

BOOK REVIEWS

Buddhist Studies in Honour of Hammalava Saddhatissa

Edited by

GATARE DHAMMAPALA, RICHARD GOMBRICH and K. R. NORMAN

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This felicitation volume consisting of 32 papers on Buddhist Studies by 18 foreign and 14 Sri Lankan scholars is dedicated to the Ven. H. Saddhatissa, Sangha Nayaka of Britain, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his service as a Dhammaduta based in London, in appreciation of his valuable life-work in the dissemination of Buddhism and Oriental Studies in the East and West for more than four decades.

Ven. Saddhatissa is a monk of great virtue and learning. Born in Satkorale in Sri Lanka on May 28, 1914, he was ordained a monk at the age of twelve. Having completed his education in traditional Buddhist learning at the Vidyodaya Pirivena, he went to India where he obtained training in scientific methods of research at the Banaras Hindu University. Thereafter he continued his researches in Britain and became a Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Edinburgh. He has taught in universities in India, Britain, Canada and Japan. He has functioned as the Head of the London Buddhist Vihara, President of the British Mahabodhi Society, President of the Sangha Council of Britain and since 1980 as the Sangha Nayaka of Britain. He is a linguist fluent in many languages and his publications have appeared in Sinhalese, Hindi, Japanese, English, French, German, Finnish, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese. In recognition of his distinguished services he has been awarded the degree of Doctor of Literature by the universities of Peradeniya, Kelaniya and Sri Jayewardenepura in Sri Lanka.

The scholars who have contributed articles to this volume are drawn from Sri Lanka, India, Japan, Europe and North America and represent the best talent in Buddhist studies. They are also friends and colleagues of the Ven. Saddhatissa. The articles deal with a wide variety of subjects in philosophy, psychology, literature, art, history, textual criticism, prosody and meditation. These have been arranged in alphabetical order but may be considered here in kindred groups.

The theme of the first article by Prof. Harvey B. Aronson of the US is the Buddha's teaching on the sublime attitudes of love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. He claims that the Theravada Buddhist thinkers

have found in this teaching a response to the social gospel of Christianity and the economic visions of Marxism but this, he insists, should not blind us to a more profoundly Buddhist religious context in which these attitudes can be employed, namely, in the cultivation of insight leading to the realisation of nirvana and ultimately escape from all rebirth. It is the conclusion of Prof. Aronson that while the ethical and psychological benefits of the cultivation of mere love etc. are extolled and advocated in the discourses of the Buddha, the special contribution of the latter is his coupling of these attitudes to a cultivation of liberating insight.

Prof. John Ross Carter of the US discusses a problem in cross-cultural studies examining, by way of illustration, the semantics involved in the question whether the *arahat* is "beyond good and evil". In the course of examining five representative scholarly views on the subject, he discusses the application of the focal Pali terms *Puñña* and *pāpa* and *kusala* and *akusala* within the framework of the Theravada perspective. In this connection he refers to the noteworthy contribution of Dr. P. D. Premasiri, the eminent Sri Lankan authority on Buddhist philosophy, who has already pointed out that the term *kusala* carried a spectrum of meaning much broader than the term *puñña* and that the later commentarial tradition tended to confuse these terms, tended to use them interchangeably, even synonymously. *Anattā* involves transpersonal orientation and *nirvana* transcends conceptualisation but the *arahat* who has realised *anattā* and *nirvana* is described in positive religious and moral terms. How, then can such a person be described as one gone beyond good and evil? It is the conclusion of Prof. Carter that this is a problem of the English medium of the Western intellectual heritage, not of the Theravada Buddhists.

L.S. Cousins of England undertakes a re-examination of the terms, *samatha*, and *vipassanā* with a view to finding out the relative position and importance of the practices they denote in the path to perfection and enlightenment. He concludes his enquiry by stating that the goal is a dynamic balance of qualities namely, peace and insight and that all the qualities are essential. If the order of development varies, it is due to variety in temperament, character and personal predilection.

Prof. Richard Gombrich of England offers a footnote to Ven. Saddhatissa's book on Buddhist Ethics by drawing attention to some points of history and usage to shade in certain nuances in the meanings of some basic Buddhist ethical terms. He thinks that *sīla* refers rather to matters of decorum than to matters of morality as the West is accustomed to. He suggests that Buddhism as it has actually been lived shows certain inconsistencies which can perhaps be understood by seeing it against the background of Hinduism. But he is careful enough to add that what appear as inconsistencies in a synchronic study may just be diachronic developments or that they may be due to a shift in context, e.g. from theoretical discussion to practical life.

Prof. Trevor Ling of England draws our attention to an interesting aspect of the literary work of Martin Wickramasinghe, "the father of modern Sinhalese literature", namely, his concern for lay people's ethics and his realistic approach to Buddhist life and culture. He shows how Wickramasinghe sought to emphasise the necessity to cultivate Buddhism, not as an intellectual pastime, but as serious concern with *mettā* at every level of life and as religious awareness.

The contribution of the Indian scholar, Prof. L. M. Joshi, on the Buddhist perspective on the unity and diversity of religions is timely and welcome. He says that happiness cannot be sectarian or racial any more than compassion can be sectarian or racial. He describes the spirit of tolerance and understanding as the most outstanding characteristic of the history and heritage of Buddhism.

The celebrated Sri Lankan Buddhist scholar, Ven. Walpola Rahula, writing on Pali as a language for transmitting an authentic religious tradition, makes an insightful observation concerning the Buddha's attitude to language as a means of communication and understanding. He quotes the Buddha's advice to his disciples not to be obstinately attached to a dialect. The Buddha considered all dialects and languages equally valid. These words are refreshingly relevant to our time and clime and they provide sweet music to our ears.

The contributions by Prof. Lily de Silva of Sri Lanka and Phra Khantipalo of Australia illustrate the value of the practical application of Buddhist teachings to the solution of the problems of man in society in our time. The basic human predicament remains constant in history. If our problems differ from those of the ancients, they do so only in regard to greater number and wider variety. Prof. de Silva gives us a lucid exposition of the teaching on the five groups of phenomena (*pañcupādānakkhandha*) showing how self-identification creates our manifold problems. She examines each of these groups citing wherever possible associated human problems recorded in history. She sums up her examination by showing that de-emphasis of individual claims and the duty-orientation of social relationships are the Buddhist methods of achieving social harmony and human progress.

Phra Khantipalo provides us with an insight into the anatomy of extremism. Extremes of thought, speech and action are common in this world and all without exception spring from the roots of unwholesomeness : greed, hatred and delusion. When extremes are promoted they are generally popular because they reflect the defilements already found in people's hearts and legitimise them. A doctrine of hol war will be quite popular, for instance, because it dresses in religious garments a very worldly activity and makes it more respectable, actually meritorious. The various religious wars of history,

including the Crusades, have not been any less bloody for that, in fact, fuelled by fanaticism they have been among the most horrific. Extreme teachings attract those in whom extreme tendencies are strong, so extreme teachers will never lack followers.

Ven. Dr. Gatara Dhammapala of Sri Lanka distinguishes clearly between *bhakti* in Hinduism and *saddhā* in Buddhism. He makes an intensive study of the texts of the Bhagavata religion and shows that *sraddha* as faith is inferior to *bhakti* of which it is merely a subsidiary preliminary. It is shown that in the Bhagavata *bhakti* is the principal element in religion and that, therefore it is superior to *karma*, *Jñāna* and *yoga*. Quite in contrast to this is the position of *saddha* in Buddhism. Distinction is clearly drawn between the affective, conative and cognitive aspects of *saddhā*. He concludes that *saddhā* and *bhakti* in Buddhism are in consonance and together shore the affective aspect of faith.

Dr. Chandra Wickramagamage of Sri Lanka examines the folklore in recorded history relating to the origin of the Buddha image in the light of archaeological evidence and concludes that the latter does not allow us to assert that Buddha images were made earlier than the first century B. C. But he is circumspect enough to add that a vast amount of archaeological excavation remains to be done in India and Sri Lanka and that till then we should not discredit the folk traditions connected with the earliest Buddha image.

Dr. Nandadeva Wijesekera of Sri Lanka describes the styles and traditions in Sinhala Buddhist painting and distinguishes clearly between a popular tradition at the local village level and a grand tradition at the court level. He says that the Sinhalese had a native tradition of art and painting at the time Mahinda thera introduced Buddhism into Sri Lanka. This tradition had developed along indigenous lines until a complete revolution took place consequent to the introduction of Buddhism. Practically this meant that the art and painting traditions of the Indian Buddhists of the third century B. C. were adopted by the court and the people of Sri Lanka. But the indigenous tradition was not altogether stymied and the evidence for both traditions existing in juxtaposition even in the Polonnaruwa period is adduced by Dr. Wijesekera. It is his view that the indigenous art and painting were intended to arouse religious emotion and the art and painting of the grand tradition were used in the sanctum of the same temple for performing acts of religious worship.

Some of the most outstanding contributions to this volume are decidedly of a technical nature and meant obviously for the specialists. This applies particularly in respect of excellent articles by a number of Japanese, European and Indian scholars. Among these special mention must be made of Mgr Etienne Lamotte of Belgium one of the greatest Buddhist scholars of all time,

Prof. Andre Bateau of France, Dr. K. R. Norman of England, Dr. Padmanabh S. Jaini of India and Professors Kogen Mizuno, Fumimaro Watanabe and Genjun H. Sasaki, all of Japan. Among specialist contributions by Sri Lankan scholars mention may be made of articles by Professors Mahinda Palihawadana and L. P. N. Perera and Doctors Ratna Handurankande and Tissa Kariyawasam. It is regretted that these welcome contributions cannot be adequately evaluated in a short such as this.

The three learned editors and the nine learned members of the Editorial Committee have to be congratulated on bringing out a volume of papers catering at once to the needs of the generalist and the specialist. It is also, indeed, a fitting tribute to the life and work of the Ven. H. Saddhatissa.

Professor **W. S. Karunaratna**