Emerging New Trends in Buddhism and Their Doctrinal and Organizational Implications

Asanga Tilakaratne[1]

Introduction

That all constructed phenomena are subject to change is one of the fundamental insights of the teaching of the Buddha. Usually this concept is understood in the context of meditation, as characterizing the phenomenal existence. It is, however, interesting to see how change takes place within the Buddhist tradition itself. The teaching of the Buddha has undergone changes in the hands of its various interpreters. One sees this phenomenon taking place from the first council that took place three months after the parinirvāna of the Buddha. Although in his self-perception a commentator would not interpret his own work of interpretation as conscious effort at changing of what is being interpreted/commented upon, what has really happened in the actual process is change, no doubt. Since the interpreters usually think that their interpretations represent the original teaching correctly, there is, on the part of interpreters and

[1] Dr. Asanga Tilakaratne, MA., PhD (Hawaii), is Professor of Buddhist Philosophy at the Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Colombo. His publications in English include: *Nirvana and Ineffability: A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language* (1993: Colombo). His most recent publication in Sinhala is a translation of and a commentary on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgarjuna* (2001: Colombo).

their followers, reluctance to accept the fact that the doctrine itself has undergone change in the process. This is somewhat different with regard to Buddhism as an organization. The organizational aspect of Buddhism, the Sasana, comprising the four groups of bhikkhus, bhikkhunis and upāsakas and upāsikās, has undergone change, and the tradition cannot deny this quite obvious fact.

Throughout its long history of twenty five centuries, the Buddhist tradition as a religious organization has undergone considerable change. This aspect of Buddhism has been studied by many scholars, and the present paper does not propose to deal with this vast subject. The purpose of this discussion is modest in the sense that it proposes to study some new developments in Buddhism. What follows is not a comprehensive account of all the new developments in Buddhism that have taken place over the past few decades. But it will try to capture some of the main trends of world Buddhism today. This includes brief discussions on what I would like to call 'trans-yānic Buddhism' and socially engaged Buddhism. Under the latter I will briefly examine what is called 'eco-Buddhism' or Buddhist environmentalism.

Trans-yanic Buddhism

Today globalization (disappearance of distance and time due to rapid improvements in transport and communication) has enhanced physical proximity and communication among different schools of Buddhist monks in an unprecedented manner. Sharing of physical space and experiencing different modes of life and practice have enhanced mutual understanding among the members of the Sangha. Modern education has done its part by providing opportunities for the monks belonging to many traditions to learn about one another's traditions. In particular, there is ever growing tendency among the non-Theravada monks to come to Theravada countries and study what is believed to be the original teaching of the Master. In a similar manner, monks from Theravada tradition go to countries such as China, Korea and Japan and learn different schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The study of Buddhism for the Buddhists has never been a dispassionate and pure academic exercise devoid of any religious significance. The end result can be mutual enrichment. It is customary today to hear a Mahāyāna or a Vajrayāna teacher referring to Pali

canon and a Theravada teacher narrating a Zen Buddhist story or quoting from Mahayana or Vajrayāna texts. Theravada Vipassana meditation is being practiced by a large number of Buddhists cutting across traditional methodologies of meditation.

The very concept of 'yāna' or vehicle is a later development in the history of Buddhism. The Mahayanists who seem to have coined the term 'mahāyāna' to describe themselves have used the term 'hinayāna' to refer to whom they considered to be of lower capacities and inclinations. Clearly 'hinayāna' is not a term the non-Mahayanists would have used to describe themselves. Neutral terms such as bodhisatvayāna and srāvakayāna were representative of the actual soteriological positions behind the so-called Mahayana and Hinayāna respectively. Vajrayāna (tantrayāna or mantrayāna) was the latest development in the process. Theravada which originated from the original Sangha after the parinirvāna of the Buddha seems to have had its existence away from this yāna struggle although technically it too could have called hinayāna. Despite the doctrinal differences there has been lot of interaction among these groups. The world-wide history of Buddhism bears evidence to how members of different Buddhist schools developed friendly and fruitful interactions through centuries. This is nowhere more evident than in the illustrious Buddhist monk-travelers from ancient China to South Asia, namely, Fa Hsian, Xuan Zang and many others who followed their lead. The Buddhist world is indebted to these Chinese monks who risked their lives for the preservation of the vast Buddhist literary heritage. In the subsequent centuries, however, this trend seems to have gradually waned. With the demise of the so-called Hinayāna traditions in India, relocation of Vajrayāna in the Tibetan area, and overall destruction of Buddhism from its place of birth, after the first millennium and half, interactions among yānas seem to have ceased. Nevertheless, within the yānas there were frequent interactions across boundaries. For instance, the East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism in China, Korea and Japan had interactions among themselves basically unhindered until modernity. The same is true for South Asian and the South-east Asian Theravada, and Vajrayāna which was East and South Asian. Particularly within the former there were frequent interactions, and give and take from the time Theravada was introduced to South East Asia from

Sri Lanka till modernity. But the three main traditions themselves do not seem to have had interactions after the celebrated Chinese pilgrims mentioned above. This state of isolation continued until the 19th century when Buddhists, like many others in the world, started moving beyond their traditional habitats.

Close physical proximity of various groups of people, who were otherwise isolated, has become a reality today as a result of globalization. One of the key characteristics of the global existence of Buddhism today is close interaction not only among different schools of Buddhism but also among different religious traditions. This close physical proximity has caused religions to review their traditional isolationist policies and come up with new ways of inter-action. Dialogue or inter-religious dialogue is a concept that has been developed quite recently in the Western religion in its effort to communicate with other religious traditions. Although Buddhism has not developed any such specific concept, friendliness and cooperation toward other religions has been there from its very inception. Usually the reaction of one particular religion to other religions has been one of intolerance and hostility. The only purpose of studying another religion was to find fault with it. Different religions have varying degrees of intolerance toward other religions. As Arnold Toynbee has said, "Three Judaic religions have a record of intolerance, hatred, malice, uncharitableness and persecution that is black by comparison with Buddhism's record."[2] Buddhism, throughout its history, has been a quite tolerant religion and it has never engaged in hostilities against other religions although occasionally the Buddhists have been unfriendly to their own dissent groups[3]. It is interesting to note that religions have always treated their internal 'heretics' more harshly than they would treat total outsiders. In pre-modern Sri Lanka Theravada tradition, for instance, there was much openness for Hindu philosophical traditions and literature and other Brahmanic systems such as medicine (āyurveda) and astrology (nakshatra) whereas it was almost totally closed for Mahayana and Vajrayāna traditions. It is only from the middle of the last century that Mahayana texts were allowed in the traditional

[2] As quoted by Noel Seth S.J.in "Buddhism and Communalism", *Religion and Society*, Vol.XXXV, No/4, December 1988.
[3] Noel Seth S.J. discusses similar instances in Buddhist history in 1988. pp. 44-66.

monastic education curriculum. The same in varying degrees holds true for the other religions in the world.

Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, is relatively a new phenomenon. What is even more new is intra-religious dialogue which has been growing for the last several decades. This is true not only for Buddhism but also for many other leading religions. Long gone are the days when the monks belonging to the three main sects in Sri Lanka would not even sit together to take part in a dāna[4]. Not only among the different sects within the same tradition but also among different Buddhist traditions inter-action and cooperation is quite a common phenomenon today. This trend is developing to such an extent that it is true to say that a form of world Buddhism or a kind of trans-yānic Buddhism is being evolved.

Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907): Father of Trans-yānic Buddhism?

The emergence of this new form of Buddhism did not, however happen all at once. Till the latter part of the 19th century the three main traditions of Buddhism existed as disparate schools confined to their traditional habitats although each tradition had close connections with its own brethren across countries. This isolated situation started changing with certain developments that were taking place in the Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka and around the world. One event with far-reaching affects was the arrival of Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) in Sri Lanka in 1880 with Madam Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), who together had founded Theosophical Society in the United States in 1875. They came to Sri Lanka inspired by reading a report of the famous Panadura debate which took place in 1876 between Buddhists and Christians. Although this was the immediate cause, the two pioneers of theosophy were already looking up to Hinduism and Buddhism as the source of 'ancient Asian wisdom tradition.' Upon arrival of Sri Lanka Olcott and Blavatsky embraced Buddhism and started working with local

[4] In Sri Lanka, this term is taken to specifically means a meal offered to monks.

Buddhist leaders, both monastic[5] and lay, in areas such as education of children and organization of adults.

In addition to starting schools for Buddhist children, a major project of Olcott was to prepare a Buddhist catechism, obviously following the Christian model, to be used in schools and also to serve as the source for correct knowledge of Buddhism for the adults whom Olcott felt to be wanting in their knowledge of their own religion. In this project he worked closely with Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thera who was the foremost of all erudite monks of the 19th century Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), and to whom he dedicated this work which was an immediate commercial success. The compilation went into several dozens of reprints and editions and was translated into many languages.

What interests us in this context is not the catechism which was confined to the Theravada Buddhism but what Olcott added at the conclusion of it as 'fundamental Buddhist beliefs' (see appendix). Olcott concluded this list with the remark that it was 'drafted as a common platform upon which all Buddhists can agree.' Guided by theosophist outlook, Olcott's main purpose was to present Buddhism as a scientific and rational system which did not have a place for superstition. The catechism was the result of this motivation. But, one could question as to why did Olcott want to develop what he believed to be the core of Buddhism acceptable to all three traditions of Buddhism? According to Elizabeth J. Harris, the answer is the following:

> The theosophists who came to Sri Lanka saw Buddhism as that part of the East's wisdom best suited to aid their search for the spiritual truth at the heart of all religion. Whether

[5] The role of the Buddhist monks not only in this particular aspect but also in what is called 'Buddhist modernism' remains to be determined. The commonly accepted belief is that the monks played only a supporting role in the works initiated by Olcott and Dharmapala. Nevertheless, records left by Olcott himself reveals how crucial was the role played by Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala among other monks. Although catechism appears to be the idea of Olcott, it was so crucial for him to get the approval of Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala for his project. Olcott admiringly records how the erudite monk went word by word of the whole document with utmost care (Ananda Guruge 1986 p.cxxxix ff). The fourteen points of the core of the teaching of the Buddha too were given approval by Sumangala. Given the vast Dhamma knowledge he had, it is probable that these points were a joint work by both Olcott and Sumangala. But unfortunately, as our current knowledge stands, we are not in a position to draw a definitive conclusion on this matter. (See Blackburn (2001) and Harris (2006) on the monks' role in ushering modernism prior to the arrival of Olcott.)

> they read this in esoteric terms or not, they usually opted to downplay the esoteric when in Sri Lanka in their zeal to encourage a 'pure', rational, exoteric Buddhism, rooted in right action, loving compassion, cosmic law. Olcott came closer than other theosophists, with the exception of Frank Lee Woodward of the twentieth century, to making Buddhism his primary love, *even seeking to create a movement that would unify Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism* (emphasis added). (Harris 2006: p.146)

In the fourteen articles Olcott presents as the fundamental Buddhist beliefs, are included the basic Buddhist teachings such as the four noble truths, karma, causation, morality and nirvana. The Buddhist non-theism, and its rational and tolerant character are emphasized at the very beginning. Olcott formulated these articles, got the initial approval of the leading members of the Sri Lanka Sangha, and got the approval the representatives of the Mahayana Sangha having presented these articles to them at the international Buddhist conference held Adhyar, Madras in 1891. At the end of the 1891 edition of the catechism Olcott describes how he got the approval of the Vajrayāna tradition for the document:

> The following text of the fourteen items of belief which have been accepted as fundamental principles in both the Southern and Northern sections of Buddhism, by authoritative committees to whom they were submitted by me personally, have so much historical importance that they are added to the present edition of THE BUDDHIST CATECHISM as an Appendix. It has very recently been reported to me by H. E. Prince Ouchtomsky, the learned Russian Orientalist, that having had the document translated to them, the Chief Lamas of the great Mongolian Buddhist monasteries declared to him that they accept every one of the propositions as drafted, with the one exception that the date of the Buddha is by them believed to have been some thousands of years earlier than the one given by me. This surprising fact had not hitherto come to my knowledge. Can it be that the Mongolian Sangha confuse the real epoch of Sākya Muni with that of his alleged next predecessor? Be this as it may, it is a most encouraging

> fact that the whole Buddhistic world may now be said to have united to the extent at least of these Fourteen Propositions.

The effort by Olcott remains the first ever in this direction, and, as his above words reveal, in addition to formulating the document Olcott actively campaigned for it to be accepted by the Buddhists all over the world.

Anagarika Dharmapala, Olcott's protégé in Sri Lanka, seems to have inherited this holistic view from his mentor. In 1889 Olcott and Dharmapala went to Japan and this trip, as one writer describes, "was taken up in the spirit of a dawning unity among Theravadins, Mahayanists, and Vajrayanists."[6] In these travels the two leaders encouraged participation of all the Buddhists in the activities they organized. For instance, when Dharmapala established Mahabodhi Society (1891) with the aim of restoring the Buddhist sacred places in India he had in his board representatives from Sri Lanka, Tibet, Thailand, China, Chittagong, Myanmar and USA. For the place of the Buddha's awakening, Buddha-gaya, Dharmapala had a grand-vision including an international university of the caliber of ancient Nalanda. As Dharmapala's own words reveal his vision included all the Buddhist traditions:

> At this hallowed spot, full of imperishable associations, it is proposed to re-establish a monastery for the residence of bhikkhus representing the Buddhist countries of Tibet, Ceylon, China, Japan, Cambodia, Burmah, Chittagong, Nepal, Korea and Arkan. We hope to found, also a college at Buddha-gaya for training young men of unblemished character, of whatsoever race or country for the Buddhist order (Sangha), on the lines of the ancient Buddhist university at Nalanda, where were taught the Mahayana and also works belonging to the eighteen sects. (quoted by Ananda W.P. Guruge in Mahinda Deegalle (ed): 2008 p.54)

Although Dharmapala later fell out with Olcott and other theosophists such as Leadbeater and Annie Besant, this holistic vision persisted in him. For both Olcott and Dharmapala there was another avenue through which this broad outlook naturally came. For Olcott

[6] Christopher S. Queen in Queen and King (1996) p.23.

it is the globalizing background from which he came. Traveling from the United States to India and Sri Lanka passing various countries and meeting with various people ,Olcott had experience needed for a holistic approach to Buddhism. Dharmapala himself came from a family with urban culture, and with his early Christian education and entrepreneurship inherited from family, he was quick to grasp this outlook of Olcott. Olcott's arrival in Sri Lanka having read a report of Panadura Debate in an American news paper can be described as a result of globalization (contraction of space and time due to rapid advances of transport and means of communication). The holistic view toward Buddhism ushered by Olcott and accepted by Dharmapala may well be described as resulting from emerging forces of globalization. Although what was initiated by Olcott and followed by Dharmapala does not seem to have reached its desired conclusion in their life times, the former's formulation of what was widely accepted as the fundamental Buddhist beliefs can be taken as the first-ever effort at formulating a 'manifesto' for intra-Buddhist dialogue and cooperation

Developments in the 20th century

Dharmapala's influence was far-reaching. The World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) initiated by the late Professor Gunapala Malalasekera in 1950 was a direct outcome of this broad outlook. Malalasekera came under Dharmapala's influence when he was quite a young man. Being the first Professor of Buddhist Civilization at University of Ceylon Malalasekera understandably had a good understanding of the historical evolution of Buddhism. It was his expressed opinion that there were more reasons for Buddhists to get together than to remain separated. The initial resolution for the establishment of WFB was presented to the 1947 meeting of All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC), and it said that an organization representing all the Buddhists of the world needs to be established "for the purpose of bringing together Buddhists of the world, of exchanging news and views about the condition of Buddhism, of different countries and of discussing ways and means whereby the Buddhists could make their contribution to peace and happiness." It is with this understanding and conviction that he convened the Buddhists from all the traditions of Buddhism and established what is known today as World Fellowship of Buddhists. After establishment

of WFB Malalasekera embarked on a world tour covering countries in South, South East and East Asia meeting Buddhists belonging to all traditions. Malalasekera's own account of this tour amply reveals the magnitude of goodwill and respect he commanded everywhere he went[7]. One of the things he achieved in this tour was to get all the Buddhists to accept the six-coloured flag, initiated by Olcott as a part of his holistic vision, as the common Buddhist symbol. In concluding the records of his travel in the Buddhist world Malalasekera says:

> I had asked for unity, for the recognition of the basic agreements which exist, as I passionately believe, amongst all who call themselves the followers of the Sakyamuni Gautama. I sensed that there was this recognition by all, orthodox Theravada or not, and felt happy that my mission was not in vain. In symbolic fellowship I asked, on a mandate of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, that the six-coloured Buddhist Flag as used in Lanka be accepted by Buddhists everywhere. Wherever I went I saw that the response to the call was marvelous. On the day of Vesak, as is known in Theravada lands, or Buddha day (as asked for by the World Fellowship of Buddhists) in others, I saw the Flag continuously from Lanka to Viet Nam, the utmost confines of this my mission. (p.71)

Another result of Malalasekera's broad vision was the Encyclopedia of Buddhism project which was conceived and planned by him. The proposed encyclopedia was not confined to Theravada but was to cover Buddhism in its totality. Malalasekera serves as its first editor-in-chief. Today WFB is an organization serving as the gathering point for Buddhists of all traditions all over the world.

World Buddhist Sangha Council (WBSC): WFB has remained predominantly a lay Buddhist organization. It took nearly two decades for a similar organization for the Sangha to develop. The World Buddhist Sangha Council (WBSC), started in 1966 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with the participation of monks from all Buddhist traditions, is an organization for the Buddhist monks exclusively. The Council membership represents all the Buddhist

[7] Read his *The Buddhist Flag in South Asia* by Malalasekera (publication date not mentioned, but could be in 1952).

traditions, sharing responsibilities among members across traditions. The Council has four objectives, namely,

(i) developing the organizations and exchanges of Sangha worldwide; (ii) helping Sangha carry out dharmaduta activities throughout the world; (iii) enhancing harmony and relationship among different Buddhist traditions and (iv) propagating Buddha's teaching of compassion to promote world peace.

These objectives testify amply to a unified vision of the Dhamma, which was to serve as the foundation for the unity of the world-wide Sangha, not identifying with any sectarian particularities. It is also interesting to note that the council accepts the six-coloured flag (referred to above) as its official flag. After four decades from its inauguration, today WBSC is a world-wide organization in its true sense where Buddhist monks from all traditions get together on one flat-form and work under one identity, namely, the sons of the Sakyamuni Buddha (*samana sakyaputtiya*). This is definitely a long way from the situation that existed at the turn of the 20th century when, at times, members of different sects belonging to the same tradition refused even to acknowledge the existence of the other sects.

Daughters of the Buddha: Sakyadhita: A similar and even more interesting development has been taking place among the Buddhist women all over the world. Like their male counterparts the Buddhist nuns along with Buddhist female followers have initiated a world-wide Buddhist women's organization called Sakyadhita (Daughters of the Sakyamuni Buddha): International Network of Buddhist Women. The Organization was founded at Buddhagaya in 1987 by a group of female Buddhist practitioners, including Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American national with Asian Studies academic background and nun in the Tibetan tradition, Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen, a nun in Tibetan tradition, Ayya Khema, a nun in Theravada tradition and Dr. Chatsuman Kabilsingh, a university professor in Thailand and later Bhikkhuni Dhammanandi, a Theravada Buddhist nun. The Organization comprises nuns and female followers from all traditions including the recently ordained nuns from Sri Lanka[8].

[8] See for more information: *Women's Buddhism and Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision,*

The very reintroduction of bhikkhuni upasampadā (full admission to Buddhist nuns) to Sri Lanka is an example for the emerging trans-yānic Buddhism. The Bhikkhuni-sasana in the Theravada tradition had become extinct for the last ten centuries[9]. The traditional position is that reintroduction within Theravada is out of the question since there is no bhikkhuni-sangha within the Theravada lineage to grant upasampadā to them. Consequently, it is claimed that until and unless a Buddha appears again none can initiate the Bhikkhuni order. This meant that there is no room for Bhikkhuni-sasana to be revived within Theravada. The stalwarts in the tradition do not wish to identify the legitimacy of the Mahayana bhikkhunis, and the Vajrayāna tradition does not have a full-fledged bhikshuni order. Consequently they do not see any possibility of cross-breeding either. The recent reintroduction of Bhikkhuni order to Sri Lanka was made possible when the prospective candidates first received higher ordination (upasampadā) from Korean Mahayana Bhikkhuni tradition and subsequently received the same from (a group of) the Sri Lanka Sangha as the traditional Vinaya requires (the bhikkhunis to have upasampadā from both the monks and nuns). Strictly speaking, the present bhikkhuni organization in Sri Lanka, which was a joint effort by both Mahayana bhiksunis and Theravada bhikkhus, is both Mahayanic and Theravadin[10]. Although the traditional monks[11] and lay people of Theravada do not accept the validity of this new upasampadā there cannot be any doubt that the age-old boundaries across traditions are being blurred and that what is emerging clearly transcends the age-old categories.

'American Buddhism': The practitioners of what is sometimes referred to as "American Buddhism" derive inspiration from various Buddhist traditions simultaneously, and seem to have

Renewal, 2000, Ed., Ellison Banks Findly, Wisdom Publications, Boston, pp.97-101.

[9] In fact, after India, it seems to have existed only in Sri Lanka where it disappeared after the collapse of Anuradhapura around 10th and 11th centuries. It does not seem that Bhikkhuni order was ever introduced to the Southeast Asian region from Sri Lanka.

[10] Ven. Hawanpola Ratanasara (1920-2000), a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk who lived in Los Angeles ordained and gave full admission to a group of women following exactly a similar methodology. *Women's Buddhism and Buddhism's Women:Tradition, Revision, Renewal*, p.154.

[11] In fact the hierarchy of the three chapters of the Sri Lanka Sangha does not recognize this joint upasampada as valid. Consequently the Sri Lanka state too does not accept the existence of bhikkhunis with full admission. The ordinary people, however, do not seem to worry about this theoretical issue.

evolved a type of eclectic Buddhism going beyond traditional categories[12].

The American Buddhism is a result of both globalization and some geo-political and social problems the world has been experiencing for the last 4-5 decades. The arrival in the USA of East Asian Vietnamese Buddhists in large numbers took place as a result of the Vietnam war that ended by 70's.The kind of Buddhism they brought was mainly Mahayana although a sizable number of these Buddhists were Theravada followers who were 'converted' by the Venerable Narada Maha Thera of Wajiraramaya, Colombo. Vajrayāna Buddhists from Tibet arrived in the West in large numbers as a result of political problems between China and Tibet. Cambodian Buddhists started arriving in the West in the 80's after disastrous political experimentations by Pol Pot regime. What they represented was Theravada Buddhism. In addition to these groups there were Buddhists from the Mahayana countries for more than one hundred years in the USA and the Theravada Buddhists from Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar for the last several decades. The evolution of this manifold Buddhism is a long story to be told in great detail and I do not attempt it here. What is to be noted however is the on-going process of the evolution of a new form of Buddhism drawing inspiration from all the traditions. As we noted earlier already some scholars have dubbed this as "American Buddhism". Richard Hughes Seager tries to portray this phenomenon in the following words:

> The American Buddhist community as a whole encompasses an extremely wide spectrum of opinions about the nature of Buddhism. Within it, traditionalist and innovative impulses co-exist, sometimes comfortably, sometimes not. Tolerance is generally valued highly and the idea that all expressions of the dharma are in essence one is widely accepted[13].

A good example of this newly evolving Buddhism comes from the Sangha (monks and nuns) in this part of the world. The Buddhist Sangha Council of Southern California founded in 1980, initially to mediate disputes between monks and laity, grew

[12] See Seager (1999) for a comprehensive discussion.
[13] I*bid*. p. 232.

up to be an organization bringing monks and laity from all Buddhist traditions that exist in that region. Inter-Buddhist celebration of Vesak organized by the Council is very significant for it marks the unanimity reached by all Buddhist traditions to adopt the full-moon day of the month of May, as accepted by the Theravada tradition, as the birth day of the Buddha. This shows how different Buddhist traditions developing consensus in matters of importance and creating new traditions in their new habitats.

In addition to this example of organizational significance, there is another important aspect with doctrinal significance that has developed within the context of North America in particular and the West in general. It is the practice of meditation we referred to at the beginning of this discussion. The insight (vipassana) meditation was introduced to the USA is 1960's by the monks of Theravada school. This early meditation remained basically traditional and the teachers were usually monks form south and southeast Asian countries. This traditional form started undergoing change with lay meditation teachers such as Sharon Salsberg (born 1952), Joseph Goldstein (born 1944) and Jack Cornfield (born 1945). Salsberg and Goldstein studied meditation under the well known Myanmar-Indian meditation teacher Goenka (born 1924) whereas Cornfield was ordained twice under Ajahn Chah (1917-1992) in Thailand. They together started Insight Meditation Society in 1974 in Barr, Massachusetts, and have been teaching meditation at their centre and elsewhere. What is unique in their practice of meditation is that it has not been confined to the traditional Theravada. They have evolved a practice deriving inspiration from all the three Buddhist traditions and even from some non-Buddhist systems. This is very different from how the traditional meditation teachers from Theravada would feature their practice. Although they may have their own unique approaches to meditation and follow some of their own methods, they basically remain within the tradition. The newly evolved practice is not strictly Theravada in that sense. It is eclectic and trans-yanic in its character. Apart from this American reconstruction of meditation, some of the world renowned teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh are well known for their innovative methods that cut across traditions.

As we know, the traditional division of Mahāyāna and Hinayāna is based on a value judgment in which the former takes the latter to be of low dispositions whereas the latter is convinced that the former is misguided. After two millennia of the controversy today, however, the traditional division does not mean exactly the same. All traditions seem to come to a consensus as to what the core Buddhism is. Traditions have displayed openness to learn from others. The Buddhists are free to follow whatever the goal they aspire to, namely, the goal of full enlightenment, that of individual enlightenment or the goal of enlightenment as an arahant. As we saw in the discussion so far, the dialogue within the Buddhists themselves has been less theoretically oriented and more practical. This however does not preclude the need to have a theoretically refined position regarding the dialogue within. What seems significant is that the substantial practical experience gained so far can shape the nature of the theory and avoid the danger of theory being empty.

Socially Engaged Buddhism

Buddhism went to the Western world roughly about one and half centuries back and was perceived as matching well with rational understanding of the universe advocated by the Enlightenment movement in Europe. More recently its philosophy was interpreted by philosophers like K.N. Jayatilleke as embodying as advanced form of empiricism. Continuing this line of thinking, today Buddhism is identified as a religious and intellectual force that provides an alternative mode of thinking and bahaviour for those millions of people who feel that they need a change.

What is known as 'socially engaged Buddhism' refers to a way of thinking and behaviour characterized by active engagement by Buddhists in social and political problems that affect the society at large. Writing in 1985 on socially engaged Buddhism, Fred Eppsteiner, having described a risky effort by a group of concerned Buddhists to evacuate about 200 civilians trapped in a combat zone in Vietnam (in the mid 1960s'), says:

> The term 'engaged Buddhism' refers to this kind of active involvement by Buddhists in society and its problems. Participants in this nascent movement seek to actualize Buddhism's traditional ideals of wisdom and compassion in today's world. In times of war or intense hostility they will place themselves between factions, literally or figuratively…[14]

Social engagement is not something new in Buddhism. In traditional Buddhist societies Buddhists have always been living a community life looking after the needs of one another. The new-ness in socially engaged Buddhism is that it is the response of the West, where Buddhism was introduced recently, to the initial misrepresentation of Buddhism as an anti-social teaching. The difference would be that whereas in the traditional societies Buddhists looked after their own societal needs the modern Buddhists would involve in large social political issues, the effects of which go far beyond the places where they originated. This is basically a result of globalization forces. Furthermore, social activism of the Buddhists can be regarded as both responding to the pressing needs of the world today and searching for new meanings of religious life itself.

Eco-Buddhism (Green Buddhism): Eco-Buddhism or green Buddhism is Buddhist theory and practice toward nature. As theory it presupposes and is based on the Buddhist perception of reality as a dependently arisen phenomenon. As practice, eco-Buddhism represents a set of attitudes and a way of behaviour. It is activism or praxis what makes eco-Buddhism a kind of engaged Buddhism[15]. As one advocate of this way of thinking puts it, "contrary to the popular view of Buddhism as a 'refuge' from the world, to become a Buddhist today is definitely political act. More specifically it is a geopolitical act[16].

The Buddhist ecologists identify two approaches to ecology: one is what is described as 'appropriate management' or stewardship of nature and its resources by man. This is understood to be

[14] *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 1985, ed. Fred Eppsteiner, Parallax Press, Berkeley, California, p.xii.
[15] A representative collection of papers is found in *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, 1990, edited by Allan Hunt Badiner.
[16] Peter Timmerman in "It is Dark Outside: Western Buddhism from the Enlightenment to the Global Crisis" in *Buddhism and Ecology*, 1994, ed. Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown, Indian Edition,

a human-centred environmentalism based on individualism and supporting exploitation of natural resources by human beings. In this perspective, the opponents claim, individual greed is justified and the result is "a planet of ten billion points of infinite greed". The other approach is characterized by protection of nature and environment from encroachment by human beings. This has been described as 'eco-centric environmentalism', and many find it preferable to the former. Writers such as Ken Jones (1993) criticize even this second type of approach which is relatively good. He describes views held under this category as "many varieties of deeper greenery" which are still based on subtle forms of individualism. He compares such approaches to the parable of elephant and blind men and proposes to jettison modern hyper individualism in favour of return to community.

What this sketch reveals is that there is an intensive discussion and debate on the issues of engaged Buddhism including many aspects of Buddhist environmentalism. The problem of individualism which Ken Jones touches is at the heart of the whole issue. The place of the human being in the whole process of interacting with nature has to be assessed correctly with the right balance. I say something about it in the next concluding section. But it is only a suggestion which needs to be argued for.

Doctrinal and Organizational Implications

As we saw in the above discussion, the trans-yānic Buddhism cuts across the traditional three yānas. The practice throughout the history has been that the contacts among the traditions have been kept to the minimum although we cannot say that there were no contacts at all or that they were actively hostile to one another. As Noel Seth's paper referred to above reveals, there have been hostilities within schools of, for instance, Japan and Korea. Sri Lanka history, however, records several instances of conflict between the Mahāvihāra and those who held different views (vaitulya-vāda). But one finds hardly any evidence of three Buddhist traditions fighting with one another. What we witness with the dawn of modernity is something different. It is a conscious effort to assimilate and incorporate ideas and practices of one another which were naturally isolated in the past owing to practical difficulties of interaction.

A question one may raise is whether there is any doctrinal or theoretical difficulty for this kind of interaction among divergent groups. Both in the early Dhamma and the Vinaya one finds frequent references to the unity of the Sangha (sangha-sāmaggi). The discourses such as Cula-gosinga and Mahā-gosinga of the Majjhima-nikāya heap praises on the disciples of the Buddha who interacted with each other like 'milk and water'(khirodakibhuta). Devadatta, on the contrary, is disparaged for splitting the sangha (sangha-bheda), which is described as one of the most serious unwholesome deeds resulting in the birth in the hell immediately after death (anantariya-kamma). But it is not included in the category of 'defeat' (pārājika), the most serious of all monastic offences. It is included in the next category, sanghadisesa, which can be remedied by proper behaviour unlike the first category which are not remedied. There are two sanghādisesa rules (rules 10 and 11) applicable to one who commits the split of the Sangha and to those who support such an act. In both cases those who were found guilty may remedy their offences by proper behaviour.

In the subsequent history of the Sasana we find that there were many instances when the groups of sangha splitting from the mother group and start acting as separate groups. Symbolic to the independent activism is performance of the Pātimokkha recital (bi-weekly recital of the code of Vinaya rules) as a separate group. It is not quite clear whether or not such breakaway groups were considered to have committed the offence of sangha-bheda. As the early Buddhist history shows, there were breakaway groups from the breakaway groups themselves, making the situation more complicated. Even in the more recent history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka this tendency of breaking away from mother groups was quite commonplace. In the Amarapura fraternity, which started in the early eighteenth century, for instance, still there are more than twenty subgroups operating as independent groups. But these groups are not considered as guilty of splitting the Sangha although every act of forming a new group of the Sangha runs the risk of sangha-bheda.

While the Vinaya does not approve of sangha-bheda it does provide for the Sangha, which is split, to come together. The recital of the Pātimokkha as one group is considered as symbolic of

the unity of the Sangha. There is a special provision for the recital when the Sangha which was split before reunites as one group. This recital is called 'unity recital' (sāmaggī-uposatha). A recent example of such performance is when all the branches of the Amarapura fraternity of Sri Lanka got together in 1969 and performed uposatha together to mark the newly forged unity[17]. This shows that the ideal situation is to have a single unitary body of the Sangha. If a group breaks away that does not necessarily mean that the breakaway group is invariably guilty for there is a possibility that the very breakaway group is the one that upholds the right position. Both the Dhamma and the Vinaya supports unity, and encourage divergent groups to unite. Strictly speaking when divergent groups come together there is no divergence any more and the uposatha is performed within the united Sangha.

The situation with the three Buddhist traditions today is different. When the three traditions come together they do come as unique groups maintaining their identity. But tend to work together upholding commonalities at a higher level. For example, in the case of sakya-dhitā or 'the daughters of the Buddha' what unites all different Buddhists groups is their identity as the female followers of the Buddha. When the first group of nuns from Sri Lanka received higher admission (upasampadā) from a group of Korean nuns and when the same group was given higher admission by the Sri Lanka Theravada Sangha, as the Theravada Vinaya requires, this becomes tantamount to accepting the validity of the Mahayana practice by the Theravada. The situation here is different from two divergent groups coming together forming one group. This is a clear case of two different Buddhist traditions accepting the validity of each other while maintaining their own identities. The resultant bhikkhuni tradition functioning currently in Sri Lanka[18] is neither fully Theravada nor fully Mahayana; it is both Theravada and Mahayana. (Currently the Sri Lanka Theravada hierarchy and the Sri Lanka state do not accept the validity of this newly formed Bhikkhuni Sangha. However, if they go as a new non-Theravada group with a new identity, this question does not arise.) The Vinaya observed by the Mahāyāna nuns

[17] The branches of the Amarapura fraternity were united formally in 1956 under the name, All Lanka Amarapura sangha Council.. In 1974 the organization was brought under a new constitution and renamed, 'Sri Lanka Amarapura Sangha Council (Sri Lanka Amarapura sangha Sabha).

[18] Thailand has only a very few bhikkhunis with higher admission.

is not the same as that followed by the Theravada nuns. On the other hand, however, the differences are only with regard to minor rules, and not the major ones. From the point of view of the Dhamma we can argue that the Mahayana while upholding the Buddhahood as the ultimate goal and the path of the Bodhisatva as the method, does not reject the arahant ideal or the srāvaka-yāna. This shows that there is really not any serious difficulty either from the Vinaya or from the Dhamma in the joint operations among the three traditions. The presence of some East Asian sects with married clergy, however, seems to pose a problem, for sex involves violating one of the central requirements of the monastic life not only in the traditional Theravada, but also in Mahayana and Vajrayāna. This more recent development which arose first in Japan and introduced to Korea almost by force at the turn of the last century may be ignored for the present discussion. In any case, in the Buddhist tradition in which where there is no centre with power accumulated, a question of excommunication does not arise. Therefore it seems that there is no real doctrinal or 'legal' difficulty for a trans-yānic Buddhism to evolve.

Engaged Buddhism represents the contemporary Buddhist approaches to social issues and problems. Although social consciousness is not absent in Buddhism what we witness today is Buddhists sharing the global awareness of the need for addressing social ills. The challenge is to apply the Buddhist principles and insights to contemporary situations which are more complex and more diverse than those of the pre-modern world. In spite of complexity and diversity of situations, since human being has remained human being from time immemorial, the teachings of the Buddha which are first and foremost meant for human beings, may be applied to these situations with success.

Of the two approaches to nature and environment outlined above, one may reject the first without much debate as not representing the true Buddhist position. The second with its many varieties may be acceptable to many. The matter, however, is not that simple or clear-cut. It is clear that the greedy behaviour of one set people endangers their own lives as well as the lives of many others who are really innocent. Such behaviour is unhealthy for oneself for one

is overwhelmed by one's own avarice. At the same time it is ethically wrong for it is harmful to others. The real challenge, however, is to forge an ethic which takes into account our own individualism, namely, the fact that we are a group of beings motivated by self-satisfaction. In the process of self-satisfaction human beings invariably use natural resources to achieve their goals. No one will say that this is wrong. It is hard to imagine how one can argue that the existence of nature takes precedence over the existence of human beings, or that human beings need to sacrifice their happiness for the sake of preservation of nature. But the destruction of nature is surely going to be self-destructive for human beings. What this means is that human beings and nature are inter-dependent, and neither takes precedence over the other. If we understand the entire universe including its many varieties of beings as an inter-dependent whole the question of one having precedence over another will not arise. Neither would there arise the need for self-sacrifice for the sake of nature. In other words, the Buddhist care for nature and ecology is not unconditional altruism. It has to be based on compassion and wisdom, the two pillars of Buddhist social action.

Conclusion

Emerging new trends in Buddhism seem to pose many problems and challenges to students and practitioners of Buddhism alike. New situations force us to look for new solutions. As far as Buddhism is concerned, the new solutions needed may not be really new. What is needed is creativity and innovation in order to adapt the ancient teachings to contemporary situations. There is an extensive discussion on these issues, particularly on engaged Buddhism and Buddhist environmentalism, in the West. Nothing comparable is seen in the traditional Buddhist societies. What is important, on the part of those who are in the traditional Buddhist societies serious about the applicability of the teaching of the Buddha to current social problems, is to have continuous discussion on these issues, rather than letting things happen on their own.

Appendix

FUNDAMENTAL BUDDHISTIC BELIEFS
(formulated by Henry Steel Olcott)

I Buddhists are taught to show the same tolerance, forbearance, and brotherly love to all men, without distinction; and an unswerving kindness towards the members of the animal kingdom.

II The universe was evolved, not created; and its functions according to law, not according to the caprice of any God.

III The truths upon which Buddhism is founded are natural. They have, we believe, been taught in successive kalpas, or world-periods, by certain illuminated beings called BUDDHAS, the name BUDDHA meaning "Enlightened".

IV The fourth Teacher in the present kalpa was Sākya Muni, or Gautama Buddha, who was born in a Royal family in India about 2,500 years ago. He is an historical personage and his name was Siddhārtha Gautama.

V Sākya Muni taught that ignorance produces desire, unsatisfied desire is the cause of rebirth, and rebirth, the cause of sorrow. To get rid of sorrow, therefore, it is necessary to escape rebirth; to escape rebirth, it is necessary to extinguish desire; and to extinguish desire, it is necessary to destroy ignorance.

VI Ignorance fosters the belief that rebirth is a necessary thing. When ignorance is destroyed the worthlessness of every such rebirth, considered as an end in itself, is perceived, as well as the paramount need of adopting a course of life by which the necessity for such repeated rebirths can be abolished. Ignorance also begets the illusive and illogical idea that the re is only one existence for man, and the other illusion that this one life is followed by states of unchangeable pleasure or torment.

VII The dispersion of all this ignorance can be attained by the persevering practice of an all-embracing altruism in conduct, development of intelligence, wisdom in thought, and destruction of desire for the lower personal pleasures.

VIII The desire to live being the cause of rebirth, when that is extinguished rebirths cease and the perfected individual attains by meditation that highest state of peace called *Nirvāna*.

IX Sākya Muni taught that ignorance can be dispelled and sorrow removed by the knowledge of the four Noble Truths, *viz.*:

1. The miseries of existence;

2. The cause productive of misery, which is the desire ever renewed of satisfying oneself without being able ever to secure that end;

3. The destruction of that desire, or the estranging of oneself from it;

4. The means of obtaining this destruction of desire. The means which he pointed out is called the Noble Eightfold Path, *viz.*: Right Belief; Right Thought; Right Speech; Right Action; Right Means of Livelihood; Right Exertion; Right Remembrance; Right Meditation.

X Right Meditation leads to spiritual enlightenment, or the development of that Buddha-like faculty which is latent in every man.

XI The essence of Buddhism, as summed up by the Tathāgathā (Buddha) himself, as:

To cease from all sin,To get virtue,To purify the heart.

XII The universe is subject to a natural causation known as "Karma". The merits and demerits of a being in past existences determine his condition in the present one. Each man, therefore, has prepared the causes of the effects which he now experiences.

XIII The obstacles to the attainment of good karma may be removed by the observance of the following precepts, which are embraced in the moral code of Buddhism, *viz.*: (1) Kill not; (2) Steal not; (3) Indulge in no forbidden sexual pleasure; (4) Lie not; (5) Take no intoxication or stupefying drug or liquor. Five other precepts which need not be here enumerated should be

observed by those who would attain, more quickly than the average layman, the release from misery and rebirth.

XIV Buddhism discourages superstitious credulity. Gautama Buddha taught it to be the duty of a parent to have his child educated in science and literature. He also taught that no one should believe what is spoken by any sage, written in any book, or affirmed by tradition, unless it accord with reason.

Drafted as a common platform upon which all Buddhists can agree.

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