REINVENTING BUDDHISM:
CONVERSATIONS AND ENCOUNTERS IN MODERN INDIA, 1839 - 1956

by

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

(Asian Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

December 2016

Abstract

This dissertation offers a fresh perspective on what has long been called India's modern Buddhist revival. Theories of this revival are based on the idea that Buddhism, a religion founded in India more than two and a half millennium ago, disappeared between the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries and was reborn in 1956 when the Indian constitutionalist Dr. B.R. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism along with half a million of his Dalit (former 'untouchable') followers. This, however, is only part of the story. Taking on the conventional narrative, the study assesses how much was really known about Buddhism in the centuries after its disappearance and asks what sense we can make of the important place that Buddhism came to hold in modern Indian society. Through an extensive examination of disparate materials held at archives and temples across India and South Asia, the study demonstrates the integral role Buddhism played in India in the century prior to Ambedkar's conversion.

To frame the discussion, each chapter of the dissertation highlights an important facet of the dynamic interplay between British colonialism, global circuits of knowledge and local Indian agency. The first four chapters (c. 1830s – 1910) examine the discovery of Buddhist ruins in the subcontinent and the challenges British epistemologies posed to prevailing Indian memories of these spaces; Indian educators and the place of Buddhism in colonial education systems; Buddhism's public life among new religious movements and literary publics; and the roles that Indians played in the development of global networks and new pilgrimage circuits. The last four chapters (c. 1910 – 1956) turn to Buddhism's influence among the Hindu right and Indian National Congress; the radical non-Brahmin and Buddhist conversion movements of marginalized communities; the fusion of Buddhist and socialist ideologies in the interwar period; and the dominant public role that the independent Indian state gave to Buddhism in its domestic and foreign policies. The originality of the work rests in its understanding of Buddhism not just as an institutionalized practice and system of thought but as an imagined and inventive 'place-world' capable of transforming the very here and now.

Preface

This dissertation is an original and independent work produced by the author, Douglas Ober.

A version of chapter eight was previously published as " 'Like embers hidden in ashes or jewels encrusted in stone': Rahul Sankrityayan, Dharmanand Kosambi and Buddhist activity in colonial India," *Contemporary Buddhism* Vol. 14/1 (2013), 134 – 48. This article was then re-published under the same title in, *A Buddhist Crossroads: pioneer western Buddhists and Asian networks 1860-1960*, edited by Brian Bocking, Phibul Choompolpaisal, Laurence Cox, and Alicia M. Turner (London: Routledge, 2014), 133 – 47.

The research for this dissertation was completed with the generous support of a Fulbright – Nehru Fellowship, the United States – India Education Foundation, the Tina Morris and Wagner Foundation Fellowship, the International Buddhist Society Graduate Scholarship, Universal Buddhist Temple Scholarship, and travel awards provided by the Department of Asian Studies and Institute of Asian Research at the University of British Columbia.

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Acknowledgments

This dissertation is indebted to many individuals. At the University of British Columbia, I am forever grateful to Harjot Oberoi for his unwavering support and generosity. This project would have not been completed without him. He is a model mentor. I also wish to thank Tsering Shakya. Our day-to-day conversations over the past five years on all kinds of topics have been an endless source of inspiration and stimulation. His enthusiasm for understanding the modern world is contagious. Jessica Main's advice and constructive criticism has enriched my research in numerous ways and I am especially thankful to she (and Tsering) for providing me with a workplace next to their own. Special thanks are also owed to Mark Turin, Joy Dixon, and Anne Blackburn for reading through the manuscript and offering insightful comments and criticisms. Although this particular research project began at UBC, its wider inspiration began at the University of Washington where Charles Keyes, Kyoko Tokuno, Steve Pfaff, Ter Ellingson, Martin Jaffe and Richard Salomon showed me in varied ways how one could approach the study of religion and history. Much of this research was conducted in South Asia and numerous individuals and institutions showed me incredible generosity and a willingness to help. These include Hemendu Bikash Chowdury, Professor Upinder Singh, Bhikkhu Morita, Venerable Buddhamitra, Tarang Bauddha, S. Anand, Venerable Pragyadeep, Bhikkhu Upananda, Pema Bhante, and the staff of the Mulagandha Kuti Library in Sarnath, National Archives of India, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, MahaBodhi Society Library in Calcutta, Theosophical Society Library in Adyar, National Library in Calcutta, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Sikkim State Archives, Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok, and Bihar Research Society at the Patna Museum. Between here and there, there are numerous other indviduals who have helped me out along the way with sources and fresh ideas, including Tashi Wangchuk, Fred Vermote, Julie Vig, and David Ellingson. Lastly but most importantly, this dissertation would never have been completed were it not for the moral and material support of my family. EJ has been there all along, reading drafts, listening to me rant and rave and being more than patient while I dwelled in another place-world. Thank you. My mom, as perhaps only mothers are capable, has treated me like a true Bodhisattva. I wish my dad could have seen this come to fruition. And Tommy and Jamie, thanks for keeping me grounded and reminding me that there is much more to life than academia.

A note on transliteration, translation and text

South Asia truly is a babel of tongues. While this poses less a problem for its all-too-common polyglots, it provides more of a challenge for scholars and writers trying to intelligibly convey the cacophony of languages to an English readership. While most of the South Asian vernacular primary source material in this dissertation is derived from Hindi, it also draws upon translated sources originally composed in languages and scripts as diverse as Sanskrit, Pali, Bengali, Urdu, Marathi, Tibetan, Burmese, Tamil, and Telugu. In order to accurately convey the original spelling (but not necessarily the pronunciation) of these various linguistic units, one is required to use a number of different transliteration systems characterized by various diacritical marks. While this provides much-needed clarity and accuracy for specialists, it comes at great costs to readability. Further problems arise due to the fact that not all writers follow the same transliteration system.

For all languages composed in the Devanāgarī script, I have followed the transliteration system used in R.S. McGregor's *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Like many scholars, I have made two modifications. First, as the final short vowel 'a' of Hindi words is (generally) not pronounced, I have omitted its spelling in transliteration (thus, I write the Hindi *bhāratvarṣ,* not Sanskrit *bhāratvarṣa*, except in cases where the referent is clearly to a Sanskrit term). Second, the *anuswāra* or nasal sound is sometimes written as 'ṇ' rather than 'ṃ' (for instance, I write *gaṇgā,* not *gaṃgā* for the river Ganges). All translations from the Hindi are mine unless otherwise noted. For transliterating Tibetan orthography, I have utilized Turrel Wylie's "A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies,* Vol. 22 (1959): 261 – 67. In cases where the original language or script is unknown to me, I write the specified word in *italics* precisely as it has been recorded in the source I am drawing from.

When using common Buddhist terms, I generally follow Sanskrit usages (for instance, *dharma* as opposed to the Pali *dhamma*). However, because the (primarily) Indian writers studied in this dissertation often used Pali as much as Sanskrit—Hindi language writings, for instance, regularly switch between *bhikṣu* (Sanskrit) and *bhikkhu* (Pali)—I often move between both sets of terminology. To some readers, this may be jarring but it not only best reflects the nature of modern Indian Buddhism but the choice to use certain linguistic

registers, particularly Pali, signified important cultural expressions and to miss this component would be short sighted.

South Asian vocabulary that has now entered the English language is written in its most common English spelling rather than using the appropriate diacritical marks (for instance, I write "Krishna" rather than the Hindi "*Kṛṣṇ,*" "lama" rather than the Tibetan "*bla ma*," and "sangha" rather than the Sanskrit *saṃgha*). The first time Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi, etc., terms are used, they appear in italicized form. All uses thereafter appear without italics.

The transliteration of personal names and places follows the most frequently encountered English spelling. When no such common English spelling exists, I write the name or place following the appropriate transliteration system. For figures who frequently appear in both South Asian vernacular and English sources, I use their most popular Anglicized name in the body of the text while retaining the appropriate diacritical marks in the footnotes and bibliography (for instance, I write "Rahul Sankrityayan" in the body of the text and "Rāhul Sāṅkṛtyāyan" in the footnotes and bibliography when referencing his written Hindi works).

A final note: The use of double inverted commas " " throughout this dissertation indicates a quoted source whereas single inverted commas ' ' indicates my own emphasis or expression. I have used brackets [ ] in quoted materials to add editorial comments or indicate words that are either not found or implied in the original source material.

Other than learning all of Babel's languages, there is no single solution to presenting all of these linguistic differences in a format pleasing to everyone. Thus, while I realize some readers will be disappointed by the system of transliteration I have used, I hope my compromise will suit both South Asian language specialists and non-specialists. I ask the reader's forgiveness in any remaining errors or inaccuracies: I am not a scholar of Sanskrit or Pali.

1 Chapter One – Introduction

One of the more curious incidents in the founding of modern India occurred on the eve of Independence on August 14, 1947 when a group of seventy-two women entered New Delhi's Constituent Assembly and unfurled the newly chosen national flag. In a last minute change decided only three weeks prior, the Gandhian *carkhā*, or spinning wheel, had been replaced by the Buddhist *cakra*, or dharma wheel, as the flag's central symbol. On the surface, the choice may seem perplexing considering that Indian Buddhism was said to have become 'extinct' nearly eight hundred years before and less than one percent of India's population identified as Buddhist at the time.[1] Yet demographic statistics and entrenched theories are not always reliable indicators of cultural conscience.

Beginning in the early to mid nineteenth century, Indian Buddhism captured the imagination of an eclectic range of people and professions across the globe: from African-American writers and British nobles to devout clergymen and socialist freethinkers, Marxist organizers and industrial tycoons to radical pacifists and imperial adventurers. Within India, the then 'Jewel in the Crown' of Britain's Asian Empire, a new generation of equally diverse figures began establishing material and intellectual connections across the globe to forge their own imagined Buddhist public. Migrant laborers, non-Brahmin activists, commercial elites, Hindu *swamis*, and anti-colonial nationalists: these represented just some of the social circles that were swept up by the new Buddhist spirit. Forming club associations, temples, and publishing houses, they discovered 'modern' messages in 'ancient' sutras, debated Buddhist histories in scholarly journals, and circulated popular magazines that compared the Buddha to Marx and his *dharma* to the laws of physics.

From the late nineteenth-century onwards, those who spoke for or against contemporary Buddhism in India almost inevitably spoke of it as a "revival."[2] Their use of the term was based on a set of assumptions drawn from a historical worldview whose general

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[1] The total number of Buddhists listed in the most recent Census at the time was 232,003. See, *East India Census 1941,* Vol. 1: Abstract of Tables (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1943), 6. I take up the issue of Buddhism's extinction in chapter two.

[2] The first reference to Buddhist revival in India that I am aware of is found in Sir William Wilson Hunter, *Indian Empire: its People, History, and Products,* 2nd edition (London: Messrs. W.H. Allen & Co., 1886), 158. For other colonial-era uses of the term, c.f., *MahaBodhi* Vol. 2/1 (1892 – 93), 4*; Theosophist Thinker* [Bellary], April 8, 1894; *The Theosophist,* Vol. 19 (1897 – 98), 629 – 630; *MahaBodhi* Vol. 10/9 (1902), 81; *Indian Social Reformer* Vol. 47/10 (1936 – 37), 152 – 53; *Bombay Chronicle,* January 27, 1937, 5; *Buddha-Prabha* Vol. 4/4 (1936)*,* 71. Calling it a Buddhist revival, as will be seen, continues to this day.

outline still remains largely intact. That worldview, constructed in the cauldron of colonial ferment by white Orientalists on the one side, and Asian scholars and intellectuals on the other side, is as follows: roughly two thousand five hundred years ago, an Indian prince, Siddhārtha Gautama, was born in Lumbini, a small hamlet not far from Kapilavastu, the capital of the small kingdom of Śākya (bordering modern-day Nepal and India). At the age of twenty-nine, Prince Siddhārtha became an ascetic, renouncing the luxuries of a royal life and traveling on foot across the Gangetic plains in search of liberation from human suffering (*duḥkha*). After six tortuous years practicing yogic techniques and attaining the highest states of meditative consciousness (*dhyāna / jhāna*), he came to the conclusion that neither rigid asceticism nor hedonism were meaningful paths. While sitting under a Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya (modern-day Bihar), he became 'awakened' (literally, *Buddha*) to the true nature of suffering and the path that leads to its annihilation (*nirvāṇa*). During the next forty-five years, he taught the dharma to kings and queens, merchants and mendicants, farmers and criminals, before attaining *mahāparinirvāṇa* or ultimate release from the cycle of life and death at Kuśīnagar (modern-day Uttar Pradesh). In the first centuries after his death, Indian rulers continued to support the community of monastics (*sangha*) that had gathered in Buddha's name and that were said to have a possessed a perfect knowledge of his teaching (*buddhavacana*). There were many great patrons but none was greater than the enigmatic Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (r. 269 – 32 BCE) who inspired by the Buddha's message of peace and tolerance, renounced war and spread Buddhism across not only India but all of southeast and east Asia. During Aśoka's time and for many centuries after, nearly all Indians gave praise to Buddha with three major waves washing over the Indian populace. First there were the 'rational' and 'scientific' early Buddhists led by the Theravādins. Their 'elitism,' however, soon gave way to the second wave, the new philosophical and devotional schools of the Mahāyānists. Third and lastly, was the 'all-corrupting' current of tantra that effectively 'smothered' the Buddha's purported scientific teaching with further superstition and deviant sexual practices.

While these three Indic Buddhist waves flooded across the rest of Asia, they simultaneously receded from the original *Buddhabhūmī.* Although much of the blame was laid on the Buddhists' own corruptions, there were two other elements at play. First was a resilient and antagonistic Brahmanical Hinduism and second were the destructive raids of

Muslim armies from the central Asian steppe. These factors, we are told, crippled Indian Buddhism. Its distinguished votaries of learning and morality were either murdered, converted or fled to neighboring Buddhist lands while India's famous monastic – universities (*mahāvihāras*) were either abandoned or burned to the ground. By the thirteenth to fourteenth century, Buddhism had 'all but disappeared.'[3] The above story has undoubtedly all the elements of a Shakespearean drama and like any parody, it has numerous problems, untenable theories and more than its fair share of creative license. Most scholars writing today provide a far more nuanced picture of Indian Buddhism's rise and decline, yet the general historical outline remains live and well. This dissertation is not an attempt to rewrite this history but the standard narrative, particularly of Indian Buddhism's unadulterated origins and death some eight hundred to a thousand years ago, is central to this study.

With the death of Indian Buddhism in the pre-modern world, the terrain was ripe for its rebirth or revival in the modern world. At the heart of this dissertation are the Indian figures and institutions whose efforts to revive Buddhism have largely gone unnoticed. India today holds a central place in the "global Buddhist bazaar," but systematic studies of modern Indian Buddhism in the years after its purported death and before the post-colonial era are few and far between.[4] This dissertation fills this critical gap and in doing so, returns a voice to the much-neglected Indian figures that revived and reinvented Buddhism, in and for the modern age. Of special significance is the way this research will require scholars of South Asia and Buddhist studies to re-evaluate the long-held (mis)assumption that Buddhism did not play a vital role in the landscape of modern India until the birth of 'Ambedkar Buddhism' in 1956. Beyond this, the study will be of acute interest to scholars of the modern world as it uncovers a wide range of global networks and processes that explain the enduring relevance and influence of Buddhism in the world today.

The primary contribution of the study is two-fold. First, it produces an integrated map of the communities, ideas and networks central to the transformation of Buddhism in modern India. Second, it advances our understanding of the various ways in which colonial-era developments continue to shape and condition the way both Indians and other communities

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[3] As will be discussed in chapter two, the notion that Indian/Indic Buddhism "all but disappeared" has become something of a meme in the wider historiography.
[4] David Geary, "Destination Enlightenment: Buddhism and the Global Bazaar in Bodh Gaya, Bihar" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2009).

worldwide conceive of Buddhism and India in the modern world. To carry out this research, I examined a wide range of materials at libraries, archives, temples (*vihāra, mandir*) and other disparate field sites across India as well as in Sri Lanka, Nepal, the United States and Canada.[5] The primary source materials are as diverse as the archives themselves. The materials include unpublished government documents, personal diaries, correspondence, temple inscriptions, published memoirs, historical newspapers, journals, travelogues, district gazetteers, intelligence reports, and popular and scholarly books. This material was primarily in English or Hindi and I have also made ample use of Hindi and/or English translations of primary documents originally composed in other languages, including Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Japanese, Burmese, Bengali, Tamil and Marathi.

Despite the occasional foray into the house of mirrors that is India's ancient and medieval Buddhist past, the dissertation's primary focus is on the period from the first decades of the nineteenth century up through the middle of the twentieth century. The beginning and end of this period is marked by two symbolic moments in time. The first moment (discussed in greater detail in chapter two) took place in 1839 and signifies a rather new expression and self-consciousness in the modern Indian encounter with Buddhism. That year, the ghost of India's Buddhist past returned to the subcontinent through the translation and publication of a newly 'discovered' Sanskrit Buddhist manuscript, the *Vajrasūcī,* whose sustained criticism of entrenched Brahmanical Hindu norms did not go unnoticed. Over the next century, the *Vajrasūcī,* in all of its varied translations, would become a staple of modern Indian Buddhism. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the dissertation ends around 1956, a year that for historians and scholars of South Asia holds a much more obvious bearing. Not only did half a million Dalits (former 'untouchables') convert to Buddhism in October that year in a striking demonstration of unity and defiance but the event also coincided with a very differently imagined year long celebration honoring "2500 Years of Buddhism" orchestrated by Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister. These prominent events of the 1950s mark the end of this survey for after this, India's encounters and conversations with Buddhism were gradually pulled in other directions.

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[5] A complete list of the archives visited is contained at the end of this dissertation in Appendix 1.

1.1 Place-making, or bringing the Buddhist past into the present

Constructing ancient history is a deeply imaginative job. Fragments of broken pottery set sideways into the earth, half-mangled statues in an disheveled shrine, a human bone dislodged from its skeleton: to the trained archaeologist, the position and spacing of these items speak to a certain moment in time. Yet even with recent scientific developments such as carbon dating and insights derived from the social sciences, there is a real difficulty in making sense of material culture when evidence is scant and unsupported by literary traditions. Reading ancient languages and locating them in historical time, a science known as philology has eased many of the ambiguities of the past but it comes with its own set of complications. When literary and archaeological records do not speak to one another—and they often do not—the historian's attempt to chart the past becomes increasingly complex.

Re-constructing history, in other words, is far from simple.[6] According to the British philosopher and historian R.G. Collingwood, the only solid things we possess from the past are the "traces of itself," the concrete relics in the form of texts, art, objects, and so on.[7] There may be visual, oral, and literary accounts to help guide our reading of these materials—the how, what, when and where of history—but our ability to truly grasp the world in which they dwelled is to a large degree guided by human imagination. The more that imagination is informed, the more sophisticated our understanding can be.[8] Everyday individuals, however, rarely engage in the sort of formalized historical reconstructions that Collingwood describes. Instead, history is typically conceived less by disciplinary regimes than by what the late anthropologist Keith Basso calls "place-making," or bringing the past into the present.[9] According to Basso, thinking about the past and our relationship to it is probably the most basic tool in the history of humanity.[10] The past is always there and even the most trivial of things can ignite the journey:

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[6] Even in places and times with detailed written records, writing history can be an exceedingly complex affair. See, Patrick Finney, "The ubiquitous presence of the past? Collective memory and international history," *International History Review,* Vol. 36/3 (2014), 443 – 472; Smita A Rahman, "The presence of the past: negotiating the politics of collective memory," *Contemporary Political Theory,* Vol. 9/1 (2010), 59 – 76.
[7] R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography and other writings,* edited by David Boucher and Teresa Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 [1933]), 82.
[8] Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 96 – 99.
[9] Keith Basso, *Wisdom sits in places: Landscape and Language among the western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 7.
[10] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 5.

> The restrictions on local travel are virtually nonexistent (memory and imagination, the most intimate and inventive of traveling companions, always see to that)…[and] getting there is quick and efficient (a quiet moment or two is usually sufficient to make the transition).[11]

In day-to-day place-making, the deep histories of our past may not be recognized at all with most time spent dwelling on the familiar, mundane and trivial. Yet our surroundings, Basso tells us, carry the marks of time and occasionally, something does happen to unsettle our habitual thought patterns and move us deeply into other place-worlds. The catalyst may be instantaneous, like the meeting of an old friend that unleashes a tidal wave of emotions, or it may be more subtle, the slow crystallization of an idea formed in the reading of a book, a conversation or a walk through familiar terrain. Whatever the trigger, time changes and "at that precise moment when ordinary perceptions begin to loosen their hold…the country starts to change. Awareness has shifted its footing, and the character of the place, now transfigured by thoughts of an earlier day, swiftly takes on a new and foreign look."[12]

This revitalization of places that carry the mark of time and where memories are stored reveals the underlining conceptual shifts in the formation of modern Indian Buddhism. Writing in his memoir in the mid-1940s, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's soon-to-be first Prime Minister engaged in his own place-making:

> In my own city of Allahabad or in Hardwar I would go to the great bathing festivals, the *Kumbh Mela*, and see hundreds of thousands of people come, as their forebears had come for thousands of years from all over India, to bathe in the Ganges. I would remember descriptions of these festivals written thirteen hundred years ago by Chinese pilgrims and others, and even these *melas* were ancient and lost in an unknown antiquity…these journeys and visits of mine, with the background of my reading, gave me an insight into the past. To a somewhat bare intellectual understanding was added an emotional appreciation, and gradually a sense of reality began to creep into my mental picture of India, and the land of my forefathers became peopled with living beings, who laughed and wept, loved and suffered.[13]

In the thousands of miles Nehru traveled across India campaigning as a leading Congress politician, shaking the hands of strangers and visiting India's storied sites, he allowed the past to enrich his understanding of the land. When he traveled to Sarnath to visit the Deer Park (*Mrigadava*), he thought of Buddha and the moment remembered by millions of Buddhists (and non-Buddhists) worldwide when the Buddha gave his first teaching. Then,

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[11] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 3.
[12] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 4.
[13] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985 [1946]), 131 – 32.

through the power of his own imagination, Nehru invented a place-world in which the ethical guidelines inscribed on the Ásokan pillar reverberated across the land and Buddha spoke words of wisdom under the shade of a Banyan tree. "Tell all the people," Buddha says in Nehru's voice, "the poor and the lowly, the rich and the high, are all one, and that all castes unite in this religion as do rivers in the sea."[14] Within this familiar, yet distant realm, Nehru lingered, until (as Basso explains), "it started to fade, as every place-world must."[15]

According to Basso, the places-worlds we visit are shaped by the "congenial places of experiential terrain: the terrain of one's youth, perhaps, or of where one's forebears lived, or of decisive events that altered the course of history."[16] Yet building place-worlds is not only about reviving former times and reliving the past. It is also about *revising* them and shaping them in ways that may not correspond to what others have suggested or supposed. Place-worlds, in other words, may be constitutive of past historical moments but their significance and meaning will forever be constructed, interrogated and fashioned as long as someone is there to imagine them. This process of imagining place-worlds, of comparing contents, evaluating strengths and weaknesses and pondering their significance is a regular collective, social process, "as common and straightforward as it is sometimes highly inventive."[17] The process through which one place-world becomes more widely accepted depends on a wide number of factors, including how credible and convincing they may seem, the charisma and authority of those who said it, or even the political conditions under which certain accounts may be authorized. Nehru's published memoirs, but especially the *Discovery of India* (1946), illustrates this very process of collective remembrance and place-making. Published at the height of anti-colonial consciousness in Asia by one of its most important leaders and still adored in its one hundred plus editions by readers today, Nehru's passages on Buddhism provide readers with fresh possibilities for building their own Buddhist place-worlds. Yet not only was Nehru's account of Buddhist India fashioned from the works of earlier writers and

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[14] Nehru, *Discovery of India,* 129.
[15] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 6.
[16] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 3.
[17] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 7.

thinkers as much bound in their own "webs of significance" as he was, but his account had to contend with numerous other place-worlds available to the Indian public.[18]

At the forefront of this study are those individuals and communities who wished to make "the stuff" of Buddhist place-worlds alive again.[19] As the following chapters describe, this task could not be so easily accomplished. For if the place-maker's main objective is to speak the past into being, to summon it with words and objects and give it dramatic, living form, to *produce* an experience of place-worlds and not just speak of them, there were an even greater number of groups and individuals who sought to produce the experiences of place-worlds either wholly separate from Buddhist ones or impressioned with a different lens.

1.2 The Buddhist revival: A literature review

Compared to other periods and aspects of Indian Buddhism, relatively few scholars have focused on its nineteenth and early twentieth century manifestations. Since at least the late 1980s, the doyen of modern Indian Buddhism has been the Indian Civil Servant, Buddhist convert and prolific writer, Diwan Chand Ahir (1928 – 2012).[20] Of the more than seventy semi-scholarly books Ahir published on Buddhism, three of them provide skeletal outlines of Buddhism's modern revival.[21] Like other writers of the period, Ahir's focus is largely on the British 'discovery' of Buddhism and Ambedkar's "mass movement" rather than the critical years in between.[22] Yet nestled throughout all three of the works, which read more like a guidebook with an impressive list of entries, are valuable nuggets of information

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[18] "Webs of significance," which is an ode to Max Weber, is from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.
[19] The expresssion is from Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 7.
[20] For Ahir's 'autobiography,' see D.C. Ahir, *Buddhist Studies: Memoirs of a Civil Servant* (New Delhi: Buddhist World Press, 2011).
[21] These include D.C. Ahir, *The Pioneers of Buddhist Revival in India* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1988); *Buddhism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991); *Buddhism in India: Rediscovery, Revival and Development* (New Delhi: Buddhist World Press, 2010). The last and most recent of these works is less an original publication that it is a compilation of select passages from the earlier two works.
[22] For instance, in the thirty-one page "History of Revival Movement" section in *Buddhism in Modern India,* Ahir dedicates six of these pages (11 – 17) to the period between 1891 – 1947. This is quite typical of most studies of "Buddhist revival." For instance, Trevor Ling's study of the same topic begins with early Buddhism, covers its decline and 'death' and then jumps straight to the 1950s with Ambedkar's conversion. See, Trevor Ling, *Buddhist Revival in India: aspects of the sociology of Buddhism* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

about little known colonial-era Buddhist organizations, figures and publications. Despite Ahir's ubiquitous presence in the bibliography of any scholar searching for clues about modern Indian Buddhism, his writings are notoriously problematic. He rarely cites his sources and his writings contain a bewildering number of typos, conflicting dates and problematic assertions. As Ahir himself put it in the preface to one of his works, the purpose of his writing was to provide a "*largely* factual History of Modern Buddhism."[23]

In addition to Ahir's frequently referenced handbooks, there have been a number of shorter works composed by Indian and non-Indian scholars. For instance, in the same stead as Ahir's *Pioneers of Buddhist Revival* (1988) is Dr. Aṅgne Lāl's Hindi-language, *Buddha Śāsana ke ratna* [*Jewels of the Buddha Sāsana*].[24] This useful work is less a history or study than it is a compilation of bibliographic entries on influential colonial-era Indian *bhikkhus*. Predating the works of both Lāl and Ahir was the short, but insightful essay by Eleanor Zelliot on the "Indian discovery of Buddhism, 1856 – 1956."[25] Although published more than three decades ago, Zelliot's seminal essay still provides a concise (if somewhat simplified) overview of the main colonial-era developments.[26] The first book-length critical study of Buddhism in colonial India is G. Aloysius' *Religion as Emancipatory Identity.*[27] Aloysius' work, which is based on an extensive reading of Tamil sources, is the most important study of the radical conversion-based Buddhist movement that developed among Tamil Dalits in and around Madras in the first decades of the twentieth century.[28] As

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[23] Ahir, *Buddhism in Modern India,* xi. Emphasis mine. In fact, calling this work a "history" is greatly misleading considering its more encyclopedic layout.

[24] Aṅgne Lāl, *Buddha Śāsana ke ratna: 32 bauddh bhikṣuon ke vyaktitva evam kratitva par abhutapūrva grantha* (Lakhnaū: Prabuddh Prakāśan, 2004). Lāl, who is a Buddhist convert and a former *bhikkhu,* is currently a Professor in the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology at Lucknow University.

[25] Eleanor Zelliot, "Indian discovery of Buddhism, 1856 – 1956," in *Studies in Pali and Buddhism: A Memorial Volume in Honor of Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap,* edited by A.K. Narain (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Company, 1979), 389 – 406.

[26] Another work which is often cited but which deserves more scrutiny is Dr. D.L. Ramteke's *Revival of Buddhism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1983). Ramteke focuses largely on Ambedkar's conversion movement, sparing no less than twenty-five pages to other Buddhist developments in colonial India. Yet while Ramteke's synopsis of post-1956 Maharashtrian Buddhism is enlightening, more than three quarters of his section on colonial Indian Buddhism is plagiarized directly from Zelliot's "Indian Discovery of Buddhism"! Compare, Ramteke, *Revival of Buddhism in Modern India,* 43 – 67, with Zelliot, "Indian Discovery of Buddhism," 389 – 406.

[27] See, G. Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity: a Buddhist movement among the Tamils under colonialism* (New Delhi: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1998). Aloysius has produced a number of works in this genre, although most are in Tamil.

[28] For a more recent evaluation, see Gajendran Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness: Pandit Iyothee Thass, Tamil Buddhism, and the Marginalized in South India" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011).

Aloysius demonstrates, one of the leaders of this movement, P. Lakshmi Narasu, later became a major influence on Ambedkar's own interpretation of Buddhism. Although Aloysius is little concerned with the wider Buddhist scene in India at the time, his work is indispensable for any scholar wishing to understand caste dynamics in modern Indian Buddhism. Inspired by Aloysius' scholarship and committed social activism, numerous other researchers have since launched their own search for the colonial origins of Ambedkar's Buddhism. Among the most valuable contributions have come from the late Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp, the activist and writer Braj Ranjan Mani and the scholar-activist Gail Omvedt.[29] While their works have produced fascinating insights into various Buddhist worlds, they have largely understood their subjects' activities as confined to regional and local quarters without recognizing their relationship to the broader Indian Buddhist scene.

An important exception to this trend stems from Gitanjali Surendran's recent PhD dissertation on "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism: Buddhist Revival in India, c. 1890 - 1956."[30] Surendran's study is, as her title suggests, an analysis of nearly the same intellectual habitus and social world as this dissertation. Her own focus on the way ideas about Buddhism "circulated from person to person, forum to forum, within communities and between communities, [and] were deployed, redeployed and therein transformed at many different junctures," is very much in tune with my own interests.[31] While there is significant overlap in the sources we examined and in the figures and organizations we discuss, there are several notable differences. The first major difference is that Surendran begins her history with the all-too-familiar story of Anagarika Dharmapala's arrival in India and founding of the MahaBodhi Society in 1891. In contrast to this, my study begins roughly sixty years prior (and in some ways long before that), locating the foundations of modern Indian Buddhism in conversations between pandits and their European patrons along with new pedagogies taught in colonial schools. The second area where this dissertation departs radically from

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[29] See, Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp, "Roots of Ambedkar Buddhism in Kanpur," in *Reconstructing the world: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, edited by Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 221 – 44; Braj Ranjan Mani, "Dr. Ambedkar's Predecessors on the Path Towards Navayana," in *Buddhism and the Contemporary World: An Ambedkarian Perspective,* edited by Bhalchandra Mungekar and Aakash Singh Rathore (New Delhi: Bookwell, 2007), 57 – 86; Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003). Omvedt's work, which is at times a bit speculative, covers the entire spectrum of India's Buddhist history with pages 217 – 43 on the colonial period.
[30] Gitanjali Surendran, "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism: Buddhist Revival in India, c. 1890 – 1956" (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2013).
[31] Surendran, "Indian Discovery," 2.

Surendran's approach is in my discussion of the "Hindu Buddha," particularly as evidenced by the activities of the Hindu industrialist J.K. Birla and the right-wing Hindu organization, the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā. Between the 1920s and 1950s, Birla sponsored the construction of more than a dozen Buddhist sites in India while the Hindu MahāSabhā (of which Birla was also a leading patron) simultaneously spearheaded a rather successful campaign to Hinduize Buddhism through political campaigns, lecture tours and popular writings (I discuss this in chapter six).[32]

Setting aside my own criticisms of all the above-mentioned works, as a combined whole they clearly point to three major developments in the making of modern Indian Buddhism. These are 1) the British discovery of Buddhism, 2) the Calcutta-based MahaBodhi Society and 3) the role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891 – 1956) in the 1950s. With the exception of Surendran's insightful dissertation, nearly all research into these three topics has been largely conceived of on an independent basis without consideration of how they shaped and were shaped by a wider Indian public. In the remainder of this section, I examine several of the most important works on these three topics as they relate to the study of modern Indian Buddhism.

In the growing body of literature on the British discovery of Buddhism via archaeological excavations, Indians are still seen as having little role in this process. Take, for instance, Charles Allen's popular history, *The Buddha and the Sahibs.*[33] Based on archival sources in India and Britain, Allen's influential work provides a rich and engaging narrative of the most accomplished Orientalists and scholar-soldiers who discovered India's abandoned or converted Buddhist spaces in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From Brian Hodgson and Sir William Jones to James Prinsep, Alexander Cunningham and even the Viceroy, Lord George Nathaniel Curzon, Allen traces in painstaking detail their piece-by-piece re-construction of India's Buddhist history. Allen frames his work as a direct challenge to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), arguing that the Orientalists were in fact "the men who discovered India's lost religion," and that our knowledge of India's pre-Islamic history is

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[32] Birla receives only passing mention in Surendran's work, mostly in list form, with the most extensive commentary amounting to him being the "the philanthropist of many Buddhist causes" (170) while the Hindu MahāSabhā's role is under theorized.

[33] Charles Allen, *The Buddha and the Sahibs: the men who discovered India's lost religion* (London: John Murray, 2002).

indebted to them.[34] While there is a kernel of truth in Allen's thesis, his work suffers (somewhat ironically) from the same problem that Said's *Orientalism* does. First, it fails to acknowledge, let alone consider how 'native' scholars may have influenced the way European colonizers looked at the 'Orient' and 'India.' Second, and perhaps its more stunning shortcoming, is the near complete absence of the numerous Indian interpreters and scholars who worked alongside the Orientalists and assisted them in their 'scientific' works. For instance, although there is the occasional reference to Indian *pandits* (scholars) and *munśī* (interpreters) in Allen's account, they are (like the subaltern) unable to speak, creating the impression that Indians had nothing to say about the Buddhist remains or ideas being discussed. This assumption, which is discussed in greater detail in chapter two is unfortunately not only shortsighted but also widespread.

In a more theoretically rich work that otherwise parallels Allen's, the art historian Janice Leoshko studies the same constellation of nineteenth century British scholars that pioneered the European understanding of India's Buddhist art and architecture.[35] Unlike Allen, she does not assume that the Buddhist past which the Orientalists constructed was necessarily a given, but rather considers how their "Protestant presuppositions" (the phrase is Gregory Schopen's) influenced their conclusions.[36] A major result of these Protestant tendencies was that late Indic Buddhism was seen as corrupted, degenerate and therefore not worthy of study. Thus, the vast corpus of Buddhist images and monuments produced in east India under the Palas (c. 8th – 12th centuries) have largely been devalued and neglected, thus perpetuating the notion that Indian Buddhism was an other-worldly soteriology disconnected from daily public life. While Leoshko's insights are cogent, they too fail to consider how these attitudes may have been perpetuated or challenged by Indian scholars.

An important intervention in this wider realm is Upinder Singh's nuanced study, *The Discovery of Ancient India.*[37] Although Singh's work is less focused on Buddhism than with the origins of disciplinary archaeology, much of the text concerns the nineteenth century discovery of Buddhist sites at Bodh Gaya, Sanchi, Bharhut and Amarāvatī. Through a careful

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[34] Allen, *The Buddha and the Sahibs,* 5. See also, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Hardmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).
[35] Janice Leoshko, *Sacred Traces: British Explorations of Buddhism in India* (Hants: Ashgate, 2003).
[36] Gregory Schopen, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions* Vol. 31/1 (1991), 1 – 23.
[37] Upinder Singh, *The Discovery of Ancient India: Early Archaeologists and the Beginnings of Archaeology* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

examination of the "experienced field archaeologists," "bumbling amateurs" and "zealous apprentices" that discovered these sites, she shows that their interpretation of the past was shaped by a number of factors, including not only the limited materials available but also the techniques at their disposal through which they could assess their finds.[38] Singh argues that ideology was indeed a powerful factor in the types of conclusions derived but is careful to point out that there was no single, monolithic Said-ian Orientalism that guided their research. Instead, scholarship linked directly to political agendas mixed with impartial, apolitical inquiries, while prejudice co-mingled with more measured approaches.[39]

One of the special strengths of Singh's work is a chapter analyzing the roles of Indian scholars connected with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Unlike Allen, she acknowledges that indigenous histories of these sites existed prior to the colonial period although she does not discuss them. Rather, her primary interest concerns the rampant prejudice and discrimination Indian scholars faced in working with their European colleagues. She also explores the most distinguished of these figures—men like P.C. Mukharji, Bhagavanlal Indraji and Rajendralal Mitra—and how their own interpretations influenced the much wider, in fact, global discussion on Indian Buddhism at that time.[40] The only shortcoming of Singh's work is that she situates these figures' contributions entirely within the small world of European-dominated archaeological scholarship and there is no discussion of how these debates shaped public Indian discourse.[41]

Studies of the British discovery of Buddhism via textual remains have been no less slow to recognize the role of Indian scholars.[42] Despite Charles Hallisey's seminal argument more than twenty years ago that the modern construction of Buddhism was influenced as much by the solitary deciphering of manuscripts as it was by the ideas and attitudes of the colonized peoples who worked alongside and often tutored the Orientalists, there has been a

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[38] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 341.
[39] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 338 – 39.
[40] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 290 – 336.
[41] However, in a more recent essay, she has addressed aspects of this issue. See, Upinder Singh, "Exile and Return: The Reinvention of Buddhism and Buddhist Sites in Modern India," *South Asian Studies,* Vol. 26/2 (2010), 193 – 217.
[42] The seminal text in this regard is Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

stubborn resistance to considering Indians in this stead.[43] While the excellent work of scholars like Donald Lopez, Urs App, and David McMahan, have taken this message to heart by carefully considering the role of Asian Buddhists in the interpretation of modern Buddhism, India appears to be a blank slate.[44] That is, apart from scattered references, these otherwise important works have not considered how Indians influenced, let alone, were impacted by the larger discussions and activities taking place. For this reason, this body of scholarship has added surprisingly little to our precise understanding of modern Indian Buddhist thought, barring several critical insights, regarding the importance of new communication technologies and the movement of ideas and people in an age of empires.[45]

The most oft-cited Asian figure to appear in all of the above writings is Anagarika Dharmapala (1864 – 1933), the Sinhalese Buddhist activist and leader of the MahaBodhi Society. Writings on Dharmapala, the Calcutta-based MahaBodhi Society and a select group of figures associated with it entail the second largest strand of writings on Buddhism in modern India. Established in 1891 by Dharmapala and the American Buddhist Theosophist, Colonel Henry Olcott (1832 – 1907), the MahaBodhi Society quickly spread to other parts of Asia, Europe and North America, galvanizing support from wealthy donors and influential elites. While a systematic study of the MahaBodhi Society as an organization has yet to be written, there are three major monographs (and numerous articles) that shed important light on various aspects of its activity. In *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott,* Stephen Prothero explores how the American colonel and social organizer extraordinaire promoted a "creole" Buddhist faith across the British Empire, United States

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[43] Charles Hallisey, "Roads taken and not taken in the study of Theravada Buddhism," in *Curators of the Buddha*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31 – 62.

[44] See, Donald S. Lopez, Jr., (ed.), *Curators of the Buddha: the study of Buddhism under colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh: a short history of the Buddha* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). The work of Urs App is particularly outstanding and he generally seems less prone to this than other scholars. See, Urs App, *The Cult of Emptiness: the western discovery of Buddhist thought and the invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Kyoto: University Media, 2012) and Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

[45] One of the more recent attempts to stay alert to the role of technologies and migration is in J. Jeffrey Franklin's *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). According to Franklin, the British presence in India led to a Buddhist "counter-invasion" in the form of printed texts, monastics, and travellers but like most scholars, he directs little focus on Indians themselves.

and Japan.[46] Through his expansive global travels and nearly two decades living in India, Olcott used a Buddhist "lexicon," a Theosophical "accent" and a liberal Protestant "grammar" to forge networks with a diverse array of individuals across caste, class and religion.[47] Of real significance for this dissertation is a chapter of Prothero's work where he analyzes Olcott's close relationship with a group of Tamil Dalit intellectual-activists in 1890s Madras who saw in Buddhism a kind of liberation theology that would free them from caste discrimination. Utilizing Olcott's international networks and social capital, they established what later became one of the most radical and enduring Buddhist organizations in India (and competitor to the MahaBodhi Society).

In addition to Olcott, most other works on the MahaBodhi Society of India are primarily concerned with Anagarika Dharmapala. In *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya (1811-1949),* the anthropologist Alex Trevithick assesses Dharmapala and the MahaBodhi Society's influence in India via the decades-long legal case that it launched in the 1890s to 'reclaim' the MahaBodhi temple in Bodh Gaya from the Śaiva Mahant who then controlled it.[48] Trevithick's work, which was based on his dissertation research at Harvard, is to my knowledge one of the first major studies to look at archival sources in India and closely consider the MahaBodhi Society's relationship with Indian organizations and figures. His account is particularly valuable for understanding the important role the MahaBodhi Society and MahaBodhi temple case played in India's leading political party, the Indian National Congress. Yet as a study focused largely on a single, albeit important, Buddhist space in India, it only briefly alludes to the larger Indian interest in Buddhism at the time.

Dharmapala is also the subject of Steven Kemper's latest monograph.[49] In *Rescued from the Nation,* Kemper examines Dharmapala's global travels propagating Buddhism, founding MahaBodhi Society branches and raising money for his legal case and various educational and religious projects across India, Sri Lanka and beyond. Kemper reserves only a chapter of his book to the Indian setting specifically, investigating the motivations and

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[46] Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: the Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
[47] Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 7 – 9.
[48] Alan Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya (1811-1949): Anagarika Dharmapala and the MahaBodhi Temple* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2007).
[49] Steven Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the United Buddhist World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

efforts behind the upper-caste Bengali Hindu support of the MahaBodhi Society.[50] With his close reading of Dharmapala's diaries, Kemper adds important new insights into Buddhism in colonial Bengal but he also perpetuates the fallacy that the MahaBodhi Society was the only major spokesperson for Indian Buddhism at that time.[51]

All of the above studies, though important contributions to the field, only concern themselves marginally with the ways in which Buddhism was being understood and constructed by Indians themselves. The major exception to this trend, and the source of the largest body of writings on modern Indian Buddhism, are those concerning the post-1956 conversions of Dalits to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar Studies is an entire field of its own, driven by a fascination for one of the most tantalizing figures in modern Indian history.[52] Although Buddhism formed just one part of Ambedkar's diverse activities as a lawyer, historian, politician, social reformer, feminist and economist, many scholars see him as responsible for igniting India's Buddhist revival. Without a doubt, his carefully orchestrated public conversion to Buddhism in 1956 along with several hundred thousand of his followers is not only one of the most important moments in modern Indian history but it also completely transformed what it means to be a Buddhist in India today. Yet by and large, most studies of Ambedkar Buddhism have looked forward rather than backwards, understanding him as the starting point of the Buddhist revival rather than as part of a much longer historical process.[53]

1.3 The architecture of the argument: Chapter outlines

When examined as a whole, scholarship on nineteenth and twentieth century Indian Buddhism is slowly coming together, but still fragmentary at best. Buddhist revival in India was often discussed in the colonial period as if it was a single monolithic movement but it

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[50] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 241 – 303.
[51] For passages where Kemper underestimates the wider Indian interest in Buddhism, see *Rescued from the Nation,* 7 – 8 and 274. For an insightful analaysis of Bengali Hindus and their interest in Buddhism (from which Kemper also draws), see, Sarath Amunugama, "A Sinhala Buddhist "Babu": Anagarika Dharmapala (1864 – 1933) and the Bengal connection," *Social Science Information* Vol. 30/3 (1991): 555 – 91.
[52] The late Eleanor Zelliot remains the doyen of (English-language) Ambedkar studies. For her classic assessment, see Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992).
[53] The writings discussed above are the (rather new) exception that proves the rule.

actually produced a wide spectrum of interpretations and therefore requires a number of different lenses. Like the history of modern Buddhism more widely, Indian Buddhism's modern formation was deeply shaped by global networks.[54] Scholars who study these networks have demonstrated that changes wrought by the expansion of imperial power, international commercial interests, and the 'death of long distance'—the communications and transportation revolutions in steamships, railways, telegraphs, etc.—laid the foundation for an unprecedented era of global religious activity.[55] In the nineteenth and twentieth century, it was the expansion of British rule over the Indian subcontinent and the formation of empires and colonies across Asia that conditioned the nature and flow of these networks.[56] If during this period when colonial epistemologies and enterprises increasingly penetrated all walks of Indian life, 'Buddhism' as a construct was invented, then Buddhism, it must be understood, was always conceived of and defined in multiple ways within specific, local contexts.[57] In the chapters that follow, I trace the history of modern Indian Buddhism, or perhaps more accurately, *Buddhisms,* through a loosely organized chronological lens.

Chapter two, "The Agony of Memory," begins by looking back at the long history of Buddhism in India, not so much as historical artifact but as it was conceived and remembered by early colonial indigenous populations. In particular, I provide material evidence that complicates narratives about Indic Buddhism's oft-cited 'death' or 'extinction' during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries and then use this as a platform to question the conventional

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[54] For a broad overview, see, Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox, and Brian Bocking, "A Buddhist Crossroads: pioneer European Buddhists and globalizing Asian networks, 1860 - 1960," *Contemporary Buddhism* Vol. 14/1 (2013), 1 – 16. For more focused studies, see, Anne Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Richard M. Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni: Travel and the Reconstruction of Japanese Buddhism," *Journal of Japanese Studies* Vol. 30 (2004), 65 – 96.

[55] See, Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780 – 1914: Global connections and comparisons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For an important case study of this, as applied to modern Islam, see Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840 – 1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[56] This model of networks and flows is by no means a rigid break with the past. Although differently conditioned, Buddhist ideas, practices and peoples have crossed Asia since its very inception through similar means. For South Asia, see Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). For South and Southeast Asia, see, Tilman Frasch, "A Buddhist Network in the Bay of Bengal: Relations between Bodh Gaya, Burma and Sri Lanka, c. 300 – 1300," in *From the Mediterranean to the South China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes*, edited by C. Guillot, Denys Lombard and Roderich Ptak (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 69 – 93; for China and India, see Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade: the realignment of India-China relations, 600 – 1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

[57] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy," *Public Culture* Vol. 2/2 (1990): 4 – 5.

scholarly view that Indians had 'forgotten' who the Buddha was and had no conception of a Buddhist past. By looking at a variety of primary sources, including translations of Sanskrit, Oriya, Tamil and Bengali texts (hagiographies, temple chronicles, *purāṇas* and scholastic manuals) as well as a variety of early nineteenth-century surveyors' reports, memoirs, correspondence and scholarly articles, I provide concrete evidence of a robust memory and conversation regarding Buddhism taking place among indigenous scholars, literati and ascetics up through the early decades of the colonial encounter. The chapter begins and ends with a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the 1839 publication of the *Laghuṭaṅka* [*Little Chisel*], a caustic response to a British Resident's circulation of an ancient Buddhist scripture in the princely state of Bhopal. This, I contend, was the first major indigenous response to Buddhism to appear in printed form in the nineteenth-century.

The third chapter, "Dispelling Darkness" (1850 – 1901), examines how dramatic shifts in Britain's colonial education policies of the 1850s gave rise to a new generation of English-educated Indians with critical 'academic' interests in Buddhist material culture and ideas. The recovery of Sanskrit and Pali Buddhist manuscripts along with the discovery of abandoned Buddhist sites in India via the new 'science' of archaeology gave Buddhism a profound sense of space and place rooted in Indian identities. To uncover this new sense of Indian Buddhism, the chapter examines the depiction of Buddhism in a popular Hindi – Urdu government schoolbook published in 1874 and used up through the end of the century. Following this, I turn to the role that indigenous populations held in new institutes of higher education, the Archaeological Survey of India and at specialized scholarly societies in urban centers. The primary sources for this chapter include the Indian Census, survey reports, a major Hindi schoolbook, published memoirs, historical journals and a series of unpublished government documents housed at the National Archives in New Delhi.

In the fourth chapter, "The Light of the World" (1870 – 1905), the narrative turns away from the specialized world of critical Indian scholarship and education in order to consider its wider public life.[58] The chapter highlights the ways that Indians of particular social classes, castes and regions were exposed to idioms and images of Buddhism via popular vernacular literature, commercial travel, military service and new religious

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[58] The idea and expression stems from, Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Public Life of History: An Argument out of India," *Public Culture,* Vol. 20/1 (2008): 143 – 68.

movements. After tracing the numerous Indian translations and adaptations of Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* (1879), I focus on four new religious movements and organizations that all espoused competing forms of Buddhism. Through an examination of unpublished archival materials, periodicals, newspapers, ritual manuals, and district gazetteers, I explore the considerable influence that the MahaBodhi Society, Theosophical Society, Brahmo Samāj and Sangharāja Nikāya all possessed in late nineteenth century India.

The fifth chapter, "Banyan Tree Buddhism" (1890 – 1922), explores how at the same time that India was emerging as the fulcrum of British power in Asia, it was also reemerging as a major intellectual and physical crossroads in the Buddhist world. The chapter introduces what I call the Indian Buddhist *ecumene,* or known Buddhist world. The Buddhist ecumene refers to those parts of the Indian subcontinent where Indians could study, practice, comprehend, or encounter Buddhism. Viewed from above and with the advantage of hindsight, the ecumene looks like a Banyan tree, a complex, interconnected web of branches that takes the observing eye in various, often circuitous directions. By following the ecumene and all of its various networks and regional nodes, the chapter emphasizes how new urban vihāras, re-discovered Buddhist spaces, charismatic leaders, communication technologies, and Buddhist organizations were constantly transforming the places and people encountered in the ecumene. In contrast to most scholarship which has focused on Dharmapala and the MahaBodhi Society, the chapter details the role of several lesser-known organizations and individuals like the Hindu wrestler turned bhikkhu, Mahāvīr; Venerable Kripasaran of the Bengal Buddhist Association; and the leaders of the south Indian Śākya Buddhist Society. Major sources for this chapter include Hindi-language hagiographies and periodicals, unpublished archival materials from Sikkim, the journals of the MahaBodhi Society and Theosophical Society and annual reports of the Bengal Buddhist Association.

Having established the primary foundation upon which modern Indian Buddhism stands, the remaining chapters turn to several of the major transformations or reinventions that took place in the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter six, "An Empire of Righteousness" (1920 – 40), shifts attention to the important issue of the 'Hindu Buddha' and how dominant Hindu orientations shaped the development of the Buddhist revival. The chapter also explores the various ways Buddhist organizations and figures engaged and reacted to these developments. Of particular focus in the chapter are the activities of the All-

India Hindu MahāSabhā and the eldest son of the industrialist family, Seth Jugal Kishore Birla. From the mid-1920s onwards, Birla and the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā were extremely active in Buddhist affairs, supporting Buddhist construction efforts, attending conferences, forwarding recommendations to the government on behalf of Buddhist groups and even sponsoring Buddhist monastics to conduct missionary work in India. Although all of these interactions are placed within a longer historical context, in order to demonstrate that the modern Hindu assimilation of Buddha is in some ways a continuation of earlier rhetorical devices, I also highlight how the modern Hindu appropriation of Buddhism was conditioned by contemporary political and cultural circumstances. Primary sources for this chapter include temple inscriptions, unpublished government documents, rare Hindi and English books, reports in Indian newspapers, the journal of the Hindu MahāSabhā and MahaBodhi Society, and the unpublished private papers of Hindu elites involved in the Buddhist revival.

Chapter seven explores the social and political world of "Bahujan Buddhism" (1914 – 56) from smaller Buddhist conversion movements among lower-caste Hindus (*śūdras*) and Dalits in southern and northern India to the large-scale conversions in the 1950s of Mahar Dalits led by Ambedkar. First, the chapter outlines the wider socio-economic and political transformations that led to the mass (*bahujan*) encounter with Buddhism. Second, it explores the intellectual and social landscape of the two most pertinent Buddhist conversion movements of the period between the early 1920s and 1940s. Third and lastly, it discusses the relationship of these earlier movements and thinkers with the most well-known conversion movement, that of Ambedkar and the Mahars in the 1950s. Primary sources for the chapter includes a prominent Hindi-language Buddhist journal, *Dharmadūt;* the popular Adi-Hindu text on Buddhism, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī aur Ārya* (1930), Census reports, personal correspondence and a selection of English and Hindi writings related to Ambedkar.

In chapter eight, "The Buddha and Marx" (1910 – 47), I examine how the rise of socialist paradigms in post-1920s India jostled with emerging debates on what the Buddha really taught. The chapter focuses primarily on two of the most influential left-leaning Indian Buddhist scholars and sometimes bhikkhus, Rahul Sankrityayan (1893 – 1963) and Dharmanand Kosambi (1876 – 1947). In contrast to previous chapters, the focus here is much more concentrated on individual lives and I highlight how several of the features discussed thus far in the dissertation personally shaped Sankrityayan's and Kosambi's intellectual

developments and modes of action. Primary sources for this chapter include Kosambi's and Sankrityayan's personal memoirs, scholarly and popular articles.

In my penultimate chapter, "Nehruvian Buddhism" (1947 – 56), I shift attention to the nationalist conceptions of Buddhism and the ways in which popular and scholarly discourses about India's Buddhist past under the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka influenced the new Cabinet established by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889 – 1964). Proceeding from here, I focus on the ideologies and activities of what I call Nehruvian Buddhism, or the state government's promotion of Buddhism in both domestic and foreign affairs. It considers the central aspirations and methodologies of the state while giving serious consideration to the way these efforts were both enhanced and challenged by other Indian intellectuals and contemporary political transformations. The primary sources for this chapter are Nehru's writings, contemporary newspaper accounts and a large body of unpublished government documents from the National Archives in New Delhi.

The dissertation concludes by reviewing the range of Buddhist developments that occurred in the century prior to 1956 and showing how they all, to varying degrees, are reflected in the discourses and practices of Buddhism during this period and in India today. It also highlights how in the period after this, Buddhism underwent changes that merit a significantly different approach.

2 Chapter Two – The agony of memory and the conversation of mankind

This chapter examines Indian memories and ideas of Buddhism in the decades surrounding the British discovery of Buddhism in the subcontinent. It contends that there was a robust memory of Buddhism among the educated Indian populace and that even among those populaces where knowledge of Buddhism was blurred, it still represented an important symbol of anti-Brahmanical activity. In exploring the centuries-long dialogue between Brahmins and Buddhists and the traces of that memory in the early nineteenth century, the chapter sheds light on two major historiographical assumptions in studies of South Asia. First, it re-evaluates the conventional narrative that Buddhism died in India between the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Second, and directly related to the theory of Buddhism's 'extinction,' it challenges the idea that Indians had 'forgotten' the Buddha and were therefore a blank slate upon which the Orientalists constructed the Indian Buddhist past.

2.1 Sūbajī Bapū and the diamond cutter

It all began with a conversation. In the spring of 1835, a British diplomat named Lancelot Wilkinson (1805 – 41) and his Sanskrit tutor, Pandit Sūbajī Bāpū began talking about an old Buddhist Sanskrit manuscript, the *Vajrasūcī,* that Wilkinson had recently acquired from a Hindu *sannyasi* during a trip to Nasik in western India.[1] In about fourteen printed pages the *Vajrasūcī* or "Diamond Cutter," lays out a scathing critique of the Brahmanical caste system. The author of the text, the first century CE Buddhist scholar, Aśvaghoṣa, begins by asking the reader simple questions like "What is Brahmanhood? Is it life (*jiva*)? Is it caste (*varna*)? Is it wisdom? (*jnana*)?"[2] Then, quoting from numerous Hindu

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[1] Wilkinson's obituary was published in the well-known Calcutta newspaper, *The Friend of India* (December 9, 1841), abstracts of which are re-published in *A Brief Notice of the Late Mr. Lancelot Wilkinson of the Bombay Civil Service with his opinions on the education of natives of India, and on the state of native society* (Cornhill: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1853). Details about Sūbajī's life are contained in a short letter written by Wilkinson reproduced as "Proceedings of the Asiatic Society," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 6/65 (May 1837), 401 – 402.

[2] Brian Hodgson (translator), "A Disputation respecting caste by a Buddhist, in the form of a series of propositions supposed to be put by a Saiva and refuted by the Disputant," *Transactions of the Royal Asiactic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* Vol. 3/3 (1831), 161. Many scholars have questioned whether Aśvaghoṣa is truly the author of this text, since neither the Tibetan *'bsTan-'Gyur* or I-tsing ascribe the text to Aśvaghoṣa. While the scholarly jury is hung on this matter, its historical authorship is less important in this context since what is more important is that these particular audiences recognized it as a Buddhist and not Upaniṣadic

scriptures (*smṛiti*), Aśvaghoṣa uses a cutting logic to turn the sources on their head and systematically demolish the notion that a Brahmin's status is based on birth alone. In Aśvaghoṣa's view, all humans are of one caste (*varṇa*) and only the person who is filled with compassion for all sentient beings and has gained control over their bodily and psychological senses is a 'true Brahmin.' Brahminhood, Aśvaghoṣa concludes, is not a quality of birth but "merely a quality of good men."[3]

When Wilkinson explained to Sūbajī that he wished to publish a bi-lingual English-Sanskrit edition of the manuscript and distribute it widely, Sūbajī resisted. By all accounts, this appears to have been the first hiccup in what had otherwise been a long and relatively fruitful relationship between the two men. Throughout his service for Wilkinson, Sūbajī had proven himself to be "anything but an orthodox Hindoo."[4] He had become a proponent of Copernican science, producing Marathi tracts arguing against Vyās' conception of the universe (which governed Brahmanical views), and been Wilkinson's close companion for nearly a decade. A Telugu-speaking Brahmin of "wonderful acuteness, intelligence and sound judgment," Sūbajī had followed Wilkinson from one princely state to another before ending in Bhopal where Wilkinson became the British Resident and Sūbajī the star attraction of the Sehore Pāṭhśālā or local Sanskrit school.[5] Wilkinson, for his part, was considered a colonial oddity, "a subaltern of Orientalism," whose unwavering support for Sanskrit and vernacular languages had earned him the respect of local leaders.[6]

Yet the conversation about the *Vajrasūci* did not go so well. In a private letter written to a colleague, Wilkinson reported that Sūbajī's eyes "glistened with anger when he heard the

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(Hindu) scripture. C.f., Daniel James Bisgaard, *Social Conscience in Sanskrit Literature* (New Delhi: Motilala Banarsidass, 1994), 11 – 15, for an insightful discussion of its authorship.

[3] Hodgson (translator), "A Disputation respecting caste by a Buddhist," 164.

[4] Letter from Lancelot Wilkinson to Brian Hodgson, May 11, 1835, quoted in Richard Fox Young, "Receding from Antiquity: Hindu Responses to Science and Christiainity on the Margins of Empire, 1800 – 1850," in *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication Since 1500,* edited by Robert Eric Frykenberg (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 208. The letter is held in the archives of the Royal Asiatic Society in London.

[5] Wilkinson, "Proceedings of the Asiatic Society," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 6/65 (May 1837), 401.

[6] David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: the dynamics of Indian modernization 1773 – 1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 278. Young, "Receding from Antiquity," 191 describes Wilkinson as someone who "hobnobbed with 'Jain banyas' and 'opulent Márwári merchant bankers.' " On Wilkinson's support for local languages, see Sreeramula Rajeswara Sarma, "Sanskrit as Vehicle for Modern Science: Lancelot Wilkinson's Efforts in the 1830s," *Studies in History of Medicine and Science* 14 (1995-96), 189 – 99.

arguments expounded."[7] Finally, Sūbajī agreed to help edit the text, but only if it was published along with his own rebuttal. In a forty seven page critique—more than three times the length of the *Vajrasūci* itself—Sūbajī attacked the *Vajrasūci*'s core reasoning by arguing that caste (*varṇa*) is "prior to all behavior…a universal inherent in the nature of reality."[8] In 1839, the manuscript plus Sūbajī's commentary officially went to print as *The Wujra Soochi, or Refutation of the Arguments upon which the Brahmanical Institution of Caste is Founded, by the Learned Boodhist Ashwa Ghoshu (with a Translation by B.H. Hodgson and a Preface by L. Wilkinson), Also the Tunku, by Soobajee Bapoo, Being a Reply to the Wujra Soochi*.[9]

In the decades following its publication, the Wilkinson-Hodgson-Sūbajī edition of the *Vajrasūci* reached an incredible range of audiences. It was widely known across India and Europe, being circulated among Christian missionaries, Indian social reformers and later, Buddhist propagandists. Museum libraries, state archives and research centers purchased it while popular magazines, literary reviews and scholarly journals debated its merits. By the end of the century, the text was a favorite among lower caste reformers like Tukaram Tatya Padaval (1838 – 98), Dadoba Pandurang (1814 – 82) and Jyotiba Phule (1827 – 90) who published their own Marathi editions of the text, finding its persuasive logic useful in their battles against the injustices of the caste system.[10] The Hindu nationalist Veer Sarvarkar (1883 – 1966) praised it, as did the Buddhist activists D.A. Dharmacharya (1902 – 1963) and Anagarika Dharmapala (1864 – 1933). In the decades that followed, the text's popularity continued to grow with further translations into Bengali, Tamil, Hindi, and Nepali with numerous reprints of the English editions.[11] Nineteenth and twentieth-century Indian publics were clearly convinced that the words of an ancient Buddhist monk were still relevant in the modern day.

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[7] Letter from Wilkinson to Hodgson, May 11, 1835, quoted in Young, "Receding from Antiquity," 208.
[8] The official title of the commentary was the "Little Chisel" (*Laghutanka* or "Tunku" for short]. For summaries of the *Tunku,* see Young "Receding from Antiquity," 209 and Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), 377.
[9] Soon after acquiring the manuscript, Wilkinson learned that Brian Hodgson and his Newari Buddhist pandit, Amritananda, had previously published an English translation in the *Royal Asiatic Society* in 1831. That translation was reproduced wholesale in the Wilkinson-Sūbajī edition.
[10] Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 225 – 27.
[11] My own research on its colonial Indian public reveals translations into English (1837, 1841, 1865, 1874, 1877, 1927, 1931), Bengali (1843), Tamil (1850), Marathi (1865), Malayalam (1868), Hindi (1927, 1931) and Nepali (1928). These translations are not to be confused with the Tamil and Bengali translations of the Upaniṣadic (*Sāma-Veda*) *Vajrasūci*.

2.2 Death, invention and the politics of forgetting

At the time that the Wilkinson-Hodgson-Sūbajī edition of the *Vajrasūci* was published, the professional enterprise that later became Buddhist Studies and Indology was still in a rather embryonic stage. Eugène Burnouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme Indien* (1844) and Alexander Cunningham's *Bhilsa Topes* (1854), two of the most significant early nineteenth-century studies to firmly place the Buddha and Buddhist traditions in India's history, were still more than a decade away. Scholars like Burnouf (1801 – 52) and Cunningham (1814 – 93), along with a vast constellation of other nineteenth-century European luminaries are often credited (or derided) today for the 'invention' or construction of Buddhism.[12]

One important facet of this construction narrative in India concerns Buddhism's disappearance. Although the precise reasons why Buddhism declined in the Indian subcontinent is not the focus of this chapter nor the dissertation as a whole, its so-called 'disappearance' or 'death' has a profound importance for our study. For the very notion of the European 'invention' of Buddhism along with the 'modern revival' of Indian Buddhism hinges to a large degree on it having 'died' in the pre-modern world and then been forgotten. Thus, a brief excursion into the paradigm of Indian Buddhism's death is necessary [see, Table 2.1].

Table 2.1: Approximate date at which scholars contend Indian Buddhism "died" and arranged by date of "disappearance"

Scholar	**Approximate date of "death" or "disappearance"**	**Source**
Alexander Cunningham	11th or 12th century ("finally extinguished")	*The Bhilsa Topes* (1854), 166
Jacob Kinnard	12th century ("all but disappeared")	*Emergence of Buddhism* (2010), 143
Klaus Klostermaier	12th century ("all but disappeared")	*Survey of Hinduism* (2007), 359
Bryan Turner	12th century ("died")	*Essays on Religion* (2014), 193
Rupert Gethin	End of 12th century ("all but disappeared")	*The Foundations of Buddhism* (1998), 8
John Strong	12th - 13th century ("pretty much died out")	*Buddhisms: an introduction* (2015), 10

[12] Among other leading scholars of the day were the French Sinologist and Chair of Chinese at the Collège de France, Jean Pierre Abel-Remusat (1788 – 1832) and the German-Russian Tibetologist, Isaak Jakob Schmidt (1779 – 1847).

Scholar	Approximate date of "death" or "disappearance"	Source
Kōgen Mizuno	early 13th century	*Essentials of Buddhism* (1996), 42
Monier Monier-Williams	early 13th century ("name died…[but] spirit survived")	*Buddhism in connexion with Brahmanism…*(1889), 171
Merv Fowler	13th century ("all but disappeared")	*Buddhism: beliefs and practices* (1989), 102
Stephen Mitchell	13th century ("extinction…virtually disappeared")	*Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (2008), 153 – 58
Donald Lopez	14th century ("all but disappeared")	*Buddhism and Science* (2009), 6
Kanai Hazra	14th century ("lost individuality…[but] never disappeared"	*The Rise and Decline of Buddhism* (1995), 399 – 400
Nagendranath Vasu	16th century	*Modern Buddhism and its Followers* (1911)
Giovanni Verardi	16th century	*Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism* (2012)
Stephen Berkwitz	17th century	*South Asian Buddhism: a survey* (2010)

Table 2.1 takes a very broad overview of the scholarly literature, both specialized and general on this topic. As the table indicates, Buddhism is typically said to have died or disappeared sometime between the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Some scholars like Stephen Mitchell have described Indian Buddhism's end days as nothing less than an "extinction."[71] Although the reason why Buddhism in India declined is an important and largely unanswered question, it is not the focus here.[72] Rather, while some scholars are willing to describe it as a death or extinction, other historians seem more uncomfortable with such claims (particularly at such an early date). For instance, the most frequently cited expression in contemporary literature, used by Jacob Kinnard, Donald Lopez, Klaus Klostermaier, Rupert Gethin and others is that Buddhism "all but disappeared" [see Table. 2.1]. Other characterizations are no less ambiguous, such as K.T.S. Sarao's metaphor that, "by the 12th century…Buddhism was an endangered species."[73] Indeed, the uneasiness about

[71] Stephen Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience,* 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 153 – 58.
[72] See, R.C. Mitra*, The Decline of Buddhism in India* (Shantiniketan: Visva-Bharati Press, 1954), and K.T.S. Sarao, *The Decline of Buddhism in India: A Fresh Perspective* (New Delhi: Manoharlal, 2012). An important (but too often neglected) intervention in the topic is Giovanni Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India* ((New Delhi: Manohar, 2011).
[73] K.T.S. Sarao, "Double Tragedy: A Reappraisal of the Decline of Buddhism in India," *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* Vol. 1 (2002), 101. In Sarao's more recent work, *The Decline of Indian Buddhism,* he takes a more nuanced position and acknowledges that calling it a disappearance or death (as he had done previously) is not exactly an accurate characterization (6).

affirming Buddhism's complete disappearance or 'death' at this date appears to stem from two major reasons.

First, it is clear that Buddhism continued to be the center of a thriving material and intellectual culture up through the present day along the borders of the subcontinent in the Kathmandu Valley, Chittagong, northeast India and the upper tracts of the entire Himalayan range.[74] Newar Buddhists from the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal, for instance, have since at least the Gupta era followed Sanskrit Mahāyāna practices, deities and Vajrayāna initiations while surviving in a wider Hindu world by "adapting to the logic of caste society, by incorporating the pollution/purity ethos of Brahmanical *dharmashastra* law codes and by supporting Hindu kingship."[75] Yet does Newar Buddhism, or the myriad forms of Tibetan Buddhism practiced across the cis-facing ranges of the Himalayas constitute an 'Indian' or 'Indic' Buddhism? For scholars like Todd Lewis, Newar Buddhism's "small but vibrant oasis of tradition…disproves the often-repeated assertion that Indic Buddhism ever completely died."[76] Yet few surveys of Buddhism, often to the chagrin of scholars of Newar culture (like Lewis), would contend that Buddhism survived in India past the fifteenth century. One nature of this debate appears to be a territorial conception of India, in which the modern nation state is projected anachronistically into the past. Nepal is not a part of India and therefore Newar Buddhism is "Nepal's Buddhism," not India's. However, the conundrum goes both ways. Buddhism has been practiced continuously in Ladakh for well over a millennium and yet few scholars, barring those of the nationalist or Hindutva persuasion would contend that Ladakhi Buddhism is Indian Buddhism despite the fact it falls within Indian territory today.[77]

Second, and yet no less complicated than the ever-shifting connotations around religion, nation and identity, is the ample evidence in the form of inscriptions and literary

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[74] Depending on one's definition of the subcontinent, Burma and Sri Lanka would also be obvious additions here.

[75] Todd Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism,* translations in collaboration with Subarna Man Tuladhar and Labh Ratna Tuladhar (Albany: State University of New York, 2000), 13.

[76] Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts,* 13.

[77] Similarly, in a recent work of excellent scholarship on sixteenth and seventeenth century monastic networks in Indian regions bordering Tibet, Burma, Assam and Bengal, Indrani Chatterjee contends that these semi-Buddhist institutes are proof that Indian Buddhism never died, but was simply forgotten. While I am sympathetic to Chatterjee's view, one has to wonder how connected a Tripura Buddhist would have felt to India in the seventeenth century. Indrani Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends: Monks, Marriages, and Memories of Northeast India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

texts that document the persistence of Buddhism in more 'centrally-located' Indian locales long after the fourteenth century and in some areas, even as late as the seventeenth century. These materials largely explain the reason why several scholars, like Stephen Berkwitz, Giovanni Verardi, and Nagendranath Vasu, contend that Buddhism endured well into the sixteenth century and possibly even seventeenth century [see Table 2.1]. The discrepancy in the dating of Buddhism's 'disappearance' among these scholars is jarring. After all, this is not a difference in years or even decades but of centuries.

The primary cause of dissent among these various scholars is less in the set of data being examined that in its interpretation. In other words, this is as much a matter of how one defines what is Indian or Indic as it is a matter of how one defines Buddhism and what is or is not Buddhist.[78] A standard litmus test for considering this important question concerns the sixteenth-century south Indian yogi Buddhagupta-nātha (1514 – 1610).[79] Buddhagupta was neither an ordained monk (*bhikkhu*) nor the product of a monastic college (*mahāvihāra*), but a yogi who had studied with a number of other non-monastics. The accounts of Buddhagupta's studies with Buddhist teachers in India, described in a colorful seventeenth century Tibetan biography (*rnam thar*), are often dismissed on the grounds that they belonged to wandering groups of ascetics (*nāths*) composed of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist (primarily Śaiva) communities (*siddha sampradāya*). In the opinions of Augustine Waddell and Giuseppe Tucci, two of the most influential 'Buddhologists' of the early twentieth century, Buddhagupta was more Śaiva than Buddhist.[80] More recently, Toni Huber has argued that Buddhagupta's Buddhist teachings were essentially fraudulent, having been mistaken as Buddhist by his all-too gullible student, the Jonangpa Buddhist master and historian, Tāranātha (1575 – 1635).[81] In other words, Buddhagupta's Buddhism, despite

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[78] In some cases, the difference in interpretation stems from the examination of a different set of data but in most cases the evidence for the survival of a post-fifteenth century Buddhism was well-known to those scholars writing after the 1930s.

[79] See, David Templeman, "Buddhaguptanatha: a Late Indian *Siddha* in Tibet," in *Tibetan Studies: proceedings of the 7th seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Graz, 1995* (Vol. 2), edited by H. Krasser, M.T. Much, E. Steinkellner and H. Tauscher (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenchaften, 1997), 955 – 66.

[80] See, Giuseppe Tucci, "The Sea and Land Travels of a Buddhist Sadhu in Sixteenth Century," *Indian Historical Quarterly* Vol. 7/4 (1931), 683 – 702; L.A. Waddell (transl.), "A 16th Century Account of Indian Buddhist shrines by an Indian Buddhist Yogi, translated from the Tibetan," *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1893), 55 – 61.

[81] Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 171 – 72 and 205 – 07.

being (mostly) acceptable to Tāranātha, fell somewhat short of the normative standards of what many colonial interpreters and modern scholars considered to be 'authentic Buddhism.'

These scholars' arguments that Buddhagupta was shaped more by Śaiva practices than Vajrayāna Buddhist ones may help locate Indian Buddhism's precarious positioning in the early seventeenth-century world but it also belittles the fact that here was an early seventeenth-century Indian seen in the historical moment as fully capable of teaching the buddhavacana or words of the Buddha. Nor was Buddhagupta alone in this regard. In the centuries before and after his death, other Indian teachers, monastic, non-monastic and typically coming from south and east Indian families, like Śāriputra (1335 – 1426), Vanaratna (1384 – 1468), and Kṛṣṇācarya (d. ~1640) traveled through India, Nepal, Tibet, and China as votaries of Sanskrit learning, Mahāyāna practices and Vajrayāna lineages.[82] Now the fact that most of the accounts of these figures stem from the pens of Tibetan rather than Indian writers may say more about Tibetan notions of Buddhism than it does about existing Indian attitudes but the underlining point remains the same: simply because it does not look Buddhist to us today does not mean it was not seen as Buddhist in that context.[83]

Such a milieu existed far beyond the world of traveling Indian *siddhas*. In the south of India, in places like Tamil Nadu and Orissa, there are signs of a self-conscious Buddhist presence that lasted well into the late sixteenth century and possibly even later. According to the Kalyānī inscription erected by the Burmese King Dhammacetī in 1479 at Pegu (and translated by the Burmese archaeologist Taw Sein Ko in 1892), a group of Burmese monks (*theras)* returning from Lanka became shipwrecked on their journey and ended up in the south Indian town of Nagapattinam.[84] There, they visited a pagoda-shaped vihāra "taller than Kanaka Giri" (Mount Meru) and worshipped an image of Buddha in a cave constructed by

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[82] On Sariputra, see Arthur Phillip McKeown, "From Bodhgaya to Lhasa to Beijing: the Life and Times of Sariputra, Last Abbot of Bodhgaya" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010). On Vanaratna and a host of other Indian pandits that carried Buddhism to Tibet in the fifteenth century and afterwards, see Lobsang Shastri, "Activities of Indian Pandits in Tibet from 14th to 17th century," in Henk Blezer (ed.), *Tibet: past and present* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 129 – 45; and F.K. Ehrhard, "Spiritual Relationships between Rulers and Preceptors: the three journeys of Vanaratana (1384 – 1468) to Tibet," in Christoph Cuppers (ed.), *The Relationship between Religion and State in traditional Tibet* (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2004), 245 – 266.
[83] This parallels the process through which Tibetan Buddhism for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was seen as little more than "Lamaism" yet judging by the presence of Tibetan centers in North America today, it has become one of the most 'authentic' forms of Buddhism in the western hemisphere.
[84] See, Taw Sein Ko (translator), *The Kalyānī inscriptions, erected by King Dhammacetī at Pegu in 1476 AD: text and translation* (Rangoon: Government Printing, 1892).

the "Maharaja of *Chinadesa* (China)."[85] After the town's 'Chinese Pagoda' was demolished in 1867 to make way for what is today St. Joseph's College, more than three hundred bronze images of Buddha, Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Lokeśvara, Vasudharā and Tārā were found. After studying these images, the art historian Vidya Dehejia concluded that they represent "a generous patronage of Buddhism as late as 1700 A.D."[86] While little is known about the use and production of these images, it is clear from other sources that socially distinct Buddhist communities were still present in the region through the late 1500s. Some forty miles west of there, an inscription found outside a Śaiva temple from Kumbakonam district (*taluk*) dated 1579 or 1580 records the grant of land to a Buddhist temple (Tamil, *buddar-kōyil*) as compensation for having to build a canal through the existing vihāra's property.[87] Although the presence of a bronze Buddhist workshop in Nagapattinam or a single Buddhist vihāra in Kumbakonam is not necessarily proof of a thriving Buddhist culture, it does require us to reconsider its so-called 'extinction.' In fact, references to Buddhists can also be gleaned from contemporary literary sources. For instance, in an early seventeenth century hagiography of the Bengali saint Caitanya (c. 1468 – 1533), the author Kṛṣṇādās Kavirāj describes Caitanya's encounters with Buddhists near Vrddha-Kasi (Tamil Nadu) in the early sixteenth-century.[88]

Similar evidence for the survival of Buddhism well into the sixteenth century is found throughout the Prachi valley southeast of Bhubaneswar in Orissa. This region, covered in massive Buddhist monuments and structures dating from the tenth to twelfth centuries, was the scene of a rather violent conflict in the early 1500s.[89] According to both the Oriya-

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[85] Vidya Dehejia, "The Persistence of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu," *Mārg* Vol. 39/4 (1988), 64.
[86] Dehejia, "The Persistence of Buddhism," 73. Shu Hikosaka dates the latest of the images to the end of the sixteenth century and is generally more ambivalent than Dehejia regarding their actual ritual use and production. See, Shu Hikosaka, *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: a new perspective* (Madras: Institute of Asian Studies, 1989), 177 – 98. A sketch of the Chinese pagoda as it stood in 1846 along with illustrations of the various Buddhist images found there is contained in Sir Walter Elliot, K.C.S.I., "The edifice formerly known as the Chinese or Jaina pagoda at Negapatam," *Indian Antiquary* Vol. 7 (1878), 224 – 27.
[87] The grant is offered to the people of Tirumalairājapuram. See, G. Venkoba Rao, "Kumbakonam Inscription of Sevvappa-Nayaka," *Epigraphica Indica,* Vol. XIX (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1927 – 28), 215 – 217. See also V. Vriddhagirisan, *Nayaks of Tanjore* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services 1995 [1942]), 31 – 32, for a discussion of this material.
[88] See, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta,* translated and edited from the Bengali by Edward Dimock with an introduction by Edward Dimock and Tony Stewart (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 464 – 65. I discuss this encounter below.
[89] See, Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall,* 372 – 76, and Prabhat Mukherjee, *History of Medieval Vaishnavism in Orissa* (Calcutta: R. Chatterji, 1940), 2 – 53.

language chronicle, *Mādalāpañjī* and Īśvara Dās' Bengali-language *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (c. 1580s), the Gajapati King, Pratāparudra Deva (r. 1497 – 1540) began a large-scale persecution of several hundred Buddhists (*bauddha-putra*) around the year 1530.[90] The leader of these "crypto-Buddhists," as the scholar Nagendranath Vasu called them, was a Nāth siddha named Vīrasiṁha who under the threat of death, adopted external Vaiṣṇava doctrines and mores while adhering to Buddhist teachings.[91] Despite Vasu's own unease with labeling these communities as Buddhist, which again comes down to a matter of definition and authenticity, what is less debated is Pratāparudra's persecution of a community known as Buddhists (*bauddha-putra*) around 1530.[92] When one considers these instances in addition to the continued repairs of the Mahabodhi Temple between the 12th to 14th century and the near continuous flows of Buddhist pilgrims to Bodh Gaya up through the eighteenth century, the narrative around Buddhism's disappearance begins to look quite different.[93]

As scholars like Donald Lopez and Philip Almond have shown, the colonial figures that came to define Buddhism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries associated it with a rational, scientific early tradition typically codified through Pali (and to a lesser degree, Sanskrit) scriptures.[94] Whether they were themselves Protestant Christians or not, these scholars tended to understand Buddhism in terms of Christian history. Buddhism was in their eyes a religion that not only fought against a caste-obsessed Brahmanical priesthood (the equivalent to the Pharisees) but had also deviated from its 'original' teaching, becoming (like the Catholic Church) bound by superstitious practices and 'absurd' theological complexities. As they constructed the grand narrative of India's Buddhist past, there was a real scholarly deference for the geographical sites where Buddha Śākyamuni was believed to have walked

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[90] Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall,* 372 – 76.
[91] See, Nagendranath Vasu, *The Modern Buddhism and its followers in Orissa* (Calcutta: U.N. Bhattacharyya Press, 1911), clxxvi.
[92] See, Mukherjee, *History of Medieval Vaishnavism,* 53 – 54, and Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall,* 372 – 76. I discuss Vasu's scholarship on Buddhism, particularly as it relates to the Indian Census, in chapter three.
[93] Consider, for instance, the inscriptional evidence at Bodh Gaya stating that a Burmese mission completed repairs at the site in 1295 along with the possible connections to Bodh Gaya suggested by four major recreations of the Mahabodhi Temple in southeast Asia between the 13th and 15th centuries (c.f., Robert Brown, "Bodhgaya and Southeast Asia," *Bodhgaya, the Site of Enlightenment,* edited by Janice Leoshko (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1988), 106 – 111. Toni Huber's *Holy Land Reborn* has also traced with astonishing detail and clarity the nearly millennia long flow of Tibetan pilgrims to India, as late as the eighteenth century. Burmese, Sinhalese and Newari pilgrims were also active and even as late as 1412 Chinese diplomats sent by the Ming Emperor Yongle (r. 1403 – 1424 CE) traveled to Bodh Gaya on pilgrimage. See, Haraprasad Ray, *Trade and Diplomacy in India-China Relations* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1993), 78.
[94] See, Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism*; and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., (ed.), *Curators of the Buddha.*

himself. It is these factors that appear to be so closely linked to the enduring theory of Buddhism's 'disappearance' between the twelfth to thirteenth centuries for this was precisely the period when the great mahāvihāras of northern India collapsed, thereby undermining the rich tradition of scholastic learning and monastic conduct understood as the apex of Indian Buddhism. By the sixteenth century, Indic Buddhism's institutionalized presence and public profile in the form of ritually distinct *pūjās,* devotional rites (*vrata*) and construction of stupas (*caitya*) had formed a clear geographic pattern. That pattern was effectively one of exclusion. Buddhists were pushed to the inner and outer frontiers of the subcontinent, seeking new patrons and less hostile environments in remote valleys and hilly regions in places like Assam, Chittagong, Nepal and the Himalayas.[95]

Yet despite Gregory Schopen's important argument twenty-five years ago that studies of Buddhism in India have been driven by Protestant suppositions that locate 'authentic Buddhism' within these elite texts and monastic walls, there seems to be a stubborn reluctance to extend the lens through which we understand Buddhism's late Indic formations.[96] In other words, simply because Indic Buddhism after the fourteenth century did not meet the normative definition of what many scholars and practitioners (Asian or otherwise) felt a Buddhist was or should look like does not mean that it died. Something may have disappeared and been lost but other aspects lived on in transformed states. At a certain point, a metamorphosis did lend itself to becoming something entirely different but that transformation clearly did not occur until much later than the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries.

When even the most seminal of scholars repeat like a mantra that Buddhism had "all but disappeared" from India by the thirteenth to fourteenth century, such assertions cement into facts, diminishing our historical imagination and marginalizing what in fact continued to be a major thread in Indic thought during the next several centuries.[97] Yet according to

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[95] My use of the term frontier refers to what Todd Lewis and Theodore Riccardi (5) describe as both "boundary frontiers," or areas on the far periphery of a civilization as well as an "inner frontier" or area circumscribed by a dominant civilization but separated by natural barriers (mountains, jungle, desert, etc.). See Todd Lewis and Theodore Riccardi, *The Himalayas: a syllabus of the region's history, anthropology, and religion* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1995), 5 – 14, for their use of this term as it applies to the Himalayas within the context of Indic and Tibetan civilizations.
[96] See, Schopen, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 1 – 23.
[97] It also marginalizes the lived social practice of late Indic Buddhist communities in places like Tamil Nadu and Orissa.

scholars like D.C. Ahir, the veritable doyen of modern Indian Buddhism, "[by the time the British arrived] even the name of the Buddha was forgotten by the Indians."[98] Likewise, in a major study of the European encounter with Buddhist thought, the French philosopher Roger-pol Droit asserts that by the eighteenth century, "Brahmans appear to have almost completely lost any recollection of their argument with Buddhism."[99] The late, great S.K. Chatterji was equally emphatic: "Till the beginning of the nineteenth century, Buddhism was a forgotten creed in the land of its origin."[100]

It is well known that the conceptual vocabulary that we use in our daily lives shapes not only scholarly perceptions but also worldviews. While it is true that the ritual worship of Buddha had been reduced to remote frontier regions when the first Europeans established colonies on the subcontinent, it is time to rethink the relationship between India and Buddhism in the early colonial world. In a seminal essay on the limitations of post-colonial scholarship, the philologist Sheldon Pollock remarked:

> What troubles me is, first the strong formulation of this [postcolonial] interpretation, whose logical extension is that colonialism in South Asia produced certain forms of domination *tout court;* and second, the thinness of the history of precolonial domination on which, ironically, this new historicism is based, and, moreover, its potential for precluding such an analysis…If we want to argue that colonialism reconstituted tradition, should we not do a careful reading of the earlier tradition (or rather, traditions) that was the object of transformation?"[101]

Studies of Buddhism in modern India and by extension, of the European 'invention' of Buddhism have been especially prone to this 'new historicism.' With the conventional view that Indians had 'forgotten' Buddha due to its 'extinction' several centuries before, the obvious counterpart to this argument is that they must have been a veritable *tabula rasa,* a blank slate upon which the 'modernist Buddhism' constructed by Orientalist scholars was written. In other words, any claim made about 'new' Buddhist attitudes in modern India is weakened precisely because we do not know enough about Indian attitudes towards

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[98] Ahir, *Buddhism in India,* 8.
[99] Roger-pol Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness: the Philosophers and the Buddha* [originally published as *Le culte du néant: Les philosophes et le Bouddha*], translated by David Streight and Pamela Vohnson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003 [1997]) 7.
[100] Quoted in Dipak Kumar Barua, "Historical Perspective of contemporary Buddhism and its followers in India," *Jagajjyoti* 2004 [2548 BE], 54.
[101] Sheldon Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia,* edited by Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 97, 99 – 100.

Buddhism in the period preceding it to really assess whether thought patterns changed or continued in the modern world. Yet while India's so-called "lack of history" or "historical consciousness" continues to be the subject of much spilled ink, it should not lead one to think that Indians did not possess an intricate and meaningful depiction of the past.[102] India may not have possessed an analogue to the Hegelian tradition of disciplinary history but it has for thousands of years produced one of the richest traditions of place-making, the process by which the landscapes around us are imbibed with the traces of the past, real or imagined.

2.3 The Indic conversation of mankind

There are a wide range of visual, oral and textual materials for understanding pre-modern Indic attitudes towards Buddha and Buddhists. These 'storehouses of memory,' as I call them, include everything from Purāṇic scriptures, vernacular hagiographies, epic literature and ballads to popular songs, poems, art and iconography. Due to the contingent nature of these materials, in terms of both their dynamic and shifting meanings as well as their sheer availability, a conscious effort is made below to discuss those particular materials that were widely circulated or would have been well known in India on the eve of British colonial rule. When viewed in conjunction with one another, these materials provide clear evidence that even as late as the nineteenth century, Buddhists (*bauddha*) continued to be the subject of much conversation. In other words, although Buddhism in its institutionalized, structured form may have effectively collapsed in most regions of India, Buddhism was still encountered in both real and imagined form.

According to the American philosopher, Richard Rorty, conversation is the basis of understanding, the fundamental social practice of everyday human life.[103] Yet the "conversation of mankind," as Rorty calls it, is not just any ordinary dialogue. The conversation of mankind is about "finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways

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[102] There have been several insightful essays on this topic. C.f., Sheldon Pollock, "Mīmāṁsā and the Problem of History in Traditional India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 109/4 (1989): 603 – 10; Arvind Sharma, "Did the Hindus Lack a Sense of History? *Numen* Vol. 50 (2003): 190 – 227; Anne Murphy (ed.), *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Thomas Trautmann, "Does India Have History?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 54/1 (2012): 174 – 205.
[103] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

of speaking."[104] Far from being trivial, this process of learning to cope with the world through conversation (what Rorty calls "edification") is not only necessary but can be profoundly transformative:

> The sense in which human beings alter themselves by redescribing themselves is no more metaphysically exciting or mysterious than the sense in which they alter themselves by changing their diet, their sexual partners, or their habitation. It is just the same sense: viz., new and more interesting sentences become true of them."[105]

Conversation is what generates new vocabulary, new descriptions and new ways to enrich our humanity. In turn, this allows us to remake and re-describe ourselves, to become, as Rorty puts it, "different people."[106] The conversation about Buddhism that is detailed below not only requires us to rethink the notion that India had 'forgotten' the Buddha but asks us to reconsider how and why the presence of the Buddhist past remained such an essential part of Indian "re-description" long after Buddhist institutions and intellectuals retreated to the frontiers.

For roughly two thousand years India has transmitted its knowledge and culture through what scholars call "manuscript cultures."[107] While Indian writing systems were in use as early as the fourth century BCE, the regular use of writing to transmit knowledge—as opposed to record the mundane, like business transactions and land grants—came much later to the subcontinent. Up until the first centuries of the Common Era, oral techniques and "memory cultures" paved the way for the explicit transmission of knowledge, from generation to generation.[108] According to Sheldon Pollock, in the first centuries of the Common Era, Sanskrit emerged as a "cosmopolitan" language transmitting systems of scientific, literary and religious thought across South and Southeast Asia.[109] The sorts of

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[104] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* 360. Rorty's phrase "conversation of mankind" (379) was originally coined by Michael Oakeshott in his essay, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind."
[105] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* 351.
[106] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* 359.
[107] C.f., Saraju Rath (ed.), *Aspects of Manuscript Culture in South India* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). See in particular, Jan E.M. Houben and Saraju Rath, "Introduction: Manuscript Culture and Its Impact in "India": Countours and Parameters," in *Aspects of Manuscript Culture in South India,* edited by Saraju Rath (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1 – 54. The title to this collection is misleading since it provides an excellent overview of manuscript cultures in India as a whole and not just the south.
[108] Houben and Rath, "Manuscript Culture and Its Impact in "India," 21. For an important and accessible study of orality in Vedic cultures, see Frits Staal, *Discovering the Vedas: Origins, Mantras, Rituals, Insights* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008).
[109] Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Sanskrit manuscripts in circulation among Brahmin literati, wealthy patrons, royal courts and after the fourteenth century, the subcontinent's extensive network of Hindu monasteries (*maṭha*), always depended on a variety of cultural, economic and political conditions.[110] Focusing on those manuscript cultures whose cultural production is noted for its regional or even "pan-Indian" popularity is especially valuable for understanding the attitude towards Buddhism in the pre-colonial world.

Early Sanskrit literature, according to Klaus Klostermaier, expressed less scorn towards Buddhists in particular than it did with those who did not follow the Brahmanical householder traditions (*varṇa-āśram-dharma*) as a whole.[111] Indeed, in the *Manusmṛiti* and the Śāstric redactions of Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* (3rd – 5th centuries), Buddhists are generally grouped together with the "non-Vedic" groups that "produce no reward after death."[112] Like Jains, Carvakas and other non-Vedic groups, Buddhists were classified as *pāsaṇḍikas* (impostors) and *nāstiks* (literally, "deniers"), terms that derogatorily but rightly labeled them as refuters of the Vedas, the notion of a Supreme God (*īśvara*) and the authority of the Brahmanical priestly castes.[113] These classifications were largely maintained in other genres of Sanskrit literature, the most important of which for our purposes, is the *Purāṇic-itihās*

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[110] This included proximity of the area to other centers of literary production, the presence of wealthy patrons who could support the composition and recitation of a text as well as the text's aesthetic beauty and "usefulness." In many pre-modern cultures—from Europe to east Asia—literary production wasn't always related to reading: a text could be commissioned for any wide variety of purposes such as attaining religious merit, social prestige, exercising one's political authority, and so on. This is evident in the meritorious copying of Purāṇas (Houben and Rath, "Manuscript Culture and Its Impact in "India," 6fn14) as well as in Buddhism's "cult of the book." On the latter, see Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* (New York: Columbia Universisty Press, 2009). One might also add that this phenomena is not much different today, whether conscious or not—after all, how many books on our bookshelves *haven't* we read?

[111] Klaus Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," in *Developments in Buddhist Thought: Canadian contributions to Buddhist Studies,* edited by Roy C. Amore (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979), 61 – 64.

[112] *Manu's Code of Law: a critical edition and translation of the Manava-Dharmasastra,* translated by Patrick Oliveville with the editorial assistance of Suman Oliveville (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 349. The passage refers to 12.95 in the original text. According to Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," 64, one of the earliest explicit references to Buddhists (*bauddha*) in Sanskrit literature is found in the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, a text originally composed between the fourth to fifth centuries CE but that gained a firm position in centers of orthodox Brahmanical learning towards the end of the first millennium. While listing those inauspicious objects at whose sight a journey should be postponed, the text refers to *saṃnyāsis* (renouncers) but then specifically mentions the "people in reddish garb" who were in all probability Buddhist monks.

[113] Buddhists were no less restrained in their use of the terms *tīrthika* (heretics, non-believers) to describe Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Jain communities. See, for instance, Tārānātha, *History of Buddhism in India (dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'I chos bskor gyi byung khungs nyer mkho)*, translated by Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970), 226.

literature. The *Purāṇas*—literally, 'old or ancient,'—were a central body of texts, traditionally said to be eighteen, but that also included a much larger number of lesser texts (*upāpurāṇa*). Puranic literature, which is widely understood as the dominant form of Sanskrit historical writings, recalls history (*itihās*) through the language of the gods (*deva*), the languages of the sages (*ṛṣi*) and their descendants. While temporal considerations are not irrelevant, they are generally accorded secondary importance to what their male Brahmin authors considered more important matters, such as the nature of the universe and tales of war between deities and demons.

As the principal scriptures of theistic Hinduism, the Purāṇas also form the central motifs and stories of popular Hindu practices. Although as a whole Purāṇic literature does not contain extensive discussion of Buddhist systems, Buddhists appear as frequent interlocutors and it is one of the most important sources for understanding a wider Brahmanical view of Buddhist traditions. The most notable feature of several major Purāṇas is their acceptance of Śākyamuni Buddha himself as the (typically ninth) *avātar* or incarnation of Viṣṇu.[114] Many colonial Indians, as will be discussed in later chapters, argued that the 'crowning' of Buddha as the *Viṣṇu-avātar* was evidence of the general spirit of Hindu tolerance and inclusiveness. Such an attitude and argument continues to have wide radiance today. Yet a closer reading of the Buddha avātar mythology suggests that the real motivation in incorporating Buddha into the pantheon of Viṣṇuavātars stemmed more from religio-political pragmatism than from respect or adoration.

In the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, where the Buddha-avātar is discussed in great detail, Buddha is introduced as one of many forms of the *māyāmoha* (delusive power) of Viṣṇu.[115] The story begins by describing how unrighteousness (*adharma*) has gained ascendancy in the world. As is the custom in these Vaiṣṇava scriptures, it then explains why and how Viṣṇu, the Supreme Being, must descend to the earth from his heavenly abode to restore proper social

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[114] Sometimes this number varies between the eighth, ninth or even twentieth. Other *Purāṇas* do not list him at all. It should be added that archaeological evidence indicates only limited spaces where Buddha's image was embodied in active ritual worship (Dr. Upinder Singh, personal communication, January 16, 2015). The bulk of the evidence comes from seventh and eighth century inscriptions in Pallava and Tamil as well as full reliefs of the Buddha-avātar at the Dashavātara temple in Deogarh.

[115] All references to the *ViṣṇuPurāṇa* hereafter are to the Horace Hayman Wilson edition. C.f., *The Viṣṇu Purāṇa: a system of Hindu mythology and tradition translated from the original Sanskrit and illustrated by notes chiefly from other Purāṇas,* translated by Horace Hayman Wilson with an introduction by R.C. Hazara (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak [1840], 1961).

order. The narrator tells us that when Viṣṇu enters the earth as Buddha, he is dressed in a red garment and speaks gently, sweetly and calmly. The nature of his character is overt: unlike in many other incarnations where Viṣṇu wields weapons and uses physical force to defeat the unrighteous, the Buddha-avātar's tactics are noticeably different. Since the demons (*daitya*) are too powerful to be defeated using force, he must demoralize them from within, a process described by one scholar as a kind of "psychological warfare."[116] The demons listen carefully to Buddha's seductive and gentle words, which are broadly consistent with early Buddhist teachings: the slaughter of animals for sacrifices should be stopped; the universe is a product of the mind; the world is without support from the gods; humanity's veneration of the Vedas as knowledge is based in error. All of these teachings are in direct opposition to the most centrally held Vaiṣṇava doctrines.[117] Yet the Buddha's charisma and 'trickery' is seemingly impossible to resist and the demons cease their worship of the Vedas, abandoning the Brahmanical rituals and the smṛitis. As they do so, they also begin coaxing other 'misguided ones' to take refuge in the Buddha until veneration for the Buddha swells across the land. Those who accept Buddha as their master become noticeably weak. It describes them as "naked" (*nagnā*) of "the armor of dharma [Vedic righteousness]" that protects the righteous and orthodox from malicious forces.[118] The message is clear: those who follow the Buddha's teachings and abandon the Vedas meet 'destruction.'

Not all Purāṇas discuss Buddhists but those that do are explicit in describing how Buddhists and other dissenters should be (mis)treated.[119] All social contact with them must be broken. Those who dine with a Buddhist go to hell. Even the sight of a Buddhist is ritually polluting and can lead to one's demise. To illustrate this, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* tells the story of King Śatadhanu and his pious wife, Śaivyā.[120] When a Buddhist renunciant enters the court of the King, they engage in conversation while his wife wisely turns away. The text explains that while the wife's decision maintained her purity, the King was reborn as a dog, a jackal, a

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[116] Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," 65.
[117] For a useful explanation of how they conflict, see, Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," 65.
[118] *Viṣṇupurāṇa* Book III, Chapter 18, Verse 33.
[119] The following section is indebted to R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India* (Shantiniketan: Visva-Bharati Press, 1954), 79 – 137 and Wendy Doniger *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 187 – 212.
[120] *ViṣṇuPurāṇa,* Book III, Chapter 18, Verse 33.

wolf, a vulture, a crow and finally a peacock before assuming a human body again. Perhaps the only thing worse than socializing with a Buddhist is becoming one.[121]

Modern scholarship believes most of the Purāṇas to have been composed between the fifth to tenth centuries, a period which in parts of India also marked growing tensions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities. Wendy Doniger notes that in many late Sanskrit works—between the eighth to tenth centuries when Buddhist institutions may have been seen as posing less of a threat to Brahmanical norms—the Buddha avātar is characterized in less hostile terms.[122] This may explain the change in tone. In the *Bhagāvata Purāṇa* (c. 10th century), for instance, Viṣṇu takes form as Buddha to protect humanity from ignorance. Similarly, in Jayadeva's *Gīta Govinda* (10th century), the Buddha-avātar is born out of compassion for animals and to end bloody sacrifices. In the epic literature of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Buddha is rarely present, apart from the occasional verse in lesser-known editions where he appears dressed in robes and deceiving the public.[123] As texts of tremendous cultural and religious importance (particularly for theistic Hindus), these manuscripts were composed, copied, and edited by scribes and scholars, where they were then read and recited at royal courts and the homes of wealthy merchants up through the mid to late nineteenth century. The frequent recourse to and study of these manuscripts conditioned a familiar yet dismissive attitude towards Buddhists that was well ingrained up through the twentieth century.

Was this hostility and perhaps later, ambivalent feeling towards Buddhists simply the product of a North Indian Brahmanical priestly conservatism? After all, it is widely known that there was a robust cross-fertilization of ideas and practices among Jains, Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, Lingāyats and various Buddhist sects throughout the first millennium. The period between the seventh to fifteenth centuries ("medieval India"), in particular, is often seen as the highpoint of Indic intellectual scholasticism, a time when philosophers of every

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[121] Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall*, 141 – 77, argues that "apostate Brahmins" or Brahmins who became Buddhists were among the most despised of the bunch. They are often the subject of separate verses in texts that lay out individualized punishments for them.

[122] Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: an alternative history* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 484.

[123] In some editions of the *Ramayana*, he appears as a teacher of dangerous atheism (*nāstika*)—a sentiment we've seen was widely echoed in the Purāṇas. He is equally absent in the *Mahabharata*, although he reappears in the late nineteenth century southern recension speaking Magadhi (Pali), dressed in ochre robes and speaking lies. Also noteworthy in this text is the "lord of demons," identified by Doniger as the Mauryan Emperor and Buddhist convert, Aśoka. C.f., Doniger, *The Hindus,* 481 – 85.

persuasion honed their logic at pluralistic courts. One outcome of these highly urbane and closely-knit lineages of learning was that Buddhist doctrines became deeply enmeshed in Indic scholastic culture. As late as the seventeenth century—when Buddhist scholars had lost the support of Indic rulers in the plains—scholastic manuals and commentaries produced by the Advaita Vedānta and Nyāya traditions, continued to show complex and surprisingly faithful understandings of the doctrines produced in the Buddhists' own texts.[124] In manuals like Śaṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya,* Madhava's *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha,* and Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's *Nyāymañjarī,* Buddhists served as the propagators of what Andrew Nicholson calls "the prototypical *nāstika* school."[125] For students of these scholastic manuals, understanding and defeating the arguments of the nāstik system was a necessary step on the way to self-realization (and prestige). Buddhists were, in other words, the 'scholastic other,' the fundamental foil—or perhaps more accurately, straw man—against which Hindu *āstikas* (affirmers) re-defined and re-imagined themselves. That is, even long after Buddhists had left the stage and were no longer providing live responses to Mimāṃsāka, Vedāntic and other āstika interlocutors, Hindu philosophers still felt compelled to converse with them.

Many of these manuals were widely circulated among educated literati up through the early colonial period so it is valuable to focus on those particular works since they formed the seeds where the Buddhist past came into being. In the various hagiographies and commentaries of the seventh-century Mimāṃsāka scholar, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, memories of a Buddhist past are in vivid form.[126] Described as a brilliant logician with a profound wit and equally sharp tongue, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa is remembered not only as a votary of Indic intellectualism but for his stunning and often violent attacks on Buddhists. By nearly all accounts, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa appears to have studied under a Buddhist guru at a young age before becoming convinced that Buddhist views were mistaken. Leaving his former guru, he became a zealous proponent of the Mimāṃsākas, castigating other mistaken 'Hindu' sects

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[124] Andrew Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 192.

[125] Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism,* 192, and 180 – 94, more broadly. For instance, see chapter 2 (p. 12 – 35) of *The Sarva-darsana-samgraha or Review of the different systems of Hindu philosophy by Madhava Acharya,* translated by E.B. Cowell and A.E. Gough (London: Trubner & Co., 1882), which presents a long list of Buddhist philosophical doctrines in order to refute them.

[126] An excellent overview of the life and thought of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa is P.S. Sharma, *Anthology of KumārilaBhaṭṭa's Works*, with preface and introduction by Peri Sarveswara Sharma (Delhi: Motilala Banarsidass, 1980 [1898 – 99]), 1 – 33.

like the Sāṃkhya, Pāñcarātras, and Pāśupatas but always reserving particular scorn for his former Buddhist teachers. He ridicules the Buddhist argument that Buddha was omniscient, asking how someone who is not omniscient himself could know that someone else is. Such a teaching, he contends, is only fit for and practiced by the symbolically polluted: outcastes, foreigners and other "animal-like" tribals.[127] Although he never withdrew his attacks on Buddhists, he later burned himself to death on a funeral pyre (or in some recensions, tossed himself off a building) after realizing what a terrible thing he had done by defaming his former Buddhist master (betraying one's teacher being the *maxima mea culpa* in Indic learning circles).[128]

Despite being more 'exclusivist' than many of his contemporaries, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa appears to have been no less representative of the general sentiment held against Buddhists by scholastics at this time. As Andrew Nicholson argues in his study of twelfth to seventeenth century Indian philosophy, Indian thinkers with "marked inclusivist tendencies," still drew a clear line between "insiders and outsiders, *āstikas* and *nāstikas*."[129] Even decidedly inclusivist philosophers like Vijñānabhikṣu (16th – 17th century), who was willing to make room for "difference and non-difference" in regards to multiple āstika positions, argued that "non-difference" does not come into play when discussing the Buddhists. In fact, while Vijñānabhikṣu rarely descends into polemics against āstika thinkers, he is relentless in his attacks on Buddhists. Only the Advaita Vedāntins—his true antagonists—are treated more harshly. The term he uses to deride them, however, is telling: he calls them "crypto-Buddhists" (*pracchannabauddha*), a common term of oral and literary slander which throughout the centuries has been used to exploit "the strong popular sentiment against Buddhism."[130] The only thing worse than a Buddhist it seemed, was someone who sounded like a Buddhist but was unwilling to admit it.

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[127] Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," 67 – 68.
[128] Sharma, *Anthology of KumārilaBhaṭṭa's Works,* 10. For a third possible ending to this story from a Buddhist perspective, see the seventeenth-century Tibetan account from Tārānātha, *History of Buddhism in India,* 226 – 34.
[129] Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism,* 188.
[130] Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," 71. See also Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism,* 189.

The eighth century Vedāntic philosopher Śaṅkara—believed by many of his followers to be an incarnation of Śiva—was no less hostile towards Buddhist institutions.[131] Indeed, his post fourteenth century reputation as the "destroyer" of Buddhism is perhaps only superseded by his reputation as being the foremost interpreter of Vedānta. After the fourteenth century, when a series of hagiographies describing Śaṅkara's "conquest of the four quarters" of India gained wide circulation, he attained a prized place in popular Hindu consciousness. By the seventeenth century, Śaṅkara's reputation must have been quite widespread, for even in Tibet he was understood as the "undisputed master of religion" responsible for Buddhist decline.[132] Śaṅkara's own scholastic commentaries, which were required reading for post fourteenth century Advaita Vedāntins, showcase a clear and lucid awareness of three different Buddhist philosophical schools (*nikāya*). Śaṅkara's advice to his audience is to avoid them if they have any "regard for their own happiness."[133]

While there is only scattered evidence for the persistence of Buddhism in the ancient Buddhist heartland (Pali, *Majjhimā Desa*) after the fifteenth century, it is clear that even if most Indians did not have an opportunity to meet living Buddhists, they continued to be well aware of their historical existence and their continued presence on the borders. In the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* of Madhava, a seventeenth to eighteenth century Sanskrit hagiography of Śaṅkara that quickly eclipsed all earlier Śaṅkara legends, Buddhists are still given ample space. Yet Jonathan Bader, who has studied the Śaṅkara hagiographies in detail, notes that in the eighteenth century recension, it is "virtually impossible to recognize anything which is intrinsically Buddhist" in the figures that Śaṅkara encounters and defeats.[134] Apart from the text's conscious labeling of certain figures and ideas as Buddhist (*bauddha),* the text frequently conflates Jain and Buddhist doctrines, a confusion which Bader sees as evidence that not only were Buddhists no longer major actors on the scene but that anything beyond a

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[131] My reading of Śaṅkara's life derives from Jonathan Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters: Traditional Accounts of the Life of Sankara* (PhD diss., Australian National University, 1991).
[132] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 41 (1933), 7 – 8. The Tibetan historian Tāranātha (1575 – 1634) blames Śaṅkara's intellectual conquests as being responsible for the Hindu (*tirthika*) conquest of "everything belonging to the twenty five centers of the [Buddhist] Doctrine." C.f. Tārānātha, *History of Buddhism in India,* 225 – 37. Contemporary scholarship, however, disputes his actual involvement.
[133] Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," 69 – 70. See also, Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters,* 137.
[134] Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters*, 137; see also 137 – 43.

vague familiarity with their ideas had largely disappeared.[135] Rather than detailing the nuances of Buddhist arguments as earlier works had typically done, the text simply rehashes the familiar tales of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa's famed destruction of the heretics, but this time with weapons rather than words:

> He [Kumārila Bhaṭṭa] defeated countless Buddhists and Jains by means of different types of arguments in the various sciences: having cut off their heads with axes, he threw them down into numerous wooden mortars and made a powder of them by whirling around a pestle. In this way he was fearlessly carrying out the destruction of those who held evil doctrines."[136]

Buddhists were no longer the primary scholastic adversaries. They were simply the defeated 'other,' the old nemesis that had been driven to the margins and whose precise philosophical proofs and social praxis were no longer deserving of sustained targeting and debate. Nonetheless, the memories of Buddhists continued to be hashed out through live performances of popular Sanskrit dramas, like the *Āgamaḍambara* and *Prabodhacandrodaya,* where the saffron robe clad monastics are the subject of much satire and comedy, appearing as little more than the progenitors of faulty views and gluttonous lifestyles.[137] There were undoubtedly some exceptions to this trend—intellectuals who recognized the Buddhists as formidable sparring partners in their centuries long conversations about self and non-self, existence and non-existence, realization, beauty, logic, death, knowledge and the numerous other categories that consumed the premodern Sanskrit cosmopolis—but their stories are more rare.[138]

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[135] He might be over-interpreting the evidence since even the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*—composed between the fifth to sixth centuries when Buddhists were active on the scene—also "confuses" Jain and Buddhist identities. Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology,* 188, argues that this "confusion" may be part of the Hindu tendency to "lump" non-Hindus in one category.

[136] Quoted in Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters*, 143.

[137] Kṛṣṇamiśra, *Prabodhacandrodaya [Rise of Wisdom Moon],* translated from the Sanskrit by Matthew Kapstein (New York: Clay Sanskrit Library, 2009); Jayánta Bhaṭṭa, *Āgama/ḍambara,* translated from the Sanskrit by Csaba Dezsó as *Much ado about religion* (New York: Clay Sanskrit Library, 2005).

[138] And most seem to have been lost to posterity. Take, for instance, Kṣemendra (d. 1070), the prolific poet known for his satires and recasting of classical works. Although he came from a Śaiva family and was said to have been a Vaiṣṇava, he had a deep appreciation for Buddhism, as evidenced by his collection of Buddhist narratives, the *Wish-fulfilling Vine of Wondrous Tales of the Bodhisattva* (*Bodhisattvādānakalpalatā*), composed around the year 1052. Yet this text seems not to have had a wider currency in the Indic world until Sarat Chandra Das acquired a copy in Tibet in the 1880s. See, Nancy Lin, "Adapting the Buddha's Biographies: A Cultural History of the Wish-Fulfiling Vine in Tibet, Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries" (PhD Diss., University of California-Berkeley, 2011).

2.4 The vernacular storehouse

In the multi-lingual universe that is India, Sanskrit literature only serves as one domain where images of a Buddhist past were stored. Indeed, as Sheldon Pollock has pointed out, during the tenth to sixteenth centuries, there was a widespread turn to vernacular literature across India (although this process was much earlier in the south, where linguistic choices in literary traditions were more varied and complex). Tamil literary sources from sixth to thirteenth century South India describe in cogent terms the age of Buddhists and provide a veritable storehouse of memories. After the seventh century when Buddhist and Jain influence began to decline, Śaiva traditions labeled the preceding period as the "*Kalabhra Interregnum*" or "interruption of the "wicked ones" (*kalappalar*).[139] Many of the most popular devotional poets from this period, but particularly the Śaiva saints, Appar and Campantar, rigorously condemn both Buddhists and Jains, turning what Anne Monius calls a "geography of inclusion" into "a rabidly sectarian vision of the Tamil landscape."[140] Buddhists and Jains are ridiculed for everything from their style of dress and manner of eating to their lack of respect for Vedic rites and use of the Prakrit (rather than 'classical') tongues.

Nowhere is this enmity more evident than in the poems and narratives surrounding the seventh-century child prodigy and Śaiva saint, Sambandar [Campantar]. Popularly remembered for his heartfelt prayers to Śiva and still worshipped with offerings across Tamil-speaking South India to this day, Sambandar's life—like the other Alvar poet-saints—was characterized by extensive travels across the countryside and use of lyrical melodies to express devotion (*bhakti*) to Śiva. Any telling of Sambandar's life or rehearsing of his songs can hardly be expressed without recourse to his frequent interactions with Buddhists and Jains. For his devotional project was also concerned with converting the courtly elites to the cult of Śiva and away from Jain and Buddhist patronage. In the many poems that Sambandar composed, he almost always reserved the tenth verse of each hymn for the denunciation of Buddhists and Jains. Buddhists—clearly identified by their shaved heads and ochre robes—

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[139] Anne Monius, *Imagining a place for Buddhism: Literary culture and religious community in Tamil-speaking South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.
[140] Monius, *Imagining a place for Buddhism,* 84.

are described as "wicked scoundrels," "worthless, wily rogues" and "fat, degenerate men."[141] In other hymns, they are considered stupid, deluded, overfed, overdressed, linguistically challenged and the teachers of a dharma that leads to misfortune and ruin.[142]

In one of the more memorable stories detailing Sambandar's life, as recalled in the popular twelfth century Tamil epic *Periya Puranam* [*Great Purāṇa*], he accepts an invitation to debate with the logician Buddha Nandi, the Buddhist head (*thera*) of a local vihāra.[143] Praying to Śiva for victory, Sambandar recites a single mantra and the monk's head is severed from his spine. Aghast, the monk's disciples challenge him again, insisting this time on a debate conducted not through "flawless mantric disputation" but with "words." At last, the Buddhists are forced to submit to Śiva's strength after Campantar proves through debate that "the omniscience of the Buddha was hollow like his moksa."[144] Whether such violence should be read literally or figuratively is often contested, but the underlying message is the same: Buddhists encourage forms of socially unacceptable behavior. As Wendy Doniger rightly observes, the Hindu criticism of Buddhists was often stated in terms of both orthopraxy and orthodoxy: Buddhists teach people the wrong belief—to stop venerating the Vedas and Brahmin castes. With the wrong belief, people will begin doing the wrong things.[145] The justification of these tales may be morally ambiguous in our own contemporary settings, but in the historical context, these kinds of pedagogies were fundamentally about reminding people to "live right."

Although these sources—temple chronicles, devotional poetry and songs—were widely read and recited in public spaces and religious sites, giving it a popularity that is not always evident by its small readership, art historians have also pointed to other spaces where memories of Buddhists were kept alive. At the massive Meenakshi temple complex in Madurai, a series of ancient murals show a band of Buddhist monks being dismembered and

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[141] Indira Viswanathan Peterson, *Poems to Siva: the hymns of the Tamil Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 10.
[142] Peterson, *Poems to Siva,* 1 – 23 and 270 – 83.
[143] *St. Sekkizhaar's Periya Purāṇam,* translated by T.N. Ramachandran, Vol. 2 (Thanjavur: Tamil University, 1995), 176 – 81. This section corresponds to Chapter 33, verses 904 - 26 in the original text.
[144] *Periya Purāṇam*, 178, 181. These correspond to Chapter 33, verses 911 and 924 in the original text. The violence used against Buddhists in these stories was by no means unusual. Perhaps the most famous tale surrounding Sambandar was his support for the violent extermination of the Jains—an event which is still reenacted in dramatic form every year at sites across southern Tamil Nadu in the Jain "Impalement" festival known as Kaluvettal. C.f., Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall,* 215.
[145] Doniger, *The Hindus,* 483.

crushed in an oil-mill. In the fourteenth century hagiography of Śaiva poet-saints, *Tiruvilaiyatar Purāṇam*, the murals are said to be the story of the illustrious Śaiva priest, Manikkavasagar (c. 862 – 85?). When a party of Lankan Buddhists arrived in the kingdom to convert the Cola King, Manikkavasagar goes out to meet them. During their first encounter, he finds the Buddhists obstinate, unwilling to accept the supremacy of Śiva's teachings ("it is not possible to make a blind man see the shining sun," he says).[146] But after negotiating a wager in which the loser is to be crushed in an oil-mill, he bests them with his magic and those who fail to take initiation (*dīkṣā*) into Śiva's order are dismembered by the Cola ruler.

According to the critical theorist Jill Bennett, art should be understood as more than just a simple depiction of the world.[147] It is a social practice that shifts social and psychological norms. In her study of traumatic memories and contemporary art across Europe, South America and Africa, she argues that representations of art have the capacity to register memories at the affective level, causing shock and prompting new understandings of any given situation. While Bennett's concept of "empathic vision," or "the mode of thought that might be achieved when one allows the violence of an affective experience to truly inform thinking," is concerned primarily with the potential of art to recognize another's experience as similar to one's own, images of violence also have the capacity to dehumanize one another and generate an affect of exclusion and distance.[148] Artistic depictions of the world, in other words, can alter people in various ways, triggering various kinds of 're-description.'

Temple art and ritual iconography is curated by the priests and patrons that control the sites and the manuscript cultures that guide the elite understanding of this material culture. Brahmin literati and land-owning castes traveling through the town of Nagapattinam, for instance, would have been well aware of the stories of Tirumankal Alvar (8th – 9th c.), as he entered the town's various Buddhist temples, stole the images and melted them down to be used in Vaiṣṇava temples.[149] Likewise, at the Lakṣmī temple of the Jagganath complex in Puri, Orissa, a fresco painting shows a Vaiṣṇava theologian converting a Buddhist monk at

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[146] On Meenakshi, see Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall,* 218 – 19.
[147] Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
[148] Bennett, *Empathic Vision,* 294.
[149] His hagiography is contained the Vaiṣṇava *kuruparamparai* (in Sanskrit *guruparamparā*). See, Dehejia, "The Persistence of Buddhism," 53 – 74.

the point of his dagger.[150] Vernacular accounts from the region recall these incidents with incredible clarity. In the twelfth century Oriya chronicle *Mādalāpañji,* a meeting between the Ganga king Rajaraja II (c. 1171 – 94) and the Buddhists leads to calls for a debate to see "who were omniscient and whose words were true."[151] Philosophical proofs are laid out and the Brahmins win the debate. Two recensions of the story point to a similar ending in which the king smashes the heads of the Buddhists to death.[152] Another story from both the Oriya-language *Mādalāpañji* and Bengali-language *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (c. 1540s) describes the King Madana Mahadeva's persecution of large groups of Buddhists and the burning of nearly all their manuscripts.[153]

Sixteenth and seventeenth-century hagiographies circulated in Bengal among Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas, one of the most successful Vaiṣṇava movements of the past five centuries, provide similarly robust (if not again, antagonistic) depictions of Buddhists. Centered on the Bengali Brahmin priest Caitanya (c. 1468 – 1533)—believed by his devotees to be the *Mahāprabhu* (Great God)—this popular movement may have only gained more popularity in the nineteenth century, but its sixteenth and seventeenth century luminaries produced a number of influential manuscripts detailing Caitanya's interactions with Buddhism.[154] In the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (c. 1540s)*,* the author Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja describes Caitanya's visit to a Buddhist village led by a young *ācārya* (master) near Vrddha-Kasi in present-day Tamil Nadu.[155] They engage in a public debate and the ācārya is humiliated by Caitanya's wit and logic. However, rather than surrendering and 'converting' to the opponent's position, as is the custom in these stories, the ācārya tries to kill Caitanya by offering him a plate of poisoned food. At the very moment the food is being offered, a large

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[150] See, Shyam Sunder Tripathy, *Buddhism and other religious cults of south-east India* (Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1988), 188. Tripathy writes that, "the continued presence of these [Vaiṣṇava] philsophers in Puri went a long way to obliterate every impression Buddhism had left in the wide expanse of the coastal Orissa" (188).

[151] *Madalapanji: The Chronicle of Jagannath Temple (Rajabhoga Itihasa)*, translated by K.S. Behera and A.N. Parida (Bhubaneswar: Amadeus Press, 2009), 34. On the composition of this text, see Herman Kulke, "Reflections on the Sources of the Temple Chronicles of the Mādāla Pāñji of Puri," in H. Kulke (ed.), *Kings and Cults: state formation and legitimation in India and southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993), 159 – 91.

[152] *Madalapanji,* 34 – 35.

[153] See Kulke, "Reflections on the Sources of the Temple Chronicles of the Mādāla Pāñji of Puri," 187; and Prabhat Mukherjee, *History of Medieval Vaishnavaism*, 2 – 53. Both stories are slightly different in who instigates the slaughter—the king or the queen—but the ending is the same.

[154] See Tony K. Stewart, *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritamrta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[155] See, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta,* 464 – 65.

bird swoops down, grasps the plate, sweeps high back into the sky and drops the plate on the ācārya's head, striking him dead. Terrified, the ācārya's disciples beg Caitanya to revive their guru back to life. In his great compassion, Caitanya does so but only after ordering all of the Buddhists to join in singing praise to Krishna (*Kṛṣṇa kīrtan*). At that moment, the defeated ācārya wakes with the word of God (*hari-mantra*) bursting from his mouth.[156]

During the many religious debates that took place at the Mughal Emperor Akbar's (r. 1556 – 1605) imperial court, Jain theologians and Brahmin intellectuals argued about the connection of Buddhist doctrines to Śaiva and Islamic conceptions of a monotheistic God (*paramīśvara*).[157] In fact, Akbar's *vizir* and court historian, Abu al'Fazl (1551 – 1602), wrote at length about the "tribe of Boodh [Buddha]." In his *Ain-e-Akbari*, he describes four different schools of Buddhist philosophy, the nature of Buddhist praxis, Brahmanical antagonism towards Buddhists and the widespread influence that Buddhists once held over the land.[158] Even in seventeenth-century Rajasthan, a region where Buddhists had never established deep roots, Buddhists continued to be spoken about in the songs and hymns of the Dādūpanthis. This devotional sect of monastic and lay communities, founded by *sant* Dādū (1554 – 1603), taught that Buddhists were one of the six schools (*ṣaddarśana*) who "wear false religious costumes" (*sabai kapaṭa ke bhekha*).[159]

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[156] During a visit to the ISCKON temple in Delhi in 2008, I was also told a similar version of this story. Another late Bengali-language hagiography, Krishna Das' (c. 1575 – 95) *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* makes even more explicit the real mission behind the *Mahaprabha*'s appearance as Krishna's avātar when Caitanya proclaims: "I have re-appeared in order to destroy the Pasandis [heretics, i.e., Buddhists/Jains] / By destroying the Pasandis I shall propagate devotion." Quoted in M. Abdul Mu'min Chowdhury, *Buddhism in South Asia: a study in history* (London: London Institute of South Asia, 2008), 310fn128.

[157] See Audrey Truschke, "Dangerous Debates: Jain responses to theological challenges at the Mughal court," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 49/5 (2015), 1328. According to Truschke (1333), Jain sources from this period continue to show a familiarity with Buddhist texts (*śastras*).

[158] *The Ain I Akbari by Abul Fazl Allami,* translated from the original Persian by H. Blochmann and Colonel H.S. Jarrett, Vol. III (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873 – 1907). Buddhists appear in all three volumes of the *Ain-i-Akbari* with the most comprehensive reports detailed in Volume III, 211 - 217 under a separate heading as "Bauddhas." Long after Akbar's reign, Mughal rulers continued to engage in political negotiation with Buddhist monastic governments at both ends of the Himalaya, showing real familiarity with their customs and doctrines. For Muslim – Buddhist engagements in Ladakh, see C.L. Datta, *Ladakh and Western Himalayan Politics: 1819 – 1848* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973) and for a recent study of marriage practices between Buddhist and Islamic royalty in western Tibet and Kashmir, see Georgis Halkias, "The Muslim Queens of the Himalays: Princess Exchanges in Baltistan and Ladakh," in *Islam and Tibet: interactions along the musk routes,* edited by Anna Akasoy, Charles S.F. Burnett and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 231 – 52.

[159] Quoted in Monica Hortsmann, "The Example in Dadupanthi Homiletics," in *Texts and Telling: Music, Literature and Performance in North India,* edited by Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 36.

The polemical tones and memories of violence contained in so many of these texts raise important questions about the nature of South Asian history, Hindu-Buddhist relations and social identity.[160] While some scholars argue that these features serve as little more than literary motifs and rhetorical devices, others have seen them as manifestations of real social tensions.[161] Some historians argue that the hostilities evidenced in the literary sources are not visible in the archaeological record, pointing to what appears to be long history of multi-religious practices at Hindu-Buddhist sites like Bodh Gaya, Amarāvatī, Nagarjunakonda, Ellora and elsewhere.[162] For Himanshu Prabha Ray, the history of these sites should be understood in terms of sharing and negotiation rather than hegemony and dominance. She

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[160] It is difficult to generalize about Buddhist – Hindu relations in the pre-modern world without taking into account a diverse and complex array of local factors, let alone the usefulness of the categories themselves. Doniger, *The Hindus,* 484 – 85, suggests Hindu attitudes towards Buddhism passed through three different stages, beginning with a "period of harmony," then a period of increased hostility and contempt, and lastly a period characterized by a "more conciliatory attitude" in which "Hindus once again acknowledged their admiration of Buddhism." She understands each of these ideological shifts to correlate with broader historical outlines: "harmony" occurs in the early period (presumably 2nd to 1st centuries BCE—she provides no dates), "hostility" during the 2nd to 8th centuries CE, and finally "conciliation" after the 8th century (when she posits a Buddhist decline). Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," provides a similar outline although his third stage period—after the 10th century—continues to be marked by hostility. Neither outline can provide the sort of localized nuance that good scholarship demands but they are suggestive of grander sentiments in the literary tradition. My own reading falls closer to Klostermaier, although I am weary of either framework since they both resemble the all-too familiar colonial chronology of a Vedic period, Buddhist period, Hindu period, and so on. As for Doniger, the primary flaw I see in her argument is her evaluation of the third stage, especially when one considers a much wider range of literary and archaeological sources—the kinds I have listed in this chapter. Her evidence of Hindu admiration and conciliation towards the Buddha is especially unconvincing. When the *Matsya Purāṇa* (10th c.) describes the Buddha as "lotus-eyed, beautiful as a god, and peaceful," she read this as evidence of the texts putting "a positive spin on the Buddha avātar" (484). But she fails to mention that these qualities are precisely the very thing that makes him so dangerous in the other texts she characterizes as "hostile." For example, in the *ViṣṇuPurāṇa,* it is his beauty, his charisma and sweet and soft words that leads the *daitya* into the clutches of his "false teaching." In my view, this is not evidence of a "more conciliatory attitude" but of a Brahmanical literary genius, a kind of Indic equivalent to the Greek Sirens, warning those that might be tempted by his enchanting melody.

[161] Some scholars believe that intellectual polemics should not be seen as evidence of wider social tensions. Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," 60, following the Indian scholar T.V. Murti, argues that polemical statements between Hindu and Buddhist thinkers were naturally inclined towards an overemphasis of difference but that this ferociousness didn't betray the tremendous agreement between them on "the common principles of a good life" and "cultural ideal" shared by both. In his view, polemics represented the "maturity" of philosophical thought and was central to the intellectual developments of Buddhists, Jains, Hindus, and other Indic religious systems. As T.V. Murti puts it, "polemics does not mean that rival systems are refuted out of existence; they are only differentiated from each other. Confusion of standpoints is warded off, and clarity results" (quoted in Klostermaier, 60). For a comprehensive study of Buddhism's rise and fall in India that reads these polemics as illustrations of real social tension, see Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall*.

[162] C.f., Upinder Singh and Nayanjot Lahiri, *Ancient India: new research* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially the introduction and chapter 6. See also, Himanshu Prabha Ray, "Narratives of Faith: Buddhism and Colonial Archaeology in Monsoon Asia," *Asia Research Institute, Working Papers Series No. 99,* November (2007).

argues that "multiple affiliation was the norm rather than the exception."[163] Her own studies of a vast array of archaeological evidence taken from across "monsoon Asia" suggest that religious practices in any single center were rarely restricted to one or the other tradition. After all, even staunch Śaivite kings, like Rajaraja (r. 985 – 1014) of the Colas, endowed large Buddhist monasteries and sponsored Buddhist rituals. Likewise, under the Pala rulers of Bengal, it is well known that both Buddhists and Hindus were generously patronized. Buddhists and Hindus worshipped alongside one another within the same complex at places like the Bhoṭ Bhagan in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Calcutta as well as in the hybrid courtyards of Kinnauri "Hindu-Buddhists."[164]

Religious communalism is not inevitable and a broad examination of Indic history reveals as much inter-religious sectarianism as it does extra-religious animosity. Buddhists argued amongst one another as vociferously as they did with Hindus, Jains and other non-Buddhists. Furthermore, scholars are not exactly amiss when they contend that Hinduism absorbed much of the ethical and philosophical basis of Buddhism (and vice-versa). Yet this should not prevent further investigation into the actual process through which Buddhist ideas and practices were assimilated into Brahmanical culture at the same time they were stigmatized as objects of derision. It has to be acknowledged that shared spaces can also be sources of conflict. Difference does not always lead to understanding or empathy. While there was no doubt a long history of communion at the multi-layered altar of Indic religious life, religious elites have long been aware that they follow disparate religious paths that present substantially different views of the world and ways to live in it. In the *realpolitik* of competition for patronage and political support, these differences often come to the fore. It is here, as a means of gaining resources, tangible and intangible, that we see the severe Buddhist critiques leveled against Brahmanical authority (and vice-versa) taking on forms of social and political tension.

Whether the decline of Buddhism in India can be traced to the hostilities outlined above is an important question and one that has been neglected in scholarship. Why Buddhism declined in India is not the subject of this dissertation but it concerns us greatly

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[163] Ray, "Narratives of Faith," 16.
[164] On the Bhot Bhagan, see Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 193 – 231. On religious practice in Kinnaur, see Rāhul Sāṅkṛtyāyan, *Kinnar deś meiṁ* (Ilāhābād: Kitāb Mahal, 2012 [1948]).

because its 'last days,' so to speak, serve as the prism through which to understand its rebirth during the colonial period. What is to be stressed here is the incredible depth and breadth of materials in conversation with Buddhists on the eve of British colonization. Of course, significant obstacles arise in our reading of these materials, the most crucial of which is our (in)ability to gauge how well known they were among a wider 'public sphere.' As a whole, social and religious interactions at the popular level in pre-modern India still remain little understood. Despite roughly thirty million manuscripts still extant in India today—clear proof of a rich and vibrant 'popular' pre-modern culture—there are very few studies of manuscript cultures in terms of understanding their actual production and use.[165] Simply put, we don't know enough about how far the knowledge systems and stories crafted and created through these manuscript cultures permeated beyond the elite communities that formed them.[166] What is evident is that among the manuscript cultures of pre-colonial India, knowledge of these texts was geographically widespread, reflecting not just individual thinkers, but a larger Indic intellectual culture deeply conversant with Buddhist peoples, philosophy and praxis.

2.5 'Jan Kampani' and the agony of memory

The more than millennium long Indic conversation about Buddha and Bauddhas continued to remain an important topic long after the old centers of Buddhist learning had collapsed and the transcontinental and transoceanic networks once linking Indic Buddhists

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[165] Pollock, *The Language of the Gods,* 558. According to Pollock, pre-modern India was characterized by a widespread "script-mercantilism" of scribes, scholars and non-professionals who copied and circulated manuscripts for personal use, prestige and other reasons. He contends that the reproduction of these texts, enhanced by oral performances, was responsible for disseminating Indian culture in ways "greater than anything achievable through print-capitalism" (558). Other scholars are less convinced. Houben and Rath, "Manuscript Culture and Its Impact in "India," 6 & 40fn65, retort: "There is no proper basis to understand the extent and impact of some two thousand years of intensive manuscript culture in India, nor of what preceded and what gradually superceded it…where were the manuscript/book shops…the Grub street hacks of the emerging print-culture in Renaissance and pre-modern Europe?"

[166] In a recent lecture "Just for Fun: Riddle Tales and the Formation of Manuscript Cultures," delivered on October 15, 2015 at the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, Canada, Adheesh Sathaye suggested that a focus on scribal cultures, i.e., the figures who copied these texts, may hold the key to unlocking our knowledge of "popular" pre-modern Indian culture.

with Buddhists elsewhere in Asia had fallen into disuse.[167] How well known were these sources to Indian literati and other educated elites during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when British Orientalists began asking questions about Buddha and the Bauddhas? Were the stories of wily bhikkhus and crafty logicians still being passed down from father to son, guru to *śikṣā*? Were these memories stagnant or locked behind a hermetic seal and only occasionally broken in moments of critical awareness or necessity?

Over the *longue durée* of the eighteenth century, the British-owned East India Company (EIC) rose to power across south Asia.[168] By 1773, when the Company established a capital in Calcutta and appointed its first Governor-General, Warren Hastings, the politics of administering and governing the regions it annexed required a growing number of administrators from Europe. For many of the early Europeans who joined the Company, India was a land of opportunity, where as one popular writer put it, "a young gentleman blessed with patronage and a stout constitution could give the pagoda tree a good hard shake and return home with a modest fortune before acquiring so much as one grey hair upon his head."[169] A great number of those who served in the upper ranks of the Company came from genteel backgrounds and although few had university degrees, they were largely products of

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[167] According to scholars like Tilman Frasch and Tansen Sen, Buddhist trade and pilgrim networks in India collapsed between the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. See, Tilman Frasch, "A Buddhist Network in the Bay of Bengal: Relations between Bodhgaya, Burma and Sri Lanka, c. 300 – 1300," in *From the Mediterranean to the South China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes*, edited by C. Guillot, Denys Lombard and Roderich Ptak (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 69 – 93. For a more Sino-centric perspective, see Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade: the realignment of India-China relations, 600 – 1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

[168] Although initially conceived as a mercantilist institution, the military and fiscal needs of the company bolstered by a capitalist logic of gaining access to Indian goods and resources, frequently drew it into political conflicts. While its powerful mercenary army—roughly 18,000 soldiers in 1763 to 102,000 in 1796—incurred massive debts in wars with varied Indian kingdoms, it sustained these expenses through the massive revenues it generated from the coastal and land trade routes it monopolized across the region. A comprehensive and balanced study of these developments is found in, Christopher Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[169] Allen, *The Buddha and the Sahibs* 12. Although it is difficult to establish exact mortality rates among European personnel in the Company at this time, it was certainly far more dangerous than Allen suggests. Frequent outbreaks of famine, malarial fever, plague, cholera, dysentery, influenza and other diseases, as well as wars, kept mortality rates considerably high. See Lella Visaria and Pravin Visaria, "Population (1757 – 1947)," in *Cambridge Economic History of India: Volume II, c. 1751 – c. 1970*, edited by Dharma Kumar and Meghnad Desai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 469 – 470. This reality is illustrated well by Daniel O'Connor's study of chaplains in the Company, where he writes, "the almost unimaginable mortality rates throughout the Company's history made the burial of the dead a major part of a chaplain's ministry…during the four month's of the hot weather at Calcutta shortly after the consecration of St Anne's Church [in 1730], 460 burials were recorded in the Clerk's Book of Mortality from a total English community of 1,200, indicating three or four burials every day." C.f. Daniel O'Connor, *The Chaplains of the East India Company, 1601 – 1858* (London: Continuum, 2012), 83.

a social class where sons acquired a solid grounding in Greek, Latin, Mathematics and Philosophy.[170] It was among this genteel class of administrators, officers, surveyors and lawyers living in colonial entrepots like Calcutta, Madras, Bombay and Benares that a new conversation between Indians and Europeans began to take place.

Amidst the wider Orientalist discussions about the nature of India's past, its social and religious customs, and the relationship between Sanskrit and Greek were a series of unanswered questions about the nature of the figure named Buddha.[171] While the concept "Buddhism" had yet to be coined, the term Buddha was well known among European intellectuals.[172] Modern European encounters with Buddhist traditions had begun several centuries before but despite a growing number of interactions with the rich tapestry of localized traditions across Asia worshipping *fo* ("Buddha" in Chinese), *hotoke* (Japanese), *sangay* (Tibetan) *samaṇa Gotam* (Thai), and many more, there was no universal consensus regarding his singular Indian origin.[173] While many believed Buddha to be a planet (the word for Mercury in most north Indian languages being *Budh*), others were less convinced. The French philosopher Denis Diderot's influential *Encyclopédie* identified him as an Egyptian in 1751. Thirty-five years later, the prolific linguist and founder of the Asiatic Society, Sir William Jones, argued that Buddha was none other than the Norse deity Oden (*Wod*).[174] Yet

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[170] Few European women settled in India in these days. The youngest males were typically around sixteen or seventeen years old and when in 1806, the East India College in London was established for the training of EIC administrators, no candidate was deemed qualified for admission unless they could translate Greek or Latin into English (O'Connor, *The Chaplains of the East India Company*).

[171] Most of the early Orientalists in India were better equipped in Persian than they were in Sanskrit or the Prakrits—the latter two languages that formed the bulk of Indic Buddhist writings. Only after William Jones' late eighteenth century discovery that Greek and Sanskrit were related did a more comprehensive foray into India's pre-Islamic past take form. On the importance of Sanskrit for Orientalist studies, see P.J Marshall (ed.), *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[172] The starting point for the modern European discovery of Asian religions were the Jesuit missions in sixteenth-century Japan and China. See, App, *The Cult of Emptiness.* These were followed by Catholic missions and European explorations in southeast Asia and Tibet. C.f., Trent Pomplun, *Jesuit on the Roof of the World: Ippolito Desideri's Mission to Tibet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Alison Gopnik, "Could David Hume have known about Buddhism? Charles Francois Dolu, the Royal College of La Fleche, and the Global Jesuit Intellectual Network," in *Hume Studies*, Vol. 35/1&2 (2009) 5 – 28. In addition to Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh,* an important (and underutilized) source for this topic is Donald F. Lach's *Asia in the making of Europe,* 9 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965 – 93).

[173] See, Lopez, *From Stone to Flesh,* 134 – 54.

[174] App, *The Birth of Orientalism,* 182 – 83. Such ideas had long shelf lives. The so-called "Negro thesis" was first proposed by the German physician and naturalist, Engelbert Kaempfer (1651 – 1716). Only later was it reproduced in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* where it began being repeated many times over the next century. Many of the arguments made by these eighteenth century Orientalists may seem comedic today but we must recall that

by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a flood of new literary and archaeological evidence gathered from European colonies across Asia—Sumatra, Ceylon, India, Burma and many more—was beginning to piece together the early Indic origins of the Buddhist traditions of Asia.

Central to this process was the colonial presence in India itself. As the Company expanded its mercantile interests across the subcontinent, surveyors and soldiers increasingly encountered artifacts of Buddhist material culture buried in the soil, hidden in dense jungles or being utilized for other secular or religious purposes. During this early phase of exploration, Buddhist discoveries were less frequent but of no less significance. In 1785, for example, one Mr. Wilmot copied a Sanskrit inscription from a stone found at Bodh Gaya—the site in modern Bihar now recognized as the site of Buddha's Enlightenment. Three years later the Sanskritist Charles Wilkins published a translation of that inscription in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, proclaiming it as the "house of Bood-dha."[175] Just a few years later, two twelfth century urns honoring Buddha were discovered near Sarnath, the small town in modern Uttar Pradesh believed to be the site of Buddha's first teaching.

During the extensive South Asia wide surveys and missions conducted by the Scottish surgeon Francis Buchanan (1762 – 1829) between 1794 and 1816, an understanding of Buddhism's material presence in the subcontinent became much more widely known.[176] Within two years of his arrival, Buchanan accompanied the British mission to the royal court of Ava [Burma] where he met the Buddhist King and visited the great *Mahāmuni* statue that had been recently taken as war booty from Arakan. In 1799, his publication, *On the religion and literature of the Burmas,* left clear indications that the Buddha of Burma was the same as the Buddha of India. Three years later, while returning from an official mission to Nepal (1802 – 03), he published reports of his trip in *Asiatick Researches*, noting the clear affinities

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this is but one important facet of the Enlightenment traditions' break away from medieval Christian theology to the natural sciences. In fact, many of the kinds of questions they asked remain at the center of humanities and social science inquiries today. Indeed, we should all remember that we will likely look no less absurd to posterity.

[175] Charles Wilkins, "Translation of a Sanskrit Inscription, copied from a stone at Booddha [sic] Gaya," *Asiatick Researches,* Vol. 1 (1788), 287.

[176] William Pinch has also provided an important overview and evaluation of Buchanan's materials for a study of early nineteenth century Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. See, William Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Appendix I. See also, Marika Vicziany, "Imperialism, botany and statistics in early nineteenth century India: the surveys of Francis Buchanan (1762 – 1829), *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 20/4 (1986), 625 – 60.

in Buddhist doctrines between the Burmese and Newars and their shared reverence for the Śākyamuni, Siddhārth Gautama. In 1807, Buchanan began a seven-year geographical survey of the Bengal Presidency, a region that includes what Pali scriptures called the *Majjhimā Desa*, or Buddhist "Middle Lands." While traveling through this region in the winter of 1811 – 12, he learned from the Śaiva Mahant that managed the MahaBodhi complex that a group of Burmese Buddhists had only recently passed through the area to offer their oblations. One of the Mahant's disciples, a Rajput sannyasi, Buchanan learned, had even "converted to the doctrines of the Buddhs."[177] Buchanan met with the Rajput Buddhist, who in turn gave him a tour of the temple complex, explaining to him the sacred significance of each image and space as had been taught by his Burmese teachers.

While much of Europe's growing understanding of India's Buddhist past stemmed from the critical editing of Buddhist manuscripts by armchair scholars at European universities, a number of the most influential interpreters were employees of the Company. Through their many decades of work with or alongside '*Jan Kampani'* (John Company), as it was often known in Indian circles, these surveyors, diplomats, officers and administrators gained first-hand knowledge of living Buddhist traditions along the frontier and Buddhist material culture, in the form of manuscripts, artifacts and monumental ruins across the subcontinent. The most stunning example of the collections acquired by these administrator-scholars is Brian Hodgson's massive collection of Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts he collected while serving as the British Resident in Kathmandu from 1820 – 43. Between 1827 and 1845, Hodgson shipped 66 manuscripts to the College of Fort William in Calcutta, 94 manuscripts to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, 79 manuscripts to the Royal Asiatic Society of London, 36 to the India Office Library in London, 7 manuscripts to the Bodelian library at Oxford, 88 manuscripts to the Société Asiatique in Paris, and 59 to the French scholar Eugène Burnouf. [178] While the translation and study of these works formed the nucleus of the Orientalist understanding of Buddhism, the numerous reports and studies, penned by 'amateur' scholars like Hodgson and Buchanan on-the-ground in India (and Ceylon) left an

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[177] Francis Hamilton, *The Journal of Dr. Francis Buchanan (afterwards Hamilton), kept during the survey of the districts of Patna and Gaya in 1811 – 1812* (Gaya: Superintendent of Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1925), 6.
[178] C.f., Donald Lopez, "Introduction to the translation," *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism,* translated by Katia Buffertrille and Donald Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 10.

enduring imprint on the nascent field of Buddhist studies and Indology. In this regard, it is not surprising that that several of the most influential early nineteenth-century Buddhological journals were produced at institutes based in India.[179]

What are very rarely discussed in histories of these scholars and explorers are the vast networks of indigenous workers who assisted them at every step. Senior European surveyors, soldiers, and scholars working in India were regularly accompanied by indigenous scholars (*pandit*), teachers, interpreters (*munśī*) and other luminaries connected with tombs, temples and mosques. These figures are often invisible in the historical record, which makes them all the more difficult to track, but their presence and influence should not be underestimated. In an influential essay published in 1995, Charles Hallisey pointed to the fact that despite claims that the Western discovery of Buddhism was mediated almost entirely through the deciphering of manuscripts, there is substantial evidence to show that the concepts of colonized peoples influenced and shaped what Orientalists had to say about Buddhism. This process of "intercultural mimesis," as Hallisey calls it, is where "aspects of a culture of a subjectified people influenced the investigator to represent that culture in a certain manner."[180] Hallisey cites the example of the great scholar and founder of the Pali Text Society (est. 1881), T.W. Rhys Davids (1843 – 1922). Rhys Davids' vision of Buddhism was characterized by a lack of ritual and emphasis on early Pali scriptures. Yet Hallisey points out that Davids' own Pali teachers, the venerable monks Waskaduve Subhuti and Yataramulle Unnanse, shared this essentialized image of Buddhism.[181] These two votaries of Pali erudition were "scholarly, aloof from lay life, and thus uninvolved in the rituals of the Buddhist community in which laypeople and monks commonly met."[182] While their own influence on Rhys Davids does not diminish his own incredible scholarly achievements, it does allude to a much more complex picture where his own views of Buddhism as rationalist and free of ritual may have been not just prompted by his own cultural inheritance but by the views and examples set by the scholarly monks he studied with in Ceylon.

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[179] These included *Asiatick Researches* (Calcutta, 1788 - 1849), *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay (1804 - ??),* and *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1832 - 1904). The other influential journals of the day were *Journal Asiatique* (Paris), *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London), and *Journal des Savans* (Paris).
[180] Charles Hallisey, "Roads taken and not taken in the study of Theravada Buddhism," in Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (ed.), *Curators of the Buddha* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31 – 62.
[181] Hallisey, "Roads taken and not taken," 47.
[182] Hallisey, "Roads taken and not taken," 47.

Nor was Rhys Davids alone in his reliance on indigenous scholars. Although figures like Sir William Jones warned other Europeans that "it was found highly dangerous to employ natives as interpreters, upon whose fidelity they could not depend," few appear to have heeded his advice.[183] Brian Hodgson's Buddhist informant, Amritananda Bandya (d. 1835) was an accomplished scholar and an essential guide to Hodgson's understanding of South Asian literatures and history.[184] The Ceylon-based British civil servant George Turnour (1799 – 1843), whose translation of the *Mahāvaṃsa* in 1837 significantly altered contemporary understandings of India's early history, was frequently assisted by his Buddhist tutor named "Galle."[185] James Prinsep (1799 – 1840), the assayist best remembered for deciphering the Kharoṣthī and Brāhmī scripts that led to the re-discovery of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka, frequently relied upon a Sinhalese Christian named Ratna Paula.[186]

In places like Japan, Nepal, Siam, Sri Lanka and so on, European scholars had access to a living community of Buddhists who could assist with translations, provide access to sources, and an insider's interpretation—what anthropologists call the "emic" perspective. Yet while Indian pandits had much to offer in the way of interpreting Persian, Sanskrit and vernacular texts, their knowledge of Buddhism was considered unreliable.[187] Besides the usual bout of Eurocentric racism, which understood 'dark-skinned savages' of India to be largely incapable of rational thought, in many cases, this stemmed from India's long history of transforming Buddhist sites through the age-old process of 'place-making.' When Alexander Cunningham traveled to Sānkāśya, the storied site in western Uttar Pradesh where early Buddhists built magnificent structures to honor Buddha's descent from "the Heaven of

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[183] Quoted in Lopez "Introduction," *Curators of the Buddha,* 5.

[184] C.f. *The Origins of Himalayan Studies: Brian Houghton Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling*, edited by David Waterhouse (London: Routledge, 2004); see also, Charles Allen, *The Prisoner of Kathmandu: Brian Hodgson in Nepal 1820 – 43* (Chicago: Haus Press, 2015).

[185] George Turnour, *The Mahawanso in Roman characters with the translation subjoined and an introductory essay on Pali Buddhistical literature, Vol. 1* (Ceylon: Cotta Church Mission Press, 1837), ii.

[186] Fluent in Sinhalese and proficient in Burmese and Pali, Ratna Paula prepared numerous catalogues for the Asiatic Society libraries in Burma, Ceylon and India and translated Buddhist works for Orientalist scholars for over a decade. C.f. "Translation of an inscription in the Pali and Burma languages on a stone slab from Ramavati, (Ramree Island), in Arracan, presented to the Asiatic Society by H. Walters, Esq. C.S., as explained by Ratna Paula," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 3/29 (1834), 209 – 14; "Restoration and translation of the inscription on the large Arracan bell now at Nadrohighat, Zillah Alligarh, described by Captain Wroughton in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, December 1837," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 7/76 (1838), 287 – 96.

[187] The exception to this rule was in the border regions, particularly in Chittagong and the Himalayas where several nineteenth-century Buddhist scholars trained and taught colonial surveyors, Indian scholars and Europeans in Buddhist teachings.

the Thirty-three Gods," his informants explained to him that the ancient stupa was the "kitchen" of the great Hindu heroine, Sita (*sītā kī rasoī*).[188] In the early 1880s when the Indian epigraphist, Bhagavanlal Indraji began studying the ancient Buddhist ruins in the west Indian village of Sopara, he was told that the Aśokan pillar and massive stupa were home to the "Fort of the Basket King."[189] It is perhaps this reason why scholars of modern Buddhism have paid very little attention to the roles of India's late eighteenth and early nineteenth century native scholars, assuming that they had "forgotten" Buddha. Yet where there was silencing and transformation, there was also obvious remembrance.

A close reading of colonial records describes a lively and often agonizing discussion about Buddhism emanating from indigenous elites. In 1788, Sir William Jones, reported that his own Sanskrit teachers "universally spoke of the *Bauddhas* with all the malignity of an intolerant spirit."[190] While traveling through Nepal in the spring of 1803, Buchanan's Bengali Brahmin interpreter found the doctrines of the Buddhists of Kathmandu "so shockingly impious" that Buchanan "could not induce him to converse on the subject with their learned men."[191] Less than a decade later, while camping amidst the ruins that would later be identified as Nalanda, Buchanan met a Jain monk who explained to him that "all the images and ruins" belonged to a time when the bulk of the "infidels…worshipped the Buddhas."[192] When in 1808, the Bengali scholar and "colossus of literature," Mrityunjay Vidyalankar (c. 1762 – 1819), composed the first Bengali language history of India (*Rājābali,* or "Book of Kings") for British students at Calcutta's Fort William College, he described the "fifteen

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[188] Alexander Cunningham, "An Account of the Discovery of the Ruins of the Buddhist City of Samkassa," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* Vol. 7/2 (1843): 245.

[189] Bhagavanlal Indraji, *Antiquarian remains at Sopara and Padana. Being an account of the Buddhist Stupa and Asoka Edict recently discovered at Sopara and of other antiquities in the neighbourhood. With twenty-one plates and a frontspiece* (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1882), 1 – 56.

[190] William Jones, 'On the Chronology of the Hindoos,' *Asiatick Researches* Vol. 2 (1790): 123. This was originally composed in January of 1788. The condemnation of the Buddha was absolutely puzzling to Jones since the same *pandits* who spoke of his degraded teaching and practice described him as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Jones' oral traditions regarding the Buddha appear to have come from two of his Sanskrit teachers: Pandit Ramlochan and the retired Vaidya physician, Pandit Radhacant, who had previously worked for Warren Hastings, the Governor-General. C.f. Garland Cannon, *The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones: Sir William Jones, the father of modern linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[191] Francis Hamilton, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal and of the territories annexed to this dominion by the House of Gorkha* (Edingburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1819), 32.

[192] R. Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India,* 3 volumes (London: Allen and Lane, 1838), 95. This is an edited edition of Buchanan's unpublished survey conducted from 1807 – 1814. Buchanan's use of the term "infidel" may have been an approximation of *tīrthika*, the term of derision often used in Jain and Buddhist texts to describe one another.

kings of the Nāstika [heretical] faith…all of the Gautama [Buddha] lineage." For the four hundred years under their rule, the textbook proclaims, "the *nāstika* views enjoyed such currency that the *Vaidika* [Hindu] religion was almost eradicated.[193]

A decade later, a young administrator named Andrew Stirling visited a rocky hill (*Khāṇḍagiri*) just five miles west of Bhubaneswar in Orissa. According to Stirling's report, the ascetics living amongst the rock-cut caves explained to him that "the place had its origin in the time of Buddha, and that it was last inhabited by the Rani of the famous Raja Lalat Indra Kesari, a favourer of the Buddhist religion."[194] When Stirling approached the farthest cave known as *Hathigumpha* ("the Elephant's Cave"), he found an inscription the ascetics claimed was from "the *Budh Ka Amel*, or time when the Buddhist doctrines prevailed." The Brahmins, he reported, look at the cave with "shuddering and disgust…and are reluctant even to speak on the subject."[195] During a visit to Gaya in the spring of 1821, Colonel Colin Mackenzie's Jain pandit informed him of the once violent relations between Buddhists and Śaivas in the city.[196] While traveling through the Krishna district of modern Andhra Pradesh in 1870, J.A.C. Boswell learned that nearly all of the Buddhist remains (numbering more than a hundred) scattered through the district were universally known in Telugu by the demeaning phrase *lanja dib-balu* or "prostitute hill."[197]

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[193] Quoted in Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 63. I have chosen to translate the term "nastik" in this particular context as "heretical" rather than "atheist" as is better known today. For an insightful summary of this term in various historical contexts, see Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism,* 192 – 94.

[194] R.G. Cumberland (ed.), *Stray Leaves from the Diary of an Indian Officer, containing an account of the famous temple of Jaggurnath [sic], its daily ceremonies and annual festivals and a residence in Australia* (London: Whitefield, Green & Son, 1865), 116 – 17.

[195] Cumberland (ed.), *Stray Leaves from the Diary of an Indian Officer,* 117. Nearly two decades later, this would be identified as one of the major Buddhist sites associated with Emperor Aśoka's edicts at Dhauli, roughly six miles away.

[196] James Burgess, "Extracts from the Journal of Colonel Mackenzie's Pandit of His Route from Calcutta to Gaya in 1820," *Indian Antiquary* Vol. 31 (1902): 65 – 75, especially 73 – 74. When Brian Hodgson began compiling oral traditions in the Kathmandu valley, his own pandits described similar animosity. C.f., Brian Hodgson, *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepal and Tibet together with further papers on the Geography, Ethnology and Commerce of those Countries* (London, 1874), 135 – 36. This essay was originally published in serialized form as, "On the Extreme Resemblance that prevails between many of the Symbols of Buddhism and Saivism," in the *Oriental Quarterly Magazine* (1827 – 28).

[197] J.A.C. Boswell, "On the Ancient Remains in the Krishna District," *Indian Antiquary* Vol. 1 (1872) 152 – 53. The original report was published in the Proceedings of the Madras Government, Revenue Department, November 7, 1870. Boswell translates *lanja dibbalu* as the "harlot's hill." The translation of "prostitute hill" comes from John Holt, who writing more than a hundred and twenty-five years later remarks that this expression continues to be used by the local populace. See, John Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu: Religious Transformation, Politics and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 10.

Material landscapes may have undergone significant transformations but the Buddhist past, its intellectual impulse and social practices had not been forgotten. On the contrary, it had been immortalized and become part of the central vocabulary through which Indian intellectuals and elites redefined and imagined themselves. At its most acute level, nineteenth century Indian intellectuals saw in Buddhism the ruptures of the past. Some processes so profoundly penetrate society's deepest mores that even hundreds and thousands of years later, their scars are still visible. Every Sunday, Christians from across the world, speaking different languages and coming from diverse backgrounds, form groups where they ponder the meanings of Old Testament stories composed more than two-thousand years before. Jews routinely turn to the Torah and dwell on the trauma of the destruction of the Second Temple in the first century CE. American philosophers and politicians regularly invoke the history of their nation and its imagined relationship to Greek and Roman archetypes. Dwelling on the ruptures of the past is a universal condition.

While Buddhism was not the only dissident voice in the pre-modern Indic world, it left an enduring mark. The Italian historian and archaeologist Giovanni Verardi is right when he asserts that over the millennia, Indic Buddhism "exercised hegemony over change and became identified with it. Even where Buddhism structured itself in such a way as to be compatible with Brahmanical principles, it remained a symbol for all anti-Brahmanical identities."[198] The conversation about Buddha and the 'fifteen kings of the Nāstik faith' invoked memories of a haunted past when Brahmanical doctrines were in decay and the lifeblood of society was under threat. Yet like all traumas and all ruptures, forgetting can be treatment and re-describing the past can help one find meaning in the world. So here we understand V.N. Rao when he writes that for nineteenth-century Telugu-speaking Brahmins, the term Buddhist had simply become "the harshest term fathers could hurl against their sons when young boys deviated from Brahminic practices."[199]

The conversations between Jan Kampani and the army of pandits that assisted them reveals not forgetting but a memory of struggle and conquest. What emerged from the mouths of these pandits was not positive adoration but from the Brahmanical point of view, a

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[198] Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall,* 201.
[199] V.N. Rao, "Buddhism in Modern Andhra: Literary Representations from Telugu," *The Journal of Hindu Studies* Vol. 1/1 – 2 (2008), 96.

largely critical assessment of an *upādharm,* a lesser teaching and way of living that had been rightfully defeated and driven from the land (*bhāratvarṣ*). This attitude along with the long history of Indian place-making led European scholars to argue that Indian notions of Buddhism were therefore biased, unreliable and ultimately, unimportant. Many early Orientalists praised Buddhism over Brahmanism and when their pandits did not, the Orientalists seemingly retorted that it was because India had forgotten what a great man Buddha Śākyamuni truly was.

2.6 Conclusion: When the past becomes the present

This chapter opened with the story of the Brahmin pandit Sūbajī Bāpū, the British officer Lancelot Wilkinson and their publication of an ancient Buddhist manuscript entitled the *Vajrasūci* or "Diamond Cutter" in 1839. To recapitulate, Wilkinson's desire to publish the text was met with resistance by Sūbajī and only after he agreed to publish Sūbajī's own sub-commentary, did it go to print. The cultural geography of the Vajrasūci—that is, its popularity, persuasiveness, distribution and circulation—was so great that by the end of the century, it was reproduced at least a dozen more times in more than seven different languages. Wilkinson, it should be remembered was a member of the diplomatic corps and the British resident in the princely state of Bhopal. As the primary patron of a Sanskrit school, he was a major figure behind the spread of Copernican science through Sanskrit and vernacular languages (as opposed to English). In addition to his scientific efforts, he also had a keen interest in social reform and encouraged the pandits at the Sehore school to search for and publicize indigenous literature that supported British views on widow remarriage, infanticide, and *satī.* According to S.R. Sarma, many teachers in the school applauded his support for indigenous rather than Christian critiques.[200] Wilkinson, in other words, appeared to have as good as a relationship that one might expect an alien ruler to have with the local community.

The most respected teacher at the school was an incredibly bright Brahmin scholar named Sūbajī Bāpū. From Wilkinson's perspective and by extension, the Raj's, Sūbajī was something of the crème de la crème of native pandits. Just a few years before, Sūbajī had

[200] Sarma, "Sanskrit as Vehicle for Modern Science."

composed a series of Sanskrit tracts arguing that Copernicus' understanding of the solar systems disproved Vyās' conception of the universe (which was the dominant Hindu model). After his defense of western science, numerous accolades and awards were given to him from the Governor General, Lord William Bentinck, including *sanads* (affidavits) in Sanskrit and English that guaranteed him safe passage through British territories in recognition of his contribution to disseminating "useful knowledge."[201] In other words, Sūbajī was a "model native scholar," someone who the Raj considered what Richard Fox Young calls an "affirmer of modernity."[202] Yet his support of Copernican science also made him deeply unpopular with some Indian colleagues. Threats were made and a learned *gosāin* in Mathura even implemented a "bann [sic] of excommunication" on anyone studying western science in the school.[203] *Jan Kampani,* as history shows, was not liked by all.

It was in this context that Wilkinson explained to Sūbajī he had recently acquired an old Sanskrit manuscript that challenged the Brahmanical argument for caste. The text, originally composed by the first century Buddhist scholar, Aśvaghoṣa, turns Brahmanical arguments on their head, asking how there can be four castes (*varṇa*) when all people have proceeded from one God (*Brahmā*)?

> If I have four sons by one wife, the four sons, having one father and mother, must be essentially alike…the foot of the elephant is very different from that of the horse; that of the tiger unlike that of the deer; and so of the rest…But I have never heard that the foot of a Kshatriya ["warrior" caste] was different from that of Brahman, or that of a Sudra ["servant" caste]. All men are formed alike…is a Brahman's sense of pleasure and pain different from that of a Kshatriya?"[204]

Continuing this kind of question and answer methodology, Aśvaghoṣa applies what Young describes as "a withering, analytical logic to the concept of Brahmanhood, reducing it to an absurdity."[205] When Wilkinson told Sūbajī that he intended to circulate a bi-lingual Sanskrit – English edition of the text, he found himself, for the first time, in conflict with the scholar. As Wilkinson recounted in a letter written to the British Resident in Nepal, Brian Hodgson, Sūbajī was visibly upset:

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[201] Young, "Receding from Antiquity," 200.
[202] Young, "Receding from Antiquity," 200.
[203] Lancelot Wilkinson, "On the Use of the Siddhantas in Native Education," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 7 (1834), 504 – 19. On the science controversy leading to this, see Sarma, "Sanskrit as Vehicle for Modern Science," and Young, "Receding from Antiquity."
[204] Hodgson (translator), "A Disputation respecting caste by a Buddhist," 166, 167.
[205] Young, "Receding from Antiquity," 208.

> My shastree [Sūbajī] who was with me when I got your letter [containing an English translation of the text], listened to my version of it into Maratha with the utmost uneasiness…He was obliged to acknowledge the truth of all it contained. Indeed, he is anything but an orthodox Hindoo now. But still his eye glistened with anger when he heard the arguments expounded and all the long-buried animosities of the Brahman for the [Buddhist] were evident in him...[206]

Despite Sūbajī's disapproval of the argument, Wilkinson insisted that it be published, but agreed in the "spirit of free inquiry" to print it along with Sūbajī's own commentary. In a forty-seven page counter-attack entitled the *Laghuṭanka* or "Little Chisel," Sūbajī cites sources from legal treatises, epic literature and the purāṇas to refute the *Vajrasūci*'s arguments. "A donkey, even a good one, can never become a horse," Sūbajī declares. "A mongrel that thinks itself a lion, won't be able to roar, no matter how hard it tries."[207]

The question that remains unanswered is why Sūbajī felt it so important to write a nearly fifty-page rebuttal—more than three times the length of the *Vajrasūci*—to a text authored by a religious community that lacked any tangible presence in day-to-day Indian life? Young argues that Sūbajī's long attack on Aśvaghoṣa was an indication that there were "limits to his modernity" and that the longer he associated with Wilkinson, "the more insecure his identity as a Hindu became."[208] Yet not all of the pandits at the school responded so unfavorably to the work. According to a letter Wilkinson wrote four months later, there were:

> …two or three learned men about me, so far enlightened, or perhaps so much annoyed by the reflections of their ignorant friends upon their new doctrines, that they are quite delighted with this attack on their own Brahmanism. They have not only taken copies for themselves but have also been lending copies of it to their learned orthodox friends who have been provoking them by attacks on their abandonment of Vyas' system of the world.[209]

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[206] Letter from Wilkinson to Hodgson, May 11, 1835, quoted in Young, "Receding from Antiquity," 208.
[207] Quoted in Young, "Receding from Antiquity," 209.
[208] Young, "Receding from Antiquity," 209. Young speculates that this insecurity may have resulted from concerns over ritual pollution. As he puts it, "Wilkinson could invoke antiquity, but did he adhere to the norms of European gastronomic culture and bring pollution into the Śihūra Samskrtra Pāthaśalā? Did meeting his mentor to compare the *Purāṇas* and *siddhantas* with Copernicanism defile Sūbajī's purity and necessitate a ritual ablution? It can only be surmised that this was how the exchange of knowledge affected their behavior" (209).
[209] Quoted in Young, "Receding from Antiquity," 208fn51. The reference to Vyās' world concerns the scientific critiques being leveled towards Purāṇic cosmology by the Sehore school.

Thus, Sūbajī's counter-attack wasn't just the symptoms of an 'insecure' Hindu.[210] While Sūbajī's ability to counter Aśvaghoṣa's argumentation was due to his own erudition and familiarity with the Indic conversation of mankind, his long diatribe also spoke to the new political context: for the first time in several hundred years, that great heresy, the outstanding dissenter and foremost challenger to Brahmanical orthodoxy was returning to the public sphere. As one of the most distinguished pandits living in India at that time, Sūbajī would have certainly been familiar with the discoveries of Buddhism taking place on the subcontinent's surface and the new conversation about Buddhism that Europeans were initiating. Some Indians, as will be seen in later chapters, were greatly inspired by the new conversation but others like Sūbajī, may have remembered more keenly the wounds of the Diamond Cutter. It was one thing to have a critique against the revealed knowledge of the Vedas leveled by a Buddhist, but to have it spread by a colonial government whose sympathies for it were increasingly public, was too much to bear.

[210] Of course, personal issues may have been relevant as well. It's possible that Sūbajī may have condemned the *Vajrasūci* in the hope that those who had condemned him for his earlier support of Copernician science would see that he was not the European parrot they believed.

3 Chapter Three – "Dispelling Darkness": Educators, scholars and the construction of Buddhism, 1850 – 1901

In the first decades after the *Vajrasūcī* controversy, the public conversation about Buddhism gained a new sense of urgency and importance among the new western-educated Indian elite. The way these "new elites" discussed Buddhism, both amongst themselves and with European colonizers, provides important insights into the changing nature of Indian society and the role that Buddhism played in it.[1] This chapter focuses on the first generation of Indian elites who worked in new public enterprises such as government education, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Census Commission and innumerable research societies. Incongruous as it may seem, the conversations among these new educated elite powered the popular Buddhist campaigns and activities of a wider social world, a subject explored in chapter four. The chapter begins by looking at state-driven educational projects, using a popular schoolbook taught in the Northwestern Provinces and Oudh as a case study for understanding new ideas about Buddhism. Then it turns to the study of Buddhism in institutes of higher education and professional research societies with emphasis on the place that indigenous populations held in them. Finally, honing in on the lives of a select group of Indian scholars, it examines the role of the Archaeological Survey of India, Buddhist Text Society, and Census Commission. While one aim of this, and the next chapter, is to simply show the cacophony of Indian voices on Buddhism during this period, it is also meant to demonstrate that there was an incredibly robust discourse about Buddhism in the decades before the MahaBodhi Society established its headquarters in Calcutta in 1891, an event still seen by contemporary scholars as the starting point for the "revival" of Buddhism in India.[2]

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[1] Scholars have long struggled in finding an accurate terminology to describe these "new elites," identifying them as everything from the "native intelligentsia" and "compradors" to "professional western-educated elements" and "middle class." However, the diversity of these new elites, as Harjot Oberoi argues, belies any simple classification. A few features, however, were particularly dominant. Most were male, came from upper class families and were of high caste status. For a useful analysis of these various typologies, including his argument for using "new elites," see Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 260 – 62 and 260 – 79 more widely. For other uses, including that of "middle class" and "native intelligentsia," see Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Christopher Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*.

[2] This is precisely the case in Gitanjali Surendran's 2013 PhD dissertation from Harvard, "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism: Buddhist Revival in India, c. 1890 – 1956."

3.1 Dispelling darkness: Imagining Buddhism in India's colonial education system

In 1877, the Bengali savant, Orientalist and permanent fixture in Calcutta's Asiatic Society, Rajendralal Mitra (1824 – 91), finished editing the *Lalitavistara Sutra*, an ornate Sanskrit biography of Buddha originally composed around the third century CE. [3] In the introduction to the text, Mitra highlighted the general historical outline of Buddhism as it was then known among the Orientalists. After describing its diffusion from the center of India to the far corners of Asia, he lamented that as great as this tradition once was, the history of Buddha's life had been obscured "in mysteries which the light of modern research has yet scarcely dispelled."[4] "India never had her Xenophon or Thucydides," he decried.[5] Instead, "her heroes and reformers, like her other great men, have to look for immortality in the ballads of her bards, or the legends of romancers….[yet] Sakya Sinha [Buddha] had not even that advantage. He was known only through the misrepresentations of his enemies, the Brahmans."[6] These tragic circumstances, however, were now slowly being reversed:

> The orientalist…has now no longer to complain of paucity of information regarding him [Buddha]. The discoveries of [Brian] Hodgson in Nepal, of [Edward] Upham and [George] Turnour in Ceylon, of [Alexander] C'Soma de Korosi in [Kinnaur] Tibet, and of Kalporth, [Jean-Pierre Abel-] Remusat, [Samuel] Beal and others in China, have placed at his disposal a large mass of legends in Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan and Chinese, which record with more than Boswellian zeal and assiduity…even the most trivial circumstances of the life and preachings of the great reformer.[7]

Although his account makes clear that historians of Buddhism like himself were deeply indebted to the pioneering work of European savants who collected and translated Buddhist materials, Mitra's writings were evidence of a new kind of Indian pandit interested in exploring the shadowy world of this ancient Indian tradition.

Prior to 1857 when the British Crown took over the East India Company's charter, the British had established only a small number of colleges and schools across their Indian territories. Missionaries established their own schools and some civil administrators

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[3] The *Lalitavistara* tells the story in Sanskrit of the Buddha Śākyamuni from the time of his descent from the Tuṣita heaven up to his first sermon delivered at the Deer Park in Sarnath. See, Rajendralal Mitra (ed.), *The Lalita Vistara, or Memoirs of the early life of Śákya Siñha* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1877).
[4] Mitra, "Introduction," *The Lalita Vistara,* 2.
[5] Mitra, "Introduction," *The Lalita Vistara,* 2.
[6] Mitra, "Introduction," *The Lalita Vistara,* 2.
[7] Mitra, "Introduction," *The Lalita Vistara,* 2 – 3.

collaborated with local elites to establish "Hindu colleges" and *madrassa*s where students could study subjects like Hindu literature and Islamic law. However, enrollment at these institutions was often segregated according to select religious communities and caste groups, thus limiting their wider scope.[8] Likewise, while scholarly societies began propping up in major cities, these organizations did not attempt to impart any systematic education for indigenous communities. After an inquiry led by the British Parliament in London concluded that the Company was failing to fulfill the Anglicist vision of imparting western education, a formal educational scheme was implemented under the Wood's Despatch of 1854.

During the following decades, each presidency—Calcutta, Madras and Bombay—came to be overseen by a Department of Public Instruction in charge of building provincial universities, expanding the secondary education sector and increasing the number of vernacular and technical schools. Under the new initiative, most government schools and colleges taught a standard curriculum that included literature, philosophy, history, geography and mathematics.[9] Although Buddhism was never a discrete subject in any of these schools until the early 1900s, the Victorian tendency to understand religion as the foundation of 'Oriental cultures' led to an environment in which the study of Buddhism formed an integral part of general studies, particularly in history and geography classes. While a comprehensive study of British pedagogies and curriculums within the context of Buddhism falls outside the purview of this chapter, a case study from the Northwestern Provinces, the large region that covered much of the upper and middle Ganges plains, provides several valuable insights.

In 1864, the Department of Public Instruction in Allahabad published the first of a three-volume Hindi textbook, *Itihās Timiranāśak* or "History as the Dispeller of Darkness." Composed by the Indian educator Raja Śivaprasād (1823 – 95), the *Itihās* was one of the most popular schoolbooks in nineteenth-century India, remaining part of the standard curriculum for fourth to tenth grade history and geography classes in the Northwestern Provinces from 1864 well into the last decade of the century. While Śivaprasād was not a

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[8] According to Nita Kumar, by the 1850s, there were 11 English colleges and 40 high schools run by the government in British India with approximately 9,000 students enrolled. By contrast, there were 92 English-language missionary schools with roughly 13,000 students. See, Nita Kumar, "India's trails with citizenship, modernization and nationhood," in *Mass Education and the Limits of State Building, c. 1870 – 1930,* edited by Laurence Brockliss and Nicola Sheldon (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 283.

[9] On the impact of these government schools and curriculums, see Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary study and British rule in India, with a new preface by the author* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014 [1989]).

scholar of Buddhism, he was, as Ulrike Stark has argued, a "hybrid intellectual" who mastered both indigenous and British systems of learning and then used those skills to engage the colonizers "as interlocutor and cultural broker [rather] than merely as 'native informant.' "[10] This makes his vision of Buddhism of particular interest since he approached it not from the position of the rare specialist but from that of an intellectual whose background and training lay within a much wider North Indian current.

Born into a Jain family of wealthy merchants, Śivaprasād received a private education in Persian and Sanskrit before enrolling in Benares Sanskrit College, first established by the Company administrator John Duncan in 1791. Like most Indian elites, he was multilingual but his linguistic and intellectual gifts exceeded most. By the age of sixteen, his in-depth knowledge of Jain, Hindu and Islamic works alongside his growing mastery of English, Bengali and Arabic gained him a position as the ambassador (*vakīl*) to the Maharaja of Bharatpur at the British Rajputana Agency. Not long after, he joined the Foreign Department as a *munśī*, later rising to *mīr munśī* (chief clerk) of the Simla Agency and becoming private secretary to H.M. Elliot, the well-known British historian and civil servant.[11] The way in which he rose to the top of the colonial hierarchy and carried himself was as much a matter of contempt to some as it was inspiration to others, a sentiment well captured by this contemporary's assessment:

> [He was] throughout life a supple courtier, who curried favor with every European official, played the sycophant and got titles, estates, and honors of sorts, earned the contempt of his compatriots and, at the same time, that of the whites to whom he 'bent the pregnant hinges of the knee that'—well, that he might get what he coveted.[12]

As the description indicates, Śivaprasād's accomplishments were many but it was in 1856, when he became the first non-European inspector of schools in the Northwestern Provinces—a position he held until his retirement in 1878—that he began transforming the way the wider populace conceived of Buddhism.

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[10] Ulrike Stark, "Knowledge in context: Raja Shivaprasad as hybrid intellectual and people's educator," in *Trans-colonial Modernities in South Asia,* edited by Michael S. Dodson and Brian A. Hatcher (London: Routledge, 2012), 71. Stark's essay provides a careful assessment of Śivaprasād's life and is a precursor to a forthcoming critical biography of Śivaprasād.

[11] Elliot, alongside John Dawson, was the author of the eight volume history, based on Persian sources, published posthumously as *History of India, as told by its own historians* (1867 – 77).

[12] Henry Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: the only authentic history of the Theosophical Society, second series, 1878 – 83* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900), 270.

In the opening pages of the *Itihās,* Śivaprasād outlines his reasons for composing the textbook. First, he found the existing histories of India written by Lord Elphinstone and other British writers to be full of errors and historical fallacies. Second, he wished "to prove to my countrymen that, notwithstanding their very strong antipathy to 'change,' they *have* changed, and *will* change."[13] For in Śivaprasād's view, the study of the past was necessary for improvement: only by looking backward could one's current predicament be understood. "Our readers must learn what history means," he writes, "and with this knowledge they will not take offense at what we write…no sober man is expected to go through these pages and again believe in the mythology of the Puranas."[14] A firm believer in the model of "scientific history" invoked by his former teachers Eliot and James Prinsep, Śivaprasād drove a harsh wedge between myth and history.[15] The stories of Rām and Krishna, of Jesus as the Messiah and Muhammad as Prophet—these may all be believed but "we ought never to mix it with the authentic [*prāmāṇik*] events of history."[16] To determine that which is authentic, students were instructed to base their arguments on objectivity (*yathārth*) and strong evidence (*prabal pramāṇ*), being forever warned about those individuals that claim the contents of their books (*pothī*) could not possibly be false.[17]

Having outlined his historical method, Śivaprasād explains that the first step in determining the *true* (*saccā*) Indian past is to realize that Indians could no longer afford to ignore the era of "Buddha which begins from Śākyamuni."[18] Then, over the course of roughly fifty pages or one half of volume three, the *Itihās* proceeds to outline details of the Buddhist tradition that had been largely unexpressed in vernacular form in this part of India

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[13] Rājā Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. I (Ilāhābād: Gavarnmenṭ ke chāpekhāna. 1883 [1864]), ii. The preface to the first volume quoted here, is in English while the remainder of the text is in Hindi with scattered passages in Urdu and English.

[14] Rājā Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III (Ilāhābād: Gavarnmenṭ ke chāpekhāna, 1880 [1874]), 12 & ii. That the text's title itself defined history as the "dispeller of darkness" (*timira-nāśak*) made clear not only Śivaprasād's judgement of its value in society but was also suggestive of popular European claims about India's 'lack of history.'

[15] "Harsh wedge between myth and history" is a paraphrase of Benedict Anderson's "harsh wedge between cosmology and history," in *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism,* 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 36.

[16] *Itihās kī prasiddh prāmāṇik batoṃ meiṃ nahīṃ milāvenge.* Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 10. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

[17] Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 10 - 11.

[18] Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 5. The idea that Buddha marks the beginning of datable Indian history became so deeply entrenched in Indology that according to Adheesh Sathaye, *Crossing the Lines of Caste: Visvamitra and the Construction of Brahmin Power in Hindu Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16 – 17, it was not until the mid 1970s that Indian scholars began to challenge such a view.

for the past several centuries.[19] While many aspects of his outline diverge from what today might be considered standard accounts of Indic Buddhism, due largely to the existing state of scholarship at that time and his interpretation thereof, this is, to my knowledge, the first modern Hindi text to recount the Buddha's life in terms (semi-) faithful to normative Buddhist accounts.

Narrating the story of the Buddha's life, Śivaprasād recalls the familiar stories to those living today: the young prince abandons his life of luxury, practices various austerities before realizing the folly of asceticism and gains enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, where he remains in a meditative state for forty-nine days. Although he does not always specify his sources, much of the content and quoted *suttas* (Sanskrit, *sutra*) appears to have been drawn from various Pali language sources, the English translations of which he likely took from George Turnour's "Pali Buddhistical Annals" published in 1837 and 1838.[20] Perhaps the most striking divergence from normative biographies of Buddha is Śivaprasād's argument—contained in a long footnote—that Śākyamuni and Mahavira, the historical "founder" of Jainism were actually the same person. Of Jain background himself, Śivaprasād anticipated criticism from Jain scholars but he was adamant in his view that Jains and Buddhists were originally followers of a single figure named "Buddh Mahāvīr" and only later, just "as a river flowing to some distance branches off into two streams named separately," did the two form separate paths. [21] Despite this (mis)interpretation, the descriptive narrative that Śivaprasād provides is surprisingly faithful to Pali Buddhist sources and contains none of the demonizing characteristic of more well-known Purāṇic scriptures. In alignment with his own

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[19] Part I begins in the first millennium of the common era, focusing primarily on the "Muhammadan" period up to the coming of the British. Part II contained the history of British India up through the present. Part III covers the social, cultural and political history of the subcontinent from its earliest known origins up through the present. Although Buddhism is not completely absent in the first two parts, it forms a significant section of Part III and is hence, the focus of the discussion here.

[20] Compare George Turnour, "Pali Buddhistical Annals," *Journal of the Asiatic Society* Vol. 7/2 (1838): 813 with Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 54fn1, where he writes out in Devanagri script the Pali hymn recited by Buddha (and translated by Turnour) at the moment of achieving enlightenment.

[21] *Jis tarah kuch dūr cal kar ek nadī ḍho nām se de dhārā ho jātī hai ek paścim gayī dūsarī pūrb usī tarah samay pā kar ācāryoṃ ke bicār meiṃ bhed paṛne se ek mat ke de. Mat arthat bauddh aur jain ho gaye.* Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 13fn1. He seemed especially concerned that Jains would be offended because they were being equated with 'meat-eating' Buddhist tantrikas. The argument that Jains and Buddhists were identical may seem odd today but according to John Cort, it was only after the Indologist and great scholar of Jain texts, Hermann Jacobi published the *Kalpasūtras* in 1879, that Orientalist scholars were convinced of their differences. See, John Cort, "Indology as authoritative knowledge: Jain debates about icons and history in colonial India," in *Trans-colonial Modernities in South Asia,* edited by Michael S. Dodson and Brian A. Hatcher (London: Routledge, 2012), 158fn34.

humanistic lens, Śivaprasād also firmly placed Buddha in temporal history, providing the reader with precise dates and times at which certain events occurred in his life and describing him in decidedly human terms. Although the cosmological element of Buddha's enlightenment is not ignored, the accent on human life is obvious.[22]

As for the history of Buddhism itself, he declares it to be a "progressive and modern creed" (*unnati kā nayā ḍhaṅg*) that "prevailed throughout the whole of Bhāratvarṣa [India]" for more than a thousand years.[23] The schoolbook explains how when Buddhism was at its apex, people from across the globe (*sari duniyā*) visited India to study at its universities (*vidyālay*). Rulers outlawed capital punishment (*qatal kī sazā*) and built large hospitals where the poor and sick could be relieved of their suffering. As he recalls Buddhism's historical spread across the subcontinent, the relics of the past are reborn in the present. The bones of Buddha's most renowned disciples, Mogallāna and Sāriputta, he tells the reader, were recently discovered near Bhopal. Large Buddhist ruins are found near Benares.[24] Narrating the accounts of the medieval Chinese pilgrims, Xuanzang and Fa-Hsien, Śivaprasād explains how in Pataliputra or today's modern-day Patna, Buddha's birthday was celebrated with great pomp: there were gripping plays and performances (*nāṭak aur līlā kā hangāmā*), nighttime illuminations (*rāt ko rośnī kā tamāśa*) and four-wheeled chariots carrying statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.[25]

In explaining Buddhist teachings, Śivaprasād stance is clear. Buddha's message of equality and non-violence was a direct challenge to the Brahmanical elites (*vedoṃ kī mahimā logoṃ*). In one of the most remarkable passages in the book, Śivaprasād frames early Buddhism as a popular protest movement against the tyranny of society, comparing its fight against Brahmanical caste and Vedic sacrifice to the struggle "for the emancipation of slaves" (*gulāmī se nikālne*) in the American Civil War (1861 – 65) and the Russian Tzar's (*bādśāh*) freeing of the Serfs in 1861.[26] For before Buddha arrived on the scene, the Śudras or lower castes were treated as no better than cattle. "But how long," Śivaprasād asks

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[22] The most detailed section on Buddha's life appears in Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 50 – 55.
[23] Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 50, 13fn1.
[24] The former was clearly in reference to Alexander Cunningham's work at Sanchi – Satdhara in 1854 and the latter to Jonathan Duncan's discovery of two urns at Sarnath in 1794. Śivaprasād's professional relationship with Cunningham likely kept him well-informed of the latest research on Buddhist remains.
[25] Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 76 – 77.
[26] Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 49.

rhetorically, "can a vessel of wood be heated without igniting? …it is a general rule that an institution based on the sacrifices (*nuqsān*) of the many for the profit (*phāida*) of a few has not long to last."[27] Thus, when Śākyamuni taught the "evil of violence" (*hiṃsā kī burāī*) and that "Aryan and non-Aryans, men as well as women, were all alike able to choose their own religion (*dharm*)," the number of Indians who took to the Buddha's message soared.[28] "It was autumn for the Sanskrit and spring for the Prakrit. The Brahmins grew pale as morning stars while the Śūdras…bloomed like lotus flowers before the rising sun."[29]

Despite these progressive qualities, Śivaprasād explains that there was a fundamental flaw in Buddha's teaching. It is "beyond the sphere of ordinary reasoning power," he contends, "attainable only by intuition and deep and patient meditation"—unrealistic skills for the majority of mankind.[30] Thus, by the time of Aśoka, the teachings of the Buddha had weakened the people, allowing sacrilege (*dharmaghāta*), ostentatiousness (*ayyāśī*) and idol worship (*pūjā mūrti*) to take root.[31] In fact, the real danger was not its idealism but its pacifism. Buddhist non-violence so "softened the heart to the detriment of the land" that "the tame spirit of petty traffickers, Baniyas, fell upon the Kṣatriyas [ruling classes]….[and] the cruelty, hardheartedness, rapacity and debauchery of the Muhammadans demoralized both [the merchants and ruling classes]."[32] By the thirteenth century, Buddhism had vanished.

From the moment it was printed, Śivaprasād's *Itihās* ruffled the feathers of a wide swathe of Indian society. Many protested against its blatant anti-Muslim bias. Others were uneasy with his image of an ever-fragmented Hinduism. Educators complained about its

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[27] *Lekin yah kaṭ kī hānḍī kab tak garm ho saktī thī...jis niyam kī nev thoṛoṃ ke phāide ke liye bahutoṃ ke nuqsān par rahīi haiṃ kadāpi cirasthāyī nahīṃ hotā.* Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 49 – 50.

[28] *Ārya aur anārya kyā strī aur kyā puruṣ sab manuṣyoṃ ko barābar dharm kā aghikārī tḥaharāyā.* Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 49 – 50. Earlier in the text (14), he is more explicit, stating that "most of the Hindus [*bahutere vaidik hindū*]" alive today were formerly Buddhist (or Jain).

[29] *Saṃskṛt kī khizān huī prākrat kī bahār āyī vaidik brāhmāṇ savere ke sitāre ban gaye śudr…sūrya ke sāmane kamal kī tarah khile.* Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 49 – 50.

[30] *Buddha ne cāhā thā ki gyan jo buddh se pare aur keval anubhab* [sic] *siddh hai a[ur] thoṛon ko hī prapt ho sakatā hai. Sab ko dān de aur in sab logoṃ kā hāl yah hai moṭī bāt cāhate haiṃ.* Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 79.

[31] Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 72.

[32] *Bauddhoṃ ne ēsā dharm calāyā ki* […damaged…] *ko baniyā kar dikhalāyā musalam* […damaged…] *kī berhamī sakhī zabardastī aur ēśaparastī ne* […damaged…] *dubāyā* […damaged…] *ko mārne lage.* Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 118. I have followed Joshi's 1874 translation (see Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III (1874), 82), for assistance in deciphering those parts of the original Hindi text that were damaged.

excessive footnoting and artificial prose.[33] Yet despite calls for the book to be removed from state curriculums, it only grew in popularity. In its first three years of use (1864 – 67), the Department of Education in the Northwest Provinces published more than twenty thousand copies of the text. When the government sanctioned translations into Urdu (1867) and in "a rare reversal of colonial textual hierarchy," even English (1874), the number of copies being circulated through classrooms across the subcontinent nearly tripled each year.[34] By 1870, more than eighteen thousand copies were being printed annually. This number nearly doubled by 1883. [35] Buddhism may not have found its place in Naval Kishore's "empire of books" but it had found a grand new patron in the state's educational campaigns to 'civilize the natives.'[36]

The widespread use of the *Itihās* in government schools is of great significance when one considers the radically different views of the past being imparted in indigenous centers of learning.[37] While it is unclear how much Buddhists would have been discussed—if at all—within indigenous pedagogies, one catches glimpses of it in the occasional memoir. In Rahul Sankrityayan's portrait of his childhood education in the village pāthśalās of late 1890s Azamgarh (in modern-day Uttar Pradesh), he recalls a fascinating moment when he is told that the carved Buddha images at Ajanta were of "demons" (*rākṣa*) frozen into stone by

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[33] A further problem was the text's translation of scientific terminology into local vernaculars, an issue which "required complex translational strategies," and led to criticisms of his high-register Sanskrit or Arabic/Persian vocabulary as being "pedantic" and "jejune." See Stark, "Knowledge in context," 76 – 85.

[34] Stark, "Knowledge in context," 82. The English translation was published as "A History of Hindustan" and the Urdu edition as *Ainah-i Tarikh Numa*.

[35] These statistics are calculated based on the ten thousand copies reported in both 1864 and again in 1866. C.f., *Report on the progress of education in the northwestern provinces, for 1865 -66, 46; Report on the progress of education in the northwestern provinces, for 1864 -65.* The eighteen thousand is calculated by reports of ten thousand copies in Hindi, five thousand in Urdu and three thousand in English for 1869 - 70. See, *Report on the Progress of Education in the Northwestern Provinces, for 1869 – 70, Part I,* 91. Calculations for 1883 are derived from adding the total number of publications printed, listed on the title pages of Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pts. I – III.

[36] On the empire of books (Stark's expression), and the Naval Kishore Press in nineteenth-century India, see Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: the Naval Kishore Press and the dissemination of the printed word in colonial India* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009).

[37] For sample curriculums in which the *Itihās* was used, see *Report on the Progress of Education in the Northwestern Provinces, for 1869 – 70, Part I,* 58 and Section IX, 213. According to Kumar "India's trails with citizenship," 291 – 95, there were more than 26 different types of indigenous schools in the Northwestern Provinces in the 1870s with three dominant models: the *tols,* for higher education in Sanskrit, *pāthśahalās* that taught the vernaculars and *maktabs,* that taught a combination of vernaculars with an emphasis on Urdu and Perso-Arabic literature. A first-hand account of these schools is found in M. Kempson, *Reports of the Local Education Committees for 1871* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1872).

Hindu heroes.[38] V.N. Rao has described similar sentiments among early twentieth century Telugu-speaking Brahmins.[39] While further research into this topic is necessary, one can speculate that such ideas were not unusual, considering the most common tropes about Buddhists in existing oral and literary traditions.[40] Colonial schools not only challenged these views but attacked their very foundations. This was a pivotal change in both outlook and in terms of the conversation itself. In the textbook view, Buddha became a modern icon: a veritable Abraham Lincoln *and* Jesus Christ, the latter of whom Śivaprasād (in an ode to Max Muller) could not resist comparing to Buddha.[41] Śivaprasād's comparative and historical interpretations strengthened the tendency to understand the history of Bauddhas and Buddha as part of the existing world religion discourse, an intellectual object on par with Christianity.[42] As Donald Lopez and Peggy McCracken explain, nineteenth century writers commonly described the two traditions as mirrors reflecting one another:

> one a religion of the West, the other of the East; one theistic, the other atheistic; one with a reluctant savior, the other with a savior who proclaimed his superiority from the moment of his birth; one whose savior is depicted nailed to a cross, the other whose savior is depicted seated cross-legged in meditation.[43]

Like all 'great religions of the world,' Buddhism was ancient, geographically widespread, had its own historical founder (the noble prince Gautama) and a fixed 'canon' of 'classical' scriptures (typically associated with Sanskrit or Pali).

Although Śivaprasād drank deeply from the nectar of Orientalist thought, one needs to be careful in over-interpreting its influence. As noted above, Śivaprasād composed the *Itihās* because he found existing British histories of India inadequate (and he was daring enough to say so). In an insightful essay, the historian Avril Powell has shown how many of Śivaprasād's historical interpretations were drawn from his own readings of Persian texts and

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[38] Rāhul Sāṅkṛtyāyan, *Merī Jīvan Yātrā*, Vol. 1(Nayī Dillī: Rādhākṛṣṇa Prakāśan, 2014 [1944]), 1 – 55, especially 36.
[39] Rao "Buddhism in Modern Andhra," 96.
[40] See chapter two of this dissertation.
[41] Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 50fn4.
[42] On the crafting of Buddhism as a world religion, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 121 – 46.
[43] Donald S. Lopez, Jr., and Peggy McCracken, *In Search of the Christian Buddha: how an Asian sage became a medieval saint* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co, 2014), 193 – 94.

much vaster knowledge of the literature.[44] While Śivaprasād's reading of primary Buddhist sources in Pali seems to have relied upon English translations, many of the conclusions he drew must be situated within a larger Jain and Hindu framework. For instance, his assertion that Buddhist non-violence and laxity of morals lead to India's downfall was in many ways the modern extension of an entrenched purāṇic argument about Buddhism leading to social disorder and decay. The idea that Buddhist monastics were hypocrites and hedonists dwelling in luxury was also a common trope in the satirical Sanskrit literature of which Śivaprasād was well-read.[45]

The argument that Buddha was a kind of socio-religious reformer, a Lincoln and Luther compressed into one, was certainly a novel proclamation that can be traced to his intimate knowledge of European history and current events. Yet while the notion that Buddha was a reformer, an idea still popular today, may be a historical anachronism, it has maintained its steam for the same reason that Śivaprasād entertained the idea: Buddha's critique of Vedic socio-religious norms has deep and discursive underpinnings in the early literary traditions of both Buddhists and Brahmins. The elective affinity, to use Weber's expression, between certain scriptural representations of early Buddhism and socio-religious reform, is readily apparent. Lastly, his argument that Buddhists once formed the majority of the Indian population, particularly among lower-caste communities, has had an equally long shelf life, with real-life repercussions among colonial and post-colonial Dalit and lower-caste populations.[46] Ultimately, many of his claims regarding Buddhist history derived from both pre-modern sources and colonial scholarship and the *Itihās* is best seen in this vein, as a hybrid intellectual's synthesis of the available materials.

Apart from the important issues regarding the nature of Śivaprasād's interpretation, the *Itihās* is a significant text for the simple fact that it was so widely known. While the

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[44] Avril A. Powell, "History Textbooks and the transmission of the pre-colonial past in northwestern India in the 1860s and 1870s," in Daud Ali (ed.), *Invoking the Past: the uses of history in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 1999), 90 – 133.

[45] For examples of this in Sanskrit dramas, see, for instance, Jayánta Bhaṭṭa's *Āgama/ḍambara,* translated from the Sanskrit as *Much ado about religion* by Csaba Dezsó (New York: Clay Sanskrit Library, 2005), Act I, Line 56l and Kṛṣṇamiśra's *Prabodhacandrodaya [Rise of Wisdom Moon],* translated from the Sanskrit by Matthew Kapstein (New York: Clay Sanskrit Library).

[46] The idea that ancient Indian Buddhism was largely practiced by lower-castes will be explored in greater detail in chapter six. The idea was not completely alien to pre-modern Brahmanical sources either. In Kumārila Bhaṭṭa's *Mīmāṃsāślokavārtikam* (8th century), Kumārila says that only outcastes, foreigners and "animal-like tribals" follow Buddha's teachings. See, Klostermaier, "Hindu Views of Buddhism," 67fn35.

number of students to attend colonial schools was proportionally small—and thus those who would have acquired the basic framework that the *Itihās* provided would have been even smaller— this should not mask the influence school graduates came to have in future generations.[47] Numerous scholars have shown how colonial education systems imparted fundamental changes in Indian society, leading to what Peter van der Veer describes as "a relocation of cultural value from belief and dogma to language, experience, and history."[48] In Harjot Oberoi's study of the rise of the Singh Sabha in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Punjab, he highlights how "bilingual skills and western education became a form of capital in a colonial society that could be effectively used to acquire power, privilege and the ability to strike bargains."[49] Put in more concrete terms, British schools taught the kinds of skills that allowed graduates to negotiate the bureaucratic apparatuses and run the kinds of voluntary associations and publishing houses that were becoming increasingly central to modern urban life. With these tools, graduates were able, as Oberoi remarks, to "appropriate both the channels of communication and, more importantly, the signifiers they generated. This control gave them an unprecedented sway over the production of symbols, texts and stories, the elements out of which any culture is created."[50] Like the Singh Sabha with Sikhism in colonial India, the new Indian elites would become dominant stakeholders in the making of modern Buddhism.

By and large, it is difficult to gauge the *Itihās'* actual classroom reception. Was it eagerly palmed page-by-page by an overachiever or simply drilled into the ears of bored adolescents? Despite these classroom ambiguities, evidence outside the classroom reveals that it was consulted widely as a standard resource on Indian history and religion by mature Indian thinkers.[51] It is easy to surmise that Śivaprasād's sound knowledge of existing

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[47] Most significantly, they produced the foundational pillars of the colonial government and later, the major leaders in the anti-colonial nationalist campaign. See, Thomas Blom Hansen, *The saffron wave: democracy and Hindu nationalism in modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[48] Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 29.
[49] Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries,* 262.
[50] Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries,* 277.
[51] The regular censorship campaigns against its use in schools certainly augmented its general popularity—who doesn't want to read a banned book? For different takes on the *Itihās,* particularly as it relates to nationalist conceptions of India and pre-colonial historiographies, see Manu Goswami, *Producing India: from colonial economy to national space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 165 – 208 and Powell, "History Textbooks," respectively. Neither Goswami nor Powell make any references to its Buddhist content.

scholarship on Indian Buddhism and translation of that knowledge into local vernaculars gave students of India's colonial education system the conceptual vocabulary and historical framework to understand the discussions of Buddhism taking place in the public sphere. By the time Śivaprasād retired from the Department of Public Instruction in 1878, the specialized study of Buddhism's past via material and literary remains had ceased being an enterprise led entirely by European Orientalists. A new generation of Indians, typically trained at colonial schools where they mastered the tools of the Orientalist trade, were using their own inherited linguistic advantages and know-how to shape the colonial consensus on Buddhism.

3.2 Like the Nalanda of "bygone times": India as a center of Buddhist scholarship

The colonial state, as Michael Mann and others have demonstrated, saw itself as engaged in a civilizing mission.[52] Whether that of an Orientalist, Anglicist, Evangelical, Utilitarian or any combination or supplement thereof, the spread of education and morality across the provinces only served to satiate part of the 'white man's burden,' to use Kipling's famous expression. Part of that 'burden' entailed the retrieval of the lost history of Her Majesty's conquered territories, a landscape of ancient sites waiting to be identified, described, classified and conserved. Cast in the role of 'ignorant natives,' Indians were widely perceived by European authorities and colonizers as incapable of using their critical faculties and making sound, historical assessments.[53] Yet as the process of cataloguing and documenting the antiquities of Her Majesty's Empire picked up speed, the need for more highly educated, critical thinkers, of which the government felt only it could produce, became increasingly evident.

By the early 1860s, programs in Oriental Studies and Sanskrit studies at the universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras had emerged as important venues where

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[52] C.f., Michael Mann, "Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress': Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India," in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, edited by Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 1 – 28.

[53] For balanced and insightful studies of the many colonial-era Indians who challenged these stereotypes through their work in archaeology and art, see, Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 290 – 354, and Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of art in colonial and post-colonial India* (New York: Columba University Press, 2004), 185 – 239.

students could study Buddhist history and comprehend the poems (*gāthā*) of the ancient *theras* (monks) and *therīs* (nuns). Although formal programs in Pali, Buddhist studies, let alone History, did not take formation until the turn of the century, there was an enduring sense among the leaders of these institutes that the study of Buddhism was at the avant-garde of human inquiry. As the *Bombay Journal of the Asiatic Society* described it in 1847: "There is scarcely any subject…which has excited more interest, or is better deserving of investigation than the origins and progress of Buddhism."[54] Academic programs often reflected the sentiment.

For instance, at Bombay University's Elphinstone College (est. 1856), Sanskrit studies was headed by the German Indologist Georg Bühler (1837 – 98). Bühler was one of the foremost authorities on Buddhist caves and manuscripts, whose passion for exploration and reading Buddhism into the past rubbed off on many of his students and field assistants. Among the latter were men like Bhagavanlal Indraji (1839 – 88), the Gujarati epigraphist and autodidact who before joining Bühler at Buddhist sites in Nepal and Bodh Gaya had trained as a draftsman at Ajanta and Karli in the 1860s. Despite being dogged by his only "tolerable" English, a shortcoming which forced him to rely on others to disseminate his findings among the wider scholarly community, he became a well-known genealogist and explorer of ancient mounds, whose discovery of the Aśokan edict and Buddha relics at Sopara in 1882 helped earn him an honorary doctorate from Leiden University two years later.[55]

Among the most well known of Bühler's classroom pupils to take an interest in Buddhism was the Sanskritist R.G. Bhandarkar (1837 – 1925), who in 1868 took over as Head of Sanskrit studies at Elphinstone. One of the most prolific historians of his generation, Bhandarkar published on an incredible variety of topics, edited the prominent journal *Indian Antiquary* and was one of the first Indians to earn a doctorate from a European university (University of Göttingen, 1885). During his long and distinguished career, most of it spent at Deccan College in Pune, where he formed the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in

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[54] James Bird, *Historical Researches on the Origin and Principles of the Bauddha and Jaina Religions; embracing the leading Tenets of their System, with account of the scriptures in the caves of Western India, with translations of the inscriptions of those of Kanari, Karli, etc.* (Bombay: American Mission Press. 1847), iii.
[55] Javerilal Umiashankar Yajnik, "Memoir of the late Pandit Bahgvanlal Indraji, LL.D, Ph.D," *The Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* Vol. 47/2 (1889): 7. A list of his English-language publications (most of which were translated from Gujarati by Bühler and Dr. Bhau Daji) includes twelve articles in the *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,* eleven articles in the *Indian Antiquary* and another six articles in miscellaneous periodicals.

1917, Bhandarkar made a name for himself as one of the foremost authorities on Buddhist kingship in Mauryan India. Although he personally found Buddhist metaphysics lacking and was critical of some of his colleagues who wished to see the seed of buddhadharma sprout in India again, he was adamant that any historian of ancient India worth his salt needed to carefully consider the presence of the Buddhist past.[56]

At Calcutta University, the first batches of Sanskrit graduates were no less adept at wielding the methodologies and theories the British taught and then applying them to the study of Buddhist remains. As early as 1870, *Babu* Chandrasekhara Banurji began using his free time as the Deputy Magistrate in Jajapur, Orissa, to publish essays on the numerous Buddhist antiquities scattered through the Cuttack hills.[57] The mixing of research with coveted government jobs was not unusual, a popular hobby (*śauq*) for many nineteenth-century Indian bureaucrats.[58] Others, like Haraprasad Shastri (1853 – 1931) would transform the antiquarian pursuit into a full-fledged profession, using his BA (1876) and MA (1877) in Sanskrit from Calcutta University to help catapult his status from 'native pandit' to "perhaps the most important scholar" of "[Sanskrit] Buddhist literature" in his lifetime.[59] In fact, when examined more holistically, what becomes evident is the fact that almost all of the great nineteenth-century Indian scholars of Buddhism began their careers at government colleges, local libraries, museums, or as assistants on archaeological expeditions.

Throughout the entire colonial period, the true Indian hub for Buddhist scholarship was Calcutta, the heart of the Bengal Presidency and capital of the British Empire in Asia. With the Asiatic Society headquarters, Indian Museum (est. 1814), Imperial Library, University of Calcutta and its numerous branch colleges, the city attracted and produced the country's most influential scholars. Much of its draw derived from its outstanding collections

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[56] R.G. Bhandarkar, *Collected Works of Sir R.G. Bhandarkar, Vol. 1,* edited by Narayana Bapuji Utgikar and Vasudev Gopal Paranjpe (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1938 [1897 – 98]), 9 – 10. A committed theist and leader of the Prathana Samāj or Prayer Society, Bhandarkar found Buddha's atheism (or at the very least, agnosticism) to be lacking with its ethics less formed than that found in the Shanti and Anushasanika books of the *Mahābhārata.*

[57] See, Babu Chandrasekhara Banerji, "Antiquities of the Cuttack Hills," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 39/3 (1870): 158 – 71.

[58] Most of the nineteenth century Asiatic Society fellows (whether Indian or European), it must be remembered, were not professional scholars of Buddhism but government bureaucrats like Babu Pratapchandra Ghosha and Babu Rashbihari Bose.

[59] The platitude is ascribed to none other than the eminent French scholar, Sylvain Levi. See, G.K. Nariman, *Literary History of Sanskrit Buddhism: from Winternitz, Sylvain Levi, Huber* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co, 1920), 1.

of material artifacts and manuscripts acquired from across the Empire. Indian visitors to the city with an interest in Buddhism could view everything from the mundane to the monumental. At the Indian Museum, more commonly known by the name *Jādū Ghar* or "House of Magic," visitors in 1876 would have been able to eye copper land grand plates, Kuṣāṇa coins and small Buddhist icons next to entire rooms overflowing with re-assembled monastic walls and pillars from Bharhut.[60]

Many of the city's most impressive collections were literary, a consequence of Lord Lawrence's 1868 order to the government to search for historical manuscripts.[61] Although the vast majority of manuscripts were in Sanskrit and catered to non-Buddhist topics, a significant portion of the Asiatic Society, Imperial Library and Calcutta University collections, to name just the three largest government archives in the city, opened vast windows into the history, philosophy and practice of Buddhism. Most represented "Northern Buddhism," the common colonial category for what is more commonly described today as Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism. A catalogue of the Asiatic Society in 1882, for instance, reported complete sets of the Tibetan Kagyur (*bka'-'gyur*) and Tengyur (*bstan-'gyur*), 256 Tibetan xylographs, more than 150 Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts, and 350 Chinese xylographs of mixed genres.[62] While large numbers of these had been deposited by European officials between the 1830s and 1860s, several dynamic Indian researchers added to the collections.[63] This included Sarat Chandra Das, who returned from his state-sponsored

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[60] After being discovered by Cunningham in 1873, the entire remains of Bharhut were dismantled, packed and shipped to the Indian Museum. For details of the complex political negotiations this required, see Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 243 – 46. The Madras Museum also had its share of materials, including the complete Amaravati remains brought to the museum in 1883. Other structures, like the Burmese pagoda currently held at Eden Gardens near Fort William in Calcutta were only partially open to the public. After the British conquest of Prome in Burma in 1854, Lord Dalhousie had the local pagoda broken into pieces, shipped to Calcutta (along with three Burmese carpenters) and then reassembled. On museums in India, see Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 43 – 84.

[61] Haraprasad Shastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanscrit manuscripts in the Government collection, under the care of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. *Vol 1: Buddhist Manuscripts* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1917), iii. By 1883, the Asiatic Society library possessed more than thirty thousand volumes in total with roughly 8,000 more in manuscript form. See, Rajendralal Mitra, August Friedrich Rudolf Hoernle and Pramatha Nath Bose, "Centenary Review of the Asiatic Society of Bengal from 1784 to 1883" (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1885), 27 – 28. By 1917, the number of manuscripts stood at 11,264 (Shastri, *Descriptive Catalogue*, iii).

[62] Mitra, Hoernle and Bose, "Centenary Review of the Asiatic Society of Bengal," 27 – 28.

[63] In 1827, Brian Hodgson, the then Assistant Resident in Nepal, shipped 66 Sanskrit manuscripts to the Library of Fort William College and 94 to the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Accompanying his shipment to Fort William was a near-complete set, amounting to over a hundred volumes, of the Tibetan *bka'-'gyur,* or "translated words" of Buddha Śākyamuni. Around the same time, the Transylvanian recluse, Alexander Csoma

journeys to central Tibet in 1879 and 1881 – 82 with over two-hundred Tibetan volumes and Rajendralal Mitra and Haraprasad Shastri, who in the course of their own trips in Bengal and Nepal, added over a hundred more Sanskrit, Prakrit, Bengali and Newari Buddhist texts to the government collection.[64]

Sources for the study of "Southern Buddhism," or the Theravādin traditions of south and southeast Asia were no less extensive.[65] Once again, many of the collections derived from the city's imperial connections. In 1867, Paul Bigandet, the Catholic Vicar of Ava and Pegu (Burma) 'persuaded' the King of Burma "to gift a copy of the Pitaka" to the Government of India and select numbers were deposited at the Asiatic Society and Calcutta University.[66] Two years later, three senior monks from Ceylon petitioned the Indian government to help them acquire a complete set of scriptures from Burma and Siam so they could "create a new edition of Páli scriptures which represent the true words of the Buddha."[67] After the final negotiations between the various parties collapsed, the collections acquired thus far were transferred to the Asiatic Society. These may explain some of the "about 125 bundles" of uncatalogued Burmese, Siamese, Javanese and Sinhalese palm-leaf manuscripts found by Rajendralal Mitra, Pramatha Nath Bose and Rudolf Hoernle at the Asiatic Society library in 1882.[68] In other words, by the late 1880s the city housed one of the most linguistically diverse, albeit fragmented collections of Buddhist manuscripts in the

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de Koros, began sending his own collections of Tibetan manuscripts to the library of the Asiatic Society from his own hermitage in Ladakh and Kinnaur.

[64] In Shastri's 1917 catalogue of Buddhist manuscripts in the Asiastic Society's rooms, he describes 119 texts, most of which are in Sanskrit with a few in Newari, Bengali and Prakrit. Although this was the most significant public collection in India, it was dwarfed by some of the largest European collections at the time. For instance, Cecil Bendall describes 1,097 Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge. See, Cecil Bendall, *Catalogue of the Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge*, publications of the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1992 [1883]).

[65] For an important interrogation into the modern use of the term Theravāda as a catch-all for non-Mahāyāna traditions, see Todd LeRoy Perreira, "Whence Theravāda? The Modern Geneaology of an Ancient Term," in Peter Skilling, Jason A. Carbine, Claudio Cicuzza, Santi Pakdeekham (eds.), *How Theravāda is Theravāda?: Exploring Buddhist Identities* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012), 443 – 571.

[66] See, Government of India, Foreign Department: Political Branch—A, February 1867, No.124-26, National Archives of India.

[67] See Government of India, Foreign Department: Poll Branch—A, July 1868, 59-62; National Archives of India; Government of India, Home Department, Public Branch. June 1869, Part A, 47-48; National Archives of India. The three monks were Hikkaduwe Sumàngala Terunnanse (Adams Peak), Bulatgama Dhammalankara Sri Summantissa Terunnanse (Chief Priest at Galle), and Idamalgoda Abayakon Atapattu Mudujanse Basnayaka (Saparagamuwa). The names of these monks are spelled as according to the government records.

[68] Mitra, Hoernle and Bose, "Centenary Review of the Asiatic Society of Bengal," 27 – 28.

world. These were significant resources for a scholarly enterprise that only decades before had doubted the very existence of Buddhism in India.

Of as equal importance to the sources themselves was the fact that the city hosted a growing body of native scholars who could read and interpret them. Although several Pali scholars, like Dharmanand Kosambi and Satischandra Vidyabhusan made Calcutta their homes after the 1900s, the motley crew that made up the Calcutta Buddhologists tended to focus on Sanskrit and Tibetan texts. To understand the social and intellectual fabric of these savants, it is best to look at the city's Buddhist Text Society (est. 1892). When Sarat Chandra Das and Rajendralal Mitra proposed the formation of the society in early 1891, they did so with the hope that by establishing a site in Calcutta, Japanese and Sinhalese Buddhists would come to study Sanskrit. They recognized the resources the city possessed and like any historian, they tied it to the past: "It is not unknown to us that in bygone times Nálanda and other Universities [in India] were the favourite resorts of Sanskrit students from distant countries, such as China, Tibet and Ceylon. This opens a new question: will the Sanskrit College in Calcutta, under its existing rules, admit Buddhist students?"[69] By 1915, Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan were not only languages of examination at Calcutta University but were effectively languages of modern-day cosmopolitanism, drawing scholars and students from across the globe, all of whom were welcome at the university's three-story Buddhist hostel.[70]

During its initial formation, the Buddhist Text Society was formed of more than nine university-educated Indian scholars, a handful of Sanskrit pandits, several Buddhist Theosophists and a few British civil servants.[71] The objects of the society were twofold: first,

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[69] "Proceedings of the Society," *Journal of the Buddhist Text Society* Vol. 1/1 (1893), i. Such ideas were no doubt being sparked by Olcott and other Theosophists.

[70] Samana Punnananda Sami, "A Buddhist Hostel in Calcutta," *Buddhist Review* Vol. 5/2 (1913), 146 – 49. In a recent lecture, Richard Jaffe reported that there were no less than twenty Japanese students who studied in India (primarily Calcutta) for more than one year between 1880 and 1930. Some of these figures, like the Nichiren monk and scholar, Kimura who taught at Calcutta University for more than twenty years (1908 – 29) and later served as Subash Chandra Bose's advisor in the Indian National Army, had a major influence on Indian-Japanese relations. See, "Japanese Buddhism's 'Western Turn': South/Southeast Asia and the Forging of the Japanese Buddhist Modern," Keynote Address at "Buddhism in the Global Eye," University of British Columbia, August 10, 2016. Likewise, several Tibetans, like Karma Sumdhon Paul from the Darjeeling hill tracts taught Tibetan at the University of Calcutta (and in the Asiatic Society) throughout the early 1900s. For a first-hand account, see *Tibetan Lives: Three Himalayan Autobiographies,* edited by Peter Richardus (London: Curzon, 1998).

[71] See the frontspiece of *Journal of the Buddhist Text Society of India* Vol. 1/1 (1893). Its more well known members included Sir Alfred Croft, Henry Olcott, Norendro Nath Sen, Haraprasad Shastri, Hari Mohan [later

to edit and publish Sanskrit or Tibetan texts relating to Indian Buddhism, geography and Indo-Aryan thought and second, "to discuss in the Journal of the Society topics of various kinds connected with that interesting subject."[72] By 1895, the society had more than four hundred members, nearly three quarters of which resided in India.[73] The increase speaks clearly to the new enthusiasm for studying Buddhism and the growing sentiment that Buddha represented one of India's greatest cultural assets. Under government pressure, in 1897 it added anthropology—"the science of mankind which comprised an inquiry into the habits, customs, manners of the human race"—to its scope, electing Herbert Hope Risley as its President and being renamed the Buddhist Text and Anthropological Society. Although it remained Das's pet project until 1907, acquiring numerous state grants to collect and publish rare Buddhist texts, Risley's two year-term as President took the organization in a different direction. [74] The added emphasis diluted aspects of its Buddhist focus and the promise of a wider circulation never blossomed, leaving the group to drop the anthropological title in 1904. By 1907, the re-named "Buddhist Text and Research Society" disappeared in a merger with the Indian Research Society, ending the fifteen-year life of colonial India's first academic organization dedicated solely to the study of Buddhist literature.

3.3 A "skilled battery" of researchers and draftsmen: Archaeology and the 'natives'

Most of the major Buddhist sites re-discovered in nineteenth century India sat far outside the new colonial centers of commerce, learning and power. Although increasingly connected by an ever-expanding network of railways and *pakkā* roads, this meant that most of India's abandoned Buddhist sites were at least a full day's journey from the nearest urban

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Satish] Vidyabhusan, Heneviratne [later, Anagarika] Dharmapala, Sri Asutosh Mukhopadhyaya, Justice Gurudas Vandyopadhyaya, and Mahesh Candra Nyayaratna.

[72] Special General Meeting held at Town Hall, Darjeeling on 29 October 1895*, Journal of the Buddhist Text Society* Vol. 3 (1895), ii. Later the group expanded its literary scope to include religious and social literature of Indian Buddhists found in Pali, Burmese, Siamese, Chinese, Korean and Japanese texts with the hope of better understanding the history and geography of ancient India and "Indo-Aryan thoughts on Buddhism."

[73] Special General Meeting held at Town Hall, Darjeeling on 29 October 1895*, Journal of the Buddhist Text Society* Vol. 3 (1895), vii.

[74] See, Government of India, Home Department: Books and Publishing Branch, October 1905, nos. 42 – 43, National Archives of India.

hub.[75] Therefore, geography and economics always played a critical role in how one would encounter first-hand Buddhist ruins *in situ*. Travel to these sites, as several colonial pilgrims' and travelers' accounts attest to, could be a grueling affair. [76] Unsanitary conditions, little or no available lodging, and the threat of disease, robbery or animal attacks were commonly reported. Yet for several thousand nineteenth-century Indians who were in some way connected with the government's conservation efforts, visits to and encounters with the *Buddha Bhūmi* became reality.

The initiative to protect and study India's ancient sites began in the early 1840s when field engineers turned archaeologists like Alexander Cunningham (1814 – 93) argued that the government had a "moral obligation" to implement "a careful and systematic investigation of all the existing monuments of ancient India."[77] For Cunningham, whose role in nineteenth-century archaeology is difficult to overestimate, almost nothing could be more important than the recovery of the Buddhist past. Within just months of his arrival in India as a nineteen-year old army cadet in 1833, Cunningham drove a one hundred and ten foot shaft down through the center of the even taller Dhāmek stupa in Sarnath, revealing the ancient Buddhist words, *ye dharmā hetu prabhavā* (all phenomena arise from causes) inscribed on a stone slab inside. "The act opened up not just the *stupa,*" the art historian Tapati Guha-Thakurta rightly asserts, "but a whole area of investigate technique that became his special forte."[78] During the nearly five decades that Cunningham lived in India—much of it in "the field" from

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[75] On the impact of railways and roads in India, see Ravi Ahuja, " 'The Bridge-builders': some notes on railways, pilgrimage and the British 'civilizing mission' in colonial India," in *Colonialism as civilizing mission: cultural ideology in British India,* edited by H. Fischer-Tine and M. Mann (London: Wimbleton Publishing Company, 2004), 95 – 116. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

[76] See, for instance, Dharmapala Sarnath Notebook no. 25; Diaries *of Chogyal Sidkeong Tulku* (1901 – 02); *MahaBodhi* Vol. 4/11 (1895 – 96), 89; Alexander Cunningham, *Four Reports made during the years 1862 – 1863 – 1864 – 1865,* 2 vols. (Simla: Government Central Press, 1871); and Dharmanand Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Dharmanand Kosambi: The Essential Writings,* edited and translated from the Marathi into English by Meera Kosambi (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), 53 – 219. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Kosambi's writings hereafter are referred to as *Essential Writings.*

[77] "Memorandum by Colonel A. Cunningham, of Engineers, regarding a proposed investigation of the Archaeological remains of Upper India," in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 31/1 (1862), 99. See also, Cunningham, "An Account of the Discovery of the Ruins of the Buddhist City of Samkassa," 241 – 49, for an earlier version of the same argument. On the origins of archaeology in India, see Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India.*

[78] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 28. The magnitude of Cunningham's research is captured well by Guha-Thakurta (42), when she describes Cunningham's writings as being seen then, as they are now, as "an archive: a source of constant citation, corroboration, and cross-reference in a field that their very authority had founded." The best study of Cunningham's life remains Abu Imam, *Sir Alexander Cunningham and the Beginnings of Indian Archaeology* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1966).

Burma and Afghanistan to Ladakh and Bhopal—he would use similar methods of guerilla archaeology to open at least another twenty-seven stupas and excavate many more. At the locally-known *caitya giri* or "hill of shrines" near Sanchi in central India in 1854, for instance, he recovered two relic boxes with inscriptions describing the remains inside as the bones of Moggallāna and Sāriputta, two of Buddha's disciples whose names were by then well-known to Orientalist scholars from their readings of Pali texts acquired in Ceylon and Burma. Despite causing extensive and often irreversible damage to the two-thousand year old structures, Cunningham's numerous finds inside the mostly alabaster and brick monuments were breathtaking, being widely reported in the news but also sadly, inspiring others to excavate and loot ruins in search of ancient treasures.[79]

By 1861, when archaeology had finally caught the Viceroy's ear, leading Lord Canning to formally approve the formation of the Archaeological Survey of India, archaeology was taking on an increasingly Buddhist flare with Cunningham its most zealous advocate.[80] The French translation of two Chinese pilgrim accounts, one by the fifth century Fa-Hsien and the other of the seventh-century Xuanzang, both of which detailed the location and expanse of Buddhist sites in India at that time, had changed the way Cunningham and other archaeologists conducted their research.[81] With the pilgrims' handbooks as his guide, Cunningham and his draftsman Babu Jamna Shankar Bhatt (dates unknown) traversed the subcontinent, attempting to match Chinese place names with local toponyms and Sanskrit – Prakrit inscriptions.[82] The results were astonishing: during the first four winter surveys

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[79] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* explores the various types of wanton destruction and looting at these sites as well as the critical nineteenth-century debates about how to best preserve or conserve them.

[80] The ASI, which Cunningham directed until he departed India in 1885, was largely confined to northern and central India until a separate survey was set up in western India in 1873 under the direction of James Burgess. South India did not acquire its own archaeological survey until 1881. See Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 85 – 87.

[81] Faxian's account, *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* or "Biography of the Eminent Monk Faxian," was posthumously published by Abel Rémusat in 1836 as *Foe-koue-ki, ou relations des royaumes bouddhiques, ou voyages des royaumes bouddhiques: voyage dans la Tartarie, dans l'Afghanistan et dans l'Inde, éxécuté, à la fin du IV e siècle, par Chy Fa Hian*. Xuanzang's travelogue, *Da Tang Xiyu Ji* or "Western Regions" was published in 2 volumes by Rémusat's successor, Stanislas Julien in 1857 – 58 as *Mémoires sur les contrées occidentales, traduits du Sanscrit en Chinois, en l'an 648 par Hiouen-thsang.*

[82] Unfortunately, very little is known of Babu Jamna Shankar Bhatt. He worked with Cunningham for over ten years, traveling to archaeological sites, interpreting ruins, conversing with locals and reading and copying inscriptions when Cunningham was unable to do so himself. Although it is difficult to speak about their relationship with any precision, it is obvious that Cunningham held him in high regard, describing him as having "a very correct eye" and being "conversant with the true shapes of these ancient characters." See,

conducted from 1861 - 65, they identified more than one hundred and sixty Buddhist sites in north India *alone*.[83] "The great extent and completeness of [Xuanzang's] Indian travels," Cunningham declared, have "never been surpassed."[84] By the turn of the century, archaeologists and art historians were churning out books and articles, describing the "strange" but "wonderful works" of art and architecture the Buddhists of ancient India had produced.[85] From one-hundred and eighty foot Buddha statues carved into rock at Bamiyan (Afghanistan), caches of Indo-Greek coins with Buddhist figures near Peshawar (Pakistan), three-story monastic universities at Nalanda (Bihar), colorful cave paintings of Bodhisattvas at Ajanta (Maharashtra) and towering *mahācaityas* at Amarāvatī (Andhra Pradesh), Buddhism had become firmly placed on the Indian map.

According to Thomas Trautmann and Carla Sinopoli, the factor that set nineteenth century archaeology apart from other humanistic inquiries of the time was its ability to connect various written records with elite material remains.[86] Archaeology and its related fields of art history, numismatics and epigraphy allowed literary traditions to be placed in a temporal framework, providing not just illustrative materials for the texts but lending a tangible basis to historical events, locales and memories. It was these qualities that lent archaeology its prestige, for without it, myth and history could be difficult to separate. Votive inscriptions at Sanchi, for instance, revealed the names of numerous female donors, allowing archaeologists to draw a connection between women and the dhamma, a relationship that can otherwise be difficult to determine from the literary tradition. The Buddha's dhamma,

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Alexander Cunningham, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. I, Inscriptions of Asoka* (Calcuta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1877), i.

[83]Alexander Cunningham, *Four Reports made during the years 1862 – 1863 – 1864 – 1865,* 2 volumes (Simla: Government Central Press, 1871).

[84] Alexander Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India* (London: Trübner and Co., 1871), xiii – xiv. The outstanding success in using the Chinese texts, particularly that of Xuanzang, to map the ancient landscape onto the modern led to a major paradigm shift in the Orientalist enquiry, where almost everything in the Chinese accounts were taken to be historically accurate. Such a sentiment still finds echoes in contemporary South Asian studies and was taken up with equal gusto by the famous explorers of Chinese Turkestan (today's Xinjiang and Gansu), like Paul Pelliot and Aurel Stein. On Xuanzang's writings as a source for South Asian studies, see Thomas Trautmann and Carla Sinopoli, "In the Beginning Was the Word: Excavating the Relations between History and Archaeology in South Asia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol. 45/4 (2002): 495 – 501, and Max Deeg, " 'Show me the land where the Buddha dwelled…' Xuanzang's 'Record of the Western Regions' (*Xiu ji*): A Misunderstood Text?" *China Report* Vol. 48/1 & 2 (2012): 89 – 113. Deeg rightly identifies the latest round of research into Cunningham's use of Xuanzang as a "deconstructive campaign."

[85] James Burgess, *The Cave Temples of India* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1880), 108.

[86] Trautmann and Sinopoli, "In the Beginning Was the Word," 499 – 500.

Cunningham argued, offered hope in this life and the next "to the young widow, the neglected wife, and the cast-off mistress" who were subjected to "daily indignities…by grasping relatives, treacherous husbands and faithless lords."[87]

Of no less importance was the manner in which archaeology and its underlining positivism brought Buddhism to the fore. Where purāṇic and epic accounts of Hindu kings and avatārs often fell flat, leaving no physical traces of the magnificent kingdoms and realms they described, the textual past of Buddhism could be located in the rock-cut vihāras and caityas that covered the subcontinent. These memorials to Buddha, as the *Illustrated London News* reported in 1883, were so impressive that they made "pigmies" of the other great monuments of the world.[88] "Imagine a general meeting of all the colossal statues of the world," a reporter wrote after returning from Bamiyan where he drew the great Buddhas later destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. Imagine the Collosi of Luxor in Egypt ("51 ft. high"), the statues of Ramses II at Abu Simbel ("about 50 ft. high"), the bronze Japanese Buddha at Todai-ji ("49 ft."), the statue of Athena at the Parthenon ("39 ft."), the Olympian Jupiter ("60 ft.") and "the still greater Colossus of Rhodes, the records of its height varying from 100 ft. to 120 ft." "If all these," he declared, "were to meet at one place, and the hitherto almost unknown Bamian great [Buddha] statue were to appear among them, *what pigmies most of them would seem!* The colossal Apollo of Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, would lose all pretense to superiority in height as he had to look up…to the gigantic strangers from Bamian."[89]

As local authorities and government branches received circulars instructing officials to make lists and collect photographs of these grand remains, one of the many problems that presented itself was the high number of monuments located inside princely states where the ASI had no legal authority.[90] At its height, the British Empire in India covered approximately

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[87] Alexander Cunningham, *The Bhilsa Topes or the Buddhist Monuments of Central India: comprising a brief historical sketch of the rise, progress, and decline of Buddhism; with an account of the opening and examination fo the various groups of topes around Bhilsa* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1854), 60.
[88] William Simpson, "The Colossal Statues of Bamian," *Illustrated London News,* November 6, 1886, 490 – 91.
[89] Simpson, "The Colossal Statues of Bamian," 490 – 91. Simpson would add that even the newly constructed Statue of Liberty in New York would fall short of the largest Buddha.
[90] Nor did all shrines and temples form a part of the ASI's purview. Many were privately owned and managed and therefore continued to be demolished and/or reworked within the confines of their own communities. This, as the case of John Marshall's petition to the Tirupallaturai temple at Trichinopoly shows, was often a sign of distress to ASI officials. See, Nayanjot Lahiri, *Marshalling the past: ancient India and its modern histories* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2012), 384. Private enterprises in Burma were no less active in repairing ruined

three-fifths of the subcontinent with indigenous rulers possessing (nominal) authority over the rest. From numerous smaller monasteries in the kingdom of Mayurabhanj to Sanchi in Bhopal, Bharhut in Nagod and Ajanta in Hyderabad, princely states possessed legal jurisdiction over many Buddhist remains. Archaeological officials were often convinced that native states were unfit to manage their own archaeological resources and frequently decried the way that Buddhist sites were 'vandalized' inside native jurisdictions. For instance, when princely authorities failed to prevent the large (148 foot by 48 foot) rock-cut caitya at Karli near Pune from being painted and shaped into a *śivaliṅgaṃ*, the state cast their failure as typical of native "negligence" and "ignorance."[91] Yet as Upinder Singh's masterful study of nineteenth-century archaeology demonstrates, there was no single paradigm that shaped princely attitudes towards conservation. The Nizam of Hyderabad, for instance, was "quite willing" to cooperate with conservation authorities and spent "considerable amounts of money from the state exchequer" to help safeguard the Buddhist frescoes at Ajanta.[92] Likewise, the nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim Begums of Bhopal generously supported conservation efforts at Sanchi, an act that directly contradicted many British refrains that a Muslim ruler could not possibly have interest in a Buddhist monument.[93]

Elite officials in princely states, however, were not the only Indians to come in contact with the archaeology of Buddhism. Although it was not until the Curzonian era when John Marshall took over the Survey that the ASI began to more closely resemble the expansive machine it is today, by the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the government was employing a large body of workers to assist in the documentation of the Empire's antiquities.[94] As early as 1854, the British had established the School of Industrial Arts (present-day Government College of Arts and Crafts) in Calcutta, where students learned new kinds of vocational and technical skills. From drawing and plaster casts to using the *camera lucida*, the School churned out "a skilled battery of drawing masters, draftsmen,

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'pagodas' and renovating old ones. Lahiri argues that many private owners were resistant to allowing the government to work on their properties since this was often seen by British officials as having acquired rights over the shrines. At Bodh Gaya, for instance, the Mahant insisted on paying for the dismantling and reconstruction of railing pillars "as he was afraid to lose his right over the temple if government paid for their relocation" (385).

[91] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 295.

[92] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 299.

[93] Lahiri, *Marshalling the past.*

[94] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 116 and 323fn13.

surveyors, engravers, and lithographers."[95] Epigraphy was another area where colonial officials, recognizing the inherited linguistic skills of the local population, made special efforts to increase expenditures. In 1871, the Viceroy Lord May instructed that "so far as possible, intelligent Natives may be employed in and trained to the work of photographing, measuring, and surveying buildings, directing excavations, and the like; while as regards deciphering inscriptions, it seems probable that Natives may be found better qualified to do this work than many Europeans."[96] Although debates about how appropriate it was to integrate 'natives' in the surveys continued well into the next century, liberal views often prevailed and by the 1880s, special funds were allocated and prizes offered by government schools to train and encourage students in archaeological sciences.[97] For the privileged and the motivated, conservation and archaeology became one avenue through which Indians could climb the ladder of rank and file as a 'native' in colonial society.

Precise figures for the number of skilled workers supported by the colonial government's various quasi-archaeological units are difficult to estimate but when one takes a more holistic picture, the number would easily number several thousand over the last decades of the nineteenth century. For it was not just the ASI that required skilled (and many more unskilled workers) to assist in interpreting Buddhist sites, but the Public Works Department, Education Department, Foreign Department and so on, that frequently called upon their services. For instance, during the Kapilavastu excavations of the late 1890s, Purna Chandra Mukherji described, "about 200 coolie, mostly *Tharus*, being employed for a week at a time, who returned to their villages; and then a fresh relay of labourers took their place."[98] Alongside this massive body of laborers, there were individuals like Lala Deen Dayal (1844 – 1905), the Punjabi photographer from Sardhana (Uttar Pradesh) who in 1866 took a job as a draftsman in the princely kingdom of Indore. A skilled photographer, his Indore-based firm, "Lala Deen Dayal & Sons," (est. 1868), became one of the most sought after photography companies in India, commissioned by Lepel Henry Griffin in 1882 – 83 to

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[95] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 143.
[96] Government of India Resolution, No. 649 – 650 (February 2, 1871), Home Department: Public Branch, No. 28/Part A, National Archives of India.
[97] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 312 – 16; Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, 89.
[98] Babu Purna Chandra Mukherji, *Archaeological Survey of India: A Report on a tour of exploration of the antiquities of Kapilavastu, Tarai of Nepal during February and March, 1899* (Government of United Provinces: Public Works Department, 1899), 1.

lead an extensive photographic survey of Buddhist ruins in central India.[99] Other trained draftsmen like Ghulam Rasool Beg and P.C. Mukherji appear to have been less struck by Buddha's doctrines than they were by his remains. The former spent several seasons working at Kuśīnagar, the site of Buddha's mahāparinirvāṇa. In 1901, he even enjoyed a brief stint in charge of all operations, a position which would have certainly led him to encounter the Hindu wrestler turned Buddhist bhikkhu, Mahāvīr and his cohort of wealthy Arakanese patrons building the town's first modern vihāra.[100] P.C. Mukherji, on the other hand, began his career as a draftsman in 1884 and spent much of the next two decades working on early Buddhist sites in the Northwestern Provinces. In addition to his own stunning finds of the Kumraharbagh Aśoka pillar and bell fragment near Patna in 1895 – 96, Mukherji is best remembered for uncovering the inconvenient truth that his colleague and superior, Dr. Anton Führer, was fabricating evidence and supplying Buddhist priests with forged Buddha relics in order to justify claims about having discovered Buddha's birthplace.[101]

Despite an awareness of numerous other figures like those above whose lives were touched by the study of Buddhism, our understanding of their precise thoughts and actions remains cloudy. This uncertainty stems from two different factors. First, there was a deep and enduring prejudice against native scholars and workers, understanding them to be little more than informants and assistants whose contributions were not worth recalling in published reports. One outcome of this is that many natives who participated in the study of Buddhism are simply (un)marked in historical records as "my *babu*," "my assistant," "my pandit" and so on.[102] Second, the English-language bias of British archaeology prevented many otherwise capable and accomplished indigenous scholars from disseminating and publishing their own

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[99] These were published in Griffin's (1886) richly illustrated, *Famous Monuments of Central India*, which includes 27 plates of Sanchi photographed by Dayal. While the growing interest in colonial portraits allowed Dayal to expand his business into different markets, other portrait photographers like D.N. Bali, of "Bali & Sons" in Rawalapindi (Pakistan), became so enthralled by the "noble Doctrine of Buddha" that he used his own profits to support an Urdu biography of Buddha based on "authentic sources." See, S. Warman, "Correspondence: a proposal," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 8/11 (1899 – 1900), 110.

[100] On Beg, see Lahiri, *Marshalling the past,* 367 – 68. I discuss Mahāvīr in chapter five.

[101] The complete events surrounding this have been retold in Charles Allen, *The Buddha and Dr. Führer: an archaeological scandal* (New York: Penguin, 2010 [2008]), with the focus on Mukherji's involvement on 178 – 225. It is valuable to note, especially on par with our discussion in chapter five, that following his dismissal from the ASI, the disgraced Führer left India for Thailand, where he was reported to have briefly taken ordination as a Buddhist monk.

[102] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 290 – 354 and Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 185 – 239. This legacy of Anglo-centric history continues in the popular histories of Charles Allen although his later works have begun to give more consideration to indigenous voices.

findings in scholarly journals. Closer scrutiny of the colonial records, however, reveals the names of many Indians whose contributions went unacknowledged. For instance, P.C. Ghosh, the librarian at the Asiatic Society regularly assisted scholars in their searches for manuscripts and materials and Babu Deva Shastri, the Professor of Mathematics at Benares College, helped scholars in matters of chronology.[103] Others, like the outstanding epigraphist Bhagavanlal Indraji, whose only scholarly crime was his rudimentary English, were "floated as scholars," as Virchand Dharamsey puts it, by having all of their works translated into English by colleagues and friends.[104] Similarly, when Buddhist relics were discovered in the Swat Valley in 1896 and credited to the work of Major F.C. Maisey—a veteran surveyor—Maisey wrote an open letter, reprinted in numerous papers, stating that the relic casket was actually discovered by two "energetic" field assistants, Ghulam Ali and Fazldud Khan. Both men, he applauded, have "of their own accord" been busy "digging up Buddhist images" and "getting volunteers from among their men to dig…I hope, in time, these working parties will receive some remuneration from Government, for all the best images and frescoes, and the above-mentioned relic, are to be eventually sent to the Imperial Museum at Calcutta."[105]

While the true underbelly of colonial archaeology—the *lascars* (servants) and *bhiśtīs* (water-carriers)*, mehtars* (sweepers) and *dhobīs* (washermen)*, coolies* (laborers) and *caukīdārs* (watchmen) and other lower- class and caste groups—remains largely outside our historical grasp with only fleeting glimpses provided in contemporary accounts, one has to wonder to what degree the discussion about the Buddhist sites permeated the workers' camps and nearby villages. What was their reading of the government signposts and surveying crews that transformed the mythic abodes of the epics and purāṇas into a historical materiality linked not to folk deities, Hindu heroes and saintly *pīrs* but Buddhist kings and monks? How did they react and contend with the babus' and sahibs' story that the massive Aśokan pillars across the subcontinent were not in fact the *Mahābhārata* brother Bhim's giant walking stick (*bhīm kā lath*), as many local traditions claimed, but the political symbol of an ancient Buddhist empire? When Henry Cole griped that the Buddhist stupa inside the

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[103] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 134.
[104] Virchand Dharamsey, *Bhagwanlal Indraji: the first Indian archaeologist: multidisciplinary approaches to the study of the past* (Vadodara: Darshak Itihas Nidhi, 2012), 14. This should by no means undermine the incredible works of Indraji, as is made clear by Dharamsey's excellent, if sometimes hagiographic study.
[105] Major F.C. Maisey, "The Buddhist relics in the Swat Valley," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 4/6 (1895 – 96), 50.

Karli caves was not *really* a śivaliṅgaṃ, as the priests had painted and shaped it to be, what did locals think? Did the sahibs' empiricism trump customary views or did the culturally-embedded meanings of a sacred landscape make their science (*vidyā*) appear empty and hollow? If the memoirs of the Buddhist pilgrims are any indicator, then the responses were often of dissent and resistance.[106] Yet every time the *Tathāgata*'s story was told, a new storyteller was potentially born and with each rendition, whether expressed orally over a cup of *chai* or in the nineteenth-century cornucopia of printed texts, Buddhist history was re-imagined in ways subject to the values and conditions of the audience and storyteller.

3.4 From pandit to scholar: Some case studies

The individuals and organizations that would continually retell the Tathāgatha's story were many but several of the most eminent nineteenth-century interpreters in India cast their ballots not as popularizers or devotees but as critical scholars. According to Tapati Guha-Thakurta, there was a fine line between the *pandits,* on the one hand, and the epigraphists and draftsmen, on the other. While the former "embodied the traditional fund of learning that British orientalists had drawn on since the eighteenth century, the other embodied a small slice of the new training and employment that the colonial government generated."[107] Both were necessary, she argues, for the surveying work the government pursued, but between them, there was the need "for a group of *modernized pandits* suited to the new requirements of the time."[108] The metaphysical transition from pandit to scholar, she argues, was based on a variety of idealized traits: of rationality and accuracy, of critical judgment and objectivity. To be more than just a 'native informant,' the Indian pandit had to make "the crucial passage from prejudice to reason, from tradition to modernity."[109] Those that successfully made that transition were awarded with the trappings of royal titles like "Rāja," "Commander of the Indian Empire (C.I.E.)," "Śāstrī" ("Learned One"), "Mahāmahopādhyāya" ("Greatest of

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[106] See, for instance, the description given by Dharmanand Kosambi of he and Dharmapala's failed attempt in 1904 to teach a group of locals at Sarnath that the stupa there had been built by King Aśoka and was not an "oil-presser's mill." After many attempts, Kosambi concludes, "I think it did not have the effect that was hoped for." See, Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 161 – 62. Dharmapala's diaries contain many similar stories.
[107] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 89.
[108] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 89. Italics mine.
[109] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 96.

Teachers") and while most had no real political power, their influence on socio-cultural norms and government projects should not be underestimated. In this last section, we take brief snapshots of four of the most important Indian scholars of the nineteenth century in order to better understand the socio-intellectual world of elite Indian scholarship on Buddhism.

3.5 Archaeology and historiography: Rajendralal Mitra and the relics of the past

One of the first Indians to make the transition from pandit to scholar was the Bengali polymath, Rajendralal Mitra (1824 – 91). Mitra, who this chapter opened with, has been rightly described as being a "a story of firsts": the first Indian to be held responsible to edit and publish Sanskrit texts in the *Bibliotheca Indica* series; first to be appointed by the government to direct an archaeological survey, the first Indian director of Calcutta's Wards institution, a founding member of the British Indian Association, and a founding-editor of two Bengali monthlies.[110] Born in 1824 to a distinguished family of scribes (*kāyastha*) previously employed by the Mughals, Mitra was groomed at an early age to become a doctor or a lawyer. After failing to complete his medical and law courses, he took to intensive language study in 1842. A gifted linguist, Mitra's mastery over more than ten classical and vernacular languages of South Asia and Europe led to his first position with the Asiatic Society four years later.[111] When in 1885, he was elected President of the Asiatic Society, he became the first non-European to hold that office. His election was a milestone and *cause célèbre*, for although he continued to be the object of several racist diatribes masquerading as scholarly critiques, his position meant that a colonial subject, a 'brown babu,' now headed one of the most illustrious scholarly organizations in the Empire, one whose members were predominantly white.

Mitra's reputation hinged on his staunch empiricism, mastery of critical western methodologies and unsurpassed knowledge of Sanskrit Buddhist literature. In publications like *Antiquities of Orissa* (2 vols., 1875 – 1880), *Buddha Gaya: the Hermitage of Śákya Muni* (1878) and the multi-volume *Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal* (1882), Mitra

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[110] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 86, and 86 – 88.
[111] These included, Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, French, German, English, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, and Oriya.

demonstrated a profound ability to connect material remains with the literary record. More than just a scholar of Buddhism, Mitra was an educator who felt that it was his duty to recover and popularize a Buddhist past whose elusive meanings had been defiled by wrongful negligence and slander. To prevent Buddhism's further disappearance, he amassed a huge collection—at private and government expense—of rare Buddhist manuscripts and antiquities, adamant that these "relics of the past, weeping over a lost civilization and an extinguished grandeur" required urgent need for protection and public visibility.[112] It was here, as the collector and historian, not as the *upāsaka* or lay devotee, that Mitra's passion for studying and popularizing Buddhism lay.

In 1877, when Mitra was sent to Bodh Gaya to inspect the ongoing excavations around the MahaBodhi Temple, he witnessed firsthand the effects of time and what he understood to be well-intentioned but misdirected efforts among the religiously devout. The previous year the Government of India had begrudgingly granted permission to the Burmese King to repair the temple complex. The relations with the Burmese were increasingly sensitive, having fought two major wars with them in the past five decades and being just years away from the third in 1885, in which the entire kingdom would be annexed as a further province of British India. The Burmese King's emissaries arrived in January but by mid-year, the government had received reports that the Burmese repairs were at odds with the types of conservation ideologies implicit in the ASI. Mitra, having already successfully led an archaeological expedition under government support in Orissa was dispatched there with explicit instructions to tread carefully and only interfere if their work risked any "serious injury being done to the temple."[113] When the Burmese began rebuilding old sculptures and inserting new ones into the niches on the outer wall of the temple, Mitra penned a message to Calcutta stating that while the Burmese were working "energetically and piously," they had no "systematic and traditional plan." The Burmese, he continued, were "ignorant of the true history of their faith and perfectly innocent of archaeology and history, and the mischief they had done by their misdirected zeal has been serious…nothing

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[112] Rajendralal Mitra *The Antiquities of Orissa,* Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Government of India, 1875), i. Proof of Mitra's concern for preserving the past is found in a descriptive catalogue of manuscripts at the Asiatic Society, where it states that of the 11,264 Sanskrit manuscripts in the possession of the library, 3,156 were acquired by Mitra! See Shastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue,* iii.

[113] Letter from Sir Stuart Bayley, Sec. to the Government of Bengal to Mitra, quoted in Rajendrala Mitra, *Buddha Gaya: the Hermitage of Sakya Muni* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1878), iii.

of ancient times can now be traced on the area they have worked upon."[114] In Mitra's study of the temple, he describes the "demolished" antiquities with a tragic sense of loss and mourning, their memories forever lost to posterity. Yet as Alex Trevithick has pointed out, what for Mitra was a matter of loss was to the Burmese a matter of gain, an issue that cuts straight to the heart of contemporary debates about Buddhist antiquities as a historical, abstract reconstruction whose timelessness must be preserved or as part of a living religious tradition in constant adaptation to the present moment. [115] While for Mitra, the right to manage religious sites was the sole prerogative of modern scholars, not of the zealous devotee, he laid the ultimate blame for Bodh Gaya's decay elsewhere.

Mitra's studies of material remains and Indic literary traditions had led him to the conclusion that Brahmins were to blame. Buddha's life, he pointed out, had been misrepresented. "Detesting with all the warmth of sectarian hatred a pervert who had forsaken their ancestorial [sic] religion and proved the most successful opponent, the ancient Hindus…never took the trouble to record the history of Buddha."[116] At Bodh Gaya, "the temple stood there deserted, forsaken, and dilapidated, and they appropriated it to their own use by giving it and its presiding image new names."[117] The Brahmanical bias towards Buddha, he contended, extended far beyond Bodh Gaya and the early tradition. After completing his extensive study of Buddhist remains in Orissa, he concluded, "it is impossible to suppose that they [the Brahmins] knew nothing of the ascendancy of Buddhism." Brahmanical silences about Buddhism were not evidence of its non-existence or minimal influence, as some of his colleagues claimed, but deliberate distortions, crafted to suit their socio-political needs. "The omission," he concluded, "can be attributed solely to religious hatred. They would do anything to avoid naming the Jains and the Buddhists; as the old adage has it 'they would rather be eaten up by tigers than seek shelter in a Jaina temple.' "[118]

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[114] Mitra, *Buddha Gaya,* 66.
[115] Alan Trevithick, "British Archaeologists, Hindu Abbots and Burmese Buddhists: The MahaBodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, 1811-1877," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 33/3 (1999): 635 – 56. This debate is fresh with resonance for the present-day debates between local stakeholders and conservation organizations across Asia (and beyond) at places like Alchi (Ladakh) and Dunhuang (Gansu).
[116] "Ancient Hindus" in this context is clearly meant as Brahmins. See, Mitra, *Buddha Gaya,* 230 and Mitra *Lalita Vistara*, 2.
[117] Mitra, *Buddha Gaya,* 61.
[118] Mitra, *The Antiquities of Orissa,* Vol. 2 (Calcutta: Government of India, 1880), 104. For his comments on Hindu silences regarding Bodh Gaya, see Mitra, *Buddha Gaya,* 12 – 17. Other scholars of Buddhism, both

While the history of Brahmanical antagonism would be repeatedly invoked by Buddhists and their supporters in the coming decades as they attempted to strip the Mahant of his ownership of the MahaBodhi temple, Mitra's criticism of Brahmins wrongly pegged him as a (sarcastically worded) 'enlightened' Anglophile. This too, as his publications evince, was a distortion.

A series of Mitra's writings produced in the late 1870s make clear that he felt some contemporary European scholars to be no less manipulative than the ancient Brahmins in their portrayal of the Indian past. The debate turned sour in 1880 when Mitra and the eminent art historian, James Ferguson went head to head in an ugly exchange. Yet, as Upinder Singh shows, the pot had been simmering for years. Both were legitimate scholars with vastly different interpretations: for Ferguson, the excess of decoration in Indian architecture was a sure sign of its "decadence"; for Mitra, the extensive ornamentation in temple architecture established its "grandeur."[119] Yet when Mitra charged Ferguson with ignoring the evidence of stone architecture in India in order to make the Buddhist motifs at Amarāvatī appear as if they were under 'Classical' Greco-Roman rather than 'Native' influences, the conversation turned nasty. After two anonymous harshly worded reviews of Mitra's work appeared in the *Indian Antiquary* in 1880, Ferguson formally replied in a politically and racially infused diatribe entitled *Archaeology in India with Especial Reference to the Works of Babu Rajendralal Mitra* (1884).[120] In the course of 141 pages, Ferguson not only attacked Mitra's (unfortunate) iconographic blunders, but in a heavily patronizing tone, accused Mitra of being an "uneducated" Indian incapable of assimilating the "great truths of scientific knowledge":

> Is it that the Babu's eye is so uneducated, that he cannot perceive the obvious distinction between Classical and Native art in India? Or is it that he is so satisfied by his own superficial knowledge, that he has not cared to follow the recent developments of Indian archaeology, and cannot consequently state them with intelligible clearness?[121]

Indian and European, often shared Mitra's assessment. On Cunningham, see Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* 39 – 40. For Indraji and Bühler, see Dharamsey, *Bhagwanlal Indraji,* chapter four.

[119] Singh, *Discovery of Ancient India,* xiv – xv.

[120] See *Indian Antiquary,* Vol. 9 (1880), 113 – 16 and 142 – 44.

[121] James Ferguson, *Archaeology in India, with especial reference to Babu Rajendralala Mitra* (London: Trübner and Co., 1884), 5, 99.

For Ferguson, a former resident of India, the real issue at stake was more than whether or not early Buddhist art had 'classical' (European) or 'native' (Indian) origins. Rather, the question was whether Indians were even capable of assessing such a thing. "The real interest in these days of discussions of Ilbert Bills, [is] in the question of whether the natives of India are to be treated as equal to Europeans in all respects."[122] The Ilbert Bill threatened to subject British residents of India to the jurisdiction of senior Indian judges and as Ferguson made clear, if Mitra—"a typical specimen of one of the proposed class of governors [judges]"—could not interpret history "objectively," how could they be fit to judge Europeans?[123] While such attitudes were by no means typical of all Indian-European scholarly interactions, the case demonstrates the way that even seemingly abstract or trivial matters regarding the dating of an ancient Buddhist sculpture were tied to the existing politics of the period. Scholarship motivated by geopolitical issues, as is seen in the next section, was impacting the study of Buddhism elsewhere as well.

3.6 Authenticity and geopolitics: Sarat Chandra Das and the study of Tibet

Beginning in the 1880s, students of Northern Buddhism increasingly encountered the name of Sarat Chandra Das (1849 – 1917). Popular newspapers and scholarly journals from India and abroad, including the *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain*, *Open Court* and *The Academy*, loved telling the story of the Bengali explorer-scholar, who disguised as a pilgrim, braved icy rivers and Himalayan passes to make it to the holy city of Lhasa.[124] He had gone to Tibet, first in 1879 and again in 1881, to study Buddhism and explore the Land of Snows. There he met the Panchen Lama, studied Tibetan scriptures and returned to his Darjeeling home (aptly named Lhasa Villa) with approximately two hundred hitherto little-known Tibetan manuscripts. Raised in the port city of Chittagong, Das left to study for a degree in civil engineering at Calcutta University in the early 1870s. Yet after falling ill with malaria—he never finished his studies—he was offered

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[122] Ferguson, *Archaeology in India*, vi.
[123] Ferguson, *Archaeology in India,* 4.
[124] See, for instance, "A Journey to the Capital of Tibet," *Contemporary Review* (July 1890); *Open Court,* Vol. 10/ (1896), *The Academy: a weekly review of Literature, Science and Art* (London), July 27, 1895, 75 – 76; "The Talent of the Natives of India*," Asiatic Quarterly Review* (January 1893), reproduced in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 2/7 (1893 – 94), 8.

a position by (later Sir) Alfred Croft, the then Inspector of Schools in Bengal to head a newly established boarding school for Bhutias, or Tibetanized hill peoples in Darjeeling.

Known as the "Queen of the Hill Stations," Darjeeling was perched on a steep ridge in the southeastern Himalayas rising nearly seven thousand feet above the Bengal plains. For the British, Darjeeling had become a popular "sanatorium" to escape the disease and heat of the plains. Ostensibly, this is why Croft had offered the job to Das. Yet the nature of the Bhutia Boarding School he was to head was unusual, as reflected in a classified letter Croft wrote to the government in Simla: "the school is to train up interpreters, geographers and explorers, who may be useful if at any future time Tibet is opened to the British."[125] Since at least the 1840s, the government had begun making efforts "to train intelligent natives of the border…in the use of instruments by which they might fix the position of the chief cities, the courses of the great rivers and mountains" of nearby lands.[126] Concerns about Russian activities in Central Asia, the 1857 uprising in northern India and the ever-present interest in creating an overland market to China via Tibet had increased government expenditures for trainings in and along the northern borders with Tibet and the Himalayas. By the time the Bhutia Boarding School opened in 1874, at least nine pandits, mostly from *pahāṛī* (mountain) Hindu families in the northwestern Himalaya (Kumaon), had already been sent to various parts of the Tibetan plateau where months and sometimes years later they returned with reports of rugged landscapes and urban oases rich in resources but fraught with serious danger.[127]

The location of the new school, then, was apt. Located just six miles from the princely Buddhist kingdom of Sikkim and eleven miles from the border with Nepal, it was surrounded by an extraordinary mixture of polyglot peoples and diverse cultures—"an unusual contradictory, motley show," as the Italian scholar Giuseppe Tucci put it.[128]

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[125] Quoted in Derek Waller, *The Pundits: British Exploration of Tibet and Central Asia* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 193. According to Waller, the school was not very successful in its mission as only a few of the boys took up surveying with Ugyen Gyatso and his brother-in-law Rinzin Namygal becoming its most successful associates. On Rinzin Namgyal, see P.L. Madan, *Tibet: Saga of Indian Explorers* (1864 – 1894) (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 71 – 73 and 131 – 32.

[126] Letter No. 38/247, 8 May 1862, from Major J.T. Walker, Superintedent, Survey of India, to the Secretary of the Government of India, Military Department, quoted in Madan *Tibet: Saga of Indian Explorers*, 13.

[127] See Waller, *The Pundits* and Madan, *Tibet: Saga of Indian Explorers*, for a discussion of these missions and the wider geopolitical context.

[128] Quoted in H. Louis Fader, *Called from Obscurity: the life and times of a true son of Tibet, God's humble servant from Poo, Gergan Dorje Tharchin: with particular attention given to his good friend and illustrious co-*

Although the demographics of the region were quickly shifting, the small population of Buddhists left a decisive imprint on the landscape.[129] Between the four major towns of Ghoom, Kurseong, Darjeeling and Kalimpong, there were several thousand Nyingma (*rNying ma*) and Drukpa Kagyu (*'brug pa bka' brgyud*) Buddhists along with several imposing monasteries (*dgon pa*).[130] These religious estates and their leaders (*bla ma*) were linked to other monastic institutions and patrons across the trans-Himalayan and inner Asian world via networks of learning and trade crafted over the centuries.

When Das arrived at the school in April 1874, he immediately began studying Tibetan with Lama Sherab Gyatso (*sog pa shes rab rgya mtsho*), the Mongolian head of Yiga Choling monastery (est. 1850).[131] During the first two years of work, Das spent much of his time recruiting local students, studying Tibetan, and exploring the local hills with one of the other schoolteachers, Ugyen Gyatso (*orgyan rgya mtsho*). In addition to being a fine scholar, Ugyen Gyatso was a veteran surveyor, having provided intelligence to the British for over a decade.[132] The two appear to have developed a good relationship, Ugyen Gyatso "the harassed and hard-working surveyor" and Das "the light-hearted observer," as one colleague put it.[133] Nearly all accounts of their journeys to Sikkim and Tibet make evident that Ugyen Gyatso did the leg work, acquiring the necessary documentation from Tibetan officials, even carrying Das on his back at times over mountain passes, but Das' skills as a linguist, lexicographer, ethnographer and importantly, English-speaking babu brought him the fame.

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laborer in the Gospel Sadhu Sundar Singh of India; *with a foreword by His Holiness Dalai Lama XIV of Tibet and an introduction by Dawa Norbu* (Kalimpong: Tibet Mirror Press, 2004), 262.

[129] The greatest demographic shift was from Nepali laborers recruited to work on the lucrative tea plantations. The town had a very large English population as well. According to the District Gazetteer, the population rose from 10,000 in 1857 to a seasonal population in 1901 between nearly 17,000 (cold weather) and 24,000 (in September). See L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907), 39.

[130] The 1901 *District Gazetteer: Darjeeling* describes four classes of Bhutia Buddhists in Darjeeling district—1550 Sikkimese Bhutias at Darjeeling, 3450 Sherpa Bhutias in the western end of the district, 2350 Drukpa Bhutias in Kalimpong, and 1700 Tibetan Bhutias found throughout (O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers,* 45 – 46.)

[131] In addition to founding the gompa (*yid dga' chos gling*), Lama Sherab was a highly regarded scholar of Tibetan language, who trained many students whose names were later attained fame. These included several Christian missionaries, the Japanese monk-explorer Ekai Kawaguchi, the Dutch linguist M.A.J. van Malen, the Police-Inspector Sonam Wangfel Ladenla and Calcutta University Professor, Karma Sumdhon Paul.

[132] See Lt Col. G. Strahan, *Report of the Explorations of Lama Serap Gyatso, 1856 – 68 in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet,* published under the direction of Col. H.R. Thuillier, Surveyor General of India (Dehra Dun: Survey of India, 1889), 3 – 7. For a brief synopsis of Gyatso's life, see Waller, *The Pundits,* 208 – 13.

[133] Thomas Hungerford Holdich, *Tibet: the mysterious* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1906), 250.

After playing a critical diplomatic role in the 1885 British mission to Peking, Colman Macaulay even penned a poem about:

> Sarat Chandra [Das], hardy son,
> Of soft Bengal, whose wondrous store
> Of Buddhist and Tibetan lore
> A place in fame's bright page has won,
> Friend of the Tashu [Panchen] Lama's line,
> Whose eyes have seen, the gleaming shrine
> Of holy Lhassa, came to show
> The wonders of the land of snow.[134]

Das' "wondrous store of Buddhist and Tibetan lore" was indeed valuable. Even two decades after his last journey to Tibet, Das continued to hold fictitious, but salaried appointments for the government. His more than a decade of work on the superb *Tibetan – English Dictionary with Sanskrit Synonyms*, published by the Governmental of Bengal in 1902, had cost the government more than forty thousand rupees.[135] The expenses were justified, Viceroy Curzon wrote in a secret letter to His Majesty's Secretary of State in London, because the "employment was semi-political…[Das'] special knowledge will continue to be available to the local authorities, who are at present entrusted with the duty of collecting intelligence about Tibetan politics and affairs."[136]

Yet while the government effectively bankrolled Das' studies of Tibetan Buddhism and his Buddhist Text Society (1892 – 1907), it was his wonderful storytelling and astute analysis that energized the budding Buddhist interests of the Indian elite. With the completion of the Darjeeling railway in 1881, transforming the previously week long three-hundred mile journey to Calcutta into a two-day affair, Das began regularly visiting Calcutta at the invitation of prominent societies and institutes. At the Indian Museum, Asiatic Society, Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science and Bengal Students' Association, he enchanted audiences with tales of "High Priests" from the "Holy City" and lucid

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[134] Hon'ble Colman Macaulay, "A Lay of Lachen," in Das, *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow,* Appendix I, iii. Many scholars have contended that Das was the inspiration for the Indian spy in Kipling's *Kim* (see Waller, *The Pandits,* 193).

[135] This figure is calculated by adding the annual salaries from each year listed in, Government of India, Foreign Department: Secret-External; August 1901, Nos. 31-33, National Archives of India.

[136] Letter to Right Hon'ble Lord George F. Hamilton, His Majesty's Secretary of State, 25th July 1901, signed by Curzon, AP Palmer, CM Rivaz, T Raleigh, E FG Law ER Elles, and AT Arundel. Government of India, Foreign Department: Secret-External; August 1901, Nos 31-33.

explanations of "BodhiDharma" and "the doctrine of transmigration."[137] His exploits, like most adventurers tales, were nearly mythic: the Tibetan companions who guided him over mountain passes are mostly absent, except when they intervened like true bodhisattvas during perilous moments when his life was in danger.[138] The memoirs may have added a dash of spice but his analysis of Buddhist doctrines and practices were methodical and incisive, indispensable to scholars as late as the 1960s.[139] They opened the door to the Indian public for a more comprehensive understanding of the past and one in which Buddhism was seen as playing a largely positive role in connecting India with the rest of Asia. In his *Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet* (1902), he explained how he was "transported with joy" when he discovered Sanskrit texts written in Tibetan script inside Shigatse's Tashilunpo monastery.[140] At public lectures, he described dozens of ancient Indian pandits who one millennium before spread "Indo-Aryan culture," "Buddhist propaganda" and "civilization" to Tibet, China and beyond.[141] Through Das' influence, the Bengali and English speaking public in India was converted to the idea that Tibetans had retained the essence of this ancient Indian dharma with perfect clarity and utmost reverence. Now, after so many centuries of separation, Indians like him were recovering the words (*vacana*) of Buddha and bringing them home.

Das's emphasis on Tibetan sources and in particular, his argument that Tibetan Buddhism was the most faithful replication of late Indian Buddhist developments left a strong imprint in the scholarly and popular world. According to Janice Leoshko, Das accepted the Tibetan view that its traditions had an unbroken connection to Indian precedents, without questioning how this lent greater authority to those Tibetan practices

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[137] Several of Das' writings and lectures were edited by his brother, Nobin Chandra Das and published as *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1893).

[138] It was probably not until the early 1900s when Das would have learned of the severe punishments, including execution, that some of his Tibetan hosts had to pay for assisting him, an agent of the British state. For a valuable overview into the larger geo-political concerns and repercussions of Das's visits to Tibet, see Alex McKay, "The Drowning of Lama Sengchen Kyabying: a preliminary enquiry from British sources," in *Tibet Past and Present: Tibetan Studies I: the proceedings of the 9th international seminar for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000,* edited by Henk Blezer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 263 – 80.

[139] See Alex Wayman's review of the reprint of Das' *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow* in the *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 25/4 (1966), 778. The general public had to wait until the early 1900s for Das' complete memoirs to be cleared by British authorities—the contents revealing too much of its clandestine support (see Waller, *The Pandits,* 293fn40).

[140] Sarat Chandra Das, *Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet,* edited by William Woodville Rockhill, second edition, revised (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1902), 112.

[141] See, in particular, Das, *Indian Pandits,* 45 – 50.

themselves.[142] In other words, Tibetan traditions (like most Buddhist traditions across Asia) carried greater capital if they were derivative of 'original' Indian ones and were not simply innovations. Although Das was not the first scholar to argue that in the absence of Indian sources, Tibetan Buddhist texts and art forms could be used to understand to developments in Indian Buddhist history, it gained greater specificity at this time, leading to the popular paradigm in which Tibetan lamas became the "jealous custodians of Indian Buddhist lore, tradition and practices."[143] What is of especial interest however is the way in which this demonstrates that modern conceptions of Buddhism proceeded according to forms of knowledge and authority that had in fact a much longer pre-colonial history. Das' assimilation of his Tibetan teachers' millennia-old theories and then subsequent dissemination of this as a discrete, form of modern knowledge illustrates not just the complexities of modernity but also "intercultural mimesis," or occasions where a "subjectified" people influence a scholar to represent their culture in a certain manner.[144]

Das' privileging of Tibetan sources and the government support he was able to furnish for it was an extraordinary intervention considering it came in an era in which scholars of Buddhism, weary of Sanskrit sources, were moving towards a "Pali-text Society mentality," to use Stanley Tambiah's expression.[145] While Das did not discourage Pali language studies—one of his most accomplished students (and another secret agent), Satish Chandra Vidyabhusan became an influential Pali scholar—the wholesale support he gave to Tibetan literature changed the way scholars thought about Indian history.[146] It is unlikely he could have accomplished such a feat without the government's support, which rest heavily on geopolitical strategies. In the short term, this led to critical institutional support from Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University (and a High Court

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[142] Janice Leoshko, *Sacred Traces: British Exploration of Buddhism in South Asia* (Hants: Ashgate, 2003), 110 – 15.
[143] Leoshko, *Sacred Traces,* 106. This concept had (and continues to have) a huge influence in both the popular and academic study of Buddhism in North America (c.f. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La,* especially 156 – 80).
[144] Hallisey, "Roads taken and not taken," 33 and 31 – 62, for his own applied model of "intercultural mimesis" in south and southeast Asia.
[145] Stanley Tambiah, quoted in Hallisey, "Roads taken and not taken," 34.
[146] Satish Chandra began working for the Foreign Department's intelligence services in the early 1900s, providing critical information on Burmese, Tibetan and Siamese visitors to the subcontinent. See, Government of India, Foreign Department: Secret—E. October 1902, nos. 88-94 and Government of India, Foreign Department: External – B, February 1906, File no. 116/117, National Archives of India.

Magistrate).[147] In the long term, it led later Indian explorer-scholars like Rahul Sankrityayan to Tibet, where he discovered even larger collections of Sanskrit manuscripts inside Tibetan monasteries.[148] In other veins, Das attempted to intervene in what he saw as the public's romantic and ultimately misguided beliefs about early Buddhism. He argued against the popular idea that Buddha was a social reformer and opponent of caste as well criticizing the idea that gender equality existed in the early sangha.[149]

3.7 Identifying the crypto-Buddhists: The "Ocean of Oriental Scholarship" and the Census Commission

During the decennial census of 1901, Sir Herbert Hope Risley (1851 – 1911), the newly appointed Census Commissioner and as noted above, former President (1897 – 99) of Das' (renamed) Buddhist Text and Anthropological Society, sent local magistrates in Bengal a printed circular. The memo contained explicit instructions to find evidence of Buddhist practice in the province, along with an outline of *The Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal* (1897), a recent text published by the Calcutta University Professor and Mahāmahopādhyāya ("Greatest of Teachers") Haraprasad Shastri (1861 – 1930).[150] As a frequent consultant for government offices, including the Calcutta High Court, Bureau of Information and Political Office of the Foreign Department, Haraprasad's innovative views on Indian history rarely went unnoticed. A former student of Rajendralal Mitra's and in the government's eyes, a "good man" felt to be far "too rare," Haraprasad was well-liked by

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[147] See, the report from Mookerjee on his institutionalization of Tibetan studies, reprinted in *MahaBodhi,* Vol. 19/4 (1911), 107 – 10. This in many ways parallels the US Department of Defense creation of area studies and languages programs in post World War II where even in spite of overt political interests, it is clear that these programs can still lead to innovative studies and institution-building.

[148] Sankrityayan's search for Sanskrit manuscripts in Tibet is discussed in chapter eight.

[149] Sarat Chandra Das, "Report on the proceedings of the second quarterly meeting," *Journal of the Buddhist Text Society of India,* Vol. 2/2 (1894). Das argued that the Buddha's only prescriptions against caste were for members of the *sangha,* who for practical reasons (i.e., begging for food) had to disregard these distinctions. For a caustic critique of Das's position on women in early Buddhism, see Dharmapala, "The Place of Women in the Buddhist Church," *MahaBodhi,* Vol. 16/2 (1908), 32 – 35.

[150] Haraprasad Shastri, *Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal* (Calcutta: Hare Press, 1897). After earning back-to-back degrees in Sanskrit from Calcutta University—the title *Shastri* was acquired after completing his Masters—in 1883, he was appointed teacher of *alankara* and *vyakarana* (Sanskrit rhetoric and grammar) at Sanskrit College. In 1895, he became Professor of Sanskrit at Presidency College. In 1900, he moved back to Sanskrit College as principal, where he remained until 1908. The title "Mahāmahopādhyāya" was conferred by the government in 1898.

authorities and had friends in high posts.[151] News of his latest 'discovery' had begun several years earlier when he published three exploratory essays for the *Asiatic Society of Bengal*, noting how certain religious practices, symbols and imagery surrounding a popular Bengali folk deity named *Dharmarāj* resembled Buddhist rites he had witnessed in Nepal and read about in medieval manuscripts.[152] By 1897, he reported more confidently:

> It is said that the expulsion of [Indian] Buddhism was complete but can this ever be a fact that the religion which counted its votaries by the million should altogether disappear from the soil of its birth and the scenes of its greatest power and influence? One is not disposed to believe such a thing…With the materials obtained up to this time, I humbly believe a case has been made out for considering the worshippers of Dharma[rāj] to be the ancient Buddhists of India. If further investigation confirms my views, a very large proportion of the population of Bengal will have to be taken out from the list of Hindus and put down under the head of Buddhists. The Census of India will have to be considerably modified and the theory that Buddhism has been swept away from the soil of India will have to be given up...*with a little care a census of the followers of Dharma[rāj] may be taken. The population will be considerable, nay, several millions.*[153]

Despite his claims to the contrary, the call to re-classify the "several millions" of Dharmāj followers as Buddhists was hardly a "humble" gesture. Yet, even after the 1901 Census ethnographers returned from the field with no evidence of that which "savour[s] strongly of Buddhism," the search continued.[154] In 1911, Census officials, on the basis of further evidence produced by one of Haraprasad's colleagues, re-classified a population of approximately twenty-five hundred *Saraks* (weavers) living in the Cuttack hills of Orissa as Buddhist. The Saraks*,* the Census reported, worship a deity named *śūnyatā* (Emptiness)*,* erect "pseudo-caityas," and meet once a year during the Buddhist festival Vesak in the cave

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[151] "Too rare" is from JWPMM, 26-7-1892, Government of India, Diary No. 227, Government of India, Home Department: Books and Publications, September 1892, Part B. 87 – 90, National Archives of India. "Good man" is from Carlyle, Foreign Department: External – B. April 1906, No. 1- 4, National Archives of India. These two documents reveal the pivotal role Haraprasad played in several government events. For instance, from 1902 – 03, Haraprasad was sought out by Curzon to serve as a "legal authority" in the MahaBodhi temple proceedings. Before being awarded the Commander of the Indian Empire (C.I.E.) in 1911, he was supplied with free copies of any works on archaeology, history and antiquities published under the authority of the Government of India.

[152] These essays were Haraprasad Shastri, "Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal," *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 1/2 (1894): 135 – 38; "Buddhism in Bengal since the Muhammadan conquest," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 64 (1895): 65 – 68; "Sri Dharmamangala: a distant echo of the *Lalita Vistara*," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 64 (1895): 55 – 64.

[153] Shastri, *Discovery of Living Buddhism,* 4, 62, 65.

[154] Reports on Buddhism in Bengal, 1901 – 02, Risley Collection, India Office Records, quoted in Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 275.

temples of Khandagiri to worship a deity called Buddhadev or Caturbhuja.[155]

The driving force behind this latest ethnographic 'discovery' of Buddhism was the Oriya polymath, Pandit Nagendranath Vasu (1866 – 1938).[156] This "Ocean of Oriental Wisdom" (*Prāchyavidyāmahārnava*) possessed a powerful presence among the colonial elite, revered as much for his compilation of the first Bengali and Hindi encyclopedias (*viśvakoś*) as for his novels, plays and scholarly works. Beginning in the late 1890s, Vasu took great interest in the Dharmarāj cult, expanding knowledge of the folk deity's worship through Orissa, particularly the area around Cuttack and the princely state of Mayurabhanj, where he spent several seasons overseeing the archaeological excavations with the support of the local Hindu Rāja. The two critical works he produced from these researches, *The archaeological survey of Mayurbhanja* (1911) and *The modern Buddhism and its followers in Orissa* (1911), were landmarks in the study of Indian Buddhism. Both are complex and ambitious histories but like Haraprasad's *Discovery*, they brought the historian's analysis to the contemporary ethnographic scene, making provocative and often speculative claims about Buddhism in the present-day landscape.

The precise details of both Vasu's and Haraprasad's arguments about pseudo-Buddhist practices they observed in contemporary India is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, three shared features of their argument are especially noteworthy for they were symptomatic of the wider context in which Indians scholars understood Buddhism's 'end days.' First, the "crypto-Buddhists" (as Vasu termed them) that both he and Haraprasad identified were always of lower-caste origins, having been cast out by orthodox Brahmanical leaders for their historical dissent. As Haraprasad noted, the Dharmarāj worshippers "rarely if ever, accept the ministration of Bráhmanas," yet like the early Buddhists, the "priests of Dharma[rāj]…never oppose Bráhmanas worshipping their deity. The Bráhmana can any time enter a Dharma[rāj] temple."[157] Similarly, Vasu's crypto-Buddhists or devotees of Mahima Dharma were tribals (*ādivāsī*) and śūdras found scattered throughout the Cuttack hills of

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[155] Only the Saraks of Cuttack were classified as Buddhist while those who lived in Bengal and Chutia Nagpur were considered a "Hinduized" form of Jains. See, H.H. Risley, *The People of India*, edited by William Crooke (Thacker, Spink & Co., 1915), 79.
[156] His accomplishments have been well documented in *Pandit Nagendranath Vasu: a sketch of his life and works* [no author] (Calcutta: Kumudini Kanta Ganguli, 1916).
[157] Shastri, *Discovery of Living Buddhism,* 20, 45.

Orissa that had been forced to flee there after persecutions in the sixteenth century.[158] Second, the liturgies of the crypto-Buddhists were composed in 'impure' and 'common' vernaculars like Bihari, Hindi, Bengali and Oriya, unrefined linguistic registers which no 'self-respecting' Brahmin would allow, since "the formula of meditation among the Hindus is given always and without exception in Sanskrit."[159] Third, the central worldviews inscribed in the Mahima Dharma and Dharmarāj scriptures held more in common with Buddhist than Hindu doctrines. Both groups, for instance, believe "that the world sprang from non-existence" and phrased their discussions of the Absolute in terms of śūnyatā (emptiness) and *saddharma* (the 'True Dharma'), common expressions found in Buddhist texts.[160]

The idea that Buddhist identities had withered away through a centuries-old process of 'Hinduization' was nothing new. Mitra had pointed to the Hindu assimilation of Buddhist sites in Orissa and Bihar and numerous other scholars since then have pointed—sometimes wrongly, sometimes correctly—to stupas converted into śivaliṅgaṃs, or to Buddhist images being worshipped as Hindu deities. At the time that Haraprasad and Vasu devised their own theories regarding the crypto-Buddhists, these ideas were even more popular, often being whipped into a public frenzy by the very noisy accusations being leveled by the MahaBodhi Society against the Śaiva Mahant's control of the MahaBodhi Temple. The difference between these claims and those of Haraprasad's and Vasu's, however, was that the former rarely involved living people. For instance, when a Śaiva priest poured the five holy fluids (*panchamṛt abhiṣek)* over a small caitya, effectively transforming it into a śivaliṅgaṃ*,* the colonial scholar did not say that the priest was actually a Buddhist unknowingly behaving like a Hindu, but rather that the object of the priest's adoration was 'originally' Buddhist. Likewise, when the Giri Mahant at Bodh Gaya drew a *tilak* across the forehead of the Buddha image at the MahaBodhi Temple, scholars rarely suggested that this made him a Buddhist, only that he was (mis)treating a Buddhist image as a Hindu one. The criticism was

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[158] Nagendranath Vasu, *The Modern Buddhism and its followers in Orissa,* cii – civ.
[159] Shastri, *Discovery of Living Buddhism,* 28. Compare with Vasu, *The Modern Buddhism*, cclx.
[160] Shastri, *Discovery of Living Buddhism,* 54. Vasu, *The Modern Buddhism,* cci – ccv and ccxxxvi. A fourth criteria, based on ethnographic evidence, could also be applied, however, the precise details differed in this case. Where Haraprasad saw iconographic and ritual similarities between Newari Buddhist ritual imagery with the Dharmarāja shrine in Jān bazar in Calcutta, Vasu drew his conclusions based on the annual gathering of Saraks at the Khandagiri caves during the Buddha purnima (Vasu, *The Modern Buddhism*, ccxxxviii – ccxxix).

no less severe but the difference is important. For just as in Mitra's criteria of the modern scholar understanding the history of the tradition better than the Burmese Buddhist herself, the consensus was clear: only the scholar with 'modern credentials' could define who or what a Buddhist is or was.

Despite the fact that Haraprasad's informants explained that Dharmarāj "is either a form of Visnu or a form of Çiva," he made it clear they were misled, for "in their books he [Dharmarāj] is much above them. He is the Supreme Deity."[161] Vasu was no less bold. When a group of lower-caste Mahima devotees attempted to enter the Jagganath Temple in Puri in 1881, leading to a riot and the burning of the Jagganath idol, Vasu argued that the movement was orchestrated by the blind poet Bhima Bhoi (1850 – 96), who in proclaiming himself as Buddha incarnate, was hoping to reclaim the (supposedly) Buddhist image inside the temple and re-create a casteless society inspired by Buddhist texts.[162] The 1881 riots are still poorly understood but all accounts agree that several people were arrested, at least one person died and the celebrated Jagganath image was dragged outside the temple and burned.[163] Conflicting accounts of the event were widely reported in newspapers and magazines and the once little known Mahima Dharma group sprang into the public spotlight. This, of course, would have strengthened the interest in Vasu's interpretation of the events since he was one of the few scholars who possessed and could read their medieval liturgies and scriptures. In the end, when the Jagganath riot was investigated in court, Vasu's account of the group's origins and beliefs was authoritative.[164] Thus, we are presented again with a situation in which the 'modern' scholar's expertise is privileged above and beyond that of the practitioner or informant.

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[161] Shastri, *Discovery of Living Buddhism,* 21 – 22.
[162] On Bhima Bhoi (1850 – 95), see Ishita Banerjee-Dube, *Religion, Law and Power: Tales of Time in Eastern India, 1860 – 2000* (London: Anthem Press, 2009), 69 – 116.
[163] See Vasu, *The Modern Buddhism,* ccxlvi – ccl. Central to this discourse was the larger and still enduring theory about the Jagganath temple's possible Buddhist origins, which began with Cunningham in the 1850s. Cunningham's argument has been long-accepted by the most eminent scholars of South Asia including, Rajendralal Mitra, James Ferguson, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and many, many more. Bhima Bhoi's journey to the temple, in Vasu's argument, hinges on his understanding that the Jagganath image is actually that of Buddha. For a critical review of the "Buddhist theory," see, O.M. Starza, *The Jagannatha Temple at Puri: its architecture, art, and cult* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 53 – 62.
[164] Banerjee-Dube, *Religion, Law and Power,* 103 – 04.

3.8 Conclusion: Buddhism and the public life of history

In an influential essay published in 2008, Dipesh Chakrabarty raised the question of under what conditions does history take on a public life. "By history," he writes, "I mean something very specific: the academic discipline that we research, teach, and study in universities under that name, the discipline that was invented in Western Europe in the early part of the nineteenth century…and began in India in the 1880s."[165] As Chakrabarty sees it, history has on the one hand, a "cloistered life" within the university, one composed of classrooms, exams, conferences, journals and so forth and a "public life," on the other hand, one that finds resonance in institutions and practices outside the university and official bureaucracy. When this second component actually begins to debate the past, the discipline of history acquires a public life. Chakrabarty's distinction is useful in a Weberian ideal-type kind of way and throughout this chapter, the point of analysis has largely remained in the domain of specialized, academic affairs.

Yet it has to be recognized that for the educators and scholars, epigraphists and draftsmen detailed in this chapter, history *never* was a cloistered affair. Not only was it seen to be integral to people's lives, but it had to be disseminated and publicized among the everyday public, lest it become (as many fear) confined to intellectuals just arguing amongst themselves. Many of the fine points of scholarly difference may have been confined to the 'cloistered life' of the university and scholarly associations, but the conversations they had were heard across several social spheres. At the same time Sarat Chandra Das was narrating his adventures in the Land of Snows to public audiences, Haraprasad Shastri was publishing serialized stories of historical Buddhist fiction in the popular Bengali-language journal, *Bangadarśan*. Set in the Aśokan era around the Buddhist sites of northwestern India and Patna, the *Kanchamala* or *Garland of Gold* marked the start of Haraprasad's side career as a historical novelist attempting "to allow proven facts to blend freely with imaginative reconstructions."[166] Likewise, Rāja Śivaprasād's *Itihās* shaped the minds and works of popular religious reformers like Dayananda Sarasvati whose 1875 manual for the Ārya

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[165] Chakrabarty, "The Public Life of History," 143 – 68. The idea of applying Chakrabarty's idea to the colonial Buddhist context stems from Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Return of the Buddha: ancient symbols for a new nation* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 21 – 22.
[166] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 133. The text was first serialized in 1882 – 83 before being republished as a novel in 1916.

Samāj, *Satyārth Prakāś* or *Light of Truth,* used the *Itihās* as the basis for his arguments against Buddhist and Jain worldviews.[167]

Yet the real-life repercussions of these Indian scholars' works and surveys has largely gone unnoticed. Nayanjot Lahiri argues that because archaeology had "no place in the education system of the British Raj," it was barely understood by the "average person who happened to come in contact with its practitioners."[168] While the nature of the "average person" in India would not have been someone who went to a British school to begin with—even in the 21st century, the governmental dream of mass education in India has yet to be realized—this chapter has shown the average British educated student would have been at the very least aware of archaeology's epistemic claims.[169] Similarly, in an otherwise insightful essay penned in 1997, the anthropologist Frank Korom argues that Haraprasad's "composite Dharmarāj," or interpretive model of a Buddhist folk deity, had no real tangible effects, existing solely in the heads of intellectuals and in the realm of "discourse theory within which scholarly debates took place."[170] Korom may be right that worshippers of Dharmarāj were largely unaffected by Haraprasad's thesis, barring the occasional field researcher on site during the next century in search of its potential Buddhist origins, but Buddhist communities elsewhere in India were deeply influenced by Haraprasad's discovery and the sort of discursive shifts in knowledge that it symbolized.

In Chittagong and parts of the Himalayas, as the following chapters will demonstrate, Buddhists began to articulate their own identities as composite shapes of 'degenerate Hinduized' Buddhism and these self-fashioned identities gave further stimulus to existing discourses of reform from itinerant Buddhist missionaries (*dharmadūt*) preaching a return to an imagined 'original Buddhism.' Moreover, in Orissa, Vasu's identification of crypto-Buddhism did generate real social change. Tired of the scholarly conclusion that Mahima devotees were 'actually' Buddhists, in the 1930s, Biswanath Baba, a prominent leader of a Mahima sect drew a clear line of separation between Buddhism and Mahima Dharma, in an

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[167] See Cort, "Indology as authoritative knowledge," 137 – 61.
[168] Lahiri, *Marshalling the past,* 384.
[169] According to Kumar, "India's trails with citizenship," 284, in 2010, "as many as 40 percent of Indian people" remain outside of the government's mass education scheme.
[170] Frank Korom, " 'Editing' Dharmaraj: Academic Genealogies of a Bengali Folk Deity," *Western Folklore* Vol. 56/1 (1997): 62.

effort to align its faith with Advaita Vedāntic traditions.[171] Yet other Mahima devotees accepted Vasu's view and attempted to reform and revive their 'original' Buddhist identity. By the 1940s, about ten thousand *Bauddhatantis* or weavers had even organized a "Bauddha Śrāvaka Sangha," calling on Buddhist monks living in Calcutta to help them "return to their past."[172] The weavers from Cuttack, as the next chapter will show, however, were not the only new groups in India attempting to return to the buddhavacana or words of the Buddha.

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[171] Banerjee-Dube, *Religion, Law and Power,* 77 – 78, 122.
[172] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 61/12 (1953), 445. For a study of the contemporary life of this community, see Sarita Dash, *The Bauddhatantis of Orissa: Culture, Identity and the Resurgence of an Ancient Guild of Buddhist Weavers* (Batagoan: Society for Environmental Action and Restoration of Cultural Heritage, Orissa, 2002).

4 Chapter Four – The light of the world: universalism and the empire of reform, 1870 – 1905

The numerous scholars and researchers discussed in chapter three may have pioneered the understanding of Buddhism in the subcontinent, but caution should be exercised in privileging ideas of Buddhism generated solely through critical academic studies. For archaeology and philology were not the only mediums through which Buddhism took a hold of the public imagination. New religious movements, popular literature, travel, and military service in Buddhist lands were just some of the other ways that Indians were encountering living Buddhist cultures or representations of Buddhism. There were, as always, class and regional dimensions to these encounters: just as reading societies and lending libraries developed primarily in urban centers, urban English educated Indians had more opportunities to meet with visiting Buddhist scholars or acquire popular books. While there were exceptions, rural market towns and villages, while never entirely off the map, were figuratively speaking, just one too many steps away. This chapter begins by exploring one of the most popular Buddhist texts in modern India, *The Light of Asia* (1879) and its reception, adaptation and re-creation in the first twenty-five years after its publication. After tracing the text's polyvalent meanings, we turn to the role that Buddhism played, either in practice or discussion, in four major socio-religious institutions that shaped the modern Indian Buddhist landscape: the Sangharāja Nikāya, MahaBodhi Society, Brahmo Samāj and Theosophical Society. The differences between these groups, as will be seen below, were many, but the foremost difference lay in the fact that only the first two advocated publicly as a Buddhist organization. Despite the vast differences between these groups, in terms of both inspiration and mission, all of the foresaid religious movements popularized Buddhism in the public sphere due to its Indian roots and universal message.

4.1 From the 'Light of Asia' to the 'Light of the World'

No other nineteenth-century text stirred the Buddhist imagination of the Indian public more than Sir Edwin Arnold's (1832 – 1904) poetic biography of Buddha, *The Light of Asia* (1879). Visitors to Calcutta's Star Theatre in the spring of 1885, for instance, could watch a Hindi language adaptation of the text known as *Buddhadev Carītā Nāṭak* [*Life of Lord*

Buddha]. Written and directed by the noted Bengali playwright Girish Chandra Ghosh, the play was a major hit among the city's luminaries, leaving one critic feeling "truly uplifted and inspired."[1] Yet in the years surrounding the text's growing popularity, Christians had fully exploited Arnold's play on words. Sir Monier Monier-Williams, the Oxford Chair of Sanskrit and noted Christian Evangelist, had closed his five-hundred plus page work on *Buddhism in its Connexion with Brahmanism* (1883) by posing the question:

> Whom shall we choose as our Guide, our Hope, our Salvation, 'the Light of Asia,' or 'the Light of the World?' the Buddha or the Christ? …Which Book shall we clasp to our hearts in our last hour—the Book that tells us of the dead, the extinct, the death-giving Buddha, or the Book that reveals to us the living, the eternal, the life-giving Christ?[2]

Despite the fact that Monier-Williams called the question "a mere mockery" and "mere absurdity" to "rational and thoughtful men," the fact that he felt it necessary to ask—and answer—the question reflected the mood in the air. Buddhism was being construed as Christianity's great competitor.[3] It predated the birth of Christ (and was therefore of greater antiquity) and had more adherents (a boon in an age of statistical sciences). Moreover, its moral virtues and purported modern, scientific thought gave it the unusual quality of being both 'religious' (moral) and 'scientific' (atheistic) at the same time.

When the Bengali Buddhist poet Sarvananda Barua (1866 – 1908) titled his own work on Buddha's life as *Jagajjyoti* or *The Light of the World,* the name had more than obvious overtones. Living amidst a vibrant Buddhist reform movement in his native home Chittagong, Sarvananda felt compelled to respond to the Christian critique. Similarly, in 1894, when the first Marathi translation of Arnold's *Light of Asia* was published, the translator Govind Narayan Kane changed the title to the *Jagadguru Gautama Buddha,* or *Gautama Buddha, World Teacher.*[4] The final catalyst it seems was Arnold's latest work

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[1] Ramchandra Datta, "Society and Morality—Acting," *Tattwamandala* Vol. 1, quoted in http://vedanta.org/2008/monthly-readings/sri-ramakrishna-patron-saint-of-the-bengali-stage/.

[2] Monier Monier-Williams, *Buddhism in its Connexion with Brahmanism and Hinduism, and in its contrast with Christianity* (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1889 [1883]), 563.

[3] Perhaps nowhere in South Asia were these tensions brought more to the fore than in the Christian – Buddhist debates of Ceylon in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the most notable at Pannadura in 1873. An insightful review of these debates and the wider context is found in Elizabeth Harris, *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, missionary and colonial experience in nineteenth century Sri Lanka* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[4] I have not been able to locate the original text but it is referenced in Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 79 - 80.

where Christ took the mantle as *The Light of the World* (1891) whereas Buddha had to remain content with domain over Asia. Sarvananda's and Kane's defiant responses—Buddha, not Christ, was the "Light of the World"— contained more than its fair share of competitiveness but it also needs to be understood as part of what Steven Kemper calls the "efflorescence of new forms of universalism" in the late nineteenth-century world.[5] These universalisms—Theosophy, imperialism, Marxism, anti-vivesectionism, vegetarianism, and so on—are fundamentally about transcending local identities and incorporating different peoples in the same project.[6]

At the World's Parliament of Religions at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the universal sources of value and authority in each of the 'world religions' represented were debated and compared. Despite the program's pre-determined Christian 'winners,' the eight Buddhist delegates to the convention helped cement lingering notions that Buddhism was Christianity's definitive 'other.'[7] While there was vast disagreement among the Buddhists themselves about the precise nature of the saddharma or true Buddhist teaching, they, like most of the other delegates represented, shared the Parliament's (theoretical) conviction that the differences between the world's great religious traditions were more apparent than real. The liberal commitment to religious unity and pluralism may have been tinged with paradoxes but it entailed a set of assumptions that many prominent reformers in India, from Rammohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda to Henry Olcott and Mahatma Gandhi tacitly accepted. The boldest of these assumptions was that unity among all the people of India was possible and that a common bond existed between people in India, Asia and the

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[5] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 1.

[6] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 2, notes that many of the world's universalisms are simply "particularism[s] dressed up as a universal," such as the concept of 'civilization' which once deconstructed turned out to be European civilization.

[7] Of the eight, six were Japanese (four priests, Toki Hōryū, Yatsubuchi Banryū, Shaku Sōen, and Ashitsu Jitsuzen, and two laymen, Hirai Kinzō, and Noguchi Zenshirō), one was Thai (Prince Chandradat Chudhadharn of Siam) and one Sinhalese (Anagarika Dharmapala). Although touted as an expression of ecumenical faith and religious pluralism, the World's Parliament was permeated by a belief in the superiority of Protestant Christianity over any other tradition and many of the debates were rigged to support that view (for instance, by providing awards for the "best papers" that denounced "heathen" traditions). The very grammar of the debates was Christian-centric as well. An important collection of the Parliament papers and speeches has been edited by Richard Hughes Seager as *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions* (La Salle: Open Court, 1993). For a sophisticated reading of the Parliament's discourse and activities with a particular emphasis on Japanese Buddhism at the fair, see Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). On Buddhism as the "other" of Christianity, see Snodgrass, 84 – 115.

rest of the world. When Vivekananda opened his speech at the Parliament with the words, "Brothers and Sisters of America," there was four minutes of applause and cheering. Considering the way that the other Hindu delegate, Professor Manilal N. D'Vivedi was neglected at the convention, the applause signified that universal brotherhood, not scholarly detail, was what the audience wanted to hear.[8] Standing in the way of such lofty goals was the incredible linguistic, cultural and religious diversity of the subcontinent itself and the vast differences beyond. The religious universalists and reformers in the British Empire worked to resolve these differences by speaking in a common tongue (most often English), infusing their diverse expressions with common British norms and practicing their various religious traditions under the sacred canopy of the unity of religions. Of all the universalisms espoused in the late nineteenth century imperium, Indian reformers shared one in common with other figures around the globe: religious universalism.[9]

When Arnold published the *Light of Asia* in 1879, he was then the editor of London's *Daily Telegraph* and only later would come to be seen as a Buddhist propagandist whose control of the press made him "not a man to be trifled with."[10] Like many Britishers of his class, he was an old India hand, who in addition to working as the Principal of the Government Deccan College in Pune from 1856 – 61, continued to travel widely across the continent long after his official departure. Arnold's sympathetic portraits of the *Bhagavad Gita* (*The Song Celestial,* 1885) and Buddhism marked him as a liberal Christian thinker, but it was the *Light of Asia* that brought him considerable fame. "At a single stroke," a British writer penned in 1916, Arnold "obtained a hearing that fifty years of devoted work of any other would not have secured."[11] Although exaggerated, the hyperbole was understandable. The text went through more than a hundred editions in the United States alone, even outselling, by some accounts, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.[12] Among English-educated

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[8] Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism,* 13.
[9] Only in the early twentieth-century did the other great universalism, that of socialism, begin to take root in India. See chapter eight of this dissertation.
[10] *Dainik-o-Samachar Chandrika,* June 16, 1896, *Report on Native Newspapers, Bengal Presidency* (1896), National Archives of India. The shift in attitude was ignited by his 1886 publication, *Return to India*, an account of his recent travels to Bodh Gaya where he decried Hindu control over the site.
[11] *Buddhist Review: organ of Buddhist society of Great Britain,* Vol. 8/2 (1916), 109.
[12] According to the *MahaBodhi* Vol. 2/5 (1893 – 94), 7 - 8, the text had already been translated into French, German, Russian, Spanish, Icelandic and Japanese. For a thorough discussion of its printing history (particularly as it relates to Europe and North America), see Brooks Wright, *Interpreter of Buddhism to the West: Sir Edwin Arnold* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), 68 – 75.

classes in Asia, the text was equally popular. Japanese Buddhists honored it with hymns and shortly after its first printing, the King of Siam awarded Arnold with the "Order of the White Elephant" for "making some version of Buddhist doctrine widely available in the West."[13] Ghosh's dramatic reenactment of the text at Calcutta's Star Theatre in 1885 was, like elsewhere in Asia, just one of many readings, performances, adaptations and translations of the text at the turn of the century. A complete history of the book's readership in colonial India has never been recorded but my own research into its vernacular adaptations and translations is suggestive of its popularity [see Table 4.1].

Table 4.1: Select Indian translations of Arnold's *Light of Asia* (1879), from 1879 - 1937

Language	Title of Work	Author	Year Published	Notes
Bengali	*Buddhadev Carītā Nāṭak* [play]	Girishcandra Ghosh	1887	First performed at Star Theatre in 1885
	Amitābha	Nabīncandra Sen	1895	
	Jagajjyoti	Sarbananda Barua	c. 1891	
Marathi	*Jagadguru Gautam Buddha Carītā*	Govind Narayan Kane	1894	Source: Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 79 - 80.
Tamil	Āciyajōti	Kavimaṇi Tēcikavināyakam Piḷḷai	1898	Source: *Theosophist* Vol. 20 (1898 - 99), 56.
	Siddharthan	A. Madhaviah	1918	
Telugu	*Buddhacaritramu*	Venkata Sastri & Tirupati Sastri	1902	Source: Rao, "Buddhism in Modern Andhra."
Hindi	*Buddhacarītā*	Rām Candra Śukla	Samvat 1979 [~1922]	Composed in hybrid Hindi - Brajbhasha for poetic purposes
Malayalam	*Sri Buddha Carītām*	Kumaran Asan	1913	Started in 1903 but published in 1913
	Pourastyadeepam	Nalapat Narayan Menon	1914	
Gujarati	*Buddhacarītā*	Narasimharao Divetia	1934	Source: S.K. Das, *Buddhism in Indian Literature,* 695
Sindhi	*Pūrab Sandeś*	Devandas Kishinani "Azad"	1937	Source: S.K. Das, *Buddhism in Indian Literature,* 485

Before turning to a discussion of some of the earliest of these adaptations and translations, let us consider the original English edition itself. Written in the style of a long Victorian poem, the *Light of Asia* or in its full title, *The Light of Asia or the Great Renunciation (Mahabhinishkramana) being the life and teaching of Gautama, Prince of India and Founder of Buddhism, as told in verse by an Indian Buddhist*, contains eight

[13] Trevithick, *Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage,* 62.

separate sections. Each section or "book," as Arnold calls them, contains roughly five to six hundred lines narrated by an "imaginary Buddhist votary."[14] The poem follows a loose chronology, beginning with Siddhartha's early life in the palace, then on to his renunciation and life as a wandering ascetic. The narrative is diverse, recalling Buddha's debates with Brahmin priests, charitable acts and experiences meditating. In the end, Arnold reveals, Buddha resisted the "Prince of Darkness [Mara]," gained enlightenment and returned to his family to teach the "Way to Peace."[15] Finally, the poem closes with a short exploration of basic Buddhist tenets in prose form. In the preface to the text, Arnold clarifies that not only is the Buddha of this poem a real person—"if, as need not be doubted, he really existed," he writes—but that most religions are "youthful" compared to Buddha's creed.[16] When Arnold penned the book, his inspiration was to make Buddhism acceptable to the Anglo-American palate in order "to aid in the better mutual knowledge of East and West."[17] In writing it, he clearly anticipated criticisms of how or why Buddha's story was of any relevance to "the West." Using terms that would have been understandable to any Protestant Christian, he advised readers against judging the original 'pristine' tradition by its present-day rituals and institutions:

> The extravagances which disfigure the record and practice of Buddhism [today] are to be referred to the inevitable degradation which priesthoods always inflict upon a great idea committed to their charge. The power and sublimity of Gautama's original doctrines should be estimated by their influence, not by their interpreters; nor by that innocent but lazy and ceremonious church which has arisen on the foundations of the Buddhist Brotherhood or "Sangha.[18]

As for the original tradition that existed before the (Catholic) church-like Sangha bowdlerized it, Arnold only had positive things to say. Buddha's doctrines, he writes, possess the "eternity of a universal hope, the immortality of a boundless love, an indestructible element of faith in final good, and the proudest assertion ever made of human freedom."[19]

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[14] Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia or the Great Renunciation (Mahabhinishkramana), being the life and teaching of Gautama, Prince of India and founder of Buddhism, as told in verse by an Indian Buddhist* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1892 [1879]), vii.
[15] Arnold, *The Light of Asia,* 157, 245.
[16] Arnold, *The Light of Asia,* ix.
[17] Arnold, *The Light of Asia,* xi.
[18] Arnold, *The Light of Asia,* x.
[19] Arnold, *The Light of Asia,* ix.

History shows that in the Indian Buddhist marketplace, the *Light of Asia* outperformed its competitors. Not only did it become the preferred English liturgy at Buddhist celebrations across India both then and today but it also served as the basis for two of India's first cinematic productions.[20] Cultural and linguistic differences may always prohibit a complete rendering of a text into another language yet the many translations of the *Light of Asia* reveal more than acculturation. Radical omissions, additions and substantially reworked sections were all central to accommodating the demands of the target audience. In an insightful essay on the representation of Buddhism in modern Telugu literature, V.N. Rao discusses the *Light of Asia's* translation into Telugu in 1902 by the famed "Twin Poets," Venkata Sastri (1870 – 1950) and Tirupati Sastri (1872 – 1920). Rao poses an interesting question, asking why the two poets, who were "rigorous Smārta Brahmins" and "knew that Buddha was unacceptable to Brahmins because he rejected the authority of the Veda" would have translated such a text.[21] The answer to this, Rao asserts, was in the changing world of the Telugu *zamindārs* or landowners whom Brahmanical scholars like the Twin Poets relied upon for patronage. In the wake of British rule, these zamindārs were becoming increasingly Anglicized as a result of English educations and lauded modes of 'civilized' Anglo-living. Yet some of these same zamindārs, he notes, "felt a faint sense of pride in their own culture":

> They were pleased when Sanskrit scholars and Telugu poets addressed them with Sanskritic titles and praised them as if they were kings wearing a crown, while they themselves were dressed in suits, played cricket, spoke English and enjoyed the company of white men and women. Thus they lived in two worlds, with a deep respect for Hindu/Indian culture and a sense of pride in it, and a fascination for the West. At this juncture, when Orientalist British and German scholars themselves came to admire India's great culture, these zamindars hailed them enthusiastically…*The Light of Asia* came at exactly the right time to appeal to this clientele.[22]

So while the zamindārs found cultural sustenance in a western poet's appreciation for an ancient Indian sage, the Twin Poets worked to reconcile the text with their own Brahmanical

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[20] For various reportings of these uses, see *Sarasvatī* Vol. 16/6 (1915), 192; *Theosophist* Vol. 12/9 (1892), 531 – 36; *MahaBodhi* Vol. 2/3 (1892 – 93), 3 – 4. The continued popularity of this book at Buddhist sites across India is further demonstrated by the fact that during several field trips to India from 2011 – 15, I have been the recipient of many new translations of *Light of Asia* by (mostly Indian or Sinhalese) Buddhist monastics and scholars.

[21] Rao, "Buddhism in Modern Andhra," 96.

[22] Rao, "Buddhism in Modern Andhra," 98, 96. To put it bluntly, as Rao does, "If you did not appreciate the *Light of Asia,* you were not considered a person of good taste" (96).

worldview and setting. In one passage, they describe the Buddha's teaching as a *jñāna mārg* or path of knowledge, implying that what Buddha taught was no different than the ancient sages. In other passages, they carefully gloss over his critiques of not just Vedic sacrifice but also of an *ātman* or self. According to Rao, these glosses and omissions were not an "interpretive fuzziness," but a clear effort to Brahminize Buddhism and Buddhicize Brahmanism.[23] Despite this hermeneutical strategy, the Twin Poets end the poem with a remarkable statement on Buddhist universalism and "why it wins":

> [The Advaita Vedānta philosopher] Śankara was angry with this religion and crushed it, but still Buddhism flourishes in the world at large. If you put all the people in the world who follow other religions on one side of the scales and all the Buddhists on the other side, the needle will tilt towards the Buddhists. Among all the religions in the world, Buddhism stands superior even today. The reason is because this religion teaches compassion to all living beings, and that's why it wins.[24]

The implications of the conclusion were two-fold. First, in an age of growing empiricism and statistical catalogues, the enormous demographic basis of Buddhism was a force to be reckoned with. The evolutionary implications, arising from nineteenth century assumptions about the spread of religion, were clear: Buddhism was in the majority because it possessed universal qualities applicable to all. Second, that universal quality, even for uneasy admirers like the Twin Poets, was that its teaching of compassion could accommodate social, racial and cultural differences.

The Telugu reception of the *Light of Asia* was just one redaction. Just as the origins and norms of Victorian England played a central part in Arnold's remaking of the *Lalitavistara,* so too did the norms and conventions of India's regional cultures play a role in the public reception and reproduction of the text. When a twenty-three year old Dharmanand Kosambi read Govind Narayan Kane's Marathi translation (1894), he found it to have been "written with such a feeling of love that the reader cannot help but be engrossed in it."[25] Kosambi knew Sanskrit and acknowledged Arnold's "not entirely reliable" translation from the *Lalitavistara* but it made no difference to him. He read it so often in those days that it "became for me an original religious text…I have still not forgotten how, while reading certain portions of it, my throat would constrict and tears would stream down my face. I got

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[23] Rao, "Buddhism in Modern Andhra," 104.
[24] *Buddhacaritramu* (1902), 6.101 – 102, quoted in Rao, "Buddhism in Modern Andhra," 104.
[25] Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 78.

into the habit of studying this book whenever I was dispirited."[26] Kosambi was not alone in his accolades and it is significant that the text in later years served as the Buddhist template for the emerging national elite. When Mahatma Gandhi read the English edition while in law school in London, he did not shed tears but he was deeply impressed.[27] India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru read it in prison, calling it one of his "favourite books."[28]

Scholarly estimations of the poem were less exemplary. When in 1899 Kosambi explained to his Sanskrit tutor, the Deccan College Professor, R.G. Bhandarkar, that he had read Kane's Marathi translation, Bhandarkar replied: "Oh, I know that book by Kane! It is the translation of an English book. The English book does not express even a quarter of the original [Sanskrit] and not a quarter of the English book is expressed in the Marathi!" Kosambi was obstinate: "If the Marathi account—which according to you contains only one-sixteenth of the original—is so gripping, one can only imagine how good the original must be. Therefore my resolve to study the original texts is all the firmer."[29] The exchange between Kosambi and Bhandarkar is important because it indicates the influence popular cultural expressions can have in fostering serious conversations and transforming emotion into more in-depth critical, understanding. Bhandarkar's criticisms may have been justified but he neglected the fact that the text was creating a sustained interest in Buddhism that could be turned into something far more profound. For by the time Kosambi died in 1947, he was one of India's most distinguished Buddhist scholars, having earned a PhD from Harvard in 1929 for his critical edition of the *Visuddhimagga*, building and managing his own Buddhist temple in Bombay in the 1930s and publishing more than thirty books on Buddhism and Indian history, almost all of them in the Marathi and Gujarati languages. Yet Kosambi was exposed to Buddha's teachings and the Buddhist past not through critical interpretations of ruins and ancient texts, but through a Marathi children's magazine, *Bālbodh,* and Kane's Marathi translation of Arnold's text. So consumed by Buddha's teaching, Kosambi left his home in Goa, traveling by foot, rail and ocean liner to Nepal, Burma, and Ceylon in search of

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[26] Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 78.
[27] Gandhi says he "read it with even greater interest than the *Bhagavadgita*," perhaps finding Buddha's teachings on non-violence to echo his Jain inheritance. See, Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth,* translated from the Gujarati by Mahadev Dessai (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993 [1929]), 59.
[28] Nehru, *Discovery of India,* 132 – 33.
[29] Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 80.

the *dhamma*. During the next six years, Kosambi would become a monk (*bhikkhu*) and acquire a vast knowledge of Pali scriptures and doctrines as he traveled a Buddhist network shaped by Buddhist globetrotters, scholar-monks and new Buddhist organizations. These networks and groups were having a formative influence on the Indian conversation about Buddhism.

4.2 Purifying the dhamma: The Sangharāja nikāya and Burmese reform in Chittagong

When Sarvananda Barua composed his poem *Jagajjyoti,* he wrote from within a tradition of Pali scholarship and modern Bengali literature that had only begun to coalesce in Chittagong during the past half century. Although Chittagong, a hilly and coastal region at the southeast end of modern-day Bangladesh, was never entirely removed from the "Pali imaginaire," to use Steven Collin's expression, its movement towards a staunch Burmese culture that privileged Pali sources can be located in the early to mid nineteenth century.[30] Much of this new trend stemmed from the activities of the Akyab-based Sangharāja Nikāya (est. 1846) and its eminent monastic leader, Saramedha (1801 – 81/2). Contemporary accounts of Saramedha's early life are deeply divided with some traditions locating him within the family of Arakanese royalty while others assert he was a native of Chittagong.[31] While his precise origins remain debated, there is more unanimity that at the age of twenty (in 1821), he took full ordination at a monastery in Akyab, the capital of the Buddhist kingdom Arakan.[32] During the following decades, he and his Burmese preceptor *Saya* Ashin

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[30] Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 78 defines the Pali imaginaire as "one potential resource, one textually externalized world of meanings on which historical agents could draw to construe their lives and aspirations, individually and collectively, at different times and in different places, to a greater or lesser extent." Critical studies of Buddhism in Chittagong are scarce with Sukomal Chaudhauri, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh* (Calcutta: Atisha Memorial Publishing Society, 1987 [1982]), and Rabindra Bijoy Barua, *The Theravada Sangha* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1978), being the most comprehensive (although still problematic).

[31] Michael Charney, "Beyond state-centered Histories in western Burma, Missionizing monks and intra regional migrants in the Arakan littoral, c. 1784 – 1860," in Jos Gommans and Jacque Leider (eds.), *The Maritime Frontier of Burma: Exploring Political, Cultural and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200 – 1800* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), 218 – 20.

[32] In recent decades, there has been a spate of excellent works on Buddhism in Arakan. See especially, Michael Charney, "Where Jambudipa and Islamdom converged: religious change and the emergence of Buddhist communalism in early modern Arakan (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries)" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1999); and Thibaut D'Hubert and Jacques P. Leider, "Traders and Poets at the Mrauk U Court: commerce and

Saralankara, moved back and forth between southern Chittagong and northern Arakan. Although the details of their activities during this period are sparse, it is easy to connect them with existing patterns of monastic migration and mobility. After the Burmese conquest of Arakan in 1784 - 85, the Burmese King Bodawphaya (r. 1782 – 1819) dispatched several dozen Burmese bhikkhus to Arakan in order to "purify" the "bad people" that had "ruined" the Dharma practices of the land.[33] These numbers continued to swell up through the 1840s, even after the British annexed Arakan in the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824 – 26). The Akyab-based monastery (*saralankara vihāra*) from which Saramedha and Saralankara launched their missions into Chittagong was in fact a product of these early religious missions, having been founded by the Burmese master, Saralankara. With Saralankara's death in 1836, Saramedha became the new head or Sangharāja (literally, 'King of the Sangha') in 1846 and forming his own monastic order known as the Sangharāja Nikāya.[34]

The impact of the Sangharāja Nikāya in eastern Bengal was multi-faceted, but three aspects are of primary importance. First, the Sangharāja monks worked against what they saw as syncretic approaches to religious patronage and practice, leveling criticisms at Hindu, Islamic and other 'outside' influences they saw in local Buddhist praxis. The Buddhist communities in Chittagong they targeted the most—primarily Maghs and Chakmas—were described in the same terms as the Burman king had described the Arakanese: as corrupt, degraded and in need of 'purification.' The sense with which Sangharāja monks viewed the Maghs and Chakmas is captured well by one of its contemporary historians, Dipak Kumar Barua. In Barua's words, the laity "were full of intellectual confusion" and venerated "gods and goddess of the Brahmanical pantheon for their own welfare…[while] the condition of the Theravada Buddhist monks was more pathetic":

> They [the monks] had almost forgotten to prepare and wear the Ticīvara, "Threefold Robe," according to the Pali *Vinaya* rules…The *Rāulis* [Buddhist monks][35] after their initiation used to follow the *Daśa-śīla,* "Ten Precepts," for seven days only without

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cultural links in seventeenth-century Arakan," in *Pelagic Passageways: the northern bay of Bengal before colonialism,* edited by Rila Mukherjee (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 77 – 111.

[33] Royal Edict of Bodawphaya, 16 October 1784, quoted in Charney, "Where Jambudipa and Islamdom converged," 259. See 260 – 61, for a brief description of these various missions between 1785 – 1840.

[34] Some Bengali accounts read this event differently, locating the formation of the nikāya and the title of *Sangharāja* to Saramedha's activities in Chittagong and patronage from the Chakma ruler Kalindi. See, Sitangshu Bikash Barua, *Buddhism in Bangladesh* (Chittagong: Prajna Printers, 1990), 8.

[35] Buddhist monastics in Chittagong were generally called *Rāulis* (*Rāli – Rāri*), which may be traced to Rāhul, Gautama Buddha's son, thereby implying that the monks are the "sons of Śākya."

> having actual knowledge about the significance of the traditional "Ten Moral Precepts." After seven days they would come back home, without leaving the *Cīvaras,* "Holy Robes," which they used to wear or place them on their heads only during religious ceremonies. But in their daily lives they used to behave as lay people. These *Rāulis* consisted of three groups, viz. *Māthe (Mahāthera), Kāme,* and *Pānjāng.* During their tours *Māthe-Rāulis* used big umbrellas on their heads, the *Kāme-Rāulis* wore conical head caps and the *Pānjāng-Rāulis* used to cover their heads with pieces of yellow robes.[36]

This, in other words, was a 'Buddhism' at odds with the Irrawaddy Valley-born inflections of Pali orthodoxy being propagated by the Sangharāja Nikāya. As Alicia Turner argues in her study of the *sāsana* in nineteenth-century Burma, Burmese Buddhists from the Irrawaddy Valley had "inherited not a single orthodox Buddhist heritage in need of preservation, but *a tradition of reform*, a process of continuously reexamined and redefined orthodoxy driven by a concern to prevent the decline of the *sāsana*."[37] This drive to reform and refine Buddhist praxis through the creation of new textual genres, reading practices, and the reorganization of the sangha was the "very engine of change" that drove the transformation of Chittagong Buddhism in the colonial period.[38] When Sangharāja monks encountered married householders wearing robes and worshipping Islamic *pīrs* and Brahmanical deities, they saw these as clear signs of a decline that needed to be resisted.

Second, it is important to recognize the wider geopolitical aspects of the Sangharāja Nikāya's success. Although Arakan and Chittagong were strictly speaking, under British rule, the Sangharāja Nikāya was in essence, an ecclesiastical wing of the Burmese state. As late as 1871, when the Burmese King Mindon Min called the "Fifth Buddhist Council," he not only bestowed a special title on Saramedha, but dispatched twenty-five additional monks to accompany him back to Akyab where they were to ordain in his order (*nikāya*) and join him in his mission. This support, as Michael Charney has argued, must be seen in light of Mindon's last effort to stretch his influence over what was a quickly shrinking political orbit, the fate of which was witnessed in 1885 with the British annexation of upper Burma.[39]

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[36] Dipak Kumar Barua, "Theravada Buddhism in Bengal under British Colonialism," 31 – 32. For a more balanced assessment, see Chaudhuri, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh,* 24 – 32.
[37] Alicia Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 25. Italics mine.
[38] "Engine of change" comes from Turner, *Saving Buddhism,* 25 and 136.
[39] Charney, "Beyond state-centered Histories in western Burma," 221.

Third, while the textual and disciplinary model of the Sangharāja Nikāya provoked some resistance among the entrenched Chittagong Buddhist leadership, even instigating the formation of an alternative nikāya to resist their influence, there appears to have been significant support for the Sangharāja's activities among the indigenous Chittagong populace. For instance, when Saramedha established the *Udaka-Ukkhepa sīmā* or place of ordination at Pahartali, the site of a popular annual fair organized around a replica of the Mahāmuni image, several rāulis re-ordained under Saramedha's lineage.[40] Indeed, like most successful missionary movements, the real cultural transformations were implemented by those Chittagongians who saw promise in the Sangharāja's cause.

One of the most important new leaders was Punnacara Dhammdhara, alias Candramohan (1835 – 1909), a Magh who hailed from the town of Unaipura.[41] As was the custom in his village, Candramohan became a monk (*rāuli*) at a rather young age and went on pilgrimage to north India around the year 1850. For reasons that are not clear, he settled in Calcutta on his return. Details of his life in Calcutta are little known other than that he is said to have lived with other monks at the *Mahānagar Vihāra,* or Monastery of the Great Metropolis, a reference that despite its image of grandeur likely consisted of nothing more than a rented room or house.[42] The five years he spent living at the Mahānagar Vihāra are a virtual blank slate barring a curious encounter with a European man named "Mr. Paul …well-versed in Buddhism" and fluent in "twenty-three languages," including Sanskrit and Pali. While the identity of "Mr. Paul" remains as nebulous as his linguistic claims, the impact of the encounter is less so.[43] When Candramohan learned that Mr. Paul was an expert in the

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[40] Chaudhuri, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh,* 34 – 35. Likewise, various accounts suggest that Saramedha originally came to Chittagong on the invitation of local monastic and lay leaders seeking more rigid interpretations of the *Vinaya.*

[41] Punnachara's full ordination name, given by the Rammana Nikāya in Pegu in 1864, was Punnacara Dhammadhara or Punyacari Dhammdhari Vinaya-sthavir. This was in fact, the third time he had received ordination.

[42] The economic status of these monks was likely too meager to construct a vast monastic edifice. When Candramohan's successors traveled through Calcutta in the 1880s and 1890s, the spaces where they were stayed were likewise termed *vihāra,* meaning less a formalized institutional site than simply a term of respect for where monks may reside. Similar phenomenon are seen in Tibetan Buddhist cultures where a lama's residence (no matter how brief or miniscule) at a site sanctifies that space, thus labeling it as a *gdan sa.*

[43] Chaudhuri, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh,* 33. As for "Mr. Paul," I suspect this may have been Paul Ambroise Bigandet (1813 – 94), the Catholic missionary and Bishop of Ava. In the nearly four decades that Bigandet lived in Burma and Siam, he became an excellent scholar of Burmese and Pali Buddhism, publishing one of the most-well known vernacular biographies of Buddha in 1858. According to the General Secretary of the Bengal Buddhist Association, Hemendu Bikash Chowdhury (personal communication, May 11, 2015), Mr.

Pātimokkha, or Pali scriptures outlining monastic conduct, he began studying with him. As the *Suttavibhaṅga* explains, Buddhist monastic ordinations occur through a system of graded paths from only five rules for novices up to two-hundred and twenty-seven for fully-ordained monks. However, no full ordination can occur before the age of twenty, something that Candramohan (and numerous other rāulis from Chittagong) had unknowingly broken. Spurred on by this breach of the cherished code, Candramohan returned to Chittagong and finally Akyab, where he re-ordained in Saramedha's Sangharāja Nikāya in 1860. A severe illness required him to disrobe, but in 1864 Candramohan traveled to Pegu in Burma to receive higher ordination (*upasampadā*) with a group of Sinhalese monks in the newly formed Rāmaññña Nikāya.[44] Taking the name Punnacara, he studied for two further years in Ceylon before returning home to Chittagong in 1866.

The Chittagong that Candramohan returned to was a tumultuous place. Incessant warfare between the British and Burmese (1826, 1852) and against various "tribal communities" in the hill tracts bordering Chittagong (1860 – 70s) had led to massive disruptions and migrations across the region. Prior to 1860, the hilly regions of Chittagong (known today as the Chittagong Hill Tracts) were under the stewardship of three different rulers, the largest territory of which was ruled by the Chakma queen (*rānī*), Kalindi (r. 1844 – 1873). Depicted in colonial accounts as a formidable adversary who valiantly resisted British attempts to divide the kingdom, Kalindi was, like many rulers in the region, the patron of a multi-religious court. The Chittagong Deputy Commissioner, Capt. Thomas Herbert Lewin, described her as a devotee of Kali who regularly consulted Hindu astrologers and kept a Chittagong Brahmin at her side.[45] For reasons that are not exactly clear, around the same time that Kalindi's kingdom was for all purposes officially dissolved by the British, she began to throw her full support behind the Sangharāja Nikāya. As one colonial report put it, through the works of the "celebrated Phoongyee [Saramedha]…the Ranee [Kalindi]

Paul was a government officer trained in homeopathic treatments and well known for his work on Vinaya scriptures. While the EIC certainly produced a number of officers cum scholars, if Candramohan's story is to be taken at face value, Bigandet seems a more likely candidate.

[44] On the Rāmaññña Nikāya, see Kitsiri Malagoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750 – 1900: a study of religious revival and change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 162 – 72. The Rāmaññña monks derived their lineage from Pegu in lower Burma (*rāmaññña*).

[45] Thomas Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers therein: with comparative vocabularies of the hill dialects* (Calcutta: Bengal Printing Company Limited, 1869), 37 – 39, 68.

formally proclaimed her adhesion to Buddhism."[46] In 1866, she sponsored the construction of a Buddhist temple at Rājanagar, installing a replica of the famed Mahāmuni image and instituting an annual fair to honor Śākyamuni Buddha. Two years later, she helped the bhikkhus Saramedha and Candramohan build the area's first three "model schools" at Satbaria, Harbang and Pahartali where local students could study Pali language and Buddhist doctrines. With Kalindi's patronage, the Sangharāja bhikkhus were able to establish a sīmā at Rājanagar, adding an additional space where local boys and men could formally ordain as monastics and accelerate the purification of the sāsana.[47]

One major outcome of this Buddhist *coup d'état* was Kalindi's sponsorship of several Bengali-language translations of Burmese and Pali texts. Critical analysis of these texts and their production deserves further research but some preliminary remarks reveal the literary efflorescence that she helped put in motion.[48] In the years just prior to her death in 1873, Kalindi ordered her court poet Nil Kamal Das to collaborate with local Buddhist scholars and compose a number of Buddhist works in the Bengali language. One of the most famous of these scholars was the poet, Phulchandra Barua, who from his home in Mahāmuni composed a number of influential treatises. These included the *Padimukh* (selected suttas taken from the Burmese *Pātimokkha* or codes of monastic conduct) and the *Magha-khamuja,* a short handbook of *Apadāna* literature (stories of the lives of various Buddhas, *paccekabuddhas* / *pratyekabuddhas* and early monastics). The most well known work he produced was an original account of the life of Buddha (*Bauddharanjikā*), based on a rare edition of the *Dhātuvaṃsa* composed in Arakanese script. Although completed in 1873 with the assistance of Nil Kamal, the *Bauddhranjikā'*s publication was stalled after Kalindi's death and only

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[46] Quoted in the *Census of India 1901,* Vol. 6, Part I, 155. The degrees to which this was a sharp, rigid like "conversion" is difficult to evaluate. For a useful evaluation of the term in a South Asian context, see David Gellner, "The Emergence of Conversion in a Hindu – Buddhist Polytropy: the Kathmandu Valley, c. 1600 – 1995," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 47/4 (2005): 755 – 80. British and Bengali Buddhist writers describe Kalindi's conversion as a bold rejection of Brahmanical rites but after her death, British writers described the court's "evincing tendency towards Hinduism" (Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Vol. II), 460). Most of the other accounts for this period have been composed by Buddhist writers and historians who were either directly employed by the Buddhist associations that emerged from these developments or were at the very least, closely connected to them, so their narrative may be driven towards an image of Buddhist victory and Hindu loss. Regardless of whether this was a Saint Paul-like conversion, there is no doubt that Kalindi's patronage moved Chittagong's cultural production towards Buddhism.

[47] Chaudhuri, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh,* 33.

[48] See, Barua, *Theravada Sangha,* 273 – 74; Chaudhuri, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh,* 32 – 36.

published in an abridged version seventeen years later.[49] Another of the most prominent Chittagong litterateurs was Dharmaraj (1860 – 94), a bhikkhu from the small Buddhist village of Raozan Upazilla who following another transcontinental Buddhist network studied Pali in Siam and Ceylon.[50] After returning to Chittagong, Dharmaraj published more than eight Bengali translations from the original Pali, including the *Sutta Nipāta* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (1887), the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (1889) and *Dīgha Nikāya* (1889). These works were widely known among Bengali elites and Orientalists and one of his most well known works, a compendium of Buddhist rituals *Hastasāra* [*Handbook of Essence*] (1893), served as the Noble laureate Rabindranath Tagore's introduction to Buddhism.[51]

Most nineteenth century Chittagong Buddhist works concerned monastic conduct, Buddhist ethics and hagiography, genres that are not surprising considering the movement's thrust towards sāsana reform. Conduct, ethics and cosmology: this triage was at the center of the powerful sense of belonging and being that Chittagong monastics and scholars wished to inculcate among the local populace. The contrast with the Calcutta Bengali Orientalist interest in Buddhism is noteworthy. Although morality was of interest, the sentiment that permeated the Calcutta Bengali scene was one of history, historiography and the growing sense of nationalism. Buddhism's cosmological elements were often downplayed in favor of Buddhism's immense contribution to 'Indian civilization' and the 'nation.' There appears to be no explicit emphasis on this in the Chittagong Buddhist literary scene.

Kalindi's death in 1873 was a critical setback for the Bengali-speaking Buddhists of Chittagong with her successor showing only nominal interest in the saddharma. However, the support of several wealthy landowners and modern educated elites appears to have kept the dharma wheel lubricated. For instance, the zamindār Haragovinda Mutsuddi not only patronized several local monks but also added another Bengali translation of the Burmese *Pātimokkha* in 1876. Others, like Krishna Chandra Chowdhury (1844 – 1910), a businessman

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[49] Other writings included the *Visandar Jātaka*, or tales of the previous lives of Buddha.

[50] Raozan Upazilla is also where the great Pali scholar, Beni Madhab Barua was born. Beni Madhab, who studied Pali with Rhys Davids and earned a D.Litt. from the University of London is discussed in chapters five and six.

[51] Narendra Kumar Dash, *Buddhism in Indian Literature* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2007), 84. Other works included *Shyambati (Samavati), Gyan Sopan [The Way to Knowledge], Saytasar [Essence of Truth]*. From the same village as Dharmaraj was another prominent writer of Buddhism, Dr. Ramachandra Barua (1847 – 1922). A former medical doctor who had served the British in Afghanistan, Ramachandra later lived in Burma and composed the first Bengali translation of the philosophical handbook, *Abhidharmartha-sangraha* (1911) in addition to an influential work on the "Duties of a Sramana" (*Sramana Kartavya,* 1913).

and government inspector (*nazir*) in the Chittagong Land Reforms Office, brought new methodologies to the sāsana reform. An educator and outstanding networker, "Kista Nazir," as he was popularly known, used the revenues and connections from his business offices in Calcutta, Chittagong and Burma to build modern schools and sponsor the education of monastics and laity alike. Among his most successful dependents was Bhikkhu Dharmaraj, the great translator of Pali works. Although Chowdhury drew on long-standing monastic networks and lineages to further his objectives, he was equally adept at building relationships with the new players in the Pali imaginaire.

When Henry Olcott visited Chittagong in 1887 on behalf of the Theosophical Society, Chowdhury paddled him up river in an open canoe to Pahartali where Olcott delivered a lecture and Chowdhury translated.[52] Later that year, Chowdhury established the "Caṭṭagrām Bauddha Samiti" or Chittagong Buddhist Association, known today by its current name, the Bangladesh Buddhist Association.[53] The Chittagong Buddhist Association also launched the first Indian journal aimed specifically at Buddhist audiences, *Bauddha-Bandhu* [Buddhist Friend], published in Bengali and English.[54] Taking a two-year sabbatical from his government posting, Chowdhury followed in Olcott's footsteps, traveling across Bengal, Burma, Siam and Ceylon in a grand venture to raise "voluntary subscriptions towards his very laudable object of raising his people through education."[55] Sadly, verbal support failed to translate into material gains and within two years, the magazine went under. "Sympathy he received in abundance," Olcott said of him, "but shekels he could not get, even for the love of Lord Buddha."[56]

Despite these shortcomings, Chowdhury remained a pivotal figure in the Buddhist scene both in Chittagong and in the wider Buddhist world. He was an honorary member of the first governing body of the MahaBodhi Society in 1892 and participated in the famous Buddhist conference Olcott convened in 1891 in order to formulate his universal "Fourteen Buddhist Principles." His knowledge of the mechanics of colonial governance became a

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[52] *Theosophist* Vol. 12/3 (1890), 158.
[53] Chowdhury was its General Secretary while Venerable Gunameju Mahathera served as its first President. Candramohan became President with Gunameju's death in 1895.
[54] The editor was Kalikinkar Mutsuddi. I was unable to find any copies of this in India and according to Hemendu Bikash Chowdhury, the General Secretary of the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha [Bengal Buddhist Association], there are no known extant copies. Personal communication, May 11, 2015.
[55] *Theosophist* Vol. 12/3 (1890), 158.
[56] *Theosophist* Vol. 12/3 (1890), 158.

necessity when the Buddhist Baruas of Chittagong began petitioning the government for official recognition in the last decade of the nineteenth century and when he assisted Bhikkhu Kripasaran in establishing the Bengal Buddhist Association (*Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha*) in Calcutta in 1892.[57] Chittagong monastics and laity continued to play an important role in wider Indian Buddhist affairs, churning out critical texts and providing an important reminder to Indian intellectuals and governing officials elsewhere in the country that the light of dhamma still burned at the margins of the Indian Empire.

4.3 "The panacea for all ills": Brahmos and the compassionate ascetic

While Chittagong Buddhists on the margins of Bengal argued in Bengali-language treatises that Buddha's teachings alone possessed the full disclosure of the universal truth, Bengalis in the urban center were offering their own interpretations of the Sage of Śākya. Apart from those involved in the Orientalist enterprise itself, the most prolific writings stemmed from the elite religious movement known as the Brahmo Samāj. Founded by the well-known social reformer Rammohun Roy (1772 – 1833), the Brahmo Samāj (est. 1829) consisted of a numerically small but influential community of upper-caste Bengalis whose critical work for the East India Company was rewarded with large estates, wealth and coveted jobs.[58] Although loosely bound by Roy's deism and iconoclasm, it was not until 1843 when the wealthy landowner Debendranath Tagore (1817 – 1905)—father of later Nobel laureate Rabindranath—took over the Samāj that it was transformed into an enlarged organization bound by its own liturgies, schools and initiation ceremonies.

An appreciation for the Buddha's dharma appears to have played no role in the early development of the Brahmos although many of its leading luminaries were exposed to living Buddhist cultures on the borders of Bengal. Roy, for instance, traveled to central Bhutan between 1812 – 15 on behalf of the East India Company. The existing accounts from those journeys, however, make clear that the "impure habits" of the Drukpa Kagyu Buddhist

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[57] This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

[58] The group was first founded as the Calcutta Unitarian Committee in 1823. Later, they distanced themselves from the church, establishing the Brahmo Sabha in 1829 and finally the Brahmo Samāj in 1843. For a major study of the group, see David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samāj and the shaping of the modern Indian mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

population were largely seen as repugnant to Roy and his Bengali colleague.[59] Debendranath was no stranger to Buddhist lands either, taking a forty-day trip through Ceylon in 1859 that involved visiting numerous Buddhist sites and meeting eminent Buddhist leaders. Accompanying him on the journey was his new disciple, the twenty-one year old bank clerk and future leader of the Brahmos, Keshab Chandra Sen (1838 – 84). While Keshab's account of that trip (*Diary of Ceylon*) reveals little of Debendranath's impressions of Sinhala Buddhist culture, it appears to have struck a chord with the young accountant himself. Despite his own misgivings about Sinhalese culture, he praised Buddha's rationalism and loving-kindness.[60] One can only speculate if it was the journey to Ceylon that sparked Keshab's interest in Buddhism or perhaps his prior education at Calcutta's recently established Hindu College, but whatever the cause, it was Keshab more than any other Brahmo figure that popularized the name of Buddha. Like the Brahmos writ large, Keshab's ideas and life are the subject of innumerable studies, but only in passing have scholars ever remarked on his attraction towards Buddhism.[61]

In order to appreciate the role that Buddhism played in Brahmoism (and the Buddha was always just one pillar in its spiritual architecture), it is necessary to understand the group's broader cultural vision. A key Brahmo tenet, originating from Roy's study of other religious traditions and involvement with the Unitarian Church, was the idea that underneath the dogmas and rituals of 'religion' lay a hidden core of rationality and humanism. Deism and piety were at the center of Brahmo teachings and to worship the one true God (*Brahmā*), Brahmos congregated in their own homes where the idolatry and superstition of their peers

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[59] Kishen Kant Bose, "Account of Bootan, translated [from the Bengali] by D. Scott," *Asiatick Researches,* Vol. 15 (1825): 128 – 56. Some of Roy's later biographers claimed that he spent his "early missing years" studying with Buddhist pandits in Benares or alternatively, that he went to Tibet to study Buddhism but these claims seem spurious since Roy's own writings never mention them (see, Noel Salmond, *Hindu Iconoclasts: Rammohun Roy, Dayananda Sarasvati and Nineteenth-century polemics against idolatry* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2004), 45). It's most likely that the nomenclature of "Tibet" refers to his journeys to Bhutan, since the most common North Indian word for this region "Bhot" simply designates the Buddhist Himalayan region at large. For an insightful study of these Bengali-led East India Company excursions to the Himalaya, see John Bray, "Krishnakanta Basu, Rammohan Ray [sic] and early 19th century British contacts with Bhutan and Tibet," unpublished paper.

[60] See, Keshab Chandra Sen, *Diary in Ceylon, from 27th September to 5th November 1859* (Calcutta: Brahmo Tract Society, 1888) 6, 26 – 27, 38 – 39.

[61] On Keshab (also spelled as Keshub), see P.C. Mazoomdar, *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1887); Frans L. Damen, *Crisis and Religious Renewal in the Brahmo Samāj (1860 – 1884): a documentary study of the emergence of the "New Dispensation" under Keshab Chandra Sen* (Leuven, Belgium: Department Oriëntalistiek, 1983).

was absent. When Keshab gained control of the Samāj in the early 1860s, the insular tendencies of the Brahmos was abandoned for a more rigorous missionary spirit that Keshab hoped would capture the hearts and minds of those beyond the Calcutta metropole.[62] Keshab's message, as the historian David Kopf explains, was,

> aimed at the liberal, young, college students whose education had freed them [in Keshab's words] 'from idolatry and the galling yoke of Brahmanical priesthood,' which 'for centuries smothered and paralyzed all the nobler sentiments and energies of the people.' India needed social reform and social reformers. Social progress could not be accomplished by talk, but by 'hard work.' 'There is a lack of moral courage in our country,' said Keshub and 'the sense of duty is dead.'…[he] maintained that social reform had to be achieved by means of religion, but not by means of the prevailing form of decadent Hindu practices. The answer…was the wedding of rational religion with 'practical work for the social good of the country.'[63]

According to Keshab, religious reform had the potential to trigger much needed social change but the message needed to be universal to succeed. Indians (and Bengalis in particular), he argued, had a superior understanding of the Deity and this gave them an important national and international role in returning humanity to a purer form of Theism. To disseminate the Brahmo message, he created a body of missionaries and writers, trained to travel the country and spread the good word.

When Brahmos gathered for worship or delivered lectures at town halls and rural villages, they circulated and read from pamphlets and books they produced through the country's growing publishing houses.[64] Where missionaries could not reach in person, the printed word could travel. With Debendranath's financing, Keshab pioneered print cultures, editing several English and Bengali fortnightlies and bringing Brahmoism to the doorstep of the educated literate Indian. His English-language newspaper, *Indian Mirror*, launched in 1861, was especially germane. As the second English paper in India at that time under

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[62] According to Damen, *Crisis and Religious Renewal,* 4, by the 1870s, Keshab's Brahmoism was being practiced in "more than 100 provincial towns and villages all over the subcontinent." Not everyone was pleased with the direction that Keshab took the Samāj, leading to a split in 1866 (largely on the basis of Keshab's perceived anti-Hindu and pro-Christian leanings) with Keshab leading the majority of the flock.

[63] David Kopf, "Neo-Hindu Views of Unitarian and Trinitarian Christianity in Nineteenth century Bengal: the case of Keshub Chandra Sen," in *Neo-Hindu views of Christianity,* edited by Arvind Sharma (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 109. The in-text quotes are from Keshab's first published pamphlet, *Young Bengal: this is for you* (1860), 1 – 5.

[64] For vivid descriptions of the daily lives of Brahmo missionaries and ascetics, see, Mazoomdar, *Life and Teachings of Keshub,* particularly 262 – 75. On print cultures in nineteenth-century India, see Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books* [on north India]; Green, *Bombay Islam* [on west India]; and Anindita Ghosh, "An Uncertain "Coming of the Book": Early Print Culture in Colonial India," *Book History* Vol. 6 (2003): 23 – 56 [on Bengal].

'native' editorial control, it quickly blossomed into one of the most popular newspapers in the country, becoming as well known in Bombay, Lahore and Madras as it was in its Bengali backyard.[65] While the newspaper content was more general, blending current events and advertisements with the latest happenings of the Brahmos, Brahmo tracts themselves were more eclectic. Although Buddhism did not fill the columns of most Brahmo works, it was of special interest and the diversity and extent of this 'Brahmo Buddhism' is worthy of an independent study.

My own survey of the materials held at the National Library and Sadharan Brahmo Samāj Library in Calcutta revealed everything from short tracts on Buddha's life to commentaries on the meaning of nirvana. Catalogues and reviews of Brahmo tracts provide even more evidence of its robust place in the Brahmo consciousness. A few examples will suffice. For instance, a circular from the *Theistic Annual* produced in 1875 includes a short pamphlet entitled "the pearls of Buddha." The "pearls," taken from the Sanskrit Buddhist scripture, *Sutras of the Forty-two Sections,* declare:

> [Buddha said]: A man who foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my ungrudging love; the more evil comes from him, the more good shall go from me…
>
> [Buddha said]: Who is the good man? The religious man only is good. And what is goodness? First and foremost, it is the agreement of the will with the conscience (reason). Who is the great man? He who is strongest in exercise of patience. He who patiently endures injury, and maintains a blameless life—he is a man indeed.[66]

In the same pamphlet, we learn that Brahmos also read from the *Prātimokṣa* or Buddhist texts on monastic conduct. Although we can only speculate as to how the texts were interpreted, it is easy to see the connection between these texts' emphasis on self-discipline and morality with the Brahmo ideal of self-cultivation and piety. One did not have to be or

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[65] By 1871, the paper was Calcutta's second most popular English daily. Other popular Brahmo papers included the Bengali-language *Dharmatattva* (1864) and English-language, *The New Dispensation* (1881). See, Damen, *Crisis and Religious Renewal,* 61.

[66] *The Theistic Annual for 1875,* 42 – 43. Those passages are taken from sections 7 and 13, respectively. The *Sutra of the Forty two Sections* is largely regarded as one of the first Sanskrit sutras translated into Chinese, although contemporary scholarship has begun to challenge that thesis. See Robert H. Sharf, "The Scripture in Forty-two sections," in *Religions of China in practice*, edited by Donald Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 360 – 71. The Brahmo translation was most likely an adaptation of Samuel Beal's, *A Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese* (London: Trübner & Co., 1871), selections of which had already been published in the *Asiatic Society of Bengal.*

become a Buddhist in order to appreciate and inculcate these pearls of wisdom. One simply had to be ethical, reasonable, and patient, virtues that any good Brahmo should uphold.

In 1876, the Bengali Ladies' Association run by a group of "Brahmicas of Calcutta" produced short pamphlets on the "Life of Buddha" as part of their series, *Prabandha Latika,* or "essays by Bengali ladies respectfully presented to the ladies of this country."[67] In another pamphlet published the following year, Buddha's call to spread his message of compassion to all lands, distant and near, among all people, is equated to a Christ-like social gospel in which the ancient sage attempts to improve the lot of humanity.[68] The Buddhist message of equality, compassion and social reform, as will be seen further below, had a wide-ranging appeal to those Brahmos envisioning a new religion for the modern world. Although the Brahmo interest in Buddhism should not be seen as exclusive—after all, the "pearls of Buddha" were accompanied with similar humanistic aphorisms emanating from the mouth of Meister Eckhart and Dādū (of the DādūPanthis)—the kinetic relationship between an imagined Buddhism and Keshab's universal church of the future was beginning to take shape.

In 1875, Keshab ordered five disciples to study five different religious traditions—Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism—and then produce a book on each one encoding it within the group's universalist message. The figure selected to study Buddhism was a thirty-five year old ascetic named Aghore Nath Gupta (1841 – 81).[69] With the assistance of the Asiatic Society's Rajendralal Mitra, Aghore Nath scoured local libraries, reading primary and secondary works on Buddhism before completing one of the first book-length modern Bengali-language studies of Buddhism, *Sakyamuni-Charitra o Nirbana-tattva* (*Life of Śākyamuni and the Philosophy of Nirvana*).[70] According to Kopf, two aspects of Aghore Nath's *Sakyamuni-Charitra* (1882) are especially noteworthy.[71] First, a major

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[67] *The Brahmo Year-book for 1876, Brief records of work and life in the Theistic Churches of India,* edited by Sophia Dobson Collet (London: Williams and Norgate, 1876), 96.
[68] *Budhistic Gospel* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1872), 2 – 3.
[69] In the early 1870s, Aghore Nath worked in greater Bengal, Assam (1870) and Orissa (1873), moving to upper India and the Punjab in the late 1870s. He died in Lucknow in December 1881 during a missionary tour, becoming known as a *Sādhu* or Saint by the "Apostolic Darbar." See Damen, *Crisis and Religious Renewal,* 132 and Kopf, *Brahmo Samāj,* 236 – 38.
[70] Kopf, *Brahmo Samāj,* 283 asserts that this is the first full-length study of Buddhism in any modern Indian language but Ram Kumar Vidyaratna's *Buddhadeva Charita o Bauddha Dharmer Samkshepa Bibaran* (*Life of Buddha, with a compendious account of Buddhism*) was published two years prior. On this text, see below.
[71] Kopf, *Brahmo Samāj,* 283 – 84. The text was published in 1882, one year after Aghore Nath's death.

impulse in Brahmo thought was the denial of human divinity and thus, Śākyamuni, like Christ and Krishna, was portrayed as a human being who taught an ethical message of universal application. Second, the Buddha's reputed atheism (*anīśvaravāda*) was a major problem. As theists, Brahmos believed that no true reformer could be devoid of God's grace.[72] In order to reconcile these differences, Aghore Nath argued that although Buddha was opposed to prevailing notions of God (*īśvar*), he "was himself neither an atheist nor an agnostic," but a "religious humanist…[who] did not believe in a creator because to him, the world was false and full of illusion. But as a humanist, he found religion in the notion of infinite knowledge and that man's pursuit of it would grant him salvation."[73]

Other Brahmo activists were no less energetic in adapting the Buddha's life and message to the contemporary Indian scene. For impressionable young men like Ram Kumar Vidyaratna, one of the ringleaders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samāj, a breakaway sect (est. 1878) known for its progressive views on caste abolition and child marriage, preaching Buddha's message became an early profession. After publishing his own 228-page Bengali-language biography, *Buddhadeva Charita o Bauddha Dharmer Samkshepa Bibaran* (*Life of Buddha, with a compendious account of Buddhism*) in 1880, the Calcutta University graduate traveled by train and foot across Bengal and Assam for nearly two years, interspersing lectures on labor conditions in tea plantations with the "Life and the devotional spirit of Buddha."[74] One newspaper reporting on a lecture delivered in February 1882 describes how Ram Kumar "dwelt at length on the spirit of self-sacrifice, enthusiasm and earnestness, which distinguished Buddha and which enabled him to become the founder of a religion which after more than 2000 years is still professed by more than 40 crores of human beings."[75]

Among the most influential of Brahmo voices on Buddhism was that of Keshab himself. One and a half years after the Sadharan Brahmo Samāj schism, Keshab inaugurated

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[72] Kopf's discussion of the Brahmos of the 1850s when the Tattvabodhini Sabha was "hijacked" by "atheist-humanists" is suggestive of wider ambiguities regarding Buddhism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. See, Kopf, *Brahmo Samāj,* 44 – 60.
[73] A.N. Gupta, *Shakyamuni Charito Nirbantattva*, quoted in and translated by Kopf, *Brahmo Samāj,* 284. According to Kopf, "the end product was a convincing case, at least from the Keshubite point of view."
[74] A review of this book is found in the *The Brahmo Year book for 1880,* 74. For a discussion of Ramkumar's missionary work, particularly as it relates to labor reform in Assam, see Dipankar Bannerjee, *Brahmo Samāj and north-east India* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers, 2006), 34 – 36, with the appendices including several reprints of valuable primary source documents.
[75] *The East,* February 6, 1882, quoted in *The Brahmo Year book for 1882,* 15.

the *Nāva Vidhan* or New Dispensation. Aimed at harmonizing and unifying all conflicting creeds, the New Dispensation was Keshab's attempt to demonstrate to the world that the *Nāva Vidhan* "was neither mysticism nor medieval asceticism but the prototype for the universal church of the future."[76] To demonstrate their universalism in ritual fashion, New Dispensation congregations arranged the chief symbols of the major religions on a single altar and read from five different Brahmo books, each containing the teachings of Moses, Buddha, Christ, Mohammad and the Hindu saints, respectively. For Keshab, the beloved and revered Buddha was the very embodiment of detachment or asceticism (*vairāgya*).[77] The ascetic turn in the movement had begun in the early 1870s when the most serious devotees began taking vows (*vrata*) to live independent lives sweeping, cooking, cleaning and praying, followed by ritual service to the outside community in the forms of songs and counseling. The justifications for an ascetic life—these practices were reviled by the Sadharan branch—drew heavily from Śaiva, Christian and Buddhist sources. The strength and extent of the Buddhist influence became very clear when Keshab orchestrated a pilgrimage to the MahaBodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya during the "Missionary Expedition" of November 1879. A pilgrims' account from that journey describes their activities:

> The minister [Keshab] and the party stood speechless, looking intently at the [Buddha] figure, and studying the principles of asceticism delineated on the face. The spirit of the noble founder of Buddhism seemed to pervade the assembly…[later, at the Bodhi tree] the sun was about to set, and evening was drawing near; there was solemn stillness on all sides. And there, where Śākya Muni sat 2,500 years ago to learn asceticism sat our Minister to hold communion with the spirit of that prophet.[78]

Three months after the pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, Keshab formally launched the New Dispensation along with a novel Brahmo rite known as *Sādhu Samāgam,* or "Communion with the Saints." Like all New Dispensation practices, Keshab intended the samāgam to be universal in outlook, fusing "all dispensations into a new chemical compound…which

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[76] Kopf, *Brahmo Samāj,* 275.
[77] See, for instance, *New Dispensation,* March 14, 1881, 2 – 3; June 16, 1881, 1; July 7, 1881, 1; September 9, 1881, 1; *Indian Mirror,* March 14, 1881; *The Brahmo Year book for 1880,* 34. This is also made explicit in Keshab Chunder Sen, *Sādhusamāgam*: *discourses on pilgrimage to the prophets*, edited and translated from the Bengali by Jamini Kanta Koar (Calcutta: Navavidhan Publication Committee, 1956 [1880]), 16. It should be noted that *vairāgya* does not mean asceticism itself (which is usually correlated with *tapas*), but is typically translated as non-attachment or renunciation. However Brahmo writers regularly translated the term into English as asceticism and hence, I follow their translation here.
[78] *Missionary Expedition* (Calcutta: Brahmo Tract Society, 1881), 14 – 15.

absorbs all that is good and true and beautiful in the objective world."[79] Devotees were instructed to recite daily hymns honoring Buddha along with a more elaborate ceremony held every Friday and at major Brahmo festivals (*utsav*).[80]

A description of the first *Śākya-Samāgam* or "Communion with Buddha" has been published in whole and is worth a brief excursion. Gathering in the downstairs of Keshab's Lily Cottage on March 14, 1880, Keshab called on his fellow pilgrims to incorporate *bodhicitta* or "enlightened selfhood" into their innermost spirit. "If one is to go to Buddha," he explained, "one must put off the clothes of the world. One must abandon the old body of the senses and don a new divine (*bhāgavatī*) body to go to Him."[81] Then with a Bo tree leaf (or sapling) and an image of Buddha Keshab acquired in Bodh Gaya, he asked the crowd to invoke the atmosphere (*bhāva*) of Sākya:

> The Buddha Śākya attained spiritual perfection in Gayā. Please show us today where the real Gayā is in our minds. You took us once, Mother, to that external Gayā. Now please show us the genuine Gayā and the real tree of detachment within ourselves. Manifest the sentiment (*bhāva*) of that Śākya, in whose eyes [are] meditation (*dhyāna*) and on whose body [are] the signs of trance (*samādhi*).[82]

He explained to those in attendance that Śākyamuni was the true symbol of compassion, the "deliverer incarnate of suffering humanity" who "holds in his hands the panacea for all ills."[83] To become Śākya-like and acquire nirvana, however, requires not just the practice (*sadhana*) of detachment (*vairāgyi*) but also that of contemplation (*dhyāna*). "Sakya-life enters our life, Sakya-blood courses through our own and we become Sakya-minded, Sakya-possessed. Sakya becomes a Bengali. Behold the soul of Sakyamuni ensouled in all."[84] With the coming of Buddha and his discovery of the path of nirvana, a new dispensation had begun, a "nation of enlightened, ascetic race of Buddhists" that transcended the Vedas,

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[79] Keshab Chunder Sen, "Apostles of the New Dispensation," a lecture delivered at the Town Hall, Calcutta, January 22, 1881, quoted in Sivnath Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samāj*, Vol. II (Calcutta: Brahmo Mission Press, 1912), 230.
[80] Keshab Sen, "The Harmony of Prophets," in *The Brahmo Year book for 1880,* 85. For a discussion of the *sadhu-samāgam* within the wider social context, see Damen, *Crisis and Religious Renewal,* 260 – 93.
[81] *Indian Mirror,* March 14, 1880, C.
[82] Here I follow the text published in the *Indian Mirror,* March 14, 1880, C. For Koar's translation of the same passage, see Sen, *Sādhu-samāgam,* 15.
[83] Sen, *Sādhu-samāgam,* 19 – 20.
[84] Sen, *Sādhu-samāgam,* 17.

Brahminism, and bibliolatry. Śākya's discovery of nirvana, Keshab concludes, "shall save the world and emancipate humanity."[85]

Despite the fact that the Brahmo promotion of Buddhism came through a deeply assimilative lens, their admiration for early Buddhist teachings was deep enough to arouse sustained public interest in the tradition. The names of many Bengalis who later popularized Buddhism through plays, dramas, and popular writings—Rabindranath Tagore, Satyendranath Tagore, Dwijiendranath Tagore, Nobin Chandra Sen, Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore and so on—all came from families who were closely associated with the Brahmo Samāj. Bengalis were at the forefront of modern Indian nationalism and a love for Buddha meant a love for the nation. All great nations need a grand history and Buddha's 'Indianness,' in their eyes, was a major civilizational asset.[86]

4.4 The universal brotherhood of humanity: Indian Theosophy and Mahatma Buddha

The Buddhist link to Keshab and the Brahmos unfolded in other ways as well. When Keshab's relative, Norendronath Sen took over the *Indian Mirror* in 1879, the paper became, as Steven Kemper puts it, "a vehicle for propagandizing the Buddhist cause."[87] Norendronath was not a Brahmo but a staunch proponent of Theosophy, the latest religious movement to profess the unity and fusion of all the world's wisdom traditions. In April of 1882, when Norendronath opened Calcutta's first Theosophical Society branch, the American and German - Ukrainian founders of Theosophy had been in India for barely three years. The American, Colonel Henry Olcott (1832 – 1907), was a retired officer, spiritualist, journalist and prominent New York lawyer who had served as a primary investigator in the Abraham Lincoln assassination case.[88] His colleague, Helena Blavatsky (1831 – 91) was cut from different cloth. Born to German nobility, Blavatsky spent much of her youth living among the Kalmuck Buddhist tribes of eastern Russia where her grandfather was a distinguished military commander. After marrying the vice-governor of an Armenian province, Blavatsky

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[85] Sen, *Sādhu-samāgam,* 19.
[86] The influence of the Tagores and Brahmos on figures like Nehru was also quite formative and many of these civilizational aspirations and ideals fixated on Buddhism would later serve as guiding principles during the Nehruvian era, an issue I discuss in chapter nine.
[87] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation*, 190.
[88] On Olcott, see Prothero, *The White Buddhist.*

moved between the imperial aristocracy in Tbilisi and Cairo. Around 1874, the duo met in New York and founded the Theosophical Society one year later in a New York City apartment.[89]

With its ad hoc conglomeration of Darwinian science, phenomenalism, chemistry, mesmeric healing and much, much more, this nineteenth-century hybrid religion can be challenging to define. For American and British working classes, Theosophy's "do-it-yourself" form of spiritualism offered direct experience of the divine without priestly mediation; to "renegade Protestants," it was a refuge from the prying eyes of the Church; to the eclectic and highbrow, it could be religious, scientific, neither or both.[90] On paper, the charter was simpler: the society sought the union of divine (*theos*) wisdom (*sophia*). Olcott was its "ethicist" and "organizer" and Blavatsky its "esoteric philosopher."[91] Theosophy came about at a moment when Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) had prompted many intellectuals to believe that materialist science would finally lead humanity away from religion and create a true heaven on earth. Although deeply influenced by Dawinian thinking, spiritualists like Blavatsky and Olcott believed that neither science nor Christianity could ever completely satiate human needs. Undergirding the movement itself was the prominent Euro-American nineteenth-century idea that all the world's religions, particularly Christianity, are *imperfect* reflections of a single universal truth. That basic premise was shared by many nineteenth-century minds, but Theosophists took it one step further. Comparative religious scholarship, occult theory and the experience of the practitioner, they claimed, proved that all contemporary knowledge, including modern science was indebted to an ancient wisdom tradition.

The progenitors and keepers of this perennial truth were a group of cryptic figures known as the Masters or Mahatmas. While the identity of the Masters remains deeply contested—some claim they were imaginative inventions while others argue they were based

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[89] For a critical study of Blavatsky, see Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1997 [1994]); Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: Theosophy and the Emergence of the Western Guru* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1993), 1 – 104.

[90] "Do-it-yourself" is from Laurence Cox, *Buddhism and Ireland: from the Celts to the counter-culture and beyond* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 173 – 74. "Refuge for renegade Protestants" is James Joyce's assessment, quoted in Cox on 177.

[91] Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 51.

on human mentors—there is no need to rehearse the nearly century and a half debate.[92] Instead, to understand Theosophy and its pervasive role in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century world, we need to consider two important facets about the Masters. First, communication with them was limited to Blavatsky, Olcott and later, a small but growing number of other 'spiritual adepts' capable of accessing the 'astral plane' where the Masters sometimes dwelled.[93] In other words, Blavatsky and Olcott, for all purposes, were the (un)official voice of nineteenth-century Theosophy. Second, while the astral plane was sometimes truly astral, during the 1880s when the flow of letters 'signed' by the Masters reached peak volume, their geographical abode was almost always located in Tibet, India or Ceylon. Thus, despite Theosophy's theoretical universalism and appreciation for all wisdom traditions, the perennial truths they expressed were unabashedly Hindu and Buddhist. That is not to say that all Hindus or Buddhists agreed with the Theosophists' interpretation of their doctrines—many did not—but the Theosophists argued that their interpretations of those traditions were the 'real' and 'authentic' versions.

In a critical study of the Masters as represented in Theosophical literature, Paul Johnson notes that this "cosmic hierarchy of supermen" were most often portrayed as males wearing "Buddhist robes" or "dressed in Rajput fashion."[94] For instance, one of the most prominent Masters, Morya—or in Theosophical parlance, "M"—was typically seen as one of three different figures: a Hindu ruler of central India, a Buddhist in Tibet or a Nepalese Buddhist living in Ceylon. Other Masters, like the famed Koot Hoomi or "KH" were also widely believed to be Buddhists in Tibet.[95] When Indian Theosophists 'encountered' the Masters in the 1880s, they described the latter as wearing "Buddhist gowns" and living in Buddhist kingdoms (typically, Tibet, Sikkim or Bhutan).[96] It is easy to scrutinize many of

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[92] For a provocative study in this regard, see Johnson, *Masters Revealed.*

[93] As Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon,* 34, describes them: "[The Masters are] beings whose rigorous esoteric training and absolute purity have invested them with supernatural powers. Immortal and immaterial, the masters can inhabit material or sem-material bodies at will (this point is not quite clear)…Commujnicating with one another by means of a sort of cosmic radio, they form a link between human beings and the chiefs of the divine hierarchy which rules the cosmos."

[94] Johnson, *Masters Revealed,* 40, 196.

[95] Johnson, *Masters Revealed,* 40 – 41 and 195 – 97.

[96] According to Johnson, *Masters Revealed,* 5, after the founders settled permanently in India in 1880, the identity of the Masters became more Tibetan and more Buddhist. Johnson (204) speculates that this shift may have been triggered by Olcott and Blavatsky's growing contact with the Tibetologist Sarat Chandra Das. For examples of meetings with the Mahatmas, dressed in "Buddhist gowns," see C. Ramiah, "Dreams about Mahatmas Realized [PartI], *Supplement to The Theosophist*, September, 1884, 125 –26; C. Ramiah,

these encounters but their historical value lays less in their factual basis than in the images of Buddhism being constructed. For not only was Theosophy incredibly popular in the western hemisphere but it had a huge bearing on Indian national politics, leadership and modern religious movements.[97] For these reasons, Theosophy needs to be carefully evaluated. Theosophical literature was widely distributed among elite Indian classes and the fact that the Masters were often seen as Buddhist was of no small consequence. Among Theosophical circles, Indian 'brothers' and 'fellows' as Theosophical members were called, were instructed to dress in Buddhist robes and even take on Buddhist identities. In other words, there was a visceral component to the Masters' identities that located ancient wisdom and modern science—the fusion of which was Theosophy's call to arms—in the figure of the Buddhist. While it would be a stretch of the imagination to claim that Theosophy was only Buddhism, Laurence Cox is right when he writes, "not all Theosophists became Buddhists; but any serious member had to engage with Buddhism."[98]

In India, the Theosophical Society (hereafter, TS) found long-term supporters among a primarily urban educated Indian elite. The institutional headquarters was always at Adyar, a leafy suburb of Madras where Olcott and Blavatsky built lodges, multi-denominational temples and an outstanding library amidst a vast campus of banyan trees.[99] For Indians, who by 1893 formed roughly three quarters of the organization's thirty-five hundred members at more than eighty Indian chapters, the organization had two primary attractions: first, its anti-Christian missionary rhetoric and second, its message of Asian revival.[100] The first of these themes, articulated everywhere from public platforms to Blavatsky's "textbook" of Theosophical thought, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), allowed the TS to forge several unions with

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"Psychological Experiences" [Part II], *Supplement to The Theosophist*, October, 1884, 138 – 39 and R. Casava Pillai, "How a Hindu of Madras interviewed a Mahatma at Sikkim," *The Indian Mirror*, March 3, 1885, 2 and March 7, 1885, 2.

[97] See, Mark Bevir, "Theosophy and the Origins of the Indian National Congress," *International Journal of Hindu Studies,* Vol. 7/3 (2003): 99 – 115; and Michael Bergunder, "Experiments with Theosophical Truth: Gandhi, esotericism and global religious history," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 82 (2014): 398 – 426.

[98] Laurence Cox, *Buddhism and Ireland,* 176.

[99] Olcott lived at Adyar for approximately twenty years in total between 1880 and 1907 and Blavatsky for close to five between 1880 and 1885.

[100] Hirendra Nath Datta, "Theosophy: in creeds and nations," *Theosophy in India* Vol. 1/1 (1904), 10; *Theosophist* Vol. 13 (1892), 20 – 33. Although the TS had some supporters among the English social circles, including the Sinnets, the Humes and Gordons, theirs was a very limited patronage. Most Indian supporters came from the new educated college elite and princely families.

local associations that resented the missionary presence.[101] The second theme, of Asian revival, was framed in terms of what Olcott called a "National Samāj of Aryavarta" for India and a "United Buddhist World" for the rest of Asia. With the help of the Theosophical Society, Olcott promised, "the ancient trunks of Indian Brahmanism and Buddhism" could be re-fertilized, "causing their hoary crowns to be once more covered with luxuriant leafage."[102] Using the metaphor of rebirth, Olcott argued that there would be both continuity and difference in Hinduism's and Buddhism's modern formation:

> once fully resuscitated, these religions, will be as different from their immediate 'forebears,' as the adult is from the youth; or, rather as the new personality with which the evolving human monad clothes itself differs from the decrepit body it shook off in its last previous reincarnation. The life is the same, the individuality identical, but the new corporeal investiture will differ from the old.[103]

Herein lay the primary difference between the Theosophists and the Orientalists, the latter of whose work from which the Theosophists heavily drew. Whereas (post-Anglicist) Orientalists saw in Asia's past a grand tradition of learning and excellence, they wished to preserve it in museums and believed the only way forward for India was to completely adopt European modalities and epistemologies.[104] The Theosophists, in contrast, were as Cox describes them, "dissident Orientalists," who argued that a modern future lay in the *combination* of "Eastern" spiritual truths with "Western" material technologies.[105] Cleansed of superstition and dogma, the underlying morality, creativity and scientific thinking at the root of these ancient Indian religions could be revived.

While Theosophy's anti-Christian rhetoric and devotion to 'Oriental wisdom' was able to mobilize broad levels of support, the devil, as always, was in the details. To begin with, many Asians resented the fact that Blavatsky and Olcott presented themselves as the ultimate authority on indigenous traditions. As the Ārya Samāj leader, Dayananda Saraswati asserted in a letter to Blavatsky less than one year after her arrival in India, "you had come

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[101] The anti-Christian element in Theosophy was much stronger in Blavatsky than it was in Olcott with the latter's criticism of Christianity directed primarily towards its evangelical missionary efforts rather than the early teaching. Christian organizations were severe critics of Olcott and the Theosophists more widely.
[102] Henry Olcott, "Net Results of our Indian Work," *The Theosophist* Vol. 12/1 (1890), 2.
[103] Henry Olcott, "Net Results of our Indian Work," *The Theosophist* Vol. 12/1 (1890), 2.
[104] On the anglicist divide in nineteenth century Orientalism, see Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*.
[105] Laurence Cox, "Rethinking early western Buddhists: beachcombers, 'going native' and dissident Orientalism," *Contemporary Buddhism* Vol. 14/1 (2013): 116 – 33. Olcott's division of a "spiritual east" and "material west" was symptomatic of a wider worldview. See, Partha Chatterjee, *The nation and its fragments: colonial and postcolonial histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

here to become disciples, now you wish to become teachers."[106] There were internal frictions (and scandals) as well.[107] Olcott envisioned a broad, inclusive society committed to a liberal theory of religious unity and social reform. Blavatsky, on the other hand, imagined a small private body where a chosen few would be inducted into the mysteries of the occult. In her eyes, Olcott's activism among the poor and masses was nothing short of a distraction.[108]

A more enduring issue was the complex set of international alliances that held together the TS' global enterprise. Theosophy looked different in different places, reflecting the outlooks and needs of its various constituencies. For instance, in Ceylon, there were two main Theosophical factions: the more popular Buddhist Theosophical Society, whose membership was mainly Sinhala and a smaller, "scientific" branch. The "scientific" branch, as Kitsiri Malagoda observes, was mostly "occult" whereas the Buddhist Theosophical Society "had very little Theosophy in it; what it did have was a great deal of Buddhism."[109] The Indian branches were no less diverse. In 1880s Punjab, the TS was closely linked to the Sikh reformist organization, the Singh Sabha whereas in Benares, it was led by a group of conservative Brahmin pandits. Likewise, the first Theosophical branch in Chittagong (est. 1887), as noted previously, was founded in conjunction with the Chittagong Buddhist Association and led by a coalition of monks and laymen. In other words, the patchwork of societies Olcott left in his tracks often reflected the diversity and aspirations of the participants themselves. The global composition of Theosophy would have long-term effects on its Indian membership, allowing Brothers and Fellows from across the globe to transcend cultural divides in a fusion of anti-colonialism and appreciation for non-Christian traditions.

Unlike the Brahmos, whose membership rarely included non-Indians, the Theosophical commitment to universalism could be demonstrated in its incredible linguistic, religious and cultural diversity. At annual and regional chapter meetings of the TS, functionaries attempted to balance and unite this diverse clientele through ritual expressions

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[106] Dayananda Sarasvati, *Autobiography,* 3rd revised edition, edited and translated from the Hindi by K.C. Yadav (New Delhi: Manohar, 1987), 68.
[107] See Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon.*
[108] Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 117. As Prothero, 53, puts it, Blavatsky's idea of spiritual life was "individual rather than social: one labored to uplift *oneself,* not to uplift *others*."
[109] Malagoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society,* 246. The Buddhist Theosopical Society had a formative impact on Sinhala Buddhist society, establishing English-language schools parallel to Christian mission schools and drawing on the support of both clerical and lay figures across the island. See, George Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 48 – 53.

of harmony and syncretism. Nowhere was this more apparent than at the opening of the Adyar Library on December 29, 1886. The ceremony began with congratulatory poems in Sanskrit, Pali and Avestan. Ritual specialists from Zoroastrian, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu traditions then paraded before a common platform, invoking blessings upon the library in their own languages and according to their respective traditions. During Olcott's lecture, he described the society's mission as two-fold: to construct a "Universal Brotherhood of Humanity" and to foster the study of Asian religious traditions. The library's manuscript collection, which quickly emerged as one of the largest in South India, would allow the "pandit, mobed, bhikshu and maulvi" to "reestablish their dignity" and publish catechisms for each respective tradition.[110]

Despite the TS' public commitment to pluralism, Olcott's private identity as a Buddhist and prominent public status as a protector of Buddhist interests in Ceylon meant that Buddhism always possessed a cherished place. Articles on Buddhist doctrine were regularly published in *The Theosophist*, the monthly periodical (still running today) "devoted to Oriental philosophy, art, literature and occultism" that the TS launched in 1879. In the journal's first two decades, numerous Indians debated fine points of Buddhist doctrine—albeit through their own Theosophical lens—but with the belief that studying the "Arhat Path" of early Buddhism was of necessity to mankind.[111] Discussion of the Arhat Path was always relational, to be compared to and in conjunction with other religious paths, whether those of Hindus, Daoists, Christians, Muslims and so on. However, under Olcott's editorial control, the number of articles on Buddhism, including translations of various Buddhist sources, was always robust. While the commentary on these sources often came with limited or no understanding of the cultural context in which they were produced, their sheer availability and presence in the marketplace was a significant departure from decades before. Although Theosophical writings were largely dismissive of contemporary Buddhist practices, perpetuating the view that present-day Buddhism was but a "brutalization" of its imagined original state, these 'scripturalist' attitudes also shared the column with those of eminent Buddhist monks who wrote not as outsiders but from firmly within the center of centuries-old

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[110] Quoted in Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 147

[111] Prominent Indian contributors included, Camul Mukherjee, Damodar Mavalankar, Norendro Nath Sen, Babaji Dhabagirinath, Ramaswami Iyer and T. Subba Row. The major sources for their discussion of Buddhism appear to have been Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism,* Sinnet's *Esoteric Buddhism* and Blavatasky's *Isis Unveiled.*

Buddhist scholarship.[112]

When Olcott and Blavatsky first traveled to Ceylon in 1880, they were accompanied by approximately twenty companions, most of whom were Hindus and Zoroastrians from Bombay. Arriving in Galle, the entire party took *pañcśil* under the eminent Buddhist monk, Hikkaḍuvē Sumȧngala (1827 – 1911).[113] How these individuals understood their taking of pañcśil under a Buddhist cleric and whether it entailed a change in identity, religious or otherwise, is difficult to assess. The writings of some of these figures make clear that there were differences between the various traditions, although the harder edges are often blurred. Although critical studies of individual Indian Theosophists are lacking, it appears that moving in between religious identities for the Theosophists was not problematic.[114] All religions, in their view, were incomplete expressions of the truth and as the Theosophical motto went, "there is no religion higher than truth" (*satyān nāsti paro dharm*). Therefore, external identities of Buddhist, Hindu and so on, were (theoretically) secondary to the higher identity of Theosophist or one who seeks divine wisdom. Of course, these idealistic expressions of earthly transcendence were always theoretical and the this-worldly logic of cultural politics and emerging religious nationalisms posed a grave challenge to the notion that Theosophists could be both Buddhist and Hindu at the same time.

For the Maharashtrian-born Brahmin, Damodar Mavalankar (1857 – 85), Hindu – Buddhist Theosophy was as transformative as it was tragic.[115] One of the earliest and most respected of all the Indian *chelas*, Mavalankar accompanied Olcott and Blavatsky on their travels across South Asia. After taking pañcśil in Ceylon, he began calling himself a Buddhist, later adding the vows of a sanyassin and becoming a prolific writer of Theosophical thought. Although Buddhist scholars would undoubtedly cast a scrutinous eye at Mavalanakr's interpretations of "Arhat philosophy," with its thick Theosophical filter and Vedāntic overtones, his writings on Buddhism are among the most valued among

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[112] Henry Olcott, "Net Result of our Indian Work," *Theosophist*, Vol. 12/1 (1890), 2. For instance, the writings of the Pali scholar and influential Sinhalese monastic, Hikkaḍuvē Sumȧngala, appeared in the journal.
[113] On Hikkaḍuvē, see Anne Blackburn's outstanding study, *Locations of Buddhism*.
[114] An important exception is K. Paul Johnson, *Initiates of Theosophical Masters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
[115] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 74 – 75, describes him as Blavatsky's "one full success."

Theosophists.[116] However, Mavalankar's Theosophical journeys also cost him dearly, both in family and life. In exchange, he found universal brotherhood in the international family of Theosophists. Yet his ever-present search for the Mahatmas led to his ultimate demise, and he disappeared in the winter snows of Sikkim in 1885.[117] Not all Indian chelas were so unfortunate. In Manohar Lall, a Hindu doctor from Bombay *mofussil* that translated Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism* (1881) into Hindi and Gujarati no later than 1888, the organization found an energetic and enthusiastic promoter of Olcott's Buddhism. "True" Buddhism, the text explained, did not admit differences of schools, sects or beliefs. It was based solely on "scientific laws" and a "universal brotherhood" with "no taint of selfishness, sectarianism or intolerance."[118] This moral, scientific philosophy, in other words, was the *only* religion for the modern age.

The Theosophical fetish for early Buddhism and propagation of its 'unadulterated' form was not the only shift taking place. By the mid-1880s, several TS chapters in India housed images of Buddha in their meeting rooms, as did some members in their public workplace offices. If Buddhism truly was seen as David Kopf argues, as "a foreign religion," then now, its most potent symbol, Gautama himself, was returning to the soil.[119] The TS secretary in Bombay, Tukaram Tatya (1836 – 98), for instance, kept an image of Buddha in the Oriental Life Insurance office he managed.[120] A small marketplace for Buddhist goods and souvenirs, available for order via commercial outfitters in Kathmandu, Calcutta, Akyab, Rangoon, Madras and Bombay was emerging. An insert from the *MahaBodhi* in 1896, contains a list of advertisers selling Buddhist wares, including postcards of Buddhist monuments, metal ware, alms bowls (*pinda-pātrā*), yak tails, statues, and other materials "for

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[116] Damodar's collected writings were published posthumously in three collections. See, Damodar Mavalankar, *Damodar: the writings of a Hindu Chela,* edited by Sven Eek (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House*,* 1940); *Damodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1982); and *The Service of Humanity* (Santa Barbara: Concord Grove Press, 1982).

[117] Damodar's body was never found and years later, he remained an important rallying point for Theosophists, such as in 1909 when Annie Besant began reporting that he was going to return the following year "to lead the Theosophical Society." See, "Theosophical Falsehood," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 17/1 (1909), 7 – 8.

[118] Henry Olcott, *Buddhist Catechism,* 33rd edition (Adyar: Theosophical Society, 1897), 60. I have been unable to find any further information on Babu Manohar Lall, other than brief references. In the preface to the thirty-third edition of the English text, Olcott reported the text to have been translated into "twenty languages, mainly by Buddhists, for Buddhists" (no page number).

[119] Kopf, *Brahmo Samāj,* 283.

[120] See, *The Indian Mirror* March 3, 1885, 2 and March 7, 1885, 2 – 3, where K.S. Pillai mentions Buddha statues at Nellore, Bombay, and Madras.

equipping prayerhalls, libraries, museums, and temples."[121] While it is unclear how all these materials were utilized—for instance, were the TS Buddha images dressed and washed, as customary Hindu practice required or simply kept bare for aesthetic pleasure?—their possession and display was a radical intervention in the material culture of India's religious marketplace.

Some Theosophists, like Kesava Pillai, a police inspector in Nellore, even began to don Buddhist robes and organize pilgrimages to Buddhist sites. After being instructed in a letter from Master "K.H." to dress in the yellow cap and robe of the Gelukpas, take the name "Chandra Cusho" (the latter being a term of respect in Tibetan), Pillai departed for a two-month journey in 1885 with similarly dressed Theosophists through Sikkim and Bhutan. His reports from the journey make clear that neither he nor his companions were interested in learning from the "Red Caps" or Drukpa Kagyu monks who in the narrative appear as little more than dangerous architects of "Black Magic."[122] While Pillai's account fits well with common colonial travelogues of an 'exotic Lamaism,' it must also be recognized that his account—published in the popular *Indian Mirror*—must have also created a kind of ethnographic curiosity about Himalayan Buddhism. At the worst, it may have led to further sneers and rumors about the 'degraded practices' of the 'Buddhist Bhotias' (although Pillai praised the Gelukpa for their use of "White Magic"). Yet, on the other hand, it could inspire readers to pick up more informed ethnographic accounts left by intrepid scholars like Sarat Chandra Das or seek out Hindi and Bengali-speaking lama scholars like Ugyen Gyatso.

The fact is from the late 1880s until the mid to late 1890s, there was a sense among Indians both in and out of the society that Theosophy possessed (for better or for worse) a disproportionate share of Buddhism. That belief stemmed from three major factors. First, Olcott's personal preference for Buddhism over other religions intensified over the 1880s and the almost-legendary, Bodhisattva-like stories of the "White Buddhist" that circulated across South Asia augmented that perception. Olcott's Buddhism became increasingly pronounced after Blavatsky set sail for Europe in 1885—she never returned to India—leaving the organization's administration entirely in his hands. Although she continued to contest

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[121] See, *MahaBodhi* Vol. 5/3 (1896 – 97), insert. Among the most prominent retailers in the *MahaBodhi* were the "Newar Commercial Store" in Pattan (Nepal) and Calcutta and Moung Shwe Oh of Moulmein (Burma), who sold teakwood and Buddhist goods.
[122] *The Indian Mirror,* March 7, 1885, 2.

Olcott's leadership, the TS was, according to Stephen Prothero, "his organization and, as such, was under his control."[123] With Blavatsky effectively gone, Olcott steered the organization towards his campaign for a "United Buddhist World," fashioning himself, as Prothero puts it, "into someone resembling Buddhism's Paul."[124] Although Prothero is adamant that Olcott's personal commitment to Buddhism never interfered with his public activism on behalf of other religious groups, many of his contemporaries did not see it that way. While Blavatsky warned Olcott in private that his Buddhist activism would damage the society's reputation, Indian opponents of Theosophy were more open in their criticisms.[125] The Hindu reformist organization, the Ārya Samāj, for instance, circulated pamphlets in 1882 accusing Olcott of being an atheist, a Buddhist, or both, and instructed their followers to lead "street-corner denunciations" of these "faithless Feringhees."[126]

Second, the nearly back-to-back publications of two major theosophical works, Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism* (1881) and Alfred Sinnet's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), only helped spread suspicions that Theosophy was a covert form of Buddhism. The fact that Olcott traveled with an official document from leading Sinhalese Buddhist monks authorizing him to "register interested people" as Buddhists would not have helped ease religious anxieties.[127] Third, and perhaps most importantly, was Theosophy's short-lived alliance with, and in many ways, creation of the MahaBodhi Society.

4.5 The MahaBodhi Society: India and a "United Buddhist World"

By the time Blavatsky died in 1891, the Theosophical Society could claim 258 branches on six continents.[128] Theosophy was on firm ground but Olcott's interest in conjoining Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhists into one "International Buddhist League" was just beginning to take off. That year, his Fourteen-point Buddhist platform,

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[123] Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 120.
[124] Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 130. In the first three years after Blavatsky's departure, Olcott took a hiatus from his Buddhist work in order "to consolidate the gains his society had made in its first decade." After being criticized for "neglecting the Buddhist cause" by the Sinhalese reformer Mohottivatte Gunananda in 1887, he returned to his campaign (123).
[125] Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 106, 157 – 58.
[126] Quoted in Johnson, *Masters Revealed,* 107.
[127] This document, dated February 2, 1884, is reprinted at the end of C.V. Agarwal, *The Buddhist and Theosophical Movements, 1873 – 2001* (Calcutta: Maha Bodhi Society, 2001).
[128] Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 131.

encompassing what he saw as the "Fundamental Buddhistic Beliefs" shared between Northern and Southern Buddhism, was signed by eminent Buddhists in Japan, Burma, Ceylon, and Chittagong. On May 31, 1891, just two months prior to Blavatsky's death, Olcott and a group of Buddhist leaders, including Hikkaḍuvē Sumàngala and Heneviratne Dharmapala established the Buddha-Gaya MahaBodhi Society. The organization, whose name changed to the MahaBodhi Society one year later, was an extension of Olcott's plans for an "International Buddhist League." The goals were explicit: to establish Bodh Gaya as a sacred center and pilgrimage site for all of the world's Buddhists and to gain control over the MahaBodhi Temple complex. Although Olcott was signed on as its director and chief advisor, along with Hikkaḍuvē Sumàngala as its President, the organization was effectively Dharmapala's. Under his management, the organization quickly replaced the Theosophical Society as the driving force behind Buddhism in India.

In a major study of Dharmapala's life, Steven Kemper argues that in spite of conventional histories that paint Dharmapala as either a Sinhalese nationalist, chauvinist or a hero, Dharmapala was fundamentally an ascetic whose life was organized around three universalisms: an Asian Buddhist universalism, the universalism of Theosophy and the universalism of the British imperium.[129] Born as Don David Hevavitarana, Dharmapala (1864 – 1933) was the product of Sri Lanka's new upwardly mobile, global urban elite. The son of a wealthy businessman and political magnate, Dharmapala attended Christian missionary schools despite his family's close relationship with leading Buddhist priests. When the Theosophists first came to Ceylon in 1880, his uncle and father took him to meet them. Taken by their message, Dharmapala joined the organization (against his parent's wishes), eventually gaining employment through their Colombo offices and traveling with Blavatsky to Adyar for the 1884 Theosophical Convention. It was during this journey that Blavatsky instructed Dharmapala to study Pali and that Dharmapala vowed, "henceforth my life should be devoted to the good of humanity."[130] Other TS members viewed Dharmapala as a promising 'brother' on account of his elite social connections in Ceylon and commitment to the organization as the General Secretary of Colombo's Buddhist Theosophical Society. By the 1890s, Dharmapala's dynamism and regular attendance at the boisterous Adyar

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[129] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation*, 1 – 52.
[130] Dharmapala, "Reminisces of my early life," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 41/4 (1933), 158.

conventions had made him one of Theosophy's most ardent activists, a role he played as Olcott's partner and protégé during meetings abroad in Asia, Europe and North America.

The catalyst that set Dharmapala in a different direction was his first visit to Bodh Gaya in January of 1891. Accompanied by two Japanese Theravādin 'converts,' Kozen Gunaratne and Tokuzawa, who had come to Ceylon to study Pali, the trio visited Sarnath and Bodh Gaya after attending the annual Adyar convention. Having read Edwin Arnold's quintessential lamentation of Bodh Gaya's degradation in *India Revisited* (1885), Dharmapala set off with preconceived notions about the Mahant's callousness and mis-management of the temple complex. Upon arriving at the seat of enlightenment, he refused to accept the Mahant's hospitality, moved into the Burmese resthouse that had been constructed during Mindon Min's restorations in 1877 and left three months later. Back in Ceylon, Dharmapala devised a plan in consultation with Olcott and Sumångala to purchase the land surrounding the MahaBodhi temple, restore the site as a non-denominational Buddhist shrine and then draw Buddhist representatives from around the world to nearby rest houses. Bodh Gaya would become to Buddhists "what the holy sepulcher is to the Christians, Zion to the Jews and Mecca to the Mohammedans."[131]

The differences between Olcott's International Buddhist League and Dharmapala's MahaBodhi Society were subtle, but significant. Olcott's Fourteen Point Buddhist Platform reached almost exclusively English-speaking elites and was representative of his Protestant emphasis on scripture and belief. Although Dharmapala's concerns were equally scripturalist, as much a product of his childhood among Christian missionaries as it was among monastic scholars of Pali, his focus on Bodh Gaya, and India more widely, shifted the focus away from text towards space. This shift in emphasis may have stemmed from Dharmapala's exposure and awareness of earlier efforts in Ceylon to 'maintain and protect' Buddhism by restoring Buddhist sites that had experienced decline or been abandoned during Portuguese and Dutch occupations.[132] Furthermore, while Olcott's idealism envisioned a United Buddhist World of one, Dharmapala was more pragmatic, realizing that in order to unite Buddhist sects divided by sectarian, ethnic, caste and class related divisions would be a Herculean effort.

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[131] *MahaBodhi,* Vol. 19/2 (1911), 349. The analogy originated with Edwin Arnold, *India Revisited* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench Trübner, 1885), 233.
[132] See, Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 160.

Nonetheless, he settled for the still monumental goal of reviving Buddhism in India.

In the MahaBodhi Society's first five years, Olcott and Dharmapala traveled widely to raise money and enlist support for their project. In Chittagong, Arakan, Japan, Burma, Darjeeling and Ceylon, they found ready ideological support but the funds they collected frequently fell short of their goals. The MahaBodhi temple movement would occasionally play a symbolic role in these regions, particularly in Ceylon, but local, not international Buddhism, was the mainstay of these regions, except in moments of cultural crisis. In India, Bengalis, and Theosophists, in particular, were the MahaBodhi Society's first supporters but like the situation abroad, most of the support came from a few well-connected individuals. Three Bengali Theosophists were especially important to his initial efforts. His closest supporter was Noredronath Sen, a successful lawyer who bought the Brahmo-owned *Indian Mirror* in 1879. Noredronath supported Dharmapala and the many Buddhists who passed through Calcutta in innumerable ways, lending his weight as a founder of the Indian National Congress, executive member of the India Association, representative in the Bengal Legislative Council and as the proprietor of one of India's most popular English dailies. In addition to Sen was the Mukherjee family led by the father Neel Comul and his only son, Neerodh Nath. Neel Comul was the Secretary of the Bengal Theosophical Society and heir to a major petroleum company and both he and his son generously provided housing and support for Dharmapala in the first two decades that Dharmapala worked in India. It was Bengali Theosophists like these that supported Dharmapala almost unequivocally despite having no interest in becoming Buddhists themselves.[133] Their support, like most other Bengalis involved in the MahaBodhi Society, stemmed from a growing civilizational and national pride in Buddha's 'Indian-ness' as well as from the wider Theosophical and Orientalist fetish with early Indian Buddhism.

Yet from early on, dissent was in the air. As early as 1892, many Calcutta Theosophists began voicing concerns about its connection with the MahaBodhi Society, fearing that it was too closely linked to Buddhist politics and Buddhism more widely. Olcott and Dharmapala both tried to mollify these fears, delivering lectures on the "Kinship Between Hinduism and Buddhism" where they emphasized the affinity between Hindus and

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[133] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 241 – 303, provides a rich and illuminating picture of Dharmapala's life in Bengal and the Bengalis beside him.

Buddhists and argued that at no time had the traditions been antagonistic to one another.[134] Two Indian newspapers, the *Behar Times* and *Indian Mirror,* of Gaya and Calcutta respectively, consistently supported Dharmapala, delicately highlighting the 'Buddhist viewpoint' on critical issues and encouraging readers to welcome Buddhists at Bodh Gaya. However, the friction between the two organizations only grew worse as the decade wore on. By the early 1900s, the cauldron was boiling. The first significant rupture occurred in 1896 when Olcott resigned from the MahaBodhi Society and withdrew his support from the legal case that Dharmapala had by then raised against the Bodh Gaya Śaiva Mahant. Reports of Buddhist monks being attacked at the temple and the angry reactions of the Hindu press had made Olcott uncomfortable with the legal proceedings, which clearly pitted Buddhists against Hindus. While the Bengali press launched a vitriolic campaign against Dharmapala, castigating him as a missionary intent on destroying Hindu – Buddhist ties, his relationship with the Theosophists increasingly soured as Annie Besant (1847 – 1933) rose as its newest star.

Besant's arrival in India in 1893 marked the beginning of a new tone for Indian Theosophy, one where the differences between Buddhism and Brahmanism were increasingly minimized and the Buddha's teachings took a backseat to the Vedas and Upaniṣads. In public lectures and popular essays, she asserted the superiority of the Vedas over the Pali Tripiṭaka and argued that Buddha promoted caste divisions and the notion of an ātman. A prominent freethinker and socialist, Besant's impassioned calls for Hindu revival and anti-colonial solidarity, gained her a tremendous following, even being elected in 1917 as President of the Congress, the political party that dominated Indian politics for an entire century. As the President of the Theosophical Society from 1907 – 33, her exuberant praise of "Hindu sciences" reinvigorated Theosophy's place among caste Hindu leadership but her argument that Buddhism was "unsuited to India" was a disaster for Dharmapala's MahaBodhi Society.[135] By July of 1898, Dharmapala was threatening Olcott that he would drop the word "Theosophical" from the Colombo Buddhist Theosophical Society if Besant

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[134] These lectures were republished in multiple journals and newspapers. See, for instance, "Col. Olcott on 'the kinship between Hinduism and Buddhism," *Indian Mirror* October 27, 1892.
[135] "Unsuited to India" is from Besant's speech reported in "Buddhist Workers," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 16/9 (1914), 144. Dharmapala regularly published Besant's remarks on Buddhism in the *MahaBodhi* throughout the 1890s.

did not change her tune.[136] Olcott refused Dharmapala's demands and the friction between the two men only worsened, eventually degenerating into a litany of slanderous articles regarding the others' organizational failures, character flaws and faulty views.[137] Although Olcott continued to work on Buddhist affairs up through the early 1900s, particularly among Dalits in South India (to be discussed in chapter five), the TS – MahaBodhi Society alliance was effectively rent in two. "Unlike his hero Lincoln," Prothero writes, "Olcott was unable to coax his "secessionists" back into his union."[138]

4.6 Conclusion: The proliferation of Buddhisms

While Dharmapala's formal relationship with the TS did not begin to heal until 1915, the universalizing ethic of the two organizations continued to bring their members and admirers together. The Bengali Theosophist, Noredronath Sen, still woke every morning by raising a bronze image of Buddha above his head and confessing "his allegiance to the great Cause."[139] Buddhists from Ceylon, Burma and Japan continued to attend the annual conventions of the Theosophists in Benares and Adyar. Buddhist pilgrims stayed at Theosophical Society houses in Gaya, Calcutta and Madras and were even given small stipends as *sangha-dāna* to help them on their way. To put it bluntly, for foreign Buddhist monks arriving in India with limited language, currency and understanding of the colonial metropole, the Theosophical Society emblem would have been a sight for sore eyes. The Theosophical Society's global network and South Asian patronage, in particular, connected Buddhist activists and Indian sympathizers, helping them form close relations, alliances and seek out new patrons. Buddhism and Theosophy was in this way, a form of Leela Gandhi's global counter-currents, a conduit of affect and friendship that forged unions both within the

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[136] Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 162 – 63.
[137] The final blow came in September of 1905 when Olcott's abusive attack on the authencitiy and veneration of the Tooth Relic in Kandy, Ceylon effectively decimated the support he previously held in Ceylon. For a succinct and insightful assessment, see Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism,* 140 – 41.
[138] Prothero, *The White Buddhist,* 168. Although Dharmapala abandoned the TS, he never abandoned Theosophy, continuing to believe in the universal message of the Mahatmas, whose names still appeared in the *MahaBodhi* journal he edited as late as the 1920s. Nor did Dharmapala's distance from the TS cut off the support he received from other Theosophists, although this was due as much to his own social status as ideological support for his cause. See, Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation*, 52 – 115.
[139] Satyendranath Sen, "Foreword," *Anagarika Brahmachari Dharmapala* (Calcutta: Maha Bodhi Society, 1918), ii.

Imperial Empire and outside it.[140]

While scholars, reformers and popularizers proclaimed the greatness of Buddhism, other Indian religious activists and intellectuals felt compelled to argue otherwise. The Bengali publicist, Bankimchandra (1838 – 94), for instance, became increasingly convinced in his later years that with "rare exceptions the European scholars were deeply prejudiced against India…they took great pains to prove that *only* the Buddhist texts, hostile to Hinduism, contained some truth. The rest of India's literary heritage was either false or borrowed from other cultures."[141] For Bankim, a Vaiṣṇava, Lord Krishna's lack of 'history' as opposed to Buddha's 'verifiable past' was a serious problem that had to be resolved. In his most well known work, the *Kṛṣṇacaritra* (1882), he argued that not only was Krishna's rationality superior to that of Christ and Buddha and therefore better suited for the modern age, but that Krishna *too* was a historical person that had only later been transformed into a mythical being by fanciful literary misfits.[142] Likewise, the great Hindi playwright, Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850 – 85) worked similarly to link Vaiṣṇavism to an empirically, traceable past that could be located in 'real time' next to Buddha and Christ.[143] In this context, Harishchandra's choice to re-stage a theatrical performance of *Prabodh Candrodaya* [*Rise of the Moon of Knowledge*] in Benares in 1871 may look to have been inspired not just by literary concerns but also by the play's narrative of Brahmanical triumph over Buddhist unrighteousness.

The most common rhetorical critique however was not fundamentally different than that of the Orientalists and Buddhist 'modernists' themselves: praise the teacher (in this case, Buddha) and criticize the followers. Such a position was standard fare by the late 1890s but it was being ushered by Hindu antagonists as early as the 1880s as well. Vivekananda lavished praise on Gautama Buddha but he and his *guru* Ramakrishna, blamed Buddhism for the tantric practices that 'degraded' Indian society.[144] Likewise, in pamphlets like *Purāṇ Kisnē*

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[140] Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
[141] Tapan Raychauduri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 178.
[142] Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Myth of Praxis: the construction of the figure of Krishna in Krishnacharita," *Occasional papers on History and Society* (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1987), 26.
[143] Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions,* 331.
[144] See Jeffrey Kripal, *Kali's Child: the mystical and the erotic in the life and teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1995]), 29. The most exhaustive study of Vivekananda's

Banāe or *Who made the Purāṇas?* (1891 – 93), Ārya Samājis argued that Buddhist pandits were responsible for inventing the Purāṇas, texts which in their view were responsible for plunging India into centuries of superstition and decay.[145] One of the most hostile reviews of Buddhism occurred in 1886 in a four-part series published by one Ram Chundra Bose in the *Calcutta Review.* Aghast with all of the new discussion of Buddhism, Bose calls its recent popularity "one of the queerest freaks of the nineteenth century" and then goes on to explain why Buddhism is not only "ludicrously false" but "at war with…the approved principles of the [modern] age."[146]

Although critical studies of Buddhism never ceased and continued to have a dominant influence on the public discourse, a significantly different genre of Buddhist literature in English and local vernaculars was by the turn of the century widely available in urban marketplaces. Bengalis were, as usual, at the head of this new effort. Dr. Ram Das Sen published a biography of Buddha (*Buddhadev carītā*) in 1892 and Babu Kristo Behari Sen, the rector of Calcutta's Albert College, published biographies of Buddha and Aśoka in 1901.[147] Besides the Bengali Buddhists of Chittagong, the most prolific popular writer of Buddhism was Charu Chandra Bose, a close friend of Dharmapala who beginning in 1892 helped manage the MahaBodhi Society's affairs during its namesake's long absences abroad. Bose published numerous popular, semi-scholarly works, including a Bengali-language translation of the *Dhammapada* (1904) and bilingual (English – Bengali) studies of ancient Buddhist women ("Life of Visakha," 1900).[148]

In the northwest of India, a network of Punjabi and Kashmiri self-proclaimed upāsakas and Buddhist sympathizers attempted to match the propensity of the Bengali Buddhist public. Pandit Bahal Singh Gautama of Rawalapindi, whose new surname

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Buddhism is in Lal Man Joshi, *Discerning the Buddha: a study of Buddhism and of the Brahmanical Hindu attitude toward it* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983).

[145] See Norman Barrier, *The Punjab in nineteenth century tracts: an introduction to the pamphlet collections in the British Museum and India Office* (East Lansing: Research Committee on the Punjab, 1969), 9, 27. It should also be added that the central text of the Samāj, the *Satyārth Prakāś* (*Light of Truth*), contained a special chapter dedicated to refuting the 'heterodox' schools of Indian philosophy, among which Buddhism was included. On the Ārya Samāj more widely, see Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

[146] Ram Chundra Bose, "Art. III—Buddha as a Man," *The Calcutta Review* Vol. 82 (1886), 65.

[147] Some of these also appeared in the Bengali monthly *Sadhana*. See *MahaBodhi* Vol. 10/3 (1901 – 02), 21; Vol. 1/11 (1892 – 93), 1.

[148] See *MahaBodhi* Vol. 12/11 – 12 (1903 – 04), 117 – 18; Vol. 9/11 (1900 – 01), 99 – 100.

"Gautama" reflected the tenor of the time, toured northwest India, delivering lectures in Urdu on "The Lord of Love and Compassion" before his unexpected death in 1910.[149] By 1901, Dr. Shiva Bart Lal Warman, had published a children's biography of Buddha along with Urdu translations of Paul Carus' *Gospel of Buddha,* Olcott's "Hinduism and Buddhism," Charu Chandra Bose's "Buddhist Psychology" and Dharmapala's "Ethics of Buddha."[150] Warman, along with his close friend, D.N. Bali, of the photography company, D.N. Bali & Sons, toured the far north of India delivering lectures on the "noble ideas of the Blessed Lord" and distributing Urdu chap books at low costs. Together, they promised to "work for the religion of Tathagata" and "spread the true Dharma."[151]

The Kashmiri Pandit Sheo Narain (d. 1933), a distinguished lawyer from Lahore, was the most prolific Buddhist activist from northwest India. Well-versed in Sanskrit (and later Pali), Narain began studying Buddhism in the 1880s. "After more or less a comparative study of religions," Narain writes, "I came to the conclusion that Buddhism will suit my requirements as the best of all religions that I had heard about."[152] After the 1920s, he and Dharmapala became close friends, living in Sarnath together, but in the decades before that, Narain published nearly two-dozen essays on Buddhism in English in addition to numerous Urdu books and translations.[153] In 1900, he published at his own expense a thousand copies of his two-hundred page, twenty-six chapter, Urdu work on *Buddha and His Teachings*. Of the work, the *Punjab Observer* declared "[Narain] makes no secret of his own religious beliefs when he commends the adoption of Buddhism as a solution of most of the problems puzzling Hindu India."[154] Later that year Narain published his first Urdu novel, *Why did you ruin me by making me an MA?* (*M.A. banā ke kyoṃ merī mittī khārāb kī*?), "written to preach Buddhism and attack the present system of University Education."[155] By the 1920s, Indian

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[149] "Lord Buddha's Birthday Anniversary in Lahore," *Indian Mirror,* reprinted in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 18/7 (1910), 514 – 15. His obituary is printed in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 18/11 (1910), 671.
[150] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 7/11 (1898 – 99), 107; Vol. 9/7 (1900 – 01), 58.
[151] S. Warman, "A Proposal," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 8/11 (1899 – 1900), 110.
[152] Pandit Sheo Narain, "In memoriam," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 41/7 – 8 (1933), 259.
[153] In fact, a significant body of the materials held at the Mulagandha Kuti Vihara Library in Sarnath (to which this dissertation is deeply indebted) are from Narain's private library, which was donated to the library after his death.
[154] *Punjab Observer,* December 12, 1900, republished in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 9/7 (1900 – 01), 119. Two other reviews, from the *Tribune* and *Indian Mirror* are also included on the same page.
[155] Sheo Narain, "Buddha and His Teachings," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 9/6 (1900 – 01), 54; see also, Vol. 8/1 (1899 – 1900), 36 – 37; Vol. 9/7 (1900 – 01), 58.

authored-works on Buddhism were available in a number of vernaculars, from Urdu, Tamil, Marathi, Bengali and even Arabic.[156]

Thus, while Indians debated Buddhism's purported merits and demerits, what emerged from this new discursive arena of print capitalism was what Anthony Giddens has described more broadly as the "intertextuality" of the exchange of opinions and observations via texts that are "freely available."[157] In other words, all conversations about Buddhism—even when expressed negatively—were a part of Buddhist place making, bringing Buddhist places, names and ideas back into the public imagination. In doing so, Buddhism gave Indians alternative futures to consider: for some, it was the source of their own regeneration and for others, a threat to the ideal social order. That future gained another layer of complication when Buddhists from border areas and abroad began arriving in India and networking with Indian sympathizers and the first generation of modern converts, a subject we turn to in the next chapter.

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[156] Some of these materials will be discussed in later chapters, but for a broad overview, see Dash, *Buddhism in Indian Literature.*

[157] Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, *Volume II of a contemporary critique of historical materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 179.

5 Chapter Five – Banyan tree Buddhism: Global networks, revival and the Indian Buddhist ecumene, 1890 – 1922

In *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* David McMahan explains how a variety of factors including industrialization, global travel, mass migration, urban growth, scientific thought and new forms of literature and art have fundamentally transformed Buddhist traditions in the modern world. "Buddhist modernism," he writes, "is a dynamic, complex, and plural set of historical processes with loose bonds and fuzzy boundaries…a facet of a more global network of movements that are not the exclusive product of one geographic or cultural setting."[1] Indeed, in recent decades, numerous scholars like Richard Jaffe, Anne Blackburn, and Steven Kemper have demonstrated how Buddhist ideas and activists from the late nineteenth-century onwards moved with unprecedented speed through a "tightly knit" global network with no apparent center.[2] These networks were in large part the creation of several energetic and dedicated Buddhist reformers, pilgrims, and entrepreneurs who not only saw the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a period of colonial interference, but as an opportunity for expansion and growth facilitated by empire and new technologies.[3]

In this chapter, I outline some of the most important figures and associations that traveled and shaped what I call the Indian Buddhist *ecumene* or lived Buddhist world. The Buddhist ecumene refers to those parts of the subcontinent where Buddhism was studied, practiced, comprehended, and encountered. Viewed from above and with the advantage of hindsight, the ecumene looks like a complex, interconnected web of networks with ever-shifting centers and nodes. Any number of features could shift the relations between these various points: new urban vihāras, re-discovered Buddhist spaces, charismatic leaders, freshly-laid railway lines, university institutes and so on, were constantly transforming the places and people in the ecumene. Those who entered the Indian Buddhist ecumene rarely possessed this comprehensive picture and were thus ever pushed and pulled in different directions, forever subject to different ideological currents and new movements. In spatial

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[1] David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6.
[2] Richard Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni,"; Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism*; Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation.* For a broad overview of this development, see, Turner, Cox and Bocking, "A Buddhist Crossroads."
[3] On this process more largely, without the narrow constraints of Buddhism, see Mark Frost, " 'Wider Opportunities': Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening and the Global Dimension in Colombo, 1870 – 1920," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 36/4 (2002): 937 – 68; Christopher Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World,* 325 – 65; and Nile Green, *Bombay Islam.*

terms, the Buddhist ecumene is perhaps best likened to a Banyan tree, that indistinguishable natural Indic monolith whose various branches have the appearance of being separate organisms yet stem from an often unknown single trunk. Just like trying to track a single branch of a Banyan tree to its core, when Buddhists or non-Buddhists traveled the Buddhist ecumene, they learned of other branches in the web of "complex global loops" connecting the Buddhist world.[4] In its lived and imagined form, the Buddhist ecumene not only became a significant connective tissue between India and the rest of Asia but offered new concepts and practices for understanding Buddhism, in turn transforming what it meant to be a Buddhist both in India and the world more widely.

Scholars writing on Buddhism in colonial India have almost unequivocally focused on the MahaBodhi Society, typically presenting it as the only significant Buddhist organization functioning in India at the time. The legacy of writing India's colonial Buddhist history from only a MahaBodhi Society perspective has had the unfortunate consequence of obscuring a number of other important Buddhist associations and figures in India at that time. While ignoring the MahaBodhi Society's role in Buddhist affairs would be reckless, it is the goal of this chapter to highlight other aspects of the Buddhist ecumene, not at the expense of the MahaBodhi Society, but rather in relation to it.[5]

5.1 Bhikkhu Mahāvīr: Forgotten travelers and the wider Buddhist world

In the winter of 1885, a fifty-two year old bhikkhu named Mahāvīr landed at the ferry dock in Tuticorin south of Madras. Having made the journey from Ceylon, he had plans to visit the ancient Buddhist sites he had learned so much about in the past four years. His preceptor and master (*upādhyāya, ācārya*), Ambagahavattē Saraṇaṃkara Indrāsabhā Mahāsthāvir (1832 – 1886), the head and founder of the Rāmaññа Nikaya (est. 1864), had taught him much about the history of these places.[6] Like other pilgrims, Mahāvīr traveled by

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[4] "Complex global loops" comes from Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni," 67.

[5] Some scholarship appears to have taken this important corrective too far. For instance, in Gajendran Ayyathurai's otherwise excellent PhD dissertation ("Foundations of Anti-caste consciousness") on Iyothee Thass, there is very little discussion of the wider Buddhist context, almost creating the impression that Thass' ideas existed in a south Indian Tamil Dalit vacuum.

[6] On Indrāsabhā and the founding of the Rāmaññа Nikaya, see Kitsiri Malagoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society,* 162 – 172. The Rāmaññа monks derived their lineage from Pegu in lower Burma (*rāmaññа*) and at the

foot, train, boat and various other forms of transit, both ancient and modern, to reach Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, Nalanda and Sarnath. Yet unlike most Buddhist pilgrims to the ancient Buddhist sites at that time, the sights and sounds of the open plains and bustling markets would have been familiar. For Mahāvīr was raised in Bihar and by most accounts, was the first north Indian Hindu in modern times to become a Buddhist monk.[7] Born a Rajput in Arrah (Bihar) in 1833, Mahāvīr Singh had spent his childhood training to be a soldier and rumor had it that when his uncle, the famed Kunwar Singh, led a rebellion against the British during the great war of 1857 – 58, Mahāvīr was on the front line. When after months of bloody fighting it was clear that the British *farangis* were the victors, Mahāvīr fled.[8] Left to his own devices, he organized some of the last remaining soldiers into a team of traveling wrestlers (*pahalavān*) who using their great physical prowess powered their travels across the country. Many years passed like this, moving from one city to another, competing in tournaments (*dangal*) staged by wealthy Europeans and Hindu royalty. By the late 1870s, his career as a wrestler was nearing an end—sarcopenia's inevitable arrival later earned him the name *Moṭe Bābā,* or the Overweight (literally, "fat") Saint—and he journeyed to Ceylon after winning his last match in Madras.

Heading to Galle, he found employment with a Hindu merchant who helped him settle and began teaching him astrological sciences (*falit jyotiṣ*). These skills, which were in high demand by the Sinhalese elite, brought him into close proximity with the sangha.[9] The itinerant wrestler continued to move from place to place until one day, after suffering from some sort of dysentery, a band of Rāmaññña Nikāya monks took him to Indrāsabhā's monastery and began to nurse him back to life. However, even on his deathbed, Mahāvīr refused to be served food by a non-Brahmin and only through "cleverness, caring, and tenderness" did Indrāsabhā break Mahāvīr's casteism and false views (*śnai śnai jāt-pāt ke*

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time of Mahāvīr's ordination, they were especially well known for their strict-observance of *vinaya* regulations and criticisms of *dēva* worship.

[7] Sources for the life of Mahāvīr include Ānand Kausalyāyan, *Buddh aur unke anucar* (Prayāg: Chātrahitakārī Pustakamālā, 1941), 99 – 109, Buddhamitra, *Svatantrā Senānī Mahāsthavir Bhikṣu Mahāvīr* (Kuśīnagar: Iṇtarneśanal Buddh Ṭrasṭ Kameṭī, 1999) and Aṇgne Lāl, *Buddha Śāsana ke ratna: 32 bauddh bhikṣuon ke vyaktitv evam kratitv par abhutapūrv granth* (Lakhnaū: Prabuddh Prakāśan*,* 2004), 87 – 93.

[8] Buddhamitra, *Svatantrā Senānī,* 12 – 30, covers Mahāvīr's involvement in these events in detail.

[9] Kausalyāyan, *Buddh aur unke anucar,* 103. According to Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism,* 41 – 45, a strong interest in *jyotiṣ* developed among monastics in nineteenth-century Lanka, particularly at places like Vidyodaya Piriveṇa.

mithyā-viśvās).[10] Following his recovery, Mahāvīr adopted the saffron robe and began studying Pali, the True Dharma (*saddharma*) and the history of the Śākya prince, who like him, was a son of the soil (*bhūmīputra*). Upon Indrāsabhā's request, he took his upasampadā in Burma in 1885.

Back in India, Mahāvīr moved seasonally between a country house (*bagan,* literally 'garden') outside Calcutta and Kuśīnagar, the site of Gautama Buddha's death and cremation in the western United Provinces. He knew well the other Buddhist travelers in India, figures like Venerable Kripasaran and Gunalankar, the leaders of the future Bengal Buddhist Association or Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha. Eventually, by the late 1890s, Kuśīnagar would become Mahāvīr's permanent home, leading him to build the ancient town's first modern Buddhist dharamśālā – vihāra in 1902. The transnational network that supported him in this endeavor was extensive but the most significant figure was his patron (*dāyak*), the Calcutta jeweler and tobacconist, Khee Zarhee.[11] Zarhee, who hailed from Arakan and whose business in gems and stones had created a small fortune, was a well-connected man. In addition to owning shops in Rangoon and Akyab, his rented house, not far from the University of Calcutta, was frequented by businesspeople and monks from all sides of the Bay of Bengal. He knew Dharmapala—their Calcutta residences were in fact only a short walk from one another—but after several Arakanese monks were assaulted in Bodh Gaya in 1895, Zarhee and Mahāvīr distanced themselves from the MahaBodhi Society, feeling that Kuśīnagar's Buddhist revival was best pursued without Dharmapala's interference.[12]

From the time of his ordination in 1885 until his death in 1919, Mahāvīr was a critical node in the Indian Buddhist ecumene beginning to re-take shape across India. His significance is three-fold. First, he represented a new face in the development of modern Indian Buddhism: the Indian whose understanding of Buddhism came first and foremost

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[10] *Indrāsabha sthāvir ne baṛe prem, baṛī hośiyārī aur baṛī komalatā se is bihārī-vīr mahāvīsinh ke dil śnai śnai jāt-pāt ke mithyā-viśvās ko dūr kiyā*. Kausalyāyan, *Buddh aur unke anucar,* 103.

[11] On Zarhee, see Buddhamitra, *Svatantrā Senānī,* 63. Zarhee was clearly involved in a variety of affairs, as indicated by his frequent appearance in government documents and *MahaBodhi* and *Archaeological Survey of India* reports, variously spelled as Kee Zarhee, Zharhee, Moung Zarhee, Khee Jha Rhee, Khee Za Rhea.

[12] Dharmapala's diaries provide good reason why Mahāvīr wanted to pursue this project independently. In the Sarnath Notebook No. 20, he writes: "In 1895 I set fire to the linga at Kusinara and the Saivaite Brahman was then the caretaker…Then Mahavir Baba asked me to give over the place to him." If "setting fire" is to be taken literally, then the problems Dharmapala caused for Mahāvīr would have been obvious and yet even if we read that passage less literally, it is suggestive of the kind of aggressive, militant-like presence that Dharmapala symbolized and Mahāvīr wished to avoid.

through regimented, monastic curriculums and exposure to living Buddhist cultures as opposed to the more common discovery via popular texts, Orientalist writings and colonial pedagogies. Those who traveled this path were typically few and far between but it is notable that several of the most influential Buddhist Indians in the early twentieth century derived much of their understanding of Buddhism through formal, monastic studies and chose to wear the saffron robe for much, if not all of their lives.[13] Second, Buddhists like Mahāvīr have been typically ignored in secondary scholarship. On the one hand, this is simply a result of his own unwritten record, making it extremely difficult to grasp the nature of his mind and personality. However, this is also a shortcoming of the Anglo-centric nature of not just colonial India but also of studies of Buddhist modernity writ large. Thus, figures like Mahāvīr rarely appear in the record because they failed to leave written English records.[14] Third, and closely linked to the second, is the fact that to overlook Mahāvīr and other figures like him is to miss a critical indigenous link in the re-interpretation and re-establishment of Buddhism in India.

In the case of Mahāvīr, his absence comes at a great cost. For his primary disciple (*śikṣā*) and companion of more than two decades, the Arakanese bhikkhu U Candramani (1875 – 1972), became one of the most influential Buddhists in modern South Asian history. Candramani not only was Ambedkar's ritual officiant (*upādhyāya*), presiding over the conversion of close to half a million Dalits in 1956 but also helped spearhead the Theravāda movement in twentieth-century Nepal by introducing a new lineage of trained monks and nuns.[15] Despite the formidable role that Mahāvīr played in the development of Buddhism at

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[13] These included the most well known national scholars like Dharmanand Kosambi, who lived with Mahāvīr in 1904, and Rahul Sankrityayan (who attended Mahāvīr's funeral in 1919). It also includes several figures of critical importance to Buddhist institutions themselves, like Bhikkhu Bodhananda of Lucknow, a colleague of Mahāvīr and Jagdish Kashyap, the great scholar of Pali, both of whom we will meet in later chapters. A summary overview of the many eminent Indians in modern times who wore the saffron robe is provided in Lāl, *Buddha Śāsana ke ratna.*

[14] Sadly, north Indians too have begun to forget Mahāvīr, the memory of him being almost entirely absent even at Kuśīnagar, where many Arakanese – Burmese deny his north Indian origins and claim him as an Arakanese. Similarly, the two schools which were established by Candramani and named in honor of Mahāvīr have now been renamed to match their Japanese and Arakanese donors.

[15] C.f., Sarah Levine and David Gellner, *Rebuilding Buddhism: the Theravada Movement in Twentieth-century Nepal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 41 – 48. The British monk Sangharakshita, who in 1979 founded one of the largest Buddhist organizations in India today, the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG), also received his ordination from Candramani.

Kuśīnagar and the cultivation of Candramani, his name has been largely lost to posterity.[16] Yet, as will be evident below, Mahāvīr's native linguistic advantages, familiarity with north Indian culture and monastic links made him a key interlocutor in the Buddhist ecumene forming across the *Majjhima Desa* or Buddhist Middle Lands.

5.2 India at the crossroads of Asia: Buddhist pilgrimage and global networks

According to the anthropologist Keith Basso, space is an abstraction, something which can be dropped over any point on the earth's surface whereas place is particular, that intangible something to which it is possible to belong.[17] Basso's distinction is useful in thinking through India's changing role among Buddhist and non-Buddhist circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Spatially, India was becoming the center of significant strands of modern Asian thought.[18] Richard Jaffe, for instance, has shown how the very idea of India as a Buddhist place shaped and re-centered modern Japanese Buddhist identities. This was packaged through what Jaffe calls "Indianism" or the idea that ancient India was the Japanese nation's "mother country" (Japanese, *bokoku*).[19] Similarly, Dharmapala envisioned Bodh Gaya as the center of the Buddhist universe, its veritable *axis mundi*. In this widely held Euro-American view, every 'world religion' had a sacred center (*axis mundi*): for the Jews and Christians it was Jerusalem, for Muslims, it was Mecca and for the Buddhist it was Bodh Gaya.[20] To put it otherwise, one could not think Buddhism without thinking India, and Buddhism was the thread through which a singular 'Asia' could be sewn.

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[16] When Candramani, then still a novice, met Mahāvīr in Calcutta in the late 1890s, Mahāvīr sent him to Wasipur (Bihar) to study Sanskrit and Hindi with local pandits. Three years later, Candramani joined Mahāvīr at Kuśīnagar and the two jointly-managed the new *vihāra* until Mahāvīr's death in 1919. See, U Tha Doe Hla, *The Life Story of Sri Bhaddhanta Chandramani Mahathera,* translated from the Burmese by U Sein Tun Aung (Varanasi: U Chandramani Foundation, 2002), 19 – 29.
[17] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 106 – 08.
[18] My focus here is primarily on India in Asian thought but one could include various European strands of thinking, including the popular nineteenth-century German notion that India was the origin of civilization.
[19] According to Jaffe, the growing Japanese interest in the figure of Śākyamuni can be traced to the Edo period when traditional biographies of him were produced in regular fashion. From the 1880s on, the interest in India was reignited, beginning with the travel memoirs of the Jōdo Shin cleric, Kitabatake Dōryū. Kitabatake's visit to Bodh Gaya in 1883 was the first visit by a Japanese man in modern history (Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni," 73).
[20] According to Trevithick, *Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage,* 63, Dharmapala got the idea from Edwin Arnold.

Buddhist India was an imaginaire, a place that existed in the mind, a fantasy perhaps, but like all fantasies, it had the ability to shape the here and now. Since the early centuries of the common era, and the hundreds of years since, the idea of India had transformed state polities, architecture, art, and self-expression, as diplomats, scholars and pilgrims carried ideas about Buddhist India to royal households and wealthy merchants in foreign lands. (The influence, of course, was always unilateral.) Yet in the period after the fifteenth century, when India's Buddhist spaces were transformed under the weight of a new political reality, there was a deep and dramatic lull in these cross-cultural exchanges.[21] Buddhist sites became difficult to access, knowledge of the saddharma waned and Brahmanical, Islamic and other cultural forces increasingly gave birth to ways of belonging and being where Buddhist teachings played no role. Despite the economic exploitation, callousness and heavy burden of colonial rule, British rule in the nineteenth century engendered a political stability and openness to the study of Buddhism that allowed, if not encouraged, a resurgence of Buddhist pilgrims to the continent.

In comparative terms, the number of Buddhists from outside the subcontinent to visit India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was far from matching the religious migrations of Muslims to Mecca at the same time. Yet travelers and pilgrims poured into the subcontinent in the thousands from far and near, transforming India into a significant crossroads in the Buddhist world. While comprehensive data on the number of visitors to Buddhist sites in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India is lacking, the sources available to us reveal significant trends.[22] First, it is clear that we are dealing with a mobile populace of incredible ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. Jaffe, for instance, has located no less than twenty-five travelogues of Japanese pilgrim groups who traveled to

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[21] An important resource for these transformations is found in the collection of essays contained in Janice Leoshko (ed.), *Bodhgaya, the Site of Enlightenment* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1988). See, especially, Robert Brown's valuable contribution, "Bodhgaya and Southeast Asia," 101 – 24.

[22] Archaeological Survey of India reports are a good resource, often describing in passing the presence of pilgrims. The *MahaBodhi* regularly reported their own estimates of Buddhist pilgrims, particularly those who passed through Calcutta and Bodh Gaya. These provide some of the best estimates but they only indicate foreign visitors to these sites. A third source of information comes from travelers' diaries and memoirs, which although valuable, often provide more anecdotal evidence. The timing of their visits, as will be seen below, could have also had a significant bearing on what they saw or did not see. A further complication with all of these materials, especially when trying to gauge Indian traffic to these sites, is that Indian pilgrims to these sites were typically seen, in colonial eyes, as "Hindu," and therefore rarely noted as unusual in the landscape.

Buddhist (and non-Buddhist) sites in India between 1887 and 1924.[23] Many of these journeys came at incredible cost and involved large numbers of people and yet, according to Jaffe, this is likely just a fragment of the total number of Japanese pilgrims in India at that time. Likewise, Anand Kausalyayan, on the basis of oral stories, reports contingents of roughly two-hundred Burmese and Arakanese pilgrims at Kuśīnagar in the late 1880s.[24] Such numbers may have been embellished in order to augment the stature of their guru, Mahāvīr, but when one looks closer at contemporary accounts of colonial Buddhist sites, it does not seem as outlandish.[25] In 1903, the Bodh Gaya Mahant, who had a strong incentive to underreport Buddhist numbers, reported approximately one hundred Lankans and one to two hundred Buddhists from Burma, Siam, Bhutan, Tibet and Chittagong at the temple complex that winter.[26] Japanese, Tibetan, and European accounts of Sarnath and Bodh Gaya, the two most visited Buddhist sites in the middle Ganges region, describe a setting far from the bustling centers that these sites are today, but the accounts themselves are evidence of its diverse and itinerant populace.[27] By the first decade of the twentieth century, Bodh Gaya and Sarnath regularly hosted laity and monastics from Tibet, Siam, Burma, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Chittagong, and Arakan and to a lesser degree from Mongolia, China, Japan, America, and Europe.[28] Ritual pluralism and global diversity was the rule rather than the exception and reports like those of the Punjabi upāsaka Paira Mall, who traveled to Kuśīnagar in 1927

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[23] Richard Jaffe, "Japanese Buddhism's 'Western Turn': South/Southeast Asia and the Forging of the Japanese Buddhist Modern," Keynote Address at "Buddhism in the Global Eye," University of British Columbia, August 10, 2016.

[24] Kausalyāyan, *Buddh aur unke anucar,* 104 – 105; Buddhamitra, *Svatantrā Senānī,* 62.

[25] For instance, on "Tibetan upasikas and upasakas who traveled three months from Tibet to Darjeeling before going to Buddh Gay and Rajgir," see Vol. 5/10 (1895 – 96), 75 – 76 and Vol. 5/11, 89. On a party of 20 Burmese pilgrims at Bodh Gaya at the same time, see Vol. 4/12 (1895 – 96), 99. On Sinhalese pilgrims, see Vol. 5/3 (1895 – 96), 18; Vol. 9/8 (1900 – 01). For "sixty pilgrims from Burma and Ceylon [who] passed through Calcutta," see, Vol. 11/8 (1902 – 03), 140. These reports just scratch the surface of the turn of the century Buddhist traffic.

[26] According to the Mahant, the Chinese of Calcutta "never go there" ("Draft Report of the Commission sent to Bodh Gaya" on April 14, 1903, quoted in Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 266 – 67).

[27] On Japanese journeys to India, see Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni". On Tibetan accounts, see Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 291 – 335. Some of the most valuable accounts of Buddhist sites at the turn of the century composed by British travelers or residents are, Eliza Scidmore, *Winter India* (1903), especially, 126 – 129 and 143 – 147; Walter Crane, *India Impressions* (1908), and Lillian Luker Ashby and Roger Whately, *My India: recollections of fifty years* (1937). Kosambi's memoir, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 53 – 219, is also an excellent guide to what was happening at these sites in the early years of the twentieth century.

[28] For varied examples, see *MahaBodhi* Vol. 5/10 (95 – 96), 75 – 76; Vol. 4/12 (1895 – 96), 99; Vol. 5/6 (1895 – 96), 43. Compare with Vol. 9/8 (1900 – 01), Vol. 11/8 (1902 – 03), 140 and Vol. 35/2 (1927), 98.

accompanied by several Tibetans, a Sinhalese bhikkhu and "two Swedish women" were not as unusual as one might suspect.[29]

Some of the most striking newcomers on the Buddhist pilgrimage came from Europe and North America. Demographically speaking, "white Buddhists" were few and far between, but when white men or women publicly proclaimed themselves Buddhist or shaved their heads and donned Buddhist robes, the discursive impact in Asia was exceptional. To paraphrase Anne Blackburn, a white Buddhist was a high card to play in Buddhist – Christian competitions.[30] Becoming a Buddhist, like 'going native' more generally, breached lines of race, religion and power that many white colonial populations found difficult to accept.[31] As early as the 1850s there were reports of beachcombers, runaways, and soldiers who had begun to 'go native' and wear saffron robes.[32] By the early 1900s, there were several dozen white Buddhists living in monasteries and traveling Buddhist networks in southern Asia. Some, like Ananda Metteya (Allan Bennett, 1872 – 1923), Nyanatiloka Mahathera (Anton Gueth, 1878 – 1957), and U Silacara (J.F. McKechnie, 1871 – 1952) who ordained in Burma in 1902, 1904 and 1907, respectively, became well known for their erudition, popular writing and charisma.[33] The centers they established and sacred spaces they visited were all a part of the ever-changing Buddhist ecumene. Dharmanand Kosambi, for instance, encountered Nyanatiloka on multiple occasions, traveling with him through India and practicing meditation with him at Sagaing Hill in Burma.[34] Others visited with Indian scholars and

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[29] Paira Mall, "Buddhist Pilgrimage Places," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 35/11 (1927), 570 – 75. En route to Kasia, Mall also visited Sravasti where he reported that there were approximately three hundred pilgrims at the Burmese vihāra (see, "News," *Buddhist India,* vol. 1/2 (1927), 167). As early as 1918, Mall had paid for two Sinhalese bhikkhus to come live in Amristar and teach him Buddhist doctrines (see Dharmapala Diary no. 23). For an insightful review of how this cultural and ritual diversity was forging new ways of being Buddhist and thinking Buddhism, see Albertina Nugteren, "Rituals around the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya," in *Pluralism and Identity: studies in ritual behavior* (1995), 145 – 67.

[30] Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism,* 105. Blackburn is referring to Olcott's towering presence in Sri Lanka.

[31] See, Cox, *Buddhism and Ireland,* and Cox, "Rethinking early western Buddhists."

[32] See, "Review of *A History of the British Empire," Calcutta Review Vol. 30, Jan - June 1858,* xvii, where it describes a young white man who joined a monastery, shaved his head and began wearing robes in Burma. Scholars of the U Dhammaloka project have done excellent work in the study of early western Buddhists, although the above evidence would challenge their argument that the first western bhikkhus emerged in the 1870s (see, https://dhammalokaproject.wordpress.com/early-western-buddhists/the-first-western-buddhist-monks/).

[33] According to Laurence Cox, white Buddhists like these softened some of the social penalties for becoming a Buddhist by joining scholarly associations or other respected Buddhist organizations that valued them as writers. Others like the Irish radical, U Dhammaloka, were seen as foul-mouthed and seditious, incurring shame and disgust among upper-class European contemporaries (Cox, *Buddhism and Ireland,* 287).

[34] Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 150 – 51, 179 – 80.

networked with monastics at rural dharamśālās and urban vihāras, sharing thoughts on everything from the profound to the profane. Travel to different Indian sites brought disparate opportunities. Figures like the Irish radical, U Dhammaloka (Laurence Carroll, 1856 – 1913) and Englishman Bhikkhu Ashoka (Gordon Douglas, d. ~1905) earned notoriety as anti-colonial freethinkers, moving outside of 'respected' colonial society and choosing to work among the colonial underbelly from which they too often derived. When in 1907 the Irish bhikkhu U Visuddha (the 'U' denoting a Burmese ordination) arrived at the Śākya Buddhist Society at the Kolar Gold Fields in Tamil Nadu, he was requested to assist in the Buddhist "conversion" of "1,000 [Dalit] workers and their families" seeking an escape from caste discrimination.[35] Such a scenario was a far cry from the atmosphere found at the Calcutta headquarters of the MahaBodhi Society.

Despite the vast differences in the kinds of Buddhisms and Buddhists one could encounter in India, there were other homogenizing trends. Prior to the nineteenth-century, there is little evidence for any kind of singular, universal Buddhist pilgrimage circuit in India. The sixth-century Tamil Buddhist text, the *Maṇimkēlai,* for instance, describes a Buddhist landscape with southern India and maritime southeast Asia as its sacred center rather than north India.[36] In a study of Sanskrit and Tibetan pilgrims' guides to Buddhist India, Toni Huber has shown that the number of 'sacred sites' varied greatly, from two to three, four, eight or thirty-two.[37] As Steven Kemper puts it, "Buddhists came from various parts of the 'great transcontinental sodality' that was premodern Buddhism, but they followed no particular path."[38] Although Bodh Gaya almost always remained at the center of the matrix, Buddhist pilgrimage was loosely regulated, conditioned more by patterns of patronage, teaching lineage, cultural transmission, geography and individual inspiration than by any singular model. According to the art historian Janice Leoshko, only in the nineteenth century did a "distinctive pilgrimage cult" centered on the "Eight Great Places" (*aṣṭa-mahāsthāna*) of Lumbinī, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath (Ṛṣipatana), Kuśīnagar, Śrāvastī, Rajgir (Rājagṛha), Vaiśālī,

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[35] *Ceylon Observer,* November 7, 1908, quoted in Cox, *Buddhism and Ireland,* 255 – 56. This is discussed in further detail below and in chapter seven.
[36] Monius, *Imagining a place for Buddhism,* 101 – 15. Contemporary narratives in Pali and Chinese also redefined the Buddhist world with their own regional or local landscape as the center.
[37] Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 18 – 19.
[38] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 222.

and Sankissa (Sāṃkāśya) emerge.[39] On the one hand, the focus on the Eight Great Places was due to the discursive shift from a world of many Buddhas to the one Buddha, Gautama of the Śākya clan. Yet this too as both Leoshko and Huber argue, was a product of archaeological discoveries and subsequent art historians' interpretations of several Pala-era sculpted stelae across India that depicted these eight sites as key moments in Buddha's life.[40] While Huber is right to note that this scheme has achieved "something of a canonical status among modern interpreters of Buddhism…as the primary model for representing and understanding India as a sacred Buddhist terrain of pilgrimage," its importance appears to have been more intellectual than tangible.[41] As it turned out, for reasons that probably have more to do with urban railway lines and ease of transit, only Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and to a lesser degree, Rajgir, Nalanda and Kuśīnagar, ever attained large numbers of foreign pilgrims in the colonial era. Even today, the only addition to this trend is Lumbini, which the Nepalese state (with Chinese financing) is working hard to develop on par with Bodh Gaya.

Nonetheless, when the Allahabad newspaper, the *Pioneer,* reported Daya Ram Sahni's discovery in 1908 of an eighteen by fourteen inch copper plate containing a long Sanskrit inscription confirming Śrāvastī as "the Great Convent of Holy Jetavana," the columnist was not amiss when he concluded that "we may expect that the yellow robed friars will flock again to the spot hallowed by the presence of their Master."[42] Buddhist intellectuals closely followed archaeological developments and the most well oiled Buddhist associations in Japan, India and Sri Lanka offered concession fares to "priests and students" who wished to travel to Indian Buddhist sites.[43] Extracts from archaeological reports on places of Buddhist interest were regularly published in the *MahaBodhi* and the society's Book Agency distributed pamphlets instructing pilgrims how to purchase railway tickets and

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[39] Leoshko, *Sacred Traces,* 69 – 73.
[40] Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 22 – 29. The significance of these four additional sites is in reference to certain miracles believed to have occurred there: at Sravasti (Śrāvasti) where Buddha defeated six heretical teachers with magic; at Rajgir (Rājāṛha), where he tamed the wild elephant set upon him by his treasonous cousin Devadatta; at Vaishali (Vaiśāli), where a monkey offered him honey, and at Sankassa (Sāṅkāśya), where he descended from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods after delivering a sermon to his mother who had died only seven days after his birth.
[41] Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 35.
[42] *The Pioneer,* July 1908, reproduced in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 16/7 (1908), 105. Daya Ram Sahni (1879 – 1939), who became the first Indian director of the ASI in 1931, was a veteran field archaeologist, scholar and associate of the MahaBodhi Society whose guides to Buddhist sites in India were essential tools for the educated traveler.
[43] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 14/6 (1906), 96.

find accommodations. In *Phra* Maha Chandrima's "Guide to the Sacred Sites of the Buddhist Holy Land," published in 1902 and distributed through the MahaBodhi Book Agency, readers were not only provided the precise costs of travel via bullock cart and train but also given new eyes through which to see the Buddhist landscape. At Kuśīnagar, for instance, Phra Chandrima explained that the reclining image of Buddha should inspire "devout enthusiastic religious zeal and remind them of Buddha in his dying hour."[44]

Access to these materials and technological resources more widely, greatly impacted the ebbs and flows of Buddhist pilgrimage. Uneven development within the British Indian Empire made the difference between the hinterlands and urban centers even greater. When the first King of Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck (r. 1907 – 26) attended the Delhi Darbar in 1911, the roughly four hundred mile journey from his Himalayan home to the nearest railway line took seventeen days. The remainder of the journey, almost one and a half times that length, took only two days by rail.[45] Likewise, for the roughly eight thousand Buddhists of Assam, the Majjhima Desa remained a distant land, cut off by deep valleys, numerous hills and rivers. Even travel on the Brahmaputra River 'highway' was long and tedious, taking on average between six to seven weeks to reach Gauhati from Calcutta by the end of the century.[46] Travel from Ladakh, Kinnaur, Spiti and other Buddhist regions in the northwestern Himalaya was no less imposing.[47] Technology never determined the destiny of a Buddhist site—we should be weary of assuming that just because technology is available, people would or could use it—but it did condition who visited there.

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[44] Phra Maha Chandrima, "Guide to the Sacred Sites of the Buddhistic Holy Land," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 11/7 (1902 – 03), 132. Chandrima was a senior monk of Chinese descent in the Thai King's court and his guidebook was based on his own travels to Buddhist sites in 1901 – 02. See, Foreign Department: Secret (E), October 1902, nos. 88 – 94, Government of India, National Archives. On guidebooks to Buddhist sites in early twentieth-century India, see Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 331 – 333.

[45] Sir Charles Bell, *Tibet past and present* (Delhi: Motilal, 1992 [1924]), 119. A major shift in traffic from the Himalayas occurred in 1881 as a consequence of the opening of the Darjeeling Railway up from Siliguri, putting the port of Calcutta and other railway line and ocean transit in close proximity for merchants, pilgrims and travelers. For an excellent study of nineteenth-century migration patterns and movement in between the plains of India and Himalayas, see, Wim van Spengen, *Tibetan border worlds: a Geo-historical analysis of trade and traders* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[46] Priyam Goswami, *The History of Assam: from Yandabo to Partition, 1826 – 1947* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012), 2 – 24.

[47] For an insightful first-hand account of a Tibetan Bonpo pilgrim traveling to north Indian Buddhist sites in the early 1900s, see Per Kvaerne, "Khyung-sprul 'Jigs-med nam-mkhai' rdo-rje (1897 – 1955): An Early Twentieth-century Tibetan pilgrim in India," in *Pilgrimage in Tibet,* edited by Alex McKay (London: Curzon, 1998), 71 – 84. See also, Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 232 – 335.

Adverse climatic conditions were of equal bearing. Religious pilgrimage, and travel more generally, at North Indian sites was then, as it is now, largely regulated by the season. Winter months provide much-needed respite from not only heat but also disease. Although improved drugs and greater access to them made it safer to travel and hence, stay longer in hazardous regions, outbreaks of malaria and cholera were a regular part of life in the subcontinent. The effects of this could be devastating. Candramani experienced the tragic side of the Gangetic plains on more than one occasion. While studying Hindi and Sanskrit in Wasipur in 1901, a cholera outbreak struck more than five hundred people dead in the village around him. To avoid infection, he moved to another village outside Calcutta but there too, the malicious disease had spread, taking the life of his new Sanskrit tutor.[48] Other pilgrims, who complained of dietary problems, famine, theft and austere conditions, repeated stories like Candramani's. India, as the still tragic mortality rates attest to and as its residents know far better than its visitors, can be unforgiving in its hardships.

5.3 Banyan tree Buddhism: Being Buddhist in early twentieth-century India

From the 1890s on there arose several new spaces in urban India where Buddhists or Buddhist sympathizers could congregate and organize. The first of these, as the last chapter explored, were the Chittagong Buddhist Association (1887) and MahaBodhi Society (1891), but other Buddhist organizations (*sabhā, samiti, samāj*) modeled along similar lines soon followed. Near simultaneous with the founding of the MahaBodhi Society was the Calcutta-based Bengal Buddhist Association (1892), which continues to manage several branches and vihāras across India to this day. In the south of India, the Śākya Buddha Society (later South Indian Buddhist Association) was founded in 1898, experiencing incredible growth in the next thirty years before collapsing into just a fraction of its former self by Indian Independence in 1947. Elsewhere, in places like Bombay, Calicut and Lucknow, several other Buddhist societies, some more enduring than others, were formed before 1925 but these will be discussed in the following chapters.

The brick and mortar of these voluntary associations—membership subscriptions, letter writing, editing, weekly meetings and regularly scheduled events—was demanding

[48] Tha Doe Hla, *Life Story of Sri Bhaddhanta Chandramani Mahathera,* 22 – 23.

work. The leaders of these organizations were often products of the new British schools and like Max Weber's "notables" (*honoratiores*), they could typically "count on a certain level of provision from private sources" and "hold office by virtue of the members' confidence."[49] Participation in these associations had various, interlocking components. On the one hand, joining a Buddhist association, as Alicia Turner argues in her study of Buddhism in colonial Burma, was a fundamentally 'modern' way of being Buddhist, although not entirely disconnected from the past.[50]

> Membership subscriptions, letters in newspapers and massive preaching events all gave individual Buddhists a purpose and means of locating themselves inside the broader body of Buddhists. It was a sense of belonging with a long history in Buddhist thought but one reimagined through new technologies and in response to new challenges. [51]

According to Turner, Buddhist associations in Burma "offered a democratized and homogenized Buddhist identity that leveled out some of the hierarchies."[52] Although many Buddhist associations in India included more 'Buddhist enthusiasts' than *Buddhists* per se, they did present opportunities to connect with a much wider world of "unseen, unknown" Buddhists.[53]

Joining a Buddhist association, regardless of whether one's objectives were explicitly 'religious' or not, could also be socially and economically pragmatic.[54] The most well known Buddhist organizations in India, like the MahaBodhi Society and Bombay Buddha Society, provided valuable connections abroad and among the upper echelons of Indian society. Bright, hard-working members could rise through the ranks of treasurer, secretary, vice-president and so on, learning critical managerial and secretarial skills easily transferable to other arenas of urban civil society. It is not surprising then that many such Buddhist societies in India, but particularly the MahaBodhi Society and to a lesser degree, the Bengal Buddhist

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[49] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: an outline of interpretive sociology*, Vol. I, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 290.
[50] My thinking of Buddhist associations is deeply indebted to Turner, *Saving Buddhism.*
[51] Turner, *Saving Buddhism,* 144 – 45.
[52] Turner, *Saving Buddhism,* 145.
[53] Turner, *Saving Buddhism,* 144.
[54] It is important to recognize that not all Buddhists in India chose to join or establish such groups. In Kuśīnagar, Mahāvīr and Candramani made no such efforts until the early 1920s when the "Kuśīnagar Bhikkhu Sangha Association" was formed for legal purposes related to the legal ownership of property. Although the lack of such an organization did not prevent Mahāvīr and Candramani from engaging modern print technologies—they produced a thousand copies of the first Hindi translation of the Pali *Dhammapada* in 1909—it is suggestive of the different social world they inhabited.

Association, were led by prominent national elites. As Gitanjali Surendran argues, being a part of either organization was "a sign of a sound education and a mark of prestige."[55]

5.4 Venerable Kripasaran and the Bengal Buddhist Association

In October of 1892, just thirteen months after the MahaBodhi Society established its first Calcutta office, a twenty-six year old bhikkhu named Kripasaran founded the *Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha* or Bengal Buddhist Association (hereafter, BBA).[56] According to its charter, the organization had five primary goals: (1) to improve the social, intellectual, and religious status of Indian Buddhists, (2) to spread education among Buddhist boys and girls, (3) to promote a wider knowledge of the tenets of Buddhism, (4) to foster the study of Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist literature, and (5) to remove the difficulties and disadvantages into which pilgrims are put on their way to and from Gaya, Kusinara, etc."[57] On the surface, these objectives were hardly different than those of the MahaBodhi Society. Indeed, like Dharmapala's society, membership in the BBA was "open to all persons irrespective of their religious beliefs and does not imply any more than an interest in one or other of the objects of the Sabha or in its publications or other portions of its work."[58] Other similarities were also apparent. They shared several of the same Indian patrons and intellectually, they both saw Buddhism as more of a science than a religion. To call it the latter could have only been in regards to its unparalleled ethics and morality, which as a BBA secretary put it, "can never be denied, even by its greatest opponents."[59]

Yet there were distinct differences between the two organizations, which not coincidentally, were located only a short walk from one another. Language and ethnicity

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[55] Surendran, "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism," 127. Surendran's dissertation does not mention the Bombay Buddha Society but it should certainly be added to this duo.
[56] The society's Bengali name, *Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha*, means the 'Society for the Germination of the Buddhadharma.' Yet the organization often goes by the Bengal Buddhist Association in English and I follow that usage.
[57] *Annual Report for the Bengal Buddhist Association for 1912 – 1913* (Calcutta: Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha, 1913), no page. Other goals included (a) expunging the social evils, prejudices and superstitions by means of instruction, publications and lectures; (b) establishing Schools and "Tolls" [Pali language institutes] in different villages for the development and culture of intellect and morality, (c) printing and circulating works on Buddhism, Pali Texts and translation of Buddhist scripture etc."
[58] *Annual Report for the Bengal Buddhist Association for 1912 – 1913*, 3.
[59] *Annual Report for the Bengal Buddhist Association for 1916 – 1917* (Calcutta: Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha, 1917), vii.

were the most obvious dissimilarities. The BBA published almost all of its literature in Bengali and its monthly journal, *Jagajjyoti* (*Light of the World*), launched in 1907 and still published today, was in many respects a Bengali version of Dharmapala's *MahaBodhi*.[60] Yet the target audience of the *Jagajjyoti* was less the elite Bengali public in Calcutta than it was the Bengali-speaking Buddhists from Chittagong who had migrated across the subcontinent and were closely linked to the Sangharāja Nikāya.

The group's founder and fountainhead Kripasaran (1865 – 1926) embodies the clear differences between the two organizations.[61] Raised in a small village outside Chittagong city, Kripasaran had humble origins, being orphaned at a young age and placed in a local vihāra. His parents were Barua Maghs, the name given to the Bengali-speaking Arakanese who had migrated north of the Naf River into southern Chittagong after the Burmese king conquered Arakan in 1785.[62] As these populations resettled across Chittagong and other parts of Bengal, many Arakanese females married Bengali men and the descendants of these families were known as *Rajbansis* or more commonly, Barua Maghs.[63] Colonial historians were long familiar with the Maghs—the Portuguese had immortalized them as pirates and slave traders—and in British eyes, they were hard workers, noted for their excellent cooking and egalitarian nature, which led them to be employed in British cantonments in places as distant as Simla and Lucknow.[64] Later, when the BBA expanded, their branches opened alongside these scattered Barua populaces.

When Kripasaran turned twenty (in 1885), he took his higher ordination (*upasampadā*) under Candramohan, the respected elder of the Sangharaja Nikaya who had

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[60] Its title of course is another stab at Arnold's (and Monier-Monier Williams') *Light of Asia* argument (see chapter three of this dissertation).

[61] Unless otherwise noted, my main source for the life of Kripasaran is Rājendra Rām, *Karmayogī Krpāśaran Mahāsthavir Baudhdharm kā dhruvatāra* (Kolkāta: Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha, 2006 [2550 BS]).

[62] By 1800, severe violence and new taxation schemes had led to what Company officials in 1800 described as a "very extraordinary and unexpected migration" of "no less than 35,000 [Arakanese] persons" to seek "protection in Chittagong." See, "Chronicle for March 1800," 61, quoted in Charney, "Where Jambudipa and Islamdom converged," 265fn622.

[63] See *Census of India, Volume 6, Part 1* (1901), 156. This is not to be confused with the major caste group of North Bengal known as Rajbansis.

[64] *Imperial Gazetteer of India,* Vol. 6 (1886), 167 – 69; Vol. 10 (1886), 305 – 10. In historical literature, the term Magh is often written as Mugg, of which see the detailed explanation in Col. Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive,* edited by William Crooke (Varanasi: Pilgrims Publishing, 2005 (reprint of 1903 original), 594 – 95. The term has been dropped in recent decades because of its pejorative connotation and connection to the formerly robust slave trade and pirating of the region.

studied in Lanka for four years and lived in Calcutta in the 1850s.[65] A year after Kripasaran ordained, he followed his preceptor to Bodh Gaya, where his biographers all proclaim that in a Dharmapala-esque type moment, the young monk gazed at the Bodhi tree and felt inspired to work for the glory of Buddhism both in Chittagong and elsewhere in the subcontinent.[66] By the early 1890s, he was living in a small rented house in Calcutta named the *Mahānagar vihāra,* from which the BBA was founded. The location of the office in Bow Bazaar was apt: nearby was a house occupied by Burmese – Arakanese Buddhists, including Mahāvīr's wealthy Arakanese sponsor Khee Zarhee, as well as a community of several hundred Baruas that could provide alms for the small monastic body.[67]

The early years of the BBA are murky with reports that he spent much of this time traveling across the subcontinent, often with Mahāvīr, visiting the sacred places of India and collecting funds for his plans to build a vihāra.[68] However, by the end of the century, the activities of the Chittagong Buddhists were well known to Calcutta's "good people" (*bhadralok*). When the BBA held its third annual Buddhist Assembly (*bauddha sammilani*) in Calcutta on October 24 – 25, 1902, Buddhist monks, lay Baruas and caste Hindus gathered together "to promote the cause of Buddhism…establish a universal brotherhood among the Buddhists" and "reform social conditions among them."[69] The nearly four hundred attendees heard recitations of various Pali *suttas* (such as the *Maṅgala-sutta, Ratna Sutta, Jayamaṅgala Gāthā*), commentaries in Bengali on the *Dhammapada*, Buddhist songs (*kīrtans*) and short lectures by local businessmen and Calcutta University faculty. Large-scale events like these only appear to have increased the stature of the association and soon it was hosting the colonial state's diplomatic envoys from Buddhist countries. For instance, in 1905, the colonial government orchestrated the Panchen Lama's state visit to India and the BBA's

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[65] Rām, *Karmayogī Krpāśaran,* 9 – 10. On Candramohan, see chapter four of this dissertation.
[66] This is rather standard fare in the presentation of his life. See, for instance, the "Special Issue Karmayogi Kripasaran Mahastahvir," in the Bengali – English magazine, *Mohājīvan,* February 22, 2015, and the *Kripasaran Mahathera 125th Birth Anniversary Volume* (Calcutta: Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha, 1990).
[67] The Burmese house was at 20 – 1 Gangadhar Babu's Lane, Bow Bazaar Street. See *MahaBodhi* Vol. 1 (1892 – 93), 5. It later moved to 6 and then 10 Eden Street, all of which were short distances from one another. My estimate of the Barua population derives from the Census Comission's report of 2903 Buddhists in Calcutta in 1891, most of which were said to be Chinese. See, *Census of India* Vol. 6, Part I: Bengal (1901), 157.
[68] C.f, Hemendu Bikash Chowdhury, "Karmayogi Kripasaran," *Mohājīvan,* February 22, 2015, 34 – 38. Chowdhury is the current General Secretary of the Bengal Buddhist Association. A BBA appeal for funds to build a Calcutta vihāra was published in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 12/1 – 2 (1903), 21. This document is signed by "Mahaweer [Mahāvīr] Bhikshu, Kripasaran Bhikshu, U Nanda Bhikshu, Ram Chadra Barua."
[69] Ananda Charan Baruya, "Bauddha Sammilani," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 11/7 (1902 – 03), 127.

newly constructed Dharmankur Vihāra (completed 1903) played host to the Panchen's elite entourage of British officials, Indian scholars, Tibetan aristocrats and incarnate lamas.[70] Five years later, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's name would be added to the list of major Buddhist dignitaries who had visited the society's headquarters.[71] To put this in historical context, this was fifteen years before the MahaBodhi Society had even built its first temple in India. The BBA, in other words, was well on the Indian Buddhist map.

Yet unlike the MahaBodhi Society, who between 1906 and 1930 received more than three hundred thousand US dollars in donations from the wealthy Hawaiian Theosophist Mary Foster *alone*, the BBA possessed neither that kind of capital nor international donor network.[72] By contrast, in almost the same timespan, Kripasaran raised twenty-thousand rupees through his preaching tours in India, Burma and Ceylon."[73] A respectable amount, but paltry in comparison to the single donation of two and a half times that from Foster to the MahaBodhi Society in just 1913.[74] While Dharmapala sailed around the world, delivering lectures, building schools and colleges, establishing relief funds for famine struck areas of Bengal and employing the country's best lawyers for his MahaBodhi Temple case, Kripasaran and his close colleague, the Vice-President of the BBA, Bhikkhu Gunalankar approached local *zamindārs,* Hindu *rājas,* and Buddhist merchants in the north and northeast

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[70] On the Panchen's visit, see Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 268 – 82.
[71] On the Dalai Lama's visit, see Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 282 – 90.
[72] Frank J. Karpiel, "Theosophy, Culture and Politics in Honolulu, 1890 – 1920," *Hawaiian Journal of History* Vol. 30 (1996), 184. It is difficult to equate this to rupees, especially since these donations came over time, but the amount far exceeded that given to any other Buddhist organization in India. Foster's (1844 – 1930) philanthropic activities were well-known to South Asians—she had many "gurus." She first met Dharmapala in Hawaii in 1893 when he was returning from the World Parliament in Chicago. Despite only meeting two more times in person, during their four-decades long relationship, Foster was the Buddhist patron *par excellence*. Her donations came in incremental sums—3,000 Rs in 1906; 15,000 Rs in 1908; 50,000 Rs in 1913 and a 50,000 USD bond in 1919, to name just a few. She was not the MahaBodhi Society's only donor. Other means of support were substantial but compared to Foster (and the family trust Dharmapala inherited), they were negligible. For instance, Dharmapala's Sarnath diary for August 24, 1920 reports that he had collected 40,000 rupees from Burma and Lanka since the organization's inception. Not an insignificant amount, but this was twenty-eight years of fundraising compared to Foster's single donation exceeding that amount in 1913.
[73] *Annual Report for the Bengal Buddhist Association 1916 – 17*, xvii. Some of the BBA's most generous benefactors included the princely states. Apart from preaching and relying upon the subcontinent's ingrained tradition of ethical giving, all general members were required to pay five rupees annually. An interesting clause (#14) in the prospectus states that "*All the Buddhists of Calcutta* besides the members of the Association shall have to contribute a donation to this Association per annum according to their ability" (emphasis mine). How well this *zakat*-like demand played out is unclear.
[74] Spurred on by allegations of financial mismanagement and fraud, Dharmapala printed a detailed record of Foster's donations in 1929, as "Mrs. Foster's Benefactions," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 37/1 (1929), 92 – 94.

of India.[75] Comparisons aside, the BBA's fundraising was enough to purchase a small plot of land (five *kathas,* at a cost of about forty-five hundred rupees) and construct the city's first modern vihāra, the Dharmankur Vihāra in 1903. They added a reading room, the Gunalankar Library in 1909 and a school, the Kripasaran Free Institution in 1912, the latter of which offered daytime courses for children and literacy classes for adults in the evenings.

Many of the BBA's activities were supported by the provincial government and several colonial officers who frequented the society.[76] Sir Harcourt Butler (later, Governor of the United Provinces and Lt. Governor of Burma) and Asutosh Mookerjee, the High Court Magistrate and Vice-chancellor of Calcutta University, were both on the society's official list of patrons. Butler helped them acquire a free plot of land in Lucknow where the BBA built the Bodhisattva Vihāra in 1907. Mookerjee, who proclaimed, "it is due to his [Kripasaran's] association alone [that] I was attracted to Buddhism and Buddhist literature," used the BBA's connections to Pali scholars abroad to bolster Calcutta University's program.[77] Under his watch as Vice-chancellor (1906 – 14, 1921 – 23), which also coincided with his Presidency of the MahaBodhi Society (1911 – 24), Calcutta University developed a Pali language department (1907), making it the first university in India to do so, constructed a three-story hostel for Buddhist students (1915) and further developed the school as an international center for critical Buddhist scholarship. Kripasaran's links with governmental elites proved especially fruitful when the government offered a coveted state scholarship for "the scientific study of Pali in Europe" to the organization's most promising member.[78] The prodigal child was Beni Madhab Barua (1888 - 1948) of Chittagong, who used the grant to become the first Asian to earn a D.Litt. from the University of London, where he read Pali with the great scholar Thomas Rhys Davids (1843 – 1922). Upon returning to Calcutta in 1918, Barua's

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[75] *Annual Report for the Bengal Buddhist Association 1916 – 17,* xvii.

[76] In addition to those discussed below, these included Sir R.W. Carlyle, member of the Governor-General's Council in charge of Revenue and Agriculture; the Bengal High Court Justices, H. Holmwood and Jogendra Chandra Ghosh. It also received the support of the rulers of several minor princely states, including Maharaja Sir Bijoy Chand Mahatab of Burdwand, Manindra Chandra Nandi, Maharaja of Cox's Bazaar and Raja Bhuban Mohan Roy, the Chakma Chief of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Rangamati. See *Annual Report(s) for the Bengal Buddhist Association,* for long-lists of their patrons, members, honorary members, etc.

[77] *Hundred Years of the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha* (Calcutta: Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha, 1992), 23. For instance, several BBA monks, like Sammana Punnanada and Dharmavansa Thero were employed by Calcutta University to teach in its Pali-language programs.

[78] "Award of a special state scholarship to Beni Madhab Barua," Government of India, Department of Education, Education Branch, August 1914, Part A, 99-109, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

achievements were to become very much the society's achievements, as he became a full professor at Calcutta University, edited the BBA's monthly-organ, *Jagajjyoti* and established a reputation as an individual who could move between critical scholar and practitioner with seemingly little problem.[79]

The question that has perplexed many scholars is why the BBA and MBS did not form a closer relationship when their goals were so seemingly identical.[80] Dharmapala and Kripasaran first met at Bodh Gaya in February of 1891, just months before the founding of the MahaBodhi Society. The meeting was happenstance and Dharmapala was impressed by the young monk's ascetic devotion: Kripasaran cut his finger while making a vow to the Buddha, and sold his sandals and umbrella in order to purchase oil to light lamps at the shrine.[81] Months later while disembarking from a steamship in Calcutta, Dharmapala, again by chance, ran into him and several of his monastic colleagues. This time Kripasaran guided Dharmapala to his rented home, the Mahānagar Vihāra in Calcutta. "I came in his trap," Dhramapala reported in his diary, "and the priests walked down to a so called Temple in Warris Bagh Lane," where Kripasaran coaxed Dharmapala "to purchase sundry articles for the priests."[82] In the years that followed, the two had an off and on relationship. They attended each other's functions, shared the same Bengali Hindu patrons and before Dharmapala acquired his own property, the BBA even hosted MahaBodhi Society meetings. Yet there were real tensions between them.

The critical fallout, I suspect, was Kripasaran and Gunalankar's joining of the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society from 1906 to 1910, which Dharmapala (justifiably) interpreted as a betrayal of his confidence. The Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society (hereafter, BSRS) was founded in 1906 during the end of the Panchen Lama's official state visit to India, which as noted above, also included a visit to the BBA. This important but

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[79] Surendran, "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism," 128 – 39, provides an excellent overview of Barua's English-language works.

[80] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 29fn62, calls it "unclear" why there was not more "solidarity," suggesting class differences as the primary culprit. Contemporary writers associated with the Bengal Buddhist Association and MahaBodhi Society frequently acknowledge the distant relationship but are silent on why they never formed a closer bond. I suspect that one of the reasons it has not been investigated further is due to the close relationship between the two societies today, fearful any digging up of the past may revive negative memories. Surendran, "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism," seems oblivious to any tension between the two organizations and their leadership, describing it as "a fruitful and cordial relationship" (68fn92).

[81] Dharmapala Diary, February 27 and 28, 1891.

[82] Dharmapala Diary, July 15, 1891.

short-lived organization (it collapsed after 1910), which has been strangely ignored or misrepresented in secondary scholarship, was the product of an incredible collaboration between European officers, Bengali Hindu elites, Sikkimese aristocracy, Japanese military officers and priests, Tibetan lamas, and Chittagong Buddhists.[83] Toni Huber, who is one of the few scholars to recognize the society's importance, characterized the BSRS as a primarily secular institution interested in the management of archaeological sites but the organization's aim was much more precise.[84] As the original prospectus submitted to the Government of India on February 6, 1906 makes clear, the society was nothing short of an intervention in the MahaBodhi Society campaign:

> You are no doubt aware of the fact that the state of affairs prevailing at Buddh Gaya has for many years past been a cause of dissatisfaction to Buddhists throughout the East…for some years past negotiations of a kind have actually been in progress…[they] have been conducted chiefly through the medium of a certain Mr. Dharma Pala, the President of that [MahaBodhi] Society. But I must say here that Mr. Dharma Pala has prejudiced his own case by his *violent and uncompromising attitude* and by the *ill-judged nature* of his proceedings…Mr. Dharma Pala continues his campaign, but he is discredited by Hindus and Buddhists alike.[85]

As the minutes of the more than three dozen meetings held in Calcutta, Rangoon, Darjeeling, and Mandalay over the next four years recount, this was less a "secular society" than a broad movement of Asians and Europeans, Buddhists and non-Buddhists who had lost faith in Dharmapala's leadership.[86] Both Kripasaran and Bhikkhu Gunalankar were working

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[83] Among the most prominent working members of the society were the Panchen Lama (President), Sikyong Tulku, the Crown Prince of Sikkim (Vice President), and the remarkable scholar - translators Kazi Dawa Samdup and Satishchandra Vidyabhusan (Resident Secretaries). Strangely, the BSRS is completely absent in Trevithick, *Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage* and only finds a brief mention in passing in Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 29 as well as Surendran, "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism," 103. While selections of the minutes are available at the National Archives in New Delhi (see, Sikkim Agency: Sikkim Agency Office, Progs Nos. 23, 1906), the most comprehensive collection is contained at the Sikkim State Archives in Gangtok (see, Darbar, 1906, File no. Nil, Part B, Paper reg: Buddhist Shrine Restoration Society).

[84] Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 277 – 79. Huber's misguided conclusions about the BSRS are likely due to the limited sources he had, which as he notes (423fn83), is based on a single prospectus of the organization published in the back of Satish Chandra Vidyabhusan's report on *The Tashi Lama's Visit to India (8th November 1905 – 17th February 1906)* (1907).

[85] Italics mine. "Letter from Captain W.F. O'Connor to Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Deaprtment," 6th February 1906, Government of India, Foreign Department: External branch B, April 1906, Nos. 104 – 106, National Archives of India. O'Connor was one of three European-born "honorary advisors" on the board of the BSRS.

[86] See, for instance, the notes from the meeting on November 24, 1907, where the members expressed their distrust of Dharmapala's understanding of the legal dynamics at Bodh Gaya (Government of India, Darbar, 1906, File no. Nil, Part B, Paper reg: Buddhist Shrine Restoration Society, Sikkim State Archives, Gangtok).

members of the association.[87] The BSRS continued to work independently of Dharmapala up until January of 1909 when a final judgment was delivered in the Court of the Subordinate Judge of Gaya, declaring that the Mahant was the sole owner of the MahaBodhi Temple complex, and thus bringing to a (temporary) close Dhamapala's fourteen-year legal case.[88] Significantly, just four days after Dharmapala received news of his devastating loss, the BSRS, in what must be considered a conciliatory gesture, invited him to join the society in what was to be their last ever meeting.[89] Clearly, it was time for reconciliation.

The spirit of forgiveness appears to have prevailed and in 1911, Kripasaran visited Ceylon on Dharmapala's invitation and three years later, Kripasaran returned the favor, hosting Dharmapala in Chittagong during Vesak. Yet beneath the façade, class and cultural differences lingered. After leaving a function at the BBA in 1915, Dharmapala wrote: "Came away disgusted seeing the utterances of the Bhikkhus there. They bring shame on the religion…The low born Bhikkhus are responsible for the destruction of the Sāsana."[90] Of Kripasaran, Dharmapala was more ambivalent. He (wrongly) called him "illiterate" but acknowledged that he is "respected": "He is a tower of strength. He does not know a word of Pali but he has got an active temperament. Akbar was illiterate, Carlyle's mother was illiterate, Lincoln's mother was illiterate…"[91] There was clearly an admiration for Kripasaran's accomplishments but the immensely different worlds they had been raised in were likely too much to bear. Kripasaran was the child of migrants and cultivators, raised among orthodox monastics on the fringes of the Empire. He spoke rudimentary English, the

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[87] Other notable Indian members included, Dharmanand Kosambi, Norendronath Sen, Babu Rashibihar Mukherji, and Surendranath Tagore, all individuals who Dharmapala had once considered his friends. His sense of betrayal was sharp.

[88] The judgment was given on January 19, 1909 and Dharmapala's appeal in the Calcutta High Court was dismissed without discussion just over a year later. See, Trevithick, *Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage,* 172 – 73, and *MahaBodhi* Vol. 17/1 (1909) and Vol. 18/4 (1910).

[89] The idea to invite Dharmapala was proposed by Norendronath Sen and Bhikkhu Gunalankara, both of whom had long-standing relationships with Dharmapala. In the last meeting, held on March 8, 1909, the central committee proposed filing a new lawsuit against the Mahant with nominees from Burma, Ceylon, India and "Mahāyāna countries." The case never appears to have gone to court, perhaps for financial reasons, considering the BSRS lawyer, Sarada Charan Mitra's recommendation that it would cost 25,000 rupees to push through a successful case. See the notes of the 10th and 11th meetings, Government of India: Darbar, 1906, Part B, Sikkim State Archives, Gangtok.

[90] Dharmapala Diary, October 27, 1915. Of Samana Punnanada, the BBA's resident monk, Dharmapala would compare to "Devadatta," the Buddha's cousin who tried to kill him (April 16 – 17, 1917). Perhaps the only exception to his tirades was Bhikkhu Gunalankar, the Vice-President of the organization, on whose death, Dharmapala called a "most amiable kindhearted man he was. In his death Bengal Buddhists lose the best Bhikkhu" (March 27, 1917).

[91] Dharmapala Diary, September 7 – 10, 1915.

lingua franca of the cosmopolitan elite and it was his charisma and asceticism that earned their respect, not his social origins. Dharmapala, on the other hand, was part of the global elite, more comfortable in the imperial urbanity of Calcutta and London than he was among the 'low born Bhikkhus' who made up the BBA.

Dharmapala may have been turned off by the so-called decadence of the contemporary Bengali sangha, but the organization's rigorous missionary instinct appears to have appealed to other Buddhists in India. Around 1912 or 1913, the Crown Prince of Sikkim and incarnate lama (*sprul sku*) Sikyong Namgyal, invited the BBA's newest secretary and polyglot bhikkhu, Kali Kumar (d. 1914) to preach "orthodox Buddhism" and "make his [Mahāyāna] subjects renounce superstitions."[92] The Sikyong (1879 – 1914) was no stranger to the massive changes taking place in the Buddhist world, having been molded by the British from a young age to "Take Due Pride in the Empire to Which He Belongs."[93] Before leaving his ancestral kingdom for Pembroke College in Oxford, his childhood tutor, the Tibetologist Sarat Chandra Das had trained him how to 'read' the Buddhist past and present, and British officers accompanying him on journeys to Japan, Burma, and Ceylon, introduced him to the imperial world. Although it is unclear at what precise moment the Sikyong began his involvement with the BBA, letters from the Sikkim State Archives show that after 1906, when he became Vice-President of the BSRS, his communication with the BBA and other Buddhists in India increased greatly.[94] He corresponded with Dharmanand Kosambi, asking

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[92] Alexandra David-Néel, *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* (New York: University Books, 1965), 54. The exact identity of Kali Kumar is a matter of some debate in contemporary scholarship. Scholars of modern Sikkim have simply known him as the 'Indian Theravādin reformer' and in a recent article, Berthe Jansen, "The Monastic Guidelines (*bCa' yig*) by Sidekeong Tulku: Monasteries, Sex and Reform in Sikkim," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (2014) 597 - 622, suggested that he was Kali Kumar Das, the Bengali scholar of Lepcha culture, and brief member of the Asiatic Society. However, inscriptions from the Bodhisattva Vihāra in Lucknow (personal observation) in addition to an 'obituary' (*Kali Kumare Antyeshthikriya [*The Funeral Rites of Kali Kumar]) in the November issue of *Jaggajyoti* in 1914 make clear Kali Kumar was a Barua from Chittagong who had taken ordination under Kripasaran sometime before 1907. All contemporary accounts of him, which unfortunately tend to be brief, describe him as fluent in Tibetan (personal communication, Hemendu Bikash Chowdhury, May 11, 2015). I am grateful to Debolina Sen, PhD candidate at the University of Calcutta for translating Kali Kumar's obituary for me.

[93] On his education, see Alex McKay, "That He May Take Due Pride in the Empire to Which He Belongs': the Education of Maharajah Kumar Sidkeon Namgyal Tulku," *Bulletin of Tibetology* Vol. 39/2 (2003), 27 – 52.

[94] See, for instance, the collection of letters written to and from Dharmanand Kosambi, Harinath De, Gunalankar, Satishchandra Vidyabhusan, etc., in Darbar, 1906, File no. Nil, Part B, Paper reg: Buddhist Shrine Restoration Society, Sikkim State Archives, Gangtok, India. His acquaintance with Kripasaran and others could have begun as early as 1900 when he visited the Calcutta vihāra of the Bengal Buddhist Association. This visit is detailed from the March 13 – 30th entries contained in the unpublished *Diaries of Chogyal Sidkeong Tulku,*

him to come to Sikkim and was the critical intermediary for communications between the 13th Dalai Lama and BBA during His Holiness' visit to India in 1910.[95]

By 1909, these communications with Buddhist modernists and activists had clearly impacted him. That year, he used his religio-political position to implement socio-religious reforms on the monastic body by composing a new monastic constitution (Tibetan, *bCa' yig*) for *all* Sikkimese monasteries of *all* schools. According to Berthe Jansen, who has studied the Sikyong's new monastic charter in detail, part of what made the document so remarkable is that while different monasteries often shared one *bCa' yig*, the idea of one *bCa' yig* for *all schools* was "exceptional."[96] In Jansen's view, the new monastic guidelines that the Sikyong laid out, such as stricter rulings on sexual deviancy were "mainly devised to discourage monastics from starting families (as was the general trend), which would greatly impact the economy and social standing of the monastery."[97] For Jansen, this is evidence that the Sikyong's actions were not those of a modernist but of a reformer: "there is no mention of Buddhism as "the religion of reason": the values he upheld were largely orthodox. The goal that Sidkeong [Sikyong] seems to have had is to reform, in order to sustain monastic Buddhism in Sikkim and to develop a politically stable polity."[98] Jansen is right to stress, as other scholars have, the shifting political conditions at the time and how he had clear motivations to reduce the trade monopoly and landholdings of the monasteries and aristocratic classes (*kazi*) across Sikkim. Yet the contents of the *bCa' yig* are also suggestive of the new milieu. In ways that resonate with similar developments occurring in Burma, the charter calls upon monks to not only uphold a more rigorous regiment of discipline and decorum but also adopt new preaching styles and engage audiences in a more friendly, casual manner.[99] When one considers his relationship with the leading lights of Buddhist 'reform' in

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the 10th Chogyal of Sikkim, gifted to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (Gangtok) by the Queen Mother of Bhutan in 2003.

[95] C.f., "Letter from Gunalankar to Sidkeong Tulku on 12 March, 1910" and "Letter from Maharaj Kumar to Dhammananda [Kosambi] on September 29, 1909," in Darbar, 1906, File no. Nil, Part B, "Paper reg: Buddhist Shrine Restoration Society," Sikkim State Archives, Gangtok, India.

[96] Jansen, "Monastic Guidelines," 599.

[97] Jansen, "Monastic Guidelines," 612.

[98] Jansen, "Monastic Guidelines," 612.

[99] Jansen, "Monastic Guidelines," 607 – 11. The parallels between the Sikyong's notions of improved preaching techniques with those of the popular Burmese meditation master, Ledi Sayadaw, are striking. See, Erik Braun, *The Birth of Insight: meditation, modern Buddhism and the Burmese monk Ledi Sayadaw* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 75 – 100, especially 90 – 92. See also my short review essay on Braun's work, Douglas Ober, "Book Review," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* Vol. 22 (2015): 475 – 80.

Burma, Bengal and India at the time, the context looks different.

A series of meetings between Bengali monks in the BBA and Sikkimese – Tibetan elites in Darjeeling and Sikkim from 1912 to 1914 is suggestive of other developments unfolding at the time.[100] In October of 1913, an agreement had been made to purchase a plot of land where "a dharamsala and monastery for both Northern and Southern Buddhists should be erected."[101] Kripasaran promised one thousand rupees but when the owner of the property demanded seven times that, the momentum dwindled. The two parties, the BBA led by Bhikkhu Kali Kumar, and the "United Northern Buddhists" of Darjeeling led by Lodoi Lama of Ging Gompa, Amji Lama of Bhutia Busty Gompa and the government superintendent of finances, K. Shempa, continued to work through the winter to consolidate their plans.[102] On February 11, 1914, the Sikyong was crowned Mahārāja and within just three months of his coronation, he sent three young Sikkimese boys to Ceylon to train in the "Southern" (Theravādin) tradition and ordain in Nyanatiloka's Island Hermitage (est. 1911).[103] At the same time, the Sikyong invited Kali Kumar along with one of Nyanatiloka's disciples, the Scottish Buddhist, Bhikkhu Silacara to Sikkim to preach the saddhamma.[104]

The Sikkimese attempt to "abandon what is not desirable" (Tibetan, *spang blang*) was, however, short-lived.[105] Just months after the first three Sikkimese children ordained in Ceylon, both Kali Kumar and the Sikyong died unexpectedly, the latter having only been

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[100] Regulars at these meetings were Kripasaran, BBA, Kali Kumar Mahasthavir, BBA, Ananda Bhikkhu, BBA, Lodoi Lama, Head Lama at Ging Gompa, Darjeeling; Amji Lama, Head Lama at Bhutia Busty Gompa (Darjeeling); and K. Shempa, the MahaBodhi representative in Darjeeling.
[101] "A Report," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 22/7 (1914), 175 – 77.
[102] "A Report," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 22/7 (1914), 175.
[103] On the basis of archival sources in Sikkim, Pema Wangchuk reports that Kali Kumar brought the boys to Ceylon. See, Pema Wangchuk, "S. Mahinda Thero: the Sikkimese who gave Lankans their freedom song," *Bulletin of Tibetology* Vol. 44/1 & 2 (2008), 142. However in Nyanatiloka Thera, *The Life of Nyantiloka Thera: the biography of a western Buddhist pioneer,* edited and compiled by Hellmuth Hecker and Bhikkhu Ñāṇatusita (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2008), 40 – 44, Nyantiloka claims he traveled to Gangtok in April or May and picked the children up himself
[104] See, Nyanatiloka, *Life of Nyantiloka Thera,* 40 – 44; David-Néel, *Magic and Mystery,* 54 – 55; Appendix 1 "Biography," in Bhikkhu Silacara, *A Young People's Life of the Buddha* (Colombo, 1953), for first and second-hand accounts of this. Wangchuk, "S. Mahinda Thero," 139 – 54, provides a good overview of the Tibetan sources for these events.
[105] My translation of *spang blang* (the transcribed text is provided in Jansen, "Monastic Guidelines," 616 – 18) differs from Jansen who translates this as "upholding moral behavior" (613). By January of the following year, there appears to have still been an effort to unify the traditions by building a "religious assembly room for both Northern and Southern Buddhists…of benefit to all Indian Buddhists." See, *Buddhist Review* Vol. 7/1 (1915), 78.

crowned Maharaja nine months before.[106] The land and monastic reforms were abandoned and all Indian Buddhists in the kingdom were expelled.[107] While one of the Sikkimese children, Mahinda Thero, would go on to become a famous Sinhalese poet, composing the country's national anthems for freedom, Sikkim remained largely off limits for Theravādin missionary monks (*dharmadūt*) until decades later.[108] While the elite connection between the Sikkimese and Bengalis would persist through the offices of the MahaBodhi Society, to which the 12th Chogyal, Palden Thondup Namgyal would become President from 1953 - 82, the closest the Bengali Buddhists would get to entering Sikkim again was through the *Gandaman Vihāra* they established in Darjeeling in 1919.[109]

5.5 Iyothee Thass, Lakshmi Narasu and the Śākya Buddhist Society

In the south of India, the Banyan tree was being shaped by as many diverse factors as it was in the Bengal – Himalayan triangle. Until the turn of the century, public Buddhist events in the region hovered in and around Madras, where organizations like the Theosophical Society, Government Museum and Madras Literary Society hosted discussions on Buddhist doctrine and history. Most of these conversations however, like those led by the remarkable scholar of ancient Tamil Buddhist texts, U.Ve. Caminataiyar remained in the domain of romantic nostalgia and only distantly interested in Buddhism's potential for full-fledged reinvigoration.[110] In 1898, however, four years after Olcott founded the "Panchama Free Schools" to educate the "Depressed Classes" (Dalits), he was approached by one of the

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[106] His tragic death, at the age of 34 or 35, still remains the cause of much suspicion within the kingdom since the reforms he attempted to implement were widely resisted by the political and economic elite. Yet medical papers at the Sikkim State Archives show that he had fallen gravely ill nearly a year before his enthronement. According to his physician, Dr. Turner, he suffered from chronic intestinal nephritis otherwise known as Brights disease. See, "Letter to C.A. Bell, Political Officer from Dr. Turner, Civil Surgeon," June 27, 1913, Government of India, Darbar, File no. 111 (1913), "Correspondence reg: illness of Maharaja of Sikkim," Sikkim State Archives, Gangtok, India.

[107] An eyewitness account of the young Maharaja's failed reforms is available in David-Néel, *Magic and Mystery,* 49 – 50. Sketches of the general context are available in McKay, "That He May Take Due Pride."

[108] On Mahinda Thero, see Wangchuk, "S. Mahinda Thero."

[109] Based on my own findings and interview on June 9, 2015 with Pema *Bhante* (Pema Wangdi Sherpa), the head monk of the Gandaman Vihāra, this remains the only Theravādin vihāra in Darjeeling (although it no longer has any affiliation with the Bengal Buddhist Association).

[110] For Caminataiyar's first hand account of the scholarly Tamil scene in Buddhism in the 1890s, see Swaminath Iyer, *The story of my life*, translated from the Tamil by Sri S.K. Guruswamy and edited by A. Rama Iyer (Tiruvanmiyur: Dr. U.V. Swaminathaiyer Library, 1980), 367 – 77.

school's native teachers, P. Krishnaswamiar with a request.[111] Krishnaswamiar and his friend, the native doctor (*siddha*) Iyothee Thass (1845 – 1914) explained to Olcott that they were "originally" Buddhists and that if he helped build them a Buddhist temple "where they could worship according to their ancestral rules," several hundred persons would join.[112] By returning "to our old Buddhist Faith only in its primitive purity," Thass explained in an open letter, "we hope to restore our self-respect and to gain that right, to win by own our exertions, domestic comforts and untrammelled personal liberty of action, which are denied us in the Hindu social system of caste, under the weight of which we are now and for many centuries have been crushed into dust."[113] The prospects of leading the Pariahs into Buddhism excited Olcott but he recognized its potential for stirring up chaos and worried it would violate his obligation to not enter "into any scheme of religious proselytism" as President of the Theosophical Society.[114]

In the end, the temptation was too strong and Olcott conceded to Thass' request.[115] In 1898, the trio set sail for Ceylon. In Colombo, they were welcomed by Hikkaḍuvē Sumaṅgala and a large group of other elite Sinhalese Buddhists "highly excited" by the idea "that these two black men were the chosen delegates of an outcaste community numbering five millions of people."[116] Amidst cries of "Sadhu! Sadhu!" Sumaṅgala administered the Five Vows (*pañcśīl*) and told them (in Olcott's rendition), "to remember that although they had been degraded to the lowest social level under the caste system of India, at the moment they became Buddhists all these arbitrary social distinctions were stript [sic] off their

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[111] On these schools and the motivations surrounding them, see Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, 137 – 38. Modeled after the Ceylonese Buddhist Theosophical Schools, which were themselves patterned after Christian missionary schools, the schools were managed by two American educators whose pedagogies were pragmatic and reform-minded but "extremely modest in aspiration."

[112] Olcott, *The Poor Pariah* (Madras: the author, 1902), 24, and Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: sixth series,* 338 – 45. Olcott's and Thass' accounts were also published in several *MahaBodhi* issues, such as Vol. 7/3 (1898 – 99), 23 – 24 and Vol. 7/4, 36 – 37. See also, Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* chapter three.

[113] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 7/3 (1898 – 99), 23 – 24. Although signed by Thass, the wording of the letter sounds like Olcott.

[114] Olcott, *The Poor Pariah*, 25. For Olcott's wider perspective on these affairs, see Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, 136 – 42.

[115] He justified his involvement by accepting Thass' argument that the Pariahs were not "converting" to Buddhism but "reverting" to their "original" identity.

[116] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: sixth series,* 345. For an excellent sociological analysis of these events, see Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* 50 – 57.

shoulders; they became freemen, entitled to their own self-respect."[117]

Returning to India, Thass and a group of gifted intellectuals beside him started the Śākya Buddhist Society at Royapettah, a neighborhood in central Madras. The structure and mechanics of the Śākya society was not unlike other modern Buddhist organizations in the South Asian world and had all the standard trappings: they held Sunday meetings, public lectures, oversaw "conversions" (by taking *pañcśīl*), constructed Buddhist temples, assisted with funerary rituals and marriage ceremonies, conducted charitable work and led educational programs.[118] Nor was it short of support from the most well-known Buddhist figures of the colonial world: Olcott paid the rent, Dharmapala gave it ample space in the *MahaBodhi,* even establishing a MahaBodhi branch beside it in 1900, and the German-American philosopher Paul Carus served as the society's first President. Yet after only a few years, these paragons of Buddhist revival began to quietly slip way. Olcott backed out after Thass failed to provide him the necessary "scriptural proof" of their ancient Buddhist identity and not long after, Dharmapala followed, finding the organization's materialist interpretation of karma problematic and its non-Brahmin, anti-Congress rhetoric detrimental to his MahaBodhi campaign.

What was the Śākya society's critical base then? The vast majority of its members were Pariahs, coming from those extremely marginalized segments of Tamil society that during the nineteenth century had increasingly suffered under what G. Aloysius calls the nineteenth-century "peasantization of economy and Brahminisation of society."[119] Most came from laboring families that since at least the early nineteenth century had entered into various types of agrarian servitude under Brahmin – Vellala landowners or other dominant and typically Sanskritized communities. According to Brahmanical notions of purity and pollution via caste (*varṇa*) ideology, these laboring groups were almost all exclusively outcaste—'untouchables' condemned and stigmatized on the basis of their birth.[120] Amongst many other things, one outcome of this system, which in many ways only became more deeply entrenched during the colonial period, was the severe obstacles it placed in front of

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[117] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: sixth series,* 345. Following the ceremony, the men met with the other monastics in the country, including Dharmapala and the heads of the Ramanna Nikaya, with whom Olcott was particularly close.
[118] Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* 57 – 60.
[119] Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* especially 33 – 49.
[120] Caste ideologies and mechanics are discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.

these communities (*śūdra* and *ati-śūdra*) attempting to enter into the emerging civil society. For as Aloysius writes, "it is only within the formal civil institutions of the emerging urban society that marginal empowerment of the subaltern groups became a possibility."[121]

The leading lights of the Śākya Buddhist Society, like Thass himself, came from urban Pariah families who performing various menial jobs in British homes had begun to acquire the incomes and dignity that allowed them to extricate themselves from their bonded ties to landed upper-caste groups. Through their own efforts, but also assisted by Christian missionaries, Theosophists and provincial government aid programs, they began to attain various levels of education and protest their social ills.[122] While these new educated leaders never formed more than a small minority, the voice they gave to Dalit communities and the place of Buddhism in them was monumental.[123] In the first thirty years, the Śākya society's rapid spread outside Madras can be traced to the migration patterns of these marginalized populations: branches were opened alongside railway workshops in Hubli (1913), military bases in Bangalore (1907), mining camps in the Kolar Gold Fields (1907), and laboring fields in Burma (1909), South Africa (1911) and Ceylon (1924).[124] Besides several branches in Madras that Thass headed, the most extensive growth occurred at Marikuppam in the Kolar Gold Fields just east of Bangalore. According to the Census reports, there were ten Buddhists in the town in 1901 but after Thass' relative, M.Y. Murugesar moved there, starting a Śākya branch in 1907, the number of Buddhists increased to just over thirteen hundred.[125] Like all of India's new Buddhist societies (*sabhā,* etc.), the functions of the Śākya society were often held in conjunction with traveling Buddhist activists from abroad.[126] In 1907, for instance, the Irish bhikkhu U Visuddha officiated at the conversion of "1,000 workers and their families" and installed a Buddhist statue inside the Kolar Gold Fields vihāra (Tamil,

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[121] Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* 44.
[122] Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* 45 – 48.
[123] Several of the organization's most notable members came from non-Dalit families, and Aloysius is persuasive when he argues that much of the early resistance to it stemmed from its broad and open-ended rather than simply sectarian base. C.f., Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* 59. Some of its most entrenched opposition came from non-Brahmin castes.
[124] For a succinct overview, see S. Perumal, "Revival of Tamil Buddhism: a historical survey," in *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: collected papers,* edited by G. John Samuel, R.S. Murthy and M.S. Nagarajan (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 1998), 529 – 42.
[125] On the Census operations in classifying Tamil Buddhists, their ideologies and activities, see Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 133 – 40.
[126] The society's headquarters in Madras, a key transit point for travel to Ceylon, certainly played a fundamental role in connecting it to broader networks of Siamese, Burmese, Arakanese and Sinhalese Buddhists.

viyaram).[127] At the nearby Champion Reefs branch established in 1916, the Burmese monk U Kantha opened the society's "Young Men's Buddhist Association Library" in 1921 to instill "the habit of reading Buddhist works and journals and to inculcate good habits."[128] Numerous other Buddhists from India, such as Dharmanand Kosambi, Bhikkhu Gunalankar (of the BBA) and U Tezzavamsa of the Burmese vihāra in Sarnath, passed through its offices, teaching Buddhism and officiating at conversion ceremonies.[129] While the transnational presence is noteworthy and should be seen as part of the Śākya society's clear integration into global Buddhist networks, we should be cautious in overestimating their influence. The nuts and bolts of these societies—management of properties and finances, drafting resolutions, etc.—were the domain of local Tamil functionaries and therefore largely outside the capacities of monastics and other Buddhist enthusiasts who could rarely speak Tamil and were generally less committed to and/or aware of local caste politics.[130] Nonetheless, the presence of monastics from distant lands played an important ceremonial and symbolic rule, casting their activities within a global sphere and "authenticating" the activities of the Śākya society by linking them to unbroken lineages (*paramaparā*) that could be (purportedly) tied to the Buddha.

Unlike those Indians who had joined Olcott in taking *dīkṣā* (initiation) under Hikkaḍuvē in 1879, the Śākya Buddhists were not Theosophists and cared little, if at all, for the Theosophical mission. They understood Buddhism to be fundamentally rational, humanistic and egalitarian—standard fare in the colonial marketplace of ideas—as well as at the root of an alternative caste-free society in which the new Tamil Buddhists imagined themselves thriving. In Thass' view, and this would become a cornerstone of twentieth century Dalit Buddhist thought, the people categorized as Pariahs were the original

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[127] *Ceylon Observer,* November 7, 1908, quoted in Cox, *Buddhism and Ireland*, 255 – 56.
[128] Quoted in Perumal, "Revival of Tamil Buddhism," 536.
[129] The names of 13 other monks from Siam, Ceylon, and Burma are included in the South Indian Buddhists Petition, Home Department: Public branch, Deposit # 141 (May 1917 – 18). See also, "Resolutions passed by the South Indian Buddhist Conference held at Bangalore on 21st November 1920," in Reforms Department, Franchise Branch, Part B, 172 – 73. Both documents are available in the National Archives, New Delhi.
[130] A valuable first-hand account is provided by Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 145 – 47, who in the autumn of 1903 spent several weeks delivering lectures on Buddhism at the Madras branch (*bauddhashram*). Mistranslations and linguistic difficulties were obvious: "Most of the time, I would read out a sutra in Pali and explain its meaning in my broken English; then [M.] Singaravelu [the Secretary] would provide a discourse on it in Tamil" (146). Singaravelu, it should be added, later became south India's 'first communist,' as I will discuss in chapter eight.

inhabitants of India and Buddhism was the *pre*-Vedic indigenous religion. Flipping the idea of the Aryan invasion on its head, Thass argued that the *mleccha* (Tamil, *milechar*), a term typically used to denote foreigners or non-Aryans were the Aryans themselves. When the Aryans came to India, they disenfranchised the already present Buddhist kings, occupied their vihāras, Brahminized the histories to make it appear as if the Vedic traditions were here first and then inflicted the stigma of outcaste on this "indigenous [Buddhist] other."[131] The argument had some antecedents in earlier Dalit thinkers (like Phule) but derived largely from Thass' deep readings of ancient Tamil literature and solid grounding in Sanskrit and Pali texts.[132]

The organ through which Thass communicated his ideas was his weekly Tamil periodical, "*One Pice Tamilian"* ("One Penny Tamilian") or *Tamilian,* founded in 1907.[133] The *Tamilian* covered a diversity of topics but at its center was Thass' astute and shrewd essays on politics, etymology, sociology and history, nearly all of which worked to reconstruct Buddhism "through the deconstruction of Hinduism."[134] Thus, in serialized articles, the *Tamilian* would argue that the Vedas were originally Buddhist ethical books, that many Hindu heroes had in fact been human Buddhists and that numerous popular Hindu festivals, like Diwali for instance, were simply appropriations of Buddhist festivals that honored bhikkhus for inventing sesame oil lamps for medical purposes.[135] From a critical historical perspective, many of these claims were as spurious as the myths they tried to debunk but to disregard them on that basis is to miss the brilliance of his argument. For in his view, one does not become a Buddhist through converting to Buddhism but by rejecting Brahmanical deities and cultural norms. "Those who refused to kowtow (Tamil, *paraayarkal*) to the brahmanical tricksters were alone the followers of *Indirar,* the Buddha," Gajendran Ayyathurai writes in his dissertation on Thass' thought.[136] While much of Thass' intellectual project involved the recovery of Buddhism and publication of Buddhist literature,

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[131] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," especially 40 – 43, 93. See also, Omvedt, *Buddhism in India,* 236 – 40.
[132] Omvedt, *Buddhism in India,* 227 – 40.
[133] The contents of the *Tamilian* from 1907 – 1914 have been studied in detail by Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," The magazine came to a halt in 1922, but was revived by G. Appaturaiyar, who ran it from 1926 to 1935. Many of these articles were later gathered and published in book form by the Kolar Gold Fields Buddhist Associations—where they continue to be published today.
[134] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 148.
[135] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 101 – 27.
[136] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 100.

in many ways it was also an all-out assault on entrenched Hindu traditions. For instance, in a four-part series he published in English in 1913, Thass asked rhetorically how Indian society could venerate books and gods that celebrate the rape of women (in reference to Krishna), the stealing of food (Ganesh), a property dispute that results in mass murder (*Mahābhārata*) and the destruction of a nation (*Rāmāyaṇa*). Hindu scriptures, he declared, "not only foster laziness and destructive qualities but make one live like a beast, not a human being."[137]

Much of Thass' deep-seated resentment towards Hinduism stemmed from his involvement in political affairs since the 1880s. He had been engaged in the emerging *swadeshi* movement from its onset and was critical of the role Hinduism played in it. At the Congress convention in July of 1891, he struck out at the hypocrisy of the so-called "Brahmin Congress" after they refused to pass his ten resolutions for the removal of caste distinctions.[138] Lokamanya Tilak, who popularized the term *swarāj* or "self-rule," was a particular target. For Thass, what needed boycott was not foreign cloth but caste discrimination and the physical violence that led to the destruction of Dalit homes and families.[139] Having lost complete faith in the Congress, he cast his lot with the ruling British government, believing that the marginalized stood a better chance under their rule than under a Brahminized Congress.[140] The political thrust that Thass instigated in the Dalit Buddhist movement left an enduring mark, its most obvious thread seen in Ambedkar's Buddhist movement of the 1950s but it also circulated widely among the urban poor of Lucknow and Kanpur, as will be discussed in chapter seven. The seed of Buddhism's "emancipatory ideology" spread via many other luminaries in the association, including M. Singaravelu and G. Appaturaiyar, but after Thass' death in 1914, the most towering figure to emerge among them was P. Lakshmi Narasu.

Narasu (1861 – 1934), unlike Thass, was a product of colonial schools and the son of a prominent advocate in the Madras courts. He studied physical sciences, graduating from Madras University and was appointed assistant professor of Chemistry at Madras Christian

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[137] *Tamilian,* July 9, 1913*,* quoted in Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 29.
[138] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 59.
[139] Omvedt, *Buddhism in India,* 238.
[140] He had serious misgivings about colonial rule as well, but his experiences with Congress leaders and at the Madras Mahajana Sabha, had led him to completely distrust any rhetoric of swaraj. See Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 59 – 70 and Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* 1 – 49, for the wider context.

College before moving to Pachaiyappa College in 1908 where he taught until retirement in 1924.[141] With Thass' death, he became President of the Śākya Society, augmenting its social stature, opening new branches, delivering lectures at national conferences, all the while presiding over conversion and Brahmin-free "reformed marriage" ceremonies.[142] He shared the gauntlet with Thass from the early days of the association but their differences were significant. As Aloysius explains:

> Narasu, although hailing from a generally backward community, came from a fairly well-to-do family whose members had made it to respectable positions in then colonial society. He also had the added advantage of modern English and scientific articulation, which gave him access to the world not only of dominant knowledge but also the circle of men of consequence in the emerging metropolis. Iyothee Thassar, on the other hand, though similarly endowed with native genius and indigenous training in Tamil literature, hermeneutics and medicine, had no direct access to, and articulation through, the dominant language of the day.[143]

Despite their differences, the two men worked side by side (although often at loggerheads) and Narasu, who also co-managed the adjacent MahaBodhi Society in Madras, was the primary Buddhism instructor during the Sunday classes.[144] After becoming President of the Śākya society, the organization maintained its political platform, demanding separate rights for Dalits (*adi-dravidas*) and Buddhists and held several General Conferences in Madras (1917, 1928), Bangalore (1920), and the Kolar Gold Fields (1932). These were major events, attended by several thousand delegates and included major speakers, like E.V. Ramasamy or "Periyar" (1879 – 1973), who chaired the 1928 convention and eventually channeled the Śākya Buddhists' momentum into his influential "Self-Respect" and "Dravidian" movement of the 1930s and 40s.[145]

Yet it was Narasu' cutting logic and scientific learning that lent a new realm to its articulation of Buddhism. A prolific writer, his books were as well known internationally as

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[141] The best introduction to Narasu's life is found in G. Aloysius' 2002 introduction to Narasu's *Religion of the Modern Buddhist* (New Delhi: Samyak Prakashan, 2002 [1932]).
[142] On these ceremonies, see Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* 112 – 16 and Narasu, *Religion of the Modern Buddhist,* 210 – 23.
[143] G. Aloysius, "Introduction," in Narasu, *Religion of the Modern Buddhist,* xv.
[144] Narasu seems to have been no less committed to the Dalit cause, raising a memorandum to the Montague-Chemsford team for Adi-Dravidas political rights during the Buddhist conference he presided over in Madras in 1917.
[145] For a detailed study of Periyar's intellectual and organizational involvement with Buddhism Gyān Elosiyas, *Periyār aur Bauddh dharma,* translated into the Hindi from the Tamil by Mozez Māikel (Nayī Dillī: Samyak Prakāśan, 2006),

they were among the Śākya Buddhist Society. Besides his *Essence of Buddhism* (1907), republished by Dharmapala in 1912 and Ambedkar in 1948, who called it "the best book on Buddhism that has appeared so far," his other works like *What is Buddhism?* (1916) went through more than fourteen editions in addition to German, Japanese and Slovak translations.[146] A slave to rationality, Narasu's interpretations of Buddhism were as incisive as they were inventive, making the Buddha sound less like an antiquated sage than an urgent solution to all of the world's contemporary problems. "Buddhism," he declared,

> is more a system of philosophy and practical ethics than a religion. If by religion we mean something which inspires enthusiasm and fervor, Buddhism is certainly a religion…but if we take as the beginning of religion the fear of God, or the dread of the unknown or the hankering for the unseen and unintelligible, or the feeling for the infinite, Buddhism is certainly not a religion.[147]

In his magnum-opus, *The Essence of Buddhism,* Narasu captured the tone and tenor of the English-educated Indian Buddhist and/or enthusiast. In thirteen quick-witted chapters, he explained why "Śākyamuni is not a supernatural founder," why "there are no beliefs which are not the outcome of knowledge," how "moral ideas have nothing to do with supernatural beings", and how caste is "quite noxious and therefore disregarded by Buddhism."[148]

Lurking underneath Narasu's gentleman façade and clear inheritance from the European scholarship he knew so well (he was also fluent in French) however, was a professor who did not submit to anyone but himself.[149] Indeed, part of his attraction to Buddhism appears to have been its epistemological foundations, which as famously expressed in the *Kālāma Sutta* emphasized reasoning and experience as the only source of knowledge and therefore, "all recourse to authority or revelation as worthless."[150] The Buddha told the Kālāma princes:

> Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that

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[146] B.R. Ambedkar, "Preface" [originally published 1948], in P. Lakshmi Narasu, *Essence of Buddhism* (Delhi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1976), ix.
[147] Narasu, *Essence of Buddhism,* 21.
[148] Narasu, *Essence of Buddhism,* xiii, 23, xiv, and xv.
[149] Ambedkar's description of him in the preface to the 1948 edition of Narasu, *Essence of Buddhism,* is dramatic but perhaps apt: "Professor Narasu…fought European arrogance with patriotic fervor, orthodox Hinduism with iconoclastic zeal, heterodox Brahmins with a nationalist vision and aggressive Christianity with a rationalistic outlook, all under the inspiring banner of…the teaching of the great Buddha" (viii).
[150] P. Lakshmi Narasu, *What is Buddhism?* with an introduction by Devapriya Valisinha (dated 1948) (New Delhi: Samyak Prakashan, 2009 [1916]), 21.

> has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration… Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them.[151]

This famous passage was read by Narasu to be the quintessential essence of Buddhism, seeing in it the very foundation of his own professional work as a professor of free inquiry and the natural sciences.[152] While some of his Śākya colleagues found his interpretations too "strange" and "scientific," his "alarmingly materialistic" interpretations of karma and rebirth were no less offensive to the MahaBodhi Society.[153] Writing from the perspective of the downtrodden, Narasu refused to accept the idea that one's rebirth is a result of one's previous station in life, arguing, on the basis of the *anattā* (non-self) and *anicca* (impermanence) doctrines, that a sentient being's karma passes on to others in this life alone and remains preserved in them until that person's death.[154] For many Buddhists, such an idea wreaked of nihilism.

By and large, Narasu saved his harshest words for Hindus, but he did not spare the sangha either, seeing in it the same 'obscurantism' and 'dogma' he despised in other religions 'unsuited' for the modern world. The criticisms were a continued source of strain on his relationship with the MahaBodhi Society, who through Mary Foster's generosity continued to make donations to the Śākya society, including providing extensive funds for their construction of the Perambur Viyaram (*vihāra*), completed in 1920.[155] Yet by the time the vihāra was completed, the content of Narasu's 'materialistic' and 'sectarian' Buddhism was so at odds with the MahaBodhi Society's mission that in its reporting of the Śākya Society's second General conference held in Bangalore in 1920, it even censored key aspects of Narasu's presidential message.[156] In the four years prior to Narasu's death in 1934, the

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[151] "Kalama Sutta," translated from the Pali by Soma Thera, *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 30 November 2013, at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel008.html.

[152] For a very thoughtful review of review of this passage and how it has been misread and taken out of context, see Bhikkhu Bodhi, ""A Look at the Kalama Sutta," *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 5 June 2010, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_09.html

[153] C.f, Devapriya Valisinha's "Introduction" to the 1946 edition of *What is Buddhism?* reprinted in Narasu, *What is Buddhism?,* 14. For a critical academic perspective, see the devastating critique leveled by Louis de la Vallée Poussin on Narasu in his book review published in *Anthropos,* Vol. 8 (1913): 579 – 580.

[154] His most lucid presentation of this is in Narasu, *Religion of the Modern Buddhist,* 78 – 126, especially 119 – 26. Ambedkar later made an identical argument (as will be discussed in chapter seven).

[155] "The Indian Buddhists of Madras Presidency," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 29/6 (1921), 218 – 22.

[156] Compare the transcript printed by the *MahaBodhi* Vol. 36/7 (1928) as "The third South Indian Buddhist Congress" (329 – 32), with the same transcript printed as the "South Indian Buddhist Conference," *Indian*

tension was palpable and finances, as often in life, became the straw that broke the camel's back. In a civil court case filed against Narasu (and that was only resolved sixty years (!) later in the Madras High Court), the MahaBodhi Society claimed that Narasu had illegally occupied the Vihāra premises, that it was actually MahaBodhi Society property and that they deserved financial compensation for their losses.[157] This Banyan branch had been split asunder.

5.6 Conclusion: Buddhist aesthetics and (the burden of) tradition

With their diverse origins, constituencies and goals, it is tempting to see these various Buddhist associations as representing self-contained worlds. In some respects, this is a fair assessment and can also explain the numerous fractures within early twentieth century Indian Buddhism. The Buddhist project at Kuśīnagar was effectively led by two Arakanese and one Indian who intentionally distanced themselves from the more boisterous, Anglo-centric approach of the MahaBodhi Society. Similarly, both the Śākya Buddhist Society and BBA were largely confined to their own ethno-linguistic spheres, mediated first and foremost by language but then by ethnicity and caste. For the BBA, the critical link was Bengali language and the Buddhist Baruas of Chittagong. For the Śākya Buddhist Society, the link was a Tamil non-Brahmin identity. When these societies spread, their growth could almost always be tracked to the migration of their independent diasporas, meaning those groups (either Pariahs or Baruas) who had been either involuntarily relocated by colonial plantation policies (Pariahs) and Burmese aggression (Baruas) or who had migrated as indentured or free laborers out of their own self-determination.[158]

Yet despite the various divisions, whether that of caste, ethnicity, language, class and so on, their activism and interpretation of Buddhism stemmed from a common desire to

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Social Reformer, Vol. 38 (1927- 28), 584 – 86. There are numerous omissions in the *MahaBodhi* reprint that were clearly intentional edits that had nothing to do with space. To give just one example, the *MahaBodhi* omitted Narasu's declaration that, "Even the words of a Buddha are to be rejected, if they do not accord with reason." It was this kind of interpretation of the *Kalama Sutta* that was too much for the MahaBodhi Society to handle.

[157] The full details of this case (#OS 2736 of 1981 and # CS 274 of 1980) are beyond the scope of this dissertation but the gist of the problem (from the MahaBodhi Society's perspective) is outlined in several articles published in Volumes 40 – 43 (1932 – 34) of the *MahaBodhi*.

[158] For an overview of migration and diaspora in India, see Amba Pande, "Conceptualising Indian Diaspora: diversities within a common identity," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 48/49, December 7, 2013: 59 – 65.

revitalize the buddhadharma. Like a Banyan tree, whose various branches have the appearance of being separate organisms yet stem from a single trunk, India's early twentieth century Buddhism was linked to a much more extensive web of changes across the globe. The early twentieth century ushered in a period when an expanding education system, international commercial networks, itinerant pilgrims, mass produced copies of ancient Buddhist scriptures and original works on Buddhism penetrated much more deeply into everyday Indian life. It is sometimes assumed that Dalits and other marginalized communities were not privy to this world, but the voices of the *Tamilian* and the emerging Buddhist world of the urban poor in north Indian cities, as will be discussed in the following chapters, is evidence otherwise. International Buddhists may not have exercised much authority in the shaping of some local traditions, but they fulfilled an important function, creating the impression, imagined or real, that their beliefs and practices were part of a larger, unseen Buddhist community worldwide.

Throughout the period that these societies were working to revive Buddhism among their respective locales, there was a current of communication, sharing and borrowing across cultural and geographical boundaries. In Japan, for instance, there was an incredible surge of interest in the Pali scriptures that southern Buddhists regarded as the purest form of Buddhism but which for centuries had been contemptuously dismissed by Japanese Buddhists as a "Lesser Vehicle" (*hināyāna*). Japanese clerics who had studied in Europe during the first decades of the Meiji era returned with "disquieting new approaches, hard to reconcile with the old sectarian and pietistic system" that favored "a body of Buddhist texts that had never formed a significant part of the Japanese Buddhist tradition—namely, the Pali canon."[159] Some Japanese responded by calling for a return to "original Buddhism" (*genshi bukkyō*) or "fundamental Buddhism" (*kompon bukkyō*) and by 1902, there were several Japanese living at Vidyodaya Piriveṇa in Colombo who had re-ordained under Hikkaḍuvē Sumaṅgala.[160] Figures like Shaku Kōzen embraced Ceylon's Pali Buddhism as the "purest, truest form of Buddhism," taking full ordination (*upasaṃpadā*) from Hikkaḍuvē in 1890 and

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[159] Jacqueline Stone, "A vast and grave task: Interwar Buddhist Studies as an Expression of Japan's Envisioned Global Role," in *Culture and Identity: Japanese intellectuals during the interwar years,* edited by J. Thomas Rimer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 219 – 20; see also 228 – 29.
[160] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 11/4 (1902 – 03), 68. On the return to original Buddhism, see Stone, "A vast and grave task," 228.

returning to Japan to start the "Society for the True Lineage of Śākyamuni" (est. 1893).[161] Others like the Rinzai (Zen) teacher, Shaku Sōen, argued that the great diversity of deities, bodhisattvas and Buddhas venerated across Asia was problematic in this time of great cultural crisis. "At the front door the wolf of Christianity opens its jaws; at the back door the tiger of Islam sharpens its claws," he wrote in 1889.[162] Without a sense of unity, a Buddhist revival was a lost cause. One of the necessary steps to strengthen Buddhism, and by extension, Asia, was to make the historical Indian Buddha, Śākyamuni, the central image of veneration, thereby unifying the Zen school and providing a common platform through which Buddhists both east and west could unite.[163]

At the same time Buddhists from other lands looked to an imagined Buddhist India for inspiration, eminent Indian artists and writers were seeing their own Buddhist past as a link to the rest of Asia. The Nobel laureate and artist, Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941), was deeply shaped by the discovery of India's Buddhist past and East Asia's Buddhist present. He and his nephew, Abandrinath (1871 – 1951), the 'founder' of the Bengal School of Art, were gravely concerned about the devastating blows inflicted upon Indian artistic traditions under British rule. In Buddhism, they saw a vessel through which to revitalize and redefine contemporary Indian art forms. While many factors guided their works, Buddhist ideas and historical art forms with deep connections to Asia's Buddhist past and present invigorated their artistic output. Through their friendship with the eminent Japanese art historian Okakura Kakuzo (1862 – 1931), the Tagores began working towards a pan-Asian artistic tradition that blended the shared aspects of 'Eastern' spiritual and artistic culture.[164] The place of Buddhism was the obvious thread in this relationship and in early works like "Buddha and Sujata" (1901) and "Asoka's Queen" (1910), Abandrinath drew heavily on stylized representations of Buddha from Japan and ancient India.[165] At the alternative college Rabindranath built in Shantiniketan, he established a Buddhist studies department in 1922, inviting the French scholar Sylvain Levi to head it and the Bengali artist, Nandalal Bose to

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[161] Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni," 87.
[162] Shaku Sōen, *Seinan no Bukkyō* (1889), quoted in Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni," 83.
[163] Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni," 83 – 85.
[164] Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[165] These and others, like "Asoka, who by the white stucco of his fame made spotless the universe," can be viewed at http://www.wikiart.org/en/abanindranath-tagore.

paint the Buddhist murals on its museum walls.[166]

Yet it was Rabindranath's prodigious output of poems and novels, as the late Eleanor Zelliot argued, that, more than anything else "placed the themes and legends of early Buddhism before the modern [Indian] public."[167] Beginning in the 1890s, he began incorporating Buddhist *suttas* (*sutras*) in his works, striking a contrast between Buddhism's social justice and openness as opposed to Brahmanism's vertical hierarchies and rigid mores. In well-known and still popular plays like *Mālini, Śyāmā* and *Chandālikā,* heroes and heroines embodied the four Buddhist virtues (*brahmavihāra*): *mettā* (kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (empathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity).[168] Yet in some arenas, he was more tenuous, questioning like Rāja Śivaprāsad before him, the prudence of a teaching that advocated renunciation from political and family life. In the *Natir Pūjā,* for instance, first performed in 1925*,* the "Queen Mother heroine is torn between devotion to the Lord Buddha, who she has seen face to face, and resentment of her husband's and son's abandoning home and throne to become monks, 'wrecking the basic order of Hindu society."[169] Despite these reservations, he was enraptured by Buddha's message, translating portions of the *Mettā Sutta,* or teaching on kindness into Bengali in 1908 and calling it a "tidal wave of truth" and the "living spirit of Unity over the greater part of Asia."[170] The reason was as simple as it was profound: Buddha's teachings on friendliness inculcated "respect for ordinary people" and "did not show contempt for anyone," washing away national and socio-cultural differences and making Buddha's message not just India's message, but the message of "all humanity."[171] For many Indians, particularly Bengalis, the Tagores were the pride of India and when Rabindranath and others talked Buddhism, with

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[166] Bose who is now often hailed as the "father of Indian modernism," trained under Tagore, and had already spent several months painting Buddhist murals and images at Bagh and Ajanta in 1909 and again in 1921. The murals at the Nandan museum in Shantiniketan were inspired from both Buddhist sites. Many of Tagore's other students, like Asit Kumar Haldar and Kalipada Ghoshal continued to represent the Buddhist past in art, architecture and iconography although like the Tagores themselves, it was never numerically dominant (see Ray, *Return of the Buddha,* 228 – 33).
[167] Zelliot, "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism," 391.
[168] Shashi Bhusan Dasgupta, "Tagore on Buddha and His Message," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 118 (October 2010 – September 2011), 23 – 27.
[169] Zelliot, "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism," 391.
[170] Ravindranath Thakur, *Buddhadev*, quoted in Victor van Bijlert, "Restating the message of Buddha for modern India: Tagore on Buddhism and its European interpreters," paper delivered at the seminar on Tagore at Leiden University, September 23 – 24, 2011, 5.
[171] Ravindranath Thakur, *Buddhadev*, quoted in van Bijlert, "Restating the message of Buddha," 5.

either the paintbrush or the pen, the nation listened. Their depictions, literary and visual, were mass-produced in tens of thousands of copies by lithographic printers and then distributed through bazaars, from which the ancient spaces of the Buddhabhūmi entered ordinary homes and businesses, guiding modern India's Buddhist place-making.

When Indians spoke of Buddhist revival in India, the question that was frequently raised was what kind of Buddhism this would be. Why Buddhism had disappeared was of equal importance, for if it was so "fanciful and dreamy," as one Bengali argued, then there was no reason to even consider its revival at all.[172] The number of those who dissented from the revivalist mood was many but among those who supported it, the global current within it was obvious. Although the term Theravāda had not yet come into full provenance, the influence of Theravādin, or 'Southern traditions' on the debate was profound.[173] In a selective reading of the past that still holds sway in much of the world today, Buddhist apologists and a battalion of Orientalist scholars argued that Pali traditions, on account of their antiquity, were more faithful to the original teachings of the Buddha and thus represented the purer, more 'scientific' and rational aspects of the tradition. While dissenting Mahāyāna voices, like those of Nanjō Bun'yū (1849 – 1927) and D.T. Suzuki (1870 – 1966) argued otherwise, Indian Buddhist enthusiasts largely privileged Theravāda traditions. Pali scriptures were a "garden of aesthetic delight," far superior to the netherworld of deviant tantrikas and mystics awash in the "Mahāyāna mist."[174] After India lost knowledge of early Buddhist teachings, science and morality had decreased: it had become a distorted place, "a vast insane asylum" where "boys of twelve years are married to young girls of two years; and girls of fourteen years are married to men of fifty years."[175] From Iyothee Thass and Lakshmi Narasu to Dharmapala and Kripasaran, Buddha was the only doctor who could treat India's disease. The problem was that they often disagreed on the nature of his prescription.

According to Arjun Appadurai, globalization's inherent tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity is only resolved through local agency.[176] When locals lose control,

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[172] Ram Chundra Bose, "Art. III—Buddha as a Man," *The Calcutta Review* Vol. 82 (1886), 65.
[173] Perreira,"Whence Theravāda? The Modern Geneaology of an Ancient Term."
[174] "Aesthetic delight" is from, "The 2461st Anniversary Celebration of the Parinirvana of the Tathagata Buddha at Calcutta," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 25/5 (1917), 105. "Mahāyāna mist" is from P.C. Bagchi, "Influence of Ceylon," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 37/10 (1929), 509 – 10.
[175] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 13/5 – 6 (1904 – 05), 45.
[176] See, Appadurai, "Disjuncture and difference," 295 – 310.

problems emerge. Local agency, therefore, is what shapes globalization and prevents that tension from rupturing. If Appadurai is right in this contention, as I believe he is, then it explains well the differences within the Indian Buddhist *ecumene*. What pressed on Kripasaran's mind were the serious nikāya divisions cutting across Ceylon, Burma and Siam. Born and bred in the monastic world, these were issues dear to him and in 1924, he called a major meeting (*bauddha-mahāsammelan*) of two hundred monastic leaders to attempt a reconciliation of Vinaya differences.[177] For Thass and Narasu, it was the fundamentally tragic and violent world of caste-discrimination in which so many of their peers lived that drove their Buddhist activism. For Dharmapala, the problem was the very divisive past that underlined contemporary Buddhism as a global unit or 'world religion.' In the island of his birth, there were nikāya divisions and caste-based ones. In Japan, he witnessed how sectarian differences had led to massive cleavages in the sangha. Like Olcott before him, he never gave up his vision of a United Buddhist World, fording ahead with a new "International Buddhist Union" in 1920. Although its members included representatives from more than twenty-nine countries, the "bond of union….between all existing societies and individual Buddhists throughout the world" collapsed in less than three years.[178] A decade later, the Chinese intellectual and monk Tai Hsu would travel the globe in his own grand venture to unify Buddhism.[179]

For many new Buddhist Indians, the deep history of Buddhist tradition, while grand and admirable, also seemed burdened by its own complexities and relations. To revive it, it had to adapt to contemporary conditions. For Narasu, the sangha had to change; for Dharmapala, a new semi-renunciate order of lay people, the "Order of Homeless Ones" (*anagarika*) was proposed.[180] The Bombay Buddha Society (est. 1922), still living in the shadow of Theosophy, attempted to circumvent the monastic sangha all together by re-

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[177] Several of the speeches from this event were published in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/1 & 2 (1925). According to these records, nearly two hundred senior monks from across the Bay of Bengal, along with two thousand lay devotees attended the six-day conference from December 6 – 12, 1924. The purpose was to unify the various *nikayas* and on the 8 December 1924, a resolution was passed that all the monastics could perform Vinayaic activities together and a new *sīmā* was established. However, the appeal for unity collapsed shortly after the convention's close. The wider significance of this merits further study.
[178] *Buddhist Review* Vol. 12/1 (1922), 2 – 7.
[179] See, Donald Pittman, *Towards a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).
[180] Anagarika Dharmapala, "Why not establish an Anagarika order of Brothers," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/4 (1925), 181 – 82.

defining the Three Refuges it recited at the beginning of chapter meetings: for them, the "human race is one family" and the sangha was any "brotherhood of man."[181]

The most glaring absence in the new conversations and encounters with Buddhism is the lack of women. It is possible that the membership of the various Buddhist associations was less exclusively masculine than my account indicates but female Buddhist leaders or writers were few and far between. The Bombay Buddha Society (to be discussed in chapter six) was for some time led by Sophie Wadia (1901 – 86), a Colombian-born naturalized Indian who moved to India after marrying B.P. Wadia, a prominent Indian Theosophist and labor activist. Likewise, the annual reports of the BBA note special meetings convened by the "Buddhist women of Bengal" and describe the formation of a Buddhist Women's Society (*Satbaria Bauddha Mahila Sammelani*) in Chittagong in 1917 but their ideas and activities are obscure.[182] Similarly, among the Śākya Buddhists of Tamil Nadu, there was a "Buddhist Women's Association" in Champion Reef.[183] Thass' *Tamilian* ran an exclusive "Ladies' Column" in which men *and women* wrote on topics like education, child marriage, sex and widowhood. One of its leading contributors was C.S. Ambal, the editor of a women's magazine and manager of a widow's home.[184] Signing off as Swapneswari, this self-proclaimed "Universal Sister" (*sarvajana sakotiri*) encouraged "women to become their own agents of change" and "to pursue creative living that would make them happy and inspire young girls."[185] A critic of Indian patriarchy, she alerted readers to society's double-standard, stating plainly that "men get away with no reprimand irrespective of the damages of their actions, whereas women even if their action is equal to a mustard seed, the society makes a mountain out of a mole hill."[186] Although the *Tamilian* promoted women's educational achievements, printing news of women's scholarships and lamenting pitiable data on widows and child marriage, its advocacy of female education, like Swapneswari's herself, was always within the framework of being a homemaker and making their life more tolerable

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[181] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 36/8 (1928), 400 – 05.
[182] *Annual Report of the Bengal Buddhist Association for 1916 – 17*. For earlier references to women's conferences in the Bengal Buddhist Association, see "Bauddha Sammilani," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 11/7 (1902 – 03), 127 – 28.
[183] Aloyisus, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* 94.
[184] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 86 & 210.
[185] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 74.
[186] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 198.

rather than equal.[187]

These fleeting records do make clear that strong females were able to move beyond normalized gender roles. Barring further information, one can only speculate as to why women were not more active. Civil society in colonial India reproduced patriarchal practices and women were typically barred from holding major public roles.[188] Not only did this pose significant challenges for women attempting to enter already male-dominated voluntary associations but it must also be acknowledged that the social costs of public conversion or affiliation with Buddhism would have likely been more severe for women. The public, then as now, was far more rigorous in policing women's lives than men's, as the "Universal Sister" bravely pointed out.[189] For any Indian woman, regardless of caste, class or denomination, the penalties for affiliating with an alternative religion (*dharma*) were considerable.

Women's voices may have been largely absent, but men, as usual, attempted to speak of and for them. Narasu admitted that while "theoretically man and woman are placed by the Buddha on the same footing of equality…in practice the latter stands much lower."[190] He blamed the situation on later Brahmanical influence, arguing that works like the *Therīgāthā,* or poems of the ancient *bhikkhunis* (nuns) were evidence of not only the "high intellectual achievements" of women but also the early Buddhist revolt against gender inequality.[191] Like many Buddhist apologists of the period, Narasu resorted to contemporary tropes about women in Burma and to a lesser degree, Japan, as evidence of what could have transpired

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[187] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 197 and 207. By today's standards, this may fall far short of feminism but it can also be said to have opened up the floor for later critical feminist takes on Buddhist and Indian patriarchy.

[188] For an important set of essays in this regard, see *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History,* edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999 [1990]).

[189] Ayyathurai, "Foundations of Anti-caste Consciousness," 198. C.S. Ambal was, of course, not alone. Other early Indian 'feminists' include Savitrabhai Phule (1831 – 97) and Ramabai Sarasvati (1858 – 1922). On the latter see, Meera Kosambi (ed. and tr.), *Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words: Selected Works* (New York and New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[190] Narasu, *Essence of Buddhism,* 92.

[191] Narasu, *Essence of Buddhism,* 89 – 96. He took the idea from Caroline Rhys Davids. The *Therīgāthā* is regarded by many scholars as the first body of literature ever composed by women. The poems are remarkable, highlighting women's perspectives on the ancient world and arguing unabashedly for the spiritual equality of men and women. The most widely consulted translation in India was undoubtedly Caroline Rhys Davids' English translation, *Psalms of the Early Buddhists* (London: Pali Text Society, 1909). The first vernacular translations that I am aware were P.K. Bhagwat's Marathi translation (with D. Kosambi), *Thera Bhikṣuṇī Ratna* (Bombay: Bombay Buddha Society, 1924), and Rahul Sankrityayan's Hindi translation, *Therīgāthā* (Lakhnaū: Buddh Vihār, 1937). For a recent English translation, see Charles Hallisey, *Therīgāthā: Poems of the first Buddhist women* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

had India only *remained* Buddhist. For decades, colonial officials had waxed eloquently how women in Burma appeared more "refined" and possessed greater social status than women in European countries.[192] Although much of this was based purely on sentiment, reports filed by colonial statisticians and ethnographers were music to the ears of Buddhist revivalists. For many Indian Buddhists, what was of considerable importance was the role of Burmese women in these tabulations as opposed to Hindu women. According to the 1911 Census, for instance, Burmese Buddhist women did not marry on average until between the ages of twenty to thirty as compared to more than two-thirds of Hindu women who would be married by the age of ten.[193] After reading figures like these, polemicists like Narasu would proclaim, "[In Burma], women do not hide behind veils and shun the street as a pest. The Buddhist law favours equality with the sexes, while the Hindu law enjoins the complete subjection of the wife to the will of her husband…Infant marriage and enforced widowhood are eating the very vitals of Hindu society."[194] In an environment in which issues like child marriage, widow remarriage, education and caste discrimination were the pressing concerns of social reformers, Buddhism in its idealized, imagined form ruled the roost.

While men's comparisons of women's bodies in Buddhism with other religious traditions never ceased, it was only a single intersection in what was a much larger discussion about the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism writ large. Such conversations had existed for centuries but with the rise of anti-colonial Buddhist politics in Asia and anti-colonial Hindu politics in India, the discussion was taking on new tones. To this, we turn in the next chapter.

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[192] Turner, *Saving Buddhism,* 46 – 49.
[193] *General Report of the Census of India, 1911* (London: Authority of His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1914), 276.
[194] Narasu, *What is Buddhism,* 82.

6 Chapter Six – An empire of righteousness: Buddhism, Hinduism and the challenge of Ārya Dharma, 1920 – 1940

This chapter shifts attention to the important issue of the 'Hindu Buddha,' examining how dominant Hindu orientations shaped the development of the Buddhist revival in both theory and practice. It shows how Hindu interpretations of Buddha and Buddhism shifted during the early to mid twentieth century in tune with the reformist initiatives of various Hindu organizations, like the Ārya Samāj and Ramakrishna Society. The chapter also explores the various ways Buddhist organizations and figures engaged and reacted to these developments. Of particular focus in the chapter are the activities of the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā and the eldest son of the industrialist family, Seth Jugal Kishore Birla. From the mid-1920s onwards, Birla and the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā were extremely active in Buddhist affairs, supporting Buddhist construction efforts, attending conferences, forwarding recommendations to the government on behalf of Buddhist groups and even sponsoring Buddhist monastics to conduct missionary work in India. Although all of these interactions are placed within a longer historical context in order to demonstrate that the modern Hindu assimilation of Buddha is in some ways a continuation of earlier rhetorical devices, I also highlight how the modern Hindu appropriation of Buddhism was conditioned largely by contemporary political and cultural circumstances.

6.1 Conversations and Conflicting Agendas: new Hindu – Buddhist debates

During the Seventh Session of the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā [hereafter, MahāSabhā] at Benares on August 19, 1923, Dharmapala explained to a crowd of six thousand people why "Buddhists were also Hindus."[1] The audience that heard the speech, which was widely covered in the national press, was by all accounts, thrilled. As the Calcutta newspaper, *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* reported:

> Mr. Anagarika Dharmapala of Ceylon…[said] the Buddhists…were all Hindus (cheers). Some might call them un-Aryan ("no," "no",) but Buddhists crossed the seas, taking Hindu civilization with them to Japan and China and made them Aryans…90 percent of Hindus and Buddhists were converted into Mussalmans ("shame"). They must all be brought back into Hinduism ("hear," "hear,"). In

[1] "The Hindu Maha Sabha," *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* reprinted in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 31/9 (1923), 354.

> Kashmir, several Buddhists have become Mussalmans and they must all be reconverted ("hear," "hear.").[2]

After Dharmapala finished his speech, the Congress politician and recently-elected President of the MahāSabhā, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861 – 1946) confirmed the veracity of Dharmapala's words: "Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were only separate sects of this great religion [Hinduism]…Buddha did not preach a separate religion, but only emphasized some aspects of Hinduism according to the needs of the time."[3]

Since establishing the first Indian branch of the MahaBodhi Society thirty-one years before, Dharmapala had offered a wide range of propositions regarding Hindu – Buddhist relations. In his first public lecture at Calcutta's Albert Hall on October 25, 1891, he argued there was no difference between the two systems of thought.[4] In the late 1890s, he wrote several essays arguing that the great scholar of Vedānta, Śankara was in fact a Buddhist.[5] A decade later he recanted, asserting that Śankara burned Buddhist scriptures and massacred Buddhist bhikkhus.[6] That same year, his essay on "Buddha's Creed" concluded that, "the philosophy of the Upanishads has no more to do with Buddhism than the principles of Evolution with the Mosaic Bible and the Synoptic Gospels."[7] Only a few years after taking the stage at the MahāSabhā convention, he would argue that there was no such thing as Hinduism at all.[8] In the grand scheme of things, Dharmapala's views on Hindu – Buddhist relations reveal no underlying thread other than someone who was closely attuned to the cultural winds and exploited every opportunity, either towards amity or antagonism, as he felt would best strengthen his case to reclaim the MahaBodhi Temple. A pragmatist to the

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[2] "The Hindu Maha Sabha," *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* reprinted in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 31/9 (1923), 354 – 55. Dharmapala is also reported to have donated one thousand rupees to the MahāSabhā (see, "The Hindu MahāSabhā: concluding proceedings," *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* August 31, 1923 in "Newspaper Extracts related to Hindu MahāSabhā," Government of India, Home Department: Political Branch, File no. 198, Part B, National Archives of India.

[3] "7th Session at Benares," *The Leader,* August 22nd, 1923, in "Newspaper Extracts related to Hindu MahāSabhā," Government of India, Home Department: Political Branch, File no. 198, Part B, National Archives of India.

[4] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 191.

[5] "Was Sankaracharya a Buddhist?" *MahaBodhi* Vol. 7/6 (1898 – 99), 57; "Was Shankara a Buddhist?" *MahaBodhi* Vol. 8/4 (1899 – 1900), 37; "Buddhism and Brahmanism," Vol. 8/5 (1899 – 1900), 45 – 46.

[6] "A Pan Buddhistic Congress," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 18/3 (1910), 412 – 15.

[7] "The Creed of Buddha," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 18/5 (1910), 462 – 65.

[8] "Notes and News: Gandhi at Mulagandha Kuti," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/6 (1925), 284 – 87.

end, Dharmapala "presented a distinctive Buddhism for every constituency."[9]

The great Indian minds that Dharmapala encountered in his own lifetime were no less complex in their own presentation of Buddhism. However, as the last several chapters have argued, a grand shift in the popular Indian attitude towards Buddha began taking place in the nineteenth-century. From Sūbajī Bapu's polemical response to the printing of the *Vajrasūci* in 1839 (discussed in chapter two) to Śivaprasād's *Itihās* (1874) where Buddha appears on the soil like an anti-Brahmin democrat to liberate the śūdras (chapter three), Buddha's place in history was shaped by present-day conceptions. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the idea that Buddhism was independent of, and antagonistic to the Brahmanical world began undergoing another transformation. As the eminent Bengali historian R.C. Dutt argued in 1893: "the cardinal tenets of Buddhism, the doctrine of *nirvana* and the doctrine of *Karma* were directly derived from Hindu ideas and Hindu practices and Buddhism was the offspring of Hinduism."[10] That notion, that Buddhism was a branch of Hinduism remains entrenched in popular Indian culture and only in recent decades have some Indologists been more forceful in the argument that *śramaṇic* traditions like early Buddhism developed in a place and time largely free of Brahmanical influence.[11]

While the scholarly transformation of Buddha into a Hindu was more subtle, the metamorphosis at the popular level was dramatic. The beginnings can be traced to the Brahmos and Theosophists but at the turn of the century it found its most charismatic voice in Swami Vivekananda (1867 – 1902). For this profoundly influential figure, Buddha was one of the greatest exponents of Hinduism's universal thought.[12] The Buddha, he argued, was the paradigmatic "rebel child," whose revolt against Brahmanism could be explained by his relationship to the *Bhagavad Gītā.* Buddha, in Vivekananda's words, "is the ideal *Karma Yogi*, acting entirely without motive, and the history of humanity shows him to have been the

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[9] Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 30. Although catering one's message is by no means the exclusive domain of Buddhists, it is important to recognize that this also has clear roots in the Buddhist concept of skillful means (*upāya*).

[10] R.C. Dutt, "Proceedings of the Society," (January 26th, 1893), edited by Śarat Ćandra Dás, *Buddhist Text Society of India* Vol. 1/2 (1893), ix.

[11] If one were to accept the terms of this debate, it would have to be said that Hinduism was a product of its encounter with Buddhism. Several Indian scholars from P.S. Jaini and Nalinaksa Dutt to B.M. Barua and KashiNath Upadhyaya made this argument many decades before. The driving force behind this argument today is Johannes Bronkhorst, of which see his *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

[12] He even called him his *iṣta devatā,* or "chosen deity" for personal worship. The most insightful and exhaustive study of Vivekananda's Buddhism is in Joshi, *Discerning the Buddha.*

greatest man ever born, the greatest combination of heart and brain that ever existed, the greatest soul-power that has ever been manifested."[13] As Lal Man Joshi, John Holt and others have pointed out, Vivekananda's interpretation of Buddha as a *karma yogi* and conflation of his teachings with Vedānta "unabashedly appropriated the Buddha for his own version of a universalistic Hinduism."[14] While some Hindus were less convinced by the renunciate model of selfless service (*sevā*) that Vivekananda saw in the great ascetic, his refashioned image of Buddha into the mold of the 'ideal Hindu' was profoundly influential among the nationalist elite.[15] Coming from the opposite end of the spectrum and subcontinent, polemicists like Narasu vocalized the progressiveness and equality of Buddha's teachings while dismissing the idea that his teachings had anything to do with the hierarchical and closed society that Brahmins fostered. Regional debates confined to local vernaculars were no less robust as the works of Iyothee Thass and Dharmanand Kosambi indicate.[16]

These kinds of conversations were widespread when in the 1920s, a looming sense of cultural urgency and crisis mobilized Hindu politicians and social organizers to take more interest in the Hindu – Buddhist conversation. During the next two and a half decades, Indian Buddhism, in both its contemporary and imagined historical forms, underwent a systematic Hindu transformation. Ārya Samājis who only decades before were publishing treatises ridiculing Buddhists now attempted to make "Buddha's *gītā*" known to "every household in India."[17] In cross-country lecture tours and through his Hindi translation of the *Dhammapada* (*Śri Buddha Gītā*) in 1923, the prominent Ārya Samāji, Swami Satyadevji, explained why Buddha was a cultural hero whose wonderful organization, the sangha, converted the whole of Asia to an Indian dharma. Just one year later, the Hindu Maharaja of Darbhanga commissioned a network of pandits and sadhus from various Hindu Sabhās to demonstrate

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[13] Quoted in Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu,* 19.
[14] Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu,* 20. Vivekananda's relationship with Buddhism has also been explored in great detail by Joshi, *Discerning the Buddha,* and Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 210 – 40 and 288 – 91.
[15] See, *MahaBodhi* Vol. 9 /8 (1900 – 01), 71 – 73, which contains a reprint of an October 1900 issue of the *Arya Bala Bodhini* ridiculing this very position.
[16] For instance, in 1913 Kosambi entered a long and heated debate with Dr. S.V. Ketkar over the nature of Buddhism, its relation to caste and Vedic violence. This was published serially in Tilak's *Kesarī* from August to November. See, Meera Kosambi, "Introduction: Situating Dharmanand Kosambi," in Kosambi, *Essential Writings,* 16 – 17. Ketkar, who received his PhD from Cornell University and was an heir to Vivekananda's neo-Hinduism, was notorious for his extreme dislike of and sustained criticisms of Buddhism.
[17] *bhāratvarṣ ke ghar ghar meiṃ.* Śrī Svāmī Satyadev Paribrājak, *Śrī Buddhagītā* (Āgrā: Dī Lavāniyāṇ Pabliśiṇg Hāus, 1923), iii.

Buddhism's 'indebtedness' to Hindu culture and practice. In their 'definitive' account, *Buddha-mimansa* (1924), Gautama Buddha is said to be a "friend of fire" (*arkabandhu*) who performed the Vedic fire-sacrifice (*yajña*) and was a teacher of the one Upaniṣadic reality (*Advayavādin*).[18] In this popular revisionist work, whose English edition was widely circulated among administrators, publicists and scholars in India, the Gaya Mahant Yogiraja and his disciple, Maitreya, draw on an incredible range of materials in Sanskrit, Pali, German, French, English and Hindi to argue that nearly every facet of early Buddhism was derived from Brahmanical works like the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Grihya Sutras*.[19] Pre-empting Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's famous expression decades later, the authors proclaim that Buddha was born, lived and died a Hindu and was honored as such through ritual mantras and temples for many centuries after his death.[20] Only when Buddha's followers became increasingly degenerate and composed of foreigners (*mleccha*) and outcastes (*achūt*) was Buddhism transformed into an anti-Vedic teaching. For this reason, the authors contend, India rejected Buddhists but not Buddha.[21] As will be seen below, the central *Buddha-mimansa* view, with only slight variations, remained dominant well into the second half of the century.

One of the strongest advocates of the new Hindu Buddha and a persuasive voice no less, was none other than Mahatma Gandhi. After Gandhi's release from prison in 1924 for his leadership in the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920 – 22, he made his *first* public

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[18] Maitreya and Yogiraja, *The Buddha Mimansa: the Buddha and his relation to the religion of the Vedas* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spinck & Co., 1924), 9 – 11, 20 – 21. The expression *arkabandhu* or "friend of fire" could also refer to Śākyamuni's relation to the Solar lineage.

[19] A significant portion of their argument rests on the notion that the *Bhagavad Gītā* predated Buddha's teachings and was hence, Buddha's inspiration. Such a chronology is largely unaccepted today and some scholars even argue that signification sections of the *Bhagavad Gītā* were composed in response to the ascendancy of Buddhism. For the seminal study in this vein, see K.N. Upadhyaya, "The Impact of Early Buddhism on Hindu Thought (with Special Reference to the Bhagavadgītā)," *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 18/3 (1968): 163 – 73.

[20] This they contend is based on the extensive number of ritual mantras where Buddha's name is recited. These include the *Buddha-Prātahsmaranam* or early-morning salutation to Buddha in the *Garuda Purana* (2.31.35), the *Buddha-Dhyānam* or meditation on him in the *Agni Purana* (49.8), the *Buddha-Bratapujā* in the *Baraha Purana* (49), the *Buddha-Gāyatri* or Vedic formula of address to Buddha in the *Linga Purana* (2.48.28 – 33) and *Buddha-Namaskārah* or salutation to Buddha in the *Meru Tantra* (Maitreya and Yogiraja, *The Buddha Mimansa,* 27 – 30).

[21] Maitreya and Yogiraja, *Buddha Mimansa,* 56 – 67, especially 56 – 57. A near identical argument was propounded by Pandit Shyama Shankar, the private secretary to the Maharaja of Jhalwar, in his *Buddha and His Sayings, with comments on re-incarnation, karma, nirvana, etc.* (London: Francis Griffiths, 1914). Shankar argued that early Buddhism had been completely transformed by its foreign practitioners and that early Buddhists worshipped Brahma as the Supreme God and believed in a soul (*ātman*).

appearance at the Bombay Buddha Society. During the Vesak celebrations organized by Anandrao Nair, the Bombay philanthropist and Society's founder, Gandhi praised Buddha's *ahimsa* but made explicit his conviction that "Buddhism is a part of Hinduism."[22] Exactly one year later, while speaking at the Vesak celebrations at the MahaBodhi Society's Dharmarājika Vihāra in Calcutta, he ridiculed the Buddhist effort to take control of the MahaBodhi Temple: "what does it matter whether we go to a little temple and worship his [Buddha's] image or whether we even take his name…it is not necessary for millions to associate themselves with one man who seeks for truth."[23] During the next decade, Gandhi frequently stressed Buddha's "Hindu origins" (Buddha was a "Hindu of Hindus" was his most common expression). On multiple occasions he even had the audacity to explain to what must have been dumbfounded Buddhist crowds how Hindus were more Buddhist than they were and how not only had the teaching of "Gautama, the Enlightened One" been "incorporated in Hinduism" after his death but also "best preserved in India."[24] Gandhi's saintly aura and national presence gave his words a particularly potent meaning but they were just the beginning of what was nothing less than a full-fledged Hindu assault against the idea that Buddhism was somehow separate from Hinduism.

6.2 Brahminizing Buddha: Sanātan dharma and the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā

The wider context for these new developments was the rise of Hindu organizations (*sabhā, samāj,* etc.) as the premiere means through which 'representative communities' accessed the state and voiced 'public interests.'[25] With the rise of communal (religious) representation in the political and constitutional reforms introduced by the colonial government after 1910 and especially after the First World War, many Hindu organizations

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[22] Mahatma Gandhi, "Speech at Buddha Jayanti Meeting, Bombay," May 18, 1924, in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* [hereafter, *CWMG*] Vol. 27: 447 – 449.
[23] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/6 (1925), 312. It is possible that Gandhi's more offensive tone during the 1925 Vesak was meant to appease the large uproar among Sanātan Dharmists during the latest round of discussion on the MahaBodhi Temple at the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā just months before.
[24] Mahatma Gandhi, "Advice to Japanese Buddhist Priests [Nichidatsu Fujī and Okitsu]," October 4, 1933, in *CWMG* Vol. 61, 452 – 53. See also, his "Reply to Buddhists' Address, Colombo," November 15, 1927, in *CWMG* Vol. 40, 367 – 72.
[25] This has been well studied. For a general overview, see Kenneth Jones, *Socio-religious reform movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

shuffled to expand their demographic base and unify and organize those communities that did not fit neatly into existing religious boundaries.[26] This required the re-formulation of 'Hindu tradition' which by the 1920s was increasingly symbolized by the articulation of "Sanātan Dharma" or the "Eternal Religion." As William Halbfass explains, when Hindu scholars and activists used the term *Sanātan Dharma,* they implied more than just an ancient Hindu tradition. They meant "[the] religion in or behind all religions, a kind of 'metareligion,' a structure potentially ready to comprise and reconcile within itself *all the religions of the world*, just as it contains and reconciles the so-called Hindu sects, such as Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism and their subordinate 'sectarian' formations."[27]

According to John Zavos, a key component in the strategies of Sanātan Dharma ideologues was "the *relegation* of doctrine to a position of secondary importance."[28] That is, rather than being driven by doctrinal or "vertical binding," as Zavos puts it, groups like the MahāSabhā focused on "horizontal binding," or the idea that all Āryans (Hindus) have an organic role in society and therefore demand respect (although not a change in their caste or sectarian status).[29] The MahāSabhā's promotion of cow protection, Hindi, Sanskrit and Nagari, service to widows and, later, low caste and Dalit groups (although again, without changing their status) were supposed to reflect the unity and consensus of the Sanātan Dharma. As the Hindu ideologue M.S. Golwalkar (1906 – 73) contended, "diversities in the path of devotion did not mean division in society. All were indivisible organs of one common *dharma* which held [Hindu] society together."[30] This idea of horizontal unity neatly dovetailed existing notions of Hindu tolerance and became one of the defining principles of the MahāSabhā's public platform.

The most powerful new symbol of Sanātan Dharmi Hinduism, however, was the

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[26] The establishment of influential Muslim organizations and Islamic ferment during the Khilafat movement was of equal bearing, galvanizing Hindu communal organizations into an aggressive, defensive action against the Muslim "other." See Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 11 – 36.
[27] William Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection,* 51. Italics mine.
[28] John Zavos, "Defending Hindu Tradition: Sanātana Dharma as a Symbol of Orthodoxy in Colonial India," *Religion* Vol. 31/2 (2001), 117. Zavos stresses how this idea was largely in contrast to the Sanātan Dharma Sabhas' greatest competitor, the Arya Samājis, who attempted to unify Hinduism via doctrinal centrality or what Zavos calls "vertical restructuring."
[29] Zavos, "Defending Hindu Tradition," 117 – 20.
[30] Quoted in Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu MahāSabhā in colonial North India, 1915 – 1930: constructing nation and history* (London: Routledge, 2013), 75.

Hindu nation.[31] For the MahāSabhā, the term Hindu was essentially synonymous with "Indian-ness." Under the influence of intellectuals like V.D. Sarvarkar (1883 – 1966), "Hindu-ness" or *Hindutva* was based on territorial, racial, religious and cultural aspects.[32] To a large degree, Hindutva was defined by one's racial and religious relationships to the *Āryavarta* (India), the sacred territory (*puṇya bhūmi*) of the Āryans. In this view, Indian Muslims and Christians were not truly "Indian" for although they may have been born in India, India was not their holy land, for that was to be found in Palestine or Arabia.[33] Buddhists, on the other hand, while unmistakably "heterodox" (*nāstika*) were still Hindu, for their presumed allegiance was to the Āryavarta, the land where Gautama Buddha lived and died.

The MahāSabhā's emphatic stress on Hinduism's orthopraxy and not orthodoxy is evident through the new *Hindu rāṣtra mandirs* or "Hindu nation temples" they constructed. For instance, at the "Mother India" temple in Benares, inaugurated by Gandhi on October 25, 1936, there are no images of deities as one typically encounters inside a Hindu temple but instead a thirty-foot by thirty-foot three-dimensional map of "Mother India" (*Bhārat Mātā*) carved in marble.[34] The map, which includes all the territory from Burma to Afghanistan and Sri Lanka to *eastern* Tibet, is itself suggestive of the aggressive posturing of the new Hindu movement. Yet, its territorial vision is not the only novel prospect. In addition to being open to anyone, regardless of caste, class, sex, or race, which made it somewhat of a spectacle in Benares' rigid caste landscape, the temple was also constructed on top of the "sacred books of all Aryan religions including Nastik ones."[35] The idea of including the scriptures of Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and all the other 'troublesome' indigenous critics of Vedic authority within a Brahmanical complex was a radically new way of conceiving of Hinduism. This was

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[31] The shift was apparent: only decades prior the MahāSabhā had claimed to represent "the whole of the orthodox classes of the Hindus in India," but now it claimed to represent "the united voice of the Hindu nation" (Zavos, "Defending Hindu Tradition," 120).

[32] Being an atheist himself, Savarkar felt that religion was only one aspect of *Hindutva* and "not even the most important one." See, Bapu, *Hindu MahāSabhā,* 62.

[33] Savarkar used the term *jati* for race, meaning a people "determined by a common origin and possessing common blood." This meant that although Indian Christians and Muslims had abandoned India, since they had Aryan blood, they could return to "their long lost kith and kin" by "re-converting" to an Aryan religion (quoted in Bapu, *Hindu MahāSabhā,* 70).

[34] The temple was the brainchild of B. Shiva Prasad Gupta, the owner of the Gyan Mandal, one of the most important Hindi presses in North India and the Hindu Sanskritist, Babu Ragava Das. See, "A temple of nationalism," *Indian Social Reformer,* Vol. 47/9 (1936), 130 – 31.

[35] "Founder of the Bharat Mata Temple," *Indian Social Reformer,* Vol. 47/10 (1936), 153 – 54.

a profound break from a more scriptural Purāṇic Hinduism that condemned any Brahmin who entered a Buddhist temple.[36] For some, the initiative to include the Buddhists and other *nāstiks* into the Hindu fold may have indeed been borne out of an ecumenical spirit of understanding and common fellowship but Savarkar's seminal text, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923) better captures the prevailing sentiment: "the Buddha—the Dharma—the Sangha. *They are all ours.*"[37]

The Hindutva vision of India, as current political events indicate, continues to be incredibly influential but scholarly discussions of its ideology have tended to stay focused on its exclusionary aspects within the context of the Indian nation-state.[38] Yet key aspects of the Hindutva ideology, particularly as it related to Buddhism, went far beyond the confines of Mother India. Although Dharmapala was not the only Buddhist delegate to the MahāSabhā convention in 1923, he was the only Buddhist to take the stage and was largely perceived by the Indian public as representing an imagined Buddhism outside. Papers in Pune and Madras read Dharmapala's statement as evidence of the MahāSabhā's ability to "reorganize" Hindu society and "make Hinduism a living force that can mould the destiny of mankind."[39] A popular Bombay weekly argued that it proved "Hinduism is not a kingdom but an Empire. It is not one religion but every religion which answers to certain general characteristics."[40] The *Times of India* was less impressed by Dharmapala's appearance but accurately surmised that the inclusion of Buddhists at the convention was evidence that the MahāSabhā was on the "warpath."[41]

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[36] "A *brahmana* who enters a Buddhist temple even in a time of great calamity cannot get rid of the sin by means of hundreds of expiations since the Buddhists are heretical critics of the sacred *Vedas.*" See, *Nāradīya Purāṇa* I. 15. 50 – 52, quoted in Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu,* 10.
[37] V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: who is a Hindu?* (New Delhi: Central Hindu Yuvak Sabha, 1938 [1923]), 27.
[38] See, Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement.*
[39] See, *Maharatta* (Pune)*,* August 19, 1923, and *the Hindu* (Madras), August 22, 1923 in "Newspaper Extracts related to Hindu MahāSabhā," Government of India, Home Department: Political Branch, File no. 198, Part B, National Archives of India.
[40] *Indian Social Reformer,* August 25, 1923, in "Newspaper Extracts related to Hindu MahāSabhā," Government of India, Home Department: Political Branch, File no. 198, Part B, National Archives of India.
[41] *Times of India, Bombay,* August 24, 1923, in "Newspaper Extracts related to Hindu MahāSabhā," Government of India, Home Department: Political Branch, File no. 198, Part B, National Archives of India.

6.3 Servants of the Ārya dharma: J.K. Birla, Asiatic brotherhood and the Hindu nation

By the late 1930s, there were very few modern Buddhist organizations in India that did not have some degree of contact with the MahāSabhā. Initially, that communication was channeled through discussions of the possible transfer of the MahaBodhi Temple to Buddhists, which the MahāSabhā convened several meetings on from the 1920s onwards. The more conservative elements within the organization balked at the idea of Buddhist management, arguing that since "Bhagwan Buddha preached the religion of the Upanishads," the temple manager should profess the Vedic Dharma and Lord Buddha as his personal deity (*iṣṭa devatā*).[42] Yet more liberal elements within the organization prevailed, concluding in a major resolution in 1926 along with Congress party members that the temple was *in actuality* Buddhist and should therefore be managed by an equal number of Hindu and "Hindu-Buddhist" delegates.[43] Just as in past resolutions, further negotiations remained stalled and only in 1949, some twenty-three years later, was a near-identical resolution turned into law. However, in the years in between, the MahāSabhā became increasingly linked to the MahaBodhi Society, which remained the dominant force behind the MahaBodhi Temple negotiations.

With Dharmapala's death in 1933, the Sinhalese *anagarika* Devapriya Valisinha (b. 1904) took over as the MahaBodhi Society's General Secretary, a position he held until his death in 1968. Valisinha was an astute and passionate networker that continued Dharmapala's courtship of the Congress and MahāSabhā elite. The degree to which this was successful is evidenced by the fact that the President of the MahaBodhi Society from 1942 – 53 was none other than Bengali Finance Minister, Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee (1901 –

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[42] Letter from Sri Pratap, Secretary of the Sanātana Dharma Sabha, Kashmir to the Editor of the *Ananda Bazaar Patrika,* reprinted in "Notes and News," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/5 (1925), 233.

[43] A copy of this report is available in *MahaBodhi* Vol. 34/1 (1926), 2 – 50. It is notable that three of the committee's four members would later have a profound impact on the shape of modern Buddhism. There was the Bihari Congressman, Rajendra Prasad, who with Independence became India's first President and was a major force behind the state's Nehruvian Buddhism (see chapter nine of this dissertation). Aside him was K.P. Jayaswal, one of the foremost historians of ancient India and head of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society. Lastly, and most importantly, was Sadhu Ramodar Das, better known by the name he took three years later when his Sinhalese Buddhist preceptor gave him robes (*civara*) and a new identity as Rahul Sankrityayan. Sankrityayan's life is discussed in detail in chapter eight and my essay, "Like embers hidden in ashes or jewels encrusted in stone: Rahul Sankrityayan, Dharmannd Kosambi and Buddhist activity in colonial India," *Contemporary Buddhism* Vol. 14/1 (2013), 134 – 48.

53).[44] Best known for founding the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the rightwing Hindu political party that metamorphosized into India's largest political party (the BJP), Mookerjee's tenure as the MahaBodhi Society President also coincided with his own Presidentship of the MahāSabhā (1944) and work among the Hindu paramilitary group, the RSS. The real mechanics of the Hindu – Buddhist courtship, however, began more than a decade before when the "servants of Arya Dharma" began calling for an "Aryan cultural brotherhood" of Hindus and Buddhists "to enlighten the present age of materialism with the message of peace."[45] The *Ārya Dharma*, which literally means "noble teaching" or "noble law," was the broad category that Hindutva ideologues used to refer to all religious paths that originated in India. The term signified an imagined unity between Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and other 'branches' of the Sanātan Dharma, but its use in Buddhist publics had a special kinetic appeal since South Asian Buddhist modernists used the term to refer to Buddha's own teaching.[46]

In the context of Hindu – Buddhist alliances, the most important servant of Ārya Dharma was the famed industrialist and Hindutva protagonist, Seth Jugal Kishore Birla (1883 – 1967). Considering the monumental role that Jugal Kishore played in mid-twentieth century Indian Buddhism, it is necessary to carefully consider the motivations and ideologies inherent in his support. Jugal Kishore (hereafter, JK) was the eldest son of the notorious Marwari businessman, Baldeo Das Birla (1863 – 1956). Born in Rajasthan, JK joined the family business in Calcutta in the 1890s, initially concentrating his activities on trading in cotton and hessian before moving into opium speculation. These pursuits, along with what were then novel ventures in importing Japanese cloth to Calcutta, reaped huge profits, making the family one of the wealthiest in India, a status it still holds today.[47] More than just

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[44] Mookerjee's father, Asutosh, it should be remembered, was President of the MahaBodhi Society from 1916 to 1924.

[45] "Hindu MahāSabhā Condolences and Aryan Cultural Brotherhood," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 41/12 (1933), 530. See, in particular resolutions 15 and 19 of the MahāSabhā.

[46] For instance, when Dharmapala attended the World Parliament in Chicago, he opened his first speech, which had been drafted by Hikkaḍuvē Sumaṅgala, by explaining that Buddhists are followers of a single "arya dharma, miscalled Buddhism by Western scholars." Quoted in Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West,* 84.

[47] According to a study conducted by *Forbes Magazine* in 2007, the scion of the Birla family, Kumar Birla is the eighth wealthiest individual in India and the eighty-sixth wealthiest in the world with a net worth of eight billion US dollars. See, Naazneen Karmali, "India's Richest," August 13, 2007, accessed at http://www.forbes.com/2007/08/05/india-billies-richest-oped-cx_nka_0813billies.html. In 1919, the branches of the old business "Baldeodas Jugalkishore" were amalgamated into the "Birla Brothers Limited," with the

astute businessmen, the Birlas were also devout Hindus who well understood the influential role Hindu institutions could possess if only financed properly. Like most Hindu trading communities, they were early supporters of the Nagari and Cow Protection movements that formed the unifying principles of the various Hindu sabhas. The Birlas were particularly close with the Congress and MahāSabhā leader, M.M. Malaviya, who "enjoyed the status of a learned guru" for the family, providing them advice and guidance.[48] The relationship was a mutual one and in return, Malaviya's various educational and religious projects in the name of Hindu revival, from managing Benares Hindu University and running several major newspapers, were largely due to JK and his father's munificence.[49] As Malaviya's son Padam Kant put it, when Malaviya wished to get something done, "Jugalkishore became his right hand."[50] While the Birlas were no less loyal to Gandhi, effectively bankrolling his political campaigns and calls for Hindu tolerance and inclusivity, they were also firm supporters of a more muscular, aggressive, Hinduism. Wrestling gyms (*akhāṛās*), military schools, RSS training camps and Hindu propaganda training centers: these were all seen as integral to the Birlas' vision of a twentieth-century pan-Hinduism.[51] As the ideological divide between the Hindu MahāSabhā and Gandhi's Congress widened, the Birlas' own positioning in this relationship became increasingly complex. While Ghanshyam Das (GD), the youngest of the Birla sons, increasingly sided with Gandhi and the Congress, JK and his father, considered to be the most religiously conservative members of the family, continued their firm support of the extreme Hindu right (although they never stopped supporting Gandhi either).[52]

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effective management turning to Ghanshyamdas (1893 – 1984), JK's younger and more well-known brother. See, Medha M. Kudaisya, *The Life and Times of G.D. Birla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 48.

[48] Kudaisya, *Life and Times of G.D. Birla,* 67.

[49] Kudaisya, *Life and Times of G.D. Birla,* 61 – 73. By 1936, the Birlas were the largest donors to BHU with more than 835,000 rupees in total, more than the contributions of the Maharajas of Udaipur, Bikaner, Alwar and Mysore combined. When Malaviya expressed a desire to take over the *Hindustan Times,* Delhi's first English language newspaper in 1926, JK covered the loan. The Birlas owned other newspapers as well, like the *Bengalee* and *Empire* (which they turned into the *New Empire*).

[50] *Jugalkiśor Birlā unke is punīt kāryake dāhine hāth ban gaye.* Paṇḍit Padhamkānt Mālavīya, "Mahāmanā Mālavīya aur Jugalkiśor Birlā," in *Ek bindu, ek sindhu: svargīya Jugalkiśor Birlā,* edited by Dev Datta Śastri (Mathurā: Śrikṛṣṇ Janmasthān Sevāsaṅgh, 1968), 70.

[51] Kudaisya, *Life and Times of G.D. Birla,* 255, 269 – 70. It is noteworthy that they were behind the controversial publication of Baburao Vishnu Paradikar's *Tikawali Gītā* in 1914. This was one of the most popular Hindi books of the decade, selling out fast and eventually being banned by the British government due to its cover picture of Mother India (*Bhārat Mātā*) with the Gītā in one hand and a sword in the other.

[52] According to Kudaisya, *Life and Times of G.D. Birla,* 105, in the late 1920s, GD began to move away from Malaviya and Hindutva ideologues, feeling that their politics were too sectarian and injurious to constitutional progress. After the 1932 Round Table Conference, when Malaviya's position on the minorities question differed

While all of the Birla sons and father attended Buddhist events during the colonial period, JK was far more involved in India's modern Buddhism than all of the other family members combined. His first public intervention occurred in 1920 during the opening of Dharmapala's Dharmarājika Vihāra in Calcutta when he donated five thousand rupees for its expansion.[53] For much of the next decade, he is silent but from 1933 onwards, his reputation as a modern-day Anāthapiṇḍika, the Buddhist patron *par excellence*, becomes well deserved. In addition to funding the construction of numerous Buddhist temples, resthouses, schools, and academic institutes, JK sponsored the printing of no less than five thousand copies of several Hindi translations of Pali scriptures, such as the *Dhammapada, Dīgha Nikāya* and *Majjhima Nikāya* and provided handsome fellowships for Buddhist monastics to conduct Buddhist missionary work (*dharmadūt kā kām*) in India.[54] Supported by one of India's wealthiest and most well connected households, the figures involved in the construction of many of these structures were the best that money and politics could buy. For instance, the Sarnath Dharamśālā (1935), Calcutta Saddharma Vihāra (1935) and New Delhi Buddha Vihāra (1939) were all designed by Sris Chandra Chatterjee (1873 – 1966), the "moving force" behind India's neo-Hindu and nationalist architectural movement (see Table 6.1).[55]

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from Gandhi's, GD severed all political links with Malaviya, although they maintained a close family bond. JK, on the other hand, continued to support Malaviya's projects, including providing him with a monthly allowance of Rs 3000. After Gandhi was assassinated by a member of the MahāSabhā which led Nehru to arrest more than 25,000 of its members (Kudaisya, 269), JK's support for right-wing Hinduism came under increasing scrutiny. When JK tried to persuade his younger brother to release some of his friends who had been jailed by Nehru, his brother responded, "I don't know why you believe that they have been propagating Sanātana Dharma. They have been propagating some sort of *Shaitan* [Satan] Dharma" (quoted in Kudaisya, 270).

[53] There is some confusion regarding this donation. Ray, *Return of the Buddha,* 114 – 15, reports that he donated the money for the construction but Birla's name is nowhere to be found on the temple inscription of major donors—and his 5,000 Rupee donation would have certainly been entered on the temple inscription since that donation made him the third largest donor after Mary Foster and Dharmapala. Only in the 1933 volume of the *MahaBodhi* Vol. 41/12 (1933), 527 – 28, is Birla ever listed as a donor for the Dharmarājika Vihāra and while the language is vague, it seems to indicate he gave the money during the event (or shortly thereafter) in order to fund the vihāra's *expansion*. It is unclear when JK first took an interest in Buddhism although his presence in Calcutta and the family connections with Japanese merchants may have sparked such ties.

[54] Much of his support for publishing Buddhist scriptures traveled via the MahaBodhi Society's "Hindi Translation Fund," which in turn supported the researches of the three most prolific Indian Buddhist bhikkhu scholars, Rahul Sankrityayan, Anand Kausalyayan and Jagdish Kashyap. He also regularly covered the 'entertainment expenses' at the Mulagandha Kuti Vihāra celebrations and was a major financer of Professor Tan Yun Shan's "Sino-Indian Cultural Society" at Tagore's Visvabharti University, whose primary researches concerned Chinese and Indian Buddhism.

[55] Jon Lang, *A Concise History of Modern Architecture in India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 27 – 29.

Table 6.1: J.K. Birla's Buddhist munificence (*dānvīr*): major Buddhist constructions financed from 1920 - 1940[56]

Year	Name of Vihāra – Dharmaśālā	Location	Notes
1920	Expansion of *Dharmarajika Vihāra* (MahaBodhi Society)	Calcutta	Rs 5000 donation.
1934	*Buddha Mandir*	Ranchi (Jonha Falls)	Opened by Seth Jamnalal Bajaj (of the Bajaj Group)
1935	"Siva – Buddhist Temple"	Calcutta	Further information lacking (see, *MahaBodhi* 1935, 607)
1935	*Saddharma Vihāra*	Calcutta	Nipponzon Myohoji temple built for Nichidatsu Fujī. Inaugurated February 16, 1935 by JK, Fujī, U Ottama, & Mayor of Calcutta
1936	*Oshajo Vihāra*	Rajgir	Nipponzon Myohoji temple built for Nichidatsu Fujī.
1937	MahaBodhi Mission Vihāra	Calicut	Partially financed by JK Birla (property provided by C. Krishnan). Inaugurated by Dhammaskanda, Kottay Kumaran (Sec. of MahaBodhi Mission).
1937	Ārya Dharma Sangha Dharamśālā	Sarnath	Foundation laid 1935. Opened on January 10, 1937 by Chen Chang Lok (Consul General China), M.M. Malaviya, Devapriya Valisinha & Tan Yun Shan (Prof., Visvabharti University)
1937	MahaBodhi Vidyālaya [College]	Sarnath	Foundation laid on April 29, 1937 by Pandit Hridayanath Kunzu (Pres., Servants of India Society)
1937	Construction of Bhikkhu accommodations at *Ananda Vihāra*	Bombay	Donation of Rs 500 to Bombay Buddha Society to provide lodging for resident monastics
1937	*Bahujan Vihāra*	Bombay	Inaugurated on January 1937. Dharmanand Kosambi served as preceptor until 1939.
1937	Construction of three-story *Āryā Vihār* at Bengal Buddhist Association	Calcutta	Inaugurated December 11, 1937 by JK Birla, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (later Pres. Of India) and SP Mookerjee (later founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh)
1938	*Ārya Dharma Dharamśālā*	Bodh Gaya	
1939	*Bhagavān Buddhdev kā mandir* and *Āryā vihār*	Kuśīnagar	Financed at cost of Rs 30,000.
1939	*Buddha Vihāra* (part of the Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇ Mandir or "Birla Temple")	New Delhi	Foundation laid October 31, 1936 by JK Birla, Devapriya Valisinha, Bhai Parmananda (VP of MahāSabhā), K. Yonezawa

[56] This list is not exhaustive and only includes the most well-known and/or relevant Buddhist projects that JK and the Birlas financed. For instance, not included in the above list are the numerous Buddha images that the Birlas donated to various temples across the country. I have also excluded the Birla's involvement in the Darjeeling and local Chinese Buddhist scene since much of this activity has been difficult to trace in any precise detail.

Year	Name of Vihāra – Dharmaśālā	Location	Notes
			(Consul-General, Japan). Opened March 18, 1939 by Mahatma Gandhi, Valisinha, JK and GD Birla, Acharya Kripalani and more than a dozen Buddhist monks
1940	Nipponzon Myohoji Temple	Bombay (Worli)	Semi-complete in 1940 but the advent of WWII delayed completion. Inaugurated in 1956 by JK Birla, Fujī.

When one considers JK's concurrent involvement in MahāSabhā politics and practices, it is clear that his championing of Buddhism was simply a directed socio-political strategy to contain the new Buddhist threat to Hindu orthodoxy. This point was made as early as 1944 by Rahul Sankrityayan in his characteristic provocative manner when he described the new Birla Dharamśālā at Kuśīnagar: "Maybe some knuckleheads (*aundhī khopaṛiyon*) thought that if you threw twenty-five [or] fifty-thousand rupees at the site, you could turn the anti-caste, atheist, self-supporting Buddhists into Hindus."[57] In Sankrityayan's view, Hindu leaders (*netā*) were fearful that the "thousands of [Buddhist] people" (*hazāroṃ ādmī*) who visited Kuśīnagar each year after Candramani and Mahavir's arrival might inspire the Dalit (*āchūt*) populace to embrace Buddhism.[58] Birla's actions, which always need to be considered within the context of the MahāSabhā, were without a doubt marked by this kind of religious positioning. By the 1930s, thousands of Buddhists from across Asia and the western hemisphere were visiting India, carrying with them a message of Buddhist social emancipation and rationality that was said to be a 'solution' for India's 'untouchability problem.' At Kuśīnagar, for instance, Bhikkhu Candramani, in the decade since Mahavir's death, had transformed the ancient site into one of the most active Buddhist spaces in the Gangetic plains, a process that involved initiating several lower-caste Hindu youths into Buddhism.[59] The MahāSabhā was well aware of these developments and concerns about caste and conversion, as will be seen in the next chapter, were obvious catalysts for this new interest in Buddhism. However, there is also good reason to take more seriously other motivations driving the MahāSabhā's and JK's involvement with the Buddhist movement.

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[57] Sāṅkṛtyāyan, *Merī Jīvan Yātrā*, Vol. 2, 192.
[58] Sāṅkṛtyāyan, *Merī Jīvan Yātrā*, Vol. 2, 191.
[59] Several of these conversions had triggered serious angst and anger among the local Hindu community. See, Tha Doe Hla, *Life Story of Sri Bhaddanta Chandramani Mahathera,* 53 – 63. The wider context of Dalit conversions is discussed in chapter seven of this dissertation.

At one level, JK's support for Buddhists stemmed from the long-standing tradition of giving (Sanskrit, *dāna*) in Indic cultures. Yet when the future President of India, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888 – 1975) described the Birlas as men "who know not only how to earn but what is more important, how to spend," what he really meant was how to spend on Hindus (in the Hindutva sense of the term).[60] The Birlas' generosity towards the followers of the Ārya Dharma was arguably unparalleled in India and yet it mirrored neither modern conceptions of philanthropy nor traditional notions of South Asian giving (*dāna*). For both of those systems of giving, according to Douglas Haynes, are outlined by universal ideals of charitable giving to anyone, *inclusive of all*, but the Birlas' philanthropy, particularly as mediated via JK and his father, was only to the followers of the Ārya Dharma.[61] For instance, at the Buddhist temple - dharamśālā (*Bhagavān Buddhdev kā mandir tathā āryā vihār*) JK constructed at Kuśīnagar in 1939, the inscription on the wall makes explicit its vision of Hindu encompassment: "All Hindu pilgrims (including Harijans [Dalits]), i.e., followers of Sanātan Dharma, Ārya Samājists, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists, etc. are accommodated in the Dharamshala subject to the standing orders of the Dharamshala committee."[62] The marble slate at the opposite end of the building goes on to explain that "Ārya Dharmists" (*āryā dharmī*) include Buddhist peoples from China, Japan, Siam, Burma, Tibet, Lanka, Cambodia, Indo-China, etc.[63] In other words, this was a generosity that publicly at least, extended only to Hindus, which in the Hindutva sense, included all "Aryanized" populations. This is not to suggest that JK's munificence should not be lauded, for he gave far more than most, but by all accounts, his generosity had clear-cut limitations.

When speaking at Buddhist events, JK most often articulated his support for Buddhism through the lens of religious devotion. As noted earlier, he was a deeply religious man, who according to his children and peers, followed a strict regiment of ritual practices. He started each day at five in the morning with prayers, regularly consulted astrologers, and

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[60] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "Presidential Address at the 12th All-India Oriental Conference at Benares Hindu University," *Proceedings and Transactions of All India Oriental Conference 1943 – 44* (Benares: Benares Hindu University, 1946), 1. In 1947, Moonje paid tribute to J.K. Birla, singling him out in the family for being "unique" in that his "charities are almost entirely concerned with the cause of Hindus" (quoted in Kudaisya, Kudaisya, *Life and Times of G.D. Birla,* 255fn93).

[61] See, Douglas E. Haynes, "From Tribute to Philanthropy: the politics of gift giving in a western Indian city," *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 46/2 (1987): 339 – 60.

[62] Personal observation of the inscription on north wall of Kuśīnagar Vihāra. Similar inscriptions are found at the other Birla Buddhist structures in Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, New Delhi, etc.

[63] Personal observation.

hired Brahmins to "ward off suspected obstacles and neutralize evil influences."[64] When he spoke of Buddha, it was thoroughly Vaiṣṇava in orientation, understanding Buddhadev to be the *avatār* of the current age (*Viṣṇu kā navī*) and the Dharmic protector (*buddhapāla*) of the current era (*kalpa*).[65] "Changes take place with change of time and in language, dress, and social rites and practices," he declared at the opening of the Nipponzon Myohoji Saddharma Vihāra in Calcutta in February 1935. "But they have no great bearing upon the true spirit of religion."[66]

> …after long centuries, things have again changed and the reign of injustice pervades the entire world. The downfall of those professing Arya Dharma in India has reached its limit on account of mutual jealousy. If for this reason anybody says that Indians have forgotten Lord Buddha, then it must be admitted that that is true in one respect, for had we kept in our minds the teachings of Lord Buddha, this great nation of India would not have welcomed the state of subjection and slavery by quarreling with one another for mean, selfish ends and would not have hurt their co-religionists in a spirit of contempt. There is yet time to get wide awake… This is my prayer to Lord Buddha that with such strength as He may vouchsafe to us—the followers of the Arya Dharma—we may succeed in benefitting the whole world by benefitting ourselves.[67]

Birla's speech here, which more or less mirrored those he gave at other Buddhist functions, is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, it challenged the popular notion that Buddhism and particularly, Buddhist non-violence was responsible for India's downfall. In the existing political climate in which Gandhi's Congress championed the cause of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* as the twin pillars of political success, the historical nature and consequences of Buddhist non-violence had become important matters for Indian intellectuals and politicians.[68] In Gandhi's eyes, Buddhist non-violence proved to be one of the few aspects of Buddhism that he routinely supported: "It is my unalterable belief that India has fallen not because it accepted Gautama's message [of non-violence] but because it failed to live up to it."[69] Many prominent scholars of Buddhism, like Dharmanand Kosambi supported Gandhi's thesis, but others like the Lahore Professor Gulshan Rai felt strongly that it was because of

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[64] Quoted in Kudaisya, *Life and Times of G.D. Birla,* 191. As the eldest son in the family, his views were considered "binding on all" and he instructed the other household members to memorize verses from the *Ramayan* and *Gītā,* chant prayers and "carry on with *bhajans, kirtans,* and *havans*" (191).
[65] Ācārya Śrī Kākāsāhab Kālekar, "Jugalkiśorjī aur bauddh-dharm," in *Ek bindu, ek sindhu: svargīya Jugalkiśor Birlā,* edited by Dev Datta Śastri (Mathurā: Śrikṛṣṇ Janmasthān Sevāsaṅgh, 1968), 48.
[66] "Seth Jugal Kishore Birla's speech at the Saddhama Vihara," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 43/3 (1935), 111.
[67] "Seth Jugal Kishore Birla's speech at the Saddhama Vihara," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 43/3 (1935), 111 – 14.
[68] Although Jainism is no less linked to *ahimsa,* it seems that Buddhism monopolized discussions in the historical imagination of the national elite.
[69] Quoted in "Notes and Comments," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 32/7 (1924), 273.

Buddhist non-violence that India "became slaves of a foreign [Islamic] culture and civilization."[70] Rai's view, which we already saw was stressed by Sīvaprasād in his *Itihās Timiranāśak* in 1874, was amplified by Hindutva hardliners like Savarkar, Golwalkar, and Moonje who all stressed repeatedly and loudly that Buddhist non-violence destroyed Indian society.[71]

It may seem odd that JK aligned himself with Gandhian Hindus rather than hardliners like Savarkar and Moonje when it came to the utility of non-violence but his understanding of ahimsa was couched more in the lens of the *absence of hatred* rather than the absence of physical violence. That is, in this very *Gītā*-esque and karmayogic interpretation, physical acts of violence performed without motivations of anger or weakness are perfectly acceptable.[72] JK's support for Buddhist ahimsa was also mediated via his own principled commitment to vegetarianism, itself a product of his rigid Brahmanical orthodoxy.[73] Birla's vegetarianism was not just a private, dietary matter but also a way of being and living in this world.[74] For instance, in 1938 when JK learned that his nephew's profitable pharmaceutical company processed animal glands, he forced his nephew to close the business.[75] A second incident, closer to home for us is recalled by "Gose Lama" (Thub-dlan 'Byung-gnas), the founder of the Tibetan Buddhist temple (est. 1955) in Sarnath.[76] According to Gose Lama, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, JK "used to give monthly stipends to the members of the Tibetan [Ladakhi] Bodhgaya monastery [est. 1938]," but once "he came to know about our

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[70] "The Influence of Buddhism in North India," *Indian Social Reformer* Vol. 44/40 (1934), 633. This is a reprint of an article Rai published in the *Tribune* of Lahore.

[71] Moonje entered into several long debates with Buddhists and scholars of Buddhism regarding its shortcomings. See, "Dr. Moonji on Buddhism," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 43/9 (1935), 457; "Buddhism vs Militarism: a reply to Dr. Moonji," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 43/10 (1935), 487 – 89; "An Indian Imperialist," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 45/10 (1937), 471; V.M. Kaikini, "Did Buddhism cause India's Downfall?" *MahaBodhi* Vol. 46/6 (1938), 266 – 71. This last essay also appeared in the January issue of the *Modern Review*. In Savarkar's history, for instance, the "first degeneration of the Hindu nation" occurred when Aśoka "strangled India" through his propagation of "non-violence, righteousness and toleration." This allowed the Huns and Scythians who were superior in "fire and sword" to destroy the formerly "magnificent empire of Chandragupta" and strip away India's "manhood for centuries" (quoted in Bapu, *Hindu MahāSabhā,* 64).

[72] Yogiraja and Maitreya, *Buddha-Mimansa,* 69 – 76, especially 72.

[73] On the Birla's family life with a particular emphasis on JK's conservative presence, which was considered "binding on all," see Kudaisya, *Life and Times of G.D. Birla,* 14 – 15 and 191.

[74] One way this played out was through he and his father's long history of charitable support for *goshalas* (cow sanctuaries) and bird refuges. See, Kudaisya, *Life and Times of G.D. Birla,* 41.

[75] Basant Kumar, *A Rare Legacy*: *memoirs of B.K. Birla* (Bombay: Image Incorporated, 1994), 31 – 32.

[76] See, Tephun Tenzin Shastri, *The Life of Gan Thupthen Jungney (Gan Gose La*) (Sarnath: Tibetan Monastery, 2005).

meat consumption," JK cut off all support for the carnivorous monastics.[77] When read in conjunction with Birla's pubic expressions of support for Buddhist *ahimsa,* both of these stories, despite being anecdotal in nature, reveal an important component of how he understood the role of non-violence in the Arya Dharma.

In all of JK's speeches at Buddhist events, he never hesitated to explain that Hinduism and Buddhism are merely two branches of the Ārya Dharma without any opposition between them. In fact, that motto of both traditions having a singular origin (*baudh aur hindūdharm ek hī mūlkī do śākhāe*) in the *Āryavarta* (India) was inscribed on several of the Buddhist structures that he financed. For students of Hindutva ideology, the idea that Buddhist Indians were Hindus is nothing unusual but the idea that Buddhists *outside* India were also Hindus is rarely discussed. Yet a slight derivation of that idea was widely current among leading scholars of the period. In an insightful essay, Susan Bayly has shown how the Indian founders of Calcutta's "Greater India Society" (est. 1926) drew on French scholarship on Indo-China to argue that India's cultural heritage possessed the same drive and aggressiveness that had led Muslims and Christian Europeans to achieve power in foreign lands.[78] The prevalence of Sanskrit inscriptions, Indian architectural styles and religious customs in places like Java, Cambodia and Siam led these scholars to argue that India was "the home of a master-race" that had brought the "heterogeneous mass of [southeast Asia's] barbarians within the pale of civilization, a task which the Chinese, their next-door neighbours, had hitherto failed to accomplish."[79] Hindu revivalists like Malaviya were major sponsors of Greater India scholarship, seeing the fruits of their labors as evidence of India's "peaceful and benevolent Imperialism…a unique thing in the history of mankind."[80] What Bayly does not discuss is how Buddhism was often seen in Indian scholarship as the active agent in the spread of 'Hindu civilization.' For several decades, scholars had argued that Buddhism was India's premiere "missionary religion," the only

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[77] Tenzin Shastri, *The Life of Gan Thupthen Jungney*, 126.
[78] Susan Bayly, "Imagining 'Greater India': French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 38/3 (2004), 703 – 44.
[79] R.C. Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East,* Vol. 1 (Greater India Society Publication No. 1, Lahore, 1927), xxii – xxiii, quoted in S. Bayly, "Imagining 'Greater India,' " 601.
[80] Quoted in S. Bayly, "Imagining 'Greater India,' " 601.

early Aryan tradition to open its doors to outcastes and foreigners.[81] It is not surprising that several of the most eminent Greater India Society scholars, like Kalidas Nag (the organization's first President), Suniti Kumar Chatterji and S.C. Mookerjee were members of the MahaBodhi Society.[82] Mookerjee, for instance, argued in 1921 that "Higher Hinduism" and Buddhism were "built of the same flesh and blood" with the latter being no "-ism" at all, but an "Arya Dharma…a stirring exhortation of [Indian] Culture."[83] For Mookerjee, reading the archives of Greater India made the solution to India's problems simple: only by resuscitating this ancient Ārya Dharma could India regain its cherished place in the world.[84] JK's invocation of the Ārya Dharma was symptomatic of these larger discourses. Buddhists, in his eyes, were Aryanized Hindus who had left their Bhārat Mātā (Mother India) long ago and were now returning after a painful separation of many centuries. It was his moral duty (*dharma*) to welcome them back.

While the MahāSabhā invited Buddhists to its conventions in India, it also sent Hindu representatives to major Buddhist conventions overseas. At the one thousand strong meeting of the Pan-Pacific Young Buddhist Association in Japan in 1934, the MahāSabhā representative, Pandit Visvabandhu Shastri, emphasized the importance of "Arya Dharma" or "the unity of spirit underlying the different Asiatic peoples in Indo-China, Manchuoukuo [sic], Japan, Penang, Siam, Burma and India."[85] The MahāSabhā, as we've seen was extremely close with the MahaBodhi Society and it is notable that the only other Indian representative to the week-long event was the former Ārya Samāji turned Buddhist bhikkhu,

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[81] For a critical review of this idea, and whether early Buddhism was a "missionary religion," see the edited collection, *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization,* edited by Linda Learman (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), especially the chapters by Learman and Kemper. Much of the debate has been driven by Jonathan Walters' PhD dissertation, *Rethinking Buddhist Missions* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1992). In early 20th century India, scholars like Saratchandra Vidyabhusan and Sarat Chandra Das regularly argued that Buddhism was a missionary force that spread Indo-Aryan culture.

[82] Kalidas Nag even served as the main editor of the *MahaBodhi* journal in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

[83] Sameer Chandra Mookerjee, "Essential Steps to India's Regeneraton: an address to the Indian public assembled at the Baisak Festival at the Chaitya Vihara, Calcutta," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 29/7 (1921), 245.

[84] See the two-part article by Sameer Chandra Mookerjee, "Essential Steps to India's Regeneraton: an address to the Indian public assembled at the Baisak Festival at the Chaitya Vihara, Calcutta," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 29/7 (1921), 242 – 47 and Vol. 29/8 (1921), 284 – 89; Sameer Chandra Mookerjee, "The need for coalition between Hindus and Buddhists," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 31/6 (1923), 210 – 14; Sameer Chandra Mookerjee, "Why India Needs Buddhism," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 32/4 (1924), 162 – 71.

[85] "Bhikkhu Ananda and Pandit Visvabandhu Shastri," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 42/11-12 (1934), 570. See also, "Reflections on the Great Buddhist Conference in Japan," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 42/11 – 12, (1934), 535 – 39 and "The Second General Conference of the Pan-Pacific Young Buddhist Association," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 42/2 (1934), 71 – 76.

Anand Kausalayayan.[86] They came to Japan together and left together, being touted as evidence of the Hindu – Buddhist union that was possible if only their superficial differences could be transcended. Efforts at fomenting an "Asiatic Brotherhood" between India and Japan were particularly pronounced in the 1930s when several prominent Japanese Buddhist (Nichiren) monks settled in India. Led by Nichidatsu Fujī (1885 – 1985), Tadao Okitsu and Daisaburo Maruyama, the Japanese renunciates had been struck by Nichiren's (c. 1222 – 82) prophecy that in the final Dharmic age (Japanese, *mappō*), Japanese Buddhists would return the True Dharma *(saddharma*) to India. Making India their *karmabhūmi* for the next several decades, the Nipponzon Myohoji monks traveled through India, chanting the Lotus Sutra mantra '*namu myōhō renge kyō'* to the beat of hand-held fan-shaped drums.[87] Through their own assertions of pan-Asianism and intensive ascetic practice, they found themselves in the arena of Hindu – Buddhist political action, living with Gandhi at his ashram at Wardha in 1933 and gaining the support of the Birlas.[88] With JK's financing, Fujī constructed three major Nipponzon Myohoji temples in colonial India: in Calcutta in 1935, in Rajgir in 1936 and in Bombay in 1940.[89] At the grand opening of the Calcutta Saddharma Vihāra on

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[86] Kausalyayan was a former Arya Samāji who under Sankrityayan's influence traveled to Lanka in 1928 to study Pali and ordain under Venerable Lunupokne Dhammananda of the Vidyālaṇkāra Piriveṇa. Through Dharmapala's London Buddhist Mission, Kausalayayan taught Buddhism in Europe for two years before returning to India where he became an outspoken Buddhist activist – monk, noted as much for his ultra-nationalilst Nagari stance (which made him close with right-wing Hindus) as his polemical criticisms of Vedic and Brahmanical culture (which put him at odds with the MahāSabhā). From 1941 to 1951, he was the General Secretary of the Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Pracār Samiti, which propagated a Sanskritized Hindi in contrast to Gandhi's Hindustani. After Ambedkar's conversion in 1956, Kausalyayan became one of the Dalit movement's most energetic Buddhist activists. On Kausalyayan, see Bhadant Sāvangī Medhankar, *Dr. Bhadant Ānand Kausalyāyan: Jīvan-darśan* (Nāgpur: Buddha Bhūmi Prakāśan, 2002).

[87] On the Nipponzon Myohoji, see Robert Kisala, *Prophets of Peace: Pacificism and Cultural Identity in Japan's New Religions* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1999), especially chapter two, and Jacqueline Stone, "Nichiren's Activist Heirs: Sōka Gakkai, Risshō Kōseikai, Nipponzan Myōhōji," in *Action Dharma: new studies in Engaged Buddhism,* edited by Christopher Queen, Charles Prebish and Damien Keown (London: Routledge, 2003), 63 – 94. An abridged version of Fujī's autobiography has been translated into English as Nichidatsu Fujī, *My Non-violence: an autobiography of a Japanese Buddhist,* translated by T. Yamaori (Tokyo: Japan Buddha Sangha Press, 1975 [1972]).

[88] To this day, daily prayers at Gandhi's ashram at Sabarmati begin with the *daimoku* (Lotus Sutra mantra). Fujī's drum is also displayed publicly inside the main hall of the Birla Mandir in New Delhi. Due to Britain's adversarial relationship with Japan, Fujī and his colleagues were closely tracked by Indian intelligence services. For records of their interactions with the Indian political elite, see Government of India, External Affairs Department: External Branch (Secret), File no. 451 (1940) and Government of India, Foreign and Political Department: General branch, File no. 318 (1936), both of which are available in the National Archives of India, New Delhi.

[89] Bombay was in fact the first site of action for Fujī with a "seminary"—essentially a thatched hut—established there in 1932. From these humble origins, a foundation was eventually laid for what came to be a small but impressive temple built in the same architectural style as the other Birla temples. The temple quarters in the rear

February 16, 1935, the spirit of Asian unity between Hindus and Buddhists worldwide were dominant themes. JK emphasized the need for followers of the Ārya Dharma to unite against the materialist forces (read: socialism and capitalism) at rise in the world while the Arakanese – Burmese monk, U Ottama prayed for an Indo-Japanese fellowship "under the deep reposefulness of the Buddhist banner of love and Ahimsa."[90]

The prized place that Buddhism held in the MahāSabhā's vision and the importance of integrating foreign Buddhist leadership into their program is evident through an examination of two major MahāSabhā events in the next five years. The first occurred just two months after the opening of the Japanese vihāra in Calcutta when Bhikkhu Ottama was elected President of the MahāSabhā.[91] The decision came at the behest of Malaviya and JK who felt it would demonstrate the all-embracing attitude of the Hindus to the Buddhist world. During Ottama's tenure as the President of the MahāSabhā (1935 – 36), which preceded the separation of Burma from India in 1937, he used the pulpit to protest the proposed division and argue for the ancient unity between Buddhists and Hindus, Burmese and Indians. "Lord Buddha was a Hindu of Hindus," he explained during his Presidential speech, and since all Buddhists of Burma "look upon India, where he [Buddha] was born and preached his gospel, as their holy land," its separation was nothing less than the "dismemberment of the great Hindu nation."[92] That was a Buddhist cause that Hindutva ideologues could rally around. As history demonstrates, Ottama's cry to stop the Burma – India partition failed but his calls for Hindu – Buddhist unity were more enduring. The MahāSabhā accelerated its rhetoric of a singular Ārya Dharma uniting all of Asia, electing Buddhist heads to regional chapters, decorating general convention platforms with Buddhist motifs and symbols and petitioning monastics to chant *paritta* (protective verses) during temple inaugurations.[93] An article

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of the current structure was complete by 1940 but when Fujī and several of his colleagues were imprisoned or deported at the beginning of the Second World War, the remainder of the temple's construction ceased. In 1956, it was officially inaugurated.

[90] "Saddharma Vihara in Calcutta," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 43/3 (1935), 137.

[91] On Ottama, see Michael Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma: a study of monastic sectarianism and leadership* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 202 – 04.

[92] "The Hindu MahāSabhā," *Indian Social Reformer,* Vol. 45, April 27, 1935, 548.

[93] For summary accounts of the Buddhist motifs and symbols, like the "Gautama Gate" at the Nagpur convention in 1938, see, *Buddhaprabha,* Vol. 7/1 (1939), 1059 – 61. Ottama was, as far as I am aware, the only Buddhist bhikkhu to be ever be elected President of the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā but other monastics, like Bhikkhu Nyanasir of New Delhi Vihāra, served as President of New Delhi branch of Hindu MahāSabhā (see, *MahaBodhi* Vol. 47/11 (1939), 521.

published in the MahāSabhā's weekly organ, *The Hindu Outlook* on May 18, 1938, demonstrates the image of this new 'Hindu Buddha' being crafted. On the one hand, there is all the standard fare of an ancient prince who "brought a renaissance of the rationalistic ideals in religion."[94] Yet further in the text it explains how Buddha "enriched the vedantic doctrines with [a] wealth of ethical refinement," and how "His *Nirvana* was the assimilation of the *Jiva* [soul/life] with the *Siva* [God]."[95] So much for the central Buddhist teaching of non-self (*anātman*).

While the Birlas built temples, schools and resthouses for all Aryan religions across India, none of them garnered the nation's attention like the Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇ Mandir on Reading Road (present-day Mandir Marg) in New Delhi. Better known as the "Birla Mandir," this grand temple complex, which spreads over seven acres and continues to be one of the most visited Hindu temples in the capital city, was one of the first "pan-Hindu" temples or Hindu Rāṣtra Mandirs built in the twentieth century. The impetus for these massive structures had come from the prominent Ārya Samāji Swami Shraddhananda (b. 1856) who argued that every city in India needed grand pan-Hindu temples to contend with competing Islamic spaces like Old Delhi's monumental Jama Masjid.[96] Had Shraddhananda survived his assassin's bullet in 1926, the New Delhi Birla Mandir would have likely fulfilled his dream. While the complex is Vaiṣṇava in orientation, it contains the full constellation of "Aryan" seers, gods, and saints with separate enclosures and wall paintings honoring Vedic rishis, Sikh Gurus, Jain Tirthankaras, Bhakti poets, lower-caste and outcaste Sants and virtually any other revered "Aryan Hindu." In the first corridor outside the northwest corner of the *sanctum sanctorum* is a small enclosure with an image of Bhagavān Buddha and several short Sanskrit and Hindi passages detailing the Buddha's teachings (*vāni*), their similarity to the *Bhagavad Gītā* and their singular origin (*ek hī mūlkī*) in India. In comparison to other sections of the temple, the Buddha quadrant is relatively small yet there are good reasons for this. For in the property adjacent to the Birla Mandir and connected via a short walkway is a large *Buddha Vihāra* whose *śikhara* (top) nearly rivals that of the main complex.

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[94] H.K. Sen, "A pen picture of Lord Buddha and his Teachings," *The Hindu Outlook,* May 18, 1938, p. 9.
[95] H.K. Sen, "A pen picture of Lord Buddha and his Teachings," *The Hindu Outlook,* May 18, 1938, p. 10 – 11.
[96] On this wider context, see Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement,* 19 – 25.

The Buddha Vihāra was also financed by JK and designed by the nationalist architect Sris Chandra Chatterjee with consultation from Pandit Visvwananda Shastri, a member of the MahaBodhi Society and author of a major text on the Buddha-avatār.[97] When the two temples were consecrated during a joint Hindu – Buddhist celebration on March 18, 1939, nearly fifty thousand people crowded the roadway to see Mahatma Gandhi oversee the ceremony. At the Buddhist temple, monks chanted paritta while in the Hindu complex, Brahmin priests recited Vedic *stotras* amidst fire. The crowds were in fact so overbearing that the microphone arrangements broke down and all of the planned speeches by Gandhi, the Birlas and Devapriya Valisinha had to be aborted.[98] The speeches that were later released to the press dwelled largely on the contributions of the Birlas to the Hindu revival and the reformative role that Buddhism had played in removing the stigma of untouchability. Caste was indeed the pressing issue of the day and its full implications are discussed in the next chapter, but it was not the only thread. As in the speeches delivered during the laying of the foundation stone three years prior, there was much discussion of how "We [Hindus and Buddhists] are brothers and we should live like brothers."[99] The Japanese Consul General, Konezawa, explained how he spoke on behalf of "forty-one million" Japanese Buddhists who "are thankful to you [India] for giving them their religion."[100] He described the chaos and strife in the world, pinpointing its causes on "selfish materialism," which Buddhism's "protest against" gave it "a great mission to perform not only in Asia but also the whole world."[101] There was no discussion of Buddhism's "civilizing role" in Imperial Japan's conquests, only how in this moment of great uncertainty Hindus and Buddhists alike needed

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[97] According to "Buddhist Vihara in New Delhi," *MahaBodhi,* Vol. 44/12 (1936), 548 – 57, the plot of land was acquired by several Barua Buddhists living in New Delhi, with Sarbananda Barua, the driving force (on Sarbananda Barua, see "The late Mr. Sarbananda Barua," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 43/12 (1935), 605. While traveling through India in 2014 – 2015, I was also told by several different individuals from across India, that Ambedkar was responsible for inspiring Birla to build the temple. A slight allusion to this is found in Bhadant Ānand Kausalyāyan, *Yadi Bābā na hote* (Nāgpur: Dīkṣā Bhūmi, 1968), 117 – 18, who reports that Ambedkar criticized Birla for failing to build a more appropriate shrine for a figure of Buddha's stature.

[98] Gandhi entered both temples and was then "virtually held prisoner for nearly an hour" while garlands of flowers were tossed into the temple from the sidewalk. See, "Opening of Sri Lakshmi Narain Temple," *Hindustan Times,* March 19, 1939.

[99] "Buddhist Vihara in New Delhi," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 44/11 (1936), 555 – 56. During the laying of the foundation stone on October 31, 1936, approximately thirty leaders, including Bhai Parmananda (of the MahāSabhā), JK Birla, Devapriya Valisinha (Gen. Sec., MahaBodhi Society), Bhikkhu Maruyama (Japan), Bhikkhu Anand Kausalayayan (India), Lt. Col. Ramsher Jung (Nepal), and the Consul-General of Japan, Konezawa, held a "tea party" at the MahāSabhā headquarters which is on the other side of the Birla Temple.

[100] "Buddhist Vihara in New Delhi," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 44/11 (1936), 552.

[101] "Buddhist Vihara in New Delhi," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 44/11 (1936), 552.

to live up to their solemn duty of remembering that this was the age of Buddha and only Buddha could eradicate suffering.

6.4 Representing Buddhist interests in a Hindu world

The MahāSabhā's dominance over the national discourse of Buddhism was based more on persuasion than coercion. However, the very nature of the colonial state, in which political representation was based on demographic figures, required Buddhist organizations to cast their lot with the MahāSabhā, which was the only major political organization in India to recognize Buddhists as a community of significance.[102] Thus, in this sense, the MahaSahba's dominance could in fact be coercive since there were few other options. Those Buddhist organizations that pursued other paths in order to attain their educational, social and cultural goals, like the *Bhāratīya Bauddha Samiti* or Indian Buddhist Society (est. 1916) of Lucknow, were almost exclusively driven by anti-Brahmin strategies to annihilate caste discrimination, as will be seen in the next chapter. The MahāSabhā did manage to make some inroads into these organizations, such as in the Malabar MahaBodhi Mission of the Kerala Buddhist Association (est. 1925), but by and large, lower-caste and Dalit Buddhists proceeded independently.

It is important to recognize however the continued development of indigenous and foreign Buddhist organizations in the subcontinent during the MahāSabhā's interwar period Buddhist expansions. The stimulus for these developments were largely continuations of older elements rather than new initiatives all together: namely, the expanding works of the Archaeological Survey of India under its Director-Generals, John Marshall and Daya Ram Sahni; the state's continued development of material infrastructure at Buddhist sites in terms of railways and *pakka* roads; the maintenance of transnational Buddhist networks; and a sustained emphasis on the Eight Great Places of pilgrimage (*aṣṭa-mahāsthāna*). All of these forces combined to create an enlarged traffic at Buddhist sites, whether for religious, commercial, tourist, scholarly or other purposes that coincided with both the need and demand for travelers facilities. The way in which this veritable boom in Buddhist infrastructure was conditioned by a colonial government that to a large degree stuck to its

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[102] "Hindū Mahāsabhā aur ham," *Dharmadūt* Vol. 1/1 (1935), 13.

laizzez faire policy of religious freedom, is most obvious when one considers the fate of Lumbini, the purported site of Buddha's birth, next door in Nepal. Buddhist pilgrims regularly visited Lumbini from the 1920s on, even during the Rana regime's rigid anti-Buddhist policies, but by the early 1940s, most requests to acquire plots of land for Buddhist properties had been denied and there were only two modern Buddhist structures near the sacred grove where Gautama is said to have been born.[103] In contrast, at Sarnath, by 1939, there were three separate Buddhist temples (Chinese, Sinhalese and Burmese), secondary and post-secondary Buddhist schools for local Indian residents, an "International Buddhist Institute" or missionary (*dharmadūt*) training school, and a major government museum housing Buddhist antiquities. At Bodh Gaya, developments were no less extensive with Tibetan, Chinese, Sinhalese, and Burmese temples either completed or under construction by the same time.[104] Of equal importance was the creation of new indigenous Buddhist organizations in metropolitan centers, several of whom like the Bengal Buddhist Association and MahaBodhi Society before them, had close connections to the central bastions of Indian political leadership.

6.5 Dr. Anandrao Nair and the Bombay Buddha Society

Foremost among these new groups was the Bombay Buddha Society, founded in 1922 by the philanthropist, doctor and Buddhist convert, Anandrao Nair (1862 – 1934). A new addition to Bombay's high society, Nair came from humble origins but had acquired vast sums of money by selling medical instruments through his "Messrs Powell and Company."[105] In the late 1920s he also built and managed Bombay's National Medical College and Yamunabai Nair (Free) Medical Hospital and Dental School. All three of these institutions were then, as they still are now, major fixtures in Bombay's bio-medical world,

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[103] For a detailed summary of the efforts to build an earlier resthouse there, see Dharma Aditya Bouddha [Dharmacharya], "Lumbini Restoration Scheme," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 30/3 (1922), 104 – 08.
[104] On Bodh Gaya's development, see David Geary, "Rebuilding the Navel of the Earth: Buddhist pilgrimage and transnational religious networks," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 48/3 (2014): 645 – 92.
[105] Most of Nair's contemporaries described him as having humble origins. There does not exist to my knowledge any comprehensive study of Nair and my sources for his life are largely piecemeal and drawn from a wide range of materials. The most important sources include the "Bombay Buddha Society" file contained in the private papers of M.R. Jayakar at the National Archives of India (New Delhi) and several short essays written about him in the *Indian Social Reformer, Buddha-prabha* and *MahaBodhi*.

covering roughly two city blocks in south Mumbai.[106] The Yamunabai Free Hospital, named after Nair's late mother, was also home to Bombay's first Buddhist temple, *Ānanda vihāra,* a two-story building with an upstairs shrine room located within the hospital grounds. Little is known about Nair's childhood but after attending a series of lectures on Buddhism by Dharmanand Kosambi around 1910, he became one of the city's most ardent Buddhist activists. Along with Dr. Vaman Baji Kulkarni, he co-founded the Buddhanugami Society in 1910 with the sole purpose of organizing Buddha Jayanti (*Vesak*) celebrations each year. During the Buddha Jayanti of 1922, which drew an "unexpectedly large gathering," a conversation between Nair and the Labour leader, S.H. Jhabwala led them to found the Bombay Buddha Society in order to spread Buddha's creed "against the materialistic doctrines propagated in Bombay."[107]

At the time Nair founded the society, his charitable endeavors and wealth had made him a critical node in the city and the seventy-two members who joined the organization in its first year carried the badges of Congress politicians, Theosophists, Bombay University Professors, and newspaper magnates.[108] By 1930, the roughly one hundred and fifty members were the driving force behind Buddhist activities in the city. On average, anywhere between twenty to forty scholarly lectures were delivered each year along with Sunday classes on the *Dhammapada* taught by the Pali scholar, N.K. Bhagwat and meditation instruction led by figures like Dharmanand Kosambi and U Ottama. European scholars like Sylvain Levi, Carol Rhys Davids, and Felix Valyi lectured in its halls and its quarterly journal, *Buddha-prabha* added another voice to the Indian Buddhist scene.[109] The society led the way in the dissemination of Pali scriptures via Marathi and Gujarati translations during the 1930s and according to Bhagwat, "was the starting point of Buddhist studies [in Bombay] with a sympathetic and appreciative attitude."[110]

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[106] The origins of the hospital are discussed in Mindula Ramanna, *Health Care in Bombay Presidency, 1896 – 1930* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2012), 4, and 92 – 104. See also, the History of the Hospital as described by the hospital administration today, http://www.tnmcnair.com/home/about.html#.V3aJrMfl7zI.
[107] S.H. Jhabwala, "The Buddha Society of Bombay," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 35/9 (1927), 461 – 66.
[108] Seventy-two members comes from the roster list contained in the Bombay Buddha Society folder in M.R. Jayakar Private Papers, National Archives of India. A copy of the first annual report of the Society was also printed in the *MahaBodhi* Vol. 31/11 (1923), 481 – 86.
[109] The *Buddha-prabha* was officially launched in 1931 under the editorship of K.A. Phadhye. It continued to run up through the 1940s. An earlier journal known as *Buddha message* had been started by the society in 1928 under the editorship of Professor S.V. Phadnis but it appears to have collapsed less than a year later.
[110] P.K. Bhagwat, "Publications of Buddhism in Marathi and Gujarati," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 61/4 (1953), 106.

Nair, by all accounts, was a deeply devout Buddhist. However, there is little doubt that several of the Buddha Society's patrons did not share his enthusiasm for spreading what he called the "Buddhist reformation movement."[111] As is indicated by the society's gradual disintegration after Nair's death in 1934, their support for the society appears to have stemmed from his prominent presence in the community.[112] The Bombay Buddha Society, in other words, was composed of men of influence and affluence. As noted earlier, when Gandhi was released from prison in 1924, he made his *first* public appearance at the Bombay Buddha Society where he presided over the Buddha Jayanti functions at Nair's home.[113] Other national leaders, particularly from the Congress and MahāSabhā followed suit.[114] Thus, it is not surprising that during the Buddha Society's heyday from 1923 to 1935, its petitions for greater Buddhist representation in the Indian legislatures, the transfer of the MahaBodhi Temple to an all-Buddhist committee and return of Buddhist relics to India exercised a formidable bearing on the nationalist elite. Likewise, the regular presence of Burmese, Japanese, Chinese, Bengali and Sinhalese bhikkhus and upāsakas at the society further cemented the idea that Buddhism, as the Congress President Srinivasa Iyengar announced at the society in 1927 "would bring about an Asiatic Federation."[115]

6.6 The All-Indian Buddhist Society: Organizing the Buddhist revival

Although the Bombay Buddha Society's prominent leadership allowed it to exercise a wider influence on the national scene, its primary activities were regional in scope focusing on Gujarati, Marathi and English speaking publics of western India. Conversely, the formation of the All-Indian Buddhist Society (*Akhil Bhāratīya Bauddh Mahāsabhā*) in 1927,

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[111] Anandrao Nair, "A Few Distinctive Features of Bhagawan Buddha's Reformation," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 40/ 4 – 5 (1932), 228 – 33.

[112] Many supporters were, as his close friend K. Natarajan described them, "not quite the genuine article. But Dr. Nair asked no questions. If a man or woman sought his assistance in the name of the Bhagavan [Buddha], it was given as a matter of course." See, K. Natarajan, "Anandrao L. Nair," *Indian Social Reformer* Vol. 44/31 (March 31, 1934), 484 – 85.

[113] "Speech at Buddha Jayanti Meeting, Bombay," May 18, 1924, in *CWMG* Vol. 27, 447 – 49. According to Gandhi, his participation in later Buddhist events was only on account of his respect and esteem for K. Natarajan, the society's Treasurer.

[114] M.R. Jayakar, Srinivasa Iyengar, Madan Mohan Malaviya, the Birlas, and *Bhikkhu* Ottama all gathered at the Society to show their adoration for the Buddhadev.

[115] Minutes from the Buddha Jayanti celebration at the Bombay Buddha Society, Monday 16th May 1927, in Bombay Buddha Society folder in M.R. Jayakar Private Papers, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

whose very name reflects the importance of the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā on its consciousness, was dedicated to unifying Buddhists under a single pan-Indian league. The society was formed by Dr. Beni Madhab Barua and Dharma Aditya Dharmacharya. Beni Madhab (1888 – 1948), as we will call him, so as not to be confused with the other Baruas under discussion, was the Calcutta University Professor from Chittagong who through the offices of the Bengal Buddhist Association traveled to Europe on a state scholarship in 1914 and become the first Indian to attain a D.Litt. from the University of London.[116] An ambitious individual, Beni Madhab also served as the General Secretary of the Bengal Buddhist Association at the same he co-managed the Buddhist India Society. His colleague, Dharmaditya Dharmacharya (1902 – 63), on the other hand, was a Buddhist Newar (*Śākya*) from the Kathmandu Valley. In 1920, his parents sent him to Calcutta to study commerce but after meeting Dharmapala, "an experience so compelling…that it was like meeting Shakyamuni Buddha himself," he changed his birth name to the Venerable Dharmacharya, began wearing yellow robes and dedicated himself fully to studying Pali and 'reforming' the Vajrayāna Buddhism of his homeland.[117] By the end of the 1920s, Dharmacharya was using his multi-lingual skills in Nepali, Bengali, Hindi and English to popularize Buddhist literature and keep the South Asian public informed of recent events in Nepal.[118]

The literary and organizational skills of these two men proved effective when in 1927 they called a conference to unify all Buddhists in India under one "All-India Buddhist League." Buddhist Indians, they argued, were disorganized and had fallen away from another due to "the estranging influences of time and distance."[119] When Buddhist communities from Madras and Nepal, Bengal and Ladakh, the Simla Hill States and United Provinces met at resthouses or vihāras, they observed, "it was like the meeting of strangers in strange lands."[120] These disparate communities they argued, were proof that Buddhism in India is not dead, only their coordinated action and unity is. In the organization's first conference, held

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[116] This is discussed in the previous chapter.
[117] Levine and Gellner, *Rebuilding Buddhism,* 27. The reference is their paraphrase of V.P. Lacoul.
[118] Dharmacharya was also a pioneer of modern Newari language. His journal, *Buddha Dharma,* founded in 1925 was the first magazine or newspaper to ever appear in Nepal Bhasha (Newari). This was later transformed into a joint Buddhist and literary magazine, *Buddha Dharma un Nepal Bhasha.*
[119] "Unity in Buddhism: plea for an all-India Buddhist League: some Indian meeting reports," *Buddhist India,* Vol. 1/3 (1927), 232.
[120] "Unity in Buddhism: plea for an all-India Buddhist League: some Indian meeting reports," *Buddhist India,* Vol. 1/3 (1927), 230.

over three winter days in Calcutta in 1928, the attendance was truly impressive.[121] Although its Calcutta locale ensured a large number of Bengali Hindus, the meeting was noted for bringing together Buddhists of all castes, ethnicities and classes, from Madras, Kolar Gold Fields, Bombay, Srinagar, Chittagong, Lucknow, Darjeeling, Ladakh and the various international monastics and pilgrims living at the ancient spaces in Bihar and the United Provinces. None of the conferences that followed were as grand or diverse as the first congregation, but they continued to draw Buddhists together in ways that all other Buddhist organizations in India had until then failed to do.[122] The topics covered during these meetings were as diverse as the attendees with fairly comprehensive reports on them published intermittently through the association's quarterly journal, *Buddhist India*.[123] There is not space in this dissertation to provide a detailed analysis of the organization's short-lived history—for all purposes, it was effectively defunct by 1938—but rather I wish to focus on one particular and vital aspect of the All-India Buddhist Society's (hereafter, AIBS) activities: their hope and ultimately, failure to "voice the noble feelings and desires of the Buddhist Indian community" before the government.[124]

From 1926 through 1940, the AIBS sent the government no less than thirteen petitions based upon resolutions that had been passed during various annual and general meetings. For instance, the memorandum of 1931 contains a list of eighteen requests to ameliorate grievances experienced by the "Buddhists of India." These included the need for the construction of a Buddhist College or University at an important Buddhist centre (# 8), the transfer of all Buddhist sites under the ASI's management to Buddhists (# 5), special facilities for studying Pali and Buddhism on the same lines as Sanskrit Tols and Islamic madrassas (# 6), the revival of the Buddhist Text Society for the publication of Pali, Tibetan

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[121] For the 1st session report, see *Buddhist India* Vol. 2/4 (1928), 269 – 94.
[122] From 1927 to 1934, there were at least thirteen conferences. Five were "All-India Buddhist Conferences" (1928, 1928, 1931, 1933, 1934) held between Calcutta and Darjeeling. Four were "All-India Literary Conferences" (1929, 1931, 1933, 1934), again held between Darjeeling and Calcutta. Two others were "North Indian or Mahāyāna Conferences" and these were held in Calcutta in 1928 and 1929. Lastly, a Ladies Conference was held in 1931 and a Youth Conference in 1929. The MahaBodhi Society does not appear to have been particularly pleased about the group's formation and the competition it faced from a new English-language journal in India. See, "Review," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 35/8 (1927), 419.
[123] For instance, there were sections on Mahāyāna literature, Buddhist art, women's education, Indian politics, child marriage, caste reform, the importance of patriotism, the conversion of Hindus to Buddhism and ongoing developments in Nepal. For the 2nd and 4th session of the AIBC, see *Buddhist India* Vol. 4/3 (1933), 11 – 20 and 34 – 44, respectively.
[124] "Editorial," *Buddhist India* Vol. 2/1 (1928), 84.

and other Buddhist literature in local vernaculars (# 11), the declaration of Buddha Day (Vesak / Jayanti) as a national holiday (#12), and the formation of a governmental Buddhist Education Committee (#19).[125] Some of the other requests were more regional in nature, such as the mandatory use of Buddhist religious textbooks in municipal schools in Darjeeling district (#16) or memorandums of support on behalf of other Buddhist representative bodies (*sabhā*) in Bangalore and Srinagar.[126] Yet most of the AIBS' requests were linked to Buddhism's lack of place in educational curriculums and the lack of Buddhists in the Central and Provincial legislatures and central and local governments. The AIBS request to 'rectify such wrongs' were in anticipation of separate electorates on communal lines in the new constitution that were being debated within the Minorities Subcommittee of the ongoing Round Table Conferences in London.[127] The response from the government to these requests was less than helpful. After reading the 1931 memorandum from the AIBS, the Joint Secretary to the Government of India, C.M. Trivedi declared it to be,

> a hopelessly confused document displaying [the AIBS'] complete ignorance of the spheres of the Central and Provincial Governments and of local bodies. This, perhaps, is not the unnatural outcome of an invitation to a backward community, such as the Buddhists are in India…there are less than 300,000 [sic] Buddhists in British India of whom more than 260,000 [sic] inhabit the province of Bengal, the bulk of them, being in three or four districts [of that province]. The problem, there, such as it is, is essentially a provincial one.[128]

Trivedi's blunt but honest assessment summed up the colonial government's attitude towards Buddhist Indians until 1947 when the British Indian flag was replaced by the Aśokacakra. In

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[125] "Representation regarding the grievances of the Buddhist community," Government of India, Home Department: Public, File No. 386 (1931), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

[126] Other Buddhist Indian societies included the Kashmiri Raj MahaBodhi Sabha in Srinagar, the Universal Buddha Society in Bangalore and the Bangalore Buddha Society. On the Kashmiri Raj MahaBodhi Sabha, see Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen, "Our Communalised Future: Sustainable Development, Social Identification and Politics of Representation in Ladakh" (PhD diss., Aarhus University, 1996), 116 – 61.

[127] The intention was to provide provisions in the new constitution to assure all communities would have their rights equally safeguarded and that minority groups should be represented even when they are unable to secure their own representation through the polls.

[128] C.M. Trivedi, Joint Secretary to the Government of India, August 10th, 1931, "Representation regarding the grievances of the Buddhist community," Government of India, Home Department: Public, File No. 386 (1931), 40. The figures Trivedi reported were from the 1921 Census. According to the 1931 Census tables, which another government officer included to amend Trivedi's report, there were 342, 161 Buddhists in the provinces (barring British Burma), roughly 315,000 of which were in Bengal. In the discussion that ensued among government officials, the officials recognized that in practice, the current system of filling two-thirds of all vacancies in any government service by open competitive examination and one-third by nomination, would naturally bar any Buddhist from obtaining a high position on the examination list from which nominations are made unless he or she scored extremely high on the examinations (Letter from S.N. Roy to E.C. Mieville," Government of India, Home Department: Public, File No. 386 (1931), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

the same response given to requests from the Bangalore Buddhist Society, Bengal Buddhist Association, Kashmir Maha Raj Bodhi Sabha, and others, the requests were always said to be of no significance since Buddhists represented such a miniscule community. Yet despite the government's rather disalarming conclusion, the AIBS continued to petition the central government for the next decade, even as Trivedi responded to nearly each letter with the same explanation that their grievances were of provincial and local concern and needed to be taken up with those respective departments.[129] Yet other changes were also emerging. In an otherwise insignificant letter dated in the thick archive of AIBS memorandums, a single line from a single letter dated to November 13, 1933 reveals a new alliance beginning to form. Dharmacharya was signing his letters to the Home Department with his New Delhi office listed as the Hindu MahāSabhā branch at Punchkuin Road.[130] As the only political organization in India that was willing to "represent Buddhist interests" in the government legislatures, the MahāSabhā was the last bastion of Buddhist hope.

6.7 Conclusion: Praise and stigma in a Hindu world

By the 1940s, all but the most conservative, sectarian or intellectual of Hindus had largely accepted the notion that Buddha had been one of the greatest persons in Indian history and therefore deserved respect and admiration. Venerating Buddha, however, did not make one a non-Hindu. On the contrary, leading a 'Buddhist way of life,' a phrase often invoked throughout the period to mean the inculcation of righteous behavior, self-reflection,

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[129] This is not to suggest that Dharmacharya simply submitted the same petitions repeatedly. For instance, in later renditions, he argued that the organization represented all Buddhist Indians in India, Africa and Burma, thus augmenting its demographic size. Although just a minority community of India, he argued that in the Indian Empire as a whole, Buddhists were the fourth largest community (due to the Burmese presence). Deploying the Burma card was a sharp manuever since officially, Burma was a province of British India until 1934 and not an independent colony like Ceylon. The argument was that religion trumped any differences between the Burmese and Indians and they should therefore be seen as one individual unit. Yet, as Trivedi pointed out in response in 1934, Burmans receive a separate recruitment for Indian Civil Service jobs, independent of their religious (largely Buddhist) status (Note from C.M. Trivedi, June 14th, 1934, in "Representations form All-India Buddhist Conference," Government of India, Home Department: Public branch, File no. 332 (1933), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

[130] See, letter no. 5450, dated 13th November, 1933. "Representations from All-India Buddhist Conference," Government of India, Home Department: Public branch, File no. 332 (1933), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

compassion and reason, was the mark of being a 'cultured Indian.'[131] For many Hindus, particularly those of the MahāSabhā and Ramakrishna Society persuasion, there was no trouble in worshipping Buddha since according to their logic, "all the qualities of Buddhism were absorbed into Hinduism" and Buddha had in fact, "lived and died a Hindu."[132] Reviving Buddhism then was not a threat to the social norm, but rather "another name for our resuscitation of our national culture."[133] Buddhism, the argument went, was both "Aryan" and "Sanātan," and therefore part of Hinduism's modern destiny. As one Hindu – Buddhist campaigner declared, without Buddhism, "India will be like milk without butter or cream."[134] Those Hindus who publicly challenged that view typically came from sectarian or intellectual quarters. When in 1956, the orthodox scholar of Madhva philosophy, Dr. Nagaraja Sharma asked how a modern state composed primarily of Hindus could support Buddha's teaching which "stands at the very antipodes of Hinduism," the Indian Vice-President and Oxford scholar, S. Radhakrishnan, deflected the criticism with his characteristic argument that Buddha was a Hindu and his teachings were derived from the Upaniṣads.[135] Sharma, like many other scholars, saw things differently, recognizing the clear distinctions between early Buddhism and its "Hindu" interlocutors. Yet in the Indian marketplace of ideas, the Radhakrishnan – Sanātan Dharma view of Buddhism remains dominant. Today, many Hindus adore Gautama Buddha, the royal prince turned ascetic, who in their view reformed Hinduism and was the Indian missionary *par excellence*. His teachings, on the other hand, are largely ignored, purposely misconstrued or synthesized on rather fragile foundations.[136]

The modern Hindu assimilation of Buddhism and in particular, Buddha, had a variety of consequences. On the one hand, it effectively appropriated the Buddha and Buddhism for its own ends, just as the higher Brahmanical castes had done more than a millennium before.

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[131] This argument is made explicitly in Radhakrishnan's preface and introduction to his translation of the *Dhammapada.* See, Radhakrishnan, *Dhammapada: with introductory essays, Pali text, English translation & notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950). For an insightful review of his Vedantic interpretation of Buddhism, see Peter Friedlander, "*Dhammapada* Traditions and Translations," *Journal of Religious History* Vol. 33/2 (June 2009), especially 229 – 30.
[132] Swami Jagadiswarnananda, "Bhagavan Buddha," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 49/7 (1941), 298 – 99.
[133] "Buddha Day Celebrations in India," *Buddhist India* Vol. 1/1 (1927), 53.
[134] "Invocation of Buddhist India," *Buddhist India* Vol. 1/1 (1927), 3.
[135] R. Naga Raja Sarma, "Foreword," in Srimad Acharya Swami Neminath Maharaj, *Is the Republic of India Secular?* (Calcutta: D.L. Bardiya, 1956), 4. The main text contains several letters exchanged by Swami Neminath, Radhakrishnan, and Sharma.
[136] See, Joshi, *Discerning the Buddha.*

The intentions may have been similar but the substance of the argumentation was fundamentally different. During the medieval appropriation, the Buddha was one of the delusive avatārs of Viṣṇu, a figure so stigmatized in Indic thought that even centuries after Buddhism's decline he continued to be remembered with disdain. In the twentieth century milieu, Buddha's place in the Vaiṣṇava pantheon was regularly touted as evidence of a pre-modern ecumenicalism without discussing the real content and nature of the Buddhadev incarnation. Occasionally, Hindu swamis acknowledged the elephant in the room, and declared that now was the time to "make amends for the wrong done by their ancestors in expelling Lord Buddha from their country on account of ignorance, jealousy and envy by reinstalling Him in every city, town and village of India."[137] As the *chāyāvādī* poet, Mohanlāl Mahto Viyogī (1889 – 1990) asked rhetorically, "when this Buddhagaya temple was still half buried under the earth [until the nineteenth century], where was the proof of our devotion?"[138]

Other strata of Hindu society felt strongly that there was no reason to 'make amends.' When Gandhi asked the Hindu Congressman, B.G. Kher to oversee JK Birla's donations to Kosambi's Buddhist Bahujan Vihāra in Bombay, Kher penned a letter to Gandhi declaring that he could not be involved in the temple once it was complete: "How am I to work on a Buddhist Vihar committee? *Are they all going to become Buddhists? Where is the need?*"[139] In the early 1930s, when Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap (then Jagdish Narain) began studying Pali, the authorities at the Ārya Samāji Gurukul in Deoghar barred him from having any connection with his Pali teacher, Bhikkhu Seevali.[140] After leaving the Gurukul for Ceylon where he became a bhikkhu, Kashyap returned to India to become headmaster of the new Buddhist high school in Sarnath. His promotion of Buddhism, particularly among Dalits and lower castes, so inflamed the local contingent of Brahmins and Banias that one night, a gang of locals locked him inside his room and lit fire to the straw mat he was sleeping on. The straw bed caught fire immediately and only by miraculously breaking the door open was he

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[137] Swami Jyoti Swarupananda, "The 2500th Jayanti of Lord Buddha," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 64/1 (1956), 28 – 29.
[138] Mohan Lal Mahato 'Viyogi,' "BuddhaGaya and Selfish Interests," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 43/7 (1935), 336. This is an English translation of his Hindi article that originally appeared in *Viśvamitra,* a popular Hindi weekly from Calcutta.
[139] Italics mine. "Letter to B.G. Kher," August 24, 1936, in *CWMG* Vol. 69, 318fn2. I discuss this and Gandhi's reaction in Ober, "Like embers," 139 – 40.
[140] "An interview with Swami Brahmanand," *Homage to Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap: a commemorative volume,* edited by P.N. Ojha (Nalanda: NavaNalanda Mahavihara, 1986), 83.

able to escape.[141] Taking a temporary leave of absence from the school, Kashyap moved to Kuśīnagar but within just a few years, he was back in Benares, having taken a teaching post for Pali language financed by JK Birla at Benares Hindu University. While the support of JK along with Radhakrishnan and Malaviya may have helped protect Kashyap from any further violence, the presence of a Buddhist Indian bhikkhu on the orthodox campus was not always welcome.[142] The repercussions of being outwardly and inwardly Buddhist were, as will be seen in the next chapter, even more severe for lower-castes and Dalits.

Despite the enduring stigma of being a Buddhist in India, the support of elite Hindu organizations and liberal leaders helped ease such animosity. Gandhi explained to B.G. Kher that there was no reason to fear a Buddhist temple in Bombay. It was no different than a temple to Ram or Krishna, just a part of the Hindu revival.[143] The Birla vihāras – dharamśālās at all the major Buddhist sites explain to the travelers passing through that Buddhists are their brothers and sisters, no different than anyone else passing through this world of suffering (*saṃsāra*). Yet naturally, Hindu support was a double-edged sword. By calling Buddhism Hinduism and Buddhists Hindus, Buddhist traditions were denied their intrinsic identity and autonomy. Since modern Hindu ideals (*ādarś*) were said to already be in accord with Buddhist values and ways of life, there was little reason to study Buddhism on its own terms. This made Buddhism something incidental, unnecessary, and trivial, effectively disregarding the ways that Buddhist teachings can structure real human lives.

Yet what is remarkable is the incredible generosity and kindness with which elite Hindus like the Birlas treated Buddhists in India. For the fact is that JK Birla did not just support Buddhist activists that kowtowed to the Hindutva or MahāSabhā cause. This was the case with Rahul Sankrityayan, Jagdish Kashyap, Dharmanand Kosambi and Anand Kausalyayan, all of whom benefited closely from Birla's support in the 1930s at the same time they wrote stinging criticisms of Hindu scriptures, doctrines and the MahāSabhā.[144] The Nipponzon Myohoji monastics in India were not as aggressively anti-Hindu as these figures

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[141] "Bhikṣu Śrī Jagdīś Kāśyap, M.A., kī hatyā karne kā prayant," *Dharmadūt* Vol. 3/8 (1937), frontspiece.
[142] See, "Tape 176: My Eight Main Teachers," by Sangharakshita, available at https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/lecturetexts/176_My_Eight_Main_Teachers.pdf. Sanghrakshita studied under Kashyap at BHU in 1949 – 50.
[143] "Letter to B.G. Kher," August 24, 1936, in *CWMG* Vol. 69, 318 – 19.
[144] See, for instance, Anand Kausalyayan's "Buddh-dharm aur Brāhmāṇ-dharm," *Dharmadūt* Vol. 3/4 (1937), 35 – 36, where he describes Sanātan Dharma as a cheap religion (*sastā dharma*) and the source of our slavery (*hamārī gulāmī*).

but JK was certainly aware of the fact that they wished to 'convert' India to Mahāyāna Buddhism. Yet JK still supported them (and the Birla Temple Japan Trust continues to support eight Nipponzon Myohoji centers in India to this day).[145] Likewise, at the "MahaBodhi Mission" that JK supported along the Malabar Coast in modern-day Kerala, the monks and activists there, led by the Malayali Bhikkhu Dhammaskanda and C. Krishnan, espoused a rhetoric that was clearly at odds with a Hindutva agenda.[146] Whether this should be taken as a sign of Hindu confidence that the Buddhist revival would not play a threat or as simply due to JK's private interests is unclear. Whatever the reasoning, JK was truly magnanimous in his support for Buddhists.

While it would be careless to underestimate the hegemonic and ultimately assimilative role of the MahāSabhā in Buddhist affairs in the post-1940s era, allying with the MahāSabhā also provided brief, short-term gains for Buddhist Indians. For instance, when Ottama founded the Burmese – Bengal Buddhist Association in Barisal (in modern-day Bangladesh) in 1936, the fact that he was simultaneously the President of the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā must have helped ease fears about Buddhist proselytization. After all, he had already declared, just like Gandhi, that Buddha was a 'Hindu of Hindus.' In this sense, it was not just the conservative elements of the MahāSabhā that benefited from the Hinduization of Buddhism, but Buddhist protractors who used the MahāSabhā's national positioning to augment their own efforts in spreading Buddhist teachings.

Lastly, calling Buddhism Hinduism was also a rhetorical strategy that allowed many Hindus to explore Buddhism without being seen as having 'abandoned' one's culture (of which Indian Christians and Muslims were often unjustly accused). For figures like Sheo Narain, who was one of colonial India's most ardent Buddhist propagandists, following Lord Buddha did not mean one had "to shelve their great Indian Heroes."[147] In Narain's view, Buddha's teachings should be studied in the spirit of comparative religion, alongside those of Ram and Krishna, Christ and Mohammad, in order to determine the true spirit of religious brotherhood. "If people imbibe it [Buddhadharma] even in spirit and act accordingly it ought

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[145] Bhikṣu Morita, Head of the Bombay (Worli) Nipponzon Myohoji Mandir, Personal communication, February 27, 2015.
[146] I discuss this in detail in the next chapter.
[147] Sheo Narain, "Revival of Buddhism," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 31/7 (1923), 259.

to make no difference whether they call themselves Buddhistic or not."[148] Similarly, for Anandrao Nair, the object of his Bombay Buddha Society was not to "convert people to Buddhism," for if they did that "they could not be called moral in their purpose. Their object was to study the life of Buddha and translate his preachings [sic] into action."[149] To some, this appeared to be a watered-down version of Buddhism but it is significant that several of the most influential Buddhist advocates in India began their studies in this context and only later became convinced of Buddhism's self-autonomy and independent expression. For those who did dissent from this hegemonic Hindu view, being Buddhist was often enmeshed within a much larger socio-cultural vision of being neither Brahmin nor Hindu. To this world of Dalit and lower-caste Buddhist conversion, we turn in the next chapter.

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[148] Sheo Narain, "Revival of Buddhism," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 31/7 (1923), 260.
[149] "Celebration of Buddha Anniversary," *Indian Social Reformer* Vol. 28, May 21, 1927, 603.

7 Chapter Seven – The mongoose and the snake: Bahujan Buddhists and the menace of caste

This chapter explores the social and political world of "Bahujan Buddhism," from smaller Buddhist conversion movements among low-caste Hindus (*śūdras*) and Dalits in southern and northern India to the large-scale conversions in the 1950s of Mahar Dalits led by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. First, the chapter outlines the wider socio-economic and political transformations that led to the Bahujan (literally, "the masses") encounter with Buddhism. Second, it explores the intellectual and social landscape of the two most pertinent Buddhist conversion movements of the period between the early 1920s and 1940s. Third and lastly, it discusses the relationship of these earlier movements and thinkers with the most well known conversion movement, that of Ambedkar and the Mahars in the 1950s. The chapter argues that despite a much wider body of scholarship that understands Ambedkar's Buddhism as *sui generis,* it was a product of a much older development stemming from the political activities and thought of radical social reformers, Buddhist bhikkhus and intellectuals.

7.1 Dhamma Dīkṣā: B.R. Ambedkar and the mass conversion movement

On October 14, 1956, Dr. "Babasaheb" Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891 – 1956) and his wife, Savita, took refuge in the Three Jewels (*triratna*), promised to observe the Five Precepts (*pañcśīl*) and then in a novel venture, pledged their allegiance to twenty-two additional vows emphasizing moral conduct and a rejection of Hindu beliefs and rites. Alongside Ambedkar sat several Indian and foreign Buddhist monastics, of which the senior most bhikkhu, U Candramani delivered the Three Refuges and Five Precepts.[1] "Conversion" ceremonies like these, barring the twenty-two vows (which were Ambedkar's invention), had been a regular feature of the Buddhist revival in India since at least the early 1900s. What made this event different and far grander than any of those ceremonies prior or since was two additional components. First, the figure taking initiation (*dīkṣā*) was one of India's most well credentialed citizens (he held two PhDs and a law degree), a former Law Minister, the chief

[1] Although Ambedkar had known of Candramani for over a decade, it was only a month before that he asked the revered Arakanese bhikkhu from Kuśīnagar to serve as his dhamma-preceptor. See, "Letter 177," in *Letters of Ambedkar,* edited by Surendra Ajnat (Jalandhar: Bheem Patrika Publications, 1993), 192.

architect of the Indian Constitution, and the undisputed national leader of India's Dalits or "Depressed Classes." That last fact was brought home by the sea of bodies, estimated at up to half a million, gathered in front of Ambedkar, who just moments later followed suit by repeating the Three Refuges, Five Precepts and "Twenty-two Vows." In the following months, these ceremonies were repeated across western and northern India as hundreds of thousands of Dalits, primarily Mahars of Ambedkar's own caste, renounced Hinduism, declared themselves Buddhists and replaced images in their temples with those of Gautama Buddha.[2] By 1961, Ambedkar's dhamma dīkṣā movement was being hailed as the largest mass conversion movement in history with nearly three million of his followers having publicly declared themselves Buddhist.[3]

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism has become one of the most written about events in modern Indian history. There are easily over a hundred articles on the topic, composed by everyone from scholars and researchers to social activists and politicians. Apart from those who have Bodhisattva-ized the political leader, matching his life to that of Gautama Buddha, the standard narrative tracking Ambedkar's journey to Buddhism follows a rather common chronology: he was first introduced to Buddhism at his high school graduation when one of his former teachers gave him a Marathi biography of the Buddha (*Buddhacarītā*).[4] As a Dalit, Ambedkar's graduation was an unusual event and with the support of several progressive Hindu reformers, he then went on to attain scholarships to study in New York and London, where he attained a Ph.D. in Economics (Columbia University, 1926), a D.Sc. in Economics (London School of Economics, 1923) and a Law Degree (London's Gray's Inn, 1923). Then, in the two decades after Ambedkar's famous Nasik statement of 1935, where he declared he "would not die a Hindu," he began studying

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[2] Most of the new Buddhists were Mahars although the movement also briefly gained momentum among urban Jatavs (Chamars) in western UP, particularly in Agra. See Owen M. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a city of India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 129 – 65.
[3] The total number of Buddhists listed in the 1961 Census was 3,250,227 with 2,789.501 of those in Maharashtra. The number of Dalits who actually took *dīkṣā* is undoubtedly much larger, but due to the loss of Scheduled Caste "privileges" that occurred in becoming Buddhist, significant numbers of Dalits did not report their "conversion." See Eleanor Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World: the Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement* (New Delhi: Navayana Books, 2013), 172 – 73 and 207 – 09.
[4] That teacher (and author of the text) was K.A. Keluskar, a prominent social reformer in Maharashtra who remained close friends with Ambedkar until the end of his life. See, Dhanajay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission,* 3rd edition (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 2009 [1971]), 19 – 21.

other religions "as if it were a massive research project."[5] Gradually, as each religion was "eliminated one by one," in the early 1950s, with his health failing and his political career having largely come to an end, he turned to Buddhism, seeing it as the only possibility for a just and egalitarian Indian society.[6]

One of the central questions in studies of Ambedkar's conversion is why a man so committed to secularism and legal jurisdiction would turn to religion at the end of his life. A survey of the most important studies of Ambedkar's conversion reveals four interlocking themes.[7] Ambedkar's conversion stemmed from a desire to 1) combat Brahmanical norms and hegemony with an equally powerful combination of Buddhist symbols and ideas; 2) build a new moral order based on equality, justice and fraternity; 3) protect Dalits from continued oppression by giving them a new personhood and way of life that neither the state nor caste Hindus could strip away and; 4) provide Dalits with a "national" (as opposed to de-nationalizing) identity, rooted in ancient India and yet respected by the world. Other commonly stressed reasons include Buddha's historical rejection of caste, the widespread theory that Dalits were "originally" Buddhist, and the non-existence of a Buddhist community to challenge Ambedkar's interpretation.[8] Other scholars have located his conversion in more political tones, arguing that it was driven by the failure of the state to provide political representation, let alone protect marginalized communities. As Anupama Rao writes: "For a [Dalit] community that was stigmatized and territorially dispersed, self-representation was neither possible from within nor outside of the terrain of formal politics…the Hindu majority dominated both spaces."[9] In other words, the failure of the democratic process in India to free Dalits from oppression and the unwillingness of Hindus to

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[5] Christopher Queen, "Dr. Ambedkar and the Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia,* edited by Christopher Queen and Sallie King (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 51. On the Nasik statement, see Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* 261 – 65.
[6] Queen, "Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation," 53.
[7] The most insightful studies include Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World;* Queen, "Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation"; Anana Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); and Gauri Vishwanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). Ambedkar's critics have labeled his conversion as nothing less than a cunning political strategy and a complete distortion of the Buddha's teachings. Others have attempted to locate Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism as a result of one-off encounters with western Buddhists and their lingering and ultimately highly convoluted influence in India.
[8] Vishwanathan, *Outside the Fold,* chapter seven; Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic,* chapter five.
[9] Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 148.

eradicate caste produced the need to seek an identity that existed outside of political spheres.

All of these remarks—the hermeneutics of Buddhist liberation, the failures of the state to protect Dalits, the anti-Brahmanical thrust of Buddhism, and so on—were undoubtedly major influences on Ambedkar. However, the one common thread (or rather lack there of) in all of these writings is the complete absence of Ambedkar's links with other Indian Buddhist movements of the period. All of these scholars appear to have taken it for granted, as a *fait accompli,* that Buddhism was dead in India and that Ambedkar, as Ananya Vajpeyi puts it, built this "new Buddhism from scratch."[10] Although Ambedkar's *dhamma* was indeed a monumental intervention in the Indian Buddhist marketplace, this was far from something out of the ordinary. To fully grasp the significance of Ambedkar's Buddhism, one needs to not only consider the reinventions of Buddhism that had been ongoing in South Asia since the mid-nineteenth century but also those conversion-based Buddhist movements in India that had preceded Ambedkar's own conversion.

7.2 Buddhism among the Bahujan and the Bahujan in Buddhism

Before proceeding, it is necessary to discuss some terminology surrounding caste and caste politics. The term "Bahujan," which literally means a mass or majority of people, has acquired a strong political connotation in India today due to the rise of a prominent political party by the same name.[11] However, the phrase also had a strong Buddhist flavor during the middle decades of the twentieth century, when Buddhist scholars popularized the Pali expression, "bahujan hitāya, bahujan sukhāya," or "the good of many, the happiness of many."[12] From that expression branched out various uses of the term "bahujan" to refer to the majority of the population, but more particularly the downtrodden.[13] During that time and afterwards, "bahujan" become both a popular slogan in mobilizing low-caste (*śūdra*) and outcaste ("untouchable") communities under one platform (as in *Dalit-Bahujan*), as well as a

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[10] Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic,* 231.
[11] The Bahujan Samāj Party or BSP was founded in 1984 by the Dalit politician Kanshi Ram. Despite the BSP's failure to emerge as a national powerhouse, it remains (at the time of writing) one of the most important political parties in Uttar Pradesh (India's most populous state). The party's use of the term Bahujan generally refers to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Castes (OBC) and other minority groups.
[12] The passage comes from the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya Pitaka*.
[13] A typical example of its use by Buddhist scholars at the time was in Dharmanand Kosambi's *Bahujan Vihāra* in Bombay, inaugurated in 1937.

point of resistance for Dalit activists who felt that the singular category of Bahujan obscures the distinctive struggles of Dalit communities.[14] While recognizing the contested nature of the expression, I use the term as a sociological catch-all, as it was used by scholars of Buddhism at the time, to refer to the large bulk of the Indian populace, with a particular emphasis on those communities who fell under two ever-shifting categories.[15]

The first category refers to that group of people once widely described as "untouchables," but more commonly known today as Dalits. Dalits, who in contemporary political sociology, are often understood as a discrete historical agent, were variously described in governmental parlance as the "Scheduled Castes," "Depressed Classes," and "Pariahs."[16] All of these terms were in the period under study used interchangeably, although each one, along with the three other common vernacular expressions, "*ati-śūdra,*" "*achūt*" and "*Harijan*" evoke mixed feelings from various audiences.[17] Nuanced differences aside, the terms all pointed in that historical moment to the community that fell outside of the *caturvarṇa,* or system of four major castes. Dalits were the *avarṇa* groups (literally, "without caste"), who in the Brahmanical view were essentially sub-human and whose touch, visible presence and in some cases, even shadow was considered polluting by caste (*savarṇa*) Hindus. What had led these groups to become seen as polluted remains contested, but in the colonial context, their low status was often linked to 'ritually impure' occupations associated with Dalit livelihoods, such as scavenging, rubbish removal, street cleaning and leatherwork.

The second group was known under various governmental terminology but in the post 1930s period, most commonly as the Hindu "Backward Classes." Like the Depressed

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[14] Ramnarayan Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 16 – 17.

[15] My use of the term to denote both categories does not mean there was necessarily any sense of shared identity and unity between or among these various Bahujan populaces, although attempts to mobilize and organize these communities were frequently made, including by the Buddhist activists examined in this chapter. Rather, the Bahujan populace was composed of various groups, marked by numerous differences, including but not limited to caste, language, ethnicity and religion.

[16] The term Scheduled Caste encompasses various "Untouchable" groups and was first used in the early 1900s. Other common administrative categories include the "Depressed Classes." The term Scheduled Castes became more popular in the 1940s through the rise of Ambedkar's Scheduled Caste Federation and after the Scheduled Caste Order of 1950, which was meant to reserve government jobs and benefits for this group.

[17] Gandhi dubbed untouchables as "Harijans" or children of God, a term that many find patronizing. Dalit, a term popularized by Ambedkar's followers and which literally means "oppressed or ground down," is the name currently used by most former Untouchables. For a useful overview of these terms, see Ramnarayan Rawat, "Genealogies of the Dalit political: the transformation of *achhut* from 'Untouched' to 'Untouchable' in early twentieth-century north India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. 52/3 (2015): 335 – 55.

Classes, this category was composed of hundreds (if not thousands) of various sub-castes (*jāti*) linked to specified hereditary occupations (such as laborers and service providers). In the four-fold caste theory, the Backward Classes were śūdras (literally, "servants") and although they were "touchable" (*chūt*) and possessing of caste (*savarṇa*), they were not "twice-born" (*dvija*) and therefore barred from the central ritual activities and religious affairs of the three upper castes. While the precise origins of caste remains nebulous, its basic organizing principles are not.[18] Caste theory functions according to a vertical, sliding scale of privileges and obligations, of purity and pollution. Castes (*jāti*) are socially exogamous and the top of the caste hierarchy is pure and has numerous privileges over the rest of the caste society. The bottom, on the other hand, has no shortage of obligations yet lacks privileges (except "to serve" the higher castes). From the perspective of figures like Ambedkar, the whole system functions as an "ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt."[19]

It is important to recognize that there are wide variations within each of these broad categories and they have varied widely depending on time and geographical region. For instance, among Dalits alone, there are various sub-hierarchies of "untouchables," "unseeables," "unapproachables," and so on. More over, there have been fiercely fought battles over the classifications of the various subcastes (*jāti*) within each of the *varṇas* and in many regions of India, the four-fold *varṇa* matrix holds less weight or is observed in significantly altered fashion. Yet in spite of these numerous disputes and variations, these two general broad categories of Śūdra and Dalit, Backward Class and Depressed Class, held then, as they do today, a profound ideological bearing. As the sociologist Gail Omvedt explains, from a caste perspective, "India represented on the whole a 'three-strata' society: the 'twice-born,' comprising the birth-defined elite as contrasted with the [Bahujan] 'masses': but within the 'masses' another significant category divided…the 'clean' Shudras…from Dalits (the 'unclean')".[20]

The penetration of Buddhist ideas and symbols among the Bahujan "masses" was not

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[18] There is a vast body of literature on caste (see Rao, *The Politics of Caste,* for a comprehensive review) but perhaps its most poignant and systematic assessment occurs in Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), of which see the annotated and critical edition (New Delhi: Navayana, 2014).
[19] Quoted in Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* 150.
[20] Omvedt, *Buddhism in India,* 220.

uniform and barring Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, it did not penetrate deeply enough to spur on a social movement anywhere until the early 1940s. Moreover, in those areas where Bahujan leaders actively engaged Buddhism, as practice or theory, it was almost always limited to the extreme minority who were fortunate enough to receive a "modern" education in the new urban setting.[21] For instance, the earliest evidence of subaltern engagement with the new Buddhist realm stems from the prominent social reformer-educator, Jyotirao Phule (1827 – 90), a Mālī (gardener caste), who was exposed to modern epistemologies via an education provided by Scottish missionaries. Phule, who was also friends with Ambedkar's father, founded his own "Society of Truth Seekers" (*Satyashodak Samāj*), promoting education for Dalits and śūdras (whom he wished to unify) and challenging theories of Brahmanical superiority by writing his own alternative histories of India.[22] Although Phule penned a scathing critique of British governance in 1882, he, like many other Bahujan leaders saw European attacks on Brahmanism as "welcome fuel for their own battles."[23] It is not surprising then, that when Orientalists and Christian missionaries alike began publishing materials contrasting the 'high-mindedness' and 'glories' of Buddhism with the 'superstition' and 'demagoguery' of Hinduism, figures like Phule took to the new Buddhist message.[24] As early as the 1860s, he published a Marathi translation of Aśvaghoṣa's *Vajrasūci,* the scathing Buddhist criticism of caste republished in the 1830s that

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[21] There is not enough space here to outline the sociology of modern Bahujan Buddhist communities but the general outlines provided by Nandini Gooptu in north India, Gnana Aloysius in Tamil Nadu, Eleanor Zelliot in Maharashtra and Cyriac Pullapilly in Kerala provide the basic gist. See, respectively, Nandini Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in early twentieth-century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)*;* Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity;* Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit;* Cyriac Pullapilly, "The Izhavas of Kerala and their Historic Struggle for Acceptance in the Hindu Society," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol. 11/1 (1976), 24 – 46.
[22] O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, 111 – 12.
[23] Omvedt, *Buddhism in India,* 224.
[24] Christian missionaries and evangelical sympathizers working in India saw Indian Buddhism as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, as evidence that India was *capable* of change, and that their own message of social uplift and religious reform was not for nothing. Since at least the 1840s, missionaries in Bengal and later, Kerala, distributed Bengali and Malayalam translations of Buddhist scriptures attacking caste. For instance, in 1843, Rev. W. Morton of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, published a Bengali-English translation of the *Vajrasūcī* (see, James Long, *Handbook of Bengal Missions* (London: John Farquhar Shaw, 1848, 276 – 78). Meanwhile, the German missionary and linguist, Hermann Gundert, began translating his own Malayalam edition of the *Vajrasūcī* from his base in Thalassery, Kerala. By 1868, it had undergone its third edition from Mangalore (C.f., Skariay Sakkariya and Albert Frech (eds.), *Dr. Hermann Gundert and Malayalam Language* (Kottayam: Centre for Kerala Studies, 1993, 105). In 1850, the Jaffna Religious Tract Society (in Ceylon) produced a Tamil version of the *Vajrasūcī*, based on Morton's English translation, but I have not been able to track whether it was distributed in Tamil-speaking parts of south India as well.

left many caste Hindus up in arms.[25] Phule, however, was not the translator of this hallmark Buddhist critique. That task was left for his friend, Tukaram Tatya Padaval (1838 – 98), a Bhandari who served in the Railways and read English and Marathi well.[26] With the *Vajrasūcī* in hand, Phule and Tukaram used the cutting logic of the first century CE Buddhist scholar as part of their lifelong "protest against priestly domination and the iron bonds of caste."[27]

Despite this early intervention, Phule's grasp of Buddhism was rudimentary. In his provocative Marathi-language work, *Shetkaryaca Asud* or *The Whipcord of the Cultivators* (1882), he contended that the ancient teaching was started by "four disinterested holy wise men."[28] Yet he knew enough to exploit its anti-Brahmanical symbolism, linking it to a campaign "to free the ignorant shudra farmers from the noose of the Aryabhats [Aryan Brahmins]."[29] Phule said little more about Buddhists but it should be remembered how closely this idea resembled that found in the influential Hindi – Urdu schoolbook, *Itihās Timiranāśak* or "History as the Dispeller of Darkness" (1874) discussed in chapter three. Raja Śivaprasād, the author of the text, had framed early Buddhism as a popular protest movement against Brahmins. He described Buddha's campaign as similar to Abraham Lincoln's struggle "for the emancipation of slaves" (*gulāmī se nikālne*) in the American Civil War (1861 – 65) and contended that with Buddhism's rise, "the Brahmins grew pale as morning stars while Śūdras…bloomed like lotus flowers before the rising sun."[30]

Phule was an early and rare example of a lower-caste leader who attempted to engage with the new Buddhist rhetoric being spread across the land. However, as explored in chapter five, by the turn of the century, a powerful undercurrent of Buddhist egalitarianism and anti-Brahminism was under way in south India. When the members of the soon-to-be Śākya

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[25] See chapter two of this dissertation for a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the first nineteenth-century publication of the text.
[26] The text was included as a part of Tukaram's, *Jātibhed Viveksar* [*A Critique of Caste Divisions*] (1865). For a summary of this text, see O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology,* 42 – 45. Tukaram, it should be noted, later became an important leader of the Bombay Theosophical Society in the 1880s and 90s.
[27] Dhananajay Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley: Father of the Indian Social Revolution* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 2002 [1964]), 93 – 94.
[28] Omvedt, *Buddhism in India,* 233.
[29] Jyotirao Phule, *Shetkaryaca Asud* [The Whipcord of the Cultivators, 1882], quoted in Omvedt, *Buddhism in India,* 233.
[30] *Vaidik brāhmāṇ savere ke sitāre ban gaye śūdr…sūrya ke sāmane kamal kī tarah khile.* Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 49 – 50.

Buddhist Society of Madras (est. 1898) joined Henry Olcott in Ceylon to return to their "ancestral faith" and "free" themselves of caste by becoming Buddhists, two important arguments were planted. First, the Śākya Buddhist Society leaders argued that the "original inhabitants" (that is, pre-Aryans) of India were (Dravidian) Buddhists and that when the Aryans "invaded," the Buddhists were punished as "outcastes" (Dalits). Second, they argued that Buddhism's progressive outlook and egalitarian ethos could solve the 'Pariah problem.' As the Śākya Society's founder Iyothee Thass explained in a letter to Olcott, by returning "to our old Buddhist Faith …we hope to restore our self-respect…and untrammelled personal liberty of action, which are denied us in the Hindu social system of caste."[31] These two notions, of an ancestral Dalit Buddhist lineage and of Buddhist equality and freedom, not only spread far beyond Thass' Śākya Buddhist Society but also became the intellectual and political cornerstone of later conversion-based Buddhist movements.

7.3 Soldiers of the sāsana: Missionary monks and downward social reformers

In addition to the emergence of a small, educated minority among the Bahujan that worked against tremendous odds to spread Buddhism among their peers, two other transformations in the social landscape must also be taken into consideration when discussing their encounter with Buddhism. The first relates to the continued development of the ancient Buddhist spaces in north India, at sites like Kuśīnagar and Śrāvastī, but most importantly at Sarnath. From the 1930s onwards, Sarnath was the *de facto* center of India's international Buddhist activist scene. The activist milieu at Sarnath was led by Sinhalese and Indian monastics and laity associated with the MahaBodhi Society, International Buddhist College and Missionary Training Institute. In addition to several Indian-born Buddhist bhikkhus and upāsakas from across western UP and Bihar who regularly visited Sarnath, the foreign Buddhist activists came primarily from Ceylon. Some, like Bhikkhu Sangharatana (1912 – 84) of Sarnath and Śrāvastī, moved to India not long after taking their preliminary monastic vows and studied at Indian schools. They were, in other words, well-equipped linguistically and culturally to adapt the Buddha's message to a local Indian audience. Most, however, were products of Dharmapala's last attempt to bring dozens of Buddhist missionaries to

[31] *MahaBodhi* Vol. 7/3 (1898 – 99), 23 – 24. For further discussion of this, see chapter five.

India. The first significant contingent came in the winter of 1929 when eight "soldiers of the Sāsana," as Dharmapala called them, led by Bhikkhu Dhammaloka of the Lankan Missionary Society (*Dharmadūta Sabhā*), came to India.[32] Initiating a cycle that would be repeated over the following decades, most of these monastics first moved to Shantiniketan, where they enrolled at Tagore's university, studying local languages, history and culture before spreading across the country to Buddhist centers at Sarnath, Bodh Gaya, Śrāvastī, Calicut and beyond.[33]

Not all Buddhist monastics traveling and working in India conceived of themselves as soldiers there to convert the *pāṣaṇḍas* or impious. Many were like the Chinese Theravādin bhikkhu Suriya or "Chīnī Baba" (1886 – 1971) who built a hut inside a Banyan tree at the Ramabhara stupa outside Kuśīnagar, dwelling in meditation and gathering a cult following for his saintly behavior.[34] Others, like the Tibetan savant Gendun Chopel (1903 – 51), combined their Buddhist scholarship with a curiosity for travel and worldly delights, imparting their socio-political messages not to audiences in India but back home.[35] Moreover, as the story of Bhikkhu Ottama, the Burmese anti-colonial agitator and President of the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā in 1935 indicates, even among those like Ottama who saw the saffron robe as the missionary's vestment were far from being non-Brahmin activists.

The fact that many of these monastics were affiliated with the MahaBodhi Society, which as chapter six argued was closely linked to the Hindu MahāSabhā, warrants further discussion. At its basic level, it is obvious that the Sarnath MahaBodhi branch's more rigid Buddhism was regularly at odds with the general ambience of the MahaBodhi headquarters in Calcutta where Bengali upper-caste Hindus dominated the society. For instance, after Ambedkar's Nasik statement in which he explained to ten thousand leaders of the Depressed Classes that the only solution to their problem was to "change your religion," the Sarnath branch telegraphed Ambedkar promising their support if he were to become a Buddhist.[36] The Calcutta leadership, which also controlled the English-language *MahaBodhi* journal, was less enthusiastic, explaining that they disagreed with "his intended apostasy, but if, however,

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[32] "Eight Samaneras Leave for India," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 37/12 (1929), 578 – 83.
[33] See Ray, *Return of the Buddha,* 228 - 34, on the nature of Buddhist studies there in the 1920s and 30s.
[34] Ācārya Jugal Kiśor Bauddh, *Kusīnārā* (Naī Dillī: Samyak Prakāśan, 2008), 191.
[35] For Chopel's insightful memoir of Indian life, see Gendun Chopel, *Grains of Gold: Tales of a Cosmopolitan Traveler,* translated by Thupten Jinpa and Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
[36] *Times of India,* October 18, 1935, quoted in Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World,* 159.

he is determined to leave Hinduism, Buddhism has all the requisites which he looks for in his religion."[37]

The juxtaposition between these two MahaBodhi Society trends is further highlighted by a special "Dalit Conference" (*Harijan Sammelan*) attended by roughly five hundred people held on the third and last day of the Mulagandhakuti Vihāra celebrations in Sarnath on November 12, 1935. The event came at a moment when the Hindu right, from Gandhi and Birla to Moonje and Malaviya, were in a frantic mode to tamper the threat of Dalit conversion, with Ambedkar's recent speech. Standing before the crowd, Bhikkhu Bodhanand, a major leader in the anti-Congress, non-Brahmin Adi-Hindu movement of western UP and the author of a popular Hindi text denouncing Hindu culture, explained that now was the time for India's revival (*punarutthān*) and that if freedom (*āzādī*) was to be attained, Hindus could not represent the Dalits, only Dalits could represent themselves (*svādhīnatā*).[38] Following Bodhanand, the Punjabi bhikkhu Anand Kausalyayan explained that Buddhism offered Dalits complete equality (*samānta*) and that "if they wanted to abandon Hinduism in which caste is an integral part, they are welcome to embrace Buddhism."[39] After the speeches, J.K. Birla and Baba Raghava Das, the Congress leader and Brahmin head of a Hindu *ashram* in Deoria handed out clothes, sweets and fruits to Dalit children. The juxtaposition between Birla and Raghava Das, on the one hand, and the speeches of the bhikkhus, on the other, is striking. The former group represented a Hindu Congress platform that opposed conversion and the self-representation of Dalits while the latter group was fiercely anti-Hindu and anti-Congress.[40] These were, in other words, strange bedfellows.

This kind of opposing trend was not unusual and by the 1940s, the Hindu - Buddhist tension within the Calcutta branch of the MahaBodhi Society was palpable. As Bhikkhu Sangharakshita's account suggests, finding a suitable compromise between these two parties

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[37] "Dr. Ambedkar to abandon Hinduism?" *MahaBodhi* Vol. 43/11 (1935), 557 – 58.
[38] "Sārnāth meim bauddh melā," *Dharmadūt* Vol. 1/8 (1935 – 36), 71. I discuss Bodhanand's works below. In another demonstration of the *Mahabodhi*'s censorship of touchy subjects, Bodhanand's speech was not mentioned in the *Mahabodhi* report on the event.
[39] "Notes and News," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 43/12 (1935), 604.
[40] Rahul Sankrityayan's presence in the crowd must not have eased any tensions: still then a Buddhist *bhikkhu,* he was not only one of the most important Hindi translators of Buddhist scriptures at the time, but had had recently translated the Communist Manifesto into Hindi and published a popular pamphlet advocating socialist governance.

was a constant balancing act for Devapriya Valisinha, the Sinhalese General Secretary in Calcutta.[41] How was Valisinha to explain to his caste Hindu Bengali patrons why MahaBodhi monks in Sarnath, from the British *anagarika,* Priyardarshi Sugatananda (Francis Story) to the "Ambedkar of Burma," U Oliyar were traveling the country urging Dalits and śūdras to "return to their own ancestral religion" and enter "the democratic fold of Buddhism"?[42]

The intellectual habitus of these "soldiers of the Sāsana" is most clearly seen through the Sarnath monthly, *Dharmadūt,* or "The Buddhist Messenger." This Hindi-language journal, the first of its kind to focus solely on Buddhism, was published by the Sarnath branch of the MahaBodhi Society beginning in 1935.[43] Like its English-language counterpart, the *MahaBodhi, Dharmadūt* published scholarship led by the most eminent scholars of the day, including Dr. Har Dayal, Rahul Sankrityayan, Vidhushekar Shastri, Jagdish Kashyap, P.C. Bagchi, and Acharya Narendra Dev.[44] Despite its Buddhological emphasis, the journal was a curios medley of voices, ranging from prominent leftists in the Progressive Writer's Association and Dalit activists (like Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu) to Hindu pandits and mainstream Indian Buddhologists with advanced degrees from western universities. While the journal's core emphasis was on clarifying doctrinal positions, publishing Hindi translations of Buddhist scriptures, and reporting Buddhist news, it also had a substantial focus on social and political issues. Vicious denunciations of Brahmanical scriptures were the norm, attacks on Gandhi's political and religious views were not unusual and the adoption of Buddhism was (not surprisingly) regularly advocated as the solution to India's woes.[45] Sometimes these arguments were explicit, being the subject of the article

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[41] This is variously reported throughout both of Bhikkhu Sangharakshita's memoirs of working in the Mahbodhi Society as an editor. See, *In the Sign of the Golden Wheel: Indian Memoirs of an English Buddhist* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 1996) and *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga: an English Buddhist in the eastern Himalayas* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 1991).

[42] "Buddhism the only hope for the Depessed Classes of India," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 59/9 (1951), 336 – 37.

[43] The journal ceased publication in July 1940 and restarted again in 1941. In the late 1950s, the journal also included a Marathi-language section, clearly aimed at its new Mahar audience with roughly four to five articles each month. It is still published today but only on an annual basis and in a bi-lingual Hindi – English format. Its early editors were mostly monastics, including Sangharatana (1912 – 84, b. Ceylon), Dharmarakshita (1923 – 77, b. India), Dharmajyoti (dates unknown), Anand Kausalyayan (1905 – 88, b. India), Sāsanasiri (1899 – 1966, b. Ceylon), and Dhammaratana (1917 – 85, b. Ceylon). Brief biographical entries on several of these monastics is found in Ahir, *Pioneers of Buddhist Revival* and Lāl, *Buddha śāsana ke ratna.*

[44] Other contributors also included prominent Hindi literateurs like Sohanlal Dwivedi and Hazari Prasad Dwivedi.

[45] See, for instance, Bhikṣu Ānand Kausalyāyan, "Āhiṁsā aur Īśvar," *Dharmadūt,* Vol. 4/5, frontspiece, in which he attempts to refute Gandhi's links between belief in God and non-violence.

itself, but even in those essays more explicitly concerned with ostensibly "religious" matters, the ethos was obvious. For instance, in "Letters of a Monk" (*Bhikṣu ke patra*), an eighteen-part series that ran from 1935 to 1938, readers entered the intimate world of a conversation that took place between Anand Kausalayayan (the author and "the monk") and one of his disciples ("Yogendra"), a recent Hindu convert to Buddhism. Through topics like the need for rationalism and sources of authentic knowledge, Kausalyayan clarifies Yogendra's doubts about Buddhism and provides his own confessional account of why any "rational, intelligent man" could see the immutable flaws and problems in Hinduism and other religions.[46]

While the soldiers of the sāsana unleashed their own intellectual weapons in the war against caste and Brahmanism, groups like the Hindu MahāSabhā and Ārya Samāj were intent on purging Hinduism of untouchability. The problem for them, from the viewpoint of Buddhist activists (and others) was that they were unwilling to give up ideas about caste as important signifiers of difference. Ārya Samāji activists, for instance, pledged that there was such a thing as caste, but that it was not based on birth but by worth (*guṇa*) and actions (*karma*). Prominent Hindu reformers saw similarities in this notion with Buddhist critiques of caste and it was in this stead that they looked to Buddha as an important ally in their mission. From this platform, caste Hindus like Syama Prasad Mookerjee (1901 – 53), who during his long tenure as President of the MahaBodhi Society also led the Hindu MahāSabhā, propagated Buddhism as a 'higher form of Hinduism.' Gandhi's support for the Bombay Bahujan Vihāra or "Buddhist Temple for the Masses," hinged on a similar logic. For Gandhi, temples honoring Buddha were integral to the 'reform' and 'revival' of Hinduism.[47] In places like Kerala, Maharashtra and UP, several leading Buddhist reformers were of this "Hindu – Buddhist" persuasion.

One of the most well known Hindu – Buddhist reformers and a colleague of Ambedkar's was the barefoot upāsaka and Brahmin, A.R. Kulkarni. After founding the Buddha Society in Nagpur in 1944, Kulkarni joined a mastery of the pen with an itinerant's

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[46] These letters were republished in book form as Ānand Kausalyāyan, *Bhikṣu ke patra* (Prayāg: Nāgarī Pres, 1940). It is unclear how widely known *Dharmadūt* was among a wider Bahujan populace in north India. Distribution and funding were both reoccurring problems for the journal but the network of monastic centers across western UP and Bihar may have helped its circulation in these regions. The space it gave to both Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu and Bhikkhu Bodhanand, two of the most well-known writers in the Adi-Hindu movement at the time, may have not only helped augment its profile among Bahujan communities but created a sense that the new Buddhist presence was an "ally" in a common cause.
[47] Ober, "Like embers," 140.

lifestyle, giving up his legal practice and "in the spirit of the early missionary disciples," preaching Buddhism at Hindu pilgrimage sites across north and central India.[48] To become a Buddhist, he argued, "it was only necessary to accept the teaching of Lord Buddha in the heart, to abide by the Five Precepts and to honour the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha."[49] Significantly, Kulkarni's Buddha Society was an important base for Dalit activists and intellectuals growing up in Nagpur in the 1940s. Although some of its patrons found Kulkarni's "Hindu Buddhist" identity paradoxical, the Brahmin Buddhist's lucid explanations of Buddhist doctrine in Hindi, Marathi and English alongside arguments of why "Buddhism is the only hope for the Depressed Classes of India" did a tremendous amount to popularize Buddhism among the masses.[50]

These were all important features in the Bahujan encounter with Buddhism but in order to understand the internal dynamics of this encounter and the importance of local agency in them, we now turn to two of the most prominent Buddhist conversion movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Both occurred independent of one another in different locales and had somewhat different outcomes but are notable for their similarity to the Tamil Buddhist movement of the early 1900s and Ambedkar's movement of the 1950s.

7.4 South Indian currents: Seeking equality in the Malabar Mission

The Tamil Śākya Buddhist Society (est. 1899) or South Indian Buddhist Association never completely collapsed. The organization was well known enough that Ambedkar met with Śākya leaders in Madras in 1944 as did the Panchen Lama and Dalai Lama in 1956.[51] Yet when a sympathetic Bombay journalist visited several of the branches in 1936, he lamented its disorganized leadership and failure to fill in the shoes of either Iyothee Thass (d. 1914) or Lakshmi Narasu (d. 1934).[52] According to Aloysius, the organization's decline was

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[48] "Upasaka Missionary of Central Provinces," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 56/12 (1949), 415.
[49] "Upasaka Missionary of Central Provinces," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 56/12 (1949), 414 – 15.
[50] "Samācār," *Dharmadūt* Vol. 13/1 – 2 (1947 – 48), 15 – 17.
[51] For Ambedkar's visit, see Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* 367. On the Tibetan visit, see "Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama India Tour," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 65/1 (1957), 27 – 30.
[52] "Salvation of the Tamil 'Untouchables' in Southern India through Buddhism" (summary of an account published in the *Bombay Chronicle,* August 23rd, 1936), in *Buddhaprabha,* Vol. 4/4 (1936), 708 – 10.

largely due to the rising tide of the Dravidian Self-Respect movement of the 1930s.[53] While the Self-Respect Movement may have diminished Śākya Buddhism's ideological coherence, the Self-Respect leader and politician E.V. Ramaswami or "Periyar" (1879 – 1973) absorbed much of its message. Periyar, who was closely associated with the Kolar Gold Fields branch in the 1920s and 1930s, published articles in Buddhist journals, delivered speeches at Buddhist conventions in India and abroad, including the World Fellowship of Buddhists in 1954 and like most other Dalit Buddhist leaders, transformed celebrations of Buddhism into anti-Brahmin events.[54]

Apart from Tamil Nadu, the most organized social movement towards Buddhism occurred in the 1920s – 30s when a small but influential group of Izhavas (Thiyas), or śūdras living along the Malabar coast began to propagate the saddharma. Despite their low position in the Hindu caste hierarchy, a relatively large number of Izhavas from Malabar had emerged as one of the most well-to-do communities in colonial south India.[55] By the early 1900s, this new generation of educated Izhavas had joined with other caste reformers to agitate for the removal of caste discrimination and social inequalities. As the decades moved forward, most Izhavas tended to gather around the ascetic reformer, Swami Narayan Guru (1856 – 1928) and his non-dualist (*advaita*) message of "one caste, one religion, one God."[56] This protest - mantra, which is branded on buildings across Kerala to this day, found its social basis in Narayan's popular organization, the *Sri Narayan Dharma Paripalana Yogam* (SNDP).

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[53] Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity,* 191 – 93.

[54] For instance, during Periyar's celebration of the Buddha Jayanti on May 27, 1953, he led his followers in the smashing of Ganesh statues before the Town Hall in Tiruchirappali. A court case was filed against Periyar and two of his companions for this action, although in the final judgement, the action was not considered an offence to religious sensibilities (Section 295 of Indian Penal Code) because they only broke images they themselves made or bought and not those worshipped in a temple. See, Elosiyas [= Aloysius], *Periyār aur Bauddh dharm*.

[55] Pullapilly, "The Izhavas of Kerala," 34. Unlike Izhavas in the neighboring states of Travancore and Cochin who continued to suffer discriminatory treatment under the Hindu princely authorities, the Izhavas of Malabar were provided new means of occupational mobility after the British annexed the region in 1800. Although their low-caste status made them subject to numerous unjust humiliations from the Namboodiri priestly caste, they were also not "untouchable" or "unapproachable" and therefore able to function as important intermediaries between the new British rulers and the conservative priestly class. This social flexibility became an essential feature of the improvement of Thiyas communities in the nineteenth century, as they became increasingly central to the new governing administration. Within only a few generations, "practically all the Indian-born higher officers in the administration of the province until the second quarter of the twentieth-century came from the Thiya community" (34).

[56] Narayan Guru's life and influence has been the subject of many studies. See, for instance, P. Chandramohan, "Popular Culture and Socio-Religious Reform: Narayana Guru and the Ezhavas of Travancore," *Studies in History* Vol. 3/1 (1987): 57 – 74.

By the 1920s, several Izhava leaders affiliated with the SNDP began to see Buddhism as a possible alterative to Narayan's syndicated Hinduism. Some, like Kumaran Asan (1873 – 1924), the poet laureate who translated Arnold's *Light of Asia* into Malayalam and C.V. Kunjuraman, the satirist and social critic who raised a ruckus through his public advocacy of becoming Buddhist, eventually returned to the SNDP.[57] However, the most influential of these new Buddhist sympathizers remained committed to the idea that Buddhist ideals showed the best direction in which social action was to be taken. Although there were many leaders of this new movement, the driving force was C. Krishnan (1867 – 1938), a former advocate in the High Court and editor of a popular Malayalam newspaper, *Mitavadi*. Born to a family of Thiyas (Izhavas) in British-controlled Trichur (Thrissur), Krishnan was able to receive a modern education due to a government program that funded schools for Backward Hindu classes.[58] In 1903, Krishnan began serving as a High Court Vakīl in Calicut but he soon gave up the practice and turned his attention to public activism and journalism, using the funds he made from the Calicut Bank, which he founded in 1908, to finance his activities. Like most Izhavas, Krishnan was an early devotee of Narayan—his home in fact served as the Calicut branch of the SNDP—but he gradually turned to the Buddhist message of social emancipation.

The public conversation about Buddhism gained momentum around 1920 when a Hindu swami wrote a letter to Narayan threatening to convert to Buddhism if Narayan's SNDP did not become free of caste discrimination immediately.[59] Although conversion to other religious traditions, namely Christianity and Islam, had long been part of the conversation, the idea of conversion to Buddhism was not only novel but startling. As the historian Cyriac Pullapilly explains, popular views of Buddhism in Kerala were based on a hodgepodge of negative assumptions and even the word "Buddhist" (*bauddha*) in colloquial parlance was a synonym for "idiot."[60] As the debate about Buddhist conversion escalated, Krishnan's *Mitavadi* became seen as a pro-Buddhist voice in opposition to the *Matrubhoomi,*

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[57] Kumaran Asan (1873 – 1924) translated Arnold's *Light of Asia* as *Buddhacaritam* in 1903, publishing it just over a decade later.
[58] On the educational context of Izhavas, see, Chandramohan, "Popular Culture and Socio-Religious Reform," 67 – 74, especially 73.
[59] Stella Joseph, *Print and Public Sphere in Malabar: A study of early newspapers (1847 – 1930)* (PhD diss., University of Calicut, 2008), 245 – 70.
[60] Pullapilly, "The Izhavas of Kerala," 30.

the other major Malayali newspaper, whose upper-caste ownership leveled serious criticism against calls for conversion.[61] While newspaper columns identified the purported merits and downfalls of conversion, Krishnan and several of his colleagues took steps to organize a large conference on Buddhism. In February of 1925, several dozen delegates from the Malabar Coast along with a contingent of Buddhists from Ceylon converged for two days at Paran Square to discuss the possibility of conversion in what was touted as the "All-Kerala Buddhist Conference."[62] The speeches delivered were primarily concerned with "how thousands of Hindus had really no place in their religion as the *Samskaras* [life-cycle rituals] and other privileges of a Hindu were confined to the first three varnas and not to shudras."[63] Others imagined more provocatively the "social advantages which Buddhism could confer on the ill-treated and oppressed classes of Malabar."[64]

Throughout the Kerala conference, Theosophy was writ large. One of Krishnan's closest colleagues, a Brahmin by the name of Manjeri Ramier [Ram Iyer] (1857 – 1958), who had been a major leader in temple-entry movements in the early decades of the century, was also the head of the local Theosophical branch. Presumably, it is through Ramier that the large contingent of Sinhalese Buddhist monastics attended the event. For instance, on the second day, after the Sinhalese *bhikkhu* Jinavamsa administered pañcśīl to "Brahmins, Nairs, Thiyyas [Izahavas], Christians, men and women," the conference President, former bhikkhu and globetrotting Theosophist Jinarajadasa (1875 – 1953), clarified how Buddha was antagonistic to no religion.[65] He explained how anyone—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, females, males—could take pañcśīl. It was fundamentally about living an ethical, upright life. In this orientation, which would be emphatically rejected by Ambedkar thirty years later, you

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[61] Joseph, *Print and Public Sphere in Malabar,* 245 – 46.
[62] Paran Square in Calicut was also the site of Krishnan's own home, which was a major hub in early twentieth-century Kerala for progressive intellectuals, artists, and political activists. The various organizations housed there, including a women's club, the Empire Printing Press and public library are representative of his diverse public engagements.
[63] "The All Kerala Buddhist Conference, Calicut," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/3 (1925), 143.
[64] "The All Kerala Buddhist Conference, Calicut," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/3 (1925), 144.
[65] "The All Kerala Buddhist Conference, Calicut," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/3 (1925), 144. Jinarajadasa was President of the Theosophical Society from 1946 – 53 and had long been involved in South Asian Buddhist affairs, as one of Dharmapala's many antagonists and as a builder of Buddhist temples himself, including the Buddhist structure at Adyar in 1925.

could be both Buddhist and Hindu, as long as you were moral. For Ambedkar, the problem was that Hinduism was anything but moral.[66]

An important feature of the conference, which resulted in the formation of the Kerala Buddhist Association, was the argument that Thiyas were "originally" Buddhist. Articulated carefully, this meant that becoming Buddhist was not simply a "conversion" but rather a "reversion" to an ancient tradition. Yet there were subtle differences between this claim and those made by the Tamil Śākya Buddhists. For Śākya Buddhists, Buddhism was the ancient Dravidian foil to a pre-Vedic Aryan tradition. In the Kerala Buddhist Association view, the theory of Izhavas being "originally" Buddhist was based on the idea that Izhavas were Buddhist migrants from Ceylon who had come to India in the early centuries of the common era. This theory, which remained entrenched among scholars until the 1960s, received mainstream scholarly approval in 1949 with P.C. Alexander's *Buddhism in Kerala.*[67] As Alexander argued:

> When Buddhism declined in Kerala those who followed that faith, contemptuously called as 'Bauddhas,' became the victims of social degradation. The vast number of Buddhists along with the Ilavas [Izhavas] now constituted a new class of "Bauddhas" whose position was little better than that of the untouchables. When Buddhism completely disappeared from Kerala these 'Bauddhas' were received back into the Hindu fold, but they had to be content with the lower rungs of the social ladder.[68]

Alexander's argument, which bore the stamp of academic approval, had been circulated in various forms for more than two and a half decades prior to this by the leaders of the new Buddhist movement. For instance, as early as 1926, the District Judge, Ayyakutti, who was also Vice President of the Kerala Buddhist Association, distributed pamphlets explaining that Izhavas had originally come from Ceylon as Buddhists and had been "a prosperous

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[66] In Ambedkar's words, "Hinduism is a religion which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has it is not an integral part of it." See, B.R. Ambedkar, "The Buddha and the Future of His Religion," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 58/4 – 5 (1950), 118.

[67] See Pullapilly, "The Izhavas of Kerala," 25 – 26. According to Pullapilly, this idea was current among scholars of the period from as early as 1906 up through the 1960s.

[68] P.C. Alexander, *Buddhism in Kerala* (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1949), 134 – 35. Alexander continues: "The bulk of the converts to Buddhism are from the Nair caste, but after the final disappearance of Buddhism they are grouped along with the Ilavas and thus the number of the Ilava community swelled up. This accounts for the close resemblance between the Nair and the Ilava communities in social customs, religious practices, etc." (134 – 135).

community in Malabar living in peace and plenty prior to their enforced conversion to Hinduism."[69]

Like the Śākya Buddhist Society, the Kerala Buddhist Association worked closely with a variety of monastic institutions and new Buddhist societies from elsewhere in South Asia. The "soldiers of the sāsana" from Sarnath circulated in and out of the Kerala Buddhist branches from the 1930s on but its early network sprung from the MahaBodhi – Theosophical institutes of Ceylon. In 1925, the Lankā Dharmadūta Sabhā or Lanka Buddhist Missionary Society sent the highly respected meditation master and scholar, Bhikkhu Ananda Maitreya (1896 – 1998) to live with Krishnan.[70] By the early 1930s, the Hindu MahāSabhā was also working its way into what was by then self-consciously dubbed as the Malabar Mission of Great Awakening (*Mālabār Mahābodhi Miśan*).[71] JK Birla, as always, picked up the bill, sponsoring the construction of a Buddhist vihāra in 1937, a reading room, dispensary and expansion of the headquarters in 1938 and a Buddhist school in 1941 (named "Vidyodaya Vidyālaya" after the Buddhist college in Colombo).[72] In 1935, Birla, Krishnan and Ramier also sponsored Bhikkhu Maitreya, Bhikkhu Dhammaskanda and another unnamed Sinhalese monastic to tour the Malabar Coast for three months and spread the "Arya Dharma" among the Bahujan populace. As the *MahaBodhi* journal reported quite cryptically, the "all-Aryanizing doctrine of *metta* and compassion alone can make them [*śūdras* and *ati-śūdras*] Aryans, as it has made in the case of so many Buddhist countries."[73]

With Krishnan's death in 1938, the local bhikkhu, Dhammaskanda became the center of the Malabar Mission. Details on Dhammaskanda's life are nebulous but he appears to have been one of the few Izhavas who donned the saffron robe. Around 1925, he left for Ceylon, where he took his ordination and studied Pali and *abhidhamma* before returning to Kerala ten years later. He was an extremely active figure whose fluency in local languages and in Pali

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[69] "Not Hindus but Buddhists: appeal from Cochin," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 34/12 (1926), 606 – 07.
[70] On Ananda Maitreya, see Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeysekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 299 – 313. They describe him as "undoubtedly one of the leading figures of contemporary Buddhism," and as a "model of Buddhist character and learning." Earlier in life, Maitreya had studied and taught at Ananda College (originally founded in 1891 by Olcott's Buddhist Theosophical Society).
[71] "Mālābar meiṃ dharm-pracār," *Dharmadūt* Vol. 1/5 (1935), 55.
[72] "Buddhist work in Malabar," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 49/10 (1941), 392. According to the *MahaBodhi* Vol. 45/8 (1937), 383, the mission is "chiefly financed by Birlaji."
[73] "Congratulations to Malabar Buddhists," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/3 (1925), 165. This could also be read alternatively as making the Izhavas, a 'Dravidian' people, into Aryans.

doctrines must have helped his own effort "to return" the Thiyas to their ancestral faith. Within his first two years back, he established at least four branches across the state and led some six hundred people to "embrace Buddhism."[74] One female "convert" explained during the Buddh Jayanti of 1937 that she became a Buddhist because Hindu, Islamic and Christian religions were "means devised by clever men to suppress and oppress womenfolk" and "it was only Buddhism that gave freedom to women."[75] Beyond rare passages like these, most of those who became Buddhist appear to have upheld the Theosophical and "Ārya Dharmik" position that being Buddhist did not require any rejection of central Hindu rituals. For by 1961, only seventeen people in Calicut district were returned as Buddhist in that year's Census.[76]

It is difficult to say with any precise clarity why the Buddhist movement failed but four reasons are especially transparent. First, after the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936, when state owned temples were opened to all caste groups, including Dalits, the momentum for conversion (to any religion) was undercut across the state.[77] Second, since the early 1920s when the Buddhist conversion question was first raised, Narayan Guru himself had tactfully undermined its very basis. As Pulapilly argues, Narayan's "famous principle [of] 'Whatever be man's religion it is enough that he be good'…de-emphasized the necessity of religious conversion."[78] From the very first All-Kerala Buddhist conference in 1925 when a Narayan *bhakta* explained how "there was no difference between the higher teaching of Hinduism and the higher teaching of Buddhism," to the SNDP's veneration of Buddha during major gatherings, there was a concerted effort to contain any possible fragmentation triggered by the Buddhist movement.[79]

Third, and although not as obvious, was the important effort made by Gandhi to both ridicule conversion and challenge claims of Buddhist equality. Gandhi's views on conversion, especially in light of the conversion of the Dalit masses whose votes he needed

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[74] "Mālābar meiṃ bauddh-dharm kā pracār," *Dharamdūt* Vol. 2/2 (1936), 22. See also, "First Ordination in Malabar," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 46/10 (1938), 461 – 62.
[75] "Malabar," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 45/6 (1937), 278.
[76] *Kerala District Gazetteers: Kozhikode Supplement,* edited by Adoor K.K. Ramachandran Nair (Trivandrum: Government of Kerala Press, 1981), 25.
[77] Pullapilly, "The Izhavas of Kerala," 42.
[78] Pullapilly, "The Izhavas of Kerala," 42.
[79] "The All-Kerala Buddhist Conference, Calicut," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 33/3 (1925), 144; "Malabar," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 45/6 (1937), 277.

for the Congress to succeed, were clear.[80] After Ambedkar threatened conversion in 1935, Gandhi replied, "religion is not like a house or a cloak, which can be changed at will."[81] Yet even prior to this, when the General Secretary of the MahaBodhi Society, Devapriya Valisinha published an essay advocating that Dalits convert *en masse* to Buddhism, Gandhi responded, "it is my conviction that there is no occasion whatsoever for Hindus to change their faith"[82] Gandhi was well-aware of the Izhava interest in Buddhism, having visited Krishnan's home in 1918, meeting him several times thereafter and making the Temple Entry campaign in Malabar, "the citadel of [Hindu] orthodoxy," a central part of his campaign to reform Hinduism.[83] The timing of these events should not be underestimated. After his five and a half week tour in Malabar in the fall of 1927, Gandhi left for Ceylon. During his three-week trip across the majority Buddhist island, he used the pulpit to condemn, again and again, the adherence to caste by Sri Lanka's Buddhist populace.[84] By pointing to the endemic caste rift among the Sinhalese sangha, Gandhi then invoked his own moral righteousness and argued that he was more Buddhist than his audience.[85] Gandhi's positionality here, of using moral, rather than knowledge-based claims to speak on the behalf of *all religions* was not an unusual strategy. This was one of his most characteristic weapons. However, to miss the timing and strategic element in his criticism of Buddhism is short sighted. He was an astute political leader and understood well the cultural capital that Buddhism carried as well as the significant alternative it possessed for India's Depressed Classes. That was a dangerous combination. As the speeches he delivered during the Ceylon tour and aftewards demonstrate, in his view, there was no reason to convert to Buddhism. For one, not only was Buddha a Hindu (and therefore, the idea of conversion did not really make sense), but two,

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[80] On the relationship between Ambedkar and Gandhi, particularly as it related to the Round Table Conferences and Poona Pact, see Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 208 – 40. See also, D.N., "Gandhi, Ambedkar and Separate Electorates Issue," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 26/21 (May 25, 1991): 1328 – 30.
[81] *The Hitavada,* October 16, 1935, in *CWMG* Vol. 68, 65.
[82] See Letter to Devapriya Valisinha, March 18, 1933, *CWMG* Vol. 61*,* 86.
[83] "Zamindars will confer on temple entry," *Bombay Sentinel,* January 21, 1937, 1.
[84] See, in particular the "Speech at Ananda College, Colombo," November 15, 1927 and "Speech at Nalanda Vidyalaya, Colombo," on November 15, 1927, in *CWMG* Vol. 40, 365 – 67. He also used these opportunities to dispute the idea that Buddha was an atheist and to criticize meat-eating and the practice of killing animals for human consumption in Sri Lanka.
[85] This was despite his own admittance that "probably, a fifth-form boy from Nalanda Vidyalaya would plough me in a Buddhist catechism" (Speech presented at the Vidyodaya College, November 15, 1927, in *CWMG* Vol. 40, 370).

why convert to a religion whose reputation was no less tarnished than Hinduism? Gandhi was attempting to demonstrate that he, a Hindu, could be more Buddhist than the best of Buddhists.

While Gandhi's charisma and personal appeal did much to ward off considerations of conversion, the fourth and final element that undercut the Kerala Buddhist movement was the very nature of its support system. As discussed in chapter six, Birla's lofty rhetoric of Ārya Dharma dismissed the notion that Buddhists possessed any independent, autonomous identity, making explicit that Buddhism was just another Aryan sect, albeit a very important one. Furthermore, the Hindu MahāSabhā's involvement in the Kerala movement, channeled through Birla's funds, always sent mixed messages. While many members of the MahāSabhā clearly saw Buddhists as Hindus and therefore part of the "Aryan faith," others continued to be weary of this nāstik path.[86]

7.5 Bhikkhu Bodhanand, "original Indians" and Lucknow's urban poor

While the syndicated "Hindu Buddhism" of the Kerala Buddhist Association was largely alien to the social emancipation project that Ambedkar later envisioned, there was a concurrent Buddhist conversion effort in the United Provinces whose influence on Ambedkar is more easily traceable. That influence stemmed from Bhikkhu Bodhanand (1874 – 1952), the founder of Lucknow's *Bhāratiya Bauddha Samiti* or Indian Buddhist Society (est. 1916) and Risaldar Park Vihāra (est. 1924). Bodhanand was a powerful voice in both the Indian Buddhist ecumene and among the Adi-Hindu religio-political movement that galvanized the Bahujan public in western UP.[87] Yet he also represents something of an anomaly: he was a Brahmin-born Bengali who spent the last four decades of his life living as a Buddhist bhikkhu among the Hindi-speaking urban poor in Lucknow.[88]

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[86] By the mid-1930s however, when the Hindu MahāSabhā's transformation from reformist Hindu organization to radical political party was near complete, its new leadership, led by figures like Savarkar and Bhai Parmananda, saw Buddhism as an acceptable "national" alternative to the "de-nationalizing" religions of Christianity and Islam. See, Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 136 – 37.

[87] On the Adi-Hindu movement, see Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability* and Gooptu, *Politics of the Urban Poor.*

[88] My primary source for the life of Bodhanand is Candrikā Prasād Jigyāsu, *Bhadant Bodhānand Mahāsthavir* (Lakhnaū: Bahujan Kalyāṇ Prakāśan, 1965). After Bodhanand's death in 1952, several short obituaries also

After being orphaned at a young age, Bodhanand or Mukund Prakash Lahiri moved from his childhood home in Chunar district of Uttar Pradesh to live with his aunt (*mausi*) in Benares. As a child, he is said to have had the inclination of a religious wanderer and spent much of his childhood in the company of sādhus and sannyāsis in the holy city. At some point in his youth, he set off for the 'four quarters' of India, studying with Brahmos, Ārya Samājis, Theosophists and Christian missionaries, eventually settling in Sindh and taking the name Nil Bodhanand as a Vaiṣṇava sādhu. In the early 1890s, he was back in Benares when a severe famine broke out. By this time, Bodhanand was feeling completely disenchanted with a caste system that "treats humans no better than a dog," and began working closely with a Christian mission conducting relief work among the famine-stricken populace.[89] On the verge of "taking shelter under the shadow of Jesus Christ," Bodhanand met several Sinhalese bhikkhus on pilgrimage to Sarnath. They explained to him that in the *Vasala Sutta*, Gautama Buddha refutes caste-based views of humanity and that he need not look to Christ as his savior. Thus began Bodhanand's journey into Buddhism.

Moving to Lucknow to manage a Vaiṣṇava temple in Ameenabad Park, Bodhanand continued to follow Hindu tenets while learning what he could of Buddhism. His interests in Buddha's teachings were not always appreciated and after he installed a Buddha image inside the temple complex in 1907, he and several of his followers were expelled from the property. Not far from there, he met Bhikkhu Kripasaran, the founder of the Bengal Buddhist Association, who in that same year established Lucknow's first Buddhist vihāra on La Touche Road (today Gautam Buddha Marg).[90] As a native Bengali speaker, Bodhanand had no problem getting immersed in the robust world of Chittagong and Bengali Buddhist scholarship and seven years later, he traveled to Calcutta to take his higher ordination (*upasampadā*) in a water-ceremony (*udakukkhepsīmā*) orchestrated by Kripasaran and Bhikkhu Gunalankar.[91] Returning to Lucknow, Bodhanand started the Bhāratiya Bauddha

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appeared in the *MahaBodhi,* the most useful of which is Sri Ganga Charana Lal, "Life and Work of Ven. Bodhanand Maha Thera," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 60/8 (1952), 286 – 89.

[89] Sāṅkṛtyāyan, quoted in Jigyāsu, *Bodhānand,* 29.

[90] On Kripasaran and the Bengal Buddhist Association, see chapter four.

[91] Some later accounts and researchers have reported that Dharmapala was also present during this ceremony. However, it very curious that it is not reported in Dharmapala's diaries nor in the *MahaBodhi* journal. Surendran, "Indian Discovery of Buddhism," 231, credits the idea of the ordination ceremony to Dharmapala but I suspect this ceremony has origins in the Rāmaññña Nikāya, which Kripasaran and other BBA bhikkhus were closely connected. See, Bhikkhu Nagasena, *The monastic boundary (sīmā) in Burmese Buddhism:*

Samiti or Indian Buddhist Society (hereafter "Samiti") in 1916 for "propagating the ideals of Buddhist education."[92] According to his student and the renowned Dalit publicist, Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu (b. 1899), the Samiti had nine principal goals:[93]

1. To treat the sufferings of other as one's own and to make efforts for their welfare
2. To remove casteism (*jāti-bhed*) and feelings of hierarchical differences for the sake of awakening ideals of humanity (*mānavatā*) by propagating equality (*samatā*) and cooperation in public life
3. To study various philosophical principles of Buddhism in a coordinated manner
4. To place emphasis on specialties of Buddhism through a comparative study of Buddhism in relation to present-day science and other non-Buddhist religions and philosophical views
5. To publish ancient Pali, Prakrit and Sanskrit texts, modern research works and their translations
6. To organize Indian Buddhist Society, propagating a feeling of brotherhood (*bhāīcāre*) amongst it and protecting their general welfare and cultural rights (*hitoṁ evaṁ sāṃskrtik ādhikāroṁ kī raḳṣā karnā*)
7. To prepare capable teams of Buddhist teachers and missionaries
8. To provide assistance to Buddhist schools and cultural centers
9. To cooperate with other Buddhist institutions having identical aims and activities.[94]

According to Rahul Sankrityayan, who began visiting the Samiti in 1918, Bodhanand's Buddhist proselytizing and penchant for calling a spade a spade triggered severe backlashes and he was forced to change the society's place of residence often. For as Sankrityayan describes him, Bodhanand was a deeply sensitive man who regularly broke into tears at the suffering he witnessed around him, but,

> whenever something good was said about the caste system (*varṇa-vyavsthā*) or caste-relations (*jāt-pāt*)…it appeared as if a sleeping lion had been awakened. From then onwards, quoting *ślokas* and quadrant verses (*caupāi*), from Manu to Tulsidas, he [Bodhanand] would annihilate the caste system."[95]

Other contemporary accounts of Bodhanand describe him in similarly striking terms, as a

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authority, purity and validity in historical and modern contexts (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2012), 227 – 47.

[92] Jigyāsu, *Bodhānand,* 2- 3. These ideals were, "compassion, friendship, equality, restraint, selfless service… eradication of one's own suffering and weaknesses, [and] attainment of permanent peace or Nirvana."

[93] Jigyasu was arguably the most important Dalit pamphleteer and publisher in north India during the mid-twentieth century. For a major study of Hindi Dalit publishing, with much discussion of Jigyasu's important presence, see Sarah Beth Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 4 – 131.

[94] Jigyāsu, *Bodhānand,* 4.

[95] "*Jahāṃ kisī ne varṇa-vyavsthā yā jāt-pāṃt kī acche śabdoṃ meṃ carcā kī ki māno sote siṃh ko jagā diyā. Phir ve manu se lekar tulsīdās tak ke ślokoṃ aur caupāiyoṃ ko udghrat karke is deś ke adh: pāt ke sabse baṛe kārṇā varṇa-vyavsthā dhajjī utārne lagate.*" Sāṅkṛtyāyan, quoted in Jigyāsu, *Bodhānand,* 29.

serious man who spent his days absorbed in study and who had an uncanny ability for reciting from memory Pali *suttas,* Hindu scriptures, Bhakti literature (*Sant sahitya*), Ārya Samāji tracts, long passages from Gandhi's autobiography and the works of noted Bengali Orientalists.[96] It is in this context that the diversity of the Samiti's activities can be explained. This was not just a society for the study of Buddhist doctrine and celebration of Buddhist events, but an organization with a clear stress on social welfare, human rights (*mānuṣik adhikāroṇ*) and not surprisingly, the annihilation of caste.

By the early 1920s, a small but influential group of educated lower-caste leaders had begun to gather around Bodhanand and with their support, he purchased a plot of land in 1924 or 1925 adjacent to today's Risaldar Park in Lucknow. The property, which soon housed a modest one-story Buddhist vihāra (two more stories were added post-Independence), is only a short walk through alleyways (*galī*) to the city's only other Buddhist space, the Bodhisattva Vihāra (est. 1907) of the Bengal Buddhist Association. The Bengali – Chittagong Buddhists clearly played a significant role in the early years of the Samiti and major Buddhist celebrations, like the Buddha Jayanti, were often held jointly at the Bodhisattva Vihāra.[97] Yet the differences between the two organizations were clear. While the Bodhisattva Vihāra catered primarily to the small Barua community in Lucknow, the principal audience of the Samiti were oilmen (*telī*), ropemakers (*baraī*), betelnut sellers (*tambolī*), shepherds (*gaṛiyā*), porters (*kahār*), boatmen (*mallāh*) and potters (*kumhār*), all impoverished members of lower-caste and outcaste communities that had migrated to urban areas of North India in the past few decades.[98]

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[96] Jigyāsu, *Bodhānand,* 14 – 15. When the prominent British Buddhist B.L. Broughton visited Bodhanand at his vihāra in 1931, he described him as "an Indian bhikkhu of strikingly noble appearance…[who] is moved to tears when, in his addresses he contrasts the glorious days of Buddhism with its present state." See, B.L. Broughton, "Buddhist Pilgrimage," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 39/8 (1931), 358.

[97] The society's early activities are difficult to determine but by the 1920s it was regularly holding lectures in Hindustani, distributing free Buddhist literature in Urdu and Hindi, and organizing community service projects among orphaned children and the urban poor. For instance, during the Buddha Jayanti of May 1928, free copies of the *Dhammapada* in Hindi and Urdu were distributed and there were three "well attended" Hindustani lectures on "Buddha and Buddhism," "Buddhism in Daily Life," "Three Refuges and five Moral Precepts," along with two English lectures on "Lord Buddha" and the "Four Aryan Truths." The first three lectures were delivered by Shiva Charan Lal and his son Ganga Charan Lal, the former of which was also the first President of the All-India Buddhist Society. See, letter from Ganga Charan Lal, the Secretary to the "Bharatiya Buddha Sangha," published in the *MahaBodhi* Vol. 36/12 (1928), 464 – 65.

[98] Jigyāsu, *Bodhānand,* 5. For an insightful study of the social and political world these communities inhabited in Lucknow, see Gooptu, *Politics of the Urban Poor*. It is also notable that despite the society's generally subaltern membership, Bodhanand's colleagues also included individuals belonging to elite circles. Frequent

In addition to holding Buddhist events, the Samiti distributed Buddhist literature and pamphlets on both political and religious topics. Due to a debilitating injury that Bodhanand suffered to his hand, writing for him was a difficult endeavor and it was due to this injury that he became acquainted with the Dalit publisher-writer, Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu. "With the thoughts of Bodhanand and the pen of Jigyasu" was the calling card of many of Bodhanand's works yet it is also notable that through their long years of close acquaintance, Jigyasu absorbed Bodhanand's Buddhist dialectic and began propagating Buddhism through his own popular writings.[99] Two of Bodhanand's first major works were a Hindi translation of the *Dhammapada* (c. 1928) and biography of Gautama Buddha (*Bhagavān Gautam Buddh*, 1933). In the latter work, which draws on Pali and Sanskrit sources and the Orientalist scholarship of Rhys Davids, Buddha is treated in a humanistic – historical lens that parallels other biographies of Buddha being produced at the time. Yet far from being a dull adaptation, the text peppers traditional Buddhist vocabulary like compassion (*karuṇa*), friendship (*maitrī*), equality (*samatā*) and peace (*śānti*) with the more contemporary phrasing of Buddha's human pragmatism (*manuṣya māpavād*) and global friendship (*viśva bandhutva*).[100]

The text that brought Bodhanand's Buddhism into the wider Hindi speaking Bahujan public, however, was his first major treatise, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī aur Ārya* (*Aryans and the Original Inhabitants of India),* published in 1930. To grasp the full significance of the text, it is necessary to understand its place within what was known as the Adi-Hindu movement.[101] The Adi-Hindu (literally, "original" Hindu/Indian) movement refers to a broad spectrum of lower-caste touchable (*chūt*) and outcaste, untouchable (*achūt*) groups that formed an influential religio- political bloc in opposition to the Congress and other closely allied Hindu reformist organizations during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Three main features of the

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participants and lecturers at the Samiti included the Head of the Sanskrit Department at Lucknow University, a principal of the (Islamic) Shia College, European Buddhists, and several professors from Tagore's university at Shantiniketan. For a description of its "elite" clientele and visitors during the Buddha Jayanti of 1931, see *MahaBodhi* Vol. 39/7 (1931), 323 – 24.

[99] Sarah Beth Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 39.

[100] Bhadant Bodhānand Mahāthera, *Bhagavān Gautama Buddha* (Nayī Dillī: Samyak Prakāśan, 2012 [1933]). In 1947, Bodhanand also produced a popular manual on Buddhist rituals (*Bauddh-caryā-padhdhati,* Lakhnaū: Buddh Vihār, 1947), which after Ambedkar's conversion underwent multiple editions (including a Marathi translation).

[101] Bhikkhu Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī aur Ārya* (Naī Dillī: Samyak Prakāśan, 2009 [1930]).

Adi-Hindu movement are especially pertinent.[102] The first is the Adi-Hindu argument that untouchables were the original inhabitants of India who were punished with the stigma of untouchability for their resistance to the Aryan Brahmin invaders several thousand years before. Second, Adi-Hindu leaders were extremely dismissive of Hindu reformist organizations like the Ārya Samāj and Hindu MahāSabhā, believing their attempts to 'purify' the lower-castes to be demeaning and patronizing. They were also rampantly anti-Congress, holding to the belief that if the Congress ever gained unbridled political power, its upper-caste leadership would not make any systematic effort to improve the lives of the non-twice born Hindus. Third, the Adi-Hindu movement drew heavily on the religious symbolism and devotional practices of the Sants, those esteemed medieval poet-saints, like Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, and Namdev, who espoused a message of absolute equality before God's eyes, thereby de-emphasizing caste differences.[103] When *Mūl Bhāratvāsī* was published in 1930, the Adi-Hindu movement was at its peak popularity with Bodhanand at its helm.[104]

At its core, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī* is concerned with the tragic state of India's downtrodden classes and how to improve their overall fortune. Bodhanand's solution is three-fold. The first is political mobilization (independent of the Congress) and the second is education.[105] While these first two components are only briefly alluded to at the end of the book—Bodhanand's daily activism in the Adi-Hindu movement and Scheduled Caste Federation spoke to those activities more directly—the third solution is to remember their ancient past. Describing this ancient world and its noble ideals (*ādarś*) is what concerns the very heart of the text. At its most basic level, the thesis is simple: India's *śūdras* and Dalits were the original inhabitants of India (*mūl bhāratvāsī*) who followed an ancient pre-Aryan śramaṇic tradition that was later perfected in early Buddhism. Only by returning to their true Buddhist identity will they be able to regain the human rights (*mānuṣik adhikāroṃ*) that have been

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[102] Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability,* 147 – 48; see also, Gooptu, *Politics of the Urban Poor*.
[103] On the Sants and bhakti devotionalism more widely, see John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
[104] Bodhanand's leadership in the movement is also verified by the photograph taken in December 1928 in Kanpur during the annual conference of the Adi-Hindu MahāSabhā (this photograph appears on the cover of Rawat's *Reconsidering Untouchability*). Seated in the middle of the photograph is Ambedkar. To Ambedkar's immediate left is Swami Achutanand, the founder of the movement and on his immediate right is Bodhanand.
[105] Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* 145 – 155.

stripped from them under an oppressive Brahmanical order (*ārya-brāhmāṇī-vyavasthā*).[106]

In the first several chapters of *Mūl bhāratvāsī,* Bodhanand explores the origins of contemporary Hindu society, focusing on the Aryan spread of Brahmanism (*Brāhmāṇ Hindū-dharm*) and caste (*varṇa*) among India's "original inhabitants" (*mūl nivāsī*). Accepting the theory of Aryan invasion, he highlights the terrible suffering and punishment the Aryan-Brahmin invaders leveled upon the original inhabitants.[107] The original Indians, he argues, followed a śramaṇa tradition that was based on egalitarian and humanistic values. Bodhanand explains that whenever India's original inhabitants were on the verge of total defeat and slavery, bodhisattvas take birth in the world to help them regain their humanity and find freedom from suffering.[108] Significantly, Bodhanand includes the Sants in his list of bodhisattvas*,* thereby creating a seamless continuity between the Buddhist world whose revival he desires and the cherished, familiar religious setting of his Bahujan audience. Quoting from Pali Buddhist sources (with his own Hindi translations), he argues that Gautama Buddha, the *jagadguru* or "World Teacher" represents the most noble of these Bodhisattva - Sants. It is only because of him, the "Light of Asia" that "India's head is held high before the entire world."[109] Yet tragically, the "true religion" (*satya dharm*) that Gautama gave birth to, in which there "is no exaltation or degradation due to caste distinction," was "completely destroyed" (*naṣṭ-bhraṣṭ karke*) by the Aryan-Brahmin invaders.[110] In the centuries after that, Buddhism was "plunged into the ocean of non-remembrance."[111] Then in an argument that parallels those histories being circulated among Buddhist converts in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and which is later seen in Ambedkar's history, *The Untouchables* (1948), Bodhanand argues that these indigenous tribes were so hated by the Brahmin oppressors that they were thrown out of society as outcastes and low castes as their punishment for being Buddhist. The argument, like Thass' some thirty years before, was

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[106] Bodhanand clearly locates this original path in the sramanic traditions and while he often describes it as Buddhism and Jainism (*Buddh aur jain dharm*), detailed references to Jainism are extremely rare. This could have been a consequence of his own preference for Buddhism or simply a lack of knowledge of Jain traditions. In any case, the implicit meaning of the text is clear: the religion of the ancient Indians is Buddhism.
[107] Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* 39 – 51.
[108] Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* 60 – 61.
[109] Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* 57. The reference to the "Light of Asia" is clearly an ode to Edwin Arnold, although he simply remarks that foreign scholars (*videśī vidvānoṃ*) accept Buddha as the Light of Asia (*Eśiyā ke jñanālok kā sūrya*) or literally the "Sun of Asia's Wisdom" (57).
[110] *jāti-viśeṣa ko utkar ṣatā yā apakarṣatā nahīṃ dī gaī hai.* Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* 56.
[111] *Vismṛti sāgar meṃ vilīna-sā kar diyā hai.* Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* dedication page [*samparṇ*].

a brilliant one for it effectively positioned Dalits and Śūdras as the true autochthones, the carriers of the only 'real' indigenous Indian tradition.[112]

The more striking claims in the text come through Bodhanand's ruminations on the similarities between the Upaniṣadic – Vedāntic literature (*Prasthān Trayī*) of the Hindus and that of the Buddhist tradition. The similarities, he asserts, are not coincidental, for in his history of ideas, anything noble (*ārya*) in Hindu scriptures was directly stolen from Buddhists and Jains.[113] For instance, Bodhanand argues that Brahmins gained their knowledge of liberation and nirvana from the Buddhists, but even then he declares, the innately "decadent" (*bhogaiśvarya*) nature of Brahmanism has left these noble teachings "float[ing] detached like ghee placed in water."[114] In a separate chapter more clearly aimed at the familiar religious world of his Bahujan audience, he focuses almost entirely on the songs of the Sants. After reviewing their poetic verses, he concludes that the Sants, with their "simple, unostentatious and compassionate mode of living" are of benefit to the world and are in fact, heirs to the Buddha's doctrine of non-violence, equality, friendship and peace.[115]

Although the intended audience of *Mūl Bhāratvāsī* are literate Śūdras and Dalits themselves, several sections in the text call upon Hindu ascetics (*sādhu-saṃnyāsī*) and upper caste Hindus (*dwijāti*) to pay heed to his message. In this "age of freedom" (*svādhinatā-upāsī yug*), a clear reference to the anti-colonial nationalist movement, Bodhanand asks rhetorically, how can you speak of freedom and rights when you knowingly keep the *śūdras* and Dalits crushed under your feet?[116] If you want freedom and to become awakened, he explains, you need to abandon the Brahmanical order that is "devoid of humanity"

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[112] It is important to recognize that although Bodhanand pursued the same emancipatory ideology as Swami Achutanand and the other Adi-Hindu/Adi-Dravida activists, his inclusion of both Śūdras and Dalits in this category was more unique. For him, all the lower castes, whether touchable (*chūt, śūdra*) or untouchable (*achūt, dalit*) were included in his genealogy of original inhabitants. While this may appear to be a trivial manner, in the politics of the moment, such an argument was extremely important. Relationships between and among the lower-castes and outcastes were then, as they still are often today, characterized by large degrees of tension and mistrust. Bodhanand's history of writing *both* groups together can be seen as both his own effort to reach a broader base and mobilize a larger Bahujan consciousness.

[113] Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* 39.

[114] *Is deś mein āne ke bād Āryoṃ ne is mahān Bhāratiy dharm kī bahut sī bāteṃ apne graṃthọ meṃ milāī avaśy haiṃ, par ve unke bhogaiśvaryapūrṇ dharm meṃ milane par bhī usī tarah alag tair rahī haiṃ, jaise jal meṃ ḍālā huā ghṛt.* Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* 83.

[115] *Saral aura ādambar-śuny, karuṇā, maitrī-pūrṇ lok-kalyāṇakārī.* Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* 83.

[116] Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī,* 155; see also, 148 – 55.

(*manuṣyatv-śūny*).[117] In her study of Hindi Dalit literature, Sarah Beth Hunt argues that Bodhanand's *Mūl Bhāratvāsī* "became the most important historical text of the Adi Hindu movement."[118] Through the influence of figures like Bodhanand and his prominent disciples, especially Jigyasu, the Adi-Hindu movement articulated "a new language of 'belonging' which was no longer about an association with middle-class [Hindu] Indian society, but rather, rearticulated new claims to indigeneity and cultural authority."[119] From an organizational perspective, Bodhanand's movement was largely a failure, for it never mobilized any more than a small group of Dalit intellectuals. Yet many of these figures later became the engine that drove Dalit cultural activity and political thought in the post-Independence era.[120] In other words, like the Adi-Hindu movement more widely, which lost its institutional base by the late 1930s as Ambedkar's Scheduled Caste Federation grew in prominence, its greatest contributions lay in creating a wider Bahujan consciousness.[121] For Bodhanand's part, this is not only evident through the pervasive influence of Buddhist themes and language in modern-day Dalit literature concerning the Sants but in his direct links to Ambedkar.[122]

Bodhanand's relationship with Ambedkar went back to as early as 1920 when the two met in Kolhapur (Maharashtra) at the famous Non-Brahmin Conference organized by Maharaj Sahuji.[123] Yet it was in the late 1920s and early 1930s when the Adi-Hindu movement was at its peak and Bodhanand was one of its major leaders that he and Ambedkar became more closely acquainted. They met several times throughout the 1930s and 1940s at Scheduled Caste Conferences and Ambedkar also visited the Lucknow Vihāra on several

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[117] Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī*, 155.
[118] Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature,* 39.
[119] Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature,* 40.
[120] Several became the North Indian torchbearers of the Dalit – Bahujan movements of later years. These included Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, the founder of the popular Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan or Common People's Welfare Press; Raisaheb Ramcharan, the prominent Dalit politician and advocate; and Lal Chedi Sathi, the founder of the UP branch of the Republican Party of India.
[121] Gooptu, *Politics of the Urban Poor,* 159.
[122] On the influence of Buddhism on twentieth century interpretations of the Sants, see Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp, "Bhakti and Buddhism: Text, Context and Public Representation of Dalit Religiosity in Uttar Pradesh," in Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp, *Neuer Buddhismus als gesellschaftlicher Entwurf: zur Identitätskonstruktion der Dalits in Kanpur, Indien*, edited by Peter Schalk, Gabriele Reifenrath and Heinz Werner Wessler (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2011), 187 – 233.
[123] Satnam Singh, "Mūlanivāsī āndolan ke amar nāyak bhadaṇt Bodhānaṇd Mahāsthavir," printed in Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī aur ārya,* 183.

occasions looking for Buddhist literature.[124] In fact, according to Shanti Swarup Bauddh, the prolific writer and owner of a prominent Dalit publishing house in New Delhi, when Ambedkar began planning his public conversion to Buddhism in the 1950s, he had originally hoped Bodhanand would oversee the dīkṣā ceremony.[125]

7.6 The Doctor and his dhamma: the Dalit Buddhist revolution

This was the world of Indian Buddhist activism when in 1933 Ambedkar entered the Buddhist ecumene and began giving hints to friends that he was, "at that juncture inclined to Buddhism."[126] The comment came just months after the Round Table Conferences and Poona Pact, when the British government accepted Ambedkar's argument that the Depressed Classes constituted a political body separate from Hindus. Gandhi, who opposed the decision, threatened suicide by starvation, refusing to consent to the decision until Ambedkar recanted. In the end, as Gandhi lay close to death, Ambedkar was forced to submit, having been put in one of the most precarious positions in his life: support his political constituency or be held responsible for "killing" India's most beloved leader. For Ambedkar, it was a critical turning point, leading to his belief that Gandhi was nothing but a wolf in sheep's clothes and that Hinduism was incapable of reform. As he put it only two years later to a crowd of ten thousand Depressed Classes leaders at Nasik:

> If you want to gain self-respect, change your religion.
> If you want to create a cooperating society, change your religion.
> If you want power, change your religion.
> If you want equality, change your religion.
> If you want independence, change your religion.
> If you want to make the world in which you live, change your religion.[127]

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[124] According to Satnam Singh, during one of Ambedkar's visits to the Lucknow Vihāra in the 1940s, Ambedkar expressed his frustration at not being able to acquire a copy of Lakshmi Narasu's *The Essence of Buddhism*, the text that Ambedkar re-published with his own introduction in 1948. The text was apparently out of print and Bodhanand supplied him with his own copy. See, Singh, "Mūlanivāsī āndolan," printed in Bodhanand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī aur ārya,* 183.
[125] Śānti Swarup Bauddh, "Preface" (*prakāśkīy*), in Bodhānand, *Mūl Bhāratvāsī aur ārya,* 5.
[126] Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* 240. This was contained in a letter from Ambedkar to Subhedar Savadkar in the spring of 1933. On the Buddhist ecumene, see chapter five of this dissertation.
[127] Quoted in Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* 255.

In Ambedkar's view, most saliently outlined in his undelivered talk published as *Annihilation of Caste,* if the caste system was to be destroyed, so too must Hinduism. Hinduism, he asserted, had its foundation in the Vedas and Śāstras, and yet these two bodies of literature were nothing but a set of immoral codes and unjust mores "legalizing" caste discrimination. "If you wish to bring about a breach in the [caste] system, then you have got to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the Shastras…You must destroy the Religion of the shrutis and the smritis."[128] While Hindu leaders of the Congress and MahāSabhā panicked, others recognized Ambedkar's dissent as a monumental opportunity. The Nizam of Hyderabad responded by offering Ambedkar forty million rupees 'to lead' the untouchables to Islam.[129] At one point, it looked as if Ambedkar would become a Sikh.[130] Buddhists were no less eager for him to join the universal Buddhist community. Traveling to Ambedkar's home in Bombay, the Brooklyn-born bhikkhu Lokanatha left Ambedkar with his popular pamphlet on why "Buddhism will set you free!"[131] Burmese merchants mailed Buddhist literature and the Sinhalese offered missionary support.[132] In an essay on "The Future of the Harijans," the leader of the Nationalist opposition party, and Ambedkar's old Round Table Conference nemesis, Sir Hari Singh Gour, urged Ambedkar to lead his flock to Buddhism.[133]

While it is unclear to what degree of influence any of these Buddhist interventions from afar had on Ambedkar, no scholar, to my knowledge, has recognized that Ambedkar was simultaneously working on his own Buddhist project just miles away from his home in Bombay. Reaching out to the Bombay Buddha Society in 1936, he met with Dharmanand Kosambi (1876 – 1947), the organization's Honorary President, former bhikkhu and Harvard

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[128] Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste,* 303 – 04.
[129] *The Times of India,* April 14, 1936, in Christophe Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste and Politics in India* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2010), 159.
[130] On the pact Ambedkar made with Moonje to become a Sikh, see Keith Meadowcroft, "The All-India Hindu MahāSabhā, untouchable politics, and 'denationalising' conversions: the Moonje-Ambedkar Pact," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 29/1 (2006): 9 – 41.
[131] See, Philip Deslippe, "Brooklyn Bhikkhu: How Salvatore Cioffi Became the Venerable Lokanatha," *Contemporary Buddhism* Vol. 14/1 (2013): 169 – 186. Deslippe's argument that Lokanatha was "a catalyst to perhaps the largest mass religious conversion in modern history" (176) is fanciful.
[132] "Financial Report," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 44/11 (1936), 530 and "Ceylon Maha Bodhi Society," Vol. 44/11 (1936), 266 – 267.
[133] Dr. Hari Singh Gour, "The Future of the Harijans," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 44/1 (1936), 8 – 13. Although not a Buddhist, Gour, who was the former Mayor of Nagpur and Delhi University's first Vice-Chancellor (1922 – 29), had in 1929 also published a six hundred and fifty page study of Buddhism entitled *The Spirit of Buddhism.*

PhD. Ambedkar told Kosambi that Bombay needed a Buddhist vihāra.[134] After the meeting, Kosambi met with Gandhi and J.K. Birla, explaining Ambedkar's interest in Buddhism, and asking for Birla's help in acquiring funds to build the temple. Within months, the foundation stone was laid and less than a year later, on January 26, 1937, Kosambi inaugurated the Bahujan Vihāra, or 'Temple of the Masses,' a small structure topped with an elegant stupa modeled after the Karli cave caitya.

Located in the middle of the mill workers area of Parel, Kosambi worked as the temple manager prescribing his heady brew of Buddhist rationalism, non-violence and democratic socialism to the temple's lower-caste and class visitors. Although Kosambi's Buddhism was anything but that of the "Hindu Buddhism" that Ambedkar despised, strangely, Ambedkar does not appear to have ever participated in any of the vihāra's events.[135] The reasons for this are unclear but it could have stemmed from both an unwillingness to support anything financed by the Birlas, the foremost sponsors of the Hindu MahāSabhā and Congress, as well as from the fact that Kosambi himself was a dedicated Gandhian and Brahmin.

Whatever the reasons behind Ambedkar's distance from the Bombay Bahujan Vihāra, by the mid-1940s, his movement towards Buddhism was increasingly obvious. Images of Buddha appeared behind him during Scheduled Caste Federation conferences and references to Buddhism grew more common in his writings and speeches.[136] By the end of the decade, the contours of Ambedkar's Buddhism were clear: this was an ancient tradition that had fought long and hard against Brahmanism and was to be admired for its rationality and democratic, social ethos. When he started his People's Education Society in 1945, the first college he founded in Bombay the following year was named Siddhartha, the birth name of Gautama Buddha. Ambedkar's second college, inaugurated five years later in Aurangabad, was named Milinda, after the famous Indo – Greek king "converted" by the Buddhist monk,

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[134] "Editorial Notes," *Buddha-prabha,* Vol. 5/2 (1937), 770. Although the precise details of their conversation are not known, the comment was suggestive, for Ambedkar was undoubtedly aware that the Bombay Buddha Society already managed a Buddhist space, *Ānanda vihāra,* located in the grounds of Nair's hospital. So Ambedkar's suggestion can only have meant that the *Ānanda Vihāra* was either too inaccessible to the general public or more likely, too elite and Hindu in its orientation, being frequented by primarily upper-caste Hindu reformers.

[135] On Kosambi's resignation from the temple, which stemmed from Kosambi's criticisms of Hindu scriptures and culture, see Ober, "Like embers," 139 – 40.

[136] Many of these speeches have been compiled in *Ambedkar Speaks (vol. II),* edited by Narendra Jadhav (New Delhi and Seattle: Konark Publishers, 2013), 263 – 330.

Nagasena in the second century BCE. Despite widespread accusations leveled then (and still today) that his interest in Buddhism was purely political "opportunitism," the private, more intimate Ambedkar was no less inclined.[137] In a rare moment of vulnerability, disclosed in a private letter (dated February 8, 1948) to Dr. Laxmi Kabir, his soon-to-be second wife, he explained that, "the only person to whom I owe all my being is Gautama Buddha."[138] During the Buddh Jayanti of 1950, he led a Buddhist procession out of the Buddha Vihāra in New Delhi for the Scheduled Castes Welfare Association and later that year, visited Ceylon to experience first-hand a living Buddhist culture.[139] Although he was deeply skeptical of the sangha, when he returned from Ceylon he formally announced at Fujī's Nipponzon Myohoji Temple in Bombay that, "he will dedicate the rest of his life to the revival and spread of Buddhism."[140]

Ambedkar's praise for Buddha was having effects farther afield as well. For instance, in the Saurashtra district of Gujarat, many Ambedkarite Dalits who having taken to his message of bus and temple entry agitation campaigns decades earlier, began integrating Buddhist symbols into their common life-cycle rituals. By 1945, brides and grooms sought blessings of Buddha while "on wedding cards…Lord Ganesh gave way to Lord Buddha," and "parents named their children according to the Buddhist tradition."[141] Likewise, in Nagpur of the late 1940s, Ambedkar's *Samata Sainik Dal* or Army of the Soliders for Equality (est. 1926) was actively propagating Buddhism as an alternative to Hinduism, staging plays based on Kosambi's *Buddhalīlā* (1914), holding Buddhist study groups and even attempting to build their own Buddhist temple.[142]

When viewed in this context, Ambedkar's most concerted movement towards Buddhism appears to have occurred in the mid to late 1940s. This also marked the period

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[137] When Ambedkar attended a meeting at the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in July, he was accused of "opportunitism." See "Advocacy of Buddhism," *Times of India,* July 26, 1950.
[138] "Letter 137b," in *Letters of Ambedkar,* 205.
[139] "Birth Anniversary of Buddha: Ambedkar's Address," *Hindustan Times,* May 3, 1950, 3.
[140] See, "Dr. Ambedkar at Worli," *Times of India,* October 1, 1950; "Dr. Ambedkar in Bombay," *Hindustan Times,* May 4, 1950.
[141] Dr. Nitin Gurjar, "Appendix 2: Dalit movements in Gujarat," in *Journeys to Freedom: Dalit narratives,* edited by Fernando Franco, Jyotsna Macwan and Suguna Ramanathan (Kolkata: Samya, 2004), 365. According to Gurjar, the first Buddha Jayanti to be held in Ahmedabad was on June 21, 1951, held under the auspices of the Scheduled Caste Federation.
[142] Vasant Moon, *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography,* translated from the Marathi into English by Gail Omvedt with an introduction by Eleanor Zelliot (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 127 – 33.

when Ambedkar moved to New Delhi to serve in the Viceroy's Council as the Secretary of Labour (1942 – 46) and where he stayed on as Independent India's first Minister of Law (1947 – 51) in Nehru's Cabinet. These were transformative moments both politically and intellectually. What is less well-known is that this also marked the beginning of Ambedkar's study of Pali under Ishwardatt Medharthi (1900 – 71), a Pali – Sanskrit scholar and principal of a "Hindu – Buddhist" school for lower-caste students in Kanpur. Medharthi himself was not a Dalit but came from what in legal terms constituted a "Backwards Class" (*śūdra*). Medharthi's father, a dedicated Ārya Samāji who had become a doctor in the British military, educated his son in the Gurukul at Haridwar. When Medharthi returned to Kanpur in the early 1930s, he befriended Bodhanand and eventually fell under his sway, transforming his father's school into a major transit spot in the Buddhist ecumene, installing Buddhist images inside it and teaching Pali.[143] Although Medharthi eventually recanted on his Buddhist identity, choosing to spend the 1960s reciting Vedic stotras in "flawless Sanskrit," in the decades before that he was a critical intermediary in the North Indian Buddhist world.[144] More significantly for our purposes, he began visiting Ambedkar during the weekends to tutor him in Pali.[145]

Through Medharthi, Ambedkar not only encountered the world of Pali Buddhist literature but was introduced to the small but tightly-knit world of Indian-born Buddhist bhikkhu converts and other 'soldiers of the sāsana.' At Kuśīnagar, Ambedkar met with Candramani and the Indian bhikkhu and writer Dharmarakshita. Candramani later oversaw Ambedkar's conversion while Dharmarakshita, the later editor of the Hindi Buddhist journal, *Dharmadūt,* arranged Ambedkar's journeys to the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Burma in 1954 and to Sarnath in 1956.[146] This also marked the beginning of Ambedkar's meetings

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[143] The *Bharatiya Ved Vidyalaya* (school) had been founded in 1914 by Medharthi's father, Dr. Fakiray Ram. The school's curriculum was largely modeled after the Gurukuls of the Ārya Samāj but also included a Pali curriculum and housed several Buddhist statues. For instance, Bhikkhu Lokanatha and Bhikkhu Gyan Keto both visited there in 1937, donating to the school two Buddha images crafted from brass and marble. Later, both Ambedkar and JK Birla donated statues to the school.
[144] Bellwinkel-Schempp, "Bhakti and Buddhism," 206.
[145] Bellwinkel-Schempp, "Bhakti and Buddhism," 210 - 11.
[146] Ahir, *Pioneers of Buddhist Revival,* 103 – 04.

with Anand Kausalyayan, the Punjabi bhikkhu who later performed his funerary rites in front of more than half a million people in Bombay.[147]

The influence of these figures is most evident in Ambedkar's 1948 publication, *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables.*[148] Similar to Bodhanand's and Thass' earlier works, Ambedkar's thesis is that the untouchables were "broken men," the scattered survivors of 'original Indians' conquered by Aryan – Brahmin invaders. When the Brahmins settled in India, the broken men worked as laborers on the outskirts of the villages for the new Brahmin agriculturalists. They were deeply despised by the Brahmins because they were Buddhists, which was in complete opposition to Brahmanical morals and regulations. For Ambedkar, the critical moment in this grand confrontation between two alien cultures was when the Brahmins realized they were losing control over the religious landscape. To combat the rising tide of Buddhist supremacy, the Brahmins adopted Buddhist ethical codes and significantly, gave up animal sacrifice, became vegetarians and declared the cow sacred. These later elements dealt a severe blow to the Buddhists, who although against animal slaughter, were not vegetarians.[149] In Ambedkar's view, it was these two features in particular that were responsible for the origins of untouchability: 1) Brahmanical contempt and hatred of the broken men's Buddhist identity and 2) the broken men's continued consumption of the carcasses of dead but now sacred cows. With these two traits, the broken men became polluted outcastes, forever stigmatized as untouchables.[150] Despite its rather speculative nature, Ambedkar's argument was both astute and sensitive. It not only dovetailed similar theories widely prevalent among Adi-Hindu groups across India and thus could easily reach this audience but also effectively submerged Dalits with the true indigenous populace while berating Brahmins as the foreign pollutants. Moreover, in what the anthropologist Owen Lynch rightly called a "stroke of genius," Ambedkar defined Buddhist culture in terms that were almost synonymous with his

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[147] Kausalyayan's descriptions of these early meetings, although no doubt colored by his own Buddhist activism, provide important clues as to both the depth of Ambedkar's devotion to Buddhism at this time as well as why he waited so long before holding a public conversion ceremony. See, Kausalyāyan, *Yadi Bābā na hote*, 117 – 26.
[148] This work is reprinted in *Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* [hereafter, *BAWS*], Vol. 7 (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1990), 233 – 381.
[149] Ambedkar, *The Untouchables,* in *BAWS* Vol. 7, 311 – 22.
[150] Ambedkar, *The Untouchables,* in *BAWS* Vol. 7, 242.

vision of modern, democratic Indian culture.[151] Being a modern Indian citizen, in other words, meant just being one's 'original' Buddhist self.

In the last five years of his life, Ambedkar spent much of his time encouraging Indians to stop treating "religion as something that is handed over from father to son," and to closely consider the differences between Brahmanism and Buddhism.[152] As he argued in "The Buddha and the Future of His Religion" (1950), the great strength of Buddhism was that Buddha "wished his religion not to be encumbered with the dead wood of the past…this is why he gave liberty to his followers to chip and chop as the necessities of the case required."[153] Fifteen years earlier, in Ambedkar's hugely popular pamphlet, *Annihilation of Caste,* he had alluded to the necessity of ridding society of this "dead wood" by quoting his former instructor at Columbia University, the American philosopher John Dewey (1859 – 1952):

> Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse…as a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible *not* to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as to make for a better society.[154]

For Dewey, those principles were enshrined in the democratic liberal traditions of the western world. Yet Ambedkar, who was undoubtedly a product of the 'western enlightenment' tradition, saw the same principles expressed in many early Buddhist scriptures. Buddha, he contends, was the "earliest and staunchest upholder of equality," a man who emphasized inquiry, investigation, and rationality, not dogma and blind adherence to tradition.[155] Like nearly every other South Asian Buddhist modernist, he was taken by those famous passages in the *Kālāma Sutta* where Buddha explains that reason, logic and rationality are the foundations of his teaching. In Ambedkar's eyes, these proved that one can be a Buddhist and be "free to modify or even to abandon any of his teachings if it was found

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[151] Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability,* 143.
[152] "Birth Anniversary of Buddha: Ambedkar's Address," *Hindustan Times,* May 3, 1950, 3. In an impressive compilation of more than three-hundred of Ambedkar's public speeches and writings, the editor Narendra Jadhav notes that between 1951 and 1956, more than twenty percent of all of Ambedkar's public speeches and writings were devoted to religion, with most focused on the ethical and social foundations of Buddhism. See, Jadhav (ed.), *Ambedkar Speaks,* Vol. II, 264.
[153] B.R. Ambedkar, "Buddha and the Future of His Religion," 118.
[154] Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste,* 313. On Dewey's influence on Ambedkar, see Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit,* 79 – 85.
[155] Ambedkar, *Buddha and His Dhamma,* in *BAWS* Vol. 11, 302.

that at a given time and in given circumstances they did not apply."[156] When Ambedkar restructured central Buddhist doctrines like nirvana, duḥkha and dhamma, he did so on the basis that historically conditioned interpretations of these were dead wood.[157] In Ambedkar's mind, Buddha was a champion of morality whose deep-seated rationality would not have approved of those interpretations that privileged dogmatic or immoral views. Buddha showed the way (*mārgadātā*) to salvation, but he did not deliver it himself (*mokṣadātā*).[158] For Ambedkar, only a religion stripped of its dead wood could provide the moral basis upon which all healthy societies are based.[159]

While Ambedkar's Buddhism was based on what he saw as universal, moral values, it had clear defining features. Carving out a Buddhist identity, separate from Hindus, was central to this project. The most explicit component of this identity is visible in nine of the twenty-two additional vows Ambedkar read out during the Dhamma Dīkṣā ceremony.[160] These stipulate in explicit terms that the new Buddhist identity is fundamentally a non-Hindu identity and that to become a Buddhist, one must renounce Hinduism. These vows, like Ambedkar's historical works more widely, reinforced the differences between Brahmins and Buddhists, a difference that roughly two millennia before the great Sanskrit grammarian Patañjali had compared to the antagonism between a mongoose and a snake. As someone who had been at the sharp end of caste Hindu discrimination, Ambedkar knew this would be an adversarial relationship, one that required a litany of vows, rituals, ideologies and texts to defeat its great nemesis. In a letter to Devapriya Valisinha, the General Secretary of the MahaBodhi Society in early 1955, Ambedkar explained why rituals were so important for the new Buddhist laity. Buddhism's historical shortcoming, he contended, was its failure to develop external initiation ceremonies for lay and not just monastic Buddhists. To combat

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[156] Ambedkar, "Buddha and the Future of His Religion," 118.
[157] For an important assessment of Ambedkar's arguments regarding these doctrines and its place within a wider framework of Buddhist hermeneutical traditions, see Queen, "Hermeneutics of Buddhist liberation."
[158] Ambedkar, "Buddha and the Future of His Religion," 117.
[159] The jurist in Ambedkar recognized the importance of law but Martin Fuchs is right when he argues that Ambedkar saw law not as the basis of society but as the necessary mechanism to enforce and punish those are unwilling or unable to accept "the sense of a fundamental, reasonable principle of 'sociality.' " See, Martin Fuchs, "A Religion for Civil Society? Ambedkar's Buddhism, the Dalit Issue and the Imagination of Emergent Possibilities," in *Charisma and Canon: essays on the religious history of the Indian subcontinent,* edited by Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar and Martin Christof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 261.
[160] In particular, numbers 1 – 8 and 19. For a list and discussion of these vows, see Johannes Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit: Religious Conversion and Socio-political emancipation* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), 57 – 58.

this weakness, Ambedkar invented a new formula (*dhamma dīkṣā*) for conversion and added that those who don't partake in it "will not be regarded as a Buddhist."[161] By the next year, Ambedkar had even created a new a marriage ceremony for Buddhists, distinct from customary Hindu rites.[162] Similar rituals had been used by Buddhist groups in Lucknow, Kanpur and Tamil Nadu for decades.

In a speech with the press that took place just after his conversion, Ambedkar explained, "I want the whole of India to be converted to Buddhism. It should not become only a Harijan religion. It is after all, a universal faith."[163] This vision is also apparent in Ambedkar's concurrent effort to expand the platform of his failed Scheduled Caste Federation into a broader, political body independent of caste relations. Just months before his formal conversion and death, he began reaching out to prominent leftist politicians in the hopes of mobilizing a larger populace or "federation of oppressed populations" composed of not just Dalits but workers and peasants, śūdras and other non-Brahmins.[164] The groundwork for this party, aptly named the Republican Party of India, after the Indian republics of the Buddha's time, was laid in Ambedkar's last months but his sudden death left the organization headless and it never developed a large presence outside of Maharashtra and to a lesser degree, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. Like the Republican Party of India, Ambedkar's vision of Buddhist conversion remained a caste-based phenomenon. Not only were the new converts almost entirely composed of Scheduled Castes (Dalits) but the vast majority were Mahars, the numerically dominant Dalit group in Maharasthra in which Ambedkar was also born.[165]

7.7 Conclusion: Situating Bahujan Buddhism

In the ever-growing body of literature on Ambedkar's conversion, the most prominent

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[161] "Letter to D. Vali Sinha [sic]," dated February 16, 1955, in *Letters of Ambedkar,* 217.
[162] See, "Letter to Shri V.S. Kardak," December 4, 1956, in *Letters of Ambedkar,* 199. Ambedkar writes: "The Buddhist Marriage ceremony is simple. There is no home and there is no sapta-padi [seven steps around the Vedic fire]. The essence of the ceremony lies in placing an earthen pot newly made between the bridegroom on a stool and to fill it brimful with water. The bridge and the bridegroom [are] to stand on two sides of the pot. They should place a cotton thread in the water pot and each hold one end of the thread in their hands. Some one should sing the *Mangal Sutta*. Both bride and bridegroom should wear white clothes."
[163] "Why I chose Buddhism": Dr. Ambedkar's Nagpur speech," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 64/11 (1956), 504.
[164] Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World,* 198 – 202.
[165] The major exception to this included several-thousand Jatavs (Chamars) in Agra, of which, see Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability,* 129 – 65.

shortcoming is the failure to recognize Ambedkar's relationship with other Indian Buddhists in the decade before his death. Without an awareness of the wider Indian Buddhist context, contemporary scholars have mis-characterized Ambedkar's interpretation as a revolutionary and radical interpretation of Buddhism. While this was undoubtedly true in the *longue duree* of Indic Buddhist history, in India's modern Buddhist moment it was far less so. As this chapter has shown, he was long connected to Indian-born Buddhist monastics and scholars who preached and practiced Buddhism along similar lines. In contrast to scholars like Martin Fuchs who contend that Ambedkar was determined to lead "without the consent or approval of others," it is clear that Ambedkar was far less willing to break with tradition than has been commonly believed.[166] The fact that Ambedkar desired acceptance from both the Indian Buddhist and international Buddhist community is seen in the Nagpur conversion ceremony itself. According to Bhikkhu Sangharakshita, Ambedkar had originally voiced resistance to "taking refuge in the sangha," and was only willing to take refuge in the first Two Jewels, the Buddha and Dhamma.[167] Yet in the end, he consented to the authority of that tradition, for as Devapriya Valisinha explained to him, without it, he would never be considered a Buddhist. Throughout the last years of his life, Ambedkar consulted and conversed with the leading Buddhist authorities in India, from Candramani and Bodhanand to Kausalyayan and Dharmarakshita, and the presence of the monastic body during the great dhamma dīkṣā was an indication that he wanted acceptance, that he recognized the importance of tradition. Here, Ananya Vajpeyi is right when she argues that, "Ambedkar did not want to leave tradition—rather, he wanted to enter into it…he wanted his entrance to be seen as a reentry, onto the historical stage of doctrinal disputation, of the long-defeated, long-banished Buddhist adversary of the Brahmin intellectual hegemon."[168]

Scholars have often pointed to a single hostile review printed in the *MahaBodhi* that criticized Ambedkar's book, remarking that it should have been called "Ambedkar and His Dhamma," as evidence that the MahaBodhi Society strongly condemned his conversion.[169]

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[166] Fuchs, "Religion for Civil Society," 266.
[167] Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006 [1986]), 136.
[168] Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic,* 233.
[169] That review (*MahaBodhi* Vol. 67/12 (1959), 352 – 53) was penned by Lobzang Jivaka (1915 – 62) or Michael Dillon, an English Buddhist monk who studied under Sangharakshita and later at Rizong Gompa in Ladakh, where he ordained. Jivaka called Ambedkar's interpretation "dangerous." Jivaka's late-in-life conversion to Buddhism has often been minimized in favor of a discussion of the fact that he was born as a

Likewise, years earlier, the British bhikkhu Sangharakshita, then working as an editor for the *MahaBodhi* journal, had raised concerns about Ambedkar's call for "a Buddhist bible."[170] Yet neither of these two critiques represented any enduring resistance to Ambedkar's conversion—in fact, Sangharakshita's Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG) remains one of the most important organizations in contemporary Dalit Buddhist life. The resistance that came from the MahaBodhi Society stemmed not from the central Indian Buddhist leadership but from its upper-caste supporters and in particular, Calcutta-based organizing body. For instance, just months after the conversion, the scholar Rahul Sankrityayan penned an approving pamphlet, comparing Ambedkar's conversion to that of Kublai Khan in the thirteenth century.[171] Bhikkhu Anand Kausalyayan dedicated the remainder of his life to work among the Dalits. In Kausalyayan's own scholarly estimation of the *Buddha and His Dhamma,* which he translated into Hindi and annotated with further Pali references, the text was a "new orientation, but not a distortion" of Buddhism.[172] When the new Dalit converts to Buddhism lost their Scheduled Caste privileges, the MahaBodhi Society's General Secretary submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Nehru asking him to recall this "great injustice."[173] The *Dharmadūt* quickly adapted to the new scene, converting a portion of its Hindi journal to Marathi, the majority language of the Mahar converts. By the end of 1957, the society's new "Indian Buddhist Fund" to support the Dalits had even distributed fifty thousand copies of a Buddhist ritual manual (*Bauddha Pujavidhi*), half in Marathi and the other half in Hindi.[174] As all of these actions indicate, the working body of the Buddhist Indian community—the so-called soldiers of the sāsana—were fully invested in Ambedkar's movement.

While many foreign Buddhist monastics came and attempted to work among the new Buddhists, the linguistic and cultural divides were major obstacles. They were more successful in forging links with educated urban Mahar Buddhists but in the village context, where most Mahars still lived, the difficulty of working among an impoverished and illiterate

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woman and was one of the first—if not the first—individuals in history to successfully undergo a sex-change operation.

[170] Bhikkhu Sangharakshita, "A Buddhist Bible?" *MahaBodhi* Vol. 60/5 – 6 (1952), 221 – 23.

[171] Rāhul Sāṅkṛtyāyan, *Navdīkṣit Bauddh* (Lakhnaū: *Buddh Vihāra,* 1975 [1957]), 18.

[172] Quoted in Queen, "Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation," 57.

[173] "Hardships of Neo-Buddhists," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 65/7 (1957), 343.

[174] "Notes and News," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 65/12 (1957), 487 – 88.

population incapable of supporting the monastics in the way they were accustomed to in their own societies was insurmountable.[175] Further complications arose when the foreign Buddhist donors and most importantly, the Birlas, that had for so many decades bankrolled the revival of Buddhism, effectively closed their coffers on the Dalit's dhamma revolution. Precisely why the former group did so is unclear but it may have stemmed from both their political alliances with the Hindu national leadership and their own resistance to Ambedkar's articulation of Buddhism, which was dismissive of other Buddhisms. The Birlas' negative reaction is easier to discern: Ambedkar's Buddhism was sectarian, anti-Hindu and politically charged. In the end, the MahaBodhi Society's "Indian Buddhist Fund" raised a measly 5,676 rupees in the first fourteen months after Ambedkar's conversion.

In a talk broadcast on BBC in May of 1956, just months before his death, Ambedkar explained, "why I like Buddhism." Buddhism he argued, taught three principles that no other religion does: "*prajna* (understanding as against superstition and supernaturalism), *karuna* (love), and *samata* (equality). This is what man wants for a good and happy life. Neither god nor soul can save society."[176] He then quickly added that, "Marxism and Communism have shaken the religious systems of all the countries," and went on to explain how Buddhism answered Marx and was the only solution to the bloody revolutions taking place across the globe. Ambedkar had long toiled with Marxist ideologies and in the last months of his life, he devoted much of his energy to comparing the two universalisms.[177] Marx's revolutionary ideology came closest to Buddhism as an emancipatory ideology. Like Buddhism, it advocated the abolition of private property, aligned poverty with social exploitation, and offered tangible solutions in the present moment. As the next chapter shows, Ambedkar was not the only Indian intellectual to see the similarities between the two.

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[175] For a balanced assessment, see Timothy Fitzgerald, "Politics and Ambedkar Buddhism in Maharashtra," in *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth Century Asia,* edited by Ian Harris (London: Continuum, 1999), 79 – 104.
[176] Quoted in Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* 490.
[177] The Marxist critique is latent in much of Ambedkar's writings but Ambedark's problem with the socialist solution was its argument that material factors alone were responsible for the growth and development of differences. Although he was not entirely consistent in his views, sometimes stressing Brahmin political and economic power over religious ideologies, in his mind the caste social structure that developed in Indian society in his mind was primarily rooted in religious ideologies, not economic conditions. In Anumpama Rao's estimation, it was Marx, not Gandhi that was Ambedkar's primary "intellectual adversary" (Rao, *The Caste Question,* 124).

8 Chapter Eight – When the Buddha met Marx: Socialism, Russia, and revolutionary dharma

This chapter explores the life and thought of two of modern India's most influential Buddhist figures: the Pali scholar and Gandhian nationalist, Dharmanand Kosambi (1876 – 1947) and the polymath, explorer and later communist, Rahul Sankrityayan (1893 – 1963).[1] Both of these individual's lives were characterized by extreme elasticity; a trait characteristic of dialectical minds that like the Buddhist notion of *upāya* could adapt itself to a changing situation. For social historians, this elasticity causes difficulties, for while their dedication to Buddhism and radical socio-economic transformation remained consistent, the strengths of those commitments shifted according to the rapidly changing world they lived in. What this means as scholars like Anne Blackburn and Kris Manjapra have argued, is that "special attention must be paid to the friction of social experiences as well as the breakdown of intellectual tools in crisis."[2] A detailed examination of Kosambi's and Sankrityayan's lives and intellectual output is valuable for two main reasons. First, their lives closely map many of the socio-cultural spaces of Indian Buddhism that have been discussed throughout this dissertation—lingering memories, encounters with Orientalist scholarship and popular literature, global Buddhist networks, reform movements and Dalit Buddhist assertions. Tracing their intellectual and social trajectories in detail allows us to better understand the way these abstract forces shaped and were shaped by real human lives. Second, and of special focus in this chapter, is the fact that both Kosambi and Sankrityayan provide a unique perspective into the tremendous influence that leftist political movements like communism and socialism had in the making of India's modern Buddhism. As the foremost Indian interpreters of Buddhism, Kosambi and Sankrityayan's radical orientations left a profound bearing on the way Buddhism is understood by Indian audiences today. Through a study of their lives and thought, we will provide less an exhaustive historical account of all Indian Buddhist encounters with the 'left' than an overview of the central figures, social conditions and discourses that made the Indian Buddhist Marxist milieu so pervasive.

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[1] Parts of this chapter were previously published in my article, "Like embers hidden in ashes, or jewels encrusted in stone'*:* Rahul Sankrityayan, Dharmanand Kosambi and Buddhist activity in colonial India," *Contemporary Buddhism* Vol. 14/1 (2013), 134 – 48.

[2] This statement has been lightly paraphrased from Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), xx. See also, Anne Blackburn's useful notion of "locative pluralism" in Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism,* 209 – 10.

8.1 Continuities and ruptures

In reading the archives of modern Buddhism, most scholars have understood the encounter between Marxism and Buddhism to be a post-1950s phenomena marked by events such as the Communist invasion of Tibet (1950), Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism'" (1962), the Cambodian King Sihanouk's Buddhist Socialism (1958) or the pseudo-Marxist rhetoric of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge (1975).[3] In recent years, a number of scholars have shown how the dialogue between Buddhism and Marxism actually began several decades earlier in places like Mongolia, Ceylon, Russia, and Japan.[4] The encounter between Buddhists and Marxists had an equally formative role in colonial India with several of the most influential leaders of Indian Buddhism publicly advocating various strands of Marxist ideology either as close alternatives to Buddhism or in conjunction with it. Like other Indian "leftists"—a term used throughout this chapter to denote those individuals or organizations whose ideologies are oriented towards a socialist worldview and in which the writings of Marx hold the primary place of influence—most Indian Buddhist interactions with Marxism developed as attempts to resolve the social and political problems of the period.[5] That is, whether they operated inside the Congress, as part of the international Communist movement, or remained opposed to either for their own political reasons, they had their shared roots in the reaction against British rule *and* indigenous systems of exploitation.

While Indian discussions of Buddhist – Marxism only became more pronounced in the early 1930s, there were much earlier strands of thought that may have inspired the language and idioms later used to propagate the view of Buddha as a Marxist-like

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[3] Studies of Buddhism under Communist rule and/or socialist influence are abundant. Several of the chapters in the edited collections by Harris, *Buddhism and Politics* and Queen and King, *Buddhist Liberation Movements,* provide excellent overviews.

[4] Three of the most focused accounts of Buddhist Marxism are in James Mark Shields, "Blueprint for Buddhist Revolution: The radical Buddhism of Seno' Girō (1889 – 1961) and the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. 39/2 (2012): 333 – 51; and James Mark Shields, "Liberation as Revolutionary Praxis: Rethinking Buddhist Materialism," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* Vol. 20 (2013): 461 – 09; and Trevor Ling, *Buddha, Marx and God: Some Aspects of Religion in the Modern World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979).

[5] On Indian leftism in its historic context, c.f., S. Roy, *Indian Political Thought: impact of Russian Revolution* (Calcutta: Minerva Publications, 1988); R. Chandavarkar, "From Communism to 'Social Democracy': the Rise and Resilience of Communist Parties in India, 1920 – 1995," *Science and Society* Vol. 61/1 (1997), 99 – 106; Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India, 1917 – 1947* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Irfan Habib, "The Left and the National Movement," *Social Scientist* Vol. 26/5 – 6 (1998), 3 – 33. My use of the terms 'left' and 'leftism' most closely follows Irfan Habib, "The Left and the National Movement," and Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India*.

revolutionary intent on transforming Indian society. In part three of Śivaprasād's *Itihās Timiranāśak* (1874), the popular government textbook discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation, Buddha was treated as a liberator of the lower castes, on par with the Russian Tzar and Abraham Lincoln.[6] In no less provocative terms, the Hindu mystic Vivekananda described Buddha as the 'rebel child' of Hinduism at the same time anti-caste intellectuals like Iyothee Thass and Lakshmi Narasu argued early Buddhism to be a religion of the oppressed in an endless struggle against landowning Brahmins. While these arguments provided a subtle layer of continuity to the emerging vision of Buddha as a Marxist, the images, assumptions and strategies upon which these 'Buddhist rebels' were constructed exercised no clear relationship to Marxist doctrine. Instead, it was two powerful forces that began to stimulate this later trend.

The first was the cathartic and bloody events of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Historians of India generally agree that a sustained and widespread engagement with socialist doctrine and organizations did not emerge *inside* India until after the October Revolution and the making of the Soviet state.[7] From the 1920s on, the new Soviet government was widely perceived as an anti-colonial and anti-imperial force that had 'liberated' the Russian peasantry from 'the yoke of Tzardom' and was committed to the right of all nations (including India) to self-determination. For these reasons, many Indian revolutionaries began to see Marxism as a possible model in their own independence movement against the British. They watched eagerly, with both anticipation and admiration, as the Soviet policies of the 1920 – 30s transformed Russian society, instituting a new era of social equality, rapid industrialization, and low unemployment. At the same time, they expressed both horror and fear towards the bloody events of the Revolution, the draconian turn under Stalin and the purges of the mid to late 1930s. The possibility that these same events could occur in India had a profound impact on the Indian national movement.[8]

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[6] Śivaprasād, *Itihās Timiranāśak,* Pt. III, 49.
[7] Habib, "The Left and the National Movement," 5; Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India*, 26. Prior to this period, many Indian socialists and Marxists were living abroad and experienced little success in bringing the socialist message into the orbit of Indian political society (as we will see, Kosambi was one of them). On the early attempts to bring socialism to India, with a focus on M.N. Roy, see Manjapra, *M.N. Roy,* 31 – 62.
[8] The impact of the Russian revolution on India's political leadership is explored in Roy, *Indian Political Thought*. For an alternative take on the Indian reception to the revolution, via the influence of

The second transformation responsible for the interaction of Buddhism and Marxism was less a singular flashpoint than it was a slow, generational shift. During the nineteenth century, most well known Indian scholars of Buddhism had been affiliated with formal institutions of Orientalist learning, government schools or alternatively, with either of Calcutta's two major Buddhist societies, the Bengal Buddhist Association and MahaBodhi Society. While their contribution to Buddhist scholarship and its popularization among India's educated classes was monumental, the social and political terrain that many of these figures occupied was in contrast to a new generation longing for revolution and radical social reform. In short, many of the "new Buddhists" of India had very different agendas shaped by the moral and political climate of the age. Some, like Bhikkhu Bodhanand and Bhimrao Ambedkar, as discussed in the last chapter, were primarily concerned with issues of caste and the redemptive discourse of Buddhism's "liberation theologies."[9] Others, such as Dharmanand Kosambi, Rahul Sankrityayan, Anand Kausalyayan, and Acharya Nagarjun, were equally concerned about the sufferings and humiliations of India's impoverished populations, but the political strategies they employed and ideological conventions they depended on were of a different nature.

8.2 Dharmanand Kosambi and the "remarkable revolution"

By the time of his death at Gandhi's ashram in 1947, Dharmanand Kosambi was known as one of India's most distinguished scholars. In addition to earning a PhD from Harvard in 1929, he published more than thirty books on Buddhism and Indian history and dozens of articles on a variety of topics in Marathi, Gujarati and English. Most of Kosambi's life was consumed by modern Buddhist scholarship, and ultimately its vernacularization for Maharashtrian Indian audiences. Editing texts, collecting manuscripts, translating scriptures, writing and teaching assignments at universities in India, America, and Russia: this was the

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anarchist ideology, see Harjot Oberoi, "Ghadar Movement and its Anachrist Genealogy," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 44/50 (2011): 40 – 46.

[9] For an insightful essay on how Ambedkar's *dhamma* was parallel to the Christian 'liberation theologies' of 1950s Latin America, see Queen, "Buddhist Hermeneutics." While the comparison is indeed apt in many ways, the invocation of 'theology' to describe Ambedkar's dhamma seems misleading since his 'science (*ology*) of God (*theos*)' was essentially based on its absence or deconstruction.

mainstay of Kosambi's life. Yet he was also very much a product of the anti-colonial and Indian nationalist movement as well as the modernist programs of Buddhist social service he learned as a young bhikkhu at the Vidyodaya Piriveṇa in Ceylon.[10] He was extremely active in the Gandhian Non-Cooperation Movement, leading several *satyagraha* protests against British rule—two of which he was jailed for—and drew on his Vidyodaya training to eradicate caste-based discrimination among the outcaste mill workers of Bombay through his Bahujan Vihāra or "Temple of the Masses" (est. 1937). These all informed the making of Kosambi's, and ultimately, modern India's Buddhism. It was the discovery of socialism, however, that caused, as he put it, a "remarkable revolution" in his thinking.[11]

Kosambi was born the youngest of seven children into a Gauḍ Sārasvat Brahmin family in the Portuguese colony of Goa. Raised to manage a coconut farm, he did not have the privilege of a 'modern' education and his enthusiasm for Buddhism was ignited by his reading of a popular account of the Buddha in the Marathi children's magazine, *Bālbodh,* and later, a Marathi translation of Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*. Life in the village was increasingly unsatisfying, however, and his memoir voices frequent frustration at the prevalence of caste-based disputes (*grāmaṇya*), prostitution, and the Hindu worship of "Lady Liquor."[12] At the of age twenty-three Kosambi abandoned his wife and child in search of "knowledge of Buddhism."[13] Utilizing his caste privilege he was able to study Sanskrit in Pune with the renowned scholar Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar (1837 – 1925) and in Benares with distinguished Sanskrit pandits. After two years, in which he faced constant criticism for his personal rather than purely scholastic interest in Buddhism, he journeyed onwards to Nepal and eventually to Bodh Gaya, where his life took a significant turn when he encountered a Burmese bhikkhu who told him about Dharmapala and the MahaBodhi Society. In Calcutta, the MahaBodhi Society, eager to assist Indians interested in Buddhism, paved the way for Kosambi's studies in Ceylon.

During the next six years, Kosambi's circle of friends and knowledge of Buddhist scripture and practice grew exponentially as he travelled a Buddhist network shaped by the

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[10] On Buddhist practice and life at Vidyodaya Piriveṇa, see H.L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings: the new Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 56 – 129.
[11] Kosambi, "Khulasa" [A Clarification] (November 14, 1937), in *Essential Writings,* 221.
[12] Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 64.
[13] Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 73 – 74.

MahaBodhi Society, Bengal Buddhist Association, Śākya Buddhist Society and numerous other organizations and figures. In 1902, he took the vows of a śrāmaṇera at the Vidyodaya Piriveṇa in Colombo under the Venerable Hikkaḍuvē Sumaṅgala, and a year later, he became a bhikkhu in Burma.[14] Kosambi's affinity for Buddhism and the Pali language exposed him to a variety of figures, ideologies and practices, as he trained in meditation practice at Sagaing Hill in Burma alongside the German convert, Nyanātiloka Mahathera, studied comparative religion in Madras with Lakshmi Narasu, and gained the patronage of Khee Zarhee and lived with Mahāvīr at his new Buddhist vihāra in Kuśīnagar. By 1906, this phase of Buddhist practice and study in Kosambi's life entered a new stage when he settled in Calcutta, determined "to make some effort to propagate knowledge of Buddhism" in India.[15] His reputation as an expert in Pali language came to the attention of those Bengali elites who managed the city's educational institutions and wished to see Pali language introduced at the university level. By the end of the year, Kosambi held positions at both the University of Calcutta and National College. This was the beginning of a decades-long teaching career that would take him to universities in Calcutta, Bombay, Sarnath, Pune, Benares, Baroda, Leningrad (Russia) and Cambridge (USA). While in Calcutta, he also came under the personal support of the progressive social reformer and patron of educational projects, Sayajirao Gaikwad III, the Maharaja of Baroda (r. 1875 – 1939).[16] Following Sayajirao back to western India, Kosambi began working on a number of books on Indian history and Buddhism. This also reconnected him with Bhandarkar and several prominent members of the *Prārthanā Samāj* or Prayer Society, an ecumenical body composed of well-educated and primarily upper-caste social reformers. Through their connections (and intellectual and financial support), Kosambi's skills in Pali and Sanskrit language came to the attention of the Harvard Sanskritist James Woods (1864 – 1935), who invited Kosambi to Harvard in 1910 to work on a critical edition of Buddhaghoṣa's *Visuddhimagga* (5th c. CE).[17]

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[14] On Hikkaḍuvē and Vidyodaya Piriveṇa, see Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism,* especially, 34 – 68.
[15] Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 186.
[16] The Maharaja of Baroda was a keen supporter of the Buddhist movement from a very early period, having sponsored the publication of numerous Buddhist texts through the MahaBodhi Society and even installing a public image of Buddha he received from a Japanese visitor, at Jubilee Square in Baroda in 1913. See, "Statue of Buddha at Baroda," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 21/3 (1913), 67. Sayajirao was also the sponsor of Ambedkar's education in the United States.
[17] The publication of this text was delayed until 1950 when a final copy, authored by Kosambi and Charles Lanman was printed by Harvard Press. In total, Kosambi spent nearly eight years on four

When Kosambi arrived in Cambridge, the socialist and progressive movements in America were at the pinnacle of their national influence. The Socialist Party of America's and American Federation of Labor's sensitive portrayals of working class conditions had a profound impact on his thinking.[18] It was not just the solutions that the socialists proposed, however, that Kosambi found so compelling. On the contrary, as he studied them more closely, he became convinced that their ideas paralleled those of the early Buddhist scriptures and living monastic communities he knew so well.[19] In his view, there were two major similarities. First, just as democratic socialists stressed collective-decision making, so did monks within the sangha when reaching decisions about assembly or punishments. Second, the socialist argument for the nationalization of property was akin to those monastic rules forbidding the individual ownership of property (minus the eight items a monk is allowed).[20] Eager to share his discovery, Kosambi published an essay for the Marathi-language journal *Kesarī,* of the radical Lokamānya Tilak group, contending that the idea of democratic-socialist governance was born in the early Buddhist sangha, and therefore not of modern European origin. Using passages taken from the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* and *Saṃyutta Nikāya* as evidence, Kosambi declares:

> The structure of the sangha of monks—through which the Buddha conducted the task of uplifting the people—was based upon the principle of collective ownership which is the highest stage of democracy. And in Burma the Buddhist Sangha still observes this principle. Those who propound the principle of collective ownership are known as 'socialists' in this country [the USA] and in Europe…the chief principle of socialism is 'to establish national ownership over privately owned property, and to induce all citizens to work in a manner conducive to the collective good without falling pretty to the temptation of personal gain under the guise of trade or anything else.'[21]

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different trips at Harvard (1910 – 12, 1919 – 22, 1926 – 29, 1933 – 34) earning a PhD in 1929. Woods, who had traveled to India on multiple occasions, remained a longtime friend of Kosambi, even financially supporting his family in the 1930s when Kosambi was jailed for his involvement in the Non-Cooperation Movement.

[18] On the rise of American socialism during this period, see Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2004), 335 – 69. On Kosambi's American experience, see Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 205 – 19.

[19] Kosambi's discovery of the 'modern' in the 'ancient' has strong parallels with other colonial-era Indian intellectuals who argued for instance that certain systems of modern science had in fact been pre-written in ancient Vedic texts (see, van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*).

[20] Kosambi, "Vajjinche Mahajanasattaak Rajya [Oligarhic Kingdom of the Vajjis]" (October 25, 1910), in *Essential Writings,* 313 – 14.

[21] Kosambi, "Vajjinche Mahajanasattaak Rajya" (1910), in *Essential Writings,* 314 – 15.

The idea that early Buddhism operated according to democratic socialist principles was to become one of the most persuasive and enduring arguments of modern Indian Buddhism. At the time Kosambi's support for this "democratic Buddhist socialism" was delicately stated, but in the ensuing decades it was a position he and many others fervently defended.

For most of the following decade, which included India's bloody conscription into the First World War, the bulk of Kosambi's writings focused on the popularization of Buddhism in Marathi, through translations of Pali scriptures and meditation texts, and introductory essays on Buddhism.[22] Kosambi's choice to write almost entirely in Marathi can be understood on two different fronts. On the one hand, it demonstrates his larger efforts to democratize and vernacularize Buddhist knowledge. It is quite clear that his audience was not just the modern English-educated elite, but also a wider population of Maharashtrians. Second, his focus on the vernacular coincided with his desire to implement social and educational reform among the lowest classes. His efforts in this regard must be understood as part of the larger colonial-era concern with downward social mobility and the unprecedented targeting of lower class and caste communities by Christian missionaries and Hindu, Parsi, and Islamic reformists.

Following the first World War, Kosambi's belief that "real political strength is concentrated in the union of workers" grew more adamant, and he continued to publicly advocate the Marxist ideology of "equality of status and power" as solutions to India's socio-political misfortunes.[23] During the early 1920s, when Gandhi's calls for non-cooperation led to the first nation-wide political struggles, Kosambi went through a phase of profound Gandhian influence, quitting a profitable research position to work at Gandhi's nationalist college, Gujarat Vidyapith (est. 1920). Yet this was also, as mentioned earlier, the period in which communism began to make its first serious inroads within the subcontinent.[24] By the

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[22] A chronological bibliography of many of Kosambi's writings has been compiled by Meera Kosambi, in *Essential Writings,* 414 – 17.

[23] Kosambi, "Khulasa" (1937), in *Essential Writings,* 221. See also, M. Kosambi, "Introduction," in *Essential Writings,* 14 – 17.

[24] While the Communist Party of India (CPI) was founded in 1924, it should be noted that in 1920, M.N. Roy and six of his colleagues had founded a party by the same name in Tashkent. The Tashkent faction struggled for acceptance among India's domestic communists, however and only after the split within the CPI in 1964 did a new branch entitled the CPI-Marxist (M) claim the earlier date as its official founding. See Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1959), 34 – 38 on the origins of the Tashkent CPI, the rise of 'radical'

mid-1920s, there were several independently organized communist groups throughout the subcontinent's major urban centers, the leading comrades of which were in correspondence with one another, working tirelessly to organize the working classes.

One of India's most well known communists at this time was in fact one of Kosambi's old Buddhist 'comrades.' The Tamil lawyer and posthumously named 'Godfather of Indian Labour,' M.N. Singaravelu (1860 – 1946), had worked alongside Kosambi in Madras and Colombo from 1902 to 1904, serving as his translator and subsidizing Kosambi's religious travels.[25] Born into a lower-caste family of fishermen outside Madras, Singaravelu emerged to become a major leader in the Śākya Buddha Society, having managed the group's Royapettah branch and the MahaBodhi Society office since 1899.[26] As late as 1915, he continued to be active in the radical Buddhist movement, widely endorsing the Śākya Society's arguments that the Tamils were "original Buddhists" and that the true swadeshi spirit rest in the egalitarian message of the buddhadharma. By 1921, at the latest, Singaravelu had begun supporting the rising Communist paradigm, convinced that 'true *swaraj*' could only be attained through a communist revolution against capitalist landowners. By the mid-1920s, Singaravelu was a prominent leader in the communist effort with his newspaper *The Hindu* being used in concert with other Indian Marxists as a cover to avoid the British interception of Communist ideas.[27] It is unknown to what degree Kosambi was influenced by Singaravelu's own movement towards communism—the two men never got along and it seems unlikely that they would have stayed in close touch—but Singaravelu's arrest in the highly publicized "Cawnpore [Kanpur] Bolshevik Conspiracy Case" of 1924 would have certainly been known to Kosambi. While the full details elude us, they need not detain us and should rather be seen as part of the ongoing negotiation of the rivaling wills of Buddhism and Marxism in the colonial period.

While Kosambi still remained unsure over the universal applicability of the Soviet model and most importantly, its advocacy of violence and class conflict, there were other

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communist politics in early 1920s India, particularly vis a vis the trade union movement. Much historical scholarship now describes the colonial-era CPI as the 'undivided CPI.'

[25] Kosambi, *Nivedan* (1924), in *Essential Writings,* 124 – 48. It is clear from Kosambi's account that there was little affection between the two and even some animosity.

[26] See, *MahaBodhi* Vol. 8/4 (1899 – 1900), 31 and Vol. 8/6 (1899 – 1900), 51.

[27] Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India,* 48 – 79; K. Murugesan and C.S. Subramanyam, *Singaravelu: First Communist in South India* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1975).

developments in Soviet Russia that were to have an equally powerful impact on his Buddhist thinking. During the first decade after the Russian Revolution, the Soviets had not only implemented radical social and economic policies but had also taken what the historian Vera Tolz calls a "pragmatic" or "tolerant" position towards its religious minorities.[28] One result of this policy was that many of the most prominent Russian "scientists" (*akademiks*) in Imperial Russia's "Rozen School" of Orientology had been deemed 'essential' to the new Soviet bureaucracy. Similar to the role of anthropologists and Orientalists in the European colonization of Asia, their knowledge of 'minority' Buddhist regions and neighboring Buddhist nations was praised by Soviet leaders, including Lenin himself.[29] Two of the most important of these "scientists," Sergei Oldenburg (1863 – 1934) and Fyodor Sherbatskoi (1870 – 1942), were widely known in Russia (and abroad) for their scholarly contribution to India's Buddhist history. They were the founding editors of the major academic series, *Bibliotheca Buddhica* (est. 1897) and with Aghvan Dorjiev (1853 – 1938), the Buryatian tutor and ambassador to the 13th Dalai Lama, they established Saint Petersburg's first Buddhist temple in 1909.[30] During the immediate post-revolution period, these *akademiks* set about establishing Buddhist exhibitions, international conferences, and museums, all of which promoted the compatibility of Buddhism and Bolshevism. The idea that Buddhism could help facilitate the spread of Enlightenment values had much older roots, but under the auspices of the Leningrad Academy of Sciences, 'Bolshevik Buddhism' took on a new pulse. At events like the Buddhist exhibition in Petrograd in 1917, Buddhism was argued to be extraordinarily close to the modern scientific worldview and a religion of the oppressed that had the potential to advance the brotherhood of nations.[31]

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[28] Vera Tolz, *Russia's own Orient: the Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160.
[29] Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnography and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 58 – 61.
[30] Many Kalymk and Buryatian 'Buddhist agents' like Dorjiev were indispensable to the geopolitical goals of the Bolsheveiks. See Alexander Andreyev, "Russian Buddhists in Tibet, from the end of the Nineteenth Century – 1930," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* Vol. 11/3 (2001), 349 – 62.
[31] See, Th. Stcherbatsky, "Philosophical Doctrine of Buddhism" (1919), in *Further Papers of Th. Stcherbatsky*, translated from the Russian into English by H.C. Gupta and edited by D. Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta: R.D. Press, 1970), 11 – 18. On these developments more broadly, see Tolz, *Russia's own Orient,* 141 – 47, and David Schimmlepennick van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 171 – 98.

It was in the midst of these developments that Kosambi—by now an internationally respected Pali scholar and freshly-minted Harvard PhD—was invited to work at Leningrad's newest Institute for the Study of Buddhist Culture (est. 1927). Kosambi's work among the Russian Orientologists from 1929-30 and again in 1933 coincided with two distinct moments that would have a long-lasting influence on his later thought. On the one hand, he was working alongside scholars, in particular Sherbatskoi, widely recognized by American and European scholars alike to be the greatest scholars of Buddhism at the time.[32] These were not rogue scholars gone mad, these were 'scientists' in the vanguard of Buddhist thought. Naturally, the ideas they held about Buddhism as a progressive, liberal force in the modern world only served to strengthen the ideas that Kosambi already held about its compatibility with socialism. On the other hand, Kosambi's travels in Russia overlapped with the beginning of the draconian or 'leftist' turn under Stalin, his campaigns against religion and 'dispersal' of those communists who did not fall in line with Soviet orthodoxy. These were the precursors to the horrendous purges of the mid to late 1930s, events that disillusioned Kosambi as much as the mainstream Indian leadership.[33]

Shortly after Gandhi inaugurated the Civil Disobedience movement in 1930 by picking up a handful of salt on the Dandi seashore in Gujarat, Kosambi returned to India to join the anti-imperialist effort. Despite his interest in the Communist Party of India (CPI) and their steady growth in the subcontinent's urban trade unions, he remained loyal to the Congress program, confident that it still provided the best opportunity for eradicating Indian poverty and gaining political freedom. In the period between April and October, he was arrested twice: first, during the Salt March at Shiroda, and a second time in October where he was sentenced to a year of hard labor.[34] Most of his political efforts during this time were focused in Parel (Bombay), a densely populated neighborhood of low-caste and outcaste millworkers and stevedores that formed the metropolitan underbelly of Bombay's workers

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[32] For instance, in Hajime Nakamura's major review of scholarship on Indian Buddhism, he writes: "In the West, Stcherbatsky's [Sherbatskoi] translation and exposition are most authoritative." See Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographic Notes* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999 [1980]), 301. On Sherbatskoi, variously spelled as Stcherbatsky, see Tolz, *Russia's own Orient,* and Theodore Stcherbatsky, *Papers of Th. Stcherbatsky,* translated from the Russian into English by H.C. Gupta and edited by D. Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta: R.D. Press, 1969) and *Further Papers of Th. Stcherbatsky*.

[33] Roy, *Indian Political Thought,* 52 – 122, and 205 – 08; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 306 – 08.

[34] See "Emperor vs Dharmanand Kosambi," *Bombay High Court*, 19 December 1930 (accessed at: http://www.indiankanoon.org/doc/1723923/). He only served five months of this sentence due to the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March.

movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Significantly, these were areas in which socialist principles and communist activities helped forge sustained expressions of working-class consciousness, albeit often through Congress platforms.[35] While Kosambi's own memoirs are particularly silent about his activities here, daily reports furnished by intelligence officials and the Bombay Presidency Police provide important glimpses of his participation in this "active political terrain."[36] Amidst crowds of up to five thousand, he regularly delivered speeches on the "Workers Duty to the country," "The fight for Bread," and the "happy and contended [sic]" history of India before British rule. In handbills and pamphlets written and signed by Kosambi, "white officers with fat salaries" and their "callous and heartless capitalist" cronies are ridiculed for protecting the "faithless pledges of a dying Empire."[37] Yet after Kosambi was released from jail with the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, he began to express widespread disillusionment with the Gandhi-led Congress platform. He, like many other Indian leftists, were disappointed that the Pact made no explicit references to the grievances and problems of India's peasant and labor movements.[38] The influence of conservative 'reactionary forces' over the Congress leadership, many leftist leaders began to believe, had "rendered it incapable of leading a revolutionary struggle against British imperialism and its native allies."[39] It was in this context that in 1934 the most powerful leftist political party in India was born. As an organization formed within the Congress rather than in opposition to it, the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) aimed to "change the content and

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[35] Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: class, resistance and the state in India, c. 1850 – 1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 266 – 305. For studies of Bombay's working class neighborhoods in a more religious context, see Green, *Bombay Islam*.

[36] The well-known expression is from Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics,* 103. In the reports and intelligence abstracts furnished by the police commissioner of Bombay to the secretary to the government of Bombay Presidency, Kosambi's name appears more than fifty times for those entries dating between April and October, 1930 (c.f. *Source material for a history of the freedom movement in India, Vol. XI, Civil Disobedience Movement April – September 1930,* edited by K.K. Chaudhari (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1990). Kosambi's descriptions of these events are recorded in Kosambi, "Khulasa," [1938], in *Essential Writings,* 226 – 34.

[37] *Source material for a history of the freedom movement,* Vol. XI, 186, 55, 314, 403.

[38] Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India,* 188 – 90. The CPI was by and large disinterested in peasant affairs at this time however, believing instead that the revolutionary base was in the working classes and trade unions (Chandavarkar, "From Communism to 'Social Democracy," 102).

[39] Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India,* 155.

policy of the Congress so that it might emancipate the masses both from foreign power and *the native system of exploitation*."[40]

Kosambi never joined the CSP but when he moved to Sarnath in the 1930s to teach Pali, he collaborated closely with several of its leading ideologues that were also undertaking their own sustained researches in Buddhism. While working at Kashi Vidyapeeth—an institution at that time under the guidance of the CSP President and scholar of Buddhism, Acharya Narendra Dev—Kosambi wrote his most significant work of political theory, *Hindī Sāṃkṛtī āṇī Ahiṃsā* [*Indian Civilization and Non-violence,* (1935)].[41] *Indian Civilization* is a creative and ambitious work, covering several thousand years of Indian history, from the Vedic era to the rise and fall of *śramaṇa* cultures up through the present-day. It demonstrates Kosambi's mastery over Pali, Sanskrit and Prakrit sources and at the same time, its Marxist undertones are obvious, as the reader is taken on an evolutionary journey following the classical Marxist historiography of primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and finally, communism. While a Marxist focus on private property shapes the text, the thread that pulls the entire narrative together is Kosambi's argument that Buddhist (and Jain) non-violence (*ahimsa*) is central to the progress of human civilization. In the last chapter of the text, which bears the same name as the title of the book, Kosambi makes explicit his thesis. The premise is simple: as non-violence advances, so too does civilization; when violence ensues, civilization declines.[42] Yet Gandhian-style non-violence alone is not enough, as Kosambi makes clear in his assessment of the present state of Indian affairs:

> India's Hindu middle class is agitating for independence. It wants independence—whether through non-violence or violence. A sickly man thinks little of whether a medicine (*auṣadhi*) contains the pure essence (*pavitra*) of plants or impure essence (*apavitra*) of meat and such things. He only wants good health (*ārogya,* literally 'absence of disease') and the sooner it comes the better. The medicines of the Ārya Samāj, Lokamanya [Tilak's] Ganesh festival, and Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent and

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[40] Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India,* 155. Although the latter part of this argument had been expressed for a decade by the CPI, many Indians—whether on the 'right' or the 'left'—were deeply sceptical of the CPI, believing it to be too closely linked to the Comintern and the Soviet machinery.

[41] My reading of *Indian Civilization and Non-violence* stems from Pandit Viśvanāth Dāmodar Śolāpurkar's Hindi translation. See, Dhārmanand Kosambī, *Bhāratīy Saṃskrti, aur Ahiṃsā,* translated from the Marathi into the Hindi by Pandit Viśvanāth Dāmodar Śolāpurkar (Naī Dillī: Samyak Prakāśan, 2010). An English translation of the book's last chapter has also been published by Meera Kosambi. See, Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti ani Ahimsa* [Civilization and Non-Violence] (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 327 – 57. When quoting sections from the last chapter, I use Meera Kosambi's English translation for sake of ease and reference. All other translations from the text refer to the Hindi edition.

[42] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 327.

> constructive project have been tried, but none have brought the cure (*lābh*). If the Bolsheviks have freed the working classes (*mazdūr-varg*) in all of the Russian Empire by destroying the aristocrats (*sardār*) and landowners (*zamindār*) all the while fighting the entire world, then why are we not able to free India of her suffering by taking the same path?[43]

Like Buddha, who in the *Majjhima Nikāya* is described as a physician treating a wound with the appropriate medicine, *Indian Civilization* is Kosambi's own elixir—his own recipe for revolution that avoids the unnecessary bloodshed of the Bolsheviks by welding Buddha's doctrine of non-violence, the Marxist wisdom of socio-economic reform and the tactical brilliance of satyagraha promoted by Gandhi. This socialist dharmic remedy should be understood as part of what the critical theorist David Scott has described as "the modern longing for revolution." Following Barnard Yack, Scott argues that the modern conception of revolution is based on "distinctive ways of defining the problem to be overcome…so as to achieve satisfaction."[44] For Kosambi, the problem is not just Indian independence, but human suffering (*duḥkha*) more widely, and his solution is clearly a blend of Buddhist and Marxist strategies.

Only towards the end of the essay when dealing with the contemporary period does Kosambi depart radically from Marxist historiography to begin his own rigorous Buddhist critique. He begins by suggesting that while the Marxist criticisms of capitalism as based upon by greed and exploitation are correct, they are better understood through a Buddhist lens. Using a series of passages from the *Tripiṭaka* literature, Kosambi explains how existential suffering (*duḥkha*) is created by the three types of cravings (Pali *taṇhā,* Sanskrit, *trṣṇā*): for sensual pleasures (*kām*), for experiences (*bhav*), and for non-experiences

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[43] *"Bhārat kā hindū madhyamvarg svatantrā ke lie vyākul ho rahā hai. Āhiṃsā dwārā ho yā hiṃsā dwārā, yadi svatantrā miltī ho to vah use cāhie. Rog se pīṛit manuṣy iskā vicar thoṛe hī kartā hai ki auṣadhi meiṃ pavitra vanspatiyāṃ haiṃ yā apavitra māṃsādi ke ark. Vah cāhtā hai ārogy aur vah jitnī jaldī mil sake utnā acchā. Usne āryasamāj lokmāny ke gaṇpati utsav aur mahatma gāndhī ke ahiṃsātmak vidhāyak kāryakram kī auśdhiyāṃ khākar dekh līṃ koī lābh nahīṃ huā. Ēsī avasthā meiṃ utkaṃṭhit yuvkoṃ ke man yadi bolśevik auṣadhī aur jāeṃ to yah bilkul svābhāvik hai. Sāre saṃsār ke virudhd laṛkar apne sardāroṃ aur zamindāroṃ ko parājit kar yadi bolśevik raśiyan sāmrājy ke sāre mazdūr-varg ko svataṃtra kar sake to usī mārg se cal kar ham is pīṛit hind deś ko kyoṃ nahīṃ svataṃtra kar sakte?"* Kosambi, *Bhāratīy Saṃskrti,* 168.

[44] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: the tragedy of colonial enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 64. Scott's phrase "modern longing for revolution" belongs in part to Barnard Yack's work, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

(*vibhav*).[45] Pursuing these pleasurable, but ultimately temporal experiences, he explains, will lead only to decay and further suffering. Having established this point, he then argues that Marxists conceive of suffering primarily through the lens of servitude and bondage related to the ownership of private property. This too, Kosambi explains, is linked to Buddhist craving. In Kosambi's logic, it was precisely the sangha's desire for and accumulation of property—in the form of land (*zamīn*), women (*strī*), and slaves [*dāsa*]—that led to its ultimate decline and degeneracy.[46] This leads him to conclude that religious communes and renunciation are antiquated and unrealistic modes of living. On the one hand, "if all men and women give up their land and become renunciants, all will soon starve to death."[47] On the other hand, if they exist separately from secular society, they will be compelled to accept land grants from kings, which Kosambi insists was their very downfall in the beginning.[48]

However, while he agrees with the socialists that religion is indeed the "opiate of the people," he sees the craving of nations, or nationalism as deadly of an addiction.[49] If religion is an opiate, he declares, "nationalism is liquor."[50] While the Buddhist scriptures point to collective and personal craving as sources of suffering, here Kosambi envisions a new criteria of suffering in the modern world, a quality he calls "nationalist craving." Echoing Marx, but couched in a uniquely Indic Buddhist idiom he recounts how the nationalist craving for "profitable trade" among the upper classes of England drove them to conquer the world, from the Americas to Asia to Africa:

> This adventure yielded profit sometimes, and loss at others. It necessitated 'resolve'—and the practice of pushing ahead only where there was profit, retreating where there was a loss. Then the 'clinging' or attendant desire to strengthen the sources of profit became powerful, which led to 'possessions' and to a structure of authority for guarding one's wealth, and the need to maintain 'security'...the national good, that is, bringing into the country the wealth of other countries, turned every evil deed into a praiseworthy one! ...instead of feeling disgusted by craving, England developed greater greed. The result was the last world war.[51]

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[45] Kosambi, *Bhāratīy Saṃskrti,* 176.
[46] Kosambi, *Bhāratīy Saṃskrti,* 182 – 83.
[47] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 350.
[48] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 350.
[49] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 354, uses the term *sāmpradāyikatā* for religion when he discusses the "opiate of the people," which may mean something closer to religious sectarianism as opposed to *sāmpradāya,* typically translated as just religion or tradition.
[50] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 354.
[51] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 339.

Warning that Britain's "imperial greed" will lead again to massive violence and exploitation, Kosambi concludes that the foremost solution to "national craving" is the same as suggested for other forms of craving: the doctrine of *aparigraha*, or "avoidance of possessions."[52] Here again, as in his earlier writings, he argues that this parallels the nationalization schemes theorized by democratic socialists. However, this time, citing the eighth-century Buddhist scholar, Śāntideva, Kosambi boldly equates the revolutionary call to nationalize property with the "unparalleled joy" of *nirvana*. In the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva proclaims*:* "Nirvana is giving up everything, and that is what I wish for. If I have to give up everything, it is best to do so for the welfare of all creatures."[53] Commenting on this, Kosambi asks rhetorically: "By abandoning their great and small estates for the good of mankind, would our wealthy people not share in such unparalleled joy?"[54]

Having shown that Buddhism and Marxism propounded similar views for the "welfare of mankind," Kosambi prescribes his synthetic tonic: the practice of "true wisdom" (*prajñā*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*). Marx, in Kosambi's vision, was a dispenser of the former but "suffered from the narrow-mindedness of Europeans."[55] That is, while his scientific knowledge of social evolution was instrumental in the advancement of mankind, it has been ultimately destructive because it was not accompanied by non-violence.[56] Turning Marx's historical sociology on his own head, Kosambi calls Marx a product of his culture, a culture that foolishly "demands an adversary" and believes that "civilization will not advance without such competition."[57] According to Kosambi, the Marxist solution to nationalism and capitalism was to unite the entire working class and oppose the bourgeoisie with the premise that the hostility between the two would wane after the struggle was over. Yet this he argues, simply transfers the hostility between nations to a hatred between bourgeoisie and workers. Comparing this strategy to "removing a thorn with another thorn," he warns:

> if, while removing a thorn with another thorn, the second thorn breaks and its sharp end remains inside before the first thorn can be removed, it is going to be more painful than it was. This situation has arisen today in Italy and Germany. An attempt

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[52] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 340 – 41.
[53] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 353fn12.
[54] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 353fn12.
[55] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 355.
[56] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 355 – 57.
[57] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 356.

> was made to use the thorn of socialism to remove the thorn of nationalism; but extrication of the first thorn failed and the second thorn joined it.[58]

The only viable way to free man's cravings from the mundane agonies of suffering and exploitation, he proposes, is an eclectic blend of *ahimsa*, socialist wisdom, and Gandhian political strategy (*satyāgraha*):

> In our country, Parshwa [the Jain Tirthankara] and the Buddha turned the current of non-violence towards the good of the masses. But it did not get into the political sphere and was, as a result, mired in a puddle of religious sectarianism. Around it grew the forest of the puranas. Mahatma Gandhi's attempt to give that further impetus and turn it to the political sphere is truly to be congratulated. But it was obstructed midway and suffered a loss of direction. This was good, in a way, because if it had continued it would have fallen into the ditch of nationalism and proved detrimental. Only if non-violence is accompanied by the wisdom of socialists will this current [the looming threat of war] turn in the right direction, and lead to the welfare of mankind.[59]

Kosambi was no doubt aware that this very kind of political critique had been waged two decades earlier by those communists who went on to found the Third Communist International.[60] What is original in Kosambi's argument, however, is his rather eclectic articulation of this in an indigenous Indic terminology much more likely to precipitate his Marathi-reading audience into action.[61] The cacophony of voices in Kosambi's philosophy of history—Gandhi, Tolstoy, Marx, Aśvaghoṣa, Voltaire, Śāntideva, Gautama Buddha, Lenin—is testament to the ideological conventions intellectuals like Kosambi had to depend on in giving Buddhism a respected place in the modern Indian conscience. The loom upon which Kosambi's philosophy is set is undoubtedly Marxist, but in the final weave the design is most clearly a modern democratic Buddhist socialism set to clothe the poor, the oppressed, and the left-leaning non-violent revolutionary. As is clear in *Indian Civilization*, the role of Buddhist

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[58] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 356.
[59] Kosambi, *Hindi Sanskriti* (1935), in *Essential Writings,* 357.
[60] That is, at the Second International, a general strike against the First World War had in fact been agreed upon, although it was never put into action. This critique was quite popular during the 1930s. I am grateful to Laurence Cox for bringing this to my attention (personal communication, December 13, 2012).
[61] Kosambi's argument can also be seen as part of the 'rationalist revolt' against 'mystical Gandhism' and 'dogmatic Communism' in 1930s India. This movement, as Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India,* 136 –65, has defined it, was led by Indian leftists who believed in the broad principles underlying the socio-economic structures of Russia but did not subscribe to everything taught or done by the Soviet leaders. Significantly, while they remained fervently committed to the goals of anti-imperialism and socialism, they remained convinced that the Congress was the best vehicle for realizing those goals, keeping a careful distance from the workers of the Communist Party of India.

non-violence always took precedence over not just the core Buddhist doctrine of suffering but also the Marxist thrust on exploitation. The First World War, the Soviet purges and the experience of witnessing bodies "being reduced to corpses" at the Shiroda satyāgraha had cemented Kosambi's dedication to Gandhi's non-violent tactics.[62] Although never losing sight of the Marxist emphasis on social exploitation, even his penultimate work, a play on the life of Gautama (*Nāṭak: Bodhisattva, 1949*), traced Buddha's renunciation not to the experience of witnessing sickness, old age, and death, but to the imminent warfare of the Śākya and Koliya clans.[63]

Indian Civilization was Kosambi's last major written attempt to influence political developments. His later works continued to show the stamp of leftist thought but it was his son's scholarship during the next decades that would associate the Kosambi name with Marxism, not the father's.[64] Yet in the months and years just after *Indian Civilization* went to print, Kosambi attempted to put his philosophy into practice in the mill workers' area of Parel where he had worked during the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1930 – 32. Since his early days as a bhikkhu at the Vidyodaya Piriveṇa to his work with the Bombay Buddha Society and MahaBodhi Society, Kosambi had been long exposed to mixing Buddhism and social work. While the Bombay Buddha Society ran a vihāra, the Society was, as discussed in chapter six, always highbrow. After a meeting with Ambedkar in October of 1935, in which the Dalit leader expressed the need for a local Buddhist vihāra to cater to the masses (*bahujan*), Kosambi informed JK Birla and Gandhi of Ambedkar's interests. JK promised Kosambi his support, and construction work was begun on a modest open-air Bahujan Vihāra (People's Temple), topped with an elegant stupa modeled on the Karli caves. For three years, Kosambi worked as the temple keeper, prescribing his heady brew of Buddhist socialism to the temple's lower-caste and Dalit visitors. Kosambi resigned from the temple's management in 1939 due to a fall out with JK and not long after, the MahaBodhi Society took over the temple to pursue what Eleanor Zelliot called "a somewhat less ambitious encouragement of Buddhist ideas."[65] It was to be Kosambi's last and only attempt to directly spread Buddhism and socialism among the urban masses. At the same time that Kosambi's efforts to explicitly

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[62] Kosambi, "Khulasa" (1938), in *Essential Writings,* 230.
[63] Kosambi, "Bodhisattva: Natak [A Play]" (1947), in *Essential Writings,* 358 – 408.
[64] Kosambi's son, D.D. Kosambi, is typically seen as the 'father' of India's Marxist historiography.
[65] Zelliot, "Indian Discovery of Buddhism," 393.

synthesize socialism and Buddhism began to wind down, one of Kosambi's distant colleagues and no less an important scholar began espousing his own revolutionary dharma.

8.3 Rahul Sankrityayan and the Marxist reform of Buddhism

If Dharmanand Kosambi forged a Maharashtrian Buddhist public, then Rahul Sankrityayan (1893 – 1963) did the same for the Hindi-speaking world. Like Kosambi, Sankrityayan crisscrossed the global networks of Buddhist activity in colonial India as an outstanding scholar, popular writer and progressive social reformer. Although best known in Buddhist circles for his recovery of 'lost' Sanskrit manuscripts in Tibet,[66] the well-travelled explorer was also active in the nationalist movement, first with the Gandhi-led Congress and then with the Kisān Sabhā or Peasant Movements, and spent a total of six years in British prisons between 1920 and 1942. Yet unlike Kosambi, Sankrityayan's engagement with Marxism was more forceful, his Buddhist vision couched in the language of Marx rather than Kosambi's socialism couched in the language of Buddha.

Born Kedārnāth Pāṇḍe to an orthodox Brahmin family in Azamgarh (modern-day Uttar Pradesh), Sankrityayan received his first education in the village pāṭhśālā, where he studied Urdu and Sanskrit. At the age of ten, he moved to Benares to continue studies in Sanskrit and became a Vaiṣṇava sādhu, adopting the name Baba Rāmodār Dās. The experience of reciting mantras and performing rituals, however, turned him away from Hindu orthodoxy, and by 1914, fed up with the ritual purity (*śauc-snān*) of the temples, he became a traveling missionary (*prachārak*) for the Hindu reformist organization, the Ārya Samāj. While honing his skills in proving one's case (*mandan)* and refuting other ideologies (*khandan)*—the basis of Ārya Samāji missionary work— Sankrityayan gained greater

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[66] The contents of these discoveries, some of which are currently housed in Patna, included a large cache of Sanskrit manuscripts (as well as Tibetan translations of missing Sanskrit texts) dating from the second century BCE to the thirteenth century CE. Some of the most important finds for scholars at that time were the complete manuscripts of the Pramāṇavārttika-bhāṣā, a subcommentary on Dharmakīrti's work on logic and Asaṅga's Yogācārabhūmi. Also noteworthy was what was then one of the oldest known versions of Saraha's Dohakośa (composed in Apabhraṃśa) and the biography of Dharmasvāmin (*Chag lo-tsa-ba Chos-rje-dpal*), a Tibetan pilgrim who visited India during the thirteenth-century. Numerous translations and critical editions of these manuscripts have since been published by the Bihar and Orissa Research Society and K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute. Although Sankrityayan published extensively on a variety of topics, very few of his works are available in English. A notable exception, focusing on Buddhism is Rahul Sankrityayan, *Selected Essays of Rahul Sankrityayan* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1984).

exposure to Buddhism, first as text and then living tradition. The central text of the Ārya Samāj, the *Satyārth Prakāś* or *Light of Truth* (1875), which Samājis were required to master, contained a special chapter dedicated to refuting the 'heterodox' schools of Indian philosophy, among which Buddhism was included. While traveling through Lucknow in 1917, Sankrityayan met Bodhanand Mahāsthavir (1874 – 1952), the Bengali founder of the Indian Buddhist Society. Impressed by Bodhanand's character and presentation of Buddhism, Sankrityayan began what can be truly marked as the beginning of his life-long engagement with Buddhism.

More than a decade would pass before Sankrityayan would replace his sadhu's robes with those of the Buddhist bhikkhu and change his name one last time to Rahul Sankrityayan, but under Bodhanand's guidance, he began reading Buddhist scriptures in Bengali, Sanskrit and Pali. As an Ārya Samāji, he was at first closely linked to the Congress and Hindu MahāSabhā as those three organizations coalesced and splintered during the 1920s. He was active in the Gandhian Non-Cooperation Movement in Bihar, and in between two and a half years of jail terms from 1921 to 1925, he was elected as the Secretary of the District Congress in Saran.[67] One of his primary tasks during this period was to serve on the committee for the MahaBodhi temple case along with Rajendra Prasad (later, the first President of India), and the renowned Indologist, K.P. Jayaswal. Such a responsibility not only connected him with the country's foremost political elites but also set him on the MahaBodhi Society track that Kosambi had travelled nearly three decades before.

Like Kosambi, he travelled to Ceylon in 1929, taking his *upasampadā* in Ceylon in 1930 under the Venerable Lunupokne Dhammananda. The Buddhist atmosphere that he encountered was extremely cosmopolitan, studying alongside Chinese, Sinhalese, Indian and European monastics yet in other ways his experiences of Sinhalese monasticism were significantly different than those Kosambi had experienced nearly thirty years before. While Kosambi had studied at Vidyodaya Piriveṇa, Sankrityayan had been sent to that college's sister institution, Vidyālaṇkāra Piriveṇa. These two institutions of Buddhist learning, both established under British rule in the late nineteenth century, were characteristic of what the

[67] Although he knew nothing of Marxism at the time, the reports he read and rumours he heard in jail of the socialist transformation in Russia led him to write his own utopian novel (*Bāisvin Sadi,* 1921), set as the title suggests, in the twenty-second century.

anthropologist H.L. Seneviratne described as a kind of "rational indigenous" response to colonialism.[68] In short, this reaction demanded the synthesis of European Enlightenment ideals and social forms with the "universalizing and liberating essence" of the buddhadhamma.[69] According to Seneviratne, the contrast between the two institutions was stark. Vidyodaya—Kosambi's *alma mater*—advocated a "sober" and "conservative" program of Buddhist social service and economic policies. Sankrityayan's garden of enlightenment, Vidyālaṇkāra, on the other hand, was groomed in an "indigenous anti-imperialism" by a new generation of Marxist-inspired Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists.[70] Indeed, the writings of Sankrityayan along with other Indian Buddhist monks studying at Vidyālaṇkāra Piriveṇa in the 1930s, including Kavi Nagarjun, Anand Kausalyayan, and Jagdish Kashyap, describe a vibrant atmosphere in which Pali manuscripts, Sanskrit literature, and Orientalist scholarship was circulated alongside the writings of Marx and American freethinkers like Robert Ingersol (1833 – 99).[71]

While the social space of these institutions may disrupt and challenge the essentialized and sanitized visions of Buddhism imagined by many, this was not just a setting unique to the monastic world of British Ceylon. Elsewhere, Sankrityayan's global encounters with Buddhism were met by individuals acutely aware of (and keen to discuss) the politics of de-colonization and the rise of the Marxist paradigm. Whether at the homes of seminal European scholars in Paris and London, where Sankrityayan served as a "missionary" (*dharmadūt*) for Dharmapala's "London Buddhist Mission" from 1932 – 33 or in the

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[68] C.f. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*. See also, Gombrich and Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed,* and Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism.*
[69] Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, 11.
[70] Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, 131fn2. Each institution's ideologies and activities have been analyzed closely by Seneviratne on pages 56 – 188. It is important to recognize that the anti-imperialist Marxist rhetoric of the Vidyālaṇkāra monks was primarily in opposition to imperialism as related to colonialism but not to the Marxist definition of imperialism as an extension of capitalism (160fn41).
[71] Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Merī Jīvan Yātrā*, Vol. 2, 1 – 28, 106 – 10, 124 – 28; Medhankar, *Bhadant Ānand Kausalyāyan,* 31 – 41. On Vidyālaṇkāra more broadly, see Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings,* 133 – 67. I do not mean to imply here that the reading of Marx is necessarily evidence of support for his theories. On the contrary, many Vidyālaṇkāra monks were at the forefront of anti-Marxist campaigns. In those cases where Sinhalese intellectuals actually worked to demonstrate the compatibility between Buddhism and Marxism, this often arose as an effort 'to counter the established elite's attempt to get some monks and others to portray Marxism as the enemy of Buddhism' (Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings,* 144fn22). My reason for pointing this out is to bring attention to both the availability of this literature and the frequency with which these ideas were being discussed. This would have no doubt inspired intellectuals like Sankrityayan to think about these issues more deeply and lead him to form his own judgements.

assembly halls and libraries of Tibet's thousand-year old *gompas* where he spent much of the 1930s, rumors of a new 'Buddhist dialectics' hovered in the air. During his first research trip to Tibet in 1929, for instance, his Mongolian tutors informed him of the Soviet-instigated "renewal movement" in Buryatia to restore Buddhism to its original, "primitive form, which has no friction with atheism, communal ownership of property," and "Marxism."[72] The "Buddha and Marx are not antagonistic," he was told, "but complementary to one another."[73] There was a newfound global confidence in Buddhism, a religion which in the words of Sankrityayan's later colleague and mentor, the famed Russian scholar Fyodor Scherbatskoi:

> …embodies in itself the highest ideals of the good, of love for one's fellow beings, of spiritual freedom and moral perfection, a religion that has ennobled the peoples of Asia and introduced civilization into their lives…[a religion that] reveals not the inadequacy of the logic of Indian intellect but rather its *undoubted superiority*.[74]

By the mid-1930s—the period in which Kosambi also made his most sophisticated synthesis of Marxist and Buddhist thinking—Buddhism was, in Sankrityayan's view, a teaching based on reason (*buddhi*), human pragmatism (*manuśya māpavād)* and atheistic humanism (*nāstik mānaviyatā*). These were the types of qualities, which David Scott has argued in the context of Marxism's global rise in the 1930s that gave Marxist revolutionaries "a new idea of the rhythm of history, a new conception of historical agency, and a new idea of how to self-consciously wrest the future from the past."[75] The gathering momentum behind this new revolutionary Buddhism was a frequent source of inspiration for modern Indian Buddhists and Buddhist sympathizers: in the ancient Indian Buddhist past, they had discovered an egalitarian, scientific dharma that could play a critical role in the global revolution. Sankrityayan, like other Buddhist 'modernists,' was particularly impressed by those texts, such as the *Kālāma Sūtta*, which as we saw with P. Lakshmi Narasu in chapter four, were widely seen as embodying an "empiricist spirit of free inquiry and self-determination."[76] Sankrityayan's own reading of the *Kalāmās* and the *Majjhima Nikāya* mirrors this kind of interpretation. In his memoir, he writes:

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[72] Sankrityayan, "The Rise and Fall of Buddhism in India" (1923 – 33), in *Selected Essays,* 137.
[73] Sankrityayan, "The Rise and Fall of Buddhism in India" (1923 – 33), in *Selected Essays,* 137.
[74] Stcherbatsky, "Philosophical Doctrine of Buddhism" (1919), in *Further Papers of Th. Stcherbatsky,* 11, 18.
[75] Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity,* 68.
[76] McMahan, *Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 64. See also, Bhikkhu Bodhi, ""A Look at the Kalama Sutta."

> When in the *Kālāmas,* I discovered the Buddha's teaching—do not accept the teaching of any book, any tradition, out of concern for your elders, always decide for yourself before you take it on principle—my heart suddenly said, listen, here is a man whose unswerving faith in truth [*satya*] understood the strength of man's independent reason [*buddhi*]…when, in the *Majjhima Nikāya,* I read: the teachings of the *dharma* that I have given are like rafts, to carry you to the other side, not to be carried like burdens upon your head; only then I realized, that the thing which I had been seeking for so many days, had been found.[77]

For Sankrityayan, the words of the Buddha were "like embers hidden in ashes, or jewels encrusted in stone," that despite being spoken twenty-five hundred years ago were still relevant to the modern mind and worthy of recovery and propagation.[78]

To recover the Triple Gem, Sankrityayan undertook four major research expeditions to Tibet (1929 – 30, 1934, 1936, 1938) in search of Sanskrit manuscripts.[79] There is neither the space nor time here to explore the details of these incredible journeys and the impact that they had on the wider world of modern Buddhology and Indology. Briefly, only three points should be mentioned. First, the impetus for Sankrityayan's journeys to Tibet had their origins in the late nineteenth-century belief that Tibetan scholastic traditions held the key to unlocking the Indian past.[80] This assumption, which as discussed in chapter three, began with figures like Sarat Chandra Das (1849 – 1917) and L.A. Waddell (1854 – 1938) and had since then been effectively cemented into fact through the outstanding research of later scholars like Saratchandra Vidyabhusan (1870 – 1920) and Giuseppe Tucci (1894 – 1984). Like Das before him (and Tucci at the same time), Sankrityayan not only travelled to Tibet in search of 'lost' Sanskrit manuscripts, but returned with *proof* of their existence, either in physical editions he acquired, photographs he took or in the copies he made by hand. Second, research trips to Tibet were rather unusual at the time for scholars of non-Tibetan origin. To complete the journeys, which grew ever more complex as time wore on and funding allowed, he relied on the support of Nepalese pandits like Hemarāja (1878 – 1953), Tibetan scholars like Gendun Chopel (1901 – 51), Samlo Geshe (dates unknown) and Geshe Sherab Gyatso (1884

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[77] Sāṇkṛtyāyan *Merī Jīvan Yātrā,* Vol. 2, 19.
[78] Sāṇkṛtyāyan *Merī Jīvan Yātrā,* Vol. 2, 19.
[79] These years also involved extensive travel to other parts of Asia and Europe, including a long journey to western Europe (1932 – 33), Ladakh and Lahaul (1933, 1936), Japan, Korea, Manchuria and Russia (1935), Nepal (1936), Iran, Afghanistan and Russia (1937 – 1938) in addition to several cross-country journeys through India and Lanka.
[80] He had begun studying Tibetan in 1927, approximately two years before his first journey to Tibet. Although his knowledge of the literary language was excellent, even by 1936, he only "knew about as much Tibetan as a seven-year old child," according to his Tibetan colleague, Gendun Chophel. See, Chopel, *Grains of Gold,* 32.

– 1968), Newari merchants like Dharmamān Tuladhār (1862 – 1938) and a host of Tibetan aristocrats who provided him protection.[81] Third, while Sankrityayan's presence among this galaxy of Himalayan and Tibetan elites was profoundly influential, he was no less a powerful force among the Indian and European elite. His scholarship brought him notoriety among European scholars, like Sylvain Lévi who had two of his Hindi-language essays translated into French and published in the prestigious academic periodical, *Journal Asiatique.*[82] At the same time, an exhibition of Sankrityayan's Tibetan thangka and manuscript collection was held in London's Regent Park in 1932.[83] In between travels to Europe and elsewhere in Asia, Sankrityayan continued working closely with numerous Indian scholars whose own lives were being transformed by the political revolution taking place in India.

The network of scholars who Sankrityayan fell in with back in India was by no means limited to Buddhologists with leftist leanings or leftists with Buddhological interests but it is notable that the two often went hand in hand. This union did not happen overnight but was slow and steady, a tug of war between the competing universalisms taking root in Indian soil. There were men like Rammanohar Lohia (1910 – 67), J.K. Narayan (1902 – 79), Acharya Kripalani (1888 – 1982) and Acharya Narendra Dev (1889 – 1956), all of whom theorized the parallels between Buddhism and the progressive socialist movements they were attempting to uphold.[84] Sankrityayan, like Kosambi, was close with several of these figures, especially after 1939 when he disrobed and joined the peasant movement in Bihar. Take for instance, Acharya Narendra Dev, the prominent educator and founder of the Congress Socialist Party, who as noted above was also a scholar of Buddhism.[85] Sankrityayan and Dev

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[81] Very few of these relationships have been studied in any detail, apart from that of Gendun Chopel, who acted as a harbinger of "Tibetan modernity." See, Heather Stoddard, *Le Mendiant de l'Amdo,* (Paris: Société d'Ethnographie, 1986). The role of the Newaris in these travels was paramount and their role in Indian Buddhist affairs was likely no less so, although our understanding of this remains abysmal. Of equal value and yet hardly understood was Sankrityayan's long-lasting relationship with Sherab Gyatso (*Shes rab rgya mtsho*), who later became a prominent Tibetan communist and head of the Chinese Buddhist Association.

[82] See, Rahul Sankrityayan, "Recherches Bouddhiques, par le Bhiksu Rahula Sanrkrityayana (de Benares)," *Journal Asiatique* Vol. 225 (1934), 195 – 230.

[83] "Paintings from Tibet ready for Buddhist art exhibition," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 40/11 (1932), 512. The exhibition was covered in London's *Daily Herald*. This collection is now housed at the Patna Museum in Bihar.

[84] There is no systematic study of why so many Indian leftists were attracted to Buddhism despite this becoming increasingly conspicuous among modern scholars (see, Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic,* 218).

[85] Narendra Dev's studies in Indology at Queen's College had led him to Buddhism and from the 1930s until his death in 1956, he published a number of influential works on Buddhist history. His most important work on Buddhism, *Bauddhadharma-darśan* (1956), won India's most distinguished literary award from the *Sahitya Akademi* in 1956. It is significant to note that during Dev's incarceration at Ahmadanagar Fort in 1942, he

translated the *Communist Manifesto* into Hindi in 1931 and in the next two and a half decades, they met often at Buddhist celebrations, scholarly conferences on Hindi language and at leftist political platforms.[86] Politically, Sankrityayan was to the far left of most of India's socialists but his erudition and commitment to Hindi as a lingua franca earned their respect. His writings and speeches were notoriously provocative and known for calling a spade a spade. He challenged the economic clout of landholding classes, the orthodoxy of Brahmin priests, urged women to abandon their families and travel the world, peasants to rise up against their masters and was known for entering Brahmin vegetarian halls and demanding meat. Yet despite these provocations, his scholarship was considered so profound and his opinions so valued that his otherwise unorthodox and marginal identity—a radical leftist who wore Buddhist robes—was center to many debates and institutions.

As the 1930s wore on, the question that drove Sankrityayan, like many leftists and Buddhists alike, was the seeming compatibility of Buddhism with Marxism. That the Russian Orientologists in Leningrad were highly regarded by Indian (and other) scholars of Buddhism as being in the vanguard of this field of thought has already been alluded to (Scherbatskoi, in Sankrityayan's words, was "the greatest Orientalist of his time").[87] It is not surprising then that Sankrityayan, like Kosambi before him, gravitated towards their scholarship and interpretations of India's Buddhist past. By the time Sankrityayan was finally granted permission to work in Leningrad in 1937, however, the Soviet attitude towards Buddhism had changed, moving from tolerance to outright condemnation and persecution.[88] Six of Scherbatskoi's closest colleagues at the Institute of Buddhist Culture (where Kosambi had worked) had been arrested, denounced as 'counter-revolutionaries'—one was even executed—and Stalin himself had felt it necessary to publicly ridicule "the absurd theory of

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helped Jawaharlal Nehru write the sections on Buddhist history and logic that appeared in *The Discovery of India* (Nehru, *Discovery of India,* 9, 173, 564), and was later a part of Nehru's 'Buddhist diplomacy' programme in the 1950s (the subject of chapter nine of this dissertation).

[86] See, Ābhijit Bhaṭṭācārya, *Mahāpandit Rāhul Sāṅkrtyāyān ke Vyaktitvāntaraṇ* (Kolkātā: Ānand Prakāśan, 2005), 141 – 51.

[87] Sāṇkṛtyāyan *Jinkā main kṛtagya* (Ilāhābād: Kitāb Mahal, 1957), 195.

[88] Sankrityayan travelled to Moscow in 1935, but he was denied permission to visit Leningrad at that time—purportedly because of his stated occupation on visa forms as a 'Buddhist monk' (c.f., Russian visa documents published in *Indo-Russian Relations: 1917-1947, Select Documents from the Archives of the Russian Federation, part II: 1929-1947*, edited by P. Roy, S.D. Gupta, and H. Vasudevan (Calcutta: the Asiatic Society, 1999), 388, 424 – 25. He worked in Russia again from 1937 – 38, 1945 – 47 and 1962, marrying a Russian Tibetologist and fathering two children.

the identity of the Communist and Buddhist doctrines."[89] While Sankrityayan never conformed exactly to Soviet Communist orthodoxy, the Soviet shift in tides, now moving in favor of a rigid Marxist-Leninism against the liberal current of synthetic Buddhist Marxism left its impact. The almost prophetic portrayals of reformed Buddhism side by side with the Communist state had been stalled, beginning a gradual reversal (at least for Sankrityayan) that left Buddhism at best, a reflection of India's lost revolutionary potential. Imbued with a newfound commitment to the forces of international Communism, Sankrityayan renounced his monastic vows—although maintaining those of an upāsaka, or Buddhist layman—and in 1939 left Russia to join the peasant movements in Bihar.

The full scope of Sankrityayan's activities among the Kisān Sabhā (peasant associations) and Communist Party of India (CPI) during the next decade need not detain us here. Along with J.K. Narayan and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (1889 – 1950), he quickly emerged as one of the foremost leaders of the organization, working on their behalf to fix the 'agrarian problem' through the mobilization of peasants on radical Marxist platforms. As the Kisān Sabhā saw it, the 'agrarian problem' referred primarily to issues of bonded labor, population pressures, over taxation, rural debt, farming techniques, and land ownership. Yet while fighting *zamindāri* or "landlordism" was primary to the movement, so too was the destruction of institutionalized religion, or the "illusion of dharma" as Saraswati called it.[90] Thus, it is not difficult to see how the Buddhist impulse against the Vedas and Brahmanical interests could be easily invoked as part of the organization's 'liberation theology.' What was of no less importance was that this ancient Buddhist teaching, which Sankrityayan had recovered and propagated via popular Hindi short stories and novels, was rooted in the soil of the peasants themselves. This, in other words, was construed as an indigenous message. While working for the Kisān Sabhā Sankrityayan was jailed for a total of twenty-nine months on three separate occasions with his third and final arrest as part of the British government's

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[89] John Snelling, *Buddhism in Russia: the story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa's emissary to the Tsar* (Longmead: Element Books, 1993), 234. Scherbatskoi's own works on Buddhist logic were condemned as part of the "ideological struggle against Leninism," a deliberate slandering of "the logic of dialectical materialism," and his well-known series *Bibliotheca Buddhica* was shut down for being "a mouthpiece of the Buddhist-Lamaist religion" (Tolz, *Russia's own Orient,* 18 – 19).

[90] Swami Sahajanand, *Jhārkhaṇḍ ke kisān*, edited and translated from the Hindi into English by Walter Hauser as *Swami Sahajanand and the Peasants of Jharkhand: a view from 1941* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 133. Hauser's introduction provides an excellent analysis of the Kisān Sabhā's tactics and ideologies during this period. See also, M.A. Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha* (Calcutta: National Book Agency Private, 1974), 69 – 71, for reference to Sankrityayan's involvement.

"exceedingly drastic" measures to "cripple the Communist machinery" during the spring of 1940.[91]

This period, not surprisingly, also marked a definite point of departure in Sankrityayan's writings towards a more rigorous Marxist historiography and critique.[92] In the two decades after his release from prison, he produced a wide range of books, novels, and plays revealing this to be one of his most fertile periods of intellectual growth and theoretical sophistication. Several of these works were explicitly political in nature, propaganda pieces meant to inspire the masses in the quest for both freedom from British rule and economic bondage. For instance, in the staggering seven novels and four collections of short stories he published from 1939 to 1955, a criticism of capitalism and religion are underlying themes while varied socialist utopias emerge throughout. Throughout these works, which were composed as part of his involvement with the Progressive Writers Association (PWA), the organization at the forefront of India's socialist realism literary movement, Sankrityayan drew heavily on his expertise in ancient history, linguistics and sociology to enliven and enrich the story.[93] Several of his most popular novels and short stories are set in the time of

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[91] Sir Reginald Maxwell, quoted in Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India,* 183 – 84. During this time, Sankrityayan had also established the first Bihari branch of the Communist Party of India. The impetus for these arrests was the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, an event which put the CPI in clear opposition to the British. Although the arrests extended to a wide variety of 'leftist' leaders, Indian Communists accounted for more than two-thirds of the total numbers of persons detained under the Defence of India rules at the time (c.f., Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India,* 183). The first two of Sankrityayan's arrests were the subject of national uproar. During his first arrest, he was attacked by (supposedly inebriated) elephants and beaten badly by Congress thugs ('*goondas*') wielding clubs (*lathis*). The event generated an outpouring of national support and outrage, which was only further exacerbated when he underwent two hunger strikes during this period—for 10 and 17 days respectively—to protest prisoner conditions and the fact that the *Kisān Sabhā* activists were charged as criminals rather than political activists. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Rajendra Prasad on July 2, 1939 warning him that the event has "deeply pained" the nation with the reaction "strongly in his favour." See Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru,* Vol. III, edited by S. Gopal (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1988), 348. Prasad's response was far from sympathetic. See Rajendra Prasad, *Correspondence and Select Documents,* edited by Valmiki Choudhary (New Delhi and Ahmedabad: Allied Publishers, 1984), 151 – 53. On the important distinction between 'criminal behavior' and 'political activism' in the colonial setting, see U.K. Singh, *Political Prisoners In India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[92] Bhaṭṭācārya, *Mahāpandit Rāhul Sāṅkrityāyān,* 152 – 53.

[93] The PWA was established in 1935 by a group of idealistic writers and students deeply influenced by avant-garde literary trends in interwar Britain who insisted that literature was only meaningful if it depicted the real-life struggles of labourers and peasants. Although the PWA forged alliances with non-Marxist litterateurs, such as Sadat Hasan Manto and Premchand, its primary support came from the CPI and other hard-line Marxists. It is notable that several of India's most influential Buddhist minds of the 1930 – 40s, such as the Punjabi monk Anand Kausalyayan and the Bihari poet-monk, Nagarjun were fervent supporters of the PWA throughout its colonial career. On the PWA and India's socialist realism movement, see the edited collection by Carlo Coppola (ed.), *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature*, Vols. I & II (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1974).

the ancient Indian Buddhist republics (*gaṇa*) when Indian merchants and kings are said to have honored Buddha and his system of "absolute communism" (*pūrṇ sāmyavād*).[94] For instance, in his most well-known piece of historical fiction, *Volgā se Gaṅgā* or *From the Volga to the Ganges* (1942)—which underwent multiple editions in fourteen different languages—Buddhism rarely comes under attack in the text's otherwise frequent diatribes against religion and religious dogma.[95] That is, through most of the text, the humiliation and suffering of slaves and working classes is often at the hands of corrupt Brahmin priests, greedy *banias,* belligerent mullahs, and Christian capitalists. In stark contrast to these images, the Buddha is described as a man who "wanted a revolution (*kranti*), one that would make the world a better place"; his dharma is compared to "a sort of communism," and his sangha as "a kind of model for a world of tomorrow."[96] Although Sankrityayan openly admitted to the rosy picture of Buddhism he painted in his works of fiction, there were aspects of Buddhism, like its penchant for non-violence, that for political purposes he was less willing to endorse. While writing *Volgā se Gaṅgā*, he was also President of the Kisān Sabhā, which at that time was under the strong influence of underground Communist organizers whose leadership put them increasingly at odds with both the Congress (and British government).[97] Gandhian non-violence, in Sankrityayan's eyes, was nothing less than "an obstacle to the revolution."[98] As one of the protagonists in *Volgā se Gaṅgā* puts it, "in this world, animals which can't fight fall victim to others."[99]

In his more critical scholarly works Sankrityayan was more nuanced in his evaluation of Buddhism's historical legacy and place in the world today. The two great teachers, Buddha and Marx, he contends, shared similar ethical views due to their dismissal of both

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[94] Novels (*upanyās*) with significant Buddhist content include *Siṃgh Senāpati* (1942, translated into Marathi, Gujarati, Burmese, Telugu, Bengali, Urdu), *Jay Yaudheya* (1944, translated into Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Telugu) and *Volgā se Gangā* (1942, translated into Marathi, Gujarati, Mayalaylam, Telugu, Oriya, Kannada, Urdu, Burmese, Russian, Nepali, Assamese, Bengali, Sindhi and English).
[95] *Volgā se Gangā* is actually a collection of twenty-short stories detailing the evolution of political organization and social thought from the pre-Vedic period up through the contemporary struggle between Gandhi and Communism.
[96] Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Volgā se Gaṅgā,* 138, 174, 142 – 43.
[97] By 1937, the situation had become so tense that the Congress government in Bihar was warning its workers against even 'passive association' with Kisān Sabhā activities and organizing black flag demonstrations during the annual meeting of the All-India Kisān Sabhā in Bihar that year. See, Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India,* 225.
[98] Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Volgā se Gaṅgā,* 362.
[99] Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Volgā se Gaṅgā*, 362.

revealed books and a creator God. The Buddhist doctrine of "bahujan hitāya, bahujan sukhāya," or "the good of many, the happiness of many," he points out, rivals Marxist ethics. Echoing Kosambi, he applauds the Buddha for trying to introduce "absolute communism [*pūrṇ sāmyavād*] inside the sangha" and points to the early Buddhist preference for democratic republics (*gaṇa*).[100] The Buddha's atheism and rationality—like Marx—allowed him to recognize that "the origin of monarchy did not lie in any divine source but...was the product of the growth of private property."[101] On the economic and social fronts outside the *sangha,* the setting was more complex. Although Buddha "fervently advocated the brotherhood of man without any distinction of race, country, or caste" (like Marx), paving the way for the idea that human beings are one, he failed to abolish caste in society at large because he relied on mercantile and royal classes. For Sankrityayan, like most Marxists, the menace of caste was retrofit into class analysis. "The caste system originated in economics. The high castes owned property, whereas the low castes were deprived of it. One could only be abolished by abolishing the other."[102] Had it not been based on wealth (*sampatti*) and had the Buddha allowed debtors (*ṛṇī*), slaves (*dāsā*) and soldiers (*rājsainik*) into the sangha, thus undercutting the strength of the landed classes, caste could have been completely eradicated. Instead, he barred them from taking ordination, and while Sankrityayan proposes that to do otherwise may have triggered a violent reaction from the landed classes, thus ending Buddhism's spread to begin with, he contends that this was a major shortcoming (*kami*).[103] In short, Buddha's critique of caste, teaching of self-dependence (*ātmāvalamban*) and intellectual freedom (*buddhisvātantra*) is to be lauded, but because he relied on merchants and kings for support, he failed to end the poverty (*garībī*) and drudgery (*dāstā*) of the exploited masses.[104] Nonetheless, Buddha's thoughts enriched literature, philosophy and art, triggered cultural revivals in other Asian lands and created a peaceful realm of co-existence across cultures based on loving kindness (*maitrī*) and the Five Precepts (*pañcśīl*).

In the centuries after Buddha's death, Buddhism's innate radicalism, despite being

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[100] Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Mahāmānav Buddh,* 35. See also, 104 – 09.
[101] Sankrityayan, "Buddhist dialectics," in *Essays on Indology: Birth Cetenary Tribute to Mahapandita Rahula Sankrityayana birth centenary volume*, edited by Alaka Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta: Manisa, 1994), 4. This essay was first published in 1956 in *New Age*, the organ of the Communist Party of India.
[102] *Jātivād ke mūl ārthik the. Uncī jāti vale sampatti ke svāmī aur nīcī jāti vale sampatti se vancit the. Ek ho haṭāē binā dūsre ko haṭāyā nahīn jā saktā.* Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Mahāmānav Buddh,* 103.
[103] Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Mahāmānav Buddh,* 34 – 43, especially 42 – 43.
[104] Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Mahāmānav Buddh,* 25 - 43.

semi-tempered, continued to shake the foundations of Indic thought in ways similar to what Hegel had done in Europe. Yogacara philosophy, with its emphasis on the dynamic and nonmaterial idea (*vijñāna*) as the basis of reality "is in a large measure similar to the idealism of Hegel…[who] held that mind or idea was primary and real and matter a product thereof."[105] Yet just as Marx is said to have turned Hegel's theories on his own head, Sankrityayan saw in the eighth-century Buddhist philosopher, Dharmakīrti a figure close to Marx.[106] Dharmakīrti argued that reality was defined by "that which is capable of objective action" (Sanskrit, *artha-kriyā-samartham*) or as Sankrityayan explains it:

> Sweets and bread are real because they are capable of objective action, i.e., they are capable of the objective action of nourishment or satisfying our hunger; but the sweets and bread seen in a dream are not real because they cannot satisfy our hunger, they are incapable of objective action.[107]

In learning to accept "objects as our guide," Dharamkirti had touched on the fundamental principle of modern empirical science. Sankrityayan calls this a "big weapon," but laments that it was "not used," for by this time, Buddhism had become too closely tied to the landed classes and therefore forced to "soften its sharpness."[108] The failure to utilize Dharmakīrti's knowledge of the conditions necessary to change objective reality with the "rational and heart-stirring" message of the Buddha was in effect, the failure of Buddhism as *religion*.[109] The fundamental problem with religion, in Sankrityayan's view, is its inability to reconcile utopian visions with the real-life demands of productive activity. Having failed to combine its ethics with objective action, Buddhism became prone to a kind of intellectual and revolutionary quiescence. This failure leads him to conclude that Buddhism never "came anywhere near the fundamentals of Marxism."[110] For in revolutionary struggles, as James Mark Shields argues, "knowledge of the conditions leading to human emancipation coincide with actions to bring about this emancipation—which ipso facto contains an ethical

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[105] Sankrityayan "Buddhist dialectics," 12.
[106] Dharmakīrti's commentaries on logic, particularly his *pramānavārttika*, were the alpha and omega of Sankrityayan's Buddhist researches and there was no other intellectual in Indic history that Sankrityayan respected more. He called him the *sabhī samay ke additīy bhāratīy dārśanik* or incomparable Indian philosopher of all times (Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Mahāmānav Buddh,* 32).
[107] Sankrityayan, "Buddhist dialectics," 14.
[108] Sankrityayan, "Buddhist dialectics," 14; Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Volgā se Gaṅgā*, 105. According to Sankrityayan, there were other features also responsible for Buddhism's downfall, but the *sangha*'s material wealth is at the center of his thesis.
[109] Sāṇkṛtyāyan, *Volgā se Gaṅgā*, 105.
[110] Sankrityayan, "Buddhist dialectics," 12. Although he argues that Buddhists are better able to grasp Marxist dialectics.

component.'"[111] In an evocative passage, Sankrityayan outlines his solution to reinvigorating the Buddhist revolution through a radical revision of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths:

> [1] Suffering is to be found in the world;
> [2] it is caused by exploitation;
> [3] suffering will cease to exist if exploitation is done away with, that is, [if the] road to communism is followed;
> [4] and communism is the way to the cessation of suffering.[112]

What Marxism can provide Buddhism, it seems, is the revolutionary praxis to free Buddhists from the bondage of their own historical failures. After being released from jail in 1943 and until his death twenty years later, Sankrityayan continued working towards the propagation of both Communism and Buddhism through popular and scholarly writings as well as via university research appointments in India, Sri Lanka and Russia.

8.4 Conclusion: Reconsidering the Buddha and the left

When examined more broadly, allowing the Indian Buddhist Marxist milieu to fade from the picture, the pre-1950s Buddhist-Marxist union was typically short-lived, based on an intense but ultimately superficial understanding of one another. In most parts of Asia, Buddhist dialogues with Marxism were typically based on rather simplistic notions of Marxist thinking. As Aghenanada Bharati suggested long ago in the case of Sri Lanka, the term Marxism was more a twentieth century buzzword capable of inciting terror and uniting the masses than a sophisticated appreciation of its competing discourses.[113] Trevor Ling has argued similarly in respect to the collaboration between Buddhists and Marxists in Burma and Cambodia.[114] The early Buddhist appeal to Marxism, Ling suggests, was less the doctrine of historical materialism than its criticism of the materialistic capitalism of the west. In short, in most Asian Buddhist case studies, Marxism arose as a natural ally against imperialism and colonialism but rarely as a genuine ideological tool.

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[111] Shields, "Liberation as Revolutionary Praxis," 469.
[112] Quoted in Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, "From Buddha to Marx," in *Essays on Indology: birth centenary tribute to Mahapandita Rahula Sankrityayan,* edited by A. Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta: Manisha Granthalaya, 1994), 119.
[113] Agehananda Bharati, "Monastic and Lay Buddhism in the 1971 Sri Lanka Insurgency," in *Religion and Social Conflict in South Asia*, edited by Bardwell L. Smith (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 107.
[114] Ling, *Buddha, Marx and God,* 91.

Yet the connection between Buddhism and Marxism cannot be solely reduced to modern political alliances. In the late 1940s, the French belletrist Andre Migot asked rhetorically whether "the words of Engels might not equally well have been those of the Buddha."[115] A decade later, the famed structural anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, dedicated an entire chapter of his monumental work, *Tristes Tropique* (1955), to exploring the links between Buddhism and Marxism. The two systems, he proposed, are each "doing the same thing as the other, but on different levels." Buddhism, he concluded "has achieved something that, elsewhere, only Marxism has brought off: it has reconciled the problem of metaphysics with the problem of human behavior."[116] Across cultures and intellectual systems Buddhism was conceived of as an ultimately positive moral force, worthy of being 'rehabilitated' and 'revived' in order to suit the demands of the modern world. As the Japanese Buddhist Marxist Seno'o Giro (1889 – 1961) argued, the problem with Buddhism was not only "a matter of priestly corruption or institutional generation" but with "the very heart of the way that Buddhism is practiced as a 'religion."[117] Sankrityayan could not have agreed more: if Buddhism is "purified" of its links to the landed classes and returned to its "primitive" or "original" state of "atheistic humanism" (*nāstik mānaviyatā*), it could once again act as a dynamic and progressive force in social evolution and human morality.

In India, the intersections between Buddhist and leftist ideologies gave rise to animated discussions, new ways of thinking and being. For the "people's poet," Kavi Nagarjun (1911 – 88), who moved to Ceylon to study Pali and don Buddhist robes, one could be both a member of the progressive forces battling zamindāri and tied to the ancient soil, a Buddhist bhūmiputra.[118] B.R. Ambedkar was no less cognizant of the Buddha's relationship to the left, even delivering a major speech at the World Fellowship of Buddhists in 1956 in which he argued that the two '–ism's' were nearly the same.[119] Like Kosambi and

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[115] Quoted in Ling, *Buddha, Marx and God,* 167.
[116] Quoted in Shields, "Blueprint for Buddhist Revolution," 334 – 35.
[117] Shields, "Blueprint for Buddhist Revolution," 343 – 44.
[118] On Nagarjuna, see Asutosh Jha, "Compile all my poems [and] it would be my autobiography: Nagarjun," *Indian Literature* Vol. 43/6 (1999): 196 – 206.
[119] Ambedkar too had a vested interest in the topic, understanding the sense of competition between the two systems and hoping to prevent Communism from making any further inroads into Buddhist Asia (the recent Chinese invasion of Tibet being of especial focus). Although deeply influenced by Marxism himself, having declared "how beautiful the Communist philosophy is" during his political campaigns of the 1930s, he had an uneasy relationship with the Indian left, especially the CPI. The reasons for this were complex, including personal distrust, caste tensions and the political competition over their

Sankrityayan, he praised the Buddha for his Communist Sangha and equated Buddhist duḥkha with the Marxist emphasis on poverty and exploitation. The only fundamental difference between Marxism and Buddhism, he argued, was in their methodology. While the Buddha only used persuasion, moral teachings and love, Marx advocated power and violence. In Ambedkar's logic, this was Marxism's fundamental error. Russia's Communists, he remarked, "forget [that] the wonder of all wonders is that the Buddha established Communism so far as the Sangha was concerned *without dictatorship*."[120]

The enduring influence of these idioms and images in independent India demonstrate that the Indian discovery and reinvention of Buddhism was shaped as much by Marxist ideas about property, economic organization, and the sources of political authority as it was by the Orientalists who 'discovered' India's 'lost' religion.[121] While the claims of ancient Indian Buddhist communism may be dubious in historical detail, or at the very least, greatly misplaced anachronisms, they were powerful as modern myth. The importance of these images for understanding modern Indian Buddhism then, is not in the historical truth itself but in the way in which they speak to the revolutionary world that modern Indians lived. In fact, as will be seen in the next chapter, with the birth of the new nation in 1947, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru drew precisely on Buddhism's emotional appeal and revolutionary rhetoric to forge a new ethos for the independent nation.

"natural" constituencies (since dalits formed a central group in the working classes of Maharashtra) (c.f., Omvedt, *Buddhism in India,* 249 – 65).

[120] Ambedkar, "Buddha or Karl Marx" (1956), in *BAWS* Vol. 3, 461. Italics mine.

[121] Yet remarkably, the role of Marxism on the socio-cognitive conditions of modern day Buddhists is greatly under-theorized, if not almost completely absent. In two of the most important works on "Buddhist modernism," that of David McMahan, *Making of Buddhist Modernism* and Donald Lopez (ed.), *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), the influence of Marx and/or Marxism on the making of Buddhist modernism is almost completely ignored. Part of this may relate to the fact that the history of Buddhism and Marxism has been (understandably) seen through a post-1950s lens in which Communist and/or pseudo-Marxist regimes in Tibet, Russia, Cambodia and elsewhere led horrific and catastrophic campaigns to destroy Buddhist institutions and ideologies.

9 Chapter Nine – From bo trees to Buddha bones: Nehruvian Buddhism and the poetics of power, 1947 – 1956

This chapter explores the ideologies and activities of what I call Nehruvian Buddhism, or the Indian government's promotion of Buddhism in both domestic and foreign affairs. The primary focus of the chapter is the new central Cabinet formed under the leadership of the Congress President and first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Through a detailed examination of government sponsored Buddhist events in the first decade after Independence, the chapter demonstrates that Buddhism was an important intellectual and material resource for the new nation-state. It contends that Nehruvian Buddhism rest on principles of universalism and nationalism that were not only impossible to reconcile but under regular challenge from competing interpretations of Buddhism and the Indian state's deteriorating relationship with China. In the end, Nehru realized that although Buddhism could be as beneficial for the nation (nationalism) as for humanity (universalism), the two did not always go hand in hand.

9.1 When the path forward is the way back: Nehruvian Buddhism, an outline

In the final weeks leading up to Indian Independence, the country's top political brass met regularly to discuss, debate and finalize the details of the upcoming transition. Amidst the many other meetings that were called in those final weeks were those of a subcommittee whose only duty was to finalize the design for the new national flag. In a decision made on July 22, 1947, just three weeks prior to formal Independence, the Gandhian *carkhā*, or spinning wheel, was replaced by the Buddhist dharmacakra, or dharma wheel, as the flag's central symbol. When the Constituent Assembly approved the decision, there was little dissent.[1] Indeed, it was just the beginning of the Republic of India's fetish for Buddhism. A year later, the Lion Seal, the ancient emblem of the Buddhist king Aśoka's Mauryan Empire, was selected as the state seal to be used on all official government documentation. When the new constitution outlawing 'untouchability' was unveiled later that year, the *MahaBodhi* could not resist linking the act with the ancient Buddhist symbols now representing the new nation: "Sometimes, truly, the road forward is the road back, in this case a return to the high

[1] *Constituent Assembly Debates, Official Reports,* Vol. 4 (1947).

level of consciousness attained in India when Buddhism prevailed and caste discrimination was condemned."[2] By January of 1950, when Rajendra Prasad was sworn in as the First President of India beneath a mammoth sandstone image of Buddha carved in Mathura fifteen hundred years before, the central government's new leanings were increasingly obvious.[3]

Public spaces took on Buddhist names—Gautama Hall, Buddha Park, Kanishka House, Lumbini Lane—while the state and central governments poured millions of dollars into restoring India's ancient Buddhist sites at places like Bodh Gaya, Sanchi, Ajanta, Nalanda and Kuśīnagar. Alongside ancient sites rose new state-sponsored Buddhist institutes and educational centers. The Government made large contributions to publish Buddhist texts in vernacular languages, including the sponsorship of the editing and publication of a forty-one volume, roughly twenty-thousand page series of the complete Pali Tripiṭaka or words of the Buddha, in Devanagari script.[4] By 1956, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had even produced a full-length feature film on the Buddha that later won an award at the Cannes Film Festival for its "exceptional artistic and moral beauty."[5] This was an age, as one writer put it, when "the Buddha spirit swept the nation."[6] The pinnacle of this newfound confidence in and support for Buddhism were the grand Buddha Jayanti celebrations of 1956, a more than year long event of festivals, conferences, art exhibitions, and international gatherings to mark the "two-thousand and five-hundred year anniversary" of Buddha's birth.

All of this activity formed part of what I call "Nehruvian Buddhism," or the state's promotion of Buddhism for secular purposes. In its simplest formulation, Nehruvian Buddhism consists of a two-pronged approach, one concerning the uses of Buddhism in the domestic sphere—that is for domestic consumption by citizens of the new nation—and one concerning the uses of Buddhism as an instrument of foreign policy. The ideological basis of

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[2] "Untouchability," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 56/12 (1948), 413.

[3] A photograph of the swearing-in with President Prasad under the Mathura image is contained in Vol. 58/4 – 5 (1950) of the *MahaBodhi.* This forurth to fifth century statue from Mathura is still in the back of the Durbar Hall of the Rashtrapati Bhavan (President's House, formerly known as Government House). When I visited there in December 2015, the tour guide informed that the statue was acquired from the Indian Museum in Calcutta by Rajagopalachari during his tenure as Governor-General from 1948 to 1950.

[4] This massive project was headed by the great Pali scholar, Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap, who edited the majority of the series. The first volume was published in 1956 to coincide with the 2,500 anniversary of Buddha Jayanti celebrations.

[5] Quoted in Freek Bakker, *The Challenge of the Silver Screen: an analysis of the cinematic portraits of Jesus, Rama, Buddha and Muhammad* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 161.

[6] D.C. Ahir, *Buddha Gaya through the ages* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1994), 137.

Nehruvian Buddhism rests on two simplistic, but powerful arguments. First, Buddhism is an *Indian* religion. Not only is Bodh Gaya the "center of the Buddhist universe," the place where all Buddhas, cosmic or otherwise, gain enlightenment, but in the *humanized* Buddhist history, the Indo - Gangetic plain is where Gautama spent his eighty summers and from where *all* Buddhism begins. Second, Buddha's teachings are inherently universal, applicable to anyone and everyone. Nehruvian Buddhism, although not averse to using Buddhist symbols to generate emotional appeal, fully adhered to a Buddhism as the "religion of reason," a modern, moral code that did not require any form of formal, institutional commitment.[7] This is seen in two remarkable statements made by Nehru, first in his early writings and later in front of a crowd of international leaders. In *The Discovery of India,* he declares:

> Buddha had the courage to attack popular religion, superstition, ceremonial, and priestcraft…he condemned also the metaphysical and theological outlook, miracles, revelations, and dealings with the supernatural. His appeal was to logic, reason and experience, his emphasis was on ethics, and his method was one of psychological analysis…it is remarkable how near this philosophy of the Buddha brings us to some of the concepts of modern physics and philosophic thought.[8]

Nearly a decade later during a massive Buddhist ceremony in Sanchi, where he presided over the installation of Buddhist relics in a new Buddhist vihāra constructed with state funds, he added, "All that is necessary is not this Vihara in stone and brick but some kind of a temple in each one's mind and heart which will enshrine those eternal [universal Buddhist] truths and which will guide us along the right path which we forsook so long ago."[9] The "truths" which Nehru and other state leaders regularly highlighted were by no means unique to Buddhism but they recognized that Buddha was one of the first great teachers of human reasoning, non-violence and ethics. They took great pride in the fact that the Buddha was an Indian and that an *Indian tradition* had given so much shape to the world. Buddhism was, as Nehru put it before the Constituent Assembly in 1947, proof that India was not just "a tight

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[7] Heinz Bechert, "Buddhist Revival in East and West," in *The World of Buddhism,* edited by Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 275.

[8] Nehru, *Discovery of India,* 120, 129. The stark contrast between the unfettered purity of Buddha and his teaching as opposed to the layered orthodoxy and dogma of Buddhism as religion is a defining trait in Nehru's understanding. Shortly after this passage, he writes: "When I visited countries where Buddhism is still a living and dominant faith…there was much I did not like. *The rational, ethical doctrine had become overlaid with so much verbiage, so much ceremonial, canon law*" (130 – 31) [emphasis mine].

[9] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Buddhism only path to escape from disaster," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 61/1 – 2 (1953), 5.

little narrow country," but once an "international centre" that guided the world.[10]

Yet only in rare cases have scholars recognized what an important role Buddhist symbols and rhetoric played in the making of the Nehruvian state. For instance, in Judith Brown's major biography of Nehru, Buddhism is absent.[11] Likewise, in an otherwise insightful essay on the transformations of the Indian national flag, the political scientist Srirupa Roy has argued that "the replacement of the [Gandhian] *charkha* with dharmacakra is a literal indication of the wider reorientation of political and economic philosophy under way at the time, as Gandhi's vision of a decentralized, economically self-sufficient India of village republics was replaced by the Nehruvian commitment to an industrialized and centralized polity."[12] Roy's analysis is insightful but her vision of the symbol as tied to a purely mechanical enterprise underestimates the moral, historical and aesthetic significance of the revitalized Buddhist symbol. For it needs to be recognized that it is not just the bureaucratic modes of production that demonstrate state authority but the "poetics of power," or theatrical performances that serve political interests as well.[13] Political success has always relied upon strong emotional, public appeal and Nehru's new Cabinet, from B.R. Ambedkar and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan to Rajendra Prasad and S.P. Mukherjee, recognized well the latent potency of Buddhist symbols and ideas.

When the nation's political elite described Buddha as the "greatest Indian in recorded history" (Vice-President Radhakrishnan), Buddhism as "the brightest jewel in India's crown" (Governor-General Rajagopalachari) and Aśoka as "the great son of India" who headed "one of the most powerful empires the world has ever seen" (Nehru) and then tied these very images to the present-day state, they were doing more than just deploying empty rhetoric and literary metaphor.[14] Nor were these sentiments only motivated by Buddhism being a "neutral" symbol, one which "no single religious community [in India] would be able to stake claims to," as Christophe Jaffrelot contends.[15] For Nehruvian Buddhism, in either its domestic or foreign affairs, was not just about looking to an idealized Buddhist past, it was

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[10] *Constituent Assembly Debates, Official Reports,* Vol. 4, 1947.
[11] Judith Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
[12] Srirupa Roy, "A Symbol of Freedom: the Indian Flag and the Transformations of Nationalism, 1906 – 2002," *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 65/3 (2006): 511 – 12.
[13] The phrase comes from Clifford Geertz, *Negara: the theatre state in nineteenth century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 123.
[14] "Buddhism brightest Jewel in India's Crown," *Hindustan Times,* May 13, 1949, 3.
[15] Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste and Politics,* 12.

also about creating a foundational ethics and ideal for a democratic, civil society. It may be more useful to think of Nehruvian Buddhism as providing a model of modern civilized existence, to take seriously Clifford Geertz's idea that the act of invoking an "exemplary center…[such as Buddha or Aśoka's India]…creates not just a center of power…but a standard of civilization."[16] As Geertz states: "By the mere act of providing a model, a paragon, a faultless image of civilized existence, the court shapes the world around it into at least a rough approximation of its own excellence."[17] When Nehru handled the cremated remains of Buddhist saints and passed them on to neighboring rulers, who installed them in their own royal halls and constitutional assemblies, he was linking these different polities to India's history and modern mode of being, both in the past and the present. It sent an unequivocal signal: love Buddha, love India.

When the two-thousand five-hundred year old remains of Sāriputta and Moggallāna arrived in Calcutta in January of 1949, more than half a million people sitting in "utmost reverence and orderliness," watched Nehru receive two reliquary urns and place them above his forehead.[18] Surrounded by a sea of Buddhist monks adorned in red and yellow robes, Nehru's arrival on the twenty-foot high platform where the relics rest coincided with a shower of yellow-rose petals (he too wore one). Throughout the day, foreign delegates and government officials gave speeches, all of which were broadcast live on All India Radio, on why Buddhist non-violence and peaceful coexistence of different religious communities were requisites for the survival of India and the world. Nehru himself stressed the importance of the Buddha's teachings on reason and compassion alongside Aśoka's ideals of tolerance. He described Buddhism as "a bond of the spirit" that did not require political attachments and called on the audience to once again renew that "silken bond."[19] One speaker compared Nehru to the esteemed Aśoka himself (*dharmika dharmarāja*), arguing that the government was following the same "lofty principles" of "righteous rulership based on benevolence and equality of rights…You have given the followers of all religions and all denominations the opportunity not only to enjoy freedom of religious belief but also to live together in harmony

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[16] Geertz, *Negara,* 15.
[17] Geertz, *Negara,* 13.
[18] "Speeches," in *The Maha Bodhi Centenary Volume, 1891 – 1991* (Calcutta: Maha Bodhi Society of India, 1991), 188.
[19] "Speeches," *Maha Bodhi Centenary Volume,* 187.

and take an equal share in promoting the national welfare."[20] Throughout the day, several of the speeches linked Buddha to Gandhi, submerging the two great souls or *mahatmas* in an underlying "rhetoric of peace and harmony."[21] The message was clear: like Bapu, Buddha too was the father of the nation and with the former's tragic assasination, Buddha could heal the wounds of the nation.[22]

Over the course of the next month, an estimated four hundred thousand people visited the MahaBodhi Society's Śrī Dharmarājikā Vihāra where the relics had been moved for public viewing (*darśan*). Celebrations of India's Buddhist heritage and speeches on the contribution of Buddhism to world peace continued to be held throughout the month at select sites across the city. While sporadic violence across Calcutta canceled several of the planned public processions, most continued unabated at private spaces like the Bengal Buddhist Association, Nipponzon Myohoji Temple (*Saddharma Vihāra*), Burmese Vihara, and Ramakrishna Mission. Photos and descriptions reveal military guards of the Gurkha Rifles standing attentively alongside long processions of military bands, Buddhist monks, decorated elephants, canopies of white silk, Rolls Royce's and the latest model of (the Birlas') Hindustan Motor cars.[23] Amidst the highly charged communal atmosphere following the Great Calcutta Killings of 1946 and tragic events of Partition, associating India with the moral sovereignty of Aśoka and Buddha was, as Jaffrelot argued, a 'safe' means to heal and unify the nation. Yet it was also about invoking the assumed rational core of religion, "the common faith of mankind," a secular religion liberated from dogma and hate.[24] "For the sake of national interest," the Governor of West Bengal proclaimed at a public speech, "Buddhist morality should spread in the country."[25] When state officials praised Buddhist doctrines in India, they rarely discussed its soteriological or deeper philosophical dimensions. Instead,

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[20] "Speeches," *MahaBodhi Centenary Volume,* 186.
[21] Torkel Brekke, "Bones of Contention: Buddhist Relics, Nationalism and the Politics of Archaeology," *Numen* Vol. 54/3 (2007): 296. After Gandhi's death, there was a vast increase in the number of publications comparing him with Buddha.
[22] A letter from Rajendra Prasad to R.R. Diwakar, the Governor of Bihar, in which the former tells the latter to get on All-India Radio and celebrate the Buddha vaisakhi in order to spread Gandhi's teachings on ahimsa, is suggestive of the new milieu. See, Letter from Prasad to Diwakar, 20 February 1949, in Prasad, *Correspondence,* vol. 11, 38 – 9.
[23] The relics were transported to Calcutta on a military cruiser, the *SS Tir,* and nineteen shots from the Fort William cannon were fired to announce their arrival. Numbers 1 – 3 of Volume 57 (1949) of the *MahaBodhi* cover these events in detail and also include several photographs of historical importance.
[24] "Common faith of mankind" comes from John Dewey, quoted in Fuchs, "A Religion for Civil Society," 261.
[25] "India needs Buddhist morality: Bengal Governor's speech," *Hindustan Times,* May 4, 1950, 3

they focused on its ethical spirit and cultural significance. As Nehru explained at Sanchi, there were two paths ahead: "the way of the sword and the way of Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi...we have to remember…the lesson of equality and service of society and compassion that Buddha taught."[26]

In a Cold War world, Pan-Asian unity based on Buddhist principles and Indian civilization were the themes of the day. In a letter congratulating Sri Lanka on its independence in 1948, Nehru recalled that the seed of Buddhism that "has flourished in Ceylon….[is] a symbol of *that great gift which India gave to Lanka and the world* so long ago…[it] is therefore a symbol of India and Lanka being together, for our mutual advantage and for the freedom and advantage of the world."[27] A decade later and these ideologies permeated foreign affairs. At the Buddh Jayanti celebrations in 1956, Nehru invited more than two hundred royal dignitaries, heads of states, foreign ambassadors and Buddhist leaders from across the world to celebrate "twenty-five hundred years" of Buddhism. During the state-sponsored celebrations, helicopters and airplanes showered villages and towns with lotus flowers and government pamphlets praising Buddhist non-violence, while Nehru and other officials stressed the ancient connections between India and the rest of Asia. Non-violence, religious tolerance, pan-Asianism, and Indian civilization: these were the themes central to and repeated time and time again throughout the extraordinary events.

In February of 1956, when the government was considering the transfer of Buddhist relics to Burma, the Indian Ambassador in Rangoon wrote a letter to Nehru explaining that, "I am convinced that nothing brings us so close to the Burmese as concrete evidence of our common spiritual heritage…it would be a fine gesture on our part if we send the relics to Rangoon by a special plane accompanied by some of our high-ranking monks in the Buddhist hierarchy."[28] Nehru followed through and in an elaborate ceremony, attended by several thousand people, the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu (1907 – 95) received them despite attending his father-in-law's funeral the same day. In a classified document on how to improve India's appearance in Ceylon, composed by the Indian High Commissioner in

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[26] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Buddhism only path to escape from disaster," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 61/1 – 2 (1953), 3.
[27] Nehru, *Selected Works,* Vol. 5, 535. Italics mine.
[28] Letter from R.R. Saksena, Ambassador, Rangoon Embassy, February 21, 1956, in Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Burma branch, File no. 40/3 (1956), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

Colombo and released just one year later, the same thinking was explicit, only now equated with demographic figures:

> India is the land of the Buddha. The Buddhists of Ceylon who number more than 60 % of the population look to India for religious inspiration. It is said to be the dying wish of every Buddhist to be reborn in India, the land of the 'Dhamma'…friendliness can be strengthened by emphasizing cultural and religious affinities. The press generally attaches tremendous importance to material on Buddhist activities in India…the Mission can, whenever possible, cull out all such comments from the Indian press and hand them out unofficially for local consumption."[29]

The High Commissioner went on to recommend the development of a "Cinema-cum-Library van" or "mobile film unit" that could screen popular documentaries in "all accessible parts of the Island." As is apparent by these examples, Nehruvian Buddhism was deeply enmeshed in the culture of the governing elite.

9.2 Nehru's tryst with Buddhism and Buddhism in the cabinet

The ways in which Buddhism became pronounced among the new political state was of no small significance. In addition to several formative leaders at the state level whose lives were closely intertwined with various aspects of the Buddhist revival, its most critical leadership was found in four members of Nehru's Cabinet. The first was President Rajendra Prasad (1884 – 1963), a trained lawyer from Bihar. Since the early 1920s, "Rajen Babu" had served as the Chairman of the MahaBodhi Temple case and was an instrumental figure in the negotiations that led to the passing of the Bodh Gaya Temple Act in 1949. The many years he spent working on the case brought him in contact with numerous Buddhist representatives from India and abroad and history shows him to have been particularly sympathetic to Buddhist interests.[30]

Second was the Vice President (and later second President), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888 – 1975), a figure whose reputation as an intellectual outweighed any other member of the Cabinet. A former Professor at Oxford, Radhakrishnan's works on

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[29] "Annual Reports on Ceylon," Ministry of External Affairs, R&I Branch, Government of India, File no. 3/8 (1957), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

[30] See, Trevithick, *Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage.* In addition to his relationships with other foreign Buddhists, like Nichidatsu Fuji, Prasad was also close friends with Sankrityayan (although political differences drove them apart in the 1940s).

Indian philosophy remain the central sourcebooks for scholars today. He published widely on Buddhist doctrine and just three years after Independence, he also produced an influential English translation of the *Dhammapada*, where he argued that the Buddha's teachings were derived from the *Upaniṣads*.[31] As with his *Dhammapada,* Radhakrishnan's interpretation of Buddhism was encoded through a Vedantic philosophy in which Buddhist doctrines were seen as only mildly different from Hindu thought. Radhakrishnan's philosophical assimilation of Buddhism into Hinduism coincided with his frequent public declarations that Buddhism was simply an "offshoot of Hinduism" and that Buddha "did not feel that he was announcing a new religion. He was born, grew up and died a Hindu."[32]

The third figure was Syama Prasad Mukherjee (1901 – 53), a former Finance Minister in Bengal and veteran of the right-wing Hindu paramilitary group, the RSS. Mukherjee's brief tenure as the Central Minister of Industry and Transport (1947 – 50) was marked by serious tensions with Nehru and the Congress more widely. A former President of the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā (1944), Mukherjee's links with the Hindu political right became extremely suspect after Gandhi was murdered by a MahāSabhā ideologue in 1948, leading Nehru to jail thousands of its members and sympathizers.[33] Relations between the two worsened over the crisis in Kashmir and in 1951, Mukherjee resigned from the Cabinet to start the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the political party that later morphed into the BJP (India's current ruling party). Yet Mukherjee (like his father Ashutosh, before him) was also the President of the MahaBodhi Society, a position he held from 1943 until his death ten years later. Thus, despite their severe political differences, even after Mukherjee resigned, the two

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[31] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1952]), 39. Peter Friedlander calls Radhakrishnan's *Dhammapada* a "moralistic interpretation" that stresses the "moral fibre" of Buddha's teachings. See Peter Friedlander, "*Dhammapada* Traditions and Translations," *Journal of Religious History* Vol. 33/2 (June 2009), 230.

[32] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "Foreword," in *2500 Years of Buddhism,* edited by P.V. Bapat (Delhi: Government of India, 1956), ix.

[33] For Nehru, Gandhi's murder was part of a larger conspiracy by the extreme Hindu rightwing. He believed that both the RSS and Hindu MahāSabhā were responsible and should be banned. In the end, only the former organization was outlawed although Mukherjee was required to deliver a public speech denouncing the organization which at that time he was still so centrally involved. Mukherjee's involvement in the MahāSabhā is often seen as an attempt to return a more moderate, constitutionalist approach to the MahāSabhā. According to Keith Meadowcroft, aspects of this are true in that "Mookerjee wanted to temper Savarkar's attacks on the Congress" but he was also "militantly communal and a staunch defender of the privileges of the Bengali *bhadralok.*" See Meadowcroft, *The emergence, crystallization and shattering of a right-wing alternative to Congress nationalism—the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā, 1937 – 52* (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2003), 105.

nemeses often held the rostrum together at Buddhist events jointly organized by the MahaBodhi Society and Central Government.

The fourth member of Nehru's Cabinet, and undoubtedly the most vocal Buddhist voice of them all, especially after 1950, was Ambedkar. Although Ambedkar's Buddhism shared the same rational interpretation as Nehru's, the space he envisioned for it in modern India contained a sharper edge and one that was not readily acceptable to Nehru's broader vision. Like Mukherjee, Ambedkar was also a political oddity in Nehru's Cabinet, having opposed the Congress for nearly his entire political career. After the Hindu Code Bill failed to pass in 1951, leading to Ambedkar's resignation the next year, Nehru and Ambedkar's political divorce had not so much severed their relationship but rather drawn it out in a tortuous fashion. For instance, when Nehru organized the much-publicized Sanchi restoration ceremonies in 1952, Ambedkar did not receive an invitation.[34] Four years later when Ambedkar finished his magnum opus, *Buddha and His Dhamma,* to coincide with the nation-wide Buddha Jayanti celebrations, Nehru dismissed Ambedkar's plea for financial assistance in distributing the book.[35] What is even more remarkable however is that the lack of collaboration between Ambedkar and Nehru at Buddhist events pre-dated the collapse of the Hindu Code Bill: my own research does not reveal a *single* Buddhist event where both men shared the *dais*. All in all, while the national leadership's support for and interest in Buddhism was multi-pronged, it was hardly unified. This was not a Cabinet with a singular vision of Buddhism but it was a Cabinet whose members spoke of competing *Buddhisms.*

While the gathering of so many Indian politicians in one Cabinet who were invested in the revival of Buddhism may appear to be a conscious decision, it should not be read in such a manner. Instead, as this dissertation has argued throughout, this was a symptom of a colonial age when Buddhist thought and history had a profound influence on the educated Indian populace. In this broad sense, Nehru was no different than the other members of his Cabinet. Were it not for his prominent role as Prime Minster and leader of Congress, Nehru's Buddhism might be relegated to just another footnote in the modern reinvention. Yet because

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[34] Vasant Moon, who attended the ceremony and was Ambedkar's close friend (and later collector and editor of his papers), describes the Ambedkarite public in Maharashtra as being "disgusted" that "Babasaheb was not given any special invitation." See, Moon, *Growing up Untouchable,* 132.
[35] See, "Letter 168" (from Ambedkar to Nehru, dated September 14, 1956) and "Letter 169" (from Nehru to Ambedkar dated September 15, 1956) in Ambedkar, *Letters of Ambedkar,* 191 – 92.

of the power and authority he came to exercise, a discussion of Nehru's "faith"—used here in its broader meaning of "trust or confidence, unshakeable belief or conviction"—is a necessary prelude to our evaluation of Nehruvian Buddhism.[36]

Nehru, as many biographers have noted, was notorious for being skeptical, if not downright hostile to religion, so the idea that he could have been personally attracted to and influenced by Buddhism, should raise eyebrows. In an insightful essay, Sunil Khilnani argues, "Nehru was a politician without religious faith but in possession of the deepest moral sense. He tried to develop a morality without the fallback of religion…It was his moral faith, at least as much as his ideological commitments, which sustained his political action.[37] "Religion," in Nehru's own words, was "closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science."[38] In contrast, the Buddha and his dharma, he wrote in 1936, "has always had a great appeal for me. It is difficult for me to analyze this appeal, *but it is not a religious appeal, and I am not interested in the dogmas that have grown up round Buddhism. It is the personality that has drawn me*."[39]

Considering his early intellectual development in western liberal traditions—he studied at an elite boarding school in England before moving onto Cambridge and Gray's Inn in London—it is not surprising that Nehru's attraction to Buddhism so closely resembles the Victorian ethos.[40] Yet even prior to this, he had learned of Buddhism from his childhood tutor, the Theosophist, F.T. Brooks. At the age of thirteen, Nehru was initiated into the Theosophical Society by Annie Besant and although he was deeply skeptical of Theosophy, he still described the experience in positive terms:

> I was thrilled. I attended the Theosophical Convention at Benares and saw old Colonel Olcott with his fine beard…I have no doubt that those years with F.T. Brooks left a deep impress on me, and I feel that I owe a debt to him and to theosophy.[41]

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[36] Here, I follow Sunil Khilnani, "Nehru's Faith," in *The Crisis of Secularism in India,* edited by Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 89 – 103.
[37] Khilnani, "Nehru's Faith," 101.
[38] Nehru, *Discovery of India,* 26.
[39] Jawharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: the autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: John Day, 1941), 197. Italics mine.
[40] See, Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism.*
[41] Nehru, *Toward Freedom,* 27. Notably, it was through the Theosophical Society, still at that time under the heavy influence of Olcott, that he read the *Dhammapada* (in English translation). On his experiences with the Theosophists and his later reservations about the group, see, 26 – 28.

Nehru's interest in Buddhism continued through his childhood years and he recalls that "the Buddha story attracted me even in early boyhood, and I was drawn to the young Siddhartha who, after many inner struggles and pain and torment, was to develop into the Buddha. Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* became one of my favorite books."[42] As Nehru grew older and his political responsibilities began to take him across the subcontinent, he began incorporating visits to "the many places connected with the Buddha legend, sometimes making a detour for the purpose."[43]

Nehru's "detours" led to several sustained encounters with Indian Buddhist scholars and prominent foreign Buddhists. When the Mulagandha Kuti Vihāra was inaugurated in Sarnath on November 11, 1931 by re-enshrining relics found at Taxila nearly two decades before, Nehru, along with his wife and sisters, attended the functions.[44] The truly cosmopolitan ceremony—it drew no less than nine-hundred distinguished visitors, more than half of which came from outside India—must have brought firmly to reality both the intellectual and devotional appeal of Buddhism's modern-day revival.[45] In fact, a Buddhist exhibition of its size and grandeur would not be repeated until almost exactly two decades later in 1952 when Nehru, then Prime Minister of an independent India, orchestrated his own re-enshrinement of relics at the newly constructed Caityagiri Vihāra in Sanchi. Those, however, were different days. This early experience clearly left an impression. Six weeks later, he mailed a full size flag of the Congress to the Sarnath branch of the MahaBodhi Society with a short note reading: "I trust this flag will be a perpetual reminder to you of the good will of the Indian Nation towards the *great cause* you represent."[46]

During the next decade, as his political stature grew, he regularly presided over and appeared at Buddhist functions at Shantiniketan, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Bombay and beyond.[47]

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[42] Nehru, *Discovery of India,* 130.
[43] Nehru, *Discovery of India,* 130.
[44] On the discovery of these relics, see Ray, *Return of the Buddha,* 89 – 97.
[45] A list of individuals along with countries and organizations represented at the inauguration is available in Appendix 1 of *History of the Mulagandha Kuty Vihaa Sacred Relics and Wall Paintings at Isipatana—the First Preaching place of the Buddha,* edited by Dr. K. Siri Sumedha Thero (Sarnath: Mulagandha Kuty Vihara, 2010).
[46] "Pandit Nehru's Letter and Gift to the MahaBodhi Society," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 40/1 (1932), no page number. Italics mine. The flag and letter are held at at the Dharmapala Museum in Sarnath.
[47] He and his daughter, Indira (who later became Prime Minister) regularly attended the Mulgandha Kuti Vihara celebrations in Sarnath throughout the 1930s and 40s. In 1937, he inaugurated the centre for Buddhist and Sino-Indian studies ("Cheena Bhavan") at Shantiniketan. See, "The Visvabharti Chinese Hall," *Indian Social Reformer* Vol. 49/32 (1937), 507.

These events, while not as grand as the one at Sarnath, continued to provide exposure to a wider Buddhist world, and served as the springboards for several important post-colonial relationships.[48] For instance, take Nehru's encounters with Taixu (1890 – 1947) and Tan Yunshan (1898 – 1983), two of the most influential Chinese Buddhists in the mid-twentieth century. Both Taixu, a Guomindang-supported reformist Chinese monk trying to make "humanistic Buddhism" (Chinese, *renjian fojiao*) the "meeting place for all races," and his lay disciple Tan, a noted Professor of Chinese History and director of the Cheena-Bhavan Institute in Shantiniketan, were driving forces in the push to reconnect India and China.[49] At a historical moment when European powers were hegemonic and Japan began its violent incursions into Chinese territory, these figures sought out Nehru and the Congress, hoping to ally India and China through the language of Buddhism. Tan, who had joined Tagore's Visva-Bharati University in 1928, not only orchestrated several meetings between high profile Guomindang and Congress officials but arranged Taixu's pilgrimage to India and meeting with Nehru in 1940 under the auspices of "Aśoka Day celebrations."[50] The day after their first meeting, Taixu visited Nehru's home where he explained to Nehru that "future collaboration among the Buddhist countries of Asia" rest upon "the revival of Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India and the establishment of an international Buddhist university."[51] Seeds were being planted in the future Prime Minister's mind.

Of no less importance were the relationships Nehru forged at these events with other Indian scholars of Buddhism. In the 1930s and 40s, when several Indian savants saw traces of socialism in early Buddhist teachings and organization, Nehru was part and parcel to the

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[48] There is not enough space here to highlight all of these relationships. Other important figures included Thakin Nu (U Nu), Goryo Maruyama, and Nichidatsu Fuji.

[49] "Meeting place for all races" is from "A World Buddhist Movement," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 37/7 (1929), 357. Somewhat strangely, Tan was a rare Chinese voice in Indian Buddhist affairs at this time. The community of Chinese Buddhists in Calcutta, which dated back to the early nineteenth-century, and at other select locales in India, appear to have rarely entered into dialogues with other Indian Buddhist communities, despite the fact that they developed monasteries at most of the "Eight Great Places." On the Chinese community, see, Xing Zhang, "Buddhist Practices and Institutions of the Chinese Community in Kolkata, India," in *Buddhism Across Asia*, edited by Tansen Sen, Vol. 1, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 2014), 429 – 58. Some of Zhang's dates for Chinese monasteries at the ancient sites seem suspiciously early to me, since in the travel and pilgrim accounts of these sites, they do not appear until much later.

[50] See "Chinese Goodwill Mission," *Indian Social Reformer,* March 9, 1940, 329. They also met with J.K. Birla, Rabindranath Tagore, MahaBodhi Society officials and leading members of the Hindu MahāSabhā and Congress.

[51] Tansen Sen, "Taixu's Goodwill Mission to India: Reviving the Buddhist Links between China and India," *Buddhism in Asia: Revival and Reinvention,* edited by Nayanjot Lahiri and Upinder Singh (New Delhi: Manohar, 2016), 313.

ideological current.[52] For instance, after Sankrityayan returned from his third trip to Tibet in 1938, Nehru invited him to his home (Ananda Bhavan) in Allahabad, where he and other Indian leftists like Acharya Kripalani, sat down to discuss the "scientific manuscripts" (*sāīṅs sambandhī pustak*) Sankrityayan discovered inside Tibetan Buddhist *gompas*.[53] Likewise, Nehru was close friends with Acharya Narendra Dev (1889 – 1956), the leader of the socialist wing of the Congress (CSP) and a Buddhist scholar of repute. Dev and Sankrityayan were also close, having read Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures together in the early 1930s while producing the first Hindi translation of the *Communist Manifesto.* Nehru was closer with Dev than Sankrityayan and their relationship grew even closer when in the early 1940s, both men were imprisoned together for their involvement in the Quit India Movement. As recorded in Nehru's *Discovery of India,* he spent many of his prison days discussing Buddhist philosophy and in particular, the *Abhidharmakośa,* which Dev was in the process of translating.[54] Dev, who later penned an award-winning seven hundred plus page tome on Buddhist philosophy (*Bauddh-dharm-darśan,* 1956), was as fine a teacher as anyone could ask for, an astute thinker who saw Buddhism as part of his own "socialist humanism."[55] Through these international encounters and Indian conversations, the pan-Asian popularity and cosmopolitan 'modern feel' of Buddhism was impressed upon him. When Nehru became head of the world's largest democracy, he drew on these intellectual and human resources to forge diplomatic connections abroad and a new nation at home.

Nehru's relationship with Buddhism also appears to have been remarkably personal, far more than a dry and sterile scientific appreciation. In the early 1930s, while sweltering in a blazing jail at the foot of the Himalayas, the Buddha served as his virtual *guru-bhaī*, a kind of secular savior that gave him strength to carry on.

> When I was in Dehra Dun Jail, a friend in Ceylon sent me a picture of this statue [of a seated Buddha from Anuradhapura in Ceylon], and I kept it in on my little table in my cell. *It became a precious companion for me, and the strong, calm features of Buddha's statue soothed me and gave me strength and helped me to overcome many a period of depression*."[56]

Just over three decades later, when Nehru died at the Teen Murti Bhavan in New Delhi,

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[52] See chapter eight of this dissertation.
[53] Sāṅkrtyāyan, *Merī Jīvan Yātrā,* Vol. 2, 264 – 65. The meeting took place on April 23, 1938.
[54] Nehru, *Discovery of India,* v and 165.
[55] Ācārya Narendradev, *Bauddh-dharma-darśan* (Paṭnā: Bihār Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Pariṣad, 1956).
[56] Nehru, *Toward Freedom,* 198. Italics mine.

there is strong material evidence to suggest that the Buddha remained by his side. The conservationists in charge of the building, which has been converted into a museum, maintain that the various rooms have been kept in their original state since Nehru's death in 1964. As one scholar who visited the house observed: "In almost every room there is a representation of the Buddha in either a photo or a sculpture. *No other image is repeated with such regularity, and there is even a photo of the Buddha on the table next to the bed where Nehru slept*."[57] Nehru's socio-historical interpretations of the Buddha can be understood as part of the humanization of ordinary life, which as the philosopher Charles Taylor has shown, is paradigmatic of the changes to social consciousness in the modern world.[58] In other words, Nehru was not focused on the blissful state of nirvana, but in exploring the interior landscapes of the mind. His visions and intimations of the Buddha and Aśoka were of a moral and historical rather than soteriological or metaphysical nature. He identified with both of the storied figures, understanding their lives and teachings as models of personal fortitude and moral strength that could be applied to individuals and the nation at large.

The simplicity and single-mindedness with which Nehru spoke about Buddhism gave his moral project a clear and coherent formation. Yet there is strong evidence to suggest that as Nehru's political responsibilities set in, his model of the Indian past moved closer to the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka, the world conqueror rather than world renouncer, to use Tambiah's phrase.[59] Throughout his writings, Nehru celebrates Aśoka's conquest of other nations through the propagation of morality (*dharma*) and non-violence. In the same way in which he imagined himself, he took Aśoka, the "great son of India" to be the philosopher-king *par excellence*, a just and non-violent ruler. In a letter written to his daughter from prison in 1932, he tells her of how Aśoka's "way of thought" led him to be the head of one of the most powerful empires the world has ever seen, "nearly the whole of India, except a tiny

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[57] Robert Pryor, "Bodh Gaya in the 1950s: Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahant Giri and Anagarika Munindra," in *Cross-disciplinary perspectives on a contested Buddhist site: Bodh Gaya Jataka,* edited by David Geary, Matthew R. Sayers, and Abishek Singh Amar (London: Routledge), 112 – 13. I can also confirm Pryor's astute observation, as I conducted research for this dissertation at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library for several weeks during the winter of 2014 – 2015.

[58] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 266 – 304.

[59] Stanley Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

tip in the south, was under him."[60] Writing again from jail in the 1940s, in a climate tinged by communal violence, Nehru makes special reference to the fact that Aśoka, the "ardent Buddhist" that he was, "showed respect and consideration for all other faiths…everywhere an appeal was made to the mind and the heart; there was no force or compulsion."[61] As many scholars have noted, a kind of "cult of Aśoka" emerged in the first decade after independence: he not only represented the Indian nation to the Buddhist world but his ancient edicts outlawing the death penalty, providing free health care and spreading a moral civil religion, were seen as having an important message for the modern world.[62] Nehru capitalized on this popular sentiment but also saw himself in Aśoka. As Ananya Vajpeyi puts it: "Aśoka was a ruler, a pacifist, ethical, ecumenical, and literary—a veritable Jawaharlal *avant la lettre*."[63]

9.3 Bo trees and Buddha bones: Relics in the modern world

In the mode of Aśoka, Nehru led the modern nation-state drawing extensively on the cultural and religious capital that Buddha's relics possessed. He had good reasons for doing so. According to the historian Himanshu Prabha Ray, there were seven major discoveries of Buddha relics in India between 1851 and 1910. The first occurred at Sanchi (1851) in Madhya Pradesh, followed by Sopara (1882) in Maharasthra, Girnar (1889) in Gujarat, Bhattiprolu (1891) in Andhra Pradesh, Piprahawa (1897) in Uttar Pradesh, Shahji-ki-Dheri near Peshawar (1908 – 09) and Mirpus Khas in Sind (1910), the last two in present-day Pakistan.[64] Despite the inconsistencies in the way each relic case was handled—some were re-distributed to museums and private collectors while others were "re-enshrined" at foreign

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[60] Nehru, *Selected Works,* Vol. 9, 63. Nehru was in fact so impressed by Aśoka that according to the Hindi poet, Harivansh Rai Bachchan, Nehru's daughter Indira (her full name was Priyadarshini Indira) was actually named after Aśoka—Priyadassi being the name that Aśoka was known by after his renunciation. See Bachchan, *In the Afternoon of Time: an autobiography,* abridged and translated from the Hindi into English by Rupert Snell (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998), 466.
[61] Nehru, *Discovery of India,* 134.
[62] On Aśoka and the pillar edicts in the ancient context, see Nayanjot Lahiri, *Ashoka in Ancient India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015). On Aśoka in modern memory, see *Reimagining Aśoka: Memory and History,* edited by Patrick Oliveville, Janice Leoshko, and Himanshu Prabha Ray (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[63] Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic,* 98.
[64] Ray, *Return of the Buddha,* 98 – 133.

and Indian *viharas*—there appears to be a clear policy shift in the way relic discoveries were handled after the discovery of the Sopara relics in 1882.[65] In contrast to the discovery of earlier relics, which were routinely distributed to museums and collectors, the cultural and communicational landscape made news of the Sopara relics well known across the elite Buddhist world.[66] From that point onwards, relic discoveries were regularly met with memorandums from Buddhist organizations and governments, requesting British Indian officials to transfer the relics to Buddhist shrines where they could be worshipped according to designated Buddhist prescriptions. When the colonial authorities recognized that relics held not just an aesthetic value as museum artifacts but a sacred presence that could be exploited for political purposes, they began using the relics to further their "geopolitical agenda."[67] While Indian claims for possession of relics after 1910 further complicated these diplomatic initiatives, the prevailing attitude was to distribute the relics to either foreign countries or "re-enshrine" them at the new vihāras being constructed across India.

To arrange these missions, the colonial government relied upon the advice of MahaBodhi Society officials in addition to Indian and European scholars of Buddhism. By Independence, the MahaBodhi Society had not only been the recipient of numerous relics, but was also seen as a reliable functionary for managing relic exhibitions and transfers. As discussed above, Nehru had attended these re-installations in the 1930s and when he became Prime Minister, he tended to pursue his relations with foreign Buddhists through the MahaBodhi Society (MBS). There were exceptions to this—independent relations and diplomatic offices provided other connections—but the MBS's close connections with government, its history of international networking and Nehru's own involvement with it since 1930 made it the obvious choice. In effect, the MBS brought an international clientele and network of pilgrims, tourists, dignitaries and scholars that no other Buddhist organization in India could match at that time. By coupling with the MBS, who by 1947 were veterans (if

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[65] According to Ray, *Return of the Buddha,* 100, each relic was redistributed according to a different logic with "no uniform pattern." In contrast to Ray, I see the late 1880s and 1910 as turning points in the discourse around relics, the former date marking the advent of foreign Buddhist claims over relics and the latter marking regular Indian claims over relics as cultural heritage.

[66] The quintessential example of this is found in Bhagavanlal Indraji, *Antiquarian remains at Sopara and Padana. Being an account of the Buddhist Stupa and Aśoka Edict recently discovered at Sopara and of other antiquities in the neighbourhood. With twenty-one plates and a frontspiece* (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1882), 1 – 56. See also, Ray, *Return of the Buddha,* 101 – 05.

[67] Ray, *Return of the Buddha,* 99.

not one of the original pioneers) in the burgeoning field of modern Buddhist diplomacy, the Government of India was able to orchestrate several successful relic tours and international exhibitions in and outside of India's borders.

9.4 Binding the periphery to the center: Relic tours and border area Buddhists

It was the return to India of two Buddhist relics, in particular, that set the stage for some of the government's most vibrant celebrations of Buddhism. The relics of Sāriputta and Mogallāna, two of Buddha Śākyamuni's most renowned disciples, had been first discovered at Satdhara in 1854 by Alexander Cunningham before being shipped to London where they sat in the British Museum for most of the next century. After a decade of negotiation, it was agreed to return the relics to India in 1941 but the danger of a submarine attack during the Second World War postponed their departure until 1947. From 1947 to 1952, these relics traveled by plane, ship, train, automobile, horseback and foot to Buddhist sites across India in Bihar, Assam, Sikkim, Ladakh and Orissa, as well as reaching royal households, museums, and public exhibitions in Cambodia, Nepal, Burma, Thailand, Tibet, and Sri Lanka.[68]

Throughout Nehru's rule, border area Buddhists were regularly given official state invitations to celebrate Buddhist events at major urban centers that held no clear association with Buddhism as well as at the ancient groves where Gautama is said to have dwelled.[69] Yet Nehru also brought the relics of India's Buddhist past to them. When the cremated remains of Sāriputta and Mogallāna were carried to the borders of India—to Assam and Ladakh in 1950, Sikkim and the Darjeeling - Kalimpong hills in 1951—the public rhetoric and performance of the relic expositions was transformed. Although Buddhism's ethical message and historical contributions to Indian culture continued to be highlighted throughout these events, there were several notable shifts that were largely absent during the same relic expositions in Calcutta and the Gangetic plain.

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[68] Various scholars have studied the return of these relics. See, for instance, Ray, *Return of the Buddha;* Brekkel, "Bones of Contention," and Jack Daulton, "Sariputta and Mogallana in the Golden Land: The Relics of the Buddha's Chief Disciples at the Kaba Aye Pagoda," *Journal of Burma Studies* Vol. 4 (1999): 101 – 28.
[69] For instance, at Calcutta in 1949, Sanchi in 1952, Bodh Gaya throughout the 1950s and in New Delhi in 1956. See the contents of the *MahaBodhi* and *Dharmadūt* from 1949 to 1956 for details and listings of these events and their attendees.

In Assam, a seventeen-day exposition of the relics began on April 18, 1950.[70] Organized jointly by the Government of Assam, the All-Assam Buddhist Association and the MBS, the Assam exposition coincided with the Assam Congress Provincial Conference and joined the conference *pandal* during that time. The Governor of Assam, Sri Prakash, presided over a crowd of ten thousand devotees in Disangpani. The small party, led by Devapriya Valisinha and Tan Yun Shan of Shantinektan, gave several speeches, collected funds for the construction of the Sanchi vihara and presided over a series of conversion ceremonies for leaders of the All-Assam Ahom Association. The emphasis in the speeches delivered were the "long-standing" connections between Assam and Buddhism and "the necessity of the revival of the Buddhist ideas of *karuna, metta* and *mudita* all over the world."[71]

Following the Assam tour, the relics were carried to Ladakh in a trip financed entirely by the Central government and Ministry of States. Four years earlier, Nehru had visited the region, carrying bones believed to be those of the Buddha Gautama himself. During his several day tour, he exhibited the relics to the highest local incarnate lamas (*sprul sku*) and promised the Ladakhi lama, Bakula Rinpoche that he would send more relics for future worship.[72] Since then, the social and political situation in Ladakh had become extremely fragile due to two destabilizing forces: first, India and Pakistan's claims over the region, leading to the first Indo-Pakistan war of 1947, and second China's invasion of Tibet in 1950, which began the slow severance of Ladakh's cross-border trade and cultural links to Tibet.[73] In 1948, Bakula traveled to Delhi with a seven-man delegation to discuss Ladakh's precarious position and from within this meeting, the plans for a relic exhibition in Ladakh were born. Two years later, a police honor guard, seven MahaBodhi Society officials and one journalist took the Buddhist relics from Calcutta to New Delhi (where Nehru met them at a public ceremony at the Birla Temple – Buddha Vihara on Reading Road), before moving on to Srinagar and then to Leh via a 'military airlift.' For ten days, the Sāriputta and Mogallāna relics were exhibited at a number of monasteries across Ladakh, targeting those which had

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[70] Sri S.C. Guha Khasnabis, "The Sacred Relics of Sariputta and Mogallana Arahans in Assam," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 58/6 – 7 (1950), 243 – 47.
[71] Khasnabis, "The Sacred Relics of Sariputta and Mogallana Arahans in Assam," 247.
[72] Nawang Tsering Shakspo, "The Revival of Buddhism in Modern Ladakh," in *Tibetan studies: proceedings of the 4th seminar of the International Association for Tibetan studies,* edited by Helga Uebach and Jampa L. Panglung (Munich: Schloss Hokenkammer, 1988), 442 – 43.
[73] See, Ravina Aggarwal, *Beyond Lines of Control: Performance and Politics on the Disputed Borders of Ladakh, India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

"suffered most during Pakistani raids."[74] Several thousand people turned out to view and worship the relics, as local monastic and militia elites mingled with Buddhist delegates.[75]

Officially, the relics were a symbol of India's dedication to "non-violence, co-operation, friendliness and forgiveness."[76] Yet the subtext was also clear. As Toni Huber argues, the relics sent "unequivocal signals" to the Ladakhi population "that the Indian nation they had just joined was sympathetic to and would even ritually support their Buddhist cultural identity."[77] MahaBodhi officials who traveled with the relic delegation were careful to articulate the government's support in terms that would resonate with any Buddhist audience: it was *vastu-dāna* (the gift of material goods), *śikśa-dāna* (the gift of education), and *dharma-dāna* (the gift of dharma).

Exactly one year later, this same message would be reiterated among a cosmopolitan Buddhist elite when the relics were carried across Sikkim, Tibet and the five most prominent centers of Buddhist activity in the Darjeeling – Kalimpong hills.[78] As in Ladakh, tens of thousands of devotees turned out to see the relics and "drink deep in the ocean of the bliss of [the] Tathagata."[79] During the three-month exhibition, which was organized in conjunction with the visit of the Dalai Lama just over the border in Yatung, numerous political elites from the border regions gathered to venerate the relics. This included the King and Queen of Bhutan, the Maharani of Burdwan, the Sikkimese royal family, the (exiled) Burmese prince and princess, and a host of European scholars and former members of the Frontier Raj. Due in part to the Dalai Lama's precarious and uncertain place across the border—only months earlier the People's Liberation Army had occupied Lhasa, triggering his "pilgrimage" to Yatung—the relic exposition gained a heightened political sense and popularity that was

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[74] "Report of carriage of Buddhist relics," Government of India, Ministry of States, Kashmir Branch, File no. 10/17 (1950), National Archives of India, New Delhi.
[75] Dr. R.M. Soft, "Exposition of the Sacred Relics in Ladak [sic]: a diary record," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 58/12 (1950), 428 – 35.
[76] File report from "carriage of some Buddhist relics" in Ministry of States, Kashmir Branch, Government of India, File no. 10/17 (1950), National Archives of India, New Delhi. Although the MahaBodhi Society, who organized the relic tour on behalf of the government, exceeded the budget allotted, government officials felt that "considering the importance attached to this Mission…it would be impolite to raise objections to the payment of certain misc. items."
[77] Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn,* 341.
[78] Namely, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Kurseong, Ghoom, and Tindharia. See, Dr. R.M. Soft, "My Journey to Tibet and Sikkim with the Sacred Relics of Lord Buddha and his two chief disciples," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 59/7 (1951), 261 – 64.
[79] Soft, "My Journey to Tibet and Sikkim," 264.

witnessed by its frequent coverage in Tibetan, Hindi and English newspapers. The relationship between the Tibetan state and Nehruvian Buddhism is discussed in more detail below but here, I wish to focus instead on how the relic exhibition in Sikkim and the Darjeeling hills was coupled with the belief among government elites that spreading Buddhism in the hills could help ensure the Himalayan population's loyalty to India.

This is indicated by concurrent events in both Assam and Sikkim – Darjeeling. When local officials discovered a Chinese government book entitled *Buddhism in China* circulating through the Sikkimese marketplaces, the Ministry of External Affairs, under the advice of the Political Officer in Gangtok, instructed the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to produce ten thousand copies of a comparable India-focused "History of Buddhism" with Tibetan, Hindi and English text.[80] After the report reached Nehru's desk, the Ministry instructed the Gangtok Political Officer to produce "as attractive a book as possible," and "properly priced" at no more than one rupee per copy with at least two thousand copies distributed free of charge to "the various schools and libraries in the border areas."[81] Nowhere in the packet of files transferred back and forth across ministry desks does it state explicitly why Nehru and other officers felt it so important to publish a tri-lingual History of Indian Buddhism in a remote Indian district. Yet the fact the idea came about after learning of a similarly themed Chinese publication makes clear the competitive nature of the relationship. The authorities believed that propagating Buddhism would send a clear message to the border communities that India and not China is their real "homeland." Just one year later, in 1956, the same geopolitical agenda was witnessed during the Dalai Lama's tense visit to India, when Nehru expressed his support behind plans to build a Mahāyāna "Institute of Tibetology" in Gangtok. While en route to his return to Tibet, on February 10, 1957, the Dalai Lama laid the foundation stone for the noted Buddhological institute with Nehru and Indira Gandhi presiding over its grand inauguration roughly twenty months later.

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[80] Later, the number was increased to twelve thousand. See Letter from T.N. Kaul to Shri P.M. Lad, Secretary, dated September 3, 1995 in Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, NEF Section, File no. 37/7 (1955), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

[81] Letter from T.N. Kaul, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs to P.M. Lad, Secretary of IGB Ministry, 3rd September 1955, in Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, NEF Section, File no. 37/7 (1955), National Archives of India, New Delhi. The final product was published by Gergan Dorje Tharchin, the Tibetan Christian and editor of the popular Tibetan-language newspaper, *Melong* (The Tibet Mirror).

Similarly, when Indian officials argued in the early 1950s that Indian students should begin studying modern colloquial Tibetan, the rhetoric was not fundamentally different than that of US Department of Defense's support for foreign language instruction in American universities at the same time.[82] Yet there were concerns about how these programs would be viewed from abroad. When the Russian Tibetologist and longtime India resident, George Roerich (1902 – 60) petitioned the government to build an Indo-Tibetan Institute at Kalimpong in 1952, the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs approved the idea. However, once Nehru caught wind of the plan, he refused to grant permission, arguing that the institute's proximity to the border would be seen by the Chinese as "a counter-revolutionary scheme."[83] After two years of negotiation, the parties involved finally agreed that Tagore's Visvabharti University at Shantiniketan was a better fit for the institute. There is also considerable evidence that the same civilizational logic of Buddhism being a pacifying, "Indianizing" force was influencing the decisions of foreign affairs officers in northeast India as well. For instance, during the winter of 1949 – 50, New Delhi granted the Burmese government permission to send a "Goodwill Mission" consisting of nine "carefully selected Buddhist monks to Assam whose object will be to strengthen the cultural ties existing between Burma and Assam."[84] In short, integrating "Border Area Buddhists" into the national fold was critical to Nehru's political aspirations and Buddhist symbols, whether material or immaterial, were central to accomplishing that mission.

9.5 Nehruvian Buddhism and the poetics of power

At the same time Nehru's government was attempting to secure loyalty at the borders and instill a moral code at the center, it drew on the country's Buddhist resources to institute what was essentially an informal policy of strengthening India's role in postcolonial Asia.

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[82] For an insightful essay in this vein, see David Ludden, "Area Studies in the Age of Globalization," *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad,* Winter (2000): 1 – 22.

[83] Letter from Nehru to T.N. Kaul, Joint Secretary, in Government of India, Education Department, A1 Branch, File no. 49/31 (1952), National Archives of India, New Delhi. Nehru was also concerned about Roerich (a Russian national) being in charge of the institute as well as the presence of so many foreign 'adventurers" in the region.

[84] These monks were from the "Hill Tract Buddhist Mission" under the direct support of Prime Minister U Nu. See, File no. 147 (July 19, 1949), Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, NEF Branch—Secret (1949), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

Srirupa Roy has rightly noted that the dharmacakra flag symbolized the "double-edged nature" of Nehru's "universalist promise…of a peaceful international order and of a strong and expansionist state."[85] In the years leading up to independence, Nehru had in many ways defined India as the symbol of anti-colonial resistance and anti-imperialism. However, in the new post-colonial order, he struggled to cast India in new terms, one where it was still a symbol of anti-colonial effort, but also a model of self-sufficiency and world leadership. The vision he projected of India was not just for Indians, but for the hopes and aspirations of all Asian peoples. "The future that took shape in my mind," he wrote from a prison cell between 1942 and 1944, "was one of intimate co-operation, politically, economically and culturally, between India and the other countries of the world. But before the future came there was the present, and behind the present lay the long and tangled past, out of which the present had grown. So to the past I looked for understanding."[86]

As a product of the age, Nehru understood Buddhism to be the link between India and the rest of Asia, and such an idea coincided smoothly with his post-independence plan to establish India as a central player in international political affairs and build closer economic links with other Asian countries. During the Inter-Asian Relations Conference, which met in New Delhi in March 1947, Nehru laid forth his philosophy that characterized his foreign policy for the next decade: "In this atomic age, Asia will have to function effectively in the maintenance of peace. Indeed, there can be no peace unless Asia plays her part…the whole spirit and outlook of Asia are peaceful, and the emergence of Asia in world affairs will be a powerful influence for world peace."[87] Projecting India as an international leader whose stature rest not on its armies, but on its moral superiority and devotion to world peace, Nehru enlisted India as part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1955. The NAM, which was often called the "Third Way," attempted to formulate an alternative policy to the Cold War division between Communist and non-Communist blocs. As the balance of global political power was replaced by a new power equilibrium oscillating between the US and USSR, Nehru argued that a new Pan-Asian identity was an urgent necessity for global stability.

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[85] *Constituent Assembly Debates, Official Reports,* Vol. 4 (1947), no page number.
[86] Nehru, *Discovery of India,* 49 – 50.
[87] Nehru, *Selected Works,* Vol. 2, 507.

The assembly of world leaders for the Inter-Asian Conference in New Delhi was shared with several other conferences, including an All-Asia Buddhist Convention held at the (Birla) Buddha Vihara on March 31. During the meeting, nearly two dozen government officials from Ceylon, Burma and Tibet met with leading Indian Buddhists to discuss the important role Buddhists could have in forming an "Asian Federation" or what one of the Ceylonese delegates (and future Prime Minister), S.W.R.D. Bandranaike described as "a Brave New World."[88] A reoccurring topic that day was the tremendous "sensitivity" being shown to Buddhism by the new leadership in Delhi. When Nehru met the delegates later that week, the most pressing matter they raised was the management of the MahaBodhi temple. The issue had been set aside during the Quit India movement but in May of the previous year, Rajendra Prasad as the Chairman of the committee, along with the MBS and Hindu MahāSabhā had met in Patna, passing a further resolution to transfer its ownership. With the Mahant's continued opposition, the negotiations continued to stall, leaving Prasad with an ever-growing pile of demanding letters on his desk.[89] Nehru responded by promising the delegates "all support for the restoration of Buddhagaya to the Buddhists," and just weeks later, he wrote to his secretary that Bodh Gayā should have a "certain international character."[90] Including non-Indian Buddhists on the MahāBodhi Temple advisory committee, he added, would be "a graceful gesture to the Buddhist world."[91] While Nehru recognized the goodwill that could be acquired by transferring control to the Buddhists, the transfer of the temple out of the Śaiva Mahant's hands also served as part of his Land Reforms Act to

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[88] "All Asia Buddhist Convention at New Delhi," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 55/5 – 6 (1947). 149. Bandaranaike, then a Minister of Local Administration, was elected Prime Minister in a landslide election in 1956 before his term came to a tragic ending when he was assassinated by a Buddhist monk three years later. Other foreign leaders in attendance included then Education Minister in Ceylon, Dr. C.W.W. Kannanagara, Justice U Kyaw of the Mint of Burma, Vira Dhammawara of Siam, Daynananda Priyardasi, President of the United Lanka Congress and Khenchen Losang Wangyal, the Dalai Lama's representative to Delhi. Prominent Indian leaders included Arabinda Barua (acting Gen Secretary of the MBS), Jagdish Kashyap, A.R. Kulkarni, and Anand Kausalayayan.

[89] A segment of these papers is housed at the National Archives of India in New Delhi under the Rajendra Prasad Private Papers collection, File No. 1-R/38, Collection No. 2, Sub: Buddha Gaya Temple. An interesting anecdote from Prasad catches the nature of these negotiations: "I once requested the Mahant to settle the Buddhagaya question. Then the Mahant said that it was a great honour for him to see Buddhists from foreign countries visit him. *Whole India is put to shame because of your so-called honour,* I replied" [italics in original]. See, "The Patna Conference," *MahaBodhi* Vol. 54/5 – 6 (1946), 140 – 41.

[90] Nehru, *Selected Works,* Vol. 9, 110.

[91] Nehru, *Selected Works,* Vol. 9, 110.

demolish zamindāri.[92] On June 19, 1949, the Bodh Gaya Temple Act was finally passed, resulting in an eight-member committee, split evenly between Buddhists and Hindus with a final ninth vote to be decided by the Governor of Bihar. The result was unsatisfactory to both parties but in 1953 when the transfer was officially completed, Buddhists around the globe celebrated while the Mahant counted his losses.[93] While killing two birds with one stone was a coup for the government, Tara Doyle is right when she argues that primary motivation behind the transfer can be credited to Nehru's efforts to strengthen India's political position in the region.[94] The internationalization of Bodh Gaya it seems was just one part of his larger imperial Buddhist vision.

Nehruvian Buddhism also marked the beginning of an era when longtime Buddhist activists in India gained the sanction of the Central and State governments, emerging as critical interlocutors in their initiatives abroad. When Burma gained its Independence in January of 1948, President Prasad attended the celebrations as part of India's first official delegation to the country. Joining Prasad was "Special Envoy" Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap (1908 – 76), the brilliant Pali scholar and student of Sankrityayan. The Hindu born Bihari and former Ārya Samāji, had become a Buddhist monk in Ceylon in 1933, traveling through south and southeast Asia, and studying the Buddha's doctrines as contained in Sanskrit, Chinese and Pali scriptures. When Kashyap returned to India in 1936, he joined the faculty at the Buddhist Intercollege in Sarnath, working with Dharmanand Kosambi and other noted Buddhologists. As awareness of Kashyap's Hindi-language translations and lucid expositions of *Abhidhamma* spread, a new faculty position at Benares Hindu University (BHU) created by JK Birla, M.M. Malaviya and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was offered to him. From these two centers, one in the heart of the international Buddhist universe and the other in the center of Hindu orthodoxy, Kashyap attempted to bridge two opposing worlds.[95] Presumably, it was

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[92] The Mahant was the largest landowner (*zamindār*) in all of Bihar, a region with one of the highest rates of property ownership inequality, and Nehru's government was insistent on demolishing that very system. See, David Geary, "The Decline of the Bodh Gaya Math and the Afterlife of Zamindari," *South Asia History and Culture* Vol. 4/3 (2014): 366 – 83.

[93] For an insightful description of the official transfer ceremony and reactions to it, see Trevithick, *Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage,* 200 – 02.

[94] Tara Doyle, *Bodh Gaya: Journeys to the Diamond Throne and the Feet of Gayasur* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1997), 187.

[95] Each morning, Kashyap traveled the rougly ten-mile dusty road between the two towns by foot, requesting alms from local households (*piṇḍapata*) and performing Buddhist rituals for a small community of new Buddhists. Kashyap's social and educational efforts among Bahujan communities were resented by segments of

these connections and skills that persuaded the government to bring him on other delegations to China and Tibet in the following decade.

During Kashyap's visit to Burma with President Prasad, he delivered saplings of the bo tree from Bodh Gaya to various Burmese officials, invoking a tradition of ritual veneration and gift-giving (*dāna*) that goes back to at least Tang China, when the Chinese monk Xuanzang returned from India with leaves from the tree as gifts to the Emperor. Following the visit, Prasad wrote to Nehru:

> There is a great deal of goodwill on account of cultural relationship with that country which could be canalized…[Kashyap] had conversations with leading Buddhists, about establishing some sort of a [Buddhist] cultural institution…its importance or necessity cannot be questioned…we require such institutions—or perhaps 'missions' should be a better expression—not only in Burma but in all Buddhist countries towards the east, south-east and north-east of India."[96]

The idea resonated with New Delhi. By year's end, Nehru pushed the central government to grant a plot of land in south Delhi to the Cambodian lawyer and politician turned itinerant monk, Dharmavira Mahathera (1889 – 1999). When Dharmavira established the Aśoka Mission later that year, the property was little more than just a thatched hut with a small Buddhist shrine but its central location at the national capital alongside Nehru's support ensured its growth.[97] During Nehru's own travels abroad, colonial Buddhist networks continued to pave the way for foreign affairs. In Japan, Nehru and other Indian leaders networked with Nichidatsu Fujī (1885 – 1985), the Japanese monk who with Birla's financial support built Buddhist temples at Calcutta (1935), Rajgir (1936) and Bombay (1940). Amidst the growing strain between Britain and Japan, Fujī returned to Kumamoto, the place of his birth in 1938 "to contemplate what course of action he and Nipponzan Myohoji should

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the community and in 1937, he barely escaped a local mob who burned down his home while he was inside sleeping. See, "Bhikṣu Śrī Jagdīś Kāśyap, M.A., kī hatyā karne kā prayant," *Dharmadūt,* Vol. 3/8 (1937), frontspiece. Later, Kashyap became one of only four Buddhist representatives on the Bodh Gaya temple committee in 1949. Two years after that, his vision for rebuilding Nalanda University was granted when the philanthropist Shri Kasan Ahmad Khan donated ten acres of land to the Government, leading to Kashyap's and President Prasad's laying of the foundation stone of the NavaNalanda Mahavihara (now University) in 1951. Kashyap's most prized achievement under Nehru's government was its sponsorship of Kashyap's editing of the complete Pali Tripataka in Devangari script.

[96] Prasad, *Correspondence,* Vol. 9, 167. See also, Prasad, *Correspondence,* Vol. 10, 332 – 34.

[97] In 1975, Dharmavira moved to the USA and the Aśoka Mission was reorganized under its new President, Ven. Lama Lobzang from Ladakh. Since the early 2000s, the Aśoka Mission has emerged as the premiere organizer of international Buddhist events in India, including holding one of the largest Buddhist conferences in modern history in 2011.

take."[98] After Japan's defeat in the Second World War, Fujī began constructing Peace Pagodas (*Shanti Stupa*) across the globe on the basis that the massive Buddhist reliquaries could help save the world from destruction. Today, more than forty of these grand monuments dot the globe, from India to Japan, the United States to South Africa and Latvia to Italy. Yet significantly, when the *first* Peace Pagoda was inaugurated in Kumamoto in 1954, Nehru and Indian delegates from the Gandhian Seva Sangha were there to transfer ten reliquary urns (*dagoba*) to Fujī and other priests, in front of a massive crowd numbering in the thousands.[99]

By the early 1950s, the act of distributing relics and other Buddhist antiquities had become so common that some government officials began to worry that they were running out of relics, a fear that likely stemmed from a warning issued by the Director General of Archaeology a decade before that the India's source of ancient relics would soon be exhausted.[100] Such anxieties were evident in several diplomatic exchanges. For instance, in 1940, when a Thai Goodwill Mission to India returned home with a steatite relic casket three inches high containing a small cylinder of gold with fragments of ashes and bone, the leader of the Mission explained to the Chief Secretary of India's Ministry of External Affairs that "that the success of the Mission would be judged in Bangkok according to the value of the relics which it brought back."[101] Later in the day, after he "drank a whole bottle of champagne without being visibly affected," the Thai Mission Head added, "in confidence that it did not matter much if the relics were not genuine."[102] Returning home with the relics, the Thai Government responded that "here in Thailand these relics are confidently assumed to be those of the Buddha himself…[and] the casket containing the relics has been exposed to the public view and has been venerated by many thousands of people, including the highest

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[98] Kisala, *Prophets of Peace,* 52.
[99] It is notable that this event occurred in conjunction with the second session of the World Conference of Pacifists, the first session having been held the year prior at Gandhi's former ashram in Wardha.
[100] See, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs: SEA Branch, File no. Z/8141/10 (1953) and File no. 1051 (1951), National Archives of India, New Delhi.
[101] "Buddhist relics from Taxila presented to the Thai Goodwill Mission in India," in Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, External Branch, File no. 723—Secret (1940), National Archives of India, New Delhi.
[102] "Buddhist relics from Taxila presented to the Thai Goodwill Mission in India," in Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, External Branch, File no. 723—Secret (1940), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

personages in the land."[103] A decade later and another request for Buddha relics, this time from the Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge in Bangkok, had to be delicately declined. After much discussion, the request resulted in the distribution not of corporeal remains, as had often been the custom, but of the physical earth removed from "four sacred Buddhist pilgrim centres."[104] During a three-day ceremony in February 1953, an urn containing the sacred soil—taken from Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Kuśīnagar—was carried by Thai monastic and government officials to the temple at Prachin Puri where "thousands of people" gathered to venerate its installation inside the *Chedi* of the Wat Saeng Swang in Bangkok.[105] In a Thai language booklet published to commemorate the event, Nehru described the ceremony as one "to serve the cause of peace for humanity…The Lord Buddha has been for ages past a symbol of peace, and the great faith which drew its inspiration from him has been a link for ages past between India and Thailand. I trust that this dedication will help to revive the ancient cultural relations between our two countries."[106]

By November of 1952, when the Sāriputta and Mogallāna relics were installed at a new vihara financed by the government in Sanchi, the attendees were a virtual who's who of the Buddhist world. In addition to Nehru, Radhakrishnan, Mukherjee and the Indian delegates of the MBS, the following were also in attendance: Prime Minister U Nu of Burma, Maharaj Kumar and Kumari of Sikkim, U Win, Minister for Sasana Affairs in Burma, Mr. A. Ratnakaye, Home Minister of Ceylon, Kushok Bakula, Head Lama from Ladakh (and a later Indian Ambassador to Mongolia), in addition to a wide range of representatives and ambassadors from non-Buddhist countries (such as France, Nepal and Pakistan). Weeks later, amidst the "chanting of Buddhist hymns and recitations of suttas to the accompaniment of blowing of conch-shells and ringing of bells," a near-identical list of political dignitaries

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[103] Letter from Thai Government to Ministry of External Affairs, February 11, 1940, in Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, External Branch, File no. 723—Secret (1940), National Archives of India, New Delhi.
[104] Request from Thai – Bharat Cultural Lodge, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, IANZ Branch, File no. 1051 (1951), National Archives of India, New Delhi.
[105] Letter from Raghunath Sharma, Director of Thai – Bharat Cultural Lodge to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, March 8, 1953, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, SEA Branch, File no. Z/81841/10 (1953), National Archives of India, New Delhi.
[106] Letter from Raghunath Sharma, Director of Thai – Bharat Cultural Lodge to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, March 8, 1953, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, SEA Branch, File no. Z/81841/10 (1953), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

were present in Calcutta.[107] Only this time, the former and Present Prime Ministers of Cambodia, and Japanese and Thai ambassadors joined the distinguished gathering. Clearly, Nehru's declaration to the Constituent Assembly just five years earlier that the Buddhist *dharmacakra* was a reminder that India was once "an international centre…[and not] a tight little narrow country," was bearing fruit.[108]

Prasenjit Duara has shown that "civilizational" categories served as the trans-territorial basis for many twentieth century nationalist leaders in China, Japan and Sri Lanka.[109] Like these figures, Nehru was aiming to project India as the singular heir of a progressive and glorious civilization that was simultaneously distinct from, yet also a part of the wider heritage of Asia. This idea, which contains a possibly insoluble tension between the exclusion of nationalism and inclusion of universalism, had its strength in modern India on the basis of Buddhism's origins. Nehru, of course, was astute enough to capitalize on these historical connections. During the Calcutta functions of 1952, the President of the MahaBodhi Society, S.P. Mukherjee told the international delegations present that as "the birthplace of Buddha and of many of His saintly disciples, [India] is the home of a culture and religion that brought civilization and spiritual light to a large section of the Asian peoples…This is an event of profound religious and historical significance not only for India but also for the whole of Asia."[110] Relishing a universalist message of Buddhist fraternity, tolerance and peace with slogans about Pan-Asian unity, Nehru argued that India was a kind of *axis mundi* for the Buddhist world. After receiving the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna in Calcutta in 1949, he remarked: "It was gratifying to see all these nations of the Buddhist world looking to India, not only with friendship but as the *mother country* where their great religion originated."[111]

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[107] *Maha Bodhi Centenary Volume,* 189.
[108] *Constituent Assembly Debates, Official Reports,* Vol. 4 (1947).
[109] Prasenjit Duara, "The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism," *Journal of World History* Vol. 12/1 (2001): 99 – 130.
[110] *Maha Bodhi Centenary Volume*, 186.
[111] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru: Letters to Chief Ministers: 1947 – 1964,* Vol. 1, edited by G. Parthasarathi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 267. Italics mine.

9.6 A Buddhist teaching in impermanence: Tibet and the India – China debacle

By 1954, state rituals supporting Buddhism and using the language of Buddhism were central to the Pan-Asian performances of the theatre state. Perhaps no where did this become more obvious than in Indian attempts to assess and resolve the tumultuous political relationship between China, India and Tibet. Between 1951 and 1958, there were at least five unofficial "friendship missions" led by Indian Buddhist monks, scholars and officials to China.[112] The Buddhist links between the two countries were the focus of these delegations and special efforts were made to visit those historical sites associated with the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, whose seventh-century pilgrimage to India regained centre stage in the early years of 1950s Sino-Indian relations. According to the historian Holmes Welch, "So important was Hsuan-tsang [Xuanzang] considered a symbol of Sino-Indian friendship that the temples connected with him in Sian [Xian] were among the first in China to be repaired [after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949] and at once began to be shown to Indian visitors."[113] For instance, during the Indian mission to China in 1955, the first to be led by a government official (A.K. Chanda, the Deputy Minister of External Affairs), the Indian delegates gifted Buddha relics and bo tree saplings to Ho Chi Minh, Zhou en-Lai and Mao Zedong.[114] In addition to visiting industrial centers and Chinese theatres, the Chinese government arranged for Indian officials to visit the "principal centres of cultural contact" between India and China in the past centuries, including the Xuanzang and Kumārajīva pagodas.[115] The important role that Buddhist vestiges played in these events is also indicated by the fact that of the twenty-two gifts Chinese officials officially delivered to Indian delegates, nearly half consisted of Buddhist memorabilia. The premise was clear: revive memories of old links and symbols of their ancient relations.

The most conspicuous example of Buddhist theatrics between India and China began in 1954 with the signing of the Sino-Indian, or *Panchshila* Agreement, which marked the

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[112] There was an "Indian friendship mission" in October 1951, an Indian "good-will delegation" in 1954, an Indian "cultural delegation" in 1955 led by Raghu Vira, another "friendship mission" in 1956 led by P.V. Bapat and Jagdish Kashyap, and a "cultural delegation" led by Sankrityayan in 1958.
[113] Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 173.
[114] Report of Indian Cultural Delegation to China under Leadership of Shri AK Chanda, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, FEA Branch, File no. 1/55 (Secret), National Archives of India, New Delhi.
[115] Report of Indian Cultural Delegation to China under Leadership of Shri AK Chanda, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, FEA Branch, File no. 1/55 (Secret), National Archives of India, New Delhi. They also visited several other Buddhist sites, like the Lama temple in Beijing.

apogee of the *Hindi-Chini Bhāī Bhāī* [Indo-Chinese Brotherhood] policy. The preamble to the accord, entitled Pancshila (*pañcśīl*) purportedly in reference to the five (*pañc*) principles of Buddhist morality (*śīla*) details the rules of conduct between the two Asian superpowers.[116] The framework is indeed remarkably Buddhist: 1) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity; 2) Mutual non-aggression; 3) Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; 4) Equality and mutual benefit; 5) Peaceful co-existence. As the famous expression goes, the Sino-Indian brotherhood (*bhai bhai*) soon went "bye-bye," culminating in the deadly Indo-Chinese War of 1962. In his seminal history of Buddhism in modern China, Holmes Welch offered a sober assessment of this new age of international Buddhist diplomacy:

> It was possible for genuine friendship to arise between individual Buddhists who had been brought together by people's diplomacy. It has to be recognized, however, that even if it did not arise it was going to be reported; and that while friendship can exist between individuals, to speak of it between nations involves a misleading personification. Nations have no hearts. They act—or rather their governments act—on the basis of national self-interest. The purpose of people's diplomacy was to obscure this fact, to create the illusion that nations are capable of loyalty and deserve trust in the same way as individual friends."[117]

As Welch's critical perspective suggests, there were opportunities for genuine collaboration but there was always an underlying layer of *realpolitik*. By 1956, India and China's supposed brotherhood was under increasing strain and Buddhist celebrations in India that year provide another window into the ritual theatre of Nehru's Buddhist statecraft.

One of the most important events of the Buddha Jayanti celebrations of 1956 was the much-anticipated arrival of the fourteenth Dalai Lama to India. His visit, which was his first trip to Indian soil and "one of the most politically important pilgrimages in Tibetan history," came amidst declining relations between India and China and recent uprisings among Tibetans in Kham (eastern Tibet) against the Chinese occupation.[118] Just four years earlier, the notorious "Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet"—which

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[116] According to Claude Arpi, *Born in Sin: The Panchsheel Agreement, the Sacrifice of Tibet* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004), 114, the use of the term was actually introduced by President Sukarno of Indonesia when he gave the name *Pantaja Sila* to Indonesia's "Five Principles" of national policy in 1945.

[117] Welch, *Buddhism under Mao,* 176 – 77. For a more recent critique of this "false narrative of Chinese-Indian friendship," see Tansen Sen, "The Bhai-Bhai Lie," *Foreign Affairs,* July 11, 2014, accessed at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/bhai-bhai-lie.

[118] Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn,* 343.

effectively ceded control of the central Tibetan state to the PRC—had just been signed by a Tibetan delegation and there were serious concerns over whether the Dalai Lama would stay in India. Throughout the course of his visit, there were continued rumors and news of ongoing Tibetan rebellions against the Chinese, thus exacerbating the situation. The complete picture of this fascinating year long pilgrimage is beyond the scope of this chapter, but for our purposes here, it is another stunning example of the "poetics of power" central to India's postcolonial foreign relations. Although the Dalai Lama's visit to India's various Buddhist shrines and sites was ostensibly religious, most, if not all of the public events themselves were overshadowed by political affairs.

The major actors in the play—Nehru, Zhou Enlai (the Chinese Premier) and the Dalai Lama—all struggled to push their own agendas. Although there was already explicit recognition that Tibet was a part of China in the Pañcśīl Agreement, throughout his travels the Dalai Lama, much to the chagrin of China, was treated by India "like a head of state."[119] When the Dalai Lama came to New Delhi in December, Nehru met him privately at the Presidential Guest House to explore the latter's options vis a vis Tibet's recent occupation. One of the most important moments in the Dalai Lama's visit came in Bihar when the Chinese engaged in their own *dāna* ritual by donating money for the construction of a Xuanzang Memorial Hall in Nalanda. This seemingly simple gesture of cultural goodwill was rich in political overtones. Rather than having a Chinese official present the gift, which was also coupled with the bodily remains of the great Chinese pilgrim himself, the Dalai Lama was placed in charge of the ritual offering. As Tsering Shakya explains:

> the Chinese tried to make it appear that the [Dalai Lama's] visit was a delegation from China by arranging for the Dalai Lama to present a gift from the Chinese Government. When the Dalai Lama and Panchen Rinpoche visited the famous Buddhist university city of Nalanda, the Dalai Lama gave Nehru the relics of the Chinese monk Xuan Zang who had visited India more than a thousand years earlier, and announced that the Chinese Government would donate 300, 000 yuan for the construction of a memorial hall. This ceremony could hardly conceal the diplomatic and political problems that had emerged.[120]

By trying to make the Dalai Lama appear as a Chinese rather than Tibetan delegate, Beijing was sending explicit signals to New Delhi, the international community as well as the

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[119] Tsering Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947* (London: Pimilico, 1999), 151.
[120] Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows,* 151 – 52. See also, Huber, *Holy Land Reborn,* 343 – 46.

politically savvy Tibetan émigré in India that Tibet was theirs. These kinds of overtly political performances and attitudes behind the state Buddhist ceremonies of 1956 leads one to cast a justifiably skeptical eye on the entire Nehruvian decade of state Buddhist diplomacy.

9.7 Conclusion: The competing wills of universalism and nationalism

How do we reconcile the performance of politics, the aspirations of a benevolent universal Buddhism, and the rational calculations of a bureaucratic state? While it is tempting to reduce everything to politics or to blindly ignore the political gerrymandering behind the accolades in Nehruvian Buddhism, the complexity of human life and the habits, responsibilities and logics inherent in political statecraft demand a more nuanced account. Ananya Vajpeyi suggests that the life of Nehru reveals two trends: one towards the idealism of non-violence, tolerance and unity, and the other towards the realism of warring nation-states and state diplomacy. "The tension within the self," she writes, "between aspiration and instrumentality, between norm and purpose mirrors or replicates a larger contradiction in the very nature of the modern state, which cannot but pull in these two opposite directions in order to present itself as ethically desirable and worthy of dying for."[121] This tension, which Vajpeyi frames through the Indic categories of pragmatism (*artha*) and ethical order (*dharma*) is also found in the distance between Aśoka and Buddha, or between the World Conqueror and the World Renouncer.[122] Nehru, it appears, seems to have been torn between these two models, and drew on both for personal sustenance as well as political inspiration at different times.

Yet the tension between Aśokan statecraft and Buddhist benevolence (*maitrī*, *mettā*), like the tension between nationalism and universalism, is difficult (if not impossible) to reconcile.[123] Nehru's uses of Buddhism in the postcolonial state demonstrates this very dilemma: one turned towards Buddhist morality and universalism, and the other towards the

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[121] Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic,* 207.
[122] Tambiah, *World Conqueror, World Renouncer*.
[123] Cosmopolitanism is sometimes argued to be one way of reconciling the two but once deconstructed, cosmopolitanism begins to look like a European particularism. See, Peter van der Veer, "Colonial Cosmopolitanism," in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, edited by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 165 – 79.

national self-interest of the Indian state and its territorial sovereignty. By linking nation with state through the ethical principles embodied by the dharmacakra and lion pillar, Nehru offered an indigenous alternative to the Cold War models of communism and democracy and to Gandhian nationalism, by projecting Buddhism as a kind of enlightened nationhood. It was a project of self-definition upon which he felt the Indian state's future relied.

In the turbulent years after Independence, Nehru and other leading Cabinet Members attempted to institute all kinds of land and social reform policies in the Indian state, some of which despite his deep vested interests in, collapsed under the weight of a fractured India. For Nehru, the promotion of Buddhist tolerance, non-violence and the legacy of Indian Buddhist civilization through national cultural events, institutes, relic exhibitions, and the national flag and symbol represented a less politically contentious vision of national development and reform. It was one part of his attempt to promote the development and welfare of the nation, temper the antagonisms between Hindu – Muslim factions, instill a sense of secular-spiritual belonging to the Indian state and maintain the loyalty of the national frontiers. The idealistic aspirations of Nehru's Aśokan Buddhist vision, with its recognition of connection to the wider world and its simultaneous rooting in the geospatial locality of the āryabhūmi reflected a new sense of possibility as the walls of colonialism crumbled down. Yet the memory of the dropping of atomic bombs in Japan and the general unease in world politics by the mid 1950s with the crises over the Suez Canal, the revolution in Hungary, and the growing ideological clash between the USSR and the USA were weighing on Nehru's conscience. "So we hover between war and peace, between the atom [bomb] and the Buddha," he wrote to the Indian Ambassador to the UN in 1956.[124]

In those tempestuous years Nehruvian Buddhism was forced to succumb to the bitter reality that while the nation's well-being can also be the world's well-being, the two do not always go hand-in-hand. The first major rupture came when Nehru's former Law Minister, Ambedkar and nearly half a million of his followers converted to Buddhism in a mass ceremony (*dharma dīkṣā*) in Nagpur. It was a triumphant moment for Ambedkar and for an oppressed population of Dalits that had been unjustly forced to bear the heavy burden of social ostracism and violence. Yet Ambedkar's Buddhist *Navāyāna*—New Vehicle—was in

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[124] Quoted in S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography: 1956 – 1964,* Vol. III (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), 32.

fundamental contradiction to Nehruvian Buddhism. Rather than giving further momentum to Nehru's secularized cultural Buddhism that stressed the resolution of difference through a Non-Aligned Third or "Middle Way," Ambedkar's conversion re-emphasized the historical antagonism between Brahminism and Buddhism and Hindus and Buddhists. Having personally experienced the failures of the secular state to rectify the wrongs inflicted upon the untouchables, Ambedkar's vision for Dalit emancipation hinged on a sectarian identity as the basis of collective political rights. As I argued in chapter eight, there is strong evidence to suggest that Ambedkar's Buddhism was moving towards an enlightened, national identity for all Indians and not just Dalits but his untimely death, just two months after the grand conversion, effectively undercut that momentum, shifting the parameters of Indian Buddhism away from secular reconciliation towards struggle, exacerbation and continued revolutionary fervor.

The ideals of reason, tolerance and non-violent imperial expansion which Nehruvian Buddhism symbolized had come under deep scrutiny, both by Nehru and his critics. Growing Dalit conversions to Buddhism and the Dalai Lama's exile to India in 1959 undermined Nehru's attempt to synthesize universalism and nationalism. Trapped by his own web of a universalizing Indian Buddhism, Nehru had failed to see the limitations of his Buddhist diplomacy, or what Joseph Nye famously called "soft power."[125] It was simply soft. When Chinese boots hit the ground in India in 1962, leading to India's devastating defeat in the Sino-Indian War, Nehru's Buddhist vision was put to rest. All the premonitions had been there. By 1960, the Indian public had clearly caught wind of this alternative face of Buddhist diplomacy, as is evident by the immense skepticism leveled at the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu's "pilgrimage" to India that year. When in between Buddhist sites, Nu met with Nehru and the Russian Premier, Nikita Khruschev in Calcutta "for a casual talk about old times," as Nehru put it, the *Guardian* called the bluff, reporting that, "the real purpose [of] the visit was political and not religious."[126] From his vast reading of world history and his experience at the forefront of anti-colonial affairs, Nehru had attempted to create a novel model of Indian

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[125] According to Nye, soft power refers to the ability of governments to coerce other governments into doing what they want without force or violence. Put simply, soft power means "getting others to want what you want." See, Joseph Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy,* No. 80 (1990): 153 – 71.
[126] "Nu meeting K," *Guardian,* February 29th, 1960, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Burma branch, File no. 4/3, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

citizenry: the calm, reasoned, scientific Indian (Buddhist). The word Buddhist would never formally be vocalized, for like Nehru himself, being a modern Buddhist meant just being a modern rational Indian.

10 Chapter Ten – Conclusion

This dissertation has outlined the history of Buddhism in India from the first decades of the nineteenth century up through the end of the 1950s. For decades, studies of modern Buddhism and modern India have been guided by quantitative measures (like Census figures) and entrenched academic theories unable to see the forest through the trees. That scholarship claimed that until Ambedkar's conversion in the 1950s, there was no Buddhism in modern India. Yet this study demonstrates that in order to understand modern Indian Buddhism, you cannot simply look at labels and titles, you have to read deeply into the list of ingredients. In the century prior to the momentous events of the 1950s, Indians of all walks of life had been transformed by Buddhism's long past. They spent their days reading and re-interpreting Buddhist scriptures, attending and delivering dhamma talks, building and re-building Buddhist shrines, and networking with Buddhists from near and distant lands. There were numerous disjunctures and rapid transitions. Sankrityayan, for instance, moved from sadhu to nationalist to bhikkhu to Marxist in just one lifetime, yet a loyalty to Buddhism characterized the last five decades of his life. The lives of Sankrityayan, J.K. Birla, Kosambi, Thass, Bodhanand, Mahāvīr or many of the other figures discussed in this dissertation help us realize that there is no one single identity at the center of modern Buddhism. Instead, "it is more revealing to assume that the persons we study exemplify locative pluralism, acting simultaneously in relation to plural and shifting *collectives of belonging* to which they feel a sense of responsibility and emotional investment."[1] Many of the Indians who committed themselves to Buddhism were exemplars of "locative pluralism," understanding Buddhism as not their only way of belonging in this world, but as an indispensable element of their daily lives. Throughout this dissertation, Buddhism has been taken to be the single constant and I have highlighted the inflections, tensions and re-tellings in that narrative, seeing in them the most salient aspects of India's modern Buddhism.

In eight main chapters, the dissertation tracked these varied expressions and relationships. The second chapter sketched the broad attitudes and ideas circulating about Buddhism among the Indian populace in the early nineteenth century. Rather than only focusing on what was not known—the lame duck that has become India's ahistorical consciousness—I also highlighted what was. It showed that although Indians did not possess

[1] Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism,* 210.

a history of Buddhism, there was a rich memory of Buddhists. Knowledge of precise Buddhist teachings and literature may have been lost but the general thrust was clear: Buddhists were Brahmanism's most formidable adversaries. In that chapter and the next, I emphasized how these stories of Buddhists and Buddha were re-evaluated in light of new historical interpretations provided by philologists and archaeologists. Chapter three, in particular, outlined the broad structures of colonial schools and the epistemological models they implemented. I traced how they guided and informed the Indian outlook on Buddhism through a network of private and state institutions. Focusing on educators like Rajendralal Mitra and Raja Śivaprasād, individuals whose lives combined both British and indigenous educations, I argued that their interpretations of Buddhism were effectively hybrid, imbibing a novel fascination for 'scientific' history while remaining skeptical of both Brahmanical and European historiographies.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, I explored Indian Buddhism's public life. Fueled by print technologies and new forms of commercial transit, fresh interpretations of Buddhism were passed across the subcontinent, from person to person and place to place. Early catalysts for this new transmission were popular works like Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia,* which were soon translated into local vernaculars where the meanings of Buddha's teachings were remolded to the local context. In the cauldron of colonial rule, where Christian missionaries had been given the freedom to roam and religion became an increasingly important part of anti-colonial and nationalist expression, Buddha was transformed into the Light of the World. These interpretations were stimulated by new religious movements, such as the Brahmo Samāj, Theosophical Society and MahaBodhi Society, whose enthusiasm for Buddhism was contagious. Leaders of these organizations learned quickly that in order to repel the threat of Christianity, Darwinian science was their ally. More often than not, they adopted the language of evolutionary science, eschewing religion in favor of spirituality and universalism. The nineteenth century science of religion contended that if religion was purged of its dogmas and reformed, humanity could return to its original 'spiritual' state. However, while figures like Max Muller understood a reformed Christianity as the model for all world religions, many Asians (and dissident Orientalists) felt that a reformed Buddhism, not Christianity, was the true archetype. Figures like Dharmapala would argue that if Christianity was reformed, it could be like original Buddhism, whereas if Buddhism was

reformed, it would become *the* religion of the modern world. While Indian thinkers rarely agreed on the precise nature of this Buddhism (and in many cases saw Buddhism as a component of their own universalisms), they invoked an imagined Indian Buddhist past as the inspiration for this global unification.

Developments elsewhere in Asia and the Empire were having an equally formative influence on the Indian interpretation of Buddhism. Hidden under the shadow of three major British wars with Burma, Buddhist monastics steeped in the Pali traditions of Burma and Ceylon established deep roots among a Bengali-speaking populace in Chittagong. Through new Bengali-language translations of ancient Buddhist scriptures and disparate commentaries, these in turn provided educated Bengali Hindus with images and intimations of Buddhism crafted via the "Pali imaginaire."[2] The monastic networks in these regions intersected with global Buddhist circuits facilitated by technological advances in long-distance travel and new commercial enterprises linking cities like Tokyo, Calcutta, Singapore and London. With these improvements, the number of foreign Buddhists traveling to India for business, study or pilgrimage increased. As vast numbers of foreign Buddhists landed in the subcontinent, Indians listened carefully to the narratives they expressed. They observed the immense respect Buddhists possessed for India's Buddhist heritage and recognized it as a momentous opportunity. Forging striking relationships with Buddhists overseas, building (and re-building) Buddhist vihāras, they took more seriously to studying early Buddhist scriptures and began comparing them with the India they inhabited now. Some like Iyothee Thass and Lakshmi Narasu saw in Buddhism a path (*mārg*) for social emancipation and freedom from caste oppression. Others like Mahāvīr, Dharmapala and Venerable Kripasaran focused their energies on rebuilding old Buddhist spaces with the assistance of monastics and upāsakas in foreign lands, and caste Hindus and Europeans sympathetic to Buddhist visions.

The second half of the dissertation detailed the dramatic shifts taking place in the last decades of colonial rule and in the first decade after Indian Independence in 1947. Chapter six shifted attention to the 'Hindu Buddha,' locating the modern Hindu assimilation of Buddhism within the framework of the All-India Hindu MahāSabhā and the industrialist family, the Birlas. It examined how Hindu orientations towards Buddha and Buddhism had shifted from being one of stigmatization to adoration with veneration for the Buddha as an

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[2] On the "Pali imaginaire," see Collins, *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities.*

individual and ethicist but not for his philosophical teachings. The effort to Hinduize Buddha was driven by both political pragmatism as well as ideals of Pan-Asianism, Buddhist – Hindu fellowship, and Hindutva ideologies. The rather successful campaigns of the Hindu MahāSabhā was also linked to the failure of Buddhist organizations in India to achieve government support for claims of minority status, reservation seats and educational facilities. While the Hinduization of Buddhism was the driving trend, the next chapter highlighted the momentous attempt to wrestle the Buddhist platform from the hands of caste Hindu leaders. Set against a background of caste reform, Dalit mobilization and anti-Brahmin movements, chapter seven assessed the positioning of Buddhism among the Indian masses or Bahujan. It studied the subaltern publics of two lower-caste Buddhist movements during the first decades of the twentieth century and tied them to Ambedkar's construction of a Buddhist liberation theology in the 1950s. These emancipatory Buddhist ideologies stemmed from both indigenous (Adi-Hindu) and Orientalist understandings of Buddhist history and developed in close collaboration with radical social reformers, political elites and Buddhist missionaries (*dharmadūt*) working in India.

Chapter eight explained how concurrent political shifts, the emergence of new networks linking India and Russia and the rise of socialist paradigms coincided with efforts to popularize Buddhism in the 1930s. Using the lives of Rahul Sankrityayan and Dharmanand Kosambi as case studies, the chapter detailed how a number of Indian leftists fused Buddhist teachings into their political projects. These projects aimed at improving institutions and creating a world of radical equality and independence. By and large, the leaders of these projects believed in the broad principles underlying the socio-economic structures of Russia but were unwilling subscribe to everything taught by the Soviet leadership. Understanding early Buddhism as a kind of socialist humanism, they contended that if Buddhism was cleansed of its religious dogmas and historical reliance on landowners and royalty, it could help foster a society of enlightened social beings.

In the last chapter, the focus turned to the important role Buddhist symbols and events played in the foreign and domestic policies of the newly independent nation-state. Tracing Nehru's fascination for Buddhism, the chapter argued that visions of a Buddhist past, particularly under the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka, held a powerful influence over Nehru and other members of his Cabinet. By integrating ancient rituals of devotion to Buddhist relics in

diplomatic and state projects, Nehruvian Buddhism attempted to forge a new consciousness and identity not just for India but all of Asia. While Nehru's use of Buddhism as a form of soft power was effectively dismantled by the Chinese invasion of India in 1962 along with the exile of the Dalai Lama in 1959, his domestic articulations were no less threatened by Ambedkar's conversion in 1956 which challenged the state's ability to speak for Buddhism.

Today, Buddhism continues to have an important but often unacknowledged role in Indian society. Although it no longer stands at the forefront of India's soft power diplomacy, having been surpassed by Bollywood and yoga, Buddhism still retains an important presence. The current President Pranab Mukherjee delivered saplings of the Bo tree in Bodh Gaya to Thailand in 2013, and to Korea and Vietnam in 2014, re-enacting Nehru's efforts in the 1950s. When the Chinese President Xi Jinping traveled to India on his first visit as head of state in 2015, the first stop on his itinerary was a specially crafted exhibition of images and posters detailing the presence of Buddhism in Gujarat and the Indian travels of the seventh century Chinese bhikkhu, Xuanzang. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's travels to Japan in August 2014, he and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe prayed at Buddhist temples together and released a series of tweets on how "looking at statues of Buddha, we were reminded of the deep historical ties between Japan and India."[3] The medium has changed but the performance of the politics and message remain the same.[4]

Nehruvian Buddhism is not the only enduring entity. Visitors to Dalit *melas* and bookshops will discover that translations of (typically Pali) Buddhist works and texts authored by Ambedkar, Bodhnand, and Sankrityayan take up substantial shelf space. What has become especially pronounced in the Hindi-language Dalit publics of north India however is the simultaneous trend of synthesizing Buddhism with devotion to the Sants. Just as in Bodhanand's 1930s works that conceived of Buddhism and *nirguṇa* Bhakti as a single stream of lower caste assertion against Brahmanism, there is now "an unproblematic amalgamation of the traditions of the Kabirpanthis, Ravidasis and Buddhists by Dalit

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[3] Shinzo Abe, Twitter post, August 30, 2014, https://twitter.com/abeshinzo.

[4] I have discussed these post-colonial expressions of soft power in "Jawaharlal Nehru, Soft Power and the Buddhist state," a paper delivered to the South and Central Asia Fulbright Conference, Hyderabad, India (March 2015) and in, "From Buddha Bones to Bo Trees: Nehruvian Buddhism and the Poetics of Power," a paper delivered to the South Asian Conference of the Pacific Northwest (SACPAN), University of Oregon (February 2016).

activists."[5] Similarly, among many radical activists in India today, there is a parallel effort to couple Buddhism and Marxism in a single platform.[6] Perhaps the most prominent figure in this regard is the controversial political philosopher Kancha Iliah whose robust body of writings on Buddhism and history continue to be met with a mixture of discord, fear and outright dismissal by mainstream academics.[7]

While these represent some of the most pronounced expressions, the nineteenth century affinity for critical scholarship and restoration of Buddhist sites remains at the core. Every year, hundreds of thousands of Buddhist pilgrims and tourists from across the globe congregate at India's ancient Buddhist spaces, conducting Buddhist rituals and meeting with Buddhists from other parts of the globe whose ritual performances and identities are both distinct and yet similar to their own. Of no less importance are the millions of dollars this spiritual tourism pumps into the local and national economy each year. Meanwhile, scholars and researchers at universities across India continue to give Buddhism a privileged place in the historiography of ancient India, understanding it to be one of the most important components of India's cultural heritage.

Although all of these developments can be clearly traced back into the world this dissertation has uncovered, there have also been significant changes since the 1950s that have altered its direction and thus provide an end point for this study. Three major developments are especially pertinent. The first stems from the tremendous influence that Tibetan Buddhists hold at Buddhist sites across India today. The popularity of the Dalai Lama (b. 1935), the influence of Tibetan lamas on Buddhism worldwide, and presence of more than one hundred thousand Tibetan refugees in the country has revitalized Himalayan Buddhist practices and given Vajrayāna Buddhism a popular respectability among Indians that it simply did not possess in the period prior to the 1950s. Secondly, S.N. Goenka's (1924 – 2013) Vipassana movement from the 1970s on has fundamentally altered the way middle-class Indians view Buddhism. Goenka's Buddhism, like the Indian state itself, is conceived

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[5] Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature,* 47.
[6] See, for instance, S.K. Biswas, *Nine Decades of Marxism in the Land of Brahminism* (Calicut: Other Books, 2008).
[7] See, Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra critique of Hindutva philosophy, culture and political economy* (Calcutta: Samya, 1996) and *God as Political Philosopher: Buddha's Challenge to Brahminism* (Calcutta: Samya, 2001). For an insightful reflection on the problems that individuals like Ilaiah pose for mainstream academic scholarship, see Chakrabarty, "Public Life of History," 157 – 58.

of as secular and it is not unusual to find Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and other groups attending intensive ten day silent meditation retreats at any of the fifty-plus dhamma centers he established across the country.[8]

Third and perhaps the most powerful development of all has been the continued prominence of the Dalit Buddhist revolution. In contrast to Goenka's secular Buddhism which is perceived as a scientific tool open to anyone, regardless of identity, the conversion of several million more Dalits since the 1950s has heightened the secular – religious divide. Mayawati (b. 1956), the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state—second only to China, Russia, the United States and Brazil in population—has promised that she and her millions of followers will publicly convert to Buddhism if she gains control of the central government.[9] As she has poured millions of dollars into building towering monuments to Buddha, Ambedkar and other Bahujan role models in places like Lucknow, Buddhism has emerged as the fastest growing religion in the state.[10] While Dalit Buddhism continues to be seen by many Indians (and global Buddhists more widely) as an abnormal, deviant sect—less an 'authentic' Buddhism than the political manifestation of casteist and communal thinking—it is an extremely important expression of social belonging and cultural meaning for more than ten million Dalits in India today. All of these new insertions into the Buddhist marketplace require a vastly different scholarly lens and for a study that has already encompassed a lot, they provide a convenient end point.

When I first conceived of this study, I was worried that there would not be enough material to sustain any concrete discussion. Standing here some five years later, I must admit that I have only uncovered a fragment of all the materials. Thus, this dissertation cannot in any sense really be a history of modern Indian Buddhism. Instead, it has tried to explore its most formative strands through an examination of the people, places, objects and ideas that

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[8] An up to date list of these India centers is available at http://www.vridhamma.org/Centers.
[9] "Mayawati to embrace Buddhism," *The Hindu,* October 17, 2006, accessed at http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/mayawati-to-embrace-buddhism/article3062177.ece
[10] According to Shiv Shankar Das, a PhD Candidate at Jawaharlal Nehru University, in the last two decades Buddhists have experienced the highest growth rate (at 340%) of any religious group in the state (they are followed by Sikhs at 51%). Although the total number of Buddhists is UP is still low, its significance lay in the fact that Buddhism is growing in popularity among not just Mahars (Ambedkar's jāti) but among Dalits more widely (nearly 70 percent of UP's Buddhists belong to the Scheduled Castes). See, Shiv Shankar Das, "Buddhism and Politics in Uttar Pradesh: Recent Developments (Part II)," accessed at http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4524:buddhism-and-politics-in-uttar-pradesh-recent-developments-part-ii&catid=119&Itemid=132.

gave it life. While conducting research for this dissertation, I opted to read widely in the archives rather than narrowing in on a single text or individual. My main reason for doing so is to demonstrate the breadth of Buddhism in modern India. For without this sort of grander narrative, examples of Indian Buddhism would continue to be seen as one-off, localized instances, rarities that do not merit inclusion in the wider historiography.[11] Naturally, I hope that this survey will force scholars to reconsider the legacy of modern Indian Buddhism and the role that India played in the formation of global Buddhism. However, I recognize that the dissertation comes with real limitations. By not dwelling at length on one text or one individual, I may have missed the nuances and textured layers of meaning that can only arise from deep reading or localized studies. Undoubtedly, such blemishes have crept into the text. I take full responsibility for these. However, if this research triggers further studies, even those deeply critical of my own analysis, I will consider it a success.

Apart from the many unanswered questions and ambiguities raised throughout the dissertation—they are too numerous to repeat here—a few major issues merit further research. First, there is a real need to more closely consider women's roles. As I alluded to in chapter five, Indian women were certainly active in the formation of modern Buddhism, but the written accounts I have examined do little more than discuss them as objects or mark them as being present. By failing to integrate women's voices, I have essentially written a(nother) history of men's Buddhism. My only hope is that someone better equipped than me will remedy this situation. Second, there is a critical need for further studies of foreign Buddhist pilgrims and travelers in India. Buddhists from outside India continued to visit its holy places long after the decline of Indian patronage (see chapter two) and the number of Buddhists in India during the colonial period is much greater than has previously been assumed. The excellent work of Richard Jaffe on Japanese Buddhists in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India can serve as a model for other researchers.[12] This research would enrich not only our understanding of mobility and travel in the colonial world but also

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[11] This is as common in introductory surveys as it is in specialized literature. For a latter example, see Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation,* 274fn102, where in an otherwise excellent work he reduces India's Buddhists to a single footnote, calling them "infinitesimal" (and therefore not deserving of inclusion).
[12] See, Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni." His book-length study on the same topic will soon be in print (personal communication, August 12, 2016).

better explain the influence that other Asian *Buddhisms* (and therefore, not just Orientalist Buddhism) had in the making of modern India.

To achieve this more holistic picture, a model of collaborative research that is rarely employed in studies of Buddhism will be required. The very nature of modern Buddhism is, to use Thomas Tweed's expression, "translocative," and is characterized by individuals who moved between various social, geographic, and intellectual worlds.[13] To grasp its translocative nature demands a body of researchers and scholars trained in different disciplines and most importantly, languages. Without critical in-depth readings of the Indian vernaculars along with pilgrims' and travelers' memoirs/reports in other languages, our understanding of Buddhism in modern India will remain inadequate.[14]

10.1 Revival and reinvention: A final consideration

Since at least 1886 when the Scottish historian and statistician Sir William Wilson Hunter (1840 – 1900) proclaimed that, "the revival of Buddhism is always a possibility in India," revival has dominated the thinking of Indian Buddhism's modern transformation.[15] The revival of Buddhism was said to be occurring across Asia at that time but its usage in the Indian context had a much more precise meaning. Revival referred not to the strengthening of a decaying or dying tradition but to the very rebirth and return to something that had been lost. For thousands of years, Buddhists across space and place have spoken of the decline of the sāsana but unlike in nineteenth century Japan, Burma or Ceylon, where Buddhism was still alive but said to be declining, Indian Buddhism was dead. For revivalists, it had become a 'forgotten' thing of the past whose material presence and noble voice had disappeared under the oppressive vicissitudes of time. Where intricate images carved by hand into the side of a mountain had once inspired the public to live a more compassionate, loving life, they were now either hidden under a thick coat of impenetrable weeds, stigmatized as the

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[13] Thomas Tweed, "Theory and Method in the Study of Buddhism: Toward 'Translocative' Analysis," *Journal of Global Buddhism* Vol. 12 (2011): 17 – 32.
[14] One possible model for this kind of research is found in the U Dhammaloka project led by Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox and Brian Bocking. See, https://dhammalokaproject.wordpress.com/u-dhammaloka/
[15] Hunter, *Indian Empire,* 158. What is perhaps most astonishing however was that this single passage, extracted from Hunter's seven hundred and forty seven page condensed version of the gazeetteer, could give rise to such a prolific discourse on the possibilities for Buddhist revival.

dwelling places of social misfits or functioning as commercial houses and competing religious shrines. Some Buddhist ideals had been retained but they were so hidden under a Draupadi-like veil of theological complexities and priestly rituals that only the most determined (or inventive) of scholars could unravel them. As archaeologists and philologists, from India and elsewhere, attempted to reconstruct this ancient world known only through memories, crumbling ruins and mythical stories contained in numerous scripts and languages, the skeletal history that was ancient Indian Buddhism made it ripe for possibilities. Where critical scholarship could not penetrate, the imagination could.

Even the most rational of human beings rely on the imagination to make sense of the world.[16] In the course of a single day, humans move between various states of being, revisiting the past, imagining known and unknown worlds and shaping them in highly inventive ways. Those varied states that humans dwell in, or what Basso called place-worlds, are shaped by a near infinite number of factors.[17] Place-worlds may be constitutive of past historical events (wars, famines, great migrations, etc.) or the "congenial places of experiential terrain," the trivial and not-so-trivial moments of one's individual youth, upbringing and life experiences.[18] All human beings are bound by their own webs of significance and the past is always mediated by the present as much the present by the past. In other words, while there is in fact an objective reality out there, our ability to grasp that reality is deeply conditioned by our present condition. Thus, the significance and meaning of these pasts will forever be invented and reinvented as long as someone is there to imagine them.

Although place-making is one of humanity's most ordinary of activities, it is far from being unimportant. On the contrary, it is central to the human experience, allowing us to cope with the world and reposition ourselves in it. It is, as Basso explains, "a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. We *are,* in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine."[19] This dissertation has been full of place-worlds that have had real, tangible impacts, connected to everyday life: whether that of Nehru, Ambedkar, Sankrityayan, or others, their Buddhist place-making had a truly live presence. When Indian

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[16] Even the most sterile of rational choice theorists will admit this.
[17] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 5.
[18] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 3.
[19] Basso, *Wisdom sits in places,* 7.

patrons—jewelers, bankers, royal households, zamindārs, and so on—supported scholars and pandits to recommission Buddhist artistic and literary works, they understood the creations as being somehow faithful to a Buddhist world that had fallen dormant and disappeared. When these works were then read (often aloud) and circulated among friends, family and strangers, they were imagined as being authentic reproductions of Buddha's teachings. The revival, in other words, rested upon the notion that one could revive the 'original' Buddhist scene. Yet is such a thing even possible? "The term 'revival,' " Holmes Welch explains, "should mean that what has declined or expired is restored to the form it originally had." Welch is right when he concludes that, "in this sense nothing has ever been revived; rebirth has always to some been a new birth."[20]

Modern Indian Buddhism was indeed a new birth, a restoration involving many older components but something distinctively designed. Perhaps nowhere was this made more succinct than in an incredibly retrospective article composed by Dharma Gambhir Sinha, a writer for the All-India Buddhist Society. In June 1928, he alluded to how modernity had not so much revived Buddhism as it had reinvented it:

> [Buddha] seems to be all things to all people…To the Brahmins, He is the preacher of Purified Brahmanism…To the ascetic, He is the Greatest Ascetic having performed the most rigorous form of asceticism; To the saints, He is Sakyamuni, and Mahamuni, the Great Saint; to the Heretics, He is the Greatest Heretic, having defeated many a heretic by His Supreme Wisdom and superphysical powers…To the philosopher He is the Greatest Philosopher, for having taught the most practical philosophy of life; to the scientists, He is the Greatest, having discovered many scientific truths two thousand years before the dawn of modern science; to the nations of the world He is the Supreme Nation-builder and unifier for having been the upbuilder of so many Buddhist nations and the unifier for having united the ninety six nations of the world, not by physical force but by a bond of spiritual unity. To the internationalists, He is the Great Internationalist, having taught the message of international unity…To the socialist, He is the Great Socialist for his message of social equality and social welfare and social progress. To the democrat, He is the Great Democrat for His principles of government by the people, for his Sangha, the Holy Brotherhood…to the Liberal, He is the Supreme Liberal for his attitude towards His enemies, and for His principle of religious tolerance…Of the modernists, He is the chief, because his views and principles tallied with all modernist ideas that led to human peace and welfare…To the revolutionary, He is the Chief, because He is the first to organize a revolution against caste tyranny and religious bigotry of the Brahmins. To the people of the world, He is the Greatest Cosmopolitan and all-uplifting teachings. To the

[20] Holmes Welch, *Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 262.

> lover of World-peace, He is an idol, as He is the Supreme Advocate of World, as His spiritual message leads all towards world peace, unity and brotherhood.[21]

The way this Buddha and his corresponding *Buddhisms* were imagined and enacted has no pre-modern precedent. When Ambedkar called his Buddhism a Navāyāna or New Vehicle, he was undoubtedly being bold and provocative, hoping to carve out the space necessary for Dalit Buddhist identity and self-expression. Yet being the astute thinker that he was, he was also tapping into a vast constellation of writers and thinkers across the globe that had been inventing their own Navāyāna, consciously and unconsciously.[22] Inventions never take place in a vacuum: there are always some antecedents and varying degrees of indebtedness to those before us and around us cannot be avoided. Invention, in other words, has many mothers and fathers (although the 'great man' theory of invention will probably long remain a more popular story).

Modern Indian Buddhism involved less the invention of anything as it did the reinvention of everything. There were significant continuities but it spoke to a new global age. Like the formation of global Buddhism more widely, it had been crafted in conversations and encounters not just between Indians and Europeans, but between and among Asians living in an uncertain age of colonial interference, unequal rule and yet unprecedented communication and awareness of one another. As Indians in the subcontinent confronted the social and political conditions of colonial rule and "British public doctrine," they did not focus only on the present.[23] They lived in the world by looking backwards and forwards. The catalyst to re-enter Buddhist place worlds may have first been triggered by colonial education systems and Orientalist enterprises but it soon arose out of local interests shaped by long-running historical debates regarding caste discrimination, inequality, moral behavior, and social disorder. Colonial rule brought new ways of thinking about these problems and new language to describe it but the recourse to Buddhism stemmed from a profound sense of connection with the traces of the past. From humble origins among

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[21] Dharma Gambhir Sinha, "Significance of Buddh Day: Buddha still living amongst us, importance of the world, "Dharmakaya," *Buddhist India: Buddhist India (Buddha Day) Annual* Vol. 2/2 (1928), 108 – 09.

[22] Contrary to popular thought, Ambedkar did not coin the term. Although I am unsure of its precise origin, Har Dayal had used the term as early as 1927 and it was widely used by Japanese Buddhists in Hawaii in the 1930s as well as in the title of a popular English work by the British Buddhist, Capt. J.E. Ellam, *Navayana: Buddhism and modern thought* (London: Rider, 1930).

[23] "British public doctrine," which is an allusion to the work of Chris Bayly, comes from Mark Frost, " 'Wider Opportunities': Religious revival, nationalist awakening and the global dimension in Colombo, 1870 – 1920," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 36/4 (2002), 937 – 67.

abandoned ruins, zealous Buddhists and dedicated scholars, modern Indian Buddhism had emerged as both an idea and tradition, which held the possibility of an enlightened nationalism that fused democratic principles of equality and reason with ethical living and world peace.

Traveling to Buddhist place worlds, whether real or imagined, was a process of discovery. More often than not, these discoveries tracked back to a point of imagined Buddhist origin where people were more decent than they were today. As Indians relived the past to find a better present and future, a classless, casteless, egalitarian society, free as much from the influences of colonial oppression and western materialism as Brahmanical discrimination and intolerable poverty, they found Buddha. He was the uncontaminated hero, the flesh and blood Indian savior who was also the Light of Asia, let alone the Jagadguru, the Light of the World, a universally admired figure. The experience of reading Buddhist scriptures in familiar and unfamiliar languages, of visiting known and unknown Buddhist spaces, listening to Buddhist teachings, of imagining Buddha and Buddhism, was nothing short of liberation, the realization that tomorrow does not have to be like today.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of major archives and libraries visited

New Delhi, India

National Archives of India

Nehru Library

Marwari [Hindi] Library [Old Delhi]

Mumbai, India

Nippozon Myohoji Temple [Japan Mandir]

Lucknow, India

Uttar Pradesh State Archives

Buddha Vihara, Risaldar Park

Bodhisattva Vihara, (La Touche Road/Gautama Buddha Marg)

Sarnath, India

Mulagandha Kuti Vihara Library

Dharmapala Museum

Patna, India

Bihar Research Society (Rahul Sankrityayan Manuscript Collection)

Kolkata, India

MahaBodhi Society Headquarters Library

Asiatic Society

National Library

Sadharan Brahmo Samaj Library

Bengal Buddhist Association

Chennai, India

Adyar Research Centre (Theosophical Society Library)

Gangtok, India

Namgyal Institute of Tibetology

Sikkim State Archives

Darjeeling, India

Darjeeling Records Room

Colombo, Sri Lanka

National Archives of Sri Lanka

Mahabodhi Society of Sri Lanka

Lumbini, Nepal

Lumbini International Research Institute

Other Libraries Visited

Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala

Bodh Gaya Temple Management Committee Library, Bodh Gaya

Benares Hindu University Central Library, Varanasi

Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi

Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath

Bihar Research Society, Patna

Siddhartha College, Mumbai

Delhi University, Delhi

Presidency College, Calcutta

Theosophical Society, Wheaton, USA

South Asia Special Collections, University of Chicago, USA