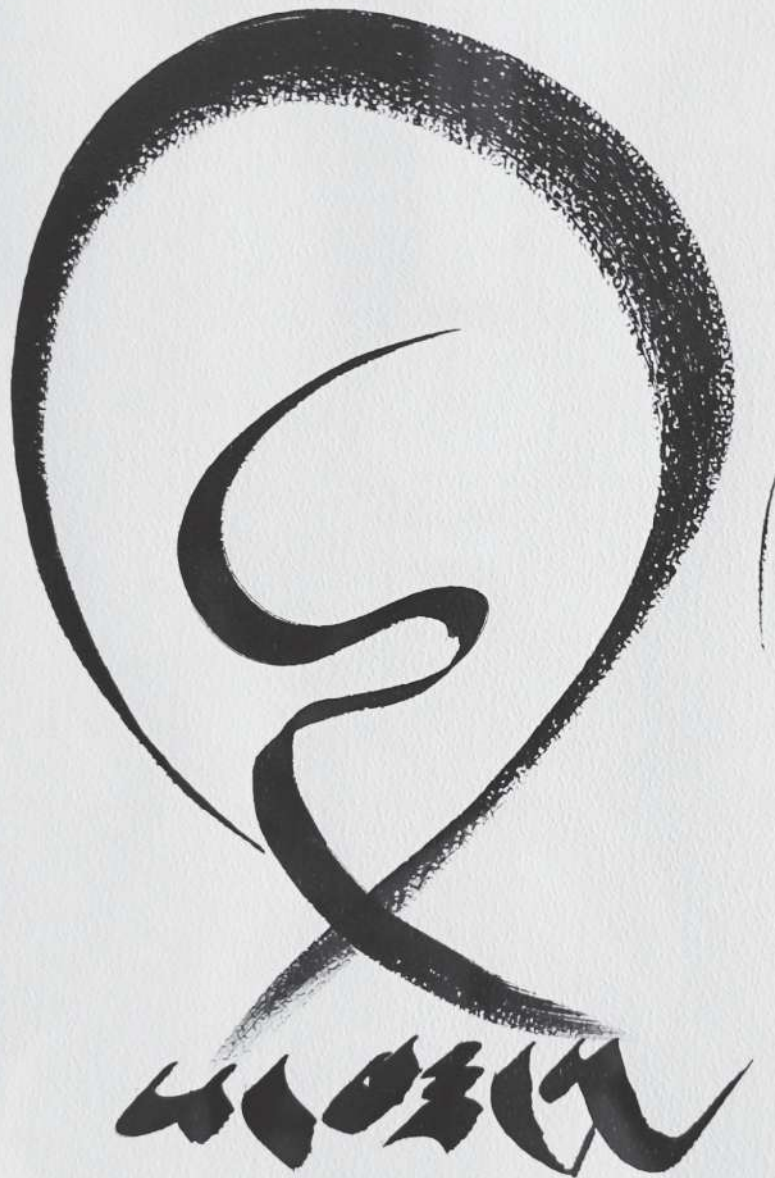


# SEEDS OF PEACE

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Thai Honour Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar  
on his 125th Birthday  
14th April 2016.  
at Nanadhamma Sathan, Srakaew



THE DALAI LAMA

March 21, 2016

Shri Suluk Srivaraksa  
The Sathirakoses-Nagapradeepa Foundation  
666 Jaroennakorn Rd.  
Banglumphoo Lang, Klongsan  
Bangkok – 10600  
THAILAND

Dear Shri Suluk Sivaraksa,

I understand that you will shortly be marking your 83rd birthday and I would like to take this opportunity to send you my greetings and express my wish that you continue to live a long and healthy life.

It is now almost fifty years since we first met on what was also my first visit to Thailand. On the many occasions that we have met since then I have been grateful for the concern and sympathy you have consistently shown for the plight of Tibet and the Tibetan people.

I also admire the dedication with which you have worked to show that what the Buddha gave us was a collection of methods to help us wake up from confusion and transform the world in a positive way.

With my prayers and good wishes,

Yours sincerely,



### 33<sup>rd</sup> Niwano Peace Prize awarded to Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

Our present world is characterized by continuous and new conflicts, some fueled by the misuse of religion, by tensions between communities, and by many natural and man-made disasters. In the face of these many challenges, the need for intra and inter-religious dialogue and co-operation among diverse religious societies is more critical than ever.

The Niwano Peace Prize was established to honor individuals and organizations that contribute significantly to interreligious cooperation, and to encourage similar efforts across the globe. Those honored have often worked in a self-sacrificing manner. The Prize seeks to recognize their persistent, but sometimes little recognized and appreciated, and courageous efforts to promote peace and to stir hope in the midst of violence and cynicism.

The Niwano Peace Prize is now being awarded for the 33<sup>rd</sup> time. During the past five years the Prize was awarded to three noble women and two men, reflecting the growing recognition of the role of women religious leaders in peacebuilding and peacemaking. It has been ten years since the Prize was awarded to an organization.

The task of the eleven members of the Niwano Peace Prize International Selection Committee is no doubt a challenging one. This year, as every year, there were many merited candidates in different categories: male and female individuals, and organizations and institutions. In making its decision, the Committee carefully considered the criteria of Niwano Peace Prize winners: peace orientation, spirituality and religious faith, commitment to interreligious cooperation, and qualitative and quantitative activities advancing peace.

According to the Committee's unanimous decision, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Niwano Peace Prize will be awarded to the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation, CPBR, in Sri Lanka.

While a relatively small island of twenty-two million people, Sri Lanka is a diverse country, home to multiple religions, ethnic groups, and languages. The country has suffered decades of violence and a civil war, which was ended only in 2009. Making things worse, Sri Lanka was hit by the deadly Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. Despite several efforts through the years to do so, the government has not succeeded in advancing lasting reconciliation among Sri Lanka's main communities, the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Christian.

The end of the war brought new hope for sustainable peace, but the challenges to its achievement remain large, including historical grievances, institutionalized injustices and corruption, and the traumatic legacy of decades of violence, disappearances, and displacement. Efforts to advance peace are made complicated by ongoing and new forms of violence and bigotry in recent years, especially targeting Sri Lanka's Muslim community.

The Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation was founded in 2002 by Dishani Jayaweera and Jayantha Seneviratne, who are also life partners and Sinhala Buddhists by birth. Dishani Jayaweera, a dynamic attorney from Colombo, quit her profession in order to answer to a deeper calling. Through CPBR, she now works closely with people throughout Sri Lanka in order to create a peaceful and just society. She works alongside university professor Jayantha Seneviratne, who is a recognized expert on conflict resolution.

According to Dishani, reconciliation is best advanced by a group of people from diverse backgrounds coming together to lead the way through example and encouragement, rather than only through social movements led by and dependent on a few individuals. The diverse staff and wider community that constitutes the CPBR family



represents this diversity, and it is their collective efforts that have had an impact in Sri Lanka and provide an inspiration for peacebuilding in the wider world.

Therefore, the whole organizational team of CPBR is being awarded the 33rd Niwano Peace Prize.

CPBR is a non-profit organization promoting peacebuilding, peace-making and nonviolent conflict transformation. It supports personal and societal transformation within and between ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional communities in Sri Lanka, working at all the grassroots, local and national levels. To achieve goals of national reconciliation, the CPBR focuses those considered to hold the greatest influence and promise for transformation: religious leaders, women, and young people.

CPBR was formed to address the root causes of conflict by first building trust and friendship among people from diverse communities to rebuild the social ties destroyed by decades of war. When fruitful dialogue brings about appreciation of the “other,” only then can true and sustainable conflict transformation occur through collaborative action effecting wider societal and political transformation. CPBR also worked on post-tsunami community rebuilding efforts by bringing together people from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds for training in collaborative problemsolving and livelihood skills.

CPBR aims for a united Sri Lanka built on a democratic state based on power-sharing, decentralization and heterogeneity in which all people can live in peace, harmony and dignity, and where distinct ethnic and religious identities are appreciated and celebrated equally. CPBR's process of building peace, and even the manner in which the team makes decisions, reflects these wider goals. The work of CPBR is underpinned by a head-heart-hand approach, enhanced by a strong belief in participation and local ownership. CPBR believes that local people have the power to find their own solutions to their conflicts. The mission of CPBR is to help make this happen.

CPBR's methodology and operating principles have led them to win the trust and respect of diverse actors and communities throughout Sri Lanka, even during periods when those involved in peace activities faced sharp public criticism and government scrutiny. This trust, and their commitment to the cause, has ensured their persistent collaboration with communities even when cynicism and polarization between communities was high, the space for peace activities was small, and the risks to peacebuilders were big.

The current initiatives of CPBR are:

1) Interfaith Dialogue (IFD) initiatives - Diversity, Dignity, Democracy

While religion can be a spiritually healing power and a vital resource of consolation for human beings caught in the midst of violence and suffering, so too can religion be an instrument to fuel hatred, distrust or brutality. Understanding this reality, and the influential role of religious leaders from all faiths within Sri Lanka to shape society, this CPBR initiative works with religious leaders throughout the country to draw from their traditions inspiration and resources for reconciliation and peace among all communities. Male and female clergy in this initiative engage in both intra and inter-faith dialogue and collaborative action for peace, in a sustained manner that allows for honest, deep, and transformational engagement.

2) Voice of Image (VOI) initiative - Represent Your Presence

Freshness, originality, spirit and novelty are the utmost characteristics of youth.

Youth have a different view on the world and life, seeing the world with new eyes, and able to envision a new future for Sri Lanka. CPBR's Voice of Image initiative is designed to give a voice to the often unheard stories and dreams of Sri Lanka's youth of both genders.

3) WOMAN initiative - Spirit, Soil, Soul

The WOMAN initiative is a powerful and creative approach for women ready to explore and discover themselves and their hidden power to build peace and new forms of life in Sri Lankan soil. The initiative combines relationship building between women from diverse backgrounds, sharing their common loss and suffering experienced during Sri Lanka's war, with skills training in peace and sustainable living through eco-friendly gardening and practices.

As demonstrated especially by the last initiative, along with its noble approaches and brave activities for peace and reconciliation, CPBR's efforts reflect also the vision and goals of the Paris Climate Change Agreement and of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Let us hope that many more groups and actors in different parts of the globe will follow the example of Sri Lanka's Centre for PeaceBuilding and Reconciliation.

Burma :

# The Price of Peace

Ramesh Shrestha

*The Irrawaddy*, 15 August 2014

The ceasefire agreements signed during the 1990s between Myanmar's military government and various armed ethnic groups allowed for the de facto existence of semi-autonomous areas such as the "special regions" in Shan State controlled by the United Wa State Army and a very ambiguous situation in other places such as Karen, Karenni and Mon states, where state authority and ethnic armed groups coexist, with the latter sometimes managing separate businesses, schools and health care systems.

These ceasefire agreements have reduced violent armed conflicts, but have not established peace. In addition, some of these agreements have been violated since the new government took office in 2011. Decades of violence has disenfranchised a large portion of the population, while a politically powerful few on all sides have exploited the situation for their own economic benefit through legal and illegal means.

The fault line in Myanmar society starts with the very nomenclature of the States and Regions. Myanmar's Constitution confers "every citizen equal rights,

liberty and justice" before the law. But the nomenclature of the seven States as administrative units identifying ethnic minority residents and seven Regions as ethnic Burman-majority territories is discriminatory and continues to identify people by their ethnic origin, thus propagating an ethnocentric sociopolitical stratagem that has its roots in Myanmar's British colonial history. This ethnocentric nationalism dominates Myanmar's political landscape and continues to challenge the authority of the central government.

Since independence, many territories and people therein have been administered and exploited by various armed groups seeking autonomy in the name of ethnic nationalism, while the military has continued to dominate the rest of Myanmar. Even after more than 60 years of independence, socioeconomic development in Myanmar has been totally undermined by this myopic, ethnocentric nationalism, despite abundant natural resources and excellent human resource potentials within the country. As a principle of inclusion, all subnational administra-

tive units should have a common name—such as State or Region or Division—signifying equality without any ethnic identification or affiliation.

The ongoing ceasefire talks involving all major armed groups appear promising and could provide a basis for a permanent peace. A permanent peace, however, can be achieved only by addressing political grievances of all ethnic groups through political means. This will mean power sharing and resource sharing so that every citizen can enjoy the same citizenship status, irrespective of their ethnic, linguistic or religious background. This is not a new issue, but steps to get to this point have not been defined clearly. In spite of the wishful thinking of many, the military will not suddenly disappear from Myanmar's political scene. Its role will gradually diminish over time, as it did in Indonesia and South Korea, where militaries used to dominate the countries' political economies for decades. Myanmar's people must live with this

*The government's peace negotiating team and leaders of ethnic armed groups meet in the Kachin State capital, Myitkyina, in November 2013.*

*(Photo: JPaing / The Irrawaddy)*

reality for the time being.

The current Constitution of Myanmar provides a broad base for power sharing through the formation of various political parties and decentralized governance with Union and State/Regional governments. However, all leaders representing various political parties must realize that a government formed based on ethnic identities would continue to pose a risk of fragmentation and destabilization as the interests of political actors would be limited to a certain constituency. There is a need for genuine compromise between the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) and ethnically based political parties. The USDP, which has dominated Myanmar's political land-



scape through military supremacy, must convince minority parties that they will not be assimilated politically, culturally, economically or socially. There is no other way to build trust between the USDP and other political parties.

The Constitution allows full authority to the subnational governments to engage in all policy except defense, foreign affairs and education curricula. This provides opportunities for subnational governments to be engaged in nearly all aspects of development. The best way for minority political parties to test the intent of the government is to contest in the national electoral process and participate in national and subnational governance structures. In this process, all political parties will be able to contribute in developing their constituencies in any field they choose. This could be a way to initiate power sharing and contribute to the lasting peace that people so desperately desire.

In recent years, sharing of revenue from extractive industries has been raised in different forums, but no clear proposal has been forthcoming on "what and how much to be shared." With the ongoing liberalization of the economy, including establishing special economic zones, large hydro-power plants, offshore drilling for gas, oil pipelines

and extraction of minerals, it would be prudent to consider allocating part of the income generated from these ventures to the local governments of the host States and Regions. The deep mistrust that exists between the government and the public in general, and minority groups in particular, must be addressed through transparent discussion on resource sharing. The discussion must also address social and environmental concerns related to extractive industries. Investment of such revenue in States/Regions will help develop rural areas and benefit local populations.

The price of peace for the government is to ensure that military elites are no longer a political and economic threat to ethnic minority groups. All ethnic minority groups must be assured and shown in practical ways that they will be treated fairly and given equal opportunity in all aspects of Myanmar's political and economic destiny. The price of peace for armed ethnic groups is to disarm and take part in the political process through national elections. There cannot be separate armies or militia within the boundaries of a sovereign nation.

The minority ethnic nationalities in Myanmar have enjoyed political support from many quarters, especially the West. In the broad-

er geopolitical context, given Myanmar's location linking South Asia with Southeast Asia, ethnic minority leaders must realize that this support is not so much to fulfill their aspirations, but largely to harass the Myanmar government and military. With the gradual opening of Myanmar, such support will decline as the government enters into economic and military cooperation with the West. It is therefore in the broader interests of ethnic nationalities too that a permanent peace is achieved. This process will be very difficult for some of the groups that remain in control of border trade and mining, but for a viable future there is no other option.

The bottom line is that

the government as well as its people should not be distracted by the short-term economic benefit that seems to be on offer at the moment. The political transition that started in 2011 can be completed only with settlement of long-standing political and economic disputes between the government and ethnic nationalities. It will require a certain amount of give and take from all sides. An uncompromising mentality among any of the parties involved will only ensure that more time, resources and lives are lost before Myanmar achieves its long-awaited peace.

..... ■ ■ .....

*Ramesh Shrestha is a former Unicef country representative to Myanmar.*

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## Burma's Ominous Political Debate over Ethnicity

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Sister Mai Nghiem

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Last year, I accompanied an ethnic Shan-Danu Muslim teenager to an immigration office in Burma's Shan State to inquire about the citizenship application she had submitted through her high school. Although her friends had received their cards, the girl was told to come to the immigration office.

When she inquired about

the reason for her visit, she was asked: "Are you of mixed blood?" The girl didn't understand the question. The official asked again, "Are you Chinese?" The girl looks somewhat Chinese. Her father is ethnic Danu and her mother is an ethnic Shan. They both are citizens, as are their parents.

She replied: "I am Mus-



*Burma's Minister of Immigration and Population Khin Yi poses for a picture at his office in Naypyidaw on June 10, 2013. The text on the background picture reads, 'Humans cannot disappear when swallowed by earth, humans can disappear when swallowed by humans.' (Photo: Reuters / Soe Zeya Tun)*

lim.”

The officer responded in an impatient tone: “Yes, that’s mixed blood,” adding that was why she needed to come to the office.

“Mixed blood” doesn’t refer to her or her parents’ ethnicities, but to her religion. It appears to be the default category for Muslims, an automatic synonym for both South Asians and Chinese. All of her hyphenated “native” ethnic identities, however socially conceived and defined, matter less than her religion.

Designating her a “mixed blood” cost her money of course. A junior officer charged her 7,000 kyat (about US\$8) to file her application. His sole act was to put her documents into a cheap, old paper folder.

The girl’s case is emblematic of the growing political debate over the status of Burma’s Muslim communities. It is enormous-

ly tangled, and is used to further increasingly ominous jingoism against anyone presumed to be non-Burmese—and there are legions of the disenfranchised.

Although Muslims, mostly Sunnis, make up only about 4 percent of the population according to the latest government census, and as much as 6-10 percent, according to the country’s Islamic scholars, they have in recent months been demonized by leaders of the 89 percent majority who describe themselves as Theravada Buddhists. The majority population, reportedly egged on by a military that wants to keep its hand in running the government from behind the scenes, repeats that Bengalis are terrorists and troublemakers who foment violence and that therefore they and their religion must be suppressed. The majority do not seem to

accept that the violence must stop immediately, and that political dialogue is needed to clear misunderstandings and problems.

The racist discourse that has been fueling extreme anti-Muslim rhetoric every day on social media websites and printed in hate publications, is also found on signboards at immigration offices at all levels in the country. The signboards say, “A race does not disappear by being swallowed by landmass, but by being swallowed by another human race.”

The political effect of self-victimization is that it lends support to an anti-Muslim campaign that is already manifested in large-scale violence.

The country’s 1982 Citizenship Act is being used against those not recognized as official “national races” to prove that their forefathers lived in the Burmese territory prior to 1823—one year before the first Anglo-Burmese war 190 years ago.

That is odd as at that time there was no Burma as we know it today. Moreover, today’s “official” categorization of 135 ethnic groups is at odds with the history of categorization itself. For example, a 1960 publication by the Ministry of Culture estimated ethnic groups to be about 50, but the manual from the Department of Immigration and Manpower published

in 1971 listed 144 so-called national races.

There, Muslims and South Asian groups were listed in an alphabet soup of designations such as Rakhine-Chittagong, Burmese Muslims, Rakhine-Kaman, and Other Burmese-Indians. The updated list of the 1990s, which the government never released officially, included only 135 groups. All Muslims and South Asian-related groups were removed. U Ko Ni, a Supreme Court lawyer, writes in *Pyithu Khit* (People’s Era) Journal that contradictions in the Citizenship Act and Burma’s three constitutions create a mélange of citizens of ethnic parents, naturalized citizens, guest citizens, people whose status is doubtful, those who have the right to be naturalized citizens, citizens with the right to run in elections and citizens without the right to run in elections.

Apart from legislative flaws, legal implications and political or electoral discrimination, the experience of Muslims in Burma sheds light on the way they are made citizens and foreigners simultaneously.

First, the name of the card that identifies one’s citizenship status is called a “Citizen Scrutiny Card.” The use of the term “scrutiny” is a reflection of the surveillance state. It is not only to scrutinize citizens as individuals but also to limit



the rights of certain people in the name of protecting race and religion.

At immigration offices, as with the girl I accompanied, the phrase “mixed blood” is frequently used. It is not something to be ashamed of in this 21st century socio-political order. Immigration Minister Khin Yi recently said citizenship in Burma is determined by bloodline.

What is equally striking, however, is the way Muslims are identified on their cards—Race/Religion for a university student whose father is ethnic Danu and mother ethnic Innthar, is identified as “India Burman Danu Innthar Islam”—without punctuation. This happens because every Muslim is required to identify on his or her card either as being from India, Pakistan or Bengali.

There are only “India” or “Pakistan” as countries but not race, if there is anything called race at all. Although there is no clarification over whether the use of these words is to refer to either nationality or citizenship, or ethnicity, using them for the category of Race/Religion appears imprudent.

The case of the student’s mother is also intriguing. The mother, who is ethnic Innthar, was identified as “Bengali” although she is not even ethnically related to a Bengali. When immigration authorities began issuing the current Citizen

Scrutiny Card in 1989, the mother’s father in a small village in the Inle Lake region was told he must register as a Bengali on his card. Not knowing the implications, the old man said: “It doesn’t matter. If you want to write, just write it.” The ethnic Innthar man thus became a Bengali.

As a result, his daughter was also issued the card on which she was classified as Bengali. Having realized that being identified as a “Bengali” on the card was troublesome, the woman took an oath at the township court that she was not Bengali but Innthar. Although the township immigration officer didn’t change her ethnic status after the oath, the woman’s argument won at last. Her Bengali status was successfully stripped off. She un-became Bengali.

In another family in Taunggyi, the multicultural capital of Shan State, a child is identified as “India + Burmese + Islam,” and another as “Pakistan + Shan + Burmese + Islam” despite the fact that they are in the same natural family unit. This doesn’t seem to matter to the government.

Such is the creation of “aliens” who have lived in Taunggyi for four generations. They are not migrants, and yet legal categorization has made them foreigners from South Asia—known as kalar. The striking matter in the first

two cases is that the grandchildren of once relatively well-known figureheads of the town have been designated foreigners or outsiders by ethnic Burmans who only recently came to Shan State on government duty—to scrutinize who are and are not proper members of the town and the country—strangers coming to town only to tell the native families that they are outsiders.

In addition to turning in-country born Muslims into foreigners, official ethnocide is going on. A good example is that of ethnic Pathi, a Muslim majority people in central Burma whose recorded history and recognized status go back to the Burmese dynasty era. Although referred to in general terms as “Burmese Muslims” since the mid-1900s, Pathi as an ethnic category has faded away. Members of the community only continue to use Pathi as a prefix to their names.

In 2012, a political party was barred from registering a party with the name “Pathi.” Similarly, members of the community no longer register as Pathi on citizenship cards. In another case, a Mandalay woman of my acquaintance has been newly registered as “India Burmese + India Burmese/ Islam.” Her old card, which was issued when she was 10, identified her by “national race” as Pathi and Islam for the religion category. But when she was

required to update the card as she turned 18, the immigration department denied issuing her the card with Pathi as a national race. She did not renew her card for more than 12 years, at which point she found herself holding a card that identifies her as “India Burmese” although it was not her decision to accept her new legal identity.

She was cheated by the authority. That is, she refused to renew the card for more than 12 years until she was ensured by the authorities of a card with Pathi as her ethnicity. But when she signed documents and picked up the card, it was written “India Burmese + India Burmese/Islam.” Now an ethnic Pathi for 30 years is a new “India Burmese.”

Religion is a major determinant of this system of alienation. For instance, a man in Mandalay has India on his card, but his brother who chooses to follow his mother’s Buddhist religion does not.

Dislike of Muslims and discrimination is not new in Burma, however. It is decades-old. But the latest round of anti-Muslim hate campaigns, animated by the 969 movement, has had a serious impact on Buddhist-Muslim relations.

Striking discrimination in my recent research in Shan State is that of primary school teachers against children. This seems new. Some Muslim parents are sad-

Siam :

## Thailand's first conscientious objector: 'I will not be a soldier in any violent army'

Lee Yu Kyung

*Green left weekly*, 20 February 2016

When an all-female army of journalists, dressed as schoolgirls, burst into laughter at a "lunch party" with the Thailand's military junta chief Prayut Chan-ocha at Government House on January 8, it became the talk of the town.

Commentators took to social media to lament the wretched state of Thai media. A senior Thai journalist, Pravit Rojanapuruk, labelled the journalists as "lapdogs" in a column in the progressive daily *Khaosod english*.

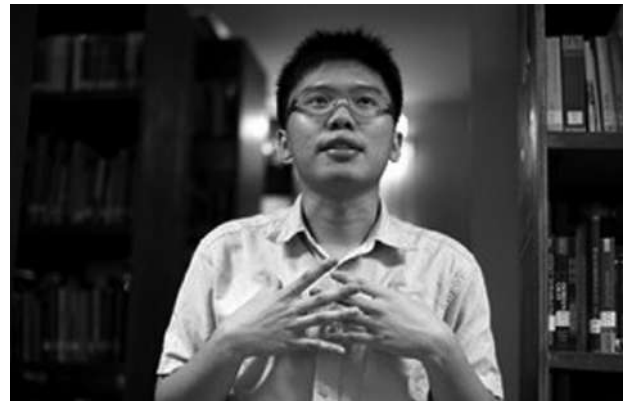
This scene came after a poll in December conducted by the National Statistical Office. The poll came up with the stunning figure of 99.3% of Thais being happy with the performance of the junta, which took power in a 2014 coup against an

elected government. The approval rating was later "corrected" to 98.6%.

Whatever credibility this poll holds, it is clear there is a layer of student activists who have maintained their unhappiness with the military rule.

**Conscientious objector**  
Netiwit Chotiphatphaisal is a 19-year-old high school student who is one of the most outstanding, given his age and level of defiance. He is the first person to publicly declare himself a conscientious objector in Thailand, where the military is a source of fortune, status and near-absolute power.

Having started to mull the question over at 16, Netiwit eventually declared himself a conscientious



..... ■ .....  
Netiwit Chotiphatphaisal,  
Thailand's first publicly  
declared conscientious  
objector. Photo by Lee Yu  
Kyung.

dened that teachers called their kids *kalar* (Indian/Muslim boys) or *kalar ma* (Indian/Muslim girls). At one school in Taunggyi, a third-grade Muslim girl was not allowed to participate in a staged activity due to her "*kalar*" look, discouraging her from going to school at all.

Teachers do not seem to be teaching respect and tolerance either. A grade one student, for example, was not befriended by other kids due to her *kalar* look, especially the "merging of the eyebrows." The list goes on.

With the anti-Muslim 969 movement, Muslims are increasingly facing discrimination in the employment sector as well. In the past, Muslims were not recruited by the military or civil service. Now employers, in both family businesses and companies, are less willing to hire Muslims. A recent university graduate applied for job at a bank in Taunggyi but was told clearly that the bank did not hire her kind.

Not all Burmese or Buddhists hate Muslims, however. There are monks, educators, activists and ordinary citizens who are frustrated with the spread of hate campaigns across the country. But their benign attitude and voices are far less powerful and felt than that of a state that has designed alienation politically and structurally, and

that of majority Burmese and/or Buddhists who have internalized and unleashed anti-Muslim sentiment and actions.

While the restrictive citizenship act makes the Muslims second class citizens, the discrimination they face results not only from the matter of law (i.e. the lack of citizenship), but also from alienation—particularly the practice of outright denial, which has much to do with racism and ignorance. Discrimination against Muslims is based on their socio-cultural or ethno-religious membership as much as on legal status.

Therefore, while addressing the 1982 citizenship act is a must, it is important not to lose sight of the social and political dynamics of alienation, ethnocide and discrimination. Promoting mutual respect, recognition and tolerance, and most importantly the undoing of anti-Muslim state propaganda and the majority's internalized racist thoughts and actions are must-address issues.

Sai Latt is a Ph.D. candidate at Simon Fraser University in Canada.

objector on September 5, 2014, his 18th birthday.

"Military rule has dominated Thai society, not only now but also for a long time," Netiwit's declaration read. "They controlled text books to promote nationalism and respect of the army. We know they want to make Thailand a military state."

Netiwit has not limited his reasons to support for "non-violence" or pacifism. Nor has he compromised his criticism of the Thai military or Buddhism. "I cannot say I am a Buddhist in a country, full of violence and where Human Rights violations occur" he stated, adding "I am a conscientious man."

Thailand is one of more than 30 countries that have conscription. Based on the Military Service Act of 1954, all male citizens are obliged to serve in the military at 21. Generally about 60% of Thailand's 300,000 forces are voluntary professional soldiers, with the rest conscripts.

Thailand also has more serving officers than the United States, 1750 officers compared to the US's fewer than 1000 for a military several times larger.

Pakawadee Veerapasong, the independent writer and activist based in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, told me that despite Thailand facing no evident threat of war, "the budget of the army is rising with every fiscal year. How the military spend its

budget is something in the shadow. Their spending should be under scrutiny."

Pakawadee has been one of a few outspoken critics advocating "military reform". She supports abolishing conscription.

## Military coups make comeback

She said up until a 2006 coup, in which the elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra was ousted, people thought military coups were obsolete in Thai politics. She pointed to the 1992 pro-democracy uprising against military rule as a source for the wide belief that the military had been expelled from the politics and returned to their barracks.

"Because of this belief, people didn't try to reform many aspects of the military," she said. "That's why we have to live in this nightmare of dictatorship again and again."

Since the 2014 coup, the junta has taken various measures in the name of a "reform" process. The military have summoned activists, journalists and political opponents for "attitude adjustment" or "talks". The abduction of dissidents has included the prominent student activist Sirawith Seritiwat.

Sirawith was abducted by a group of uniformed and masked men in front of Thammasat University on January 20. *Khaosod english*

reported that he was slapped, verbally abused and blindfolded. He was asked questions, such as: "Why are you talking with journalists?"

The next day, a junta spokesperson admitted they were behind his abduction and released him.

Less than a week later, however, another student activist was abducted by men believed to be plain clothed military officers. A recent report from Thai Lawyers for Human Rights suggested that from May 22, 2014, when the military regime staged its coup, to September 30 last year, 1408 civilians were tried in military courts. There is no sign of the military reforming itself. Rather, its powers are strengthened by a recently passed bill.

In November, the junta passed a new bill called the Reserved Forces Act. The junta-appointed legislature passed the bill with four abstentions. Other than an online petition, there was no outcry or debate.

Under the new law, 12 million male citizens aged between 18 and 40 are subject to a random draft for two years military training regardless of their past duty. The annual drafting number would be 300,000, 2.5% of the target citizens.

## Unease

I met a small group of high school students a month after the bill passed. The teens

showed me A4 sized posters on which they wrote: "Thai men are not slaves of the military".

They said they were considering a campaign of public protests. Among the students was 19-year-old Nithi Sankhawasi. He has just completed Territorial Defence Training, or locally known as "Ror Dor", for three years during high school. Ror Dor is military training for army reserve force students. It is, most of all, an optional way to not be drafted when you turn 21.

"Every Friday we would go to the military camp," Nithi said. "We learn about the old Thai history, but never contemporary issues. We also learn about the King, religion (Buddhism) and the military, besides occasional military training.

"You have to buy shirts and boots just like soldiers. Everyone on Ror Dor training has to pay for themselves. All the businesses [providing the needed products] belong to military." To Nithi, this is corruption.

"I felt it was a waste of time. Teenage years are a precious time of your life, isn't it?"

Saengchai Law, a 16-year-old student, has completed his first year of Ror Dor. He said out of 17 male students in his class, 13 were taking part in the Ror Dor program.

But Netiwit, Thailand's first conscientious objector has refused to take part in Ror Dor. As a result, he is

subject to conscription in two years.

"I have problems with Ror Dor also," said Netiwit. He raised the issue of military training for those underage. "Schools want students to obey like soldiers," he said. "They want us to be fearful of the military. So when coups happen, there is little resistance and most are OK with it."

Under the military regime, student reserve forces seem more obligated to follow commands. On February 4, the army chief announced student reserve forces would be deployed at polling stations for an upcoming referendum over the junta-drafted constitution. The second draft by the junta-appointed Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) came out at the end of January amid heavy criticism it would empower the aristocracy.

Concern is growing that the junta want to create an intimidating atmosphere for voters. Three days later, Colonel Winthai Suwaree denied the announcement by the army chief, saying the "army had a policy to encourage these students to take part as volunteers".

Since his declaration, Netiwit has received more than a thousand messages. These are mostly threats to kill or beat him. "They argued I was not patriotic enough," he said.

One of death threats was from a soldier in the troubled

southern provinces. The provinces have been the scene of a renewed insurgency since January 2004 that has claimed more than 6000 lives.

Last December, the Internal Security Operation Command said security personnel in the south would be cut this year by more than 1400 personnel to 69,295. This number includes conscript soldiers, although the percentage has not been revealed. Many conscript soldiers are from the poverty-stricken north-east, where an anti-coup movement has established a foothold.

### Risking jail

*The Nation* reported that the chief of the 26th Army Military circle, Major-General Dech-udom Niharat, "urged young men to report to authorities to serve their country". The report suggested that 900 21-year-olds avoided registering for military conscription in the north-eastern province of Buriram last year.

The punishment is up to three years in jail. Those who evade the newly passed Reserved Forces Act would face an even harsher sentence of four years.

"I can't say I am ready to go to jail as of now," said Netiwit. "I hope there will be an alternative way I can do it. But if given no choice, I will have to go."

His father once talked of "paying money" to avoid

military service. But Netiwit opposed this because it is a corrupt solution. "The poor can't pay the money. It's not fair, not just." Netiwit said his family is lower middle class and respect his decision.

Netiwit, who said he is interested in the self-described "democratic socialist" US presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders, is not aggressive in advocating the abolition of conscription. He thinks "too radical change" would not work in Thailand. "Step by step" he said.

For the time being, he supports setting up an "alternative civilian service", which has been practiced in

several countries including Switzerland. "Also," he said, "a small army would be more effective. But the Thai army is too big and against the Thai people. They killed many of them."

The idea of a "conscientious objector" is new for Thai society. Pakawadee noted: "The fear of prosecution by military court, [and] the beating and bullying by officers once recruited in the barracks is widespread." She has emphasised that "much support is needed for Netiwit when the time comes for his conscription age".

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## Thai Buddhism's unholy mess

Denis D. Gray

*Nikkei Asian Review*, 14 March 2016

BANGKOK -- For devout Buddhists in Thailand, the images were unsettling: a burly monk grabbing a soldier in a headlock while other saffron-robed clergy scuffled with troopers in what one Thailand-based columnist called "an unholy mess." What made the events even more troubling was the man at the center of the protest: an aged abbot seeking the country's highest Buddhist office despite being investigated for a tax

evasion scam and linked to a controversial religious sect.

Unfortunately, Thais, 90% of whom are Buddhists, have become accustomed to hearing unsavory reports involving monks, including sex scandals, gross materialism and criminal activities, as well as criticism of the Sangha Supreme Council -- the governing body -- as a conclave of old men out of touch with modern society





*Buddhist monks take part in a protest against state interference in religious affairs at a temple in Nakhon Pathom province on the outskirts of Bangkok on Feb. 15. © Reuters*

and unable or unwilling to undertake needed reforms.

The February confrontation between monks and military men, involving some 1,200 monks and their supporters on Bangkok's outskirts, dramatized some of the many ills that afflict Thai Buddhism, mainly corruption and politicization.

The protesting clergy are pushing for the selection of a 90-year-old abbot, Somdet Phra Maha Ratchamangalarcharn, more popularly known as Somdet Chuang, to become the next supreme patriarch -- the spiritual leader of the country's Buddhist faith -- despite being investigated for allegedly acquiring a vintage Mercedes-Benz through a tax evasion scheme. There are also doubts about his suitability to serve as Buddhism's guiding light because of his close ties to the Dhammakaya sect and its leader Phra

Dhammachayo, a self-confessed admirer of Hitler, who was investigated for embezzling some \$25 million in public donations before being cleared by the supreme council last year, although the government has still not ruled on the case.

Chuang was nominated by the 20-member council to become the next supreme patriarch on Jan. 5. But Thailand's military government, noting the controversy surrounding the abbot, has delayed seeking the needed royal endorsement of the nomination, which sparked the escalating conflict.

Leading social critic and Buddhist scholar Sulak Sivaraksa said that "a dark era of Buddhism in Thailand will come" should Chuang be appointed. A leading Thai-language newspaper Matichon wrote that the recent deep political rifts in Thailand have "fully infil-

trated into the religious realm," and warned that they were threatening to plunge Buddhism into a crisis.

Just how closely politics and religion intertwines is still difficult to discern, but the Dhammakaya sect is seen as supporting the deposed and exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his "Red Shirt" followers, so Chuang's elevation would be a setback for efforts by the government of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha to eradicate his legacy.

Thaksin was overthrown in a 2006 military coup as Thailand spiraled into bloody clashes between his backers and the country's traditional elite. A second

coup in 2014, spearheaded by Gen. Prayuth, toppled Thaksin's sister, Yingluck, as prime minister and put the military in charge.

## Political involvement

Some monks have since become involved on both sides of the political divide in what many Buddhist scholars consider a violation of the religion's tenant to remain aloof from politics. Thai clergy are, for example, barred from voting.

The Buddhism Protection Center of Thailand, whose members include monks and retired military men, and other supporters are calling for Buddhism to be enshrined as the state religion in a new constitution now being forged by the military government. Thailand has traditionally promoted religious tolerance, with the king acting as the protector of all religions. These groups claim they are shielding the religion against a sea of troubles. They have called for greater public morality, pressuring the government last October to ban a horror film about a monk that they claimed was insulting to Buddhism. More significantly, they oppose interference by the government or others in Thai Sangha, defined as the Buddhist monastic community as a whole.

Other monks have advocated violence. Apichart Punnajanto, a senior monk



Buddhist monks scuffle with a soldier during a protest near a temple on the outskirts of Bangkok on Feb.15.

at Bangkok's famous Wat Benchamabopit, or Marble Temple, wrote on his Facebook page last year that a mosque should be burned for every Buddhist monk killed in southern Thailand's Muslim insurgency.

What stunned some observers more than Apichart's words -- with their negation of the Buddha's core principle of non-violence -- was the response of the Sangha council: total silence. In the eyes of critics, the council and the Buddhist hierarchy it controls, has neither condemned nor eliminated practices such as calls to violence, corruption among even leading clergy, and outdated feudalistic procedures.

"The crux of the problem is the closed clerical system which centralizes governing power within a small group of 20 elders without any internal monitoring and auditing mechanisms. It is a system that is accountable to no one," said a leading reformist monk Phra Paisal Visalo. "The lack of transparency has given rise to nepotism and abuse

of power to give favors to the elders' networks."

Phra Maha Boonchuay Doojai of the Chiang Mai Buddhist College, who is involved in inter-faith dialogue and the fight against AIDS, said the senior clergy was largely ignorant of modern society and the few younger members of the supreme council were not powerful enough to exert change. "They are not aware of the changes in society. Monks in Thailand are not taking social issues into consideration. This will be the only way to preserve Buddhism in Thai society. But this is not in the eye of the Sangha," he told the *Nikkei Asian Review*.

Phra Maha Boonchuay is also campaigning to allow women to become bhikkhunis, fully ordained female monastics equal in almost every way to their male counterparts. This is opposed by the council. The ban forces women to travel

to Sri Lanka, where Theravada Buddhism is also practiced, to receive ordination.

There have also been calls for amending the 1962 Sangha Act, which centralized power and allowed the presiding hierarchy to make decisions in secret. Such an amendment could include oversight into the final destinations and uses of some \$4 billion in annual public donations to monasteries.

### Falling ethical standards

While many of Thailand's roughly 200,000 monks act in accordance with the religion's precepts, modernization has undermined much of their spiritual authority and roles as community leaders. A number have turned to evangelical movements, magic cures and "checkbook Buddhism," ranging from predicting lottery numbers to pardoning misdeeds in exchange for "donations." Some abbots have become rich landlords, evicting poor

tenants to gain higher profits from other business activities.

Monks have been convicted of everything from murder to wildlife and drug trafficking to child abuse. One fugitive former abbot, Wirapol Sukhpol, faces charges of drug use, money laundering, fathering a child by an underage woman, and illegally amassing millions of dollars. A photograph showed him seated in a private jet wearing aviator sunglasses and sporting a Louis Vuitton bag.

"There is growing consensus that the Thai Sangha is in state of serious crisis and one of continuing diminishing prestige and respect. It has lost its revered status as the moral center of the Thai polity," said a Bangkok-based scholar of Thai politics and society. "Once a traditional pillar buttressing the nation, it is now shaken and fallen from grace."

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# Unforgettable Puey Ungphakorn

Recounting the life of one of  
Thailand's most noble citizens 100  
years after his birth

Anchalee Kongrut  
*Bangkok Post*, 9 Mar 2016

Today marks the centennial of Puey Ungphakorn, a remarkable man who lived a remarkable life as a founding father of the modern Thai economy, pedagogue at Thammasat University and Bank of Thailand, role model and larger-than-life figure who was influential during some of the most momentous years of Thai history.

Tributes are being paid to him all month long -- in fact, it began early last year when UNESCO named him one of the world's outstanding personalities for his steely ethics and integrity. Since last April, Thammasat University, where Puey -- often known as Ajarn Puey -- served as dean for the Faculty of Economics and rector during the tumultuous 1970s, has held monthly lectures to examine his thoughts on economics as

well as political and rural development. Bank of Thailand, where he served as governor for 12 years, will hold a regional conference at his memorial in Kuala Lumpur on March 14.

But it's not just academia and the intellectual community that are remembering him. Puey's life and work are being celebrated in other ways, too. In the current climate, his experience -- as a man who worked for the military, and who was attacked by both the left and the right, eventually going into exile after the bloody incident of Oct 6, 1976 -- has become as relevant as ever.

Every Saturday this month, ThaiPBS will be running a biographical documentary series about Puey's life. Later this month, at the National Book Fair, Vanchai Tantivittayapitak will publish a biography entitled *A Man Called Puey*.

The book aims to explain to younger generations why Puey -- who was born on Mar 9, 1916, and died in

1999 in England -- has been revered, and what society can learn from him. Several magazines this month, including *Sarakadee*, *National Geographic Thailand* and *A Day*, have put Puey on their covers. And last year, there was a musical based on his life called *Mungkorn Salad Klet*, with three different actors playing Puey at three different stages of his life.

Asst. Prof Pokpong Junvith, of the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat University, says society under the current political system can learn a great deal from the life of Puey.

"It's so timely to watch the documentary or read about his life, because what happened in his time bears such a resemblance to what we're experiencing today," says Pokpong, who produces the TV documentary *Puey Ungphakorn: Jark Karn Marnda Sou Cherng Takorn (From Womb To Tomb)* for ThaiPBS. The series aired its first episode last Saturday at 9pm, with three more episodes coming in the following Saturdays.

The documentary tells the life story of Puey, from his early days as a poor but outstanding student at Assumption College, his studies in England, his life-risking period as a spy in the Free Thai Movement against Japan's occupation of Siam during World War II, and his days of constant pres-

sure as Bank of Thailand governor when he was working under junta leader Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat. The most momentous episode of his life came when he was rector of Thammasat University, culminating with the Oct 6 massacre, which forced him to flee to England.

Asst Prof Pokpong says the series is not just a chronicle of Puey's life.

"We want the viewers to get inside his head," he says. "We want viewers to understand Ajarn Puey's ideas about politics and development. He was always a champion of democracy, freedom of expression and public participation from the grassroots."

Despite his background as a technocrat, Pokpong says that Puey was not a rigid bureaucrat. After observing that his idea of the modern economy did not distribute wealth to farmers and low-income groups as he wished, Puey shifted his focus to education and rural development.

"People often salute him for his contributions to the modern economy, rural development and education. Yet the gem quality of Puey that people often ignore, but which will be highlighted in the documentary series, is moral courage," says Pokpong.

In fact, Puey's name recently resurfaced after the 2014 coup, when the pro-military camp invoked his

Puey Ungphakorn visits  
Pridi Banomyong in  
France in 1972.





Shooting a scene from Puey Ungphakorn: Jark Karn Marnda Sou Cherng Takorn (From Womb To Tomb) for ThaiPBS.

name as an example of an upstanding man willing to work with the military for the sake of the country, without prejudice against the way his boss had obtained power.

“But Ajarn Puey is different from politicians or officials who are working with [the current junta],” Pokpong says. “First and foremost, he never, ever, feared criticising the junta if he believed the military had done wrong. I wonder if any of the politicians and officials who work with the NCPO have the guts to upset the junta. I think our leaders, and those working with the junta, can learn from him.”

With a PhD in economics from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), the financier hotshot came back to Thailand in the 1950s. He refused lucrative job offers from financial institutes to work for significantly less money as a government official at the Ministry of Finance and then Bank of

Thailand. Soon, he rose to become the country’s economic tsar, helping revamp the banking system in Thailand, making it stable and trusted in the world economy. His liberal economic ethos helped shift Thailand from military oligarchy to a more internationally accepted free market. His refusal to budge against the powers that be helped Bank of Thailand achieve relative freedom from political intervention.

Of course, the hard-nosed civil servant sometimes got caned. Even a high-profile technocrat like Puey was demoted during his time at Bank of Thailand, after he refused to waive the penalty levied on a commercial bank that was owned by strongman Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. In another case, he even needed to flee the country, and worked as an economic

counsellor to the Royal Thai Embassy in London. This was after he denied the request of Pol Gen Pao Sriyanon, a strongman in the military, that Bank of Thailand switch banknote-printing houses. Surprisingly, after Field Marshal Sarit became prime minister through a coup in 1959, he invited Puey to return as Bank of Thailand governor, an offer that he took.

“Puey knew how to speak and deal with the military government. Sometimes he even composed poems to air his disagreement or urge a dictator like Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachon, who came to power in the mid-1960s, to adhere to his promises. Puey was respectful and polite but firm in his causes. Most of all, he knew that his most powerful weapon was a threat to leave.

“Puey once said the best weapon of Bank of Thailand governors was to tender a resignation,” says Vanchai Tantivittayapitak, a writer and critic who received the Sri Burapha Literary Award and whose biography of Puey will come out this month.

Thus when the military government was crossing the line, they would see the stubborn central bank governor waving the letter of resignation. “And Field Marshal Sarit would back off. The junta had refused to let Dr. Puey go as they fully knew he was highly capa-

ble, upright and could deliver like no one else. Most of all, they knew Puey was not doing anything out of his own interest. Other commercial bankers and tycoons in the country also trusted him. Everyone knew the country always came first for Dr. Puey Ungphakorn.”

Throughout his civil servant’s life, Puey had been approached to become finance minister and prime minister a number of times. He always declined these political positions. Once, when he was offered the chance to become prime minister, he asked the government to make him rector of Thammasat University instead.

“Ajarn Puey is a unique character, one of a kind. Thailand never lacked brilliant students from world-famous universities, but I wonder how many ace students would drop out of his class at LSE to risk his life during World War II, by volunteering for the Free Thai Movement and parachuting into Thailand to work in the resistance against the Japanese army. Puey knew he might get killed, but he did it anyway,” says Vanchai.

Unlike many high-achieving leaders, Puey, according to records from his colleagues and friends, was self-critical and open to criticism from others.

After learning that his economic ethos and devel-



opment model did not trickle wealth down to the low-income brackets, Puey created the Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement, known as the first NGO in Thailand. And when he became rector at Thammasat University, he founded a social-development project that made students observe up-close the life of the rural poor. He realised that economic development on its own cannot create equal wealth distribution. Puey said in 1976: "There is a flaw in the country's drive to achieve economic prosperity. We give priority to growth while ignoring social justice. At this point, we should instead pay serious attention to rural development."

Vanchai reflects on the fact that "Puey is an elite yet he is down-to-earth. Not many elite technocrats in this country have his common touch. Perhaps the problems with development policy in this country are the result of us having had only one Puey Ungphakorn instead of a few more".

Puey also has his critics. For the radical left of the Cold War years, his Gandhist non-violence and socialist ideology -- evident in such policies as land reform and the social-welfare state -- was never to the taste of the Maoist-style 70s. Activist students also criticised him for banning some of their protests against the junta. At the same time, the

ultra-right wing saw Puey's pro-welfare-state stance and accused him of being communist, an accusation that forced him to leave the country in dramatic fashion on the night of Oct 6, 1976, after the bloodshed at Thammasat University. With this biography, he might appear larger than life -- the rise of a son of from a poor immigrant Chinese family to become a major figure in history. But the most poignant memory people have of Puey is of his humble personality. This financier did not have a taste for Savile Row suits; his colleagues report that he did not even have his own dinner jacket. Puey was known for his frugality and his palate for street food -- he was generous in handing out money to his drivers and other low-ranking employees. Puey shunned material gain: his lifelong wish was to see an economic model that allowed for the trickling-down of wealth and development -- sadly, something he never witnessed in this country.

After his death in 1999, his wife, Margaret Smith, discarded many of his belongings. His funeral was simple, his ashes scattered according to his own stated wish in his much-quoted "From Womb to Tomb", a moving piece of writing that reflects his vision towards development for Southeast Asia, and which is part of the paper he wrote during

sabbatical as lecturer at Cambridge University.

His eldest son, Jon Ungphakorn, said in a seminar in January at Thammasat that he disliked seeing his father become simply a worshipped memory of the past, rather than a person with significant relevance to the present.

"When you read books about my father, or articles criticising his ideas and words, you make him alive. His legacy will remain when he is perceived as a human being who did many good things but also did some bad things. And that is the truth about being human."

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## Two Greats Take Thailand's Power Struggle to the Stage in Dance

Sasiwan Mokkhasen

*Khaosod* english, 17 March 2016

BANGKOK — An insurgent dance artist and outspoken intellectual, masters from different worlds within the same kingdom, will take the stage later this month as Hindu god and servant locked in the immortal struggle over power.

In addition to being a provocative commentator on taboo subjects, social commentator Sulak Sivaraksa knows a step or two of traditional dance. For his 83rd birthday, the royalist-cum-royal critic will take a divine role in a traditional masked dance drama with three top artists, including the nation's best known contemporary dancer, Pichet Klunchun.

Unsurprisingly, there is a political dimension to the March 26 performance, a

Khon production choreographed to reflect Thailand's social turmoil through the myths underpinning the national narrative.

"This performance is a mirror to reflect the image that has been repeated again and again in Thai society," said Pichet Klunchun. "Which is building legitimacy by claiming to be a good person beyond reproach."

As with most Khon, the story is taken from the national epic, Ramakien. Inspired by "Narai Prab Nontok" (Narai Subdues Nontok), their version has been updated to the current situation under the name "Prach Thon Thook" (Suffering Intellectual.)

"Narai Prab Nontok is a perfect story to reflect Thai



Philosopher-Activist Sulak Sivaraksa to take the stage in the one-night-only "Prat Thon Thuk"

society both in the past and present," Pichet said. "It was about the classes, the obsession with power that does not belong to you, passion and vindictiveness."

In the original, servant Nontok was bullied by all the gods he served. In order to protect himself, Nontok asked for a magic finger that is able to kill anyone by pointing at them but ended up overusing it. The god Narai then disguised himself as a beautiful woman to kill Nontok. The servant thinks the fight is unfair, so they agree to a fair fight in the mortal world, which is the beginning of the whole epic derived from the Hindu Ramayana.

Sulak stars as Narai with Pichet in the role of Nontok. Two other veteran artists, painter Thepsiri Saksopha and Silpathorn-winning performer Pradit Prasathong, will also be part of the production.

Despite his fame – or infamy – for criticizing the monarchy he also supports, Sulak has a strong passion for the performing arts and has been involved in past traditional dance projects.

Pichet, long scorned by Khon traditionalists for fusing it with contemporary movement, mostly performed abroad for many years. In recent years, he's become more widely embraced at home. He received a Silpathorn Award, Thailand's highest cultural distinction, in 2006.

About half of the seats have been reserved for the show, with another 100 or so seats being sold for 500 baht.

Revenues will be donated to a Cross Cultural Foundation fund called "We Are All Billy" which aims to help Thailand's disenfranchised populations and is named for disappeared and presumed dead Karen activist Porlachee "Billy" Rakchongcharoen.

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## Measures to protect Buddhism emerge as charter draft is unveiled

editor, *Prachatai* english

Pressured by Buddhist groups to enshrine Buddhism as a national religion, the constitution drafters have met the demands halfway by providing mechanisms in the new draft constitution to protect Buddhism.

On Tuesday afternoon, 29 March 2016, the junta-appointed Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) headed by Meechai Ruchuphan unveiled the finalised draft constitution. The fate of the draft will be decided by public referendum in August.

One of the interesting features of the draft constitution is Article 67 on religion, which appears in Chapter 6, on the direction of state policies.

Article 67 reads "The state shall protect and patronise Buddhism and other religions. In protecting Buddhism, which is the religion to which the majority of the Thai people have adhered since time immemorial, the state shall encourage education to promote the teachings of Theravada Buddhism for the development of the mind and wisdom, and shall implement measures

to prevent any forms of harm or threat against Buddhism, together with encouraging Buddhists to take part in enacting these measures."

The Article differs greatly from Article 79 of the 2007 Constitution which in brief states that the state shall protect and patronise Buddhism, the religion to which the majority of the Thai people adhere, and other religions, and foster good will and cooperation among all faiths to encourage good morale and the development of living standards.

Article 67 gives extra emphasis to Theravada Buddhism, the dominant Buddhist sect in mainland Southeast Asia, which is followed by about 90 percent of the Thai population.

Last week, members of the National Network to Protect Buddhism and representatives of the Thai Sangha (Buddhist clergy), submitted a list of 100,000 names to Supoj Kaimook, Deputy Chair of the CDC.

The group claimed that the list was collected from people who supported the campaign to make Buddhism the state religion and urged the CDC, then in the final

stage of rewriting the draft constitution, to concede to their demand.

The Buddhist group told the CDC then that making Buddhism the state religion would make it easier for the draft to pass the upcoming public referendum.

In August 2014, the Thai junta, which sees Buddhism as a part of the Thai identity, approved a Bill to Patronise and Protect Buddhism. The Sangha Supreme Council (SSC), known in Thai as 'Mahathera Samakhom', the governing body of

the Thai Buddhist clergy, and the National Office of Buddhism (NOB), the secular office under the Prime Minister's Office responsible for promoting Buddhism, have unsuccessfully tried to propose the bill since 2006, but it was rejected by previous governments.

The proposed bill says "Buddhism is one of the pillars of the Thai nation and is the religion to which most Thai people adhere. Therefore, Buddhists should be united in patronising and protecting Buddhism to make

it prosper and enhance Buddhist principles and ethics to develop the quality of one's life." In addition to these vague sentiments, however, the bill will allow the SSC and the government to punish anyone deemed to threaten a narrowly defined version of Buddhism promoted by the authorities.

For Sulak Sivaraksa, one of the founding members of International Network of Engaged Buddhists and a historian who is renowned for his criticisms of the SSC, the bill clearly shows the

SSC's desire to gain more prominence in Thai society.

"This bill shows blind stupidity and lust for power," said Sulak. "The Sangha Supreme Council is a very weak council. It doesn't have its own identity. That's why it wants to show that it has power, which is regrettable," he added.

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## Conference on Social Engagement and Liberation

Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of  
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Conversion to Buddhism

11th - 14th October 2016.  
Nagaloka, Nagpur, India.



Registration forms will be available within three months. In the meantime please contact us at: >> 60Liberation@gmail.com  
>> Website: [www.nagaloka.org](http://www.nagaloka.org) and [www.inebnetwork.org](http://www.inebnetwork.org)

# INEB's 2016 Biennial Conference Converging Streams: Engaging for Holistic Development

An Interfaith Dialogue for Peace and Sustainability  
Colombo and Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka

Rita Litwiller



The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) held its 2016 biennial conference from January 22 – 28 in Sri Lanka organized by INEB, Sadahan Sevana, the Sevalanka Foundation and the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC). Approximately 200 persons from 22 countries interacted in various processes of interfaith dialogue focusing on peace and sustainability. The majority of persons came from Asian countries including Laos, Myanmar, China, S. Korea, Siam/Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, India, and Sri Lanka,

with others coming from Canada, the USA, Hungary, Austria, and Australia.

This year's conference theme was Converging Streams: Engaging for Structural Development. The opening public symposium on the evening of January 22 at the Sri Lankan Foundation in Colombo began with chanting accompanied by traditional instruments which brought a feeling of calm and unity to the gathering. This symposium was particularly auspicious as the President of Sri Lanka, Maithreepala Sirisena, shared the stage with luminaries in the fields of engaged

Buddhism, climate change, and holistic and sustainable development.

Joanna Macy, an environmental activist and Buddhist scholar, delivered the keynote speech on sustainable development. She inspired others to "DO SOMETHING". . . For the environment, for the seventh generation, for the planet. She said, "radioactive contamination, scrambling the DNA code (genetically modified food), fracking and injecting chemicals into the water system are FOREVER. And facing this liberates heart and mind. There is so much danger and threat to life that the future





generations and ancestors are with us at this moment. We will be remembered as the generation that contaminated our planet. We cannot dismiss each other by blaming the bad actors (Monsanto, Shell, Avista). We have to liberate ourselves . . . the love of life is on our side. Every tradition is calling us to speak the truth together. We are all victims and we are all accountable. This is the work we were born to do because we were born in this time!”

One unique highlight of the symposium took place when an agreement to sustain life – Our Ecological Conversation – was read and officially presented to the President. This agreement was drafted on January 22 in Sri Lanka by a group of scientists and environmental activists during a pre-conference meeting on climate change, its causes, impacts and actions from an interfaith perspective. The statement ends with the following imperative:

*We call on all world leaders, faith*

*leaders and all peoples of this planet:*

- *To unite for our common good, to collectively embrace a new paradigm where economics and politics serve life and sustainability; where our differences enrich us to live as one human family, to be mindful of what is needed now and those generations yet to be born.*
- *To abandon growth-based economics; to commit to the Great Turning towards sustainability, total elimination of fossil fuels, healthy and toxin-free agriculture, moral and physical wellness, and a life-centered approach to sustainability.*

*May we be rigorous in our efforts, respecting all life-forms and embrace the opportunity of this Ecological Conversation. Let us be guardians and champions of these changes; let us have faith in our common destiny.*

Nigel Crawhall, who moderated the panel of respondents, began by stating that “this was a

historic gathering, as we are facing the greatest challenge on earth,” then went on, to introduce the panelists all of whom have lifetime commitments to supporting peace on the planet. Key messages given by the respondents including Venerable Lama Lobsang noting the need to move out of the monastery and temple to look for common solutions to our problems. Dr. Ariyaratne recommended solving these with an approach that combines spirituality with communication technology. Sulak Sivaraksa spoke about structural violence saying that it was systematically preventing people from meeting their basic needs. This was followed by reminding the audience that each person is on a personal quest that leads each of us to find common ground because we are actually interrelated. Lodi Gyari Rinpoche commented that sustainability is needed within ourselves and that sustainability of our beliefs begins with ourselves, and requires putting beliefs into action. Venerable Ratthana closed by ap-

pealing to everyone to support the agreement that was read, then went on to say that spiritual leadership and collective effort is necessary for it to be put into practice.

The participants ventured on two separate study tours designed to help them to understand the country context that prepared them for the conference that followed. The two groups traveled in different directions, one to examine the topic of ecosystems, climate change and sustainable development in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve in southern Sri Lanka while the second group learned about pluralistic and inclusive societies living in the post-war conditions of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka.

Participants on both study tours formed relationships while traveling long distances through the countryside as they learned about the issues in these areas. Both groups met at the Islander Center in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, for the two day conference. During

the morning of the first day, panelists gave presentations about structural violence and its impact on societies and development. The second morning, another panel addressed the topic of holistic development. These presentations provided the building blocks for the afternoon sessions.

Both afternoon sessions consisted of large and small groups interacting using other forms of dialogue which were the World Café where participants explored the topic of structural violence, and Open Space where groups formed that shared common themes to develop approaches for addressing social issues together. Joanna Macy's closing remarks following the World Café clearly express what took place: "Let us come together in gratitude for each other, for being here, for open heartedness for listening to each other; the process of the World Café, willingness to participate in it. Here we are at this moment – gratitude for love in

this historical moment in the world."

The conference provided many other formal and informal opportunities for participants to interact during pre-conference workshops, cultural presentations of tea ceremonies, performances by musicians and dancers, meditation, as well as shared meals and accommodations. The successful outcome of INEB's conference has yet to be realized, however the seeds have been carefully sown across countries and cultures as people return home with new ideas and approaches to holistic development, as well as a clearer understanding of the negative effect structural violence has on everyone. INEB's network has also been strengthened and broadened as it continues to reach out to other faith traditions as partners and collaborators on issues of common concern.

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## Suksit Siam

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# Eco-Temple Community Development Project Group Work Meeting

Jonathan Watts



The Eco-Temple Community Development Project is a newly forming sub-network of the Interfaith Climate and Ecology network (ICE) of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). The Eco-Temple Community Development Project's general goal is to develop ecological human communities that are sustainably interconnected with the natural environment through the community center of a religious facility/temple. Such temples will manifest ecological standards on the material, relational, and spiritual levels. INEB and ICE members have a wide variety of communities, resources, and needs. By working together to develop an Eco-Temple Community Design Scheme, a strategic base of best practices

can be developed to help each community meet their specific needs.

The two day meeting, held just after the INEB General Conference from January 29-30, 2016, was the first time this new sub-network had an extended period together to share their activities and delve more deeply into the numerous interconnected issues in eco-temple community design. In this way, the meeting sought to: 1) share, identify, and begin collaboration among core members to support the development of eco-temple communities; and 2) from this shared knowledge, further develop and articulate an Eco-Temple Community Design Scheme, which can be a planning tool for our own and other eco-

temple community initiatives. Our focus was not on technology transfer or aid, but rather sharing perspectives and experiences to empower participants to develop answers in their own localities.

With an eye towards an intimate and collaborative process, organizers of the meeting decided to keep participant numbers below 25 persons. In the end, about 20 people participated from 10 different countries. There were 5 main temple communities that offered presentations on their work and formed the center of our discussions from: Tamil Nadu, India (Sukhavati Eco Temple), various sites in Myanmar (Socially Engaged Monastic Schools), Chonburi, Thailand (Smart Pagoda), Tokyo, Japan (Juko-in & Kenju-in



temples), and Shandong, China (Zhengjue Temple). From the basis of these groups, we had a period of presentations followed by peer review and extended discussion on each project.

On the afternoon of the second day, the group had a final exchange, much of which centered on issues and difficulties in sustaining the shared work. The group wants to continue what we felt were the dynamic and practical conversations of the two days without getting bogged down in the building and maintenance of yet another new network requiring excessive amounts of e-mail communication and documentation which is an added burden for non-native English speakers with poor internet access. In this way, we will seek to develop the Eco-Temple Community Development Project more as a meme, or as a method or path, rather than as a fixed project with fixed membership. This means that we will try to further develop the Eco-Temple Community Design Scheme so that it can be used as a planning and action tool for our own and any other eco-temple community initiatives in the world. We hope to continue to enrich the design scheme and further our own work based on a number of cooperative agreements mentioned in the above temple community profiles and through an ongoing series of small meetings and site visits (often with a particular learning theme), which we have already

begun. Further, in order to save resources and increase the likelihood of participation, we will try to hold our group meeting during large INEB and ICE general conferences, while conducting the site visits before or after, as follows:

April 2015: South Korea (2nd ICE conf.) & site visit: Japan (theme: nuclear & clean energy)

January 2016: Sri Lanka (INEB general conf.) & site visit: south India (theme: earth bricks & environmental justice in new Buddhist communities)

December 2016: site visits (2): Thailand (opening of Phra Sangkom's Smart Pagoda) Myanmar (theme: ecological use of bamboo)

July 2017: Indonesia (3rd ICE conf.) & site visit: (TBA: Muslim eco mosques?)

November 2017: Taiwan (INEB general conf.) & site visit: China (theme: solar energy)

In the intervening periods, a basic homepage with profiles of the main member eco-temple communities and the evolving Eco-Temple Community Design Scheme will be maintained on the homepage of the Japan Network of Engaged Buddhists (JNEB) and the new ICE homepage.

## BUILDING ECO TEMPLE COMMUNITY IN TAMIL NADU

From January 31 to February 3, 2016, 5 members of the Interfaith

Climate and Ecology Network (ICE) (under the International Network of Engaged Buddhists - INEB) took a three day study tour of the site for an eco-temple community development project in the region of Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, South India. The tour was conducted in conjunction with ICE's Eco-Temple Community Development Project, Group Work Meeting held in Sri Lanka from January 29-30.

The purpose of this tour was to inspect the site for the building of an eco-temple and to brainstorm on cooperative action with locals and our host, Gautham Prabhu Nagappan (also an ICE member). Gautham is the Executive Director of the Foundation for His Sacred Majesty (FHSM), based in Chennai, which has been working in this region for 7 years among the most marginalized communities of former outcaste or untouchable Hindus, now referred to as Dalits. The Foundation has been mobilizing multi-stakeholders participation in the design and implementation of a self-sustainable model on education and alternative livelihood to achieve community empowerment with the ideology of Dr. Ambedkar and the great Buddhist monarch of ancient India, Ashoka. FHSM is working on a number of levels from human rights advocacy to sustainable agriculture, income generating projects, youth education and mobilization, and Buddhist education and practice. The proposed Sukhavati Eco Temple





would provide not only a spiritual center for the community but also a multifarious complex for further development of the above programs. Gautham has continually emphasized in his recent work that environmental justice and integrity is an important missing link in the social development work amongst Dalits, which has mostly focused on political and legal rights.

The agendas of the tour were:

- Visiting the site of the proposed Sukhavati ("Pure Land") Eco Temple located on 10 acres of now open plain. The entire property covers 150 acres with good water resources from a nearby lake. Gautham seeks to develop this larger property both for reforested bio-diverse land and for agricultural development of millet farming, a healthier and less resource intensive crop than white rice. The land will also be used to develop micro-grid solar, bio-mass, and other forms of clean

energy.

- Witnessing a pilot Compressed Stabilized Earth Blocks (CSEB) brick making machine and production process. The Sukhavati Eco Temple will be a domed stupa made of CSEB using local earth and local labor as part of a community income generating project making CSEBs.
- meeting the people in the community. Our group had a variety of interactions during the three days which included a very impressive interaction with local youth groups and their leaders. These groups were largely thematized on Buddhist study and community service themes. They are attempting to form associations of young people focused on improving their education with a spirit of serving and giving back to their community. Seeing the energy and investment put into succeeding generations of community leaders felt like an especially important activity for the sustainability of FHSM's goals and work.

Seeing the realization of a community development sector gives one an even stronger sense of the potential for success for the Sukhavati Eco Temple project. Gautham feels the time is ripe for proceeding with temple construc-

tion to the next stage as a means to provide further inspiration and energy to the community. As Buddhist identity, education, and training is still underdeveloped in this new movement among Dalits, an actual temple—of which there are none for Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu—would be an important sign of empowerment and identity. It is hoped that a major Buddhist temple would add to this culture by not only restoring the original Buddhist culture of the region but bringing the teachings and insights of Ambedkar on spirituality and social justice to the wider communities of this region.

A series of agreements were made with Gautham and the members of the tour which included AC member Rev. Hidehito Okochi, EC member Jonathan Watts, ICE members Melinda Varfi and Mischa Altman, and director of the INEB Institute Ted Mayer. They include: creating a more detailed topographical and design map of the land and temple, creating a business plan for the temple including the self-sustaining aspects of it; planning fundraising trips for Gautham to Europe, Japan & Korea, and the United States from May to July of 2016; and developing an educational unit around the concept of the Eco-Temple Community Development Project on such themes as good governance, environmental protection, and collective action.

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## Opening of the INEB Institute



On February 22nd, the auspicious Makha Bucha Day was celebrated, commemorating in part when the Buddha taught about the importance of abstaining from causing harm, striving to do good, and purifying one's mind. At Wongsanit Ashram in Nakhon Nayok, Siam the day marked the opening of the INEB Institute's English for Engaged Social Service program. The three month program is designed to foster English language proficiency coupled with transformative learning for peace and justice that is grounded in Buddhist thought and practice.

The day commenced with an opening ceremony led by primary teachers Theodore Mayer and Nilanjana Premaratna and included words from the founder of the Institute, Sulak Sivaraksa. Dozens of guests were present for the opening ceremony that included an introduction to the course and a communal meal.

Students from across Asia are participating in this program that will run until the second half of May. In addition to improving English language skills, the curriculum includes teachings and workshops related to socially engaged Buddhism that are

intended to train students to be leaders and effective agents of social, environmental and political change.

Following the English language session, the INEB Institute will begin a yearlong master's degree program in socially engaged Buddhism. The MA program will consist of three terms of coursework that will take place at sites in Siam, Taiwan and India. In addition to a range of courses offered, requirements include a meditation retreat, completion of an internship or thesis as well as a summer seminar that will provide an opportunity for students to present their work to others.

Curriculum will include holistic training in individual and social transformation and will provide education in the Theravada traditions of Siam, Ambedkarite Buddhism in Pune, India, Tibetan Buddhism in Himachal Pradesh, India and Mahayana Buddhism in Taiwan. The MA program is connected with the Arsom Silp Institute of the Arts in Bangkok and will be fully accredited by the Thai Ministry of Education. Those interested in learning more or in enrolling in the program should visit: [www.inebinstitute.org](http://www.inebinstitute.org)

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## Questions and Answers about INEB's Programs for Alternative Higher Education

**Question 1:** What is the name of your project for alternative higher education?

The INEB Institute, which is short for the Institute for Transformative Learning of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists

**Question 2:** What is the nature of your curriculum? Will you emphasize Environmental Studies, Peace Studies, or Buddhist perspectives on the world?

Actually, the curriculum includes all those you mention here. When we state in simple terms what our students will study, we state it as follows:

1. The work, thought, and approaches to transformation on the

part of engaged Buddhists and their friends and allies.

2. The tools for self-cultivation and social change.

3. The means for understanding and alleviating key manifestations of social suffering in the present era, such as climate change, severe inequality, and violence.

**Question 3:** What programs does the INEB Institute envision?

We have been working on 3 separate programs:

1. Our first program, now running (22 February – 20 May, 2016), is called English for Engaged Social Service.

2. Our second program will be a course called Buddhist Leadership Training. It will be of six months or more duration, and begin in the 2016-2017 academic year.

3. We are also planning a Master's in Socially Engaged Buddhism, to begin in August of 2017.

**Question 4:** Will graduates receive a formal degree, or a certificate?

For the first two programs (English and Buddhist Leadership Training) students will receive a certificate. Successful participants in the Buddhist Leadership Training program will also be eligible to receive partial credit towards our MA program. For the MA program itself we are working with Arsom Silp Institute of the Arts in Bangkok to register an accredited degree program. It would be called "MA in Socially Engaged Buddhism." We are quite far along in this process, and expect approval by the Arsom Silp board sometime this Summer. Graduates would receive a formal master's degree.

**Question 5:** What kinds of work or occupation are you preparing

your graduates to undertake?

We argue that the critical state of the world—especially in terms of climate change, severe social inequality, and the challenges of violence and lack of voice—makes it urgent to train leaders who are able to learn from how Buddhists have encountered the challenges of modernity so far. This will make it possible for the students themselves to become leaders of communities and social movements based in nonviolence and in the dual objective of personal and social transformation. We feel that the need for people who can synthesize and integrate a larger vision of the state of humanity along with concrete practices and learning objectives that could help build a humane future is more urgent than building the skills required in specific professions. Nevertheless, we recognize the importance of learning skills that can provide a livelihood, and there are a number of concrete vocations or professions our graduates could carry out. Here are two paragraphs from our official curriculum proposal:

In terms of profession or occupation, one of our key goals is to produce graduates who are able to bring a Buddhist perspective into economic development, whether they come from Buddhist or largely non-Buddhist countries. The Buddhist perspective emphasizes the interdependence of all forms of life, and the need to cultivate compassion for these forms of life, not only at the personal level, but at the level of communities and societies.

The key name we are using for this profession is "Buddhist social development worker". While this is the core occupational identity we envision for our graduates, they may in fact work as researchers, consultants, social analysts, moral visionaries and

nonviolent communicators, or even as temple management specialists. We use this latter term in relation to the fact that in Japan a movement is just beginning to create "eco-temples" that are very conscious of their relationships to both nature and the local community in all respects—use of land, water, building materials and other resources, avoiding polluting activities, reducing waste, and so on. Similarly, in Thailand various temples have taken the lead in conserving forests and supporting local communities.

We also expect that many of our students will be taking time off from jobs they already hold.

**Question 6:** Where will your courses be offered?

They will be offered primarily at Arsom Silp Institute of the Arts in Bangkok and Wongsanit Ashram in Nakhon Nayok, Thailand. In addition to the Thai campuses (Theravada Buddhism), our MA students will also spend at least five weeks with each of the following affiliated partners: in Taiwan the Hong-Shi Buddhist College (Mahayana Buddhism); in Nagpur and Pune, India the Nagaloka Centre and the Manuski Institute (Ambedkar Buddhism)); and in Bir, India the Deer Park Institute (Vajrayana Buddhism). Subsequent years may see partnerships in other countries, such as Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, or Nepal, as well.

**Question 7:** What are the qualities and characteristics you seek in your student body?

Our primary target group will be young adults from Asia who have given priority to their own spiritual growth and to working for social change, and who are ready to embark on a period of intensive learning to

facilitate their life projects.

We emphasize young adults from Asia not only because they have been one of INEB's key constituents for many years. We also recognize the need for creative and compassionate leadership in a region of the world that is changing rapidly, where inequalities are stark and environments radically threatened, and where ethnic animosities and violence are rife.

At the same time, we welcome students from anywhere in the world who share the basic commitments of our project. We also hope to work both with leaders and with those who do not yet consider themselves leaders, with the understanding that all humans are potentially leaders in one or more realms, and that dialog between the grassroots and those who wield influence is of great benefit.

Out of necessity our primary medium of communication will be English. This means that students must have an adequate command of English in order to participate. The INEB Institute's English programs will help to broaden the pool of qualified students in this respect.

**Question 8:** When do you expect to begin accepting students for your MA program?

We hope to begin accepting students in early Fall of 2016. We decided it was not advisable to try to open by our original date, which was August 2016. We have pushed our opening date back to August of 2017 so as to have sufficient time to prepare a master's curriculum that will integrate many dimensions into a single, coherent program.

**Question 9:** What is the cost and duration of the MA program?

Our early budget projections were roughly \$25,000, but we are in the process of refining the budget, and we believe the final amount may be less than that, perhaps in the range of \$20,000 to \$23,000 for the entire program, including travel and room and board. We should have completed a careful budget revision by July of 2016.

The MA program will offer nine months of intensive coursework, followed by a period of internship or research. Thus the amount of time students would need to set aside would be a full year. The students then will have an additional 4-6 months within which to complete their thesis or to write an extended report on their internship.

We are also exploring the possibility of offering the program in a sequential modular fashion. That would mean that students might be able to join us for shorter periods of between 6 and 8 weeks, and complete one module of the program at a time. They could come back the following year to complete the next module. Some or all of the modules would have to be done sequentially, as they will be prerequisites for the others.

**Question 10:** Do you expect that your students will pay for their own tuition and fees, or will all of your students be scholarship students?

It is very important to our mission of serving promising young adults (especially those without access to resources) in Asia to offer substantial scholarships. In addition, we hope to attract a small number of paying

students from primarily the Americas and Europe, possibly also China and elsewhere. Their tuition would help reduce our need for a) patron-based or organizational scholarships (who send us qualified candidates and support their tuition), and b) unallocated scholarships that we can use for deserving students who do not have an organizational sponsor.

**Question 11:** Can donors who wish to support your programs receive a tax deduction for their donations?

The INEB Institute works under the Sathienkoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, which is a non-profit organization based in Thailand. Donations should qualify as charitable and tax-deductible donations.

**Question 12:** If someone wishes to support your projects with a financial donation, where or to whom should they send it?

Donations can be sent to the following account, which belongs to the Sathienkoses-Nagapradipa Foundation: Savings Account # 024-2-62146-8, Siam Commercial Bank, Charoen Nakhon Branch. The donor should then send an email to: [secretariat@inebnetwork.org](mailto:secretariat@inebnetwork.org) informing the General Secretary of INEB of the amount and purpose of their donation.

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**Special thanks** to Poranee Sponsel for posing a number of these questions.

**Answered by** Theodore Mayer



# 20 Years of Grassroots Leadership Training

## The Myanmar Experience

Pracha Hutanuwatr & Jane Rasbash (March 2016)



In 1988 the student movement was violently suppressed and Aung Sang Suu Kyi put under house arrest after Myanmar had been closed to the rest of the world since 1962. In 1994 Reverend Saboi Jum, General Secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention, invited Thai social activist Pracha Hutanuwatr and UK journalist Martin Smith to Myanmar to see the possibility of starting NGO work in Kachin State, the first ethnic area to sign a peace accord with the military. Under military rule, the Christian church and Buddhist temples had become vital civil society mechanisms. The church denominations had development departments and the Buddhist temples generally focussed on monastic education for children.

The outcome of the visit was 20 Kachin community leaders came to Thailand and the Philippines for 12 weeks training and exposure. Every year for more than a decade, commu-

nity leaders from Myanmar came to Thailand for what became known as Grassroots Leadership Training or GLT, the participant profile broadening to include more ethnicities and religions. At the time we could not hold long courses in Myanmar as meetings of more than five people had to be authorised. Tight military control made serious discussion on social issues impossible. Democracy and human rights were unmentionable. The GLT courses became very popular because it was a new opportunity to travel out of Myanmar. All the universities were closed for most of the 1990s except the military academy and the seminary.

When the groups from Myanmar came to Thailand and saw all the modern infrastructure, their first impression was a sense of being left behind and inferiority. We challenged this through the learning process and took them to see the reality behind

the facades. The slums, poverty and sex trade areas in Bangkok were a huge shock. Some Christian ethnic nationals thought they were discriminated against because of their religion. Again this hypothesis was shattered when they visited the Philippines, experiencing poverty, garbage dumps, slums and prostitution in a Christian country.

We prepared the group for what they would see and discussed & debriefed on the structural nature of the social issues. This aided the learning and helped frame the experience as well as opening a space to hear strong feelings and absorb the shock. We related the issues to macro social analysis and how the structures of society were created and became the cause of this suffering, environmental destruction and poverty. Participants were also exposed to practical, workable alternatives that the Thai and Philippine NGOs were using to try and bring

about sustainable change. They visited rice banks, micro credit, savings groups, organic agriculture, alternative schools etc. As one participant said '*we see with our own eyes what is working and this inspires us to create something new when we go home.*'

Our mentor and teacher Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, the Founder of SEM and many other Thai NGOs, strongly supported the GLT programme and always met the groups and talked about engaged spirituality and social change with provocative lectures challenging the status quo. We invited diverse speakers to share their analysis on e.g. liberalism, socialism, social democracy, green politics, and deep ecology perspective. The pros and cons of modernisation and globalisation were deeply debated. By the end of the course these community workers could understand the big picture and see and articulate a vision for a better society. We made time for daily meditation / prayer / contemplation a priority with respect to all religions and at least a one week retreat during the training. This supported inner growth, aided the absorption of complex information and sowed the seeds for interreligious tolerance.

We ensured the positive aspects of traditional and cultural values were appreciated and built on as we started to envision the future. The gist of the GLT training is that participants understand what is going on in the world and how that is impacting culturally, economically, socially and environmentally both in their communities and the world at large. They also learned *global thinking*: how decisions made far away influence what happens in their villages. At the same time they gain skills and inspiration

for *local doing* to start something in their communities to address the issue they are facing. We alerted them to modern forces like consumerism, environmental degradation and economic injustice that can challenge cultural integrity and spiritual roots. Thailand and the Philippines are examples of uprooted cultures that have lost spiritual integrity through the process of modernisation and in the name of development.

We were very grateful for Maran Ja Baw, our invaluable interpreter for the first few GLTs. After the first training she ran the Development Department at KBC and co-facilitated Deep Ecology workshops with Jane Rasbash. She became a good friend without whom our message would not have got across to participants. Her huge intellect and broad mind was able to articulate complex concepts in a way that could be understood by the participants. Seng Raw, who went on to found Metta Development Foundation, was also a great support in those early days, offering practical suggestions and skillful, considered advice.

After the first training there was a need for follow up inside Myanmar to support our alumni who had started writing proposals and wanted to access funds for small community development projects. These follow up trips were done very, very carefully because of the political sensitivity. This is what we call low profile activism. Follow ups were mainly about community organising and small-scale eco farming, micro-credit or training projects. The authorities did not consider grassroots organising under the banner of the church or temple a political threat. However, it was

empowering local people to take action and preparing them for the coming political change.

Besides supporting the work in the field of our participants, follow up visits exposed us to the reality of their situation. This helped us improve the training programme and curriculum, making it more relevant to the reality participants were facing.

Over the years the programme expanded to reach different groups.

*Sangha GLT*: After a few years working with Christians of different denominations, in 1998 we branched out to include Buddhists and the Burmese majorities in developing Peace Leadership Training (PLT). By the early 2000's the political situation became more relaxed and we started PLT, working with writers, journalists, lawyers and others with influence on public opinion. This four-week course had more political content and serious debate on issues like democracy, capitalism, socialism, green politics, etc., and deep discussions with intellectuals and intelligentsia in Bangkok.

*Training of Trainers (ToTs)*: The latter part of the first ten years we focussed on ToTs, a different kind of intensive leadership training that ensured the work spread inside Burma was by and for local people. The ToTs were led by Pracha and supported by GLT alumni Kwan Lum and Thet Nai. The ToT gave participatory facilitation skills so alumni could work in the local context, bringing the message of GLT appropriately.

During this time SEM went into Myanmar several times a year led by a second generation of Thai colleagues,

primarily Somboon, Jar, Jessica and Walra, who were now holding the GLT courses and follow ups. This team started connecting all the alumni in a cross-country network with alumni activities in different localities.

The majority (over 95%) of over 500 GLT alumni are working for social service one way or another. Some are community organisers and others work in CBOs, Church organisations and NGOs. Many are in positions of influence like Samson from GLT 1, now General Secretary of KBC, Peter from GLT2, now General Secretary of the Lisu Baptist Convention. Lots of Metta Development Foundation staff and management joined GLTs like Bo Bo Lwin, who set up the Kalyanametta Foundation. The Peace Leadership Group included many notable writers and journalists, in particular Juu and Kotar who are bringing the messages to a much broader audience. The list goes on. Thus the GLT approach is influencing different domains in Myanmar society during this transition time. Crucially it is equally supported by the emerging civil society from the community up.

There is widespread recognition among alumni and later their communities that traditional villages have many positive components of a healthy village, such as the deep community relationships and core spiritual and cultural values. Any intervention or 'development effort' has to build on this solid base to further transition to sustainable eco-communities. This prevents community reconstruction from uprooting local people from their culture and spirituality and falling into 'catching up mentality' with the idea that they belong to a backward community that needed to

be modernized to be 'good enough' or 'progress' enough.

The deep bonds and lasting friendships forged at the GLT courses have expanded into a network with a deep understanding of critical issues and as time went on they were seen as a very useful qualification for local and international NGO work. Under the leadership of Kwan Lum and Thet Nai, Gaia Sustainable Management Institute (GSMI) now runs many GLT and ToT courses and supports other emerging NGOs. They have adapted the curriculum to fit the fast changing milieu of present Burmese society and broadened out to become an advocacy organisation on issues such as dams, deforestation etc. We now see interreligious collaboration for example Buddhist monks visiting Baptists projects in Kachin State and Lisu projects near Mandalay sometimes staying in Christian churches, which never happened previously. This aspect of interreligious collaboration is vital in Myanmar after more than half a century of division and rule stemming from the colonial period.

When we first went to Myanmar, Reverend Saboi asked us to commit to at least 10 years. In his view this kind of education project takes a generation for the seeds to flourish. This set the scene for serious commitment and continuing engagement over the last 20 years. This has been greatly augmented by the sense of brotherhood – sisterhood with the key people we are working with mentioned above, and many more. The trust, the friendship, the care and the



aspiration to work together for an alternative model of development is so inspiring. Alongside GSMI, organisations like Metta Development Foundation and Shalom Foundation have become much larger and far reaching than anything we ever attempted. It is wonderful for us to bear witness to the success of these organisations entirely due to their own merit. It seems amazing now it is 20 years since that first GLT and how well-known GLT and GLT alumni are in Myanmar in the NGO and grassroots movements.

As Myanmar opens with opportunities we did not dare to dream of, we are happy to see the emergence of civil society to stand up against threats of environmental and cultural degradation, yet saddened to see increased conflict, particularly for Kachin and Rohingya people. We would like to sincerely thank and acknowledge all the participants, many of whom are engaged in civil society and who deeply inspired us to continue working for Myanmar for the last 20 years.

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This is a version of a longer article written alongside the SEM Annual Lecture on this topic in February 2016.

# Dawei locals, CSOs raise concerns over violation of human rights

Khine Kyaw | Myanmar Eleven  
YANGON, 10 March 2016



On Monday, they issued a joint statement urging the governments to take action against, among others, corruption among governmental departments related to the project, forced relocation, and to solve the problems before resuming the ground construction of the project.

“If the project is to continue in the old way without finding the root causes to the problems caused by mismanagement, and taking effective action, the local people will be greatly affected and the sustainable and real

development for our country would not be created,” it said.

A number of CSOs and more than 10 villagers stated their cases at an event on Monday. It followed the three governments’ agreement to resume the project, starting with the initial phase awarded to the consortium led by Italian-Thai Development. During 2010-2012, ITD, the original concessionaire which later relinquished the concession, started works on some infrastructure projects.

Htein Than said he and others in Payadat village feared losing

agricultural land if the project resumes. He said some in the village, housing more than 300 households and 1,000 people, lost farmland when ITD started a quarry. Waste from rock production has also destroyed nearly 81 hectares of paddy fields. ITD offered to pay 3 million kyats for an acre, but residents said compensation should be 10 million kyats (Bt87,000). No negotiation followed, he said.

“We do not know anything but farming. If we lose farmland, we really do not know what to do for our survival,” he said emotionally.



Maung Than of Mayingyi village said more than 81 hectares of paddy fields in his village were destroyed because of the construction of a road linking the quarry to the SEZ site. He said the road blocked the waterway and led to flooding in some areas and shortage in others. He is afraid that the project resumption would worsen the conditions.

Both hope that the new government would look at the problems.

Penchom Saetang, director of Ecological Alert and Recovery-Thailand (EARTH), was among the CSO representatives attending the event. She raised three demands to the Thai government: a new feasibility study, the realigning of participatory processes and other related measures in compliance with laws, norms and standard practices in Thailand.

### Information disclosure

She noted that information disclosure must be improved as Myanmar's law and regulatory system remains too weak to handle extremely critical social and environmental issues associated with massive investment projects like this.

Saw Frankie, director of Tanasserim River and Indigenous People Networks, said land grabbing emerged after the road construction. He said rich people from the city were granted titles for communal land which was partly converted to rubber plantations.

He attributed ongoing conflicts to lack of corporate social responsibility, failure of information disclosure and lack of a standard compensation system.

"Compensation offered is not enough to sustain the family's future. The villagers cannot buy a land plot of the same size in other locations. Land available in the relocation site is not sufficient and the houses built there are not strong enough for potential disasters. All in all, the remedy is not secure enough for alternative livelihoods," said Thant Zin, director of Dawei Development Association.

Nirun Phitakwatchara, former national human rights commissioner of Thailand, said Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commerce and relevant agencies should establish a regulatory mechanism to oversee transnational investment by Thai

investors and ensure compliance with the United Nations' human rights guidelines.

Meanwhile, the Myanmar government should focus on public discussions and transparency enhancement. It must ensure the proper system for environmental and social impact assessment, project management and fair compensation scheme.

"The new government needs to comply with best practices to ensure human rights are respected," he said.

"Public consultations should also be conducted in Kanchanaburi so that Thai people can listen to the Dawei people and exchange views ... People normally look at results but we urge them to focus on process. We need more consultation processes."

..... ■ .....

## Did you renew your subscription?

May we remind our readers to renew your subscription or help others who cannot afford to pay for *Seeds of Peace*, so that the publication will be available to all who seek something to read beyond what is provided by the mainstream mass media. The suggested rate is USD 50.00 per year. If you can provide more support, we would be very grateful for your generosity. Your money will go to support INEB activities for grassroots people in SE Asia.



24 February 2016

Dear Friends,

When I received The Right Livelihood Award, also known as the “Alternative Nobel Prize,” I used the entire cash award to lay the foundation stone of the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM). Subsequent financial donations by kalyanamittas enabled SEM to be what it is today. SEM was established in honor of Dr. Sem Pringpuangkeo. He was a key figure in the Thai NGO movements. SEM also holds an annual public lecture, a practice it has been doing since Dr. Sem was still alive. SEM focuses on providing alternative education, contemporizing the three-fold training in morality, concentration and wisdom. It reaches out beyond the Buddhist community and holds trainings and workshops in Laos and Burma—with satisfactory results. It has received financial support from various individual donors, locally and internationally, and non-profit international organizations. Anyone who is interested in SEM activities may begin by reading Jane Rasbash’s recent public lecture, which was translated into Thai by Pracha Hutunuwat. Preeda and Poonchawee Ruangwichathorn also deserve to be mentioned for capably running SEM’s Bangkok office. They are supported by a dedicated staff. In sum, SEM is in good hands and is moving in the right direction both domestically as well as in neighboring countries.

In 2014 I received the Jamnalal Bajaj International Awards in India. I used the entire prize money to set up a university for socially engaged Buddhism under the rubric of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, which I founded in 1989. INEB is a truly international network. An

important partner in this endeavor is Silp Ashram, a private, alternative Thai university. An important financial support to jumpstart the university also came from Khun Sumalee Virawaithaya, who left us 3 million baht in her will. The first batch of students will begin their education by taking pre-sessional English classes at Wongsanit Ashram in Nakhon Nayok province. The Ashram itself was a gift made in 1984 by the children of Their Serene Highnesses Prince Subha Svasti Wongsanit and Princess Samoe Svasti.

The Ashram needs major refurbishment to make it suitable for university education. M.R. Saisavasti Svasti has donated 1 million baht for this cause.

The university was opened officially on 22 February 2016; that is, Makha Bucha day. SEM was also established on Makha Bucha day.

A number of individuals and organizations have made crucial financial contributions to the university. Let me mention just a few of them. Dhammananda Bhikkuni gave 100,000 baht. Mr. Chatchawal Pringpuangkeo will give 500,000 baht every year in memory of his parents Dr. Sem and Mrs. Chalamm Pringpuangkeo. Foreign friends like Alan Senauke from the US donated \$1,500; Professor Nakamura from Japan, \$5000; Dr. Yu from Taiwan, \$5000; and Venerable Pomnyun Sunim from South Korea, \$5000. Phakchok Rinpoche has 1 scholarship reserved for a Nepalese student. The Bridge Fund from the US provides 3 scholarships for students from China. The Children’s Foundation has 1 scholarship

for a Thai national. Dr. Pichai Tangsin offered one scholarship for a Thai student. The Foundation for Scripture Study at Wat Thong Nopakun awards 1 scholarship. And the Por Foundation donated 100,000 baht. I set aside a sum from the Niwano Peace Prize to me to have one scholarship.

It seems that we are off to a good start. After 12 weeks of intensive English lessons (22 February to 20 May 2016) in Nakhon Nayok province, the first semester will begin in Taiwan on 15 August 2016. The academic year will comprise of 3 semesters and will end on 10 August 2017. In Taiwan, Bhikkuni Chao Hwe will graciously shoulder all the expenses. We only need to find interpreters, teachers, students, and money for airfares.

I now offer you an opportunity for merit-making. This year alone for the pre-session at Wongsanit Ashram we fell short of the target by \$15,000. If we

can obtain contributions of at least 500,000 baht, we will be able to move ahead without much difficulty. Supporting this new university surely constitutes a wholesome action. A contemplative Buddhist education will not only benefit Thai society but also Buddhism in general.

Anyone interested in making merits is kindly asked to transfer donations to the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, Account No. 024-2-59705-9, Siam Commercial Bank, Charoen Nakhon Branch. For further information, please contact Ms. Patcharasiri Yimmuang by phone at 086-763-6644 or email: p\_phatc@hotmail.com. Alternatively, you can contact the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, located at 666 Charoen Nakhon Road, Banglumpoo-Lang, Klongsan, Bangkok 10600, Thailand. (Receipt of donation can be used for income tax return.)

Sincerely,  
Sulak Sivaraksa

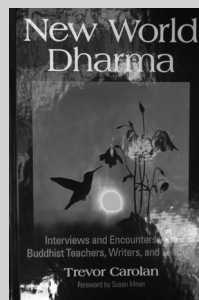
P.S. This university has 3 fulltime professors and a number of part-time and guest lecturers. There are currently 16 students, lay as well as ordained, from various countries. Teaching and learning will be based on the kalyanamitta style. That is, teachers and students will get to learn from one another, have time to meditate and cultivate the three-fold training together, and confront the problem of social suffering collectively.

## Recommended Reading



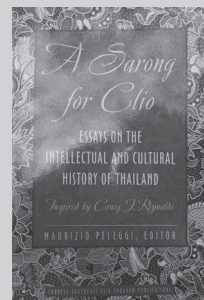
Bhutan Nuns Foundation  
Annual Report 2014

**Publisher:** Bhutan Nuns Foundation



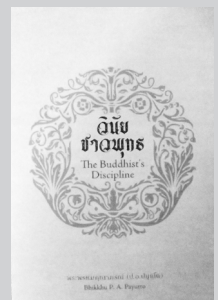
**New World Dharma**  
Interviews and Encounters with Buddhist  
Teachers, Writers, and leaders

**Author:** Trevor Carolan  
**Foreword:** Susan Moon



**A Sarong for Clio**  
ESSAYS ON THE INTELLECTUAL  
AND CULTURAL HISTORY  
OF THAILAND

**Inspired:** Craig J. Reynolds  
**Editor:** Maurizio Peleggi



**The Buddhist's Discipline**

**Publisher:** Watnyanaves  
**Author:** Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto

## The 100th birth anniversary of Puey Ungphakorn Closing Address



Today marks the 100th birth anniversary of Puey Ungphakorn, a man truly worthy of being honored. There's a Buddhist saying that venerating the venerable is an auspicious act.

Honoring someone is easy—perhaps all too easy. We can build that person a monument, for instance. But according to the Buddha, this is not the essence of proper veneration. Besides, if we are not careful a monument built to pay homage to someone may obtain a life of its own, turning into a magical object blindly worshipped by many people. This is a widespread practice in Thai society.

Speaking of monuments, I am reminded of Horace's Odes:

*I have created a monument more lasting than bronze and loftier than the royal structure of the pyramids, that which neither devouring rain, nor the unrestrained North Wind*

*may be able to destroy; nor the immeasurable succession of years and flight of time.*

*I shall not wholly die and a greater part of me will evade Libitina [the Goddess of Death]....*

Puey's honor too is more lasting than bronze, than any great monument.

The Buddha praised the practice of veneration. Veneration entails distilling or focusing on the good qualities of a person and using them to guide one's conducts or way of living. The point is to attempt to live like a venerable person.

Idealism is the essence of Puey's life. In other words, he was more concerned about the common good, especially alleviating the conditions of the poor and marginalized, than obtaining personal gains. As such, he wanted to dismantle structural injustices in society.

However, Puey became a civil servant in a bureaucracy that was itself violent and unjust. It had produced many spineless bureaucrats who were willing to serve the military dictatorship in exchange for personal gains. These bureaucrats couldn't see the dangers of capitalism and consumerism. Nor did they understand the threats posed by great power imperialism and transnational corporations.

To the best of his ability, Puey used his position as civil servant under the military dictatorship to serve the people. He did not compromise his idealism. He did not sell out. He refused to follow unjust orders and never feared fighting for what he considered right.

Puey always strove for excellence in terms of Beauty, Goodness and Truth. He was a practicing Buddhist with deep knowledge of the religion—a fact that many respectable monks also recognized. Nevertheless, he also honored other religions and moral philosophies. Communism however repelled him.

In his quest for Beauty, he was a patron of the arts. He tried to find ways to make artists gain social



recognition and respect. He used the Bank of Thailand as a vehicle to support various artists. Several private commercial banks soon emulated this practice. Moreover, Puey played the Thai flute as his pastime.

In whatever work he was engaging, Puey used “santi pracha dhamma” as his north star. He wanted to move beyond formal democracy and nodded favorably at participatory democracy in which the people take part in deciding matters that are important to their lives. He aimed to narrow the gap between rich and poor and claimed that everyone possesses equal dignity. Puey also wanted every form of employment to be guided by Right Livelihood in part to maintain environmental sustainability.

Puey however was not without flaws or weaknesses. For example, was he not biased in favor of some of his close disciples and friends? Did he not know that many of the individuals around him were simply using him for their personal gains?

In any case, Puey was morally courageous. Beneath his outward humility was great strength. Risking a break with the royal court, he courageously paid Pridi Banomyong a visit in France—a true act of venerating the venerable if there's one.

It was the nature of Puey's job to work closely with the dictator Thanom Kittikachorn. The latter recognized Puey's capability and was supportive of him. Puey endured the dictator and tried to focus on his good qualities. He had hoped that the dictator would slowly democratize the country—which became a faint possibility in 1968. But Thanom's auto-coup in 1971 ended all hope. This was the context in which Puey wrote his famous letter from Nai Khem Yenying to Nai Tamnu Kiatkong, Village Chief of Thai Charoen. It was a polite letter that was powerfully and beautifully written. The letter sealed Puey's expulsion from the bureaucracy.

Another masterpiece by Puey is “The Quality of Life of a Southeast Asian: A Chronicle of Hope from Womb to Tomb” (often known shortly as “From Womb to Tomb”). This is required reading for anyone truly concerned about society and the natural environment.

Puey also had an uncanny ability to see through things—people, events, situations, etc.—and make them serve the common good despite the rigid constraints. For instance, the dictatorship didn't allow

non-state actors to engage in social activities. When Puey received the Ramon Magsaysay Award he learned about a Taiwanese model of rural development which involved the private sector that was being practiced with great success in the Philippines. Given that Taiwan was also a dictatorship at that time, Puey felt that the Taiwanese model could be applied to the Thai case. As such, he established a foundation to achieve this end. Members of the younger generation were also encouraged to participate in rural development.

In England, Alec Dickson founded the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), whose influence in the US led President John F. Kennedy to establish the Peace Corps in 1961. When Dickson visited the Thai kingdom, Puey asked me to take Dickson to see him. Inspired by Dickson, Puey established a local equivalent of the VSO. It was a difficult task that was full of obstacles. In particular, the military dictatorship feared that Puey was indoctrinating the youths and using them as his political power base. In any case, Puey managed to assuage the dictatorship's fears and carried through the plan.

As for the Mae Glong river basin development initiative, Puey wanted the inhabitants of Samut Songkram province to continue living and working there instead of migrating to Bangkok. Besides, Samut Songkram was a fairly prosperous province. To realize this objective the local inhabitants' well-being had to be further improved, not only economically but also in terms of employment and public healthcare. If successful, this pilot project could be experimented with in other provinces as well. However, this project ultimately became a thorn in his side as the military, Interior Ministry and local politicians were unhappy with it.

The rural development model, the Thai ‘peace corps’, and the Mae Glong river basin development project are three of Puey's legacies that should be reworked. Doing so would be akin to building a truly great monument for him.

..... ■■ .....

An abridged translation of the lecture in Thai at Sriburapa Auditorium, Thammasat University 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016

# Dhamma for the Mature<sup>1</sup>

## (Dhamma Samrup Phū-sūng Āyu).

Bangkok: Thammasapha, no date.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu  
Translated by Donald K. Swearer

First I want to express my pleasure that all of you want to study the Dhamma, and came to this place [Wat Suan Mokha] for that purpose.

We are sitting here in the very heart of nature<sup>2</sup> not in a building that cost hundreds of thousands or millions [of baht]. As we sit here together in the very heart of nature may we have the right kind of heart (*cai*) so that we may benefit fully from this experience.

Some of you may be thinking that sitting here in the midst of nature is beneath your dignity and, consequently, you may experience anger or feel foolish. You forget that the Buddha attained enlightenment while in the very heart of nature. He was a mighty king, but he attained enlightenment in nature under the shade of a tree. He taught in nature, encountered others in nature, held meetings in nature. His “Dhamma hall” was in nature; his dwelling was in nature; he died in the midst of nature, not in a monk’s dwelling (*kuṭi*), a monastery hall (*vihāra*), or a hospital.

Think about this. How does the earth connect with the Buddha or with the Dhamma, both of which arose in the midst of nature? The Buddha taught in the midst of nature; the Buddhist scriptures (*tipiṭaka*) came into being in the midst of nature; we speak of the Sangha, *kuṭi*, and *vihāra* as the “ground.” In the Buddhist era, the earth came to have a great deal of meaning as the place that gave birth to everything, including the Dhamma.

We come [to this place] and sit here on the ground... Touch the earth with your hands; experience contentment; feel the [presence of the] Buddha, and



[come to] awareness, knowledge, understanding, Nibbāna. Make this as fully useful [in your lives] as you can. When you are at home it may be difficult to be centered because you are surrounded by beautiful things. The *sala* in this wat is a centering place where distinguished guests, like Mr. Krathamontri,<sup>3</sup> are sitting. Let us concentrate on the Buddha while we are sitting here.

The Mature--Those in the Autumn of Their Lives--and Stages of Aging

True maturity has reference to the heart-mind (*cit-cai*), not to the body. Maturity of heart and mind means that one has a broad knowledge. In Pāli the term is *rattaññū*. Young people are preoccupied with eating, playing, and sex, and, as they age, with home, family, and acquiring wealth. When one progresses beyond these interests, one seeks a quiet and calm heart-mind, merit (*puñṇā*) and goodness (*kusala*), concentration (*samādhi*) and meditation (*bhavana*). One may be content with being in a state of calmness and give away one’s wealth to one’s children and relatives.

Beyond that, one may spend more time at the temple (wat) and teach others. The elderly often have a fund of knowledge and are able to teach and advise others. But even beyond that, an elder may achieve a nibbānic-like state of mind. To be sure, one may regress with age far from nibbāna and simply age, and grow more distant from a calm heart and mind.

#### The Mature Should Study the Four Stages (*bhumī*) of the Mind-Heart

I would like to explore the topic of the four stages of the heart-mind. The first is *kāma*, the love of another--satisfaction, taste, joy, beauty--and applies to children and young people in particular. The level of *bhumivāca* applies to the satisfaction of the heart-mind at the level of the senses/desire (*kāma*). Beyond that is *rūpavāca*, that is to say, *rūpadhamma* that does not accrue *kamma*. For example, one donates to the monastery and even though it is something material it does not accrue *kamma*. However, as a matter of the mind (*citta*) it connects with form consciousness (*rūpañāṇa*); that is happiness that arises from concentration (*samādhi*) in the form of *āramaṇa* (disposition).

Beyond that is the formless (*arūpa*) level. In ordinary language this is beyond the distinctions of merit and goodness, honor and fame, and so on. One has no attachment to material things and wealth, but is attracted to the nonmaterial, to merit, (*puñṇā*), goodness (*kusala*), honor, and fame. Regarding the heart-mind, however, one affirms happiness that arises from *samādhi* and the *rūpa-ñāṇa* (form-knowledge). This happiness arises from things that do not have *āramaṇa* such as the atmosphere, consciousness (*viññāṇa*), nothingness, and *saññāṇa-saññāyatana*. The fourth level is the transmundane level (*lokkutara-bhumī*).

#### The Dimming of the Heart-Mind in the Mature

By way of summary—we usually like material things that are delicious, beautiful, delightful and healing that we classify as *kāmāramaṇa*. Both men and women are homeowners and want money and wealth, material things such as cattle and rice fields. However, one

tires of these materials things and moves beyond them to an appreciation of merit and good. One progresses to a higher level and teaches others how to make the heart-mind firm (*pakati*).<sup>4</sup>

What should be the proper frame of mind for the mature? Fundamentally, the mature person does not commit an act that results in suffering. Such an act is *pāpa*. Rather, one acts virtuously (*puñṇā*) in a way that produces happiness. Beyond that is *nibbāna*, a condition where one is free from the throes of evil. One overcomes suffering (*dukkha*), embodies virtue, goodness and happiness, and attains the freedom that is *nibbāna*.

#### Freedom: True Peace and Happiness

Pay close attention: from evil to good, from good to liberation, from demerit to merit; from merit to freedom, from suffering to happiness, from happiness to freedom. The foolish do not understand freedom but go 'round and 'round in circles. They like the delicious, the enjoyable, playing around, dancing and so on. They do not know what brings true happiness. The *devatā* in heaven are mired in *kāmāramaṇa*. They must move beyond to the Brahma realm, and to be truly free they much reach *nibbāna*.

The mature must understand freedom beyond conflict, happiness, sorrow, and torment. Happiness isn't simply being calm and peaceful. It is a state beyond happiness and sorrow that might be called a state of separation (*viveka*) where one is truly untroubled, not hot and bothered by anything from the outside or inside; free from passion and prejudice (*kilesa*). *Nibbāna* is right before us: from evil to good, from good to the freedom which is *nibbāna*.

#### Look and See What's What

When you think about your trip to Suan Mokh, do you think of it as difficult or as enjoyable? If you came here to have fun, play, and eat delicious food, or even to experience nature, you are acting like a child rather than a mature adult. A mature person comes here to understand what's what. The immature, however, come here only to have fun or to experience something different, unusual, or exciting.

I'm speaking in a very straightforward way that may anger you. However, if you leave here and don't see this truth, you're not realizing what you should be by being here. Rather, you're like young people who come to Suan Mokh to have fun rather than to realize a state of calm and quiet. Whoever understands this teaching attains the highest truth (Dhamma), and is called a tathāgata. Tatha means "like that;" gata means "to have attained suchness;" to become an arahanta. A tathāgata is one who transcends love, anger, hatred, fear, agitation, worry, envy, egoism, argumentativeness; a state where one sees things as they are, not as odd or strange. If one does not reach this state, one is blinded by attachment or sees this condition as unusual rather than ordinary; one is stuck in oppositions—love and hate, fear and anxiety. Because one does not see things as they are, one is attached to one side or the other. One gets excited about first this and then that. Such a person is foolish and lacks a real understanding of things as they are. One who does not see things as they are is always confused.

#### To See Things As They Are is to Attain the Highest Summit

To see things as they are is simply to acknowledge birth, old age, and suffering without affection, anger, hatred, or fear. If one achieves such an understanding one has no problem regarding the conditions of birth, old age, suffering, and death. One is foolish to consider old age, suffering, and death as something odd or out of the ordinary. To do so is because of limited understanding, to be fearful, and to suffer. If one is old, one should accept old age for what it is; the same for suffering and death. In Buddhism we recognize that everything is subject to impermanence, suffering, and voidness, that there is no self that endures, that all things are subject to the conditions of interdependent co-arising (paṭicca samuppāda). To realize this truth is to be an arahant; to be a tathāgata.

If one is an elder in the Buddhist sense of the term, one perceives the deeper meaning of the fundamental teachings of the Buddha: impermanence, suffering, not-self, emptiness, the conditioned nature

of things (idapaccayatā), tathagāta. One attains a state of non-agitation beyond the conflicting feeling of happiness or sadness.

#### Test Whether or Not You Are an Adult

Most of you here today are several decades old. You should take stock of the state of things from the time you were an infant to a young person to adulthood and now on to old age. Why did you have feelings of love, hatred, anger, fear or excitement? This is a way of taking stock of yourself; whether or not you are an adult or whether your feelings are as volatile as a child's. This is a way of checking to see whether or not you are no longer childlike, governed by conflicting feelings of love, hatred, fear, excitement and worry produced by ignorance. A child does not understand the real meaning of impermanence and not-self. A child is infatuated with this and that, with things that are to their liking--pretty, funny, pleasant, and delicious. But when one becomes an adult one is more apt to see things as they really are. An adult's feelings, as I am using the term, is not determined by extremes but by a sense of moderation as a result of seeing things contextually rather than exaggerating their singular importance. An elder, in this sense, is tranquil, calm, untroubled, and undivided, similar to the unconditioned, uncompounded state of nibbāna, the further shore--unlike this shore which is compounded, and fraught with suffering. We need to understand these deeper realities that we do not ordinarily see or feel. Unlike children fascinated by the present, young people preoccupied with sex, homeowners worried about their possessions, we should seek the enjoyment of calmness and quiet, avoiding the extremes of elation and depression. I do not hesitate to speak very directly to you. To be a mature person is to be like what I have just described. The Thai term for "adult" is sung which means high, tall, elevated as, for example, a tall mountain that cannot be submerged because of its height. A mature person is one who cannot be inundated by dukkha (suffering), passions or prejudice (kilesa).



### One's Mind is Lofty Because

#### One Knows What is Right

One is a lofty person because one knows the truth--what is what--and, therefore, one is not governed by attachment or excitement; is not angry, hateful, or fearful. One who is lofty cannot be overcome by passion or prejudice, desire (*lobha*) or anger. Suffering does not arise because one is not overcome by attachment, anger, or hatred. Suffering arises because of passion (*kilesa*), and passion arises because one does not know the truth. The foolish are bound by love and hate, profit and loss, defeat and victory, the duality of beauty and ugliness, cause and effect, by sense objects that govern the way of the world. One so conditioned sees things as good or evil, possible/not possible, meritorious/demeritorious, happiness/suffering, defeat/victory, rich/poor. This is the way things are. One is bound by cause and effect. To overcome poverty we pursue the way of non-poverty; to achieve the good we adopt the good. To hold firm to one thing whether meritorious, or good, or whatever, we become that very thing.

#### To Have or to be Something is Problematic Because of Attachment

If we are attached to something we think it is ours or that we are what we possess, then we are bound to have a heavy heart and are unable to sleep. Therefore, avoid attachment that produces a false sense of self. Rather we should follow the law of cause and effect. We should not identify ourselves with the things we use or with which we associate. Wealth, cattle, rice fields, and so on are things we eat and use but we should not identify ourselves with them or be attached to them as our possessions. Rather, they are part of nature, (just as we are part of nature). If we identify with our cattle and fields we will not be able to sleep. The same is true with money and with our children. Put money in the bank. Our children are not us and to think they are leads to suffering. To be free according to nature is not problematic but the way things are. Attachment leads to suffering.

### Attachment Leads to Suffering

Selfishness gives rise to passion and prejudice, desire, and anger. Their arising produces suffering which undermines our ability to love others or to be interested in the Dhamma or what is right. Today the world is filled with selfish people who exploit one another. Selfishness is increasing in the pursuit of beauty and wealth. It is at the heart of conflict between the rich and the poor. Wealth creates selfish capitalists; the poor become selfish laborers or selfish communists who continually fight with one another. This is a matter of *kilesa* which is at the heart of selfishness.

#### Today Selfishness is on the Increase

In the past there was less that encouraged selfishness than today. People ate more simply, lived more modestly, and demanded less when compared to today. People today want more beautiful, larger houses and automobiles worth thousands and millions of baht. They act in such foolish ways all of their lives. Such people never really become adults, but remain immature children infatuated with superficial things like desiring the finest food, clothes, the best houses and appliances.

In the past people got along fine without electric lights or ice and they were less troubled and anxious than folks today. They had no electric lights but their hearts radiated light because they were less crazy and attached to things than folks today. They didn't drink ice water but their hearts were cooler than folks today who drink ice water all the time because of *kilesa*. Think about how we use electricity. Isn't it primarily for pleasure and convenience? The same if true for all kinds of appliances that serve to increase *kilesa*. We become increasingly enslaved to delicious things and conveniences.

Today we don't know what's right or understand what's sufficient and what brings calmness. We promote the superficial and artificial rather than what's authentic and sufficient. When we get what we think we want, then we want more and more. We never reach adulthood in the sense I'm using the term. If we can reduce *kilesa*, thirst, and desire, attain the wisdom of maturity, manage our mind, thought, and

speech—that is Dhamma, what is correct and right.

Dhamma Is Duty In Regard to That Which is Right  
To do one's duty (na-thi)<sup>5</sup> will bring happiness which is tantamount to respecting the Buddha. What did Buddhas revere? It was the Dhamma. The Dhamma was their duty. At the Buddha's enlightenment he asked himself, "What should I honor in the future? I am Buddha. I should honor the Dhamma and announce, 'Every Buddha—past, future, and present—has honored the Dhamma.' To honor the Dhamma is the duty of every Buddha." Similarly, everyone has a duty--a child, a young person, a young adult, an adult, an elderly person. It is important that each of us fulfill our duty as best we can. To rise above suffering (dukkha) we much fulfill our duty to the best our ability.

Happiness Comes When We Do Our Duty Correctly  
The elderly in the audience have had to fulfill their responsibilities for a long time, and doing so has brought satisfaction and happiness. You didn't have to waste money traveling here to the South to wash dishes and sweep the house. To do your best at whatever you're doing brings satisfaction and happiness even if it's washing dishes and cleaning the house. When you think about it, happiness doesn't really depend on spending money but on fulfilling our obligations to the best of our ability. You might not believe me but doing your best produces a sense of well-being and satisfaction, even if it's just washing the dishes and cleaning the house.<sup>6</sup> True happiness doesn't cost a satang but acting according to the very best of our ability brings satisfaction and happiness. To be engrossed in spending money plays tricks on us. The more we spend the more we become absorbed in spending but that doesn't lead to happiness. Happiness doesn't require spending money but doing what is correct (thuk tong). This sort of satisfaction is true happiness.

Be aware (samādhi) when you wake up in the morning and while you are brushing your teeth. This leads to a sense of satisfaction. You'll be happy the entire time you're washing your face. Foolish people, however, don't know where their minds are and are

unable to be attentive. Their minds wander from one conflicting feeling to another so even as they are washing their face awareness, happiness, and understanding become impossible. They are deceived into thinking that playing around will bring them happiness, not realizing that performing their daily duties is satisfying. Let me give you a homey example. Wherever you go, even when you go to the bathroom, be aware (satisampajañña) of a feeling of satisfaction (pho cai). Such awareness escapes the foolish because their minds are wandering all over the place.

Let's consider eating a meal. When you enter a dining room and put rice into your bowl and then eat and swallow it, be aware to the very best of your ability of the satisfaction that you feel while you are eating, whether the morsel you put in your mouth is delicious or not; if it's fruit whether it's sour, and if we eat something sour do we feel anger, or if we eat watermelon and it's too tasteless do we get angry rather than appreciating its nourishment. Eating mindfully with concentration and awareness will produce satisfaction and happiness, and it doesn't cost a satang.

Now we come to washing cups and bowls, and cleaning the house. We should do all of these activities mindfully. It is satisfying to wash the dishes and clean the house. However, the minds of the foolish are elsewhere; hence, they lack the awareness to wash the dishes with concentration and proper understanding. When sweeping the house the mind should be focused on the broom. See the dust being swept up as a means to develop mindfulness. Sweeping the house mindfully leads to happiness. Moving a damp cloth back and forth to clean the house is analogous to developing mindfulness. The foolish can't understand this. They are deluded, thinking that everything, including happiness, can be acquired with money.

True Happiness Must Follow the Way of Dhamma  
True happiness must follow the path of the Dhamma. To follow the Dhamma to the best of our ability is to be one with the Buddha. It leads to happiness, satisfaction, and true joy, not a deceptive kind of delight. Therefore, be aware of feelings of delight based on

deception (louk luang). Searching for mere enjoyment isn't worthwhile and doesn't increase wisdom which is seeing things as they truly are wherever one goes--home, town, and so on. Wherever one is, one realizes the true nature of things and, therefore, is not attached. The mind is not compounded and confused, and because it is not obsessed with things one is happy, tranquil, and at rest. One doesn't have to spend even a satang to realize that condition. All of you should ponder this truth.

#### Proper Duty Brings Contentment [and] Is True Happiness

Farmers, gardeners, government servants, and manual laborers who perform their jobs to the best of their abilities are fulfilled, and the harder they work at their jobs the more they realize this truth. Even if one is unfortunate and must beg, one should be the best at begging. One should strive to be the best at one's occupation and be content (pho cai). One should take care of one's physical being in all things—eating, bathing, even going to the bathroom. One should encourage friends, relatives, and associates to act in the best ways they are able and to be satisfied for that very reason.

Today I would like us to consider what we can do regarding various actions ranging from something as simple as raising our hands together in an act of paying respect. I expect that none of you have heard an explanation of the act of placing the palms

of our hands together and paying respects to another as a holy or divine act. We don't need to go in search of heaven. Simply placing the palms of our hands together and raising them in respect is a heavenly act; likewise, acting in anger or in hatred (rangkiat) is a hellish act.

#### The Buddha Spoke of Heaven and Hell as Here and Now

Thinking of heaven as a post-death place in the sky and hell as a post-death place under the earth removes heaven and hell far from us, unattainable, and beyond our ability to realize. However, heaven is attainable in the here and now when we carry out our responsibilities correctly. Prior to the Buddha, people thought of heaven and hell as places; heaven above and hell below the earth. The Buddha did not object or argue about this [misunderstanding] but simply said, "If you want be in heaven, you should do good acts; doing bad acts leads to hell. Heaven and hell are in our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and heart. When we act improperly and incorrectly we find ourselves in hell; likewise we find heaven in our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and heart when we act properly." This is what the Buddha taught regarding heaven and hell. We must be very careful in regard to all of our thoughts, actions, and daily activities, for heaven or hell is realized through them in the here and now.

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<sup>1</sup> A more literal translation of "phu sung ayu" might be "elderly." However, as I interpret Buddhadasa's essay, I find "mature" a more apt translation.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, "the center of the earth" (klāng din).

<sup>3</sup> Presumably the principal sponsor or patron of the event.

<sup>4</sup> Pakati is an important term in Buddhadasa's lexicon making translation a challenge depending on the circumstance. In this instance I have chosen, "firm".

<sup>5</sup> Na-thi is most often translated as "duty," although in these passages sometimes "responsibility" sometime seems a better fit.

<sup>6</sup> Buddhadasa's reference here is reminiscent of Thich Nhat Hanh's *Miracle of Mindfulness*: "If while washing dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not 'washing the dishes to wash the dishes.' What's more, we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can't wash the dishes, the chances are we won't be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands. Thus we are sucked away into the future -and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life."

# Ma Ba Tha Monks in Transition in Myanmar: How can The Face of Peace be Further Supported?

Jill Jameson



Co-facilitation of training with Ashin U Thatdama

Soon after my arrival in Myanmar at the end of January, I was invited to go to Mandalay and offer peacebuilding training at Sasarna Parla Monastery. The invitation came from a monk from the Saffron Revolution with whom I have been co-facilitating peace building training over some years for his sangha and community in Yangon. The monastery turned out to be the headquarters of Ma Ba Tha (MBT or Association for the Protection of Race and Religion), the extremist Buddhist group which arose out of the '969' movement in 2014, and was reported on in the January - April 2016 issue of Seeds of Peace 'Anti-Muslim Buddhist Group moves toward Myanmar's Mainstream'. Our two-day workshop, 'Peacebuilding and Dhamma', had about fifty participants - a much larger group, and different from the range of activists I often work with. I felt as if I was stepping into the mouth of a tiger - but the tiger turned out to be more like a lamb!

The workshop was opened by the monk Ashin Wirathu, one of the MBT leaders who said the monks were being 'watched' over the issue of 'race and religion' by both the government and international NGOs. He said he would like his members now to have some ways to teach others, and for this workshop to be a 'foundation to help nurture their communities'. What follows is just a few glimpses of this participatory and encouraging workshop, characterised by an openness, reaching out to others and an enthusiasm to learn new ways of relating such as small group discussion between monks and lay people. I heard that usually when monks have given a Dhamma talk, for example, there is no discussion between monks and lay people. This workshop was also an opportunity for me to see my prejudices towards MBT, to learn by listening and being surprised at their openness! I was very appreciative and ably assisted with co-facilitation by the monk who had brought me to Mandalay.



Of the twenty monks present, one was head of a monastic school of 1,000 students, another was chairman of all MBT Dhamma schools, another was deputy-head of Dhamma schools and writes about religion, whilst others were teachers at Dhamma schools or members of U Wirathu's monastery. Lay people were from a wide range of voluntary organisations, such as 'funeral and social affairs', teaching at Dhamma schools, members of MBT or members of 'National Buddhist Saturday Youth Associations' (NBSYA). One woman was not involved in any organisation but said she worked for peace in Kachin State. I could see that MBT was very well organised, admirably reflected in the organisation of this workshop!

When asked about their hopes for this workshop, the participants focussed on the path to peace and what threatens it. One person said 'for real peace, we must eradicate bad feelings in each of us'. But some saw the challenge as the way the media distorts stories, or that we are all threatened by terrorists.

In the small group discussion on their vision for a harmonious Myanmar, some had a more limited focus with comments such as, 'if children do not attend Dhamma school, they will not behave politely'. Others had a wider vision such as the many who talked about the need for 'understanding each other and for trust', and for 'equality and unity in organisations as a way to help the whole country'. One person questioned 'how to work to eradicate racial and religious attacks on each other, i.e. how not to be narrow minded', whilst another said, 'we need good-hearted feelings for others, and this needs to be nurtured'.

We played lots of games such as 'knots' with underlying messages brought out by participants, such as the need for co-operation, whilst other games acknowledged our many differences...and our commonalities. An exercise in listening skills, where participants mingle, find a partner and share stories and feelings, revealed, when it came to the topic of 'what makes me afraid', fears for example of being 'hated' or of 'being beaten'.

In the small group discussions of what from their own experience promotes co-operation, as well as reflecting on ways they nurture themselves and their communities, there was a tendency to speak more generally and conceptually, often prefaced by 'should' and 'ought' and with reference to the rules and regulations. However, lived experience of promoting co-operation shone through from a NBSYA participant who said that in meeting every Saturday, and by recording their experiences, they had developed mutual respect and better understandings of each other. Another shared that with respect for each other, they find that when disputes arise they can more easily be resolved without putting the blame onto others. In an example of nurturing self and community, one person referred to the words of the Buddha, 'not having hatred but love'. Behind these encouraging insights lies the legacy of the last fifty years of fear, with an accompanying need for security which may often manifest as blindly holding to the 'rules and regulations'.

In a visual exercise of looking into some of the possible barriers to communication there was a reluctance – not surprisingly - to name some of the major barriers, such as race and religion, but the participants came to name many other factors that block or distort communication. Drawing out the root causes of conflict and what is invisible was also initially a challenge for them. The tendency was to focus on personal aspects - such things as jealousy and envy – but not hatred. Other structural sources of conflict later emerged such as colonialism, 'power-over', poverty and also fear. One person brought up the 'Muslim violence in Paris' last December.

I gave a couple examples of mapping a conflict which would have had resonances for them, in that so often it is the visible violence that is taken up by the media and so by the general population, whilst neglecting the core issues - which often have been land confiscation. Firstly, I mapped an example of communal conflict inflamed by the media in Eastern India. This had its roots, as brought out by the local participants, in land confiscation to further extend

bauxite mining. Another example –also where the core issue was land confiscation - came from peacebuilding training with mostly monks and nuns from Shan State. Land confiscation has been the core issue noted in many similar workshops in Myanmar over the last few years, and looking into the ‘needs and fears’ of different stakeholders has provided opportunities for reaching out to the ‘other,’ beginning the process of healing. They could glimpse the usefulness of this tool but with insufficient time and such a large group, a mapping exercise was not practical. Instead, we focussed in small group discussions on ways they could respond to the needs of their communities through Ma Ba Tha or other organisations, giving examples such as of the hundreds of community banks in monasteries in Shan State, which have indirectly reduced conflict.

Just as Badu Bala Sena, the extremist Buddhist organisation in Sri Lanka we met at our INEB conference late January, said they now had a change of focus towards health and education activities and wanted to develop temples as socioeconomic centres, so hopefully, MBT might transition to activities which could help in the healing across differences. Ma Ba Tha in Myanmar and Bodu Bala Sena in Sri Lanka have both been driven by their fear of conversion by Islam and their perceived need to protect Buddhism.

Group discussions on responding to community needs showed a somewhat inward turning focus –not reaching out to community needs but instead, emphasising the need to expand MBT and to spread the teaching at dharma schools ‘throughout the country.’ One person spoke of a two pronged approach, that of empowering MBT members with the need for ‘capacity building,’ and as well, ‘to expand MBT to other vulnerable areas.’ He presented a model for their society, which seemed to me to suggest a nationalistic, Buddhist, economic model for supporting and protecting their own businesses.



Participatory discussion

The purpose of this model was said to be a basis for building human resource capacity, for increasing societal education, jobs and business quality and ultimately for peace and stability and a strong nation. But when fear – which has been used over the last fifty years to control people - inhibits reaching out across differences, and where some issues are still very sensitive, the tendency is to further reinforce the ‘insider,’ that is, the Buddhist majority. This model would seem to aim to further protect race and religion. Could this be similar to what has been expressed on Union Day in Myanmar over the last fifty years, a unity through denial of difference?

In the reflections at the conclusion of our workshop, I was surprised by the openness of participants to each other and their encouraging comments. They obviously greatly enjoyed the learning through interaction, and the many exercises and games. Many commented on how much they liked the participatory methods in fostering friendships, group discussions, deepening understandings, and seeing the need for further co-operation. Some said they would be able to use some of the exercises in their communities, and as ‘everyone has so many problems,’ they could see the importance of listening to each other.

Several of the monks said they need more of this sort of training, and spoke of the importance of being able to 'speak out' and share- which has not usually been possible. They will share some of this in their communities. Others shared how they could see ways to reduce fears through team work and co-operation, sharing stories and their feelings. It was also useful some said, to look into the root causes of a conflict. Overall, many appreciated the opportunity of listening to each other with respect.

After our workshop and at a meeting at his monastery, we asked U Wirathu about possible future training needs for his sangha, and he replied that for now, they are working on peacebuilding, and that I was 'welcome to come and teach his sangha anytime'. And as if to reiterate the peace work, he said they were now 'co-operating with Muslims in Mandalay, Ayewaddy and Yangon'. Hopefully, this can be demonstrated!

With MBT's emphasis on 'protection of Buddhism,' we asked U Wirathu about ways they might be deepening understanding and practice of the Dhamma. He replied that MBT teaches the Buddha doctrine as well as teaching meditation in the Dhamma Schools, to integrate meditation with life. But their practice, he said, was different from in the West in that, in Myanmar, there was 'less effort'. Further, he said, they and the '969' movement had been 'misunderstood by Buddhists from overseas', and that the 'the world thought monks were behaving badly towards Muslims.' At the end of our workshop we had asked a couple of the key MBT people if the 'hate speech' had stopped and were told it was now less. We also heard from them that there were different ways of speaking such as to us in a polite way, yet sometimes more aggressively to others. It would seem that the National League for Democracy (NLD) election landslide last November, and perhaps gentle reminders of the Buddha's words from overseas, as well as workshops with local organisations have helped MBT to reflect on their ways, and possibly to reframe their language and actions in terms of 'peace'. How genuine is this reframing? In a way it is

similar to what we heard from the BBS leaders in Sri Lanka, who told us they were now a 'nonviolent positive energy working for all people in Sri Lanka'. Before going to Mandalay, a friend had said of our forthcoming workshop that 'they will want to convince you they are not wrong'. We all have our contradictions, and some say U Wirathu wears a mask, and that it is difficult to know where he stands. This gives rise to a lack of trust on the one hand, but on the other there seems to be an opportunity to support and encourage the face of peace.

Back in Yangon, I wanted to discuss with others working mainly with monks, how to explore possibilities for follow-up with MBT. What follows comes from various conversations with local organisations such as SEMS (Socially Engaged Monastery- based Schools), SEM (Spirit in Education Movement) and KMF (Kalyana Mitta Foundation) on the ways they are working with monks towards social harmony. Some focus more on intrafaith activities as interfaith work mostly seems to be too sensitive. This is useful, especially where even 'peace' is a topic that can be a sticking point, like religion.

Peace-leadership training and study tours to Thailand and Cambodia are being offered by SEMS, to several monks, nuns and teachers per year who are abbots and leaders. The aim is to 'make them think' using critical analysis, to open to models alternative to their past experience, and ultimately, for a 'transformation of mind.' Monks as leaders also need to be able to respond to such emerging issues as consumerism and critical water shortages in their areas. However, as the higher level monks are mostly very busy, they are less likely to be involved in their communities. On the other hand, higher level monks may be teaching up to one thousand monks and thus have an influence on future generations.

I heard from staff at SEM, which has been offering short courses in Grassroots Leadership Training for Buddhist and Christian leaders from Myanmar over the last twenty years, that there are now 500,000 monks in Myanmar, who can be seen

to fall into a range of loose groups. There could be 100,000 - 200,000 moderate monks, about 500 MBT monks, the anti MBT monks, the 'social' monks, the Saffron Revolution monks (seen as being at a lower level if they have no monastery or degree), and the 'Pariyatti' (study of Buddha teachings - Dhamma and Vinaya) monks.

SEM's recent change in strategy is due to increased religious tension, from working with interethnic and interfaith groups to now working with intrafaith Buddhist groups. This follows meeting informally with some MBT monks, listening to their concerns and of how most of these monks in MBT are committed to nonviolence, but just want to protect their community and follow the influential monks. After the November elections, some 'Pariyatti' monks, which includes U Wirathu's monastery, said they were no longer part of MBT. So now SEM works with 'Pariyatti' and moderate monks, and has skilfully brought them together to explore the weaknesses and threats in their own religion, other religions and in the government. They found weaknesses within their own religion and how their approach (through the 'hate' songs) might have contributed to hatred in others. Five of these monks from this SEM workshop, each teaching one to two thousand monks, went to our recent INEB meeting in Sri Lanka and were shocked by the interethnic violence there. So monks are seeing the need for change themselves and the need to use Dhamma teachings of the Buddha, as well as becoming aware of the need for dialogue and debate and the need to integrate the teachings with life. SEM would like the monks to integrate peace in their work rather than to run peace forums, as these tend to isolate others, they have found.

KMF focus their work around peace, the environment and youth in a mosaic of training and workshops, constantly responding to the ever changing needs and issues. At this time of transition in Myanmar, KMF have developed an early warning system at community level, giving training in peace journalism to monitor communities. In focusing on

the grass roots and trust building, they work with influential monks and nuns, teachers via peace education, and youth who are potential leaders. This approach is also to counter the perception that the traditional classroom culture creates violence through lack of dialogue and questions.

Some KMF staff and interns had recently attended peacebuilding training, but due to lack of trust across differences – particularly religion - they feel a need at this time to create more space for monks and communities to learn from each other and to use different approaches, such as 'edu-tainment' skits to raise awareness, and innovative campaigns such as the 'pan sagar' or flower speech/words bracelet. The staff members I was talking with felt it was important for people from outside of Myanmar to know that there are not only religious tensions, but a wide range of other issues that they and many organisations are working on such as citizenship and identity issues, jade trading, land confiscation and corruption. They felt the distortion often occurs through the media, such as when floods in central Myanmar last year were reported by the BBC, and instead focussed on 'Rohingya people being kicked out from camps'. This is not just a Muslim issue, she said, it is 'global and encompasses citizenship, and as Aung Sang Suu Kyi says, is due to our fears'.

In their intrafaith sangha work amongst several groups of monks, nuns and monks' associations, they develop awareness from Buddhist perspectives and undertake leadership training which includes critical thinking, environmental issues and 'do no harm'. They have also met with senior monks seeking to have peace education included in the Dhamma School curriculum, and are involved with interfaith work across a range of organisations. They work with limited funds and are concerned about the many NGOs coming to Myanmar with largesse and often short-term approaches, leading to fears that Myanmar could become another 'Cambodia'!

Just as Myanmar in early 2016 is in transition with the NLD becoming mainstream, so is MBT. I

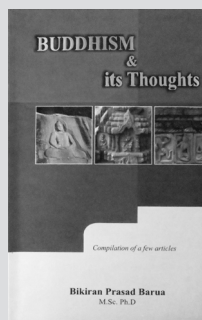


was encouraged by the openness and the insights of the MBT participants in our workshop, and they appreciated the participatory approach to learning, especially from each other. U Wirathu told us that they want to be peacebuilders, nurture their communities and that they are co-operating with Muslims. However, the strengthening and expansion of Ma Ba Tha and building a strong nationalistic, Buddhist economic model for society, could this be in the service of further protecting race and religion? Or are there ways to further encourage the face of

peace? As peace and religion are still sensitive so it would seem that the intrafaith work of local organisations like SEMS, SEM and KMF are especially significant at this time. From their research targeting senior monks for exposure visits, further training and intrafaith group discussions all have the potential to influence large numbers of monks and others in the future, so as to be able to better respond to the many issues and perhaps to be a counter to the increasingly well-organised MBT.

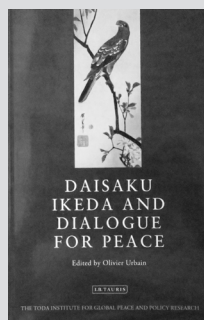
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## Recommended Reading



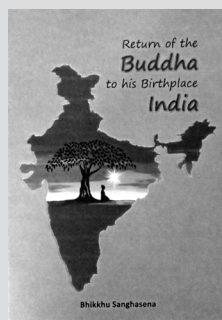
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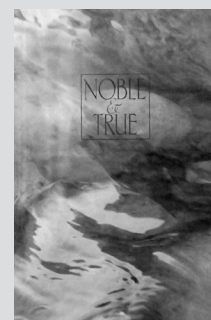
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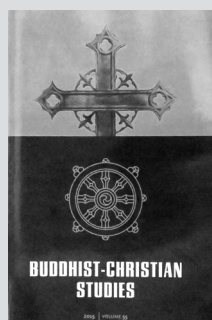
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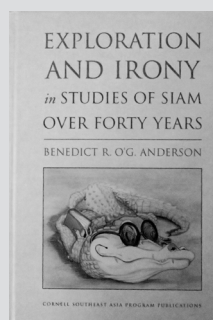
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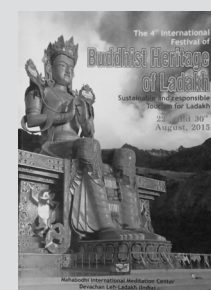
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## The Journey of the Buddhists of South India:

### *‘From Buddhist towards untouchability to Hindu untouchables to Buddhist’*

N. Gauthama Prabhu

#### Introduction

**B**uddhism was introduced to South India during the period of Mauryan emperor Asoka (c. 273 - 236 BCE). The peripheries of South Indian states were found to have Asoka's rock edicts referring to the Buddha Dhamma.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt the first royal patronage of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu was Asoka the Great. But it was his son Mahinda who was responsible for the introduction of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu. The discovery of large number of Buddhist vestiges at various places in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry states and the anthropological studies have indicated the wide prevalence of Buddhism in this region. Emperor Asoka built stupas at Kanchi (Kancipuram) in the third century BCE. As part of Asoka's mission, a party of Bhikkhus went to Sri Lanka in 250 BCE under the leadership of Arhat Mahinda (Mahendra), after the third great Buddhist conference under Moggaliputta Tissa Thera held in Asoka's presence at Pataliputra (Patna). Mahendra Thera appears to have travelled by sea and to have passed through Kavirapattiman where, during his temporary stay, he raised seven Buddhist viharas which the later Tamil Sangam works, such as Silappadikaram and Manimekalai (2nd century A.D.), attribute to Indra. Indra is only a contraction of Mahendra.<sup>2</sup> Mahendra was greatly helped in spreading Buddhism in South India by Arittaha of Sri Lanka, the uncle-in-law of King Devanampiya Tissa. South

India continued to be the centre of Pali Buddhism as late as the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The Buddhist monks formed a galaxy of stars that illumined the Buddhist firmament in South India for nearly 1,300 years. A golden age of Buddhism, when the Triratna caught South India in its enchanting and soothing grasp, and when monks and nuns (bhikkhus and bhikkhunis) like Manimekalai, and upasakas and upasikas who were lay followers of the enchanting Buddhist faith, travelled throughout the land in utter renunciation and humanitarian zeal to render help.

The contributions of early Buddhist kings and scholars from South India

As mentioned earlier, Emperor Asoka played a significant role in spreading the Buddha Dhamma in South India. However, there were other rulers and dynasty who contributed to the growth of Buddhism, especially in South India. The Kalabhra Dynasty flourished with an upsurge of Buddhism, though less is known about them. However, the only Kalabhra king who is known with a specific name is Accuta Vikranta. He is believed to have ruled towards the close of fifth century AD and the beginning of sixth century AD. It is significant that during the Kalabhra reign, which lasted nearly 300 years, Buddhism was at its best in and around Kanchi, ancient Tondaimandalam. And there flourished a number of Buddhist saints and scholars, such as

Nagaguttanar, author of Kundalakesi, (4th century), Buddhadatta, the Pali commentator (5th Century), Dignaga, the great logician (5th century), Dhammapala, another Pali commentator (6th century), and Bodhidharma, the great Dhyana teacher (6th century). The association of Buddhaghosha, the greatest Pali scholar and commentator, who was a contemporary of Buddhadatta, further confirms the ascendancy of Buddhism during the Kalabhra interregnum in the Tamil land.<sup>3</sup>

Buddhism disappeared from this city as of an unknown date, but was revived as of the 9th century.<sup>4</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Chudamani vihara was built by the Javanese king Sri Vijaya Soolamanivarman with the patronage of Raja Raja Chola I. The “Animangalam Copperplate” of Kulothungachola notes that “Kasiba Thera” (Buddhist monk) renovated the Buddhist temple in the 6<sup>th</sup> century with the help of Buddhist monks of “Naga Nadu”. This “nagar annam vihar” later came to be known as “Nagananavihar”. Buddhism flourished until the 15<sup>th</sup> century and buildings of the vihara survived until 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Destruction of Buddhist shrines and institutionalising untouchability

The plight of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu changed after the 7<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of Vaishnavism and Shaivism which tried to establish the Hindu Brahminical influence. The Buddhist and Jain were under attack by rulers who were in favor of the Brahminical belief systems. The Chinese scholar monk Xuan Zang (Hsuan Tsang) visited Kanchipuram, which is one of the oldest cities in South India, and was a city of learning for Tamil, Sanskrit, and Pali. He further recorded that Tamil Buddhist monks flee to Sri Lanka due to the fear of persecution from the rulers.<sup>5</sup> Pandit Hisselle Dharmaratana Maha Thera writes, “Although Buddhism declined in the Tamil country from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards it was by no means eradicated. For several centuries Buddhism still survived though in a state of decline. The continuation of the Mahavamsa states that in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century King Parakramabahu of Dambadeniya brought down Buddhist monks and scrip-

tures from the Chola country in Tamil Nadu to revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka. During this time there was a great deal of cultural exchange between South India and Sri Lanka”. The chief of the monks who was brought from South India was Ven. Dhammakitti. He wrote the continuation of the Mahavamsa from the time of king Srimevan up to his time.

The economic sustenance of Buddhist monasteries and temples largely depended on people’s contribution through donations. Donations were most often made by private persons such as wealthy merchants and female relatives of the royal family, but there were periods when the state also gave its support and protection. In the case of Buddhism, this support was particularly important because of its high level of organization and the reliance of monks on donations from the laity. State patronage of Buddhism took the form of massive propertied foundations.<sup>6</sup> The gradual expansion of caste regulations shifted political and economic power to localities, reversing a trend toward centralization. The caste system began to dominate secular life as a code for social and economic transactions. Brahmins developed a new relationship with the state that obliged political officials to enforce the caste regulations.<sup>7</sup> As the system grew, states gradually lost control of land revenue. Indian society developed in a manner opposite to that of China or Rome, which were dominated by government officials. Instead, Brahmins became hereditary authorities in a series of weak, ephemeral states. Many historians have shown that large sections of original inhabitants (untouchables for instance) were alienated from their own lands. Manickam, a renowned historian, contends that the Aryanisation (Hinduisation) process reached its peak during the period of Imperial Cholas under state patronage and this led to a form of slavery, mainly associated with land. The distribution of land as gifts to Brahmins by the kings during the Pallava and Chola periods brought about changes in land relations. Brahmins, who were until then mostly advisers and *purohits* (family/royal priests) to the king, became landowners in several places.<sup>8</sup> Brahmins came to regulate more and more aspects

of public life, and collected fees for the performance of rituals. Caste law, administered by Brahmins, was built up to control all local economic production and much of its distribution, transforming the property system. Hinduism's displacement of Buddhism came by this indirect route. Orthodox Brahmins could now dictate the flow of resources upon which institutional Buddhism depended upon. Buddhism was also weakened by rival Hindu temples. These undercut Buddhist patronage followed with violent destruction of Buddhist shrines and killings of Buddhist monks. The Buddhist monasteries of Sringeri were taken away by the Brahmins under the supremacy of Adi Shankaracharya.<sup>9</sup> Madhava Acharya, in his "Sankara-digvijayam" of the fourteenth century A.D., records that Suddhanvan "issued orders to put to death all the Buddhists from Ramesvaram to the Himalayas".<sup>10</sup> Aalavaipathikam records that around 640 A.D., Sambanda Murti, a Brahmin, won over the Pandya royal family and caused the massacre of 8,000 Buddhist monks in Madurai; Buddhist nuns were reportedly made into devadasis (Hindu temple prostitutes) and relocated in the Hindu temple precincts. Perhaps the most horrible effect of the fall of Buddhism in ancient India, which is haunting us even today, is the start of devadasi system. The system of votive offering of girls, especially Buddhists, to the deities in Hindu temples is a system found in all parts of India, but was more prevalent in South India.<sup>11</sup>

The persecution and eventual exodus of Buddhists from Tamil Nadu to Kerala in the seventh century was occasioned by the fall of Buddhist Kalabhras at the hands of Pandyas. The Buddhists came to Kerala and established their temples and monasteries in different parts of the country. The following Hindu temples were once Buddhist shrines: the Vadakkunnathan temple of Trichur, the Kurumba Bhagavathi temple of Cranganore, and the Durga temple at Paruvasseri near Trichur. A large number of Buddha-images have been discovered in the coastal districts of Alleppey and Quilon; the most important Buddha-image is the famous Karumati Kuttan near Ambalappuzha.<sup>12</sup>

Tirupathi Balaji was once a Buddhist shrine which was converted for Brahmanical use. The statue itself is a Buddhist statue resembling the Padmapani.<sup>13</sup> Brahmanisation process effected Buddhism immensely through official conversion of Buddhist temples to Hindu temples, and replacement of Hindu gods over ancient Buddhist sites. As a consequence, the ancient philosophers of Buddhism were demonized and threatened by Hindu rulers for torture and death. The upholders of Brahmanism reformatted their religious activities by incorporating the tradition of Buddhists, and allowed to retain the outward forms of their traditions whilst claiming the traditions were in honor of Hindu god, with an intention that traditions exist but the reason behind them left forgotten. This process of Hinduisation did not end with the destruction of Buddhism but destroying the historical facts and weakened the social – economical – political powers of the Buddhists. This is one of the main reasons behind poverty in South India which is still continuing. As a result, many Buddhists were ostracised as 'untouchables', migrated as cheap labourers to different countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Fiji, and Mauritius with the help of British officers.<sup>14</sup>

#### Revival of Buddhism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

The revival of Buddhism began in India in 1891, when the Sri Lankan Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala founded Maha Bodhi Society. Its activities expanded to involve the promotion of Buddhism in India. Col. Henry Steel Olcott's Theosophical society in Chennai was initially very complimentary towards the revival of Buddhism in South India. In one of his inaugural address in 1898 in Madras is as follows: "Buddhism will make every man, woman and child among you free of all the oppression of caste; free to look your fellowmen bravely in the face; free to rise to any position within the reach of your talents, your intelligence and your perseverance; free to meet men, whether Asiatics, Europeans or Americans on terms of friendly equality and competition.....; free to follow out the religions path traced to the lord Buddha without



any priest having the right to block your way; *free to become teachers and models of character to mankind*.<sup>15</sup> However, in South India it was Pandit Iyothethasar who spearheaded the Buddhist revival movement with the support of Col. Henry Steel Olcott. Iyothethasar addressed the issue of 'Pariah' (Untouchable caste) subordination in a more direct manner. He also shared the belief that 'pariahs' were Buddhists, and that the Aryan invaders systematically destroyed the religious beliefs of the pariahs and reduced them to a degraded status. Iyothethasar forays into the origins of 'untouchable' communities convinced him that words such as 'Pariah' or Paraiyan were deliberately used from a rhetorical and political standpoint. It was asserted that such terms had been in use for a fairly long period, ostensibly to encourage a sense of moral debasement among the 'untouchable' communities. They were also deliberately employed with an intention to keep the former Buddhists ignorant of their own past.<sup>16</sup> Pandit Iyothethasar started his campaign to retain the Buddhist identity among the untouchables and petitioned the British Indian government regarding basic human rights. In fact, he challenged the practice of including the untouchable population under the Hindu category.

The changing socio-economic status of the untouchables during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

Many untouchables during the 18<sup>th</sup> century joined the British army. The British Indian army had a separate regiment known as the Paraiyah regiment which served the British for a quite a long period. In fact it is this army that helped the British to enter and conquer South India. The primary reason behind them joining the British army was with an expectation that the British army would help the pariahs release from the oppression of caste system. For almost 150 years the untouchables formed the backbone of the British Indian army.<sup>17</sup>

But in 1890, the British government placed a ban on recruitment of untouchables in the Indian army. The change in the British policy was due to the Hindu army entering into British army, and it

became difficult for British army to have mixed race regiments. So for their convenience sake, they banned the recruitment of untouchables. Most of the untouchables who served the British army did not have any other source of income other than relying on the British government jobs which included military services, civil services and police services. One might observe even now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most of the untouchable community in rural areas psychologically prefer these three sectors as the most viable and secure jobs. Therefore, this ban of recruitment was a stunning blow for the untouchables in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which impoverished their socio-economic status. So the only scope left for them was to work as daily wage workers and as agriculture farmers. Further, in South India, a communal system called 'Mirasdari' prevented the untouchables from owning lands. According to the Mirasdari system, the untouchable community shall not own or purchase lands.<sup>18</sup> The untouchables who already lost their Buddhist shrines and temple properties to Brahmins had no other option other than becoming bonded laborers and cheap laborers. This period of history also witnessed many untouchables migrating to different countries such as to Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, etc. Ethnic Indians today account for 2% (950,000) of Burma's population and are largely concentrated in two major cities (Yangon and Mandalay). During World War II, almost half of Rangoon's (Yangon) population was Indian, and about 16% of the population of Burma was ethnically Indian. During this period, with the overseas income, the untouchables tried to purchase their own lands, and were again prevented by the Hindus through the Miraswari system. It was due to the efforts of Iyothethasar's constant demands for retaining temple lands and the then Collector Lord Tremenheere that a new act was passed. Based upon the report of Lord Tremenheere the Act came to be known as the Depressed Class Land Act, 1892. The Act gave rights to the untouchable communities to own lands and protected their land rights with the help of the British government.

### Hindu revivalism during 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> century

The Hindu renaissance of the late 19th century, especially the establishment of Brahmo Samaj of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Arya Samaj of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Neo Vedanta of Vivekananda were indicators of the diminishing population of the Hindus in India. During the British 1881 census, the Indian national movement leaders tried to persuade the British government especially for the inclusion of the untouchable population under the Hindu category, which was strongly opposed by the Buddhist leaders such as Iyothethasar, Periyasamy pulavar etc. However, after the death of Iyothethasar in the year 1914, and the Hinduisation of Theosophical society which was once instrumental in reviving Buddhism, the geopolitics of South India changed. As mentioned earlier, that the system of devadasi was introduced by the Hindus against the Buddhist women. The extracts from the Arthashastra of Chankya shows how providing sexual entertainment to the public using prostitutes was an activity strictly controlled by the State and also carried out in the State owned establishments.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately the Theosophical society which was spearheading the revival of Buddhist movement in South India became the center for glorifying and reviving the devadasi system due to the process of Hinduisation. Interestingly, the devadasi revivalists, usually the Brahmins, wanted to preserve the traditional form, and a new form was given which is now popularly known as 'Bharatanatiyam'. The devadasi system includes dance with prostitution. Sadly, even the girl child of devadasi end up in the same profession. The Theosophical society tried to revive the devadasi system by alienating dance from the devadasi system. Under the support of Annie Beasant of Theosophical society, Rukmini Arundale established Kalakshtra, which teaches Bharatanatiyam.<sup>20</sup> The anti-devadasi campaigners have reported that there were up to 23,000 devadasi in Karnataka state and up to 17,000 in Andhra Pradesh in 2007.<sup>21</sup> On 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1936 at Mumbai, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar asked to stop devadasi practice in the conference of devadasis. However, it is still alive even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Meanwhile, the Hindu scholars and academicians were very much biased towards the contribution of ancient Buddhists. According to Neelakanda Sastri the period of Buddhist prominence was considered as dark period, and the Buddhist kings were considered as evil rulers. The State-sponsored projects for Hinduisation of the Indian society have been in full swing ever since the independence of India from the British which is nothing but transition of power from the British to Brahmins. Hindu fundamentalist organizations have entered in every sphere of life in India imposing a direct challenge advocating the caste system.

### Conclusion:

Dr. Ambedkar was painfully aware of the entanglement of religion and society due to Hinduism and caste system; therefore, he intended to reconstruct Buddhism not only as a religion for the untouchables but as a humanist and social religion, which combined scientific understanding with universal truth. His Buddhism projected a religion for a modern, civic society. But Dr. Ambedkar was not the first to cast Buddhism for Dalits. Every century witnessed the resistance to accept Hinduisim and its caste system. Many Buddhist scholars and leaders challenged this graded inequality. However, the historic conversion of 800,000 untouchables to Buddhism by Dr. Ambedkar has a larger significance in the Indian society. As a result thousands of Buddhist organizations and movements have sprouted. Many researchers and academicians have emerged to address the issues related to caste system and the status of Buddhists. Thousands and thousands have been embracing Buddhism in South India. One of the major parts of modern Buddhist movement in India is the attempt to prevent Hinduisation of Buddhism. According to Dr. Ambedkar, the origin of untouchability in India was basically a distinction between tribesmen and alien tribes who broke away and subsequently came to be treated as Untouchables. In addition to this, he cites two more reasons for the origin of Untouchability: (i) hatred towards the Buddhists by Brahmins; (ii) the continuation of

beef-eating.

The Buddhists were finally absorbed into the caste system, thus becoming the fifth category of the Hindu varna system, mainly as 'Untouchables'. With this the Buddhist presence was completely obliterated from the land of its birth. Dr. Ambedkar writes in his book, *The Untouchables*, that the ancestors of today's Dalits were Buddhists who were reduced to the lowly status of 'untouchables' for not having accepted the supremacy of the Brahmins. They were kept apart from other people and were forced to live in ghettos of their own.

According to current facts and figures available from the National Human Rights Commission, every day there are three women from the untouchable community who are raped, two are murdered and two houses are burnt in India. The conversion towards Buddhism certainly gives major positive and psychological changes among the untouchables. After the untouchables embrace

Buddhism they have to face different kinds of challenges: (i) establish pan-Indian Buddhist identity with a uniform cultural practice overcoming all socio - cultural – linguistics barricades, (ii) fight against social injustice especially rights related to land, education, livelihood, manual scavenging, and access for public amenities, (iii) spreading the Buddha Dhamma all over India, (iv) fight against the caste hegemony on the socio-economic-political fronts, (v) bringing social democracy to the fullest at the grassroots. The untouchables who embraced Buddhism due to Dr. Ambedkar's historic conversion have shown substantial improvement in their socio-economic status. But still there are millions of untouchables in India who have not even reached the thresholds of social and economic development, and still continue to suffer due to the caste system.

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<sup>1</sup> Rock-Edict No. 3, Asoka says that his Dharma Vijaya prevailed in the border kingdoms of the Colas, Pandiyans and at Tambapanni.

<sup>2</sup> The History of Buddhism in Tamil Kingdoms of South India by T.N.Ramachandran (Former Joint Director-General, Department of Archaeology, Government of India)

<sup>3</sup> Arunachalam, M. (1979). *The Kalabhras in the Pandiya Country and Their Impact on the Life and Letters There* (Original from the University of California, Digitized Jul 30, 2008 ed.). University of Madras. p. 168

<sup>4</sup> H.P. Ray, *The Winds of Change*, Delhi 1994, p. 142

<sup>5</sup> *Buddhist Heritage of Tamil Nadu and its links with Lanka* by Dr. Nirmala Chandrahasan

<sup>6</sup> Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Harvard University Press, 2000, pages 180, 182

<sup>7</sup> Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Harvard University Press, 2000, page 209

<sup>8</sup> *Slavery in the Tamil Country: A Historical Overview*, historian S. Manickam

<sup>9</sup> Sir Charles Eliot in his book *Hinduism and Buddhism* (1921 Ed. Page 211)

<sup>10</sup> Jaini, P.S., Narain A.K., ed., 1980. *The Disappearance of Buddhism and the Survival of Jainism: A Study in Contrast*. Studies in History of Buddhism. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Company:181-91

<sup>11</sup> Devadasi were degraded Buddhist nuns by Dr. K. Jamanadas

<sup>12</sup> *Land and People of Indian States & Union Territories* – In 36 volumes edited by S C Bhatt & Gopal K Bhargava

<sup>13</sup> Jamanadas. K Tirupati Balaji was a Buddhist Shrine.

<sup>14</sup> Raj Sekar Basu (2011) *Namdanar's Children: The Paraiyans' tryst with destiny*, Tamil Nadu 1850 – 1956. Sage Publication

<sup>15</sup> *Rebuilding Buddhism: The Theravada Movement in the Twentieth Century Nepal* by Sarah Le Vine, David N Gellner

<sup>16</sup> *Nandanar's children: The Paraiyans' tryst with destiny*, Tamil Nadu 1850 – 1956

<sup>17</sup> Ambedkar B.R. *The Untouchables and the Pax Britannica*

<sup>18</sup> Kumar, Dharma: *Land and Caste in South India*

<sup>19</sup> Chanakya's well regulated system of prostitution in ancient India By Sanjeev Sabhlok

<sup>20</sup> Jogan Shankar(1990) : *Devadasi Cult – A Sociological Analysis*. Ashish Publishing House.

<sup>21</sup> Figures provided respectively by Velugu, a programme of the State Government of Andhra Pradesh, and the Women's Development Corporation of the State Government of Karnataka (via Sravanti and KIDS).

# The Noble Task for the Theravada Buddhist Community: To Establish Its Bhikkhuni Lineage

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Ven. Bhikkhuni Wu Yin

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## Abstract

It is a holy and noble task for the Theravada Buddhist community to establish its Bhikkhuni lineage, regardless it is for the entirety of the Vinaya teaching, the completion of the Sangha, the spread of Buddha-dharma, or even for the benefit.

Causes and conditions are always carefully examined when the Buddha lays down the precepts, whether it is their observations, transgressions, or exceptions. There are workable ways by which the Theravada Buddhist community (especially Sri Lanka) can establish its Bhikkhuni lineage. Only when all the seven groups of disciples are present is a Sangha complete. When qualified women are accepted into the Sangha, obtaining complete education on precepts, doctrine, and meditation, it surely will bring a positive effect on the transmission of the Buddha-dharma. It is also an act which expresses the genuine concern in Buddhism for the whole world.

The Theravada Buddhist community should give Bhikkhuni ordination

Buddha originally accepts seven groups of disciples in the Sangha. They include bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, siksamanas, samaneras, samanerika, upasakas, and upasikas. They together form a complete Sangha. Bhikkhuni ordination is recorded in the Canon,

beginning from the Buddha's time to the modern day Taiwan, China, Korea, Vietnam, and other countries. The holy lineage is kept alive in these countries. In the Chinese Buddhist community, the Bhikkhuni lineage was established long ago, started from 433 AD. The lineage has been passed on for over fifteen hundred years. The Theravada Buddhist community till now still lacks of a bhikkhuni lineage. To a certain degree, it is a great regret to the development of the Buddhist community.

Things to be considered for Theravada Nuns regarding Bhikkhuni ordination

About setting up precepts or even their observation, the Buddha has always emphasized the concept of conditions, instead of black and white prohibition or exemption. If Buddha appears in the 21st century, with his great compassion and wisdom, witnessing the real situations of the world, he would definitely support the Theravada nuns to get bhikkhuni ordination to help the spread of the dharma.

To establish the bhikkhuni lineage is simply to restore the tradition of the Sangha, not opening a brand new branch. Judging from the Vinaya Canon of all the schools, it is clearly indicated that a complete Sangha contains seven groups of disciples. Buddha has allowed the bhikkhus to give bhikkhuni



ordination for the nuns. It is unquestionably recorded in the Vinaya of various schools. Theravada nuns' bhikkhuni ordination is significant for the spread of the dharma, from the global viewpoint. Nowadays, the membership of both the monastics and laypeople in the Theravada Buddhist community, including their nationalities, cultures, social status, are much different than that of the old days of Sri Lanka while it was under the governance of the church-state dual system within a much more conservative society. The Theravada nuns' role in the spread of the Dharma as well as the well-being of the entire Sangha gets more and more importance by the days. This is something that the Theravada bhikkhus should not ignore.

While Chinese Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism move outside their native countries, being circulated in many corners of the world, Theravada Buddhism is widespread in Europe and North America. Buddhism has become literally a world religion. Regardless of whether the members are from the Theravada or Chinese tradition, together they need to make Buddhism one of the important standards for universally recognized cultural value, spirituality and ethics for humanity. Let those male and female, with pure faith, qualified to be ordained, have the opportunity to join the Sangha, becoming bhikkhus or bhikkhunis, and fulfill their pursuit of liberation and serve the beings. This is Buddha's compassion toward the world; furthermore, it is the responsibility of all Buddhist disciples.

The meaning of nuns getting bhikkhuni ordination

According to the Vinaya, when Buddha accepted women into the Sangha, he had acknowledged that a woman, after going forth and obtaining bhikkhuni ordination, was capable of reaching arhatship. In both Buddhist doctrine and meditative practice, it is equal between men and women in terms of their progress in ethics and spirituality. Having the status of a bhikkhu or a bhikkhuni provides both men and women, in the areas of observing precepts,

teaching Dharma to all beings, and the leadership in the Sangha, a higher level of training in the spiritual life in the Sangha. It helps cultivate within them the ability to practice as well as to teach the Dharma correctly. To help the members to assume the central role in leadership in the Sangha with the growth of Dharma is the best way to actualize the ideal of guiding all sentient beings with the Dharma.

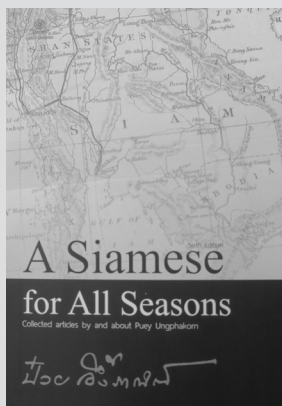
Establishing bhikkhuni lineage in the Sangha can not only correct the internal gender stereotype within the Buddhist community, which often leads to negative reinforcement, but also clarify the misunderstanding of gender discrimination against women in Buddhism by the general public in society. Moreover, it encourages women directly engaging in the religious practice, actually obtaining the essential education and training in Buddhism. It provides opportunities for personal development and devotion to upholding the triple gem.

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Bhiksuni Wu-Yin, Joined the Sangha in 1957, received the bhikkhuni ordination in 1959.

She is now the Abbess of Luminary Buddhist International Society, President of the Buddhist Institute of Hsiang Kuang Temple.



# A Siamese for All Seasons

*Zia Collinsfree*

Collected articles by and about Puey Ungphakorn  
6<sup>th</sup> edition, Komol Keemthong Foundation Press

Since this year is the 100th anniversary of Puey's birth and also the year that UNESCO is celebrating him as a globally-significant person, there has already been a lot of Thai-language promotion of him in some Thai-language media, books and seminars. As for English-language recognition, there has been Puey Ungphakorn: An Honest Siamese in A Class of His Own, a translation of Sulak Sivaraksa's book from the original Thai. That publication has received a few reviews in *Seeds of Peace*. To add to this, *A Siamese for All Seasons* has also been published as a sixth edition. It contains Puey's economics papers, transcripts of seminars on democracy and the student movement, anecdotes and a translation of Puey's war stories of his time in the Free Thai movement, published in Thai as *Taharn Chuakrao* (The Temporary Soldier).

An exceptionally bright member of the first generation of Thammasat University students, Puey was awarded a government scholarship to study Economics at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). When World War II broke out in Asia and the Siamese allied itself with the Japanese occupiers against the Allied Forces, groups of Siamese students in Britain and America defied orders to return home, instead organizing themselves as the Free Thai (Seri Thai) movement coordinating with Pridi Panomyong's Siam-based resistance movement to liberate the country. While in the USA, the Free Thai movement was allowed to form its own independent corps, the UK-based movement, while recognized by the British government, was only permitted to operate under British military command and was heavily restricted due to Siam's status as an enemy nation. As a result, members of Free Thai's military wing, many of whom were royals or high-ranking diplomats, served in the lowly Pioneer Corps (motto: *Labor Omnia Vincit*; the same as that of Puey's old school, Assumption College), doing menial tasks such as

cleaning toilets. They did this without any fuss, while also training in communications and undercover operations. Puey recalls his pledge not to kill any Siamese even though he was harmed and his dilemma, in case of capture, of whether to swallow his cyanide tablet (and fail to protect a vital written communication to Pridi carried on his person) or be taken alive and possibly tortured. While neither was particularly desirable, he decided to risk doing the latter. When he was mistakenly parachuted along with his comrades far from their intended location, he was captured by local villagers and detained. Due to their discovery of his mission and the novelty of his being a parachutist, he became something of a local celebrity. Despite a pro-Japanese government, the people were delighted with the news that Japan was losing the war.

After completing his studies, Puey returned to Siam to work off his scholarship despite exemption due to his Free Thai service. In his career, his solid courageous integrity shone through. Several examples are given of events occurring under the successive postwar military dictatorships. The future Field Marshal Sarit Tanarat, then a general in Field Marshal Pibulsongkram's government, tried to buy up a commercial bank guilty of illegal transactions. He asked Puey, as then-Deputy Governor of the Bank of Thailand, to persuade the Cabinet to reprimand the bank rather than fining it as was usual practice. Puey disregarded Sarit's request and followed the correct procedure, only to be sacked by the Cabinet. He also crossed the godfather-like police chief, Pao Siyanon, who had arranged with the OSS (later CIA) to appoint a mediocre American firm to replace the better-quality British Thomas de la Rue in printing Thai banknotes. Puey, charged with assessment of the case, concluded that the American company's product was inferior and the manager was of bad repute. Both of these instances angered Pibul, Pao and Sarit, but they needed his expertise.

Later, when Sarit took power, he offered Puey a ministerial post and even a new house to replace his 'small, uncomfortable wooden' one. Puey politely but firmly refused both, staying true to his wartime pledge to never serve in a ministerial post as that would mean that his service in the Free Thai movement would have been for personal gain. He became Governor of the Bank of Thailand instead. During his tenure, a tin smuggling racket run by Sarit (unknown to Puey), known to the International Tin Council, was damaging Siam's reputation. Sarit, angry at ITC pressure, ordered Puey to walk out of the ITC meeting in protest at the 'bullying' of Siam. Rather than obey, Puey sent a telegram disagreeing with the dictator, as well as wise advice. Sarit relented. Puey cleverly and legally solved the problem without Siam losing face.

The book also includes in-depth analysis and discussion between Puey and American academics of the events from 1973 to October 1976 at seminars held at Georgetown University and the US Committee on International Relations. Amongst other issues, Puey relates his concerns about the student movement being feted and groomed by the elite after 1973, eventually leading them astray and ending in the backlash of 1976. He also very politely pointed out America's role in the crisis.

Action to Steps to International Monetary Order, a paper written in memory of Puey's late colleague

Khunying Suparp Yossunthorn (another Free Thai member), is very economics-heavy and non-Max Keiser types may struggle. In my view, it would be better to have a brief summary, with references to the full documents for anyone who could understand them.

A morally upright person working in a corrupt system can, over the years, become discouraged and cynical, but not Puey. He maintained to the end his high-minded ideals on public welfare and democracy, equality and freedom, summarizing them in the famous *Calendar of Hopes from the Womb to the Crematorium*, which was published as part of a series of articles in the *Bangkok Post*. Sadly, while some reforms have been implemented since his time, notably free universal health coverage and social insurance, large problems such as land hoarding by the rich, serial water shortages for agriculture (but not golf courses) and giant agribusiness conglomerates remain.

Puey, like anyone struggling for justice, was very upset at times and would be sad to see the state of today's world, when evil always seems so much more powerful than good. However, he believed that 'Even if you have no hope of success you should keep on doing what you believe in for the sake of your freedom of doing so. For me, I shall continue to write and speak out (the truth).'



## Buddhist teacher and feminist Rita Gross dies following stroke

*Philip Cunningham  
Bangkok Post, 15 Dec 2015*

Rita Gross, a prominent scholar on Buddhism and gender, author of *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, and a senior Buddhist teacher, died on Wednesday, November 11, after suffering a stroke in late October.

Buddhist teacher Judith Simmer-Brown wrote on the Shambhala Network:

Rita Gross died peacefully today at her home in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Following the instructions of her teacher, Ven. Khandro Rinpoche, her body has been washed and perfumed with saffron in the traditional Tibetan manner and her Wisconsin friends will sit with the corpse for the specified three days before it is cremated. Rita asked that her ashes be sprinkled into the Lotus Pond at Mindrolling Jetsun Khandro, Rinpoche's retreat center in central Virginia.

After Gross's stroke, Barbara Ryan, head of practice and study at Mindrolling Lotus Garden in Virginia, where Gross was a teacher, told *Lion's Roar*, "Our sangha is very sad about what has happened. Khandro Rinpoche has asked people

to accumulate the vajrasattva mantra. We've been doing prayers since we heard."

While in India this spring, Gross suffered a milder stroke which affected her ability to walk, but by October, she had recovered after intensive physical therapy.

Gross was born in 1943 and took refuge in 1977 with Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. She is known internationally for her scholarly work on Buddhism and gender. Her most recent book is *A Garland of Feminist Reflections: Forty Years of Religious Exploration*. For many years she was a professor of comparative studies in religion at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. In 2005, she was made a *lopön* (senior teacher) by Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche, and she taught at Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche's Lotus Garden Center, located in the United States.

Gross has contributed to both the Shambhala Sun and *Buddhadharma*. Her articles have included *Making our Way: On Women and Buddhism*, *How American Women Are Changing Buddhism*, and an upcoming review in the Winter 2015 issue of *Buddhadharma*.



"Once we cultivate genuine **compassion**,  
the soil is prepared to receive **seeds of  
happiness**. Communities grow and shape  
'the commons'"

# THE COMMONS, COMPASSION & COMMUNITIES

To inspire towards creative leadership for social,  
inner, and global transformation

**WELCOME 24 PARTICIPANTS**  
around the globe to engage in :

- Workshops with Right Livelihood Award laureates.
- Inter cultural dialogue with participants from different countries.
- Experiential learning in the communities.
- "Inside Out" workshop with experts.

## FEE AND SCHOLARSHIP

**35000 Thai Baht [1000 USD / 900 EUROS]**  
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**JULY 10<sup>TH</sup> - JULY 24<sup>TH</sup>, 2016**

In Bangkok, Nakorn Nayok, Chiang Rai,  
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**Deadline for submission is by May 15th, 2016**