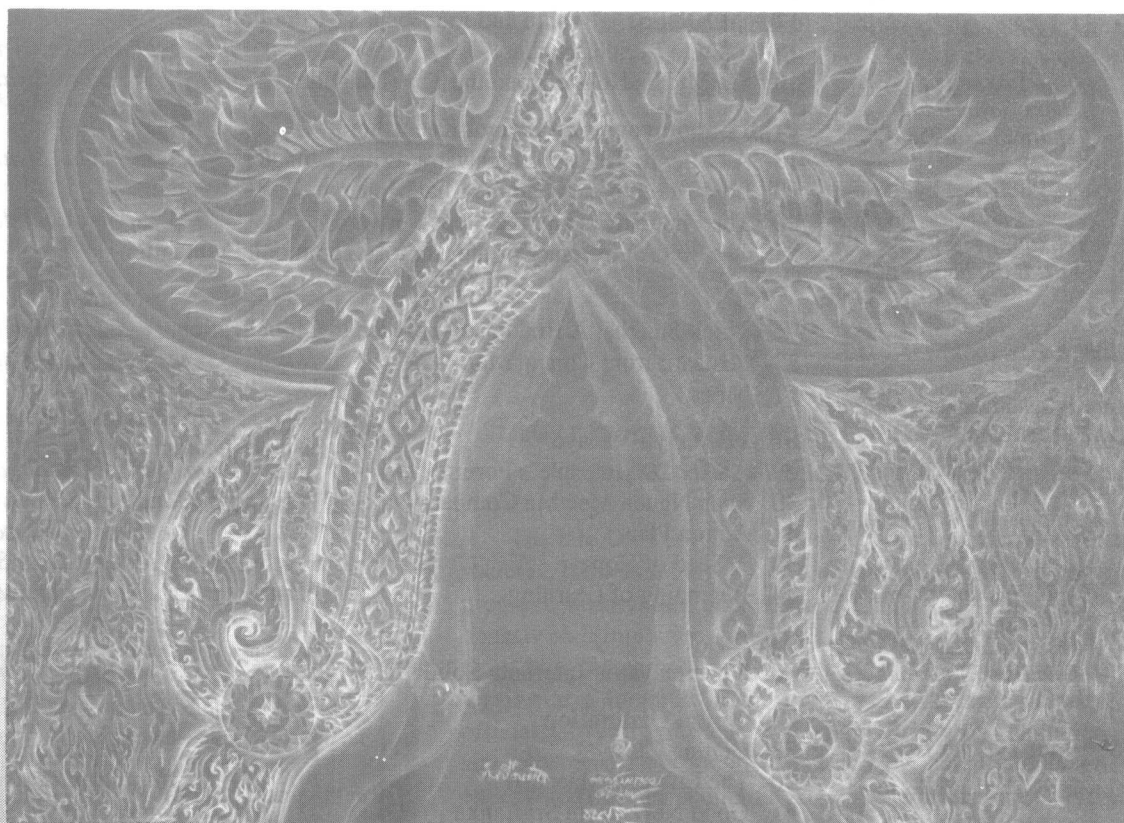


SEEDS OF PEACE

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**Here and Now:
The Need for Bhikkhuni Ordination
in Siam**



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Vasana Chinvarakorn

* This drawing of Tara, the female bodhisattva of universal compassion, was done in Oxford by Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma in 1980.

PEACE

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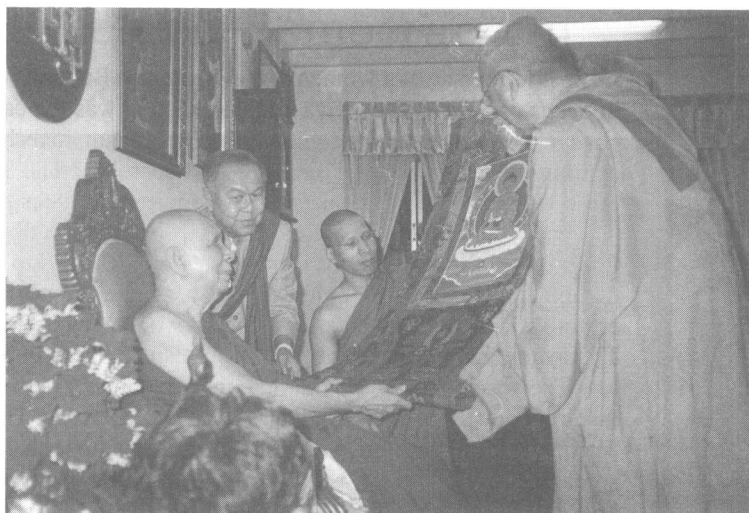
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The goals of INEB are to:

1. Promote understanding and co-operation among Buddhist countries, different Buddhist sects, and socially conscious Buddhist groups.
2. Facilitate and carry out solutions to the many problems facing our communities, societies, and world.
3. Articulate the perspective of Engaged Buddhism regarding these problems and train Buddhist activists accordingly.
4. Serve as a clearing house of information on existing Engaged Buddhist groups.
5. Cooperate with activists from other spiritual traditions.

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His Holiness Somdej Phra Nyanasamvara,
Supreme Patriarch of Siam receiving a tangka
from the Venerable Doboorn Tulku at the closing ceremony
of the World Sacred Music Festival in December 2000.



Letter from Thaksin Shinawatra, Prime Minister
Subject: Puey Discussion Forum, 2001

The late Dr. Puey Ungphakorn was an important person in Thai society. He was a paragon of idealism and principles, especially of progress, beauty, and goodness. His philosophy on life is based on honesty and simplicity. If one studies his life and thinking, we will see that these values are amply reflected in his deeds, whether he was serving as a member of the Free Thai Movement, Budget Bureau official, Governor of Bank of Thailand, Rector of Thammasat University, etc. Mr. Puey greatly benefited his country. In particular, he endeavored to foster economic growth alongside monetary stability and emphasized the importance of *santi pracha dhamma* and nonviolent social change.

I express my sincere support for the initiative of the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute and Thammasat University to renovate an edifice in Wat Pathumkongka, the temple where Mr. Puey's urn is kept. I pray for the success of the project and for the health and wellbeing of the project managers.

Editorial Notes

The inferior status of women in the Theravada Buddhist tradition has long been a topic covered in *Seeds of Peace*. The Ariya Vinaya meeting was the catalyst for a renewed call for concrete changes in the status of ordained women. In Siam, maechee is the name given to a woman who commits to eight-precepts and dons white robes. The government does not fully recognize these women as religious persons and society relegates maechees to performing menial tasks. Currently, maechees are not encouraged to study the dhamma. In this issue we hope to share information about the status of maechees in Siam and to inspire further work towards the goal of higher ordination and, subsequently, greater respect for all women. The Sri Lankan re-establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha (women who have received higher ordination) in the Theravada tradition is a reason for optimism and a resource for the Thai process.

The formation of the International Buddhist Youth Movement (Interbuddy) was another inspiring development of the Ariya Vinaya conference. The group has members from Indonesia, Thailand, Mongolia, India, and the US and we hope that *Seeds of Peace* will be a channel for spreading awareness about the group and making youth projects a major component of socially engaged Buddhism.

As in the last issue, we are including a historical document, *An Interview with Moubatten*, in order to point to the similarities between the constructed mystery of the monarchy in the 1930's and the veil protecting the royal family that continues to exist today. Again, we need to raise a warning flag: the substance of the Moubatten document, especially pertaining to the mysterious death of King Rama VIII, does not reflect the view of the publisher and editors of *Seeds of Peace*. The document is merely another piece of evidence that helps exonerate Mr. Pridi Banomyong from the allegation of regicide.

The election has come and gone and Thaksin Shinawatra has taken the helm. Politically, many commentators like to point out to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra that running the country is categorically different from running his business empire. They often contend—and not without a modicum of truth—that the country is infinitely more complex than a business enterprise. But most critics fail to emphasize another obvious fact: a corporation is essentially a 'private tyranny'; that is, it is organized from the top-down and therefore has an authoritarian subculture. If Premier Thaksin governs the country in a business-like manner, then he will surely treat people's movements and organizations in the society as merely a nuisance—as chattering rabble—and continue to freeze the semi-democratic nature of the country. But even transnational corporations profess concern for the wellbeing of their host communities. Surely the new Thai premier will do likewise; at the very least to weave his business interest into the very social fabric, blurring the distinction between philanthropy and commercialism.

Premier Thaksin has wasted no opportunity to flagellate (and promote) himself, arguing that the recent explosion of the airplane he was supposed to travel on was an attempted assassination. Among other reasons, the Thaksin government cited its serious war on drugs (especially amphetamines or *ya baa*) as the cause of the failed assassination.

The Thaksin government is also wobbling in its Burma policy. It is still uncertain whether or not to discard the diplomatic stance of its predecessor and warm up towards the Burmese military junta—and make a mockery of the country's professed concern for human rights and democracy. The premier himself has recently affirmed his government's respect for human rights to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson. At the social level, the spate of Thai-Burmese border clashes (coupled with a series of crimes perpetrated by Burmese nationals) has triggered a nationalist backlash in the country and may reduce the sympathy of the Thai people for the plight of the Burmese. Sulak Sivaraksa's letter to the prime minister published in this issue should be read in the context of the political development mentioned above.

S.C.
S.J.

BURMA: Peace, Nonviolence and Democracy in Burma: Voices from India

A two-day conference on "Peace, Nonviolence and Democracy in Burma: Voices from India", was held on 30th & 31st March 2001 at India International Center, New Delhi. The keynote address to this conference was delivered by Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, Right Livelihood Award recipient from Thailand, on "Peace, Nonviolence and Democracy in Burma". Other speakers include the renowned Gandhian and Chairperson of the Asia People's Association Ms. Nirmala Deshpandey, Shri Rabi Ray (Former Speaker of the Lok Sabha), Shri Surendra Mohan (Janta Dal), Shri Kuldip Nayar (veteran journalist and Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha), Prof. Ashis Nandy (Senior Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies), Prof. Ananth Kumar (J.N.U.), Prof. Imtiaz Ahmad (J.N.U.), Shri Ganga Prasad Bimal (J.N.U.), Shri Kamleshwar (Senior Journalist) and Shri R.A. Mittal (Hind Mazdoor Sabha). The speakers expressed their deep concern about the denial of democratic rights of the people of Burma for over a decade now. They were equally concerned about the absence of debate and discussion in this country regarding our government's new engagement policy towards Burma as well as the lack of response from the civil society at large when the people in our neighbourhood are suffering under extreme conditions of torture, oppression, forced labour and political violence in Burma. They were unanimously of the opinion that the restoration of the



democratic system and rule is a necessary condition to ensuring the rights of people. The Indian government's rationale behind the new engagement policy and the emerging ties with the military government in Burma was questioned by the speakers. They wanted to know how India's political, economic and security interests would be better served by becoming closer to the military regime which has conceded considerably to the political, military and strategic interests of China in the neighbourhood and access to the Indian Ocean region. The speakers wondered whether Indian response is a panic reaction to the Chinese gains with the military regime and in the process ensuring the survival of the military Junta in Burma (Myanmar). They also voiced the concern at India's recent response to the ILO resolution criticizing the condition of forced labour and exploitation inside Burma (Myanmar). It was an irony of

sorts that this historical resolution was opposed only by the four Asian countries (China, India, Japan and Malaysia) while the rest of the world supported the resolution.

The speakers welcomed the present dialogue between the military regime and the leadership of the democratic movement in Burma and hoped that this dialogue will positively result in a transition towards democracy and reveal a concealed game plan of the military regime to gain time and acceptability with world powers at large. The speakers at length dwelt upon the socio-cultural and historical ties between the people of India and Burma. They urged the government of India to uphold the good traditions of India's foreign policy and also appealed to the government not to forsake the path of peace, freedom, nonviolence and democracy as shown by the life and works of the father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi. An

unanimous resolution to this effect was adopted at the conference expressing sympathy and solidarity of the people of India with the people of Burma who are struggling for democracy and a goodwill message to the leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Dr. Tint Swe (who was elected as the Member of Parliament in 1988 elections representing the National League for Democracy,

Burma), Dr. Zaw Win Aung (Federation of Trade Unions, Burma), Mr. Myat Thu (one of the student activists engaged in the struggle for democracy in Burma) and Mr. Lian H. Sakhong (Secretary of the United Nationalities League for Democracy, Burma) were also invited to participate in this national dialogue of scholars, teachers, writers, lawyers, leaders from different

political parties, peace, human rights, non-party political and trade union activists. This conference was organised by the Committee for Nonviolent Action in Burma (CNAB) with the active co-ordination of Dr. Ramu Manivannan (Delhi University).

Ramu Manivannan
1 April 2001

CHINA: Spiritual Movement Causes Deep Ill Ease

The new government is under increasing pressure to take a stand on the Falungong meditation sect amid growing controversy over the group's plan to hold an international conference here in April.

Those against the meeting include Thai-Chinese communities and China experts who fear that foreign members of a group China has condemned as an "evil cult" might cause unrest and use the opportunity to offend Thailand's powerful "friend".

Strongly in favour of an open door are Sulak Sivaraksa, the outspoken social critic, and Somchai Homla-or, secretary-general of Forum Asia, a leading advocate of human rights.

Mr Sulak maintains that Thailand must stand up for its sovereignty and resist bending to China's wishes.

Falungong practitioners in Thailand, he said, have every right to exercise their religious belief according to the Thai constitution.

"This is a basic human right of Thai citizens. Whoever disa-

grees can also express his opinion but the Thai government has to ensure that the rights of Falungong should be respected," he said.

Thailand, he maintained, must not cower under threats from Beijing. "We must have our own dignity and this is our sovereignty. We should not chicken out." Mr Somchai said today's borderless world "compels Thai society to learn to co-exist with people who have different views so long as they do not lead to violence".

Thailand, he said, must stand up as a democratic country and resist any interference from China, which has used diplomatic as well as covert means to press for compliance with its wishes.

Noppadol Ekabuse, an organiser of the Falungong conference, said the aim was only to exchange views among Falungong members and spread the word about the spiritual movement. He maintained that the conference, planned for April 21-22, was still on even though he had not been in contact with

the authorities.

Special Branch Police, who have been monitoring the activities of local practitioners since China outlawed the movement in July 1999, however, have become increasingly wary about the conference.

They fear anti-Beijing feelings might rise and unrest ensue if the conference showed video films carrying a message from Li Hongzhi, the movement's US-based leader, and of the recent self-immolation in Beijing which members maintain did not involve their Chinese brethren.

The absence of direction from the new government on the matter is not helping.

Surakiart Sathirathai, foreign minister, has merely reiterated his predecessor's line on the matter, saying Thailand would not allow anyone to engage in activities harmful to neighbours.

The Business Relations Associations of Thailand plans to petition Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to ban the meeting. The Association of Pharmaceutical Retailers and Federation of

All Saes (Chinese families) have published an anti-Falungong message in Chinese-language newspapers, backing views expressed earlier by the Thai-Chinese Journalists Welfare Foundation, Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Buddhist Charity Foundation and Thai-Taechiu Association.

This is a rare case of Thai-Chinese communities taking a common stand against a specific movement. They represent ordinary Chinese as well as businessmen, proponents of the Mahayana Buddhist sect, and people who practise muay chin and taikkek at Lumpini park.

It is these pressures rather than the ambiguous message of Thai authorities that has put organisers of the meeting, who are trying to keep a low profile, at a loss.

Since Beijing outlawed Falungong, Special Branch Police have watched local members' activities at Lumpini, Benjasiri and Chatuchak parks. Although local members say there are about 100 known practitioners, the Chinese embassy claims the movement has a following of 1,000 people in Thailand.

Thai authorities "are afraid that we are part of the Dhammakaya sect which caused headaches for the Chuan government for a while. But we are not. We just meditate and practise movement in order to attain greater serenity. It's for our health and our mind," said an unidentified woman, who exercises with her son at Benjasiri park.

Mr Noppadol said the conference would allow practitioners from around the world to exchange experiences, with the majority likely to come from Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong due to the closer contacts with the

group in Bangkok.

"Master Li Hongzhi will not come to open the conference, so the conference should do no harm to China or undermine the good relations between Thailand and China," Mr Noppadol said.

"It will only be a get-together among us. But a by-product is to help make known to the Thai public the true essence of the Falungong discipline: truth, compassion, forbearance." Phuvadol Songprasert, a social scientist specialising in China at Kasetsart University, said human rights was the name of the US game to pressure China, and the Falungong issue was just another tool.

Mr Vorasakdi, of Chulalongkorn University's Institute of East Asian Studies, said Thailand, by limiting Falungong activities, would not be siding with China but showing an understanding of a "friend's" phobia about any threat to its political regime.

"In fact, opposition against Falungong has deeper grounds, not just to appease Beijing, but to preserve peacefulness in society. What if 10,000 Falungong followers gather at the Royal

Plaza?" he asked.

The China expert said it was foreign practitioners, not Thai members, that gave cause for concern.

"We cannot anticipate or control what will be discussed [at the conference]." In addition, he said, government permission for the conference to proceed would "imply official recognition which would send a wrong signal to Chinese communities in other ASEAN countries, whose governments have not allowed this spiritual movement to blossom at the expense of their cordial relations with China".

Recognition of Falungong raises cultural and religious debates that could lead to social discord, he said.

The prospect of as many as 600 foreign members of such a little-known movement here so strongly opposed by Beijing can only raise alarm bells among Chinese Thais whose prime concern is a peaceful way of life.

Achara Ashayagachat

Bangkok Post, 23 February 2001



CAMBODIA: Youth Peacecamp in Cambodia

During March 11-17, 100 young people from nine countries gathered at the Center for Culture and Vipassana outside of Phnom Penh as part of the Southeast Asian Youth Camp for Peacebuilding. The camp was organized by YFP (Youth for Peace), a Cambodian NGO that works to promote peace among students through workshops and camps. Some examples of their activities include workshops on self development, conflict resolution, human rights, and building cultures of peace. YFP is a unique program designed to help youth develop holistic skills such as self confidence, spirituality, and morality. The conference was modeled on these same ideals and the daily schedule included meditation and games before breakfast, a panel session in the morning, a workshop in the afternoon, and cul-

tural performances in the evenings. The panels featured experienced Cambodian activists and academics such as a leader in the democracy movement and a professor studying cultures of peace in Cambodian literature. The topics of the workshops ranged from Burmese women's issues to the relationship between spirituality and political activism.

The following are the observations of two participants:

Having visited Tuol Sleng museum [a museum documenting the war crimes of the Khmer Rouge] before the conference, I was struck by the symbolism of having a youth peace camp in Cambodia. Memories of the chaotic rule of the Khmer Rouge were part of the collective consciousness

during the conference and the most striking aspect for me was the ability of the participants to transcend the weight of history through laughing, singing and dancing. Cambodian students took the lead in this spirit of optimism and energy. The members of Youth For Peace had a sense of self-esteem and purpose that stood out among all the groups. They were critical about the effect of violence and rampant corruption on the political and spiritual development of Cambodia, but they had faith in their work... The workshops were run by the participants and as both a participant and a facilitator, I found them disappointing.



Another participant said:

The most memorable thing for me was how much love the Cambodian people expressed to us and all the work they put into making a conference for people from all over Southeast Asia. They helped us share in each others joys and tears. Usually when I go to conferences I don't feel so moved or inspired, but at this conference I felt that the focus was on the human and not on some theory or abstract world problem. The focus was on the here and now and who

the participants were at that moment. I think that everyone has a story to tell and this conference was about sharing stories. I felt like a kid again. I remembered what made me smile when I was a kid and the simple joys that come from laughing and enjoying each others' company. The most striking thing for me was the ability of the Cambodian youth to burst into song and everyone would know the song and the ability of the Cambodian people to capture a moment and revel in it together. I

couldn't believe how much joy they expressed in their identity and how they used this joy to empower themselves and others. Everyone knew the songs, the dances, and the games and together they uplifted all of our spirits.

The conference ended with a trip to Siem Reap to visit the temples of Angkor Wat. There are plans to make the conference an annual event.

Staff Report

MALAYSIA:

Malaysian Courts Tackle Ethnic Unrest

Dozens of people arrested during Malaysia's worst ethnic clashes in decades have appeared in court amid a growing war of words between the government and opposition over the origins and implications of the violence. Nearly 150 people were remanded in custody following three days of street battles involving gangs of Malay and ethnic Indian youths on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. [The ethnic makeup of Malaysia is 60% Malay, 27% Chinese, 7% Indian, and 7% from other ethnic groups]

Charges of illegal possession of weapons and unlawful assembly have already been brought against more than 30 defendants.

Five off-duty soldiers and a fireman were among 32 people charged with illegal possession of weapons and other offences during the first day of court hearings on Thursday.

It is not clear whether the

police have identified suspects for the killings of six people during the clashes.

While calm has now returned to the rundown mixed-race neighbourhoods where the violence erupted, the political fallout continues unabated.

The Malaysian authorities are eager to be seen taking a tough line against the individuals held responsible for the country's most serious outburst of ethnically-related violence since the 1960s.

After initially dismissing the affair as sporadic incidents related to drugs and other criminal activities, the government now appears bent on seizing the opportunity to embarrass its critics.

The Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has weighed into the argument, accusing opposition parties of deliberately trying to stir up racial discontent

among the majority Malay and minority Indian communities with the aim of toppling his government. [Mahathir had also recently announced that special privileges for people of Malay descent would be continued.]

Suggestions by some opposition leaders of a cover-up over the extent of the casualties resulting from the clashes has given the authorities ammunition for legal proceedings.

Among those being investigated on possible charges of sedition are Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, the wife of the jailed former deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, and Nasharuddin Mat Isa, the secretary-general of the main Islamist opposition party, PAS.

*Simon Ingram
BBC, 16 March 2001*

AFGHANISTAN: Understanding the Tragedy of Idols

By the time this is published, the world's two tallest sandstone Buddha statues, in Bamiyan, central Afghanistan, will have been demolished.

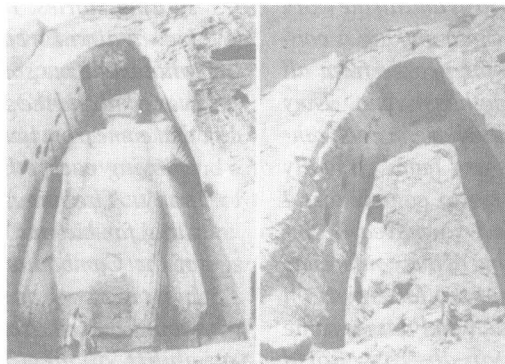
When I first learned about the intentions of Taleban supreme leader Mullah Omar to destroy these two ancient images dating back more than 1,400 years, I was saddened. But I did not write anything then because I could not find any reason. I was under no illusion my writing would have any impact on the destruction.

But things changed on Sunday. When news of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues appeared on television, a young Buddhist woman in my presence was evidently upset. She was whispering to her relatives sitting nearby that those who committed this atrocity should go straight to hell. But then seeing me, she graciously said no more, perhaps fearing that her words might hurt me.

Coming from a devout Muslim family in Thai society, I attended Thammasat University in the early 1970s where I was taught, among other things, to appreciate the serene beauty of the Sukhothai-style Buddha images by none other than M.R. Kukrit Pramoj. This article is an attempt to help others such as that young woman understand this act.

For a Muslim, the authoritative sources from which rights and wrongs can be determined are the Koran, the Islamic holy book which Muslims believe is God's word, and the Prophetic traditions (Hadiths).

Recounting the stories of



Abraham (Prophet Ibrahim) and Moses (Prophet Musa), there are no less than ten verses in the Koran in which idols are depicted as something that will lead people astray and therefore are preached against. When Prophet Muhammad was able to return to Mecca, it was said that he destroyed some idols in the sacred Ka'ba.

Why is idolatry considered so negatively in Islam? Islam attempts to open up a straight path from the human soul to God. Islam is against idolatry, because attachment to idols leads people astray (Koran XIV: 35); embodies falsehood (XXII:30); and the love of idols will not last but for this lifetime, (XXIX:25). This is because idols as religious symbols should point to a higher truth. But when people cannot move beyond the symbols and become attached to them as truth, idolatry results.

Despite these religious injunctions, I would argue that the decision by the Taleban leadership to demolish the Bamiyan Buddha statues was unwise politically and misguided spiritually because of their failure to understand the new idolatry, the impact of their actions on Muslims elsewhere, and the spiritual challenges facing Muslims

today.

In the century that saw the birth of Prophet Muhammad, the Syrian Monophysite Bishop Jacob of Saroug described a scene when Satan was lamenting its collapse of authority as a result of the recent disappearance of paganism. But finally the Devil exclaimed: "I do not mind if the priest uses the interest he draws from his money to buy an axe with which to smash the temples of the gods! The love of gold is a greater idol than any idol of the gods..." The Devil's insight is an apt characterisation of the present age when everything can be bought and sold, from forests to islands in the oceans to the bodies and souls of daughters and sons, and dignity and honour. Money becomes a new god in a world where the love of money replaces the spiritual quest.

If the Devil is right in pointing out that it is not gold *per se* that is a greater idol but the love of gold, then the issue of idolatry has very little to do with things concrete but has the world to do with attachment. If such is the case, in addition to gold or wealth, attachment to one's own power and righteousness could also be considered idolatry. In this sense, Mullah Omar might have misun-

derstood the conditions of the age in relation to the Koranic injunctions.

To understand the Taleban decision on the Bamiyan Buddha images, it is important to situate Afghanistan in a map of the Muslim world where Islam as a comprehensive social system clashes with secularism. Some would argue that Muslim countries after the age of colonisation could be categorised as follows:

1. Countries that attempted to implement a secular nationalist tradition but did not engage all sectors of their diverse societies, such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq;
2. Countries that attempted to implement a secular disruption without radical agricultural reform, such as Algeria, Tunisia and Libya;
3. Countries that tried to initiate policies of industrialisation and modernisation through existing patronage systems, such as Indonesia and Pakistan;
4. Countries where ruling families remained as the primary nexus of the patronage network, engendered some kinds of development, yet precluded wide-scale, socio-economic transformation, such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates and Brunei;
5. Countries where Islam was used yet overshadowed by national, sectarian, ethnic or religious differences, such as Sudan, Nigeria and Afghanistan.

The present Afghanistan is a country born out of decades of war where people fought for their freedom to lead their lives free of the shadow of superpowers. The Taleban movement is a child of

war where the goal is to restore political order, to be imposed forcefully in a world sharply divided between Muslims and those who are not.

In the quest for purity, the Taleban leadership either failed or did not care to see two problems. First, despite their claim to exercise their sovereign power within the boundaries of their nation-state, their act affects the lives of Muslims elsewhere. In India, for example, there were recent reports that copies of the Koran were burned in protest. This could easily trigger deadly communal violence. It is highly likely that Afghan refugees residing in non-Muslim countries will not benefit from such an act. Second, nearly a third of the world's Muslims live in countries where they can never hope to become a numerical majority. I doubt if the Taleban leadership who decided to demolish the Buddha statues have thought of these people or their Islamic obligation to other Muslims.

The quest for purity is sometimes dangerous, especially when charged by attachment to one's own power and the righteousness of one's cause. I am saddened by the destruction order because the Taleban leadership fail to see the beauty of God's creation or to construe the meanings the statues have for others. Fifteen centuries ago, another Omar (582-644 AD), the second Caliph after the death of the Prophet, showed how Muslims could overcome such failures.

For example, in the Treaty of Jerusalem (637 AD), written in the words of Omar, it is clearly stated: "The protection is for their lives and properties, their churches and crosses, their sick and healthy, and for all their co-religionists. Their churches

shall not be used for habitation, nor shall they be demolished, nor shall any injury be done to them or to their compounds, or to their crosses nor shall their properties be injured in any way." Not only did Caliph Omar not destroy others' religious symbols, but he officially protected them.

When Omar was in Jerusalem, he went to ask the bishop where to say the prayers. He saw a stone which the ancient prophets had left as a relic. It is called "Sakhrah", and the Jews hold it in high veneration. Omar politely took off his shoes near Sakhrah. This simple act reflects the degree to which Omar was sensitive to others' way of life and the meanings they accorded their sacred objects. His action, no doubt, resulted from a combination of factors, profound understanding of the Koranic message, appreciation of the prophetic tradition which he was privileged to observe first hand, his own personality and political consideration, among others.

There is a Koranic verse that I read often because it authenticates the modern condition of Muslims relevant to the issues raised here: "To Allah belongs the east and the west. Whichever way you turn there is the face of Allah. He is omnipresent and all knowing." (11:115) It is important for Muslims to meditate on this verse. The spiritual challenge of the age in the quest to overcome human tragedy is, perhaps, to continue to fight against the new idolatry and yet to see God everywhere.

Chaiwat Satha-Anand
Bangkok Post, 15 March 2001

- Chaiwat Satha-Anand (Haji Qader Muheideen) is the director of the Peace Information Centre, Foundation for Democracy and Development Studies at Thammasat University.

INDONESIA: Wahid and Indonesia's Media Politics

Less qualified men have been presidents. Ronald Reagan and Josef Estrada were movie stars. Soeharto was a colonel and the late President Doe of Liberia was only a sergeant when he became president of Liberia. Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur—his honorific childhood nickname, descends from Java's ecclesiastical Muslim aristocracy. He is well educated, civilised, cosmopolitan and polyglot—speaking Arabic, Javanese, Indonesian, English and Dutch. He is steeped in the Koran and solidly represents a living tradition, that of Javanist Islam as opposed to the Modernist stream of Islamic fundamentalism. Gus Dur grew up at the centre of Javanist Islam and Javanist Islamic politics. His father Wahid Hashim was the leader of Nahdatul Ulama, the organisation of traditional Javanist Islam and a loyal supporter of Soekarno. Witty, humble, erudite in Islamic theology and occasionally Machiavellian, Gus Dur was more than equal to the task of giving all his political rivals a run for their money during the last days of Soeharto's crumbling New Order. As a result of last minute political manoeuvring Gus Dur managed to slip in through the narrowest of spaces to gain the Presidency of the Republic of Indonesia.

However, after coming to power Gus Dur quickly revealed his independence. Those who had supported him, believing they could control him if only because of his near blindness, became disappointed, including the ambitious Fundamentalist Muslim leader, Amien Rais. The

media went on the offensive against Gus Dur.

In this undeclared war against Gus Dur the media tends to regard facts as largely irrelevant. The only thing that matters is that Gus Dur's fall from power should be imminent because of the country's intractable problems he has failed to solve, election pledges he was unable to deliver and the thickening political intrigue by his opponents to overthrow him. Therefore, the media tends to highlight the President's mistakes, magnify the significance of political intrigue against him, exaggerate the threats to his position, downplay his achievements and ignore his replies to his accusers.

"The media makes slanderous accusations against me. My advisors tell me I should sue them," said an uncannily relaxed President Gus Dur seated behind his massive desk, stacked with Beethoven CDs in his spacious calm office inside the Istana Merdeka, the Presidential Palace. Outside the Presidential Palace 20,000 radical Islamic students had gathered chanting "Gus Dur, Mundur!", "Gus Dur resign!"

"But I am reluctant to bring newspapers to court because it would create a depressing effect on press freedom," said Gus Dur, as he explained in his quiet and matter-of-fact way the problems he faces with the media. Gus Dur's conversation tends to be interrupted by an occasional telephone call or report from his staffers on the status of the student demonstration taking place outside the Istana grounds. A report informed Gus Dur that

his ambitious political rival, Amien Rais, was spotted directing the demonstration from a commandeered bus. Another report informed him that large numbers of loyalists from his own 20 million strong traditional Islamic organisation Nadahtul Ulama are marching on the Presidential Palace to show solidarity with their leader under siege.

"The media has mounted a systematic campaign to destroy Gus Dur's image," said Thai Buddhist leader Sulak Sivaraksa, who was in Jakarta with members of the Thai Senate Human Rights Commission, Phipob Dongchai and the Chairman of Forum Asia, Somchai Homlaor. "We do everything we can to answer many malicious accusations against the President, but the media don't pick it up," said Wimar Witoela, the Presidential Spokesman. Members of the President's family are distressed by the sustained campaign in the media to discredit Gus Dur.

However, facts appear to be irrelevant to the media's charge that Gus Dur has changed. Facts can change. In some cases if the press says something often enough it becomes true, as in the case of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, the media takes every opportunity to suggest, in different ways, that Gus Dur is shedding his democratic mask and is revealing dangerous dictatorial tendencies. A recent charge dramatised by the media and echoed back and forth by news sources, alleged that Gus Dur intended to disband parliament.

The Presidential Spokes-

man, Witoela, categorically denied that Gus Dur wanted to disband parliament. Witoela claimed that Gus Dur was quoted out of context. The President was making a general observation that under the Indonesian Constitution the Office of the President appears to enjoy a preponderance of power in relation to the Parliament. This asymmetrical relationship is reflected in the President's power, in the event of a national emergency, to disband Parliament. "This is not the same thing as saying that the President wants to disband Parliament," said Rizal Ramli, Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs.

Another recent accusation against the President is that he is interfering with the media. The fact that the media, including the press, has been able to continue attacking the President with impunity tends to contradict the former's own claim that freedom of expression is being shackled.

Gus Dur protested calmly, at the suggestion that he is interfering with the media. "Nothing can be further from the truth. I am the victim of the media. The local media makes libelous accusations against me. These lies are often picked up and reported in the international press and subsequently, quoted back in the local press. When the lies are picked up and reported in the international media they become magnified. When the same lies, circulating in the international media, are quoted back in the local press, they are multiplied."

Ownership and control of the media are largely in the hands of the President's political opponents. "Most of the urban TV channels are owned by Soeharto's daughter Tutut and other Soeharto cronies. The press has been bought," said Gus Dur in a quiet



matter-of-fact manner. Dr. Habib Chirzin, editor of the Muslim journal *Kultur* reaffirmed that at least four TV stations, including TVI and SCTV, are owned by former President Soeharto's daughter Tutut. The government owns only one TV station.

The most established and prestigious daily newspaper, *Kompas*, belongs to Catholic media mogul Yacob Oetama. *Jakarta Post*, the English language daily also belongs to the Kompas Group. There is evidently a high degree of concentration of ownership and control in the media industry. Although, media ownership is apparently dominated by Abangan and Christian interests, radical Muslim groups have managed to penetrate the nation's largest newspaper, *Kompas*. Consequently, *Kompas's* editorial line often reflects the views of radical Muslim groups who have recently become very critical of Gus Dur. Muslim influence in Indonesia's largest Catholic newspaper dates back to 1991.

The tabloid incident incurred the wrath of pious Muslim fundamentalists who demanded that the tabloid *Monitor* be banned from publication. "To pacify the radical Muslims, the

owner of Kompas Yacob Oetama, apparently, let several Muslims sit on the editorial board of the newspaper," recalled Gus Dur. "Some of the hostility against me, reflected in Kompas, can be traced to the radical Muslim elements on the editorial board who are closely associated with my political opponents in the fundamentalist Muslim camp," added Gus Dur.

"The only time I have interfered with the media was when I dissolved the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Social Affairs, which represented the propaganda machinery of GOLKAR and General Soeharto's New Order, one day after I was installed as President of the Republic of Indonesia," Duri he said.

The press also alleged that Gus Dur wants to issue a decree to disband GOLKAR. "That's rubbish," said Gus Dur. By its mischievous reporting the press has contributed to the tension between Gus Dur and his coalition partners including GOLKAR Chairman Akbar Tanjung and Vice President Megawati.

Further damaging Gus Dur's credibility is the way the media has blown up the extraordinary story of Gus Dur's masseur,

Suwondo, who disappeared after allegedly persuading a senior official of BULOG, the state food distribution agency to embezzle US\$4.1 million from a pension fund. The event has been dramatised by the media as Gus Dur's "BULOGATE". The interesting thing about the reporting of Bulogate was the way the media had played up Suwondo's disappearance. As long as Suwondo was at large the media could make all kinds of innuendoes about the possibility of Gus Dur's collusion in the embezzlement of BULOG funds.

But Suwondo has been caught and is now in jail. Strangely, the media gave considerably more attention to Bulogate when Suwondo was at large than after Suwondo has been apprehended. Many people outside Indonesia did not even know that Suwondo has been arrested. It would seem that if the media is really interested in getting to the bottom of the scandal of Bulogate now is the time to focus on Suwondo and his testimony and that of other witnesses.

Friends of Gus Dur never for a moment believed that he could be guilty of abetting Suwondo. "Gus Dur never screened the people who came around him. He is not suspicious by nature. That has been his endearing quality, but it also makes him vulnerable to unscrupulous people like Suwondo," said Ramli.

Another scandal mongering story dramatised as Bruneigate by the media concerns the lack of accountability in Gus Dur's handling of a US\$2.0 million aid donation, for the politically troubled province of Aceh, from the Sultan of Brunei. Again the media strongly suggested that the funds were misappropriated. The media campaign to paint

Gus Dur as Indonesia's Estrada was prolonged and did much to tarnish the President's image in the public eye.

The government's explanations were largely ignored by the media. Gus Dur's party (PKB), has published a White Book accounting for the receipt and disbursement of the aid funds from the Sultan of Brunei, but the media did not seriously take up the government's explanations. The government has also produced a witness to testify, but the Parliament decided not to call up the witness. As a result the government's case remained under-reported in the media.

The media tends to under-report the President's achievements while highlighting his problems and his failures. The collapse of the Rupiah, delays in the disbursement of IMF funds, the massacre of ethnic Madurese by rampaging Dayaks in Sampit, the temporary closing of the Mobil facilities in Aceh, the slow progress of the Attorney General's investigations into the past crimes of the Soeharto family, the thickening of political intrigues to impeach the President, have all been highly publicised.

The substantive significance of some of these problems are highly questionable. Given that Indonesia's reserves stood at about US\$80.0 billion, delays in the disbursement of IMF funds should not pose any serious problem except that the alarmist reports tend to exert a downward pressure on the Rupiah. The vulnerability of the Rupiah also stems from the fact that the IMF has refused to allow Indonesia to introduce any currency restrictions. The Indonesian Rupiah is currently the most free ASEAN currency.

The weakness of the Rupiah

does not reflect the poor performance of the Indonesian economy. Real GDP in 2000 grew by 4.8%. Exports in 2000 grew by 27.4% to US\$62.0 billion. Indonesia enjoyed a trade surplus of US\$28.47 billion for the year 2000. "I am satisfied with our economic performance, given the unfavourable climate last year. We shall try to do better this year. Our Commerce Minister Lurus Panjaitan is negotiating to sell helicopters to Malaysia. We are also negotiating with China to produce light aircraft in Indonesia. In addition, we seek to deepen our economic relationships with both Malaysia and Thailand within the framework of the Northern Triangle. I shall seek an early meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir and Thailand's Prime Minister Thaksin to discuss issues of mutual interest," informed Gus Dur.

There are some very interesting economic parallels between Indonesia and Thailand following the installation of the new Thai Rak Thai led (TRT) government in Thailand. Both Indonesia and Thailand appear to be abandoning the World Bank sponsored model of export led growth which had contributed to the phenomenon of the Asian Economic Miracle spanning the '80s and early '90s. "We shall not stress industrialisation and exports," said Gus Dur.

Both Gus Dur and Thaksin Shinawatra, Thailand's newly elected Prime Minister, have announced that they cannot depend upon foreign investment to return to help turn around crisis-ridden Asian economies.

Another similarity is that Gus Dur wants Democratic Indonesia to discontinue the Soeharto government's stress on large

companies(except in the mining and natural resource sector which requires large capital equipment) and exports, which tended to concentrate wealth in a few hands leaving the mass of the Indonesian people behind. He wants to make Indonesia's large domestic economy the cornerstone of the country's economic development strategy. "We shall concentrate on the people's economy and the domestic market instead of pushing exports like we used to do under Soeharto's New Order. The more we export the more we have to import," said Gus Dur.

The Thaksin government also seeks to move away from urban based export-led industrialisation which tended to put pressure on the current account and on the Baht currency. Its

current stress on SMEs (small and medium enterprises), the farm sector and the domestic economy, tend to echo similar concerns in Indonesia.

Despite the media's exaggeration of the significance of political intrigue to impeach the President, Gus Dur may perversely outlast his political opponents. Amien Rais's aggressive and vulgar attempts to discredit Gus Dur at all costs is fast appearing to be counterproductive. The more the President's political opponents exploit Indonesia's explosive potential for ethnic, religious, and communal violence to destabilise the country's democratic government, the more people may feel that having a religious, tolerant, liberal and ecumenical leader, like Gus Dur, may be Indonesia's

best bet.

After all Vice President Megawati has remained in the background and, in fact, has gone to great lengths to rein in her own supporters. Reliable sources say that she hesitates to support any extra-constitutional moves to impeach the President because it may create an undesirable precedent, which could be turned against her in the future. Moreover, historical memories and a sense of family honour may also be at stake. Gus Dur's father, Wahid Hashim, then head of NU, had thrown his organisation's crucial support behind Soekarno, Megawati's father, during the political crisis in 1950.

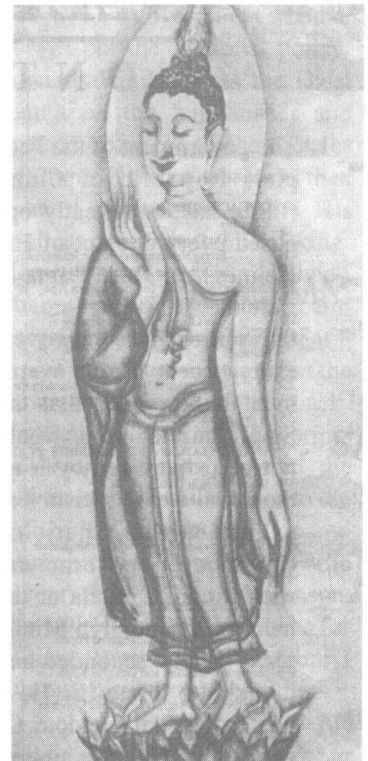
Jeffery Sng
21 March 2001

INDIA: 'Buddha Smiles' An Appeal

On 11th and 13th of May 1998 India conducted its nuclear explosions at Pokharan in Rajasthan. At that time India did not pretend that these tests were only 'Peaceful Nuclear Explosions' (PNE) like in the case of the 1974 test. But there was something consistent in both the 1974 and 1998 tests. The code of language used in communicating the success of these tests was the same, 'BUDDHA SMILES'. The usage of 'BUDDHA SMILES' as a code of success simply conveys the mindset of the political and scientific establishments in this country. Is this the mind of the modern State which is perennially insecure? Is this an achieve-

ment of science that has been projected as a weapon of security by the political leadership? How and why would Lord Buddha smile upon these acts? The usage of this code 'BUDDHA SMILES' was far more disheartening than the test(s) and worse yet, when our Prime Minister visited Bodh Gaya in early 1999 he sought to justify at length about our nuclear objectives and circumstances surrounding India's nuclear weapons programme and the decision of his government.

I sought forgiveness and prayed that I do have a responsibility to my people and the people of this world at large. I was too young to have responded in



1974, hence this time in 1998. At this hour of reflection and deep sorrow was born an initiative with the similar code 'BUDDHA SMILES' as used by the government but in keeping (true) with the teachings of Lord Buddha, that would bring smiles to the faces of millions of people in this country and in other parts of the world. There is a vast multitude of humanity in India who suffer from poverty, diseases, underdevelopment, malnourishment and lack of health and educational opportunities. But our government spends hundreds of crores on the nuclear weapons programme and dedicates the success of these tests as demonstration of our national determination. The record of health and educational status of the rural

poor, children (especially the girl children) and women since independence compares poorly even among the less developed countries while our advancements in space, nuclear and computer sciences give us a myopic comfort of a place among the dominant elites of the global power system. This is a great divide. Would Lord Buddha Smile at this state of deprivation, suffering and inequality faced by the poorest subjects on this mother earth? Our first and foremost task is to commit ourselves to the cause of literacy campaigns and programme(s) in rural areas, education of female children, self-employment and empowerment of women and youth in rural and neglected regions of the country. This is how I understand the meaning of

'Buddha's Smile'. I therefore, humbly seek your support and co-operation in rededicating ourselves to this noble cause.

This initiative was launched on 31st March 2001 by my esteemed teacher Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa (who is also the Patron of this initiative and programme) at India International Centre, New Delhi, India.

Ramu Manivannan

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SIAM: His Holiness and the Thai Kingdom A Recent History

1. The government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has consistently opposed every attempt of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to visit the Thai kingdom. At the same time, however, every recent Thai government has asserted that the Sino-Thai relationship would not be jeopardized by H.H. the Dalai Lama's visit. For example, the Chatichai Choonhaven government, with Siddhi Svetsila at the helm of the Foreign Ministry, warmly seconded my initiative to invite His Holiness to the Thai kingdom. Of course, the Chinese ambas-

sador in Bangkok vehemently protested against the initiative and even lobbied MR Kukrit Pramoj, former Prime Minister, to launch a preemptive action. Premier Chatichai essentially turned a deaf ear to China's protest and promised to discuss the matter over at the National Security Council. Unfortunately before the visit of His Holiness was discussed, the National Peace-keeping Council staged a military coup d'etat in February 1991 and ousted Chatichai from power.

2. During the first Chuan Leekpai government in

1993, a group of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, intended to show moral support for Aung San Suu Kyi by visiting Burma. Naturally, the Burmese military junta refused to allow them in the country, and, therefore, the Nobel Laureates had to gather in the Thai kingdom. The Chuan government was initially reluctant to receive His Holiness; however, the Thai king graciously intervened on His Holiness's behalf, persuading the government to change its mind. The King even offered to personally

receive all the Nobel Peace Laureates at the Poo Ping Palace in Chiang Mai. Unfortunately, His Holiness was preoccupied with other urgent issues and could only make it to Bangkok.

3. Based on the context discussed above, I intended to invite His Holiness to participate in the Ariyavinaya conference scheduled for 2000. I contacted the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs and sent an official letter declaring my initiative. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was fairly receptive, but there were various insurmountable obstacles along the way.

The Ariyavinaya conference coincided with the official visit of the vice president of the PRC to observe the 25th anniversary of Sino-Thai relations. I was asked to postpone the meeting to a new date, and I abided by the advice. Somehow the new schedule for Ariyavinaya meeting also coincided with H.M. Queen Sirikit's state visit to the PRC. So once again, I was forced to postpone the conference. Throughout this frustrating period, His Holiness remained patient and understanding.

The Ariyavinaya conference was thus rescheduled for January 2001. As expected, things did not go the way I expected. The prime minister dissolved the parliament and elections had to take place. M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, the deputy foreign minister, once again asked me to postpone the conference to any date after the elections. Feeling regretful, the deputy foreign minister with the permission of the prime minister offered to meet with His Holiness anywhere in the world to

explain the reasons for the postponement of the conference. Instead, His Holiness proposed that the deputy foreign minister should have a talk with the Tibetan minister of religion, who was about to participate in a conference on Buddhism held at Buddhamonthon, Nakhonpratom province. The meeting between the Thai deputy foreign minister and Tibetan minister of religion eventually took place at Suan Pakkard Palace in November 2000.

A point that cannot be over-emphasized is that the deputy foreign minister insisted that every Thai government since and including Chatichai's has not expressed disapproval of His Holiness's visit to the Thai kingdom. In other words, a change of government did not and will not lead to a change of policy towards His Holiness. Allowing His Holiness to visit the country has virtually become a national policy, the deputy foreign minister argued. Furthermore, Sino-Thai friend-

ship does not imply unequivocal support for China's policy on every issue. By implication, this refers to Tibet.

We now have a newly elected government and I would like to ask the new government whether it will put the 'national policy' towards His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the backburner and instead, kowtow to the dictates of China. If the answer is no, then I shall once again invite His Holiness to visit the Thai kingdom. If the answer is yes, then I shall embark on a public campaign against such a policy.

There is a good sign that the new government will not backpedal on this issue. The prime minister pledged his—and the government's—allegiance to the principles of human rights and humanitarian law during the recent visit of Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and therefore I am optimistic about the future.

Sulak Sivaraksa



A Letter to Thaksin Shinawatra, Prime Minister

A couple of days ago, Your Excellency kindly visited and lunched with the members of Assembly of the Poor who have long been demonstrating in front of the government house. If your administration is able to mitigate or solve the plight of the Assembly and of many other poor people in the country—after all they are the majority in the country—then its reputation will be much grander than most previous administrations. And as the premier, Your Excellency will make history, and will be remembered as a statesman, not as any ordinary politician.

The primary reason why I liked the administration of Mr. Chaovalit Yongchaiyudh, which undoubtedly had many weaknesses, is because the prime minister kept the two promises which he had made to me. First, he appeared sincere and serious in his attempt to tackle poverty and alleviate the suffering of the poor. Second, he was determined and courageous enough to submit Mr. Pridi Banomyong's name to UNESCO for recognition as a great personality in world history. Mr. Chaovalit even admitted to me that the structures of Thai society have long enabled the rich to exploit the poor, wittingly or otherwise. He added that any government that refuses to alter these structures is not legitimate to govern the country. It seems that the Chuan administration had not grasped the gravity of this problem at all. I do hope however that your administration will give priority to solving the grievances of the poor.

As for Mr. Pridi Banomyong,

it can be said that he was the founding father of Thai democracy. Also, he helped liberate the country during the Second World War by forming the Free Thai Movement, thereby protecting its sovereignty and independence after the war. These two deeds are in themselves great and honorable, and therefore they are extremely difficult to match. Here I am not even including the numerous other contributions that Mr. Pridi made while heading various ministries. He, of course, founded Thammasat University as the country's first open university, enabling the poor throughout the country to have greater access to higher-level education. Needless to say, these are the hallmarks of a true statesman.

Unfortunately, Mr. Pridi's contributions are not well appreciated or recognized in Thai society. Here are some examples. One, there was an attempt to secretly remove Mr. Pridi's nomination from UNESCO's evaluation process at the eleventh hour.

Two, the proposal to print out postage stamps in honor of Pridi Banomyong was shot down by the Communications Authority of Thailand (CAT). CAT insisted that it is not possible to produce such stamps because a gap of 25 years (between the person's death and the present) is needed to commemorate any person on stamps; Mr. Pridi passed away in 1983. However, there are stamps of the Princess Mother. I queried the Minister of Communications about this issue and he replied that the 25-year

rule does not apply to members of the royal family. Perhaps we are taking a great leap back to the times of absolute monarchy. Mr. Sanan Kachornprasat, the then Minister of Interior, and Mr. Anand Panyarachun both talked to the Chuan government on my behalf about the Pridi postage stamps—but to no avail. Lacking moral courage, the government succumbed to the pressure from the reactionaries and supporters of absolutism.

Three, the proposal to print out Pridi currency notes also struck many raw nerves. It must be pointed out that every civilized constitutional monarchy has images of individuals other than the royalties on its currency notes. Although professing to be civilized, this kingdom shuns such practice. Even the watered-down proposal of reinstating the image of the pedestal tray, which is a symbol of democracy, in the currency notes was treated with alarm. Between 1932 and 1957 the image of the pedestal tray adorned every Thai currency note. The Sarit dictatorship could not even tolerate a symbol of democracy and banished the image from the country's bank notes in 1958. Again, the Chuan government did not have the courage to challenge a legacy of the dictatorship era.

Four, the TaChang residence, in which Pridi lived during his regency and used as the headquarters of the Free Thai Movement, now belongs to the Crown Property Bureau. It is rumored that the director of the Bureau has transformed the residence into a private club house that is used to

receive and entertain his guests such as Mr. Tarrin Nimanheminda. Even if this is not true, the government should have asked the King to use the residence as a Free Thai Movement memorial. I am sure that the King would kindly support such initiative for there is a precedent: the 14 October 1973 memorial was also built on a plot of land belonging to the Crown Property Bureau.

Unlike a number of leaders of the Democratic Party (from Mr. Khuang Aphaiwong to the Pramoj brothers) who, driven by sheer political opportunism, had consistently implicated Mr. Pridi in the death of King Rama VIII, the present King believes that Mr. Pridi was innocent of the charge. This is evident in the most recent biography of the King, *The Revolutionary King*.

Since Mr. Pridi was an innocent man who had performed invaluable services for his people and kingdom, the Thai people must grant him honor, which is long overdue. Showing gratitude towards a benefactor is a sign of goodness. I do hope that Your Excellency's administration has a strong moral fiber, upholds truth, justice, and dhamma, and truly honors Mr. Pridi.

Your Excellency might begin by redressing some of the mistakes the Chuan administration had committed.

1. In consultation with the ministers of communications and finance, Your Excellency might want to reconsider the case involving the Pridi Banomyong postage stamps and currency notes. If you feel that this is an unworthy cause, then do not bother to do so. History will be the final arbiter of Mr. Pridi's legacy. As the Chairperson

of the Steering Committee on the Project for the National Celebration on the Occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of Pridi Banomyong, Senior Statesman (private sector), I have produced local stamps and currency in honor of Mr. Pridi and democracy. Here I have stolen a leaf from the Kudchoom community's book, which launched its own local currency in the form of Bia. Remember that local currencies can be found in every developed country. If Your Excellency is attuned to the will of the people or civil groups, your administration should tolerate, if not support, such initiatives. The previous administration lacked a strong moral fiber and resolution. Hence it maintained an ambiguous stance towards Mr. Pridi, wavering between limited respect and opposition. I wonder if Your Excellency's administration is sufficiently endowed with moral courage to produce concrete results in honor of Mr. Pridi. In Bangkok we have a road named Pradist Manudharm. Would Your Excellency consider renaming the Asia Route Pridi Banomyong? Even the autocratic Phibunsonggram regime had a Paholyothin Road as a sign of respect for a military man who helped bring about democratic changes in the kingdom.

2. When Mr. Banharn Silpaarcha was the premier, he lavished the taxpayers' money on his native province, Suphanburi, at the expense of other provinces. Of course, it was not the right

thing to do. I hope you will not travel down the same road as Mr. Banharn and pamper Chiang Mai, your native province, with enormous funds. Your Excellency should also take the fate of other provinces into consideration. In particular, I would like to draw Your Excellency's attention to Ayutthaya. One, it was the former and longest-serving capital of Siam and produced more kings than other capitals. Two, it was the birthplace of Mr. Pridi who brought democracy in the form of constitutional monarchy to the kingdom. His leadership in the Free Thai Movement also protected the country's sovereignty and independence—a great feat not dissimilar to that of King Naresuan or King Taksin. I once broached the idea of constructing a Pridi Banomyong memorial park in a plot of land owned by the Lukchan [Pridi's mother] Foundation in Ayutthaya with Mr. Sanan Kachornprasat, who was then serving as the interior minister. Mr. Sanan was highly supportive of the idea, agreeing that the memorial park would have both practical and symbolic values. Unfortunately, Mr. Sanan's political tenure abruptly ended, paralyzing the project. If Your Excellency decides to revitalize Ayutthaya, it will be a boon to the forces of beauty, goodness, and truthfulness in the kingdom.

3. If the proposed Pridi Banomyong memorial park in Ayutthaya is intended to serve as a symbolic link to the concept of democracy

and liberty, then there should also be an institution that will directly promote democracy according to the requirements of human rights and international law. For example, this institution will heighten the peoples, especially the ones who are treading on the borders of society, understanding of globalization—its actors, institutions, ideology, threats, and so on. To put it starkly, a Pradist Manudharm Institution should be established, not only as a research center but also as a forum to equip the new wave of people's organizations and even (oppositional) members of parliament with intellectual self-defense and moral responsibility. Similar to the Phra Poklao Institution, which helps deepen the people's understanding of democracy, the Pradist Manudharm Institution would help broaden the society's knowledge on human rights and international law. Some of us have discussed this idea with Mr. Wan Muhamad Noor Matha while he was serving as the chairperson of parliament and was among the oppositional politicians. Now that he is part of the coalition government, Your

Excellency in conjunction with Parliament should perhaps consider following up on this issue.

4. Your Excellency should untangle the webs of confusion and inefficiency that are confining the national research funds. Moreover, a new national research institution should be established, emphasizing alternative visions and practices and holistic education; alternative, that is, to the mind-numbing mainstream ideas found in the official and ruling circles. I am talking about issues such as Buddhist economics and developmental strategies. The poor and marginalized will be the main beneficiaries of such an institution. Therefore, they, as well as NGOs, should participate in the working of this research institution.

UNESCO has declared that the celebration on the centennial anniversary of Mr. Pridi Banomyong will officially terminate at the end of 2001. I trust that on 11 May 2001 Your Excellency will not fall prey to moral cowardice and sincerely participate in a celebration in honor of Mr. Pridi at Ayutthaya. As a reminder, Your Excellency, by virtue of your rank, is the chairperson

supervising the national celebration on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of Mr. Pridi Banomyong. I do hope that Your Excellency will give your utmost cooperation in planning the remaining activities in honor of Mr. Pridi for the year 2001.

Respectfully yours,
Sulak Sivaraksa

Chairperson of the Steering Committee on the Project for the National Celebration on the Occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of Pridi Banomyong, Senior Statesman (private sector)

P.S. Although the previous Democratic administration had a dismal record for serving the poor and consistently wavered in its commitment to honor Mr. Pridi, it maintained an admirable foreign policy towards Burma. Your Excellency should study well the Democrats' Burma policy and attempt to do even better. For starters, Your Excellency should think twice about your planned state visit to Burma and should rein your minister of defense, preventing him from meddling or becoming involved in the affairs of neighboring countries; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be left to take care of them.

Sulak Sivaraksa
18 February 2001

Lord Mountbatten and the Thai Monarchy

Notes of an Interview between Lord Mountbatten and His Highness Prince Dhani Niwas of Siam at 4:16 p.m. on Thursday 27th May 1948.

1. Prince Dhani Niwas told me that he had come to Delhi on

behalf of the Siamese Royal Family specially in order to seek my advice on the future of the King of Siam, and particularly whether the latter should visit the United Kingdom and learn about

Court life and the Armed Forces since, he said, I was widely regarded in his country as a friend of Siam and by his own family as a particular friend of the Siamese Royal Family.

2. I informed Prince Dhani Niwas that I had recommended to the late King of Siam that he should pay a visit to the United Kingdom and learn about the Armed Forces either by attachments or by special visits to units. I said that I thought that similar advice held good for the present King. The Prince seemed much relieved at this, and said that he had hoped that I would say it. He asked whether he might convey what I had said to the present King of Siam. To this I agreed.
3. Prince Dhani Niwas then fortunately asked me whether I had any other helpful suggestions about the present King of Siam. This gave me the opening which I required, and I said that I trusted that, for the good of the future of the Siamese monarchy, the story of the late King's death would be publicly and satisfactorily cleared up in the near future. With this the Prince agreed. I told him that I had followed the details of the late King's death to the best of my ability through various Siamese friends; and that I had come to the conclusion that it could not possibly have been a case of suicide. Prince Dhani Niwas said that this was also his opinion.
4. I then said that I did not see how it could have been a case of murder, for who could have been the assassin and what could have been the motive? At this stage, the Prince merely nodded.
5. I then said that this left only one possibility, namely, that an accident had occurred. It was known that the late King and his brother, the present King, were inordinately fond of firearms and were constantly firing off their revolvers. I suggested that an accident might very easily have occurred in which the younger brother had by sheer mischance and ill-fortune killed the elder. I suggested that if this were so it would account for the unsatisfactory state in which the enquiry into the late King's death appeared to have terminated.
6. I gave my view that if this were indeed the truth the future of the Siamese monarchy was in grave jeopardy; for at any time the enemies of that monarchy would be able to reveal that the present King was a regicide; and would no doubt claim that his action had been deliberate and not accidental; why otherwise had the matter been hushed up for so long. I asked how, with such a threat hanging over the present King, he could contemplate a public visit to the United Kingdom or indeed to any country, let alone returning to Siam. I said that if this theory was indeed true, I would urge that the King of Siam should fully and frankly confess, saying that he had been so overcome by grief at having accidentally killed the person whom he loved most in the world that he had allowed himself to be persuaded not to make a statement at the time lest the double shock might prove too great for his people. I suggested that he should now explain the circumstances to his people, if indeed it was true that he had been accidentally responsible for his brother's death.
7. Prince Dhani Niwas said that, if what I had suggested had been true, he was quite certain that my advice would have been correct and should have been followed. But in point of fact, enquiries which had been held had cleared the King completely, since he had a cast-iron alibi. When the shot had been fired, the present King had been in his bedroom, which did not adjoin that of the late King. Officials on duty in the corridor had seen the present King emerge from his bedroom and go to his brother's bedroom after the shot had been fired. The question of the King's complicity therefore did not arise.
8. I asked the Prince why, if this was indeed true, the complete innocence of the present King had not been publicized. He replied that he presumed that the reason for this was so that no one should be encouraged even to imagine that for the King to have killed his brother was a possibility.
9. I pointed out that a position had now been reached in which a number of thinking people could hardly fail to believe that the accident solution was the most likely, since, if suicide was really out, who was the assassin and where was the motive?
10. Prince Dhani Niwas then told me that a young Naval Officer, who was a close associate and friend of the ex-Regent and Senior Statesman Nai Pridi Bhanomyong, was believed to have been the assassin. It was not for one moment supposed that

Pridi had been an accessory to the murder, but on the other hand, his associates knew that he had become dissatisfied with the late King for, although he himself had recalled him, the latter had not co-operated with him. In fact, it was rumored that the late King had suffered a similar fate to that of Thomas Beckett, his assassin having committed the deed in the hope that he would thereby please Pridi. It was said that Pridi himself had been horrified on discovery of the truth but, realizing the loyal motives behind the assassination, had misdirected the police to ensure that a verdict of murder would not be brought in.

11. This was Prince Dhani Niwas' explanation of the motive; and this young Naval Officer was his nominee for the assassin. I gave him my view that although highly desirable it would not be essential to proclaim either the assassin or the motive in order to clear the present King; since the minimum that was wanted was a

cast-iron alibi which was apparently already available.

12. I said that I could not in any event recommend that the present King should visit England until the question of his being involved in the accidental shooting of this brother was completely cleared up.

Prince Dhani Niwas entirely saw the point in this.

13. Finally, we agreed upon the following line of action:

a) Prince Dhani Niwas would leave for Lauzanne on 25th June. There he would see the King of Siam and the Princess Mother. He would recommend to them that if an invitation was forthcoming from His Majesty's Government in the U.K. they should visit England and that the King of Siam should there spend some six months in studies and particularly among the three Defense Services.

b) Prince Dhani Niwas would reassure himself of the strength of the King of Siam's alibi and if it was indeed, cast-iron, request

permission to inform me accordingly, and urge that suitable publicity steps should be taken by the Siamese Government.

c) The Prince would then go to Paris, for a visit of 10 days (which has been already arranged). He would then arrange through the Siamese Ambassador to visit London.

d) On his arrival in London, Prince Dhani Niwas wished to come and see me in the first instance and report the results of his talk with the King of Siam.

e) If these results were entirely satisfactory I would endeavor to help him to obtain the necessary invitation for the King of Siam from His Majesty and His Majesty's Government.

f) The Prince would then remain long enough in London to arrange whatever details were necessary.

The First Bricks and the Steps Forward The Life of Komol Keemthong

"We are running out of people who are willing to lay themselves down as the first bricks upon which others can step completely down into the ground and tread on to survive with honor."

Komol Keemthong

Thirty years ago, as a young and newly graduated 25 year old man,



Komol Keemthong would not have imagined that his life and death would be remembered and his words would thrive as immense inspiration to upcoming generations of Thai activists.

In 1970, unlike many of his fellow graduates from the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Komol chose to apply

for a job as a teacher in a remote community school at a mining village in Surat Thani, Southern Siam. Undeterred by the continuing rifts and armed fighting between the communist insurgents and the security officers, Komol taught the children of the miners, who otherwise would have been left uneducated. He taught there for one year before he was shot dead, reportedly by the communists who suspected that he was a spy.

Komol spent his childhood in Pitsanuloke, an upcountry province of Thailand, and became involved with student activism only during his university years. He became chairman of the Faculty's Social Study Club and started to arrange a wide range of activities including seminars, lectures and study trips to the countryside to expose students to various social problems. Students were encouraged to go to rural areas and help with public services based on the concrete needs of the locals, e.g. school construction, rice barn construction, etc. The villagers were happy with the new developments and interaction with the "highly educated" folks, whereas the students were able to get a good grasp of their sufferings. The tradition of rural camp has lived on in Thai universities and inspired many to become active in various areas of social development.

He became acquainted with Sulak Sivaraksa, who was then editor of *Vidayasarn*, after his departure from the renown *Social Science Review*, which had been acclaimed to be the most prominent intellectual journal in those days. Through the journal, Komol's vision of social suffering and the need for nonviolent and contemplative ways of ad-

ressing these problems was nourished. He became a regular member of the *Baridassana Sevana Club*, the members of which preferred to clad in traditional Siamese attire and met in groups to discuss various social problems, a very rare opportunity in the society when the military ruled and banned gatherings of more than three people altogether. Interacting with Sulak, a prolific writer and a well known sharp tongue, and being involved with the discussion group, greatly inspired the young Komol. He had accepted to be editor of the *Social Science Review's Student Edition*, before he decided to leave behind all comforts of Bangkok for his beloved work, teaching in service of the rural poor.

It was through Sulak that Komol got to know the school and the mine's manager, to whom he later applied for a teaching position. He was immediately admitted, as it was rare that a student from a leading university would devote himself to this hard and unrecognized work. He was later joined by his fellow graduate, Miss Ratana Skulthai, who was then about to leave for her teaching in Hawaii.

Komol taught at one of the first "community schools" in this country, a drastic change from the education system that has been controlled by authorities, geared toward making competitive social animals and making students succumb to a set of modern values: consumerism, authoritarianism, etc. What he aimed to achieve was entirely different from the goals of teaching he had been imparted; he wanted his students to be proud of their culture and take pride in their ancient wisdom. This pioneering work came with a price.

He was well aware of the seriously dangerous situation in the area. In one of his letters to Sulak, he wrote

"During the ten days that I left for Bangkok, villagers were shot down almost everyday, altogether eight already. It was reported that the police, who were supposed to protect the villagers, were even gunned down. There were no arrests, even though the shootings took place just a few meters from the district office and the gunmen were familiar faces."

Komol set an example of an outsider who respected and cherished what we nowadays call "local wisdom". With strong conviction in his method, he talked with villagers and studied local arts and knowledge. He and Sulak organized a performance of the traditional Southern drama *Manorah* in Bangkok, which was nearly in extinction. His insatiable desires to learn local culture and ways of life eventually brought him and his girlfriend tragedy. Naïve Komol and Ratana, along with a villager, were found dead on 22 February 1971. No one dared retrieve their bodies that day and waited until the following day. The *Bangkok Post* dated 26 February 1971 carried the headline "Terrorists Kill 2 Graduates".

It was not only his work that lives on, but also his many writings, which, according to Dr. Paitoon, are "easy to read, beautiful, and linguistically rich, as they directly stem from his genuine thoughts and feelings". Explaining his ideal, Komol had this to say.

"Being able to survive in the world is not a difficult matter. One simply turns one's color and adapts. But those who are committed, believe, and adhere to

their principles are rare and this is hard to do."

The Komol Keemthong Foundation was founded to carry on his ideals, to serve as a first brick for others to tread on. Its activities in the last thirty years are varied including publishing many inspiring books, organis-

ing rural camps, and later on ecological camp activities for student activists. A yearly celebration is set on his mortal day, 22 February, highlighted by a series of annual lectures. The previous speakers have included many activists, mostly young people who are pioneering in

their attempts to help society such as Ms. Tuenjai Deetes (recognised for her work for the hilltribal people, presently a senator), and Mr. Vijaya Chokewiwat (high ranking officer in the Ministry of Public Health).

Pipob Udomittipong

The 30th anniversary of the Komol Keemthong Foundation: Honorary People Awards 2001

To observe the 30th anniversary of K.K. Honorary People's Awards were presented to the following:

William J. Klausner

Bill Klausner has long acted as a linchpin of international organizations pioneering social works in Thai society and has persistently emphasized the importance of cultivating and developing idealism in Thai youths. For instance, since the founding of the Komol Keemthong Foundation in 1971, Bill has greatly facilitated and complemented the youth projects of the Foundation.

Having lived in the Thai kingdom for almost five decades, Bill Klausner has a deep love for the country and a profound understanding of Moo Baan Nong Kon in Ubonrachathani province. As a practicing Buddhist, he well recognizes the value and meaning of traditional way of life and wisdom and therefore profoundly understands the impacts of the developmental craze and economic globalization on the country.

Whether as a university professor or a pivotal link to numer-

ous international organizations, Bill ably and interestingly employs a different mirror to reflect on Western and Eastern cultures in a humble and dignified manner.

Pierre Marchand

For decades, Pierre Marchand has invaluable contributed to the lives of millions of children worldwide and has consistently promoted non-violence. During the American war in Vietnam he helped organize support for Vietnamese children, which eventually grew into PARTAGE. Meaning 'sharing' in French, PARTAGE soon expanded to help children around the world. For example, PARTAGE has supported several Thai organizations such as the Foundation for Children, Center for the Protection of Children's Rights Foundation, and Fight Against Child Exploitation. Unfortunately due to internal conflict, Pierre was forced to leave PARTAGE.

Pierre Marchand's work with children is also connected to the broader non-violence movement, which he has long advocated. Recently, supported by a group

of Nobel Laureates, he successfully persuaded the United Nations General Assembly to unanimously earmark the year 2000 as the Year for Education and Non-violence and the first decade of the 21st century as the Decade for the Culture of Non-violence.

Somkiat Appinyachon

Forty-one-year-old Somkiat Appinyachon from Chiangmai is a pioneer in worker-centered industrial management, as evident in the running of his company, Apina Industry Limited. Apina is a furniture company which has approximately 1000 workers. Showing great faith and trust in his workers, Somkiat enabled them to fully participate in the planning, administration, and evaluation of the company's policies and targets. Additionally, the company provides the children of its workers with scholarships and has a welfare program for its employees. To his employees, Somkiat is also a living model of voluntary simplicity and humility. Furthermore, he does not neglect social responsibility, pushing forward with his mobile library project



and campaigning for the conservation of mangrove forests.

Rewadee Prasertcharoensukh

The forty-nine-year-old Rewadee is the embodiment of sacrifice, idealism, and social responsibility. Working behind the scenes and making good use of her extensive experience with the underprivileged and marginalized, she has long helped to sustain and support various non-governmental organizations morally and intellectually, especially the ones that are oriented towards youths and rural areas. At present, Rewadee is Director of the Natural Resources Management for Environmental Sustainability Project and secretary general of DANCED. She has set in motion a network for alternative and sustainable agricultural practices that conducts workshops and researches on, among other things, alternative developmental paths and debt problems of farmers.

Dej Phumkacha

Dej Phumkacha from Samut Songkhram province is an elderly and well-respected social activist and developmental expert. Dej has provided many youths engaging in social works with valuable training and intellectual support. In particular, he has proven that aside from theoretical know-how any developmental project requires intensive field study and working, living, eating, and being with the local people. Another prerequisite for a successful developmental project is that the local people must be at the center of the project; they must be the active participants in the project, not passive onlookers. Throughout his long and illustrious career, Dej has spoken out and protested against rightwing dictatorships and has sought to strengthen democracy in the country. He is also a member of the Committee for the Promotion of Democracy.

Thai-Malaysian Gas Pipe Network

These civil groups have exposed the dead bodies in the government's developmental closet, showing how the Thai-Malaysian gas pipeline and its related industries viciously interfere with the livelihood, culture, society, economy, and natural environment in Songkhla. They also point to the virtue of alternative models of development, ones that are rooted in traditional values, lifestyle, and wisdom. Moreover, securing the support of academics, students, NGOs, and celebrities, they serve as a heartening model of solidarity and non-violence.



Think Sangha: A Buddhist Approach to Globalization

Think Sangha, an affiliate group of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), held a five day international meeting in Hawaii from March 23 to 28, 2001. The meeting was small and meant to intensively engage in the groups' next collaborative project, a Buddhist analysis of globalization. The meeting will subsequently be used as a springboard for the publication of this group analysis and the development of concrete strategies and practices for facing the challenges of globalization. The Agendas which follow are the result of pre-conference groundwork.

Agenda 1 (outer work)

A Buddhist Vision Of Civil Society in Response to Globalization

What does globalization mean for religion? On a superficial level, we can see on one hand the fundamentalist response of clinging to the old certainties and pushing away the new; while on the other hand inter-religious dialogue has used the opportunity to learn from each other. Neither of these, however, captures the deeper spiritual meaning of globalization. To get at this deeper meaning, we have begun to look at a popular concept being used today, civil society. There appear to be at least three or four conflicting conceptions of what "civil society" is. "Original" Civil Society developed out of the Reformation in Europe as the creation of a conscious community based around a shared understanding of Christian teachings and what it means to be a human being. The collapse of this ex-



periment led to attempts to create civil society through the nation state (political) and the market (economic). All of these conceptions can be considered from a spiritual point of view, since they include and are based upon an idea of the nature, meaning, and purpose of human life. From this point of view, globalization is a complex transformation that is not only economic, political, and technological, but just as much spiritual in the sense that these conceptions are based on very different views of "the meaning of life." These conceptions are struggling for supremacy as we enter the new millennium, and perhaps the most critical issue of all for our future is which of them will prevail. Thus, there is a need for a Buddhist vision of Civil Society.

A Buddhist vision of civil society will explore the following:

- * Reform of the Buddhist Sangha
- * Building of Grassroots Community
- * Integration with other ele-

ments of the New Civil Society movement

- critical & nuanced "Localism"
- * Strategic Cooperation with some elements of Globalization
- working with existing structures to transform closed systems into open ones

A key component to this process is both "inner" and "outer" work. A mature socially engaged Buddhism demands that practitioners devote concerted effort to their religious discipline (the inner work) while also becoming active in society (outer work). As a single religious institution, Buddhism must not only seek to offer its practical solutions to society for what it means to be human. It must also do its inner work of reforming and updating its own organizational structures, so that it can continue to offer authentic pathways for those searching for the meaning of their humanity. There is now a process of meetings called "Ariya

Vinaya" which has been initiated by Sulak Sivaraksa and His Holiness the Dalai Lama to confront this inner work. A number of Think Sangha members are also actively involved in this initiative.

Agenda II (inner work) Developing Socially Engaged Buddhist Analysis and Think Sangha

Think Sangha is part of a larger process of redefining and recreating Buddhism for the 21st century. A mature and nuanced analysis of social issues by Buddhists is an essential step towards this recreation. A socially engaged Buddhist methodology can use various methods for relating Buddhist tradition and practice with social theory. Our goals include:

- * to search through and locate Buddhist texts which have direct relevance for social conditions (e.g. Cakkavatti Sutta)
- * to locate and apply Buddhist principles and themes to larger social contexts (e.g. Thich Nhat Hanh's Tiep Hien Precepts)
- * to locate and apply which Buddhist teachings and practices are relevant for today and to leave behind ones which have become outdated (e.g. the outdated restrictions on female ordination)
- * to apply the inner experiences of Buddhist practice to dealing with social problems (e.g. dissolving the inner-outer duality of personal and social transformation inherent in much Western social

theory)

Put together, these methods can constitute the basis of a system of socially engaged Buddhism from analysis to articulating positions to developing forms of engagement. Such a systemization is not an attempt to create an orthodoxy in which socially engaged Buddhists must fit. Rather, it is in order to focus and unify the disparate movements of socially engaged Buddhism. In wider terms, it can help spiritual activists make themselves better understood in society and locate their respective niches within social movements.

For more information on Think Sangha visit our homepage at: <http://www.bpf.org/think.html>

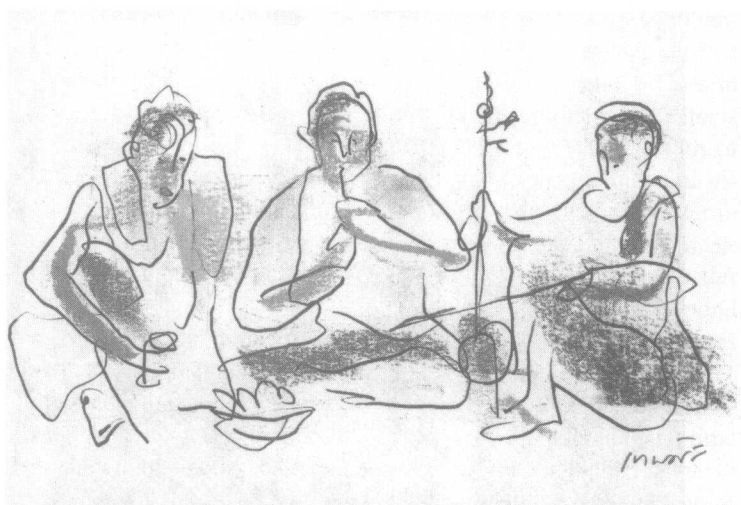
Jonathan Watts

Postcard from Chiang Mai

"WE'RE ALL FEELING something is wrong," says the Thai social critic Sulak Sivaraksa. "The world is lacking a spiritual base."

To try to put the world to rights, if only for a weekend, Sulak and a few thousand like-minded people from around the world gathered in Chiang Mai in mid-December for the World Festival of Sacred Music. Inspired by the Dalai Lama's Tibet House, a New York-based cultural centre, the locally organized event was one of a number of festivals marking the new millennium and celebrating what the organizers feel is a growing sense in the world of interdependence.

Few venues could have been better. Amid the green hills of northern Thailand, Chiang Mai is just a song's breath from the Himalayas and home to several impressive Buddhist sites, including the 500-year-old Wat



Suan Dok, a royal garden turned monastery that hosted the opening event.

But for all the deep and sonorous chanting of Thai monks on that first night, many of the sounds of the festival were as much political as spiritual. As so often, it seems that wherever the

Tibetans go, controversy is rarely far behind. Indeed in Chiang Mai, the music seemed at times almost to be drowned out by more worldly concerns.

From northeast India, the Nagas came to Chiang Mai with passionate tales of their 150-year struggle for independence against,

first, the British, whom they accuse of invading their territory in the mid-1800s, and later India.

Like the Tibetans, the Nagas want to take control of their own destiny. But, also like the Tibetans, their presence can prove embarrassing for some. In this case though, it was the Tibetans themselves who might have preferred to have heard less from the Nagas. The Tibetans' exiled government is based in India, and the local Indian consul had been invited to the event.

More potential controversy came from the American group the Dharma Bums, long-time champions of the Tibetan cause, who were asked not to perform their song Rangzen: Free Tibet for fear of making too many waves. Two nights later to a much smaller, select crowd, they belted out the rock anthem in a bar along the canal.

From Thailand itself came

members of the Assembly of the Poor, to sing some songs and tell some stories. The group has staged high-profile sit-ins and protests outside Government House in Bangkok against the planned Pak Moon dam in northeast Thailand over which even the World Bank has expressed serious reservations.

But capping it all was the surprise arrival of Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, wife of jailed Malaysian politician Anwar Ibrahim, who spoke movingly about her husband as she accepted an award on his behalf. So is there a spiritual side to what she and her husband have gone through? Yes, she says. "Whatever my husband has had to sacrifice, has given fruit to more spirituality among certain Malaysians. Muslims have turned back to God, to religion."

Ultimately, she believes, her experiences will bear fruit. "I see

these tragic circumstances have blossomed out into a feeling for more democracy, an anger and rejection of corruption and injustices. Seeing this brings on the forbearance to hold on in times of sadness, depression, that there is a better day, there is a silver lining."

But what, you might wonder, have the Nagas' struggles or Anwar Ibrahim's troubles got to do with a sacred music event. For some, it's a case of spirit in action. Others call it socially engaged Buddhism. A few jokingly describe it as dharma (universal truth) with teeth. But for Sulak and many others, the answer is simple: What's the dharma for if it isn't for righting wrongs?

Jim Messenger
Far Eastern Economic Review
January 18, 2001



ASEM 2000 People's Forum "People's Action and Solidarity Challenging Globalization"

Parallel civil society conferences were organised in Bangkok in 1996 and London in 1998 on the occasion of ASEM 1 and 2. These activities, sustained advocacy, and information initiatives have been undertaken with in the framework of the Asia-Europe People's Forum(AEPF)—a network of organisations cooperating on issues of common concern in both regions.

One of the important recommendations made during the ASEM 2 NGO Forum in London (1998) was to organize a forum during the next Asia-Europe Meeting (October 2000 in Seoul) on "Spirituality and Globalisation." Taking into account the religious and cultural realities present in these two continents, it was deemed important by a number of NGOs to take this theme up as a priority in the coming discussions, and not to ignore this issue when referring to Asia-Europe relations.

A similar forum, the ASEM 2000 People's Forum, was organised to coincide with ASEM 3. This was a four day event in Seoul from October 17-21 2000, which aimed to bring together a broad range of civil society organisations from Asia and Europe on the theme of "People's Action and Solidarity Challenging Globalisation."

Several international NGOs, such as Pax Romana ICMICA (International Network of Catholic Intellectuals and Professionals), Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute (engaged Buddhists in Thailand), Centre Lebet (inter-

national network engaged in human development) have participated in the ASEM process. The group decided to organize a workshop on "spirituality and globalisation" during the People's Forum on ASEM 3 with the following goals:

1. To critically reflect together on the impact of globalisation and the role of religions/spirituality to humanizing the globalisation process
2. To help promote mutual understanding among the various religious and spiritual traditions, practices and values in Asia and Europe
3. To advocate the human and spiritual values in the debate and negotiations in the ASEM 3 process
4. To develop a network of open-minded and socially concerned religious groups and NGOs in Asia and Europe,
5. To join forces with like-minded organizations and NGOs in developing a global civil society in Asia and Europe

We were more than 100 participants from more than 10 countries of Asia and Europe who gathered for a workshop in Seoul, from October 16 to 19, 2000 to review and reflect on the topic of globalisation and spirituality.

The workshop provided a good opportunity for participants representing different religious and spiritual traditions, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and various indigenous spiri-

tualities, to better understand one another and to discuss plausible collaborative responses to the significant issues arising from the phenomenon of globalisation. Specifically, our sharings with one another, our interpersonal interactions, as well as the worship sessions and cultural celebrations helped us to deepen our understanding of each other and our appreciation for each other's spiritual and religious traditions.

The workshop challenged us to respond to the following key questions: How has globalisation, especially as manifested in the neoliberal perspectives of today, affected our religious and spiritual traditions? How can we, as communities of the different religious and spiritual traditions, respond to the effects of globalisation? What roles do our spiritual and religious traditions have in challenging the negative effects of globalisation? What kinds of alternative spiritualities and visions can we develop in order to help create a new and more healthy society? How can we better collaborate in order to respond more effectively to the challenges posed by globalisation?

Even as most of the participants were meeting for first time at this workshop, we were able to experience the communion of communities, characterised by mutual talking and listening as well as sharing and learning. This experience of mutuality was also an invitation for each participant to be true to oneself as well as to others. Through it all we discovered that we are very

much an intrinsic part of one global community. Friendly and sincere interactions also helped participants engage in a process of critical self-awareness and discernment, at times accompanied by a sense of confusion and pain, by way of 'de-constructing' and 're-constructing' our own spiritual traditions.

This process included the

importance of openness and mutual respect, developing common grounds based on compassion, love, justice, and solidarity, and cultivating a culture of peace dialogue, understanding and appreciation.

In discussing the role of spiritualities in challenging globalisation, we felt challenged to renew our own spirituality in

order to make it more relevant and responsive to contemporary challenges. In this regard, we found it very important to be constantly reminded of the original vision of the founders of our own religious and spiritual traditions for the enlightenment and liberation of the whole humanity.

Duanghathai Chadbudhikul

Suan Nguen Mee Ma Company (Garden of Fruition): Sustainable Community Venture

Suan Nguen Mee Ma was the name of the land in Klongsan, Bangkok that belonged to Ajarn Sulak's mother and became the home of SEM, Seeds of Peace and several NGOs. Now it is taking on a new identity as a sustainable community business venture. Having been involved with NGOs for many years, we have realized that the more we get involved with communities, villagers, and socio-economic development, the more we need income generating activities to facilitate this involvement and our contributions. Our activities cannot only rely on fundraising. That is why this year we have come up with the plan to set-up a social business venture to help support both our activities and underprivileged people threatened by loss of livelihood. To that end we established co-operation with like-minded friends, social activists, business persons and villagers in order to promote and co-create a sustainable market and socially responsible business network.

During the first three years Suan Company will concentrate on establishing a strong co-operative relationship with its core groups. From this position it will gradually reach out to a wider circle of client-systems.

Suan Company will emphasize common interests, challenges and common motivation among these groups. Its central value is "Right Livelihood".

Our purposes are as follows:

1. To sell, distribute indigenous and village products, and explore new consumer markets for products of craftsmanship. To contribute to the development of associations between producers and consumers, focusing on fair trade while honouring local wisdom. Creative Shops will be the platform for a great variety of community products from villagers and indigenous people of different cultures as Pak Moon ("Assembly of the Poor"), Karen and Tibetan.

2. To publish supporting literature and produce educational materials in order to promote new ideas and practices for sustainability and human centered education. To offer a diversity of views on new paradigms and subsequent implementation in some fields:

- sustainable business management
- alternative education
- lifestyle, Engaged Buddhism, health and indigenous culture, especially from Tibet
- media and technology for social transformation

3. To organize events, vocational training and product development; training in business development skills; and consultancy. A diversity of activities will be organized such as: training, conferences, workshops, study trips, eco-tours, edu-tours and social development program visits for people inside and outside the country.

One of our purposes is to raise awareness of consumers and producers towards these business activities. We will help promote and campaign the venture of social responsibility for our indi-

vidual growth, the earth, and our communities. We would like to set an example so that people feel more encouraged to enter into this kind of business. This activity will hopefully attract the support

of donors who intend to provide scholarships for the training of villagers, vocational training, and product development.

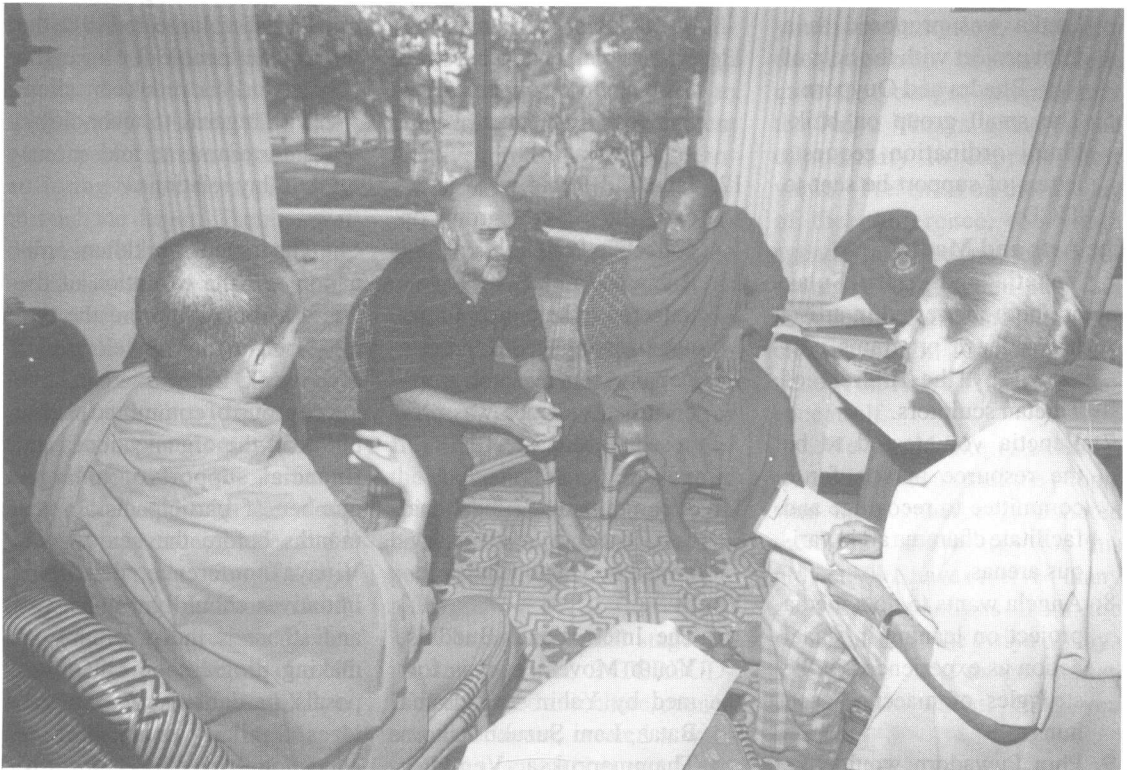
Wallapa Kuntiranont
Hans van Willenswaard

Sustainable Community Venture

Setting up the company named *Suan Nguen Mee Ma* or *Garden of Fruition* is a logical step in order to engage in longer term perspectives with local and village communities threatened by loss of livelihood. We aim to share economic interdependence with the underprivileged and to develop a continuous commitment to a lifestyle of self-reliance, sustainability and social responsibility.

For further contact : Suan Nguen Mee Ma Co., Ltd. 117 Fuang Nakorn Rd.
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E-mail : suancompany@access.inet.co.th

ACTION PLAN of the Ariya-Vinaya Conference



The Ariya-Vinaya conference held during January 21-27 in Suphanburi, Siam fostered a sense of renewed commitment

to engaged Buddhist practice. Many people voiced support for strengthening and expanding existing projects such as the

Alternative Education Resource Center, the Forest College, University of the Poor, and Dhamma Park, but the following were cat-

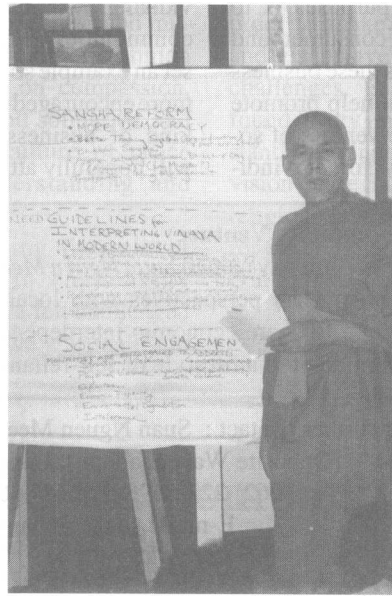
egorized as new ideas growing out of Ariya-Vinaya :

Bhikkhuni Ordination

1. Dr. Lee volunteered to be the resource person for women who are looking to receive ordination abroad.
2. Maechee, bhikkhuni, and lay training workshops for dhamma teaching and leadership skills will be orchestrated by TICD and Ouyporn.
3. UN conference for monks, nuns, and laypeople to work with NGO's with the purpose of raising awareness about violence against women and children. Bhikkhuni Dr. Lee will act as the liaison to the UN.
4. An international study tour to learn from the experience of Theravada nuns in Sri Lanka was proposed as a joint project with the help of Rev. Bhadra and Ouyporn.
5. The small group on bhikkhuni ordination requests letters of support be sent to TICD.

The Arts and Media

6. Venetia and Ajarn Sulak are both interested in artist-in-residence programs prompted by the interest of Tibetan sculptors.
7. Venetia volunteered to be the resource person for a committee to recognize and facilitate dhamma art in various arenas.
8. Angela wants to do a media project on leaning in social action as experienced in the struggles of maechees and nuns.
9. Phra Puwadorn would like to start a media watch study group to analyze the media from a dhammic perspective and promote positive representations.



Research Ideas

10. Sander Tideman and David Chappell, seconded by Wallapa and Hans, are eager to start a series of meetings on Buddhist economics.
11. Ajarn Sulak and Rabia want to create more opportunities for learning from Latin America.
12. Jane and Rabia were interested in a study group on collective karma.
13. Rabia and Lek (TICD) volunteered to help create a vinaya for engaged Buddhists
14. A pan-Asian research group on urban violence was proposed by Mani.

Awards

15. A committee on educational excellence awards was suggested by David Chappell.

Youth

16. The International Buddhist Youth Movement was formed by Yabin Yap, Lama Bataa, Lani Suzuki, Pakorn Thammapraksa, Ven. Puwadorn Piyasilo and Patcharasiri Yimmuang (Noy).

Sangha Reform

17. Ven Dussdi, Arnie, and Venetia agreed to help with

mainstream Buddhist ceremony renewal to create an awareness of suffering and relevance for modern life.

18. Ven Samnang and Ven Dussdi volunteered to be the contact people for a sangha network and monk education, with regards to technology, entertainment, and monastic-lay relations.

The issue of bhikkhuni ordination and the evolution of the youth association were the two most outstanding developments of the week. Both initiatives have a core group of committed people but need the organizational and financial support of a larger number of participants. In the months before the next Ariya-Vinaya conference, these two initiatives should get underway and there is the possibility of making progress on other proposals, particularly the research ideas. Similarly, establishing the educational excellence awards, the Buddhist economic network, and the recognition of existing dhamma art are feasible targets.

Sonali Chakravarti

A Seed of Hope

We walked for many years in the desert.

No tree to shelter us with its shade
In our despair, the tears fell to the earth so bare

We were unaware, deep down, a little seedling lay,

A seed of peace, a seed of hope
Waiting for the rain that never came
Until our tears awakened it.

It came to life! Little
by little it struggled up

We nourished it as it grew and in return, it gave us shade.

And for us, a refuge made.

We hope this tree we can sustain
To heal the Earth's suffering and pain.

*Poem by Phra Phuwadon Piyasilo
Mitsuyo Lani Suzuki
Venetia Walkey*

"A Seed of Hope" was born out of the efforts of a monk, an artist, and a spiritual wayfarer, an off the beat Ariya Vinaya team with a story to share. The inaugural performance began with suffering sojourners plodding through the desert. Their tears of distress fell onto the ground, awakening a tiny seedling. To everyone's delight, the Most Venerable Samdhong Rinpoche led the chanting of "om mani padme hum..." as the seedling struggled up and grew into a magnificent tree. The performance culminated with the youth taking refuge under the tree and a humorous presentation of a sign that read, "Buddhist Economics."

The poem represents the human potential to liberate oneself and others from suffering. When we are born into this world, we are all like seeds in the desert. Yet, in order for the seeds to sprout, there needs to be the right environment to nurture its growth. Unfortunately, this loving environment has been nearly

lost to the negative forces of competition and materialism. Like the seeds, most youth are trapped in the soil without ever realizing their full potential. The International Buddhist Youth Movement (INTERBUDDY) was born out of the deep desire to awaken the youth so that they can grow into loving and wise trees that bring shade to others.

INTERBUDDY is a spiritually based collaborative organization dedicated to a culture of non-violence. The group is interested in using non-violent action to promote human rights, cultural diversity, inter-religious understanding, economic fairness, environmental sustainability and community empowerment. It is an international network of Buddhists youths and youths from diverse spiritual traditions to build friendships and implement creative projects for peace together in our communities.

As a network, INTERBUDDY provides a space for the exchange of ideas as well as practical information to empower youth. But as a community, we can nurture each other's spiritual growth. The idea for INTERBUDDY was born out of the conviction that with a strong spiritual foundation, the youth have the potential to be active peace-builders in their communities.

During the initial stages of its development, INTERBUDDY has printed a brochure, opened a bank account, created a website and an email chat group. As an international team we hope to continue the dialogue of peace-building via the internet where members can join to discuss some of the issues facing our commu-

nities and our lives. At the international level, a Jerusalem Interfaith Youth Gathering is being planned for the year 2003 by the INTERBUDDY committee. At the national and local levels, each country representative is responsible for the implementation of peace-building activities such as spiritual eco-tours, group meditation, prayers for peace and peace walks depending on the circumstances of each area.

Youth have a special talent to defy old norms and to explore new realms of creative expression that often inspires change in others. Old patterns can be broken when action is based on inspiration and wisdom. By being inclusive of the voices of artists, youth and other minority voices, we can sow the seeds of renewal. The youth presentation, with the encouragement of wise Elders, gave the younger generation at the Ariya Vinaya gathering an opportunity to express their views. Presented on the last day of the conference, the youth agenda involved not only proposing a youth action plan, but included a creative and humorous critique of the intellectual climate of the Ariya Vinaya Conference itself.

We would like to extend a warm thank you to all the people who have generously donated their time and energy for this project. We have received many generous donations from the participants of the Ariya Vinaya meeting to help us get started with our Movement. Thank you so much.

Mitsuyo Lani Suzuki

For more information please contact interbuddy@hotmail.com or see our webpage-<http://interbuddycentre.tripod.com/home>

Beginning of Learning

In Buddhist thought and practice the concept of *ariya* refers to the quality of being that would guide the path of enlightenment and noble life. The essence of *vinaya* lies in understanding the eternal truth about noble path. Therefore *ariya-vinaya* is a dynamic process of our thought, action, and the life towards higher experience and realisation. It is an everyday revolution and struggle for change within us. The implications of this change are relevant both to an individual as well as to the society. This continuous struggle involves recognising our negative traits and qualities like greed, hatred and delusion. In ideal terms, *ariya-vinaya* is a holistic approach to peace, development, and life in human societies based on Buddhist worldview.

A basic enquiry often made is whether *ariya-vinaya* is relevant to the present world. This is mainly due to the understanding of *vinaya* as ethics and principles exclusively governing the role of Sangha and its members but not the laypeople. *Ariya-vinaya* is both a dynamic and living reality. A truly wonderful expression to



signify its relevance lies in experiencing and understanding its quality of mindful consciousness. The establishment of the institution of Sangha itself is based on the principle of social equality. There is indeed a clear distinction between the laypeople and the monks and nuns. This distinction is more in regard to the recognition of their respective roles than discrimination in pursuit of the path of *ariya-vinaya*. There are clear precepts and practices based on Buddha's teachings which can be cited to this effect. *Ariya-vinaya* is a Buddhist worldview which is highly

relevant because of the problems confronting the world today. The problems like poverty, underdevelopment, structural violence, wars, the changing relationship between man and nature, and the consequences of the model of development cannot simply be understood in terms of our government policies and appraisals of the same. There is a need to recognise the spiritual crisis engulfing humanity. Therefore the responses will necessarily be through spiritual means. The Vinaya need not be static. It is also a continuous self-introspection that would bring new insights and provide new interpretations to our values and traditions. This would not only preserve the continuity but also ensure their relevance to our times and changing realities.

On the one hand, the Ariya Vinaya conference in Supanburi placed before us the challenges facing the humanity as a whole and sought understanding of our responsibility towards alleviating them at the same time. On the other hand, the dialogue at the conference addressed itself to the nature of our responses. It is this





aspect that helped the participants to address specific concerns like consumerism, structural violence, gender issues (including Bhikkhuni ordination), Sangha reforms, alternative education and development. The most outstanding contribution of this conference for me was the benefit of sharing and listening to the vision and experiences of other members. The narratives, like the struggle of the Bhikkhunis for reforms within the sangha, stand as guiding lamps of our path. The dialogue made me feel more human. It related me to the cosmic realities. The experience is exhilarating as we explore our own being and come face to face with the reality that we are human and a recognition that we are mortals and we deeply understand our responsibilities for the future. Is it possible to overcome the impact of our negative actions and build a future based on a holistic vision of peace, development, and life? The Ariya Vinaya conference is an effort to regenerate the creative energy within us to under-

take corrective and positive measures. In the Buddhist view of karma (action) it is possible to transform our past and change the future through the present. This, in my view, is not simply a divine law of karma based on Buddhist religious thought and action. It is based on rational premises of understanding an action, its causes and effects. It is thus spiritual and scientific. The Ariya-Vinaya conference addressed itself to this task for fighting against ourselves, i.e., the struggle within. There is a need to search more deeply about our cultures and values and the basis of their construction as social practices and systems. In this search lies the struggle against the "change-resistant culture" of which we are all a part.

There is no doubt that the values of democracy, freedom, and equality are rooted in our ancient traditions. From a Buddhist perspective the meaning of freedom is much broader than the western interpretation. The Buddhist notion includes free-

dom from greed, hatred, and delusion. But how do we translate the individual human liberation as collective human freedom within our societies? This is where I recognise the human hurdles in the name of religion, culture and social systems. Out of this context arises the need and significance of justice. This idea of justice is basic and relevant to understanding the meaning of freedom and equality in a society. The oligarchy in the United States, the elite democracy of the West, and India as the largest democracy in the world are poor reflections of our idea of justice in a political democracy. The struggle, therefore, cannot be defined in terms of modernity versus tradition. In the struggle to achieve freedom, equality, and justice we are simply reestablishing the truth and the basis of life that was denied to the common humanity. There is sacredness in our recognition of the truth. The recognition of pain is the beginning of learning.

Ramu Manivannan

Dhammayatra: Interfaith Solidarity Walk

'The tree that gives you pleasant shade, to sit or lie at need, you should not tear its branches down, a cruel wanton deed'

In December 2000, the Spirit in Education Movement and TICD (Thai Interreligious Commission for Development) organized another series of interfaith walks in solidarity with the struggles of the tribal people in the north of Siam. The main intention behind the annual walk is to foster an international and interfaith moral witness to the struggles of the indigenous peoples in their endeavor to preserve and evolve sustainable ways of life and livelihood.

Bringing in the sacred and profane dimensions of the land, the walks have a spiritual dimension, and establish a sensibility that helps us connect with

people who have been marginalized by our notions of development and progress. The walks this year were led by a forest monk, a Catholic priest, tribal leaders, Deep Ecologists and the spirits that flock amongst the trees and rivers.

I was privileged to participate in this unique and multidimensional experience. The walk was divided into three groups, each numbering 20-25 participants. The three routes were Maechem, Samuung, and Pai. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds: men and women from Alaska, Hawaii, Burma, Thailand, India, Germany and Australia. We were students, teachers, activists, musicians and community workers. We all came together in an attempt to look deep within ourselves and address universal concerns.

All the groups started off with a simple ceremony at Wat Umong, Chiangmai on 28th December and then boarded off-road vehicles to head for the base camps. The next 14 days were spent in villages, living in the homes of the indigenous tribes, where we were privileged guests. The groups mostly interacted with the Karen people; but we also took shelter in villages of Mun and Lua tribes.

The weather during this time of the year in the north is cold. Not many fruits or crops grow in this season, thus we had to compromise the flavors and tastes with which we have been conditioned. The warmth and hospitality extended by the villagers was very touching. Their simplicity is reflective of wisdom.

The walk works at various levels. On one level it is a trek





with challenges of nature, the confronting of personal limitations, and the practical necessity of teamwork. Then it works on a spiritual level, when one is overwhelmed by the forces of nature, the monks and priests who lead, and the harmony between tribal people and nature. After being exposed to delicate ecosystems, we developed a level of awareness, *'the pulse of our earth'*, and tried to develop insight through the eyes of the local indigenous people rather than through conventional knowledge. Finally, the walk culminates in a concern for the spirit of the land, the people, their traditions and culture and reminds us of our duty as members of a collective whole.

The walk runs through a great variety of terrain, through thick forests, deep river valleys and up barren hill tops. Even though the walk resembles more of an arduous trek, with frequent halts at villages we were able to rest and rejuvenate ourselves in the joyful and simple company of the villagers. All groups spent two to four days at each village, and this gave us time to gain a good exposure into their traditional lifestyles, agricultural

practices and religious life. Most of the Karen people practice spirit worship which involves many ceremonies and representations of universal tribal beliefs. We spent time sharing stories from each of our homelands, singing songs in many languages under the cold, starry night skies. The idea of 'bearing witness' is to listen to those voices who we, in our ignorance, categorize as uneducated or backward. As we progressed through the walk, we began to realize how far we are disconnected from the land. We only feel safe in the confines of the city. We realized that one day, our cities and our urban lifestyles are going to consume our forests and its people.

The most significant problem which the indigenous people in the North seem to face is the policy adopted by the government of developing National Parks. This conception is rooted in false notions of conservation of the environment. It leaves no room for human beings who are more a part of the environment than their urban counterparts. SEM and TICD, in cooperation with other local NGO's, have been working with local community

projects to provide access to information and support. The success of such an experiment like the 'dhammayatra' lies in the wisdom that exists as a collective within the indigenous people. For they allow us in their forests, which are their homes, and help us understand them through the forests.

Part of the walk is a two day solo retreat in the forest, where we practiced contemplation and fasting at a campsite, and this helped us to reflect on the deep personal experience of the walk. At the end of the walk all the groups came to Wat Luang, a forest monastery near Chiang Mai, and participated in sacred ceremonies.

The walk each year has grown in popularity and it has helped established a strong link between the indigenous and people from cities. In conclusion, I would like to quote Karen tribe leader, *patti* Musson, who, in response to a concern raised by a participant in the walk, says, "then why don't we (*urban dwellers*) bring the forest to the cities..."

Prashant Varma

Getting Clear: Revealing the Myths in Theravada Buddhism

The AIDS epidemic in Thailand results from the prostitution of women and children and is connected to the low status of women and children. As I search for its roots, I enter and hopefully bring light into the basic value system of Thai Buddhism.

When I read a UN report entitled, "Women in Poverty" (May 2000, UNESCAP), I could feel the cultural suffering, so I breathed and centered. The section on Thailand, paragraph 175 spoke of two main ideas in one paragraph - 1) the role of Thailand's sex trade industry in its economy, and 2) traditional religious practices which are a form of gender oppression in Thailand. I rested with the dilemma.

Ten years ago when I taught at a university in the US, I would ask my students to watch this region of the world and the spread of AIDS that would occur because of the sexual exploitation of women and children. As the years passed, I ordained and wandered with the intention to come and serve this population. Little by little, I became strong enough to bear witness and be present.

Now, I work with women and children with AIDS, network with international organizations, and see the poverty, depression and learned helplessness in the villages quite deeply. As I continued to search more deeply, I came to learn of Thai Buddhism as consisting of: Animism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Actually, there is no "pure" form of Buddhism anywhere in the world. For example, in the West, Buddhism

blends with psychology. In ancient Tibet, when Buddhism arrived it blended with the Bon religion.

When Buddhism arrived in Thailand, it blended with Animism. Then during the 14th - 18th centuries when Thailand accepted the Indian System of Law, the country received much Hindu influence. I am most grateful for the pioneering research of Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilasingh in these areas. Ideas of a low status of women and children were absorbed into Buddhism in Thailand. This changed the teachings of the Buddha, such that many myths began to arise over time which bring much suffering.

By exploring these myths, we may bring light into the darkest crevices of the heart: light of forgiveness, light that leads to transformation. Religious institutions go through cycles of birth, flourishing, decline and rebirth. Currently, Thailand experiences a period of Sangha ethical decline as a result of the Sangha drifting away from the heart of the teachings and into social norms. This analysis may help lead to a period of clarity and rebirth.

I envision change as an upward moving spiral that loops back at times. During times of reverse movement, conflict and inner-tension prepare for the loop to move forward and upward again in evolution. Now, I experience life as moving towards new levels of ethical consciousness and presence.

With this heartfelt commitment, I met with Mr. Paul Toh of UNAIDS in Bangkok. In our

discussion, he reported Thailand as having two million direct sex workers. Direct sex workers are those who work in establishments, parlors, etc. Indirect workers are those who work the streets and this number is conjectured to be at least the same amount as the direct workers, if not more. The total population of Thailand is 61 million. He estimates 80% of the sex workers are women.

The number of prostitutes the government reports and the number NGOs report are different. Yet, the reality is clear. The pimp receives about 2/3 of the income, and about 64% of prostitutes are involuntary. Young women and girls are sold by their brothers, fathers, mothers and family members who frequently tell them that they will have a job in elder care or child care in the city. In filial piety they depart to earn income for their families. Many are unaware of the dehumanized future that awaits them.

The slave-trader goes to the village and speaks to the village headman. The Girl Guides Association of Thailand also shared that teachers and principals serve as intermediaries in the sale of girl children in the North and Northeast.

I wonder what forces could bring a person to sell another person? I wonder what forces could cause the door of the heart to close? Are poverty and structural economic injustices enough to close the heart? The sorrow from individuals accumulates into a structural violence which moves as a norm throughout the culture and resists the identification of a responsible party.

In response to this sorrow, I reflect upon the Metta Sutta and the force of a mother's instinctive love to protect her child. "Even as a mother protects with her life, her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart may we cherish all living beings - radiating kindness over the entire world. Upwards to the skies and downwards to the depths, outwards and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill will." This Sutta is core to Buddhism. What happened to undermine this force of love in Thailand? How is the will to love trying to manifest in this setting?

I reflect on the wisdom of Samdhong Rinpoche as he noted that the shortcomings are not in the teachings of the Buddha, yet are in the behaviors of people and the misunderstandings of teachings.

I reflect on the understanding that whatever is denied from conscious awareness may come to dominate consciousness. I sense on a societal level, this is what has occurred in Thailand. Denial of the roots of the low status of women and children over the years contributes to today's suffering. So, with tender awareness, so gentle and sensitive, let us examine some of the myths that have led to the suffering.

Myths and Mis-teachings of Buddhism in Thailand Which Have Lead to The Oppression of Women & Children

- * A woman is lower or of less "value" than a man.
- * A woman cannot attain enlightenment.
- * When a woman dies, she can hope to be reborn as a man.
- * A daughter gains you no merit.
- * A son is a blessing because he can ordain as a monk and earn merit for the family.

- * After a family sells their daughter into prostitution, they can clear their kamma if their son ordains as a monk—even if only for 3 days.
- * When a son ordains as a monk, the mother receives the merits.
- * A prostitute can clear her kamma by donating money to the temple.
- * If a woman is beaten by her husband, it is because she beat him in the past (rape, etc.). "blaming the victim"
- * If a woman gives her body to a monk for sex, she can gain merit.
- * Women have bad or negative kamma.
- * Women are unclean, and thus should not circumambulate stupas or enter sacred sites.
- * There are no Bhikkhunis.
- * The Bhikkhuni Sangha died out.
- * Bhikkhunis are evil and cause the destruction of the Sangha.
- * If a woman wants to train for full-ordination as a Bhikkhuni, it is because she has the defilement of "egoism."
- * An eight precept Thai nun's role is to serve monks and clean the temple.
- * An eight precept Thai nun is not a religious person and thus denied access to healthcare or travel benefits, as monks are.
- * An eight precept Thai nun is a religious person and is thus denied her right to vote, as monks also are denied their right to vote.

There are many ways to counter these myths about women. First, there is the Buddha's teaching on equanimity and love. The Buddha loved all people equally and trained both Bhikkhunis and Bhikkhus. The Buddha taught that all sentient beings can attain enlightenment,

The Buddha did not teach of nibbanic heaven after death. The Buddha let it be known that enlightenment occurs in the here and now through direct and transcendent perception and the experience of reality.

The sangha has a special role in perpetuating the equanimity taught by the Buddha and the five precepts that protect against human slavery and sexual exploitation. It is the responsibility of the Sangha to teach these precepts and protect the vulnerable in society. It is inappropriate for the Sangha to allow social forces to push the Sangha to serve as "spiritual pimps" to the sex trade industry, for the Buddha taught that silence in response to violence is violence by complicity. Dharma is about seeing reality and the potentiality of life clearly. Any teaching which obscures clear seeing and respect for life leads to societal decline—economically, health-wise, and spiritually.

The Buddha did not blame people for suffering which they encountered in life such as domestic violence or rape. Any Buddha alive today cries tears of compassion in response to the suffering of Thailand's women and children. The Buddha remained present, breathing in and out, and responded with wisdom and compassion. The Buddha's capacity to listen without judgement, to listen and observe his inner responses of empathetic distress were highly developed. Thus, the Buddha did not close his heart, feel guilty for doing so, and then blame the victim for sharing his or her pain. When others suffered the Buddha heard their cries and felt their pain, yet remained open-hearted and intellectually alert in order to cultivate tender awareness that leads the

other person to release his or her suffering. The Buddha fostered this because of the strength of his practice, confidence in love and kindness, and confidence in people's capacity to heal and change their lives. The Buddha inspired and uplifted people after they released their sorrow.

The Buddha was open and receptive to life's changing circumstances. The Buddha believed in the positive potentiality of all sentient beings. Karma is imponderable. The moment of change is in the present moment, the past and the future are never here. Thus, causes and effects must be altered in the here and now. Countless beings since beginningless time have performed good deeds. Reflection and contemplation of this statement can relax one's body and consciousness into openness and receptivity.

The Buddhist scriptures are believed to have been recorded more than 400 years after the passing away of the Buddha and

are considered as historical documents consisting of memories, beliefs, faiths, and interpretations. From these scriptures we see that from the time of the Buddha until today, there have been enlightened Bhikkhuni and Bhikkhu masters in this world. The debate over lineage is often a hindrance to fully accepting the place of Bhikkhunis in the Thai Theravada tradition. Historically, the Venerable Bhikkhuni Devasara with seven other Bhikkhunis went from Sri Lanka into China in 429 CE and carried the Dharmagupta lineage, and this lineage is still alive today with an unbroken Upasampada lineage. Therefore, the Dharmagupta lineage is a branch of the Theravada tradition. In 433 CE the second group of Sri Lanka Bhikkhunis entered China. Both arrivals are recorded in the *Chinese Biography of Nuns*, (*Bi chu ni chang*). All Vinaya rules found in the Dharmagupta Bhikkhuni Patimokka are precisely the same in content as those in the Theravada

Bhikkhuni Patimokkha. Dr. Hema Goonatilake says, "The only difference is that the order in which the rules appears varies, and that there are many more rules in the Dharmagupta tradition."

May we eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The time is now to let the bhikkhuni sangha blossom and flourish in Thailand. Several Buddhist leaders are calling for a change in the attitude and the status of women in all traditions. Venerable Samdhong Rinpoche stated that the sangha is currently incomplete and "the Bhikkhuni lineage can be revived at any time". Equanimity and compassion, when combined with a belief in the power to transform present conditions, can heal the myths that have contributed to the suffering of countless women and children and, above all, society itself.

Even petals let go to the wind.

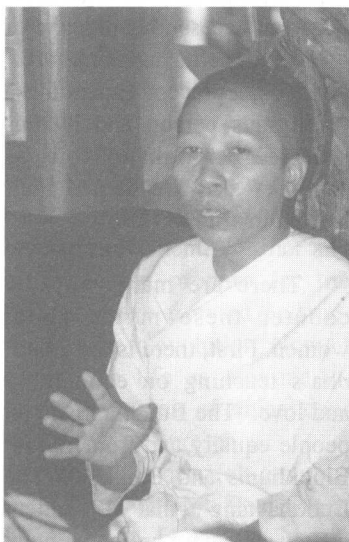
Dae Haeng Sunim

Bhikkhuni Dr. Lee

The Life of a Maechee

The words: Buddhist Sangha, ordination, society, psychology, woman, education, humanity are all words connected in my heart. I ordained because I wanted to learn more about Buddhism and because I have deep faith. My life all around me is all women, since I was a child until now. In college I studied social psychology. Now in my life, I work with many Buddhist nuns.

For my future education, I am concerned about women, Buddhism, and society. I am planning the future in my heart, I would like to make a nunnery. I



will try with my full effort.

Everybody in the world likes happiness. If we understand life truly, this is possible. In life we can cultivate the following virtues: loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. I try to practice these every day.

Now I will tell you about when I first ordained. The leader of the nuns in the temple told me, "We do not offer money, just a small stipend, but we do offer food to you. You must cook for the monks, wash dishes and cups for the monks, clean the kitchen,

clean the temple. Then, when finished, you will get food.”

For two years I worked in the temple and did everything for the monks. Then, I decided to stop because I got an idea. “I have an education. Why should I cook for the monks in the temple?”

Some monks spoke rudely of me; they said “Lazy nun, bad nun.” I practiced meditation alone. So they cut my food. They cut my tiny allowance. I began to take Dhamma classes outside of the temple. They wouldn’t teach a woman. A cousin helped with small money for food and bus fare.

Most of the nuns in Thailand have little education, only elementary school. This affects the life of the nuns. They fear not to have food or shelter. They live in fear of the monks at all times. They fear during their lives as ordained women, and they fear to disrobe and live as lay women.

They are not happy.

One day, I heard a good news that a nun was trying to open a college for nuns. I decided to go and help. The nuns’ college didn’t have money, so they made friends with one of the two monks’ colleges here in Thailand. Then the monks and male teachers began to come and teach at the nuns’ college. They began to teach the students and staff that women should not try to be more than *maechees*, or eight precept nuns. They said that women in Thailand should not try to have more or higher ordination.

In Thailand, Thai nuns have only eight precepts--- the same as a lay man, *upasaka*, or lay woman, *upasika*. The government denies us access to free health care and travel, privileges that fully-ordained monks receive. Yet the government also categorizes us as “religious persons,” and thus denies us our

right to vote as the monks are also denied.

The government and the male Sangha push us down. “Why? The Buddha taught that every person has equal opportunity for enlightenment. Why does the government and male Sangha not consider all people as equal?”

Now I am thinking of how I can raise myself up and then help Thai women. Soon I plan to go to Sri Lanka to study and ordain as a Theravadin samaneri. Later, I can study to become a Theravadin Bhikkhuni. I want to go to Taiwan because I heard that there are many bhikkhunis in Taiwan. I ask myself, “How did they do this? How do they practice?” I want to learn. Then I intend to return to Thailand and empower Thai women.

Rattigorn Rattanaburi

Good News from Sri Lanka

Dambulla, Sri Lanka: The full moon day of March 12, 1998 marked the re-establishment of the Theravadan Bhikkhuni lineage after a 900 year absence in Sri Lanka. Now Sri Lankans receive the blessings and societal benefits of 200 Bhikkhunis, 400 Samaneris (novices) and 3000 Dasa Sila Matas (yellow-robed ten precept nuns).

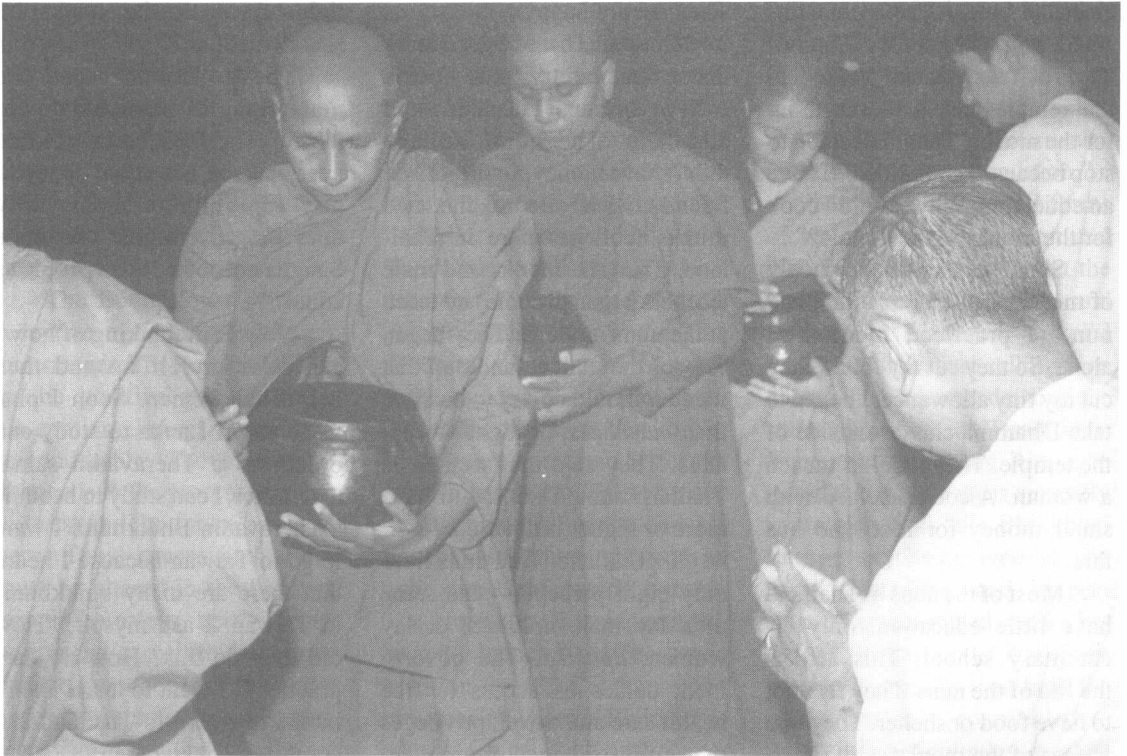
The journey to fully actualizing the teaching of the Buddha in society involved the wisdom of monastic scholars who re-identified all forms of ordination as described in the Tripitaka, and who retraced the Theravadin and Vinaya lineages that travelled in 433 C.E. from Sri Lanka into

China via Venerable Bhikkhuni Devasara and her following of Bhikkhunis. The research of Dr. Hema Goonatilake is most notable in this area, as are the contributions of Venerable Bhikkhuni Ayya Khema, of Germany, who played a leading role in inspiring her Sri Lankan Dhamma friends, male and female, for decades before.

However, it was the fourteen year effort of individuals and the collective initiatives of ten precept nuns (Dasa Sila Matas), monks, and laity that brought about societal transformation. The journey involved several international ordinations in India with the support of an interna-

tional Sangha and international women’s organizations. Historically, the contributions in 1988 of Venerable Bhikkhu Professor H.Ratanasara Maha Thero who organized an ordination in Los Angeles and then in 1996, the contributions of Venerable Bhikkhu Dr. Mapalgam Vipulasara Maha Thero who organized a Higher Ordination in Saranath, India shine with the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha.

By 1998 many Maha Sangha members, and women properly trained and ready for Higher Ordination traveled to Bodhgaya, India for a similarly creative international Theravadin ordination. Theravadin Bhikkhunis of



various nationalities ordained. What marked this ordination as different was the response of the Sri Lanka Sangha upon the return home of the Venerable Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis.

The society celebrated, and scheduled a Higher Ordination to be held in Dambulla. Thus, with concurrence of the Maha Sangha on the full moon day of 1998, a Higher ordination occurred at the Golden Temple. Bhikkhunis or-

dained and received concurrence of the Maha Sangha to ordain Samaneris. The Venerable Maha Sangha also concerted three Uppajjaya Bhikkhunis and eight Kammacariya Bhikkhunis.

The Maha Sangha and Nikaya of Sri Lanka now walk the path of Buddha with dignity as the Buddha intended with the four-fold sangha of ordained and laity intact: *Bhikkhu, Bhikkhunis, Upasakas, Upasikas*. They wel-

come and approve of the developments, as does the society at large. This support has helped combat social problems, such as AIDS, drug trafficking, and prostitution.

This article was prepared by members of the bhikkhuni sangha at Golden Temple. For more information please contact rangir@sltnet.lk.



Feel the Beauty of the Lotus: An Interview with Dhammananda

Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, Ph.D was educated at McMaster University (Canada) and Magadh University (India) and taught Buddhist Philosophy at Thammasat University for two decades. She has written more than forty books in Thai and English

including *A Comparative Study of Bhikkhuni Patimokkha* and *Thai Women and Buddhism*. She was ordained last month in Sri Lanka.

Why did you decide now was the right time to receive ordi-

nation?

My age! I realized it was now or never. Last year I was very ill and I had positional vertigo. This was good dharma practice. People had told me that I should wait until retirement, but after the illness I thought, "I

cannot be negligent, I should do it now.” That was my immediate reason. I have seen small coffins and I know that death comes to young ones as well as old ones. I was behaving as though I would live up to 100.

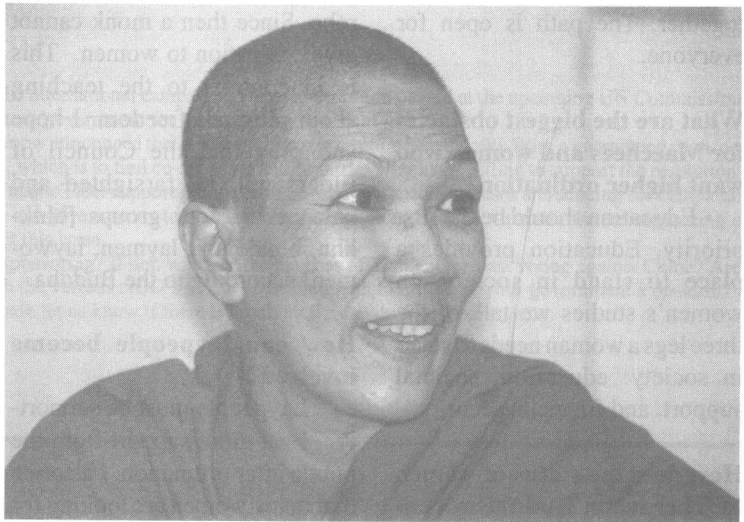
When young monks are ordained they do not have to renounce everything but in my case, I had to give up a lot. I earned a lot of money and was working for television. I have renounced all that. I have one weakness, I enjoy high tea very much and now I cannot have the *mishti* (sweets) that goes with tea. That is real renunciation. Now I only have one meal and no snacks or *mishti* in between.

What was the experience of ordination like?

The part that was most difficult for me was not the decision to be ordained but the question of which tradition. Ordination was not just for myself; I wanted to be accepted in this country where female ordination has not been accepted for 70 years. I was considering the Chinese tradition, but I learned from my mother’s experience. She was ordained in the Chinese tradition 40 years ago and she had supporters here, but she did not have any followers.

I have close connections with the Tibetan lineage and I take His Holiness as my spiritual guru. However, they have only *samaneri* (novice) ordination with maroon robes and then after two years, you must change robes and go to another tradition. I did not think laypeople would be able to accept jumping from one robe to another. It is very important for a nun to have the support of laypeople.

I followed very closely the development of the Sri Lanka



ordination, but one thing I did not accept was that the [Sri Lankan] bikkhunis started ordaining others when they had only three years standing instead of the 12 years required by scriptures. I read an interview given by local Sri Lankan monks who were organizing the ordination, and they said that the Buddha gave permission to alter minor rules “if the sangha so desires” and this was the phrase they used. The Sri Lankan sangha granted permission for the *dhassa sila matas* (eight or ten precept nuns) who had 40 years experience as religious women [but only three years as bhikkhunis] to ordain others. This explanation satisfied my academic curiosity, and I decided to go to Sri Lanka.

The ordination itself was recognized by five senior monks from Siamnigaya, a lineage from Ayutthaya, Thailand. Siamnigaya was the lineage that actually reinstated the bhikkhu sangha in Sri Lanka after it had been wiped out by a Hindu king. I went to Sri Lanka and was ordained by this lineage which has roots in Thailand. Those who objected to my mother’s ordination in the Mahayana tradition cannot say that to me; we have different

standing. Some people from *The Nation* [newspaper] still objected.

How has ordination affected your relationships with family and co-workers?

No problem with my family. Our temple has existed for 40 years. They were prepared for this. I resigned from Thammasat University last year and many of my co-workers don’t know. Some of them don’t understand the issue. They think I have gone crazy. This is fine with me. Everyone needs to go through their own spiritual development. If you think bad of someone it is because you have bad thoughts in your mental setup.

What are your goals?

My goal is to lead a good life as a nun. I want to show society that it is possible to live the life of a renunciant but still be beneficial to society. We cannot wait for the monks alone to do the job. We should step forward and offer ourselves to society. We seldom commit. We would rather say, “Let’s see whether she will fall.” The media want me to be a role model. I don’t know. If people want to follow come along, walk

together. The path is open for everyone.

What are the biggest obstacles for Maechees and women who want higher ordination?

Education should be the first priority. Education provides a place to stand in society. In women's studies we talk of the three legs a woman needs to stand in society: education, societal support, and financial security.

How does the status of women in Theravada Buddhism connect to other social problems?

The role of women in Theravada has been submissive. We never had that ordained group. For a long time, because it was written in Khom script, only an elite group had access to the Tripitaka and even today, the teachings remain inaccessible. Now we have Tripitaka in Thai, but it is so archaic that you need someone to translate it. The monks have a monopoly. Monks who complete grade nine study Pali as a language and not Pali in regards to the dharma-vinaya. People think of them as walking encyclopedias, but they do not have well-rounded knowledge and do not understand the essence of Buddhism. Without understanding the essence, they carry the cultural bag of patriarchy. What is the spirit of Buddhism? It is freedom, peace, happiness—and it is for both men and women.

What do you see is the role of the sangha and monks regarding bhikkhuni ordination?

The monks are scared to make any supportive comments. This is an order from the Council of Elders issued in 2471. This came after women who had been ordained were ordered to dis-

robe. Since then a monk cannot give ordination to women. This is in contrast to the teaching about religious freedom. I hope and pray that the Council of Elders will be farsighted and balance the four groups [bhikkhu, bhikkhuni, laymen, laywomen] according to the Buddha.

How can laypeople become involved?

Laypeople must be supportive. I get more support from the public after ordination. I also see that many women are looking for a space to develop their spiritual practice.

Do you think Thai people have misconceptions about bhikkhuni ordination?

There are many misconceptions. If people understood the true message then we would be talking about a more peaceful life for mothers, daughters, children. We need to see how things are interconnected. When there is suffering somewhere it generates itself and you are part of its existence.

How can laypeople interested in bhikkhuni ordination help this process?

Laypeople can get involved to help train women, form an administrative center, and a place for study. We can learn a lot from the Sri Lankan experience. They are two steps ahead of us.

Before I went to Sri Lanka, I thought Maechees were not the right soil. They are scared. When I saw the Dhasa Sila Matas in Sri Lanka and their role in higher ordination, I changed my mind.

Does the lack of support from the sangha come from cultural baggage or the lack of knowledge about the lineage?

Both. The core problem is ignorance.

I never imagined ordination would happen so fast and happily, too. When I went to Sri Lanka in 1993 for a conference, they said "don't mention ordination" and then, a few years later, 200 of them ordained! This is very happy news and gives me hope for change. I also have faith in the monks who study. They quote from the dharma-vinaya to show senior monks the legitimacy of bhikkhuni ordination.

Any words for Seeds of Peace readers?

Before you get to seeds of peace, there is lots of turmoil. I think to study Buddhism you should look to other traditions, I am grateful to be born a Buddhist. Being exposed to other traditions helps us find the right path. With success, we get bloated egos. With failure, we lose our spirit. In order to keep the balance—keep the vitality without ego—we need self-examination. We must reverse the gaze. Look inside yourself, particularly if you are a social worker and concerned with social problems. You must nurture the inner spirit, and keep a well inside you that will not dry up. To practice dhamma, you cannot always be serious, otherwise you lose the beauty of the world. You should feel the beauty of the lotus. I chose the name Dhammananda [when I ordained] because it means joyfulness.

The interview was conducted on March 21, 2001 at Thammasat University by members of the *Seeds of Peace* staff.

March 2, 2001

Dear Sulak,

I am writing to bring you up to date on the international campaign to have a resolution passed at the upcoming UN Commission on Human Rights session criticising the Chinese government for its human rights record in Tibet.

As you may know, the United States has now announced that it will sponsor a resolution (see below). With a guaranteed sponsor, the campaign can now move to the next stage, which is to find co-sponsors and countries which are willing to support the resolution.

Australia Tibet Council and most other major Tibet support groups have now put out media releases announcing the campaign and we are renewing our efforts to convince our governments to co-sponsor the resolution. Here in Australia we are organizing a grassroots letter campaign to politicians about this issue.

Is there any possibility of Thailand co-sponsoring? If not, what are the chances of Thailand at least voting against China? Are you able to do anything personally or through the various NGO's you are involved with to influence your government's position?

I look forward to hearing from you. Please let us know if there is anything we can do from here to help.

Regards,
Alex Butler
Australia Tibet Council

U.S. State Department
Washington D.C.
February 26, 2001

The United States will introduce a resolution on China's human rights practices at the United Nations Commission when it meets at Geneva in March. Our goal in sponsoring this resolution is to encourage China to take positive, concrete steps to meet its international obligations to protect the fundamental freedoms and civil liberties of the Chinese people.

Unfortunately, over the past year, the Chinese government's poor human rights record worsened, and China continues to commit numerous serious abuses. The government intensified crackdowns on religion and in Tibet, and suppressed any persons or group it perceived as a threat. The government also significantly stepped up its campaign against the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

We call on the other members of the international community, especially those who are members of the Commission, to join with us in supporting a resolution.

14 February 2001

My dear Sulak,

Greetings from Sarvodaya, Sri Lanka. It was nice hearing from you.

We are very busy these days. On 18 March, 2001 the first volume of my autobiography (running into 600 pages) will be launched with the Speaker of Sri Lanka's Parliament as the Chief Guest. There will be over 5,000 people attending the book launch. At the end of February I have organized a SAARD meeting at which the theme "Children at Risk" will be the topic of discussion. The International Peace Centre Vishva Niketan conducts retreats and meditation programmes including programmes for prison officials and prisoners. Peace Walks and mass peace meditation programmes island-wide are held. Although I have handed over the administration of Sarvodaya to my son, Vinya, the socio-spiritual activities, which are badly needed in Sri Lanka, are handled by me.

Sarvodaya is active in 15,000 villages and Vinya is in charge of the programmes which are very effectively conducted. Please come this way when you have the time and we will have some quiet hours together.

With the blessing of the Triple Gem,
Yours sincerely,
Ari

A.T. Ariyaratne
Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

23 February 2001

Dear friends,

We write with deep concern about the assault of Tipu Sultan, a correspondent of United News of Bangladesh, in Feni. On 25 January 2001, Mr. Sultan was beaten by a gang associated with Jainal Abedin Hazari, MP of the ruling party in Feni. He was left with broken hands and legs, and struggling for life in a hospital. This happened nine days after Sultan publicised the MP's destruction of a girl's school in Feni because they did not invite him as chief guest for the school inauguration. Moreover, government authorities did not respond to Mr. Sultan's appeals for protection after they fled Dhaka.

We are shocked to learn how a Member of Parliament could terrorize the people of his own district because of some trivial problems. What is more shocking is that this terrorism has been going on for the past two decades. Has nothing really been done to deter the violence?

In solidarity with the victim and survivor of the assault, we appeal to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, to:

1. Ensure sufficient protection for Mr. Tipu Sultan, his family and relatives.
2. Take legal action against the perpetrators of the assault.
3. Provide necessary treatment facilities to the victim.

Submitted by the Asian Center for the Progress of Peoples, Hong Kong.

Social Justice, Democracy and Alternative Politics: An Asian-European Dialogue

Ramu Manivannan, ed.,
(Bangkok: SEM, SNF, and FES, 2001)
ISBN: 974-260-173-9

In May 2000 an international conference in honor of Mr. Pridi Banomyong's centenary, which went by the name of "Social Justice, Democracy and Alternative Politics: An Asian-European Dialogue", was held in Ayutthaya, Siam. This volume, edited by Ramu Manivannan, is a compilation of the papers and reports from that conference. It also offers a glimpse—lamentably a quick and sanitized one—into the open discussions held there.

Overall the conference was "excessively peaceful and consensual," Donald Sassoon observed. And despite being an inter-civilizations dialogue, controversies were very limited and the conferees "[had] not come close to something as a fist fight" Ashis Nandy joked. Well a fist fight certainly did not break out, but on at least one occasion voices were raised, fingers were pointed at one another, and several faces were reddened with anger. The most heated and most interesting exchanges erupted over the issues of "Asian values," modernization, and imperialism—hence the focus of this review.

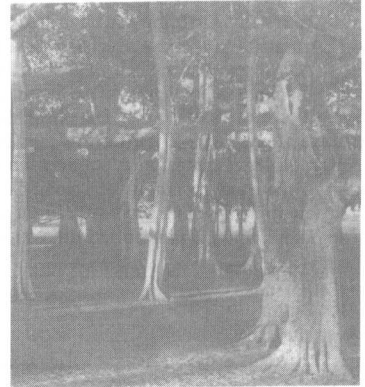
The conference kicked off with Walden Bello's provocative and biting presentation. Bello decried the US promotion of democracy during the Clinton administration as "one-third substance and two-thirds PR" and insisted that "What democracy promotion was not about was creating institutions and pushing policies that would bring about more equality in access to wealth and resources as demanded by the poor majority." Rather, Washington's promotion of democracy is merely a means to provide "the framework for the

spread of market forces, the untrammelled operation of which was expected to spur economic growth as well as put an end to the unholy relationship between authoritarian government and monopoly businesses known as 'crony capitalism.'" Undoubtedly, the democracy that Washington is promoting abroad is the kind it has long been experimenting with at home.

Concluding his address, Bello stated "We must transform our elite democracies into social democracies, which means asset and income redistribution at home and strong checks on the central sources of anti-democracy in our time: the imperial power of Washington and transnational corporations." In short, Bello emphasized the transnational character of the threats to meaningful democracy and called for a concerted effort to tackle them. However, at the conference the following day this vital observation was largely thrown down the memory hole. The hollowing of democracy became not a transnational issue but a malaise found only in particular civilizations.

Thomas Heberer clinically analyzed the mindset and value system of the Asian monster he had imagined and represented. Among the Asian traits (weaknesses) Heberer pointed to were "paternalistic, family-oriented, consensual and clientelistic patterns of political behavior", "hierarchical political structures and vertical patterns of decision-making", "respect for and acceptance of authority and order, harmony and consensus instead of confrontation, conflict, and competition", "education has a

*Social Justice,
Democracy and Alternative Politics:
An Asian-European Dialogue*



Papers and reports from an international seminar in honour of Mr Pridi Banomyong's Centenary

edited by Ramu Manivannan

priority over punishment", "learning by imitation", "priority of ethics and morality over law", and "obedience, persistence, and self-discipline." He argued that these values may "hinder the emergence of structures of modernity and thus contribute to preserving authoritarian structures and thinking." For example, deriding the Asians' penchant for lemming Heberer rhetorically asked "where was it when Japan attacked its neighboring countries in the 30s and 40s? During the Cultural Revolution in China? In Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge? Or during all the bloodshed in the region in recent decades?" No one at the conference immediately shot back the question "Where was it when Nazi Germany attacked its neighboring countries in the 30s and 40s?" There was no Edward Said among the participants to point out the centrality of Western culture in fostering and sustaining Western imperialism and colonialism.

Many decades ago Heberer's list of Asian values would probably have read servile, passive, weak, childish, immature, unreflective, despotic, imitative, law-breaking, and so on. Put differently, his list was simply a reworking of the broader Orientalist discourse central to European and American literature on

the non-West. We should remember that even Marxism was Orientalism painted red. These traits, Heberer implied, made Asia a stagnant cesspool and they are in sharp contrast to Western values, which breed dynamism and progress. As a result, Asians required or even beseeched Western tutelage. Here we can see flashbacks of 18-19th century civilizing missions and of *Heart of Darkness*.

Although Heberer suggested that “the West should learn too and become open for an all-embracing dialogue with other cultures” he seemed to feel that this was not yet the time to do so. In a subsequent open discussion, Heberer, substituting the idiom of modernization for racial hierarchies, stated “It is a matter of fact that the western countries are superior in terms of science and technology, political and economic organizations and the development of legal mechanisms. I think that most Asian leaders...have accepted that Asia which once had its golden age should now be prepared to learn from the West.” The contradictions in Heberer’s Orientalist discourse are now starkly manifested. If Asian values lead to inertia or stagnancy how did Asia have a golden age? If Western values lead to dynamism why was Europe merely a quiet backwater during the golden age of Asia? (Also, Heberer did not acknowledge what—probably nothing at all—Europe had learned from the Asian golden age.) Moreover, the fall of Asia, which preceded the rise of the West, may not really have to do with values.

The initial reactions to Heberer’s argument ranged from approval to mild rebuke. Donald Sassoon concurred with Heberer’s list of Asian values and highlighted “the relative similarity between the fundamental concepts of the whole Asian values and some of the concepts which emerged in Europe to-

wards the end of the 19th century....” Again, Asians are inert and always a few centuries behind the dynamic West; the key to the future lies with the West. Politely challenging Heberer’s thesis, Chandra Muzaffar contended that the debate on Asian values “is a waste of time. We are talking about a creature that does not exist.” And Sulak Sivaraksa insisted that a major distinction between Asian and Western values is that the most important value for Asians is “how to be worthy” while that of Westerners is “how to have.” For many Asian participants, ‘Asian values’ seemed to refer to the teachings espoused by, for example, the Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, and the Dalai Lama—values that Heberer conveniently ignored.

The most comprehensive and forceful rebuttal to Heberer’s thesis (finally) came from Ashis Nandy on the third day of the conference. And this was when the conference climaxed. Mincing no words, Ashis Nandy bravely declared, “I would indeed propose that one of the reasons that we did not have much controversy...is because our category and framework were heavily dominated by one party in the dialogue of two. I do not think that a dialogue between Asia and Europe can begin in this post-colonial world unless we grapple with the issue of imperialism as a category.” He then went straight ahead to dissect the components and contradictions in the Western value system. He was not going to let the European participants talk about Western values without having to justify themselves.

Ashis asserted that “one of the major contributions of the Enlightenment vision is to set up binary polarities aimed at pluralising one part of it and not the other.” For instance, “you can be underdeveloped in various ways but you can be developed in only one way.” A corollary of this form of binarism is the

linearity in Western concept of progress. As Ashis mocked, “What is culturally different and culturally distant I am converting into something temporally different. I am converting the difference to my past. This has several advantages because I can tell the other person that I know him better than he does about himself. I was very like you yesterday. I have transcended myself from that stage and moved beyond it. You are struggling in the present. Your present is my past.” He further pointed out that the Enlightenment did not celebrate the concept of nonviolence and thereby contributed to “the perverse operation of rationality and mechanisation of science,” which logically culminated in the long and violent twentieth century.

Several European participants did not blithely accept Ashis Nandy’s viewpoint and an intense drama soon unfolded. Unfortunately a large chunk of the fiery open discussion on the third day of the conference is not reproduced in this book for whatever reasons. Though sanitized and censored, there are lingering traces to indicate that it was not the most cordial of discussions. For instance, Erfried Adam angrily volunteered “It is not possible to have a dialogue when we try to be so radical and controversial...I have no understanding of what Ashis Nandy has been saying. He has all the freedom to pursue a completely different paradigm. But he possibly cannot have all the answers to the problems we are concerned about.” Perhaps Nandy had shocked Adam. Asians are not supposed to be radical and use original or indigenous paradigms because they are imitative. And in a reversal of role Adam was implying, that the conferees should uphold “Asian values” such as prioritizing harmony and consensus.

S.J.

Toward a Global Civilization? The Contribution of Religions

Patricia M. Mische and Melissa Merklung, Editors
Peter Lang: New York, 2001
ISBN:0-8204-5194-0

Working in the Seeds of Peace office, it seems that inter-religious dialogues, global peace conferences, and working papers on religion and development are everywhere, so what comes out of them? Usually the endeavor produces more questions and more conferences but few theories about the critical implications of interreligious dialogue and new approaches. This collection of essays lays out the need for a religious understanding of the transition to an integrated world and the common foundation for dialogue among religions and is self-reflective in its approach. Historian Arnold Toynbee wrote that the common ground for all religions lies in

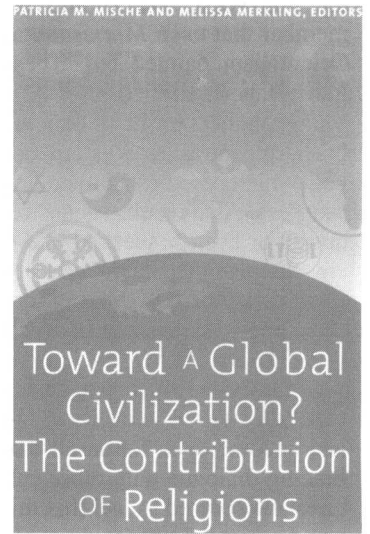
- 1) human nature (and the over-coming of self-centeredness)
- 2) the present state of the world (dealing with technology, war, etc)
- 3) the conviction that humans are not the greatest spiritual presence in the Universe, but that there is a greater presence—God or absolute reality—and that the true end of humans is to place themselves in harmony with this
- 4) we all have common adversary in the worship of man and “collective human power”

Laying out these similarities is a good foundation for the rest of the collection, it is as if, by accepting these tenets of universal religion, the reader is free to concentrate on the more subtle elaboration found in the specific chapters.

In the introductory essay,

Patricia Mische uses a systems analysis approach to describe three views of the current transformation: the 50 year timeframe of the breakdown of the post-war order, the 500 year timeframe of the breakdown of the nation state, and the 10,000 year timeframe of the breakdown of the myth of dominance. The combination of these time frames is compelling evidence for the need to vocalize new worldviews based on interconnectedness with the earth and all sentient beings.

The first essay by Richard Falk explains how and why the study of governance and political science has excluded any discussion of religion or spirituality up until the present. Apart from fears of fanaticism and the oppressive religious state, Falk says that “the justification for the exclusion of religion had to do with the perception that religious institutions were inimical to the rise of science and material progress in human affairs”. At the same time he acknowledges that although religion was never formally acknowledged as interconnected with the authority of the state, “religion excluded from entering the front door of political life will tend to enter other entrances, including concealed trapdoors” and thus, should be addressed in more than a tokenistic way. Governments are slow to respond to this need and when religion does become integrated into political rhetoric it is often seen to be co-opted or manipulated. President George W. Bush’s call for “faith-based institutions” is more frequently a humorous punch line rather than



the basis for a new world-view. Falk also raises the critical question about whether discussions of global governance are misguided from the start given the weak status of the UN and pessimistic hopes for a change in the near future. Another factor to be considered in the formation of a global civilization is the emerging power of “netizens: the new militant, political identities arising out of close affiliation with the Internet, with political sensibilities that gravitate toward the ethos of self-adjusting systems and a libertarian resistance to governmental regulation in any form”. The pull away from the discipline and historical baggage of religion has become stronger through the Internet and virtual identities that are not grounded in time or space.

The most provocative essay “Religion and...” by Robert Traer fundamentally challenges the process of inter-religious dialogue for its exploitative and functional approach to religious teachings. The common rhetoric and practice of enumerating the problems of violence, poverty, racism, and then using *selective* religious teachings to state ideals is an example of well-intentions gone awry. This process, argues Traer, is misguided and by argu-

ing that people can “pick and choose” what parts of religion and spirituality to embrace denies the particular and historical experiences of people in faith communities. The people become less important than the relevant theory. He says, “For the Muslim, the teachings of divine mercy and judgement cannot be separated, for each informs and shapes the understanding of the other, and both express the divine will.” The practice of only highlighting divine mercy as an aspect of spirituality and peacemaking is inflating the power of humankind to understand transcendental values. The author raises the question that perhaps we cannot understand the value of judgement and it is only our narrow experience that is causing us to isolate judgement as a negative concept and mercy as a positive one. Isolating abstract ideas renders unimportant institutions, histories and personal experiences. Similarly, in the Buddhist tradition the statement of “looking on all beings with compassion” is not a purely utilitarian philosophy for achieving world peace. It is at the core of a Buddhist worldview and cannot be applied in isolation. The “religion as resource” approach attempts to “free resources [values and spirituality] from the religious institutions and organizations that have preserved these ideals but have failed to realize them”.

An alternative to such a utilitarian view of religion would be a “religion as source” basis for interreligious communication that looks to lived experiences and the history of people and religious choices. Other people’s stories and experiences based on religion will lead to “new ways to add to and modify our stories” and to talk about faith encounters. Instead of trying to create a new system of spirituality based on

the best from different religions, Traer says we must look to all that we already know and validate these experiences through exchange. This exchange will engender a solution to the global social problems that are at the beginning of “religion as resource” discussions. Traer’s focus is on people, and the fostering of trust and honesty in exchange, rather than in the creation of an intellectually viable, syncretic religious theory. Academics, religious leaders, and spiritual seekers cannot edit out the parts of religion that they do not agree with. Grappling with these issues and acknowledging the fallibility of all religions and thus the human race itself, is part of the journey to transcendence and deeper understanding. This does not mean accepting the status quo but does mean working with existing institutions and people as they are grounded in history and experience and, thus, not entirely malleable. The short length of Traer’s article is frustrating and means that his ideas are not fully elaborated, and he does not demonstrate the “religion as source” approach through examples. This leaves the article incomplete at the crucial stage of praxis. Can the “religion as source” approach only work on a small-scale, interpersonal level? What are the policy implications? How can this approach be integrated into a more holistic view of development?

Another point of clarification is needed regarding people who are not part of traditional faith communities and are looking to talk about spiritual experiences in a universal way in order to connect with others. This is part of the momentum for the new age philosophy and literature prevalent in the US and Western Europe and should have

been addressed explicitly. Carefully choosing certain aspects of various faiths is at the center of new age spirituality; however, it seems that there can be a reconciliation between Traer’s idea of honest, experience-based exchange and the selectivity that occurs when people are trying to rediscover a language of spirituality. New age terminology with its glossary of multicultural terms is often used as a way to talk about spirituality, but it is not the only way. Speaking of spiritual experiences in a way that is grounded in emotional experience and uses personal language could be considered a level of “religion as source”.

The subsequent articles in the collection can only be read in light of Traer’s thesis about the shortcomings of the “religion as resource” approach. Some, like one essay that extracts Confucian teachings about human rights and ecological sustainability and another which focuses on the “Contribution of African Culture”, clearly fall into the model Traer criticizes and fail to offer innovative ideas for the formation of a global civilization with distinct faith traditions. Others, such as “Islamic Revivalism: A Global Perspective” by Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk, pick up where Traer leaves off—at the point of policy applicability. The quest for Islamic revival, “the affirmation of an Islamic ideological alternative to secular nationalism, Western nationalism, and socialism”, has advocates who represent much broader ideas than the radical groups focused on by the international media. Said and Funk see the leadership of such Islamacists as the crucial factor in bridging Islamic revival and the need for dialogue in order to meet social and political challenges. Leaders have the power to lay the frame-

work for voluntary cooperation, a presupposition of trust, and the formation of common objectives. Identifying common objectives is distinct from creating a common rationale using a motley collection of traditions and religious teachings in order to justify such objectives. Common objectives serve a functional purpose, incorporating these objectives into

a spiritual worldview should not be functional and cannot be done on a universal level.

Toward a Global Civilization? The Contribution of Religions makes a valiant attempt to move beyond the slew of inter-religious conferences and papers and achieves its goals in presenting a diverse collection of authors who are largely self-conscious

about this trend and want to do more. The book does not set out to make concrete recommendations but does provide a starting point for thinking about how inter-religious understanding could be used in a context other than symbolic declarations.

Sonali Chakravarti

Thai Foreign Policy 1932-1946

Charivat Santaputra

Committees on the Project for the National Celebration on the Occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of Pridi Banomyong, Senior Statesman (private sector)

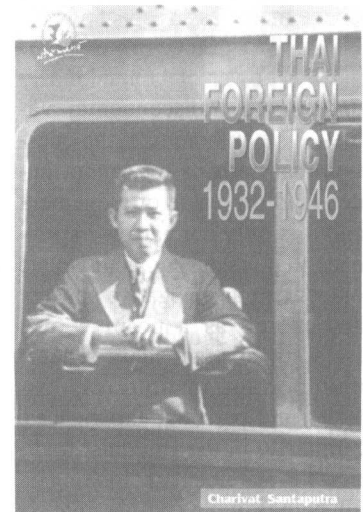
This book on Thai Foreign policy during the period of 1932-1946 is not only significant for its historical value but also for its contemporary relevance in view of its sheer potential to guide our understanding of the post-war years in Thai politics at both the national and international levels. There is another historical value attached to this scholarly work, i.e., it deals primarily with what one may call the Pridi years in Thai politics. This period is considered as one of the most important phases of modern Thai history. It was a curious phase and it was difficult to distinguish between domestic and international concerns. The nation went through a full cycle of emotions and recovered its pride and future due to the heroic role of Pridi Banomyong and other liberals. In several ways Pridi's life itself was a statement of that time. This volume is the result of painstaking research and valuable documentation based on primary sources which enhance its potential for interpretation of politics on its own merit.

This book is originally a Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Faculty of Social Science-Politics,

University of Southampton. This is exemplified by the author's pursuit of academic insight and methodological rigour. The author has done well to maintain his academic neutrality given the choice of Brecher's decision-making model and the opportunity for analysis and interpretation of the actors and actions. In an ultimate sense every actor and his action has been subordinated to scrutinise the developments in Thai foreign policy with an object of retaining the national interest. The value orientation of the national elite acquires significance in this context. It is this crucial recognition of the distinctiveness of each major actor, groups and interests including those of foreign powers represented in Thailand at that time which adds interest to the book.

The author considers that there was no single pattern of Thai foreign policy during the period 1932-1946. This was largely due to the background and legacy of Thai diplomacy during the pre-war years. Thai diplomacy during this period was influenced by several factors such as its traditional hostility towards France, a studied yet uncertain relation-

ship with Britain and a sense of admiration for Japan due to its economic and military pre-eminence in the region. Charivat Santaputra develops five major patterns of Thai foreign policy during the period 1932-1946 against this background. Firstly, the pattern of a society open to foreign influence and ultimately penetration which it considers as inevitable due to the historical reasons. Secondly, the open door policy was neutralised in the emergence of the pattern of 'balance of power'. Thirdly, the pattern of flexibility was recognised as the best available option for a weak state like Thailand, an attitude of 'bend with the wind'. Fourthly, the pattern of alliance with great power(s). This pattern continued even after the Second World War. This is based on the



belief that Thailand's security can be ensured only by a commitment from the major power. The case of Pibul (Luang Pibulsongkhram) leading the country into alliance with Japan in 1941 and the decision to ally with the United States of America in the post-war period are some the examples of the elite psyche in Thailand. Lastly, regarding the pattern of irredentism, the author makes an interesting distinction when he says that the policy of irredentism is not only ad hoc but a natural policy. He notes that irredentism had been laden within the Thais' sentiment due to the loss of territories exacted by the imperialist powers. He considers that military irredentism and Pan-Thai policy was certainly an opportun-

istic approach to placate the people of Thailand. The author attributes responsibility for the losses suffered by the country during the war years to this opportunistic group of military and political elite in Thailand.

In his appraisal of the study Charivat Santaputra has made certain valuable and highly significant observations in the context of the Thai foreign policy during the period 1932-1946. He is totally unassuming when he sums that "a democratic form of government is more conducive to good and beneficial foreign policy, at least in the case of Thailand as indicated by the experiences between 1932-1946." The book is not without a message from history when it draws at-

tention to Crosby's warning in 1943 that 'the political eclipse of the Siamese liberals will endure so long as the army and navy continue to possess the physical means of keeping them in subjugation. Not until this impediment has been removed will there be a prospect for the application of democratic principles in Siam...' This came true as early as the end of 1947 and almost remained a part of the reality of Thai politics until the middle of 1990s except for a brief interval during 1973-1976. Is this why the book is dedicated to Pridi Banomyong, the tragic hero of modern Thai democracy?

Ramu Manivannan

INEB News

After the Ariya-Vinaya meeting, INEB in corporation with the Thai Interreligious Commission for Development (TICD), organized a one-week study tour for Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. Participants included three monks from Ladakh who are the teachers of the Ladakh Nun Association, three Bhikkhunis from Sri Lanka, one Tibetan Bhikkhuni from Dharamsala and one American Bhikkhuni who teaches at the Thai nun's college in Bangkok.

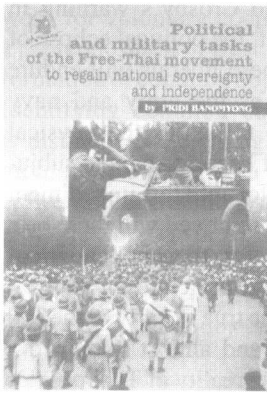
The group went to visit temples and nunneries that are involved in various social development projects in rural areas located in central and northeastern part of Thailand. These projects are the initiatives of monks and nuns who use Buddhism as a means to respond to the structural violence that arises from modernization, capitalism, materialism and consumerism. The pro-



jects include traditional healing systems, savings group, organic farming and cooperative rice mills, rice banks, teaching youths about community and environment through artwork and Dhamma, and teaching Dhamma to women, senior people and children.

After the study tour the

Bhikkhunis and Bhikkhus reflected that the process helped enhance their understanding of the meaning and the impact of structural violence. Many of them felt inspired by the work of nuns and monks who use the Buddha's teachings to help revive the livelihood of the community.



Political and Military Tasks of the Free Thai Movement to regain national sovereignty and independence
Pridi Banomyong

ISBN: 974-7833-88-3

Published by the Committee for the Centennial Anniversary of Pridi Banomyong, 2001.

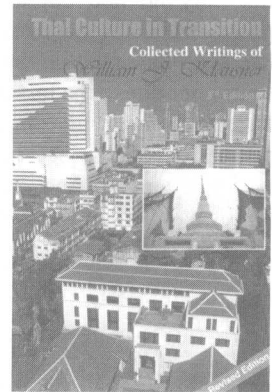
Part of the series to commemorate his centennial, this work was compiled by Pridi Banomyong in the late 1970's and is a collection of primary source documents, including correspondence and official reports, in reference to the position of Siam during World War II.

Thai Culture in Transition
Collected Writings of William J. Klausner

3rd Edition

Bangkok: Siam Society, 2000.

ISBN: 974-8298-50-7



A collection of essays and observations on the changes in religion, food, and social hierarchy in Thailand by a Komol Keemthong Foundation honoree.



focas: forum on contemporary art and society

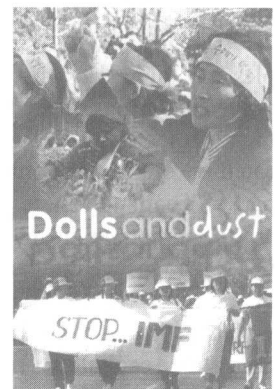
Singapore: The Necessary Stage, 2000.

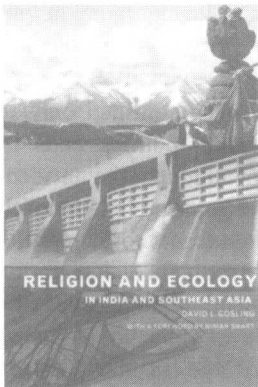
ISBN: 0219-5054

In the inaugural edition of this biannual publication, the focus is on representation, community arts and public interaction, and artistic censorship in the Singapore press. The themes correspond to forums held in Singapore in the last six months. The writings about the prohibition of *Talaq*, a play about women in the Muslim Indian community, are a revealing look at the subtleties of censorship in Singapore's pluralistic society.

Dolls and dust
CAW and Wayang

This is a comprehensive report on the conditions of women workers in South Asian countries. It shows how industrial restructuring, globalisation and male development have affected their lives, the communities they belong to and the environment. The book succeeds in its attempt, both at the macro and micro levels to highlight how globalisation, led by bodies like the World Bank and the IMF in league with Asian banks and agencies, has drastically affected the lives of women and forced them to serve as a 'docile and cheap labour force'...





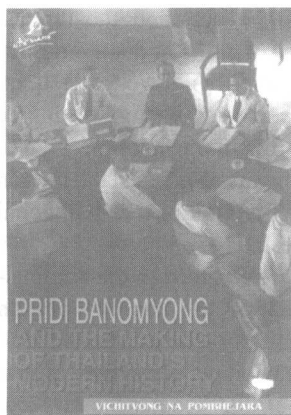
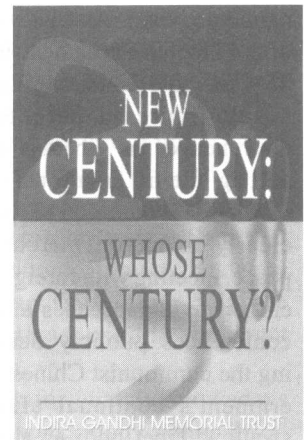
**Religion and Ecology
in India and South East Asia**

David L. Gosling
ISBN : 0-415-24030-1

Expanding our horizons is what this book does to any reader with human concerns of the great ecological threat our planet faces. We are aware that religious traditions like those of Hinduism and Buddhism have evolved a consciousness which protects and preserves the environment and the ecological potential of these traditions is brought under study, both in a historical perspective and also in contemporary expression. We should look at India and its Southeast Asian counterparts to play a more crucial role in the preservation of the whole ecosystem. David L. Gosling adopts a scholarly approach and provides valuable insights based on extensive fieldwork in the region, and this work is formulated in the sphere of the social-political context of religious change, especially in India and Thailand.

**New Century: Whose Century?
Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust
Monmohan Malhoutra, editor**
ISBN: 81-7476-339-2

This is a compilation of the papers and proceedings of the Seventh Indira Gandhi Conference, held in New Delhi, November 1999. Thinkers from diverse backgrounds and nationalities look at the terrain of the information revolution and correlated social changes and attempt to charter it. Some of the key participants were Sulak Sivaraksa, Johan Galtung, and Dr. Karan Singh.

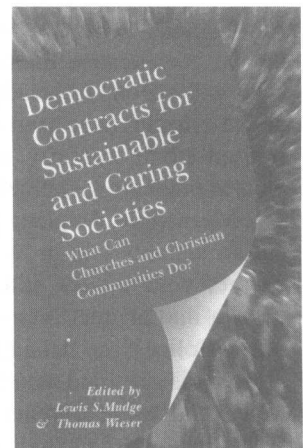


**Pridi Banomyong
and The Making of Thailand's
Modern History**
Vichitvong Na Pombhejara
ISBN: 974-260-175-5

This book tells the story of the life of Thai Statesman Ajaan Pridi, how he served his country and his countrymen, and how he was framed and exiled from his homeland. It brings to light the success of his vision, his daring leadership and the various causes and conditions which led to his false implication. It should prove very interesting for the English reader, who may find it difficult to access materials on this subject.

**Democratic Contracts for
Sustainable and Caring Societies**
**Edited by Lewis S. Mudge
and Thomas Weiser**
ISBN: 2-8254-1334-8

This volume is a compilation of the presentations in the 4th W.A. Visser't Hoof Memorial Consultation held in Geneva, 1999. It gives an opportunity to look at the relationship between democracy, sustainability and globalization. Although the effort of such a dialogue is to tackle the question of what Churches and Christian communities specifically can do regarding the enforcement of democratic contracts, the outcome clearly involves an inter-faith role and responsibility.



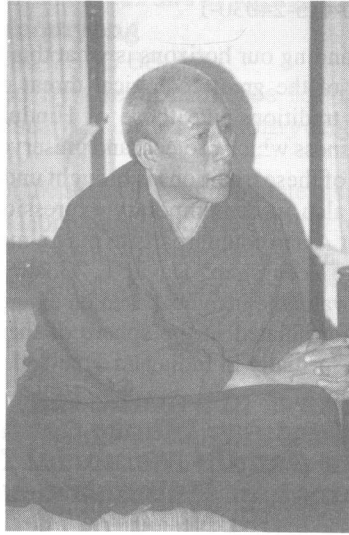
The Long Road to Freedom

Bobbing up and down a stream, little ducklings and their mother glide on the surface, creating trails of ripples in their wake. A man in a maroon robe gazes at the scene, and even if his serene face reveals no emotion, subtly it exudes compassionate equanimity—almost like the smiling Lord Buddha himself.

In his early 60s, Samdhong Tulku Rinpoche is a balanced mix of inner tranquillity and dynamic activism. As Chairperson of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, Venerable Samdhong has been a key figure in heightening awareness of the Tibetans' plight among the international community. It is common to spot the elderly monk on marches for peace, meeting with foreign leaders, or giving speeches at major conferences publicly denouncing the communist Chinese government's continual effort to swallow Tibet both as a nation and a culture.

At present, there are between 300,000 and 500,000 Chinese troops occupying the place once known as the holy land of the Himalayas. Under the pretext of modernisation, more than 7.5 million Chinese have reportedly been transferred to the Tibet Autonomous Region, as skilled labour, technicians, managerial staff and so on. Ironically, the native Tibetans have been turned into an ethnic minority, marginalised in their own homeland.

Meanwhile, religious persecution continues to grow more severe, with monks and nuns thrown into prisons. Veneration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's portraits is regarded as a crime. More and more parents have risked the hazardous trek across



the mountains to free their children from the oppressive regime. Many ended up joining the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala, India, now home to over 130,000 Tibetan residents.

Political movements for the freedom of his birthplace are, however, only one facet of Samdhong Rinpoche's work. Holding the title of Bikshu Mahathero, the venerable monk has been running the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Varanasi in India, since 1971 as a director, and from 1988 onwards as rector.

Fluent in Tibetan, English, Hindi and Sanskrit, Samdhong Rinpoche is responsible for all the institute's publications. A specialist in Abhisamaya and Madhyamika Buddhist philosophy, he has published over 60 articles to date and interviews in different academic journals and in the press.

"Preservation of Tibetanness is far more important than establishing political policies for procurement of rights and freedom," Samdhong Rinpoche often stresses. "Hence, our struggle

should not be confined only to accomplishing political ends. If, devoid of unique Tibetan identity, Tibet gains complete political freedom or autonomy, it would be akin to the mere disintegration of China and nothing more."

Born in 1939 in Nagdug, a small village in the Tibetan province of Kham, Samdhong Rinpoche started his monastic studies in 1951 at the University of Drepung, Lhasa. He completed a degree eight years later, amidst the height of the Tibetan national uprising against the Chinese military occupation which resulted in thousands of his fellow Tibetans being massacred,

Having fled across the border that same year, the young monk went on to continue his education at the re-established Drepung Monastery in India, where he obtained the highest degree of *geshe* or doctor in Buddhist sciences. Two years later, he received another *geshe* degree from the monastery of Gyuto, which was also re-established in India in Dalhousie, Himachal Pradesh.

Well-versed in the administration of the exiled Tibetan community—he was principal of several branches of the Central School for Tibetans and vice-president of the Congress of Tibetan Youth in 1970-1973—Samdhong Rinpoche has played a vital role in supporting the Dalai Lama's promotion of democracy among his compatriots.

Now the Parliament, the highest legislative body of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, has become a freely-elected assembly, representing all segments of the Tibetan society, be

they in geographical or denominational terms.

The Parliament, also known as the Assembly of Tibetan Peoples Deputies, comprises representatives from all three Chokas (provincial regions) of U-Tsang, Amdo and Kham, as well as the four Buddhist sects and the Bon religion. The 46 deputies are tasked with the charges of electing the *Kashag* (Cabinet), previously an exclusive prerogative of the Dalai Lama, as well as laying down policies and monitoring foreign relations and activities of Tibetans overseas.

Moreover, according to His Holiness's vision, were Tibet ever to be granted autonomy, the Government-in-Exile, including the Dalai Lama himself, must eventually give up their temporal authority, so as to pave the way for a truly democratic election of the president and the Constituent Assembly.

Toward this end, Samdhong Rinpoche has been active as a member of the Preparatory Commission for the charter of the Tibetans in Exile and the Future Constitution of Tibet.

The mission is in consonance with his religious convictions.

"The bhikkhu or bhikkhuni sangha should be free from doing statecraft," Samdhong Rinpoche said, sharing his views during a recent seminar on Sangha reform in Thailand. "It would be better for monks and nuns to be involved in selective social activities (such as teaching and guiding lay people). The two responsibilities of monks are reading/learning and meditation.

Construction of the temple and work at the monastery is acceptable, but social work outside the monastery is not. The Tibetan example of monk-rulers seems to go against the rules but they are

ruling with Dhamma."

On the other hand, Samdhong Rinpoche's views of the secular state of affairs are rather bleak. The modern state is a "body of hypocrisy" monopolised by a very tiny number of people and driven by greed and fear. Fundamentally, there are no differences between a so-called democratic regime and an autocratic or totalitarian one.

On a broader scale, international politics do not hit the mark either, to judge by the monk's gauge of democratic values. Citing J. Krishnamurti's speech at the United Nations headquarters—that the basic idea of nation is division, so how can it ever be united?—Samdhong Rinpoche shares his exasperation of having been propagating the Tibetan cause for several decades, and yet human rights violations in his homeland continue to rise.

Diplomatic talks about the need to uphold democracy, equality, and human rights, the venerable monk says, serve only "ornamental" purposes, lacking in genuine commitment to exert pressure on the nations who violate the principles.

"The UN Human Rights Commission is one of the most undemocratic institutions, and has nothing to do with [the protection of] human rights at all. It has no teeth nor instruments to implement the resolutions.

The UN Declaration of Human Rights has not benefited anyone either. Somebody once said, perhaps the existence of the UN Declaration serves one purpose—that now we can say human rights are being violated under article so and so."

Such an acerbic sense of humour intermittently peppers any conversation with Samdhong Rinpoche. Despite his humble

demeanour, the monk has definite, clear-cut views about the ways of the world.

Asked if he thinks modern-day clerics should keep themselves informed about the modern world by taking up some secular subjects, the venerable replies with an adamant "No", and then...

"I'm not very up-to-date but I'm almost 'near-to-death'," he said, playing with puns. "Being up-to-date is very easy, but that only engages with information. I just keep my eyes and ears open, and let intuition come. To understand the 'evil of modernity', I don't need to study any subjects in depth.

Monks and nuns should study dhamma, Pali, and Commentaries. Meditation should be given more importance. So should [cultivation of] loving kindness, or compassion. To study the canon alone, one lifetime is not enough.

"Unfortunately, nowadays many monks study political sciences, economics, all these Western subjects for practical use. I'm afraid they would not be able to maintain a standard of *Sila* (virtuous conduct)."

Playfully calling himself a "savage", underneath it all, Samdhong Rinpoche is no dogmatic recluse. For the learned man, the self-coined epithet reflects his cynicism toward the fanfare claim of so-called development, science, and globalisation.

Modernity, in his view, is imbued with a host of ironies. While more wealth is generated, fewer and fewer people are able to access it. There are more school buildings, but less education, more hospitals, and yet the bills are too expensive for the poor to afford the services. The trickle-

down effect espoused by neoliberal economics is a completely unacceptable proposition.

Witnessing the systematic suppression of Tibetans and their culture by the Chinese government, Samdhong Rinpoche draws a parallel with an intangible but pervasive onslaught of economic colonialism, which is more deep-rooted and difficult to repel than imperialism by force. The assault has pervaded both Western and Oriental nations alike.

But can the trend of monolithic capitalism be curtailed, let alone reversed? Samdhong Rinpoche does not think it is utopian values and local sovereignty based on simple living and self-sufficiency.

The exiled Tibetan communities in India, for instance, thrive on limited resources. The venerable monk said a mere three-hectare plot of land could easily provide enough food crops to sustain 20 families.

“From one seed of pumpkin, the villagers could grow more than three hundred pumpkins a year. The whole Ashram enjoys eating the vegetable and earns a sizeable income from selling the rest in the market.

This is an example of *Savaraj*—self is controlled by oneself. Everything is localised, and the needs are minimised. We live in harmony with nature around us. The villagers enjoy freedom—from greed, competition—and have more-leisure.

This is a very sustainable development, in the sense that people would live a happy, contented life. Gradually, this can bring us to *Karma-Savaraj* (collective self-governance). This is not only for village people alone, it is a way of life for everybody. It’s a remedy to all of the problems that have been created by

modernity.”

But what about the immediate problems of Tibet itself? After four decades of being forced to leave their birthplace, will there ever be hope for the exiled Tibetans to return home?

Despite success in maintaining the international community’s sympathy, all the calls by the Dalai Lama to engage the government of the People’s Republic of China have been met with deaf ears.

Samdhong Rinpoche himself proposed a peace mission called *Satyagraha* (literally meaning “adherence with truth”) a couple of years ago. Based on Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence, of which the monk is a devout student, the crusade urged Tibetans to go back to Tibet and start a non-violent movement within the occupied land. The proposition has been criticised by some as equivalent to an act of suicide, but the monk believes it would be far more effective than the past diplomatic campaigns.

In true Buddhist spirit, Samdhong Rinpoche believes it is up to individual and collective action to counter the stream of negative karma and to inaugurate the positive.

Despite all the hardships and uncertainties, the venerable remains optimistic about the future—an impressive trait, it seems, shared by a number of Tibetans.

“It’s remarkable that in spirit of all the miserable conditions, people living inside Tibet have not changed their way of life, or their minds. They have tried to keep their religion and their language alive. They have a strong faith in Buddhism, in the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The Tibetans in exile,

though small in number, are doing well also. The youngsters are getting a good education, and the culture is alive.

Finally, international support is so overwhelming. Wherever we go, we receive vast, genuine support from people at the grassroots, in the east and west. So one day there will be some changes. Big changes may be taking place in central China, and thereby the Tibetan issue can be settled.”

The article is based in part on a recent international conference on Ariya-Vinaya held in Suphan Buri province. Samdhong Rinpoche’s views on alternative politics will be incorporated, together with those of other Asian leaders, in a book on the same theme compiled and edited by Pracha Hutunuwatr and Ramu Manivannan, and is expected to be released around the middle of this year.

Vasana Chinvarakorn
Bangkok Post, Saturday,
March 31, 2001

