

# REDISCOVERING THE DHARMA: WESTERN ENCOUNTERS WITH BUDDHISM IN 19TH CENTURY SOUTH ASIA

Peter Friedlander

Draft of lectures to be given on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> January at the Melbourne Buddhist Summer school organised at University College Melbourne by The Kagyu-Evam institute. PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE DRAFT ONLY  
Note that the actual lectures diverge at times from the text here.

In the four sessions of this course we will look at the following topics.

1. Rediscovering the Buddha: follow the footsteps of Alexander Cunningham as he locates the sacred sites of the Buddha's life.

- Cunningham and the Druids
- Cunningham on tour
- Cunningham and Bodhgaya

2. Rediscovering the Dhamma: journey to 19th century Ceylon and join scholars, missionaries and officials as they translate Buddhist sacred texts.

- Prinsep and the Ashokan edicts
- Gogerly and the Dhammapada
- Muller and the sacred Texts of the East

3. Rediscovering the Sangha: join the explorations of scholars and colonial officials as they encounter the living Buddhist traditions of Sri Lanka.

- Ceylon Accounts
- Spence Hardy
- Panadura Debates

4. Rediscovering refuge: witness how early 19th century missionary opposition to Buddhism transforms into Westerners themselves becoming Buddhists.

- Colonel Olcott
- Ananda Metteyya

Rediscovering the Buddha: follow the footsteps of Alexander Cunningham as he locates the sacred sites of the Buddha's life.

Intro: a while ago (late 2007) on 'Are you smarter than a 5<sup>th</sup> grader?' a woman was asked something like "which religion considers the Ganges river in India to be holy", she thought for a while and then said "well there are Protestants, Catholics and Hebrews, I will just guess and say my own religion which is Catholic."<sup>1</sup> I was a bit surprised by that answer, but it shows how different people think of different things when you say religion to them, and how some Westerners still have hazy notions of other parts of the world.

Warm up activity: write down all the religions you can think of and then get together in groups of three and compare your lists, then we will share with each other about what the religions are that we have thought of. [Write up on whiteboard, if there is one]

Lecture part one: The background

In this session I want us to follow in the footsteps of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Westerners in India who rediscovered the Indian origins of Buddhism. I also want to show you how this was part of a larger picture of how Westerners encountered religious life in various Asian countries and came to see that such a thing as 'Buddhism' was one of the kinds of religion they were meeting.

It's important to realise that before the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western people had only the haziest notions about Eastern religions. In medieval Europe people were

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<sup>1</sup> Quote found on: <http://www.thegldg.com/forum/showthread.php?t=15392>

seen as falling into four categories, Christians, Jew, Moors (that is Muslims), and what were called by terms such as 'Heathens' or 'Gentiles'.

So what we now understand as separate religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, etc. were all just seen as forms of Heathenism.

For instance Ralph Fitch who was in India from 1583-91 visited Agra where he described the people as being both 'Moors and Gentiles'<sup>2</sup>. He then went on to visit Pegu in Burma and then visited the Shwedagon Pagoda near Rangoon, which he describes as being where the 'Tallipoies or Priests' live.<sup>3</sup>

Gradually however the accounts brought back by merchants and travellers from Asia began to be pieced together and the religions of South East Asia, which had been seen as separate religions it was realised were parts of one religion, which came to be called Buddhism. In India itself the notion that there was such a religion as Hinduism only slowly came into being.

To begin with the relationship between India and Buddhism was also not understood. Indeed as late as the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century some people still thought the Buddha might have been an Egyptian. This was a hang over from earlier views which had seen the images of the Buddha with thick lips and curly hair as indicating that he was an African, and leading to the speculation that he was from Egypt. In fact even today some people still hold this view, for instance according an African Scholar called Muata Ashby.

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<sup>2</sup> Forster, William, (1921, Indian ed. 1985), *Early Travels in India 1583-1619*, Oriental Books, Delhi, p.17.

<sup>3</sup> Forster, 36. Forster notes that the term Tallipioie for monks is how monks were addressed in Talaing as 'tala poe' means 'My Lord' in that language.

'even in the early 21st century, the idea persists that Buddhism originated only in India independently. Yet there is ample evidence from ancient writings and perhaps more importantly, iconographical evidences from the Ancient Egyptians and early Buddhists themselves that prove otherwise.' <sup>4</sup>

I think that this odd view also points to an important point to consider, that ideas from the past still sometimes shape our views of the present day. So the connections we draw in how we link different religions can have many interpretations. But, and I can't stress this enough, I don't believe for a moment that Buddhism originated in Egypt, so please don't think I am introducing this to show that. I might as well in fact point to the way that Madame Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophism, thought that the Egyptians were Indians.

May we not assign as a reason for this remark the fact that until very recently nothing was known of Old India? That these two nations, India and Egypt, were akin? That they were the oldest in the group of nations; and that the Eastern Ethiopians - the mighty builders - had come from India as a matured people, bringing their civilization with them, and colonizing the perhaps unoccupied Egyptian territory?<sup>5</sup>

What I am trying to show you is that process by which different cultures were related to each other was one which had many possible roads to follow, but in the end mostly the world has settled on certain views about the past.

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<sup>4</sup> Ashby, Muata (2006), The Ancient Egyptian Buddha: The Ancient Egyptian Origins of Buddhism, <http://www.amazon.com/Ancient-Egyptian-Buddha-Origins-Buddhism/dp/1884564615>.

<sup>5</sup> Blavatsky, H.P. (1877) Isis Unveiled, pp. 515-6, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/isis/iu-hp.htm>.

Another possible connection which was drawn between Buddhism and other traditions was with Druidism. This leads us in fact to the main player in this session, Alexander Cunningham, for in his 1854 work 'The Bhilsa Topes' he suggests that Buddhism and Druidism are closely related and says.

In the Buddhistical worship of trees displayed in the Sanchi bas-reliefs, others, I hope, will see (as well as myself) the counterpart of the Druidical and adopted English reverence for the Oak. In the horse-shoe temples of Ajanta and Sanchi may will recognise the form of the inner colonnade at Stonehenge. More, I suspect, will learn that there are Cromlechs in India as well as Britain; that the Brahmans, Buddhists and Druids all believed in the transmigration of the soul; that the Celtic language was undoubtedly derived from the Sanscrit; and that Buddha (or Wisdom), the Supreme Being worshipped by the Buddhists, is probably (most probably) the same as the great god Buddhwas, considered by the Welsh as the dispenser of good. These coincidences are too numerous and too striking to be accidental.<sup>6</sup>

He then goes on to argue that primitive Buddhism was also the same as the Greek Hermetic teaching, and that they trace their origin back to 'Maia, the Atlantis'.<sup>7</sup>

The very notion of Druid teachings themselves was also a feature of late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century imaginings of the past, in which the prehistoric monuments like Stonehenge had been conflated with the Celtic religious traditions which had as their priests the Druids. Prominent amongst the proponents of these

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<sup>6</sup> Cunningham, Alexander (1854), *The Bhilsa Topes*, pp. v-vi.

<sup>7</sup> Cunningham, p. viii.

ideas were people known as antiquarians such as John Aubrey (1626-1697) who first connected Megalithic monuments and Druids and Dr. William Stukeley (1687-1765). Aubrey and Stukeley both toured the countryside and recorded details of the monuments they found and Stukeley published two notable books, 'Stonehenge, a Temple Restored to the British Druids' (1740) and 'Abury, a Temple of the British Druids' (1743).<sup>8</sup>

There is a lot of similarity between what Aubrey and Stukeley were doing and what Cunningham was also to do, touring the country looking for monuments and developing theories to explain their origins. Clearly though what was different was that Cunningham's discoveries were to be in India, and that unlike his predecessors he was to become fascinated by rediscovering Buddhism, rather than Druidism.

So how do we get from this fairly non-standard picture of Buddhism though to the Alexander Cunningham as the man who followed the footsteps of the historical Buddha through India?

One of the key differences is that no actual Druidic texts survive, and the only descriptions of their culture are unsympathetic accounts in works like Caesar's Gallic Wars.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Chris Witcombe (1999) 'the Druids' on 'Earth Mysteries', at:  
<http://witcombe.sbc.edu/earthmysteries/EMDruids.html>

<sup>9</sup> A quote of the relevant passage from the Gallic Wars can be found on 'Druids' at  
<http://www.roman-britain.org/celtic/druids.htm>.

But, in the case of Buddhism two types of sources were available to Cunningham, first Buddhist texts themselves and second, Chinese pilgrim's accounts of ancient India. Indeed it appears that by the 1830 soon after arriving in India he conceived of the idea of following the footsteps of the seventh century Chinese Pilgrim Xuan Zang (630-44 CE) (Hsuan Tsang in the old transliteration).<sup>10</sup>

### Alexander Cunningham

Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893) was one of the pivotal figures in the development of Buddhist studies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a major contributor to the discovery and restoration of the main sites sacred to Buddhism in Northern India. He spent over 48 years in India, from 1833 to 1866 and from 1870 to 1885 and published no less than 15 books and countless articles over the 45 years from 1848 to 1893.

Nowadays for many of us getting to India is as simple as a short trip on a plane. For the first European travellers to India it was not as simple at all. Indeed the first English ship to get to India was on August 24 1608, but it had left England in March 1607<sup>11</sup> having taken almost a year and a half to get to India. Indeed it remained very common that a voyage to India might take more than a year right into the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This was partly because of the winds often took ships first to South America, and only then back to Africa, and from time to time a ship would be becalmed and remain for months at a time in a port.

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<sup>10</sup> Singh, Upinder (2004), *The Discovery of Ancient India*, Permanent Black, Delhi, p 28.

<sup>11</sup> Forster, 62.

By the 1830s though it normally took about six months to get to India, the outward voyage starting in April and arriving in September and it would have been after such a voyage that the 19 year old Cunningham reached India.

Nor yet was travel in India easy once you had got there. During the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century almost the whole of the North of the country was engulfed in various wars that made travel very hazardous. By the time Cunningham arrived the situation was more settled, but as an army officer his career included taking part in the war in the Punjab with the Sikhs and his tours in the Ladakh area led him into areas where conflict was an ever present possibility.

I argue there are two main formative influences on Cunningham's interest in Buddhism, literary sources and his own experiences touring India. Soon after the 19 year old Cunningham arrived in India in 1833 a book was published in Paris, the *Foe Koue Ki Ou Relation des Royaume Bouddhiques* by Remusat, Klapoth and Landresse. This was a translation of the account of India by the fifth century Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Fa Xian (404-14 CE) (also found as Fa Hsien/Fa Hian/Fa-Hien).<sup>12</sup>

Cunningham seems to have been fired with enthusiasm by the idea of connecting the account to the geography. His first effort in this direction was a letter of 1843 entitled 'An account of the Discovery of the ruins of the Buddhist

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<sup>12</sup> Singh, 36.



City of Samkass – by Lieut. Alex. Cunningham of the Bengal Engineers, in a Letter to Colonel Sykes, F.R.S.<sup>13</sup>

Then in 1853 Stanislas Julien published a translation of <sup>14</sup>the Chinese Pilgrim Xuan Zang's travels and a yet more detailed translation in 1857-8.

It also appears that important in his exposure to Buddhism was his tours of the country and his tours of Ladakh in 1846 and 1847 on the basis of which he wrote his earliest monograph (i.e. book) which was published in Calcutta in 1848 and was entitled *Essay on the Aryan Order of Architecture, as exhibited in the Temples of Kashmir*,<sup>15</sup> and his second publication *Ladakh, Physical, Statistical and Historical* published in London in 1854.<sup>16</sup>

By 1848 he put forward the project of tracing the footsteps of Fa Xian and Xuan Zang in the manner that Pliny had followed the route of Pliny in his Eastern Geography.<sup>17</sup> This points of course to another influence we cannot ignore in any 19<sup>th</sup> century constructions of the past, the classical influence. Cunningham would have presumed that any gentleman apart from English would know Latin, Greek, French, German, and as an Indian army officer at least two oriental languages, in his case Persian and Sanskrit.

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<sup>13</sup> JRAS 7:241-7 cited in Singh, 360.

<sup>14</sup> Singh, 38.

<sup>15</sup> I will not deal with this work here as I have not been able to get access to a copy of it.

<sup>16</sup> Cunningham, A. 1854, *Ladakh, Physical, Statistical and Historical*, London, 1854, (reprint, 1997, Gulshan Publishers: Srinagar.)

<sup>17</sup> Singh, 40.

What is vital about these tours he undertook was that he would have actually met Buddhists, who he would not have met in the plains of India in the 1830s and 1840s.

He then went on to explore the Buddhist monuments of Central India in 1851 and on the basis of these investigations wrote *The Bhilsa Topes, or Buddhist Monuments of Central India*.<sup>18</sup>

It must be born in mind that in 1833 when he first came to India the Western study of Buddhism was in its infancy and it is apparent from two of his early works, both published in 1854, that he was in the process of developing his ideas about Buddhism. There are also indications that both works, although they describe different periods of investigation of Buddhism by Cunningham, were both completed in Simla in 1853.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore he refers to his explorations of Central India in order to show the significance of his observations on the Buddhist funerary writes of Ladakh when commenting on the deposition of five types of precious objects with the dead.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Ladakh, Physical, Statistical and Historical***

This remarkable work is basically an account of Cunningham's trips to Ladakh and it he vividly depicts the scene that he witnessed and conveys a sense of excitement about what he was encountering. His account of the Religion of

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<sup>18</sup> [Get reference from other part of article]

<sup>19</sup> Cunningham also refers to his work on the Bhilsa Topes in his book on Ladakh, see footnote on p. 375.

<sup>20</sup> p. 308

Tibet forms the thirteenth chapter of the book<sup>21</sup> thirty pages out of a work of 496 pages. He starts by asserting that Buddhism was

‘first introduced into Ladak during the Asoka, upwards of 2000 years ago, when that great follower of Buddha was propagating his new religion with all the zealous ardor of a proselyte.’<sup>22</sup>

He appears to base this on his reading of the *Mahawanso* and on the *Fo-kwe-ki* which reports what the people of the area six centuries later believed. The *Fo-kwe-ki* he refers to is the account of the visit of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hien in 399-400 CE in the edition by ‘Messrs Remusat, Klaproth and Landresse or the translation by Laidley’.<sup>23</sup> In regard to the *Mahawanso* he does not make it explicit which translation he is referring to but it must have been that by the French Scholar [forgotten his name]. He again refers to Ashoka’s missionaries when he asserts that Ladak had been Buddhist from ‘the conversion of the people by Asoka’s missionaries down to A.D. 400, when Fa Hian visited India.’<sup>24</sup> Other sources on Buddhism that he mentions include Csoma de Koros’s *Grammar*,<sup>25</sup> Hodgeson’s *Buddhism*<sup>26</sup> and Moorcroft’s *Travels*.<sup>27</sup> However, in a sense the main source he is drawing on is his own experience for he describes many aspects of the Buddhist practices he saw himself.

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<sup>21</sup> pp. 354-384.

<sup>22</sup> p. 354.

<sup>23</sup> p. 1 n.

<sup>24</sup> p. 357.

<sup>25</sup> p. 356 n.

<sup>26</sup> p. 361 n.

<sup>27</sup> p. 381 n.

## The sacred sites

In 1793 William Jones announced to the Royal Asiatic society in Calcutta that he has identified Chandragupta with the Sandrakotos identified by the Greek ambassador Megasthenes. And dated him to 312 BCE to 293 BCE, which allowed the dating of his grandson Ashoka to 267 to 231 BCE.

In 1794 Jagat Singh, a local landlord, was pulling down the Dhameka stupa at Sarnath for bricks and this came to the attention of Mr Duncan, the local magistrate, that is British administrator, for Benares. This led to the identification of Sarnath as the site where the Buddha gave his first teachings in a publication in 1798.

In 1811 Buchanan, a British administrative officer visited Gaya on one of his tours and began to gradually understand what he was looking at, and that it was Bodhgaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment.

Then in 1835-6 that Cunningham, in one of his first excavations, confirmed that Sarnath was the second sacred site of Buddhism.

So by 1836 the significance of Bodhgaya and Sarnath was known. But the locations of most of the main sites were not known. Lumbini, his birthplace, Kapilavastu, where he spent the first 29 years of his life, Sravasti the capital of Kaushala, and Vaishali, the site of the last sermon, and Kushinagar, that of his death.

## Prinsep and Ashoka

One of the problems was that script found on many of the ancient monuments was no longer known in Northern India. This problem was noted by Prinsep who had come out to run the royal mint in Calcutta and then gone onto to work in Benares. Fascinated by this problem he worked to decipher the script,

this he did by working on short inscriptions that he had the idea might be donation records by relating the texts to possible Sanskrit phrases he began to deduce which symbols represented which sounds. By 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1837 he was able to write to Cunningham telling him that he had now deciphered the messages on some of the Sanchi monuments. Thus by June 1837 he was able to report to the royal Asiatic Society in Calcutta that he could read most of the ancient inscriptions from Sanchi. Even more important was that he had identified in the Delhi inscriptions not only various Buddhist phrases but also that some of the inscriptions were done by 'The beloved of the gods' devanamapriya piyadasi. As he and his India collaborators such as Ratna Paul started to translate they found that the edicts were by a ruler teaching about how a righteous king would behave. At first they thought the king piyadasi might have been a Sri Lankan ruler, as this epithet was found with a Sri Lankan ruler in the history of the kings in the Mahavamsa, which Tournour had the recently translated history from the Pali. But this made little sense. Tournour though realised that the key was in another text, the Dipavamsa in which the epithet 'beloved of the gods' was applied to Ashoka. For the Europeans Ashoka's grandfather Chandragupta was already a known character as he was described, as Sandokottos in a Greek description of ancient India. Then in 1838 in an edict from Girnar, in Gujarat, he found mentions of Ptolemy and Egypt. Then in the same year they translated the edict from Dauli in Orissa where Ashoka explained how he had taken to the dharma after his bloody conquest of Orissa.

However, in 1839 sadly James Prinsep died at an early age and the search for India's past lost a brilliant player. He had been in India since 1819 and in that time had unlocked the secret of India's Ashokan past.

Cunningham and the four sacred sites

Of the four most sacred sites of Buddhism Bodhgaya and Sarnath were easily found. That left less certain where the sites of the Buddha's birth, Lumbini,

and that of his death, Kushinagar, were and countless other sites mentioned in the Chinese Pilgrims accounts and the ancient stories in the Pali canon.

During the first phase of the Archaeological survey of India between 1861 and 1865 Cunningham worked for four seasons. During these he identified a number of key Buddhist sites. In his first winter tour in 1861-2 he included Bodhgaya and Kushinagar, not to mention Rajgir and Nalanda and Vaishali (Singh: 62).

In his second tour he travelled North West and followed Xuan Zang's route from Matthura to Shravasti. He also went towards Allahabad and thirty miles from it on the Yamuna found the village of Kosam, which E. C. Bayley had suggested might be the ancient city of Kausambi, which Cunningham found to be true when he excavated.

The survey team when the survey resumed in 1871 consisted of Cunningham and two assistants and travelled by foot, horseback, elephant and palanquin and later on by rail. In 1871 tour he visited Bodhgaya and Rajgir again. On the 1873-4 tour he found the Bharhut stupa. One important upshot of this was that Subhuti, a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka, approached him to help him understand the scenes depicted on the Stupa. We will meet this same Subhuti again in relation to the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. This points to a central contradiction in the way that the British saw their discoveries as 'theirs' they were actually being made in collaboration with Indians and Sri Lankans for whom the British looked for assistance in understanding the texts and the relationship of the sculptures and relief images to Buddhist traditions.

However, despite during his lifetime adding Kushinagar to Bodhgaya and Sarnath as key Buddhist sites identified, the location of Lumbini remained unknown.

The discovery of Lumbini is a tangled tale. In 1885 an estate manager told Vincent Smith of a column and ruins on his property near the Nepali border (258), but Vincent Smith ignored it as medieval. Then in 1893 a Major in the Nepali army Jaskaran Singh found a site of something called Bhimsena-ki-nigali and this led to a request to the Archaeological survey of India to identify it. They sent the officer for that province Dr Fuhrer to the site and that led to its location as the site of a stupa built by Ashoka for Konakamana (Skt Kanakamuni), a previous Buddha, a site which both Fa Hsien and Xaun Zang had located near to Kapilavastu and Lumbini. Then in 1896 in response to this Dr Fuhrer went to a site located by the local administrator at Rumindeji, the one first noticed in 1885, and found an inscription on the column there saying that it was Lumbini, and then he also managed to locate. By the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December the Allahabad Pioneer was running a story that the birthplace of Buddha had been identified. However the location of Kapilavastu was not so certain and excavations soon began at a second site Piprahwa. Eventually it turned out that Dr Fuhrer had been economical with the truth, and his excavation techniques, and his location might well have been wrong. To this day there are two possible sites for Kapilavastu, a Nepali one and an Indian one.

Nor yet is it certain that Kushinagar was correctly identified, although I think it is, some still have doubts that Kasia is Kushinagar, and even now I get emails from somebody, Terrance Phelps, who thinks that Cunningham got it wrong.

### **Lecture 1 - part 2: Cunningham on tour 1861-1885**

Any of you who have been to India will know that you can't travel as easily in all seasons. If you imagine that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the roads were mostly not made up you can immediately see that travel during the monsoon would not be practical, nor yet during the summer was activity realistic during the day in many parts. So instead what you need to imagine is each winter Cunningham

setting out on a tour to investigate some area which he had identified as of interest. After his initial trips to Kashmir and to Ladakh there was a gap caused by various factors, not least the first war of independence, and it was not till 1861 that he again set out on a winter tour and after four tours in 1865 the tours were suspended, due to lack of funds and Cunningham returned to England.

After some years a movement to start the work again came to a head and Cunningham was appointed as head of a new Archaeological Survey of India in 1870 and from 1871 to 1884-5 he once again set out each cool season on a tour of an area of India. Cunningham's final tours were written up as the 21<sup>st</sup> in the series of reports on the Archaeological survey of India.

Cunningham's works were far from finished though at this point and three of his most important works were published after this, including Ancient Indian Geography (1871), The Stupa of Bharhut (1879) and Mahabodhi The Great Buddhist Temple (1892).

### **Lecture 1 - part 3: Cunningham in Context: Nineteenth and early 20th century conceptions of Bodhgaya**

In 1878 the Bengali scholar Rajendralal Mitra wrote one of the first major books on Bodhgaya. Describing the temple, which was then highly dilapidated, he says.

The Mahants of the last century erected several buildings, but they never attempted anything like the reproduction of the old style; and, judging from what they have left behind, were not capable of doing any work of the kind. The temple stood there deserted, forsaken, and dilapidated, and they appropriated it to their own use by giving it and its the presiding image new names. In doing so they did not even take



the trouble to change the image, or bring to light the inhumed portion of the temple by removing the rubbish around its base.<sup>28</sup>

During the 19th century the British took possession of Bodhgaya and under the direction of Alexander Cunningham restored the Bodhgaya temple in 1880. Cunningham in his preface to his *Tours in North and South Bihar in 1880-1881*.<sup>29</sup> Speaking of the cold season of 1880-1881 he says.

‘My object in visiting Buddha Gaya was to the opportunity of the clearance of the accumulated rubbish around the temple, of exploring the remains that had been already brought to light by Mr. Beglar, and of ascertaining, if possible, the sites of many of the holy places which have been described by the Chinese pilgrims, and perhaps also some traces of the original temple of Asoka. In both of these objects were completely successful.<sup>30</sup>

The result of this trip was moreover the creation of the physical form of the modern sacred site of Bodhgaya. The English traveller J. C. Oman visited Bodhgaya sometime shortly after 1880 and described his feelings on seeing the newly reconstructed temple for the first time in this way.

A very short walk from the Hindu monastery brought me to the ancient temple I had come to see, the hoary relic of many fleeting centuries. As it stood there before me it looked quite new, and I must confess that a feeling of disappointment took possession of me as I contemplated the “restored” edifice, with the fresh stucco mouldings and Portland cement additions of the Department of Public Works. In my disappointment I could not help thinking that the renovated temple might, perhaps, bear as much resemblance to the original temple erected on the spot as the Buddhism of some recent European writers to the doctrines of Sakya Muni.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Mitra, Rajendra Lal, *Buddha Gaya: the Great Buddhist Temple The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*, 1878, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> Cunningham, A and H.B.W., Garrick, *Report of Tours in North and South Bihar in 1880-1881*, Vol XVI. Indological Book House: Delhi, 1969. (original edition 1881)

<sup>30</sup> op. cit. p. iii.

<sup>31</sup> Oman, J. C., *Mystics, Ascetics And Saints Of India : A study of Sadhuism, with an account of the Yogis, Sanyasis, Bairagis and other Hindu Sectarians*. T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1905, p. 36.

Cunningham published his magnum opus on Bodh Gaya<sup>32</sup> after his retirement in 1892, when he was 78. He allowed himself a trace of romanticism in the poem on the title page.

Slowly the Prince advanced, - beneath his tread,  
At every step th' expectant world shook,  
Until he rested 'neath the Bodh Tree -  
At once the trembling universe was still  
Acknowledging the thronement of its lord.

In the preface he gives an attempt to give a historical account of the history of the Mahabodhi temple and concludes this with the comment.

The importance of the Mahabodhi Temple for the history of Indian art is quite unique, as it gives us the oldest existing remains of both sculpture and architecture. The sculptures of the Bharhut Stupa date from the flourishing period of the Sunga Dynasty, about B. C. 150, whereas the Mahabodhi remains belong to the period of Asoka, just one century earlier.<sup>33</sup>

In 1996 Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty published a study of the art of Bodh Gaya under the title *Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gaya*.<sup>34</sup> In this work he provides a chapter of the historiography of the study of Bodh Gaya which he describes as beginning with Alexander Cunningham of whom he says.

'Working from the preconception that Indian art began with the Maurya emperor Asoka (c.272-231 BC) under Greek or Persian influence, relying only on literary accounts, inscriptions or motifs rather than on the style of the sculptures, Cunningham was unable to distinguish the undeniably Maurya style of the Vajrasana sculptures from the later sculptures of the sandstone railing or walk, or the sculpture of Bodh-Gaya from that of Bharhut. So he assigned them all to the 'Indo-Persian' style of 250-200 BC on grounds like 'Arian letters' of inscription, 'Persepolitan' pillar bases or capitals or use of similar motifs in reliefs.'<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cunningham, Alexander. *Mahabodhi or the Great Buddhist Temple under the Bodhi Tree at Bodh-Gaya*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998. (1<sup>st</sup> published 1892).

<sup>33</sup> op.cit. p. iv.

<sup>34</sup> Chakravarty, Kalyan Kumar, *Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gaya*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1997.

<sup>35</sup> Op. cit. pp. 10-11.

The next phase he considers to be in the work of James Ferguson (1876) and Rajendra Lal Mitra (1878). The third phase he argues is that of Theodore Bloch (1908-9) and Benimadhab Barua (1931, 1934).<sup>36</sup>

Benimadhab Barua was a well known Bengali scholar of Buddhism who was active in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was himself from the Bengali Buddhist community who are known collectively by the caste title Barua. In September 1931 in Serampore Calcutta Benimadhab Barua wrote the introduction to what he intended to be the first of five books called *Gayà and Buddha-Gayà [Early history of the Holy Land]* the title of this volume he gave as 'Pre-Buddhistic History of Gaya'. The inspiration for writing this work he describes as being due to a short stay he, and his wife and children, made to in Bodh Gaya in October 1928 when they accompanied his aunt Sasikumari Barau on a pilgrimage to Gaya, Varanasi and Kushinagar.<sup>37</sup> Later in this book he gives a description of Bodh Gaya which appears to have been of his general impression of the site when he visited it in 1928.

'Uravela, too, appears even now as the same sandy tract with its plain surface and open spaces. The same Nairañjana still flows down towards the North presenting a beautiful landscape view, and is still remarkable for its sunny beaches and crystal waters. The spot of the Bo-tree is still the same sombre woodland in the heart of the tract of Uravela, and is still situated in the immediate neighbourhood of Senanigama, the modern village of Urel. The Mahabodhi is still the same holy site where the great Bo Asvattha lords it over. The site itself is still surrounded by an enclosure and shines forth with great many shrines.'<sup>38</sup>

To many readers at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century this description may seem strikingly at odds with their own experiences because it is so totally unlike

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<sup>36</sup> Op. cit. p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Barua, Benimadhab, *Gayà and Buddha-Gayà [Early history of the Holy Land]*, Bhartiya Publishing House, Varanasi, 1975, (original edition 1931?), p. vii.

<sup>38</sup> op.cit. p. 248.

contemporary Bodh Gaya. Furthermore reading it one might be forgiven for asking. Is he even talking about the same place? Furthermore, by some peculiar coincidence he also describes his inspiration for his work in this manner. He describes looking around the temple railing and says.

As we went round this ancient railing, the symbolical representations in duplicates of some six or seven signs of the Solar Zodiac attracted and deeply engaged my attention. The Rai Saheb (his host) had then with him no other literature on the subject than Dr Rajendralala Mitra's Buddha Gaya to guide me in my study of these figures. I was very much pained indeed to find that Dr Mitra had not paid sufficient attention to these figures and especially the clear testimony in stone of a known date was not availed of by the writers on Indian astronomy in discussing the antiquity of the age when the Hindus might be supposed to have been familiar with the twelve signs of the Solar Zodiac as distinguished from the twenty-seven or twenty-eight constellations of the Lunar Zodiac.<sup>39</sup>

There must be considerable doubt about the veracity of this theory, as like the days of the week that mislead Cunningham, the Solar Zodiac is not likely to have been represented on the Bodh Gaya railings as it was not known in India until much later than the period of the railings.

However, the point I wish to argue here is simply to show that the well springs of his inspiration appear in the above passage to have lain in a kind of vision of the eternal and universal importance of Bodh Gaya. This is confirmed by the following section later in the preface where concerning the arrangement of the text he says it is presented from different perspectives.

'past and present, Hindu and Buddhist, Indian and Extra-Indian, local and universal. In a word I have tried to realise the history of the great holy land as a vision.'<sup>40</sup>

A little later he says of the purpose of the work.

'The real excuse, undoubtedly, is that the book is intended not so much to enlighten others as to manifest my own self in the hope that those who are like-natured, like-

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<sup>39</sup> op. cit. p. vii.

<sup>40</sup> op. cit. p. x.

minded, like-visioned will care to look at the glorious picture of the place as I have viewed it and may, perhaps, derive some benefit from it.<sup>41</sup>

The tone of much of Benimadhab Barua's discussion of Bodh Gaya is reminiscent of the tone of Cunningham's approach of 1853. For instance in his discussion of 'Gaya as a Meeting place of Hinduism and Buddhism'<sup>42</sup> he discusses the *Ficus Religiosa*, the genus of tree of which the Bodhi tree is an example and he says.

'As regards the *Asvattha* or *Pippala*, one cannot but be interested to find that it figures throughout ancient Indian literature as a sacred symbol of life and its growth and possibilities.'<sup>43</sup>

He then links the references to trees in the *Katha Upanishad* and the *Bhagavadgata*. He then quotes from Buddhist India [by Rhys Davids?] pp. 231-232 to support a claim that the 'vessels from the mystic Soma cult were made of its wood'. He then moves to a discussion of the famous *Munduka Upanishad* simile of the two birds in a tree. Of this he asserts that.

It is undoubtedly the *Asvattha* or *Pippala* which in the *Munduka Upanishad* symbolises the tree of life whereon perch two charming birds and dwell as inseparable comrades, one of which eats its fruits and the other simply looks on and ponders without eating anything.'<sup>44</sup>

He then argues that the two birds natures reflect that of the tree itself which is 'characterised by its two different trends or tendencies or dispositions, vital and reflective'<sup>45</sup> and suggests that this also relates to a Vedic hymn which

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<sup>41</sup> op. cit. p. xi.

<sup>42</sup> op. cit. p. 245.

<sup>43</sup> op. cit. p. 250.

<sup>44</sup> op. cit. p. 251. An odd claim as the type of tree is not mentioned at all in the reference given at *Munduka Upanishad* III.1.

<sup>45</sup> 251

speaks of two birds in a *pipala* tree.<sup>46</sup> All of this is of course quite valid what is interesting is that he chooses to finish his collection of references with this.

‘As some of the earthen seals unearthed at Harrapa and Mohenjo-daro, clearly attests, the actual artistic representation of some such symbolism pregnant with meaning, is as old as 3000 B.C. and none need be surprised if this is a striking relic of long-forgotten Indian civilisation which is on a par with, if not decisively anterior to, the Sumerian.’<sup>47</sup>

Delightfully the source for this is given as ‘The London Illustrated News, Feb. 27, 1926, p. 356. Fig.2.’<sup>48</sup> This interest in the possibilities of Harrapan connections is continued later in a further discussion of the tree.

‘Emphasizing the importance of the particular *Asvattha* as a Bo-tree of the last and greatest known Buddha it [Buddhism] has just served to bring once more into prominence the ancient Tree of Life, the religious symbol of a long-forgotten Sumerian-like Indian civilisation in the two buried cities of Harrapa and Mohenjo-daro.’<sup>49</sup>

Finally consider this passage which combines both themes of antiquity and universality.

‘The attainment of Buddhahood by the Buddha proved to be an epoch-making event in history. The pilgrimage undertaken by king Asoka to pay his worship in honour of the great Bo-tree, the then known living witness to Buddhahood of the Buddha, proved a great incentive to the lasting work of piety done by those who copied his example. But for the impetus given by King Asoka it is doubtful if the region of Gaya would have risen into world-wide importance. Whoever the actual builders of the numerous votive shrines, none need be astonished to see that the fame of the builder of the Bodh-Gaya shrine is still enjoyed by the pioneer in the field (≠dikara). As a happy result of his action, Bodh Gaya has become to the Buddhists what the hill of Golgotha is to the Christians and Mecca to the Muhammadans.’<sup>50</sup>

Where was Barua getting some of these ideas from? He constantly quotes from Cunningham's Mahabodhi and for the final conclusion of his rambling

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<sup>46</sup> RV., I.22.164.20.

<sup>47</sup> 252

<sup>48</sup> 252

<sup>49</sup> 255.

<sup>50</sup> 271-272.

work he quotes from Giles translation of a hymn to the Mahabodhi temple, drawn from pp. 70-71 of Cunningham's Mahabodhi.

To sum up this section what I have tried to show is that from the mid 19th century onwards British and Indian scholars alike used Bodhgaya as a kind of drafting board onto which they sketched their ideas of what it represented. For Fergusson, and Cunningham it represented an echo of classical sophistication in an alien landscape. For Rajendralal Mitra and Barua it represented a link to an eternal indigenous Indian traditions that stood on a par with Western culture. But, none looked at the practices and traditions of its contemporary inhabitants as representative of its nature, orientalist and nationalist alike saw it as chance to reconstruct an ideal no longer current at the site. In other words both projected onto it a paradigm for how they wanted to see India develop.

#### Session one: Conclusion

By tracing the career of Alexander Cunningham we can get a picture of the British quite literally discovered Buddhism, in terms of its physical remains in India. But we also get an indication of the ways in which Buddhism was situated within British understandings of India and the world.

Although Cunningham can be seen as the founder of modern archaeology in India, he was also the heir to the antiquarian tradition that preceded him. Also, it's fairly clear that for Cunningham although there was a mystery to the East, and an attraction to Buddhism, it remained an external object of interest. For him Buddhism was not something that was going to influence his own belief systems or life, but something to be discovered and studied in terms of its artifacts. There is also not a great deal of interest in Buddhist texts apart from in what they can tell us about the archaeological remains. What we need to do now is turn to the next way in which Westerners discovered Buddhism, the translations of Buddhist texts.





## Session Two: Rediscovering the Dharma

Warm up activity:

- First: make a list of religious sacred texts you have read.
- Second: get together in groups and compare which texts you listed.
- Third: share them with the class, make up a class list of texts.

Comment: Perhaps because I asked you to make a list of texts, that is what we have ended up with, but you know in a sense it's already a big presumption. That religions all have a sacred text, and that this is the first way we should explore what constitutes a religion. In the next session we will look at another way to explore religion, though living practice, but in this session we are looking at rediscovering the dharma in the sense of the discovery of the Buddhist sacred texts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Session Two part One: Introduction - The notion of a sacred text

It's hard to imagine how it was that Westerners first came to read the Buddhist sacred texts. The problems were enormous; you needed access to the texts, and sufficient knowledge of the language to be able to understand them. Plus I suppose you needed the inclination to begin with.

When you read the accounts of early travellers to India, from the sixteenth century onwards you also see that understanding another religious teaching would also have been very difficult because of the agendas that led most people to Asia. The majority of travellers were there to make money if possible; or perhaps in the hope of converting people to Christianity. The idea of travelling half way round the world simply to try and learn about other cultures was not really high on most people's horizon.

But there is also something vital to realise, that just like me asking you what religious texts you had read, there was already an idea in play at this time that if somebody was interested in finding out about the religion of a people, then what you would be looking for is basically the sacred texts of those people.

One of the notions which had revolutionised Europe in the reformation was the idea of the primacy of written texts. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a revolutionary not only in terms of the ideas he put forward, but also in proposing that true religion was not found in practices and customs, but in the word of the Bible.

An important technological development which had made such an idea imaginable was the invention of printing. Guttenberg (1400-1468) had invented movable type and produced the first printed bible in 1545-55. Although it was actually still a 5<sup>th</sup> century Latin translation of the Bible, and we have to look elsewhere for the idea of translating the Bible into a contemporary language. In a sense in the fifth century the vulgate Latin Bible was in a contemporary language, but for most English speakers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century it was probably the King James Bible, first published in 1604 which constituted their idea of the ideal text representing the word of God.

So by the 18<sup>th</sup> century English speakers arriving in Asia had a clear idea of what they were looking for, if they were looking for a sacred text at all, and it was some sort of equivalent of the English translation of the Bible.

Of course there was also a second problem, just as the Bible needed to be translated, so did sacred texts from Asia, and to begin with people had very little idea what the languages of Asia were. They knew the European languages, and knew of Arabic and Persian, but beyond that things were a lot less clear.

In India the common 18<sup>th</sup> century European view was that people spoke something called 'Indostans' or 'Moors' which was viewed as being a kind of 'jargon' meaning a non-grammatical language. What seems to have been happening was that travellers were unable to distinguish between Tamil, Bengali, Urdu etc. and thought they were all part of one language. However, from the local Brahmins they learned that the ancient sacred texts were in a different language 'Sanskrit'.

Perhaps if sacred texts were the only things in Sanskrit Westerners would not have been so interested in learning Sanskrit. But, it was also known that traditional law books were in Sanskrit so a number of Westerners set out to learn Sanskrit. William Jones (1746-96) studied Sanskrit with native teachers partly motivated by a desire to translate the ancient legal texts and partly out of a kind of European Enlightenment interest in the world. As he did so he realised that it bore a great resemblance to Latin and Greek in its basic structure and in 1786 delivered a lecture (later published as an article in 1788) in which he argued that they were derived from a common ancestor. This had in fact been earlier realised by Jesuit scholars and others, but it was Jones who attracted the public's attention to this and he is seen by many as the founder of the modern study of the languages of South Asia.

At around the same time another fellow Orientalist of William Jones, and scholar in India, Charles Wilkins (1749-1836) published a version of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in 1785 as the *Bhagvat-geeta, or Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon* (London: Nourse, 1785) which was the first English translation of a Sanskrit sacred text. This was then translated into French in 1787 and into German in 1802.

So by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century people in Europe had a clear picture of what they might be searching for in other religious traditions in terms of

sacred texts. But, India was not where Buddhist sacred texts were going to be first encountered, so we need to shift our focus.

Alexander Csoma de Koros (1784-1842)

One extraordinary example of a European who discovered Buddhism and its texts was the Hungarian Alexander Csoma de Koros. He is often regarded as the originator of western scholarship of Tibetan Buddhism, although perhaps in a sense there were earlier Jesuits who preceded him, but their work did not form part of the subsequent history of Tibetan studies. He was born in Transylvania in 1784. He was clearly very gifted when it came to languages and in his youth learned Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, French, and Romanian, and perhaps Turkish, before getting a scholarship to Gottingen where he also then studied English and Arabic. In 1819 convinced that the origins of the Hungarian people were to be found in Central Asia he set off, travelling on foot, by boat, and by raft, and in Persia learning Armenian and adopting the name of Iskander Beg and posing as an Armenian, and by 1822 had arrived in Leh, the capital of Ladakh. There he found that he could not get any further into central Asia due to the political situation. On his way back at Dras, not far from Srinagar, he met William Moorcroft, an East India Company agent, who convinced him to stay in Ladakh and learn Tibetan as a way to learn about the origins of the Hungarian people. So for nine years, till 1831 he staying in monasteries in Lakakh and Zanskar and learned Tibetan and studied Buddhist scriptures. Then in 1831 he was persuaded to go to Calcutta to work on the publication of the grammar and dictionary of Tibetan he had been compiling. Then after working as a librarian for the Asiatic society for a number of years he set off again in 1842 for Lhasa where he hoped to study in its libraries and find out more about the origins of the Hungarian peoples, but he died on the way in the foothills of the Himalayas in Darjeeling.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See: <http://www.shambhala.mn/Files/csoma.html>, and Batchelor, 1994: 235-237

He was however never a Buddhist, and despite the view that the Tibetan faith approached nearer than any other to Christianity regarded it as unsatisfactory. In fact his works also included along with his dictionary and grammar translations into Tibetan of Christian tracts such as a liturgy, the Psalms and a Prayer-book.

I could switch here to an account of the first translations of Chinese Buddhist texts, or of Buddhist texts found in South East Asian countries, but in order to show the relationship with what was happening in India instead I shall focus on Sri Lanka, or Ceylon as it was then known.

Session two part two: Rediscovering the Dharma in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ceylon

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sri Lanka was on the verge of major change. It was just in the process of being taken over by the British, and whilst administrators were wondering how to govern their new possession, British missionaries were contemplating how they could convert the inhabitants to Christianity. This session looks at the issue of how Buddhist texts in Sri Lanka came to be translated into European languages and how in the space of a hundred years an entirely new window was opened into the Buddhist world by the study of Buddhist texts. In order to give a focus to the presentation as well I am going to concentrate on a particular text, the Dhammapada, and show how translations of it developed.

The Earliest Pali Scholarship

Eugène Burnouf (April 8, 1801–May 28, 1852) was a French orientalist.

He was born in Paris. His father, Professor Jean Louis Burnouf (1775-1844), was a classical scholar of high reputation, and the author, among other works, of an excellent translation of Tacitus (6 vols., 1827-1833). Eugène Burnouf published in 1826 an *Essai sur le Pali ...*, written in collaboration with Christian

Lassen; and in the following year *Observations grammaticales sur quelques passages de l'essai sur le Pali*.

The next great work he undertook was the deciphering of the Avesta manuscripts brought to France by Anquetil-Duperron. By his labours a knowledge of the Avestan language was first brought into the scientific world of Europe. He caused the *Vendidad Sade*, to be lithographed with the utmost care from the manuscript in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, and published it in folio parts, 1829-1843.

From 1833 to 1835 he published his *Commentaire sur le Yaçna*, l'un des livres liturgiques des Parses; he also published the Sanskrit text and French translation of the *Bhagavata Purana ou histoire poétique de Krichna* in three folio volumes (1840-1847). His last works were *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien* (1844), and a translation of *Le lotus de la bonne loi* (The Lotus Sutra, 1852). He had been for twenty years a member of the *Académie des Inscriptions* and professor of Sanskrit in the *Collège de France*.

See a notice of Burnouf's works by Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, prefixed to the second edition (1876) of the *Introd. à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien*; also Naudet, *Notice historique sur MM. Burnouf, père et fils*, in *Mém. de l'Acad. des Inscriptions*, xx. A list of his valuable contributions to the *Journal asiatique* and of his manuscript writings, is given in the appendix to the *Choix de lettres d'Eugène Burnouf* (1891).

George Turnour (1799–1843)

The *Mahawansha*, also known as *Mahavamsa*, (Pāli: "Great Chronicle") is a historical poem written in the Pāli language, of the kings of Sri Lanka. It covers the period from the coming of King Vijaya in 543 BCE to the reign of King Mahasena (334 – 361).

The first printed edition and English translation of the Mahawansha was published in 1837 by George Turnour, an historian and officer of the Ceylon Civil Service and colonial secretary in Ceylon in 1837.

**George Turnour** was the eldest son of the Hon. George Turnour, son of the first Earl of Winterton; his mother being Emilie, niece to the Cardinal Duc de Beausset. He was born in Ceylon in 1799, and having been educated in England under the guardianship of the Right Hon. Sir Thomas Maitland, then governor of the island, he entered the Civil Service in 1818, in which he rose to the highest rank. He was distinguished equally by his abilities and his modest display of them. Interpreting in its largest sense the duty enjoined on him, as a public officer, of acquiring a knowledge of the native languages, he extended his studies, from the vernacular and written Singhalese to Pali, the great root and original of both, known only to the Buddhist priesthood, and imperfectly and even rarely amongst them. No dictionaries then existed to assist in defining the meaning of Pali terms which no teacher could be found capable of rendering into English, so that Mr. Turnour was entirely dependent on his knowledge of Singhalese as a medium for translating them. To an ordinary mind such obstructions would have proved insurmountable, aggravated as they were by discouragements arising from the assumed barrenness of the field, and the absence of all sympathy with his pursuits, on the part of those around him, who reserved their applause and encouragement till success had rendered him independent of either. To this indifference of the government officers, Major Forbes, who was then the resident at Matelle, formed an honourable exception; and his narrative of *Eleven Years in Ceylon* shows with what ardour and success he shared the tastes and cultivated the studies to which he had been directed by the genius and example of Turnour. So zealous and unobtrusive were the pursuits of the latter, that even his immediate connexions and relatives were unaware of the value and extent of his acquirements till apprised of their importance and profundity by the acclamation with which his discoveries and translations from the Pali were received by the savants of Europe. Major Forbes, in a private letter, which I have been permitted to see, speaking of the difficulty of doing justice to the literary character of Turnour, and the ability, energy, and perseverance which he exhibited in his historical investigations, says, "his *Epitome of the History of Ceylon* was from the first correct; I saw it seven years before it was published, and it scarcely required an alteration afterwards." Whilst engaged in his translation of the Mahawanso, Turnour, amongst other able papers on Buddhist History and Indian Chronology in the *Journal of the Bengal Asiatic Society*, v. 521, vi. 299, 790, 1049, contributed a series of essays on the Pali-Buddhistical-Annals, which were published in



1836, 1837, 1838.—Journ. Asiatic Soc. Bengal, vi. 501, 714, vii. 686, 789, 919. At various times he published in the same journal an account of the Tooth Relic of Ceylon, lb. vi. 856, and notes on the inscriptions on the columns of Delhi, Allahabad, and Betiah, &c. &c, and frequent notices of Ceylon coins and inscriptions. He had likewise planned another undertaking of signal importance, the translation into English of a Pali version of the Buddhist scriptures, an ancient copy of which he had discovered, unencumbered by the ignorant commentaries of later writers, and the fables with which they have defaced the plain and simple doctrines of the early faith. He announced his intention in the Introduction to the Mahawanso to expedite the publication, as " the least tardy means of effecting a comparison of the Pali with the Sanskrit version" (p. cx.). His correspondence with Prinsep, which I have been permitted by his family to inspect, abounds with the evidence of inchoate inquiries in which their congenial spirits had a common interest, but which were abruptly ended by the premature decease of both. Turnour, with shattered health, returned to Furopo in 1842, and died at Naples on the 10th of April in the following year. Tho first volume of his translation of the Mahawanso, which contains thirty-eight chapters out of the hundred which form the original work, was published at Colombo in 1837; and apprehensive that scepticism might assail the authenticity of a discovery so important, ho accompanied his English version with a reprint of the original Pali in Roman characters with diacritical points. Ho did not live to conclude the task he had so nobly begun; he died while engaged on the second volume of his translation, and only a few chapters, executed with his characteristic accuracy, remain in manuscript in the possession of his surviving relatives. It diminishes, though in a slight degree, our regret for the interruption of his literary labours to know that the section of the Mahawanso which he left unfinished is inferior both in authority and value to the earlier portion of the work, and that being composed at a period when literature was at its lowest ebb in Ceylon, it differs little if at all from other chronicles written during the decline of the native dynasty."

[Quelle: **Tennent, James Emerson <1804-1869>**: Ceylon: an account of the island. -- 2nd ed. -- London : Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1859. -- 2 Bde. : Ill. ; 23 cm. -- Bd. 1, S. 312 - 314.]

The first missionary translators in Sri Lanka

The British gained control of the coastal regions of Sri Lanka in 1796 and then of the central highlands in 1815. During this period British people began to

settle in Sri Lanka and amongst these were Methodist Missionaries. One of the most influential early figures to study Buddhism in Sri Lanka was the Methodist Minister Spence Hardy who arrived in Sri Lanka in 1825. The first major work he published was 'Eastern Monachism' which appeared in 1850. In the preface to this he said.

In the month of September, 1825, I landed in the beautiful island of Ceylon as a Wesleyan Missionary, and one of the first duties to which I addressed myself was, to acquire a knowledge of the language of the people among whom I was appointed a minister. After reading the New Testament in Singhalese, I began the study of the native books, that I might ascertain, from authentic sources, the character of the religion I was attempting to displace (Hardy, 1850: v).

In his 1850 work "Eastern Monachism" Spence Hardy described the *Dhammapada* in the following way.

The Dhammápadan, or Dampiyáwa, the Paths of Religion, written upon 15 leaves, with nine lines on each page, and 1 foot and 8 inches long. It contains 423 gáthás, which appear to have been spoken on various occasions, and afterwards collected into one volume. Several of the chapters have been translated by Mr. Gogerly, and appear in the Friend, vol.iv.1840. The Singhalese paraphrase of the Paths, is regarded by the people as one of their most excellent works, as it treats upon moral subjects, delivered for the most part in aphorisms, the mode of instruction that is the most popular among all nations that have few books at their command, and have to trust in a great degree to memory for their stores of knowledge. A collection might be made from the precepts of this work, that in the purity of its ethics could scarcely be equalled from any other heathen author (Hardy, 1850: 169).

Daniel Gogerly (1792-1862) arrived in Ceylon in 1818, initially to simply run the printing press at the Methodist mission but was then in 1823 ordained as a Methodist minister. In the 1830s he began to learn Pāli and from 1838

onwards began to publish articles and translations in the Methodist journal 'The Friend'. In 1840 he published a series of selections from the *Dhammapada* in 'The Friend', which were then reprinted again, with revisions, in its successor 'The Ceylon Friend' in 1881 and then again as edited by Bishop in Gogerly's collected works published in 1912. Bishop's work contained translations of the first 255 verses of the *Dhammapada*, and a note that Gogerly had left the last eight chapters untranslated.

Although it was not the first complete published translation it certainly must be regarded as the first substantial translation of the *Dhammapada*.

It is important to note that Gogerly, like his colleague Spence Hardy, was studying Buddhism in order to assist in his efforts to convert Buddhists to Christianity. In her recent (2007) study of Buddhism and Christianity in 19<sup>th</sup> century Sri Lanka Harris pointed out that the nub of his interest was to find ways to prove to Buddhists that they were not wise (Harris, 2006: 63). He was also particularly known as an advocate of the view that Buddhists were nihilists, who did not believe in the Creator God or the soul and sought annihilation as their goal.

#### *Dhammapada* translations from 1855 to 1881

The next major steps in translation of the *Dhammapada* into Western Languages happened between 1855 and 1881. In 1855 the Danish scholar Viggo Fausbøll (1821-1908) published a critical edition of the Pāli text, and a translation into Latin (Fausbøll 1855). Then in 1860 Albrecht Weber (1825-1901) published a German translation of the *Dhammapada* (Weber 1860). I will not be able to deal here further with these Latin and German translations but instead will turn to the seminal work of Max Müller as his translations of the *Dhammapada* are still available for sale today.

In 1870 Max Müller (1823-1900) published the first complete English translation of the *Dhammapada* as part of a larger work on the 'parables of

Bhuddhaghosa', i.e. the stories which accompany the *Dhammapada* text (Rogers, 1870). Müller in the introduction to the 1870 edition, which he wrote in the summer of 1869 (Rogers, 1870: liii) explains how the parables were translated by Captain Rogers from the Burmese *Dhamma Pada Vatthu* on a furlough after spending some years in Burma where he had learned the vernacular (Rogers, 1870: v). Müller also wrote that he had hoped to find the Burmese versions of the stories were translations of the Pāli stories, attributed to Buddhaghosa, but was disappointed to find that there were not, being rather 'abstracts' as he put it. Moreover, he indicated that he 'felt disappointed at the character of the Burmese translation' (Rogers, 1870: viii) as they were vernacular stories, not translations of Pāli stories, he considered them to be of limited value but still interesting in terms of the study of Buddhism and of fables. The first story in the Captain Roger's translation is on how an elderly monk, called 'Kakkhupala Mahathera' (*Cakkhupala Mahāthera*), became blind and stepped on some ants killing them, but as there was no intention of ill will he was blameless, and this is said to explain the meaning of the first verses in the *Dhammapada* (Rogers, 1870: 1-11). It appears likely that Müller's understanding of the verse, and translation, as a moral teaching, was influenced by his familiarity with this Burmese vernacular version of the story.

In the introduction to his 1869 translation (page references here are to the 1872 reprint) Müller refers on a number of occasions to Gogerly. The first reference is included in his account of previous translations he has studied, he gives pride of place to Fausbøll, then mentions Weber, Gogerly, Upham, Burnouf, and 'others'. However, in a foot note he refers to the mention of Gogerly in Hardy's 1850 publication, not Gogerly's translation itself (Müller, 1872: 152). Moreover, when Müller does refer to Gogerly it is for his publications such as his translation of the *Brahmajala sutta* and his researches on the question of the status of a Creator God in Buddhism (Müller, 1872:172). This was an issue which greatly concerned not only missionaries like Gogerly and Spence, but also Müller himself, who in 1870

said whilst discussing the Buddhist denial of a Creator God 'In no religion are we so constantly reminded of our own as in Buddhism, and yet in no religion has man been drawn away so far from truth as in the religion of Buddha' (Müller, 1882: 171). The only other reference to Gogerly in the introduction to Müller's translation is in regard to the name of the text, Müller says that Gogerly translated it as 'The Footsteps of Religion' and Spence Hardy translated it as 'The Paths of Religion', which he says he broadly agrees with, but then points out that in his view the best translation is 'Path of Virtue', the title he himself adopts (Müller, 1872: 186-87). In the only clear reference to Gogerly as a translator he says.

Gogerly, though not to be trusted in all his translations, may generally be taken as a faithful representative of the tradition of Buddhists in Ceylon, and we may therefore take it for granted that the priests of that island take *Dhammapada* to mean, as Gogerly translates it, the vestiges of religion, or, from a different point of view, the path of virtue (Müller, 1872: 187)

It is important to note that he understands Gogerly as presenting a faithful translation of how Buddhist monks themselves understood the verses at the time. This is, I suspect, however, a form of veiled criticism, as Müller regarded the text and the commentary as the true arbiters of the meaning of the text, not contemporary Singhalese understandings.

In his often illuminating notes on his translations he refers only once to Gogerly. He comments on how Gogerly and D'Alwis translate 'mind precedes action' in regard to the first verse (Müller, 1872: 193). It seems though that possibly he is referring to Gogerly as cited in Spence (Spence 1850: 28), rather than Gogerly himself. The next mention of Gogerly is in a footnote to the title of chapter two, *apramada*, which he noted was translated as 'religion' by Gogerly (Müller, 1872: 200). He also mentions Gogerly's 'Lecture on Buddhism' in regard to the meaning of *nāma-rūpa* in verse 221 (Müller 1872: 256). There are no further mentions of Gogerly at all in his notes to his translation. He occasionally refers to Hardy, and a few times to D'Alwis, but

mostly to Fausbøll, Burnouf and Weber. Indeed he often compares how Fausbøll and Weber have translated a verse, but never after the first verse mentions Gogerly's version. So the extent to which Gogerly was an influence on Müller in this translation seems to have been very marginal indeed.

In 1878 two more translations were published, a French translation by Fernand Hû, which I will not deal with here, and an English translation by Samuel Beal from a Chinese version of the *Dhammapada*. Beal refers to two previous translations, by Fausbøll and Müller, and in a footnote mentions that Mr Gogerly has also translated 350 of its verses. However, his source for this is the Hardy's 1850 publication, not Gogerly himself, so it seems possible that he had not seen Gogerly's translation (Beal, 1878: 1).

The next stage in the development of *Dhammapada* translations took place in 1881 when Müller published a further revised version of his translation in the Sacred Books of the East Series (Müller, 1881). The introduction to the 1881 edition of the translation was also a substantially new work, including a long account of the history of the Pāli canon. However, it still contained some similar sections to the 1869 introduction. Gogerly again is mentioned in relation to the title, but only in passing in a section somewhat similar to that from 1869 about the title of the work (Müller 1881: xlvii). In new material though in regard to the translation he indicated that it was a revision of his 1870 translation, revised in response to reviews and incorporating the latest scholarship, and having consulted two versions published in 1878, the French translation by Fernand Hû and Samuel Beal's translation from the Chinese (Müller, 1881: p. xlix). He also repeats his mention of Gogerly having translated some sections of the work, but again mentions only the reference to this in Spence's 1850 publication.

Müller also indicated elsewhere that Gogerly's works were not well known in Europe and in a lecture he gave on Buddhism in 1862 he said regarding Pāli studies in Ceylon after the death of Burnouf.

The exploration of the Ceylonese literature has since been taken up again by the Rev. D. J. Gogerly (died 1862), whose essays are unfortunately scattered about in Singhalese periodicals and little known in Europe ; and by the Rev. Spence Hardy, for twenty years Wesleyan missionary in Ceylon. His two works, "Eastern Monachism" and the "Manual of Buddhism," are full of interesting matter, but as they are chiefly derived from Singhalese, and even more modern sources, they require to be used with caution (Müller, 1876:192)

The conclusion that seems to be inevitable from this is that despite Gogerly's translation of the *Dhammapada* being a significant step in the translation of the *Dhammapada*, basically its first English translation, due it to appearing only in Singhalese publications it was largely unknown and ignored in Europe.

#### Later translations and Gogerly and Müller

Following on from Müller a number of other translations also appeared before the First World War. In 1881 a translation was published by James Gray which was published from the American Mission Press in Rangoon. Then translations by Paul Carus in 1894, embedded in his Buddha and his Gospel, and by Albert Edmunds in 1902 and then by Wagiswara and Saunders in 1912. However, whilst most of them cite Müller as the first translator of the *Dhammapada* into English, none of them even mention Gogerly.

## Session two part three: Rediscovering Ashoka

Warm up: try and write down a brief note on your earliest memory, and also see if you can work out what is the earliest written piece of information about you that you have, a diary, a school notebook, something like that, but not a birth certificate or other legal document. Then work out the difference in years. Then share with small group then share the difference in years with the class.

Comment: It's amazing how often we have memories which long predate any actual physical records we have of ourselves. What we are going to do today is to look at how putting together ancient written records of Ashoka and memories of Ashoka created something entirely new in 19<sup>th</sup> century India.

Essentially the point is this. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ashoka was remembered in Asia in a number of legends in which he was depicted as the ideal example of how a ruler could convert to Buddhism and then develop it as a state religion. Quite separately there existed in India a range of monuments with things written on them, but what was said on them had been long forgotten, and even who had erected them. Due to the ingenuity and perseverance of a number of British and Indian scholars the script on the monuments was deciphered, and it was discovered that they were the texts of edicts erected by the Emperor Ashoka. The picture they gave us of the Emperor was quite different from that in the legends.



## Rediscovering the Sangha

Warm up: each write down three things you have seen Buddhists doing. Then get together in a group and see what things you have written down and work out how your ideas relate to Buddhism and how they relate to culture. Then share with the class your groups ideas on what makes certain things 'Buddhist'.

Comment: As Westerners moved around in Asia in the colonial period they tried to work out what was Buddhist about the cultures of various countries they went to. In the previous session we looked at how they studied Buddhist texts, in this session we are looking at how they studied Buddhist people.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century a clear division emerged between what was seen as original Buddhism, an abstract doctrine which was compatible with Western ideas of what a religion should be, and the everyday practices of Buddhists in Asia, which were seen as corrupt folk religion. I would remind you that this idea, pure texts, corrupt practices, is actually the model that goes back to Luther, so in a sense what was happening was just that Europeans were applying the same template they saw religion in Europe though, to Asian religions. But at the same time there were people who were meeting Buddhists, and learning about their lives in a way which was quite different. But it was not because they wanted to practice Buddhism, but at least they were interested in how Buddhists lived their lives. However, the reason for this was often because they wanted to convert Buddhists to Christianity.

Earlier notions of conversion, as practiced by the Spanish, Portuguese and perhaps the Dutch as well, had by and large ignored the religions of the people that they converted. All that was seen as needed basically was for people to renounce their heresy and to convert to Catholicism. By comparison

a virtue in some Protestant missionary work was the idea you needed to study your opponents so you could defeat their arguments.

### Christian Buddhist Missionary Encounters in Sri Lanka

Early encounters between Europeans and Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka were normally based on the intention of the Europeans to convert the Buddhists. Harris gives two examples. A Methodist missionary, Thomas Erskine, met a monk in Belligama in 1816 who was pleased to tell him about the five precepts, but unwilling to listen to Erskine who wanted to tell him that Buddhism was false. In a second example she describes how an Anglican priest, Samuel Lambrick, described a conversation with a monk where he found that the monk put forward the view that there was some worth in all religions, but then became unhappy with Lambrick's company when he proposed that only one religion could be right, and the other would be totally wrong (Harris, 2006: 196).

Or consider this description of an encounter in 1835 with a monk by the Rev. James Selkirk, of the Church Missionary Society.

I found a Buddhist priest at the rest-house on my return. He was a young man, much more modest than the generality of them, with whom I had a conversation on the Christian religion. As he also expressed a readiness to receive a copy of the book of Genesis which I had with me, I gave it him, telling him, at the same time, some of the most wonderful things contained in it. He listened to all I said with patience, and went away apparently much pleased with his book.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> James Selkirk, (1844), *Recollections of Ceylon, After a Residence of Nearly Thirteen Years*, Hatchard and Son, Piccadilly London, p. 459. [Full text at: <http://books.google.com/books?id=KXYIAAAAQAAJ>].

Judging from Selkirks account of his travels in Sri Lanka one of his main activities was wandering around handing out Christian Missionary literature. So whilst these early encounters show us something about how Westerners encountered Buddhist monks and lay people they don't tell us much really about what they themselves learned from the encounters. They certainly described the monks, the temples and the life of the people, but they don't seem to have really taken an interest, as they were so fixed on conversion.

Spence Hardy (1803-1868) [picture]

One important figure in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century phase of the British encounter with Buddhism was Spence Hardy. He was a Methodist Missionary who arrived in Sri Lanka in 1825 and determined on his arrival to learn Singhalese. Twenty five years later in 1850 he published a work Eastern Monachism in which he described in detail the Singhalese Buddhist religion as he had seen it. He also compared it with what he had learned about Buddhism as practiced in other Buddhist countries.

Perhaps one of the most striking things is despite the motivation for his study of Buddhism having been to refute the Buddhist teachings, he actually made a pretty good attempt to understand Buddhism as it was practiced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Sri Lanka. He also seems at times to be not antagonistic, for instance he says at one point

‘The cave-temple at Dumbulla is one of the most perfect viharas now existing in Ceylon, and it is also one of the most interesting spots in the Island’ (Spence Hardy: 202).

He also speaks of how he visited the site twice in 1829 and 1838 with his wife and child, but leaves the main description of it to a quote from Forbes.

Jonathan Forbes, a British Military officer, had published in 1841 an account of eleven years he had spent in Sri Lanka. This includes a description of the ceremony of the taking out of the Tooth Relic from the Temple of the Tooth in

Kandy as he saw it in 1828. He also describes the monks and elements of the teachings and says of the Buddhist moral doctrines that.

The religion of Gautama Buddha enjoins its followers to place reliance on Buddha, his religion, and its priesthood. It enjoins also just conversation, and strict adherence to veracity : Just conduct, and incessantly endeavouring to counteract the effects of former sin by the practice of active virtues: Just living, earning a livelihood by honest means : To reverence priests and your parents: To give alms, particularly to the priesthood.\* Forgiveness of injuries is also inculcated as a matter of wisdom as well as of virtue. This religion forbids its followers —

To envy their neighbour, or covet his property :

To follow the worship of false gods :

To commit adultery:

To indulge in unprofitable conversation, or use irritating or unbecoming language :

To destroy any animate being :

To sell the flesh of animals, or rear them for slaughter :

To trade in deadly weapons, or fabricate instruments of war, or anything to be used in the destruction of life:

To trade in poisons :

To use, prepare, or sell intoxicating liquors:

To traffic in human beings ; to sell one's children, or transfer a slave :

To receive bribes : \*

To deprive any one of his property by violence, fraud, or deception :

To tell a falsehood, or use words to conceal the truth.

Guatama thus sums up the duties of mankind :— "

Abstain from all sin, acquire all virtue,\* repress thine own heart." This is unobjectionable; yet how feeble, cold, and inefficient, compared with the summary of Christianity contained in the words, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all

thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself!" (Forbes 306-307)

What is striking then about these early encounters with Buddhism is that despite at times closely observing what they saw before them. Still their authors were it seems blind to what they saw.

## The Christian Buddhist Debates

The next phase in this encounter was the Buddhist response to the Christian missionary efforts and there has been a considerable amount of work on the encounter between Christians and Buddhists in Sri Lanka. Elizabeth Harris's recent (2006) study has examined this subject in. Part of the interest in this is because a series of public debates took place in Sri Lanka between 1865 and 1873 in which Christian and Buddhist spokesmen, priests and monks, put forward arguments to show why each other's religion was false.<sup>53</sup> The results of the debates were judged it seems in terms of which speaker the audience felt had proved their point. In each case the Buddhists felt that they had won the debates, although some of the Christians may have disagreed, and they became important events in the re-establishment of Buddhist self identity in Sri Lanka (Harris, 2006: 202-203).

The debate took place in front of a huge crowd in a field at Dombagahavatta in Panadure. David de Silva, the main advocate for Christianity in a voice like 'the screeching of a tortured cat' (Fox 161) whilst Gunananda spoke in a high soprano, you have to remember of course that this was long before PA systems so they had to speak loudly of course. It seems as well that de Silva addressed the audience as if they were scholars with lots of quotes from Pali and Sanskrit, but Gunananda spoke in everyday Singhalese.

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<sup>53</sup> Rohan Jayetilleke. 'The five Great vadayas or Debates were, Baddegama Vadaya (1865), where the first Anglican Church was built in Sri Lanka, Christ Church (still the church and school under the same name exist) Udanvita Vadaya (1866); Gampola Vadaya (1873) Varagoda Vadaya (1865) and finally most resounding one Panadura Vadaya (1873).' See: <http://www.floridabuddhistvihara.org/rcsite/page.jsp?articleid=34>.

De Silva's first strategy was to quote Buddhist texts so show that there was a contradiction between the notion of anatta and merit making. Gunananda's response was to question de Silva's competency in the Buddhist scriptures then arguing that there was a kind of soul in Buddhism called the ātmaya, an ongoing identity, but not a self-nature. Young and Somaratna's account of the debate thinks the debate was shaped also in part by anti-church free thinkers as he then asked what shape Christians claimed the soul to be?

Gunananda then argued that the bible showed that God was not omniscient and that in the story of Zipporah shows that God demanded blood sacrifices, and it was implied like a Preta, a hungry ghost demon. Essentially the debate came down to this issue, that the god of the old testament behaved more like a preta than anything else.

The debates first afternoon turned on an attempt by de Silva to show that dependent origination made no sense, and a refutation of this by Gunananda. This was then followed by an attack by Gunananda on Christianity. This was on the basis that the slaughter of innocents in Bethlehem actually showed that Jesus was some sort of ill omened demon impostor sent to trick the world.

On the second day the Christians, this time with F. S. Sirmanne as spokesman, attacked the omniscience of the Buddha. Gunananda then responded by accusing Moses of having been an exorcist (kapurala).

Then de Silva on the last afternoon returned to the fray and argued that the Buddha was immoral, both in his actions, such as pardoning angulimala, and in his code of conduct for monks. In particular he quoted the rule about bestiality, a monk who had sex with a monkey, which is punishable by penance but not expulsion from the monkhood (as it would be if it was with a woman. This he argued showed the Buddha condoned bestiality.

Then in the final hour Gunananda was given the opportunity to respond to this. Oddly, Young and Somaratna reckon, his main attack was on Christian cosmology, arguing that the modern Western science showed the flat earth of the bible to be incorrect, but that Buddhism was compatible with modern science. This seems very sensible, with one exception, he was apparently actually arguing that traditional Buddhist cosmology was scientific. However, despite this it sets a theme which I think you would probably all agree with, that Buddhism is compatible with modern science in a way which literal belief in the bible is clearly not (Young and Somaratna: (161-177)).

The nature of the debate also focused on points initially raised by Christians in most cases. One tactic Christians had used was to argue that inconsistencies in Buddhist scriptures showed them to be fallible. So Buddhist monks began to point out the inconsistencies in Christian teachings in reply. The Ven. Guṇānanda, the spokesman for Buddhism at the 1873 debate in Panadura, attacked the teaching of the omniscience of the Christian God by pointing out that he was described as doing such things as repenting for his actions, when surely an omniscient God would not have done anything to cause such repentance.

A second tactic in Christian missionary attacks on Buddhism was to argue that Buddhist cosmology did not agree with modern science and geography, the Buddhist response was to point out that modern science also contradicted the book of Genesis, and so in that Buddhism denied a creator God it was more in accord with modern science than Christianity (Schmidt-Leukel, 2006: 7-8).

I argue that the Buddhist response to their encounters with Christian missionaries can be described as having three facets. First, a willingness to teach about their tradition. Second, an openness to looking for what is of value in any religious system.



However, the third point is that despite any initial reluctance to debate whether Buddhism or Christianity was 'true' there was an enthusiastic embracing of the notion of proving the truth, or falsity, or each teaching.

## Conclusion

In this session we have seen how discovering the Sangha developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Sri Lanka. It starts as observation of monks, but no serious attempt to understand their teachings. Then in the period when Spence Hardy was active it moves into intensive study of Buddhism, with the aim of finding ways to refute it. Then finally in the era of the Panadura debates it Christianity itself comes under attack from Buddhists, who turn Christian arguments against Buddhism back on Christianity.

For the next phase in the discover of Buddhism, Westerners becoming Buddhists, the Panadura debate also has an important role to play. For an account of the Panadura debate was published soon afterwards by an American Universalist Minister and medium who by 1856 was preaching on Spiritualist doctrines, James Martin Peebles (1822-1922).<sup>54</sup> This will be important to us in the next session as it was widely circulated in the USA and led to the first American declaring that they had become a Buddhist.

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<sup>54</sup> See Linda Pendleton (2006), Biography of James Martin Peebles:  
<http://www.todancewithangels.com/peebles.html>.

## Session Four: Rediscovering Refuge

Warm up: List three ideas from the teachings of the religion you practice and then list three things that you do which relate to your religion. Then get together with a small group and come up with three points which show the difference between the idea of a religion and how it is practiced.

Comment: hopefully what that showed was that there is often a big difference between the ideas that are associated with a religion and its practice. You could describe this as the difference between precept and practice. In fact its one of the big changes that happened in religion over the last couple of hundred years that people have been able to assert they were followers of one religion, whilst still living a lifestyle which was largely similar to the followers of other religions. In particular what concerns us today is how it was that people began to become interested in not just studying Buddhism, but being Buddhists.

There is a passage in the 1891 report on the census of India where it says that a number of Europeans had listed their religion as Buddhist, but this had been 'corrected' back to Christian. In other words in the minds of the British officials the notion of a European being a Buddhist was inconceivable. But, it shows that there was a beginning going on in the development of the notion of being Western, and a Buddhist.

### Western Buddhists in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

I want to look at two people who are examples of the changing ways in which people who were born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century became Western Buddhists. We will start by looking at the Theosophists and in particular the American Theosophist Colonel Olcott (1832-1907), who is sometimes said to have been the first American to become a Buddhist. Then we will look at the life of the

troubled Englishman Ananda Metteyya (1872-1923) who was the first Englishman to become an ordained monk.

### Spiritualism and Theosophy

A good place to start looking for the roots of how Westerners became Buddhists is spiritualism. This is not least because spiritualism was one of the alternate forms of religious belief that it was possible to take up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for Europeans. It will also lead us back to Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott and the Theosophists who will play leading roles in this drama.

There has been a good bit of debate about the extent to which spiritualism and Theosophism played in the Buddhist revival. In a great book on the development of Buddhism in the US 'How the Swans came to the Lake' by Rick Field (1981) the author argued that spiritualism was a major factor. Then Stephen Batchelor in his book 'The Awakening of the West' (1994) on how Buddhism came to the West argued that this was not the case at all and the importance of spiritualism had been over emphasised. I tend to agree with Rick Field here, I think the importance of spiritualism in making Westerners open to Buddhism is important, but I think we also need to acknowledge the role that Asians played in the Buddhist revival.

In several of the individual stories we will explore today it's evident that there was a crossover in ideas. One of the vital ways in which I think there is a crossover is so taken for granted these days that it's easy to forget. It's simply the notion that religion is a personal matter. If you think about it most of you here today are probably studying out of personal interest. But, in pre modern times in the West the idea that you individually might change religion was seen as a dangerous notion, a heresy in fact. When people did change religion it was as a community, all becoming Quakers, Methodists, or whatever.

One of the distinctive features of spiritualism was the idea that it religion was essentially an individual belief, speaking to the dead was a personal matter at heart. Although it's not really quite the same at all becoming a Buddhist was also a personal matter, it was not necessary for all Europeans to become Buddhists, only for individuals.

I've also mentioned the role of people from Asia in the development of Western practice of Buddhism. It's also important to realise that many of the leading Buddhist reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Anagarika Dharmapala, were deeply influenced by Western ideas. What emerged as Modern Buddhism was really a mix of ideas from Buddhism and the West and whole rafts of assumptions in it speak as much of Western tradition as they do of Asian Buddhist traditions. But for now let's start with the extraordinary figure of the Colonel Olcott.

Colonel Olcott (1832-1907)

Henry Steele Olcott was born in Orange New Jersey in 1832 and went to school in New York and graduated from Columbia University and become involved with scientific agriculture. By 1858 he was the agricultural editor of the New York Tribune. At the start of the civil war in 1861 he joined the army and ended up with the rank of Colonel having worked with the army and the navy. After the war he became a lawyer and investigator specialising in corruption. In 1878 he was appointed by the US government to investigate trade conditions between the US, India and Ceylon.

[from How the swans Came to the Lake, 84 -88.

Olcott's own version of how he came to investigate the events at Eddy Brother's farm in Vermont was that he suddenly felt compelled to investigate spiritualism and buying a copy of a journal called 'The Banner of Light' he read about how manifestations were occurring at the Eddy brother's farm. He

then wrote an article which appeared in the New York Sun. On a second trip he met Madame Blavatsky when he was there.

Madame Blavatsky (1831-91) was a Russian spiritualist. She was married at the age of 17 in 1848 but ran away from the marriage. She said she had travelled the world from 1848 to 1858 and her travels included two years in Tibet and a visit to Ceylon where she became a Buddhist. She then went back to Russia where she married an Italian opera singer, but after his death in 1870 or 1871 she emigrated to the USA.

Now back to Colonel Olcott, in 1874 he had been sent to report for the New York Sun on the events at Eddy Farm in New York and he then wrote a book called *People of the Other World*. As part of this investigation he met Madame Blavatsky (1891) who he became friends with. From this point on his interest in Eastern Religion began and in 1875 he founded the Theosophical Society with Madame Blavatsky.

During the following years Blavatsky wrote *Isis Unveiled* in which she laid out her ideas about the basis of Theosophy. But the Theosophical society did not flourish and they became interested in India partly due to the Arya Samaj, which they initially thought had similar ideas, but then realised it was not quite the same. The second factor was that they entered into correspondence with Sumangala and Meggittuwatte [Field], who had been in the Panadura Debate of 1873.

Along with Madame Blavatsky he set off for India in 1878 and reached Ceylon in 1880 where in May at Galle they 'embraced' Buddhism. This was not long after the Panadura debates of 1873, some 20 miles from Colombo, and their arrival was eagerly looked forward to by Sumangala and others in Ceylon.

Olcott had also been involved in India with founding the Theosophical society there and in 1879 had organised a 'Swadeshi' exhibition in Bombay. This was a kind of festival of Indian Arts and crafts. In South India and Ceylon he also became interested in the idea of founding schools, in South India for outcasts and in Ceylon for Buddhists. These were modelled on the Christian mission schools which were springing up everywhere in India, but instead of inculcating Western values sought to promote Hindu and Buddhist ideals.

In 1894 he returned to Europe just as a school was opening called the 'Olcott free School' in Southern India. He then went on to open a school in 1898 called the 'H.P.B. Memorial Free School', in 1899 a third school, the Damodar Free School' and in 1901 a fourth at Mylapore, the Tiruvaluvar School and in 1906 a fifth school at near Adyar called the 'Besant Free School'. These schools were largely aimed at providing education to low caste, untouchable children.

In Sri Lanka he worked with the Singhalese leader Anagarika Dharmapala and they worked to establish Buddhist schools, as opposed to Christian schools, on the Island.

Olcott was also caught up in the aftermath of the 1883 riot when Christians attacked a Buddhist procession in Colombo. In a subsequent meeting between Olcott and the Governor, Lord Stanmore, an agreement was reached to allow the Buddha's Parinirvana, Wesak, to be declared a public holiday.

Olcott also wanted to create a counterpart to the kind of Christian Catechism used in Missionary schools and so he set out to create a brief summary of

Buddhist beliefs, the 'Buddhist Catechism'. This was done by consulting widely and was first published in 1881.<sup>55</sup> It takes the form of 64 questions and answers, along with a kind of discussion of the main points in the text. This was also published in a revised version by Henry Leadbeater in a short form suitable for schools in 1889 and takes the form of 64 questions and answers, but has none of the discussion found in the long version.<sup>56</sup>

It is also said that around this time he designed the Buddhist flag.<sup>57</sup> That is to say that he described how the basic idea was already in the minds of

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<sup>55</sup> There is an internet edition of the 1908 version of the Catechism available on the net at <http://www.archive.org/details/abuddhistcatechi0000olcouoft>.

<sup>56</sup> There is an edition on the internet of the smaller Buddhist Catechism Compiled by C.W. Leadbeater and translated from the Sinhalese *Bauddh Çiçubodhaya* (Buddhist Instructions for Children) by C. Jinarajadasa as first published in 1901 (Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, India). See: <http://www.theosophical.ca/SmallBuddhistCatechism.htm>

<sup>57</sup> Meaning of the Flag

The Buddhist flag, first hoisted in 1885 in Sri Lanka, is a symbol of faith and peace used throughout the world to represent the Buddhist faith. The six colours of the flag represent the colours of the aura that emanated from the body of the Buddha when He attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree. The horizontal stripes represent the races of the world living in harmony and the vertical stripes represent eternal world peace. The colours symbolise the perfection of Buddhahood and the Dharma.

The Blue light that radiated from the Buddha's hair symbolises the spirit of Universal Compassion for all beings.

The Yellow light that radiated from the Buddha's epidermis symbolises the Middle Way which avoids all extremes and brings balance and liberation.

The Red light that radiated from the Buddha's flesh symbolises the blessings that the practice of the Buddha's Teaching brings.

The White light that radiated from the Buddha's bones and teeth symbolises the purity of the Buddha's Teaching and the liberation it brings.

Buddhists in Ceylon, but he made suggestions about the shape and its precise form and this became the Buddhist flag.

He also travelled to Japan, in 1888 and 1890, lecturing widely and by 1891 he also got Japanese and Mongolian monks to also endorse his a statement of In 1891 he also managed to get a range of Buddhists to endorse 14 things that Buddhists believe in, Buddhist precepts.

In 1886 he established the Adyar Oriental library, which became the Indian centre of the Theosophical society. It was there in 1907 that he died and handed on the leadership of the Theosophical society to the English Woman Annie Besant.<sup>58</sup>

One question clearly is what sort of Buddhists were Olcott and Blavatsky? They described themselves as esoteric Buddhists, and argued that there was a primal Buddhism which was 'pre-Vedic' and existed before the historical Sakyamuni. In 'Isis Unveiled' it's really not easy to work out what Blavatsky believes as it's a kind of stream of consciousness writing. Apparently she wrote much of while apparently in a trance and copying from invisible documents. Basically, it's very rambling.

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The Orange light that radiated from the Buddha's palms, heels and lips symbolises the unshakable Wisdom of the Buddha's Teaching.

The Combination Colour symbolises the universality of the Truth of the Buddha's Teaching.

See: <http://www.fotw.net/FLAGS/buddhism.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Mostly based on: Kirtisinghe, Buddhadasa, (1981), 'Colonel Henry Steele Olcott the Great American Buddhist' in Colonel Olcott His Service to Buddhism, Wheel Publication 281, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy.



A much more coherent account is found in *Esoteric Buddhism* by A. P. Sinnet (5<sup>th</sup> ed. London, Chapman and Hall Ltd 1885) which was first published in 1883. Sinnet (1840-1921) was living in Allahabad at the time and was the editor of the *Allahabad Pioneer*. He was already by 1870 a journalist in England and in 1879 had moved to India and was living in Allahabad in 1879 and also had a house in Simla in 1880. In both of them he had Blavatsky as a guest and experienced séances with her. It appears that these séances became the talk of Anglo-Indian society (a term which meant English people living in India in those days). He had an interest in Spiritualism in England before arriving in India and this inspired him to contact Blavatsky and Olcott when she came to India. The upshot was that he became an enthusiastic follower of the Theosophist tradition.

Perhaps the key points to mention here is that Esoteric Buddhism is about the evolution of the soul, and it was held to have always been a secret not revealed to everyday Buddhists. Basically, it's not really Buddhism at all, but an odd mix of Spiritualism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Typical of its eclectic approach is the proposition that Buddha has since his *parinirvana* reincarnated as Shankaracharya and Tsongkhapa.<sup>59</sup>

To find firmer ground in terms of people becoming what we would call Buddhists we need to look elsewhere it seems. In many ways the first English Buddhist also came from a similar background, an interest in Spiritualism, and an organisation called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

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<sup>59</sup> See online edition at <http://www.theosophical.ca/EsotericBuddhism.htm#buddha>

Ananda Mettaya (1872-1923) was born in London as Allan Bennett. His mother was a Catholic and he trained as a chemist. He also suffered from asthma from his childhood onwards. He was fascinated by science and after rejecting Catholicism he turned to Hinduism and began to practice Yoga. He then went on to become interested in Theosophy and in 1894 joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. In 1898 Aleister Crowley also joined this group and was impressed by Bennett. However his health was bad in 1900 he went to Sri Lanka where it was hoped the warmer conditions would be better for his health.

In 1900 visited Sri Lanka for the first time and met Dr. Cassius Pereira (later Ven. Kassapa Thera). During two years he spent on the Island he learned Pali and after six months was fluent in it. He also learned Yoga from Hindus on the island and could do feats such as making his body rigid.

He then decided to ordain and went to Burma where he was ordained as a novice under the name of Ananda Maitreya and in 1902 received upsampada, full ordination. He then worked to spread Buddhism and started a society and a journal which ran from 1903 to 1908. However, his health deteriorated again which interfered with his activities. Despite this in 1908 he returned to Britain, from April to October on a mission, to spread Buddhism. It was in view of his arrival that a British Buddhist Society, later to come to fame under Christmas Humphreys came into existence.

However circumstances were not kind to him and following his return to Burma he was not able to return to the West before 1914. This he did in large part due to his ill health meaning doctors told him to disrobe and return to England. He then managed to work for Buddhism when his health allowed

and from 1920 to 1922 was living in London and editing 'The Buddhist Review'. However in his final years his health continued to deteriorate and he died in 1923 (Harris: 1-16).<sup>60</sup>

What distinguishes Ananda Metteyya from the Theosophists is that he stands on the cusp of those willing to say that they are Buddhists, but actually not really Buddhists in a modern sense, and modern Western Buddhists.

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<sup>60</sup> Harris, E. (1998), *Ananda Metteyya: The First British Emissary of Buddhism*, Wheel Publication No. 420/422, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy.