GOLDEN DRUM

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A REVOLUTION REBORN

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AUGUST—OCTOBER 1988 (2531)

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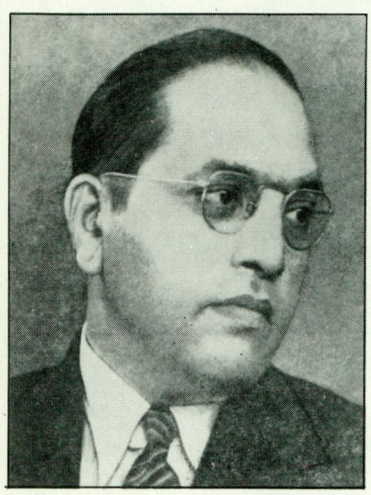


The front cover shows Dr B.R. Ambedkar, and (inset) Sangharakshita and Lokamitra in Poona, 1982

A Revolution Reborn

Vimalakirti sat on my desk allowing his legs to swing in the mosquito-fraught air. He smiled as he spoke, but his voice was insistent:

'To tell you the truth, I cannot remember a single moment in my life when I did not feel angry—until I began to practise Buddhism.'

There were at least two remarkable things about this statement. The first was that Vimalakirti was not exaggerating.

He was born in 1947, in a village of 300 souls just twenty miles from Poona. His family were of the Mahar caste, and their lot in life was to perform whatever menial acts were demanded of them by the village's Caste Hindu population. For sweeping the pathways, performing sentry duty, bearing messages, or whatever, their reward was a little patch of land—which there was never any time to tend, an annual gift of foodstuffs—and whatever they could get by begging in between, endless beatings, and incessant abuse. He watched friends and relatives die of minor ailments because nobody would take their needs seriously. Forbidden from mixing with other children, he spent hours alone in the fields, sulking, honing his resentment to a fine point, and, by his own admission, snapping even at those adults who tried to offer an occasional kind word. It was not a very good start to life. But why should he expect anything else? He was an Untouchable.

The second significant thing about Vimalakirti's statement was that he made it not in Marathi but in English. Although his parents could see no point in an Untouchable educating himself; although he was refused entry to the school classroom—for fear that his presence would pollute the other children; although he was illiterate and had never in his life seen a pencil when he began his education at the age of eight, Vimalakirti had by now managed to acquire fluency in Hindi and English, a B.A. in Politics and Economics, a Masters degree in Politics and Public Administration, and a further degree in Law. Not long before, he had abandoned a Ph.D and an assault on the Bar—in both of which ventures I'm certain he would have succeeded—in order to practise and teach Buddhism.

It may seem extraordinary that a man, who had not very long ago accepted a clerical job—for which he was already over-qualified—because his relatives were in danger of starving, and who now had a very real chance of launching himself into a career that promised financial security, should have 'thrown it all away' in order to work for the spread of Buddhism. But Vimalakirti saw nothing contradictory in his actions. After all, everything he had done and achieved had been an attempt to honour the memory, and further the work, of his hero, Dr Bhimrao Ramji 'Babasaheb' Ambedkar.

Before ordination, Vimalakirti's name had been Babasaheb Kularam Gangawane—the 'Babasaheb' part being his parents tribute to the leader of India's sixty million Untouchables. Like so many others that I encountered during two extended stays in India, Vimalakirti's life had been in other ways too a recapitulation in miniature of Ambedkar's. Like Ambedkar he had fought against all odds to educate himself; he had involved himself in political struggles, for respect and basic rights, still necessary despite the safeguards written into the Indian Constitution; and he had become a Buddhist, at first nominally, in the initial wave of mass-conversion rallies heralded by Ambedkar's own conversion in October 1956, and then 'effectively' when he joined our Order, in 1980.

Vimalakirti believed that he had read every word Ambedkar wrote. These studies, and his disillusionment with the petty squabblings which characterised the political scene, had convinced him that the real key to Ambedkar's work—and the sole means to its furtherance—lay in Buddhism. Ambedkar had not simply converted to get away from something. He was sincerely trying to lead his people *to* something. But what was it? Again, as with many others, his Buddhist studies, his meetings with monks, and even a period spent as a *shramanera*, or 'novice monk', had failed to provide any clue as to what Buddhism might have to offer people who were crying out for dignity, self-respect, freedom, and prosperity. It was his encounter with a member of the Western Buddhist Order called Lokamitra and a movement known as Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG) which would finally point the way.

Exactly ten years ago I interviewed Lokamitra for the *FWBO Newsletter*. He had just returned from a journey that had changed his life: a trip to India to study Yoga with the renowned teacher, B.K.S Iyengar. While there, he had made contact with a number of Sangharakshita's friends in Poona and Nagpur, and had, as a consequence, seen the potential for a new Buddhist movement working primarily among Ambedkar's followers. Now he was planning another journey: he would return to India, this time to stay, in order to start that movement. 'I was horrified,' he said of his first visit. 'Here were millions of Buddhists with almost nothing being done for them. . . There's so much we can do: anything could happen—I hardly dare think of two or three year's time!'

Ten years have passed. TBMSG, the movement that Lokamitra founded, is now the most active and successful Buddhist organisation in Central India. It would be no exaggeration to say that it has changed not only Lokamitra's life, but through its Dharma, cultural, and social welfare activities, thousands of others besides. It really does seem to be making possible the 'Dharma revolution' of which Ambedkar and people like Vimalakirti dreamed.

As a fully committed Buddhist, and as Chairman of TBMSG's centre in Wardha, Vimalakirti is not only happy and fulfilled at last, but an effective, leading figure in Ambedkar's revolution. He would be the first to accept that there is still a lot of work to be done. But that smile which lit his face as he told me about his childhood, and which I can see even now, assures me that the work will be done. After all, Vimalakirti is only one of those thousands of people. I hardly dare think what will happen over the next twenty to thirty years!

Nagabodhi

A Peaceful Revolution

Vimalakirti

The story of TBMSG really begins, not in 1978, but in the 30's and 40's, with Dr Ambedkar's struggle to free the Untouchables. Vimalakirti fills in the background:

In 1936, Dr B. R. Ambedkar, the great leader of India's Untouchables, outlined his vision of an ideal society:

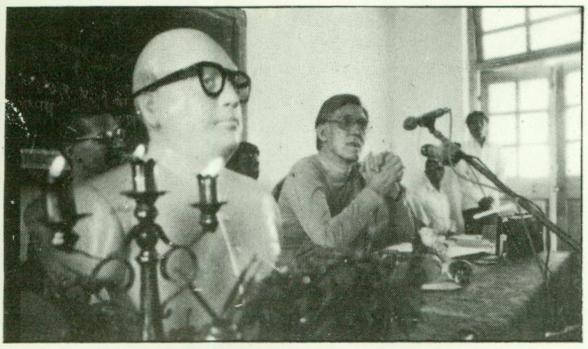
'My ideal would be a society based on Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. An ideal society should be mobile and full of channels which allow the changes taking place in one part to affect other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. . . . This is Fraternity, which is only another name for Democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government: it is primarily a mode of associative living, of conjoint experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect between fellow men.'

Even at a time when India was within sight of independence, this was a radical vision for a nation that had been steeped for centuries in an ideology of rigid social gradation and caste oppression.

Although India is known to be a land of many religions, it is generally believed that Hinduism is the religion of the majority. This is a misleading view, for beneath the common title 'Hinduism' are subsumed a vast number of conflicting communities. The official doctrine of Hinduism was, from its earliest days, the division of society into four major classes. The Brahmins (the priests and educators) occupied the highest and most privileged stratum. Then came the Kshatriyas (the warriors and administrators), then the Vaiyshas (the merchants), and then the Shudras (servants). But this fourfold division soon gave birth to thousands of castes each associated with a particular occupation or skill. Caste membership had nothing to do with one's interests and capacities: one entered a caste by being born into it. No change of caste was ever permitted.

In this society there existed a number of classes of people who were placed below even the lowest members of society, and treated worse than animals. These were the Untouchables. Members of these castes were denied the right even to be considered human beings. To exert themselves to better their lives through education, employment, decent living, or free communication was forbidden. If they dared to wear jewellery, new clothes—rather than rags,

Sangharakshita speaks during his first return-visit to India



Sangharakshita in Aurangabad, 1982

or even to use metal utensils in the kitchen, they were accused of insulting the Caste-Hindus. As I write this, my own childhood, thirty years ago, appears before my eyes. I was born after Independence, after Untouchability had been officially outlawed, but I was subjected to all the curses of Untouchability: insults, humiliation, rejection, dejection, and denial. This practice continues unabated even now in many parts of the country.

Dr Ambedkar was a phenomenon. Born into an Untouchable family, he succeeded nevertheless in achieving an unparalleled level of education (in India, in the USA, in the UK, and in Germany) and of influence. A barrister by profession, he dedicated all his powers and skills to the uplift of his people and to the overthrow of the cruel system that held tens of millions of people in its thrall. He fought his struggle simultaneously on the political, social, economic, and educational fronts, writing books, founding political parties and trades unions, establishing consciousness-raising societies, newspapers, schools, colleges, and hostels, and organizing a number of historic non-violent demonstrations. In all this, his aim was to awaken the Untouchables to their human rights and to impress upon their minds the falsity of the religion they professed in such ignorance and which treated them so badly.

At first, he set his sights on the reform of Hinduism. He soon realized, however, that such a thing would be impossible. In 1935, therefore, he reminded the Untouchables that the disabilities they were suffering resulted from their being members of the Hindu community, and exhorted them to sever their connection with Hinduism and seek solace and self-respect in another religion. This was, perhaps, an extraordinary conclusion. Had not the Untouchables already suffered enough at the hands of religion?

In Ambedkar's view, however, political power, even a socialist revolution, would not be enough. He said: 'While I have condemned the religion of *rules* . . . I agree with Burke when he says that "True religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all civil government rests." When I urge that these ancient rules of life be annulled, I am anxious that their place be taken by a religion of Principles, which alone can lay claim to being a true religion.'

Soon after, he developed his thesis: 'You must give a new doctrinal basis to your religion, a basis that will be in consonance with liberty, equality, and fraternity. . . . This means a complete change in the values of life; it means a complete change in outlook and attitude towards men and things. It means conversion.' After much research into the doctrines and histories of the world's major religions, Ambedkar concluded that Buddhism was precisely the 'religion of Principles' that his people needed.

At the time, on the political scene, the transfer of power was taking place and Ambedkar had to concentrate on securing political rights for his people. The following decade was a crucial period, and Ambedkar was at the peak of his career. He became the first Law Minister of independent India, and the chief architect of her Constitution. In this position he was able to win political rights for the Depressed Classes, and to succeed in outlawing the practice of Untouchability.

But this was not enough. He had gone some way towards abolishing the old unjust society, but he had not yet adopted a definite course of action that would replace it with his ideal society. And so it was that, on 14 October 1956, he converted to Buddhism, along with several hundred thousands of his supporters. By doing this they were effectively taking an oath to bring about a complete revolution by peaceful means—a Dharma revolution. They also hoped to set an example to the world which, Ambedkar believed, could be saved from its peril only when people were prepared to follow the teachings of the Buddha, and thus to change themselves.

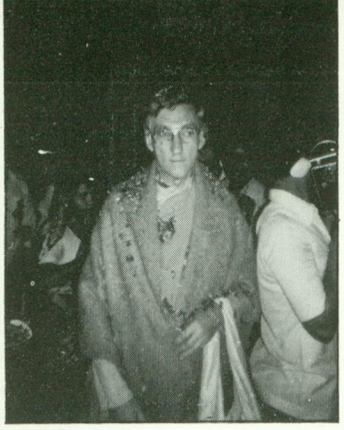
But then disaster struck. Seven weeks after the first conversion rally, Ambedkar died, leaving his movement in the hands of his newly converted and totally inexperienced followers. There was chaos and confusion, in the course of which Ambedkar's advice that 'A good disposition is the only permanent guarantee of permanent goodness', and the Buddha's emphasis on training the mind—as a means of training the 'disposition'—fell upon deaf ears.

Ambedkar's institutions became battle-grounds for power-struggles among his own followers; the government tried to curtail the conversion movement by denying to Buddhists those rights and privileges that had so recently been won for the depressed Hindu castes. The Buddhist countries of the East ignored the new Buddhist movement, or dismissed it as a quasi-political phenomenon. The few bhikkhus who did appear on the scene had little understanding of the situation, and merely imposed their own traditional customs and practices on an ignorant laity. Buddhism became a matter of rites and ceremonies, of looking after bhikkhus and building viharas to accommodate them. Thinking people came to suspect that Buddhism was no better than the old religion, and turned away disillusioned. . . . All the enthusiasm and dynamism with which the conversion movement had been launched vanished into the dark. Within two decades the signs of decline were everywhere, and those sincere people who had hoped for a new life were becoming disillusioned.

At this terrible time, in 1978, a new ray of hope arose miraculously from the West. This was Sangharakshita, a man who had won the confidence and respect of Dr Ambedkar himself. Before returning to England in 1967 he had been one of the very few people who had tried to give confidence, encouragement, and instruction to Buddhists in India. Now some of his disciples were coming to live with us, basing themselves in Poona. By the middle of the following year Sangharakshita had visited India, and had ordained ten people. TBMSG had been born: the Dharma movement had been revived, and Dr Ambedkar's dream protected.

It was like a miracle. People rushed to talks, classes, and retreats that were organized. They began to practise meditation, study the Dharma, and feel the changes in their lives. They gave up drinking alcohol, gambling, smoking and chewing tobacco; they stopped beating their wives and children. . . . Thousands of people have now benefited in such ways. On a deeper level, they have begun to develop mutual understanding and friendship among themselves, begun to work on their hatred, resentment, and jealousy. People are now beginning to appreciate the importance of loving kindness as a path to unity, solidarity, and co-operation—and thus to effectiveness in society. In many ways, and on many levels, people are realizing that Dharma practice really does offer a path to a new and better life.

Today, thirty years after the first conversions, and ten years after the birth of TBMSG, the Indian Buddhist scene has been considerably changed. Requests for retreats, talks, and classes pour in day by day—more than we can meet! In the West, the FWBO has come of age. In India, TBMSG is still a child of just ten years. Nevertheless, it is standing firmly on its feet, a source of inspiration, courage and confidence.



More To Come

TBMSG has been a reflex of Sangharakshita's wish to continue working among India's new Buddhists. Is he happy with the way things are going? Nagabodhi asked.

'Bhante envisages a network of viharas spreading to wherever there are ex-Untouchable Buddhists. . . . The Western Buddhist Order is well suited to the task. Dr Ambedkar himself saw the need for a new kind of bhikkhu: educated, in touch with the modern world, and free to act, free to go out and do Dharma work. There is no reason why the general lines on which the FWBO operates in the West should not be valid out there. Bhante also hopes to see us doing something on the material plane, such as supporting a medical team to work among the poor people. Before long there will do doubt be Indian Order members. . . .'

That extract from one of our Newsletters *provides a glimpse of your vision for the Movement's development in India, ten years ago. Are you surprised that things have gone so well?*

I can't say I am surprised. I knew the need of the ex-Untouchables for the Dharma, and I was quite confident that the kind of approach developed by the FWBO in the West would be suitable for India.

But did you expect TBMSG to have more trouble establishing its name, or its credentials, given that it was originally founded by Westerners?

Not really. I knew that the ex-Untouchable Buddhists on the whole had no prejudice against Westerners—least of all against Western Buddhists. I also knew that from the very beginning they had been desperately looking to Buddhists outside India, hoping for some gesture of friendship and solidarity. But they have on the whole been very bitterly disappointed by the Buddhist countries of south-east Asia. Virtually no help, not even any encouragement, has come from those quarters, except for the occasional bhikkhu, perhaps, trying to do something—but no more than that. There has certainly not come the sustained and solid support that Ambedkar expected. It's probably not an exaggeration to say that all the Buddhist countries of south-east Asia, combined, have not contributed even a tenth as much, even financially, to the ex-Untouchable Buddhists as have Western Buddhists, especially those in England.

Can you say which of the past ten years' developments have pleased you most?

One has certainly been that we now have so many Order members of Indian origin. I've been very pleased to see how very effectively many of those have been able to work, despite—in most cases—having families, full-time jobs, and so on.

We now have centres in Maharashtra and Gujerat, and we're beginning to spread towards the states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka; we have medical teams and some educational work, and the Order has grown quite quickly. Are there any major areas of activity that you are still waiting to see being tackled?

I'd like to see much more literature being published in all the major Indian languages. We are still lagging behind quite seriously in this respect. We've brought out quite a few pamphlets, and a few books even, in Marathi, but not much in any other language.

That suggests that you would like to see the conversion movement gathering momentum, and spreading further afield.

'... so many Order members of Indian origin'

This is something we should think about very seriously. At present the conversion movement remains more or less confined to the Mahars [Dr Ambedkar's own caste]. But if it is to achieve Ambedkar's original objectives it will have to spread to other communities as well: beyond the ex-Untouchables and beyond the Scheduled Caste communities, even. We do already have just a handful of Caste-Hindu sympathizers, and a few of those do consider themselves to be Buddhists. That is a very good thing because, if 'Buddhist' becomes just a synonym for 'Mahar', then the Mahars themselves will not really have broken out of the caste system.

As our work in India becomes better known in the Buddhist world, it is possible that other organizations may wake up to the potential of the situation. Do you feel it would be a good thing if some of them started to work there?

It would depend entirely on the nature of those movements. If they wanted to work entirely along traditional Theravada lines, they'd best not bother. Frankly they'd do more harm than good. In the south-east Asian Buddhist countries, bhikkhus have largely become more or less like the Indian Brahmins, and the ex-Untouchable Buddhists, having shaken off the yoke of one set of Brahmins, don't want another! They want the Dharma, which the majority of bhikkhus in south-east Asia are just not able really to practise or to preach.

So is there any other way in which you would like to see our own Movement progressing?

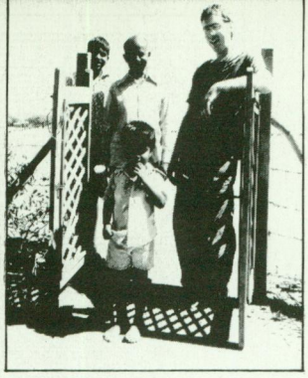
Well I'd obviously like to see it progressing on all fronts! I'd like to see more viharas, more medical centres, and more hostels. I'd like to see a small hospital; I'd like to see more meditation centres; I'd like to see more publications; I'd like to see more classes and courses and retreats and lectures, and public meetings! I'd just like to see more of everything.

Is there any particular message you would like to pass on to our Indian friends on this anniversary occasion?

Clearly, I'd like all the Order members, mitras, and other Friends in India just to go on working as hard as they possibly can. I would like them to know that they have the full sympathy and support, at least the moral support, of all members of the Order and of the Movement in the West, and especially my own sympathy and support. I would also like them to know that we look to them not only to do what is good for India, and for people in India who wish to come into contact with the Dharma, but also to be a source of inspiration to us here in the West. We know very well that they are working under much more difficult conditions that we have to face here, so we admire them all the more for what they are able to achieve.

One last question. Are you hoping to return to India yourself?

I do hope to go back. When and how I can't say at the moment. But I would be very disappointed if I couldn't pay at least one more visit to India, and probably more.



Padmavajra and friends in 1978

Padmavajra, Lokamitra, and first Order members on retreat.

BEGINNINGS

The mission was quite straightforward: team up with Sangharakshita's old friends and start a new Buddhist movement. But, as Padmavajra explains, it would call for some serious adaptation.

Our first home in India was a small hotel on a busy main road. The hotel was built above a restaurant, and the little room shared by Lokamitra, Kularatna, and myself sat directly above the kitchen. For those first months the smells of spices and the roar of motor-scooter engines pervaded our lives.

That room was our base. In it we held study groups, meditation classes, and organizational meetings. Of an evening the room was crammed with Poona Buddhists, who would often stay talking with us late into the night. Eventually a friend lent us his retirement bungalow in a Buddhist housing estate. The bungalow was not only more spacious and comfortable, but it also brought us into contact with an important section of the Poona Buddhist population, out of which were to emerge many mitras and Order members.

From the moment we arrived, Lokamitra was active. He spent his days darting from place to place in his orange anagarika's robes on a hired bicycle, meeting people or organizing classes and retreats, all of which he would lead. For me, initially, it was a question of just tagging along, trying to keep up with the pace and adjusting to being in a new and bewildering culture. Eventually I did become more involved in the work, though not without encountering a few teething problems. I can remember, for example, my first attempts at producing a set of minutes for a meeting. I had no idea how to spell Marathi proper names, so when our committee received their minutes nobody could understand who was supposed to have said what, or where anything was supposed to be taking place.

We began conducting meditation classes, lectures, study groups, and retreats. As we knew no Marathi we always had to use interpreters. Our activities were held in locations quite unlike anything we were used to. Lectures were almost always held in the open air, on plots of waste land, in parks, or even on busy roads, with the audience sitting on the pavement. For meditation classes we had to use whatever rooms were available, without worrying too much about comfort. Our Sunday morning meditation class was held in a garage in an affluent part of Poona. Its owners were Indian Christians who used their car to drive to church on Sunday mornings. They had allowed two of our friends the use of the garage while they were out on the condition that they would practise birth control and encourage others to do so. It was a small garage with a tin roof and an oil-stained floor, but once we had spread out some rugs and set up a shrine, it would soon fill with men, women, and children in their best clothes.

We held retreats in the countryside in 'Inspection Bungalows'—which are for the use of government officials and politicians. As some of our friends had important government jobs it was not difficult for us to hire them, though the caretakers had usually to be 'looked after' when they found out that we were holding a Buddhist retreat. Later on we managed to hire a scout camp which had once been a raja's palace. This facility was almost ideal, the only difficulty being having to deal with the camp caretaker: a tall man, with a small mean mouth and a thin moustache. At the beginning and end of each retreat he would take what I considered to be sadistic pleasure in writing down—in triplicate—every utensil we had used. His English was poor, but he spoke it with great confidence, prefacing everything with, 'Now I suppose you think, Mr Padmavajra . . .'

In spite of these unpromising conditions we could see people changing and delighting in their first taste of real Buddhist practice. A close rapport began to develop between us and the Poona Buddhists. Lokamitra, especially, made every effort to communicate with them. He would spend his spare time learning Marathi, studying the life and writings of Dr Ambedkar, and meeting people informally. The Poona Buddhists themselves were very eager to communicate with us and a group of some ten friends soon began to constellate around us and share responsibility for our activities. It was out of this group of friends that the first Indian Order members emerged.

Despite my willingness to communicate, I found it hard at first to teach Buddhism in a manner relevant to the local conditions. When I began to teach meditation in Poona I did so in more or less the same way as I had done in London. Naturally, this did not engage people very much. Eventually I had something of a breakthrough. While in a dentist's waiting room I found myself flicking through the Indian film magazine 'Filmfair'. It was full of scandalous stories and photographs of voluptuous women and ruggedly handsome men. Neither the stories nor the photographs held much appeal for me, but I was struck by the names of those stars: there was a kind of music, a kind of poetry, about them. Long after I'd forgotten the film-stars' faces, I found myself savouring names like Parveen Babi, Hema Malini, Amitabh Bacchan, Shashi Kapoor, Dharmendra, and the like. At a meditation class some days later, while discoursing on the importance of avoiding distractions like bad movies and film magazines, I casually mentioned the names I remembered. Suddenly the whole class was interested and involved in what I was saying! I realized then how important it was to tune in to the culture of the people I was teaching.

It was not always easy to communicate the specifically FWBO approach to Buddhist practice. On the whole, our insistence on essential Buddhist

principles and practices, as well as our desire to make them as relevant as possible, were instantly attractive to many people. Nonetheless there were a few things which some found hard to grasp. Most people already had ideas about what being a Buddhist involved—some of them quite bad ideas—which meant that we had to do a lot of re-educating. Particularly difficult for some people to grasp was our understanding of the nature of being an Order member or a mitra. Some people, used to Buddhist movements that made no real demands on their adherents, were quite upset to discover that a deeper involvement with us would mean that they would really have to practise Buddhism.

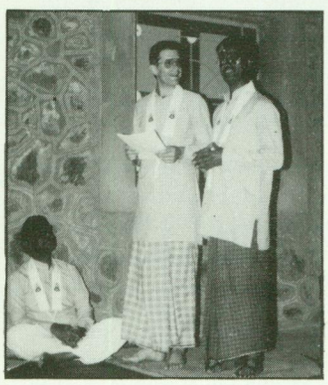
I particularly remember some mitra ceremonies that took place as part of a Sangha Day celebration. The evening had started with a fine talk by Lokamitra in which he had taken great pains to explain what it meant to become a mitra. Just as he was about to conduct the ceremonies, for two women, a gentleman stood up and began shouting 'I want to be your mitra. Why are you letting only these ladies be your friend? Why cannot I be your mitra?' Not having listened to the talk, he thought Lokamitra was using the word 'mitra' in its Marathi sense which means simply 'friend', rather than in the specifically FWBO sense. As the man was an influential figure in the Poona Buddhist community there was much excitement, and at once the atmosphere became tense. Lokamitra sought to remedy the situation by saying 'Mitra does *not* mean friend', and his interpreter—with a 'so be it' shrug of the shoulders—translated this quite literally into Marathi. (The English equivalent would have been, 'Friend does not mean friend.') This unintended paradox silenced everybody for long enough to allow Lokamitra to explain again what being a mitra meant, and our Sangha Day was saved. Later on we decided to call mitras *Dhammamitras* which made things much clearer.

Without doubt my most treasured memories of those first months were Sangharakshita's two visits at the beginning of 1979. He was quite an example: he seemed so perfectly natural, so at home. It was as if he had just returned to Poona from a few months in Kalimpong rather than having been in the West for twenty years. He tuned in to the Poona Buddhists immediately, teaching in a way that was perfectly suited to their needs.

We were very busy while he was with us, arranging a tight schedule of lectures, question-and-answer sessions, retreats, and interviews. In India Sangharakshita is an important religious teacher and is treated with all the devotion and respect that such a position entails. The atmosphere at his lectures was a highly charged mixture of enthusiasm and devotion. Thousands of people attended, and would offer him countless marigold and jasmine garlands. Whenever he made a particularly impressive point in his lectures the crowds would burst into spontaneous applause and laugh delightedly. Though simple, his lectures were never simplistic. In one, for example, he expounded the major schools of Indian philosophy and showed how Buddhism differed from them all. His lectures were like jewel-mines containing expositions of Buddhist texts and Dr Ambedkar's writings, stories from the life of the Buddha, personal anecdotes, jokes, social comment, and much else besides. In whatever he said one could feel that his sole purpose was to communicate the means by which people could transform their lives.

It was also an education to see Sangharakshita deal with an Indian 'Buddhist' rationalist, whose ideal man seemed to be Bertrand Russell, and who could not even begin to entertain the possibility of rebirth. Sangharakshita told him (somewhat to his discomfort) that it was all right not to believe in rebirth, so long as one made an all-out effort to gain Enlightenment in this very life.

The most significant events of Sangharakshita's visits were the ordinations he conducted, two on his first visit, and nine on the second. I can still remember the joy at the conclusion of that second batch of ordinations. In the silence that followed the loud shouts of 'Sadhu!', I felt the delight of witnessing the birth of the Order on Indian soil. We had definitely arrived.



Lokamitra and Vimalakirti

MEETING A NEED

Lokamitra talks to Nagabodhi about the work of TBMSG, and shares some views on the current state of the 'Dharma Revolution'.

At the end of June, Lokamitra returned to England for a short stay—his third since 1978. As ever, he was a dynamo of vitality: ten years of hard and relentless work seem to have increased, rather than diminished, his reserves of vigour.

Back in India, more than sixty Indian Order members were tending the movement he had initiated, a movement which now works through twelve urban centres and a beautiful rural retreat centre, a host of publications and two regular magazines, Right Livelihood projects, communities, a cultural wing, and a social welfare wing—*Bahujan Hitay*—which offers medical and educational help to slum dwellers in several towns. TBMSG is now becoming known far beyond Maharashtra, and seems set to make an extraordinary impact, not only on the immediate Buddhist world of Dr Ambedkar's followers, but, given time, on India herself. Lokamitra is not satisfied.

'My enthusiasm has not changed at all: I am as convinced as I ever was that TBMSG can do a tremendous amount, both Dharmically and socially. I know that the potential is there, and I believe that we are the only people working to develop that potential. But I am continually being confronted by the contrast between the demand for what we are doing and our ability to fulfil it. We get requests from all over the place—for lectures, to start centres, for retreats. . . . In every village, in every town in Maharashtra—and potentially in India—there is a demand for Dharma work. We are really fulfilling so little of it that it hurts.

'For example, at Kondapur, we have a place where we go for retreats. It's about 20-30 kilometres from Poona. When I first went to stay there last year, the local Buddhists were talking about the condition of their people—how they knew nothing about Buddhism and were still following the practices of the old religion. "We've never had anyone to teach us," they said. "We know nothing. We are starving for teachings."—And that was so near Poona! There are probably about 6,000,000 Buddhists in Maharashtra. In Poona alone there are probably 300,000. Even though we've got four centres there, we haven't managed to reach all of them. It's frustrating.'

Even if there is still a long way to go, there's no doubt that TBMSG has achieved a great deal in its first decade. And if the inevitably slow growth of a movement that has to engender and train its own highly dedicated workers is a source of frustration, TBMSG has nevertheless managed to be more effective than any other movement working in that situation. I wondered whether that had anything to do with the fact that it was founded by Western Buddhists.

'Dr Ambedkar himself said that the Buddhist nations must come forward and help. This is very important because of the background conditions of the people involved: caste, Untouchability, lack of education, and so forth. Foreigners are outside the caste system, and can relate more easily with Buddhists there than can people from other communities within India. I think this is why Dr Ambedkar felt that Sangharakshita could be so helpful, because he was free of caste and all that goes with it.

'Then again, the fact that we are not just outsiders, but 'new Buddhists', is very important too. Buddhists in modern India must evolve a Buddhism that is appropriate for them. Of course, the way we practise here in the West may not be appropriate for them in every instance, but we have developed our Buddhism through experiment, and have an experimental approach to our practice. It's that approach and that attitude which is so important. By and large, the

Thais, Sinhalese, and the Japanese Nichirens who have tried to work there have failed because they haven't had this flexibility in their approach; there's been too much identification with their own culture.

'Although the Western link might have been important at the beginning, TBMSG has now gathered its own momentum. I don't think there's any longer a need for it to be dependent on foreign Buddhists. There is a very healthy bond of brotherhood, as it were, with people outside India, but no longer any dependence. If I were to leave, things would carry on.'

'Probably the main reason TBMSG has been so effective is that we have confidence in Buddhism. People can see that we actually practise it; they see a dedicated team of people who are serious about what they are doing. . . . Dr Ambedkar asked his people to convert to Buddhism, but because he died so soon after the conversions, very few people knew why. As a result, there has been very little confidence in the Dharma. We have that confidence: we have confidence that we can change, that society can eventually, steadily change through the Dharma if enough people practise it. People appreciate that. They are relieved to discover that there is something in Dr Ambedkar's vision.'

The past ten years have seen some important developments on the Indian political and economic scene. There is more prosperity, another decade has passed since the Constitution outlawed Untouchability. All the same, Lokamitra believes that Dr Ambedkar's memory and vision is as highly revered, and as relevant, as it was in the fifties.

'If anything, his name is growing; he's much more appreciated now than he was when he was alive. By looking at their experience of life, and through increased education, people seem to be much more aware of what he did for them. Originally, many people dismissed him for turning to Buddhism. But conversions are still taking place among the Scheduled Castes, and this could easily increase. There is a tremendous interest in Buddhism, and not just in Maharashtra. We can't fulfil all the invitations we get these days to visit other states.

'There is certainly a little more prosperity. When I first went to live in Ambedkar Society, out of two hundred households only two or three had television sets. Now, probably 75% of them do, and that's fairly general of Buddhists who are able to get jobs. But this is only a very small proportion of the Buddhist community. Unemployment is extremely high, there are very few jobs going, even for those who have managed to overcome the handicap of their home background and climb through the education system. Those who do get reasonably good jobs are able to buy a TV and a few more consumer items, but that does not mean they are able to to develop any real depth to their prosperity. That is virtually impossible.

'For those who can achieve it, a little financial security—and the self-respect that arises from it—is obviously a good thing. But it is a double-edged sword. Increased financial well-being, just to the extent of being able to consume a little more, does not necessarily reflect an increase in initiative, responsibility, and so on. In India you don't really find capitalism in the way you find it here in the West. There *is* scope for private enterprise in India, but the Buddhist people are not taking part in that at all. Those with good jobs are involved in government service, which does not tend to foster those qualities of initiative and responsibility that the Buddhist community needs. From this point of view, I would say that materialism is possibly the greatest threat facing the Buddhist community at the moment.

'The vast majority of Buddhists are still extremely poor, uneducated, and live in villages where caste prejudice is still strong. 75% of the Indian population is village based. Inevitably, industrialization will erode caste barriers, but caste feelings are basically as strong as ever. Dr Ambedkar's vision of a Dharma Revolution is certainly still relevant, and people seem to be realizing this more and more.'

While TBMSG plays its part in Ambedkar's 'Dharma Revolution' by attempting to change society by transforming the individuals who comprise it, Bahujan Hitay would seem to be working on a more down-to-earth basis. These two aspects of the movement's work are administered and financed entirely independently, but Lokamitra sees them as being very closely bound together.

Siddharth entertains in a Dapodi kindergarten

'I have never myself separated the Dharma and the social work, and I don't see it is possible to do so. You can't close your eyes to the situation around you. From the very beginning we saw that we wanted to do social work. Things are so obvious there: there's so much poverty, so much backwardness, so much illiteracy, so much poor health. Bahujan Hitay has been a spontaneous response to that. The initiative came from our Order members, many of whom have come from those same conditions. They want to do what they can to help.

Although we are by no means working exclusively with or for Buddhists—the people benefiting from our hostels, kindergartens, medical work, and so on, come from many other communities—it is the Dharma that leads the way. You could say the initiative to do something, and the ability to do it, both come from the fact that we are Buddhists. For those of us working in Bahujan Hitay who *are* Buddhists, the social work is an expression of our Dharmic commitment: it's a very good form of Right Livelihood. To do that kind of work you have to be reliable and you have to be committed to overcoming personal difficulties in your efforts to work with others. Above all, you have to want to take responsibility.

But there's also the matter of trust—without which you can do very little. People now seem to know that we are able to organize our projects well because we are Buddhists. They know that a positive atmosphere prevails in our facilities. This is especially true of our hostels: even non-Buddhist parents are glad to know that the people in charge really do practise Buddhism.'

Lokamitra has now spent ten years of his life in India—a country, he admits, to which he is still adapting. His job has not been an easy one, but he has no plans to return home. More than that, he feels that a few more Order members could follow his example.

'I'd recommend the work with no doubt at all. I don't know why more people aren't getting out of England and starting centres in new countries. We've got the Three Jewels, and we want to share them. At the same time we want to do something with our lives that is as meaningful and creative as possible. I can't see any more meaningful work than making the Three Jewels available to others. The different countries are like so many lakes: you drop something into one and the ripples will spread. It's good and important that we have so many 'drops' in the English lake; I'm sure. But on the other hand, many areas of the world are being neglected. I think we probably have to spread ourselves a little more thinly.'

BUILDING A BRIDGE

Mahamati, director of Aid For India, tells the story of a valuable—and effective—link between Indian and Western Buddhists.

Towards the end of 1980, several Order members, mitras, and Friends could be found pacing the streets of London knocking on hundreds of doors. They were representing a charity called Aid For India, and to those who were sympathetic they gave an explanatory booklet and arranged to call back in a day or two.

'There are still millions of Indians', the booklet began, 'who suffer the stigma of being branded as Untouchables. They have the worst jobs, the worst living conditions, and the worst education of all the castes. This is their status by birth and until recently they had no chance of escape from this position. Aid For India is the charity which helps these people to overcome their caste background and find new and better lives for themselves'.

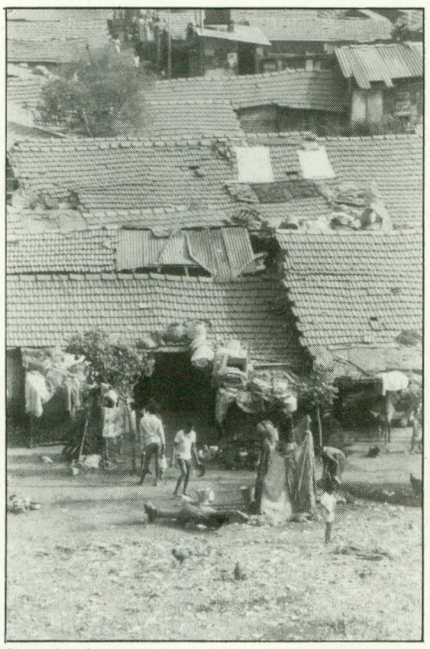
When you give to a charity it is always difficult to know how your money will be spent, and especially so when it is going to a destination thousands of miles away. The element of trust and faith in the organization to which you are giving is important. Although the fundraisers, in most cases, had never been to India, they were nevertheless able to communicate their belief that the project initiators in Poona (Indian members of our own Buddhist Order) could be relied on to make the most of whatever help they were given. Eight years later, many of those earliest supporters are still giving money regularly to Aid For India, having watched AFI's initial plans turn into reality.

It was clear to the first Order members in India that the new Buddhist movement inaugurated by the establishment of TBMSG would need to include an active social dimension. When a Buddhist family offered TBMSG some land adjacent to slums in an area of Poona called Dapodi, the opportunity was quickly taken. This gave rise to Aid For India's first appeal: the 'Poona Project', which set out to find ways of bringing health and education to some of the poorest slum dwellers.

I first went to India in 1983 to write reports for Aid For India's third annual Newsletter. At that time, two English Order members, Virabhadra and Padmashuri, a doctor and nurse respectively, were offering clinics in borrowed huts around the Dapodi slums. There was also a sewing class and a *balwadi* (kindergarten) run by local women. There were plans to extend the Poona Project, and also for a new project—called 'Action In Education'—which would set up a series of hostels for secondary school children. To be honest, I was a little disappointed that more had not been achieved. By that time we had a healthy surplus in our bank account; there was no shortage of funds. Was this the dynamic social movement that was going to change the lives of thousands? This, after all, was what we had been promising the public in London.

I returned to England still deeply committed to the vision of the Poona Project, and now to Action In Education, but more realistic as to how long it would take to achieve these goals. I knew that Virabhadra's and Padmashuri's early work in Dapodi went far beyond the immediate facilities being provided (even though they were saving lives). They had taken the essential first step in developing contact and trust as the basis for true co-operation.

But what we now needed was to find people in India who would be able to initiate projects, and communicate with and work sensitively with local communities. They would have to be able to inspire individuals and communities with a vision of the great changes that would take place if they could only feel confident in themselves and acquire some education and training. Thus they would be not so much doing things *for* the poor, as working *with* them, so that they might help themselves.



Slum landscape

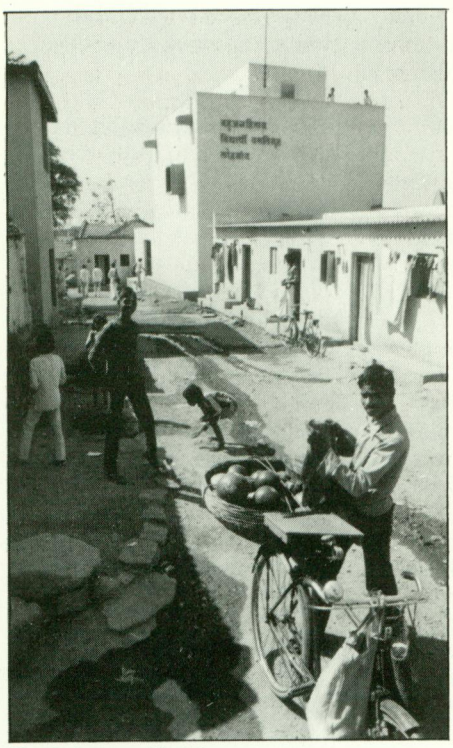
Vimalakirti had been the first Indian Order member to devote himself full-time to TBMSG's work in Poona. Along with Lokamitra, he had been the main instigator of the Poona Project. Other Indian Order members and mitras, despite commitments to families and jobs, had given all the time they could to TBMSG's activities. Now, many more workers were needed, particularly people steeped in the practice of the Dharma. This, of course, depended on the expansion of the directly Buddhist side of the movement. And one of the things which was holding back this aspect of the project was, paradoxically, money.

Aid For India had gone out to the general public for help with the social projects, and had been well received. But the funding of exclusively Buddhist activities was still wholly dependent on contributions from FWBO centres. In 1984, Aid For India's trustees realized that it was time to go out to Buddhists around the world, and ask them to help fund this nascent cultural and spiritual revolution.

As a consequence, Aid For India has added a 'Dharma Fundraising' wing to its initiative, and has organized tours which have reached out to Buddhists in the UK, USA, Malaysia, Singapore, and later this year to Germany and Taiwan. Wherever it has been possible to meet with Buddhists face to face, the response to our appeal has been one of unreserved enthusiasm and generosity.

When I made a second visit to India,

A kindergarten at Dapodi



The Lohagaon Hostel

earlier this year, *Bahujan Hitay* (meaning 'For the Welfare of the Many', the name given to the social wing of TBMSG) was working with so many people in so many places that it was impossible for me to witness all its activities. In Dapodi there were now *balwadis*, study classes, literacy courses, and health check-up and vaccination programmes in all four principal localities, as well as daily clinics in an impressive central building, sewing classes, and cultural and sports activities. Moreover, the Poona Project had extended beyond Dapodi to five other districts, most now with the same range of activities as in Dapodi.

Bahujan Hitay had a large team of teachers, health-workers, and social workers, all of whom were Indian, most of whom were Buddhists, under the direction of several full-time Indian Order members. Those affected by the Poona Project came from many different castes and religions, and could be counted in thousands.

There were hostels for high school students in Poona, Ulhasnagar, Aurangabad, and Wardha, with more opening shortly in Ahmedabad and in Poona (this one for girls). Each hostel was under the direction of a local committee of Order members, mitras, and Friends. All told, there were now facilities for 220 students from poor home backgrounds. As construction programmes are completed, there will be facilities for many more.

On the directly Buddhist front, the retreat centre at Bhaja had expanded, and more buildings had been constructed. A large vihara was soon to be built in Dapodi. . . .

Help has come in many ways from within India itself. People have given land and buildings, gifts of money, labour, and gifts in kind. On my recent visit I heard of the progress being made in attracting grants from the Government of India, of new fundraising ventures within India, and ideas for profit-making businesses. This is all of the highest importance. Bahujan Hitay wants to move towards economic self-sufficiency, to lessen and finally transcend its dependence on funds from abroad.

Aid For India has helped to get projects started in India, but the benefits accruing to those involved in its work in the West seem to be no less. Most, if not all, fundraisers have found themselves drawing on ever deeper resources of confidence in themselves, in the Buddhist movement both in the West and in India, and in the Dharma. Few have emerged from a two-month full-time Aid For India appeal without being substantially transformed. In a wider sense, Aid For India has served as a bridge, linking our movement with other Buddhists, and the world beyond.

From the impetus of the early stirrings of the Poona Project, Aid For India has grown into an organism with a life of its own. To underline this, last year it burst into a new dimension by giving birth to a sister charity, 'The Karuna Trust'. Even in its early years, Aid For India has been able to offer help to projects other than those of Bahujan Hitay. It has been funding the running expenses and expansion costs of Dhardo Rimpoche's ITBCI school in Kalimpong, some new facilities for the People's Education Society, and a drought relief project for Tibetan refugees. Now 'Karuna' is looking with compassionate eyes towards those countries and causes which could offer more scope for a truly Buddhist form of social action.

THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

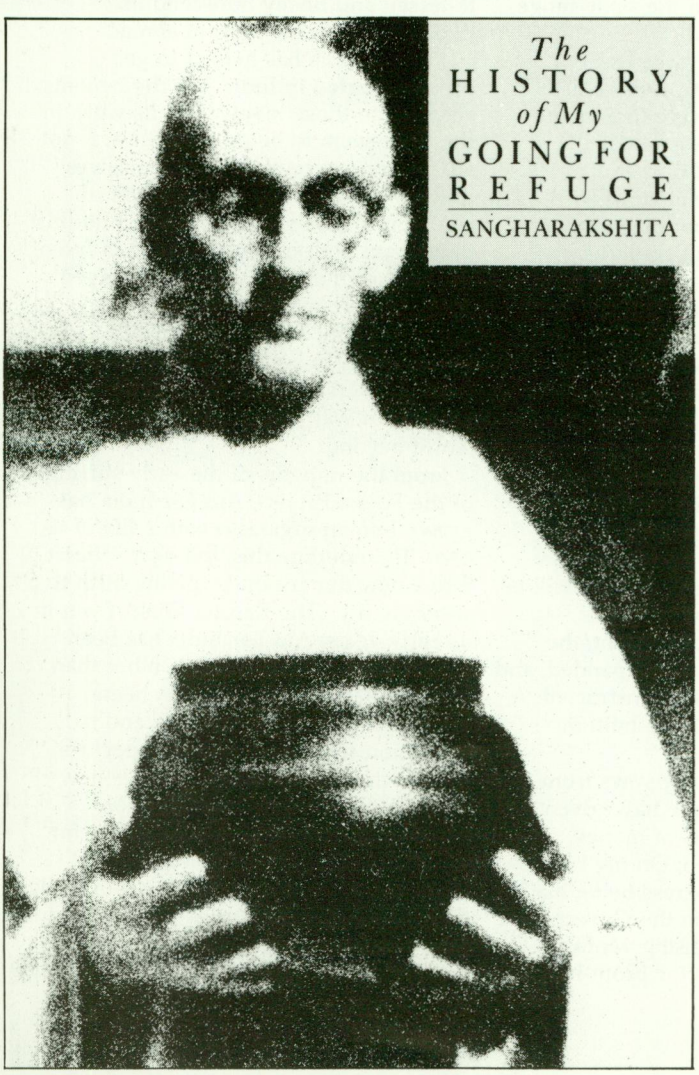
The History of My Going for Refuge
by Sangharakshita
Published by Windhorse
pp. 130. Paperback
price £4.95

In the Western Buddhist Order, 'Going for Refuge' is given a greater prominence than it is in few, if any, other existing traditions of Buddhism. Indeed, without an appreciation of the significance accorded to the act of Going for Refuge by Sangharakshita and members of the WBO, it would be very difficult to understand what the Order is really about. *The History of My Going for Refuge* provides an excellent basis for such an understanding.

In outlining the progressive deepening of his own Going for Refuge, over more than forty years, Sangharakshita provides many insights into the essential nature of Buddhism and Buddhist practice. Above all, he shows exactly how, and why, he came to see Going for Refuge as 'the very heart and centre of Buddhism'.

Sangharakshita's own understanding of Going for Refuge was, he says, 'clarified in the process of its being acted upon'. So this 'history' takes the form of a brief thematic autobiography, interweaving acts and ideas—often contrasting his view of Going for Refuge at a particular time with more mature reflections.

For example, in recounting his first experience of 'taking Pansil', at the London Buddhist Society in the early 1940's, Sangharakshita notes, with approval, the somewhat 'unorthodox' tendencies of the Burmese bhikkhu U Thittila, who conducted the ceremony. U Thittila, to the censure of some of his more strictly 'orthodox' brethren, disrobed when working as an air-raid stretcher bearer. Sangharakshita comments, 'I have always been glad that I first took the Refuges and Precepts from this quiet and unassuming man for whom, as we now say, commitment was primary and lifestyle secondary—a man who, whether wearing orange robes or a blue boiler-suit, was at heart neither monk nor layman but simply a Buddhist.' (p. 24).



Even several years later in India, living as a 'freelance' Buddhist monk, Sangharakshita had yet to realize 'that "Going Forth" and "becoming a monk", were spiritually of value only to the extent that they were expressive of one's Going for Refuge.' (p. 26). Throughout the 1950's, however, largely as a result of his contact with Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist teachers, Sangharakshita's views on Going for Refuge seem to have matured rapidly. By the time he wrote *A Survey of Buddhism* (published in 1956), he could observe that, in the light of the Bodhisattva ideal, 'it becomes impossible to identify the spiritual life exclusively with a life of monasticism.' (p. 46).

By 1959, he had seen that 'the differences between the various grades of religious persons were of far less significance than they were sometimes thought to be. . . . The difference between the monk and the layman was not a difference between the ordained and the unordained. Both monks and laymen were ordained persons and both monks and laymen were, therefore, full members of the Buddhist spiritual community. This came very close to saying . . . as I afterwards did say, that ordination and Going for Refuge were in fact synonymous and that Going for Refuge . . . was *the* unifying factor' in Buddhism (pp. 63-4). It was this thinking which became the basis of the Western Buddhist Order, which he founded in 1968—an Order of men and women who went for Refuge, and which was neither 'monastic' nor 'lay'.

Many other strands run through the work. One of the most fascinating is the development of Sangharakshita's ideas about 'levels' of Going for Refuge. In effect, this amounts to replacing a merely 'ecclesiastical' hierarchy (e.g. layperson—novice monk—monk—senior monk, etc.) with a genuinely spiritual hierarchy, based not on lifestyle, but on the degree of a person's actual Going for Refuge—'provisional', 'effective', 'real', and so on.

Taking this approach, Sangharakshita is able to review a range of expressions of spiritual experience in the light of Going for Refuge. Thus, for example, he sees the arising of the Bodhichitta not as a 'higher' level, or more advanced practice than Going for Refuge (as it tends to be represented in Mahayana sources), but as the 'altruistic dimension' of Going for Refuge. Likewise, the opening of the Dharma Eye, Stream Entry, and Going Forth are all seen as 'different aspects of a single basic, crucial, and unique spiritual experience' (p. 104).

The History of My Going for Refuge shows, probably more clearly and succinctly than anything he has yet written, exactly how, why, and where Sangharakshita has disputed existing Buddhist tradition. It becomes clear that he has done this only when he has reluctantly had to conclude that existing Buddhist tradition no longer embodies Buddhism itself. Sangharakshita's own thoughts, acts, and writings emerge from the book as a persistent attempt to get at what is essential in Buddhism—especially to cut through the institutionalized fetters of literalism and formalism.

Whether one seeks an introduction to Sangharakshita himself, or to his most distinctive teachings, or to the heart and essence of Buddhist practice, or to the basis of the WBO, this book can be recommended very warmly. Summarizing a lifetime of Going for Refuge, it could—indeed deserves to—emerge as one of the key documents in the development of Western Buddhism.

Tejananda

NOT BUDDHISM AT ALL

Cover illustration

Modern Buddhism
by Jacqui and Alan James
Published by Aukana
pp. 150 Paperback
price £6.50

Jacqui and Alan James are the founders of 'The House of Inner Tranquillity', a retreat centre in Wiltshire where they teach meditation and Buddhism. This book, their second, is a collection of ten lectures given by them to their meditation students, with such titles as 'Buddhism and Sex', 'Birth and Death', and 'Buddhism is not an Alternative Therapy'.

The blurb on the back cover describes the book's content as 'The Buddhist teaching expressed in up-to-date, 20th Century language, covering subjects of particular interest to modern day men and women.' The authors are said to be 'great teachers' presenting 'ancient truths in a way totally in tune with the needs of their time and culture'.

The idea of communicating Buddhism in a relevant and practical way, applying its wisdom to the issues of our everyday lives, is a noble one, and after reading the blurb, one expects the book to be very useful. Unfortunately it is not. It is written throughout in very imprecise language and continually displays a disappointingly shallow understanding of the Dharma. There are a great many wrong views scattered throughout the book, of which there will only be space here to discuss a few.

'The Family' is one subject on which many people would be grateful for a few wise words of guidance; but the section with this title is by no means satisfactory from a Buddhist point of view. Buddhism teaches that when you are reborn the life ahead of you will be affected by your actions in previous lives; but it does *not* teach, as we are told in this section, the deterministic view that 'a being knows before it is born both the high and the low points of its future human life'. And there are no naïve assumptions in Buddhism, as there are here, that all our sufferings are *chosen* because of what we need to learn from them. We are told that since we choose to be born into a family or environment which will meet our spiritual needs, there can be no such thing as a bad family or bad environment. Thus 'if a child's mother beats it frequently and it finds the beatings unpleasant, it is nevertheless still right for it', because it chose that experience and will learn from it. (The possibility that the child may be physically or psychologically harmed is not entertained.) Parents are assured that they can save themselves the pain of much self-recrimination by realizing that the child needed their violent behaviour for its spiritual growth. What the Jameses seem to be saying is that parents don't need to take responsibility for their behaviour: they have no obligation to act ethically. After all, 'any difficulties the child experiences in responding to the conditions provided by the parents are its own responsibility'. Not only is this remote from Buddhist thought, it seems rather remote from humanity. It is very much the sort of argument used by many Hindus to justify the atrocities of the caste system.

In the section entitled 'Buddhism and Sex', the basic notion is that we must accept both the masculine and the feminine poles within ourselves—a concept which has much to be said for it if understood properly—in terms of the importance of developing both 'masculine' qualities like energy and confidence and 'feminine' qualities like sensitivity and receptivity. But we go badly wrong if we think (as the Jameses do) that heterosexual relationships are 'right' because they imply a union of both masculine and feminine principles, whereas homosexuality is 'wrong' because it implies a denial of one principle. This is very crude thinking. We don't need to look at many heterosexual couples to see that heterosexuality is no guarantee of emotional or psychological balance. It is surely that balance that is the important thing, whether one is heterosexual, homosexual, or anything else.

The Jameses try to substantiate their views on all this, incidentally, by saying that what they consider to be 'wrong sexuality' has always been criticized by the majority of people in any culture, whereas their idea of 'right or normal sexuality' is always fully accepted. One might well question whether this assertion is historically accurate; but even assuming that it is, are we supposed to think that the views of the majority are always right? Shouldn't we determine our behaviour by what we consider to be conducive to spiritual development rather than by mere convention?

One could extend the list of wrong views in this book almost indefinitely, but the last example we shall look at here comes from the section called 'Creating the World You Want'. If I understand this very confused chapter rightly, the reader is being told that other people are creations of his own mind, they are nothing but successions of images in his own brain. This is solipsistic nonsense, and it is particularly disagreeable that on the basis of this view the Bodhisattva Ideal—the great Buddhist ideal of leading all beings to Enlightenment—is interpreted in selfish terms: 'you have to change your mental monologue which creates the world, not the world itself'; our task is merely to think positive and uplifting thoughts, and then our personal world—the only world which really exists—will be perfect. Since we create the people around us, we only need to be positive ourselves for them to be positive too. This is the first interpretation of the Bodhisattva Ideal I have ever come across which has no hint of compassion in it: the Jameses have completely missed the point. There is a reference to the kind of people who 'work tirelessly to feed the starving, to heal the sick and to bring harmony to those torn by war and unrest'. But the Jameses feel that 'the evidence of millennia' shows that such people are wasting their time in the pursuit of what is 'at best a worthy dream and at worst a foolish fantasy'. It seems extraordinary that the Jameses cannot see how much good has been done through the ages by people who have cared about the sufferings of others—the Buddha, for example. Compassionate activity is an absolutely central ideal in Buddhism; yet the Jameses dismiss it as worthless. One finally comes to the conclusion that *Modern Buddhism* is not Buddhism at all; indeed it is deeply regrettable that such an ignorant and offensive book should be published in Buddhism's name.

Satyadeva

LIVING PEACE

Being Peace
by Thich Nhat Hanh
Published by Parallax
Paperback. pp. 115. £5.00

Thich Nhat Hanh is a master in the Vietnamese tradition, which draws on both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism. In Vietnam he founded the School of Youth for Social Service to rebuild villages destroyed by bombs, and to help in the resettlement of tens of thousands of people fleeing the war zones. He also founded Van Hanh Buddhist University and the Tiep Hien Order.

He toured the USA and Europe in 1968, communicating —through public lectures, the media, and meetings with public figures—his people's desire neither for communism, nor to be 'saved' from communism, but simply for self-determination and peace. Distrusted by extremists of both sides for his outspoken and uncompromising neutrality he was unable to return for fear of arrest, and has spent the last twenty-two years in enforced exile. He is now based in a rural community in France that he has established with fellow Vietnamese refugees and Western disciples.

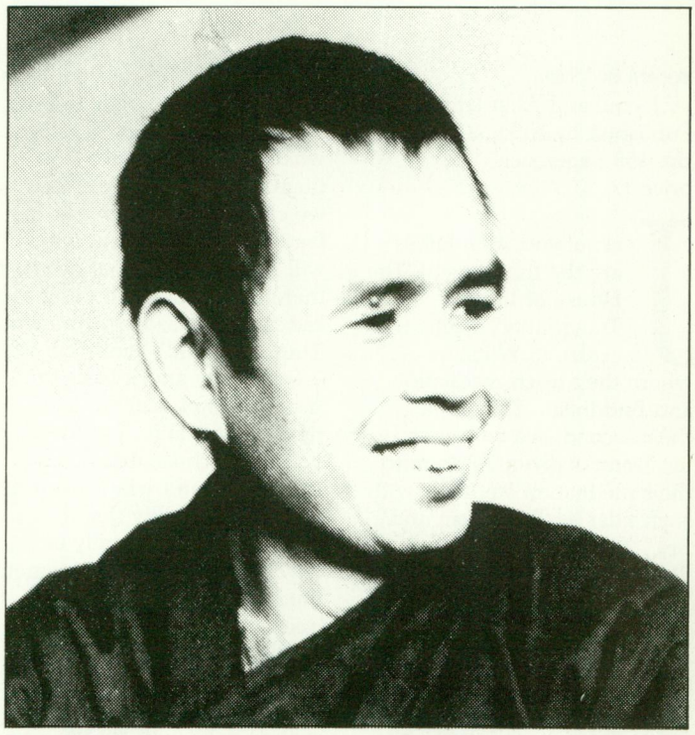
Once again, Nhat Hanh's voice is becoming widely heard in the West, this time thanks to the work of Parallax Press in the USA. A number of his works have appeared over the past two years, some of them translations of earlier writings in Vietnamese, others edited versions of more recent talks and writings in English. They include *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, originally written for young activists working in war-torn Vietnam; *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing; Interbeing*, a commentary on the fourteen Tiep Hien precepts; *The Heart of Understanding; The Sun in my Heart*; and *Being Peace*.

Being Peace is a collection of talks given to peace activists and meditation students during a tour of the USA in 1985. He aims to being a 'new dimension' to the peace movement which is, he says, filled with anger and hatred, and cannot fulfil the path expected of it. 'A fresh way of being peace, of doing peace, is needed. . . . Peace means work, first of all, being peace.' (p. 80).

This fresh way, according to Nhat Hanh, can be provided by the practice of meditation and what he calls 'engaged Buddhism'. 'To me, a meditation centre is where you get back to yourself, you get a clearer understanding of reality, you get more strength in understanding and love, and you prepare for your re-entry into society.' (p. 52). 'Engaged Buddhism' means bringing the practice from the meditation hall into daily life: if we know how to do this, he says, it will have a tremendous effect on social concerns.

In our society, says Nhat Hanh, 'everything seems to work in concert to try to take us away from our true self' (p. 8). Therefore he advocates practising a way of life that resists this pull, that gives us sovereignty over ourselves; it is, of course, a 'non-violent resistance' (p. 110). He explains that the first step is to stop the dispersion and self-forgetfulness that habitually dominates our minds. He discusses simple approaches to bringing this stopping about through the way in which we breathe, walk, sit, and smile. The second step is to see clearly what is going on in ourselves and around us. This seeing enables us to understand, which, he says, is 'the source of love' (p. 107).

This understanding is also the source of reconciliation. According to Nhat Hanh, people generally identify with one ideology and side against another. 'Reconciliation is to understand both sides'. He recognizes that to do so is dangerous, because we will be suspected by both sides (just as he was suspected): 'but if we don't do it, if we align ourselves with one side or the other, we will lose our chance to work for peace.' (p. 70). In a particularly interesting section he explains a seven stage practice for settling disputes within one's family or community.



Thich Nhat Hanh

Nhat Hanh's peace worker is one who strives to be fully aware of the suffering caused by the nuclear arms race, hunger, and pollution, and sees the connection between his or her everyday actions and these disasters, or potential disasters. Yet at the same time, in the words of the title of his first talk, 'Suffering is Not Enough'. 'Life is both dreadful and wonderful. To practise meditation is to be in touch with both aspects.' (p. 4).

Being Peace is a very direct and personal communication. Nhat Hanh presents the essence of Buddhism with a joyfulness, clarity, and simplicity which straight away makes us want to put it into practice. This is likely to be the response both of a complete newcomer to Buddhism and a long-term student grateful for his freshness and inspiration. Here we are listening to a man who, despite the enormous trials and sufferings to which he and his fellow countrymen have been subjected, has retained a remarkable fidelity to his ideals. *Being Peace* would be an excellent introduction to his other books, which are equally helpful and enjoyable.

Mahamati

ALSO RECEIVED

Thousand Peaks
by Mu Soeng Sunim
Parallax Press

The Method of Zen
by Eugen Herrigel
Arkana

Accept This Gift
edited by Frances Vaughan & Roger Walsh
Arkana

A Sense of the Cosmos
by Jacob Needleman
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Zen Culture
by Thomas Hoover
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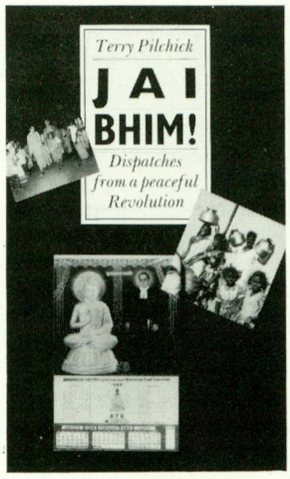
Rich in bizarre detail and peopled by a cast of warmly sketched characters, this first-hand account offers a powerful argument for the effectiveness of peaceful, grassroots social action which should be read by anyone interested in achieving a fairer world without violence.



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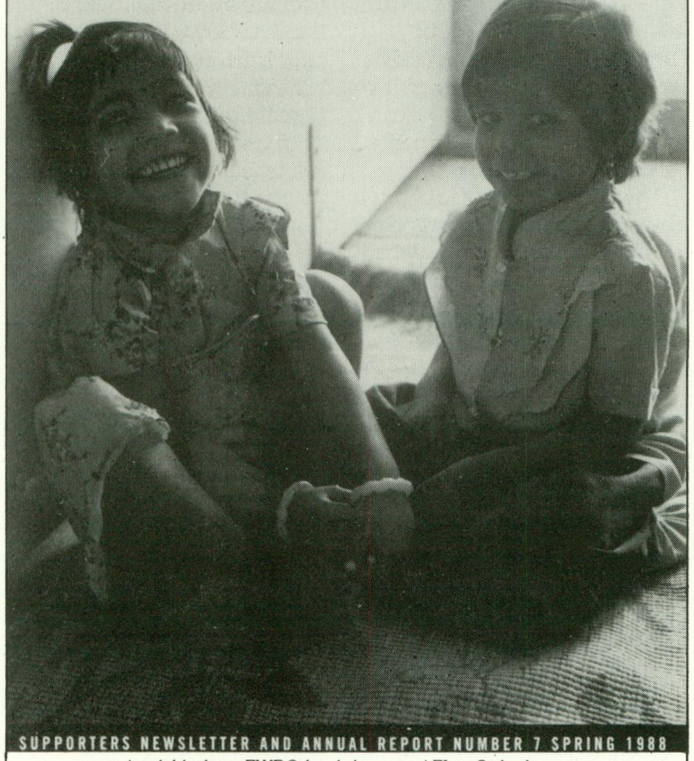

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For more information about Karuna Fundraising contact:

Manjusvara: Telephone 0865- 728794

*e*vents

AUGUST - DECEMBER 1988

Sept 16-18 **MEN'S EVENT: *STEPS ALONG THE WAY.*** Stories from the Buddhist tradition in which individuals take an important step forward on the path.

Sept 18-25 **TRIPLE STUDY SEMINAR:** on 1. *Schiller's Aesthetic Education of Man* with Michael McGhee; 2. *The Imaginative World of Blake* with Atula; and 3. *The Duties of Brotherhood* with Subhuti.

Nov 11-13 **MEN'S EVENT: *THUS HAVE I HEARD.*** Stories from the Pali Cannon, the ancient record of the Budda's teaching, preserved by the *Theravada* school.

Dec 18-Jan 6 **PADMALOKA WINTER RETREAT:** Led by Subhuti on the theme of *The Three Protectors*, the archetypal figures that embody the three principal qualities of Enlightenment.

18-23 Dec - *Vajrapani – The Bodhisattva of Energy*
23-30 Dec - *Manjugosha - The Bodhisattva of Wisdom*
30 Dec - 6 Jan - *Avalokiteshvara - The Bodhisattva of Compassion*

All these events are for men with previous experience of FWBO meditation and Puja only. For further details see the Padmaloka programme, or contact:

Padmaloka

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A Middle Way For Tibet?

Addressing the European Parliament at Strasbourg on 15 June, the Dalai Lama surprised the world by announcing his willingness to meet the Chinese half-way over the problem of Tibetan sovereignty.

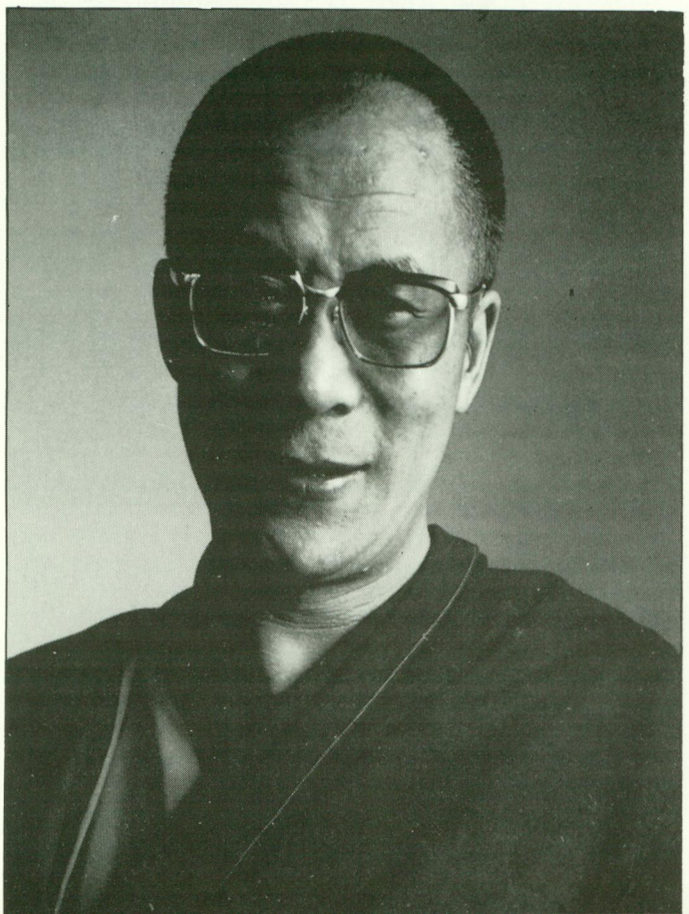
The Chinese view has always been that there is no problem: the region—anyway a part of China—was freed from a repressive theocratic aristocracy in 1959; the Dalai Lama is a symbol of the old ways and should mind his own business.

Things have changed in recent years, however. The Western press now has unprecedented access to Tibet, and has made it abundantly clear that the Tibetans still regard themselves as living in an occupied country under the oppression of the Chinese who are systematically eroding their culture and traditions. Given the opportunity, the Tibetans will clearly demonstrate their allegiance to their religion, and to their leader, the Dalai Lama.

The core of the Dalai Lama's proposal was that Tibet should become a self-governing, democratic political entity', but 'in association with the People's Republic of China'—which would, above all, retain management of foreign policy. On a more visionary note, he urged that Tibet should be transformed into 'a zone of peace, a sanctuary in which humanity and nature can live together in harmony.'

The Dalai Lama knows that his readiness to tread a middle path will be viewed as a face-losing compromise by those of his followers who seek complete independence. But with the Chinese entirely opposed to any such notion, and with violence, and the suffering caused by violence, poised to escalate, the Dalai Lama would rather field a compromise—one in which he is himself excluded from the government—than maintain a confrontational stance whose only guaranteed outcome would be more violence and more suffering.

In recent years, the Chinese have attracted respect for their new spirit of openness, their willingness to face up to internal problems, and their sensitivity to world opinion. It is therefore possible that they will give the Dalai Lama's proposal serious attention. Perhaps the 14th Dalai Lama will once again be seen in Lhasa, though perhaps in a jeep rather than a palanquin.



The Dalai Lama

God And The Classroom

Alarmed to discover that some British children know as little about Christianity, their national faith, as do people in 'darkest Africa', a number of British peers are seeking to enlist the help of the law. If the Bishop of London's amendment to the 'Education Reform Bill' is accepted, religious education, and acts of morning worship, in state-run schools will soon have to be, 'in the main', Christian.

Existing legislation, in force since 1944, has been couched in general terms, allowing teachers to adopt a flexible, 'multifaith' approach to religious education—an approach ideally suited to the needs of a country that has become increasingly multi-racial and pluralistic over the past forty years. The new proposals, however, while preserving the parents' right to withdraw their children from Christian indoctrination, and offering some scope for separate morning assemblies for children of non-Christian faiths (but only in areas with high immigrant population-levels), seem alarmingly out of pace with the times.

It will surely be sad—and potentially divisive—if British children grow up with little or no appreciation of the religious beliefs and traditions of their non-Christian schoolmates. Under existing rules, Buddhists, for example, frequently give talks in schools, and show schoolchildren round their centres. This sort of thing could become a thing of the past. In these times, when some knowledge of the world's major religions seems to have become an indispensable qualification for understanding the major trouble spots, such a retrogressive reform seems absurd at best, and dangerous at worst.

Presumably, the amendment has been tabled as part of an attempt to bring the country back onto to the moral rails. If so, then one underlying assumption, that Christianity offers an indispensable and unique path to moral values, seems almost insultingly chauvanistic to non-Christians. Another assumption, that moral and spiritual values can be legislated into existence, seems to fly in the face of all experience. Children, like the rest of us, learn best when guided and inspired by living example. There is nothing so calculated to excite a child's scorn as compulsory activity based on narrow mindedness.

Fur Wars

Both houses of the Canadian parliament recently expressed opposition to plans being considered in the UK which could seriously damage the fur trade. The prospect they so fear is that fur products will soon be labelled in a way which informs purchasers of the precise methods used to trap the animals concerned.

The dilemma at the heart of this issue is an ecologist's nightmare. The cruellest trapping methods are those employed by a group of remote communities in the far north of Canada, who are themselves something of an endangered species. If they cannot sell their furs, the trappers will be forced to find conventional jobs in the industrial world, and their traditional way of life will quickly die out.

The Canadian legislators perhaps have more faith in the sensitivity of fur wearers than is really necessary. But the fact that they have been threatening to wage a trade war if those labels appear demonstrates an unfashionable reluctance to allow the free play of market forces to sort things out. One can only suspect that, in their hearts, they know that very few people are prepared to play a part in the brutal slaughter of animals once their imaginative faculties have been awoken.

DHARMACHARINI TARASHRI

At 2.10am, on Tuesday 12 April, Dharmacharini Tarashri died of cancer at the West Suffolk Hospital. She was seventy years of age. With her at the time were her *kalyana mitras*, Ratnashuri and Aloka.

Tarashri was born in South Africa of European/Jewish stock, and after completing her education in Britain she spent the rest of her life here as a maths and science teacher, a profession to which she was very dedicated. She was a life-long writer of poetry, and an enthusiastic wood-carver after her retirement. Being a great nature-lover, she also had a quite formidable knowledge of natural history.

Tarashri was ordained on 19 January 1986, having first made contact with the FWBO at a meditation course run by Subhuti in Diss during 1983. One of the many remarkable things about Tarashri was how quickly she connected with the essential value of the Dharma. She was able to commit herself to the realization of the principles embodied in the Three Jewels in a surprisingly short period of time—to such an extent that when, in 1985, she was told she had a form of cancer, she faced the shock of that discovery, and the subsequent gruelling treatment, with a fortitude that surprised even herself.

'I also learned how *metta* sustains a recipient. There was no depression, there was impatience with one's weakened condition. There were constant acts of *metta*.' So she wrote when introducing herself in *Shabda*, the Order newsletter, after her ordination.

The illness restricted her mobility, so comparatively few people met Tarashri, but those that did certainly remembered her! Her robust cheerfulness and immense warmth and kindness, and her constant joy at having chanced (seemingly) upon the Three Jewels, made her an unforgettable character.

Tarashri's joy sustained her even when the cancer returned and another exhausting round of treatment ensued. She faced the possibility of death squarely and with considerable strength. Tarashri was content that at last she had found the Three Jewels and had gone for Refuge—something she felt she had been looking for most of her life. She said that she would be 'peeved' if she didn't have a bit more time left, but it was not crucial. It is a tribute to Tarashri's strength that she genuinely saw her cancer, and its subsequent treatment, as an opportunity to develop patience—something which, under different circumstances, would have been the work of a decade, she said.

As is often the case with those who are close to death, Tarashri's health seemed to be getting better and better, and increased 'getting about' seemed imminent when she caught 'flu. Before long she was in hospital with a chest infection. That was when she heard that the cancer had returned. Her death was calm and gentle, surrounded by friends—an inspiring example to practitioners of all ages.

Anybody who has tried to practise the Dharma will have realized very early on that it is no easy matter without great determination and effort. But as Tarashri showed, it can also be a process of great joy. It is also not a solitary process. For the Buddha and Dharma jewels to be anything other than theoretical, most of us need to develop the Sangha jewel on an ordinary level: the company of fellow practitioners who help, encourage, and share both in our victories and our mistakes. Tarashri's awareness and appreciation of the Sangha was vivid and unflagging and she contributed to the spirit of fellowship with such zeal that many practitioners must have had to take a fresh look at what they had perhaps begun to take for granted.

Coming to the Three Jewels late in life, Tarashri realized that she did not have time to get caught up with non-essentials, even if she had had the inclination. Worrying unnecessarily about problems or even difficulties takes time and is something of a luxury given that the only thing in this life that is totally guaranteed is the fact that we will all die one day. This need not fill us with panic. As Tarashri proved, after a few years of dedicated and sincere practice, even death ceases to be a problem.

Aloka

MEN'S ORDINATION PROCESS

This year some potentially far-reaching changes are being made to the process by which men are prepared for ordination into the Western Buddhist Order. These changes were explained and discussed at a national gathering of men who have asked for ordination held at the Padmaloka retreat centre over the weekend of 18-19 June.

This weekend was Subhuti's first initiative in his new role as the chairman of Padmaloka and the man with overall responsibility for 'the process'. It was also the first event led by the new team of Order members who will be permanently based at Padmaloka and involved in all retreats—which by the end of the year will include Subhuti, Sona, Suvajra, Surata, and Chittapala, plus Aloka on a non-residential basis. Subhuti explained that the aim of the new team was to change the focus from selecting men for ordination to helping them towards effective Going for Refuge—helping them to develop their commitment to Buddhist ideals to the point where this becomes the central force in their lives.

The team feel that the existing system, with its (real or perceived) emphasis on selection, may have tended to discourage some men from Going for Refuge, while the focus on 'ordination', with its rather priestly overtones, has sometimes obscured the real aim of the system. Readiness for ordination does not mean being competent to take on a 'priestly' role—although many members of the Order do in fact teach and work in and around public centres, this is not an essential part of being an Order member. Being ready to join the Order means to be ready to Go for Refuge effectively—it means that a commitment to spiritual growth and spiritual community has become a strong enough current in one's life to be an effective force under most reasonable circumstances.

But the team also stressed that readiness for ordination in the WBO means readiness to Go for Refuge within an existing spiritual community. This implies an understanding of the basic principles of the Order and the Movement. It means a reasonable grasp of the Dharma, and especially of the Dharma as interpreted for a Western context by Sangharakshita. And of course it means real friendships with existing Order members. Finally, readiness for ordination means to have an effective meditation practice, so that one is equipped with one of the most important tools for spiritual growth and for staying in touch with Buddhist ideals.

In view of all these different requirements for ordination, different people will obviously need to work on different areas to prepare themselves. To help them the team aim to create a more tailor-made approach for each mitra, with different ordination request retreats concentrating on different aspects such as meditation, Dharma study, or communication.

As a first step in this direction the number of ordination request retreats will be increased to nine a year, so that retreats will be smaller and more intimate, and more diversity can be introduced as the system develops. Enough flexibility will be built in to allow mitras to attend each retreat for a weekend only, for nine days including two weekends, or for a full two-week period, so that those who are tied by work commitments have more freedom to create their own timetable of retreats and make better use of weekends.

One of the main themes stressed during the weekend was the need to promote both diversity and unity, in the Order itself and among the mitras seeking ordination. The team would like to see people from a variety of backgrounds being encouraged to Go for Refuge, so that the spiritual community is enriched by a wide range of talents and types, and any tendency for the Order to constantly remake itself in its own image is resisted. The increased flexibility of the retreat programme should help in this respect by making it easier for those with mainstream jobs to attend. Also ordination will be made easier for mitras who really cannot spend three months at the course in Spain, removing a restriction which in the past made ordination difficult for those with full-time jobs.

To ensure the unity of the Movement, men who have asked for ordination are being encouraged to see Padmaloka as their national centre, a home-from-home where they can develop a wide network of friendships and a vision of the Movement that transcends centre boundaries. Two national weekend gatherings will be held every year to help forge a mitra *sangha* and ensure that it gathers in large numbers. The team would like to see the mitras who have asked for ordination working as an 'order around the Order', a duplicate sangha in which people strive to relate on the same basis of openness, metta, and shared vision seen in the Order itself. They see the creation of this mitra sangha as an important part of preparing mitras for ordination, by providing them with an environment in which they can put their Going for Refuge into practice before formal ordination.

But to be fully effective these changes in the ordination process will need to be matched by others in the Movement at large—and this is an area where mitras themselves will need to take part of the initiative. The team suggest that 'Going for Refuge groups', like those already set up for women, should be introduced more widely (see 'New Moves for Mitras'). They also suggest that the now little-used *kalyana mitra* system (a formal commitment to spiritual friendship with two Order members) should be resurrected for mitras who have asked for ordination.

Sangharakshita with new Order members at Guhyaloka

NINE NEW DHARMACHARIS

The rain in Spain, it seems, falls very largely on Guhyaloka. Floods and downpours are by now part of the tradition of the remote retreat centre in the mountains of once-arid Alicante province (which had been suffering from a fifteen-year drought until the FWBO arrived). This spring has continued the tradition, so that while the nine new members of the Western Buddhist Order attending the ordination course at Guhyaloka have perhaps not seen Spain at its sunniest, they have at least been treated to an experience of the already stunning valley at its green and flower-decked best.

In other ways the outlook at Guhyaloka continues bright—particularly the prospects for the community's efforts to spread the Dharma in Spain. The Orden Budista Occidental (WBO in Spanish) is now officially registered as a religious association—the first non-Christian body to be so registered (we think) and two further well-attended retreats have been held at El Bloque, an 'evolutionary centre' near the coast.

Meanwhile building work goes on with efforts to renovate a ruined stone farmhouse set in a beautiful forested spot in the middle of the valley, for use as a second solitary retreat facility.

SANGHARAKSHITA DIARY

The balloons go up on FWBO Day

The golden Rolls Royce was waiting round the corner from the London Buddhist Centre. Border Television had brought it along to film an interview with Sangharakshita for a series entitled 'Why We Are Here', but when they saw the Centre's splendid shrine room the film crew quickly changed their minds, and Sangharakshita was interviewed not reclining in the plush rear of the Rolls but seated cross-legged in front of a large golden Buddha.

The following three weeks were very full. In this short period Sangharakshita had individual interviews with about eighty people in London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Glasgow. He also attended the 21st anniversary celebrations of the FWBO in York Hall, London, where he chaired the afternoon talks and was presented with a fine appliqué picture of White Tara. This was a gift from Dhardo Rimpoche, one of his Tibetan teachers during his long residence in the Himalayan town of Kalimpong. The same weekend Sangharakshita also gave an informal talk to members of the Western Buddhist Order on 'The Next Twenty Years', and read a new paper—now published as a book—entitled, 'The History of My Going for Refuge'.

The next day he paid his first visit to the new Birmingham Buddhist Centre. Then it was on to the Manchester Buddhist Centre to conduct an *anagarika* ceremony for a radiant Susiddhi, and thence to Glasgow, where he spent two days at Heruka, one of that city's men's communities. In Glasgow he also paid a visit to Ink, the printing co-operative run by the Glasgow Buddhist Centre. Sangharakshita commented that he was very glad to visit Ink at last, and to see the stocks of his many books stacked in large piles ready for distribution.

The final leg of Sangharakshita's brief tour took him back to Manchester, where he and the writer Keith Sagar attended a public poetry reading by Peter Redgrove. All three were to have participated in a weekend school on 'Criticism in Crisis', but this had earlier been cancelled. Instead he had an enjoyable evening listening to Mr Redgrove and a number of local poets reciting their work. On his return he was interviewed by Radio Norfolk and a local newspaper. Despite his busy schedule over the previous three weeks he looked very well, and was glad that his energy had fully returned after his operations and illness the previous year.

Towards the end of April Sangharakshita travelled to Guhyaloka, the FWBO's remote retreat centre in the mountains of south-eastern Spain, where for the past months he has been participating in the men's ordination course to prepare new members of the Western Buddhist Order. After two months he conducted the private ordinations of nine men, and on 14 June led the public ordination ceremonies and announced the ordinees' new Buddhist names. Nine more people had commited themselves to the ideals of Buddhism. Nine more people had entered the Western Buddhist Order.

NEW MOVES FOR MITRAS

Concern at the relatively low number of new mitras and Order members emerging from the London Buddhist Centre has led to an increased emphasis on upgrading the mitra system. A number of improvements have already been made to the women's mitra system by Vidyashri, whose five year period as women's mitra convenor at the LBC ends this summer. Some of Vidyashri's initiatives are now being extended to the men's system at the LBC, and their adoption on a national basis is being encouraged. (See 'Men's Ordination Process.')

In the past, women at the LBC have often had to wait for long periods before the women's Order chapter felt able to provide the facilities and support for them to become mitras. But now the increased effort put into supporting mitras over the past few years is bearing fruit, and sixteen women have become mitras in just over a year.

For women mitras who have requested ordination, 'Going for Refuge groups' have been in operation for about a year. These are small groups, each consisting of four mitras and an Order member, which aim to encourage intimacy, friendship, and trust as well as providing a direct focus on Going for Refuge. It is hoped that this initiative will mean more women Order members arising from the LBC in future. This year six women from these groups attended the ordination course at Taraloka.

There is also concern that fewer men are asking for ordination than would be expected from a centre as large as the LBC. To improve this situation the men's chapters plan to initiate their own 'Going for refuge' groups, and to discuss more ways of helping men towards ordination. A recent increase in the number of *kalyana mitra* requests is, it is hoped, the beginning of an encouraging trend.

Kathleen Raine and Sangharakshita

BEAUTY AND TRUTH

22 Since its launch in 1984, Independent Arts in Croydon has won an international reputation for the quality and range of its events. But perhaps its strongest and most unusual feature is that it provides a voice which consistently upholds and promotes certain values: the arts, it is saying, are important, they have something real and valuable to communicate.

The values informing the activities at Independent Arts are, of course, those of Buddhism. Independent Arts was set up as a meeting point between two worlds—that of Buddhism and that of art—in the belief that true art, like Buddhism, is a means of spiritual growth.

Last April, Sangharakshita and Kathleen Raine, the poet and literary critic, met in conversation at Independent Arts to discuss the relationship between religion and art.

This occasion marked the publication of a collection of Sangharakshita's essays, *The Religion of Art*, a central theme of which is that the function of true art is to communicate spiritual values. Kathleen Raine is the co-founder and editor of Temenos, a review dedicated to this same view of the arts. Miss Raine is also very sympathetic to Buddhism whose values, she says, 'are beyond criticism by any standards'.

The conversation touched on many subjects: Buddhism as a path of beauty, the sublimity of some Hindu images, the relation between religion and art, Christian mysticism, Christian art, the Turin shroud, and the poetry of Blake and Yeats. But underlying this wide ranging discussion was a fundamental agreement on the spiritual function of true art.

In Miss Raine's words, 'You cannot produce any living, valid art . . . unless it is informed by this spiritual content'. Later she added, 'I would define poetry as the natural language of the soul. . . . Our society doesn't make any distinction [as to the source of poetry], there is only one level, that is the daily level. [But] if you deny the level of the soul, you are in fact denying poetry'.

Sangharakshita pursued this idea through reference to the Indian literary tradition, and in particular to Sri Aurobindo, who made a classification of the different levels of consciousness from which poetry can issue—on the

Kathleen Raine declared that 'Art that does not have its roots in some . . . tiny, underground trickle of spiritual reality is not art, it's simply self-expression.' Agreeing, Sangharakshita added that 'certain examples of modern art . . . seem to me to be just people . . . being sick onto the canvas! . . . It's not nourishing any of us. It belongs to the hospital, not to the art gallery!'

Not only were the speakers in fundamental agreement on the spiritual function of true art, both also felt this view to be highly unfashionable. In Sangharakshita's words, 'At the time that I wrote . . . *The Religion of Art* . . . I felt myself . . . to be a complete anachronism. . . . I'm really quite medieval in spirit!' But Sangharakshita is now encouraged to find that there are people in sympathy with him, including, of course, Kathleen Raine, who replied, 'The Timeless is always Timely.'

Kathleen Raine concluded the evening by reading her poem 'Memory of Sarnath', which she then presented to Sangharakshita.

NEW CENTRE FOR SOUTH LONDON

Over the years the story of the Croydon Centre has been one of continual expansion and diversification. The present phase began in 1981 with the opening of Hockney's vegetarian restaurant and Hockney's Wholefoods at 98 High Street, Croydon. These two increasingly successful businesses have provided the financial basis for all that has happened since. In 1982 the Croydon Buddhist Centre began its activities in the High Street, followed in 1984 by the launching of Independent Arts (or the Arts Centre as it then was). At the beginning of 1985 Rivendell, a beautiful old rectory in Sussex, was purchased for use as a retreat centre.

May brought a new development: the move into Clapham. The need for another men's community had been apparent for some time, the money was available—so why not buy a house in a new area that could also be used as a Buddhist centre?

The house that was eventually found is situated in a quiet street near Clapham Common. Built in 1870, it is a tall red-brick building with Dutch gables and stone steps leading to a classical style porch. The house is flanked by two coach-houses, and inside it is very spacious—built in four storeys, it has six bedrooms, two reception rooms, and a large basement ideally suited to holding classes.

Although the house cannot yet be used as a Buddhist centre, the prospects for such activities are exciting. South London has yet to be fully serviced by the FWBO. Clapham is an up-and-coming district in the heart of South London, and is within easy reach of many major districts of South and Central London, including Battersea, Lambeth, Wandsworth, and Chelsea.

The new community building in Clapham

RIDING THE DRAGON

Over the past few years the team of full-time meditators at Vajraloka retreat centre in North Wales have caused something of a revolution in meditation teaching within the FWBO. They have produced a wealth of useful material to help overcome the problems experienced by Westerners learning to meditate, and the 'Vajraloka approach' has been spread throughout the Movement by centre workshops and classes for meditation teachers.

In recent months these efforts have been continued with a workshop tour which included the London, Lancashire, and Glasgow Centres. These presented new material for experienced meditators, which was very well received and will make up part of the next level of meditation teaching to come out of Vajraloka.

Vajradaka, a member of the Vajraloka community, has been producing a number of video films, including one on meditation and the retreat experience, and another on Vajraloka itself. These will soon be available for sale or hire. He has also given a talk at the Glasgow and Manchester centres—entitled 'Riding the Dragon'—about making the most effective use of a meditation retreat.

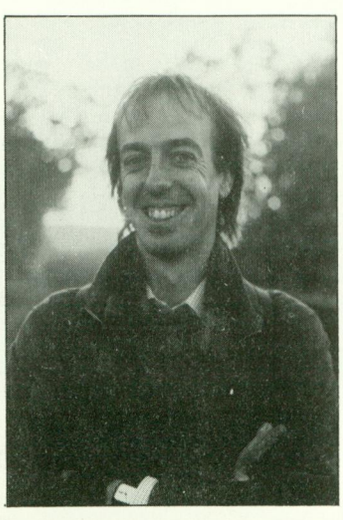
These efforts should make the 'Vajraloka approach' to meditation even more widely known. But for anyone who wants to experience this in its full intensity there is still no substitute for actually riding the dragon—by going on a meditation retreat at Vajraloka itself.

BUDDHISM AND MENTAL HEALTH

Practising Buddhists are on the whole a good deal less neurotic—and a good deal happier—than people at large. To those closely involved with Buddhism this seems almost too obvious to be worth mentioning. But it points to the fact that Buddhism clearly has something to offer in the field of mental health—something which society may be able to make use of even in its own limited secular terms.

Awareness of this fact is reflected in an upsurge of interest in mental health work in the FWBO. Several Order members are active in stress management, others are working with alcoholics, and a number in counselling. The Order also includes several full-time professionals in the field of psychology, and one Jungian analyst.

Recent attempts to pull these various strands together have led to several meetings and a 'Counselling and Therapy' retreat, but so far these initiatives have been fairly low-key. A coherent approach will depend on the emergence of a distinctively Buddhist perspective on the fundamental issues—what really is mental health, and what is needed to achieve it?—so that those involved in the field can begin to work from basic principles.



Advayachitta

Advayachitta, a clinical psychologist, has been giving a great deal of thought to these questions. He recently gave a series of three talks at the Croydon Centre entitled 'What is Mental Health?', 'Practical Means to Mental Health', and 'Illuminating the Depths'.

Psychotherapy has at best a fragmented view of what constitutes mental health. In his first talk Advayachitta set out to clarify this issue from a Buddhist point of view, by using the skilfully concentrated states of mind achieved in the lower levels of *samatha* meditation to illustrate the real nature of mental health. He argued that the first *dhyana*—a meditative state characterized by positive emotion, integration, and widened perspective—provides a practical benchmark for mental health. To live in the first dhyana is to be a fully healthy human being.

In his second talk Advayachitta discussed the parallels between behaviour therapy, cognitive therapy, and Rogerian counselling, and what each technique could teach the others. Examining the question of what is truly important in therapy, he concluded that real success depends on the therapist, through his or her own skilfulness, encouraging skilfulness in the client. This can be done by encouraging the client to think and act in a skilful manner, and by nurturing the experience of skilful states of mind. To succeed, the therapist must somehow lift the client to a higher state, giving him a direct experience of healthier mental states like those found through meditation.

In his last talk Advayachitta presented a critical view of the idea of the unconscious as set out by Freud and Jung. While recognizing that Jung's thought was an important advance on that of Freud, he criticized the Jungian concept of the archetype. In particular he argued that because the same symbols are used to represent the Jungian goal of individuation and the Buddhist goal of Enlightenment, this does not mean that they are the same thing—as is often assumed by Jungians. While psychological integration is a valid goal for most of us, and a necessary step on the way to Enlightenment, the two exist on quite different levels. The Jungian goal is much closer to existence in the first dhyana—or to basic, positive mental health—than it is to Buddhahood.

Each of Advayachitta's talks was attended by an audience of 60-70, representing a broad spectrum of people, from practising Buddhists to non-Buddhist mental health professionals.

Once a coherent Buddhist approach to mental health work has emerged, Advayachitta would like to see a Right Livelihood mental health charity set up to work in the fields of counselling and stress and anxiety management. A number of other Order members are also seriously interested in this idea, and Advayachitta hopes that the first steps in this direction may be taken within about a year. In the meantime he intends to continue running meditation workshops for mental health workers—the next will be held this autumn—and perhaps to organize a weekend course.

THREE NEW COMMUNITIES

At the latest count about eighty people were living in communities in the immediate area of the London Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green.

'Single sex' communities are now a major feature of life around the LBC, and collectively they are having a major impact on the whole area, so that it is now quite difficult to go out into the nearby streets without meeting a Buddhist.

In the past year three new men's communities have been established, each with two or three Order members and two or three mitras or friends, which LBC chairman Dhammarati sees as an encouraging development. While fewer women have been involved in forming new communities, there is also a definite increase in the number of women 'Friends' wanting to live with more experienced women Buddhists.

THE LBC: A NEW NEWSLETTER

On 16 May a London Buddhist Centre newsletter was launched. The first issue, which included features on recent retreats, short biographies of new mitras, an update on developments at the LBC's new Suffolk retreat centre, and features on Right Livelihood co-ops, quickly sold out its print run and was met with much enthusiasm.

The editorial team, which consists of one Order member, Chittidhara, and two friends, Christiane Grant and Mary Healy, are very pleased that an active response has been generated, with several people promising to write articles for the next issue. The newsletter should appear about every two months.

THE GAME OF LIFE

The Dharma should change us—but to do that it must touch us at levels that a merely intellectual understanding cannot reach. For the Dharma to be really effective we need to experience it with our emotions and our imagination as well as with our rational mind—we need to make it come alive. But to develop ways of teaching the Dharma which allow us to make this sort of imaginative connection is obviously no easy matter.

Clearly a lot of thought and effort still needs to be devoted to this topic, but the 'Game of Life' retreat held at Padmaloka from 22 April to 1 May was a valuable step in the right direction. Based on the Tibetan Wheel of Life, this event used a combination of drama, music, and the plastic arts to make these teachings more tangible by translating them from verbal concepts into direct experience.

With the assistance of playwright Kovida, musician Bodhivajra, and sculptor and painter Chintamani, the retreatants were asked to imagine their way into the states of mind implied by each of the six realms of Buddhist cosmology, then to create both an environment and a short drama depicting each realm. Even the retreat leader Subhuti (usually more noted for his verbal expositions) chipped in with his own approach to bringing the Dharma to life—such as when one of his front teeth fell out while he was talking on impermanence. Thankfully this dramatic demonstration left him none the worse for wear.

The dramas set out to explore each realm—and the cure for the state of mind which underlies it. They ranged from the surreal to the close to home (such as the depiction of the animal realm through a group of drunken football supporters watching a match on TV). Each realm contained its own Bodhisattva, guiding beings towards a clearer view of their condition—In the animal realm, for example, one of the 'supporters' gradually steers a chorus of 'We Shall Overcome' from a loutish chant into a hymn of determination to rise above the animal state.

On the last day of the retreat—fittingly Buddha Day, the anniversary of the Buddha's Enlightenment—the retreatants boxed up the stage-set for each realm and built a shrine from the boxes. They then performed a *puja* with musical accompaniment around the shrine, took the boxes outside, and burned them in a bonfire under the full moon.

Obviously this event was great fun. But for many of the retreatants it was also a tiring and sometimes even disturbing experience. The process of creating a concrete world based upon a state of mind gave a vivid illustration of how we are all constantly creating our own world and our own future by our thoughts, feelings, and actions. This was a strong and effective retreat which brought home an important aspect of the Dharma in a way that mere words could never match. Hopefully it will be the first of many such events. The highlights of the event were videotaped by Terry Williams, who hopes to produce an edited version for teaching and promotion.

In the animal realm

Nagabodhi in Bombay, 1982

THE PEACEFUL REVOLUTION

For those who would like to know more about TBMSG and the unique social and spiritual revolution that has been sparked off by Dr Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism, a new book soon to be launched by Windhorse Publications will be of interest.

Jai Bhim!—Dispatches from a Peaceful Revolution by Terry Pilchick (Nagabodhi) is a colourful first-hand account of the author's Indian experiences. Nagabodhi, who edits this magazine, travelled with Sangharakshita on his three month lecture tour of Maharashtra, in 1982, and returned to Poona, Bombay, Aurangabad and Ahmedabad two years later to witness the day-to-day life of TBMSG.

In his book he has painted a vivid picture of the Indian Buddhist scene—one which should be an inspiration to many of us in the comparatively easy West. *Jai Bhim!* will cost £5.95 and will be available from Windhorse Publications from 1 September.

TARALOKA

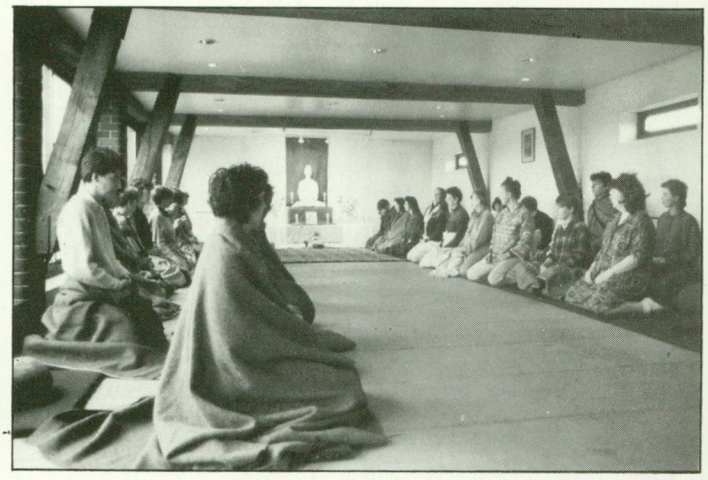
Taraloka, the FWBO's retreat centre for women in the Shropshire countryside, has by now become well enough established to maintain an active programme of outside events and to begin to attract media coverage.

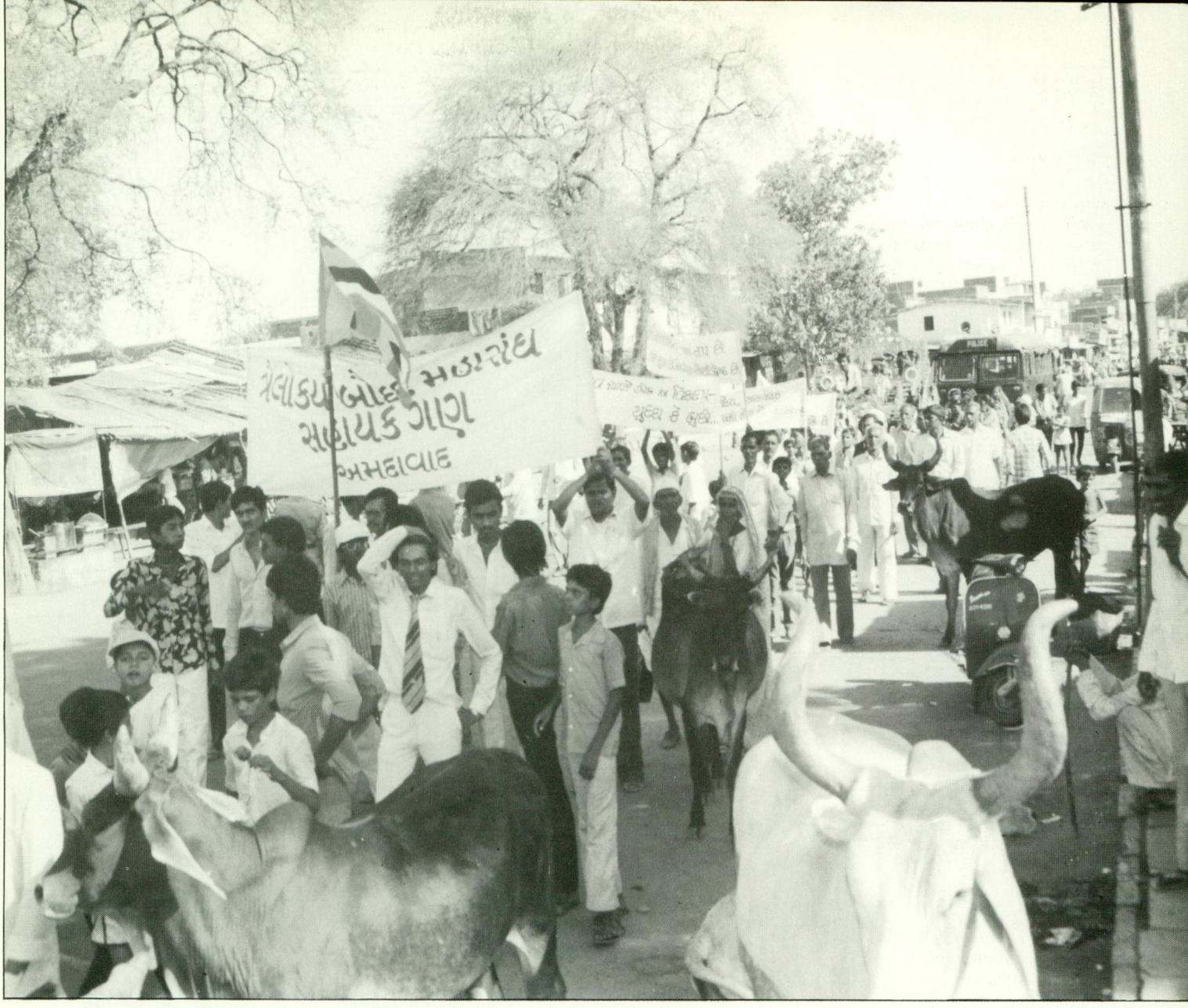
A series of events in the surrounding area and a policy of developing strong local links have resulted in the Centre becoming a focal point of contact for a large area of North Wales, Staffordshire, and Shropshire. Earlier this year an article on the centre appeared in *Time Out*, and a proposed article in the *Times'* Women's Section is in the pipeline. Coming in the wake of a TV news item on the BBC's 'Midlands Today' programme which appeared last September, these articles seem sure to attract new retreatants, and to raise the level of public awareness of the activities of women in the FWBO.

Work on the new shrine room has now been completed, and the past few months have seen a varied and colourful programme of retreats, including an ordination request retreat (a new departure for women seeking ordination).

The Centre is succeeding to generate enough income from retreats to cover running expenses and support the resident community of ten women, although any future expansion or improvements to the facilities will depend on outside fundraising.

The shrine room at Taraloka





AMBEDKAR JAYANTI

14 April was the 97th anniversary of the birth of Dr B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of India's 'Untouchables' whose conversion to Buddhism in 1956 opened the way for the rebirth of Buddhism in its native land.

Not surprisingly, TBMSG centres celebrated this anniversary on a large scale. In Dapodi the eve of Dr Ambedkar's birthday was marked by a candlelit procession which wound through the Buddhist areas of the city before culminating in the garlanding of Ambedkar's statue. In Poona the anniversary was celebrated more sedately by a programme of meditation and Dharma talks, while in Wardha Vimalakirti gave a three-day series of lectures on Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and other Order members gave talks in the surrounding villages.

THREE NEW RUPAS

Three new Buddha rupas have been installed at TBMSG branches this quarter.

In Ulhasnagar a rupa donated by TBMSG Poona was ceremonially installed on the day of the April full moon. To mark the occasion a procession was organized in which all the local Order members, mitras, and Friends took part—and as a result of which attendance at classes has risen considerably.

Also in April a new Buddha image was installed in Aurangabad, while in Poona Lokamitra donated a rupa to the new North Zone of the Yerawada Branch. This was installed by Vimalakirti at the new North Zone headquarters —described by chairman Dharmagupta as a 'tin shed'. The rupa however is housed in a special closed wooden shrine, while the 'shed' itself has already been extended, and plans are afoot to upgrade it into a more pleasant building.

BUDDHA DAY IN INDIA

The anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment on 1 May was celebrated on a grand scale by several branches of TBMSG.

In Ahmedabad a morning of Dharmic and cultural events, during which three men and two women formally embraced Buddhism, was followed by a procession through the city—the first Buddhist procession to take place in Ahmedabad (at least in this millenium!). The procession was led by a bronze statue of the Buddha on a flower-decked carriage drawn by two white horses. This was accompanied by a band and a large but orderly crowd of Buddhists bearing banners. The procession, which covered a seven kilometre route in three hours, made a great impact and was a very powerful publicity medium. It is worth noting that when Sangharakshita attended a religious conference in Ahmedabad in 1946 he had to personally cajole a few Hindus into joining him in celebrating the anniversary of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Things have changed somewhat over the last forty or so years.

In Wardha, in the Vidharba region of Maharashtra, a large pandal or covered stage was erected to seat five hundred people. This was used for two complete days of Dharma activities, which included meditation, puja, talks, and chanting of verses from the Dhammapada. In a special ceremony on the afternoon of Buddha Day, five women were accepted as mitras, and in the evening a Caste-Hindu took the refuges and precepts, and thus became a Buddhist.

Wesak procession in Ahmedabad

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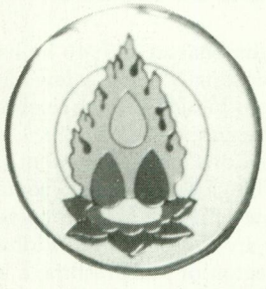

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