

## Guest Editors Foreword

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# Buddhism and Buddhist Studies: From History to Contemporaneity

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The story and history of Buddhism, followed nowadays by more than five hundred million persons all over the world, starts about 2500 years ago, in India. Nowadays, Buddhism is understood rather as a non-religion, a life-philosophy, intellectual in nature but easy to follow, considered to not be limited by time, space, race, culture.

Researchers still hesitate to give precise details regarding Gautama Buddha's life, yet it is generally accepted that he lived, spread his knowledge and founded a monastic order during the reign of Bimbisara, ruler of the Magadhan Empire (VI-V C. B.C.E.) (Rawlinson, 1950, Muller, 2001). The Buddha, "The Enlightened One", is also called Śākyamuni, "The Sage of the Śākya people", born into the Gautama clan, Siddhārtha being his name before he left home to embrace a religious life. The founder of what is today called Buddhism, from his first discourse, at the Deer-park near Benares, spoke in a simple manner about the principles to be followed when adhering "the Noble Eightfold Path", and "the Four Noble Truths" (see for example Rhys Davis, 1894), addressed to every sentient being. A huge body of canonical scriptures defines Buddhism since its early times, the first ones being preserved and transmitted in the form of *Tripiṭaka*, meaning "The Three Baskets", in the Pāli language, which included the *Vinaya*, *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma* (see Nakamura, 1987, 1999). Siddhārtha Gautama is credited to have brought a message of compassion, morality and equality, as he revolted against the oppressive social laws and condemned the caste system, being considered a strong opponent of the Indian caste, and an upholder of equality among people in society (Ambedkar, 1957).

Buddhism flourished and spread in India for about one millennium, a period time that is seen as a time when

"the great thinkers, great mystics, great sages [...], by their uncommon intellect, and supreme wisdom made a great impression upon the thought of people; the sculptors and artists and Buddhism hewed great cave temples and *stupas* which are to this day among the great achievement of humankind" (Sankrityayan, 1973: 328-349 *apud* Ahir, 2013: ix). In its long history, Buddhism became the national religion of India during King Aśoka, reaching its zenith during the reign of Harsavardhana (606-647 C.E.), the last "Buddhist Emperor". Different researchers have defined the historical phases of the evolution of Buddhism in India as: consolidation, systematic propagation, becoming a popular religion, struggling and maintaining, massacre and regression, followed by a period of apparently disappearance (see Naik, 2006). A renaissance and revival of Buddhism is agreed to have started in India as early as 1891, with the intention of restoring the sacred Buddhist shrines, as well as with the discovery of numerous relics on the Indian territory, or the return of the relics kept abroad. After 1947, "the Buddhist revival movement came to be associated with nationalism and ancient Indian culture" (*ibid*: 9). In 1956, to mark 2500 years of Buddhist Era commenced on the day of the Mahaparinirvana celebrated worldwide, in India a Buddha Jayanti Celebrations Committee has been appointed; the same year, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar adhered to Buddhism, along with half a million followers. While a significant increase in the Buddhist population in India took place since then, Buddhism in India is still far from having the power of a living religion (Ahir, 2011: 201). Starting with 1950, India Archeological Survey also started systematic archeological works and restoration of Buddhist heritage, the Buddhist sites being nowadays among the most important travel and tourism destinations, nationally and internationally. India is now represented as "The Land of Buddha", in the Ministry of Tourism promotion campaigns.

In the context of all Indian religions, Buddhism occupies a unique place, firstly for addressing and accepting people of all strata of society, but also populations like the Indo-Greeks and Indo-Scythians, who settled in India at the time, and secondly, for its

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propagation in countries from like Ceylon, Burma, Tibet, Nepal, Sri Lanka, China, etc. Thus, it has conquered in time, due to its simple and clear teachings equally addressed to everybody, a great part of Asia. Along with the spread of the religion, there were introduced in those countries the Buddhist art and architecture, language and literature and above all, translations of the Buddhist scriptures, and the subsidiary literature in the languages of the countries where the religion made its home (Rama, 1999: 77). With the propagation of Buddhism, and its becoming a pan-Asian institution (Jackson, Makransky, 2013: 5), “the words of Buddhist theologians were preserved, transported from country to country, and translated from one language to another. They became in this way a kind of currency within élite circles in the Buddhist world” (id: 6). As Richard Gombrich argues, Buddhism, wherever practiced in Asia, although seen sometimes as syncretic, it is rather defined as accretive, meaning it can coexist with other religious systems (in the case of Theravada Buddhism, see Gombrich, 1971, 2009: 49); this being in agreement with L. Dumont who wrote that in early India Buddhism was “an individual religion based upon choice [...] added to the religion of the group” (Dumont, 1960: 46).

Undoubtedly the most prominent figure of Buddhism in the contemporary world is His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso, who received a Nobel Prize in 1989, for His message of peace. Following the China invasion of Tibet, in 1959 the Dalai Lama had to search political asylum in India. Despite the difficult conditions that Tibet is passing through, the country never stopped struggling to keep alive its religious and cultural identity, defined as “Tibetan Buddhism”. His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet made Dharamsala, in Himachal Pradesh, India, an important center of Tibetan culture and Buddhism knowledge. His presence, along with more than one million Tibetans who received Indian asylum, helped at creating awareness and reviving the Buddhist tradition in its country of birth. His books helped to make the Buddhist vision and knowledge known throughout the world.

Despite the long history of Buddhism, Buddhist Studies are considered still a young academic discipline, seen rather as a heterogeneous field of study, drawing on classically accepted disciplines, such as philology, history, archeology, philosophy, etc. It is thus multidisciplinary, due first of all to its object of study and to the international composition of the scholars engaged in this field of research (Ruegg, 1962, 1992; Foulk, 1993). J. W. DeJong, in 1974, was making a history of Buddhist Studies in Europe and U.S.A. (DeJong, 1974: 55-106). Before him, Ernst

Windisch (Strassbourg, 1917, Berlin, 1920, Leipzig, 1921), Henri de Lubac (Paris, 1952), G.R. Welbon (Chicago, 1968) tried to systematize the history of such studies. J. W. DeJong defines the “early period” of Buddhism being made known in Europe as early as in Megasthenes’ work, following Clement of Alexandria (200 C.E.) and Hieronymus (± 347 – 419 C.E.) who mentions the birth of Buddha (cf. Dihle, Dihle, 1964, 1965; Foucher, 1949). However, the Western world became aware of Buddhism with Marco Polo’s thirteenth century account on Buddhism in his *Description of the World (Divisament dou Monde)*. Only starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Indian sources on Buddhism in Sanskrit and Pāli were studied. There are to mention the pioneering researches of Eugène Burnouf (Burnouf and Lassen, 1826), who remarks Simon de la La Loubère as the first to mention Pāli (Windisch, 1917, 1920, 1921: 125; Lubac, 1952: 99) and also who stressed the fact that Indian Buddhism had to be studied on the basis of Sanskrit texts from Nepal and the Pāli texts from Ceylon (*Introduction a l’histoire du Bouddhisme indien*, Paris, 1844). There are to mention the works of Isaak Jakob Schmidt (1832, 1837), Alexander Csoma de Körös (1836-1839), Philippe Édouard Foucault (1847-1848), etc. Starting with 1800, the knowledge of Buddhism in the West increased, yet 1877 marks a turning point in Buddhist studies: many Pāli texts are edited, as well as Buddhist Sanskrit texts. In 1881 Max Müller published the Sanskrit text of the *Vajracchedikā*, one of the most important texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism; in 1882-1897 Émile Senart published the *Mahāvastu*, having the merit to explain the myth of Buddha as a product of India and its religious concepts, based upon Vedic and Brahmanical literature. There are to mention Kern, Senart, La Vallée Poussin, Hermann Beckh, who stressed the importance of yoga in Buddhism. The publications, as well as the archeological discoveries, helped a new generation of scholars to enlarge the perspective on Buddhism studies: Serge d’Oldenberg, Sylvain Levi, Th. Stcherbatsky, F. W. Thomas, Louis de La Vallée Poussin, followed by their disciples and students (DeJong, 1974).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Buddhism and its institutions went through major changes, “if Asian Buddhist theology prior to modern era was confined primarily to the monasteries, today it has become decentralized, issuing not only from the *wats* and *vihāras*, but also from university departments and lay oriented practice centers” (Jackson, Makransky, 2000: 7). Modern Buddhism developed from an exclusively Asian tradition to a global one, as since the nineteenth century more and more “Westerners” started to study its doctrines and to live its practices, arriving to have a word to say in the evolution and definition of contemporary Buddhism (*ibid*: 8). Nowadays, as Ralph

Flores critically points out, Buddhism has been “sucked into a whirlpool of global economics, New Age therapies, and neo-Buddhism. This situation is manifested in glossy magazines and newsletters supported by advertisements for meditational supplies” (Flores, 2008: 2), alongside with other Asian traditions, like yoga. What would be the use of understanding the Buddhist tradition, for Europe and Europeans? The answers are yet to be found. Seeing from the East to the West, as Lokesh Chandra writes, “The European perceptions of eurocentrism and the general theory of civilizations are both structuring of a mind that has seen phenomenal advances during the last millennium. The Western mind is seeking room to move meaningfully in a pluralistic universe, while it is rooted in the meaning and being of its own thinking and understanding. It does not seek either a revaluation or a trans-valuation of its *bodhicitta* (*bodaishin*) in the rich structures of consciousness of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism or Shintoism. [...] We have to discover freedom to acknowledge variousness. [...] So concepts like “cultural commonality” and “universalism” are counterproductive rather than creative. Buddhism has accepted and respected differences, the beauty of many forms, the eternality of various values” (Chandra, 2003: xxvii).

This special issue of the International Review of Social Research addressed scholars from a wide range of disciplines connected to Buddhist academic research and Buddhism. The articles we selected cover an extended spectrum of research topics, including Buddhist history and histories, Buddhism in India and Asia, Buddhism and archaeology, Buddhist rituals and practices, Buddhism cultural origins and cultural transformations, Buddhism, identity and social change, Buddhist heritage, Buddhist sites and tourism. We welcomed articles on classical textual analysis, Buddhist doctrine, archaeology, as well as analyzing contemporary Buddhist communities. The volume’s guest editors are interested in enhancing the advances and research results in the field of Buddhist studies and Buddhism, worldwide. Acknowledging the interdisciplinary and international nature, inherent to the contemporary Buddhist studies, we intended to facilitate the exchanges of ideas between different disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, social and cultural anthropology, ethnology, history, archeology, art history, religious studies, literary, textual and philological studies etc. We considered also the observations of José Ignacio Cabezón, for an emphasis on cultural contextualization (see Nash et. al., 1966), as well as on cross-cultural analysis or feminist studies (see also Gross, 1993, Klein, 1995), or to a critique of colonialism, neocolonialism (Cabezón, 1995: 264).

The research paper authored by Anand Singh, entitled *Female Donors at Sārnāth: Issues of Gender, Endowments, and Autonomy*, acknowledges women participation in early Buddhism religious rituals in connection to their social autonomy. The research points out that, since Early Buddhism, women participated in numerous religious activities and their names have been found in various donative records. The author argues that the impact of Buddhism on women’s autonomy in the early India is still under debate, although Buddhism might be seen as a source of transformation of gender relations.

In the West (Europe and U.S.A.), Buddhism is seen more like a philosophy, an intellectual reflection, as separated from theology during the early modern times; yet, as some researchers note, “theology probably is at work even when it appears to be absent.” (Jackson, Mackenzie, 2013: 2). The article authored by Nguyen Quy Hoang, investigates the doctrine of *anattā* (Not-self) and other related doctrines from Early Buddhism. As Lokhande explained, “the basic tenets of Buddhism rely on the concept of *Tilakkana Anicca* (Impermanence), *Dukkha* (Suffering) and *anatta* (Substancelessness)” (Lokhande, 2003: 151-157). The author analyzes Early Buddhism doctrinal texts that define self as the combination of five aggregates (*skandhas*), to emphasize that the perspective on *anattā* as ‘No-self’ is not accurate.

The author of the next article, Chow Chandra Mantche, proposes an analysis of the *Theravada Buddhism in North-East India*. The research emphasizes that five states in North-East India are important as Buddhism sites: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Mizoram and Tripura, many ethnic communities professing Theravada form of Buddhism being Khamtis, Phakeys, Khamyangs, Turungs, Aitons, Singphos, Tikhak Tangsas, Chakmas, Moghs, Boruahs. The case study focuses on the Tai-Khamtis, the largest *Theravada* Buddhist community of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, showing that Buddhism is a living part of this community life and culture. By studying the *Theravada* Buddhist practices of the Tai-Khamtis, who are following the Burmese (Myanmarees) church, but also of indigenous origin, the author gives light to the relationship between India and the other South-East Asia countries.

Based on his lifelong archeological investigations, Sunil Kumar Patnaik makes a presentation of *The Buddhist Monuments in South-Eastern India: A Study of Forms and Patronage*, with a focus on the Buddhist heritage of the State of Odisha. Different Buddhist monuments have been discovered, built from the third century BCE to the sixth-seventh century CE. The author argues that the Buddhist remains discovered through archaeological investigations help to reconstruct the past of the region and of India

(Chakrabarti, 2006: 315). Buddhist establishments have been built in the post-Asokan period in this region, particularly at Lalitgiri, Langudi, Radhanagar, Dhauli, Jaugarh and Aragarh. The paper emphasizes that from the earliest period of Indian historical setting, Buddhist monuments played a major role for growth of religion, trade, art and architecture in the Indian Sub-continent.

The next article, authored by Umakanta Mishra, studies the sacred landscape in the Buddhist site of Udayagiri, Odisha, with a focus on Stūpa as *śarīra dhātū* to stūpa as *dharma-dhātū and maṇḍala*. The study explores the religious practices (stūpa worship) and their changes mainly on the Udayagiri site, but also at Lalitgiri, both found in Odisha. The evolution of stūpas in the Buddhist sites of Lalitgiri and Udayagiri, first as containing corporal relic in 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, followed by dharma relic and *Bodhimāṇḍa* (Buddha image) in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards; from 7<sup>th</sup> century CE various *dhāraṇī* s were inserted inside stūpas and were inscribed on images; in the final phase maṇḍala stūpas emerged. Nevertheless the changes, these areas remained an area of spiritual attraction throughout all the analyzed historical period, as the author concludes.

N. James proposes an *Interpretation for Odisha's 'Buddhist Diamond'*, with a focus on cultural heritage tourism in India. Although promoted as touristic attractions, the archaeological sites of four early Buddhist monasteries, are not properly preserved and effectively interpreted for the visitors proper reception. A critical view is exposed through the case study of visitor management and interpretation at Lalitgiri. While the measures for preservation there are deemed as good, as it cannot be assumed that visitors have the background to understand the original contexts of the displays, there is an urgent necessity for improving the quality of the information offered as interpretation.

Borobudur is the largest Buddhist temple in the world, built in the 9<sup>th</sup>-century, in Central Java, Indonesia, and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The paper written by Budi Hermawan, Ubud Salim, Fatchur Rohman and Mintarti Rahayu discusses the issues for *Making Borobudur a Buddhist Religious Tourist Destination: an Effort to Preserve Buddhist Temples in Indonesia*. While the Borobudur temple has been designated as an excellent destination by the government, in an effort to increase foreign exchange, thus increasing the number of visitors, at the same time it also increased the threat to the sustainability of the site. The research intends to provide alternative solutions for the management of Borobudur temple that pay attention to its sustainability, as well as to its not only heritage tourism characteristic, but also the spiritual and religious features that defines a Temple

Balaram Tripathy investigates the *Buddhist remains of Boudh district*, in Odisha, India, in a historical perspective. The author includes in his analysis the literary sources available, as well as colonial times' records of Buddhism in this area. The archeological evidences in sites like Boudh, Syamsundarpur, Pragalpura, are enriched with accounts regarding nowadays traditions of the local communities in the region.

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