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BUDDHISM IN THE WESTERN WORLD

The history of Buddhism in the Western world goes back to a period before the Christian era. First there were those contact and inter-cultural influences which gave Buddhism a hearing in the world into which Christianity was born and developed. Secondly, there were outstanding scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who presented Buddhism to the Western world through editions and translations of Buddhist scriptures and their research. Finally, certain misrepresentations of Buddhism which persisted in the minds of Westerners needed to be removed and a brief positive account of what Buddhism has to offer to our modern world presented.

The Lord Buddha lived in India in the sixth century B.C. The first historical and important confrontation between the classical East and the classical West took place in the fourth century B.C. when Alexander the Great invaded India. He was no ordinary soldier. As a pupil of Aristotle, he deeply appreciated cultural values, and in his expedition was a large number of scholars and artists for cultural exchanges. It is reasonable to suppose that the knowledge of Indian culture these Greek intellectuals and artists took back to their country included some acquaintance with Buddhism. As a result of this meeting of East and West, diplomatic relations were established and maintained between several Greek rulers and India, Court of Pataliputra (Modern Patna), the Capital of Maurya Empire.

In the third century B.C., the great Buddhist Emperor Asoka of India, sometimes described as the Buddhist Constantine, in three of his Edicts (Rock Edicts II, V and XIII), engraved on rocks and still extant, declared that he had established a ministry of religious affairs (called Dhamma-mahamatra) to spread the Dhamma and to promote moral and religious life among the people, and that he had sent successful "Missions of Piety" to some Greek territories in addition to various parts of his own empire. He mentions by name five Greek kings to whom these missions were sent. They have been identified as Antiochus II of Syria (261-246 B.C.), Ptolemy II of Egypt (285-247 B.C.), Antigonas Gonatas of Macedonia (276-246 B.C), Magas of Cyrene (300-258 B.C.) and Alexander of Epirus (272-246 B.C.). There can be no reasonable doubt that Asoka's "envoys" or "missionaries" (Duta) spread a knowledge of Buddhism in these Greek territories, where Judaism was already known.

A few years ago an Edict of Asoka in both Greek and Aramaic languages was discovered in Afghanistan. (It is interesting to note that Aramaic was the language of Christ.) Very recently another Edict in Greek only, not as yet published, was discovered in the same country. The contents of those Edicts are more or less the same as those of Asoka's 'Edicts of Dhamma' (Dhammalipi) discovered in India. It is now believed that almost all Asoka's Indian Edicts were published

simultaneously in Greek also for the benefit of Greek speaking peoples.

The Questions of Milinda' (The Milinda-panha), the well-known Buddhist text in Pali language written about the first century after Christ (A.C.), reports a discussion on some important Buddhist doctrinal problems between a king named Milinda and the scholar-saint Nagasena. This king has been identified as the Greek king Menandros, who ruled the north-western part of India in the first century B.C.

The Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka (The Mahavansa), written in the fifth century A.C., but based on earlier material, says that in the first century B.C. a delegation of Buddhist Monks from the Greek city of Alexandria (Yona-Nagara-Alasnda), led by the Greek Elder Dhammarakkhit the Great, attended the inauguration ceremony of the Great Stupa (now called Ruvanvalisaya), at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. Whether this refers to Alexandria in Egypt or some other Alexandria, it was a Greek city where an important Buddhist community existed.

Clement of Alexandria, one of the 'early Church fathers', in the closing decade of the second century A.C., says that amongst the 'barbarians' whose philosophy came to Greece were 'those who obey the precepts of Buddha'.

Numerous scattered references like these indicate the existence of Buddhism in the West in those early days. There should be no doubt as to the Buddhist influence on the Greek world and on early Christianity. The Christian monastery itself seems to have been influenced by the Buddhist monarchism. It is well-known that Buddhists were the first in history to establish and organise cenobitic monasteries. Yet, curiously, no documents pertaining to Buddhism in the West in those early days are to be found today. One wonders whether they were destroyed by nature or perished at the hand of narrow-minded fanaticism. The influence of Buddhism and Indian thought on Western culture especially during those formative Christian centuries would provide serious students with numerous subjects of research.

The serious study of Buddhism began in the West in the early nineteenth century. If what follows should seem to be no more than a roll-call of the names of those to whom the Western world today owes its knowledge of the Buddha and his Teaching, attention has to be drawn to those who founded the study of Buddhism in faculties and universities all over the world.

A summary of the nineteenth century advance in Western studies of Buddhism must begin with the German philosopher Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who awakened an interest among Western philosophers and intellectuals through his references to Buddhism which he greatly admired. But the credit for initiating the systematic and scientific study of Buddhism goes to French Orientalist Eugene Burnouf (1801-1852) with the publication in 1826 of his pioneer work *Essai sur le Pali*, in collaboration with the German scholar Lassen. (Among his

other works should be mentioned L' Introduction al' Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien (1844) and his translation of the well-known Mahayana Buddhist Sanskrit Sutra called Saddharm Pundarika C1852). Among Burnouf's eminent pupils was the German Indologist Max Muller. One may consider Burnouf as the father of Buddhist studies in the West.

The work initiated by Burnouf was continued in Paris by researches and publications of original texts and translations. The greatest worker in this field was Sylvain Levi (1863-1935), who discovered and published rare Mahayana Buddhist Sanskrit texts with his translations. His work opened up new fields of research in Buddhist philosophy and history. The great French tradition established by Burnouf and Levi is being most successfully continued today by a brilliant pupillary succession: Paul Demiville, Louis Renou, Jean Filliozat, Olivier Lacombe, Armand Minard, Andre Baareau among others, though some of them are not exclusively Buddhologists.

Among Sylvain Levi's pupils was a Belgian, the famous Louis de La Vallee Poussin. Of his numerous works, his epoch-making translation (1923-1931) of Vasubandhu's Adhidharma-Kosa should be singled out as it is almost an encyclopaedia, not only of Sarvastivada, but of Buddhist philosophy in general. La Vallee Poussin's tradition in Belgium, generally considered as a part of the French School is excellently continued today by his worthy pupil and successor Etienne Lamotte, whose voluminous contributions are universally esteemed and appreciated.

This interest in Buddhist studies, begun in Paris, gradually spread all over Europe.

In Denmark, Victor Fausboll brought out in 1833 an edition of the Dhammapada, the best known Buddhist text, accompanied by a translation and notes in Latin. This was the first Pali text to be published in full in Europe in Roman characters. Another remarkable Danish Pali scholar was V. Trenckner, who started work on the Critical Pali Dictionary, a tremendous undertaking, still in the course of production. Its headquarters are in Copenhagen. Helmer Smith, the renowned Swedish Pali scholar, was also connected with this dictionary.

In Sweden, there were the famous authors August Strinberg and Victor Rydberg who brought forward basic tenets of Indian philosophy and the famous social democratic thinker and politician Kata Dahlstrom, whose ideas amongst others form the ideological base of the modern Swedish welfare society, who called herself Buddhist and took many examples from the Buddhist Doctrine when she talked.

As regards the oldest Swedish history it is interesting to note that the Swedes during the Viking Era about 1000 years ago as conquerors and merchants penetrated the lands beyond the Caspian Sea and that they brought back many things to their commercial centre at Helgo in the Malaren. Thus there has been

found at archaeological excavations the Buddha Rupa (the image of Lord Buddha) of Gandhara Style from approximately the 7th century, which is now permanently exhibited at the National Museum of History in Stockholm. May it be that some individuals were interested in Buddhism before the Christian Era?

Further Development of Buddhism in Sweden

Buddhist groups open to public were however not formed until the 1950s. A forerunner of those groups was the Theosophical Society which at least in certain respect propagated Buddhist and Hinduistic ideas. The small Buddhist movement in Sweden was however mainly founded by two persons well known to their Buddhist friends in Asia: Mr. Marcel Sirander, better known as Rev. Tao Wei, and Dharma Mother Amita Nisatta.

If we should name a precise year when Buddhism was established in Sweden we must say "1954". This year the famous Dhammaduta Monk Ven. Narada Thera from Sri Lanka visited Sweden in connection with the inauguration of the London Buddhist Vihara. He made a lecture tour at that time in Sweden and spread the message of Deathlessness to many Swedes. The visit was reported in many newspapers.

Initiated by this event, Marcel Sirander Rev. Tao Wei founded the Swedish Buddhist Society in Gothenburg and then the World Fellowship of Buddhists was founded; the Swedish Buddhist Society joined as a Regional Centre. Rev. Tao Wei, who is well known in Thailand, that Buddhist country which he visited on many occasions, was active as a Teacher and Author up to his death in 1983. Before his death he transferred the society to his disciple Dr. Peter Bergh, Upasaka Dhammaviro, who has carried on the work.

The second important person in the development of the early Buddhist movement in 50s was Bhikkuni Amita Nisatta, who after being ordained in Nepal and studying Vipassana (Meditation) and Abhidhamma in Burma, returned to Sweden in 1956. She was personally exhorted by the Prime Minister of Burma U Nu to return as a Buddhist missionary to her Home Country. After her arrival in Sweden, she soon started a lecture Tour and soon she had gathered a small but faithful circle around her called "friends of Buddhism". This society is also registered as a Regional Centre of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, and she has been an ardent participant at many conferences of the World Fellowship of Buddhists.

In the 60s the situation among Buddhists here was influenced by the fact that so many Tibetan Lamas had been forced into exile. Several Tibetan Friendship groups were formed by, among others, Ven. Amita Nisatta and this led to increased interest in Tibetan Buddhism, so called Vajrayana. Recently this Centre has founded a Hermitage in the countryside where followers can undergo a three-year retreat leading up to full ordination as Lama. This society represents the

Kagyupta Order, one of the three main Buddhist Sects of Tibet.

Several other small groups have been founded. During the 60s many individuals became interested in Zen Buddhism and several Meditation Groups were founded. A Centre for the Lotus Buddhist Order was initiated by Rev. Tao Wei, but it was dissolved in 1980.

Thus it is obvious that there was a certain growth of interest in Buddhism during the 60s and early 70s and that this interest led up to the formation of several small groups. Up to this point, there was no direct co-operation between the groups. In 1978, however, an umbrella organisation for all Swedish groups was formed on the initiative of the then Ambassador of Sri Lanka, Baddrapala Wickramatunga, who became very popular among Swedish Buddhists due to his hospitality and open-heartedness. The name of this national organisation for Buddhists is the Buddhist Union of Sweden, and the present President is Dr. Peter Bergh; Upasaka Dhammaviro. All the hitherto named groups became member organisations of the Buddhist Union and a good co-operation was started in the field of publications and joint celebrations of the Buddhist holidays such as Vesakh-day.

During the end of the 70s and beginning of the 80s, the situation of Buddhism changed radically in Sweden due to immigration of Buddhists from Indochina i.e. Vietnam, Kampuchea and Thailand. The number of Buddhists rose to nearly ten thousand, from earlier having been only a few hundred. Most of those Buddhists had however settled recently in Sweden and they were unorganised as to their religious life.

To give them a chance to keep up their religious identity, the Buddhist Union of Sweden called a meeting with representatives of different Buddhist groups and immigrants from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Kampuchea and Tibet. It was decided that suitable persons would call meetings of these different nationals and consequently form societies in which the different traditions could be practised in the mother tongue of the people in question.

The Thai Buddhist Association was thus founded 9 October 1983 in the presence of the Ambassador of Thailand; H.E. Nikorn Praisengpetch; the Members of the Board of the Thai Buddhist Union of Sweden and a Member of the Holy Order Sangha; Ven. Phra Maha Narong Phaddhayano, resident Monk in Buddharama Temple in Holland. This association is meant to be a central religious society for immigrant Thai Buddhists and it should be one of several Temples. The Thai Buddhist Association in Sweden is a Member of the Buddhist Union.

On 2 June 1984, the first local Buddhist Temple of the Thai was founded under the patronage of His Eminence Ven. Phra Brohmmagunabhorn, Member of the Supreme Council of the Holy Order of Thai Sangha of Thailand and H.E. Nikorn Praisengpetch, the Ambassador of Thailand. The name of the Temple became

"Buddharama Temple" and Ven. Phra Maha Jamnong Chutindharo was appointed as Chief Incumbent. This Buddhist Society now constitutes the largest society with more than 1,500 supporters, and it is shortly planning to build the Thai Temple in Sweden.

J.D.H.