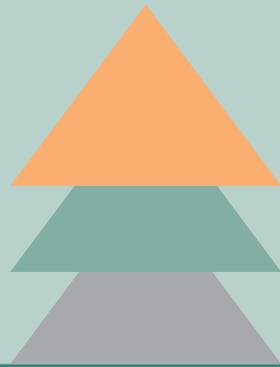


Religions and Development Research Programme

Buddhism and Development: A Background Paper

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Working Paper 18 - 2007



Religions and Development

Research Programme

The Religions and Development Research Programme Consortium is an international research partnership that is exploring the relationships between several major world religions, development in low-income countries and poverty reduction. The programme is comprised of a series of comparative research projects that are addressing the following questions:

- How do religious values and beliefs drive the actions and interactions of individuals and faith-based organisations?
- How do religious values and beliefs and religious organisations influence the relationships between states and societies?
- In what ways do faith communities interact with development actors and what are the outcomes with respect to the achievement of development goals?

The research aims to provide knowledge and tools to enable dialogue between development partners and contribute to the achievement of development goals. We believe that our role as researchers is not to make judgements about the truth or desirability of particular values or beliefs, nor is it to urge a greater or lesser role for religion in achieving development objectives. Instead, our aim is to produce systematic and reliable knowledge and better understanding of the social world.

The research focuses on four countries (India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania), enabling the research team to study most of the major world religions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and African traditional belief systems. The research projects will compare two or more of the focus countries, regions within the countries, different religious traditions and selected development activities and policies.

The consortium consists of six research partner organisations, each of which is working with other researchers in the four focus countries:

- University of Birmingham, UK: International Development Department, Department of Theology and Religion, Centre for West African Studies, Centre for the Study of Global Ethics.
- University of Bath, UK: Centre for Development Studies.
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi.
- Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan.
- University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan.

In addition to the research partners, links have been forged with non-academic and non-government bodies, including Islamic Relief.

Religions and Development Working Paper 18

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Preface

This is one of a series of six background papers prepared as part of the Religions and Development Research Programme. Each aims to provide an introduction and overview of the teachings of one of the major faith traditions with which the programme is dealing: Christianity, African traditional religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. Their purpose is to summarize recent material produced by the relevant religious organizations and by some of the main academic interpreters to provide background material on the understandings of 'development' that arise out of the core beliefs and values of each faith tradition.

Each review seeks to identify concepts and teachings relevant to human development within the relevant faith tradition, with reference to its teachings/ethics and theology. It also considers the extent to which the understandings have evolved over time; identifies major differences in the understanding of concepts developed by different branches within a faith tradition; and discusses the extent to which views associated with particular religious organisations and their adherents arise from their religious beliefs or are influenced by the social and cultural context in which adherents live.

The writers were asked to concentrate on the key concepts underlying the notion of 'development': development (goals, obstacles and appropriate strategies), poverty (and its causes), wealth, inequality and well-being. They were also asked to consider issues of particular relevance to the various components in this research programme

- a) Credit and debt
- b) Gender roles and equality
- c) Education (the role of education and access to educational opportunities)
- d) Engagement in public life through politics, social movements, advocacy, community organization etc
- e) Corruption/ethical behaviour in public life
- f) Livelihood decisions e.g. building wealth, seeking improved wellbeing, begging.

The contemporary discourse of development post-dates most religious teaching, which is not historically or even today couched in terms of the conventional international development discourse. However, each religious tradition has ideas about 'right social ordering' and provides guidelines to individuals and societies about the values and ethics they should adopt in their pursuit of a life that is not just spiritually rewarding but also morally and socially responsible. Interpreting these teachings in a

relatively short paper in the light of the terminology of development is problematic and the interpretations and views put forward by the authors of these papers are necessarily partial and provisional.

Moreover, all religious traditions have developed schools or denominations that present different interpretations of core teachings and practices. Religious traditions have also developed under the influence of different sorts of inputs: for example, from mystics, theologians, philosophers, ritual specialists or legal experts. While at certain times and in certain places particular interpretations of religious traditions may dominate, it is impossible to talk about a single view of development, for example *a Christian view* or *a Muslim view*, and instead we may find a range of opinions or even competing views. This difficulty is compounded by the fact the interpretation of teachings may vary between the authorities responsible at the highest level and local religious specialists, between the official sources and everyday lived religion, over time, and between places, where it is interpreted through the lens of differing cultural traditions.

Some of this variety is captured in the papers, but certainly not all. The authors themselves come from different backgrounds: not all are scholars from within the religious tradition about which they are writing, and not all are adherents of that tradition. Each has his or her own interests and preoccupations. The accounts are also dependent on the available sources, which do not necessarily deal with all the issues that the authors were asked to consider. Although each of the papers adopts a basically similar approach, their coverage and detailed organisation vary.

These papers were initially prepared for the use of the large international team of researchers engaged in the Religions and Development Research Programme. We hope, however, that they will be a useful resource for all those interested in the topic.

Carole Rakodi
Director, Religions and Development Research Programme.

1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to provide a background paper that is concerned with the intersection between Buddhism and international development. Firstly, I will provide a brief overview of Buddhist teachings, beliefs and practices; secondly, I will discuss the relationship between Buddhist values and key development concerns; and, finally, I will provide a more focussed investigation into some areas of development and the way that Buddhists might approach them (i.e. ecology; economics, poverty, debt and borrowing; gender; and peace building).

This is an introductory paper, written with those unfamiliar with the Buddhist tradition in mind. Hence, it is not an in-depth critical study of the relationship between Buddhism and development, but rather an overview of existing studies. Readers should also be reminded to reflect upon the gulf that often exists between 'lived religion' and the ideal version of the tradition that can be extracted from the texts. This is, on the one hand, a result of the fact that people often do not exactly follow or match up to the ideals of the traditions that they profess to follow. On the other hand, local cultural variations in religious belief and practice are also relevant and have an impact upon diversity within different traditions.

2 A brief overview of Buddhist teachings, beliefs and practices

Whether or not Buddhism is a religion is always open to question. Scholars of religion typically include Buddhism within their inquiry since it shows many of the characteristics of what religion is understood to be: systems of belief, institutional organisation around belief and ritual practices, religious specialists in its monastic system and an ethical discourse based upon its teachings and beliefs. However, the fact that Buddhism does not hold with a belief in a transcendental deity or supernatural beings does differentiate it from most other religious systems. While the figure of the Buddha and various '*bodhisattvas*'¹ do, at the popular level, more or less, fulfil the role of transcendent deities, and often Buddhists will combine local animistic beliefs in the supernatural within their Buddhist practice, the 'orthodox' view is that a reliance upon the divine is an obstacle to the individual taking responsibility for their own journey towards enlightenment.

Buddhist teachings begin with the fact of human suffering (*Pali dukkha/ Skt duhkha*)², which is caused by craving and desire (*tanha/trsna*) for things external to the individual self. The Buddha taught not only that craving for things in the world is a source of *kamma/karma*³, which means that we continue to be reborn each time we die (*karma* 'binds' us to future rebirth), but that the belief in a discrete individual 'self', to which we are attached, is itself a fundamental mistake or delusion that must be recognised in order to escape *samsara* (the cycle of rebirths). The teaching of *anatta/anatman* ('no self') is at the very core of the Buddha's second sermon, which he gave following his own realisation of the causes of human suffering (Harvey 1990). While this teaching may seem highly esoteric, the Buddha taught the practical means to overcome craving and attachment through following the 'eightfold path' of right understanding, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration.

From the very beginning in Northeast India (dates of the Buddha's life are taken as circa 485-405 BCE, following Gombrich, 1992) the Buddha envisaged the need for a 'fourfold *sangha*' (community) consisting of fully ordained men and women (*bhikkhus/bhiskus* and *bhikkhunis/bhiksunis*) as well as lay men and women (*upasaka* and *upasika*). Hence, a system emerged whereby some Buddhists renounced the world in order to join the monastic *sangha/samgha*, where they could more fully live within an environment that was conducive to meditation practice and living by the eightfold path, in order that they might achieve enlightenment (the state where one is freed from *samsara*). Others would remain in the world and support the monastic community through the giving of alms - for lay Buddhists this is a positive source of merit – *punna/punya* - that can improve their chances of a better rebirth in the future. Despite the seeming emphasis here upon choosing the religious life in order to

signify a personal commitment to gain release from *samsara*, the monastic *sangha* has also served communities. For instance, as Pongsapich (1993) tells us: “from the earliest times, monks and their monasteries provided refuge for the needy and the sick, their schools offered education to the public, and their precincts were used for communal activities in all localities” (1993, p. 1).

As Buddhism developed and spread to different regions of the world, different schools of thought emerged. Today there are three main extant traditions: Theravada, found in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Laos; Mahayana, found in Korea, China, Japan and Vietnam; and Vajrayana, found in Tibet, Nepal and parts of Northern India.⁴ There are important differences between the Buddhist teachings in the different schools, but these differences represent attempts to improve explanations of reality in order to improve upon the means to achieve enlightenment. For instance, the later Mahayana and Vajrayana schools emphasise the concept of *sunyata* (emptiness) rather than no-self (*anatta/anatman*) in order to express the notion of impermanence and non-duality.

Much more recently, since the late eighteenth century, Buddhism has begun to spread to the West. Buddhism was ‘discovered’ by colonial ‘orientalists’ such as Sir William Jones, who established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784; Sir Edwin Arnold, who published his famous book - *Light of Asia* - popularising Buddhism to a western audience in 1879 and who co-founded the Mahabodhi Society in 1891; T. W. Rhys-Davids who in 1881 founded the Pali Text Society; and Allan Bennett McGregor who entered a Burmese monastery in 1901 and, taking on the new name of Ananda Metteya, founded the ‘International Buddhist Society’ in 1903 and the ‘Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland’ in 1907 (see Almond, 1988). However, rather than just transporting an existing tradition to a new context and to a new audience, ‘Buddhism’ underwent a transformation during its transmission to the West. There was a tendency to: emphasise the texts over the tradition as it was lived and practised in Asia; to focus upon the psychological and philosophical aspects, rather than the ritual and the supernatural; and to impose a “rational order on what had hitherto been perceived as unrelated, thus creating the ‘prototype of the European concept of Buddhism’” (Baumann 1995, p. 56; 2001).⁵ Some scholars have referred to the western import of Buddhism, which has been informed by informed by modernity, individualism and Protestantism, as ‘Protestant Buddhism’ (Mellor 1991; see discussion of ‘Engaged Buddhism’ below).

3 Buddhism and research on development

For the Religions and Development Research Programme, which focuses on India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania, Buddhism is relevant because of its association with India. While Buddhism had died out in India by the tenth century CE, there are two patterns of more recent revival of the tradition. The first of these followed the Chinese invasion of Tibet, when the Dalai Lama, with his followers, was permitted in 1959 to establish a 'government-in-exile' in Dharamsala in Kangra District, in the northern state of Himachel Pradesh. Since then a community of several thousand Tibetan exiles have also settled there, in Upper Dharamsala, or McLeod Ganj, where they have established monasteries, temples and schools. The second revival of Buddhism in India can be traced to the work of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in the state of Maharashtra to outlaw untouchability, in the early part of the twentieth century. While Ambedkar (1891-1956) was born as an outcaste or untouchable, he managed to pursue higher education in the US and the UK and to become a lawyer and Bahujan⁶ political leader, as well as the main author of the Indian constitution after independence. However, his pursuit of dalit rights was not confined to politics: instead, he converted to Buddhism in 1956 and then converted an estimated 380,000 of his followers to the tradition. This conversion was, on the one hand, a symbolic rejection of Hinduism, which was considered through its sanction of the caste system to justify the oppression of outcastes. On the other hand, the conversion to Buddhism has proved to be an important means of enabling dalits to enhance their self worth and, to a degree, their social standing in a society that continues to exercise discrimination against what are now called, for classification purposes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) (Jaffrelot, 2005; Omvedt, 2004). Studies on dalit⁷ communities indicate consistently low levels of education, health and income compared to higher castes (Robb 1996). Increasing numbers are converting to other religions, including Buddhism, in order to improve their status (Patel, 2003; Fitzgerald, 1997). For instance, the BBC recently reported that "thousands of people have been attending mass ceremonies in India at which hundreds of Hindu Dalits converted to Buddhism and Christianity...The ceremonies mark the 50th anniversary of the adoption of Buddhism by the scholar Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar."⁸ Some states in India that are governed by the Hindu Nationalist BJP, have introduced legislation to restrict such conversions (i.e. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu), whereas Gujarat has reclassified Buddhism, as well as Jainism, as part of Hinduism in "an attempt to prevent conversions away from Hinduism eroding the BJP's bedrock support."⁹

3.1 The relationship between Buddhism and key development concerns

David Loy writes that:

“Like other religions, Buddhism is sometimes criticized for its idealism: for encouraging a non-materialistic way of life that goes against the grain of our main desires and motivations. If we want to reduce poverty, we are referred instead to the science of economics, which has discovered the laws of economic growth that promote worldly well-being, and to international development agencies, which apply those principles to improve the lot of “undeveloped” societies” (1999).

While some branches of Buddhism (e.g. Zen, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism) have typically stressed the meditative and other-worldly, there have been recent shifts in Buddhist thinking across its different traditions, whereby the tradition has responded to many of the concerns that occupy international development. James (2004), for instance, shows that over the past century there have been developments in Zen Buddhism which seek to transform the meditative into critical action, especially with respect to concern for the environment. Queen’s 2000 edited volume *Engaged Buddhism in the West* points to the emergence of a new style of Buddhism, which he argues began in the West, that has come to be called ‘Engaged Buddhism’. He suggests that western Buddhists have, in a sense, lost patience with Buddhists in their traditional environments and that western engaged Buddhism is essentially a new chapter in Buddhist history. He sets it up as a fourth *yana* (‘vehicle’) to supplement those of early Buddhism: Hinayana (Theravada), Mayayana and Vajrayana.¹⁰

However, Queen (2000) is probably too harsh on ‘indigenous’ Buddhists, since a number of new movements have appeared within Buddhism since the second world war (for example, in Japan and Thailand), which seek to relate to issues of poverty, the environment and social and political justice. Some of these movements are particularly active in international interfaith organisations such as the Parliament of the World’s Religions and the World Conference on Religion and Peace. A more representative impression of modern Buddhist movements is gained from the variety of views presented in Wei-hsun Fu and Wawrytko (1991), where authors from around the world and from different traditions seek to relate Buddhist ethics to the needs of modern society.

In section 5 of this paper, I will review the relationships between Buddhism and key development concerns, including the newer tradition of Engaged Buddhism. The discussion will be divided into the following sections: Engaged Buddhism; 'Buddhism and ecology'; 'Buddhist economics'; 'Buddhism and gender' and 'Buddhism and peace building'. However, initially it will be instructive to provide an overview of Buddhist values, upon which to hang the discussion of development concerns.

4 Buddhist values¹¹

4.1 Karma

Harvey¹² begins his book *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* with the observation that

“Fundamental features of Buddhism’s world-view relevant to ethics are the framework of karma and rebirth, accepted by all schools of Buddhism, with varying degrees of emphasis, and the Four Noble Truths, the highest teachings of early Buddhism and of the Theravada school. In the Mahayana tradition, an increasing emphasis on compassion modified the earlier shared perspective in certain ways” (2000, p. 8).

To those unfamiliar with Buddhist teaching, the doctrine of *karma* may appear to be similar to fatalism, which within the context of thinking about development could seem to be non-conducive to social ethics that encourage people to consider ways that they can improve their situation. We do sometimes find an articulation of attitudes that can seem problematically fatalistic or deterministic. For instance, Tibetan Buddhism often takes a deterministic view of *karma*, suggesting that people are to blame in some sense for their current situation in life because of their actions in a past life. This has caused controversy in recent times with regard to discussions about whether Buddhism would hold Jewish Holocaust victims responsible for their fate.

To liberal western thinking the idea that one’s gender or social situation is in any way a result of previous actions in a past life is unappealing. However, the Buddha intended to gesture towards explanations for social difference rather than to establish fixed roles and social situations. Harvey presents the position of mainstream Buddhist thinking on *karma* as follows; the emphasis here is upon what the individual can do to improve his/her situation, even if certain aspects of it have been conditioned by actions in a previous life:

“karma and fatalism differ on two scores. Firstly, humans have freedom of choice; their present actions are not the karmic results of previous actions, through karmic results may influence the type of action that a person tends to think of doing, because of the character he or she has developed. Secondly, not everything that happens to a person is seen as due to karma. Any unpleasant feelings of illnesses that one has can arise from a variety of causes: ‘originating from bile phlegm, or wind, from union (of bodily humours), born from seasonal changes, born from disruptive circumstances, arriving suddenly [due to the action of another person], or born of the fruition of karma” (2000, p. 23).

By contrast, there are certain aspects of life that are considered to be the results of past *karma*. These include: one's current rebirth, one's social class at the time of birth, the general character of an individual, 'crucial' good and bad things which happen to a person, and the way in which an individual tends to see the world. Harvey stresses that since an individual can never actually be sure which elements of a particular situation is determined by their past karma a person should always strive to make the best of a their lot. Nevertheless, while the doctrine of *karma* should not mean that people are fatalistic, there is an important sense in which Buddhism teaches an individual to "live patiently with a situation" (2000, p. 23).

4.2 The 'Four Noble Truths' and the 'Eightfold Path'

The second shared aspect of different Buddhist traditions that Harvey notes as being relevant to a consideration of ethics is the Four Noble Truths, the teaching delivered at the Buddha's first sermon:

- 1) the truth that suffering (*dukkha*) exists: "Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering: in short the five categories affected by clinging are suffering"¹³;
- 2) the truth that the arising of suffering has an origin, which is craving (*tanha*): "It is craving which renews being and is accompanied by relish and lust, relishing this and that: in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being. But whereon does this craving arise and flourish? Wherever there is what seems lovable and gratifying, thereon it arises and flourishes"¹⁴;
- 3) the truth that *dukkha* has a cessation (*nirodha*): "What is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering? It is the remainderless fading and cessation of that same craving; the rejecting, relinquishing, leaving and renouncing of it. But whereon is this craving abandoned and made to cease? Wherever there is what seems lovable and gratifying, thereon it is abandoned and made to cease"¹⁵ and
- 4) the truth that there is a path leading to the cessation of *dukkha* (the Noble Eightfold Path): "What is the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering? It is the Noble Eightfold Path, that is to say: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration".¹⁶ The Noble Eightfold Path is fundamentally concerned with cultivating the correct mindset conducive to overcoming craving and hence suffering in order to reach '*nirvana*' ('blowing out' or 'quashing'), the state of Buddhist enlightenment and freedom from *samsara* (future rebirths): actions from this state of wisdom (*panna*) no longer create *karma* since they are undertaken without attachment.

Hence, ethics with respect to how one acts, thinks or talks, for instance, are crucial to the ultimate goal of Buddhism: morality is “part of a spiritual path which largely consists of cultivating a more wholesome character by undermining moral/spiritual defilements and cultural counteractive virtues. This process of ...transformation is seen to culminate in a state of liberation from all traces of greed/ attachment, hatred and delusion, and their consequent suffering, through the experience of Nirvana” (Harvey 2000, p. 58). Buddhists are guided in this quest by what are called the three refuges: Buddha, *dhamma* and *sangha*.

4.3 Buddhist precepts and rules

Lay Buddhists and monastics pledge to keep certain precepts or rules. There are five precepts that are kept by lay Buddhists (although some may opt to keep eight¹⁷): non-injury to all living beings (*ahimsa*); avoiding theft and cheating; avoiding sexual misconduct; refraining from lying and other forms of wrong speech; and retaining sobriety. The ethical conduct of monastics, by contrast, is governed by the *vinaya* (monastic code), which includes the maintenance of complete celibacy. In the Theravada tradition, for instance, there are 227 rules for monks, which include, elaborate upon and add to the lay precepts. On the whole, the Buddha considered that living in the world created obstacles that made it difficult to eradicate ‘greed, hate and delusion’. Hence, the rules governing the monastic way of life were intended to create the optimum conditions for Buddhist practice.

4.4 *Dana* (‘giving’) and philanthropy

It is important to note the centrality of giving (*dana*) within Buddhism as an action that is ‘karmically fruitful’ (Findly, 2003). Linked to the idea of giving is the sharing of the karmic fruits of action. In the Theravada tradition a boy who is ordained as a novice monk, for instance, will share the fruits of this auspicious action with his mother, who has enabled him to enter the monastic *sangha*. In the Mahayana tradition we find this idea in the transference of karmic fruits to ‘all sentient beings’, particularly in the figure of the *bodhisattva* (Harvey 2000, p. 66). The most prominent aspect of giving is with respect to the alms offered to the monastic *sangha*. In particular, the giving of alms creates a ‘field of merit’ for lay Buddhists. This, however, also has a gendered dimension since, in practice, it is believed that more merit can be generated through giving to male mendicants rather than female. In Thailand, for instance, the white robed nuns (*mae chis*) typically receive less alms than the orange robed male monks (*bhikkhus*), thereby adding to the precariousness of their existence.

According to Pongsapich, in Thailand, for example, “from its earliest times, Buddhism has been a significant source of philanthropy and social service, and remains so today. Philanthropy in Thailand has a very long tradition. To witness rows of Thai monks begging for food from citizens who give alms every morning is to observe a ritual dating back to the dawn of Buddhism in the country. Buddhism established the foundations of philanthropy, and with it the nonprofit sector” (1993, p. 1). However, while this is evidence of a culture of giving (philanthropy), it is to the monks rather than to the needy in the community. Thus, whether this culture of giving ever extends to support for development projects not linked to the monastic community is not made clear. Many monasteries do, however, provide shelter, food, healthcare and education, so in giving to monks, people are supporting the social service dimension of the temples. For instance, there are examples of the involvement of Buddhist monks in HIV/AIDS palliative care and prevention awareness. See *Buddhist Monks Provide HIV/AIDS Care*¹⁸; *Buddhist Monks raise AIDS awareness in Laos*¹⁹; ‘the Sangha-metta project’²⁰; Bechte and Apakupaku, 1999; Kubotani and Engstrom, 2005.²¹ (However, for the monks, the primary motivation for *dana* may be the religious merit accrued, rather than a desire to help the poor).

While some Buddhists may give to Buddhist temples/monks to increase their religious merit, regardless of the activities in which the temples/monks are involved, we can also find examples of Buddhist giving specifically to development-related projects. In particular, the important Buddhist values of loving kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*), whereby the Buddhist endeavours to overcome the apparent distinction between their own self and others would seem to support concern for the needy. The largest civic organisation in Taiwan, for instance, (giving away well over US \$20 million in charity a year) is a Buddhist organisation called Ciji/Tzu-Chi. According to Huang (2004, p.217),

“the Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation (Tzu-Chi or Ciji) is primarily a lay Buddhist movement that focuses on relieving human suffering through secular action. Inspired and led by a Buddhist nun, Compassion Relief is at present the largest formal association in Taiwan, with increasing overseas expansion: in the last decade, Compassion Relief has persistently delivered relief goods to different contents, and overseas Chinese, especially emigrants from Taiwan, have formed branches in 35 countries. Overseas devotees carry out Compassion Relief missions by localising Compassion Relief’s Buddhist charitable practice in their host societies and by forging and sustaining ties with the headquarters in Taiwan.”

Huang and Weller (1998) suggest that it “urges middle-class women to extend their family values and roles to the wider society, and to forge a new identity as mother to the world” (1998, p. 386). These women give their time and their money to the organization. The above example suggests that some Buddhists are motivated to give to development organizations as a fulfilment of the Buddhist ethic of *dana* (Laliberte 2004). However, Ciji is a Buddhist organization and it would be interesting to ascertain whether Buddhists are more likely to give to Buddhist organizations than secular ones.

4.5 Ethics of social justice

4.5.1 Social equality

In the context of considering the relationships between religions and development, it is useful to consider what Buddhism has to say about social ethics. A good place to start is the Buddhist attitude towards the caste system in India (a system of social ethics that is modelled on hierarchy rather than social equality). In Buddhism equality is valued as a social good and according to the Buddha,

“Not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a brahmin. By (one’s) action one becomes an outcaste, by (one’s) action one becomes a brahmin” (Sn. 136, cited in Harvey 2000, p. 110).

Thus, although one is born into a particular social class, a person is considered to be able to move from within this class if their talents and efforts allow. Although Buddhism emerged from within a Hindu philosophical world-view, from the outset it was sharply opposed to the caste system and instead considered that anyone was capable of reaching *nirvana*. Hence, the monastic *sangha* was open to all regardless of their social standing. However, as Buddhism spread from India, it tended to accommodate the particular social system it came up against.

The advocacy of equality within early Buddhism also extended to women. After some initial reluctance,²² the Buddha agreed to ordain women as *bhikkhunis*. However, although the Buddhist canon indicates that the Buddha established both female and male monastic orders, within the Theravada and Vajrayana tradition the *bhikkhuni* ordination died out (although it continues to flourish in Mahayana contexts, such as Taiwan, to this day). Opposition to its reintroduction largely depends upon the belief that it is necessary to have both male and female ordinands present at a *bhikkhuni* ordination and, since there are no *bhikkhunis/bhikshuni* (in Theravada and Vajrayana), the lineage is extinct and it

is impossible to revive it. In Thailand, for instance, women may ordain as white robed *mae chis*, but only observe eight precepts and are mainly occupied in caring for the day-to-day needs of monks.²³ The *mae chi* institution is not mentioned in the Buddhist texts, in fact its exact origins are unclear (Lindberg-Falk, 2000, p. 45), and many are critical that it is a poor substitute for the *bhikkhuni* ideal. The living conditions of a *mae chi* are often inadequate, they have little opportunity for study of the *dhamma* (Buddhist teachings) and the majority live in temples, where they cook and clean for the monks (Muecke, 2004). This is a good example of a situation where a religious tradition can be interpreted to support equality (in this case there are even corroborating historical precedents), yet patriarchal gender hierarchies have compromised best practice. So while, in theory, the Buddha's teachings are gender-neutral and women have been allowed access to more-or-less²⁴ the same positions of status and authority as men, the tradition as it has been lived and practised does not typically treat men and women the same. In particular, the Buddhist teaching of *kamma/karma* is often taken to mean that women are a lower rebirth than men. As I have illustrated in a recent paper (Tomalin, 2006), this understanding has been linked to women's inferior social status in Buddhist contexts.

4.5.2 Human rights

If we broaden the discussion of gender equality to consideration of human rights (Husted et al. 1998) it is important to note that, although Buddhism does not talk directly about 'rights', in the modern western sense, there is much within the tradition that appears supportive of rights-based thinking. Harvey suggests, however, that some Buddhists may object to the language of rights because it can come across as aggressive and self-centred, and that it, moreover, goes against the Buddhist understanding of the impermanence of the individual self. He argues that, on the whole, notions of 'universal human duties' are seen as more suitable within a Buddhist framework, which would seem to fit well with our earlier discussion of the Buddhist precepts. With respect to negative rights (i.e. the right to not be subject to something), Harvey suggests that these are strong within the tradition because of the emphasis upon others having a duty to not harm other living beings. Support for positive rights (i.e. the right to be entitled to something), however, is less strong, as the tradition sees them "more as something that it is good for others to choose to provide" (Harvey, 2000, p. 121) than as an inalienable right.²⁵

4.5.3 *Karuna Trust*

One example of a Buddhist inspired movement that aimed to address issues of social inequality and human rights was that associated with Dr Ambedkar (discussed in section 3). As a direct response to Ambedkar's call for a '*Dhamma* revolution' - in which the *Buddha-Dhamma* is (quite un-traditionally) used as the basis for social projects to uplift the dalits – different organizations have emerged with this as their goal. One such organization in Maharashtra is called Bahujan Hitay. It which works closely with a UK-based NGO called the Karuna Trust, linked to the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. According to the Bond Directory:

“The Karuna Trust was established in 1987 and continues the work of Aid for India which was founded in 1980 by members of the Western Buddhist Order. Karuna supports long term development work with India's former so-called 'untouchable' communities, funding educational, medical, skills-training and cultural projects. Karuna funds most of its work through its Indian partner Bahujan Hitay, which means 'for the welfare of the many'. Although Bahujan Hitay is run entirely by people from the Dalit or scheduled caste communities who have converted to Buddhism, the projects reach out to all communities affected by poverty and discrimination. Recent work has included educational hostels for children affected by the Gujarat earthquake, the Asvagosha performing arts project, which aims to revive and develop the traditional arts of story telling, song and drama, and the Centre for Learning Resources (based in Pune) which provides training and materials for teachers in early childhood education. Karuna has eight staff in the UK.”²⁶

The Karuna Trust also funds projects not run by Bahujan Hitay, including some Tibetan schools and a project with abandoned 'railway children' in Gaya, Bihar. Overall, however, Dr Ambedkar's vision of social uplift has led to the appreciation of the links between Buddhism and development within the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), via their Indian counterpart the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG).

4.6 Political ideals and attitudes towards state power

The political ideals of Buddhism are such that a ruler has certain key responsibilities to look after his subjects. In the Buddhist texts, the ideal king is modelled on legendary rulers of the past: “he should look after all his people...and also animals and birds. He should prevent crime and give to those in need” (Harvey, 2000, p. 114). The Indian emperor Asoka (c. 268-239 BCE) is considered to be a good example of the ideal king, inaugurating “various public works: wells, rest-houses, and trees for both

shade and fruit for travellers, and medical herbs and roots for humans and animals” (2000, p. 116). Harvey writes that “such measures were also fostered in Indian regions beyond his actual empire, by what must have been early ‘foreign aid’ measures” (2000, p. 116).

Harvey tells us that the dominant political model supported by Buddhism, and that which has typically found within Theravada contexts, is ‘triangular’: “the king supporting and being advised by the Sangha, the Sangha drawing members from and being supported by the people, and the people acquiescing in the rule of a king provided he was not immoral” (2000, p. 118; Ling 1973). In modern times, however, we find Buddhist teachings being used to support other styles of socio-political organisation: from socialism in Burma, to capitalism in Thailand and Chinese communism. While monks are traditionally expected to refrain from involvement in political affairs, there are many examples where this ethic has not been adhered to (e.g. modern Tibet, Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Japan). There is a literature on Buddhism and politics generally (e.g. Gokhale, 1966; Harriss, 1999; 2007; Tambiah, 1976) as well as studies on Buddhism and politics in particular places (e.g. Tambiah, 1992; Obeyesekere et al. 1972; Smith, 1978 (Sri Lanka); Suksamran, 1977; Reynolds, 1994 (Thailand); McCarthy, 2006 (Burma); Dunnell, 1996; Orzech, 1998 (China)).

5 Buddhism and development

The above discussion has provided a brief overview of some key Buddhist values, including social and political values. In the following section I will move on to look at some areas of Buddhist thought and practice that have a direct bearing upon development.

5.1 Engaged Buddhism²⁷

Engaged Buddhism is a good place to begin a more focused discussion of the relationships between Buddhism and development. The term ‘Engaged Buddhism’ is modern, first used by the Vietnamese monk Tich Nhat Hanh in 1963 (Eppsteiner, 1988; Hanh, 2002; Queen and King, 1996). Some scholars consider that the roots of ‘Engaged Buddhism’ go back to transformations during the colonial period, particularly in Sri Lanka where there was a Buddhist resurgence in the face of the Protestant critique of what was considered to be the socially passive and transmundane nature of traditional Buddhist thought and practice (Harvey, 2000, p. 112). This style of western-influenced Buddhism has been called ‘Protestant Buddhism’: it is reformist (e.g. stressing contemporary ethical concerns), assigns a greater role to the laity, and (as discussed above) is more focussed upon Buddhism as a rational and non-theistic tradition. Others claim, however, that Engaged Buddhism, as a style of socially active and reformist Buddhism, predates the colonial era, and that the *sangha* in Asia, for instance, is actually reviving modes of practice that were suppressed by the colonialists. Yarnall (2000) divides Engaged Buddhists into two types: traditionalists (who consider that social engagement is inherent to the Buddhist tradition: it is nothing new) and modernists (who see Engaged Buddhism as a contemporary response to social problems: it is a distinctly new style of Buddhism, or a fourth *yana*) (Queen, 2000)). The traditionalists (who are both Asian and western, whereas the modernists are predominantly western) argue that the image of Buddhism as otherworldly and uninterested in social issues is a western orientalist construction (arguably beginning with Max Weber’s depiction of Buddhism) (Macy, 1988, p. 173).

While it is not necessary here to rehearse the contours of each position in more detail, the following statement by Yarnall is instructive in illustrating that either position is probably incomplete and that both are ideological:

“One can choose to stress the continuities between the beliefs and practices of contemporary Buddhists and those of the past, or one can choose to stress the discontinuities. If such choices are not made consciously and carefully, then they are always made unconsciously. Either way, they usually represent more of an ideological or political disposition (or move) than an historical “observation” (2000; also in Queen et al. 2003).

The range of issues that concern Engaged Buddhism share many parallels with those of international development. For instance, on the 'Buddhist Peace Fellowship' website there are 'Socially Engaged Buddhism Resources'²⁸ listed under the following headings:

1. Environmental Issues
2. Racism and Diversity
3. Service and Caring in Various Fields
4. Social and Economic Analysis – Buddhist economics
5. War, Violence, Conflict, and Nonviolence
6. Women's Issues, Gender, and Sexuality
7. Work and Livelihood

Within the website, not all of these headings contain references to studies that have a direct relevance to developing countries (e.g. work and livelihood focuses upon western contexts), but they do, nonetheless, show a marked resonance with development concerns. While the Buddhist Peace Fellowship is based in the USA, it also has 'chapters' in several developing countries: Bangladesh, Mexico and India. Its mission is to: "serve as a catalyst for socially engaged Buddhism. Our purpose is to help beings liberate themselves from the suffering that manifests in individuals, relationships, institutions, and social systems. BPF's programs, publications, and practice groups link Buddhist teachings of wisdom and compassion with progressive social change."²⁹

However, even if one takes a modernist view of Engaged Buddhism (as responding to ethical pressure from western values as well as the unique nature of modern social problems), it is not a movement or tendency that is only driven by western Buddhists. Within all Buddhist countries there are groups and organizations that consciously consider themselves to be 'Engaged Buddhism', but there are also instances of Buddhist social activism, social service provision or humanitarian assistance that exist, and probably always have to some degree, without explicitly locating themselves as 'engaged'. Well known examples of socially engaged Buddhism in Asia include: Tzu Chi (a Taiwanese organization; see Huang and Weller, 1998); Sarvodaya (a Sri Lankan organization; see Bond, 2004; Macy, 1985); 'development monks' in Thailand (see Darlington, 2000a; 2000b); Sulak Sivaraksa (Thai Buddhist social activist and scholar, Sivavraksa, 1999; 2002; 2005); the Santi Asoke Buddhist Movement, Thailand (Essen, 2005); International Network of Engaged Buddhists (headquarters in Bangkok); Maha

Ghosananda (Cambodian monk; Ghosananda, 1992); Soka Gakkai (Japanese organization see Stone, 2003); Dr Ambedkar (India; Ambedkar, 1984[1957]); and Dalai Lama (Tibet; Dalai Lama, 1999).³⁰

While ‘Engaged Buddhism’ as a movement is relatively small in terms of its spread and numbers of affiliates in comparison with the traditional schools of Buddhism in particular contexts, the issues and values that it focuses upon are precisely those that concern modern development. It is, however, also important to consider how ‘ordinary’ Buddhists would respond to such issues. It is important to make a distinction between a study that looks at Engaged Buddhism as a movement or tendency that is concerned to apply Buddhist thinking to contemporary social issues, and a study of the way in which day-to-day Buddhist thought and practice typically influences development-related issues. The latter is also important, since most Buddhists are not explicitly involved in movements for social change yet do hold beliefs and participate in practices that have an impact upon social change and development.

The above section (4) on Buddhist values has described the ethical stance of Buddhist traditions with regard to development-related issues and below I will relate this discussion of ethics to concerns about ‘Buddhism and ecology; ‘Buddhist economics’; ‘Buddhism and gender’ and ‘Buddhism and peace building’. While this discussion will aim to look at these concerns without filtering them through the lens of Engaged Buddhism, this can be quite difficult to do since much explicit thinking about development concerns within Buddhism has been shaped by the thinking of so-called Engaged Buddhists.

5.2 Buddhism and ecology

Discussions about Buddhism and the environment are typically found within Engaged Buddhist literature. The literature stresses the positive ways in which Buddhist thought and practice can influence care for the natural world and has a normative agenda in calling for a greater recognition of this potential within environmental initiatives across the globe. This is to be distinguished from another, smaller, genre of literature that is concerned to look at the ways in which Buddhist thought and practice influence people’s relationship to the natural world. This influence may not always be positive, in terms of how it translates into ‘environmentally friendly’ behaviour.

The website of the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology has a useful bibliography on Buddhism and ecology.³¹ Rather than review this literature, my aim here is to map out some of the key themes arising within a Buddhist approach to the environment; to deal briefly with some critiques; and to give some details of environmental organizations working within a Buddhist framework. In his overview of Buddhism and ecology,³² Swearer points to several features of the tradition that are conducive to ecological thought. For instance, he draws attention to the importance of compassion in the tradition and argues that “out of a concern for the total living environment, Buddhist environmentalists extend loving-kindness and compassion beyond people and animals to include plants and the earth itself.”³³ Moreover, the teaching of *karma* and rebirth applies to all sentient beings and, at times, also to plants and trees: “Kukai (774–835), the founder of the Japanese Shingon school and Dogen (1200–1253), the founder of the Soto Zen sect, described universal Buddha-nature in naturalistic terms, ‘If plants and trees were devoid of Buddhahood, waves would then be without humidity’ (Kukai); ‘The sutras [i.e., the *dharmas*] are the entire universe, mountains, and rivers and the great wide earth, plants and trees’ (Dogen)” (Swearer, 1998).

Critiques of the ecological interpretation of Buddhism point out that the tradition can also be seen to go against ecological thinking. For instance, central to Buddhist soteriology (theory of salvation) is the idea that the material world is a source of suffering and attachment that makes it difficult to realise the impermanence of notions of individual selfhood (Harriss, 1991). This, it is argued, would hardly seem to support an attitude conducive to environmental conservation.

Moreover, Swearer summarises criticisms that the idea of no-self (*anatta/anatman*) or emptiness (*sunyata*) is incompatible with ecological awareness, since it would seem to

“undermine human autonomy and the distinction between self and other, essential aspects for an other-regarding ethic. What are the grounds for an ethic or laws that protect the civil rights of minorities or animal species threatened with extinction when philosophically Buddhism seems to undermine their significance by deconstructing their independent reality as an epistemological fiction?” (Swearer, 1998).

However, this reading of the doctrine of *anatta* is arguably problematic, since such an understanding of the impact of the lack of distinction between self and other would also seem to mean that it was impossible for a person to operate at all on a day-to-day level. This is surely not how we should understand the teaching of *anatta*, since it arguably renders it useless. Instead, Buddhism makes a

distinction between two levels of truth: conventional (*sammuti sacca*) and ultimate (*paramatta sacca*). Teachings about *anatta* are taught as *paramatta sacca* whereas environmentalism is taught in the sphere of *sammuti sacca*. On the conventional level we do, of course, consider ourselves to be discrete selves; however, the purpose of Buddhist practice is that at the ultimate level this distinction is invalid. This does not mean, moreover, that a perfectly enlightened Buddha is incapable of an 'other-regarding ethic', but that because he/she realises that the idea of 'self' is a delusion they are even more capable of demonstrating infinite compassion.

It cannot be assumed that Buddhism is inherently environmentalist, since Buddhist environmentalism is a modern phenomenon and, as such, is the product of a particular interpretation of the tradition. However, there are very many environmentalist organizations across the globe that quite successfully draw upon Buddhist teachings as the foundation for their ecological thought and action (see the example of the 'development monks' in Thailand, below). For instance, the website of the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology has a list of 'engaged projects' within the Buddhist tradition³⁴ and the UK based Alliance for Religion and Conservation is working with a number of Buddhist organizations across the globe.³⁵

5.2.1 Development monks in Thailand

The work of Parnwell focuses upon a case study from North-East Thailand of the role played by a local abbot and 'development monk', Than Phra Khruu Supjarawat, in promoting sustainable development based on Buddhist principles and involving a local 'faith community'. Since the early 1980s, Than Phra Khruu has mobilised his local community to reverse ecological destruction through the resuscitation of traditional healing and herbal medicines, reforestation, soil rehabilitation and the development of organic rice farming. These efforts have gone hand-in-hand with community-centred initiatives such as the construction of a community rice mill, the introduction of a community currency system and the operation of community markets. Some of these activities have also involved national NGOs which have been attracted to the area by this practical example of the localist, grassroots and community culture-focused form of development that they philosophically follow (Parnwell, 2005a, 2005b, 2006).

An article by Darlington (2000a; see also Darlington, 1997; 2000b; Ekachai, 1994; Udomittipong, 2000) discusses the work of ‘environmentalist monks’ in Thailand and this initiative is also outlined on the Harvard University *Forum on Religion and Ecology* website:

“Drawing on Buddhist principles and practices, ecology monks have adapted traditional rituals and ceremonies to draw attention to environmental problems, raise awareness about the value of nature, and inspire people to take part in conservation efforts. Ceremonies such as tree ordination rituals (*buat ton mai*), in which trees are blessed and wrapped in saffron robes to signify their sacred status, are part of a larger effort to foster a conservation ethic rooted in Buddhist principles and bolstered by Buddhist practices.”³⁶

5.3 Buddhist economics³⁷

The term ‘Buddhist Economics’ first appeared in an essay by E. F. Schumacher³⁸, published in *Asia: A Handbook* (Wint, 1966) and later collected with other essays in Schumacher’s famous volume *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973). This latter book has been translated into 27 languages and in 1995 was named as one of the hundred most influential books since World War II, by the *London Times* Literary Supplement. Schumacher developed his idea of Buddhist economics when travelling in 1955 to Burma as a UN consultant. He begins the essay with the observation that: “‘Right Livelihood’ is one of the requirements of the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path. It is clear, therefore, that there must be such a thing as Buddhist economics.” He begins his discussion with an evaluation of attitudes towards labour within contemporary economics and Buddhism. Whereas the modern economist, he argues, sees human labour as “an item of cost, to be reduced to a minimum if it can not be eliminated altogether, say, by automation” (1966, p.1) and the ‘workman’ within the economist’s system considers his labour to be a sacrifice at the expense of leisure time, the Buddhist take a difference view:

“The Buddhist point of view takes the function of work to be at least threefold: to give man [*sic*] a chance to utilise and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his ego-centredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed for a becoming existence... To organise work in such a manner that it becomes meaningless, boring, stultifying, or nerve-racking for the worker would be little short of criminal; it would indicate a greater concern with goods than with people, an evil lack of compassion and a soul-destroying degree of attachment to the most primitive side of this worldly existence. Equally, to strive for leisure as an alternative to work would be considered a complete misunderstanding of one of the basic truths of human

existence, namely that work and leisure are complementary parts of the same living process and cannot be separated without destroying the joy of work and the bliss of leisure” (1966, p.2).

One arguably problematic conclusion that Schumacher draws is that a Buddhist economics is ‘needs based’, rather than to maximise production or employment, and therefore he concludes that “women, on the whole, do not need an ‘outside’ job, and the large-scale employment of women in offices or factories would be considered a sign of serious economic failure” (1966, p. 2). Their role instead is to care for children in the home. The ‘economic failure’ he alludes to consists of an economic system that puts profit and consumption above individual need and Buddhist practice. Thus, if we rewrite this from a more enlightened perspective that does not employ a biological essentialism about women’s natural roles as mothers and carers, the more important point to be made from a Buddhist perspective is that it would support a economic system based upon “the Middle Way between materialist heedlessness and traditionalist immobility, in short, of finding “Right Livelihood” (1966, p. 6).

Schumacher also draws attention to ‘production from local resources’, ‘simplicity and non-violence’ and the sustainable use of natural resources as fundamental to a Buddhist economics. While he is suggesting that the basis for such an economic system exists conceptually within Buddhist contexts, his vision does seem romantic and nostalgic. How would such a system fit within a broader global economic framework not based upon Buddhist principles? How could the will to implement and sustain such a system be generated in poor Buddhist contexts where people are already bound up in capitalistic economics and where their route out of poverty seems to be contingent upon greater incorporation into the capitalist system?

In order to begin to address these questions it would be necessary to find examples of Buddhist economics in practice, or at least to look at the writings of Buddhists about economics and development that are grounded in grassroots experience. Pryor, in two articles (1990; 1991), looks at the attitudes towards economics in Buddhist texts. In his first paper (*‘A Buddhist Economic System – In Principle’*) he concedes that his “discussion of ideas in the formal Buddhist canonical sources does not tell us anything very specific about how Buddhism is actually practiced today” (1990, p. 340). His second paper (*‘A Buddhist Economic System – In Practice’*), despite its title, continues with this emphasis. While it is important to understand what ‘tradition’ tells us about (a) Buddhist view(s) of

economics, traditional views were formulated within particular socio-economic and cultural contexts, and it is also important to investigate the articulation of traditional Buddhist ideas in the contemporary era (Dehejia and Dehejia, 1993; Payutto, 1994). However, I will begin with a brief discussion of Pryor's articles and will then move on to look at work by Zadeck (1993) that attempts to locate such interpretations of the Buddhist texts within a modern context, with particular reference to the Savodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka. I will finish with a discussion of an article by David Loy on the topic of Buddhism and poverty (1999).

Pryor begins his discussion with the observation that "the notion of Buddhist economics may seem a contraction in terms" (1990, p. 339).³⁹ For instance, "its doctrines of nibbana (nirvana) appear to both deny the importance of economic activity and to encourage withdrawal from the world" (1990, p. 339). However, contemporary Buddhist scholars (in both Asia and the West), he notes, are increasingly interested in examining the links between the tradition and economic systems. Pryor focuses upon the "this worldly actions' of the laity" (1990, p. 343), since the monastic community does not engage in economic activity. While

"property per se for the layman [sic] is not despised...First, the owner of such wealth should not be unduly attached to it, nor must he [sic] accumulate it by immoral means. To cultivate this non-attachment, a person must be generous and give large parts of it away, specially to the monks...Thus, wealth is a means for gaining merit. Second, such generosity leads to the accumulation of merit which, in turn, means that a person is reborn to a higher position of wealth and social status; thus inherited wealth is a sight of virtue in a previous life" (1990, p. 344-345).

Pryor also stresses that the "Buddha saw no virtue in poverty" (1990, p. 345), since it can impede one's ability to understand and live by the *dhamma*.

In his second article, Pryor is interested to understand how the economic principles expounded in the Pali Canon (the Theravada Buddhist set of texts), have influenced actual economic behaviour. He begins by pointing out that Theravada Buddhism does not have a system of giving to the poor, since it was primarily the monks who were the recipients of donations. He does suggest, however, that it is not indifferent to the poor, since the moral virtues of compassion and generosity are regarded as one way of increasing merit. Moreover, the revered Buddhist Kings were known for the financial aid that they gave to the poor and donations to the monastic orders did then place the monks in a position of

being able to provide refuge to the destitute or help the poor. Thus, “although there is little discussion of distributive justice, redistribution of income, either through the public, private, or monastery sectors, is certainly regarded in a favorable light” (1991, p. 1).

He argues that “Buddhism is not inimical to material prosperity [...since it...] is not just a religion of the monks, but also of the laity” (1991, p. 7). However, this observation, he suggests, was not taken into consideration by Max Weber in his writing on the tradition. In a discussion entitled ‘*The Other-Worldliness of Buddhism and Its Economic Consequences*’ (1968, pp. 627-30), Weber notes that:

“the impact of Buddhism varies from country to country, depending upon the cultural milieu in which it is found. However, in all of them “no motivation toward a rational system for the methodical control of life flowed from Buddhist...piety.” Although the doctrine does leave “room for the acquisitive drive of the tradesman, the interest of the artisan in sustenance, and the traditionalism of the peasant,” it accepts “this world as externally given” and does not provide for a “rationalized ethical transformation” of existing conditions which is necessary either to improve one’s own economic condition or that of society in general. Although a type of capitalism has existed in these countries in a modest sense, “there was no development toward ‘modern capitalism’, nor even any stirrings in that direction. Above all, there evolved no ‘capitalist spirit’ in the sense that is distinctive of ascetic Protestantism”” (1991, p. 7).

Thus, in focusing upon the monastic strand within Buddhism, Pryor argues that Weber missed the contribution of the laity. For instance, Zen Buddhism “has had an extremely strong cultural impact on Japan, has certain important other-worldly aspects, and yet this has not prevented Japan from achieving an impressive degree of economic development...the relationships between ‘other-worldly’ Buddhism and economic and political systems are much more complicated than Weber suggested (a matter explored by a number of writers e.g. Tambiah [1984], Sarkisyanz [1965]) (1991, p. 7-8).

Zadek (1993) writes that his work takes “the debate beyond his [Pryor’s] focus upon the canonical texts and into the heartland of Buddhist, into ‘practice’ itself” (1993, p. 433). He discusses the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka as a “community organization working to improve the situation of people in rural areas throughout Sri Lanka” (1993, p. 436). He continues, “important here is that the philosophy and imagery through which Sarvodaya’s aims and approach are articulated are drawn from a combination of Gandhian and Buddhist principles” (1993, p. 436; (Ariyaratne, 1978-91; Macy, 1985; Batchelor and Brown, 1992). While the extent of the successes of Sarvodaya has been a

subject of considerable debate, Zadeck suggests that his paper does “illustrate the types of actions and forms of organization that might arise from people rooted in Buddhist perspectives, and the kind of tensions that can built up around such approaches” (1993, p. 437).⁴⁰

5.3.1 Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement

Founded by A.T. Ariyaratne, in 1958, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, is an organization based upon Buddhist and Gandhian principles that provides development projects for Sri Lankan villages (Zadek and Szabo, 1993; Ariyaratne, 1978-91, 1979, 1980a, 1980b, 1982, 1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1996; Ariyaratne and Macy, 1992). It is the largest indigenous organization working in reconstruction following the 2004 tsunami. As Zadeck tells us,

“the critical feature of Sarvodaya’s method is embodied in its approach to village-level consultation and mobilization. Sarvodaya has evolved a process of decision-making at village level which would in secular ‘development vocabulary’ be called *participative decision-making* (Chambers, 1992; Max-Neef, 1991). This includes, (for example, meetings of the entire village *in family gatherings explain*, and the formation of groups within the village (women, youth, elders, etc), who are then encouraged to articulate their own needs and the path by which those needs might be achieved (usually with some technical, organizational or material help from Sarvodaya)” (1993, p. 436).

While the movement considers itself to be founded upon Buddhist principles, its website stresses that:

“Sarvodaya is clearly rooted in Gandhian and Buddhist traditions, but actively engages people of all religions and ethnic backgrounds. Events at the village, district and national levels often begin with non-denominational meditation and invocations from the perspectives of all religions represented. Sarvodaya builds houses side by side for Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus. Peace Secretariat teams are led by Muslim, Christian and Hindu Sarvodaya personnel. The Movement consciously directs its efforts to people of all religious persuasions. Its purpose is not to proselytise but to help participants see their common humanity. Many people are rightfully concerned about the recipients of relief supplies. We want to assure you that every effort is made to serve Sri Lankans of all religions in all parts of Sri Lanka.”⁴¹

Its strategic development plan is divided into three interlocking dimensions: ‘consciousness goal’; ‘economics goal’; and ‘power goal’.⁴² The ‘consciousness goal’ involves the “transformation of human consciousness through spiritual, moral and cultural awakening, and deepening societal commitment

to non-violence”; the ‘economics goal’ involves “transformation of the society through the creation of a full engagement economic system that creates sustainable village economies which meet the 10 basic needs of all Sri Lankans through social, economic and technological empowerment”; and the ‘power goal’ involves the “transformation of the political system to establish community self governance (*gram swara*), participatory democracy and good governance through political and legal empowerment.”⁴³

5.3.2 Buddhism, poverty, debt and borrowing

Loy, in his article ‘*Buddhism and Poverty*’ (1999), is interested in modern application of traditional Buddhist thinking about economics to an understanding of poverty (see also Loy, no date; Sizemore and Swearer, 1990). He provides a critique of the neoliberal economic approach of the contemporary development project and argues that Buddhist teachings can provide both alternative models of development that do not have as many negative consequences as the neoliberal model and resources to deal with those negative consequences. He suggests that development projects which aim to “end poverty by ‘developing’ a society into an economy focused on consumption are grasping the snake by the wrong end” (1999, p. 4) since the

“single-minded pursuit of material wealth will not make human beings happy or even rich. A world in which envy (*issa*) and miserliness (*macchariya*) predominate cannot be considered one in which poverty has been eliminated. This follows from the second noble truth of the Buddha: the cause of *dukkha* is *tanha* ‘craving’. When human beings gain an intense acquisitive drive for some object, that object becomes a cause of suffering” (1999, p. 4).

Being in a situation of poverty also “leads to borrowing and increasing debts and thus ever-increasing suffering” (1999, p. 1). However, this is not just a consequence of being ‘poor’ but also because humans tend to be attached to material goods and sensory pleasure. So the eradication of poverty is not just a matter of more provision of material wealth but should go hand in hand with a process of transformation within the individual where he/she realizes that craving material wealth (beyond the satisfaction of basic needs) is a cause of attachment and suffering. Moreover, in one text from the Pali Canon, the *Anguttara Nikaya*, Loy tells us that “the Buddha speaks of the four kinds of happiness (*sukha*) attained by householders: possessing enough material resources, enjoying those resources, sharing them with relations and friends, and not being in debt” (1999, p. 4):

“And what is the happiness of freedom from debt (*ananasukha*)? Herein, a son of good family owes no debt, be it great or small, to anyone at all. He experiences pleasure and happiness, reflecting. ‘I owe no debts, be they great or small, to anyone at all.’ This is called the happiness of freedom from debt....

“When he realizes the happiness of being free from debt, he is in a position to appreciate the happiness of owning possessions. As he uses his possessions, he experiences the happiness of enjoyment...” [A.II.69]⁴⁴

‘Appreciating the happiness of owning possessions’ is at the heart of the Buddhist attitude towards wealth, where, as Sizemore and Swearer write, “to be non-attached is to possess and use material things but not to be possessed or used by them” (1990, p. 2).

However, the Buddha did not consider that avoiding personal debt and poverty was the responsibility of the householder alone (i.e. poverty is not just a consequence of greed for material possessions that leads to borrowing, debt and poverty). Instead, rulers must do their best to prevent poverty amongst their people:

“Thus from not giving of property to the needy, poverty became rife, from the growth of poverty, the taking of what was not given increased, from the increase of theft, the use of weapons increased, from the increased use of weapons, the taking of life increased - and from the taking of life, people’s lifespan decreased, their beauty decreased” (D.III.68, cited in Harvey, 2000, p. 197).

Harvey gives a further example of the Mahayana philosopher Nagarjuna advising a King that he should:

“Cause the blind, sick, the lowly, the protectorless, the wretched and the crippled to equally attain food and drink without interruption (verse 320). Always care compassionately for the sick, the unprotected, those stricken with suffering, the lowly and the poor and take special care to nourish them (verse 243). Provide extensive care for the persecuted, the victims (of disasters), the stricken and diseased, and for worldly beings in conquered areas (verse 251). Provide stricken farmers with seeds and sustenance, eliminate high taxes by reducing their rate (verse 252). Eliminate thieves and robbers in your own and others’ countries. Please set prices fairly and keep profits level (when things are scarce) (verse 254). (Raja-parikatha-ratnamala, cited in Harvey 2000, p. 199)

Harvey writes that, ‘Robert Thurman sees such advice as outlining ‘a welfare state...a rule of compassionate socialism’ (1985:128)” (2000, p. 199).

5.4 Buddhism and gender

Key questions for examination will include: do Buddhist teachings discriminate against women and to what extent are women allowed to take positions of leadership and responsibility within the tradition? I will investigate the links between these questions and broader gender and development concerns. While the central teachings of Buddhism can be considered as gender neutral (since they concern the ways in which the individual – regardless of sex – may overcome *dukkha*/suffering) the actual practice of the tradition has not been gender equal. In many instances, women have been denied equal ordination rights with men and pervasive across Buddhist traditions is the idea that women are a lower rebirth than men. The Buddhist texts tell us that the Buddha established a male religious order (*bhikkhu sangha*) as well as a female religious order (*bhikkhuni sangha*). This tradition has only survived continuously in Mahayana Buddhist countries, having died out within Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism by the eleventh century. The Buddha apparently had to be asked three times before he reluctantly agreed to allow women to enter the *sangha* (the first woman to be ordained was his stepmother Mahaprajapati). For a detailed discussion of the reasons why he was initially reserved about this issue, and whether or not this indicates a genuine concern that women are not really capable of leading a renunciate life, see Owen (1998). It can be suggested, on the one hand, that the Buddha was not free from social conditioning about women's capabilities or, on the other hand, that his reluctance was based upon doubts that women ordinands would be accepted by the broader society. In addition, women are expected to follow 'eight special rules' (the *garudhammas*), which some suggest is a reflection of the Buddha's initial reluctance to allow women to be ordained and that the extra rules for nuns effectively make them subservient to the monks (see Owen, 1998, p. 20-26). Others suggest that they were later additions to the tradition and did not reflect the Buddha's intentions (Kabilsingh, 1991, p. 29-30; Kusuma, 1999, p. 20; Tsomo, 1999, p. 27).

The marginalisation of women within the Buddhist tradition, particularly within Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism where women have not been able to fully ordain, has led some to make links between the gender hierarchies in Buddhism and wider socio-cultural discrimination against women. One way of strengthening women's position within the tradition as well as within society, it is argued, is to allow women the same ordination rights as men.⁴⁵ With women in positions of leadership in Buddhism they would be more likely to be able to challenge negative stereotypes held about women, as well as to provide positive role models. For instance, the *bhikkhuni* ordination has been recently revived in Sri

Lanka and there is a movement in Thailand to do the same there (although it faces fierce opposition). A strong theme within this movement is the argument that gender hierarchies within Thai Buddhism have a broader cultural impact upon social attitudes that disempower women. As van Esterik writes, Buddhism is a “key component of Thai identity” providing “a way of viewing the world, a sense of reality, moral standards, and a shared language and metaphors for analyzing their existing life situation” (2000, p. 65-66; Peach, 2005, p. 124). Buddhism reinforces the understanding that women are a lower rebirth than men because of *kamma* acquired in previous lives (Owen, 1998) and “women are socialised to be relational, socially embedded and family oriented rather than independent, autonomous, self-determining individuals” (Peach, 2005, p. 124). This intrinsic inferiority of women is reinforced within the structure of everyday public Buddhist practice and custom:

“Men perform all the public roles of Buddhism, ordained as monks or as lay officiants, leading the chanting, conducting rituals, and participating as members of the *wat* (temple) committee. In addition, the organisation of space in the meeting hall clearly denotes the differential status distinctions between monks and lay persons, elders and younger people, and women and men. Monks sit upon a raised platform, denoting higher status. Elderly men sit closest to the monks, followed by younger men. Women sit around the perimeter. The elderly men make merit by placing food in the monks’ bowls first, followed by the younger men. Not until the youngest boy has made his offering will the most elderly woman lead the other women to make their offerings” (Klunklin and Greenwood, 2005, p. 48).

Many advocates of the *bhikkhuni* ordination consider that there is a very direct relationship between the low status of women in Thai Buddhism and the inferior status of women in Thai society, which places them at risk of abuses such as domestic violence and sex trafficking, as well increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. There is a body of literature that examines the relationship between Thai Buddhism and women’s oppression in Thailand, particularly with respect to the issues of sex trafficking and HIV (Klunklin and Greenwood, 2005; Peach, 2000; 2005; Thitsa, 1980). For instance, as the activist and writer Khuankaew suggests:

“One of the core causes of violence against women has not yet been touched upon – the beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and values that come out of a patriarchal society influenced by Buddhism itself...in the discussions at the local, national and international meetings of women organizations the root causes of prostitution have always been poverty, western models of development and modernization...Hardly mentioned as a cause of prostitution is the lack of leadership roles for women in Buddhism” (2002, p. 16).

In Thailand the only formal religious option available to women is life as a white robed *mae chi*. As Puntarigivat argues “the replacement of *mae chi* by a *bhikkhuni* institution would greatly raise women’s status at the core of Thai culture and would begin to address many of women’s problems in Thailand – including poverty, child abuse and prostitution” (2001, p. 225). The reasons that girls and women enter prostitution in Thailand are complex, and researchers are likely to point to the lack of educational and economic opportunities for poor females, as well as the demands of a profitable sex-tourism industry. However, the tendency of Buddhist teachings not to view sex work as immoral or degrading removes much of the stigma associated with similar work in many other cultures (Peach, 2005, p. 125). In Thai culture, prostitutes are not viewed with universal negativity and in the Buddhist texts we find stories about prostitutes, often friends of the Buddha. Moreover, as Peach tells us, one popular attitude towards prostitution in Thailand is that it enables women to earn money that they can give as donations to monks. This provides them with an opportunity to earn merit in order to improve their *kamma* for a better rebirth in the next life (i.e. as a man), implying that women are considered to be less important than men (2005, p. 125). Thus, “traditional Thai Buddhist culture functions to legitimate the trafficking industry, and thereby deny the human rights of women involved in sexual slavery” (Kabilsingh, 1991, p. 67; Muecke, 1992; Puntarigivat, 2001, p. 227; Peach, 2000, p. 65; Satha-Anand, 1999).

Some women within Tibetan Buddhism are also campaigning for full ordination rights as an important means of transforming the status and opportunities for (not fully ordained) nuns as well as lay women. There is an interesting transnational aspect to these campaigns. For instance, the women involved in the *bhikkhuni* movement in Thailand are linked to broader networks of Buddhist women in both Thailand and abroad. On an international level, the Thai or Tibetan *bhikkhuni* movement reflects a broader campaign to secure equal ordination rights and status for women across Buddhist traditions.⁴⁶ In contexts where religious beliefs, discourses and practices continue to have a strong public appeal, strategies to empower women within these traditions have are relevant for development.

5.5 Buddhism and peace building

Although Buddhism is typically associated with peace and non-violence (Edwards, 1998), Buddhist countries have not been immune to outbreaks of war. Nevertheless, support for violence is difficult to find within the Buddhist texts and the tradition holds many resources that can support peace-building

endeavours (Chodron et al. 2006; Thich Nhat Hanh, 2005; Sachs, 2006; Topmiller, 2006; Khong, 2007).⁴⁷ However, as Harvey writes:

“these resources and ideals must sometimes be better known and applied more fully... The post-colonial period has left a legacy of instability and social readjustment in several Buddhist lands, and it is clear that, in certain quarters, there has been a danger of religious revival degenerating into exclusion of non-Buddhist ethnic groups (Sri Lanka), egalitarianism degenerating into hatred (Cambodia), and anti-colonial nationalism degenerating into xenophobia (Burma)” (2000, p. 283).

Puri's (2006) book about the Engaged Buddhism and the Dalai Lama discusses his thought on issues such as non-violence, human rights and the political autonomy of Tibet. He is a particularly good example of a Buddhist figure who combines attention to pressing socio-political issues of the current era with traditional Buddhist teachings. However, other figures such as A.T. Ariyatane (Sri Lanka), Aung San Suu Kyi (Burma), Sulak Sivaraksa (Thailand), Dr Ambedkar (India), Thich Nhat Hanh (Vietnam), Maha-Ghosananda (Cambodia), Nichidatsu Fujii, Daisaku Ikeda and Nikkyo Niwano (Japan) have also sought to transform situations of violence into peace through employing Buddhist principles.

6 Conclusion

In this paper my aim has been to provide an introduction to key Buddhist teachings and values and to relate these to issues that are relevant to development. It is not a comprehensive study, but more an indicative overview that individual researchers can use as a starting point either for more focused literature reviews (e.g. on particular development concerns or on the relationship between religion and development in different locations) or as a basis for guiding research in the field.

Notes

- 1 Within Mahayana and Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism we find figures called bodhisattvas. Bodhisattva means 'being-for-enlightenment': these are individuals who take vows (the '*bodhisattva* vows'), including to work towards the enlightenment of all beings while at the same time progressing their own development towards full Buddhahood (the '*bodhisattva* path'). This contrasts with the aim within the earlier tradition of Theravada Buddhism, where the emphasis is upon one's own enlightenment without the compassionate focus upon helping others to also become enlightened. Popular bodhisattvas include Maitreya and Guanyin/Avalokitesvara.
- 2 Pali is the original language of Indian Theravada Buddhism and Sanskrit of Indian Mahayana Buddhism. The early texts have also been translated into other languages.
- 3 In Sanskrit, for example, karma is a noun derived from the verbal root 'kr', which means 'to work'. However, in addition to meaning work or action, it also refers to the results or 'fruits' of one's actions. In Indic religions it is karma that keeps the individual bound to future rebirths and which influences the nature of the particular rebirth.
- 4 See Skilton (1994) for an historical account of spread and emergence of different schools.
- 5 See Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) for discussion of Protestant Buddhism in Sri Lanka Buddhism. See ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/allen.htm for a review of this book.
- 6 A political party in India, representing dalits.
- 7 Mahatma Gandhi gave the name harijan ('born of god') to those who stood outside the caste system and were otherwise known as 'outcastes' or 'untouchables'. Today the term dalit is used and preferred in self-designation, variously translated as 'crushed', 'stepped on' or 'oppressed'.
- 8 Dalits in conversion ceremony, 14th October 2006 news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6050408.stm
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Hinayana means 'lesser vehicle' and Mahayana means 'greater vehicle'. Coming as a later tradition, and one that saw itself as being more authentic than the earlier Theravada, Mahayana Buddhists referred to the Theravada as Hinayana. From the Theravada perspective it is a pejorative term and not one used in self-reference.
- 11 Kalupahana (1995).
- 12 Bibliography on Buddhist Ethics by Peter Harvey, Journal of Buddhist Ethics 7 (2000) jbe.gold.ac.uk/7/harvey001.html.
- 13 Samyutta Nikaya LVI, 11 www.buddhanet.net/4noble.htm.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 The additional three precepts are: not eating after midday; not engaging in entertainment; and abstaining from high or large beds.
- 18 www.usaid.gov/kh/Success_Stories/cambodiastory6.pdf
- 19 www.unaids.org/en/MediaCentre/PressMaterials/FeatureStory/20061114_UNDPLao_en.asp
- 20 www.buddhanet.net/sangha-metta/project.html
- 21 The annual conference of the International AIDS Society typically has presentations on this topic (see www.iasociety.org/search/search.asp?pageid=1110&searchtype=3, to search past conference abstracts).
- 22 For a discussion of the possible reasons for this reluctance see Owen, 1998. She suggests that perhaps passages such as these were added later to reflect the interests of a patriarchal sangha. Gross proposes that the Buddha "was not entirely free of the social conditioning of his times. I do not believe that enlightenment entails a timelessly perfect social conscience of universal scientific and historical knowledge. Therefore, it did not occur to the Buddha to encourage women to be equal to men in their unconventionality and counter-cultural activities" (Gross 2001, p. 7).
- 23 Below I will discuss recent initiatives within Theravada and Vajrayana Buddhism to reintroduce the bhikkhuni ordination and the links that this is considered to have with women's empowerment in society more broadly.

- ²⁴ The reason that I say ‘more or less’ here is to draw attention to the fact that from the outset women had to follow more rules than men (in the Theravada women had 311 rules compared to the 227 of the monks). Women also had to follow an additional ‘eight special rules’ (garudhammas). Some argue that this implies recognition of their inferior status, while others draw attention to the function of some of these rules in protecting women.
- ²⁵ See Damien Keown (1992) Bibliography on Buddhism and Human Rights, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 2 jbe.gold.ac.uk/2/rightbib.html ; on-line conference on “Buddhism and Human Rights”, 1-14 October 1995, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* jbe.gold.ac.uk/online.html; see also Husted el at. 1998.
- ²⁶ www.bond.org.uk/database/members/Default.asp?strRequest=memberdetails&intOrgID=115
- ²⁷ <http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/online.html>: Journal of Buddhist Ethics, online conference on Socially Engaged Buddhism, April 7th-14th 2000.
- ²⁸ http://www.bpf.org/html/resources_and_links/bibliography/bibliography.html
- ²⁹ http://www.bpf.org/html/about_us/mission/mission.html
- ³⁰ See http://www.bpf.org/html/resources_and_links/bibliography/bibliography.html#chapter04 for a selection of resources on Engaged Buddhism in Asia. See also ‘Engaged Buddhism’ at <http://www.dharmanet.org/engaged.html>
- ³¹ <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/religion/buddhism/bibliography.html>
- ³² <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/religion/buddhism/index.html>, this article was originally published in *Earth Ethics* 10(1), 1998.
- ³³ <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/religion/buddhism/index.html>
- ³⁴ <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/religion/buddhism/projects/index.html>
- ³⁵ <http://www.arcworld.org/>
- ³⁶ http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/religion/buddhism/projects/thai_ecology.html
- ³⁷ <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/disciplines/economics/bibliography/noyce6a.html>
- ³⁸ <http://www.shambhala.org/centers/victoria/economics.pdf>
- ³⁹ The focus of his discussion is upon Theravada Buddhism, practised in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka and Thailand.
- ⁴⁰ See below for a discussion of Sarvodaya.
- ⁴¹ <http://www.sarvodaya.org/about/faq/>
- ⁴² www.sarvodaya.org/about/strategic-goals/
- ⁴³ Ibid. See also: Arrindell, 1983; Bobilin, 1988; Bond, 1996; Colletta, 1982; Dasgupta, 1982; Dissanayake, 1991; Goulet, 1981; Hewage, 1973; Kantowsky, 1980; Moore, 1981; Perera, 1995; 1992; Williams, 1984; Wismeijer, 1981.
- ⁴⁴ www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/9280/econ5.htm
- ⁴⁵ Even in contexts where women are allowed full ordination rights they still suffer discrimination both within Buddhism and in wider society. Thus, some women within these contexts are also campaigning for improved conditions and a transformation in gender oppressive ideologies supported by Buddhism that have an impact upon social attitudes towards women.
- ⁴⁶ For instance, in July 2007 in Hamburg ‘The First International Congress on Buddhist Women’s Role in the Sangha: Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Lineages’ was held; there is an annual award ceremony for ‘Outstanding Women in Buddhism’ that has been held since 2002 on International Women’s Day at the United Nations in Bangkok; and there is an international Buddhist women’s organisation called Sakhyadhita that holds a conference every other year
- ⁴⁷ See bibliography on ‘war, violence, conflict, non-violence’ on the Buddhist Peace Fellowship website: www.bpf.org/html/resources_and_links/bibliography/bibliography.html

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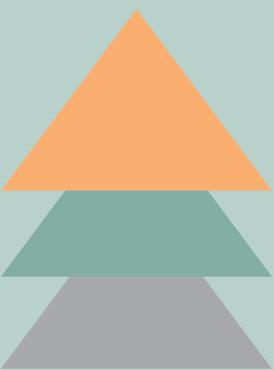
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