

Sakyadhita

International Association of Buddhist Women

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SHARING IMPRESSIONS, MEETING EXPECTATIONS Evaluating the 12th Sakyadhita Conference

By Titi Soentoro

It was a great joy to be among such esteemed scholars, nuns, and laywomen at the 12th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women held in Bangkok from June 12 to 18, 2011. It felt like such an honor just to be in their company. This feeling was shared by all the participants. Around the general theme, "Leading to Liberation, the conference addressed many issues of Buddhist women, including issues that people don't generally associate with Buddhist women, such as the environment and LGBTQ concerns.

At the end of the conference, participants were asked to share their feelings and insights, and to offer suggestions for the next Sakyadhita Conference. The evaluations asked which aspects they enjoyed the most and the least, which panels and workshops they learned the most from, and for suggestions for themes and topics for the next Sakyadhita Conference in India. In many languages, participants shared their reflections on all aspects of the conference

What Participants Appreciated Most

Overall, respondents found the conference very interesting and enjoyable. One said that she appreciated "the extraordinary beauty of the site (and) open-air setting for panels." Another concurred, "I particularly loved the setting of the conference. It was wonderful to be in such a sacred space and outdoors for much of the time." Some said, "All the programs were interesting" and, "the presenters presented good papers." Another said, "I truly enjoyed all of it...all aspects, especially the tour after the conference."

Meditation was the activity that respondents enjoyed most, particularly the chanting on opening and closing days. Many different meditation traditions were introduced and practiced during the conference, both in daily sessions and in workshops. The peaceful morning meditation sessions surrounded by trees created calm, joy, energy, and a sense of community as daughters of the Buddha. The meditation workshop guided by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo was a session that many respondents felt they learned most from. They also appreciated "Meditation that Works for Daily Lives" by Sister Khema, "Meditation Instructions" by Maechee Sansanee, and "Meditation through Singing and Tea" by Shen-chon Lai. Not surprisingly, many participants suggested meditation in daily life and diverse meditation traditions as topics for discussion and practice at the next Sakyadhita conference.

As one respondent exclaimed, "Some really great panels this year!" One favorite was The



Maechee Sansanee, host of the 12th Sakyadhita Conference, and her translator Joy. Photo credit: Hsingju Lin.

Bhikkhuni Issue Revisited, where speakers discussed *bhikkhunis'* experiences and plans for reviving the *Bhikkhuni* Sangha in different countries. Another favorite was Speaking of Other Religions, which described women's understandings and experiences of liberation in different religions. Participants found Karma Lekshe Tsomo's talk on "Mother Teresa and the Bodhisattva Ideal" and Jewish scholar Bonna Devora Habermann's metaphor of giving birth as liberation very thought-provoking. Other thought-provoking panels included Buddhist Women and Global Sustainability, Leading Buddhist Women, The Many Forms of Compassion, and Mr. Dharma, Ms. Samsara: Challenging Stereotypes. Some people mentioned specific papers, such as "May All Sentient Beings Be Well and Happy," "Women's Leadership and the Buddhist Concept of Non-Self," "Animal Release in Taiwanese Buddhism," "A Buddhist Nun's Encounters with the Charter for Compassion," and "Establishing the *Bhikkhuni* Sangha in Nepal." One respondent said, "I enjoyed the various panels that told of the work and problems the nuns were facing. Most of this was new to me and gave me great gratitude for how much is provided for my community to lead a monastic life." Another said, "I learned the most from the panel on New Directions toward Buddhist Social Reform, especially from *Bhikkhuni* Rattanavali's paper."

Participants also learned a great deal from specific workshops. Among the favorites were "Yoga for Wisdom and Liberation," "Working with Survivors of Sexual Violence," "Chinese Guqin and Traditional Medicine," "Lineage and Leadership in Taiwanese Buddhism," "Being a Peace Leader and Healing Conflicts Using Social Intelligence," and "Forgiveness Practice." One person loved "The Authentic Compassion Writing Workshop" so much that she joined this workshop everyday!

Most respondents could not think of any panel or workshop that they enjoyed the least and many said that they enjoyed them all. Many mentioned that they appreciated the opportunity to raise questions and receive answers during the discussions. "I enjoyed meeting and talking with women from different traditions. Many of the panels were excellent and I learned a lot.... and (also from) informal conversations with women." Respondents said they loved the atmosphere of the conference, where they could meet and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. Many also expressed appreciation for the environment, the food,

and the wonderful, enthusiastic, and energetic volunteers.

Always Hoping to Improve

To help improve the Sakyadhita conferences, participants were also asked what they enjoyed the least. Most suggestions concerned logistics rather than substance. One said, "There were too many panels and too much sitting, but she didn't want to miss anything." Another suggested that we have more breaks for meeting and talking to people informally. Some people had difficulty with the Bangkok heat and wished there were more fans. Some had difficulty with the hotel shuttle arrangements and wished the hotels were closer to the venue. One person suggested more small discussion groups.

Sometimes participants' opinions varied widely. Some found the conference a bit too long, while others found it too short. Some thought that the open-air conference hall was unsuitable for an international conference, while others found it refreshing. Some appreciated the question and answer sessions, while some did not. Most loved the cultural performances, but some did not. Some wished there were more workshops in different languages, but people had nothing but praise for the amazing volunteer translation teams who worked night and day to provide simultaneous translation into eight different languages.

Diversity: The Strength of Sakyadhita

We received a long list of suggested topics for presentations, discussions, and workshops for the next conference. Many are eager to discuss various meditation topics and compassionate social service activities, such as education for women in developing countries and care for disadvantaged children. Many also wish to discuss the development of Sakyadhita and Buddhist women in general.

The responses to the conference evaluations reflect a variety of feelings, opinions, and suggestions from participants. The responses also reflect Buddhist women's different backgrounds as *bhikkhunis*, eight- and ten-precept nuns, scholars, and lay practitioners, all with diverse interests. The responses are a mirror of the richness of Buddhist women. Their diversity is unifying and encouraging and strengthens them to walk through life compassionately.



Thai conference volunteers enjoy their work. Photo credit: Hsingju Lin.

Cover photo credit: Naomi Chen.

13th Conference Theme: "Socially Engaged Buddhism" or "Buddhism for a Just World"

13th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women Vaishali, India, January 2013

Sakyadhita is pleased to announce its 13th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, to be held in Vaishali, India, followed by a tour to the Buddhist pilgrimage sites. Vaishali is the place where Mahaprajapati, the Buddha's foster mother, became the first Buddhist nun. Suggested panel topics include:

Transforming Ourselves

Self-Esteem, Self-Promotion & No-Self
Constructive Criticism & Toxic Mind
Cultivating Confidence
Vipassana & Mental Development
What is a Liberated Mind?
The Dharma of Aging

Engaging the Dharma in Relationships

Capable Women Working Together
Creating a Stable Sangha
What Do We Mean by Social Status?
Buddhist Women & Human Rights
Transforming Structural Violence
Strengthening Lay-Monastic Relations
Buddhism & Social Justice

Nuns in the World

Legal Recognition for Nuns
Bhikkhuni Revolution
Theravada Nuns Across Cultures
The Transnational Bhikkhuni Movement
Becoming Visible: Nuns in the West

Expressing the Dharma

Interpreting the Dharma
Documenting Women's Stories
Dharma & the Media
Is There a Feminine Dharma? Voices, Forms & Expressions

Envisioning the Future

The Future of Sakyadhita
The Next Generation: Dhamma for Young Children
Buddhism & National Identity
Emerging Voices: Dharma & Youth
Ambedkar's Message for Women

Workshop Ideas

Young Buddhist Women
Buddhist Women as Scholars
Funding the Dharma
Buddhist Feminist Leadership
Negotiating Hierarchies
Conflict Resolution in Buddhist Centers

THE QUESTION OF LINEAGE IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM

A Woman's Perspective

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Some years ago I was visiting a Tibetan Nunnery in northern India and was shown into their shrine room, which in those days also doubled as a dining room. The main image was of Shakyamuni Buddha, flanked by the bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara and Mañjushri. With pride, my guides pointed out the thangkas of the lineage lamas that had been presented to them by their head rinpoche. There were about ten or more thangkas around the walls, filled with icons of each of the heads of that lineage, starting from the founder in the tenth century up until quite recently. I exclaimed, "But haven't you noticed that the figures in this shrine room are all males? This is a nunnery, but where are the representations of enlightened women?" The nuns were surprised, because they had never thought of this fact before. They took it for granted that the symbols of enlightenment would have a male body.

The Buddhism of Tibet, and likewise of other Asian countries, is, of course, patriarchal. This means that the Dharma from the time of the Buddha until today has been written about and handed down by male scholars and practitioners who are usually monks. Nowadays, we are much more aware that the Dharma is presented from an almost totally male perspective and often by men who, from their infancy, have had little or nothing to do with women and therefore regard the feminine as suspect, if not downright dangerous. We all know this.

One of the reasons for this is that, in Tibet, lineages were almost exclusively in male hands. This reflects a phenomenon,

restricted to Tibet and the surrounding regions, of recognizing the rebirths of realized practitioners, known as *tulkus*. This means that when a great lama or teacher dies, then after a certain time has passed, a search is made for the reincarnation. Relying on previous indications and signs, together with the dreams and prophecies of other high rinpoches, the new incarnation is found and brought to his monastery at an early age. My own lama was enthroned at the age of two, while he was still wearing diapers under his robes and drinking milk from a bottle.



Venerable Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and Sr. Malia Wong. Photo credit: Hsingju Lin.

These incarnate lamas, of which there are hundreds, are automatically given special training to prepare them in their role. They receive teachings and empowerments from the highest lamas within their lineages. They are often kept apart from ordinary monks and are raised to become the teachers and heads of their monasteries.

The lineage holders, especially, are brought up as Dharma princes and infused with all the empowerments, oral transmissions, and knowledge that they will need to enable them to transmit these same traditional teachings to others in the future. In other words, a lineage master will transmit the complete Dharma treasure of his tradition to his most worthy disciples, who are often the recognized incarnations of his own masters. Thus, after a time, the lineage of lamas becomes an exclusive “boys’ club,” with just a few lamas of that lineage passing the ball of tradition among themselves. There is no room for women in such an all-male setup.

Once I asked my lama, Khamtrul Rinpoche, why there are so few female tulkus. Rinpoche replied that his sister had more signs surrounding her birth than he himself had had. Everyone was hopeful, but when the child turned out to be a girl, they were very disappointed and just considered it to be a mistake. Rinpoche explained, “If the child had been a boy, he would have been well taken care of, probably placed in a monastery, then educated and groomed as someone special, but since the baby was a girl, her spiritual upbringing was ignored and she had no chance to be trained in the Dharma.” Khamtrul Rinpoche said that this was fairly common in Tibet and such women were usually married off. Only after their children were grown, did they have the opportunity to go off and spend time in personal cultivation. But since they had little education, they were unable to benefit many others through their teachings, even should they attain personal realization. Khamtrul Rinpoche added, “It has nothing to do with inherent male superiority. It was just social conditions that made it difficult to choose coming back in a female body.” It is highly unlikely that the highest lineage lamas would even acknowledge one of their own numbers incarnating in a female body.



Vietnamese volunteers celebrate. Photo credit: Hsingju Lin.



Mindful movement at the Sakyadhita conference in Bangkok.

Nonetheless, occasionally female masters did appear in the early days of the lineage. For instance, in the Vajrayogini and Chakrasamvara tantric lineage of the Drukpa Kagyu tradition, there appear two yoginis – Kunden Rema and Machik Konjo – who came after Rechungpa, the heart son of Milarepa. Women were accepted as long as it was a yogic lineage, but once the practices were absorbed into the monasteries, the lineage became exclusively male.

However, there are some practice lineages that were started by female practitioners. One is the Nyungné purification tradition that includes fasting and prostrations based on devotion to the thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. This tradition was founded on the visions of Gelongma Palmo (Sanskrit: Bhikshuni Lakshmi), a nun from a royal family in India who was cured of leprosy by this practice. Nyungné is the one tradition in Tibet that monks, nuns, and laypeople practice together.

Another important early lineage associated with women was the Shangpa Kagyu, a lineage that went underground after some centuries, but resurfaced in the late nineteenth century due to the efforts of Jamgon Kongtrul. More recently, Kalu Rinpoche and his followers did much to re-establish the practice of this yogic tradition. The Shangpa Kagyu lineage is associated with two important yoginis, Niguma and Sukhasiddhi. Although they were both born in Kashmir at around the same time, it seems that they never met. Niguma was the sister of the great scholar and yogi Naropa, but she received her teaching directly from the primordial Buddha Vajradhara and some human gurus and attained a rainbow body during her lifetime.

Sukhasiddhi was married and had six children. Later in life, she met the great ascetic Virupa and received empowerment from him. In one evening, she attained enlightenment and the rainbow body simultaneously. Both Niguma and Sukhasiddhi were teachers of the eleventh-century Tibetan practitioner Kyungpo Nalor who founded the Shangpa Kagyu tradition.

Another important lineage known as *chöd* (cutting off) was founded in the eleventh century by the great yogini Machik Labdron. The *chöd* practice has been incorporated by all Tibetan Buddhist schools. Although after the early days these lineages soon became almost entirely male dominated, down to the present day these practices have been especially beloved by women. Other important traditions have been passed on through the family line, rather than through an incarnation line, but again it is usually only

males who are considered eligible for high ecclesiastical office.

Unfortunately, this situation can seriously undermine the feelings of confidence and aspiration that female practitioners require as encouragement for their progress on the path. Every day, when they recite the names of the lineage of enlightened masters, hardly one of them is a woman.

In modern times, an interesting possible exception is Khandro Rinpoche Tsering Paldron, the eldest daughter of Mindrolling Trichen Rinpoche, an important Nyingma lama who died a few years ago. Since her father had no sons, Khandro Rinpoche, who is a nun, seems to have taken on the role as the head of the Mindrolling tradition and runs not only her own nunnery, but also the large Mindrolling Monastery. This lineage is well known for its strong female practitioners, called the Mindrolling Jetsunmas, which began with Mingyur Paldron in the eighteenth century. Perhaps Khandro Rinpoche will abdicate the role if and when an incarnation of her father is recognized, or maybe not. Of all the Tibetan traditions, the Nyingmapa are probably the most sympathetic towards female practitioners.

In addition, there existed at least two exclusively female lineages in Tibet that can be mentioned as exceptions to this general situation. The first was started by a princess named Chokyi Dronme during the fifteenth century. She was recognized during her lifetime as an embodiment of the tantric deity Vajravahni (Tibetan: Dorje Phagmo) in a form that is recognized as the queen of the dakinis, representations of the enlightened female principle. This was a female incarnation tradition associated with a Samding Monastery, where the residents were half monks and half nuns. She was the only woman in Tibet whom H.H. the Dalai Lama was permitted to bless by placing his hand on her head. Otherwise, in earlier times, even his own mother was only blessed with a tassel. The twelfth incarnation in this lineage, known as Samding Dorje Phagmo, presently lives in Lhasa and is employed as a high-level government official. In 1993, I visited Samding Monastery, which is situated in a spectacular location overlooking Yamdrok Lake. There we met a number of friendly resident monks who told us that the present Dorje Phagmo incarnation rebuilt the monastery after its destruction during the Cultural Revolution and comes every year to stay at the monastery for a short period. However, H. H. the 16th Karmapa mentioned to me that he met and instructed this Dorje Phagmo when she was young and did not think that she was the genuine incarnation.

The other, more recent female incarnation lineage began in the nineteenth century with a woman known as Ani Lochen Chonyi Zangmo. She was born in 1865 in Rewalsar, the sacred lake of Guru Padmasambhava near Mandi in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. She was an extraordinary practitioner who eventually founded Shugseb Nunnery southwest of Lhasa. In time, her fame grew and many of the great lamas and high government officials of the day visited her. She became known as Shugseb Jetsun Rinpoche and the nuns of her nunnery were renowned for their practice of *chöd*, following the Nyingma tradition. Shugseb Jetsun Rinpoche died in the early 1950s. At present, Shugseb Nunnery has been rebuilt both in Tibet and also in north India and the resident nuns continue to practice their traditions.

In Vietnam, I was heartened to see chapels set aside in the nunneries to honor the nun masters of their traditions, starting with paintings of Maha Prajapati Gautami preaching to her nun disciples. The nunneries display photos of their founding abbess and the subsequent abbesses up to the present. All these nuns are honored with lights, incense, and flowers. This is a tradition that is already followed in certain Buddhist countries nowadays and we sincerely hope that the custom will spread widely.

In conclusion, as nuns in the Tibetan tradition, at least those in nunneries situated in India and Nepal, continue to develop their scholastic abilities and undertake long-term meditation retreats, we hope that they will be empowered to contribute their distinctive feminine voices to the male chorus, so that finally the message of the Dharma can be sung harmoniously by a mixed choir.

LIPSTICK BUDDHISTS AND DHARMA DIVAS

Buddhism in the Most Unlikely Packages

By Lisa J. Battaglia

"You're a Buddhist?" I am often met with this rejoinder when I identify myself as a Buddhist scholar/practitioner. Implicit, and sometimes explicit, in this quizzical declaration and its accompanying tone and facial gestures are puzzlement, sometimes shock, and slight disbelief, or at least a seeming reassessment of any preconceived notion of who or what a Buddhist is. My own personal experience as a Western female Buddhist scholar/practitioner and the responses that such an identity elicits from people has spurred the current exploration of female Buddhist identity, of conceptions about "Self" and "Other," of the real and imagined intersections of East and West.

The purpose of this paper is to challenge stereotypes and assumptions about female Buddhist scholars/practitioners while simultaneously highlighting the complex and multivalent nature of female Buddhist identity. This study results from three overarching methodologies: pedagogical reflections on teaching Buddhism at the university; personal experience as a Western female Buddhist scholar/practitioner who does not fit the stereotypical profile of a Buddhist; and scholarship on contemporary "TransBuddhism," that is, "intersections of the real and the imagined, and of the Asian and the Western [Buddhists]."¹

As a teacher of Buddhism at the college-level, a preliminary and ongoing task is to unearth and challenge stereotypes, assumptions, and misconceptions about Buddhism and Buddhist cultures and peoples—for example, the notion that all Buddhists are bald, vegetarian, meditate in full lotus, wear robes, are dreadfully serious, don't wear makeup, don't play sports, and never have any fun. Such insular and erroneous conceptions contribute to



Nepali kids fashion show. Photo credit: Bhikkhuni Indawati.

"Buddhism profiling," or the creation of a normative Buddhist identity that is homogenous, static, timeless and "intellectually and morally wrong." In her exploration of "The Study of Non-Western Cultures,"² Martha Nussbaum delineates two vices of cross-cultural description: *descriptive chauvinism* and *descriptive romanticism*. *Descriptive chauvinism* consists of recreating the other in the image of oneself, or, reading the strange as exactly like what is familiar. Such a maneuver erroneously masks differences, eschews cultural sensitivity, and implicitly privileges one's own standpoint as universal and normative. Inversely, *descriptive romanticism* entails viewing another culture as excessively alien and virtually incompatible with one's own. Elements of similarity are ignored while elements that seem mysterious and exotic are highlighted.

As a scholar and teacher of Buddhism in American universities, I encounter this romanticizing impulse time and time again—from students, in scholarship, and in broader social circles. In students' imaginations, for example, Buddhist cultures inevitably emerge as paradisiacal, peaceful, and innocent, in contrast to a West that is imagined as materialistic, corrupt, and aggressive. Interestingly, in a strange inversion, this very same romanticism—replete with the impulse to idealize and oversimplify—gets mapped onto Western Buddhist practitioners. It seems that descriptive romanticism takes precedence over descriptive accuracy, whether in the classroom or in life. Consider, for example, Western Buddhist scholar/practitioner Stephen T. Asma's unabashed self-identification as a Buddhist:

I'm not a monk, or even a member of a temple. I've studied Buddhism with some amazing scholars and practitioners, and I've taught Buddhism for many years in the States and Asia.... I probably drink too much, and I'm not the least bit interested in sexual abstinence. I like the White Sox, and I eat meat.

He continues,

Frankly, I probably seem like an odd Buddhist. Whenever I mention it in conversation, people respond with incredulity. Apparently, I should look more diminutive, speak in more hushed tones, and garland myself with more hippie swag.³

While comical and brazen, Asma's reflections on his uncanny Buddhist identity illuminate broader and deeper issues of religious identity—how it is claimed, how it is categorized, and how it is perceived—as well as our encounters with and imaginings of "the Other."

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 1990 there were 404,000 self-identified, adult Buddhists in the United States. In 2008, this number rose to 1,189,000. I consider myself one amongst these self-identified, adult Buddhists in the USA, though my Buddhist identity is often perceived—by both myself and others—as implausible and tenuous, at least on the surface. Like Asma, I identify as a Buddhist, yet not of the "severe Buddhist" type. Three personal anecdotes may serve to illustrate.

A year and a half ago, I attended the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. In the early morning hours, I would go to the hotel gym to log miles on the treadmill. I would sheepishly peer through the window as my Sakyadhita sisters walked past to attend the early morning meditation session. I experienced feelings of self-consciousness, bordering on shame. Despite my experience of running as meditation in motion, how could I possibly forgo formal meditation for a hot

and sweaty fitness center? How un-Buddhist of me! Then, the strangest thing happened. I walked a bhikshuni in full monastic garb, and she began walking on the treadmill beside me. So, I thought, it is possible to be athletic and Buddhist. I later recounted this incident to a fellow Western Buddhist scholar/practitioner who was attending the conference and she confided that, when she returned back home to Canada, she was going to train for a body building competition.

Scene two, at the same conference: I was having breakfast before heading to the temple to attend Dharma talks and workshops. A small group of Dharma sisters approached my table and asked if I would like to go shopping at the Ben Thanh Market. I pause—shopping? I was overcome with excitement at the prospect of exploring a new part of the city and searching for treasures to bring back home with me. I exchanged my conference program for my wallet and headed out the door. How seemingly un-Buddhist!

A third vignette: I was attending "Exploring Buddhism: 2010 Wisdom Teachings," a seminar at a nearby college (in Massachusetts). While listening to the panel of Buddhist scholars and practitioners, my eyes wandered over to the door, where I scanned the shoes lined up neatly in a row: clogs, Birkenstocks, various eco-friendly slip-ons (all the "hippy swag" of Asma's musings). And then, standing out like a sore thumb, were my high-heeled black leather boots.

"They don't belong there," I thought. This was immediately followed by the next revelation, "Perhaps I don't belong here."

So, this begs the question: What does it mean to be a Buddhist? A female Buddhist? A female Buddhist in the West? Traditional and doctrinal criteria for assuming a Buddhist identity typically consist of taking refuge in the Triple Gem and abiding by the five ethical precepts. Yet, in reality, as Karma Lekshe Tsomo notes, "[E]stablishing religious identity is an elusive and multifaceted process, both for those who claim these identities and for those who attempt to categorize adherents according to their religious affiliation."⁴ Indeed, when we examine the category of Buddhism, we find that there are a variety of adherents, a variety of definitions of what it means to be a Buddhist, and varied perceptions of what it means to be a follower of that faith tradition. Turning the lens



Lisa Battaglia at Buddha shrine during the 11th Sakyadhita conference in Vietnam. Photo credit: Erik Van den Akker.

back on Western female Buddhists, we find that Buddhist women in North America “run the gamut”: from mothers, to corporate executives, to celibate nuns; from women in “hippy swag” to Dharma divas in high heels.⁵

Where does this leave unlikely Buddhists like me? Turning to the Buddhist record provides some insight, particularly in the metaphor of the lotus. It is said that after the Buddha’s enlightenment he had a vision of the world as being like a lotus lake with lotuses in all stages of growth: some still beneath the water, some just little buds appearing above the water, some half open, and some completely out of the water and fully open. He saw that all living beings are at different stages of development just like the lotuses. The tradition affirms that the Buddhist path is many-forked and furthermore, that different people are at different stages along the path. Examining the Buddhist historical record reveals a diversity of Buddhist practices and a diversity of Buddhists. Far from being static or uniform, Buddhist cultures and identities are complex, plural, and often fraught with contradictions and tensions.

We live in a world now characterized by “complicated interdependencies” in which East and West, self and other, do, and must, meet constantly. Such meetings across spatial and cultural boundaries require a self-critical perspective—namely, perceiving our own projections of oversimplification in relation to other cultures and traditions, as well as in relation to those cultures and traditions to which we claim allegiance. In his text, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America*, Charles Prebish challenges us to embrace diversity, both of Buddhist communities and Buddhist identities:

Perhaps the most critical issue is not how to develop some universally acceptable and probably presumptuous standard of acceptability, such as adaptation or acculturation or ethnicity, but instead to consider how American Buddhism might promote an ecumenical sense of itself that allows for and even encourages diversity, recognizing the integrity of each American Buddhist community [and, I would add, each American Buddhist individual] irrespective of how it defines itself.⁶

Recall the metaphor of the lotus. Some of us are still beneath the water, others of us are skimming the surface in full bloom. Some of us are in monastic garb, others of us are in Prada suits. Some of us shave our head in the morning, others of us reach for our mascara and hair dryer. Perhaps, it is our attachment to religious identities that causes alienation and even conflict. As Karma Lekshe Tsomo reminds us, “From a Buddhist perspective, the problem is not religion per se, but attachment to religious identities.”⁷ When encountering “the Other”—whether it is East meets West, or model Buddhist meets unlikely Buddhist—Martha Nussbaum challenges us to think in terms of common human problems and the choices we all must make:

All human beings have to confront their own mortality and cope with the fear of death; all human beings have to regulate their bodily appetites, making judgments in the areas of food, drink, and sex; all have to take some stand about property and the distribution of scarce resources; all need to have some attitude to the planning of their own lives.⁸

As the Buddha teaches us, he came to make known two things: the truth of suffering and the cessation of suffering.

Perhaps this is the crux of Buddhist identity: our shared humanity. Particularly, at this seminal time in Buddhist women’s history—when women’s full and diverse participation in Buddhism is at the forefront of global Buddhist consciousness—it is imperative to welcome all forms of female Buddhist identity with wisdom and compassion.

NOTES

1. Nalini Bhushan, Jay Garfield, and Abraham Zablocki, eds., *TransBuddhism: American Perspectives on the Transmission, Translation, and Transformation of Buddhism in the Global Arena* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), pg. 4.
2. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 118-31.
3. Stephen T. Asma, *Why I Am a Buddhist: No-Nonsense Buddhism with Red Meat and Whiskey* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2010), p. 2.
4. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Creating Religious Identity,” *Religion East and West* 9(2009) 78.
5. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Global Exchange: Women in the Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism,” *TransBuddhism*, p. 162.
6. Charles Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. x.
7. Tsomo, “Creating Religious Identity,” p. 77.
8. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, p. 138.



Nuns and the sand mandala constructed during the Bangkok conference.

ANTI-VIRUS ENLIGHTENMENT

By Hyunmi Cho

While sitting in meditation one Sunday morning, a thought arose in my mind about the antivirus software that my husband installed in my computer. How great it would be if only I could install this kind of software in my brain! A software application could automatically check once a week to make sure my mind stayed clean. I could keep my brain and mind debugged, just like my computer software! With one click, I could check up and clean out any toxins that settled in my mind.

Suddenly, one morning I realized that meditation was clearing my busy mind, just like the anti-virus software cleared harmful computer viruses that I sometimes spread to others. Wow! This was great! My meditation became my antivirus software—automatically checking and cleaning my toxic mind. When I told my husband about this experience, he said, “That’s a great thought, honey. I’ve got an idea. You should tell Lekshe about this.”

Recently, I sent Ven. Lekshe an email to share my experience and she asked me to write something on this subject for the Sakyadhita Newsletter. I sensed that she hoped this creative “anti-virus enlightenment” experience will help benefit the world. I like the idea of sharing my story about how useful meditation is to clear viruses lingering in the mind, ones we may not even notice. I’d like to generate positive energy to help this suffering world.

Practicing meditation has definitely been good for clearing obscurations from both my body and my mind. However, further thoughts have challenged me, such as, “What do I do with this clear mind? OK, I feel genuinely happy, but is this the purpose for which we practice meditation so diligently? What do I do with the positive self—the “I,” “me,” and “myself” that Buddhists talk about? How and when can this self contribute to the world?”

Buddhist wisdom says, “Start right here and right now.” I’ve been engaged sincerely in this effort for a long time. I try diligently to train my mind in Buddhist wisdom, just as I train in my disciplined classical ballet practice, without even thinking. As a consequence, my practice has helped produce much positive energy which, in my case, is expressed to others through teaching. I teach a course called “Mindful Asian Dance” that is very fulfilling. It has sustained me for 15 years now at UCSD. Applying a clear and mindful perspective for teaching has been my most useful tool. I begin with myself, then try to infuse the environment around me with positive energy, like incense, with anyone I meet. The meditation becomes my daily practice, while sitting, exercising on the treadmill, or dancing. To maintain this clarity and focus is more challenging while chatting or eating. At those times, I feel like I am returning right back to the animal kingdom!

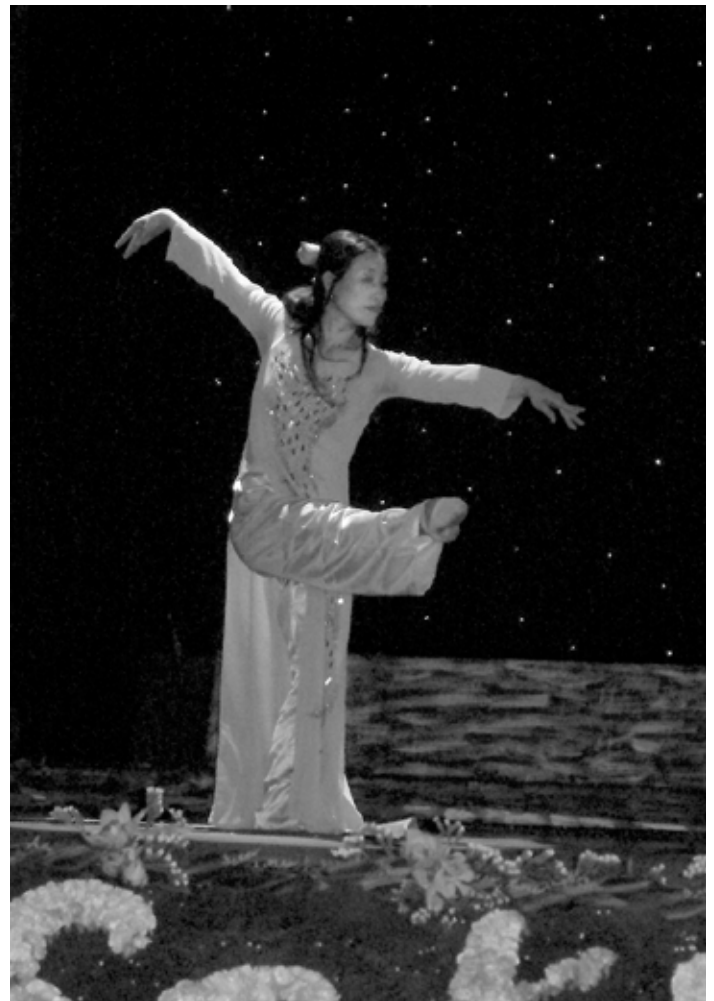
Surprisingly, as I continued my meditation program, I began to see positive energy gradually spreading wherever I went and whatever I did. The radiance of positive energy began influencing my work. Students come with different ethnicities, beliefs, attitudes, and ambitions. When they take my course in Mindful Asian Dance, they try to understand one another, and then use their positive energy to engage with the “otherness” of their fellow students. While working with each other, they soon relax and learn to respect this otherness, and to recognize differences as simply habitual, cultural, and traditional behavior. All this occurs while making the enjoyable, mindful body movements of Asian dance. The most fascinating thing is that students begin

to recognize their own insecure identities and to discover the insecure identities of others.

Sadly, everyday we hear and read negative news about social disorder among people from different cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and ethnicities in the world. I want to shout out to everybody that the whole world should take this class on Mindful Asian Dance. This introductory class is uniquely designed to help encourage positive energy through an understanding of history, value systems, and cultures. It inspires the creative mind to construct an ideal world through the arts of performance, costume design, dance, and music.

My students realize that they not only learn how to dance, but also how to produce positive views about other cultures and traditions, and to reduce the gap between their differences. Every year, I receive comments from students, such as:

The things that I have learned in my Asian Dance class at UCSD are things that I haven’t had the opportunity to learn before. I had a chance to try something different from my major and it was always fun. In just a short time, I learned skills, and personally learned things about my culture that I never



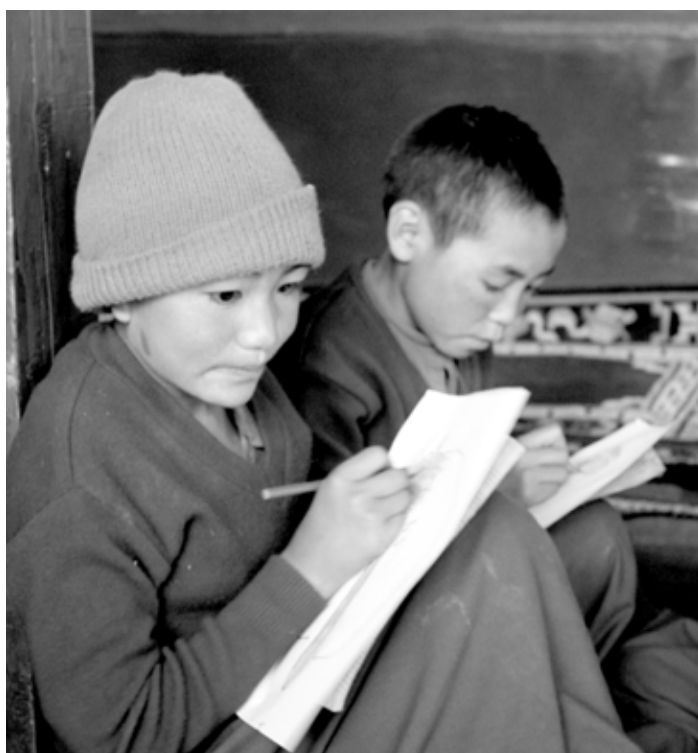
Hyunmi teaches Asian Dance as the University of California, San Diego.

knew before. I don’t have any dance training whatsoever, but it was exciting to try something that was out of my element and experience something new. It wasn’t simply a dance class. We also learned the historical context of Asian dance and did a self-reflection paper. That was extremely beneficial, because it helped me to figure out where I was going and to set goals for my life.

This was something that I had been struggling with, but never really thought about. I very much appreciated this opportunity and definitely enjoyed every minute.

My rewarding experiences of teaching dance and practicing meditation remind me of the lovely story of the Buddha's birth in the Jatakas, which I found while reading Lama Surya Das' book *Buddha is as Buddha Does*:

The Bodhisattva (the future Sakyamuni Buddha) was born long, long ago as a dull, gray parrot. One day a fire broke out in his forest. As he instinctively flew out of the forest to safety, he saw many animals below that were trapped, as well as many plants and trees that were being destroyed, so he resolved to do whatever he could to save the forest. He flew down to the river, scooped up water with his wings, flew over the center of the fire, and shook the drops onto the flames. He did this over and over again, even though his small actions had no noticeable dampening effect on the raging inferno, and even though his feathers were becoming more and more charred by the flames. On a cloud high above, several gods (devas) were leisurely feasting and watching the parrot. Some were poking fun at his futile efforts, but one of them secretly felt pity for him. This one changed himself into a huge eagle and flew down to urge the parrot to give up his effort and save himself. When the parrot refused, the eagle was moved to tears by the parrot's compassion. These abundant divine tears put out the fire and saved the forest. What's more, some of the tears fell on the parrot's feathers and turned them from gray into a whole rainbow of bright colors.



Young Zanskari nuns studying. Photo credit: Elles Lohuis.

RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF SCHOLARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH BUDDHISM

By Christine Murphy

There are many ways to engage with Buddhism. Practitioners have told me they study through their teachers and through

their practice. Many attend lectures or public teachings. Others read books and articles. Some travel to Dharamsala, Kathmandu, Southern India, and other places in order to receive initiations, blessings, and advice.

There is also the academic means of engaging with Buddhism. Scholars, who may or may not identify as practitioners but who wish to conduct research and analyses according to Western academic strictures, may also travel, attend lectures and conferences, and discuss their findings and experiences with others. However, the guidelines within which they work are traditionally structured according to the pursuit of objective observation, rational analysis, and appropriate theorization.

As a new academic, recently enrolled in a Buddhist Studies PhD program, I am struggling with these scholastic and non-scholastic concepts, and the expectation of how I should apply them to my research interests. Western academic practice is a phenomenon unto itself. Modern scholars often refer to "post-colonial discourse" as the framework within which intercultural studies are conducted, while at the same time assuring us that objectivity in this paradigm is futile, as we are all products of our own cultures, upbringings, individual personalities, biases, and preferences. I find these blanket statements difficult to digest.

Postcolonialism is a lens and an intellectual discourse that examines the aftermath of colonialism in former colonies, mostly now independent societies and nation states. In theory, it works to uncover and address the imbalances and injustices which resulted from the colonial worldview of the past centuries that was imposed on them. However, as Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo said at the 2011 American Academy of Religion conference, "I don't understand why they say 'post-colonial.' There doesn't seem to be anything 'post' about it." "Colonizing" in the sense of one country physically overpowering another for the purposes of conversion, repression, and exploitation is not as common in the 21st century as it was in the previous centuries.

However, examples of more powerful nation states acting in their own interests, for their own benefit with minimum concern for the welfare of those nation states upon whom they act, continue to abound. Dominant powers' foreign politics are clear examples of this; for example, the U.S. government's eager interest in removing Middle Eastern dictators or the Russian interest in Chechnya, but minimal concern for the Tibetan situation or East Timor. While one may argue that these are dissimilar situations, I mention them because they are both internationally known, globally significant examples of human rights violations, yet the former are aligned with economic interests, while the latter are not. Choosing policies of intervention based on primarily economic or financial interests may not be in line with a strict definition of post-colonialism, but these examples would hardly qualify for a rejection of the term.

These are simplistic examples, however, when compared with cultural or spiritual colonialism. One needn't invade a country with military might or overthrow a people or regime in order to alter its demographics. Media saturation, economic sanctions, political alliances, and the constant and omnipresent transfer of popular culture from one area of the world to another are often more than enough to radically alter the culture, religion, and economics of countries in distant parts of the globe.

One could argue that policy makers and academics are not necessarily one and the same, and the actions of a particular government in power do not necessarily reflect the current attitudes and ideologies of the time. However, choices made by those in power have a great impact on us, whether we would like them to or not, and the effects of an unbalanced, and sometimes outright prejudiced, worldview will inevitably penetrate to every

layer of society, and even through the walls of the ivory tower of scholarship.

Second, if objectivity is impossible, and we are destined to understand the world only within the context of our respective microcosms, how does one go about studying a religious tradition into which one was not born, a lifestyle one has not chosen for oneself, and a part of the world in which one does not live? The final question seems the easiest to answer, since it is possible to relocate, but what of the first two? In order to study a monastic tradition, must one be a monastic? In order to study Buddhism, must one be born a Buddhist, or have converted to Buddhism? To join a religious tradition for academic rather than spiritual purposes seems disingenuous, unethical, and disrespectful, even if it may be an effective way to gain experience for analyzing a group's identity. An academic analysis of the tradition from an outsider's perspective gathers important data by taking an objective stance, but may miss important components of the group by overlooking or ignoring the affective dimension.

Further, distinctions between those who are Buddhist or not Buddhist, and between those who are born Buddhist and those who become Buddhist, have little meaning if we cannot agree on the definition of the term "Buddhist." Must one have a teacher? A lineage? A Dharma center, monastery, or retreat center? Western Buddhists are frequently met with skepticism when they announce their religious affiliation, as if the necessary racial, linguistic, and ethnic criteria for membership have not been met. Conversely, people of Himalayan descent, regardless of where they were born, which passport they hold, or which, if any, religion they ascribe to, are assumed frequently, both by their peers and others, to be Buddhist. Assumptions about the importance of ethnicity for religious identity are among the many dilemmas that confront the researcher.

Another term I often hear in my classes is "deconstruction." To deconstruct something, I've been told, is to pull apart the pieces of an idea, a belief, or anything which is a composite whole of smaller parts. Just as constructing a house refers to building a house from many pieces, deconstructing a house, or an idea, means tearing it down into its many pieces. This is most effective when applied to concepts which we presume to already understand. Deconstruction demands we examine our subject from the perspective that all conceptualizations are compacted with social, political, economic, gender, and racial layers, which must be pulled apart and analyzed in order to better understand not only the subject itself, but the understanding of the subject across various temporal, cultural, and circumstantial spheres.

In the context of Buddhism, the process of deconstruction forces us to ask what we think Buddhism is, and what our definitions reveal about ourselves and the intellectual tools we're using to answer our questions. The relationship between ethnicity and religious identity highlights the way that race can become entwined in defining what it means to be Buddhist. One could easily see a racial distinction between many North American and European Dharma centers that primarily attract white, middle-class practitioners, but which exist next door to Buddhist centers whose practices are specific to Asian or Asian American practitioners with ties to Vietnam, Burma, Tibet, Thailand, and so on.

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and others have drawn attention to the role of gender in one's understanding of Buddhism. As Jetsunma's article in this newsletter shows, there are many examples of great female Buddhist practitioners throughout history, but even in nunneries the prevalent form of iconography refers to men and teachers are primarily male. More

widely, continued gender discrimination in many parts of the world affects women both within religious spheres and without. Lack of resources, and a lack of access to education and leadership opportunities prevent women, both lay and monastic alike, from full engagement and representation in their traditions, thereby reinforcing the discrepancy between male and female scholarship, spiritual achievement, and positions of authority.

Geography also plays a part in our conceptualization of Buddhism. Today, for example, Dharmasala is a place of pilgrimage, and I know many men and women across the world who dream of going to India or Tibet, to set foot on "real" Buddhist soil. I have a friend who is a devoted and diligent practitioner. She spent a year in retreat in a hermitage in Northern California, committed to hours of intensive practice each day. I spent a year in Thosamling Institute and Nunnery in Sidhpur, India, writing a book (not about Buddhism), knitting, and chatting. I slept in late, missed morning prayers, and shopped for jewelry every weekend. Nevertheless, people often seem more impressed by my year than by hers, simply because I was in India, the land of spirituality. As this personal anecdote indicates, location, or perhaps a romanticized image of spirituality associated with a specific location, may supercede skill, commitment, and spiritual attainment.

In conclusion, there are many ways to engage with Buddhism, and academic study is only one of them. Like all methods of learning, it has its own set of rules and guidelines to be observed. As I reflect on this issue, however, it appears to me that "the pursuit of objective observation, rational analysis, and appropriate theorization" applies to much more than academic achievement. Is this not the process and the goal of our study of the Buddhist teachings and, indeed, our meditation and contemplative

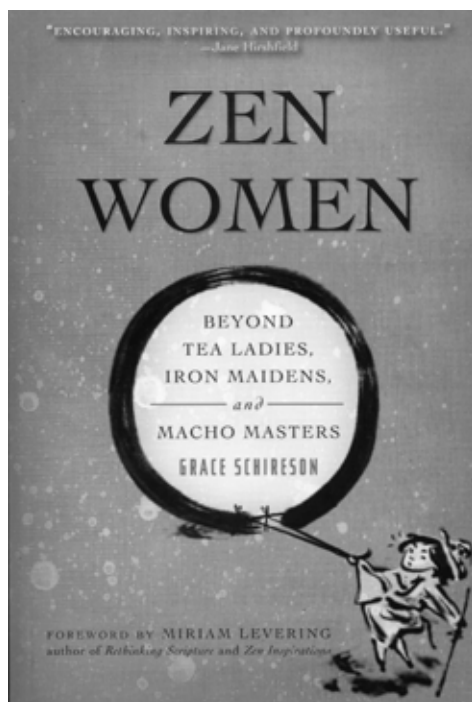


Grace Schireson is the abbess of Empty Nest Zendo in California and dharma heir of Sojun Mel Weitsman of the Suzuki roshi lineage. She is author of *Zen Women*.

practice? Or, in other words, our Dharma-inspired cultivation of self-awareness and introspection? Observing, analyzing, and theorizing are fascinating, engaging activities, which I believe can contribute to a better understanding of ourselves, the world, and everything in it. Whether pursued in a university or in meditative retreat, the pursuit of understanding can result in great benefit, as long as we do not lose awareness of ourselves in the process.

AN INTERVIEW WITH GRACE SCHIRESON

By Janice Tolman



Grace Schireson, author of *Zen Women: Beyond Tea-Ladies, Iron Maidens, and Macho Masters* (Wisdom Publications, 2009) gives evidence of the potential of women's leadership. Through ten years of research for her book, she sought to resolve contradictions and missing stories in the Zen record. Newly interpreted, the stories function as case studies of women's social engagement and encouragement for women's leadership in the sangha and in society. Schireson is a licensed psychologist and recognized dharma heir of Sojun Mel Weitsman in the Suzuki-roshi lineage. She is the abbess of Empty Nest Zendo in California, USA. Janice Tolman interviewed her in May 2010. She speaks on the problem of recognizing and fostering women's leadership.

Janice Tolman: First, what led you to write *Zen Women*?

Grace Schireson: After my ordination in the Suzuki-roshi lineage, I did not know how to inhabit my role or job as a Zen priest. All of the images and teaching stories were about men and their ways of teaching. I needed some help to fully express my practice as a woman, and I came across a poem by Rengetsu. Her ability to expose her longing, rather than claiming it had disappeared entirely, resonated deeply with my own experience. I could not relate to the male Zen masters who claimed to have conquered all delusions, but I could relate to a woman who used her spacious awareness to hold everything tenderly—even her own human vulnerability.

JT: You have embedded a few poems in the text of *Zen Women*.

Let's offer one of Rengetsu's (227), one you helped to translate, I believe:

Wind blows across
Katada Bay
A forsaken boat
Unmoving on the
Icy stillness.

GS: Rengetsu's life of loss and her use of her personal suffering to create beauty have affected me most deeply. Her loss of children, husbands and home were followed by her vow, her devotion to seeing that her life force blossomed. Every talent she had, and every hardship she faced was transformed by her steadfast practice into poetry and art. The objects upon which her poems were inscribed were made to be handled for everyday use. You could drink in her devoted practice in a cup of tea. You could see your own life reflected in her amazing serenity as you read her poem on a teapot.

JT: In writing *Zen Women* you have searched through records of the past to find models of women's leadership. You give portraits of individual women who were founders of temples, nuns, laywomen, patrons, and poets. You describe them in terms of their specific traditions, their historic cultures, and their personal histories. You link the past to the present. You celebrate diversity, and you ask for innovation in the roles for Buddhist women. When I read *Zen Women*, I thought, "This is a book in support of an American Zen." To what extent does the vision reflected in this book reveal a uniquely American character?

GS: Perhaps it represents the Western character rather than just the American view. The Dalai Lama said that Western women may save the world. We bring our compassion and no-nonsense managerial skills to active engagement with the world's problems. Our legal rights, level of education, self-confidence, and affluence are at historically high levels. Women can do a great deal for the world's suffering if we develop a focused mind and clear vision through Buddhist training. Buddhism can help us find our purpose.

JT: Once you had the vision for *Zen Women*, how did you do the research and what kept you going?

GS: I spent about ten years researching and writing. Professor Miriam Levering and other scholars helped me. I traveled in Japan (mostly) and in Korea and China looking for the traces of female Zen teachers and attending academic conferences. My commitment was to being a pipeline for the female voices, so I just needed to find their records and provide a conduit. My own personal difficulties and doubts over the ten years of writing were all seen in the perspective of the overwhelming hardships that these women had encountered. No matter what setbacks I suffered, my life of practice would never come close to requiring the sacrifices that the female ancestors endured. Because of my closeness to their life stories, I had their perspective and their hardships to help me see that my suffering and my frustrations were rather minor in the big picture. I also had Sakyadhita's founder's words as inspiration. At the conference in Lumbini, Karma Lekshe Tsomo told one of my students, "If you are a Buddhist woman, you need to write. Thinking that you are not good enough is no excuse."

JT: The story of the Japanese poet and potter Rengetsu happens to be my favorite part of *Zen Women* too. You write that her "poetry and teaching are like clouds—given away on cups, teapots, and other household objects, they have no solid form... it appears without claiming to be anything special" (227). One problem we may have recognizing our teachers who are women is that we abdicate leadership to our male counterparts. Instead

of recognizing female teachers, we enjoy a non-hierarchical commonality among women. Does this socialization as women help or hinder our ability to lead a sangha and teach the dharma? Does it deny us recognition as leaders to one another? Or is it that we have not sufficiently learned to recognize the “nothing special” teaching of Zen?

GS: I will make another broad generalization and say that women tend to be more humble. This may occur naturally through biology or because social expectations encourage women to not call attention to themselves through their accomplishments. I found it terrifying to become the teacher in the Zen group I had created. I knew as a woman I would face criticism and I preferred to stay in the background; I preferred for the group to remain leaderless or non-hierarchical. My own male teacher pushed me forward in the sitting group I had started. There are many stories told of women who are aiming for success; many stereotypes depict them as hard-hearted, lonely and cruel. Many movies show these women being punished for their aspirations. The stereotype of the iron maiden makes it clear that there is a high price to pay for relying on your competence rather than remaining “safe” in the background.

I believe that currently women need to consciously examine and define what female leadership looks like. Women do not do the “strong, silent type” so well, which is the default position for choosing (male) leaders. Men naturally appear that way; women do not. We are generally more communicative, more accessible, and more vulnerable. Our leadership style is more hands on; we do not rest on our position; we tend to get our hands dirty and make our mistakes more publicly. The image of “female leadership” does not yet exist in worldly or public positions. We have an image for a good “Mom,” but we do not have an image for a strong female president. I believe that we need to articulate and inhabit our leadership, which includes the “nothing special,” while at the same time we take risks and explore new images and models that can be seen and appreciated.

JT: In the book you explain that a female lineage has existed and yet has been broken. An important theme of *Zen Women* is how to nurture a lineage of female teachers of Zen despite this broken lineage. You write, “Like a stream gone underground, the women’s order would seem to disappear, only to surface again in a different location.... We do find evidence of its persistence, but no linked relationship from teachers to disciples” (39). In the face of “no formal or continuous lineage of female Zen teachers,” how do we find the stream and recognize our teachers? Does it depend on the recognition of male teachers in Asia or the US?

GS: I have placed my own bets on receiving the traditional empowerments through the male lineage. I believe that women face many obstacles in being recognized as teachers. In my mind having the standard certifications, recognizable in their community or tradition, provides women the best opportunity for acknowledgment of their legitimate authority. With easily recognizable standard certifications women can unquestionably take the teaching seat and build a practice community. When both men and women have derived their teaching empowerments from women, I hope we will see more appreciation for women’s leadership.

JT: You and I are both engaged in developing Sakyadhita USA, an organization of Buddhist women that aspires to unite women from various orders of Buddhism all over the world, Theravada, Chan or Zen, and westernized forms. Stepping out of American Zen, we learn that women in Thailand are jailed for taking vows and wearing robes. Many women have waited for generations to be fully ordained according to the precepts in their traditions.

Scholars who have been studying the Pali canon and abbesses who have been running convents may well look at new American ideas with skepticism. The ideas you present in *Zen Women* advocate flexibility, notably to enable family and professional life along with Buddhist vows and ordination. Are these ideas going to make an inter-Buddhist organization difficult or might we find synergy in these differences?

GS: No doubt there will be conflict across traditions; probably there has always been some rivalry over which is best. “Will the real Buddhism please stand up (or sit down)?” The fact is that monastic training for women is important to developing and sustaining our tradition, and there are many women who will choose to marry and to practice (just as men have so chosen in modern Japan). But we need each other’s support and example. Women need to be able to choose monasticism or choose a more engaged Buddhist path in the world. Monastics need financial support, and women have always been strong financial supporters of Buddhist practice. Historically, the money donated by women has come through husbands or families, while now money may be earned by women’s successful work in the world. Women who practice Buddhism while married and working will help to support the revitalization of the female monastic order. Women who have been able to enter Buddhist practice deeply while maintaining a household are in a position to deeply appreciate monastic practice and to support it financially.

JT: What are your next steps as a dharma teacher and as a scholar and writer?

GS: I am feeling my way on the path, one breath at a time. I have many teaching invitations, more than I can accomplish. I hope to do more writing, perhaps in collaboration with other women teachers about how women can practice as themselves. What I mean is that in order to enter this practice, we cannot imitate men, we must enter intimately as women. What kinds of practices support women seeing through their own fears and delusions? What kinds of practices inspire women to be more courageous?

FULL ORDINATION FOR WOMEN AND THE FOURFOLD SANGHA

By Santacitta Bhikkhuni



Bhikkhuni Ordination, Oct. 17, 2011.

Photo credit: Ed Ritger / www.edritger.com

On October 17th, three Western women – from Wales, Canada and Austria – received Theravada *bhikkhuni* ordination at Spirit Rock Meditation Center with Ven. Tathaaloka Theri, an American senior Theravada *bhikkhuni*, as their preceptor. Full ordination for female monastics in the Theravada and Vajrayana traditions is now becoming increasingly more recognized, realigning these traditions with the Buddha's original Fourfold Sangha, comprising of nuns (*bhikkhunis*), monks (*bhikkhus*), lay women and lay men.

The Buddha first gave *bhikkhuni* ordinations shortly after the *Bhikkhu* Sangha was established, more than 2500 years ago. In the 3rd century BCE, Ven. Sanghamitta, daughter of King Asoka, brought *bhikkhuni* ordination from India to Sri Lanka, and from there the ordination lineage migrated to China, where it is still thriving today. However, around the 11th century CE, due to war and famine, the *bhikkhuni* monastic order died out in Theravada countries. There is no historical evidence that full *bhikkhuni* ordination ever reached Tibet.

In the second half of the last century, *bhikkhuni* ordination has been re-established for Theravada nuns and made available for Vajrayana nuns through the unbroken *bhikkhuni* lineage that was maintained in China. After almost 1000 years, the full and proper place for female monastics in the Buddha's dispensation is now available for nuns of all three schools of Buddhism.

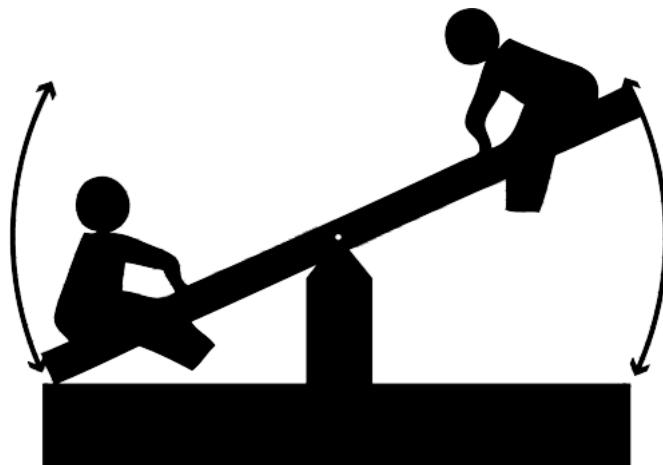
The event at Spirit Rock was a coming together of the Fourfold Sangha. More than 50 monks and nuns from all three Buddhist schools, traveling from as far as Australia, New Zealand and Germany, as well as Buddhist lay teachers and about 300 supporters, gathered for this historic occasion. Ven. Thubten Chodron Mahasthaviri of Sravasti Abbey was the most senior *bhikkhuni* present that day: she received full ordination in Taiwan in 1986 through *bhikkhunis* of the Mahayana School.

Through a long process of epic proportions, we are beginning to see *bhikkhuni* training monasteries being established in both the Theravada and Vajrayana Sanghas of the East and West. This process is being encouraged by forward-thinking monks and lay practitioners, who are aware of the dire need for a reorientation of our present day world – a world of unprecedented complexity going towards environmental breakdown and great chaos. In order for Buddhism to unfold its full potential to benefit modern society, it has to integrate feminine perspectives of expressing and embodying the teachings, following the Buddha's original intention and actions more than 2500 years ago.

Talks given at the ordination ceremony at Spirit Rock are available at www.saranloka.org. A slideshow of the ordination is accessible on www.youtube.com by searching *Bhikkhuni Ordination*.

Santacitta Bhikkhuni has been practicing meditation since 1988 and is co-founder of Aloka Vihara, a Theravada monastic residence for women in San Francisco. She has trained as a nun in both the East and West since 1993, primarily at Amaravati Monastery/UK, and received *bhikkhuni* ordination in 2011. Since 2002, she has been integrating Dzogchen teachings of the Vajrayana into her practice.

Reprinted from the online News from Sukhasiddhi Foundation, October 2011.



A SEESAW

By Wendy Lin

I enjoy watching kids playing on a seesaw in the park. Even more, I enjoy seeing their smiling faces, trying so hard to keep the balance of the seesaw. When one is higher than the other, it seems quite difficult to maintain the balance of the seesaw. When I became a volunteer, I gained a lot of experience in how to keep my balance – balancing my daily needs and helping meet the needs of others. Learning how to apply the Buddhist teachings to benefit others was really challenging.

Three years ago was my first visit to Harmony Home Taiwan, together with one of my girlfriends, an AIDS volunteer from England. Harmony Home Taiwan is a NGO that takes in AIDS patients and orphans. Since they do not get any assistance or funding from the Taiwanese government, the project depends on donations for funding. There are more than 200 AIDS patients and 50 kids in Harmony Home. Most of the adult patients are either gays or drug addicts, but the kids' parents are all drug addicts and some are still in the prison. From that very first visit, I realized that the patients need more than funding, especially the kids. As far as I know, Harmony Home can arrange legal adoptions so some kids can go to the U.S., as long as their parents agree to the adoption procedure. Otherwise, most of the children remain at the center. The 50 kids were either abandoned by their original families or their parents, who are still in prison and cannot support them, and around 50% are HIV positive or will become HIV positive eventually. This is the reason why our non-profit association (Taipei Three Doshas Body Mind Spirit Development Association) began working with these kids from Harmony Home. We want to help educate the children and help them to uplift their spirits. Although Harmony Home separates the children from the patients, it seems that the negative energy remains. Harmony Home can only afford the basic daily necessities and cannot provide professional psychological help.

Talking with some of the nannies at Harmony Home, I found their stories quite similar. When these women were released from prison, it was quite hard for them to find a job. Besides, their children were living at Harmony Home, so it was easy for them to work there as a nanny. They not only look after their own kids, but also take care of other mothers' kids. But these nannies used to be drug addicts and they do not receive any proper training. I have observed that it is quite difficult for them to avoid returning to their bad habits of drug addiction once their old contacts start to get in touch with them. Most of them

have been taking methadone daily to overcome their addiction, but after they have been released from prison, it is very hard for them to stay away from drugs.

A question that arises is whether the drug addiction they suffer from is the result of bad luck or whether it is the result of making poor choices. Either way, it seems that they do not learn much during rehab in prison. I have two vivid memories. One day, one of the nannies sneaked out to take drugs and locked herself in the bathroom, where she fainted. Her daughter, who was only six years old, found her mother in the bathroom. The child already knew at six that her mother had been an addict for a long time and that her mother got into drugs as a way to make a living.

The other experience I remember was also very sad and made me see clearly how a child inherits the karmic consequences (vipaka) of its parents. This child was about five years old and his parents had given him drugs since he was born, whenever he started to cry or got hungry. This caused him to have a disorder of the spinal column. Eventually, he was unable to walk like a normal child. As hard as he tried in physical therapy, he only learned to crawl on the floor using his tiny hands and feet. Tragically, his parents were so "out of it," they did not realize the harm they had done to their own child.

Sometimes we take the kids from Harmony Home for outside activities, but this boy has no choice but to stay inside. I could see that he was really desperate to go with us. His eyes were full of tears, as he lay on his tummy on the floor and stared at me, pleading for help. Harmony Home used to call him "a big baby!" and they even told me, "Teacher Wendy, he is always like that. He just wants your sympathy!" After hearing those words, I asked myself whether I really have the compassion and wisdom to help these children. This kind of self-inquiry has become my biggest challenge while walking the path of the bodhisattva.

The fortunate thing is that I do not need to worry much about my daily needs, so I have time to help others. I share as much as I am able, but always wonder how I can teach the children to fish rather than just giving them the fish. Can I teach them enough to survive by themselves when they grow up? Even then will they be able to find a way to transform their lives?



Translation teams work day and night. Photo credit: Hsingju Lin.

I have been helping educate the children at Harmony Home for more than two years. Our association provides different classes every Saturday morning, including yoga, dance, indoor rock climbing, English, and art classes. No matter how hard we work to teach the children, it seems that the main problem is still their living environment. There are many problems. The kids

see the AIDS patients lying in bed, always receiving help from somewhere. The drug addicts do not find jobs, but simply sleep and eat whatever Harmony Home is able to provide. The children see many dramas play out around them. They mistakenly believe that if they are weak, people will notice and give them more help. As a result, they do not develop a sense of self-worth or become positive or strong. Instead of going to school, teenage boys hide all day long in the internet café playing video games.

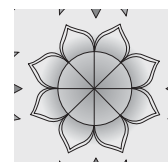
I have spent a lot of time talking with these boys, trying to help them develop self-confidence. Sometimes they even ask me, "Teacher Wendy, why do I need to be a better person? Since all my life will be spent at Harmony Home, I will always have someone to look after me. Why should I push myself harder?" It is really challenging to see their unhealthy mental attitudes. Harmony Home does not provide psychological counseling, but focuses on getting enough funding to live from month to month. Since there are too many patients to care for, they just let the kids go their own way.

I tried to provide the teenage boys with part-time jobs at our association during their summer holiday, to help them develop better discipline. The boys would work for a few days, then quit. They were unable to get up on time in the morning and felt bored with the office work we gave them, but they never lost interest in playing computer games. Once the boys get paid, they spend all their money at the internet café. At the same time, Harmony Home does not try to push them. Sometimes I think I had better give up working with these teenage boys. My work at Harmony Home is deeply frustrating, especially because the management does not welcome my ideas for change, focusing more on funding than on education. It has become really challenging to apply Buddhist teaching in my volunteer work to benefit others.

Gradually, I have realized that I am attached to helping the children reach certain goals. When the unexpected happens, I feel frustrated. If I can simply give love to the children and help Harmony Home without any attachment, my heart will certainly be peaceful. In the Buddhist teachings, we talk about the six paramitas. The first paramita is to practice generosity, which can be taken to mean giving selfless love and compassion to others without any thought of reward. This practice helps us to reduce our craving and self interest.

Honestly speaking, if I am grasping at being a volunteer who looks good by helping others, then my intention to benefit gets mixed up with my personal identity. If I hear someone say "Wendy is such a wonderful person and enjoys helping others," then I become attached to it. Slowly, I am realizing that it is not enough to walk toward the bodhisattva path. A real bodhisattva always has a peaceful mind and the wisdom to serve others without any attachment. Indeed, the children and AIDS patients at Harmony Home have their own karma and their own spiritual journey. As hard as I work to help them, I cannot help them change unless they themselves develop awareness and decide to change. Gradually, I am gaining wisdom and learning to give love as best I can, here and now, without expectations.

Next time I take the kids out of Harmony Home to play on the seesaw in the park, I will simply be an observer, simply a person to give them love.



SAKYADHITA IN CYBERSPACE

Sakyadhita and the Social Media Revolution

by Charlotte B. Collins

Between the time of the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (December 28, 2009 - January 3, 2010), and the 12th Sakyadhita Conference in Bangkok, Thailand (June 12-18, 2011), there was enormous growth in the use of free internet tools for sharing information. These tools are referred to as “social media” and include Facebook, Hi5 and similar “friends” networking sites. These tools also include free sites where videos can be uploaded and shared, such as Google’s YouTube. Other free social media tools are professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn, where personal profiles can include professional resumes, changes in employment or projects, and lists of professional skills. A final type of free social media tool, such as Twitter, is used to “tweet,” to post short bursts of “up-to-the-minute” announcements of events as they are taking place, or comments on such events, in messages limited to 140 characters.

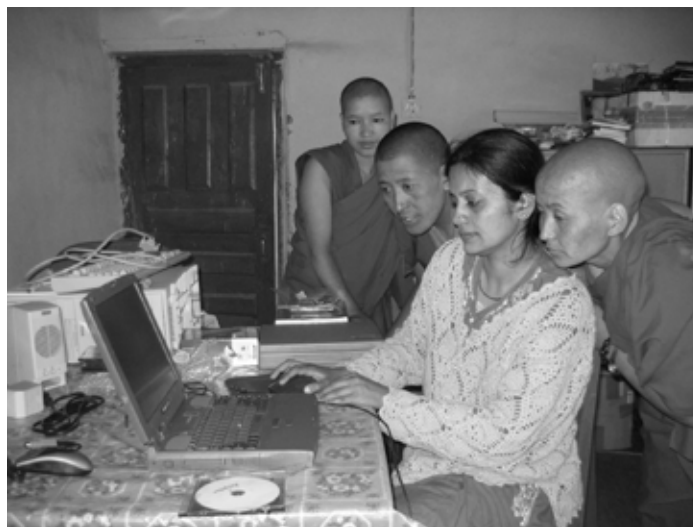
Admittedly, the use of social media to promote the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam was limited by the fact that Facebook was blocked by the government in Communist Vietnam. At the time, Facebook, and versions of it, were the main social media tools in use globally. Overall, there were fewer tools to use and even fewer knowledgeable users than we have now.

Fast forward to Bangkok 2011. Early in 2011, the local conference organizing committee put up a website in Thai. They also posted a video on YouTube in which Mae Chee Sansanee Sthirasuta, founder of Sathira-Dhammasathan, the host Buddhist study center, issued an appealing video invitation to attend the 12th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Bangkok in June. The local committee further launched a 12th Sakyadhita Conference page in Thai on Facebook and an account on Twitter. At least two conference blogs were started on Wordpress by local volunteers.

Soon afterward, the 12th Sakyadhita International Conference Planning Committee, based in California and Taiwan, had not only posted websites in English and Chinese, but also had launched YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter accounts with several blogs carrying regular conference information and travel updates. Sakyadhita International had also begun using Constant Contact email service and was able to easily send out conference information, registration materials, and travel updates to its 2500-member worldwide email list.

By the time of the Bangkok conference’s opening ceremony on June 12, a number of social media channels in multiple languages were at the fingertips of conference organizers. It was no longer necessary to send out press releases and photos about daily conference events, either electronically or in print and to hope that news media editors would publish them. Also, because of the previous five months of conference announcements on social media, several media outlets, such as The Buddhist Door and Buddhnet.tv sent reporters to cover the conference from start to finish, further expanding the media outreach overall.

As another way to compare the Sakyadhita conferences in Vietnam and Thailand in terms of media coverage, we could look at internet search listings on Google. In early 2010, immediately after the close of the Vietnam conference, searching on Google for “Sakyadhita” or “11th Sakyadhita” or “Sakyadhita Vietnam,” yielded no more than a dozen returns, with only four or five relevant to the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam. By comparison, a few months after the 12th Sakyadhita Conference



Julie Thomas teaches computer skills in the Himalayas.

in Bangkok, a search on Google for “12th Sakyadhita” yielded approximately 2,200 returns of which 2,090 (95 percent) or more were relevant to the 12th Sakyadhita Conference in Bangkok in June of 2011.

It is interesting to note that most of these search returns were not the result of social media postings by conference committees and their volunteers. Most were of two types. The first type was from internet news aggregates—services that search the entire internet several times a day, collecting content related to specific search terms or “tags,” then store the tagged content in repositories or archives that can be “fed” to the news reader accounts of individuals, institutions (government or universities) or media conglomerates (such as Associated Press or Reuters). The second type of listings were posts from the social media status updates of users who attended the 12th Sakyadhita Conference.

Surprisingly perhaps, the second type accounted for the larger number of listings among the 2,090 search returns. For example, many panel and workshop presenters posted status updates, uploaded videos or tweeted about their participation in the conference. Likewise, student attendees uploaded videos featuring teachings by their masters. Monastics and laywomen posted status updates of conference events featuring their own traditions, communities or temples. The postings may have occurred during the conference itself or in the following months. Nevertheless, it’s easy to see that from a single moment or event at the conference, hundreds of social media postings could have been generated.

Another outcome of this “social media revolution” we are experiencing is that each person with a cell phone, laptop, or other electronic device is a potential media outlet in herself. During the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam in early 2010, it was not uncommon to see a young nun talking on her cell phone as she strode toward her parked motorbike, then to ride off with her robes flying. But what changed by mid-2011 was that, in the intervening 18 months, the social media revolution accelerated. Of course, the increased use of Facebook, Hi5, YouTube, Twitter, and the like could not have happened without the proliferation of smartphones and other handheld devices, along with a generation of young tech-savvy women in both Asia and the West. An education now includes using the tools of internet communications and social media.

Another role that social media plays, especially sites such

as Facebook and LinkedIn, is connecting people. In the wake of past Sakyadhita conferences, attendees returned to their home communities and remained connected to new friends, mostly in the same geographical area. It's well known that women typically return home from Sakyadhita conferences and work together to address the issues of their communities, continuing to network locally. With the tools of social media, following the Bangkok conference, attendees continue to network globally. Each of us in the Sakyadhita family is in touch, sometimes almost daily, with friends and contacts around the world, as we all post updates on Facebook, Hi5, LinkedIn, and other social media. As we learn to harness the power of social media, we will no doubt reach across continents and oceans to create global projects to address the issues of our global community.

Planning has already begun for the 13th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women to be held in Vaishali (Bihar), India, in January 2013. Notably, forming a media sub-committee is at the top of the planning to-do list. We might predict that an internet search on the term "13th Sakyadhita" in mid-2013 will yield a hundred thousand listings! Daughters of the Buddha, get your tech on!

Charlotte B. Collins has been the Sakyadhita webmaster since 2009 and is President of Sakyadhita USA. She lives in Sierra Madre, CA, USA.



Photo credit: Hsingju Lin.

A POEM

There is such poignant beauty
in the small.
In the small, delicate strands of existence,
the tiny realities
that tremble,
caught between the breezes of peace
and the firestorms of war.
--Nan Metashvili

NEWSLINE

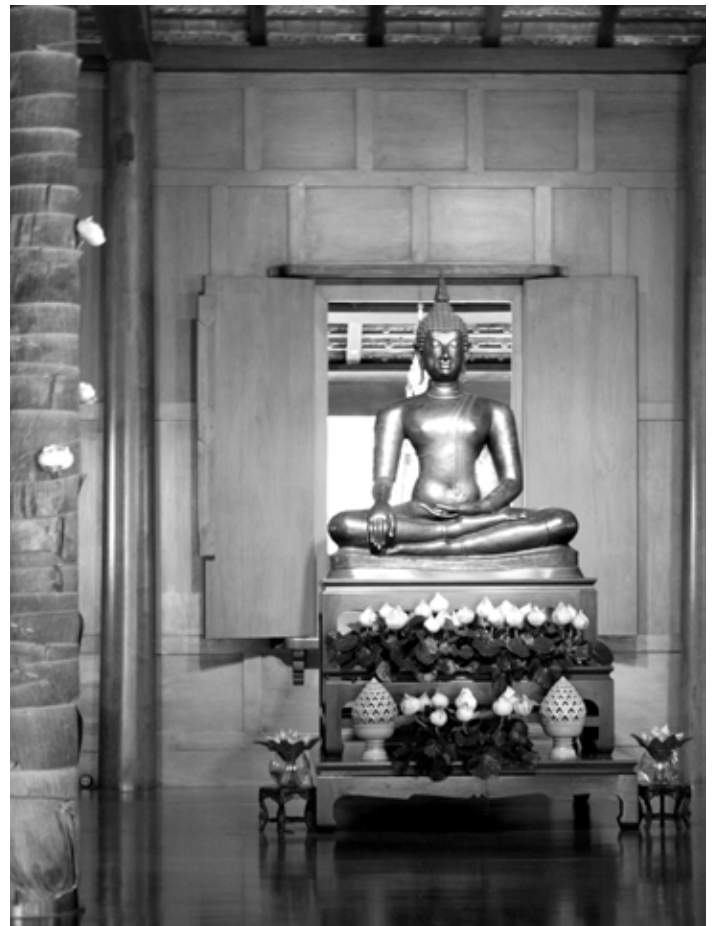
A TRAGIC EPISODE

By Rebecca Paxton

On June 24th, a 21 year old nun, Ani Karma Lhamu (also known as Sangita Lama), was traveling by bus to her home monastery. Waylaid in a remote place by bad weather, she was robbed and serially raped by the driver of the bus, his two helpers and a driver of another bus and his helper until she was unconscious. Although a victim of a brutal crime, she was rejected when taken to a government hospital. Later under pressure she was admitted to the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences. The five men have been arrested and charged for the crime.

As a member of a Buddhist minority in Nepal, the birth place of the Buddha, her religion, her vocation and her economic status made Ani Karma Lhamu a target of a brutal crime. Sakyadhita International seeks all avenues to raise the legal rights and societal perception of Buddhist women for their protection and development. In Nepal, questions arose whether she should be expelled from her nunnery because of the rape. Unfortunately, in many areas of the world where crimes are committed against women, it is the women that are viewed as the culprit. This situation is exacerbated by archaic Buddhist institutional perceptions and regulations that prevent the full, equal participation of women at all levels of the Buddhist community, including a Women's Sangha.

Sakyadhita International fully supports Ani Karma Lhamu.





Nuns read a *sutra*. Photo credit: Dorge Tsering.

FURTHER READING

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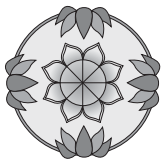
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