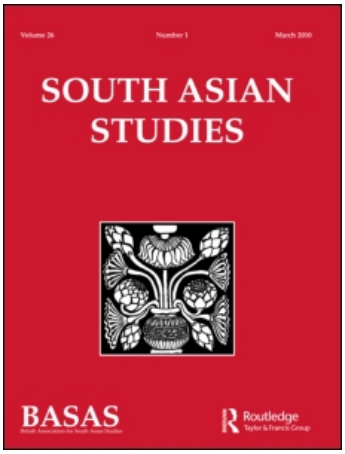


South Asian Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t919339774

Exile and Return: The Reinvention of Buddhism and Buddhist Sites in Modern India

Upinder Singh[a]
[a] Department of History, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Online publication date: 22 September 2010

To cite this Article Singh, Upinder(2010) 'Exile and Return: The Reinvention of Buddhism and Buddhist Sites in Modern India', South Asian Studies, 26: 2, 193 — 217
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/02666030.2010.514744
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02666030.2010.514744

South Asian Studies
Vol. 26, No. 2, September 2010, 193–217

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Exile and Return: The Reinvention of Buddhism and Buddhist Sites in Modern India

Upinder Singh*

Department of History, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

The objective of this paper is to highlight the processes that have led to the reinvention of Buddhism and Buddhist sites in modern India. A major aspect of this reinvention is the conversion of members of the Scheduled Castes to Buddhism, a movement especially associated with B. R. Ambedkar. Another important factor is the exile and internationalization of Tibetan Buddhism. These have coalesced with the pervasive visibility of the material remains of ancient Buddhism; state interest in promoting spiritual tourism; global movements of pilgrim-tourists; improving bilateral ties between India and Japan; and Japanese investment in the conservation of ancient Buddhist sites in India. The convergence of all these factors has led to a revitalization of Buddhist tourism-cum-pilgrimage circuits and to a dramatic resurrection, or rather reinvention, of ancient Buddhist sites. This is demonstrated with special reference to the site of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh. Extinct sites such as this one offer wide open spaces that can be appropriated by various religious and secular groups and by agencies seeking to strengthen their presence, visibility, and/or profit. The paper emphasises that histories of ancient sites must take cognisance of their transformations in the modern, increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: Buddhism; archaeological sites; Ambedkar; Dalits; Tibetans; pilgrimage; tourism; Nagarjunakonda

A great deal of scholarly attention has been bestowed on the early history of Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent, but the understanding of its longer-term trajectories is very inadequate. The general view is that Buddhism declined drastically during the early medieval period (*c.* 600–1200 CE). However, there are grounds for arguing that the hypothesis of a virtual extinction of Buddhism during that period is at least in part the result of a lack of investigation and the non-acknowledgement of textual, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence that suggests otherwise.[1]

Eastern India is often seen as the last Buddhist bastion, where monasteries such as those of Nālandā, Odantapura, Vikramaśilā, and Somapurī flourished under the patronage of the Pāla kings.[2] But there is evidence from other regions as well. In Orissa, remains of early medieval *stūpas*, monasteries, and sculptures are known from Lalitagiri and Ratnagiri. Many Buddhist *vihāras* were built during this period in Nepal. The *Chachnāmā*, an early thirteenth-century Persian translation of an old Arabic history of Muhammad bin Qasim's conquest of Sind in the early eighth century, suggests that Buddhism was an important part of the religious landscape of this north-western region. In Kashmir, the Ratnagupta and Ratnaraśmī monasteries at Anupamapura flourished in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Several major ancient Buddhist monastic centres – for instance those at Sanchi (in modern Madhya Pradesh), Amaravati (in Andhra Pradesh), and Nalanda (in Bihar) – continued to flourish until the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Even after the thirteenth century, the monastic tradition was alive in the western Himalayas in Ladakh, Lahaul, and Spiti, which had close connections with the monasteries of Tibet. In fact, some of these monasteries have a more or less continuous history from the early medieval period right down to the present. It is clear that Buddhism never really disappeared from India, though it did decline, and was relegated to the geographical, political, and cultural margins.

Just as problematic as the assessments of the extent of Buddhism's decline are the explanations for this decline. While the Turks have been blamed for the sack of Nālandā at the close of the twelfth century, they were certainly not responsible for the demise of monasteries in other parts of the country. Apart from the Turks, the most frequently cited reasons for the religion's decline include its being swallowed up by Hinduism due to its lack of distinctiveness, the 'open frontier' between Buddhism and local cults, 'corruption' by Tāntric influences, a decline in political patronage, and the *saṅgha*'s loss of material support due to economic dislocation caused by frequent wars.[3]

*Email: upinders@gmail.com

ISSN 0266-6030 print/ISSN 2153-2699 online

DOI 10.1080/02666030.2010.514744
http://www.informaworld.com

There is a view that Buddhism's eclipse was never complete, and that there was a connection between its lingering, simmering ancient residue and the Buddhist resurgence in modern India. For instance, Benoy Gopal Ray has argued that a handful of Buddhists survived in Bengal after the religion had virtually disappeared in other parts of the subcontinent, and that this spark was re-ignited by Buddhist revivalist movements in the late nineteenth century.[4] Similarly, there is a hypothesis that in Orissa the religion did not disappear but went underground and survived in the form of a 'crypto-Buddhism' (a combination of Tāntric, Buddhist, and Vaiṣṇava elements), its echoes surfacing several centuries later in the Mahima Dharma movement of the nineteenth century.[5] Notwithstanding such assertions, there is no doubt about the ultimately relatively diminutive dimensions of an identifiably Buddhist *saṅgha* and laity in medieval times. Buddhism survived on the margins and may have left a strong latent impression on Indian soil, but its revival, or rather reinvention, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seems to be largely a result of completely new factors and forces.

According to the 2001 Census of Religions carried out by the Government of India, Buddhists constitute about 0.8% of the total Indian population, a mere 7,955,207 out of a total population of 1,028,610,328. They are sprinkled all over the country, with larger concentrations in the north-east and in Maharashtra: Sikkim (28.1% of the state's population), Arunachal Pradesh (13%), Mizoram (7.9%), Tripura (3.1%), Jammu and Kashmir (1.1%), Himachal Pradesh (1.2%), and Maharashtra (6%).[6] A comparison of the data for 1961, 1971, 1981, and 2001 suggests that the numbers of Buddhists in India have more than doubled between 1961 and 2001, from approximately 3,256,000 in 1961 to 7,955,207 in 2001. Of course, this is within an overall phenomenon of population growth, in which the numbers of adherents of other religions have increased as well.

But it is not just a matter of numbers. Apart from the 'official' Buddhists, i.e. those who declare themselves as Buddhists in the census operations, Buddhism has a larger constituency and acceptability, especially among the Indian intelligentsia. Ling talks of two types of Buddhism in modern India – one is a comprehensive religious and cultural package, the other is personal and has a strong philosophical and meditational element.[7] It is the appeal of the latter that explains the otherwise perplexing fact that in spite of the negligible presence of Buddhists in India at the time of Indian independence, the *cakra* (wheel) and the addorsed lions of the Sarnath capital of the Maurya emperor Aśoka, symbols with strong Buddhist resonance, were incorporated by the newly born Indian state into its national flag and national emblem.[8]

The idealized view of Buddhism as an ancient faith marked by rationality, non-violence, and an egalitarian message was one of several competing twentieth-century imaginings of the ancient Indian past, but it was one that was and continues to be very influential. In this construction of ancient India, the Buddha – the charismatic founder of the faith – and Aśoka – its most famous royal patron – are valorized for the virtues they are seen to have embodied and propagated. This idealization of Buddhism had its roots in the West's discovery and understanding of Buddhism,[9] but it also seems to have been connected with the centrality of non-violence in Gandhian nationalism. It is also significant that this valorization of Buddhism has not – at least until now – been seen as particularly threatening or problematic by adherents of India's other religious communities and their leaders.

What is most directly significant from the point of view of this paper is that within the national and international community of Buddhists, India's status as the homeland of Buddhism (we know how important homelands are!), never really forgotten, is becoming increasingly important. And although it never completely left India, Buddhism has returned, although in different forms.[10] The extent of this revival should not be exaggerated: in actual demographic terms it is of modest proportions, but its global visibility and impact are greater than what the demographic statistics would lead us to expect. The most important source of this revival is the conversion of people belonging to Scheduled Castes and Tribes to Buddhism. Another important factor is the exile and internationalization of Tibetan Buddhism. These two factors have connected with an increasing state interest in promoting 'spiritual tourism' in an increasingly globalized world. Simultaneously, fueled by improving bilateral ties and pan-Buddhist sentiment, there has been increased Japanese investment in the conservation of ancient Buddhist sites in India. The main argument of this paper is that the conjunction of all these factors has led to a distinct and sustained revitalization of Buddhist pilgrim-cum-tourist circuits, increased activity at many ancient Buddhist sites, and a dramatic resurrection, or rather reinvention, of many extinct ones.

The reinvention of Buddhism in modern India may not have happened were it not for the fact that in spite of Buddhism's earlier decline and peripheralization, and in spite of the vandalism inflicted by time and archaeologists, the material remains of ancient Buddhism were, and still are, very visible all over the subcontinent. These continue to provide important anchors for the Buddhist revival, and the revitalized ancient remains have in turn become potent symbols as well as catalysts of this revival, ones that are likely to multiply in number and increase in importance and visibility in the coming decades.

Certain aspects of this phenomenon have been noted and discussed by some scholars. For instance, Toni Huber has described the Tibetan diaspora's very deliberate use

of ancient Buddhist sites in India as a resource to further its own concerns.[11] Catherine Becker has detailed how the Tibetan Buddhists' Kālacakra celebrations in 2006 altered the landscape of Amaravati in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh.[12] However, there is need for a broader historical perspective, one which takes into account many other features of the revitalization of ancient Buddhist sites within the larger context of the twentieth century Buddhist revival India. Apart from the activities of the Tibetan exiles, there are several other important aspects of this larger context including Dalit conversions, global flows of tourists and pilgrims, government investment in sites associated with spiritual tourism, and international cultural diplomacy in the form of the funding of conservation projects. This paper discusses how all these factors have coalesced to generate a reinvention of Buddhism and Buddhist sites in modern India.

Ambedkar, the neo-Buddhists, and ancient Buddhism

The most important source of the resurgence of Buddhism in modern India has been an internal socio-political one, and consists of the conversion of sections of the Scheduled Castes or Dalits, the modern representatives of communities which suffered centuries of oppression and marginalization in caste society as 'Untouchables'. This process is inextricably linked with Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) and the dramatic event that took place in Nagpur in the state of Maharashtra in western India on 14 October 1956, the year when the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's *parinibbāna* was celebrated in various parts of South and Southeast Asia. On that day, in a large open field – later known as the Diksha Bhumi – Ambedkar took Buddhist vows, along with 400,000 of his 'Untouchable' followers, publicly declaring their conversion to a new faith.

Although Buddhist conversions are generally associated with Ambedkar, it is important to note that the Buddhist revivalist movement in India had a background and precursors.[13] The Maha Bodhi Society, founded by the Ceylonese Anagarika Dharmapala in 1891, was an institution which contributed greatly towards generating an international interest in Buddhism within and outside India. But there were other institutions and individuals as well. For instance, in 1891 Kripasharan set up the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha, which was very active in Bengal.[14] In South India Pandit Iyothee Thass (1845–1914) established the Sakya Buddhist Society (also known as the South Indian Buddhist Association), and spearheaded a social protest movement among Paraiya labourers which spread through the labour diaspora to South Africa and Burma.[15]

Ambedkar had declared in 1935 that although he had been born a Hindu, he would not die one. But he took a long time to reach the decision to lead his community into the Buddhist fold, and it was a decision that was simultaneously personal and political. Ambedkar's personal interest in Buddhism is said to have been sparked off by a book on the life of Gautama Buddha given to him by one of his teachers in Bombay in 1908. But as a political leader of India's 'Untouchables', Buddhism was neither his first nor his only choice, and he carefully weighed it against other options such as Sikhism, Christianity, and Islam. A combination of several factors gave Buddhism an edge for being chosen as the religion of salvation for India's oppressed and marginalized millions – the fact that the Buddha's teaching could easily be mined for messages of egalitarianism, rationality, and ethics; its international presence; its deep roots in Indian soil (this was very important for Ambedkar); and the fact that in the mid-twentieth century, there were actually very few Buddhists in India. The field was more or less clear – the new converts would not have to contend with any strong, entrenched ecclesiastical elite.[16] His opponents called the mass conversion at Nagpur a political stunt; most of his own political advisors and colleagues were against the idea, but Ambedkar's stature was such that that they all fell in line.

From the point of view of the present paper, several things seem especially significant about the Nagpur conversion ceremony. A replica of the Sanchi *stūpa* was prominently displayed on the dais, a reminder of Buddhism's long, grand heritage in ancient India. The sentiment of pan-Buddhist internationalism was palpable. The dignitaries seated on the dais included D. Valisinha, the General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society.[17] Ambedkar took his vows from a Burmese *bhikkhu* named U. Chandramani, apparently the oldest Buddhist monk in India at the time. After the event, messages of congratulations flowed in from prominent individuals from other Buddhist countries, such as the Prime Minister of Burma.[18] Ambedkar had appropriated ancient Indian Buddhism, linked it with modern, internationalized Buddhism, and transformed it into something new, something he himself called *Navayāna* ('the new vehicle'). The strong element of anti-Hindu sentiment and protest that accompanied the ceremony was very evident from the vows taken by Ambedkar and the other converts.[19] Early Buddhism had to a large extent adjusted itself to existing social hierarchies and created in the *saṅgha* an island of equality in the midst of a very unequal world; it had also co-existed with the Hindu cults without undue acrimony. In the twentieth century, in Ambedkar's hands, Buddhism blended with strident social protest and political assertion, and took on a sharp anti-Hindu stance.

True religion, in Ambedkar's view, was an important aspect of society, one that was necessary to maintain the moral basis of both individual and community. In his

opinion, the Buddha, like Marx, put forward a doctrine aimed at radically transforming society. But Ambedkar went on to argue that while both Marx and the Buddha put forward a call for social equality, Buddhism was superior to Marxism because of the peaceful, democratic means it advocated to achieve this end.[20] Ambedkar's book, *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, was completed just before he died, and was published posthumously in 1957. Written in pithy, lively point-form, this book presented his final and most detailed understanding of the Buddha's life and ideas. He asserted that there was a fundamental difference between the western notion of religion and the idea of *dhamma* in Buddhism; the latter was preeminently social and moral, and its purpose was to reconstruct the world. True *dhamma* (*saddhamma*) is that which breaks down barriers between man and man, which maintains that worth and not birth is the measure of man, and which promotes social equality. Ambedkar described the confusion about what constituted the core of the Buddha's teaching as in large part a result of the misreporting of his ideas by monks. He asserted that the touchstone of ascertaining whether a particular interpretation of the Buddha's teaching was correct or not was whether that interpretation was logical and rational. He denied that the four noble truths made Buddhism a pessimistic doctrine. He scoffed at the hagiographical explanation of the Buddha's disenchantment with worldly life as a result of witnessing the 'four sights' in Kapilavastu. As for the role of the s*aṅgha*, he asserted that the *bhikkhus* should be servants of society.[21]

Ambedkar clearly saw himself as an agent for the revival of a once-great Indian religion and wanted his book to inspire and ignite the reader to change his destiny. The *Buddha and his Dhamma* ends with prayers for the return of the Buddha to his native land and for spread of his *dhamma*. Not everyone was impressed. A review of the book in *Mahabodhi*, the journal of the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta, described it as a dangerous book, and remarked that it should have been titled *Ambedkar and his Dhamma*.[22]

Ambedkar used the term 'neo-Buddhists' to refer to the Scheduled Caste converts. The prefix 'neo' was apt for two reasons – they were new converts to the religion, and the religion they embraced was in fact a new interpretation of Buddhism, one with a strong element of social and political protest. Indian neo-Buddhism differed from Buddhisms in other parts of the world in many fundamental ways, including in its religious ideas and social orientation. It was essentially a lay Buddhism, one in which lay leaders predominated and monks played a very insignificant role. During the 1950s and 1960s the majority of the converts came from two groups among whom Ambedkar enjoyed an especially strong following – the Mahars of Maharashtra (who had traditionally been service providers in villages – watchmen, removers of cattle carcasses, wall-repairers, etc.) and the Jatavs of Agra (largely employed in shoe-making) in Uttar Pradesh. Ambedkar also invented a new myth of origin for the neo-Buddhists, one which connected them directly with ancient India and ancient Buddhism. His hypothesis (put forward in his essay *The Untouchables*, published in 1948) was that the twentieth century 'Untouchables' were the descendants of the Buddhists of ancient India, 'broken men' who stuck to their religion and to beef-eating, and who were reduced to their pathetic position due to the machinations of the Brāhmaṇas.

The mass conversion of Dalits to Buddhism does not, however, seem to have had a massive or sustained legacy after Ambedkar, and today the vast majority of the Scheduled Castes in India are in fact not Buddhist. There have been a few episodes of conversions of members of Scheduled Caste and Tribe groups, including some well-publicized ones, in recent times. For instance, on 27 October 2002 a small number of Dalits publicly converted to Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity at a ceremony held in Gurgaon, near Delhi. The organizers were the All-India Confederation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Organisations and the Lord Buddha Club.[23]

On 4 November 2004 a Diksha (conversion) ceremony was organized in Delhi by the All India Confederation of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes Organizations and the Lord Buddha Club. The number of conversions that took place on that day is debated. It seems that about 20,000 people eventually took their vows, but the organizers allege that the police had prevented as many as 50,000 people from entering the city. In fact, the rally was originally supposed to be held in the centrally located Ram Lila grounds and the venue had to be shifted to the more out-of-the-way Ambedkar Bhavan due to police insistence that it would create a law and order problem.[24]

One of the biggest post-Ambedkar conversion rallies took place on 28 May 2007 when it was reported that about 50,000 (100,000 according to some sources) Dalits and tribals converted to Buddhism at Mahalaxmi Race Course in Mumbai, on the fiftieth anniversary of B. R. Ambedkar's death and the Nagpur Diksha. The ceremony was organized by an organization called the Babasaheb Ambedkar Pratishthan, and was apparently also supposed to be a show of strength by a Dalit leader of Maharashtra named Ramdas Athawale (alias Udit Raj), who sought to establish his credentials as the true torch-bearer of Ambedkar's legacy.[25] A Dalit writer named Laxman Mane, who had organized a smaller conversion of some 140 tribals at Nagpur in 2006, was also involved. Monks from several countries were present on the occasion. The Dalai Lama was scheduled to attend, but for some reason did not make an appearance.

On the whole, it is evident that mass conversions of Dalits and tribals to various religions (mainly Buddhism,

Christianity, and Islam) are not as frequent or substantial as certain Hindu groups who have spear-headed moves towards the passing of strict anti-conversion laws in some states maintain. This is in spite of the fact that according to law, Scheduled Caste converts to Buddhism and Sikhism do not lose their special privileges after conversion, whereas converts to Christianity and Islam do.

Various reasons have been cited for the sparseness of Buddhist conversions in the post-Ambedkar era. Although Adele Fiske's study was based on data collected in 1966–67, its conclusions are still relevant. There is the very loose structure of Buddhist organizations, the lack of co-operation and coordination among them, political in-fighting, a weak financial and personnel base, and the absence of a charismatic leadership transcending local, regional, and caste boundaries. Connected to the last point is the fact that neo-Buddhism is basically a lay religion, one in which the *saṅgha* has little presence or importance (Ambedkar's attitude towards the *saṅgha* was one of suspicion and distrust). There is a lack of interest among young neo-Buddhists to don monastic robes, and the training facilities for monks or *baudhacharyas* (lay-persons who can officiate at life-cycle rituals) are weak.[26]

Instead of looking towards religious conversion, Scheduled Castes today seek more direct gains through political positioning both within parties with a wide social base or through association with political parties that explicitly have a Dalit base. The electoral successes of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh are illustrative of the latter trend. Although the fortunes of this party were significantly diminished in the 2009 national elections, there is no doubt that today, in their quest for social justice and advancement, groups low in the caste hierarchy seek salvation through politics rather than through religion. Political parties, for their part, can no longer ignore the Dalits.

Tibetan Buddhism in India and its links with Ladakh, Lahaul, and Spiti

The second major facet of the increased visibility of Buddhism in twentieth- and twenty-first century India has its source in political processes in India's neighbourhood. In ancient times Tibet was home to the Bon religion. According to tradition, Buddhist influences started making their impact there from the reign of King Songsten Gampo in the seventh century. Tibetan Buddhism was strongly influenced both by Indian Buddhism and by the autochthonous Bon traditions. Buddhism was transmitted to Tibet by many Buddhist monks, the best known among whom were the Indian monks Śāntarakṣita, Padmasambhava, and Atiśa. The various Tibetan sects identified themselves as belonging to the Mahāyāna stream with respect to their philosophy and religious practice, and were strongly influenced by Buddhist *tantra* (known as Vajrayāna or Mantrayāna). The 'dark period' of the ninth and tenth centuries was followed by a revival in the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, during which time the major Tibetan sects such as the Nyingmapa, Kagyu, Sakya, and Geluk took shape.[27]

The exile of Tibetan Buddhism from Tibet and its refuge in India was a twentieth-century phenomenon, and was a direct outcome of the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1949 and the subsequent Chinese crack-down on Buddhist monastic institutions. In 1959, ten years after the invasion, Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama and the chief spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhists, fled to India along with about 85,000 followers. Subsequent to that event, a Central Tibetan Administration, functioning as a government in exile, was established. It continues to function, with headquarters at McLeodganj in Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh. The internationalization of Tibetan Buddhism was thus a result of its forced exile from its homeland.

With the help of the Indian government, the United Nations High Commission for refugees, and various foreign donors, the Tibetan refugees were ultimately settled in fifty-two settlements spread across ten Indian states (apart from thirty-five settlements in Nepal and seven in Bhutan). The largest numbers of refugees were located in five settlements set up between 1960 and 1974 in the southern state of Karnataka. The new settlers mainly devoted themselves to agriculture (they also took to agro-based industries and handicrafts) and established monasteries and schools. The biggest settlement of Tibetan refugees is the Lungsung-Samdupling settlement in Bylakuppe, Karnataka. Starting off with a population of 3000, this now consists of seven villages or camps, with an average of 30 families in each camp.

Over 8,000 Tibetans live in Dharamsala, which is also the official residence of the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan government in exile has set up a library and archives of Tibetan works, and has made efforts to promote the study of Buddhist philosophy and Tibetan language and culture, including the study of traditional Tibetan medicine, astrology and handicrafts. Several monasteries and nunneries are located in the town.

Although physically concentrated in India, the Tibetan diaspora has an international spread. The Department of Information and International Relations of the Government in exile places the Tibetan diaspora at about 111,170. Of these, 85,000 live in India, 14,000 in Nepal, 1,600 in Bhutan, and 1,540 in Switzerland. About 640 Tibetans are scattered across other countries of Europe, 110 in Scandinavia, 7,000 in the USA and Canada, 1,000 in Taiwan, 220 in Australia and New Zealand, and 60 in Japan. Thus, in contrast to the neo-Buddhist movement, which has an essentially Indian

perspective, Tibetan Buddhism has acquired a strong international flavour. This has led to a greater international visibility of the Tibetan Buddhists in India, a highlighting of the ancient Indian Buddhist heritage, and of the fact that India is the original homeland of Buddhism. A corollary to the substantial international exposure that Tibetan Buddhism has received and the interest it has attracted is that the second half of the twentieth century has seen the creation of a Buddhist following beyond Asia into Europe and America, one that is notable not so much for its numbers as for the high-profile celebrity status of some of its members.

The international awareness and sympathy that the Tibetan cause enjoys today has much to do with the current Dalai Lama. He has travelled to over sixty-two countries, meeting many dignitaries and heads of state (most recently President Obama of the United States), and has received numerous international awards including the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize for leading a non-violent struggle for the liberation of Tibet. He was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal – the highest civilian honour in the United States of America – in 2006. Although he has visited Japan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Taiwan, the maximum number of foreign visits made by the Dalai Lama have been to the United States and Germany. Devotees from various countries come to seek his blessings and guidance in Dharamsala. Through his discourses, visits, and various kinds of initiation ceremonies held in different parts of the world, the Dalai Lama has personally played an important role in highlighting the plight of the Tibetan refugees and strengthening the international profile of Tibetan Buddhism.

While the scale of international, especially western, attention that Tibet has received in recent years may appear novel and unprecedented, it is important to remember that this attention is part of a longer-term engagement. Donald S. Lopez Jr has pointed out that Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism have long been a focus of European desire and fantasy. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, western scholars considered 'Lamaism' (the term they used for Tibetan Tāntric Buddhism) as a corrupt version of the original pristine faith. The mid-twentieth-century Tibetan diaspora led to a significant shift in attitude and perspective. Buddhism started claiming American and European converts and became internationalized. Now, because of Tibet's seclusion, Tibetan Buddhism came to be considered as *more* authentic than that of any other land, and became an object of academic inquiry in western universities. This academic inquiry had an urgency about it, as its practitioners saw themselves as engaged in a rescue operation to save a culture that stood on the brink of extinction.[28] Lopez has also elaborated on the creation of a new sort of myth about Tibet as a perfect, ethereal, idyllic world before the Chinese invasion. In this new mythologizing, Tibet is seen as a spiritual panacea for a materialistic western world.[29]

But coming back to India, it should be noted that the persecution and exile of Tibetan Buddhism has in fact contributed towards revitalizing Buddhism in India, especially in the northern mountainous areas of Lahaul and Spiti (both in the state of Uttarakhand) and in Ladakh (in the state of Jammu and Kashmir), regions where the Buddhist tradition has ancient roots. In Lahaul-Spiti the evidence of the Buddhist impact dates from the eighth century, and this impact became especially marked between the late tenth to twelfth centuries under the patronage of the Guge kings, although the situation in the neighbouring areas of central and southern Himachal was different.[30] Although it looks like a remote area, Laxman S. Thakur points out that Lahaul-Spiti and specific sites within the region, Kinnaur in particular, occupied a strategic position between two major international trade routes – the silk route which linked China, India, central Asia, and Europe; and the Great Northern Trade route of the subcontinent, which swept from the eastern Indian port of Tāmraliptī across the Gangetic plain to Taxila in the north-west. The brisk trans-Himalayan Indo-Tibetan trade was in fact an important sustaining feature of the economy of Lahaul-Spiti from early times. The area was also a cultural melting-pot – people of diverse origins traversed the high mountain terrain, bringing in new ideas and technologies and enriching its cultural mosaic.[31]

This cultural mosaic is visible, for instance, in the paintings at Tabo (in the Spiti valley), one of the most important ancient and still-active monasteries. Its history goes back to the late tenth century and its walls bear exquisite murals. When the monk Geshe Sonam Wangdu came from Tibet to Tabo in 1976, there were only two monks living there; today it houses 45 monks.[32] The Dalai Lama has visited Tabo several times; he conferred the initiation into the practice of Kālacakra *tantra* there in 1983, and sat on the throne of the main temple in 1996 to celebrate the thousand-year anniversary of the monastery. In 2004 he visited the monastery to teach and bestow the Vajradhātu initiation. He was supposed to visit the monastery again in 2009 to consecrate the Kālacakra *stūpa* being built there, but the visit did not take place. It was during the time of Geshe Sonam Wangdu that the new Kālacakra temple (in which the initiation was held) was built. The Tabo monastery has for many years now been running a school for training young monks as well as making arrangements to send some of them to monastic universities elsewhere.[33]

Close interaction with Tibet is also a centuries-old phenomenon in Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir, where Buddhists are concentrated in the north and east, while Muslims predominate in the south and west. The

Buddhist parts of the region are marked by ubiquitous lamas (monks), *chortens* (the term used for *stūpas* in this region), *gompas* (monasteries), colourful prayer flags, and *mani* walls with prayer stones bearing prayers and invocations in the Tibetan script. Buddhism made its impact on Ladakh from much earlier times, but the major Ladakh monasteries date from the eleventh to nineteenth centuries, when royal patronage became available, and many of them are living institutions with a rich but highly endangered artistic heritage. A prominent example is Alchi monastery, noted for its exquisite murals, which was founded in the eleventh century by a Tibetan noble who extended his political control over Ladakh.[34]

From a long-term point of view, it is important to note that in the western Himalayas the connections through patronage and interaction between Buddhist monasteries and the villages in which they are situated have been increasing in strength. Although most of the senior monks in these monasteries are Tibetan, a few young monks are drawn from nearby villages. Many monasteries are involving themselves in secular education, thereby consolidating their links with the aspirations of the laity. Lamas play an important part in the daily life of the people, especially in the performance of life-cycle rituals, and also function as astrologers and exorcists. There is a close interdependence between monasteries and villages. In Ladakh (as also in Lahaul and Spiti), families frequently give over a son to the monkhood, farm the monastery's land in return for a share of the produce, make donations to monasteries, and extend financial help to monks on various occasions.[35]

Clearly, then, the monastic tradition is thriving in Ladakh, Lahaul, and Spiti, and the long-standing religious and cultural links with Tibet have strengthened since the 1960s. In fact, there has been an interesting reversal – in ancient times, Tibetan monks imbibed learning from the Buddhist homeland. Now, exiled from its own home, Tibetan Buddhism is playing a key role in consolidating and deepening the Buddhist tradition in Ladakh, Lahaul, and Spiti.[36]

Dalit Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism: an unbridgeable chasm?

There does not seem to be any significant interaction between the two faces of the Buddhist revival in modern India – the Dalit and Tibetan movements. Dalit Buddhists do not figure prominently among the supporters of the Tibetan cause. The Dalai Lama, for his part, has only occasionally spoken about issues of social inequality and the Dalits. For instance, when a million Dalits were expected to convert to Buddhism on 14 October 2001, under the aegis of the All India Confederation of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe Organizations, the Dalai Lama reportedly made a supportive statement.[37] Similarly, as mentioned earlier, he was supposed to be present at the mass conversion rally of Dalits and tribals in Mumbai in May 2007, but eventually did not participate, for unknown reasons.

The Dalai Lama emphasizes that formal conversion to Buddhism is not sufficient in itself; it is essential that converts (Dalit or otherwise) deeply imbibe the religious doctrines.[38] There is also a major divergence in the orientation of the two movements. The Dalai Lama's Middle Path, emphasizing love and compassion, even towards one's adversary, has in recent years been questioned even within the Tibetan community.[39] It has never struck a chord with Dalit Buddhists, for whom Buddhism constitutes a way out of the harsh and sometimes brutal realities of caste oppression and conflict. It has also been suggested that the Tibetan Buddhists have little to gain from integrating with a group that has a low social and economic status,[40] but the chasm between Tibetan and Dalit Buddhists runs much deeper than this.

Apart from enormous differences in religious belief and practice, there is also the radical difference in the place of the monastic tradition. As mentioned earlier, monasticism is of little importance among Dalit Buddhists, among whom full-time monks are few and unimportant, and several Buddhist organizations offer short-term crash courses for monks and lay *Baudhacharyas*. This is a far cry from the rigorous and long-term training required for becoming a monk in the Tibetan tradition. The enormous cultural divide, including that of language, between neo-Buddhists and monks from other lands has been a major reason why the few attempts made by the former to connect themselves with monastic communities in various parts of the world have not been very successful. Dalit converts do not feel comfortable with monks from other countries and prefer interfacing with monks or laypersons from their own community:

> Buddhist monks from other countries have played a minor role in the mass conversion movement [of the Scheduled Castes] of the past decade. Differences in rite, custom, and language have hampered the efforts of monks from Japan, Tibet, Burma, Cambodia, and Ceylon. Several laymen said, 'We are Indians, we do not want to adopt Japanese or Ceylonese ways'. Others indicated that monks should be recruited from Scheduled Caste communities so they would know the language and mentality of the people.[41]

Furthermore, the Tibetan Buddhists in India have very self-consciously and deliberately maintained their distance, not only from Dalit Buddhists but also from the rest of India and Indians. The scattered Tibetan communities in India are 'intentionally nonassimilative' and the overall level of acculturation among exiles in is rather

low.[42] I noticed in the course of my travels in Ladakh, Lahaul, and Spiti that senior Tibetan monks, including those who had lived in India for decades, did not know how to speak any Indian language. Huber has argued that the exiles have no real interest in India, except for their own settlements and the sacred places associated with Buddhism, with which they identify strongly. Further, he asserts that although official statements made by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile allude to India being the birth-place of the Buddha and Buddhism and therefore a Holy Land, for a variety of reasons most Tibetans living in India have an ambivalent, even negative, attitude towards their adopted country.[43]

Given all this, it is hardly surprising that on the occasions when neo-Buddhists and Tibetan Buddhists do interface, nothing much happens:

> I met two Tibetan monks living in the guest room of a very simple vihara in a very small poor Buddhist community outside Pune in Maharashtra. They had been there several weeks and had learned enough Pali to chant some formula familiar to the Maharashtrian Buddhists, and were making plaster Buddha images from molds they had brought with them to repay the hospitality they were given. No other communication was possible, and I expect the connection did not last long.[44]

The deep cultural divide between the Buddhisms of the Dalits and the Tibetans constitutes a huge obstacle to the prospect of the emergence of a pan-Buddhist unity in India. These two Buddhisms are embedded not only in very different cultural matrices but also in very different political contexts and orientations. For Ambedkar, Buddhism was a way of raising the position of the Scheduled Castes to a new level vis-à-vis the upper castes, linked to a strident rejection of Hinduism and all that it stood for. For the Tibetan Buddhist elite, on the other hand, it is part of a way of life that is threatened, one that has to be zealously protected in exile. While Dalit Buddhist organizations and Tibetan Buddhists share a history of persecution and may on some occasions share a platform, the political, social, ideological, and cultural differences between the two are too great to allow any genuine dialogue. While Tibetan Buddhism has embraced, in fact thrives on, internationalism and international support, the neo-Buddhist movement has an inward orientation. Nevertheless, there is at least one important spatial meeting ground between Dalit Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists and Buddhists from other parts of the world. This meeting ground is created by pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage as a meeting ground

The importance of pilgrimage in religious practice cuts across religious, cultural, and chronological divides. The history of the spread of Buddhism within and beyond the subcontinent is one of peripatetic monks and pilgrims, and the travel and transformation of ideas and practices over vast geographical distances. In the context of this paper, it is important to recognize the significance and impact of pilgrimage not only as part of Buddhist religious practice, but also as an important event in the lives of the individuals who launched Buddhist revivalist movements, such as Anagarika Dharmapala and B. R. Ambedkar. All revivalist movements have connected themselves with the ancient places made sacred through association with the Buddha. Some of these are multi-religious sites, which have seen struggles for control between different religious communities. The best known example is Anagarika Dharmapala's staking claim to Bodh Gaya, which was in the nineteenth century a pilgrimage site for Buddhists and Hindus alike, igniting a dispute which still lingers.[45]

Reflecting on the nature and potential of pilgrimage, Victor Turner points out that pilgrimages are liminal phenomena, in some ways similar to rites of passage. In the course of pilgrimage, the structures of everyday social life are altered by *communitas*. *Communitas* is different from the sense of community which arises from a geographical area of common living – the bonds of *communitas* transcend this. Where pilgrims come from is as important as where they go, and the nature and intensity of the bonds created by pilgrimage also depend on the journey itself. Furthermore, society and culture impinge on the process, and there are limits to the *communitas* that is generated – inherent social divisions are attenuated, not completely eliminated.[46]

For Indian Dalit Buddhists, visiting the ancient Buddhist sites is a way in which they can connect themselves with a great heritage to which they can lay claim, a compensation for the marginalization and low social status they experienced over many centuries. The neo-Buddhists of Maharashtra frequent Ajanta, Ellora, and Karle, and many of the guides at the Ajanta and Ellora caves are Dalit Buddhists.[47] Festivals such as Buddha Jayanti are often celebrated at the caves at Aurangabad, Nasik, and Junnar. Ancient Buddhist sites provide neo-Buddhists with a rich store of emblems for their buildings and their homes, and Dalit Buddhist homes are often decorated with photographs of Sanchi, Sarnath, and Bodh Gaya.[48]

Zelliot argues that the neo-Buddhist movement does not ultimately have a physical centre located at a particular *place*. It is B. R. Ambedkar, considered a *bodhisattva* by many of his followers, who constitutes the centre. Therefore, the site where he was cremated in Mumbai is an important place of pilgrimage, as is the Diksha Bhumi in Nagpur (Figure 1).[49] Actually, a better way of describing the situation is to acknowledge that for Dalit Buddhists there are actually *two* kinds of

1. Modern stūpa *marking the site of the Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur.*

pilgrimage destinations – those connected with Ambedkar and those connected with ancient Buddhism. But while the former are few, the latter are many, and have the potential to increase enormously in number.

As for the Tibetan Buddhists, it should be recalled that pilgrimage was for centuries an essential part of Tibetan life, connected not only with Buddhism, but rooted in an older autochthonous view of the mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes, caves, and other features of the physical landscape as pulsating with the presence of spirits, demons, and deities. The Tibetan word for pilgrimage is *gnas skor* – literally, 'circling around an abode', an allusion to the act of circumambulation that was generally carried out at such places.[50] Pilgrimage welded together diverse and distant parts of Tibet and contributed in a significant way towards creating cultural unity.[51] Major places in this pilgrimage network included Lhasa and Mount Kailash, but the many available pilgrim guide books describe a plethora of major and minor/local pilgrimage destinations.

India was known to Tibetan monks and lay Buddhists from ancient times as a land of many sacred places associated with the founder of the faith. After the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1949, the Chinese government clamped down on outside travel for two decades, and pilgrimage to India became virtually impossible. Pilgrimage within Tibet itself was declared a punishable offence, on the ostensible grounds that it represented feudal superstition.[52] Chinese policy has varied since then, but travel of Tibetans to India has always been subject to government surveillance and regulation, especially since many of those who traveled to the sacred sites in India ostensibly as pilgrims often stayed on to seek political asylum.

After 1959, with the movement between Tibet and India having become problematic, the Tibetan exiles had to focus on the already-known pilgrimage spots within India, notable among which were the ancient sites and still-functioning old monasteries. Huber has perceptively drawn attention to how the Tibetan exile elite has been engaged in an 'intensive and strategic ritual use of the landscape of the Buddha in India' and that it has been trying actively to colonize these ancient sites in a way that is very similar to what the Maha Bodhi Society tried to do in the early twentieth century.[53] However, what is equally important to note is that this activity intersects with other group interests in these sites, including those of Indian neo-Buddhists, domestic and international tourists,

pilgrims and pilgrim-tourists, the Indian government, and the governments of East Asian Buddhist countries, especially Japan.

Pilgrimage in its modern forms

Anthropological studies have established that although pilgrimage is an important religious activity cutting across cultural, religious, and chronological divides, it has several extra-religious dimensions as well. For pilgrims themselves, this culturally accepted expression of religious piety has always been entangled to varying degrees with other motivations – the desire to take a break from the tedium of everyday life, 'get away from it all', see new places, and seek adventure. From the larger historical perspective, the connections between pilgrimage, commerce, and politics are very well-known and are illustrated by the age-old congruence of trade and pilgrim routes. Victor Turner in fact identifies solemnity, festivity, and trade as three foci of pilgrimage throughout history. He talks abut the 'field' generated by a pilgrimage centre and speculates about the historical role of pilgrimage in the development of cities, markets, and roads.[54]

In our own time, the terminology connected with the flourishing tourism industry includes what is often referred to as 'spiritual tourism.' The question that is directly relevant to this paper is this: does this fall within the category of religious activity, tourist travel, or both? Spiritual tourism is a broad term that includes travellers with many different backgrounds, motivations, and interests, travelling to destinations that have some sort of religious import. What is central to the argument of this paper is that a segment of these travellers can in fact be described as pilgrims or pilgrim-tourists.

Destination, intent, and self-perception define the pilgrim, and apart from the religious associations of the places visited, the only way of actually ascertaining the extent to which visitors to Buddhist sites can be described as pilgrims is through visitors' surveys. The magnificent site of Ellora in Maharashtra includes twelve Buddhist, seventeen Hindu, and five Jaina caves. The site, which was given the status of a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1983, was and is still located at the intersection of several local, regional, and sub-continental trade and pilgrimage routes. It is interesting to note that in a recent 2009 survey of 'off-season' visitors to Ellora,[55] 51% of the Indian visitors characterized themselves as pilgrims and were travelling on well-established pilgrimage routes.[56] In spite of the fact that the Archaeological Survey of India officially discourages active worship at the site, this is not enough to deter pious visitors (Hindus, Buddhists, Jainas, others) from expressing their religiosity in various ways, something which is especially visible at the Kailāśanātha temple. As for foreign visitors to Ellora, the survey showed most of them came from Europe (46%) and North America (26%), while Asians followed with a lower 21%. However, these statistics do not give an accurate picture, as a large number of travellers from Japan and South East Asia regularly visit the Buddhist caves, but not during the hot summer months, which was the time when the survey was conducted. Many East Asian and Sri Lankan visitors who were interviewed described themselves as pilgrims; some of them tried to meditate in the Buddhist caves, in spite of being disturbed by the noisy ambience. It is evident that although spiritual tourism appears to be a new phenomenon, and while the level of the overt religious/ritualistic activity conducted at the destinations may not be on par with what is seen at popular living shrines, some of what is included under the umbrella term of spiritual tourism can in fact be seen as a new form of an old practice, i.e. pilgrimage, transformed in the context of an increasingly globalized world.

The promotion of spiritual tourism, especially in the sites on the Buddhist circuit, is now a very self-conscious aim of the Indian state. The tourist industry has been growing rapidly and is recognized as an exceptionally fast-growing sector of the Indian economy, with a very high revenue-capital ratio and employment generation potential. The numbers of foreign tourists arriving in India were estimated as about 2.73 million in 2003 and 3.92 million in 2005, reflecting a growth of 43.6% over the two-year period. Foreign exchange earnings from tourism similarly showed an increase of 35% in 2004 and 20% in 2005 over the previous year, taking these earnings from a total of US$ 3.5 billion in 2003 to US$ 5.7 billion in 2005.

Those involved in formulating tourism policy in India are acutely aware of the revenue potential of tourists and pilgrim-tourists, and the development of Buddhist tourism circuits, along with other thrust areas such as rural tourism and eco-tourism, are major areas of interest for the Indian government. The fact that until recently culture (which includes historical sites and structures) and tourism were handled by the same ministry reflects the fact that the Government of India has tended to see these two arenas as closely related. (The departments of culture and tourism were separated last year.) The Tourism Department gave central financial assistance to the tune of approximately Rs 935 million between the eighth to tenth five year plans to develop Buddhist circuits. During the past few years twenty-two Buddhist sites in the country have been singled out for special attention, and fourteen projects amounting to about Rs 572 million were sanctioned for infrastructural development at twelve sites. Recent reports of Parliamentary Standing Committees have identified various key tourist circuits that need to be developed, including the Buddhist circuits of Andhra Pradesh (with

a special focus on Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati), Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, and Varanasi), central India (Sanchi), and Jammu and Kashmir (Leh).[57] The Parliamentary Standing Committee's report for the year 2007–08 was especially strong in its emphasis on the need to promote tourism, encourage public-private partnership, increase fund allocation for the Archaeological Survey of India, and enhance investments in the conservation of historical monuments.[58] A major campaign entitled 'Come to India – Walk with the Buddha' was recently launched and was directed especially towards the Southeast Asian and domestic markets. Government tie-ups are being planned for a common promotional campaign for Buddhist sites in India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

The various states of the Indian union are currently vying with each other to promote their ancient Buddhist sites as exciting tourist destinations. While Bihar is exceptionally well-endowed with such sites, the ubiquitous presence of ancient Buddhist remains means that other states need not feel left out. In Orissa, infrastructure at the Buddhist circuit sites of Ratnagiri, Lalitagiri, Udayagiri, and Langudi is being improved, and a Peace Park is being planned at Dhauli. In February 2007 the Ministry of Culture and Tourism tried to improve Buddhist tourism in this state by organizing the first Buddha Mahotsav on top of the Dhauli hills, in conjunction with the Maha Bodhi Society of India and the Kolkata-based Nirvan Buddhist travel organization. The festival coincided with the world-wide celebration of the 2550th anniversary of the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. Other states, including Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Andhra Pradesh, are similarly trying to develop and promote Buddhist pilgrim-cum-tourist sites.

The government of the state of Andhra Pradesh has recently begun to realize that it houses an exceptionally large number of ancient Buddhist sites. It is interesting to note that apart from the older well-known sites of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, even recently excavated sites such as Bavikonda (excavated in 1982–87) and Thotlakonda (excavated in 1988–93) are quickly being developed for tourist traffic, and a Rs 500 million project has already been drawn up for the purpose. The Thotlakonda Tourism Project includes, among other things, plans to develop food courts, gardens, a Buddhist archaeological museum, a circular train, and a sound-and-light show. In tune with the times, the State Museum of Archaeology in Hyderabad has opened a Holy Relics Gallery, where relics from Andhra Buddhist sites are on display. In an interesting departure from orthodox museum practice, visitors/devotees are encouraged to use the room to meditate (Figure 2). The aim is to attract visitors by linking the display with current religious and spiritual concerns.

A recent study conducted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce estimated that about 200,000 Buddhist tourists visit India every year and that these numbers could increase by 400% (generating over US$ 1 billion of revenue) if the Buddhist circuits were developed properly. The Buddhist circuit attracts East Asian tourists in particular. Japan is among India's foremost tourism-generating markets – Japanese tourists have been coming to these destinations for a long time and

2. People meditating in the Holy Relics Gallery, State Museum of Archaeology, Hyderabad.

many an intrepid tour guide has learnt to speak their language. It is estimated that in 2005 about 102,000 Japanese tourists arrived in India, and the numbers of visitors from other East Asian countries are also growing. The major destinations of the pilgrim-tourists on the Buddhist circuit are Sarnath, Kusinagara, Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Rajgir, Vaishali, Sanchi, Amaravati, and Nagarjunakonda. The government plans to link the major Buddhist sites by a world class rail network, beginning by connecting Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, and Vaishali. Dharamsala too is a destination for Indian and international pilgrims and tourists.

On 17 and 18 February 2004 the Ministry of Culture and Tourism organized an International Conclave on Buddhism and Spiritual Tourism in New Delhi. It was inaugurated by the then President, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. The conclave brought together 400 devotees and dignitaries from over twenty-five nations, including Cambodia, Singapore, and Mongolia, the Dalai Lama delivering the keynote address. On 19 February the conclave shifted to Bodh Gaya for the official ceremony, where the Mahabodhi temple was declared a World Heritage Site. This event highlights the connections between the revenue interests of the Indian state, the desire of pious Buddhists from all over the world to travel to sites associated with the Buddha's life, and the significance of the presence of Tibetan Buddhists in India.

East Asian investment in the conservation of ancient Buddhist sites in India

The expansion of Buddhist spiritual tourism can also be seen as part of a larger range of interactions between India and East Asia, particularly Japan, especially with regard to the conservation and promotion of India's Buddhist heritage. But it is equally important to recognize that this is a more recent representation of much older networks of Asian interactions. For instance, the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya attracted international Buddhist pilgrims and patrons throughout ancient and early medieval times. Until at least the seventh century, pilgrims from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Burma, China, Korea, and Central Asia were visiting the shrine. The evidence of these interactions comes from Chinese accounts as well as Nepalese coins and Burmese, Nepalese, and Chinese inscriptions found at the site. But from the point of view of this paper, it is also significant that apart from the visits of devout monks and lay people there were also several attempts to 'repair' the shrine. Two Burmese missions had effected 'repairs' to the temple in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Much more is known about the nineteenth-century mission: in 1874–75 the Government of India received a request from king Mindon's foreign minister that they be allowed to repair the Mahabodhi temple.[59] Three 'Burmese gentlemen' arrived in Bodh Gaya in January 1877, obtained permission from the chief mahant of the temple, and spent about six months in the area. During this time they cleared away a large area around the Mahabodhi temple, and engaged not only in repair, but also in fresh construction. When the activities of the Burmese came to the notice of archaeologists the Government of Bengal asked them to leave, and took on the task of repairing the Mahabodhi temple itself. The conservation work carried out here became the focus of a heated debate concerning restoration and conservation among archaeologists and architectural scholars in India, but that is another story.[60] What is most significant from the point of view of the arguments being made here is that in the late nineteenth century the status of the Mahabodhi temple was recognized by a Burmese ruler who sought to enhance his prestige by repairing a Buddhist shrine located in the homeland of Buddhism but well beyond the political borders of his own domain.

In recent years the international involvement in conservation work at Buddhist sites in India has increased significantly. The Indian government has accepted foreign aid for several projects related to conservation and tourism, several of them connected with Buddhist sites, and many of them involving investments by a country in which Buddhism has a strong presence, namely Japan. For several years now, the Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC) has been offering loans for infrastructural development at Ajanta and Ellora. The total expenditure on the first phase of this project was Rs 1,275 million. For the second phase, Japanese loan assistance to the tune of Rs 2,992 million (7,331 million yen) was expected (the total projected cost of the second phase is Rs 3,600 million).[61] The project involves the conservation and protection of the sites, improvement of airport facilities, and upgrading of tourism-related infrastructure. The implementation of the project lies with the Ministry of Tourism of the Indian Government, with the active involvement of the Archaeological Survey of India. It is interesting to note that the JBIC loan covers a micro-credit programme to help fund the training and marketing activities of artisans living in and around Ajanta and Ellora (apparently, not enough is being done in this regard). The Government of India has also entered into an agreement with the JBIC for loan assistance of about Rs 3,956 million for infrastructure development at Buddhist sites in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, specifically at Sarnath, Kushinagara, Kapilavastu, Shravasti, and Sankisa (the total project cost is Rs 6,800 million). The JBIC, for its part, is also apparently interested in improving infrastructure at Buddhist sites in Sikkim, Ladakh, and Madhya Pradesh.

Furthermore, the Japanese interest in Indian Buddhist sites is part of a larger phenomenon of improving

bilateral ties between India and Japan and the latter's forwarding of a series of loans through Official Development Assistance.[62] These loans have helped finance development projects of various kinds, apart from the conservation of India's cultural heritage. Currently Japan is the only country giving assistance for the conservation of historical sites in India. The 2007 joint statement towards the Japan-India Strategic and Global Partnership included specific mention of Japanese assistance in developing tourism-related infrastructure in India, including the Buddhist pilgrimage circuit.

It is also worth noting that Japan is the largest contributor to the World Heritage Fund and that the UNESCO/Japan Trust Fund for the Preservation of World Cultural Heritage has funded the restoration of many important historical sites in other parts of the world, such as those at Angkor (Cambodia), Jiaohe City and the Hanyuan Hall of Daming Palace (China), monuments in Hue City (Vietnam), Wat Phu (Laos), and the historic area of Bagan (Myanmar). The fund financed conservation work at Mohenjo Daro and at various Buddhist monuments in the Gandhara region in Pakistan. In India this Fund was responsible for financing the restoration of the main *stūpa* and some other structures at Sanchi and Satdhara in Madhya Pradesh.

The promotion of tourism along Buddhist circuits is also part of ongoing processes of co-operation among the larger community of South Asian and East Asian countries. For instance, the promotion of this circuit and ecotourism are the two key target areas identified by the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) countries, which comprise Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. SASEC's 10–year Tourism Development Plan, with a special focus on integrating nature and culture, is receiving Japanese funding through the Asian Development Bank.

It should also be noted that Japanese archaeologists have been involved in the excavations of two key Buddhist sites in South Asia. In 1992–95 the Japanese Buddhist Federation sent a team headed by Satoru Uesaka to excavate Lumbini in Nepal. The Federation also helped fund conservation work at the site, especially the repair of the Māyādevī temple. Archaeologists from Kansai University, Japan, working in collaboration with the Archaeological Survey of India, were involved in several seasons' excavation at Shravasti in Uttar Pradesh in 1958–59, 1986–88, and 1993–94.

Modern temples built by East Asian communities are a common sight at Buddhist pilgrimage sites such as Kusinagara, Bodhgaya, Rajgir, and Sarnath. Sarnath has several modern Buddhist temples built and maintained by monks from Tibet, China, Japan, and Myanmar. The most important monastery-shrine complex at Sarnath is the Mūlagandhakuṭi Vihāra, built by the Maha Bodhi Society of India, which enshrines relics found at Taxila and Nagarjunakonda. The walls of this temple have paintings by the Japanese artist Kosetsu Nosu, and the original 'World Peace Bell' of this temple (which had to be replaced in 2005 due to damage) was donated by the Japanese Buddhist community.

The transformation of ancient Buddhist sites due to increasing international involvement and investment and the demands of the tourist industry is visible in many places, but has not been adequately documented, in part no doubt because this kind of investigation is not considered a serious scholarly endeavour. There are, however, a few exceptions. For instance, David Geary's study of the Mahabodhi temple directs attention to the ways in which the site has been transformed due to commercial factors linked directly to the booming tourism industry.[63] The international presence at the site increased steadily from 1956 onwards, and today the environs of the temple are dotted with many temples, *vihāras*, and guest-houses built by groups from several countries including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, and Mongolia. Geary discusses the ways in which the local community living in and around this relatively poor part of the state of Bihar have participated and benefited economically from the increased tourist traffic, for instance through the making and selling of Buddhist souvenirs, and how the increasing stakes have simultaneously led to friction and conflict among local shop-keepers and hoteliers. The international flavour of Bodh Gaya is reflected in its international temples, the occasional marriages between Japanese women and Indian tour guides (who speak fluent Japanese), and the wide range of cuisines on offer in restaurants. The government of Bihar is well aware of the great revenue generation potential of the Mahabodhi temple and has been busy trying to improve infrastructure, for instance through a plan to make an eighteen-hole golf course. The completion of the Gaya international airport in 2002 made the site much more accessible to visitors. This was also the year in which Bodh Gaya was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, making it the first 'living' Buddhist site to be given this coveted status. Bodh Gaya is an ancient Buddhist site which continued to see varying volumes of pilgrim traffic over the centuries, and is today a flourishing pilgrim and tourist destination. But thanks to tourists, pilgrims, and pilgrim-tourists, many a 'dead' Buddhist site is also coming to life again.

The reinvention of extinct Buddhist sites

One of the most interesting features of the contemporary Buddhist revival in India is the resurrection, or rather reinvention, of several extinct ancient Buddhist sites as a result of a conjunction of the factors outlined in earlier sections. One of the important recent developments in this

context is the concerted appropriation of ancient Buddhist sites by Tibetan Buddhists through large-scale ceremonials which have religious and political import, and which bring together and unite the scattered Tibetan diaspora and its sympathizers.[64] The most important of these ceremonials is the Dukhor Wangchen or Kālacakra initiation. This initiation into the practice of Kālacakra *tantra* is an important part of Tibetan Buddhism, and the fourteenth Dalai Lama has conducted more Kālacakra initiations than any of his predecessors. The first two conducted by him were held in Lhasa in Tibet (in 1954 and 1956). Thereafter, they have been held in various parts of the world, including in Los Angeles (1989), New York (1991), Barcelona (1994), Ulan Bator (1995), Sydney (1996), and Toronto (2004). Within India, the initiations have been held in various places, including Dharamsala (1970), Bylakuppe (in Karnataka, 1971), Bodh Gaya (1974, 1985, 2003), Leh (in Ladakh, 1976), Tabo (1983, 1996), Kyi (in Spiti, 2000), and Sarnath (1990).

In 2006 the thirtieth Kālacakra was held at Amaravati in the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. Until then this place was, at a popular level, known more for its Śaiva Amareśvara temple than for the ruins of a Buddhist complex that date from the third century BCE to the thirteenth century CE. The *mahācaitya* at Amaravati was gradually destroyed and dismantled after the thirteenth century, irrevocably so during the nineteenth century (Figure 3).[65] But between 5 and 16 January 2006 the Kālacakra brought it to life again (Figure 4). The idea of organizing the event at this place was apparently that of one of its sponsors – the Busshokai Centre of Kanazawa, a small group in Japan devoted to the study of Tibetan Buddhism. The result was that the winter of 2006 saw thousands of devout Buddhists from all over the world converge at Amaravati.

The main organizer of this event was the Norbulingka Institute based in Dharamsala, and substantial funds and resources were provided by the Government of India, the state government, and the Central Tibetan Administration. The Andhra Pradesh government spent some Rs 500 million on infrastructure including road improvement, sanitation, electrification, medical facilities, drinking water, and a helipad for VIPs. Houses, schools, and colleges were converted into hotels, and hundreds of tents were set up to house visitors. The valedictory function was conducted by the Dalai Lama, and several state ministers and high-ranking officials attended. The audience included as many as 80,000 to 100,000 people from different parts of the world including India, China, Mongolia, Tibet, the Netherlands, Australia, Ireland, Japan, Iceland, Southeast Asia, and South America. The presence of American film actor Richard Gere contributed the important glamour quotient. The Andhra Pradesh government clearly saw this event as an opportunity to place Amaravati firmly on the world spiritual tourism map.

Becker has described in detail how the landscape of Amaravati was dramatically altered by the Kālacakra. The Archaeological Survey of India raised the level of the

3. The Amaravati mahācaitya *today; courtesy of Sonali Dhingra.*

4. Kālacakra celebrations at Amaravati, January 2006; courtesy of Tenzing Sonam.

drum of the ruined *stūpa* mound, propped up sculpted limestone slabs against it, and added a new metal railing. Devotees added prayer flags, garlands, and ceremonial paraphernalia. A colossal 125 foot image of the seated Buddha (funded by devotees and government agencies) was installed, together with a much smaller gilded image of *ācārya* Nāgārjuna, right across the street from the already-standing statue of Ambedkar. Becker states that on the occasion of the Kālacakra, the remains of the ancient Amaravati *stūpa* were infused with 'a new sacred authority. . . a relic-like quality', the result of a combination of re-used ancient elements and much new imagery.[66]

A few days before performing the ceremonials at Amaravati, the Dalai Lama inaugurated the Holy Relics Gallery in the Andhra Pradesh Museum in Hyderabad, where, as mentioned earlier, ancient remains mix with current spiritual interests within the precincts of a museum. He also visited the site of Nagarjunakonda, no doubt because of the strong visibility of the third- to fourth-century Buddhist remains of the ancient Ikṣvāku capital of Vijayapurī, which was once located in this place.

The Dalai Lama's footprints are as visible in the western Himalayas as in South India. Reference was made earlier to the two Kālacakras held at Tabo. In August 2007 the Dalai Lama delivered teachings on 'The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva' and Kamalaśīla's 'Middle Stages of Meditation' at Nako, a small, picturesque village in the Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh. On this occasion he also conducted an Avalokiteśvara initiation and a Dechok initiation. When I visited Nako in the summer of 2007 it was humming with development activity and anticipation of the forthcoming event. It is interesting to note that this major ceremonial event also coincided with the holding of an academic one – an international seminar on the culture of the north-western Himalayas.

The iconography of convergence: Nagarjunakonda

The reinvention of Buddhism in India and India's increasing stature as Buddhism's original homeland are perhaps not surprising when seen as part of the long-term history of Buddhism in the subcontinent. This paper has emphasized that the convergence of various processes that have contributed to this resurgence can be seen especially clearly at Buddhist pilgrimage sites which attract Dalit Buddhists as well as East Asian and other international pilgrim-tourists. This convergence is vividly represented in the varied iconography that marks the landscape of these sites. While Becker has described some aspects of this at Amaravati, it can be seen even more graphically at Nagarjunakonda.

Situated on the banks of the river Krishna and surrounded on three sides by offshoots of the Nallamalai hills, Nagarjunakonda (in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh) was once a 15 square kilometre valley, rich in

remains from the prehistoric to medieval periods. Tragically, most of these remains were permanently drowned in the waters of the Krishna River when a major multi-purpose dam project was initiated at this place in 1955. In the heady optimism of post-Independence socialism, big dams represented the new India's hopes for a prosperous future, and if it was necessary to sacrifice an ancient site in the interests of development and modernization, that would have to be done.

The explorations and excavations at Nagarjunakonda have a very long history. Discovered in 1926 by A. R. Saraswati, the site was excavated in that very year by A. H. Longhurst. Longhurst's report (published in 1938) represents the first stage in the interpretation of the site, one in which it was seen essentially as a Buddhist site (Figure 5).[67] The report on the second series of excavations by T. N. Ramachandran (published in 1953) drew attention to the many Hindu temples in the early historic city.[68] During the 1950s, as plans for building the dam across the Krishna were drawn up, Nagarjunakonda's impending submergence led the Archaeological Survey of India to undertake a massive project of exploration, excavation, and documentation. About 136 new structures and structural complexes were unearthed, and before the valley was turned into a gigantic lake, nine of the most important structures were transplanted and rebuilt on top of the Nagarjunakonda hill, which became an island in the midst of the lake created by the dam. Smaller-scale replicas of fourteen other structures were fabricated and set up on the banks of the reservoir. The first part of the report of the 1954–60 excavations (published in 1975), by R. Subrahmanyam and others, focused on the site's prehistoric and megalithic remains, while the second part, edited by K. V. Soundararajan (published as recently as 2006), offers a consolidated view of the early historic remains, artifacts, and inscriptions.[69]

In spite of the abundant evidence of its varied, changing, and multi-religious character, there has always been a strong tendency for both scholars and the Indian government to privilege one particular aspect of Nagarjunakonda – its early historic Buddhist remains. The reasons for this privileging include the Buddhist bias of early archaeologists in colonial India. There is also the strong resilience of a tradition of uncertain historicity which connects this place with the renowned Buddhist scholar-monk Nāgārjuna. To this can be added the Indian government's deliberate privileging of the Buddhist connections of the site to promote its own perspective and its revenue interests, and it is these connections which are advertised abundantly in and around the place.

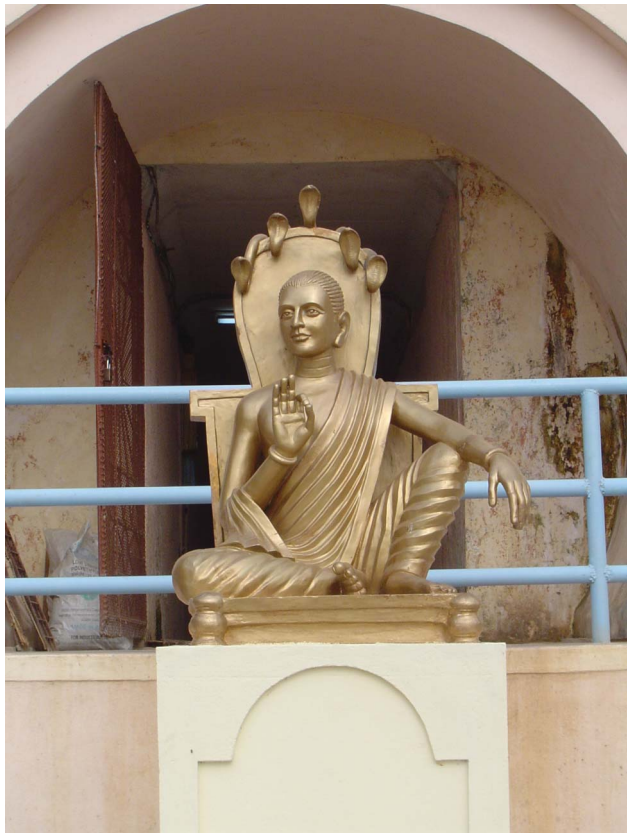
Today the most imposing edifice at Nagarjunakonda is a modern construction – the gigantic Nagarjunasagar dam, the largest masonry dam in the world, the centrepiece of a massive project which took place between the 1950s and the 1970s (Figure 6). While laying its foundation stone on 12 December 1955 Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru declared that he was founding one of

5. Ruins of the early historical mahācaitya*, Nagarjunakonda.*

6. The Nagarjunasagar dam.

7. Nāgārjuna portrait in the dam gallery.

the many new temples of humanity that were being built all over India. This excerpt from his speech is displayed prominently on the outer walls of the lift tower of the dam, both in English and in Telugu translation. However, the ancient Buddhist links of Nagarjunakonda can be seen everywhere, even at the dam site. A modern artist's painted portraits of Nāgārjuna hang in the dam gallery (Figure 7), while a gilded concrete image of the monk



8. Gilded Nāgārjuna image near dam gallery exit.

stands prominently at the gallery exit (Figure 8). Even the dam railing is a crude modern copy of a typical ancient Buddhist railing (Figure 9).

On Nagarjunakonda island, where some of the ancient structures were rebuilt, is the guest house where Nehru stayed in the winter of 1955 when he came to lay the dam's foundation stone. There is also a museum where a selection of the archaeological material discovered in the course of excavations over the years is displayed. In a play on the name 'Nagarjunakonda', a serpent motif is woven continuously into the small stone screens that are interspersed along the outer walls of the museum building. Inside, to some extent because the Buddhist reliefs and images outnumber the stone sculptural remains associated with Hindu temples, the display has an overpoweringly strong Buddhist emphasis.

Domestic tourists, pilgrims, and pilgrim-tourists, and those from other countries including Japan, Tibet, and Sri Lanka, visit the site. There is no flood of Buddhist pilgrims – yet. But that the process is underway is evident from clues strewn amidst the *kikar* trees and landscaped gardens crossed by oleander-lined paths on Nagarjunakonda island. Many of these clues date from the time when the Kālacakra was held at nearby Amaravati. Heaps of piled-up stones are reminiscent of the votive offerings seen all over the barren mountainous terrain of the western Himalayas. Colourful prayer flags flutter incongruously over a megalithic burial site

9. Railing of the Nagarjunasagar dam.

10. Prayer flags fluttering over reconstructed megalithic burial.

reconstructed by the Archaeological Survey of India (Figure 10). Small sign-boards identify the *pipal* saplings planted by the Dalai Lama during his brief visit (Figure 11).

The modern town, which consists of two parts – Vijayapuri North and Vijayapuri South – has a large number of gilded statues, most of them installed in 2005, during the dam's Golden Jubilee celebrations. There are statues of a former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi; a former president, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy; a former Minister for Irrigation, K. L. Rao; a former chief minister, Brahmananda Reddy; the first chief engineer of the dam, Mir Jaffer Ali; and also the more recent chairman of a local cement factory. Strongly reminiscent of the stones raised in the early historical city of Vijayapurī (the ancient name of Nagarjunakonda) in memory of heroes who died in battle many centuries ago, there is a modern 'Martyrs' Memorial' which names the engineers and workers who lost their lives during the dam's construction (Figure 12). As at the dam site, here too, mingling with the images and ideas of modern times, are iconic representations of more ancient, imagined, connections. In front of the recreation club in Vijayapuri South is a statue of the Buddha (Figure 13). A Nāgārjuna image stands at the entrance to the right earth dam, the entrance to the power station is ornamented with a gigantic plaster *stūpa* façade (Figure 14), and there is a large image of Nāgārjuna over the side entrance. The ancient Buddhist connections

11. Pipal *sapling planted by the Dalai Lama on Nagarjunakonda island.*

12. The 'Martyrs' Memorial'.

13. Buddha bust outside Recreation Club.

of Nagarjunakonda were evidently in the forefront of the consciousness of those who designed the landscape of the modern dam-city, and these connections were deliberately and repeatedly emphasized by them.

The Dalit connection is also represented iconically at Nagarjunakonda. In the main fenced-in *chowk* of Vijayapuri South is a large concrete canopy supported on four pillars which bear quadruple lions (part of the emblem of the ancient Maurya emperor Aśoka as well as of the modern Indian nation state), a *cakra* (wheel), and an elephant (Figure 15). One of the many connotations of the elephant is its symbolic association with the Bahujan Samaj Party, a political party which ostensibly represents the interests of India's Dalits). Under the canopy, high on a three-tier pedestal, stands B. R. Ambedkar, in his familiar dress and pose – bespectacled, blue-suited, his right arm raised up, the index finger of his hand pointing in a firm, didactic gesture. The iconography of Ambedkar (which usually also includes a fountain pen and a book, representing the Constitution of India, in the drafting of which he played a leading role) deliberately emphasizes a westernized, educated man.[70] On top of the canopy is a smaller seated gilded figure of the Buddha, seated in the *vitarka mudrā* of giving instruction. In this *chowk*, what we have is a remarkable ensemble of images that graphically illustrates many of the processes that have been discussed in this paper. The East Asian connection is likely to strengthen as Nagarjunakonda becomes more firmly placed on the Buddhist pilgrim-tourist circuit.

The images of the Buddha and Nāgārjuna, commemorations of the Dalai Lama's visit, the statue of Ambedkar at the cross-roads, and the visits of Indian and international tourists and pilgrim-tourists – all these aspects converge and blend into the landscape of Nagarjunakonda. As is the case at other Buddhist sites, these are not the symbols of the revival of an old religion, once dominant, and subsequently relegated to the cultural margins. Although anchored in ancient Buddhism and its sacred places, in reality they represent an entirely new conjunction of factors and forces, internal as well as international, religious as well as utterly mundane.

14. Façade of Nagarjunasagar Power Station.

Conclusions

Asian Buddhism's interest in and interaction with ancient sites in India goes back to very early times. From the mid-twentieth century onwards, this interest and interaction became more intense due to the factors outlined in this paper. In fact, new Buddhist sects and organizations are currently actively marking their presence on Indian soil in many ways, including through the construction of new kinds of *stūpas*.[71] Unlike popular religious sites which are bustling centres of active worship, extinct sites offer a large number of wide open spaces with great potential for appropriation by Buddhist groups who are seeking to expand their presence and visibility. These places have the additional advantage that there is little competition from entrenched rival religious groups, although the history of Bodh Gaya shows that there will always be latent potential for future competition, contestation, and conflict at those sites that have a multi-denominational profile and history. This would, in fact, apply to a large number of sites, since most ancient Indian 'Buddhist' sites have connections with the Hindu and Jaina traditions as well.

The reinvention and increased visibility of ancient Buddhist sites in India can be traced to a variety of sources, including the neo-Buddhist and Tibetan Buddhist movements, state recognition of the enormous tourist potential of these sites, and the increasing East Asian and indeed international interest in them. It has been argued in this paper that a significant segment of the people who travel to the sites on the spiritual tourism circuits can be described as pilgrims or pilgrim-tourists.

15. Chowk *of Vijaypuri South.*

Some of these sites may seem rather out of the way and difficult to access. This is the case with Nagarjunakonda, for instance, which is not only difficult to reach but is also located in an area where Naxalite (left-wing extremists) are very active. On 30 April 2006 a tourist boat headed for the island was blown up by Naxalites, thankfully after its occupants had been made to disembark. But for the intrepid and adventurous pilgrim-tourist, the arduousness and dangers of the journey can be a challenge rather than discouragement.

We are currently witnessing the steady expansion of the circuits of spiritual tourism, and given the large number of ancient Buddhist sites, the possibilities are virtually endless. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent these sites can actually foster a sense of *communitas* among those who visit them, specifically among the Dalit Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists (and their non-Tibetan adherents and supporters), and East Asian Buddhists. Given the enormous differences between the cultural matrices in which all these Buddhisms are embedded, the potential for this seems fairly limited at present.

The reinvention of Buddhism and Buddhist sites in modern India can be seen as a new phase in the history of Buddhism in India, one which is fueled by many processes operating in an increasingly globalized world. The long-term prospects of this reinvention can only be a matter of speculation. The vitality and survival of Buddhist monasteries and communities have always been dependant on their relationship and level of integration with their hinterland. It should be noted that due to globalization the hinterland of Buddhist communities has expanded enormously and that it is, more than ever before, not governed by spatial proximity.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the increased activity at ancient Buddhist sites presents opportunities for many but also dangers to the sites themselves. As these sites become more visible, as they are appropriated by religious groups, and as the money flows in to swiftly develop them as heritage sites and destinations for spiritual tourism, crucial decisions have to be made. The reinforcement of the drum of the Amaravati *stūpa* represents a modest modification of an ancient structure. But there are instances of *stūpas* having been reconstructed in their entirety, sometimes not very tastefully, as at Satdhara in central India. The reinvention of Buddhism and Buddhist sites therefore brings to the fore many important and complex policy issues related to the conservation and restoration of ancient monuments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is a revised version of a paper I presented at a conference organized by Ryukoku University, Kyoto, and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in Kyoto, Japan on 5 October 2007. I would like to acknowledge the help given by Tenzing Sonam, Ritu Sarin, Arjun Mahey, and Yaaminey Mubayi in the course of my research for this paper. I would also like to acknowledge the valuable comments and suggestions made by the anonymous referee of an earlier version of the paper. Thanks are also due to India International Centre library and to Prof. K. T. S. Sarao and Neha Sarao for locating crucial readings.

NOTES

1. For instance, Leoshko has underlined such a lack of investigation of 'later material' from the site of Bodh Gaya. J. Leoshko, *Sacred Traces: British Explorations of Buddhism in South Asia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 3–4.
2. Nālandā is located in the Nalanda district of Bihar; Odantapura is near Nalanda; Vikramaśilā is identified with Antichak in Bhagalpur District, Bihar; Somapurī is identified with Paharpur in Rajshahi District, Bangladesh.
3. T. Ling, *Buddhist Revival in India: Aspects of the Sociology of Buddhism* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 11–46.
4. B. G. Ray, *Religious Movements in Modern Bengal* (Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1965).
5. N. N. Basu, 'Modern Buddhism and Its Followers in Orissa', *Archaeological Survey of Mayurbhanj*, 1 (1982), 12. Founded by Mahima Gosavi, this movement combined social protest with *bhakti* and had certain Buddhist elements in its ideas and organization. For details, see also G. Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), pp. 225–27.
6. Several Buddhist groups claim that these figures were deliberately understated, and that many Buddhists, especially new converts, were counted as Hindus during the census.
7. Ling, pp. 132–34.
8. This is something for which B. R. Ambedkar apparently took credit, but was evidently supported by other leaders as well.
9. P. C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
10. Ling (p. 134) describes it as a quickening of interest with potential for further growth rather than a revival.
11. T. Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
12. C. Becker, 'Remembering the Amaravati Stūpa: The Revival of a Ruin', in *Buddhist Stupas in South Asia: Recent Archaeological, Art-Historical, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. by J. Hawkes and A. Shimada (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 268–87.

13. A. Fiske, 'Scheduled Caste Buddhist Organization', in *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*, ed. by J. M. Mahar (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972), pp. 113–18.
14. Ray, pp. 165–68.
15. Omvedt, pp. 236–40.
16. The conversion of lower castes to Buddhism (as also to Islam and Christianity) was known in earlier periods in Indian history. But there were many important differences between these earlier events and what happened at the Diksha Bhumi in Nagpur in 1959. In this case, the conversion was that of a large section of an entire caste (the Mahar caste of Maharashtra, to which Ambedkar belonged); the converts built their own religious organization and held on to many aspects of their social customs, leadership, and caste loyalties; and the conversion was that of a group of people who were already connected to a political party that represented their interests. See E. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi: Manohar 1992), pp. 126–27, 191–92. Ambedkar had founded the Independent Labour Party in 1936. The name of this party changed to the Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942 and to the Republican Party in 1957.
17. According to Omvedt, the members of the Maha Bodhi Society were actually alarmed by Ambedkar's plan. Note the telegram sent to him by the secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta: 'Shocked very much to read your decision to renounce Hindu religion . . . Please reconsider your decision.' (Cited in Omvedt, pp. 258–59). Later the Society argued that if the Dalits must convert, it should be to Buddhism. Omvedt argues that the reason was obvious: in India the Maha Bodhi Society was dominated by Bengali Brahmins and they were not particularly happy about a Dalit influx into the Buddhist fold.
18. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1954; repr. 1962), pp. 494, 489.
19. After the standard declaration of taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the *saṅgha* was made, Ambedkar himself administered to his followers twenty-two additional vows, which included an emphatic repudiation of the worship of the Hindu gods and also a rejection of the idea that the Buddha was an *avatāra* (incarnation) of Viṣṇu.
20. See Ambedkar in V. Rodrigues (ed.), *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 172–89.
21. B. R. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and his Dhamma* (Bombay: Siddharth College, 1957), pp. x, xi, 301–09, 316–36, 350–51, 511–12.
22. Cited in Ling, p. 91.
23. Posted in *The Tribune*, 28 October 2002. The function was organized to condole the killing of five Dalits in Dulina village in Jhajjar District on 28 October. It is reported that at least twelve Dalits took the vows of Buddhist monks, twelve among those present declared themselves as converts to Islam, and one married couple converted to Christianity. Apart from Udit Raj, chairman of the All-India Confederation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Organizations, the well-known film director Mahesh Bhatt was also present. The first convert to Islam was converted by the President of the All-India Muslim Morcha, and leaders of the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind were also present. The couple was converted to Christianity by the President of the All-India Christian Council.
24. Posted in *The Hindustan Times*, 4 November 2004.
25. 'Thousands of Dalits Embrace Buddhism', <http://www.internationalreporter.com/News-2143/thousands-of-dalits-embrace-buddhism.html> [accessed 27 July 2010].
26. Fiske, pp. 113–42.
27. D. S. Lopez, Jr (ed.), *Religions of Tibet in Practice* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998), p. 24.
28. D. S. Lopez, Jr, 'Foreigner at the Lama's Feet', in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. by D. S. Lopez, Jr (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 251–95.
29. If all this sounds cold and unsympathetic towards the Tibetan cause, Lopez is quick to add that 'to allow Tibet to circulate in a system of fantastic opposites . . . is to deny Tibet its history, to exclude it from a real world of which it has always been a part, and to deny Tibetans their agency in the creation of a contested quotidian reality. During the past three decades fantasies of Tibet garnered much support for the cause of Tibetan independence. But those fantasies are ultimately a threat to the realization of that goal.' D. S. Lopez, Jr, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 11.
30. L. S. Thakur, *Buddhism in the Western Himalayas: A Study of the Tabo Monastery* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 35.
31. Ibid., p. 5.
32. T. Sonam, 'The Geshe of Tabo', *Tibetan Bulletin* (1990).
33. See <http://www.tabomonastery.org/> [accessed 27 July 2010].
34. *Alchi: The Living Heritage of Ladakh: 1000 Years of Buddhist Art* (Leh: Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2009).

35. J. Rizvi, *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983; repr. 1998), pp. 208, 220.
36. I must add that the 'revitalization' of these monasteries also has its limits. The remote monasteries of Ladakh, Lahaul, and Spiti are desperately in need of funding and attention from the Indian government to help preserve their unique historical and artistic heritage.
37. 'I am always expressing, telling and sharing with new Buddhists, particularly those who come from the so-called lower castes, that taking to Buddhism should not result in resentment among other religions or caste systems. . .'. 'If some people from this country [India] follow the dharma, it is good. After all, I describe Buddhism and Hinduism as twin brothers and sisters.' *The Times of India*, 10 April 2001. The Dalai Lama here seems to have been trying to downplay the element of conflict associated with Dalit conversions.
38. I am grateful to Tenzin Geyche Tethong, the personal secretary of the Dalai Lama, for bringing this to my attention.
39. This emerges graphically in *The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom*, a recent film by Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam (White Crane Films, 2009).
40. Zelliot, pp. 235–36.
41. Fiske, pp. 135–36.
42. Huber, p. 346.
43. Ibid., pp. 348, 350–58.
44. Zelliot, pp. 235–36.
45. A. Trevithick, 'British Archaeologists, Hindu Abbots, and Burmese Buddhists: The Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, 1811–1877', *Modern Asian Studies*, 33.3 (1999), 635–56.
46. V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 1974). Turner takes the term *communitas* from Paul Goodman but gives it a new meaning.
47. Zelliot, pp. 230–33.
48. G. M. Tartakov, 'Art and Identity: The Rise of a New Buddhist Imagery', *Art Journal*, 49.4 (1990), 410.
49. Zelliot, p. 245.
50. Huber, p. 121.
51. M. Kapstein, 'The Guide to the Crystal Peak', *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. by D. S. Lopez, Jr. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998), pp. 103–04.
52. Huber, pp. 338–46.
53. Huber, pp. 338, 372. Huber provides an excellent discussion of the interactions between Tibet and India across the centuries.
54. Turner, pp. 221, 226.
55. Yaaminey Mubayi, personal communication.
56. These people additionally described their interest in Ellora as fueled by awareness of its historical importance and the beauty of its sculpture, something they had come to learn of from their school text-books (Yaaminey Mubayi, personal communication).
57. See the Report of the Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism, and Culture, 79th report on demands for grants (2004–05, demand no. 93) of the Ministry of Tourism (Parliament of India, Rajya Sabha, available online).
58. See the Report of the Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism, and Culture's 120th report on demands for grants (2007–08) (Parliament of India, Rajya Sabha, available online).
59. Trevithick, pp. 648–51; U. Singh, *The Discovery of Ancient India: Early Archaeologists and the Beginnings of Archaeology* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), pp. 218–21.
60. Singh, pp. 218–30.
61. The balance is supposed to be obtained from various government agencies such as the Archaeological Survey of India, the Airport Authority of India, and five State Government agencies.
62. Many of these details are from the data provided on the Internet by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. New Japanese loans were frozen following the nuclear test conducted by India in May 1998; the freeze was lifted on 26 October 2001.
63. D. Geary, 'Destination Enlightenment: Branding Buddhism and Spiritual Tourism in Bodhgaya, Bihar', *Anthropology Today*, 24(3) (2008), 10–14.
64. Huber, pp. 358–73.
65. Singh, pp. 249–90.
66. Becker, p. 268.
67. A.H. Longhurst, *The Buddhist Antiquities of Nagarjunakonda, Madras Presidency*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 54 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1938; repr. 1999).
68. T. N. Ramachandran, *Nagarjunakonda 1938*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 71 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1953; repr. 1999).
69. R. Subrahmanyam and others, *Nagarjunakonda (1954–60): Volume I*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 75 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1975); K. V. Soundararajan (ed.), *Nagarjunakonda (1954–60): Volume II (The Historical Period)*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 75 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2006).
70. 'The personality which Ambedkar presented with that elitist image was arrogant, caustic, aggressive, never violent but rarely polite. To realize the impact

of this figure, one must place it alongside the stereotype of the Mahar (the "Untouchable" caste that Ambedkar belonged to)'. Zelliot, p. 59. Tartakov argues that such images express the history and aspirations of neo-Buddhists, and that the portraits and statues of Ambedkar are genuine revolutionary art, art as an instrument for social change (Tartakov, p. 411–16).

71. J. Kim, 'What makes a Stūpa? Quotations, Fragments, and the Reinvention of Buddhist Stūpas in Contemporary India', in Hawkes and Shimada, pp. 289–309.