

## BOOK REVIEWS

In his conclusion, Bracken states that his intent in this book has been to focus on the ways in which religious traditions have made intelligible the relationship between the Infinite and the finite, as well as how the Infinite has been revealed in and through the finite. He then addresses a number of counterarguments from traditional Christian theology where the nature of God is fully actual and determinate, as well as from the Eastern traditions he had explored in the previous three chapters. As he argues for his theistic trinitarian process model, it becomes clear that Bracken sees this model as having—like any intellectual model—certain strengths and weaknesses for wrestling with vexing philosophical and theological questions concerning Ultimate Reality and the world of our experience. Bracken's book is an outstanding contribution to fostering comparative theological reflection and conversation about this central issue of religious thought East and West. It certainly deserves to be read and discussed widely by scholars from all religious traditions who are interested in comparing the presuppositions we use in trying to understand Ultimate Reality and its relationship with our world.

*BUDDHIST WOMEN ACROSS CULTURES: Realizations.* Edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo. State University of New York Press, 1999. pp. viii + 326. ISBN: 0 7914 4138 5.

SHOBHA RANI DASH

KARMA LEKSHE TSOMO began her activities with and for Buddhist women through Sakyadhita ("Daughters of the Buddha"), an international association of Buddhist women founded in 1987. As a result of her efforts, this anthology is now in our hands. Each of the fifteen contributors reflects on women and Buddhism in doctrinal, philosophical or social terms.

The essays are divided into two sections: Buddhist Women in Asian Traditions and Contemporary Buddhist Women. The first part, as the title indicates, deals with Buddhist women in India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan and Tibet. The essays in the second part are varied, including a biography of Aung San Suu Kyi, a comparison of Christian and Buddhist women, Buddhist women in the West, and the question of conception and the entry of consciousness.

The introductory chapter starts with the legacy of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, the founder of the order of nuns (bhikṣuṇī saṅgha). Her story is well-known, but Karma Lekshe Tsomo retells it with many provocative suggestions. Especially noteworthy is Karma Lekshe Tsomo's effort to date the history of women in Buddhism prior to the Buddha's Enlightenment. She presents some interesting theories about the

Buddha's denial of a female monastic order. Karma Lekshe Tsomo finds examples of the superior spiritual achievements of women, both ordained and lay, in the Theravāda tradition as well as the Mahāyāna sūtras. However, her statement that "the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha . . . was never officially established in . . . Japan" (p. 9) raises some questions. If this is the case, then was the establishment of the official nun (官尼) absolutely baseless? Karma Lekshe Tsomo briefly discusses the position of Burmese nuns, stating that they have "a second-rate religious status" (p. 11). The Sri Lankan bhikṣuṇī movement, particularly the ordination crisis, is amply described. In sketching the situation of Thai nuns, Karma Lekshe Tsomo refers to "the most respected profession, the Saṅgha" (p. 14). I wonder if it is really correct to describe the Saṅgha as a religious profession. All in all, the introduction presents an accurate picture of the subordinate and ambiguous status of Buddhist nuns in most Asian countries. Still, I have one more terminological question: are the terms "male religious specialists" and "female religious specialists" (p. 17) proper substitutes for "monks" and "nuns"?

The article by Elizabeth J. Harris presents the different portraits of women found in Theravāda Buddhism, using a wealth of textual evidence. Her argument, based on her reading of canonical texts, that gender differences have no place on the path to Enlightenment, deserves serious consideration. What truly exists in Enlightenment is only the liberated being, neither male nor female.

Lorna Dewaraja would like to find a "women's liberation movement" dating back to the time of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. Unfortunately, Dewaraja does not make her case in a concrete and convincing way. In her effort to prove the Buddha's positive attitude toward women, during a period when the birth of a daughter was nothing but a curse, Dewaraja quotes I. B. Horner's citation in *Women in Early Buddhist Literature* of Saṃyutta Nikāya I.85, in which the Buddha consoles King Pasenadi of Kosala, who is grieving at the birth of a daughter. The Buddha says, "A female offspring, O king, may prove even nobler than a male" (p. 69). While it is true that this sentence seems to express a positive evaluation of women's potential, the rest of the verse makes it clear that a girl is only good insofar as she becomes a virtuous wife, obedient daughter-in-law and mother of a son (not of a daughter):

For she may grow up wise and virtuous  
 Her husband's mother reverencing, true wife  
 The boy that she might bear may do great deeds  
 And rule great realms, yea, such a son  
 Of noble wife becomes his country's guide

(In fact, this verse does appear in Harris's article [p. 55]).

Moreover, Dewaraja writes, "Manu's Code of Laws adversely influenced social attitudes toward women" (p. 68). If she is justified in this statement, then what are we to make of the following:



## BOOK REVIEWS

Where women are worshipped, gods are pleased there.

Where they are not worshipped, all the doings are fruitless.

[Yatra nāryastu pūjyante, ramante tatra devatāḥ

Yatraitāstu na pūjyante sarvāstatrāphalāḥ kriyāḥ] (Manusmṛtiḥ, III. 56)

Despite the above questions, Dewaraja's attempt to present a clear picture of the socio-political-religious status of women in India and Sri Lanka is valuable. It will help readers to comprehend the status of women in Indian Buddhist society compared to their status in the early Hindu-dominated society. Dewaraja makes good use of survey reports and quotations in comparing the social condition of women in India and Sri Lanka.

Next I will quickly mention some of the other articles. Senarat Wijayasundara's strong advocacy of the revival of the traditional Buddhist order of nuns might bear fruit in the near future. A brief but comprehensive history of Japanese Buddhist nuns is provided by Paula K. R. Arai. She has often written about the struggle of Japanese Buddhist nuns, particularly those of the Soto Zen sect, to make "a positive difference." Hae-ju Sunim asks, "Can women achieve Enlightenment?" The answer, of course, is "Yes." Sunim supports this affirmative answer with textual evidence. Sexual transformation is not required for Enlightenment; rather, a woman's body is a skillful means (upāya) that serves the purposes of a Bodhisattva.

Janice D. Willis presents brief biographies of some renowned Tibetan Buddhist women practitioners. Sarah Pinto describes Tibetan beliefs concerning pregnancy and childbirth, the notion of impurity, and above all the penetration of Buddhism into every corner of Tibetan society.

The Western Buddhist Order is introduced by Dharmacharini Sanghadevi. The WBO does not think it necessary to adopt the traditional seven hierarchical categories of followers, i.e., monks, nuns, female probationers, male novices, female novices, male lay devotees, and female lay devotees. The WBO opts for teamwork to achieve smooth operations. Sanghadevi clearly describes the structure and functions of the WBO, including its social welfare activities, especially in helping the "untouchables" of India.

Rita M. Gross emphasizes that the future of Buddhism depends largely upon the laity rather than the monastic community, with a "feminist reconstruction" playing an important role. Moreover, Gross suggests that, in the traditional Buddhist view, saṃsāra is populated by women whereas nirvāṇa is monopolized by men, and the destruction of the barrier between these two gendered realms can only lead to a more positive and less flawed society.

All of the contributions to this volume are well organized and present useful material on a variety of topics related to women and Buddhism. Several of them focus on the Buddhist wave that has found a place in the Christian-dominated societies of the West. Since the authors come from different countries, cultures and outlooks, their understandings of Buddhism and their views of women naturally vary.

This spectrum of concerns and approaches gives readers a global overview of questions related to women and Buddhism. Many readers will find inspiration in the essays as well as affirmation of the vitality and potential of women throughout the world.

*RELICS, RITUAL, AND REPRESENTATION IN BUDDHISM: Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravāda Tradition.* By Kevin Trainor, Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions 10. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

ROBERT RHODES

JŌKEI (1155–1213), a Japanese Hossō Buddhist monk of the Kamakura period, wrote a number of liturgical works, including one dealing with relic worship. In this document, called *Shari kōshiki*, he declares:

I vow that, on the basis of the power of the relics, I will quickly arouse the aspiration for enlightenment. The Buddha's original vow states, "After my nirvāṇa, (I will be) transformed into my relics, and make sentient beings whom I teach arouse the aspiration for enlightenment. . . ." It should be known that our arousing of the aspiration for enlightenment and our attainment of Buddhahood are solely due to the power of Śākyamuni's relics.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, Jōkei asserts that, after Śākyamuni Buddha passed away, one can achieve enlightenment by worshipping the Buddha's relics left behind in this world. When I first read this passage many years ago, I wondered, "How is this possible?" Unfortunately, Jōkei himself does not explain how the worship of Śākyamuni's relics can result in Buddhahood.

Kevin Trainor's stimulating new study, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation: Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravāda Tradition*, takes up the phenomenon of

<sup>1</sup> The text of Jōkei's *Shari kōshiki* which I have used is found in the eleventh fascicle of the *Kanrin juyō* 翰林拾葉, preserved in the Ōtani University library. The text is undated. The *Kanrin juyō* is a collection of Buddhist documents and texts copied by Kenshō Gusen 顯証弘宣 during the Meiji period. Unfortunately, like the other fascicles in this collection, the eleventh fascicle is unpaginated. According to its colophon, the *Shari kōshiki* was copied by Kenshō on 4/16/1883 (Meiji 16) from a text preserved at the Hōgon-in 宝嚴院, a subtemple within Tōdaiji.