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# Apology

Because of some last minute changes, the article by Peter Alan Roberts in Volume 2, "Translating Translation", was published with some serious mistakes in the text and without its footnotes. We apologise to readers for this mishap, and are printing the correct version at the end of this issue.

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# **Editorial**

# Richard Gombrich

Some time before he became Master of Balliol, Andrew Graham, then a tutor in economics at that Oxford college, gave the customary report required of a Fellow on return from sabbatical leave. "Sometimes," he wrote, "the problem is not so much to extend the frontiers of knowledge as to try to keep them in the same place." Sadly, I find this remark applicable to Buddhist studies. I surmise that it does not often happen in these days of rapid and pervasive global communication that someone in a large field such as, say, chemistry, engineering or modern European history publishes an academic article which is based on facts which have been shown twenty years ago to be incorrect, or fails to mention an equally established discovery which alters the entire complexion of the topic under discussion. Though the number of scholars in Buddhist studies is tiny compared with those in such major fields, the same cannot be claimed for us.

Could this be because, rather than although, we are so few? The Buddhologist tends to be alone in her university, with no colleague whom she can regularly meet to discuss her (and their) work, let alone ask to check a draft article for errors, whether of omission or commission. Despite the internet and the increasing number of works of reference, perhaps the very flood of information now available makes it almost essential to have the filter of another brain on hand, to discover what it is relevant for us to know.

Be that as it may, I am impelled to these speculations by a book which I review elsewhere in this issue. My review explains that on the whole I think well of the book and recommend it; but there are a few defects in it which I suggest deserve comment in a wider context. So here I shall mention two of them.

I have explained in my editorial in volume 1 how I deplore certain trends in the current study of Buddhism, and consider that postmodernist deconstruction

perniciously militates against progress in historical knowledge and understanding. In my review below I mention a couple of startling post-modernist claims in the book. After stating, I think correctly, that "there was no institutionally organized religion known as 'Hinduism' until the British gained control over [India]", the author goes on, "Buddhism' was constructed similarly..." But in all times and places, so far as I know, both Buddhists and their neighbours have had a clear conception of Buddhism. In the Pali/Theravāda tradition, Buddhism as a historical phenomenon, institutionally organized, is known as the *Sāsana* (*Śāsana* in Sanskrit). There is also another term, no less clear-cut in meaning, which translates "Buddhism" in another sense: *Dhamma* (*Dharma* in Sanskrit) is what the Buddha taught. The *Dharma*, being a set of propositions and injunctions, is eternal, and is rediscovered by each Buddha when it has been completely forgotten in this world.

Nowadays it is usually said that the Buddha prophesied that his *Sāsana* would last for 500 years (a figure subsequently revised to 5,000); not only that, but the tradition goes into detail about what will constitute that disappearance. In fact the canonical text (which I discuss again below) uses the word *sad-dhamma* ("true teaching") when he makes this prophesy; I think the word is here referring to the texts in which the teaching is conveyed, which the tradition claims will disappear from the world in a precise order, ending with the monastic disciplinary code, the *Pātimokkha* (see below).

There are other Indian terms for "Buddhist" in various contexts; for instance, brahminical Sanskrit texts use *Bauddha*, as in *Bauddha mata*, "Buddhist views".

This has nothing to do with the fact that people who consider themselves Buddhists, and may indeed have declared themselves to "take refuge" (ultimately rely on) the "three jewels" – the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha – may also have other beliefs and practices which cannot be identified as part of the Buddhist tradition. This has confused monotheist observers, who think in terms of "Thou shalt have no other God but me". But a Buddhist does not stop being a Buddhist by making an offering to a god in a Hindu temple, or even by offering up a Christian prayer, any more than a cricket lover, even a professional cricketer, loses that identity by playing a game of football.

Nor is defining Buddhism the same as defining Buddhist identity. Institutions are indeed crucial to such a discussion. The third jewel of Buddhism is the Saṅgha, the community of monks and nuns, and a higher standard of orthopraxy is expected of them than of other ("lay") Buddhists. This again is rather alien to the

monotheistic religions, and has had a great effect in shaping modern Buddhism and how it is understood ("constructed"). But it is a grave mistake to think that the outlines of Buddhism have always been as contestable as they have become today.

The other point to which I wish to draw attention concerns a discovery which should affect our whole view of the Buddha's attitude to women, and also, I believe, our view of whether it is feasible to re-institute the full ordination of women in the Theravāda tradition. I refer to an article published by Ute Hüsken in 1993, and republished in an English translation from the German in 2000. (Full references are given in the review below.) In what Hüsken rightly calls the "legend" purveyed in the Pāli *Vīnaya* of how the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha was founded, the Buddha is only persuaded with great difficulty to permit the ordination of women. When he finally does so, he makes it a condition that at ordination each woman take a vow to observe for the rest of her life eight rules, which are given the new technical term *garudhamma*.

What Hüsken has done, in a nutshell, is to prove that this cannot be a true account, because there is much in those rules which presupposes that there were women in the Saṅgha already!

To summarise: the rules include a term for a female novice, *sikkhamānā* (literally "female trainee"), which is not explained and could not be understood unless such people already existed. Moreover, several of the *garudhamma* rules are the same or almost the same as rules which figure in the general catalogue of offenses a nun must not commit, the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha*. This is the counterpart to the catalogue of offenses not to be committed by male monks, the *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha*, which is the very backbone of the *Vinaya*. But in the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* these rules are *pācittiya* rules, a technical term which means that the only penalty for breaking them is confession, whereas breaking a *garudhamma* carries a more severe penalty.

Obviously the very same offense cannot carry two different penalties, so the mere inconsistency tells heavily against the story. In fact, however, for there to be a monk there has to be a code of rules for him to observe, and the same must go for women, so the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* must be the older text; and it would not exist if there were no one to whom it applied.

Here let me insert two points of my own which further support Hüsken's conclusion. She translates *garudhamma* "important rule" (though she wrote in German, this is what the German words she used mean), and this is how the term

has traditionally been understood. However, while *garu* has several meanings, the one I find most relevant here is that a *garu* is someone who must be respected and obeyed. So I think *garudhamma* means "rule of hierarchy". When we look at their content, that is exactly what these rules are: they lay down how under all circumstances a nun is hierarchically inferior to a monk and even the most senior nun must obey and give precedence to the most junior monk.

Secondly, just after laying down the eight *garudhamma* the Buddha says that if women had not been allowed to ordain, his teaching would have lasted a thousand years, but now it will only last five hundred years. Since this has been falsified, the tradition has not been slow to accept that this piece of text is an inept interpolation. Though Hüsken's argument is strong enough to stand on its own, this surely makes it even more obvious that the eight *garudhamma* too are a misogynistic interpolation, probably dating from around the time of the Second Council, when that part of the *Vinaya* seems to have been compiled.

In fact, the whole story surrounding the Buddha's grudging acceptance of women into the Sangha becomes extremely suspect – a "legend", as Hüsken says. After all, we know that there were already Jain nuns in that part of India at that time. Those who now base upon any part of this account their refusal to reinstitute the ordination of women, at a time when according to the same account Buddhism should no longer even exist, are being flagrantly illogical and shamefully biased.