

## Book Reviews

*Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka*, by Anne M. Blackburn, Buddhism and Modernity, University of Chicago Press, 2010. xxii + 256pp., 3 half-tones, 1 map, hb. \$45.00/£29.00. ISBN-13: 9780226055077.

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### Keywords

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*Locations of Buddhism* explores the themes of colonialism and modernity in Sri Lanka through the biography of Sumaṅgala Hikkaḍuvē (1827–1911), a prominent monk and scholar of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Anne Blackburn surveys his work, both as a monk and as a scholar, and in doing so highlights a variety of issues the Buddhist *saṅgha* encountered under British occupation. These include governmental responsibility for Buddhist affairs, education, relationships with Christians and western adventurers, and internal disputes within the Buddhist hierarchy. Whilst more elementary accounts of Buddhism often naïvely assume that Buddhism is opposed to caste, and that the aim of the Buddhist monk is to achieve *nibbāna*, Blackburn rightly takes it for granted that caste exists in Sri Lanka, that it can affect monastic careers, and that horoscopes and astrology are not merely phenomena belonging to a folk religion, but of scholarly interest to monks like Hikkaḍuvē.

The role of the government in Buddhist affairs is highlighted by the dispute between Hikkaḍuvē and Galagame Atthadassi, discussed in the first chapter. Hikkaḍuvē was appointed as the abbot of Śrī Pāda, a famous pilgrimage site, to replace Atthadassi, the disgraced incumbent who had neglected his duties and misappropriated funds. The government ratified appointments within the *saṅgha*, but Atthadassi disputed whether they (or anyone else) had a right to dismiss him. The dispute lasted four years, going as far as the Supreme Court.

The second chapter sees Hikkaḍuvē being appointed to Vidyodaya Piriveṇa, a new establishment for monastic training in Colombo. The institution attracted students from all over the island, including Christians. While the school appears to have fulfilled an important role, there were tensions between its Buddhist teachers, who wanted their students to undergo a monastic education, and the government, who would have preferred more attention to mathematics, and less to ancient languages like Pāli and Sanskrit.

Chapter three explores what might seem to be a trivial dispute, namely whether Buddhist monks should wear their robes covering both shoulders or only one. (Hikkaḍuvē, evidently, adopted a ‘two shoulders’ approach from 1884.) The dispute

was more than a matter of fine interpretation of the *Vinaya*, however. The way in which one wore robes could indicate the monastic communities with which one associated, and those from whom one wished to distance oneself. There were issues about nationality: Ceylon, being under British occupation, lacked a Buddhist monarch as a patron of the *saṅgha*, unlike Siam (Thailand), whose monarch continues to act as a focal figure for the religion. Blackburn explores the dilemma within Sinhalese monasticism, in which some monks believed that seeking the headship of the King of Siam would ensure the authenticity of ordination, while others feared that such a movement would sacrifice the national identity of Sinhalese monks.

The rivalry between Sinhalese and Siamese Buddhism re-emerges in the fifth chapter, which recounts the visit in 1897 of (Siamese) King Rama V, whose visit Hikkaḍuvē helped to plan. The king, however, had expected permission to hold the famous tooth relic while visiting Kandy's Temple of the Tooth but, on being denied this, took serious offence and truncated his state visit. As Blackburn reveals earlier, in chapter four ('Engaging the Adventurers'), the tooth relic also proved a source of controversy when Colonel H.S. Olcott, founder-leader of the Theosophical Society, published an article in the *Theosophist* in 1905, disparaging the veneration of the relic as mere superstition. Relations with Cambodia fared better, and the author recounts how Hikkaḍuvē facilitated the arrival of Cambodian monks, who brought a canopy and curtains to protect the tooth relic.

The book highlights well the tensions between Buddhists, Christians, western scholars, the Theosophical 'reformers', and the Maha Bodhi Society founded by Anagārika Dharmapāla. For example, Hikkaḍuvē took exception to Hermann Oldenberg's contention that the author of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* did not know of the first Buddhist council. Oldenberg had completely discounted the traditional Buddhist view that the Buddha himself authored the work — an interesting impasse, illustrating well the problems of 'insider' and 'outsider' approaches to religion. Although Olcott, no doubt with the best of intentions, sought to ensure that Buddhism was not eroded by the Christian missionaries, his attempts at formulating a 'Buddhist Catechism' were not wholly welcome. Hikkaḍuvē at first endorsed it, but later criticised it and assisted in the preparation of two rival catechisms.

In the final chapter, Blackburn discusses the appropriateness of the terms 'Protestant Buddhism' and 'Buddhist Revival' to characterize the effects of colonialism on Sinhalese Buddhism. She takes these terms to signify the rise of lay activism and decline of monastic power, increasing emphasis on Buddhism's rational and scientific character, and attempts to counter western influence while appropriating western technology and adopting Christian-derived structures. The author questions the extent to which such processes occurred, for example citing the continued veneration of sites and relics as evidence of belief in quasi-magical power, and arguing that the interest in disseminating Buddhist texts took its rise at least a century before the celebrated Buddhist-Christian debates.

*Locations of Buddhism* is meticulously researched, drawing on primary source material, including archived journals of newspapers of the period, official documents, and personal correspondence and diaries of Buddhist leaders, several of which have been translated by the author herself. Despite being scholarly, the book is lucid and readable. This is an impressive piece of research, which can be read both as a biography of a famous monk and as a history of Sri Lankan Buddhism during the colonial period.