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III. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Presidential Address Given on the Occasion of the Fifth Conference of The International Association of Buddhist Studies, Hertford College, Oxford, England, August 16–21, 1982

by Walpola Rahula

Let me express my deep gratitude to the International Association of Buddhist Studies and to the organizer of this conference, Professor Richard Gombrich, for the honour they have done me by inviting me to preside at this august assembly of eminent scholars. It gives me great pleasure to greet all of you assembled here from the four quarters of the world, and with a sense of humility I look back on the work done in our field by our illustrious predecessors, knowing that their example will further what we propose to do here.

The early nineteenth century may be regarded as the beginning of one of the most important eras in Buddhist history since Asoka's time in the 3rd century B.C. Never before in the history of Buddhism was Buddhist literature so widely disseminated throughout the world in so many different languages. This may be considered or interpreted as a new form of *Dharmacakrapravārtana*, particularly in the Western world.

This "Setting in motion the Wheel of Truth" in the Occident began in earnest with the publication in 1826 of the Essai

sur le Pali by the French Orientalist Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852) in collaboration with the German scholar Lassen. Burnouf may rightly be considered the father of Buddhist studies in the West. Among his eminent pupils was the well-known German Indologist Max Müller.

Interest in Buddhist studies gradually spread from Paris to Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Russia, England, and the United States. Buddhologists in these countries during the last one-hundred-and-fifty years have contributed enormously to the spread of Buddhist thought in many different languages. In Denmark, Victor Fausböll brought out in 1855 an edition of the *Dhammapada*, the best known Buddhist text, accompanied by a translation and notes in Latin. This was the first Pāli text to be published in full in Europe in Roman characters.

England, though, has rendered the greatest service to Buddhism in the West. T. W. Rhys Davids, after eight years as a civil servant in Sri Lanka, where he studied Pāli, returned to England in 1872, and began to work with other Orientalists in Europe. The greatest of his many and varied contributions to Pāli Buddhist studies was the foundation of the Pali Text Society in 1881, in order "to render accessible to students the rich stores of the earliest Buddhist literature." He directed the activities of the Society, harnessing and co-ordinating talents scattered in many countries, both East and West.

The Pali Text Society in its early period lacked funds and was supported by Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma. Today, however, it is self-supporting and flourishing. In this connection, with a sense of profound gratitude, we should remember the Society's late President, Miss I. B. Horner, not only for devoting all her energy to its welfare as her life work, but also for placing it on a sound financial basis by establishing a generous fund in her name for the perpetuation of the Society. Now, the PTS is progressing quite satisfactorily and smoothly under the direction of its new President, Mr. K. R. Norman of Cambridge, and its Secretary, Professor Richard Gombrich of Oxford.

Thanks to the Pali Text Society, we have now in Roman characters all the Pāli Canon of the *Tipiṭaka*, though some of the

Abhidhamma texts need editing more fully. In addition, it has also edited, in some sixty volumes, the Pāli commentaries of the *Tipiṭaka*, besides a good number of other post-canonical works. There are the English translations, in some fifty-eight volumes, of practically the whole *Tipiṭaka*. To these should be added the *Pali-English Dictionary*, English-Pali Dictionary, The Dictionary of Pali Proper Names and The Pali Tipiṭaka Concordance.

It is interesting to observe that while countries on the European continent like France and Belgium specialized in Mahāyāna, England specialized in Theravāda.

One has only to look into the Bibliographie Bouddhique of thirty-odd volumes, published in Paris under the editorship of the late Mademoiselle Marcelle Lalou, to realize the tremendous amount of work produced in the field of Buddhist studies in different languages in the West during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At the level of practice and observance, today in the Western world, including the United States, there are hundreds of Buddhist temples, vihāras and meditation centres, both of Theravāda and Mahāyāna, and two Buddhist universities in the U.S.A.

Meanwhile, in the East, the "Setting in motion the Wheel of Truth" in recent years assumed multifarious forms at different levels of activity.

The World Fellowship of Buddhists was inaugurated in 1950 in Colombo under the leadership of the late Professor G. P. Malalasekera, my teacher in the University of Ceylon. Leading representatives of Theravada and of different sects of Mahāyāna from twenty-nine countries, in both East and West, participated in this assembly. This was, perhaps, the first time in the history of Buddhism that delegates of almost all schools of Buddhism assembled on the same platform to deliberate the interest and welfare of their religion. This congress brought all Buddhist countries, communities, and groups throughout the world closer together. At this assembly, it was resolved not to use any longer the old-fashioned term Hīnayāna, Small Vehicle, with reference to Buddhism prevalent in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and some other parts of the world; but, rather, Theravada, because Theravada is not Hīnayāna, and there is no Hīnayāna sect extant today as a community anywhere in the world. It is strange that there are still some out-moded scholars who use the term Hīnayāna with reference to Theravāda. The headquarters of the World Fellowship of Buddhists is at present in Bangkok, Thailand.

In 1956, the celebration on a grand international scale of Buddha Jayanti, 2500th anniversary of the Parinirvana of the Buddha, created a new interest in Buddhism. To mark this historic event, various important activities were undertaken in different countries. Special mention should be made of the Chattha Sangāyanā, the Sixth Synod or Council, in Rangoon, Burma, which, with the collaboration of learned Mahā Theras from all Theravada countries, collated and brought out a new edition of the Pāli Tipiṭaka. The Encyclopedia of Buddhism, under the editorship of the late Professor Malalasekera, was started in Sri Lanka. Also, the publication of a new edition of the Pāli Tipitaka, with a Sinhala translation, was initiated in Sri Lanka under the patronage of the government. In India, a complete edition of the Pāli Tipiṭaka in Devanagari script was produced for the first time under the editorship of the late Venerable Jagadīsha Kāśyapa Mahā Thera, the uncle of Professor A. K. Narain and my revered sabrahmacari (co-celibate) from the Vidyālankāra Pirivena, Sri Lanka. Many other literary works, both big and small, were published in both the East and West. Meriting special mention in this connection is the remarkable work of the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy, Sri Lanka, under the editorship of the German-born Buddhist monk, Venerable Nyanaponika Mahā Thera, to popularize the teaching of the Buddha in a large number of countries among readers of different levels.

In 1966, the World Buddhist Sangha Council was inaugurated in Sri Lanka, bringing closer together the members of the Sangha of the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna. At the request of the founding Secretary-General of this organization, the late Venerable Pandit Pimbure Sorata Thera, I had the honour of presenting a formula for the unification of the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna. This formula, which was unanimously accepted by the Council, is now published as Appendix IV of my Heritage of the Bhikkhu (Grove Press, New York). The last Congress of the World Buddhist Sangha Council was held in Taiwan on a grand scale during the first week of December, 1981.

The only international Buddhist and Pali University in the world was opened in Colombo on the 22nd of April this year. I had the privilege of planning and organizing this institution at the request of the President and the Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. Buddhism and Pāli are compulsory subjects. In addition, as optional subjects, there are in the curriculum various other languages, both Eastern and Western, religions, philosophies, histories, cultures, etc. No vocational subjects, such as agriculture, engineering, or medicine will be taught. Although intended primarily for the education and training of Buddhist monks, this university is open to all, Buddhists and on-Buddhists, laymen and women. Students in foreign countries can take the examinations of this university as external students, without even going to Sri Lanka. Its affiliated colleges may be established not only in Sri Lanka, but also in foreign countries. The motto of the university is a saying of the Buddha's taken from the original Pāli Canon, clearly indicating the aim of the institute: Dhammacakkam pavattetum "To set in motion the Wheel of Truth."

To turn to our organization, the International Association of Buddhist Studies: this, as we hope, is a new, additional push to the Wheel of Truth on an international scale, since this association brings together learned Buddhologists from many parts of the world for discussion and exchange of views at an intellectual level, and creates new interests and promotes further studies. We owe our gratitude for its founding General-Secretary, Professor A. K. Narain, who inaugurated it at the University of Wisconsin. At the same time, our sincere thanks are due to Professor Richard Gombrich, local secretary and coordinator of this Fifth Conference, for organizing it so magnificently here at this seat of learning at Oxford.

I give you my best wishes and blessings for the complete success of this conference in all your deliberations, and hope that this Congress will produce far-reaching results in moulding Buddhist studies in the future.