

Abstract

Between two civilisations: history and self representation of Bangladeshi Buddhism

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Buddhism is believed to have all but died out in India following the thirteenth century Muslim invasion. However, in Bengal groups of non-Bengali people have continued to practice Theravāda Buddhism, which they are said to have imported from nearby Burma, or which they were converted to from other forms of Buddhism after migrating to Bengal. Their practices were “reformed” in 1856 by Burmese monks.

An analysis of the historical material reveals a tendency by non-Buddhist Bengalis to downplay any relationship between the Buddhist traditions of Burma and Bangladesh, and to represent Buddhism as a phenomenon of the past. This reinterpretation of historical data is part of the formation process of a Bangladeshi national identity.

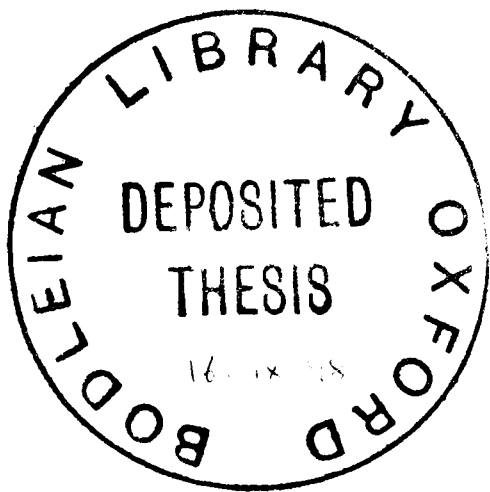
That this process is in progress is confirmed by the existence in Bangladesh of a centralised and standardised educational system, having among its aims the integration of the national population. Religious education, in Bangladesh as elsewhere, plays within this system an important role in national integration.

On the other hand, certain institutions of Bangladeshi Buddhism, such as temporary ordination, and features like the importance attributed to the Mahāmuni temple (which houses a replica of a very sacred Buddha image from Burma) confirm the historical connection between the Bangladeshi and the Southeast Asian Buddhist traditions.

Any remaining doubts about the nature of Bangladeshi Buddhism are dispelled by the reading of a devotional song belonging to the *genre* known as *Bauddha pālā kīrtana*. The *kīrtana*, a ballad originating within the Hindu devotional movements, is very popular among all Bengalis, with no distinction of faith. The subject of this text, deriving from an apocryphal birth-story of the Buddha of Southeast Asian origin, reveals once again a link between the Buddhist traditions of Southeast Asia and Bangladesh, its Indian style just indicating regional taste.

BETWEEN TWO CIVILISATIONS:
HISTORY AND SELF REPRESENTATION OF BANGLADESHI BUDDHSIM

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Contents

List of Illustrations vi

List of Tables vii

Acknowledgements viii

Note on pronunciation and method of transliterating Bengali x

Abbreviations xi

Introduction

I.1 Aims and methods of the thesis 1

I.2 Historical background 6

I.3 The setting of the fieldwork and ethnographic notes 12

I.4 Previous research on Bangladeshi Buddhism 18

Part one

Chapter one: The origins of Buddhism in Bangladesh

1.1 Between history, myth and historical inventions 25

1.2 The Brāhmī inscription of Mahāsthān 34

1.3 Buddhism in pre-Pāla East Bengal according to Chinese sources 40

1.4 Summary 52

Chapter two: One thousand years of Buddhist history

2.1 Introduction 53

2.2 Tāntric Buddhism: from monastic to esoteric Buddhism 55

2.3 The sources 62

 2.3.1 Monuments and images 62

 2.3.2 Journals, inscriptions, Buddhist literature and other textual sources 67

2.4 Summary 75

Chapter three: The nineteenth century reform and the origin of the present sects of Bangladeshi Buddhism

3.1 The background: The arrival of the British	77
3.2 The reform process	82
3.3 The present <i>nikāyas</i>	88
3.3.1 The Dvāra Nikāya	89
3.3.2 The Sangharāja Nikāya	90
3.3.3 The Mahāsthavir Nikāya	94
3.4 Religious reform in the Theravāda tradition and the nineteenth century	
Theravāda Buddhist reform movements	97
3.5 Summary	103

Part two

Chapter four: The Transmission of Knowledge about Buddhism

4.1 Transmission of culture and the formation of national identity	105
4.2 Buddhist education and studies in schools: a description	106
4.2.1 The Bangladeshi School System	106
4.2.2 Buddhist Education in the Primary and secondary schools	108
4.2.2.1 <i>Bauddha Dharma Śikṣā</i>	110
4.2.2.2 <i>Pāli Bhāṣā Śikṣā</i>	112
4.2.3 Colleges and Universities	112
4.2.3.1 Syllabi for Honours B.A. and M.A. courses in Pali	114
4.3 Buddhist education in monasteries	115
4.3.1 Monastic schools, Pali <i>toḷs</i> and Colleges	115
4.3.2 The Bhikkhu Training Centre	119
4.4 The transmission of knowledge about Buddhism in other countries:	
some comparisons	122
4.5 Some considerations	126
4.6 Summary	128

Chapter five: Buddhist monks and monasteries of Bangladesh

5.1 Introduction	130
5.2 Entering the Sangha	133
5.3 The monk's everyday life	138
5.3.1 Food, dress and money	141
5.4 Some monasteries and festivals	146
5.4.1 The monasteries of Dhaka	148
5.4.2 The monasteries of Chittagong	151
5.4.3 Mahāmuni and Thegarpuni temples	152
5.4.4 The old monasteries of Ramu and Cox's Bazār	158
5.5 Summary	161

Chapter six: A Buddhist ballad from Bangladesh: the *Sambhūmitta Pālā*

6.1 An apocryphal <i>jātaka</i> from Southeast Asia to an Indian tune	162
6.2 <i>Sambhūmitta Pālā</i> : the Bengali text	167
6.3 <i>Sambhūmitta Pālā</i> : the English translation	206

Conclusion	245
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Bibliographies

Works in Bengali	248
Works in other languages	249

Illustrations

Maps

- 1 Map of Bangladesh. page 23
- 2 Map of the Chittagong region. 24

Plates

Between pages 161 and 162

- 1 The corpse of the Venerable Viśuddhānanda Mahāsthavir.
- 2 Novices at the Bhikkhu Training Centre, Kadalpur (Chittagong).
- 3 Novices at the Bhikkhu Training Centre, Kadalpur (Chittagong).
- 4 Ceremony of temporary ordination at Gohira (Chittagong).
- 5 Shaving of the head during temporary ordination at Gohira (Chittagong).
- 6 A monastery in the Chittagong region.
- 7 A monk standing in front of his cell. Chittagong region.
- 8 Dhammarajika monastery. Dhaka.
- 9 Detail of the roof of the Sakyamuni monastery. Dhaka.
- 10 Chittagong Buddhist Monastery. Chittagong.
- 11 The Mahāmuni temple. Raozan. (Chittagong).
- 12 Wall decoration. Mahāmuni temple. Raozan. (Chittagong).
- 13 Thegarpuni temple (Chittagong) during the annual *melā*.
- 14 The “*tribhanga*” Buddha image of Thegarpuni.
- 15 Lamarpara temple. Ramu.
- 16 Bell at Lamarpara temple. Ramu.
- 17 Buddha image. Lamarpara temple. Ramu.
- 18 Buddha image. Lamarpara temple. Ramu.
- 19 Buddha image. Lamarpara temple. Ramu.

Tables

I.1 Main historical dates.	page 10
I.2 Former district-wise enumerated census population by religion (percentage).	17
1.1 Devadatta's <i>dhutangas</i> in the different <i>Vinayas</i> .	51
3.1 Ratio of Monks per <i>nikāya</i> among the Bangladeshi Sangha.	88
3.2 Names of the Sangharājas of Bangladesh and their time in office.	91
3.3 The Sanghanāyakas of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya (from 1957 to 1994).	95
3.4 The Sanghanāyakas of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya from the seventeenth century to 1994.	97
4.1 Percentage of Literate Persons and Persons Completing at least First Grade of Education in Different Census Years, 1961-1991.	107
4.2 Literacy Rate by Religion in Bangladesh, 1991.	108
4.3 Enrolment figures for the Pali courses: Dhaka University.	113
4.4 Enrolment figures for the Pali courses: Chittagong University.	113
4.5 Number of Pali Institutions, Teachers and Students in Bangladesh between 1983 and 1988 according to S. Baruā.	118
4.6 Number of Pali <i>toles</i> with teachers and students in Bangladesh from 1979 to 1984, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.	118
4.7 Pali <i>toles</i> and Colleges in Bangladesh according to S. Baruā.	119
5.1 Vihāras and Monks of Bangladesh per Nikāya.	132
5.2 Daily schedule in use at the Bhikkhu Training Centre - Raozan.	139

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A note on pronunciation and method of transliterating Bengali

The Bengali script, like most South Asian scripts ultimately derives from the Brāhmī script and is relatively closely related to the Devanāgarī script used by Hindi (and nowadays for printing Sanskrit). However, in the course of time the pronunciation of certain letters in Bengali has become very different from the equivalent Sanskrit.

The inherent vowel ‘a’ is in Bengali pronounced almost like short ‘o’ (as in English ‘got’). The three sibilants ś, ṣ and s are generally all pronounced ‘sh’ in West Bengal, while in some areas of Bangladesh they are all pronounced like ‘s’. ‘Y’ is pronounced as ‘y’ or as ‘j’ depending on the position within the word. Also, while in writing Sanskrit a stop mark indicates when a consonant is not followed by the inherent vowel, this is not the case in Bengali, leaving the reader with no clue.

Whenever transliterating Bengali I have adopted, with few variations, the so-called Sanskrit method, that is the one conventionally adopted to transcribe Sanskrit into roman script. To facilitate pronunciation I have however transcribed the letter ‘y’ as either ‘y’ or ‘j’ depending on its pronunciation. Also, I have transcribed the nasalisation symbol known as *candrabindu* with the symbol ~, which I have placed, for purely technical reasons, in front of the syllable to be nasalised as opposed to on top of it.

Personal names have also been transcribed following the Sanskrit method. However, whenever a name has traditionally been transcribed in English in a different way, I have maintained that transcription. One such a case is the name Haque, which following the Sanskrit transliteration should be written as Hak.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in chapter six, in the transliteration and translation of the *Sambhūmitta Pālā*. The abbreviated words constitute the notation for the performance of the ballad.

- K. *Kathā*. Not sung narrative part.
- S. *Sure*. Literally “in a melodious way”. General term referring to the sung part of the ballad.
- Jh. *Jhumur*. Narrative singing. Name of a particular metre already in use in Middle Bengali.
- D.Jh. *Dīrgha Jhumur*. Modified, longer, form of the *jhumur* metre.

Introduction

I.1 Aims and methods of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the anthropology of Theravāda Buddhism and to the knowledge of the history of Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent. It is an attempt to understand Bangladeshi Buddhism through the idea of Buddhism that the Buddhists of Bangladesh themselves try to convey. Comparison of this idea with the data available on the history of Buddhism in Bangladesh will result in the definition of contemporary Bangladeshi Buddhism. Unlike a large number of works produced in the past on Buddhist communities this thesis does not aim to measure the “buddhistness” of Bangladeshi Buddhists. Since the West’s rediscovery of Buddhism and the subsequent translation, mainly into English, of the Pali Canon scholars have measured the degree of adherence to the norms expressed in it by different Buddhist communities. I do not believe this to be fruitful research. More interestingly, other scholars, having accepted the different manifestations of Buddhism, have analysed the differences between precept and practice within specific Buddhist cultures and sometimes have compared them. In my research, instead, I accept the fact that Bangladeshi Buddhists are Buddhists on the basis of their affirming so and their acceptance of a set of belief and practices that are commonly recognised as being Buddhist. Instead of describing the peculiarity of Bangladeshi Buddhist culture by means of outlining their religious practice in relation to a generally defined “pure” Theravāda Buddhist rule, I will match the kind of Buddhism transmitted within the Bangladeshi Buddhist community with historical data.

The study of Buddhism in Bangladesh is particularly important because of the peripheral location of this region within the Indian subcontinent, which has contributed to its distinctive historical evolution, and because of the consequent

influence it receives from Southeast Asia, in particular from Burma. When Buddhism had practically died out in the rest of India it was still flourishing in East Bengal and after the Muslim invasions had wiped out the surviving Buddhist establishments a considerable part of Eastern Bengal was ruled by the Buddhist kings of Arakan (once an independent kingdom and now part of Burma). My argument is that despite some attempts to present Bangladeshi Buddhism as the continuation of an Indian tradition supposedly going back to the times of Buddha, its links with the Southeast Asian tradition are predominant and the efforts to deny them are part of a Bangladeshi nationalistic plan: the imagining of a new political community, that is the Bangladeshi nation, as one could say using Anderson's terminology (Anderson 1983). It seems that, following the principles of social entropy expressed in the work of Ernest Gellner (1983), the Bengalis are trying to Indianise and therefore Bengalise the Buddhist tradition of Bangladesh. Gellner writes:

The basic deception and self-deception practised by nationalism is this: nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population. It means that generalized diffusion of a school-mediated, academy-supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves. That is what *really* happens. ...

The role of culture is no longer to underscore and make visible and authoritative the structural differentiations within society (even if some of them persist, and even if, as may happen, a few new ones emerge); on the contrary, when on occasion cultural differences do tie in with and reinforce status differences, this is held to be somewhat shameful for the society in question, and an index of partial failure of its educational system. (Gellner 1983, 57 and 64)

My work attempts to reconcile the Indian and Burmese roots of Bangladeshi Buddhism. This will be done through the observation of some aspects of contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh, in particular the way it perpetuates itself, and the reading of a Bengali Buddhist literary work belonging to the *genre* known in Bengali as *Bauddha pālā kīrtana*.

It is generally believed that Buddhism had all but died out in India by the end of the fourteenth century. This belief is founded on the lack of archaeological

evidence subsequent to that period and to the general tendency to ascribe to the population of a country the religion of its rulers. The recent research of Michael Aris (1996) on the Tibetan and Bhutanese biographies of Vanaratna, a Bengali Buddhist monk who lived between 1384 and 1468, suggests the existence in later periods of a Buddhist establishment of considerable size in the Chittagong area. This fact, along with the legends connected with the establishment of the older temples still standing in Bangladesh, would be an ideal starting point for research covering the darkest period of Buddhism in Bangladesh. My work, despite dealing with the history of Bangladeshi Buddhism, has nothing new to say about this period. That task is left to others, or to my own subsequent research. Still, the history of Bengali Buddhism that will be presented in the following chapters is not a mere repetition of well known facts.

My treatment of the history of Bengali Buddhism consists of the analysis of those historical episodes that are deemed relevant by the Bengali Buddhists to define their own selves. The periods that are considered the most important for the definition of contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh, are its origins and its recent reform. I have dealt with these two periods in the first and third chapters of this thesis, while the second chapter merely functions as a logical *trait d'union* between the two periods and covers the obscure mediaeval period.

The second part of this work elaborates on the definition of Buddhism given by the Bangladeshi Buddhists. This is done through an analysis of how knowledge about Buddhism is transmitted within the community and a description of the kind of knowledge that is transmitted. This part is substantiated by a comparison of the Bangladeshi religious education system with that of other countries. I have also compiled a chapter, chapter five, on monks and monasteries. I have not done this in the belief that Theravāda Buddhism is solely the religion practised by an élite of religious professionals. The reason why I decided to describe Buddhist monastic life and the monasteries of Bangladesh is that I think that these elements contribute to convey a certain image of what Bangladeshi Buddhism is within the Bangladeshi

Buddhist community. Truly, even within Bangladeshi Buddhism one can recognise different types of religion as described by David Gellner (1992, 6). Specifically Gellner has recognised a soteriology, a social religion and an instrumental religion. Soteriology is, as the word says, the religion of salvation intended as salvation from the evil of this world. Social religion is the label under which the life cycle rites are grouped; while instrumental religion is whatever one does, or asks someone else to do, to achieve a particular worldly goal. However, since my work does not consist in a comparison between precept and practice, I have not tried to describe and analyse these aspects of Bangladeshi Buddhism, except for monastic ordination and a few religious festivals. Moreover, as I will illustrate in the last part of this introduction, Eva Rosén-Hockersmith (1985) has amply dealt with the social and instrumental aspects of Bangladeshi Buddhism and there seemed to be little point in duplicating her research.

Last, in chapter six, I present a *Bauddha pālā kīrtana*: a Bengali ballad in verse dealing with the story of an earlier life of the Buddha which, in this specific case, is part of the Burmese tradition. The *pālā kīrtana* is a well known literary *genre* in India outside Buddhism. Being a combination of elements belonging to both the Indian and the Burmese tradition the *pālā kīrtana* appropriately exemplifies my thesis. However, to the best of my knowledge this is the first time that anyone in the academic world has dealt with this *genre* of the Buddhist literature. For this reason my treatment of the *Bauddha pālā kīrtana* is far from being complete and I hope others will follow this lead. Here, besides giving a few explanatory words, I will just present the text of the *pālā kīrtana* in roman script with my translation from Bengali into English.

In order to complete the necessary fieldwork to study Bangladeshi Buddhism I have lived and worked in Bangladesh and in India for several months over a period of about four years. I first went to Bangladesh in December 1992 for a total of five weeks which I spent in Dhaka and travelling around the Chittagong region, visiting monasteries and getting acquainted with the local Buddhist community. After this exploratory trip I went back to Bangladesh in October 1993 and stayed there until

June 1994. During this period I was based in Dhaka, where I was teaching at the local university, but travelled regularly to the Chittagong region. In Dhaka, where there are few Buddhists, I lived with a Muslim widow but also had a room in the main monastery. There, my job as teacher at the university gave me easy access to relevant information on the teaching of Buddhism and Pali within this and other institutions. In Chittagong I had a room in the main monastery, while when I travelled in the rural areas I either stayed in monasteries or with local Buddhist families. Strangely enough, especially being a woman, I lived much closer to the members of the Sangha than to those of the laity, a fact that accounts for my better knowledge of these. Later, between October 1995 and January 1996, I lived in Calcutta, where I further improved my Bengali and met with some exponents of the Bangladeshi Buddhist community who have migrated to India.

As for the methodology of my research, I do not feel that a particular label should be used. However, I can say that during my fieldwork I was a participant observer. Having started the study of Bengali in England, before going to Bangladesh, I was able to conduct conversations in that language soon after my first visit to Bangladesh. This has enabled me to interact directly with most of the people I dealt with for my research. However, since many of those who live in the Chittagong area speak a form of local dialect, incomprehensible even to native Bengalis coming from other regions, I had to resort to the services of Bhikkhu Gyana Ratna, who has also helped me in many other ways, to communicate with them.

I have tried to present the reader with all the information I could gather within the scope of my research. Still, because of my own shortcomings and because of some objective limitations to fieldwork on the subject of Buddhism in Bangladesh, my research can by no means be considered a complete work on the subject. While I have no excuse for what I may have overlooked, I cannot be held responsible for having been denied access to important information. As I will have the occasion to repeat several times, the majority of the Buddhists of Bangladesh live within an area known as Chittagong Hill Tracts. Because of unsolved disputes between the central

government and the people of this area, and the consequent occasional outbreaks of violence in the region, this area (except for the town of Rangunia) was forbidden to foreign visitors during all the time I spent in Bangladesh.

I.2. Historical background

The modern state of Bangladesh is a very recent creation. It corresponds to the eastern part of the region which in colonial times was called Bengal. Until 1947 Bangladesh was part of the British Empire. After the partition of India, when Pakistan was created, eastern Bengal having a majority of Muslims in the population was separated from India to form a state with the distant region of Pakistan under the name of East Pakistan. The partition of India between India and Pakistan is one of the darkest pages of modern Indian history. Thousands of families were uprooted from their homeland to settle on either side of the Indo-Pakistani border according to their religious beliefs. The only justification for the existence of a united Pakistani state, which comprised Pakistan proper (then known as West Pakistan) and East Bengal, was the common religion of the majority of the people of those two regions. From any other point of view the people of Pakistan and East Bengal are very different: they belong to different ethnic groups, they speak different languages written in different scripts, they have different habits, including for example different diets. Despite all these differences, Pakistan and East Pakistan remained under the same government until 1971. Then, when the electoral results giving the Bengalis a large number of seats in parliament were not recognised, an extremely bloody civil war exploded. This eventually led to the separation of the two countries and the creation of the state of Bangladesh as we know it now.

The fact that the region of East Bengal has had in the past fifty years three different names under different administrations can be confusing for the purpose of research, however one has to remember that in more ancient times Bangladesh has

had many more names and has been part of several states, sometimes at the same time, thus creating even greater confusion for those wishing to deal with the history of the area. To clarify things, one of the great historians of the region, R.C. Majumdar, writes:

1. The Province in British India, called Bengal, was not known by this name (i.e., its Indian equivalent) before the Muslim conquest of this territory [that is the thirteenth century].
2. In pre-Muslim period there was no common name for the whole province, though Gauda, which originally formed only a part of it, was sometimes used to denote the whole or a considerable portion of it. Even in the nineteenth century a Bengali poet referred to his native land as Gauda.
3. Vanga was originally the name of the Southeastern part of the Province, but its boundaries were not well-defined, and other geographical names such as Samatata, Harikela, Vangāla, were used for different parts, if not the whole, of it at different times during the pre-Muslim period. ...
4. The English name, Bengal, and its Portuguese form, Bengala, were both derived, not from Vanga, as is generally supposed, but from Vangāla which the Muslim rulers adopted as the name of the Province. (Majumdar, R.C. 1971, 1)

It is apparent that an attempt to write a historical account of Bengal is a challenging task since there was no such entity as Bengal until recent times. It is even more challenging to trace the history of something, for example Buddhism, within a geographical area whose internal and external borders are so mobile.

Due to its geographical position in the extreme east of India, not easily accessible because of the number of rivers crossing it, this region was not subject to Aryan influence until at least the second half of the 1st millennium B.C. Very little is known of Bengal during the period before the rise of the Gupta Empire. Several scholars have tried to place this region within the Maurya Empire, but I will show in the first chapter of this work the reasons why I do not believe their conclusions to be correct. There is, however, no doubt that by the fourth century A.D. Bengal had acquired a sophisticated form of administration as testified by the accounts of the Greek and Roman writers of the period. The area presently occupied by the Republic of Bangladesh was at the time divided among three regions, namely: Vanga-Samatata, Puṇḍra-Vardhana and Kāmarūpa. More specifically, Vanga comprised what is now South Bengal and Samatata Eastern Bengal. The other two countries incorporated small parts of Northern and Northeastern Bengal in their much larger territories.

From the great amount of epigraphic evidence available we know that several dynasties ruled over smaller or larger parts of this area between the fourth century A.D. and the arrival of the first Muslims invaders in the first half of the thirteenth century. The most important of these dynasties were the Guptas, the Pālas and the Senas. It is not clear when exactly the Guptas subjugated Bengal, but we can safely assume that it was some time round the first part of the fourth century. Their reign stretched across Bengal but did not include its easternmost part, Samatāṭa, which remained a separate kingdom. The centre of the Gupta Empire in Bengal was Puṇḍravardhana, in modern Bangladesh, near the Indian border. The Guptas ruled over the region until around the end of the sixth century or the beginning of the seventh century, when due to external attacks their empire crumbled and in Bengal local powers took over the administration of the region. Among the dynasties that emerged in the period between the Gupta and the Pāla period most prominent were the Khaḍgas of Samatāṭa (630-700), who are said to be the first Buddhist dynasty to have ruled over any part of Bengal. The region eventually fell into a period of anarchy and to protect themselves from its dangers in the middle of the eighth century the Bengalis elected a king: Gopāladeva, the founder of the Pāla dynasty. The Pālas reigned over Bengal with fluctuating fortune until the middle of the twelfth century. They were a Buddhist dynasty and under their reign Buddhism reached its highest point of development in Bengal. As I will illustrate in more detail in chapter two, it was during the Pāla dynasty that the greatest Buddhist temples and universities flourished in Bengal. Despite their personal religious affiliation, the Pālas were very tolerant and did not exclusively support Buddhist establishments as one can see from the many inscriptions of the time. From the beginning of the eleventh century the Pālas gradually lost their kingdom. Between 900 and 1050 AD, Samatāṭa came under the rule of the Chandra dynasty. Eventually the Sena dynasty, which is said to be originally from South India, subjugated most of Bengal and ruled over it between 1095 and 1225 AD. The members of this dynasty were Hindus and opposed Buddhism. It is during their rule that Buddhism in Bangladesh, deprived of any

support, started to decline, at least in its monastic form. The Senas had several royal cities in Bengal, the most important of which was Vikrampura, near modern Dhaka.

During the Sena period, around 1202, Muslim invaders, led by Muhammad Bakhtyār Khilfi, made their first appearance in Bengal. A detailed account of this invasion is given in the Arabic text called *Tabaqāt-i-Nasiri* (Raverty trans. 1881). From this moment on the history of Bengal practically becomes a list of killings and usurpation. The history of Muslim rule over Bengal can be divided into two main periods. The first Muslim people to invade India, and consequently Bengal, were Arabs, Turks and Afghans. These people had arrived in Bengal after a series of expansion movements from their homeland to the West. The Arabs, the Turks and the Afghans were not new to Bengal. For many centuries they had entertained a commercial relationship, as reported in many contemporary sources, but until Muhammad Bakhtyār Khilfi's invasion this relationship had always had only economic bases. This first period was initially characterised by the Mamluks' rule (1227-1287) which was to be followed, after a short time, by the two dynasties that ruled in this period: the Ilyās Shāhi dynasty (1342-1481) and the Husain Shāhi dynasty (1493-1538). The Muslim administrations were characterised by high instability, a factor that led to the momentary emergence of Hindu rulers at the beginning of the fifteenth century and to the takeover of power by a group of Abyssinian former slaves, not counting the innumerable assassinations and usurpation that ordinarily took place. Also, the borders of the Muslims' territories in Bengal were, especially towards the Southeast, quite insecure. The region of Chittagong, with its important port, has always been of great interest to all neighbouring states. Arakan, Tripura and the Muslims alternated in control over this territory, so that, if space allowed, it would be more appropriate here to write a separate history for Chittagong. It will be enough to remember that with the weakening of Afghan rule Chittagong was from about 1580 to 1666 under almost uninterrupted Arakanese rule. In this period Portuguese traders were extremely active in all the Gulf of Bengal being engaged in piracy and slave trade. They had their base

in Chittagong and were allied to the Arakanese rulers, whom they subsequently betrayed, permitting their defeat at the hands of the Mughals.

Table I. 1

Main historical dates.¹

4th-6th century	Parts of Bengal under the Guptas' rule
630-700	The Khaḍga dynasty (Buddhist) rules over Samatāṭa
750-1155	The Pāla dyanasty rules most of Bengal
900-1050	The Chandras gain power over Samatāṭa
1095-1225	Sena dynasty
1202	Muhammad Bakhtyār Khilfi's invasion of Bengal
1227-1287	The Mamluks' rule
1342-1481	Ilyās Shāhi dynasty
15th century	Hindu dynasties rule over parts of Bengal (dates uncertain)
1493-1538	Husain Shāhi dynasty
late 15th century	Abyssinian former slaves usurp power
1526-1858	Mughal Empire in India (only until 1757 in Bengal)
1580-1666	Arakanese rule over Chittagong
1600	The British East India Company founds the factory of Calcutta
1757	The Nawab of Bengal is defeated in the battle of Plassey. All of Bengal under British rule
1947/8	Independence of India from British rule. Partition of India and annexation of East Bengal to Pakistan with the name of East Pakistan
1971	After a bloody civil war Bangladesh is declared an independent state

¹ Some of the dates overlap due to the fact that they refer to events taking place in different parts of Bengal.

The second period of Muslim rule over Bengal is the so called Mughal period. The Mughals were originally from the plains of central Asia and descendants of the famous Gengis Khan. They first invaded India in the first half of the sixteenth century, but it is not until the second half of the same century that they included Bengal in their territories. Here one has to keep in mind that as the Mughals subjugated a large part of India the history of Bengal now becomes the history of the province of a vast empire. The history of Mughal rule in India in general and Bengal in particular is well documented in many historic works in Arabic, such as the *Ain-i Akbari* of Abul Fazl Allami, available in translation and considered an encyclopaedia of mediaeval India. Of particular interest for the subject matter of my research is the Mughal policy toward non-Muslim subjects. Unfortunately, these texts do not specifically mention Buddhism or Buddhists. This fact could mean that by the time the Mughals established their rule over Bengal all traces of Buddhism had disappeared or, more likely, it could indicate that the Muslim, as happened later to the European settlers, did not distinguish Buddhism from other Hindu cults. Despite periods of heavy persecution and the fact that conversion to Islam both in the Turk-Arab and in the Mughal period was certainly “encouraged”, the majority of the population retained its own religion and some non-Muslims reached posts of great importance within the Mughal administration in Bengal and elsewhere. The existence of a great number of non-Muslims is confirmed by the promulgation of rules specifically addressed to the non Muslims such as a poll tax known by the Arabic name of *jizya*.

Starting from Bengal, in the eighteenth century the Mughals were replaced throughout India by the British power. The British were first solely interested in trade and entrusted the monopoly of commerce with this part of the world to the East India Company. However, the Company decided to adopt a policy of land acquisition and later of proper colonisation which in 1757 brought all of Bengal under its control. Subsequently the British crown took over from the East India Company the rule of its Indian possessions and a colonisation campaign began, leading to the acquisition of

all of India with Calcutta as its capital. The history of Bengal during the British rule is extremely well documented and many volumes have been written on different aspects of this period, which ended when the independence of India was declared in 1948 and Pakistan was founded.

I.3 The setting of the fieldwork and ethnographic notes

Bangladesh (Map 1, p.23) is an oddly shaped country. To the South it is bordered by the Gulf of Bengal and to the East and the Northeast by the hills of the Indian states of Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram and those of Burma. The rest of its borders, apart from a small portion of it near the city of Rajshahi which runs along the Ganges, look like a very irregular line drawn from north to south through Bengal. Bangladesh is an extremely flat country and ninety per cent of its land is an alluvial plain crossed by numberless rivers, including the Ganges and the Brahmaputra (here known as the Jamuna), and it is said that Bangladesh has the highest number of rivers in relationship to its size of any country in the world. The only relief from the extensive plains of Bangladesh are the hills of Chittagong Hill Tracts in the Southeast and those in the Sylhet region to the Northeast. The hill ranges run north-south and are on average quite low, with their highest peak reaching just above one thousand metres. Most of the Bangladeshi coastline is made up of the Ganges delta, a forest area known under the name of Sundarban. The remaining part of the coast, from Chittagong to Teknaf, runs in a north-south direction ending in a long strip of sand from the city of Cox's Bazar to Teknaf. The rivers are the source of important resources, from food to transportation. However these rivers have not always been where we see them now and their movements have caused the fall and rise of many a town and village. Also, the size of the rivers has caused, even in modern times, great communication problems where the construction of bridges has been too difficult or too expensive.

The climate of Bangladesh is subtropical and tropical with temperature rarely going below twenty degrees centigrade but reaching unbearable heights, made worse by the high humidity, in the summer. Most of the rainfall occurs during the so-called “rainy season” between the months of June and September, when floods frequently occur. This is also the season when Bangladeshi coastal areas are hit by cyclones and the consequent tidal waves. The climate of Bangladesh is one of the reasons why we have relatively few archaeological remains of its glorious past.

Bangladesh has a surface of only 144,000 square kilometres, less than half the size of Italy, and its growing population of 108 million people (Census of Bangladesh 1991) makes it one of the most densely populated countries in the world. This factor, combined with underdevelopment and poverty, makes the fight for scarce resources quite tough and does much to explain why minorities such as the Buddhists are discriminated against.

I did not concentrate my fieldwork on a specific village or a delimited geographical area, both because my research is about history and self-representation in the Bangladeshi Buddhist community in general, and because of some practical problems, such as the difficulty I faced, as a foreign single woman, in finding my own accommodation even in a urban setting. As I have said before, I was based in Dhaka, in the centre of the country and frequently travelled in the Chittagong region. Most of the research was conducted in Buddhist villages within a few hours journey from Chittagong, such as Mirzāpur, Gahirā, Rāozān, Kadalapur, Rānguniya, Pāhārtali and Joyārā. I also made a few excursions to the Ramu area in the extreme south. For the reasons outlined above, the Chittagong Hill Tracts were systematically and sadly excluded from the area of my research. In general, I found travelling in rural Bangladesh difficult and some localities that I have visited could only be reached on foot even at the best of times, i.e. outside the rainy season. Map 2 (p. 24) depicts the region of Chittagong and shows the location of some of the villages I visited.

The people of Bangladesh are far from belonging to a single ethnic group. Some of them, like the tribal people living in the hills of Sylhet, can trace their origins

to pre-Aryan times. Others have arrived from far to the west during the Turk and Mughal periods, and some are of marked Tibetan-Burmese descent. Much scholarly research has been done on the different ethnic groups of Bangladesh, especially on the tribes (Bessaignet 1958 among others).

The Buddhists of Bangladesh belong to three distinct ethnic groups. The largest of these is that of the Cākmās. The Cākmās, who have marked mongoloid characteristics, live in the central part of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, having Rangamati as their main centre. They have their own script, a variety of Burmese, which they have now mostly abandoned in favour of Bengali, and their own language, a form of Bengali dialect. Some have tried to argue that the Cākmās are of Indo-Aryan origin. It is however obvious from their physical features that this is not possible. Also, there is plenty of historical evidence proving that the Cākmās, who once lived in the hills of Central Arakan, in subsequent stages moved to their present location. Bechert (1979) mentions a volume by S.C. Gosh published in 1909 in which all the historical records existing at that time dealing with the history of these people are collected. Unfortunately I have not managed to find this volume, which I believe to be written in Bengali. The Cākmās seem to be mentioned in several Burmese sources and can also be identified with the “Tsagma” named by Tāranātha in his *History of Buddhism* (Chattopadhyaya ed. 1990). Until recent times the Cākmās, whose previous capital was Rājnagar, had their own separate administration headed by a king or a queen. Due to economic reasons it is nowadays possible to find Cākmās in Dhaka and other parts of Bangladesh. However, the great majority of them still live in Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Cākmās, like the rest of the Buddhists of Bangladesh today follow orthodox Theravāda Buddhism. This, as I will illustrate in chapter three, is the result of the reform occurred in 1856. The nature of the Buddhism practised by the Cākmās before the reform has been greatly debated. The most authoritative view currently held is that of Bechert. On the basis of the analysis of the sacred texts used by the Cākmās before the reform, Bechert has no doubt that:

We can definitely reject the suggestions of some Bengali scholars that the Āgar Tārās represent texts of the tradition of Tantric Buddhism. Cākmā Buddhism

had always been of the Theravāda type and the texts of the Āgar Tārā collection must have been adopted from the collection of *parittas* current in Upper Burma and Arakan when the ancestors of the Cākmās had still lived there. (Bechert 1979, 112)

The Cākmās do not perceive themselves as Bengalis or Indian in the broader sense of “Subcontinental”. Evidence of this is given for example by an episode that every Cākmā person would proudly tell. According to this story, which I was unable to corroborate, when the independence of India from England was declared, and the former British colony was divided into separate nations, the Cākmās placed Burmese flags over their buildings. They did this in the belief that the Chittagong Hill Tracts would have been declared part of Burma. Certainly they would have never imagined that their territory, mostly inhabited by Buddhist people of Southeast Asian origin, would have been annexed by Muslim and Subcontinental Pakistan. Already ethnically different from the majority of Bangladeshi, the Cākmā’s perception of their own separate identity is enhanced by the fact that they have their own language and, more importantly, script. Bechert (1977) underlines the fact that a national script, kept alive by the national religious order is at the basis of the Cākmās national identity.

Another Bangladeshi Buddhist group is that of the Baruās. The Baruās are said to be the descendants of a Buddhist group that migrated from Magadha to Arakanese administred Chittagong following the Muslims persecution they experienced in their country. Some of them would have settled in Tripura and adopted the Hindu religion. The Baruās support this theory and claim that their ancestors were princes of Magadha who, having settled in Arakan, established a new kingdom there. As a result the Baruās of Chittagong and Tripura claim to belong to the same stock as the kings of Arakan. One can safely assume that the supposed nobility of the Baruās’ ancerstors is just a way to give dignity to their traditions. The interesting detail here is that the Baruās, given their relatively recent immigration into southern Bengal, perceive themselves as a distinct group within the population of modern Bangladesh. The Baruās recognise their Indian origins, but also see the close links they have with Southeast Asia. The kind of Buddhism practiced by the Baruās before their settlement in the Chittagong region is thought to be of the Mahāyāna and

Tāntric type. However, Bechert (1977) argues that they were converted to Theravāda Buddhism when they settled in Arakanese Chittagong.

The Baruās are also known as Baruā Maghs. The name Magh, which is also applied to the Arakanese people, is said to derive from Maghada, the land of origin of the Baruās. According to Hall (1955, 411), despite much speculation about the etymology of this word the question remains unsolved. However, since the name Magh has been associated with the piratical activities of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the term is nowadays seldom used and only with a negative meaning. Another theory of the origin of the Baruās is that they are the descendants of Arakanese men who settled in Bengal during the Arakanese rule of this region and married local women. However, this seems to be a hypothesis that would be hard to prove. Most of the Baruās live in villages on the plains of Chittagong and in Chittagong itself and all of them speak Bengali. In the nineteenth century some of the Baruās migrated to Calcutta and they can still be found in that area. A smaller group of Baruās known by the name of “Siṃha Baruās” live in the region of Comilla.

The last of the Buddhist ethnic groups found in Bangladesh is that of the Marmas or, as they call themselves, Rakhaing. These are the Arakanese people who migrated to the South of Chittagong district following the Burmese invasion of Arakan in the eighteenth century. They speak Arakanese, a form of Burmese dialect, and use the Burmese script. Some have for practical reasons adopted the Bengali language and script; however in my contact with Marma monks I had some difficulty in finding anybody able to translate their language to me. Most of the Marmas live in the area of Cox’s Bazār and Ramu, near the Burmese border, and still have strong links with Arakan proper. The Marmas perceive themselves as Arakanese, no different from the people who live on the other side of the Bangladeshi-Burmese border.

In my research I have mainly had contacts with Baruās; nevertheless, whenever possible I have tried to collect information from Cākmās and Marmas alike. If the political situation both in Bangladesh and Burma will allow it in the future,

much anthropological and historical research could be done especially in the border area between these two countries.

Table I. 2

Former district-wise enumerated census population by religion (percentage).

Former District	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Christian	Others	Total
Bandarban	47.6	3.5	38.0	7.3	3.6	100
Chittagong Hill Tracts	43.0	10.7	45.4	0.7	0.1	100
Chittagong	85.7	12.0	2.0	0.1	0.2	100
Comilla	92.7	7.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	100
Noakhali	93.8	6.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	100
Sylhet	82.9	16.6	0.0	0.3	0.2	100
Dhaka	91.9	7.4	0.1	0.4	0.1	100
Faridpur	83.9	15.6	0.1	0.3	0.1	100
Jamalpur	96.9	2.4	0.1	0.4	0.3	100
Mymensingh	92.6	6.4	0.1	0.7	0.2	100
Tangail	91.5	7.0	0.0	0.4	0.2	100
Barisal	86.9	12.8	0.0	0.3	0.0	100
Patuakhali	91.3	8.5	0.2	0.0	0.0	100
Jessore	84.1	15.7	0.0	0.1	0.1	100
Khulna	74.1	23.3	0.0	0.5	0.1	100
Kushtia	96.3	3.3	0.0	0.3	0.1	100
Bogra	91.6	7.6	0.1	0.2	0.5	100
Dinajpur	77.1	21.0	0.1	0.6	1.2	100
Pabna	94.2	5.6	0.0	0.1	0.1	100
Rajshahi	89.8	8.3	0.1	0.5	1.3	100
Rangpur	88.5	10.9	0.1	0.2	0.4	100
Total	88.3	10.5	0.6	0.3	0.3	100
Total Number	93,881,029	11,178,866	623,410	346,062	285,625	106,314,992

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics; 1995 *Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh*.²

² I am aware of the fact that the figures of this table slightly differ from those of the Census of 1991. I have decided here to base the contents of this table, with minor corrections to the arithmetic, on the figures of the 1995 *Yearbook of Bangladesh*, which are supposedly based on those of the 1991 Census, believing that the substance of the information given will not be altered.

I.4 Previous research on Bangladeshi Buddhism

Not much research has been done in the past on the subject of Bangladeshi Buddhism compared to the amount of work covering the history and anthropology of other Buddhist people. This is due to several factors. First of all, the Buddhists in Bangladesh represent less than one per cent of the population of the country. In other countries where Theravāda Buddhism is present it is usually the religion of the majority; as a consequence in those areas more material is available to scholars and writing on the subject is welcomed if not encouraged by the local people and authorities. Also, the majority of the Buddhists of Bangladesh live in areas which in the last few years have been out of bounds to foreign researchers, i.e. to the vast majority of them, because of the current situation of unrest in Chittagong Hill Tracts between the central government and the tribal people. Moreover, in Bangladesh, which has adopted Islam as its state religion, the authorities have no interest in encouraging this type of research. Lastly, I have explained before that the Buddhists of Bangladesh comprise several ethnic groups, speaking different languages. To produce a comprehensive anthropological study on them would take a massive effort.

Following the nineteenth century reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism, of which I write in detail in chapter three, some literature has been produced by Bangladeshi Buddhists, both laity and members of the Sangha, on the subject of Buddhism in Bangladesh and its history. This material, which is of great interest for the subject matter of my thesis, consists mostly of pamphlets and small books, mostly in Bengali, that are written following oral tradition and the personal belief of the writer. This material may contain valid and useful information but it lacks any reference to the sources used.

Some observations on the customs and history of Bengali Buddhists were collected by the compilers of the *Gazetteers* and other official records in British colonial times. These are what we can consider to be the first anthropological and historical treatment of the subject. Of course, these texts are not void of mistakes and

misconceptions; nevertheless they are to be deemed an extremely important source of information.

The main works on Buddhism in Bangladesh written up to now number three. None of these works is what could be considered a complete study on Bangladeshi Buddhism since they tackle different aspects of it. The first one is an article in German by Heinz Bechert (1977) on the history of Theravāda Buddhism in East Bengal. This article, as Professor Bechert has written to me, contains all the material that he has collected on the subject and that he had previously published in separate papers. The article is based on various historical sources and on original information that Bechert collected when he visited Chittagong Hill Tracts, when Bangladesh was still known as East Pakistan. The importance of this paper lies in its panoramic overview of the whole of the history of Bangladeshi Buddhism, focusing mainly on the Cākmās, and its reference to original material such as the *Akhar Tārā*, a sacred book of the Cākmās in garbled Pali language, and other Burmese sources. On the basis of the linguistic analysis of the *Akhar Tārā* Bechert affirms here that the kind of Buddhism practised by the Cākmās before the nineteenth century reform is Theravāda in nature. Following the Muslim conquest of this part of Bengal the Buddhist people living here gradually lost their religious traditions, hence the need of a reform when the opportunity came.

As a result of his work Bechert sees contemporary Bangladeshi Buddhism as the continuation of a Southeast Asian tradition. In fact, the Cākmās, as well as the Marmas, were following the Theravāda tradition before they moved into Bengal from Burma, while the Baruās, who followed the Mahāyāna and Tāntric tradition were converted to the Theravāda one following their settlement in the Chittagong area.

The second work on Bangladeshi Buddhism is a book in English by Sukomal Chaudhuri (1982), a Professor of Pali at the Sanskrit College in Calcutta. This work is based on personal knowledge, Chaudhuri being a Bengali Buddhist, and on information collected during a fieldwork trip to Bangladesh. It is very informative but at times it fails to adhere to what would be considered the normal standards of

scholarship. Professor Chaudhuri told me during a series of interviews in the winter of 1995/96 that he left Bangladesh as a child following a series of personal tragedies. After some time spent outside Bengal he was finally taken under the protection of Dharmapala Mahathera of Calcutta and started living in the monastery where that monk is incumbent. Despite his own academic background, when compiling this work Chaudhuri follows the manner of the Bangladeshi Buddhist writers of whom I have written above, and out of religious belief reports historical facts and rituals as he considers that they should be and not as they in fact are. Also, Chaudhuri does not analyse the historical material he presents, thus reporting as true some information that has been recognised by now, by most if not by all academics, as false. The importance of this book is that despite all its imperfections it is the only work to date to cover so many aspects of Bangladeshi Buddhism. Chaudhuri in fact writes both about the past and present of Bangladeshi Buddhism. He talks about the Bangladeshi Buddhist people, their practices and their festivals. He also writes about the Sangha of Bangladesh and its organisation. Lacking a clear framework, Chaudhuri has no thesis to demonstrate, and his book can be considered a useful source for further research.

Finally, the most recent study on Bangladeshi Buddhism is a book in Swedish by Eva Rosén-Hockersmith (1985). This work, which can be considered the only anthropological study on Bangladeshi Buddhism, is concerned with the most recent developments of Bangladeshi Buddhism as the religion practised by the Baruās. In particular Rosén-Hockersmith focuses on the evolution of the practice of Buddhism in Bangladesh as a consequence of its being the religion of a minority of the population of that country. Rosén-Hockersmith bases her book on direct observation and the information collected during several periods of fieldwork conducted in the Chittagong area between 1978 and 1982.

In the first part of her work the author gives the ethnographic and historical background of present Bangladeshi Buddhism. This brief introduction is not based on original research and for what concerns the older religious history of the different

Bangladeshi Buddhist ethnic groups it relies on the work of Bechert. Rosén-Hockersmith obviously supports Bechert's opinion on the nature of Bangladeshi Buddhism before the nineteenth century reform since in the English summary of her book she writes:

Historically, Buddhism in Bangladesh has several roots. The Cākmās and the Marmas were Theravāda Buddhist before they settled in East Bengal. The Baruās, however, could conceivably be traced back to an older tradition of late Indian Buddhism in Bengal; it is possible that there were small groups of Mahāyāna Buddhist in East Bengal as late as the 15th century and that such groups were converted to Theravāda during the centuries of Arakanese rule in the Chittagong area (15th-16th century). (Rosén-Hockersmith 1985, 160)

The second section of Rosén-Hockersmith's work gives an account of the Sangha and lay organisations which resulted from the 1856 Theravāda reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism. This part is completed by description of the average temple and its administration. It is stressed that "lacking the active support of a congenial government, East Bengal Buddhism has developed a high degree of lay organization and lay activity within the Buddhist community." (Rosén-Hockersmith 1985, 161).

The writer, who lived among Baruā people, gives in the third part of this book a precious account of the "worldly" aspects of their religion. Life cycle rituals and Buddhist festivals are here described. Rosén-Hockersmith stresses in this section that certain rituals and cults being more of a Buddhist nature are more acceptable than others that have been borrowed from Hinduism. A large section is here devoted to a cult specific of the Buddhists of Bangladesh: that of the monk Sīvali. This monk, who is famous in Buddhist literature for being the one who would never return from an alms' round with an empty bowl, has come to symbolise material plenty. To him people address prayers for gain of whatever sort.

In the last part of her work Rosén-Hockersmith argues that to preserve their own identity where they are so small a minority the Buddhists of Bangladesh had to free their religion from all non-Buddhist elements, such as the worship of Hindu gods, which is a very common feature in other Buddhist countries, for instance Sri Lanka, where Buddhism is the religion of the majority. However, since Buddhism in its more orthodox interpretation is solely concerned with salvation from the evil of

this world, and because Bangladeshi Buddhists cannot resort to Hindu gods, they have as an alternative created their own Buddhist “saints” such as the figure of the monk Sivali. Rosén-Hokersmith ends her book by stating that the emergence of the Sivali cult in Bangladesh supports the idea that Buddhist soteriology needs to be complemented by a worldly counterpart. The work of Rosén-Hokersmith is of great value and I hope that one day it will be available in English translation.

Following the lead of my predecessors, I hope that my work will contribute to a better understanding and knowledge of the Buddhism and Buddhists of Bangladesh. However, since my research, as well as that of those who have dealt with the subject before, is only a partial contribution to the goal, I hope there will be someone in the future who will have the interest and the opportunity to deal with the subject in a more comprehensive way.



Map 1.
Map of Bangladesh.



Map 2.
Map of the Chittagong region.

Chapter one:

The origins of Buddhism in Bangladesh

1.1 Between history, myth and historical inventions

The two most important events in the history of Bangladeshi Buddhism are the introduction of Buddhism into the region and its reform in the nineteenth century. The reform is a relatively recent episode and, as I will explain in chapter three, there are no written records of it. However there is no doubt about its historicity, even though some details may be ambiguous. The case of the introduction of Buddhism in this area is a different matter. The conversion of a community to Buddhism is an event that in all Theravādin countries has a special importance, which is reflected in the fact that the Buddhists of all of each such country claim that it was the Buddha himself who preached there. For example, according to the *Mahāvamsa* (Ch. I), one of the Sri Lankan chronicles, the Buddha visited Sri Lanka several times and declared it the place where his doctrine would flourish. Likewise, according to *The Glass Palace Chronicle* (§103, 6-7), one of the Burmese chronicles, as well as the Thai chronicle (see Jayawickrama, 1968), the Buddha visited those countries and predicted the spread of his doctrine there. These accounts contain no historical truth; no scholar doubts that the Buddha never left northern India. Accordingly, the tradition of attributing to the Buddha the introduction of his doctrine in all Theravādin countries¹ can only be considered a way to legitimise those traditions.

There is no such thing, or at least we do not know of it, as an ancient chronicle of Bangladesh; however, the belief that the Buddha came to this part of the world to preach his doctrine is part of the local Buddhist tradition. Despite the lack of any archaeological or textual evidence not only members of the Sangha and Buddhist

¹ I am told that according to local traditions the Buddha also visited Cambodia and Laos as well as Mahāyāna countries such as Nepal.

devotees, but also some Bengali scholars maintain,² or at least do not think it impossible³ that Buddhism was preached in Bengal by the Buddha or by some of his contemporary pupils. This idea, as I will illustrate later, is not a recent introduction in the religious history of the region, being already present at the time Hiuen-Tsiang toured the area in the first half of the seventh century A.D. Those who support this belief have tried to justify their claims through textual and historical evidence. Their suppositions are based on legends reported in later texts and sometimes on the belief that the Buddha was endowed with psychic powers - *iddhi* - one of which allowed him to fly through the air and therefore visit faraway places. Other evidence sometimes cited to support the belief that the Buddha visited Bangladesh includes the popular story of Sumāgadhā Anāthapiṇḍaka from Kṣemendra's 1051 A.D. work,⁴ the *Bodhi-Sattvādāna-Kalpalatā*, which tells how the Buddha came to preach in Puṇḍravardhana at the request of a pious lady, and the *Samyutta Nikāya* (V, 89 and 168-170) where it is mentioned that Buddha once lived in Setaka, which some⁵ identify with a town situated in the land of Sumbhas in West Bengal. Unfortunately, we cannot take these suppositions as relevant because they are not supported by any evidence: Kṣemendra lived many centuries after the Buddha's death, while the identification of Setaka is arbitrary.

Even the idea that the missionary Gavāmpati crossed this region during the lifetime of the Buddha, on his way to Suvāṇṇabhūmi, as suggested in the *Mahākarmavibhanga*,⁶ is rejected by Lamotte (1958, 328), who assumes this tradition to be apocryphal and no earlier than the fifth century A.D. Moreover, there is no agreement among scholars on the identification of Suvāṇṇabhūmi, as explained by Malalasekera, who writes:

Suvāṇṇabhūmi is generally identified with Lower Burma, probably the Pagan and Moulmein districts. It probably included the coast from Rangoon to Singapore. ... Fleet [J.R.A.S., 1910, p. 428] suggests, however, that it might be

² Visuddhananda Mahāthera (1983, 2).

³ Chaudhuri (1982, 1-2); S.B. Baruā (1990, 1-2) and Akanda (1990, 11)

⁴ For the dating of this work see the introduction to Vaidya ed. 1959.

⁵ Niyogi (1976, 121); Visuddhananda Mahāthera (1983, 2); Ray (1356 Bengali, 494) and Sugatānanda Mahāthera (1986) among others..

⁶ *Mahākarmavibhanga*, 62, as reported by Lamotte (1958, 328).

the district in Bengal called by Hiouen Thsangt “Ka-lo-na-su-fa-la-na” (Karnasuvarṇa), or else the country along the river Son in Central India, a tributary of the Ganges, on the right bank of the river which is also called Hiranyavāha. The probability is that there were two places of the same name, one originally in India itself and the other in Further India. (Malalasekera 1938, 2: 1263).⁷

Therefore, it could be that Gavāmpati went to Suvāṇṇabhūmi without passing through Bengal.

Likewise, the fact reported by many authors⁸ that the *Anguttara Nikāya* mentions a Buddhist teacher named Upasena, who is described as *Vanganaputta*, is not relevant: *Vanganaputta* has to be regarded as a bad misreading of *Vaṅgantaputta*. Indeed, Malalasekera (1938, 1: 404), who lists all references to the monk in the Canon, writes that “He [Upasena Vaṅgantaputta] was born in Nālaka as the son of Rūpasārī, the brahminee, his father being Vaṅganta.” Even accepting the reading of *Vanganaputta*, one would have no evidence of a link between Buddhism and Bengal at such an early stage. Firstly, it has not been proven that the term *Vangana* has anything to do with *Vanga*, the ancient name of a part of Bengal. Secondly, that some pupil of the Buddha might originally have been from Bengal does not mean that the Buddha’s teaching was preached there.

There are different opinions about the historical origin of Buddhism in Bangladesh. Again, scholars, members of the Sangha and Buddhist layman are divided in their views. Some believe that Buddhism was introduced in Bangladesh during the reign of Asoka or around that time, i.e. the third century B.C.⁹ Others think that, in the absence of any archaeological evidence, the introduction of Buddhism in Bangladesh cannot be earlier than the first centuries of the Christian era.¹⁰

The first thing that is apparent is that the region was not subject to Aryan

⁷ See also Skilling 1992

⁸ Niyogi (1976, 121); Visuddhananda Mahāthera (1983, 2); Ray (1356 Bengali, 494) and Sugatānanda Mahāthera (1986) among others.

⁹ Paul (1939, 72-73); Ray (1356 Bengali, 494); Majumdar (1971, 522); Haque (1990, 16) and Chakrabarti (1922, 63 and 179-180).

¹⁰ Mitra (1954, 49); Cākmā (1990, 132); Bhikkhu Śīlācār Śāstri (1986, 3); S.B. Baruā (1981, 31 and 35); Kayal (1993, 16).

influence until relatively late. The Aryans first settled in the Indus valley. Subsequently, forced by new migrations from central Asia, they moved east towards the Ganges valley. For this reason, their influence did not affect Eastern Bengal until at least the second half of the first millennium B.C. This does not mean that the Bengalis had not developed a civilisation of their own. Rather, by that time they had not yet acquired particular features of the late Aryans, such as their state organisation. This factor is of great relevance. In fact, it would be impossible to postulate the spread of Buddhism into a country where there is no centralised authority to support the Sangha. The Buddha himself had counted on royal patronage. Moreover, it is hard to believe that the Bengalis would have embraced Buddhism before being exposed to Brāhminical culture, even though Majumdar reports that according to Chatterji:

The ideas of *karma* and transmigration, the practice of yoga, the religious and philosophical ideas centring round the conception of the divinity as Siva and Devī and as Vishnu, the Hindu ritual of *pūjā* as opposed to the Vedic ritual of *homa*, ... all these and much more in Hindu religion ... would appear to be legacy from our pre-Aryan ancestors. (Majumdar 1971, 22).

We know that at the end of the fourth century B.C. Candragupta established the Maurya dynasty in Magadha and subsequently expanded his kingdom to the neighbouring countries. His grandson, emperor Asoka (circa 268-233 B.C.), completed his mission and almost forced the submission of the entire subcontinent. The devotion of this ruler to Buddhism is well known. Unfortunately, we do not know the eastern limits of Asoka's empire. We do know that although Asoka left inscriptions of various kinds throughout his vast empire, we find no trace of them in any part of Bengal. This fact strongly suggests that Asoka's empire did not include Eastern Bengal. Nonetheless, Kulke and Rothermund (1986, 378) in their map of "Maurya Empire under Ashoka (268-233)" include part of Bengal. They also attribute to this emperor an inscription, a minor rock edict, in Mahāsthān (Rajshahi Division), which I will extensively analyse in the next section of this chapter. This opinion is controversial, and I have not found any mention of this inscription in the work of Bloch (1950), an important authority on Asokan inscriptions, nor in that of

Allchin and Norman (1985).

Evidence supporting the idea of the spread of Buddhism in Bangladesh in Asokan times is given by two of the inscriptions found at Sānchi (Bühler 1894a, 108, 1894b, 380). Inscriptions no. 102 and no. 217, dating from the second or third century B.C., record the donations to Buddhist institutions by two inhabitants of Puñavaḍhana (*sic*), in modern Bangladesh. However, even accepting the contents and the dating of the two inscriptions, it is difficult to prove on their basis that Buddhism was practised at all in Bangladesh in that period. In fact, people donating to a Buddhist temple need not be Buddhist themselves. Furthermore, even if the two donors of the Sānchi inscriptions were Buddhist, this does not mean that Buddhism was a widespread phenomenon in Bangladesh. If Buddhism were widespread in Bangladesh at the time, one would expect to find at least some evidence of Buddhist communities and yet there is no such evidence for several centuries.

With regard to the specific conditions of Buddhism at the time of Asoka, Dutt writes that:

At the time when Asoka embraced the faith, it was a faith current, and perhaps popular, only in the Puratthima. Some scholars hold the opinion that the Buddhist Sangha itself was then known as the 'Magadha Sangha', having only a regional standing. The boundary landmarks of the Puratthima are mentioned in a legend from which it will appear that it covered an area extending only from the east of Hardwar to the eastern boundary of Bihar. (Dutt 1962, 102).

This assumption can be considered correct on the basis of the Sinhalese chronicles, where no mention is made of Bengal among Buddhist regions. It seems impossible that had Bengal been a Buddhist country it would have been overlooked by the Sinhalese historiographers, since Vaṅga is the motherland of Vijaya, the first legendary king of Laṅkā (*Mahāvamsa* VI). Also, as said above, some identify Suvāṇṇabhūmi with present day Burma. As a consequence, they attribute the conversion of Burma as well as Bengal (which is on the way from Pāṭaliputra to Burma) to the Theras Soṇa and Uttara, who were sent out as missionaries by Asoka after the Pāṭaliputra council.¹¹ However this is an episode that so far has not been

¹¹ According to Lamotte (1958, 276) the Pāṭaliputra council took place in the 18th year of Asoka's reign, which he identifies with the year 250 B.C.

proved to be historical. For example, Lamotte (1958, 320 ff.), who gives a detailed description concerning the conversion to Buddhism of several regions following Asoka's missionary expeditions, does not mention Bengal.

We know, on the basis of one of the *Cetiya-ghara* inscriptions found at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa (Vogel 1933, 22-23), that Buddhism had already been introduced into Vaṅga around the third century A.D. The inscription records the foundation of some religious buildings for the benefit of Sinhalese monks who had converted a number of countries, including Bengal:

For the benefit of the masters and of the fraternities (*of monks*) of Tambapaṇṇa (Ceylon) who have converted Kashmir, Gandhāra, Chīna, Chīlāta (Skt. Kirāta), Tosali, Avaramta (Skt. Aparānta), Vaṅga, Vanavāsi, Yavana (?), Damila (?), Palura (?) ... and the Isle of Tambapaṇṇi (Ceylon). (Vogel 1933, 23).

One could argue quite rightly that the Sinhalese monks had not introduced Buddhism in some of the countries mentioned in the inscription. However, it is important to note that Vaṅga is listed here as a Buddhist country. It is therefore reasonable to believe that at the time of the compilation of this inscription Buddhism had reached Bengal.

It was not until the establishment of the Khadga dynasty, between A.D. 660 and 750, that we have evidence of any Buddhist ruler in East Bengal. All we know for sure about this dynasty lies in the content of a copper-plate land grant discovered at the end of the last century in Ashrāfpur, about 30 miles northeast of Dhaka. The text of the copper-plate, which bears a seal with a couching bull, was first discussed at a meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal on 4 March 1885, and the proceedings of the meeting also contain a facsimile of it. Sircar (1983, 41-43), who edited this text in one of his volumes of select inscriptions, wrote:

The charter begins with an adoration to the Munindra (Buddha) and records the grant of several plots of land ... by king Devakhaḍga [c. A.D. 670 - 685], in favour of the Buddhist monastery built by the monk Saṅghamitra, for the long life of the prince Rājarājabhaṭa ... The grant was issued on the 13th of Vaiśākha in the 13th regnal year of king Devakhaḍga. It was written by a Buddhist named Puradāsa at the victorious royal camp at Karmānta which N.K. Bhattasali identified with modern Baḍ-kāntā near Comilla. (Sircar, 1983, 2: 41)

On the basis of the evidence presented above we can safely say that Buddhism

was introduced in Bangladesh around the second or the third century A.D., possibly by Sinhalese monks. This view is sustained by the opinion that Buddhism had reached Burma around that same time (Sengupta 1994, 26 ff.) even though according to Hall (1955, 152) “So far as historical evidence is concerned, however, there is no trace of the penetration [in Burma and Arakan] of Indian influence earlier than the fragments of the Pali canon found at Hmawza (Śrikshetra or Old Prome) dating from c. A.D. 500.” The recent work of Stargardt (1995) has further moved the dating of these text to the fifth century.

The idea, no matter how old, that the Buddha visited the region, should be considered merely part of the local tradition. In fact, among the authors I have examined, only Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera (1983, 2), the late Sanghanāyaka of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya, advocates this theory. All other writers, Buddhists and non-Buddhists, while mentioning the existence of this belief, do not give to it any credence. Moreover, Sangharāja Śīlāṅkār Mahāthera, the most senior monk of the Sangharāja Nikāya, told me during an interview (May 1994) that he had never considered the question of the introduction of Buddhism into Bangladesh. He added that he did not know what the answer to this question could be, and that if I had let him know in advance that I wanted this kind of information he would have asked for the opinion of some historian. It never occurred to Śīlāṅkār Mahāthera to tell me that the Buddha himself had spread his doctrine in Bangladesh.

From the ideas expressed by the Bengali authors presented above, one sees that two different opinions regarding the historical introduction of Buddhism in Bangladesh coexist. On one side, there is an attempt to prove the antiquity of this tradition and its links to the times of the Buddha and of Emperor Asoka. On the other side, Bangladeshi Buddhism appears as a relatively more recent phenomenon, which, as I will illustrate in the following chapters, is associated with the Southeast Asian tradition of the Burmese region of Arakan. This association, which derives from the physical contiguity of the two regions and the consequent exchanges, is revealed both by the historical events and cultural institutions shared by the two traditions.

One may wonder whether the attempt to link Bangladeshi Buddhism to Indian Buddhism may suggest a desire by Bangladeshi Buddhists to give dignity to their tradition in the formation process of their national identity. However, upon closer inspection, it is evident that this theory has no foundation. If this hypothesis were correct, one would expect Bangladeshi Buddhist scholars to support the link between Bangladeshi and Indian Buddhism, with non-Buddhist Bangladeshi scholars opposing the same idea. Yet, the contrary is true. Even though the Buddhist authors presented above suggest in general that the Buddhists tradition of Bangladesh may be older than presently known, all of them seem to agree on the fact that it is not possible to say whether Buddhism was practised in Bangladesh before Christ and that if it was practised it would not have been much widespread. The non-Buddhist Bengali scholars instead seem more inclined to accept the hypothesis that Buddhism was introduced in Bangladesh at the time of Emperor Asoka or around that time. Among the authors previously mentioned, Ray (1356 Bengali, 494) and Majumdar (1971, 522), two of the greatest Bengali historians, as well as Haque (1990, 16) a leading figure among contemporary Bangladeshi scholars and the former Director of the National Museum of Dhaka, support the idea that Buddhism was practised in Bangladesh during Asokan times.

Since the Bangladeshi Buddhists do not see themselves as part of the older Indian tradition one can suppose non-Buddhist Bengalis historians to have a purpose in maintaining the contrary. One reason is that these historians aim to create a Bengali national identity which includes the Buddhist people of Bangladesh. This aim, which, as is evident from the dating of Ray's work, predates the partition of India and the creation of Bangladesh, follows the principles of cultural entropy outlined by E. Gellner (1983). Gellner argues that the creation of a national identity demands a degree of cultural homogeneity which is achieved by the selective use of historical and cultural traditions. He writes:

It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round. Admittedly, nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions

invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored. ... The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. (E. Gellner 1983, 56-57)

In our case, history has been manipulated through the wrong reading of the already mentioned Brāhmī inscription of Mahāsthān in an attempt to overshadow the connection between the Buddhist tradition of Bangladesh and that of Southeast Asia. Also, as I will show in chapter three, all Bengali non-Buddhist scholars ignore the recent history of Bangladeshi Buddhism, which emphasises the relationship between the Buddhist traditions of Bangladesh and Arakan.

Other evidence which highlights the attempt to incorporate Buddhist Bangladesh in the Bangladeshi nation is given by the way in which Bangladesh has been divided into Divisions for administrative purposes. We know that today the great majority of Bangladeshi Buddhists (see Table I.2) live in Chittagong and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Looking at the map of Bangladesh, one would expect Chittagong Division to coincide with Chittagong and the Hill Tracts, the part of the Bangladeshi territory that protrudes towards the Southeast. However, this Division has been designed to include the town of Sylhet and the surrounding area, and some of the Division's administrative headquarters, like the School Board, are not located in Chittagong but in Comilla. Chittagong Division was evidently designed to prevent the possible formation of an area inhabited by people ethnically and culturally homogeneous and distinct from the rest of the Bangladeshi population, which could have resulted in the formation of a separate nation. To prevent this eventuality, further measures have been adopted. First, the State has encouraged Muslim Bengalis from other parts of the country to settle in the Hill Tracts. Second, entire villages have been dispersed following the construction of the Kaptai dam in the Hill Tracts. Third, it is illegal to sell maps of the area of Chittagong and the Hill Tracts as opposed to District maps.¹² The Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, which investigated human rights violations in the Hill Tracts in 1990, found that :

¹² In the summer of 1994 I tried to purchase a map of Chittagong and the Hill Tracts at the market in Chittagong. I was then told by all shopkeepers that those maps were not produced anymore because they were illegal. I finally managed to acquire a map produced before the ban.

The authorities in the Hill Tracts are striving to bring the hill peoples into mainstream Bangladesh national society. This is done through exclusive development of specified and approved cultural projects. Simultaneously the authorities are utilising military control to perpetrate structural violence in the Hill Tracts to deter the people from practising their religion freely. This is still happening as the events of September 19th, 1990 near Kaptai demonstrate.

Traditional religion and culture are being taken out of their context as a ethical basis for the daily life of hill people and being transformed into an exotic folkloric show. Meanwhile those authorities condoning and encouraging this actually lament the “tragedy” of the lost cultural past of the hill people and, as noted in the Chittagong Ethnographic Museum, consider hill peoples’ cultures as appropriate for archaeological study. The hill peoples of the CHT are indeed being subjected to ethnocide. (The Report of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission 1991, 100).

While most Bangladeshi Buddhist live in the Hill Tracts, not all the habitants of that region are Buddhists. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see, given the few examples of above, how the findings of the Commission apply to Bangladeshi Buddhist culture in general.

To complete the picture of the early history of Buddhism in Bangladesh given here, in the next section I shall proceed to analyse the Brāhmī inscription of Mahāsthān, demonstrating that it is absurd to consider it evidence for the existence of Buddhist communities in Bangladesh before the Christian era. Then, in the section after that, I will present the diaries of the Chinese pilgrims Fa-Hian, Hiuen-Tsiang and I-Tsing, who travelled in India between the beginning of the fifth and the end of the seventh century A.D., which constitute the earliest first-hand accounts of the state of Buddhism in Bengal

1.2 The Brāhmī inscription of Mahāsthān

The so-called Mahāsthāni Brāhmī inscription was found at Mahāsthān, near Rajshahi, in 1931. It consists of a “piece of hard limestone measuring 3.1/4" x 2.1.4" x 7/8".” (Bhandarkar 1931, 84). The script is Brāhmī, and the language is a local form of Prakrit. The inscription is in fragmentary condition but scholars hypothesise, given the text and the shape of the stone, that it was never much bigger than its present size.

The importance of this inscription lies in the fact that it has been considered as the earliest evidence for the existence of Buddhist communities in ancient Eastern Bengal. This belief is held despite the fact that the French-Bangladeshi team of archaeologists who are presently excavating Mahāsthān has so far not found any evidence proving any Buddhist activity there before the sixth century.¹³ The huge archaeological site of Mahāsthān¹⁴ has so far only been partially excavated and new findings may in future bring evidence that will oblige us to revise the dating of the introduction of Buddhism into the region. Still, this seems a remote possibility. Here I will analyse the Mahāsthāni Brāhmī inscription in order to come to a conclusion about its content and to determine its dating.

The transcript of the Brāhmī text¹⁵, as given by Bhandarkar (1931, 85), is as follows:

1. nena Sa[m*]va[m*]gīy[ā]nam [Galadanasa] | Dumadina-[mahā*]
2. māte | sulakhite Puḍanagalate | e[ta]m
3. [ni*]vahipayisati | Saṁva[m*]giyānam [cha di*]ne [tathā*]
4. [dhā*]niyam | nivahisati | da[m*]g[ā*]tiyāy[i*]k[e] d[evā]
5. [tiyā*][yi]kasi | su-atiyāyika[si] pi | gaṁḍa[kehi*]
6. [dhāni*][yi]kehi esa koṭhāgāle kosam [bhara*]-
7. [ṇīye]

This text has been similarly translated by various scholars. I will here give a sample of two different readings by means of the translations of Mukherji and Maity (1) and that of Bhandarkar (2):

(1)

To Gobardhana of the Saṁvaṁgīyas was granted by order. (Or To the Saṁvaṁgīyas was given by order Sesamum and mustard seeds). The Sumātra will cause it to be carried out from the prosperous city of Puṇḍranagara. (And

¹³ Declaration of Dr. J.F. Salles, of the French-Bangladeshi team of archaeologists, at the meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society held in London on 13 April 1995.

¹⁴ Measuring 1 mile x 0.75 mile.

¹⁵ The text in parenthesis indicates Bhandarkar's suggested reading. Dr. Fynes tells me that asterisks conventionally indicate text that is illegible in the original. However, Prof. Schopen tells me that in this case the asterisks indicate text that is not in the inscription and has been added by its editor.

and insect, (lit. parrots) in the city, this granary and treasury will have to be replenished with paddy and Gaṇḍaka coins. (Mukherji and Maity 1967, 39-40)

(2)

To Galadana (Galārdana) of the Saṃvaṃgīyas (was granted) by order. The Mahāmātra from the highly auspicious Puṇḍranagara will cause it to be carried out. (*And likewise*) paddy has been granted to the Saṃvaṃgīyas. The outbreak (*of distress*) in the town during (*this*) outburst of superhuman agency shall be tided over. When there is an excess of plenty, this granary and the treasury (*may be replenished*) with paddy and the *gaṇḍaka* coins. (Bhandarkar 1931, 87)

It is apparent that between the two translations there are no relevant differences. The real point is to decide whether we can take this inscription as a grant to a Buddhist community or not. There are two questions that have to be answered: first, who were the *Saṃvaṃgīyas*; second, is the inscription a grant at all?

Mukherji and Maity (1967, 40) as well as Sircar (1965, 80) report that according to Baruā the term *Saṃvaṃgīyas* should be read as “of persons of the *ṣaḍvargika* sect of the Buddhists.” This sect should thus correspond to the followers of the ‘group of the six’ often mentioned in the canon.¹⁶ This belief has no logical foundation. First, the prefix *sam* cannot have any connection with the Sanskrit numeral *ṣaḍ* meaning six. In fact, all Middle Indo-Aryan languages, of which the Eastern Māgadhī of this inscription¹⁷ is one, use the word *cha* to express this numeral.¹⁸ The reading of *sam* as a derivation of *ṣaḍ*, is not only implausible, it is not even coherent with the language of the rest of the inscription. Second, the six monks are probably not real historical characters. In fact they are commonly regarded, as reported by Rhys Davids and Stede (1921-25, 273), as a “group of six, a set of (sinful) bhikkhus taken as exemplification of trespassing the rules of the *Vinaya* (cp. Oldenberg, *Buddha* 7 384).” Since this term *Chabbaggiyā* (Pali) designates a kind of abstract opposition to the Buddha, it seems most improbable that any real monks would have taken their name. That would be like having a Christian sect called

¹⁶ Vin. i 84 f., 104, 106, 111, 113, 114, 138, 160, 170, 185, 189, 192, 194, 203 f., 216, 285, 306, 316; ii. 73, 105 ff., 145 ff., 213 ff., 241, 262, etc. : J. i. 191, 217, 360; iii. 149; DhA. iii. 48 f., 330, 382. As listed in Malalasekera (1938, 2: 926).

¹⁷ See Bhandarkar 1931, 84.

¹⁸ See Pischel, 1957, § 441, 317.

Judasite. This remains true despite the fact that later orthodox historiography elaborates on the historical personae of this alleged group.¹⁹

The interpretation of *Savagīyānam* (as in the inscription) given by Bhandarkar seems much more convincing:

The word may be equivalent to the Sanskrit *Samvargīyānām*, which, however, yields no good sense. It may stand for *vargīyānām*, 'of the class-fellows, or the clansmen', with *sam* prefixed to it. But this prefix *sam* remains meaningless and inappropriate. Besides, what is meant by saying that something was given by *sāsana* to 'Galadana of the clansmen'? Who were these clansmen? Why is their name not specified? It will be better to insert another *anusvāra* this time after *va*, and read the whole word as *Samvamgīyānam*, 'of the Samvamgīyā (tribe)'. (Bhandarkar 1931, 85)

Bhandarkar then points out that *Vamgīya* certainly could be the name of a tribe.²⁰ The name would designate the tribes of the Vanga region. Those tribes, being confederated, would subsequently be referred to as *Samvamgīya*. Bhandarkar's argument is based upon a parallel case regarding the *Vrjji* country. Watters (1905, 2: 81) agrees with Beal, who, commenting on the report of Hiuen-Tsiang on this region, affirms that "The country of the Vrijjis or Samvrijjis, *i.e.*, united Vrijjis, was that of the confederated eight tribes of the people called the Vrijjis or Vajjis ..." (Beal, trans., 1884, 77 n. 100). In fact, this form of confederate government was not at all unknown in ancient India.²¹

The suggestion that the *Samvamgīyas* were a population and not a Buddhist monastic community is reinforced by analysis of the nature of the text. Both of the above translations agree on the fact that grain and money were to be distributed to the

¹⁹ "*Chabbaggiyā*: A group of monks, contemporary with the Buddha, frequently mentioned as being guilty of various Vinaya offences. Six monks - Assaji, Punabbasu, Panduka, Lohitaka, Mettiya and Bhummaja - were their leaders, hence their name. There were also nuns in their following, who likewise violated the Vinaya rules in various ways. It is said that Assaji and Punabbasu had their headquarters at Kītāgiri, Mettiya and Bhummaja(ka) at Rājagaha and Panduka and Lohitaka at Jetavana. According to the *Samantapāsādikā* they were all of Sāvatti and all originally acquainted. Finding a living hard to obtain, they entered the Order under the two Chief Disciples. They decided among themselves that it was unwise for them all to live in the same place, and they therefore divided into three groups as mentioned above. Each group had five hundred monks attached to it. Of the three groups, the followers of Panduka and Lohitaka were the most virtuous. They remained near the Buddha accompanying him on his tours. They did not, like the others, transgress Vinaya rules." Malalasekera (1938, 1: 926).

²⁰ Still, Sircar thinks that "Samvarga however might have been the name of a locality." Sircar (1965, 80, n. 5).

²¹ "Though monarchy was usual in ancient India, tribal states also existed, which were governed by oligarchies. ... chiefly in the foothills of the Himālayas and in N. Bihār. ... The most powerful non-monarchical state at this time (*the time of the Buddha*) was the Vrjjan confederacy ..." Basham (1954, 96).

Samvāṅgīyas, and that the granary was subsequently to be refilled with the same goods. Sircar (1965, 80, n. 6) maintains that “It is difficult to understand whether the keeper of the store-house is ordered to replenish the stores in apprehension of an impending scarcity or it was the persons receiving grains who had to pay them back.” Let us consider both options. In the first case, there would have been no necessity to record the fact. Inscriptions were produced to record important acts that had to be remembered in the long run. Grants, for example, were engraved in copper plates or other long-lasting material so that the deed should be known to posterity and the legal possession of the granted goods assured. The recording of the fact here hypothesised cannot be included in the above category. In the second case, if the Buddhist Order was the recipient of these seeds and money one could wonder if the *bhikkhus* could have refunded them. *Inter omnes constat* that the members of the Sangha, as was the custom among the ascetics of ancient India, lived by means of the material support of laity. The work of Schopen (series of lectures delivered at Oxford University during Trinity ‘97) indicates that, at least among the monks following the Mūlasarvastivādin Vinaya, the prohibition to handle any gold or silver,²² did not prevent them from accumulating great wealth. This means that the supposed Buddhist monks of our inscription, had they followed the same rules, could have negotiated and repaid this kind of loan. On the other hand, it sounds more reasonable that an authority should grant grain and money to a population affected by natural disasters. This use is confirmed by the authority of the *Arthaśāstra* (IV, 3, 78, as translated in Bhandarkar, 1931, 88) in which it is affirmed that “During a famine, the king may show favour by giving *gratis* seeds and food. Either he (may carry out) work in forts and on dams with the distribution of food, or he may distribute food *gratis* (without exacting work).” In this particular case, the power allocating the seeds and the money does not claim any labour and expects the goods to be returned, but this does not seem to be

²² This includes money in general.

incompatible with the ideal expressed in the *Arthaśāstra*.²³

As for the dating of this inscription, there is no consensus among scholars in this regard. Most²⁴ believe that it was engraved in the third century B.C. This belief is based on the resemblance of the script used here with that of the Asokan inscriptions, especially the letter *s*, which occurs in a form resembling the letter *sh*. Still, there are many differences between the two scripts that cannot be ignored, namely the different length of the vertical part of the letters *t*, *p*, *h*, *v*, and *s*. Moreover, the use of the *daṇḍa* as punctuation mark was not common in Asokan inscriptions and was “sometimes inserted meaninglessly”.²⁵ If there is a time gap between this inscription and those of Asoka, we shall determine whether this one is earlier or later. The research of Falk (1993) has established that there was probably no writing in India, therefore no inscriptions, before Asoka. For these and other reasons, Pandey’s claim (1962, 2) that the inscription dates to the time of Candragupta Maurya or slightly earlier in the fourth century B.C. seems to be groundless. The opinion of Dani (1963, 55 ff.), who places the inscription in the second half of the second century B.C., is more probable. Dani comes to his conclusion by comparing the alphabet used here with that of the Asokan and other later inscriptions. Assuming that our inscription cannot be Asokan, the use of the letter *dha* in the shape of the Roman capital letter D places it in the second half of the second century B.C., because later the reverse form became more common. Although the language used in the Mahāsthāni inscription may resemble that of the Asokan ones,²⁶ one in the end has to agree with Dani’s view, when he observes that:

Asokan Brāhmī ... had a unity of purpose which ultimately determined the style of writing. That script, in spite of minor differences, can be termed imperial. In contrast to the Asokan inscriptions stand a great number of records which ... show a variety of purpose and are entirely different in content and style from the Asokan. Whether we take the administrative records, like the Mahāsthān inscription ... we are struck by the great change that marks them out from the Asokan mode of writing. (Dani 1963, 50).

²³ It is interesting to note that Bhandarkar assumes that the need to assign money together with seeds is due to the fact that natural calamities (in this particular case a flood) destroy goods that need money to be replaced (Bhandarkar 1931, 89).

²⁴ Bhandarkar (1931, 84); Sircar (1965, 79, n.3); Mukherji, and Maity (1967, 39).

²⁵ Bhandarkar 1931, 84.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

In conclusion, it seems reasonable to believe that the Brāhmī inscription of Mahāsthān is the record of a loan granted by some authority to a group of local tribes, at some time not earlier than the second century B.C. The inscription does not explicitly mention the religious affiliation of either the donor or the recipients of the grant. Any attempt to prove the existence of Buddhist communities in Bangladesh at such an early stage by means of this inscription is therefore arbitrary.

1.3 Buddhism in Pre-Pāla East Bengal according to Chinese sources

In A.D. 400, with the arrival in India of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hian, a tradition began of Chinese monks willing to travel to the subcontinent to find original versions of sacred books, visit Buddhist sites and learn Sanskrit. These monks collected an enormous amount of information regarding the regions they visited and the people they met, with special regard to Buddhism, and reported on them in their journals. For this reason their descriptions are of incomparable value for the study of the history and religions of the areas they visited. In this section I will outline the conditions of Buddhism in East Bengal in the period between the beginning of the fifth century A.D. and the end of the seventh century A.D. by means of an analytical reading of the accounts of Fa-Hian, Hiuen-Tsiang and I-Tsing.

Fa-Hian entered India in A.D. 400 from the Indus valley, after crossing the Gobi desert, and subsequently proceeded eastwards, until he reached the Ganges' mouth. He then reports that:

From this, continuing to go eastwards nearly fifty yôjanas, we arrive at the kingdom of Tāmralipti. Here the river empties itself into the sea. There are twenty-four Saṅghārāmas in this country, all of them have resident priests, and the Law of the Buddha is generally respected. Fa-Hian remained here for two years, writing out copies of the Sacred books (Sūtras), and taking impressions of the figures (used in worship). (Beal, trans., 1869, 146-7).²⁷

²⁷ See also Giles trans. 1923.

Tāmralipti has by now been unanimously identified with modern Tamluk, in Midnapore district, West Bengal, a seaport town²⁸ of which we find mention in the *Mahāvamsa* (XI. 38 and XIX. 6).²⁹ Despite the brevity of this account it still is of great importance since it bears witness to the presence of Buddhism at the beginning of the fifth century A.D. in West Bengal.³⁰ This does not count as evidence for the practice of Buddhism in East Bengal, but at this point it cannot be excluded. That Fa-Hian did not continue his journey into East Bengal might suggest that there were no Buddhist centres east of Tāmralipti, or at least none of importance. However, it seems at least equally, if not more, probable that Fa-Hian decided not to travel further in Bengal for the simple reason that he desired to go to Sri Lanka. Within Bengal, Tāmralipti would have been the ideal place at which to embark for such a journey by sea.

A long time after Fa-Hian's journey, another monk, Hiuen-Tsiang, came to India and stayed from A.D. 629 to 645. Unlike his predecessor, Hiuen-Tsiang extensively toured Puṇḍavardhana, Kāmarūpa, Samatāṭa, Tāmralipti and Karnaśuvarṇa.³¹ Accordingly, his account of the eastern part of the subcontinent³² is rich in interesting data and is considered the most important source on the condition of Buddhism in the area at the time.

The identification of Puṇḍavardhana, the first region visited by Hiuen-Tsiang, has been debated for a long time among scholars at the beginning of this century.³³ More recently, in 1931, with the discovery of the Brāhmī inscription of Mahāsthān, Puṇḍavardhana's capital has been fixed near the site of the finding, i.e. north of Bogra, in Rajshahi division. According to Hiuen-Tsiang, in Puṇḍavardhana:

²⁸ "It was formerly on the mouth of the Ganges. It is now situated on the western bank of the Rūpnārāyana ..." (Law 1932, 68).

²⁹ For other references see Law 1932, 68.

³⁰ Beal, who translated the Chinese text, writing upon Tāmralipti, says in a footnote that "From this port there was extensive traffic with Ceylon and the southern coasts of India. Buddhism flourished here, but probably under a corrupt form, as the intermixture of races was considerable, and the people superstitiously inclined." (Beal, trans., 1869, 146). One may doubt the scientific basis of this affirmation.

³¹ I use the forms of the geographical names as restored in Watters 1905, 2:184, 186, 188, 190 and 191.

³² Beal, trans., 1884, 2:194-204.

³³ Watters 1905, 2: 185. Beal, trans., 1884, 2: 194, n. 18.

There are about twenty *sanghārāmas*, with some 3000 priests; they study both the Little and Great Vehicle. There are some hundred Dêva temples, where sectaries of different schools congregate. The Naked Nirgranthas are the most numerous. To the west of the capital 20 li or so is the Po-chi-p'o *sanghārāma*. Its courts are light and roomy; its towers and pavilions are very lofty. The priests are about 700 in number; they study the law according to the Great Vehicle. Many renowned priests from Eastern India dwell here. Not far from this is a *stūpa* built by Asôka-rāja. Here Tathāgata, in old days, preached the law for three months for the sake of the Dêvas. Occasionally, on the fast-days, there is a bright light visible around it. By the side of this again, is a place where the four past Buddhas walked for exercise and sat down. The bequeathed traces are still visible. Not far from this there is a *vihāra* in which is a statue of Kwan-tsz'-tsai Bôdisattva. Nothing is hid from its divine discernment; its spiritual perception is most accurate; men far and near consult (this being) with fasting and prayers. (Beal, trans., 1884, 2: 195).

Going east about 900 li, Hiuen-Tsiang reached Kāmarūpa, which scholars agree is the old name of Assam, which at that time included part of what is now Bangladesh. Basak explains as follows:

That province included in the past, within its own boundaries in the west, portions of North Bengal, viz. part (if not whole) of the Kuch Bihar State and of the Rangpur district, with the river Karatoyā as the western boundary. Some portions of China and the Himālayan regions also formed its northern section and a portion of East Bengal (*i.e. Sylhet*) was included in it towards the South-West. (Basak 1934, 210).

Hiuen-Tsiang would have visited this region following the reiterated invitation of its king, but it has been argued that he may never have visited Kāmarūpa at all.³⁴ More will be said later about the eventuality of his visit to this province. What the Chinese pilgrim tells us in his records about the inhabitant of this area and their religious behaviour is that:

They adore and sacrifice to the Dêvas, and have no faith in Buddha; hence from the time when Buddha appeared in the world even down to the present time there never as yet has been built one *sanghārāma* as a place for the priests to assemble. Such disciples as there are of a pure faith, say their prayers (repeat the name of Buddha) secretly, and that is all. There are as many as 100 Dêva temples, and different sectaries to the number of several myriads. The present king belongs to the old line of Nārāyana-dêva. He is of the Brāhman caste. His name is Bhāskara-varman, his title Kumāra. ... Though he has no faith in Buddha, yet he much respects Śramanas of learning. (Beal, trans., 1884, 2: 196).

Proceeding southwards the Chinese pilgrim reached Samatāta. As for the

³⁴ "We need not suppose that the pilgrim made the journey indicated in the text of our present passage, and his statements as to distance and bearing are not necessarily to be treated as authoritative. There is nothing, however, in the text of our passage to indicate that the pilgrim did not actually visit the country here described." (Watters 1905, 2: 187).

identification of this country, Watters writes that:

Cunningham regarded the Samatāṭa of this passage as being the district of 'the Delta of the Ganges and its chief city which occupied the site of the modern Jessore'. Fergusson considers it to be the Dacca district, the former capital of which was Sonargaon. We should probably place it south of Dacca, and in the district of the modern Faridpur. (Watters 1905, 2: 188).

Hiuen-Tsiang writes that in this country:

There are professors (believers) both of false and true doctrines. There are thirty or so *sanghārāmas* with about 2000 priests. They are all of the Sthavira schools. There are some hundred Dêva temples, in which sectaries of all kinds live. The naked ascetics called Nirgranthas are most numerous. Not far out of the city is a *stūpa* which was built by Asôka-rāja. In this place Tathāgata in former days preached the deep and mysterious law for seven days for the good of the Dêvas. By the side of it are traces where the four Buddhas sat and walked for exercise. Not far from this, in a *sanghārāma*, is a figure of Buddha of green jade. It is eight feet high, with the marks on its person perfectly shown, and with a spiritual power which is exercised from time to time. (Beal, trans., 1884, 2: 199).

Continuing west, Hiuen-Tsiang arrived at Tāmralipti. I have already mentioned the identification of this place with modern Tamruk. When the Chinese pilgrim arrived in this town he discovered that:

There are both heretics and believers. There are about ten *sanghārāmas*, with about 1000 priests. The Dêva temples are fifty in number, in which various sectaries dwell mixed together. ... By the side of the city is a *stūpa* which was built by Asôka-rāja; by the side of it are traces where the four past Buddhas sat and walked. (Beal, trans., 1884, 2: 200-1.)

Finally, according to his records, Hiuen-Tsiang went to Karnaśuvārṇa. Following Watters (1905, 192-193), Hiuen-Tsiang's "location of Karnaśuvārṇa ... is not in agreement with the rest of the narrative, and we must apparently regard that place as 700 li to the north-east instead of north-west of Tāmralipti." Here the Chinese monk found that:

There are believers and heretics alike amongst them. There are ten *sanghārāmas* or so, with about 2000 priests. They study the Little Vehicle of Sammatīya (Ching-tiang-pu) school. There are fifty Dêva temples. The heretics are very numerous. Besides these there are three *sanghārāmas* in which they do not use thickened milk (*ū lok*) following the directions of Dêvadatta. By the side of the capital is the *sanghārāma* called Lo-to-wei-chi (Raktaviti), the halls of which are light and spacious, the storeyed towers very lofty. In this establishment congregate all the most distinguished, learned, and celebrated men of the kingdom." (Beal, trans., 1884, 2: 201-202.)

In the same paragraph, Hiuen-Tsiang reports an interesting anecdote concerning the introduction of Buddhism into this kingdom:

At first the people of this country did not believe in Buddha; at this time there was a heretic of Southern India who wore over his belly copper-plates and on his head a lighted torch. With lofty steps, staff in hand, he came to this country. Sounding aloud the drum of discussion, he sought an adversary in controversy. Then a man said to him, 'Why are your head and your body so strangely (arrayed)?' He said, 'My wisdom is so great, I fear my belly will burst, and because I am moved with pity for the ignorant multitude who live in darkness, therefore I carry this light on my head.' After ten days, no one was found to question him. Among all the learned and professed scholars there was not a single person to discuss with him. The king said, 'Alas! what ignorance prevails in my territories, that no one should be able to challenge the difficult propositions of this stranger. What a disgrace to the country! We must scheme and seek through the most obscure retreats.' Then one said to him, 'In the forest there is a strange man who names himself a Śramana, he is most diligent in study. He is now living apart in silence and obscurity, and so he has lived for a long time; who so well able by his united virtue to controvert this irreligious man as he?' The king hearing this, went himself to invite him to come. The Śramana replying, said, 'I am a man of south India; I stop here on my travels merely as a stranger. My abilities are small and commonplace; I fear lest you should not know it, but yet I will come according to your wish, though I am by no means certain as to the character of the discussion. If, however, I am not defeated, I will ask you to erect a *sanghārāma*, and summon the fraternity to glorify and extol the law of Buddha' The king said, 'I accept your terms, nor could I dare to forget your virtue'. Then the Śramana, having accepted the king's invitation, proceeded to the arena of controversy. Then the heretic went through (*chanted*) some 30,000 words of his school. His arguments were profound, his illustrious (*figures* or *writing*) ample; his whole discourse, both as to names and qualities, was captivation to sight and hearing. The Śramana, after listening, at once fathomed his meaning; no word or argument deceived him. With a few hundred words he discriminated and explained every difficulty, and then he asked (*the heretic*) as to the teaching (*the principles*) of his school. The words of the heretic were confused and his arguments devoid of force, and so his lips were closed and he could not reply. Thus he lost his reputation, and, covered with confusion, retired. The king, deeply reverencing the priest, founded this convent; and from that time and afterwards the teaching of the law widely extended (through the kingdom). (Beal, trans., 1884, 2: 203-4)

In commenting on Hiuen-Tsiang's report, an important secondary source, Hiuen-Tsiang's biography (Beal, trans., 1911), is invaluable. This biography was compiled by the Shaman Hwui Li, one of the monk's disciples, after the master returned from his travels. The work is of great value since it can be considered a supplement to Hiuen-Tsiang's own account: "What is obscure or half told in the one is made clear in the other." (Cranmer-Byng 1911, v.)

What inevitably strikes the reader of the two books is that, with respect to the part of the pilgrim's journey described above, the order of the trip is very differently told in the two accounts. According to the biography, instead of following the above itinerary, Hiuen-Tsiang went from Puṇḍravardhana southeast to Kaṇḍasuvāṇa, then southeast to Samatāṭa and finally to Tāmralipti. Only much later would he have gone,

if he went, at all to Kāmarūpa. This last route is preferred by Watters (1905, 2: 192). One could embrace this point of view since it may account for some unclear passages in the pilgrim's records, like the misplacement of Kaṇasuvarṇa suggested above, but I am not inclined to subscribe to it. Although the visit to this country is placed in different succession in the 'Records' and in the 'Life', and the two accounts partly differ in content, there is no reason to believe this journey did not take place. As for the question here posed, there is no doubt that Kāmarūpa is described in both texts as a non-Buddhist country, thus eliminating any possible controversy.

With respect to the account of the number of temples and monks as well as the presence of heretics, the differences between the 'Records' and the 'Life' are not important. In Puṇḍravardhana the biography lists twelve *sanghārāmas* as opposed to twenty. The Dêva temples, and by extension the nature of the heretic schools, are not mentioned here or in Samataṭa. In this last country, the 'Life' records twenty and not thirty temples, while the number of priest increases from two thousand to three thousand. On Tāmralipti the two works agree on all the figures, while in Kaṇasuvarṇa the number of temples is identical, but the number of priests goes from two thousand to three thousand, as in the preceding case. The temples of the supposed followers of Devadatta are in the biography two and not three. Finally, the anecdote on the introduction of Buddhism into Kaṇasuvarṇa is present in both books. In short, the discrepancies are minor.

Hiuen-Tsiang's reference to a group of ascetics following Devadatta's proscription regarding milk is of interest. According to the Pali Canon, Devadatta was the son of a maternal uncle of the Buddha, who had been converted by the Buddha himself when he visited Kapilavatthu after the Enlightenment.³⁵ After years in which he had become a respected member of the Sangha, Devadatta is said to have started a series of manoeuvres, including three attempted murders, in order to take control of the Sangha from the Buddha. The enmity between the two was not limited to this life, as illustrated in many *Jātakas*. However, each of Devadatta's efforts to

³⁵ For all references to Devadatta in the Pali Canon see: Malalasekera 1938, 1: 1106-1111.

overthrow the Buddha resulted in failure and when all of his followers left him for the Buddha, he fell ill and eventually died swallowed up in Avīci hell.

The Chinese monk says that the ascetics he met did not use thickened milk following Devadatta's prohibition. In the large Buddhist literature the five points on which Devadatta confronted the Buddha, in Pali *dhutanga*,³⁶ are different in different texts. For example, according to the Pali *Vinaya*, Devadatta does not mention the prohibition to have milk. He declares:

It were good Lord, if the monks, for as long as life lasted, might be forest dwellers; whoever should betake himself to the neighbourhood of a village, sin would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts, let them be beggars for alms; whoever should accept an invitation, sin would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts, let them be rag-robe wearers; whoever should accept a robe given by a householder, sin would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts, let them live at the root of a tree; whoever should go under cover, sin would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts, let them not eat fish and flesh; whoever should eat fish and flesh, sin would besmirch him.³⁷ (*Vinaya Piṭakam, Cullavagga*, VII. 3. 14. Horner, trans., 1952)

Beside that of the Theravādins, other schools have produced versions of the *Vinaya* which have been preserved in Chinese translation. These are: the Mahāsāṃghika, the Mahīśāsaka, the Dharmaguptaka, the Sarvāstivādin and Mūlasarvāstivādin. Of the last one we have a Tibetan version as well as some parts of the Sanskrit text.³⁸

According to Bareau, the exclusion of milk from the monk's diet is mentioned in the Mahīśāsaka and in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*.³⁹ He also gives us a list of seven (or eight, depending on the method of counting) different points that, variously combined in the above *Vinayas*, would account for the five *dhutanga* of Devadatta, which are always five, but not the same five.⁴⁰

This is incompatible with my findings. Firstly, thanks to the help of Prof.

³⁶ This term indicates a set of practices appropriate to a scrupulous person leading to the 'shaking off' of evil dispositions or obstacles to spiritual progress. For a study on the subject see Dantinne 1991.

³⁷ "sādhu bhante bhikkhū yāvajīvaṃ ārañṇakā assu, yo gāmantam osareyya vajjam nam phuseyya. yāvajīvaṃ piṇḍapātikā assu, yo nimantanam sādiyeyya vajjam nam phuseyya. yāvajīvaṃ pamsukūlikā assu, yo gahapaticivaram sādiyeyya vajjam nam phuseyya. yāvajīvaṃ rukkhāmūlikā assu, yo channam upagaccheyya vajjam nam phuseyya. yāvajīvaṃ macchamamsam na khādeyyum, yo macchamamsam khādeyya vajjam nam phuseyyā'ti".

³⁸ Bareau, 1989-1990, 1.

³⁹ Bareau, 1989-1990, 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Schopen and Prof. Dudbridge, I have traced the presence of the point regarding milk in a Sanskrit Mūlasarvastivādin *Vinaya* (see below) as well as in a Chinese Mahāsāṃghika one.⁴¹ It is surprising that Bareau missed this and found the same point about milk only in the Mahīśāsaka and in the Dharmaguptaka versions. Secondly, in both versions of the *Vinaya* I examined, the list of the five points differs from any combination hypothesised by Bareau, containing some elements not listed by the French scholar and some in contrast to what is generally believed was Devadatta's philosophy. These are:

- (1) Though he is a renunciate, Gautama consumes milk and yoghurt. From today forth we should not do so, because it causes trouble to calves.
- (2) The renunciate Gautama consumes meat . We should not do so, because that causes living beings to be killed.
- (3) The renunciate Gautama consumes salt. We should not do so, because it originates from dust.
- (4) The renunciate Gautama wears clothes with torn fringes. We should wear clothes with long fringes, because by that practice the efforts of weavers are frustrated
- (5) The renunciate Gautama lives in the jungle. We should live in villages, because through that practice the things that people donate are not put to use. (Gnoli ed. 1978, 259. Translated for me by Prof. Gombrich)⁴²

Mukherjee (1966) tries to put some order in the great confusion about Devadatta in the Buddhist literature. The results of his comparative study, confirming the presence of the prohibition of having milk only in the Mahīśāsaka and Mūlasarvastivāda text, are presented in Table 1.1.

The next question which needs to be answered is that of the identification of the Bengali monks following Devadatta's proscription on milk. Watters suggests that:

With reference to the Brethren who abstained from the use of milk, curds, and (*sic*: word apparently missing in Watters' text) as articles of food our pilgrim's statement that they did so as followers of Devadatta may have been the suggestion of a Mahāyānist Brother. All Mahāyānists were supposed to abstain from milk food, and I-ching states expressly that it is unlawful food. (Watters 1905, 2: 192)

I cannot find any evidence suggesting that Mahāyānists should abstain from milk products, but even if this were the case, the attribution of this rule to Devadatta

⁴¹ *Taishō Tripitaka*, 24:149, text 1450, part B (text available only in Chinese). Translated for me by Professor Glen Dudbridge, Professor of Chinese, Oxford University.

⁴² Note that in the Chinese text of the above footnote, the five points are arranged in the same way.

must be later. It is agreed that Devadatta was a contemporary of the Buddha, if not a relative of his, and that he attempted to divide the order during the lifetime of the Blessed One. Following the dating provided by Gombrich (1991b), the Buddha's Parinibbāna occurred in c. 404 B.C., but "the expression 'Mahāyāna (or its equivalent in the local language) has been used by Buddhists from perhaps as early as the first century BCE ..."⁴³ It therefore appears absurd to use the term Mahāyāna in reference to Devadatta or his followers. Also, *Vinaya* rules are not Mahāyāna⁴⁴ so that it would be impossible to place Devadatta in the Mahāyāna tradition on these grounds.

As for the allusion to I-Tsing's work, the Chinese pilgrim outlines in a paragraph of his text the *Vinaya* rules followed by the Indians regarding food. He relates that food is classified as soft and hard and that each group is made of five kinds of food, milk not belonging to any of the two groups. Then he adds that:

We may regard milk, cream & c., as besides the two groups of the five mentioned above; for they have no special name given in the *Vinaya*, and it is clear that they are not included in the proper food. (Takakusu, trans., 1896, 43).

Even if this were the case, it would not account for the identification of some ascetics as the followers of Devadatta on the basis of the exclusion of milk from their diet.

Because of the above considerations I believe it is improbable that Hiuen-Tsiang ever came across any followers who owed eating practices to Devadatta. If the Devadattians ever really existed and survived their founder, to the extent that Hiuen-Tsiang found two or three of their monasteries as late as more than a thousand years after the death of the Buddha, one would expect to find archaeological or textual evidence of their existence and yet there is none. What the pilgrim might have come across is a sect of ascetics who followed a particular diet which excluded milk. Because of the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya* that he probably knew (since it had already been translated into Chinese), Hiuen-Tsiang may have assumed that these were followers of Devadatta. Moreover, Chinese people do not traditionally use dairy products, so Hiuen-Tsiang may have been particularly sensitive on this issue and been

⁴³ Williams 1989, 2.

⁴⁴ On this point, see Gombrich 1988, 112.

happy to find some ascetics who appeared to him to follow this Chinese tradition.

With respect to the story Hiuen-Tsiang is told describing how Buddhism was introduced to Kāṇasuvāṇa, it is noteworthy that according to that story Buddhism came to this region from South India. We do not have any evidence in support of this account, any more than for the Buddha's journey to Eastern Bengal or the presence of Asokan monuments. Still, it is interesting to note a few things about it. As for the time this episode might have taken place, it has been argued that it may have been at the time of the Chinese monk's visit (Beal trans. 1884, 2:202, n.42). But the use in this text of the Chinese word *chu*, as Professor Dudbridge tells me, clearly expresses something that occurred in the past. In fact, this term is usually adopted at the beginning of this type of legendary story, and literally means "originally", "at the time when".

Commenting on this episode, Watters tells us that:

The haughty conceited pundit with copper sheathing to keep his learning in his stomach, and the light on his head in pity of the ignorant people who lived in darkness, occurs in several Buddhist works. One of the best known of these men is the father of Sāriputra, the description of whom recalls in several points the passage in our text, but Sāriputra's father overcomes his competitor in discussion" (Watters 1905, 192).

Unfortunately, I have not been able to verify Watters reference to Ta-chih-tu-lun, ch.10.

Soon after Hiuen-Tsiang's visit, I-Tsing started his journey towards India, which took place between A.D. 671 and 695. Unfortunately, the accounts of this pilgrim (Takakusu trans. 1896) are very imprecise; moreover, he did not visit East Bengal: like Fa-Hian, he only stayed in Tāmralipti. His work does not follow, as do those of the other two Chinese monks, a chronological succession of the places he visited, but is organised by entries regarding the rules followed and the habits of Indian Buddhists. For these reasons his journals are not a viable source, even though by his visit to Tāmralipti he testifies that at that time this was still a Buddhist centre of a certain importance.

Finally, as for the kind of Buddhism practised in the area covered by my research, it is interesting that the majority of the monks Hiuen-Tsiang met followed

the Sthavira school. In fact, the only region where the Chinese monk meets followers of the Great Vehicle is Puṇḍravardhana. Here, as said above, the number of Mahāyānists is about seven hundred, plus part of the other three thousand monks that lived in the same area. The number of temples in Tāmralipti has definitely decreased since the time of Fa-Hian's visit (from twenty-four to ten). Unfortunately, I-Tsing does not give us any figure to compare with these. Moreover, the kingdom with the most temples is Samatāṭa, the easternmost place in the pilgrim's journey. This may well indicate that by that time Buddhism was declining in India proper, but still expanding towards the east. This fact could explain the lack of archaeological material predating the seventh century A.D., thus justifying the assertion that before the Pālas, Buddhism was a marginal, and rather new, phenomenon in East Bengal.

Table 1.1

Devadatta’s *dhutangas* in the different *Vinayas*.

Source: Mukherjee 1966, 76-77. My translation from the German

	Theravāda	Dharmagupta (Dh)	Mahīśāsaka (Mī)	Sarvāstivāda	Mūlasarvastivāda (Chinese)	Mūlasarvastivāda (Sanskrit)
<u>Dwelling</u>						
a	The Monks should live in the forest and not in villages. (1)					The Monks should live in villages. (5)
b	The Monks should live under trees, never having a roof on their head. (4)	The Monks should live in the open. (3)	The Monks should leave in the open during the eight Spring and Summer months and in reed-huts during the remaining months (rainy season). (5)	As in Dh. (4)	As in Dh. (4)	
<u>Food</u>						
c	The Monks should beg for their food and should not accept any invitation for a meal. (2)	The Monks should beg for their food. (1)	The Monks should live on alms. (4)	As in Dh. (2)	As in Dh. (1)	
d	The Monks should neither eat meat nor fish. (5)	<i>idem</i> (5)	<i>idem</i> (3)	<i>idem</i> (5)		The Monks should not eat any meat. (2)
e		The Monks should neither eat butter nor salt. (4)	The Monks should not eat any salt. (1)			As in Mī. (3)
f			The Monks should not eat either suit not sour milk. (2)			As in Mī. (1)
g				The Monks should eat only once a day. (3)		
<u>Clothing</u>						
h	The Monks should wear rags and should not accept garments from householders. (3)	The Monks should wear rags. (2)		As in Dh. (1)	As in Dh. (2)	
i					The Monks should wear three robes. (3)	The Monks should wear robes with long seams. (4)

1.4 Summary

The belief that Buddhism was introduced into Bangladesh by the Buddha, by some of his contemporary disciples or by some early Buddhist missionary is not supported by historical evidence. The belief that Buddhism was introduced by Buddha into a given country is part of an old tradition common to many Buddhist countries.

Also, the attempt to prove that Buddhism had already reached Bengal by the time of the Mauryas on the basis of the Mahāsthān Brāhmī inscription has proved groundless. First, the inscription bears no reference to any Buddhist donor or recipient of a donation. Second, it may be argued that the inscription does not refer, strictly speaking, to a donation at all. We can consider the misreading of this inscription as an attempt to Indianise the Buddhist tradition of Bangladesh in the process of forming a Bengali national identity. The Bangladeshi Buddhist tradition, instead, as shown by its historical and cultural institutions, is closely linked to the Buddhist tradition of Southeast Asia.

The available archaeological and textual evidence suggests that Buddhism was not introduced into Bangladesh before the second or third century A.D. The diaries of the Chinese pilgrims who visited India in search of Buddhist texts constitute the earliest first hand account of the state of Buddhism in Bengal. Despite the fact that it was not before A.D. 400 that these travellers set foot in India, their extremely detailed descriptions give us an insight into the kind of Buddhism practised at that time and its geographical scope.

Chapter two:

One thousand years of Buddhist history

2.1 Introduction

The millennium between the seventh and the seventeenth centuries is, in the history of East Bengal, the period in which Buddhism went from being the religion of the ruling dynasties to near extinction. The history of this period is generally divided into two parts: before and after the establishment of Muslim rule around the thirteenth century.

It could be confusing to try to follow the political history of the region while focusing on the development of Buddhism. For this reason, this chapter is not organised around the political events of the time. At one time different Buddhist dynasties were ruling over East Bengal, while at another time the same area was differently divided and ruled by dynasties belonging to different faiths.

Extensive research has been done on the history of both the pre- and post-Muslim periods. It is however remarkable that all historians tend to focus on the events that were taking place in only part of Bengal, systematically excluding Southeast Bengal, i.e. the Chittagong region. This area, partly because physically segregated from the rest of modern Bangladesh, produced its own dynasties, such as the Devas, the Chandras, and the Varmans. These dynasties are usually called “minor” or “independent” in reference to their relationship to the Pālas, the dynasty that ruled over most of Bengal during the greater part of the first period. Still, since the southern dynasties have left us monumental sites of the calibre of the more than fifty mounds in the Maināmati-Lalmai range, they are obviously not to be considered minor in the history of the region. Regarding the systematic exclusion of events taking place in Southeast Bengal from the history of Bangladesh, Rashid writes:

The history of South-East Bengal, or what was anciently known as Vāṅga-Samatāṭa, is very meagrely known. It has scarcely any continuous narrative as distinct from that of North Bengal, and till very recently, whatever information we had of this region as a separate entity was indeed so insignificant and uncertain that in a comprehensive work like the Dacca University's *History of Bengal* (Ed. R.C. Majumdar, Vol. I, Hindu Period, Dacca 1943), containing over 700 pages, a minor chapter of only 15 pages was deemed sufficient to deal with it. (Rashid 1974, 27).

For the study of Buddhist history, the situation gets even worse when it comes to the second period. In fact, so little material is available for the study of Buddhism after the Muslim invasion that one could even doubt whether there was any Buddhism in Bengal at that time. This problem, however, is mainly due to the fact that on one hand there are no Buddhist archaeological or epigraphic records of that time, while on the other hand Muslim historiographers were not at all concerned with any religion other than Islam.

The problems encountered in the establishment of the history of Bangladeshi Buddhism in this period, and the lack of information regarding the history of Southeast Bangladesh, are consistent with the thesis of this work. On the one hand, Bangladeshi Buddhism is presented by modern historiography exclusively as an Indian phenomenon, having no links with the Southeast Asian tradition. However, even a superficial examination of the history of Southeast Bangladesh in this period reveals strong political and cultural links between this region and Arakan, to the extent that it has been argued (Paul 1940, 78 and Ali 1961) that the Chandra rulers of Bengal are related to the Chandras who were ruling in Arakan around the same period, both being Buddhist. On the other hand, it is made to seem as if Bangladeshi Buddhism completely disappeared with the arrival of the first Muslim invaders, thus being a phenomenon of the past.

The scope of this chapter is to outline the history of Buddhism in Bangladesh from the seventh to the seventeenth century on the basis of the evidence available. In particular, I will try to show that quite probably Buddhism in Bangladesh survived the Islamisation of the country. Also, when possible, I will highlight the links between the Buddhist tradition of Bangladesh and that of Arakan. It becomes in fact increasingly apparent, as I will show in the third part of this chapter, that all evidence

of the survival of Buddhism in Bangladesh after the Muslim invasion indicates a strong relationship between the two traditions.

In the next section of this chapter I will give a brief account of the doctrinal evolution of Buddhism in the period under consideration and the consequent changes in religious practice. This account is based on the works of leading scholars in the field of Tāntric Buddhism such as Samuel (1993), Sanderson (1994), and Snellgrove (1987).

In the second section, I will describe what sources are available for the history of Buddhism in this period. However, since these sources are many and diverse a complete analysis of them would be beyond the scope of this chapter, so I will refer to the existing literature. The first part of this section deals with monasteries, stupas and statues of this period found by archaeologists. The second part deals with the literary sources. These consist of inscriptions, Buddhist literature, historical records and the journals of travellers.

2.2 Tāntric Buddhism: from monastic to esoteric Buddhism

From a doctrinal point of view, the period under examination is characterised by the introduction of Tāntric practices into traditional Buddhism. In this section I will try to explain what Tantra is, how Tāntric methods were introduced into Buddhism, how Tantrism changed Buddhism and how Tantrism got adapted to Buddhist ideals.

Tantrism is a form of religious practice whose origins have been lost in time. In a controversial paper Gombrich (1996, 134 ff.) argues that the Pali Canon contains references to what would much later be categorised as Tāntric practices dating around the fifth century B.C. If proved correct, this opinion, not supported by any archaeological evidence, would push the date of the first known Tāntric practices back by over a thousand years.

Through the performance of rituals and different meditative techniques Tantrism preaches the attainment of worldly as well as religious goals. Becoming associated with different religious traditions, from Buddhism to Jainism and Vaiṣṇavism, it has taken various forms.

Tāntric Buddhism differentiates itself from other forms of Buddhism mainly by its ritualistic nature. Sanderson has thus summarised the character of Tāntric Buddhism:

The term 'Tantric' is used here to denote a form of religious practice which is distinguishable from the rest of Buddhism principally by its ritual character, only secondarily by soteriological doctrine, and hardly at all by specific theories of ultimate reality. The basic character of this Tantric ritual is that it entails the evocation and worship of deities [*devatā*] by means of mantras of which the visualized forms of the deities are transformations [*pariṇāma*, *parāvṛtti*]. Access to such mantra-ritual is not achieved by virtue of the *prātimokṣasaṃvara*. ... It is necessary to undergo in addition an elaborate ritual of empowerment [*abhiṣeka*] during which the initiand is introduced to a particular mantra-deity and its retinue. (Sanderson 1994, 88)

With the adoption of initiation rituals, available equally to monks and lay people, men and women, Tāntric Buddhism broke with the traditional hierarchy of earlier Buddhism. This is a very important event in the history of Buddhism. The Sangha in fact is no longer the indispensable instrument for the preservation the Buddhist practice. Gombrich writes:

Access to tantric ritual and the meditations based on them is given by initiation (*dīkṣā*), or rather by a graded series of initiations, imparted by teacher to pupil. Laymen too may be initiated and in due course themselves become teachers and initiators; and women may be hierarchically superior to men of the same social category; *tantra* thus has a different status system from earlier Buddhism, and one which on the ground may cross-cut the clerical/lay distinction. (Bechert and Gombrich eds. 1984, 14)

The rituals of the Buddhist Tantras have been studied and described in detail by several scholars. Among these are D. Gellner (1992), who has described the Tāntric rituals of the Newars of Nepal; Beyer (1973), who has described the Tāntric rituals of the Tibetans; and Sanderson (1994), who has described the empowerment ritual in the Yoginītantras, a late phase of Vajrayāna.

The development of Tāntric Buddhism is quite complex and it has not yet been fully unveiled. This is mainly a consequence of its esoteric nature. One thing we know is that there is no evidence suggesting that Tantricism was introduced into

Buddhism by any specific individual. Despite this, earlier scholars used to report traditions claiming the contrary which have been rejected by all modern scholarship.

Dasgupta, for example, wrote that:

Tradition holds Asaṅga, the great exponent of the Yogā-cāra school, to be responsible for the introduction of Tāntricism in Buddhism; he again, in his turn, is believed to have been initiated into this mystic cult by Maitreya in the Tuṣita-heaven. Others, on the other hand, hold that Nāgārjuna, the renowned exponent of the Mādhyamika school, was the real founder of the esoteric school, and that he, in his turn, received the doctrines from the Celestial Buddha Vairocana through the divine Bodhisattva Vajra-sattva in the “iron tower” in South India. Apart from these traditions, some scholars are disposed to think that in the *Mahāyāna-sūtrā-lankāra* [sic] of Asaṅga there are clear references to the sexo-yogic practice of the Tāntric Buddhists. ... If this interpretation ... [is] accepted, it may be inferred that the Tāntric ideas were already prevalent in Mahāyāna Buddhism in the time of Asaṅga (4th-5th centuries A.D.) ... Some scholars are again of the opinion that the Tāntric elements were introduced into Buddhism by Lord Buddha himself as a mere provision for the laities whose intellectual calibre and moral equipment would not allow them to follow the path chalked out by him. (Dasgupta 1995, 17-18)

What is now commonly accepted to be the earliest manifestation of Tantrism in Buddhism, dates around the second century AD. This form of Buddhism can be called Tāntric since it involved initiation by a teacher and because of its ritualistic nature. It consists, in Skilton’s words, of

... chapters from various Mahāyāna sūtras devoted to *dhāraṇī*, long sequences of unintelligible syllables, which are attributed with various powers. These are clearly related both to the mantras of the Mahāyāna and to the *parittā*-texts, such as the *Mettā Sutta*, recited for protection by non-Mahāyāna Buddhists. (Skilton 1994, 137).¹

The same author (Skilton 1994, 137) adds that this early phase “was probably a private minority interest, which for a long time had no great impact on the Buddhist community as a whole.”

The Buddhism that Hiuen-Tsiang had found in East Bengal was either Śrāvakayāna or Mahāyāna, in their monastic forms. Some of the monasteries of the time, such as the famous Nālandā, in Bihar, were in fact large centres of learning and

¹ On the subject of *dhāraṇī* Snellgrove writes: “The *Karuṇāpūṇḍarīka Sūtra* contains as its second chapter a whole collection of such formulas listed as “bases for confidence” (*adhimuktipadam*) in the acquisition of the various accomplishments demanded of a Bodhisattva, the four applications of mindfulness, the four determined efforts, the four magical powers, etc. They are known in this text as *dhāraṇī*, which should properly refer to a short mnemonic string of words, holding (the terms derives from a Sanskrit root meaning “to hold”) the meaning succinctly of an intention which in normal speech would need to be much more prolix. *Mantra* is a more general term, comprising a vast range of ejaculations of a fixed traditional form, achieving their powerful effect within the context of a strictly controlled ritual usage.” (Snellgrove 1987, 122)

thus can be rightly referred to as “monastic universities”. Within these institutions a large number of subjects, not exclusively religious, were the object of study. Samuel writes:

In the later Buddhist period, several large monastic ‘universities’ grew up in north east India. Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, and Yogācāra philosophy, along with the study of logic and disputation (*pramāṇa*) and the monastic disciplinary code (*vinaya*), formed a major part of the academic curriculum in these institutions, which were staffed largely or entirely by ordained celibate monks. They can thus be seen as an outgrowth of the monastic communities which, had existed from the early days of Indian Buddhism.

Secular subjects, however, were also taught at these new institutions, and it appears that many of the new students at these institutions were not themselves destined for monastic careers (See Dutt 1962:325-327). (Samuel 1993, 408)

The foundation and sponsoring of these centres had started under the Gupta rulers; however this practice reached its peak under the Pālas, who, unlike the Guptas, were Buddhists themselves. Among the institutions founded by the Pālas in Bengal are the great monasteries of Vikramaśīla, Odantapura and Somapura. A detailed account of Somapura will be given in the next section of this chapter.

The monastic universities proved to be fertile ground for the introduction of Tāntric practices in Buddhism. The Tāntric principles were expressed in *sūtra* form in so called “root texts”. These texts, which were similar in format to the Mahāyānist *sūtras*, little by little gained popularity among the scholars of the monasteries. About these texts, Samuel writes that:

Like the Sūtras, these text were held to represent the teaching of the Buddha, although they were taught not by his historical form of Śākyamuni but through his Tāntric aspect, called Vajrakhara. ... The prevalence of visionary, yogic, and analogical procedures within the later Mahāyāna Sūtra tradition has already been noted, and there was probably no sharp breach between the later Mahāyāna Sūtras and the early Tantras (for example, Martin 1987: 191-192). There was however, a real if gradual change. ... New Tantras continued to appear until the last stages of Indian Buddhism. One of the most important of all Tantras for the Tibetans, the Kālacakra Tantra, appeared in India not long before the final destruction of the Buddhist monasteries by the Islamic armies. ... A large commentarial literature on the Tantras also developed in India. (Samuel 1993, 410)

The Tantras have traditionally been divided (See Snellgrove 1987, 119 and Samuel 1993, 411-412) between:

Kriyā Tantra (Action Tantras)

Mantrayāna

Caryā Tantra (Performance Tantras)

Yoga Tantra

Vajrayāna

Anuttarayoga Tantra (Supreme Yoga Tantras)

In the Kriyā and Caryā Tantra the practitioner visualised the deity externally, while the Yoga and Anuttarayoga Tantra involved the identification, during the ritual, of the practitioner with the divinity. Because of their less radical approach the Kriyā and Caryā Tantra were the first to be introduced in the Buddhist universities. Samuel (1993, 412) writes that “The Kriyā and Caryā (‘Mantrayāna’) probably grew up as an extension of ritual, yogic, and devotional tendencies already present within the Mahāyāna.” The nature of these Tantras did not conflict with the general principles of the earlier kind of Buddhism. As a consequence the *bhikkhus* who followed these practices kept living within their communities, following the same monastic rules as the other monks.

Unlike the Kriyā and Caryā Tantra, the Yoga and Anuttarayoga Tantra developed first outside the monastic universities. The practitioners of this kind of Tāntric Buddhism are known as *mahā-siddhas* (great adepts). These were *yogins* who, having rejected conventional religious practice, travelled around, sometimes accompanied by a low-caste woman with whom they performed their rituals. The legendary biographies of these men, preserved in Tibetan, have given us some insight into their practices.

This new phase of Tāntric Buddhism, with the adoption of new terminology and symbolism, marks the beginning of the “way” or *yāna* known as the Vajrayāna, from the name of its most prominent symbol the, *vajra*, the diamond or thunderbolt. Snellgrove writes:

However, it is with the adoption of the term *vajra* (adamantine) for the absolute state, as explained above, that tantric Buddhism becomes a separate “Way” (*yāna*), as distinguishable from the Mahāyāna as this is distinguishable from the so-called Hīnayāna. Mantrayāna, the earlier alternative name for Vajrayāna,

continues to suggest closer links with traditional Mahāyāna practice than fits the case, as the term Vajrayāna comes into use, for both the goal (although some might dispute this) and certainly the means employed to reach it, are no longer the same. The followers of the Mahāyāna had advanced from the earlier goal of nirvāṇa as achieved by an Arhat to the goal of enlightenment as achieved by a Buddha. The followers of the Vajrayāna in their turn direct their energies toward a state of enlightenment (for this term is still used) which is also referred to as Great Bliss (*mahāsukha*) and as the sphere of Vajrasattva ("Adamantine Being"), while those who achieve it are known as "great adepts" (*mahāsiddha*). Although it may be shown that many of the roots of the Vajrayāna were already present in the Mahāyāna, just as those of the Mahāyāna were in the Hīnayāna, the differences between the Vajrayāna and the earlier forms of Buddhism are extreme. The main difference derives from the Vajrayāna use of incantation and ritual as means toward the ultimate goal, whereas in the earlier phases of Buddhism their use was largely peripheral. By their means one gains power over beings in other spheres of existence, either dominating them, so that they may do one's will, or identifying oneself with them, so that one may enjoy their higher states of existence. (Snellgrove 1987, 129-130)

It has been commonly believed that after entering this last stage Buddhism gradually became assimilated into Vaiṣṇavism (Dasgupta 1995, Ch. V). One cannot deny the close link between Buddhist and Hindu Tantrism. However, even Sanderson (1994), who argues that this late form of Tāntric Buddhism is so similar to Tāntric Śaivism because the first is modelled on the second and not because of "hypothetical common sources", asserts that Tāntric Buddhism remained Buddhist "in terms of its function and self perception". Evidence of the fact that Tāntric Buddhism remained a distinct religion, is given by the fact that Buddhist Tāntric practices and literary production remained quite alive in India until the arrival of the Islamic armies. Also this is the form of Buddhism that the scholars who escaped from the Muslim destruction introduced into Tibet when they took refuge there.

The very last stage of Tāntric Buddhism in India, around the eleventh century, is characterised by a gradual integration within the monastic universities of the Mantrayāna and Vajrayāna trends. As Samuel writes:

The differences between the two bodies of material were already lessening at this time, and were to become still weaker in Tibet, where identification with the deity would become common even within the Kriyā and Caryā Tantras, and the elaborate ritual of Kriyā and Caryā would be adapted to the Yoga and Anuttarayoga Tantra. (Samuel 1993, 413).

From a textual point of view this synthesis is well represented by a text called the *Kālacakra Tantra*. This text, written in the middle of the eleventh century, is the last of the Tantras to appear in India.

A last question that remain to be answered is how can anyone claim that Tāntric Buddhism could still be called Buddhism, given that some of its rituals have a sexual component, obviously in contrast with Buddhist monastic law. Sanderson has thus answered this question:

The general trend, however, has been to modify the rituals so that they [no] longer involve these infringements. The great Tantric Master Atīśa considered that the sexual elements of Vajrayānist ritual were permissible only for married householders. Monks could receive all the consecrations, including the most esoteric, but would receive the latter only in a symbolic or mental form. (Sanderson 1994, 97)

According to several accounts, as I will illustrate later, Buddhism quite probably continued to flourish in Bengal, particularly in the southern region of Chittagong, centuries after the Muslim invasion of Bengal. However, it is difficult to speculate about the kind of practices and the doctrinal tenets of the Buddhism that may have been practised in that period. Unfortunately, the otherwise very rich Islamic historiography is not at all concerned with the religious practices of the non-Muslims. The only reference I could find in it to any Buddhist people does not even distinguish them from the followers of any other Indian religion. The piece in question, from the *Tabakāt-i-Nāsiri*, refers to the capture, probably in 1199, of what has been identified (See Sarcar ed. 1948, 3) with “Odaṇḍapura-vihāra” in modern Bihar. Raverty has thus translated this passage:

There were two brothers of Farghānah, men of learning, one Nizām-ud-Dīn, the other Samsām-ud-Dīn [by name], in the service of Muḥammad-i-Bakht-yār; and the author of this book met with Samsām-ud-Dīn at Lakhnawatī in the year 641H., and this account is from him. These two wise brothers were soldiers among that band of holy warriors when they reached the gateway of the fortress and began the attack, at which time Muḥammad-i-Bakht-yār, by the force of his intrepidity, threw himself into the postern of the gateway of the place, and they captured the fortress, and acquired great booty. The great number of the inhabitants of that place were Brahmans, and the whole of those Brahmans had their heads shaven; and they were all slain. There were a great number of books there; and, when all those books came under observation of the Musalmāns, they summoned a number of the Hindūs that they might give them information respecting the import of those books; but the whole of the Hindūs had been killed. On becoming acquainted [with the contents of those books], it was found that the whole of the fortress and city was a college, and in the Hindūi tongue, they call a college Bihār. (Raverty trans. 1881, 552)

Most scholars tend to believe that Buddhism completely disappeared from Bengal subsequent to the Muslim invasion. However, since there is no doubt about

the historicity of the reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism in the nineteenth century, it is obvious that some form of religious practice, perceived by its followers to be a form of Buddhism, had survived in Bangladesh until then.

2.3 The Sources

2.3.1 Monuments and images

Centuries of Islamisation, combined with the harsh climate of Bengal, prone to cyclones and flooding, have preserved very little of the many Buddhist monuments that must once have existed in East Bengal. As a consequence, the few ruins that have been excavated are in extremely poor condition and of some of the ancient monasteries we only know the name and the approximate location from literary sources and tradition. An example of this last type is the much renowned Paṇḍita monastery, which it is agreed was once standing in Chittagong but whose ruins have never been located.²

The two major Buddhist archaeological sites in Bangladesh are Pāhārpur Vihāra in Rajshahi Division, and the Maināmati-Lalmai ridge near Comilla, in Chittagong Division. Besides these major sites other Buddhist ruins have been located in Mahasthangarh and the surrounding area in Rajshahi Division, in Savar, near Dhaka, and in Sitakot, again in Rajshahi Division.

The most impressive of the Buddhist buildings of Bangladesh is the famous Somapuri Mahāvihāra, also known as Pāhārpur Vihāra, from the name of the locality in Rajshahi division where its ruins are located. This name in turn derives from the mound formed by the monastery's ruins: *pāhār* in Bengali means mountain or mound. On the basis of an inscription of the Gupta period found on the temple site it is believed that this *vihāra* was built over a Jain monastery.

² When Chittagong Central Hospital was recently built a Buddhist statue was unearthed. It is believed that the present site of the hospital may be that of Paṇḍita Vihāra.

A description of this complex will help to understand the high level reached by the Buddhist religion in Bengal before the Muslim conquest. The following outline is based on the works of several scholars (Dikshit 1938; Dasgupta 1961; Quadir 1980 and Chakrabarti 1992, 110 ff. among others), who have described in numerous articles and books the ruins of Pāhārpur Mahāvihāra. It is generally believed that the temple was built between the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century by emperor Dharmapāla, who also sponsored the construction of several other religious institutions. Somapuri comprises several buildings, surrounded by ramparts on its four sides. Access to the compound was through a gate in the northern wall. The gate led, through a staircase, to a hall in the main building. This quadrangular building contained 177 cells for the monks, arranged on four floors, together with other halls and rooms. Given the size of the establishment, it is thought that the Somapuri Vihāra hosted at any time several hundred Buddhist monks. The general plan of the complex is very similar to that of much earlier establishments, such as the famous Nālandā Vihāra in Bihar, and other smaller monasteries found in several parts of India. What is peculiar about Somapuri is not just the fine sculptures and terracotta plaques that used to decorate the buildings, but the architectural style of the main temple which stood in the middle of the compound. This brick temple had an unusual base in the shape of a cross measuring about one hundred metres both from north to south and from east to west, rising from the ground in three stepped terraces which contained several chambers. Quadir gives the following description of the temple:

The greatest architectural attraction during the Pala period was the Somapuri Vihara (Paharpur), the extensive remains of which have been laid bare by systematic excavations. It is the biggest single vihara (measuring 922 feet north-south and 919 feet east-west, externally) so far known in the subcontinent. The gigantic establishment with surrounding 177 monastic cells, gateways, votive stupas, minor chapels, tank and a multitude of other structures for the convenience of the inmates, is dominated by a central shrine, conspicuous by its lofty height and architectural peculiarities. It is distinguished by its cruciform shape with angles of projection between the arms, its 3 raised terraces and complicated scheme of decoration of walls with carved brick cornices, friezes of terracotta plaques and stone relief. (Quadir 1980, 7).

Everybody agrees that this must have been a very impressive monument and

some (among others Quadir 1980, 7) suggest that its architectural style greatly influenced that of later Burmese and Javanese temples. I do not know whether there is any basis for this statement; however, if it were proved to be true it would indicate an early relationship between the Bengali and the Burmese Buddhist communities. It would also testify to a noteworthy exchange, since Bengali Buddhism would have influenced Burmese Buddhism and not viceversa, as came to be the rule later. As for the influence of Pāhārpur on the style of Javanese temples, Hall (1955; 20-21) tells us that a large number of Indonesian pilgrims used to go to India to study Buddhism and to look for manuscripts; there are records of the foundation of a temple for their use at Nālandā. This could suggest the presence of Indonesian Buddhists at Somapuri as well, which would account for the influence on the style of their temples.

Quite different from the Pāhārpur site, the Maināmati-Lalmai site lies over an eleven kilometre long range of hills, extending north to south between the villages of Maināmati and Lalmai, to the west of Comilla. Besides the twenty or so principal sites, only some of which have so far been partially excavated, scholars have located more than thirty other mounds (Chakrabarti 1992, 120-122). As for the dating of the site, it is argued that its origins must go back to the sixth century A.D. (Chakrabarti 1992, 137-138), while on the basis of the so called Maināmati copper plate, which I will discuss in the next section, we know that a Buddhist temple must have been built in the area in the first half of the thirteenth century.

The discovery of the Maināmati site goes back to 1803 (Chakrabarti 1992, 123), when the already mentioned Maināmati copper-plate was found during some road works. However, it was not until its accidental rediscovery by the military, during the last World War, that it attracted the interest of the Archaeological Survey of India. Unfortunately, by the time the area became protected, many of the ruins had been sacked for construction materials.

What we know about the many buildings of this site is very little. This is due to the few excavations done in the area and to the fact that most of the collected data have remained unpublished. The information here presented is mainly based on the

recent work of Chakrabarti (1992). This in turn contains much information from the unpublished official reports as presented in Rashid's unpublished work (Rashid 1968). Other information was gathered from Khan's report of the 1955 excavations at Salban Vihāra, also known as Salban raja palace (Khan 1955). The scarcity of material available on this site and the neglect in which it is left confirm the idea that the official history of Bangladesh tends to exclude the Southeast of the country.

One important thing that emerges from the scant data available from this site is the fact that the people of Southeast Bengal had established Buddhist centres competing, at least in size, with those of the Pālas. In fact, on the basis of epigraphic evidence, we know that the monuments of the Maināmati-Lalmai range had not been established by the Pālas. Their reign did not extend this far until the first quarter of the eleventh century and it was not maintained for long (see Rashid 1974). Also, the building of new monasteries was still sponsored here, and by a family of supposed Burmese origin, a quarter of a century after the Muslim destruction of Odantapura described above, as I will illustrate later.

Among the sites in the Maināmati-Lalami range, Salban Vihāra is perhaps the best known. It is located almost exactly half way between the two villages of Maināmati and Lalmai. The complex's name derives from a nearby Sal tree forest (*ban* in Bengali means forest); however this name has no historical value. On the name of this monastery Chakrabarti writes:

Salban Vihar or the Salban monastery is so called because of a forest of Sal (*Shorea robusta*) trees in the neighbourhood. The nearest village is called *Salbanpur*. There is no inscriptional evidence to support this name. Inscriptionally the name is *Sri-Bhavadeva monastery* or *Sri-Bhavadeva-Mahavihara*. As the Salban Vihar sequence began before Bhavadeva, who flourished in the early part of the eighth century, the original name of the place cannot be 'Bhavadeva' monastery. It is probable that Bhavadeva was responsible for the large-scale building activities of the monastery and thus had his name associated with it. The original name of the place before the eighth century remains unknown. (Chakrabarti 1992, 123-124)

This monastery is in the form of a square and was quite large in size, comprising 115 cells. In the middle of its central courtyard rises a large stupa, which once contained large Buddhist images. Unfortunately we know nothing about the practices and activities of the monks who once lived in this monastery.

Another major site within the Maināmati range, about three miles north of Salban Vihāra, is known as Kutila Mura. Here, a massive wall encloses a large area on which stand the remains of three main stupas together with nine subsidiary stupas. About the identification of this site Chakrabarti writes:

These three stupas passably (sic) represented the Buddhist Trinity or Three Jewels. It has been pointed out that 'no fewer than five epigraphic records discovered in this area refer to a certain "Ratna-traya" (Three Jewels representing Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) shrine, a famous Buddhist establishment at Devaparvata, the Samatata capital' (BA 1979:72). There is little doubt that the Kutila Mura complex represents the Ratna-traya shrine of the inscriptions. (Chakrabarti 1992, 129-130)

Other sites in the Maināmati-Lalmai range include Ānanda Vihāra. This site has only partly been excavated and has been greatly damaged over time by the activity of brick-robbers and by the fact that people leaving in the nearby Cantonment have used the site as a dump. Moreover, it seems that the site was used during the Liberation war of 1971 as a mass grave where bodies were buried together with live ammunition (see Chakrabarti 1992, 132-133).

While there are virtually no extant buildings belonging to this period, a relatively large quantity of images has been preserved. These sculptures and terracotta plaques come from temples and shrines all over Bangladesh and it is principally thanks to them and to the literary sources that one can reconstruct any history of Buddhism in the region. Among the images available one can find a great variety of Mahāyāna and Tāntric figures as well as images of Gautama Buddha.

The best source for an in depth study of Bangladeshi Buddhist art is Bhattasali's work (1929) on the collection of Buddhist and Brāhmanical sculptures in Dhaka National museum. Since the writing of that book the museum's collection has expanded; however, it remains a unique guide to Bangladeshi Buddhist iconography.

Among the acquisitions that Dhaka National museum has made since the writing of Bhattasali's book are two bronze images of Buddha found in Chittagong Hill Tracts and described in an article by T.K. Baruā (1960). These statuettes, dating between the twelfth and thirteenth century, are worth mentioning here because of their Burmese features and style. The two images, of no particular artistic value, testify the

influence on Bangladeshi Buddhism by Southeast Asian Buddhism in this period.

On the subject of Buddhist art, it has to be noted here that while one can safely assume that all Buddhist images were once located within Buddhist buildings, not all Buddhist temples and shrines exclusively contained Buddhist images. The reason for this is not just the fact that Buddhist practice always had room for deities of other traditions for the attainment of worldly goals. It has also to be kept in mind that when building a new temple it was common practice to employ decorative materials coming from older buildings. For example, Pāhārpur Vihāra's renowned sculptures and terracotta plaques are by no means exclusively Buddhist. Among the sculptures, some of which are said to date to the Gupta period, there are images depicting scenes from the life of Krishna and others portraying scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. As for the terracotta plaques, which are considered the most striking feature of Pāhārpur, they portray besides the usual Buddhist and Hindu divinities scenes from popular legends as well as decorative motifs from the animal kingdom.

2.3.2 Journals, inscriptions, Buddhist literature and other textual sources

The situation regarding written evidence for the history of Buddhism in Bangladesh between the seventh and the seventeenth century is quite similar to that of other sources. There is a large amount of material dating to the pre-Muslim period, while very little is available on the following period. However, the data available on this latter period is extremely important since it suggests that Buddhism did not disappeared in Bangladesh after the Muslim conquest. The texts can be divided into travellers' journals, inscriptions and Buddhist texts.

As already said, despite the fact that the Muslim rule over Bengal is well documented in the rich Muslim historiography of the time, no direct mention is made

of Buddhist practices, since the writers did not distinguish Buddhism from other Indian religions. Even an in depth research work on the social history of Bengal during the Mughal period such as Raychaudhuri's book (Raychaudhuri 1969) does not contain any information on the state of Buddhism in that period and one has to assume that the author did not find any reference to Buddhism in his sources.

It is reported (Islam ed. 1992; 763) that sometimes when poor and low-caste non-Muslims formally converted to Islam, and therefore were for all purposes considered Muslims, they would keep their traditional religious customs. This phenomenon was counterbalanced by the adoption of some Hindu customs on the part of the Muslim immigrants into Bengal as well as by the adoption of the cult of pirs, the Muslim saints, by the entire population, irrespective of their religious affiliation. It is therefore clear how Buddhism, which because of its own evolution and because of the Muslim repression, was no longer a monastic phenomenon, could have gone totally undetected by the Muslim compilers of the historical works even if they had been interested in it.

In the same way, the pilgrims who travelled to Bangladesh in this period, while they often mentioned in their journals the existence of non-Muslim communities, seldom went into any detail regarding their affiliation. They however reported a large quantity of useful information and can be considered the best available source on the Buddhism of the Muslim period.

Marco Polo (1254-1323?), the Italian traveller, is the first Westerner to report on Bengal. He labels the people of this country as *pessimi idoli* (very bad idolaters) without getting into any detail about their religion. It is however doubted (Ruggieri ed. 1986, 316-7) that Marco Polo ever visited Bengal, and his account is believed to be second hand.

Another traveller, the Venerable Dhyānabhadra, an Indian who passed through Bengal around the first quarter of the fourteenth century, talks about the flourishing state of Buddhism in India and other countries. According to the information given in the preface to a poetical inscription on a stupa erected in his

honour at the Korean temple of Kuei-yen Sū (Waley 1932), it seems that not only did Dhyānabhadra found several Buddhist communities in various parts of India, but also that the type of Buddhism they practised was by no means exclusively Tāntric. According to this document Dhyānabhadra said:

On the way to my teacher, I first of all passed through the country of Lo-lo-hsü (Rādhaka i.e. Rādhapura in Bengal). Here I found someone explaining the Lotus Scripture. I talked with him and cleared up some of his difficulties. (Waley 1932, 362)

The famous Moroccan pilgrim Ibn Baṭṭūta (1304-1377) travelled between Chittagong and Sylhet via Sonargaon, then part of Kāmarūpa. In his journal he often refers to non-Muslim people in that region but does not specify their affiliation (Husain trans. 1953, 237-242). In one case (Husain trans. 1953 241-242) he mentions some tribal people that he describes as non-Hindu but does not otherwise identify them.

The existence in the mediaeval period of Buddhist monastic centres in Bengal is consistent with the information found by Michael Aris (1996) in the Bhutanese and Tibetan biographies of Vanaratna (1384-1468), a Bengali monk who is mentioned as “the last of the pandits from India to visit and work in Tibet” The Tibetan sources used by Aris indicate that Vanaratna was born in the eastern Indian city of Sadnagara, which Aris tells us Roerich identified with modern Chittagong (for Vanaratna’s Tibetan biography, see Roerich trans. 1949-53). About the earlier part of Vanaratna’s life, Aris declares that :

At the age of eight Vanaratna was ordained by his main teacher, the abbot Buddhaghosa, head of 400,000 monks of the monastery of Mahācaitya. The abbot was assisted in the ordination ritual according to the rules of the Vinaya code by one Sujataratna, head of 50,000 monks of the monastery of Suvarna, and another monk called Buddhajnana. (Aris 1996, 4).

More important evidence for the survival of Buddhism in Bangladesh is, as pointed out by Aris (1996), the fact that during his youth in Chittagong Vanaratna had received a complete training in several disciplines, which must have required institutional support. Aris says:

His studies began with the Sanskrit grammars of Katyayana and the Kalpasutra of Sarvavarman, also the Mahāyāna classic of the Bodhicaryavatara by Santideva and the Vinaya code of monastic discipline. At the age of thirteen his

teacher Buddhaghosa chose for him the goddess Vajrayogini as his tutelary deity and from then on he was initiated into many of the mandalas of the Vajrayāna, focusing particularly on the Kalacakra (especially the practice of the sadangayoga). The realisation that he could not make much headway in the tantras without further study of grammar took him back to the Kalpasutra and thence to the study of synonyms (the Amarakosa by Amarasimha and its commentary) and poetics. He also studied logic (pramana) under one Ratnakirti, who had himself composed a treatise in this field. His studies continued up to the age of twenty-one, by which time he had mastered the sutras, the Jatakas, the Prajnaparamita literature and its commentaries, and a great number of the tantras while continuing to specialise in the Kalacakra. When he was twenty his teacher Buddhaghosa administered the Bodhisattva vow to him, and, at the age of twenty-one he presided over Vanaratna's full monastic ordination, assisted in this once again by the senior monks Sujataratna and Buddhajnyana. (Aris 1996, 5)

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, at the time when Vanaratna was growing up in Chittagong, Ma Huan, a Chinese sent by the Emperor of that land on an embassy to other Asian countries, arrived at Chittagong port on his way to the region he calls Bengal, that is the Dhaka region (Philip 1895). In the section of his journal relating to this part of his trip Ma Huan (Philip 1895) never mentions any Buddhist people. Since according to his own account Ma Huan stayed in Chittagong only the time needed to get a boat to Sonargaon it is quite possible that he never became aware of any Buddhist living there. Ma Huan does not even mention the presence in what he calls Bengal of any kind of non-Muslim people, whereas we know that a part of the Bengali population had not converted to Islam. However, since Ma Huan was in Bengal on official business, with a large escort, in the name of the Chinese Emperor, one has to assume that he may have met only top members of the ruling class, whom I do not doubt to have been exclusively Muslim. In conclusion, we cannot exclude the presence of Buddhists in Bangladesh, especially in the Chittagong region, on the basis of the information contained in Ma Huan's journal.

A century after Ma Huan's trip to Bengal another traveller, Duarte Barbosa, arrived in Bangladesh. The Portuguese noted in his journal (Longworth Dames trans. 1918-21, 2:148) the presence of non-Muslims and reports that "The Heathen of these parts daily become Moors to gain the favours of their rulers". Unfortunately, Duarte Barbosa does not give more details about these converts and therefore we cannot tell

what their religion was.

Another important, even though not always reliable, source of information about the history of Buddhism in Bengal in this period is the famous *History of Buddhism in India* by the Tibetan monk Tāranātha (Chattopadhyaya ed. 1990) compiled in 1608 (Chattopadhyaya ed. 1970, xxiii). The information he gives about the earlier history of Buddhism in India has sometimes proved incorrect; however, one may assume that he would have been better informed about recent and contemporary events. In the chapter dealing with the spread of Buddhism in Eastern India (Ch. 39) Tāranātha writes:

From the time of Abhayākara [Fol 129 B] the influence of the Mantrayāna went on increasing. As most of the scholars of the *madhya-deśa* went to these countries after the invasion of Magadha by the Turuṣkas, the Law extensively spread there.

At that time lived king Śobhajāta. He built many temples and established about two hundred centres for the Doctrine.

Next came king Siṃhajati. He also helped the spread of the Doctrine, and the Law became more extensively widespread in all these countries. It is said that even now during the occasional congregations (there), the numbers of *bhikṣu*-s reaches twenty to thirty thousand, not to speak of course of the numerous *upāsaka*-s.

From these countries came the later *paṇḍita*-s like Vanaratna, who visited Tibet.

In the later period, there was a king there called Bālasundara. Though in these countries, the Vinaya, Abhidharma and the Mahāyāna *śāstra*-s were very popular, the Guhya-mantra-dharma - excepting a few like the Kālacakra and Trayavṛttamālā - had become extremely rare. So he (Bālasundara) sent about two hundred *paṇḍita*-s to *mahā-siddha* Śāntigupa and others in Dramila and Khagendra in the south to learn the practice of the Guhya-mantra and restore these in these countries. His (Bālasundara's) sons Candravāhana now resides in Ra-khañ, Atītavāhana rules Ca-gama (? Cākmā), Bālavāhana rules Mu-ñāñ and Sundara-ha-ci rules Naṃ-ga-ṭa. (In these countries) the Law remains extensively spread till now according to the older tradition. (Chattopadhyaya ed. 1990, 330-331).

This account was originally written in Tibetan, therefore there may be uncertainty in the identification of some of the people and places mentioned. It is nonetheless very clear that Tāranātha firmly believed that during his time Buddhism was still practised in Bangladesh. Moreover, one could wonder whether Tāranātha's reference to "the older tradition" could indicate that Śrāvakayāna Buddhism was extant in Bangladesh during the seventeenth century.

Soon after the compilation of Tāranātha's work a Portuguese missionary, Fray Sebastien Manrique, extensively toured Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts

on his overland journey to Arakan between 1629 and 1643, as reported in his journal (Eckford Luard and Hosten trans. 1927). At the time of Manrique's trip the region of Chittagong had been under Arakanese rule for a long time, a fact that Manrique is fully aware of (I, 88). In a chapter dedicated to the religious life of the Magh (i.e. Arakanese), Pegu, Brama (i.e. Burma) and Ava nations (I: 221-231), Manrique gives an accurate description of the religious rites of these people and there is no doubt that they were Buddhist. He writes that:

All these four peoples and many of their neighbours are pagans. ... The priests and monks of these sects and peoples are usually called Raulins ... They all wear yellow robes and have bare shaven heads, except the Pungrins, who wear a yellow tiara with the ends and points turned back-wards. On principle and in accordance with their oaths they do not have any women and live in chastity. ... Amongst this large number of pagan priests many Raulins are monks and live in Temples or Monasteries, some of these being palaces most sumptuous and richly endowed. ... Besides these Raulins there are other religious persons, Hermits who live like anchorites and cenobites, retiring to deserts and lonely places. ... (Eckford Luard and Hosten 1927, I 221-223)

One would expect that Manrique, a religious man, very concerned with the religious life of the people of all places he visited, would have taken note if the inhabitants of the area of Chittagong had not followed the religious customs of the Arakanese who ruled over them. Manrique also observed that even in Mughal Bengal most people had not converted to Islam. He writes:

In early days all the kingdoms of Bengal followed heathen cults, as the greater part of them do to this day. Except some, however, who since this region became subject to the Mogol Empire, have abandoned their heathen faith, and the more difficult road to hell, to follow the wider and easier road which is that of Alcoran. (Eckford Luard and Hosten 1927, I: 67).

These speculations, suggesting the survival of Buddhism in Bangladesh well after the arrival of the Muslim, are further supported by the account of another traveller, Thomas Bowrey, an Englishman who travelled to the countries around the Bay of Bengal between 1669 and 1679, just after the annexation of Chittagong by the Mughals (Temple ed. 1905). Bowrey is not as sophisticated an observer of the religious life of the people he met as was Manrique. He however observed some of the rituals of the *Brachmans*, the name he generally gave to the Hindus, and that one can safely assume he would also have applied to Buddhists. In Bengala he reports:

The Brachmans of this Kingdome are great Students in the Magick art, and make their Sorceries more apparent then they of any Other Kingdome in Asia.

They are a people very much dreaded by the Moors as well as the Idolaters. They infinitely inhabit this Kingdome, but most Especially on the back Side thereof, vizt. towards Arackan, where they Enjoy a great part of the Countrey with great freedom, none dareinge to molest them. (Temple ed. 1905, 205)

Even though Buddhists are not directly mentioned in Bowrey's account, it is very interesting here to note that the English traveller refers to the people living in the area bordering Arakan as practising their own religion undisturbed. This proves that the Muslims, who we know never managed to convert to Islam a large part of the Bengali population, had been particularly unsuccessful in the southernmost part of Bengal. As a consequence, on the basis of the accounts of the foreign travellers who visited Bengal in the Muslim period one cannot rule out the survival of some form of Buddhism in the region of Chittagong. Moreover, the evidence so far produced stresses the link between Bangladeshi and Southeast Asian Buddhism.

Other written sources available for the history of Buddhism in this period are inscriptions. Inscriptions usually record the foundation of a temple or a grant for its maintenance. The texts of the inscriptions of this period have been largely examined and sometimes translated into modern languages. The most comprehensive study of them is the work of Sircar (1983), who however does not give a translation of the inscriptions.

The work of all scholars confirms the patronage of Buddhism by the Pālas and by the independent dynasties of Southeast Bengal, the Chandras, but also the Varmans (Chakrabarti 1992, 85-86). The epigraphic records also confirm that all the Buddhist dynasties also supported non-Buddhist institutions, and corroborates the idea that Buddhism was practiced in Bengal after the Muslim invasion.

It is clear, on the basis of the so called Maināmati copper-plate, that Buddhism was still thriving in Southeast Bengal almost a quarter of a century after the Muslim destruction of Odantapura reported above. This inscription, found during some road repairs in the Maināmati Hills in 1803, records the grant of a plot of land in favour of a Buddhist monastery (Bhattacharya 1933, 282 ff.). Fortunately, the inscription bears a clear date which has been calculated (Keilhorn 1893, 107-108) to correspond to 19

February 1220. Even more important to my analysis is Law's identification of the donor with the member of some Burmese family who had settled in Bengal. He writes:

The extraordinary nature of the three names of the grantor 'Dhaḍi-eba', his father 'Heḍi-eba' and the writer 'Medinī-eba', all apparently belonging to the same family, deserves more than a passing notice. Though the names have, no doubt, been more or less Sanskritised in the hands of the writer of the fairly good Sanskrit verses, they clearly preserve their foreign origin in the unique appellative 'eva' or 'eba', found in all the three names, which is entirely unknown in any Indian dialect as far as we know. Colebrooke also noticed that contrary to the rules of the language 'the particle eva is subjoined without changing the preceding vowel'. Fortunately he did not disturb the text with proposed emendations and in none of the three names there is any room for any doubt on the reading. We are, therefore, tempted to hazard the conjecture that here we have evidence of a respectable family of Burmese origin which settled and survived in the 13th century A.D. in the district of Tippera. For 'ba' and 'ye-ba' (modified to 'e-va') seems to be the characteristic of Burmese names even now. The inscription may thus be regarded as corroborating in a peculiar manner the intercourse between the kingdom of Paṭṭikerā [identified with this region] and Burma as recorded in the Burmese chronicles. (Law 1933, 284-285)

Later epigraphic evidence indicates that a Buddhist temple was built in Chittagong as late as the sixteenth century. Rizvi writes that:

According to an inscription in a silver plate found in a Buddhist Keyang in Chittagong, the Keyang was built in 1542 by Chandilah Raja, who was probably [the] Arakanese Governor for Chittagong. (JASBIP 383) [sic]. (Rizvi 1970, 67)

Unfortunately, I was unable to locate Rizvi's source. Nevertheless, I have no reason to doubt the existence of the inscription this author refers to.

The other most important source for the study of Bangladeshi Buddhism in its Tāntric period is the *caryāpada* songs. These are a collection of Buddhist verses discovered at the beginning of this century in a manuscript in the Rāj Darbār Library of Nepal. It has not been possible to establish the exact time when these songs were composed; it is however believed that they were originally compiled between the eight and the twelfth century. The language of the songs is said to be a form of proto-Bengali, but it has been argued that it could be the ancient form of a number of eastern Indian languages.

Among the many studies produced on the subject of the *caryāpadas*, the work

of Dasgupta (1995; 3-9 and 35-50), Sen (1977), and Kvaerne (1977), complementing each other, can be considered an exhaustive guide to their reading. Sen and Kvaerne give a complete description, analysis, edited text and translation of the *caryāpadas*. They analyse their script and handwriting, look into the details of their grammatical structure, metre and contents. In Sen's book one can also look at facsimile reproductions of the actual manuscript. Dasgupta's work deals instead with the *caryāpadas* only as part of his larger study of Tantrism and other contemporary cults. However, he dedicates the opening pages of his book to the *caryāpadas* in general as well as an entire chapter, the second of the first part, to "The General Philosophical Standpoint of the Caryā-padas". From the information contained in Dasgupta's work one can see how the principles of Tantra outlined in the first part of this chapter worked in their original context.

Because the Buddhism of the *caryāpadas* is an esoteric religion, its texts, addressed to initiates, are not readily understandable and some of their meaning may have been lost. Nonetheless, years of scholarship, especially among the Newars of Nepal, who still regularly use these texts (in the original language) as part of their esoteric Buddhist rituals, have managed to provide us with a fairly coherent account of the Buddhist thought contained in these songs.

2.4 Summary

In the period between the seventh and the seventeenth century the form of Buddhism that was practised in Bangladesh underwent dramatic changes. The causes of these changes are two. First, Bangladeshi Buddhism adopted the principles of Tantra, partially relinquishing the traditional monastic ways. Second, after the arrival of the Muslim invaders, Buddhism was no more supported by the ruling class but actively suppressed.

The evidence we have, both archaeological and textual, on the history of Bangladeshi Buddhism of this time mostly concerns the pre-Muslim age. It is thanks to this evidence that historians have been able to reconstruct the evolution of Buddhism in this period. For the Muslim period we have little and mostly indirect evidence suggesting that Buddhism was practised in Bangladesh. One important consideration is the fact that the Muslim conquerors of Bangladesh and the Western missionaries and colonial officers that followed them did not distinguish Buddhism from other Indian religions. For this reason, even if Buddhism had still been practised in East Bengal in this period there would be no record of it. The journals of the travellers that visited Bangladesh between the fourteenth and seventeenth century as well as some other contemporary documents contain indications that Buddhism was still practised in Bengal at that time. However, these statements are not supported by any archaeological evidence. As the next chapter will show, it is obvious that some kind of Buddhist practice had survived in Bangladesh, within non-Bengali ethnic enclaves, until the nineteenth century.

Chapter three:

The nineteenth century reform and the origin of the present sects of Bangladeshi Buddhism

3.1 The background: The arrival of the British

At the end of the eighteenth century Buddhism was still practised in Bangladesh. It however had acquired elements belonging to different local traditions which were incompatible with the principles of Buddhism, while knowledge of the monastic rules had been lost. Animal sacrifices and the recitation of garbled Pali texts¹ were performed side by side by Buddhist village priests known as *rāuli* (etymology unknown). It is at this time that a series of historical events created favourable conditions in this region for the reform of existing Buddhism and the revival of orthodox Theravāda Buddhism.

In 1757 all of Bengal came under the administration of the East India Company and subsequently of the British Crown. The British, unlike most previous rulers of this region, Europeans and Asians alike, were not particularly interested in the propagation of their religion. Before their arrival, Hindus, Muslims and Christians had with varying success tried to impose their faith. The British were more concerned with the commercial exploitation of their colonies and until 1813 the East India Company forbade missionaries from residing in the Company's territory. At the same time, all religions went through a period of reform in India during the nineteenth century, as illustrated by Jones (1989) either because their followers wanted to restore a glorious past or because they were confronted with the supposed superiority of the religion of the colonisers.

¹ Bechert 1979, 112.

The political events that took place in the kingdoms of Arakan and Burma also contributed to the particularly favourable conditions for the reform of Buddhism in East Bengal. When war between these two countries broke out in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, many Arakanese fled their country. The records of the time speak of thousands of refugees crossing the Bengali border. In a letter sent to the Honourable Warren Hastings, Governor General at Fort William, the writer states:

I have the pleasure to Acquaint You of two thousand people of Arracan having deserted their Country and come to settle in this Province. I have therefore allotted them some ground on terms Agreeable to the enclosed Pottah, which with good treatment I hope will induce them to stay and cause more to come as this Province wants much people of the Cultivation of the waste land.
Islamabad the 17th November 1775. (Islam ed. 1978, 73-74)

In 1784 the Burmese conquered Arakan and to suppress the revolts that followed their occupation they used violence and mass deportation. To save their lives many more Arakanese people escaped into the neighbouring Chittagong region and O'Malley (1908, 58) reported that: "Great efforts were made by the East India Company to induce these immigrants to settle down peaceably, and lands were allotted to them in Cox's Bazār." Sir Arthur Phayre writes:

The conquest of Arakan (1782-4) had promised to bring quiet to that country. The people rejoiced at the prospect of relief from desolating civil war; but cruel oppression and severe exaction by the Burmese officers destroyed their hopes, and roused them to revolt. The fact of thousands of men being forced from their country to labour on the "works of merit" undertaken by Bodoahprā, of whom none returned home, is recorded with bitter resentment in the history of Arakan. The chiefs who headed the insurrection maintained for some years a guerrilla resistance. Thousands of people abandoned their country, and took refuge in British territory, where they were permitted to settle on unoccupied land. (Phayre 1883, 220)

To compel the fugitives to return, from 1793 on the Burmese repeatedly crossed the border of the British territories. The tension created by these events resulted in the first of the three Anglo-Burmese wars, after which, in 1826, the British annexed Arakan to their Indian colonies.

The Arakanese people were Buddhists of the Theravāda tradition and those among them who settled down in the region of Chittagong kept practising their religion there. This area was not new to Arakanese influence, having been, as explained in the previous chapter, under Arakanese rule from circa 1580 to 1666.

The Mughals had chased the Arakanese out of the Chittagong region, but their influence, especially among the Buddhist community and the Burmese-ethnic people living in the Chittagong region, never ceased. The strong cultural influence exerted till now by the Arakanese Buddhists in Chittagong is evidenced, for example, by the great importance attributed to the worship of the Mahāmuni Buddha image, the symbol of political power in Arakan, a copy of which is preserved in the temple by the same name in Raozan (Chittagong District). This original Mahāmuni statue has always been the object of great devotion in Arakan, so much so that that country has been identified with it and has acquired the name of “the land of the great image”. The Mahāmuni temple of Raozan is one of the most sacred places of the Buddhists of Bangladesh and a full account of it and its Arakanese counterpart is given below.²

The introduction of British rule in the region also promoted the reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism by dramatically improving local communications. Having trade as their primary objective, the British administrators built roads and introduced a railway system that promoted the exchange of ideas as well as goods throughout the territories under their control. Likewise, the spread of printing technology,³ with the consequent increase of books and newspapers, the relative increase in literacy rates, and the translation of traditional works into regional languages made it possible for ideas to reach a large audience. These new conditions, as suggested by Jones (1989, 6-7) contributed to the rise of several socio-religious reform movements in the same way as the Protestant reform had benefited from the invention of the printing press and the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages.

Notwithstanding the benefits associated with the introduction of modern Western technology, the Bangladeshi Buddhist reform movement was essentially a rural phenomenon. In view of this fact, Ling’s (1990, 19) theory that the creation of important urban centres in Bengal, subsequent to the British conquest, led to the Buddhist revival of those years is problematic. Professor Ling considers Buddhism

² See chapter five.

³ According to P.J. Marshall (1995) printing in Bengal was established extraordinarily early.

as the religion of an urban intellectual class, and sees its revival in nineteenth century Bengal as a direct consequence of the creation of such a class.

In the same way, S.B. Baruā's theory (1981, 42-44) that Buddhism was revived in Bangladesh via Bengali Buddhist cooks who went for work all over India is only weakly supported. According to this author, many Buddhists in Bengal had become landless after refusing to pay the property tax on land introduced by the British. For this reason, many of them had to find employment and a great number of them became cooks. These cooks were mostly illiterate, but being devoted Buddhists, as soon as they could afford it, they started to found Buddhist clubs and created scholarships for Bangladeshi Buddhist students, thus reviving Buddhism in Bengal.

The reform movement that brought about the restoration of the Theravāda tradition in Bangladesh can be seen as of a piece with the several Muslim and Hindu socio-religious reform movements that came into existence all over India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, in accordance with my thesis, none of the major historical works covering this period of the history of Bengal (Islam 1992, Sinha 1967 and O'Malley 1925) include this event, even when they comprise entire chapters devoted to the nineteenth century reform movements of the Hindus and Muslims. Likewise, Jones' volume (1989) on the socio-religious reform movements in British India does not even mention the reform of Buddhism in East Bengal.

Jones (1989, 3-4) divides the religious reform movements of the Hindus and Muslims between 'transitional' and 'acculturative'. Transitional movements are those that "had their origins in the pre-colonial world and arose from indigenous forms of socio-religious dissent, with little or no influence from the colonial milieu". The leaders of these movements were not anglicised individuals and there was no concern among the members of the movements to adjust their concepts and programmes to the colonial world. Acculturative movements, by contrast, originated within the colonial milieu and were led by individuals who were products of cultural interaction. "Acculturative movements sought an accommodation to the fact of British supremacy,

to the colonial milieu that such supremacy had created, and to the personal position of its members within the colonial world.”

It is difficult to use Jones’ terminology to define the Bangladeshi Buddhist reform movement. On the one hand it can be termed as a ‘transitional’ socio-religious movement, since its leaders not only were absolutely not anglicised but were mostly concerned with a return to origins, a past purity. Also, the reform they were sponsoring was not a defensive reaction to missionary criticism. On the other hand, the movement adopted the organisational structure typical of Jones’ acculturative movements, which modelled themselves on Western religious associations.

One can see that while the Hindu and Muslim movements were in substance social reform movements that used religion as the source of their legitimisation, the reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism was primarily the reform of a religious order. Also (as we shall see) it required the intervention of a foreign element: and unlike the other reform movements it did not lead to any form of communalism, a fundamental base for religious nationalism.

Rosén-Hockersmith (1985, Part IV) also compares the revival of Theravāda Buddhism in Bengal in the nineteenth century to “the ‘sanskritization’ of the Hindus and the ‘islamization’ or ‘ashrafization’ of the Muslim.” She writes:

The revitalization of Buddhism in the 19th century represents a contra-acculturative movement motivated in part by a wish to elevate the social status of the Bengal Buddhist community of the area, the Baruās, i.e. with the restoration of their Buddhist identity, the Baruās have wished to remove themselves from a status as a Hindu low caste (Rosén-Hockersmith 1985, 164).

Despite finding her analysis of these phenomena quite plausible, I have not found any evidence supporting it. The social status motive operated only in Jones’ ‘acculturative’ movements, whose members were concerned with the dignity of their religion *vis à vis* that of the colonisers and of other religious groups. This does not seem to have been a concern of those involved in the reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism. Rosén-Hockersmith’s posited social reasons behind the restoration of Buddhism in Bangladesh better apply to the case of the reintroduction of Buddhism in India, in the middle of the twentieth century, by Dr. Ambedkar. Buddhism was then

embraced by a large number of low caste Hindus in order to improve their social status.

3.2 The reform process

The reform of Buddhism that took place in Bangladesh in the nineteenth century was not the result of a single occurrence, but a slow process to which different elements contributed. Besides the favourable political situation and technological advances described in the previous section, three elements determined the reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism. These are: the preaching of the Venerable Sāramedha, the Sangharāja of Arakan, to Bangladeshi monks and lay supporters; the support given by Queen Kālindī of the Cākmās to the reform process; and the example set by a local monk, Chandramohan, who was later to become the first Bengali Sangharāja of Bangladesh under the name of Ācariya Puṇṇācāra Dhammadhara.

Between the first attempts to reform Bengali Buddhism made by the Venerable Sāramedha of Arakan and the re-ordination of the first group of monks as Theravāda Buddhists there is a gap of eight years. Certainly, it took even longer before the results of this reform could spread among the entire Buddhist community. It is only twenty-one years after the reform of Bengali Buddhism had started that the Sangharāja Nikāya of Bengal became independent of the control of the Arakanese Sangha as a separate organisation.

Despite the fact that these events happened in relatively recent times, it is impossible to find any original documents giving an account of them. According to Bechert (1977, 61), the original records of the reform of the Bengali Sangha were kept in a monastery in Akyab, modern Sittwe, the capital of Arakan, which was destroyed by bombing during the second World War.

All authors writing on this subject, apart from Bechert (1977) and Rosén-Hockersmith (1985), are Bangladeshi Buddhist. They tell, in different degrees of detail, the same story, at times even using the same words. It is not clear whether all scholars have been using a single primary source, which none of them mentions, or have just repeated the same story as reported by tradition.

According to all the authors (S.B. Baruā 1990, Bhikkhu Śīlālācār Śāstrī 1986, Chaudhuri 1982, among many others) who report these facts, in 1856 the Venerable Rādhū Māthe, also known as Rādhācaraṇ Mahāsthavir, was on a pilgrimage when he met the Sangharāja of Arakan, the Venerable Sāramedha or Sāramitta Mahāthera. The Bengali monk told the Sangharāja about the condition of Buddhism in East Bengal and invited him to come to Chittagong and preach. It is not clear whether the two were going or returning from their pilgrimage and whether the destination of the journey was Sitākunḍa or some other sacred place. These details are not significant here. All writers agree on the fact that the Sangharāja accepted the invitation of Rādhācaraṇ and established himself in a temple near that of Mahāmuni, in the district of Chittagong. He stayed there about two years and, being already familiar with the local language, he preached to local Buddhists, monks and laity alike, trying to convince them to abandon all practices foreign to Theravādin orthodoxy, such as animal sacrifice and the worship of gods. The Venerable Sāramedha was not terribly successful in his attempt, especially with the *rāulis*, the Buddhist priests. This is because the rules of discipline that he was prescribing were very rigid and against the principles that these Buddhist priests had observed throughout their lives. Moreover, many *rāulis* were old and did not want to lose their seniority, so they would not consider submitting themselves to the Sangharāja of Arakan, who, at the time, was younger than they.

Nevertheless, Sāramedha's preaching was not in vain and he managed to acquire precious support among the laity. Queen Kālindī of the Cākmās, a feudal state then under the British government and now part of Chittagong Hill Tracts, was the most important among those the Sangharāja managed to win over to his side. The

Cākmās were a Buddhist tribe, but the kind of Buddhism they practised at that time was pervaded by non-Buddhist elements. After Queen Kālindī had heard a sermon by Sāramedha in 1856 or 57 she decided to support the reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism. Risley reports:

The Chakmās profess to be Buddhists, but during the last generation or so their practice in matters of religion has been noticeably coloured by contact with the gross Hinduism of Eastern Bengal. This tendency was encouraged by the example of Rājā Dharm Baksh Khān and his wife Kālindī Rāni, who observed the Hindu festivals, consulted Hindu astrologers, kept a Chittagong Brahman to supervise the daily worship of the goddess Kālī, and persuaded themselves that they were lineal representatives of the Kshatriya caste. Some years ago, however, a celebrated Phoongyee came over from Arakan after the Rājā's death to endeavour to strengthen the cause of Buddhism and to take the Rāni to task for her leanings towards idolatry. His efforts are said to have met with some success, and the Rāni is believed to have formally proclaimed her adhesion to Buddhism. (Risley 1892, 1:172-3)

Without the patronage of Queen Kālindī the reform movement would surely not have been so successful. However, it has to be noted that the reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism that took place in the nineteenth century did not occur as the result of direct intervention by the king or queen as had been customary in the pre-colonial setting. Queen Kālindī simply set an example to her subjects and, taking advantage of the new technology available, sponsored the publication of printed material on Buddhism. Chaudhuri reports:

Queen Kālindī also took initiative to publish religious books in Bengali so that the Buddhists in her kingdom could learn about Buddhism. She ordered her court-poet Nīl Kamal Das of Betagi village (Chittagong) to prepare a complete biography of the Buddha. Nīl Kamal Das, being a Hindu, did not know much of Buddhism. He appointed some Buddhist scholars of Chittagong for the purpose. We learn from the *Bauddharañjikā* itself that Phul Chandra Baruā (popularly known as Phul Lothak) of Noapara village in Chittagong, a Bengali Buddhist poet of the time, was the pivot among them who translated into Bengali the “*Dhātuvañ*” (*Thāduttām*= *Thāḍuttām*= *Tādhuyāim*), written in Arakano-Burmese language, containing the lives of some previous Buddhas including Buddha Dīpaṅkara, the career of the present Buddha from birth to Nirvāṇa, and some religious tenets. Nīl Kamal Das gave a literary form to the book. When the work finished the queen sent Nīl Kamal Das to Calcutta to print the book. But unfortunately she died in 1873 before the printing of the book completed. Only about half of the book (up to the incident of the admission of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and other women in the Saṅgha) was published in 1890 from Chittagong under the title “*Bauddharañjikā*”. (Chaudhuri 1982, 37)

As indicated above, no original document seems to be available on these important events in the history of Buddhism in Bangladesh, apart from a copy of the

Bauddharañjikā which is available at the India Office of the British Library. As a result, the only biographical notes I was able to find about the Venerable Sāramedha are those given in a booklet published by the Pakistan Sangharāja Nikāya Centenary Committee (1967) (herein after PSNCC), together with the information given by S.B. Baruā (1990, 6-10). Unfortunately, these works contain no mention of the sources that have been used for their compilation.⁴ Bechert, in his article on the history of Theravāda Buddhism in East Bengal (1977, 61) refers to the work, in Burmese, of Arhan Vimala (1963), which I have not so far been able to locate.

If the information given by the PSNCC and S.B. Baruā is correct, Sangharāja Sāramedha's relationship with the region of Chittagong had begun much earlier. According to the first, Sāramedha was born in Harbang, Chittagong, where his family had taken refuge after the Burmese invasion of Arakan (PSNCC 1963, 1), while according to the second, the future Sangharāja was born in Arakan and later migrated to Harbang with his tutor, the Venerable Saralankar Mahāsthavir (S.B. Baruā 1990, 6). Both sources agree on 1801 as the year of birth of Sāramedha and on 1821 as the year of his higher ordination, but while S.B. Baruā says that he was born in the royal family of Arakan, the PSNCC only mentions that he bore royal marks on his hands and that he was advised to enter the Sangha in order to avoid involvement in a fight for the throne of Arakan (PSNCC 1963, 1-2 and S.B. Baruā 1990, 6). The attribution of royal descent to important figures is a common theme in Buddhism. Therefore we can regard this information as unreliable. Only the PSNCC mentions that when the political situation in Arakan deteriorated, Sāramedha and his teacher left Harbang for Chittagong (PSNCC 1963, 2). In February 1826, Arakan came under the Government of Bengal and many Arakanese refugees decided to return to their homeland. At this point both sources agree that Sāramedha and his teacher were among them. They set out for Akyab, where they settled and established a

⁴ Only in the section dealing with the date of birth of Sāramedha does the PSNCC book vaguely refer to the sources used, saying "Based upon the inscriptions on the seals and titles conferred by different rulers and memoirs left behind by the succeeding Buddhist monks the date of birth of His Holiness the Sangharāja Sāramedha Mahāthera may be assigned to the Christian Era 1801" (PSNCC 1967, 1).

monastery, later known as Saralankara Vihāra (PSNCC 1963, 2 and S.B. Baruā 1990, 7).

There is no reason why these accounts should not be believed, at least where they agree. This would mean that the Venerable Sāramedha spent a considerable part of his life in the District of Chittagong, where he also took ordination. The refugees from Arakan surely came in contact with the indigenous population of the area of Cox's Bazar and this could explain the claim, made by all writers, that Sāramedha could speak the language of Chittagong. However, this does not seem to explain another claim: that the Venerable Sāramedha had to be told, first by the young Candramohan (see below) and later by the Venerable Rādhu Māthe, about the conditions of Buddhism in Bengal. One can assume that had he lived at least twenty years among the people of this region he would have seen for himself the differences between the local form of Buddhism and the one practised by the Arakanese people. This is especially true if one considers that the Arakanese monks, who, like all monks of present day Burma, trace back their ordination to the *Kalyāṇisīmā* tradition,⁵ were particularly concerned with the observance of *Vinaya* rules. In fact, they were so concerned with these rules that a major dispute had erupted in Burma in the last part of the eighteenth century regarding the right way to wear robes - namely, whether to cover one or both shoulders.⁶ One may suppose that the Buddhists of Chittagong, laymen and monks alike, had felt until then no particular reason to reform their practice and that the Arakanese had deemed it was not their duty to intervene in such a matter.

In any event, before Sāramedha supposedly encountered Venerable Rādhu Māthe he had already presumably been invited by another monk, who had sought ordination in Akyab, to reintroduce orthodox Buddhism in Chittagong. This monk

⁵ Bechert in Bechert and Gombrich eds. 1984, 152. One of the most important events in the history of Buddhism for present day Burma is the reform introduced by King Dhammaceti of Pegu in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. This king had been a monk in the 'Sinhalese Sangha' in Burma and when he decided that the Sangha of Pegu needed to be reformed he sent a group of monks to be reordained in Ceylon in 1476. The ordination took place in the river Kālanigaṅga, after which an ordination hall or *sīmā* named *Kalyāṇisīmā* was established in Pegu.

⁶ Bechert in Bechert and Gombrich eds. 1984, 153. The Burmese Sangha opted for covering both shoulders, which from an historical point of view is wrong.

was Candramohan, later known as Ācariya Puṇṇācāra Dhammadhara. About the future Sangharāja of Bengal it is said that he was from Chittagong and that after being ordained at the age of sixteen or seventeen he went to Calcutta. In Calcutta he studied Pali and Buddhism in general and came to know that a person below the age of twenty cannot receive the higher ordination. As a result he decided to get reordained in either Sri Lanka or Burma. He finally got to Akyab and was ordained by Sangharāja Sāramedha before going back to Chittagong, where he worked with great determination to convince the monks to learn the *Vinaya* and live accordingly. After falling seriously ill he disrobed, apparently on his father's advice. However, once he recovered he went to Burma with a group of Sinhalese monks and got reordained by the Sangharāja of Burma in Pegu. There he was given the name of Puṇṇācāra Dhammadhara. After his third ordination, Puṇṇācāra Dhammadhara went to Sri Lanka in 1864, and there he took part in the establishment of the Rāmañña Nikāya.

Meanwhile, in 1864, Sangharāja Sāramedha paid another visit to Chittagong, invited by those lay Buddhists who had reverted to orthodox Theravāda Buddhism. This time he brought with him a full chapter of trained monks in order to give higher ordination to those who were willing to take it. He was again based in the area of Raozan, near the Mahāmuni Temple, and it is there that the first historic *upasampadā* ceremony took place, thereby formally inaugurating the restoration of the Theravāda tradition in Bangladesh.

Two years later, in 1866, Puṇṇācāra Dhammadhara returned from Sri Lanka. He joined the reform movement, started teaching Pali and the doctrine of the Buddha, and set up several schools, and became known as Ācariya, the Pali word meaning teacher. He also sent some *bhikkhus* to Sri Lanka and Burma for further training in Pali.

In 1877 Sangharāja Sāramedha visited Chittagong for the last time and handed over the leadership of the Sangharāja Nikāya to Ācariya Puṇṇācāra Dhammadhara. Sangharāja Sāramedha then returned to Akyab where he lived until 1882, the year of his death. Ācariya Puṇṇācāra Dhammadhara remained at the head of the Sangharāja

Nikāya until his own death in 1909.

3.3 The present *nikāyas*

Despite the great success of the reformation, which virtually converted all Bangladeshi Buddhists to the Theravāda tradition, not all of the Buddhist priests agreed to be reordained by the Sangharāja of Arakan. Moreover, the Arakanese exodus had brought a number of Buddhist monks into Chittagong district, some of whom never returned to their homeland, while other Arakanese ethnic people already lived in what now is Bangladesh. Because of these facts, three *nikāyas* are now present in Bangladesh: the Sangharāja Nikāya, the Mahāsthavir Nikāya and the Dvāra Nikāya of Arakan. Historically there have been other *nikāyas* in Bangladesh, but these died out presumably either because their members joined other *nikāyas* or because the pupillary lineage could not be continued, lacking the necessary number of fully ordained monks to proceed to new ordinations.

Table 3. 1
Ratio of Monks per *nikāya* among the Bangladeshi Sangha.

<i>nikāya</i>	A	B
Sangharāja Nikāya	85%	82.64%
Mahāsthavir Nikāya	7%	7.89%
Dvāra Nikāya	8%	9.47%
total	100%	100.00%

The figures in column A are those given by Paññāvaṃsa Mahāthera, those in column B are based on the incomplete data given by Chaudhuri (1982, 42) which is listed in detail in Table 5. 1 below.

The figures given to me by Paññāvaṃsa Mahāthera,⁷ of the ratios between the

⁷ Personal communication, winter 1993

different *nikāyas* in the Sangha of Bangladesh are illustrated in column A of Table 3.1 above. These figures appear reliable as they are very close to the figures contained in the incomplete data given by Chaudhuri (1982, 42) reported in column B of the table.

By definition, the members of different *nikāyas* do not belong to the same pupillary lineage and cannot perform religious ceremonies, *Sanghakammas*, together since they follow a different set of rules of behaviour.⁸ In the next sections, I will illustrate some of the characteristics of the different *nikāyas*. Other characteristics are elaborated elsewhere, particularly in chapter five.

3.3.1 The Dvāra Nikāya

The monks of the Dvāra Nikāya who live in Bangladesh belong to the same lineage as those who live in Arakan proper. Together with their lay supporters, they are the remnant of the Arakanese community that migrated to the area of Cox's Bazār at the time of the Burmese conquest of Arakan and possibly of the Arakanese people who had settled there over time, especially during the Arakanese rule over the region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact, the monks of this *nikāya* that I was able to contact were born and ordained in the region of Akyab, the capital of Arakan. Both monks and lay followers of this group are completely distinct from the rest of the population of Bangladesh, Buddhist and non-Buddhist. First of all, they belong to a different ethnic group, whose features are markedly mongoloid. Second, they speak a very different language, Arakanese, a Burmese dialect, which they still use in their everyday life and worship and which they write in their own script.

As far as I was able to witness during the two visits I paid to the area of Cox's Bazār, there is not much contact between the members of the Dvāra Nikāya

⁸ Gombrich 1988, 110-112. In ancient times these differences were recorded in different versions of the *pātimokkha* rules. All Theravādin monks follow the same *pātimokkha*, but their *nikāyas* differ on certain minor points, e.g. the shaving of the eyebrows.

and other *nikāyas*. Chaudhuri (1982, 58) writes that the monks of the Dvāra Nikāya perform their *Sanghakammas* with the monks of the Sangharāja Nikāya because they belong to the same pupillary lineage. However, my impression is confirmed by the refusal of the Arakanese Sangha in Bangladesh to give up some of their ancient abandoned temples⁹ to the Sangharāja Nikāya, who proposed to revive them.

The Dvāra Nikāya was founded in Burma as a reform movement in 1854 when the Sudhamma Nikāya was split into Shwe-gyin and Dvāra Nikāya. A few years later the Dvāra Nikāya split again into three sub-sects.¹⁰ According to Chaudhuri (1982, 58) two sub-sects, the Kyo-upa Nikāya and the Saiken Nikāya, are now represented in Bangladesh.

The members of this *nikāya* live exclusively in Cox's Bazār and the surrounding area bordering Burma where the Bangladeshi Burmese community lives. I am not aware of any attempt by the members of the Dvāra Nikāya to expand their sphere of influence into other parts of Bangladesh, probably because they would have great difficulties in finding any support among the indigenous Buddhist population.

3.3.2 The Sangharāja Nikāya

The vast majority of the monks of Bangladesh belong to the Sangharāja Nikāya, the one established by the Sangharāja of Arakan and led since then by seven other Sangharājas, as listed below in Table 3.2.

The members and the lay supporters of this *nikāya* are divided into two groups: those of the “plains” and the “hills”. The Buddhists of the plains belong to the Baruā ethnic group, while different Tribal groups, such as the Cākmās, constitute the Buddhists of the hills. These different ethnic groups were described in more

⁹ See section 5.3.4, part of which discusses the old temples of Ramu.

¹⁰ Chaudhuri (1982, 58) reports the existence of only two sub-groups of the Dvāra Nikāya and writes that the split within the *nikāya* originated over the interpretation of the rule concerning the *Kathina* ceremony. Bechert (Bechert and Gombrich eds. 1984, 154), whose opinion I regard as more authoritative, reports three sub-groups within this *nikāya*.

detail in the Introduction (I.3). Here it will be enough to remember that the Baruās are said to be the descendants of a group that migrated from Magadha, modern Bihar, to Arakan when the Muslim invaded their country, while the Cākmās are of Tibeto-Burmese descent.

The division of the Sangharāja Nikāya into these two groups is due to the different geographical areas where Baruās and Tribals are predominant and, as I will explain later, to the administrative structure of the *nikāya*. However, these differences do not justify, for example, the fact that Tribal monks do not share their temple in Dhaka with the Baruā monks despite the fact that the entire *nikāya* would much benefit from this sharing. At the same time, I do not believe that the Baruā monks ever claimed any right over the Tribal temple in the capital, while their attempts to establish a temple in Dhaka to represent the Sangharāja Nikāya are well known.¹¹

Table 3.2

Names of the Sangharājas of Bangladesh and their time in office.

I	Sangharāja Sāramedha	from the reform - 1877
II	Sangharāja Punnachara Dhammadhara	1877 - 1909
III	Sangharāja Gunalankar	1909 - 1927
IV	Sangharāja Varagnana	1927 - 1936
V	Sangharāja Tejavanta	1936 - 1942
VI	Sangharāja Dharmananda	1942 - 1957
VII	Sangharāja Abhayatissa	1957 - 1974
VIII	Sangharāja Shilalankar	1974 -

Source: S.B. Baruā 1990.

Due to the fact that Bangladeshi law forbids foreigners from visiting Chittagong Hill Tracts, my knowledge of the Tribal Buddhists of Bangladesh, who

¹¹ See section 5.4.1.

live there, is extremely limited. It is therefore impossible here to attempt a detailed comparison of the two branches of the Sangharāja Nikāya. It would be desirable to acquire more information on this point as well as on the dating of this division since it appears that at the time of the restoration of orthodox Theravāda Buddhism in Bangladesh this distinction did not exist.

To my knowledge, there are no official records of the history of the Sangharāja Nikāya, and even the works of respectable members of the Sangha, such as that of Dharmadhar Mahāsthavir (1964), are mostly based on oral tradition. Some information on the history of this *nikāya* can however be gathered from the material available in the biographies of the Sangharājas (PSNCC 1967, D.P. Baruā 1981, S.B. Baruā 1981 and 1990 among others).

Not counting the founder of the *nikāya*, who was of Arakanese descent, all other Sangharājas come from the District of Chittagong and all of them are Baruās. The second Sangharāja was first ordained under the pre-reformed system and had to be reordained in the reformed Sangha, while the third Sangharāja was apparently one of the first monks to be ordained directly into the reformed Sangha. Of the Sangharājas who followed, all but the sixth were ordained in Arakan, and all spent periods of time studying in Arakan, Burma or Sri Lanka. In one way or another all the Sangharājas are praised for their qualities as social reformers, for fighting non-Theravāda elements in the lives and worship of Bangladeshi Buddhists and for the institution of several schools. Also, practically all of the Sangharājas have been greatly involved in the leadership of several welfare institutions, while only one of them, the sixth, was known to be an *Abhidhamma* scholar who spent much of his time in meditation. Lastly, apart from the present Sangharāja, who was born in 1900, all others were born in the previous century.

From the information available, it seems that the history of the *nikāya* is pervaded by awareness of the reform which not only revived the Theravāda tradition in Bangladesh but also reinforced the cultural bonds between the Buddhists of Arakan and those of Bangladesh. That none of the Sangharājas has been of Tribal

descent is justified by the fact that usually it is a monk's senior pupil who takes the place of the teacher at his death. Since the first Bangladeshi Sangharāja was a Baruā and since boys usually become novices and get their religious education in the local temple, all the Sangharājas thus far have been Baruās.

As for the administration of this *nikāya* Chaudhuri reports that:

In the Saṅgharāj Nikāya, there is a supreme administrative Body called "*Saṅgharāj Bhikkhu Mahāsabhā*" which practically controls all the monks belonging to its Nikāya in Bangladesh. The Saṅghanāyaka is the supreme head who is assisted by four Anu-Saṅghanāyakas - all are elected by the members of the Saṅgharāj Bhikkhu Mahāsabhā. There is also a secretariat called Kāraka-saṅghasabhā consisting of 30 members including a secretary as the chief. The members of the Kāraka-saṅghasabhā are elected for three years, whereas the Saṅghanāyaka and the Anu-Saṅghanāyakas are elected for life-time. The Kāraka-saṅghasabhā executes the decisions of the Saṅgharāj Bhikkhu Mahāsabhā and is empowered to settle all ecclesiastical matters, including disputes. All the sessions of the Kāraka-saṅghasabhā are held under the presidency of the Saṅghanāyaka, and in his absence, under the chairmanship of any of the four Anu-Saṅghanāyakas. The Kāraka-saṅghasabhā meets whenever necessary, but the General Assembly of the Saṅgharāj Bhikkhu Mahāsabhā is held once in a year. The Saṅgharāj Bhikkhu Mahāsabhā has fifteen regional branches - ten in Chittagong, two in Comilla and Noakhali and three in the Chittagong Hill Tracts headed by the Rājgurus of the three respective circles, viz. Cākmā Rājguru in Rāngāmati, Mang Rājguru in Mānikcheri and Bhomang Rājguru in Bāndarban. (Chaudhuri, 1982, 43).

This kind of administrative structure is similar to that of the Sangha of other Theravādin countries, such as Burma and Sri Lanka, where the State and the administration of the monastic order are separate.¹² However, despite the formal appearance of the administration of the *nikāya*, one has to keep in mind that the Bangladeshi Sangha is very small¹³ and that most temples host only one monk. Accordingly, the degree of formality in the running of the *nikāya* appears to be less than that described above. This does not mean, as I will explain in more detail in chapter five, that the monks do not conform to the *Vinaya* rules.

¹² Both in Burma and Sri Lanka since the end of the British rule there have been several attempts on the part of the State and political parties to interfere with the administration of the Sangha. However these attempts to interfere have been minimal compared to the kind of power the kings used to exert over the Order.

¹³ According to my counting, detailed at p. 130, in all of Bangladesh there are rather over 800 monks.

3.3.3. The Mahāsthavir Nikāya

The few Buddhist priests who refused to be reordained in the Sangha founded by the Sangharāja of Arakan did not belong to a single group. Traditionally, it is reported that they were divided into three congregations, taking their names from their founders. These groups were the Titan, Dāsyā and Abhayā Māthe, founded by Titan Mahāsthavir of Hoarapara, Rāmdās Mahāsthavir of Hoarapara and Abhayāśaraṇ of Lekhera respectively. Only S.B. Baruā (1981, 75) claims that the groups were only two and that Rāmdās and Titan Mahāsthavir were not the leaders of separate groups but members of the same sect, but his report is not very clear on this point.

Despite refusing to be reordained in the Sangharāja Nikāya, the monks of these groups agreed on the need for a reform of current Buddhist practice. In 1957 the three groups converged into a single *nikāya*, the Mahāsthavir Nikāya, led since then by nine Sanghanāyakas, as listed below in Table 3.3. Instead of seeking reordination by a chapter of validly ordained monks from another region, as has been the custom among Theravādins, the members of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya just purged their practice of non-Buddhist elements and started to follow the *Vinaya* rules again.

Because the reform of this sect of Bangladeshi monks was not effected by the intervention of any foreign group of monks, its members consider themselves the direct descendants of the original Buddhists of the region. They also claim that they have maintained a continuous tradition at least since the sixteenth century and that since then there have been twenty-four Sanghanāyakas who have guided them. This list is very hard to obtain¹⁴ and my efforts to acquire a copy of it from monks who claimed to have it have been in vain. Recently I have finally managed to find this list, reproduced below in Table 3.4, in a book by Priyānanda Mahāthera and S. Dharmapāla Mahāthera (1980, unnumbered pp. between pp. 74-75.).

It seems that existence of a single lineage would be incompatible with the more recent history of the *nikāya*, also accepted by the monks, which, as stated above,

¹⁴ See S.B. Baruā's 1981, 75 ff.

was the result of the union of three separate groups. However, one cannot doubt the fact that Buddhism was practised in Southeast Bengal at the time preceding the reform or the fact that the kind of Buddhism practised was not orthodox Theravāda. Because of this, one cannot exclude the possibility that the pre-reform Buddhist priests or monks belonged to some sort of organisation led by a Sanghanāyaka. This organisation may have been politically divided into several groups which came together in 1957 as a response to the reform movement.

Table 3.3
The Sanghanāyakas of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya (from 1957 to 1994).

I	Sumanatiṣya Mahāsthavir
II	Dharmajyotiḥ Mahāsthavir
III	Jayasumana Mahāsthavir
IV	Prañālankār Mahāsthavir
V	Candrajyotiḥ Mahāsthavir
VI	Dharmadarśi Mahāsthavir
VII	Dharmapāla Mahāsthavir
VIII	Viśuddhānanda Mahāsthavir

Source: S.B. Baruā 1981.

I am not aware of any relationship between the monks of this *nikāya* and those of the Dvāra Nikāya. However it is a well known fact that the members of the Sangharāja Nikāya do not consider the monks of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya as truly Theravādin, because they do not belong to a validly ordained lineage and because of their sometimes unorthodox behaviour.¹⁵ While the majority of the public seem not to be too concerned about the affiliation of monks to either *nikāya* and in general wish to see a united Bangladeshi Sangha, the monks of these two groups continuously oppose each other. In this fight for supremacy among the Bangladeshi Buddhist community no means has been spared and several times these matters have reached

¹⁵ See chapter five.

the courts, as I was told by Gyana Ratna Bhikkhu, a monk of the Sangharāja Nikāya, S.B. Baruā (1981, 78-79) also reproduces the text of an out-of-court settlement of a quarrel between the two sects.

Recently there has been an attempt by the members of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya to unite the Sangharāja and Mahāsthavir Nikāyas. Information on this matter is not easily obtained, monks are reticent on the subject. It appears that an elder monk, possibly of the Sangharāja Nikāya, had been appointed to head this new group, but opposition from the majority of the monks of the Sangharāja Nikāya and the death of the leader of the newly founded sect resulted in the failure of this attempt. When I was invited, in January 1993, to attend the funeral of Nagosan Mahāthera, the head of this group, I was specifically requested by Sumana Baruā, a layman very close to Viśuddhānanda Mahāsthavir, the Sanghanāyaka of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya and my host, “not to ask the monks any question regarding the *nikāyas*.” A large group of monks from both the Sangharāja and the Mahāsthavir Nikāyas attended the funeral of Nagosan Mahāthera, who had died some months before¹⁶; however I never heard anything about him or the ‘new’ *nikāya* after this event.

The Mahāsthavir Nikāya consists of a small number of monks and is active in only a few villages of Chittagong District, but has a large temple in Dhaka. Its presence in Dhaka, a fact that will be discussed in more detail in chapter five, has been the result of the support given to this group by the government and it has contributed to the relative prosperity of this sect. One could also speculate that the government of Bangladesh, as well as the previous Pakistani administration, would have political reasons to favour this minority Nikāya. In fact, its support of this group, representing a tiny minority of the Bangladeshi Sangha in open contrast with its majority, clearly fuels their conflict, preventing the formation of a united Bangladeshi Sangha. Such a united Sangha could in fact support a nationalistic

¹⁶ The delay in holding this funeral may seem strange. I was told by Bangladeshi Buddhists that on the occasion of the death of important people the funeral is commonly delayed. This allows the organisation of a grandiose ceremony. Also, those who wish to attend the ceremony can make the necessary arrangements. Several people have told me that this practice is also common in Thailand where funerals can also be postponed when the family of the deceased is poor and need time to gather the money necessary to pay for the funeral expenses.

movement in the Southeast of the country where already the friction between the government and the people of the Hill Tracts has given birth to an anti-government armed movement. Also this *nikāya* is the only one with no links with Arakan.

Table 3.4

The Sanghanāyakas of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya from the seventeenth century to 1994.

Sanghanāyakas of the seventeenth century	
I	Śrīmat Cāindā Mahāsthavir
II	Śrīmat Nāindā Mahāsthavir
III	Śrīmat Añcān Mahāsthavir
IV	Śrīmat Kaṇalā Mahāsthavir
Sanghanāyakas of the eighteenth century	
V	Śrīmat Suriya Mahāsthavir
VI	Śrīmat Aṇathā Mahāsthavir
VII	Śrīmat Lohāna Mahāsthavir
VIII	Śrīmat Jhālā Mahāsthavir
Sanghanāyakas of the nineteenth century	
IX	Śrīmat Rādhācaraṇ Mahāsthavir (Rādhu Mahāsthavir)
X	Śrīmat Rāmadāś Mahāsthavir
XI	Śrīmat Triratna Mahāsthavir (Titan Mahāsthavir)
XII	Śrīmat Keśarī Mahāsthavir
XIII	Śrīmat Paññāsār Mahāsthavir (Khetra Mohan Mahāsthavir)
XIV	Śrīmat Abhayācaraṇ Mahāsthavir
XV	Śrīmat Amaracān Mahāsthavir
XVI	Śrīmat Rāmadhan Mahāsthavir
XVII	Śrīmat Duyabarāj Mahāsthavir
Sanghanāyakas of the twentieth century	
XVIII	Śrīmat Agrasāra Mahāsthavir
XIX	Śrīmat Jayasumana Mahāsthavir
XX	Śrīmat Sumanatiṣya Mahāsthavir
XXI	Śrīmat Prañālankār Mahāsthavir
XXII	Śrīmat Candrajyotiḥ Mahāsthavir
XXIII	Śrīmat Dharmadarśi Mahāsthavir
(xxx)	Śrīmat Dharmapāla ī Mahāsthavir
XXIV	Śrīmat Viśuddhānanda Mahāsthavir

Source: Priyānanda Mahāthero and S. Dharmapāla Mahāthero, 1980

Following the death in 1994 of Viśuddhānanda Mahāsthavir, this *nikāya* was for a number of months without a Sanghanāyaka. During my last days in Dhaka, in May/June 1994, it seemed that, though he was not the senior Mahāthera, Śuddhānanda Mahāthera was to assume leadership of the *nikāya*. Rumours reached me of fights, even violent ones, between the monks of this *nikāya* on the subject of Viśuddhānanda's succession. Finally, during my visit to the Baruā and Cākmā communities of Calcutta in November 1995, I was told that Gñyāṇālok Mahāsthavir of Chittagong had been appointed as Viśuddhānanda's successor.

The organisation of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya is, according to Chaudhuri, similar to that of the Sangharāja Nikāya but, given the much smaller number of its members, on a reduced scale. In fact, he writes:

The Nikāya of the Mahātheras (Māther-Dalī) is headed by one Mahānāyaka-Thera. Under him there is one Anu-Nāyaka-Thera and a Kāraka-saṅghasabhā consisting of 11 monks including one secretary. The General Assembly of monks meets once in three years. In all other cases, the Mahāthera-Nikāya has got the same organisational structure and executive principles as those of the Saṅgharāj-Nikāya. (Chaudhuri 1982, 43).

3.4 Religious reform in the Theravāda tradition and the nineteenth century Theravāda Buddhist reform movements

Religious reform in the Theravāda tradition has not been the result of dramatic protests by dissident groups. Since the time of Emperor Asoka, who is said in the *Mahāvamsa* (V) to have convoked the third council in Pāṭaliputra, rulers of Buddhist countries have given themselves the duty of overseeing the Sangha of their country to ensure that it conform to the norms laid down in the *Vinaya*. This interest of the king in the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of his national Sangha is due to the particular link between Sangha and Kingship in Buddhist states. On the one hand, the Sangha justifies the authority of the king, legitimising the symbols on which his power rests. This is done in several ways, most noticeably through the compilation of historic literary works, a phenomenon that has resulted in Sri Lanka in the creation of a

corpus of historical works without equal in South Asia. On the other hand, the king, who since the lifetime of the Buddha had been the principal sponsor of the Sangha, not only acquires great merit, but by giving his favour to one or the other *nikāya* makes sure that none of them becomes so powerful as to threaten his control.

There have been basically two ways in which a ruler has precipitated the reform of a “corrupt” Sangha. In the first case, when the Sangha was deviating from what was considered acceptable behaviour, the king would invite a monk, in most cases an ascetic renowned for his discipline, to help him in this task. The ascetic would compile a list of rules that the members of the Sangha would have to follow if they did not want to be expelled from the Order. In the second case, when the purity of the pupillary lineage was in dispute or when a country did not have enough monks to proceed to a valid ordination, kings have sent embassies to foreign Buddhist countries, requesting a delegation of fully ordained monks to come and ordain or re-ordain the members of the Sangha in their country.

When the British subjugated Sri Lanka and Burma, the link between political and religious power in these two countries broke, with different effects on the Sangha in the two countries. In Sri Lanka, the major change within the Sangha caused by the British conquest was the development of the modern *nikāyas*. Carrithers writes that:

The oldest *nikāya* in Sri Lanka now is the Siyam Nikāya, which traces its lineage back to the eldest of the monks who came from Thailand in 1753 to renew the higher ordination tradition. The last Kandyan kings decreed in effect that all monks must be of this *nikāya*, by commanding that all monks must be ordained in Kandy by the monks of that line. This was to insure the purity (at least in caste, for all monks were to be of the highest caste) and the unity of the Sangha, under the king’s control, although even at the best of times kings never long retained such control. On the British-controlled coast before conquest, and throughout the island after conquest, monks started other *nikāyas*, either by simply holding their ordinations elsewhere, or by bringing a new ordination tradition from Southeast Asia. In 1803 the Amarapura Nikāya began, and sheltered under its name more and more *nikāyas* until at present there are about twenty-six under its aegis. ...

Some modern monks have complained that it was the British refusal to regulate the Sangha that resulted in this, in their words, ‘schism’ and ‘decay’. But in fact the modern Sangha may have thereby come rather to resemble the early Sangha, before the intervention of a Buddhist king; many small fraternities, each its own family, so to speak, but united by very similar observances of Discipline - or by similar lack of Discipline - and enjoying very similar positions in society. No longer do monks compete for the largesse of a king. Rather, they compete for a clientele in their immediate area who support them on a small-scale, nearly day-to-day basis. They must not be seen to depart too

spectacularly from the Discipline; and fresh reform movements springing up frequently, especially in the south, act as their conscience. The Sangha probably does better without a king. (Carrithers in Bechert and Gombrich eds. 1984, 144-5).

Also, the British conquest of the whole of the island and the subsequent arrival in Sri Lanka of Protestant missionaries provoked the rise of what has been known as Protestant Buddhism. Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988, 202-240) describe in detail this phenomenon which caused the laity to be more active in all religious matters and lay individuals to feel that they could aspire to their own salvation, i.e. *nirvāṇa*. The greater interest of laity in Buddhism also generated a sense of national identity, legitimising the political aspirations of the Sri Lankan élite, and making Buddhism an integral aspect of the island's politics up to today (see Tissa Fernando in Smith ed. 1973).

In Burma, the Sangha was much more under the control of the king than it was in Sri Lanka. A large administrative body headed by a Sangharāja, appointed by each king, in turn ruled over the Sangha. When the British annexed Burma this system collapsed and as a consequence new groups and movements originated within the Burmese Sangha. Bechert writes:

There have, however, been numerous reform movements within the Sangha since the beginning of colonial times, such as the Shwe-gyin Nikāya and Dvāra Nikāya which were formed as far back as the middle of the 19th century. These self-governing bodies were modelled on the reform-*nikāyas* which had been founded in Ceylon in the 19th century. But various more cohesive groups, such as the so-called 'Pakkoku' and 'Ngettwin' sects, were also created within the majority group which after the collapse of the Burmese monarchy was largely 'non-organized' and which, to distinguish it from the small reform groups was called Sudhamma Nikāya, after its religious council which remained in existence until 1938. (Bechert in Bechert and Gombrich eds. 1984, 153)

The Buddhist revival movements that arose in Burma during the British rule were also closely linked to the independence movements. Buddhism was the factor that gave the Burmese people a national identity, distinguishing them from the Christian British and the Hindu and Muslim Indians who ruled and administered them. In this connection Bechert reports:

Religious concepts did nevertheless play an important part in rebellions against British rule as early as the 19th century. In this connection, the risings connected with so-called messianic movements must be mentioned particularly,

expressing the popular hope for the early advent of a *cakravartin* or *Setkya Min*, the ideal world ruler, and of the future Buddha Maitreya. Pretenders to the throne who consider themselves incarnations of the *cakravartin* tended to follow in the wake of such movements, as did magicians, astrologers and the rituals and solemn vows characteristic of secret societies. (Bechert in Bechert and Gombrich eds. 1984, 149)

Thailand also saw in the nineteenth century the revival of Buddhism in association with the introduction of social and political reforms. This country however had not been colonised. In this case it was the ruling Buddhist dynasty, that of the Chakri kings, that sponsored the revival and the social reforms. The Thai kings practically held divine status and Reynolds explains:

As Indra ruled and maintained the order of Dhamma in his domain, so the Thai monarch was to rule and maintain the order of Dhamma in his earthly kingdom. However it must also be emphasized, though this aspect has not been highlighted in most of the literature on the subject, that this order which the king was responsible for representing was conceived in more than static terms. (Reynolds in Smith ed. 1973, 41-42).

As Reynolds illustrates in full detail in his essay, the Thai kings, faced with the modernisation movement that threatened to make their own existence obsolete, intelligently decided to use their traditional role to lead the movement.

It seems that the nineteenth century reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism can only marginally be connected to the revival movements that were taking place within the Buddhist communities of Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand during the same period. One important difference is the fact that the Bangladeshi reform was principally a monastic reform, requiring the reordination of its Sangha, while the Sri Lankan, Burmese and Thai movements were mainly social movements legitimised by Buddhism.

The political and nationalistic motive did not have any place in the Bangladeshi reform movement. Not only was this purely a monastic reform, but when the British occupied Bengal the link between political power and Buddhism had long ceased to exist in the region. Moreover, though the Buddhist population was concentrated in one area, Chittagong and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, these people had been ruled for centuries by non-Buddhist Bengalis as well as by non-Bengali Buddhists. The Buddhists of Bangladesh are ethnically different from the rest of the

Bangladeshi population, so had Buddhism for them become a source of national identity, this identity would very likely not have been a Bengali one.

This interpretation is reinforced by the evidence supplied by more recent events. There can be no doubt that the liberation war of 1971 was fought to assert the national identity of the Bengalis against the Pakistani government. In fact, the 1971 civil war between Bangladesh and Pakistan has its roots in the so-called 'language movement' which began in 1952. The Bengalis had then started fighting the Pakistanis who wanted to impose Urdu as the only official language of the entire country. Still, it is well known that leaders of the Buddhist community, such as the king of the Cākmās, who currently serves as an Ambassador in the Pakistani foreign service, and Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera,¹⁷ supported the Pakistani side. The Bangladeshi Buddhists had in general no particular loyalty to the Pakistanis and yet they did not hesitate to stand on the side of the Pakistanis, who were not-Buddhist and non-Bengalis, against the Bengali nationalists.¹⁸

It is however clear that there is a feature common to the Buddhist reform movements of the nineteenth century: the adoption of modern methods in the administration of religious affairs, including the use of modern technology, e.g. printing, to promote both old and new ideals. The 1856 reform of Bangladeshi Buddhism shares in fact with the movements that arose in other countries a large scale take-over of the sponsorship of the Sangha by lay supporters organised in societies and clubs

¹⁷ To the role of Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera in supporting Pakistani rule Dr. Ahmed Sharif, Quaxi Nur Uz-Zaman, Dr. Serajul Islam Chowdhury and Shahriar Kabir in their work on the Collaborators of the Pakistani regime dedicate a long entry (Muktijuddha Chetana Bikash Kendra Central Committee 1987, 115-117).

¹⁸ In situations of conflict minorities have often made alliances with unlikely partners. For example, in Sri Lanka the Muslim community is allied with the Buddhists against the Hindus.

3.5 Summary

The movement that brought about the reform of Theravāda Buddhism in Bangladesh has its origins in the favourable political and historical situation of nineteenth century India. The religious freedom enjoyed under British rule and the wars between Arakan and Burma with the consequent emigration of a great number of Buddhists into Bengal almost inevitably triggered the revival of Buddhism in the area. Also, the great improvement in communication made in the same period contributed to the reform.

The reform process took place over a period of several years. In this period, pious Bengalis such as Ācariya Puṇṇācāra Dhammadhara and queen Kālindī of the Cākmās supported the efforts of the Sangharāja of Arakan to revive the Theravāda tradition in Bangladesh. New monks were ordained and others were reordained according to the rules of the *Vinaya*. The teaching of the principles of Theravāda Buddhism in Bangladesh was restored.

Some of the old Buddhist priests refused to be reordained, while the Arakanese monks who had migrated into Bengal did not need to be reformed. For this reason three different *nikāyas* are now present in Bangladesh. The reformed group that was established by the Sangharāja of Arakan is called Sangharāja Nikāya and comprises more than eighty per cent of the Bangladeshi Sangha. The group that refused to be reformed by the Sangharāja of Arakan but declares itself 'self-reformed' is that of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya. This group is the smallest among the Bangladeshi Sangha, accounting for about seven percent of the monks. However, this Nikāya is very influential because of the support it receives by the Bangladeshi government in its attempt to prevent a united Sangha from inspiring a non-Bangladeshi nationalistic movement. The remaining part of the Bangladeshi Sangha is ethnically Arakanese and belongs to the Dvāra Nikāya of Arakan.

Religious reform is quite a common phenomenon in the history of Buddhism. However, it has traditionally been the privilege of the Buddhist king to oversee the

reform of the Sangha of his country. With the arrival of the colonial powers and the extinction of the Buddhist dynasties the laity has consequently developed a greater involvement in the control of the Sangha. In the countries where Theravāda Buddhism is the religion of the majority of the population this event has triggered a series of consequences such as the rise of nationalist movements. Since Buddhism is the religion of a small minority of the population of Bangladesh, ethnically distinct from the rest of the Bengali population, its reform failed to produce the same effects.

Chapter four:

The Transmission of Knowledge about Buddhism

4.1 Transmission of culture and the formation of national identity

So far we have looked at the history of Buddhism in Bangladesh and how it has been interpreted in modern times to serve the elaboration of a homogeneous Bangladeshi culture which has contributed to the formation of a Bangladeshi national identity. However, still following Gellner's theory (Gellner 1983), it is through a centralised, universal, generic and standardised education system that the members of industrial or would be industrial societies are integrated. For this reason in this chapter I will examine the Bangladeshi school system and in particular what material about Buddhism it delivers. Also, I will describe the kind of religious education Buddhist people, laity and monks, are exposed to in the course of their lives and the means by which it is transmitted.

In the first part, after giving a description of the Bangladeshi school system and its aims, I will illustrate what formal teaching about Buddhism it delivers. This part also contains a detailed account of the official syllabi and the examination procedure, and it is integrated with official data on literacy and education.

In the following part, the educational activities that take place within religious institutions are analysed. Again, this part is divided into sections. The first one deals with the teaching activities that are carried out in temples. The second relates the history of the Bhikkhu Training Centre and its function as a school for monks.

At the end of the chapter I will look at religious education in other countries and its function, within the education system, as an element of national integration. I will then suggest a few considerations that arise from the reading of the information given in the previous parts.

4.2 Buddhist education and studies in schools: a description

4.2.1 The Bangladeshi School System.

The Bangladeshi school system is divided between primary, secondary and university level. Primary education lasts five years, while secondary schooling is divided between junior and senior level: the first a three year course and the second a two year course. Universities and colleges offer undergraduate and graduate courses of various length.

No pre-schooling is provided by the government for children below primary school age, that is five years. Some private institutions exist in the major cities offering a kindergarten type service. These are small local institutions and it is fair to say that this sector of the education system is virtually non-existent.

Primary education is free but not compulsory. Bhattacharya (1995, 24) reports a Government program, started on a limited scale in 1991, to introduce compulsory primary education. According to S. Haque (1991, 5), the country has over 40,000 primary schools, nine tenths of which are government managed, with 169,000 teachers, catering for some seven million pupils. Most students only attend this level of education; however, Haque (1991, 5) tells us that "Drop-out rate is very high in this stage - as high as 56 per cent from class I to class II. Out of every 100 admitted in class I only 30 or so generally graduate."

Schools at all levels are badly staffed and equipped, teachers are poorly paid and often absent. The great majority of schools cannot offer a variety of subjects due to lack of prepared teachers and resources. This situation is reflected in the country's low literacy levels, illustrated in Table 4.1 below.

From the facts reported above it is clear that education in Bangladesh is by no means universal. Consequently, one could wonder whether Gellner's theory can still be applied in the case of Bangladesh. The other characteristics of the education system of modern society introduced by Gellner are present in Bangladesh.

Education is centralised and standardised: curricula are set nationally, while examinations at primary and secondary level, such as the Secondary School Certificate, are set by the four Educational Boards. The training given by the system is, at least in the earlier classes, generic. Also, it is evident that literacy and education achievement rates show a positive trend. Moreover, the objectives of the Bangladeshi school system, set by the Education Commission in 1973, include national integration. Haque (1991, 4) quotes among the goals set by the Commission “to instil in the child the sense of patriotism, citizenship, dutifulness and curiosity and develop in him the qualities of perseverance, industry, good manners and justice.” It is therefore reasonable to see Bangladesh as one of Gellner’s industrial societies in which the school system plays a key role in the integration of its members.

Table 4.1
Percentage of Literate Persons and Persons Completing at least First Grade of Education in Different Census Years, 1961-1991.¹

Census Year	Literacy Rate		Rate of People Completed at least 1st grade	
	All Ages	7+ years	All Ages	7+ Years
1961	17.0%	21.5%	14.8%	18.1%
1974	20.2%	26.8%	17.2%	22.8%
1981	19.7%	26.0%	27.2%	35.8%
1991	24.9%	32.4%	34.6%	45.0%

Source: Bangladesh Population Census 1991.

The country also has a parallel system of Islamic schools, the *madrasahs*. According to Haque (1991, 4) there are some 2,500 *madrasahs* in Bangladesh, with an enrolment of 350,000 students. Two *madrasahs* are managed and financed by the government. The *madrasahs* offer a Muslim education program of sixteen years,

¹ Unfortunately, the definition of literacy differs from census to census. The effect of change in definition has to be kept in mind when comparing the literacy levels obtained from different censuses. For this reason, the rate of people who have completed at least 1st grade is a better indicator of the trend of literacy. Take note that for 1961 the data referring to 7 years and over population is instead calculated for 5 years and over.

from primary to post-graduate level; however an institution does not necessarily offer all stages of education. Tuition is given in Arabic, Persian and Bengali.

The *madrasahs* are the Muslim equivalent of the Buddhist Pali *toles* of which I will give a description in the next section of this chapter. The kind of instruction given in this kind of school reflects the culture of a sub-group, the Muslim one, and despite the seemingly large number of students and schools, the percentage of the population going through this kind of education is minimal. It is also to be noted that the literacy rate of the Muslim population does not seem to be affected by the existence of this alternative system of education, as illustrated in Table 4.2 below showing the literacy rate of the Bangladeshis by religion.

Table 4.2
Literacy Rate by Religion in Bangladesh, 1991.

Religious communities	Literacy Rate	Literacy Rate
	All Ages	7+ Years
All Religion	24.9%	32.4%
Muslim	24.1%	31.5%
Hindu	32.0%	39.8%
Buddhist	23.6%	31.4%
Christian	36.8%	50.6%
Others	6.5%	11.4%

Source: Bangladesh Population Census 1991.

4.2.2 Buddhist education in the Primary and Secondary Schools

Religious education is compulsory in Bangladesh in the primary and secondary schools from the second to the tenth class. However, it appears that this aspect of the curriculum is not meant to integrate the Bangladeshi population. We know that in Bangladesh there are several religious communities. Still the members

of each community are not given any instruction in any of the other religions. Moreover, it is actually illegal in Bangladeshi schools to demand that any pupil should receive religious instruction in any religion other than his own. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh states in fact that:

No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or to take part in or to attend any religious ceremony or worship, if that instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own. (Art. 41.2)

Schools in theory provide religious education in the four main religions: Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist. In Bangladeshi primary and secondary schools, teachers give classes in a range of subjects, regardless of their qualifications, a rule that applies to the teaching of religion as well. It is the headmaster who decides which teachers are in charge of teaching religious education classes. Since the majority of the teachers and pupils are generally Muslim, this turns out to be the religion taught in most schools. Pupils of other faiths are of course not asked to take the course. At the end of the school year, when the Muslim pupils undertake a written test on Islam, the Buddhist students are orally tested on Buddhism by a Muslim teacher. In practice this means that a Muslim teacher asks questions on Buddhism chosen from the relevant textbook, in which answers are also given.

Only in predominantly Buddhist schools, such as the schools attached to Buddhist temples, in the Chittagong area and in Chittagong Hill Tracts is Buddhism actually taught by a teacher. In such schools Buddhist principles are taught and Buddhist students are required to study Pali in the sixth, seventh and eighth classes. After that, Pali is optional for the last two years of school. I have not found any evidence that pupils are actually given Pali classes outside the Chittagong region and the Hill Tracts and the only school where I have seen Pali textbooks is the Bhikkhu Training Centre of Kadalpur, Raozan (Chittagong District), which I will describe more extensively later.

At the end of their secondary education, all pupils undertake the Secondary School Certificate test, known as S.S.C, that is set by the different School Boards of Dhaka, Comilla, Rajshahi and Jessore. Among the subjects of the test are Religion

and Pali, the latter of which is optional. The tests for the different subjects have a similar format. The pupils have briefly to answer a series of questions, each worth a certain amount of credit. Some of the questions are in a series and the students are required to answer only a certain number of them. Despite the fact that the question papers are prepared by different people in different places it is not rare for the same question to appear in different papers. In fact it seems that the members of the Educational Boards draw their choices from a single master list which never changes over time. Past examination papers in all subjects are published in volumes such as *S.S.C. Test Papers*. At the end of these volumes there is a list of the most commonly asked questions in each subject with the answers. It is common practice among Bangladeshi students to memorise all these questions and answers.

4.2.2.1 *Bauddha Dharma Śikṣā*

The National Curriculum Committee and the Text Book Board are the two authorities in charge of compiling the syllabi and the textbooks for all subjects, including religion. The collection of texts used for the teaching of Buddhism is entitled *Bauddha Dharma Śikṣā* (Instruction in Buddhism). It is a series of small books, one per school year, forty to one hundred pages long, each divided into sections. The text has recently been revised and a new edition of *Bauddha Dharma Śikṣā* has been published. The structure of the old and the new edition is basically the same and it is repeated in all the volumes of the collection. Here below is a list of the topics in what is more or less the same order as they appear in every booklet, with only minor variations.

a) Pali formulas and basic Buddhist principles:

- (1) worship verses (triple gem, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, bhikkhu, bodhi, parents)
- (2) verses for offerings (of perfumed incense, light, flowers, drinks, food)

- (3) the precepts
- (4) the three refuges
- (5) the four noble truths
- (6) karma and its fruits *
- (7) Buddha and bodhisattva
- (8) followers of the Buddha and their meritorious acts
- (9) Buddhist celebrations and festivities *
- (10) Buddhist sites *
- (11) the Tripitaka

b) Readings:

- (1) Selection of Suttas
- (2) Selection of Jātakas

The first part is almost identical for all the volumes in the series. The items marked with an asterisk are those which are present only in the new edition of the series. Differences between the volumes for the different classes include the addition of appropriate verses for the offering of items not listed in the previous volumes, the last five of the ten precepts, and the withdrawal of the verses of worship addressed to one's parents. All Pali verses are followed by a translation in Bengali. At the end of each section of the textbook the editors have prepared a list of review questions covering the materials in the section. The questions are of the same kind as those in the S.S.C. test described above. The only substantial differences between the volumes appear in the section dedicated to the readings, the largest in every book. These readings are Suttas and Jātakas from the Pali canon in their Bengali version. Each volume contains a different selection of readings, with three to five Suttas and a slightly larger number of Jātakas.

4.2.2.2 *Pāli Bhāṣā Śikṣā*

Pāli Bhāṣā Śikṣā (Instruction in Pali) is the title of the manual of Pali language. It comes in three volumes, one for each class in which the subject is compulsory. Of the three volumes I could find, the first one was published in Tripura (India) and the other two in Chittagong. The first book is merely a list of grammatical rules, each followed by some translation exercises. The other two volumes are each in two parts. The first part deals with grammar, while the second part is a selection of *Jātakas* (in Pali language and Bengali script). I cannot say if the differences between the volumes are due to the fact that they were written by different authors. As said above, I have never seen these books actually being used in schools.

4.2.3 Colleges and Universities

Colleges, in the Bangladeshi educational system, offer two different kinds of certification. Students can attend a two-year course at the end of which they undertake the Higher Secondary School Certificate test, known as H.S.C., similar in format to the S.S.C. test. Alternatively, students can take a four-year course, leading to a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.). Little information is available about Buddhist studies at College level. Two of the Colleges, Chittagong and Feni Government College, are said to have a long tradition of Pali studies that goes back to the British period.² Other Colleges, Raozan, Boalkhali, Shaleh-Noor and Banskhali are known to have recently introduced Pali departments.³ None of the above mentioned institutions seems to be particularly renowned for its academic relevance in Pali studies.

² According to S. Baruā (1992, 61), the Pali department of Chittagong Government College was started in 1908, while Feni College opened a Pali department during the school year 1926-27.

³ For details about the history of Pali Departments in Bangladeshi Colleges see S. Baruā 1992, 61.

Table 4.3
Enrolment figures for the Pali courses: Dhaka University.

Class	Session	No. of students enrolled
B.A. (Honours)	1987-88 to 1989-90	14
M.A. Preliminary	1987-88	3
M.A. Final	1987-88	7
M.A. Preliminary	1988-89	3
M.A. Final	1988-89	2
B.A. Subsidiary	1988-89	46

Source: Sukomal Baruā 1992.

Table 4.4
Enrolment figures for the Pali courses: Chittagong University.

Class	Session	No. of students enrolled
B.A. (Honours)	1987-88	12
M.A. Preliminary	"	16
M.A. Final	"	10
B.A. Subsidiary	"	18

Source: Sukomal Baruā 1992.

No University in Bangladesh offers a degree in Buddhist studies. However, Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi University offer degrees both in Islamic Studies and Islamic history and culture. The study of Buddhism is confined to the departments of Pali, which started their activity in Dhaka and Chittagong Universities in the academic year 1973-74. At present, four teachers work in the Dhaka department and three teachers in the Chittagong one. Both Universities offer an Honours B.A. course as well as an M.A. course. Students who wish to enrol in the Honours B.A. program have to pass the S.S.C. test in Pali or the H.S.C. test in Buddhist religion at S.S.C or

H.S.C. level.⁴ Immediately above are two tables (Table 4.3 and Table 4.4) adapted from Sukomal Baruā's article on Buddhist studies in Bangladesh (S. Baruā 1992, 60-61) showing the enrolment figures for the Pali degrees in Dhaka and Chittagong University. These figures give a limited picture of the scope of the Pali departments.

All of the students enrolling for a degree in Pali have so far been Buddhist. Occasionally, non-Buddhist students take a limited course at the department for credits in other degrees.⁵

4.2.3.1 Syllabi for Honours B.A. and M.A. courses in Pali

The syllabi for the Honours B.A. and M.A. courses in Pali are basically the same in the two Universities offering these degrees. Here I will refer to the one published by Dhaka University.

To complete the Honours B.A. degree, students have to take a total of nine papers over a period of three years. In addition to these papers the students undertake in-course exams and a *Viva Voce* exam. The syllabus includes excerpts of Pali Canonical texts,⁶ translation from Pali into English and Bengali and vice versa, history of Pali literature and comparative philology. Noticeably, the Canonical texts are seldom read in Pali since the students find it difficult to read that language in Roman script and very few texts are available in Pali language and Bengali script. Most times Bengali and English translations are used.

M.A. students take four papers and a *Viva Voce* exam at the end of each of

⁴ "The Equivalence committee decides that a candidate after passing the S.S.C. examination with Pali or H.S.C. with at least Buddhist Religion at S.S.C. or H.S.C. with Madhya passed is eligible for admission to the 1st year B.A. Honours courses in Pali. Science and Commerce students are also eligible for admission with the special order approved by the authority on the condition that they have to appear at the admission test arranged by the department if the candidate has minimum qualification of Second Divisions both in S.S.C. & H.S.C. examinations." (S. Baruā 1992, 59).

⁵ Information received from Professor Sukomal Baruā, during a series of interviews held in the Pali department of Dhaka University during Spring 1994.

⁶ Excerpts of: *Dhammapada*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Thera-Therīgāthā*, *Samyutta Nikāya*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha*, *Mahāvagga*, *Cūlavagga*, *Mahāvamsa*.

the two years of course. The program for the first year includes a selection of Canonical Pali texts,⁷ history of Pali language and literature and comparative philology. The second year program includes a selection of Pali and Buddhist Sanskrit texts,⁸ Political History of early Buddhism, Religious History,⁹ Canonical and non-Canonical texts,¹⁰ Buddhist philosophical texts¹¹ and translation from English or Bengali into Pali and vice versa. Again Bengali and English translations are preferred to the Pali texts.

The format of the exams is such that the students have to answer a number of questions from a larger list. Some of the papers contain passages for translation, but it is extremely rare for students to do any of them. The different sections of the exams are worth varying numbers of marks and it is never the case that a student needs to attempt the translation part in order to pass the exam. In the academic year 1993-94, when I was teaching at Dhaka University, the rule was that in order to pass a course students need only to achieve an average grade of 40/100.

4.3 Buddhist Education in the Monasteries

4.3.1 Monastic schools, Pali *tols* and Colleges

During my stays in Bangladesh I had several opportunities to live on the grounds of temples considered among the most important in the country: Dhammarajika Buddhist Monastery, Kamalapur, Dhaka; Sudharsan Vihar, Noapara, Raozan, Chittagong (also known as Agrasara Memorial Complex); and the Chittagong Buddhist Monastery of Buddhist Temple Road in Chittagong. Two of these temples, Dhammarājika and Sudharsan, had regular schools in their compounds. The third, Chittagong Buddhist Monastery, had a relatively good library

⁷ Excerpts of: *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Sutta Nipāta*, *Thera-Therīgāthā*, *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha*, *Cūlavagga*, *Mahāvamsa*.

⁸ Excerpts of: *Milindapañha*, *Lalitavistara*, *Divyāvadāna*, *Buddhacarita*, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

⁹ Excerpts of: *Sāsanavamsa* and *Mahābodhi vamsa*.

¹⁰ Excerpts of: *Samyutta Nikāya*, *Anguttara Nikāya*, *Apadāna*, *Jātakas*.

with Pali canonical texts in Burmese and Sinhalese script. However, I never witnessed any religious teaching activities within the temples, and I do not believe that there were any taking place. It is true that in Dhammarajika's compound there is a small building (one room) with a large board on its door declaring it a Pali school, but, according to Suman Baruā, who always lived in the temple compound and has an M.A. in Pali from Dhaka University, the place was never used for this or any other purpose. This is even more surprising if one considers that Dhammarājika Monastery was, until his death on 2 March 1994, the main residence of Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera, Secretary of the Bangladesh Sanskrit and Pali Education Board. Suman Baruā also told me that nobody attends Pali courses in the monastery. Nevertheless, according to him, from time to time some laymen are granted a certificate in Pali. As for the Chittagong temple's library, the books are seldom used since practically nobody can read the scripts in which they are printed.

Apart from the Bhikkhu Training Centre that I will describe in the next section, the only trace of activity of religious educational institutions within monasteries is in the already mentioned article by Sumangal Baruā about Buddhist studies in Bangladesh (1992, 57) and the data regularly published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. According to Baruā's article, during the last period of British rule a few Pali Tols and libraries were established both in West and East Bengal and since then they served as "premier monastic establishments where considerable number of novices and monks take proper religious education regularly." In the following pages I reprint two tables (Table 4.5 and Table 4.7) from the above mentioned article (S. Baruā 1992, 58) with a list of the Pali Tols and Colleges in Bangladesh between 1983 and 1988, and their geographical distribution (1986-87?) as well as the numbers of students and teachers involved. These data are supplemented by Table 4.6, the information given by the Bangladeshi Bureau of Statistics about the number of Pali tols and the number of students and teachers in Bangladesh between 1979 and 1984.

¹¹ Excerpts of: *Dhammasangani*, *Atthasālinī*, *Patthāna* and *Visuddhimagga*.

Baruā goes so far as to give the following syllabus for Pali Institutions:

Pali Institutions teach the courses; Ādya, Madhya and Upādhi. The Ādya course is of one year's duration with separate syllabi for Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma. After passing the Ādya Examination he may complete the Madhya course in another one year and thereafter he may do the Upādhi course in a further one year. The Ādya Examination consists of two papers each of three hours duration carrying 100 marks. Each of the Upādhi Examinations includes four papers. The syllabi of the first three papers comprise the selected pieces of basic concepts in Vinaya, Sutta and the Abhidhamma - holy Scriptures and the remaining fourth paper of every examination containing Pali grammar, translation and prosody. (S. Baruā 1992, 59)

My impression is that the establishments of Baruā's article and of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' data operate only on paper. First, while I saw one of these Tols, the one at Dhammarajika monastery, I never saw it operating. Second, it seems quite incredible that with a population of less than one million Buddhists, Bangladesh, one of the twenty poorest countries in the world, should have almost one hundred Pali institutions. This seems even more incredible if we consider, as said above, a literacy rate among the Buddhist population in 1991 of 23.6 per cent.

There are two explanations that could account for the figures of Baruā's article. The first is that several monks might affirm that they have regular Pali instruction in their temples simply as a matter of prestige, given that one of the traditional roles of a temple is to be a site of learning. Also, it may be that in fact some Pali tuition takes places in the monasteries. The degree of formality of such classes and the details of the curricula would then be different from those suggested by the data here presented.

The second and less noble cause for this misrepresentation is that Pali schools attract Government financial support. All schools receive subsidies that are meant to be the base for teachers' salaries. According to Baruā's article:

[The Bangladesh Sanskrit and Pali Education Board] receives from the government a grant-in-aid of taka eighty thousand per annum ... Currently a tol receives teachers benefit for two teachers only (a) Tk.100/- per head per month, while a college receives (b) Tk.120/- at the same procedure for three teachers. Besides, a teacher is entitled to obtain 30% of the total amount as dearness allowance. (S. Baruā 1992, 59)

While laymen are given certificates for courses they may never have attended, all novices, according to Gyana Ratna Bhikkhu, get some limited education within the

temple. Still according to Gyana Ratna, a few novices are sent out of the temple for regular education. The training period of the *sāmaṇeras* varies with their intellectual abilities, but on average it is five years long. The future monks are taught the *Vinaya* rules, which they are supposed to memorise, and a selection of *Suttas*, mostly from the *Suttanipata*, which are essential for their role in lay society. Unfortunately, canonical texts are very rarely available and the *sāmaṇeras* have to resort to anthologies both in Pali and Bengali. This is especially the case with regard to Bengali texts, since there is no complete Bengali translation of the Canon.

Table 4.5
Number of Pali Institutions, Teachers and Students in Bangladesh between 1983 and 1988 according to S. Baruā.

Session	Institutions	Teachers	Students enrolled	Candidate passed
1983-84	88	385	1318	1083
1984-85	88	385	1350	1134
1985-86	98	408	1337	1049
1986-87	96	405	1270	1082
1987-88	110	430	1116	901

Source: Sukomal Baruā 1992.

Table 4.6
Number of Pali *tols* with teachers and students in Bangladesh from 1979 to 1984, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Year	No of tols	Teachers			Students		
		male	female	total	male	female	total
1979-80	67	239	27	266	510	198	708
1980-81	75	269	30	299	660	247	907
1981-82	79	284	30	314	719	295	1014
1982-83	79	284	30	314	384	435	1219
1983-84	86	341	30	371	966	352	1318

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 1985, 102.

Table 4.7
Pali *tols* and Colleges in Bangladesh according to S. Baruā.

<u>Location</u>	<u>No. of Pali Tols</u>	<u>No. of Pali Colleges</u>
Dhaka	-	1
Chittagong	-	2
Fatikchari	1	2
Hatazari	-	2
Raozan	2	17
Rangunia	2	4
Comilla	1	1
Mirsarai	2	-
Boalkhali	1	1
Patiya	2	5
Chandanaish	3	2
Anwara	2	2
Banskhali	4	1
Ramu	1	-
Cox's Bazar	5	1
Rangamati	6	3
Barkal	2	1
Khagrachari	14	1
Chandraghona	1	-
<u>Ramgarh</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>
Total	50	46

Source: Sukomal Baruā 1992.

4.3.2 The Bhikkhu Training Centre

In 1981, Paññāvaṃsa Mahāthera went to Sri Lanka and joined the Bhikkhu Training Centre at Maharagama (Colombo) together with twelve other monks from Bangladesh. After this experience, Paññāvaṃsa thought that a place was needed in Bangladesh where *sāmaṇeras* could concentrate on their studies, away from the

distractions of lay communities. Having collected the necessary funds in Bangladesh as well as abroad, in 1985 he founded the Bhikkhu Training Centre at Kadalpur, Raozan. This is a very small complex in Chittagong district, run by Sugatapriya Bhikkhu,¹² which comprises a temple, living quarters for monks, novices and orphans and a cyclone refuge type building to be used as a school once it is completed. In fact, this is the second institution of its kind to be established in East Bengal. According to Paññāvaṃsa Mahāthera (1986, 10), Dharmadhar Mahāsthavir, the present Sangharāja, founded a centre for the education of Bengali Buddhist Monks in the early 1940s. The centre was based in Mahāmuni, Pahartali (Chittagong District), and had to be closed down in 1943 because of financial problems.

The Bhikkhu Training Centre is secluded and the lack of proper paths leading to it makes it difficult to reach even at the best of times. Besides Sugatapriya, three monks leave in the centre together with about thirty *sāmaṇeras* and thirty or so orphan boys. The novices come from all Buddhist areas of Bangladesh: Comilla, Noakali, Chittagong and the Hill Tracts.

Life in the Training Centre is very structured.¹³ Everybody gets up at five o'clock, sits for a session of worship and then has breakfast. Thereafter, the novices go begging for alms in the nearby villages with the help of some of the orphans. This operation requires quite some walking and since not all of the Buddhist villages are conveniently located on the main paths the novices' arrival is announced by a boy banging on a metal plate. In this way, lay supporters are apprised of the novices' arrival and can meet them at cross-roads. The Training Centre appears to be the only place in Bangladesh where monks beg for their food in this traditional fashion. Likewise, the novices of the Bhikkhu Training Centre in Maharagama go on *piṇḍapāta* and this is probably unique in Sri Lanka. The reason for the Bangladeshi novices to go on *piṇḍapāta* is that their monastery is extremely poor and not located

¹² After I left Bangladesh in June 1994, Sugatapriya went on a trip to the United States. There he fell ill and died. I have no news on who has taken over his position at the Bhikkhu Training Centre since then.

¹³ For a detailed presentation of the daily schedule at the B.T.C., see chapter five, section 5.2.

within a village, so that it is difficult for the monks and novices otherwise to get enough food from lay supporters. It is however evident from the Sri Lankan case that begging for alms is considered to be part of the novices training.

The rest of the day, for both novices and orphans, is spent in studying, worshipping, resting, and running the place. The only difference between the lives of the novices and those of the orphans is that the novices take the ten precepts and so do not take any food after midday. It would be more appropriate to say that the novices, as well as the monks, do not take any 'unlawful' food after midday, as I will explain in more detail in the section about food in the lives of the monks, in the next chapter.

The temple's school run by the monks provides education up to the eighth class, but during my visits it appeared that these curricula were not formal. For example, I was told that English was one of the subjects taught, but none of the monks or the novices at the centre could speak English, apart from Sugatapriya, who was certainly not fluent. Even the so-called library is nothing more than a cabinet filled with books and placed behind a door in such a way that access to it is almost impossible.

Once they complete their education, novices stay in the temple until the age of twenty, when some of them are ordained. According to Sugatapriya, most of those who complete their education as novices stay in the Centre and get ordained. Sugatapriya could not estimate how many *sāmaṇeras* have already completed their education at the Centre since its establishment, but affirmed that in the period between 1985 and 1994 twenty *sāmaṇeras* had been ordained monks. This figure seems to be extremely low, considering that it applies to a period of nine years. If Sugatapriya's counting is not wrong, the effectiveness of the Centre is obviously minimal. Still, according to Sugatapriya, the rate of permanence in the order for monks coming from the Training Centre is higher than average.

4.4 Religious education and the transmission of knowledge about Buddhism in other countries: an overview

In pre-modern times, Buddhist temples, like religious institutions of other faiths, have traditionally been sites of teaching of religious and secular subjects alike. In chapter two we have seen how some of these centres developed into monastic universities attracting pupils from faraway places. The subjugation by non-Buddhist people, the colonisation by European powers, and the advent of modernisation have eliminated in Buddhist countries the temples' monopoly of education. In modern times each country has then developed its own education system in which the transmission of knowledge about Buddhism and other religions has acquired different forms.

Among Buddhist countries, Thailand has not been colonised by any foreign power and Buddhism has been the religion of the great majority of its people for many centuries. As a consequence, the education system of modern Thailand has evolved directly from the traditional temple education system. The transmission of knowledge about Buddhism did not have to be reintroduced into the curricula. On the contrary, a centralised, universal and generic education system had to be imposed over the Buddhist one in order to allow modernisation.

We have seen in the previous chapter that the royal family of Thailand paid a key role in the modernisation of the country and that it managed to maintain its supremacy thanks to its ability to master it. An important element in the role played by the Thai royal family in the modernisation process of the country has been the support it has given to the adoption of a modern education system. Wyatt (1994, 223-248) has described in detail how this process took place at the end of the nineteenth century.

As a result of the social and political history of Thailand, Buddhism and related subjects, such as Pali, are widely taught. Curricula are extensive and exams are rigorous. Also, all Thai male Buddhists spend some time during their lives in

monasteries where they are again trained in Buddhist subjects, and monks have exclusive access to modern style universities such as the famous Mahā Culalongkorn University of Bangkok.

The citizens of Thailand are by no means exclusively Buddhist. However, given the close link between Buddhism, kingship, modernisation, and education, Buddhist religion seems to dominate the scene when it comes to education. Peter Skilling, a scholar and a former monk who lives in Thailand, informs me, for example, that in that country:

There have been controversial issues like an order by the Ministry of Education to place images of the Buddha in all schools--that did not go down well at all in the southernmost Muslim provinces, and the order was probably later rescinded or modified. (Peter Skilling, personal communication)

The case of Sri Lanka is quite different. This country was colonised since the beginning of the sixteenth century by the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British. In turn these powers imposed on the people of Sri Lanka an educational system which excluded the teaching of local religions. However, religious education, in the form of the religion of the conqueror, was an important part of the curricula of colonial Sri Lanka. Through the imposition of Christianity the European powers were trying to forge loyal citizens.

It was not until 1870, with the creation of the Department of Public Instruction, substituting "the heavily Christian biased Schools Commision" (Karunaratna 1994, 16), that "non-Christians for the first time got their voices heard." (idem). The Buddhist revival of the same period also facilitated the reintroduction of religions other than Christianity in Sinhalese schools. The credit for reintroducing Buddhist education into Sinhalese curricula is generally given to Colonel Olcott, the American Theosophist. Detailed information regarding the history of Buddhist education in Sri Lanka can be found in the works of Ginigé (1931?) and Karunaratna (1994). This last work also compares the historical evolution of religious education in the United Kingdom and in Sri Lanka.

From Karunaratna's work (1994, 68-69) we learn that starting from 1843 a series of laws were passed in Sri Lanka limiting religious education. As a result,

religious education was restricted to the religion of the pupil, and teachers of religious education were required to be trained in their subject. This state of religious segregation, similar to the one adopted in Bangladesh, persisted in Sri Lanka until a few years ago. Sumana Ratnayaka, a Sinhalese colleague and a former member of the Sinhalese Sangha, tells me that:

Religious education is compulsory in Sri Lanka. However, while when I was a child one was only trained in his own religion, nowadays all pupils are taught the island's four religions and the subject of study is no more called Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam or Christianity, but 'religion'. The different traditions are also studied at university level and it is not at all rare to find students pursuing a degree in a religion other than their own. (Sumana Ratnayaka, personal communication)

Sumana Ratnayaka also tells me that the Sinhalese monks, like their Thai colleagues, have exclusive access to special institutions, such as the Bhikkhu Training Centre of Maharagama, where they can further their studies in Pali, Sanskrit and Buddhism. Again, the curricula are comprehensive and examination quite rigorous.

According to Karunaratna (1994, 68), in Sri Lanka, at least in the twenty-five years before 1988, no particular syllabus was followed in the teaching of any of the religions. Gombrich in his study of traditional Buddhism in that country (1991a, 387 ff.) gives us an example of the contents of texts used there for the teaching of Buddhism both in schools and in the Buddhist Sunday School. The Buddhist Sunday Schools were founded by the Young Men Buddhist Association (YMBA) and for many years they have been the main vehicle for teaching Buddhism to children. Some of the texts described by Gombrich may no more be in use in Sinhalese schools since the recent changes in the religious education curricula described above. It is however quite interesting to note the great similarity between the contents of the texts illustrated by Gombrich and those used in Bangladesh, where pupils are still only exposed to the principles of their own religion and where Buddhism is the religion of tiny minority. The Sinhalese texts, like the Bangladeshi ones, include various formulae for worship, a selection of readings from the Jātaka stories and episodes of the life of Gautama Buddha. Also, the format of the texts from the Sinhalese Sunday school primers presented by Gombrich, where each

lesson is followed by a series of question that the pupil is supposed to answer, is identical to similar parts of the Bangladeshi textbooks.

In all countries religious education is a component of the curricula in at least some institutions. Nowadays the teaching of Buddhism in schools is no more limited to the Buddhist community and to the institutions of those countries, such as Thailand and Sri Lanka, where Buddhism is the religion of the majority of the population. The need for social integration in the United Kingdom, for example, has resulted in the incorporation of non-Christian religions, including Buddhism, in some religious education curricula. (See for example Keene 1993a and 1993b).

Like the educational system of many countries, the British system has its roots in the Church. Schools used to be attached to cathedrals and monks used to be the teachers. Britain was not exposed to foreign colonisation, therefore British society has been for a long time relatively homogeneous. Also, the monarch is in the United Kingdom the head of the Church. Because Church and State coincide collective and official worship in Britain is Christian.

Foreign powers have not ruled over Britain for centuries. However, as a result of the British colonisation of many and diverse countries, and the migrations towards Britain of the people of these, modern British society is multicultural. The introduction of the study of non-Christian religions in British schools is a response to this phenomenon.

Looking at one text used in British schools for the study of Buddhism (Keene 1993a, 56 ff.) one immediately notices the similarities and the differences with the texts used in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Here again one finds the story of the life of Gautama Buddha, the main formulas and doctrine. Also, the format, with a short text followed by a series of questions for the student, is similar to that of the Asian counterparts. However, the English text (Keene 1993a) includes parts on "Being a Buddhist" (p. 56), "The two main school of Buddhism" (p. 64) and, "The spread of Buddhism" (p. 66), which appear to be specifically written for students from outside the Buddhist community.

While Britain has recently included Buddhism and other religions in its curricula, the situation is quite different in India, the country where Buddhism began. When the Indian state was founded, it was decided that it should be a secular state. No religion, among the many practised in that country, was to become the national religion or to acquire special status. To increase integration the State has, at least in principle, cut all links with the Church. According to the senior monk at the Cākmā refugee settlement in Dum Dum, Calcutta,¹⁴ this attitude has resulted in the exclusion of religious education from Indian schools. A consequence of this policy is that the Cākmās in Dum Dum, a community mostly made up of monks and children, do not study Buddhism in their school and claim that there are no textbooks that can be used for this purpose.

4.5 Some considerations

Religious education plays a major role in national integration through the educational system. This is due to the fact that while the generic and standardised training given through the school system allows the social mobility needed in modern society, it is through religious education, or the absence of it, that a society transmits its moral values, thus completing the integration of its citizens.

From the detail above it is possible to see that there are mainly four models of religious education in the school system. Different models have been adopted by some countries in different periods, while other countries have maintained a single model throughout their modern history.

The first model is the one followed in Thailand and until recently in Great Britain. The link between Church and State in those countries is very strong and it is strengthened by the fact that the school system has its roots in the pre-modern religious institutions where the specialised clerical class used to be trained. The

¹⁴ Personal communication Winter 1995/96

religion of the State is by no means the only religion practised by the peoples of those countries. However, it is through the identification of the State with one particular Church and the imposition through the school system of that one religion that the citizens of those countries are integrated.

A second model is the one followed in India and other countries, such as the United States. These are secular states. This means that State and Church are in these nations totally separated. Despite, or maybe because of, the many religions practised in these countries no religious education is given through the school system. The transmission of knowledge about any religion takes place only within the individual communities. National integration is improved by the adoption of a lay moral system. An exception among the countries where this model has been adopted is Japan. In fact, the separation between State and Church was here imposed after War War II by the winning coalition.

A third model is the one adopted in Bangladesh and until recently in Sri Lanka. Here religious education is part of the education curricula, however students are not trained in any religion but their own. At first this model does not appear to further the national integration which is one of the main aims of the modern school system. One could then wonder why this particular model is adopted. The population of the two countries belong to four religions: Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. In both countries the majority of the population belongs to one religious group: Muslim in Bangladesh, Buddhist in Sri Lanka. To impose the religion of the majority through the education system would lead to great unrest in the religious minorities, which are the historical rivals of the majority, and the goal of national integration would then become even more distant. The adoption of secularism does not seem politically viable in these countries because of the existence of strong historical links between the State and a particular religion. Religious segregation seems a possible solution despite the fact that this may fuel the formation of groups based on religion that can undermine the stability of the nation.

In Bangladesh it would be unthinkable to impose Islam on the whole

population without major problems, and the Muslim majority would find it unacceptable to receive religious instruction relating to a religion other than Islam. The model of religious segregation seems to be the only answer to the problem of religious education and the formation of national identity through the school system.

In recent times Sri Lanka has abandoned the model of religious segregation. A new model, consisting in religious instruction in all the major religions, has been adopted there as well as in other countries, such the United Kingdom, even though in a limited form. The adoption of this model requires a certain degree of negotiation between the State and the single national religious sub-groups. While the majority of the population can still belong to a single religious group and the State could be attached to a particular Church, instruction in all the main religions is adopted as a means to greater national integration.

Regardless of the model adopted, it appears from the material discussed in the previous section that the contents of the syllabi of religious education regarding Buddhism is quite similar in all countries. What may differ is the degree of rigour in the application of the syllabi and in the testing procedure. This, however, is not a peculiarity of religious education. The differences between countries are merely due to the different resources available.

4.6 Summary

A modern school system is an important means of national integration in Bangladesh as in any other nation. This remains true despite the fact that due to lack of resources the system does not reach a great part of the population.

Religious education is an integral part of the Bangladeshi syllabus. Pupils are taught the principles of their own religion and, in accordance with the national constitution, they are not required to receive any instruction in any religion other than their own.

The syllabi adopted in Bangladesh for the study of Buddhism and Pali, the language of the scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism, are similar to those adopted in other countries. Also, the programs of formal religious education organised within the Buddhist community are similar to the foreign counterparts. Unfortunately, in consideration of certain characteristics of the Bangladeshi population, such as its low literacy rate, and other factors, such as the economic conditions of Bangladesh, the teaching about Buddhism in Bangladesh is not always as formal and in depth as described in the syllabi.

Due to different historical and social conditions, different models of religious education have been adopted in various countries around the world. Despite the differences, all models aim to further national integration. The model of religious segregation adopted in Bangladesh is one of these.

Chapter five:

Buddhist monks and monasteries of Bangladesh

5.1 Introduction

Despite all attempts to make the Buddhist tradition of Bangladesh part of a Bangladeshi national image, the fact that it follows in the line of the traditions of Southeast Asia, in particular that of Burma, is evidenced by some of its institutions. In order to support this statement, in this chapter I will describe the life of the Buddhist monks of Bangladesh, as well as some of the most important temples and festivals as I was able to observe them during my stays in the country.

Notwithstanding the limitations to my research that I have outlined in the introduction, I take the following description of monastic life as a good representation of the same in any Buddhist temple in Bangladesh. Monks have frequent opportunities to meet, thus influencing and checking each other's behaviour, and monks belonging to the same *nikāya* observe the same formal rules.¹ Furthermore, if the lifestyle of the monks were to be noticeably different from one monastery to the other, this would be unacceptable to the lay community. Laymen acquire the merit necessary for their salvation in many ways, and offerings to the *bhikkhus* are considered the most meritorious acts. It is thought that the more pious the recipient of the *dāna* (offering), the more merit will be acquired by the donor. Therefore a monk of deviant behaviour would not find any support from the lay community.

As seen in chapter three, the Bangladeshi Sangha is divided into three *nikāyas*, all belonging to the Theravāda tradition. Therefore the life of all Bangladeshi monks is regulated by the two hundred and twenty-seven *pātimokkha* rules of the Pali *Vinaya Piṭaka*, as is that of all Theravādin monks.² Naturally, since, the *pātimokkha*

¹ Gombrich 1988, 110-112.

² On the discipline of the Theravāda Sangha, see Gombrich 1988, Ch. 4.

rules were laid down more than two thousand years ago³ they cannot provide for certain issues of modern life. The Buddha himself continuously adapted rules he had issued, to meet the needs of the different situations the monks were to face. Also, just before his death, he declared that minor rules could be changed by the Sangha, provided that the majority of the monks agreed upon these changes.⁴

This, together with the characteristic of Buddhism of being adopted in the lay communities, and sometimes in the Sangha, side by side with other cults,⁵ has resulted in the formation of regional variations in the monastic lifestyle. Through the observation of these variations in Bangladeshi Buddhism we shall be able to point at its Southeast Asian roots.

In the following pages, after describing the monks' ordination ceremony and the institution of temporary ordination, I will look into the details of monastic life. In particular, I will describe the daily life of the average monk, his dress, his relationship with food and money. Thereafter, I will give a general description of the average Bangladeshi Buddhist monastery, followed by a more detailed account of some of the most important monasteries: Dhaka monasteries, Chittagong Buddhist Monastery, Mahāmuni and Thegarpuni temples, the old temples of Ramu, and Aggamedha temple of Cox's Bazār. Besides these, there are a number of other temples, like Sudarsan Vihār (Raozan) or the Bhikkhu Training Centre (Raozan), which I visited and where I stayed on more than one occasion. The communities of these places have contributed to my understanding of Bangladeshi Buddhism and monastic life despite the fact that they are not specifically described here.

One characteristic, peculiar to Bangladeshi Buddhism, that will emerge from the following description and that we have been able to observe also in the previous

³ There is no agreement between scholars and tradition on their dating. Traditionally the *Vinaya* claims the authority of the first council, held just after the Buddha's death, while modern scholars in general argue that it was compiled over a period of centuries. Comparing the Chinese and Pali versions of the *Vinaya*, Gombrich (1988, 91-93) argues that while "the tradition has not yet been proven substantially incorrect" he accepts the date of 350 BCE given by Rhys Davids and Oldenberg as the date of completion of the *Vinayas*.

⁴ *Dīgha Nikāya* 2:154.

⁵ Since Buddhism is not concerned with worldly matters, its followers resort to other cults for these.

chapters, is the lack of material support from the government and the absence of alternative large supporters. As a result the Bangladeshi Sangha is relatively poor and even the most important temples are dilapidated. Another result is the relatively small number of monks and monasteries in Bangladesh, not just in absolute terms, but also as a percentage of the Buddhist community. From the incomplete data given by Chaudhuri (1982, 42) I have estimated a total number of just over eight hundred monks in all of Bangladesh, as illustrated in Table 5.1 below. From the figures of Chaudhuri I have derived an average of 1.3 monks per monastery. Assuming his counting of the monasteries to be correct, this gives a total of 824 monks. Since the Buddhist population of all of Bangladesh is estimated to be of 623,410 individuals (1995 Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh) the percentage of monks in the entire Buddhist population (male and female) is a mere 0.13%.

Table 5. 1
Vihāras and Monks of Bangladesh per Nikāya.

Nikāya	N. of Vihāras	N. of Monks
Sangharāja Nikāya	200	265
Mahāsthavir Nikāya	55	65
Dvāra Nikāya	60	(78)
Chittagong Hill Tracts (Sangharāja Nikāya)	320	(416)
total	635	824

The figures in parentheses were worked out from the average of 1.3 monks per *vihāra* in the other temples. Source: Chaudhuri 1982.

These figures can be compared with those I have calculated for Thailand from the data given by Bunnag (1984, 164). According to her, during the rainy season 1% of the whole Thai male population lives in monasteries as monks. Of these monks 25 to 40% are only temporarily ordained, leaving a 0.75 to 0.6% of full time monks in the total male population. Assuming the male population is 50% of the total (in western countries it is usually slightly less) this gives us a total of 0.375% to 0.3%

monks on the entire population. Also, it is possible to compare the above figures to the historical data given by Spiro (1982, 283-284) regarding Thailand, Sikkim and Bhutan, Tibet and Ladakh, and Burma.

5.2 Entering the Sangha

Admission as a member of the Sangha is open in Bangladesh, as in any Theravādin country, to all males who can meet the requirements embodied in the *Vinaya*. Briefly, to be eligible to enter the Order one should not be affected by any deformity, should be in good health, not in debt or convicted of any crime, have received his parents' permission as well as that of his wife, if he has one.

Ordination is carried out at two different levels. The lower ordination or *pabbajjā* can be taken by boys as young as seven, while aspirants to full ordination or *upasampadā* have to be at least twenty years old.

In Bangladesh, as in the other Theravādin countries of Southeast Asia, all men at some point in their life take ordination and spend some time in a monastery. As to this, Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera and Chaudhuri write

Upasampada (*sic*) (ordination) is compulsory for all male Buddhist in Bangladesh. In his life time every male shall have to be ordained as Bhikkhu or Sāmaṇera. It is a compulsory social obligation of the Buddhists in Bangladesh. (Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera 1983, 11)

A boy is given Pabbajjā at any age from seven and upwards. It is a social tradition that a boy must get his pabbajjā any time before his marriage. This is not welcome in the society that a person will get married even if he did not take pabbajjā (Chaudhuri 1982, 66)

This phenomenon, known as temporary ordination, is peculiar to Southeast Asia (Spiro 1982, 234 ff. and Bunnag 1973, 36 ff) and is not practised in Sri Lanka. There an attempt was recently made to introduce temporary ordination (Gombrich 1984), but it has fizzled out. Besides its social function as a rite of passage into manhood, temporary ordination is taken in Bangladesh (Lewin 1869, 40 and Chaudhuri 1982, 97), as in all the countries where it is practised, as a way of

acquiring and transmitting merit. However, while in Thailand it is customary for the temporary monks to spend at least a rainy season in the monastery, in Burma and Bangladesh this is rarely the case, probably because of the younger age of the temporarily ordained.

The custom of temporary ordination was not practised during the lifetime of the Buddha and I have no information regarding the introduction of this tradition into Bangladesh. The earliest reference I could find to this practice goes back to 1869 when Lewin, describing the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts wrote that

Every year at the “khiong,” just before the commencement of the jooming season, the ceremony of “shinag pruhpo” occurs. This is a religious rite approaching closely in significance to our “confirmation.” The young boys of the village, on attaining the age of 8 or 9 years, are clothed in the yellow garments of the priesthood, have their heads shaved, and at the “khiong,” go through a ceremony which seems to be on their part a kind of assumption of religious duties. They sit all in a circle before the priest; before each one is an offering according to the means of his parents, of rice or cloth, and before each burns a little lamp which is kept trimmed and bright during the ceremony by the sponsor or nearest male relative of each, who sits behind; each of the acolytes reverently joins his hands, bows his head, and makes the responses after the presiding priest. After the ceremony they remain in the “khiong,” dressing and living as priests for seven days, during which time they must eat simply and indulge in no sports or vain pastimes. Women do not participate in this rite, but it is common of a man to perform it two or three times during his life. Is any one dear to him sick, or has he escaped from any danger, he performs the “shiang” as a kind of acknowledgement of God’s mercy, or a supplication for forbearance. (Lewin 1869, 40)

As for the Baruās, in 1908 O’Malley reports that

Every Baruā has to be initiated and to live as a Sāmanera (Srāmana) or novice for at least seven days, and some of them also take vows to be a member of the priestly order for some years after that period following their initiation (O’Malley 1908, 69)

The lower ordination ceremony is performed in the same way, whether it is undertaken for a limited time or for life, and requires that aspiring *sāmaṇeras* be provided with the Eight Requisites. These are the commodities that, according to tradition, a monk requires for his daily life and is authorised to own. They are: three robes, one bowl, one razor, needle and thread, white cloth to filter water, one belt. While the last four items on the above list are easily obtainable and cheap, the robes and the bowl are extremely expensive by Bangladeshi standards. Monks told me that

the price for a set of three robes was around tk.3,000 and that of a bowl tk.1,000.⁶ Moreover, bowls are extremely difficult to get because, given the low demand, the only market-place where they can be purchased is at Cox's Bazār, near the Burmese border, where they are imported from Burma. Given the great difficulty in acquiring them, I have very rarely seen monks owning or eating from bowls. They are usually borrowed from the temple just for the ordination ceremony. Robes, on the other hand, are usually made in Bangladesh, but importation from Sri Lanka is not rare. Besides the items of the above list, the aspiring *sāmaṇeras* bring to the temple a pair of slippers, a pillow and a mattress.

The difficulties, financial and otherwise, encountered by Bangladeshi Buddhists in the acquisition of the minimum requirements for the ordination ceremony are in striking contrast with the situation found in Burma and Thailand. In Burma temporary ordinations are conducted with great pomp and only a minimal part of all the expenses and trouble goes for the organisation of the religious aspect of the ceremony (Spiro 1982, 237-8). In Thailand, besides the large sums of money spent for the ceremony (Bunnag 1973, 165 ff.), a great deal of effort is spent on the paperwork required by the Thai administration to ensure that the person to be ordained is not entering the Sangha in order to escape some responsibility in lay society (Bunnag 1973, 39-40).

The lower ordination ceremony takes place first in the house of the person to be ordained and then at the temple. When I was invited to be present at a temporary ordination ceremony, I was a guest of the local temple and I only witnessed the part of the celebrations that took place there.

On the day of the ordination, the future novice's head is shaved. Then, according to Chaudhuri

After taking bath he wears new garments. In the Afternoon he is taken to the *vihāra* in a procession. The *cīvaras* are nicely folded (which takes the shape of a *cetiya*) and fastened with a waist-band and put into the alms-bowl. While going to the *vihāra* this bowl is put on his head. The ladies and relatives follow him with various articles of *dāna* arranged nicely on the trays and winnowing-fans

⁶ In 1994 the monthly salary of a high school teacher was tk.2,000, the cost of a newspaper tk4. GB£1 = tk.60.

carrying on their heads. Sometimes a band-party follows the procession. This is a happy occasion to earn merit. So most of the villagers participate in it. (Chaudhuri 1982, 66)

In the ordination I was able to witness, four boys, dressed in their best clothes, came to the temple accompanied by the population of the entire village in a very festive mood, followed by a band that had started to play much earlier. The roll of robes fastened with a belt, with the central part raised, was put into the bowl with the rest of the Eight Requisites and carried by the aspiring *sāmaṇeras* on their heads. Relatives followed the boys with trays containing fruit, flowers, and leaves. The bowls with their contents, together with the offerings, were presented to the *bhikkhus* on a table. When the boys had greeted the monks the *dānas* were placed at the monks' feet and the table removed. After everybody had taken the Five Precepts and the Three Refuges, the boys took leave of their elders, touching their feet. Thereafter, the future *sāmaṇeras* took their place, squatting in front of the monks, the bowls in front of them and the bedding items with the slippers behind, holding the roll of robes to their forehead.

It did not seem to me that the future *sāmaṇeras* had undergone any specific preparation for this ceremony. Bunnag, with reference to the ordination ceremonies taking place in Thailand, affirms that

The spiritual or educational requirements for entry into this most prestigious role are minimal. The candidate's preparedness is very generally measured by his ability to learn the Pali responses that he must make during the ceremony, though vigorous prompting throughout by an older and more experienced relative is by no means unknown. (Bunnag 1984, 164)

In the case of the ordinations taking place in Bangladesh, or at least the case I was able to witness, the aspiring *sāmaṇeras* do not learn any Pali verses for the occasion. Whenever they are required to utter Pali verses they are not familiar with (that is, all verses specific to this ceremony) one of the monks would speak before them and thus they would only have to repeat the words.

Ideally, the ceremony should follow the pattern outlined by Chaudhuri, who writes

Then taking the *cīvaras* in his hands he will pray to his would be preceptor (*upajjhāya*) as follows:

“Okāsa, ahaṃ bhante, pabbajjaṃ yācāmi” (Thrice)

- Reverend Sir, I pray for pabbajjā

Then if the bhikkhu gives his consent after observing some formalities (including various queries as laid down in the Pāli Vinaya regarding his competency to be initiated), then the boy will pray again as follows.

“Bhante, sabba-dukkha-nissaraṇa-nibbāna-sacchikaraṇatthāya imaṃ kāsāvaṃ gahetvā pabbājetha maṃ bhante, anukampaṃ upādāya” (Thrice)

- Reverend Sir, in order to realise Nibbāna wherein lies the end of all wordly sufferings, you please accept these *cīvaras* and make me initiated (Thrice)

Thus praying he will hand over the *cīvaras* to the preceptor. After that he will again pray in the same way to receive back the *cīvaras* and make him initiated. Only in the case of ‘*gahetvā*’ as above he should now say ‘*datvā*’ (meaning ‘giving’).

Then the preceptor will take him inside an enclosure and help him in giving up his lay-garments and wearing the *cīvaras*. Before that the boy has to give up all his belongings if he possesses any. After that he will be brought in the hall. He has put on *antaravāsa* and *uttarāsaṅga* and put the *saṅghātī* on his left shoulder. He will then sit before the preceptor and say:

“Paṭisaṅkhā yoniso cīvaraṃ paṭisevāmi”

- Having judiciously considered I use these robes.

Then he will pray for ten precepts (*dasa-sīla*) to observe

... Then the preceptor will say: “Sādhū Sādhū imāni tisaraṇena saddhiṃ pabbajjā- sāmaṇera-dasasikkhāpadāni appamādena sampādetha.”

Then the novice will be asked to contemplate on the actual purpose of using *cīvara*, *piṇḍapāta*, *senāsana* and *gilāna-paccaya-bhesajja*.

Thus the ceremony comes to an end (Chaudhuri 1992, 66 - 68)

The case I observed only slightly differed from the above pattern. The main difference that I was able to notice was that although the boys had shaved their heads in the morning, monks armed with razors symbolically shaved them again. While this operation was taking place, the monks were uttering the Pali names of the first five of the thirty-two constituents of the body: *kesā* (hair), *lomā* (body hair), *nakhā* (nails), *dantā* (teeth), *taco* (skin). This constitutes a standard meditation exercise, which Richard Gombrich tells me is part of *pabbajjā* in all Theravādin countries.

The *sāmaṇeras* thus ordained, unless they have joined the Order temporarily, now start their careers towards monkhood. The only rules they have to observe are the Ten Precepts and they have to respect all *bhikkhus*, regardless of age, as their seniors.

As seen in the previous chapter, the *sāmaṇeras* undergo a period of training and instruction which varies in length according to their abilities and to the available means. Once the *sāmaṇeras* are ready to become *bhikkhus* and in any case not before reaching the age of twenty, they undertake *upasampadā*, the higher ordination.

I am not aware of any higher ordination that took place while I was in Bangladesh. It is not very often that someone takes *upasampadā* and in any event, lay people are not supposed to enter the *sīmā*, the restricted area of some temples where the ordination ceremony takes place.⁷ For these reasons, in this case I have to rely entirely on the information reported by Chaudhuri. He writes

In the *upasampadā* all procedures are to be followed as in the case of *pabbajjā*. In addition to that the following are to be observed:
 ... He [the aspiring monk] should be informed beforehand about the strict rules and regulations to be observed in a *bhikkhu*-life. ... In the case of *pabbajjā* only one *bhikkhu* is necessary, but in the case of *upasampadā* presence of a full chapter of *bhikkhus* (i.e. *bhikkhu-sangha*) consisting of a minimum five *bhikkhus* is essential. ... The Pāli *Kammavācā* is to be read out by a competent *bhikkhu*. The *upasampadā* ceremony will be carried out strictly according to the principles of the *Kammavācā*, which includes seeking permission of the *Sangha* to give ordination, to make many queries regarding the competency of the candidate to be a *bhikkhu* etc. etc. Two competent *bhikkhus* are to be selected to be the *ācāriya* (teacher, locally called “*Sikṣā-guru*”) and *upajjhāya* (preceptor, locally called “*Dīkṣā-guru*”) of the candidate. ... In the case of *upasampadā*, *sanghāṭi-cīvara* is essential, otherwise the *upasampadā* will not be valid. (The *Sanghāṭi-cīvara* is of the same size as *uttarāsaṅgha*. Only difference is that the *Sanghāṭi-cīvara* is two-fold). (Chaudhuri 1982, 98)

In principle the above description seems to be a reliable one. However, since Chaudhuri does not make known his sources, I suspect that his account is merely a representation of how the *upasampadā* ceremony should be performed according to the Pali canon.

5.3 The monks' everyday life

The everyday life of the Bangladeshi monks is not particularly different from that of the monks of other Theravādin countries (compare Spiro 305 ff with Table 5.2 below). However, monastic life is not necessarily the same for all monks, even for those living in the same monastery. The differences are due to many factors. Some monks are devoted to academic studies and meditation. Others are great social

⁷ Women are forbidden at all times from the *sīmā*, but laymen can visit the *sīmā* when no religious function is held there.

workers. Others again have a quite idle life. The monks' day is usually divided between meditating, studying and the performance of their duties for the lay community. As an example of the ideal schedule of the monks' daily routine I here below present (Table 5.2) that followed in the Bhikkhu Training Centre of Raozan.

Table 5.2

Daily schedule in use at the Bhikkhu Training Centre - Raozan.

<u>DAILY WORK AND WORSHIP SCHEDULE</u>	
<u>time</u>	
dawn at 4:00	wake up and get ready for the first worship
4:30 to 5:30	first worship and collective meditation
5:30 to 6:15	different activities according to one own's duty and cleaning of rooms
6:15 to 7:00	first collection of alms and eating of first collection
7:00 to 10:00	study
10:00 to 11:00	bathe and go for alms round
at 10:00	the students of 1st, 2nd, 8th, 9th and 10th classes will go to their respective schools
11:00 to 12:00	lunch
12:00 to 4:00	the students of 3rd, 4th and 5th class will go to their respective schools; the students of 6th and 7th class will recite texts (in the monastery)
4:00 to 6:00	gardening and children's games
at 6:00	get ready for evening worship
6:30 to 7:00	evening worship and meditation
7:00 to 7:15	drinks
7:15 to 10	study
from 10:00	sleep
every Friday morning at 7:00 extra Dharma class	
and from 2:00 to 4:00 children's meeting	

Monks always get up quite early in the morning, usually before sunrise,⁸ and meet for chanting and meditation. This is not always a communal event. A monk could pray and meditate in his room, but this is an exception rather than the rule, provided there is more than one monk living in the temple. The chanting consists in the recitation of verses worshipping the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, and some *suttas*.

After the first worship session the monks, according to the above schedule, attend to different duties, including that of making sure that the temple and their lodgings are tidy. This is not a task that the monks or the novices always perform in person. *Bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇeras* usually get the help of some lay person, like a temple boy, for this kind of menial work, but in some cases the housekeeping work is neglected for days. This is true especially of the large temples of Dhaka and Chittagong, while small temples are usually better kept.

Breakfast is the next activity the monks attend to. There is no prescribed time for this meal and its timing depends mainly on when the lay devotees bring their offerings to the monastery.⁹ It usually takes place between 5:00 and 7:00 AM. The monks do not always eat their breakfast in the monastery. This happens when a householder has invited them to chant *suttas* in his home, or there is not enough food in the monastery to feed everybody.¹⁰ In this last case, monks would find a way to become the much honoured guests of a householder. This kind of invitation is usually addressed to a specific monk who is particularly close to the host family and he would extend the invitation to an agreed number of other *bhikkhus*. These invitations sometimes take the form of proper rituals, called *Sangha dāna*. *Sangha dānas*, where monks first are fed and then recite Pali *suttas*, have to be attended by a group of five or more monks. However, on special occasions larger groups, of a dozen monks or more, are not unusual. *Sangha dānas* are a good opportunity for the

⁸ In this monks are no different from most Bangladeshi householders.

⁹ In some of the monasteries, like Dhammarājika, there is a kitchen and a lay person is in charge of the preparations of the monks' food; however, this is not common.

¹⁰ This can, for example, happen in Chittagong Buddhist Temple, where there is a large and often variable number of monks and novices.

lay devotees to earn merit. Usually they are arranged for occasions like the death anniversary of a family member or the inauguration of a new house.

After breakfast the monks are free and therefore engage in all sorts of different activities, including doing nothing, until lunch time. In the schedule given above, the *sāmaṇeras* spend this time studying, but not all monks do so. In Bangladesh some monks are involved in the running of welfare agencies, like orphanages or centres for the immunisation of children, so some of them spend this time in these occupations.

All activities are interrupted around eleven o'clock, for lunch. In the Bhikkhu Training Centre monks and *sāmaṇeras* beg for their food in the Buddhist villages of the area; however this is a unique case in Bangladesh. Since Buddhists are a tiny minority of the Bangladeshi population there is fear, among monks and laymen alike, even in predominantly Buddhist areas, that the monks would be ridiculed (or worse, attacked) if they were seen begging for their food. The arrangements for lunch are the same as for breakfast, but in my experience monks are much more likely to be invited to private houses for breakfast than for lunch.

After lunch most monks take some rest and then engage again in all sorts of activities, as they do in the morning, until evening. Around seven they gather again, chant together, drink tea, and after a few hours go to bed.

5.3.1 Food, dress and money

Food, dress and money are three components of everyday life the use or form of which differentiate the members of the Sangha from the rest of the world. However, not all monks have the same attitude when dealing with them and, at least as regards food and money, their approach is different from that prescribed in the canon and the commentaries.

Among the Bangladeshi Sangha the most controversial of the three items seems to be food. According to the “Middle Way” philosophy preached by the Buddha, food should not be anything more than sustenance for the body. The monks should not indulge in the pleasures of food, but at the same time they should not mortify their bodies through starvation. For this reason, a series of rules regarding when and what to eat are included in the canon and its commentaries.¹¹ Mainly, monks and *sāmaṇeras* who are in good health should only eat once a day, any time before midday, and they are not allowed to express their preferences about food.

With the passing of time and the adoption of new eating habits in society in general, several local versions of what is lawful or not in food matters have developed among the Sangha. Nevertheless, on one point it seems that all Theravādins have always agreed and this is the prohibition of taking food after midday. Sticking to this principle, Bangladeshi monks, even though breaking the original rule, that prescribes a single meal a day, have both breakfast and lunch before noon. However, the Bangladeshi Sangha is divided into different *nikāyas* and these, as already said, are generally defined by the fact that their members observe different versions of the *pātimokkha* rules. This fact has produced different behaviour among the Bangladeshi monks with regard to food restrictions. Therefore, while agreeing in principle on the food ban after midday, some monks of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya regularly have an evening meal. I could ascertain this in the periods I have spent as a guest in their monasteries. In doing so they are certainly aware of the general impropriety of their act since they do not allow lay people, save those in charge of cooking and serving, to see them at these times. Since I have seen monks of this *nikāya* dining in the presence of other monks, always of the same *nikāya*, this means that there is a sort of agreement among them that allows them to eat all sorts of food after midday.

What monks eat during their meals is, as said above, provided by lay supporters. Consequently, the monks’ diet is the same as that of the families of the

¹¹ For references to the canon on points regarding food and regulations concerning it, see Wijayaratna 1983, Ch. IV, *passim*. Also Rhys Davids and Stede 1921-25, 510 under the entry *bhojana*.

region where they live, though the *bhikkhus* are always honoured with the best food. Bangladeshi monks, regardless of their *nikāya*, are not vegetarians and their diet comprises meat and fish as well as eggs and, when possible, sweets, of which all Bengalis are extremely fond.

Having said that all food is permitted to monks at lawfully scheduled meals, the problem arises of determining what it is still possible to eat and drink outside those times. I was puzzled on seeing that even those I considered very observant monks would freely drink Coca Cola and eat mango-flavoured ice-cream after midday, while refusing a cup of tea containing even a drop of milk. What I could not grasp was the principle, explained to me by some of the monks of the Sangharāja Nikāya, according to which some foods are considered ‘energising’ while others are not. Only food that is ‘energising’ should be avoided after twelve. Something is ‘energising’ when it has the property of giving energy to the body so that it can maintain its functions. Supposedly one could not live on fruit juices, pop drinks, sesame seed biscuits or any fruit-flavoured ice cream, while it would be possible to live on milk or vanilla ice-cream, which contains milk.

On this, the point of view of the Bangladeshi monks is not very different from that of the monks of Thailand, as reported by Bunnag, who writes that:

After this time [midday] he [the monk] is allowed to smoke or chew betel or to drink liquids which are unsweetened or which do not contain milk. In practice this often means that the monk takes liquid to which he has not himself added either sugar or milk, so that, for instance, Coca Cola and manufactured drinks are not prohibited. (Bunnag 1984, 163)

If monks of different *nikāyas* have different approaches to food and related matters, it seems that this is not the case with dress and the possession and handling of money. In dress there has been no substantial change since the Buddha’s time, while concerning money there has been agreement on change.

Bhikkhus and *sāmaṇeras* wear, from the day of ordination, the typical saffron robes that, together with their shaved heads, make them so easily identifiable. In brief, the *pātimokkha* rules regarding clothing specify the robes’ shape, dimension and material, the way they should be properly worn and the quantity that a monk can

possess at any given time.¹² The Buddhist idea behind these rules is that the monks should be properly dressed, their clothes should not be expensive or made of rags, should be functional, make the monks easily recognisable and give no reason for reproof from laymen or members of other sects.

As said above (p. 135), some of the robes come to Bangladesh from other Buddhist countries, mainly Sri Lanka. This has made even more improbable the creation of a regional style. Even between the different *nikāyas* there is no distinction whatsoever in the style or colour of the robes of their members. In this Bangladeshi monks are not different from the monks of other Theravādin countries, as reported by Bunnag (1973, 28) about Thai monks. Robes come in different gradations of colour, from bright orange to deep maroon, and are worn by the monks with no distinction of age or seniority. On this point Chaudhuri (1982, 99) disagrees and writes that “Generally the *sāmaṇeras* and young *bhikkhus* are provided with light coloured *cīvaras*, while the senior *bhikkhus* with the deep colour ones.” But this appears to be fanciful.

Another particular differentiating the life of monks from that of laymen is the relationship the members of the Sangha have with money.¹³ Traditionally monks did not earn their living and lived with food, clothes, medicines and whatever they may have needed, including dwellings, as offered to the Sangha by the lay community. Also, the last one of the Ten Precepts undertaken by the novices and repeated (in substance) in the *pātimokkha* prescribes that members of the Sangha should not touch gold or silver, which has always been taken to include money in general.

This rule seems always to have led to problems in the practical running of the community as well as in the lives of single monks. Many artifices have been conceived at all times to respect it in the literal sense, while being able to cater for the needs of such a large organisation as the Sangha. Lay temple assistants would, for

¹² For references to the canon on points regarding the monk's dress and regulations concerning it, see Wijayaratna 1983, Ch. III, *passim*.

¹³ For references to the canon and the commentaries on rules regarding monastic life and money, see Wijayaratna 1983, Ch. V, *passim*.

example, be in charge of the physical handling of the money. Bunnag (1984, 163) indicates that these practices are still adopted in Thailand; however this is not the case in Bangladesh.

Not being sponsored by a Buddhist government, the different Bangladeshi *nikāyas* are run like modern organisations by the senior monks, in co-operation with lay leaders and, sometimes, with the help of external agencies. This activity involves the administration of the money donated to the Sangha by lay supporters and foreign aid agencies as well as the administration of the monasteries' resources.

What has generally been preserved of the prohibition on handling money is the spirit of the rule. This requires the monks to give up involvement in worldly business with the aim of personal profit. I say "generally", because even though the great majority of the monks are not involved in the administration of the *nikāyas*' financial business, and therefore are exempt from any such accusations, in fact some monks of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya have been accused of impropriety. Members of other *nikāyas* and of the Catholic Church have repeatedly accused the higher levels of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya of the appropriation of large sums of money for personal use.

To end this section on the daily life of the monks, I will spend a few words on another characteristic of monastic life: chastity. All monks and novices observe a vow of chastity. Breaking this rule would mean immediate expulsion from the Order. This vow seems to be universally accepted and respected by all members of the Sangha and nothing else is to be said, or, to put it in the words of Bunnag (1984, 163): "Curiously, though in theory regarded as being a difficult rule to observe, in practice it [chastity] seems to be no more difficult or tiresome than abstaining from one's evening meal..."

5.4 Some monasteries and festivals

At the beginning, the Buddhist movement was a movement of wanderers and renouncers, so the Sangha did not own any kind of dwelling place. Later, but still during the lifetime of the Buddha, under the insistence of lay supporters who wanted to endow the Order with appropriate lodgings and with the establishment of the rule that monks should spend the rainy season in retreat,¹⁴ the first monasteries were built.¹⁵

In the following pages, I will give a description of some of the most important temples of Bangladesh, based on my observations and integrated with the reports of other authors. As seen in chapter two, in ancient times Bangladesh had large and renowned *vihāras*, such as Pahārpur, the Maināmati-Lalmai temples, or the Pandita Vihāra of Chittagong, of which all traces have been lost. In contrast to the splendour and glory of these ancient institutions, the temples of modern Bangladesh, not supported by rich and powerful sponsors, are quite small and simple buildings.

Bangladesh is still largely a rural country and the vast majority of Buddhists live in the region of Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts. Consequently, there are only three temples in Dhaka, about six temples in Chittagong, while certain relatively small countryside villages of the Chittagong Division have two temples, one each for the Mahāsthavir and Sangharāja *nikāya*.

The average Bangladeshi temple consists of a single building. Only in Dhaka, Chittagong and a few other major sites are there temples that are compounds of different buildings, each with a different function. Temples usually are rectangular structures, made of brick or stone and painted in white. At the front of these buildings, along one of the longer sides, there are three openings leading to three small rooms. One of the rooms is the place where the monk(s) and novice(s) of the place live, while the other two are Buddha shrines¹⁶. The central room is the most

¹⁴ Oldenberg ed., 1878-1883; I, 137.

¹⁵ For references about this point in the Pali canon, see Wijayaratna 1983, 35-47.

¹⁶ At times only the central room is a shrine while the other two are the lodgings of the monks.

important. It usually accommodates a large statue of the Buddha, often accompanied by smaller ones, and its walls are sometimes painted with scenes from the life of the Buddha or some well-known Buddhist story, such as that of *Āṅgulimāla*. The third room, very similar to the previous one, has smaller or less beautiful statues than the main one. Due to a great number of thefts that have hit the temples, usually the statues and other objects of devotion, especially if antique or made in metal¹⁷, are kept behind iron bars. The space in front of the temple is usually covered, like a veranda, with a tin roof so that a relatively great number of people can be accommodated during celebrations or meetings.

Due to the very basic and similar style of all temples, it is quite difficult, practically impossible, to find elements that would help one to date them. Moreover, the climate of the region requires that repairs and renovations should be continuously made to the buildings. New layers of white paint are constantly laid over the old ones, with the result that all temples look alike. Unless a temple was built in the last century or so, and therefore there is still some memory of its establishment, most temples are said to be extremely old. Some are traditionally attributed, with no evidence whatsoever, to emperor Asoka.

Given the extreme similarity of most temples, I will here account only for those buildings of particular interest, especially historical, limiting my writing to temples I personally visited. These temples are Mahāmuni Temple, Ṭhegarpuni Temple, the ancient temples of Ramu and Aggamedah Temple of Cox's Bazār. I will also describe the monasteries of Dhaka and Chittagong.

¹⁷ I was told by several monks and laymen that sometimes, as in Ramkot (Ramu), bronze statues are painted so to deceive thieves into believing them to be clay.

5.4.1 The monasteries of Dhaka

None of the three temples of Dhaka is centrally located. Dhammarājika Vihāra, the most important temple of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya and the largest in town, is in Basabo. This is an area divided from the rest of the city by the railway line and includes the slums that the homeless and the beggars of this town have built all along the railway. In his description of the monastery, Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera, the founder of the complex, writes that:

Savar, not far away from Dhaka was visited by Buddha according to Buddhist literature and as confirmed by veteran Bengali historian Late J.N. Bose. King Ashoka had got to erect monuments or Dharmarajika pillars over eighty four thousand spots, and Savar was one of them. In course of time the place has been known as Dharmarajika which again turned into Dhamrai. ... After the name of Ashoka's Dharmarajika pillar the Buddhist Monastery of Dhaka has been named Dhammarājika Buddhist Monastery ... The entire campus comprises an area of four and a half acre of land, gifted to the Buddhists of Bangladesh by the Government for developing it into a centre of upliftment of the Buddhist community. ... Within the campus at present four buildings constitute the entire complex. In one of the buildings one room is reserved for Buddha worship and offerings of flowers and candles etc. Just beside this, Atisha Hall is extended facing to the south. Another double storied building is meant for Dharmarajika Pali College, Dharmarajika Library and a small museum. ... Within the campus a Bodhi tree spreads its branches and leaves ... A standing image of the Buddha is placed upon the pinnacle of a pillar known as Dharmarajika Ashoka pillar, constructed in memory of completion of 2500 years of Siddhartha's birth ... Just some yards away a big double-storied building is meant for housing, educational and technical centre. The inmates of the orphanage dwell in that building. Another one-storied building of several compartments is used as medical centre and printing press. (Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera 1983, 18-21)

The monastery, founded in the late 1960s on land granted by the Pakistani administration,¹⁸ is a compound of several uninspiring buildings, arranged around a large pond, housing, at the time of my stays in Bangladesh, about thirteen monks and thirty-five novices. The compound includes a large unfinished prayer hall, the monks' quarters, an orphanage, a Pali school and a workshop. The building accommodating the monks also contains two rooms for the worship of the Buddha, one on the ground floor, usually open to the public, and one on the first floor. In these rooms several Buddha statues, pictures of important monks and the like have

¹⁸ Viśuddhananda Mahāthera was generally accused by his opponents of being a Pakistani collaborator.

been gathered. This collection constitutes what the monks of the monastery call the museum. The two most important pieces of the collection are an unspecified relic of the Buddha and some ashes said to be those of the Venerable Atiśa Dīpankar.¹⁹ A room on the ground floor is where the monks take their meals and watch television,²⁰ while in another room on the first floor the ashes of a Japanese Buddhist man are preserved²¹.

By Bangladeshi standards Dhammarājika monastery is quite large. The monastery's size and its location in the capital, although the Buddhist population there is very small, are the reasons for its comparative prosperity and fame. However, since this establishment belongs to the Mahāsthavir Nikāya it is not so popular with all the Buddhists of Dhaka. This means that some of the Buddhists in town attend services there only on very special occasions.

The second largest monastery in Dhaka, located in the northern sector of town known as Mirpur, is the Sakyamuni Bauddha Vihāra, led by the Venerable Prajnananda Mahāthera. The temple itself is a small building in Burmese style. This temple, which caters for the Hill Tracts' Buddhists in Dhaka, was erected by tribal constructors in the style typical of the temples of that border region. The area dedicated to prayer and Buddha offerings is a small room with the usual gathering of Buddha statues.

In contrast to the size and style of the temple, opposite stands a large modern building, erected by French architects. This building houses an orphanage sponsored by a French charity that caters for tribal orphan boys and some administrative offices. When I first visited this temple, in 1992, the orphanage was still under construction

¹⁹ Pandit Dīpankara Śrījñāna Atiśa was a famous Bengali monk who lived at the time of the Pālas and went to Tibet, where he lived for some time. Not all scholars agree on Atiśa's nationality.

²⁰ This is the only monastery equipped with a television, which is regularly watched by the monks. In other temples it is rare to find even a radio.

²¹ These are the ashes of a Japanese businessman whose company established the Sonargaon Hotel, a five star hotel in Dhaka. At the man's death his ashes were distributed, according to his will, in various countries. The ashes preserved at Dhammarājika were donated by the man's family to the government of Bangladesh, who put the monastery in charge of preserving them in exchange for an allowance. Noticeably, the small room where the ashes are preserved is the only truly clean room in the entire compound.

and there were only four monks living there. Now with the completion of the orphanage and the project of building a bigger temple many more monks, all of them from Chittagong Hill Tracts, live there, but I was unable to ascertain their number.

The third temple in Dhaka is also located in the northern part of town, near Zia International airport. Its name is International Buddha Vihāra, but in spite of its high sounding name it can be reached only on foot, by crossing an extremely precarious bamboo bridge. When I visited it, in the winter of 1992, the temple was no more than a bamboo hut and only three monks lived there, in the only room constituting the monastery.

The temple belongs to the Sangharāja Nikāya and it is, in the minds of its founders, the *nikāya*'s response to the international popularity of Dhammarājika monastery. Thanks to its location in the capital, Dhammarājika, of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya, which accounts for less than 10% of the Bangladeshi Sangha (see Table 3.1) has always been very popular with foreigners. For this reason it has so far attracted most of the aid that foreign institutions have given Bangladeshi Buddhists. The *bhikkhus* of the Sangharāja Nikāya planned to set up a Buddhist centre in Dhaka of easier access to foreign visitors than Dhammarājika, hence the choice of this location on the way to and from the airport. But, in the summer of 1994 the International Buddha Vihāra had not become completely operative and Dhammarājika was still the Buddhist temple most popular with foreign visitors. One of the reasons of this is that the monastery is advertised as "the old Buddhist temple" in the list of city highlights given to the guests of the Sonargaon Hotel (the only five-star hotel in town). As mentioned above, some of the ashes of the former owner of the Sonargaon Hotel are preserved in Dhammarājika.

5.4.2 The monasteries of Chittagong

The situation is slightly different in Chittagong, since the main temple is on Buddhist Temple Road, a fairly central area once known as Enayet Bazār - Nandankanan. It was established in 1899, after the reform of the Bangladeshi Buddhist Sangha, and belongs to the Sangharāja Nikāya. The small walled compound, all painted in yellow, consists of a main building, a Buddha shrine and a Bodhi tree with a small room for offerings attached to it.

The main building has three floors. Two large symmetrical staircases lead to the first floor, which accommodates a hall for prayer and preaching with a collection of Buddha images behind an iron gate. This is the room where the monks preach and take their meals. The same floor contains a small library with canonical texts in Burmese and Sinhalese script and the rooms of the senior monks. The top floor is a very recent addition, which was sponsored by the Italian branch of the Catholic association Caritas. On this floor are the rooms for the rest of the *bhikkhus* and for the *sāmaṇeras*.

The Buddha shrine, on the left of the main building, is a small construction containing a large Buddha statue. This was unearthed during the construction of the town General Hospital and now is displayed here, behind the usual bars. This statue is believed to be the only remains of the once glorious Pandita Vihāra and for this reason it is an object of great devotion.

The monks who live in Chittagong Buddhist Temple know nothing about its history and I have only found two brief reports of it. R.B. Baruā (1978, 273) reports that the temple was established in 1899 by the Chittagong Buddhist Association of Dr. Bhagirath Baruā. According to the same author, it was through the activities of the first high priests of this temple that Buddhism was popularised in Bangladesh. Similarly, Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera, of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya writes that

This temple was established in the last part of 19th century. Dr. Bhagirath Baruā, then a Buddhist leader was one of those who sacrificed their best for this temple. He was the founder of this monastery as the first construction of it started by him on the land which he bought with his money. At that time he

was the General Secretary of Chittagong Buddhist Association. In 1903 Ven. Dharmavangsha Mahasthavir was the principal of this temple and he reformed it under his proper guidance. In that year a huge Buddha-statue, discovered at the hills of General Hospital of Chittagong, was placed in this temple. (Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera 1983, 16)

The total number of temples in Chittagong is about six, but none of the others is as big or important as the one on Buddhist Temple Road. Also, none of them seem to have been established before the Buddhist reform of the 19th century. I only had the opportunity to visit two of the other temples of Chittagong. One, built next door to one of the city mosques, used to be run by Gñyāṇālok Mahāsthavir, the present Sanghanāyaka of the Mahāsthavir Nikāya, and the first disciple of Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera. This monastery is the stronghold of the Mahāsthavir nikāya in Chittagong. It is a small monastery, arranged around a little courtyard, to which access from the street is possible only through a small gate. Another temple, established a few years ago, is built on top of a small hill, among Muslim huts, on land donated by the government. It has one monk and two novices.

5.4.3 Mahāmuni and Thegarpuni temples

The Mahāmuni temple of Pahartali (Raozan, Chittagong) owes its name to the Mahāmuni temple of Dinnyawadi in Arakan where the Candasāra Buddha image was once preserved. This was one of the most venerated images in Southeast Asia and can now be seen in the Arakan pagoda at Mandalay. It is said that the Buddha image found at the Mahāmuni temple in Bangladesh is a copy of the Arakanese one. R.B. Baruā (1965, 28-30), Chaudhuri (1982, 30-31), Qanungo (1988, 95-96) and Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera (1983, 15) give slightly different accounts of the history of the Bangladeshi shrine, which also happened to be the centre of the nineteenth century reform,²² and the image found there. Both Chaudhuri and Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera give 1813 as the year the temple was founded. In brief, it is traditionally

²² See chapter three.

believed that a certain Cāiṅga Ṭhakur, a Buddhist priest from Pahartali, had visited Arakan and had seen the original Mahāmuni image. Wishing to have a replica of this statue in his own village, he drew a copy and took measurements of the original. Once Cāiṅga Ṭhakur returned to his village he employed some Arakanese sculptors and within six months the image, made of brick and cement, was completed.

The story of the Mahāmuni image of Arakan is closely connected with the religious and political history of that kingdom. The fact that the Bangladeshi Buddhist community attributes special importance to this shrine underlines the close relationship between their tradition and that of Southeast Asia in general and Arakan in particular. Moreover, despite the fact that 1813 is traditionally given as the year of the establishment of the Bangladeshi image and its completion time is given as six months, it is obvious that whether we consider the story of Cāiṅga Ṭhakur to be true or not, the contact with Arakan which inspired the construction of the Bangladeshi statue had to occur at a much earlier date. In fact, the Arakanese Mahāmuni image was removed from that country in 1784. This would support the view of an early relationship between the Buddhists of Arakan and Bangladesh.

The importance of the original Mahāmuni statue is indicated by the belief that this is the only exact image of the Buddha. Many authors report the story of this image; however, the most detailed report seems to be that of Forchhammer (1891), who gives a full description of the temple site and a translation of “extracts from the Mahāmuni thamein (a history of the shrine) and the Sappadānapakarana (Sarvasthānaprakarana), an ancient Arakanese manuscript of great value.” (Forchhammer 1891, 2). In brief, the image was build during the 51st regnal year of Chandrasurya, who ascended the throne of Arakan in A.D. 146. Despite this date being much later than the Buddha’s death, the legend tells that this bronze statue was cast during a visit of the Buddha to Arakan and it is supposed to be a life size exact image of the Blessed One. Once the statue had been completed, according to Forchhammer’s translation:

While the great teacher gazed upon the image it slowly rose as if possessed of life and stood in the attitude of welcoming his elder brother (Gotama); and the

Omniscient One stretched out his right hand, waved his hand, and said (to the image): 'Younger brother, do not stand up. I shall enter Nirvāna in my eightieth year; but you, endowed with the supernatural powers of a Buddha, shall exist for 5,000 years, which I have prescribed to be the limit of my religion; you shall be the means of working the salvation for men and nats.' After delivering this prophecy the Blessed One continued: 'In one of my former existences I was a king on the island of Cheduba. I broke the thigh-bone of a gardener and sliced off a piece of flesh from the back of a young prince; you (addressing the image) are my representative on earth and you shall suffer the results (Kammavipāka) of these two evil deeds.' Gotama then preached a sermon on the Candasāra image - for so he named it. It is the first and only true image of the Buddha. (Forchhammer 1891, 4-5)

After relating the legendary origin of the Mahāmuni image, the Arakanese records presented in Forchhammer's work give a detailed account of the history of the temple and the image until 1784. In that year King Bodawpaya of Burma conquered Arakan and had the statue moved to his kingdom. Forchhammer (1981,7) again tells us that "Until the removal of the Candasāra image the Mahāmuni pagoda was the most sacred shrine in Indo-China; the entire religious history of Buddhistic Arakan centres around this "younger brother" of Gotama ..." The importance of this centre in the history of Southeast Asia is stressed by the fact that

The kings of Pagan, Prome, and Pegu invaded Arakan from the earliest time, often with no other intention than to obtain possession of the sacred image of Gotama preserved in the Mahāmuni temple. The first attempt recorded in native histories is that of King Supaṇṇa, who reigned in the latter half of the first century of the Christian era. (Forchhammer 1891, 7).

The Mahāmuni temple compound at Pahartali comprises several small white buildings scattered over a large area. Its buildings include dwellings for the monks who live there and a meditation centre: a couple of rooms in poor condition. There are also separate temples, built very close to the main one because of its great importance. The shrine where the famous Buddha image is preserved is a cube-shaped building topped by five yellow domes. The inner room, where the renowned statue is placed, is surrounded by a corridor with walls painted with Buddha images.

The temple is visited by many devotees all year round, because this is considered a particularly meritorious act. Many couples - especially among tribal people - come here before their wedding, to bring good fortune to their union. However, the period in which most people visit the temple is during the annual Māghi Pūrnimā fair. This is a very old tradition, which according to Qanungo goes back to

the Mughal period. He writes

The Buddhist fairs of Mahāmuni, Ṭhegarpuni, Forachin etc. date back to the late Mughal period. In the Mahāmuni fair the plains people and the hill people met together to exchange or to trade on goods. People from all corners of the district and of all walks of life gather in these fairs to sell and purchase commodities and to enjoy shows and entertainments. (Qanungo 1988, 561)

Unfortunately, no evidence which could support Qanungo's statement seems to be available. Certainly the fair was a major Buddhist festival at the beginning of the twentieth century, when O'Malley wrote that

There are several temples of special sanctity, at which annual fairs are held - in some on the Māghi Pūrnimā day (the full moon of the month of Māgh) and in others on the Phālguni Pūrnimā, Bishuba Sankrānti and Baisākhi Pūrnimā. On these occasions they light candles in the temples and present clothes and money before the image of Buddha; some Hindus and Muhammadans even do the same. The Chakmās and other hill tribes also present their offerings and hang up long flags, especially at the Mahāmuni temple in village Pahārtali, which is more easily accessible to them than other shrines; here the fair is held day and night for seven days and sometimes more. This village contains three temples, with large images of Buddha, two of which belong to the Baruās and the third to the Mongh Rājā, a hill chief in the Hill Tracts. (O'Malley 1908, 71)

Another old temple, site of the extremely popular Māghi Pūrnimā fair, is that of Ṭhegarpuni. O'Malley (1908, 72) calls this temple Buragosain and places it in the locality called Bagahara or Ṭhegarpuni. This information is not correct. At present both the locality and the temple are known by the same name, that of Ṭhegarpuni, while according to R.B. Baruā (1965, 32) and Visuddhanda Mahāthera (1983, 15), Buragosai is the name of the Buddha statue here preserved.

The author who gives the most complete account of the legend regarding this temple and the statue here preserved is R.B. Baruā, who writes that

At that time there was no human habitation at Ṭhegarpuni. It is said that Chatafru, a descendant of famous Haidamza made this place habitable by killing a tiger. For this reason they are known as the descendants of tiger-killer (Bagmarer gosthi). Rajmahal, an uncle of Chandrajyoti built a monastery at Ṭhegarpuni and planted a Bodhi-tree from Bodhagaya. On the north side of the Bodhi he built a small wooden house (Bodhimandapa) in order to install the sacred image, given by Chandrajyoti. There he dug a tank with the help of Chandam's descendant Chendi. In course of time this Tribhanga Buddha image disappeared after that house had collapsed. The image remained concealed for a period of two hundred years. After that one Nilamani, wife of Haradhan Baruā of Bagkhali in a dream was asked by Buddha to rescue the statue with vessels filled with gold and to build a temple. Nilamani did as instructed, but she could not finish the temple. She entrusted this work to her nephew Haradhan Mahasthavir who built the temple and enshrined the image. From this time onwards this statue was known as 'Budhāgonsai'. According to tradition 'Budhāgonsai' fulfilled the desire of the devotees who prayed and worshipped

him with great devotion. This image was broken into three parts (Tribhanga). It now consists of two parts (upper and lower parts), the middle part being lost. (R.B. Baruā 1965, 31-32).

It is interesting to note the unusual meaning given here to *tribhanga* as “broken into three pieces”. This term is in fact commonly used in Indian iconography and dance to indicate a characteristic posture with the hips moved on one side. It is quite ridiculous to think that the Buddha could ever be represented in this posture.

Chaudhuri completes the above anecdote, giving a detailed report on the recovery of the Buddha statue and the origin of the *melā*. He writes

About the origin of the fair at Thegarpuni, there is a traditional story as follows: About 150 years ago Mrs. Nilkumārī Devī, wife of Śrīdhan Baruā of Bākkhālī, Chittagong, was informed in her dream that a Buddha image was lying in the nearby pond. According to the information searches were made and a Buddha image, broken into three pieces, was discovered along with a jar of gold coins in a pond. But unfortunately the middle portion was missing. Anyway, the upper and lower part of the image were made together and it was installed in a temple erected for the purpose spending all the gold coins received, in the village of Thegarpuni under the supervision of Nilakumārī's nephew Ārādhān Mahāstavir of Karal village. The image was named Buḍā Goñāi (= Buddha Goswāmi). ... The image was installed in the Māghī Full Moon day of 1855 and in every year, to commemorate the event the Thegarpuni Fair (popularly known as Theñāpairar Melā) is held during the period which lasts for about three days. (Chaudhuri 1982. 87-88)

An important piece of information contained in the above account and supported by Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera (1983, 15) is that there was a Buddhist temple and an annual *melā* in Thegarpuni before the Buddhist reform and revival that took place in 1856. Truly, according to R.B. Baruā it is thanks to the institution of the *melās*, as opportunities for Buddhist people to meet, that this religion has been preserved till now in Bangladesh. In chapter three I have mentioned his belief that it was during one of these *melās* that the decision to reform the Sangha was taken. Elsewhere he writes that

These *melas* or fairs seem to have been organised during the period of decay of Buddhism with the object of sustaining people's faith and beliefs in that religion. Buddhism is still found to hold on in this part of East Pakistan perhaps due to the prevalence of these *melas* which are the source of inspiration to the people in general. They give impetus to their religious sentiment by providing them with occasional festivities and social gatherings. (R.B. Baruā 1965, 28)

This theory would support Qanungo's opinion, which places the origin of Thegarpuni and Mahāmuni *melās* in the Mughal period. Unfortunately, as often

happens when we look back to the period before the 19th century reform, no evidence seems to be available which could help in determining the truth.

Nowadays Thegarpuni is a large walled compound. On the right side of the main shrine a few low buildings have been erected. The expansion from the first building, where the famous statue is preserved, seems to be recent. Apparently the reason for this expansion is not an increased number of monks living here, but the desire of members of the different *nikāyas* to have their own premises in such an important location.

Access to the main building is through a yellow gate topped by Asokan lions, wheels and swastikas, Buddhist symbols not commonly found in other temples of Bangladesh. The rectangular shrine is at higher than street level and it is necessary to climb a few steps to reach the veranda which surrounds the edifice. On its roof are several stupa-shaped domes: a big central one, flanked by two smaller ones with very little ones at its corners. The base of the big stupa is painted in pink and, while the minor stupas are entirely white, the central one is decorated with wheels and swastikas, and the words “Buddha, Dharma, Sangha” are written in Bengali script on the lower part of its front side.

Inside, the big central room, with pink-tiled walls, is dedicated to the remains of the celebrated Buddha statue. This is kept in the half of the room enclosed by a pink gate decorated with wheels and a glass panel placed just in front of it. Only the *bhikkhus* have access to the statue. Of this, the lower portion is covered with a saffron robe and the head is placed on top of it, with a quite unnatural effect. The head is then covered with several layers of golden leaf donated by devotees, so that it is impossible to perceive its original features. I believe this to be the only place in Bangladesh where this practice, common in the countries of Southeast Asia, is in use.

The rest of the compound is almost entirely made up of *bhikkhus*’ lodgings. There are some small shrines in the other buildings, but the Buddha images preserved there are of no particular historical or artistic value.

5.4.4 The old monasteries of Ramu and Cox's Bazār

By far the most beautiful buildings among Bangladeshi Buddhist temples are the old temples of Ramu (Cox's Bazār): Lamarpara Temple, Sima Bihār and the Rakhine Buddhist Temple. The reason why such a relatively small centre is the site of such large and beautiful temples is that while nowadays the name Ramu just identifies a village, it once used to refer to the entire region of Chittagong of which Ramu was an important centre (O'Malley 1908, 188 and Qanungo 1988, *passim*).

All of the three temples are made of wood and have a distinctive pagoda shape, with multiple roofs, covered with tin and decorated with various carvings. Writing about the architecture of Bengali temples in the nineteenth century, Hasan states that:

Arakanese, locally known as Maghs, who were Buddhists by faith settled in Cox's Bazār, Chittagong in the late 18th century. They erected pagodas and khyangs where they worshipped. The pagodas are small brick buildings with circular tapering stepped tops and ornamental pinnacles, while khyangs are built of wood and corrugated iron on a brick platform. Their tiered superstructures are carried on rounded wooden columns, and the ornamental gables over the entrance are carved with floral scrolls. (Hasan in Islam ed. 1992, 678)

Lamarpara is the largest and the most beautiful of these temples. It is a compound of various buildings which must once have housed a large and prosperous community of monks. Now only an old lady, the government appointed guardian, lives here together with her family. Nobody remembers when the last monks lived in this place, not even the guardian lady, who claims to be eighty years old and says that her family already lived here when she was born.

Because of the state of dereliction of the buildings only one of the many halls of the temple compound can be visited. This contains three beautiful Buddha statues in Burmese style, placed on finely carved and richly decorated pedestals.

Besides these three outstanding works of art the only other remains of the great treasures of the temple, which has been sacked several times, are two big bronze bells. Of these, one is placed at the entrance to one of the buildings, while the second one, larger and more beautiful, hangs in the middle of a separate pavilion. Both bells

are plain on their surfaces and on top bear a sculpture of two dragons.

The only written material that seems to be available about this temple is the very brief account given by Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera, who writes that

An Arakanese Landlord named Daung set up this temple at Lamarpara, Ramu in the first part of the 18th century. A number of bronze Buddha statues and a big bell are preserved in this temple (Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera 1983, 17)

The two other temples, Sima Bihār and the Rakhine Buddhist Temple, are a smaller, more modest, version of Lamarpara. They both consist of a single wooden building, in the same characteristic pagoda shape. They both are in poor condition but, unlike Lamarpara, they are both still in use.

Outside Sima Bihār, a board states that the temple was established in AD 1785, 2329 BE, and I have not been able to find any information or evidence supporting or denying this claim. Only one monk lives here, with two novices, and since they only speak Burmese I was unable to gather more information from them. In a corner of the temple hall a cabinet contains a collection of canonical books in Burmese script.

The other monastery, the Rakhine Buddhist Temple, is said to have been built in AD 1885, but as in the previous case, I know of no evidence. Both the monks who live here come from Akiab (Arakan), a two and a half hour boat journey from Teknaf, the southernmost town in Bangladesh. I only met the younger monk and since he could only speak Burmese we could not properly communicate. All information I got from him was through the tentative translation of Gyana Ratna Bhikkhu of Chittagong, who was accompanying me.

The young monk told us that the abbot had been here for twenty-three years, while he had just arrived in 1993, hoping to get better education opportunities than in Burma. In spite of the fact that both the monks living here were from Akiab the young *bhikkhu* said that there were no formal links between the Buddhist community of that place and this temple. About the age of the monastery the monk could only repeat the date given on the board outside the temple and added, without giving any explanation, that Lamarpara temple was contemporary or a little older. Some local

people who had come to the temple during my visit affirmed that the temple catered for all the local Buddhists, with no ethnic distinction.

Last, I am here going to mention Aggamedha *kiang* (= temple) of Cox's Bazār. This is a large, old compound in the local Burmese style, catering mainly to the large Burmese Buddhist population of the town. The several wood and stone buildings include a *bhikkhu sima*, several stupas and shrines with Buddha images. An eighty-four year old local monk who has been living here for the past fifty years says that this is the oldest temple in the area. He also says that the temple is named after the monk who transferred it here from Ramu about three hundred years ago, during a period of political instability and wars. This information is partially discrepant with that given by Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera, who writes that

About five hundred years ago a merchant of Arakan named Shwe Zanoo establish this temple at the centre of Cox's Bazār town in memory of his teacher and preceptor Aggamedha Mahāsthavir. The temple was named after the Venerable monk. A large number of ancient replicas of Buddha are present in this wooden temple. It is the oldest temple in Cox's Bazār. Bew Festival (a festival when pure water is thrown about) is held here in every vernal equinox. (Viśuddhānanda Mahāthera 1983, 17)

As has been the case with the other old temples I have here described, it has been impossible to find any primary sources of information about the monastery and its history.

5.5 Summary

Formally, the life of Bangladeshi monks is not very different from that of monks in other Theravādin countries, since, with minor variations, they all follow the same rules. Their daily routine and their dress are similar, sometimes identical, and complete chastity is practised by all of them. However, where a divergence from tradition occurs, this points to the Southeast Asian roots of Bangladeshi Buddhism. This is for example the case with the institution of temporary ordination.

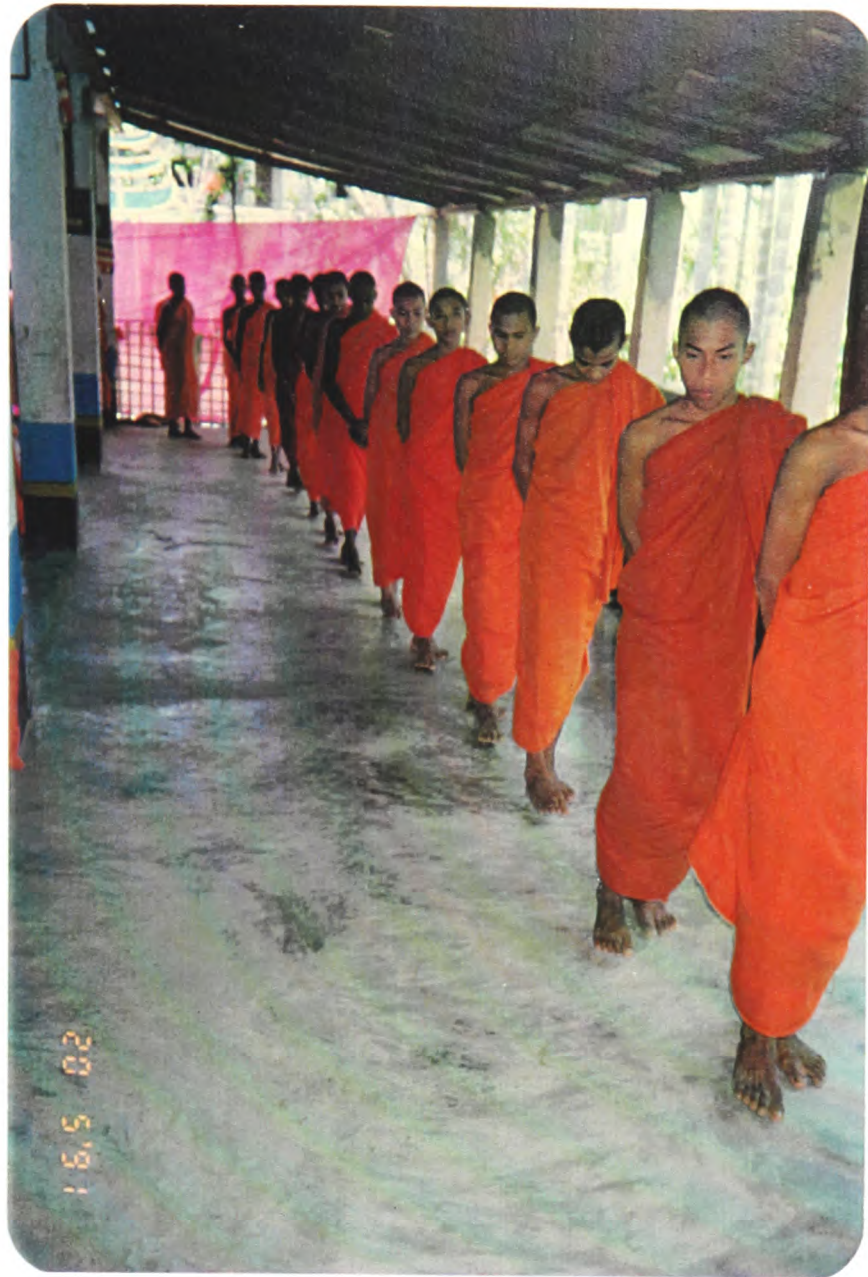
Still, anyone visiting Bangladesh would sense a deep contrast between the life of these and that of all other Theravāda monks because of the low standards in all material aspects of the monks' life. This is due to two factors: the poverty of Bangladesh and the lack of support from the government. The lack of material support is also the cause of the small number of monks among the Bangladeshi Buddhist community and of the dilapidated state of the temples.

We know nothing about the history of most of the temples still standing in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, an observation of some of the establishments exposes again the Southeast Asian roots of Bangladeshi Buddhism. The architectural style of some of the temples, the practice of applying innumerable layers of golden leaf to the *Ṭhegarpuni* image, and, more significantly, the importance given to the *Mahāmuni* temple, which houses the replica of a greatly venerated Arakanese image, are unmistakable signs.



Plate 1.

The corpse of the Venerable Viśuddhānanda Mahāsthavir awaiting cremation.



Plates 2 and 3.

Novices at the Bhikkhu Training Centre. Kadalpur, Raozan.



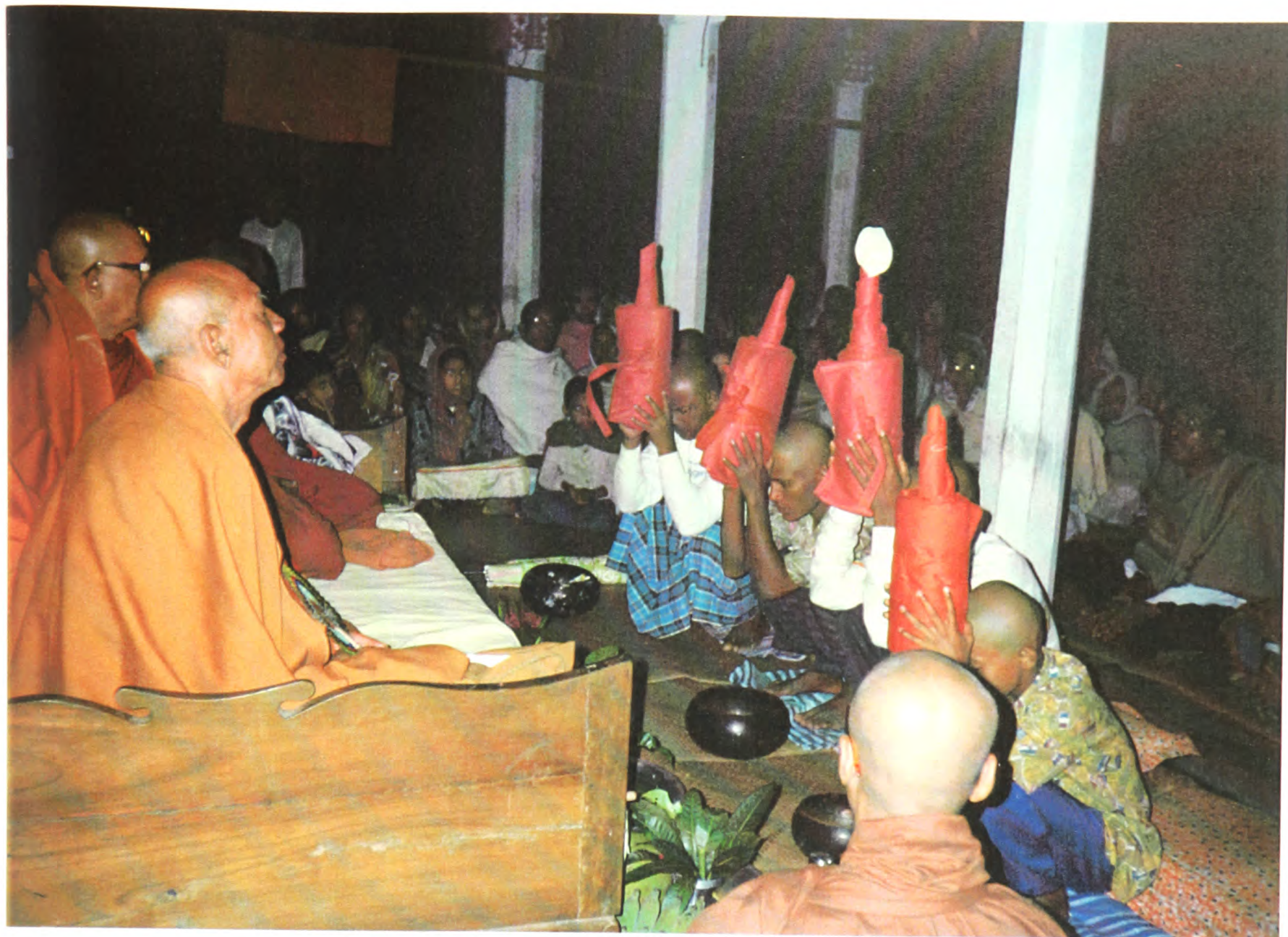


Plate 4.

Ceremony of temporary ordination at Gohira (Chittagong).

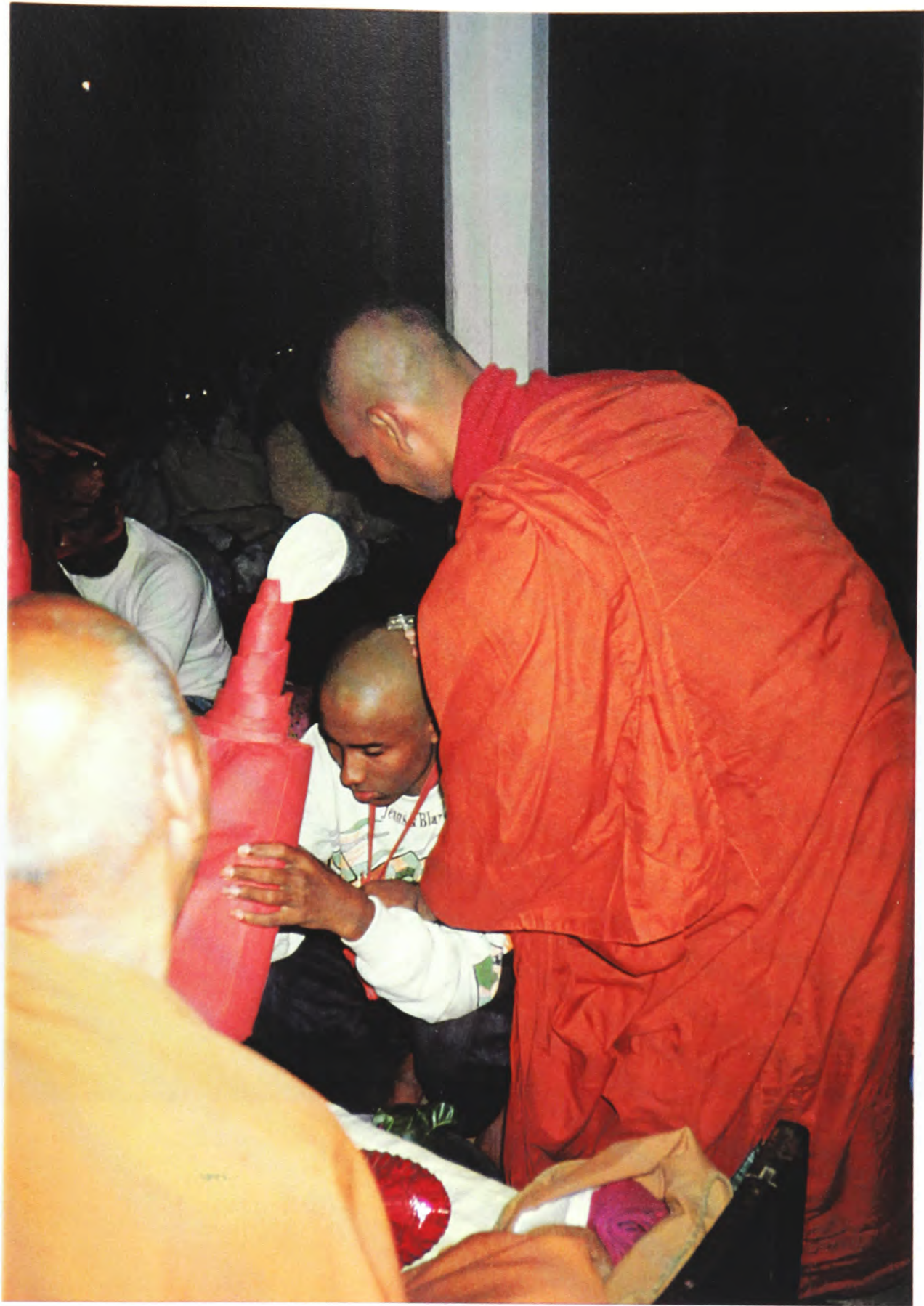


Plate 5.

Shaving of the head during temporary ordination at Gohira (Chittagong).



Plate 6.

A monastery in the Chittagong region.

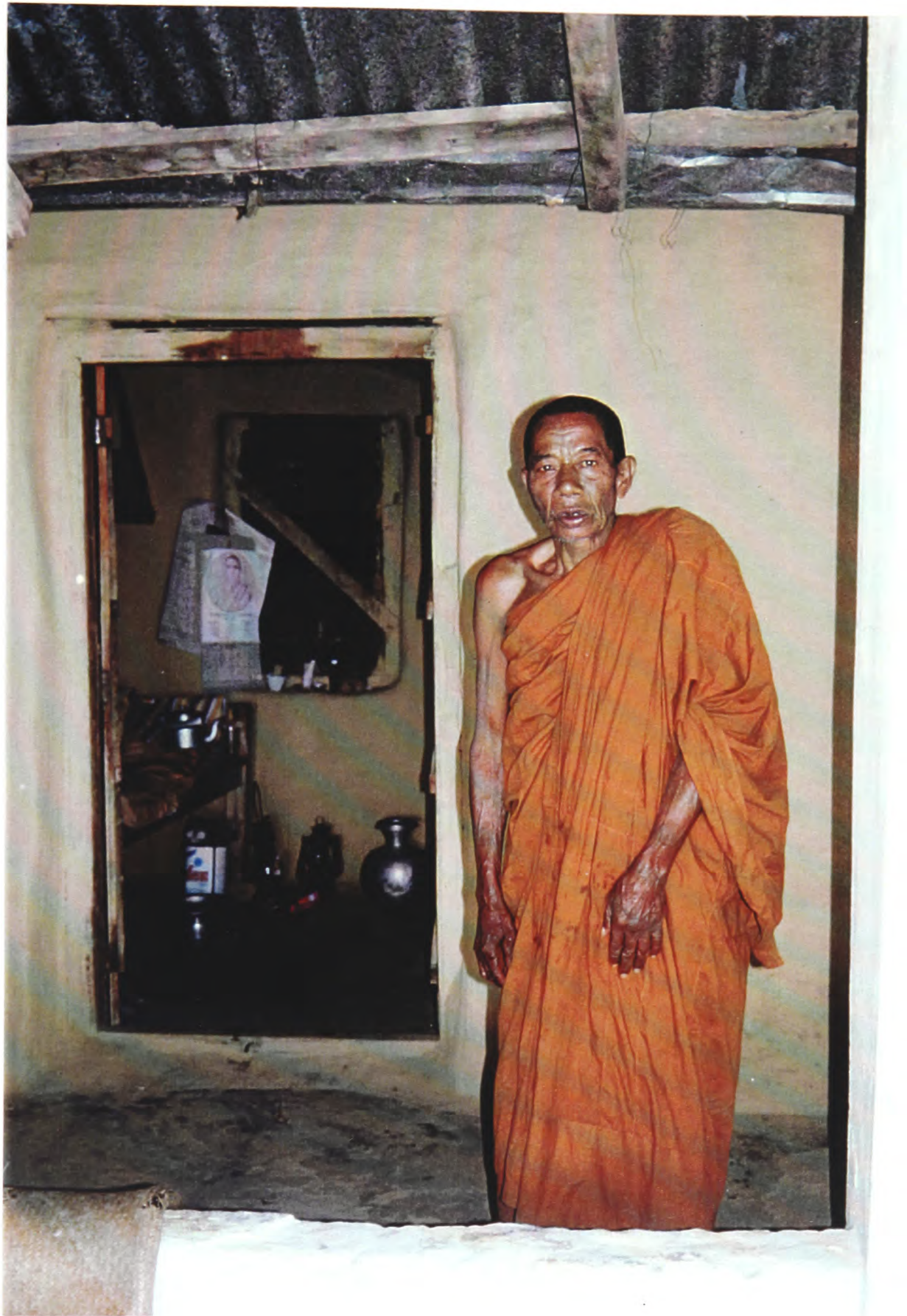


Plate 7.

A monk standing in front of his cell. Chittagong region.



Plate 8.

Dhammarajika monastery. Dhaka.



Plate 9.

Detail of the roof of the Sakyamuni monastery. Dhaka



Plate 10.

Chittagong Buddhist Monastery. Chittagong.



Plate 11.

The Mahāmuni temple. Raozan. (Chittagong).



Plate 12.

Wall decoration. Mahāmuni temple. Raozan. (Chittagong).



Plate 13.

Thegarpuni temple (Chittagong) during the annual *melā*.



Plate 14.

The “*tribhanga*” Buddha image of Thēgarpuni.



Plate 15.

Lamarpara temple. Ramu.



Plate 16.

Bell at Lamarpara temple. Ramu.



Plate 17.

Buddha image. Lamarpara temple. Ramu.



Plate 18.

Buddha image. Lamarpara temple. Ramu.



Plate 19.

Buddha image. Lamarpara temple. Ramu.

Chapter six:

A Buddhist ballad from Bangladesh: the *Sambhūmitta Pālā*

6.1 An apocryphal *jātaka* from Southeast Asia to an Indian tune

To complete my analysis of Bangladeshi Buddhism, in the following pages I will present an example of the literature this culture has produced: the *Sambhūmitta Pālā*. Ahmed, in his article on the folk literature of Bangladesh (1992), underlines the role that folk literature plays “in shaping and determining the character and identity of a nation”. He also says that “Folk literature is essentially an oral literature that is composed with a mixture of past tradition and present experience. It originates within a geographical confine and an integrated social wind [sic].” (Ahmed 1992, 586). From the analysis of the *Sambhūmitta Pālā* it will be apparent that the tradition which has produced such a work, despite some reference to Indian culture, is substantially Southeast Asian.

The *Sambhūmitta Pālā* owes its title to the name of the hero of the story, king Sambhūmitta, and to the particular *genre* of this work: *pālā* in Bengali means ballad. Before proceeding with the presentation of the Bengali text and its English translation, I shall here discuss the subject matter as well as some stylistic details of the *Sambhūmitta Pālā*.

The *Sambhūmitta Pālā* narrates the story of king Sambhūmitta, the compassionate and selfless king of the town of Campaka. Sambhūmitta, made aware of the fact that his brother, Asambhūmitta, is plotting to overthrow him, renounces his kingdom in favour of Asambhūmitta and decides to retire into the forest. His wife, Kesinī, and their two baby children, Jayasen and Jayadatta, accompany him. When in the forest, after a series of incidents, the four get separated. Kesinī is kidnapped by a merchant, while the children, thought to be abandoned, are adopted by a clan of fishermen. Sambhūmitta, grieving over the loss of his family, ends up in the city of

Takṣaśīla. The king of that place has just died leaving no heirs and Sambhūmitta is chosen to become the new king of Takṣaśīla. A series of fortunate incidents reunite Sambhūmitta to his lost wife and children. At the end of the narrative, it is explained that Sambhūmitta and his family had to undergo the pain of their separation due to bad *karma*.

The theme of the *Sambhūmitta Pālā* is based on the *Sumbhamittajātaka*. This is one of the fifty birth-stories of the Buddha collectively known as *Paññāsa-Jātaka* or with the Burmese name of *Zimmè Paṇṇāsa*. This collection of non-canonical texts is believed to have been compiled around the fifteenth century, possibly in northern Thailand (Feer 1875, 417 ff.). The name *Zimmè Paṇṇāsa* in fact means “Chieng May Fifty” in Burmese, and it is thought that the stories may have originated in that city of northern Thailand. Three recensions of these birth-stories, all from Southeast Asia, have survived to our day (see ‘Preliminary Remarks’ in Jaini 1981 vol. 1).

The fact that this particular birth-story of the Buddha should be very popular among Bangladeshi Buddhists, so much so that a new version has been written of the *Sambhūmitta Pālā*, titled *Sambhumitta* [sic] (Kabiratna Priyadarśī Mahāsthavir 1394 Bengali year), with a different ending and added episodes, reinforces the notion that their tradition should be considered part of the Southeast Asian one. This non-canonical Southeast Asian *jātaka* seems in fact to be more popular in Bangladesh than a canonical *jātaka* with a very similar theme: the *Vessantara Jātaka*, “the most famous story in the Buddhist world” (Cone and Gombrich 1977, xv).

The one element linking the *Sambhūmitta Pālā* to Indian culture, though not Indian Buddhist culture, is its style. I have said above that the *Sambhūmitta Pālā* is a ballad; it is however specified in the second line of its title that this *pālā* is also a *kīrtana*: a particular type of religious song. A *kīrtana* is a song in praise of a god, invoking the name, the qualities, and the deeds of that particular god. It is also a love song that the follower of a god sings to express the pain experienced at being separated from the object of his devotion. The *kīrtana* was systematised as a regular

part of worship in South India during the second part of the first millennium and it is closely related to the rise of *bhakti*: the devotional movement.

In Bengal, the *kīrtana* is linked with the rise in the sixteenth century of the Vaishnava movement initiated by Chaitanya, whose family was originally from the Sylhet area (Kennedy 1925).¹ After Chaitanya became a *bhakta*, a man devoted in heart and life to the service of Krishna, he engaged whole-heartedly in musical worship, i.e. the *kīrtana*. Chaitanya also introduced the typical Vaishnava way of begging for alms, inviting people to sing the name of *Hari*. Chaitanya's *kīrtana* was chorus-singing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. Beginning in the evening, the *kīrtana* would increase in volume and emotional intensity as the hours passed: bodily movements and hand-clapping would become more and more intense, sometimes resulting in the excesses of hysteria.

One might think that Buddhism, based on the principle of mindfulness and the doctrine of the Middle Way, could not possibly employ a highly emotional form of worship such as the *kīrtana*. However, the *kīrtana* as a form of devotional singing has gained so much popularity in Bengal as to become associated with all religions. While retaining its character as a song of love and devotion, and other characteristics such as the invocation of the name of the divinity the song is dedicated to, the *kīrtana* has lost in Buddhism its excesses.

Very little is known of the history of the Buddhist *pālā kīrtana*. According to Buddhist music teachers I had the opportunity to interview in Chittagong in 1994, the *Bauddha pālā kīrtana* is a very recent invention. According to the same sources, the first *Bauddha pālā kīrtanas* were composed in this century, as a consequence of the flourishing of Buddhism following the revival of 1856. Supposedly, a relatively large collection of Buddhist *pālā kīrtanas* once existed in Chittagong, but it was lost during the independence war of 1971. The text here presented was taken from the hand-written notebook of a singer in Raṅgunia (Chittagong). In the opening page of

¹ For the story of the *kīrtana* in Bengal see Sānyāl 1989.

the text 1953 is given as the date of its compilation. There seems to be no reason why one should doubt that the Buddhist *pālā kīrtana* is such a recent phenomenon.

One could wonder whether the Bangladeshi Buddhists' adoption of the *kīrtana* as a form of literary expression may indicate a stronger link between this tradition and the Buddhist culture of the Indian subcontinent than I have suggested up to now. Given the nature of the text of *Sambhūmitta Pālā*, we can consider *pālā kīrtanas* to be a recent addition to the rich world of Buddhist performing arts in general, and to Buddhist theatre in particular. As will be apparent from the following text, the *pālā* contains an alternation of narrative (*kathā*) and song (*jhumur*, *sure* and *dīrgha jhumur*). The sung part is divided between chorus and solo singing. In ancient times Indian Buddhist culture produced a large number of theatrical works. In all Buddhist cultures this tradition has been kept alive (Ahmed 1995), despite the fact that Buddhist doctrine does not support this kind of entertainment. The representation of *jātakas* is particularly common. The fact that the Buddhists of Bangladesh alone have chosen the *kīrtana* as a form of expression, and the fact that other religious groups of this region have done the same, seems to indicate a Bengali regional taste for this form, rather than a continuity with any ancient Buddhist Indian tradition.

The following text is divided into three parts. The first part, pages 'a' to 'e' besides the title page, comprises a standard invocation to the Buddha and an invitation to the audience to join in the worship of the Buddha. The second part, pages 1 to 31, is the story of king Sambhūmitta. These two parts form a typical *pālā kīrtana*. The third part, which can be divided into two parts, from page I to VII and page VIII, constitutes a later addition to the main document. The first part is an exhortation to Buddhist unity in Bangladesh. This text, by two different people, of whom we know nothing but their names: Baskara and Binay, is not a standard part of a *pālā kīrtana*. It is possible to date this part to after the sixth Buddhist Council of 1956, which is mentioned on page IV. The last page of the text is on the other hand an alternative wording to the end of Sambhūmitta's story. The owner of the notebook from which I

have taken the *pālā kīrtana*, or one of his predecessor, may have noted this version after hearing it from another singer.

The text of the *Sambhūmitta Pālā* is here presented in its original form. No emendation has been made to the text, but whenever possible suggestions have been given in the footnotes.

6.2 *Sambhūmitta Pālā*: the Bengali text

[a]

Sambhūmitta Pālā
(Bauddha Jātaka abalambane pālā kīrttana)
by²
Madan Mohan Cākmā BA BL
o
Rāsmohan Baṛuyā MA
gāyak
Śrījut Bābu Śaśāṅka Bikāś Caudhurī
Grām: Thegarpuni
P.O. Bhāṭīkhāin
Caṭgrām
২৬শে অক্টোবর, ১৯৫৩ ইখ

[b] Buddha bala man rasanāy - śamaner bhay rabe nā
 śamaner bhay rabe nāre - śamaner bhay rabe nā
Buddha Dharmma Saṃgher nām - balare man abirām
 Buddha Dharmma Saṃgha bine bhabe mukti pābe nā
Aṅgulīmālā byādh chila - Buddher nāme tare gela
 antimer cirasāthī - triratnake bhūla nā
bhabasindhu taribāre - ḍāka Buddha - kaṇṇa dhāre³
 Buddha kaṇṇa dhar⁴ bine - bhabe mukti pābe nā
pākā ghaṛ pākā bārī - ṭākā payasār jamidārī
 prān gele piñjar chere saṅge kichu jābe nā

² Lekhak.

³ Kaṇṇadhāre (one word).

⁴ Kaṇṇadhār. (one word).

ei dhan jan --- niśār svapana
sakali māyār khelā
bhaja triratana --- ore abodh man
bhūlo⁵ nāre aman bholā

(Jh.) (aman) bhūlo⁶ nāre
madhu mākhā - Buddher nām
madhu mākhā - Dharmmer nām
madhu mākhā - Saṃgher nām

(Jh.) bhūla nā - bhūla nā
eman din ār pābe nā.....
jata bala tata bhāla.....
bala bala ābār bala
madhu mākhā Buddher nām

[c] jei mukhe kheyecha bhāi dudh ār cini
sei mukhe tule dibe jalanta āguni
kibā gaṛ kibā bāṛi kibā sādher bau
jābār kāle pather sāthī saṅge nāire keu
strī putra bon bhāginā keha kāro nay
du diner miche māyā pather paricay
kumārer śarā pātil bhāmle nā lay jorā
sonār dehakhānī kemane jābe poṛā
pākāghaṛ pākābaṛi kare diye jābe
lohār sinduker cābi kār hāte rākhibe

⁵ Bhula.
⁶ Bhula.

(Jh.)

keha nay āpnār

strī putra bon bhāginā

jābār kāle pathar sāthī

dudiner miche māyā

pākāghar pākābarī

bhāi bala bandhu bala

ekā ese ekā jābe

[d] kothāyre kāngaler Buddha --- ekbār dekhā dāo āmāre
 sādhaner dhan cintāmanī --- tāre nā herile prān bidare
 kisukhe rekecha Śrībuddha --- dibā niśi biśayānāle jvale jāy aṅga
 tomār premabārī bariśane --- śuśital⁷ kara āmāre
 bhabanadīr kulkinārā nāi --- akul sāgare⁸ mājhe bhāsiye beṛāi
 eman bāndhab nāire --- dākiye jijñāsā kare

tumi satī sundar karunārī sām̐ya - he - mukta debatā mahān

tumi duḥkha baran kariyā sukherī sandhān lāgiyā

janme (2) pāramitā⁹ purṇa karile

labhile jñānā, e mukta mahān

duḥkher payadhī¹⁰ kariyā manthan amṛterī sandhān labhechile jakhan

jīber lāgiyā diyāchile bikāiyā

biśve-karile prajñā dān - he mukta debatā mahān,

trijater¹¹ prāṇī kaṇḍila jakhan debatāgane (taba) kare nibedan

karunerī krandan

kariye śrabān

biśve karile punaḥ abhijān (he) mukta mahān

⁷ Śuśital.⁸ Sāgarer.⁹ Pāramitā.¹⁰ Payodhī.¹¹ Trijagater.

gurube namaḥ

[e]

bandanā

ohe Buddha karuṇāsindu dīnabandhu jagatpati
 Śudhadana¹²-sūta Buddha Gopākānta namastute
 janaka-Rāhula Buddha agatira gati
 sāṣṭāṅge praṇati kari luṭāye kṣiti
 prathamete bandi āmi Śrībuddher caraṇ
 dvitīyate bandi Dharmma āmi narādham
 tṛtīyate bandi āmi sujana saṃhati
 triratna bandanā kari luṭāye kṣiti
 Śrībuddher caraṇe āmi kari nibedan
 dayā kari mama kaṇṭhe kara āgaman

prathame jata bayobṛddha kariyā bandana
 binaya bacane balī niyo sambhāṣaṇ
 pitār caraṇe āmi praṇati jānāi
 ~jāhār oraṣe janmi Buddha guṇ gāi
 mātār caraṇe āmi kariye praṇām
 ~jāhār jaṭhare jamni gāi guna gān
 ār o jata guru āche kariyā bandana

(Jh.) Sambhūmitta pālā āmi kariba kīrttan

(S.) Sambhūmitta pālā kathā śuna sarbbajane
 pāp pūnyer bicār sabe kara mane mane

¹² Śudhodana

ei pālā śunle habe jñāner sañcār

(Jh.) prakāśiyā balba āmi - sabhār mājhār

[1] (K.) Prakṛtir līlāniketane Campaka nagarī prācīnkāle ati samṛddhaśālī chila. Prabāl¹³ boidurjyamani muktār samalanṅkṛta suucca gambuja biśiṣṭha saudha rāji - ei nagarer śobhā barddhan karta: prakṛta dhanasampade Campaka nirantar paripūrṇa chila.

(S.) dhanadhānye puṣpe bharā¹⁴ Campaka nagare
ullāsita prajābṛnda dibā bibhābhare¹⁵
ahiṃsā paramadharma rakṣe sarbbajan

(Jh.) kāhār o aniṣṭha cintā kare nā kakhana
Campaka nagare sukhe rājya kare
Sambhumitta¹⁶ nāme rājā
putrasamajñāne parama jatane
rakṣā kare tār prajā

(Jh.) sabe sukhe chilare
ānanda hillole bhāsi

(D. Jh.) sadā chila Campakabāsī

(K.) Campakarāj Sambhumitter¹⁷ Keśinī nāme ek rānī ebaṃ sei marumaya saṃsāre śāntir nirjhar svarūpa.

¹³ Prabāl

¹⁴ Reference to the work of D. L. Ray.

¹⁵ Bibhāri.

¹⁶ Sambhūmitta

¹⁷ Sambhūmitta

(K.) Asambhū ie pratijñā/pañ²⁰ kari gopane dhana diye pātra mitrake bhulāiyā rākhila jāte tāhārā Sambhūmittake śatru bale mane kare.

(S.) (Jh.) pakṣabhūta karila
 dhanaratna diye bahu
 pātramitra bhulāiyā

[3] (K.) Mahārāj Sambhūmitta ekdin ratnāsane upabiṣṭa āchen, eman samay śaśabyaste janaika amātya ese ballen: “Rājan, jatane pālita sarpa jeman bipul phanā bistār kare āpan prabhuke-damśan karte udyata hay, serūp āpni jāhāke parama sohāge buke dhare pālān karechen - sei cirapoṣita Asmbhū āj Campaka rājya āpnār hāt theke keṛe nebār mānase - āpnāke biṣanetre dekhchen.

(S.) roge kaṣṭa pete²¹ jadi Asambhū kakhana
 tār kaṣṭe duḥkhakliṣṭa biṣanna badana
 roger ārogya hetu dibārātra bhābe
 śuśruṣā karita sadā āhār nidrā cheṛe
 manda buddhi adhārmik duṣṭa durācārī

(Jh.) rājya lobhe bhule gela hena upakārī

(K.) Amātyer mukhe rājā ei kathā śune stambhita o āscarjyanvita haye ballen “~Eyā! Āmār bhāi Asambhū āmār birūddhe ṣaṛajantra karcche! Nā, ei rājya ta āmi ār cāi nā”

(S.) kibā prayojan rājsimhāsan
 kāñcane rañjita bārī
 maraner kāle jāba sab phele

²⁰ The writer proposes these two words, which have the same meaning, one on top of the other.

²¹ Peta.

manimuktā ṭākākāṛi

[4] (K.) “Ei asār rājyer janya sahodarer saṅge juddha kare aṅge kalamkakāli mekhe
rājatva-karā dūrer kathā, āmi indratva-o cāi nā.”

(S.) Asambhūr hāte rājya, svarṇa-simhāsan
binā raktapāte āmi kariba arpaṇ
sukhete kātuk kāl mama sahodar

(Jh.) svarṇa-simhāsane base - haye - rājyaśvar²²
kāṅgāl beśe bane āmi kariba gaman
phalamūl kheyē tathā - rakṣiba jīban

(Jh.) bane gaman kariba
rājya ebe parihari

(D.) jāba āmi tvarā kari, rājya ebe parihari

(K.) Rājā svīya rājyer prati bītaśraddha haiyā banagaman mānase - patnī Keśinīr nikat
bidāy nite gaman karilen.

(S.) (D. Jh.) bidāy nibār tare rājā gela dhīre dhīre
Keśinīr śayanamandire
pariteche cakṣujal gaṇḍa bahi-abiral
śokasindhu uthali antare

(Jh.) rānīke ḍākila
ogo priye uṭha bali

²² Rajyeśvar.

epatir dāk śuni[manuscript illegible]..... rānī

[5] (K.) Rājā takhan balilen: “Priye! Jānte pārlem rājsimhāsan kere nebār mānase Asambhū āmār biruddhe-ṣarayantra cālācche. Jei rājsimhāsaner janya nijer sahodar bidroh²³ niśān urāte pāre, sei rāj simhāsan tuccha tṛna khaṇḍer nyāy ekṣani chere dicchi.”

(S.) bidāy dāo go ohe priye, jāba āmi rājya chere
putra-jugal laye sāthe jeo tomār pitrghare

(S.) āṛ nā dekhibe more
jāba āmi bohu dūre

(Jh.) jābār kāle dekhe jāi go putrgaṇe nayanbhare

(K.) Patiprāṇā satī patir mukhe akasmāt marmmāntika bākya śuniyā ~tāhār hṛidaya
śatadhā bidīrna hate lāgla takhan jantranāy ballen:

(Jh.) saṅge nāhi nile more
garala kheyē jāba mare.....

(D. Jh.) chāyārūpī abhāgīre lao go saṅginī kare

(Jh.) cārūkanṭhe rājāmani
bale takhan ei bānī

(D. Jh.) thāka tumi gr̥habāse, jāba āmi banabāse

23 Bidroher.

[6] (K.) Rājā takhan rāṇike sāntvanār sure ballen: “Priye:

(S.) bāsakāle niketane śṛgāler śabdaśune
 bhave tumi ati bhītā hao
 himsra-paśur garjjan²⁴ śuni banete bhay pābe tumi
 kon prāne - bane jete cāo?

(K.) Rājār ei niṣedh bānī śune rānīr puṣpakamal²⁵ marmmasthal byathita hate lāgla.
 Svāmīr pā duṭī jaṛāye dhare aśrupūrṇa-nayane kātaraṇṭhe balilen: “Jībane kona
 bhikṣā āpnār kāche cāi ni, adya ei bhikṣā cāi.”

(S.) abalā satī nārīr pati alaṅkār
 pati bine nāhi śobhe abanī mājhār
 emon sādher pati tumi je āmār

(Jh.) ekākī nā jete dība baner mājhār

(K.) Rāṇike nānārūp praboth diyeo rekhe jete asamartha haoyāte takhan duijane duiṭī
 śīśu - bokṣe dhariyā janmabhūmi - tyāger nimitta prastut hailen. Eman samaye rājā
 aśrupūrṇa - nayane janmabhūmike sambodhan kariyā ballen: “Ayi! Campaka -
 ānandadāyini svargādapi gariyasī janmabhūmi, śīśukāl hate - tomār śyāmal bakṣe kata
 khelechi tomār phalmūl kheyē ei deha puṣṭha karechi. Mātaḥ tomāke praṇām. Āj
 ciradiner janya tomār kaṅgal chele tomāy cheṛe bahu dūre calla.” Ei bale rāja rānī.

[7] (S.) (Jh.) dhīre dhīre jāy re
 Campaka nagar parihari.....
 projābrinda tyāg kari.....

²⁴ Garjan.

²⁵ Puṣpakomal.

(D. Jh.) prāṇer śiśu bokṣe dhari

(S.) rājār paścāte - cale Keśī mahārānī

(Jh.) nayanjale bakṣa bhāse gajendra - gāminī

(K.) Tāhārā bahu - durgam giri kāntār maru atikram kare abaśeṣe - jalapūrna ek - mahāmatī nadīr kūle upanīta halen latā bitān suśobhita ekṭī ḍumur brkṣer tale śīśu duiṭī rekhe.

(S.) rāṇike takhan laiye rājan
 nadīte kāṭila ~sātār
 niye parapāre rākhi Keśinīre
 jalete nāmila ābār

(Jh.) ~sātār dila nadīr jale

rānīke rākhiyā tīre

putragan ānibāre

prāner bā[ndhab] ānibāre

(K.) Rājā jakhan nadīr madhyapathe ese upasthita halen eman samay duijan Kaibartta kathā bale ekkhānā naukā beye jācchila. Kaibarttader kathā sune pitā āschen mane kare Jayasen ānandita haye balla:

[8] (S.) śīghra kare esa pitaḥ nadī ~sātāriyā
 śāntī kara āmādere bukete dhariyā
 eman niśītha kāle-nadīr puline
 taba pāne ceye āchi bhay lāge prāne

(Jh.)

ohe pitah esare

nite tvarā āmādere

(K.) Takhan Kaibarttagan eirūp nibhṛta ban mājhe śisur ḍāk śune cintita o āścārjānvita hailen.

(S.)

suniyā śísur ḍāk Kaibartta duijan

cintita bismita tārā haila takhan

bijan nadīrkūle kebā śīsu dāke

esa esa bābā boli ati monosukhe

(Jh.)

giye tārā dekhila

kebā śīśu ḍāke sethā.....

(K.) Takhan Kaibarttarā Jayasen o Jayadattake nadīr tīre dekhte pela, śísūduiṭī dekhe tāhāder antare putra-sneher bhāb uday halo. Āj duiṭī putraratna lābh karlām, ei bole:

(Jh.)

ānanda hrdaye tārā

śisūjugal niye gela

tule nila naukā pare

niye gela naukāy kare

[9] (K.) Kaibarttader, prasthāner alpakṣaṇ parei - Sambhūmittā rājā nadī haite uṭhe putrajugal nā dekhe.

(S.)

kabhu brksatale

kabhu nadī jale

dauriye tālāsa kare

kabhu murcchā jāy

kabhu kare hāy

kabhu ~kāde uccasvare

(Jh.) ~kādi rājā dākila

ohe putra esa bali

esa esa prānamani

(D. Jh.) nā dekhiye tomādere bakṣa mama pheṭe jāye

(K.) Putragañer antardhāne - rājā duḥkha pūrṇa hṛdaye:

(S.) ~kādiyā balilen rājā gada gada bhāṣe

jādumani hārālem āji hethāy ese

tāhāder laye jadi kaṅgāler bese

(Jh.) bhikṣā māgi prāṇadharī phiri deṣe deṣe

(S.) rahitām tabu sukhe - e bhaba mājhāre

klāntihārā śāntibharā śīśu bakṣe dhare

(Jh.) duḥkha bhule rahitām

prāṇer jādu bakṣe dhari.....

jāduganer badan here.....

[10] (K.) Anek anusandhān kareo jībanasarbbaśva putra duiṭi nā peye rājā śok
santapta-hṛdaye rānīr nikaṭ jābār uddeśye ābār nadīr jale ~sātār kāṭṭe lāglen.

(S.) punaḥ punaḥ phire cāy

jadi śīśur dekhā pāy

(D. Jh.) prāṇe²⁶ nāhi - māne hāy

(K.) Mahārāj Sambhūmitta jakhan nadīr madhyapaṭhe ese upasthit halen takhan pañcaśata baṇik ekkhāni naukā laye bāniye jācchila. Candrāloke Keśinī soundarjer sāmrajya bistār kare prastarmayī pratimār nyāy nirabe base āche. Keśinīke dekhe - baṇikerā jijñāsā karla.

(S.) ke tumi rūpasī nārī ethā²⁷ ekākini
base ācha kāhār lāgi kaha go ekhani
abaśeṣe mahārānī bale nimnasvare
parapāre gechen rākhi hethāy more
bilamba nā kari tini nite - abhāgīre

(Jh.) sātārī - bipula bārī āsiben tīre

(K.) Baṇikerā eke aparke ballo: “Eman ujval lābanyamayī ramanī mūrṭti āmāder carmma cakṣe ār kakhano dekhinī. Jena sarater pūrṇa śaśī bhūtale patita hayeche.” Jyaisṭha baṇik rānīke ballo: “Ogo rānī, tumi naukāy uṭhe paṇo. Ekhan āmi [11] tomāke niye jāba.” Baṇiker kathā śune basanter samīraṇe mṛdu kampitā mādhabī latikār nyāy rānīr dehalatikā ~kāpīte lagila.

(S.) Kesinī takhan kariye rodan
 kahila binay dhīre
 āmi abhāginī janamaduḥkhinī
 nionā bali go more

pati jadi hethā āsi nāhi here more

²⁶ Prāṇ.

²⁷ Colloquial form of *hetā*.

śokete ākul habe ~kādi - uccaiḥsvare.
ekhano chāre ni dugdha āche eko chele

(Jh) ke khāoyābe²⁸ kṣīr nanī tumi more nile.

(K.) Rānī takhan kātarkanṭhe baṇikke balilen:

(D. Jh.) duṭher śīśu karte rakṣā - cāhitechī ei bikṣā
chāra more tumi kṛpādāne
tāder bihane āmi tabe haba pāgalinī
putraśoke jvali rātridine

(K.) Rānī eirūp anek kākuti minati karā sattveo duṣmati²⁹ baṇik ~tār kathāy kaṇapāt
nā kariyā ~tāhāke balapūrbbak naukāy tule naukā cheṛe dilen. Naukāy,

(S.) patiputra śoke rānī pāgalinī prāy
kabhu uṭhe kabhu base dhare rākhā dāy
āṣādh śrābane jena barśe jaladhar

(D.) tatodhik aśrujal bahe dharadhar

[12] (K.) Patiputra śoke pāgalinīprāy:

(D. Jh..) ~kāde rānī uccaiḥsvare karāghāt kare śire
patiputra kothā bole bole
niṣṭhur baṇikgaṇe tule more jalajāne
niye jāy ati kautuhale

²⁸ Emendated. The author of the manuscript has tried to correct a misspelling. The result is not clear.

²⁹ Durmati.

phāṭiyā jāiteche buk nā dekhiye putramukh
prānapati nā dekhiye ār
patiputra nāhi dekhā kapāle ki chila lekhā
janma kire ~kādite āmār

(Jh.) dugdha kebā dibe go
Jayadattake snehabhare.....
candrer mata badan bhare.....
mā baliye dākbe kāre.....

(D. Jh.) mā baliye dākbe kāre, dugdha kebā dibe go

(K.) Baṇikgan Keśinīke niye jābār alpakṣaṇ pare Sambhūrāj jal hate uṭhe rānīke je br̥kṣer tale rekhegiyechilen, sei br̥kṣer tale giye dekhlen rānī nei. Samudra kalloler mata rājār śokocchās uṭhilo takhan uccaiḥsvare ballen: “Priye! Emon bipader samay tumi-o āmār hr̥daye nidārun śokaśalākā biddha kare cale gele.”

[13] (S.) ḍāke rājā karuṇsvare ohe priye bali
kothāy gele tvarā kare esa ethā bali
sādā śabda mahārānīr kichu nā pāila

(Jh.) cakṣujale bakṣabhāse ~kadiyā uṭhila
eke to śísur soke hayechi kātār
tomāy hetha nā heriyā ~kapiche antar

(Jh.) esa esa prānapriye
kothā³⁰ gele tvarā kare.....
śānti kara abhāgāre.....

³⁰ Kothāy.

(K.) Rājā rānīr śoke muhyamān haye - nad-nadī-bṛkṣa jāhā sāmne dekhitechēn,
tāhākei sambodhan kariyā balitechēn.

(S.) karuṇa rodane bale sambodhane
 giri nadī śākhā śākhī
 ākāś paban deba rakṣagan
 tarulatā paśu pākhī
 kon pathe gele pāba dārā chele
 bala more kṛpā kare
 tāder bihane rahiba kemane
 jāba āmi prāṇe mare

(S.) kothāy jāba ki kariba bhebe nāhi pāi

(D. Jh.) kothāy giye śoke paṛā³¹ ei aṅge³² juṛāi

[14] (K.) Rājā śoker bhār hṛdaye dhāraṇ karte nā pere mṛtyuke ḍākte lāglen: “Ohe mṛtyu, tumi kothāy? Āmāke grās-karo, ohe - rabi śāśī-bajramālā, tomār³³ kakṣacyuta haye.”

(S.) dhvaṃsa kara - abhāgāre
 binaye kātare bali.....

(D. Jh.) duḥkha ār sahite nāri

(S.) śokete pāgal haye Sāmbhūmitta hāy

³¹ Poṛā.

³² Aṅga.

³³ Tomra.

bajrāhata mṛgasama edikete dhāy
 nagar prāntar bahu ghuri abaśeṣe
 upanīta halen tini Takṣaśilā deśe

(Jh.) upanīta halare
 klānta dehe anāhāre.....
 (D.) nagar prāntar ghuri rājan.....

(K.) Rājā Takṣaśilār ek puṣpodyāne prabeś kare āpādamastak kāpaṛ diye ek khānā
 śilār upar nidrā gelen. Sei samay Takṣaśilār rājār mṛtyu haoyāte rājsimhāsan śūnya
 chila, kāran tāhār santān santati keha chila nā. Amātyabarga rājsimhāsan śūnya thākā
 ucita nahe bibecanā kare puṣparath cheṛe dilen.

[15] (S.) dhīre dhīre cale rath atimanohar
 ihār paścāte cale śata śata nar
 dundhubhī nināde nṛtya kare nācoyālī
 gāyak gāyikā gāy diye karatāli.

(Jh.) huludhvani kara go
 meyegane madhursvare.....

(S.) Sambhūmitta je udyāne nidrā jāitechila
 puṣparatha se udyāne prabeś karilo

(Jh.) pradakṣin karila tāre
 saptambār puṣparatha

(S.) purohita takhan ultāye basan
 dekhila caranatal

(Th.)

rājcihna dekhila

Śambhūrājā³⁴ kopāle³⁵

(K.) Purohita takhan sakalke ballen: “Śilāy nidrita ei byakti-i Takṣaśilar rājā habār upajukta calun ei udyāne tāke āj rājpadе abhiṣikta kari.” Takhan sakale utphulla hr̥daye Sambhūrājke dākte lāglen.

[16] (S.) (Jh.)

ohe prabhu utha re

nidrā tyaji-rathopare

(D. Jh.)

.....

(K.) Śambhūrāj³⁶ nidrā ate uṭhe jijñāsā karilen: “Āpnārā ḍākchen kena?” Takhan sakale balilen:

(S.)

rājā tomāy kariba

Takṣaśīlār rājyamājhe

(D. Jh.)

.....

(K.) Takahn Sambhūrāj atikaṣṭe śokabhāb gopan kare madhur kaṇṭhe - balilen:
 “Āpnārā ei pather kāṅgālke kenai bā rājṣade baraṇ karben? Ei rājyer ki kona rājā
 nei?” Takhan prajāpunja balilen:

(S.)

chila ek narapati - sarbbagunajuta

sohāge rakṣita tini chila prajājata

³⁴ Sambūrājā.

35 Padatale.

36 Sambūrāj.

marāṇa kabale tini giyecheṇ go cale

(D. Jh.) ei saṁsāre keha - nāi tār patnīkanyāchele

(S.) sei kārane milimiśi morā sarbbajan
rājabaraṇ tomāy mora kariba ekan

(Jh.) uṭha prabhu rathopare
bilambe ār kārjya nāire

[17] (K.) Śāmbhūrāj³⁷ prajāpuñjer kākuti-minati upekṣā karite nā pāriyā abaśeṣe
puṣparathe uṭhe basilen.

(S.) dhīre dhīre cale rath
Sambhūrājke bakṣe laye.....
jayadhvani karago
jubābṛddha sabe mile
nārīgane sabe mile huludhvani karago

(K.) Mahārāj Śāmbhūmitta³⁸ Takṣaśilār rājsimhāsan lābh kare sucārurūpe rājya śāsan
karite lāgilen. Jakhan prānādhik putraganer kathā mane paṛe, takhan śatasahasra-
br̥ścik jena tār bakṣe daṁśan kare. Tībra jvālā sahja karte nā pāriā tini gada gada
svare balten:

(S.) putradhan bine rājya ~ādhār rajanī
biphal suramyabāṛī hirā³⁹ muktāmani ...[manuscript illegible]

³⁷ Sambūrāj.

³⁸ Sambhūmitta.

³⁹ Hīra.

(D. Jh.) parer chele kole nile maner āgun dviḡunajvale
 eki daśā hala mora bhubane
 dārā putra nāhi dekhā - kapāle ki chila lekhā⁴⁰
 maner āgun nibāba kemane

(K.) Bhoḡ śrotāmaṇḡali ekhāne Sambhūmitter kathā rekhe Kaibarttader ghare
 Jayasen o Jayadatta ki prakāre āche calun ekbār darśan kare āsi.

[18] (S.) Kaibartterā rakṣe śīśu parama jatane
 śuklapakṣer ~cāder mata bāre dine dine

(Jh.) bāṛite lāḡila
 Kaibarttader ghare śīśu
 bimal sundar sthāne cāy thākibāre
 ābilatā aramyatā paṅka ḡṛṇā kare

(Jh.) Kaibartterā cintā kare
 śīśuganer svabhāb here

(K.) Takhan Kaibartterā bālakajugal Takṣaśilar rājāke upahār dilen.

(S.) putrajñāne pālen rājā balak duijan
 pitā putrer paricaya nā hala ekhan

(K.) Jyaistha baṅik - rāṅike niye ~tāhār sahit nānārūp bākya jāl bistār kare bibāher
 prastāb karlo, takhan rāṅi ḡṛṇā o lajjāy lajjābatīlatikār nyāy adhomukhī haye. Sei
 aprītikar - prastāb pratyākhyān karilen. Takhan baṅik ~tāhāke nānārūp pralobhan o
 bhay dekhāila. Rāṅi ihāte o bicalita nā hoye balilen:

⁴⁰ Nibhāba.

(Daśakuśī)

(S.) svāmirūpe pūrbbejāre barāṇiya ei saṃsare
debajjāne karechi pūjan
nirāśer āśātaru chila mor paramaguru
tini bine āndhār bhuban

[19] (S.) satītvadhan bikray kari ei anāthinī
 kabhu nāhi haba tomār āṅga bilāsini
 more badha kara jadi astra āṅgemārī

(D. Jh.) svāmi pade barañ tabu karite nā pāri

(K.) Baṇik byartha manorath hayeo tathāpi bideśe bānijya karanopalakṣye jābār kāle kām pipāsā caṇṭārtha karte pārbe bale rāṇikeo niye jeta. Jakhan se kām kaluṣita hrdaye rāṇike sparśa karite udyata hay, takhan rāṇī śīlānusmṛti-bhāvanā o buddher gun śarana kare ei baliten:

(S.) ohe Buddha dīnabandu uddhār kara abhāgīre
bipade paṛechi āmi ḍāki tomāy bāre (2)
abalāganer bal
tomārī caraṇatal
tumi bīne keha nāire abhāginīr ei saṁsāre
Buddhake ḍākito jabe rānī karuṇsvare
duṣṭha banik rānīr aṅga dharite nā pārere

(Jh.) jvalanta āguner mata
rānīr aṅga tapta takhan
cinte banik mane mane

ei keman adbhutā nārī

(D. Jh.) bujhte āmi nāi pāri, ei kemon adbhuta⁴¹

[20] (K.) Ekdin baṇik Takṣaśilār rājghāṭe naukā ~bedhe rānīke naukāte rekhe katak manoram sāmagraī laye Sambhūrājke upahār dilen. Takhan rājā baṇikke ballen: “Baṇik mahāśay adyarātri eikhāne nāṭyābhinay habe. Tāhā dekhe jāben.” Takhan baṇik sasambhrame ballen: “Mahārāj naukāte āmār strike rekhe esechi.”

(S.) hethā jadi thāki āmi ke rakśibe tāre
se kāraṇe thākte nārī kṣama prabhu more
narapati Sambhumitta⁴² Jayasen Jayadatta
 nadir kūle dila pāṭhāiye
 pāṭhāiye dila re
bālak duijan nadir kule

(S.) henakāle Jayadatta kare jijñāsan
bala dādā kṛpā kare pūrbba bibaraṇ
kebā mātā kebā pitā moder ei saṃsāre
ki prakāre elem morā Kaibartter ghare

(Jh.) bala dādā dayā kare
 mātā pitā kebā moder

(D.) kothāy moder janmabhūmi prakāśiye bala tumi

[21] (K.) Ai dike naukār moṭhye putraśokabihvalā rānī Jayadatter ei marmmasparśī

⁴¹ Adbhutā.

⁴² Sambhūmitta.

bānī śrabaṇ kare tār hṛdayviṇa pratyek tār jhaṅkār diye uṭhla. Tini bhāblen: “Eta rātre nadīr upakūle bālak duijan eirūp balābali karechen kena? Tārā o ki āmār putra Jayasen o Jayadatter mata hatabhāgā haye janmagrahan karechen. Dekhī tārā ār o ki bale.”

(S.) (D. Jh.) naukāte ~dārīye rānī śune bālaker bānī

kān pātiye ati sābdhane

Jayasen balen takhan ogo bhaire kara śraban

duḥkher āgun uṭhila mor prāṇe

(S.) janaminu rājḱule morā rājār chele
mātā pitā abhāgārā hārai nadīr kūle

(Jh.) tumi ati šísu chile

(D. Jh.) balitechi ekhan bhāire

(S.) Campaka nagarī moder śūna janmabhūmi
Sambhūmitta pitā moder - Keśinī janani

[22] (K) Jayasen o Jayadatter kathā śune rānī bujhte pārlen. Sei bālak duṭī ār keha nay, tāhāri putra Jayasen o Jayadatta.

Manihārā phaninī jena punaḥ maṇi prāptite dhairjycyūta⁴³ ghaṭe seirūp rānī hārānu⁴⁴ nidhi putragan peye ār sthir thākte pārleṇ nā. Unmādinir mata nauka hate uthe: “Hāy putra Jayasen, hāy putra Jayadatta, āmi toder kaṅgālinī mā esechi.”

(S.) śokete ākul hoye ~kādi uccai svare

⁴³ Dhairjacyūti.

44 Hārāno.

bālak duijan jaṛāye dhare bakṣopare

(Jh.) ~kāde rānī ghana ghana
bakṣe dhari jādugan
pāiyā putra ṭhana

(D. Jh.) Keśinīr kathā śune bujhila bālakgane
 moder mātā ei abhāginī
 mā, mā, bali karuṇasvare ~kāde-rānīr caraṇ dhare
 śokasindu uthale takhani

(Jh.) omā, omā, mā [manuscript illegible]
 bakṣe dhara āmādere
 aṅga moder abaś hala.....
 kothā chile etadin

(D. Jh.) jādugan bakṣe dhare ~kāde rānī uccaisvare

[23] (K.) Rānī prāner dulāl duṭī bakṣe jaṛāye dhare ajasra dhārāy ~kādchen. Takhan ekjan lok ei byāpār dekhe baṇiker niykaṭ giye balla. Takhan gṛtāsikta analer nyāy baṇiker rāg prajjvalita haye uṭhla. Se rājsamīpe giye ballen: “Rājan! Āpni je praharī pādhāiyāchen, jānte pārlum tāhārā atyācār kareche.” Baṇiker mukhe rājā ei kathā śunibāmātra - kroḍhāinvitta simher nyāy garjjan kare ghātakke ḍeke ballen: “Ohe ghātak. Śīghra nadīr kūlhate balak duṭī maśāne niye badh karo. Jena tāder pāpbadan ār dekhte nā pāi.” Takhan ghātak rājār ādes peye.

(S.) hāte asi cakṣulāl daurī hethā jāi
 dante kare kharamara jamadūt prāy
 niṣthur ghātak takhan tīkṣṇa raśi diyā

bālakere bādhe tvarā khasiyā khasiyā
 bandan sthān hote rapta paṛte⁴⁵ lagla
 jantranā - sāhite nārī⁴⁶ ~kāddiyā kahila

sāhite nārī⁴⁷ go
 eman jantranā māgo
 rakta paṛe dhara dhara

(D. Jh.) bala ghātak tvarā kare bādhle kena āmādere

[24] (K.) Pāṣān hṛday ghātak bālak jugaler kathā śune bahu tarjjan garjjan kare
 ballo: “Kena ~bedheci ei kīla, ei lāthi, ei capeṭāghāti tār uttar debe.” Ei bale bālakder
 sahyaśaktir atīt kīl lāthite tāhāder aṅga jarjarita kare maśāne niye calla. Eman samay
 hṛday bhedī karun bilāpe diganta mukharita kare tārā balle:

(S.) aṅga moder abas halo cale nā caran
 abhāginī māke phele śvaśāne⁴⁸ kari gaman
 āmāder hay hārā habe jena jñānahārā
 nayanete bahibe dhārā bakṣa pheṭe jāy (ekhan)

(Jh.) calilām, cālālām
 anāthinī māke pheli
 masānete janmer tare
 putraganer duḥkha dekhe
 ~kade rānī mahāśoke
 āmār maraṇ kena hala nāre

⁴⁵ Paṛite.

⁴⁶ Nārī.

⁴⁷ As above.

⁴⁸ Śmaśāne.

ei duhkha nā dekhite
putraśokī haoyār āge
eki chila mor kapāle
dahite hāy śokānale

[25] (S.) luṭāye paṛila bhūme putra putra bali
mahājhare paṛe jena dharāte kadali

(Jh.) gaṛāgaṛi diye ~kāde
karāghāta kari buke
ālu thālu beśe rānī

(K.) Janaika paṇḍit pather madhye bālak jugaler kāhinī śune byathita hṛdaye rājār
nikaṭ ese ballen: “Rājan! Āpni adya je bālak bhṛtya - duijaner prāṇadaṇḍer ādeś
diyechen tāhārā prakṛta doṣī kinā bicār kare dekhā āpnār ekānta ucit chila. Rājan bicār
nā kare doṣī sābyāsta karā ihā rājadharma nahe.”

(S.) rājyer rājā jadi kabhu svecchācārī hale
rājyabāsi jvale mare rājār pāpānale

(Jh.) rājār amaṅgala sumaṅgla jata
ghaṭe rājyer nr̥per guṇe
rājār /nr̥per⁴⁹ guṇe prajāgan, dukhī sukhī sarbbakṣaṇ

[26] (K.) Paṇḍiter ei sunīti pūrṇa-bānī śune rājā ballen: “Paṇḍita mahāśay
purnendur amal dhabala jyotssnāy andhakār rajanī jeman ālokita hoye uṭhe, seirup
āpnār jukti pūrṇa-bānī śune āmi je tāhāder bicār nā kare mahābhul kare phelechi, tāhā
bujhte pārlem.” Takhan rājā ek dūtke ḍeke ballen: “Ohe dūt śīghra śvaśāne giye bālak

⁴⁹ The two words are given as alternatives.

duṭī niye esa.” Ghātak asahāy mṛga śisur nyāy ei bālakduṭī dharāsāyī kare niṣkaṣita
asi uttolan pūrbbak tāhādigake badh karite udyata haiyāche, dūt badhy sthāner kichu
dūr hate ei dr̥śya dekhe ākul kanṭhe bale uṭhla,

(S.) rākho rākho ohe ghātak
kāṭa nā go ebe bālak

ādeś more kareche
nite tāder rājasthāne

(D. Jh.) uddhār kare bālakgane nila tvarā rājasthāne
 nṛpati takhan kare jijñāsan
 mṛdu bhāṣe tāhādere
 kaha bhṛtyagan sab bibaraṇ
 prakāśiye tvarā more

[27] (Jh.) kibā kārja karecha
baṇiker patnīsane
niśītha rajanī joge

(D.) bhay lajjā tyāg kare prakāśiye balore

(D. Jh.) nīpatir kathā śune kahila bālakgane
 ati duḥkhe kariye rodan
 bañiker patnī nahe tini moder mātā hay
 ohe rājan karaī śraban

(Jh.) śuna rājan moder bāṇī
tini moder hay jananī

(D.) dekhlem mātā abhāgārā bali tomā ihā tvarā

(K.) Bālakder ei kathā śune rājā āścārjānvita haye ballen: “Priya bālakgan tomrā Kaibartter chele haye. Bañiker patñike “mā” bale paricay diccha kena?” Takhan bālakgan balla raktākta dui hasta añjalī baddha kare kātār kanthe ballo:

(S.) Kaibartta nay moder pitā karaha śraḇaṇ
prakāśīye kaba tomāy moder bibaraṇ
janaminu rājjakule morā rajār chele

(Jh.) mātā pitā abhāgārā hārāi nadīr kule

[28] (S.) Sambhūmitta pitā moder Keśinī janaṇī
mātrbhūmi Campakanagar sampadaśālinī

[illegible]

(D.) dukhhinī jananī moder āche rājan naukāpare

(K.) Jayasen o Jayadatter kathā śune rājā bujhlen, ei bālak duiṭī ār kei nay, ~tāhār sneher dulāl Jayasen o Jayadatta. Takhan ~tāhār badanamaṇḍal apūrbba ānande haṭāy megamukta ākāśer nyāy ujval haye uṭhla. Takan tini svarṇāsan hate uṭhe ballen: “Batsagan! Āmi tomāder abhāgā pitā Sambhūmitta” ei bale.

(S.) jarāye dharila rājā tvarā tāhādere
ksane ksane buke dhare mukhe mukha kare

(Jh.)

ānandāśrū bahila

ganḍa bhesa dhara dhare

nayan jugale rājār

(D.)

kibā suk, svarga suk - ei saṁsāre putra mukh

(S.)

bālake takhan

kariye rodan

kahila kātara svare

janam duḥkhiṇī

moder janaṇī

āche pitaḥ naukopare

[29] (K) Pitaḥ baner hariṇī jeman byāḍher jāle baddha haye byāḍher hāte bahu
lānchanā bhog kare, tadapa āmāder mātāke baṇik lauhaśṛaṅkhaler dvārā naukāy
~bedhe rekhe ~tāhāke asahanīye jantranā dicche.

(Jh.)

ohe pitah bali-re

tomār carantale

(D.)

cala pitah nadīr tīre, moder māke ānibāre

(K.) Mahārāj Sambhūmitta putraganer mukhe prāṇapriyār kathā śune āhlāde unmattva⁵⁰ haye nadīr tīre giye baṇikke ballen: “Ohe bhai baṇik! Tomar naukar upar je nārītā āche, se āmār sahadharmminī. Ekdīn gabhīr rātre daibadurbipāke paṛe ~tahake ek nadīr kūle hārāye phelechilam, bhāi kṛpā kare āmār jīban saṅginīke phirāye dāo.” Rājār eirup kathā śune baṇik balla: “Phirāye dicchi Mahārāj, ~tāhāke niye jān.” Takhan,

(S.)

rājā uthi naukopare

Keśinīr nām dhare

50 Unmatta.

(D. Ph.)

ḍāke tini ati karuṇasvare
prāṇapatir kathā śuni rānī haye pāgalinī
~kādiye uṭhila uccaiḥsvare

(Th.)

mūrcchāgata hala rānī
rājār carane pare

(D.)

etadine pati dekhi, mūrcchāgata hala rānī

[30] (S.)

caitanya labhila jabe satīkulamani
param sohāge tuli kahe naramani

(Th.)

ohe priye ~keda nā
cale⁵¹ ebe rājpure
putragan tomār kache

(D.)

cala ebe rājpure, putragan laye sāthe

(S.)

patnīputra laye rājā gela rājpure
bājila maṅgalabādyā ati miṣṭasvare
rājā Sambhūmitta ānande pramatta
ānanditta naranārī
ānanda bājar basila ebār
Taksaśilā rājapuri

(Jh.)

ānander bājar basila
Taksaṣilā rājyer mājhe

51 Calo.

rājā rānīr milan hala
 mātā-putrer milan hala

(D. Jh.) mātā putrer milana hala, ānander bājār basila

(K.) Jātake ukta hayeche - purba janme-o Jayasen o Jayadatta Sambhūmitta rājār strī rānī Keśinīr putrarūpe janmagrahaṇ kariyāchilen. Sei janme rānīr ekānta anurodhe rājā Sambhūmitta putradvayer krīṛār-janya bṛkṣāgra hate duiṭī pakṣīśābak (sārī pakṣīr chānā) nāmāye diyāchilen. Śuk o sārī bāsāya phire [31] śābakadvayer adarśane bicched jantraṇāy abhibhūta hayechila. Krīḍā śeṣ hale rājā Sambhūmitta - śābakadvayke ābār jathāsthāne rekhe esechilen. Śābakadvhay phire peye śuka sārī biśeṣ pulakita hala. Śābakadvhay haraṇ kare śuk sārīke asahya bicched jantraṇāy rekhe punaḥ phirāye deoyāy rājā Sambhūmitta - ihajanme pūrbbajanmer duṣkarmmer janya svīya putradvay o rānīke hārāye aśeṣ bicched jātanā bog karataḥ punaḥ tāhādigake - phire peyecchilen.

(S.) je jeman karma-kare e bhabasamsāre
 teman karmmer phal nite habe śire
 Sambhūmitta pālā ebe hala samāpan

(Jh.) premānande Buddha bala ohe sādhuban

samāpta

bala Buddha bala - bala jay-jay bala sabe
 premānande bāhu tale
 nirbānada dure jabe

[I] torā ciniyā neyare⁵² svajāti bandhugan

(āmār) Buddha Dharmma Saṃga dhane (2)

ahimsvār mantra diye jīb tvarāte⁵³, e dharāte udāy halo triratane

kālpanik pujā chārī, arahater pujā kari

bhaba sindhu pāri dite ai dayāl bine,

hiṃsā nindā dalādali cheṛe kara kolākoli⁵⁴

juger hāoyā gāye tuli aikya bandhane

ābhijātya jed chāra, nikāya gaurab tyāṅkara

maitrī bhābanā kara ekāgra mane

dui saptamī ek masete amābasyā pūnimāte⁵⁵

mantra niya ekyogete antima sādhanē

gr̥hi jarā pañcasīle - sakāle ār baikāle

nā hay jīban jābe biphale taribi kemane

sarbba dik mangala habe - jāti dharmmer gaurab bārbe

dīn Bhāṣkarer ei prārtana jātir carane

[II] din kāṭhāilām tomāre bhābiyā bhabe

.....

dharmmare = dibā halo - abasān - ~ādhār dekhe- kā~pe⁵⁶ prān

jam kokilā uṭhila ḍhākiyā

āśāy (2) railām basi, dekhā-dibe ekdin āsi

āj kāl kare dīn gela caliyāre (2)

(dharmmare) jñāti bamdhur manda-balā- aisab karlām galār mālā

kebal tomāy pāiba baliyā

jadī tumi dekhā-dibe dayāl bale jāmbē sabe

dhānkā bājuk duniyā juṛiyāre (2)

52 Neore.

53 Tarāte.

54 Kolākuli.

55 Pūrnimāte.

56 ~Kāpe.

(dharmmare) ahimsā parama dharmma taba dharmmer sāra marmma

jhībagan jāy uddhār haiyā

Bhāṣkare kay cintāki ār tumi jār karṇadhar

sāhas ācche se isārā pāiyāre (2)

[III] morā dhvaṇśa halem maitriṛ bihanere bandhu

husiyār Bouddha janagane

(bandhugan) jāder nitṛtve cali tārā kare dalādali

marme mari paraṣpar śune

nānā bahi istāhāre jāti kutsā pracār kare

ei bhābe pragati ki ānere bandhu

(bandhugan) Bauddha dharmme janma niyā abouddher nīti laiyā

svārthāndhe-phiri jane (2),

muṣṭhimeya Bauddha jāti, na bujhi pragatir rīti

dhamśa kare nānā pratisthānere bandhu

(bandhugan) saṅjoga rākhi paraṣpāre, mete uṭhe⁵⁷ aikyer sure

rakṣā nāhi ei kalpanā bine

hiṁsā nindā kara tyāg juger hāoyā gāye mākha

maitrī bābanā⁵⁸ rākha aikya bandane

(bandhugan) kul, nikāy jed chāṛa, svadharmer unnati kara

śunen Bauddha jana sādharane

dīn bhāṣkarer ei prārtanā jene śune cup theko nā

lāgche āgun moder gharer kone

[IV] bhaja Buddha deb, kaha Buddha deb, laha Buddha debe⁵⁹ nāmre

biśay bāsanā- chāṛi mahā⁶⁰ nidrā parihari

⁵⁷ Uṭho.

⁵⁸ Bhābanā.

⁵⁹ Deber.

⁶⁰ Moha.

sei jan nirbbān kārī
 bāḍjāo midāṅga⁶¹ ḍol⁶² premānande Buddha bala
 ānande Buddha gun gāore
 dutiyāṁpi tātiyāṁpi -- svaran⁶³ kara puna bari⁶⁴
 bhabanadīr o pārete cala
 śākīa kula mani -- dibaśa rajanī
 bhramarā⁶⁵ Buddha - gun gāore
 Buddha nām rase -- sei⁶⁶ jan bhāṣe
 sei jan nirbbān pāyare

jāgare jāgare baṅgīya Bouddha - kenare rayecha ghumyā (2)
 jegeche cīn, sinhala jāpān - jhegeche tibbat nepāl bhūṭan,
 bārmāmā śyām haye - āguyān - saśtha saṅgīte⁶⁷ mātiyā (2)
 svārdḍha⁶⁸ dvi sahaṣra barṣa somoe - Bauddha dharma uṭhibe udiye
 ahīnsār mantre pṛṭhibi - juṛiye - uṭhibe purna - jāgiyā (2)
 mahāmānaber bānī āgata prāye - ātma kalahe - (morā) kenare hāy,
 svamāj⁶⁹ dainandin hacche mṛta prāy, svārthāndher mohemajiyā
 hiṁsā - dvaṣ dvaita kālīmā muchiye, jata dalādali jāore bhūliye
 abheda dolāte duliye (2) āiṁsār patākā laiṇā ... (2)
 dina Bhāṣkārār ei nibedan, maitrī bhābanāya rata kara mana,
 aikier surete kari kolākuli - daore prān saṁpiyā ... (2)

⁶¹ Mṛidaṅga.

⁶² Ḍhol.

⁶³ Smaran

⁶⁴ Bāri.

⁶⁵ Conventional religious literary motif, which was already present in Kalidasa's *kavya*. The mind sucks the nectar of the Buddha's name, as the bee sucks the nectar of flowers. Ecstatic enjoyment = *rasa āsvāda* (Sk.) tasting the (sweet) flavour. From the 18th c. onwards this is a typical Bengali motif in the worship of Kālī and Krishna.

⁶⁶ Jei.

⁶⁷ Saṅgītite.

⁶⁸ Sārdḍha.

⁶⁹ Samāj.

[V] Buddha bala Dharmma bala - man ekbār Saṅga bala
 Buddha Buddha - Buddha bole bhabanadīr pāre cala , (2)
 bhabasindu taribāre - dhāla Buddha⁷⁰ kaṇadhāre
 Buddha je kṣudhārī anna - Buddha je tṛṣṇār jal
 jale Buddha - sthale Buddha - caṇdre Buddha - surje⁷¹ Buddha
 anale anile Buddha - Buddha namare bhūmaṇḍhala

ār bandhu nāire

aikēbal Buddha-bine

aikēbal Dharmma bine.....

aikēbal Saṅga bine.....

(Jh.) jege uṭha Bauddha jubak svamāj jācche chāre khāre ... (2)
 tathāgater gourab tarī dhubibeki ghor aṇdhāre ... (ai)
 ābhijātya moḍal jata, calche nāre rītimata
 abidyaya haye mohit lāṭhi ghurāy ghare ghare ... (ai)
 dhvaṇśa hay jāti Dharmma, bujhiē dāo sār marmma
 svārthak kara svīyajanma - svadharmmayī⁷² rākha ghere⁷³... (ai)
 śīkṣita nāyak jārā - dalādalite ātmahārā
 jñāne⁷⁴ tāder hṛday bharā svārthāndhe svamāj dhvaṇṣakare
 baṅgīya Bauddha chātrēr prati, dīn Bhaṣkarer ei minati
 ahiṃsā maitrī ki pragati bujhiye dāo tāder tare

[VI] man tui sādhan bhajan karli nā

(Jh.) - sādhaner dhan cintāmani tāre cinte pārli nā

dhara man kathā dhara Śrībuddher smaran kara (hāy hāy re)

⁷⁰ Corrected by the author ,who had originally written: Buddha bala.

⁷¹ Sūrje.

⁷² Svadharmmaī.

⁷³ Ghire.

⁷⁴ Ajñāne.

Buddha Dharmma Saṃga balle, pāper bhay ār rabe nā re (man)
 janma jvarā⁷⁵ bhaba byādhi rabe nā
 guru guru guru bala ai mantra tomāy kebādila (hāy hāy re)
 dhākār matan dhākle tāre - dekhā pābe hṛd āntare (reman)
 āsaletē dhākār matan dhākte jāna nā
 kothāy ghar kothāy bārī kothay kara basat girī (hāy hāy re)
 Sāriputra Mudgalāyan chila tārā prabhur śiṣya haila
 tumi kon jugete kon śiṣya kule bala nā
 (Jh.) prāni hatyā curi ār o jejan karibe
 babicārer⁷⁶ phal jīb niraye jāibe
 mithyā kathā surāpān jejan baribe⁷⁷
 dine-dine bhāgya lakṣī⁷⁸ tāhāre chāṛibe
 śīlete sadgati hay svajan prakāse
 sādhu saṅge raṅga kara esa sādhu bhāṣe
 sādhu saṅge kara prīti bhatti māthā noyāiyā
 bhakti latā diye tāre caran dhara jarāiyā

[VII] nadīr bhāb nā buje (man) se nadīte jhāp dio nā
 nadīr akul pāt[h]ār- dio nā sātār
 jhāp- dile se kul pābe nā
 giyechelem nadīr kule - katajan āchego bhūle
 nadīr dheu dekhe mare
 dayāl guru sri Gautam āchen para pāre
 (aman) - bhakti haile jete pāre paysār darkār kare nā
 Buddha Dharmma Saṃga bala triratner nām svaran⁷⁹kara
 tabe jete pārbe man

⁷⁵ This word is meaningless. The author may have intended to write *jadā*, meaning old age.

⁷⁶ Babhicārer.

⁷⁷ Karibe.

⁷⁸ Lakṣmī.

⁷⁹ Smaran.

dhārmikerā jete pāre nadir para pare

pāpīrāo jete pāre nā - hāngar kūmbhīr chāre nā

tomar dehatarī sojā kara man mājhīre tālās kara

tobe jeta pārbe man

aṣṭa śil paṇca śil lāohe⁸⁰ tāri smaran

mukhe mettākarunādi nitya kara bhāba nā

tomār deha tarīr chay jan dārī tārā sadāy⁸¹ kare chal chāturi

bebaś⁸² kena ore abadh man

dīn hīn binay kahe dhara gurur caran

guru bine bhaba sāgarer pāre jete pāre nā

[VIII]⁸³

Sambhūmitta pitā moder Keśinī janani

prakāśiyā bale dilam suna rāj mani

(Campak nagar chila moder janmabhumi)

janmabhumi chila moder Campak nagar

karmma doṣe halem morā nagar bāhir

Sambhūmitta pitā moder

Keśinī moder janani

prakāśiyā bale dilām

ohe Buddha dīnabandhu - udhār kara abhāgāre

bipade paṛechi āmi - ḍāki tomāy bāre bāre

anāthganer bal

tomārī caran tal

tumi bine keha naire - anāthganer ie saṃsāre

⁸⁰ Nāole.

⁸¹ Sadāi.

⁸² Be is a Persian negative particle.

⁸³ As mentioned above, on this page the author of the manuscript introduces an alternative ending to Sambhūmitta's story.

Buddhake ḍākibe⁸⁴ jabe anātha karunsvare

deyā kare ekbār more - dekhā diye jāo āmāre uddhār kara abhāgāre

dāki tomāy bāre bāre

bipade paṛechi āmi

tumi bine gati naire

caran dhare ḍāki tomāy

adham baloke ḍāki

āmi tomay abvatāre

⁸⁴ Dākibe.

6.3 *Sambhūmitta Pālā*: the English translation

[a]

Sambhūmitta's ballad

(a devotional song based on a Buddhist birth-story)

writers

Madan Mohan Cākmā BA BL

and

Rāsamohan Baruā MA

singer

Śrījut Bābu Śaśāṅka Bikāś Chaudhurī

Village: Thegarpuni

Post Office: Bhāṭikhāśin

Chittagong

26 October 1953 C.E.

[b] oh my mind, utter on [your] tongue "Buddha" [and] there will be no fear of death

oh there will be no fear of death, there will be no fear of death

oh my mind, ceaselessly utter the name of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

without Buddha, Dharma and Sangha there would be no release from the world

Angulīmālā was a hunter, through the name of the Buddha he completed his crossing [i.e. was saved]

at the end [of life], forever companion, do not forget the triple gem

to cross the ocean of life call the navigator Buddha

without the navigator Buddha there would be no release from the world

brick house, brick residence, the rich landlord

leaving the cage of life cannot take anything with him

these wealth, people, [are] night dreams
worship the triple gem, o senseless mind
so, you, do not forget this

(Jh.) (so) don't you forget
honey smeared, the name of the Buddha
honey smeared, the name of the Dharma.....
honey smeared, the name of the Sangha

(Jh) don't forget, don't forget
such a day will not come again
the more you say, the more goodness will come.....
say, say, again say
honey smeared is the Buddha's name.....

[c] in the same mouth, o friend, in which you ate milk and sugar
there they will put burning fire
great house, marvellous residence, favourite wife
at the time of leaving there is no companion for the road
wife, son, sister, nephew, nobody belongs to anybody
[all are] false affections of a short time, acquaintances of the road
if the clay pot [or its] lid break it is not possible to fix [them]
golden body, how will [you] be burned!
to whom will you give the brick house and the brick residence?
In whose hands will you deposit the key to the iron safe?

(Jh.) nobody belongs one
wife, son, sister, nephew
at the time of going, companion of the road

affections are of a short time
brick house, brick residence
speak of brother, speak of friend
alone you come, alone you go

[d] where is the Buddha for the suppliants, please, appear to me [just] once
most precious gem⁸⁵ of my adoration, whom if I do not see my heart would
break
in what happiness, venerable Buddha, you have kept me; day and night, the
fire of my possession burns my body!
showering [me] with the water of your love, [please] cool me down
the stream of life⁸⁶ has no shore, [and] in the middle of the ocean [which has]
no shore I float around
there is no such friend [here], who calls out to ask [if I need help, i.e. to offer
his help]

you are the Truth equal to the beautiful Karuṇā⁸⁷, Oh! great liberated divinity
you welcome sorrow for the search of bliss
 you fulfilled your excellence in your repeated births
 you have gained knowledge, oh! great liberated divinity
when having churned the milk ocean of sorrow, you found the nectar⁸⁸
 that [i.e. the path to liberation] you gave away [to your disciples] for
 the benefit of living beings
 you gave the world supreme knowledge, Oh! great liberated divinity
when the creatures of the three worlds wept, the gods appealed to you

⁸⁵ *Cintāmani*: wish-fulfilling gem.
⁸⁶ Literally “flow of becoming” thus referring to the Buddhist idea of the five aggregates continuously changing.
⁸⁷ Personification of *karuṇā*.
⁸⁸ Reference to Hindu myth in which the ocean of milk was churned to obtain the nectar that made gods immortal. Means of liberation.

having heard the wails of the miserable ones
 again you made a trip to the world, o great liberated divinity
 obeisance to [my] teacher

[e]

invocation

oh you Buddha, ocean of compassion, friend of the poor, lord of the world
 Buddha, the son of Śudhodana, husband of Gopā, I salute you
 Buddha who is the father of Rāhula, the refuge of those with no refuge
 prostrating myself on the ground, I salute [you] with my eight limbs
 firstly, I prostrate myself at the feet of the venerable Buddha
 secondly, I humbly pay my respects to the Dharma
 thirdly, I salute the assembly of the excellent people
 I pay homage to the triple gem, prostrating myself to the ground
 at the feet of the venerable Buddha I present my petition to please, o voice of mine,
 come

first I salute all the elders
 please accept my humbly spoken greetings
 I send my respects to [my] father's feet
 from whose semen I was born, I sing Buddha's song
 I obediently bow down at my mother's feet
 in whose womb having been born, I sing songs of obeisance
 and all the savants I praise

(Jh.) I will sing the ballad of Sambhūmitta

(S.) all of you people, listen to the story of Sambhūmitta

in your heart judge all merit and demerit
if you listen to this story there will be advent of knowledge

(Jh.) I will openly speak, in the middle of this assembly

[1] (K.) The very prosperous town of Campaka was, in the old times, the playhouse of nature. Rows of buildings with very high cupolas decorated with coral, opals and pearls used to increase the beauty of the town: Campaka was always full of natural wealth.

(S.) the town of Campaka was full of natural crops and flowers
the happy subjects day and night practised non-violence [as] the
greatest Dharma

(Jh.) nobody ever thought of harming anybody
[There] happily reigned in Campaka
a king named Sambhūmitta
treating them as his own children, he very carefully
cared for his subjects

(Jh.) everybody was happy
floating on the waves of happiness

(D. Jh.) always were the residents of Campaka

(K.) Sambhūmitta, the king of Campaka, had a queen named Keśinī and, like a
spring of peace in the desert of life

(S.) he had two sons

Jayasen [and] Jayadatta.....
in the town of Campaka.....

(D) he had two sons, Jayasen [and] Jayadatta

[2] (K.) He⁸⁹ had a younger brother named Asambhūmitta. One day Asambhū sat in the flower garden and thought: “If [my] elder brother were to die or to get [too] old, indeed his sons would sit on the royal throne and there would be happiness and prosperity. I too was born in a royal family, but in this life I shall never get to know the joy of kingship. Therefore, by hook or by crook, I shall usurp the royal throne from my elder brother. Otherwise the moon of my fortune will forever be covered with the darkness of hopelessness.”

(S.) if [my] elder brother does not leave the kingdom without a fight,
I would certainly take it by killing him with the strike of weapons
[and], oh yes, I shall kill his children.

(Jh.) so that no lineage from them will survive in the world
I will make their blood flow in a stream
having swam [in it] I shall quench my thirst in it

I will paint
the town of Campaka, [with] the blood of the children.....
a river of blood I will let flow

(K.) Asambhū took this vow [and] giving secretly riches to courtiers and friends
confused them so that they would think of Sambhūmitta as an enemy.

⁸⁹ Sambhūmitta.

(S.) (Jh.) he brought them to his side
giving much wealth
confusing courtiers and friends

[3] (K.) One day, while His Majesty Sambhūmitta was sitting on the throne, a minister came in an excited state and said: “Your Majesty, like a snake which is brought up with care, becoming ready to bite his own master, spreads [his] large hood, in the same way the one you brought up, holding him against your chest with great love, that very one, the always nurtured Asambhū, today, wishing to snatch away the kingdom from your hands, looks at you with poisonous eyes.”

(S.) if Asambhū ever got to suffer some disease
[you] became sad, suffering out of sorrow for his pain.
for the cure of [his] disease, day and night without resting
always you nursed [him] giving up eating and sleeping
the wicked, dishonest, mean criminal, performer of bad actions [as
he is]

(Jh.) out of greed for the kingdom [he] forgot such a benefactor

(K.) Hearing these words from the mouth of the minister, the king, speechless and surprised said: “My brother Asambhū is intriguing against me! No, I do not want this kingdom anymore.”

[illegible]

[5] (K.) The king then said: "My dear, I have come to know that my brother intending to usurp the royal throne is leading a conspiracy against me. The throne for which one's own brother can raise the flag of rebellion , that royal throne like a worthless bit of grass I am right now throwing away."

(S.) oh! my beloved bid me farewell, I shall go away leaving the kingdom,
taking with you the two children please go to your father's house

(S.) you shall never see me again
I shall go very far

(Jh.) but at the moment of going [forever] let me see the children to fill up
my eyes

(K) [When] that virtuous wife, devoted to her husband, suddenly heard from the mouth of her husband these heart breaking words, her heart broke into a hundred pieces. Then, in pain, she said:

(Jh.) if you don't take me with you
I shall die taking poison.....

(Jh.) please take me along as your companion, me who am like your
shadow and am wretched

(Jh.) the gem of a king in his beautiful voice
then said these words.....

(D.) you stay and live at home, I shall go and live in the forest

abandoning all subjects.....

(D. Jh.) clasping the children to their chest.....

(S.) after the king - followed queen Keśī

(Jh.) moving majestically,⁹¹ her breast flooded with tears.

(K.) Having crossed many difficult mountains, forests and deserts, at last they arrived at the bank of a mighty river, full of water. Having put the two children under a fig tree well decorated with dangling creepers

(S.) the king having taken the queen
 swam across the river
 having brought Keśinī to the other bank and keeping [her there]
 he got down into the water again

(Jh.) he swam in the water of the river
keeping the queen on one bank.....
in order to bring the children.....
beloved like one's life.....

(K.) Just when the king was half way across the river, Kaibarttas⁹² were passing on a rowing boat, talking to each other. Having heard the words of the Kaibarttas, Jayasen thinking that their father was coming, happily said these words:

[8] (S.) come quickly, oh father, having swum across the river

⁹¹ Like an elephant.

⁹² Hindu caste of fishermen.

(S.) sometimes under the trees sometimes in the water of the river

he searched for them running around

sometimes fainting sometimes lamenting

sometimes weeping loudly

(Jh.) the king weepingly called saying
 oh sons come to me
 do come o jewels of my heart

(D. Jh.) not seeing you my heart breaks into pieces

(K.) The king's heart [was] sad for the disappearance of [his] sons.

(S.) weeping the king said in a choked voice
 today having come here I have lost my darlings.
 if taking them with me[and] dressed as a beggar

(Jh.) we wandered in different countries [despite of] our begging;

(S.) even then we would have lived happily in this life
tirelessly peacefully clasping my children to our chests

(Th.) I would have remained oblivious of my troubles
clasp^{ing} to my chest my heart's beloved.....
having seen the faces of my darlings.....

[10] (K.) Even after much searching he failed to find his two sons: the wealth of his life. The king, his heart heavy with grief, started to swim again in the water of the river in order to go back to his queen.

if my husband comes back here [and] does not see me here
 he will be agitated in grief crying loudly
 I have one such son who has not yet been weaned

(D) if you take me who will feed him [and the other one] with evaporated
 milk and cream.

(K.) Then the queen told the businessmen in a pitiable voice:

(D.) to save the suckling baby [I] am begging this
 [that] you release me compassionately
 without them I would go crazy
 day and night burning with grief for my children

(K.) In spite of the queen's great begging and persuading, the evil-minded
 tradesman, without listening to her words, forcefully took her on the boat and started
 it. On the boat,

(S.) the queen, almost crazy, grieving for [her] sons and husband
 sometimes stood and sometimes sat, it was difficult to keep her still
 her tears [were] flowing incessantly

(D.) even more than the rains showered by the clouds of the months of
 Asad and Śrāban⁹⁴

[12] (K.) The queen [was] almost crazy grieving for [her] sons and husband.

⁹⁴ June July, monsoon months.

inspected the soles of [his] feet

(Th.)

he saw royal marks

on the soles of the feet of king Sambhūmitta

(K.) Then the priest told everybody: "This person sleeping on the stone [is] worthy to be the king of Takṣaśīla. Let us today consecrate him as king in this garden." Then everybody with delighted heart repeatedly called king Sambhū:

[16] (S.) (Jh.)

oh master, wake up

having shaken off [your] sleep, get on the chariot

(D. Jh.)

(K.) When king Sambhū woke up from his sleep, he asked: “Why did you call [me]?
Then everybody said to him:

(S.)

we want to make you king

of the kingdom of Taksaśila

(K) Then king Sambhū having concealed his sadness with great difficulty, asked them in a sweet voice: “Why indeed should you invite this beggar of the road⁹⁵ to be your king. Is there no king in this kingdom?” Then the subjects said:

(S.)

there was a king, who possessed all good qualities

he used to protect all his subjects with love

[but] he has gone to the realm of death

95 Pauper.

(D. Jh.) he has nobody in this world, no wife, daughter or son

(S.) for this reason, we the people [of this country], all got together,
 now we shall consecrate you as our king

(Jh.) _____ get on the chariot, our master!
do not delay any more

[17] (K.) King Sambhū unable to ignore their persuasion, finally got on the chariot.

(S.) slowly slowly went the chariot
taking king Sambhū on its bosom
oh "hail the king"
young and old collectively
oh all women ululate (2) collectively

(K.) King Sambhū having taken the throne of Takṣaśīla ruled the kingdom efficiently. Whenever he recollected his dear children, he felt as if a hundred thousand scorpions stung his heart [and] unable to endure the sharp pain he used to say in a choked voice:

(S.) without my dear children it is dark [as] night
 useless are the palace and gems like diamond and pearl

(D. Jh.) if I hold someone else's child, the fire of my mind burns doubly
what is this condition I have reached in this world.
was it written on my forehead [that I should] never see [my] wife and
children?
how can I put out the fire of my mind?

(K.) Oh, my audience, here I postpone the story of Sambhūmitta. Let's go and see again how Jayasen and Jayadatta are doing in the house of the fishermen.

[18] (S.) the fishermen looked after the children with great care
[they] were growing day by day like the moon of the bright fortnight

(Jh.) in their house kept on growing

the children in the house of the fishermen

[the children] wanted to stay in a clean and nice place.....

they hated dirtiness, ugliness and mud

(Jh.) the fishermen pondered
having seen the nature of the children

(K.) Finally the fishermen took the pair of boys and presented them to the king of Taksaśila.

(S.) the king[too] brought up the boys like his own sons
 [but] at this time father and sons did not know each other

(K.) The eldest trader abducted the queen. Then, talking to her in an elaborate manner, he proposed marriage to her. But the queen in disgust and embarrassment bent her head like a *lajjārati* creeper and refused this unpleasant proposal. Then the trader threatened her in many ways and also tempted her with many promises. The queen was not distracted even with that and said:

(Daśadhuśī)

(S.) whom, earlier, as my husband

I honoured in this world

as my god and worshipped him

[he was like] the tree of hope for the hopeless, he was my great teacher

without him this world is dark

[19] (S.) [I,] this helpless one, selling the wealth of my chastity
shall never be your sexual partner
even if [you] kill me stabbing me with a weapon

(D. Jh.) I cannot ever accept you as my husband

(K.) The tradesman, despite being disappointed, when going abroad for trading, used to take the queen [with him] in order to be able to fulfil [his] lust. Whenever he, his heart contaminated with lust, tried to touch the queen, the queen would take refuge in the Buddha's qualities and meditating on the *śīlanusmṛti*⁹⁶ would speak thus:

(S.) oh Buddha friend of the poor save this wretched one
I have fallen into danger and I call you again and again
your feet are indeed
the strength of women
but for you there is nobody in this life for this wretched one
whenever the queen would call the Buddha in a pathetic voice
the wicked tradesman could not touch her body

(Jh.) like burning fire

then the queen's body would become hot

 the tradesman kept on thinking

how strange is this woman

⁹⁶ See *Visuddhimagga* VII, 101-6.

(D. Jh.) I cannot understand, how strange is this woman

[20] (K.) Once the tradesman anchored the boat at the royal pier of Takṣaśīla. Having left the queen in the boat, taking some attractive objects he made a gift to king Sambhū. Then the king told the tradesman: Mr. tradesman tonight here there will be a theatrical performance. You shall depart after seeing it. Then the tradesman respectfully told him: "Oh great king, I left my wife in the boat."

(S.) If I stay here who will protect her?
 [I] cannot stay, therefore please excuse me, master
 king Sambhūmitta sent Jayasen [and] Jayadatta
 to the river bank
 he sent them
 both the boys to the river bank

(S.) at that time Jayadatta asked
 kindly brother give me an account of [our] antecedents
 in this world who are our mother and father
 and how did we get into the house of the fishermen

(Jh.) kindly tell me brother
 who are our mother and father

(D.) explain to me, where is our birth place

[21] (K.) Meanwhile, in the boat, the queen, grief-stricken for her sons, having heard those heart-rending words of Jayadatta, [felt] as if every string of the harp of her heart was tingling. She thought: "This late in the night, on the bank of the river,

with a sharp cord. By the rubbing [of the cord]
blood oozed from the tied places.
we cannot endure the pain, they said crying

we cannot endure
o mother, such pain
blood is falling in streams

(D. Jh.) executioner, tell us quickly why did you bind us

[24] (K.) The cruel-hearted executioner having heard the words of the two boys threatening and shouting said: “Why did I bind you ? The answer to it would be giving this punch this kick and this slap.” Having said that, he took them to the execution ground [while] punching and kicking [them] beyond the boys’ endurance, greatly hurting the bodies of the boys. At that time, filling the horizon with their heart-piercingly sad lamentation, they said:

(S.) our limbs are paralysed, we cannot lift our feet
leaving our unfortunate mother we are going to the cremation ground
deprived from us she will be as if unconscious
her eyes will shed a flood of tears, our hearts are bursting [now]

(Jh.) we are going we are going
leaving our helpless mother
for the last time in our lives we go to the execution ground

having seen the suffering of the sons
the queen was crying with great sorrow

why does my death not come
so that I do not see this grief
before I witness the bereavement of my sons

..... was this in my destiny
that I should burn in the fire of grief

[25] she prostrated herself on the ground shouting: “Children, children”
as a banana tree falls on the ground in a great storm

(Jh.) rolling about she wept
beating her chest
in disarray the queen

(K.) While on the way, a pundit heard the story of the two boys [and] his heart [was] afflicted, [so] he went to the king [and] said: “King, before you condemned to death these two slave boys today, you should have judged whether they were really guilty or not. Oh king, finding guilt without investigation is not proper justice.”

(S.) if the king of the kingdom ever becomes a tyrant
the subjects die burning from the demerit of the king

(Jh.) whether bad or good luck
happen in the kingdom
according to the nature of the king the subjects are happy or
unhappy

(K.) Having heard the good advice of the pundit, the king said: “Respectable pundit, as the dark night becomes lighted by the clear and white moonlight of the full moon,

having heard your rational words I can understand now that I committed a great mistake in not investigating them.” Then the king called a messenger [and] said: “Oh messenger, without delay go to the cremation ground and fetch the two boys.”

The executioner put the two boys on the ground like helpless baby fawns, pulling the sword out of its scabbard he was about to kill them. The messenger saw that scene from a distance from the execution ground [and] rising his voice shouted:

(S.) stop, stop, oh executioner!

do not slay now the boys

I have orders
I have to take them to the king

(D. Jh.) having rescued the boys [he] took [them] quickly to the king's presence
then the king asked
asked them gently
tell me, oh servants, tell me quickly all the full account clearly

[27] (Jh.) what have you done
with the tradesman's wife
in the dead of the night

(D.) leaving aside fear and embarrassment, tell me clearly

(D. Jh) hearing the king's speech weeping in great grief

the boys said

she is not the wife of the tradesman she is our mother

oh king, please listen to us

(Jh.) please, king. listen to our words
she is our mother

(D.) we, the wretched ones, saw our mother we tell you this quickly

(K.) The king was surprised to hear the account of the boys and said: "Dear boys, you are the sons of the fishermen, how can you introduce the wife of the tradesman as your mother?" Then the boys, clasping their bloody palms together, said in a tormented voice:

(S.) the fishermen are not our parents, please listen
 we shall explain to you our account
 we were born in a royal family, we are princes

(Jh.) we poor ones lost our father and mother on the bank of a river

[28] (S.) Sambhūmitta is our father Keśinī is our mother
the prosperous city of Campaka is our motherland

(Jh.) Do listen, oh king!
our mother is in the boat

(D.) Our sad mother, oh king, is in the boat

(K.) Having heard the words of Jayasen and Jayadatta the king understood that those two boys were none but his beloved Jayasen and Jayadatta [and] his whole face lit up in ecstatic happiness like the sky suddenly free of clouds. Then he rose from the golden seat and said: “My boys, I am your wretched father Sambhūmitta.” Having said this,

(S.) the king quickly embraced them
again and again [he] clasped them to his chest [and] kissed them

(Jh.) tears of joy flowed down
flooding his cheeks
from both the king’s eyes

(D.) what happiness, what heavenly happiness, [brings] in this world the
face [of one’s] son

(S.) the boys then weeping
 said in a distressed voice
 ever wretched our mother
 is, oh father, [still] in the boat.

[30] (K.) Oh father, as a wild doe caught in the hunter’s net suffers much torment at the hands of the hunter, in the same way the tradesman having bound our mother with iron fetters is inflicting on her unbearable tortures in the boat.

(J.) Oh father we beseech you
 falling at your feet

(D.) let us go father to the river bank to fetch our mother.

(K.) The great king Sambhūmitta, having heard from the words of his sons that news of his dearest [wife] became mad with joy and having gone to the river bank told the tradesman: “Oh brother tradesman, that woman who is in your boat is my wife. One day in the dead of night, due to an evil turn of fate I lost her on the bank of a river.

bliss

the end

shout the name of the Buddha and hail him
raising your arms in the ecstasy of loving bliss
all your sufferings will go away

[I] Oh you, assembled friends, recognise this
(my) wealth of Buddha Dhamma and Sangha (twice)
the triple gem appeared on this earth in order to save beings by giving [them] the
mantra of non-violence
we give up the worship of illusory things when we worship the *Arahant*
[there is no one] but that compassionate one to get across the ocean of life
give up jealousy, abuse, quarrelling and embrace each other
take on your body the bond of unity, accepting the tendency of the current time
give up the stubbornness of aristocracy, give up the glory of *nikāya*⁹⁹
with concentrated mind meditate on loving kindness
in order to practise the means to the life beyond, you should communally take up
initiation¹⁰⁰ [, i.e.:] on the two seventh days in the month¹⁰¹ and on the new moon and
full moon days
those who are householders either in the morning or in the evening should take the
five precepts
otherwise life would pass fruitlessly, and how shall you be liberated?
all around there will be prosperity, the glory of the nation and Dharma will increase
this is the pleading of poor Baskar at the feet of the nation

⁹⁹ This is a clear appeal for the unity of the Bangladeshi Sangha.

¹⁰⁰ Lit. get the mantra.

¹⁰¹ [the dark and bright fortnight]

[II] I have spent my time meditating on you in this world

.....

oh Dharma - my heart is trembling seeing the darkness [and] the days finishing
the cuckoo started calling

I kept waiting hoping that [you] would appear one day

day after day all my days have passed (ditto)

oh Dharma - I have made the abuse of relatives and friends my garland

only because I shall get you

if you appear everybody will know [you] as the compassionate one

let the drum sound filling up the world (twice)

oh Dharma - non-violence is the greatest Dharma which is the essence of your
religion

[by it] people get liberated

Baskar says that when your are one's navigator there is nothing to worry about
one gets encouraged by getting that sign.

[III] We get destroyed because we lack the attitude of friendship, oh friend, beware
of Buddhist people

(oh friends) the leaders that we follow quarrel with each other [and] we are ashamed
when we hear the rumour

in many books and pamphlets they make negative propaganda about different races

oh friends, is this the way to bring development?

(oh friends,) being born Buddhist, [we] have adopted non-Buddhist costumes

each of us lives blinded by selfishness

there are only a handful of Buddhist people, we do not understand the rules of
advancement

oh friend, we destroy various [Buddhist] institutions

(oh friends,) keeping together, let's be intoxicated by the music of unity

there is no deliverance without this idea
 get rid of jealousy and abuse, take upon yourselves the tendency of the present time
 keep your meditation on loving kindness in the binding of unity
 (oh friends,) give up the differences of lineage [and] *nikāya*, improve your own
 religion
 please listen, oh you, the whole Buddhist public.
 this is the prayer of poor Baskar, do not keep quiet when you know the truth.
 the fire [of destruction] has caught the corner of our house.

[IV] worship the divine Buddha, utter the word of the divine Buddha, take the name
 of the divine Buddha
 giving up attachment to possessions avoiding great slumber (slumber of delusion)
 he is the practitioner of salvation
 oh you, play on the *mṛidanga* and drum and utter Buddha [’s name] with blissful love
 sing the qualities of the Buddha with ecstasy (three times), remember it again
 let’s go to the other side of the river of life
 o you black bee¹⁰² sing day and night the qualities of the Buddha, the gem of the
 lineage of Sakya
 he who floats on the nectar of the name of the Buddha attains salvation
 wake up, wake up, Buddhists of Bengal ! Why are you sleeping?
 China, Ceylon and Japan are awake, Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan are awake, Burma,
 Thailand push forward, they are intoxicated by the sixth Council
 within the time of two and a half thousand years the Buddhist religion will rise
 pervading the hearth with the mantra of non-violence, it will rise again
 the speech of the great man is about to come, alas! Why are we immersed in the
 delusion of blindness selfishness, quarrel internally [and hence our] society is
 becoming as if dead every day?

¹⁰² See note 65.

the religion of the nation is falling apart; teach [them] the essence [of religion];
 make your birth useful, and fence around your own religion
 the leaders who are educated - have completely lost their personality in quarrels
 their hearts are full of delusion, being blind with selfishness they destroy society.
 this is pour Bhaskar's appeal to the Bengali Buddhist students, please for them
 explain the modern development of non-violence and loving friendship.

[VI] oh you my mind, you didn't practise worship and devotion

(Jh.) you did not recognise who is the philosophers' jewel which is the treasure of
 religious practice

listen, my mind, listen to my words, keep your mind fixed on the Venerable Buddha
 (alas my poor mind)

if you say Buddha Dharma and Sangha, there will be no fear from sin, oh my mind
 birth, old age and the disease of being, will not exist

repeat the name of the guru who has given you that mantra (twice)

if you can call him in the proper manner you will realise him inside your heart (twice)

in fact you don't know how to call properly

where is your country house, where is your house, where do you conduct your living
 (twice)

Sariputta and Moggallana were the ones who became the Lord's disciples

tell me indeed in which age, to which pupillary lineage you belong

(Jh.) Those who will engage in killing and stealing

as a result of their misconduct will go to hell

whoever will lie or drink alcohol

the goddess of good luck will leave him day by day

your own friends revealed that by the performance of *sila* one goes to heaven

the virtuous people are inviting you, go and rejoice in their company

love the company of the virtuous, show them your respect by bowing your
head

entwine their feet with the creeper of your devotion.

[VII] not understanding the nature of the river (oh my mind) don't dive in that river

the sidless expanse of the river - do not swim

if you dive in you will not be able to find the other side.

I went to the bank of the river - oh! how many people are deluded

they are suffering only watching the waves of the river

the benign teacher Venerable Gautama is on the other side

(oh my mind) one can cross if one has devotion, there is no need for money

say Buddha Dharma and Sangha, remember the name of the triple jewel

then, my mind, you can go

the meritorious people can reach the other bank of the river

the sinner cannot go - sharks and crocodiles will not leave them alone

make the boat of your body balanced, find the boatman, your mind

then you will be able to go

take refuge in the eight precepts and the five precepts

and follow every day calmly the meditation on loving kindness and

compassion and so on

there are six oarsmen in the boat of your body they always try to cheat you

oh my silly mind, why are you not in control?

poor and humble Binay says: get hold of the feet of the teacher

without a guru you cannot go to the far bank of the ocean of life

[VIII] Sambhūmitta is our father, Keśinī is our mother

we have explained everything, oh you, our beloved king

(the city of Campaka was our motherland)

Campaka city was our motherland

we left the city due to our bad karma

Sambhūmitta is our father

Keśinī is our mother

as we have disclosed

oh you Buddha friend of the poor people, save this unlucky one

I have encountered danger - I call you again and again

the power of the destitute

comes from your feet

there is nobody besides you - in this world for the destitute

when you will call Buddha, in a helpless pitiable voice

please appear in front of me once

save me this luckless one

I call you again and again

I am in danger

besides you there is no rescuer

I call you holding your feet

like little children

I call you the incarnation of Buddha

Conclusion

I have stated in the Introduction above that the aim of this thesis is to further our knowledge of the history of Buddhism and to contribute to the anthropology of Theravāda Buddhism. Moreover, I have underlined the importance of such a work given the peripheral location of Bangladesh within the Indian Subcontinent and its proximity to Burma, a Buddhist country.

To achieve my objectives, first I have looked at the history of Buddhism in Bangladesh, from its introduction into the country to the present. It was immediately apparent that it was possible to divide the accounts available into two groups.

The compilers of the first group are non-Buddhist scholars and official historians. They are keen to link Bangladeshi Buddhism to the Indian tradition of Emperor Asoka, even at the risk of forcing a misinterpretation of data, as in the case of the Mahāsthāni Brāhmī inscription. The non-Buddhist scholars and official historians also systematically exclude the history of the Chittagong area from their works and completely ignore the presence of any Buddhist community in Bangladesh after the Muslim invasion of the country in the thirteenth century. So important event in the religious history of Bangladeshi Buddhism as the Theravāda reform of 1856 is totally ignored by these authors, even when the subject matter of their work is precisely the religious reform movements of nineteenth century Bengal.

The second group of compilers can be called the Bangladeshi Buddhist. This group is not at all concerned with the antiquity of Bangladeshi Buddhism. Although reporting the belief that Buddhism was introduced into Bangladesh by the Buddha (a belief common to all Theravādin countries, constituting a standard way to legitimise a Buddhist tradition), Bangladeshi Buddhists are ready to accept that there was no Buddhism in Bangladesh before the second century A.D. It is through the works of this group that we are made aware of the recent history of Bangladeshi Buddhism and its links with the Buddhist tradition of Arakan, now part of Burma. A comparison

between the material presented by the two groups reveals a tendency by the non-Buddhist and official historians to downplay any links between the Buddhist tradition of Bangladesh and any non-Indian traditions, such as the Burmese one. This is done in order to produce a homogeneous cultural background common to all the people of Bangladesh: the Bangladeshi nation.

Second, I have looked at that the way Bangladeshi Buddhism perpetuates itself and at some of its institutions. If a plan existed to create a Bangladeshi nation which would include the Buddhist community of that country, this would have been apparent from how the Bangladeshi school system transmits knowledge about Buddhism and the other religions practised in the country. The regime of religious segregation adopted in Bangladeshi schools at first may lead one to believe that religious education is not used as a way of integrating the citizens of Bangladesh. However, after some considerations and after comparing the system adopted in Bangladesh with those in use in other countries, it becomes apparent that indeed religious education is here used as a way to further national integration.

To confirm that Bangladeshi Buddhism is in fact part of the Southeast Asian tradition I have then considered some aspects of Bangladeshi Buddhism, such as the institution of temporary ordination and the special sanctity attributed to the Mahāmuni temple and the image there preserved. All findings support that view. Further evidence came from the reading of a *Bauddha pālā kīrtana*, a literary *genre* peculiar to Bangladesh. It consists of a ballad, in a format typical of Vaishnavism, narrating an episode of a previous life of the Buddha. Despite the Indian style of this ballad, which only reflects a regional taste common to all religious groups, the subject matter of the song, which is taken from a Southeast Asian apocryphal birth-story of the Buddha, confirms the link between the Buddhism of Bangladesh and that of Southeast Asia.

In conclusion, all Buddhism, especially Theravāda Buddhism, contains elements of the Indian civilisation within which and against which the Buddha operated. Also the great monastic establishments which existed in Bangladesh during

the Pāla period were part of the Indian cultural scene. However, with the Muslim invasion of India and the destruction of the large monastic centres, Buddhism in Bangladesh was relegated to the southeast region of the country. There, because of the geographical contiguity with Arakan, it absorbed elements of the culture of that country and of Southeast Asia in general. We do not know when this process started. There is no reason to exclude the possibility that the Buddhist communities of Bangladesh and Arakan had influenced each other since the introduction of Buddhism in the region, whenever that happened. It is however undeniable that contemporary Bangladeshi Buddhism, the direct and indirect result of the 1856 reform operated by the Sangharāja of Arakan, is part of the greater Southeast Asian tradition. The only elements that distinguish Bangladeshi Buddhism from its Southeast Asian counterparts are its material poverty and the fact that this is the religion of a small minority of the population of a country. Any attempts to portray Bangladeshi Buddhism as a phenomenon of the past, exclusively Indian and Bengali in character, constitute a manipulation of historical data typical of nationalism.

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