

India's Benevolence to Thailand

By

The Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu



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ANUMODANĀ

(To all Dhamma Comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:)

Break out the funds to spread Dhamma to let Faithful Trust flow,
Broadcast majestic Dhamma to radiate long living joy.

Release unexcelled Dhamma to tap the spring of Virtue,
Let safely peaceful delight flow like a cool mountain stream.

Dhamma leaves of many years sprouting anew, reaching out,
To unfold and bloom in the Dhamma Centers of all towns.

To spread lustrous Dhamma and in hearts glorified plant it,
Before long, weeds of sorrow, pain, and affliction will flee.

As Virtue revives and resounds throughout Thai society,
All hearts feel certain love toward those born, ageing, and dying.

Congratulations and Blessings to all Dhamma Comrades,
You who share Dhamma to widen the people's prosperous joy.

Heartiest appreciation from Buddhādāsa Indapaṇṇo,
Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi longlasting.

In grateful service, fruits of merit and wholesome successes,
Are all devoted in honor to Lord Father Buddha.

Thus may the Thai people be renowned for their Virtue,
May perfect success through Buddhist Science awaken their hearts.

May the King and His Family live long in triumphant strength,
May joy long endure throughout this our word upon earth.

from



Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2 November 2530

(translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu, 3 February 2531 (1988))

BHIKKHU BUDDHADASA

"Achariya Buddhadasa Mahathera for over half a century has been doing research into the Buddha's wealth of knowledge concerning Man and Nature and has produced voluminous teachings. The teachings center around getting rid of 'self' and becoming free to be in harmony with Nature. Long before the contemporary awakening he had loudly pointed out that the World was running into crisis because it was travelling in the wrong track, induced by basically wrong thinking, wrong education and wrong economic system. According to Buddhadasa Mahathera, it is morally a wrong way of life. He has been calling for the return of Global Ethics."

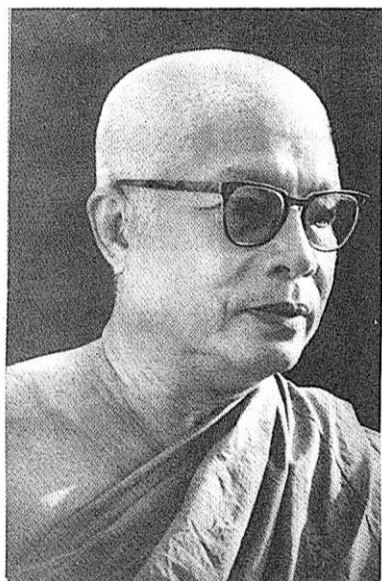
*Prawase Wasi, M.D.
Siriraj Hospital, Bangkok.*



"Buddhadasa's interpretation of the Buddha, as well as other aspects of the Sāsanaā (religion), seeks to reveal the core or essence of the Buddhaddhamma but not to the exclusion of the rich and variegated textures of the tradition. His understanding of the person of the Buddha in terms of the principles of "Whoever sees me (Buddha) sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees me (Buddha)", and the polarity of everyday language and Truth language make a unique contribution to the ongoing Theravāda interpretation of the meaning and significance of the founder of their tradition."

*Donald K. Swearer
American Scholar of Thai Buddhism
Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.*





Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

*India's Benevolence to Thailand**

By

The Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu



All of you who are interested in the Dharma,

Allow me to talk to you in the informal way with no formalities as are practised in the traditional “Dharma-desana”. The informal way which is now known as “Pathakatha-Dhamma”, being more simple, more economical and less tiresome.

The subject of today's talk is “*Thanks to those who brought Buddhism to us*”. Late this evening we have already dwelt on “*Dharma-cakra*”, the Wheel of Law; its benefits; how it helps allaying sufferings and

*A talk on July 8, B.E. 2533 (1990) at Suanmokkhabalaram, Chaiya, South Thailand, to commemorate Asalha Puja, full-moon day of the eight lunar month, on which the Buddha preached His First Sermon and founded the Buddhist Order.

unravelling problems, and whither it takes us. Our talk was more or less conclusive; the area of elaboration being on advantages to be derived from the practice of Buddhism; how, with Buddhism as our guidance, we can rid ourselves of sufferings and solve life's problems, and thereby attaining satisfactory state attainable by man.

Benefits of Buddhism

Without Buddhism, we might have been unable to be what we are now. Without Buddhism, there would be no monks as we now see them sitting in the rear. Without Buddhism, there would neither be lay devotees, upasakas and upasikas, nor monks and novices, Bhikkhus and Samaneras. And, indeed, without Buddhism, there would be no that knowledge to overcome sufferings and to make ourselves calm and quiet. In short, without Buddhism, there would be nothing afore-mentioned, including our Suanmokkhabalaram, the Garden of Liberation. That we have what we see around us and that we are satisfied by them, is entirely due to the benign influence of Buddhism.

It becomes us now to see how we can acknowledge and repay this gift of Buddhism from India, a concern not only of the members of Suanmokkhabalaram but also of the entire Buddhist community. We have been gifted with the spiritual wealth, par excellence, with which to overcome sorrows and sufferings. Through this gift of the Dharma from India, we have also greatly benefited in mundane affairs such as in the area of culture, of

custom, usage, etc. Buddhism, in short, is the basis of the Thai culture. What Thailand has as its national culture today, is entirely due to the teachings of Buddhism.

Please reflect well. Buddhism gives freedom to all mankind, freedom from the bondage of defilement, freedom from craving and ignorance. Complete freedom is taught in Buddhism. Such is the blessing of Buddhism.

Freedom from defilement, in effect, means freedom from sorrow and suffering which ordinarily is understood and termed by the world as happiness. The Buddha, however, seldom called this state "happiness". Instead, He preferred to use the words "the cessation of suffering" in order to avoid further attraction for the word "happiness". The term "happiness", in the mundane sense, gives rise to more temptation and allurements. To the Buddha, what is most important to consider and drive at was "the cessation of suffering". The "cessation" obtained, the problem is over; there is no necessity for further efforts and struggle.

We Buddhists have studied and practised Buddhism and, as a result, have understood the cessation of suffering. Our continuing practice of Buddhism enables us to get together, to have with us monks and temples denoting the influence of Buddhism. That we have been able to find ourselves in such satisfactory state is entirely due to the teachings of Buddhism prevailing in the country. Imagine! Had Buddhism not been introduced in this land, would we be able to find ourselves in such

state? Would we be able to pull through? That we are gathered here is enough to prove that we are not only happy with Buddhism but that, together, we mean to go ahead with the task of advancing Buddhism.

All this demonstrates our acceptance of and satisfaction with Buddhism, no matter how long ago it had been with us. The Wheel of Law, i.e. the Dharmacakra, has been introduced in Thailand as it has been in many other countries. However, here we are concerned only with our country. We are concerned not only with the fact that we have derived benefits from the Dharmacakra received, but are also concerned with the question of repaying those benefits. At this point, many of you might be surprised at hearing the word repaying, i.e. repayment of benefits acquired, which is the main theme of my talk today.

The Indians gave us religion and culture

It is certain that the Dharma or Buddhism, of itself, could not come to Thailand. It follows that we have to consider "who brought it here". For this, we have to go back to history. And the somewhat wilful answer is, as Buddhism is a product of India, the Indians must have brought it. According to Buddhist records, it was Sona and Uttara Theras, the two Elders, at the behest of Emperor Ashoka, that brought Buddhism to this part of the world. Sona and Uttara Theras were, of course, Indians. But the Indians did not bring only Buddhism to Thailand. They brought more than Buddhism; they brought Brahminism as well. So, in the field of religion,

the Indians brought us Buddhism as well as Brahminism. And both, Buddhism and Brahminism or Occultism, have their values. So far in the field of religion.

Now comes culture which, in extension, incorporates custom and tradition in its fold. As a matter of fact, religion is a part of culture. So are learning and education. But we prefer to separate religion from culture, entrusting many allied issues to the domain of culture. You may ask "who brought culture to Thailand?" The answer again is "the Indians." Indian culture came to be the basis of Thai culture. In other words, the culture of Thailand has the culture of India as its mother.

Please think it over. You may not agree with me. But don't be too conceited as to forget others' goodness. To be brief, all Thai culture has its roots in Indian culture. As already told you, we received both Buddhism and Brahminism (also termed Hinduism) from India; these two religions were brought to this land by the Indians. So was culture. We received all divisions of culture from India as I am giving you the details now.

I remembered having read a book entitled: "Indian Cultural Colony of Siam". I was at first shocked and angry to read that Siam was a cultural colony of India. The book indeed bore the above title. But on going through it, I realised that "Indeed! this is true"! My anger then subsided. The truth is what we term our culture, originated from and based on Indian culture and religions.

Those who disagree with me may furnish evidences to disprove what I have said. We really acquired our religion and culture from India. Take for instance the case of Buddhism. The more we study and practise Buddhism, the more we get benefits by so doing, and the more we remember with gratitude those Indians who brought these precious gifts to us. We Thais lacked capability to bring these gifts ourselves. The Indians brought them in various manners, such as in legends and religious tales, etc. The Indians came to this part of the world, so-called Suvannabhumi, Land of the Gold, which comprised the entire Malay Peninsula. They came to Suvannabhumi even before the advent of Buddhism. They were traders bent on making commercial profit, gold in particular. They took gold back to India, so much so that a lot of gold, perhaps more than what we had here, went to India. An opulent Indian Maharaja could be the owner of more gold than what many rich men here could have. This state of affairs existed several millenniums ago with the result that a large quantity of Thai gold found its way to coffers in India.

I am putting this point just to enable you to visualize the commercial traffic between India and Thailand that existed long before the age Buddhism. Undoubtedly the Indians came to Suvannabhumi in search of commercial profit. With them, they brought articles of material value for barter purpose. In addition, they also brought substance of spiritual and cultural worth for their counterparts and hosts. The local people, not so so-

phisticated and progressive as the new comers, naturally welcomed “new stuffs” from their guests. Included in the “new stuffs” were occultical beliefs and substance which, as said before, arrived in this country even before Buddhism. After Buddhism was well founded in India, it was also brought to Suvarnabhumi. Thus, both occultism (called Saiya-Shastra in Thai) and Buddhism found their way to Thailand.

In such wise, all affairs relating to cultural significance, were introduced to this country, and, in the course of time, through absorption and blending, they became part of our flesh and blood. With the passage of time, inter-marriage between the guests and the hosts grew, thus further deepening the cultural ties. That being the case, you will see that the Indians came here aeons ago, and they spared no efforts to make Thailand, their adopted country, as progressive as India, their motherland.

1. The Four Requisites

Let me now explain to you in a straight-forward manner and not out of fallacy; my purpose being to enable you to grasp correct understanding.

First of all let me speak about the Four Requisites, termed the Four Paccaya in Pali, namely, food, clothing, dwelling and medicine. It could be assumed that these four requisites were also taught us by the Indians. Had we not come into contact with the Indians and still living in the North somewhere near China, we would undoub-

tedly still be under the cultural influence of China. Our food would be more or less like that of the Chinese. Our contact with the Indians taught us to eat food similar to that of the Indians. Mind you, the Chinese do not relish pepery food. Neither do they use spices. But the Thais here are fond of pepery and spicy dishes like "Kaeng", and they enjoy "Nam-prik". Surely, we would not know how to eat "nam-prik" had we not befriended the Indians. At best we would only know "See-Ew", the Chinese brand of soya bean sauce. We learned to eat "Nam-prik" from the Indians. In India people mix onion, chilli and vinegar together and eat it as "Nam-prik". Yes, the Indians introduced "Nam-prik" to us in the course of their association with us.

Most amusing is the fact that the Indians taught us here to eat food with fingers. We pick up food and put it into our mouth with fingers. The Chinese, instead, use chop-sticks for this purpose. Without contact with the Indians, surely we would not eat in this manner. The Buddha, the Arahants, nay, all the Indians, follow this method of eating till today. In India even cabinet ministers do the same. So, it is from the Indians that we learned how to eat hot and spicy food, to enjoy "Nam-prik" and to use fingers for eating. Those who are fond of "Nam-prik" have reason to be thankful to the Indian friends.

Now comes clothing. Without association with the Indians, we would never learn to use "paa-nung" or "paa-choong-kraben". This use of "paa-nung", born

in India, came to Thailand via Cambodia. While in India, once in the country-side, I was wonder-struck by a sight which made me imagine I was in my own Thailand. Some Indian women, wearing "paa-nungs" exactly the same way as our Thai countryside women do, were walking past myself and my colleagues. From behind they looked exactly the same as Thai women in "paa-nung". Carrying some parcels on their heads, they moved along with arms swinging gently backward and forward. For a moment, I was under the illusion that I was in Thailand! It is too true to say that we learned wearing "paa-nung" from India.

The art of putting on clothes is imitative. As the ancient Thais were living quite close to Southern China, at best we would have opted the Chinese trousers. The lengthy "paa-nung", worn by Indians and Thais, formerly called "paa-lai" in Thailand, used to be worn by both Thai females and males. "Paa-lai", was imported from India. Please, by no means, mistake it to be European-made. "Paa-lai" was manufactured in Surat, a Western province of India, where numerous patterns of the stuff, with all designs and colours, were beautifully woven and exported to Thailand, as if to encourage the Thais to use them. So, we Thais learned to wear "paa-nung" or "paa-choong-kraben" from India.

Dwelling: Thai temples and shrines bear much resemblance to religious structures of India; they differ from those of China and Europe. Our dwellings and Buddhist monasteries too are similar to their counter-

parts in the sub-continent.

Medicines: Thai traditional medicines, often termed herbal, used to be prepared in Buddhist monasteries before the introduction of Western medicines. Homes of herbal medicines, Buddhist monasteries produced and distributed them to those who needed. The prescriptions originated from India, using various herbs as prescribed by Indian Gurus and Acaryas; hence names of medicines themselves are often Indian. Many component parts, being unavailable locally, were brought from India, such as Sarabhi (a tree of the family Guttiferae), Karnanikar (hursinghar), Bikul (Mimusops), and Bunnag (the rose chestnut). Introduced from India, the herbs were planted locally and they soon proliferated across the country. This applies especially to the case of Karnikar and Mali (Arabian jasmine)

Now comes betel leaf chewing which is typically Indian and strictly follows the Indian method. In India, you will be surprised to see that betel leaf chewing, now-a-days less seen in Thailand, is still very common. The Indians taught the Thais to chew betel leaf. But don't be misguided, the Indians did not bring tobacco and opium to us. They only taught us to chew betel leaf, so much so that we have an expression in Thai "Your lips are red with betel leaf"! So, you see, Thailand learned herbal medicines chiefly from India. Situated in the same tropical zone, both Thailand and India are afflicted by tropical diseases alike, and both use herbal medicines to counteract the ill effects.

I have just told you how we learned the "Four Requisites" from India and how we "Thai-ised" them to our benefit.

2. Custom Relating to Life

Let us now turn to what is termed culture, i.e. cultural observances relating to life. Here we follow the Indian observances or custom from, so to say, the cradle to the grave. From the time of conception to the delivery of the child, similar observances are performed. When the child grows up, the parents have to arrange his or her tonsorial shaving, religious initiation, education, marriage, etc.; all more or less in the say way as practised in India. And, at the time of passing, the remains are cremated as in India, and not buried as in China. After death, the libation ceremony (Shradha), meticulously carried out in India, follows the same pattern as practised in India. In short, all cultural observances pertaining to life from birth to death, are reproductions from India. They are not Thai in origin; the Thais have something else. What we presently do in Thailand are copied from India. As it is, the cultural practices relating to life that we received from India, are so consummate and deep-seated.

Let us turn to theme connected with farming. It is my observation that the Indian share fixed to the plough for the purpose of tilling, is alike the Thai share. It is different from the Chinese and European shares. I have marked this. Rice farmers in Thailand follow the same rice-farming procedure as practised in India. Even

rituals connected with rice farming success, such as the propitious ceremony in honour of Mother Rice, are identical in the two countries. Rice harvest also is done in the same way. You may go to India to verify my observation, if you wish. Apart from what I have already related, occult rituals in praise of earth, water, fire, wind, etc. are observed in the same spirit and belief in both the countries.

3. Education

We come now to a somewhat higher subject, i.e. education. In the field of pursuance of literature and rethoric, we have followed the Indians for more than a thousand years. The Thai scripts derived from the Brahmi and Devanagari scripts of India. Today they still bear resemblance. Our A.B.C. writing originated from India.

In the Thai language, consonants and vowels are combined and graded much in the same way as in the Indian languages. Today in ordinary writing of the Thai language, at least 30-40 per cent of the words used are from India, and in higher and literary writing, the percentage rises proportionately. You can pick up any Thai book and verify my statement by reading the contents in any page. Most of you who are here, I dare say, have names composed with Indian words. In Thai prosody, with more than a hundred kinds of metre, all verses are copied from India. The most amusing point is with the fact that in all these undertakings, we excel our teachers; we perform better than our teachers do.

Please, I am not joking, and, hearing what I say, do not be misguided. We Thais are capable of doing things better than those who teach us. Take, for instance, we adopted "paa-nung" from India, but we put it on more gracefully than our Indian brothers; we prepare edibles more deliciously than our instructors. Thai cuisine, because of its adaptation and skill is well-known the world over. Our poetry, learned from India, is more sonorous than that of India. Lacking rhyme and caring only to the number of letters stipulated, Indian metrical compositions are not so resonant as their Thai counterparts. However, this talent on our part is not to be shown off; it is to be acknowledged only.

4. Art

Now comes the issue of art. All branches of art, whether it be painting, dance, drama, masked play, or any other form of art, are learned from India. In this area too, we perform better than our teachers. Even the art of compiling books is not Thai; it is Indian. So is the shadow-play which is called "Chhaya-Nataka" in India. In Thailand we call it "Nang-ta-lung" or "Manorah". All these branches of art were adopted from India but, once in our hands, we improved upon them and made them more sophisticated and graceful. Improvement is ours but originality came from India.

All formations or postures of dance that we have, are learnt from India; they are not from China or Europe. And, of course, Thai dances are very graceful and elegant. I may add that sculpture is another gift from

India. All images extant here, whether of the Buddhas, the Bodhisatvas or whoever else, are replicas of those found in India. Last, what may be called “Sugandha-karma” (perfumery) is also from India. We learned it from the Indians, but we improved it to a better standard, more scented and more redolent. Culturally we are India’s slaves, but we fare better than our masters. This is to be noted.

5. Various Sciences

Numerous sciences of olden days were learned from India. For instance the science of capturing wild elephants and training them to be useful domestic animals, was also from India. We have treatises on elephant, horse, cat, bird and rat—all from India. The use of magic formulae, either by uttering charms or by blowing with the mouth, was from India. So was the martial art of self-defence with swords or staffs.

Is it enough, this narration of receiving cultural bestowals from India? Should we be displeased with the author of the book “Indian Cultural Colony of Siam”? No, we should’nt. On the contrary, we should be thankful to him for the knowledge revealed in his book. I touch on this matter just to remind us the value of being grateful. We should be grateful to those who do us good, and should think of doing something to repay that debt of gratitude.

In respect of our rules of conduct and behaviour, such as being civil and polite, we have also learned

much from India; certainly not from either China and Europe. Our style of greeting, "Wai", identical with the Indian "Namaskar" or "Namaste", is definitely Indian.

I would like to invite abuses from politicians! I am for democracy, democracy with respects to elders. In the Buddhist Sangha administration, we have most democratic rules pertaining to meetings. All resolutions must be unanimous; there is no single voice of dissent. This is because we pay due respects to elders. Now-a-days, in our so-called democratic meetings, we allow opposition and full use of abusive language without respect to elders, with the result that most meetings end up with chaos and disorder. Real democracy respects elders, just as in Bhikkhu Sangha meetings we respect elders. I wish this decorum return in our midst.

Buddhism and Occultism

Both Buddhism and Occultism came from India. Both are inextricably intermingled and both exist in Thailand for ages past. Probably it can be said that Buddhism and Hinduism are father and mother respectively of the mental make-up of the Thais in general. Occultism has exerted a no less important role over the lives of ordinary Thais all over the country. However, occultism is for the weak-minded and the young. Those of less intelligence rely upon it till their minds are fully developed. Children are apt to believe in ghosts and various kinds of spirit till they are mentally full-grown to understand teachings of the Buddha. Occultism is

deeply embedded in the average Thais' mentality from their very childhood. Occultism helps people to allay fears in their minds.

Without knowledge of Buddhism and had there been no occultism, most men will turn lonesome and forlorn and might succumb to various stages of nervous breakdown. So, despite its superstitious weakness, occultism is a succour to the weak and the feeble-minded. In any country, there are lots and lots of such people; hence the necessity to keep on occultism. Occultism gives warmth to the weak; it helps prevent neurological disorder. For well-developed minds, Buddhism helps. But the weak need aid from occultism. Occultism can not be discarded. Even in a modern city like Bangkok, occultism is needed for its weak-minded citizens.

Since there are both the weak-minded and the strong-minded, it is necessary to have both occultism and Buddhism. Here in this city of Chaiya, evidences as old as a thousand years, show that there used to exist both Brahmin and Buddhist shrines in a monastery compound. The Brahmin shrine stood in front and the Buddhist one did at a little distance inside the compound. Children who walked past by, paid obeisance first to the Brahmin shrine, and, then a little distance up, did the same to the Buddhist counterpart. The young and the weak-minded elders first comforted themselves at the Brahmin shrine, then entered the Buddhist one, care-free and assuredly. The strong-minded elders did

without all this and showed themselves as mellow Buddhists.

At Wat Phra Dhatu Monastery, there were such twin shrines, Brahmin and Buddhist, but were later demolished and the land was used for housing construction. The same can be said of Wat Chaiyaram and Wat Tha Bodhi Monasteries. Usually monasteries over one thousand years old, had a Brahmin shrine standing on its front. Such practice on the part either of the king or the administrative body of those days, spoke well of their wisdom in allowing two faiths to exist side by side to suit mental development of common people.

I entertain no reproof for occultism because, as said, it is useful for the weak-minded. Governments and kings of old days must have known the psychological condition of their people well. Hence they allowed both the Brahmin and Buddhist shrines to exist side by side. Later on Brahmin shrines were gradually done away with but their historical traces remain still. Many images of Hindu gods and goddesses were given sanctuary in Buddhist temples. For instance at the pagoda of Wat Chedi Kaew, two Shiva-lingas and an elephant head of the Hindu God Ganesha were found. This only shows that Brahmin images were given respect, and ordinary people, according to their level of intelligence, were allowed free choice.

This is how we received religious and cultural bestowals from India. No doubt, the Indians came to this part of the world, Suvarnabhumi, in search of com-

mercial interests. But they also brought with them intellectual achievements which they left behind after their home return. Above all, many of them, the Brahmins in particular, had inter-married with local womanhood which augmented the already existing bonds of brotherly relations. Such state of relationship between immigrants from India on the one hand and inhabitants of Suvarnabhumi, Thailand in particular, on the other, must have been in practice for the past two or three millenniums. As a result, till today we have people, claiming Brahmin lineage, who call themselves Thai Brahmins. How can such mingling of blood be denied or spurned? We have to admit that this mixed blood, born of Hindu-cum-occultical and Buddhist elements, continues to vitalize Thai blood to the present days.

How can we return India's benevolence?

We can now summarise that we had received very many things from India, be it religions, occultical beliefs and practices, custom and rituals, and a hundred and one things more. In brief, we owe a great deal to India. Hearing these words of mine, you may say that, on behalf of India, I am asking you for the return of the benevolence given by India. Yes, you may abuse me. Only please don't forget the obligation on our part.

Having said all this, it is my considered opinion that we should do something to repay the obligation. The best thing, of course, would be to carry Buddhism back to the Indians. But, I, for one, would think that this is not an easy task. I don't think we Thais possess

the ability. Besides, our Indian friends are solidly entrenched in their Hindu Faith. So, both sides are, so to speak, evenly matched!

However, we have to do something to let our friends know that we have not forgotten their goodness and that we mean to repay the obligation. I still remember the visit to our institute of some Indian officials from the Embassy of India at Bangkok. They were highly surprised to see the stone carvings and sculptures depicting life of the Buddha around the Spiritual Theatre. They asked me as to how I managed to accomplish the task. I told them that I went to India and took photographs of these artistic objects. Back to Thailand, I started the moulding process and the result was what they were then seeing. Perhaps they did not quite believe what I said, and exclaimed. "Surely without singular love and devotion this work could not have been accomplished. You have done extraordinary honour to India!" These words uttered by Indian visitors from the Indian Embassy at Bangkok still ring in my ears.

We have to do something to give India and the Indians more satisfaction, something that will convince them cent percent that we remember their benevolence. After completing the Buddhist carvings and sculptures along with the Spiritual Theatre just mentioned, my mind turned towards doing this "something". It struck me that we should construct a "Miniature India", with emphasis on her cultural achievements that have spread far and wide including Thailand. A plot of land near by,

about 6-8 rais in area (approximately 3.50 acres), had been reserved by me for the purpose. Almost 30 years have now elapsed with many projects at our institute already fulfilled, but without the “Miniature India” just spoken of. It is my feeling that we should now take up the matter and realize it. This will show that we are not negligent of our duty towards those who have rendered us good and it will definitely be an expression of our deep-seated gratitude to India.

The Plea to build Miniature India

Today I have somewhat overdone my talk. I began with recounting India's benevolent acts towards us and ended with urging for the building of a “Miniature India” I wish to state here very clearly that this is neither an act of fund raising nor a charity collection. Our Institute, Suanmokkhabalaram or the Garden of Liberation, has never embarked upon such an act. What I desire is to produce something concrete as a token of our gratitude to the goodness rendered to us. This is no fund raising; no charity collection.

In substance, Buddhism will be the guiding force in the construction of the Miniature India. Historically authentic spots will be allotted to sites connected with Buddhism and the Buddha's life story, such as places of His Birth, Enlightenment, Preaching of the First Sermon and His Passing. Due consideration will also be given to places sacred to the Hindus. In short, as soon as anybody sees this Miniature India, he or she will at once recognise with joy that “Yes, this is India!”

At the same, time, it will demonstrate the Thai people's sense of thankfulness to the Indian friends for their benevolent acts in introducing to us their religion and culture which, so to say, have become our flesh and blood for the last two or three thousand years, nay, even be fore the arrival of Buddhism.

I have spoken about the "Dharmanacakra" or the Realm of Dharma to which is related the "Dharmacakra" or the Wheel of Law, brought here by the Indians. Today we have Buddhism with us. Buddhism has given us the meaning of life. Here, we see a large assembly of the faithful, i.e. upasakas and upasikas, the cleanly-shaven monks or Bhikkhus; all these are unmistakable evidences of the cultural influence of India.

What I am telling you today may not concern directly the Asalha Puja Day to celebrate which we are assembled. But, indirectly it does, because it concerns the Wheel of Law which, while enriching our lives, has enabled us to call ourselves Thais.

What I have said in respect of our relationship with India and the Indian people is truth. You may or may not like to hear about it. You may even get displeased with me for relating it. Truth, however, remains truth; nobody can deny it. And we, on our part, cannot become forgetful of it. The Miniature India about which I have spoken, will be a token of honour to India. It will, I feel certain, be a source of pride and satisfaction to the Indians. The construction should neither be too elaborate or too simple; its purpose is just to bear witness

that we are not a forgetful people.

Another important point which I want you to bear in mind is that in this cultural presentation, the Indians brought the gift to us at our own door; no effort was made by us. As already spoken, the Buddhist records have it that Emperor Ashoka, the great Buddhist monarch, commissioned two Buddhist elders, Sona and Uttara Theras by name, to bring the message of Buddhism to Suvarnabhumi, the Southeast Asian region of which Thailand is a part.

In Southern Thailand there are families which trace their source to Indian traders who migrated and settled here. I myself have relatives who speak of their Indian ancestry, some claiming Brahmin lineage. All these are historical facts.

It might be of interest to you to hear a question from me. May I ask: "At what stage of life we Thais, in one way or another, have not come under the cultural sway of India?" If you want my help to answer this question, I can only say in all honesty that we are influenced by Indian cultural beliefs and observances from, as it were, the cradle to the grave. Nay, I would say from the time of conception in our mother's womb. Just study the following phases in our life: mother's pregnancy, child's birth, tonsorial cutting, child's education, his or her marriage, religious observances from youth till old age, performance at the time of death and after, etc., etc. Can we deny that religious-cum-cultural observances at the afore-mentioned stages of life did not

have their origin in India?

Buddhists must be mindful of other's goodness

Now, if you who are present here do not think that what I am talking is nonsensical, then let us think over how should we return India's benevolence? To behave as if we do not remember other's goodness, is too ill-bred to allow it to pass. Whether monks or laymen, we are indebted to India for reasons already stated. Some of you may not like the idea and may simply say: "It is none of my concern. I am a Thai, I am for Thailand only, and have nothing to do with India". I feel that, as Buddhists, we could ill afford ignoring the obligation. It is incumbent on us to do something in this connexion. Over and above, in doing so we will not repay the benevolence only of India but also of the Buddha, for the Buddha was an Indian; He attained Enlightenment in India; His Dharma or Religion was promulgated in India. No one can challenge this historical truth.

I beseech you to think over the issue. Please forgive me. I am not asking for charity. I only express to you what I feel in the depth of my heart. I require help to accomplish the task. One foot of mine is already in the grave. I have accomplished many undertakings in life. Only this one, the Miniature India, remains. Miniature India, if and when fulfilled, will demonstrate to the world that we Thais are a grateful people. We honour India and the Indians for the cultural and religious gifts presented to us. And in so doing we also honour the

Buddha, our Father.

The Dharmacakra or the Wheel of Law was introduced and established here by the Indians, spreading over far-flung area, beginning from the Malay Peninsula right up to Chiangmai and beyond, marked all the way by archaeological sites and remains testifying to Indian cultural influence.

My talk today may not have a direct bearing on the Dharma. But the issue of feeling thankful to a person for his kind act is a tenet taught in the Dharma. So, in our case, we are inspired by the Dharma in feeling grateful to India. India had given us culture, religion and even occultism. There is a combination of Indian flesh and blood in ours. We unconsciously have Hinduism as our mother and Buddhism, our father.

To sum up, my talk today may be taken as a reminder of our duty to repay the moral debt due to India because India bestowed on us the Wheel of Law, the Pali terminology being "Dharmacakra". You may, if you deem fit, kindly convey the news to your friends and acquaintances across the country. We must fulfill our duty, the sooner the better.

I have spoken for an hour. It is now high time to stop. Let us offer our sincere thanks to the Dharma for bringing us together here. Had the Wheel of Law not been established here, we might have been followers of other religions, may be Christianity or Islam. Indian culture and religions, Buddhism in particular, coalesced

under the name of the Wheel of Law, were firmly established here, thus giving birth to the Thai Buddhist Realm. We have to look after this realm to the best of our ability. With its blessings we mean to conquer the devils, both within and without. We will thereby attain purity, wisdom and peace, and be Buddhists in the true sense. We will not be the receivers only. We will also be the repayers, repaying in proportion to the precious gifts received.

My talk today may or may not be termed Dharmic. I have told you the truth. It is up to you to put it into action, individually or collectively. It will be an indication of our gratitude to India. Please bear in mind day and night that as Buddhists we can not be unmindful of the goodness rendered to us.

Thank you!

Translated from the Thai by

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SUGGESTED READING

Other books by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu:

Buddha-Dhamma For Students

Christianity and Buddhism

Dhamma – The World Saviour

Gesänge und Sprüche zur Verehrung und Andacht in Dhamma

Handbook For Mankind

Heartwood From The Bo Tree

Handbuch für die Menschheit

India's Benevolence to Thailand

Keys to Natural Truth

Life Should Be Harnessed By Two Buffaloes

Mindfulness with Breathing: Unveiling the Secrets of Life

No Religion

Paticca-Samupāda: Practical Dependent Origination

Some Marvellous Aspects of Theravāda Buddhism

The 24 Dimensions of Dhamma

The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh

The A, B, C of Buddhism

The Prison of Life

Towards Buddha-Dhamma

Zwei Arten der Sprache

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