

Charisma in Buddhism

By Ven. Piyasilo



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Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.

CHARISMA IN BUDDHISM?

A sociological and doctrinal study of charisma, this book discusses three past Buddhist workers — Father Sumaṅgalo, Ānanda Maṅgala Mahā. nāyaka Thera, Dr. Wong Phui Weng — and a living master, the charismatic Ajahn Yantra Amaro of Siam. Among other topics discussed are

- Types of charisma
- Genius, leadership and charisma
- The Buddha as a charismatic leader
- The Sangha and the routinization of charisma
- Exploiting charisma
- The disadvantages of charisma
- Buddhist Suttas relating to charisma

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- Buddhism, Merit and Ideology
- Charisma in Buddhism (1992h)

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Charisma

in Buddhism

Piyasilo

Commemorating the Venerable Piyasīlo's 20 Years of Monkhood

CHARISMA IN BUDDHISM

A study of the work
of
Father Sumaṅgalo,
Ānanda Maṅgala Mahā.nāyaka Thera
and Dr. Wong Phui Weng
in
Malaysia and Singapore
&
Phra Ajahn Yantra Amaro

[being a preprint of
*Buddhism, Society and History:
towards a postmodern perspective*]

by

PIYASĪLO

Dharmafarer Enterprises
for
The Community Of Dharmafarers

1992h

[II:6.3–6.8]

THE BUDDHIST CURRENTS SERIES

This title forms part of the main work, *Buddhism, History and Society* (1992g) by Piyasīlo. Due to its length and for the sake of a balanced treatment of topics in the main book, this segment has been issued separately as a *preprint* but maintaining the original number sequence of the main book with which it should be used. In this way, individual topics of special interest are made cheaply available even before the main title has been released. Some sections of the books listed below may not have as much details or as many references as the author would like them to have. This shortcoming is due to his Dharmafarer Libraries being withheld by the Friends of Buddhism Malaysia, which he left in 1991 to work with the Community of Dharmafarers. The author welcomes your criticisms and suggestions.

The Buddhist Currents titles include:

- (1) Buddhism, History and Society: Towards a postmodern perspective (1992g). *Main text*.
- (2) Buddhist Currents: A brief social analysis of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Siam (1992a). I.30.2–30.322.
- (3) Buddhism, Merit and Ideology: Some aspects of Buddhism in Siam today (1992f). I.30.33–30.37.
- (4) Charisma in Buddhism: A study of the work of Father Sumaṅgalo, Ānanda Maṅgala Mahā.nāyaka Thera and Dr. Wong Phui Weng in Malaysia and Singapore & Yantra Amaro (1992h). II:6.3–6.8.

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DEDICATED
to
our Past and Present
and a Dharmic vision of the future

to

THE BUDDHIST GRADUATES
AND PROFESSIONALS
of
Malaysia and Singapore
the pupils, supporters, admirers
and emulators

of

the Venerable (Dr.) Sumaṅgalo, DLitt
the Venerable Wattala Ānanda Maṅgala
Mahā.nāyaka Mahā.thera
‘Saddharma.kīrti Śrī Paṇḍita Dhamm’āloka
Vaṃsa-d,dhvaja’
late Chief High Priest of the Amarapura Nayāka
in Malaysia and Singapore
and
Dr. Dharmapāla Wong Phui Weng, PhD

‘Anak cucu jadi saksi.’
(Posterity will bear witness)

PIYASĪLO & THE COMMUNITY OF DHARMAFARERS

Piyasīlo started life as a monk in Singapore in 1970. After his 5-year basic monastic training in Siam, he worked in Melaka, Petaling Jaya, Singapore and elsewhere running **national residential Dharma courses**.

As a Buddhist writer, his work cover children's books, textbooks, doctrinal discussion and translations of Pali texts (especially the Sutta Nipāta). Besides running open meditation retreats, Piyasīlo introduced basic meditation into the campus Buddhist curriculum.

In 1983, he founded the Singapore Buddhist Youth Fellowship, later called The Friends of Buddhism Singapore (1986). As one of the pioneers of the **Buddhist Studies** project for Singapore secondary schools (1981–1992), he was instrumental in its success, serving as Resource Consultant and lecturer to the Buddhist Studies Team of the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore.

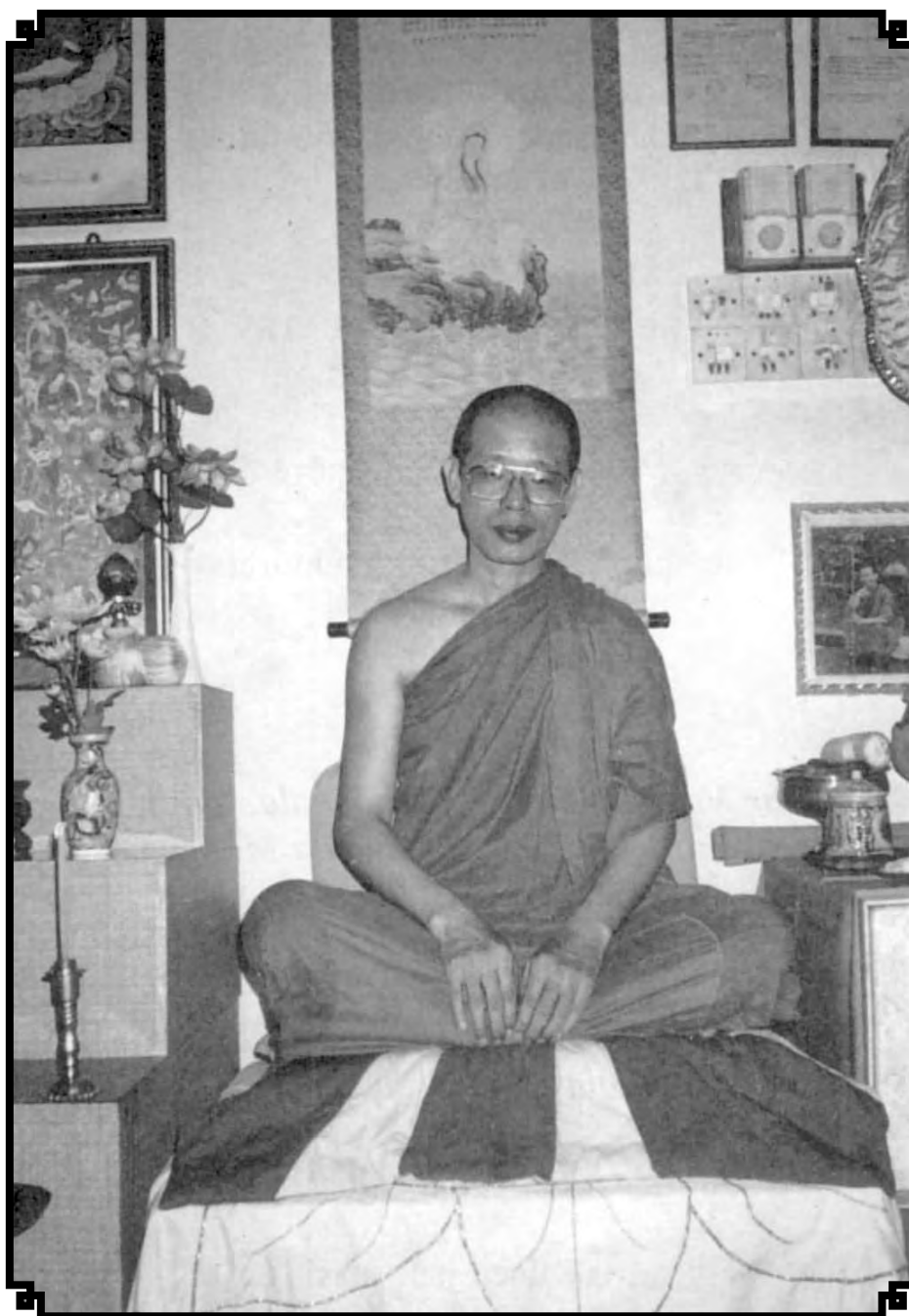
In February 1981, he founded the Damansara Buddhist Vihara, followed by the Friends of Buddhism Malaysia in June 1984. In the late 1980s, Apple Computer featured him in 'A day in the life of an Apple user' for Southeast Asia.

Among more than 40 titles he had written are *Avalokitesvara, Mandala and the Five Buddhas, Nichiren, Charisma in Buddhism* and *Buddhism, History and Society*.

In 1991, at the threshold of his Third Decade of Dharma work, Piyasīlo renounced 'association Buddhism' to work on his own as a socially-engaged Buddhist with the **Community of Dharmafarers**, comprising Dharmacaris or full-time communitarian lay Buddhist workers. Piyasīlo and the Dharmacaris are interested in how local Buddhists think and work in order to understand and solve their problems, and to seek **ideas**

that would be conducive towards the building of a wholesome **Buddhist Community** based on Right Livelihood.

One of the continued efforts of the Community is Buddhist research and the the production of books such as this one. Since the Community comprises of full-time voluntary workers, your Dharma-spirited assistance is most welcome. The official organ of the Community is the *Svara*, a quarterly journal.



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PREFACE

This book grew from my attempt to study cult and sect in Malaysian/Singaporean Buddhism, and to answer the question 'Is Buddhism today a cult?' [*Buddhism, History and Society*, 1992g 11:6–6.21]. One of the main characteristics of a cult is its leader's charisma. In this case, I was also concerned at the lack of continuity of Buddhist work in the two countries, where I work. For reasons which I have discussed in the main text, *Buddhism, History and Society*, Malaysians and Singaporeans have a special attraction to *teachers* rather than to teachings. The success or failure of a Buddhist teacher here, in other words, depends on whether or not he is *liked* and approved of by the Buddhist establishment. The principal factor leading to such an acceptance or popularity, that is, *charisma*, is here discussed from the doctrinal, historical and social aspects.

The period of study covered in this book spans about 40 years, that is, beginning around 1955 when **Sumaṅgalo** first arrived in Malaya to the death of **Wong Phui Weng** in 1988, with **Ānanda Maṅgala** sandwiched in between — these three are past Buddhist workers — and the living charismatic, **Yantra Amaro**. It goes without saying that the roots of the events and ideas discussed here go further back, and that their effects are being felt to this day. However, this is neither a biography of Sumaṅgalo, Ānanda Maṅgala, Wong Phui Weng, nor Yantra; nor is it an effort at a 'historical' ancestor or hero worship. It is an attempt to present a critical survey, that is, an analytical study, of the ideas, difficulties and significance of their work.

In some ways, the methods of the three past Buddhist workers have been emulated by many Buddhist leaders in Malaysia and Singapore today, usually without being aware of it. Indeed, not many of the new generations of Buddhists have even heard of Sumaṅgalo, Ānanda Maṅgala and Wong Phui Weng. Most of those who have known them tend to be ignorant of their significance, even simply forget them, in today's fashionable maelstrom and multitude of Buddhist gurus and groups. The overall lesson here is that there is a need for *continuity* in local Buddhist work.

The second section of this book [6.7], on **Charisma** itself, is its longest and, theoretically, the most important. Admittedly, this is a Buddhist interpretation of charisma, with the main purpose of examining its context in current Buddhism. In fact, this section grew out of the Buddhist Training Centre Occasional Paper 4, of the same title, which was in turn a revision of an article which first appeared in *Still Water* (Jan–Mar 1991), the FOBM newsletter.

The last section on **Yantra Amaro** was prompted by his visit to Malaysia in June 1992. This analysis of the charisma of Yantra is based on available documents about him (all of which were produced by his group) and on participation observations. This section was the easiest to write because Yantra, like Ānanda Maṅgala, is rather relatively well documented, that is, as far as this brief study goes. My experience of Siamese Buddhism and some knowledge of Siamese helped tremendously in the analysis.

Sadly we could not include any photographs in this maiden edition. *We are likely to include photographs and any relevant new materials in future editions if they are available, especially from my readers.* This is one way to preserve such valuable materials for future generations. Perhaps other scholars might be interested to do further research in this area, too. Surely, such efforts would contribute to the better understanding of not only local Buddhism, but of current Buddhism as a whole.

Since this book is actually a preprint from the main text, *Buddhism, History and Society*, its Preface (including the Acknowledgements) apply here, too. However, I have to especially thank the Dharmacaris for their suggestions of living examples of a few of the charismatic types discussed in this book. The Afterword is also from the main text, but which probably would have been revised when the completed work is published. The bibliography of this book is found in the main text.

P.

‘Samantamukha.’

21st July 1992

ABBREVIATIONS

(Scriptural and Reference)

[A title in SMALL CAPITALS refers to a Canonical work, followed by its *PTS translation title*. For other abbreviations and conventions, and more details, see *Guide to Buddhist Studies*, vol. 1: Abbreviations, Conventions and a Bibliography.]

A	AṄG'UTTARA.NIKĀYA (<i>The Gradual Sayings</i>)
AA	MANORATHA.PŪRANĪ, Aṅg'uttara Nikāya Commentary
APA	VISUDDHA,JANA.VILĀSINĪ, Apadāna Commentary
AP	APADĀNA
B	BUDDHA.VAṂSA (<i>Chronicles Of The Buddhas</i>)
BA	MADHUR'ATTHA.VILĀSINĪ, Buddha.vaṃsa Commentary (<i>The Clarifier of the Sweet Meaning</i>)
Bc	Burmese Tripiṭaka, Chaṭṭha Saṅgīti Edition, Rangoon [Yangon]
BHS	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
BURM	Burmese, Myanmarese
C	CARIYĀ.PIṬAKA (<i>Bucket of Conduct</i>)
CA	CARIYĀ.PIṬAKA COMMENTARY (Paramattha.dīpanī VII)
CHIN	Chinese
CPD	<i>Critical Pali Dictionary</i> , Ed Trenckner et al, 1924-
CULV	CŪLA.VAṂSA
D	DĪGHA.NIKĀYA (<i>Dialogues of the Buddha</i>)
DA	SUMAṄGALA.VILĀSINĪ, Dīgha Nikāya Commentary
DH	DHAMMAPADA

DHA	DHAMMAPAD'ATTHAKATHĀ, Dhammapada Commentary
DHK	DHĀTU.KATHĀ (Pakaraṇa) (<i>Discourses on the Elements</i>)
DHKA	DHĀTU.KATHĀ COMMENTARY
DHS	DHAMMA.SAṄGAṆĪ (<i>A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics</i>)
DHSA	DHAMMA.SAṄGAṆĪ COMMENTARY (Attha.sālinī)
DIPV	DĪPA.VAṂSA
DIVY	DIVYĀVADĀNA
DP	DUKA.PAṬṬHĀNA
DPA	DUKA.PAṬṬHĀNA COMMENTARY
DPL	<i>Dictionary of Pali Language</i> , R.C. Childers, London, 1874.
DPPN	<i>Dictionary of Pali Proper Names</i> , 2 Vols, G.P. Malalasekera, Indian Text Series, 1937; repr PTS. 1960.
ENCY	<i>Encyclopædia of Buddhism</i> : vols 1 (1961), 2 (1966), & 3 (1971)
BSM	Ed G.P. Malalasekera; vol 3 (1979) ed J. Dhirasekera; Govt of Sri Lanka.
IT	ITI.VUTTAKA (<i>As It Was Said</i>)
ITA	ITI.VUTTAKA COMMENTARY (Paramattha.dīpanī II)
J	JĀTAKA (<i>Jātaka Stories</i>)
KH	KHUDDAKA.PĀTHA (<i>Minor Readings</i>)
KHA	KHUDDAKA.PĀTHA COMMENTARY (Paramattha.Jotikā I) (<i>Minor Reading and Illustrator</i>)
KVU	KATHĀ.VATTHU (<i>Points of Controversy</i>)
KVUA	KATHĀ.VATTHU PAKARAṆA COMMENTARY (Pañca-p,pakaraṇ'-aṭṭhakathā III)

LALV	LALITA.VISTĀRA
M	MAJJHIMA.NIKĀYA (<i>Middle Length Sayings</i>)
MA	PAPAÑCA.SŪDANĪ, Majjhima Nikāya Commentary
MAHV	MAHĀ.VAṂSA (incl Cūlavam̐sa)
MILN	MILINDA.PAÑHĀ
MVST	MAHĀ.VASTU (Avadāna)
Nc	CULLA.NIDDESA
NCA	CULLA.NIDDESA COMMENTARY (Saddhamma.pajjotika II)
NETT	NETTI-P,PAKARAṆA (<i>The Guide</i>)
NM	MAHĀ.NIDDESA
NMA	MAHĀ.NIDDESA COMMENTARY (Saddhamma.pajjotika I)
P	PAṬISAMBHIDĀ.MAGGA (<i>The Path of Discrimination</i>). Pāli.
PA	SADDHAMMA-P,PAKĀSINĪ, Paṭisambhidā.magga Commentary
PAT	PAṬṬHĀNA MAHĀ.PAKARAṆA
PATA	PAṬṬHĀNA COMMENTARY (Pañca-p,pakaraṇ'aṭṭhakathā V)
PED	<i>Pali English Dictionary</i> , PTS, 1921-25, Repr 1966.
PG	<i>Pali Glossary</i> , Dines Andersen, 1901, 1904-7. Pkt
PKT	Prakrit
PTC	<i>Pali Tipiṭakam̐ Concordance</i> , Pts, 1952-
PTS	Pali Text Society (Edition), London.
PUG	PUGGALA.PAÑÑATTI (<i>Designation of Human Types</i>)
PUGA	PUGGALA.PAÑÑATTI COMMENTARY (Pañca-p,pakaraṇ'aṭṭhakathā II)
Pv	PETA.VATTHU (<i>Stories of the Departed</i>)

PvA	PETA.VATTHU COMMENTARY (Paramattha.dīpanī IV)
S	SAMYUTTA.NIKĀYA (<i>Kindred Sayings</i>)
SA	SAMYUTTA.NIKĀYA COMMENTARY, Sārattha-p,pakasini
SB	Royal Siamese Tripitaka, Bangkok.
SBB	Sacred Books of the Buddhists (tr series started by T.W. Rhys Davids, 1875), PTS.
SBE	Sacred Books of the East ed Max Muller, 1875–1900, OUP.
SED	<i>Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> (M. Monier-Williams), OUP, 1899; Repr, MLBD, 1963...1986.
SIAM	Siamese
SINH	Sinhalese, Sinhala
SKT	Sanskrit
SN	SUTTA.NIPĀTA (<i>Book Of Discourses</i>)
SNA	SUTTA.NIPĀTA COMMENTARY (Paramattha Jotikā II)
T	Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo , edd Takakusu & Watanabe, Tokyo [Chinese ed: Dazheng Xinxiu Dazang Jing, Taipei, 1975]
THA	THERA.GĀTHĀ (<i>Elders' Verses I</i>)
THAA	THERA.GĀTHĀ COMMENTARY (Paramattha.dīpanī V)
THI	THERĪ.GĀTHĀ (<i>Elders' Verses II</i>)
THIA	THERĪ.GĀTHĀ COMMENTARY (Paramattha.dīpanī VI)
TKP	TIKA.PAṬṬHĀNA
TKPA	(Tika)Paṭṭhān'aṭṭhakatha (Pañca-p,pakaraṇ'aṭṭhakathā V)
U	UDĀNA (<i>Verses of Uplift</i>)
UA	UDĀNA COMMENTARY (Paramattha.dīpanī I)
UJL	UPĀSAKA,JANĀLAṆKĀRA

Uv	UDĀNA.VARGA
V	VINAYA (Piṭaka) (<i>Book of Discipline</i>)
VA	VINAYA COMMENTARY (Samanta.pāsādikā)
VBH	VIBHAṄGA (<i>Book of Analysis</i>)
VBHA	VIBHAṄGA COMMENTARY (Sammoha.vinodanī)
VIMM	VIMUTTL.MAGGA (<i>The Path of Liberation</i>) [Upatissa]
VISM	VISUDDHI.MAGGA (<i>The Path of Purification</i>) [Buddhaghosa]
VISM _{MT}	PARAMATTHA.MAÑJŪSA, Visuddhi.Magga Mahā.tīkā
VT	VINAYA.TĪKĀ (Sārattha.dīpanī)
Vv	VIMĀNA.VATTHU (<i>Stories of the Mansions</i>)
VvA	VIMĀNA.VATTHU COMMENTARY (Paramattha.dīpanī III)
VY	SAMANTA.PĀSĀDIKĀYA ATTHA.YOJANĀ, Vinaya Attha.yojanā
YAM	YAMAKA
YAMA	YAMAKA COMMENTARY (Pañca-p,pakaraṇ'atṭhakatā IV)

* Starred forms. These are Pali neologisms, e.g. *pāliññū, most of which are from the 'Thai-English Buddhist Dictionary', part II of Phra Rajavaramuni's Dictionary of Buddhism (enl), Bangkok, 1985:361–442.

References within [square brackets] usually refer to *Buddhism, History and Society* or one of its related volumes. See title list on the imprint page. The reference is given as [Chapter:section] e.g. [X:5], or simply as [section], e.g. [5], if it is found within the same chapter.

II:6.3 Sumaṅgalo (Robert Stuart Clifton) (1903–1963)

The Venerable Sumaṅgalo (Robert Stuart Clifton), or Father Sumaṅgalo, as he was affectionately known in his own time, was born in Birmingham, Alabama (USA) in 1903 as Harold Amos Eugene Newman to a devout Christian family that had been dedicating its first sons to the ministry for over three centuries. As the only son, he was marked for the ministry, but from an early age began to doubt many Christian teachings. From the public library, he read books on all the world religions, and found himself attracted to Buddhism. At the tender age of 13 (1916), he embraced Buddhism, at a time when there were only a handful of Buddhists in the USA ('less than fifteen in the whole country', according to him). [See especially the various issues of *The Golden Light*, 1958-1964 & Seet Chee Kim's *Know More About Him*, Melaka, 1964.]

When he completed his university studies and attained a Doctorate in Literature, he began to lecture on Buddhism from time to time. From 1933 onwards, he began to give regular weekly lectures in San Francisco (California). After two years, he left for Japan and China to study Buddhism more deeply, and he remained in North Korea and Japan for a year. In 1935 he was ordained a Shin priest of Nishi Hongwan-ji by Chief Abbot Kosho Ohtani in Kyoto (Japan), the first Westerner to have done so. After that he returned to the US to perform his priestly functions while working in such jobs as a probation officer. He also lectured all over Europe, South America and Hawaii. In 1951, he founded the Western Buddhist Order, 'an organization dedicated to interpreting the Dharma to the West and establishing groups where none existed' (*The Western Buddhist*) and of which he became Superior-General. (Ernest 'Kaundinya Shinkaku' Hunt, an English priest of the Soto Zen

temple in Hawaii, was its President.) In Britain, his Order was represented by Rev. Jack Austin.

In 1954 he left his New York home for southeast Asia. En route, he stayed three weeks in Hawaii where he founded a Buddhist Club in the University of Hawaii. Then he was in Japan for six weeks, lecturing at thirty universities. After a brief visit to Hong Kong, he went to Rangoon [today Yangon, Myanmar] to attend the 3rd Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. Then he went on to Siam, where he stayed for three years. In June 1957, he joined the Theravāda Order in the Kingdom of Laos, and was given the Dharma name (chāyā) of *Sumaṅgalo* (meaning 'very auspicious'). Later that year he left for Penang (Malaya) which became his base until his death six years later.

Earlier on, in 1955, as the Advisor of the Penang Buddhist Association (PBA), he founded the PBA Youth Circle (PBAYC). Sumaṅgalo's **Youth Circle** (YC) concept, an effective adaptation of a successful Western Christian idea (already popular amongst the Japanese Buddhists of the USA) began to catch on among the young Buddhist British subjects of Malaya who easily took to the innovative monk, what more a white Westerner of philosophical humour at that. The 'YC explosion' shook Malaya at the following epicentres:

- 1955 — The Penang Buddhist Association YC.
- 1958 — The Malacca Buddhist Association YC.
- 1958 — The Kedah Buddhist Association YC.
- 1958 — The Central Kedah Buddhist YC (Sungai Petani).
- 1958 — The Trengganu Buddhist YC. *(The TBYC was formed before its parent-body.)
- 1959 — The Wat Chaiyamangalaram [Jaya.maṅgal'ārāma] Buddhist YC (Penang).
- 1959 — The Batu Pahat Buddhist YC.

- 1960 — The Taiping Buddhist Society YC.
- 1960 — The Selangor Buddhist Association YC (KL).
- 1961 — The Kelantan Buddhist Association YC.
- 196? — The Buddhist Society of Perak YC.*
- 1963 — The Segamat Buddhist YC.

[*The BSPYC was probably formed around 1961-1963.]

As a result of a two-month (November–December 1959) Dharma tour of **Singapore** by Sumaṅgalo and Susiddhi (a newly ordained American monk), a number of Sunday Schools and YCs were formed there at the Maha Bodhi School (at Geylang), the Poh Em Ssu (at Pasir Panjang), the Singapore Buddhist Lodge (Kim Yam Road), Meow Im Kok Yuen (Sommerville Road), Bodhi Larn Yah (at Telok Kurau), and the WFB Singapore Regional Centre (The Singapore Buddhist Youth Circle). In January the same year, while Sumaṅgalo was passing through Singapore on his way to the US, the faithful of Singapore offered him the honorary abbotship of the Poh Em Ssu [Bao En Si], the first white man to have ever taken such a position in the country. (The Chief Trustee of this beautiful monastery on a hill overlooking the sea off Pasir Panjang was Mr. Lee Choon Seng, a prominent businessman and Buddhist.)

While in Singapore, Sumaṅgalo and Ms. Pitt Chin Hui translated the Kṣītigarbha Sūtra from the Chinese into English. He also worked on *Buddhist Stories for Young and Old* (1960). In the same year, back in Penang, he published the popular *Buddhist Sunday School Lessons*, which was then widely used in Malaya. Besides *The Golden Light* (his first effort) and *Wesak Lotus Blossom*, he helped start a number of other Buddhist magazines. Alongside the traditional chants used by the respective Buddhist groups, he introduced an English liturgy, especially in the form of responsories (another Christian legacy to Buddhist advantage), and used modern hymns during services

[cf H.S. Olcott [I:30.241] in Ceylon]. Early in his stay in Penang, he had introduced the consecration of Buddhist couples — the Buddhist wedding — following a set English text. Not everyone, however, accepted this innovation, which later died out. (Liow Woon Khin, *Buddhist Temples and Associations in Penang, 1845–1948*, JMBRAS 62,1 1989:77& n71.) Despite his numerous duties, he still found time to counsel and comfort both the young and the elderly.

6.31 The FMBYF

Sumaṅgalo's Dharma efforts were mainly geared towards three main areas, that is, rectifying misconceptions regarding Buddhism, correcting 'Buddhist' malpractices, and activating the local Buddhist children and youths. From his Christian background, it is obvious that he knew the importance of socializing the Buddhists at an early age, certainly not later than their twenties. He introduced and encouraged youth activities by way of music, singing, dancing, games, sports, festivals and whatever would attract the youths. One very effective method he employed was the 'goodwill tours', often with the Penang Buddhist Association members, to visit various Buddhist centres all over the country. He was himself an untiring traveller, not just in Malaysia, but the world over (USA, Siam, Canada, Japan, Hawaii, the Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore, Australia).

Sumaṅgalo's efforts eventually led to the first ever national youth gathering, the 'First' **Pan-Malayan Buddhist Youth Convention** (24–27 December 1958), held in the Penang Buddhist Association premises. The participants comprised twelve delegations, coming from Kedah, Malacca [Melaka], Penang [Pulau Pinang], Singapore, Trengganu [Terengganu] and Selangor,

and numerous guests and observers (called 'visitors'). The opening ceremony was conducted by Sumaṅgalo himself, who gave an address. The Thai Consul, the Malayan Chinese Association president (Lim Chong Eu), and representatives from the PBAYC, the University of Malaya Buddhist Society, Malacca, and Selangor, also spoke. Among the congratulatory messages and telegrams received and read were those from the Yang Dipertuan Agung [the King] and the Prime Minister (Tunku Abdul Rahman).

Sumaṅgalo was elected the pro tem Chairman (i.e. the Convention Chairman) and Tan Keng Huat of Penang the Hon. Secretary. Then the delegates from the various states each gave their opening speeches. During the first two days of the Convention, 19 resolutions were discussed, and 15 were adopted. The Selangor Buddhist Association YC submitted the key resolutions:

1. That a Pan-Malayan Buddhist Youth Federation be formed. [The prefix 'Pan-' was deleted in the amended resolution.]
2. That should a Pan-Malayan Buddhist Youth Federation be formed, the office-bearers of the new organization be elected in accordance with the constitution that has been adopted.
3. That a quarterly magazine [later amended to 'newsletter'] containing articles from members of various Buddhist Youth organisations in Malaya and Singapore be published.

(Selangor Buddhist Assn., *Anniversary Souvenir Magazine* 1958/1959.)

The UM Buddhist Society resolution 'that religion be taught in all government schools and that pupils be allowed freedom of choice' was unanimously adopted. The Constitution drafted by the PBAYC was also adopted. The nomination of office bearers then followed. Of the five members elected to the 1st MBYF Council, the posts of the President, the Vice-President and the

Hon. Treasurer were held by Penang. The Hon. Gen. Secretary and his Assistant were from Malacca, and the Hon. Auditor from Kedah.

The main aims of the **Malayan Buddhist Youth Fellowship** (MBYF) were to ensure the future of Buddhism in Malaya; to create more opportunities for fellowship amongst Buddhist youths; to curb the growing materialism amongst modern youths; to promote good citizenship; and to train future Buddhist leaders. It was also resolved that the official address of the MBYF be that of the PBA, and that the venue for the next convention (held biennially) be either Singapore (first choice) or Malacca. The affair concluded with the Convention Dinner. The last three days of the Convention (26–28 December) were spent on excursions to places of interests and recreation (including campfires).

The Second National Convention of the MBYF was held in the Malacca Buddhist Association (Seck Kia Eenh) premises (19–21 December 1960), which was declared open by the Chief Minister (Abdul Ghafar bin Baba). Nationwide participants comprised 15 delegates representing 13 Buddhist youth organizations. Khoo Kah Loon was elected the President, with Lim Hong Tatt as the Hon. Gen. Secretary. Besides Sumaṅgalo, six prominent Chinese Mahāyāna monks — Seck Kim Seng (Malacca), Seck Hong Choon (Singapore), Seck Kong Ghee, Seck Jin Yen, Seek Poon Tor, Seek Chuk Mor (all from Penang) — were elected Religious Advisors. A number of lay patrons and advisers were also elected. In 1961, the Executive Council was directed by the Registrar of Societies to change its name to the *Federation of Malaya Buddhist Youth Fellowship* (FMBYF) because its old name, with only *Malaya*, ‘may give rise to the impression that Singapore is also included.’ (*The Golden Light* 1963 4,2:21 f)

The Third National Convention of the FMBYF was held in the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society premises in Kuala Lumpur (16–19 December 1962). The Minister of Transport (Dato' Haji Sardon bin Haji Jubir), who had consented to declare the Convention open, failed to turn up due to health reasons. The President, too, was absent due to some urgent matter. Sumaṅgalo declared the Convention open. One of the highlights of the meeting was the voluntary offer by the Kuala Trengganu delegation to host the 1964 Convention. 'The generous offer was accepted with alacrity and thus a rather vexatious problem was erased from the agenda,' reported *The Golden Light* (1963 6,2:21). The Convention introduced a new election system where 'a nominating committee composed of the outgoing officers and national advisers meet and prepare a slate of candidates for office-bearers.' (ib.). Chan Wee How was elected the new President, with Cheah Swee Jin as his Hon. Gen. Secretary; both were from the PBAYC.

By 1961, Sumaṅgalo's arduous local Dharma tours had brought him into contact with all the four institutions of higher learning in KL (the University of Malaya, the Technical College, the Language Institute and the Federation Military College), where he held lectures and conferences to assist them in their organizational work. In February 1963, Sumaṅgalo was scheduled to go on a Dharma tour of Australia and New Zealand, but on 6th February, he died. The greatest loss due to his death was perhaps the fact that his efforts towards the formation of a **Pan-Malayan Buddhist Association** with the help of the Buddhist youth movements were beginning to take shape, and which would surely have been his greatest contribution to Malaysian Buddhism. [The idea of a Pan-Malayan Buddhist Federation, however, was first suggested in 1941 by Hirano [Hirano San], an ex-monk and the Japanese Director of Education in Penang.

(*Penang Wesak Holiday Souvenir* 1949:21; *Federation of Malaya Wesak Celebrations Souvenir* 1962:27) [Cf. Editorial to *The Golden Light*, 1962 5,1.] (In 1959, however, the Malayan Buddhist Association was formed by the Chinese Mahāyāna Sangha. and which later became the main Buddhist voice in the country.) [V:8] The editorial *The Golden Light* of May 1963 noted that

...in this country, there have been comments that, with his passing, the Buddhist activities of the country — particularly its youth activities — will be greatly retarded, if not reduced.

This view is a fallacy, because, prior to his leaving this life, the late Venerable Sumaṅgalo had laid strong foundations for his successors to build on.

It will be seen later that these were ironic words: the Youth Circle movement did sputter and die out.

The Fourth National Convention (the last one) of the FMBYF was held in Kuala Trengganu (13–17 October 1964). It was hardly two years after Sumaṅgalo's death, but there were clear ominous signs of the direction that the Youth Circle movement was taking. The Convention had only about 10 hours of deliberation; the rest of the programme was relegated to 'fellowship' activities (or 'social activities', as they were called then), sports, social visits and dinners. However, the Convention did adopt a thoughtful resolution that a week every year be set aside to the memory of Sumaṅgalo. (*The FMBYF 4th Convention* souvenir publication, 1964. *The Malaysian Buddhist*, 1,1 Feb 1965:4.)

Earlier on, in 1963, after the 3rd National Convention, the Council planned to launch a quarterly: the first, and only, issue of *The Malaysian Buddhist* appeared in February 1964. By 1965, the FMBYF was still not a full-fledged national body, with merely 11 member organizations, that is, only about half of the existing youth groups in Malaya then. After that, the FMBYF significantly slowed down; the 1966 Convention planned for

KL was never held. The FMBYF's name was finally struck off the records of the Registrar of Societies on 2nd September 1970 (File R.S.M. 219/62). And so the 1960's closed with local Buddhist youth activities in the doldrums.

6.32 Sumaṅgalo's Sangha disciples

The six-year period that Sumaṅgalo spent in Malaya and Singapore (1957–1963) was highlighted by a number of admissions of Westerners into the Buddhist Order and the lively international Buddhist contact that local Buddhists (especially the PBA) enjoyed. Even before Sumaṅgalo, Westerners had been showing a growing interest in Buddhism, and foreign monks had been passing through Malaya and Singapore. One of the most charismatic of them was the Italian-born American Buddhist monk, **Lokaṇātha**, from New York who joined the Burmese Sangha in Rangoon. In the early 1930s, he made a tour of mainland Southeast Asia calling for reform and revitalization of the Theravāda Sangha. The Siamese Sangha, however, branded him as a subversive (P.A. Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict*, Singapore, 1989:135 t).

In 1947, on his way to the US, Lokaṇātha stopped over in Penang and gave public talks at the PBA and the Penang Hindu Sabha, among other places. His address on 'World Peace' was broadcast over the Penang Broadcasting Station. His forceful presentation won many converts in Malaya as well as the West. Two outstanding converts were Dr. Lowell H. Coate (Editor-in-Chief of *The Progressive World*) and the Countess Jennette Mlo-decka who, after leaving behind her wealth to her family, flew to Ceylon [Sri Lanka] to become a Buddhist nun. It is believed that Lokaṇātha converted the Catholic shrine of Rudolf Valentino (a Hollywood movie star, an idol of the 1920s) into a Buddhist one; for, according to Lokaṇātha, 'If the famous actor

had been alive today, surely he wouldn't object to seeing his Catholic Shrine transferred into a Buddhist Shrine, for he admired Buddhism although he was a devout Catholic.' Valentino, like Lokanātha, was Italian-born.

In 1952, Jack Austin (b. 1917) and Richard Robinson were ordained by Sumaṅgalo in London. Austin was given the name of **Suvajra**. In 1954, he was initiated into the Arya Maitreya Mandala (founded by Lama Govinda) in West Berlin. In 1966, he was initiated into the Soto Zen by Chisan Koho Zenji in London. In 1977, he was ordained as a Hongwan-ji priest in Kyoto.

In 1958, Sumaṅgalo ordained Anton Miles as **Mahinda**, who had arrived from Australia where he had spent a year of rest after an arduous six years in many Buddhist countries of Asia. He took over much of the teaching and meditation classes which leaves Sumaṅgalo momentarily freer to engage in youth work and Sunday School promotion. His special interest in meditation led to the formation of the first local meditation centre, the 'Dhyana Meditation Centre' (*The Golden Light* 1958 1,3:24).

The maiden issue of *The Golden Light* reported one **Vajrasara** (James E. Wagner) who had 'now completed a course of special study at the University of Hawaii and, on finishing this work, he will visit his family in California and then return to Malaya to undertake English language preaching in Singapore-Malaya.' (1958 1,1:21). The same issue also reported that Prasitt S. Clifton, adopted son of Sumaṅgalo, had become a student in a Los Angeles high school 'where he will study for some three years, afterwards going to the recently opened American Buddhist College in New York City for another two years to study, prior to returning to Malaya to work as a Buddhist missionary and specialist in meditation.' (1958 1,1:20). An interesting news

item on the same page said that Seck Chuk Mor had given a very successful series of Dharma public lectures to the Hawaiian Chinese Buddhist Association in Hawaii.

In May 1959, Harold Brian Goode (an American from Hollywood) was initiated as a novice and named **Susiddhi**. He then left for Japan, where he was conferred full orders by the Supreme Zen Patriarch on 9th September 1959. He returned to Penang on 15th September to become Sumaṅgalo's close assistant. One of Susiddhi's achievements was his authorship of 'Buddhism Today', a feature-length colour documentary film on Buddhism in Malaya, focussing on youth activities. Important sequences were filmed in various parts of the country, especially Penang, Malacca (including the 2nd FMBYF Convention), Selangor and Kedah. The film's executive producer, Yeoh Cheang Aun, announced that production plans had been made for a second film, and a crew is expected to leave for Bangkok, Chiangmai and Angkor Wat in the near future. (*The Golden Light* 1961 4,2:15 f.)

In 1961, Susiddhi went on a Dharma tour of Siam, Hong Kong and Taiwan, all of which took him nine weeks. While in Taiwan, he ordained as a bhikshu of the Mahāyāna Order and received the Bodhisattva Precepts. Sadly, a motoring accident there kept him in bed for a month, but he returned to Penang in May to continue his duties. He is believed to have disrobed in due course.

On 3rd October 1959, Dallan Steding (an American) was ordained in the PBA and given the Dharma name of **Subhadra**. In 1961, Marcel Cerutti, the President of the Swedish Buddhist Society, was ordained in the PBA and named **Suṇyāta**. By then he was already engaged in a lecture tour of several educational institutions, and later received permission to translate into Swedish and publish some of the PBA publications.

Later in the year, he went to Dhammaduta College at Kaba Aye, Rangoon [Yangon, Myanmar] for an extended stay to study Buddhism and effective propagation methods. Then he planned to make a tour of several Buddhist countries before returning to Sweden.

In 1961, Ms. Peggy Teresa Nancy Kennett, Mus.B. (b. 1924), an English professional music teacher, was reported to be working on 'The Great Renunciation', a cantata on the Buddha's life, and which would be available on long-playing record from her address in London (*The Golden Light* 1961 4.3:11 1). On the 21st January 1962 she was ordained into the Rinzai Zen [Linchi Chant tradition by Seck Kim Seng, the abbot of Cheng Hoon Teng (Malacca). Sumaṅgalo administered the Precepts and she was given the Dharma name of **Sumitrā**. In due course, she left for Japan to study Soto Zen at Soji-ji under Chisan Koho Zenji. She was installed as abbess of Unpuku-ji (Mie Prefecture), and then granted Sanzen licence. In 1970, **Jiyu Kennett Roshi** (the name and title she was given) moved to Shasta Abbey (Shastazan Chisan-ji) which became the headquarters of her reformed Soto Zen Church and Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (OBC). In her reforms, she has evidently attempted to adapt Roman Catholic hierarchical terminology to a Buddhist system suitable for the West. She has written a number of books, the best known of which is *Zen is Eternal Life* (1972) (2nd ed. as *Selling Water by the River*, 1976).

While Sumaṅgalo was living in Malaya, a number of Westerners (both men and women) went for refuge, and he also received a number of distinguished guests (e.g. Mr. Leo Dethridge of the Australian High Court and his wife, an officer of the Victoria Buddhist Society, in 1960). It appears that the PBA had a number of foreign representatives overseas: Rev. Iru Price was its representative in the US and Canada, and Ralph

Presnall in Hawaii. In the same year, a Buddhist Brotherhood was formed in the Malayan Teachers College, Kirkby (near Liverpool, England), with a committee of seven led by Cheah Swee Jin (ex PBAYC).

While the limelight seemed to be largely focussed on Western monks and nuns on the Malayan centre-stage, a momentous event was taking place in the Cheng Hoon Teng in Malacca. A Straits-born Chinese, Tan Cheng Kooi of Penang, was taking full Mahāyāna orders — the first local-born to do so — at 3 pm on 3rd March 1962 before a large assembly and given the Dharma name of **Seck Chi Kah**. Prior to his ordination, he had pursued his higher Buddhist studies under Seck Kim Seng. Sumaṅgalo administered the Precepts. Also present in the ceremony was the recently ordained Sister Sumitrā. Seck Chi Kah was then fluent in Hokkien, English and Malay, but today has mastered Mandarin, too. On 9th March he delivered his first public lecture to a capacity audience at the PBA where he spoke on 'The Advantages of the Buddhist Life.' (*Lotus Wesak Blossoms* 1962:6–10; reprinted in *New Directions in Buddhism Today*, the Community of Dharmafarers, 1992.)

6.33 Sumaṅgalo and Buddhism

After the death of Sumaṅgalo, except for Jiyu Kennett Roshi, none of the Westerner Sangha members he ordained or helped ordain, seemed to be active since. After six years of the 'Sumaṅgalo era', the Buddhist situation in Malaya apparently returned to 'normal', that is, basically every Buddhist temple, organization or group was only involved in its own affairs, or none at all. It is relevant to ask here why no one continued Sumaṅgalo's work? But before that we have to ask another related question: Why did Sumaṅgalo become a monk, and why did he choose to remain in Malaya?

There are basically two kinds of reasons for anyone to leave the household life for the monastic life. While it is true that a person of good intent would take the robe for spiritual reasons (personal development, altruistic work, enlightenment), there are also the *social* reasons for one to do so. Let me put it another way: why didn't Sumaṅgalo's predecessors become monks or nuns, or why are there no monks from a jungle tribe deep in the virgin Amazon? The answer is the same one that explains why, when and where Buddhism arose in India and elsewhere, and did so with resounding success. Very simply, the answer is that the conditions were right.

What were the conditions that made Sumaṅgalo turn to Buddhism and the robe? First and foremost, he came from a devoutly religious family. In fact, a number of other famous Western Buddhists came from devout Christian families and whose fathers were church ministers: T.W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) was the son of a Congregationalist minister; E. Douglas Harding (b. 1909) was disowned by his Exclusive Plymouth Brethren family. Others like Lokanātha and Ānanda Maṅgala (1917–1986) came from a devout Catholic background. Sometimes the person reacted against Christianity; sometimes, s/he was strongly attracted to Buddhism. A strong religious background usually encourages one to extend one's interest in religion.

The second reason is that native Westerners, at least those in Sumaṅgalo's area, tolerated other religions and cultures, or were indifferent to them. As such, he was not persecuted, which he would have been if he were living in Salem (Mass.) during the 17th century. In Susiddhi's case, he was exposed to Buddhism brought by Chinese migrants in San Francisco. Both Sumaṅgalo and Susiddhi, in other words, had the advantage of being socialized as a Buddhist from a relatively young age.

One could bring in a third reason, though not so acceptable to non-believers, that is, in their past lives, both of them must have been Buddhists. As such, they had the same propensity of being Buddhist in this life. Even then, good seeds might not grow in poor soil. There must be a conjunction of a number of suitable conditions. All the right conditions were present in the case of Sumaṅgalo and Susiddhi.

6.331 *Sumaṅgalo in Malaya*

During the best part of his life, Sumaṅgalo spent traversing the world, but decided to spend his last six years mostly in the Penang Buddhist Association in Malaya. Why Malaya and why the PBA? Sumaṅgalo arrived in Malaya in 1954, when she was still a British colony (but gained independence in 1957). It was a time when the British influence was still strong and the education system was not yet nationalized. The level of English in the urban areas, especially the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore), were among the highest in the empire.

The English-speaking Buddhists of Malaya and Singapore, a large majority of whom were ‘Straits Chinese’, that is, local-born Chinese (Peranakan or Baba who speak a Sino-Malay patois) and ethnic Chinese, who were proud to have been ‘British subjects’, retained a good level of Anglophilia (a deep respect for the British) (some of them even up to this day) while maintaining loyalty to their fatherland (i.e. Malaysia or Singapore). Although Sumaṅgalo was American, he spoke English; that was good enough for the native Buddhists, since they could communicate and work with him. Moreover, he was well schooled (DLitt), well travelled and mixed well.

Although the PBA began in a Mahāyāna tradition, it quickly grew into a non-sectarian Association. This was partly due

to the local presence of various Buddhist schools (the Pure Land, Burmese Theravāda, Siamese Theravāda and Sinhalese Theravāda) and the close proximity of Siam, a Buddhist country; and partly due to the tolerant and eclectic nature of the Chinese religious mind. Such a state of affairs suited Sumaṅgalo perfectly, since, in his own words,

I do not call myself a Theravadin or a Mahayanist. I am simply a follower of Lord Buddha and I am very happy to be a friend to anyone who is sincerely trying to follow Lord Buddha's teachings, whether that person is Burmese, Siamese, Chinese, Japanese, European or American. (Seet Chee Kim, *Know More About Him*. 1964:v f.)

Another important reason for Sumaṅgalo's sojourn in the PBA was that the Association elders and members accepted him, especially because they were *lay* Buddhists. It would have been a different story if the PBA was a monastery or vihara, considering that each community (Burmese, Siamese, Sinhalese, etc) had their own Buddhist temple and their native Sanghins.

6.332 *Why did the 'Sumaṅgalo era' end?*

The 'Sumaṅgalo era' ended for one simple reason — there was no one to continue his work. His protégé and would-be successor, Susiddhi, left Penang in due course. None of the other monks Sumaṅgalo ordained or helped ordain stayed on nor returned to assist him for any sustained period of time. If not for Susiddhi, he might not have made it so far. Such dedicated Sanghins are known to have died from overwork.

Why did the other Western monks (like Suvajra, Mahinda, Vajrasara, Subhadra and Sumitrā) not stay on? If Malaya of the 1950s and 1960s lacked local Sanghin workers, the West had even fewer. Most of the Sanghins in the East or the West had to initially work all alone. Suvajra (Jack Austin) became a pioneer

of Shin Buddhism in Britain. Sumitrā won worldwide fame as the head of Shasta Abbey and the reformed Western Zen Order.

Susiddhi was Sumaṅgalo's protege, but he faded from the scene after the teacher died. He apparently found the burden too heavy to bear. By 1961, Sumaṅgalo and Susiddhi were beginning to feel the strain of their work. While Sumaṅgalo was away, Susiddhi had to fill in for him, thus doing the tasks of two monks. *The Golden Light* reported, 'The fact that Venerable Sumaṅgalo and Reverend Susiddhi are already committed in and about Penang makes it a matter of soon-to-be imperative necessity that another modern-minded monk or nun come out to help in this work on a broad scale.' (1961 4,3:12). Two years later, Sumaṅgalo died.

Like his countryman, Henry Steel Olcott in Ceylon [I:30.241], Sumaṅgalo was a Buddhist pioneer who gave a boost to Buddhist revival in their adopted land. Sumaṅgalo, however, was not as successful as Olcott, and even failed to find a successor, a failure not entirely Sumaṅgalo's. Even today no local monk or nun has successfully started a line of Buddhist workers that survived him or her. This is because we are still not yet mentally independent, but depend on others to lead us. Or, we only play leaders, but are really only filling up opportunistic vacuums. *When Buddha is not around, Devadattas abound.*

6.34 Why the FMBYF failed

(a) In the 1970 National Buddhist Youth Seminar (25–29 July), 'sponsored' (i.e. organized) by the Selangor Buddhist Youth Fraternity, and held in the University of Malaya (KL), I was (on Ānanda Maṅgala's advice) one of those who strongly proposed that, instead of reviving the FMBYF, we should start all over again, and so was founded the Young Buddhist Association

of Malaysia (YBAM). It was almost as if a whole generation had passed by unnoticed and not many people in the Seminar knew what the FMBYF was, much less knew what to do with it. So much for continuity of leadership and work.

As is common in most organizations, *poor leadership* led to the decline of the FMBYF and its deregistration in 1970. The FMBYF was a pioneer Buddhist organization and its leaders might have been good Buddhists but were relatively inexperienced in organizational work. It was understandable that they almost solely depended on Sumaṅgalo for inspiration and approval. After all, he was a monk; that was a tall pedestal. And he was a white Westerner; that made the pedestal huge and awesome. Their leader, in other words, was not *primus inter pares*, a first amongst equals. It might be said that the FMBYF leaders, ironically, were poor leaders but good followers, that is, as long as they had their leader, Sumaṅgalo. What we have here, to rephrase a Chinese saying, is a case of *blue blanches, green bleaches*.

(b) It is never easy trying to run a national organization when the council members *came from different parts of the country*. Like a courtship, initial zest can be overwhelming. Then, like some marriages, the enthusiasm soon fizzles off. Outstation councillors found the long-distance travel increasingly tedious and other priorities began to loom conveniently larger. Even those living in the same town found the mile very long and missed meetings. Learning from this past mistake, the YBAM insists on having its core council members (especially the Standing Committee) from Penang residents or from its ambient region. The YBAM is effectively run by Penang.

The findings of the sociology of organizations clearly shows that an organization must have a healthy source of *funds* if it is to survive, what more thrive. [See, for example, Bird & Westley, 'The

economic strategies of new religious movements', *Sociological Analysis* 1985 46,2:157–70.] Although the FMBYF leadership comprised working professionals, its members were mostly students who could not afford to contribute much by way of funds. About halfway in its short life-span, there were clear signs of funding problems:

The Youth Circle of Wat Chaiya Mangalaram has instituted a new policy that is being followed by more and more youth circles all over the Federation. They take it for granted that those members who are so lax in paying subscriptions as to fall half a year or more behind in their payments are not worthy of being carried on the books. Now only slight arrears are tolerated and they have weeded out the 'feet-draggers'. They report that their youth circle is now more vigorous than ever. (*The Golden Light* 1961 4,2:16)

Neither all the Buddhist youth organizations nor all the Buddhist youths in the country participated in the FMBYF. Even at its peak, it represented less than half the total number of Buddhist youth organizations in the country. Due to strong crypto-Confucianist family upbringing, local Buddhist youths (about 14–40) were generally more obedient to their parents and family than to religion. Permission for going outstation to attend an FMBYF function (or for any movement outstation, for that matter) was not always forthcoming. Traditional Oriental upbringing usually cast a retarding shadow on its seedlings; the average Malayan (and Malaysian) adolescent tended to emotionally mature later than their Japanese or Western counterpart (but the television seems to be helping them to catch up at a faster rate now).

(c) This crypto-Confucianist parent image is also found in the aptly named 'parent body', to which is tied the youth group (except perhaps in the case of the Trengganu Buddhist Youth Circle, which was founded before its parent body; but

that is another story today). Like a larger but more impersonal version of the biological family, the organizational parent-body had a tendency to keep an Orwellian eye over its underlings. Even then, rarely is there a sustained or well-organized Sunday School or youth body in a parent body situation. Even the best of them today (perhaps with the exception of the PBA) is heavily politicized in favour of certain communal and sectarian ideologies.

In the parent tree's shadow, little seedlings never grow. They become soft and discoloured, playfully bending at the slightest breeze that blows by. The pervasive playfulness of our Buddhist youths are mainly the result of this crypto-Confucianist over-parenting (which is the root of a host of other social and emotional problems of our community, too). All the programmes of the FMBYF Conventions betrayed a majority percentage of time allotted to 'socializing' — not the sociological usage here — but meaning adolescent pursuits of dancing, games, sports, vaudevilles, excursions, recreation and other fun items. These may not be negative in themselves; the problem lies in wrong emphasis.

The FMBYF as a national body reflected the actual situation on the YC or the temple level. 'After many months of hibernation,' the Editorial of *The Lotus* (Quarterly Journal of the Malacca Buddhist Association Youth Circle) admitted, it was back in circulation (1960 1,4) the month before the 2nd FMBYF Convention held in Malacca. Its news section (1819) reported on the following: *Food and Fun fair, L.C.E. and Senior Cambridge Examinations 1960, Musical Evening, Badminton, Film Shows, Magic Show, Excursion, Book on 'Buddhist Hymns and Devotions', Games 'Caram' [Carrom], Concert, Folk Dancing Class, Art Class and Y. C. Library.* Dharma activities were prominent by their absence! This state of affairs was representative of the

other YCs throughout the country. Even today, this is still the general tendency in the local Buddhist youth activities.

The troubling question here is this: If these YC members (or the Dharma/Sunday School members) were to 'graduate' from their respective organizations when they become adults, what could they say that had benefitted them from their association with Buddhism when they were young? Or worse, when they are in trouble and in spiritual need, what could they turn to from what they have learnt of the Dharma? Indeed, a number of their ex-members, including some top organizers, have become committed evangelists.

Most of what I have said so far can be summed up as one main reason for the failure of the FMBYF: the lack of commitment to the Buddhist cause; that is, the lack of proper priorities. To date, *local Buddhists have rarely put Buddhism first in their lives*. Perhaps this might well be so; for, after all, lay Buddhists are not Sanghins who do not have to earn a living. Yet there are many good examples of successful lay Buddhist organizations, some of which are international. Here lies the crux of the local Buddhist organizational problem: we do not have a workable Dharma-based economic philosophy, if any at all. **Basically, the problem is not that of the lack of funds, but the lack of wisdom in using it.** [On funds and wealth, see 11:35.1 V:12 VIII:10.]

(d) On a spiritual or at least social level there is an insidious hindrance, a pernicious fetter to Buddhist development in Malaysia and Singapore, more so in the former as the latter is now part of the First World [I:30]. This hindering fetter is that of *conceit* or unwholesome pride (*māna*). It involves a certain consciousness, overt or covert, of 'we' against 'them', an almost simplistic black-or-white relationship where 'if you are not with us, you are against us' (a biblical teaching). In such

a state of affairs, there is almost no room for criticism; every criticism is regarded as an expression of dissent, an attack on the *dignity* of the person, especially a vihara dignitary, organization leader, or committee member. This modern notion of 'dignity' should be re-examined against the traditional virtue of *honour* (which is not so much regarded a virtue today). [See, for example. Macionis, *Sociology*, 3rd ed. 1991:631.] In simple terms, honour is the placing of the wholesome interests of the community above oneself, entailing some degree of humility, while dignity implies the self-centred 'right' of an individual. **While the dignity of the individual should be respected, the honour of the community should take precedence.**

Then there is the chronic convention ailment of adopting resolutions and never implementing most of them. The main reason for this is that the convention organizers or powers that be did not wish to antagonize any of its participants by rejecting the resolutions they had submitted (the reason being their ulterior desire for political support). As such, the FMBYF 4th Convention resolution to set aside a week every year in Sumaṅgalo's honour and memory was not carried out.

The FMBYF had failed and the Sumaṅgalo era ended not because he was a cult leader: we had made him a cult figure. We made him a beacon around whom we little insects gathered and danced, but when the beacon went out, we dispersed again lost in the darkness. Yet, *each of us is a firefly with our own light; we only need to gather together to form a blazing beacon.*

6.35 Review of Sumaṅgalo's contributions

The most important achievement of Sumaṅgalo's was that he initiated the Buddhist youth movement in Malaysia. His most effective tool was the Dharma talk, and he lectured publicly and tirelessly. The youth 'social' (i.e. recreational) activities

were his auxiliary tools, his carrot on a stick. The only problem was that when the carrot was eaten up, the donkeys remained donkeys, albeit more Buddhist donkeys.

How effective Sumaṅgalo was amongst the Buddhist adults of his time needs a separate study. For our purposes here, it suffices to say that though he might have upgraded the Buddhist lives of many of them, he was not very effective in most cases, even (or especially) amongst the adult lay Buddhist leaders. There is clear evidence of this in the 1960 Wesak handout of 'Lord Buddha's Monastery' (Malacca) prepared by Seet Chee Kim. A whole page (of uncertain authorship) was dedicated to theistic adoration; it is here reproduced as is (with all misspellings retained):

Wesak the Great Buddah Day

Namo Tassa Bagavato Arahato Sammasam Buddhassa.

(Praise be to the Lord, The Holy One, The whole
enlightened, The One Perfect in Wisdom.)

FIRST SERVICE

In the beginning we should honour GOD, We should adore
Him with all our heart and soul

God is our Father, The most merciful and Preserver of the
world.

All Glory and praise is due to God, The Creator, the nourisher,
and Evolver of not one or other community but equally of all races,
communities and creatures.

Our Compassionate Father of the whole universe, to whom
we offer praise for the boundless love and pity vouchsafed to all
living beings.

We are indeed filled with thankfulness that it has been granted
to us to know His salvation.

In reverence and humilation we kneel before Thee day and
night our thoughts dwell on thy countenance.

We hold fast to Thy Holy Name and prostrate ourselves before

Thy Sacred Name at everywhere.

Incline Thy heavenly ear, Oh Our Father Almighty, to hearken unto us Thy divine Love and save us from misery, grant us Thy pity and Thy protection, let Thy spiritual light shine upon our bodies and illumine our hearts. And bless us all.

Honour my words which have been conveyed to any of my Prophet, or Sage and the Sage Prince Siddartha Gautama the Buddha.

Namo Tassa Bagavato Arahato Sammasam Buddhassa.

(Malacca Buddhist Assn. Wesak Handout, 1960:8)

This 'prayer' was probably addressed not to the Christian God, but to the Chinese *tiān gōng* (Lord of Heaven), whom Buddhists usually identify with Śākra, whose feast day is observed by traditional Hokkiens [Fukienese] on the 9th day of the 1st Chinese moon. [Some, however, have erroneously regarded *shàngdi*, 'Emperor of Heaven' or the 'Jade Emperor', as Śākra; but *shàngdi* is rarely worshipped as a deity by the Chinese. He is probably better identified (by way of 'symbolic adaptation' or Buddhicization) as Mahā.brahma, the *dà fàn tiān* of the Chinese Buddhists, whom Buddhists place on a lower status than the Buddha.]

Evidently, Sumaṅgalo had been more successful in Buddhicizing the Buddhists of Penang, especially those of the PBA, than those elsewhere. The October 1959 issue of *The Golden Light* (2,3:33–35), for example, contains a courageously outspoken article 'On Monks and Temples' by a YC leader, Tech Eng Soon (later Dr. Teoh Eng Soon, MBBS MD MRCOG FACS AM Am), author of the equally controversial *Malayan Buddhism* (1963). Teoh severely criticized the commercialism and malpractices in Buddhism that had led to many born Buddhists to opt for Christianity. His article stirred a hornet's nest nationwide, but he was strongly defended in the Editorial of the July 1960 issue of *The Golden Light* (3,2:2), which said, among other

things, that

His outspoken criticisms of the conduct and misdeeds of certain monks, excerpts of which were reproduced in Malaya's leading English daily, caused a storm in Malayan Buddhist circles. Instead of appreciating what he is trying to do for Buddhism... the so-called practising Buddhists raved about what they believe to be the 'damage' done by him to Buddhism and about what they termed as 'the terrible sin' he committed by having the audacity to criticise those whom they consider to be pious members of the Sangha.

It is unfortunate that many... [of our Buddhists]... are unable to accept the truthful statements of Teoh Eng Soon about the way in which Buddhism is being exploited by unscrupulous people masquerading as devout followers of the Buddha. The ravings... reveal two important points. Firstly, they show that they [Teoh's critics] are unable to think clearly for themselves. Secondly, they reveal that they know very little about Dharma and that they are still unable to appreciate that Buddhism is a way of life taught by the Buddha and not mumbo jumbo advocated by the hawkers of religion in yellow robes. A good many of the hawkers of our religion have the temerity to arrogate to themselves the sole right of interpreting the Buddha's doctrine to the laity.

...In judging the views expressed by Teoh Eng Soon our readers should **...see things as they are.**

The main cause of the present state of affairs of Malayan Buddhism is the refusal of the majority of our leaders and monks to see our immediate problems in their true light. They prefer to indulge in sophism to justify their actions rather than face the truth and, as a result of doing so, probably lose their privileged positions. It is tragedy that the top ranks of Malayan Buddhism and the Sangha are cluttered with leaders and monks of such calibre. (*The Golden Light* 1960 3,2:2 f)

This excerpt is about a third of the Editorial; it shows that the situations it refers to and mentioned in Teoh's article have changed little, only that 'the top ranks' of Malaysian Buddhism

‘with their leaders and monks’ are more sophisticated, more titled, more professional, and keep wanting more and more — and that there are hardly enough Dharma-inspired critics to stand on a pin’s head, and any criticism is heeded only with a conspiracy of silence or summarily fobbed off. The most well-intentioned Buddhist critic today is unlikely to be even remotely defended by the likes of a latter-day *The Golden Light* even if he speaks with a voice of Buddhism or the *svara* of Dharma. More likely than not, he would be surreptitiously reported to the Home Office or the Police, or be threatened with legal suits through some publicity-hungry shyster. To a certain extent times have changed. [Cf Piyasilo, *Buddhist Psychology*, esp 1990e Part I.]



II:6.4 W. Ānanda Maṅgala (1917–1986)

(a) About two years before Sumaṅgalo passed away, a calm-faced Sinhalese monk arrived in Singapore, fresh from two years of meditation training in Upper Burma. He arrived with both shoulders covered by his monastic robe in a traditional fashion. Later on, he characteristically bared his right shoulder like a Syāma Nikāya monk [I:30.264c]. Little did anyone suspect then that this stout and quiet monk of fair complexion was unlike most other Sinhalese monks and that he would be rocking the Buddhist boat in Singapore and Malaysia with his stentorian rhetoric for the next quarter of a century. Waiting in the wings of the local Buddhist stage, as it were, was the Venerable Ānanda Maṅgala.

Like Sumaṅgalo, the Venerable W. Ānanda Maṅgala (the W. stands for Wattala, his home village) — or AM as he was affectionately known by those who knew him — was a charismatic monk. AM, born of Sinhalese burgher [mixed blood, probably Dutch] descent, was named Narcissus Ānanda Anthony Fernando Meemanage. Although his ancestors were Buddhists, he was born a Catholic, a fact which influenced his childhood. He was educated by the Christian Brothers at the De La Salle School, Mutwal (Sri Lanka), and at St. Joseph's College, Colombo, where in his own words he 'received the best consideration from two prominent Oblate Fathers, Le Goc and Le Jeune' (*Buddhist Digest* 'Invitational Global Dhammadhuta [sic] Tour'. Singapore, 1972:18).

AM's adult life went through three important phases, the first of which began early in his life when he was a seminarian and a mystic of the Contemplative Order of Rosarians (a Sinhalese Roman Catholic order modelled on Trappist monasticism) at Tholagatty, northern Sri Lanka. His 'strong

desire to transcend pious indoctrination and negative inhibitions', however, led him to be disillusioned with Catholicism ('Random Thoughts — Reminiscences.' *The Young Buddhist*, Singapore, 1978:180). In later years, in the prime of his monkhood, he recounted his conversion more jubilantly:

‘...the fullness of Catholic life over-spilled into the vehicle of Buddhism. Christianity says “love your neighbour as yourself”. Buddhism says “love all sentient beings”; with me it was the over-filling of the Christian heart towards all beings, not just toward human beings only’... (*The Statesman*, New Delhi, Sep 1971. in *Buddhist Digest* 1972:31)

While AM was in Allentown (Pennsylvania, USA), Patti Canfield quoted him as saying, ‘I bear witness to the Christian Faith but no longer accept it in my life.’ (*Mulhenberg College Weekly*, Dec 1971, in *Buddhist Digest* 1972:35)

In the second phase of AM’s adult life, that of an atheistic social worker in the Indian Freedom Movement (for 16 years in the 1940s) as an honorary citizen of India, he worked with Jawaharlal Nehru (later India’s first Prime Minister), whom he met in 1945 in his capacity as former President of the Ceylonese Union in Mysore State and the VicePresident of the Indilanka Buddhist Association of Bombay. Around this time, too, he received training as a Naturopath in Poona. He was the last Sinhalese disciple of Gandhi, serving as a *satyagrahi* (non-violent activist) but he confessed that he did not accept Gandhi’s ‘pickle of religious views’ (1978:181). At one point (1947), he even called Gandhi ‘a Pacifist Dictator while others were Fascist Dictators’ (*The Young Buddhist* 1981:37) and mourned ‘the sad compromise which Mahatma Gandhi made... when he permitted his disciples to commit the *error of the “Partitioning” of Bharat Desh*’ (ib. 1985:56). His pacifist trait (despite his awesome irascibility) were even more evident when he was a monk. While

he was in the USA, the *Los Angeles Times* (Jan 1972, in *Buddhist Digest* 1972:36) quoted him as saying 'that the world's hot spots do not involve truly religious struggles'. The *Honolulu Advertiser* (Jan 1972) reported:

As tempting as it might be to use the label 'religious war', the term doesn't apply to conflicts in Northern Ireland, Middle East or at the India-Pakistan border. Ānanda Maṅgala Thera ...agreed that world's hot spots do not involve truly religious struggles. He said, 'Religion must be kept out of politics'. British influence in Northern Ireland has its own weight, which is beyond that of Catholicism and Protestantism. In the monk's view the Arab States are fighting capitalism and Zionism and over the historical Palestine issue. (Reported in *Buddhist Digest* 1972:36 f)

In the third and final phase of his life, he was an agnostic Theravāda bhikshu (for 29 years). Of his decision to leave Catholicism for Buddhism, he mused, 'Not that I love Christ less but that I love the Buddha more.' In 1957 he was initiated a novice (*sāmaṇera*) and the following year, sought the tutelage of the Most Venerable Webu Sayadaw Phaya Gyi, the renowned meditation teacher of Kyaukse, Upper Burma. In 1959 he returned to Sri Lanka to be ordained as a bhikshu in the Śrī Laṅkā Amarapura Mahā Nikāya Saṅgha presided over by the Most Venerable Udhammita Dhammarakkhita Tissa Mahānayaka Thera, the head of the Nikāya. Then he returned to Burma to resume his meditation training.

(b) In 1961, just before leaving Burma, AM's teacher asked him whether he would choose to give away 'silver' or 'gold', meaning that social work and Naturopathy were not as valuable as teaching meditation and Dharma. That same year, AM represented Singapore in the World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference in Cambodia [today Kampuchea]. Since his arrival in Singapore in 1961 until his death, he tirelessly toured the

world, especially Malaysia and Singapore, distributing the gold of Dharma.

On the Poson Full moon of June 1961, he began his Dharma-dūta at the Sri Lankaramaya in Singapore. Among his achievements — his famous ‘firsts’ — were a 10-day Buddhist Youth Seminar for Sinhala Buddhist Youth, 21-day Buddhist Youth Holiday Camp, public veneration of parents, chanting of Suttas by youth and special religious services to usher the commercial New Year and the Sinhalese New Year. A notable gesture he made was the celebration of the Sinhalese New Year with inter-racial and inter-religious youth groups at the Sri Lankaramaya, and where he also invited other religionists to speak in inter-religious dialogues.

(c) On leaving Singapore in 1962, AM visited the Brickfields Buddhist Temple (of the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, KL) and stayed there as a guest monk from 1962 to 1963. During that period, he initiated a Combined Vesak Programme, organized by the Selangor Buddhist Association Youth Circle and the Dhamma School children of the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, when he wrote and directed ‘Tapussa and Bhalluka’, ‘The Light of Asia’, ‘Sinhalese Poetry in Action’, ‘Canda Kinnara Jataka’, ‘Sweetest Little Fellow’ and ‘Little Pal’. He also encouraged the singing of Buddhist hymns and held meditation classes. During the Vesak of 1963, he became the first Buddhist monk to deliver a Buddhist talk over TV Malaysia.

In due course, he was invited to be the Resident Monk in the Malacca Buddhist Association (1963–1967). A few years before Nehru (1889–1964) passed away, AM requested him to donate a replica of the Sarnath Buddha image to the Sri Lankaramaya in Singapore and to the Buddhist Missionary Society in KL. Since 1963, he was the sole religious advisor to the University

of Singapore Buddhist Society, and remains the sole religious advisor to the Singapore Polytechnic Buddhist Society since its inception. The two societies became the nucleus of AM's youth efforts in Singapore.

My first meeting with AM was during one of his public lectures in the Malacca Buddhist Association, in 1963 — he was a veritable Stentor and Demosthenes both rolled into one, a loud and eloquent orator; but, in due course, it was his courage that inspired me most. That meeting changed my life, especially after he patiently suffered my one question about 'why there is no soul?' which I kept asking in different ways for about three months! When I finally decided to become a monk, he advised me to be ordained in the Siamese Order because, according to him, 'they could take better care of you.' His advice on Sinhalese monastic politics left no impression on me at that time, as I could not conceive of Sanghins at loggerheads with one another.

My utter naiveté regarding Sinhalese monastic politics was later painfully deflowered in my close encounters with certain Syāma Nikāya monks, who probably found my AM-like candour too high a risk to have around the vihara and my Siamese ordination a slap in their face. The situation came to a head that whenever I approached them, for example, with some ideas for Buddhist work, they curtly fobbed me off forever or fudge and mudged saccharin-sweet waffle.

Despite AM's warnings of Sinhalese clerical cloak-and-dagger, he impressed on me the excellence of the Sinhalese monastic tradition where it existed. However, his arrangements to send me to Sri Lanka in 1971 to join the Vidyālankara Buddhist University failed because of the students riots. (Through his good offices, the Sinhalese Prime Minister, Mrs. S. Bandaranaike, had promised to make arrangements for my stay there

upon my arrival.) Due to my over-eagerness to take up serious Dharma training, we decided that I should go to Siam instead, and Aggadhamma (the abbot of Wat Anand) made the arrangements. Actually, the occasion was thrust upon me. The future 17th Supreme Patriarch of Siam visited the Wat and I was initiated a novice by him; but that is another story.

6.41 Ānanda Maṅgala in Melaka

The four years (1963–67) that AM spent in Melaka [previously Malacca] was a turning-point in the history of the Malacca Buddhist Association or Seck Kia Eenh (SKE) [meaning ‘Shakya Hall’]. Much of the SKE’s progress today is the result of the momentum given by AM. It should, however, be remembered that this was the organization that had circulated the God-prayer in 1960 [6.35]. Looking back, I could almost say that AM knew what he was up against when he became the SKE Resident Monk. The reform he had in mind for the SKE needed the support of the young; after all, they were the future.

In the same year that he arrived in Melaka, AM organized his first Buddhist Youth Seminar (August 1963), lasting a week, in the premises of the Malacca High School (where I later completed my ‘A’ levels). At the end of the year, he introduced the Buddhist Youth Holiday Camp. This later became the SKE Holiday Work Camp, an annual event a number of which I was privileged to organize and which is still being carried on today. In a number of ways, AM’s youth camps were like those of Sumaṅgalo’s Youth Circle camps, but those of AM’s had slightly less recreation and more Dharma talks (but no meditation). AM, however, conducted meditation for adults in Malaysia and Singapore.

Only from 1978 onwards did meditation form a prominent part of the local Dharma courses beginning with the Dharma

Preacher's Training Courses and other courses that I initiated. It is not a question of whose courses were better or the best here. One generation benefitted from the legacy of the preceding ones; the following was a logical development of the preceding.

Whether one admired or disliked AM, everyone who knew him was likely to be impressed by his public spirit. During the Confrontation period (1963–65), when Sukarno of Indonesia militantly opposed the formation of Malaysia, AM held a public gathering where he announced that the Buddhist monks of Malaysia would contribute towards the spiritual strength of the country during that difficult period. [*Souvenir of ten Years Upasampada 1959–1969*. Singapore. 1970:10.] It was a symbolic gesture, but many were impressed. This was the sort of gesture that the unimaginative native Buddhists and association Buddhists seemed to be incapable of, and the cynical ones would not bother about — we have yet much to learn here.

6.42 AM: what he did, what he was

Although most people who were aware of AM's work in Melaka admired and approved of him, he had a loyal band of die-hard detractors, mostly elders and traditionalists (not all of whom were Chinese). They were those who, in the course of AM's sojourn in the SKE, had been unhappy over some or all of the activities, changes and reforms that he had introduced. Ironically, none of them were known to have disapproved of AM's liberal ways. Moreover, he was extremely deft in defending himself whenever the need arose, and almost everyone accepted his eloquence to the point of wondering why other monks were not like him. His detractors disliked him for some other reason which I shall explain in a moment. (It is important to understand here that such an attitude of selective approval

of what are *perceived* as monkly virtue or vice applies to any other monk or nun, not in AM's case alone.)

Among AM's achievements in Melaka (other than those already mentioned) — the 'firsts' as he often called them — were the following: Open-air Bodhi Pūjā, All-night Chanting (by the Sinhalese Theravāda Sangha), Wesak Preludes (stage productions), Wesak Eve Public Procession, multi-religious forum, Wesak Blossoms (stage productions), Buddhist Youth Sports Meet, and Buddhist Youth Talenttime. He had written, choreographed and directed outstanding Buddhist musicals and plays. In short, he sang and danced, and taught the youths how to do so.

As a champion of Buddhist ecumenism, he integrated Mahāyāna and Theravāda pūjās. (This Integrated Pūjā, as I called it, is still in use in the SKE today.) Sumaṅgalo before him, too, had some sort of integrated Pūjā, but it was somewhat westernized.

AM's laurels of achievements were something to be proud of, but apparently only the youths were impressed. Most of the elders suspected that he was gradually gaining the edge over them — which he was! Some of them labelled him an impious 'Socrates', poisoning the minds of the young; some jested he was more like Socrates and Xanthippe (Socrates' bad-tempered wife) combined! AM's Zeus-like temper was proverbial. Although his outbursts were usually violent, they were like lightningless thunder. They never went beyond speech, except on one occasion. When I was still an upper secondary student, I once watched with amazement how he, in his inner robes, actually ran and chased out of the temple a band of local hooligans who were heckling Dharma School girls. When a couple of them tried to confront him, he held them down with wrestling grips. The police was summoned and the hooligans

apprehended. After the dust had settled, AM confided in me that he was a wrestler before, which left me wondering what else the Admirable Crichton wasn't!

(Years later, when AM was working in Singapore, an emotionally unstable medical student called him a 'communist', a label he strongly objected to. In his characteristic ire, he had a lawyer's letter sent to the hapless critic, warning him of legal action. Fearing that he was likely to lose his scholarship in such a litigation, the shaken university student sensibly and officially apologized, and was never heard from again. AM once told me that he had some working knowledge of jurisprudence. In Singapore, he had a number of young pupils who were lawyers.)

The SKE was founded by wealthy Babas [6.331] and has been run by them ever since. [In recent times, non-Babas have been elected into the Committee, but the temple leadership is still effectively in Baba hands, and probably always will.] From the start, however, very few people — even the more conservative Babas — seemed to have disapproved of AM's occasional strong-armed tactics (especially when the occasion called for it), or even his 'unmonkly idiosyncrasies', such as his cigar-toting, cinema-going (he brought me along to see Hitchcock's 'Psycho' and a few Hindi movies), TV-watching and radio-listening, close proximity with the young (especially girls and young women) and condoning teenage boy-girl frivolities (which at one point earned him the sobriquet of 'the match-maker'). What his detractors were actually worried about was that he was gaining too much control of the SKE — perhaps those 'unmonkly idiosyncrasies' were ploys to win over the young, some thought.

The elders found enough reasons for their suspicions. AM, for example, had a hand in the dissolution of the SKE Provident

Fund (which he thought was merely making money at the expense of its subscribers). At one point, he publicly spoke his mind against the 'God-prayer' handout of Vesak 1960. Through his influence, more young people were elected into the SKE Committee. On one occasion, he had the kidney-shaped twin 'oracle blocks', at the Buddha Shrine removed and kept in his quarters; on another occasion, he furiously cast them away right before the very eyes of shocked devotees. (After he had left, the elders put them back right where they had been!) Before AM's time, the SKE was notorious not only as a 'Babas' temple' (which the ethnic Chinese scorned upon), but as a '*rich* Babas' temple' (which the poorer Babas frowned on). He stopped the practice of the reserving of seats and tables for rich and prominent Babas and their families during the Wesak free dinner, and made it an open first come, first served affair. The affected Babas, rankling with what they perceived as an insult, kept away from the SKE and AM. The idealistic young, however, applauded his action. In short, AM's detractors were not so much unhappy with what he *did*, as they resented what he *was* or what they *perceived* him to be.

6.43 A sociology of scandal [cf III:1 2]

Among those who, for some reason, hated or feared a socially significant person like AM, at least a few of them would jump at the slightest opportunity to discredit, even ostracize, him. The source of AM's charisma was largely in his gift of speech, supported by his forthright courage, and he was not one to mince his words. In this he was the antithesis of the proverbial *Mahā.nāyaka Theras* who were masters of fudging and mudging. In other words, as long as AM was physically present, his detractors rarely dared speak, much less act, against him, or if they did they had always failed in their schemes. But it was

another story when AM was absent for a prolonged period. What I am about to relate, albeit a personal view and summary of a protracted and complex series of events, serves as an example of how allegations and gossips were used as a means of social manipulation and, more importantly, **as a lesson for loose tongues and idle ears.**

In 1967 (when I was 18), AM left Melaka for Sri Lanka, where he had two hernia-related operations (one in which he had a length of his small intestines removed), but little did we know he would never again be the SKE Resident Monk. While he was away, his detractors seized the opportunity to block his return. While AM was recuperating in Sri Lanka, his Melaka followers constantly kept in touch with him. Later in 1968 when he settled in Singapore, plans to reinstate him in the SKE gained greater momentum. During an SKE Annual General Meeting (probably 1967), in a daring coup d'état of sorts, they successfully blackballed all the anti-AM elements out of the Management Committee.

Their victory, however, was short-lived, because some furious elders were adamant in keeping AM out of the SKE. They probably submitted an official complaint to the authorities. AM was effectively kept out of Malaysia. Official appeals by AM's supporters (who had taken over the Management Committee) to the authorities failed to bring AM back into Malaysia. In the meantime, AM had settled down in Singapore. Later (after the most resolute of the anti-AM elders had died) when he tried to enter Malaysia, he surprisingly faced no difficulty at all! On making an inquiry with the authorities, he was told that no official complaint had actually been made against him after all.

What were the real issues involved in the AM 'scandal'? The whole affair started rather innocently with a bull session

involving some prominent SKE youths. Their colourful range of topics soon drifted to some items of women's clothing hanging on the clothesline outside the monk's quarters in the premises of a lay association (but the quarters had not been inhabited in months) — AM was away in Sri Lanka. Somehow, one of the youths spilled the gossip to an elder, and the fuse was lit. I wonder if to this day that youth (today a family man) is any wiser about what he had actually precipitated by careless talk. The SKE elders, still rankling with AM's high-handed ways, capitalized on the gossip, and planned their move to oust him. The events that ensued made the years 1967–1968 perhaps the darkest for the SKE.

Why do people gossip? **Gossip** can be an effective means of social control, as its targets become aware that they are the subject of praise or scorn. Gossip is a localized small talk of interest only to those possessing some personal knowledge of the person/s being talked about. Prolonged gossip usually turns into **rumour**, that is, unfounded information spread informally, usually by word of mouth over a wide area. Rumour has three characteristics: *it thrives in a climate of ambiguity; it is changeable (with added details and colour as it spreads); it is typically difficult to stop (since it progresses geometrically and usually persists for years)*. [Macionis. *Sociology*, 3rd ed. 1991:595.] In the case of AM, he was not around to defend himself, nor could he return to do so.

During AM's long absence, the temple was a nest of gossips and counter-gossips; snitches abounded. Temple frequenters moved around gingerly in their like-minded cliques, careful to avoid any adversary. One of the most shameful developments was that innocent devotees and hapless visitors were often cornered into listening to lengthy public denunciations and to equally fiery exonerations of an absent victim, depending

on which faction they met. The temple became a hive, buzzing with discussions and debates, and an arena for bull sessions. The weak-minded (who were the majority) swung on the pendulum of opinion, ever switching sides; some self-righteous, most confused. There were no fence-sitters: everyone had an opinion. AM's enemies in high places wallowed smugly in their dastardly self-satisfaction at the misfortunes of a thorn in their cloth. Not a single Sanghin stood up for a fellow Sanghin.

In the long run, it might be said that the elders succeeded in keeping AM out. He did not return to the SKE until a few years later, when he was well-established in Singapore and doing good Dharma work there. AM was, of course, not the only victim of such plots to get rid of an influential monk (who is supposed to be celibate) by throwing charges of incelibacy. It was not a matter of whether the charges were true or not; the important thing to them was that the person was removed. *Fling dirt enough and some will stick.*

The lesson of the AM affair is clear: people (in this case, local Buddhists) tend to listen to gossips and believe rumours, perhaps even believe *in* them. Instead of seeking harmonious ways of sorting a problem out, most are likely to take sides: one side must be wrong, the other side right. There are no gray shades, no middle way, as it were. For such witch-hunters, the accused or victim is guilty until proven innocent, that might is right, that who shouts the loudest is the victor. The mediating voices of compassion and good sense are ever drowned by the incessant invectives of vindictive carpers and punitive crabbers — everyone seems to have something sanctimonious or nasty to say about the victim, the opponents or their associates. This pattern repeats ever itself even to this day whenever such a situation arises. In a way, the AM affair was never

resolved: it died a natural death. This seems to be the most common way, often the only way, that local Buddhists solve serious problems.

Aren't our children learning from their elders the finer points of mud-slinging and back-stabbing, and inheriting a legacy of neurotic conflict? ('Neurotic' in the sense of filling emptiness and boredom with endless stopgaps, and diversions.) **Does this mean that local Buddhists are unable to solve serious problems effectively?** (In some ways, even creating them?) If this is true, is such a Buddhism beneficial or relevant to our times? These are troubling questions that concerned Buddhists often ask, and there is no dearth of cases of association and vihara politics to support this grave concern. The Kālāma Sutta to the Kesputtiyas should never be forgotten.

Do not accept anything through hearsay (*mā iti.kirāya*) [remarks, gossips and rumours]... When you yourselves know what is bad, blameworthy and censured by the wise /Saints/, abandon those things. When you yourselves know that these things are good... accept and practise them. (Kesaputtiya Sutta. A 1:188 f 2:191 f)

6.44 AM in Singapore

Where the AM affair was concerned, Melaka's loss was Singapore's gain. AM, however, had been living in Singapore from 1961–1963 before going to Melaka. At that time, he was the sole religious advisor of the University of Singapore Buddhist Society (USBS) [now the National University of Singapore BS] since 1963 and of the Singapore Polytechnic Buddhist Society (SPBS) since its inception in 1965. At first (June 1961), he resided in the Sri Lankaramaya (St. Michael's Road) but left after ten months (May 1962), following some temple politics. On the invitation of Aggadhamma, the abbot of Wat Anandametyaram (Thai Buddhist Temple, Silat Road), he spent the

rains-retreat of 1968 there. The Wat has its own Youth Circle, the Anandametyaram Buddhist Youth Circle (AMBYC).

The friendship between AM and Aggadhamma was a very beautiful one which few knew about. It has a special place in my life because I became a novice at the Wat Anandametyaram under their guidance. Earlier on, when AM was in the Sri Lankaramaya, he gave shelter to Aggadhamma who could not find his own residence. While AM was in Melaka, Aggadhamma finally found a place in Wat Anand. In 1968, on his return from Sri Lanka (and unable to return to Melaka), Aggadhamma welcomed him to Wat Anand. That year, AM formed the Vesak Prelude Joint Celebration Committee comprising the USBS, the SPBS and the AMBYC (the last-named was chairman). In 1969, the maiden issue of *The Young Buddhist* (an annual) was published. That year, AM led the Singapore Buddhist Sangha Organization delegation to the World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference in Malaysia. Since 1969, the USBS, the SPBS, the AMBYC, and in due course, a new group, the Singapore Buddha Sasana Society, became directly involved with his work.

6.441 *World tours*

(a) 1970. By this time, AM was very well known in the religious world, especially in the West. This new dimension in his life opened for two main reasons. The first is that he was in communication with the Institute for the Study of Religions and Society in Singapore and Malaysia (through Dr. Ray Nyce), and second, *The Young Buddhist* effectively acted as his testimonials. Most importantly, of course, his dynamic youth work and his Catholic past, among other personal qualities, fascinated international religionists and scholars.

In 1970, AM participated in the World Council of Churches'

(WCC) multi-religious dialogue held in Ajaltoun ('Ajaltūn, north-east of Beirut), Lebanon (theme: 'Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths'), as Co-Chairman of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. There he delivered a paper on 'Dialogue and Devotion'.

In October the same year, he attended the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), whose theme was 'World Religions and World Peace', organized by the World Council of Churches and hosted by the Rissho Koseikai in Kyoto, Japan. AM was invited as a representative of Theravāda Buddhists and the Institute for the Study of Religions and Society. AM also spoke on behalf of the Bukit Ho Swee Community Service Project at the Development Workshop.

In January 1971 when Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike was in Singapore to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, AM was the only Sinhalese Theravāda monk (indeed the only monk in Singapore) who had the privilege of a private audience with her. During the 45-minute discussion, AM informed Mrs. Bandaranaike regarding the Sinhalese community, 'the smallest ethnic group in Malaysia and Singapore'. He championed the cause of the cultural development of the Sinhalese long settled in Malaysia and Singapore. The matter of the Colombo YMBA [Young Men's Buddhist Association] Dhamma Examinations was also discussed with AM submitting several suggestions to the Ministries of Education and of Cultural Affairs in Sri Lanka. One of the suggestions was that the annual examination dates, should be changed from December — the school examinations period for Malaysia and Singapore — to April) (*Buddhist Digest* 1972:44).

(b) 1971-1972. In August 1971, AM started on his celebrated global Dhamma.duta tour on the invitation of several countries. His first stop was Sri Lanka, where he spent 9 days. There

he again met the Prime Minister, Mrs. Bandaranaike, at her Temple Trees residence for nearly 70 minutes, during which time he brought up important issues regarding insurgency, cultural affairs and the Sinhalese community overseas, and also the Colombo YMBA Dhamma Examinations.

AM also met some other government officials, various members of the clergy (especially his teachers), and G.P. Malalasekera. He gave talks at the WFB HQ and at the YMBA Hall in Borella (when he brought up the matter of the YMBA examinations again). [In a letter to AM dated 25th February 1972, Siri Perera, Qc, gave a favourable reply (*Buddhist Digest* 1972:44).] At the YMCA in Colombo-Fort, AM attended an 'Interreligious Dialogue' with Lynn de Silva of the Methodist Church in the chair. AM also conducted a two-day weekend seminar on the Sigalovāda Sutta for the National Youth Organization of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. Several English, Sinhalese and Tamil newspapers gave coverage of his activities there. Of AM, 'Maithri' wrote

On Wednesday I met one in robes and in the beginning he did not seem any different from the rest, who mouth religion for a purpose. But after a while I grew wiser. What made me wiser was not the torrent of words that flowed or the volume of noise he made but a certain ring of sincerity on his voice and a glint of forthrightness in his eye.... His manner is full of go-go and vibrancy... the Venerable said there was no hope for the betterment of religion —

- Unless the Sangha gave up its divisions and became united under One Sangharajah [*sic*].
- Unless the Buddhist clergy gave up their material ambitions and became more tolerant and prepared to enter into dialogue with other religionists.

(*Daily Mirror* Aug 1971. in *Buddhist Digest* 1972:29 f)

In September 1971, he was in India, where he met the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, at her residence in New Delhi, and met several other leading figures and old associates. He was interviewed by the Press and All India Radio. In an article titled 'A Buddhist Missionary from Abroad', *The Statesman* of New Delhi reported:

Born a Roman Catholic in Ceylon, he took to saffron robes in 1957 when the fullness of Catholic life 'over-spilled into the vehicle of Buddhism. Christianity says "love your neighbour as yourself'. Buddhism says "love all sentient beings";' with me it was the over-filling of the Christian heart towards all beings, not just toward human beings only'... And his melodious monologue unfolds (prose overflowing into verse), people come and go — some to receive his blessings and others 'old friends', who knew him when he was a Naturopath and a social worker.... (Reported in *Buddhist Digest* 1972:32)

After a day's stop-over in Iran, he arrived in Amsterdam, where he spent 2 full months (September–October) at the 'De Kosmos Meditation Centre, spending his time mostly with Dutch youths. There he conducted several lectures and regular meditation sessions (3 days a week). At the disused Moses and Aaron Church (Roman Catholic), he delivered a talk on 'Peace'. At Zondort [Zandvoort?], he lectured on meditation to the Cistercian Monastery (a Trappist Order). Besides conducting several weekend dialogues and meditation sessions for adult groups, he met Buddhists in the Hague and Driebergen. Radio Nederlands and the TV in Frankfurt interviewed him. In a testimonial letter, Eva Bouman, a student of Oriental Studies at the University, wrote

His meditational classes and lectures were well attended. For two months he was focal point to our centre, and as such have been many things to many people: an eloquent representative of the

way of Buddhism, a spiritual teacher of great quality and a friend whose wise counsel was greatly valued. (*Buddhist Digest* 1972:10)

In November, he spent 4 days in Denmark, where he delivered 3 lectures on Buddhism to high school students at a Jesuit College in Copenhagen.

In November, he spent 10 days in West Germany to attend the conference on 'World Religions — World Problems'. At the invitation of the Roman Catholic Academy in Frankfurt and the Protestant Academy in Amoldshain — his hosts — AM read a paper on 'World Religions — World Problems' at a consultative meeting of Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Hindu scholars. While there, he visited the late Dr. Paul Dahlke's residence, where Sinhalese monks now reside. In a testimonial letter, Sis. Ursula Mertens, OSB, writes

As we started our group discussions the great difference between the two traditions became manifest. I marvelled at the patience with which the Thera tried to solve our first difficulty that in Buddhism there is 'no self'.

Thanks to the Thera's knowledge of Western and Christian Philosophy and Theology he was able to allow at least some of us to dive deeper into a Buddhist's thinking. The few of us who had some personal experience with Zen meditation were happy to be able to follow the Thera right away. (*Buddhist Digest* 1972:10 f)

After that he was in England, as the guest of a group of English people led by Brian Sanders of Kent, and Mrs. L. Donat of the London School of Yoga, who extended him several opportunities to enter into spiritual dialogue. While in London, he conducted several meditation sessions and gave talks on Buddhism, and visited the London Maha Bodhi Society and the Thai Buddhist Temple. He spoke at the universities at Oxford (the Oriental Institute), Cambridge (University Buddhist Society) and Reading (University Buddhist Society). In London AM

delivered a short talk at an inter-religious service conducted in memory of the War Dead at Acacia House, Acton. Besides meeting Sangharakshita and Jack Austin, he was interviewed by the Consultant Editor of *Yoga and Health* magazine which featured him in full colour on the cover. AM confided in me that while he was in England, the Beatles, the pop group 'more popular than Christ' then, invited him to meet them, but he turned down the invitation.

In November, he was 3 days in Canada, where he held Dhamma discussions in Montreal and Toronto (at the Buddha Dhamma Centre run by A.G. Smart). Then he spent 3 months (November–January 1972) in the USA. He was the Visiting Scholar for the 1971 Fall Semester (29 Nov 1971–17 Dec 1971) of Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania, where he 'presented several public lectures, met with a series of religion and history classes on a daily basis, and conducted informal conversation with interested students at the College' (Dr. Charles S. Bednar, Assoc. Dean, *Buddhist Digest*, 1972:14). At the College, he also conducted meditation sessions. He spoke at the Jesuit High School in Allentown and at the Zen Monastery in Easton, and met the Indian community for Dhamma discussion and meditation sessions in the residence of Prof. Dr. Sinha and Mrs. (Dr.) Sinha. The press interviewed him. In its article 'Berg students impress monks', *The Morning Call* of Allentown, Pa., quotes AM thus:

'The future of the United States of America should not be gauged by the Youth in the streets, but by those behind the desk and studying,'... 'Monks are not crusaders. They carry the message with dignity and say "man is saved by his own wisdom"'. (Reported in *Buddhist Digest* 1972:34)

During December he was in New York, Washington and San Francisco. While in New York (7 days), he made an on-the-

spot study of the 'Black problem', met Dr. Homer A. Jack (Sec.-General, WCRP), and visited the United Nations during the Indo-Pakistan crisis. In Washington (3 days), he lectured on meditation at the Washington Buddhist Vihara, followed by a Dhamma discussion. In San Francisco (3 days), he stayed in San Bruno, but visited various leading Buddhist institutions. In January 1972 he was in Los Angeles, where he spent 2 weeks with at the International Buddhist Meditation Centre, as a guest of its President, Ven. Dr. Thich Thien-An. There he gave several lectures and dialogues, held a week-end seminar and conducted a special spiritual retreat by promoting the Eight Precepts. He gave talks at the Downey High School and the California State College. At the University of California, Los Angeles, he lectured on 'Comparative Approach to Buddhist Meditation'. As a guest of Sinhalese families, he visited Disneyland and Hollywood. As before, the press interviewed him.

On the return leg of his trip, AM stopped in Honolulu (3 days), where he gave a talk on meditation at the East-West Centre of the University of Hawaii. He was 2 days in the Philippines, where he talked on meditation at the East-West Pastoral Institute of the Ateneo University, Manila. While in South Vietnam (3 days), he was the guest of the South Vietnamese Theravāda Sangha at Ky-Vien-Tu, Saigon [today Ho Chih Minh City], where he delivered a series of talks on meditation. He was in Siam for 4 days, where he paid his last respects to the 17th Sangharaja [who was my Preceptor]. At the WFB Headquarters, he met the President and the General Secretary on some important controversial issues. He also met the President of the Buddhist Society of the Chulalongkorn University (who had arranged for my Siamese lessons). I visited him at the Manohra Hotel (where he stayed) to update him on my monastic training. (As I was then still under tutelage, I

remember feeling so nervous about meeting a monk in a hotel in Siam, that while crossing the street in the dusk I just barely missed being knocked down by a speeding cyclist!)

(c) 1974. In April, AM attended the WCC Multi-lateral Dialogue (theme: 'Towards World Community: Resources and responsibilities for living together') in Colombo, Sri Lanka. For this last occasion, he had me invited as a participant, but as I was still in the midst of my monastic tutelage (*nissaya*) I felt I was not yet ready for such an encounter.

From his experience of such conferences and his previous insights, he nevertheless made it a point to put it across to the Christians that any attempt to 'proselytize more than evangelize' would prevent true religious dialogue. He candidly remarked that

Multi-religious conferences are now turning out to be academic exercises for clever manipulations of mere knowledge without any standards of spirituality. Some of them cover up their lack of a true interiority by their 'Doctorates'. At a conference I participated with the Hindu-Muslim-Christian-Jew-Buddhist it was not possible to draft a resolution defining the word 'Spiritual'. ('Random Thoughts — Reminiscences.' *The Young Buddhist* 1978:184)

In the same article, he voiced his concern over the professionalism and materiality that is overtaking religion:

Even religiously inclined societies have turned highly professional and have lost their spiritual vocations. The 'Small is no more beautiful'. While the Academicians are making inroads occupying the space of the true religious and spiritual persons, the traditionalists and priestcraft orientations have shown total disregard of their irrelevance in a fast advancing world of science, technology and education. (1978:184)

At one point, it seems that AM's various costly overseas trips

must have made him somewhat self-conscious, especially when he often criticized some monks as being 'globe-trotters'. In a somewhat disclaiming, even apologetic, tone, one could clearly hear AM's voice through Leong Kum Toh who penned this preamble to 'A brief summary of the Venerable Thera's Dhammadhuta [*sic*] Tour':

It is to be noted that the Venerable was not on a globe-trotting spree. He was also not on a self-imposed world tour to promote mere fellow-feeling among the known. His entire trip was sponsored by non-Buddhists, who were eager to learn more about Buddhism. Wherever he went he had the essential skills of culture, education and upbringing. His experience in Youth work further enhanced his calibre as someone uninhibited by external structures. Above all, he was blessed with the gift of a 'silver-tongue' and was therefore, able to champion the concepts of Buddha Dhamma within the dynamics of comparative religious studies. (*Buddhist Digest* 1972:8)

6.442 SBYO and the 'Buddhist Oasis'

In 1970, the Singapore Buddha Sasana Society joined AM's group, and together, the four formed the **Singapore Buddhist Youth Organizations** (SBYO), a loose platform for Buddhist youths to be involved in national-level Buddhist activities under AM's guidance. Representatives from the SBYO components formed the Singapore Buddhist Youth Joint Celebrations Committee (SBYOJCC), under AM's spiritual directorship. Under the aegis of the SBYO, the USBS and the SPBS organized the Vesak Prelude Dhamma contests and the Vesak Prelude Cultural programme at the Victoria Theatre under AM's direction. The Vesak Blossoms project was left in the hands of a new group, the Singapore Buddha Sasana Society (under the leadership of Michael Yang Peng Chang) 'to channel the Vesak Eve Youth Campfire to be followed by a Vesak day spiritual

retreat' (*Buddhist Digest* 1972:5). The Anandametyarama Buddhist Youth Circle was entrusted with the Singapore National Day celebrations.

The Young Buddhist, a National Day publication, became an annual project. Its contents and quality kept growing over the years for as long as AM lived. For about eight years, AM worked with the four mentioned Societies. As in Malaysia, most of his national-level activities were mainly focussed on Vesak Day [this is the way Singaporeans spell it; in Malaysia it is 'Wesak']. By this time, AM's idiosyncrasies and activities involving the Singaporean youths soon earned him the nickname of 'the mod monk'. Once in a Radio Ceylon interview, when he was posed the question 'Why are you called by some Sinhalese in Singapore the Nadagam [*dancing*] Monk?' he gave this well-known reply:

If an artist monk can paint pictures of 'imaginary' Devas in transparent blouses; if a monk can engage himself in sculpture; the carpenter monk, and the tailor monk can enrich the 'coffers of a temple' why can't I utilize my dramatic training to produce 'Buddhist stories' communicating the Dhamma — Is it not an Audio-visual Sermon? ('Random Thoughts — Reminiscences. *The Young Buddhist* 1978:185.) [AM takes *nadagam* to mean 'field of culture relating to drama, songs and dances.' ib.]

In due course, however, the Buddhist youths of the four Societies, in one way or another, at one time or another, found it difficult to keep up with his pace, exuberance and irascibility. To say the least, there were moments of difficulties. It appeared that as the years passed, the campus Buddhists were appreciably becoming more callow and more mutinous: either the institutions were drawing in ever younger students or the Societies were attracting less mature members. In the end, AM decided to slow down his involvement with the four Societies; and in

1978, he formed the **Singapore Buddha-Yana Organization (SBYO)**, comprising of Buddhist professionals, many of whom he had befriended earlier on. It was around this time that he moved into his own residence, which he called 'The Buddhist Oasis', a link-house on Jalan Hari Raya (off Thomson Road), but later moved to Jalan Ikan Merah in the same vicinity.

When the Sinhalese-Tamil riots broke out in the last week of July, 1983, AM was profoundly saddened by it and wrote his emotional appeal in the following year's issue of *The Young Buddhist*, entitled 'An Open Letter to the Sri Lanka Bhikkhu Sangha' (1984:55–61). AM's political acumen through personal experience could be felt in the article, though he rarely expressed his political thoughts otherwise, much less in writing. The article also reveals him as a strong anti-colonialist.

6.45 AM as I knew him

While in Melaka, AM saw the 'God-prayer' Wesak handout [6.35], I still remember how he publicly displayed his characteristic ire. His admirers, mostly the younger Buddhists, gratifyingly took his irascible nature as that of someone on their side; but the elders were bemused by his 'unmonkly' demeanour and were unamused by the support he received from the young. Many who see themselves as victims of his ire tried to desert the temple, but he often tracked them down (even to the extent of visiting their homes) and won them back with his charms (which included robust, almost Rabelaisian, humour).

AM was the first and most irascible monk I had met, who was somewhat like a cross between Bodhidharma and Nichiren. (Coming to think of it, I have yet to meet another monk like him.) Throughout my friendship with AM, I rarely had any problem with his irascibility. When others chose to diplomatically and discreetly evaporate, I remember staying

on, often feeling rather amused at his stormy outbursts, for they were occasions of tirades of some of the best English prose I had ever heard. Happily, I was one of the few (maybe the only one) who had benefitted from such occasions by way of language and vocabulary!

Part of my oblivion of his anger was due to my preoccupation with discreetly noting down some of his expressions that were unfamiliar to me, to be looked up later — somehow, it seemed important to me then to understand exactly what he was trying to say. Not on a few occasions, I would sit with him, like old friends, and ask him what had upset him or to listen to him, sometimes in curious wonder, sometimes with empathic chagrin, to his grievances. As a mid-teenager, I was exposed to more SKE dirty linens and Buddhist politics than anyone my age then. The lesson was invaluable, because as his anger abated, he would often point out to me various sides of the issues that had irked him. They were rare lessons in human psychology and Buddhist leadership.

In the worst of his irate outbursts, he appeared to be a lonely tormented giant in a wilderness. (During his 1971–72 world tour, however, he was in the best of spirits, especially in the West.) The fact that I had rarely fled from his wrath taught me a valuable lesson. His anger was often a desperate cry of anguish and agony at the apathy, pettiness, sycophancy and cowardice he saw in the Buddhists we cared for. From him I learnt that *one could be angry without hating*, but it is a very difficult gesture for others, especially the ‘nice’ people, to understand. In this, AM and I had an unspoken understanding that formed the basis of my best years of learning from him. (This refusal to bow to the language of anger, however, landed me into hot water not a few times with some irascible SKE elders.)

While he was in Melaka, I served as his part-time body servant for a period. (He taught me how to make a special eggnog with Nescafe for him, and often prided to others, ‘You should make it like Beng Sin here does!’) Such occasions led me to know him well enough to be deeply attracted to his penchant for ‘musing’ — what he called his almost nonstop discoursing and ruminating, which most SKE frequenters often found to be noise but was music to my ears.

As a bibliophile (or bibliomaniac, to some), I had another reason for serving him so humbly — an ulterior motive — which was to have access to his precious library, wherein I wallowed for hours in my maiden voyage through the Pali Text Society translations, Malalasekera’s *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, and numberless other Dharma gems. I remember feeling especially ecstatic to be able to hold in my very hands the *Pāli Tipiṭakam Concordance*; for, up to then, I was naive enough to have the impression that only the Christians had a concordance — an impression I picked up from Bible studies with my Gospel Hall elder brother before I turned to the Middle Way. In due course, unasked, AM presented many of his precious volumes to me, I suspect, in appreciation of my services to him and probably because he noticed my love for books. (Sadly, to date, such gifts are in the custody of the FOBM, which makes my writing of even this book an especially difficult task fraught with distractions from lack of my customary references. I had to resort to old notes, scrapbooks and borrowed books.)

Unsurprisingly, one of my ‘quarrels’ with AM centred around Dharma and Vinaya. During AM’s SKE days, besides showering him with Dharma questions whenever the opportunity arose, I often badgered him to hold Dharma study classes. More often than not, I had difficulty accepting his dancing, singing and other ‘unmonkly’ liberties. One day, out of utter

exasperation, he burst out, 'Dharma! Dharma! Dharma! That fellow Beng Sin must be mad!' 'Yes, Venerable!' I stone-facedly replied sounding like a fundamentalist prig. In due course, however, we almost completed a study of Narada Thera's *Manual of Buddhism*, with occasional lapses that kept me anxiously waiting.

6.46 Review of AM: the man and his work

It would take up quite a lot of space here merely to list a summary of AM's accomplishments (especially his youth work and involvement in international Buddhism), some details of which are given in the 1985 *Young Buddhist* Supplement Issue, which records his 25 years of Dharmadūta. Among other things, he was a founder member of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (1950) (which he attended as Ānanda Meemanage, representing 'The World Fellowship of Faiths', New Delhi) and of the World Buddhist Sangha Council. He was reported to have delivered a well-acclaimed address before the Parliament of World Religions held in New Jersey (USA). (*The Young Buddhist*, Singapore, 1986:27]

AM's most admirable quality, which sometimes worked against him, was his indomitable candour. As far as I knew him, I could not see anyone that he feared, not even the politicians. There was a certain Wesak procession when the guest VIP had not arrived even when the appointed time was well past, he threatened to proceed with the public procession without the VIP to the nervous protests of several patient elders.

Another memorable example of AM's great courage was in connection with caste discrimination over the 'Kathina Civara consecration' (Kathina robe offering) in Malaysia. Being an Amarapura Nikāya monk, he suffered 'subtle discrimination' from the Syāma Nikāya monks, who twice ignored him even

though he was invited by the sponsors. With a delegation of his lay disciples, AM confronted the guilty party, who then gave assurance that there will be no repeat of it.

When he was 61, reflecting on his 20 years of monkhood, he mused:

I feel happier than I have been ever before. Seventeen years I have spent serving the cause of youth bringing untold spiritual strength to brave the storm of 'traditionalism, priestcraft and superstition'. I have stood my ground without any semblance of a compromising attitude. I have utilised every ounce of my rational instincts as far as they carry me, and I have always experienced that there are levels that transcend reason. I have respected tradition and certain formalities as merely a means of communication but never as the ultimate end. I have never been reluctant to adopt better techniques of traditional formalities, if I have found that the old must give in to the new, but only in such situations where the old has become obsolete and irrelevant. (*The Young Buddhist* 1978:185)

Earlier on, in the same article, 'Random Thoughts — Reminiscences,' reflecting on the 10th Anniversary of the SBYO, he wrote:

...I have laboured in the service of Youth making no compromises with manipulative and untruthful parents or Elders of the Order, who prefer to keep a blind eye to the hypocrisy of grown-ups and yet speak in harsh terms over the mistakes of innocent and growing up youths. (*The Young Buddhist* 1978:179)

Most of what AM had written and his youth activities are recorded in *The Young Buddhist*, an annual he started in 1969. I had the privilege of working with him for the first few issues and even designed one of the covers for him. It was an interesting experience to watch how he had the magazine published — a good lesson for the publishers of campus Buddhist magazines and other Buddhist publications. First, he would write

to the guest writers for articles, and push the relevant departments for their reports. The most difficult part was raising the funds through advertisements. Although there was a special person or team to do this, he usually ended up getting the greatest number of advertisements, not so much because he was influential, but because he went out more often. And he usually spent more time at the printer as a 'quality controller' than any other member of the editorial board.

The Young Buddhist had a world-wide readership, and one of its best critiques was from R.J. Zwi Werblowsky.

This admirable journal is, essentially, an 'in-group' affair but 'it has the tremendous advantage of not only fostering the group's cohesion but also of giving the reader an ideal of, and making him share in, the life and activities of a particular and very lively and dedicated group.' (1978:159)

Zwi Werblowsky noticed that most of the names occurring in the magazine were Chinese and Sinhalese, which meant that 'we are dealing here with a largely ethnic phenomenon' which was understandable because in Malaysia and Singapore 'it is the religion mainly of the Chinese population, and, of course, the smaller Sinhala population groups'. Zwi Werblowsky was particularly impressed with AM's honesty:

The Ven. Ānanda Maṅgala Thera's article in the 1977 issue [an open letter to the Sinhala Sangha in Malaysia and Singapore] is praiseworthy for its ruthless honesty. Whilst not simply an indictment of certain Dhammaduta (or, to be more precise, lack of genuine Dhammaduta) activities by certain Sri Lanka monks, and of corruption in some Sangha circles, it is at any rate a healthy reminder to the starry-eyed of what the stark realities are also in the Buddhist world. (*The Young Buddhist* 1978:159)

Zwi Werblowsky also observed that *The Young Buddhist* (meaning AM as well), 'whilst making every effort to be non-sectarian

and “ecumenical”, nevertheless evinces a clear tendency to propagate Theravāda (i.e. sociologically speaking, Sinhalese) Buddhism amongst Mahayanists (i.e. sociologically speaking, the Chinese population in Singapore and Malaysia) (1978:160).

In his early years in Melaka, AM had vehemently denounced Sinhalese clerical titles which, he charged, could easily be bought. He seemed to have mellowed in his later years; for, he accepted from his Nikāya the title of *Saddharma. kīrti Śrī Paṇḍita Dhamm’āloka Vaṃsa-d,dhvaja*, which made him the ‘Chief High Priest’ (*mahā.nayaka*) of his Nikāya in Singapore and Malaysia. Ironically, he was the only Amarapura Nikāya monk in Singapore then, with perhaps another in Malaysia (in Sentul). [The Syām Nikāya had only about five monks resident in Malaysia, and even fewer in Singapore then.] [On a mistranslation of clerical titles, see V:9.]

Even without his clerical title, his past glory in the political arena was enough to open many official doors, especially in Sri Lanka and India, where on a number of occasions he brought his inner circle of disciples to privileged audiences before the countries’ highest leaders. Such gestures, along with his courage, candour, energy and wit, made many who had worked with him thought that they could not hold a candle to him.

On his death, *The Young Buddhist* died with him. The dedicated workers of the SBYO, like loyal bulls and cows that have lost their herder, plodded back to their respective pens and pastures, gathering together on ever fewer occasions, in ever fewer numbers. *No one could replace AM*, his pupils would chorus. Anyone who had worked with him, even for a short time, would know that he had always tried his utmost when others flagged or failed. His silver-tongued message to posterity is that **if one could not be a candle bright, at least be a mirror reflecting its light.** [6.754b]

II:6.5 Dr. Wong Phui Weng, PhD (1936–1988)

Two years after the death of Ānanda Maṅgala, one of the most tragic figures in the field of lay Buddhist work in recent times, Dr. Dharmapāla Wong Phui Weng, PhD, who, only after a brief decade of lay missionary efforts, died of cancer at 52. Wong was born into a difficult family as the youngest of 11 siblings and was orphaned at 7. Despite his childhood difficulties, he did very well in his studies at the Batu Road Boys' School and the Victoria Institution (KL), and later at the University of Malaya, where he earned a doctorate in botany.

Wong began his career with the Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia (RRIM); but later joined Monsanto (M) Sdn. Bhd., where he was attached to the Agri Chemicals Research and Sales Training department, and later as Product Development Manager of Agri Chemicals for some years. He was then offered a post in the Technical Division of Hoechst (M) Sdn. Bhd. where he remained for the rest of his life.

Like most Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia of his time, Wong was born into a family that was so called Buddhist, but was really Shenist. By his own admission, he wrote,

...I remember I was disgusted with the slaughter of chickens and pigs for offerings to Buddha as a God. Burning paper money for the dead, the elaborate costly funeral rites for my father when he passed away and what appeared as numerous rites and rituals in the name of Buddhism. (*Voice of Buddhism* 1978 16.2:27)

In essence, these are sentiments which are repeated *ad nauseam* by the born 'Buddhists'. Disgusted with 'Buddhism' (or rather Shenism), Wong, in his late teenage years, turned to Christianity, and with his characteristic zeal delved into the Bible, studying both the Methodist and Catholic traditions. 'This was my undoing as a Christian,' he admitted, 'because the

more I studied, the more confused and disillusioned I became.’ (*Voice of Buddhism* 1979 16,1-2:38). For 25 years, he was in a religious dilemma.

In 1978, it occurred to him to seek the truth ‘beyond the bounds of Christianity’. Apparently, most, if not all, his doubts about Buddhism were cleared upon his reading of K. Sri Dhammananda’s *What Buddhist Believe*, a popular and populist apologetic attempt to answer various misconceptions and malpractices in the name of Buddhism common in Malaysia (especially amongst the Chinese). The *Voice of Buddhism* (June 1989:37) obituary, however, says that ‘Dr. Wong’s involvement with Buddhism began 12 years ago [i.e. 1977] when upon reading “Sayings of Buddha”, he wrote to our Chief Ven. Dhammananda to ask whether he would be allowed to continue to respect Jesus Christ.’ The reply he received, that he could respect any other religious teacher inspired him to become a Buddhist.

Like most beginners at the Brickfields Buddhist Temple, Kuala Lumpur, he attended the Friday evening talks. In the same year (1978) he made a dramatic and welcomed entry into the elite Buddhist fold by writing a letter amounting to a public confession of faith and enclosed a MYR\$5,000 cheque ‘which I would like to be invested in a Trust Fund, the annual proceeds in the way of interest, I would like to recommend to pay for Rev. K. Sri Dhammananda’s free publications.’ (*Voice of Buddhism* 1978 16.2:27). Wong’s hope was that it would ‘serve as a nucleus for a larger Publications Trust Fund’ supported by the members of the Buddhist Missionary Society (BMS) (founded by Dhammananda in the Brickfields Buddhist Temple, and head of the Sinhalese Syāma Nikāya mission in Malaysia, sponsored by the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society). [In May 1992, when we inquired regarding the Trust, we were informed that it was discontinued soon after Wong died, because ‘there was

no one to manage it.' We could not get details as to how the Trust progressed when it existed, if there had been one. There was no mention of the Trust in the obituary, too.]

In the same year that Wong publicly declared himself a Buddhist (1978), he attended the Third Dharma Preachers' Training Course (DPTC 3. 4–11 December, Wat Chetawan, in Petaling Jaya), a national level course which I organized. In the course of the DPTC 3 he became more certain of his mission, as a result of which I gave him the Dharma name of 'Dharmapāla' (Guardian of the Dharma) as an inspiring reminder of Anāgārika Dharmapāla, the most famous lay Buddhist worker of our time. By 1980, Wong had become a small sensation in the Brickfields Buddhist Temple and was serving as the Chairman of BMS Publications Committee. In the same year, he was appointed an Honorary Representative of the Pali Text Society for Malaysia and Singapore (*Voice of Buddhism* 1980 17,1:10). Sadly, due to differences in opinion regarding missiological ideals and other difficulties, he subsequently gave up the position.

After several intense and interesting discussions on Buddhist missiology in the local context, Wong and I concluded that we would effect our mission in three main directions: *free literature, spiritual counselling, and meditation*. The basic idea was to spread a wide network of contacts, informing the public not only about basic Buddhism, but also of the availability of Buddhist counselling. In the process of the counselling, the client would be introduced a suitable meditation. The client would then be encouraged to keep up the practice. Regarding meditation, I suggested that we should promote one simple practice that would be useful for the local Buddhists and for interested people. This meditation should be effective in alleviating basic emotional difficulties: the method, a simple and safe one, was **the Cultivation of Lovingkindness** (*mettā.bhāvanā*).

As a major effort to promote Buddhist counselling, I suggested to Wong that we co-author a practical handbook which would cover the basics of spiritual counselling, the proper application of meditation techniques to specific personal problems (after they have been identified through counselling), and readings from the Scriptures relevant to specific problems. The partly completed *Buddhist Mental Medicine and Mind-healing* (Piyasilo & Wong, 1980) of 126 cyclostyled foolscap pages was used as a training text for the Fourth National Dharma Interaction (NADI 4, 5–11 December 1980) which I organized under the auspices of the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia, and asked Wong to be its Convenor. In fact, the whole book up to that point had been completed by me since Wong was new to Buddhism, but had the ‘qualification’ (PhD in botany). He worked to finance the project and to distribute it. One of the most interesting features of the book was Chapter 6: *Readings from the Scriptures for Use During Counselling*, where relevant passages were listed under specific personal problems. There were readings for depression, for loneliness, for suicide tendency, and so on.

6.51 The Neo-Buddhists

In 1979, I mooted the idea of forming ‘The Saddhamma Buddhist Society’ (SBS) to a few interested friends, including Wong. Even at this early stage, there were signs of two levels of our Buddhist work. The proposed SBS would serve as an association duly registered with the Registrar of Societies, while a dedicated core of Buddhist workers would form ‘The Neo-Buddhists’ (NB). The aims of the SBS/NB (Article 3 of the proposed Constitution) were as follows:

1. To stress on the Basic Tenets of Buddhist Doctrine.
2. To give Buddhism a contemporary expression.

3. To strike a balance between Buddhism and the Buddha Word.
4. To promote and maintain multilateral dialogues amongst the various schools and sects of Buddhism.
5. To preach the Buddha Dhamma.
6. To serve society along Buddhist principles.

Article 7 (Days of Observance and Worship') was especially interesting, as it reflect the traditional sentiments of our group despite our 'NeoBuddhist' philosophy:

The fourteenth, fifteenth and eighth days of the lunar fortnight have been hallowed by the Buddha as days of Observance (*uposatha*) when there is the hearing of Dhamma (V 1:102) and the keeping of the Precepts (A 4:248). Buddhists should duly assemble on those days, particularly the fourteenth and fifteenth, and on other days as may be announced by the Council.

The Constitution had a special provision for a Spiritual Director. The rest of the Constitution followed the guidelines of the Registrar of Societies.

Wong was especially enthusiastic about the SBS, and proposed that a house he owned (which was then being rented out) could be used as our Centre. The first issue of *The Neo-Buddhist Svara* (our in-house watchdog newsletter) reports:

A very enthusiastic Neo-Buddhist who recently joined the movement decided to turn his home into the 'Dhammapala Vihāra' (a Buddhist centre) where those interested in Buddhism could contact him. He has also offered another house just outside Daman-sara Jaya to be turned into a sort of 'Buddhist home' where Buddhist students could lodge cheaply and at the same time help run it as a Buddhist centre (to be called the 'Dhamma-vijaya Vihāra'. (1979:3)

A veteran Neo-Buddhist, Kong Kok Chin, set aside the master-

bedroom of his home as the 'office' of the movement and whose address was used by the movement (as I was still staying in Wat Chetawan, PJ, and did not have proper working space). He further suggested that we start a Buddhist bookshop on a commercial scale and was willing to invest MYR\$30,000, while another couple of people were prepared to invest an equal amount. A successful Buddhist businessman pledged the use of his premises in the commercial 'State' area of Petaling Jaya. Unfortunately, none of these plans were realized, and for reasons which may serve as a valuable lesson for Buddhist posterity.

When word of such 'Neo-Buddhist' developments began to spread and that we were planning to register ourselves, certain parties seemed not too pleased about it. A number of our supporters who showed interest in the proposed SBS were also members of a certain vihara. Two frustrating developments occurred. The first was my being honoured ('honoured' because it had never happened before) by the visit of a certain influential vihara lay member whom I knew as being very devoted to his well-known teacher. After the preliminary platitudes of praising the 'good work' we were doing, the elder warned to the effect that 'We cannot support you if you call yourselves *the Neo-Buddhists* (NB).' When pressed for the reason, he refused to say more; but it was not difficult to read between the lines. The second development, an even more frustrating one, then occurred.

The minutes of the 3rd pro tem NB Committee Meeting (6th May 1979) recorded Wong's resignation as pro-tem Secretary, saying that this position had taken too much of his leisure time. His frequent absence from home had adversely affected his marriage and family life.' Despite his personal difficulties he made an effort to keep in touch with me but his visits

became less and less frequent. Then came the announcement: 'P.T.S. appointment for B.M.S. Man' (*Voice of Buddhism* June 1980 17,1:10). Wong's contact with me became even less frequent. He would send me letters or drop notes at my door (even when I was in). In his letters, he would ask me for ideas and help in various projects he had in mind. He was beginning to go on his own steam.

Two important points should be noted here regarding the fate of the Neo-Buddhists: one concerned them as individuals, the other as a group. Wong resigned from his secretary post in the NB pro tem Committee and then went on his own. He gave 'marital problems' as the reason for his resignation. Although his religious involvements were not the actual cause of those problems, they intensified existing ones. Many married Buddhist workers face similar problems: an enthusiastic spouse who spends 'too much' time in Buddhism or Buddhist work often has to face the wrath of the partner: the partner's voice is usually louder than the Buddha's. This does not mean that the marriage becomes more happy after the religious spouse has forsaken Buddhism or slowed down religious commitments. The second point has a greater devastating effect on local Buddhist work. When Dr. Wong left the Neo-Buddhists, most of the other enthusiasts began to lose spirit. The charisma of professionalism [6.711 6.712] was gone, as it were, so what was the point of working? It is as if the bellwether had fallen down the ravine and the herd dispersed. In other words, a personality cult seemed to have formed around Wong. The effects of a personality cult are usually devastating, and current Buddhist work in Malaysia and Singapore often centres around a personality, rarely an ideal or vision. There was also the problem of lack of courage in some Buddhists, as evident in the account which follows.

6.511 *Saddhamma Buddhist Society*

In 1980, the police visited me saying that there was a complaint launched against me for ‘raising funds illegally and misappropriating them’. In 1978, while in Melaka, some lay devotees helped to raise funds for a proposed study trip to the US and Western Europe. In fact, I made two trips to the West (1979 and 1982). The report, signed by a pupil of a well-known Sinhalese monk, also contained an allegation that I was ‘spreading a dangerous brand of teaching called Neo-Buddhism.’ (The police however did not question me on this matter at all — they were more concerned regarding the report about fundraising.) As a result of the investigations, Kong (who proposed the bookshop) was terribly shaken and decided to opt out. I remember feeling very disappointed at his inability to cope with such ‘occupational hazards’ — the case however had been closed since.

Nevertheless, on 7th December 1980, we held our first public gathering to discuss the idea of registering the association, the name of which by then had been changed to ‘The Society for Buddhist Education and Research’ with a quaint acronym of SOBER. We managed to get more than enough people to form a Committee. Then a third frustrating development, involving further manipulative forces occurred: one of the elders abruptly backed out. His reason was that since he was a member of a certain vihara, it was not ‘morally right’ for him to participate in our proposed Association. Again, reading in between the lines, we let the matter rest where it was, and found an only-too-willing replacement. Strangely, after a while, more and more of the erstwhile interested individuals seemed to ‘lose interest’. Someone or some party had been sabotaging or lobbying against the Neo-Buddhists.

By then, the Neo-Buddhists had decided to revert to the

original name of 'The Saddhamma Buddhist Society'. The registration papers were ready and a few signatures had been obtained. Somehow Wong and I felt that things were not going to be as easy as we had thought. Certain powerful people were against our plans, and Wong must have been upset with me for not taking a firmer hand in staving them off, or he might have thought that he was once again barking up the wrong tree.

6.52 Syarikat Dharma

The professional man in Wong pushed him on to launch a one-man show of dedicated Buddhist work. His initial efforts were in connection with a struggling printing company called Syarikat Majujaya which used to print a number of my books and the Damansara Buddhist Vihara (DBV) literature. The company was failing and Wong saved it by investing in it. When the new company, called Syarikat Majujaya Indah, was formed, he became one of its directors.

It was at this time that Wong registered his own company, Syarikat Dharma, addressed at 6, Lorong Segambut Tengah Satu in KL, but which later moved to Ampang New Village following Syarikat Majujaya Indah. The objectives of Wong's Syarikat Dharma (as found in his free literature) were:

1. Introducing The Dharma to those who do not know it.
2. To promote simple Buddhist meditations most suitable for lay people practising at home without a teacher.
3. To promote inter-sectarian understanding.
4. To provide information on how to contact publishers to obtain books not available locally, for consolidation of Dharma knowledge.

In time, Wong became more feverish and aggressive in his efforts 'to flood the country with free Buddhist booklets' (his

own words). And publish booklets he did, in English, Chinese and Bahasa Malaysia. Wherever he went on his company's field trips and during holidays, he would make contacts, distribute booklets and receive donations. In other words, he had become a Buddhist *colporteur*. His enthusiasm left many people admiringly breathless, and he enjoyed the attention. Once Wong intimated to me that the approach that he had taken would open every temple door (meaning that because of my reformist vision and activities, some temples were uncomfortable with me).

Wong was nevertheless aware of his shortcoming as a Buddhist worker, and often referred to me those contacts he could not or did not want to help. I would receive letters from those interested in Buddhism or Buddhist publications saying that Wong had recommended that they wrote to me. And when I published a new book, I would send Wong a complimentary copy, and it went on like that for some years.

6.53 *Mettā* and Bha Vana

Most of what Wong learnt from other teachers and myself continued to be used by him throughout his missionary efforts. His special interest in Lovingkindness (*metta*) led him to produce hundreds of thousands of the booklet entitled *Metta Bhavana*, the first series of which was 'authored' by Ampitiye Sri Rahula Maha Thera, and which closed with the Cultivation of Lovingkindness method from *Buddhist Mental Medicine and Mind-healing* (Piyasilo & Wong, 1980). The booklets bore a list of readings from various Buddhist traditions and the addresses of local meditation centres recommended by him.

Aware of his lack of both qualification and experience in Buddhist meditation and doctrine, Wong rarely, if ever, used his own name on the booklets he himself had compiled. He

came up with an ingenious idea: he used the pseudonym of 'Bha Vana', from *bhāvana*, which is Pali for 'meditation' or '(mental) development', which clearly revealed where his heart lay. As Bha Vana, he published a new series of *Metta Bhavana* booklets, this time subtitled 'Meditation on Loving-kindness'.

His new edition of *Metta Bhavana*, compiled and edited from various other relevant sources, was a sort of testimony to his growing confidence and independence in Buddhist work. The new booklet carried a longer list of active Buddhist centres and recommended books. Every booklet now contained a mail order list and the names of various overseas publishers dealing in Buddhist books. He had become a *mail-order colporteur*.

At that time, his printer was still Syarikat Majujaya at Segambut (KL). It was then becoming a favourite printer with a growing Buddhist clientele who could only afford a limited budget to print Buddhist literature. Wong himself made sure that a copy of *Metta Bhavana* cost only about 5-10 sen (hardly US 3-5 cents) to encourage a wide distribution and large donorship. His main method of cutting down cost was to use the same metal plates repeatedly on cheap paper and binding. Rarely would he make changes to the main text; only the advertisement pages were usually updated. It was such booklets that some snobbish Western Buddhists have dismissed as 'those little booklets from the East' while they wrote proud glossy-covered tomes.

Another way that Wong tried to cut cost and optimize distribution of his materials was to make use of 'sub-distributors'; that is, he would give an appropriate number of copies of his materials to reliable supporters for re-distribution. His professional acumen here relied on what he termed as using 'other people's effort' (OPE), 'other people's money' (OPM), and so

on. He often quoted Napoleon Hill and the 'Universal Success Principles' (in a poem called 'Success' (*Berita YBAM* 13 March 1984:13)).

Understandably, there were those who thought such techniques were cheap and unethical; but his supporters, especially school and college students, undergraduates and young professionals, were impressed. Although they were amongst his greatest admirers, for some reason, Wong worked with them only occasionally and never really joined forces with them in any sustained effort.

6.54 Review of Wong's work

Except for a few velvet-fisted viharins, Wong's colporteurship received widespread support wherever he went throughout Malaysia, including Sarawak and Sabah. As far as colporteurship went, Wong had the professional experience (after all, he was with the Agri Chemicals Research and Sales Training department of Monsanto) and he had a constant source of funds (public and private) for his projects. He had a loyal group of donors (including affluent elders), some giving regular and admirable sums. He had almost no difficulty with supporters from lay organizations. Monk-run viharas, however, were another story; there was always the risk that he might be poaching on the vihara reserve of donors. Indeed, a few donors, disillusioned with the misdirected and uncertain manner that some viharas managed their funds actually re-channelled their donations to Wong. Understandably, this change of heart often ruffled the feathers of the jilted, to say the least.

Despite Wong's difficulties with the BMS, he was its proverbial land-sighting bird (a metaphor mentioned in the Kevaddha Sutta, D 1:222), except that he found difficulty landing when-

ever he flew back, only to fly out again. Sometime before 1987, he confided in me that he was given the task of making a report on the benefits that various societies in the country had received from the work of the BMS in its 25 years of existence. The good doctor travelled to various corners of the country, visiting Buddhist centres and interviewing Buddhist workers, but he was utterly disappointed and disillusioned, even disgusted, at the predominance of personal conflicts, backbiting, politicking, money-mindedness and general lack of fellowship and direction among the local Buddhists. When asked what useful information he had gathered from his survey, his disenchanted reply was: 'Nothing happened!' (Here, Wong and I face similar problems with groups like the BMS: we have our own minds when it comes to certain matters and did not receive the blessing of the imprimatur.)

When the glossy and colourful special issue of the *Voice of Buddhism* commemorating the '25th Anniversary Silver Jubilee Celebrations' appeared, his name and his report were significantly absent. Wong's disappointment with the true state of Buddhism in the country apparently led to a new turn in his nationwide literature blitz. In his desperation, as it were, to inspire grassroots Buddhists and in his efforts to 'answer the evangelists' (one of his favourite public talk was on why he gave up Christianity), he did what some might dismiss as being frivolous. In August 1988, for example, he published a booklet entitled *What the Stars Say* with the pictures of pop stars Boy George and Tina Turner on the cover! It was a small collection of anecdotes and 'testimonies' mostly by film stars on how they appreciated Buddhism.

Although Wong's war cry was 'Flood the country with Buddhist booklets!', it is wrong to say that he was only interested in quantity. His main concern was that of *optimizing* his

funds and distribution of his booklets. On a number of occasions, he cheaply reprinted selected titles by well-known Buddhist authors and marketed them at a subsidized price. In some cases, for example, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Wheel Series of the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy) was reprinted for free distribution.

[Asian Buddhists have a tradition of reprinting good Buddhist works as acts of merit, but often without seeking the permission of the author. This is not so much plagiarism as a gesture of Oriental admiration: many oriental Buddhist classics do not even bear the author's name! Unfortunately, Westerners and westernized Buddhists (especially those who depend on funds from non-traditional sources) are not amused. Some years ago, a Singapore Buddhist bookshop that reprinted a popular book on what the Buddha taught was reported by an over-conscientious chief monk to its author. The merit-makers were intimated a warning to stop distributing the book or face serious consequences.]

By that time, Wong had had some rather unfortunate disagreement with the other directors of Syarikat Majujaya Indah, which climaxed with his being pressed by them to withdraw his shares and give up his directorship. The 1988 booklet bore his pseudonym 'Bha Vana' and his home address right on the front cover, but not Syarikat Dharma. He was now even more independent! The main issue here probably concerned a clash of ideals; Wong's vision was to spread Buddhism, but Syarikat Majujaya Indah was a profit-oriented business. His booklets were, however, still being printed by the same company.

Wong's greatest setback, like that of almost all other Buddhist professionals who ventured (some might say 'dabbled') in Buddhist work, however, was the lack of painful *qualification and experience*. In the same 1988 booklet, he dedicated the whole of the back outside cover to:

YOU TOO CAN PROMOTE BUDDHISM / EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT AN EXPERT!

He was appealing to his readers to practise charity (*dāna*) and to communicate Buddhism, from what little they knew of it, to others who knew even less. Although he was a neophyte in meditation (though he had some counselling experience from one of the people-help groups), his great enthusiasm to promote meditation led him to publish a few rare titles like Phra Rajsiddhimuni's *Manual for Checking Your Vipassana Kamat-thana Progress* (Syarikat Dharma/Majujaya), to the chagrin of some local Vipassanā stalwarts, who not only disapproved of such books, but even if they were good, would limit them to their inner circle of practitioners.

Wong's missionary enthusiasm led him to make international contacts. This is where he took full advantage of his title of 'Dr.' The world eagerly responded. His name and reports of his work appeared in a number of international Buddhist publications. He became the local representative of the Pali Text Society (London). Even his name was sometimes quoted as an authority in disputes amongst some lay Buddhists. [6.754b]

In 1988 (when he was only 52), without warning, he was tragically struck down by terminal cancer. The news understandably shocked him: having known him, he must have felt angry and ashamed. Angry because he had great plans for Buddhism; ashamed because he could not keep to his word, as it were. He kept his affliction mostly to himself. In due course, he made his peace with a number of his antagonists (including the Catholics). On his deathbed, he instructed his wife to invite 'the Venerable from Sentul' to perform his last rites.

His wife, however, magnanimously invited me to lead in the last rites, since, according to her, 'You both have been as thick as thieves'. The Chief High Priest of the Syāma Nikāya in

Malaysia and Singapore, who was also present, gave the congregation an unannounced privilege of an address in which he spoke on the bond between his vihara and Wong. Before the fire, I had the honour of inviting Ven. Saraṇaṅkara, the abbot of the Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple (Sentul), to perform the last reflection and receive the traditional *paṃsukūla-robe* offering. In the funeral oration before the fire, I expressed my profound regret in not having been able to personally bid a Buddhist friend and *Dharma.pāla* farewell before his new life. May this brief study serve as a token offering to his memory.



II:6.6 Sumaṅgalo, Ānanda Maṅgala, Dr. Wong contrasts

The work of the three late Buddhist workers — Father Sumaṅgalo (1950s–1960s), Ānanda Maṅgala Mahā.nāyaka Thera (1970s–1980s) and Dr. Wong Phui Weng (1970s–1980s) — covered roughly a period of forty years, that is, about one generation. They never met one another, but their lives overlapped successively. During their own life-time, however, they saw the fruits of their Buddhist work. Unfortunately, they all shared the same fate of their work not outliving them. Why did they succeed in their own life-time? Why did their work die with them?

All three Buddhist workers — Sumaṅgalo the YC Father, AM the ‘mod monk’, and Wong the colporteur — succeeded in their own lifetime simply because they were energetic and resourceful. Like the H.S. Olcott of the Sinhalese Buddhist revival, they were good organizers, but not philosophers (which, perhaps, they never intended to be). Like Anāgārika Dharmapāla, they were indefatigable propagandists (in the best sense of the term). Yet all three of them had shortcomings and faced overwhelming odds. Sumaṅgalo, despite all the respect and adoration from the natives, was not deeply grounded in any Buddhist school. Evidently, this was his conscious choice of not becoming ‘sectarian’. Although neither he nor any of his pupils had compiled any tome of his thoughts, his articles (especially those in *The Golden Light*) spoke right to the hearts of his adoring flocks everywhere, and he showed sensitive concern towards the ills of contemporary Buddhism. One must not forget that Sumaṅgalo was a pioneer, living over two decades ago, when good Buddhist teachers and books were not so easily available as today.

AM the 'mod monk' was a greater orator than he was a writer. His writings, as evident from *The Young Buddhist*, were mostly polemical, and often rhetorical, with a distinct style of oblique reproach (by saying nice things about the subject before saying his mind). AM, however, was an organizer par excellence. As in Sumaṅgalo's case, no one took the trouble to compile AM's thoughts systematically, if at all, while he was alive, though reports of his activities and his articles were published every year (especially in *The Young Buddhist*) during the last part of his life (even then, mostly through his own efforts). He would have made an excellent socially-engaged Buddhist activist today; indeed, he was one in his own way.

Both AM and Wong had the misfortune of being insidiously watched by clerical dastards and becoming the victims of their machinations in religious empire-building. Understandably, Wong, a layman new to Buddhism and a neo-Buddhist, was more deeply affected; he struggled on painfully, but refusing to show it. In this, he is *the first Bodhisattva of lay Buddhist workers*. As in the case of AM, some of Wong's booklets (a few of which he wrote himself), too, tends to be polemical; besides, they had the appearance of a business prospectus — 'this booklet tells you why Buddhis is good, try it, and here are some recommended book and addresses you could contact,' and so on. He was, in other words, a *Buddhist evangelist* (in the best sense of the word), but never a proselytizer. Where he lacked qualification and experience in the Buddha Dharma, his enthusiasm more than compensated it.

Some may call Wong a runaway horse (for what was perceived as his 'zeal without knowledge'); but difficult times called for emergency measures; yet, he was always eager to learn. In a way, most of us are like Wong; we are all lacking in some skill or knowledge in the Buddha Dharma. Wong's

lesson is that if you are young, waste neither time nor effort to master the Buddha Dharma. It will pay dividend in due course; otherwise, he seems to warn, you might end up like a runaway horse. Others might mourn your passing, but soon even that memory becomes flimsy — when there are too many runaway horses to mourn and to remember.

All the three Buddhist workers we have discussed were Buddhists of the people, moved by the same spirit that motivated Col. H.S. Olcott and Anāgārika Dharmapāla. They laboured not out of ambition, but because there was a crying need for Buddha Dharma; they were there amongst the people with only a little more than the others but were ever willing to share, not to take away. They toiled not that they would be honoured and titled for it, but because of the light and fire within them that refuse to die. They lived and struggled, often all alone, and died alone in their faith. Theirs is a friendly but clear warning to religious empire-builders and their McGuffins that there will always be those who would work without glory, without gain, without vihara. They did not merely say that they wished for no empire; they never had an empire!



II:6.7 Charisma

(a) *Preliminary.* The three Buddhist workers we have discussed [6.3 6.4 6.5] shared one common denominator: their followers and the Buddhists at large perceived them as *charismatic* figures. The charismatic leader, according to Weber, ‘preaches, creates, or demands *new* obligations’, ‘transforms all values and breaks all traditional and rational norms... [and] central attitudes and directions of action.’ (*Economy and society*, 1978:243 245 1115). In other words, a charismatic leader creates a new value-orientation and strives to impose it on others. Since they create new value orientations, they inevitably clash with existing ones.

All leaders, especially teachers, have some level of charisma [6.711 a]. Although it is usually an inborn ‘gift’, a leader also may either be *attributed* it or may *acquire* it [6.6 6.711]. Sumaṅgalo, for example, won the respect of the Malayan and Singaporean Buddhists for two reasons: he was a white man and a Buddhist monk (the former is a source of congenital charisma, the latter of acquired charisma). Ānanda Maṅgala was an English-speaking Theravāda monk with a colourful past (both sources of cultivated charisma) [6.711a]; but people either respected or feared his candour and irascibility (both sources of congenital charisma) [6.711]. Dr. Wong Phui Weng used his professional charisma (invoking his PhD and professional status) to the advantage of his Buddhist work [6.711a 6.712]. In all these cases, the sources of charisma are used by their respective owners to *get* things done without either coercion nor providing material reward. Donald Hutchinson, in an interview for a London monthly magazine, made this observation of Ānanda Maṅgala:

Things happen for Ānanda Maṅgala. I only watched the process

for a short time, but I strongly suspect that it continues more or less indefinitely. He never asks anyone to do anything, and *yet* they continually do things for him. Listeners excuse themselves when they are not needed; he walks towards a door, and somebody leaps to open it; quiet is needed, so a manager rattling keys rushes unasked to unlock a private room; people insist on being photographed with him, and so it goes on, with the chunky saffron robed figure bearing amiably around because — people seem to be so happy that he is so happy. (*Yoga and Health* 12 1971, in *Buddhist Digest* 1972:3 2)

Sumaṅgalo, AM and Wong, though *perceived* as charismatic figures by their supporters, were neither radical nor revolutionary. In some way, they were innovators, even reformists: Sumaṅgalo and his Youth Circle movement, AM and his ‘mod’ approach to Buddhist youth work, Wong and his ‘professional’ colporteurship. But their work was never carried on; they were only generally mentioned or invoked in opportune circumstances, but their mentioners and invokers then went their separate ways. Here lies one of the most serious weakness of Malaysian/Singaporean Buddhism: *each generation of leaders and workers, as a rule, lead and work with more organizational ingenuity than with historical continuity*. It is as if each generation has to start all over again, and even if any ideas or practices were adopted from the past or some other sources, they are used as if they have never existed before.

In their inspired efforts to disseminate the Buddha Dharma, however, no right-minded Sanghin, Dharmafarer or lay Buddhist worker would ever think of setting up a cult or founding a sect. Even if one tries to do so, one is very unlikely to succeed; even if success does come, it rarely survives the founder’s death. Cults and sects, however, often grow around people who in time discover their powers of attracting admirers, or

begin to attribute special qualities to such persons; such qualities are then publicly proclaimed in an ever-widening circles of devotees. This is the power of charisma.

(b) *Christian conception of charisma.* The New Testament of the Christians contains two important passages referring to *charismata* (pl) or 'gifts of grace', and they have interesting implications for the study here. Michael Hill, in *A Sociology of Religion*, notes that

in the Epistle to the Romans, Paul juxtaposes the 'enthusiastic' exercise of charisma with its institutional varieties, and the *New English Bible* clearly brings this out in its translation: 'The gifts we possess differ as they are allotted to us by God's grace, and must be exercised accordingly: the gift of inspired utterance, for example, in proportion to a man's faith; or the gift of administration, in administration.' [Rom 12:6]. The other gifts mentioned are teaching, exhortation, charity, leadership and mercy. (M. Hill, 1973:147)

The First Epistle to the Corinthians gives a long list of other 'gifts', such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing and so on (1 Cor 12:4-11).

The deterministic tone of the two biblical passages are clear. To a Buddhist, all the 'gifts' mentioned can be cultivated by one who is determined enough: indeed, such gifts could be cultivated even outside the purview of religion. Moreover, if those qualities were 'gifts' from God, then one need not cultivate them at all — one either has them or not. Buddhists, amongst others, would find this determinism curious, to say the least.

The original usage of the term 'charisma', Hill notes, is 'undoubtedly to distinguish the organizational base of the Christian church from that of the surrounding social institutions'

(Hill, 1973:148). Sociologists have tried to extend the concept of charisma beyond its Christian usage and apply it, for example, to political situations. Weber, however, intended it as a generalized concept, 'since his typology of legitimate authority is one of his most generalized use of ideal-type models' (ib).

Charisma has today become a universal, even secular, concept, and outgrown its Christian usage. This is not to say that charisma was unknown in older religions — indeed, even the very first religions revolved around charisma, e.g. around the shaman. Among the Western religionists, the Christian usage is, for historical reasons, perhaps the best known. In his *Kirchenrecht* (2 vols, 1892), for example, the Strassburg church historian and jurist, Rudolf Sohm (1841–1917), analyzing the transformation of the primitive Christian community into the Roman Catholic church in terms of a 'charismatic institution', notes that:

The doctrine of the constitution of the ecclesia which was derived from the divine word, but in truth was apostolic in that the organization of Christianity *is not legal but charismatic*. Christianity is organized by the distribution of *gifts of grace* (Charismata) which at the same time enables and calls the individual Christians to different activities in Christianity. The charisma is from God.... And thus the service (*diakonia*) to which the Charisma calls, is a service imposed by God, and an office in the service of the church (ecclesia) and not of any local community. [Quoted by C.J. Friedrich, 'Political leadership and the problem of the charismatic power.' *Journal of Politics* 23,1 Feb 1961:14.] [ST Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, Cambridge, 1984:327–9]

What Christians attribute to 'gifts from God' — speaking ability, teaching skill, leadership, etc — Buddhists regard as the results of past karma and/or present conditions (i.e. nature and/or nurture), and as qualities that can be developed here

and now. The Buddhist view of charisma, as such, has direct social relevance for us today. In broader terms, the Buddhist view is that all charismata arises from three sources: personal, social and spiritual. The **personal basis for charisma** has to do with the individual's mental frame. One's way of thinking may make one become charismatic, or, conversely, it could draw one towards a charismatic person.

The **social source of charisma** usually depends on the culture and traditions of a particular society. Among the Middle Eastern peoples, for example, prophets were (and still are) accorded charisma. This is the Durkheimi nature of society where *vox populi, vox dei* [The voice of the people is the voice of God]. Here the people — here, meaning the social conditions — create the prophet, and the prophet speaks the society's psyche. Another source of charisma, according to Buddhism, is **the Dharma** or Transcendental Reality, which is an *impersona* as opposed to the *persona* of a theistic Being. This Transcendent Reality is above both the person and society, but yet comprising them. It is the inability to see this intrinsic unity — but to see life as 'manyness' (*papañca*, sn 8) — that causes a human or any living being to be spiritually alienated, as a result of which such a one grasps after 'things' (*tammayo*, Sn 846b), which one *reifies* or projects as realities (such as ideas about God and an unchanging eternal soul).

The Buddhist concept of charisma, as such, goes beyond that of a powerful attraction towards a person, but concerns the very source of our understanding of life and the universe itself. For Buddhists, charisma is not so much a gift that enables one to disseminate the True Teaching or convert others, as it is the spiritual strength (*saṃvega*) that one accepts and applies to realize the Transcendental Reality. Let us now discuss the Buddhist term or terms for charisma and their usages.

(c) *Buddhist conception of charisma*. [6.756 6.757] In an earlier brief essay, 'Charisma in Buddhism' (Buddhist Training Centre Occasional Paper 4, 1991), I stated that 'There is no Pali or Buddhist term that exactly translates the Greek term *charisma* as used by the Christians or in modern sociology' (1991:6). In this new endeavour, I stand corrected, having discovered a close Buddhist term for it in *pamāṇa* (Pali) or *pramāṇa* (Sanskrit), which literally means 'measure'. Not only is the term defined in the Canon, but there are clear admonitions against relying on them (A 2:71, Pug 531). I have discussed the term below [6.722].

Another important Buddhist term related to *charisma* is *ādhipateyya* or *ādhipateyya* (BHS *ādhipateya*) [derived from the prefix *ādhi* ('supreme, over') + *pati* (meaning 'lord')], from which is also derived the abstract term *adhipacca* (Skt *adhipatya*), meaning 'overlordship, supreme rule, supremacy, mastery, power' (CPD). This supreme power is so absolute that it has been called 'divine supremacy' (*issar'ādhipaccaṃ*, A 2:205), i.e. universal kingship (*cakkavatti*) and the divine right of kings who rule with supreme power among the clans (*kulesu paccek'ādhipaccaṃ*, A 3:76). The *Ādhipateyya Sutta* (A 1:147–150) also appears in full below [6.757].

The Pali Commentaries explain the term *ādhipateyya* as 'priority' (*jeṭṭhakam katvā*, 'putting in the first place', DA 3:1005 f, AA 2:243, UA 406, DhsA 125). In a broader sense, it means 'supremacy, predominance, authority; influence, esp the influences (*ṭhānā*) that induce people to follow virtue' (CPD). As a synonym of *adhipacca*, it too has a divine quality (*dibbena ādhipateyyena*, D 3:146, A 3:33). It is a term that is found in numerous places in the early Canon, and as a doctrine, three types of *ādhipateyya* are mentioned. Here the term has been variously translated as 'lordship' (Dines Andersen, *Pali Glossary*, 1901:39. *Encyclopædia of Buddhism* 1:204), 'precedence' (Ñāṇāmolī, *Vism:Ñ* 1:34), 'sovereignty'

(Andersen ib), ‘dominance’ (F.L. Woodward, A:W 1:130) and ‘mandate(r)’ (C.A.F. Rhys Davids, JRAS 1933:330 331).

As a term in its own right, *ādhīpateyya* is often applied to divine qualities; for example, it is said that one who is reborn in the heavens would be blessed with ‘divine life, beauty, comfort, fame and lordship’ (*dibbaṃ āyu.vañṇa.sukha.yasa.ādhīpateyyaṃ*, DhA 3:293). In the **Tissa Sutta**, there is an account of how the monk Tissa, after death, was reborn as a Supreme Being (*brahma*) in the Brahma Realm. He was visited by Mahā Moggallāna who asked him whether the other Supreme Beings had a particular kind of spiritual knowledge. The Brahma Tissa replied that those Supreme Beings are quite satisfied with the ‘supreme life, supreme beauty, supreme comfort, supreme fame, supreme lordship’ (*brahmena āyunā brahmena vañṇena brahmena sukhena brahmena yasena brahmena ādhīpateyyena*), but lack the knowledge to free themselves from their heavenly state to escape to the Beyond (A 4:76).

In the **Paññattiyo Sutta**, the Buddha declares that ‘Māra / the Evil One/ who burns with miraculous power and fame is the foremost of the supremely powerful [charismatic?]' (*Māro ādhīpateyyānaṃ iddhiyā yasaṃ jalaṃ*, A 2:17). This statement is understandable because the early Buddhist texts regard Māra as the lord of the all worldly existence, as opposed to Nirvana (S 3:195 4:85, Nc 506, SnA 2:506). On a positive note, we have the term *ādhīpateyya* as referring to three priorities. The *locus classicus* for the three types of priorities is the **Ādhīpateyya Sutta** (A 1:147) [6.757].

(d) *Sociological theory*. It is not always easy, even impossible, to translate an early Buddhist term without bringing it out of its original context. In other words, we usually risk reading something into the translation or omitting certain finer points.

Sometimes, the original term is more specific, sometimes broader, than its modern translation. The term *ādhīpateyya* is a good case in point when we translate it as ‘lordship’, ‘priority’, ‘dominance’, ‘authority’ — or even ‘power’, in terms of Max Weber’s three grounds for authority (discussed in the next section). One way out — the one which has been adopted here — is to apply ‘contextual translation’, i.e. to use a different English expression to fit the original context: I have translated *ādhīpateyya* as ‘priority’, ‘regard’ and ‘lordship’ depending on the context and English sense. (This is the method I generally follow for other Buddhist terms.)

According to the *Ādhīpateyya Sutta*, there are three kinds of ‘lordship’ or *priority*: self-priority (*att’ādhīpateyya*), world-priority (or lordship of the world) (*lok’ādhīpateyya*) and Truth-priority (or lordship of the True Teaching) (*Dhamm’ādhīpateyya*) (A 1:147-150). Here, ‘self-priority’ refers to the supremacy of self, or self-regard, that is, making self the dominant factor in a decision or aspiration. Simply put, it means that one takes oneself as *the* source of motivation for an action. In this category would be included *charismatic power* (in the wholesome sense). [Cf. *pamāṇa*, referring to charisma in both senses, wholesome and unwholesome: 6.722.]

Here, traditional authority and rational-legal authority are aspects of worldly dominance. Truth-priority forms the basis of *spiritual authority*, but lies outside the purview and interest of the Weberian categories.

This is not to say that Weber’s conception of charisma has nothing to do with religion. On the contrary, in his treatment of charisma, we see its intimate relationship with what Durkheim called the *sacred* and Otto termed the *holy*. We can see in charisma a clear break from the profane, the routine and the everyday. In a charismatic situation, one enters into a relationship

with an unusual, unpredictable and power-endowed person. Weber explains that *charisma* is

a certain quality of an individual's personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional (*ausseralltäglichen*) power or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.' (*On Charisma and Institution Building*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt, Chicago, 1922:48; *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* [1913] 1947:358 f; *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 2nd ed. 1964:179; *Economy and Society*, 1978:241)

The 'extraordinariness' (*Ausseralltäglichkeit*) of these charismatics is not simply in their number and frequency; rather, it is the intense and concentrated form in which they possess or are attributed qualities rarely present in routine actions. Here 'routine actions' are not merely repetitive actions, but

are those which are governed mainly by motives of moderate, personal attachment, by considerations of convenience and advantage, and by anxiety to avoid failure in conforming to the immediate expectations and demands of peers and superiors... they are uninspired actions in which immediately prospective gratifications and the demands of immediate situations and of obligations to those who are close at hand play a greater part than does the link with transcendent things. (E. Shils, 'Charisma' in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1968 1:387.)

The intensity of this most unroutine quality and the strength of its motivation are also influenced by situational exigencies and by the prevailing culture. It can, however, be cultivated by *isolating* oneself for a period from the routine environment, by *self-discipline* and by *instruction* [6.713]. If it is highly prized, it could be encouraged in certain individuals to allow it to emerge from themselves.

In Weber's treatment of charisma, there are three main characteristics. Charisma is *unusual*, being radically different from the routine and the everyday. It is *spontaneous*, unlike the predictable and stable established forms of authority. And it is *creative* in the sense that it is a source of new social forms and new movements. Thomas O'Dea points out that these three characteristics coincide remarkably with the qualities which theologians' in the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions have attributed to God (O'Dea & O'Dea Aviad, *The Sociology of Religion*, Englewood Cliffs, 1983:25). In his paper on 'Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis', Douglas F. Barnes proposes 'a theory of religious, charismatic leadership' in which he discusses four basic propositions: the perception of objective symbols [6.714], that charismatic leaders tend to arise in a period of social change and amongst minority or deprived groups [6.715], institutionalization and the innovation of the leader's teaching [6.713 6.715], and the relationship between charismatic leaders and traditional religion [6.731 (JSSR 17,1 1978:1–18). According to Barnes, these characteristics in no way define charisma, but rather they stipulate certain relationships between charisma as a form of authority and other social and psychological variables (1978:2).

6.71 Power and authority

Power, socio-anthropologists say, is necessary because whenever people meet, there usually is disagreement, especially in politics. **Power** has been defined by sociologists as *the ability to achieve desired ends despite possible resistance from others* (Macionis, *Sociology*, 1991:480). No society, however, can exist if that power is only derived from force, because then people would break the rules whenever they had the chance. Effective social organization, therefore, depends on *cultural values*,

that is, significant agreement about proper goals, and on *cultural norms*, the appropriate means of attaining them. Weber then thought about the ways in which inequalities of power might be considered just.

According to Weber, **authority** is *power that is widely perceived as legitimate rather than coercive* (1947:328 = 1968:46 f). The validity of a claim to authority or legitimate power, according to Weber, may be made on three grounds, namely, the traditional, the rational-legal and the charismatic:

(1) Traditional grounds. Such an authority rests on an established belief, age-old rules and accepted practice in the sanctity of immemorial customs and traditions. Traditional authority is usually absolute because the ruler has the ability to determine laws and policies. For example, the ancient Chinese emperors invoked the 'mandate of Heaven'; before the Napoleonic era, European monarchs ruled through the 'divine right of kings' (a notion debunked by the Aggañña Sutta, D 3:80-98) [Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhists*, 1988:85 f]; and up to Hirohito before the end of the Second World War, the Japanese emperors claimed divinity.

According to Weber, there are three kinds of traditional authority: 1. *Gerontocracy*, that is, the rule by elders, usually in small tribal or village communities. Such elders, regarded as most steeped in traditional wisdom, exercised their authority personally without any administrative staff. 2. *Primary patriarchalism*, the rule of the male head of the household. This inherited authority is usually based upon the household unit and usually occurs in combination with gerontocracy. 3. *Patri-monialism* is similar to patriarchalism and often emerges from it, but it has an administrative staff and a military force, bound to the patriarch by bonds of personal allegiance. This form of authority is common among traditional despotic governments.

For Weber, the ideal-typical example was the sultanate. He regarded all structures of traditional authority as barriers to the development of rationality.

(2) Rational-legal grounds. Such an authority rests on a belief in the 'legality' of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (i.e. rational-legal authority). Such an authority is derived from the written rules and regulations of political systems. For example, the authority of the Prime Ministers of Malaysia and of Singapore are legitimized by their respective country's constitutions. In a nation based on rational-legal authority, such leaders are regarded as servants of the people and their powers have legal limits. Rational-legal authority is assigned to the position or office, not to the individual. An administrative staff or bureaucracy is formally charged with looking after the interests of the corporate body or society within the limits of the law. As such, it is also called *bureaucratic authority*. Weber regarded the rise of rational-legal forms of authority as being a major factor in the rationalization of the modern world. By 'rational' here is meant a calculated means of achieving domination or the functional integrity of a society or organization. [1:27.1]

(3) Charismatic grounds. Such an authority rests on the leader's exceptional personal or emotional appeal to his followers, on the devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (i.e. charismatic authority). Charismatic authority may be moral or immoral. So long as the leader is *perceived* to possess qualities that set him apart from ordinary people or as long as they believe in his mission, his authority will remain secure and often unquestioned. Charismatic authority, as such, is a

strictly *non-rational* phenomenon, since it in no way deals with the calculation of means and ends, and follows no rules.

In her work, *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership* (1984), Ann Ruth Willner observes that each charismatic leader draws upon the values, beliefs and traditions of a particular society. Gandhi's celibacy, for example, was perceived by Indians as a demonstration of superhuman self-discipline. Charismatic leaders often associate themselves with widely respected cultural and religious heroes. Willner, for example, describes how Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran associated himself with Husein, a Shiite Muslim martyr. [Cf the sultans of early Melaka who claimed to be descendants of Alexander the Great [1:14].] This indirect borrowing of charisma from an appropriate source may be called *associative charisma*. There is also charisma borrowed *directly* from a charismatic source: this may be called *reflected charisma*, which we shall discuss in the next section.

We have discussed the three types of authority as ideal-types, but Weber was well aware that in the real world, any specific form of authority involves a combination of all three in various proportions. Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, for example, has been invested with all three types of authority. He was elected as prime minister in accordance with a series of rational-legal principles. A good part of his rule and political life has had traditional elements. Finally, many of his supporters regard him as a charismatic leader. Another example is that of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the 32nd president of the USA but was re-elected three times (G. Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, NY, 1988:121).

6.711 *Types of charisma*

(a) Weber's conception of personal charisma, however, is problematic. On the one hand, it could be argued that the powers and qualities are inherent in the individual by way of

personal attributes of the leader. On the other hand, it is arguable that the charisma arises from the recognition accorded by the individual's followers, which as such is purely a psychosocial relationship. In common experience, we usually see charismatic figures displaying elements of both personal attractiveness and forcefulness that leads to great popularity or devotion. [Tambiah, 1984:325–7329–34]

Pure charisma arises in two ways: one is born with it or one is ascribed it, but both usually co-exist in a charismatic person. When people talk about charisma, they usually mean **congenital charisma**, that is, where one is born with special gifts (especially beauty, leadership and intelligence) and often mistake it to be the only kind of charisma, that is, either one has it or does not have it. When such a charisma develops later in life (for example, as one's beauty flowers or one's social grace blooms), then it is called **natural charisma**. The only difference between congenital charisma and natural charisma is that the former arises *at* birth while the latter arises sometime *after* that.

The story of Lakunṭaka Bhaddiya (Bhaddiya the Dwarf) [6.722], hardly a person with congenital charisma, but who attracted a popular following with his eloquence and wisdom (both of which he developed after becoming a monk), is an example of *acquired charisma*. (He had a sweet voice, which would be a basis for congenital charisma.) **Acquired charisma** is actually a general term for three types of charisma and their derivatives, all of which that are neither congenital nor ascribed. If Lakunṭaka Bhaddiya's eloquence and wisdom were won after becoming a monk, they are the source of *cultivated charisma*. In modern terms, cultivated charisma, as in the case of Paderewski, is sometimes called *professional charisma*, where the charisma arises from the aura of skill or qualification,

especially in a prestigious profession [6.7a].

When charisma is borrowed directly from a charismatic source, it is called *reflected charisma*. If one's power or influence arises through being indirectly linked to another source of charisma, then it is known as *associative charisma*. A third category of charisma is **ascribed charisma**, arising from qualities that is attributed to one. It is difficult to identify this sort of charisma, since it is subjective perception. In a way, it refers to the followers' empowerment of a non-congenital charismatic [6.713].

In summary, there are altogether seven levels of charisma [6.7a], classified in accordance with their order of naturalness, namely:

- (1) Congenital or natural charisma [6.71 la 6.721 6.754b]
- (2) Ascribed charisma [6.54 6.713d 6.722a]
- (3) Acquired charisma [6.54 6.711 a 6.722b 6.751 a 6.754b]
- 3a (4) *Reflected charisma* [6.71lb 6.71(3)]
- 3a1 (5) *Associative charisma* [1:14 II:6.75lb]
- 3b (6) *Cultivated charisma* [6.711 a]
- 3b1 (7) *Professional charisma* [6.54 6.712]

The most natural charisma is that which one is born with, i.e. congenital charisma. Almost as natural is ascribed charisma, especially where a significantly large number of people empower the charismatic. Acquired charisma is a general term for and often a combination of two other varieties and their respective sub-varieties (3a 3a1 3b 3b1). Each of these seven levels — or eight levels, if one differentiates between congenital charisma and natural charisma — are of two types: wholesome charisma [6.75 6.753] and demonstrative charisma [6.75 6.751a 6.752].

On a moral level, it is possible to assess all these types

of charisma as being wholesome or as being demonstrative (i.e. unwholesome). When one's charisma is employed towards altruistic purposes, even mutually beneficial ends, it can be said to be *wholesome charisma* [6.75 6.753]. On the other hand, *demonstrative charisma* [6.75b] is unwholesome, even false, charisma, used for selfish and harmful ends.

(b) Charisma could rub off onto a person through a direct association with a charismatic or a person perceived to be one. This is called **reflected charisma**. M. Snyder, E. D. Tanke and M. Berscheid of the University of Minnesota (USA), for example, conducted an interesting experiment which showed that reflected charisma (arising from what they called 'dynamic attractiveness') could be acquired through being associated with others who are sources of charisma. Male college students were instructed to talk over the phone to female students. Each man was shown the photo of his phone partner, but unknown to the men the photos were not the actual ones. The photo was either of a very attractive or a very unattractive woman.

When the sessions were over, a panel of judges listened to the taped voices of the participants, and rated the men who thought they were speaking to an attractive woman as being more attractive, interesting, sociable and sexually warm than the men who thought they were speaking to an unattractive woman. In other words, the men who thought they were talking to an attractive woman became *more* dynamically attractive themselves. (Snyder, Tanke & Berscheid, 'Social Perception and Interpersonal Behavior: On self-fulfilling Nature of Social Stereotypes,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35 1977:656–666). The kind of person one associates with apparently affects one's personality, even if through misperceptions.

6.712 *Genius and charisma*

An important source of charisma is one's beauty or attractiveness, of which there are two kinds. There is *static attractiveness* of form (*rūpa*), that is, one's stable features, such as a pleasant face, good physique and proportion, fine hairstyle, and makeup. This is usually what people mean when they speak of *beauty*. Then there is *dynamic attractiveness*, or one's expressions (*viññatti*) through one's postures and gestures (*kāya.viññatti*) — that is, physical expression or body language — and through one's verbal expression (*vacī.viññatti*) or vocal language, which includes such qualities as a good voice, a good command of language, wit and wisdom. [In themselves, physical and verbal expressions are produced by 'co-nascent (*saha.jāta*) volition,' and as such are purely physical; they are not karma, which is mental. The morality of the expressions depends on the karma, i.e. the intention behind the actions. See Nyanatiloka's *Buddhist Dictionary*, 3rd ed. 1972, svv *viññatti* and *paccaya* (6).] When such attractiveness, static or dynamic, are applied to effect communication with others, they are regarded as *social intelligence* or *social skills*.

Lakuṇṭaka Bhaddiya lacked static attractiveness, but excelled in dynamic attractiveness — he had social intelligence or communication skills. Another form of intelligence [18] is *technical intelligence*, that is, specialized skills externally applied to people (as in the case of monks and doctors), to animals (as in the case of veterinarians) and things (as in the case of scientists) — such people may have some level of professional charisma. When technical intelligence is applied to a very high degree of success, it is sometimes regarded as **genius**.

When one excels in an invaluable skill of imagination and/or creativity, and applies it, especially in a situation where that desirable skill is hitherto non-existent and which brings effective result/s, one is said to be *a genius*. (A **champion** is a

‘momentary genius’ in that his attaining of a certain climax or the breaking of a record in a game or sport has attained an accepted level, or reached a point where no one else has officially attained before.) While genius is an exceptional capacity to imagine and create, charisma is an exceptional ability to inspire and attract. While genius is a private faculty, only the *results* of which are seen by others, charisma is a public perception resulting from *the social effects of one’s personal attractiveness and social intelligence*.

Although physical attractiveness is an important basis for charisma, an attractive person lacking social intelligence usually does not become charismatic. The case of Mark Spitz, the US national swimmer, is a good example. In the 1972 Olympic Games he won an unprecedented seven gold medals. After the Games he was flooded with hundreds of business offers, such as appearances on TV shows, magazine interviews, endorsing of products, and film contracts. After appearing on two popular TV shows, critics judged him to be devoid of acting talent, and the offers dramatically slowed down. Instead, he became a reasonably good sports commentator (R.E. Riggio, *The Charisma Quotient*, 1987:122).

The remarkable success story of the Polish pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941) is an example of one who began with neither genius nor charisma, except iron determination. His systematic musical training began only when he was 12, rather late by the standard of his days, by which time his bad technical habits were already ingrained. After a tour of Russia with a remarkable lack of success, he returned to the Warsaw Conservatory and then studied under Theodor Leschetizky in Vienna. By then he was 24, goaded on only by his love for the piano, and with a dedicated intensity that somewhat terrified Leschetizky.

In 1888, however, when he played in Paris, he was a sensation. He arrived in the US in 1891, and while in New York, he practised 17 hours daily for a full week. By 1896, he was a musical cult figure. Audiences refused to leave the concert hall and often insisted on encores for a full hour. Although Paderewski's critics often gave bad reviews of his playing, his audience adored him as the greatest living pianist, even the personification of the piano! As an unexcelled showman, he triumphed through manner rather than solid craft. While his rivals were counting his wrong notes, he was counting his dollar notes. [H.C. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, London, 1963:ch 21.] Paderewski's case proves that a charismatic need not be a genius. It is equally true that a genius need not always be charismatic, though one could be both, as in the case of the Buddha.

6.713 *Charisma or popularity?*

(a) It is often said that a 'likeable' or 'charming' person has charisma. In everyday language charisma, popularity and personal attractiveness are treated as if they are synonyms when, in reality, the latter two are only *elements* of charisma. Popular as a person may be with us, in most cases, we might not always be ready to let him or her decide for us our course of action. Indeed such a person is popular because he demands *nothing* from us. A charismatic leader, on the other hand, is a very demanding master, even if that quality is subtly asserted, as in the case of prince Nanda who initially renounced the world, not out of faith, but out of deference to the Buddha (Tha 157 f, J 1:91 2:92 ff, U 3:2, SnA 273 f, DhA 1:115–125, UA 168 ff). There is also the example of Christ's command to the rich youth to 'sell all your possessions and follow me'.

Popularity is clearly different from charisma in another manner. We might like someone because he has an affinity

with us and because he reflects a favourable image of ourselves, and he is someone of an equal level, as it were, and easily *accessible*. This situation is clearly different from the *distance* maintained by the charismatic from his disciples, even his lieutenants, as exemplified by John the Baptist's remarking of Christ that 'I am unworthy to loosen his shoes'. The Dhammapada Commentary tells of Anātha.piṇḍika, who in his fervent devotion to the Buddha, recalling to mind His erstwhile delicate princely status, never asked Him any question for fear of wearying Him (DhA 1:3 ff), though he visits Him two or three times a day (J 1:95 ff 226). [Boudon & Bourricaud, *A Critical Dictionary of Sociology*, London, 1989:70]

(b) Scholars generally agree that a charismatic leader is one whose power is not obtained through institutionalized procedure, whose ability to lead and inspire comes from the sheer force of personality and conviction without the aid of material incentives or coercion, and converts others to his message and wins their loyalty by persuasion. The founders of religions and heads of religious communities satisfy these criteria so long as they have acquired neither a machinery of coercion (e.g. an army) nor wealth. Buddha and Christ were charismatic leaders. Mohammed was one until he had organized an army, and Gandhi before he was supported by the party machine. The power of the last two people, however, are only partly charismatic.

In some special cases, however, the charisma can be derived from certain institutionalized procedures, especially religious ones. The Siamese charismatic monk Yantra, for example, employs the tradition of Buddhist asceticism [6.8c 6.8(17)]. Some years ago, a certain young monk was said to have spent a couple of years in 'solitary retreat' in the well-furnished upper floor

of a well-known monastery in Penang. The popular explanation for such a noble gesture is a sort of spiritual recharging, but tacitly it is a sure source of charisma, he was common talk for a while and won country-wide respect amongst the Chinese Buddhists.

(c) The opposite of a charismatic leader is a tyrant or dictator who uses brute force and fear, or a ruler who is obeyed by virtue of his office regardless of his personal qualities or abilities. Sometimes, a charismatic leader commands a loyal following even though he lacks certain personal qualities or abilities, but unlike the tyrant or dictator, the followers believe in the charismatic's mission. Sometimes a charismatic is compared to a *revolutionary*. Weber pointed out that

Within the sphere of its claims charismatic authority rejects the past, and is in this sense specifically revolutionary. (*Economy and Society* [1921], tr Roth & Wittich, NY, 1968:245)

Although charismatic power is viewed by some as a threat to the status quo or the system, and it may well lead to dramatic changes in that system, charisma is not always the same as revolutionary force. Unlike revolutionary force, which is objective and external, charisma leads to changes in the minds of actors by causing a 'subjective or internal reorientation' which may, however, lead to 'a radical alteration of central attitudes and direction of action with a completely new orientation of all attitudes towards different problems of the world' (Weber, *Economy and Society* [1921], 1968:245). [*A New Dictionary of Sociology* (ed G.D. Mitchell), 1979:27]

(d) The authority of a charismatic leader is, in other words, not based only upon what the leader is or does, but also depends upon validation or certification by *followers*. The personality

traits of charismatic leaders must dovetail or mesh with the expectations of their followers so that they allow the leaders' assertion of power. Personality traits, however, is only a small part of the process of validation by the followers, who must also show willingness to take the leadership of such person seriously. The charismatic leader, in other words, must be *empowered* or *certified*, as it were, by his followers and the audience. Although the power of a charismatic is relatively short-lived and dies with him, it can nevertheless be decisively influential, as in the case of the Buddha.

In most cases, all that is needed is a brief thrust of charismatic power to uplift a group of people in a period of social crisis or change. Such a group is usually cut off from the mainstream of society or the centres of political power. King Bhumibhol Adulyadej (Rāma IX) of Siam is here a good example of a charismatic person and office empowered by the people and who in turn empowers the people in their plights under one military government after another (1957 1973 1976 1981 1992). [30.47b]

Charismatic leaders also tend to arise when there is a breakdown in traditional authority (such as Japan following her defeat and devastation after the Second World War). Without such favourable social conditions, society would dismiss the potential charismatic as an eccentric leader, where 'their "charisma" can frequently be unrecognized or indeed be considered peculiar, deviant, or perhaps insane' (W. Friedland, 'For a Sociological Concept of Charisma', *Social Forces* 43 1964:21). [6.715]

6.714 *Symbols of charisma*

Meredith B. McGuire, one-time president of the Association for the Sociology of Religion in the USA pointed out that his research observations suggest that charismatic authority

would be better understood as a result of negotiation between a would-be leader and followers. In this process, the leader offers an order of things which may appeal to followers. The new order is presented through *symbols*, which may produce a sense of the leader's power. The charismatic leader gains power by manipulating such symbols so that 'an order is produced in one sphere of reality by linking it with the order of another sphere of reality' (M.B. McGuire, 'Discovering Religious Power', *Sociological Analysis*, 1983 44:7). Such symbols may come in the form of relating concrete suffering (*dukkha*. — *dukkha*) or worldly vicissitudes (*vipariṇāma.dukkha*) through reference to a higher or metaphysical level of suffering (*saṅkhāra.dukkha*). In Yantra's verses, for example, he constantly alludes to a higher quality or purpose, as evident in this excerpt from 'Be Troubled For No Trouble':

Suffering encourages us		Whereas poverty makes us careful.
The difficulties strengthen us		And enable us to be good.

(*Out of the Free Mind*, Bangkok, 1989:3 1)

The symbolism used here is poetic verse [6.8e]. In other words, he is able to maintain a sort of new order by convincing his followers that there is a higher purpose or meaning for their current predicaments, and in that way providing them with consolation or hope.

It is true that charisma is connected with exuberant symbolism. The peremptory character of the charismatic message ('sell your possessions and follow me') or, by contrast, its deliberately sensible and concrete nature ('the land of milk and honey') is based on the more or less suspect use of the imaginary. But charismatic metaphors are not the product of an unrestrained imagination. They are guided by a more or less conventional rhetoric, through which the charismatic figure seeks to safeguard his role, and

which nourishes the faith of his disciples. (Boudon & Bourricaud, *A Critical Dictionary of Sociology*, 1989:70)

The potential leader, McGuire adds, must *symbolize* reception of charisma in forms the group understands and respects. 'The ability to arouse in the group a sense of that power is, therefore, one sign of the *effectiveness* of these symbols.' (1983:7) [Randall Collins, 'On the Microfoundation of Macrosociology', *American Journal of Sociology* 86,5 1981: 984–1014].

A Buddhist charismatic might project as his symbols, various ascetic practices [6.8(f7)], claims of high meditation levels [6.8(f8)], even Sainthood itself [6.8(f11)], or sacred objects (talisman, amulets, charms, regalia, palladia, etc) [6.751]. McGuire's research on Catholic pentecostals, for example, 'discovered numerous ways leaders communicated their power, such as body language of dramatic gestures, forms of eye contact, and proficient use of potent gifts of the Spirit like prophecy and discernment' (*Pentecostal Catholics: Power, Charisma, and Order in a Religious Movement*, Philadelphia, 1982, quoted 1983:7) [Roy Wallis, 'The Social Construction of Charisma', *Social Compass* 29.1 1982:25–39]. Such symbols serve to confirm that the charismatic is in contact with the spiritual or the divine, and so long as he could do this and his followers believe him, he is in command of charismatic authority.

6.715 *Routinization of charisma*

The highly personal (even arbitrary) nature of charismatic power makes its institutionalization or routinization a problematic one. According to Boudon and Bourricaud (*A Critical Dictionary of Sociology*, London. 1989:71), at least three conditions must be fulfilled in order to legitimize or normalize charismatic power. First, *a relatively stable hierarchy* must be established in the 'emotional community', in which the charismatic

leader usually holds the central position, and from which he mediates relations between members of the community [1:30.321d]. [Weber. *The Methodology of the Social Sciences, Economy and Society*, London 1962]

As a result, free and direct (if not exclusive) access to the leader is highly valued by his lieutenants. His favour becomes the prize in a competition which he has great difficulty in controlling. Since everyone's status in the group depends on his intimacy with the leader, there is a resultant risk of meteoric promotions or crashing downfalls, of purges which may sometimes be bloody, and of consecrations which are often ephemeral. Such unpredictability has its echoes in the totally irregular manner by which the 'emotional community' provides for its own maintenance and subsistence.... The 'emotional community' has as much difficulty in organizing its adaptive relations with its external environment as it has in establishing stable relationships among its members. In the end, because it is built around a charismatic leader, his disappearance threatens it with the gravest of crises. (Boudon & Bourricaud, 1989:71 f)

Second, the 'emotional community' must be *favourable to the growth of charisma*. Or, to put it another way, what kinds of groupings are likely to form themselves into 'emotional communities'? Here there are three main situations. In its widest sense, *the religious sect* constitutes the first type of environment which favours the growth of charisma. Such sects tend to grow around the most general problems, especially the problem of meanings (*Sinngebung*) which we attach to life, death, sickness and suffering (what Weber called *theorides*).

Another favourable environment are the political parties which constitute 'secular religions', such as the totalitarian parties of Hitler and of Stalin during the first half of the 20th century. Today, however, charismatic leadership is more likely to thrive in *the marginal or breakaway organizations* which claim to

represent the highest moral standards and devote themselves to achieving progress in certain objectives. Such 'ghettos' or groupuscules (fundamental groups) can be seen as expressions of secular religiosity, though they are not at all hierarchical or totalitarian like those of Hitler or Stalin. [6.713] [Carl J. Friedrich, 'Political Leadership and the Problem of Charisma', *Journal of Politics* 23,1 Feb 1961:3–24]

Third, all 'emotional communities' raise questions about their own *authenticity*. How sincere or dedicated are the charismatic leader and his disciples to their avowed objectives? The traditional rationalist suspicion about charisma (its instability, brevity, unpredictability) is still relevant here. It is also important to be aware of the *coexistence* of pure charisma and routinized charisma, such as that of a divine king [6.713d] [E.H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A study of Medieval Political Theory*, Princeton, 1957].

Furthermore, it is useful for us to ask what the 'emotional community' can teach us about the state of society. Finally, the reasons for the emergence of certain types of charismatic movement may help us understand the relationship between charisma and different forms of social movement, and to a certain extent predict the future state of society.

6.716 *Charisma and after*

Because of its personal nature and its definition by followers, pure charisma (i.e. the totality of its power) is inherently unstable, mercurial and ephemeral. When compared to the advantages of traditional authority and bureaucratic authority, the followers of the charismatic leader are lacking on virtually all counts.

The staff members [of the charismatic leader] are not technically trained but are chosen instead for their possession of charismatic

qualities or, at least, of qualities similar to those possessed by the charismatic leader. The offices they occupy form no clear hierarchy. Their work does not constitute a career, and there are no promotions, clear appointments, or dismissals. The charismatic leader is free to intervene whenever he or she feels that the staff cannot handle a situation. The organization has no formal rules, no established administrative organs, and no precedents to guide new judgements. (G. Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 2nd ed, NY, 1988:120)

In these and other ways, Weber found the staff of the charismatic leader to be 'greatly inferior' to the bureaucratic system. He was concerned with the problem of what *happens to charismatic authority when the leader dies*. Is it possible for such a group to live on after the leader's death? If the followers were not to end up as cultists, letting the group die with the leader, but wish to continue the leader's work, then this question is of the greatest consequence. In some cases, followers have vested interest in the continued existence of the group; for, if the group dies, they are out of work. Initially, the bereaved followers might try to re-create a situation in which charisma in some *adulterated or diluted form* persists. This is, however, a very difficult struggle because of the unstable and personal nature of charisma. It can exist in its pure form only for as long as the charismatic leader lives.

The followers might then try to look for a *new charismatic leader*. Even if the group is successful, they are unlikely to find someone with the same, not to mention better, aura than the predecessor. Such a situation is common amongst Buddhist associations. A *set of rules* might be formulated to identify future charismatic leaders, as is common in the *tulku* (incarnate lama) tradition of the Tibetan Vajrayāna. Such rules, however, rapidly become traditional authority, and very often such subsequently chosen individuals fall short of the original virtues

of the charismatic founder or leader. In any case, the nature of traditional leadership eliminates the personal character of charisma and becomes a 'charismatic office' instead.

While the charismatic leader lives, or before dying, he could designate a *successor*, to whom charisma could be transferred symbolically, as in the case of hereditary leadership in some Japanese Buddhist organizations. It is however questionable whether the successor would be as charismatic as the predecessor, or be successful in the long run. On the other hand, the followers or a council of elders could appoint a successor and have the appointment accepted by the group. The appointed successor, however, is in effect a traditional leader rather than a charismatic one. *Ritual tests and ordeals* could be instituted and the one who emerges with full colours is proclaimed the new leader. This method creates problems of its own: what if there were more than one qualified individual, or worse, if there were none?

In the long run, charisma cannot be normalized or routinized, as is obvious in the Sangha today. Inevitably, charismatic authority becomes transformed into either traditional authority or bureaucratic (rational-legal) authority. Both these latter forms of authority are found in the modern Sangha *as a corporate entity*. The support given to the Sangha by the Buddhist community is based on the former's traditional authority. The ordination ceremony performed by Sanghins is founded on rational-legal authority. (The support of *individual* members of the Sangha, however, tends to be on the basis of personal charisma [6.723].)

Charisma, in other words, is a cyclic phenomenon. If it is successful, it goes on to become routinized. Once routinized, it would in due course become either traditional authority or rational-legal authority. Then over time the cycle repeats itself.

For this reason, Weber regarded rational systems of authority as being stronger than charismatic authority, and maintained that *rationality* [1:27] — not charisma — is the most irresistible and important revolutionary force in the modern world. [Ritzer, 1988:120 f]

6.72 Charisma and leadership

Unlike traditional or rational-legal leaders, charismatic leaders often become well known by challenging established institutions, or rejecting current social conditions, and advocating dramatic changes in society. They are also willing to take risks and adopt unconventional actions to attain these changes or to build a 'new society'. Besides rejecting conventional institutions and codes of conduct, a charismatic leader usually has little of the ordinary: he has no career pattern, and no formal training or qualification. They are likely to appear or succeed in disordered or unstable situations when the established (rational-legal) rules and traditional rulers have lost authority. Charismatic leaders like Buddha, Jesus, Joan of Arc, and Gandhi, arose in the milieux of deep-seated and extensive social problems, where they see their mission as that of eliminating those problems and establishing a better life for their followers. As such, the conduct of charismatic leaders is disruptive, at least, in the short term (Gerth & Mills, *From Max Weber*, 1946:245–250). Weber stressed that charismatic authority is always *a relationship between leaders and followers*, and not a characteristic of the leader alone.

Authority invoked on rational grounds, on the other hand, is gained through the process of law. Authority based on traditional grounds is received from the past but still has to be socially sanctioned, for example, through primogeniture. Authority gained through charisma is a very personal

one based on *trust* or faith. If we accept this explanation on a simple level, we could say that during His own lifetime, the Buddha exercised charismatic authority insofar as He was the only promulgator of Vinaya rules and the adjudicator for all legal matters concerning the Sangha, that is, until He gave the sanction to the Sangha itself with the ordination of the brahmin Radha (V 1:55 f; cf V:H 3:59.4-6. 60.1).

When Weber described the three kinds of authority, he was referring to *ideal-types*. He realized that legitimacy usually has more than one source. The Buddha, for example, had charismatic appeal, but the Sanghins after the first twenty years of His Public Ministry had, and still has, *traditional* basis in the ordination rite performed by the Sangha (whose authority comes from the ordination lineage or *paramparā*, going back to the Buddha Himself). The monastic systems in Buddhist countries like Siam, and Islam in Malaysia, enjoy rational-legal authority through being patronized by the state.

6.721 *The Buddha as a charismatic Leader*

In *A Critical Dictionary of Sociology*, its authors Boudon and Bourricaud define charisma as 'a highly asymmetric power-relationship between an inspired guide and a cohort of followers who see in him and his message the promise and anticipated achievements of a new order, to which all adhere with greater or lesser conviction.' (1989:70). Such a definition suggests that no leader, religious or secular, good or evil, is immune from charisma. Leaders like Hitler and Mussolini used their charisma for the annihilation of countless lives and to their own destruction. In sociological terms, at least five factors can be listed to show that the Buddha was endowed with charisma:

1. **For the charismatic leader, the message is the vocation.** The Buddha's Message is not simply the description of a new or

desirable order. It is an injunction to devote oneself to its realization, i.e. Enlightenment. To the monk, Vakkali, the Buddha declares that ‘One who sees Dharma, sees Me. One who sees Me, sees Dharma.’ (S 3:120). ‘Dharma’ here means not only the True Teaching, but also Enlightenment itself.

2. The Buddha’s message is one of spiritual urgency. The Buddha spoke the celebrated Bhadd’eka.ratta verses on at least four occasions: to the assembled Sangha (M no. 131), to Ānanda (M no. 132), to Mahā.kaccāna (M no. 133) and to Lomasak’aṅgiya (M no. 134). The third verse says:

Exert yourself this very day!
Who knows death (will come) tomorrow.
For there is no bargaining
With Death’s great horde. (M 3:187 189–191 193 f 198 200–202)

Furthermore, the experience of ‘spiritual urgency’ or ‘religious emotion’ (*saṃvega*) (V 1:30 33, D 3:214, S 1:197 3:85 5:130 133, A 1:43 2:33 114, Sn 935) is held with high regard by the Buddhists. This wholesome emotion is important enough for the early Buddhists to attribute it to Prince Siddhartha’s seeing the Four Sights (an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a holy man) when he was 29 (DhA 1:84 f, AA 1:36; cf Makhadeva Jātaka, J no. 9).

3. In His lifetime and within historical time, the Buddha had neither predecessor nor successor. The Pali Canon mentions seven past Buddhas (*sattannaṃ sammā.sambuddhānaṃ*) (V 2:110, A 2:72 ff. J 2:145–147), whose names are mentioned in a number of Suttas (D 1:2 f 3:195 f) [Piyasilo. *Life of the Buddha*, 1987d:44 f]. These Buddhas, however, have either arisen during a different world-cycle (*kalpa/kappa*) or in a different Dispensation (*sāsana*). Indeed, there can only be one Buddha at a time (D 2:225, M 3:65, A 1:27, Vbh 336, DA 3:897 ff, MA 4:118–121, AA 2:11–14, VbhA 434–436; cf BA 56 296 f). One of the reasons the Milinda.paṇha gives

for this is that just as ‘the earth, sire, is mighty and unique; even so, there can be only one Buddha at a time [in a Buddha-field]’ (Miln 236 f). The Dhammapada echoes a similar sentiment: ‘Rare is the arising of Buddhas’ (Dh 182d).

4. The Buddha’s message is a radical one. The legitimacy of the Buddha’s Message stems from its radical opposition to the Vedas and brahminical practices. While the brahmins exploited the masses through their elaborate and expensive rituals (*yajña/yañña*, D 1:146) and baptism (S 1:167 f, of Sn 458–486), the Buddha taught that Liberation lies in a life of moral conduct, internal purity and wisdom (*jñāna/ñāṇa*). In denouncing the brahminical system of His days, the Buddha proclaimed the Eternal True Teaching (*sanantano Dhammo*) (S 1:18 189).

5. The Buddha left behind a living tradition. The Eternal True Teaching lives on even after the Buddha’s passing. Indeed, the Buddha regards the True Teaching as being above even Himself. The Gārava Sutta, found in both the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna, records that during the fifth week after the Great Enlightenment, this thought arose to the Buddha during His solitude: ‘Ill indeed it is to live without respect (for a teacher), without deference (to an elder)!’ (S 1:139, A 2:20, SA 1:203, Taishō 99 ch 44:321c18–322a27& 100 ch 5:410a3–410b9). The Sutta goes on to relate that the Buddha, having examined the whole world of beings, and not finding any sage or priest (i.e. no one) superior to Himself in spiritual qualities, acknowledges ‘the True Teaching wherein I am supremely enlightened’ as being worthy of respect and deference. [Piyasilo, *Buddhist Prayer*, 1990c:56]. The Buddha, in honouring the Dharma, effectively identifies Himself with it — He is ‘Dharma-become’, ‘manifestation of Truth’ (*Dhamma. -bhūta*) is applied to the Buddha (D 3:84, M 1:1113:195 224, S 4:94, A 5:226 256). Since the Dharma is abstract, it is only metaphorically the Teacher of the Buddha. It is in this context

that the Buddha should be understood as having declared to the naked ascetic Upaka on the road to Benares, thus: ‘No teacher have I; there is none equal to Me.... I am the Peerless Teacher!’ (V 1:8, M 1:171, Kvū 289, SA 1:204, ThiA and Thi 291 ff). Based on such teachings, the Mahāyāna developed the doctrine of the *docetic* Buddha and the immanent and eternal Bodhisattvas [cf Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest...*, 1984:332].

6.722 *Charisma and Saddharma*

(a) The Rupa Sutta (A 2:71; cf Pug 7 53, Tha 469-472, DhA 114. SnA 242) provides an insight into the Buddhist conception of charisma. It lists four personal sources or ‘measures’ (*pamāṇa*) of charisma [6.722], that is, how one ‘measures’ (i.e. attributes charisma to) another and becomes satisfied or ‘inspired’ (*pasanno*) with the person. There are, says the Sutta, four kinds of persons: one who measures by and is inspired by appearance, by voice, by outward austerity, and by Dharma (A 2:71). The Sutta prose does not elaborate on the four types, but the Sutta verse (virtually identical with Lakuṇṭaka Bhaddiya’s Thera.gāthā, Tha 469–472) is informative:

A person who has judged (another) by appearance
and followed (another’s) voice,
 Overcome by desire and passion, they know him not.

The fool, with /mental/ hindrances all around,
knows not the (person’s) interiority,
 And sees not (even) the exterior — carried away, indeed, is he by voice.
 One who sees (only) external results does not know the inside,
 And sees not the outside — he too is carried away by voice.
 One who sees (both) the inside and the outside,
 Who sees without /mental/ obstructions, is not carried away by voice!
(A 2:71 ≠ Tha 469-472, cf Pug 53 f)

Lakuṇṭhaka Bhaddiya, the sweet-voiced dwarf, who spoke these same verses in the first person, was concerned at being misjudged by his deformed looks, and their being entranced on hearing his voice. (Lakuṇṭhaka Bhaddiya's Thera.gāthā mention only looks and voice, and omit the other two 'measures'. It is likely that his verses are older, and from which are derived the Aṅguttara version.)

(b) The four measures of charisma are explained in the Puggala.paññatti as follows:

What sort of person is one measuring by and inspired with looks (rūpa)?

Here a person, having seen the height, the breadth, the shape, or the whole /of a person or object/, grasping such estimations (*pamāṇam*), feels inspired. Such a person is one measuring by and inspired with looks.

What sort of person is one measuring by and inspired with voice (ghosa)?

Here a person, on the basis of comments, of praise, of applause, of compliments of others, grasping such estimations, feels inspired....

What sort of person is one measuring by and inspired with outward austerity (lūkha)?

Here a person, having seen the austerity [or roughness] of the robes, of the almsbowl, of the lodging, of various (other) austerities [things difficult to do], grasping such estimations, feels inspired....

What sort of person is one measuring by and inspired with what is true (dhamma)?

Having seen the moral conduct, the mental concentration, the wisdom (of another), grasping such estimations, one feels inspired. Such a person is one measuring by and inspired with what is true.

(Pug 53 f, PugA 229 f; cf A 2:70, SnA 242, DhA 3:113 f)

(c) Here is summarized the glosses concerning the doctrine of 'measures' as given in the Dhammapada Commentary, the Sutta Nipāta Commentary and the Puggala.paññatti

Commentary, using the first as the main text with glosses from the other two texts [within square brackets]:

There are four measures among those who dwell together in the world (*loka.sannivāse*).

Having seen the Perfect Self-enlightened Buddha, there is none who is not inspired. For, individuals whose measure is form (*rūpa-p.pamāṇika*) look upon the golden-hued body of the Tathāgata /Thus Come/, adorned with the Major and Minor Marks [all complete and whole (PugA)], [(His) radiant aura extending for a fathom around the Body (SnA)], and are inspired by what they see.

Those whose measure is the voice (*ghosa-p.pamāṇikā*) listen to the report of the Teacher's virtues through many hundreds of births and, in the teaching of Dharma, to his voice, endowed with the eight excellences [(sounding) like the Indian cuckoo, sweet, noiseless and divinely deep (SnA)], and are inspired by what they hear.

Those whose measure is austerity (*lūkha-p.pamāṇikā*) are inspired by His austere robes [such as its being of a dull colour (PugA)], [austere bowl (austere in colour, form and material (PugA)), physical austerities (SnA PugA), austere seat (PugA)], and so forth.

Those whose measure is Dharma (*Dhamma-p.pamāṇikā*), [examining the aggregate of His nature, beginning with moral conduct (SnA)], reflect, 'Such is the uprightness of the One with the Ten Powers, such is His tranquillity, such is His wisdom; in uprightness and tranquillity and wisdom the Blessed One is without an equal, without a peer.' Thus they are inspired.

Indeed those who praise the virtues of the Tathāgata lack words to express their praises.

[Amongst all the living beings, out of three, two measure (others) by *form*, one does not; out of five, four measure (others) by *voice*, one does not; out of ten, nine measure (others) by *austerity*, one does not; out of a thousand, only one measure (others) by *Dharma*, the rest do not. (PugA 230)]

(DhA 3:113 f, SnA 242, PugA 229 f.)

The last parenthetical remark (in the Puggala.paññatti Commentary) is of statistical interest. In contemporary terms, it says

that within a group of people 66.67% are *form-inspired* (i.e. they measure by looks), 80% *voice-inspired*, 90% *austerity-inspired* (or religiously biased), and only 0.001% are *truth-inspired*. The first three types of persons — those who measure by looks, by voice and by austerity — are those who attribute charisma to another, based largely or only on the charismatic's externality. This was the standard of the Commentarial period (mediaeval India and Ceylon), and probably that of ancient India, too.

However, in our own times, the first three figures are more likely to be in the inverse, that is, 90% are more likely to be form-inspired, 80% voice-inspired (slight or no change), and 66.67% austerity-inspired. The figure for the truth-inspired is perhaps even smaller today. Nevertheless, in either case, those who are partial to the first three measures are more common than those who are truth-inspired. The truth-inspired are those who recognize and accept individuals with charisma pure and proper, where the charismatic's externality reflects a spiritual interiority.

(d) A further warning against being misled by externalities or false charisma [6.75b] is given in the Diamond Sūtra of the Mahāyāna tradition, where the Buddha gives this profound admonition:

Those who by form have seen Me,
And those who have followed me by voice,
Wrong are the efforts they have engaged in,
Me those people will not see.

From the Dharma one should see the Buddhas,
From the Dharma.kāya [Buddha-nature] comes their guidance.
Yet the Dharma's true nature cannot be discerned,
And no one can be conscious of it as an object.

(Diamond Sutra = Vajra-c.chedika Prajñā.pāramitā 26a–b)

The teachings of the Rūpa Sutta and the Diamond Sūtra can be put into contemporary terms in this manner: our estimation or ‘measure’ of others is merely a mental construction based on the false notion of a self. Ideas and biases in our minds are reified onto external things; **we see in people and things what we like to see.** Yet we are not ourselves because the perceptions are false; they are not themselves because we have reified or projected them. The true ‘self’ is our own *mind*, which if we understand becomes a helpful tool; indeed, it is the only real tool we have to deal with ourselves and the world.

Before passing away, the Buddha exhorted His followers to take the True Teaching as their island and refuge:

Live, O monks, as islands unto yourselves! Be a refuge unto yourself! Take no other refuge! Take the True Teaching as your island! Take the True Teaching as your refuge! Take no other refuge! (D 2:100 3:58 77)

[Here, the Buddha goes on to explain that self-refuge refers to the cultivation of the four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*).] Elsewhere I have attempted to show that since the Sanghin is a renunciate, he also renounces charisma [V:20].

6.723 *The Sangha and routinization of charisma*

As Weber had pointed out, the charismatic leader is most effective in a small group, usually a body of disciples or other personally devoted inner circle rather than an established administrative system. In the case of religious charisma, the inner circle

may consist of members of the leader’s immediate household, living in an intimate and emotion-laden communal relationship with him. They receive their appointment not on the basis of technical expertise, but rather because of the intensity of their devotion or willingness to subordinate themselves to the leader’s will. They are commissioned to carry out the will on an *ad hoc* basis.

There is no administrative routine, or any such routine is short-lived, constantly disrupted by the intervention and revelation of the leader. The economic basis of the movement is irregular and founded on booty or *freewill* offerings. Decision making is erratic and inspirational. (Kuper & Kuper, *The Social Science Encyclopedia*, 1985:103)

As the group grows, the creation of an administrative system and the acquisition of funds open possibilities of coercion as well as inducement by way of material incentives. The hierarchy of the system commands the respect and obedience that had been held by a charismatic individual. The office, in other words, has become independent of the personal qualities of the holder, and the leadership has become institutionalized. Such a process is known as the **routinization of charismatic authority**. The death of a charismatic leader, too, often leads his charisma to gradually become 'routinized' (Weber 1947:363–386).

Pure charisma is unstable and short-lived, as would be the group or project. that depends on it. For its survival and progress, there is a need for mechanisms of *co-ordination*, *supervision* and *delegation*. Such developments, however, introduces impersonality and routine, and the desire for greater stability and predictability on the part of officials and workers. There is, however, a greater likelihood for success and growth. The charisma of the group founder is vested in another by virtue of succession (hereditary or traditional), or by a ritual of consecration. Such forms of 'hereditary charisma' or 'charisma of office' acts as a transitional stage in its transformation into either traditional authority or rational-legal (bureaucratic) authority. In the case of the Buddha, we have a very interesting process whereby He Himself, as it were, *transfers* His charisma onto the Sangha even before His passing. [Cf J.C. Holt, *Discipline: The Canonical Buddhism of the Vinavapitaka*, Delhi, 1981:50 114.]

Chapter 7 of the Culla.vagga of the Vinaya records an incident where Devadatta, the Buddha's wicked cousin, invited the elderly Buddha to retire and let him (Devadatta) take over the leadership of the Sangha, but the Buddha firmly rejected the proposal, remarking, 'I, Devadatta, would not hand over the Sangha even to Sāriputta and Moggallāna. How then could I to you, you miserable /one who partakes of requisites that are like a/ lump of spittle!' (V 2:188, M 1:393). [The Commentary explains the Buddha's strong words as follows: Requisites accruing by means of evil livelihood should be ejected like spittle by the noble ones: Devadatta partakes of requisites of this nature. (VA 1275)]

In appointing no successor, the Buddha's charisma is not transferred to any individual after Him, but to an institution (the Sangha). In His last moments, the Buddha admonishes His disciples thus:

Ānanda, it may be that you would think: 'The Teacher's instruction has ceased; now we have no teacher!' It should not be seen like this, Ānanda; for what I have taught and explained to you as the Teaching and the Discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher. (D 2:154)

For this reason, after the Buddha's passing, when asked by Vassakāra, the Magadhan chief minister, on whether the Buddha appointed a leader of the Sangha, Ānanda replied in the negative, saying instead that 'the True Teaching is the support /of the Sangha/' (M 3:9 f). The term 'True Teaching' (*Dhamma*) here is not only a synecdoche for the Doctrine and the Discipline (*Dhamma.vinaya*), but also takes precedence over the Discipline (*vinaya*). For, it is the Discipline that protects the True Teaching by drawing away (*vinayati*) evil from the practitioner.

The Sanghin draws his or her authority from being 'a Sakyan offspring' (*sakya.puttiya*) (V 1:44, A 4:202, U 44) [the term

is usually translated as 'of the Sakyan son']. This is an example of traditional authority. Once the Buddha has permitted the Sangha to carry out its own ecclesiastical acts (*saṅgha. kammā*), He effectively confers charisma upon the Sangha, i.e. the assembled community. Indeed the whole of the Vinaya deals with the legitimacy and execution of this authority. Such an authority is a *legal* one, insofar as the monk or nun is bound to it as s/he would be to secular law. The Buddhist Sangha, however, demands no 'vow of obedience' like that of the Catholic orders. Any obedience on the part of a Buddhist Sanghin is based on respect and trust. The ecclesiastical act certainly had the weight of secular law in the early days of Buddhism, but today it is mostly parochial (i.e. limited to a particular sect) or ceremonial (like a confessional). In other words, the respect that Sanghins accord one another or are accorded to each of them individually by the laity today is largely based on varying degrees of *charismatic* authority that the one who shows respect sees in the one respected. [6.7161 [Cf V:161 f = Tittira Jātaka, J no. 37. 'The Partridge Brahmafaring' in *Svara*, Jan–Mar 1991:18 & n.]

6.73 Charismatic leaders

The charismatic leader is sometimes seen as a prophet, of which Weber distinguishes between two kinds: the ethical and the exemplary. The *ethical prophet* sees himself as 'an instrument for the proclamation of a god or his will... [and] he demands obedience as an ethical duty'. Examples of the ethical prophet are Zoroaster and Mohammad. The *exemplary prophet*, on the other hand, 'by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation... [with] nothing to do about a divine mission or an ethical duty of obedience, but rather directs itself to the self-interest of those who crave salvation, recommending to them the same path as he himself traversed'.

Such a prophet is the Buddha. [Traditional Buddhists should note the special definition and usage of the term 'prophet' here as referring to a teacher, not an intermediary.] (Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* [1956], London, 1963:55. S.N. Eisenstadt, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*, Chicago, 1968:263).

According to Peter Berger and Douglas F. Barnes, charismatic leadership tends to be *de-alienated* (D.F. Barnes, 'Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religions*, 17,1 1978:3 f). De-alienation is said to be the conscious realization that the social world is humanly constructed and therefore unstable (P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Garden City (NY), 1967:96–101). There are two different ways in which charismatic leaders may be de-alienated based on their differing relationships to the transcendental or the divine. The first is a *mystical dealienation*, in which the leaders realize that their own teachings are of the same fleeting nature as all other systems of thought. An example of such a de-alienated charismatic leader is Weber's ideal-type of the *exemplary prophet*. The second type of charismatic leadership is one of *prophetic de-alienation*, where the leaders may reject or accept the traditional sacred symbols and the institutionalized religions of their times, yet they present their own teachings or interpretation of tradition as representing the word of God or some other divine or transcendental source, in which case the divinely inspired word is to be followed without question. Weber's idealtypes of the *ethical prophet* is an example of this type of de-alienation.

Weber, however, spoke of a *prophet versus priest* dichotomy (*The Sociology of Religion* [1956], tr Fischhoff, London, 1963:chs 2 & 4), and regarding 'charisma in its pure form' he stated that

In order to do justice to their mission, the holders of charisma, the master as well as followers, must stand outside of ties to this

world, outside routine occupations, as well as outside routine occupations of family life.' (From Max Weber, tr Gerth & Mills, NY, 1946:248)

The prophet, in Weber's view, is *anti-institutional*. Among others, Talcott Parsons and Peter Berger have argued, for different reasons, that Weber's conception of the charismatic prophet as being radically against societal institutions is misleading.

Parsons criticizes Weber's theoretical method of ideal-types as a form of 'trait atomism', that is, Weber tended to individualize traits 'instead of interrelating them within systems', a tendency that leads to a typological rigidity that characterizes the prophet as one who invariably breaks with tradition (Weber, 1963:lxiii f). Berger, on the other hand, proposes three important ideas. First, that a charismatic leader who occupies an institutional office may attempt to change the religion by a 'radicalization from within rather than of challenging from without'. Second, even within a religious tradition (such as Christianity), charismatic leaders may form their own religious organization (as was common during the Protestant Reformation). Third, charismatic leaders may break away from both the institutional structure and the religious tradition and found their own sect or religion (Berger, 'Charisma and Religious Innovation: The social location of Israelite prophecy', *American Sociological Review*, 1963:950).

In short, charismatic leaders have three options, as it were: they may occupy a religious office within a religious tradition (as in the case of Yantra Amaro of Siam [6.8]); they may remain within a tradition and institute a new religious structure (as in the case of Ashin Jinarakkhita and the Buddhayāna of Indonesia); or, they may reject both the religious tradition and the institutional structure, and found their own religion (as in the case of Nichiren and the Nichiren sects of Japan). [Douglas F.

Barnes, 'Charisma and Religious Leadership: An historical analysis', JSSR 17,1 1978:1-18].

6.731 *Charisma and 'greatness'*

Whether a charismatic works from within an institution or outside it, his success largely lies in his leadership. Experts on the subject agree that leadership is *the process through which one member of a group (its leader) influences other group members toward the attainment of specific group goals* (E.P. Hollander, 'Leadership and power'. In Lindzey & Aronson (edd.) 1985 2:485-537). The operative term here is *influence*; a leader is able to get things done, sell his/her ideas, and bring about change.

In Shakespeare's comedy, *Twelfth Night*, we find Malvolio, the smug and pompous fool, receiving a letter which tells him, thus:

...be not afraid of greatness: Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. (Twelfth Night 2.5)

The 'greatness' here refers to leadership and the three kinds of leaders: the traditional or 'born' leader, the rational-legal leader (who 'achieves' greatness through bureaucracy), and the charismatic leader (upon whom greatness is 'thrust'), respectively.

Common sense and history show that some people are born to lead; for example, Alexander the Great, Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln and Gandhi. Besides such born leaders, there are the self-made leaders of the rags-to-riches legends where once impoverished individuals achieve greatness. Such magnates and philanthropists, many of whom though unschooled or poorly schooled, are often awarded titles and honours from royalty, universities and other institutions. Some have even become powerful politicians and public figures. Then there are certain groups in some societies who attempt to reserve

greatness solely for themselves by way of birth, e.g. through the feudal system (e.g. in Europe and East Asia) or the caste system (in India and Sri Lanka). It is obvious that the highest class was the designer of such a scheme. In all these instances, only the born leaders and self-made leaders are likely to command charisma.

Leaders, born or self-made, become charismatic when they have 'greatness thrust upon them', irrespective of whether they actually possess any outstanding personal qualities. A charismatic leader, then, could be someone quite ordinary, but is *perceived* by others as having some extraordinary traits. What is crucial in such a leader is the process by which he is set aside from ordinary people and treated as if endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers or virtues that are not accessible to the ordinary people (Kojiro Miyahara, 'Charisma: From Weber to Contemporary Sociology', *Sociological Inquiry* 53 1983:368–388).

Why do some people have greatness thrust upon them? One reason we have mentioned is that there are some who are born to lead (e.g. Alexander the Great). According to the **great person** or **trait theory**, such people differ from others in some ways. For example, they seem to have greater ambitions and clear visions of where they are going. Even lesser leaders appear different from their followers. Successful professionals, popular politicians, sports heroes and religious leaders seem to possess some sort of aura that makes them special individuals. The theory suggests that these traits are shared by leaders of all times everywhere. Although scientific research has failed to confirm such ideas, a few consistent findings have emerged, e.g. leaders are slightly taller and more intelligent than their followers (J.G. Geier, 'A Trait Approach to the Study of Leadership in Small Groups', *Journal of Communication* 17 1969:316-323;

G. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, Englewood Cliffs (NJ), 1981).

The **Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (M no. 30) gives a list of 32 special marks of the 'superman' (*mahā.puruṣa/ mahā.purisa*), whose possessor would become either world conqueror (*cakravarti/ cakravarti*) or world renouncer (the Buddha). The Sutta further explains that these marks were the result of good deeds done in former births and can only be sustained in the present life by one's virtues. This Sutta, however, could have been canonized during Asoka's time [IX:1.3], as it seems to employ the Malinowskian *social charter* to legitimize or reinforce Asoka's own sovereignty.

[Malinowski, in his theory of myth, claims that a myth can act as a '**social charter**': that is to say, it justifies the manner in which things are done in present day society by reference to a mythical or sacred past. (C. Seymour-Smith, *MacMillan Dictionary of Anthropology*, London 1986:36)]

6.74 Three types of leadership

(a) From our discussion so far, it is well established that a charismatic leader often serves as the key agent of social change, sometimes transforming a whole society through his/her vision of a new order or bringing forth a new religion. Recent research has confirmed that charisma is *not* necessarily an inborn trait. In a laboratory study of charismatic leadership conducted by J.M. Howell and P.J. Frost (1989), subjects worked on given office tasks under the direction of leaders (professional actors, but undisclosed to the subjects) specifically trained to demonstrate one of the three contrasting styles of leadership: *charismatic*, *structuring* or *considerate*.

The *charismatic leaders* presented themselves as dynamic and energetic; they set lofty goals, expected high performance, and showed great confidence in their subjects, speaking to

them in an engaging but relaxed tone. The *structuring* leaders, on the other hand, showed that they were primarily concerned with the task at hand, giving directions in a cool, matter-of-fact tone and communicated with their subjects in a businesslike manner. The *considerate* leaders, in turn, were friendly towards the subjects and generally showed a high level of interest in them and their satisfaction with their task.

Howell and Frost predicted that overall, **charismatic leaders would produce the most favourable results** by generating high levels of productivity and satisfaction among subjects. These findings show that a charismatic leader might not only capture and hold the interest of followers, but also encourage high levels of effort and output from them. Their most important finding, however, is that *charisma is a specific pattern of behaviour than some (even many) individuals can acquire*. In other words, there is no need to look for a charismatic personality; one only need to arm oneself with enhanced social skills. [For summary, see Baron & Byrne, *Social Psychology* 1991:469–471.]

(b) Yet not everyone can become charismatic leaders all the time. If everyone could, then they would have few followers, if any, and charismatics would be as valuable as sand in a desert. Moreover, charisma is a very precarious form of authority, and usually could exist in its pure form for a relatively brief period. Charismatic leaders usually emerge at the beginning of social movements or at the start of new and difficult tasks. Their characteristically bold, impulsive and dramatic gestures often rouse their followers or colleagues to unified and effective action. Outsiders, however, may perceive charismatic leaders to be impractical or eccentric, even fanatical.

Charismatic leaders are not likely to pay attention to the practical details that arise in the course of work. If any

movement or project were to endure over time or spread wider, it needs mechanisms of co-ordination, supervision and delegation. Such tasks need leaders who have the relevant abilities and personalities. Such administrative details may be less heroic, but nonetheless essential, and which are best managed in the hands of **administrative leaders**. Among other things, they draw up duty rosters, plan fund-raising projects and budgets, and develop rules and procedures for the group's common progress.

If administrative leaders are the *doers*, then **intellectual leaders** are the *thinkers* who are largely involved in developing the movement's ideology and vision. They navigate the movement in the proper direction in keeping with their ideology and vision. Those who find difficulty accepting the charismatic leader's emotional appeal, would find it easier to interact with the intellectual leader who is rational and thoughtful. It is the intellectual leader, however, who helps broaden a movement's attraction. [L.M. Killian. 'Social movements.' In R.E.L. Faris (ed.) 1964:426–455.]

6.75 Exploiting charisma

(a) The availability of charisma is not confined to leaders alone; for, every society has people who are magnetic, creative, talented, or simply ambitious. Besides political leaders and religious leaders, famous painters, musicians, actors and entertainers are sometimes charismatic people. Even obscure individuals who are liked by their friends can become charismatic. However, charisma always manifests itself in connection with *leadership*. Those who have a great urge to lead or to command, even to exploit, others invariably seek to gather charisma to effect their purposes.

Such ambitious people only need to imitate the various

personal styles of a charismatic by using such strategies as the use of rhetoric, similes and metaphors, allusions to myth and history, gestures and postures, and rituals, and the management of crises and anxieties. These are, however, only externalities: a charismatic leader, to be successful, must deal with issues of ultimate concerns of followers. Clifford Geertz, for example, states that *meaning, morality and suffering* are three points where chaos threatens to break upon man, and any religion that hopes to endure must cope with these problems (Geertz, 'Religion as a cultural system' in M. Banton (ed), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London, 1966).

(b) An understanding of the nature of charisma helps one to improve the quality of Buddhist leadership by its insight into religious movements, religious organization and vihara politics, and prevents one from being blinded by the light of unwholesome charisma. In this connection, it is useful to be aware of two kinds of charisma: the *wholesome* and the *demonstrative* [6.753]. In itself, charisma can be said to be morally neutral. Its morality depends on the intention behind the charismatic gestures.

Demonstrative charisma is the greatest show on earth, that is, if one could get away with it. It solely depends on the public *perception*, or rather *misperception*, of one's having certain desirable qualities. This (mis)perception is projected and encouraged by such cosmetic props as histrionics (gestures and postures), ready rhetoric and waffle, the investment of religious habits (e.g. monastic robes), the social facade of acceptable conduct and platitudes (e.g. the externality of monastic rules), and the awarding and using of titles (both secular and ecclesiastical). These props are often enhanced by the use of modern technology and effective public relations (especially the mass

media). The bottom line here is the desire to attract greater charisma for the selfish reasons.

(c) The **Khaluṅka Sutta** has been analyzed by scholars [such as R. Johansson in N. Katz (ed) *Buddhist and Western Psychology*, Boulder, 1983] as dealing with psychological defence mechanisms. One of the examples of a 'defensive monk' given by Buddha is of interest to us here:

The monks reprove a fellow monk for some offence, and he, when reproved by them, *speaks before the assembly of monks with arms gesticulating* (*saṅgha.majjhe bāhā.vikkhepaṃ bhaṇati*). (A 4:193)

It is obvious here that the Buddha wants to draw our attention to the monk's performance. The monk apparently wants to make a good impression of himself by an imposing show. In this way, he might make his fellow monks forget the real issue (i.e. his offence) or give more weight to a weak point he is trying to put across. Such an attempt to hide a weakness by a good achievement in a different field is what psychologists call the defence mechanism of *compensation*.

In this case, too, the monk is shrewdly attempting to display demonstrative charisma, which is notoriously found in warmongers (like Hitler) and cunning politicians. The public gatherings of such monks are the closest Buddhist equivalents we have of a Pentecostal or charismatic rally. Photographs of such posturing charismatics can be found in Buddhist publications, and sometimes even on the Buddha shrine.

(d) One of the subtlest charismatic strategies is the use of *paradoxical* or *enigmatic speech* (or 'transcendental waffle'). For example, when Rajneesh [6.755] was asked, 'Why do you call yourself "Bhagwan"?' a term meaning 'Blessed Lord' — a title reserved for deities and the Buddha — his reply is characteristic:

Because I am — and because you are — and because God is.... When I call myself God, I mean to provoke you, to challenge you. I am simply calling myself God so that you can also gather courage to recognize it in me, you have taken the first step in recognizing it in yourself. (Joshi, 1982:114, quoted by S.J. Palmer, 'Charisma and Abdication: A study of the leadership of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh' *Sociological Analysis* 49,2 1988:125).

This fudge-mudge on the guru's part is a test of loyalty, serving to weed out the less committed members.

Another charismatic technique is the invocation of *mystery and humour*. The 12-hour day of unpaid labour expected of all Rajneeshpuram residents was euphemized as 'an abundance of creativity' and hyperbolized as a form of meditation-in-the-world called 'Worship' (*Rajneeshism*. Academy of Rajneeshism, Rajneesh Foundation International, 1983). Rajneesh's Rolls Royce collection was as 'a sign of the great love between master and disciple' or, alternatively, as a 'joke'. A Rajneeshi testified that

Bhagwan is like a child who delights in his toys. He has 92 Rolls Royces, the most expensive car in the world, and yet he... can only drive one at a time, and only for half an hour a day. For us, it is a great paradox, a great joke. (Reported by S.J. Palmer, 1988:128).

Those unquestioningly loyal to him would accept his ownership of the 92 Rolls Royces as a 'joke'. They were subtly led by him to believe that such a 'playful' exploit is a 'test' of their spirituality (i.e. loyalty). After all, he is 'divine' and everything is in his power. At least, surely it must have been the fruit of his immensely great store of good karma! Most cult followers are quite contented to seize the moment, living a day at a time — come what may, including basking in the glory of a charismatic.

6.751 Buddhist fetishism

(a) Weber spoke of two forms of charisma: the volatile 'pure charisma' [6.716] and the enduring 'routinized' form [6.715], but what eluded him 'was the objectification of charisma in talismans, amulets, charms, regalia, palladia, and so forth — a phenomenon as old as religion, indeed as old as all forms of leadership' (Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest...*, 1984:335). Charisma is concretized in the images and emblems of the Buddha, saints, and other deities, serving as

indexical icons, by which existential contact with the monk and by virtue of his impregnating them with sacred words, purifying them with sacral water, and other similar acts of transference, embody the monk's virtue and power. (Tambiah, 1984:336).

Relics of the Buddha and of saints, by the very fact that they were once a part of flesh and blood holiness, is naturally imbued with charisma. In the hands of the cunning and ambitious, such sources of charisma become vulgar materializations as saleable goods, which in turn inspire fakes, become publicity pawns in the mass media, and encourage a mythology of miracles (Tambiah ib).

Even as early as the 2nd century BCE, the **Buddha relic** was used as a source of charisma in Ceylon. The Sinhalese warrior-king Duṭṭha.gāmiṇī (r 161–137 BCE) placed a relic in his lance and had a company of 500 monks escort him into battle (Mahv 25:3 ff). Alice Greenwald, however, provides an important insight for these seemingly unbuddhist gestures:

The relic on the lance, monks going off to war, quite simply signify more than ostensible disrespect. To be sure, the latter incident signifies more than the expressed textual justification, that the sight of bhikkhus ensured 'both blessing and protection,' or Rahula's equally insufficient explanation that the act, in insinuating Sangha approval, was a means of assuring public support

and sympathy for the campaign [W. Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, Colombo, 1956:701. More than wise political moves or strategies, the placing of a relic on the lance and the conscription of bhikkhus are fundamentally symbolic gestures witnessing the conquest of Buddhism over the chaos represented by the Tamil dynasty. (A. Greenwald, 'The Relic on the Spear', in B.L. Smith (ed), *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, Chambersburg (Pa), 1978:26) [C. F. Keyes, 'Political Crisis and Militant Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand', in *Religion and legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma*, (ed) B.L. Smith, Chambersburg (Pa), 1978:147 f]

Whatever Duṭṭha.gamiṇī's true intentions might have been, one point is clear: the placing of the relic in his lance invoked acquired charisma [6.711] upon him. There is, however, no way of knowing if such a 'sacred relic' is human bone (if it were the Buddha's or an Arhat's) or fish-bone (or whatever), unless one sends them for chemical analysis and carbon dating. A Sinhalese Buddhist told me this humorous anecdote: a devotee once visited a monk, but the monk's pupil told the devotee that he must wait until the monk had finished frying bones to make 'Buddha relics'!

Why do some people distribute 'Buddha relics' and amulets? Because the recipient of the 'relic' would be deeply indebted to the giver who has apparently given him a piece of 'the Buddha'. The amulet is a 'reminder' of the virtues of the Buddha or a saint; it is a religious *fetish* (the objectification of sacred qualities). Its owner or donor gains more respect and support (material and otherwise) from the recipient. He (usually it is a man) is effectively announcing to the world that he is the custodian of one of the most sacred objects in Buddhism. [Cf the Buddha's Eye Tooth (1:30.221a), and the Emerald Buddha (1:30.41)]. Buddha relics and amulets are often resorted to as a means of mustering self-confidence by those in the power

and prestige game: the urban ruling class, politicians, professionals, the intelligentsia, and the military [I:30.47a] [B.J. Terwiel, *Monks and Magic*, Lund, 1975:7583. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest...*, 1984:ch 22 esp pp 344 f]

(b) A common way of acquiring charisma is through *association* with a charismatic person. The ancient sultans of Melaka, for example, acquired charisma by claiming descent from 'Iskandar Zulkarnain', i.e. Alexander the Great, himself [1:14]. Fledgling gurus often make it a point to announce their 'close association' with a well-known religious figure or powerful name. In modern times, the technique becomes somewhat more sophisticated with the use of photographs and the mass media, especially where they serve as permanent colourful records of one's having exclusively been in the hallowed presence of a source of charisma.

A typical current example of the desire for associative charisma is found in the December 1991 issue of the YBAM *Dharma Digest*, which contains an article on Zen Buddhism with the following blurb: '*This article is reproduced from INTERSECT, June 1991, a magazine published in Singapore, read and respected by prominent businessmen and leaders in over 1000 countries*'! Moral of blurb: 'This article is reliable, believe me!' Associative charisma is desirable as a bush when one is unsure about one's wine, be it a product or a plan. Unfortunately, there are more bushes (and undergrowth) today, then there is good wine. At least, good Buddhists neither drink nor get drunk.

6.752 Charisma and conscience

It is not uncommon for those in quest of demonstrative charisma, consciously or unconsciously, to resort to 'anomic' means of achieving it; in other words, 'get whatever you want, but don't

get caught'. One local manifestation of this pursuit is that of 'selective plagiarism' in the publication of Buddhist literature and audio-visuals, where credit is only given to borrowings from certain 'respectable' authors, or even none at all. In some cases, where the work is admired, but not its author, the borrowing or copying are not only uncredited but even 'authored' by the borrower — as in the case of a Guanyin Mantra tape of the Dharmafarers that was slightly speeded up by a certain vihara and which it then sold under a new label. Such gestures and postures are clearly desperate charisma-attracting ventures. This is surely a furtive attempt at gaining **demonstrative charisma** [6.75].

Not all persons with charisma have the desire to have acquired it; often enough, it is thrown at them. A venerable and friendly old monk or a nun who was an erstwhile film star, for example, is likely to have charisma thrown at him or her. Such persons, despite their protests, might easily attract a following, but for the wrong reasons. The Gold Mountain Monastery (California, USA) nun, Héng Dào (former 'Ji āshì' actress, Liào Fèng Míng) renounced the robe after 15 years in the Order and returned to Hong Kong because she 'felt being pressured by young people following her, as if deifying her' (Nan Yang Siang Pau, 6 March 1992).

Such people are unlikely to sneeze unnoticed or unadmired at; even an ear-wiggle might be perceived as being a symbolic or ominous gesture by an attentive rhapsodist. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Calpurnia warns Caesar of evil omens that portend danger to his life:

When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.

(*Julius Caesar* 2.2)

Calpurnia's warning may be interpreted to mean that when one has charisma, any extraordinary event is likely to be attributed to that person.

6.753 Reincarnate lamas

Just as Weber described two types of charisma: the *volatile* form found in prophets and their likes, and the other *routinized* in the form of institutions, there are in Buddhism two modal crystallizations: one exemplified in the 'doctrine of purity' of the Arhat and the saint and their followings, and the other in the 'doctrine of presence' of the Bodhisattvas in this world, the best example of which is the person and office of the Dalai Lama, regarded as the continuing incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, and similarly of the tulkus, the incarnate lamas, and to a lesser extent in the institution of Buddhist kingship in Theravāda countries. (Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest...*, 1984:332)

It is not uncommon in Malaysia and Singapore for devotees to 'collect' initiations or empowerments and Refuge ceremonies from such tulkus and charismatics without understanding what they mean, much less do they keep to the spiritual practices which such empowerments entail. Such ceremonies tend to be taken by the initiate or refugee as some kind of 'blessing' or religious autograph-collecting. In his lecture on 'Tibetan Buddhism as a Living Religious Option' delivered at Claremont College (California), Jeffrey Hopkins, American scholar, writer, translator and the Dalai Lama's interpreter, who has studied for 6 years in the Lamaist Monastery of America (New Jersey, USA) and who has been involved with Tibetan Buddhism for 26 years, makes this well-qualified statement:

...we new Buddhists need to remember the basic Buddhist dictum, 'Do not rely on the person; rely on the doctrine.' This is particularly important when faced with a culture that has come to be strangely

infatuated with recognizing reincarnations of past religious figures in almost every village. I have wondered if Tibetan culture has so enthusiastically embraced the practice of declaring persons to be highly developed at a very young age in order to excuse itself from having to gain achievements in practice, much as in my own family a claim of greatness was made based on birth as a WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant]. What better way to carve a niche for oneself and one's group than not to have to do anything to deserve respect! Greatness due to birth is very attractive!... The word 'tulku' itself literally refers to an Emanation Body of a Buddha, though in common practice the term has come to refer to those whose rebirth is affected by a compassionate wish to serve others. The arbitrary ascription of such a lofty rank suggests discouragement with and even cynicism about the possibility of enlightenment. (J. Hopkins, *Radical Conservatism*, INEB, 1990:67 f)

Hopkins goes on to say that this is the type of ridiculous exaggeration that stifles analytical investigation and could lead to cultism. From his experience, most Tibetans do not take all this very seriously, 'maintaining all the while another system of recognition that is based solely on achievement'. Tibetan culture, Hopkins further notes, has mechanisms for keeping persons with such high titles in line, 'but when they are outside of these strictures, all sorts of havoc can take place in the midst of gullible followers'.

The institution of the *tulku* can be (indeed has often been) an effective tool for the propagation of Dharma. If that is the case, then, it is an example of the application of wholesome charisma. As such, it is a well-deserved spiritual gift that one receives from living the Buddha Dharma. It is reflected in a body and mind that are calm and clear, a person whom even the devas hold dear. It attracts gifts of need, not the need of gifts. One endowed with wholesome charisma needs little, but

gives much; owns little, desires less. His charisma is his own mind and heart, and the Gift of Dharma.

Wholesome charisma [6.75], in other words, comes from one's spiritual depth (e.g. through meditation) and manifest compassion (e.g. in social work). Personal attractiveness or other blessings may be the source of one's charisma, but this is a temporary result of one's past karma. To only enjoy it without applying it to wholesome enterprises is 'eating stale fare' (DhA 1:401), that is, using one's store of blessings without replenishing it, as it were — one would lose that charisma in no time. Wholesome charisma is rooted in generosity, lovingkindness and wisdom; it should invoke those very qualities in others.

The charisma in others is what we perceive in or project onto them, especially in a crowd. However inspiring or 'holy' charisma may be, it appeals to the senses (especially the lower mind); it is a *sensual* attraction, a *personal* attraction, and an external phenomenon which we consciously or unconsciously desire to possess. **When we look for the light in others, the light will blind us; only the Light within can truly enlighten us.**

6.754 *The disadvantages of charisma*

(a) It has been pointed out [6.723 6.74] that charisma, in its pure form, is personal, contingent and short-lived. Any movement or activity dependent upon it would similarly be doomed to the same fate. We have also seen how charisma could be cultivated within oneself [6.74], even for unwholesome purposes [6.75 6.751]. The main disadvantage of charismatic leadership concerns a 'crisis of continuity' (T.F. O'Dea, 1983:39), that is, charisma is intensely *person-centred*, not *method-centred*: the method is the person, as it were, and should the leader die, so dies the system, so ends the work — as in the cases of

Sumaṅgalo [6.3], Amanda Maṅgala [6.4] and Dr. Wong Phui Weng [6.5] — or it might begin to assume forms foreign to the founder. One wonders if the Christ-centricity of Christianity, by its very personal nature, had not been the cause of its being split up into *21,000 sects* ('and they all hate each other') (*World Christian Encyclopædia*, 1985:17) and whose number is growing.

Charisma will nevertheless always exist wherever there are groups of people, no matter how small. Since politics concerns people and power — and charisma wields great power over people — politicians find it to be their ideal tool. Charisma, however, finds its most common and widespread expression through religion, which though not as strong as it was before, still persists in its *charismatic effect*. According to Boudon and Bourricaud, three fundamental dimensions of religious charismatic effect can be recognized.

First, charisma tends to attribute an extraordinary importance to a message and to the person who carries it. Second, the charismatic message is both a principle of responsibility for the messenger and a source of obligation and commitment for the receiver. Third, the charismatic message is a project which prepares a way that often leads to an absolutist vision of social action.

The relativist attitude which weighs conditions and circumstances leads to resignation and cowardice, whereas charisma, with the irresistible evidence with which it is invested and the promise of its own realization which it carries with it, demands an unconditioned engagement.... The most exalted forms of militancy, which obviously concern only a very small fraction of party militants and militants of various social movements, illustrate the seduction and the vitality of charisma. It is in this sense that our societies remain, for better or for worse, profoundly religious, or, rather, profoundly exposed to charismatic seduction. (Boudon & Bourricaud, *A Critical Dictionary of Sociology*, 1989:301)

(b) The term 'charisma' is often misused. When used indiscriminately, it becomes meaningless, even confusing. Such is the case when it is applied to any kind of aura surrounding an office, the supernatural powers of rulers and priests, or even popularity, prestige or status [6.713]. It might be argued, for example, whether Dr. Wong Phui Weng was a charismatic Buddhist worker or not. One of the reasons for his acceptance by the local Buddhists was his doctorate in botany. Most of his friends and contacts, however, accepted him as *Dr. Wong*: it did not matter to them whether the doctorate was academic or medical. In short, they regarded it as a status symbol. As such, for Wong's assistants and supporters, the doctorate was a source of his charisma. Had it been a doctorate in Buddhist Studies or a relevant field, he would then be a *qualified* specialist, not a charismatic. Insofar as Wong consciously utilized his title of 'Doctor' to gain acceptance and respect — and induce his admirers and supporters to assist him in his work — it is **acquired charisma** [6.54]. If he made a lot of friends and admirers, and left it at that, then he was merely enjoying the benefits of his *status*.

A truly charismatic person, however, is rare: s/he might start off as one, but in due course usually gains or uses other forms of authority.

With the exception of the founders of small sects, leaders can only be partially charismatic. For many of his admirers, de Gaulle had a great deal of charisma, but he also had a police force and the entire apparatus of the state at his disposal to enforce his commands. As the bloody purge in 1934 has shown, Hitler could not rely on his charisma alone, even in his relations with the party stalwarts. Nevertheless, his power over most of the Germans has a very large (though varying) charismatic element, although his power over the conquered nations and his political opponents

was based on naked force. (S.L. Andreski in *A New Dictionary of Sociology*, ed G.D. Mitchell, 1979:27)

One might take that Ānanda Maṅgala — insofar as he used only his innate (i.e. personal) qualities — had **natural charisma**, that is, until he started the Singapore Buddhayāna Organization as an instrument of his work. It might be argued, however, that he is not a true charismatic since he was a monk, and his devotees respected the robe rather than his person. He was however far from being a conventional monk [6.42 6.45 6.46]. So we have here a mixed case of charisma, popularity and tradition. Anyway, as in the case of Wong and Sumaṅgalo, his work, too, as we knew it effectively died with him.

(c) Charismatic individuals, in their most intense fruitfulness, are *creatively destructive*. They bring in the new at the cost of the old. The larger society does not always welcome change, especially if it has to lose familiar patterns of behaviour and pleasures. As such, all societies seek to make some provision for those with charismatic tendencies.

In its endeavour to produce docile and productive citizens, educational systems often face problems with those of charismatic intellectual and moral propensities. The universities, through training and research, attempt to discipline those charismatic propensities and to bring them, at least initially, to learn and affirm what is already known. Only after this disciplining is the student to some degree free to discern and create a new order through original research and ideas. In the political arena, too, there is the same attitude towards charismatic tendencies: *the nail that sticks out is hardest hit* — unless it is a very hard nail.

In certain sections of the army, however, especially those concerned with unconventional warfare (such as shock troopers),

in which traditional military routines are thought to be inadequate, charismatic fighters with heroic tendencies are accommodated. After all, in their missions, they are more exposed to imminent danger than the conventional soldiers are. Similarly, painters, writers and the creative are likely to find a free and fertile haven in bohemia, literary coterie and artistic circles. The routine sectors of society are more inclined to accommodate non-traditional modes of creative expression when they do not intrude upon or threaten their routine lives.

(d) On the other hand, the *Sangha* or *monastic system*, whether coenobitical (communal) or anchoritic (hermitic), are institutional structures for the segregation and control of the potentially charismatic, that is, those who are prone to experience a sense of direct contact with the transcendent. The rules and routines of monastic life, especially within a coenobitical framework, serve to prevent the emergence of charisma, and to dilute and disperse it if it were to occur. The hermits of the anchoritic tradition as a rule lead solitary lives, and as such cannot communicate their charisma directly and effectively to society at large. The monastic life, in so far as it is a way of life that is geographically separate from society, is an antidote against charisma. That is, as long as the monastic individual does not mingle with society; for when they do, the resultant charisma becomes evident in a society that supports the monastic system.

A seasoned charismatic leader, however, need not always be present to exert his power over followers. Even in his absence, such a charismatic could be present. Followers of charismatic leaders invariably revere their images or photographs, whose ubiquity conjures up his presence amongst those who keep them. Such are the examples of Rajneesh

[6.755b], Sangharakshita [VI:40.1] and Yantra Amaro [6.8(13)]. While devotees venerate the pious portraits of Sangharakshita and of Yantra on Buddhist shrines, Rajneesh's smiling visage watch Big Brother-like on ashram walls. In fact, Rajneesh's disciples insisted that he was even more present to his disciples in his absence. When he stopped directing his Dynamic Meditation sessions, for example, an empty chair was placed on the podium. (S.J. Palmer, 'Charisma and Abdication: A study of the leadership of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh' *Sociological Analysis* 49,2 1988:125).

(e) The use of charisma is interesting when analyzed in the context of Transactional Analysis (TA), a theoretical system for identifying, describing and classifying human behaviour to develop a personal awareness of how we affect one another. TA has two major elements: egostates and transactions. Every individual finds his or her sources of behaviour in three *ego-states* or orientations towards self and others — parent, adult and child — that are linked to past relationships. The *parent ego-state* is characterized by behaviour that is either nurturing (loving, caring, protective, helpful) or critical (authoritative, patronizing, rigid, evaluative, punitive). The *adult ego-state* shows characteristics of being analytical, controlled, objective, considerate, relevant, communicative. The *child ego-state* is childish (crying, yelling, nasty, tantrums) or childlike (spontaneous, playful, laughing, hugging). In summary, the parent ego-state represents a set of behaviour and attitudes that reflects a parental model. The adult ego-state expresses accurate analyses of reality and provides for the continued well-being of the individual. The child egostate comprises a pattern of behaviour that comes from the feelings and attitudes of childhood. A set of interactions between two people is called a *transaction*. [T. Harris, *I'm OK — You're OK*, NY.

1967. Gerald M. Goldhaber & Marylynn B. Goldhaber. *Transactional Analysis: Principles and Applications*, Boston, 1976]

The ego-state of a charismatic is usually that of *the parent*, mainly because of the adulations he receives from followers, whose ego-states are usually those of the child. Although a parent-child transaction in itself may not be unwholesome, a prolonged relationship as such would lead to blind faith or dependence in the followers. A charismatic may have problems when having to deal with another 'parent' follower. In a pure charismatic situation, adult-child transactions are rare, and adult-adult transactions almost non-existent. In other words, the thinking and deciding are done by only one person — the charismatic — who in many ways is *a parent-figure par excellence*.

(f) The most serious disadvantage of charisma lies in its very source. The authority of a charismatic leader is not based only upon what the leader is and does, but also depends upon validation by *followers*. The personality traits of charismatic leaders must dovetail or mesh with the expectations of their followers or would-be followers so that they allow the leaders' assertion of power. Personality traits, however, is only a small part of the process of validation by the followers, who must also show willingness to take the leadership of such a person seriously.

The charismatic leader, in other words, must be *empowered* by his followers and the audience, that is, as long as the followers believe in his mission. Those who give power to others may also take them away; as such, charismatic power is as a rule unstable, shortlived, even mercurial. As such, in the three types of authority, according to Weber, charismatic authority is regarded as strictly *non-rational*. [6.71]

6.755 *The end of charisma*

(a) It has often been pointed out that with the death of the charismatic leader, the group and benefits that have arisen through him die with him. Sometimes the charismatic does *not* die: he retires or fails — he *abdicates*, to use Susan J. Palmer's term. Palmer, in her attempt to apply Roy Wallis' model of a charismatic leader's four responses to institutionalization — Encouragement, Acquiescence, Displacement, and Resistance — to the career of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and his movement, the Rajneesh Foundation International (RFI) [6.75d], proposes a fifth category, that of Abdication, and that a distinction between two aspects of charisma, *the Performer* and *the Pastor*, be drawn in order to understand this new category ('Charisma and Abdication: A study of the leadership of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh', *Sociological Analysis* 49.2 1988:119–135).

Wallis has done a study of the career of Moses David, the prophet-founder of the Children of God, a deviant Christian group which originated in California in 1968. He then analyzed the relationship between charisma and its antithesis, institutionalization, by identifying the four possible responses of charismatic leaders ('Charisma, Commitment and Control in a New Religious Movement', in *Millennialism and Charisma*, ed. R. Wallis, Belfast, 1982). Wallis argues that the seemingly erratic behaviour of 'Mo' David can be interpreted as an example of Resistance,

in which the charismatic leader foresees the threat of institutionalization subverting his authority and takes active and effective steps to forestall it. (Wallis, 1982:119)

Palmer, in her attempts to explain Rajneesh's leadership as an example of Resistance, however, 'encountered a series of obstacles which suggest that the relationship between charisma

and institution building is more complex than Wallis' four categories allow for' (Palmer, 1988:120).

(b) Palmer points out that though Rajneesh employed the strategy of Resistance at several points in his career, he also adopted the strategy of Encouragement, described by Wallis as a process

in which the charismatic leader embraces the possibilities involved in institutionalization and actively directs the process in such a way as to control it and utilize institutionalized structures and procedures to buttress his authority, rather than allowing it to constrain him. (Wallis, 1982:117)

In 1974, Rajneesh moved from Bombay to Poona, where he founded the Shree Rajneesh Ashram, whose daily programme began with Dynamic Meditation, and where in the evenings he delivered his famous discourses. By 1975, western-style therapy groups had been incorporated into the programme and he drew large international crowds every week. Between 1974 and 1978, more than 50,000 seekers had tried the therapies at Poona (*Oregonian*, 1985:9). The burgeoning membership meant that Rajneesh was no longer available to his sannyasins (committed pupils), except for a small core group. Thus the problem of institutionalization began. He *encouraged* growth and approved the effort of his 'power ladies' to establish a well-run ashram while he imbued the growing superstructure with his own personal mystique. His portraits were everywhere: on the walls and on every disciple's chest in the *mala* (beads); and then there was the empty chair on the podium of the meditation hall [6.754d] (Palmer, 1988:125).

(c) In one phase of his career, Rajneesh retreated into a period of silence, from the spring of 1981 up to October 1984. During

this period, the institution builders were active, and Rajneesh's response at that time appeared to conform to Wallis' description of Acquiescence,

in which the charismatic leader, finding himself trammelled and constrained, acquiesces to the situation with more or less good grace. (Wallis, 1982:117)

Another dramatic development occurred on 16th September 1985, when Rajneesh held a major press conference at Rajneeshpuram (a 64,229 acre ranch in Oregon) in which he revealed a series of crimes (poisoning attempts, wiretapping, bugging the rooms and financial abuse which left the commune US\$55M in debt) allegedly perpetrated by Ma Anand Sheela and her 'fascist gang'. From the evidence at hand, Palmer concludes that Sheela's alleged crimes (for which she was convicted) were the result of an unsuccessful attempt at Displacement, described by Wallis as

that which institutionalization proceeds without clear recognition by the charismatic leader of what is occurring until too late for him effectively to reverse the situation despite a strong antipathy towards it. (Wallis, 1984:118)

A difficulty which Palmer found in trying to fit Rajneesh's case to Wallis' model of Resistance was that Rajneesh did not appear to share Mo's desire to control and direct his follower's lives. The outstanding example, Palmer states, which illustrated this was Rajneesh's announcement on 26th September 1985 that he was renouncing his role as guru and ending his religion, Rajneeshism.

(d) In order to account for Rajneesh's colourful career and his subsequent abdication, it is useful to be aware of two aspects of charismatic authority, i.e. *Performance* and *Responsibility*.

A charismatic's authority rests on his ability to demonstrate exceptional qualities to convince others of his 'supramundane power or knowledge for which [he provides] the channel of which [he is] the source' (Wallis, 1982:2). In this role he is like a creative artiste or *Performer* who receives adulation from his fans. In terms of Responsibility, the leader as *Pastor* must be willing and able to provide a direction for the group, to formulate policies and decide on administrative matters. On a more mundane level, he must counsel his followers, and settle conflicts arising from within and without — a Pastor who protects and guides the flock. From her study, Palmer believes that Rajneesh excelled as a Performer but is weak or recalcitrant as a Pastor.

On 27 October 1985, Rajneesh was arrested and charged with arranging 'sham marriages' among his disciples in order to bypass US immigration laws. He simply negotiated for the lightest sentence — a technical plea of guilty while privately denying the charges — and left the country, abandoning his flock. Rajneesh's decision to abdicate can be partly understood in relation to his being an *exemplary prophet* [6.73], but one who lacked a mission. Instead of defying the authorities, he remained true to his claim of being the 'Enlightened One' who remained 'aloof and separate as an island'.

Palmer concludes her study by arguing that Rajneesh's abdication solved the perennial problem of institutionalization in several ways:

First, it enabled him to renounce the responsible role of pastor, while retaining the role of performer. He relinquished his followers but kept his audience and devoted 'Friends'.

Second, it was undoubtedly a step to salvage his reputation and protect his personal charisma which Sheela's scandalous behaviour threatened to discredit. Thus he disassociated himself

from the organization and religion, Rajneeshism, which had suffered an institutional 'loss of charisma'.

Third, it served as a sort of shaman's ordeal of initiation, a symbolic death which enabled him to change shape... his Abdication was a means of transformation from one type of charismatic leader to another: in Fred Bird's typology it would represent a transition from a Devotee-type to an Apprentice-type leader*. Instead of presiding over a utopian city, Rajneesh has become an itinerant performer, and is producing philosophical literature. (Krishnamurti and Gurdjieff wrote or dictated prolifically after they abdicated.)... (Palmer, 1988:135)

[* According to **Frederick Bird's typology of new religions** ('Charisma and Rituals in New Religious Movements' in *Understanding New Religions*, edd. G. Baker & J. Needleman, Seabury Press, 1978:173), the Devotee, Apprentice and Disciple, each features a different type of leader-follower relationship. The *apprentice leader* plays the role of a teacher of techniques which the apprentice learns in order to tap a source of sacred power which is perceived to be within the self (e.g. a traditional Theravāda *vipassanā* teacher). The *devotee leader* is looked up to as a lord, incarnation, avatar, or Second Coming, and is perceived to be the transcendent source of sacred power to which the devotee must surrender in order to find salvation (e.g. a Vajrayāna tulku). The *disciple leader* is usually viewed as being an enlightened and/or skilled practitioner who teaches or counsels members, clients, affiliates or students usually through an inner circle of adepts or virtuosi (e.g. the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order founder).]

6.756 *The decharismatization of Buddhism*

Although the Buddha and many of His Saints, even later Sanghins, exude charisma, they invariably place spirituality first [6.722]. The Canon contains many accounts of 'decharismatization' — the discouragement of the use of personal gifts or abilities to assert undue influence upon others. Such accounts can be found in the events behind the promulgation of Vinaya rules and in admonitions of the Sutras. The last section of the

Monastic Code, that dealing with Training (*sekhiya.dhamma*) (V 4:185 ff), for example, forbids monks from laughing loudly (rules 11 & 12), from making loud noises (rules 13 & 14), from swaying their bodies (rules 15 & 16), from standing with arms akimbo (rules 21 & 22) and so on. [The two rules in each case covers two occasions, 'while walking' and 'while sitting' in public.] Such rules are not only for maintaining proper decorum, but also to restrict the physical expressiveness of a Sanghin and preventing histrionics.

Although the Buddha has not formally proscribed the use of charisma, there are a number of Sutra accounts showing the Buddha's discouragement, even disapproval, of it. In the **Araṇa.vibhaṅga Sutta**, for example, the Buddha admonishes that monks 'should speak quite slowly, not hurriedly' so that 'the body does not tire and thought does not suffer and the sound does not suffer and the throat is not affected; speech... is clear and comprehensible' (M 3:231 234). This advice makes sense when one considers that loud and gesticulatory speeches are popular with politicians, warmongers and evangelists, all of whom may be examples of charismatics. Yet it also might be argued that this very decorum of the monk or nun could be a source of charisma. That may well be so, but the charisma has a more peaceable and tranquil effect, as that found in a traditional Theravāda sermon (*Dhamma.desanā*).

The story of **Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja** clearly illustrates the Buddha's disapproval of the misuse of charisma. A merchant of Rājagaha had a costly sandalwood bowl hung from the top of a high series of bamboo poles, hoping that it would be taken by a 'recluse or brahmin who is a perfected one as well as of one psychic power'. When Moggallāna, the foremost master of psychic power, turned down the invitation, Piṇḍola used his psychic ability to retrieve the bowl. When the Buddha heard of

this, he severely reprimanded Piṇḍola of performing a cheap trick:

It is not suiting, Bhāradvāja, it is not becoming, it is not fitting, it is not worthy of a recluse, it is not allowable, it is not to be done. How can you, Bhāradvāja, on account of a wretched wooden bowl exhibit a superhuman feat, an act of psychic marvel to householders? As, Bhāradvāja, a woman exhibits her loin-cloth on account of a wretched coin (*māsaka*) even so by you, Bhāradvāja, was a superhuman feat, an act of psychic marvel exhibited to householders on account of a wretched wooden bowl. It is not, Bhāradvāja, for inspiring those who are not yet inspired, nor for the increase of those who are inspired, but, Bhāradvāja, it is not inspiring to those who are not inspired as well as those who are inspired, and it causes uncertainty in some. (V 2:110 f. DhA 3:201 f, J 4:263)

The Buddha accordingly promulgated a rule forbidding Sanghins from displaying any supernormal status or psychic power to householders (v 2:112). The aim of Buddha Dharma is not to sell itself *because* it is well packaged; it should not even *sell* itself: it is to be given *freely*, and that one should test for oneself that it is good for one.

6.757 *Ādhipateyya Sutta* [6.7d]

(a) *Two* other important canonical texts in connection with charisma are the Rūpa Sutta, the Puggala.paññatti 4:22 [6.722] — and the Ādhipateyya Sutta, which we now turn to. Earlier on [6.7d] we have discussed the term *ādhipateyya* as referring to three kinds of spiritual **priorities**, the first of which includes charisma. The *locus classicus* for the three types of priority is the Ādhipateyya Sutta (A 1:147), but the set itself is mentioned without comment in the **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 3:220). The **Ādhipateyya Sutta** is the concluding discourse of the Deva.dūta Vagga in the Tika.nipāta of the Aṅguttara Nikāya.

The pioneer Pali scholar, C.A.F. Rhys Davids, in the early days of Western Buddhist research, remarked that this is an ‘overlooked Pali Sutta’ (JRAS 1933:329–334). [Mrs Rhys Davids, however, argues (erroneously though) that ‘we see the Founder at the start practically substituting *dharma* for *ātman* as the aspect under which he rendered homage to the Highest’ (1933:332).] As this discourse plays an important part in our discussion, it has been translated in full here, by way of a fitting close to this study on charisma.

(b) Ādhipateyya Sutta (A 1:147–150)

Monks, there are these three priorities (*ādhipateyyāni*). What three?

The priority of self, the priority of the world, the priority of the True Teaching.

And what, monks, is **the priority of self** (*att’ādhipateyya*)?

Here, monks, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty house, thus reflects:

‘It is not for the sake of robes that I went forth, nor for the sake of almsfood, nor for the sake of lodging, nor for the sake of such and such an existence /or future lives/. But it is with this thought (that I go forth): Indeed am I fallen into unsatisfactoriness, overcome by unsatisfactoriness, due to birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Truly, so doing, I will see the ending of this mass of unsatisfactoriness. For if I, who have gone forth from the house into houselessness, should pursue such *objects of sense pleasures* or worse ones, that would be improper for me.’

Then he reflects thus: ‘But, truly, shall I put forth effort unstintingly, establish (my) mindfulness undistractedly. Calm shall my body be, not (nervously) excited; (my) mind concentrated in one-pointedness.’

Thus giving priority to self, he abandons the unwholesome, cultivates the wholesome, abandons the blameworthy, cultivates the blameless, (and) keeps himself /spiritually/ pure.

This, monks, is called the priority of self.

And what, monks, is **the priority of the world** (*lok’ādhipateyya*)? Here,

monks, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty house, thus reflects:

‘It is not for the sake of robes that I went forth, nor ...almsfood, nor... lodging, nor... such and such an existence /or future lives/. But... that ...I will see the ending of this mass of unsatisfactoriness. For if I, who have gone forth from the house into houselessness in this manner, should think *thoughts of sense-pleasure, or thoughts of ill will, or thoughts of harm* in the greatness of the world’s population — but great, indeed, is the population of the world — there must surely be a sage or a priest who possesses psychic powers, the divine eye [clairvoyance], or the ability to read another’s mind. Even from afar, they can see me; though nearby, they are not seen, but they know (my) mind. They would know me thus: “Behold, sirs, this clansman here, who though in faith went forth from the house into houselessness, leads a life of evil (and) unwholesomeness!”

Or, there must surely be a deva who possesses psychic powers, the divine eye, or the ability to read another’s mind.... They would know me thus: “Behold, sirs, this clansman here, who though in faith went forth from the house into houselessness, leads a life of evil (and) unwholesomeness!”

Then he reflects thus: ‘But, truly, shall I put forth effort unstintingly,... Calm shall my body be, not (nervously) excited; (my) mind concentrated in one-pointedness.’

Thus making the world predominant, he abandons the unwholesome, cultivates the wholesome, abandons the blameworthy, cultivates the blameless, (and) keeps himself /spiritually/ pure.

This, monks, is called the priority of the world.

And what, monks, is **the priority of True Teaching** (*Dhamm’-ādhīpateyya*)?

Here, monks, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty house, thus reflects:

‘It is not for the sake of robes that I went forth, nor ...almsfood, nor... lodging, nor... such and such an existence. But... that ...I will see the ending of this mass of unsatisfactoriness. For if I, who have gone forth from the house into houselessness in this manner, should

reflect thus: Well-taught is the True Teaching of the Blessed One, to be self-realized, timeless, for one to “come and see”, leading onward, to be known individually by the wise. Now there are colleagues (of mine) in the Holy Life who live, knowing and seeing (the Truth).

And I too have likewise gone forth into this well-taught True Teaching and Discipline: it is not proper for me to live slothful and heedless.’

Thus making the True Teaching predominant, he abandons the unwholesome, cultivates the wholesome, abandons the blameworthy, cultivates the blameless, (and) keeps himself /spiritually/ pure.

This, monks, is called the priority of the True Teaching.

These then, monks, are the three types of priority.

*There is no secret place in the world where an evil deed could be hidden.
You yourself, O human, will know what is true or false!
Alas! My friend, you look down upon the true witness (that is your self)!
How can you hide the evil that there is in the self from the self? |*

*The devas and the Tathâgatas /Thus Come/ (can) see the fool living in evil.
Therefore, the self-regarding one (**att’ādhīpako**) should live mindfully.
Let the world-regarding one (**lok’ādhīpako**) meditate and
be wise /in guarding the mind/.
For whom the True Teaching is lord (**Dhamm’adhipo**),
let him be a /silent/ sage following the True Teaching. |*

*Having conquered Mara /the Evil One/ and having overcome death,
the one who strives gains the end of birth!
Such a one is wise, knower of worlds, the /silent/ sage,
unshaped, in am, state, b)’ anything (**sabbesu dhammesu atammaro***). ||*

(A 1:147–150)

[* *atammayo*, ‘unshaped... by anything’ [Introd 9.1 I:34.2], a pregnant Pali term. see Santikaro Bhikkhu, ‘Atammatayā : The rebirth of a lost word’, *Crossroads* 4,2 1989:87-90.]

(c) *Commentary*. The verse portion of the Ādhipateyya Sutta says that the one with self-regard should be mindful (*sato*); the one with regard for the world should be wise (*nipako*), and the one with regard for the True Teaching should live in accordance with it (*anudhammacārī*) (A 1:149 f). The Attha.sālinī (Dhamma. saṅgaṇī Commentary) says that one who has self-regard should practise moral shame (*hiri*), and the one who has regard for the world (or other-regard) should show moral fear (*ottappa*) (DhsA 125, Vism 1:34). One who has regard for the True Teaching should avoid all evil, cultivate the good, purify his mind (Dh 183).

From a sociological viewpoint, the three priorities can be regarded as the grounds for charisma, authority or power. Such charisma, authority and power are only *wholesome* if they are used to avoid evil, to do good and to purify the mind. Even then, the Buddha reminds us that charisma, authority or power is not worth a 'sixteenth' (i.e. an iota) of living a Dharma-based life (such as keeping the Precepts) (A 1:213 f 4:252).

Better than sole sovereignty over the earth,
Or going to heaven,
Or overlordship over all the world (*sabba.lok'ādhipaccena*),
Is the Fruit of Stream-winning /leading to Enlightenment/.
(Dh 178)



II:6.8 Yantra Amaro: A current case of charisma

One of the most successful and remarkable monks of our time is **Phra Ajahn Yantra Amaro Bhikkhu**, who celebrates his 20th Rains Retreat (*varṣa/vassa*, Siamese *phansā*) next year (1993). The title 'Phra Ajahn' (Skt *varaḥ ācārya*) meaning 'noble teacher', is a common form of address for monastic teachers. His personal name was originally Vinai, which he later changed to *Yantra* (a Sanskrit word meaning a magical amulet, usually written), the significance of which will be discussed later.

Yantra makes an interesting subject in the study of Buddhist charisma, especially in terms of the sociology of religion (such as the Stark-Bainbridge theory of religion) [II:6.6]. His study is even more significant because he has touched the lives of many Buddhists in Malaysia and Singapore in our own time. Within weeks of writing this section, he made an impromptu appearance in Kuala Lumpur, one which has been analysed here in comparison to his appearance in Ipoh in 1989.

Up to the date of writing, he is reported to have travelled on preaching tours of Europe, USA, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. Religious instructions by his monks are available from six centres: Suññatārām Forest Monastery, Kanchanaburi (central Siam); Tham Wua Suññatā, Maehongson (northern Siam near the Myanmar border); Wat Sabchan (Suññatārām), Chantaburi (central Siamese coast); Suññatārām Kautieumpa, Nakhorn Sī Thammarāj; Dhammaleela Meditation Centre, Nakhorn Nāyok (central Siam); Suññatārām Forest Monastery Inc, Bundanoon (NSW, Australia); and Suññatārām Denmark, Ishøj (Denmark). The Dhammaleela Foundation in Bangkok manages his funds and publishes almost all his books.

(a) *Early life (1951–1970)*. Born in 1951 in Pāk Phanang district in the southern province of Nakhom Sī Thammarāj, Siam, his lay name was Vinai La,ong.suwan, the youngest of seven children. His given name, *Vinai*, is the Siamese cognate with *Vinaya* (discipline), a quality which he was to cultivate in his religious life. Even as a child, his parents, Roong and Thanom La'ong.suwan, regularly brought him to see Luangpū Suk, a 'highly virtuous monk' and learn from him. On completing his secondary schooling, Vinai went to Bangkok and joined the Bangkok Technical College, where he studied tourism and languages, and received a certificate in Tourist Administration.

(b) *Lay asceticism (1971–1974)*. For three months he worked at the well-known Dusit Thani Hotel in Bangkok. According to his popular biography (available from various free booklets published by the Dhammaleela Foundation), he left his job 'due to an interest in studying philosophy, religions and meditation' (*Heart Blossom*, Bangkok, 1991: back cover).

While living in Bangkok, he observed the confusion caused by constant striving for many things in order to maintain life. Owing to his innate wisdom, he realized the impermanence of life, seeing the appearance and disappearance of all worldly phenomena. With his virtue and perfection highly developed, he made a strong determination to abandon the confused worldly life and took to the life of an ascetic or Yogi, in search of Truth. (*Out of the Free Mind*, Bangkok, 1989:133; *Biography*, Bundanoon, 1992b:3)

He was then only 20 years old, and living with Phra'khrū Sophit (one of his early teachers) at Wat Rājādhivās, and there he began a serious study of the Buddha Dharma. In 1970 he read his first two books on Buddhism, *Handbook for Mankind* and *Follow the Footsteps of Arahanta* (both by Buddhādāsa), and after that 'he realized that nothing in this world is permanent' (1992b:4).

With his virtues highly developed, his heart was filled with the perfections of the Buddha. He made a strong determination to abandon the confusion of a worldly life. (1992b:4)

Seeing 'the uncertainty and nonsense of worldly life', he established himself in the practice of 'yoga' (here meaning lay asceticism in the Siamese tradition) for four years (1971–74), wandering about, 'heading for solitude' (1991:back cover). In his quest for truth, he read a number of books (especially those of Buddhādāsa, Luang Vichitr Vadakān, Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi') and studied under well-known teachers, such as Luangpū Kao and Buddhādāsa.

Throughout his religious life, he and his followers made biographical notes on his progress, which I have found very useful here. The main events of his four years as a lay ascetic are as follows:

1971. Led a solitary life as a yogi, observing the 8 Precepts and meditating (Breath meditation) at Asom [*Ashram*] Sāthana' or Sādhana Dwelling, on the island of Kok Samed, Rayong province, attended by a friend. This placename was inspired from a reading of Tagore. Realizing 'a kinship with all living beings' and that it is not necessary to kill animals for food, he gave up meat and lived on vegetables and fruits that he could find on the island. (1992b:4 f)

After 8 months on the island, he left and headed for Suan Mokkh in Chaiyā, Surāththāni province, where Buddhādāsa lives, and there studied and practised Dharma for a while. When he visited his parents, he 'passed Dhamma practice on to them' (1992b:5).

1972. Practised yoga for 'self-purification' in Kaeo Surakān Cave, Nakhorn Sī Thammarāj province, under a teacher (not named), for over 6 months. The cave contained the corpses of more than 10 men and women in various stages of decomposition.

Watching day to day the decomposition of the bodies, he lived with these rotten corpses which became bloated, with bloody and body fluids exuding and also with the smell of rotten flesh. To expose and search for the internal organs for contemplation, he cut open rotten bodies, removed some organs and preserved them in liquid. Living side by side with these corpses enabled him to make good progress in the way of Dhamma. (1992b:5) [f8]

By the end of the year, he was wandering about and preaching 'north and south'. He toured Nakhorn Pathom and Nakhom Nayok provinces in central Siam. Because of his 'unique looks and the way he spoke' — he had handsome Indian features — many then thought that he was a yogi from Nepal.

One of his followers recorded in his notebook that at that time, the ascetic Vinai used an umbrella *net* (*klōt*) like that of a *tudong* (*dhutaṅga*) monk. For his almsbowl he used half a coconut shell which he polished until it shone. He was in the habit of polishing it while talking Dharma to the laity. When he was on almsround, he kept to the decorum of a monk's (such as not looking at people's faces). He took food only from the almsbowl and only 5–7 spoonfuls at one sitting, giving the rest to those who would have the remains. When he gave Dharma talks, he 'would fill everything around him with loving-kindness for healing' (1992b:64). He made his own robes, and wore sandals made from rubber tyres. The philosophy of his spiritual life may be epitomized in these words: *When with others, be as if alone; when alone, be as if with others* (cf 1992b:12), meaning 'do not be lost in the crowd, do no evil even in private' [Introd 2.2].

1973. Left Nakhorn Nayok for the Rains Retreat in Lan Phra'kaeo Cave, Phū Kradung Mountain, Loei province (in the far north), one of the coldest regions of Siam. The cave was very cold and it was difficult to find food. Sometimes he had to gather plants growing in the vicinity and eat them with

sticky rice, salt and chili. His mind grew in spiritual strength in the silence and depths of the forest. His body, however, was beginning to suffer from his self-denial. One day, while sitting in meditation with his mind concentrated, he had a vision.

He saw an old man with a bright face who was carrying a robe in one hand and a crystal ball in the other. The old man said to him: 'Yantra, your time has arrived! We have been waiting for you for a long time. Now is the time that you will take up your duty and take up your role in sustaining Buddhism.'

When he received the robe and the crystal ball he felt the pure energy flow from them into his heart and he felt rapture and happiness. After this the vision disappeared. (1992b:7)

It was probably this incident that led him to adopt the new name of *Yantra*. Immediately afterwards he fell seriously ill with cerebral malaria and was admitted by his devotees to the Sirirāj Hospital, Bangkok. Then, he rested at home until he fully recovered.

(c) *Life as a monk*. In 1974, he gave up the life of a yogi to become a monk at midnight of the full moon day of the 6th Siamese lunar month or May (i.e. Visākha Pūjā) at Wat Ratanārām (Wat Bang Bo), Pāk Phanang, Nakhorn Sī Thammarāj, and was called *Phra' Vinai Amaro Bhikkhu*. His preceptor was Phra'khru Sthita.śīl'ācārya (Sathit.sīlā.chān), with Phra'khru Sudharma.samācārya (Su'tham.samāchān) as the First Ordination Teacher (*kamma,vāc'ācariya*) (who announces the Act). The Second Ordination Teacher (*anusdsan'acariya*) (who gives the first formal monastic instruction) was not named. Because he recovered from a serious ailment, his preceptor gave him the Dharma name (*chāyā*) of *Amaro* (immortal).

From here on, his life as a monk has been documented rains (*vassa*) by rains (*Phra Ajahn Yantra Amaro's Biography*, Bundanoon:

Suññatārām Forest Monastery, 1992b), on which I base the following account (the years here representing, as in the life of the Buddha, the rains retreat he spent and by which monastic seniority is counted):

(1) 1974, *Wat Ratanārām*, where he spent the rains at the invitation of his parents and relatives, and during which time ‘he studied textbooks and served his religious teachers’ (1992b:8). After the rains, in November, he wandered on foot following the rail tracks and sleeping under an umbrella net in a graveyard. He stayed at Suan Mokkh for a while before travelling up to Nakhorn Pathom province, preaching along the way as the occasion arose. In due course, he arrived in Nakhorn Nāyok.

(2) 1975, *Khau Lūk Chāng cave in Nakhorn Nāyok*. It was a ‘new cave and nobody had ever stayed there before; there were many kinds of poisonous snakes in the area’. (The cave was probably ‘newly’ discovered.)

The snakes liked to sleep under his bamboo platforms as if they could sense that this monk practised Dhamma and did not kill sentient beings, so they could live together peacefully.

He practised mindfulness of breathing continuously. This mindfulness became stronger until he could use it to control and cut off external contacts and stop all perceptions. His mind was concentrated deeply into absorption. He sat in this posture without moving for three days and three nights.

When he came out from this absorption he contemplate[d] the arising and disappearing of the body, feeling, thoughts and Dhamma. He realized that it is in the nature of things to disappear because they do not really exist....

This knowledge brought him rapture and happiness. He saw the suffering and troubles of all beings trapped in the cycle of birth and death, and this moved and inspired him immensely, as if the spirit of the **great Bodhisatta of Compassionate Love** had appeared in his mind. He thought that he would study all the teachings of the Buddha and help all beings to be free from suffering.

After this, every year before the end of a rains-retreat, he would practise in this way for three days and three nights.

(1992b:8, with minor grammatical and typographical corrections.)

(3) 1976, *Phū Kradung mountain, Loei province*. This was a time of communist activity and political unrest when many rebel students hid in the forest, causing the government to close it. The Head Officer of the National Park, however, allowed Yantra and his two novices to occupy the same cave [Lān Phra'kaeo Cave, 1973] he had used before since he 'had pure intention to practise the Dhamma'. He continued with his Breath Meditation 'and attained the state of absorption'. According to his biographers, 'this was the second time in his practice, since monkhood, that he acquired so much wisdom, energy and encouragement' (1992b:10).

After the rains, he walked north deep into a region controlled by communist guerillas. Along the way in the forest, he came across many dead bodies, 'some of them had been dismembered and the parts were strewn around' (1992b:10). At this time, he often discoursed on the meditation on death to his followers.

(4) 1977, *Tham Din (a cave), Uttaradit (north central Siam)*. He led a rather secluded life, refraining from speaking and sometimes not eating. Only a few times, he came down the hills to meet the people who had come to see him. As he continued his meditation, he realized 'the chain of phenomenal cause and effect and the inter-connection of all things and events which make up the circle of suffering' (1992b:11). From Tham Din, he and his followers walked to Chiangmai, about 180 km away.

(5) 1978, *the upper floor of a two-storied cave, Tad Mōk waterfalls, Maetang district, Chiangmai province*. Outside the rains retreat, Yantra always led his disciples through the forests and

mountains, staying in a place for only two or three nights at the most. According to his biographers, Yantra always undertook these five ascetic practices: going on almsround, going on almsround in line, eating only once a day from a bowl, wearing triple robes, and dwelling in the forest (1992b:12). During their wanderings, Yantra and his pupils encountered various natural obstacles, such as difficult roads and heavy floods. When travelling, they would only drink water or a cup of milk.

Once he met some monks who expressed their disapproval of spirit worship by the villagers. He answered that 'they [the monks] should not look down upon or blame the villagers because what they believed, they could take refuge [*sic*] in the time of their suffering'. Then he told the monks to help them clean the spirit house, adding that 'the devas or heavenly beings liked cleanliness' (1992b:13).

(6) 1979, *Huey Bon cave, Fang district, Chiangmai province*. The mountain roads here were extremely slippery and difficult. After the rains, guided by a local monk, they passed Paeng Luang village and walked into Burma. He made pilgrimages to some important shrines and pagodas before he was arrested at Mohlamang and taken to Rangoon [today Yangon] where he spent four months in jail, and where there were more than a hundred monks and other prisoners. He continued his meditation and austerities, which impressed the guards and prisoners, and was given prison privileges. He even gave Dharma talks, and every weekend, some Burmese would bring almsfood to him in jail.

One night while he was deeply absorbed in meditation, he felt his body floating up into the sky. His body exploded into countless tiny particles. His mind was concentrated into one-pointedness and he felt illuminated, light and free. He felt peaceful that he had never experienced before. Dhamma appeared clearly to him. He

had no doubt at all about the truth of the Lord Buddha's teachings. He saw everything as the lessons of life. Everything acted according to its own nature. He felt brave in the Dhamma and could be anywhere without fear. (1992b:16)

On being released, he returned to Siam by the way he had come.

(7) 1980, *Bān Paeng Luang, Chiangdao district, Chiangmai*, where Gen. Moh Heng, the leader of the local independence movement, hosted him throughout the rains. The general ordered his soldiers to guard Yantra and on full moon days they observed the Precepts and listened to his Dharma talks. During this period, he reflected on his prison experience, which seemed to have somewhat shaken him, for

he felt like emerging from water; he will dry off in time. When a bottle containing intoxicant is emptied, the smell lingers in the bottle. It takes time for all the traces to disappear completely. (1992b:16)

(8) 1981, *Pha Tong cave, Maejun district, Chiangrai (northernmost province)*. He spent the rains with 50 monks and novices. That year he meditated on the three characteristics of all things: 'Impermanence, Unstability and Non-Self, and he realized that 'Nibbana was nowhere else but here and now' (1992b:174).

(9) 1982, *Tham Wua Suññatā, Maehongson province*. On the way there, he was often caught in heavy rain. Passing through Pai district, he wrote in his notebook: 'Even if the robe is wet, never mind, walk on with joy. Dhamma is to be one with rain.' (1992b:17)

(10) 1983, *Kok Māk (an island), Trāt province (near Kampuchean border)*, where he lived in seclusion. At the end of the rains, he was down with malaria and hospitalized in the province hospital.

(11) 1984, *summit of Kitchakūt [Vulture Peak] mountain, Chantaburi province*. Hundreds of people from the neighbouring provinces walked with him from Trāt province to this place ‘because they knew Phra Ajahn’s virtues and practice’ (1992b:19).

(12) 1985, *Kroeng Kra Wta, Sangkhlaburi district, Kanchanaburi province*, where he established the Suññatārām Forest Monastery, though the place was infested with wild animals and malaria. His health had been poor and he was often physically weak due to lack of rest.

Therefore he called all his disciples to stay with him to learn and train themselves. That is why in this year there were seventy-four monks and novices and many hundreds of lay people, who stayed with him and they all tried to increase their effort, and practise hard. (1992b:20)

During this rains, he announced to his followers that he would be away for at least 5 years: he was going on a tour of the West. In April 1986, he left for Finland, and visited such countries as Denmark, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia.

(13) 1986, *Auvila village, near Juva town, about 400 km from Mikkeli, north Finland*. At this time, he wrote poems and the book, *The Heart of Void*. The natives were friendly and almost every house in the village invited him for lunch. After the rains, he visited Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and then travelled south to Germany. In Belgium, England, France and Italy, he visited their historical buildings, churches and parliament houses. Sometimes he stayed with Christian priests ‘to establish good relationships between the religions’ (1992b:22). He spent several weeks in Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia.

(14) 1987, *Mally Montanisa, Yugoslavia*. The villagers ‘showed

great interest, enthusiasm and respect for Phra Ajahn's teaching and his example' and often visited him (1992b:22). During his 8 months in Yugoslavia, he gave a number of Dharma talks to and discussed meditation techniques with the Belgrade University students. After two years in Europe, he left for the USA in January 1988.

(15) 1988, *Loma Linda, California*, where his ailing sister offered a quiet house in the hills, and where he looked after her until her death that same year. Many Siamese and Americans came to study and practise meditation under him. After the rains, he taught Dharma at a number of places, including Siamese temples. He was in Vancouver for a week and then returned to the US in January 1989. After the US, he visited Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. In March he arrived in Australia on the invitation of the Australian Buddhist Mission.

(16) 1989, *Bellbird Wildlife Refuge, near Port Macquarie, New South Wales, Australia*. Australians, Siamese and other Asians visited him. A devout layperson offered him 100 acres of land near Bundanoon village, bordering on Morton National Park, for his rains retreat, and for monks to reside there to give Dharma instructions.

(17) 1990, '*Suññatārām*', *Bundanoon, New South Wales, Australia*. During this rains, he took time to rest, write and paint. However, when the occasion arose, he would characteristically offer long Dharma talks and meditation instructions lasting hours, sometimes twice a day.

After over five years away from Siam, he returned in June 1991 and resided at Wat Rajadhivas, Bangkok. The day following his arrival, hundreds came to listen to his Dharma talk and to offer alms. As before, he again travelled through the south, northeast and central regions of Siam visiting old teachers, preaching and counselling as he went along.

(18) 1991, *Suññatārām Forest Monastery, Kroeng Kra Wia, Sangkhlaburi district, Kanchanaburi province* (where he had spent his 12th rains), with 92 monks, 20 novices and about 100 lay devotees. His biographers say he intends to spend his 19th rains (1992) here, too.

(d) *Yantra in Ipoh (1989) and Kuala Lumpur (1992)*. At the time of my writing this book, Yantra made a visit to Malaysia. We took this opportunity to have a first hand participant observation of this remarkable teacher, and submit a comparative analysis of his methods, especially in connection with his appearance in Ipoh in 1989. On the night of Friday, 19th June 1992, Yantra made a public appearance in the P. H. Hendry Memorial Hall of the Brickfields Buddhist Vihara, Kuala Lumpur. The event was a last-minute decision and was announced for 8 pm, by which time several monks were already seated on the stage. There were 2 Theravāda and 2 Mahāyāna monks. One of them was Mahinda, a Malaysian pupil of K. Sri Dhammananda and one of Yantra's followers and current promoters.

While waiting for Yantra, Mahinda spoke about how he first met Yantra and the first rains retreat at Yantra's temple in Siam. Among the reasons that attracted Mahinda to Yantra was Mahinda's first meeting with him in Singapore where Yantra brought Mahinda to the seaside and sat 'watching the waves' until about 1 am. Mahinda then went on to give a general talk covering topics like giving, moral conduct, and other basic teachings, to fill in the time while they were waiting for Yantra. Mahinda's talk went on for over an hour.

During that time Yantra approached the hall several times but did not enter. Some devotees went down on their knees a number of times as they awaited the master. In this connection, Mahinda spoke picador-like about patience and repeatedly

stressed in his somewhat teasingly patronising manner that 'if you know Phra Acharn, you would know that his teaching is *akāliko*', meaning that he is always late and gives lengthy talks. The crowd laughed. Such a remark is obviously a *joke*, one which is common in connection with charismatic leaders [6.75d]. The scene somehow evokes a *corrida de toros* where the picador prepares the bull for the matador.

In 1989, during his talk in Ipoh in the hall of Tong Lam Siew Chock nunnery, off Green Lane, there were seated behind him six or seven Siamese monks (probably his pupils). Yantra then, as in KL, performed the routine of late entrance, which apparently helps heighten crowd excitement. The talk was scheduled for 8 pm but he arrived at about 10 pm, and the session ended around 2 am. Of some 100 people in the hall, only about 20 people remained behind. Some of those who had waited earlier on, left even before it started. Just before this engagement, Yantra was at the Ipoh Buddhist Youth Association centre casually talking to various individuals in turn. When reminded of the time, he told them not to be concerned about it. [fl 1 fl 2]

Coming back to the KL event: At about 9.30 pm several monks brought in a TV set and a video player, while Mahinda went on talking. Around this time, too, a table was set up outside the hall for Yantra's free publications (expensively produced books on his life, poems and drawings in English) and two about A4-size colour pictures (one a bust portrait, the other a half-body portrait with 'Hollywood, Ca.' on the bottom left hand corner) for free distribution. On the back of the second portrait is mentioned in Siamese 'Korng.thun,būchā nai Phra' Āchān Yantra' (Ajahn Yantra Dhamma Fund) with Yantra as its 'Honorary President'.

The table was managed by a few Siamese lay devotees from Yantra's entourage. The crowd at the table was disorderly and

had to be restrained from rushing and taking more than one copy each of the materials. For a while it reminded one of an annual grand almsgiving ceremony in a local wat when, after the monks had eaten, the crowd began to practically jostle and scuffle around the food table in a riot of tentacle-hands grasping whatever bits of ‘blessed remains’ that could be found! This is popular Buddhism, but where the food is more popular.

Mahinda’s talk was then interrupted to show a video-tape which was, according to him, about *piṇḍapāta* (almsround by monks). But the one hour show in Siamese was actually about Yantra himself, who appeared almost throughout. While the video was being shown on a small screen to a packed hall, a taped reading of Yantra’s poems was being played in the background. After a while, a woman attempted to give a running commentary of the show in English but found it too long and difficult.

At about 10.15 pm, while the show was going on, Yantra went up the stage unnoticed and quietly took his seat. The hall lights were still dimmed at that time. The show ended at about 10.30 pm, and the lights were switched on again — and there right in centre stage sat Yantra crosslegged with his palms together in *añjalī*, eyes closed! He made a slow mindful bow to the audience, and after a pause began his talk, speaking in a controlled and soft dulcet voice, characteristic of meditation gurus. (While Yantra was talking in the hall, Mahinda was in the monks’ quarters speaking to his own smaller congregation of about 10 people.) More than 200 people packed and overflowed the hall during Yantra’s talk. Many of those outside the hall were talking away. The talk ended just before 2 am.

As in KL (1992), so it was in Ipoh (1989), Yantra spoke in a similar tone, using narratives, repeating the same ideas with

different examples each time. His favourite slogan was 'Watch your mind!' There were those in the audience, especially middle-aged and elderly Chinese women, who gazed wide-eyed and spellbound: one observer remarked that some members of the audience conducted themselves in awe as if 'appearing before the emperor'. Most of his fervent followers believe that he has psychic power of healing and a very advanced meditation level. From the books published about him by his pupils, it is evident (from the quotations in this section, for example) that at least some of his followers regard him as being enlightened or to have achieved some level of Sainthood. [f6 f8]

In Ipoh (1989) (and in other local towns which Yantra visited then), his devotees were told to bring a white lotus each, which were then blessed by him with a sprinkling of holy water on them and the lotuses as they filed past him. The lotus was then said to be able to heal sickness. (However, we have not received any report of healing that had actually occurred.) This practice was one of his favourite routines then, though in many places (e.g. Melaka and KL), devotees found it very difficult to get white lotuses. In KL (1992), however, many devotees brought large bottles of water for blessing, but no lotuses.

During his Ipoh (1989) visit, Yantra's English was not as good as during his KL visit (1992). Even then, in KL, he sometimes spoke in halting English, and when coming to difficult terms or ideas, he used Siamese, which Mahinda 'translated' into English. (As far as I know, Mahinda does not know Siamese, but he could have picked it up during his spell with Yantra.)

(e) Method of teaching. By any Buddhist standard, Yantra's method of preaching is traditional. For example, he gives traditional Poshadha sermons and quotes Sutra passages. In his use

of poems and drawings, he is clearly emulating Buddhādāsa, whom he himself admires. And like Buddhādāsa, too, Yantra often uses colloquial idiom in his preaching. He says, for example, 'Dhamma is duty' and 'Try your best to do your duty' as members of the family (as father, mother, son, daughter) and so on (*Noble Treasure*, Bangkok, 1992a:12).

Another effective teaching aid he uses is what might be called 'numerical Dharma' like that found in the Aṅguttara Nikāya. Two of his numerical Dharmas (albeit in Siamese) are well known: he warns against over-indulging in the pleasures of the 3 K's, *kin kām kiat* (food, sex, fame), and puns on homonyms like *suk* and *sukh*, which in Siamese, can mean 'excess/cooked' as well as 'cool/happiness' (the latter, from Pali *sukha*) (1992a:42 92 93). Elsewhere, he claims that his 'medicine for long life' are the 5 A's (again in Siamese): *āhān* (Skt *āhāra*, 'food'), i.e. 'fresh food'; *ākāt* (Skt *ākāśa*), 'clean air', *auk.kamlang.kāi*, 'regular exercise'; *ārom* (Pali *ārammaṇa*), 'good temper'; and *āchom* (Skt *ācamana*, 'cleansing'), 'regular elimination of waste' (1992a:93).

Although some of Yantra's drawings look like Buddhādāsa's Zen sketches, Yantra also works with colours. Most of his drawings are accompanied by pithy religious sayings, especially those reflective of the nature of life. A collection of such drawings and verses are found in his *Visuddhi Dhamma*, a Siamese work translated into English as *Out of the Free Mind* (Bangkok, 1989). The poetically sensitive may find most of the verses rather bland and platitudinal, even crude; if so, the difficulty lies in their translation. They were originally in Siamese and were 'verses of learning' and reflection notes, not poetic palate ticklers. There seems to be a tendency amongst the 'poetically sophisticated' that if one could not understand a poem, or only a few people understood it, it is a 'good' poem. Yantra's Buddhist verses can be understood almost at once, but

they can have very profound meanings. They are meant for teaching the masses.

(f) *The charisma of Yantra.* Yantra is an excellent living example of a Buddhist charismatic. From the various publications about him produced by the Dhammaleela Foundation and by his pupils, it appears that he had been preparing his charismatic growth all the way beginning in 1971 when he was 20, an age which was regarded as mature enough for monkhood, but he began as a lay ascetic instead [f5]. He is perhaps one of the best self-documented young monks we have today. In this subsection, we shall briefly discuss how and why he did this and how his charisma grew. The comments here are at best preliminary to encourage further research into an interesting current religious phenomenon.

(f1) It is likely that Yantra's religious tendencies began with his childhood, when his parents regularly brought him to the monasteries to see monks and listen to Dharma. Like the average Siamese Buddhist child, he was a friendly youth. His training in Tourist Administration especially called for *interpersonal and communication skills*. The beginnings of his charisma lie in his natural Siamese Buddhist friendliness and his professional training.

(f2) His schooling and professional training were especially useful in inculcating a habit of *making notes*. The average Siamese youth, by college age, would have been familiar with Siamese poetry and could write their own verses and poems. In a way, Siamese education still retains its classical traditions much more than the systems of the neighbouring countries. (It should be remembered that Siam has never been directly colonized by any foreign country.) In other words, while Yantra's

ability in versification is not extraordinary, at least as far as most Siamese are concerned, *their translations serve as an innovative means of teaching the English-speaking Buddhists*. His verses and drawings are a second source of his charisma.

(f3) Almost all of the contents of Yantra's publications comprise of or are based on *his personal and autobiographical notes, and those of his followers*, and they cover the whole of his life as a religious: as a lay ascetic (*yogī*) and as a monk up to the time of my writing (1992). Throughout his religious life, numerous colour photographs of himself (most of them very well-posed in various postures and gestures) and his impressive activities at home and overseas have powerful selling points. Most of such photos end up on the Buddhist shrine where they are venerated [6.75d]. It has been remarked that *Heart Blossom* (1991) and *The Path of the Sun* (1992c) are like expensive-looking glossy tourist prospectuses! Such methods are however not new, and have been well used by mega-wealthy new movements like the Dhammakāya Foundation. It is not just a matter of verses, notes and photos, but how they are presented as mass media. Siamese printing standards — one of the highest in Asia — do the rest. All this is the third source of his charisma.

(f4) The next point, regarding his fourth source of charisma, is probably a minor one, but nevertheless mentionable for the sake of completeness. When he was born, he was given the name of Vinai (Pali *vinaya*), which is a very common name amongst the Siamese. The name 'Phra Ajahn *Vinai* Amaro' somehow does not sound as charismatic as 'Phra Ajahn *Mantra* Amaro'. The name *Yantra* is not only rare as a personal Siamese name, but was the name by which he was addressed by the old man of his meditative vision in the Lin Phra'kaeo Cave in 1973. The word *yantra* also has Vajrayanist significance, but is probably

just a nice coincidence. What is interesting is that the word appeared in a vision. In other words, it was already in his subconscious. As such, it might be said the name is a source of *mantric power* and charisma for him.

(f5) One of the most powerful sources of Yantra's charisma lies in his *visions and meditative attainments*, or their claims. Both experiences cannot be externally demonstrated, even if that were possible, not many would be qualified or wise enough to discern them. His visions (like the one of the old man), if psychoanalyzed by experts would yield interesting results. Suffice it to say that well-known saints, especially the founders of the great religions, have had some sort of vision (e.g. the Five Great Dreams of the Bodhisattva, A 3:240–242). Although Yantra's 1973 vision may not have been as dramatic as those of Joan of Arc's hallucinations (all the better for it), it announced one of the most important turning points in his life. What is remarkable is that *everyone* has some sort of vision (usually in the form of dreams or voices), but it is the manner in which one utilizes such experiences that make them a source of charisma [Introd 8.1].

Two interesting questions here are: *Why did Yantra become a lay ascetic and not a monk at 20 (the usual age for ordination)? And, why did he not remain a lay ascetic?* The answer to the first question cannot be culled from the texts available so far. As to the second question, the answer is more obvious. Yantra had a vision of an old man telling him to ordain (1992b:7). The vision is interesting in its symbolism: the old man with a bright face carrying a robe in one hand and a crystal ball in the other. *The old man with a bright face* can be taken as an archetypal symbol of a self-actualized Dharma-person — the *bright face* symbolizes wisdom, *old age* represents maturity; both present a vision

of Yantra in the future. The *robe* is the social means towards that future, since it is the most respected religious means open to any Siamese man. The *crystal ball* is a classic symbol — the wish-fulfilling gem — that is, the Enlightened Mind; this is the spiritual goal.

The crystal ball can also be taken to represent wisdom, while the robe compassion. Both qualities are those of the Buddha, in whom they are perfectly balanced. Yantra's ascetic practices are said to 'purify' him, that is, cleanse him of ignorance. It is like polishing a smudged crystal ball which then becomes clear, as is its original nature. His desire to help others is represented by his rapturous outburst after three days and three nights of continuous meditation, at the end of which he felt as if 'the spirit of the great Bodhisatta of Compassionate Love' had appeared in his mind (1992b:8). This Bodhisattva is, of course, Avalokiteśvara, the most popular of Buddhist deities, better known than the Buddha Himself. From my understanding, this imagery represents Yantra's great desire to go down to the level of the masses (including the Chinese who worship Guanyin) and reach out to them in compassion. After all, when Westerners asked Yantra what his religion is, his reply is 'My religion is loving kindness, compassion, and understanding others.' (1992a:47). (All this analysis is, I must admit, merely an amateurish conjecture, the truth of which only Yantra himself would best know.)

(f6) Contrary to Weber's conception of charisma as something inherent in a person, *charisma is often thrust at one*. One of the most effective ways of charisma-building is in its broadcast, by followers and the public, of the virtues of the person [11:6.72], as in the case of the Buddha, for example:

And a good report of (His) reputation has spread about regarding

the Venerable Gotama thus: 'Such indeed is the Blessed One... the Teacher of devas and humans, Enlightened, Blessed!'... Good indeed is the sight of an Arhat such as This! (D 1:87 f, Sn 103 = M 92)

Yantra's biographies contain two kinds of personal virtues and epithets: those he himself claims and those that his biographers and pupils attribute to him. From the books, it is difficult to determine which is which, for example, the following statements must have been spoken by Yantra himself and then reported by his followers:

- "'Yantra, your time has arrived!'" ('the old man' in his vision. 1992b:7);
- 'the snakes liked to sleep under his bamboo platforms' (1992b:8);
- 'he could use it to control and cut off external contacts and stop all perceptions' (1992b:8);
- 'attained the state of absorption' (1992b:8);
- 'he realized **the chain of phenomenal cause and effect and the inter-connection of all things...**' (1992b:11, original emphases);
- 'his body exploded into countless tiny particles' (1992b:15);
- 'Phra Ajahn realized that *Nibbana was nowhere else but here and now*' (1992b:17, original emphasis),
- 'Phra Ajahn's intention... was to train monks and novices in strict *Vinaya* (rules of the monks) and religious routine' (1992b:26).

On the other hand, it is obvious that the following statements are attributed to Yantra by his followers:

- 'with his virtue and perfection highly developed' (1989:133 1992b:3);
- 'his heart was filled with the perfections of the Buddha' (1992b:4);
- 'by nature he is a **pure, kind-hearted person**' (1992b:6, original emphasis);
- they knew of Phra Ajahn's virtues and practice' (1992b:19).
- '[he] would fill everything around him with loving-kindness for healing' (1992b:64).

Yantra's devotees are understandably moved to sometimes romanticize the personal qualities and spiritual adventures of a great charismatic. It is not so important whether these statements are true or false as the fact that they have been made, and have had their effect in attracting charisma. The basic principle here is that *charisma tends to attract charisma*.

(f7) Most if not all of such claims are founded on Yantra's personality and spiritual experiences. After all, in the religious life, whether as a lay ascetic or a *tudong* (Pali *dhutaṅga*) monk, the aim is to emulate virtuous teachers and cultivate one's own spiritual virtues, and Yantra, as evident from his accounts, has done just that. As a source of charisma, his religious asceticism significantly attracts the ready and rich respect that *tudong* monks command in Siam.

I may be labouring this next point, but the fact that Yantra is a *man* is a vital factor in his success as a charismatic. For some kind of women (especially those attracted to him personally), his manhood serves as an *objective symbol of charisma* [f11 6.714]. Were Yantra a lay woman ascetic, it is highly unlikely that Yantra would have commanded much respect, not to mention attention, especially when there is no official bhikkhunī Order in Siam.

The vision of a monk in jungle brown carrying his folded umbrella-net on one shoulder, the almsbowl bag on the other and a kettle in one hand, calmly trudging down the road evokes such a strong religious emotion that it has inspired a sort of patron saint of the ascetic life in the Arhat Sīvalī, whose image one sometimes sees on a Siamese shrine. In the case of Yantra, he preferred residing in a cave wherever he could, at least during the first 9 or 10 years of his monkhood. In fact, for 7 rains retreats out of Yantra's first 9 years as a monk (and

even as a lay ascetic before that), he lived in a cave. Otherwise, he would be walking as a wandering ascetic covering vast distances into the remotest, even most dangerous (wild or communist-infested), corners of the country, and was even arrested in Burma where he spent 4 months in jail. These are proverbial headlines for the charismatic press.

(f8) Among Yantra's *subjective symbols of charisma* [f11 6.714] are his claims in meditative attainment, or those attributed to him, for example:

- A. He had attained or easily attains absorption (1992b:7 8 10 16).
- B. He felt rapture and happiness (1992b:7).
- C. He felt his body floating up into the sky and exploded into countless tiny particles, and he felt illuminated, light and free (1992b:16).
- D. He could use it [meditation] to control and cut off external contacts and stop all perceptions (1992b:8).
- E. He had meditated continuously for 3 days and 3 nights and does so at least once a year (1992b:8).
- F. His heart was filled with the perfections of the Buddha (1992b:4); he had no doubt at all about the truth of the Lord Buddha's teachings (1992b:16); [his] intention... was to train monks and novices in the *Vinaya* (1992b:26).

Especially for the uninitiated and those who do not meditate, this is easily a very impressive and inimitable track record. I have labelled the experiences A B C D E and F for easy reference. Experience A is an experience of meditation absorption (*jhāna*) when all the 5 mental hindrances (sensual craving, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt) (A 3:62, Vbh 378) have at least been temporarily suspended. Item A is an underlying experience for all the other experiences, i.e. BCDE and probably F.

Basically, item A would at least comprise the 5 absorption-factors (*jhān'aṅga*, M 1:40): initial application (of attention), sustained application, physical rapture, happiness and one-pointedness of mind — they constitute the 1st Absorption. In the 2nd Absorption, the two 'applications' of thought cease. In the 3rd Absorption, physical rapture ceases as the experience becomes more refined; and in the 4th Absorption, there is only mental equanimity with one-pointedness of the mind. Any conscientious meditator, even in a good beginner's retreat, and certainly through sustained and proper practice, would be able to attain at least the 1st Absorption. Item B, as such, refers to either the 1st or the 2nd Absorption. [Piyasilo, *The Buddha's Teachings*, 1991b:chs 26 & 27.]

Item C is often a unique experience, that is, if it arises with the attainment of one-pointedness of mind (*cittass'ek'aggatā*). As a rule, there is also a feeling of 'oneness' with everything, with the universe. One could, as it were, experience fantastic forms when the subject-object dichotomy is transcended. One could feel infinitely stretched out all over the universe like a film of soap, or in this case, explode as it were into countless tiny particles. These are all mind-made side-shows of nascent meditation concentration; it is only the beginning of the mental journey. Some teachers, especially traditional Vipassana masters, would insist that such experiences are unnecessary, even disapprove of them.

Item D, if true, is probably a description of the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā*).*vedayita.nirodha*) or the attainment of extinction (*nirodha.samāpatti*) (D 1:301 3:265 290, A 4:410), (described by Yantra with textbook accuracy), that is, the temporary suspension of all consciousness and mental activity, following the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-perception (i.e. the 8th Absorption). In a manner of speaking, this is only

one step 'below' Nirvana — as such, it is a very extraordinary claim to make. [See Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, 4th ed 1980:132 f. Piyasilo, *The Buddha's Teachings*, 1991b:226.]

Items D and E go together: one could be in a state of cessation continuously for a few days up to a week or more each time, as in the case of the Buddha (V 1:1-4), but one has to ascertain the period just before getting into the state, a sort of setting an internal bioclock. Technically, one should first have perfect mastery of all the 8 Absorptions, and the previous attainment of Non-return (*anāgāmi.phala*) or Arhathood (*arahatta*). On the other hand, there is a possibility that one could have misdiagnosed one's meditation experience. Moreover, non-Buddhist yogis are known to be able to go into a state of suspended animation and be buried for a whole week or more.

By traditional standards, items A B and C are run-of-the-mill experiences in calmness meditation (*samatha.bhāvanā*). The only difference is that scrupulous masters would not announce them, nor allow their pupils to do so. Traditional masters would find it curious about why Yantra makes public knowledge of such complex meditation experiences as those represented by items D and E. Such reports, however, seem to have stopped just before his 7th rains (1980) to date — it is possible that they are so commonplace to Yantra that they are not worth reporting any more. Such religious experiences — and those regarding the corpses in the Kaeo Surakan cave [1972] — create a certain *distance* between the charismatic master and his followers, who often feel that they are not as good as the master, perhaps not even good *enough* for him [6.713].

Item F comprises claims that Yantra's 'heart was filled with the perfections of the Buddha', that 'he had no doubt at all about the truth of the Lord Buddha's teachings' and that his intention 'was to train monks and novices in strict

Vinaya'. Such claims hint at the attainment of Stream-winning (*sotāpatti*), the first path of Sainthood, and by which he would have at the most only 7 more lives before attaining Enlightenment. The Pali Canon defines a Stream-winner (*sotāpanna*) as one who has 'unshakable faith in the Buddha... the Dharma... the Sangha...and blessed with flawless moral virtue dear to the Aryas...' (S 5:360 f).

Here again it is difficult to substantiate the claim. Only Yantra himself will know the truth; then again he could be mistaken. Anyway, there will always be those who would believe. The mere acquaintance with someone who even as much as *claims* to be a Saint, or one's proclaiming it vicariously, is surely at least enthralling for most, if not ego boosting for some.

(f9) One of the characteristics of a charismatic person is that he has *inimitable courage*, or at least perceived to have it. On this point I would like to briefly discuss two interesting incidents: the one regarding the cave of corpses and the incident of the spirit-worshippers. In 1972, while living in the Kaeo Surakān Cave, Yantra not only contemplated on festering corpses and lived with them, but actually cut them up to obtain certain internal organs which he preserved in liquid for meditation (1992b:5). Remarkable as his deeds may seem, they are against canonical and traditional tenets (e.g. Vism 183 f, cf M 1:58 f 89, S 5:131), where practical advice and health rules are given (cf A 2:17 where only the 'perception', *saññā*, of a corpse, not a real one, is sufficient for meditation). It should be remembered that Yantra was then only a lay ascetic under the instructions of a certain unnamed teacher. Such practices, nevertheless, become sources of charisma especially when they cannot be, or are not easily, emulated by others, certainly not his lay followers and admirers. This might, however, create the wrong impression

that Buddhism is such a macabre and difficult religion to practise, certainly not one for the daily life of a lay person.

The second incident in connection with the inimitable courage of a charismatic is the story of the monks and the spirit-devotees. After his 5th rains retreat (1978), Yantra met some monks who disapproved of the spirit-worship practised by the villagers, a stand expected of an average well-trained monk — that of educating the villagers in the True Teaching. Yantra, as it were, capitalized on the situation by answering that the monks ‘should not look down upon or blame the villagers because what they believed, they could take refuge in [in] the time of their suffering’ (1992b:13). There are some technical issues involved here.

By right, Yantra, as a monk, should have spoken to the monks privately and appreciated the problem from the monks’ side, so that they ‘become like milk and water’ (*khīr’odakī.bhūtā*, V 1:351). The impression one gets from the story is that, like a Christ throwing money-lenders out of the Temple (which is a controversy in itself), Yantra criticized the monks and actually ‘told the monks to help them [the villagers] clean the spirit house’ (ib). Moreover, as a wandering monk, Yantra presented himself as an expert in local problems, which those monks had been facing for a much longer time and will continue to face after Yantra had left their village. In a way, Yantra had suggested a workable solution, but implemented it at the cost of the monks. The villagers would certainly find Yantra an attractive figure for siding with them! Perhaps if we have more details of this story, a different picture might emerge.

(f10) Another important issue concerns Yantra’s monastic tutelage and seniority. At the time of the spirit-worship incident, Yantra was only 5 rains in the Order; in other words, he had

just emerged from his novice monkhood (i.e. completed his 5-year tutelage or 'dependence', *nissaya*, as a monk) (V 1:79-81). This is probably a minor point because the rule today, it seems, is not to follow this rule. We are not, however, told of the seniority of the monks he had advised. If he had been a junior monk, it was improper of him to have advised the senior monks. It is also curious that his years of tutelage (at least the first 5 years of monkhood), except for the first rains, were spent on his own. A possible explanation is that he had obtained leave from or was instructed by his teacher/s.

It helps here to recall canonical stories of Saints and great ascetics like the Kassapa brothers (respected even by King Bimbisāra himself), who, having joined the Sangha, showed their deference to the Buddha and spent time learning under Him (v 1:35). My point here is the importance of *monastic tutelage*, not to suggest that Yantra in any way regards himself as above training nor that he treats his teachers with disdain. Indeed, from the accounts we have of Yantra, he is most respectful and loving towards them, and is obviously very popular with them. In fact, Yantra has illustrious teachers, such as Buddhadaśa and Luangpū Kao. Although no other famous teachers are mentioned in his biography to be his mentor, the two well known names are sufficient to endow him with *associative charisma* [6.712 6.751].

When discussing situations such as this — a charismatic monk having his own way and benefitting others — one should keep a balance between *textuality* and *history*. The Buddhist texts are like ancient diaries and guidebooks of the Buddha and His early Saints, and while most of the doctrines are 'timeless' (*akālika*), the Buddha allows religious latitude, as evident, for example, from the Kālāma Sutta (A 1:189) and the Araṇa-vibhaṅga Sutta (M 3:234 f). Simply put, whatever spiritual effort

is commendable so long as it keeps to ‘the Dharma in brief as transmitted to Pajāpatī Gotamī, that is, it leads to passionlessness, to freedom from bondage, to absence of accumulation, to wanting little, to contentment, to solitude, to putting forth energy, to ease in supporting oneself, and not to the contrary (V 2:258 f; cf the 10 reasons for the institution of the Vinaya, V 3:21).

(f11) Earlier on, I mentioned that Yantra’s style of teaching is colloquial, ‘from the heart’, and as such is easily appreciated by his audience. The interesting point here, however, concerns *ritual listening* [11:12.1]. What is regarded as a blessing (*maṅgala*) — listening to the Dharma (Sn 265), followed by practice, realization and sharing — has degenerated into a *passive accumulation of merit* [1:30.33]. In other words, devotees *hear* Yantra (or any teacher) but they apparently do not *listen* to him (or them). Anticipating this, as it were, Yantra often makes his preachings down-to-earth, sugar-coated with stories and analogies, and repeating the same key teachings using different illustrations each time.

Unlike most other monks (especially meditation masters), Yantra often employs appropriate postures and gestures, albeit in a manner becoming of a meditation master, to put across his teachings [cf the gesticulations of modernist monks, 1:30.264]. Such techniques of ‘Buddhism in motion’, are *objective symbols of charisma* that can have a somewhat hypnotic effect on the susceptible audience [f7 f8 6.714]. In such histrionics lie the essence of what excites teenagers in their pop singers, rock stars and their shows. A teaching monk, in some way, is a stage performer; even more so is a charismatic.

At first glance, Yantra appears as a traditional Siamese monk, but in his KL appearance (1992), he publicly displayed a curious departure from tradition: he bowed to the audience

[7.6d]. What is fascinating is that it was no ordinary bow. It appears to have been part of a well-orchestrated series of dramatic effects to work up audience excitement. First of all, he let the audience wait for him. Even though he came up to the hall and was invited in by Mahinda, he did not do so until some 2 *hours* after the announced time. Even then, he stole up the stage in the dim light and when the lights came on, he was already seated down in meditation posture with eyes closed. Then he put his palms together in *añjalī* — and dramatically bowed before the audience.

Any traditional monk would have regarded this gesture as irregular for a Theravāda monk, though acceptable of a non-Theravāda monk (e.g. a Chinese Mahāyāna Sanghin). Perhaps, for good reason, he has not announced that he is beyond being a Theravāda monk or that he is an anomaly (as evident from the manner of his answer to the question about what his religion is) [f5]. The local Chinese audience would most likely take this gesture of his as being an expression of deep humility and friendship. All the better for his charisma and a good example for other monks and nuns.

Noble as Yantra's efforts may be, those who come with lotuses and bottled water for blessing and healing are unlikely to heed his admonitions. Uninvited they come for blessing and healing, uninvited they leave when they feel they have got what they wanted. In this case, Yantra's *audience problem* is just as bad as that faced by any teaching monk, charismatic or not, perhaps his problem is worse, being a charismatic.

(f12) All charismatic leaders have ways of testing the loyalty of their followers. Rajneesh, for example, gave an enigmatic answer when he was asked why he called himself 'Bhagwan' and his followers accepted his ownership of 92 Rolls Royces

as a 'joke' [6.75d]. Yantra's technique of testing the loyalty of his audience is apparently by the 'late entrance' test. In his 1992 KL appearance, for example, he did not go on stage, though he stole near the assembly hall a few times, until 2 *hours* after the appointed time! He was similarly late in his 1989 Ipoh appearance, and elsewhere. On both occasions (and elsewhere) he finished around 2 am!

By delaying his entrance dramatically, he not only builds up crowd excitement, but '*weeds out*' the less patient and less loyal individuals. Most of those who have left early or have given up waiting are probably not so humble people anyway or are too busy to commit themselves to him. Those patient enough to wait are more likely to have greater faith and are more tractable. Those who have stayed right through his session until the end (about 2 am) must surely have great patience (not to say energy) and/or great faith in him.

(f13) Yantra's popularity in Malaysia and Singapore is well known. One special bonus source of charisma is the fact that he is a *foreigner*. The local consumer society still reserves great respect and demand for imported goods! In Siam, however, that bonus comes from his five-year trip to the West. Every young monk in Siam dreams of going West, and there are enough Siamese wats overseas to attract them with travellers' tales of better standards of living and creature comforts — as I have said, this is a young person's dream, not so much a monastic proclivity.

A further minor point concerns Yantra's *languages*. His mother tongue is Siamese, but he is still learning English. The fact that he spoke halting English may be regarded as a source of charisma, if his audience perceive him as a remarkable person in being able to express profound ideas through

a foreign language. The audience may have confused intelligence with spirituality, but it is a source of charisma all the same. Had he been a very fluent speaker of English, he would probably have been dismissed as a scholar, especially if he stopped dispensing holy water, too. (I remember many years back, some devotees were surprised at any Asian monk who wore glasses or spoke English!) This is a common language situation whenever well known meditation masters speak before the local audience.

(f14) In terms of **Berger's typology of charismatic leaders**, Yantra is one who occupies a religious office (monkhood or abbot-hood — he has a chain of temples and retreat centres) within a religious tradition (Buddhism) [6.73]. **The Stark-Bainbridge theory of religion**, on the other hand, distinguishes three types of *cults* [on the neutral usage of this term, see 6.16]: *audience cults* (which have little or no formal organization), *client cults* (which range in organizational structure from loose networks of private practitioners to formal service corporations) and *cult movements* (fully-fledged self-contained religious groups). At this point, Yantra is in a transitional stage, growing from an audience cult into a client cult. Considering the tolerant nature of Buddhism and Siamese society, it is unlikely that Yantra's movement (if it grows into one) would become a cult movement. It might probably grow into another sect like the fundamentalist Santi Asoke. Then again, it could simply become a well-known forest monastic tradition like that of Acharn Chah. Only time will tell.

If Yantra were to live in Malaysia or Singapore, he is likely to end up starting a cult movement. No comparative study has yet been made between the behaviour of his audiences in Malaysia/Singapore and elsewhere (say, Siam or Australia or

Denmark). It is possible that the behavior of the Malaysian/Singaporean audience is more cultish than elsewhere. Then the Buddhist community of Malaysia/Singapore deserves a separate study in terms of cult affinity and its social causes. In fact, the last decade (beginning roughly with 1980) is the nascent period of cult movements in Malaysia and Singapore, the heyday of which is yet to come.

Despite all that I have said here, I wish to state that the most important aspect of Yantra concerns the *spirituality* that he promises his followers and which his followers see in him. It is this internal light of Dharma that Yantra uses his charisma to convey to the masses. Insofar as he is doing this, he is a remarkable preacher of Dharma. The means, however, should not be mistaken for the end. Charisma is a powerful means for creativity as well as for destruction; it is vital, yet destructive. When it adorns tyrants, warmongers and mad persons, the charismatic seduction and its accompanying destruction are always widespread.

Charisma, after all, is the 'measure' (*pamāṇa*) of oneself [6.722] and, as such, is showmanship, the attractive packaging of a product, and the sugarcoating of bitter medicine. Only moral virtue, mental oneness and insight wisdom provide the true measure of an individual. In the truly spiritual who possesses such a measure of charisma, its benefits can be far-reaching, even if their work do not outlast them. Even then, a charismatic is an exception to the rule, but by the spirit of Buddha Dharma, everyone is an exceptional individual. Yet not everyone need become charismatic. For this reason, the ancient Buddhist dictum says: *Do not rely on the person; rely on the Teaching.*



Afterword: A prayer [*Buddhism, History and Society*, 1992g]

A book such as this — an open survey of current Buddhist social problems, and how to overcome them — must end with a special meditation and prayer. Every Buddhist reader surely would be able to identify with at least some of the problems related here, and might read those parts with some concern or embarrassment, if not consternation. Throughout the book, I have tried to understand the situation myself, as I am myself a part of it. We cannot any more afford to bury our heads in the depths of intoxicating material comfort or lose ourselves in the mist covered towers of private religiosity. There is a Buddhist community out there which is a part of a greater world community of Buddhists, and of which you and I are members. We can be *true* members of that community only through our wholesome actions, speech and thought.

Buddhism is rapidly gaining followers, many of whom have become or would become leaders, but the true leaders are the *thinkers*, not those at the head of crowds; for, they can only see a short distance, often distracted by the noisy crowd that follow them. We need thinkers who can rise above the crowds, even above leadership; for, often, a thinker might have no followers. Indeed, he needs none; but followers need him. Yet, **thinking can only be done alone**, even in a gathering of thinkers. It is this solitude of thought that changes society and the world.

The written word gives such a deceptive impression that the writer seems very sure of what he has written. Or that he might be presenting 'the most appalling facts in a way that these facts seem acceptable,' as one concerned Buddhist put it. On the other hand, at least a few timeservers of the Buddhist establishment have at one time or another charged me for

making a mountain out of a mole hill, and that I have written nothing useful or relevant (that is, useful or relevant to them). My detractors and critics — some pretend they have neither — might even accuse me of having wounded self-confidence and self-righteousness in dealing with such problems when I should be ‘bettering’ myself. Somehow I cannot help feeling that such sentiments tend to be an excuse for not doing anything but to ‘let the situation pass’. The situation will not pass; it only grows worse, unless we do something about it, even in a very small way. Some might charge me for trying to attract self-glorification or even personal gain. My answer is that there are better ways to gain glory and wealth than by writing books for a community that is largely *aliterate* (able to read, but preferring not to).

Perhaps this book may have no effect on the present, while I yet live. Perhaps the cunning and misguided might use the ideas expressed here for their selfish ends. This is a risk I must take to reach out to the Dharma-minded thinkers of the present and the future, especially the future. The truth of impermanence may be painful in taking away what we value, but it is also healing in giving us other opportunities to gain a clearer vision of life and things of greater value.

This present life is a legacy of the past and which belongs to the future. This life is so precious that we should not allow anyone or anything to cloud it, nor should we be discouraged from seeking the best in ourselves and in others and, despite overwhelming odds, to preserve them as a rich legacy for posterity, so that they could look back and know each of us as one of the innumerable bridges that cross the rivers of cyclic time linking the Buddha realms.

Let me close by putting Nietzsche’s words on the ‘death of God’ in a more auspicious context:

This tremendous event is still on its way... it has not yet reached the ears of man. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars require time, deeds require time even after they are done, before they can be seen and heard. (Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, NY, 1956)

And when that time comes, like a maestro thoroughly absorbed in the ecstasy of his masterly music, entralling his audience with beauty and one-pointed mind, there shall be masters of Dharma who shall bring joy and goodness to listeners and thinkers.

