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Religious Belief and Practice among Sri Lankan Buddhists
in the UK

Thesis submitted for the qualification of PhD

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

This thesis presents an examination of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK which highlights the multivalent meanings of ritual, devotional, cultural and meditative practices within the Sri Lankan diaspora, and thereby overturns the simplifications of existing analyses of Buddhism in the West. The dominant paradigm within the study of Buddhism in the West has been based on the use of a 'Two Buddhisms' model, in which a contrast is drawn between the religiosity of Western convert Buddhists and that of Buddhist immigrants from Asia (chapter 2). This model draws on and reinforces ideas dominant within the anthropological study of Theravada Buddhism in Asia, which suggest that lived Buddhism can best be understood by the drawing of certain dichotomies based on categories such as nibbanic/kammatic or modernist/traditional (chapter 3). My fieldwork and interviews at Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions in the UK challenge such simplistic models. The primary focus of my research is the London Buddhist Vihara, the oldest Buddhist monastery in the UK (chapters 4-7). However, my analysis is also broadened beyond this institution through discussions of a second Sri Lankan temple in London (chapter 8) and a meditation-centred Sri Lankan organisation without a permanent temple or centre (chapter 9). The thesis explores these organisations not only in relation to each other, but also in relation to other Theravada Buddhist institutions in the UK, particularly those predominantly attended by British converts. Through this analysis, the thesis produces a highly nuanced examination of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK, one which reveals the religious diversity found among Sri Lankan Buddhists in Britain, and which shows that one can find points of similarity and contact, as well as areas of difference and distance, between diaspora and convert Buddhists in the West.

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Chapter 1

Introduction. Beyond Dichotomies: Towards a Nuanced Understanding of Diaspora Buddhism

This study examines the forms of religiosity found among Sri Lankan Buddhists in Britain. It is based on fieldwork carried out in 2006 and 2007, which involved participant observation at a number of Buddhist institutions and interviews with Sri Lankan practitioners. This study examines and reveals the shortcomings with previous academic portrayals of Buddhism in the West. By exploring the complex, diverse and multidimensional nature of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK, and locating Sri Lankan Buddhism within the broader landscape of Buddhism in Britain, this study moves us beyond such limited earlier models.

The study makes a contribution to academic knowledge in a number of ways. It provides the first substantive study of diaspora Buddhism in the UK. Previous research into Buddhism in Britain has focused almost exclusively on the religiosity of British converts, thus providing only a partial, somewhat Eurocentric picture. By providing an in-depth analysis of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK, and particularly of how it stands in relation to Western convert Buddhism, my study redresses this imbalance.

While diaspora Buddhism has been little explored in the UK, a greater amount of research into the subject has been conducted in the USA. My study contributes to this body of work, building on and moving beyond existing research. Previous studies have often been dominated by a model which draws a firm distinction between the Buddhism of Western converts and that of Asian immigrants, casting the two as internally homogenous and fundamentally separate. Western convert Buddhism is portrayed as focused on meditation and individual spirituality, while Asian immigrant Buddhism is portrayed as ritualistic and concerned with cultural preservation in the diaspora. Through in-depth, qualitative research this study reveals the complexity and diversity found within the Sri Lankan community in terms of how individuals understand and practise Buddhism and in terms of how they view the relationship between religious practice and cultural preservation. The study thus helps us to move beyond the simplistic dichotomies of the 'Two Buddhisms' model towards a more complex and nuanced understanding of diaspora Buddhism and its relationship to convert Buddhism.

The study also contributes more broadly to our understanding of lived Theravada Buddhism. The firm distinction between convert and immigrant Buddhism which continues to be made by many scholars working on Buddhism in the West draws on and reinforces certain dominant ways of analysing lived Buddhism in Asia, in which dichotomies are drawn between forms of Buddhism using labels such 'kammatic' and 'nibbanic'. The study investigates the applicability of such labels to the religiosity of Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK, concluding that ultimately such dichotomies undermine and obscure our search for more accurate understandings of the relationship between different forms of contemporary Buddhist practice.

In this introduction I first provide brief overviews of Buddhism in Britain, Buddhism in Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in the UK. I then discuss my fieldwork methods. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Buddhism in Britain

Buddhism has a relatively short history in the UK. While there was some awareness of Buddhism in Britain before 1800, it was only from the 1830s that it began to attract any serious attention (Bluck 2006:4). Throughout the nineteenth century interest in and knowledge about Buddhism grew. In large part this was due to scholarship, which focused on the translation and interpretation of Buddhist texts. Some British people did become personally interested in Buddhism at this time, but prior to 1900 few individuals took the step of converting (Bluck 2006:6).

In the first half of the twentieth century interest in practising Buddhism grew, and in 1924 the Buddhist Society – today the oldest Buddhist organisation in Britain – was established in London. However, it was from the 1960s onwards that Buddhism in the UK began to expand rapidly (Bluck 2006:7-12). This expansion was accompanied by diversification. While early Buddhist organisations tended to be ecumenical in character, this period saw the establishment of different schools and sub-schools of Buddhism. Today it is possible to find British converts practising in a variety of different Buddhist traditions. It is common for scholars to break these down into Tibetan traditions, Theravada traditions (originating in South and Southeast Asia) and East Asian traditions (Bluck 2006:17-21). However, each of these categories contains many internal divisions. We can also find forms

of Buddhism among British converts which cannot be traced directly back to a single tradition in Asia (Bluck 2006:152-178).

The growth of convert Buddhism is, however, only part of the story of Buddhism in Britain. In the 2001 census 149,157 people described themselves as Buddhists. Of these 45% were born in the UK. 49%, on the other hand, were born in Asia (Bluck 2006:15-16). In addition, a significant number of those born in the UK are likely to be the children of Asian immigrants. Thus in contemporary Britain convert Buddhists are outnumbered by members of diasporic Buddhist communities. The history of Buddhist migration to the UK has been little explored. While there were small numbers of Asian Buddhists in the UK before the Second World War,¹ it was in the second half of the twentieth century – just as convert Buddhism in the UK was expanding rapidly – that significant numbers of Asian Buddhists began to settle in the UK (Baumann 2001:16). One can now find Buddhists in Britain from Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Nepal, China, Japan, India, Malaysia, Vietnam, and many other parts of Asia. These immigrant Buddhists represent a range of schools and traditions.

As the above illustrates, Buddhism in contemporary Britain is extremely complex and diverse, encompassing individuals from different national and ethnic backgrounds, representing a range of different schools and traditions. As I have noted, scholarship thus far has tended to focus on the Buddhism of British converts rather than that of the various Buddhist diaspora communities found in the UK.

1.2 Sri Lankan Buddhism

Holt observes that 'Sri Lanka is home to the world's oldest continuing Buddhist civilisation' (2003:795). Inscriptions show that Buddhism was present on the island from as early as the third century BCE, and it remains the predominant religion on the island today, followed by around 70% of the population. The vast majority of Sri Lankan Buddhists come from the Sinhalese ethnic group, the largest ethnic group in the country (around 74% of the population). The other major ethnic groups in Sri Lanka are the Tamils (around 18%

¹ Since scholarly discussions of the history of Buddhism in Britain have tended to focus almost exclusively on convert Buddhism (Almond 1988; Batchelor 1994; Bluck 2006:4-24), the earliest history of immigrant Buddhism in the UK remains largely unstudied. Brief references to Buddhism can be found in work which examines pre-war Chinese and Japanese migration to Britain (Benton and Gomez 2008:274; Itoh 2001:133). In addition, Webb's history of the London Buddhist Vihara (2004) highlights the involvement of immigrant Sri Lankans with the temple from its beginnings in 1926.

of the population), who are predominantly Hindu, and the Muslims (around 7%), who although they tend to speak Tamil, are regarded as a separate group. In addition to Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, there is also a significant Christian presence on the island, a legacy of the colonial era. Today around 8% of the population – a combination of Burghers (descendants of European settlers who married Sinhalese or Tamil women), Tamils and Sinhalese – are Christian.² Thus Sri Lanka is a multicultural and religiously diverse country, albeit one in which Buddhism is predominant.

The predominant form of Buddhism found in Sri Lanka is the Theravada school, which is also the predominant school in Burma, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos, as well as having a significant presence in Vietnam, Yunnan province of China and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh (Crosby 2008:836). In the modern period Theravada Buddhism has spread to many other parts of the world, and today many converts in the West follow Theravada or Theravada-influenced forms of Buddhism.

Key characteristics of Theravada Buddhism include the use of Pali as a sacred language, the recognition of certain Pali scriptures – the Pali Canon – as the highest textual authority, and the prominent role given to a celibate monkhood who follow a distinctive *vinaya* (monastic rule) (Crosby 2003:837). Theravada Buddhism can be distinguished from those forms of Buddhism which come under the label of Mahayana, which are predominant in North and East Asia.

Theravada Buddhism is often equated within scholarship with early Buddhism, with Mahayana being seen as a later development. This idea is somewhat problematic (Walters 2000: 111-112; Crosby 2008:1). However, it does reflect how the Theravada sees itself. As Berkwitz notes, ‘Sri Lankan Buddhists continue to regard themselves as the adherents of “pure Buddhism”, a form of the religion that has existed more or less unchanged from the time that the Buddha and his immediate disciples spread the Dhamma many centuries ago’ (Berkwitz 2003:57).³

Despite its somewhat conservative outlook, Theravada Buddhism is not an internally homogenous phenomenon which is untouched by outside influences. Rather Theravada is internally diverse and complex. It has taken different forms in different countries as it has developed and interacted with other forms of religiosity (Buddhist and

² Statistics taken from Deegalle (2006a:2).

³ See also Berkwitz (2006b:45-46).

non-Buddhist). In addition, even within national traditions Theravada Buddhism is complex and multidimensional.⁴

1.3 Sri Lankan Buddhists in Britain

In the 2001 census 67,945 people in the UK were registered as having been born in Sri Lanka (a 72% increase on the 1991 census).⁵ When discussing the Sri Lankan community in the UK, however, we are interested not only in those born in Sri Lanka, but also in those born in the UK to Sri Lankan parents who may view themselves, at least to some extent, as Sri Lankan. The figure for the total community including such individuals has been estimated to be approximately 100,000 to 110,000.⁶

Of the 67,945 Sri Lanka-born individuals in the 2001 census, 7,845 recorded their religion as Buddhist. Again, this figure would be increased if we took into account British-born Sri Lankans. However, it is nevertheless notable that the proportion of Buddhists among Sri Lankans in the UK is low when compared with the proportion in Sri Lanka. In comparison, 33,688 Sri Lankan-born individuals – almost half of the total number of Sri Lankan-born – recorded their religion as Hindu in the 2001 census. These figures reflect the fact that while Tamils are a minority in Sri Lanka, they make up the majority of Sri Lankans in the UK. This is in large part due to the effects of conflict, beginning in 1983, between the Sri Lankan government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, as a result of which many Tamils have come to the West as refugees.

I will discuss the history of Sri Lankan migration to the UK in more detail in chapter 8. Here I will provide a brief sketch of this history by way of background. Sri Lankan migration to Britain can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when members of elite sections of colonial Sri Lankan society began to come to the UK to attend universities (Jayawardena 2000:255-258). However, the numbers of Sri Lankans in Britain remained small until the second half of the twentieth century. Siddhisena and White (1999) note that the 1951 census recorded only 6,447 Sri Lankan-born individuals living in

⁴ For illustrations of the diversity found both between and within national Theravada traditions, see the articles on Sri Lanka (Berkwitz 2006b), Burma (Schober 2006), Thailand (McDaniel 2006) and Cambodia (Thompson 2006a) in the 2006 volume *Buddhism in World Cultures* (Berkwitz 2006a). For a discussion of some of the ways in which over-simplistic academic models of Theravada Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia are challenged by the diversity of the tradition see the conclusion of Crosby and Khur-yern (*forthcoming*).

⁵ All figures from the 2001 census are taken from the publication *Focus on Sri Lankan Community*, produced by organisation Multicultural Matters (no date).

⁶ This estimate is taken from the publication *Focus on Sri Lankan Community* (see previous note).

England, Wales or Scotland, and suggest that the majority of these individuals are likely to have been of British origin (i.e. born to British parents who were living temporarily in Sri Lanka). In the second half of the twentieth century the Sri Lankan population in the UK grew significantly. By 1971 17,045 Sri Lankan-born individuals were recorded as living in the UK. This rose to 26,172 in 1981, and 39,387 in 1991 (Siddhisena and White 1999:516).

As the Sri Lankan community grew, its character changed. Again I will explore this issue in chapter 8. Here we can summarise these changes by noting that while early migrants from Sri Lanka tended to come from elite, affluent and often English-educated backgrounds, settling into professional employment in the UK, as time has gone on the Sri Lankan community has become more mixed in terms of social background and economic success. Despite these changes, the community remains one with relatively high levels of education and employment (Siddhisena and White 1999:532).

An interesting feature of the Sri Lankan community is its concentration in London. 73% of the Sri Lankan-born individuals recorded on the 2001 census lived in London.⁷ It is because of this that my study, though concerning Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK, focuses almost exclusively on institutions in London. There are Sri Lankan Buddhist temples in other parts of the UK, but there are more temples in and around London than there are in the rest of the UK combined.

Another important issue concerns the relationship between different sections of the Sri Lankan community in the UK. As we have seen, the community is divided in a number of ways. The ethnic divide between Sinhalese and Tamils is of particular significance, and raises the question of whether we can speak of a single 'Sri Lankan' community, or whether it is more appropriate to speak of separate Sinhalese and Tamil communities. In reality the relationship between the two communities is complex. In many ways they regard themselves as entirely separate groups. However, at the same time friendships and contacts exist between the two communities, and some individuals and organisations in the UK express a shared sense of 'Sri Lankan' identity. A number of my respondents suggested that some movement has occurred over time away from a greater (though certainly not completely) shared sense of identity towards a greater separation of the communities, a trend that has also been noted by Jazeel (2006). This reflects the escalation of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. It may also be attributable in part to the demographic changes within

⁷ Statistics taken from the publication *Focus on Sri Lankan Community* (see note 2).

the Sri Lankan community. Early migrants were often members of the English-educated elite in which Sinhalese/Tamil divisions are often less accentuated. With time, and as the community has become more mixed demographically, so the division between the two communities has become significant.

The above brings us to the issue of how to refer to the community that I am studying. I have chosen to use the term ‘Sri Lankan Buddhists’, rather than ‘Sinhalese Buddhists’. My reasons are threefold. Firstly, since virtually all Sri Lankan Buddhists are Sinhalese, one is not being more exact by using the term Sinhalese Buddhists. Secondly, I found that some of my interviewees preferred to use the term ‘Sri Lankan’ rather than ‘Sinhalese’ to describe their identity, as ‘Sri Lankan’ was seen as more inclusive. While some others preferred the use of ‘Sinhalese’, I have used Sri Lankan as its inclusiveness encompasses both those who prefer to label themselves ‘Sri Lankan’ and those who prefer ‘Sinhalese’. Lastly, predominantly using ‘Sri Lankan’ enables me to use the word ‘Sinhalese’ in a more specialised way, such as when I am referring to an individual or organisation which puts a particular emphasis on a specifically ‘Sinhalese’ cultural identity.

The first Sri Lankan Buddhist temple in the UK was the London Buddhist Vihara, founded in 1926 by the Sri Lankan Buddhist activist Anagarika Dharmapala. Dharmapala initially established the London Buddhist Vihara not as a religious centre for Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK, but as a missionary centre aiming to spread Buddhism among the British. The history of this temple will be examined in chapter 4.

As the size of the Sri Lankan community in Britain grew, so did the number of Sri Lankan temples. In 1982 the Thames Buddhist Vihara – located in Seldon, to the south of London – was established. Following this, in 1989 the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre was founded in North West London. Since then many new temples have been established. At present there are six Sri Lankan temples in Greater London.⁸ The town of Letchworth, located around 30 miles to the north of London, contains another two Sri

⁸ These are: the London Buddhist Vihara, Chiswick (www.londonbuddhistvihara.org, accessed 20/06/2010); the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre, Kingsbury (www.homepage.nflworld.com/ssibc/iindex, accessed 20/06/2010); the Thames Buddhist Vihara, Seldon (no website); the East London Buddhist Cultural Centre, Plaistow (www.elbcc.org.uk, accessed 20/06/2010); the Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre, Redbridge (<http://redbridgevihara.org.uk/>, accessed 20/06/2010); and the Samadhi Meditation Centre, Edmonton (no website). Another temple – the Buddhist Realists’ Vihara (Southgate) – was active sporadically during my research period, and now seems to be inactive (see appendix 6 for more details).

Lankan temples.⁹ Away from London and its surrounding areas further Sri Lankan temples can be found in Manchester¹⁰, Birmingham¹¹, Leicester¹² and Glasgow.¹³

These temples range in terms of size, the number of patrons they attract, the number of monks they house, and the activities that they run. They are united by the fact that they all house at least one Sri Lankan monk (some also house monks from other backgrounds), and by the fact that some activities – the offering of *dāna* (food) to monks, the performance of rituals of Buddha *pūjā* and *pirit* chanting – are common to all of them. Such temples take their place in a complex and diverse Buddhist landscape, in which they co-exist not only with organisations and institutions representing non-Theravada traditions of Buddhism, but also with different manifestations of Theravada Buddhism: Thai, Shan, Cambodian and Burmese temples; monasteries housing convert Theravada monastics; meditation groups and centres teaching Theravada forms of meditation; and so on.

The temples mentioned above are not the only religious institutions attended by Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK. Some Sri Lankans attend Buddhist institutions that are not specifically Sri Lankan in focus, such as those run by British converts. There are also a number of Sri Lankan Buddhist groups which meet outside temples, in private houses or rented spaces. In addition, many Sri Lankans visit non-Buddhist religious institutions, such as Hindu temples and Christian churches.

1.4 My research

Before I began my fieldwork in London I travelled to Sri Lanka (October/November 2005). The purpose of the trip was twofold: to improve my knowledge of the Sinhala language; and to give me a solid grounding in the nature of lived Buddhism in present-day Sri Lanka. The trip was useful in the first regard, but of greater importance in the second. Based primarily in Kandy, I spent time at the University of Peradeniya and got to know lay and monastic students and staff in the department of Pali and Buddhist studies. This gave me an opportunity to discuss Buddhism and Sri Lankan culture in depth with knowledgeable informants. I also spent time travelling in central Sri Lanka, and Colombo. I spoke

⁹ These are the Letchworth Buddhist Temple (www.letchworthtemple.com, accessed 20/06/2010) and the Dhamma Nikethanaya Buddhist Centre (www.letchworthbuddhism.com, accessed 20/06/2010).

¹⁰ www.ketumati.org (accessed 20/06/2010).

¹¹ www.buddhist-mahavihara.com (accessed 20/06/2010).

¹² <http://leicesterbuddhistvihara.co.uk> (accessed 20/06/2010).

¹³ www.tsbv.org.uk (accessed 20/06/2010).

informally with laypeople and monastics (including European monks based in Sri Lanka, who proved an interesting source of insights). I attended rituals and religious classes of different kinds, spent time researching attitudes to Buddhist issues in the popular media, and visited many Buddhist and non-Buddhist religious institutions. My time in Sri Lanka allowed me to familiarise myself with key issues in contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhism, many of which became important in my research. I gained an understanding of the significance of popular Sri Lankan religious figures, such as the late monk Venerable Gangadawila Soma who was referred to many times by my informants in the UK. I attained a grounding in Sri Lankan Buddhist and cultural politics, which inform debates about identity in the diaspora in important ways. I gained knowledge of the various approaches to Buddhist monasticism found in contemporary Sri Lanka, which informed my later understanding of how Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions in the UK stand in relation to each other (and in relation to non-Sri Lankan institutions). My time in Sri Lanka also gave me a strong awareness of the disillusionment with mainstream Buddhism found among many lay Sri Lankans, and the tendency to search for alternative forms of Buddhist practice. Awareness of these issues helped me to recognise the importance of alternative forms of Buddhism in the diaspora, and thus led to my exploration of such groups (chapter 9). More generally, spending time in Sri Lanka gave me a literacy in Sri Lankan Buddhism – its discourses and terminology; its significant places of worship; the vocabulary through which particular rituals and practices are discussed. This proved invaluable both to my research process in the UK – in that it gave me prior knowledge and experience of engaging with many of the issues raised by my UK informants, thus in many cases enabling a deeper level of conversation than would otherwise have been possible – and to my overall understanding and analysis of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK.¹⁴

My research in the UK was qualitative in nature and broad in scope. Both of these characteristics were in part a response to previous work on diasporic Theravada Buddhism which suffered from a lack of qualitative data and a somewhat narrow focus (chapter 2). I was also influenced to some degree by previous work in the field of Buddhist studies, particularly Gombrich and Obeyesekere's *Buddhism Transformed* (1988). While this study

¹⁴ For an example of the importance of a familiarity with the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition when analysing the diaspora we can look to Fitzpatrick's study of the Washington Buddhist Vihara (2000). Fitzpatrick argues that the performance of a ritual at the Vihara dedicated to the twenty-eight Buddhas of the past represents a Mahayana influence (2000:78). One more closely versed in Sri Lankan Buddhism would be aware that the ritual and the twenty-eight past Buddhas that it recognises are rooted in the Sri Lankan Theravada tradition.

of developments in post-independence Sri Lankan Buddhism is far more concerned than mine with dimensions of religiosity which fall outside the realm of mainstream temple Buddhism, I was influenced by Gombrich and Obeyeskere's ability to give a picture of a religious community that was at once broad in its vision and based on in-depth, qualitative case studies.

My concern to achieve a similarly in-depth picture of how Sri Lankan Buddhists understand, speak about and practise their religion led me away from quantitative research methods (such as surveys) which can provide only broad information about patterns of temple attendance and ritual practice, and towards qualitative methods which provide richer insights into the understandings and interpretations held by one's informants. In the main my research consisted of two elements: participant observation and interviews.

I conducted participant observation at Sri Lankan temples, groups and events in and around London. This research began in late 2005 and continued throughout 2006. I began writing my thesis in 2007. However, as I lived in London I was able to carry on my fieldwork while I began my writing. This proved extremely useful. It will be noted that some of the events which I describe in most detail in the thesis occurred in 2007. This reflects the fact that I was able to go back into the 'field' in order to look in greater depth at certain issues which I had identified as important during the course of writing the thesis.

As will be discussed below, my participant observation was wide ranging, focusing particularly on three institutions, but not limited to these groups. I attended rituals, festivals, cultural events, classes on meditation and Buddhist philosophy, talks of various kinds, and ceremonies in the homes of laypeople. I also assisted with Sunday school classes and on one occasion gave a talk about my research at a temple. As I participated in these various events I spoke informally with other participants, making contacts and exploring how people understood the activities in which we were participating. This participant observation formed the bedrock of my research, giving me a rich understanding of the range of religious practices and discourses found within Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions in the UK, and of the range of understandings and interpretations of Buddhism found among Sri Lankan laypeople. An overview of my fieldwork is provided in appendix 6.

In order to gain a more in-depth insight into the views of Sri Lankan practitioners I conducted a total of 60 interviews. The majority of these – 47 – were conducted with first and second-generation lay Sri Lankans and followed a standard format. The interviews

were semi-structured in nature. I came with a basic set of questions, but I tried to let the conversations flow naturally, and to allow new areas and issues to be brought up if this was productive. This style of interview has two advantages over more structured forms of questioning. Firstly, it allows the agenda for the interview to be dictated to a greater extent by the understandings and interests of the interviewee. Rather than the interviewee being asked to comment on a number of pre-determined issues, the interviewee's own ideas about what is important and significant are explored. This avoids imposing an agenda which distorts the picture, and allows for a richer understanding of the religious and cultural worldview of the informant.¹⁵ Secondly, and relatedly, semi-structured interviews allow for a more exploratory style of research. While some research projects begin with a firm thesis in place, I wanted my study to be exploratory in nature – to explore the religiosity of the Sri Lankan community without a firm pre-determined thesis, and to allow the research process to mould the nature of the project. The nature of my interviews helped in this respect as they allowed new issues and avenues of research to be opened up during the interview process which may not have occurred to me previously.¹⁶ Such an approach was particularly important given that existing literature on Buddhism in the West is, as I have indicated, skewed towards a perspective reflecting the interests and assumptions of Western (predominantly white) practitioners and scholars. Furthermore literature on Theravada generally has also been criticised for its Orientalist or neo-colonialist bent, as well as for its imposition of Weberian-based models (Hallisey 1995; Gunetillake 2001; King 1999; Crosby 2008; Choempolpaisal 2008).

The content of my interviews changed to some extent over the course of my research as the study was shaped by the research process itself. Early in my research I used a broad set of questions, ranging from specifically religious questions, to questions about an individuals' experience of living in the UK, to questions about their views on Sri Lankan politics. This broad range of interests reflects my own multidisciplinary background. While my first degree was in the humanities (Study of Religions, with a focus on Buddhism, Pali, Sinhala and Sri Lankan Buddhist practice and history) my second degree was in the social

¹⁵ For a fuller discussion of the benefits of semi-structured interviews over more structured forms of questioning see Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland (2006:104-110).

¹⁶ See Crosby and Khur-Yearn's similar initial methodology (*forthcoming*). Working with anthropologists Tanenbaum and Eberherdt they performed open in-depth interviews preliminary to the design of their widely circulated questionnaire. In my case I did not move on to questionnaires because I was sufficiently integrated into the community and conducting my fieldwork over a long enough period to conduct a high number of in-depth interviews.

sciences (Migration and Diaspora Studies). I therefore wished to be guided regarding the extent to which political, ethnic, religious and other allegiances were of primary importance in Sri Lankan Buddhist expressions of identity. As the study progressed, I was able to focus more on the issues that were most relevant to the study. In the main these were issues of religious belief and practice – how different rituals and practices were understood, and so on. However, other issues – particularly views on questions of cultural identity – remained important. The change over time was a subtle and gradual one. I retained the same list of basic questions throughout. However, I gradually gave more emphasis to those sections that became most important for the study and less to those which became more peripheral (in some cases omitting certain questions altogether). The nature of the interviews also varied depending on the nature of the interviewee. For example, if the interviewee was strongly involved in Sri Lankan politics, this area was explored in greater depth as it was likely to have a bearing on their views on other issues. Thus the interview process was a fluid and flexible one.

Appendices 1 to 4 provide details of my 47 standard interviews, including a general discussion of my interview methods (appendix 1), my interview questions for first and second-generation interviewees (appendices 2 and 3), and a list of my interviews, incorporating demographic details about my interviewees (appendix 4). The majority of my interviewees were individuals that I met during the course of my participant observation. Others were contacted via snowball sampling, in which possible future interviewees are suggested by existing contacts (Bryman 2001:98-99). This technique was particularly useful in finding second-generation interviewees, since second-generation Sri Lankans tend to visit temples less regularly than their parents, making it more difficult for me to encounter such interviewees during participant observation.

My interviewees were varied in terms of their ages, backgrounds, occupations, the length of time they had been in the UK, and their degree of interest and participation in Buddhism. Often those who put themselves forward to be interviewed were likely to be individuals who had a particularly strong personal knowledge of and involvement with Buddhism. Interviewing only such individuals would have been problematic since it would have meant that only the views of a certain section of the community were explored. I tried to avoid this problem by deliberately seeking out interviewees with a range of levels of religious involvement, from those that attended Buddhist institutions every week (or more),

to those whose attendance was much more irregular. Assessing the 'class background' of my interviewees was not always easy. Each interviewee was asked to describe their family background in terms of class. However, expressing Sri Lankan social categories – which incorporate several factors including family heritage, occupation, education, caste, language use and land ownership – in terms of UK categories is not straightforward. In addition, often my interviewees defined their background simply as 'middle-class', a term which in some ways tells us little since most Sri Lankans in the diaspora would define themselves somewhere along the middle-class spectrum. The term middle-class is commonly used in Sri Lanka to refer to a wide range of social positions, from those who are university educated and employed in high-status professions (doctors, lawyers, senior civil servants) to those with less high levels of education working in less high-status positions (shopkeepers, minor government servants). These two groups can be distinguished from outside as 'upper middle-class' and 'lower middle-class', but it was relatively common for my informants to use simply the catch-all term of 'middle-class'. Those falling outside this spectrum, who would define themselves as 'working class', are underrepresented in the British diaspora, lacking the resources required for migration. I have tried to assess the backgrounds of my interviewees as accurately as possible, using both their self-assignment of class and other information (for example, their parents' occupations if these are mentioned).

The interviews varied widely in terms of length, depending on how much the interviewee had to say, and how much time they could spare. My shortest interviews took around 45 minutes. The longest lasted over 5 hours, and took place over multiple sessions. Most interviews were recorded. However, in some cases this was not possible either because of the circumstances of the interview (for example, some interviews took place in public areas of temples where recording was sometimes inappropriate as it would have inadvertently have picked up on the private conversations of others present) or because the interviewee was not comfortable with being recorded. In such cases I made extensive notes. Providing transcripts of the interviews has not been possible due to the sheer volume of recorded material. However, I have quoted extensively in the thesis from those interviews which were recorded.

The interviews were conducted anonymously so as to allow my interviewees to speak more freely. A number of issues made anonymity particularly important. Some of the

issues explored in the interviews were potentially sensitive or controversial: issues of personal belief and practice; questions relating to Sri Lankan politics; questions regarding opinions about and disputes between different temples and institutions; and issues relating to differences in religious, moral and cultural values between first and second-generation migrants. Anonymity was also important because the Sri Lankan community in the UK is relatively small and fairly close-knit. Thus many of my informants are likely to be known to each other. The Sri Lankan community is also one with a high level of education. This makes it more likely that members of the community will have access to and an interest in reading research into the community. Again this makes anonymity in interviews particularly important. Pseudonyms are employed throughout the thesis when referring to interviewees or those that I spoke with during fieldwork. Real names are used only when referring to individuals whose names are a matter of public record (such as the resident monks of temples, or individuals delivering public talks).¹⁷

In addition to my 47 standard interviews, I also conducted 13 other interviews which did not follow my standard list of questions. These interviews focused on particular issues rather than on the full range of questions used in my standard interviews. Such interviews were carried out either because I wanted to explore in more depth with an individual a particular issue which had been raised during my fieldwork, or because the individual in question was in a particular position within the Sri Lankan community – as, for example, a lay religious teacher or a political organiser – which gave them an insight into the certain aspects of the community on a broad level (patterns of religious practice, patterns of immigration, attitudes towards cultural identity and belonging). 8 of these additional interview were with Buddhist monks. When planning my research I had initially intended not to interview monks as I wanted the study to focus on the religiosity of the Sri Lankan laity, and not to rely on monastic interpretations of religious belief and practice.¹⁸ However, as I began the study I found that interviews with monks could in some cases be extremely useful, particularly in helping me to gain an understanding of how institutions

¹⁷ I have given the real names of the monks that I spoke with, except in the case of my interview with a senior monk from Amaravati, who requested that he remain anonymous.

¹⁸ My stance here can be seen as a reaction to the approach taken in Gombrich's influential ethnography of rural Sri Lankan Buddhism (1971). While Gombrich's study is presented as an analysis of rural Sri Lankan Buddhism as a whole (lay and monastic), the vast majority of Gombrich's data is derived from interviews with monks (see Gombrich 1971:37-38). For examples of more recent anthropological work on Theravada Buddhism in Asia which has avoided the monastic-centred approach taken by Gombrich in favour of an approach which gives more attention to lay opinion see Tanenbaum (1995), Eberhardt (2006) and Samuels (2008).

are viewed by those that organise their activities. My interview with Venerable Seelagawesi, the monk around whom the Nissarana group (examined in chapter 9) is organised, was particularly useful since the nature of the Nissarana group is determined by Venerable Seelagawesi's particular outlook in a way that is not the case to the same extent in other Sri Lankan organisations in the UK. In addition to my interview with Venerable Seelagawesi, I conducted 6 interviews of varying lengths with Sri Lankan monks based in the UK. I also conducted an interview with a British convert monk at the monastery of Amaravati, in which I asked for his impressions of how Sri Lankan laypeople practise at this institution. A list of my non-standard interviews is given in appendix 5.

On occasion individuals that I approached for an interview were unable to conduct a one-to-one interview, but suggested that I send questions for them to answer by email. Generally I was reluctant to conduct interviews in this way because of my preference for in-depth qualitative interviews rather than surveys. However, on two occasions when I felt that the individuals concerned may have particularly interesting views, I did experiment with this form of questioning. On the first of these occasions the results were somewhat unsatisfactory, the respondent giving only very short responses to my questions. However, on the second occasion I changed the style of my questioning, narrowing my field of questions to allow a more in-depth investigation of particular issues. This email exchange, with an individual I have given the pseudonym Swarna, proved particularly informative for my investigation of issues of identity and cultural preservation at Sri Lankan temples (chapter 8).

As mentioned above, my research was broad in its scope. Previous studies of Theravada Buddhism in the diaspora have tended to focus either on a single temple (Fitzpatrick 2000) or on a comparison between two institutions within different communities (Numrich 1996; Cadge 2005). I too began my research at one particular temple, the London Buddhist Vihara (henceforth LBV) located in West London. I chose to begin with this temple for a number of reasons. I was already familiar with the temple, having attended for some time as a practitioner. In addition, the LBV is by far the oldest Sri Lankan temple in the UK, having been established in 1926. While there are now at least 12 Sri Lankan temples in Britain, the LBV remains the pre-eminent Sri Lankan temple in terms of reputation and profile, and one of the largest in terms of the size of its building and the number of patrons that it attracts. All of these reasons mean that the LBV is a natural

place to start for one attempting to obtain a picture of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK. My final reason for choosing to focus on the LBV is that it is the Sri Lankan temple in London which attracts the largest number of convert practitioners, making it an interesting venue for the exploration of the relationship between Sri Lankan and British convert Buddhism.

While my study began with the LBV, it was always my intention that my research would not be limited to this single temple. I had a number of reasons for wanting my research to be broader than this. As I will explore in chapter 2, the tendency of previous studies to focus on single institutions as representative of whole diaspora Buddhist communities has led in some cases to somewhat one-dimensional portrayals which fail to explore fully the diversity of Buddhism in such communities. One of the aims of my research was to avoid such problems and provide an exploration of the variety of forms of religiosity found among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK. As the study will demonstrate, considerable diversity can be found within the LBV itself. However, in order to get a fuller picture of this diversity it is necessary to look beyond a single temple to the range of Sri Lankan Buddhist temples, organisations and groups found in the Britain. The different Sri Lankan temples in and around London have much in common in terms of their teachings, religious practices and activities. However, there are also important differences between these temples which need to be explored if one is to gain a full understanding. In addition to these temples, as noted in section 1.3, there are also a number of Sri Lankan Buddhist groups in the UK which are not based in temples, meeting in private homes or rented spaces. The forms of religiosity found in such groups add another layer to the religious variety found within the community.

My decision to take a broad approach in my research was also related to my desire for the study to be exploratory in nature. As discussed above, I began my study determined not to impose a thesis at the outset, but with an intention to explore the Sri Lankan community and allow my study to be shaped by this process. Thus while I began my research with the LBV, I always intended to look beyond this temple to explore other manifestations of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK which seemed interesting and relevant to my concerns. The exploratory nature of my research bore particular fruit in my investigations of the Nissarana group, discussed in chapter 9. Since this group is not advertised widely, has no permanent temple and gains new members largely by word of mouth, I did not become aware of its existence until some way into my research (this was

also the case with another group discussed in chapter 9, the Sathdhamma group). The broad, exploratory nature of my research made it possible for me to explore this significant manifestation of Sri Lankan Buddhism in depth when I did become aware of its existence, in a way that would have not been possible had I confined my study from the start to a particular temple or group of temples.

My research thus proceeded with these principles of breadth and exploration in mind. The LBV remained the centre of my study. I spent more time at this temple than at any other institution. I attended meditation classes, ritual services, all-day events held to celebrate significant days in the Buddhist calendar, study classes, talks of various kinds, and many other activities. I also assisted occasionally at the temple's Sunday school. Of my 47 standard interviewees, 27 were patrons of the LBV. The central place of the LBV in my research is reflected in the fact that four chapters of this study are dedicated to that institution, while another chapter (chapter 8) also contains much discussion of the LBV. Nevertheless, my research was not confined to the LBV. I visited every Sri Lankan temple in London, and both of the Sri Lankan temples located in Letchworth. Some I visited only once, but at others – particularly the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre located in Kingsbury and the Samadhi Meditation Centre located in Edmonton – I spent a considerable amount of time, attending festivals, rituals, talks and cultural events of various kinds. Beyond such temples I also contacted and spent time with non-temple-based Buddhist groups, particularly the Nissarana group mentioned above. However, my research was not restricted to Buddhist institutions and groups. As I made contacts within the community I also spent time at Sri Lankan cultural, social and political events, and attended rituals and ceremonies in the houses of laypeople. Attending such events enabled me to gain a broader view of the Sri Lankan community and to make contact with people that were not frequent attendees of temples, who I would have been unlikely to meet otherwise. For example, my initial contact with the Nissarana group came at a Sri Lankan social event, the Festival of Cricket. Without attending this event I may have remained ignorant of the group's existence. I also extended my research by using snowball sampling to reach second-generation contacts, many of whom were infrequent visitors to temples. My decision to take a broad approach also applied to my research at the LBV, since I made sure that my interviewees from this temple ranged from those who attended the LBV regularly

and exclusively, to those who attended the temple irregularly, to those for whom the LBV represented only one of a number of Buddhist institutions that they attended.

My research was thus wide-ranging. This presented the problem of how to structure the resulting study. I have focused in the study on the three institutions which I gave most attention to during my research: the LBV, the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre (henceforth SSIBC) and the Nissarana group. As my research progressed I gradually came to focus on these three institutions more than any others because I felt that looking at these institutions in combination would provide a good insight into the range of approaches to religiosity found within the Sri Lankan community. As noted above, the LBV was the institution that I spent the most time at during my research and more than half of my interviewees attended this temple. As a result I have focused in the study more on this temple than on any other institution. While I did not attend the SSIBC as regularly as the LBV, I nevertheless spent a significant amount of time at this temple, observing rituals, festivals and talks, and making many contacts. I conducted interviews with five regular patrons of the SSIBC, and with two of the resident monks of the temple. While I did not come into contact with the Nissarana group until some time into my research, the time that I spent with the group represented perhaps the richest participant observation of my study. The group meets most frequently when Venerable Seelagawesi, the monk around which the group is formed, visits the UK. During these periods the group is very active, with activities taking place every day in the rented houses that the group employs. While most Sri Lankan temples in the UK are open to visitors at any time during the day, only at certain times – during scheduled rituals, festivals and classes – do they act as social places where individuals gather together. At other times those attending tend to do so as individuals or in family groups. In contrast, the houses of the Nissarana group function as social spaces at all times of the day, with Venerable Seelagawesi, the other monks of the group, and lay followers gathering together and welcoming any visitors. As a result I was able to spend whole days with the group, sometimes staying in the houses of the group overnight. This, and the relatively small size of the group, made it possible for me to gain a very strong insight into the group during the periods in 2006 and 2007 when Seelagawesi was in the UK. I also conducted interviews with Seelagawesi and with four laypeople involved with the group. While the number of interviews conducted at the SSIBC and the Nissarana group was less than at the LBV, this is reflected in the balance of the thesis. Even at these two

institutions my interview numbers compare favourably with Numrich's study of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the USA (1996), which incorporates only one interview with a Sri Lankan layperson, and Fitzpatrick's study of the Washington Buddhist Vihara (2000), which in a full-length study of a single institution draws on interviews with just four members of the Sri Lankan laity.

While the study focuses primarily on three institutions, it is not intended to be a comparison, let alone a balanced comparison, of the three. Rather, my aim was to provide an examination of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK that is centred on the LBV, but which brings in discussions of other institutions in order to add complexity and breadth to the analysis. It would have been possible to take a different approach, perhaps providing a more straightforward comparative study of the LBV and SSIBC based on conducting similar amounts of fieldwork and interviews at each temple. However, the simplistic and polarising nature of such an approach would be problematic. While the LBV and the SSIBC were sometimes cast as opposites by my informants, the differences between the two temples are subtle and in many respects they have much in common. Thus a straightforward comparative study would be in many ways redundant and would run the risk of drawing false dichotomies between the two temples, something I have tried to avoid. It would also not have enabled me to look at either institution in the depth that I have been able to explore the LBV. I have thus favoured an approach which uses my research on the SSIBC and the Nissarana group to stretch and expand my primary analysis at the LBV, highlighting dimensions of and issues within the Sri Lankan Buddhist community which would have been missed had I focused only on a single temple. Examination of the differences between the three institutions certainly plays an important role in the study, but equally important is the consideration of religious diversity within particular institutions (particularly the LBV as the primary site of research) and common themes found throughout the Sri Lankan community.

As mentioned above, my research was not restricted to the LBV, the SSIBC and the Nissarana group. I visited 6 other Sri Lankan temples in and around London. I also met with members of another Sri Lankan Buddhist group not based in a temple, the Sathdhamma group (discussed briefly in chapter 9), and made two visits to the convert Theravada monastery Amaravati with Sri Lankan friends. Seven of my interviewees were patrons of institutions other than the LBV, the SSIBC and the Nissarana group. In addition,

one of my second-generation interviewees had never attended any Buddhist institutions in the UK, while another two attended temples fairly regularly with their family while growing up, but had seldom attended temples in adulthood. There are some areas of my research that I planned to look at in depth in the thesis, but which could not be included for reasons of space. For example, I planned a longer discussion of the Sathdhamma group. I also planned to include a chapter looking specifically at second-generation attitudes to religion and identity. While these two areas are not explored fully, both are considered to some extent. Other areas that I explored during my research are not dealt with specifically in the study. For example, three of my interviewees were patrons of the Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre, but this temple is not focused on in the study. However, such aspects of my research have nevertheless been useful. From the beginning I considered the study to be first and foremost not an analysis of particular institutions but an examination of how individuals within the Sri Lankan community approach Buddhism. The study uses three institutions as its primary loci of analysis, but my analysis was informed by my research as a whole. In some parts of the thesis – such as when I examine attitudes towards textual authority – my discussions look at the Sri Lankan community as a whole rather than only at patrons of specific temples. In other parts of the thesis – such as my discussions of how individuals view rituals such as *pūjā* – my discussions are more specific to certain temples, but here also my broader research helped me to develop my analysis. It should also be noted Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK does not consist of a series of entirely discrete temple communities. While the majority of respondents in my 47 standard interviews attended one institution primarily (an indication of the primary temple or group attended by each of my interviewees is given in Appendix 1), only 4 mentioned only a single institution in the UK when describing their practice of Buddhism. Some of my interviewees regularly practised at more than one institution. For example, my interviewee Ishan attended both the LBV and the Thames Buddhist Vihara, located in South London, on a regular basis. Similarly, my interviewee Ushma attended the Thames Buddhist Vihara, the Nissarana group, and Buddhapadipa, a Thai temple located in Wimbledon. Others had changed their primary institution of attendance over time. My three interviewees from the Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre, for example, had all been patrons of the LBV before the opening of the Redbridge temple in 1999. Thus their views were relevant to my understanding of the LBV. My broader research was also useful in helping me to understand how the institutions

that I focused on were viewed by patrons of other institutions. This was important since perceptions within the community of different institutions and how they stand in relation to each other became a key theme in my research.

While my research was based primarily on participant observation and interviews, I also drew on other sources of information. All of the institutions that I looked at produce forms of literature, such as books, pamphlets, newsletters, journals, or websites. Such literature was not regularly referenced by my informants as an important source of their religious understandings. However, looking at such literature did help me in my understanding of the various institutions that I looked at. The LBV has produced a number of books and pamphlets of various kinds. It also produces a journal containing articles about Buddhism and news about the temple. In addition, the temple has a regularly updated website which details its activities and gives explanations of various aspects of Buddhism.¹⁹ I have drawn on these resources – which are discussed in more detail in chapter 5 – in my analysis of the LBV. The LBV also produces recordings of many of the talks that take place at the temple. These are made available as CDs in the temple’s bookshop. These recordings were useful for me as they allowed me to quote from talks that I attended at the temple, and to listen to talks that were given before the period of my research. A final source relating to the LBV which proved useful was Russell Webb’s history of the temple (2004). Webb was involved in the organisation of the LBV for many years, and his book was particularly helpful in giving me an understanding of the turbulent events at the temple in the 1980s.

Like the LBV the SSIBC produces a journal, and has published a number of collections of scholarly essays (see chapter 8). The temple also has a website, though it was not updated during the period of my research.²⁰ While I have not discussed literature of the SSIBC in depth in the thesis, this literature (particularly the temple’s journal) was useful in helping me to gain an understanding of the temple. The third institution that I focus on, the Nissarana group, produced little in the way of printed material, a compendium of the Pali verses used by the group in chanting rituals being the only item of this kind. However, the group is very active on the Internet. The group’s regularly-updated website contains teachings of various kinds, photos, videos, transcriptions of Pali verses for chanting, and recordings of chanting and meditation instructions.²¹ The site is linked to the group’s social

¹⁹ www.londonbuddhistvihara.org (accessed 20/06/2010).

²⁰ www.homepage.nl/world.com/ssibc/iindex (accessed 20/06/2010).

²¹ www.nissarana.org (accessed 20/06/2010).

networking site, which allows those involved in the group to discuss teachings and practices.²² While for reasons of space I have not been able to refer to this material in my analysis, studying this material complemented my fieldwork and interviews and added further depth to my understanding of the group. I was also able to draw on recordings of talks made by Venerable Seelagawesi. The talks that Seelagawesi gave while in the UK in 2006 and 2007 were often recorded, and I was given a CD containing a number of these talks.

I began studying Sinhala language as an undergraduate, three years before the commencing my fieldwork, and continued to study the language until my fieldwork began. In addition, as noted above, immediately before my fieldwork I travelled to Sri Lanka, in part with the intention of improving my ability in the language. As a result of this I gained some competence in basic spoken Sinhala. This knowledge – particularly of Sinhala religious vocabulary – assisted me in my interviews and fieldwork. However, my ability in the language was never such that I would have been able to conduct interviews in Sinhala, or understand without assistance sermons delivered in the language (sermons often use a formal version of Sinhala which those who are not fully fluent – including many second-generation Sri Lankans – find difficult to understand). Although it would have been useful in some respects to have a stronger knowledge of Sinhala, overall issues relating to language did not raise serious problems for my research. At the LBV the overwhelming majority of activities are conducted in English. In the Nissarana group both English and Sinhala are used, but when any non-Sinhala speakers are present English is used predominantly. I was rarely the only non-Sinhala speaker at Nissarana events. A number of convert Buddhists are involved with the group. In addition, one key member of the group is a second-generation Sri Lankan who is not fluent in Sinhala. Sinhala is used more widely at the SSIBC, the majority of activities being conducted in this language. However, when attending events at the SSIBC I was always able to obtain translations of talks from those present. Additionally, on one occasion, the SSIBC's Kaṭhina celebrations of 2007, when I wanted to look in particular depth at the talks that took place without unduly disturbing other participants, I was accompanied to the temple by a Sinhala-speaking fellow PhD student who was able to provide translations for me. Language was never a barrier to conversation during my fieldwork or to interviews. While Sri Lankans in the UK vary in

²² <http://noblesharing.ning.com/> (accessed 20/06/2010).

terms of the degree to which they use English it is uncommon to find Sri Lankan Buddhists in Britain whose lack of English constitutes a serious barrier to conversation. I encountered only two individuals during my fieldwork who were unable to communicate effectively in English. Thus the focus of my study was unaffected by language considerations.

1.5 Structure of thesis

This thesis can be divided into two parts. In chapters 4 to 9 I analyse my own fieldwork. Prior to this I dedicate two chapters to discussing issues arising from previous literature which informed my fieldwork and analysis. Chapter 2 examines previous studies of Buddhism in the West, focusing particularly the development and influence of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model, the most recent form of which casts immigrant and convert Buddhism as fundamentally different and separate forms of religiosity. Chapter 3 examines ways in which lived Theravada Buddhism in Asia has been analysed. I look critically at attempts to classify forms of lived Buddhism using dichotomies such as kammatic/nibbanic, kammic/nibbanic, and modernist/traditionalist. Such forms of analysis parallel the dichotomies of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model, and thus in order to explore that model fully these more fundamental models need also to be examined.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 are dedicated to data collected about the institutional life of the London Buddhist Vihara (LBV), and about the religious perspectives of its patrons. As discussed above, the LBV was the institution at which I spent the greatest amount of time both prior to and during my fieldwork. My analysis in these chapters is concerned with two key issues: firstly, the nature of the Buddhist practices and discourses found at the LBV and how this positions the temple with respect to other manifestations of Theravada Buddhism in the UK; secondly, the various ways in which Sri Lankan patrons of the LBV understand and practise Buddhism, and how these can be most fruitfully analysed. Chapter 4 provides a general overview of the LBV and its history, and introduces the central questions addressed in the following chapters. Chapter 5 looks at dimensions of the LBV which emphasise meditation and the intellectual study of Buddhism and play down the importance of ritual aspects of the religion. Chapter 6 examines the approach to Buddhist ritual found at the LBV, and the diverse ways in which ritual is understood by patrons of the temple. Chapter 7 highlights the diversity found at the LBV in terms of teachings and practices, and

addresses the question of whether it is fruitful to understand the religiosity of Sri Lankans at the temple in terms of a 'Two Buddhisms' dichotomy.

In chapter 8 my focus turns to the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre (SSIBC), a Sri Lankan temple located in Kingsbury, North West London. As discussed above, my intention in looking at the SSIBC is to bring breadth to my analysis. The SSIBC is significant in this respect since it was often contrasted with the LBV by my informants in various ways. However, while I explore the differences between the two temples, I also highlight that it would be a distortion to cast these two institutions as binary opposites. Following a theme that runs throughout the thesis, the differences that exist between the LBV and the SSIBC are revealed to be subtle and complex. Chapter 8 also provides the most detailed discussion in the thesis of attitudes towards religion and cultural identity among Sri Lankans in the UK, the differences between the LBV and the SSIBC in terms of cultural focus being used as a starting point for a broader discussion of issues of cultural identity and perseverance in the diaspora.

Chapter 9 examines forms of religiosity within the Sri Lankan community which lie outside mainstream temples such as the LBV and SSIBC, focusing particularly on the Nissarana group. Examining this group helps to broaden the study in important ways. Groups such as Nissarana are an important aspect of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the diaspora, but have been ignored by previous studies. Such groups are especially significant because the form of Buddhism that they teach presents a particularly strong challenge to the portrayal of diaspora Buddhism given within the dominant 'Two Buddhisms' model. My analysis locates the Nissarana group both in relation to mainstream Sri Lankan temple Buddhism and in relation to Western convert Buddhism. The chapter also looks at other aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhist religiosity which lie outside temples, particularly at attitudes towards the worship of divine beings at Hindu temples or other institutions.

Chapter 10 concludes the study by arguing for the need for more complex and sophisticated methods of analysing lived Buddhism in the West, in which forms of Buddhism are examined along a number of axes simultaneously rather than according to a single convert/immigrant dichotomy.

As a last point in this chapter I want to discuss two pairs of terms that recur throughout my analysis: religion and culture; and meditation and ritual. Many contemporary Sri Lankan

Buddhists make a firm distinction between religion and culture, particularly those embracing modernist understandings who tend to advocate a return to a 'pure' Buddhism stripped of the 'later accretions' of Sri Lankan culture (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:220-221). For such individuals 'pure' Buddhism exists separate from any of its particular cultural manifestations. From a scholarly point of view this position is problematic. I take the position that an absolute distinction between religion and culture cannot be made. As Nye argues, "religion" is not some free-floating thing that exists outside of the cultural setting' (2008:7). The de-ritualised, meditation-centred Buddhism of Sri Lankan modernists, as much as 'traditional' Sri Lankan Buddhism, is embedded within – and thus must be understood within – a particular cultural context. It is for this reason that I use scare quotes when discussing references to 'pure' Buddhism made by Sri Lankan Buddhists – from the academic perspective there is no culture-free 'pure' Buddhism, just particular cultural expressions of Buddhism.

Despite this, some parts of this thesis may seem to make a firm distinction between religion and culture. I discuss the 'religious' and 'cultural' aspects of temples separately, and I speak of temples having cultural roles *in addition to* religious roles. The distinction that I am making here is not between religion and culture as two entirely separate realms, but between two different dimensions of diasporic Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. Thus when I speak of temples playing the role of a cultural centre, I am discussing the extent to which they play a self-conscious role as sites for the preservation of Sri Lankan culture and identity in the diaspora through their use of language, their provision of non-religious cultural activities, and their provision of social spaces for Sri Lankans to gather. Such 'cultural' dimensions of temples cannot be entirely disassociated from their religious activities. Since Buddhism is a central aspect of Sinhalese culture, participation in Buddhist activities is a key aspect of cultural preservation in the diaspora. In addition, some of my informants made connections between the approaches to 'religious' and 'cultural' issues found at particular temples (see chapter 8). Nevertheless, the basic questions that are raised by the issue of the cultural focus of temples are clearly different from those raised in my discussion of 'religious' issues, and the two thus need to be analysed separately.

Making some form of distinction between religion and culture is also useful because – as noted above – such a distinction is made by many Sri Lankan Buddhists. It was common for my informants to distinguish between religion and culture, and to view

temples as playing separate (if not entirely unrelated) religious and cultural roles. Some that I spoke with suggested a conflict between these two roles, arguing that temples were places of diaspora culture *rather than* places of real religious practice (see chapter 5). Making a distinction between the cultural and the religious therefore helps me to understand and reflect the views of my informants.

Thus in making distinctions between ‘religion’ and ‘culture’ I am using the two terms to denote different areas examined in my research – those relating to Buddhist belief and practice and those relating to the self-conscious reproduction of Sinhalese cultural identity in the diaspora – and to highlight some of the discourses about religion and culture found among Sri Lankans in Britain.

In this study meditation is not discussed under the category of ‘ritual’. Differing scholarly opinions can be found regarding whether meditation should be regarded as a ritual or as something separate from ritual. For example, Smart includes meditation as an aspect of the ‘ritual dimension’ of religion (1996:96-99), while Spiro makes a clear division between the two (1971:192). I have treated meditation apart from rituals such as *dāna* and *pūjā* for two reasons. Firstly, because much of this thesis is concerned with investigating the applicability to Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK of models – such as the ‘Two Buddhisms’ (see chapter 2) model and Spiro’s kammatic/nibbanic dichotomy (see chapter 3) – which make a separation between meditation and ritual. In investigating these models I have employed the same separation for ease of analysis. Thus in chapter 6, where I am concerned with whether ritual practices at the LBV accord with the analysis of Buddhist ritual in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model and in Spiro’s work, it is helpful to employ the same definition of ritual so that I am looking at the same phenomena that are considered in these models. Secondly, the divide that I have made between meditation and ritual largely reflects understandings that I encountered within the Sri Lankan community. While one can find a range of religious understandings in the community, it was common for those that I spoke with to make a distinction between meditation and rituals such as *pūjā* and *dāna*.

It should be noted, however, that parts of my analysis challenge the idea of a strict separation between meditation and ritual. Thus my arguments in chapter 6 critique the idea that there is an absolute separation between the ‘nibbanic’ activity of meditation and the ‘kammatic’ activity of rituals such as *dāna* and *pūjā*. I show that while many Sri Lankans

make some distinction between meditation and such rituals, this distinction needs to be understood in a nuanced way. My treatment of meditation and ritual separately is thus not based on a commitment to a particular view of the relationship between the two. Rather, my separation of the two can be seen as a provisional one for the purposes of analysis, and as one which my analysis in some ways challenges.

In this thesis, then, I present an analysis of Sri Lankan Buddhism in Britain based on in-depth qualitative research which highlights the complexity and diversity found within the community and thereby challenges previous models of Buddhism in the West. Such previous models have defined migrant and convert Buddhism in opposition to each other with a rigidity which has resulted in misrepresentation. The firm binaries of such models reflect Orientalist assumptions which create a strong opposition between Self (the West) and Other (the East). Such binaries are linked to value judgments, reflected in the disproportionate attention given within scholarship to convert rather than migrant Buddhism. Perhaps most indicative of this trend are books by Coleman (2001) and Bluck (2006) which give overviews respectively of Buddhism in the West generally, and Buddhism in Britain specifically, without including any analysis of diaspora Buddhist communities. As we shall see in chapter 2, underlying this focus on convert Buddhism is an assumption that convert religiosity is somehow more 'authentic' or charged with personal commitment, than the 'traditional' or 'cultural' Buddhism of migrant communities. The resulting tendency to set apart diaspora Buddhism from the study of Buddhism in the West means that one-dimensional portrayals of migrant Buddhist communities going largely unchallenged while convert Buddhism is explored in ever greater depth. This thesis attempts to redress this balance and to take the Sri Lankan diaspora seriously as an important site of Buddhist practice in the UK.

Note on terminology

Pali and Sinhala terms are used throughout the thesis. Aside from those – such as Buddha – which have become part of the English language, such terms are rendered in italics. *Kamma* and *nibbāna* have both become accepted English terms in their Sanskrit forms of karma and nirvana. However, since Pali forms are used within the Theravada tradition, I employ these forms and render them in italics. Sri Lankan Buddhists have two sets of terminology – one

in Pali and one in Sinhala – to draw on when speaking about Buddhism in English. I have generally employed the terms that were used most often by my informants. Thus the protective chanting of the Theravada tradition is referred to using the Sinhalese *pirit*, rather than the Pali *paritta*, while the Pali form Buddha is preferred to the Sinhala form *Budu*. Names of festivals and celebrations (such as Wesak and Kaṭhina) and names of individuals described in Buddhist texts (such as Anāthapiṇḍika) are not italicised.

Sri Lankan monks are conventionally referred to in English by the title ‘Venerable’. Other titles are occasionally used. One monk that I came into contact with referred to himself with the title ‘Reverend’, while laypeople will sometimes use the Pali term ‘Bhante’ (an honorific term meaning something akin to ‘Venerable’) for a monk they hold in particularly high regard. However, ‘Venerable’ is used far more often. I therefore employ this title when speaking about Sri Lankan monks in this thesis. When referring to Western convert monks, I use the term that is used most often by the monk himself and/or his followers. Western monastics practising in the Thai Forest tradition are referred to as ‘Bhikkhu’ (the Pali term for a Buddhist monk, used for males) or ‘Sister’ (used for females) if ordained for less than 10 years, and ‘Ajahn’ (a Thai term meaning ‘teacher’) if ordained for 10 years or more. Titles used by Western monks outside this tradition include ‘Bhante’ and ‘Bhikkhu’. I use titles in my first reference to a monk in a particular chapter or section. Thereafter I drop the title, since employing a title on every reference would be cumbersome.

References to texts from the Pali Canon are to the Pali Text Society editions. Texts are referenced only on their first appearance. The following abbreviations are used to refer to the section of the Pali Canon which contains the text:

AN = Aṅguttara Nikāya

DN = Dīgha Nikāya

Sn = Sutta-nipāta

Chapter 2

Two Buddhisms in the West?

In this chapter I review previous literature concerning issues of religious belief and practice among diasporic Buddhist communities in the West. The study of Buddhism in the West is a relatively young discipline, and the research that has been carried out has tended to focus more on the Buddhism of Western converts than on Buddhism in immigrant communities (Numrich 1996:xxii). Those studies that have been carried out into immigrant Buddhist communities have tended to focus on what we may call sociological issues – questions of integration and assimilation, of cultural preservation and identity, and of the ‘Westernisation’ of institutions – rather than on questions of religious belief and practice (see Hori *forthcoming*). Rather than attempting an exhaustive representation of previous studies of immigrant Buddhism in the West, I shall focus in this chapter on those studies that are most concerned with issues directly relevant to my discussion of religious belief and practice among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK. Thus I will give most attention to studies which focus on issues of belief and practice, and I will give more attention to studies of diasporic Theravada Buddhism than to literature concerning other forms of immigrant Buddhism.

Among scholars who have tried to make sense of the complexities of Buddhism in the West one model has been particularly popular. This is the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model, which attempts to describe and analyse Buddhism in the West by drawing a contrast between the Buddhism of Western converts and the Buddhism of Asian immigrants. The model argues that these two forms of Buddhism in the West are very different in character, have very different histories, and have little contact with one another. This model is of particular interest to me not only because it has become the dominant way in which diasporic Buddhism in the West is described in academic (and at times, non-academic) discourse, but also because it forms the basis of what is so far the only full-length published study to look in any depth at Buddhism in a diasporic Sinhalese community in the West: Paul Numrich’s *Old Wisdom in the New World* (1996). I will spend the first two sections of this chapter assessing the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model, paying particular attention to Numrich’s study.

As my analysis will illustrate, I feel that the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model is useful in that it highlights that Buddhism in the West consists of two very different streams.

However, when we come to look in depth at Buddhism in the West it becomes clear that the portrayal that it provides of immigrant Buddhism is ultimately limited and distorting, creating divisions between what is similar and treating as homogenous that which contains more diversity than similarity. It further gives converts a disproportionate place within Western Buddhism, treating them half of the tradition (and very often giving them far more attention than immigrant Buddhists) when in reality they are a minority balanced against a majority consisting of a series of distinct and diverse diaspora communities. It is also deceptive in that, as I shall show in section 2.1, the phrase ‘Two Buddhisms’ has a continuity that has outlasted its original referent. What the ‘two’ are has changed substantially even in the few decades during which the phrase has been in use. In section 2.3 I will examine material which looks in greater depth at issues of belief and practice among diasporic Buddhists and is thus able to expand upon the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model and provide more sophisticated analyses of religiosity in immigrant Buddhist communities. Finally, in section 2.4 I will discuss scholarship that deals specifically with Buddhism in the UK.

2.1 The ‘Two Buddhisms’ model

The term ‘Two Buddhisms’ was first used by Charles Prebish in his 1979 book *American Buddhism*. Here Prebish distinguishes between ‘two distinct lines of development for Buddhism in America’ (1979:51). Significantly, Prebish does not define the two forms of Buddhism he identifies in terms of ethnicity or divisions such as immigrant/convert. Rather Prebish’s division is based on questions of orthodoxy and dedication to practice. Those forms of Buddhism based on ‘sound, basic doctrines’ and ‘solid religious practice’ are distinguished from those that play down the importance ‘basic doctrine and painstaking practice’ in favour of ‘the promise of something new, frequently centred on the personal charisma of a flamboyant leader’ (51). It was not until the 1990s that a number of scholars – including Prebish (1993) – began to consistently define Buddhism in the USA in terms of a divide between American converts and Asian immigrants. It was also in this period that scholars began to apply the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model beyond the USA to Buddhism in Europe and Australia.¹ There is debate among such scholars about precisely how the ‘Two

¹ See, for example, Baumann (1995,2001,2002a) and Spuler (2000). Also of interest is the use of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model outside specialist books and articles, in discussions of Buddhism in the West in more general introductions to Buddhism (see Thompson 2006b:132).

Buddhisms’ should be defined, and about whether further divisions should be made, resulting in a three or four Buddhisms model.² However, the picture given in literature which employs the ‘Two Buddhisms’ is consistent enough for me to describe it here in generalised terms.

While the analysis given in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ literature is fairly consistent, there is little agreement on how to refer to the two forms of Buddhism that the model identifies. Terms used to describe the Buddhism of Western converts include ‘white’ (Fields 1998), ‘new’ (Coleman 2001), ‘import’ (Nattier 1998), ‘modernist’ (Baumann 2001), and ‘convert’ (Numrich 2000). Terms used to describe the Buddhism of Buddhist immigrants from Asia include ‘ethnic’ (Coleman 2001), ‘culture’ (Numrich 2000), ‘Asian’ (Numrich 1996), ‘Asian American’ (Gregory 2001), ‘baggage’ (Nattier 1998), and ‘traditionalist’ (Baumann 2001). In this study I will use the term ‘diaspora Buddhism’ when referring to the Buddhism of Asian immigrants, and the term ‘convert Buddhism’ when referring to the Buddhism of Western converts. The term diaspora highlights the ‘in between’ nature of immigrant communities in the West, and avoids the problematic implication that the Buddhism of Asian immigrants is necessarily more a matter of ethnic inheritance than personal conviction (unlike terms such as ‘culture’ and ‘baggage’). The term convert Buddhism captures what distinguishes these Buddhists from other Buddhists in the West: that they were not born within the Buddhist tradition.

The ‘Two Buddhisms’ model portrays convert and diaspora Buddhism as being fundamentally different in character. Convert Buddhism, according to the model, is characterised by an emphasis on the practice of meditation and the study of Buddhist philosophy; by a lack of enthusiasm for ritual, merit-making, devotion and what some refer to as the ‘folk’ aspects of Asian Buddhism (e.g. gods and spirits, palm reading, fortune telling and amulets); by an emphasis on lay practice and a playing down of the traditional divide between the laity and the monastic *Sangha*;³ by a tendency to see Buddhism as a

² Nattier (1998) and Seager (1999, 2002) both suggest threefold models of Buddhism in the West, while Machacek (2001) argues for a fourfold model. While all of these attempts to expand the basic ‘Two Buddhisms’ model are helpful in giving a more nuanced picture of Buddhism in the West, in each case the extra categories that they add concern forms of Buddhism which are outside the scope of this study (in all three cases, East Asian forms of Buddhism). Thus when it comes to the forms of Buddhism that interest us here – Theravada Buddhism in the West – these models affirm the basic ‘Two Buddhisms’ model. Moreover, the adding of ‘folds’ arguably contributes to the reification of falsely discrete distinctions rather than to the nuancing of representation.

³ The Pali term *Sangha* refers to the Buddhist community, and is most often used in the Theravada tradition with reference to the community of monks.

way to achieve personal fulfilment rather than as a community or family religion; and by a tendency to detach Buddhism from questions of ethnic identity.⁴ Baumann suggests that the form of Buddhism found among converts has its roots in the ‘modernist’ approaches to Buddhism which emerged in many Asian countries during the colonial period, and which aimed to produce a rationalised, de-ritualised and meditation-centred form of Buddhism (Baumann 2001:3, 28).

By contrast, diaspora Buddhism as portrayed in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model is characterised by an emphasis on ritual, merit-making and ‘folk’ aspects of Buddhism; a less enthusiastic approach to the practice of meditation; an emphasis on preserving rather than questioning or changing the religious tradition of the ‘home’ country; a more traditional approach to the relationship between the laity and the monastic *Sangha*; a tendency to see Buddhism as part of family and community life rather than as an individual pursuit; a tendency to use temples not only for religious purposes, but also for wider ‘cultural’ purposes (such as the teaching of ‘home’ country languages and cultural practices to young members of the community); a greater emphasis on the importance of claiming a Buddhist identity; and a tendency to connect Buddhism with discourses of ethnic identity.⁵ Baumann argues that diaspora Buddhism is the result of the importation to the West of ‘traditionalist’ Buddhisms, which Buddhist modernists reacted against (2001:3, 26).

In addition to arguing that convert and diaspora Buddhism are different in character, some proponents of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model also argue that there is little social contact between the two (Numrich 2000:196; Seager 2002:106). Thus Nattier suggests that convert Buddhists are more likely to have links with other converts practising within different Buddhist traditions than with diaspora Buddhists within their own tradition (1998:190).

2.1.1 Paul Numrich *Old Wisdom in the New World*

Paul Numrich’s *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples* (1996) analyses the way in which Buddhism is practised by convert and diaspora Buddhists in two Theravada temples in the USA: Wat Dhammaram, a Thai temple in Chicago, and Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara, a Sri Lankan temple in Los

⁴ My discussion of how convert Buddhism is described is based on Baumann (2001, 2002a), Fields (1998), Gregory (2001), Nattier (1998), Numrich (1996, 2000), and Seager (1999).

⁵ My discussion of how diaspora Buddhism is described in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ literature is based on Baumann (2001, 2002a), Gregory (2001), Nattier (1998), Numrich (1996, 2000), and Seager (1999, 2002).

Angeles. Numrich's book is significant for the present study not only because it is so far the only full-length published work to give attention to how Theravada Buddhism is practised in an immigrant Sri Lankan community, but also because it is the only study to attempt to illustrate the 'Two Buddhisms' model using in-depth original research. Other literature that has employed the 'Two Buddhisms' model or some variation upon it has tended to rely on surveys of existing literature or on the personal experiences and viewpoint of the author rather than on in-depth research into particular communities (Baumann 2001, 2002a; Fields 1998; Gregory 2001; Nattier 1998; Prebish 1993; Seager 2002 ; Spuler 2000).

Central to Numrich's study is his analysis of the divisions that exist, both socially and in terms of how they approach Buddhism, between the diaspora (Thai and Sri Lankan) and convert Buddhists who attend the two temples. Numrich argues that these two groups form 'parallel congregations' at the temples: congregations which, while they attend the same institutions under the direction of the same monks, have different understandings of Buddhism, practise Buddhism in very different ways, attend the temples on different occasions and interact with each other very little (chapter 4). Thus Numrich describes the Thai and Sri Lankan Buddhists at these temples as practising a community-centred form of Buddhism based on ritual and merit-making, attending temple in the main for festivals; to make merit by offering food to the monks or by making offerings to an image of the Buddha; to have monks perform rituals as a blessing for a certain life event; to commemorate and transfer merit to a deceased family member; to perform worship for a god or to the *bō* tree; to ask monks to read their palms or to prepare amulets for them; or, in the case of younger members of the Thai and Sri Lankan communities, to take part in Sunday school classes on Buddhism and Thai or Sinhala language (chapters 4 and 5). The American converts at these temples, by contrast, practise an individualistic, de-ritualised, meditation-centred form of Buddhism and attend the temples in the main for meditation classes, meditation retreats and discussions on Buddhist philosophy (chapters 4 and 6). While Numrich notes that there are a few occasions on which immigrant and convert Buddhists attend the same events at the temples, he observes that even on these occasions the two congregations, divided not only by their different approaches to Buddhism but also linguistically and in terms of ethnicity, interact little with each other (66-67).

Numrich's analysis thus suggests that even within Buddhist temples in the West which attract both convert and diaspora Buddhists we can find a 'Two Buddhism' divide.

Within his discussions Numrich acknowledges that some variety in terms of approach to religion can be found with the two congregations at each temple, particularly among the diaspora congregations. Thus he speaks of a 'continuum of religious adherents within the Asian congregations of these temples' and notes that one can find 'some Asians who think a lot like American converts' (64). However, Numrich does not look in depth at the religious diversity found among diaspora Buddhists. Despite the above caveats he argues that:

...the subgroups within the Asian congregations of Wat Dhammaram of Chicago and Dharma Vijaya of Los Angeles remain more Asian than American, by which I mean that the religious attitudes and behaviors of any given Asian member approximate those of fellow immigrants more than those of American converts. (64-65)

Rather than dwelling on the complexities within the diaspora communities at Wat Dhammaram and Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara, Numrich concentrates instead on drawing out the contrasts between the meditative, philosophical Buddhism of the converts at these temples and the 'traditional', ritualistic Buddhism of their diaspora congregations.⁶

2.2 Critique

In this section I provide a general critique of the 'Two Buddhisms' model before looking at some particular aspects of Numrich's study. Before moving on to my critique, let me say something about the strengths of the 'Two Buddhisms' model. The model usefully highlights that diaspora and convert Buddhism have different (if at times interconnected) histories and represent different social phenomena. Making a distinction between the two is useful from an academic point of view because it helps us to recognise that these two streams of Buddhism in the West need to be studied in different ways, since different religious, cultural, political and economic factors are relevant when analysing them. The model also highlights that there are often differences between convert and diaspora Buddhism in terms of Buddhist practice and the role that Buddhism plays in these communities. However, as we shall see, making generalisations about the differences and divides between the two Buddhisms can soon lead us into difficulties. It should also be

⁶ Numrich's use of the terms 'Asian' and 'American' in the above quote is interesting, and reveals the extent to which he makes a firm distinction between convert and diaspora Buddhism. Here he refers to approaches to Buddhism as 'Asian' and 'American' rather than in terms of the attitudes and patterns of practice they entail. Thus for Numrich it is axiomatic that there are distinct convert and diaspora forms of religiosity.

noted here that scholars employing the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model often acknowledge its limitations. Peter Gregory writes:

Although such a characterization of the two Buddhisms may be useful in providing an initial orientation to the landscape, once we actually begin to try to navigate on the ground we will soon discover that the situation is more complex and that we would only be misled if we were to apply it too rigidly to specific cases. (Gregory 2001:245).

Thus Gregory sees the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model as something limited which we must eventually go beyond. I agree with this but will further suggest that it is something we must – beyond the rather superficial level of noting groupings – do without. Therefore, even if one acknowledges some usefulness, providing a critique of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model is important. In order to build on and move beyond or discard a particular model it is important to understand the problems with this model.

My basic disagreement with the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model is that it presents essentialised, one-dimensional portrayals of diaspora and convert Buddhism as fundamentally different and separate forms of religiosity. As such it leads us to ignore both the diversity found within convert and diaspora Buddhism, and the points of similarity and contact that can be found between the two. Moreover it groups different diasporas together. Since my study concerns a single diaspora Buddhist community, my critique here will focus on the problems with the model’s portrayal of diaspora Buddhism when applied to a single ethnic/land of origin group. In order to examine the difficulties with the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model I will look in turn at three arguments commonly made by those using the model: that there are social divides between convert and diaspora Buddhists; that Buddhism plays different roles in the lives of convert and diaspora Buddhists; and that convert and diaspora Buddhists tend to practise and understand Buddhism in different ways.

It is certainly true that in many cases there are social divisions between diaspora and convert Buddhists. However, it should be noted that such divisions are only part of the picture. Instances of closer relations between convert and diaspora Buddhists can also be pointed to. For example, Cadge and Sangdhanoo, in their historical overview of Thai Buddhism in the USA, show that there has been a great deal of contact between Thai Buddhists and Western converts in the more than 40 years that Thai Buddhism has had a presence in America (2005). Significantly, they observe that while convert presence in

some Thai temples has resulted in 'parallel congregations' of the kind described by Numrich, at other temples Thais and American converts practise together (2005:21). During my research contact between Sri Lankan and convert Buddhists was particularly evident in the Nissarana group (examined in chapter 9), in which converts and Sri Lankans practise together with no form of parallel congregations. My research also highlights the popularity among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK of certain convert Buddhist teachers, a phenomenon which again complicates the idea that there is little contact between convert and diaspora Buddhists.

It is also true that Buddhism often plays different roles in convert and diaspora communities. Whereas among Western converts embracing Buddhism involves a change in identity, in diaspora communities Buddhism often plays a role in reinforcing and maintaining home-country cultural identities. While convert Buddhists tend to embrace the religion as a way to achieve personal fulfilment, in many diaspora communities Buddhism is integrated into community and family life. In addition, diasporic Buddhist temples often play a number of roles which are not played by convert Buddhist institutions, such as those of social and cultural centre for the diaspora community. However, when discussing the social roles that Buddhism plays in diaspora communities we must also be careful not to suggest that diaspora Buddhism is necessarily concerned more with the preservation of homeland culture and identity than with personal religious practice. This questionable assumption is made by Baumann, who argues that diaspora Buddhists, 'practice their religion primarily in order to preserve and maintain their cultural identity and heritage' (1995:64). Baumann's comment brings to mind arguments made by Hori (*forthcoming*), who suggests that the Western tendency to place great value on individuals choosing their religion leads scholars to regard convert Buddhism as 'authentic' religiosity, while devaluing diaspora Buddhism as 'merely pro-forma religion', more about membership of a particular ethno-religious group than about personal religiosity. Hori states:

Western/convert Buddhism, just because it is the personal choice of an individual, fits the Western notion of real religion. By contrast, Asian/ethnic Buddhism is depicted as if it were not authentic religion; its function is not really religious but sociological, to assist its members to assimilate.

This, Hori argues, leads scholars to study convert and diaspora Buddhism differently, so that 'Asian/ethnic Buddhism gets studied sociologically while Western/convert Buddhism

gets studied as religious studies'. The present thesis attempts to move beyond this tendency by taking seriously the personal religiosity of Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK. To choose to stay within the tradition in which one was raised is the majority choice and not indicative of an absence of choice, commitment or thought. This is particularly so in the diaspora context when to pursue one's religion of birth may entail even more active choices and effort than to discard it.

When it comes to the question of how Buddhism is understood and practised by convert and diaspora Buddhists, again it is true that there are often differences between the two groups. However, the essentialised, one-dimensional portrayals of convert and diaspora Buddhisms offered by the 'Two Buddhisms' model are problematic. Diaspora Buddhism is viewed as ritual-centred and 'traditionalist', while convert Buddhism is viewed as meditation-centred and 'modernist'. The use of the labels modernist and traditionalist in this context is critiqued by Hori, who argues:

Part of our problem in understanding Buddhism in the West is that we are quick to assume that ethnic Buddhism is 'traditionalist', born before the modern world began, focused on devotionalist ancestor and memorial rituals, offering lay people only merit-making exercises, teaching only karma and rebirth. In this assumption, we are still implicitly associating the modern with the west. But if we paid more attention to the Buddhism that is being sent out of Asian countries and less to the Buddhism that is being received in the West, we would see this stereotype for what it is. (Hori *forthcoming*).

Labelling convert Buddhism as modernist and diaspora Buddhism as traditionalist ignores the fact that – as noted in by Baumann (see section 2.1) – modernist Buddhism originates not in the West but in Buddhist nations in Asia. Modernist forms of Buddhism, which emphasised meditation and played down the importance of rituals of merit-making, emerged in different parts of Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as attempts to reinterpret Buddhism in ways that were in accordance with modern (Western) thought. While the Asian origins of modernist Buddhism are noted by Baumann, he continues to label diaspora Buddhism as 'traditionalist' on the grounds that modernist Buddhism has been influential among 'only a minority' in Asia (2001:28). It is certainly true that modernist Buddhism has not entirely replaced more traditional forms of practice in Asia, and that modernist ideas have been particularly influential on certain sectors of society (often the educated urban middle-classes). However, it is problematic to argue that those Buddhists in Asia who have adopted a modernist approach to Buddhism are insignificant in number, given the role of

modernist Buddhism in national politics and personal identity formation in many Buddhist nations. Even if the influence of modernism has been greater among the urban educated middle-classes, many Buddhist diaspora communities in the West are characterised by an overrepresentation of precisely these sections of society. From what we know of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and considering the high proportion of educated, middle-class professionals in the Sri Lankan community in Britain, one would expect modernist forms of Buddhism, emphasising meditation and playing down the importance of ritualised merit-making, to be relatively common in the diaspora.

The above might seem to suggest that diaspora Buddhists can be divided into two groups: those who practise a modernist form of Buddhism of the kind found among Western converts, and those who practise a traditionalist form of Buddhism. Here a new 'Two Buddhisms' model is suggested, making a division not between convert and diaspora Buddhists, but between modernist and traditionalist Buddhists across the convert/diaspora divide. However, looking again at Buddhist societies in contemporary Asia suggests that things are more complex than this. Making a simple modernist/traditionalist divide ignores the fact that one can find considerable diversity even within modernist forms of Buddhism. While common themes can be found in modernist forms of Buddhism worldwide, Buddhist modernism is not a uniform movement. Some modernist forms of Buddhism found in contemporary Sri Lanka have much in common with the Buddhism of Western converts (and, in fact, some Buddhist institutions in Sri Lanka attract significant numbers of Western practitioners). However, others differ in significant ways from the dominant trends found among convert Buddhists.⁷ Making a firm divide within diaspora communities between modernist and traditionalist forms of Buddhism is also problematic. To take Sri Lankan again as an example, modernist and traditionalist forms of Buddhism do not exist as two entirely separate categories in contemporary Sri Lanka. Instead they co-exist in a complex and overlapping relationship both with each other and with more recent forms of religious change which have emerged in the post-colonial era (see chapter 3).

The question of how we can understand the relationship between different approaches to Buddhism is a key theme of my research. Above I have argued that it is problematic to describe all Buddhists in Asia, and hence all diaspora Buddhists, as practising a traditionalist form of Buddhism centred around rituals of merit-making and

⁷ See Bond (2003) on diversity within modernist, meditation-centred Buddhism in contemporary Sri Lanka.

blessing. However, this does not mean that all diaspora Buddhists can be characterised as taking a strongly modernist approach. As we shall see, a significant proportion of individuals in the Sri Lankan community in Britain take an approach to Buddhism which foregrounds meditation and dismisses the importance of merit-making rituals. However, not all take such an approach. Some individuals take little interest in meditation, emphasise the importance of rituals such as *pūjā* and *dāna*, and thus differ in important ways from the majority of converts in terms of their practice of Buddhism. Such cases raise the question of how, when religious differences between convert and diaspora Buddhists are observed, such differences are to be understood and conceptualised. This question – which will be continued in chapter 3 – to some extent take me beyond a critique of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model towards broader questions of how to understand religious difference within Buddhism. For students of Theravada Buddhism the divide that the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model makes brings to mind not only the modernist/traditionalist division, but also other attempts to divide lived Buddhism into categories, particularly Spiro’s kammatic/nibbanic division (1971) and Winston King’s somewhat different kammic/nibbanic dichotomy (1964). Such categorisations of Buddhism have become extremely influential in Buddhist studies, and the ease with which the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model feeds into such categorisations means that the divisions it makes seem natural ones to many students of Buddhism. Spiro and Kings’ analyses suggest that kammatic/kammic and nibbanic Buddhism are fundamentally different religious systems, each with a different ethos and soteriological goal. From such a perspective convert Buddhists who focus on meditation and diaspora Buddhists who focus on rituals are engaging in very different forms of religiosity. In the next chapter and throughout this study I will examine the usefulness of such dichotomies for understanding the forms of Buddhism found among Sri Lankans in the UK.

Lastly in this section I want to look at some specific aspects of Numrich’s study. Numrich’s work is important and the differences that he finds between convert and diaspora Buddhists are certainly significant. However, two aspects of Numrich’s study make it difficult for the analysis to move beyond the limits of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model. The first concerns the nature of Numrich’s research. Numrich looks in greater depth at the religiosity of convert practitioners at Wat Dhammaram and Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara than at that of

diaspora Buddhists at these temples. Numrich conducted in-depth interviews with ten convert Buddhists and provides fairly lengthy 'spiritual biographies' of each interviewee. By contrast he bases his portrayal of diaspora Buddhism not on interviews, but on observing how diaspora Buddhists practise at the temples, and on a survey asking diaspora Buddhists which religious practices they regard as most important. The differences here are problematic. They perpetuate the tendency observed by Hori for scholars to treat convert Buddhism as a more authentic form of religion than diaspora Buddhism. While the understandings of Buddhism held by Numrich's convert interviewees are taken seriously and explored in depth, the diaspora Buddhists at the two temples are given little voice, their religiosity reduced to their tendency to engage in certain rituals and attend certain festivals. Thus under-representation of diaspora Buddhists in the study of Buddhism in the West is continued even in this study which focuses on diaspora temples.

Numrich's lack of interviews with diaspora Buddhists problematises his claim that he presents an analysis of the 'religious understandings and ritual behavior' (1996:64) of these Buddhists. While he does provide the latter, the religious understandings of these Thai and Sri Lankan practitioners go largely unexplored, and the reader is left to infer these understandings from the way in which diaspora Buddhists practise. Reading religious understanding from practice in this way is problematic. As we shall see in chapters 6 and 8, Buddhist rituals such as *dāna* and *pūjā* are multivalent and can be understood in a variety of ways. Numrich shows that many diaspora Buddhists do not place as strong an emphasis on meditation as convert Buddhists, and are more likely to participate in rituals of *pūjā* and *dāna*. However, how these rituals are regarded by those that take part in them – whether they are seen as primarily means of merit-making quite divorced from practices such as meditation, or whether they are seen as ways of developing and purifying the mind akin to meditation – is left unexamined. Given the emphasis on state of mind and/or heart when participating in 'ritual' even in the earliest Buddhist literature, the lack of any interviews suggests a deeply problematic basis for interpreting the meanings that rituals have for participants.

The second aspect of Numrich's study that I want to focus on is the range of institutions that he examines. Numrich focuses on one Thai temple in Chicago and one Sri Lankan temple in Los Angeles. Focusing a study in this way is not problematic in itself. However, it is possible that in concentrating only on one temple in each community

Numrich has produced somewhat one-dimensional portrayals of Buddhist practice among Thais and Sri Lankans in the USA. Many diaspora Buddhist communities – especially those of a significant size – contain a number of different Buddhist institutions and organisations, each differing to some extent in terms of their religious focus and the patrons that they attract. In order to get a full picture of Buddhist practice within such communities it is necessary to take into account this range of institutions. While Numrich does not explore the issue in depth, he does note the existence of other Buddhist temples serving the Thai community of Chicago and the Sri Lankan community of Los Angeles. Numrich’s brief discussion of the different Thai temples in Chicago is particularly interesting (1996:36-38). In addition to Wat Dhammaram, there are two further Thai temples in Chicago: the Natural Buddhist Meditation Temple of Greater Chicago and the Buddhadharma Meditation Centre. Numrich’s discussion suggests that these temples both differ significantly from Wat Dhammaram in terms of the degree to which they play the role of a Sri Lankan cultural centre, and in terms of their religious focus. The difference is most striking at the Natural Buddhist Meditation Temple of Chicago, which Numrich describes as being characterised by an ‘overriding devotion to meditation’ (1996:37). These differences raise the possibility that Numrich may have obtained a very different picture of the religiosity of Thai Buddhists in Chicago had he chosen to focus on a different temple.

During my research I found that the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in London is served by a range of temples, as well as by a number of groups which meet outside mainstream temples. In addition, many Sri Lankans in the UK attend convert Buddhist institutions. Interestingly, I encountered a number of Sri Lankans who preferred to attend strongly meditation-centred Buddhist institutions or groups rather than more mainstream Sri Lankan Buddhist temples, despite the fact that many mainstream temples do provide meditation classes, and despite the fact that a number of convert Buddhists – who themselves take a meditation-centred approach to Buddhism – regularly attend such mainstream temples. Such cases disrupt the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model in an interesting way, alerting us to the fact that when we study convert and diaspora Buddhists practising at a particular diaspora temple we are not looking at ‘convert Buddhists’ and ‘diaspora Buddhists’ in some generic sense, but at particular members of these two groups who have chosen to practise at one among a number of possible Buddhist institutions. This raises questions not only about diaspora Buddhism, but also about convert religiosity. As Cadge

and Sangdhanoo note with respect to convert Buddhists in the USA, '[a]dditional research is needed to better understand what brings non-Asian Americans to Buddhist temples to learn rather than to meditation centres or other convert Buddhist organizations where these teachings are also available' (2005:29).

2.3 Moving beyond the 'Two Buddhisms' model

I have now looked in some depth at the problems the 'Two Buddhisms' model brings to an analysis of diaspora Buddhism in the West. While the model has been extremely influential in academic accounts of Buddhism in the Western world, we can find some scholarship which goes beyond it, providing more sophisticated analyses of diaspora Buddhism. I do not have space here to discuss all such material.⁸ Instead I will look in some depth at two studies which are particularly relevant to my thesis. Both provide in-depth analysis of particular diasporic Theravada temples in the USA.

2.3.1 Wendy Cadge *Heartwood*

Wendy Cadge's *Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America* (2005) compares diaspora and convert Buddhists at two separate Theravada institutions in the USA: Wat Phila, a Thai temple in Philadelphia; and the Cambridge Insight Meditation Centre (CIMC), a non-monastic convert institution based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Cadge identifies some important differences between the convert and diaspora Buddhists that she studies. She notes that while many converts at CIMC reject certain aspects of Buddhist teaching, including seemingly key concepts such as *kamma* and rebirth, such teachings are accepted by the majority of Thai Buddhists at Wat Phila (98). Cadge also observes that while most (though not all) Thai Buddhists at Wat Phila believe that it is not possible for laypeople to attain *nibbāna* in this life (93), converts at CIMC believe that it is (98).

⁸ Other material that moves beyond the problematic 'Two Buddhisms' model includes McLellan's *Many Petals of the Lotus* (1999), which analyses five diaspora Buddhist communities in Toronto, highlighting the religious diversity both within and between these communities; and Cadge and Sangdhanoo's overview of Thai Buddhism in the USA (2005), which illustrates diversity among Thai Buddhist temples in America in terms of religious and cultural focus, highlighting contact between diaspora and convert Buddhists in many Thai temples in the USA. Also important is Numrich's 'Two Buddhisms Further Considered' (2003). Here Numrich, while continuing to support the use of a 'Two Buddhisms' model, presents a significantly different version of the model giving greater attention to the religious diversity that can be found within diaspora Buddhist communities.

However, despite these differences, Cadge does not create a firm dichotomy between the diaspora and convert Buddhists that she studies. Rather she highlights that a range of approaches can be found among these two groups, particularly among the Thai Buddhists of Wat Phila. Cadge analyses understandings of Buddhism at Wat Phila in terms of a continuum, with ‘rational’ interpretations at one end, and ‘supernatural’ interpretations at the other (105).⁹ Those at the rational end of the spectrum view Buddhism as a scientific philosophy that should be accepted only when it has been tested through study and meditation; do not assume the existence of gods and other higher powers; regard figures such as the Buddha and Luāngphō Sot (a famous Thai monk who has a significant place in the teachings of Wat Phila, and who fathered the distinctive *dhammakāya* meditation practice) as teachers whose example one should follow rather than as beings who can help one supernaturally; and regard rituals and ceremonies as ways of focusing one’s mind on the teachings of the Buddha. Those at the supernatural end of the spectrum emphasise the protective power of amulets; stress the supernatural powers of the Buddha and Luāngphō Sot; accept the existence of gods and other higher powers; view meditation as bringing supernatural results; and view rituals as ways of making merit (92-93, 105-106, 109-110, 152-153, 194). While the divide between rational and supernatural understandings can appear sharp, Cadge’s conceptualisation of approaches to Buddhism at Wat Phila as a continuum rather than a dichotomy makes it clear that a range of different understandings – some more rational and some more supernatural – can be found at the temple.¹⁰ By

⁹ The terminology Cadge employs is somewhat problematic. Cadge states that the labels ‘supernatural’ and ‘rational’ do not imply that approaches which stress the supernatural are irrational (Cadge 2005:235-236, n.49). However, the labels do lend themselves to such an interpretation. It would be preferable to use alternative labels, perhaps opposing ‘supernatural’ to ‘empirical’. I stick with Cadge’s terms only because this makes it easier for me to draw comparisons between my analysis and Cadge’s work.

¹⁰ There is another issue here which Cadge misses, perhaps through a lack of familiarity with Thai Buddhism. Wat Phila teaches *dhammakāya* meditation, which is a sub-branch of *yogavacara* (Crosby 2000:186-187; Newell 2008:249-264). *Yogavacara* is a somatic form of meditation which undermines the contrast between mind and body culture that underlies the division often made by scholars between nibbanic practices – aimed at developing the mind towards enlightenment – and apotropaic practices – aimed at bringing worldly blessings and protection (Crosby 2000, 2005). Thus it would be surprising if a firm division could be made between those at Wat Phila who emphasise the ‘supernatural’ benefits of Buddhist practice, and those that emphasise Buddhism as a meditation-centred philosophy.

More generally, Cadge’s failure to highlight the distinctive nature of the meditation practices taught at Wat Phila undermines her generally successful attempt to introduce greater complexity to the study of diaspora Buddhism. Cadge tends to treat Wat Phila as a generic representative of the Thai Theravada tradition, so as to contrast it with CIMC as a representative of convert Buddhism. However, the *dhammakāya* tradition that Wat Phila belongs to is a distinct and sometimes controversial one within Thailand (Newell 2008:110-155). Cadge leaves unexplored the questions that this raises: do all laity at Wat Phila view themselves as followers of this particular tradition, or do some attend simply because it is their nearest Thai temple?; how do the patterns of understanding and practice found at Wat Phila compare with those at other

highlighting the diversity found at Wat Phila, Cadge is able to show that although there are some important differences between the Thai Buddhists of Wat Phila and the converts of CIMC, one can also find points of similarity between how patrons of these two institutions understand and practice Buddhism (particularly in the case those that lie at the rational end of Cadge's continuum (105)).

Cadge's analysis of issues of identity at Wat Phila is also of interest. Cadge distinguishes between ascribed identities – identities that are inherited at birth – and achieved identities – identities that individuals construct themselves (157). Despite the fact that most practitioners at Wat Phila were born as Buddhists, Cadge finds that only a minority of these individuals describe their religious identities in purely ascribed terms (158). Most at Wat Phila describe their religious identities in both ascribed and achieved terms. These individuals say that they were born as Buddhists but that they have found out more about Buddhism and become 'real Buddhists' since arriving in the USA (158-159).¹¹ Cadge also looks at how practitioners at Wat Phila view the relationship between their Buddhist and Thai identities. Some at the temple make a strong link between the two, arguing that '[t]o be Thai is to be Buddhist' (163). For this group coming to the temple is strongly linked to maintaining Thai cultural identities in the USA. Others at Wat Phila, however, tend not to equate their religious and ethnic identities. Instead of seeing Buddhism as a way of preserving their inherited cultural tradition, they stress it is a philosophy in tune with modern thinking which helps them in their present lives in the USA (163-164). Cadge's findings here help us to move away from the idea that diaspora Buddhism is primarily a matter of preserving 'home country' culture and identity.

In addition to moving beyond simplistic analysis of the 'Two Buddhisms' model, Cadge's study also raises certain questions. One of these concerns how diversity within diaspora Buddhist communities can best be conceptualised. As noted above, Cadge focuses on where practitioners lie on a rational/supernatural scale, thus giving most importance to the degree to which individuals emphasise supernatural beings or forces. While I will employ Cadge's rational/supernatural continuum in my analysis, I will also look at Sri

Thai temples in the USA?; to what degree do the religious differences that Cadge finds at Wat Phila reflect differences in the degree to which individuals are dedicated to the particular teachings of the *dhammakāya* tradition?

¹¹ Cadge does not look at whether this sense of a change in religious identity is related to the fact that Wat Phila belongs to a particular tradition within Thai Buddhism (see previous note). It may be that for some at Wat Phila this sense of becoming 'real Buddhists' in the USA is connected to their embracing of the *dhammakāya* tradition taught at Wat Phila.

Lankan Buddhism in the UK in a number of other ways. For example, borrowing terms from Spiro (see chapter 3), I will look at the degree to which individuals emphasise kammatic merit-making, apotropaic rituals of protection, or nibbanic practices of mental purification. I will also look at the degree to which individuals accept and take part in rituals of offering towards divine beings. In employing a single rational/supernatural continuum Cadge's analysis tends to take for granted a connection between different dimensions of religiosity: on one hand we have those who accept the supernatural, stress merit-making and apotropaic protection, and engage in practices of worship towards divine beings; on the other we have those who reject the supernatural, stress the nibbanic purification of the mind, take less interest in kammatic and apotropaic practices, and reject rituals directed towards divine beings. As we shall see, my research suggests that the forms of religiosity found in diaspora Buddhist communities are more complex than this and need to be analysed along a number of different axes rather than in terms of a single continuum.

2.3.2 Bridget Fitzpatrick *Diversity in Practice*

Bridget Fitzpatrick's PhD thesis *Diversity in Practice: Placemaking among Sinhalese and Americans at the Washington Buddhist Vihara* (2000) is the only full-length study other than Numrich's to present an in-depth analysis of a diasporic Sri Lankan Buddhist temple. Fitzpatrick does not focus on issues of religious belief and practice to the same degree as Numrich and Cadge. However, she does examine these issues to a certain extent. Fitzpatrick is critical of the 'Two Buddhisms' model (10-18), and while her analysis reveals significant areas of difference in terms of how convert and diaspora Buddhists at the Washington Vihara approach Buddhism, it also reveals considerable diversity within these communities, and areas of commonality across the convert/diaspora divide. By providing detailed portraits of a number of the Sri Lankan patrons of the temple, Fitzpatrick shows that the approaches that these individuals take to Buddhism range from emphasising merit-making and apotropaic protection, to an emphasis on meditation, more akin to the approaches found among convert Buddhists (35-50).

Fitzpatrick also adds complexity to our understanding of the social relationships between convert and diaspora Buddhists. While she shows that there are times when social divides between converts and diaspora Buddhists at the Washington Vihara are evident (84-

85), she also shows that at other times one can find contact, dialogue and solidarity between the two groups (90, 136-139, 150-153). More fundamentally, Fitzpatrick highlights that diaspora and convert Buddhists at the temple consist of two essentially separate groups is not a given, but something that is constructed, negotiated and at times transcended within the temple (17, 104-139).

The study also adds to our knowledge of the relationship between religion and identity in diaspora Buddhist communities. Here Fitzpatrick's arguments to some extent reflect those of Cadge. Fitzpatrick shows that, while for some Sri Lankans the Washington Vihara functions very much as a cultural centre, not all Sri Lankans see it in these terms (82). Rather, she argues, how the temple is defined is a contested issue, with different narratives depicting it variously as 'a cultural refuge...[.]a social centre, an educational institution, a marketplace for religious ideas, a spiritual mission, or a sacred retreat' (81). Fitzpatrick, like Cadge, also challenges the idea that ethnic and religious identities are necessarily seen as connected within diaspora Buddhist communities. While some of the Sri Lankans at the Washington Vihara make a strong connection between their Sinhalese and Buddhist identities (38), others – especially those who emphasise meditation and play down ritual – connect the 'true' practice of Buddhism more with the West than with Sri Lanka, because of the emphasis given to meditation by Western converts (124).

Fitzpatrick's final chapter compares the Washington Vihara with other Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions in and around Washington, and in North America more generally. This highlights something of the diversity that exists among such institutions. Fitzpatrick shows that these institutions vary in terms of their religious foci, the services they provide for the Sri Lankan community, the degree to which they attract non-Sri Lankan members, the general cultural and religious atmosphere found within them, and the demographics of the Sri Lankan patrons that they attract (176-190). Thus Fitzpatrick highlights the heterogeneity of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in North America, showing the diversity found within the Washington Vihara, and that found among different Sri Lankan temples in the USA and Canada.

2.4 Buddhism in Britain

Scholarship that has been produced so far in the relatively young discipline of the study of Buddhism the UK has focused almost exclusively on convert Buddhism. A broad overview

of convert Buddhism in the UK is offered by Bluck (2006), who analyses the seven largest convert organisations in Britain. Bluck highlights the diversity of convert Buddhism in terms of teachings, practices and the ways in which Buddhism has been adapted in the West. Other work on British Buddhism has tended to be less broad in its focus. Mellor (1989) analyses two convert organisations, the Forest Sangha and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO). He argues that these organisations must be understood not in terms of 'a radical break with Western structures and influences', but in terms of continuity with certain elements of Western religious and intellectual thought. Mellor suggests that convert Buddhism has much in common with liberal Protestantism – an emphasis on individualism and personal experience; a suspicion of ritual and religious form; a tendency to question dogma and tradition – and notes that convert Buddhist criticisms of Christianity often echo Protestant criticisms of Catholicism. While Mellor's work focuses on the way in which Buddhism has been transformed in the UK, studies by Bell (1991) and Kay (2004) highlight the importance of understanding convert traditions in terms of their Asian origins. Kay in particular – who studies the Tibetan-derived New Kamapa Tradition (NKT) and the Japanese-derived Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (OBC) – is cautious of analyses which foreground the transformation of Buddhism under the influence of Protestantism and modernism. He notes that many aspects of the OBC which seem 'Protestant' in nature have precedents in the Japanese Zen tradition, and that certain characteristics of the NKT – its exclusivity, its emphasis on uniform belief and practice – suggest a reaction against modernism rather than a transformation under its influence.

Waterhouse (1997) studies issues of authority within five convert Buddhist organisations in the city of Bath. Four sources of religious authority that are drawn on by convert Buddhists are identified: texts, teaching lineages, charismatic teachers, and personal experience. While she finds that all four sources of authority are emphasised to some extent in each group that she looks at, Waterhouse observes that the groups vary significantly in the degree to which they emphasise different authority sources, with some (particularly Theravada practitioners) stressing personal experience over any kind of faith and others (particularly followers of the NKT) strongly emphasising the need for faith in a spiritual guide. Panyasiri (2004) studies convert Buddhists at six Theravada institutions in Britain (including both convert organisations and diaspora temples). While highlighting

differences between the institutions that he examines, Panyasiri finds commonalities between the convert practitioners at these institutions – particularly a dedication to meditation, and a disinterest in merit-making.

A recent thesis by Smith (2008) provides an insightful analysis of issues of ethnicity and class in two convert Buddhist organisations, the FWBO and Soka Gakkai International (SGI). Smith finds that while there is little overt racism within the FWBO, the organisation is characterised by a privileging of white, middle-class cultural forms, which leads many people of colour within the organisation to feel excluded. By contrast, Smith finds that SGI is characterised by a more cosmopolitan and inclusive institutional culture. Smith's study also looks critically at the 'Two Buddhisms' model (16-20), noting that it ignores diversity between different diasporic Buddhist groups and the 'hybridity' of much Asian Buddhism, and that it synonymises convert Buddhism with whiteness, thus ignoring the place of people of colour within convert Buddhist organisations. It is this last point which Smith's thesis seeks to address. Smith's study can be seen as representing a step forward in the study of British convert Buddhism, from approaches which look at convert Buddhism in very broad thematic terms, towards more subtle and nuanced analyses of particular aspects of convert Buddhism.

As my study is concerned with placing Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK in the broader context of British Theravada Buddhism, for my purposes the most significant aspect of previous literature is what it can tell us about the nature of British convert Theravada Buddhism. Bell, Waterhouse, Bluck and Pracharart all highlight the importance of meditation among convert Theravada practitioners. Bell, Waterhouse and Panyasiri also note the disinterest of such practitioners in ritualised merit-making. Other characteristics of convert Theravada Buddhism in the UK are also significant. As noted above, Waterhouse finds that convert Theravada practitioners in Bath place a strong emphasis on personal experience, and less on faith in teachers and texts. In line with this, she finds that many such practitioners have little belief in the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth. Similar attitudes are identified by Bell (1998:156). Such attitudes have also been found by scholars investigating convert Theravada practitioners in the USA (see Cadge 2005:98). Another characteristic of contemporary convert Theravada Buddhism, highlighted particularly by Mellor (1989:155,247) and Bell (1991:3,189,267), is its emphasis on practice (particularly meditation) rather than intellectual study. As Bell and Mellor highlight, British Theravada

has changed in this regard over time with the rise to prominence of the Thai-derived Forest Sangha signalling a move away from the more intellectualist Buddhism of the Buddhist Society. Further research into convert Theravada Buddhism in the UK is needed, particularly research which explores the diversity among convert practitioners. While Pracharart suggests important differences between converts who practise at diaspora Theravada temples and those that practise at convert institutions (2004:299-300), his research does little to suggest what these differences may be.

While the study of convert Buddhism in the UK has developed significantly over the last 20 years, diaspora Buddhism in Britain remains largely unexplored within academia. The most significant study of diaspora Buddhism in the UK is Law's brief overview of religious belief and practice within the Vietnamese community (1991). There are no full-length published studies of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK. There are, however, some works which give some attention to Sri Lankan Buddhism in Britain. Panyasiri's thesis (discussed above), while focusing on convert Buddhists, gives some attention to diaspora temples which are also attended by converts, including the Sri Lankan London Buddhist Vihara. However, Panyasiri's discussion of this temple is short, focused mainly on convert practice and contains some problematic assertions.¹²

An MPhil thesis by Fernando (2005) presents a comparison of Sinhalese Christians and Buddhists in and around London. While Fernando does not focus in depth on issues of religious belief and practice, he does look at such issues to some extent. He notes that diversity can be found among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK when it comes to how they approach their religion, with some emphasising a modernist, philosophical Buddhism and others practising a 'popular and ritualistic' Buddhism (2005:243). My study builds on Fernando's observations here. Fernando's main focus is on identity, particularly the degree to which the two groups in question have maintained separate ethnic identities or integrated into British society. Here Fernando again highlights diversity among Sinhalese Buddhists, as well as between Sinhalese Buddhists and Christians (2005:187-217). Again my study builds on Fernando's analysis in this area.

Deegalle – a Sri Lankan monk resident in the UK – has written an article (2004) examining the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre, the Sri Lankan temple in

¹² Panyasiri incorrectly asserts that majority of those that attend the LBV are British converts (2004:121). His brief descriptions of first and second-generation practice at the LBV are also somewhat problematic, and are not supported with evidence (2004:122-124).

London which I examine in chapter 8. Deegalle looks at the temple's history in the context of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK, examines the various activities at the temple, and addresses the question of what attracts Sri Lankans in Britain to the temple. The article is informative, though its short length precludes in-depth analysis or an exploration of religious diversity within the Sri Lankan community.

Chapter 3 Two Buddhisms in the East?

It has become somewhat acceptable to assert that Theravada Buddhism is actually two religions, namely, kammatic and nibbanic Buddhism.

Harvey B. Aronson (1979:28).

There are two Buddhisms now in Ceylon: the residuum of the old Buddhism of the past centuries, as it lingers in out-of-the-way places, and as it has shaped the habits and ways of those who are not under European influence; and a new revival, much more self-conscious and artificial, which aims indeed only at reviving what Buddhism always professed to be, but which has been influenced, in its estimate of that profession, very largely by Europeans.

The Anglican Bishop of Colombo, 1892 (quoted in Gombrich 1988:173)

Since they first came into contact with it, Western observers of Theravada Buddhism in Asia have often defined the forms of Buddhism they have encountered in terms of various dichotomies. Theravada Buddhism has been divided into nibbanic and kammatic Buddhism, nibbanic and kammic Buddhism, cognitive and affective Buddhism, elite and village Buddhism, and modernist and traditional Buddhism. The idea that Buddhism can be divided into two quite distinct categories can be traced back to the work of Weber, who argued that there was a radical divide between world-renouncing monastics and the laity in early Buddhism (1958:214). More recent dichotomies have, however, tended not to make their distinction exclusively along lay/monastic lines.

The 'Two Buddhisms' model of Buddhism in the West draws on and reinforces the dichotomising tendencies found in work on Buddhism in Asia. Thus in order to analyse and critique the 'Two Buddhisms' model effectively it is necessary to look at the work that this model draws on (whether explicitly or implicitly).

In this chapter I will analyse some of the most influential scholarship concerning the nature of Theravada Buddhism in Asia. I will focus primarily on four sets of dichotomies that have been used to analyse Buddhism in Asia: Spiro's 'nibbanic' and 'kammatic' Buddhism; King's similarly named, but significantly different 'nibbanic' and 'kammic' Buddhism; Gombrich's 'cognitive' and 'affective' Buddhism; and the distinction drawn by many scholars between 'modernist' and 'traditional' Buddhism.

As I explore these different dichotomies I will repeatedly come back to the question of how these ways of analysing Buddhism relate to the 'Two Buddhisms' model of

Buddhism in the West. In this way the chapter will bring the question of the nature of the various forms of Buddhism found in the West into a wider field of arguments concerning the nature of lived Buddhism. This will inform my analysis of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK.

My analysis in this chapter, while still concerned with critiquing the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model of Buddhism in the West, takes a somewhat different approach from the critique of the model found in chapter 2. In that chapter many of my arguments concerned the failure of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model to recognise the diversity found within diaspora Buddhism. Many of my arguments here address a different question: given that in some cases we find certain differences between diaspora Buddhism and convert Buddhism, how should we understand these differences? Are a diaspora Buddhist who focuses on rituals and a convert Buddhist who focuses on meditation practising entirely different forms of religion, or can links between the two be found? Since my analysis here focuses on such issues, some of my discussion may seem to accept the idea that diaspora Buddhists primarily practise a ritual-centred form of Buddhism while only converts focus on meditation. Such characterisations are used only for the sake of my theoretical arguments.

3.1 Melford E. Spiro *Buddhism and Society*

Melford Spiro’s *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes* (1971) is a classic work in the anthropological study of Theravada Buddhism, and Spiro’s division of lived Buddhism into different categories remains influential today.¹ Spiro’s study focuses primarily on Buddhist practice in one village in Upper Burma. However, Spiro also incorporates information gathered during periods of fieldwork in other parts of the Theravada world, and on this basis argues that the conclusions of his book are valid for the Theravada tradition as a whole (15-16).

Spiro is concerned with the relationship between what he refers to as ‘normative’ Buddhism – which he equates with the Pali Canon – and Buddhism as it is practised by Buddhists in the world (4). He concludes that we can identify three separate systems of religiosity which together make up the totality of Buddhism in the Theravada world. These are:

¹ The continued influence of Spiro’s ideas within Buddhist studies is evident in Rupert Gethin’s popular introductory text *The Foundations of Buddhism*, which includes a section looking at Spiro’s work (1998:110-111).

1. Nibbanic Buddhism, the path to *nibbāna* based on the practice of morality and meditation (31-65).
2. Kammatic Buddhism, the path to a pleasant future life based on certain forms of ritualised religious giving (66-139).
3. Apotropaic Buddhism, a system for obtaining protection from dangers in the present life based on participation in certain forms of Buddhist ritual (140-161).

Spiro identifies nibbanic Buddhism with normative Buddhism (31). He regards kammatic Buddhism as a non-normative form of Buddhism based on the transformation of certain elements of nibbanic Buddhism (68). Spiro's view of apotropaic Buddhism is complex: he recognises that apotropaic practices are found in the Pali Canon (144), but he questions whether such practices were found in the very earliest forms of Buddhism (144). Spiro argues that most Theravada Buddhists in Asia practise primarily kammatic and apotropaic Buddhism, with nibbanic Buddhism being practised by only a small number of individuals and existing for the rest of society only as an unpractised ideal (13).

The central aspect of Spiro's analysis is his division between nibbanic and kammatic Buddhism. While Spiro expresses some concerns about the compatibility between apotropaic rituals and the doctrine of *kamma* (155), in general he argues that apotropaic Buddhism is compatible with both nibbanic and kammatic Buddhism (160-161). On the other hand, he views kammatic and nibbanic Buddhism as fundamentally conflicting religious paths. Spiro views nibbanic Buddhism as a path of morality and meditation leading to the ultimate goal of *nibbāna*. According to Spiro, kammatic Buddhism transforms normative nibbanic Buddhism in two ways. Firstly, the goal of the religion is transformed (66-67). Instead of aiming for *nibbāna* – a state in which all personal desire and sense of self is transcended, and all future rebirth terminated – kammatic Buddhism is motivated by a desire for a pleasant future rebirth (typically in a heavenly realm or as a rich human). Secondly, kammatic Buddhism transforms the means by which one's goal is achieved. Within nibbanic Buddhism the goal of *nibbāna* is obtained through a path of inner development, through moral practice and meditation. Positive moral actions are regarded as bringing kammic rewards, but these rewards are not seen as the reason for performing such actions (47). Instead moral actions are performed in

order to transform one's inner self and develop the form of character needed for one to progress in the practice of meditation (47). In line with such thinking, nibbanic Buddhism stresses the importance of intention. According to nibbanic Buddhism, only acts motivated by a pure intention produce kammic merit, thus ruling out the idea of performing moral acts specifically for the purpose of generating merit (47). Within kammatic Buddhism, Spiro argues, all of this is changed. Instead of being seen as a side effect of moral behaviour, merit becomes the reason for performing moral actions (98). Instead of being a way of inner transformation and character development, moral actions become seen as mechanistic ways of changing one's external position in the universe by generating merit for one's next birth (105). In line with this, the emphasis on intention found in nibbanic Buddhism is largely ignored (106). Instead, kammic merit depends on the nature of the act itself and the quality of the recipient of one's actions. In practice those acts that are regarded as most meritorious are specifically religious ones, such as feeding monks or making offerings to a Buddha image (109). In contrast, Spiro found that Burmese Buddhists tended not to see keeping the moral precepts of Buddhism as important ways of making merit (99-102). Thus Spiro argues that kammatic Buddhism gives most importance to ritualised acts of religious merit-making and little to positive acts of selfless morality. While in general Spiro emphasises kammatic Buddhism as a system of generating merit for oneself, he also notes that Burmese Buddhists engage in practices in which merit is transferred to others, particularly to deceased family members (124-128).

Spiro thus argues that the majority of Theravada Buddhists reject the goal of *nibbāna* in favour of a positive rebirth in the next life, and replace the nibbanic emphasis on inner development through morality and meditation with a focus on ritualised acts of merit-making. It should be noted that, given Spiro's equation of normative Buddhism with the Pali Canon, his assertion that kammatic Buddhism is non-normative is flawed. Scholars such as Egge (2002) and Obeyesekere (2002:136-139) show that discourses of kammatic merit-making can be found in the Pali Canon alongside those teachings which Spiro refers to as nibbanic.

A clear link can be made between convert and diaspora Buddhism as they are portrayed in the 'Two Buddhisms' model and Spiro's categories of nibbanic and kammatic/apotropaic Buddhism. On one hand we have a convert Buddhism that is described as being concerned primarily with meditative mental purification, and on the

other we have a diaspora Buddhism which is seen as being concerned with rituals of merit-making and apotropaic blessing. To illustrate the way in which academic portrayals of convert and diaspora Buddhism in the West can be linked with the ideas of Spiro we can look to Bell's examination of British converts and Thai diaspora Buddhists practising at the Amaravati monastery in the UK (1998). Bell notes important differences in how these two groups of Buddhists practise at Amaravati, arguing that British converts tend to focus more on meditation, while Thais tend to focus on religious giving. Bell observes that converts at Amaravati are generally positive about the generosity shown by Thai Buddhists who come to give food at the monastery, seeing it as a way to generate a feeling of 'the joy of giving' (1998:156-157). However, she argues that this misunderstands the behaviour of the Thai Buddhists, who see their giving largely in terms of the generation of merit (1998:157). Here a divide is portrayed between convert Buddhists who emphasise mental cultivation and diaspora Buddhists who emphasise the ritualistic accumulation of merit.

Spiro's analysis usefully highlights the importance of merit-making and apotropaic protection within many forms of lived Buddhism. However, evidence from anthropological studies of Theravada Buddhism challenges Spiro's firm kammatic/nibbanic division. Gombrich and Southwold both challenge Spiro's depiction of the majority of Theravada Buddhists in Asia as being concerned exclusively with the accumulation of merit by stressing the importance of religious values and ethics in Buddhist societies. Gombrich notes that for village Buddhists in Sri Lanka certain qualities are highly valued in individuals, including freedom from attachment to worldly goods, self-control, loving-kindness and generosity (1971:308-312). All of these qualities correspond with the principles of Spiro's nibbanic Buddhism. Southwold, while noting the presence of merit-making rituals in Sri Lankan village Buddhism, argues that villagers tend to play down the importance of such rituals and stress instead the centrality of ethical conduct to Buddhism (1983:62,175). Southwold also notes that ethical conduct is valued among villagers in large part because of the way that it affects the mind of the actor, thus linking it to nibbanic discourses of mental purification (1983:199).

To note that certain personal qualities and ethical standards are valued in Theravada societies is not, of course, to argue that all individuals live by these ideals all of the time. In many Theravada societies we can also find certain values – such as the preservation of

status and the importance of wealth and power – which clash with the ideals of nibbanic Buddhism (see Gombrich 1971:307-308; Spiro 1971:474-475). However, as Southwold notes, it is problematic for a sociology of Buddhism to ignore the highest ideals of Buddhists and concentrate only on their failures to live up to these ideals (1983:20). A true understanding of lived Buddhism must look at both the ideals and the behaviour of Buddhists. Thus if the ideals of many Theravada Buddhists in Asia are those of nibbanic Buddhism, it is problematic to label their Buddhism as exclusively kammatic in character.

We can also critique Spiro over the issue of what motivates Buddhists to engage in religious acts. Spiro argues that the major reason for religious giving among Burmese Buddhists is the generation of merit. The importance of merit as a motivation for religious giving should not be underestimated. However, it is problematic to see the motivation for such religious acts in purely kammatic terms. Piker, in a study of Buddhism in rural Thailand, argues that Thai Buddhists give to monks in large part because of their admiration of certain qualities that monks are thought to possess: particularly the quality of equanimity, the lack of which was felt by the villagers that Piker interviewed to be ‘the most direct cause of suffering in their daily lives’ (Piker 1973:55). Thus monks are seen as exemplars of nibbanic qualities and giving to them is related to feelings of ‘genuine respect and admiration’ (1973:53). A further, and in some sense related, source of motivation for religious giving is suggested by Strenski (1983). Criticising the idea that giving to monks can be adequately viewed in terms of a ‘crass calculus of spiritual merits and demerits’ (1983:474), Strenski argues that such giving must be seen in a wider context, which incorporates ideas of the place of Buddhism and the individual in society. From this perspective giving to monks is seen as supporting economically that which benefits society as a whole (1983:473-474). Thus giving is performed not just for merit but as part of what it means to be a good pious Buddhist.

A third way in which Spiro’s firm nibbanic/kammatic division can be called into question is by looking at the issue of how Theravada Buddhists in Asia view the process of participating in religious activities. Spiro argues that for most Buddhists the idea that what is most important is the intention behind one’s actions and their effect in purifying one’s mind has been transformed into a focus on the act itself. However, the idea that a concern with mental states is not a part of how most Buddhists in Asia view their participation in religious activities is challenged by the anthropological evidence. Tambiah, looking at

Buddhist practice in rural Thailand, notes that while the act of giving to monks is seen as way to make merit, ‘villagers also say it has certain consequences in this life: the giving of gifts to monks produces a happy and virtuous state of mind’ (Tambiah 1968:49). Gombrich makes similar arguments, noting that emphasis is often put on the joy that participants feel when giving to monks or making offerings to an image of the Buddha, and that many Sri Lankan Buddhists speak about participating in Buddhist rituals in terms of ‘purifying the thoughts’ and ‘mental progress’, notions which are also employed when speaking about meditation (1971:139,294-295). In his introductory text on the Theravada Gombrich employs the following passage to counter the view that merit-making can be viewed as ‘a dry metaphysical mercantilism’:

Merit, *puñña*, is not only a sort of intangible religious good, but is also a psychological good, in that giving to (well-behaved) monks inspires laymen to generosity, happiness, peace, and so forth. Hence the atmosphere at a hermitage during an alms-giving ceremony ... is strikingly quiet and pious, and, for those laymen susceptible to piety, an occasion of happiness or even reflection. The virtuous monk ... ‘inspires faith’. (Carrithers, quoted in Gombrich 2006:128)

A recent article by Samuels (2008) concerning merit-making in rural Sri Lanka looks at these issues in greater depth. Samuels notes that among the Buddhists that he spoke to religious acts such as feeding monks and making offerings to the Buddha were thought to generate merit due to the happiness or gladness that they gave rise to in the *hita* of the individual, *hita* being a Sinhala term translated by Samuels as ‘heart/mind’ (2008:127). For these Buddhists merit is seen to depend not simply on one’s intention of pure concern for those one is acting towards, nor only on the religious act itself or the quality of the recipient of one’s action, but on the psychological feelings of happiness one experiences before, during and after a religious act. These feelings are seen to depend on many factors. One’s intention to give to another is one factor. However, other factors are also seen as important: one’s feelings of happiness on seeing the results of one’s actions (e.g. seeing how one has benefited Buddhism and society by supporting monks); the happiness generated by the appearance and behaviour of the monks one is giving to, and by the rituals that they perform following one’s giving; and even the happiness one feels when observing a well-kept temple with its stupa, shrine room and *bō* tree (2008:128-134).

Samuels’ article shows that we cannot make an absolute divide between the idea that Buddhist religious activities are performed in order to make merit and the notion that

they are performed for the purpose of purifying and uplifting the mind. Samuels' interviewees clearly see the purpose of activities such as giving to monks to be the generation of merit, but they see this as fundamentally linked to the attainment of certain psychological states, so that making-merit and the development of the mind go hand in hand. Samuels thus highlights the problems created by defining Buddhism in Asia in terms of a nibbanic/kammatic dichotomy.

If we turn back to Spiro's own study we find that even here there is much that challenges the strict dichotomy between nibbanic and kammatic Buddhism. Spiro shows that certain ideas and values that are central to nibbanic Buddhism permeate Burmese society: the need to overcome greed, hatred and delusion (1971:47); the concept that the world is characterised by suffering, impermanence and the lack of self (475); the belief that ultimately grasping after wealth leads to suffering (243); and so on. He also shows – echoing the arguments of Piker – that the veneration and support given to monks in Burma is motivated not only by the desire for merit but also because monks are held to exemplify the values of nibbanic Buddhism (475). Despite all this, Spiro argues that nibbanic Buddhism is little practised by Burmese Buddhists: that the values discussed above are given only lip-service and that monks are admired specifically because they represent what the majority of Buddhists are not. To illustrate this argument, he contrasts the Buddhist ideas of suffering, impermanence and non-self with the values of prestige, charismatic power and authority which, he argues, define the goals of most Burmese Buddhists (goals which are to be obtained in the next life through the accumulation of merit) (474-475). However, I have noted above the problems with this kind of argument: one cannot dismiss the highest ideals that people hold from an understanding of their religiosity, even if their behaviour does not always accord with these ideals. In addition, Spiro's study does show evidence that Burmese Buddhists see their practice of Buddhism in terms other than simply the accumulation of merit. For example, in his discussion of Buddhist rituals he finds that a number of reasons other than the accumulation of merit are given by Burmese Buddhists for their participation in rituals, many of which are connected to how these practices pacify and uplift the mind (194-200).

As a last point in this section it should be noted that Spiro's claim that most Burmese Theravada Buddhists have replaced the goal of *nibbāna* with that of a prosperous and pleasurable rebirth can also be questioned. Despite this claim, Spiro reports that the

majority of the Burmese Buddhists that he interviewed did in fact express a desire for *nibbāna*. In response to this, Spiro argues that these individuals have reconceptualised *nibbāna*, viewing it as ‘a blissful state, similar to but even more blissful than the material *deva* heavens’ (80). However, as Keown notes, Spiro’s arguments on this point are problematic (Keown 2001: 86-87). He offers no proof in support of his claim that Burmese Buddhists have reinterpreted the meaning of *nibbāna*. In addition, in some parts of his study he contradicts this claim by arguing that most Burmese view *nibbāna* as ‘total extinction’ rather than as a form of heavenly paradise (1971:59). Thus it seems that Spiro’s informants would not agree that their religiosity represents a radical rejection of nibbanic Buddhism.

3.2 Winston King: kammic and nibbanic Buddhism

Spiro was influenced in his analysis of nibbanic and kammatic Buddhism by Winston King’s earlier discussion of ‘nibbanic’ and ‘kammic’ Buddhism (King 1964:138-175). However, there are important differences between King’s nibbanic/kammic dichotomy and Spiro’s nibbanic/kammatic categorisation. As discussed above, Spiro distinguishes between ‘normative’ nibbanic Buddhism, which is a path of morality and meditation, and ‘non-normative’ kammatic Buddhism, which is a path of amoral, ritualistic merit-making. King – whose work, like Spiro’s, primarily focuses on Buddhism in Burma – also acknowledges the importance of ritualised merit-making among lay Buddhists (1964:144-149). However, he does not make this the focus of his dichotomy. Instead, acknowledging that the religiosity of most Burmese Buddhists is not solely about accumulating merit, King defines kammic Buddhism as a path of character development and living according to certain ethical values (166). As with Spiro’s kammatic Buddhism, the ultimate aim in King’s kammic Buddhism is a pleasant rebirth in one’s future life. Such a rebirth is not, however, seen to be purely the result of the mechanistic accumulation of merit. Instead it is seen as the outcome of building up one’s character through acting in accordance with Buddhist values or loving kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy (150-164). King contrasts this kammic Buddhism with nibbanic Buddhism, which is characterised not by moral actions in the world, but by world-renunciation and meditation (1964:61-165).

While Spiro argues that in lived Buddhism the emphasis within normative Buddhism on morality and inner development has been replaced by a kammatic emphasis

on accumulating merit ritualistically, King's discussion of kammic Buddhism suggests that character development and morality are central to the religiosity of most Burmese Buddhists. Nevertheless, like Spiro, King regards the religiosity of most Burmese laypeople as fundamentally separate from the path to *nibbāna*. What is it, then, that fundamentally distinguishes these two forms of Buddhism? We can identify three interrelated issues: whether or not one's actions result in the accumulation of kammic merit; whether one's acts are characterised by positive emotions of kindness and compassion or by detachment and equanimity; and whether one embraces or renounces the world.

While King's kammic Buddhism is not concerned purely with the accumulation of merit, it does involve merit accumulation since this is the inevitable outcome of positive moral actions in the world. For King such accumulation of merit ultimately leads one away from *nibbāna* since it results in future rebirths (163-165). King thus argues that nibbanic Buddhism differs radically from kammic Buddhism in this respect, in that it involves avoiding the accumulation of merit and 'burning up' one's store of merit and demerit (164-165). Related to this is the issue of the motivation of one's actions. For King, kammic Buddhism involves acting from states of mind characterised by loving kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy. While he acknowledges that these mental states are regarded positively in the Buddhist tradition, King argues that they are ultimately incompatible with the goal of *nibbāna* since actions based on them generate merit and therefore lead to future rebirths (1964:163). King argues that nibbanic Buddhism is characterised by actions based on detachment and equanimity which generate no merit and therefore do not serve to bind one to the cycle of *samsāra* (162-163). This brings us to perhaps the most important distinction between nibbanic and kammic Buddhism. For King nibbanic Buddhism is fundamentally world-renouncing: it is unconcerned with moral action in the world (which brings only merit and further rebirth) and concerned only with one's personal attainment of *nibbāna* through a regime of detachment and meditative absorption (1964:168). Kammic Buddhism, on the other hand, is for King world-embracing: it is concerned with doing good in the world and enjoying the (worldly) rewards of one's positive behaviour (1964:168).

Can a comparison be made between King's analysis of Theravada Buddhism in Asia and the 'Two Buddhisms' model of Buddhism in the West? Perhaps to some extent it can. While Spiro's kammic/nibbanic dichotomy seems to accord more fully with the

divide between ritualism and meditation that is central to the 'Two Buddhisms' model, some portrayals of diaspora and convert Buddhism in the West do bring to mind King's analysis. As an example we can look at a passage from Cadge's study of Thai and American Buddhists in the USA. While Cadge's analysis to a certain extent challenges the 'Two Buddhisms' model, some aspects of her study are suggestive of a dichotomy between convert and diaspora Buddhism. At one stage Cadge looks at the how convert Buddhists regard the emphasis on religious giving – particularly the preparation of food to monks – found among Thai diaspora Buddhists (2005:108-109). Cadge finds that these converts are able to view such practices positively by viewing them as opportunities to practise mindfulness – the mindful preparation of food being seen as a way of extending one's meditation practice into everyday life (2005:108). However, Cadge finds that the Thai Buddhists who are involved in religious giving tend to talk about this practice not in terms of mindfulness but in terms of the cultivation of generosity (2005:109). Here the division that is made between convert and diaspora Buddhists is not one between the cultivation of the mind and the ritualistic accumulation of merit. Rather, for Cadge both diaspora and convert Buddhists are concerned with questions of internal character development, but they stress different kinds of mental cultivation: convert Buddhists stressing meditative concentration and mindfulness (which corresponds closely with King's nibbanic Buddhism) and diaspora Buddhists stressing the cultivation of positive emotional states such as generosity (which corresponds with King's kammic Buddhism). The comparison between King's kammic/nibbanic dichotomy and the diaspora/convert dichotomy can, however, not be taken too far. For King nibbanic Buddhism is world-renouncing and thus ultimately the concern of monastic meditators. This clearly is not the case with convert Buddhism, which tends to play down the division between monastics and laypeople and to reject the idea that the highest ideals of Buddhism are fundamentally linked to renunciation of the world.

King's portrayal of lived Buddhism has clear advantages over the kammic/nibbanic dichotomy of Spiro. It avoids the problematic claim that most Buddhists are solely concerned with the accumulation of kammic merit, while still acknowledging that making merit does have a significant place in the lives of many Buddhists. However, there are also some difficulties with King's analysis, chiefly centred around his insistence that kammic and nibbanic Buddhism are fundamentally separate

religious paths. We can explore these difficulties by looking again at the three issues which divide kammic and nibbanic Buddhism in his analysis.

While some scholars support King's assertion that accumulating kammic merit is inimicable to attaining *nibbāna* (Collins 1998:145; McDermott 1973:345-346), others – including Keown (2001) and Gombrich (1996:52-53) – challenge this idea. These scholars point out that *nibbāna* comes about through the extinction of craving, not the extinction of *kamma*. Moreover, they argue that since kammic merit is the result of acts performed from a positive state of mind, generating merit in fact goes hand in hand with the purification of the mind and the journey towards *nibbāna*.

The notion that one must abandon actions based on positive emotions such as loving kindness and compassion in order to attain *nibbāna* has also been challenged by a number of scholars (Keown 2001, Karunadasa 1994; Premasiri 1976). Opposition to this view is voiced most strongly by Keown, who argues that far from leading away from *nibbāna*, moral acts inspired by loving kindness and compassion are not only conducive to *nibbāna*, but are themselves nibbanic in nature. Thus moral action is seen, according to Keown's interpretation, as a way of gradually actualising *nibbāna* by acting in accordance with nibbanic values (2001:127)

This brings us to the issue of whether nibbanic Buddhism is essentially world-renouncing. There are clearly strands within the Theravada tradition which emphasise the need for one striving for *nibbāna* to renounce the world. However, scholars such as Keown (2001), Aronson (1980), Swearer (1973) and Katz (1982) point out that there is also an emphasis in the tradition on the need for the *nibbāna*-faring individual to engage with the world compassionately. The model for such compassionate engagement in the world is the Buddha himself, who is presented as teaching the *Dhamma* (the teachings of Buddhism) out of sympathy and compassion for the world (Keown 2001:41-43,72-74). As Swearer notes, engagement in the world does not go against the key ideals of nibbanic Buddhism, which is 'fundamentally interested in the transformation of the individual's relationship with the world rather than rejecting the world' (1973:606). From the other side of the equation, it is also important to note that practices involving an element of renunciation have long been a part of the religiosity of many Asian Buddhists who have not completely renounced the world. Observing extra precepts so that one lives a semi-monastic life (usually only on certain days, but sometimes permanently) has long been an important part

of the practice of many lay Theravada Buddhists.² In addition, the practice of meditation – considered by King as part of the path of the renunciant – has never been an exclusively monastic concern.³

All of these arguments do not mean that, in the pre-modern period at least, most Buddhists would not have perceived a vast difference between the religiosity of a layperson and that of a meditating forest monk. Even in the contemporary era, when the idea that laypeople can and should strive for *nibbāna* has become somewhat more widespread, the majority of lay Buddhists in Asia are likely to see their religious practice as being somewhat distant from that of the *nibbāna*-faring virtuoso (whether lay or monastic). However, what is in question here is not whether these two kinds of Buddhist religiosity are the same, but what the relationship between them is. The arguments above suggest that it is problematic to see these two paths as fundamentally separate. Instead they suggest that what King calls kammic and nibbanic Buddhism may be seen more accurately as different manifestations of a single path towards *nibbāna*. This is encapsulated in the idea of Buddhism as a ‘gradual path’ involving the steady cultivation of wisdom and compassion over a period of many lives.⁴

If we move back to look again at King’s discussion of Burmese Buddhism with these arguments in mind, we find that his portrayal of kammic and nibbanic Buddhism is challenged by some of his own evidence. Most significantly, he acknowledges that his view that kammic and nibbanic Buddhism are fundamentally separate is not shared by the majority of Buddhists in Burma. Thus King found that ‘it is stoutly maintained as an article of faith by Theravada Buddhists that the two ways are one, and the layman’s way of heaven-seeking leads on directly to Nibbana – even though it is only the first stage on the road’ (King 1964:169). Thus the idea of a strict division between kammic and nibbanic Buddhism is not part of how Burmese Buddhists think about their religion, but something that King has read into Burmese Buddhism. While King believes that contemporary Burmese Buddhists are incorrect to see kammic and nibbanic Buddhism as the same, the arguments that I have made suggest that one can find much support for this interpretation in

² The status of the partially renounced layman – the *upāsaka* – in the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition is discussed by Obeyesekere (1963:150-152).

³ Samuels (1999) notes that the *Sutta Piṭaka* of the Pali Canon contains references to lay people practising meditation, as well as to lay people attaining the highest goals of the religious path.

⁴ The phrase ‘gradual path’ is used to describe pre-modern Theravada Buddhism by George Bond (1988:22-33).

the Buddhist tradition. In any case, when studying lived Buddhism our primary concern should be how those we are studying understand their religion, not whether their understanding accords with the ‘true’ nature of the tradition (however one chooses to define this).

3.3 A note on conceptions of the Buddhist path in narratives

In this section I explore some arguments made by Strong (1990) about the way in which merit-making and *nibbāna* are discussed in Buddhist narratives. Strong aims to criticise Spiro’s nibbanic/kammatic dichotomy, but his arguments also have a bearing on the validity of King’s analysis.

Strong looks at a number of narratives of giving found in different parts of the Theravada world. In doing so he shows that discourses of merit accumulation and the attainment of pleasant rebirths are generally not portrayed in Buddhist narratives as completely separate from discourses of meditation and striving for *nibbāna*. Instead *nibbāna*-oriented and merit-making discourses are generally strongly interconnected in Buddhist narratives, so that making merit and achieving a pleasant rebirth is often seen as a preliminary step towards the renunciation of worldly life and the attainment of *nibbāna* (Strong 1990:120-121). Strong argues that this has important implications for how acts of merit-making are understood within Buddhism. Thus he writes:

Dāna [religious giving]...is an act that is kammatic and nibbanic at the same time. It is an act by which one gains a better rebirth; it is an act by which one renounces the fullness of mundane life brought by high birth (1990:122)

Strong’s article brings to mind Collins’ suggestion that there is a need to ‘decentre’ and ‘recentre’ *nibbāna* in the academic study of Buddhism (Collins 1998:114-117). For Collins, decentring *nibbāna* in academic discourse means moving away from the position of scholars such as Spiro who define the religious path of the *nibbāna*-striving virtuoso as the only one that is truly Buddhist in character. This position ignores the fact that such a path, with *nibbāna* viewed as an immediate goal, has always been the current vocation of only a tiny minority, and that the Buddhist tradition has never portrayed this path as the only valid form of practice. On the other hand, Collins argues that *nibbāna* needs to be recentred in academic discussions because *nibbāna* is ‘symbolically central’ to all aspects of Buddhism, even those which are not concerned with immediate striving for *nibbāna* in this life.

Strong's article highlights the importance of *nibbāna* in those aspects of the Buddhist tradition that have been labelled kammatic or kammic in two interrelated ways. Firstly, he shows that the structure of Buddhist narratives means that merit-making acts are regarded within the tradition as ultimately leading in the direction of *nibbāna*. This challenges King's assertion that the path of worldly morality and the path to *nibbāna* are inimicable. Secondly, he shows that because merit-making acts ultimately take place within a religious discourse which is structured by the concept of *nibbāna*, such acts cannot be regarded purely as exercises in mechanistic merit-accumulation. Instead such acts will invariably also be infused with 'nibbanic' values of mental development and renunciation. This challenges Spiro's portrayal of kammatic Buddhism.

3.4 Richard Gombrich *Precept and Practice*

Richard Gombrich's *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (1971), remains perhaps the most influential anthropological study of 'traditional' Buddhism in Sri Lanka. As the title of his study suggests, Gombrich is concerned with the degree to which the living tradition of Buddhism accords with textual orthodoxy (47-54). While Spiro argues that the religiosity of the majority of Buddhists in Burma is a corruption of normative Buddhism, Gombrich states that he found rural Sri Lankan Buddhism to be 'surprisingly orthodox' (47).

One element in Gombrich's defence of the orthodoxy of Sri Lankan Buddhism concerns the relationship between Buddhism and other forms of religiosity practised by Sri Lankan Buddhists. In virtually every culture in which it has become established Theravada Buddhism has co-existed with other forms of religiosity based on interactions with gods and demons, and 'non-Buddhist' rituals of magical protection. The fact that many Buddhists in Sri Lanka accept the existence of gods and the efficacy of non-Buddhist magical practices led some interpreters to label Sri Lankan Buddhism as syncretistic and corrupt (54-59). Gombrich strongly criticises this view. He points out that the non-Buddhist forms of religiosity found among Sri Lankan Buddhists do not conflict with the teachings of Theravada Buddhism (57-58). Practices such as making offerings to gods, Gombrich notes, are only held to be relevant to worldly concerns. Questions of one's fate after death and of ultimate salvation are, on the other hand, held by Sri Lankan Buddhists to be the domain of Buddhism alone (55). That one can turn to gods or to various magical practices

for assistance in worldly matters is, Gombrich argues, no more a logical contradiction to Buddhism than turning to a doctor when one is ill. As we shall see later in the study, not all contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists agree with Gombrich on this point.

Gombrich's analysis of more specifically Buddhist forms of religiosity is based on a distinction between 'cognitive' and 'affective' religion (5). This distinction differs from the dichotomies of Spiro and King in that it refers not to two distinct forms of religiosity but to two aspects of the religiosity of every individual. The distinction is between 'what people say they believe and say they do, and what they really believe and really do' (5). Thus 'cognitive' religion refers to the way in which people describe their religious belief and practice, while 'affective' religion refers to the anthropologist's interpretation of what people really believe and feel, based on observation of their religious behaviour. Since Gombrich's cognitive/affective dichotomy does not refer to two distinct forms of Buddhism, it cannot be compared directly to the 'Two Buddhisms' model. However, since it aims to explain the religiosity of Buddhists in Sri Lanka, the dichotomy is clearly relevant to my discussion of Buddhism in the Sri Lankan diaspora.

Gombrich uses the cognitive/affective dichotomy to analyse a number of aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhism. I will focus here on those elements of Gombrich's study which relate most closely to the issues addressed so far in this chapter. When discussing practices such as giving to monks or making offerings to a Buddha image, Gombrich argues that there is often a difference between how Sri Lankan Buddhists approach these practices cognitively and affectively. Cognitively, he argues, the importance of intention and one's mental state while giving is emphasised. Affectively, on the other hand, there is a tendency to regard such activities as mechanistic ways of making merit (302,138-139). Gombrich's analysis also suggests a cognitive/affective distinction in how many Sri Lankans view *nibbāna*. While the cognitively it is stressed that *nibbāna* is the only worthwhile goal, Gombrich argues that most Sri Lankan Buddhists do not want to attain *nibbāna*, preferring to achieve a pleasant rebirth in heaven or as a rich human (19-20). Thus Gombrich's study suggests that there is a significant divide between the cognitive approach that most Sri Lankans take to Buddhism – which focuses on mental development and the attainment of *nibbāna* – and their affective religiosity, which sees merit-making in mechanistic terms and focuses on the goal of a pleasant future rebirth. The similarities between this analysis and Spiro's use of the nibbanic/kammatic dichotomy are clear, but Gombrich's analysis differs

from Spiro's in the crucial respect that cognitive and affective religion are regarded as two aspects of the religiosity of a single individual.

Does Gombrich's analysis help us to gain a better understanding of lived Buddhism? Certainly he provides a more sophisticated portrayal than the somewhat one-dimensional analysis offered by Spiro. By using the categories of cognitive and affective religion Gombrich is able to show that individuals can hold more than one approach to Buddhism simultaneously. However, I have some reservations about the terms cognitive and affective themselves. Gombrich defines the terms as the difference between 'what people say they believe and say they do, and what they really believe and really do'. This seems to imply that only affective religion refers to the actual religiosity of individuals, and that cognitive religion refers to religious ideals that are given lip-service but ignored in practice. Such a view would bring Gombrich close to Spiro's view, that the values and ideals of 'nibbanic' Buddhism are known and notionally supported by all Buddhists, but ignored in practice. However, such a view sits uneasily with Gombrich's study as a whole, since his ethnographic data ethnographic data highlights that nibbanic values as well as kammatic tendencies are found within the practised religiosity of Sri Lankan Buddhists (308-312). Thus there seems to be a gap between Gombrich's overall analysis and his definitions of the terms cognitive and affective, a gap which suggests that in reality the division between these two aspects of religiosity is not as wide as Gombrich implies: in actuality it seems that the lived religiosity of most Sri Lankan Buddhists ('what they really believe and really do') consists of both aspects that Gombrich defines as cognitive and dimensions he defines as affective.

3.5 Modernist Buddhism

The analyses of lived Buddhism that I have examined so far in this chapter can all be said to be concerned with 'traditional' Theravada Buddhism.⁵ As discussed in chapter 2, 'traditional' Buddhism is generally opposed within Buddhist studies to 'modernist' Buddhism, a category denoting certain new ways of thinking about and practising Buddhism that emerged in many parts of Asia from the late-nineteenth century onwards,

⁵ Both King and Gombrich use the term 'traditional' to describe the Buddhism that they analyse.

often in response to contact between Buddhism and Western thought (Bechert 1984).⁶ In this section I will explore the concept of modernist Buddhism, and how it relates to the other ways of analysing Buddhism discussed in this chapter.

The dichotomy between traditional and modernist Buddhism is somewhat different to the others examined above. While those dichotomies are concerned with making divisions *within* traditional Buddhism, here it is argued that a new form of Buddhism has emerged which can be contrasted with traditional Buddhism. Still, as we shall see, clear connections between the modernist/traditional divide and the other dichotomies examined in this chapter can be identified.

I will focus here only on modernist Buddhism in Sri Lanka, since the nature and influence of modernist Buddhism has varied between different parts of the world, and since a great deal has been written specifically on the topic in Sri Lanka.⁷ In 1815 the whole of the island that is now called Sri Lanka came under British rule. At this time Buddhism declined on the island in terms of its power and influence, and had to contend with a hostile and government-supported Christian missionary presence. It was in this context that modernist Buddhism emerged in the late nineteenth century, particularly among the urban middle classes. Modernist Buddhism has been characterised as developing both in opposition to and under the influence of Protestant Christianity. This has led some scholars to employ the label 'Protestant Buddhism' when referring to the movement (Obeyesekere 1972; Malalgoda 1976; Gombrich 1988). More generally, modernist Buddhism can be seen as influenced by contact between Buddhism and modern Western thought. We can identify a number of features which can broadly be said to be characteristic of modernist Buddhism in Sri Lanka. These include:

1. A tendency to portray Buddhism as a rational teaching that accords with modern science. A contrast is drawn here with Christianity, which is regarded as a religion of blind faith (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:221-223).
2. A tendency to play down the importance of ritual aspects of Buddhism. Buddhism is seen instead as a religion of morality and meditation (Seneviratne 1999:47).

⁶ It should be noted that the term 'traditional Buddhism' is somewhat problematic, in that it seems to imply that pre-modern Buddhism was homogeneous and unchanging over hundreds of years. I recognise this problem, but continue using the term 'traditional' here for the sake of analytical ease.

⁷ See Bond (1988); Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988); Seneviratne (1999); Malalgoda (1976).

3. A tendency towards textualism, and criticism of aspects of Buddhist belief and practice which cannot be justified with textual evidence (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:220-221).
4. A tendency to play down the division between layperson and monastic. The layperson becomes seen as someone who can strive for *nibbāna* just as much as a monk (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:215-216).
5. An emphasis on the practice of meditation, for both monks and lay people (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:237-240).
6. A new optimism about the possibility of attaining *nibbāna* in the present lifetime. Whereas in pre-modern Sri Lankan Buddhism it was often thought that one could not achieve *nibbāna* in the present age, within modernist Buddhism we find a tendency to reject this view (Bond 1988:57,68).
7. A tendency towards 'this-worldly asceticism': combining the practice of meditative Buddhism with an active involvement in worldly affairs (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:231-237).
8. A tendency to criticise involvement by Buddhists in 'non-Buddhist' forms of religion, such as praying to divine beings (Gombrich 1988:197).

The emergence of Buddhist modernism represents an important development in the way in which Buddhism was understood and practised in Sri Lanka. While I have argued that the descriptions of traditional Buddhism given by Spiro and King draw too great a distinction between the religiosity of ordinary laypeople and the goal of *nibbāna*, clearly within Buddhist modernism we find a stronger emphasis on striving directly for *nibbāna* in the present lifetime, and a greater tendency to play down the importance of rituals of merit-making.

Relating the dichotomy of modernist/traditional Buddhism to the 'Two Buddhisms' model is straightforward since, as noted in chapter 2, many scholars that employ the 'Two Buddhisms' model draw a connection between the two dichotomies themselves, linking diaspora Buddhism with traditional Buddhism, and convert Buddhism with modernist Buddhism. As noted in chapter 2, the equation drawn here is fundamentally problematic since it ignores the fact that modernist Buddhism is not a Western phenomenon but something which emerged in Asia.

Modernist ideas have had a significant impact on Sri Lankan Buddhism in the 20th century. However, it would be wrong to suggest that modernist Buddhism has completely replaced more traditional forms of Buddhist belief and practice. Some studies – including Gombrich’s *Precept and Practice* – suggest that Sri Lankan Buddhists can be divided clearly into two groups: modernist Buddhists, located mainly in the urban middle-classes, and traditional Buddhists, found in rural areas of the country (see also Southwold 1983). However, other scholars have problematised this model. In a review of *Precept and Practice*, Malaloda (1972) argues that Gombrich fails to notice the influence of modernist Buddhism on many aspects of the rural Sri Lankan Buddhism that he studies, and suggests that in reality modernist and traditional Buddhism are less separate than Gombrich implies. Significantly, Gombrich has expressed very similar ideas in a more recent publication:

In fact, although traditional Buddhism and Protestant Buddhism can always be isolated as pure types, on the ground they are mingling and influencing each other more all the time. It is becoming more and more common to find a distinctly ‘Protestant’ element in a generally traditional environment (typically a rural village), and the urban, educated and middle-class Buddhist may equally have traditional attitudes and practices (1988:199).⁸

The complexity of contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhism is added to by the fact that modernist Buddhism is not the only form of religious change that has occurred in the island in recent times. The post-colonial period has been characterised by a number of different forms of religious change. These include a trend towards ‘neo-traditionalism’, which shares the rationalism of modernist Buddhism but which in other ways reflects a more traditional approach (Bond 1988:112-119); a rise in the popularity of *deva* worship (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:30-36); and the growth in popularity of various new forms of Buddhist ritual (Bond 1988:113-114). While these new religious developments in many ways represent movements away from the ideals of modernist Buddhism, it would be wrong to suggest that modernist Buddhism has been replaced by these new developments. Rather, more traditional aspects of Buddhism, modernist Buddhism, and these more recent trends exist in a complex relationship, sometimes in conflict, and sometimes overlapping. Thus in contemporary Sri Lanka one can observe a rise in the worship of divine beings, alongside a strong movement against such practices (popularised by the well-known monk Venerable

⁸ For a more recent discussion of the intermingling of modernist and traditional understanding of Buddhism in contemporary Sri Lanka, see Crosby’s discussion of the varied and changing interpretations given by Sri Lankans of the religious significance of the 2004 tsunami (2008).

Gangodawila Soma (Berkwitz 2008)). Similarly, one can find a strong movement towards lay meditation (Bond 2003), alongside a growth in elaborate new forms of Buddhist ritual (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:384-410).

As all of the above indicates, Sri Lankan Buddhism has been transformed in the last 150 years in ways which are more complex and far-reaching than merely the adoption of modernist Buddhism by a small elite section of society. Even those aspects of contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhism which appear to be most 'traditional' exist in a transformed religious and cultural landscape – one in which religious practices and ideas are more contested and debated – which may alter the meaning of such aspects of Buddhism for those that engage in them (Berkwitz 2003:70).

Thus to speak of Sri Lankan Buddhism in terms of a dichotomy between traditional and modernist Buddhism is highly problematic. This does not mean that we cannot identify certain patterns within contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhism. It is certainly the case that one can find some manifestations of Buddhism in Sri Lanka which strongly reflect the ideals of modernist Buddhism, and others which differ significantly from such these ideals. In addition, it is true that modernist Buddhism has had its most pervasive influence among the urban middle-classes. However, to attempt to encapsulate such patterns in terms of a simplistic dichotomy between urban, middle-class modernist Buddhism and rural traditional Buddhism ignores the complex nature of contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhism.

3.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I have attempted to add depth to my analysis of the 'Two Buddhisms' model by examining some of the ways of analysing lived Buddhism in Asia which the model draws on and reinforces.

As in chapter 2, my intention has not been to argue that there are no differences between diaspora and convert Buddhists. Rather it has been to examine the nature of these differences and call into question whether they can best be analysed by drawing a firm distinction between a ritual-centred, 'kammatic' diaspora Buddhism on one hand and a meditation-centred, 'nibbanic' convert Buddhism on the other.

The chapter can be divided into two parts. My discussions of the ideas of Spiro, King and Gombrich put to one side the profound influence that Buddhist modernism has had on the religiosity of many Buddhists in Asia, and focused instead on the question of

how best to conceptualise the relationship between ‘traditional’ Theravada Buddhism – centred around rituals, giving little place to intensive meditation practice, and not concerned with the attainment of *nibbāna* in this lifetime – and the meditation-centred Buddhism that is found among Western converts. My arguments suggest that, while the differences between these different forms of Buddhism are profound, it is fundamentally problematic to make an absolute distinction between these forms of Buddhism using dichotomies such as kammatic/nibbanic and kammic/nibbanic. While the Buddhists that Spiro and Gombrich study clearly approach Buddhism in a different way to most Western converts, it is problematic to argue that their religiosity is concerned only with the mechanistic production of merit, and not with ideals of moral and mental purification, or to suggest that these Buddhist have entirely abandoned the goal of *nibbāna* in favour of a the more ‘worldly’ rewards of kammic Buddhism.

In section 3.5 the focus of my arguments changed somewhat. Here I looked at the important influence that Buddhist modernism has had on Sri Lankan Buddhism. My discussion here highlights the untenability of the idea that modernist, meditation-centred Buddhism is something found only among Western converts. What I have described as modernist Buddhism is certainly not the only form of Buddhist religiosity found in contemporary Sri Lanka. In addition, even among those forms of Sri Lankan Buddhism which are most clearly modernist in character we can find considerable diversity. Thus in highlighting the influence of modernist Buddhism in Sri Lanka I am not arguing that all Sri Lankan Buddhists take a similar approach to Western converts. Rather, my intention has been to demonstrate that defining Sri Lankan Buddhism as ‘traditional’ in contrast to ‘modernist’ Western convert Buddhism – or even suggesting that Sri Lankan Buddhism itself is internally divided into separate categories of traditional and modernist – is fundamentally problematic. Modernist Buddhism, though not the only influence on contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhism, has had a profound impact, one which makes defining Sri Lankan Buddhism as ‘kammatic’ or ‘kammic’ in comparison to the ‘nibbanic’ Western converts even more problematic.

Chapter 4

The London Buddhist Vihara: A Sri Lankan Missionary Temple in Britain

In this and the next three chapters I focus on the approaches to Buddhism found at the London Buddhist Vihara (henceforth LBV), a Sri Lankan temple located in the affluent West London district of Chiswick. The LBV is the institution at which I spent the most time during my research and thus the institution that is looked at in the greatest depth in this study. In this chapter I provide a brief overview of the Vihara, its activities and its history. In the following three chapters I explore the Buddhist teachings and practices found at the LBV and the ways in which Buddhism is understood and practised by the Vihara's Sri Lankan patrons. The issue of the degree to which the LBV acts as a social and cultural centre for Sri Lankans in the UK is addressed briefly in chapter 5. However, this issue is explored in greater depth, alongside the related question of how Sri Lankan patrons of the LBV look at questions of cultural identity, in chapter 8 where comparisons are made between the LBV and the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre.

4.1 The founder of the London Buddhist Vihara: Anagarika Dharmapala

The LBV was established in 1926, and the Vihara's website identifies it as 'the first Buddhist monastery to be established outside the continent of Asia'.¹ The LBV was

¹ There are a number of institutions which may present a challenge to the LBV's claim to be the first Buddhist monastery outside Asia. The Buddhistische Haus was established in Berlin by the German convert Buddhist Paul Dalhke in Berlin in 1924. However, in its earliest days the Buddhistische Haus was not a monastery in the orthodox sense of the term, in that those that resided there were not fully ordained monks living by the full monastic code (*vinaya*). Rather, they were living a lifestyle somewhere between that of a monk and that of a layperson, with the five precepts of a lay Buddhist as their only set of rules (see Baumann 2001; Batchelor 1994). In the USA Japanese immigration led to the establishment of Jodo Shinshu temples as early as 1889 (Bechert 1984:281). However, clergy within this school do not follow the rules of a Buddhist *vinaya*, are not required to be celibate, and may marry. They are thus not monks in the sense in which term is usually employed both within the Theravada school and within the academic study of Buddhism.

A stronger challenge to the LBV's claim comes from Russia. Buddhist institutions were present in the Russian Empire (and thus in an area that is now regarded as part of Europe) from the seventeenth century, when the regions inhabited by the Buryats and Kalmyks, peoples of Mongolian origin who followed a 'Tibeto-Mongolian' form of Buddhism, came under Russian control (Ostrovskaya 2004:21-25). In 1915 a temple was established in the Russian capital of Saint Petersburg to cater to the large number of Buryat and Kalmyk people who had settled in the city (Snelling 1993; Ostrovskaya 2004). This temple housed from its beginnings a number of monks following Tibetan Buddhist traditions, and thus disproves the LBV's claim. It is worth noting, however, that the historical significance of the Saint Petersburg temple is somewhat different from that of the LBV. While the LBV was established specifically in order to spread Buddhism among the non-Buddhist people of Britain, the Saint Petersburg temple was established to serve a Buddhist community that had been incorporated into Russia as a result of the expansion of the Empire.

founded by the Sri Lankan Buddhist reformer Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933). Dharmapala was a key figure in the emergence of modernist Buddhism in Sri Lanka. He was critical of the ritualism of traditional Sri Lankan Buddhism and called for a return to a 'pure' Buddhism centred around meditation, morality and working for the good of others. Born as Don David Hevavitarana, he took the name Anagarika Dharmapala at the age of 24, and dedicated the rest of his life to the promotion of Buddhism and Sinhalese culture. Dharmapala means 'protector of the Dharma', while Anagarika is a title meaning 'one who is homeless' (Gombrich 1988:186). Traditionally this title refers to a monk, but Dharmapala used it to denote a new kind of religious identity, lying somewhere between monk and layperson.

In addition to being a religious reformer, Dharmapala was a key figure in the development of modern Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. He was a critic of British imperialism, of the non-Sinhala minorities in Sri Lanka, and of the adoption of elements of Western culture by certain sections of colonial Sinhala society (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:212-213). In this sense, Dharmapala was an inward-looking figure, interested in ridding Sinhala culture and Sinhala Buddhism of foreign influences. However, Dharmapala was also somewhat outward-looking. While he emphasised the importance of Buddhism as an aspect of Sinhalese culture, he also promoted Buddhism as a universal religion, and one that is in line with modern (Western) thinking (McMahan 2004:900-907). Dharmapala's emphasis on Buddhism as a universal religion was manifest most clearly in his belief in the need to spread Buddhism outside those countries in which it was already established. He worked to revive the fortunes of Buddhism in India (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:206). He also made efforts to establish Buddhism in the West. This involved not only the establishment of the LBV but also the address that Dharmapala made to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, which has been regarded as a key moment in the introduction of Buddhism to the West (McMahan 2004:900).

Dharmapala died in 1933, seven years after the establishment of the Vihara. However, his legacy continues to affect the Vihara in a number of ways. The present location of the LBV – opened in 1994 – is named 'Dharmapala Building', and a bust of Dharmapala is located in its entrance. In September each year the Vihara celebrates Dharmapala's birthday with a special ceremony. The Vihara is owned by the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust, an organisation based in Sri Lanka. This body takes an interest in

ensuring that the Vihara is run in the spirit in which Dharmapala intended. The idea that the LBV should remain true to Dharmapala's original vision was also emphasised to me a number of times by both lay and monastic informants at the temple. When individuals spoke about the LBV remaining true to Dharmapala's vision, they generally had one or both of the following ideas in mind: firstly, that the Vihara should be a place of 'pure' Buddhism of the kind promoted by Dharmapala; secondly, that – since Dharmapala founded the LBV in order to spread Buddhism to the British – the Vihara should be a non-culturally-specific centre of Theravada Buddhism, teaching Buddhism to individuals from any background, rather than a Sri Lankan social and cultural centre. That Dharmapala's primary intention in establishing the LBV was to spread Buddhism among the British is clear from his writings. In one article, written after the initial establishment of the Vihara, and indicating Dharmapala's desire for a more substantial centre, he states:

The natives of England should be enlightened as to the merits of the great Aryan Dharma. It is necessary that we should have a preaching hall and a library in some central place in London' (Dharmapala [1927] 1965:661).

4.2 A brief history of the London Buddhist Vihara

When the LBV was founded there were far fewer Sri Lankan Buddhists living in the UK than there are today. However, there were some Sri Lankans in Britain at that time, and Webb's history of the Vihara highlights that from the beginning it was attended by both British converts and Sinhalese Buddhists living in the UK (2004:1-20). Sri Lankans in the UK at this time came predominantly from elite, English-educated backgrounds. The trend of individuals from such background coming to the UK to pursue a university education can be traced back to the late nineteenth century (Jayawardena 2000:255-258). The British convert Buddhists that were involved in the early stages of the Vihara's development included such notable figures of the early British Buddhist scene as Christmas Humphreys and J.F. McKechnie (who had at one time been a Buddhist monk in Burma). Many converts who participated in the Vihara's activities were also involved with the Buddhist Society, the oldest Buddhist organisation in the UK (established 1924).

When it was first established the Vihara was located not in Chiswick but in nearby Ealing. In 1928 the Vihara moved to a property in Regents Park and in the same year three monks came from Sri Lanka to become the first resident monastics of the Vihara. The LBV remained in Regents Park until the outbreak of the Second World War, when the property

was compulsorily purchased by the municipal authority. The one monk living in the Vihara at that time returned to Sri Lanka in early 1940 (Webb 2004: 33).

Following the end of the war efforts to re-establish the LBV were made both in Britain and in Sri Lanka, culminating in the establishment of the Vihara's third premises in Knightsbridge in 1954 (Webb 2004:33-43). In 1957 the well known Sri Lankan monk and academic Venerable Hammalawa Saddhatissa was appointed as the head of the Vihara (Webb 2004:53). He was to remain in post for the next 27 years.

In 1964 the Vihara moved again, this time to Chiswick. In the same year a Buddha relic from Sri Lanka was presented to the LBV by Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. This event was celebrated with a Sri Lankan-style *perahera* (procession) involving elephants, Kandyan dancing and a large Buddha image on a float (Webb 2004:71-74; Oliver 1979:70-71).

The LBV underwent a turbulent period in the 1980s following the resignation of Venerable Saddhatissa as head monk and the appointment of Venerable Medagama Vajiragnana as his successor (Webb 2004:149-157). I will explore this period in greater depth in chapter 8. In summary, the period saw disputes concerning the validity of Venerable Vajiragnana's appointment as head monk and the question of who owned the Vihara, the Sri Lanka-based Anagarika Dharmapala Trust (who appointed Venerable Vajiragnana) or the UK-based British Maha Bodhi Society. The disputes led to a lengthy court case.

In 1991 the court case was settled in favour of the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust (Webb 2004:155). Venerable Vajiragnana was thus confirmed as head of the Vihara. Prior to this, in 1990, Venerable Vajiragnana received the title of *Sangha Nāyaka* (effectively 'head monk') of Great Britain from one of the foremost monastic authorities in Sri Lanka (Wimalajothi 2003:56). Under Venerable Vajiragnana's leadership greater structure was given to the activities of the LBV. In addition, it has been argued that Venerable Vajiragnana restored the Vihara's emphasis on teaching Buddhism to the British (Wimalajothi 2003:49). It seems that in the years prior to his appointment the LBV had lost this emphasis to a certain extent and focused on the needs of Sri Lankans.

In 1994 the LBV moved to its present location. While all of its previous locations have been residential properties, the current property was formerly a social club. It is thus better suited to the large crowds that attend the Vihara during special events and festivals.

While I was undertaking my research at the LBV Venerable Vajiragnana was seriously ill and was often in hospital. In December 2006 he passed away at the age of 78. His life was celebrated at Buddhist ceremonies both in the UK and in Sri Lanka. In 2007 Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala, a resident monk at the Vihara since 1992 and acting head since the death of Venerable Vajiragnana, was officially appointed as the new head. In May 2008 Venerable Seelawimala was awarded the title of *Sangha Nāyaka* of Great Britain, the same title held by Venerable Vajiragnana.²

4.3 An overview of the present-day London Buddhist Vihara

Building

The LBV is situated in a former social club. All of the public areas are situated on the ground floor. The majority of religious activities at the LBV take place in a large carpeted hall, sometimes referred to as the meditation hall. At one end of this hall stands the Vihara's shrine, consisting of a large gold Buddha-image surrounded by an assortment of other statues and objects of devotion, including a *bō* tree (the tree under which the Buddha is said to have gained enlightenment) in a glass case. Rituals of *pūjā* are regularly performed towards the shrine.

A second large hall provides a space for people to eat and drink on festival days, for meetings, for the Vihara's Sunday school classes, and sometimes for lectures. At the back of the hall is a raised stage, used annually for the performance of a play by pupils of the Sunday school, which also houses the LBV's library.

The first floor of the LBV houses the living quarters of the Vihara's resident monks. The number of monks living at the LBV varies. For much of the period of my research there were five resident monks, but more recently the numbers have fluctuated. Some monks live at the LBV for many years. Others come to the Vihara for a temporary period of a few weeks or months. All of the permanently resident monks of the LBV, and most of those that come to the Vihara temporarily, are Sri Lankan. However, sometimes convert monks stay temporarily at the Vihara. During the period of my research all of the resident

² It should be noted that the head monk of the LBV is not the only Sri Lankan monk in the UK to hold a title of *Sangha Nāyaka*. At the time of writing I am aware of four Sri Lankan monks in different temples in Britain with this title (there are differences in terms of the Sri Lankan authority that awards the titles, and in terms of the exact nature of the titles). Such titles are largely symbolic: there is little centralised authority among Sri Lankan monks in the UK (while there are links between certain temples, in general each temple in the UK is run independently), and thus in reality there is no single head monk.

monks belonged to a particular monastic group, the Siyam Nikāya, which is the largest and most powerful monastic order in Sri Lanka.

Organisation

The LBV is owned by the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust (ADT), based in Sri Lanka. The ADT appoints the resident monks of the Vihara and takes an interest that the LBV is being run in accordance with what they see as Anagarika Dharmapala's original vision. The ADT also appoints a lay management committee of three people (currently all Sri Lankans) to look after the Vihara property.

The head monk of the LBV is in overall charge of the day-to-day running of the Vihara. He is assisted in this task by a group of coordinators, drawn from the lay supporters of the Vihara. There are around 50 coordinators, consisting of both Sri Lankans and British converts. The coordinators meet once a month to organise the various activities conducted at the Vihara. A smaller number of laypeople (many of them also coordinators) are more closely involved in the day-to-day running of the Vihara, spending a considerable amount of time at the Vihara every week, assisting with clerical duties and other tasks that need to be performed.

There is no form of official membership at the LBV. However, as is the norm at temples in Sri Lanka, those that regularly give *dāna* at the temple (i.e. provide meals for the resident monks) are given the title of *dāyaka*. *Dāyakas* at the LBV provide the lunchtime meal for the monks (monks do not eat after noon) once every three months. Thus there are around 90 *dāyaka* families. In Sri Lanka *dāyakas* are often heavily involved in the running of the temple. The situation at the LBV is somewhat different. Some *dāyakas* are also on the organising committee, but the two groups are regarded as separate.

Many of the activities of the LBV (talks, classes, rituals) are conducted by the resident monks. However, lay supporters – both Sri Lankans and converts – are also involved in the conducting of some activities. Lay followers often deliver talks at the LBV, lead study classes and teach in the Vihara's Sunday school. The LBV also invites many teachers from outside the Vihara – both monks and lay teachers – to conduct activities.

Activities

In the following chapters I will look in depth at the various activities conducted at the LBV. Here I provide a brief overview of some of the key activities of the Vihara.

- ***Pōya* day celebrations.** The monthly *pōya* or full-moon day is the central day of religious observance among Sri Lankan Buddhists. In Sri Lanka each *pōya* day is a public holiday. Since *pōya* days can land on any day of the week, this is not the case in the UK. Therefore, *pōya* days tend to be celebrated in Britain on the Sunday nearest to the *pōya* day itself.

Many of the central annual celebrations of Sri Lankan Buddhism occur on *pōya* days – for example, the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and death are all commemorated on the Wesak *pōya* day – and most *pōya* days are associated with some significant event in the life of the Buddha or the history of Sri Lankan Buddhism. At the LBV not every *pōya* day is celebrated. Of the 12 annual *pōya* days 5 are celebrated regularly: Navam (February),³ Wesak (May), Poson (June), Esala (July, also known as Dhammacakka Day), and Unduwap (December, also known as Sanghamitta Day).⁴

On these occasions the LBV provides a full day of religious activities, starting around 9am and finishing around 6pm. The programme will generally include a number of talks, some ritual activities and a period of meditation. Some attending these programmes will undertake to live by a special code of eight precepts for the day (this is referred to as observing *siḷ*). Such individuals take on certain aspects of the rules of monks for the day – such as not eating after noon – and tend to spend most of the day in the LBV’s meditation hall, listening to talks and engaging in meditation or rituals.

- **Ritual activities.** A range of Buddhist rituals are regularly performed at the LBV. These are discussed in detail in chapter 6.

³ The Navam *pōya* day was not regularly celebrated prior to my research. It was first celebrated in February 2007, and is now a regular event at the LBV.

⁴ A list of major annual observances at the LBV, including details of these different *pōya* day celebrations, can be found on the Vihara’s website: www.londonbuddhistvihara.org/calendar.htm (accessed 20/06/2010).

- **Classes.** A number of different classes on Buddhist doctrines and philosophy are held at the LBV weekly. I will discuss these further below. A meditation class is conducted every Wednesday evening. In addition, a meditation retreat is conducted on the last Saturday of every month.
- **Sunday school.** The LBV runs a Sunday school to teach Buddhism and Sinhala language to second-generation Sri Lankan children. The school is taught by the resident monks and lay patrons of the Vihara.
- **Social engagement.** The LBV is involved in various forms of socially engaged action. A charity administered by monks and lay supporters of the LBV raises money to fund the education of deprived children in Sri Lanka and other countries. The LBV was also involved in charity work following the tsunami that affected Sri Lanka and other regions of South and Southeast Asia in 2004. The monks of the LBV act as Buddhist chaplains in hospitals located near to the Vihara. In addition the Vihara also holds an annual blood donation day, during which patrons of the Vihara are encouraged to give blood.

Other socially engaged work carried out by the LBV involves representing Buddhism in various contexts. The monks of the Vihara are actively involved in interfaith work, the previous head monk being a founding member of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, the leading interfaith body in Britain.⁵ Educational visits from schools, colleges and universities are regular events at the LBV. On such occasions one of the resident monks of the Vihara will usually give a talk about Buddhism. The LBV is often asked to represent Buddhism at state occasions, such as the Remembrance Day service held annually at the Cenotaph, or in situations when the government wishes to consult with different faiths on a particular issue. The Vihara also has connections with the Sri Lankan government. Monks from the Vihara regularly attend events at the Sri Lankan High Commission in London, such as the celebrations of Sri Lankan Independence Day held in February. In addition, politicians from Sri Lanka who are visiting the UK will sometimes make visits to the LBV. One interesting

⁵ Venerable Vajiragnana was awarded an O.B.E. for his interfaith activities in 2006. For an account of his achievements in the field see Wimalajothi (2003:52-55). In an article on the subject Vajiragnana stresses the importance of interfaith work for promoting understanding and harmony between religions, and particularly for raising awareness in the UK of the basic teachings of Buddhism (Vajiragnana 1997).

example of the participation of the LBV in Sri Lankan government events occurred in January 2007 when a group of seven Sri Lankan monks, including the present head of the LBV, made a visit to Iran as a goodwill gesture organised by the Sri Lankan government.

The majority of activities at the LBV are conducted in English, but Sinhala is also used to some degree (often *pōya* day celebrations feature one talk in Sinhala). Rituals at the Vihara usually involve chanting in Pali, the liturgical language of Theravada Buddhism.

Patrons

Despite the fact that the self-image of the LBV is that of a temple spreading Buddhism to British people, the majority of the Vihara's patrons are Sri Lankans. However, a significant number of British convert Buddhists also attend the LBV, and during certain activities at the Vihara – for example, during the weekly meditation classes – converts often outnumber Sri Lankans. Among the nine Sri Lankan temples in and around London that I visited during my research the LBV was the one with the largest convert presence. In addition to Sri Lankans and British converts, the LBV also attracts diaspora Buddhists in the UK who come from places other than Sri Lanka. I came across Buddhists from Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Japan, Malaysia, and Indonesia at the Vihara during the course of my research. It is impossible to give a figure for the number of patrons of the LBV. As is the case with all Sri Lankan temples in London, there is no formal membership at the Vihara. In addition, patterns of attendance mean that it is not possible to gauge with any accuracy the numbers involved with the Vihara from the numbers present at any particular activity. Some patrons of the Vihara come weekly for the Sunday *pūjā*. Others attend *pōya* day celebrations. Others still attend in the main not during public activities but individually or with their family in order to offer alms or have particular rituals performed. No particular form of attendance or participation is expected of every patron, and some may only attend the LBV once or twice a year. During my research the most popular event at the LBV was the annual celebration of Wesak, which by my estimate attracted around 400 participants. However, again it should be stressed that not all patrons of the Vihara attend even this event. In his MPhil thesis Ferenando estimates that there are 1000 Sri Lankan families who regularly

take part in the Vihara's activities (2005:97). However, this estimate seems a little high to me, and Fernando admits that it is impossible to give exact figures in this area

Certain observations can be made about the Sri Lankan community at the LBV. While Sri Lankans from a range of backgrounds can be found at the Vihara, it is noticeable that patrons of the LBV are particularly likely, when compared to patrons of other Sri Lankan temples in Britain, to come from affluent, well-educated, high-status backgrounds. I will come back to this point in chapter 8. The majority of Sri Lankan participants during *pōya* day celebrations and other public activities at the LBV are first-generation migrants. A pattern of second-generation Sri Lankans attending Sunday school when young, but attending the Vihara less frequently from their late teens onwards was observed by a number of my informants. However, this pattern should not be over-emphasised. Some second-generation Sri Lankans regularly attend *pōya* day celebrations, talks and *pūjās* at the Vihara. In addition, it is the norm in Sri Lanka for those attending *pōya* day programmes to be predominantly in middle age or above, so the lack of young adults at such activities is not unusual in the Sri Lankan context (Gombrich 1971:274).

4.4 A centre of modernist Buddhism or a place of kammatic and apotropaic ritual?

The following three chapters will be structured around an investigation of what kind of Buddhist institution the LBV is. Thus I am interested in questions such as: What kind of religious activities are found at the LBV? How are these activities spoken about by monks and other sources of authority at the Vihara? What kind of approach to thinking about and practising Buddhism does the LBV encourage? Is the LBV a place in which a single approach to Buddhism is found or one in which many ways of thinking about and practising Buddhism are manifest?

Unlike the other Sri Lankan institutions that I look at in this study, the LBV has been written about a number of times, both in academic literature and elsewhere.⁶ Two previous assessments of the nature of the Vihara are particularly interesting to consider because they give somewhat contrasting pictures of the institution. In an article published on the website Buddhnet (1994) Dr V.A. Gunasekara, a Sri Lankan Buddhist involved with the Buddhist Society of Queensland in Australia, holds up the LBV as an example of how Theravada Buddhism should be transplanted to a foreign land. In doing so he contrasts

⁶ For examples of literature which discusses the LBV see Oliver (1979), Gunasekara (1994), Panyasiri (2004), Fernando (2005), and Webb (2004).

the LBV with the Lankarama temple in Singapore, which was established in the 1940s by a group of Sinhalese migrants. In part the contrast that Gunasekara draws between the two temples concerns the question of their cultural focus. He praises the LBV as an institution teaching the universal doctrines of Buddhism to individuals from any background. On the other hand, he condemns Lankarama for focusing only on the needs of the Sinhalese diaspora and for acting as a Sri Lankan cultural centre. However, the contrast that Gunasekara draws also concerns the approach to Buddhism found at the two temples. Gunasekara identifies the LBV as a place in which Buddhist philosophy is studied and discussed. He also identifies it as a place in which meditation is practised (although he stresses that the LBV does not emphasise meditation above all else). In contrast, he argues that study of the Pali Canon is largely absent at Lankarama, and characterises the approach to Buddhism found at that temple as one focused on ritualistic aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhism such as the offering of *dāna* and robes to monks, the chanting of *pirit*, and the performance of rituals of Buddha *pūjā* and *Bodhi pūjā*.

The distinction that Gunasekara makes between the LBV and the Lankarama temple is thus clear. Looking back at the terminology encountered in chapter 3, we can say that Gunasekara portrays the LBV as a place of 'modernist' or 'nibbanic' Buddhism, and Lankarama is a place of 'traditional' or 'kammatic/apotropaic' Buddhism.

A recent PhD thesis by Panyasiri (2004) challenges Gunasekara's characterisation of the LBV. Panyasiri calls into doubt both the idea that the LBV is a place of 'modernist' Buddhism and the idea that it is a place in which 'kammatic' and 'apotropaic' Buddhism are rejected. In discussing the concept of 'modern Buddhism' he argues:

If this view seeks to disregard the pre-modern era, it is not shared by the Theravada of the London Buddhist Vihara. They retain both protective and kammic influences together with the goal of Nibbana as a multi-faceted religion which for them is Theravada Buddhism today (2004:118)

The views of Gunasekara and Panyasiri on the nature of the LBV thus seem to conflict to some extent. Which view is correct? In truth, both have some validity. As we shall see, Gunasekara is correct to describe the LBV as in some sense emphasising a more philosophical and meditation-oriented form of Buddhism than some Sri Lankan temples in the diaspora. At the same time, Panyasiri is correct to note that the LBV does not exclude ritual aspects of Buddhism. In fact, all of the ritual activities that Gunasekara associates

with the Lankarama temple in Singapore also take place at the LBV to some extent. However, Panyasiri's argument that Sinhalese Buddhists at the LBV incorporate nibbanic, kammatic and apotropaic practices into their religiosity – while it contains an important truth – is too general a statement to tell us anything specific about the nature of the Vihara. It ignores the fact that there is to some extent a 'modernist' emphasis in the activities of the LBV, even if this does not completely exclude rituals of merit-making and protection.

The arguments above show that the question of the religious nature of the LBV is a complex one, and that the Vihara cannot be accurately described in one-dimensional terms (for example, as entirely 'modernist' or 'traditionalist', or as emphatically 'ritualistic' or 'philosophical'). In the following chapters I will draw out the complexity of the LBV as a religious place by looking in turn at a number of different ways in which the Vihara can be described.

Chapter 5

The London Buddhist Vihara as a Centre of Modernist Buddhism

In this chapter I explore dimensions of the LBV which support V.A. Gunasekara's description of the Vihara as a centre of modernist Buddhism I begin by examining discourses and activities at the LBV which emphasise meditation and play down the importance of ritual. I then look at the emphasis on studying Buddhism found at the Vihara. Finally, I briefly discuss the LBV's role as a social and cultural centre, and the degree to which this affects perceptions of the Vihara as a place of Buddhist practice.

5.1 The LBV as a place of meditation-oriented, deritualised Buddhism

Many discourses and practices at the LBV emphasise Buddhism as a philosophy of meditation and mental development, while playing down the importance of rituals of merit-making and protection. This is not the only approach to Buddhism found at the LBV. However, such an approach is evident at the Vihara to a significant degree. The emphasis on a meditation-oriented, de-ritualised approach to Buddhism found at the LBV can be attributed the Vihara's desire to remain true to the legacy of Anagarika Dharmapala, who emphasised Buddhism as a path of mental development and was critical of the ritualism of traditional Sri Lankan Buddhism. It can also be related to the fact that the Vihara aims to promote Buddhism among British converts, who are generally strongly interested in meditation and uninterested in ritual aspects of Buddhism. However, it would be incorrect to associate such an approach to Buddhism only with converts at the LBV. Many Sri Lankan patrons of the temple also favour such an approach to Buddhism.

Let us now turn to look at how an emphasis on a meditation-centred, de-ritualised approach to Buddhism is manifest at the LBV. In terms of the activities run by the LBV, an emphasis on meditation is evident in the Vihara's weekly meditation classes and in its monthly meditation retreat. Meditation also forms a part of some other activities at the Vihara: *pōya* day celebrations always include a period of meditation, as does the weekly *pūjā* service.

Meditation classes at the LBV consist of a 45 minute period of concentration on the breath, followed by 10 minutes of standing meditation and 15 minutes of meditation on the quality of *mettā* (loving kindness). After the meditation there is either a talk by the monk teaching the class or a reading from a book by a well-known meditation teacher, followed

by a question and answer period. A number of approaches to meditation can be found in the modern Theravada world. Contemporary debates often focus on the relationship between *samatha* meditation, which aims to bring about a relaxed and focused mind, and *vipassanā* practices, which aim to cultivate insight into Buddhist truths about the nature of reality and thereby bring one towards *nibbāna*. The LBV refers to the meditation that it teaches as *vipassanā*, even though the two forms of meditation practised in the Wednesday class are most often regarded as *samatha* practices. This reflects a tendency in teachings at the LBV to play down the *samatha/vipassanā* division, and to argue that rather than being treated as entirely separate, *samatha* and *vipassanā* should be cultivated together. Thus the Vihara's website states:

These two forms of meditation should not be regarded as two distinct practices, but as the two sides of the same coin, and one should try to achieve a balance between them.¹

This approach reflects that taken by the Thai meditation teacher Ajahn Chah and the Sri Lankan meditation instructor Venerable Henepola Gunaratana. These were the teachers referred to most often during meditation classes that I attended at the LBV,² and the Vihara's website lists Gunaratana's 'Mindfulness in Plain English' (2002) as a recommended reading. However, other forms of meditation can sometimes be found at the LBV. A regular visitor to the Vihara is the British convert monk Bhante Bodhidhamma, who teaches the '*vipassanā* only' method of the Burmese monk Mahasi Sayadaw. That Bodhidhamma often takes the Wednesday evening meditation class when he visits the Vihara is illustrative of the fact that the LBV is not a place where a single discourse about Buddhism can be found, but a place where one can find a range of approaches to Buddhism (see chapter 7).

Another place where we can find evidence of a meditation-centred approach to Buddhism at the LBV is in the literature of the Vihara. The LBV produces a variety of literature. It has a well-run website which features sections describing Buddhism and providing answers to various questions about Buddhist teachings and practices.³ It also produces a bi-annual journal, *Samadhi*, which provides news about the Vihara and articles

¹ www.londonbuddhistvihara.org/fund_topics/meditation.html (accessed 20/06/2010).

² I attended meditation classes at the LBV fairly regularly both before and during my research. I made detailed notes on classes that I attended on 7 occasions during my fieldwork.

³ The website of the LBV is found at www.londonbuddhistvihara.org (accessed 20/06/2010).

about Buddhism. In addition, the LBV occasionally produces booklets explaining aspects of Buddhist teachings, and longer books collecting articles on various Buddhist themes.⁴ An emphasis on meditation is found in much of this literature. The Vihara's website dedicates considerable space to the subject; one of the booklets produced by the Vihara is entitled *Meditation = Awareness* (Vajiragnana 1995); and the Vihara's journal features articles with titles such as 'The Benefits of Long-Term Meditation' (Gunaratana 2007) and 'Practical Vipassana' (Gunaratana 2005). A tendency to play down the importance of ritual aspects of Buddhism can also be found in the literature produced by the LBV. This is most evident in a section of the Vihara's website dedicated to the subject of 'Buddhist Practices'.⁵ This section contains the following discussion of certain Buddhist ritual practices:

Q: Buddhists are often seen praying to the Buddha, offering flowers and covering Buddha statues with gold leaves, and pouring water onto Bodhi trees. Are these actions beneficial?

A: There are no prayers as such in Buddhism since, by definition, Buddhism cannot be classed as a theistic religion (i.e. there is no 'creator god'). The Buddha, having attained Nibbana, and after his death is beyond the call of prayer.

In fact, the Buddha discouraged his followers from worshipping him and for several centuries after his death there were no Buddha images produced.

Certain rituals and practices are later additions to Buddhism and satisfy people's need for expression and worship. As Buddhism spread beyond India, it absorbed many of the local beliefs and traditions in keeping with its ideals of tolerance. This is why the actual practices of Buddhism differs widely among the various cultures with much emphasis on rituals.

Buddhists kneel before an image of the Buddha or a Bodhi tree and reflect on the virtues of the Buddha and may recite the five precepts.

The above practices by themselves do not produce any direct benefits. However, when performed with good intention (not with the ulterior motive of obtaining some selfish benefit) they have the effect of enhancing devotion (saddha) and the purity of the mind. The value of such practices comes from individual effort, not from any external power.

The idea that the Buddha is in any way accessible through prayer or ritual is strongly denied here. In addition, it is argued that the earliest forms of Buddhism did not include rituals involving Buddha images. This, together with the claim that Buddhism has over its history absorbed many local forms of religiosity 'in keeping with its ideals of tolerance',

⁴ For examples of books and booklets produced by the LBV see Vajiragnana (1995), Wimalajothi, Pemananda, Ananda, and Nanayakkara (2003), and Vajiragnana (2006).

⁵ See www.londonbuddhistvihara.org/qa/qa_practices.htm (accessed 20/06/2010).

serves to create a distance between ‘true’ Buddhism and the ritual practices being discussed. Ultimately such ritual practices are accepted, but only in as much as they are seen as ways of purifying the mind and enhancing one’s feelings of devotion. Benefits of merit-accumulation or apotropaic protection are not mentioned, and it is expressly stated that such rituals produce no benefits in and of themselves.

A meditation-oriented, de-ritualised approach to Buddhism is also often manifest in talks given at the LBV. Here I will look at two talks delivered at the Vihara during the course of my research in which such an approach to Buddhism is clearly expressed.⁶

Dr Matheesha Gunatilake ‘Going Nowhere? The Path to Nibbāna’ (delivered 03/03/07)

Dr Gunatilake is a Sri Lankan psychiatrist resident in London. In the Sri Lankan community there are a number of laypeople with a good knowledge of Buddhism who regularly give talks at temples. Dr Gunatilake spoke at the LBV a number of times during the period of my research, and has also delivered talks at other temples in London. This talk was delivered as part of the LBV’s series of monthly *Dhamma* talks.

The fact that laypeople are invited to deliver talks at the LBV is notable in itself, since it disrupts the strict division between lay and monastic roles which the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model attributes to diaspora Buddhism. As noted in chapter 4, the LBV’s founder Anagarika Dharmapala was a non-monastic Buddhist teacher. Dharmapala was a key influence on the changes that occurred within modernist Buddhism in terms of how the roles of monk and layperson were thought about (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:231-237). Thus while the LBV is a monastic temple, it is also the inheritor of a modernist tradition in which the idea of firm boundaries between laypeople and monastics is challenged, and the roles taken at the Vihara by lay teachers such as Dr Gunatilake reflect this.

The content of Dr Gunatilake’s talk also disrupts stereotyped portrayals of diaspora Buddhism. As the title suggests, the talk is concerned with the path towards *nibbāna*. The basic theme is that all Buddhists should make an effort to move towards *nibbāna*. Dr Gunatilake argues that progress on the spiritual path can be difficult if we do not have some definite goal to aim for. He thus suggests that we should look at our goal, consider where

⁶ I am able to quote from the talks discussed here because these talks (like many at the LBV) were recorded and made available on CDs.

we are now in relation to that goal, and make an effort to move towards the goal. The ultimate goal is of course *nibbāna*, but Gunatilake focuses on the lesser goal of *sotāpanna* or ‘stream enterer’, the first of the four levels of spiritual attainment that the Theravada tradition recognises. Gunatilake emphasises this lesser goal because it represents a more attainable target than *nibbāna* – an interim goal which can act as a source of motivation and orientation on one’s spiritual journey.

Having established the level of *sotāpanna* as a suitable goal, Gunatilake proceeds by suggesting that we need to look at the qualities of those who has reached this level – their faith in the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*; their standard of ethical conduct; the level of meditative concentration they can achieve; the degree of insight that they have attained – and consider to what degree we hold these qualities. In this way we can more clearly see what we need to do in order to achieve our goal.

Gunatilake also discusses paths which can distract one from progressing towards *nibbāna*. One of these is that of *āmisā pūjā*. *Āmisā pūjā* refers to the making of material offerings to the Buddha or *Sangha*. It is often contrasted with *paṭipatti pūjā*, putting into practice that which the Buddha taught.⁷ Gunatilake illustrates the potential dangers of *āmisā pūjā* by looking at life of Anāthapiṇḍika, one of the Buddha’s most prominent lay followers. It is worth quoting Gunatilake at length here:

...there is another slightly...I wouldn’t say wrong...but...another path we need to be aware of. And that is the path of *āmisā pūjā*. There is nothing wrong in it, but there is more to be done.

We all know about, I believe, a man known as Anāthapiṇḍika. He was one of the great benefactors of the Buddha. He helped and gave a lot of *dāna*. He was very generous. And he used to come with all his friends to the temple.

One day [...] the Buddha told Anāthapiṇḍika, ‘You give a lot of *dāna* to this temple, that’s fine. But you need to spend time in seclusion as well. [...]. And Venerable Sariputta was also around at the time when he said that and Venerable Sariputta went on to explain what this seclusion was. And he said, ‘When you are in seclusion you are away from the advantages and the disadvantages of the sensual world, of the *kāmaloka*’. So in a sense he seems to have been talking about going into deeper states, of *samādhi* and *jhāna* perhaps. So this is what the Buddha was prescribing to this layperson. *Dāna* is not enough, you need more. *Dāna* is an important part [...] but you need to practise as well.

And does anyone know what happened to Anāthapiṇḍika on his deathbed? [...] The Buddha sent Venerable Sariputta to his home to see if Anāthapiṇḍika could be made to realise *nibbāna* at his point of death at least. And when

⁷ The literal meanings of *āmisā pūjā* and *paṭipatti pūjā* are ‘offering of raw flesh’ and ‘offering of practice’.

Venerable Sariputta started explaining the *Dhamma* – it must have been an incredible sermon – Anāthapiṇḍika started crying. [...]. Then Venerable Sariputta asked, ‘Oh Anāthapiṇḍika, is your pains [*sic*] getting worse...the illness that you are suffering from?’ And Anāthapiṇḍika said, ‘No. I have not heard *Dhamma* like this ever before. That's why I'm crying now.’ And really, it looks as if the Buddha was trying to push him in that direction way before his death. But it looks like it didn't work, unfortunately. So whatever reason that was that he didn't take to meditation, he didn't take to further practice...he was a *sotāpanna* himself...but whatever the reason was that he didn't take to practice, I think that it's an important lesson for us [...]. Don't wait until the last moment. You need to start working on those things now.

It is interesting that the interpretation Gunatilake gives of Anāthapiṇḍika's story here is the opposite of that given by Gombrich (1988). Gombrich argues that the fact that Anāthapiṇḍika was only introduced to the higher (nibbanic) elements of the Buddha's teachings on his deathbed suggests that in early Buddhism laypeople were not expected to meditate or take a serious interest in the path to *nibbāna* (1988:76). For Gunatilake, on the other hand, the story indicates that the laity must take an interest in such aspects of religion and thus avoid the mistakes of Anāthapiṇḍika who, despite the Buddha's advice, practised only the lesser path of *āmisā pūjā*. Which interpretation of the Anāthapiṇḍika story is correct is not our concern here. What is important is how Gunatilake's interpretation of the story – and his talk generally – communicates a certain vision of lay Buddhist religiosity, one which does not dismiss ritual and giving *dāna* (*āmisā pūjā*) but which gives more emphasis to the need to meditate and progress on the path towards *nibbāna* in one's present life.

Ajahn Brahmavamso 'Buddhism and God' (delivered 20/04/07)

Ajahn Brahmavamso is a British convert monk. He is a member of an order of predominantly convert monastics known as the Forest Sangha. Since the Forest Sangha and their institutions will be referred to often in this thesis it is worth giving a brief description of the order. The Forest Sangha's origins lie in the Thai tradition of meditation-focused forest monasticism, and more particularly with the famous Thai monastic meditation teacher Ajahn Chah (1918-1992). Chah attracted many Western followers from the late 1960s onwards, and eventually a community of Western monks developed in North East Thailand (Bell 1989:85-90). One of these convert monks was Brahmavamso, who ordained

in the early 1970s at the age of 23.⁸ In 1977 Chah and four of his Western disciples made a visit to the UK, and when Chah left for Thailand the disciples remained to establish a monastic order in Britain (Bell 1989:90-92). In 1979 the order established its first monastery, Cittaviveka, located in Chithurst, Sussex (Bell 1998:153). As the order grew, further centres were established. There are now five centres of the Forest Sangha in the UK, and many others elsewhere in the West.⁹ Brahmavamso is the abbot of a temple in Australia.¹⁰ The most important centre of the Forest Sangha for the purposes of this study is Amaravati, a monastery located in rural Hertfordshire, which was established in 1984 (Bell 1998:154). The largest of the Forest Sangha's institutions, and dedicated to activities for lay visitors to a greater extent than Cittaviveka (which acts primarily as a monastic training centre) (Bell 1989:5; Bluck 2006:44), Amaravati is extremely popular among Sri Lankans in the UK, who visit to offer food to the resident monastics, to attend talks and meditation classes, and in some cases to attend residential meditation retreats (see chapter 9 for more on this).

Brahmavamso is one of the most well-known monks of the Forest Sangha. He is known for his ability to communicate Buddhist teachings in an accessible, entertaining and amusing way. He is particularly well-known in Sri Lanka, which he visits regularly. Brahmavamso is also extremely popular among Sri Lankans in the UK. He was the Buddhist teacher that was mentioned to me more than any other by Sri Lankans during my research.¹¹

⁸ For biographical information Ajahn Brahmavamso see www.ajahnbrahm.org/about.html (accessed 20/06/2010).

⁹ Aside from the two large monasteries discussed here (Cittaviveka and Amaravati), there are smaller monasteries in Northumberland, Warwickshire, and Devon. Outside the UK there are Forest Sangha temples in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland and Italy. Comprehensive information about the Forest Sangha and its institutions can be found on its website, www.forestsangha.org (accessed 20/06/2010).

¹⁰ www.dhammadoka.org.au (accessed 20/06/2010).

¹¹ Following the period of my fieldwork Brahmavamso's reputation has been affected by his decision, in October 2009, to ordain four women as Theravada nuns. While Brahmavamso's was not the first attempt in recent times to re-establish the order of Theravada nuns (which died out in the 11th to 13th centuries), his actions went against the official stance of the Forest Sangha, which follows the Thai Sangha Governing Council's position that the lineage of Buddhist nuns cannot be revived. Female monastics in the Forest Sangha live not as fully ordained nuns observing a full set of *vinaya* rules, but as *siladharas* observing ten precepts. As a result of his actions Brahmavamso was expelled from the lineage of the Forest Sangha. He continues to be the abbot of the Bodhinyana monastery, but this monastery is no longer considered an institution of the Forest Sangha. See www.forestsangha.org for an article detailing the Forest Sangha's reasons for expelling Brahmavamso (accessed 20/06/2010). A collection of articles supporting Brahmavamso's actions can be found at: <http://groups.google.com/group/dhammadharini/web/responses-to-ajahn-thanissaros-concerns-on-bhikkhuni-ordination-validity> (accessed 20/06/2010). How these events will affect Brahmavamso's relationship with the LBV and his reputation among Sri Lankans in the UK is impossible to gauge at this early stage.

In this talk here Brahmavamso speaks on the topic of 'Buddhism and God'. He chose this topic, he says, because he is addressing Buddhists living in a society in which the idea of God is prevalent. He looks at the three aspects of the nature of God: God as someone we can pray to for help; God as the ultimate cause of the universe; and the mystical idea of God as the underlying meaning driving human existence. Brahmavamso argues that Buddhism rejects the first two aspects of the concept of God entirely. There is no God or divine power that you can pray to in times of trouble, he argues. You must depend on yourself. In addition, he argues, Buddhism rejects the idea of a creator God. Such a concept does not explain why the world is a place of great suffering. Instead of thinking of the world as created by God we should focus on how we create the world through our perceptions and actions. When it comes to the mystical aspect of God, Brahmavamso argues that here we can find more in common between Buddhism and 'the more thinking, the more wise, the more [...] probing of people who have other religions'. He argues that like such elements of theistic religions, Buddhism is concerned with searching for peace, truth, compassion, freedom, contentment, meaning and love. In both Christianity in its more mystical aspects and Buddhism, he notes, we find an emphasis on stillness and finding meaning within oneself. The difference, he argues, is that Buddhism does not need the concept of God to describe this inner peace and meaning.

When discussing the idea of God as someone to be prayed to, Brahmavamso criticises not only followers of theistic religions, but also the practice of some Buddhists. He notes that among many Buddhists one finds ideas about gaining protection from certain sources of religious power. Thus he states:

...now sometimes Buddhists have that idea. I'm looking around to see how many of you have string on your wrists, thinking that's going to protect you, maybe from bad driving, from accidents, from cancers, from dying young, or whatever else you think you're afraid of.

Here Brahmavamso is referring to the practice of *pirit* chanting – the recitation (usually by monks) of certain sections of the Pali Canon, which is believed by many Buddhists to bring apotropaic protection – and specifically to the practice of having *pirit* thread (string over which *pirit* has been chanted) tied around one's wrist. This is a commonly practised ritual within Sri Lankan Buddhism (see chapter 6) and indeed many present during the talk did have *pirit* thread around their wrists. Brahmavamso goes on to tell a story about a woman

who came to his temple in Australia asking for some *pirit* chanting to bring blessings for her upcoming exams. Brahmavamso performed the chanting, not because of a belief that it could benefit the woman in a supernatural way, but ‘because we understand that the chanting actually increases the person’s confidence...lifts their morale. So why not?’ The woman failed her exams, and as a result never returned to the temple, blaming Brahmavamso and his fellow monks for her failure. Brahmavamso notes that the reason for this woman’s failure in her exams was that she did not study for them, and argues that:

...no matter how many times you get the priests to chant...it doesn’t matter how many thousands of holy strings you put around your fingers, if you haven’t done the work you are not going to pass the examinations.

Unsurprisingly, since the theme of the talk is the concept of God, Brahmavamso also criticises those Buddhists who pray to divine beings for protection and help. He tells a long and humorous (fictional) story about a Buddhist priest from Malaysia who had great faith in the ‘goddess of mercy’ Kuan-yin. During a flood this priest put his faith in Kuan-yin instead of accepting human help. As a result he died. Brahmavamso argues:

...the whole idea of a religion like Buddhism is to empower a person, encourage them to be responsible and to stop passing the buck to a Buddha, to a bodhisattva, to a Kuan-yin, to a God, to anybody.

Kuan-yin is a deity worshipped primarily within Mahayana Buddhist traditions. While worship of Kuan-yin can be found in some Theravada traditions – for example, in Thailand (Falk 2007:188) and Malaysia (Tan 1988:103) – Kuan-yin is not worshipped in Sri Lanka. However, many Sri Lankan Buddhists do pray to other deities for help and protection (see chapter 9), and Brahmavamso’s arguments are clearly applicable to such practices.

Brahmavamso thus communicates an understanding of Buddhism in which rituals of apotropaic protection have little place. Such rituals are acknowledged to be widespread and seen as helpful if used as a means of boosting confidence. However, they are seen as harmful if used as practical resources bringing tangible benefits. Brahmavamso’s Buddhism is concerned primarily with the cultivation of the inner self and the finding of peace and meaning within one’s mind. As we might expect, for Brahmavamso this cultivation for inner peace of meaning is fundamentally tied to the practice of meditation.

5.2 Links with convert Buddhism

The emphasis on meditation-centred, de-ritualised Buddhism at the LBV mirrors the approach found among convert Buddhists. It is thus unsurprising that Vihara has strong links with convert institutions and teachers. In addition to Ajahn Brahmavamso, other monks and nuns from the Forest Sangha are also regular visitors to the LBV. There are also convert monastics outside the Forest Sangha who regularly visit the Vihara, such as Bhante Bodhidhamma, a teacher of the meditation techniques of Mahasi Sayadaw.

The LBV also has strong links with the Buddhist Society, the oldest Buddhist institution in the UK. The Buddhist Society is an ecumenical Buddhist organisation which runs a range of courses on the study and practice of various forms of Buddhism.¹² The head monk of the LBV gives a talk at the Buddhist Society every year as part of the society's Buddha Day celebrations. In addition, teachers from the Buddhist Society sometimes deliver talks at the LBV.

Links between the LBV and non-Theravada forms of convert Buddhism can also be found. On two occasions during my research convert monastics from Tibetan Mahayana traditions gave talks at the Vihara. In addition, talks are regularly given by Sister Amarasiri, a convert teacher who combines Theravada and Tibetan teachings.

5.3 LBV as a place of scholarly Buddhism

If the above illustrates that a tendency to emphasise meditation and play down the importance of ritual can be found at the LBV, in chapter 6 I will show that the LBV is also a place in which rituals of merit-making and apotropaic protection can be found. However, the LBV cannot be understood in terms of a simple opposition between a meditation-oriented, de-ritualised approach to Buddhism on one hand, and a ritual-centred approach to Buddhism on the other. Here I look at another aspect of the LBV: its role as a place of scholarly Buddhism.

When I say that the LBV is a place of scholarly Buddhism I mean that it is a place in which studying Buddhism in an intellectual way or listening to talks giving intellectual expositions of Buddhist doctrine is valued. Such scholarly approaches to Buddhism can be contrasted with 'practice-oriented' approaches to Buddhism. Practice-oriented approaches

¹² For a recent discussion of the Buddhist Society see Kemmer (2007).

are those which emphasise not intellectual understanding, but the practical application of Buddhist teachings, primarily through meditation. Scholarly and practice-oriented approaches to Buddhism do not necessarily stand in opposition to each other, and at the LBV both can be found.

A better understanding of what I mean by scholarly and practice-oriented approaches can be achieved by making a comparison between the LBV and institutions of the Forest Sangha. The Forest Sangha is perhaps the most popular and influential Theravada organisation among British converts (Bluck 2006:14). Thus comparing the LBV with the Forest Sangha will also help me to locate the LBV in relation to an important branch of Theravada Buddhism in the UK.

Previous studies have established that the articulations of Buddhism found at institutions of the Forest Sangha tend to stress practice and give less importance study (Bluck 2006:25-48; Mellor 1989:250, 258-260). Bluck notes that while some monks and nuns of the Forest Sangha do dedicate time to the study of Buddhist texts, significant amounts of study are not expected of them, and in fact excessive study may be criticised as indicating an overly academic approach (2006:31). This lack of emphasis on study has its roots in the attitudes of Ajahn Chah. Bluck quotes a member of the Forest Sangha who notes that Chah told Ajahn Sumedho, his most senior Western disciple, to 'lock his book away, as the really important book to study is your own heart' (Bluck 2006:31).

A similarly practice-oriented approach to Buddhism can be found in some articulations of Buddhism at the LBV. The two talks discussed in section 5.1 both exemplify a practice-oriented emphasis. Brahmavamso's talk is focused on encouraging individuals to practise in certain ways: to abandon rituals of apotropaic protection and concentrate on realising the highest truths of Buddhism in their lives. Its aim is not to give an intellectual exposition of Buddhist teachings, but to communicate in more experiential terms the inner peace brought about by practice. Gunatilake's talk described above also displays a strongly practice-oriented emphasis. It focuses on encouraging individuals to take up meditation and make progress on the path to *nibbāna*. Interestingly, during the talk Gunatilake expresses a cautious attitude towards intellectual study, identifying reading about Buddhism without dedicating time to practice as a potential distraction from the Buddhist path. Employing an analogy used throughout the talk which likens the path to

nibbāna to a journey to Manchester (the point being that in both cases one needs a clear understanding of how to reach one's goal), he states:

There are also other paths that we should be aware of...things like...they might look like they lead to Manchester, but they really don't. Say, for example, some people love to read *Dhamma* books. Do you love to read *Dhamma* books? You know, they read so much of it but they don't do any real practice as such. Or they listen to all these *Dhamma* talks. [...] We need to be clear about what practice is and what that is. I'm not saying that's not important because it can be important because, I think, you learn things. But certainly, if you need to take this home...if you want to develop something, then practice is really in your own hands. Because sometimes this [reading and listening to talks] can just become entertainment, *Dhamma* entertainment. [...] I think the best things that you can read are instructions to practice. I think those are the best things you can read.

A practice-oriented approach to Buddhism was also evident in other talks that I attended at the LBV during my research. Aside from Gunatilake and Brahmavamso, regular speakers at the Vihara who give talks of this nature include the convert teacher Sister Amarasiri, who delivered talks during my research period for the Sanghamitta Day celebrations of 2006 and the Navam *pōya* day celebrations of 2007, and the Sri Lankan meditation teacher Venerable Henepola Gunaratana, who gave talks at the LBV in June 2007. Of 41 talks given at the LBV during my research period (as part of *pōya* day celebrations, at other major events, as part of the Vihara's monthly *Dhamma* talk programme, or as special one-off events)¹³ which I either attended and took notes on, or obtained recordings of,¹⁴ 17 can be described as taking a practice-oriented approach. Such an approach to Buddhism is also manifest in other activities at the LBV, particularly in the Vihara's provision of a weekly meditation class and monthly meditation retreat. The readings, discussion periods and talks that take place during these activities are always strongly practice-oriented in nature.

Alongside such practice-oriented discourses, however, scholarly, study-oriented approaches to Buddhism can also be found at the LBV. One regular speaker at the LBV is Anil Goonewardene, a Sri Lankan barrister who, alongside his involvement with the Vihara, also teaches at the Buddhist Society. Mr Goonewardene spoke during the Navam *pōya* day celebrations of February 2007 on the subject of the 'Working of Kamma' and

¹³ I have excluded from this total talks given during meditation classes, which are inevitably practice-oriented in nature, and those given during Sunday *pūjās*, which have a distinct form (see chapter 6).

¹⁴ As noted in chapter 1, the LBV produces audio CDs of some of the talks that are delivered at the Vihara. This enabled me to hear some talks which I was unable to attend due to other fieldwork commitments.

during the Dhammacakka Day celebrations of July 2007 on the subject of the ‘Four Noble Truths’. Goonewardene’s talks provide accessible intellectual expositions of what the Theravada textual tradition teaches on these subjects. They are not exhortations to engage in meditative practice or attempts to express an experiential understanding of Buddhist truths. This does not mean that they are entirely divorced from questions of practice. However, the general tone of Goonewardene’s talks is very different from that of the more emphatically practice-oriented talks discussed above. Here conveying intellectual knowledge of the topic is the primary concern, not inspiring the audience to practise.

Other talks at the LBV can be regarded as more emphatically scholarly in nature since they are delivered by academics.¹⁵ During the Vihara’s Poson celebrations of June 2007 a talk was given on the topic of ‘Kamma’ by Professor Richard Gombrich, Britain’s best-known scholar of Theravada Buddhism.¹⁶ The talk gave an academic exposition of *kamma*, the historical context in which it arose, and the possible reasons why many people in this context accepted Buddhist ideas about *kamma*. Another academic that regularly speaks at the Vihara is Chandra Wickramasinghe, a Sri Lankan astrophysicist working at Cardiff University.¹⁷ Wickramasinghe has become particularly well-known for his theory, developed with his late colleague Sir Fred Hoyle, that life has its origins outside the earth, and was brought to earth via comets. Wickramasinghe spoke twice at the LBV during my

¹⁵ Aside from the two scholars discussed here, other scholars who have delivered talks at the LBV in recent years include Ananda Guruge (Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at the University of the West, California), G. S. Widanapathirana (Senior Professor of Microbiology at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka), Dr Hema Goonatilake (Formerly a senior faculty member at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, co-founder of the Centre for Women’s Research, Sri Lanka, expert in gender and development, and active member of Sakyadhita, the International Association of Buddhist Women), and Venerable Dhammavihari (1921-2010, former Professor of Pali and Buddhist Studies in University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka and the University of Toronto, Canada). Others who have delivered talks at the Vihara based on their professional expertise include Vernon Wijeratne, a Veterinary Geneticist who spoke in October 2007 about Buddhist attitudes towards stem cell research, and Nimal Patiraja, a Veterinary consultant who spoke in February 2008 about Buddhism and animal welfare. In total, of 41 talks at the LBV which I either took notes on or obtained recordings of during my fieldwork period – excluding those delivered during Sunday *pūjās* or during meditation classes – 15 can be described as taking an intellectual, rather than practice-oriented, approach. 9 talks could not easily be classified as either practice-oriented or intellectual/scholarly in nature. In the main these were sermons somewhat similar in nature to those given during Sunday *pūjās* at the LBV (see chapter 6).

¹⁶ Richard Gombrich was Boden Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford from 1976 to 2004, and is currently Founder-President of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. He has published influential books on Theravada Buddhism (1988) and the origins of the Buddhist tradition (1996), and ethnographic works on rural Sri Lankan Buddhism (1971) and contemporary developments in Sri Lankan religiosity (with Gananath Obeyesekere, 1988).

¹⁷ For a profile of Dr Wickramasinghe see www.astrobiology.cf.ac.uk/chandra1.html (accessed 20/06/2010).

fieldwork period, at the Wesak celebrations of 2006 and 2007.¹⁸ Wickramasinghe's talks looked at issues of astronomy and cosmology, at the question of the existence of extra-terrestrial life, and at the parallels between Buddhist cosmology and theories that are being developed within modern science. For example, in one talk he argued that Buddhist ideas about the size of the universe found in the Pali Canon – which state that there are huge numbers of suns, inhabited planets and 'world systems' in the universe – concord with recent scientific views, and that the Buddhist notion that world systems undergo cyclic change agrees with contemporary understandings of how galaxies go through periods of formation, continuation, and destruction.

As with the talks given by Goonewardene, those given by Gombrich and Wickramasinghe are not completely unrelated to questions of practice. However, the general tone of these talks was scholarly rather than practice-oriented, and they include discussions of issues somewhat removed from the concerns of practice-oriented Buddhism, such as the Buddhist view of the universe on a macro-scale, or the finer complexities of the workings of *kamma*. In addition, Gombrich and Wickramasinghe stand in a somewhat different relationship to their audience when compared to speakers such as Ajahn Brahmavamso. Gombrich and Wickramasinghe speak as academics, individuals with an intellectual knowledge of their subject matter. Brahmavamso, on the other hand, speaks as a practitioner, someone with considerable experience of putting Buddhist teachings into practice.

A scholarly approach to Buddhism is also evident in some of the other activities that take place at the LBV. This is most obviously the case in the study classes the LBV runs. Altogether the Vihara runs four different study classes. Three of these are fixed-term courses of eight to ten weeks which are run in connection with Birkbeck College. The first of these gives a basic introduction to Buddhist teachings, the second consists of reading selected sermons from the Pali Canon, and the third looks at more advanced aspects of Buddhist philosophy and psychology. The fourth class, which I attended regularly towards the end of my research period, is aimed at more advanced students of Buddhism. In these classes a small group (the number of participants ranged from 7 to 14 in classes that I attended) read their way through translations of key Theravada texts, with one individual reading a few pages aloud followed by a discussion involving the whole group. The texts

¹⁸ Wickramasinghe's ideas on this issue are the subject of a recent new story on the website of the BBC. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/south_east/8491398.stm (accessed 20/06/2010).

are looked at in considerable detail, with only a few pages being covered in each class. During the period of my research this class was working through the *Visuddhimagga*, the classic summary of Theravada doctrine written in the fifth century CE by Buddhaghosa.

Another aspect of the LBV in which a scholarly approach to Buddhism is often evident is the discussion periods that take place during *pōya* day celebrations. Discussion periods often take place after talks on *pōya* days, with the congregation having an opportunity to ask questions and make comments to the speaker. In addition, on two occasions during my research – the Poson and Dhammacakka Day celebrations of 2007 – discussion periods took place as activities in their own right, with a panel of monks and knowledgeable lay teachers fielding questions. The topics addressed during such discussion are often very different to the strongly practice-oriented discussions that take place during meditation classes, reflecting instead a concern with intellectual understanding of Buddhism. During the Sanghamitta Day celebrations of 2007, for example, one discussion period focused on the reliability of Buddhist textual accounts of the origin of the order of Buddhist nuns, and on Theravada textual teachings concerning the ability of women to become Buddhas.¹⁹ During the Poson celebrations of 2007 the question of whether the five moral precepts of Buddhism were first taught by the Buddha or have their origin in pre-Buddhist Indian religion was discussed.²⁰ During Dhammacakka Day of 2007 a long discussion concerning the intricacies of Buddhist teaching about rebirth took place. Speakers discussed how rebirth occurs, how identity is retained during rebirth, and the workings of the *bhavāṅga*, the state of the mind that according to Theravada philosophy occurs during deep sleep and also forms the link between different lives (Gethin 1998:215-218).²¹ None of these issues are irrelevant to questions of practice. However, the topics, and the tone in which they were discussed, clearly reflected an intellectual rather than practice-oriented approach.

A scholarly approach is also evident in some of the literature produced by the LBV. In section 5.1 I noted that the LBV produces a bi-annual journal and occasional books of articles on Buddhist themes. The articles found in these publications vary in terms of style. Some reflect an academic style and are written by academics in the field of Buddhist studies. For example, a contribution by Peter Harvey (University of Sunderland) to a

¹⁹ Fieldwork notes 02/12/2007.

²⁰ Fieldwork notes 24/06/2007.

²¹ Fieldwork notes 29/07/2007.

volume produced to celebrate the 75th birthday of the LBV's previous head monk, Venerable Vajiragnana, presents a scholarly examination of the first two of the four noble truths of Buddhism (Harvey 2003). An article in the same volume by the Sri Lankan scholar and monk Venerable Bellanwila Wimalaratana (University of Jayawardhanapura) provides a discussion of art and architecture at the ancient Indian Buddhist site of Nalanda (Wimalaratana 2003). Another collected volume of essays, produced in 2006 to commemorate the 2550th Buddha Jayanthi (anniversary of the Buddha's passing away), includes a discussion by R.A.L.H. Gunawardana (University of Peradeniya) of the ways in which the notion of a Theravada Buddhist 'world', stretching across territorial boundaries, has historically been conceptualised within the Theravada tradition (Gunawardana 2006). By contrast, some articles in publications produced by the LBV are firmly practice-oriented in character. The contributions to the LBV's journal by Venerable Henepola Gunaratana which I mentioned in section 5.1 – 'Practical Vipassana' (2005) and 'The Benefits of Long-Term Meditation' (2007) – can be placed in this category. These articles discuss issues such as how to prepare for a meditation retreat, why it is of benefit to meditate with a group, common mistakes that people make in meditation, and how to make meditation practice relevant to one's everyday life. Other articles in LBV publications fall somewhere between the scholarly and the practice-oriented. An article in the Vihara's 2550th Buddha Jayanthi volume by the Sri Lankan scholar and monk Venerable Dhammavihari (2006) provides an overview of the place of protective chanting (*paritta* in Pali, *pirit* in Sinhala) in the Theravada tradition, which is primarily intellectual in nature but concludes with an encouragement for readers to engage in such chanting themselves. An exposition of scriptural teachings concerning anger contributed to the same volume by Richard Jones, a convert patron of the Vihara, is similarly somewhere between an intellectual discussion and a guide to practice (Jones 2006).

The emphasis given to scholarly approaches to Buddhism at the LBV can be related to the backgrounds that the resident monks of the Vihara come from. The monks that are selected to serve at the LBV tend to be scholarly, university-educated monks. This was stressed to me in my interview with the LBV's present head monk. Three monks were resident at the Vihara for the full period of my research: Venerable Seelawimala (the present head monk), Venerable Bandula and Venerable Wimalajothi. All three are university educated. Venerable Seelawimala worked as a school teacher before coming to

the LBV. Venerable Bandula served as a missionary monk in India. Venerable Wimalajothi taught in the Department of Buddhist and Studies at the University of Peradeniya. Past head monks of the Vihara include such well-known scholarly monks as Venerable Narada – a famous preacher of the Vajirarama temple in Colombo (renowned as a centre of scholarly monastic) and author of popular books such as *The Buddha and His Teaching* ([1942 1988]) – and Venerable Hammalawa Saddhatissa, who during his time at the Vihara lectured at lectured at Oxford University and the University of London (Thaniya 1990), and whose book on Buddhist ethics (Saddhatissa [1970] 1987) remains a standard work in this area. Other well-known Sri Lankan scholar-monks such as Venerable Walpola Rahula (1907-1997) – author of the popular introduction to Buddhism *What the Buddha Taught* ([1959] 1997), an influential figure in the development of politicised monasticism in Sri Lanka, and former vice-chancellor of Vidyodaya University²² – and Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya (1896-1998) – one of the leading Sri Lankan monastic figures of the twentieth century, and for many years professor of Buddhism at Vidyodaya University²³ – have also taught at the LBV in the past (Webb 2004:55, 119).

Various typologies can be used to locate the monks of the LBV in relation to other kinds of monastics in the Sri Lankan tradition. During a conversation with Simon, a regular convert participant at the Vihara, he used the traditional Theravada distinctions between forest and village monks, and between *vipassanādhura* monks (those that have meditation as their vocation) and *ganthadhura* monks (those that have study as their vocation).²⁴ The monks of the LBV are classified as village monks and *ganthadura* monks. Another typology – suggested to me in my interview with the head monks of the LBV – is rooted more firmly in the contemporary Sri Lankan context. Here three career paths for monks are outlined. Firstly, there are those monks who ordain in their youth, excel in their studies and go on to study at university. Such monks tend to go on to take teaching posts at schools or universities. The monks at the LBV were identified with this group. Secondly, there are those who ordain in their youth but do not study at university and thus find their vocation as temple monks, spending their time running the temple and conducting rituals. Thirdly, there are monks who ordain when they are already adults. Such monks tend to be interested

²² Rahula is discussed at length by Seneviratne (1999:130-188).

²³ For a discussion of Ananda Maitreya's life and views see Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:299-313).

²⁴ Fieldwork notes 13/11/2007. For a discussion of these traditional distinctions see Gombrich (1971:314-315).

primarily in meditation. Whichever typology is used, all point to the scholastic backgrounds of monks at the LBV and distinguish them from monks who take a more explicitly meditation-centred, practice-oriented approach to Buddhism.

The tendency of Sri Lankan missionary or *dharmaduta* monks to come from scholarly, university-educated backgrounds is highlighted by the work of scholars such as Kemper (2005) and Seneviratne (1999). Kemper traces the origins of the contemporary notion of the missionary monk back to the ideas of Anagarika Dharmapala, and notes how Dharmapala's influence spread through Colombo's colleges of monastic learning, Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara, and through the central-Colombo monastery of Vajirarama, another institution of scholarly monasticism. Thus Sri Lankan missionary monasticism has developed out of a particular milieu of scholarly monasticism, rather than from the central manifestations of meditation-centred, practice-oriented Buddhism in Sri Lanka: the tradition of forest monasticism (see Carrithers 1983) and the insight meditation movement (see Bond 1988), or from the broader tradition of village monasticism.

We should be careful at this point not to make too great a distinction between different kinds of monasticism. Today interest in meditation is not confined in Sri Lanka to centres of the insight meditation movement or monasteries of forest monks. Instead, these two movements have had a more general influence, making interest in meditation more widespread (Bond 1988:173). Missionary monks travelling to the West – and particularly those at temples such as the LBV, which stresses the teaching of Buddhism to non-Sri Lankans – are perhaps especially likely to have some experience in meditation given the interest in meditation found among Western converts.²⁵ Thus while the monks of the LBV do come predominantly from scholarly backgrounds, this does not mean that they can be regarded as having no connection with more practice-oriented forms of Buddhism. It should be noted in this regard that the meditation classes and retreats at the LBV are usually led by one of the resident monks, and that the present head monk of the Vihara has trained in meditation both with the late Godwin Samararatne, a renowned lay Sri Lankan meditation teacher who taught until his death in 2000 at the Nilambe meditation centre in

²⁵ It should certainly not be assumed, however, that all Sri Lankan monks who come to the West have experience in meditation teaching and practice. The Australian convert monk Venerable Dhammika notes that, 'not a few Sri Lankan monks have confided to me the embarrassment and discomfort they felt when they first got to the West and were asked to teach meditation.' (*no date*:52).

Kandy,²⁶ and with Venerable Henepola Gunaratana, a well-known monastic meditation expert who founded the Bhavana Society meditation centre in the USA.²⁷

It would be wrong, then, to draw an absolute distinction between the LBV and the tradition of scholarly monasticism in which it has its origins, and more meditation-centred, practice-oriented traditions of Buddhism. However, it is nevertheless important to note that a distinction does exist here. The monks at the LBV remain first and foremost scholarly monks rather than meditation experts. During a conversation with the head monk of the Vihara, he told me that monks with a particularly strong dedication to meditation would be unlikely to stay at the LBV on a permanent basis because they would not want to dedicate their time to some of the non-meditative activities that monks at the LBV are expected to take part in, such as socially engaged work and representing Buddhism at state occasions.²⁸

All of this illustrates that while practice-oriented approaches to Buddhism have a significant place at the LBV, the Vihara must be distinguished from more definitely practice-oriented institutions such as those of the Forest Sangha. This is not only because the LBV is characterised by an emphasis on scholarly approaches to Buddhism, but also because it does not display such an emphatic emphasis on practice-oriented Buddhism as is found at such institutions. At institutions of the Forest Sangha the vast majority of activities and talks emphasise a meditation-centred, practice-oriented approach to Buddhism. Rather than the one-day meditation retreats of the LBV, such institutions offer lengthy retreats of a number of weeks. In addition, the monastics at such institutions are all regarded as specialists in the practice and teaching of meditation. The distinction between the LBV and such institutions was expressed succinctly to me by Sunil, a regular patron both of the LBV and the Forest Sangha's Amaravati monastery, during a conversation at the temple.²⁹ Sunil compared meditation to mountain-climbing. Going to a specialised meditation centre or monastery, he argued, is like climbing a difficult mountain with an expert guide. Going to the meditation class at the LBV, on the other hand, he saw as being similar to going to

²⁶ For more information on Godwin Samararatne see Bond (2003:32-35).

²⁷ For an account of Gunaratana life, see his autobiography (Gunaratana 2003). Gunaratana's career exemplifies the porous nature of the boundaries between scholarly monks and meditation specialists. Gunaratana was ordained as a child and followed the path of a university-educated, scholarly monk, eventually becoming resident in a diasporic temple in Washington DC. However, he left this temple to found the Bhavana Society after becoming increasingly interested in meditation practice and teaching. While Gunaratana illustrates that some scholarly monks in diasporic temples have a strong interest in meditation, his eventual decision to establish an independent centre indicates that monks who are particularly dedicated to meditation will eventually prefer to leave diaspora temples for institutions with a stronger meditative focus.

²⁸ Fieldwork notes 13/11/2007.

²⁹ Fieldwork notes 25/03/2007.

one's local gym: it is beneficial, but it is very different to actually climbing a mountain. This analogy aptly sums up the provision of practice-oriented, meditation-centred Buddhism at the LBV: such forms of teaching and practice are found at the Vihara, but certainly not to the same extent that they are at an institution such as Amaravati.

5.3.1 Study-oriented Buddhism and the convert/diaspora divide

This section discusses the significance of the emphasis on scholarly Buddhism found at the LBV in relation to the categories of convert and diaspora Buddhism. In his study of diasporic Theravada temples in the USA (see chapter 2) Numrich associates an interest in study-oriented Buddhism with convert rather than diaspora practitioners. He describes convert Buddhists as taking an 'intellectual approach' to Buddhism, which emphasises the study of *abhidhamma* (Theravada philosophy) (1996:124). On the other hand, he describes diaspora Buddhists as focusing on attending festivals and ritual observances (1996:80-197). Numrich supports his argument by noting that converts were significantly more likely than diaspora practitioners to attend study classes at the two temples that he researched (1996:72-73), and Fitzpatrick found similar patterns in her study of a Sri Lankan temple in the USA (2000:6-7). During my research at the LBV I also found that British convert participants tended to outnumber Sri Lankans in the Vihara's study classes, although the class sizes were always small in comparison to the Wednesday evening meditation class, and there was always some Sri Lankan participation in the class. In a sample of 4 advanced study classes at the Vihara on which I made notes, the total number of participants ranged from 8 to 14, while the number of Sri Lankans in the group ranged from 2 to 5. However, while I do not dismiss the significance of this evidence, in this section I will demonstrate that to describe interest in scholarly, study-oriented approaches to Buddhism as characteristic of convert Buddhism, and not characteristic of diaspora Buddhism, is highly problematic.

The association that Numrich makes between convert Buddhism and intellectual study is also made by Bluck in relation to British convert Buddhism. He defines an interest in textual study as a common feature found among British converts (2006:192). However, when we look at British convert Buddhism in a little more detail, we find that describing convert Theravada Buddhism as a whole as study-oriented is simplistic and misleading. As Bluck highlights, early convert interest in Buddhism – beginning in the late nineteenth

century – was certainly characterised by an intellectual approach. Buddhism in the UK can be seen as growing out of academic interest in the subject and thus as initially being more a matter of intellectual interest than ‘a life-changing spiritual practice’ (Bluck 2006:7). As Bluck notes, the earliest Buddhist societies in Britain tended to involve scholars of Buddhism as well as those more interested in the practice of the religion (Bluck 2006:7). Lectures, reading texts, and discussions of Buddhism seem to have been the main activities of such societies, while more practice-oriented activities (such as meditation classes) seem to have been rare (Bluck 2006:7).

The Buddhist Society – today the oldest Buddhist organisation in the UK – was founded by Christmas Humphreys in 1924 (Kemmer 2007:3). One of the aims of the society was to move Buddhism in Britain away from its early emphasis on scholarship and towards an emphasis on practice (Bluck 2006:9). However, while it did this to an extent, in large measure the Buddhist Society continued to reflect the intellectual and scholarly nature of early British Buddhism. That this was the case is reflected in the fact that as late as 1983, when Christmas Humphreys died and Ajahn Sumedho (the foremost monk of the Forest Sangha) was installed as the Honorary President of the Society, the society was still talking about the need to move away from ‘intellectual Buddhism’ and towards a greater commitment to practice (Bluck 2006:26). Today the Buddhist Society continues to have a somewhat academic emphasis, albeit alongside an emphasis on practice. In many respects, in fact, the society has similarities to the LBV. Like the LBV it runs classes on meditation alongside courses of study which are somewhat academic in nature.³⁰ Again like the LBV, the society has links with the world of academic Buddhist studies: it funds scholarships for research in the field, and academics regularly give talks at the society. In addition, the society’s quarterly journal, *The Middle Way*, shares the ‘semi scholarly’ (Kemmer 2005:9) nature of some of the publications of the LBV. Thus in the LBV and the Buddhist Society we have two organisations which have a certain amount in common. Both were established at a time when British Buddhism was characterised by a strong emphasis on scholarship and study and although both can be seen as representing to some extent a move towards more practice-oriented Buddhism within this context, both continue today to reflect to some extent the academic nature of early British Buddhism.

³⁰ Information on the classes run by the Buddhist Society can be found on the society’s website: www.thebuddhistsociety.org (accessed 20/06/2010).

The Buddhist Society was founded as the representative organisation of Buddhism in Britain, but from the late 1960s its influence declined as Buddhism in the UK grew rapidly and began to change in character (Bluck 2006:10). This period saw a movement among convert Buddhists – or at least among those embracing Theravada or Theravada-influenced forms of Buddhism – away from the scholarly Buddhism of the society towards more practice-oriented approaches (Baumann 2001:25-26; Bell 1991:3,189). Two practice-oriented forms of Buddhism that have been particularly influential among converts in this period are the lay insight meditation movement, which has its origins in Burma (Fronsdal 1998:164-166), and the Thai forest meditation tradition of Ajahn Chah (the Forest Sangha). These traditions not only emphasise practice but also play down the importance of the study of Buddhism, sometimes seeing too much emphasis on study as counterproductive to success in meditation.³¹

All of this suggests that to a certain degree contemporary convert Theravada Buddhism in the West is characterised not by an emphasis on study, but by a tendency to play down the importance of study and emphasise instead practising meditation and listening to or reading Buddhist discourses of a practice-oriented kind. This is supported by Waterhouse's study of convert Buddhists in the city of Bath. Waterhouse notes that the convert Theravada practitioners that she interviewed gave study 'a very low priority' (1997:66). From this perspective the LBV's emphasis on scholarly Buddhist discourses can be seen as a part of the Vihara's activities which is out of tune with the interests of many contemporary convert Buddhists.

I am not arguing here that all convert Theravada Buddhists are unconcerned with study. The fact that we can find converts at study classes at the LBV and at the diasporic Theravada temples studied by Numrich and Fitzpatrick, demonstrates that there are converts with an interest in study. However, it is clear that to associate study-oriented

³¹ I have discussed the practice-oriented attitude of the Forest Sangha in section 5.3.1 above. The tendency to play down the importance of study found in the insight meditation movement is noted by Fronsdal (1998:166) and Bubna-Litic and Higgins (2007:167). Interestingly, Bubna-Litic and Higgins, discussing recent trends within the insight meditation movement in Australia, observe something of a move towards scriptural study among such converts in more recent years (2007:167-168). However, they note that this is a new development and something that has 'surprised' many long-time convert meditation practitioners, who previously had little interest in study (2007:167). In addition, the forms of study that they point to as becoming more popular among convert practitioners are quite different from those commonly found in Sri Lankan diaspora temples, in that they take a more critical view of the Theravada textual tradition (particularly its commentarial tradition) (2007:167-170). The tendency to play down the importance of study that is found in the insight meditation movement in the West is also evident in the movement in Asia (see Bond (1988:147) on the movement in Sri Lanka).

approaches to Buddhism with convert Theravada Buddhism as a whole is fundamentally problematic. It may be that, in an interesting twist to the 'Two Buddhisms' model, some convert practitioners come to diaspora temples precisely because they can find an emphasis on study in such places that is lacking in the convert-run Buddhist institutions available to them. This seems to be the case with 'Barry', an American convert Buddhist interviewed by Fitzpatrick during her research at the Washington Buddhist Vihara (2000:50-54). Barry is very interested in study and regularly attends the study classes at the Washington Vihara. He is critical of forms of convert Buddhism in the West which do not rely as heavily as the Washington Vihara on studying the Pali Canon, and expresses to Fitzpatrick a wish that more Sri Lankan temples be established in the USA (2000:54). Similar attitudes were expressed to me by Ian, a regular at the LBV's advanced study class, during a conversation at the Vihara.³² Ian argued that an emphasis on textual study is a particular feature of the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition, and stated that he saw this as a good thing. He observed that while many convert Buddhists prefer to meditate rather than to study, he views both as important. While Ian did not criticise convert centres which place little emphasis on study in the way that Fitzpatrick's informant did, it was clear from our conversation that the emphasis on study found at the LBV was one factor which particularly attracted him to the Vihara. In Barry and Ian, then, we have examples of converts who value the study of Buddhism, but who associate an emphasis on study more with Sri Lankan Buddhism than with convert Buddhism. Examples such as these may help to answer the question, posed by Cadge and Sangdhanoo, of what brings convert practitioners to diaspora temples rather than to the convert Buddhist organisations available to them (Cadge and Sangdhanoo 2005:29).

Let us move on now to consider attitudes towards study-oriented Buddhism among Sri Lankan diaspora Buddhists. That an emphasis on the study of Buddhism by laypeople is an aspect of modernist Sri Lankan Buddhism is observed by both Bond (1988:65) and Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:236). Gombrich and Obeyesekere highlight the case of a layman who teaches classes in *abhidhamma* (Theravada philosophy) to lay audiences in cities throughout Sri Lanka. They characterise his style of teaching as 'halfway between a sermon and a lecture', and highlight the fact that his audience take notes during the classes, as one might during a scholarly lecture (1988:235-136). Gombrich and Obeyesekere's

³² Fieldwork notes 07/11/2007.

description of the semi-scholarly nature of these classes brings to mind some of the Buddhist discourses found at the LBV, particularly the talks given by Anil Goonewardene.

During my research I found a strong interest in the intellectual study of Buddhism among many that I interviewed and spoke with. One of my standard interviewees, 11 have a strong interest in studying Buddhism, while another 11 state that they sometimes read books on Buddhism. In order to illustrate the strong interest in study-oriented Buddhism found among some Sri Lankans in the UK, let me look at some examples from my interviewees. My interviewee Damith, a patron of the LBV now in his early 60s, developed an interest in Buddhist philosophy in his youth. As a young man he attended classes on *abhidhamma* at the well-known Vajirarama temple in central Colombo. After coming to the UK Damith paid less attention to Buddhism for some time. However, in the 1990s he became more interested in the religion again. He began to practise meditation, and resumed his interest in studying *abhidhamma*. In spite of this interest, Damith does not attend study classes at the LBV, in part because he lives a considerable distance from the temple, but also because he feels these classes are more for newcomers to Buddhism and will only cover issues that he has already studied. He prefers to study through his own reading. During our interview Damith's interest in study is strongly evident. He keeps a number of books on Buddhism in front of him, which he often consults in order to give detailed answers to particular questions. These books include English translations of *suttas* from the Pali Canon, and Sinhala guides to *abhidhamma*. Throughout the interview Damith quotes sections of the Pali Canon in support of his views, sometimes giving the exact chapter and verse of the *sutta* that he is referring to. When we discuss meditation he stresses the importance of consulting Buddhist texts so that one can be sure that one is practising in accordance with true Buddhist teachings. Interestingly, Damith makes a contrast between his own approach to study and that found among a group of convert Buddhists that he came into contact with. For some time Damith attended a lay Theravada meditation and discussion group organised and primarily attended by convert Buddhists, which met in a private house near to where he lives in Kent. Damith is somewhat critical of the attitudes held by the converts in this group, noting that while he has a strong interest in analysing and examining Buddhist teachings, this interest was not shared by the others in the group. In addition, they did not share his concern that one should always check one's experience and progress in meditation against the teachings found in Buddhist texts. Instead, they put a

greater emphasis on relying on one's own experiences in meditation. Damith finds this approach problematic. He points out that according to the Theravada tradition only certain special individuals are able to find the way to enlightenment through their own experience without guidance from outside.³³ For all other individuals, Damith argues, seeking guidance in scriptures is vital so that one can be sure that one is following the right path. Thus Damith states:

...I certainly look at the books and check exactly what I am doing [...] If you look at the books, it explains in detail how you proceed from A to B in meditation, and it has a very clear path, because the people who have tried to follow this [i.e. their own experiences] and have gone the wrong way have also ended up with a lot of problems.

Another of my interviewees who shows a strong interest in the study of Buddhism is Kumari. Kumari was born in Sri Lanka but came to the UK with her family as a child. From this time she regularly attended the LBV's Sunday school. She began to become particularly interested in studying Buddhism around the age of 12. At this time her Sunday school classes began to look in depth at *abhidhamma*. Kumari found the subject interesting, and read about *abhidhamma* outside her classes. She continued to read English-language books on *abhidhamma* after leaving the Sunday school.³⁴ Kumari's father has a good knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and is close to the resident monks of the LBV. Kumari notes that as a child she enjoyed listening to her father and the monks discuss Buddhist philosophy, and joining in with these discussions as her own knowledge grew. Like Damith, Kumari makes a distinction between her approach and that found among many converts, who she views as focusing too exclusively on meditation. The following is an extract from our discussion of convert Buddhism:

³³ The Theravada tradition distinguishes those who become enlightened by following the teachings of Buddhism and those – such as the historical Buddha – who reach *nibbāna* without guidance at a time when Buddhist teachings are not present in the world. The latter path is regarded as more arduous, and as taking many lifetimes to complete. It is thus viewed the path for only certain extraordinary beings (Gethin 1998:32-34).

³⁴ Kumari does not mention specific books that she has read. However, the kind of books that she is likely to have read can be ascertained by looking at the syllabus of the LBV's Sunday school (www.londonbuddhistvihara.org/for_children/syllabus.htm (accessed 20/06/2010)), which lists Venerable Narada's *A Manual of Abhidhamma* ([1956] 1980) as an essential text. This is a translated and edited version of a Pali *abhidhamma* manual dating from the 11th or 12th century CE, the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*.

Kumari: I do think that the people at Amaravati really do have an emphasis on the meditation. And, I mean, that's good, but I personally feel that meditation alone is just not good enough.

David: OK, so you think people who concentrate on meditation alone are missing something?

Kumari: I think so...I think you need to learn the philosophy...and there's quite a lot of *abhidhamma* [that one should learn].

Note that the divide being made here does not mirror that of the 'Two Buddhisms' model. Kumari is not critical of individuals who practise meditation, nor does she view meditation as something that Sri Lankans do not take an interest in. While she does not practise seated meditation regularly, Kumari herself has an interest in meditation. She has practised in the past, and she plans to attend meditation retreat at Amaravati in the future. She is critical of the suggestion that Sri Lankans in the UK do not meditate, a suggestion that she has encountered in interactions with monks from Amaravati:

I've been to *dānas* there [at Amaravati] with other Sinhalese people, and the monks there seem to think that we as a Sinhalese community don't meditate as much as a maybe people who are the British, white [converts to Buddhism] [...]. And I remember once sitting in a sermon which turned into a bit of an admonition of 'clean your mind as many times as you clean your body'.

Kumari sees these views as inaccurate. While she acknowledges that some Sri Lankans take little in-depth interest in their religion, she argues that generally among Sri Lankans 'there's quite a big revival of wanting to meditate...more and more people are wanting to do it'. Thus the divide that Kumari makes between converts and Sri Lankans is not based on whether or not individuals practise meditation. Rather the division is based on the idea that many converts, unlike Sri Lankans, tend to dedicate themselves to meditation *alone*. For Kumari this is problematic, since following Buddhism is about more than just meditation. More specifically, it is also about gaining intellectual knowledge of Buddhist philosophy.

Another of my interviewees who demonstrates a strong interest in studying Buddhism is Bathiya, a patron of the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre (SSIBC), which I will explore in chapter 8. Bathiya came to the UK from Sri Lanka around 6 months before our interview. He lives close to the SSIBC, and regularly attends the evening Buddha *pūjās* held at the temple. During our interview, and during the many further conversations that we had in the context of my fieldwork at the Sri Saddhatissa

International Buddhist Centre,³⁵ Bhatiya demonstrates a strong interest in discussing and explaining complex aspects of Theravada teachings. Bhatiya has some interest in meditation, and practised regularly for a period when in Sri Lanka. However, at present he does not practise seated meditation regularly, and his interest in discussing Buddhist teachings is not limited to practice-oriented discussions of meditation. Rather, Bhatiya shows an interest in discussing a range of aspects of Buddhism, some of which are likely to be considered abstract and unimportant by individuals who focus solely on practice. In our conversations he speaks with enthusiasm and knowledge about Buddhist cosmology, the intricacies of the workings of *kamma*, and how one is able to transfer merit to the deceased. Bhatiya shows a particular interest in the relationship between Buddhism and modern science, and often draws upon ideas and concepts from the field of science when discussing aspects of Buddhism.

Bhatiya has a strong interest in reading about Buddhism. One book that he mentions particularly in our conversations is *The Buddha's Explanation of the Universe* (1957), an English-language volume written by the Sri Lankan scholar C.P. Ranasinghe. This book, as its title suggests, gives an account of the nature of the universe from a Buddhist perspective. Based on the seven book of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, the section of the Pali Canon dealing with systematic philosophy, it focuses particularly on subjects such as the nature of matter and the nature of the mind. The book illustrates the strongly intellectual approach to Buddhism that Bhatiya demonstrates in our conversations. The importance of studying Buddhist philosophy is stressed in the book. For example, in its forward the well-known scholar-monk Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya states that '[w]ithout an exact knowledge of *Abhidhamma*, the higher doctrine, it may be said that one can know nothing of Buddhism as it is' (Ananda Maitreya 1957:5). In keeping with such views, the book itself is essentially an intellectual exposition of Buddhist philosophy. While it contains references to meditation and *nibbāna*, it cannot be described as reflecting a practice-oriented approach. It does not contain instructions on how one should practise meditation, or personal accounts of experiences in meditation. Rather meditation and *nibbāna* are discussed in a more formal way, in terms of their place within the overall system of Theravada philosophy. The book also contains many topics which bear little relation to meditative Buddhism. Buddhist theories about the nature of matter are discussed at length,

³⁵ Fieldwork notes 06/08/2006, 27/08/2006, 20/05/2007, 10/08/2007, 12/08/2007, 19/08/2007.

and the question and answer section at the end of the book contains discussions of issues such as ‘What are the conditions prevailing in the higher planes of existence taught by Buddhism?’ and ‘In what way could we measure the degree of force of good actions and evil actions?’. Such abstract topics are likely to be of little interest to Buddhists who favour a strongly practice-oriented approach.

Bhatiya’s interest in study-oriented Buddhism was particularly exemplified during my research when I travelled with Bhatiya and two other Sri Lankan patrons of the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre to the Amaravati monastery of the Forest Sangha, in order to hear a talk by Ajahn Sumedho, the abbot of the monastery.³⁶ Sumedho gives a series of public talks at Amaravati on Sundays every summer, and a number of Sri Lankans regularly attend these talks. On this occasion Sumedho’s talk was entitled ‘The Silence of the Immeasurable’. In keeping with the general approach of the Forest Sangha, the talk reflected a strongly practice-oriented approach. There was little abstract discussion of Buddhist doctrine. Rather, the talk focused on how one can put Buddhist teachings into practice in one’s life. Sumedho particularly addressed the question of how one can overcome one’s mental conditioning and sense of self, and thereby experience that which is unconditioned (*nibbāna*). Much of the talk focused on Sumedho’s own experiences and struggles as a meditating monk. At one point in the talk Sumedho stressed the difficulty of speaking about the unconditioned, and joked that it might be preferable for him to simply say nothing during the talk (hence the reference to silence in the talk’s title). This emphasis on the difficulty of expressing the truths of Buddhism in words is typical of practice-oriented forms of Theravada Buddhism which place greater value on experience than on doctrinal formulations.

After the talk, the audience had an opportunity to meet with Sumedho and ask questions. Bhatiya asked Sumedho about a particular point of Buddhist doctrine that he had been contemplating recently. The point related to the workings of *kamma*. Bhatiya noted that according to the Theravada tradition the negative *kamma* that comes from acts such as killing depends on certain factors, including that one is conscious that one is taking a life and that one has the intention to take a life. His question concerned how these issues apply to animals which regularly kill in order to eat. Bhatiya’s own view was that such animals do not incur negative kammic results in the way that human killers do because they act on

³⁶ Fieldwork notes 12/08/2007.

instinct and thus without a true intention or awareness of what is being done. However, he noted that he was not certain of his views since they are challenged by *Jātaka* stories (stories of the previous lives of the Buddha) in which animals are depicted as acting morally and immorally, and receiving appropriate kammic rewards and punishments. Bhatiya was thus keen to ask Sumedho about this issue, so that he could get the opinion of such a well-respected monk. In the event, Sumedho's reply largely accorded with Bhatiya's opinion on the matter. What is interesting for our purposes, however, is the nature of Bhatiya's question. To me the asking of such an abstract doctrinal point seemed somewhat incongruous in the context of Sumedho's highly experience-based and practice-oriented talk. However, the question was characteristic of Bhatiya's interest in the intellectual study and discussion of Buddhist doctrine.

The above examples illustrate that one can find Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK that take a strong interest in the intellectual study of Buddhism. Indeed the comments made by Damith and Kumari suggest that an intellectual interest in the study of Buddhist philosophy may be more characteristic of Sri Lankans than of converts. Other aspects of my research further point to an interest in study-oriented Buddhism among Sri Lankans. At the LBV, while Sri Lankans tend to be the minority in study classes, they make up the majority during study-oriented talks, such as those by Anil Goonewardene, Richard Gombrich, and Chandra Wickramasinghe mentioned above. All of these talks took place during *pōya* day celebrations, when around 80 per cent of those present were Sri Lankan. The majority of contributions to question and answer sessions and discussion periods during *pōya* day celebrations at the Vihara are also from Sri Lankans. As mentioned in the previous section, these periods often reflect a study-oriented approach to Buddhism, with discussions being centred around what is written in the textual sources about the question at hand. A link between Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK and a study-oriented, text-based approach to Buddhism is also made by a senior monk from the Forest Sangha whom I interviewed during the course of my research.³⁷ This monk notes that he has found a strong interest in studying Buddhism among many Sri Lankans that he has come into contact with. In many cases, he notes, Sri Lankan Buddhists have a greater knowledge of the Theravada textual tradition than he has himself:

³⁷ This monk asked not to be named in my study. Interview conducted 04/05/3007.

Many of the Sri Lankans know many more of the *suttas* than I do...I've read them...I've read, and then its gone, whereas they will keep reading, reading, reading...they can quote verse and chapter.

The fact that study classes at the LBV do not attract large numbers of Sri Lankan participants thus does not indicate a lack of interest in study-oriented Buddhism among Sri Lankans in the UK. As this suggests, there are reasons other than a disinterest in such aspects of Buddhism for individuals to choose not to attend such classes. As noted above, my interviewee Damith does not attend these classes because he lives some distance from the LBV, and because he feels that he would not learn anything new from them. The extensive reading that Damith and Bhatiya both engage in without attending classes shows that some prefer to study on their own without the support of a class.

Of course, not all Sri Lankans take an interest in studying Buddhist philosophy. As can be seen from the numbers given above, those who have a strong interest in study are a minority among my interviewees. Perhaps the most important difference between Sri Lankans in the UK and convert Buddhists is that there is far greater variety among Sri Lankans in terms of their level of personal interest in their religion. Since they have made the choice to convert into the religion, convert Buddhists tend to have a high level of personal interest in Buddhism. Among Sri Lankans, who have been born into their religion, the degree of personal interest that individuals take in Buddhism varies much more. However, among those Sri Lankans who have a strong personal interest in Buddhism – such as Damith, Kumari and Bhatiya – it is common to find that this interest is characterised by an emphasis on what I have defined as intellectual or study-oriented Buddhism.

As a last point in this section we can note that taking an interest in studying Buddhism seems to be more common among certain sections of the Sri Lankan community than others. Dedicating oneself to serious textual study clearly requires free time, so it is unsurprising that those that I spoke to with the strongest interest in study often developed this interest at times in their life in which they had more time to dedicate to such study. For example, as noted above, my interviewee Damith developed his interest in study as a young man. He then gave less attention to study during his career as a doctor, before taking up the interest more seriously after retirement. It would also be unsurprising to find an interest in the intellectual study of Buddhism to be more common among the well-educated, and indeed the majority (9 of 11) of my respondents with a strong interest in study are

university graduates. My interviewee Gihan, well read in Buddhism himself, argues that there is proportionately more interest in the intellectual discussion of Buddhist philosophy among Sri Lankans in the UK than among Buddhists in Sri Lanka because of the high level of education in the diaspora. He states:

There are more people here [in the UK] who are educated. So they may be looking at religion a little bit more analytically rather than purely [taking an interest in] devotion. [They are more interested in discussing philosophy] whereas in Sri Lanka most people when they go [to the temple] they stick to ritual rather than academic discussion.

5.3.2 Questions of textual authority and the convert/diaspora divide

Many of the manifestations scholarly or intellectual Buddhism found at the LBV are concerned with the study or exposition of Buddhist texts, principally the texts of the Pali Canon or the classical commentarial texts of the Theravada tradition. Thus talks by Anil Goonewardene on the Four Noble Truths and the teaching of *kamma* provide examinations of how these issues are discussed in the Pali Canon. Similarly, a talk delivered for the Navam celebrations of 2007 by Venerable Bandula, a resident monk of the LBV, which looked at the status of the *sotāpanna* or ‘stream enterer’ (the first attainment on the path to *nibbāna*) focused on what the Theravada textual tradition tells us about the nature of a *sotāpanna*, how one reaches this level, and how one can recognise a *sotāpanna*. A focus on texts is also evident in articles produced by the LBV. For example, the articles discussed in section 5.3 by Peter Harvey (2003) and Richard Jones (2006) are respectively an examination of teachings on the Four Noble Truths found in the Pali Canon, and a discussion of teachings concerning anger found in the *Visuddhimagga*, the classic summary of Theravada teaching written by Buddhaghosa. Study classes at the LBV also display a textual focus. As noted in section 5.3, one of these classes focuses on the examination of sermons from the Pali Canon, while during the period of my research the advance study class was reading it way through Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*. This emphasis on textual Buddhism at the LBV raises questions about attitudes towards textual authority at the Vihara. Here I explore this issue in relation to the categories of convert and diaspora Buddhism.

A number of studies of Western convert Theravada practitioners suggest that a calling into question, or at times an outright rejection, of certain elements of textual

Buddhism, including such seemingly central teachings as those of rebirth and kammic merit, is relatively common among such converts (Waterhouse 1997; Bell 1998; Cadge 2005).³⁸ Waterhouse quotes a convert practitioner in a group in Bath, discussing rebirth:

I don't believe in it...If somebody started telling me I couldn't do it [practise Buddhism] unless I believed in rebirth I couldn't (1997:52).

Waterhouse goes on to note that Buddhist texts represent just one source of religious authority among convert Buddhists. Other sources of authority that Waterhouse found to be important among converts included one's own experience and one's own reasoning and rational analysis (1997:222-228).

Such attitudes towards textual authority are evident not only among individual convert Buddhists but also among some convert institutions and teachers. The most obvious example here is Stephen Batchelor, a British Buddhist teacher and writer, whose book *Buddhism Without Beliefs* (1997) advocates an agnostic approach to Buddhism in which textual teachings of *kamma*, rebirth and cosmology are not accepted merely on faith. The lay-centred Insight Meditation in the USA displays similar tendencies. Rebirth, the idea of different realms of existence, merit-making, and traditional ideas about the four stages of enlightenment – all central aspects of the Theravada textual tradition – are all largely ignored in the movement's teachings (Fronsdal 1998:172). A more orthodox approach is found in the Forest Sangha. One would be unlikely to hear a monk or nun in this tradition openly questioning textual teachings about *kamma* and rebirth. However, even in this tradition we can find evidence of a tendency to put less emphasis on certain elements of textual Buddhism. Bluck notes that while 'mythological and cosmological' aspects of Buddhism were often discussed in Ajahn Chah's community in Thailand, such teachings – and even the idea of rebirth – are rarely spoken about in Forest Sangha communities in the West (Bluck 2006:31).

Convert Buddhists taking an approach to textual authority of the kind described above – which I will refer to as a 'Buddhism without beliefs' approach – often draw justification for this approach, somewhat ironically, from a particular text from the Pali Canon, the *Kālāma Sutta* (AN i, 188). In this text the Buddha advises a group of laypeople not to accept teachings on the basis of a number of sources of authority – such as

³⁸ As with the previous section, my arguments here concern only convert Buddhists following Theravada or Theravada-influenced forms of Buddhism.

revelation, tradition, reasoning, that they come from a teacher of great prestige, or that they are found in scriptures – but only when they know in themselves that ‘these things are wholesome, blameless, commended by the wise, and being adopted and put into effect they lead to welfare and happiness’ (translation from Batchelor 1997:1). For many converts the *Kālāma Sutta* means that one should not accept teachings just because they are contained within Buddhist texts. Instead one should check such teachings against one’s own experiences and one’s reasoning. Those aspects of textual Buddhism which cannot be verified through these sources should either be rejected or regarded agnostically.

Despite the justification that many convert Buddhists find in the *Kālāma Sutta*, the idea that Buddhists are free to reject aspects of textual Buddhism as they see fit is a radically new development. It is developments such as this that Baumann points towards when he argues that we are currently witnessing the emergence in the West of a new historical phase of Buddhism (Baumann 2001). Baumann refers to this new phase as ‘global’ or ‘post-modern’ Buddhism, and argues that it is characterised by interpretations which ‘secularize and psychologize’ Buddhism (Baumann 2001:32).

Since during my research I did not focus on the attitudes of convert Buddhists at the LBV, I cannot provide a detailed account of the approaches to questions of textual authority found among this community. However, my impression is that attitudes such as those described above are common among converts at the LBV. Certainly I encountered converts at the LBV who expressed disbelief in rebirth or other ‘supernatural’ aspects of textual Buddhism. For example, during one study class that I attended, which looked at a commentarial text concerning the life of the historical Buddha, a convert practitioner expressed strong scepticism about certain supernatural elements of the text, such as those which described how, as the Buddha would go about his daily activities, he would be supernaturally assisted by forces of nature (for example, by the wind blowing leaves from his path).³⁹

If we can find a questioning of textual authority among some convert Buddhists at the LBV, such an approach is not characteristic of the way in which Buddhism is expounded at the Vihara. A self-conscious calling into question of key aspects of the Buddhist textual tradition of the kind found in Batchelor’s writings is not found in talks and sermons given

³⁹ Fieldwork notes 13/11/2007.

at the LBV. In addition, the tendency to ignore ‘supernatural’ elements of Buddhism which Bluck detects within the Forest Sangha is not evident at the Vihara. The LBV’s website contains detailed expositions of Theravada teachings concerning *kamma*, rebirth and cosmology,⁴⁰ and gives a link to a website detailing academic research conducted which attempts to provide scientific proof of rebirth.⁴¹ In talks, sermons and question and answer sessions at the LBV, ‘supernatural’ elements of Buddhism – such as rebirth, the workings of *kamma*, the miraculous powers of the Buddha, cosmology, and the mechanics of transferring merit to the deceased – are mentioned often. This is particularly evident during sermons given at the Vihara’s Sunday *pūjā*, which frequently recount Buddhist stories involving the miraculous and the supernatural (see chapter 6). However, one can also find mention of such aspects of Buddhism during *pōya* day celebrations. For example, Anil Goonewardene’s talk on *kamma* during the Navam celebrations of 2007 gave a detailed account of Theravada textual teachings concerning how one’s actions lead to kammic results in this life or in future lives, including a discussion of whether one can avoid negative kammic consequences by counteracting negative *kamma* with positive acts.⁴² Similarly, as noted in section 5.3, a discussion period during the Dhammacakka Day celebrations of 2007 focused on the teaching of rebirth, and the intricacies of how identity is retained in this process. The discussion also examined the transference of merit and how this process is understood to work in Buddhist teachings. As with Goonewardene’s talk, the discussions here were strongly focused on the teachings found in Theravada texts.⁴³

The attitude towards textual authority found at the LBV must be seen within the context of attitudes towards such issues found within Sri Lankan Buddhism more broadly. As Gombrich and Obeyesekere note (1988:221), an emphasis on the authority of texts has always been present within Sri Lankan Buddhism. In the colonial era ‘modernist’ Buddhists such as Anagarika Dharmapala put an even greater emphasis on the importance of textual authority. Such modernists saw themselves as reformists, returning to the ‘pure’ Buddhism of the Theravada texts and away from what they saw as the ‘later accretions’ of the Sri Lankan tradition (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:220-221). Gombrich and Obeyesekere

⁴⁰ www.londonbuddhistvihara.org/qa/qa.htm (accessed 20/06/2010).

⁴¹ This is the work of Dr Ian Stevenson (1918-2007) and his successors at the University of Virginia. See www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/personalitystudies/case_types.cfm#CORT (accessed 20/06/2010).

⁴² Fieldwork notes 03/02/2007.

⁴³ Fieldwork notes 29/07/2007. I come back to look at aspects of this discussion in greater depth in chapter 6.

refer to the stance taken by such modernists as ‘fundamentalist’ and argue that it was influenced in large part by the fundamentalism of the Protestant missionaries in the colonial period (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:220-221).

Unsurprisingly, I found that attitudes towards textual authority among Sri Lankans at the LBV – and among Sri Lankans in the UK generally – tended to mirror those found in Sri Lanka. Among some Sri Lankans in the UK a strongly textualist approach is evident. My interviewee Damith manifests such an approach. In the previous section I noted that Damith has a strong interest in the study of textual Buddhism. This interest reflects his tendency to emphasise the authority of texts. Throughout our interview Damith often consults texts when answering my questions. Thus when I ask about whether certain forms of giving – such as giving to monks – are particularly meritorious, Damith consults a Sinhala language summary of the *abhidhamma* and gives a long description of the various factors which influence the merit that one attains from giving. These include: one’s thoughts before, during and after giving; the strength of one’s mental conviction upon giving; the quality of the item that is given; whether the gift is needed by the recipient; whether the gift is one of a certain number of items that should never be given as a gift; and the quality of the recipient of the gift. Damith then goes on to look at this last factor in detail, again taking his answers from his book. He states that giving to one hundred people who do not accept the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha* brings less merit than giving to one person who does. Similarly, giving to one hundred people who accept the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha* brings less merit than giving to one person who has attained the first stage on the path to *nibbāna* (the stage of the stream-enterer). Damith continues in this manner, stating that the merit one receives increases as one gives to individuals of higher and higher spiritual attainment – to those on the second and third stages of the path, to those who are enlightened, to *Paccekabuddhas* (those who achieve Buddhahood but does not teach others) and to Buddhas. Thus Damith expresses a strong emphasis on the validity of what Buddhist texts tell us about the merit one receives through giving.

Elsewhere in our interview I ask Damith about the practice of having *pirit* chanted. Damith supports the idea that the chanting of *pirit* can bring about some form of blessing or protection by again looking towards Buddhist texts. He notes that according to Theravada texts, the Buddha taught the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta* (*Sn* verses 143-152) – a key *pirit* text –

to a group of monks who were being harassed by demons while living in a forest. The Buddha told the monks to learn and recite the *sutta*, and by doing so they were able to pacify the demons. Damith also notes the story of the Buddha's teaching of the *Ratana Sutta* (*Sn* verses 222-238), another key *pirit* text. According to the story, the Buddha taught the text at a time when the city of Vasali was experiencing famine, disease and the presence of many evil spirits. The Buddha advised his attendant Ananda to walk around the city reciting the *Ratana Sutta* and sprinkling water from the Buddha's alms bowl. As a result the problems of the city disappeared. For Damith these textual examples of *pirit* chanting give authority to the practice. *Pirit* chanting is often accompanied by other practices, such as the distribution of blessed water (i.e. water that has been chanted over) and the tying of blessed string around the wrists of those present. Damith's comments about these practices are revealing:

Damith: The *Ratana Sutta* has the bowl of water that is sprinkled. Now [today] people use it on the head, you drink it, you do all sorts of things with it. It may have meaning...it might have. I can't say no. But I don't know, basically. But certainly the *pirit nul*, the string, is not something that goes back to the time of the Buddha. It is something new that has come after that. I have checked that from a monk also and he said, 'yes it is not the case [that *pirit* thread goes back to the time of the Buddha]'.

David: So you don't attach much importance to [*pirit* thread]?

Damith: I do tie [i.e. have *pirit* thread tied when I go to a temple]. But whether it had meaning or not, I'm not really that...either way...I don't really pay any attention to it.

Damith's responses here again reveal his strong emphasis on textual authority. The tying of *pirit* thread is regarded by Damith as having no textual authority, and therefore he does not feel any compulsion to believe that it has a meaning or efficacy. However, he is less ready to entirely dismiss the use of blessed water, since the use of such water is explicitly mentioned in the textual tradition.

Another of my interviews in which the authority of texts was strongly emphasised was that with Udara and Sumal, friends from Sri Lanka who have both come to the UK within the last three years. In our interview both frequently call upon textual authority when answering my questions. For example, when I ask whether it is particularly meritorious to

give to monks, Sumal's reply echoes that given by Damith, and similarly calls upon textual authority:

If you want I could give you a *sutta* that specifically deals with this question. There are various levels, dependent on the recipient of the *dāna*...the merits vary...I'll just give you an example. If there is an immoral person who is an undertaker or something, and say if you give something to him. And if you give the same thing to another person who keeps his precepts or at least who's moral [...] The merits gained by giving to that good person would be higher than [those gained from] giving to the other person. But it gradually increases, like. It is better to give to, say, a stream enterer [...] so it gradually increases. Say if it's an *Arahat* [being who has attained *nibbāna*] [that you give to] it's more meritorious. If it's a Buddha, it's [even] more.

Sumal and Udara also invoke the authority of texts when I ask them about miraculous aspects of Buddhism. When I ask them about the tradition that the Buddha made miraculous visits to Sri Lanka during his lifetime – the sites which the Buddha is said to have visited are major pilgrimage centres in Sri Lanka – they both note that the story is not found in the Pali Canon:

Udara: In the Pali Canon there's no scriptural record of it, isn't it? I don't know. I just keep an open mind. I don't have an opinion. In the Sri Lankan tradition it's almost a fact. [But] there's nothing in the scriptures. But I do have some kind of belief that if your psyche is well developed you can travel from place to place psychically.

Sumal: I also haven't heard of any evidence in the *suttas* that Lord Buddha has come [to Sri Lanka], but I believe that it's certainly possible [...] And also, I think that monk told us – Venerable Nagita⁴⁴ – that somewhere Buddha has said that [Buddhism] is going to be established in Sri Lanka, that sort of thing. But I don't know where it is in the *suttas*. I remember something like that. I don't know if I am misquoting him, but I remember something like that. But he was also saying that there is no historical evidence for the fact that the Buddha has come to Sri Lanka. Besides, Ananda...Venerable Ananda would have recorded [the event]. Because Venerable Ananda was the Buddha's attendant. So he was actually recording what he was...like, before he became the attendant he gave some conditions to the Buddha, like 'If you...'...Buddha was supposed to tell him every...all the sermons that he preached elsewhere [when Ananda was not with him]. So I don't know why there's no account of Sri Lanka [in the Pali Canon], because that's the condition and so if the Buddha came here he must have told it to Venerable Ananda as well, right?

⁴⁴ Venerable Nagita is an Australian convert monk resident in Colombo. Udara and Sumal attended classes given by Nagita before coming to the UK, and both attribute him with having a strong influence on their current approach to Buddhism.

Thus the idea of the Buddha visiting Sri Lanka is not entirely dismissed – and the idea that such miraculous events are possible is affirmed – but it is called into question because it is not mentioned in the Pali Canon. In addition, Sumal suggests that if the Buddha did come to Sri Lanka, the lack of any reference to this event in the Canon is difficult to understand since according to tradition the Buddha gave details of all the sermons that he preached to his attendant Ananda, who recited these sermons at the council which first established the Pali Canon.

During our interview Udara and Sumal also draw on textual authority when speaking about a range of further issues, including the transference of merit, the worship of gods, the specific kammic punishments that result from particular immoral acts, the practice of astrology, and the practice of going on pilgrimage. My interviews with Damith and with Udara and Sumal thus represent particularly clear examples of individuals drawing on textual authority. These individuals have a very strong knowledge of the Theravada textual tradition, and frequently refer to texts during our interviews. The majority of my interviewees were less conversant with the textual tradition. However, further examples of individuals drawing on textual authority were nevertheless relatively common. During my interview with Harshini, a regular patron of the LBV, we speak about whether the kammic results of negative actions can be cancelled out by the performance of positive acts. Harshini states:

If you do something bad then [...] I think it comes back to you. But then at the same time in certain scriptures...I'm not very familiar with these things...sometimes they say if you do something bad and if you do [a meritorious act] it can [cancel out one's negative *kamma*]...But then you shouldn't do something expecting a big benefit, you know. The things you do, you should do with your whole heart, rather expecting any gain.

The reference to texts here is interesting since it goes against the grain of Harshini's own view. Harshini is critical of the idea that one can engage in meritorious activities in order to cancel out the results of one's negative actions because she feels that one should not engage in meritorious actions with the thought of personal advantage. However, Harshini cannot entirely dismiss the idea that negative *kamma* can be cancelled out because the textual tradition seems to support the idea.

Another example of an individual appealing to textual authority comes from my interview with Anuja, a patron of the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre. When I ask Anuja about why Buddhists have *pirit* chanted, she answers:

In Buddhism...our leader [the Buddha]...in India there was a very big tragedy [...] so many people got sick and died [...] so many people died and...spread disease. Then those ghosts also came, devils and all these people also came. And those places [were] not so good for living for human beings. That place was like that. Then what happened...then during that period, what our leader has done, he has done some *pirit* [...] So he has done *Ratana Sutta*. You know there are some *sutta*...So he has done some *sutta*. Then what happened [was] those sickness has gone, very powerful rain came, all the dead bodies [were] washed away. And those ghosts and all [were] no more there. Therefore peoples' life [was a] better life...they came across a better life. Therefore we believe that most of the time when you do some *pirit* it will give you a very good environment, very good life. No sorrow in your home. If you have *pirit* in your home we believe that if you have any ghosts or any another died people [who have] attraction to your place [they will be] no more there.

Here Anuja follows Damith in explaining the efficacy of *pirit* by relating the story – found in the commentaries to the Pali Canon – of the Buddha's first preaching of the *Ratana Sutta*.

Another example comes from my interview with Ushma, who attends a number of Buddhist institutions in the UK. We discuss the practice of making offerings to gods. Many Sri Lankan Buddhists make offerings to gods in the hope that these divine beings will be able to help them with particularly problems in their life. These offerings are made in Hindu temples, in *dēvālēs* (a shrine to a god) or at altars in the home. Ushma notes that she used to visit *dēvālēs*, but that she stopped going after listening to the preaching of the well-known monk Venerable Gangodawila Soma, who argued that Buddhists should not worship gods, and that one receives more blessings and benefits in life simply by living morally than by praying to gods. When I ask Ushma if Soma was making the claim that gods do not exist, she answered in the negative, stating that gods certainly exist since they are referred to in Buddhist texts:

He doesn't say that they don't exist...even in Buddha's time...[in] all the *suttas*...*Mahāmaṅgala Sutta*...the gods invited him. So there is a god realm somewhere.

Here Ushma refers specifically to the *Mahāmaṅgala Sutta* (*Sn* verses 258-269), in which the Buddha is approached by a *deva* (a divine being) and asked what gives the highest protection. The Buddha then gives a list of things that bring protection: moral behaviour, looking after family, discussing the *Dhamma*, realising the truths of Buddhism, and so on.

Beyond these examples of individuals directly referring to textual authority, more generally I found the tendency to call into question aspects of textual Buddhism which is evident among many converts to be less common among my first-generation Sri Lankan interviewees. The attitudes that I encountered concerning the teaching of rebirth illustrate this. While a tendency to question or even reject this aspect of textual Buddhism is common among convert Buddhists, in my 25 interviewees with first-generation Sri Lankans these dimensions of Buddhism were called into question by only 2 individuals.⁴⁵

It is possible to make connections between the approaches that Buddhists take to textual authority and other aspects of their religiosity. As noted in chapter 2, Cadge analyses approaches to Buddhism according to where they lie on a rational/supernatural continuum. Mirroring Cadge's findings among Thai Buddhists in the USA, I found that my respondents varied in terms of where they stood on this continuum, with some holding interpretations of Buddhism which stressed supernatural elements and others playing down the importance of the supernatural. Cadge found that American converts tended to hold interpretations of Buddhism that fell towards the rational end of the rational/supernatural spectrum, and my impression is that this is also the case among converts at the LBV.

The relationship between where individuals fall on Cadge's rational/supernatural continuum and their attitude towards textual authority is clear when we look at my discussion above. Many of the aspects of textual Buddhism which converts commonly question – teachings concerning rebirth, the workings of *kamma*, cosmology, and miracles – are those that in some way involve an affirmation of the supernatural. By contrast, Sri Lankans who uphold the authority of texts will clearly tend to affirm such supernatural teachings. It is notable that many of the examples given above in which textual authority is

⁴⁵ My initial list of interview questions did not contain a direct question concerning whether the interviewee accepted the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth. However, the question was addressed in every interview either directly – on some occasions if the issue seemed important I raised the question directly – or indirectly through the discussion of practices such as transferring merit to the dead. As mentioned above, on only two occasions did my interviewees express attitudes which called into question the teachings of *kamma* on rebirth. On another occasion an interviewee, when asked whether he accepted rebirth, responded: 'I haven't done enough research on it.' While this seems to indicate an agnostic approach, later in he stated that despite not having researched the issue he did accept rebirth 'because that is the essence of Buddhism'.

invoked concern supernatural aspects of Buddhism: the idea that giving to certain individuals brings one a particularly large amount of kammic merit; the idea that *pirit* chanting can bring apotropaic benefits; and so on.

The tendency for Sri Lankans to affirm supernatural aspects of textual Buddhism is reflected in the attitudes towards the relationship between religion and science expressed by some of my interviewees. Comparisons between Buddhism and scientific thought have been a key feature of discourses about Buddhism in the modern world (McMahan 2004:898). Among Buddhists in both Asia and the West Buddhism has often been portrayed as a religion that is uniquely compatible with modern science. However, Buddhists differ in terms of precisely what they mean when they argue that Buddhism and science are compatible. For many converts Buddhism is compatible with science because one need not accept those 'supernatural' aspects of Buddhism which are felt to go against the findings of modern science.⁴⁶ Among Sri Lankans who put more emphasis on the authority of Buddhist texts a different approach can be found. Here it is argued that there are many parallels between Buddhist doctrines and modern scientific thought.⁴⁷ Those aspects of Buddhism which cannot be proven by modern science are not dismissed, but are regarded not as ways in which Buddhism goes beyond science. The idea here is that Buddhism reveals truths which science has not yet discovered, but which may be discovered by science in the future.⁴⁸ Such a view of the relationship between Buddhism and science was expressed to me a number of times during my research. Thus, for example, my interviewee Gihan argues that:

Buddhism is beyond science...Buddhism is also science, but the limits of Buddhism is [*sic*] beyond [the limits of] modern science.

My interviewee Bathiya similarly emphasises the superiority of Buddhism to science:

⁴⁶ Ideas of this kind are expressed by Batchelor in *Buddhism Without Beliefs* (1997:37).

⁴⁷ Some features of Buddhism commonly claimed to indicate compatibility with science include: that it teaches that the universe is governed by natural laws rather than by a creator god; that it teaches that these natural laws are characterised by processes of cause and effect; that it is not hostile to Darwin's theory of evolution; and that it teaches that all things are impermanent and in a state of flux. For a typical Sri Lankan Buddhist perspective on the compatibility of Buddhism and science see Radhika Abeysekere's answer to the question 'Why is Buddhism sometimes compared to science?' in her book *Questions and Answers in Buddhism, Volume II* (2007:18-27).

⁴⁸ As McMahan (2004) highlights, the two interpretations of what it means for Buddhism and science to be compatible that I have outlined here can be traced back to the earliest stages of Buddhism's arrival in the West.

We [Buddhists] regard science as a small child, whereas Buddhism is something like a very wise old man.

The affirmation of supernatural aspects of textual Buddhism is thus a key factor which distinguishes the religiosity of many Sri Lankans from that of many convert Buddhists. This is particularly apparent in my interview with Udara and Sumal, since in many other ways Udara and Sumal's approach to Buddhism shares much in common with that of Theravada converts. Both place an emphasis on the practice of meditation. Both often visit institutions of the Forest Sangha and both express admiration for the monastics in this tradition. In addition, both to some extent distance their religiosity from an approach which emphasises rituals of *pūjā* and *dāna*. However, Udara and Sumal's strong acceptance of aspects of the Theravada textual tradition such as the transference of merit, the existence of different realms of rebirth, and the efficacy of *pirit* chanting puts them at odds with many convert practitioners. The contrast is clearly illustrated during our discussion of kamma. Sumal notes that some Buddhist texts list specific kammic results for particular immoral acts (such as being reborn as a person of poor intellect if one drinks alcohol). I remark that many converts pay little attention to the kammic results of actions in the next life, and instead focus on the problems that immoral action brings in one's current life. Sumal responds by noting that Buddhist texts also consider the effects of immoral action in this life. However, he also goes on to defend the importance of considering the future kammic effects of one's action. He refers to a list of five things which according to Buddhist teachings individuals should frequently reflect upon, one of which is the fact that one is owner of one's own kamma. Sumal argues that this illustrates the importance of considering the kammic results of one's actions:

So that reflection is really important. Because, maybe if you think about the *kamma* part...because if you know the consequences of what you are doing, then you know...it's nobody else...it's your existence that is going to suffer from the *vipāka* [the kammic result that you are creating]. So I think that's quite important as well. Although in the West it may not be thought of as important, it might be actually really important...in a way important, right? Because then a person knows that he is going to get all his actions, like get the punishment for bad [actions].

The concern that Sumal shows here with the future fruits of kammic action is reflected in the views he expresses when we discuss making offerings to monks. While Sumal emphasises that giving *dāna* should be principally about expressing generosity and non-

attachment rather than making merit, he also notes that when he engages in such giving concern for merit is in his mind to some extent. He states:

I know that whatever I have got in this life is because I have practised [giving *dāna*]...The reason I am not starving like some people in Africa is because I have given [*dāna* in the past]. So there is an aspect of ensuring your future as well...in the existence...until you attain *nibbāna*.

This concern with making merit for one's future lives clearly distinguishes Sumal's approach to Buddhism with that found among converts.

The idea of making a link between the degree to which individuals emphasise textual authority and where they lie on Cadge's rational/supernatural spectrum is, however, problematised by two factors. Firstly, the textualism of modern Sri Lankan Buddhism is often as concerned with denying supernatural aspects of religion which are not supported in Buddhist texts as it is with upholding those supernatural teachings which are supported by textual authority. Thus among my interviewees who particularly stressed textual authority, often this authority was called upon to criticise rather than support aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhist religiosity. Some of the examples given above demonstrate this: Udara and Sumal call into question miraculous aspects of the Buddhist tradition which lack textual support, while Damith questions the significance of *pirit* thread on the same basis. A further example from my interview with Udara and Sumal can be mentioned. Both interviewees are critical of the practice of making offerings to gods. Sumal supports his opposition by noting a Buddhist *sutta* which suggests that there are certain things in life that one cannot get by praying, but only by behaving in a moral way:

I remember a very important *sutta*. It says there are five things in the world that you cannot get by praying... 'If it were possible to get these things by praying, who would not get it'. That is the statement, that's how it starts at the beginning... And it lists different things like, say, wealth. People think 'May I have abundant wealth and this and that'. [The *sutta* says that] by praying for it you won't get it [...] So to take that example, if you want to have wealth then you would have to practise *dāna*, that sort of thing. The way is not praying but this [moral action]. [Similarly] if you want to have long life, you can't get it by praying. You have to live a life conducive to long life. Say, for instance, if you help people who are suffering, say by donating blood or something like that. Or by refraining from killing animals. That kind of thing, it will bring long life... So it's clearly stated that you can't get certain things by praying, [by] just asking for it from god or anybody.

Another reason why it is problematic to make a definite link between the degree to which individuals emphasise textual authority and where their approach to religion lies on the rational/supernatural spectrum is that while upholding the authority of Buddhist texts implies supporting the supernatural teachings found in these texts, it does not necessarily imply that one's overall approach to Buddhism will place a strong emphasis on the supernatural. Cadge's discussion largely equates acceptance of the supernatural and emphasising such aspects of Buddhism. However, some Buddhists accept the existence of supernatural beings and forces, yet do not emphasise their importance. My interviewee Damith falls into this category. As mentioned above, Damith affirms the idea that giving to monks brings a particularly large amount of merit, and the idea that chanting *pirit* can bring one protection. However, Damith places little emphasis on the need to make merit through *dāna* or have *pirit* chanted for protection in his own practice of Buddhism. Instead he focuses on meditation and the study of Buddhist philosophy. When it comes to the issue of making merit, Damith notes that according to the textual tradition, while it is meritorious to give to people of high spiritual attainment, it is even more meritorious to practise meditation. As a result, if one practises meditation, there is no need to perform merit-making rituals at a temple:

Do you need to go to the temple to do good? Do you need to spend a lot of money to do good? The answer is no. Here is says very clearly...personal individual generosity given by the mind [through loving-kindness meditation] to other people is far superior to all the money you can spend and give to anybody else.

Further, although Damith accepts supernatural teachings found in Buddhist texts himself, he emphasises that one need not accept these teachings in order to practise Buddhism. He states that the central teaching of Buddhism is the four noble truths. If one can accept these core principles, he argues, one can practise Buddhism. All other aspects of the religion, including the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth, he regards as 'peripheries'.

So far I have drawn a dichotomy between converts and Sri Lankans in terms of their attitudes towards textual authority, and I have placed the LBV on one side of this dichotomy. However, as with so many issues, it would be wrong to draw an absolute divide between converts and Sri Lankans here. In addition, it would be problematic to overplay the degree to which the LBV's attitude towards textual authority puts it at odds with convert

Buddhists. In the rest of this section I will complicate the arguments that I have made above.

To begin with the LBV itself, while the Vihara is a place in which the authority of the Theravada textual tradition is generally affirmed, it would be wrong to characterise the Vihara as a place of strict textual 'fundamentalism' in which any questioning of textual authority is frowned upon. Modernist Sri Lankan Buddhism is characterised not only by a tendency towards textualism, but also by an emphasis on Buddhism being a non-dogmatic religion which discourages blind faith (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:221-222). Such an emphasis is found at the LBV. An article published in the Vihara's journal, entitled 'Is Theravada Buddhism Fundamentalist?' (Jones 2000), expresses this outlook, arguing that while the Theravada tradition does put a significant emphasis on the texts of the Pali Canon, it should not be described as fundamentalist because it encourages individuals to investigate and test its teachings rather than taking them on trust. Similar sentiments are expressed in an article written by the LBV's previous head monk, Venerable Vajiragnana, in which he states that within Buddhism 'we are encouraged to question and investigate' rather than simply accepting the authority of teachers, texts or traditions (2003:110). This attitude is reflected in the atmosphere of the LBV. Discussion sessions during *pōya* day celebrations at the Vihara are characterised by an atmosphere in which questioning and debate are encouraged. As I will explore below, there were occasions during my fieldwork when the accuracy of textual teachings was questioned in these discussion sessions. Such questioning was never treated as problematic, but was generally accepted and explored. Thus, while the way in which Buddhism is taught at the LBV generally affirms the authority of the Theravada textual tradition, the voicing of perspectives which question aspects of textual Buddhism is certainly not considered unacceptable at the Vihara.

It is also important to note that while the LBV does not reject or ignore supernatural aspects of textual Buddhism, nor can it be described as placing an especially strong emphasis on them. As noted above, sermons, talks and discussions at the Vihara often mention rebirth, *kamma*, and miracles performed by the Buddha. In addition, as we shall see in chapter 6, rituals at the Vihara are often spoken about in terms in terms of the merit and/or apotropaic benefits they bring. However, at the same time the overall emphasis found at the LBV is one which stresses the importance of moral and mental development and to a certain extent plays down the importance of generating kammic merit and

apotropaic protection through rituals (as noted in section 5.1). Thus while the LBV's approach to questions of textual authority is somewhat different to that found among many convert practitioners, it would be wrong to overplay the degree to which this creates a distance between the Vihara and those that take a 'Buddhism without beliefs' approach.

Moving on to look again at attitudes to textual authority among Sri Lankan Buddhists, while it is true that among Sri Lankans in the UK one can generally find a greater emphasis in the authority of texts than is found among converts, it would be wrong to suggest that no questioning of textual authority can be found within the community. On a number of occasions during my research I encountered Sri Lankans calling into question aspects of textual Buddhism. During my interview with Pamu, a patron of the LBV, he states that he personally does not believe that *pirit* chanting brings apotropaic protection. My interviewee Lasith, a patron of the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre, calls into question the textual teaching that giving to monks brings a particularly large amount of merit. He also expresses a sceptical attitude towards some of the miracles found in Buddhist texts, arguing that in some cases the texts may contain exaggerations designed to make the stories contained within more interesting to readers:

When you [are] writing books, the writers always try to make it interesting. If something happens here, you don't write it exactly as it happened, isn't it? Because [for] someone reading it won't be interesting. So you try to exaggerate, or put something, like it says...at one stage Buddha [had] rays of fire and water coming out of his body. But it might not be the case. It might be something simple. Something happened. But you write it so that people start reading and memorise [it]...[you] elaborate a little bit.

Lasith does not deny the possibility of miracles entirely. In fact, he argues that it is likely that the Buddha would be able to perform acts which to us appear miraculous. However, Lasith's willingness to question textual accounts of miracles is significant.

Another example occurred during my interview with Venerable Seelagawesi, the leading monk in the Nissarana organisation (examined in chapter 9). Seelagawesi refers to the story, found in the Pali Canon, that upon his birth the Buddha stood up and took seven steps to the north, leaving lotus flowers growing in his footprints. Seelagawesi states that when he is asked about this story, he states that he does not know whether or not it happened:

My answer is that I have come to this world and I have not known about that...That means, I say that I don't know about that because I have not stepped [i.e taken seven steps after birth]...my mother didn't say that I stepped...And I have not seen anybody [take seven steps after birth].

Seelagawesi does deny entirely the possibility that this miracle did occur, and ultimately he argues that whether it did or not is unimportant. However, his views here certainly indicate a willingness to question the accounts of the Buddha's life found within the Theravada textual tradition.

On occasion during my research the authority of a section of the Pali Canon was called into question during public discussions at the LBV itself. One example took place during the LBV's 2007 Sanghamitta Day celebrations.⁴⁹ Sanghamitta Day celebrates the arrival in Sri Lanka of the Buddhist nun Sanghamittā, the daughter of King Asoka and the founder of the order of nuns in Sri Lanka. The talks and discussions that take place on Sanghamitta Day tend to focus on issues relevant to women. In the discussion period held during the 2007 celebrations one issue that was raised was that of the establishment by the Buddha of the order of nuns. According to the account given in the Pali Canon, the Buddha was initially reluctant to ordain women, eventually doing so only on the condition that they abide by certain extra rules and that they always defer to the authority of monks. During the discussion Mr Perera, a regular attendee of the LBV and someone known to be well-read in Buddhism, called into question this canonical account. He argued that the Buddha took an egalitarian approach to gender and thus would not have been reluctant to ordain women. He suggested the story we have today was added to the Canon after the time of the Buddha, perhaps as a result of the Buddhist tradition being influenced by the less egalitarian approach to gender found within Hinduism.

These examples show that some questioning of textual authority can be found among Sri Lankan Buddhists. In chapter 9 I will look briefly at an extreme example of the questioning of textual authority: that of the Sathdhamma group who call into question the authenticity of the entire Theravada textual tradition. While such a strong questioning of textual authority is not common in the Sri Lankan community, the idea that the Canon need not be accepted in its entirety is certainly not unique to the Sathdhamma group. Interestingly, one of my interviewees who made this point was Damith, who I have

⁴⁹ Fieldwork notes 02/12/2007.

mentioned above as stressing the authority of texts. Damith notes that according to Buddhist tradition, the Pali Canon was compiled after the Buddha's death by a group of his enlightened disciples. It was then handed down orally. Damith argues that as long as the Canon was handed down by monks who had gained enlightenment, its accuracy was guaranteed. However, he argues, it is likely that some of those involved in passing on the Canon until it was written down were not enlightened. As a result, we cannot be entirely sure that the texts that we have today reflect the exact teachings of the Buddha. As my discussion above demonstrates, despite these views Damith continues to put a strong emphasis on the authority of the textual tradition. However, his admission that the textual tradition may not be completely accurate is significant.

The examples of questioning textual authority discussed so far can perhaps be seen as focusing on quite minor issues. While many converts 'secularise' and 'psychologise' Buddhism by calling into question teachings concerning *kamma* and rebirth, the examples considered above involve a less radical questioning of the traditional. It is notable that Lasith, while calling into question some accounts of miracles in the Canon, does not reject miraculous aspects of Buddhism altogether. This is not the radical 'Buddhism without beliefs' found among Western converts, in which everything supernatural is removed. Even the Sathdhamma group who question the authority of the textual tradition as a whole, continue to affirm the teaching of rebirth. However, while in general I found a questioning rebirth to be somewhat rare among my first-generation Sri Lankan Buddhists, such questioning was not entirely absent. Two of my first-generation interviewees express an agnostic approach to the question of rebirth. One of these is Arjuna, a patron of the Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre, a Sri Lankan temple located in East London. When I ask Arjuna of his view of the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth, he states simply:

I don't know. They might be true.

This reflects an agnostic theme that runs throughout the interview. When we discuss transferring merit to the dead, Arjuna states:

I don't know whether you can pass merits or not...I don't know. It might be true, so you might as well do it.

Such attitudes reflect the fact that Arjuna does not view such aspects of Buddhism as very important. Although he attends the weekly Buddha *pūjā* at the Redbridge temple, Arjuna

views such ritual practices as ‘traditional’ and not essential parts of Buddhism. He expresses little interest in merit-making. Instead, he emphasises the importance of meditation and philosophical aspects of Buddhism. As such, questions such as whether the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth are true, whether one can transfer merit and whether *pirit* can bring protection are not regarded as important by Arjuna.

While Arjuna expresses his agnostic approach to *kamma* and rebirth only when I ask about the issue directly, my interviewee Sathi – a regular attendee of the LBV’s meditation classes – raises the issue at an early stage of our interview. When I ask what she sees of the most important aspects of Buddhism, she states:

I think it’s a sensible religion and it’s something that...you can decide for yourself what you want out of it. [...] I don’t disagree with any of it, and the things that I don’t understand – like rebirth and all that – I just think ‘Well, I don’t need to take it on board’. It might be true, it might not be true, but that is not important, you know.

Thus for Sathi the fact that one does not need to accept the teaching of rebirth in order to practise Buddhism is one of the most important aspects of the religion. Sathi does not completely dismiss the possibility of rebirth. In fact, later in our interview she suggests that overall she feels that rebirth is probably true. However, she then goes on to note that either way the truth of rebirth is of no real importance to her. Thus she states:

I can see sort-of that it [rebirth] could happen. Deep down I feel that it’s probably right, although that’s not the part of Buddhism that I’m attracted to. You know, it’s neither here nor there.

Sathi’s view that the truth of rebirth is ultimately unimportant reflects her overall approach to Buddhism. Her overriding focus is the practice of meditation, and she takes no interest in practices aimed at making merit for future lives or at transferring merit to the deceased. Thus the truth or falsity of rebirth is not something that she considers important.

While I found the voicing of such agnostic views about the teaching of rebirth to be rather uncommon among first-generation Sri Lankans, I found a tendency to question or dismiss this aspect of textual Buddhism to be somewhat more prevalent among my second-generation interviewees. My interviewee Sampath describes himself religiously as a ‘Buddhist/Atheist’, a label which in itself indicates a somewhat ‘secularised’ understanding of Buddhism. When we speak about rebirth, he states that, ‘I personally don’t believe in

reincarnation particularly...mainly [I] don't believe'. In addition, his understanding of *kamma* to a large extent strips the concept of its 'supernatural' aspects. He expresses scepticism about the idea that if you do something good you will get something in return. Rather, he says that he views the teaching of *kamma* as indicating that one cannot expect others to treat one well unless one treats them well in return.

My interviewee Lalith also expresses an understanding of *kamma* which is largely stripped of any supernatural aspects. Lalith states that he understands the kammic effects of good acts in terms of the positive feelings that they bring about in those that do them, and the way in which they help one to purify one's mind. When I note that Buddhist teachings about *kamma* also include the notion that positive acts will bring merit and thus some form of worldly benefit, Lalith states 'I hope that is true also, but I can't rationalise it that way'. He argues that when considering these issues 'the leap of faith thing...is a little bit difficult'. When we speak about rebirth he states 'the answer is I don't know [whether rebirth is true], and I'll never find out until I die'.

My interviewee Laksiri came regularly to the LBV with his family while growing up. However, he became more personally interested in Buddhism after coming into contact with convert Theravada monks and institutions while at university. Today he visits the LBV only occasionally, preferring to attend retreats at convert institutions such as those of the Forest Sangha. When we discuss rebirth Laksiri's states:

I'm agnostic when it comes to post-death rebirth...I understand rebirth as a moment-to-moment phenomenon.

The idea that rebirth occurs every moment is a traditional one within Buddhism, standing alongside the teaching of rebirth occurring after death. An emphasis on this dimension of rebirth is common among convert Buddhists.

Like Laksiri, my interviewee Tilan came to the LBV regularly with his family while growing up, but developed a greater personal interest in Buddhism as a young adult. However, unlike Laksiri, Tilan's developing personal interest in Buddhism led him to attend the LBV more frequently, as well as attending convert institutions. Today he regularly attends *pōya* day celebrations at the Vihara. When we discuss rebirth, Tilan says that he rarely considers the subject:

I don't really think too much about rebirth...reincarnation.

He does not dismiss the possibility of rebirth, but he argues that it is not an issue that is worth thinking about, since its truth or falsity is ultimately unknowable:

We will never know...and it's not worth...what a waste of energy trying to sit down and work it out...we just won't know.

Another second-generation interviewee, Shalini, was born and raised in Germany, before coming to the UK as a student. Shalini had little interest in Buddhism as a child and for some time she considered herself a Christian. However, she came to embrace Buddhism after moving to the UK, and now attends the LBV regularly. When we discuss rebirth Shalini states:

I'm not sure as to how far I believe in rebirth.

She goes on to note that part of what led her to embrace Buddhism was the fact that one does not need to every aspect of the religion in order to practise:

I think the reason I chose Buddhism was that...it's so unconstrained. I mean, like, one day I'll meet a child on the tube or whatever, and I'll connect with it, and I'll think 'Oh, I wonder if I knew him in a former life' [...] But I wouldn't...say 'This is why my life's this way – because of something I did in my former life' [...] It's just...because it's religion...you don't always have evidence for it, so...you can't rationalise it.

Similar agnostic views about rebirth are also evident in a number of my other interviews with second-generation Sri Lankans. Muditha states that 'I think the jury's still out on reincarnation', adding that since Buddhism encourages one to question its teachings 'it's a very Buddhist thing to question this belief'. Champika, refers to the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth as 'nice ideas', implying that these are pleasant ways of viewing the world, but not ideas that she necessarily accepts. Altogether, of those who identified themselves as Buddhist, eleven of my second-generation interviewees expressed views in which rebirth was questioned or viewed agnostically, while only five unambiguously affirmed the teaching of rebirth.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Altogether I interviewed twenty-one second-generation Sri Lankans. Of the remaining five, two were raised as Buddhists but stated that they no longer viewed themselves to be Buddhist. Three gave no view on the subject of rebirth, stating that they had thought little about the issue.

This tendency to question rebirth clearly parallels attitudes found among many convert Buddhists. From the perspective of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model it might be argued that here we are seeing among second-generation Sri Lankans an abandoning of the ‘Sri Lankan’ approach to Buddhism found among first-generation migrants and the adopting of a ‘Western’ approach more in line with the culture that they have grown up in.⁵¹ However, it is important not to overplay the divide between ‘Sri Lankan’ and ‘Western’ Buddhism here. As I have shown above, a tendency to call into question aspects of the Theravada textual tradition can be found among some first-generation Sri Lankans. In addition, even where textual authority is upheld, the view that one does not need to accept every aspect of the textual tradition in order to practise Buddhism is widespread among Sri Lankan Buddhists. Thus, while the greater prevalence of agnostic attitudes towards rebirth among the second-generation is clearly significant, to describe this as representing the adoption of a fundamentally ‘Western’ understanding of Buddhism would be problematic.⁵²

As a last point it should be noted that one can also find diversity among converts when it comes to questions of textual authority. While many converts manifest a ‘Buddhism without beliefs’ approach, not all do. Fitzpatrick’s convert interviewee Barry strongly emphasises the authority of Buddhist texts, particularly the Pali Canon. He describes reading the Pali Canon as ‘like going right to the source’, and praises the Washington Buddhist Vihara for teaching ‘real Buddhism’ based on the Canon (Fitzpatrick 2000:52). In contrast, he is critical of American convert institutions, which he feels are overly keen to adapt and modify the teachings of Buddhism (Fitzpatrick 2000:54). This case raises the possibility that some convert Buddhists may choose to practise at Sri Lankan temples precisely because of the attitude towards textual authority found at these institutions.

5.4 The LBV as a social and cultural place for the Sri Lankan community

I examine questions of culture and identity at the Vihara more fully in chapter 8. However I want to say something here about the extent to which the LBV serves as a cultural and

⁵¹ The idea that second-generation diaspora Buddhists are likely to take an interest in convert Buddhism is suggested in some literature which employs the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model (see Baumann 2002b:83,101; Numrich 1996:77).

⁵² The fact that ideas mirroring the ‘Buddhism without Belief’ approach found among many converts in the West can be found among some Buddhists in Sri Lanka is highlighted by H.L. Seneviratne’s discussion of the writings of the Sri Lankan journalist Uvindu Kurukulasuriya (1999:311).

social centre for Sri Lankan Buddhists in London and the way in which this affects the perception of the Vihara as a place of Buddhist practice.

The LBV's self-image is that it is primarily a centre of Theravada Buddhism, not a centre of Sri Lankan or Sinhalese culture. It was emphasised to me by monks and laypeople at the Vihara that Anagarika Dharmapala established the LBV in order to introduce Westerners to 'pure' Buddhism, not in order to provide a cultural and social space for Sri Lankans in the UK.⁵³ Often the LBV's stance in this regard was contrasted with other Sri Lankan temples in the UK, which were regarded as more concerned with providing a social and cultural place for the Sri Lankan community.

The LBV does, however, act as a cultural and social centre to some degree. This was acknowledged by the previous head monk of the LBV in an article produced on the occasion of the opening of the Vihara's current premises in 1994. Here, when discussing the different roles played by the LBV, he gives one as the following:

It is a cultural centre for Sri Lankan expatriates who need a meeting place with a religious atmosphere to keep their past heritage alive. (Vajiragnana 1994:3)

The most obvious way in which the LBV acts as a cultural centre is in its provision of a Sunday school, in which second-generation Sri Lankans study not only Buddhism, but also Sinhala language. Aside from language, other aspects of Sinhalese culture – such as traditional dance – are also sometimes taught at the Sunday school. In April each year the

⁵³ As noted in chapter 4, Dharmapala was an advocate of a 'modernist' Buddhism which played down the importance of ritual and traditional Sri Lankan folk practices. Scholars have seen Dharmapala's religiosity as an internalisation of critiques of popular Sri Lankan Buddhism and ideas about the nature of 'pure' Buddhism emanating from the West (see Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:202-240; Deegalle 2006b:129-134). That Dharmapala should be called upon by those who argue that the LBV should not stress its role as a cultural centre for the Sri Lankan diaspora is perhaps ironic. While Dharmapala was influenced by Western thought and critical of many aspects of traditional Sri Lankan religion, he was also a strong proponent of Sinhalese cultural nationalism and a critic of the Westernisation of elite sections of Sri Lankan society. The idea of Sri Lankan temples in the diaspora acting as cultural and social centres would thus seem to accord with Dharmapala's cultural nationalism. However, as noted in chapter 4, Dharmapala was a complex figure, arguing within Sri Lanka for the hegemony of Sinhala-Buddhist culture, while promoting a universalised form of Buddhism in the West. The fact that no significant Sinhalese diaspora existed in Dharmapala's time allowed these two aspects of Dharmapala's character to exist without conflict. In this regard it is notable that the Sri Lankan figure of recent times who has most often been compared to Dharmapala in terms of his modernist approach to Buddhism and his support of Sinhalese nationalism – the well-known monk Venerable Gangodawila Soma, who died in 2003 – did not share Dharmapala's interest in spreading Buddhism to non-Sri Lankans. Soma travelled widely, living for some years in Australia and coming to the UK on at least one occasion. However, he travelled primarily to speak to Sinhalese Buddhists in the diaspora, to whom he delivered a message rooted in the idea of preserving local Sinhalese forms of religion and identity (Berkwitz 2008:102).

LBV celebrates Rahula Dhamma Day, in which children of the Sunday school put on a show involving plays about Buddhist topics, along with performances of Sri Lankan dance.

While the Sunday school is an example of the LBV acting as a place of Sri Lankan culture, it is also a time when the Vihara acts as a social place for the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in the UK. While their children study, many of the parents of the Sunday school's pupils remain at the Vihara, taking the opportunity to socialise with Sri Lankan friends, or read the Sri Lankan newspapers that are available for free in the foyer of the Vihara. The Sunday school is not the only time when the Vihara acts as a social place for the Sri Lankan community. Often the Vihara holds events organised by Sri Lankan organisations in the UK, such as old boys' or old girls' associations of notable schools in Sri Lanka. For example, in October 2007 an all-night *pirit*-chanting ceremony was held at the LBV by the association of ex-pupils of Ananda College, a well-known Buddhist school in Sri Lanka, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the association. Such events clearly have a strong religious dimension. However, they are also social occasions for members of such organisations to come together. Even during some of the more specifically religious events held at the LBV, these events often have a strong social dimension. During major *pōya* day celebrations Vihara runs a programme of religious activities – talks, discussions, meditation periods, and rituals – in the meditation hall. However, not everyone who comes to these events will attend all of these activities. Outside the meditation hall, especially during the most popular festivals, the Vihara will be a place of socialising and discussion. People are free to attend as much or as little of the religious programme as they want to. Some will attend all of the religious programmes. Others may attend none, and instead spend the day in the main hall of the Vihara catching up with friends. Generally there is no conflict between the social and religious aspects of such events. However, once or twice during the course of my research there were complaints that the noise of those socialising outside the meditation hall was disrupting the religious activities within the meditation hall. On one occasion, one of the resident monks had to come into the main hall and ask the people gathered there in a forcible manner to keep the noise down.

For some the fact that Sri Lankan temples act as cultural and social centres for the Sri Lankan community detracts from their ability to act as places of Buddhist practice. Arguments to this effect were made to me frequently during my research. It was argued that Sri Lankan temples are primarily social and cultural places *rather than* religious places;

that people come to Sri Lankan temples to gossip rather than to practise Buddhism; and that Sri Lankan temples, because they are social places as well as religious places, lack the calm, peaceful atmosphere of institutions such as the Forest Sangha's Amaravati monastery.

Such arguments were often made by individuals favouring a meditation-centred approach to Buddhism. For example, during my interview Sisara, a dedicated meditator and member of the Nissarana group (discussed in chapter 9), he is somewhat dismissive of Sri Lankan temples in the UK, referring to them as places 'where people get together and gossip'. Similarly, during a conversation with Oshan, a member of the Sathdhamma group – another strongly nibbanic-oriented group discussed in chapter 9 – he likened Sri Lankan temples in the UK to pubs. He insisted that he did not intend this as an insult, but merely as a way of highlighting the fact that such places are primarily social environments rather than serious places for the practice of Buddhism.⁵⁴

Another example of such opinions came during a visit that I made to Amaravati with the Nissarana group.⁵⁵ During the visit I met Viran, a Sri Lankan man who was at that time staying at Amaravati for a short period. Viran has lived in the UK for 30 years. In the past he regularly attended Sri Lankan temples, including the LBV, but now he prefers to attend only Amaravati. In part this is because he has a strong interest in meditation. However, he also prefers not to attend Sri Lankan temples because he would have to spend a lot of time in social 'chit-chat' at such temples, rather than dedicating his time to Buddhist practice. Similar views were expressed by Hiranya, who I met at a talk given at the LBV by a well-known Sri Lankan monk Venerable Dhammavihari.⁵⁶ Hiranya had come to the temple specifically to see this talk, which emphasised meditative Buddhism and criticised those who take a strong interest in ritualised merit-making. This reflected Hiranya's general approach to Buddhism. Hiranya told me that he usually did not come to Sri Lankan temples, and that he preferred instead to attend monasteries such as Amaravati. Again his reasons for this were that he saw Sri Lankan temples as primarily social places rather than places dedicated to Buddhist practice.

A further example comes from my second-generation interviewee Laksiri. Laksiri had little interest in Buddhism as a child, but interest grew during his time at university

⁵⁴ Fieldwork notes 24/10/2007

⁵⁵ Fieldwork notes 09/08/2006.

⁵⁶ Fieldwork notes 09/09/2006.

when he attended a talk by a Canadian convert monk. Laksiri began to practice meditation, initially on his own. Later he joined meditation classes given by the Samatha Trust, a convert Buddhist organisation which has its roots in the Thai tradition. As time went on his interest in meditation grew, and he began to attend meditation retreats at convert Buddhist institutions such as Amaravati and Gaia House (a retreat centre located in Devon). Despite his current strong interest in Buddhism, Laksiri now rarely attends the LBV or any other Sri Lankan temple. He notes that for a period of a year he lived only 10 minutes walk from the LBV but attended the Vihara only twice. Laksiri's reasons for not attending the LBV are multiple. As someone with a very strong interest in meditation-centred Buddhism Laksiri prefers to practice at institutions such as Amaravati which focus more emphatically on such aspects of Buddhism. Laksiri is also critical of the way in which Buddhism is taught at the LBV, arguing that the Vihara does not do enough to make Buddhism relevant and accessible to second-generation Buddhists such as himself. However, Laksiri's disinterest in the LBV is also linked to the idea that it is more of a social place than a place of Buddhist practice. When I ask directly what he thinks of Sri Lankan temples, he states that these institutions 'serve their purpose as social centres'. When I ask whether he would be interested in attending the LBV on occasions such as Wesak, he answers:

If it was Wesak I'd rather actually practise than go and jostle around in the temple.

Laksiri's reply here partially reflects his idea of what authentic Buddhist practice is – he would rather attend a meditation retreat than the kind of Wesak programme offered by the LBV – but it also reflects a sense that the busy, social environment of the LBV on Wesak is not the ideal place in which to practise Buddhism.

All of the examples considered above concern individuals who take a strongly nibbanic approach to Buddhism. However, I also found similar views expressed by some who did not take a strong interest in meditation. One of my interviewees was Bhakti, a second-generation Sri Lankan who regularly attends Buddhist temples with her parents. Unlike Laksiri, Bhakti has not developed a strong interest in meditative Buddhism. Her involvement with Buddhism primarily involves offering *dāna* and participating in rituals with her family. Bhakti's parents attend both Amaravati and a Sri Lankan temple located in Letchworth. Bhakti tells me that she prefers to visit Amaravati rather than the Letchworth

temple, since she feels that the Letchworth temple is more of a social place than a 'holy place':

When I go to Amaravati I feel like I'm going to a temple. When I go to Letchworth I don't...to me it doesn't...because it's not peaceful. It's crowded, it's noisy, and it's more of a social gathering. And I don't come out feeling peaceful. It doesn't feel like a holy place to me, whereas Amaravati does.

While Bhakti compares the Letchworth temple with Amaravati, another of my second-generation interviewees, Amal, makes a similar comparison between Sri Lankan temples in the UK and those in Sri Lanka itself. Amal notes that he enjoys attending temples when he visits Sri Lanka because of their peaceful atmosphere. He argues that temples in the UK do not share this atmosphere because of the degree to which they act as social centres. Thus he states:

I would much rather go to temples in Sri Lanka because I find them a lot more serene [...] when it comes to temples in Britain...I just find it so overcrowded...Rather than a religious thing, it's a community thing.

As these examples illustrate, the idea that the social and cultural roles played by Sri Lankan temples in the UK to some extent detracts from their status as places of authentic Buddhist religiosity is commonly expressed. However, we need to be cautious here. The idea that Sri Lankan temples are primarily social and cultural centres for the diaspora community and only secondarily places of Buddhist teaching and practice is certainly not shared by all Sri Lankans in the UK. The situation is particularly complex at the LBV. As my discussion at the beginning of this section illustrates, the LBV's status as a social and cultural centre for Sri Lankan Buddhists is somewhat ambiguous. Reflecting this ambiguity, while some Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK view the LBV as primarily a social place for the Sri Lankan community, others view it quite differently, as a place of serious and dedicated Buddhist teaching and practice. This idea is expressed particularly in my interviews with Anika, a regular patron of the Vihara, and with her two British-born children, Chaturi and Padmini. All three describe the LBV as a place dedicated to the communicating of what Anika refers to as the 'real teachings' of Buddhism. In part what is being celebrated here is what Anika, Chaturi and Padmini see as the LBV's strong focus on Buddhist philosophy and meditation rather than only on ritual. However, the family also describe the LBV as a place of serious Buddhist practice, rather than a place primarily dedicated to the social and cultural life of

the Sri Lankan community. They contrast the Vihara in this regard with the Thames Buddhist Vihara, a temple located in South London which the family attended until coming to the LBV around 10 years ago. The family's decision to move temples was motivated by a number of factors, but one of these was the sense that the LBV was less of a social and cultural centre than the Thames Vihara and more of a purely Buddhist place. Thus Padmini says of the Thames temple:

It seemed more like a social gathering...that's how Mum and Dad felt...rather than being a place to practise religion.

By contrast, Padmini describes the LBV as a place where 'the religion is the centre'. Another of my interviewees, Harshini, similarly describes the LBV as a place of serious Buddhist practice. Harshini often observes *sil* at the LBV during major *pōya* day celebrations. She argues that in comparison with temples in Sri Lanka, the observance of *sil* at the LBV is much less an opportunity for socialising and gossip, and much more a time of dedicated Buddhist practice:

I think back home it's not very...I mean, people gossip during *sil* and people talk about their own problems and people can be laughing and joking, but in the temple here people are more serious...[people] tend to be more serious

Harshini views this seriousness of practice found at the LBV as connected to the Vihara's commitment to being first and foremost a Buddhist place rather than a cultural centre.

Thus the views that we find about the LBV reflect its somewhat ambiguous status. For some the temple is primarily a social and cultural centre for the Sri Lankan community, rather than a place of serious Buddhist practice. For others, the LBV is a place primarily devoted to the teaching and practice of Buddhism, a place where 'the religion is the centre'.

As a last point in this section it should be noted that not all Sri Lankans find the fact that temples act as social and cultural centres problematic. I was surprised by the frequency with which those that I spoke with expressed a negative view of the social role of temples, since I had expected at the outset of my research that in a diaspora community the social spaces provided by temples would be much valued. There were, however, voices among my informants who did speak more enthusiastically of the social roles played by temples. For example, during my interview with Arjuna, who initially attended the LBV after arriving in the UK in the 1970s but now attends the Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre in

East London, he highlights that for him coming to the temple is not only a matter of religion. Thus when I ask him about why he comes to the temple, he initially speaks about coming to participate in the weekly *pūjā*, but then adds:

And for the community to get together as well, isn't it? I was thinking it's not just only religion. [The temple is also for] the people to get together.

Similarly, while my interviewee Bhakti (discussed above) prefers the calm, peaceful atmosphere of Amaravati to the busy, social atmosphere often found in Sri Lankan temples, another of my second-generation interviewees, Malini, expresses a completely contrasting view. Malini, who attends the LBV, enjoys what she sees as the warm, welcoming, social atmosphere of this temple and finds Amaravati lacking in this respect. Thus she says of Amaravati:

I find it very impersonal and quite cold, whereas when I go to the *pansala*⁵⁷ I feel very warm and homely and loved and protected.

There were also those among my informants who emphasised the importance of temples playing the role of cultural centres, enabling the preservation of Sri Lankan culture in the UK and the passing on of this culture to the second generation. For example, my interviewees Ruwan and Asoka both stated that their principal reason for attending the LBV was to take their children to Sunday school so that they were familiar with Sinhalese Buddhist culture. In chapter 8 I will explore in greater detail the range of views found at the LBV about the degree to which the temple should be a cultural centre for Sri Lankans or a purely religious centre appealing to those from all backgrounds.

Finally, it should be noted that even among those who view Sri Lankan temples in the UK as cultural and social centres *rather than* authentic places of religious practice, this assessment is not necessarily meant in a wholly negative sense. As noted above, during my conversation with Oshan he characterises Sri Lankan temples as places for the Sri Lankan community to socialise rather than as places of true Buddhist practice. However, he also stresses that such social and cultural centres are necessary for the diaspora community.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Pansala* is the Sinhala term for a Buddhist temple.

⁵⁸ Fieldwork notes 24/10/2007.

Chapter 6

The LBV as a Place of Ritual

Rituals of merit-making, blessing and protection are an important part of the LBV's activities, despite the fact that one can find a tendency to de-emphasise the importance of rituals in certain discourses expressed at the Vihara. Forms of ritual practice found at the LBV include:

- **Buddha *pūjā*.** A Buddha *pūjā* is held at the LBV 6pm every Sunday. A *pūjā* consists of the offering of a number of items – including flowers, incense, candles, and liquids – to the shrine to the Buddha in the LBV's meditation hall, accompanied by the chanting of certain Pali verses, led by the resident monks.¹ Sunday *pūjās* at the LBV are accompanied by a sermon, a period of meditation and the tying of *pirit* thread (see below).

Monks at the LBV also perform *pūjās* daily, in the morning and evening. These are shorter than Sunday *pūjās*, and do not include the sermon or the period of meditation. Laypeople may attend these daily *pūjās*, but they are not public ceremonies in the way that the Sunday *pūjā* is.

- ***Pirit* chanting.** The term *pirit* refers to certain Pali texts, the chanting of which is said to bring blessings and protection.² Monks at the LBV chant *pirit* in many situations. *Pirit* chanting is part of the Sunday *pūjā* and takes place during many *pōya* day programmes. *Pirit* is also chanted at the beginning of the Wednesday evening meditation class. Sometimes the chanting of *pirit* is accompanied by the distribution of thread and water over which monks have chanted. The thread is tied around the wrist. The water is poured into the hands of participants, who then drink some and place the remainder on the top of their heads.
- ***Dāna*.** The offering of food to monks – referred to as *dāna* – is a central aspect of most Theravada temples.³ Monks should not cook for themselves, relying instead on food offered by laypeople. At the LBV devotees generally offer food to the monks

¹ For a discussion of Buddha *pūjā* in the Sri Lankan tradition see Gombrich (1971:135-149).

² For a discussion of the chanting of *pirit* in the Sri Lankan tradition see Gombrich (1971:236-243). *Pirit* is the Sinhala term. In Pali this chanting is referred to as *paritta*.

³ For discussions of *dāna* in the Sri Lankan tradition see Gombrich (1971:268-269,323-324) and Samuels (2008).

every day, once in the morning and once at lunchtime (monks do not eat after noon). Sometimes monks will travel to the house of a donor to eat.

The offering of *dāna* is an important merit-making practice. It is usually accompanied by other ritual practices. One of the most important of these is the ‘transference of merit’, in which those giving the *dāna* express the wish that the kammic merit of the act may be of benefit to another (usually a deceased family member).⁴ The transference of merit is accompanied by chanting from monks and sometimes by a ritual in which the donors pour water into a cup until it overflows. The transference of merit is not only performed during *dāna* ceremonies. Sometimes a *pūjā* is sponsored by a family in memory of a particular relative, and here the transference of merit will also take place.

- **Special rituals.** Throughout the year a number of special ritual events take place at the LBV. Perhaps the most important of these is Kaṭhina.⁵ This takes place in October or November, following the 3 month period known as *vassa*, during which there are restrictions on the length of time that monks may leave their temple (Gombrich 1971:326). During Kaṭhina a special monastic robe is offered to the monks of a temple. Offerings of robes are often made in temples, but the Kaṭhina robe is regarded as a special offering that can only take place once a year. The offering of a Kaṭhina robe is often said to bring a particularly large amount of kammic merit (Spiro 1971:226; Swearer 1995:25).

Another annual ritual event at the LBV is the *pirit*-chanting ceremony that takes place every September to commemorate Founder’s Day, celebrated on the birthday of Anagarika Dharmapala. Monks chant *pirit* from 7.30pm until midnight. On the following day a *dāna* is offered to the participating monks and merit is transferred to Dharmapala, and to all of those who have been involved in the development of the Vihara throughout its history.

Another ritual event that takes place on occasion at the LBV is the *Bodhi pūjā*. A *Bodhi pūjā* is a special form of *pūjā* which is characterised by its use of Sinhala verses in addition to Pali verses (which are traditionally used in *pūjās*) and by the melodic and musical style in which its verses are chanted (Gombrich 1981). *Bodhi pūjās* have become very popular in Sri Lanka since the mid-1970s when they

⁴ For a discussion of the transference of merit see Gombrich (1971:265-281).

⁵ For a discussion of the significance of Kaṭhina in the Theravada tradition see Swearer (1995:22-25)

were popularised by the famous monk Venerable Panadure Ariyadhamma (Seneviratne and Wickmermatne 1980:739; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:284-285). *Bodhi pūjās* took place at the LBV during my fieldwork prior to the Founder's Day *pirit*-chanting ceremony in September 2007, and during the *Kāṭhina* ceremony of November 2007.

Other special forms of ritual occur at the Vihara as one-off events. For example, ceremonies were held in commemoration of both the tsunami of 2004 and the terrorist attacks on London in July 2005.

- So far I have focused in the main on public rituals at the LBV. There are also forms of ritual at the LBV that are not public events. Individuals or families often come to the LBV to have monks chant *pirit* or to make an offering to the Buddha image. Very often these private rituals are performed to commemorate or bring blessings to a particular event, such as a birthday, a child's upcoming exams, a trip abroad, or the purchase of a new house or car.
- Monks from the LBV often travel outside the Vihara to participate in rituals. These include *dāna* ceremonies in peoples' homes (mentioned above), blessing ceremonies for new houses, funeral ceremonies, and ceremonies at other Sri Lankan temples in the UK.

The rituals that take place at the LBV are often accompanied by discourses which refer to concepts such as merit, blessings and protection. When the monk that leads the Wednesday evening meditation class performs a chanting of the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta* – a *pirit* text which describes the benefits of cultivating *mettā* or 'loving kindness' – at the beginning of the class, he states that he is doing so to bring blessings to those present. When the transference of merit is performed at the Vihara – for example, during the Navam *pōya* day celebrations of 2007, when merit was transferred to the recently deceased head monk, Venerable Vajiragnana⁶ – the monk leading the ritual will explain how this ritual can, in kammic terms, benefit the individual to whom it is dedicated. More generally, at the end of every Sunday *pūjā* and at the end of every *pōya* day celebration one of the Vihara's monks states that through their actions the participants in these events have made merit. He will then express the wish that through this merit the participants will have a long, peaceful,

⁶ Fieldwork notes 03/02/2007.

trouble-free and successful life. This statement of conclusion at the end of a meritorious act – which can be seen in itself as a ritual of blessing or of the conferring of merit upon individuals – shows clearly how ritual acts at the LBV are associated with discourses of kammatic merit accumulation and apotropaic protection.⁷ This is important because Buddhist rituals are open to multiple interpretations, and there are Buddhist institutions which incorporate such rituals without stressing ideas of merit-making and protection. This is evident in institutions of the Forest Sangha. While we can find somewhat less emphasis on ritual activities in such institutions when compared with the LBV, such institutions nevertheless incorporate many rituals: offerings to Buddha images; the giving of *dāna* to monks and nuns; the performance of blessings for births, new houses and marriages, funeral observances; and special ritual events such as Kaṭhina (Sucitta and Candasiri 2001). However, at these institutions such rituals are generally not discussed in terms of merit-making and protection. Instead they tend to be looked at more in psychological terms, as ways of uplifting the mind or marking a certain event psychologically (see Sucitta and Candasiri 2001).⁸ This tendency to retain ritual elements of Buddhism but to interpret ritual in purely psychological terms can also be found in other institutions popular among convert Buddhists. For example, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), a convert Buddhist organisation founded in the UK which draws on elements of Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, has a strong ritual dimension to its teachings, but generally makes no reference to merit-making or apotropaic protection in its discussions of rituals. On its website the FWBO describes rituals as ‘a way of directly engaging the emotions’.⁹

The LBV is thus both a place of ritual, and a place in which we can find discourses of apotropaic blessing and kammatic merit-accumulation. There is not necessarily a contradiction here with the discourses noted in chapter 5 which play down the importance of ritual. The discourses examined in chapter 5 do not condemn ritual practices entirely. They merely de-emphasise such practices and emphasise instead more ‘nibbanic’ aspects of Buddhism.

The space given to ritual at the Vihara represents another way in which the LBV can be distinguished from more meditation-centred groups and institutions. Strongly

⁷ This practice is discussed by Gombrich (1971:217-226).

⁸ For an exemplification of how rituals are discussed in the Forest Sangha see Sucitto and Candrasiri (2001).

⁹ www.fwbo.org/buddhism/ritual_and_devotion.html (20/06/2010).

meditation-oriented forms of Theravada Buddhism are not always dismissive of ritual. I mentioned above that ritual practices have a place in institutions of the Forest Sangha. Among meditation-oriented monks in Sri Lanka we can also find some engagement in ritual activities (Carrithers 1983:261-262). However, in general we find that monks in more meditation-centred organisations tend to give less prominence to rituals than we find at the LBV. For such monks meditation and the teaching of meditation is their central practice, and any involvement in ritual practices is strictly secondary.¹⁰ The attitude found here is well communicated by Venerable Seelagawesi, a meditation-oriented monk who regularly travels to the UK from Sri Lanka who I will discuss in chapter 9. Seelagawesi expresses an unwillingness to spend his time travelling to *dāna* ceremonies so that laypeople can dedicate merit to their deceased relatives, stating in our interview that, ‘I have not come [to the monkhood] to eat for dead people, I have come to practise the *Dhamma*’. It is not the case that Seelagawesi never participates in rituals or attends *dāna* ceremonies. Rather his general attitude is that his first concern as a monk is with the practice of the *Dhamma* (which equates with nibbanic-oriented Buddhism) rather than with participating in rituals of merit-making. At the LBV, on the other hand, participating in rituals for lay supporters and travelling to *dāna* ceremonies is central to the duties of resident monks.

So far I have shown that many rituals take place at the Vihara, and that these rituals are often accompanied by discourses of blessings and merit. These facts, though significant, tell us too little. To gain a fuller understanding of the LBV as a place of ritual we need to explore a number of further issues.

Firstly, it is important to consider not only the rituals that do take place at the LBV, but also those that do not. The LBV is not simply a place of ritual, but a place in which certain forms of ritual are embraced and others are excluded. The most notable exclusion is that of any form of rituals related to the gods of the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon. Many Sri Lankan Buddhists, both in Sri Lanka and in the diaspora, engage in rituals which call upon the help of gods (*devas*) for protection and blessings.¹¹ In Sri Lanka many Buddhist temples contain shrines (*dēvālēs*) at which offerings to the gods can be made (Gombrich 1971:225). The temple examined in chapter 8 – the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist

¹⁰ For a discussion of these issues in relation to forest-dwelling, meditation-oriented monks in Sri Lanka see Carrithers (1983:261). Attitudes towards partaking in ritual found among Western convert monks in the Thai forest tradition are discussed by Schedneck (2008).

¹¹ For a discussion of the worship of gods among Sri Lankan Buddhists see Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:17-22,30-36).

Centre in Kingsbury – contains such a shrine. At the LBV, however, there is no *dēvālē*. During my interviews with Venerable Seelawimala and Venerable Bandula, while they were not critical of those that visit *dēvālēs*, they argued that worshipping at a *dēvālē* is not in line with the true teachings of Buddhism, and that a Buddhist should take refuge in the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha* rather than in the gods. They characterised *dēvālē* worship as an aspect of Hinduism rather than of Buddhism. They thus argued that a *dēvālē* would be inappropriate in a temple such as the LBV which is dedicated to the propagation of ‘pure’ Buddhism. As discussed in chapter 3, the view that ‘pure’ Buddhism involves a rejection of the rituals of the *dēvālē* is often found within modernist forms of Sri Lankan Buddhism. Significantly, it was a view held by Anagarika Dharmapala, the LBV’s founder (Gombrich 1988:197). A rejection of the rituals of the *dēvālē* does not necessarily mean a rejection of the existence of divine beings. Theravada cosmology affirms the existence of *devas* (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:17-19) and all of the Sri Lankan monks with whom I discussed the issue during my research upheld this view. One can even find activities at the LBV in which *devas* are mentioned. For example, the Sunday *pūjā* at the LBV includes the chanting of a Pali verse containing a line that can be translated as: ‘May all *devas* protect you’.¹² The argument is not about the existence of gods, but about the legitimacy of worshipping these gods at a *dēvālē* and asking them for assistance.

It is not only rituals relating to divine beings that are notable by their absence at the LBV. There are also forms of Buddhist ritual which are given less emphasis at the LBV than at certain other Sri Lankan institutions. I noted at the beginning of the chapter that a special form of *pūjā* known as a *Bodhi pūjā* is occasionally performed at the LBV. *Bodhi pūjā* is a longer and more elaborate ritual than a regular Buddha *pūjā* (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:385). However, the *Bodhi pūjās* that I witnessed at the LBV lasted only around thirty minutes. Some *Bodhi pūjās* – and other similarly devotional forms of *pūjā* – performed at other Sri Lankan institutions are significantly longer and more elaborate than those found at the LBV. Again the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre in Kingsbury provides a point of contrast here. At this temple forms of *pūjā* are performed which did not occur at the LBV during my fieldwork. For example, in October 2007 the temple in Kingsbury held an *aṭavisi Buddha pūjā*¹³ (a *pūjā* dedicated to the 28 Buddhas of

¹² See appendix 7, which gives details of the verses chanted during *pūjās* at the LBV.

¹³ This ritual is named in a combination of Sinhala and Pali, reflecting the fact that both languages are employed in the ritual.

the past), conducted by Venerable Uduwe Dhammaloka, a monk who is well-known in Sri Lanka for his ritual performances. An *aṭavisi Buddha pūjā* is similar in style to a *Bodhi pūjā* – in fact sometimes it is referred to as a *Bodhi pūjā*¹⁴ – but this ritual was much longer than the *Bodhi pūjās* that I witnessed in LBV. It lasted for around an hour and a half and it was the only event at the temple taking place on that evening (whereas at the LBV *Bodhi pūjās* always took place as part of a series of different activities). In addition to the length of this ritual, it was notable for the fact that it involved the use of 28 small Buddha statues (representing the 28 Buddhas of the past), each of which was presented with identical offerings. This further served to create a sense of high ritual within the *pūjā* which tended to be less evident in rituals at the LBV.

It should also be noted that even the performance of relatively short *Bodhi pūjās* seems to be a new development at the LBV. During a conversation with Nalin, a layman involved in the organisation of the Vihara, he indicated to me that in the past such *pūjās* had not taken place.¹⁵ He added that the presence of such rituals today was a response to demands from certain sections of the Sri Lankan laity. The implication here is that *Bodhi pūjā* is not seen as something quite in line with the ‘pure’ Buddhism that the LBV regards as its proper focus, but as an element of ‘popular Buddhism’ introduced as a concession to those within the Sri Lankan community to whom such rituals are important.

That *Bodhi pūjās* and other forms of related ritual should be regarded as not being part of ‘pure’ Buddhism is unsurprising. Among Sri Lankans taking a modernist, deritualised view of Buddhism we can find a tendency to see the *Bodhi pūjā* (and related rituals) as problematic in a way that rituals such as *pirit* chanting and Buddha *pūjā* are not. Thus the well-known Sri Lankan scholar-monk Venerable Walpola Rahula included the ‘new-fangled Bodhi-puja’ in a list of ‘forms of pollution to pure Theravada teaching’ (Rahula 1991).¹⁶ In contrast Rahula bemoaned the fact that ‘these days one hardly hears of Buddha-puja’. Why are rituals such as *Bodhi pūjā* regarded as problematic in this way? In part it is their non-traditional nature (the use of Sinhala in the liturgy of these rituals, the

¹⁴ See Gombrich (1981:47-54).

¹⁵ Fieldwork notes 13/11/2007.

¹⁶ My references to this article by Rahula are taken from Perry (1997). Rahula’s article was published in the Colombo Daily News. I do not have access to archives of this publication in the UK.

melodic style of chanting that is used), but other factors are perhaps more important.¹⁷ The elaborate nature of these rituals, and the more devotional tone that they take when compared to Buddha *pūjās*, combined with the fact that they are thought by many Sri Lankans to be particularly strong sources of this-worldly blessings, gives these rituals a sense of emphasising the magical and the miraculous in a stronger way than one finds in Buddha *pūjās* or *pirit* ceremonies. Both Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:394) and Seneviratne and Wickremaratne (1980:736,741) note that *Bodhi pūjās* are regarded as bringing more powerful – and more specific – this-worldly, ‘magical’ benefits than standard Buddhist rituals such as Buddha *pūjā* and the chanting of *pirit*. These scholars suggest that the *Bodhi pūjā* is in this respect somewhat similar to *dēvālē* worship and other forms of Sri Lankan spirit religion. This is a complex issue. Buddha *pūjās* and *pirit* ceremonies – as we have seen – both involve discourses of blessings and merit generation. However, such rituals can be more easily encompassed into a modernist, deritualised understanding of Buddhism – as being simply ways of calming the mind or cultivating certain virtues – than rituals such as *Bodhi pūjā*. Two of my interviews at the LBV reflect the criticisms of *Bodhi pūjā* and related forms of ritual discussed here. My interviewee Damith criticises the idea that such rituals bring particularly powerful benefits, and suggests that these practices are the result of Mahayana influence on Theravada Buddhism. My interviewee Udara states that for him the practice of *Bodhi pūjā* ‘doesn’t seem to have much meaning’ and associates such rituals with an approach to Buddhism which emphasises ‘getting something’ (i.e. an apotropaic benefit) as the goal of one’s practice. While both Damith and Udara take a meditation-centred approach to Buddhism, neither dismisses all forms of Buddhist ritual. Damith affirms the efficacy of rituals such as *dāna* and *pirit* (see chapter 5), and expresses no criticism of Buddha *pūjā*. Udara also affirms the efficacy of *dāna* and *pirit*, and notes that he strongly enjoys attending *pirit*-chanting ceremonies. It is significant, then, that these two individuals single out *Bodhi pūjā* for criticism.

Another criticism that is made of *Bodhi pūjā* concerns the relationship between the ritual and the *bō* tree. The *Bodhi pūjā* is so named because it involves verses of veneration towards the *bō* tree (the tree under which the Buddha was enlightened) (Gombrich and

¹⁷ The innovative nature of the *Bodhi pūjā* is noted by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:385-387) and Deegalle (2006b:153). However, Gombrich and Obeyesekere also note links between the *Bodhi pūjā* and older forms of worship (1988:384)

Obeyesekere 1988:384). Some who perform the *Bodhi pūjā* do so in the presence of a *bō* tree and make offerings to the tree as part of the *pūjā* (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:392). This has led critics to see the *Bodhi pūjā* as a ritual in which the *bō* tree is called on for miraculous help, something they see as contrary to the teachings of Buddhism (Perry 1997:341). Such criticisms are voiced by Damith. He argues that paying respect to the *bō* tree is not problematic because the Buddha allowed those who came to see him, when he was away from his residence, to offer their gifts to the *bō* tree. However, he criticises those who view the *bō* tree as a powerful source of benefits and protection. I conducted an interview with Venerable Rahula of the Letchworth Buddhist Temple, a Sri Lankan monk well-known for his performance of *Bodhi pūjā*. While he emphasises the way in which *Bodhi pūjā* helps one to calm and concentrate the mind, he also affirms that this ritual can bring apotropaic benefits. In addition, while he rejects the idea that the *bō* tree is being worshipped in *Bodhi pūjā*, he affirms that some positive apotropaic power comes from the tree.¹⁸

The absence of more elaborate forms of *Bodhi pūjā*-style rituals at the LBV further highlights the fact that the LBV cannot be characterised simplistically as a place of ritual. Clearly the LBV is not a place in which rituals of merit-making and blessing are rejected. However, certain Buddhist rituals which are associated strongly with ideas of this-worldly benefits have an ambivalent place (or no place at all) at the LBV.

A last issue that I want to look at regarding the LBV's rejection of certain aspects of ritual concerns a discussion that took place at the Vihara during the LBV's Dhammacakka Day celebrations in July 2007.¹⁹ During a discussion period in which a panel of monks and learned laypeople took questions from the congregation, a layman in the audience asked a question about the traditional practice of giving a *dāna* seven days after a death in order to transfer merit to the deceased.²⁰ A discussion took place about the legitimacy of this practice and the reasons for carrying it out. Various opinions were voiced from the audience and the panel. The dominant voices were a layman on the panel, Mr Perera, and one of the LBV's resident monks. Mr Perera argued that many rituals relating to death in the Sri Lankan tradition have no basis in Buddhist teachings. Here he was referring to various

¹⁸ Both the LBV and the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre contain small *bō* trees. It should be noted, however, that *Bodhi pūjās* do not necessarily require the presence of a *bō* tree.

¹⁹ Fieldwork notes 29/07/2007.

²⁰ For a discussion of this practice in the Sri Lankan context see Gombrich (1971:231-243). The monks that Gombrich interviewed gave interpretations of this practice similar to those voiced at the LBV by Mr Perera.

rituals that have traditionally taken place in order to prevent the ‘spirit’ of the deceased from finding its way back to its home (and thus disrupting the lives of the living). As he explained, such rituals include not carrying the body from the house head-first, so that the spirit will not be able to find its way back. Such practices, Mr Perera argued, are simply traditions or superstitions and have no basis in Buddhism. Similarly, he argued, there is no particular reason why one should give a *dāna* at seven days after an individual’s death. Again this was seen as merely tradition. On the other hand, both Mr Perera and the monk on the panel argued that the act of giving a *dāna* (at some point) and offering merit to the dead was justified within Buddhism. They supported this with references to the Pali Canon. This support for the transference of merit was then qualified by Mr Perera, who stated that according to the texts only those reborn as a certain kind of *preta* (a particular kind of unhappy rebirth) can receive merit that is offered. Thus giving a *dāna* and offering merit can only be of benefit to some individuals. Still, argued the Mr Perera, merit should be transferred to the deceased because we cannot know where they have been reborn, and because even if it cannot benefit the deceased, offering merit is a positive thing for the living to do (as an act of generosity and a way of remembering the dead).

This discussion is revealing. Certain practices and certain understandings of ritual are rejected as having no basis in the teachings of Buddhism, while others are accepted as legitimate. Significantly, the benchmark of authenticity here is texts. I have noted already a tendency towards textualism at the LBV (chapter 5). The textualism evident here is significant in that it illustrates a factor which distinguishes the LBV both from more ‘traditional’ forms of Sri Lankan Buddhism (wherein rituals rejected by the LBV on textualist grounds may be accepted)²¹ and from trends within convert Buddhism, which emphasise that textual authority need not be accepted on every issue. For many converts, sections from the Pali Canon which advocate the transference of merit may be called into question because of the argument that transferring merit sits uneasily with Buddhist ideas about *kamma*,²² or because many converts do not accept Buddhist ideas about kammic merit. Often the textualism of modernist Buddhism is equated with a rejection of rituals, but within the landscape of Buddhism in the West it represents a middle point between the

²¹ The categories of ‘traditionalist’ and ‘modernist’ Buddhism are discussed in chapter 3.

²² The apparent inconsistencies between Buddhist teachings on *kamma* and the practice of transferring merit are explored by Gombrich (1971: 265-284).

acceptance of that which is not textually prescribed and the rejection of even those aspects of ritual that are found in texts.

The examples above complicate the idea of the LBV as a place of ritual and thus problematise the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model. The model defines diaspora Buddhism as ritualistic, in opposition to the meditation-centred Buddhism of converts. However, what it means for a Buddhist institution to be ‘ritualistic’ is a complex matter. The LBV gives more space to ritual – and to discourses of kammatic merit-making and apotropaic protection accompanying ritual – than, for example, institutions of the Forest Sangha, but the Vihara also excludes some forms of ritual and some understandings of ritual.

We can also increase our understanding of the LBV as a place of ritual by looking more closely at the discourses and activities that surround rituals at the Vihara. Above I noted that rituals at the Vihara are often accompanied by discourses of merit, blessings and protection. However, rituals are also often accompanied by other discourses, and by other activities, which indicate that these practices should be regarded not only as concerned with the kammatic and the apotropaic, but also as connected to nibbanic concerns: character development, meditation, the realisation of Buddhist truths, and so on.

In some instances the connection between rituals and nibbanic aspects of Buddhism is very clear. The chanting of the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta* during the Vihara’s weekly meditation class, when considered in the context of the class as a whole – which includes a period on meditation on *mettā* – must clearly be interpreted not simply as a ritual of apotropaic blessing, but also as a ritual of preparation for meditation, which helps to bring to mind the quality of *mettā*. However, even when rituals occur at the LBV in contexts that are less straightforwardly ‘nibbanic’, it is often still the case that these rituals are accompanied by discourses and other activities which mean that it is not possible to see them in purely kammatic or apotropaic terms. To illustrate this point let us look at two activities at the LBV: the Kathina ceremony and the Sunday *pūjā*.

Kathina is a ceremony that can be particularly associated with merit-making because the offering of a Kathina robe is thought by many to bring a particularly large amount of merit (Spiro 1971:226; Swearer 1995:25). The fact that giving a Kathina robe is regarded as so much more meritorious than other forms of giving suggests that in the Kathina ceremony we are dealing with an act in which the merit obtained is associated more with the act itself than with the state of mind with which it is performed. It is this

disassociation of merit from intention that Spiro sees as the basis of the separation between nibbanic and kammatic Buddhism. However, when we look at Kaṭhina in detail we find that this event is more than simply a manifestation of kammatic Buddhism.

I attended the LBV's annual Kaṭhina ceremony on the two occasions that it was held during my research period, in November 2006 and 2007.²³ The two ceremonies were largely similar, but here I will focus on the 2007 ceremony. Unlike other major celebrations at the LBV, Kaṭhina does not last for a full day. Instead it begins at around 3pm and ends at around 6pm. In 2007 the programme began with brief talks about the significance of Kaṭhina from two of the LBV's resident monks. This was followed by the ceremony itself in which the laity formally offered the Kaṭhina robe to the monks. Having accepted the robe, the monks then conducted a ceremony amongst themselves in which one among them was selected to receive the robe. Following this there was a brief talk in Sinhala by Venerable Mahinda, a visiting monk from the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre. This was followed by a *Bodhi pūjā* which lasted around 30 minutes.²⁴ The ceremony ended with the chanting of *pirit*, another short talk by the Vihara's head monk, and the statement made by monks at the end of every significant event in which they state (in English) that those present have made merit and wish them a happy and peaceful life.

Ideas of merit-making were certainly present in the talks given during the day, and the fact that the Kaṭhina ceremony brings a particularly large amount of merit was mentioned a number of times. However, other ways of looking at Kaṭhina were also stressed. The first talk of the day, delivered by the LBV's head monk, discussed merit but also mentioned more 'nibbanic' concerns. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, Kaṭhina marks the end of the *vassa* period in which monks are restricted in the degree to which they can travel outside the Vihara. *Vassa* is sometimes interpreted as a period of increased religious practice, for monastics and for laity (Kariyawasam 1996:46). The talk stressed this aspect of *vassa*, viewing it as a time when laypeople could dedicate themselves particularly to meditation. The head monk noted that there are many accounts in Theravada texts of laypeople making significant progress on the path to *nibbāna* during *vassa*, and stressed that this shows that while the life of a monk may be the most suited to the attainment of

²³ Fieldwork notes 05/11/2006, 04/11/2007.

²⁴ A *Bodhi pūjā* is not a usual part of the LBV's Kaṭhina celebrations. On this occasion a *Bodhi pūjā* was arranged as a way of celebrating and blessing the appointment of the new head monk of the Vihara. During the 2006 Kaṭhina celebrations at the Vihara there was no *Bodhi pūjā*. Instead there was an additional talk by a visiting Sri Lankan monk, which focused on Buddhist philosophy.

nibbāna, laypeople can also make significant progress on the nibbanic path. Here Kathina is portrayed not only as a time of kammatic merit-accumulation, but also as an event marking the end of a period in which laypeople should dedicate themselves the nibbanic path.

The second talk given during the day, given by Venerable Bandula, while affirming the merit made from gifts given during Kathina, stressed that it is not the size of one's gift that determines the merit one receives but the act of giving itself. Merit, the speaker noted, comes not from something external to oneself, but from the feeling within one's heart when one gives. These ideas are significant. While Bandula did not challenge the idea that Kathina offerings are particularly meritorious, the ideas expressed – by linking merit to one's feelings upon giving – do challenge the general idea that merit generation is linked to particular acts of ritual giving. Here merit-making is seen not as a matter of performing certain acts, but as a matter of one's feelings when giving. Such ideas serve to connect merit-making with nibbanic concerns, since merit becomes seen as something linked with the cultivation of the mind.

Talks that took place during the ceremony also placed emphasis on issues of community. It was emphasised that the *vassa* period is one which brings the lay and monastic communities closer together. The hard work undertaken by monks and laity in order to organise the ceremony was stressed. The final talk of the day, delivered by the head monk, focused on thanking the congregation for their support of the Vihara over the last year, and asking them to continue their support in the future. That issues such as these should be expressed during Kathina is unsurprising, since the ceremony is a display of the support given to monks by the laity. One particularly interesting element of the LBV's Kathina ceremony is the fact that when the robe is offered a member of each national community represented at the LBV – Sri Lankan, British, Bangladeshi, Malaysian, and so on – is invited to partake in the offering. This practice reflects the LBV's self-image as a Buddhist centre for individuals from any background rather than a specifically Sri Lankan temple. It also indicates that the giving of the Kathina robe is regarded not merely as a ritual of merit-making but as a symbolic act of support for the Vihara from the lay community as a whole.

Overall, then, while Kathina at the LBV is accompanied by discourses which emphasise the merit that can be made through participating in this ritual, it is also

accompanied by other discourses: those which emphasise Kaṭhina as the culmination of a period dedicated to the practice of nibbanic Buddhism; those which stress that one's focus in giving during Kaṭhina should be on one's feelings of generosity; and those which celebrate Kaṭhina as an expression of the sense of community at the LBV.

Buddha *pūjā* is not seen as a ritual producing merit on the same scale as Kaṭhina. Nonetheless, this ritual of offering to the Buddha is believed to generate kammic merit for its participants and thus may on first impressions seem to fit straightforwardly into the category of kammatic Buddhism. However, once again when we look in more detail we find that things are more complex than this.

I made detailed notes on Sunday *pūjās* that I attended at the LBV on 6 occasions. The *pūjā* follows a similar structure every week. An A4 sheet detailing this structure and giving the verses chanted in the *pūjā* both in Pali and in English translations, is distributed to those attending the ritual.²⁵ Prior to the *pūjā* items offered to the Buddha are placed on the shrine in front of the Buddha image. The laity sit on the floor facing the shrine, while the resident monks sit on raised seats next to the shrine. The ceremony begins with verses in homage to the Buddha, the taking of the 'three refuges' (wherein the congregation affirms in Pali that they take the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha* as their 'refuge' or source of religious guidance), and the chanting of the five moral precepts of Theravada Buddhism.

Following this Pali verses are chanted which proclaim that offerings of flowers, lights and incense are being made to the Buddha, along with further verses in praise of the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. There is then a short sermon by one of the resident monks. After the sermon the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta* is chanted in English translation by one of the monks, and then in Pali by the whole congregation. There is then a 15 minute period of meditation on *mettā* (loving kindness). This is followed by the chanting of further Pali verses expressing wishes of blessings for all of those present. The *pūjā* concludes with the statement by one of the monks that those present have attained merit and with his wish that through this merit they may be happy and successful. The *pūjā* is sometimes sponsored by an individual or family either in order to mark a certain occasion or in memory of someone who has died. If this is the case the closing statements of the *pūjā* may make special

²⁵ I have included a copy of this sheet in appendix 7.

mention of the individuals concerned or involve a ritual of water pouring in which merit is transferred to the dead.²⁶ After the conclusion of the *pūjā* the participants line up to receive *pirit* thread and *pirit* water from the monks.

As with *Kāthina*, discourses of merit-making are certainly present during the Sunday *pūjā*, most evidently at the end of the ceremony when it is declared that merit has been made. There are also apotropaic elements, in the verses of blessing that are chanted and in the distribution of *pirit* thread and *pirit* water. However, there is more to the *pūjā* than kammatic merit-making and apotropaic protection.

Something that differentiates the *pūjā* at the LBV from similar ceremonies in Sri Lanka is that the congregation is supplied with vernacular (English) translations of the Pali verses that are chanted. In addition, one element of the *pūjā* – the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta* – is chanted in both English and Pali. This use of English reflects the fact that the LBV sees itself primarily as a missionary temple whose purpose is to spread Buddhism among the British community. However, it also has the side effect of making the verses chanted available in a language that the Sri Lankans in the congregation can understand (few Sri Lankan laypeople can understand Pali, and in Sri Lanka Buddha *pūjās* generally do not incorporate chanting in Sinhala). Whether this has a significant impact on how Sri Lankans at the LBV interpret the *pūjā* is hard to gauge, as many Sri Lankans already have a knowledge of the general meaning of the most commonly chanted Pali verses, even if they do not understand the Pali language. Whatever the reason, the fact that many Sri Lankans have an understanding of the meaning of the verses chanted during the *pūjā* is significant because some of these verses express distinctly nibbanic themes. For example, the verses that are chanted in reference to offering flowers to the Buddha contain a line which compares the impermanence of flowers to the impermanence of the body (a comparison which reflects clearly nibbanic concerns) – ‘Even these flowers must fade, so does my body pass to decay’ – and a line expressing an aspiration to attain *nibbāna* – ‘through this merit may there be release’.²⁷ That many at the LBV are aware of and responsive to the nibbanic themes found here is reflected by the fact that a number of my interviewees emphasised *pūjā* as an opportunity to reflect on impermanence (see below).

²⁶ This water-pouring ritual is discussed by Gombrich (1971:269-270).

²⁷ For full translations see appendix 7.

A second element of the Sunday *pūjā* that needs to be considered is the period of meditation. The fact that meditation is part of the *pūjā* shows that this ceremony is concerned not only with the ritualised accumulation of merit, but also with the development of the mind. That the meditation practised during the *pūjā* is one on *mettā* rather than one on mindfulness or a form of *vipassanā* is worth noting. Within Theravada Buddhism the latter forms of meditation are viewed as being more central to the path to *nibbāna* than *mettā* meditation, which is regarded as a way of uplifting the mind and developing the personality but not as a method leading to an understanding of central Buddhist truths such as the impermanence of the self (Gombrich 2005). These issues bring to mind King's notion of a divide between kammic and nibbanic Buddhism. I will come back to this issue below.

Let us turn now to the sermon that takes place during the Sunday *pūjā*. This sermon is of interest generally for our analysis of the LBV because it differs both from meditation-focused, practice-oriented *Dhamma* talks and from more scholarly discourses (both of which are discussed in chapter 5). In addition to the sermons at the *pūjās* that I attended, I also had access to 53 Sunday sermons delivered at the Vihara by the resident monk Venerable Wimalajothi, which have been collected and published (Wimalajothi 2005). The sermons given during the Sunday *pūjā* are not experience-based discussions of meditative practice. Nor are they scholarly expositions of the Buddhism. Rather, they are short talks designed to communicate and illustrate a particular Buddhist teaching, often of a moral nature and always of a kind that is regarded as applicable to everyday life. Very often the sermon takes a particular form. It begins with the recitation of a verse from the *Dhammapada* (an element of the Pali Canon which collects short verses attributed to the Buddha) in Pali and then in English translation. There then follows a story involving the Buddha, usually the story which explains the circumstances in which the Buddha first delivered the verse. The sermon then continues with a discussion and exposition of the particular point made in the verse.

One interesting point regarding the content of these sermons is that they often contain references to rebirth, Buddhist cosmology and the miraculous powers of the Buddha. In one sermon I attended, which concerned anger, it was stated that one who is angry may be reborn as a snake or another poisonous animal.²⁸ The published collection of

²⁸ Fieldwork notes 30/09/2007.

sermons mentioned above includes references to the use of supernatural powers by the Buddha and his disciples (Wimalajothi 2005:1,125,181,203,274); to interactions between the Buddha and *devas* (13,187); and to stories in which beings are reborn in various realms of existence due to their kammic actions (34,255,269). Such examples demonstrate the greater space given to the discussion of topics such as rebirth and the miraculous at the LBV in comparison with convert Buddhist institutions (discussed in chapter 5). The topics of rebirth, cosmology and the Buddha's miracles are, however, not the central issues addressed in these sermons. Instead the sermons focus in the main on how individuals should behave in everyday life. Topics that are covered include the importance of not harming others, truthfulness, working hard, controlling one's mind and keeping good friends, and the problems brought about by materialism, and craving. These sermons seldom discuss ideas relating to merit-making. Instead they focus on the need for the individual to develop his or her character through moral practice and the controlling of the mind. When reference is made in these sermons to the *pūjā* itself (which is seldom) it tends to be viewed as a situation in which generosity is cultivated through giving, rather than as an occasion for merit-making.

One sermon that made particularly interesting points was delivered by Venerable Buddhadasa, an English monk who stayed at the Vihara for a short time in 2007.²⁹ He strongly stressed that Buddhism is primarily about this life rather than the next, and took as the theme for his sermon the preoccupation with external beauty in contemporary society. He argued that Buddhists should be interested instead in cultivating internal beauty through the practice of *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (moral conduct) and *bhāvanā* (meditation). In chapter 3 I noted how Spiro characterises kammatic Buddhism as being concerned with changing one's external position in the universe through merit-accumulation. One aspect of one's external position in the universe that *kamma* can affect is beauty, and one of my interviewees – Indira, a participant in the Nissarana group – told me that some Sri Lankan Buddhists believe that making offerings of flowers to the Buddha can lead one to be reborn as a beautiful person in one's next life. In this talk, however, it was stressed that external beauty and one's next life should not be one's primary concerns, and that one should focus instead on the internal development of one's character.

²⁹ Fieldwork notes 03/06/2007.

The sermons that take place during the LBV's Sunday *pūjā* thus cannot be classified as discourses of purely kammatic Buddhism. One might wonder, however, whether they – and the *pūjā* as a whole – could be seen as an example of King's kammic Buddhism. As discussed in chapter 3, while Spiro makes a division between kammatic acts aimed at making merit and nibbanic acts aimed at the purification of the mind, King's division is between kammic Buddhism, which emphasises the cultivation of virtue and positive mental states but does not lead to enlightenment, and nibbanic Buddhism, which move one towards *nibbāna*. The fact that these sermons focus on moral issues and do not have the level of focus on meditation found in strongly practice-oriented discourses at the LBV could be seen as indicating that these sermons teach the importance of moral action and the cultivation of positive mental states, but do not focus on the realisation of the highest truths of Buddhism and the attainment of *nibbāna*. Such an argument could be linked to my comments earlier regarding the fact that the period of meditation during the *pūjā* is one focusing on *mettā* rather than a form of meditation that is regarded as more directly nibbanic. From this perspective it could be argued that the Sunday *pūjā* is an event that encourages individuals to cultivate positive emotions and act morally in the world, but not one that encourages the meditative detachment and insight into impermanence that is characteristic of nibbanic Buddhism.

Such arguments are worth considering. One sermon that I attended, which took the popular *Vyagghapajja Sutta* (*AN* iv, 281) of the Pali Canon as its subject, did in fact state that the Buddha's teachings consist of a number of different levels – teachings those for this world (encompassing ideas such as working hard, spending wisely and having good friends), teachings for the next world (faith, generosity, good conduct, and wisdom), and teachings for the attainment of *nibbāna*.³⁰ This seems suggestive of a divide between nibbanic Buddhism and a Buddhism more concerned with good conduct in the world.

However, a closer look at the Sunday sermons shows that to view their teachings as kammic rather than nibbanic would be misleading. While these sermons do not focus in great detail on meditation, they are full of references to nibbanic themes, and very often contain recommendations for individuals to take up meditation. Often these sermons are directly nibbanic, communicating a central message than cannot be interpreted as anything other than an exhortation to take up the path to *nibbāna*. For example, in the published

³⁰ Fieldwork notes 07/10/2007.

collection of sermons mentioned above, one is purely dedicated to the topic of the need to eradicate craving in order to eradicate suffering (the central message of the four noble truths, perhaps the most fundamental formulation of the path to *nibbāna*) (Wimalajothi 2005:163-168), while another stresses that attainments on the path to *nibbāna* are preferable to being a king or a divine being (193-198). Another has the self-explanatory title ‘Meditation is a Must’ (273-278). Other sermons focus on themes that might be regarded as less fundamentally nibbanic, but which are connected in the sermon with nibbanic themes. For example, one sermon in the published collection is primarily concerned with the message that one should act harmlessly towards others (65-68). A story in the sermon relates that once a group of youths were beating a snake with sticks. The Buddha saw this and told them that if one harms others one will not find happiness. Reflecting on this, the youths became stream-enterers. The sermon continues with its theme of the need to behave considerately towards others, and ends with the following statement: ‘The mind of a person who acts with consideration and compassion develops wholesome values and attitudes that lead to the path of *nibbana*’ (68). Here the central theme – acting harmlessly – seems to fit King’s description of kammic Buddhism, in that it promotes the development of positive emotional qualities. However, the sermon suggests that acting harmlessly and with compassion is something that leads ultimately to *nibbāna*. These are just a few examples. Overall, of the Sunday sermons that I have heard and read almost all contained some reference to nibbanic themes. Even the sermon mentioned above which differentiated various levels of the Buddhist teaching explicitly mentioned that the nibbanic path was available to those practising today, and stated that the various levels of the Buddha’s teachings were connected rather than completely separate.

All of this does not mean that the Sunday *pūjā* and the sermon it contains can be regarded as ‘nibbanic’ in the same way that one would regard, for example, a meditation class at the LBV. Even with the many references to nibbanic themes found in the Sunday sermons, these sermons do not explore meditation in the same depth or with the same experiential style as one would find in more explicitly nibbanic-oriented Buddhist discourses. Furthermore, Sri Lankans who take a strong interest in nibbanic path do tend to view *pūjā* as a somewhat ‘lesser’ activity than more clearly nibbanic practices, such as meditation (for examples of such attitudes see section 6.1 below). However, as my arguments here demonstrate, the fact that the LBV Sunday *pūjā* cannot be seen – and is not

regarded by those that participate in it – as ‘nibbanic’ to the same degree as certain other practices (particularly meditation) does not indicate that it should be regarded as ‘kammic’ and entirely unconnected with the path to *nibbāna*.

The last element of the Sunday *pūjā* that I want to discuss here concerns the statements made at the end of the *pūjā* concerning the merit that has been made by the participants. As mentioned above, such statements are also made at the end of most major events at the LBV and serve as a confirmation of the merit received. Two aspects of this statement are significant. Firstly, during two of the *pūjās* at which I made detailed notes, the monk making this affirmation stated that the merit that had been made was due to the fact that we had ‘purified’ our minds through the activities that we had undertaken.³¹ Here we find – as we found in the Kathina ceremony – a linking of merit-making to the purification of the mind. This again moves us away from kammatic ideas of mechanistic merit-making, towards an idea of merit going hand-in-hand with developing one’s mind.

The second important aspect of the statement made at the end of the Sunday *pūjā* is that it contains a reference to *nibbāna*. This is in fact the case with all statements of this kind made at the LBV. My description of these statements given above – that a monk expresses the wish that those present should, through the merit that they have accumulated, enjoy a long, peaceful, and successful life – only gives part of the picture. The monk always concludes by wishing that all present will attain ‘the peace and bliss of *nibbāna*’. Activities such as the Sunday *pūjā* are thus connected with the nibbanic not only because they contain elements which express nibbanic themes, but also through this concluding wish. This brings to mind my discussion in chapter 3 of the way in which merit-making and the path to *nibbāna* are often interconnected in Buddhist narratives. The wish made here creates a narrative around the activity that it concludes, to the effect that even if the activity itself is regarded purely in terms of kammatic merit-making, this merit-making could not be regarded as entirely separate from the (eventual) path to *nibbāna*.

Thus, as with the LBV’s Kathina rituals, the Sunday *pūjā* at the Vihara is a ritual event in which a number of different aspects of Buddhism are expressed. It is certainly a ritual of merit-making. However, it is also a place in which merit-making is linked to the purification of the mind, in which morality and the cultivation of *mettā* are stressed, in which it is emphasised that Buddhism is concerned with how one lives in this life and not

³¹ Fieldwork notes 01/10/2007 and 03/06/2007.

only with merit for the next life, and in which we can find many themes that are explicitly ‘nibbanic’ in nature.

As my arguments in chapter 3 demonstrate, Buddhist rituals can rarely be interpreted purely in kammatic or apotropaic terms. Buddhist rituals are multidimensional, and rarely are such rituals entirely divorced from themes of mental purification and the attainment of *nibbāna*. Thus the multidimensionality found in rituals at the LBV is not unique to this temple, and can to a certain extent be found in all Sri Lankan temples (in both Sri Lanka and the UK). However, my fieldwork suggests that at the LBV – reflecting its self-image as a centre of ‘pure’ Buddhism which does not emphasise ritual – we can find a particular emphasis on the ‘nibbanic’ aspects of rituals. While some of the aspects of ritual at the LBV described above – such as the wish made by a monk that those engaging in a ritual activity should attain *nibbāna* – are found throughout Sri Lankan Buddhism (see Gombrich 1971:217), others – such as the emphasis on *Kaṭhina* being the culmination of a period of nibbanic practice or the large number of references to nibbanic themes found in the sermons given during the Sunday *pūjā* – are reflective of the particular religious emphasis found at the LBV.

6.1 Understandings of ritual among Sri Lankans at the LBV

In order to understand the LBV as a place of ritual one needs to look not only at the forms of ritual found in the Vihara, but also at the way in which these rituals are understood by the Vihara’s patrons. The fact that rituals are spoken about in certain ways at the LBV does not necessarily mean that those practising at the Vihara will share these understandings of ritual. It would be possible (though perhaps unlikely) for the majority of the laity at the LBV to ignore the nibbanic elements of ritual and see ritual in purely kammatic and apotropaic terms.³² This, however, was not what I found during my research. Rather, I found considerable diversity in how individuals looked at ritual. In this section I will explore this diversity. The majority of the section will concentrate on views of Buddha *pūjā*. Before this I will look briefly at my experiences during the *Kaṭhina* ceremony of 2006.

As I always did at such events, I spent much of my time during the 2006 *Kaṭhina* celebrations speaking with those present about the significance of the event. Some of those

³² Such a situation would to some degree correspond with Gombrich’s cognitive/affective dichotomy (see chapter 3).

that I spoke with were regulars at the LBV who I knew well, while others I was talking to for the first time. Three conversations that I had during the day are particularly illustrative of the diversity of approaches to ritual found at the LBV. The first of these was with Deepika, a woman who I knew fairly well, not primarily from the LBV but from the Nissarana group (discussed in chapter 9). I spoke with Deepika before the Kaṭhina ceremony itself, when most of those present were mingling in the main hall. Our conversation was fairly brief, but the way in which Deepika spoke about Kaṭhina was interesting because of the emphasis that she put on merit. Most notably, Deepika stated that she had just been to put a stitch in the Kaṭhina robe because this is said to increase the merit one attains during the ceremony. At the LBV the Kaṭhina robe is placed in the temple for the whole day of the ceremony so that anyone can come to add a stitch in this way, and I heard the idea that putting a stitch in the robe oneself leads to a particularly strong kammic return a number of times during my research. In emphasising this idea Deepika expressed an understanding of Kaṭhina which interprets the ritual primarily in kammatic terms. After speaking with Deepika I had a longer conversation with Sudantha. Sudantha knows the monks at the LBV well and he and his wife come to the Vihara around once every two weeks to donate provisions to the temple. They also attend major *pōya* day celebrations, and on such occasions they are often accompanied by their two children and their grandson. I spoke with Sudantha and his family many times during my research. When we spoke during Kaṭhina Sudantha told me that he was mainly interested in the moral and philosophical dimensions of Buddhism. He emphasised the noble eightfold path – one of the key formulations of the path to *nibbāna* – and, although not a practitioner of meditation himself, he expressed an admiration for meditative Buddhism. A psychiatrist by profession, he expressed a particular interest in psychological aspects of Buddhist teachings. On the other hand, Sudantha expressed a sceptical attitude towards certain supernatural aspects of Buddhism. He stated that he could not entirely accept the truth of rebirth since it cannot be proven. When we spoke about the Kaṭhina ceremony he said that he had little interest in or belief in such ritual aspects of Buddhism. He noted that when he visits the Vihara to give provisions, he does not perform any rituals, but comes only to make his donation and speak with the monks. However, he stated that he was happy to participate in events such as Kaṭhina since he saw them as a part of his culture. Personally, though, he was more

interested in the philosophical talk that took place as part of the Kaṭhina celebrations than in the ritual of Kaṭhina itself.³³

During a tea break in the middle of the celebrations I had another lengthy conversation, this time with Damith, who I had never spoken to before but later went on to interview. As discussed in chapter 5, Damith takes a strongly textualist approach to Buddhism which accepts the idea that particular forms of religious giving are particularly meritorious, but also plays down the importance of kammatic merit-making in favour of nibbanic aspects of Buddhism. Our discussion at Kaṭhina reflected these views. Damith affirmed the idea that participating in a Kaṭhina ceremony is strongly meritorious, attributing this to the fact that the donation is made to a large group of monks (who live a more virtuous life than laypeople) who have just completed the *vassa* retreat (a period of particularly virtuous behaviour). However, he also stressed nibbanic aspects of Kaṭhina – emphasising the importance of the state of mind when giving and how cultivating the mind in this way can bring one towards *nibbāna* – and overall during our conversation he gave more emphasis to philosophical and nibbanic aspects of Buddhism than to kammatic merit-making.

These three conversations highlight the diversity of views that can be found during a single event at the LBV. On one side we have Deepika, for whom the Kaṭhina ceremony represents an opportunity for kammatic merit-making. On the other side we have Sudantha, who expresses little belief in supernatural aspects of Buddhism and little interest in the ritual offering of the Kaṭhina robe. For Sudantha, Buddhism is about philosophy, morality and meditation, not merit-making rituals. Somewhere in the middle lies Damith, who accepts the idea that participating in a Kaṭhina offering can bring a particularly large amount of merit, but relativises the importance of kammatic dimensions of Kaṭhina by placing more emphasis on the development of the mind and the nibbanic path.

While these examples provides a snapshot of the different approaches to ritual found at the LBV, in order to explore the issue in more depth it is necessary to look at an area that my research focused on in more depth, such as Buddha *pūjā*. Buddha *pūjā* was

³³ As noted in note 24 the 2006 Kaṭhina celebrations at the LBV (unlike those in 2007) featured an extended talk on Buddhist philosophy given by a visiting Sri Lankan monk. This talk – delivered in English – gave no mention to the Kaṭhina ceremony itself or to merit-making, but focused on Buddhist ideas about how we perceive the world and how this influences our actions. The talk made a number of references to contemporary psychology, a point which Sudantha noted with pleasure when I spoke again with him after the talk.

discussed in all of my interviews, and was something that I had numerous conversations about during my participant observation (as a ritual that occurs at the LBV on a daily basis *pūjā* naturally came up as a topic of conversation far more often than Kaṭhina).

I found that Sri Lankan patrons of the LBV understood *pūjā* in a variety of ways. A simplistic approach to understanding this variety would have been to make a divide between those who interpret *pūjā* in kammatic and apotropaic terms, and those who view *pūjā* as a way of developing the mind, reflecting on impermanence, and cultivating generosity. However, in reality things are more complex than this, and as we shall see not all individuals can be placed in one of these narrow categories. Because of this I found it easiest to borrow an approach from Cadge's study of Theravada Buddhists in the USA, and analyse the understandings of *pūjā* that I encountered along a spectrum. Here I illustrate this spectrum by looking in some detail at a how *pūjā* was understood by 10 of my interviewees. In order to gain a full understanding of how individuals look at the practice of *pūjā* it is necessary to look at their approach to Buddhism more widely – how they look at other rituals; how often they attend the temple; which other forms of Buddhist practice they engage in; and so on. Often in my interviews *pūjā* was discussed alongside other common ritual practices, particularly the offering of *dāna*. Thus in the cases below I look not only at how the individuals in question understand *pūjā*, but at how this understanding fits in with their general approach to Buddhism.

At one end of the spectrum of approaches to *pūjā* that I encountered stood those who dismissed *pūjā* entirely. I actually found a complete dismissal of *pūjā* to be uncommon at the LBV. I did, however, encounter individuals who took this position on occasion. For example, the members of the Sathdhamma group, which I discuss in chapter 9 as an example of a strongly nibbanic Sri Lankan Buddhist organisation in the UK, also occasionally attend the LBV. Members of this group dismiss rituals such as *pūjā* entirely, taking no interest in kammatic, apotropaic or nibbanic dimensions of such rituals. However, even these individuals told me that they occasionally attended such rituals because of social obligation (for example, if a *pūjā* was given in memory of a deceased friend or relative).³⁴ More common at the LBV were those that expressed a critical or disinterested attitude to *pūjā*, but who allowed that *pūjā* could have some worth if taken as a symbolic act or a form

³⁴ Fieldwork notes 24/11/2006.

of contemplation. Such individuals generally allowed little or no place for *pūjā* as a source of merit or apotropaic blessings. One of my interviewees who fits into this category is Sathi. Sathi came to the UK in the 1960s, but began to attend the LBV regularly only around 5 years ago. Today she attends the Wednesday evening meditation class every week and the mediation retreat every month. Raised in a family who took little interest in ritual aspects of Buddhism, she continues to take little interest in such practices. The focus of her religiosity is meditation. She does not attend the weekly Sunday *pūjā* or offer *dāna* at the temple, and the only event that she regularly attends at the LBV which is not focused entirely on meditation is the annual Wesak celebration. When I ask whether she ever attends *pūjā* at the LBV, she answers:

No. That side of it doesn't interest me, the prayer...I can see the chanting...I can see it has a calming effect. But for me to just go for a chant without the meditation, it doesn't make sense.

Sathi's use of the term 'prayer' is significant, indicating a particular objection to the idea of performing *pūjā* as a way of asking for some specific benefit. This ties in with the rest of the interview, in which she shows no interest in kammatic or apotropaic religious practices, whether these are specifically Buddhist practices (*pūjā*, *dāna*, *pirit*) or other practices popular among Sri Lankan Buddhists (attending *dēvālēs* or Hindu temples). For Sathi the only way in which *pūjā* may be valuable is as a way of calming the mind, an idea that links *pūjā* to meditation. However, even in this regard *pūjā* does not hold a strong interest for Sathi.

Another of my interviewees who can be located at this end of the spectrum is Sampath. Sampath is a student who was born in London to Sri Lankan parents. He attended the LBV sporadically during his childhood, and went to the temple's Sunday school for a year. Today he does not attend the Vihara regularly, but will occasionally attend with his parents. He does not regularly attend the Sunday *pūjā*. When I ask about his religious views he describes himself as a 'Buddhist/Atheist'. He expresses a belief in Buddhist principles (such as the idea that the pursuit of material gain is ultimately pointless) and ethics (such as vegetarianism),³⁵ and cites the story of the Buddha's life as 'powerful' in a symbolic sense.

³⁵ That Sampath associates being vegetarian with Buddhism is interesting, since only a minority of Sri Lankan Buddhists are vegetarian (Gombrich 1971:304). No other members of Sampath's family are vegetarian. However, as Gombrich notes, vegetarianism much admired by Sri Lankan Buddhists, even those that eat meat

However, he also expresses scepticism about certain key Buddhist teachings, such as those concerning *kamma* and rebirth.

During our interview Sampath expresses a number of different opinions about *pūjā*. At some points he is strongly negative about the practice, and sceptical even about the legitimacy of statues of the Buddha. Thus when I ask generally about his view of ritual aspects of Buddhism, he answers:

Well *dāna* I think is a good thing, but...in the London Buddhist Vihara there is huge bronze statue of the Buddha. I don't know what the relevance of that is. I guess it's a focal point, but Buddhism to me is not about having statues and things like that.

He goes on to address the practice of Buddha *pūjā* itself, stating:

I wouldn't offer something to the Buddha. Surely if he achieved nirvana he doesn't exist anymore or he wasn't reborn in this world.

Elsewhere in the interview he expresses a similar view when I ask if he or his family ever offers *pūjā* at home:

No. That is not what I or my parents consider Buddhism.

Sampath's position here is straightforward: the Buddha is no longer present in the world, so making offerings to him does not make sense; and more generally Buddha images have no place in Buddhism as he understands it. Elsewhere in the interview Sampath expresses a less critical – if still unenthusiastic – view of *pūjā*. In doing so he also reveals how he feels the practice should be understood:

It's pretty harmless...It is meant to be about...perhaps it would mean more if they let the flowers rot rather than replacing them and only having very beautiful flowers there.

Sampath's wish that flowers offered during *pūjā* should be allowed to rot before the Buddha image was one that was expressed to me a number of times during my research. The argument is that the flowers are supposed to symbolise impermanence, and that letting them rot would give the *pūjā* greater meaning by focusing participants on the importance of understanding the impermanent nature of all things. As noted above, the theme of

themselves (1971:305). While Sampath's family are not vegetarians, he notes that they strongly supported his decision to give up eating meat

impermanence, and the idea of the flowers offered in *pūjā* as a symbol of impermanence, is something that is found within the verses chanted during *pūjās* at the LBV. Here, then, Sampath is arguing that if *pūjā* does take place it should be used as an opportunity to reflect on Buddhist teachings, and its form should more closely reflect that significance. In contrast, any sense of *pūjā* being valued as a way of making merit or obtaining apotropaic benefits is absent in Sampath's answers. In fact, like Sathi, Sampath takes no interest in any kammatic or apotropaic religious practices. That he should have little interest in merit-making is perhaps unsurprising given that, as noted above, he expresses scepticism about Buddhist teachings concerning *kamma* and rebirth.

The attitudes of Sathi and Sampath are perhaps unsurprising given that neither participate in *pūjās* regularly. However, I also came across similar views – somewhat critical of *pūjā*, and seeing it as of value only if taken in symbolic or contemplative terms – among individuals who attended *pūjās* at the LBV fairly regularly. As an example we can turn to Shalini. Shalini was born in Germany to Sri Lankan Buddhist parents and in her youth considered herself to be a Christian. This changed when she came to the UK. At this point, in part influenced by having more Sri Lankan Buddhist friends of her own age, she became more interested in Buddhism and began to attend the LBV quite regularly. Today she sees herself as a Buddhist. She currently attends the LBV for the Sunday *pūjā* every week with her parents, and also comes for many *pōya* day celebrations.

Shalini stresses the philosophical and the ethical in her approach to Buddhism. She views Buddhism as a path of mental cultivation leading to *nibbāna*. She does not emphasise merit and is critical of what she sees as the overemphasis on ritualised merit-making found among some Sri Lankans:

It really irritates me because, like, I think that's not what it's about. You don't go to a building... a temple... into one building and gain your merits just there. I think you're supposed to be out in life getting your merits.

Thus here Shalini is arguing that merit should be thought about as something generated by living morally in one's everyday life, not as something generated in specific ritualised acts of temple-based merit-making. She goes on to express admiration for a talk given at the LBV in September 2006 by the well-known Sri Lankan monk Venerable Dhammavihari. In this talk, titled 'The joys of the journey and the bliss of terminating it', Dhammavihari criticised what he saw as an overemphasis on ritualised merit-making among Sri Lankans

Buddhists, and a lack of interest in following the path to *nibbāna*. Shalini does not regard herself as following a strongly ‘nibbanic’ path herself – she has practised meditation in the past but does not practise currently – but she shares his negative view of ritualised merit-making.

When I ask Shalini about offering *pūjā* to an image of the Buddha, she initially expresses a low opinion of the practice:

I don’t like that at all, actually, because from my understanding the Buddha actually said ‘I don’t want to be worshipped’, and I accept that. I think that’s what distinguishes Buddhism from all the monotheistic religions.³⁶

Elsewhere in the interview she states:

There’s not a God [in Buddhism]. It’s a teacher ...he’s a leader. But I think in Sri Lanka Buddhism...it’s all confused, because they worship the statues.

Later in the interview, however, Shalini takes a less negative view of making offerings to images of the Buddha. She speaks of her enjoyment of making offerings of flowers at temples during trips to Sri Lanka. She describes making such an offering as ‘such a beautiful gesture’ which ‘symbolises so much’. However, as the discussion above would lead us to expect, Shalini’s appreciation of Buddha *pūjā* is limited to its symbolic value, and does not encompass its value as a means of merit-making. In fact, she argues that focusing on merit when performing such rituals leads one to miss their symbolic significance, since ‘it becomes more about the action than the meaning behind it’.

Another of my interviewees who participates in *pūjās* fairly often yet expresses a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the practice was Harshini. Harshini has attended the LBV since coming to the UK in the 1970s. She attends the temple to offer *dāna* every three months and for major *pōya* day celebrations. She does not attend the Sunday *pūjā* regularly, but she has attended in the past and she usually participates in *pūjās* when she does attend the temple (*pūjās* are offered during every *pōya* day celebration, and as part of most *dāna* ceremonies). In addition, she and her husband often make offerings to a Buddha image in their home.

³⁶ The claim that the Buddha did not want to be worshipped – which is also made by my interviewee Hashan (see below) – is likely to be derived from sections of the Pali Canon in which the Buddha advises his disciples to follow the *Dhamma* rather than offering worship to him (Kinnard 2003:905). It should be noted that there are also passages in the Canon which take a much more positive attitude to worship (Kinnard 2003:906).

Harshini has a strong interest in meditation and meditates regularly at home. While she emphasises the importance of meditation, Harshini plays down the importance of Buddhist rituals. When I ask why people give *pūjā*, she begins her answer by stating: ‘this is the thing, isn’t it’. Here she is indicating that she sees something problematic in the practice of offering a *pūjā*. She goes on to make a contrast between Amaravati and Sri Lankan temples. At Amaravati, she notes, people are more interested in meditation and developing the mind, and less interested in offering *pūjā*. She is expressing approval of Amaravati here – she sees offering *pūjā* as relatively unimportant, and regards meditation and developing one’s mind as much more central to what Buddhism should be about.

Harshini does not dismiss *pūjā* entirely. She notes that one can achieve some sense of mindfulness and meditative concentration through offering *pūjā*. However, she argues that this is not deep mindfulness of the kind developed in meditation, but mindfulness of a rather superficial kind. She goes on to state that ultimately there is ‘no need’ to offer *pūjā*. It is notable that Harshini’s appreciation of *pūjā* is limited to the extent that it can be used as a form of meditation. Any sense of *pūjā* as a means of merit-making is absent from Harshini’s answers, and at certain points in the interview she expresses criticism of ritualised merit-making. She also places little emphasis on the apotropaic power of Buddhist ritual. When I ask whether it is possible to benefit in practical worldly ways from *pirit* chanting or *pūjās*, she says that she does not know, but that she ‘believes more in *kamma*’ than in such rituals. Here she is emphasising that she regards one’s future as being determined more by the *kamma* generated in one’s everyday life than by one’s participation in apotropaic rituals.

Those discussed so far all view the practice of *pūjā* as to some degree problematic. As we move along the spectrum of understandings we come to individuals who do not voice a critical opinion of *pūjā*, but who share with those above the view that the value of *pūjā* lies principally in its symbolism and the opportunity that it offers for contemplation. In these examples we also find a little more space given to issues relating to merit and/or apotropaic dimensions of Buddhism. However, the main emphasis we find is once again on *pūjā* as contemplation.

Kumari, whose views about the intellectual study of Buddhism I discussed in chapter 5, attends the Sunday *pūjā* most weeks with her parents. She also attends major *pōya* day celebrations at the LBV, and accompanies her parents when they offer *dāna*. In

addition, she sometimes comes to the temple in the middle of the week simply to sit in the shrine room and meditate or perform some Pali chanting. When speaking about Buddhism Kumari stresses its philosophical and meditative dimensions. As noted in chapter 5, she has a keen interest in *abhidhamma*. She has some interest in meditation, although she currently has little time to practise consistently.

We come to the issue of *pūjā* while discussing the differences between Sri Lankan Buddhists and Western converts. As discussed in chapter 5, Kumari notes that many convert Buddhists prefer to focus exclusively on meditation rather than on the study of Buddhist philosophy, a tendency which she views as problematic. I note that another difference between converts and Sri Lankans is that converts are less likely to engage in rituals such as *pūjā*. Is this also a problem? Are convert Buddhists lacking something in their practice by not engaging in such rituals? Kumari answers:

Not really. But then *pūjās* are all about things like...when you offer flowers you are supposed to contemplate on the impermanence of the flowers.

She argues that in this respect *pūjā* is similar to meditation. Kumari goes on to note that many Sri Lankans participate in rituals such as *pūjā* simply because it is something that their parents have done, without truly understanding the deeper meaning behind the practice. She notes that some offer fruit rather than flowers during a *pūjā*, and questions the appropriateness of this. She feels that flowers are a more powerful symbol of impermanence than fruit and therefore a more suitable offering. Kumari thus mirrors Sampath's concern that the centrality of impermanence to the ritual of *pūjā* should not be lost.

While Kumari is critical of the way in which some Sri Lankans approach *pūjā*, she does not voice criticisms of the practice itself. In addition, while she focuses on *pūjā* as a form of contemplation, she does not display a critical attitude towards merit-making. Unlike many of my second-generation interviewees (see chapter 5) she affirms the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth, and while she does not speak about rituals such as *pūjā* and *dāna* being performed in order to generate merit, she acknowledges that such rituals do bring merit and affirms the efficacy of merit transference. This shows a greater openness to 'kammatic' dimensions of Buddhism than I found among the interviewees discussed above. Still, merit-making remains a rather minor concern throughout my interview with Kumari,

and her emphasis when it came to *pūjā* was firmly on seeing *pūjā* as an opportunity for contemplation of impermanence.

A similar approach to *pūjā* is evident in my interview with Anika. Anika started coming to the LBV in 1994, having previously practised at the Thames Buddhist Vihara, a temple located to the south of London. This change of temples coincided with a change in Anika's approach to Buddhism. Anika describes her approach to religion while growing up in Sri Lanka as being centred around rituals such as *dāna*, *pūjā* and making offerings to deities in *dēvālēs* or Hindu temples. She says that at this time she did not think very deeply about religion, but merely went 'with the flow of it'. In doing so, she says, she missed the core of the teachings. Now, on the other hand, she emphasises the philosophy of Buddhism and the development of the mind through meditation. Anika regularly attends classes on Buddhist philosophy at the LBV, and sometimes attends the Wednesday evening meditation class. She also attends most *pōya* day celebrations. Anika does not attend the Sunday *pūjā* regularly, but does attend occasionally, and also participates in *pūjās* when she attends *pōya* day celebrations.

When Anika speaks about *pūjā*, she stresses a number of reasons for the practice. She states *pūjā* is a way in which we can give reverence to the Buddha. She also views *pūjā* as a way in which one can cultivate generosity and overcome attachment, stressing that one must offer flowers to the Buddha 'without any attachment'. In addition, she emphasises *pūjā* as an opportunity to reflect on impermanence:

The meaning of offering flowers...one thing is to make the place look beautiful and good smelling in his [the Buddha's] name. [But one] also [gives] to understand the impermanence of a flower...so you are referring to that impermanence in the flower, and you are also thinking of your own life and all the other things that are living around you...[which are] impermanent. So that's the other meaning of offering the flower.

Since Anika defines her current religiosity partly in terms of a move away from a focus on ritual, one might expect her to share something of the critical attitude towards *pūjā* expressed by Shalini and Sampath. However, this is not the case. When we discuss differences between Sri Lankans and convert Buddhists, Anika expresses an admiration for converts, but also states that there are certain characteristics which are found among Sri Lankans, and less evident among converts, which she strongly values. One of these is the seriousness and reverence with which Sri Lankans participate in *pūjā*.

As my comments above suggest, Anika does not stress the generation of merit as a reason for participating in *pūjā*. This corresponds with her general view of Buddhism, which emphasises meditation and mental development and does not focus on the kammatic and apotropaic. However, like Kumari, Anika does mention merit at times during her interview, and does not express a critical attitude to merit-making. She expresses trust in the efficacy of rituals of merit transference, and notes that she offers merit to the gods and to deceased friends and relatives after performing rituals. Anika also demonstrates a more accepting attitude to the apotropaic dimensions of *pūjā* than many of those discussed above. She accepts that the *pirit* chanted during *pūjā* can bring apotropaic benefits, although she does not see such chanting exclusively in apotropaic terms (she also stresses *pirit* as a way of producing positive states of mind).

As we move along the spectrum of understanding of *pūjā* we come to those who give a more definite place to kammatic merit-making, yet who also stress the effect of rituals such as *pūjā* on the mind. One of my interviewees whose understanding of *pūjā* falls into this part of the spectrum is Gihan. Gihan has been coming to the LBV since arriving in the UK in the 1960s. Like a number of my interviewees, he states that he has undergone a change in his religiosity over time. For Gihan this change occurred around 15 years ago. He describes the change in terms of a movement from having a theoretical, 'textbook' knowledge of Buddhism, to actually putting Buddhism into practice. He began to practise meditation, and to attend the temple more regularly. He also developed a strong interest in astrology at this time. Today Gihan attends the Sunday *pūjā* at the LBV every week. He also attends major *pōya* day celebrations, and occasionally attends the Wednesday meditation class. At home Gihan practises meditation and performs a *pūjā* every evening. When I ask Gihan why he offers *pūjā*, he replies:

It's ritualistic, but energy-wise it is soothing...it takes me to a positive energy atmosphere...[it brings] serenity...tranquillity within me.

Thus initially Gihan speaks only about the effect of *pūjā* on the mind. I note that some have told me that they give *pūjā* in order to make merit. Does he not think in these terms? Gihan answers:

Yes, I do. Because, what is merit? Merit is your good feeling, no?

Here Gihan is arguing that making merit is a reason for giving *pūjā*, but that merit is something that results from the positive mental states that are generated by *pūjā*. Thus for Gihan, making merit and developing or calming the mind are not separate things. Rather, merit comes precisely when one achieves positive mental states. Gihan's views bring to mind those expressed by the rural Sri Lankans interviewed by Samuels (2008) (see chapter 3), for whom merit is brought about by the feeling of happiness that one experiences when engaging in acts such as *dāna* and *pūjā*. As is the case with Samuels' informants, Gihan's views break down any firm distinction between the 'nibbanic' and the 'kammatic'. The extent to which Gihan emphasises nibbanic aspects of ritual is most evident when he speaks about *dāna*. As with *pūjā*, Gihan states that in *dāna* one generates positive states of mind through giving, and that these result in merit. However, he goes on to firmly link these states of mind with the nibbanic path. He begins by noting how giving transforms one's experience of the world around one:

By giving...the person who gives, gives with a good thought...just like if you give somebody twenty pence, you feel good about it, no?...Particularly when you don't have much money and you give twenty pence, you feel even better...it's energy, the energy within you. With that positive energy you see the world in a different way, with pink glasses, no? I mean, I am sure the day you are able to give something with a real good heart you will see sunshine everywhere...you are smiling all the way.

Gihan goes on to link this transformation to the Buddha's path to enlightenment:

In Buddhism it [giving] has been developed to a very high level. In the *pāramitās*, [we have] *dāna pāramitā*...which is giving. And in Buddhism, of course the Buddha as a *bodhisatta* perfected this giving. And he perfected it to such an extent that he can give his own life to others, and gave his life and children away, giving the kingdom away, giving his eyes and things.

The *pāramitās*³⁷ are a list of ten qualities the perfect embodiment of which constitutes one formulation of the path to *nibbāna* (Gombrich 1988:121). In the Theravada tradition these qualities are particularly linked with the *Jātaka* stories, which relate tales of the Buddha's previous lives. In these stories the future Buddha (referred to in this period as a *bodhisatta*, a being on the path to Buddhahood) practises the different *pāramitās*, gradually building up

³⁷ *Pāramitā* is a Sanskrit term. In the Theravada textual tradition the Pali equivalent – *pāramī* – is used. However, in Sinhala the Sanskrit term is used. When Sri Lankan Buddhists speak in English they often use Pali and Sinhalese terms for Buddhist concepts interchangeably.

his perfection in these qualities in preparation for their perfect embodiment in his final life (Ohnuma 2003). The examples that Gihan gives of the Buddha giving away his life, his eyes, his children and his kingdom can all be found in the *Jātaka* stories.

In the quotations above, then, Gihan views giving *dāna* not simply as a positive act, but as something which can transform one's relationship with the world, and which in its highest forms constitutes a key element of the path towards *nibbāna*. In all of this, however, it should not be thought that Gihan regards *dāna* in nibbanic rather than kammatic terms. Instead, as emphasised above, it is precisely because of the way in which giving transforms one's mind that – for Gihan – it also brings merit.

Gihan notes that his understanding of the workings of merit is not one that all Sri Lankans share:

Buddhism deals with people with different understandings, different knowledge, different intelligence. So different people interpret merit in different ways...Not many people, I think, can discuss merit in the same way I was discussing.

He argues that many Buddhists think of merit in less sophisticated terms than he does, as a simple matter of receiving a specific benefit from carrying out a specific act. He notes that such 'unsophisticated' understandings are found even in some Buddhist texts:

In classical Buddhism and in *Jātaka* stories, you talk about 'give one sack of rice [to a monk in this lifetime], and you will get a million sacks of rice [in your next life]'. I think that is written for the average people, to persuade [them to make offerings]. Because they [these stories] are not written by Buddha, they are written by monks afterwards.

For Gihan such ways of looking at merit are problematic because merit results not from the act that you perform, but from the 'feeling within you' when you carry out a positive act. He is similarly critical of other ideas which seem to view merit-making in rather mechanistic terms, such as the idea that one's merit depends on how much one gives, and the idea that giving *dāna* to monks brings more merit than giving to others.

In addition to speaking about *pūjā* in both kammatic and nibbanic terms, Gihan also gives attention to the apotropaic dimensions of *pūjā*. When speaking about the *pirit* chanting that forms part of *pūjā*, he emphasises that this is not an important part of Buddhism, but nevertheless acknowledges that *pirit* chanting can bring apotropaic benefits. He gives three reasons for this power: because the sound of the chanting brings positive

energy; because *pirit* chanting expresses universal truths, and the proclamation of such truths brings power; and because those that are engaged in chanting *pirit* radiate positive energy from their minds.

Gihan presents a sophisticated view of *pūjā*, in which the nibbanic and kammatic are linked. Another of my interviewees, Ishan, also sees Buddhist rituals simultaneously as a means to make merit and a form of mental development, but does not bring these two dimensions of ritual together as Gihan does. Ishan came to the UK in the 1970s and has been coming to the LBV since this time. He comes to the temple to offer *dāna* once every three months. He also attends major *pōya* days at the temple, and frequently comes to the temple with his family to mark important occasions (such as birthday or approaching exams). Ishan rarely practises seated meditation. However, he expresses an interest in the cultivation of the mind, and suggests that one need not sit cross-legged in order to practise meditation. He argues that one can cultivate Buddhist virtues in one's everyday life, citing his own job as a doctor as giving one a particular opportunity to practise kindness. In addition, he views his practice of listening to recordings of Pali chanting while driving to and from work as a form of meditation. When we discuss rituals such as *pūjā* and *dāna*, Ishan gives two reasons for participating in such practices. Firstly, he states that such acts are performed so that one can overcome one's attachment to material things by practising generosity. Secondly, he states that such acts are performed because they are said to generate kammic merit. Unlike Gihan, Ishan does not equate these two dimensions by stating that 'merit is your good feeling'. Indeed certain aspects of his answers suggest that he does not view the merit generated in such rituals as being purely derived from the positive mental states that these rituals bring about. For example, Ishan suggests that giving to monks brings a particularly strong amount of kammic merit when compared to other forms of giving, something that Gihan denies because of his view that merit comes only from one's feelings when giving.

At the furthest end of the spectrum of approaches to ritual at the LBV are those who emphasise the accumulation of merit as the primary reason for participating in ritual acts. Such an approach is evident in my interview with Darika. Darika came to the UK in the 1990s. She does not attend temples regularly, coming to the LBV mainly to give *dāna* or to attend *dāna* ceremonies of friends. She does not come regularly to the Sunday *pūjā*, but offers a *pūjā* whenever she offers *dāna* at the Vihāra.

When I ask why she performs rituals of *pūjā* and *dāna* (the two are discussed together in our interview) Darika emphasises that they are performed in order to generate merit. She does not speak about *pūjā* as an opportunity to contemplate impermanence, nor does she link it to nibbanic practices such as meditation. In fact, Darika makes a rather firm divide between meditation and practices such as *pūjā* and *dāna*. Those who meditate, she argues, are developing their minds and thereby moving towards *nibbāna*. On the other hand, in rituals of *pūjā* and *dāna* we are generating merit for our next life and ‘blessings’ for this life (thus she views these practices in both kammatic and apotropaic terms).³⁸ Darika expresses a strong admiration for those who meditate, and states that she sometimes practises meditation. However, she notes that her obligations to the financial well-being of her family mean that she needs to give more attention accumulating merit and worldly blessings, and is unable to dedicate herself to meditation, the cultivation of non-attachment, and the path to *nibbāna* as much as she would like.

Darika’s approach to ritual thus places most emphasis on kammatic and apotropaic dimensions. However, other dimensions of ritual are not entirely absent from Darika’s answers. She speaks about *pūjā* being offered out of respect for the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. In addition, she gives some attention to the importance of one’s state of mind when offering *pūjā* and *dāna*, noting that the Buddha taught that one’s intention when acting determines the kammic results one receives. It should also be noted that, while Darika feels she is unable to dedicate herself strongly to the practice of nibbanic Buddhism, she does not see her practice as entirely separate from the path to *nibbāna*. She emphasises that, while she is not able to dedicate herself to meditation, she nevertheless tries to gradually cultivate qualities of non-attachment during her life which will lead eventually to *nibbāna*. In addition, she emphasises that by making merit she hopes in her next life not for prosperous rebirth in material terms, but for rebirth into a ‘peaceful’ Buddhist family in which she is able to dedicate herself to meditation.

The above examples illustrate that a diverse range of approaches to the ritual of *pūjā* found at the LBV. It should further be noted that I also encountered individuals who gave reasons for participating in *pūjās* which did not fit anywhere in the spectrum employed above. An example of this is provided by my interview with Hashan. Hashan attends the LBV every week to take his children to Sunday school. Other than this he attends certain

³⁸ Darika notes that she would offer a *dāna* if an important event in her family’s life – such as a marriage – was approaching. Here *dāna* is viewed very much as a source of blessings in this life.

major *pōya* day celebrations such as Wesak. He does not attend the Sunday *pūjā* regularly, but his family will sometimes offer *pūjā* at a shrine in their home, and his children take part in a *pūjā* every week as part of their Sunday school. When I ask Hashan why *pūjā* is offered, his initial answers reflect many of the approaches outlined above. He offers some criticism of Buddha *pūjā*, arguing that the Buddha did not ask us to worship him. Despite this, he does give positive reasons for engaging in *pūjā*. He states that *pūjā* is offered out of respect for the Buddha. He also argues that offering *pūjā* helps people to cultivate generosity. When I ask whether *pūjā* is offered in order to bring merit, Hashan affirms that as a positive act, *pūjā* does bring merit. Thus Hashan offers both kammatic reasons for offering *pūjā* and reasons which are connected with the development of the mind.

As the interview progresses, however, it becomes clear that Hashan does not view these motivations for *pūjā* as very relevant for himself. In fact, Hashan notes that he does not take a strong interest in *pūjā*. He views *pūjā* as something that is more relevant to older, retired people who, he argues, tend to take more interest in both making merit and progressing towards *nibbāna*.³⁹ Hashan, in his mid-forties and concentrating on work and raising his children, does not yet regard such religious concerns as being of pressing personal importance. However, despite taking little personal interest in kammatic or nibbanic dimensions of Buddhism, Hashan has another reason for coming to the temple and engaging in rituals such as *pūjā*: in order to give his children exposure to the Buddhist tradition. Hashan is concerned that his children should have a good knowledge of Buddhism and a connection to the tradition. He states that, while he personally does not put a lot of stress on ritual observances, if Buddhists did not attend temples and partake in rituals, their children would not be exposed to Buddhism and the religion might eventually vanish.⁴⁰ Thus for Hashan the most important function of *pūjā* is as a concrete expression of the Buddhist religion through which his children can become involved in the tradition.

It is clear, then, that a wide range of approaches towards the rituals such as *Kaṭhina* and *pūjā* can be found among patrons of the LBV. My findings here have interesting implications for how we understand notions of community within the Vihara. Cadge, in her

³⁹ While there are many in the Sri Lankan community who take an interest in such aspects of Buddhism when younger, there is certainly something to what Hashan says here. Strong interest in Buddhism – whether meditative or ritual-centred – is noticeably more common among the middle-aged and elderly.

⁴⁰ The concern that Sri Lankan Buddhism is under threat and may one day vanish if Buddhists do not put enough effort into supporting it is a common theme in post-colonial Sri Lankan Buddhist discourse (Bond 1988:105-112; Berkwitz 2003:65-66; Berkwitz 2008).

discussion of the Thai temple Wat Phila in Philadelphia, argues that the concept of merit-making is key to ideas of community at the temple:

Merit is the glue that holds the community together through religious ceremonies based in exchange between monks and lay people (2005:138).

My findings suggest that it would be wrong to regard ideas of kammatic merit-making as the central binding force within the community at the LBV. In fact, my research calls into question the very idea that the Vihara can be regarded as a single community bound together in a single way. This is clear if we look again at my interviewee Sathi. As discussed above, Sathi comes to the LBV for meditation classes and retreats, and rarely participates in rituals of *pūjā*, *dāna* or *pirit* chanting at the Vihara. As such Sathi participates in a particular community at the temple – those that share her interest in meditation – but has little contact with those who attend the temple in the main for *pōya* day celebrations or for the weekly Buddha *pūjā*. It is most accurate to view the LBV as consisting of a number of different communities: those who attend the Sunday *pūjā*; those who come for meditation classes; those who attend *pōya* day celebrations; those who come as individuals or families to offer *dāna* or perform rituals; those who attend classes on Buddhist philosophy; those who come to bring their children to Sunday school; and so on. Some patrons of the LBV partake in many of these activities. For example, my interviewee Anika attends (either regularly or occasionally) *pōya* day celebrations, meditation classes, study classes, and Buddha *pūjās*. Others – such as Sathi and Hashan, who attends in the main to bring his children to Sunday school – partake in only one or two.

My research also raises the question of what it is that binds together particular communities at the Vihara. If we take the community of people who take part *pūjās* at the LBV, it is clear from the evidence above that what binds these individuals together is not the idea of merit-making, since many of those that partake in *pūjā* regularly express little interest in merit, while some reject the idea of ritualised merit-making completely. What binds these individuals together is not how they understand the ritual of *pūjā*, but their very participation in the ritual. While they differ in terms of how they interpret *pūjā*, they are brought together by their shared physical involvement in the practice.

In connection with this, it is interesting to note that on occasion during my research I encountered views about the significance of Buddhist rituals among Sri Lankans at the LBV which interpreted these rituals precisely in terms of their role as symbols of

community and belonging. Above I discussed my interview with Shalini, in which she criticises approaches to *pūjā* which emphasise making merit. When we move on to talk about the wearing of *pirit* thread, Shalini states that when she was younger she saw *pirit* thread as a source of apotropaic blessings, but that now she focuses more on the way in which *pirit* chanting and wearing *pirit* thread connects you to the whole of the community that is engaged in the ritual. In the following quote she discusses a practice which sometimes occurs when *pirit* is chanted – the *pirit* thread which is distributed to the congregation at the end of the ritual is first passed around those present so that all are holding it when the chanting takes place:

When I was younger I always thought ‘yeah, it’s a blessing’...Because they bless you when they tie it [the *pirit* thread] around [your wrist]...they say a prayer, like [...] ‘May you be healthy’ and all this. And when I was younger I always thought ‘Oh, its some kind of...yeah, it’s a blessing and it’s just a good thing to have on your hand’. And, like, now I think...because the whole symbolism of everyone holding this thread while they’re chanting...that’s become very important to me now. To me, like, it’s more about the event as a whole. Because it’s quite remarkable that hundreds, thousands of people were stood there holding the same piece of thread that’s being blessed. And, you know, you’re all expressing something. And then its sort-of cut into pieces and everyone gets a little piece and goes away with it.

Another example of a second-generation Sri Lankan at the LBV interpreting rituals such as *pūjā* and *pirit* chanting in terms of ideas of belonging and community is provided by Miran. Miran comes to the LBV with his parents, usually for major *pōya* day celebrations. While I did not conduct an interview with Miran, I spoke to him at the Vihara on a number of occasions. On one such occasion, during the celebrations of the Navam full moon day in February 2007, we spoke generally about rituals such as *pūjā*, *dāna* and *pirit* chanting.⁴¹ Miran noted that whenever he comes to the LBV with his parents he participates in such rituals, but that he sees such rituals as largely ‘meaningless’. By this he meant that he has no belief in the efficacy of these rituals in kammatic or apotropaic terms. He went on to note that he also had little belief in rebirth arguing that such a belief required a ‘leap of faith’ which he was unwilling to make. He was not dismissive of Buddhism, however, and had an interest in the more philosophical and psychological aspects of the religion. When discussing his own participation in rituals such as *pūjā* he compared it with the situation of

⁴¹ Fieldwork notes 03/02/2007.

Jews who continue to participate in certain Jewish religious observances but state that they have no belief in God. Thus the rituals are participated in not because of their significance in kammatic, apotropaic or even nibbanic terms, but as a way of expressing a sense of identification with the Vihara and with Buddhism more generally. Miran's view of Buddhist ritual shows clearly the problems with the idea that the community at the LBV is bound together by the concept of merit-making. Miran has no belief or interest in kammatic merit-making, but this does not prevent him from deriving a sense of identity and belonging from participating in rituals at the Vihara.

Chapter 7

Many Discourses and Many Understandings at the LBV

In this last chapter focusing solely on the LBV I conclude my analysis by highlighting the diversity of religious practices, discourses and understandings found at the Vihara. I begin by looking generally at the LBV as a place of many discourses and many understanding, before turning to examine whether we can find ‘Two Buddhisms’ at the LBV.

In the last chapter I demonstrated that Sri Lankans at the LBV understand rituals such as *Kaṭhina* and *pūjā* in a number of ways. This reflects the broader fact that Sri Lankans at the LBV vary in the ways in which they understand and practise Buddhism as a whole. My interviewee Sathi emphasises meditation above all else and takes no interest in rituals of *pūjā* and *dāna*. My interviewee Darika emphasises the kammatic and apotropaic benefits of such rituals and does not practise meditation regularly. Kumari shares Sathi’s interest in meditation, but takes a stronger interest in the investigating Buddhist doctrine in an intellectual way, and gives a little more space to kammatic and apotropaic ritual. Damith emphasises the authority of Buddhist texts and affirms the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth, while Sampath labels himself a ‘Buddhist/Atheist’ and takes an agnostic approach to such doctrines. Hashan takes little strong interest in any aspect of Buddhist practice, but attends the LBV regularly to bring his children to Sunday school.

In addition to being a place of many understandings of Buddhism, the LBV is also a place in which a variety of Buddhist discourses and activities can be found. The multiple understandings of Buddhism found among patrons of the LBV would not be possible were it not for the fact that the LBV is a place which manifests many different dimensions of Buddhism. As we have seen in chapters 5 and 6, at the LBV we find an emphasis on meditation, an emphasis on the study of Buddhism, a degree of emphasis on the Vihara as a social and cultural centre, and both an emphasis on ritual and a tendency to de-emphasise the importance of ritual. Thus it is difficult to speak of the religious nature of the LBV in the singular. Instead the LBV is a place of religious diversity, a diversity that is reflected in the approaches to Buddhism found among the Vihara’s patrons.

One interesting characteristic of the LBV that relates to the issues discussed here is the lack of what might be called a strong ‘authorial voice’ at the Vihara. By this I mean that the LBV is not an institution which communicates one distinct and unified ‘message’ coming from one single source of authority. This is not to say that sources of authority are

not found at the LBV. The resident monks, and particularly the head monk, are clearly the central religious authorities at the Vihara. However, it is notable that many of the discourses expressed at the LBV come not from these monks but from sources outside the Vihara. Of 39 talks delivered during the 9 *pōya* day celebrations that took place at the LBV in 2007 and 2008, 26 were delivered by monks or laypeople from outside the Vihara.¹ In addition, all of the monthly *Dhamma* talks given at the Vihara are delivered by outside speakers, while less regular talks by celebrated guest speakers such as the convert monk Ajahn Brahmavamso (see chapter 5) and the Sri Lankan meditation teacher Venerable Henepola Gunaratana are among the most popular events at the LBV. Even during the Wednesday evening meditation class the main discourse is often a reading from book by a well-known meditation teacher such as Ajahn Chah rather than a discourse from a resident monk. The fact that so many of the speakers at the LBV come from outside the Vihara means that one can find a greater range of ideas and opinions about Buddhism at the LBV than might be the case if the majority of the discourses came from within the Vihara. It means that one can find Ajahn Brahmavamso criticising Buddhists who put their trust in *pirit* thread, while also finding the practice of chanting *pirit* and tying *pirit* thread to be a central part of the Vihara's activities. In addition, it means one can find some speakers at the Vihara emphasising practice-oriented approaches to Buddhism and warning against the dangers of becoming too interested in study, and others giving detailed, scholarly expositions of abstract Buddhist doctrines. Here I have focused on times when activities and discourses at the LBV seem to clash to a certain extent. However, in general it is not a question of discourses and activities contradicting each other, but simply of there being a range of different ways of speaking about and practising Buddhism at the LBV which would be unlikely to be the case to the same degree if the Vihara had a more singular authorial voice.

While the fact that a diverse range of Buddhist discourses and activities can be found at the LBV is significant, it is not enough to simply characterise the Vihara as a place of diversity. As noted in the previous chapter, the LBV is a place which incorporates a

¹ The 9 *pōya* day celebrations that took place at the LBV in 2006 and 2007 were: Wesak 2006 (14/05/2006), Poson 2006 (11/06/2006), Dhammacakka Day 2006 (09/07/2006), Sanghamitta Day 2006 (10/12/2006), Navam 2007 (03/02/2007), Wesak 2007 (06/05/2007), Poson 2007 (24/06/2007), Dhammacakka Day 2007 (29/07/2007), and Sanghamitta Day 2007 (10/12/2006) (there was no Navam celebration in 2006). I attended all of these celebrations except Dhammacakka Day 2006, but I was able to obtain the programme for this event.

variety of practices, but also a place in which some practices found in other Buddhist institutions (*dēvālē* worship, some forms of *pūjā*) are excluded. Beyond this, it is also important to note that while a diverse range of practices and discourses can be found at the LBV, one can nevertheless identify tendencies within the Vihara in terms of how much emphasis is placed on different aspects of Buddhism. It is this that makes it possible to place the LBV in comparison with other Buddhist institutions in the UK. While we can find some emphasis on meditation-centred Buddhism at the LBV, we cannot find the same degree of emphasis as is found at, for example, an institution of the Forest Sangha. On the other hand, while we can find an emphasis on rituals of merit-making and apotropaic protection at the LBV, the Vihara is characterised by a somewhat lesser emphasis on such aspects of Buddhism – and a greater emphasis on meditation-centred approaches to Buddhism – than is found at some Sri Lankan temples (see chapter 8). This point brings us back to the debate that I set up between Gunasekara and Panyasiri at the conclusion of chapter 4, concerning the degree to which the LBV can be characterised as a centre of ‘modernist’ Buddhism. As Panyasiri notes, the LBV is a place in which many dimensions of Buddhism are present, including kammatic merit-making and apotropaic protection, dimensions which are sometimes dismissed in modernist approaches to Buddhism. However, the LBV is also a place that is characterised to a certain degree by an emphasis on modernist understandings which place philosophy and meditation at the centre, and de-emphasise the importance of ritual.

7.1 Two Buddhisms at the LBV?

Let us turn now to look at the question of whether the Vihara can be described as a place which contains ‘parallel congregations’ of convert and Sri Lankan Buddhists practising different forms of Buddhism separately. Some of what I have said above – for example, my observation that the Sri Lankan congregation at the LBV is characterised by a high level of diversity in terms of how individuals approach Buddhism – suggests problems with any attempt to describe the LBV in such terms. However, it is worth considering this issue in more depth.

Interestingly, one can find discourses within the Vihara itself which are suggestive of a ‘Two Buddhisms’ divide. For example, an article in a book published by the LBV, in describing those that attended the LBV in the 1980s, makes a division between ‘native

British people' who are interested in learning about Buddhism intellectually and practising meditation, and Sri Lankan Buddhists who come to the LBV for 'pujas, blessings etc' (Wimalajothi 2003: 44-45). Does my research support the idea of a 'Two Buddhisms' division at the LBV? Certainly we can identify some aspects of how converts and Sri Lankans practise at the LBV which are suggestive of such a division. Perhaps most significantly, British convert Buddhists make up the majority of those that attend the weekly meditation classes. I recorded the numbers attending the meditation class in a sample of 6 classes during my research. The number of participants in these classes ranged from 30 to 40. The number of Sri Lankan participants ranged from 9 to 12. The mean percentage of Sri Lankans in the classes was 31.1%. I attended the meditation class at the LBV many more times both before and during my research and my experience suggests that these figures accurately reflect Sri Lankan and convert participation in these classes. From the other side, Sri Lankans outnumber converts at the Sunday *pūjā*. It was not always possible to count the numbers at the Sunday *pūjā* exactly because of the seating arrangements at the ritual and because of the tendency of some to arrive before the ritual begins or leave before its conclusion. My estimates of numbers at the 6 *pūjās* at which I made detailed notes ranged from around 20 to around 45. The number of convert participants ranged from 3 to 7. My fieldwork observations suggest that Sri Lankans are also more likely than converts to engage in other ritual activities, such as giving *dāna* in the temple and in their own homes, having rituals of *pirit* chanting performed for certain special events, and so on. Sri Lankans are also more likely to attend the LBV for 'cultural' reasons – principally to bring children to Sunday school, or to help run the Sunday school – than convert Buddhists.

Here, then, we have some evidence which appears to be suggestive of a 'Two Buddhisms' divide. When we look a little closer, however, things become less clear-cut. The best place to begin is perhaps the talk given at the LBV by Ajahn Brahmavamsa in April 2007 (discussed in chapter 5). Here we have a talk by a British convert monk who is well-known for his knowledge of meditation, and who in his talk specifically criticises any kind of reliance on certain ritual practices that are common among Sri Lankans. However, the majority of the audience for Brahmavamsa's talk was made up of Sri Lankans rather

than British converts (around 250 present during the talk, approximately three quarters of whom were Sri Lankans).²

While Brahmavamso is particularly popular among Sri Lankans, his is not the only example of a talk at the LBV which focused on meditation and played down the importance of ritual which was attended by many Sri Lankans. The other meditation-oriented talk discussed in chapter 5 – that given by Matheesha Gunatilake – attracted an audience that was roughly half converts and half Sri Lankans.³ Other talks can also be mentioned. The well-known Sri Lankan meditation teacher Venerable Henepola Gunaratana, currently the head of the Bhavana Society meditation centre in the USA, regularly visits the LBV. In May 2007 he gave a talk and answered questions from an audience of around 150 people at the Vihara, of whom the majority were Sri Lankans. As is typical of Venerable Gunaratana's talks, the focus was firmly on meditation from a practical point of view. I was struck by the level of knowledge about meditation demonstrated by the Sri Lankans who asked questions of Venerable Gunaratana. These questions covered topics such as the relationship between *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation, the process through which impermanence can be realised during walking meditation, and how one should react if one's mind is disturbed during meditation by external sound.⁴

When we look back at the talks discussed in section 5.1 of chapter 5 we can see from the content of these talks that they are given with the knowledge that many in the audience will be Sri Lankans rather than converts. When Matheesha Gunatilake mentions the dangers of the path of *āmisā pūjā* and criticises the idea that the higher states of the spiritual path are not realisable in the present age, he is addressing issues which concern Sri Lankans rather than converts (since no convert concentrates on *āmisā pūjā* at the expense of meditation, and the idea that *nibbāna* is not attainable today is not found among convert Buddhists). Similarly, when Ajahn Brahmavamso discusses the tying of *pirit* thread and the idea of praying to gods he is clearly doing so because he knows that such practices are found among the Sri Lankans that he is addressing. These talks, then, can be said to simultaneously affirm and disrupt the impression of diaspora Buddhism given in the 'Two Buddhisms' model. They affirm the model by taking for granted that rituals of *pirit* chanting, transferring merit, and asking for assistance from divine beings are central aspects

² Fieldwork notes 20/04/2007.

³ 27 people attended this talk, of whom 15 were Sri Lankans and 12 converts (fieldwork notes 03/03/2007).

⁴ Fieldwork notes 31/05/2007.

of Sri Lankan Buddhist religiosity. At the same time they disrupt the model by criticising all of these aspects of Sri Lankan religiosity, and by showing that many Sri Lankans in the UK are interested in talks which focus on meditation. The fact that Sri Lankans go to see talks of this kind does not, of course, indicate that they have abandoned all of the practices that are criticised in such talks. During Ajahn Brahmavamso's talk there was much good-natured guilty laughter from the audience when he spoke about *pirit* chanting and requesting help from gods, an indication that many present engaged in these practices. Still, the popularity of these talks does indicate that many Sri Lankans at the LBV have a strong interest in elements of Buddhism that the 'Two Buddhisms' model associates firmly with converts.

Other than one-off talks by speakers such as Brahmavamso, the events that attract the largest number of people to the LBV are *pōya* day celebrations. All *pōya* day celebrations at LBV attract a predominantly Sri Lankan congregation (although a number of converts are present on every *pōya* day).⁵ Thus the religious activities that take place during *pōya* days are – if we follow the 'Two Buddhisms' model – representative of Sri Lankan rather than convert Buddhism. However, if we look at the events that take place during a typical *pōya* day we get a rather different picture of Sri Lankan Buddhism than is presented in the 'Two Buddhisms' model. *Pōya* day programmes are not dedicated predominantly to ritual-focused kammatic and apotropaic Buddhism. Ritual does play a part in every *pōya* day celebration. A Buddha *pūjā* always takes place during the day, as does chanting in praise of the Buddha, and the day always concludes with the chanting of *pirit*. However, these represent a small proportion of the activities held during a *pōya* day. *Pōya* day programmes also include a period of meditation (typically of around 30 minutes), while the major part of every *pōya* day is dedicated to talks on Buddhist themes delivered by the monks of the LBV or lay and monastic speakers invited for the day. These talks are a mixture of scholarly discussions of Buddhist teaching, sermons similar in style to those delivered during the Sunday *pūjā*, and meditation-centred, practice-oriented talks. There was at least one talk dedicated to a practice-oriented approach to Buddhism at every *pōya*

⁵ It is difficult to gauge how many people attend *pōya* day celebrations at the LBV. Not all that attend will do so for the whole day, so the numbers tend to fluctuate. In addition, different *pōya* days attract different numbers of people. The most popular *pōya* day celebrations – usually Wesak is the most popular each year – attract perhaps 400 participants during the day. Of these around 80 will be observing *sil*. The *pōya* days which are least well attended – such as Sanghamitta Day – attract around 100 participants. Typically around 80 per cent of participants at *pōya* day celebrations are Sri Lankan.

day celebration that I attended at the Vihara, and some *pōya* days were notable for their strong emphasis on such an approach. As an example we can look at the celebrations of Sanghamitta Day 2007.

As noted in chapter 5, Sanghamitta Day celebrates the establishment of the order of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka, and thus often features talks and activities which are considered relevant to women. This explains the greater participation of women in this programme than is usually the case at the LBV. Two of the talks given during the day were by female teachers (aside from Sanghamitta Day in 2007, no other *pōya* day at the LBV during my research featured more than one female speaker). In addition, the day was run by members of the past pupils' association of Visakha Vidyalaya, a well-known girls' school located in central Colombo. The programme on for this day began with the recitation – led by the head monk – of the eight precepts by those who were observing *sil* during the day. Following this Pali verses were chanted in praise of the Buddha. There was then a 30 minute period of meditation, led by Ajahn Candasiri, a convert nun of the Forest Sangha. After a break for tea, Ajahn Candasiri gave a talk, which was followed by a Buddha *pūjā*. At 11:30 *dāna* was served, first to the monastics present, then to those observing *sil*, and finally to the rest of the laity. The afternoon's activities commenced at 1:15 p.m. with a *sutta* reading from Julian Wall, one of most committed convert practitioners at the Vihara. This was followed by a talk by Sister Amarasiri, a British convert teacher who has received training in both Theravada and Tibetan Mahayana traditions. At 2:30 members of the Visakha Vidyalaya past pupils' association presented all of those present with an English translation of the *Dhammapada*, a text from the Pali Canon containing short verses attributed to the Buddha. After another tea break, there were two final talks. The first, by Matheesha Gunatilake was entitled, 'Understanding Anatta (non-self), psychiatry and Buddhism'. The second, delivered in Sinhalese by Venerable Chandakitti, a visiting monk from Sri Lanka, focused on the importance of cultivating *mettā* (loving kindness). The day ended with the chanting of *pirit* by the LBV's resident monks.

The first thing that struck me about this programme was the amount of space that it gave to convert Buddhist teachers. While the majority of those attending the programme were Sri Lankan, three of the five talks delivered during the day were given by converts. This in itself suggests problems with the 'Two Buddhisms' model. Beyond this, the programme was notable for the degree to which it emphasised a meditation-oriented,

nibbanic approach to Buddhism. Both Ajahn Candasiri and Sister Amarasiri are experienced meditation practitioners and teachers, thus it is unsurprising that their talks expressed a strongly practice-oriented approach. Sister Amarasiri in particular emphasised the importance of gaining experiential knowledge of Buddhist truths, such as the teaching of no-self, through practice.⁶ Julian Wall is a regular at the LBV's meditation classes. He is also a regular practitioner at Amaravati. Mr Wall's talk was referred to as a *sutta* reading, but in fact he drew on a number of sources – most prominently, on a teaching by Ajahn Sumedho, the abbot of Amaravati – and his own experiences to speak on the theme of patience. Again his talk reflected a meditation-centred approach to Buddhism. I have discussed another of Matheesha Gunatilake's talks in chapter 5. On this occasion Dr Gunatilake's talk focused on the doctrine of no-self, giving an overview of Buddhist teachings on the topic and drawing parallels between these teachings and the findings of modern psychiatry and psychotherapy. In some senses Dr Gunatilake's talk was more study-oriented and less based on personal experience than the talks discussed above – it was primarily an exposition of Buddhist teachings rather than an experienced-based discussion of meditation practice. However, as noted in chapter 5, Dr Gunatilake emphasises the need for Buddhists to meditate and progress towards *nibbāna*, and the talk reflected these ideals. Thus no-self was not spoken about only in the abstract, but as something to be explored and realised through meditation.

The above clearly demonstrates that it is problematic to view *pōya* day celebrations at the LBV as occasions for a ritual-centred 'diaspora Buddhism' focused on kammatic and apotropaic goals. Kammatic and apotropaic practices are evident during the programme. However, at the same time the programme is dominated by talks which express a clearly meditation-centred, nibbanic approach to Buddhism.

The fact that Sri Lankans outnumber converts at certain meditation-oriented talks at the LBV and during *pōya* day celebrations thus challenges the idea that Sri Lankans at the LBV take no interest in meditation-centred forms of Buddhism. Of my 27 first and second-generation interviewees from the LBV, 7 stated that they currently practised meditation regularly, while another 3 had a strong interest in meditation, and had practised regularly in the past. As this highlights, while not all Sri Lankans at the LBV take a strong interest in meditation, a substantial minority do. It is interesting to note that of these 10 individuals

⁶ My descriptions of the talks given during the day are based on my fieldwork notes (10/09/2006).

only one attended the LBV's meditation class regularly during the period of my research, while another 3 attended occasionally. As this indicates, not all Sri Lankans at the LBV who take a strong personal interest in meditation do so in the context of the classes that the Vihara provides. Let us take a few examples. My interviewee Harshini takes a strong interest in meditation. She practises meditation at home and enjoys listening to recordings of talks by meditation-oriented monks (particularly monks of the Forest Sangha). Harshini's interest in meditation has grown in recent years, and she now attends meditation retreats at Amaravati twice a year. However, Harshini has never attended meditation classes at the LBV. Instead she attends the LBV for *pōya* day celebrations, occasionally for Buddha *pūjās* and to offer *dāna*. Rather than attending meditation classes at the LBV Harshini and two other Sri Lankan friends who live in the same area of London meet weekly at one of their houses to meditate, listen to recordings of Buddhist talks, and discuss Buddhists teachings.

My interviewee Damith (discussed in chapters 5 and 6) similarly practises meditation regularly in his home. Damith does not attend meditation classes at the LBV in part because he lives outside London, making attending events in the evening problematic. However, Damith also states that he has little interest in attending such classes since he feels that he has enough knowledge of Buddhism to practise on his own, gaining any further guidance that he might need by reading Buddhist *suttas* or discourses by meditation teachers on the Internet. Despite this, Damith does practise meditation in group contexts on occasion. Prior to our interview Damith regularly attended a predominantly convert Buddhist meditation and discussion group located in the area in which he lives. In addition, when I spoke with Damith some time after our interview, he told me that he had recently attended a retreat in the UK led by Venerable Dhammajiva, the senior meditation teacher at the Nissarana Vanaya meditation monastery in Sri Lanka, whom Damith particularly respects as a teacher of meditation.⁷

I found many similar examples during my fieldwork of Sri Lankan practitioners at the LBV who had a strong interest in meditation yet did not attend the LBV's meditation classes. For example during the LBV's Sanghamitta Day celebrations of 2006 I spoke with

⁷ Despite its name, and its focus on meditation-oriented Buddhism, there is no direct link between the Nissarana Vanaya monastery and the Nissarana group discussed in chapter 9. Dhammajiva made a visit to the UK in 2009. The retreat that Damith attended was organised by a group of lay Sri Lankan followers of Venerable Dhammajiva.

Mrs Gunesekere.⁸ Mrs Gunesekere had just returned from a meditation retreat at Amaravati when we spoke. She emphasised her interest in meditation during our conversation, noting that in addition to regularly attending retreats at Amaravati, she was involved in the establishment of the Satipanya retreat centre, a centre located in Wales run by the convert monk Bhikkhu Bodhidharma. However, while Mrs Gunesekere regularly attends *pōya* day celebrations at the LBV, she does not attend meditation classes at the Vihara. I also regularly met individuals at the LBV who did not attend meditation classes at the Vihara but were involved with the Nissarana and Sathdhamma groups which I discuss in chapter 9. The Nissarana group is characterised by a strongly nibbanic approach to Buddhism which gives a central place to meditation. 5 regular members of this group also attend the LBV regularly. However, while their involvement in the Nissarana group suggests an interest in meditation, none of these individuals attended meditation classes at the LBV. The Sathdhamma group is characterised by an unorthodox approach to Buddhism which emphasises the attainment of *nibbāna* but rejects meditation as a route to *nibbāna*. Members of this group can thus hardly be said to have an interest in meditation. However, the emphasis placed on the attainment of *nibbāna* by the group means that its members have much in common with those that practise meditation in terms of their focus on nibbanic, practice-oriented aspects of Buddhism. All 6 members of the Sathdhamma group that I met when I attended one of the group's meetings also attended the LBV, but for obvious reasons they do not attend meditation classes.⁹

The examples given above illustrate that the level of interest in meditation or otherwise nibbanic-oriented approaches to Buddhism found among Sri Lankan patrons of the LBV cannot be gauged purely by looking at how many Sri Lankans attend meditation classes at the Vihara. It is easy – but often misleading – to assume when making a study of a religious institution that this institution represents the only space of religious practice for its patrons. Sri Lankans at the LBV who have an interest in practising meditation or otherwise engaging with nibbanic Buddhism have a range of options open to them: Amaravati and other monasteries of the Forest Sangha; other convert meditation centres; visiting meditation teachers such as Venerable Dhammajiva; informal meditation groups such as that organised by Harshini and her friends; Sri Lankan groups with a nibbanic focus such as the Nissarana and Sathdhamma groups; as well as the classes and retreats offered

⁸ Fieldwork notes 10/12/2006.

⁹ Fieldwork notes 24/11/2006.

by the LBV itself. In addition, some may prefer simply to practise meditation on their own at home.

Thus far in this section I have argued against the idea of a ‘Two Buddhisms’ divide at the LBV by highlighting the popularity of meditation-centred talks among Sri Lankan patrons of the Vihara, by showing that *pōya* day celebrations at the LBV are characterised by a strong emphasis on meditation-centred Buddhism, and by showing that a substantial number of Sri Lankans who attend the LBV have a strong interest in practising meditation. In fact during my research I found the modernist emphasis in the LBV’s teachings and practices (see previous section) to be to some extent reflected in the approaches to Buddhism found among its Sri Lankan patrons. Thus while I found religious variety among Sri Lankans at the LBV, I found an emphasis on meditation to be somewhat more common among the Sri Lankan patrons of the Vihara than in the other Sri Lankan temples that I visited (such as the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre, examined in chapter 8). One indication of this while 10 of my 27 interviewees at the LBV had a strong interest in practising meditation, none of my interviewees from the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre practised meditation regularly.

That patrons of the LBV are particularly likely to favour a modernist approach to Buddhism is also suggested by other aspects of my research. As noted in chapter 6, my interviewee Anika, a regular patron of the LBV, notes that her approach to Buddhism has changed over time. Whereas previously her religiosity was focused on rituals of *pūjā* and *dāna*, now she emphasises Buddhist philosophy and meditation. When I ask her about the reasons for this change, Anika attributes it to her coming to the LBV (previously she had attended another Sri Lankan temple in London):

I think it’s a result of coming here because here they are trying to teach Buddhism to people who don’t know the philosophy. Whereas in Sri Lanka, you know, you are taken for granted...that you will learn if you want to. And they just carry on with the rest of it. So you just follow with the flow of it, and...you know, you keep going to the temple, you offer flowers, you give alms and all that. But you are missing the core of it, the real teachings.

Anika continues:

This temple is here to spread Buddhism...[to] spread the teachings. So it is really doing what we ought to be doing...It’s doing what I really need...what a temple

should be doing for someone like me. Because I need to know the real teachings, the meaning behind all of this.

Here, then, Anika attributes the change in her religiosity to the LBV and its emphasis on spreading the ‘real teachings’ of Buddhism (by which she means those centred on meditation and philosophy rather than on rituals such as *pūjā* and *dāna*). Elsewhere in our interview Anika makes comments which suggest that her changing approach to Buddhism may in fact pre-date her coming to the LBV. She notes that she was looking for a temple of this kind before she came to the LBV, and that she eventually came into contact with the Vihara after it was recommended to her by a relative. It is likely that both of Anika’s answers give part of the truth: that she was seeking a temple at which to explore philosophical and meditative aspects of Buddhism, and that upon finding the LBV she has been influenced to explore these aspects of Buddhism more fully. Either way, Anika’s comments show that we can see a correlation between the ‘modernist’ emphasis of the LBV and the approach to Buddhism found among at least some of its patrons.

A similar correlation was evident in the views expressed to me by Sunil, another patron of the LBV. Coming from an upper middle-class Sri Lankan family with a history of interest in meditation-centred forms of Buddhism, Sunil takes little interest in rituals of *pūjā* and *dāna* and focuses on in his practice on meditation. When he first came to the UK in the early 1990s Sunil began to attend both the LBV and institutions of the Forest Sangha such as Amaravati. Initially he was particularly drawn to the latter since their strongly meditation-centred approach to Buddhism matched his own interests. However, over time Sunil came to appreciate the LBV to a greater extent. He told me that while in the past he had no interest in the LBV as a Sri Lankan cultural and social centre, he now has more appreciation of these aspects of the temple. When we discussed different Sri Lankan temples in London, Sunil drew a contrast between the LBV and the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre. He argued that the LBV is characterised by a focus on meditation and related activities, the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre gives less attention to such dimensions of Buddhism. Because of this Sunil prefers to practise at the LBV, since its focus on meditation reflects his own approach to Buddhism.¹⁰

¹⁰ Fieldwork notes 04/03/2007.

There is, then, some evidence suggesting that the LBV is more likely than other Sri Lankan temples in the UK to attract Sri Lankan patrons with an interest in modernist, meditation-centred forms of Buddhism. However, as I have argued above, the Sri Lankan patrons of the LBV are characterised above all else by their religious diversity, and despite everything that I have discussed above it was clear from my fieldwork observations that a higher proportion of converts than Sri Lankans at the Vihara have a strong personal interest in meditation practice. Among convert Theravada Buddhists practising Buddhism is often equated with practising meditation (Bell 1989:189). Thus Buddhism generally does not appeal to those British people who have no inclination towards meditation. In the Sri Lankan community this is clearly not the case. While we can find many Sri Lankans at the LBV who take a strong interest in meditation, those that meditate regularly are nevertheless a minority. As noted above, 7 of my 27 interviews from the LBV practise meditation regularly, while another 3 have a strong interest in mediation and have practised regularly in the past. Thus 20 of my interviewees do not take a strong personal interest in meditation practice. We must exercise caution at this point. The fact that many Sri Lankan patrons of the LBV do not practise meditation regularly clearly differentiates them to a certain extent from converts whose practice is centred upon meditation. However, this does not necessarily mean that we can best describe the religiosity of such individuals using a ‘Two Buddhisms’ dichotomy in which they are portrayed as a ‘traditional’ or ‘ritualistic’ and thus contrasted with ‘modernist’ or ‘meditative’ converts.

To illustrate my argument here, let me turn to one of my interviewees, Pamu. Pamu came to the UK in the early 1960s and has attended the LBV since this time. He comes to the Vihara every three months to give a regular *dāna* with his wife. Other than this he attends the Vihara only for special occasions such as Wesak and Kaṭhina. While Pamu includes a few minutes of *mettā* meditation in his daily practice of yoga,¹¹ he does not practise extended periods of seated meditation and does not attend meditation classes or retreats. On first impressions, then, Pamu’s practice of Buddhism seems to accord fairly well with the picture of ‘traditional’ diaspora Buddhism given in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model – he attends the temple for festivals and ritual observances, and does not attend

¹¹ Pamu began practising yoga before he came to the UK. During our interview he changes his mind over the question of whether he regards his yoga practice as connected with Buddhism. Initially he states it is something that he does to relieve stress and that it has ‘nothing to do with religion’. However, he then argues that it does have certain connections with Buddhism, since it helps to calm one’s mind.

meditation-centred activities. However, the views that Pamu expresses during our interview highlight the difficulty with defining his approach to Buddhism in these terms. When I ask Pamu whether he performs *pūjās* towards an image of the Buddha in his home, he states:

No. I am not a follower of the ritual aspect [of Buddhism]. I have a Buddha image at home, but to me it is a work of art or a symbol. I respect it, but I am not ritualistic. To practise Buddhism you do not have to have an altar. You can do that [make offerings to an altar], and for the rest of the day you may be engaged in something else [i.e. something that is not compatible with Buddhist principles]. What is important is that all the time we are Buddhist.

Thus Pamu explicitly denies the importance of ritual aspects of Buddhism. When we discuss giving *dāna* Pamu entirely rejects the idea of giving in order to generate merit. Rather he emphasises that he gives *dāna* as an act of generosity and a way of supporting the Vihara:

In Buddhism the impression is given that you will get benefits in the next birth [from giving *dāna*]....I am against that sort of thinking. That is like putting money in the building society...your motive is to maximise the returns. They [good deeds such as *dāna*] have to be done for the sake of doing that [i.e. for the sake of doing the deed]. It is a good thing to help someone. I give *dāna* because...to help that institution [the LBV] which propagates Buddhism and helps people.

Pamu also rejects the idea of giving *dāna* in order to transfer merit to the deceased. While he does not deny the possibility of transferring merit, he states that he never gives for such reasons, but only for the sake of giving itself:

All religions have the practical side of it...the promotion side of it...all religions...I think this is to give you hope...that whatever you do will be transferred to their essence. For me, whenever I go [...] ‘Do you give this *dāna* in connection with someone deceased?’, they ask that. And if you say ‘Yes, so and so’, then I think they are delighted...they like that [...] It’s a sort of exchange isn’t it, David? You give *dāna*, they give merit to be given to [the deceased]...It’s swapping, isn’t it? So whenever I am asked, I’m not going to swap. I say ‘[I am giving] just for the goodness of it’. Giving is good, and that’s all about it.

Just as Pamu rejects kammatic aspects of Buddhism, so he takes little interest in apotropaic dimensions of the religion. When we discuss the chanting of *pirit* he states that while he receives *pirit* thread when he visits the temple, he does not see *pirit* chanting as having tangible apotropaic benefits. Rather, he focuses on the way in which the sound of *pirit* chanting can calm and concentrate the mind. Pamu also rejects non-Buddhist apotropaic

practices which many Sri Lankans engage in, such as praying to divine beings in *dēvālēs* (shrines to the gods) and Hindu temples. Pamu has no involvement with such practices, and rejects their efficacy entirely (see chapter 9 for more on such practices).

Pamu expresses strong admiration for Western convert Buddhists, stating:

The best Buddhists I see are the Westerners...They are...they don't have...ties with other practices. They are going there for Buddhism and Buddhism alone...pure Buddhism.

He expresses particular admiration for Ajahn Sumedho, the abbot of Amaravati. He argues that while Sri Lankan monks tend to rely on the repeating the same examples from *Jātaka* stories in their sermons, he finds Ajahn Sumedho's talks more engaging and relevant. Thus he states that when it comes to preaching:

...the best persons [*sic*] are [monks like] Sumedho Thero [...] That's a completely different Buddhism. I love to listen to him. He doesn't dig into these *Jātaka* stories.

My interview with Pamu demonstrates the problems creating an absolute divide between a 'modernist', 'meditative' convert Buddhism and a 'traditional', 'ritualistic' diaspora Buddhism. While Pamu does not take a strong interest in meditation, and while his attendance at the LBV is mainly for giving *dāna* and the observance of certain key festivals, it would be wrong to describe his understanding of Buddhism as 'ritualistic' or 'traditional' and thus as fundamentally contrasting with the 'modernist' Buddhism of Western converts.

Pamu's approach to Buddhism is not an unusual one among Sri Lankans at the LBV. In chapter 6 I demonstrated that a range of approaches to ritual practices can be found among patrons of the Vihara, and discussed others who share Pamu's tendency to play down the importance of kammatic and apotropaic aspects of Buddhism. My interviewee Shalini particularly, whose views I discussed in chapter 6, shares much in common with Pamu in terms of her understanding of Buddhism. Shalini attends the LBV for the weekly Sunday *pūjā* and often attends *pōya* day celebrations at the Vihara. She does not practise seated meditation regularly, although she says that she feels that she practises a form of meditation when engaging in activities such as yoga and running.¹² Thus, like

¹² Shalini has recently taken up the practice of yoga. Like Pamu (see note 11) she expresses conflicting views about the relationship between yoga and Buddhism. Initially she links the two, stating that yoga is 'my way of

Pamu, Shalini's practice of Buddhism may appear from the outside to indicate a 'traditional' approach. However, Shalini rejects kammatic merit-making, calls into question the practice of making offerings to the Buddha, and does not view the practice of *pirit* chanting in apotropaic terms. When it comes to the practice of praying to divine beings, Shalini states that while she has engaged in such practices in the past at her parents' instigation, she personally has little interest in such practices. For Shalini, as for Pamu, Buddhism is principally a philosophy of the mind focused on ethics and mental cultivation, in which kammatic and apotropaic rituals, and 'supernatural' dimensions in general, play little part.

In all 12 of my 27 interviewees from the LBV either share the critical attitude towards ritualised merit-making of Pamu and Shalini, or simply take no interest in kammatic aspects of Buddhism. In relation to apotropaic dimensions of religion, 11 share Pamu's sceptical attitude about the power of *pirit* chanting. In addition, 15 either share his critical attitude towards the worship of divine beings or simply have no involvement with such practices.

Two aspects of my interview with Pamu deserve further mention. As noted above, while Pamu does not practise extended periods of seated meditation, he includes a few minutes of meditation as part of his daily practice of yoga. I found many similar examples of individuals at the LBV who did not practise seated meditation, yet regularly engaged in other forms of meditative practice. As mentioned above, Shalini states that she practises a form of meditation while exercising. In chapter 6 I noted that another of my interviewees, Ishan, views his practice of listening to recording of Buddhist chanting while driving to work as a form of meditation. My interviewee Kumari states that she tries to practise *mettā* meditation while taking the tube to work, and notes that her father – also a regular practitioner at the LBV – practises in a similar way during his daily commute. Another of my second-generation interviewees, Namal, notes that since he finds it hard to concentrate when practising seated meditation, he tries to practise a form of meditation while walking during his everyday life. My interviewee Asoka says he would like to practise seated meditation regularly, but that he does not have time to do so. However, he goes on to note that he tries to bring meditation into his everyday life by being conscious and aware in all

doing Buddhist meditation'. Later, however, she states that 'I don't actually do it for religious reasons. I do it for personal reasons, because I have a very stressful job, and I have to be able to detach myself from it'.

that he does. He notes that this is something that he was advised on by a monk from the Forest Sangha:

Something that one of the monks at Amaravati told me was, 'You don't have to be cross-legged to do meditation [...] you meditate while teaching your children. Be conscious about the moment.'

These examples serve to further complicate the idea of a 'Two Buddhisms' division at the LBV by showing that an interest in the ideals of meditation-centred Buddhism is not found only among those Sri Lankans at the Vihara who regularly practise seated meditation.

The second aspect of my interview with Pamu that deserves further mention is the admiration that he expresses for the preaching of Ajahn Sumedho. That Pamu, not a committed practitioner of meditation himself, should express such a strong liking for the preaching of this meditation-oriented monk is significant. Again it highlights that interest in meditation-oriented Buddhism is not limited to those Sri Lankans who are strongly committed meditation practitioners. As noted above, talks at the LBV by meditation teachers such as Ajahn Brahmavamso and Venerable Henepola Gunaratana attract large numbers of Sri Lankans. Some Sri Lankans that attend such talks are committed meditators. However, others that attend do not meditate regularly. When Venerable Gunaratana spoke at the LBV in May 2007 I met two of my interviewees, Darika and Champika, neither of whom practise seated meditation on a regular basis.¹³ That such non-meditators should be interested in attending a talk by Venerable Gunaratana – a preacher who tends to focus very much in his talks on the experience of meditation itself, and to assume a good knowledge of meditation among his audience – illustrates the wide appeal of meditation-oriented Buddhism among Sri Lankans in the UK.

By focusing on my interview with Pamu I am not suggesting that all Sri Lankans at the LBV share his approach to Buddhism. While a significant number at the LBV share Pamu's disinterested attitude towards merit-making, 15 of my 27 interviewees at the Vihara show at least some concern for kammatic aspects of Buddhism. As discussed in chapter 6, such individuals range from my interviewee Anika, who acknowledges the merit brought by ritual and practices the transference of merit, but generally emphasises nibbanic rather than kammatic aspects of ritual, to my interviewee Darika, who strongly emphasises the importance of merit-making. A range of views can also be found among my 16

¹³ Fieldwork notes 31/05/2007.

interviewees at the LBV who do not share Pamu's strongly sceptical attitude towards the power of *pirit*. When I ask Ishan whether he views *pirit* as bringing tangible benefits, he initially says that he does not see it as bringing protection in a literal sense, but rather views it as a way of calming the mind and expressing one's faith in living by Buddhist teachings. Ishan goes on to note that some talk about the sound vibrations produced by *pirit* bringing one positive benefits, and suggests that this may be the case. Thus Ishan allows that *pirit* may bring positive results in itself, but puts most stress on its psychological benefits. My interviewee Asoka, on the other hand, expresses a firmer confidence in the tangible power of *pirit* chanting. During our interview he states:

I am very aware that chanting *pirit* has a deep significance, and a material benefit if you are receptive.

He goes on to note that during his youth in Sri Lanka he witnessed the power of *pirit* personally when he was present at a *pirit*-chanting ceremony held for a woman who was said to be possessed by a demon. When the possessed woman heard the *pirit* she became agitated and tried to stop the monks from chanting. However, when she touched the *pirit* thread that had been placed around the chanting monks she was thrown back. Asoka thus states:

So I have actually seen it with my own eyes...and nothing you or anybody could say that there was not a physical change out of this *Āṭānāṭiya Sutta*¹⁴ would change [my belief].

10 of my interviewees at the LBV either regularly engage in practices directed towards divine beings – in *dēvālēs*, in Hindu temples or in their own homes – or state that they would if they had a problem in their life.¹⁵ Again a range of approaches can be found here. Asoka tells me that he does not visit *dēvālēs* or Hindu temples regularly, but that he would perform rituals towards gods if he was in particularly difficult situation and needed help. Hashan occasionally visits the *dēvālē* at the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre

¹⁴ The *Āṭānāṭiya Sutta* (DN iii, 194) is regarded in Sri Lanka as being especially effective in dealing with troublesome supernatural beings (Gombrich 1971:264).

¹⁵ Two of my interviewees at the LBV fall into neither category that I have outlined in relation to the worship of divine beings. As noted above, my interviewee Shalini has in the past taken part in such rituals at her parents' instigation, but does not have a personal interest in such rituals. My second-generation interviewee Kumari has taken part in such rituals in the past through her involvement with a traditional dance group. However, outside this context she does not participate in such practices.

in Kingsbury. However, during our interview he expresses a somewhat agnostic view of such practices. He states that his parents had a strong belief in visiting *dēvālēs*, but that his belief is less strong and that ultimately he does not know whether such rituals have a real efficacy. In addition, he states that in large part the benefits of visiting a *dēvālē* are psychological – performing the rituals brings confidence in the face of the difficulty one is facing. My interviewee Ruwan, on the other hand, expresses a far stronger faith in the worship of divine beings. Coming from a family in which many members were priests at *dēvālēs* he affirms that institutions ‘have some power’. When he visits Sri Lanka he regularly participates in the worship of divine beings at places such as Kataragama, the town in the South of the island which houses a large shrine to the god of the same name (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:163-199). In the UK, he used to travel regularly to Skanda Vale, a Hindu monastery in Wales which attracts many Sri Lankan Buddhists (see chapter 9), although he has stopped visiting this institution in the last two or three years.¹⁶

As the above indicates, one can find Sri Lankans practising at the LBV whose religious understanding and practice does to at least to some extent resemble the portrayal of diaspora Buddhists given in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model. As an example let me look again at my interviewee Nuwan. Nuwan came to the UK in the early 1990s and has attended the LBV since this time. He comes primarily to take his children to Sunday school every week, and also attends major *pōya* days at the temple such as Wesak. He does not practise meditation (though he says that he would like to if he had more time) and he does not express the interest in the preaching of meditation-oriented monks that Pamu does (though he has been to Amaravati a number of times, and states that he enjoys the atmosphere at this monastery). Nuwan does not offer *dāna* at the LBV – he notes that it is difficult to get an opportunity to offer *dāna* at the Vihara because there are more families that attend than there are *dāna* places – but in the past regularly offered *dāna* at a Sri Lankan temple that was established briefly in Hounslow. When we discuss Buddha *pūjā*, Nuwan states that he rarely participates in such rituals, either at home or at the Vihara.

As noted above, Nuwan has a strong interest in the worship of divine beings for apotropaic purposes. Nuwan also expresses a faith in Buddhist apotropaic rituals such as *pirit* chanting, describing such chanting as ‘like a wish...to give good health and affirming a strong belief in its benefits. He always wears a *pirit* thread around his wrist, and argues

¹⁶ Nuwan stopped attending Skanda Vale because the monastery introduced new rules requiring visitors not to eat meat for 3 days before visiting. Nuwan states that he dislikes such ‘extreme’ restrictions.

that while some people wear the thread just ‘as a style’, he does not. Rather, he states, ‘I wear it because I believe [in its power]’.

Nuwan does not attach a great deal of importance to personal ritualised merit-making. When we discuss *dāna* he states that he will give to monks if they are in need, but that if there is no need he would rather give his money to charity than give unnecessarily to temples. Similarly he states that he does not feel the need to attend Buddha *pūjās* as long as he is living morally in his everyday life. However, Nuwan does not express the strongly critical attitude towards merit-making that Pamu does. In addition he affirms the importance and efficacy of the practice of transferring merit to the dead, stating simply when I ask whether merit can be transferred:

Yes. We believe that it can help people in their next life.

My interview with Nuwan highlights that some Sri Lankans at the LBV differ quite significantly from convert Buddhists in terms of how they practise and understand their religion. While his relative disinterest in personal merit-making complicates the issue, his strong affirmation of apotropaic Buddhist ritual, his interest in rituals directed towards divine beings, his affirmation of the importance of transferring merit to the dead, and his lack of strong interest in meditation and meditation-oriented discourses all mean that in many respects Nuwan’s religiosity corresponds reasonably well with the picture of diaspora Buddhism given in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model. However, this does not mean that Sri Lankan Buddhism at the LBV as a whole can be best understood through the narrow dichotomies of this model. Rather, taken alongside the rest of my research, my interview with Nuwan serves to illustrate the religious diversity of Sri Lankans at the Vihara. In all only 4 of my interviewees at the LBV could be placed with any ease into the category of ‘traditional diaspora Buddhism’ that is suggested by the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model.

If Sri Lankan Buddhism at the LBV cannot be understood through the dichotomies of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model, how can we best understand the relationship between Sri Lankans and converts at the Vihara? The relationship is complex. As I have shown, the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model is problematic because many Sri Lankans at the LBV share much in common with convert Buddhists in terms of how they approach their religion. However, this does not mean that these Sri Lankans necessarily take an approach to Buddhism which

is identical to that found among convert Buddhists. Let me illustrate my point with some examples. As noted in chapter 6, my interviewee Anika states that her approach to Buddhism has changed significantly since she started coming to the LBV. Previously her religiosity was focused on rituals of *dāna* and *pūjā*, and she had a significant interest in the worship of divine beings. Since coming to the Vihara she takes a stronger interest in meditation and exploring Buddhist philosophy and has abandoned rituals of worship towards deities entirely. Thus in many ways Anika's religiosity has come to resemble that found among convert Buddhists. However, as noted in chapter 6, Anika stresses that while she has much in common with convert Buddhists, she also differs from converts in certain respects. Despite moving towards a more meditation-centred form of Buddhism, Anika continues to practice rituals such as *dāna* and Buddha *pūjā* regularly, and she states that she participates in such rituals with a reverential attitude which is more typical of traditional Sri Lankan Buddhism than convert Buddhism. Anika also affirms apotropaic and kammatic dimensions of Buddhist ritual to a greater extent than a convert practitioner typically would – as noted in chapter 6, she regularly practises rituals of merit transference, and affirms the apotropaic power of *pirit*. Thus when I ask Anika whether her approach to Buddhism now has more in common with that of a convert than with that of a traditional Sri Lankan Buddhist, she states:

I would not say that, David...I think I have got maybe the best of both.

I have discussed my interviewee Harshini both in chapter 6 and above in this chapter. Harshini's strong interest in meditation, her disinterest in ritualised merit-making or apotropaic dimensions of Buddhism, and the fact that she regularly attends retreats at Amaravati mean that she shares much in common with convert Buddhists at the LBV. However, Harshini also occasionally engages in the practice of making offerings to deities – particularly the god Kataragama, who is extremely popular among Sri Lankans – in order to bring particular worldly benefits. In addition, Harshini and her husband are both devotees of the Indian Guru Sai Baba, an individual followed by many Sri Lankans who is believed by his followers to be able to perform miracles. Harshini's husband regularly attends Sai Baba meetings, at which songs of devotion towards the Guru are sung, and Harshini also attends these meetings occasionally. Thus some dimensions of Harshini's religiosity differentiate her significantly from most convert Buddhists.

Like Harshini, my interviewee Gihan has a strong interest in meditation. He practises daily at home, and occasionally attends the LBV's meditation classes. However, once again Gihan also differs from the majority of convert Buddhists in a number of ways. While he does not visit *dēvālē* or Hindu temples regularly, Gihan does occasionally engage in practices of worship towards divine beings. In addition, Gihan expresses a stronger belief in and concern with kammatic and apotropaic Buddhist rituals than is commonly found among convert Buddhists – he describes his engagement in Buddha *pūjā* at least in part in kammatic terms, and he affirms the apotropaic power of *pirit* chanting (see chapter 6). As these examples indicate, Gihan's approach to Buddhism is generally characterised by a greater affirmation of and emphasis on supernatural dimensions of religion than is commonly found among convert Buddhists. Significantly, when I ask Gihan if there are any major differences between the way in which Sri Lankans practise Buddhism and the way in which it is practised by Western converts, he argues that Western Buddhists tend to lack 'devotion'. When I ask whether this lack of devotion can be an obstacle to the practice of Buddhism, Gihan argues:

From the long term...in the final analysis, yes. Because there is something called...Buddhism always talks about...you've got to have devotion, but that devotion has to be based on knowledge. Say [an] average Buddhist in Sri Lanka, they have devotion but not necessarily based on analytical knowledge...But the devotion is important because if you don't have the devotion...there are times when there are a lot of things that cannot be logically explained, and you need devotion to...link onto the kind of energies that we are talking about [within Buddhism]. [...] Buddhism says don't believe in things but still you've got to have kind-of faith...trust, you see. So just because you don't know what is beyond, it does not mean you mustn't trust it, you see? Because at least if you know that there are people that have tread [*sic*] the path and come back and tell you about it [...] You've got to have some trust, you see. It's just like the way...if you are learning physics you have to have trust on the teacher, because most of the kids don't know what the teacher is going to say.

Gihan's comments about the importance of trusting the Buddhist tradition bring to mind my discussion in chapter 5, in which I argued that Sri Lankan Buddhists generally display a greater tendency to affirm the authority of Buddhist texts than convert Buddhists. In that chapter I noted that a number of my interviewees – such as Damith, Udara and Sumal – share much in common with converts in terms of their interest in meditation-centred Buddhism, yet differ from many converts due to their strong acceptance of textual authority.

The above examples show that in order to understand the relationship between Sri Lankans and convert Buddhists in the UK we need to look not only at a single aspect of religiosity – such as interest in meditation – but at a range of factors: the degree to which individuals view Buddhist rituals in terms of kammatic merit-making and apotropaic protection or in more nibbanic terms; the extent to which supernatural aspects of Buddhism are affirmed and emphasised; the degree to which individuals practise meditation or take an interest in meditation-oriented Buddhism; the attitudes that are taken to questions of textual authority; the degree of interest taken in practices directed towards divine beings or Gurus such as Sai Baba. Patterns of temple attendance are also important – while my interviewee Pamu and Shalini share much in common with convert Buddhists in terms of how they understand Buddhism, it is nevertheless significant that they attend the LBV not for meditation classes but primarily for *pōya* day celebration and rituals such as *dāna* and *pūjā*.

By examining the religiosity of Sri Lankan Buddhists at the LBV in these different ways we find that some at the Vihara share a great deal in common with convert Buddhists. My interviewee Sathi – discussed in chapter 6 – falls into this category. Sathi attends the LBV only for meditation classes, the monthly meditation retreat and for Wesak. She does not offer *pūjā* or *dāna*, and has no interest in merit-making or in the obtaining of apotropaic protection through *pirit* chanting. Sathi also has no interest or involvement with rituals of worship towards divine beings or devotion to Sai Baba. Sathi expresses some interest in convert Buddhist teachers and institutions. When we spoke she had recently returned from a retreat at Amaravati, and she notes that she enjoys reading books by convert teachers such as Larry Rosenberg and Jack Kornfield. Sathi also shares with many convert Buddhists an agnostic approach to the issue of rebirth. Thus in many ways Sathi's understanding and practice of Buddhism mirrors that commonly found among converts. Such an approach to Buddhism is also evident in the views of my second-generation interviewee Laksiri. As discussed in chapter 5, Laksiri attended the LBV while growing up, but became personally interested in Buddhism only after coming into contact with a convert monk. He now practises primarily at convert-oriented institutions such as Amaravati, although he does attend the LBV occasionally. Given Laksiri's interest in convert institutions, it is perhaps unsurprising that Laksiri's approach to Buddhism strongly resembles that of a typical convert Buddhist: meditation is stressed; kammatic and apotropaic aspects of Buddhism are largely dismissed; the worship of divine beings is rejected entirely; and an agnostic view is

taken concerning the question of rebirth. Interestingly, Laksiri comments during our interview on the similarity of his understanding and practice of Buddhism to that found among converts. When I ask whether he feels, as a second-generation Sri Lankan, that he leads a British or a Sri Lankan lifestyle, he states that he feels that his way of life is British. He goes on to note:

I guess the only connection back [to Sri Lanka] would be my Buddhist stuff, but I think my interest in Buddhism is almost... I come at it from an interesting angle because...it's almost as a British practitioner, not as a Sri Lankan practitioner.

Altogether 4 of my interviewees from the Vihara can be described as taking an approach to Buddhism which is very similar to that commonly found among convert practitioners. As noted above, another 4 of my interviewees lie at the opposite end of the spectrum, differing significantly from convert Buddhists in a number of ways and having a certain amount in common with the 'traditional' diaspora Buddhism suggested by the 'Two Buddhisms' model. The majority of my interviewees, however, fall between these two extremes, sitting in a complex relationship with convert Buddhism, with significant points of both similarity and difference.

Finally in this chapter let us look briefly at another way in which we can consider whether there are 'Two Buddhisms' at the LBV. Numrich's 'parallel congregations' thesis suggests not only that diaspora Buddhists and converts practise Buddhism in different ways, but also that when these groups practise in the same temple there is little interaction between them. At the LBV a lack of interaction between convert and Sri Lankan Buddhists can be noted to some extent. Sri Lankans who attend the LBV only to give *dāna* or to take their children to Sunday school have little interaction with converts at the Vihara. During *pōya* day celebrations – which are predominantly attended by Sri Lankans but always attract a number of converts (generally around 20% of participants) – I often observed a certain tendency for converts to socialise with other converts and Sri Lankans with other Sri Lankans. In large part this is attributable to the fact that individuals tend to socialise with those they already know: converts are likely to know other converts because they have met during meditation classes, while Sri Lankans will know other Sri Lankans either from coming to the Vihara on other occasions or because of friendship networks that exist outside the Vihara. However, there is by no means a complete lack of contact between Sri

Lankans and converts at the LBV. The Wednesday evening meditation class always concludes with a time for participants to socialise over tea and biscuits, and during this period Sri Lankan and convert participants mix freely. Particularly among those converts who have been involved with the Vihara for a number of years and those Sri Lankans most dedicated to meditation, I observed a number of close friendships. Contact between the two groups is not restricted to meditation classes. Even during the LBV's Sunday school – the time when the Vihara is most emphatically a 'Sri Lankan' space (since all of the children at the school come from Sri Lankan backgrounds) – convert Buddhists are not entirely absent, since a number of converts are involved in teaching at the school. Converts became involved with the school during the period of my research, with a rotating team of converts (plus one young Sri Lankan man with a strong involvement in meditation) teaching a class to older pupils of the school (aged around 14 to 16). The idea behind the class was that British-based Sri Lankan teenagers may find it easier and more interesting to speak with British converts than with Sri Lankan-born adults.¹⁷ Thus – mirroring the patterns observed by Fitzpatrick (2000), who found that the division between converts and Sri Lankans at the Washington Buddhist Vihara was not absolute but negotiated and often transcended – at the LBV one finds not the completely discrete congregations described by Numrich (1996), but a complex picture of both divisions between convert and diaspora Buddhists, and contact and friendships across the convert/diaspora divide.

¹⁷ I was involved in teaching this class on three occasions (Fieldwork notes 04/03/2007, 17/06/2007, 07/10/2007).

Chapter 8

The Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre: A Sinhalese Cultural and Religious Centre

In this chapter I examine the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre (SSIBC), a Sri Lankan temple located in Kingsbury, North West London. The temple consists of two semi-detached houses which have been joined to form a single building. The upper levels of the temple contain the rooms of the temple's resident monks.¹ On the ground floor one finds the public spaces of the temple: a shrine room containing a large Buddha-image and various other statues and objects; two further rooms used for meetings and classes, or to accommodate those that cannot fit into the shrine room during religious observances (one of these contains a second, smaller shrine surrounded by a number of small *bō* trees); and a room containing a *dēvālē* or shrine to the gods (see below). Behind the temple is a small garden containing another large Buddha image and a pond. In terms of the activities that it conducts the SSIBC is similar in many ways to the LBV: all-day programmes take place to celebrate significant *pōya* days; Buddha *pūjās* are conducted daily, accompanied on Sundays by a sermon; a Buddhist school for Sinhalese children is conducted weekly; *dāna* is offered daily to the resident monks; and so on. There are, however, also some important differences in terms of the activities conducted at the two temples. These will be explored in the course of the chapter.

I decided to look at the SSIBC for two principle reasons: firstly, because like the LBV the SSIBC is one of the most popular and successful Sri Lankan temples in London; secondly, because the SSIBC makes an interesting point of comparison with the LBV. As we shall see, the SSIBC was established in some sense in reaction against the LBV, following a period of turbulence at the LBV in the 1980s. Today, as we shall see below, Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK often contrast the two temples with each other, seeing them in some sense as opposites. In reality, as we shall see, we can find significant points of similarity as well as significant differences between the two temples. Examining the SSIBC thus allows me, following my discussion of the LBV, to illustrate something of the diversity that exists within Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK, while simultaneously showing

¹ The number of monks resident at the SSIBC varied during my research period. At the time of my interview with the head monk, Venerable Piyadassi, in March 2006 there were 8 resident monks.

that it is problematic to make absolute distinctions between different Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions.

The analysis of the SSIBC presented here is conducted in order to test and expand on the findings that emerged from my interviews and participation with Buddhists attending the LBV, and as such the chapter focuses at some points more on the LBV than the SSIBC. For example, this is the case to a large degree when I look at the issue of the cultural focus of the two temples. This reflects the nature of my research. As discussed in chapter 1, my intention in this thesis is not to provide an equally balanced comparison of four Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions in the UK, but to present an analysis of Sri Lankan Buddhist religiosity in London which is centred on the LBV, but which also looks at other institutions in order to highlight the diverse Buddhist landscape within which the LBV is located. It is in this spirit that my analysis of the SSIBC is presented.

The chapter begins by looking at the disputes within the LBV in the 1980s which led to the emergence of the SSIBC. It then moves on to compare the two temples, focusing particularly on three points of difference.

8.1 The origins of the SSIBC

In the 1980s the LBV underwent a turbulent period, culminating in a court case over the question of its ownership. The events of the period continue to be a somewhat controversial issue within the Sri Lankan community and many of my interviewees were reluctant to discuss them in depth. However, a basic account of the events of the period can be established. In 1984 Venerable Saddhatissa, the head of the Vihara since 1957, tendered his resignation, citing ill-health and the pressures of working as a missionary monk as his reasons (Webb 2004:149).² The Anagarika Dharmapala Trust (ADT) appointed a new head monk, Venerable Vajiragnana, who had previously served at the LBV under Venerable

² The fact that attempts were made – apparently with Saddhatissa’s approval – to reinstall Saddhatissa as the head of the LBV less than a year later perhaps casts doubt on these reasons. Webb’s history of the LBV illustrates that the time preceding Saddhatissa’s resignation was a tense one at the temple. Saddhatissa faced criticism – not least from Webb himself in his role as secretary of the Vihara – centred on the failure of the Vihara to meet the needs of British convert Buddhists (Webb alleges a lack of adequately trained and motivated missionary monks; a lack of regular, structured classes; and a general tendency to focus more on the needs of the Sri Lankan community than on those of converts (2004:120-124). The airing of these criticisms at a meeting in 1984 led to Saddhatissa staging a walk-out, and Webb suggests that this point marked the beginning of ‘plotting’ by Saddhatissa and a group of lay supporters against those who favoured a greater stress on the LBV’s role as a missionary temple for British converts (2004:144-145). Thus we can perhaps view Saddhatissa’s resignation not as the starting point of the disputes at the LBV, but as occurring within the context of already-existing tensions.

Saddhatissa. However, in 1985 during a meeting of the British Maha Bodhi Society (BMBS), the lay organisation responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Vihara, a motion was passed which re-installed Venerable Saddhatissa as the head of the LBV (Webb 2004:150). There was thus a dispute between the ADT, which regarded Venerable Vajiragnana as the head of the LBV, and the BMBS, which saw Venerable Saddhatissa as the head of the Vihara. Since the ADT is based in Sri Lanka while the BMBS consists of British-based laypeople, on first sight the dispute may seem to be between the British-based laity and the Sri Lankan-based hierarchy. However, from Webb's account, my own investigations and the simple fact of the LBV's continued success after the ADT's victory, it is clear that lay patrons of the Vihara were divided in terms of which side they supported. Both the ADT and the BMBS saw themselves as the rightful owners of the Vihara building and thus a court case ensued which lasted over five years. In 1991 the case was finally settled in favour of the ADT, cementing Venerable Vajiragnana's position as the head of the Vihara (Webb 2004:155). By this time Venerable Saddhatissa had passed away, having continued to reside at the LBV until his death.

If these basic facts are fairly straightforward, the issues underlying these events are more complex. The key question that needs to be explored here is that of why the lay Sri Lankans controlling the BMBS took the decision to challenge the authority of the ADT and the legitimacy of Venerable Vajiragnana's position as head of the Vihara. As indicated above, many that I spoke with and interviewed were unwilling to speak in detail about what remains a controversial issue. Some did not want to speak about the issue at all. In addition, two of my interviewees were happy to discuss the matter, but asked me to turn off my tape recorder when we did so, indicating that they did not want their comments to be attributed to them, even under a pseudonym. For this reason I do not employ names of sources, whether interviewees or those I spoke to during fieldwork, in the following discussion. A number of different reasons for the split were suggested to me. These included:

1. Perhaps the most straightforward explanation is that those controlling the BMBS were unhappy that the power to make major decisions about the LBV (such as the appointment of the head monk) was held by a body in Sri Lanka (the ADT) rather than by the BMBS itself, the organisation representing the lay community in the UK, which supplied the majority of the Vihara's funds.

2. One informant suggested that some lay patrons of the LBV were unhappy with organisational changes to the Vihara made by Venerable Vajiragnana after he became head monk. It was suggested that Venerable Vajiragnana introduced a tighter form of organisation to the LBV in which more control over the Vihara's activities was placed in the hands of the resident monks, and that some laypeople objected to these changes. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Paul Numrich cites disputes about whether temples should ultimately be controlled by laypeople or monks as a major factor leading to a schism and the establishment of a new temple among the Sri Lankan Buddhists in Los Angeles that he studied (1996:33-35).

3. Some suggested that to a certain degree the disputes at the LBV were motivated by the desire of certain lay patrons to gain positions of power within the Vihara because of the status that such positions bring within the Sri Lankan community in the UK. The importance of diasporic religious institutions as places where individuals can gain recognition and status – factors which are often denied them in the wider 'host' society – is often commented on in literature concerning diaspora religion (Warner 2000:272).

4. The issue cited most often to me in explanation of these events was that of the cultural focus of the Vihara. It was suggested that the members of BMBS who challenged the authority of Venerable Vajiragnana felt that the LBV should be primarily a Sinhalese temple catering to the needs of Sri Lankan immigrants, while Venerable Vajiragnana wanted to stay true to what he saw as the original purpose of the Vihara: spreading Buddhism to British people. This issue is particularly stressed in the account of the LBV in the 1980s given in Webb's history of the Vihara (2004:120-158).³ Webb notes that the challenge to Venerable Vajiragnana's authority was accompanied by an attempt to replace many of the British individuals holding positions within the BMBS with Sri Lankan Buddhists. Thus it seems that there was a desire on the part of some lay Sri Lankans that the LBV be both primarily 'Sri Lankan' in its cultural focus, and primarily run by Sri Lankan Buddhists.

³ Given Russell Webb's involvement in the LBV at the time of the dispute, it would have been interesting to speak with him in order to discuss the issue in more depth. I contacted Mr Webb twice, firstly during my fieldwork and then again during the writing of the thesis (25/01/10), but did not receive a reply.

There are again parallels here with Paul Numrich's work. Numrich shows that among both Thai Buddhists in Chicago and Sri Lankan Buddhists in Los Angeles the question of what the cultural focus of a temple should be – whether it should be purely a religious place in which 'ethnic' culture plays little part, or whether it should be cultural centre for Buddhist immigrants – has been a major factor leading to schisms and the emergence of new temples (1996:35-39).

5. Lastly, two informants suggested to me that Sri Lankan political issues played a role in the dispute at the LBV. Numrich's respondents suggested that the patrons of the two Sri Lankan temples in Los Angeles that he studied tended to support different political parties in Sri Lanka (1996:35). Similar intimations were given to me about the LBV and SSIBC, with the LBV being associated with the United National Party (UNP) and the SSIBC with the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP). The 1980s were a period of political turmoil in Sri Lanka, with the escalation of the conflict between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, compounded by strong (and, in the late 1980s, violent) opposition to the UNP government from sections of the Sinhalese population (Little 1994:86-101). It was suggested that the dispute at the LBV was linked in part with opposition to the perceived links between the temple and the UNP. However, my informants were reluctant to discuss these issues in depth, and the monks at the two temples stressed that their institutions had no ties to particular political parties.

Thus a range of factors seem to have contributed to the disputes that took place within the LBV in the 1980s. It was in the context of this period of turbulence at the LBV that the SSIBC emerged. In 1989 one of the resident monks of the LBV, Venerable Galayaye Piyadassi, with the support of a number of lay Sri Lankans, established a new temple in Willesden, North West London. The temple moved briefly to a location Harrow, before finally moving to its present location in Kingsbury in February 1990. Following Venerable Saddhatissa's death the temple took on the name Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre in his memory, a fact that serves to further identify the temple with one side of the disputes that took place within the LBV.

It seems that, understandably given their historical relationship, there has in the past been some tension between the LBV and the SSIBC. My interviewees Pamu and Kumar

both state that there is a rivalry between the two institutions. However, such tension was not evident to me to a significant extent, and monks from the SSIBC attended events at the LBV during my research period, including the 2007 Kathina celebrations and at the *dāna* ceremony held in March 2007 to mark the three-month anniversary of the death of the previous head of the LBV, Venerable Vajiragnana.

During its relatively short history the SSIBC has grown rapidly. As with the LBV there is no official membership at the SSIBC, so numbers of patrons are difficult to gauge. However it is a mark of the SSIBC's popularity that while the temple itself is smaller than the LBV, some of its major events are held in the main hall of the nearby Kingsbury High School, since the numbers that they attract could not be accommodated in the temple itself. In June 2007 I attended the temple's joint Poson and Wesak celebrations in this venue, which attracted around 500 participants.⁴ The busiest that I saw the temple itself was during the Kathina celebrations of 2007. By my estimate around 300 people were present for at least some part of these celebrations.⁵ The SSIBC's profile in the Sri Lankan community is heightened by the event that it organises every April celebrating Sinhala and Tamil New Year. This celebration – which is also held in a hired venue outside the temple – is one of the largest annual events in the Sinhalese community in the UK, attracting over 2000 attendees, including patrons of many temples other than the SSIBC. No equivalent event is organised by the LBV.⁶

8.2 Comparing the LBV and the SSIBC

I want to move on now to look at how the SSIBC differs from the LBV. One difference between the two temples that I should note briefly concerns their organisational structure. While the LBV has a single board of organisers, the SSIBC is run by three different groups: a group bearing the name of the temple itself, which organises the day-to-day religious activities of the temple; the Sri Lanka Educational Cultural and Welfare Foundation, which organises cultural events (such as Sunday school classes and the temple's New Year celebrations); and World Buddhist Foundation, which organises educational and academic activities (such as the publishing of books). A perhaps more significant organisational

⁴ Fieldwork notes 24/06/2007.

⁵ Fieldwork notes 28/10/2007.

⁶ The LBV does not celebrate Sinhala and Tamil New Year because this is seen as a cultural rather than religious event.

difference between the two institutions concerns who ultimately controls them. The LBV is ultimately controlled by the Anagarika Dharmapala Trust, who own the building and appoint the head monk. At the SSIBC, on the other hand, ultimate control lies with Venerable Piyadassi. It was suggested to me by Swarna, a regular patron of the LBV, that these differences result in variation in the degree of control that lay patrons are able to exercise over the LBV and SSIBC. She argued that at the LBV the fact that ultimate control of the temple does not lie with the head monk means that lay organisers are able to have a greater influence over how the temple is run than is the case at the SSIBC. Swarna did not see this as necessarily bringing positive results at for the LBV, since she felt that the lack of a strong central source of authority meant that the LBV is more likely than the SSIBC to be characterised by disputes and power struggles among its lay followers.⁷

Another difference between the LBV and the SSIBC concerns the *nikāya* or monastic grouping to which their resident monks belong. All of the resident monks at the LBV during the period of my research belonged to the *Siyam Nikāya*. On the other hand, the resident monks at the SSIBC during my fieldwork period included representatives of all three major Sri Lankan *nikāyas*. At the time of my interview with Venerable Piyadassi, the temple housed 8 monks, 4 from the *Siyam Nikāya*, 3 from the *Amarapura Nikāya*, and 1 from the *Rāmañña Nikāya*.⁸ Piyadassi told me that in Sri Lanka monks from different *nikāyas* rarely reside in the same temple.

While these differences between the LBV and the SSIBC are significant, they were not those that were most often mentioned to me during my research. When I spoke to Sri Lankan Buddhists about the two temples, three points of difference between them were mentioned more than any others: differences in the kinds of Sri Lankan patrons that they attract; differences in their cultural focus; and differences in their religious focus.

8.3 Patrons of the SSIBC and LBV

One difference between the LBV and the SSIBC that was commented on by many that I interviewed and spoke with during my research concerned the nature of the Sri Lankan patrons of the two temples. The LBV is viewed as a temple of the elite, with a large proportion of its patrons coming from upper middle-class backgrounds in Sri Lanka and

⁷ Fieldwork notes 24/06/2007.

⁸ For a discussion of the founding of the different *nikāyas* found in present-day Sri Lanka see Carrithers (1983:70-82).

working in high-status, professional occupations in the UK. The SSIBC, on the other hand, is viewed as a temple appealing to a less elite section of Sri Lankan society. This difference was highlighted to me a number of times during my research. My interviewee Nuwan, himself a patron of the LBV, states that the LBV tends to attract ‘upper class people’ – he particularly notes that many doctors attend the temple – while the SSIBC tends to attract ‘medium class’ patrons. Another of my interviewees from the LBV, Ishan, makes a similar divide, and suggests that the differences here reflect the locations of the two temples (Chiswick being a more affluent area than Kingsbury). Another patron of the LBV, Asoka, suggests that the differences between the two temples is due to members of different social groups feeling more comfortable mixing with those of a similar background. Thus when I ask if the two temples attract different sectors of the Sri Lankan community, he answers:

Asoka: Yes. It is...I find that...It is like if you are a well-to-do lawyer, a doctor, a consultant...Would you feel out of place going to the same pub as some council labourers. Would you feel...I mean it’s not a physical barrier, but there is certainly a barrier.

David: A social barrier?

Asoka: There’s a social barrier there. Now that kind of barrier is there between the two temples. It’s not that X people can’t visit Y temple. They certainly can. But there’s an intellectual...there’s a level of intellectuality between the two.

The divide was also recognised by many patrons of the SSIBC. During my fieldwork at the temple, Ajantha, a regular patron of the SSIBC, described the LBV as a temple ‘for the elite’ and the SSIBC as a temple for ‘ordinary people’.⁹ Similarly Kumar, one of my interviewees from the SSIBC, states:

I think it’s quite posh people going to London Vihara [...] posh backgrounds...doctors and engineers.

The divide between the temples is known even to Sri Lankans who attended neither temple. For example, my second-generation interviewee Rajini, whose only family are patrons of the Thames Buddhist Vihara located in South London, notes that:

Chiswick people [i.e. patrons of the LBV], apparently, are the rich, snobbier people.

⁹ Fieldwork notes 07/07/2006.

She suggests that there are clear differences between Sri Lankan temples in London in terms of the class backgrounds and status of those that attend them. When I ask her to rank the temples that she knows – the LBV, the SSIBC and the Thames Vihara – in such terms, she places the LBV at the top, the Thames Vihara in the middle, and the SSIBC at the bottom.

It is interesting that this divide between the LBV and the SSIBC is noticeable even to some convert Buddhists familiar with the temples. One evening, after attending a study class at the LBV, I spoke about the two temples with Nigel, a regular participant in the class. He made a clear class divide, stating that Sri Lankan patrons of the LBV tended to be ‘doctors and lawyers’, while those at the SSIBC were more likely to be ‘shopkeepers’.¹⁰

While my research was qualitative rather than quantitative in nature, the differences noted by my informants were apparent during my fieldwork. The preponderance of professionals at the LBV – particularly doctors – is striking, and this is less evident at the SSIBC.¹¹ However, the difference between the two temples is certainly not absolute. Again, this was emphasised to me by my informants. My interviewee Ishan, for example, stresses that while the class differences between the two temples are real, one can nevertheless find people from a range of background at the LBV. My interviewee Nuwan, himself from a lower middle-class background in Sri Lanka, argues that while the LBV does attract many upper middle-class professionals, the demographic mix of the temple is currently changing, with the temple attracting more people from less elite backgrounds.

When the class differences between the LBV and the SSIBC were mentioned by my informants, they were often mentioned alongside other differences, particularly differences in terms of how recently individuals have arrived in the UK. Just as the SSIBC is seen as attracting a less elite section of the Sri Lankan than the LBV, so it is regarded as attracting a higher proportion of Sri Lankans who have arrived in the UK relatively recently. Thus when my interviewee Nuwan characterises the LBV as an ‘upper class’ temple and the SSIBC as a ‘medium class’ temple, he links it with the fact that many at the SSIBC have come to the UK from the early-1990s onwards. To understand this link we need to look briefly at the history of Sri Lankan Buddhist migration to the UK.

¹⁰ Fieldwork notes 22/01/2008

¹¹ 4 of my interviewees from the LBV are doctors, while another 3 are medical students. 2 of my second-generation interviewees from the temple are the children of doctors.

Little research has been carried out into the history of Sri Lankan Buddhist migration to the UK and I am not able to provide a comprehensive account of this history.¹² However, I have been able to gain a generalised understanding of this history via the small amount of written material has been produced on this issue as well as via my own research.¹³ Sri Lankan migration to the UK can be traced back as far as the nineteenth century. In its earliest stages – lasting until perhaps the 1940s – this migration was small-scale and limited almost exclusively to members of the Anglicised upper middle-classes, who came to the UK in order to attend universities. As time went on – particularly in the 1960s and 1970s – Sri Lankan migration to the UK increased and became less the preserve of the elite. However, Sri Lankans migrating in this period continued to come largely from the upper middle-classes and to come to the UK largely for higher education leading to a high-status professional occupation. More significant changes in Sri Lankan Buddhist migration to the UK seem to have taken place in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period individuals from a much wider spectrum of backgrounds in Sri Lanka came to the UK, and settled less exclusively in high-status professions. Some Sri Lankans coming to the UK in this period came as refugees escaping the turbulent political situation in Sri Lanka at this time.¹⁴ We can thus see a clear change in the socio-economic make-up of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in the UK over time, with what was at first a solidly upper middle-class, professional community becoming more mixed.¹⁵ The SSIBC – established in 1989 as the changes detailed above were taking place – has been particularly successful in finding support from those sections of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community who have arrived in recent years. That is not to say that all those that attend the SSIBC are new arrivals, or for that matter that all of those that attend the LBV have been in the UK for

¹² A greater amount of research has been conducted into the history of Tamil Sri Lankan migration to the UK. For a particularly insightful discussion of this history see Daniel (1997:154-193). While focusing on the migration of Sri Lankan Tamils, Daniel's article also provides some information concerning the history of Sinhalese migration to Britain.

¹³ For material that gives some information about the history of Sinhalese migration to the UK see Daniel (1997), Siddhisena and White (1999), Jayawardena (2000), Roberts (2003), and Jazeel (2006).

¹⁴ The majority of Sri Lankans who have come to the UK as refugees are Tamils from the North and the East of the island (the areas that have been most affected by the ethnic conflict). However, a number of Sinhalese have also sought asylum in Britain. Many of these are individuals who were involved in the JVP insurrection of 1987, which was eventually violently crushed by the Sri Lankan government. I have been told that there is some stigma surrounding being a refugee within the Sinhalese community. It is thus perhaps unsurprising that I rarely encountered individuals in the community who told me that they had come to the UK as a refugee. However, I did encounter such individuals occasionally.

¹⁵ Gamage (1998) highlights somewhat similar patterns of change over time in the Sri Lankan community in Australia.

many decades. I encountered newly arrived migrants at the LBV, and Sri Lankans who had been in the UK for more than 40 years at the SSIBC. As with the issue of class, the matter is one of trends at the two temples, not one of absolute distinctions.

Connections can be made between the demographic differences between the LBV and the SSIBC and some of other ways in which these two temples were described to me. In addition to noting the tendency for patrons of the LBV to come from affluent, middle-class backgrounds, some of my interviewees argue that the LBV is characterised to a certain degree by an elitist atmosphere in which importance is given to issues of status and class background. My interviewee Dinesh, himself a patron of the Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre, a temple located in East London, is critical of this aspect of the LBV, arguing that newcomers to the temple tend to be questioned on their family background, their occupation and even the car that they drive so that their status can be ascertained. Dinesh argues that his own temple and the SSIBC are characterised by a more egalitarian atmosphere. The elitism found at the LBV is also commented on by my interviewee Bandu. Bandu was born in the UK to Sri Lankan parents, and attended the LBV with his family while growing up. However, Bandu was put off the LBV by the emphasis on money and status that he encountered among some of its patrons. He now attends the SSIBC regularly, having been impressed on his first visits to the temple by the fact that 'everyone was on the same level'. The importance of questions of status at the LBV is also mentioned by my interviewee Nuwan. Although he now regularly attends the LBV to bring his children to Sunday school, before the birth of his children Nuwan came to the temple rarely since he felt that the predominantly upper middle-class patrons of the Vihara tended to look down on those like himself who came from less high-class backgrounds in Sri Lanka. However, Nuwan argues that this concern with status at the LBV is something that is gradually fading away as more individuals from lower middle-class backgrounds are beginning to attend the Vihara.

8.4 Cultural focus

The difference between the LBV and the SSIBC that was mentioned to me most often during my research concerns the cultural focus of the two temples. As noted in chapter 5, while the LBV plays the role of a Sri Lankan cultural and social centre to some degree, in general it is regarded as primarily a centre of 'pure' Theravada Buddhism rather than a

cultural centre for the Sri Lankan community. The SSIBC is generally regarded both as a being more 'Sri Lankan' in character than the LBV, and as fulfilling the role of a cultural and social centre to a greater degree.

The emphasis that the SSIBC places on playing role of a cultural centre is noted by my interviewee Asoka. Now a patron of the LBV, Asoka was involved with the initial establishment of the SSIBC. Although he later left this temple, he notes that he continues to admire the work it does as a cultural centre:

Today I respect that temple as a very good cultural centre for our Sinhalese people. I think it's the most effective cultural centre.

Similar comments are made by my interviewee Sisara, a leading member of the Nissarana group (discussed in chapter 9). Sisara refers the SSIBC as 'a very sociable place' and 'more a cultural centre than a temple'. Others among my interviewees make direct comparisons between the LBV and the SSIBC in terms of their cultural focus. Thus Ishan, a regular patron of the LBV, argues that the SSIBC, along with the Thames Buddhist Vihara based in South London, are temples which explicitly play the role of 'cultural' or 'Sinhalese' centres, whereas the LBV is a temple with a more purely religious focus. My interviewee Gihan, also a patron of the LBV, speaks about the differences between the two temples at greater length. Of the LBV, he states:

The LBV is primarily a teaching Vihara. It is really for propagation of Buddhism to academic way [*sic*]. Because, as you know, the origin...its origin...creation by...Anagarika Dharmapala. And I think in those days Christmas Humphreys¹⁶ was perhaps involved in it. It is a very, very high level [at which] it was done. And I think to this day the original objective of the temple is being maintained. We have the academic side, linked to the universities and so on and so forth. Then, on top of that, the Buddhist community [is] continuously...constantly demanding this need for a temple as a social and religious place, as they normally have in their villages. So the temple is trying to meet that role as well. They do it, somehow or another.

On the other hand, Gihan describes the SSIBC in the following terms:

¹⁶ Christmas Humphreys (1901-1983), a barrister and later a High Court judge, was a leading figure in the development of Buddhism in Britain, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century (Bluck 2006:7-10). Humphreys was the founder of the Buddhist Society and its president until his death. Gihan is correct in his assertion that Humphreys was involved in the earliest days of the LBV. As Webb notes, it was correspondence with Humphreys that first brought the LBV's founder, Anagarika Dharmapala, to the UK (Webb 2004:3).

I think Kingsbury is....sure, they have this role of propagation of Buddhism through academic way [*sic*], but I don't think they are properly recognised that way by the establishment. But nevertheless they are fulfilling that because various elites go there. But generally Kingsbury temple is seen much more like a temple in Sri Lanka, like a village, social atmosphere...social and cultural. And they do excel in that kind of work.

The most obvious way in which the cultural focus of the SSIBC is manifest is in the use of language at the temple. While the majority of the LBV's activities are conducted in English, at the SSIBC most activities are conducted in Sinhala. The use of English is restricted to certain situations (particularly to those activities which are designed to appeal to an audience that is not exclusively Sri Lankan, such as scholarly talks and meditation classes).¹⁷ Aside from this linguistic focus, the SSIBC also displays a greater interest in promoting Sri Lankan cultural activities in the UK than the LBV. This is most apparent in the celebration of Sinhala and Tamil New Year that the temple organises in April each year. I attended these celebrations in 2006, when they took place in Harrow Leisure Centre. The event attracted a crowd far larger than for any religious activity organised by the SSIBC during my research – in our interview Venerable Piyadassi states that these celebrations usually attract over 2000 participants, and this estimate seems reasonable to me. The event consisted of the playing of Sri Lankan games (including competitive coconut scraping and coconut palm weaving), the performance of traditional Sri Lankan music and dance, comedy routines, and speeches from notable figures such as the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to the UK, Kshenuka Senewiratne. There was little reference to Buddhism in the proceedings, except for the recitation of the five precepts at the beginning of the event. The LBV does not organise a similar New Year celebration. Another event highlighting the cultural focus of the SSIBC took place in September 2006, when the temple organised a display of traditional Sri Lankan dance and music by children from the temple and children from the Mudita Children's Home, a home for orphans and troubled children in Sri Lanka which is run by the temple's charity, the Mudita Foundation. Cultural performances – of Sri Lankan music and drama – also played a significant role in the SSIBC's Buddha Jayanthi celebrations (commemorating 2550 years since the death of the Buddha) which were held in Brent Town Hall in June 2006.

¹⁷ English is also used in the SSIBC's weekend school for children, a necessity since not all of the second generation are fluent in Sinhala.

The cultural focus of the SSIBC is also evident in the activities that it organises for children. The temple runs weekly classes on Sri Lankan dance for second-generation children, in addition to its classes on Buddhism and Sinhala language. Lessons in traditional dance are occasionally part of the LBV's Sunday school,¹⁸ but dance is not taught at the LBV in the consistent way that it is at the SSIBC. The cultural performances given by children of the temple at the Buddha Jayanthi celebrations of 2006 were directed by Professor Mudiyanse Dissanayake, the head of the Department of Drama, Ballet and Modern Dance at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts in Sri Lanka. That such a prestigious figure should be brought in to organise the performances is indicative of the strong emphasis given to such cultural activities at the SSIBC.

Thus while the LBV occupies a somewhat ambiguous position in terms of the role it plays as a Sri Lankan cultural centre, the SSIBC plays such a role in a much more emphatic way. This is perhaps most clearly signalled by the fact that one of the three bodies which run the temple's activities – the Sri Lanka Educational Cultural and Welfare Foundation – is primarily devoted to cultural activities. Aside from the more obvious factors discussed so far, the idea of the SSIBC as a place of Sri Lankan culture can also be linked to more subtle factors. In the comments noted above by my interviewee Gihan, he describes the SSIBC as having the atmosphere of a village temple. The sense of the temple having a particularly 'Sri Lankan' atmosphere is also communicated by my interviewee Lasith, a regular patron of the temple, who states that, 'when I come to the temple I feel like I am in Sri Lanka'. While the LBV is certainly also a 'Sri Lankan' place to some degree, it is notable that I did not hear similar comments about the LBV during my research.

The SSIBC also tended to be characterised as a social centre for the Sri Lankan community to a greater degree than the LBV. It is notable that the quotes given above from my interviewees Gihan and Sisara both link the SSIBC's role as a 'cultural' centre to its role as a 'social' centre. As noted in chapter 5, while the LBV plays a social role in the Sri Lankan community, some suggest that it is a less social place and more dedicated to religious practice than other Sri Lankan temples in the UK. My second-generation

¹⁸ Performances of music and dance by children of the Sunday school make up some part of the LBV's Rahula Dhamma Day programme, held in April each year as a celebration of children at the temple. This is the event at the LBV at which Sri Lankan cultural performance plays the largest part. However, unlike the SSIBC New Year celebrations, Buddhist themes are central to the programme of Rahula Dhamma Day. When I attended this event in 2006, the event included a dramatised performance of the story of the Buddha, and a short play illustrating Buddhist teachings about the dangers of greed (Fieldwork notes 23/04/2006).

interviewee Padmini, for example, notes that her family prefer the LBV to other Sri Lankan temples because one can be more 'anonymous' there. By contrast, the SSIBC tended to be celebrated as a welcoming and sociable place by those that I spoke to within the temple, particularly by Ajantha, one of the temple's organisers whom I spoke with a number of times.¹⁹ The strong community spirit found at the temple was also emphasised in a talk that I attended at the SSIBC's Kathina celebrations of 2007, in which Venerable Mahinda, a resident monk of the temple, stated that this spirit marked out the SSIBC as the foremost Sri Lankan temple in Europe.²⁰ My fieldwork observations suggest that the SSIBC plays a particularly important social role for newly arrived immigrants – who I encountered more often at this temple than at the LBV – as a place for them to make socialise, make contacts, and find support.

The strong Sri Lankan cultural focus of the SSIBC is reflected in the make-up of its patrons. The overwhelming majority of patrons of the temple are Sri Lankan. The SSIBC attract some non-Sri Lankans. One of the resident monks of the temple, Venerable Sumana, is from Nepal, and this attracts a small number of Nepalese Buddhists to the temple. In addition, the temple is occasionally attended by Indian Buddhists from the Ambedkar tradition.²¹ Small numbers of individuals from British backgrounds attend the academic talks and meditation classes that the temples runs (both of which are conducted in English).²² However, the temple does not attract a significant convert congregation in the way that the LBV does. This is unsurprising and unlikely to change in the future given that the majority of the temple's activities are conducted in Sinhala.

I want to turn now to explore the reasons for the differences that exist between the LBV and the SSIBC in terms of cultural focus. The most obvious way in which these differences can be explained is by looking at the origins of the two temples. The LBV was originally conceived of by Anagarika Dharmapala as a centre teaching Buddhism to British

¹⁹ Fieldwork notes 07/07/2006, 10/08/2007.

²⁰ Fieldwork notes 28/10/2007.

²¹ Dr B.R. Ambedkar was a political and social leader of the Dalit ('untouchable') people of India. In 1956 he, along with around 380,000 of his followers, converted to Buddhism from Hinduism. Ambedkar rejected Hinduism because of the caste system's role in the oppression of the Dalit people (Queen 1996:48-55). The Ambedkar Buddhist movement has from its beginnings had connections with Sri Lankan Buddhism, and the SSIBC has a particular link with the movement because Venerable Saddhatissa was personally involved with Ambedkar's conversion (Goodman 1988:329). In May 2007 Venerable Piyadassi took part in the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Ambedkar's conversion, which took place in Mumbai, and a report of the event appeared in the SSIBC's journal (*no author* 2007).

²² Meditation classes at the SSIBC are significantly smaller than those at the LBV. There were fewer than 10 participants in the classes I attended, consisting of a mixture of converts and Sri Lankans.

people, not as a Sri Lankan cultural and social centre. The SSIBC, on the other hand, came into being after a split within the LBV in part related to the desire among some Sri Lankans for the LBV to give greater attention to the needs of the Sri Lankan community. The origins of the temples are not, however, the only factors that need to be considered when thinking about the differences in the cultural focus of the LBV and the SSIBC. These differences can also be linked to the nature of the Sri Lankan congregations at the two temples. This was emphasised by some that I interviewed and spoke with. Bandu, who attended the LBV when growing up but now attends the SSIBC, argues that Sri Lankans at the LBV are less interested in preserving their language and culture than those at the SSIBC. Noting that many Sri Lankans at the LBV prefer to speak in English rather than Sinhala, he argues:

They tried to forget their past...they just remembered the religion and forgot the culture. But at Kingsbury temple everything is enrolled...the culture, the religion, the language.

Swarna, a regular patron of the LBV, made a similar assessment when answering my questions about the two temples via email, stating that among Sri Lankans at the SSIBC 'the culture is much more concentrated than at the LBV'.²³

These comments suggest that the differences in the cultural focus of the LBV and SSIBC reflect differences in their Sri Lankan patrons. To understand why this is the case we need to look back to my discussion above of the demographic differences between the temples.

The differences in the cultural focus of the SSIBC and the LBV can be related to the differences in the socio-economic backgrounds of their patrons. In Sri Lanka individuals from affluent, middle-class backgrounds are more likely than those from less wealthy backgrounds to be fluent in the English language. They are also more likely to lead lifestyles that can be described as in some sense 'Westernised'. Some wealthy families in Sri Lanka speak English as their first language and send their children to English-language schools. Individuals from affluent, middle-class Sri Lankan backgrounds who come to the UK are thus more likely to accept – or in some cases even prefer – a temple which runs its activities primarily in English.²⁴ More broadly, because of their greater familiarity and

²³ Email communication 03/07/2007

²⁴ 5 of my first-generation interviewees from the LBV come from families which used English to some degree in the home. None of my first-generation interviewees from the SSIBC come from such backgrounds.

sense of identification with Western culture, such individuals are more likely than those from less affluent backgrounds to take an approach to settling in the UK which emphasises integration into British society. Such attitudes would clearly make the cultural focus of the LBV more appealing to such individuals than that of the SSIBC. Sri Lankan Buddhists from less affluent backgrounds, on the other hand, are less likely to have had such a high degree of exposure to the English language and to Western culture while in Sri Lanka. They are thus more likely to favour the use of Sinhala rather than English in temples, and to feel more comfortable in a temple with a strongly 'Sri Lankan' cultural focus.

A link can also be made between the cultural focus of two temples and the fact that the SSIBC tends to attract a greater proportion of recently arrived Sri Lankan immigrants than the LBV. As a generalisation it can be said that more recent Sri Lankan migrants often show a greater desire than earlier migrants to preserve a strong form of Sinhalese cultural identity in the diaspora. This difference between different generations of migrants is noted by Fernando in his MPhil thesis (Fernando 2005:239-246). Fernando makes a distinction between those Sri Lankans who came to Britain before the mid-1970s and those that came after, suggesting that the former are 'more comfortably integrated into the UK' (242), while the latter show a greater interest in maintaining a strong sense of Sri Lankan identity and in promoting Sri Lankan cultural activities in the diaspora. While those that I spoke to varied in terms of when they saw the change as taking place, there was general agreement that different attitudes to issues of cultural identity were noticeable in different generations of migrants. My interviewee Ishan, who first came to the UK in the late 1970s, states that those who have come to the UK more recently than him tend to stress their Sinhalese identity and culture to a greater degree. He links this to the fact that such immigrants are less likely than those that came before them to have grown up in bilingual families (Ishan himself come from a family in which both English and Sinhala were spoken). My interviewee Asoka also came to the UK in the late 1970s. However, unlike Ishan, he views himself as part of the later, more culturally Sinhalese generation of migrants. Asoka makes a divide similar to that made by Fernando, between those coming before the 1970s and those arriving after this time. He argues that those in the first group have tended to emphasise integration into British society rather than maintaining their Sinhalese culture and identity, while those like himself in the second group have placed more emphasis in the preservation of their culture and identity. My interviewee Nuwan similarly identifies

himself with a later group of migrants who are more interested in preserving Sinhalese culture and language in the diaspora. However, Nuwan, who came to the UK in the early 1990s, places the divide between the two generations for migrants much later than Asoka. He argues that it is principally since 1990 that the Sri Lankan community in the UK has changed, stating that:

Most people, I am talking about [those coming] before [the] 1990s, the children can't speak Sinhalese.

A number of reasons can be given for the tendency of more recent Sri Lankan Buddhist migrants to put a greater stress than those that came before them on the preservation of Sri Lankan culture and identity. Most obviously this change can be seen as a reflection the changing socio-economic make-up of the Sri Lankan community over time. Since more recent migrants come less predominantly from affluent, middle-class background in Sri Lanka, they are less likely to be fluent in English and culturally Westernised. Another important factor is certain cultural changes that have occurred in the postcolonial history of Sri Lanka. Since the island gained independence from the UK in 1948, Sri Lanka has been characterised by a cultural and political movement in the direction of Sinhalese nationalism, an ideology which puts a strong emphasis on the preservation of Sinhalese culture and identity and which tends to define Sinhalese culture and identity in opposition to the West (which is identified with colonialism).²⁵ A particularly significant date in recent Sri Lankan political history is 1956, which saw the coming to power of the nationalist Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the subsequent installation of Sinhala as the national language of the country (previously it had been English) (Little 1994:70). These events led to significant changes in the field of education – whereas previously the majority of the most prestigious schools in the island had taught in English, they subsequently moved to teaching predominantly in Sinhala and Tamil (Wijesina 2003:368). More recently the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has led to an increased perception of Sinhalese culture and identity being under threat and therefore to a further stress on the importance of cultural preservation (Bond 1998:36). Thus over the last 60 years Sri Lankan culture has seen significant changes. There has been a reduction in the use of English in education and more generally a

²⁵ For a general discussion of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism see Bartholomeusz and de Silva (1998).

move away from the Anglicisation that was a product of the colonial period, towards an outlook which emphasises a strong sense of Sinhalese cultural identification. It is thus unsurprising that different generations of Sri Lankan migrants to the UK manifest different approaches to questions of cultural identity. Earlier migrants are not only more likely to have been educated in English, but also more likely to have, in Fernando's words, a 'close association with an anglicised way of life' (2005:242). Later migrants, on the other hand, are less likely to have been educated in English or to feel an affinity with English culture, and more likely to put a strong emphasis on the need to preserve Sinhalese culture and identity.

The importance of the factors discussed above to changes in attitudes towards cultural identity in the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in the UK was stressed by a number of those that I spoke with. During a conversation Ajantha, a regular patron of the SSIBC, noted the increased emphasis put on the preservation of culture among recent migrants, and argued that this is primarily a response to events in Sri Lanka itself, which have brought an increased sense that Sinhalese Buddhist culture is under threat, and that Sinhalese Buddhists are failing to preserve their culture and identity as effectively as other communities in Sri Lanka.²⁶ My interviewee Darika points to both the conflict with the LTTE, and the general decrease in the use of English in Sri Lanka to explain why recent migrants put a greater stress on Sinhalese culture. Thus when I ask whether she has noticed a change in attitudes towards issues of culture between different generations of migrants, she answers:

Yes. It could be something to do with the war, I think. That might make people more patriotic. But I think the Tamil people always had that thing...wanting to be...being a minority. They always had that, but Sinhalese people usually didn't. But I think because of the war it might be [increasing].

She goes on to note:

And also I think they speak a lot more in Sinhalese now [in Sri Lanka]. English is hardly used in Sri Lanka, although everyone speaks a bit of English.

We can also point to certain practical changes that have made cultural preservation and the maintenance of strong forms of cultural identity somewhat easier for more recent migrants.

²⁶ Fieldwork notes 07/07/2006.

Earlier migrants came to a country in which the Sri Lankan population was small. Today the community is much larger, and accordingly is equipped with greater resources: larger numbers of cultural and religious associations; greater numbers of community events; more shops and restaurants providing Sri Lankan goods and cuisine; a wider range of community newspapers and magazines. All of this means that later generations of migrants have been more able than those that came before them to spend much of their free time engaging in Sri Lankan cultural and community events, and more generally to live a Sri Lankan lifestyle in the UK, with a wide circle of Sri Lankan friends, easy access to Sri Lankan food and products, and so on. The significance of such factors is mentioned by a number of my interviewees. Mahela, a regular patron of the LBV, came to the London in the 2000s having previously lived in Northern Ireland. He notes that while in Northern Ireland he mixed with many non-Sri Lankans, since there were few Sri Lankans in the area where he lived. In London, on the other hand, he finds that the size of the Sinhalese community means that most Sinhalese people mix primarily with other Sinhalese, a situation which he views as regrettable. My interviewee Lasith argues that the predominance of Sri Lankan migrants in some areas of London means that these areas are becoming 'another Sri Lanka'. He views this development as having both positive and negative consequences:

Well I would say there are plusses and minuses. I would say, like...yes concentrating in one place...in one way it's good because...we are in Harrow, we've got all the Sri Lankan shops, and you get all the Sri Lankan vegetables. Sometimes you don't even feel like you are in England because you have everything. Even some [Sri Lankan] vegetables you can't get in Sri Lanka, you can get it here. So...all the food and everything. So, you are...ok, you are totally...you are like at home. But on the other hand, you are in England, but sometimes you don't feel like you are in England.

Lasith goes on to note that when he speaks to his mother and father-in-law, who lived in the UK for a short period in the 1970s, they are amazed by the changes that have occurred among the Sri Lankan community in London, and the degree to which it is now possible to live a Sri Lankan lifestyle in the UK. While both Lasith and Mahela express an ambivalent attitude towards the growth of the Sinhalese community in the UK, my interviewee Asoka expresses a wholeheartedly celebratory attitude towards this development. As someone who emphasises the importance of maintaining Sinhalese identity and culture in the diaspora, he notes that in the past he was critical of earlier generations of Sri Lankan migrants who took a more integrationist approach to settling in the UK. However, he states

that his views have changed as he has become aware of how difficult it was for earlier immigrant to maintain their culture, given the lack of a large Sinhalese community in Britain at that time. He argues that now, with a large Sinhalese presence in the UK, there is no longer the need to integrate into British society that there was in the past.

The above indicates that the differences between the LBV and the SSIBC in terms of their cultural focus need to be understood not only in relation to the LBV's greater emphasis on spreading Buddhism the British, but also in terms of differences within the Sri Lankan community over issues of integration and cultural preservation. The strongly 'Sinhalese' cultural identity of the SSIBC can be seen as reflecting the strong emphasis placed on cultural preservation and Sinhalese language by a particular section of the Sinhalese Buddhist community.

In order to explore the issue of cultural identity within the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in more depth, I want to turn now to look more directly at the LBV. Since the majority of my interviewees were patrons of this temple, I am able to present a fuller account of attitudes towards issues of cultural identity and preservation at this temple than at the SSIBC.

I have argued that the cultural focus of the LBV reflects in part the fact that this temple, when compared to the SSIBC, attracts a greater proportion of Sri Lankan Buddhists who place a lower emphasis on the preservation of strong forms of Sinhalese culture and language in the diaspora. While this is true as a generalisation, it should be stressed that the differences between the two temples on this issue – like the demographic differences between them – are far from absolute. During my fieldwork at the LBV I encountered a range of approaches to issues of cultural identity and preservation, and a range of views about the degree to which Sri Lankan temples in the UK should play the role of Sinhalese cultural centres. That the LBV's congregation is somewhat divided on issues of cultural identity was emphasised to me by Swarna, a regular patron of the Vihara. In an email answer to my questions about the Vihara, Swarna states:

The SL people who attend the LBV are divided on the issue of culture with some preferring the diluted version (i.e. East/West mix) and others not.²⁷

²⁷ Email communication 03/07/2007

Swarna further notes that Sri Lankans at the LBV are also divided as to what the cultural focus of the Vihara should be:

[T]here are many SL Buddhists who would prefer the temple to maintain a more Sinhala focus but there is opposition to this.²⁸

I spoke with and interviewed individuals who fell on both sides of the divides that Swarna mentions. Let me begin by looking at those at the LBV who do not place a strong emphasis on the need to preserve Sinhalese culture and identity. My interviewees Sarath and Chandrika, a married couple who have attended the LBV since coming to the UK in the early 1980s, exemplify such views. Sarath and Chandrika, who come from bilingual upper middle-class families in Sri Lanka, do put some emphasis on maintaining Sri Lankan culture and identity in the diaspora. For example, they emphasise to me that they are pleased that their children can speak some Sinhala. However, at the same time they also take a strongly integrationist approach to living in the UK. They stress that as soon as they arrived in the UK they took the decision to make a strong effort to integrate into British society. They now see themselves as being at home in the UK, stressing that in terms of identity they feel no different from anyone else in Britain. While they are pleased that their British-born children can speak some Sinhala, they stress that they regarded them as being British first and foremost.

Sarath and Chandrika are critical of what they see as the increasing ghettoisation of the Sinhalese Buddhist community in the UK. They argue that more recently arrived immigrants are less likely to integrate into British society, more likely to express negative attitudes towards the UK, and more likely to emphasise a strong sense of separate Sinhalese identity to their children. They argue that this change was already occurring when they arrived in the UK in the early 1980s, and that it has increased over time. They particularly associate such attitudes with certain areas of London – they mention Wembley in particular – and with those that attend the SSIBC.

Sarath and Chandrika's views about the LBV reflect their views about issues of cultural identity. They argue that the LBV should stay true to its original role as a religious centre teaching Buddhism to British people, rather than playing the role of a Sri Lankan cultural and social centre. They note that the Vihara attracts people from a range of cultural

²⁸ Email communication 03/07/2007

backgrounds and stress that this is how the Vihara should be. In fact, Sarath and Chandrika feel the LBV should ideally be even less 'Sri Lankan' in character than it is today. They feel that the Vihara has become too dominated by Sri Lankans and has come to play the role of a Sri Lankan social centre to too great an extent. Sarath and Chandrika do not argue that there should be no place for Sri Lankan cultural activities in at the LBV – such as the teaching of Sinhala language to children – but they stress that such activities should very much take second place to the Vihara's principle role as a religious institution appealing to people of all cultures.

My interviewee Anika expresses similar views about cultural identity and the role of the LBV. She stresses that, while some Sri Lankan immigrants prefer to mix mainly with people from a similar background, she enjoys mixing with many cultures:

When you live in a foreign land, I think its best if you learn to live with all sorts [...] Some like to be very close to [people from there own background], but I think...this is my own view...I think you need to know everybody. I mean. I know Sri Lankans, I know English, I know French, I know Germans, I know Spanish...I know all sorts.

Anika notes that she rarely takes part in Sri Lankan community events in the UK, giving her reasons as follows:

Because I feel it stops me from going further on the path that I am on now...Because it takes me completely away from the community I'm living in now, which is more English and more European

Similarly, she takes little interest in Sinhalese media available in the UK (such as satellite television channels), stating that she does not want to 'be stuck' within a narrow Sri Lankan culture in the UK. When I ask Anika if she would define her identity as Sinhalese, she states:

Yes, because I was born a Sinhalese. But I am already quite Europeanised now...Is it wrong to say that? [laughs]

When we discuss her children, Anika argues that they are far less culturally Sinhalese than she is. In line with her general views about identity, Anika does not view this as a problem. When I ask her how her children would identify, she argues that they would see themselves as 'Sri Lankan' rather than 'Sinhalese'. This distinction, which was made to me a number of times in relation to second-generation Sri Lankans, implies a sense of identification with

the country of Sri Lanka without a strong and more exclusive sense of Sinhalese cultural identity.

Anika's views about the LBV mirror her views about cultural identity. Anika expressed her views about the Vihara most clearly not in our interview, but during a conversation that we had at the LBV some time after the interview.²⁹ We spoke after a talk given at the Vihara by the Sri Lankan monk and academic Dr Mahinda Deegalle to commemorate the three-month anniversary of the death of the previous head monk of the LBV, Venerable Vajiragnana. In his talk Dr Deegalle argued that Sri Lankan temples in the UK should make more of an effort to appeal to non-Sri Lankans. He was critical of what he saw as the insularity of many Sri Lankan Buddhists and of their tendency to connect Buddhism with Sinhalese culture. He argued that Sri Lankan Buddhist temples should be places open to anyone, rather than places only for Sri Lankans. The theme of the talk seemed rather curious given that the LBV already puts a strong emphasis on appealing to non-Sri Lankans. After the talk I spoke with Anika about what Dr Deegalle had said. She expressed strong agreement with the general tone of his remarks. She too was critical of the culturally insular the nature of many Sri Lankans and Sri Lankan temples in the UK (though she disagreed about Dr Deegalle's characterisation of the LBV in these terms). Like Dr Deegalle, Anika argued that Sri Lankan temples should be places open to all cultures rather than cultural and community centres for the Sri Lankans in the UK.

Another patron of the LBV who expresses views on questions of cultural identification and preservation similar to those held by Sarath, Chandrika and Anika is Swarna. As noted above, in her email answers to my questions Swarna identifies the LBV as being divided over questions of cultural focus. She identifies herself firmly with those that oppose the LBV taking a more strongly Sinhalese cultural focus. In an interesting turn of phrase, she writes:

The buzz word at the moment is multiculturalism and I vote in favour of that for the LBV but perhaps there could be multiculturalism without culture?!!!

Thus Swarna argues that the LBV should be multicultural, in the sense of embracing people from all cultures, but 'without culture' in the sense of not giving a strong place to Sinhalese cultural activities.

²⁹ Fieldwork notes 17/03/2007.

Another of my interviewees who can be loosely placed in this grouping when it comes to questions of culture and identity is Ishan. Ishan, who comes from a bilingual upper middle-class family in Sri Lanka, is a regular patron of the LBV and was in the past involved in the running of the Vihara's Sunday school. Ishan does not emphasise the need for Sri Lankan immigrants integrate into British society in the strong way that Sarath and Chandrika do. However, he notes that he does not put as strong an emphasis on the preservation of Sinhalese culture and identity in the UK as some migrants, particularly those who have come to the UK since him, who are more likely to come from monolingual families in Sri Lanka. This lack of a strong emphasis on Sinhalese culture and identity is most evident in his approach to raising children in the UK. While he feels that being Sri Lankan plays an important part in the identity of his children, he notes that he and his wife have not 'banged the Sinhalese drum' with them – i.e. that they have not stressed a strong sense of Sinhalese cultural identity. As with Anika, he argues that his children feel 'Sri Lankan' rather than 'Sinhalese'. When we discuss the different Sri Lankan temples in the UK, while he argues that temples such as the SSIBC are providing a good service as Sri Lankan cultural centres, he notes that he is pleased that the LBV has retained its focus as a religious rather than cultural centre.

One can thus find many Sri Lankans at the LBV who do not put a strong stress on Sinhalese cultural preservation in the UK and whose views about what the cultural focus of the LBV should be reflect this. On the other hand, one can also find Sri Lankans at the LBV who place a much stronger emphasis on the need to preserve Sinhalese culture and identity in the diaspora. My interviewee who most strongly exemplifies such an approach is Asoka. Asoka was born into a bilingual upper middle-class family in Sri Lanka, and describes himself as being brought up in a 'highly Westernised' section of Sri Lankan society. While living in Sri Lanka he identified strongly with Western culture. However, after coming to the UK in the late 1970s Asoka's outlook changed radically. He found coming to the West a disillusioning experience, and began to become more interested in Sinhalese culture. He states:

I started reflecting, 'Hang on a minute, we do have a culture of our own, and I have been neglecting that'.

Today Asoka strongly emphasises his Sinhalese identity and stresses the importance of preserving Sinhalese culture in the diaspora. He is critical of those Sri Lankans who share his former, Westernised outlook, stating:

...now when I go to Sri Lanka I see those poor souls still struggling with that kind of attitude...And I take particular interest in mocking them. Although I have a good grasp of English, when I find that they would talk to me in English I purposely...I talk to them in Sinhalese. If they continue to talk to me in English, there comes a point [where I say] 'Don't you know your bloody language?'

When we discuss the issue of identity, Asoka defines himself as 'Sinhala-Buddhist', and emphasises that he sees his religious and ethnic identity as inextricably linked. Despite living in the UK for almost 30 years, he notes that he does not see himself as at all British. As we might expect from the above, Asoka places a strong emphasis on handing down his Sinhalese culture and identity to his children. When I ask how he teaches his children about Buddhism, after answering my question he goes on to note:

Apart from teaching them Buddhism, I teach them about Sinhalese...to be Sinhalese as well. Say, for instance, I make it a point to tell them, or remind them, that this is a Sinhalese house and that we talk in Sinhalese as much as possible inside the house... that we have Sinhalese values.

When I ask what he would think if his children told him that they considered themselves British, Asoka states:

It has happened. And I have asked 'Why do you say that?' And they say 'Well, I was born here.' And I say 'Yes, you were born here, but you are culturally from Sri Lanka.' They ask me 'What is culture?' Then I explain to them what the typical Sri Lankan attitude is, our values and our norms. And there is a significant difference between that and...I don't necessarily say British, but I say the Western culture.

The emphasis that Asoka places in the preservation of Sinhalese culture and identity is reflected in the views he expresses about the LBV. While he does not directly express a view in our interview about what the cultural focus of the LBV should be, his comments about attending the Vihara demonstrate the importance that he gives to the LBV as a place of Sinhalese culture. At the time of our interview Asoka came to the LBV every week to assist with the Vihara's Sunday school. When I ask him about his reasons for coming to the LBV, he answers:

If you ask me ‘Why do you go to the temple now?’, it is to take my children [to Sunday school]. But while I’m there I’m aware that I can be a role model, not only to my children but to other children as well. So I made sure that my children wear the national dress to the *daham pasala* [Sunday school]. They hated it. But eventually I found that others copied. And I was quite pleased that I had made some change... [It was] not forced upon them, but it made them think.

Thus for Asoka it is important that the LBV is a place of Sinhalese culture, symbolised by the wearing of the Sri Lankan national dress.

The importance of preserving Sinhalese culture and identity in the diaspora is also emphasised by my interviewee Nuwan. As noted above, Nuwan came to the UK in the early 1990s and views himself as part of a generation of Sri Lankans who tend to be less Westernised and more interested in maintaining their culture than those that came before them. While all of those that I have discussed so far in this section come from families in which English was spoken to some extent, Nuwan comes from a Sinhala-speaking family and, while he is able to communicate well in English, he is noticeably less fluent than many at the LBV. Throughout our interview Nuwan emphasises that he places importance on maintaining his Sinhalese culture and identity in the UK, stating:

I am not racism [*sic*]...but I like keeping my culture.

He also emphasises the importance of passing Sinhalese culture and identity to his children, stressing that ‘they can’t be English’. He argues that ‘Sinhala culture is disappearing from the world’ – a concern that was expressed to me a number of times during my research – and that it is therefore important that he passes this culture on to his children. Nuwan’s views about the LBV reflect his views on cultural identity. He stresses that his main reason for coming to the Vihara is to take his children to Sunday school so that they can maintain a link with Sinhalese Buddhist culture. In addition, he criticises the tendency of some Sri Lankans to speak in English at the Vihara, arguing that it alienates those who would prefer a Sinhalese-speaking atmosphere.

Another of my interviewees from the LBV who stresses the preserving of Sinhalese culture and identity in the diaspora is Darika. At the time of our interview Darika was involved in the setting up of a Sri Lankan community centre in West London, which aimed to provide Sinhala lessons for children, lessons and in Sri Lankan dancing and showings of Sinhalese films. She particularly stresses the importance of passing Sinhalese language and

culture on to those born in the UK. When we discuss the LBV, Darika argues that the temple is too Westernised. She particularly focuses on the use of language at the LBV, arguing that more of the talks and activities run by the temple – particularly those conducted during *pōya* day celebrations – should be conducted in Sinhala.

The above illustrates that my correspondent Swarna is correct when she states that Sri Lankan at the LBV are ‘divided on the issue of culture’. I have highlighted a divide between those that take an integrationist approach to settling in the UK, and those that strongly emphasise the importance of the maintaining Sinhalese language, culture and identity in the diaspora. Such different approaches to questions of cultural identity lead to different ideas about what the nature of the LBV should be. For the former group, the LBV should be a purely religious centre. The latter group, on the other hand, attach greater importance to the role of the Vihara as a place of Sinhalese language and culture.

In this section I have used the differences between the LBV and SSIBC in terms of cultural focus as a starting point for a broader discussion of issues of cultural identity among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK. The ‘Two Buddhisms’ model of Buddhism in the West posits a straightforward relationship between Buddhism and cultural reproduction in diaspora Buddhist communities: that engagement with Buddhism in such communities is not simply about ‘religious’ issues, but also about cultural preservation, and that Buddhist institutions within such communities are not only places of religious practice but also cultural centres. I have tried to reflect the complexity found in the Sri Lankan diaspora, by showing that different attitudes towards cultural preservation and the degree to which temples should play the role of cultural centres can be found among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK. On the macrocosmic level, these different attitudes are reflected in the differences between the LBV and the SSIBC. On the microcosmic level, these differences can be found within the LBV itself.

8.5 Religious focus

The third difference between the SSIBC and the LBV that was often mentioned to me during my research was that of the religious focus of the two temples. As noted in chapter 7, I was told by Sunil – a regular patron of the LBV – that the LBV is characterised by a focus on meditation which is not evident to the same extent at the SSIBC. On other occasions the religious differences between the two temples were mentioned in connection

with their cultural differences. When my interviewee Asoka describes the SSIBC as a ‘cultural centre’, he links this to the presence in the temple of a *dēvālē* (shrine to the gods). Similarly, my interviewee Sisara makes a link between the cultural focus of the SSIBC and the importance given to rituals at the temple, arguing that ‘when the culture is present, the rituals are present’. In a conversation with a resident monk from the LBV, he similarly made a link between the cultural focus of the temples and the greater place given to certain Buddhist rituals at the SSIBC.³⁰

Before I look at the religious differences between the temples, I should first note that despite these differences, the two temples also have a great deal in common religiously. Rituals of *pirit* chanting and Buddha *pūjā* are practised in a largely similar way in both temples. Like the LBV, the SSIBC shows a dedication to socially engaged Buddhism. Monks in the temple are active in interfaith work, and often attend local government events as representatives of Buddhism. In addition, a charity which funds a home in Sri Lanka for orphaned and destitute children is run from the temple. The SSIBC is also characterised by a degree of emphasis on the scholarly study of Buddhism. The temple regularly organises talks at the temple by academics in the field of Buddhist studies, most notably on the occasion of United Kingdom Buddhist Day, an event which takes place at the temple every year in August or September to commemorate the life of Venerable Ananda Metteyya (born Charles Henry Alan Bennett, 1872-1923), the first Englishman to be ordained as a monk in the Theravada tradition. I attended this event in 2006, when the Sri Lankan monk and scholar Mahinda Deegalle (Bath Spa University) delivered a lecture on ‘Theravada Buddhism in London’. In 2007 I spoke at the event about my research. Scholars who have spoken at this event in the past include Elizabeth Harris (author of a book about Ananda Metteyya (1998)), Jas Elsner (University of Chicago) and Rupert Gethin (University of Bristol). Other scholars in the world of Buddhist Studies who have delivered lectures at the SSIBC in the past include Richard Gombrich (University of Oxford), Helen Waterhouse (Open University), Tim Barrett (School of Oriental and African Studies), and Tadeusz Skorupski (School of Oriental and African Studies). In 2003 the temple organised an academic conference on ‘Buddhism in the West’ at the University of Westminster, which featured lectures from scholars such as Damien Keown (Goldsmiths) and Ananda Guruge (University of the West, California). In addition, like the LBV, the temple has produced

³⁰ Fieldwork notes 07/11/2007.

books consisting of collections of scholarly articles on Buddhist themes (Piyatissa, Perera and Goonesena 1992; Perera 2000).

Moving on to look at the religious differences between the two temples, the most striking of these is the fact that the SSIBC contains a *dēvālē* (shrine to the gods). As noted in chapter 6, there is no *dēvālē* at the LBV. The *dēvālē* at the SSIBC, located in what was formerly a garage, was established in 1993, before which offerings to the gods were made at a temporary shrine which had to be disassembled and stored away after each time that it was used. The *dēvālē* contains large statues of Vishnu, Kataragama and Ganesha, three of the most popular gods of the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon. It also contains smaller statues and pictures of a range of other deities. An individual with the title of *Kapumahattayā* acts as the priest to the *dēvālē*, conducting rituals and making offerings (of fruit, money, incense and lamps) to the gods on behalf of those who wish to call upon their help. The *Kapumahattayā* lives permanently at the SSIBC and is supported financially by the temple. In addition to his work in the *dēvālē* he also helps in the general running of the temple. Offerings to the gods can be made at any time, but Wednesdays and Saturdays are regarded as particularly auspicious days on which to make such offerings and the *dēvālē* tends to be particularly busy on these days. People make offerings for a variety of reasons. When I spoke to the *Kapumahattayā* he identified the most common of these as: to ask for help in recovering from an illness; to ask for the resolution of a family dispute; to gain blessings for a forthcoming exam; and to ask for help because a child is not working hard at school.³¹ Often individuals will make offerings to different gods for different reasons. For example, requests for help in the field of education tend to be made to Ganesha.

If the presence of the *dēvālē* at the SSIBC is the most striking difference between the SSIBC and the LBV, there are also some differences in terms of the Buddhist rituals that take place at the two temples. As discussed in chapter 6, while the LBV does occasionally include short *Bodhi pūjās* in its activities, it does not include longer and more elaborate *pūjās* of this kind. At the SSIBC, on the other hand, such lengthy forms of *pūjā* are an important part of the temple's activities. I attended an *atavisi Buddha pūjā* – a *pūjā* offered to the 28 Buddhas of the past – at the SSIBC in October 2007. The *pūjā*, which involves offerings to 28 small statues representing the Buddhas of the past, was offered on the evening before the SSIBC's Kathina celebrations. This *pūjā* is an annual event at the

³¹ Fieldwork notes 27/07/2006.

temple and was conducted by Venerable Uduwe Dhammaloka, a Sri Lankan monk well-known for his pleasing and melodious style of chanting. In June of 2007 I attended another lengthy *pūjā* of this kind which was held in the main hall of Kingsbury High School – elaborately decorated with Buddhist flags and flowers, and featuring a *bō* tree brought from the temple – as a celebration of both the Poson and Wesak days of that year. The *pūjā* – which attracted a congregation of around 500 – was again conducted by Uduwe Dhammaloka, accompanied on this occasion by another well-known Sri Lankan monk, Venerable Kolonnawe Sumangala. As notes in chapter 6, *Bodhi pūjās* and other elaborate *pūjās* of this kind are often regarded as especially powerful sources of merit and blessings. While, as always, I found a range of views among those that I spoke to at these *pūjā* about how they understood the rituals, the particular power of these rituals to bring apotropaic blessings was mentioned by a number of those that I spoke with, particularly after the *pūjā* held for Wesak and Poson (after which I had a greater amount of free time to speak with people). For example, Anil, a regular patron of the temple, told me that the power of the ritual derives from the sound of the chanting performed by the participating monks (I noted above that Uduwe Dhammaloka is particularly known for his pleasant style of chanting). Ajantha, who is involved in the organisation of the temple, told me that rituals of this kind are popular among Sri Lankans precisely because of the worldly benefits they bring, and added that they became particularly popular in Sri Lanka as individuals sort ways to cope with the difficulties brought to the country by the conflict between the government and the LTTE.

Another way in which the SSIBC differs from the LBV in terms of ritual practice concerns the ritual activities that take place in the temple during the *vassa* period (the three month period culminating in *Kaṭhina* during which restrictions are placed on the degree to which monks can travel outside their temple). I did not observe any changes to the regular activities taking place at the LBV during the *vassa* periods that occurred during the period of my research, although – as noted in chapter 6 – at the LBV’s *Kaṭhina* ceremony of 2007 reference was made to the *vassa* period being one in which monks and laypeople should dedicate themselves to meditation and progressing towards *nibbāna*. At the SSIBC, on the other hand, the normal Buddha *pūjā* is replaced during the *vassa* period with a longer ritual incorporating a *Bodhi pūjā* along with a special form of Buddha *pūjā* referred to in Sinhala as a *nava arahadi Buduguna pūjā* (A *pūjā* dedicated to the nine special qualities of the

Buddha). These *pūjās* – which are each sponsored by a supporter of the temple – attract a much larger congregation than normally attended Sunday *pūjās* at the SSIBC. Of 6 of these *pūjā* which I attended during the *vassa* period of 2006, each attracted a congregation of somewhere between 50 and 100 people. When I attended the first normal Sunday Buddha *pūjā* after the end of the *vassa* period, the number present had returned to the more standard figure of around 20.³² When I asked my interviewee Anuja, who I first met at a Sunday *pūjā* during *vassa*, why more people attend *pūjās* during this period, she answered that offerings performed in this period are particularly meritorious.

We can thus find at the SSIBC certain rituals which are less prevalent (and in some cases altogether absent) at the LBV, and which are regarded as bringing particular kammatic and apotropaic benefits. Another way in which the religious focus of the SSIBC differs from that of the LBV is that the temple's activities and programmes feature less of an emphasis on meditation-centred, practise-oriented Buddhism. As noted in chapter 5, talks in which individuals speak about meditation in a practice-oriented way, often making reference to their own meditative experiences, are a regular part of religious programmes at the LBV. At the SSIBC such talks are less evident. None of the talks that I attended during my fieldwork at the SSIBC could be described as practise-oriented in the way that, for example, talks at the LBV by Ajahn Brahmavamso or Henepola Gunaratana are. There is also no equivalent of the LBV's monthly meditation retreat at the SSIBC.

In chapter 5 we saw how the degree of stress on meditation-centred, practice-oriented approaches to Buddhism found at the LBV coincided with the temple having many links to convert Buddhist institutions and teachers. The SSIBC has less strong links with convert Buddhism. Western-born monks have stayed at the temple in the past,³³ but during my fieldwork no talks by convert monastics were given at the temple. In part the low level of involvement of convert monks can be attributed to the fact that the majority of the temple's activities are conducted in Sinhala. However, English is used in some of the temple's activities and so the general absence of convert teachers must be seen as related at least to some degree to the religious focus of the temple. An interesting point of comparison between the LBV and the SSIBC is that while the visiting monk who attracts the largest

³² Fieldwork notes 15/10/2006.

³³ Venerable Dhammika, an Australian monk, was resident at the SSIBC for a short period in the early 2000s. Dhammika, who now lives in Singapore, is the author of *The Broken Buddha* (2004), a critique of contemporary Theravada monasticism, which makes reference to his experiences staying in Sri Lankan temples in the West.

crowds at the LBV is the convert meditation expert Ajahn Brahmavamso, at the SSIBC it is Venerable Uduwe Dhammaloka, who – as noted above – is renowned not as a meditation teacher but for the aesthetically pleasing way in which he performs rituals.

It is notable that the religious differences that I have identified between the LBV and the SSIBC bring to mind the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model. I have suggested that the LBV is characterised by a focus on meditation-centred Buddhism, while the SSIBC is characterised by a focus on kammatic and apotropaic ritual, as well as a focus on rituals directed towards divine beings. To employ another familiar dichotomy, I have suggested that the LBV is characterised by a modernist approach to Buddhism, and the SSIBC by a more traditionalist approach. There is certainly truth in these descriptions. However, as with so much in this study it must be stressed that the differences here are far from absolute. Both the LBV and the SSIBC are places in which one can find a range of understandings of Buddhism, and thus to associate the LBV purely with a modernist, nibbanic approach and the SSIBC wholly with a focus on kammatic and apotropaic ritual would be problematic.

The most significant religious difference between the SSIBC and the LBV is clearly the presence of a *dēvālē* within the SSIBC. During my interviews with one of the resident monks of the LBV, they state that the LBV would never consider installing a *dēvālē* since worshipping at such shrines does not accord with the teachings of Buddhism. However, the fact that the SSIBC contains a *dēvālē* while the LBV does not should not be taken to indicate an absolute distinction between the Sri Lankan patrons of the two temples when it comes to the practice of making offerings to deities. As noted in chapter 7, 10 of my interviewees at the LBV do engage in such practices, or state that they would do if they had a particular difficulty in their life. On the other hand, I encountered individuals at the SSIBC who rejected such practices. 4 of my 5 interviewees from the temple do make offering the gods, but my interviewee Lasith, a regular at the SSBIC, does not, stating in our interview:

In Buddhism I think it clearly says that you can't get anything from *devas* [...] So I don't believe that you can get something if you offer something to gods.

Similar attitudes were expressed to me during my fieldwork by Tilak, another regular patron of the SSIBC,³⁴ and by Daya, who attends the temple only occasionally.³⁵ Daya stated that rituals performed gods are means by which weak-minded people can find psychological support, but that he had no belief in their power to bring results.

Moving on to the other religious differences between the temples, while the SSIBC is characterised by a lesser focus on practice-oriented, meditation-centred approaches to Buddhism than the LBV, meditation is certainly not absent from the SSIBC. A weekly meditation class takes place at the temple, periods of meditation are a regular part of *pōya* day programmes, and Sunday *pūjās* at the temple often include a period of meditation.

My fieldwork observations suggest that patrons of the SSIBC are less likely than those at the LBV to practice meditation regularly, and none of my 5 lay interviewees at the temple practised extended periods of seated meditation on a regular basis. However, interest in practising meditation or otherwise engaging in meditation-oriented approaches to Buddhism is certainly not absent at the SSIBC. My interviewee Bhatiya is not a regular practitioner of meditation. He attends the daily *pūjā* at the SSIBC regularly, and he expresses a strong belief in the kammatic and apotropaic power of rituals such as *pūjā*, *dāna* and *pirit* chanting. However, Bhatiya does have some interest in meditation and nibbanic aspects of Buddhism. In the past he has practised meditation regularly, and he continues to take an interest in talks by meditation-oriented monks, particularly those of Ajahn Brahmavamso (he mentions listening to audio recordings of such talks). In August 2007 I accompanied Bhatiya and two other regular patrons of the SSIBC, Palinda and Lakshman, on a trip to Amaravati to listen to a talk given by Ajahn Sumedho.³⁶ This was one of a series of talks given by Sumedho on Sunday afternoons during that summer, and Bhatiya, Palinda and Lakshman had also attended other talks in the series. During the trip they spoke enthusiastically about the talks and about reading books by Ajahn Chah that they had bought from the Amaravati bookshop. This trip highlighted to me the difficulty of making firm divides between different approaches to Buddhism. Bhatiya, Palinda and Lakshman are not regular meditators, and their most regular form of Buddhist practice is participation in *pūjās* at the SSIBC. However, their strong interest in talks by Ajahn

³⁴ Fieldwork notes 26/08/2007.

³⁵ Fieldwork notes 06/08/2006.

³⁶ Fieldwork notes 12/08/2007.

Sumedho demonstrates an interest in more meditation-centred, emphatically nibbanic forms of Buddhism.

If the above shows that it is problematic to view the SSIBC purely as a place of kammatic and apotropaic rather than nibbanic Buddhism, the same can be said when we look at the rituals that take place at the temple. The differences between the SSIBC and the LBV in the area of rituals are significant – the presence of special lengthy forms of ritual at the temple (such as the *aṭavisi Buddha pūjā*), and the longer *pūjās* performed during the *vassa* period, indicate a stronger emphasis on the generation of merit and apotropaic blessings at the SSIBC. However, throughout this study I have argued repeatedly that Buddhist rituals can rarely be described purely as occasions of merit-accumulation or the invocation of apotropaic blessings. As at the LBV, rituals at the SSIBC are surrounded by a number of different discourses, and therefore must be understood as multidimensional phenomena rather than in solely kammatic and apotropaic terms. This can best be illustrated with a discussion of the Kaṭhina celebrations which I attended at the SSIBC in October 2007.³⁷ These celebrations were considerably longer than those that I attended at the LBV: while the LBV's Kaṭhina observances take place in a single afternoon, those at the SSIBC began the day before the Kaṭhina ceremony itself with a lengthy *aṭavisi Buddha pūjā* conducted by Venerable Uduwe Dhammaloka, and continued with a full day of activities leading up to the ceremony, consisting of 5 talks, a discussion period with a panel of resident and visiting monks, a period of meditation, and a Buddha *pūjā*.

An emphasis on merit-making and apotropaic blessings was evident in many aspects of the celebrations. I have noted above that *aṭavisi Buddha pūjās* are regarded as a particularly strong source of merit and blessings. The fact that giving a Kaṭhina robe brings a particularly large kammic return was mentioned by three speakers during the day of the ceremony. In addition, one talk during the celebrations, given by Venerable Mahinda, one of the temple's resident monks, focused on the importance of making merit. Venerable Mahinda stated that if one was to have success in life one needed two things, merit and hard work: without hard work one could never be successful no matter how much merit one had accumulated, but without merit one could not be successful no matter how hard one worked. This talk expressed an emphasis on the importance of merit-making that was not found to the same degree in any talk that I witnessed at the LBV.

³⁷ The discussion here is based on my fieldwork notes (27/10/2007, 28/10/2007).

It would be wrong, however, to see the SSIBC's Kaṭhina celebrations as purely an occasion for ritualised merit-making. While the celebrations contained no strongly meditation-oriented talks of the kind that are so common at the LBV, they did include a period of meditation practice. In addition, not all of the talks during the celebrations focused on merit. A talk delivered by the academic and monk Dr Mahinda Deegalle, a frequent visitor to the temple, focused on how Kaṭhina can be seen as a ritual symbolising the importance of the Buddhist community. Dr Deegalle noted that sometimes Buddhism is portrayed as an individualistic religion with little social dimension. The Kaṭhina ceremony, he argued, showed that this is not the case. The ceremony is not just about the individual who donates the Kaṭhina robe, but about the work that is done by the whole community – both lay and monastic – to make the event possible. It is an event which brings the lay and monastic communities closer together and symbolises the relationship between the two. While he acknowledged that Kaṭhina was said within Buddhism to be a source of great merit, Dr Deegalle stressed that the meritoriousness of the event must be seen in the context of this broader meaning of the ceremony as a celebration of the Buddhist community.³⁸

Another talk, delivered by Venerable Nalaka, a visiting Sri Lankan monk, also highlighted the difficulty of viewing the celebrations in purely kammatic terms. The talk began by looking at the practice of offering flowers to an image of the Buddha. Nalaka noted that flowers can be seen as symbolic of the Buddha – their pleasant appearance and smell representing the beauty and goodness of the Buddha. He stressed that when we offer flowers to the Buddha we should be conscious of these meanings and generally focused on the act we are doing – we should make the offering with an aware, focused mind, not with one that is wandering. Here the idea of Buddha *pūjā* being an act of mechanistic merit-making is undermined by a stress on the state of mind with which one engages in this ritual. The talk then moved on to look at the nature of listening to Buddhist sermons. The speaker argued that listening to a sermon is like sitting with something delicate balanced on our lap. When we get up we should be careful to protect and keep with us what we have learnt, not simply let it fall, forgetting about it in our daily lives. Here again the idea of engaging in Buddhist activities simply as a form of meritorious practice is undercut by an attitude which stresses the need to focus on the meaning of sermons and apply them in one's life.

³⁸ See chapter 6 for more on the importance of Kaṭhina as a symbol of community,

Similar points were then made concerning the recitation of Buddhist verses. Nalaka argued that it does not matter how many stanzas one is able to recite; what is important is whether one knows and lives by the meaning of these stanzas. The rest of the sermon was taken up with an explanation of a single verse from the Pali Canon. The verse emphasised the importance of maintaining a focused and controlled mind, and not allowing one's mind to be swept away by distractions. The speaker illustrated the meaning of the verse by relating a lengthy story from the time of the Buddha about a prince named Viḍūḍabha who allowed himself to be consumed by anger, resulting in his taking the lives of many people and eventually in his own demise. After relating this story Nalaka noted that everyone has the potential to have their mind intoxicated in this way, whether by anger (as in the story), a desire for wealth, an addiction to alcohol or drugs, or any of a number of other factors. He joked that even he, were he to win the lottery, may be swept away by his new wealth and suddenly expect everybody to look up to and respect him because he was rich.

In this talk, then, we find a strong emphasis on the need to cultivate certain Buddhist virtues – principally a focused mind – and a degree of criticism of an approach to Buddhism which is based on simply participating in certain meritorious religious activities without engaging with Buddhist teachings. At one point, when discussing his central theme of the importance of controlling and focusing the mind, Nalaka made a link between this theme and the attainment of *nibbāna*. He noted that by controlling the mind one will eventually be able to attain a focused mind in meditation. This will then lead to the attainment of high levels of meditative concentration. In turn this will lead to the attainment of the various stages of spiritual attainment leading up to *nibbāna*, and eventually to the attainment of *nibbāna* itself. The ideas expressed here, though they made up only a small part of the talk, are significant. The link made between participating in rituals such as *pūjā*, the concentration and controlling of the mind, and the eventual attainment of *nibbāna* illustrates the difficulty of making firm distinctions between the kammatic and the nibbanic. The talk creates a narrative whereby controlling one's mind in a mundane sense through participation in kammatic rituals is seen as leading in the long run to more profound forms of mental cultivation and thus to the attainment of *nibbāna*.

8.5.1 Approaches to Buddhist ritual among laypeople at the SSIBC

The idea that the LBV is purely a temple of ritualised merit-making and apotropaic benefits is also challenged when we look at the approached to ritual found among lay patrons of the temple. As at the LBV, I found a range of approaches to rituals among those that I spoke with and interviewed at the SSIBC, including approaches which played down the importance of practices such as *pūjā* and *dāna*, and particularly of their kammatic and apotropaic dimensions. Such an approach is exemplified by my interviewee Lasith. Lasith came to the UK in the early 2000s. When he first came he lived close to the SSIBC and came to the evening *pūjā* at the temple at least once a week. Now he lives further away, but he still tries to attend *pūjā* at the temple at least once every two weeks. Aside from attending *pūjā* he also sometimes comes to the temple for major *pōya* day celebrations (I met Lasith at the Wesak and Poson celebrations of 2007). Lasith admires meditation-centred Buddhism. However, he does not practice meditation himself. He has tried in the past, but found that he was unable to concentrate his mind.

Since Lasith attends *pūjā* at the SSIBC fairly regularly, his views about *pūjā* are perhaps surprising. He first mentions the subject while discussing a convert Buddhist that he knew while studying at university in Latvia. For Lasith this convert embodied how one should practise Buddhism:

When I was in uni [...] I had a professor who was teaching me material science...And suddenly, because I am from Sri Lanka he spoke to me, and I found out to my amazement that he is a Buddhist. And he gets all his books from Sri Lanka and he reads them. And when he started talking to me, I found out that he [has] got a [more] in-depth knowledge than me about Buddhism. And then...what I learnt from him is...he doesn't go to a temple and do these *pūjās* or anything. What he does is he practises Buddhism. That's what Buddha said, I think, rather than going and doing *pūjā* ...that's what Buddha said – you go and practise and you benefit yourself.

I ask Lasith what he means by 'practising Buddhism' if this does not include practices such as *pūjā*. He answers:

Well, Buddhism is something...you develop your own...you make your future, or your next life or whatever...you make it good for yourself by doing meditation or ...practising in the sense...it's not like monks...yes, in Buddhism it says, if you want to become a monk, it clearly says 'these are the guidelines'. But still you can be a layman, you can have your own family life, and then still you can practise

Buddhism. I don't think that – even though, yes, I come to the temple – I don't think...coming to the temple is not a major part of Buddhism. [It is better] even if you stay at home and follow the principles of Buddha, like...you give to people...[try to overcome] hatred...in Pali you say *lobha* [greed], *moha* [hatred], *dosa* [delusion]...if you can ignore them [these traits]...just take it [one's negative characteristics] away from you...and practise *mettā* [loving kindness], *karuṇā* [compassion], *muditā* [sympathetic joy]...that's what I think – that's what it is [to practise Buddhism].

Here, then, Lasith argues that practising Buddhism in the way that the Buddha intended consists in rooting out negative mental traits and cultivating positive ones, and not in attending Buddhist temples in order to participate in rituals such as *pūjā*. The earlier part of Lasith's answer is a little unclear, but some important points are contained here. Lasith mentions meditation as an aspect of his understanding of true Buddhist practice, which ties in with his idea of true Buddhist practice as relating to mental cultivation. The comments he makes about monks are also interesting. He expresses the view that even if one does not live as a monk, one can still 'practise Buddhism'. Thus he is arguing that the cultivation of the mind and the rooting out of greed, hatred and delusion are not practices to be undertaken by monks alone, but something that all Buddhists should dedicate themselves to. In stressing meditation and the overcoming of greed, hatred and delusion, and in arguing that the true practice of Buddhism should not be the preserve of monks, Lasith places a clear emphasis on the nibbanic. While he does not practise meditation himself, the views he expresses here coincide to a large extent with those who take a meditation-centred approach.

While Lasith views attending temples and participating in rituals such as *pūjā* as being inessential aspects of Buddhism, he does regard such practices as having some positive dimensions. Thus he states:

In one way, going to the temple would help. As a family man, like...when you are at home you have your own problems. You have to solve things and you don't have time [to concentrate on Buddhism]. When you come to the temple your mind is peaceful...peaceful atmosphere...so it helps you to calm down and...sitting in front of the Buddha statue, it calms you down...and, ok yes, mentally it helps. But it's not something... [it's not] a must that a Buddhist should do. Yes, as a Buddhist you can go to the temple. But it's not a necessity...you can stay at home. What you have to do is follow what Buddha has showed you...Buddha's path...and be a better person.

Thus Lasith views coming to a temple and being in the presence of a Buddha image as helping to calm the mind. However, at the same time he continues to stress that such practices are not necessary as long as one is following the teachings of the Buddha at home.

So far I have not mentioned merit at all in my discussion of how Lasith views *pūjā*. When I note that some that I have spoken to viewed participation in *pūjā* as a way to accumulate merit, Lasith rejects such an approach to *pūjā*:

I don't believe in [that]. Well, you give something, yes obviously you will get something – it is like action-reaction. But...by giving you purify your mind. It's exactly what Buddha said. You start giving...you practise giving...so then you don't have these bonds, 'it's mine, it's me', sort-of thing. As a human being we can't completely take it away, but at least to some extent you can do it by giving. And also, when you give to someone...if I can give something that the other person doesn't have, and if that person is happy with what I gave...that gives me good uplift as well...Rather than keeping it and enjoying [it] alone, you share it with someone else. Then you have that joy [thinking] 'I gave it to someone who really needed it'.

Lasith thus rejects the idea of participating in rituals such as *pūjā* and *dāna* in order to accumulate merit, and emphasises instead seeing rituals as ways in which one can cultivate generosity and overcome self-centred desire. Later in the interview Lasith repeats his rejection of giving for kammatic reasons. In doing so he makes another interesting argument, suggesting that the idea that giving *pūjā* or *dāna* brings merit can be seen as a strategy which draws towards the religion those who may otherwise not come:

I am not after *pin* [merit] or anything...it might be...ok, yes, there is an inner factor that you can't see, you might be getting *pin* or whatever...[But] its a way of putting the thing to people in a way that they can understand. So you say, 'You give *dāna* and you get *pin*'. So that makes sense to them: 'OK, we give something and we get something that can be used in our next life'. So...otherwise...if you go and say what I am saying – 'you don't have to go to the temple and you can practise at home' – people will say 'yeah, why should I go to the temple. I will practise at home'.

At first sight there seems to be some confusion in Lasith's answer's here. He argues that the notion that temple-based rituals such as *pūjā* bring merit is a strategy to attract people to the temple. However, at the same time both here and in the previous quote he also suggests that offering *pūjā* and *dāna* does indeed bring merit. In fact there is no contradiction in Lasith's thoughts. To understand what he means we need to look a little more at how he discusses *kamma* and merit. While Lasith rejects the idea of participating in rituals such as *pūjā* in

order to make merit, this does not mean that he takes no interest in *kamma* and merit. He expresses a strong belief in *kamma* and rebirth, and emphasises throughout our interview the importance of ‘doing good *kamma*’. When I note that this does not seem to sit easily with his view that engaging in rituals such as *pūjā* is not necessary, Lasith answers:

Good *kamma* is not coming to the temple. Good *kamma*...you can...without coming to the temple you go and give something to [the] poor...that’s a good *kamma*. You don’t need to come to the temple.

Thus for Lasith, producing merit is important, but this is not something that is primarily tied to temple-based ritual acts. Rather, one’s merit comes from the deeds one performs in everyday life. For Lasith merit comes as a natural consequence of living through Buddhist principles – cultivating generosity, developing one’s mind and so on. Lasith does not deny that participating in Buddhist rituals brings merit. However, he rejects the idea that rituals of *pūjā* and *dāna* are a particularly strong source of merit. Since they are positive acts, they will like any positive act bring merit, but there is nothing about such deeds which make them more meritorious than positive acts performed outside the temple. Lasith’s rejection of the idea that merit is made primarily through temple-based rituals is reflected in his questioning of the teaching that giving to monks brings more merit than giving to non-monastics:

Monks...they always say [that] the highest merit is giving something to Buddha...and while Buddha is not here, [giving to] his followers...the monks...that’s the biggest merit...that’s where you get it. But I don’t know...I’m not totally agreeing with that. What I’m saying is, ok, the monks are having enough and there a lot of poor people outside [the temple], and giving to them might give you more merit, or else at least give you some satisfaction.

Thus for Lasith, while doing good *kamma* and making merit is important, taking part in ‘kammatic’ temple-based rituals is not. Rather, merit follows naturally from the ‘true practice’ of Buddhism – rooting out greed, hatred and delusion and cultivating compassion, loving kindness and equanimity.

Just as Lasith places little emphasis on the kammatic dimension of rituals, so he gives little emphasis to their apotropaic dimensions. He notes that he always wears a *pirit* thread around his wrist and that he will often have *pirit* chanted for significant events in his life (such as before exams). However, he says that he wears *pirit* thread more as a symbol of Buddhism than as a form of protection, and states that he has *pirit* chanted out of

‘tradition’ rather than through a firm belief in its beneficial effects. He goes on to note that having *pirit* chanted can benefit one psychologically, by calming one’s mind. In addition, he does not entirely rule out the possibility that *pirit* may have a more tangible apotropaic benefit, noting that the sound waves produced by *pirit* may have a ‘positive effect’. However, generally Lasith plays down the idea that *pirit* and other Buddhist rituals can bring strong apotropaic benefits.

While Lasith plays down the importance of kammatic and apotropaic dimensions of ritual, Priyan, who I spoke with after a Sunday *pūjā* at the SSIBC, strongly emphasised these aspects of ritual.³⁹ Most individuals who spoke to me during my research about the kammatic or apotropaic benefits of rituals tended to do so in rather abstract terms. Priyan, however, gave me concrete examples of the benefits that ritual can bring. Having recently arrived in the UK, he was living near to the SSIBC and came regularly to the temple. He had recently experienced problems with his landlord, but stated that these had been resolved after he came regularly to *pūjās* at the temple and carried out similar rituals at home. He attributed the resolution of his problems to the kammic merit generated by these rituals. Here we see an example of the lines between kammatic and apotropaic dimensions of rituals being blurred – the rituals were regarded as bringing apotropaic benefits, but these benefits were seen to be the result of kammic merit.

While the example of Priyan highlights the importance of kammatic and apotropaic dimensions of ritual for some at the SSIBC, it was uncommon for those that I spoke with to view rituals purely in these terms. The most common approach to ritual that I encountered at the SSIBC was one which emphasised kammatic and apotropaic aspects of ritual alongside other dimensions, including those relating to developing the mind and moving towards *nibbāna*. Such an approach is found in my interview with Bhatiya. Bhatiya lives near to the SSIBC and attends the evening *pūjā* at the temple most days. When I ask Bhatiya if participating in *pūjās* is important, he answers:

No, it is not. If you don’t do [it], that doesn’t mean you are not Buddhist. Being a Buddhist is actually living what the Buddha had taught, not worshipping him. That is something that he had told. Not that he is saying, ‘Don’t worship’. What he is saying is, ‘Do practise what I am saying. That is greater than worshipping me’.

When I ask what the purpose of *pūjā* is, Bhatiya states:

³⁹ Fieldwork notes 17/09/2006.

Worshipping in the morning actually helps within the day because it gives you a time to recollect your thoughts. And you start with a fresh mind. And you start with a Buddhist vision in your mind.

So far Bhatiya's views on *pūjā* seem similar to those of Lasith – *pūjā* is not an important aspect of Buddhism, and the significance that it does have is as a reminder of Buddhist teachings. However, as the interview progresses it is clear that Bhatiya gives more space to kammatic and apotropaic dimensions of ritual than Lasith. When we spoke prior to our interview Bhatiya made a distinction between two kinds of *kamma*: *puñña kamma* and *kusala kamma*. The precise meaning of the terms *puñña* and *kusala* is a matter of scholarly debate.⁴⁰ For Bhatiya, *puñña kamma* refers to acts which are performed in order to bring about merit, while *kusala kamma* refers to acts which are performed in order to purify the mind and move one towards *nibbāna*. The distinction made here to a certain extent mirrors Spiro's kammatic/nibbanic division. However, Bhatiya views acts of *puñña kamma* as being able to benefit one in specific ways in this life, not only in the next. Thus he sees acts of *puñña kamma* in both kammatic and apotropaic terms.

When I raise the issue in our interview, Bhatiya affirms that all Buddhist rituals can be acts of *puñña* or *kusala kamma* depending on the intention with which they are performed. Unlike Lasith he does not see carrying out rituals specifically for the purpose of making merit as problematic. He regards such ritualised merit-making as entirely legitimate, even though it is not the 'highest level' of practice. Bhatiya also differs from Lasith in that he accepts that certain ritual activities – those involving offerings to the Buddha and the monastic Sangha – produce a greater amount of merit than other non-Buddhist acts of generosity.

Because of his initial comments about *pūjā*, I had expected Bhatiya to see his own engagement in rituals in terms of *kusala kamma*. However, when I ask him about this, he replies:

It is a blend actually...Sometimes...if you are in trouble...if you are in a bad period...people do a lot of *puñña kamma* to get rid of those bad periods.

⁴⁰ For examples of scholarly works that discuss these terms see Premasiri (1976), Keown (2001), Cousins (1996), Gombrich (1996), Egge (2002), and Adam (2005). For more on this issue see chapter 10.

I go on to ask if participation in rituals can be both *kusala* and *puñña* at the same time, Bhatiya answers:

Yes...*puñña kamma* and *kusala kamma* [are] very difficult to separate... You can't actually say 'Now, this is *puñña kamma*, this is *kusala kamma*'... It's the degree that varies... It's something like this actually...

At this point he clasps his hands together with his fingers intertwined, in order to indicate the way in which *kusala* and *puñña* are blended together in practice. Thus Bhatiya views his participation in rituals such as *pūjā* simultaneously in both nibbanic and kammatic/apotropaic terms.

A similar approach to Buddhist ritual is found in my interview with Anuja. Anuja came to the UK only three months before our interview. Since arriving in the UK she has come to the SSIBC regularly. While she was in Sri Lanka Anuja was particularly devoted to the practice of offering *Bodhi pūjā*. She worked at an office located near to a temple with a *bō* tree, and she would visit the temple most days to perform *pūjā* towards the tree.

Our discussion of Buddhism begins with the issue of *dāna*. When I ask why *dāna* is offered Anuja gives a number of responses. She initially states that it is because the Buddha is the most important person for Buddhists, and when one gives to monks one believes that one is also giving to the Buddha (she notes here that when one gives to monks, the first piece of food is always offered to a Buddha-image). Thus she sees giving *dāna* as a way of respecting the Buddha. She goes on to connect *dāna* with the path to *nibbāna*. She states that the Buddha gave people directions on how to stop rebirth and suffering and thereby attain *nibbāna* – this is the ultimate goal of all Buddhist people. To do this we need to remove all negative 'things' [qualities of the mind], such as greed. By giving *dāna* we develop generosity and help to get rid of these negative things. Thus here *dāna* is seen as a means of mental cultivation and a part of the path to *nibbāna*. A third reason that she gives for giving *dāna* focuses on merit – she notes that one gains merit for this life and one's future lives through giving *dāna*.

Thus when speaking about *dāna* Anuja views this practice both in nibbanic and kammatic terms, and as a way of paying respect to the Buddha. Apotropaic dimensions of Buddhist rituals are also mentioned by Anuja. When we discuss *pirit*, she affirms the apotropaic power of *pirit* chanting. Anuja also speaks about the apotropaic benefits of *Bodhi pūjā*. She speaks of *Bodhi pūjā* as a means of making merit, and as something

connected with developing the mind in the direction of *nibbāna*. However, she also views *Bodhi pūjā* as something that can bring specific worldly benefits in one's present life. I have noted that *Bodhi pūjā* is seen by some Sri Lankan Buddhists as a particularly strong source of apotropaic benefits. When I ask Anuja if she performs *Bodhi pūjā* hoping for a specific benefit, she answers:

Yeah...like develop my studies, and my work...like, office work...something like that...more benefits...something like that.

Thus Anuja participates in *Bodhi pūjā* with the hope that doing so will benefit her in terms of her career and her academic studies. When I ask to what she attributes the power of the *Bodhi pūjā*, Anuja argues that the power lies in the *bō* tree, noting that some scientists in Sri Lanka have claimed that *bō* trees emit certain invisible rays which produce beneficial effects.

Anuja sees no contradiction between the nibbanic, kammatic and apotropaic aspects of her religiosity. Rather than seeing making merit and moving towards *nibbāna* as mutually exclusive (as Spiro does) Anuja sees them as linked, stating twice in our interview that making merit helps one to move towards *nibbāna*. When we discuss apotropaic dimensions of Buddhist ritual, I ask Anuja whether asking for such worldly benefits contradicts the idea that one's ultimate goal should be *nibbāna*. She answers:

[You are asking for] a better life in this life....Because you have to live. You can't die tomorrow. You can't die [the] day after. There will be a time for you to die. Until that point...you should not suffer in your life. Because this is suffering...living is suffering. So you need to get some relief for the suffering. So therefore people are doing [apotropaic rituals]...and even myself I am thinking like that [...] [While] you live, you have to have a good life...better life...best life...until you go to *nibbāna*. [You are] asking for *nibbāna*, but at once it won't [happen]...it is not reality. Tomorrow you can't go to *nibbāna*.

Here, then, Anuja argues that since *nibbāna* is not achievable immediately, it is useful to engage in apotropaic rituals which can help one to deal with one's everyday problems.

We can thus find a range of approaches towards Buddhist ritual among patrons of the SSIBC, with some playing down the importance of kammatic and apotropaic dimensions of ritual, some emphasising such dimensions, and others viewing ritual simultaneously in nibbanic, kammatic and apotropaic terms.

8.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I have attempted to provide a nuanced comparison of the SSIBC and the LBV. These two temples are often cast as opposites by members of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community. The differences between the two temples certainly help to highlight that diasporic Buddhist institutions vary in terms of the patrons that they attract, the degree of emphasis that they give to acting as cultural centres, and their religious focus. However, to cast the LBV and SSIBC as opposites – on one side the ‘modernist’ LBV playing down the importance of its cultural role, and on the other the ‘traditionalist’ SSIBC emphasising the preservation of Sinhalese culture in the diaspora – is to ignore the fact that the differences between the two temples are for the most part matters of degree rather than of absolute distinctions.⁴¹

⁴¹ As noted in chapter 1, aside from the LBV and the SSIBC there are four other Sri Lankan Buddhist temples in London, with six more located elsewhere in the UK. A comparison of all of the Sri Lankan temples in the UK would extend the analysis of the LBV and the SSIBC given here. All of these temples have a certain amount in common in terms of the activities that they run: *pōya*-day programmes, rituals of *dāna* and *pūjā*, meditation classes, and so on. At the same time, however, these temples also vary in some respects: their cultural focus; their religious focus; the demographic make-up of their patrons; the degree to which they attract non-Sri Lankans to their activities; and so on. They also vary in terms of size. The LBV and the SSIBC are among the larger Sri Lankan temples in the UK. Many other temples are much smaller, some housing only one monk and being located in much smaller premises than the LBV or the SSIBC.

Chapter 9

The Nissarana Group: A Nibbanic Sri Lankan Organisation in the UK

Permanent temples with resident monks are an important part of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK. However, such temples – which I will refer to as ‘mainstream’ temples, since they are the central representations of Sri Lankan Buddhist religiosity in the UK – are not the only institutions attended by Sri Lankan Buddhists in Britain. There are also a number of groups which exist outside mainstream temples. These organisations tend to be somewhat smaller in scale than mainstream temples and to lack any kind of permanent temple or building (with meetings taking place instead in private houses or rented spaces). Nevertheless, they represent an important aspect of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK which would be neglected were I to focus only on mainstream temples. The majority of this chapter is dedicated to an analysis of one such organisation, the Nissarana group. At the end of the chapter I will look briefly at other religious institutions patronised by Sri Lankan Buddhists, paying particular attention to the worship of divine beings (‘gods’ or *devas*) for apotropaic purposes.

9.1 The Nissarana group

The Nissarana group consists of a number of monastic and lay Buddhists who have formed an organisation around the charismatic Sri Lankan monk Venerable Wellawatte Seelagawesi. To describe the group it is necessary to first describe Seelagawesi himself. Seelagawesi ordained in Sri Lanka at the age of 27, having previously been involved in meditation practice as a layperson. When we look at three kinds of Sri Lankan monks that were described to me in my interview with the head monk of the LBV (chapter 5), Seelagawesi falls into the category of monks that ordain as adults and are primarily interested in meditation rather than academic study. He is thus what I have described as a practice-oriented monk, rather than a scholarly monk. As discussed below, in my interview with him Seelagawesi clearly distinguishes himself from those monks who have studied at university, stating that he prefers to learn through practice than from books. Where Seelagawesi differs from many practice-oriented monks is that in addition to teaching meditation and giving *Dhamma* talks, he also practises certain forms of spiritual healing.

Seelagawesi has a substantial following in Sri Lanka. He has travelled outside Sri Lanka to teach on a number of occasions, visiting not only the UK but also the USA and

Denmark. Seelagawesi first came to the UK in 2000 when he was invited by a Sri Lankan follower of his who was studying in Britain. Since then he has travelled to the UK every year. During the period of my research Seelagawesi visited the UK twice, once in 2006 from early July to early October and again in 2007 from early June to late July. While Seelagawesi is the dominant monastic figure in the Nissarana group, he is not the only monk involved with the organisation. During his visit in 2006 Seelagawesi was accompanied by another Sri Lankan monk, Venerable Ariyagawesi. In 2007, Seelagawesi's visit was preceded by a visit from Ariyagawesi and two other monks, Venerable Santhasumana, and Venerable Santhamanasa, who stayed from the middle of March until the end of April.

Over time a small community has grown around Seelagawesi's visits to the UK. At first this community would not meet unless Seelagawesi was in the country. However, more recently the community has taken on a more permanent nature and has held meetings in Seelagawesi's absence. This sense of permanence within the group has brought with it the establishment of a website detailing the group's activities,¹ and the adoption of the name Nissarana (a Pali term meaning liberation or enlightenment) by the group.

The group has no permanent centre in the UK. However, during Seelagawesi's last two visits houses have been rented for the period that he is in Britain (in both cases these were located in North-West London). Outside of this time the group meets in private houses. There has been some suggestion within the group of establishing a permanent centre in the UK in the future, but as yet these plans have not come to fruition.

While the Nissarana group is clearly centred primarily around Seelagawesi and the other monks that visit from Sri Lanka, others also play leadership roles in the group. In the UK the group was until recently led by a Sri Lankan layman, Sisara, who has been a follower of Seelagawesi since 2000. Sisara, who shares something of Seelagawesi's charismatic teaching style, organised meetings of the group in Seelagawesi's absence, and even when Seelagawesi was in the country Sisara acted as a teacher within the group rather than simply another lay follower. When I first met Sisara he lived a semi-renounced life, permanently observing the eight precepts that are usually observed by laypeople only on certain occasions, while continuing to work and live a married life. Towards the end of my fieldwork period, in September 2007, Sisara left the UK to ordain as a monk in Sri Lanka.

¹ www.nissarana.org (accessed 20/06/2010).

The number of people involved with the group is difficult to estimate as there is no formal membership. The core of the group in the UK consists of around 30 individuals. However, the activities of the organisation attract many that are not within this core group. The most popular event organised by the group that I witnessed – the Kathina ceremony that marked the end of Seelagawesi’s visit in 2006 – attracted around 70 people.²

As we shall see, the Nissarana group is characterised by a nibbanic focus and a tendency to play down the importance of ritualised merit-making. Within the group distinctions are often made between the approach to Buddhism found in the group and the approach found within mainstream temples. Mainstream temples tend to be portrayed as places of ritual, while the Nissarana group is seen as a place more strongly dedicated to nibbanic practice (see below). However, there are nevertheless links between the Nissarana group and mainstream temples in the UK. During Seelagawesi’s visit in 2006 I accompanied members of the group on a visit to the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist centre, where they offered *dāna*.³ Visits were also made to the London Buddhist Vihara. In addition, in 2007 Sisara gave a talk at the Thames Buddhist Vihara as part of a *pōya* day programme. While the most centrally involved members of the group – such as my interviewees Sisara and Mohan – tend to practise predominantly within the group, the majority of those outside this core group also attend other Buddhist institutions either occasionally or regularly. Thus my interviewee Ushma regularly attends the Thames Buddhist Vihara, and the Thai Buddhapadipa temple in Wimbledon, in addition to participating in activities of the group, while my interviewee Indira attends the East London Buddhist Centre on a fairly regular basis.

It is difficult to give a summary of the activities of the group, since they vary from day to day. However, a typical day of activities when Seelagawesi was resident in the UK included periods of meditation (at least two per day), extended periods of Pali chanting, and the periods of *Dhamma* teaching and discussion. Greater numbers of people were able to attend at weekends, and thus more extensive and structured programmes of meditation and discussion were often scheduled at weekends. However, the group’s activities were certainly not restricted to weekends. On weekdays while Seelagawesi was in the UK there would always be a small number of laypeople present at the group’s houses during the day, with many more arriving in the evenings (some would stay in the houses overnight), and

² Fieldwork notes 08/10/2006.

³ Fieldwork notes 02/08/2006.

Seelagawesi gave *Dhamma* talks on every day that I spent with the group. This daily preaching is something that distinguishes the Nissarana group from mainstream temples such as the LBV and SSIBC. Another activity practised by the group is healing. Healing sessions occurred twice a week during Seelagawesi's visit in 2006.

An interesting feature of the group is the fact that it attracts not only Sri Lankans, but also a number of convert Buddhists. Seelagawesi is a strong English speaker and began to attract Western convert followers when a number of Americans visiting Sri Lanka became interested in his teachings. When Seelagawesi visits the USA and Denmark a substantial number of those that attend his programmes are converts, and an article describing one of Seelagawesi's visits to the USA was published in 2006 in *Tricycle*, a magazine aimed at convert Buddhists in the USA (Heaton 2006). In the UK the Nissarana group is predominantly Sri Lankan. However, a number of converts have participated in the group. Three American converts who have practised with Seelagawesi in the USA and in Sri Lanka were resident in the UK for the duration of my research period (a fourth stayed only during Seelagawesi's 2006 visit), and participated actively in the group. In addition, a small group as Seelagawesi's followers from Denmark came to stay at the group's rented house for a period during Seelagawesi's visit in 2006. Other than myself, one other British convert participated regularly in the group's activities, and the group also received occasional visits from other interested British people. Additionally, the group has connections with the predominantly convert Bedford Buddhist Group, and during his visit in 2006 Seelagawesi made a visit to this organisation. The activities of the group are conducted in both Sinhala and English, depending on who is present at the time.

I first encountered the group in 2006 at the Festival of Cricket, a cricket tournament which is perhaps the largest annual Sri Lankan social event in the UK (the group had a stall at the festival which advertised its activities and distributed free food).⁴ I became a frequent visitor to the rented house of the group in Wembley, on two occasions staying overnight.⁵ I participated in many of the activities of the group – including meditation programmes, *Dhamma* discussions, healing activities, and visits to other Buddhist institutions – and had many conversations with its lay and monastic members. I continued to participate in the group's activities in 2007 both during the periods when monks were visiting the group and after, when Sisara continued to organise activities until he left to ordain in Sri Lanka.

⁴ For details on this event, see www.festivalofcricket.org (accessed 20/06/2010).

⁵ Anybody was welcome to stay in the house as long as there was room.

9.1.1 Characterisation of the teachings and practices of the Nissarana group

Here I present an analysis of the distinctive approach to Buddhism found within the Nissarana group, looking at eight key aspects of the organisation.

1. The Nissarana group is characterised by a disinterest in the ritualistic production of merit. In our interview Seelagawesi makes a distinction between ‘real’ Buddhism – centred on the cultivation of the mind – and ‘popular’ Buddhism – centred on the generation of merit:

When you see the real practice and the popular practice...[the] two [are] different. Popular practice depends on the merit. Real practice depends on the purification of the mind. So they are two different things.

Seelagawesi is critical of the centrality of merit-making and transferring merit to the dead in popular Buddhism, arguing that rather than encouraging people to make merit, ‘Buddha encouraged them to practise virtue, concentration and wisdom, practise the noble eightfold path’.

Seelagawesi’s objection to merit-making rituals is not based on scepticism about the efficacy of such rituals of the kind commonly found among convert Buddhists. He accepts the merit-producing power of activities such as *dāna* and the idea that participating in such meritorious activities can bring one rebirth in a ‘positive’ realm after death. His objection to merit making is that it focuses on the attainment of worldly benefits, when the real aim of Buddhists should be the attainment of *nibbāna*. Throughout our interview Seelagawesi argues that making merit and thereby attaining a ‘positive’ rebirth is of little benefit, since suffering exists in every realm of existence:

The person who has merit comes to the human world and experiences suffering. And he goes to the divine world [and] he experiences suffering. And the person who does *pāpakamma* [negative deeds], he goes to the hell, the animal realm...suffering...and devil realm...suffering...and *pretaloka* [the realm of hungry ghosts]...suffering. So everywhere you find the suffering. Suffering is universal. So the Buddha found the noble way. The noble way is not the meritorious action. It is to go beyond the merit.

Seelagawesi regards the prominence of merit-making in popular Buddhism as being the result of the institutionalisation of Buddhism. As monks became settled in temples, he

argues, they became interested in gaining financial support from the laity, and thus encouraged the laity to engage in merit-making rituals:

When you think of the generation by generation of the monkhood, [in] that early stage there was no monks [*sic*] who had a temple of their own. Now we have...my temple, your temple, in that manner. And at that time [in the past] they were without any possessions. Now here I [a monk with a temple] have to develop my temple. I have to maintain my temple. Therefore I need a lot of money and resources. Then I should [make] popular these things [i.e. Buddha *pūjā*, giving *dāna* for deceased relatives and so on].

Seelagawesi distances himself from such institutionalised Buddhism. His concern is with the cultivation of the mind, and he avoids involvement in ritualised acts of merit-making such as *dāna* ceremonies arranged in order to make merit for a deceased relative:

When they ask me to come for the *dāna* for the father has died, the mother has died, I say ‘Your mother has gone to somewhere, you can’t stop that. I’m not going to eat for that’. I have not come to eat for dead people, I have come to practise the *Dhamma*.

The Nissarana group’s tendency to play down the importance of ritualised merit-making is reflected in the absence of certain practices within the group. Seelagawesi does not perform Buddha *pūjās*, and – as noted above – is generally unwilling to dedicate his time to attending *dāna* ceremonies for the deceased. However, ritual is certainly not absent from the group. Apotropaic rituals involving chanting and healing are central to the group’s activities (see below), and the distribution of *pirit* thread is regularly practised. The group also commonly engages in practices which are classically seen as means of making merit. At the end of Seelagawesi’s visit to the UK in 2006 a *Kaṭhina* ceremony was performed. More generally, whenever Seelagawesi or other monks attached to the group are in the UK, they are offered *dāna* every day. Within the group, however, there is a tendency to distinguish between engaging in such practices for the purpose of making merit, and performing such acts as a way of cultivating generosity. The tendency to dismiss ritualised merit-making within the group is thus not a complete rejection of acts that are regarded as meritorious. Rather, it is a belief that one should perform such acts not in order to generate merit, but as ways of cultivating the mind in the direction of *nibbāna*. Even the idea of making merit is not entirely absent from the Nissarana group. At times merit was mentioned within the group in a positive way. In our interview, while Seelagawesi

generally criticises merit-making, at times he speaks of merit in a less negative light. For example, he states:

There is merit...not just to go to the heaven....it's for my benefit, for the practice.
I want to be strong with my practice.

Here merit is not entirely dismissed, but its usefulness is regarded as lying not in its ability to bring a better rebirth, but in the help that it can bring one while one is following the path to *nibbāna*. This reflects the general attitude towards merit-making found within the Nissarana group. It is not merit-making itself that is criticised, but approaches to Buddhism which put the accumulation of merit ahead of the nibbanic path.

The attitude of the Nissarana group towards merit-making is encapsulated in the criticism that is often made within the group of the practice, common in Sri Lanka, of laypeople buying certain items – such as monastic robes and bowls – from temples in order to offer them back to the same temple.⁶ This practice is seen as a corruption of the original ideal of monks relying on the laity for their simple needs. Here, it is argued, the donation becomes a money-making practice on the part of the temple and an exercise in purely ritualised merit-making on the part of the laity, rather than an opportunity to cultivate generosity by finding out what the monks of the temple really need and donating this. In our interview Seelagawesi focus particularly on one example of this practice, that of temples selling *aṭapirikara*, a Sinhala term referring to the eight items traditionally allowed to a monk:⁷

When I want to offer a *dāna*, if I am stingy I try to buy the *aṭapirikara* [...] I try to buy it from the temple for cheap money. If I am wise with my wholesome activity, I try to ask what they need really. So here you see how [to] define it. So this is something very important to understand. What is true? What is right? What is beneficial? In that way...When you do that you find that there is a good mind, good *kamma*, good happiness and all these things.

Thus here what is criticised is not the making of merit (Seelagawesi states that giving in the correct way brings 'good *kamma*'), but forms of giving which focus on the mechanistic production of merit rather than on the development of generosity.

⁶ I observed this practice only once at a Sri Lankan temple in the UK, at the Kaṭhina celebrations of the Samadhi Meditation Centre in Edmonton, where robes were available for devotees to buy and donate back to the temple. Fieldwork notes 10/11/2007.

⁷ These eight are: 3 robes, an alms bowl, a waistband, a razor, a needle and thread, and a water strainer. In the Sri Lankan tradition the eight are often sold in a single wrapped parcel (Gombrich 1971:152-153,159-161).

So far I have focused primarily on Seelagawesi's views on merit-making. I found that laypeople involved with the Nissarana group tended to express similar views. Sisara, the lay leader of the group in the UK, shares Seelagawesi's critical attitude towards those who focus in their practice on the generation of merit through ritual. In our interview he argues that while *dāna* is an important aspect of Buddhism, linked with key aspects of the path to *nibbāna* such as morality and renunciation, today too many people give *dāna* thinking of merit rather than of such nibbanic virtues:

Dāna fulfils two things. With the *dāna* you fulfil the space of *sīla* (morality) and you fulfil the space of renunciation, of letting go. But you give today with the expectation of getting. So this is why the *dāna* is not fulfilled, because you must give because it allows you to let go [...] In the case of perfection that is how you should give. By giving you should not get more. By giving you should have got rid of it.

Another member of the group, Mohan, expresses similar views. He makes a distinction between giving *pūjā* and *dāna*, and practising what the Buddha taught, identifying himself with the latter:

From Buddha's sayings...what he says...there are two ways that people can worship him: by giving things and by practising what he teaches. I think it's important to practise what he teaches.

When I ask what Mohan means by 'practising what he teachers' he mentions meditation and discussing the *Dhamma*. When I ask whether generating merit is important, he answers:

Not really [...] The end result should be enlightenment. [One] should come along that way. On the way to *nibbāna* we should get *pin* [merit], and everything and stuff. [But] nowadays people only concentrate on *pin*.

Thus like Seelagawesi, Mohan does not reject merit but argues that the path to *nibbāna* rather than the generation of merit should be one's focus.

On occasion during my research members of the Nissarana contrasted the group with mainstream Sri Lankan temple in the UK, viewing such mainstream temples as places dedicated primarily to ritualistic, merit-oriented Buddhism. Thus during our interview Sisara argues that 'in the temples today there is very little wise attention...there is more of ritualism' (wise attention is a term used frequently within the group to describe the process

of mindfully investigating one's experience in order to realise Buddhist truths). During a conversation with Yohan, a frequent participant in the group's activities during 2007, he employed the dichotomy used by Matheesha Gunatilake in the talk at the LBV discussed in chapter 5, characterising the Nissarana group as a place of *paṭipatti pūjā* (putting the Buddha's teachings into practice) and mainstream Sri Lankan temples as primarily places of *āmisā pūjā* (making ritual offerings).⁸ On other occasions members of the group did not specifically mention temples in the UK, but more generally made a contrast between ritual-centred Sri Lankan temple Buddhism and the focus on spiritual development and the path to *nibbāna* found at the Nissarana group.⁹ We have seen in previous chapters that to characterise mainstream Sri Lankan temples in the UK as purely concerned with ritualised merit-making is problematic. While both the LBV and SSIBC give more focus to ritualised merit-making than the Nissarana group, it would be wrong to describe them as places dedicated purely to kammatic Buddhism. In addition, while among those practising within the Nissarana group one is particularly likely to encounter individuals who dismiss kammatic merit-making and privilege nibbanic Buddhism, such understandings of Buddhism are far from absent at the LBV and SSIBC.

2. As one might expect given its nibbanic focus, the group is characterised by an emphasis on meditation. Two of the monks involved with the group – Ariyagawesi and Santhamanasa – belong to the *Galdūva* sect, a group of forest-dwelling monks in Sri Lanka who are known for their strict adherence to monastic rules and their dedication to meditation.¹⁰ Seelagawesi is not a member of this sect, as he feels that their particularly strict adherence to monastic rules would restrict the activities that he is able to perform.¹¹ However, he nevertheless gives much attention to meditation in his teachings and programmes. The group's interest in meditation is reflected in the contact that it has with the Forest Sangha. The group makes regular visits to institutions of the Forest Sangha,¹²

⁸ Fieldwork notes 30/04/2007.

⁹ Fieldwork notes 09/08/2006, 01/10/2006, and 30/04/2007. Seelagawesi also makes this contrast in our interview.

¹⁰ This sect is discussed in detail in a study by Carrithers (1983).

¹¹ The *Galdūva* sect is a subgroup of the *Rāmañña Nikāya*, the smallest of the three main monastic groupings in Sri Lanka. Seelagawesi belongs to the *Amarapura Nikāya*. For a discussion of the *nikāyas* in the Sri Lanka tradition see Gambrich (1971:358-371).

¹² In 2006 I made a visit with members of the group to the Amaravati monastery (Fieldwork notes 09/08/2006). In the same year, 15 members of the group participated in a weekend retreat at the Forest Sangha's Aruna Ratnagiri monastery in Harnham, Northumberland.

and in 2008 Seelagawesi and his followers were involved in organising a trip to Sri Lanka by Ajahn Karuniko, a monk from the Forest Sangha.

When Seelagawesi visits the UK periods of meditation take place at the beginning and end of each day, and often activities during the day also feature an element of meditation. A number of forms of meditation are practised within the group. These include: concentration on the breath; walking meditation; the cultivation of loving kindness; and meditations in which certain Pali and Sanskrit words and phrases – such as ‘*sammā araham*’ (a Pali phrase used to describe the Buddha, meaning ‘fully worthy/enlightened’), ‘*sugata*’ (a Pali epithet of the Buddha), ‘*śānti*’ (a Sanskrit term meaning ‘peace’) and ‘*om*’ (an untranslatable Sanskrit syllable, of religious significance primarily in Hindu traditions and in some esoteric Mahayana forms of Buddhism) – are continuously repeated aloud. Some of these forms of meditation are familiar Theravada practices.¹³ Others – such as the meditations on ‘*śānti*’ and ‘*om*’ – have been developed within the group. This reflects a tendency towards creativity and trusting in personal experience and intuition which runs through the group’s teachings.

A strong interest in meditation is common among the group’s members. All of my interviewees from the group are regular meditators. However, not all of those involved with the group practise meditation regularly. For example, one central member of the group, Sanuthi, told me that she rarely meditated outside the group’s activities. She had tried the practice a number of times, but found that she was unable to concentrate.¹⁴ That Sanuthi feels able to be involved with the Nissarana group despite not meditating regularly reflects the fact that the group is not as single-mindedly dedicated to meditation as some Buddhist institutions. Meditation plays an important role within the group, but the group’s activities are not dominated by extensive periods of silent meditation in the way that activities are at some meditation centres and monasteries. The group is certainly characterised by a practice-oriented, nibbanic approach to Buddhism, but approach is manifest not only through meditation, but through a range of practices: *Dhamma* discussions and *Dhamma* talks (which focus on applying the teachings of nibbanic Buddhism in one’s everyday life); extended periods of Pali chanting (such chanting is a regular feature of the group’s

¹³ Meditations on the breath and on *mettā* are extremely common practices in the Theravada tradition. The repetition of ‘*araham*’ or ‘*sammā araham*’, while less ubiquitous in contemporary Sri Lankan Theravada practice, can be found in a number of meditation traditions in the Theravada world (Crosby 2000; Newell 2008:238-239; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 360,368).

¹⁴ Fieldwork notes 20/09/2006.

activities, and in my interviews with Sisara and Mohan both emphasise that such chanting represents an opportunity for reflecting on the Buddha's teachings); and even through the group's healing activities (which, as we shall see, are viewed as connected with the nibbanic path).

3. One of the most important aspects of the Nissarana group is the way in which the leaders of the group speak about Buddhism. Seelagawesi is particularly well regarded for the way in which he communicates the *Dhamma*, and the other teachers in the group – particularly Sisara – share something of his charismatic style.

Seelagawesi is highly regarded as a speaker because of the way in which his *Dhamma* talks make the highest truths of Buddhism applicable to the everyday lives of his audience. The talks that he delivered during my time with the group often drew on stories from his own life – particularly from his youth before he became a monk¹⁵ – or on situations familiar to his followers (for example, during one talk Seelagawesi illustrated Buddhist teachings about desire and suffering through a discussion of attending a dinner-dance – a common social function among Sri Lankans in the UK).¹⁶ His talks focus not on stories from Buddhist texts, or on giving 'textbook' accounts of Buddhist doctrine, but on exemplifying Buddhist teachings through concrete examples. Seelagawesi is also well regarded because he is seen as a free-thinker and a straight-talker – someone who is not afraid to speak his mind, to address topics which many monks would not, and to say things that may be regarded as controversial. His strong views on Buddha *pūjā* and *dāna* ceremonies for the deceased are illustrative of this. Seelagawesi's talks are also popular because they are entertaining and often amusing. I was often struck by the amount of humour present in Seelagawesi's teachings and the laughter he produced from his followers. This contrasted with the more reserved and formal atmosphere usually found during talks at the LBV and SSIBC.

During my fieldwork members of the Nissarana group often pointed to the way in which Buddhism is spoken about within the group as a central reason for their participation. Sisara explains that when he first encountered Seelagawesi he was struck by his ability to answer questions and explain the *Dhamma*:

¹⁵ Fieldwork notes 20/07/2006, 02/08/2006, 09/08/2006.

¹⁶ Fieldwork notes 02/08/2006.

I was intrigued by the examples he took [when speaking about the *Dhamma*]. And I was asking myself how come I couldn't take that example. I'm older than him. How come I couldn't come up with that example and explanation and answer? [...] Whatever [you spoke about] he would talk with [you] and then he would just take an example and make you feel understanding...in that way. Your argument didn't hold no [sic] value after that.

The importance of the way in which Buddhism is spoken about within the group was also stressed in a conversation with Sanuthi.¹⁷ She stated that while she sometimes attended mainstream Sri Lankan temples in the UK, the talks given at such temples tended to be boring, and not to apply directly to one's everyday life. In contrast she praised the talks given within the group as being interesting and useful. She described Seelagawesi as open-minded and willing to speak his mind more directly than most monks. A similar contrast between the talks given at the group and those given at mainstream temples was made in a conversation that I had with Anura and Deepika, a married couple who attend Nissarana activities fairly regularly.¹⁸ They argued that *Dhamma* talks given at mainstream temples were often shallow and based on the repetition of learnt doctrine. In contrast, they praised talks given by Seelagawesi and others in the Nissarana group for their depth and the fact that tended to be rooted in personal experience. In a conversation with Ruwani, an occasional attendee of the group's activities, she praised Seelagawesi for his down-to-earth and engaging style, for the way in which his talks motivate one to practise Buddhism, and for the fact that his talks often involve discussions rather than just being a one-way discourse. She stresses that she prefers such talks to those of monks in mainstream temples who merely repeat familiar *Jātaka* stories.¹⁹

4. Other distinctive characteristics of the monks involved with the group are also significant. For those involved in the group, these monks – and Seelagawesi particularly – are regarded as embodying monastic ideals in a number of ways which distinguish them to some extent from other Sri Lankan monks. I have already noted that these monks belong to the category of meditation-oriented monks rather than to that of monks who are primarily scholars or ritualists. On a number of occasions members of the group cited the fact that these monks are meditation practitioners who can speak from experience about the nibbanic

¹⁷ Fieldwork notes 20/09/2006.

¹⁸ Fieldwork notes 28/09/2006.

¹⁹ Fieldwork notes 09/08/2006.

path as part of the group's attraction.²⁰ For example, Aravinda, a regular participant in the group's activities during 2007, told me straightforwardly that he preferred to come to the Nissarana group rather than to mainstream Sri Lankan temples in the UK because the monks in the group meditate, while those in temples do not.²¹

Above I mentioned that two of the monks involved with the group belong to the forest-dwelling *Galdūva* sect. While Seelagawesi does not belong to this sect, in many ways his approach to monasticism is similar to that found within this sect. The sect is known for the strict rules that its members follow.²² As a result of their following these rules, these monks are regarded as living simple lives with a greater element of renunciation than those of most Sri Lankan monks. Seelagawesi is also regarded in this way. A key exemplification of this concerns the issue of food. Seelagawesi and the other monks of the Nissarana group always eat from their own bowls, which they carry with them from place to place. All food offered to them must be placed into these bowls, rather than served on a plate. In addition, these monks are extremely strict about not eating anything that is not offered to them: unless food is formally presented to them by a layperson, they will not eat it. These attitudes distinguish these monks from the majority of Sri Lankan monks, who generally eat from a plate and are often less strict about only eating what is offered. The simplicity and strictness of the lifestyles of the monks involved with the Nissarana group was emphasised to me often during my fieldwork. During our interview Seelagawesi stresses that he lives a 'simple life' with few possessions, and argues that such a lifestyle corresponds with that of the *Sangha* at the time of the Buddha. Lay members of the group expressed admiration at the commitment the monks showed to living a life of renunciation and strictly keeping their monastic rules. For example Vidu, a frequent attendee of the group's activities, told me that on one of his visits to the UK, Seelagawesi's begging bowl was lost during the flight.²³ Rather than simply taking his food on a plate, Vidu noted with pleasure, Seelagawesi waited until another monastic bowl could be found before accepting any food. Asiri, another regular member of the group, noted with admiration that unlike many monks who eat both in the morning and at lunch, Seelagawesi

²⁰ Fieldwork notes 02/08/2006, 28/09/2006, 30/04/2007.

²¹ Fieldwork notes 21/03/2007. As noted in chapter 5, while the sweeping statement that monks in mainstream temples do not meditate is highly problematic, it is accurate to state that these monks are likely to be less devoted to meditation practice and teaching than monks such as those found in the Nissarana group.

²² A guide for Western monks planning to visit Sri Lanka produced by the Buddhist Publication Society describes the *Galdūva* sect as 'the strictest *vinaya* tradition in Sri Lanka' (Nyanatusita 2008:3).

²³ Fieldwork notes 08/09/2007.

takes only one meal a day.²⁴ Both of the practices mentioned here – only eating from one’s bowl, and only taking only one meal a day – are included on a list of 13 *dhutanga* practices – ascetic practices which monks in the Theravada tradition may undertake, and which are particularly associated with forest-dwelling, meditation-oriented monks (Carrithers 1983:62-66; Bell 1991:88).²⁵

So far I have described the Nissarana monks as embodying traditional Sri Lankan monastic ideals. However, some characteristics of these monks, or more particularly of Seelagawesi, are somewhat at odds with classical Sri Lankan ideas about how monks should behave. Traditional ideas associate ideal monks with being quiet, withdrawn, contemplative, calm and serious.²⁶ Seelagawesi can be all of these things. However, at other times he is playful, humorous, energetic and even angry. As noted in point 3, humour is often present in the Nissarana group, and Seelagawesi often makes jokes during his teachings, some of which are considered shocking when coming from a monk. For example, during one *Dhamma* talk during my fieldwork, Seelagawesi made jokes about people picking their nose, to the mixed delight and disgust of the group.²⁷ Seelagawesi also occasionally sings songs during his *Dhamma* talks, and frequently engages in athletic activities such as performing cartwheels.²⁸ Again, and as Seelagawesi himself admits, such forms of conduct that are traditionally seen as inappropriate for monks. Seelagawesi’s style of preaching is also somewhat removed from traditional ideals of monastic behaviour. Rather than speaking in a reserved, quiet style, Seelagawesi is direct, energetic and playful when preaching.

Perhaps the most interesting way in which Seelagawesi departs from traditional ideals is in his tendency to display anger. Seelagawesi is also known to have a short temper and to be at times sharply critical of those he feels are in the wrong. This is something Seelagawesi freely admits, and in fact when I first met him his quick temper was one of the

²⁴ Fieldwork notes 20/09/2006.

²⁵ In our interview Seelagawesi emphasises another of these practices – that of obtaining one’s food by going from house to house on an alms round rather than receiving *dāna* at one’s residence. He states that while this practice is not practically possible for him in the UK, in Sri Lanka he prefers to obtain his food in this way.

²⁶ The importance of monastic demeanour within the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition is discussed at length by Samuels (2010).

²⁷ Fieldwork notes 28/09/2006.

²⁸ Seelagawesi spoke to me about performing cartwheels, jogging and playing football, although I did not witness him engaging in these activities. During my time with the group he would occasionally engage in somewhat athletic activities in the house where he was staying. For example, on one occasion he and some other members of the group played a game in which they jumped across a room of the house to pick up a cup from the floor (Fieldwork notes 20/09/2006).

first things about himself that he mentioned.²⁹ In our interview he mentions his tendency to display anger a number of times. While anger is seen as a negative emotion within Buddhist teachings, Seelagawesi gives a positive interpretation of his reputation as an angry monk. He portrays himself not as someone who is slave to a short temper, but as someone to who is determined to live the monastic life as he believes it should be lived, and who is prepared to state his views in a forceful and assertive manner. When he mentions his reputation as an angry monk, it is often in connection with his determination to practise in a manner of his choosing rather than letting others determine how he should practise. He gives the following account of his interaction with a group of Sri Lankan laypeople in the USA who were not happy about his refusal to perform Buddha *pūjā*:

When I was in Austin, I was not happy to do this Buddha *pūjā*. Then people tried to teach me. Then I said, 'I have not come to learn Buddhism from you. I have come to share the *Dhamma*, the practice. You asked me to come for lunch. You didn't ask me to come for a teaching. And I don't want you as a teacher. I have a teacher. I have a teacher in Sri Lanka' [...] I said that 'I'm not going to eat [i.e. accept *dāna*]. I don't do this. And I'd like to go to the hell. Because I'm not following you. I'm following my opinion.' And then they were very afraid of me. And I said that 'You can't force me to do that'. And they were very afraid of that.

It was suggested to me both by Seelagawesi and by other members of the group that some conservative lay Sri Lankans dislike Seelagawesi's playful, direct and at times confrontational style.³⁰ For example Sisara notes that some, upon seeing Seelagawesi engaging in athletic activities, assume that he cannot be a serious monk:

If Seelagawesi in his robe does a cartwheel it is seen that he is a playful monk...people relate to spirituality with certain [outward] things. We have never recognised wise attention.

Yohan, who became involved with the group during 2007, told me that after meeting Seelagawesi for the first time he was initially reluctant to practice with the group since he felt that Seelagawesi did not behave as a monk should, particularly by acting in an energetic way and relating stories from his rebellious behaviour as a youth. However, after coming

²⁹ Fieldwork notes 20/07/2006.

³⁰ Fieldwork notes 02/08/2006, 20/09/2006. This was also during my interview with Indira.

again to the group Yohan was impressed by Seelagawesi's style of preaching, and he eventually became a strong follower of the group.³¹

While some may find Seelagawesi's approach to monasticism problematic, for his followers all of the characteristics of Seelagawesi discussed here serve to make him a compelling figure. When I ask Mohan what first attracted him to Seelagawesi's activities he points not to any particular teaching or practice, but to the character of Seelagawesi himself, noting that on meeting Seelagawesi as a teenager in Sri Lanka he was immediately impressed by 'how he handles people, how he leads people'. Similarly Sisara, who first met Seelagawesi in 2000, states that Seelagawesi provided him with an example of how to follow the Buddhist path by showing 'how the four noble truths is [*sic*] lived in a person'.

5. Another key dimension of the Nissarana group is the practice of forms of spiritual healing. Seelagawesi began healing soon after ordaining as a monk, when he encountered a woman suffering from cancer and experienced a profound feeling that he could heal her. Seelagawesi feels that his healing ability and the healing techniques that he employs have their origins in his previous lives as a Buddhist monk in China and Tibet. Over time Seelagawesi has developed these healing techniques through a process of experimentation.

When Seelagawesi visited in 2006 healing was practised in the house rented by the group on two evenings every week. During Seelagawesi's visit in 2007 healing sessions were less regular, although they still took place occasionally. When Seelagawesi is not in the UK, some healing continues to take place during meetings in private houses.

In the Nissarana group healing is used to treat a range of medical problems. Conditions that were treated in the group during my research period, or which Seelagawesi and Sisara mentioned healing in the past, included chronic pain, persistent headaches, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, hypoglycemia, meningitis, heart problems, neurological problems and multiple sclerosis. A variety of healing techniques are used. The most common involves the patient lying down while the healer passes his/her hands over them (without touching them) repeatedly for a set period of time. Following this, certain selected stanzas from the Pali Canon are chanted repeatedly by all present (usually healing takes place in a group context). Another technique is referred to as 'trance healing', and consists of the healer speaking to the patient in a soothing and relaxing way. At the end of

³¹ Fieldwork notes 29/07/2007.

this kind of healing the patient will usually sleep for some time. A third form of healing is telepathic healing, in which the healer attempts to heal someone who is not present through the power of the mind.

The question of how these techniques are thought to work is a complex one. The account provided here is based on my interviews with Seelagawesi and Sisara, in which we discuss healing at length, as well as on information gathered during my fieldwork. One way in which healing is thought to work is through the transmission of healing power from the healer to the patient. This power is said to emanate from the mind of the healer, from the chanting performed during healing and from the hands of the healer (at one point during my fieldwork I was asked to put my hands in between the healer and the patient in order to feel the power being emitted³²). Compassion also plays a key role in how healing is understood, the power of healing being seen as a manifestation of the compassion of the healer. Healing is also spoken about in psychological terms. Within the group illness is often seen as being caused by the presence of certain negative psychological traits within the patient. As such, healing is often seen as a matter of helping the patient to overcome these negative states of mind and develop positive mental qualities such as compassion and confidence. This psychological aspect of healing cannot be completely separated from the ideas above of healing being caused by a force emitting from the healer, since in my interview with Sisara he states that in some cases the healer can use his power to cause a change in the mind of the patient.

As one might expect, given that the healing techniques originate with him, Seelagawesi is the principle healer within the group. He is regarded as having particular powers of both diagnosis (he is thought to be able to 'scan' the body of individuals with his mind in order to determine their problems and how they should be treated) and healing (he is thought to emit more powerful healing energies than others within the group). However, Seelagawesi encourages others within the group to practise healing also. He argues that anyone can practise healing as long as they have compassion. Thus most of the laypeople who are most centrally involved with the group practise healing to some degree. Significantly, however, the monks other than Seelagawesi who are involved with the group take no part in healing activities. As noted above, these monks are members of the *Galdīva* sect, which is known for its strict monastic rules. These rules prevent monks from engaging

³² Fieldwork notes 20/07/2006.

in healing. This raises the question of whether Seelagawesi himself should, as a monk, be practising healing. In Sri Lanka most monks do not practise healing. Monks often chant *pirit* for the benefit of people who are ill, but the benefits of *pirit* are generally regarded as much more general and non-specific than the forms of healing performed by Seelagawesi. Some feel that it is wrong for monks to engage in healing, and during our interview Seelagawesi states that he has been subject to criticism along these lines in the past. He defends his practice of healing by noting a passage from the Pali Canon in which the Buddha advises the monk Angulimala to assist a woman experiencing problems in childbirth by making a declaration of truth (something which is thought to have a certain power within Buddhism). For Seelagawesi this passage shows that the Buddha did at times encourage some forms of healing.

The fact that the Nissarana group practises forms of healing could be seen as somewhat anomalous from the point of view of a the ‘Two Buddhisms’, which makes a firm division between approaches to Buddhism based on meditation and the attainment of *nibbāna*, and those based on ritual action and the attainment of ‘worldly’ benefits. However, within the group, far from being seen as contradictory, moving towards *nibbāna* and engaging in apotropaic healing practices are seen as complementary and interrelated. For both those giving healing and those being healed, involvement in healing is seen as being connected to spiritual development on the nibbanic path.

For those who give healing, the practice is regarded as an opportunity to cultivate compassion and generosity, and thus to develop one’s character in the direction of *nibbāna*. During my interview with Sisara, when I ask him whether he was interested in healing when he first met Seelagawesi, he states:

No...and even now it doesn’t interest me. But healing is part of the four noble truths, and I am interested in the four noble truths and the eightfold path.

Thus here Sisara states that he is not interested in healing in itself, but only because he regards it as part of the path of nibbanic Buddhism. Seelagawesi connects healing with another formulation of the path to *nibbāna*, the ten *pāramīs* or ‘perfections’, a list of virtues which need to be cultivated if one wishes to attain *nibbāna*.³³

³³ See chapter 6 for more on the perfections.

If someone wants to practise the *Dhamma*, he should develop his fulfilments – generosity, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, in that way...10 *pāramīs*. So this opportunity [to practise healing] helps us to have that...[those] things.

Mohan also connects healing with the nibbanic path, seeing it particularly as ‘a way of fulfilling compassion.’ The fact that healing is regarded within the group as helping one move towards *nibbāna* reflects the general emphasis that the group puts on compassionate action as an aspect of the path to enlightenment. I will come back to this point below.

Healing and nibbanic elements of Buddhism are seen as linked with regard to those receiving healing also. Within the group practising nibbanic Buddhism is regarded as bringing good health. Thus it is suggested that meditation, the cultivation of loving-kindness and the eradication of negative states of mind can lead one to a life with fewer medical problems. In line with this view, many illnesses are attributed to underlying spiritual or psychological problems. During my interviews with Seelagawesi and Sisara they identified a number of states of mind that can lead to illness, including fear, hatred, jealousy, doubt and anger. The process of healing is thus viewed not only as a matter of physical healing, but also as a matter of spiritual development. Seelagawesi combines his healing with teaching the *Dhamma*, and often healing is thought to be linked to the cultivation in the mind of the patient of positive states of mind such as love and compassion. In many cases Seelagawesi advises patients to practise meditation. In our interview Seelagawesi states:

We see that...many of the causes of the illness...most of the time you find that [illness comes about] because of the carelessness or the ignorance. So we get the opportunity to teach them...how to find the importance of the life [...] Usually we teach the *Dhamma* at the same time. And here they have a purpose to learn *Dhamma*, because they are ill. And after that they find that they can follow this *Dhamma* because they want to maintain their good health. So they practise. Then they get rid of their negligence and other things, and they become aware of their good practice.

That many who are healed by Seelagawesi go on to take an interest in nibbanic Buddhism is confirmed by Mohan:

I have seen most of the time once they come to healing and they get rid of their disease or illness, then they become very devoted to Buddhist practice.

All of this means that it is not possible to make an absolute distinction between those who come to the Nissarana group for healing and those who come to practise nibbanic Buddhism. Healing sessions that I attended occasionally attracted individuals who seldom came to other activities.³⁴ However, the majority of those regularly involved in healing who I spoke with were also involved in other activities of the group. My interviewee Indra came to the group with her husband, who suffers from chronic pain and regularly received healing from Seelagawesi. However, during our interview she stresses that she comes to the group not only for healing, but also to listen to practise meditation and listen to Seelagawesi's *Dhamma* talks. Similar sentiments were expressed by Anura and Deepika, a married couple who originally came to the group for help with Anura's back pain.³⁵

6. The healing practices found in the Nissarana group are based on certain supernatural beliefs: that Seelagawesi is able to 'scan' individuals with his mind in order to diagnose them; that during healing certain powers are emitted from the minds and hands of healers; and so on. More broadly, supernatural beliefs are strongly evident throughout the teachings and activities of the group. Some of these are beliefs that are traditionally found in Sri Lankan Buddhism (belief in rebirth and *kamma*, belief in divine beings, belief in astrology). Others are more particular to the group. For example, Seelagawesi employs forms of numerology of his own devising³⁶, and the ideas about healing found within the group are not commonly found in mainstream Sri Lankan Buddhism.

As noted in chapter 5, supernatural aspects of Buddhism, such as teachings concerning *kamma* and rebirth, tend also to be affirmed at mainstream Sri Lankan temples in the UK, a fact that differentiates these temples to a certain extent from some convert institutions. At the Nissarana group, however, one finds a greater emphasis on the supernatural – or at least discussions of the supernatural in more vivid and specific terms – than is evident at a temple such as the LBV. One way in which this is evident is in the way in which rebirth is discussed in the group. Seelagawesi and the other leaders of the group often speak about past lives in particularly vivid terms, often speculating about the nature of their own past lives and those of others. During my fieldwork Seelagawesi stated repeatedly that he felt that in his past lives he had been a Buddhist monk in both China and

³⁴ Fieldwork notes 19/09/2006, 04/10/2006.

³⁵ Fieldwork notes 28/09/2006.

³⁶ Seelagawesi discusses the system of numerology that he employs in our interview.

Tibet.³⁷ He also mentioned other past lives. On one occasion he stated that he felt that at the time of the Buddha he had been an elderly divine being and had witnessed the Buddha preaching. He then died as a divine being, and was reborn as human. Eventually – still within the lifetime of the Buddha – he ordained as a Buddhist monk, and was thus present at the Buddha’s funeral.³⁸ Such vivid discussions of one’s own past lives are not found at mainstream temples such as the LBV and SSIBC.

In addition to claiming some knowledge of his past lives, Seelagawesi also states that he feels that he knows when he will die. In our interview he speaks about discussing the issue with one of his followers:

I have accepted that I am going to die when I am 72 years old. And I know that I am going to die in 2035, October 11th. He said ‘How do you know?’ And I said ‘I don’t know. I believe in that manner. And it’s a strong belief’. And I think that I’m going to die in the morning. 8:30 to 9:30, between these times.

Again, such ideas of having personal insight into the time of one’s death are not found at mainstream Sri Lankan temples.

Another supernatural aspect of Buddhist teachings that is discussed in vivid terms in the Nissarana group is the existence of divine beings. On two occasions during my research Sisara made reference to how the spiritual practices performed by the group had caused the unseen divine beings dwelling in the houses used by the group in a positive way, so that these beings now gave their blessings to the houses and those living there.³⁹ Again, non-human beings and their effects are generally not discussed in such vivid terms in mainstream temples.

The Nissarana group also discusses the effects of chanting *pirit* in rather specific and concrete terms. In mainstream temples such as the LBV the idea that chanting *pirit* brings worldly benefits is present, but the nature of these benefits is usually expressed in somewhat general terms (often described simply as ‘blessings’). In the Nissarana group, however, the benefits of *pirit* are spoken about in a more tangible way. As part of healing rituals, *pirit* is regarded as bringing about specific, observable apotropaic results. In addition, the power produced through *pirit* was spoken about during my time with the group as something that could be physically felt. During Seelagawesi’s time in the UK in

³⁷ Fieldwork notes 20/07/2006, 04/10/2006, 16/06/2007.

³⁸ Fieldwork notes 22/07/2007.

³⁹ Fieldwork notes 21/03/2007, 08/09/2007.

2006, a small pot containing stones over which *pirit* had been chanted was placed in the corner of one room of the house rented by the group. In our interview Mohan states that if one held one's hand over this pot one could feel the power invested in the stones by *pirit* chanting.

The Nissarana group thus lies clearly towards the supernatural end of Wendy Cadge's rational/supernatural spectrum (chapter 2). In the group – more than in any of the other institutions discussed in this study – supernatural aspects of Buddhism are assumed and ever-present in a vivid way in teachings and discussions. The fact that the Nissarana group contains a strong emphasis on the supernatural is particularly interesting because of the group's simultaneous emphasis on meditation and the nibbanic. When discussing Cadge's work I raised the question of the relationship between where Buddhists lie on the rational/supernatural spectrum, and the degree to which these individuals emphasise merit-making or meditative self-transformation in their practice. From the point of view of a two-fold model of Buddhism it would be easy to assume that individuals who hold an understanding of Buddhism which stresses the supernatural tend to focus on rituals and merit-making in their practice, while individuals who hold a more 'rational' understanding of Buddhism tend to place more emphasis on meditation. Here the classic models would be the diaspora Buddhist who believes strongly in the merit-making powers of Buddha *pūjā* and *dāna*, and who focuses on these practices rather than meditation, and the convert Buddhist who has little belief in the efficacy of ritualised merit-making, and who focuses primarily on meditation. The Nissarana group shows that this model is problematic, not only because it is a diaspora Buddhist organisation which is firmly nibbanic in focus, but also because it combines a nibbanic focus with an understanding of Buddhism in which the supernatural is firmly emphasised. While the group is characterised by a rejection of kammatic merit-making this is not because the group calls into question supernatural elements of Buddhism, such as teachings concerning *kamma*, rebirth, and the efficacy of merit-making rituals, but because the group regards the true practice of Buddhism as being that of meditation and self-transformation. This highlights the importance, discussed in chapter 7, of analysing approaches to Buddhism not according to a single factor – such as where individuals lie on Cadge's rational/supernatural spectrum, or the degree to which individuals emphasise the kammatic and the nibbanic – but in terms of a range of aspects of religiosity.

7. The approach taken to supernatural aspects of Buddhism within the group is illustrative of another characteristic of the group: the approach that its teachers take to the issue of textual authority. As discussed in chapter 5, the approach taken towards supernatural aspects of Buddhism at mainstream temples is reflective of the emphasis on textual authority found at such temples. Those supernatural aspects of the Buddhist tradition that are mentioned at the LBV – *kamma*, rebirth, miracles performed by the Buddha – tend to be those that are supported by textual authority. In the Nissarana group the situation is quite different. Often when supernatural aspects of Buddhism are discussed within the group the source of authority is not Buddhist texts but the personal experience and knowledge of members of the group. When Seelagawesi speaks about his own past lives, while the idea of rebirth is of course found in Buddhist texts, his source of authority is not the textual tradition but his own experiences and feelings of having been born previously in a particular place and time. Similarly, the healing practices employed by the group derive not from Buddhist texts, but from the feelings of Seelagawesi, Sisara and others that certain practices will bring certain benefits, as well as from their experience of what has worked in the past.

Within the group, then, we find an emphasis on the intuition, knowledge and experience of the group's teachers as a source of authority. By contrast, Seelagawesi at times displays an attitude which questions the authority of the textual tradition. As noted in chapter 5, during our interview Seelagawesi calls into question the story found in the Pali Canon which states that upon his birth the Buddha took seven steps to the north. Elsewhere in the interview Seelagawesi challenges textual authority in a more direct way:

I don't want a teacher who tries to explain [to] me with the book, because the book is not important for me. The practice is important for me. Some people they like to follow the book, but personally I don't accept it...that...agree with that. [...] In the book you find many various opinions, no? [...] So I don't know which opinion to follow. So because of that it is better to practise... 'love is love'. 'May I be happy. May I be healthy...' Then when I get angry I know that I got angry. Then I know that it is anger...anger means unwholesome mental factor...unwholesome thought. So there I find [this truth]. In a book I find that to understand the anger I should accept many things...many things. Here [in my practice] it is easy. So I like that practical way. And when I act in that manner, some monks want to know the education that I have. They want to know whether I have gone to a university. Whether I know Pali or Sanskrit, in that way. So I have to say that I have not learnt Pali, I have not learnt Sanskrit, I have not gone to any [monastic university]. I just

left the school, then I found a job, and after that I came to the robe and I started doing meditation. I have read some books, but I have not followed Pali language and other things.

Here Seelagawesi contrasts himself, as one who has come to the monkhood as an adult, with those monks who ordain as children and go on to attend monastic universities. Such monks have a far better knowledge of textual Buddhism than Seelagawesi. However, for Seelagawesi such textual knowledge is not important. He places a higher value on that which has been personally realised and understood through practice about issues such as anger, than he does on discussions of such issues in Buddhist texts. This emphasis on personal understanding and experience over reliance on texts is also evident in Seelagawesi's questioning of the story of the Buddha walking seven steps after his birth. Seelagawesi refuses to accept the story on trust because it is not something that he has experienced himself (see chapter 5).

Seelagawesi encourages those that follow him to take a similar approach to questions of authority. He does not suggest that his followers should accept everything that he teaches on trust. Rather he encourages people to practise themselves and develop their own understanding and experience. He stresses that his understanding is not perfect, and that just as his followers can learn from him, so he can also learn from them.⁴⁰ Thus during our interview, when talking about healing, he notes that while he teaches many people to practise healing, he does not insist that they follow his methods exactly:

I don't say that you should follow my way. I say that you find your own way...And try, try to experience these things. And if you feel that it's very easy and methodical and successful, we can share...we can learn from you. I am not going to say that I'm a perfect teacher. I'm a teacher, and I like to learn.

To some extent the approach to authority found here – one in which neither texts nor teachers are to be accepted as absolute sources of authority, and in which considerable emphasis is put on the authority of personal experience – has similarities with the 'Buddhism without beliefs' approach found among many convert Buddhists. However, the approach to questions of authority found within the Nissarana group does not result in a dismissal of all supernatural aspects of Buddhism. Rather, as we have seen, within the group the supernatural is strongly present in a vivid way. Within the group emphasising

⁴⁰ Fieldwork notes 20/07/2006.

one's own experience is not thought to lead to a rejection of the supernatural since the supernatural – the truth of one's past lives; the presence of divine beings, the power generated by *pirit* chanting; the efficacy of healing rituals – is felt to be something that can be experienced through Buddhist practice.

8. Another significant aspect of the Nissarana group is the importance that it gives to compassionate action. I noted above that within the organisation healing is valued in part because it is seen as a way in which those giving healing can cultivate generosity and compassion. The group also emphasises other ways of acting compassionately in the world. Forms of compassionate action practised within the group include: raising money for hospitals; donating money to build a rest house for Buddhist pilgrims in India; organising sponsorship schemes to benefit Sri Lankan children orphaned as a result of the tsunami in 2004; and buying cows in Sri Lanka that are being sold for slaughter and finding them homes where they can be looked after.⁴¹

In addition to these activities, the importance of compassion and other positive emotions is strongly emphasised in teachings within the group. In his talks Seelagawesi frequently stresses the importance of developing attitudes of love, compassion, patience, generosity, and gratitude, and of applying such attitudes in one's interactions with the world.⁴² Seelagawesi emphasises the importance of love and compassion in his own practice of Buddhism also. He describes his approach to the monastic vocation as being fundamentally rooted in such qualities, stating in our interview that he became a monk 'because of love for the world'. He contrasts his approach to monasticism with that of other meditation-oriented monks in Sri Lanka, who prefer to live a life somewhat removed from society rather than spending their time dealing with the problems of ordinary people. While, like these monks, Seelagawesi favours a monastic life of renunciation and meditation, he is not interested in separating from society. Rather he is committed to working compassionately within society. I have noted that Seelagawesi is not ordained into the strict forest-dwelling *Galdūva* sect that two of the monks he works with are members

⁴¹ These activities were discussed during my fieldwork (Fieldwork notes 20/07/2006, 02/08/2006, 08/10/2006), and during my interviews with Seelagawesi and Sisara. I received email updates about Seelagawesi's cow-rescuing programmes both during and after my fieldwork period (email communication 24/09/2007, 10/04/2007, 05/03/2009, 30/03/2009).

⁴² Fieldwork notes 02/08/2006, 04/10/2006, 09/10/2006, 25/06/2007, 22/07/2007. The importance of developing positive emotional qualities is also stressed a number of times on the CD of *Dhamma* talks given to me by Seelagawesi.

of. This is because he feels that the strict rules of this sect would restrict his ability to work compassionately within the world. In our interview Seelagawesi states:

I am not going to say I'm the only one monk that practises [i.e. who is dedicated to a life of meditation and renunciation]. There are many monks [who practise in this way]. But I am...you can find me here. Why? I work with the people. So people...the [other] monks who practise in this manner, they don't want to work with the people because they find there [a] lot of disturbances. So they go to some other places. But here I am kind to practise with the people.

A particularly striking example of Seelagawesi's emphasis on cultivating love and compassion came during his visit to the UK in 2007.⁴³ During a day of activities with the group, Seelagawesi declared to all of those present: 'I am a member of the breast-feeding family!'. He went on to relate that he had heard that in some rare occasions Buddhist monks practising in Tibetan traditions have been known to develop the ability to breast-feed when it is needed (for example, if an unwanted child is abandoned at a remote monastery and there is no-one else to look after it). Seelagawesi stated that the ability to breast-feed among these monks is a result of their cultivation of love and compassion, and thus that he too could develop the ability to breast-feed if necessary. Here we see a particularly strong example of Seelagawesi's commitment to working compassionately in the world for the good of others (and one which is typical of Seelagawesi's unconventional and sometimes shocking style of monasticism).

Within the Nissarana group we thus find both a strong nibbanic emphasis and a stress on compassionate action and the cultivation of positive emotional qualities. These two aspects of the group's teachings are not seen as separate. Rather, developing compassion and working for others is seen within the group as a way of cultivating one's mind in the direction of *nibbāna*. The degree to which compassionate action is seen as nibbanic within the group is illustrated in point 6 above where I note that Seelagawesi and Mohan both regard healing as a way of fulfilling the *pāramī* of compassion, while Sisara sees healing as integrally related to the realisation of the four noble truths. Elsewhere in our interview Sisara makes an even stronger connection between compassionate action and the nibbanic path. He states that for him the attainment of *nibbāna* is about trying to always act compassionately and to find out how to stop acting in non-compassionate ways. Here, then, *nibbāna* is viewed as the perfection of compassion.

⁴³ Fieldwork notes 25/06/2007.

We can make a link here with the attempts to make divisions between different forms of Buddhism discussed in chapter 3. The tendency found within the Nissarana group to dismiss ritualised merit-making in favour of nibbanic practice clearly brings to mind Sprio's distinction between kammatic and nibbanic Buddhism. However, the group's strong emphasis on positive emotion and working compassionately in the world means that we cannot describe the group using King's kammic/nibbanic dichotomy. For King the nibbanic path involves moving away from emotion towards indifference to world. Within the Nissarana group, on the other hand, a strong nibbanic emphasis is combined with a strong emphasis on emotion. Seelagawesi often draws on highly emotional – one might say sentimental – stories in his talks. For example, during a talk given to the group in 2006 he related a favourite story heard in his youth about two brothers who were talented artists.⁴⁴ Since they came from a poor family which could not afford to send them to study art at university, the brothers came to an arrangement. One would study, while the other would work in order to support him. When the first had finished his studies, the roles would be reversed. The brothers decided who would study first by tossing a coin. The younger brother won the toss and went to university, while the elder found a job as a miner. When the younger brother finished his studies he returned to his sibling and told him that it was now his turn to study. However, by this time the elder brother's hands had been damaged by work and he is no longer able to draw. On hearing this, the younger brother asked the elder to place his damaged hands in a position of prayer and made a drawing of them as a symbol of his gratitude. For Seelagawesi this story is a powerful symbol of the importance of cultivating and expressing gratitude, and he relates the tale in a strongly emotional style. All of this is a long way from the emotionless nibbanic Buddhism described by King. At the same time, talks of this kind cannot be classified under King's category of kammic Buddhism, since the emotions of gratitude, compassion, love, patience and generosity that Seelagawesi encourages are regarded by Seelagawesi as elements of the path to nibbanic perfection. The link made by Seelagawesi between developing positive emotion and the nibbanic path is exemplified by his statement during a talk focusing on compassion that, 'love and compassion help us to detach, so there is no possessive mind'.⁴⁵ The Nissarana group emphasises detachment, then, but interprets this not as emotionless indifference, but

⁴⁴ Fieldwork notes 20/09/2006.

⁴⁵ This quotation is taken from the CD – given to me by Seelagawesi – of *Dhamma* talks that he delivered during his visit to the UK in 2006.

as a detachment from selfishness which is rooted in positive emotion. Thus while for King the nibbanic path is essentially a world rejecting one, for Seelagawesi the path to *nibbāna* is to be found through living well in the world. During a talk given to the group in 2006 he stated:

Freedom [i.e. *nibbāna*] is something we experience while we are having a peaceful life in the world. We can't escape from the world.⁴⁶

9.1.2 Conclusions

While I have argued that the portrayal of diaspora Buddhism given by the 'Two Buddhisms' model is problematic when used to describe the religiosity of Sri Lankans at mainstream temples, the Nissarana group provides an even stronger challenge to the model. Here we have a (predominantly) Sri Lankan organisation which manifests an approach to Buddhism which in many respects mirrors that commonly found among converts. Kammatic merit-making is largely dismissed in favour of nibbanic practices; meditation is emphasised; and teachers within the group are valued as experienced practitioners who are able to communicate their own understanding and experience, rather than that which is found in texts.

If my examination of the Nissarana group problematises the 'Two Buddhisms' model, it also illustrates the difficulties inherent in other attempts to describe Buddhism in the West using a two-fold classification. While the Nissarana group shares much in common with convert Buddhism, certain characteristics of the group distinguish it from the approaches commonly found among converts. The emphasis on apotropaic healing rituals within the group is uncommon among convert Buddhists. While many converts ignore or dismiss supernatural aspects of Buddhism, within the group the supernatural is present in a particularly vivid way. In addition, while the group emphasises meditation, it does not do so to the extent commonly found in convert meditation centres and monasteries. Thus the group highlights that in order to fully understand the forms of Buddhism found in the West one needs to examine these forms of Buddhism along a number of different spectrums, rather than in terms of simplistic modernist/traditional or meditative/ritualistic dichotomies.

The fact that a number of converts are involved in the activities of the Nissarana group further complicates the picture. There is certainly no 'Two Buddhisms' divide within

⁴⁶ This quotation is taken from the CD of *Dhamma* talks given to me by Seelagawesi.

the group. Converts and Sri Lankans do not form separate congregations, but mix freely and take part together in the same activities of healing, meditation, chanting and discussing the *Dhamma*. The fact that the convert members of the group take an active part in its healing activities highlights that not all convert Theravada practitioners take a 'Buddhism without beliefs' approach to the religion in which all supernatural aspects are dismissed. Thus convert Buddhism, like diaspora Buddhism, is a complex and varied phenomenon.

As noted in my introduction, the Nissarana group is not the only Sri Lankan organisation in the UK which meets outside mainstream temples. Another organisation which I studied during my research was the Sathdhamma group.⁴⁷ This group consists of a number of Sri Lankan laypeople who meet weekly in a private house in West London to watch videotapes of talks given by certain lay Sri Lankan preachers.⁴⁸ Like the Nissarana group, the Sathdhamma group is characterised by a strongly nibbanic focus and by a tendency to view mainstream temples as places of ritual and socialising rather than as places of serious Buddhist practice. However, the teachings of the Sathdhamma group are far more unorthodox than those of the Nissarana group. The group argues that the Pali Canon does not represent the true teachings of the Buddha, and that the true teachings are available instead from the lay teachers of the group, who are believed by their followers to be enlightened. These teachers present a radically reworked version of Theravada teachings. Monasticism and all forms of Buddhist ritual are rejected. The idea that the Buddha taught moral rules is also rejected, it being argued that the Buddha taught only how to achieve *nibbāna*, and that observing moral rules is unrelated to the nibbanic path.⁴⁹ Interestingly, meditation is also rejected. It is argued that while meditation can help one to relax, it does not help one to achieve *nibbāna*. Rather, the group argues, *nibbāna* is achieved simply by realising the truth of non-self. How this occurs is not entirely clear, but much emphasis is placed on listening to preaching by enlightened teachers. In the Sathdhamma group, then, we have another example of an organisation outside mainstream Sri Lankan temples which – with its strongly nibbanic emphasis and its rejection of ritual –

⁴⁷ The term 'sathdhamma' can be translated as 'true teaching' or 'real teaching'.

⁴⁸ The central teacher of the movement is a Sri Lankan layman named Mr K.L. Siriwardana. According to those I spoke with, Mr Siriwardana has a fairly large following in Sri Lanka. The teachings of Mr Siriwardana have much in common with those of 'Guru F' in Bond's paper on lay meditation teachers in Sri Lanka (Bond 2003). However, since Bond does not give the real names of those he writes about, I cannot be sure whether Siriwardana and Guru F are one and the same.

⁴⁹ This idea is at odds with Theravada orthodoxy, which views moral observance as a key aspect of the path to *nibbāna*.

challenges the 'Two Buddhisms' model, but which also differs radically from the approaches to Buddhism commonly found among converts in certain respects (particularly in its rejection of meditation).⁵⁰

Nissarana and Sathdhamma are not the only groups of this kind in the Sri Lankan community. For example, towards the end of my research I became aware of a group following the teachings of the well-known Sri Lankan monk Venerable Kiribathgoda Gnanananda, who strongly emphasises meditation and particularly stresses the attainability within this lifetime of the first stage of the nibbanic path (the stage of the 'stream enterer').⁵¹ The existence of these different groups indicates that many Sri Lankans in the UK have a strong interest in meditation-centred or otherwise nibbanic forms of Buddhism. For some this interest is satisfied by mainstream temples. However, others prefer to look outside such temples to organisations which are seen as focusing more directly on a practice-oriented, nibbanic approach to Buddhism. These organisations also highlight the importance of taking a broad view when examining diasporic Buddhism. Such groups reveal aspects of religiosity in the Sri Lankan community that would have been missed had I focused solely on a single mainstream temple. The importance of such groups should come as no surprise to those familiar with contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhism. Studies have highlighted the increasing religious variety among Buddhists in Sri Lanka, and the tendency of many to look for religious options outside mainstream temple Buddhism (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; Berkwitz 2003; Bond 2003). My research suggests that similar patterns are also observable among Sri Lankans in the UK.

As a last point here I want to say something about the Nissarana group in relation to the issue of the preservation of culture in the diaspora. Alongside the issues mentioned above, another aspect of the group that differentiates it from mainstream temples is that it does not play the role of a Sinhalese cultural centre in any self-conscious way. The group does not offer Sinhalese language classes for children, or host performances of traditional

⁵⁰ My understanding of the Sathdhamma group comes from conversations with members of the group (Fieldwork notes 05/06/2006, 24/11/2006, 24/10/2007), and from reading articles on the group's websites, www.geocities.com/sathdhamma (accessed 10/11/07) and www.satyagaveshi.com (accessed 10/11/07). These websites are now inactive, but a number of articles from the former site, written by a UK-based member of the group, have since been published (Karusena 2009). Further information about the group and reaction to it from mainstream Sri Lankan Buddhism can be found in a number of on-line articles. Particularly interesting in the authorless pro-Sathdhamma article 'Buddhism as practised today' (*no date*). This article has produced on-line responses from the well-known Sri Lankan monks Venerable Kiribathgoda Gnanananda (*no date a*) and Venerable Henepola Gunaratana (*no date*).

⁵¹ This group has recently established a permanent centre in Hertfordshire. For information on the teachings of Gnanananda see the central website of his movement: www.buddhavisision.com (accessed 20/06/2010).

Sri Lankan dance or music. In our interview Sisara states that in contrast to those temples which focus on Sinhalese culture, the Nissarana group provides a place to ‘talk about the human being’. Here Sisara is arguing that the group is a place of personal religious investigation and practice rather than a place of cultural preservation. This does not necessarily indicate a particular attitude towards issues of cultural identity within the group (two of the most centrally involved members of the group send their children to Sunday school classes at mainstream temples). Rather, it simply indicates that cultural preservation is not seen as something relevant to the group’s activities.

9.2 Other religious institutions attended by Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK

In addition to groups such as Nissarana, Sathdhamma and the followers of Kiribathgoda Gnanananda, we can also identify other religious institutions and forms of religiosity outside mainstream Buddhist temples which attract Sri Lankan Buddhists in Britain. This section looks briefly at these alternative expressions of religiosity.

9.2.1 Convert Buddhist institutions

Many Sri Lankan Buddhists attend convert Buddhist institutions. By far the most popular of such institutions among Sri Lankans are the monasteries of the Forest Sangha, particularly Amaravati. In my 47 standard interviews, 35 interviewees stated that they had visited an institution of the Forest Sangha at least once, to offer *dāna*, attend talks by the resident monastics or – in 6 cases – attend residential retreats. However, these are not the only convert institutions attended by Sri Lankans in the UK. During my research I encountered Sri Lankans who practised at the Satipanya Buddhist retreat centre in Shropshire (run by the convert monk Bhante Bodhidhamma),⁵² with the convert monk Bhikkhu Pesala who resides in East London,⁵³ and at the Gaia House meditation retreat in Devon.⁵⁴ My second-generation interviewee Laksiri has practised in the past at the Plum Village meditation centre in France, which was founded by the Vietnamese teacher Thich Nhat Hanh who combines Zen and Theravada teachings and has a strong convert following.⁵⁵ In addition, my second-generation interviewee Shalini practised meditation

⁵² www.satipanya.org.uk (accessed 20/06/2010).

⁵³ www.aimwell.org/index.html (accessed 20/06/2010).

⁵⁴ www.gaiahouse.co.uk (accessed 20/06/2010).

⁵⁵ For information on Plum Village see the centre’s website: www.plumvillage.org (accessed 20/06/2006). On Thich Nhat Hanh and his socially engaged approach to Buddhism see King (1996).

while studying at university with the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (recently renamed the Triratna Buddhist Community),⁵⁶ an eclectic convert movement which draws on elements of Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings (Bluck 2006:152-178). Since my research focused primarily on Sri Lankan institutions, the majority of my interviewees practise primarily within Sri Lankan groups or temples. However, three of my interviewees, while attending Sri Lankan temples on occasion, attend convert institutions most often: my first-generation interviewees Udara and Sumal who most often attend the Forest Sangha's monasteries of Amaravati and Cittaviveka, and my second-generation interviewee Laksiri, who primarily attends Amaravati and also takes regular retreats at the Gaia House retreat centre (noted above). In all three cases this reflects their strongly meditation-centred approach to Buddhism. It became clear to me during my research that there are a significant number of Sri Lankans in the UK who prefer to practise exclusively at convert institutions (principally those of the Forest Sangha). Investigating the religious understandings and motives of such individuals would be an interesting area for future research.

9.2.2 The worship of divine beings among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK

Many Sri Lankan Buddhists, in addition to attending Buddhist institutions, also engage in practices of worship towards divine beings, usually referred to as gods or *devas*. I have already discussed the worship of gods at the SSIBC's *dēvālē*. However, this is not the only space in which Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK offer worship to gods. Hinduism has a strong presence in Sri Lanka, where it is the majority religion of the Tamil community (in all approximately 15.5% of the population are Hindu (Deegalle 2006a:2)). There is a substantial overlap between the deities of the Sri Lankan Buddhist pantheon, worshipped in *dēvālēs*, and those that are worshipped in Sri Lankan Hindu temples, and my informants commonly referred to the deities worshipped in *dēvālēs* as 'Hindu gods'.⁵⁷ It is thus perhaps unsurprising that many Sri Lankan Buddhists both in Sri Lanka and the diaspora also attend Hindu religious institutions.

⁵⁶ This change of name occurred in April 2010. For details see <http://fwbo-news.blogspot.com/2010/04/western-buddhist-order-becomes-triratna.html> (accessed 20/06/2010).

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the pantheon of Sri Lankan Buddhist gods see Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:17-22, 30-40).

The most significant Hindu institution in the UK for Sri Lankan Buddhists is the Skanda Vale temple and monastery located in South West Wales. Founded in 1973 by Guru Subramaniam, a Sri Lankan born to a Sinhalese Buddhist father and a Tamil Hindu mother, Skanda Vale is located on 115 acres of what was previously farm land.⁵⁸ The site contains three temples, dedicated to the deities Murugan, Kali, and Ranganatha (a form of Vishnu). The institution is run by an order of celibate monastics, most of whom are Western converts, who have dedicated themselves to the service of God through devotion and work. Most of those that attend Skanda Vale are Hindus (either from Indian or Sri Lankan Tamil backgrounds) or British people who have become interested in the religious services it offers (Taylor 1987:106). However, many Sri Lankan Buddhists also attend, attracted by the fact that its central deity is Murugan, devotion to whom is extremely common among Sri Lankan Buddhists (who more often refer to him using the names Kataragama or Skanda), and more generally by the fact that the temple has its roots in forms of Sri Lankan religiosity with which they are familiar.

While Skanda Vale is the most significant Hindu institution in the UK attended by Sri Lankan Buddhists – 17 of my interviewees have visited Skanda Vale at least once – it is not the only one. 4 of my interviewees have attended Hindu temples in London. Outside any institution, 19 of my interviewees have images of gods in their homes, as a part of their shrine to the Buddha.

Among Sri Lankan Buddhists gods are worshipped for apotropaic purposes – to bring a particular worldly blessing or benefit. Reasons for making offerings to gods that were mentioned to me by my interviewees and others that I spoke with included: to gain help with passing exams; to help overcome an illness; to gain success in one's job or business; to gain protection during a bad astrological period; to obtain help when purchasing a house; to enable one to have children; and to give protection to newly purchased car.⁵⁹ Often requests to gods involve the making of a vow. Here the individual will make an initial request to a particular god, together with a promise that upon the granting of the request they will make a further offering to the god (whether in a *dēvālē*, in a Hindu temple, or at a shrine in their home). Since the worship of gods is undertaken for

⁵⁸ For further information about Skanda Vale, see the institution's website, www.skandavale.org (accessed 20/06/2010). For scholarly examinations of the temple see Taylor (1987) and Geaves (2007:208-238).

⁵⁹ As noted in chapter 5, the particular deity that is prayed to depends upon the nature of the help that is requested.

apotropaic reasons, involvement in such practices tends to be irregular – individuals will make requests when they have a particular need.

Views about practices directed towards gods vary among Sri Lankan Buddhists. Some strongly embrace such practices, while others reject them and argue that participating in them is contrary to the teachings of Buddhism. Among my first-generation interviewees, 15 state either that they regularly make requests to gods (either at a shrine in their home, at the SSIBC *dēvālē*, at Hindu institutions in the UK, or during visits to Sri Lanka) or that they would do so if they had a particular need. 8 of my first-generation interviewees reject such practices. The remainder fall somewhere between these two positions, neither affirming nor entirely rejecting such practices.⁶⁰

Among those Sri Lankan Buddhists who reject the worship of gods it should be noted that this rejection is rarely due to a rejection of the existence of gods, since their existence is supported by mainstream Theravada teachings. Rather, it is the efficacy of making offerings to god that is questioned – it is argued that making offerings to gods will not bring the help that one desires. Thus my interviewee Damith states:

What I do know, from my reading in the religion, is that a god cannot give you anything and you cannot give anything to a god.

Beyond this, it is argued that such practices are not necessary since one can achieve both a positive and happy life, and even the respect of divine beings, through the practice of Buddhism. Thus my interviewee Sumal argues:

If you keep the five precepts as a layperson, even gods will bow to you [...] gods will respect you [...] If you are a person who accepts [the precepts] you will be venerated by the gods. It is not that you have to go begging for the good things from them.

The idea that the way to a happy life and the respect of the gods is through Buddhist practice rather than making offerings to the gods creates an opposition between these two practices. As a result, making offerings to gods is seen by some Buddhists not only as

⁶⁰ It is often difficult to make a definite divide between those who accept the worship of gods and those that reject it. As with many aspects of the religiosity of Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK, it is easiest to look at the attitudes that individuals take towards the worship of gods along a spectrum, with strong belief in such gods at one end and absolute rejection at the other. Even among my interviewees who regularly engaged in the worship of gods, a range of views concerning the practice was evident. Some expressed a strong faith in such practices, while others spoke more agnostically, stating that the benefits of the practice may be in large part psychological.

ineffectual, but as to some extent incompatible with Buddhism in as much as it causes one to place less emphasis on the true way to a happy and peaceful life – the practice of Buddhism itself. This idea was expressed by some of those that I spoke. My interviewee Anika argues that those Sri Lankans who make offerings at *dēvālēs* are ‘going away from Buddhism’. Another of my interviewees, Ishan, argues that those that visit *dēvālēs* do so because they do not have a proper faith in Buddhism. He goes on to argue that since Buddhism teaches self-reliance, asking for help from gods does not sit easily alongside Buddhist practice.

Criticism of making offerings to gods came to prominence in Sri Lanka in the late 1990s and early 2000s through the preaching of the popular monk Venerable Gangodawila Soma. Soma, who died in 2003, was a fierce critic of what he saw as an increasing reliance on the worship of gods among Sinhalese Buddhists. He criticised such practices as being ineffective. He also argued that they led people to neglect Buddhism, particularly the following of Buddhist morality (Berkwitz 2008:94). Soma’s preaching was extremely influential not only in Sri Lanka itself, but also in the diaspora (Berkwitz 2008:81). Significantly, three of my interviewees – Udara, Sumal, and Ushma – state that Soma’s preaching was the principle influence on their decision to abandon the practice of making offerings to gods. Thus when I ask whether she engages in such practices, Ushma states:

I used to...I used to. And I’ve still got this little Ganesh statue [on my shrine at home]. But when I read more and more...and the person who changed my life...not life, I mean the way of thinking, was...you must have heard about...Soma *Hāmuduruvō*⁶¹ [...] Because when I listened to his *Dhamma* talks...what he said is true, in a way.

David: And what was he saying...?

What he is saying is...all that we have to do is observe the five precepts. We don’t have to seek any...any favours from gods. Because that [following the precepts] will lead you to a good life [...] We don’t have to go into those things [the worship of gods in *dēvālēs*]. If we do good things, they will protect us.

The prominence of Soma’s criticisms of deity worship means that all Sri Lankans are aware of the view that such practices are not compatible with Buddhism. In light of this, my interviewees who engaged in such practices justified them in a variety of ways. Some,

⁶¹ The Sinhala term *Hāmuduruvō*, meaning ‘son of the master [i.e. the Buddha]’, is a respectful title given to monks (Gombrich 1971:80).

while disagreeing with Soma about the efficacy of such practices, agree that true followers of Buddhism do not worship gods. They thus argue that they, and many other Sri Lankans, do not follow Buddhism entirely. Thus my interviewee Nuwan states of Soma:

Maybe he's right, because if you are a real Buddhist you can't believe [in worshipping gods]. But...our people are not one hundred per cent Buddhist. They are just [following] habits and following the parents and things. If you are Buddhist I think you follow what Soma *Hāmuduruvo* said. Because you are learning and following the Buddhism. But we are coming from [i.e. following the practices of] the parents.

Others among my interviewees reacted to Soma's criticisms by arguing that Soma was condemning not the practice of worshipping gods in itself, but the way in which some Sri Lankans engage in the practice. My interviewee Bhatiya states:

He [Soma] accepts [the existence of gods]...but what he is saying is...now, what people does is, they do all the bad things in the world, and then they go with the *pūjā* [to the gods] and they say, 'This is the offering, please help me' [...] So what [Soma] is saying is, even the gods, to help them [those that offer to the gods] they have to actually be [morally] proper people. Otherwise the gods won't even look at them.

My interviewee Harshini, who does not go to *dēvālēs* or Hindu temples regularly, but occasionally makes a vow to the god Kataragama for a particular benefit, justifies her faith in such practices by noting that the power of gods was attested to by the famous monk Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya (1896-1998). She notes:

What he says is, when the Buddha was alive he told this deity...Kataragama...to look after the Southern part of Sri Lanka [...] That's what he says in his books. So because of that you tend to believe that there is something...

Thus Harshini justifies her practice in the face of criticisms from monks such as Soma by appealing to the authority of another well-known and well-respected monk who had a strong faith in such practices.⁶²

So far I have looked only at views on the worship of gods among first-generation Sri Lankans. Among my second-generation interviewees I found somewhat less interest in the worship of gods. Of 21 interviewees, 11 state that they reject or take no interest in such

⁶² As Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:306-313) highlight, Ananda Maitreya's views on Kataragama are unorthodox, having their origins in a series of oracles that he obtained from astrologers in Madras.

practices, while only 5 affirm a personal interest and belief in praying to gods. The remainder fall somewhere between these two positions.

It was among second-generation Sri Lankans that I found some of the strongest criticisms of the worship of gods. For example, my interviewees Tilan, states:

To me it's anathema to Buddhism. The Buddha totally respected the Hindu deities. He never talked about them, but he never dissed them. Obviously that's the attitude to take. But for me...I don't understand that concept, so I don't...obviously I don't do that. And I would try to convince someone, 'What is the value of doing that?'

Perhaps more interesting than simply considering the number of my second-generation interviewees who engage in or reject worshipping gods is looking at how the views of my second-generation interviewees compare to those of their parents, since this enables us to see if we can find a change in attitudes between the first and second generation. Of the 11 of my second-generation interviewees who reject the worship of gods, 6 grew up in families which engaged in such practices. Beyond this, 4 more of my second-generation interviewees, while not entirely rejecting such practices, state that they have less interest and involvement in such practices than their parents. For example, my interviewee Shalini sometimes takes part in the worship of gods with her parents, but states that she has little belief in such practices herself, and that 'when I bring up my children I'm not going to place such an emphasis on the Hindu gods'. Thus we can find some clear movement away from the worship of gods among second-generation Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK.

It is interesting to consider the relationship between the attitudes individuals hold towards the worship of gods and the general approach that they take to Buddhism. We may expect those who take a strong interest in meditation to reject the worship of gods. Indeed this is what I found in a number of my interviews. Above I noted that three of my interviewees were influenced in their decision to reject the worship of gods by the preaching of Venerable Soma. In all three cases, this change in their attitudes coincided with a move towards a meditation-centred approach to Buddhism. Another of my interviewees, Anika, also describes her move away from the worship of gods as being part of a general change in her religiosity away from a focus on rituals and towards a focus on meditation and philosophy. However, not all Sri Lankans who embrace meditation reject the worship of gods. In chapter 7 I noted that two of my interviewees from the LBV, Harshini and Gihan, have a strong interest in meditation and yet occasionally participate in

rituals directed towards gods. I also found some interest in the worship of gods among members of the Nissarana group. While Venerable Seelagawesi takes no interest in such practices, Sisara, the lay leader of the group, was at one time a strong devotee of the Skanda Vale temple and continued to attend Skanda Vale during the period of my research.

9.2.3 Other forms of religiosity

Other forms of religiosity that have some popularity among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK can be mentioned. Some Sri Lankan Buddhists participate in the worship of the Indian Guru Sathya Sai Baba. The popularity of Sai Baba in Sri Lanka has been recorded by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:53-54). Eight of my interviewees have some involvement with the worship of Sai Baba, either in their own home or at a Sai Baba group at which devotional songs are sung. Sai Baba is thought by his followers to have certain miraculous powers, and an important dimension of the movement is the notion that as a result of their devotion individuals will attain certain benefits in their lives. In this sense the worship of Sai Baba and the worship of divine beings have certain similarities: both are centred on the idea that such worship will bring apotropaic benefits. However, some Buddhists who follow Sai Baba emphasise that there is more to this form of religiosity than miracles and apotropaic blessings. For example, my second-generation interviewee Muditha states that while some view Sai Baba as 'deity', he prefers to think of him as a 'philosopher'. For Muditha the most important aspect of Sai Baba's teachings is not his miracles but 'the philosophy and the spiritualness [*sic*] of it'. My first-generation interviewee Harhsini argues that Sai Baba's spiritual teachings are very much in line with Buddhism:

If you read his books and teachings, its all Buddhism...Compassion and loving kindness and everything, you know...everything is just Buddhism.

Some Sri Lankan Buddhists take an interest in certain Christian practices. Since the colonial period there has been a sizable Christian presence in Sri Lanka, and many Sri Lankan Buddhists have a belief in the power of particular forms of Christian religiosity (Stirrat 1992:153). 7 of my interviewees have had some involvement with Christian practices. For example, my interviewees Ruwan and Indira have both since coming to the UK made pilgrimages to Lourdes with Sri Lankan friends. Gihan, a patron of the LBV, speaks of visiting the British pilgrimage site of Walsingham. My interviewee Darika notes

that she includes a statue of Jesus on the shrine to the Buddha in her home. The parents of my second-generation interviewee Ranjan also have a statue of Jesus on their shrine and he expresses faith in both Jesus and the Christian God (see chapter 10).

Ethnographies of the religiosity of Buddhists in Sri Lanka – especially Gombrich and Obeyesekere’s *Buddhism Transformed* (1988) – highlight the existence of many other forms of religiosity within this community: astrology and other forms of divination; various forms of white and black magic; cults formed around priests or priestesses who are thought to be possessed by divine beings; apotropaic rituals of *bali* and *tovil* (sometimes referred to as ‘devil-dancing’). Many of those that I interviewed and spoke with expressed an interest in astrology. In my 47 standard interviews, 33 interviewees took some level of interest in astrology, ranging from amused enjoyment of such practices (in the case of my interviewee Sathi) to strong affirmation in the power of astrological predictions (in the case of my interviewee Gihan). Other than this I encountered relatively few references to the forms of religiosity listed above. It may be that my decision to focus primarily on Buddhist institutions meant that I did not encounter the full range of religious practices found among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK, and that an investigation that had focused more directly on such aspects of ‘spirit religion’ would have uncovered more in this area. It may also be that some of the forms of religiosity listed above are somewhat private and hidden from sight in the UK.⁶³ However, on occasion those that I spoke to suggested that many aspects of the ‘spirit religion’ that one finds in Sri Lanka are simply less evident in the diaspora.⁶⁴

⁶³ Geaves notes that middle-class professional South Asians are often reluctant to speak to researchers about aspects of religion which may be considered as ‘superstitious’ or as bringing shame on the community (Geaves 2007:94).

⁶⁴ Fieldwork notes 05/03/2006, 12/08/2007. Interviews with Asoka and Gihan.

Chapter 10 Conclusions

In his study of meditation traditions in Burma Gustaaf Houtman makes an interesting comparison between his own research and the work of Spiro. As discussed in chapter 3, Spiro argued that meditation is rare among Burmese Buddhists. Houtman, on the other hand, found the opposite to be the case:

[W]hen I went to Burma I found meditation centres thriving and bustling with meditators, and everywhere people were going to centres to meditate (Houtman 1990:244).

Houtman argues that the differences here reflect the academic contexts in which the two studies were written and the previous work that they reacted to. Spiro was strongly influenced by the work of King, and despite the differences in their analysis Spiro's study in many ways represents an elaboration of King's ideas. In his writing King expresses the powerful 'culture shock' that he experienced when he first came into contact with Burmese Buddhism. Since his prior understanding of Buddhism had been based on Western textual scholarship which played down the importance of ritual and devotion, King was taken aback by the strong emphasis on such dimensions of Buddhism found among many Burmese (1964:47). As a result it is unsurprising that King's work – and Spiro's attempt to flesh out his arguments – focuses strongly on the differences between the Western text-based image of Buddhism as a ritual-free path of meditation, and the emphasis on devotion and ritualised merit-making found among many practising Buddhists. In the context in which it emerged such a focus was in many ways useful, since it provided a necessary correction to previous understandings. However, Houtman argues that this emphasis ultimately leads Spiro to present a misleading picture of the place of meditation in contemporary Burma – in stressing the importance of ritual and merit-making in Burmese Buddhism, Spiro ignores the fact that there is also a thriving interest in meditation and the nibbanic path (1990:245). Houtman's study, coming in the wake of the work of Spiro and King, attempts to provide a corrective on this issue, and to place meditation once again 'at the hub of Burmese Buddhism' (1990:245). As Houtman notes, all of this illustrates 'the way we construct scholarly knowledge as the result of awareness of previous texts on the subject' (1990:244). Our frameworks of analysis are never entirely objective. Rather, we

are influenced by the academic environment in which we work and by previous scholarship, whether we accept this material or react against it.

We can see parallels between the above and the way in which the present thesis stands in relation to previous studies of diaspora Buddhism. For the first wave of scholars to study diaspora Buddhism, what struck them as most significant was the contrast between diaspora and convert practitioners. Such a focus was in many ways natural since ethnicity is an important site of difference in the contemporary world (Cornell and Hartmann 2007:1-14), and because – despite my criticisms of the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model – it is certainly true that there are often interesting differences in the religiosity of convert and diaspora Buddhists. I have also suggested that these scholars were influenced to some degree by the dichotomising tendencies of previous work in the field of Buddhists studies such as that of Spiro. In contrast, when I went into the field, with a prior knowledge of work employing the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model, what struck me most forcibly were those aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK which did not fit with the model: the strong interest in meditation shown by many Sri Lankans (chapters 7 and 9); the tendency for many laypeople to play down or dismiss entirely the importance of ritualised merit-making (chapters 6, 7 and 8); the existence of groups such as Nissarana which are explicitly critical of ritual-centred temple Buddhism and stress the meditative path to *nibbāna* (chapter 9); the strong contacts between some convert and diaspora practitioners found at institutions such as the LBV and the Nissarana group (chapters 7 and 9); the overwhelming popularity among Sri Lankans of convert teachers such as Ajahn Brahmavamso (chapter 5 and 7); and so on. My thesis has thus been concerned to highlight such aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK and thereby produce a more balanced picture of diaspora Buddhist religiosity.

My point here is that in critiquing the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model I am not arguing that it has no validity whatsoever. The model has been useful in providing an initial picture of Buddhism in the West, and it does highlight some significant truths about the nature of many diaspora Buddhist communities. It is certainly true that while taking a strong interest in meditation is a defining feature of convert Theravada Buddhism, many Sri Lankans in the UK do not practise meditation regularly. It is also true that in general Sri Lankans are more likely than converts to take an interest in rituals of merit-making and/or apotropaic protection. However, like Spiro’s work on Burmese Buddhism, ultimately the model suffers from placing too much emphasis on a single contrast and giving too little room to

factors which complicate this dichotomy. While it is true that Sri Lankans in the diaspora are in general less likely than converts to meditate and more likely to take an interest in merit-making, it is fundamentally problematic to portray Sri Lankan religiosity as a whole as unconcerned with meditation and focused primarily on kammatic ritual. It is perhaps the case that the 'Two Buddhisms' model is more useful when used to describe convert Buddhists in the West. Research suggests that convert Buddhists are generally characterised by a commitment to meditation and a disinterest in merit-making (Cadge 2005; Bell 1998). However, it is a mistake to characterise diaspora Buddhism in opposition to this, as being defined by that which convert Buddhists are not. Diaspora Buddhism is simply too complex and diverse for such simplistic models. While my study attempts to move beyond these problems with the 'Two Buddhisms' model, I do not claim it to be an objective last word on the nature of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the diaspora. No study can make such a claim. Rather, like Houtman's work, the study is a contextual response to previous work, an attempt to provide a corrective to the weaknesses of previous models, and a contribution to the ongoing process of providing richer and more complex understandings of the forms of Buddhism found in the West.

If we are to leave behind the 'Two Buddhisms' model, this raises the question of how diaspora Buddhism can be analysed more fruitfully. I have considered and rejected the suggestion that we can replace the conventional 'Two Buddhisms' model with an alternative dichotomy which distinguishes between 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' Buddhists across the convert/diaspora divide. I have also rejected the idea of analysing forms of Buddhism in terms of a single rational/supernatural continuum. Instead, I have argued that forms of Buddhism need to be analysed along a number of different axes simultaneously. Such an analysis is fruitful whether one is considering institutions or individuals. Let us consider these in turn.

This study has focused predominantly on three institutions: the LBV, the SSIBC and the Nissarana group. I have examined a number of different aspects of these institutions: the degree to which those that attend them and they as institutions emphasise a meditation-centred approach to Buddhism; the degree to which emphasise intellectual study; the attitude they manifest towards questions of textual authority; the degree to which they emphasise rituals of merit-making and apotropaic protection; the degree to which they

emphasise ‘supernatural’ aspects of the Buddhism; the extent to which they play the role of a social centre for the Sri Lankan community; the degree of emphasis that they give to Sri Lankan cultural activities; the languages which they employ; the ways in which they are viewed by Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK; whether they are places with a strong ‘authorial voice’ or places in which many different practices and discourses are present; the nature of the monastic teachers at these institutions; and so on. Examining institutions in these different ways helps us to provide an intricate analysis of how they stand in relation to each other and to other Buddhist institutions in the UK. We have seen that many aspects of the LBV highlight commonalities between this temple and convert institutions: the emphasis on meditation and other practice-oriented dimensions of Buddhism; the tendency to play down the importance of kammatic ritual found in some of the temple’s literature and talks; the temple’s rejection of certain aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhist and non-Buddhist ritual; and the strong links between the temple and a number of convert teachers. At the same time, a number of aspects of the LBV distinguish the temple from the dominant trends within convert Theravada Buddhism: the significant place given to rituals of *pūjā*, *dāna* and *pirit* – and, more significantly, to discourses of merit and apotropaic blessing associated with such rituals – at the temple; the approach to textual authority found at the temple and the tendency to affirm ‘supernatural’ aspects of Buddhism; the emphasis placed on study-oriented approaches to Buddhism in the temple’s talks and activities; and the role that the temple plays as a cultural and social centre for Sri Lankans (although it plays this role to a somewhat lesser degree than many other Sri Lankan temples in the diaspora). In many ways the LBV can be seen as occupying a middle-ground between strongly meditation-centred convert institutions and the ideal-type ‘traditional’ Sri Lankan temple. This in-between nature of the LBV is reflected in the variety of views of the temple that I encountered during my research.

Among my informants there was a tendency to cast the LBV and the SSIBC as opposites. Indeed there are some important differences between the temples, and it is perhaps tempting to create a strong dichotomy between the two: on one hand we have the ‘modernist’ LBV, a self-defined missionary temple, serving as a place not only for Sri Lankans, but for individuals from a variety of backgrounds, teaching a universalised form of Buddhism centred on meditation and Buddhist philosophy, and playing a minimal role as a Sri Lankan cultural and social centre; on the other hand we have the ‘traditional’ SSIBC,

serving primarily the Sri Lankan community, acting as a place of Sri Lankan cultural preservation in the diaspora and meeting the Buddhist and non-Buddhist ritual needs of the diaspora community. This is the division that V.A. Gunasekara makes between the LBV and the Lankarama temple in Singapore (chapter 4). However, ultimately making such a firm division brings the same problems as the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model – in our eagerness to identify a contrast, we end up with limited, one-dimensional forms of analysis. While there are important differences between the LBV and SSIBC, I have highlighted that these are in the main a question of subtle variations in emphasis, not of absolute distinctions. Despite their differences the temples have much in common. Basic rituals of *pūjā*, *dāna* and *pirit* are practised in much the same way at both temples. At both one can find an emphasis on study-oriented Buddhism. Both differ from many convert institutions in their greater tendency to affirm and discuss ‘supernatural’ aspects of canonical Buddhism. In addition, while my fieldwork suggests a somewhat greater presence at the LBV of individuals with a strong interest in meditation, any difference in this regard is a subtle one, since both temples are characterised by a diversity of approaches to Buddhism among their patrons. Perhaps the most important point of similarity between the two temples is that both are both places of multiple discourses lacking a single ‘authorial voice’. This diversity of discourses and practices makes any attempt to draw a firm dichotomy between the two temples fundamentally problematic.

Looking at the Nissarana group along the various axes outlined above reveals differences from both the LBV and the SSIBC. Unlike those temples, the Nissarana group manifests a stronger ‘authorial voice’, the discourses and practices found within the group being determined to a large degree by the teachings of Venerable Seelagawesi. Reflecting Seelagawesi’s concerns, the group is characterised by a strong emphasis on practice-oriented, nibbanic aspects of Buddhism: meditation is emphasised; the monks of the group come from traditions of meditation-centred monasticism rather than from scholarly backgrounds; and talks given within the group are strongly practice-oriented in nature. The group is also characterised by a tendency to be critical of approaches to Buddhism which focus on the ritualised accumulation of merit, which those within the group tend to associate with mainstream temple Buddhism. Other differences from mainstream temples include the group’s approach to questions of authority – which reveals a greater tendency to question textual authority and place authority in personal experience (particularly that of

the group's teachers) – and the fact that the group does not play the role of a Sri Lankan cultural centre in any self-conscious way. Once again it is tempting to draw a firm distinction between the Nissarana group and mainstream Sri Lankan temples, but again this would be misleading. While the Nissarana group is characterised by a particular emphasis on meditative Buddhism, such dimensions of Buddhism are certainly not absent from the LBV and the SSIBC. In addition, rituals associated with merit-making (such as *dāna*) and discourses which discuss merit are not entirely absent from the Nissarana group. The differences here are subtle, and can be best identified by looking at particular details of the Nissarana group rather than by making firm dichotomies. Relevant details here include: the tendency for members of the group to regard the monks of the group as living up to particularly high ideal of monasticism in terms of the strictness with which they follow monastic rules and their dedication to the meditative path to *nibbāna*; the high regard in which the teachers of the group are held as charismatic speakers who draw on their own experience rather than on what they have learnt from books; and the particular tendency among the group's teachers and lay followers to put a strong stress on the need to cultivate the mind and tread the path to *nibbāna* rather than dedicating oneself only to kammatic merit-making (exemplified by Seelagawesi's rejection of Buddha *pūjā*).

Many aspects of the Nissarana group reflect commonalities with convert Theravada Buddhism in the UK. It is thus perhaps unsurprising that the group has connections with the Forest Sangha and attracts a number of convert practitioners. However, the group also displays important differences with convert Buddhism, most notably the place it gives to rituals of healing and the general emphasis it places on supernatural aspects of Buddhism.

Looking at institutions along a number of different axes thus enables a nuanced understanding of how these institutions stand in relation to each other and to other institutions in the broader landscape of British Buddhism. However, this study is intended primarily as an examination of the religiosity of Sri Lankan Buddhist individuals in the UK, not as an analysis of institutions. Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK cannot be defined in terms of a series of discrete temple communities, and within particular institutions one finds a diverse range of religious approaches. Thus an examination focused only at the institutional level would result in a significantly restricted analysis. Throughout this study I have looked at a number of different dimensions of the religiosity of individuals: their level of interest in meditation; the extent to which they take part in merit-making rituals such as

dāna and *pūjā*; the ways in which they understand such rituals; whether or not they take an interest in the worship of divine beings; their attitudes towards Buddhist rituals of apotropaic protection; the attitudes that they take to questions of textual authority; the degree to which they are interested in the study of Buddhism; where they lie on Cadge's rational-supernatural spectrum; the kind of Buddhist talks they enjoy listening to; and so on. Looking at these various dimensions enables complex portrayals of individual approaches to Buddhism, which move us beyond both the 'Two Buddhisms' model and any attempt to apply a simplistic modernist/traditionalist dichotomy within the Sri Lankan community. As discussed in chapter 7, when we examine approaches to Buddhism in this way we can find Sri Lankans that do correspond at least to some extent with the model of an ideal-type 'diaspora Buddhist' given in the 'Two Buddhisms' model in terms of their religious understanding and practice. My interviewees Ruwan (chapter 7), Darika (chapter 6) and Anuja (chapter 8) can be seen as falling into this category. On the other hand, we can also find Sri Lankans in the UK who have a remarkable amount in common with the ideal-type 'convert Buddhist'. In chapter 7 I identified my interviewees Sathi and Laksiri as falling into this category, noting that Laksiri consciously identifies his approach to Buddhism as sharing more in common with a 'British practitioner' than a typical Sri Lankan Buddhist. Two more of my interviewees who can be seen as falling into this category are Chaturi and Padmini, second-generation sisters whose mother, Anika, I also interviewed. Anika's religiosity has changed in the UK, and she now puts a greater emphasis on meditation and Buddhist philosophy than she did in Sri Lanka. However, as discussed in chapter 7, Anika notes that her approach to religiosity nevertheless differs somewhat from that of Western converts because she continues to appreciate and take a reverential attitude towards traditional Sri Lankan Buddhist rituals. Chaturi and Padmini share their mother's approach to Buddhism in many ways. Both stress that the most important aspect of Buddhism is its philosophy and the application of these teachings in day-to-day life. While neither practises meditation regularly, both express an appreciation for the practice and Padmini has attended meditation classes at the LBV in the past. Part of Anika's changed approach to religion involved abandoning practices relating to the worship of divine beings, and both Chaturi and Padmini also reject such practices. In some ways, however, Chaturi and Padmini's approach to Buddhism differs from their mother's. While Anika continues to engage in ritual aspects of Buddhism regularly and does not express a

critical attitude towards rituals of merit-making, Chaturi and Padmini do not regularly participate in any form of ritual and – while they do not dismiss ritual entirely – they are more critical of approaches to Buddhism which focus on kammatic ritual. Thus Padmini states:

I like the idea of giving blessings to a deceased relative, I think that's nice, but I wouldn't ever follow these meritorious acts and things like that...I think you should live a good life and you should live by the Buddhist philosophy but I don't agree with doing particular things to get merit in terms of *kamma* and...being able to be born into a better life by doing things in this life. I don't follow that philosophy...I don't really see any...I don't believe in it at all...I think it's quite ritualistic. [...] In terms of meritorious deeds you do a good thing in expectation of getting good *kamma* back, and I don't agree with that. I think you should...everyday you should...if you want to do a good thing, do it. But don't expect to receive something in return.

Anika is present during the interview and when rituals such as *dāna* are discussed she notes the importance of 'the joy in giving' when engaging in such acts. Padmini and Chaturi, however, do not pick up this theme, and generally express a more negative attitude towards ritualised merit-making. The difference between Anika and her daughters here is slight but significant. In both cases there is agreement that ritual should not be the central focus of one's Buddhist practice. However, Padmini and Chaturi distance themselves more fully from ritual-centred approaches. Padmini and Chaturi also differ from their mother in terms of how they view their religiosity in comparison with that of Western converts. While Anika notes significant differences between herself and a typical convert, Padmini and Chaturi express a sense of identification with what they see as a 'Western' approach to Buddhism. The following exchange is indicative of this:

Padmini: I must say, actually, that...it's Western...it's more of a...I think both of us hold more of a Western view of Buddhism, a Western appreciation of Buddhism, [rather] than the Eastern-type of ritualistic appreciation of Buddhism

Chaturi: But then you have to question yourself [as to] which is better, because a lot of the time people will go to the temple and think that they are being Buddhist by lighting oil lamps and offering flowers and stuff, but they don't really have a true knowledge of Buddhism and you can see that in the way that they carry out their day-to-day lives...they're not very Buddhist people.

Thus Padmini and Chaturi share much in common with converts in terms of how they approach their religion, and consciously identify themselves as doing so. The fact that 3 of

my second-generation interviewees – Padmini, Chaturi and Laksiri – should describe their approach to Buddhism as being ‘Western’ or ‘British’ is interesting. For some it may seem to confirm the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model since here a distinction is made between convert and ‘Sri Lankan’ or ‘Eastern’ Buddhism. From such a perspective it could be argued that these second-generation Sri Lankans are abandoning the ‘Sri Lankan’ Buddhism of their parents and embracing a ‘Western’ form of Buddhism more in tune with the culture in which they have been raised. My research supports the idea that we can find a degree of movement among second-generation Sri Lankans towards a greater embracing of attitudes commonly found among convert Buddhists, such as a questioning of the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth and a rejection of the worship of divine beings. However, clearly I do not agree that it is useful to speak of convert and (first-generation) Sri Lankan Buddhism as completely separate and entirely different forms of religiosity. Significantly, while they make a divide between convert and Sri Lankan Buddhism, Chaturi, Padmini and Laksiri demonstrate an awareness that Sri Lankan Buddhism is more complex than such a simplistic dichotomy would suggest. Padmini and Chaturi note that many in Sri Lanka – including their own cousins – hold understandings of Buddhism similar to their own. Thus if they view their approach to Buddhism as a Western one, they clearly view many in Sri Lanka as taking such a Western approach also. In addition, while Padmini and Chaturi see themselves as differing in some respects from their parents in terms of how they approach Buddhism, overall they view their understandings of Buddhism as fairly similar. Padmini states that her parents are ‘definitely more traditional and more cultural in the sense that they go to the temple more often and they pray and stuff’, but that ‘their ideas about the religion and the philosophy...I think in that way we are quite similar’. Thus while Padmini and Chaturi view themselves as having moved further in the direction of a ‘Western’ understanding of Buddhism, they clearly do not regard themselves as differing radically from the ‘Sri Lankan’ Buddhism of their parents. My interviewee Laksiri, while characterising his approach to Buddhism as more ‘British’ than ‘Sri Lankan’ in nature, also displays an awareness of the diversity found within Sri Lankan Buddhism. Laksiri’s mother is a member of the Sathdhamma group, discussed in chapter 9. With its rejection of all forms of Buddhist ritual, of meditation, and of the authority of the Pali Canon, the Sathdhamma group is a far more radical departure from traditional Sri Lankan Buddhism than are the convert traditions that Laksiri practises within. When I ask Laksiri if the way in

which he approaches Buddhism is different from the approach taken by his family, he states:

Yes, very different. It's funny because I'm almost more orthodox Buddhist than they are.

Thus while Chaturi, Padmini and Laksiri all use a distinction between Sri Lankan and Western Buddhism in order to signal their disinterest in certain approaches that can be found more commonly among Sri Lankans than among converts – such those which focus on kammatic ritual – they also show an awareness that Sri Lankan Buddhism is in reality internally diverse and complex. It would be accurate to say that these second-generation Sri Lankans hold understandings of Buddhism which in some respects lie nearer than those of their parents to the understandings commonly found among Western converts. However, it would be inaccurate to describe their parents as holding 'traditional Sri Lankan' understandings of Buddhism which foreground kammatic and apotropaic ritual.

The above brings me back to my main arguments. So far I have noted that some Sri Lankans in the UK practise Buddhism in ways which correspond fairly well with the picture of diaspora Buddhism given by the 'Two Buddhisms' model, while some hold approaches which have a great deal in common with those found among British converts. However, only a minority of my 47 standard interviewees could be placed straightforwardly in either of these categories, 7 in the first and 5 in the second. The religious understanding and practice of the majority of Sri Lankans cannot be understood within such narrow dichotomies. Padmini and Chaturi's mother, Anika, shares with many converts a strong interest in meditation and a rejection of rituals directed towards divine beings, yet distinguishes herself from such converts because of her continuing appreciation of and reverential attitude towards Buddhist ritual. Laksiri's mother, on the other hand, as a member of the Sathdhamma group, shares with converts a disinterest in kammatic and apotropaic ritual and a commitment to the nibbanic path, but differs radically from converts in her rejection of meditation. As these instances demonstrate, analysing approaches to Buddhism along several axes moves us away from simplistic two-fold modernist/traditional divisions of Buddhism, and towards a more accurate picture of the various approaches found among Sri Lankans in the UK and how these stand in relation to each other. Throughout this thesis I have given a number of examples of individuals whose religiosity cannot be placed in either of the categories given above. Here I will explore three further

examples from my interviews in order to illustrate the necessity of breaking away from such narrow categories.

My interviewee Arjuna came to the UK in the 1970s and initially he attended the LBV. However, he was involved in the establishment of the Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre in 1999 and now regularly attends this temple. Arjuna comes to the temple every Sunday to attend the weekly Buddha *pūjā*, and occasionally offers *dāna* with his family. When I ask him what he regards as the most important aspect of Buddhism, Arjuna replies by critiquing the religiosity of many Sri Lankans:

I think in Sri Lanka people actually...they don't know much about Buddhism. They follow Buddhism because their parents are Buddhist and all that. So it's just a sort-of cultural thing as well.

Arjuna distinguishes himself from this approach, stating that:

I try to read about Buddhism and try to follow the principles.

What Arjuna means in these statements becomes clearer when we speak about *pūjā*. While he attends *pūjā* at the temple every week, he does not attach great importance to this practice, arguing that one need not attend temple to practise Buddhism and that *pūjā* is simply 'a traditional thing'. When I ask further about the practice, he states:

Arjuna: I think for me it's tradition. But...part of it is important, like meditation.

David: OK...

Arjuna: ...in the *pūjā*, part is meditation. That's good.

David: OK. So you do a little bit of meditation in the *pūjā*?

Arjuna: Yeah...that's good.

David: That's the important part?

Arjuna: Yes. That's the important part. Other things like...offering flowers...[it's] sort-of tradition.

Arjuna's interest in meditation extends beyond the brief period practised during the *pūjā*. While he does not attend meditation classes or retreats at a Buddhist institution, he practises meditation regularly at home. In addition, he enjoys reading books written by monks of the

Forest Sangha, particularly those of Ajahn Sumedho. By contrast, Arjuna expresses little interest in kammatic ritual. He does not reject such aspects of Buddhism entirely, but he plays down their importance, and expresses an agnostic attitude towards the efficacy of practices such as the transference of merit. This agnostic attitude towards the supernatural extends throughout the interview. As noted in chapter 5, Arjuna takes an agnostic approach to the teachings of *kamma* and rebirth. Similar ideas are evident when I ask about the significance of *pirit* chanting:

It's sort-of a blessing, like. The priest in a good heart is doing that. Again...if it's good, it's good. There's no harm for that, isn't it? [So one] might as well do it.

When I ask Arjuna if he engages in practices of worship towards divine beings, he states:

I don't...according to Buddhism you are not supposed to go to *dēvālēs*. I think people [who go to *dēvālēs* are]...scared of some unknown god or devil or whatever.

While this seems to suggest strong opposition to such practices, as the interview progresses Arjuna expresses less strong views on the subject, stating that the claims made by *dēvālēs* 'might be true' and noting that he might be interested in visiting the temple of Skanda Vale if given an opportunity:

I didn't get a chance to go to Skanda Vale actually. If I get a chance I'll go. Again, it's harmless going there, isn't it?

While Arjuna does not visit *dēvālēs* or Hindu temples, he does engage in practices towards Sai Baba. He became interested in Sai through a colleague who was a very devoted Sai follower. Arjuna himself does not attend Sai Baba meetings, but has pictures of Sai in his house and has in the past prayed to Sai for particular apotropaic benefits. However, in keeping with his general outlook, Arjuna maintains an agnostic view of such practices:

Yeah, I had an interest. But, yeah, I had a belief in it. But I don't know whether it's true or not.

To a certain extent Arjuna's approach to Buddhism resembles that of Pamu, discussed in chapter 7. In terms of temple attendance his religiosity seems to fit into the category of a 'traditional' Sri Lankan practitioner. However, many aspects of his understanding of Buddhism – his emphasis on meditation; his appreciation of the writing of Ajahn Sumedho;

his tendency to play down the importance of kammatic ritual; his agnostic attitude towards the supernatural – are strongly akin to attitudes commonly found among convert practitioners. This demonstrates the importance – noted in chapter 2 – of studying diaspora Buddhism using in-depth, qualitative research, rather than relying on observations of temple attendance and ritual practice. Arjuna’s agnostic attitude towards divine beings can also be seen as a point of similarity with many converts, although his openness to the worship of divine beings and his belief in Sai Baba put him at odds with those Buddhists – both convert and Sri Lankan – who feel that such practices are not compatible with Buddhism.

A somewhat different approach is evident in my interview with Ushma. I first met Ushma at a meeting of the Nissarana group. In addition to occasionally attending the events of this organisation, Ushma regularly attends the Thames Buddhist Vihara and Buddhapadipa, a Thai temple in Wimbledon where she practises meditation four times a week. As this suggests, Ushma has a strong interest in meditation and nibbanic forms of Buddhism. When I ask her what she sees as the most important aspect of Buddhism, she states:

What we are seeking...at my age what I am seeking is some peace in myself, and I want to attain...because I have read [...] quite a lot about Buddhism...and I would like to reach one of the states...

The states that Ushma refers to here are attainments on the path to *nibbāna*. Thus her aim is to make substantial progress on the nibbanic path in this life. Ushma notes that her approach to Buddhism has changed over time, and that she has dedicated far more time to meditation in the last few years. While Ushma’s strong interest in meditation mirrors convert approaches to Buddhism, other aspects of her religiosity are somewhat at odds with trends found among converts. We can begin to explore this by looking at her attitudes to kammatic ritual. Ushma emphasises that she is not interested in generating merit in order to achieve a high level of material affluence in her next life, and states that she would prefer a ‘peaceful’ life in which she can practise Buddhism. While she offers *dāna* at the Thames Buddhist Vihara three times a year, she stresses that she does not do so in order to make merit for herself:

When I prepare the *dāna* ...whatever the merit, its not for me I'm thinking of actually. I want to pass all the merits to my deceased parents and whoever in the family.

Ushma's disinterest in personal merit-making aligns her with many converts. However, it is noticeable that she does not reject the efficacy of kammatic rituals or the concept of merit-making as a whole. She affirms the efficacy of transferring merit. She also affirms the idea that giving to monks brings a particularly large amount of merit, stating that this is because of the number of rules observed by monks:

According to Buddhism when they are giving something...offering something...priests are on a higher level than ordinary people, because they have observed more precepts than us. Like, we...on a daily basis we observe five precepts. But on a *pōya* day...you know *pōya* is the full-moon day...we observe eight precepts or nine precepts. So if somebody gives *dāna* to a person...a layperson on that day...somebody who has observed eight precepts. Because [the recipient] he is much more higher than the person who is offering the *dāna*...so that is the basis that you get merit.

The acceptance of supernatural aspects of Buddhism observable here is evident throughout the interview. Ushma affirms a belief in certain miraculous aspects of the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition, such as miracles associated with the Buddha's tooth relic enshrined in Kandy. She also affirms the apotropaic power of *pirit*:

Ushma: *Pirit* is for your protection. If you have this [*pirit* thread] all the time...I mean for so many years I had a *pirit* thread in my hand [...] If you know the meaning of *pirit*, you have the protection. Because...sometimes before I go to bed I chant *pirit* for myself and for my children.

David: OK. And you feel it does have that protective effect?

Ushma: Yes.

Ushma also affirms the existence of gods, noting that they are attested to in Buddhist texts. In the past she regularly made offerings at *dēvālēs* when visiting Sri Lanka. However, more recently she has given up this practice after being convinced by the preaching of the well-known monk Venerable Gangodawila Soma that Buddhists should not engage in such practices. Ushma expresses a belief in the miracles of Sai Baba, stating that she was influenced to follow Sai by a Sri Lankan Tamil friend who was a strong Sai devotee. In the past she has attended Sai meetings, particularly when her sister was seriously ill. However,

when I note that Venerable Soma was also critical of Buddhists following Sai Baba, she expresses agreement with his argument that Buddhists should ultimately rely on themselves rather than on figures such as Sai.

If we compare Ushma's approach to Buddhism with that of Arjuna we can see that in some ways – particularly in her stronger devotion to meditation – her approach is closer to that of a typical British convert. Her disinterest in personal merit-making and her view that Buddhists should not attend *dēvālēs* also place her close to attitudes commonly found among converts. However, in other ways her views lie further away from those of many converts than do Arjuna's: she displays a firm belief in the power of apotropaic ritual; a faith in textual teachings about the existence of gods; and more generally a strong acceptance of supernatural dimensions of the Sri Lankan tradition.

The final example I want to consider here is my second-generation interviewee Ranjan. Ranjan was born and raised in Cambridgeshire. While he was growing up his family did not attend a Sri Lankan temple regularly, but occasionally visited the Amaravati monastery. The family would often perform lengthy *pūjās* towards a shrine in their home, led by Ranjan's grandmother (who lives with the family). Ranjan now lives in London. He rarely attends a Buddhist temple today, but considers himself to be a Buddhist. He regularly prays to an image of the Buddha in his home, and continues to participate in *pūjās* when he visits his parents. While a number of my second-generation interviewees express scepticism about supernatural aspects of Buddhism such as *kamma* and rebirth, Ranjan does not. In fact he states that such teachings are central to his worldview:

Kamma and rebirth is essential...synonymous with my way of life.

When I ask if this means that he always thinks about the consequence for his next life when acting, he states that he thinks more about the immediate consequences of actions:

I think about that [the next life], but on a more constant level I think about what I do now...if I do anything [bad] it will come back on me...in this life.

The acceptance Ranjan shows here of supernatural aspects of Buddhism is also evident elsewhere in the interview. He affirms a belief in the protective power of *pirit*, and states that he would be open to the truth of miracles in the Buddhist tradition. He also affirms a belief in the supernatural benefits of rituals such as *pūjā*, stating that he 'believes in' such rituals. When I ask what he means by this, he states:

Ranjan: I think...from my experience...the reason when I go and look at the Buddha and pray...its almost trying to...its almost in a way taking the easy way out and hoping an answer will come to me for what I need to do. Which is why I think most people would go and worship at any place of worship...

David: So if you've got a problem, you might go and hope that it would get resolved?

Ranjan: Exactly.

David: Are people thinking that the Buddha would help them?

Ranjan: Oh yeah, I'm pretty sure yeah...the incarnation of Buddha as it may be today...or the memory of the Buddha...like the memory of Jesus Christ.

A number of points can be drawn from this passage. Firstly, the passage highlights that Ranjan views *pūjās* in apotropaic terms – as means of finding solutions to problems in this life. Secondly, it is notable that Ranjan views the apotropaic benefits of *pūjā* as in some sense coming from the Buddha. The majority of Sri Lankans that I spoke with were clear that one is not asking the Buddha for assistance in a *pūjā*, but Ranjan clearly accepts that in *pūjā* he is praying to the Buddha. The third point of interest is Ranjan's mention of Jesus. While Ranjan's immediate family are Buddhist, they have strong links with Catholicism. Some of their extended family are Catholic and the family attended church fairly regularly while Ranjan was growing up. Ranjan expresses a strong belief in Jesus and in the Christian God. The *pūjās* that Ranjan participates in with his family are directed towards not only the Buddha, but also to Jesus, as well as to various Hindu gods (in whom Rajan also expresses faith). Images of all of these deities are included on the family shrine. When Ranjan speaks of *pūjā*, he does not distinguish between prayers directed to the Buddha and those directed to Hindu gods, to Jesus or to the Christian God. This differentiates him from the majority of Sri Lankans that I spoke to, who tended to make a clearer division between Buddhist and non-Buddhist forms of religiosity, and among whom (even if they engaged in some forms of Christian practice) an acknowledgment of faith in the Christian God was uncommon.

Ranjan is conscious that some aspects of his religiosity – particularly the fact that he prays to the Buddha for apotropaic help, and the fact that he also prays to Hindu gods and Jesus – may be seen by some as not according with Buddhist teachings. However, while he admits that this may be the case, he is largely unconcerned by this. When I ask if there is a

contradiction between being a Buddhist and worshipping Hindu and Christian divinities, he answers:

Well this is the thing, it hasn't actually worried me. And people have said to me 'Oh isn't that hypocritical?...Isn't that...?' And I've said well at the end of the day, you know, I acknowledge these other faiths and I try and be the best person I can, and not worry too much about the bureaucracy of one religion or the other. But...yeah when I do think about...I do think about it, and I think 'Oh yeah, my life is a...[inaudible] a bit of hypocrisy here'. But at the end of the day if I'm happy and I'm not hurting anyone I don't see the point to be honest, so it doesn't really bother me. I actually quite enjoy perplexing people, telling them 'Oh yeah, I'm a Buddhist but I actually go to the Hindu temple and the Catholic church'.

Ranjan thus differs to a significant degree from many convert Buddhists in terms of his approach to religiosity – in his strong acceptance of the supernatural; in his view that one can pray to the Buddha for help; and in his interest in praying to Hindu gods and to Jesus. There are, however, aspects of my interview with Ranjan which highlight attitudes closer to those found among converts. Ranjan notes that his understanding of Buddhism has changed to some extent in the last six years. Previously he had given more emphasis to engaging in rituals and praying for specific benefits. Now he places a stronger emphasis on moral aspects of Buddhism – not harming others, and following the Buddhist precepts. His change in attitudes has also affected how he views participating in rituals such as *pūjā*. Thus he states:

I still pray now, but in the sense that I more kind-of clear my thoughts...try and clear my thoughts, rather than pray for something.

Ranjan has not entirely given up praying for apotropaic benefits, but he now views his participation in rituals such as *pūjā* as primarily being 'an opportunity to really not think about anything else but myself...[to] reflect upon myself'. In addition, like many of my interviewees, he expresses some criticism of Buddhists who spend a lot of time practising rituals but do not live by Buddhist principles in their day-to-day lives. Ranjan's move to a more contemplative understanding of Buddhism has also involved taking an interest in meditation. Ranjan was encouraged to practise meditation by his mother, who has also changed in her approach to Buddhism in recent years, and who Ranjan describes as an important influence on his religious thinking. Ranjan generally practises meditation for

relatively short periods – around five minutes at a time – and has not attended meditation classes or retreats. However, he states that he has found meditation a beneficial practice.

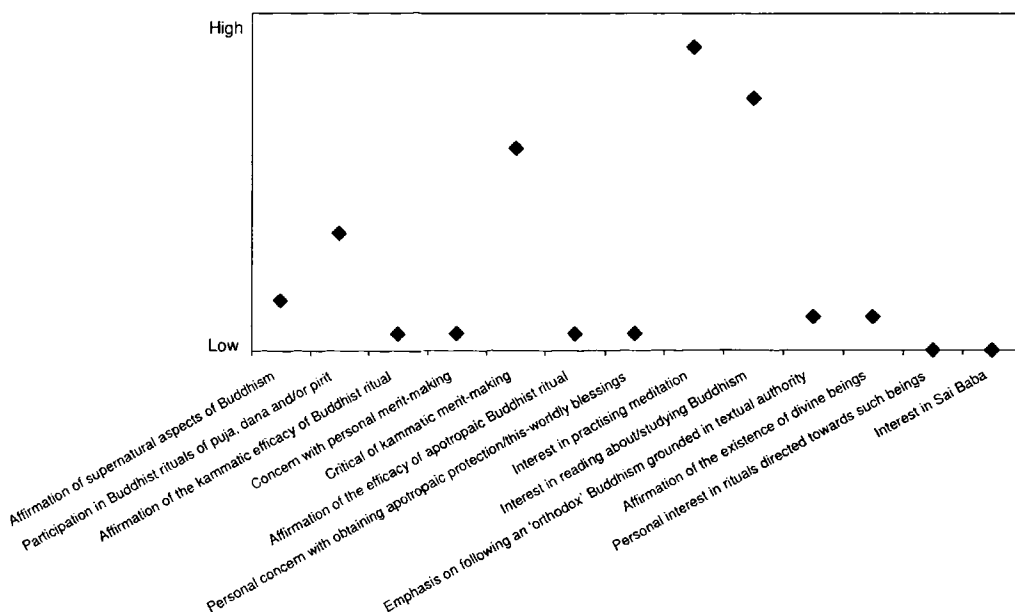
The change in Ranjan’s approach to Buddhism has not been a radical one, and his strong belief in the supernatural and interest in apotropaic ritual continue to put his religiosity somewhat at odds with that of many converts. However, Ranjan’s new-found interest in meditation, his increasing view of ritual as an opportunity for self-reflection and his critical attitude towards overly ritualistic approaches to Buddhism mean that his religiosity does not fit easily into the category of ‘traditional diaspora Buddhism’ as outlined in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model.

In Arjuna, Ushma and Ranjan, then, we have three individuals whose approaches to Buddhism do not fall into either of the categories outlined in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model, and who also differ from each other in significant ways. Ranjan differs from Arjuna in his greater affirmation of supernatural aspects of Buddhism. This affirmation of the supernatural is shared by Ushma. However, Ushma differs from Ranjan in her greater dedication to meditation and the path to *nibbāna*. She also differs in her rejection of the worship of Hindu gods, a rejection which reflects a general concern with Buddhist orthodoxy – on a number of occasions Ushma supports her views by appealing to the idea of an authentic Buddhist tradition, sometimes giving scriptural support – which Ranjan does not share. Arjuna, Ushma and Ranjan thus exemplify the benefits of analysing forms of Buddhism along a number of axes – it enables more complex and nuanced portrayals of the way in which different forms of Buddhist religiosity stand in relation to each other.

The above can be illustrated visually using graphs which plot the religiosity of Buddhist practitioners in relation to several dimensions. Figures 1 to 5 do this with respect to 13 aspects of religiosity: the degree to which individuals affirm supernatural aspects of Buddhism; the degree to which individuals participate in rituals of *pūjā*, *dāna* and/or *pirit* chanting; the degree to which individuals affirm the kammatic power of Buddhist ritual; the degree to which individuals emphasise personal merit-making; the degree to which individuals are critical of those who emphasise personal merit-making; the degree to which individuals affirm the efficacy of apotropaic Buddhist ritual; the degree to which individuals emphasise the importance of obtaining apotropaic protection and worldly blessings through Buddhist ritual; the level of interest that individuals have in meditation practice; the level of interest that individuals have in reading about and/or studying

Buddhism intellectually; the degree to which individuals emphasise the importance of following an ‘orthodox’ approach to Buddhism grounded in textual authority; the degree to which individuals affirm the existence of divine beings (‘gods’ or *devas*); the degree of involvement that individuals have in the worship of such divine beings; and the level of interest that individuals have in the religion of Sai Baba. Figures 1 and 2 represent the religiosity of the ‘ideal-type’ convert and diaspora Buddhist as described in the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model.¹ Figures 4, 5 and 6 represent respectively the religiosity of Arjuna, Ushma and Ranjan. These figures help to give a tangible representation of my qualitative research, highlighting clearly the differences between the religiosity of my three interviewees as well as the ways in which they differ from the ideal-type convert and diaspora practitioner.

Figure 1: Representation of the religiosity of ideal-type convert Buddhist



¹ I use the idea of an ‘ideal type’ here in a Weberian sense, to identify a model or notional individual who fully embodies the nature of convert or diaspora Buddhist as defined by the ‘Two Buddhisms’ model.

Figure 2: Representation of the religiosity of ideal-type diaspora Buddhist

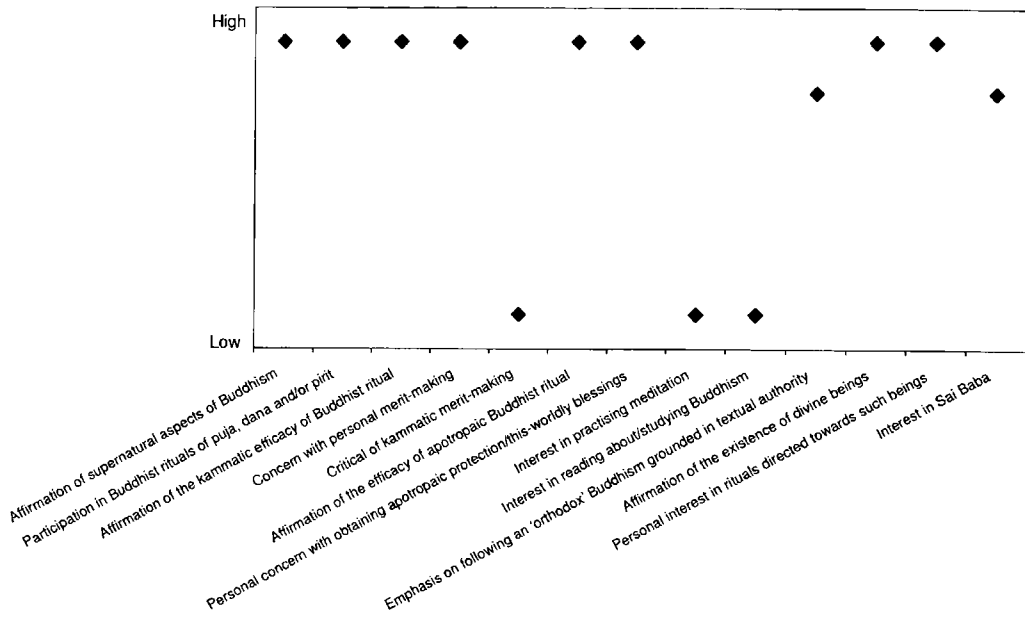


Figure 3: Representation of the religiosity of Arjuna

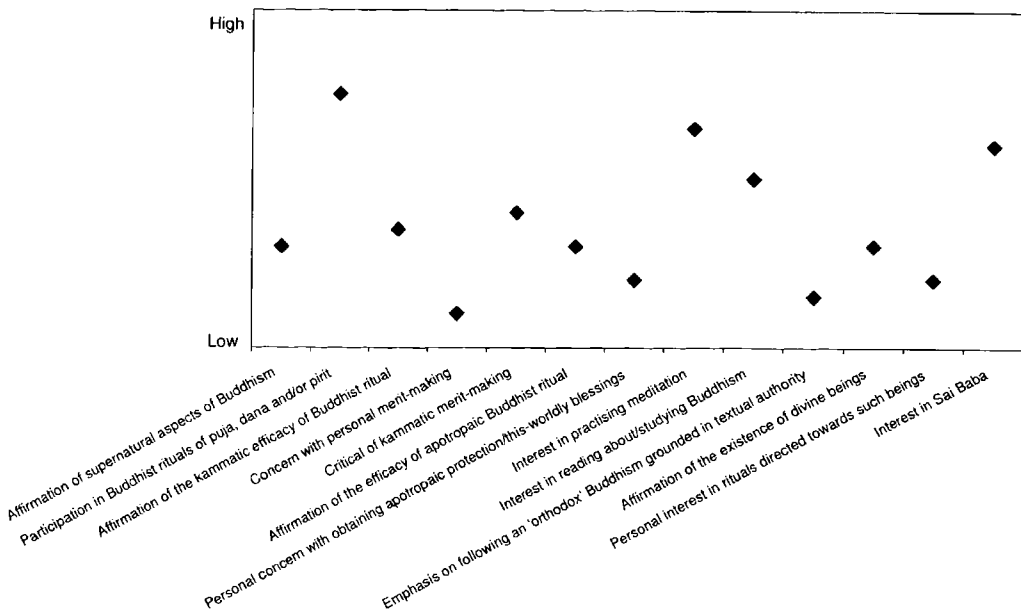


Figure 4: Representation of the religiosity of Ushma

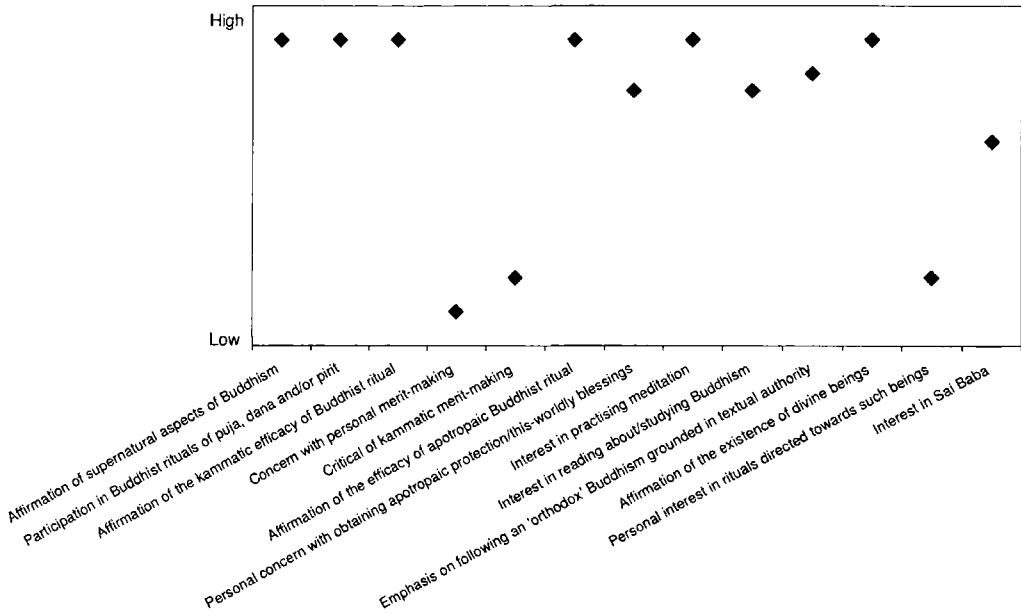
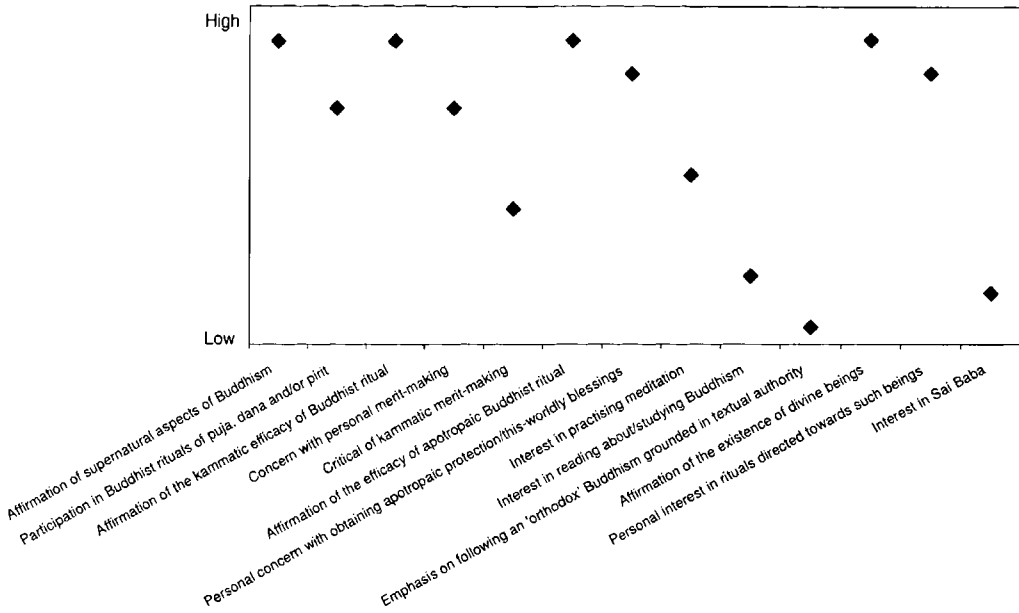


Figure 5: Representation of the religiosity of Ranjan



If illustrating the diversity of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK has been one key concern of this thesis, another has been exploring the applicability of dichotomies such as kammatic/nibbanic and kammic/nibbanic to the religiosity of Sri Lankan Buddhists. Here our focus draws away from mapping diversity along several axes, and towards the issue of how we can best understand religious difference along a particular axis. Our concern is with questions such as: how can we best conceptualise the relationship between the serious meditator and the participant in rituals such as *pūjā* and *dāna*? Are these individuals practising quite separate forms of religiosity, or are their different paths interconnected in some way? The ‘Two Buddhisms’ model reflects and reinforces binary forms of analysis such as the kammatic/nibbanic and kammic/nibbanic dichotomies, thereby suggesting a firm division between meditative and ritual-centred forms of Buddhism. It is for this reason that I have felt it necessary to explore the applicability of such dichotomies to the community that I studied.

Let us begin with Spiro’s kammatic/nibbanic division. Throughout this study I have argued against the drawing of a firm distinction between the kammatic generation of merit and the nibbanic cultivation of the mind. On an institutional level I have highlighted that seemingly kammatic practices at the LBV and the SSIBC – such as Buddha *pūjā* and Kaṭhina – are accompanied not only by discourses which emphasise merit, but also by discourses which interpret these rituals as opportunities for the development of the mind. On the individual level, I have shown that a range of approaches to rituals such as *pūjā* and *dāna* can be found among Sri Lankans in the UK, and that this range can be best understood not in terms of a simple dichotomy, but in terms of a spectrum, with approaches which give more emphasis to rituals as opportunities for contemplation and the cultivation of detachment and generosity at one end, and approaches which give more emphasis to the production of merit at the other. It is true that there are Sri Lankans who reject merit-making entirely. Such individuals either interpret rituals purely as opportunities to cultivate the mind or rarely participate in such rituals at all. These individuals can be seen as rejecting kammatic Buddhism in favour of a purely nibbanic approach. However, not all individuals who have a strong interest in nibbanic Buddhism reject merit-making. We can look, for example, to my interviewee Sumal whose views I discussed in chapter 5. While he views his approach to Buddhism as one which stresses the meditative path to *nibbāna*, and while he generally views rituals such as *pūjā* and *dāna* as opportunities to develop

generosity and non-attachment, Sumal also affirms the importance of making merit for one's future lives. Even within the Nissarana group, with its strongly nibbanic focus, kammatic merit-making is not dismissed entirely. Rather it is approaches which he regards as focusing too exclusively on merit that are the object of Venerable Seelagawesi's criticisms. If we move to the other end of the spectrum, I did not encounter any individuals in the Sri Lankan community who envisaged their participation in rituals or their religiosity as a whole purely in terms of the kammatic production of merit and did not give any importance to the cultivation of the mind. We can exemplify this by looking to my interviewee Darika, who I placed furthest to the 'kammatic' end of the spectrum when discussing approaches to *pūjā* at the LBV. While Darika stresses the accumulation of merit and to some extent distances herself from those who practise meditation, her religiosity cannot be seen as wholly 'kammatic': she emphasises the importance of one's state of mind while participating in rituals; she stresses the need to cultivate non-attachment in this life (even if one is unable to meditate regularly); and she states that in making merit she hopes to be reborn in a life in which she can dedicate herself to meditation, thus creating a narrative which links her present kammatic religiosity to the nibbanic path. Thus if we can find some within the Sri Lankan community who dismiss the kammatic and focus only on the nibbanic, we cannot find the opposite. Rather, outside those who reject merit-making entirely we find a range of approaches, none of which can be described as wholly nibbanic or wholly kammatic.

It should be noted, however, that during my research I did on occasion come across discourses among Sri Lankans which seemed, on first appearances, to challenge my arguments above by suggesting a firm distinction between the kammatic and the nibbanic. In chapter 5 I discussed a talk given by Matheesha Gunatilake at the LBV in which he distinguished *āmisā pūjā* – the practice of making offerings to the Buddha and the *Sangha* – from *paṭipatti pūjā* – putting into practice what the Buddha taught. In chapter 8 I noted the distinction made by my interviewee Bhatiya between *puñña kamma* – acts performed in order to generate merit – and *kusala kamma* – acts performed in order to purify the mind and move one towards *nibbāna*. In addition, in chapter 9 I highlighted the division made by Venerable Seelagawesi between 'popular practice' – based on the accumulation of merit – and 'real practice' – based on the purification of the mind. Here, then, we have three instances in which a clear division is made between two quite distinct approaches to

Buddhism – one centred on meritorious ritual acts, and another dedicated to nibbanic mental purification. From a scholarly perspective the *puñña/kusala* division made by Bhatiya is particularly interesting. The meaning of these two Pali terms and their relationship to each other has been the source of much scholarly debate.² Such debate centres on whether these terms refer to two aspects of a single type of positive action (*kusala* referring to the nature of the action, and *puñña* to the kammic merit that it generates),³ or to two different kinds of positive action (*kusala* to those which move one towards *nibbāna* and *puñña* to those which bring one merit).⁴ Bhatiya’s understanding clearly accords with the latter interpretation, and thus seems at first appearance to suggest a strong division between kammatic (*puñña*) and nibbanic (*kusala*) acts. However, as my discussion in chapter 8 illustrates, when I explore Bhatiya’s views in greater depth this idea of a firm division between the kammatic and the nibbanic is problematised. While in theory Bhatiya views *kusala* and *puñña* acts as separate, he admits that in practice they tend to be blended and that it is impossible to say that an act is wholly *kusala* or wholly *puñña*. Rather, he suggests that all forms of positive Buddhist action are both *puñña* and *kusala*, and that acts vary only in the degree to which each of these aspects is emphasised. Thus Bhatiya’s views in fact support my claim that in practice it is problematic to make a firm division between kammatic and nibbanic approaches to Buddhism.

The other dichotomies mentioned above also prove less indicative of a kammatic/nibbanic division than they first appear when explored in depth. While Seelagawesi suggests an absolute division between merit-based ‘popular’ Buddhism and ‘real’ Buddhism, my research shows that the Nissarana group does not reject merit-making entirely and that aspects of mainstream Buddhism which Seelagawesi would classify as ‘popular’ – such as the performance of Buddha *pūjā* – cannot be accurately understood as being purely concerned with merit-making. Seelagawesi’s popular/real dichotomy must be understood as a rhetorical device – linked to his general encouragement to people to focus more on nibbanic practice and less on merit-making – rather than an attempt to accurately

² For examples of scholarly works that discuss these terms see Premasiri (1976), Keown (2001), Cousins (1996), Gombrich (1996), Egge (2002), and Adam (2005). Discussions of these terms and their meanings are not limited to Western scholarship. I came across discussions of the terms in material produced by the LBV (Kariyakarawana 2003) and the SSIBC (Mahinda 2005), and in an on-line article by Venerable Kiribathgoda Gnanananda, a well-known Sri Lankan monk with a strong following in the UK (no date b). Here also we can find some debate about the terms.

³ This interpretation of *kusala* and *puñña* is expressed by Keown (2001) and Gombrich (1996).

⁴ This interpretation of *kusala* and *puñña* is expressed by Premasiri (1976) and Cousins (1996).

describe approaches to Buddhism in the Sri Lankan community. Dr Gunatilake's division can be viewed similarly. Thus while the dichotomies made by Bhatiya, Seelagawesi and Gunatilake are significant – in that they highlight that discourses which contrast merit-making and mental purification can be found within the Sri Lankan community, and that the question of how much one should focus on each is a matter of debate within the community – they cannot be taken to indicate the existence of two entirely separate approaches to Buddhism among Sri Lankans. Kammatic and nibbanic remain useful concepts in that they refer to different dimensions of Buddhism which are recognisable to Sri Lankan practitioners, but they are not useful if taken to refer to separate systems of religious practice.

There is even less justification for the use of King's kammic/nibbanic division among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK. While Spiro makes a division between kammatic acts aimed at making merit and nibbanic acts aimed at the purification of the mind, King's division is between mundane (kammic) acts of mental development and (nibbanic) acts which move one towards *nibbāna*. Were such a division to exist among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the UK we would expect to find no reference to *nibbāna* in seemingly kammic aspects of religiosity, such as the weekly Buddha *pūjā* at the LBV, or the Kaṭhina ceremonies at the LBV and SSIBC. However, as discussed in chapters 6 and 8 we in fact find strong references to *nibbāna* in these rituals. Such rituals are surrounded not by discourses which emphasise the development of the mind, but also by discourses which link this mental development to the attainment of *nibbāna* (whether in this life or in future lives). From the other end of the spectrum, were there a firm kammic/nibbanic division within the Sri Lankan community in the UK we would expect the strongly nibbanic Nissarana group to take little interest in the mundane cultivation of the mind – the development of qualities such as compassion, love, generosity, and so on. However, as discussed in chapter 9, the Nissarana group strongly emphasises the development of such mental qualities and views this development as firmly connected to the nibbanic path. The only place during my research in which I came across views suggestive of a kammic/nibbanic division was within the Sathdhamma group, discussed briefly in chapter 9. This highly unorthodox group rejects all forms of mental cultivation as having no connection with the attainment of *nibbāna*. Thus while moral observance and rituals of *dāna* and *pūjā* are regarded within the group as developing positive qualities of the mind,

these qualities are regarded as unconnected to the ultimate goal. Even meditation is rejected, since it is seen as producing only mundane mental cultivation. *Nibbāna*, according to the group, is attained through insight into the transient nature of the self, which cannot be achieved through cultivating the mind. While the understanding of Buddhism within the Sathdhamma group differs from King's in key ways – for King *nibbāna* is achieved through meditation, and King views the nibbanic path as that of the world-renouncing monk, while the Sathdhamma group is entirely lay – its sense of mundane mental cultivation and the path to *nibbāna* being entirely separate accords with King's kammic/nibbanic division. However, the applicability of the kammic/nibbanic dichotomy to the teachings of the Sathdhamma group only serves to illustrate the difficulties with applying the dichotomy outside this group. The Sathdhamma group is distinctive precisely because it rejects the connection between the cultivation of positive mental states and the eventual attainment of *nibbāna* which is generally affirmed within expressions of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK.

Highlighting the difficulties with applying the kammic/nibbanic and kammic/nibbanic dichotomies to Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK helps us to move beyond the firm binary oppositions of the 'Two Buddhisms' model and towards more nuanced understandings of religious difference. There are clearly significant differences within the Sri Lankan community (and within British Buddhism generally) regarding the degree to which people prioritise meditation and the nibbanic path or ritualised merit-making, and it is significant that one can find discourses within the community which label these differences in binary terms. However, it is also clear that such binaries are often of limited use in helping scholars to obtain accurate understanding of religious differences – such differences reflect subtle variations of emphasis rather than firmly separate systems of religiosity.

While the central focus of this study has been issues of religious understanding and practice, another theme – explored particularly in chapter 8 – has been issues of identity and cultural preservation in the Sri Lankan diaspora. Here again I have tried to highlight the diversity and complexity in the community and thus to move beyond understandings which posit a simplistic relationship between diaspora Buddhism and cultural preservation. I have shown that Sri Lankan institutions in the UK vary in terms of the degree to which they play

the role of Sinhalese cultural centres. I have also shown that we can find diverse attitudes among the patrons of particular institutions concerning the approach that the community should take to issues of cultural preservation and the role that temples should play in this. This in chapter 8 I highlighted a division between those at the LBV who stress the importance of the preservation of Sinhalese culture and identity in the diaspora and thus emphasise the cultural role of temples, and those and the Vihara who favour a more integrationist approach to settling in the UK and are critical of what they see as the inward-looking nature of an increasingly ghettoised Sinhalese community. However, like so much in this thesis, views about issues of cultural identity at the LBV – and in the Sri Lankan community generally – can best be understood in terms of a continuum rather than in terms of a set of binary oppositions. The majority of my interviewees fell somewhere between the two positions outlined above when it came to questions of cultural preservation and identity, neither favouring a strongly integrationist approach nor emphasising the need to preserve Sinhalese culture in the diaspora to a strong degree. Others questioned the importance of any form of cultural identification. For example, when I ask my second-generation interviewee Laksiri how he would define his identity, he initially gives himself the label of ‘British Asian’. However, he stresses that this reflected not how he saw himself but how others would identify him. When I asked how he viewed himself, he answers:

It doesn't really sit in any...again its just this thing of labelling...it's not....Obviously the more you go into meditation and, like, presence...that labelling sort-of falls away. The more you find out about that labelling falling away, the less you label.

It is perhaps significant that Laksiri tends to practise predominantly at convert Buddhist institutions, since the idea of moving away from any form of identity is often a key theme within convert Buddhism. Indeed, this was one of the central themes of a talk given by Ajahn Sumedho at the Amaravati monastery which I attended during my fieldwork with a group of Sri Lankan friends.⁵ Cadge observes that some convert Buddhists reject even the label of ‘Buddhist’ (2005:168), and Laksiri expresses a similar attitude when I ask him what he sees as the key to Buddhism:

Probably...it not being Buddhism is one important thing...

⁵ Fieldwork notes 12/08/2007

By this he means that it is important to him that one is not caught up in label of 'Buddhism'. While such disavowals of the importance of religious or cultural identity are certainly a common feature of convert Buddhism, it should be noted that they are not found only among those that practise at convert institutions. Similar ideas were often expressed within the Nissarana group. For example, during one visit to the group Venerable Seelagawesi told me that what was important in his practice was overcoming suffering, not the label of 'Buddhism'.⁶

Ideas about identity, cultural preservation and the relationship of these to Buddhism are thus contested within the Sri Lankan community. Within the 'Two Buddhisms' model there is a tendency towards simplistic ideas about the relationship between Buddhism and diasporic identity, illustrated by Baumann's suggestion that diaspora Buddhists 'practice their religion primarily in order to preserve and maintain their cultural identity and heritage' (1995:64). My analysis, following Cadge's work on Thai Buddhism in the USA, moves us beyond such simplicities towards a richer understanding of the multiple ideas about religion, identity and culture found among diaspora Buddhists.

10.1 Concluding observations on diaspora and change: potential directions in the future study of diaspora Buddhism

This thesis represents the first full-length study dedicated to the analysis of a diaspora Buddhist community in the UK.⁷ As such I hope that future studies will move beyond my work to produce richer and more complex pictures both of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the UK and of diaspora Buddhism more generally. As my arguments at the beginning of this chapter illustrate, it is through not only building on previous studies, but also identifying and overcoming their weaknesses, that we move towards more nuanced and accurate forms of academic understanding.

One way in which future studies may fruitfully build on my work is through a greater exploration of the issue of religious change among diaspora Buddhists. While many studies of diaspora religion make the issue of change their central focus, I have not focused in depth on this issue. This is because my primary concern has been to produce better

⁶ Fieldwork notes 22/07/2007

⁷ As discussed in chapter 2, Law has written a short study of Vietnamese religion (including Buddhism and Christianity) in the UK (1991). Fernando's MPhil thesis on Sinhalese religion in London (2005) similarly focuses on both Christian and Buddhist migrants.

understandings of the nature of diaspora Buddhism and how it stands in the landscape of Buddhism in the West, rather than to look at how Sri Lankan religiosity in the UK differs from its expressions in Sri Lanka, and because I am aware of the problems that can arise from an over-eagerness to identify diaspora communities as sites of profound change.⁸ Religious change is a complex area and any study that wants to deal with the issue fully needs to make this its central focus. However, while I did not focus on the issue of change, the subject inevitably arose on a number of occasions during my research. It is perhaps useful to end this study by looking briefly at some of the questions about change that my study raises for future research.

The relatively strong level of interest in meditative Buddhism that I found among Sri Lankans often led me to question whether we can find a greater level of interest in such forms of Buddhism among Sinhalese Buddhists in the diaspora than one finds in Sri Lanka. Such a development would not be surprising. Vertovec (2000) highlights that common trends among diaspora communities include a heightened self-awareness about and tendency to reflect upon one's religious tradition, often leading to a movement away from 'popular' or 'local' forms of religiosity and towards 'official' or 'orthodox' forms. What 'orthodox' means in Theravada Buddhist terms is of course contested, but in the modern era we see an increasing tendency to identify 'true' Buddhism with meditation. It can be argued that the likelihood of diaspora Buddhists in the West moving in the direction of meditative Buddhism is further heightened by the presence in the West of a sizeable convert community who favour such forms of religiosity. During my research I encountered some evidence suggestive of developments of this kind. Many Sri Lankans that I spoke with who practised meditation had developed this interest in meditative Buddhism since coming to the UK. Illustrating this, 12 of my first-generation interviewees had a strong interest in meditation practice, and 7 of these stated they had taken up meditation seriously since leaving Sri Lanka. On occasion those that I spoke with explicitly linked the change in their religiosity to being in the diaspora. For example, as discussed in chapter 7, my interviewee Anika attributes her change from a ritual-centred approach to Buddhism to one centred more on meditation and studying philosophy to being in the UK,

⁸ For example, Numrich (1996:140-144) argues that a process of 'Americanisation' has taken place within diaspora Theravada temples in the USA, exemplified by moves towards 'Protestantization' and 'laicization'. However, both of these processes have been observed to be features of religious change within Sri Lanka itself since the nineteenth century, and Numrich shows little evidence that such developments have been furthered in a profound way in the diaspora.

and more particularly to coming to the LBV. Similarly, during a conversation fieldwork with Sanath, a regular at the LBV's meditation classes, he told me that he had little real knowledge of Buddhism before coming to the UK and was motivated to find out more when he took a teaching job and one of his British pupils began asking him questions about Buddhism which he was unable to answer. Through his investigations he came to embrace a meditation-centred approach to Buddhism. Here we have a clear example of being in the diaspora producing self-consciousness and reflective thought about religion, resulting in a change in religious orientation. These examples, then, do seem to point towards real movements in the direction of meditative Buddhism as a result of the diasporic experience. However, we need to be cautious about the conclusions that we draw here. The examples above could lead us to speak of radical diasporic change, with a 'traditional Sri Lankan' approach being abandoned in favour of a 'modernist Western' approach. However, to argue in this way would be to reintroduce the kinds of problematic binaries that this thesis has argued against.

In reality modernist, meditation-oriented Buddhism is extremely common in Sri Lanka. While some Sri Lankans have adopted such an approach to Buddhism since coming to the UK, others – such as my interviewees Udara, Sumal, and Mohan – already had an interest in this form of Buddhism before they left Sri Lanka. Even among those who have embraced meditation in the diaspora, we cannot assume in every case that they would not have gone on to take an interest in meditation had they stayed in Sri Lanka. Taking a strong interest in Buddhist practice is often viewed by Sri Lankans as something primarily of interest in older people,⁹ and thus for many who have embraced meditation in the UK this may be more a question of age than of the effects of living in the diaspora. This is how my interviewee Harshini views her own move towards embracing meditative Buddhism. She notes that the change in her religiosity came about not immediately after she came to the UK in the 1970s, but only in the last few years, and she attributes the change not to being in the diaspora but to growing older and more mature. When I ask whether she thinks she would have embraced meditation had she stayed in Sri Lanka, she states that she may have done, noting that meditation is now very popular in Sri Lanka, and that her own sister (who still lives in Sri Lanka) goes to meditation classes regularly.

⁹ Gombrich observes that the majority of those that observe *sil* in rural Sri Lankan temples are elderly (1971:274). Deegalle notes that older radio listeners in Sri Lanka have been shown to be significantly more likely than younger listeners to take an interest in Buddhist-themed programming (2006:166).

We can also question the idea that embracing a meditative form of Buddhism necessarily means embracing a 'Western' form of Buddhism. We have seen throughout this thesis that many Sri Lankans who share the convert interest in meditation differ in other ways from attitudes commonly found among converts. A Sri Lankan who moves away from kammatic ritual and towards a nibbanic approach to Buddhism in the diaspora may choose to practise within a convert tradition, but equally he or she may choose a group such as Nissarana or Sathdhamma, which differs from convert Buddhism in significant ways. Even when individuals take an interest in convert Buddhist teachers, the idea that this represents the embracing of a fundamentally 'Western' form of Buddhism and a uniquely diasporic development is problematised by the fact that many Western convert monks – including the ubiquitous Ajahn Brahmavamso – are extremely popular in Sri Lanka.

I am not denying here that we can see some movement towards meditative Buddhism among Sri Lankans in the UK – the examples above suggest that this is the case at least to a degree. What is at question is how we conceptualise such changes. To see such developments as radical changes towards 'Westernisation' in the diaspora would be problematic. Rather such changes should be seen in terms of, to borrow a phrase from Martin Sokefeld, a 'cultural continuum of ongoing change in both home country and diaspora' (2004:151). Changes that are taking place represent not radical departures from an unchanging 'traditional' Sri Lankan Buddhism, but developments of trends already found in a dynamic and ever-evolving Sri Lankan tradition.

Another form of change that can be studied in the diaspora is generational change – how those born in the diaspora differ from the first generation in their attitudes and practices. Here my study offers more compelling evidence of change. In chapters 5 and 9 I noted that my second-generation interviewees are more likely than their first-generation counterparts to question the teaching of rebirth and to reject the worship of divine beings. These patterns are certainly interesting but once again caution is advisable. Not all second-generation Sri Lankans demonstrate these attitudes – as my interview with Ranjan, discussed above, illustrates – and again it needs to be stressed that such attitudes represent not a radical diasporic departure, but a development of trends that can be found to some extent in Sri Lanka.

This brief discussion of religious change in the Sri Lankan diaspora perhaps raises more questions than it answers. It is my hope that these questions will be a fruitful area for future research.

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Appendix 1: Description of interviews

In this appendix I provide a discussion of my interviews. My interview questions are listed in appendices 2 and 3. Appendix 4 gives a full list of my standard interviews, together with demographic information on my interviewees. Appendix 5 lists the additional interviews that I conducted.

For my standard interviews I used two sets of questions: one for first-generation Sri Lankans and one for second-generation interviewees. Second-generation interviewees were defined as those who were either born in the UK (or elsewhere outside Sri Lanka) or came to the UK early in their childhood. While the two sets of questions have much in common, they inevitably differ in several areas (for example, the section on attitudes to arriving in the UK is omitted for second-generation interviewees). As discussed in chapter 1, my interviews changed to some extent as my research progressed. I retained the same basic list of questions, but gave more emphasis to some issues and less to others which were no longer a significant area of focus in my research (such as political attitudes).

My interviews were semi-structured in nature. The interviews did not always follow my list of questions exactly. I tried to make the interview process open, giving the interviewees as much space as possible to express their views. With especially open questions I included sub-questions or further issues that it might be useful to explore in square brackets after the questions. Perhaps the most significant section of the interviews was that which focused on the personal religious understanding and practice of the interviewee. I tried to keep the discussion here particularly open, allowing the interviewee to explain how they viewed and practised Buddhism in their own terms, and then exploring specific issues within this. My interview questions cover this area with 5 questions (3.1 to 3.5 in my first-generation interviews; 3.2 to 3.6 in my second-generation interviews), but these provided only a basic guide. I aimed first to gain a basic picture of how my interviewee understood and practised Buddhism. I then examined particular issues in more detail, asking my interviewee whether they participated in particular practices, and for each practice exploring how my interviewee understood the practice and their reasons for engaging or not engaging in the practice. Finally, I raised a number of particular issues of belief and practice which may or may not have been raised already in the discussion.

I have provided the following demographic information about my interviewees: age; place of birth; gender; marital status; first language (along with details of fluency in Sinhala for English-speaking second-generation interviewees); occupation; family background; education; time of arrival in the UK; and primary Buddhist institution(s) attended. My interviews were

conducted anonymously, so I have not to given information which can easily identify individuals. Thus I have given ages and dates of arrival in the UK in 10-year bands rather than exact figures. As discussed in chapter 1, the question of the family background of my interviewees was complex. I asked each first-generation interviewee about the family background that they came from in Sri Lanka, and have defined these backgrounds as fully as possible. I asked my second-generation interviewees to identify their parents' family background in Sri Lanka, and to give their parents' occupations. Under 'education' I have indicated whether the interviewee has studied at, or is currently studying at, university (and, for first generation interviewees, in which country they undertook these studies). For those interviewees that have not attended university, I have given an indication of the nature of their school education and any other education they have undertaken.

As discussed in chapter 1, in addition to my full interviews I conducted a number of other interviews with monastics, lay people with a significant knowledge of the Sri Lankan community, and individuals with whom I wished to investigate particular issues. A list of these interviews is supplied in appendix 5. A standard set of questions was not used in these interviews. Rather, each interview differed depending of the issues that I was interested in exploring.

Appendix 2: Interview questions for first-generation interviewees

1. Background

- 1.1 Age
- 1.2 Place of birth
- 1.3 Family background
[working-class? middle-class? upper-class?]
- 1.4 Education.
[level of education]
- 1.5 Marital status
- 1.6 How was Buddhism practised in your family while you were growing up?

2. Arrival in UK

- 2.1 When did you come to the UK?
[Reasons for coming?]
- 2.2 What were your initial impressions of the UK?
[Have these impressions changed over time?]
- 2.3 Have you experienced any racial prejudice since coming to the UK?
- 2.4 Do you feel a part of British society?
- 2.5 How did you come to be involved with the temple that you attend?
[Why did you choose this temple? Do you go to other Buddhist temples or organisations? Are there any differences between the different Sri Lankan temples in London?]
- 2.6 What is your level of involvement with the temple?
[how often do you attend? For what reasons? Are you involved in the organisation of the temple?]

3. Religious Belief and Practice.

- 3.1 What do you see as the most important aspect(s) of Buddhism?
- 3.2 Describe your practice of Buddhism.
[How do you practise in the temple? at home? elsewhere?]
- 3.3 Which of the following Buddhist practices do you take part in?:
[Performing chanting/saying *gāthas*
Attending *pōya* day celebrations
Giving *dāna*
Pirit chanting ceremonies
Buddha *Pūjā*
Bodhi Pūjā
Meditation; Meditation retreats
Reading about Buddhism
Listening to Buddhist sermons
Wearing amulets
Attending Buddhist festivals
Any other practices that you engage in?]
- 3.4 Do you engage in any other religious practices:
[Visiting *dēvālēs*/Hindu temples
Astrology

Practices relating to Sai Baba
Other practices?]

3.5 Views on specific religious issues:

a. Transferring merit.

[Is transferring merit possible? How does this process work?]

b. *Pirit* ceremonies.

[Does *pirit* chanting and *pirit* string bring protection? How does this work?]

c. *Dēvālēs*.

[Can one attain worldly rewards from visiting *dēvālēs*? How does the process work?

What do you think of the view expressed by some in Sri Lanka that Buddhists should not go to *dēvālēs*?]

d. Buddha's miraculous visits to Sri Lanka / miracles that are said to have occurred during the Sri Lankan tsunami in 2004.

[Do you believe in these miraculous events? Is it important to believe in such events to be a Buddhist?]

3.6 Have you had much contact with British converts to Buddhism?

[How does the way they practise Buddhism compare with how Buddhism is practised by Sri Lankans? Have you ever visited Amaravati? Other convert Buddhist centres?]

3.7 Has the way in which you understand and practise Buddhism changed while you have been in the UK?

[How? What do you think are the reasons for these changes?]

3.8 How do your children practise Buddhism?

3.9 Are relationships between the laity and the monks different in the UK when compared with Sri Lanka?

3.10 Some Sri Lankan Buddhists in London are organising protests against companies who have used the Buddha image in certain 'inappropriate' ways. What is your view of these protests?

[Have you taken part in these protests? Would you do so in the future?]

3.11 Are there differences between the ways in which men and women practise Buddhism in the Sri Lankan community?

[What are the reasons for these differences?]

4. Lifestyle

4.1 Would you say that your lifestyle is more 'British' or 'Sri Lankan' on the whole?

4.2 Do you socialise mainly with other Sinhalese Buddhists or with members of other communities?

[Which other communities?]

4.3 Do you take part in any Sri Lankan community activities?

[Which activities?]

4.4 Cultural consumption:

Do you read Sri Lankan newspapers?

Do you watch Sri Lankan TV and Films?

Do you visit any websites relating to Sri Lanka?

4.5 Raising of children:

Do you speak Sinhala or English at home with your children?

Is it important to you that your children know about Buddhism?

Is it important to you that your children know about Sinhalese culture?

Is it important to you that they identify as Sinhalese?

Is it important to you that they marry a Sinhalese Buddhist?

4.6 Do you know many Tamil or Muslim Sri Lankans in the UK?

On the whole are there close relations between these two communities?

4.7 Are there differences between different generations of Sinhalese immigrants regarding the approach that they take to questions of cultural identity and maintaining their culture in the UK?

5. Links with Sri Lanka

- 5.1 Do you have strong links with Sri Lanka today?
- 5.2 How often do you visit Sri Lanka?
- 5.3 Would you ever consider returning to Sri Lanka permanently?
- 5.4 Do you take an interest in Sri Lankan politics and current affairs?

6. Sri Lankan Politics

- 6.1 Do you support a particular political party in Sri Lanka?
- 6.2 What are your views on the current peace process in Sri Lanka?
- 6.3 What are your views of the teachings of Venerable Gangodawila Soma?
Was Soma right to express concern over unethical conversions by Christian groups in Sri Lanka?
- 6.4 What is your view of the monks of the Jathika Hela Urumaya?
Should monks be involved with parliamentary politics?
Is there a need for a party that looks after Sinhalese Buddhist interests?
- 6.5 Are you involved with any Sri Lankan political organisations in the UK?
Have you taken part in any protests or campaigns in the UK relating to the political situation in Sri Lanka?

7. Identity

- 7.1 How would you describe your identity?
[Sri Lankan? Sinhalese? Buddhist? Sinhala-Buddhist? British?]
Has your sense of identity changed while you have been in the UK?
- 7.2 Where do you think of as 'home'?
[Sri Lanka? UK? London?]
- 7.3 Is Buddhism an important part of your identity?
[Does coming to the temple play an important role in helping you maintain a sense of Sinhalese and Buddhist identity?]
- 7.4 The UK media often refers to an 'Asian' community in the UK. (i.e. a community of all of those of South Asian origin). Do you feel part of an Asian community?
- 7.5 How do your children define their identity?

Appendix 3: Interview questions for second-generation interviewees

1. Background

1.1 Age

1.2 Place of birth

1.3 Family background of parents in Sri Lanka
[working-class? middle-class? upper-class?]

1.4 Parents' occupations

1.5 Childhood.

Where did you grow up?

Were there many other Sri Lankans living in the area at that time?

Did your family socialise a lot with Sri Lankan friends and/or relatives when you were growing up?

Was it important to your parents that you grew up knowing about Buddhism and Sinhalese culture?

Did you/do you speak Sinhala or English at home with your parents?

Did you attend Sunday school at a Buddhist temple while you were growing up?

Aside from this, did you attend the temple regularly?

1.6 School and friends.

What was the ethnic and religious make-up of your schools?

Were there many Sri Lankan pupils at these schools?

Were your friends when you were growing up predominantly Sri Lankan Buddhists or from other ethnic and religious backgrounds?

1.7 Education/career.

Did you/do you go to university?

At University did you socialise predominantly with people from particular ethnic/religious backgrounds?

Did you join any university societies which reflected your ethnic or religious background?

[Sri Lankan/Sinhalese/Buddhist/ South Asian/Asian Society]

What is your occupation/intended occupation?

1.8 Did you experience racial prejudice while you were growing up?

Have you experienced racial prejudice more recently?

2. Lifestyle

2.1 Would you say that your lifestyle is more 'British' or 'Sri Lankan' on the whole?

2.2 Do you socialise mainly with other Sinhalese Buddhists or with members of other communities?

[Which communities?]

2.3 Do you take part in any Sri Lankan community activities?

[Which activities?]

2.4 Do you go to a Buddhist temple regularly?

Do you ever go to other temples?

2.5 Cultural consumption:

Do you read Sri Lankan newspapers?

Do you watch Sri Lankan TV and Films?

Do you visit any websites relating to Sri Lanka?

2.6 Marriage/relationships.

Are you married?

If yes: Does your spouse come from a Sinhalese and/or Buddhist background?

Did your parents expect you to marry someone from this background?

Was your marriage arranged/introduced?

If no: Do you expect to marry someone from a Sinhalese and/or Buddhist background?

Do your parents expect you to marry someone from this background?

How would they react if you married someone from a different background?

Do you expect to have an arranged/introduced marriage?

2.7 Do you have children?

If/when you have children will you teach them about Buddhism and Sinhalese culture?

Will you take them to Sunday school at a Buddhist temple?

Will you take them to visit Sri Lanka regularly?

2.8 Do you come into much contact with people of a similar age to yourself who were born and raised in Sri Lanka?

[Do you feel that you have a lot in common with such people or do you feel very different to them?]

2.9 Do you know any non-Sinhalese Sri Lankans in the UK?

3. Religious Belief and Practice.

3.1 Do you consider yourself to be a Buddhist?

3.2 What do you see as the most important aspect(s) of Buddhism?

3.3 Describe your practice of Buddhism.

[how do you practise in the temple? at home? elsewhere?]

3.4 Which of the following Buddhist practices do you take part in?:

[Performing chanting/saying *gāthas*

Attending *pōya* day celebrations

Giving *dāna*

Pirit chanting ceremonies

Buddha *Pūjā*

Bodhi Pūjā

Meditation; Meditation retreats

Reading about Buddhism

Listening to Buddhist sermons

Wearing amulets

Attending Buddhist festivals

Any other practices that you engage in?]

3.5 Do you engage in any other religious practices?

[Visiting *dēvālēs*/Hindu temples

Astrology

Practices relating to Sai Baba

Other practices?]

3.6 Views on specific religious issues:

a. Transferring merit.

[Is transferring merit possible? How does this process work?]

b. *Pirit* ceremonies.

[Does *pirit* chanting and *pirit* string bring protection? How does this work?]

c. *Dēvālēs*.

[Can one attain worldly rewards from visiting *dēvālēs*? How does the process work? What do you think of the view expressed by some in Sri Lanka that Buddhists should not go to *dēvālēs*?]

d. Buddha's visits to Sri Lanka / miracles that are said to have occurred during the Sri Lankan tsunami in 2004.

[Do you believe in these miraculous events? Is it important to believe in such events to be a Buddhist?]

3.7 Is the way that you understand and practise Buddhism different to that of your parents?

[If yes, how?]

3.8 Have you had much contact with British converts to Buddhism?

[How does the way they practise Buddhism compare with how Buddhism is practised by Sri Lankans? Have you ever visited Amaravati? Other convert Buddhist centres?]

3.9 Do you know the resident monks at the temple well?

[Have you ever gone to these monks for advice? Do you bow to monks when you visit the temple?]

3.10 Some Sri Lankan Buddhists in London are organising protests against companies who have used the Buddha image in certain 'inappropriate' ways. What is your view of these protests?

[Have you taken part in these protests?/Would you do so in the future?]

3.11 Are there differences between the ways in which men and women practise Buddhism in the Sri Lankan community in the UK?

[What are the reasons for these differences?]

3.12 Have you ever been involved with any religion other than Buddhism?

4. Links with Sri Lanka

4.1 Did you visit Sri Lanka often while you were growing up?

Did you enjoy the experience?

Did you feel at home in Sri Lanka?

4.2 Do you visit Sri Lanka often now?

Who do you go with?

What do you do?

4.3 Do you think that you will continue to visit Sri Lanka regularly/begin visiting Sri Lanka in the future?

4.4 Religion in Sri Lanka:

Do you engage in any religious practices when you visit Sri Lanka?

Have you ever been on a Buddhist pilgrimage in Sri Lanka?

[Where to?]

Have you ever been to the shrine at Kataragama?

[Did you go for a particular reason?]

Have you ever listened to or read the teachings of well-known preachers in Sri Lanka?

4.5 Do you feel a sense of identification with the country of Sri Lanka?

4.6 Would you ever consider living in Sri Lanka?

4.7 Do you take an interest in Sri Lankan politics and current affairs?

5. Sri Lankan Politics

5.1 Do you support a particular political party in Sri Lanka?

5.2 What are your views on the current peace-process in Sri Lanka?

5.3 Are you familiar with the monk Venerable Gangodawila Soma Thera?

What do you think of his teachings?

Was Soma right to express concern over unethical conversions by Christian groups in Sri Lanka?

5.4 Are you familiar with the monastic political party Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), who won seats in the Sri Lankan parliament in 2004?

What is your view of this party?

Should monks be involved with parliamentary politics?

Is there a need for a party that looks after Sinhala-Buddhist interests?

5.5 Are you involved with any Sri Lankan political organisations in the UK?

Have you taken part in any protests or campaigns in the UK relating to the political situation in Sri Lanka?

6. Identity

6.1 How would you describe your identity?

[Sri Lankan? Sinhalese? Buddhist? Sinhala-Buddhist? British? British-Asian?]

6.2 Where do you think of as 'home'?

[UK? Sri Lanka? London?]

6.3 Do you identify in different ways in different situations?

[e.g. at school/university/work; at the temple; when you are in Sri Lanka]

6.4 Do you ever feel any conflict between being British and being Sri Lankan?

6.5 Does Buddhism play a key role in your sense of identity?

Does coming to the temple play an important role in helping you maintain a sense of Sinhalese and Buddhist identity?

Do you see being Buddhist or being Sri Lankan as being more important to your sense of identity?

6.6 The UK media often refers to an 'Asian' community in the UK. (i.e. a community of all of those of South Asian origin). Do you feel part of an Asian community?

Appendix 4: List of standard interviews

Interview date: 15/02 and 14/03/06

Pseudonym: Mahela

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: IT engineer

Family Background: From a lower middle-class background in Sri Lanka. Father a government servant.

Education: Attended state schools in Sri Lanka. Studied IT privately in Sri Lanka.

Came to the UK: 2000s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 16/02 and 23/02/06

Pseudonym: Anika

Age: 50-59

Place of birth: Sri Lanka.

Gender: Female

Married: Yes. Husband is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala. However, English was spoken to some degree in the family.

Occupation: Complementary therapist and beautician.

Family Background: Describes herself as coming from a 'privileged' upper middle-class background in Sri Lanka. Father a manager in a tea plantation. Describes the family as somewhat 'Westernised'.

Education: Educated at state schools in Sri Lanka. Did not attend university.

Came to the UK: 1980s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 06 and 13/03/06

Pseudonym: Asoka

Age: 50-59

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Grew up speaking English and Sinhala. Family spoke English at home, but he was educated in Sinhala.

Occupation: Local government official

Family Background: Describes himself from coming from an Anglicised upper middle-class background. Father a government clerk. Family owned a large amount of land.

Education: Attended university in the UK

Came to the UK: 1970s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 19/03/06

Pseudonym: Jayantha

Age: 50-59

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Currently unemployed.

Family Background: Describes himself as coming from a fairly wealthy, land-owning middle-class family.

Education: Attended state schools in Sri Lanka. Did not attend university

Came to the UK: 1970s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 16/04/06

Pseudonym: Chaturi

Ages: 10-19

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Female

Married: No.

First language: English. Can understand basic Sinhala, but not confident in speaking.

Occupation: Student

Family Background: Parents come from upper middle-class backgrounds in Sri Lanka. Father a banker. Mother an alternative therapist.

Education: Currently a university student.

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 16/04/06

Pseudonym: Padmini

Ages: 20-29

Place of birth: Sri Lanka. Came to UK as a child.

Gender: Female

Married: No.

First language: English. Can understand basic Sinhala, but not confident in speaking.

Occupations: Lawyer

Family Background: Parents come from upper middle-class backgrounds in Sri Lanka. Father a banker. Mother an alternative therapist.

Education: University graduate

Came to the UK: 1980s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 18/04/06

Pseudonym: Kumar

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Student

Family Background: Describes himself coming from a reasonably well-off middle-class background. Both parents are teachers.

Education: Attended university in UK. Currently a post-graduate student.

Came to the UK: 1990s

Temple: Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre.

Interview date: 20/04/06

Pseudonym: Kumari

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: Sri Lanka. Came to UK as a child.

Gender: Female

Married: No

First language: English. Can speak Sinhala, but even when very young in Sri Lanka picked up English more than Sinhala, since this is what her parents tended to speak at home.

Occupation: Student.

Family Background: Describes her parents as coming from well-educated, middle-class backgrounds. Mother a teacher, father a doctor.

Education: Currently a university student.

Came to the UK: 1990s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 02 and 09/05/06

Pseudonym: Nuwan

Age: 40-49

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Chef

Family Background: From a lower middle-class background. Father a foreman for the Sri Lankan railways.

Education: Attended state schools in Sri Lanka. Professional training in the UK.

Came to the UK: 1990s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 10/05/06

Pseudonym: Bandu

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: Fluent in both English and Sinhala.

Occupation: Student

Family Background: Describes his parents as coming from wealthy, educated backgrounds. Father a lawyer. Mother works in nursing.

Education: Currently a university student.

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre

Interview date: 04 and 19/05/06

Pseudonym: Gihan

Age: 60-69

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: No (divorced).

First language: Sinhala. Parents spoke only Sinhala. However, he attended English language classes as a child.

Occupation: Retired engineer.

Family Background: Comes from a lower middle-class background in Sri Lanka. Father worked for the Sri Lankan railways in a supervisory role.

Education: Attended university in UK.

Came to the UK: 1960s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 12/05 and 17/10/06

Pseudonym: Dinesh

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala, but spoke English at school when growing up.

Occupation: IT officer

Family Background: From an upper middle-class background. Father held a senior position in the civil service.

Education: Attended university in the UK.

Came to the UK: 1990s

Temple: Redbridge Buddhist cultural centre.

Interview date: 19/05/06

Pseudonym: Saman

Age: 50-59

Place of birth: Sri Lanka.

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Small business owner

Family Background: From an upper middle-class background. Father a businessman.

Education: Attended state schools in Sri Lanka. Professional training in Sri Lanka and UK.

Came to the UK: 1970s

Temple: Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre.

Interview date: 25/05 and 16/06/06

Pseudonym: Pamu

Age: 60-69

Place of birth: Sri Lanka.

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Spoke Sinhala at home, but educated in English.

Occupation: Retired architect.

Family Background: From an upper middle-class background. Father was a village headman, a position within the colonial civil service.

Education: Attended university in UK.

Came to the UK: 1960s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 28/05/06

Pseudonym: Ishan

Age: 50-59

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Family were bi-lingual, speaking both English and Sinhala at home.

Occupation: Doctor.

Family Background: Describes himself as coming from a wealthy, upper middle-class background. The family owned a substantial amount of land and his father – whom he described as well educated – worked managing this land.

Education: Studied medicine in Sri Lanka and the UK.

Came to the UK: 1970s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara; Thames Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 06/06/06

Pseudonym: Ravi

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: English. Does not speak Sinhala.

Occupation: Surveyor

Family Background: Describes father as coming from an upper middle-class background. He is a solicitor. Mother a nurse.

Education: University graduate.

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: Thames Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 06 and 20/06/06

Pseudonym: Tilan

Age: 40-49

Place of birth: Sri Lanka. Came to UK as a child.

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: English. Can understand some Sinhala, but does not speak the language well.

Occupation: Electrical engineer.

Family Background: Describes his father's background as middle-class, and his mother's as working-class. Father a radiographer.

Education: University graduate.

Came to the UK: 1960s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 08, 14, and 21/06/06

Pseudonym: Sampath

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: English. Can speak basic Sinhala, but describes his Sinhala as 'not very good at all'.

Occupation: Student.

Family Background: Describes his parents as coming from well-off, middle-class background in Sri Lanka. Father an engineer. Mother a teacher.

Education: Currently a university student.

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 21/06/06

Pseudonym: Sathi

Age: 60-69

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Female

Married: Yes. Husband is a European Christian.

First language: Spoke English and Sinhalese growing up. Family spoke mainly in English.

Occupation: Property owner and manager

Family Background: Comes from an upper-middle class English-speaking family in Sri Lanka.

Father was a lawyer.

Education: Educated at a private school in Sri Lanka.

Came to the UK: 1960s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 23 and 29/06/06

Pseudonym: Rajini

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Female

Married: No

First language: English. Can understand some Sinhala, but cannot speak the language well.

Occupation: Student

Family Background: Parents from upper middle-class backgrounds. Father an engineer.

Education: Currently a university student.

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: Thames Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 27/06/06

Pseudonym: Laksiri

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: English. Can speak Sinhala fairly well. Parents speak to each other in Sinhala, but to him in English.

Education: University graduate

Occupation: Management consultant.

Family Background: Parents middle-class backgrounds in Sri Lanka. Father an engineer. Mother a teacher.

Came to the UK: N/A.

Temple: Institutions of the Forest Sangha; London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 05 and 21/07/06

Pseudonym: Lalith

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: Sri Lanka. Came to UK as a child.

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: English. Can speak colloquial Sinhala, but cannot read or write or speak formal Sinhala.

Occupation: Marketing consultant

Family Background: Parents from middle-class, well-educated backgrounds in Sri Lanka. Father an engineer.

Education: University graduate.

Came to the UK: 1970s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 06/07/06

Pseudonym: Harshini

Age: 50-59

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Female

Married: Yes. Husband in also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Doctor.

Family Background: From a lower middle-class background in Sri Lanka. Father a teacher.

Education: Studied medicine at university in Sri Lanka.

Came to the UK: 1970s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 21/08/06

Pseudonym: Ushma

Age: 60-69

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Female

Married: Yes. Husband also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Retired. Previously worked in a post office.

Family Background: Father worked for the Sri Lankan railways. Describes her background as middle-class.

Education: Attended state schools in Sri Lanka. Did not attend university

Came to the UK: 1970s

Temple: Thames Buddhist Vihara; Nissarana group; Buddhapadipa temple.

Interview date: 11/07/06

Pseudonym: Champika

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Female.

Married: No.

First language: English. Can speak and understand conversational Sinhala quite well, but cannot understand formal Sinhala.

Occupation: Student

Family Background: Describes her parents as coming from middle-class, but not exceptionally wealthy, backgrounds in Sri Lanka. Both are doctors.

Education: Currently a university student.

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 25/07/06

Pseudonym: Bhakti

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: UK. Came to Sri Lanka as a child.

Gender: Female

Married: No

First language: English. Can speak Sinhala 'a little bit'.

Occupation: Research scientist.

Family Background: Describes parents as coming from middle-class, well-educated families in Sri Lanka. Father a civil engineer. Mother a teacher.

Education: University graduate

Came to the UK: 1970s

Temple: Amaravati; Letchworth Buddhist Temple.

Interview date: 08/08/06

Pseudonym: Nihal

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: English. Can speak very little Sinhala.

Occupation: Political lobbyist.

Family Background: Describes mother as coming from an upper middle-class background. Father's background slightly less affluent. Father an engineer. Mother an accountant.

Education: University graduate

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: Family attended Thames Buddhist Vihara while Nihal was growing up. Seldom attends temples today.

Interview date: 10/08/06

Pseudonym: Muditha

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: English. Can understand Sinhala perfectly, but his spoken Sinhala is not very good.

Occupation: Occupational psychologist.

Family Background: Describes parents as coming from wealthy, well-educated, high-status families in Sri Lanka. Father an engineer. Mother an administrator.

Education: University graduate

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 31/08/06

Pseudonym: Bhatiya

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: Sinhala. However, educated in English since 'A' levels.

Occupation: Currently unemployed. Worked in marketing in Sri Lanka.

Family Background: Comes from a well-off middle-class background. Father held a senior position in the Sri Lankan police force.

Education: Attended university in Sri Lanka.

Came to the UK: 2000s

Temple: Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre

Interview date: 08/09/06

Pseudonym: Anuja

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Female

Married: Yes. Husband is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Currently a student. Worked in Sri Lanka in the finance department of a large company.

Family Background: Describes her background as middle-class. Father worked for the Sri Lankan postal service.

Education: Attended university in Sri Lanka. Currently undertaking postgraduate study in the UK.

Came to the UK: 2000s.

Temple: Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre

Interview date: 20/09/06

Pseudonym: Mohan

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Electrical engineer

Family Background: From an upper middle-class background. Father an accountant. Mother a teacher. Family also has some wealth from owning land.

Education: Attended university in the UK

Came to the UK: 2000s

Temple: Nissarana group

Interview date: 25/09/06

Pseudonym: Hashan

Age: 40-49

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Manager of a shop.

Family Background: From a lower middle-class background in Sri Lanka. Father a government servant.

Education: Attended University in Sri Lanka.

Came to the UK: 1980s
Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 01/10/06
Pseudonym: Namal
Age: 40-49
Place of birth: Sri Lanka. Came to UK as a child.
Gender: Male
Married: No
First language: English. Learnt Sinhala to some degree when young but says that his Sinhala is not good.
Occupation: Civil servant.
Family Background: Describes his parents as coming from wealthy upper middle-class backgrounds in Sri Lanka. Father worked for the Sri Lankan embassy in the UK.
Education: Educated state schools in the UK.
Came to the UK: 1970s
Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 06/10 and 30/11/06
Pseudonym: Ranil
Age: 20-29
Place of birth: UK.
Gender: Male
Married: No
First language: English. Says that he can speak Sinhala 'a little bit -- I can communicate, but I'm not great'.
Occupation: Student
Family Background: [Not discussed¹]
Education: Currently a university student
Came to the UK: N/A
Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 10/10/06
Pseudonym: Shalini
Age: 20-29
Place of birth: Germany.
Gender: Female
Married: No
First language: Fluent in English and German. Speaks Sinhala with family.
Occupation: Analyst for investment bank.

¹ This interview is a little different from the others on the list. It began as an interview about a particular issue. Ranil is the president of the Sri Lankan society at a university in London. I wanted to speak to him about the society because I was interested in issues of identity among second-generation Sri Lankan Buddhists. This is a section of my research that I have not been able to discuss fully in this thesis because of restrictions on space. As the interview developed, it became broader, and eventually we covered the majority of issues in my standard list of interview questions. However, the unique nature of the interview meant that issues were covered in a different order than usual, meaning that some areas were not fully addressed. Most notably, I did not fully explore Ranil's family background. Despite this, the interview nonetheless provided useful information concerning Ranil's understanding and practice of Buddhism.

Family Background: Describes mother as coming from a wealthy, upper-class background. Father from a less wealthy background. Father an optometrist.

Education: University graduate.

Came to the UK: 1990s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 08 and 09/11/06

Pseudonym: Ranjan

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK.

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: English. Was taught some Sinhala by his parents when young, but says that his standard is fairly low.

Occupation: IT position for a media company

Family Background: Struggles to place parents' backgrounds in terms of class. Hesitantly suggests that they are from upper working-class backgrounds. Father is a doctor. Mother a retired nurse.

Education: University graduate

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: Family attended Amaravati while Ranjan was growing up. Seldom attends temples today.

Interview date: 10/11/06

Pseudonym: Arjuna

Age: 50-59

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala.

Occupation: Radiographer.

Family Background: From a lower middle-class background in Sri Lanka. Father owned a shop.

Education: Attended university in Sri Lanka

Came to the UK: 1970s

Temple: Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre

Interview date: 17/11 and 05/12/06

Pseudonym: Damith

Age: 60-69

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: Sinhala. Family spoke mostly Sinhala at home. However, family were all fluent in English, and Damith sometimes spoke English with friends when growing up.

Occupation: Retired doctor.

Family Background: Describes his family background as 'upper to upper middle-class'.

Education: Studied medicine at university in Sri Lanka.

Came to the UK: 1980s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 30/11/06

Pseudonym: Amal
Age: 20-29
Place of birth: UK
Gender: Male
Married: No
First language: English. Describes his Sinhala as 'fairly fluent'.
Occupation: Works for an employment agency.
Family Background: Describes his parents as coming from backgrounds that were neither extremely well off nor extremely poor. Father a physiotherapist. Mother a nurse.
Education: University graduate
Came to the UK: N/A
Temple: Thames Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 14/12/06
Pseudonym: Indira
Age: 50-59
Place of birth: Sri Lanka
Gender: Female
Married: Yes. Husband also Sinhalese and Buddhist.
First language: Sinhala
Occupation: Retired nurse
Family Background: Describes her family background as middle-class. Father a chief postmaster in the Sri Lankan post office.
Education: Trained as a nurse in the UK.
Came to the UK: 1970s
Temple: Nissarana group; East London Buddhist Cultural Centre.

Interview date: 29/01/07
Pseudonym: Sisara
Age: 40-49
Place of birth: Born in the UK, while his parents were studying in the country. They returned to Sri Lanka before his first birthday.
Gender: Male
Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.
First language: Sinhala
Occupation: Works in a management position for a telecommunications company.
Family Background: Comes from a wealthy, upper middle-class background in Sri Lanka. Father held a senior post in the civil service.
Education: Attended University in the UK.
Came to the UK: Born in the UK (see above). But came to the UK permanently in the 1980s.
Temple: Nissarana group

Interview date: 05/03/07
Pseudonym: Malini
Age: 20-29
Place of birth: UK
Gender: Female
Married: Yes. Husband is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.
First language: English, but describes herself as being fluent in Sinhala.
Occupation: Doctor.

Family Background: Describes her parents as coming from comfortable, middle-class but not elite families in Sri Lanka. Father a Veterinarian. Mother a microbiologist.

Education: Trained as doctor in UK.

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara

Interview date: 28/04/07

Pseudonym: Darika

Age: 50-59

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Female

Married: Yes. Husband is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala. Educated in English, but spoke Sinhala at home.

Occupation: Managerial position in a private company.

Family Background: From an upper middle-class background in Sri Lanka. Father was a solicitor.

Education: Educated at private school in Sri Lanka. Did not attend university.

Came to the UK: 1990s

Temple: London Buddhist Vihara; Amaravati.

Interview date: 09/05/07

Pseudonym: Asanka

Age: 20-29

Place of birth: UK

Gender: Male

Married: No

First language: English. Can speak vernacular Sinhala fluently, but struggles to understand the more formal form of the language.

Occupation: Student.

Family Background: Describes his parents as coming from middle-class backgrounds. Both parents are doctors.

Education: Currently a university student.

Came to the UK: N/A

Temple: While parents occasionally visit temples, he has never attended a Buddhist temple in the UK.

Interview date: 09/06/07

Pseudonym: Udara

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male.

Married: No

First language: Comes from a Sinhala-speaking family, but educated in English.

Occupation: ICT technician.

Family Background: Describes his background as 'working class'. It would perhaps be more accurate to see his background as lower middle-class. Mother a teacher. Father worked for a fisheries company.

Education: Attended university in Sri Lanka.

Came to the UK: 2000s

Temple: Does not attend any temple regularly. Sometimes visits London Buddhist Vihara and institutions of the Forest Sangha.

Interview date: 09/06/07

Pseudonym: Sumal

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male.

Married: No

First language: Educated in Sinhala and came from a Sinhala-speaking home, but also spoke some English among his classmates when growing up.

Occupation: ICT technician

Family Background: Describes family background as middle-class

Education: Attended university in Sri Lanka

Came to the UK: 2000s

Temple: Does not attend any temple regularly. Sometimes visits institutions of the Forest Sangha, and has occasionally attended Sri Lankan temples.

Interview date: 05/07/07

Pseudonym: Lasith

Age: 30-39

Place of birth: Sri Lanka

Gender: Male

Married: Yes. Wife is also Sinhalese and Buddhist.

First language: Sinhala

Occupation: Quantity surveyor.

Family Background: Describes his background as middle-class

Education: University educated in UK and Europe.

Came to the UK: 2000s

Temple: Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre

Appendix 5: List of additional interviews

Interview date: 25/08/05

Interview with Venerable Seelawimala of the London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 03/03/06

Interview with Venerable Piyadassi of the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre

Interview date: 11/04/06

Interview with Venerable Bandula of the London Buddhist Vihara.

Interview date: 28/04/06

Interview with Gamini, editor of a publication aimed at the Sri Lankan community in the UK.

Interview date: 24/05/06

Interview with Venerable Hemaratana of the Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre.

Interview date: 09/06/06

Interview with Rohan, Sri Lankan political organiser in the UK.

Interview date: 15/06/06

Interview with Jagath, Sri Lankan lawyer with extensive knowledge of Sri Lankan migration to the UK.

Interview date: 07/09/06

Interview with Venerable Rahula of the Letchworth Buddhist temple.

Interview date: 17/09/06

Interview with Venerable Sumana of the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre

Interview date: 24/09/06

Interview with Ajith, lay Buddhist teacher within the Sri Lankan community in the UK.

Interview date: 04/10/06

Interview with Venerable Seelagawesi of the Nissarana group.

Interview date: 04/05/07

Interview with resident monk from the Amaravati monastery.

Interview date: 17/06/07

Interview with Sarath and Chandrika, lay people involved in the organisation of the London Buddhist Vihara.

Appendix 6: Overview of participatory fieldwork

Here I provide an overview of my fieldwork, focusing on my research at the London Buddhist Vihara, the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre, and the Nissarana group, but also detailing other fieldwork undertaken in the course of the project.

London Buddhist Vihara

I was familiar with the LBV prior to the beginning of my research, having attended meditation classes at the temple as a practitioner. I had also occasionally attended Sunday *pūjās*, *pōya* day celebrations and the Vihara's monthly meditation retreat. While these experiences informed my research, I began to study the temple more thoroughly at the beginning of 2006. My research at the temple continued throughout 2006 and during 2007, when I began writing my thesis. I continued to attend the Vihara after this time also, so it is difficult to put a precise end point on my research. However, when I speak about my 'research period' in this thesis I am referring to 2006 and 2007.

When I began my research I was informed by monks and laypeople with whom I spoke that the best time to make contacts among the Sri Lankan patrons of the LBV would be on Sunday afternoons during the Vihara's Sunday school, when many parents of pupils at the school would congregate and socialise while their children studied. I therefore began to come to the Vihara on Sundays, and this enabled me to make many contacts, leading to my first interviews. Coming to the temple on Sundays also brought me to the Sunday evening Buddha *pūjā*, which I attended several times over the course of my research, making detailed notes on the ritual on 6 occasions. The largest regular gatherings at the LBV are for *pōya* day celebrations. I therefore attend such celebrations regularly during my research. I attended the Wesak celebrations of May 2006 and 2007, the Poson celebrations of June 2006 and 2007, the Dhammacakka Day celebrations of July 2007, the Sanghamitta Day celebrations of December 2006 and 2007, and the Navam celebrations of February 2007 (there were no Navam celebrations in 2006). I also attended the LBV's *Kāṭhina* celebrations in November 2006 and 2007. Such events were key to my research, both in terms of the insights that they gave me about the ways in which Buddhism is discussed and practised at the Vihara, and because of the opportunity that they gave me to speak with people and make contacts.

Other activities that I attended at the LBV include: the Vihara's celebration of the 2550th anniversary of the Buddha Jayanthi (the passing away of the Buddha), held in Ealing Town Hall and featuring talks from the Sri Lankan scholar Ananda Guruge and the convert Theravada monk Ajahn Khemadhammo, as well as cultural performances; talks in the Vihara's monthly lecture series; the Rahula Dhamma Day celebrations of 2006, at which children from the LBV's Sunday school performed plays, dancing and music; special talks given at the LBV by Ajahn Brahmavmaso (April 2007) and Venerable Henepola Gunaratana (May 2007); food fairs held to raise money for

the Vihara; and activities in March 2007 to mark the three-month death anniversary of the LBV's previous head monk, Venerable Vajiragnana, including a lecture by Venerable Mahinda Deegalle and a *dāna* ceremony for a large number of visiting monks, at which Ajahn Sumedho of Amaravati gave an address. In 2007, at the request of one of the Sunday school's organisers, I became involved in teaching classes at the LBV along with a rotating pool of other volunteers. I taught a group of the school's older pupils on three occasions (changes in the school meant that this class was discontinued). I continued to attend the LBV's meditation class during my research period, at times regularly and at other times (when other research commitments made it difficult) more sporadically. Towards the end of my fieldwork period, and continuing after I had finished my fieldwork, I attended sessions of the Vihara's Tuesday evening advanced study class.

Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre

I had visited the SSIBC a number of times before the period of my research. I attended the celebrations of United Kingdom Buddhist Day in September 2005, and led a visit of MA students from the School of Oriental and African Studies to the temple in December of that year. My research at the temple began in earnest in 2006. I conducted an interview with Venerable Piyadassi in March 2006, and visited the temple a number of times to speak with people and make contacts. Piyadassi advised me that the best time to meet people at the temple would be on Sundays, when the weekly Buddha *pūjā* takes place. I therefore began to attend Sunday *pūjās* often, coming particularly regularly during the *vassa* period of 2006. This proved an excellent site for research, since the *pūjās* during this period attracted large numbers of participants (around 50 to 100) on each occasion, and because this period is seen as one of particular religious significance, a fact that made the discussions of the significance of different religious practices that I took part in at the temple at this time particularly fruitful. I met 4 of my 5 lay interviewees from the SSIBC during Sunday *pūjās*. As at the LBV, my research at the SSIBC continued throughout 2006 and 2007.

Other than Sunday *pūjās*, activities that I engaged in at – or organised by – the SSIBC included: Buddha *pūjās* held on weekday evenings (attendance at such *pūjās* tends to be low, but there are always some lay attendees); meditation classes; the temple's Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebrations of April 2006 (held in Harrow Leisure Centre); the temple's 2550th Buddha Jayanthi celebrations of June 2006 (held in Brent Town Hall and featuring cultural performances, talks by the Sri Lankan scholars Ananda Guruge and Oliver Abeynayake, and an exposition of relics of the Buddha); a special *Bodhi pūjā* held at the temple in July 2006 to commemorate those killed in the London bombings of 7 July 2005; the celebrations of United Kingdom Buddhist Day in July 2006; a programme of Sri Lankan music and dance performed by children from the temple and from the children's home in Sri Lanka which the temple funds, held in Kingsbury High School in September

2006; the joint Posen and Wesak celebrations of June 2007; and the Kaṭhina celebrations of 2007. I assisted in the temple's summer school for children in August 2006, teaching the students to play chess (and in return being taught the game of Carrom, popular in Sri Lanka and the Indian subcontinent, by monks and laypeople at the temple). In August 2007 I delivered a talk about my research at the temple as part of the celebrations of United Kingdom Buddhist Day. In addition to my 5 interviews with lay patrons of the temple, my 2 interviews with resident monks, and the many conversations that I had with laity and monastics during my fieldwork, 2 individuals at the temple were a particular source of information. In July 2006 I spoke extensively with the *Kapumahattayā* (priest) of the SSIBC's *dēvālē* about the history of the *dēvālē*, the relationship between the rituals of the *dēvālē* and Buddhism, and the problems or wishes that bring people to the *dēvālē*. In February 2006, on one of my earliest visits to the temple, I spoke for some time with Ajantha, a layman involved in the organisation of the temple. I went on to have many long conversations with Ajantha throughout the course of my research. While I did not record a formal interview with him, Ajantha was a constant source of information and insights about the temple, the Sri Lankan community in the UK, and the approaches to Buddhism found within the community.

Nissarana group

I first came into contact with the Nissarana group at the Festival of Cricket, a large Sri Lankan social event held in Shenley, Hertfordshire in July 2006. The group had a stall at the event which distributed free food and advertised its activities. Shortly after this, I visited the group's rented house in Wembley, North West London, where I met Venerable Seelagawesi, around who the group is organised, for the first time. From this time I attended activities of the group regularly, on two occasions staying overnight in the group's house, until Seelagawesi left the UK in October 2006. The group was an ideal site for participant observation because it was relatively small and close-knit, making it easy for me to get to know the central members of the group well. In addition, the fact that *Dhamma* talks and discussions about Buddhism took place daily at the Wembley house meant that I was able to gain a thorough understanding of the approach to Buddhism taken by the group in a short space of time. In 2007 the group rented a house in Northolt, North West London. Three Sri Lankan monks – Venerable Ariyagawesi, Venerable Santhasumana, and Venerable Santhamanasa – visited the group from the middle of March until the end of April. Seelagawesi arrived in early June and left in late July. During this period I visited the group less regularly than in 2006, in part because for large periods the monks of the group were not resident in London. During his visit Seelagawesi made trips to France and Holland, and spent much time visiting followers elsewhere in the UK. Altogether he spent only 22 days in Northolt. The monks that preceded

Seelagawesi also spent time travelling in Europe and the UK. However, despite this I nevertheless made several visits to the group in 2007, on one occasion staying overnight in the Northolt house.

It is difficult to pick out particular events or occasions of interest from my time with the Nissarana group. My time with the group generally consisted of a repetitive schedule of meditation, *Dhamma* talks, *Dhamma* discussions, healing rituals, and extended periods of chanting. However, a number of occasions of particular interest can be singled out. In 2006 I accompanied the group on trips to give *dāna* at the SSIBC and at the Amaravati monastery in Hertfordshire. At the end of Seelagawesi's visit in 2006, which took place over the *vassa* period, a Kathina ceremony took place. This was the largest gathering held by the group in 2006 – around 70 people attended – and it featured a fuller and more structured programme than usual, with invited monks and the observance of *sil* by 3 members of the group. A similar programme marked the departure from the UK in April 2007 of the monks Ariyagawesi, Santhasumana, and Santhamanasa. Around 50 people attended this event, with around 15 observing *sil*. My fieldwork at the Nissarana group came to a satisfyingly neat conclusion, with an event held in a private house in September 2007, which marked the departure of Sisara, the lay leader of the group, to become ordained in Sri Lanka (Sisara had spoken about his intention to ordain throughout my time with the group). This event, attended by around 40 people and consisting of talks by Sisara, extended periods of chanting, and discussions, started at around 7pm and continued until 2am (late finishes of this kind were common within the group).

Other fieldwork

I made a number of visits to Sri Lankan temples in London other than the LBV and the SSIBC. During my research the Sri Lankan temple located nearest to my home was the Samadhi Meditation Centre, a small temple located in a terraced house in Edmonton, North London. I visited temple on a number of occasions, including the temple's second anniversary celebrations of September 2006, its Navam *pōya* day celebrations of February 2007, and its Kathina celebrations of November 2007. The Redbridge Buddhist Cultural Centre is located in Redbridge, North East London. I visited this temple twice in May 2006, and again in October 2006. On these occasions I attended *pūjās*, spoke with lay patrons of the temple, and conducted an interview with the temple's resident monk, Venerable Hemaratana. I also attended the 2550th Buddha Jayanthi celebrations organised by the temple in conjunction with the East London Buddhist Cultural Centre, which were held in East Ham Town Hall in May 2006. The East London Buddhist Cultural Centre is located in Plaistow, East London. I visited this temple prior to the beginning of my fieldwork period, attending the Poson celebrations of May 2005. I visited again in September 2006, when I spoke with monks and lay patrons of the temple. The Thames Buddhist Vihara is located to the south of London in Selsdon. I visited this temple and spoke with its resident monks in March 2006. I also attended the

celebrations of Sri Lankan New Year organised by the temple in April 2006, which were held at the Archbishop Langfranc High School in Croydon. A final Sri Lankan temple in London that should be mentioned is the Buddhist Realists Vihara, located in Southgate, North London. I visited this temple in August 2005, but the layman looking after the temple at that time told me that the resident monk, Venerable Sumanasiri was away and that the temple was not currently running activities. I subsequently found that this was often the case and that the activities of the temple were somewhat sporadic. I met Venerable Sumanasiri at other Sri Lankan temples, and at my university, the School of Oriental and African Studies (where he had come to attend a lecture). However, I was not able to arrange to speak in depth with him or to visit to the temple. The temple was seldom mentioned by Sri Lankans that I spoke to during my research (aside from a reference to it by my interviewee Asoka, who stated intriguingly that he preferred not to attend this temple since he felt that Venerable Sumanasiri took a 'Western' approach to Buddhism). It was suggested to me in 2008 that the temple is no longer active.

Outside London I visited both of the Sri Lankan temples located in Letchworth Garden City. That there are two Sri Lankan temples in what is a rather small town is the result of a schism among the lay supporters of what was originally a single temple. The original temple was established in 2000 and the split occurred in 2004, resulting in the Dhamma Nikethanaya Buddhist Centre, which is located in the original temple building, and the Letchworth Buddhist Temple, which is headed by the original temple's head monk, Venerable Rahula. I visited the Dhamma Nikethanaya Buddhist Centre in July 2006 when the temple held an all-day programme to celebrate the resolving of financial issues concerning the temple's ownership, and to mark the beginning of the *vassa* retreat. I visited the Letchworth Buddhist Temple in September 2006 and conducted an interview with Venerable Rahula.

I also attended religious institutions and events outside Sri Lankan temples. As noted above, I visited the Amaravati monastery of the Forest Sangha with members of the Nissarana group in 2006. I also visited the monastery in August 2007 along with 3 friends from the SSIBC in order to listen to a talk by Ajahn Sumedho, the abbot of the monastery. In addition, I visited the monastery alone in May 2007 in order to conduct an interview with a senior monk of the Forest Sangha. I attended a meeting of the Sathdhamma group (discussed in chapter 9) in a private house in South West London in October 2007. I also spoke at length on the telephone with one of the leading members of the group on two occasions. Following Ajahn Brahmavamso's talk at the LBV in April 2007, I attended another talk that he gave during his short visit to Britain, at the University of London Buddhist Society. I was interested to see if this talk attracted any Sri Lankan students, given the immense popularity of Brahmavamso among Sri Lankan Buddhists. There were around 10 Sri Lankan students in the audience of approximately 150. More significantly, there were also

around 30 middle-aged first-generation Sri Lankans in an audience that I had expected to be predominantly students. Some of these I recognised from the LBV. From conversations with individuals after the talk, it became clear that some of those present had attended all of Brahmavamso's talks during his visit (in addition to the LBV and University of London talks, he also led a full day programme at the Thames Buddhist Vihara). This was another illustration of the strong popularity of this monk among Sri Lankans in Britain. In May 2006 I visited a Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu temple in Wembley along with a Roshan, a Sinhalese Buddhist who I had met at the SSIBC and who had a strong interest in the worship of divine beings. The trip gave me insight into the way in which gods are worshipped by Buddhists in Hindu temples, and I had a long conversation with Roshan about the worship of gods and how it relates to the practice of Buddhism.

I also attended *dāna* ceremonies in the homes of individuals that I met during my research. In March 2006 I attended a *dāna* held by Vasantha, a patron of the LBV, to mark the 3 month anniversary of his father's death. Monks from the LBV and the Letchworth Buddhist temple attended, along with a large crowd of lay Sri Lankans. In August 2006 I attended a *dāna* at the house of Bandula. I met Bandula at the SSIBC, but the *dāna* was given to 3 monks from Amaravati. This event, which was attended by 9 laypeople, gave me a good opportunity to investigate why some Sri Lankans in the UK prefer to give *dāna* to monks from the Forest Sangha rather than to Sri Lankan monks, and to discuss with the monk present their experiences of interacting with the Sri Lankan community.

Aside from attending religious institutions and events, I also attended social and cultural events within the Sri Lankan community during my research. Such events allowed me to speak with a range of people and to make contacts among individuals who rarely visited temples or other Buddhist institutions. More generally, they gave me a broader view of the nature of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in the UK. Social and cultural events that I attended during my research included: a programme of Sri Lankan music performed to celebrate Sri Lankan Independence Day, held in a school hall in Kingston in February 2006; the Festival of Cricket, a sports tournament and social event which provides one of the largest annual gatherings of Sinhalese Sri Lankans in the UK (I attended in both 2006 and 2007); a meeting and dinner held in July 2006 by the Association of Professional Sri Lankans, a body dedicated to promoting unity among Sri Lankan professionals and putting forward a positive image of Sri Lanka; the annual dinner dance of the Old Boys Union of Dharmaraja College, a well-known school located in Kandy (Sri Lanka's second city), which I attended in October 2006 along with a friend from the Nissarana group; and an Interfaith event held in Hayes, West London in February 2007 organised by the Sri Lankan Social and Cultural Organisation, a group which promotes cultural and charitable activities in the Sri Lankan community. I also attended political events within the community. I had an interest in diasporic Sri

Lankan politics prior to my research, having investigated the subject during my MA. At the outset of my research I had intended to look at links between Buddhism and politics in the community, but eventually my research took me in other directions. Nevertheless, attending political events was useful in giving me a broader view of the community, in helping me to understand arguments about identity and cultural preservation within the community and how these are related to political questions in Sri Lanka, and in helping me to make further contacts. Political events that I attended included: a protest held in May 2006 at the BBC Bush House building, against perceived BBC bias in coverage of Sri Lankan politics; a protest at Parliament Square in September 2006, calling for the British government to take action against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; a meeting of the Patriotic National Movement, a Sinhalese nationalist organisation, held in September 2006 in Feltham, West London (I also attended a meeting of this organisation prior to my research period in November 2004); and a gathering held in a private house in Surbiton, South West London in May 2006, at which the Sinhalese nationalist politician Champika Ranawaka gave an address. The usefulness of the broad approach to research that I took is well illustrated by this last example. The meeting was interesting in itself for the opportunity that it gave to explore issues of identity in the diaspora. However, even more important for my research was that it was at this meeting that I first came into contact with members of the Sathdhamma group (discussed in chapter 9). While all of the members of this group with whom I spoke also attended the LBV, it is unlikely that I would have found out about the group at the temple itself, since the unorthodox and somewhat controversial nature of the group means that individuals are unlikely to discuss the group at a mainstream Buddhist temple.

Appendix 7: London Buddhist Vihara *pūjā* sheet

I reproduce here a copy of the sheet that is distributed to the congregation during the London Buddhist Vihara's Sunday Buddha *pūjā*. The sheet gives the Pali verses that are chanted, along with their English translations. One section of the *pūjā*, the *Karaṇīya-metta sutta*, is chanted in both Pali and English.

A BUDDHIST SERVICE

LONDON BUDDHIST VIHARA, London W4 1UD.

*GONG (followed by): SĀDHU-SĀDHU-SĀDHU

VANDANĀ (HOMAGE)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa!
(repeat 3 times)

TISARANA (THE THREE REFUGES)

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi ... (repeat)
Tatiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi ... (repeat)

PANCA SĪLA (THE FIVE PRECEPTS)

- Pānātipātā veramani sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
- Adinnādānā veramani sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
- Kāmesu micchācārā veramani sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
- Musāvādā veramani sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
- Surā-meraya-majja-pamādatthānā veramani sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

PUPPHAPŪJĀ (OFFERING OF FLOWERS)

Vanna-gandha gunopetaṃ-etaṃ kusuma santatiṃ
Pūjayāmi munindassa-siripāda sarorūhe.

Pujemi *Buddhaṃ* kusumena 'nena
Puñña metena ca hotu mokkhaṃ
Pupphaṃ miḷāyāti yathā idamme
Kāyo tathā yāti vināsabhāvam

Pujemi (2) *Dhammaṃ* kusumena 'nena... (repeat)
Pujemi (3) *Saṅghaṃ* kusumena 'nena ... (repeat)

PADĪPAPŪJĀ (OFFERING OF LIGHTS)

Ghanasārappadittena-dipena lamadhamṣiṇā
Tilokadipaṇṇi sambuddhaṇ-pūjayāmi tamonudaṇ

DHŪPAPŪJĀ (OFFERING OF INCENSE)

Gandha sambhāra yuttena-dhūpenāhaṃ sugandhinā
Pūjaye pūjanīyaṃ taṇ-pūjā bhājana muttamāṇ

STANZAS IN PRAISE OF THE TRIPLE GEM

• Iti pi so bhagavā arahāṇ sammā sambuddho –
vijācarana sampanno – sugato lokavidū – anuttaro
purisadamma sārathī – sathā devamanussānaṃ –
buddho bhagavā 'u.

NAVA GUṆA GĀTHĀ

Arahāṇ arahoti nāmena – Arahāṇ pāpam nakāraye
Arahatta phalaṇ paṭto – Arahāṇ nāma te namo

Sammā sambuddha ñānena – Sammā sambuddha desanā
Sammā sambuddha lokasmiṇ – Sammā sambuddha te namo

Vijā-carana sampanno – Tassa vijā pakāsītā
Aññā-nāga-tuppanno – Vijā-carana te namo

Sugato sugatattānaṃ – Sugato sundaraṇ pi ca
Nibbānaṃ sugatiṇ yanti – Sugato nāma te namo

Lokavidūti nāmena – Aññā-nāgate vidū
Sankhārasatta okāse – Lokavidū nāma te namo

Anuttaro ñāna sīlena – Yo lokassa Anuttaro
Anuttaro pūja lokasmiṇ - Taṇ namassāmi Anuttaro

Sārathī sārathī devā – Yo lokassa sārathī
Sārathī pūja lokasmiṇ - Taṇ namassāmi sārathī

Deva yakkha manussānaṃ – Loke agga phalaṇ daḍaṇ
Dadantaṇ damayantiānaṃ – Purisā-jañña te namo

Bhāgyavā Bhagavā yutto – Bhagga kilesa vāhato
Bhaggaṃ samsāra muttāro – Bhagavā nāma te namo

Ete nava guṇā yassa – Sambuddhassa sīrmatto
Namāmi taṇ mahāvīraṇ – Sabbāññiṇ Dipadūtāmaṇ

*GONG (followed by): SĀDHU-SĀDHU-SĀDHU

(It is good – It is good – It is good)

VANDANĀ (HOMAGE)

Honour to the Blessed One, The Exalted One, The Fully-Enlightened One!
(repeat 3 times)

TISARANA (THE THREE REFUGES)

I go to the Buddha as my Refuge
I go to the Dhamma as my Refuge
I go to the Saṅgha as my Refuge
For the second time I go to the Buddha ... as my Refuge
For the third time ... as my Refuge

PANCA SĪLA (THE FIVE PRECEPTS)

I take the precept to abstain from killing
I take the precept to abstain from taking that which is not given
I take the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct
I take the precept to abstain from false speech
I take the precept to abstain from intoxicants

PŪPHAPŪJĀ (OFFERING OF FLOWERS)

These flowers fresh, fragrant and colourful, I offer at the lotus-like
feet of the Noble One. With flowers, the Buddha – the Dhamma –
the Saṅgha I revere and through this merit may there be release.
Even these flowers must fade, so does my body pass to decay.

PADĪPAPŪJĀ (OFFERING OF LIGHTS)

With candle lights brightly shining, abolishing gloom,
I revere the Enlightened One, the Light of the Three Worlds, who
dispels the darkness (of ignorance).

DHŪPAPŪJĀ (OFFERING OF INCENSE)

With perfumed incense, I revere the Exalted One, worthy of
profound admiration and offerings.

STANZAS IN PRAISE OF THE TRIPLE GEM

• (BUDDHAVANDANĀ : SALUTATION TO THE BUDDHA)

The nine qualities of the Buddha

Such indeed is the Blessed One * Exalted * Omniscient
* Perfect in knowledge and conduct * Fully accomplished *
Knower of worlds * Incomparable Guide for the training of persons *
Teacher of gods and men * Enlightened and * Blessed

THE NINE QUALITIES OF THE BUDDHA

By name He is Arahant as He is worthy. Even in secret He does no evil. He
attained the fruit of Arahantship – To Thee, the Worthy One, my homage
be.

By name He is Sammasambuddha. The teaching is of the
Sammasambuddha. A fully Enlightened One is He in the world. To Thee,
the fully Enlightened One, my homage be.

He is endowed with wisdom and knowledge. His wisdom is made known.
The past and the future He knows. To Thee who is endowed with wisdom
and conduct, my homage be.

He is Sugata being self-disciplined. Being good He is Sugata.
He has gone to the good state of Nibbana. To Thee the Sugata, my
homage be.

By name He is Lokavidu. He knows the past and future. Things, beings and
space He knows. To Thee the knower of worlds, my homage be.

By wisdom and conduct He is unrivalled. An unrivalled One He is in the
world. In this world He is revered as an incomparable One. That
incomparable One, I salute.

A charioteer, a charioteer is He of Devas. He is a charioteer to the world.
He is a respectful charioteer in this world. That charioteer I salute.

To devas, Yakkhas and men in this world, He gives the highest fruits. The
givers He subdues. To the knower of men, my homage be.
The Bhagava is replete with fortune. He has destroyed all passions. He has
crossed the ocean of samsara. To that Bhagava, my homage be.

That fully enlightened, noble, great hero – Who is endowed with these nine
virtues, Who is all-knowing and – A Chief of bipeds, I salute.

- Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo – sandiṭṭhiko akāliko – ehipassiko opanaiko – paccattaṃ veditaḅbo viññūhi'ti.
- Supatipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho – ujupatipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho – nāyapatipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho – sāmicipatipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho – yadidaṃ cattāri purisaṃyugāni – aṭṭhapurisaṃyugāla – esa bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho – āhuneyyo pāhuneyyo – dakkhineyyo aññalikaṃariyo – anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassa'ti.

KARAṆĪYA METTA SUTTA

1. Karaṇīyaṃatthakusalena – yaṃ taṃ santaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca
Sakko ujū ca sūjū ca – suvaco c'assa mudu anatimāni
2. Santussako ca subhāro ca – appakicco ca sallahukavutti
Santindriyo ca nipako ca – appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho
3. Na ca khuddaṃ samācare, kiñci yena, viññū pare, upavadeyyuṃ
Sukhino vā khemino hontu – sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitatā
4. Ye keci pāṇabhūtatthi – tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā
Dighā vā ye mahantā vā – majjhimā rassakānukathūlā
5. Diṭṭhā vā yeva addiṭṭhā – ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre
Bhūtā vā sambhavesi vā – sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitatā
6. Na paro paraṃ nikubbetha – nāthimaññetha katthacinaṃ kañci
Byārosanā paṅghasaññā – nāññamaññassa dukkhamiccheyya
7. Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttā – āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe
Evampi sabbabhūtesū – mānasaṃ bhāvaye aparimānaṃ
8. Mettaṃ ca sabba-lokasmim – mānasaṃ bhāvaye aparimānaṃ
Uddham adho ca tinyañca – asambādhaṃ averaṃ asapattaṃ
9. Tittāṃ caraṃ nisinna vā – sayāno vā yāvāt'assa vigatamiddho
Etaṃ satiraṃ adhiṭṭheyya – brahma metaṃ vihāraṃ idha māhu
10. Diṭṭhina anupagamma sīlavā – dassanena sampanno
Kāmesu vinneyyā gēdhaṃ – na hi jātu gabbhaseyyaṃ punareti'ti

• (DHAMMAVANDANĀ: SALUTATION TO THE DHAMMA)

The six qualities of the doctrine

- Well-expounded is the Dhamma (Doctrine) by the Blessed One * to be self-realised * with immediate fruit * inviting investigation * leading on to Nibbana * to be comprehended by the wise, each for oneself

• (SANGHAVANDANĀ: SALUTATION TO THE SANGHA)

The word 'Sangha' here is not confined to ordained monks and nuns, but signifies 'noble disciples' and covers everyone – including lay persons who may possess any of the eight spiritual attainments referred to herein as 'these Four Pairs of Persons, the Eight Kinds of Individuals'.

* Of good conduct is the disciples of the Blessed One * of upright conduct is the disciples of the Blessed One * of gentle conduct is the disciples of the Blessed One. The disciples of the Blessed One – namely, these Four Pairs of Persons, the Eight Kind of Individuals – is worthy of gifts, is worthy of reverential salutation, is an incomparable field of merit to the world.

THE DISCOURSE ON LOVING-KINDNESS

1. One who is skilled in the good and who wishes to attain that state of calm, Nibbana, should act thus:
One should be sincere to oneself, upright and conscientious, of soft speech, gentle and not proud.
2. Contented, living simply, peaceful and unburdened, with senses calmed, prudent, modest and without showing anxiety for support.
3. One should not commit any slight wrong on account of which wise men might censure one.
May all beings be happy and secure, may their hearts be wholesome!
4. - 5. Whatever living beings there be – those mentally feeble or strong, physically long, stout or medium, short, small or large, those seen or unseen; dwelling far or near; those who are born and those who are to be born – may all beings, without exception, be happy-minded!
6. Let none deceive another nor despise any person whatsoever in any place; in anger or ill-will let one not wish any harm to another.
7. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.
8. Let thoughts of infinite love pervade the whole world – above, below and around – without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.
9. Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, as long as one is awake, this mindfulness should be developed; this, the wise say, is the highest conduct here.
10. Not embracing false views, virtuous and endowed with insight, giving up attachment to sense desires – indeed, such a person does not come again for repeated becoming (for rebirth).

METTĀ BHĀVANA (MEDITATION ON UNIVERSAL LOVING KINDNESS)

• MANGALAS

Bhavatu sabbamangalaṃ
Rakkhantu sabba devatā
Sabba Buddhānubhāvena – sadā sotthi bhavantu te
Sabba Dhammānubhāvena – sadā sotthi bhavantu te
Sabba Saṅghānubhāvena – sadā sotthi bhavantu te

• BLESSINGS

May all blessing be yours
May all devas protect you
By the power of all the Buddhas may happiness ever be yours
By the power of all the Dhammas may happiness ever be yours
By the power of all the Sangha may happiness ever be yours

• Punyānumodanā (Thanksgiving and Blessings)

- (All together): SĀDHU – SĀDHU – SĀDHU

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