



**OCBS – IIBS International Conference – 2014**  
**“Buddhism Rejoins the Great Conversation in India”**

A conference organised by  
the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies  
(A Recognised Independent Centre of the University of Oxford, UK)

and  
the Indian Institute of Buddhist Studies, Pune

22-24 November 2014

<http://www.ocbsindiaconference.org>

**Organizing Committee Members**

1. Prof. Richard Gombrich, [D. Phil., Oxford] United Kingdom
2. Ven. Dr. Khammai Dhammasami, [D. Phil., Oxford] United Kingdom
3. Prof. Jeffrey Race, [Ph.D., Harvard], United States of America
4. Dr. Alexander Wynne, [D.Phil, Oxford] United Kingdom
5. Prashant Bhalesain, [M.Tech (Design), IIT Bombay ], Pune, India
6. Pravin Bhalesain, [M.Tech. (IT), IIT Roorkee], Pune, India

**Sponsors:**

1. Seema and Hanumant Bhalesain, Trustees of the Indian Institute of Buddhist Studies (IIBS) Pune
2. Ms. Jennifer Lee, Hongkong

3. Prashant Bhalessain, Pune, India
4. Siam Commercial Bank, Bangkok, Thailand

## **MISSION**

Buddhism flourished in India for more than a millenium and a half, until in the 13th century AD almost all its institutions were destroyed by external forces. Until then, it contributed greatly to Indian civilization through its dialogue with other religions.

After its fall, India continued to shelter a rich diversity, but the loss of Buddhist values was a grave setback.

About Buddhist ideas and practices there is bound to be controversy, and this is as it should be. But it is beyond dispute that in this 21st century AD gross inequality cripples both economic advance and personal happiness. The Buddha established the equal worth and equal rights of men and women. (The story that he was reluctant to found an order of nuns has been shown to be a later prejudiced invention.) Systems of social inequality, especially those prescribed at birth, create cruelty, injustice and misery. To flourish, a society must allow all its citizens of both genders to achieve their potential. The great reformer Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar clearly saw this, and his legacy has inspired many, but it has still not been realised throughout India how much it offers to the whole nation.

This conference aims to help reactivate two great conversations: that between Buddhism and the rest of India, and that between the followers of Dr Ambedkar and the many other Buddhist groups in India today. We shall scrutinise the present with the aim of building a better future. We intend to range from considering the possible role of India's Buddhist revival on the world stage to clarifying immediate local problems and even suggesting some solutions.

The Buddha preached universal love, tolerance and sympathy; he was also a great pragmatist who had no time for purely theoretical speculation. We hope to hold this conference entirely in his spirit.

## **PROGRAMME**

*Unless otherwise stated, events were in English.*

### **DAY 1 - 22nd November 2014, Saturday**

**9:30 am**

- Pravin Bhalesain, President, Indian Institute of Buddhist Studies (IIBS) Pune, India welcomed all guests and introduced the main participants.
- The program started with the offering of flowers to statues of the Buddha and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Then students from Mumbai University Pali Department sang the Ratana Sutta and Bhim Vandana on Dr. Ambedkar in Pali.
- Prof. Richard Gombrich, Founder, Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies (OCBS), Oxford, United Kingdom explained the ideas behind the conference and stressed the urgency of taking action.
- Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar, Member of Parliament, former member of Planning Commission of India and former Vice-Chancellor of Mumbai University, gave the inaugural address, reminding us of the immeasurably important role played by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and how he brought the Buddha back into the daily life of contemporary India.
- Prof. Dr. Wasudeo Gade, Vice-Chancellor, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, Maharashtra, spoke on the need for Buddhist Studies in India.



Prof. Richard Gombrich addressing the participants



(L-R) Prof. Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar,  
Pravin Bhalesain, Dr. Alexander Wynne, Prof. Dr. Wasudeo Gade



Audience listening to the inaugural session



Inaugural Session

### Messages:

- Ms. Jennifer Lee - A well-wisher and supporter of Buddhist Studies from Hong Kong -

*“May this Great Conversation bring together India's rich heritage and spiritual traditions.*

*Our determination to spread the Buddha's wisdom will measure our loyalty to the best in our past, and our service to the future of the world.*

*Wishing you fruitful deliberations and a successful conference! :*

- Siam Commercial Bank -

*“We believe this conference will benefit local Bhuddist community as well as scholars in India. And hence leading to concrete plan to revive Bhuddism in India.”*

- Honorable Mr. Kiren Rijju, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Government of India – On behalf of the minister Sonam Gechen Agola, Addl. Private Secretary acknowledged the invitation and conveyed his greetings for the success of the programme in a letter as below:

सोनम गेचेन अगोला  
SONAM GECHEN AGOLA



No. MOS/Home 365327/97/2014

ADDL. PRIVATE SECRETARY TO  
MINISTER OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
NORTH BLOCK, NEW DELHI-110 001  
Tele : 011-23092073, 23094054  
Fax : 011-23093549  
Email : sonamagola@nic.in

Dear Metta,

01 OCT 2014

Namaskar,

The Hon'ble MoS (Home) Shri. Kiren Rijiju, has received your invitation- IIBS International conference 2014 at Pune on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2014.

I have been directed to inform you that November month is reserved for the Parliament Session and he will not be able to attend the programme. He has deeply regretted the inconvenience and conveyed his greetings for the success of the programme.

With regards.

Yours Sincerely,

(Sonam Gechen Agola)

**Metta,**  
**Pravin Bhalesain**  
President,  
Indian Institute of Buddhist Studies,  
Survey No. 17/4, Suyog, Mangal Nagar,  
Wakad Road, Thergaon, Pune  
( Maharashtra)-Pin 411 033

Message from Honorable Mr. Kiren Rijiju's office





## **United we stand, divided we fall.**

We announced on the conference website:

While it is beyond our means to bring together representatives of every Buddhist organization in India, we are inviting about 20 organizations and hope that about 15 will feel able to send one or two spokespersons. We propose that the theme for discussion should be: “Our Complementarity: the Scope for Co-operation.” We hope that this discussion can take place in a positive atmosphere. Dwelling on differences is unproductive, but mere benign rhetoric will serve no purpose. Everyone is asked to focus on the question: What can be done to establish closer and better relations between Buddhists in India?

The Ven Dr Anil Sakya from Thailand, aka Phra Sugandho, chaired the sessions, supported by Dr. Yojana Bhagat from Mumbai University, Pali Department. The presentations listed below lasted ten to fifteen minutes each.

### **11.30 am**

- Dr. Sharda Sanghavi, Director, Vipassana Research Institute (VRI), Global Pagoda, Mumbai, Maharashtra, explained the work of the Institute.
- Dr. Neeti Rana, Dean, School of Buddhist Studies, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, explained the work of the University in the field of promoting Buddhist Studies.
- Dhammacari Upayaraja and Dhammacharini Kuranadeepa, Triratna Buddhist Order, Pune, explained their organization’s work for the Buddhist cause.
- Mr. Savi Savarkar, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, presented his art work on the Devdasi system, which throws light on the pathetic state and inhuman treatment of Devdasi women in Hindu Society.



Dr. Sharda Sanghvi, Vipassana Research Institute (VRI), Mumbai



(L-R) Dr. Neeti Rana, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh

2:30 pm

- Ven. Narinda Mahathero (Miao) a senior monk from Arunachal Pradesh, explained the condition of Buddhist society in North East India.
- Mr. Sitaram Gaikwad, Akhil Bhartiya Magasvargiya (ABM) Samaj Prabodhan Sanstha, Kalyan Mumbai , presented the social and cultural work done in the Scheduled Tribe area near Mumbai in Kalyan and Thane.
- Mr. Yugeshwar Nandan from Patna, Bihar, a social activist, has written a book in Hindi on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, making his work and life easy for common people to understand. He spoke on the current state of Buddhist work and community in Bihar. (In Hindi.)
- Mr. Suresh Mate, MA Pali, MPhil (Pali) from the Pali Department, Mumbai University, spoke on “Social democracy and its Implementation”.
- Mr. Sunil Kamble from the Pali Department, Mumbai University, spoke on “Dr.Ambedkar’s Vision and Challenges before Buddhism in India”
- Dr. Dhananjay Lokhande, Head, Department of Adult, Continuing Education and Extension, Savitribai Phule Pune University, spoke on his experience of contemporary Buddhist society in Maharashtra.



(L-R) Ven. Narinda Mahathero (Miao), Arunachal Pradesh, Prof. Dr. Dhananjay Lokhande, Dr. Yojna Bhagat, Ven. Dr. Anil Sakya, Mr. Suresh Mate, Mr. Yugeshwar Nandan, Mr. Sitaram Gaikwad, Mr. Sunil Kamble



4:30 pm

- Ven. Dhammapiya, Dhammadipa School, Tripura, North East India, presented his work on Dhamma -inspired schooling and his views on the relations between Buddhist monks and Upasakas in contemporary India.
- Ms. Varsha Dethe, Pali Department, Mumbai University, reported on fieldwork on the topic “Problems of Contemporary Buddhist India - Culture”, jointly prepared by her, Mr. Sujit Kamble and Ms. Pragati Prabhe.
- Ms. Vaishali Gaidhani, Pali Department, Mumbai University, reported on fieldwork on the topic “Problems of Contemporary Buddhist India - Bhikkhu” jointly prepared by her, Ms. Nutan Pol and Ms. Manisha Kamble.
- Ms. Megha Tayade, Pali Department, Mumbai University, reported on fieldwork on the topic “Problems of Contemporary Buddhist India - Education”, jointly prepared by her Mr. Rupesh Gamare and Mr. Ajay Kasare.
- Mr. Damodar Morey, a Marathi literary figure, spoke on democracy and its relation with the Buddhist tradition. (In Marathi.)



(L-R) Ven. Dhammapiya, Tripura, Dr. Yojna Bhagat, Ven. Dr. Anil Sakya, Prof. Damodar Morey, Ms. Vaishali Gaidhani, Ms. Megha Tayade, Ms. Varsha Dethe

**Group Photo**



## DAY 2 - 23rd November 2014, Sunday

### Second Morning - Buddhist Revival

We announced: In the morning we shall look at four great Buddhist revivals, all alive today, based on four different parts of the world. The one thing that they have in common is that in all of them laity have played leading roles. On the other hand, this set of four lectures (of half an hour each), by giving us such diverse ideas and practices to admire, should make us all aware of the richness, variety and adaptability of the Buddhist tradition. We may also find that we know less about Buddhism than we thought.

#### 9:30 am

- Dr. Louella Matsunaga, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford UK, spoke on "Shin Buddhism in Japan: 'Other power' and radical non-discrimination"
- Mr. Rey-Sheng Her, Tzu Chi Foundation, Taiwan, spoke with slides on "Tzu Chi: Buddhism as altruism".
- Dr. Grace Foster Pollard D.Min., CST-T , a student of the Tibetan meditation master Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and a humanistic psychotherapist, spoke on "American Buddhism today: individualism, psychotherapy, neuroscience."
- Dr. Birendra Nath Prasad, Dept of History, Babasaheb Ambedkar University, Lucknow, - spoke on "Recent Buddhist revival movements in Uttar Pradesh".



Dr. Louella Matsunaga, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford UK



Mr. Rey-Sheng Her, Tzu Chi Foundation, Taiwan, ROC



Dr. Grace Foster Pollard, USA





Dr. Birendra Nath Prasad, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh



(L-R) Dr. Louella Matsunaga, Mr. Rey-Sheng Her,  
Prof. Richard Gombrich, Dr. Grace Foster Pollard, Dr. Birendra Nath Prasad



Mr. Rey-Sheng presented gift to Prof. Richard Gombrich



(L-R) Pravin Bhalesain, Prashant Bhalesain, Hanumant Bhalesain, Ms. Seema Bhalesain, Prof. Richard Gombrich, Mr. Rey-Sheng Her, Ms. Smita Bhalesain-Shende



Mr. Rey-Sheng presented gift to Hanumant Bhalesain and Ms. Seema Bhalesain

## **Second Afternoon – Buddhist Values for Public Life**

### **Daring to forgive, daring to succeed**

Legal battles against discrimination are slowly being won. But how are we to conduct the next stage of the non-violent struggle? The forces of prejudice are still active even when they have been outlawed, and the scars they have inflicted are still smarting. What problems do we face now, both in others and within ourselves? Can we learn how to tackle them?

In South Africa, Nelson Mandela's legacy of truth and reconciliation offers an inspiring example. In India caste and gender remain menacing challenges. Can the examples and teachings of the Buddha and of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar help us to cope with both struggles?

We hope to learn from a small number of other organised movements who work for oppressed minorities and with whom we can explore the scope for collaboration.

### **2:30 pm**

- Mr Cornel Rezmives, a Romani (Gypsy) from Romania, currently domiciled in the UK, could not come because of visa delay created by the Indian Consulate in London. His powerpoint was presented by Richard Gombrich and Pravin Bhalesain. It concerned the Romani People and the relevance of their experiences to the Ambedkarite movement.

### 3:00 pm

- A discussion on the variety of Buddhist traditions in India was chaired by Fr Gregory Sharkey, D.Phil. Oxon., S.J., from Nepal. He was joined on the podium by the Ven Shravasti Dhammika from Singapore, who spoke first; it was then opened to the floor. Over 50 people from the audience spoke and there was healthy discussion, a general exchange of views which allowed those present to share their concerns for about an hour.

### 5:00 pm

- A recorded video message on the struggle against discrimination from Dr. (Ms.) Pregs Govender, Deputy Chairperson, South African Human Rights Commission, was telecast in front of the audience in the conference hall, as she could not attend in person.. Her message touched the hearts of the audience.

You can find the YouTube videos at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKZAthsWWy0>



Pregs Govender Online



Ven Shravasti Dhammika from Singapore



Fr Gregory Sharkey, D.Phil. Oxon., S.J., USA and Nepal



Interactive Session



Interactive Session



Interactive Session

## **DAY 3 - 24th November 2014, Monday**

### **The Way Forward: Information and Education**

**It is by helping others that we can best help ourselves.**

We announced: Conferences often come up with good ideas, but then that is the end of it: there is no follow through. We intend to be different. On this final day, we intend to recap the good ideas that have come up earlier in the conference and examine how they can bring practical results; we shall also discuss how to improve information and Buddhist education. We invite Buddhist activists to put forward suggestions.

Buddhist education is in a deplorable state. Within India, even if courses are established it is very hard to find qualified teachers, and there is a grave lack of reading material in Indian vernacular languages. Translating the Pali Canon must be a high priority, and so must the wide distribution of good basic books about Buddhism. Moreover, education about Buddhism should not be confined to Buddhists. Worldwide, the serious study of early Buddhism (notably the Buddha's own words) and of the Pali language barely exists any longer. The OCBS is committed to raising the standard of Buddhist education for both scholars and the general public.

**Ven Dr Anil Shakya took the chair for the whole day.**

**9:30 am**

- Prof. Richard Gombrich talked on the position of the Ambedkarite community in India and made proposals for its improvement. He talked about the power of the Internet to expose the inertia of India's political process and to bring about peaceful but dramatic change, as we see happening through voluntary organizations in the West.
- Dr. Yojana Bhagat, Coordinator of the Pali Department, Mumbai University, spoke on "Pali and Buddhist Education in India – Past, Present and Future".
- Dr. Smita Sahgal, history professor from Lady Sri Ram College, Delhi University, spoke on "Nalanda and Vikramashila: Buddhist Repositories of Higher Learning"
- Mr. Geoffrey Bamford, Chairperson of the Society for the Wider Understanding of the Buddhist Tradition (So-Wide) Oxford, UK, talked about mindfulness and the Buddhist tradition





(L-R) Dr. Yojan Bhagat, Ven. Dr. Anil Sakya, Prof. Richard Gombrich and Geoffrey Bamford



Dr. Smita Sahgal, Delhi



Dr. Yojna Bhagat, Pali Department, Mumbai University

**1:30 pm**

Each member of the organizing committee who was present spoke briefly about what progress we were making, and there was further general discussion from the floor.



(L-R) Pravin Bhalessain, Dr. Alexander Wynne, Ven. Dr. Anil Sakya,



Concluding Session

## Summary

We provided a great deal of original and important information; even the academics all felt that they learnt a lot. On the first day it was about what Buddhist organisations (and some prominent individuals) are doing in India today; on the second morning we learnt about the amazing variety of Buddhist lay movements across the world; on the second afternoon we heard of other oppressed communities across the world who face many of the same issues as the Scheduled Caste Communities in India, and there was a totally successful spontaneous but orderly public discussion.

Finally, Ven Dr Sakya formulated **three resolutions** and put them to all present. Although the conference gathering had no kind of authority, it is encouraging that all three resolutions were passed by all present with no dissenting voice. The organisers therefore hope that they will bear practical consequences.

1. To found a new society, the Dr. Ambedkar Compassionate Society for SC/ST/DT/NT (oppressed people outside SaVarna Society), to be run by the Ambedkarite movement but to concern itself with other oppressed communities as well, and to defend both members of those communities against injustice and Buddhism itself against attack and discrimination.
2. That that society will have an active website, which will include current news about its concerns (both the atrocities and defence against them), as well as other matters of interest to the community and its educational and cultural concerns.
3. That under the auspices of that same society, and of the OCBS, we shall do all we can to promote translation into Marathi and Hindi of the Pali Canon and the works of Dr Ambedkar, and also of other materials which Ambedkarites may want to study, and also

to promote the publication of Dr Ambedkar's writings in a more accessible form, both on the internet and in print publications costing nothing or very little.

**Few Moments:**













**OCBS Address:**

The Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies (OCBS)  
Wolfson College,  
Linton Road,  
Oxford, OX2 6UD,  
United Kingdom  
Telephone: +44 (0) 1865 274 098  
E-mail: [info@ocbs.org](mailto:info@ocbs.org)  
[www.ocbs.org](http://www.ocbs.org)

**IIBS Address:**

Indian Institute of Buddhist Studies  
Survey No. 17/4, Suyog, Mangal Nagar,  
Wakad Road, Thergaon,  
Pune - 411033  
India  
Telephone: +91 9822350013  
E-mail: [pbhale@gmail.com](mailto:pbhale@gmail.com)  
[www.iibs.org.in](http://www.iibs.org.in)