

BOOK REVIEWS

Anand Singh (ed.), *Dana: Reciprocity and Patronage in Buddhism*

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This book is a collection of 15 articles by well-known scholars of Buddhist studies. The editor deserves the credit for creating a pool of intelligent collection of works from the scholars placed all over the world. This will serve as a crucial collection in order to understand the multi-dimensions of Dana and the developments around it. The constant additions to the concept of Dana have helped the monks/nuns to evolve in their personal and spiritual lives along with the constant growth of humanity and wealth of the *Sangha* (peerless field of merit). The spiritual contention for making a Dana have been expounded as 'Give ye your gifts with thoroughness, with your own hands, with due thought and give not as if you were discarding something' (p.19). Further, it brings forward the process through which the Dana brought large majority of people in the orbit of religious experience, especially the Gahapatis who were absent from the religious scenario, prior to the introduction of Dana. With this growth the Dana replaced the *dakkhina* (*dakshina*), and established a link between the people, on the one hand, and religion, on the other. Efforts have been made to establish roots about the influence of Buddhism on the Tamil classics with special reference to the *Manimegalai*, but don't go far.

The dimension of Dana extended in the work is not limited to the alms or the things received in charity. The distinction in similar terms has been well laid out along with the principles and components of Dana. Further, it highlights various requirements to be fulfilled by a monk to be eligible to receive the alms. Before receiving the Dana, the receiver is expected to draw the distinction between the personal alms and the community alms. The dynamics of the Dana comes near attaining fulfillment only when the trio intersection between *sangha*, monk and laity happens. The classifications of the requisites of Dana are of great help to understand the nuances of *nissaya* and variety of Danas.

The advent of Buddhism and the historical journey of the ancient locality Akhta/Rishipatana/Isipatana/Migadaya, and finally Sarnath have been done through the rigorous ethno-archeological study, have also looked into the origin and development of the Sarnath School of sculpture. The changing histories of the structures and localities (Ancient to modern times) have been done well by taking up the case of the Mahabodhi temple, which had an 'active Buddhist cult', who lost its glory to the Saiva *nagasanyasi* during the ninth century. During medieval times, the Saivites allowed the Buddhist to pray in temple but the grants of the state were received only in favour of the chief of the Savaite *math*. Thus, reflecting that the Buddhist place (Mahabodhi) was appropriated and overshadowed by the local cult in absence of the great tradition and for maintenance of peace. A brief description of the contention between the state, Zamindar and the Naxals after J.P. Movement (1975) makes the picture complete. The introduction of the Buddha Bhattaraka in the Vrata system of Brahmanical religion (thought I don't think the usage of this term is appropriate) during the early Medieval India highlights the attempts made for inclusion of the name of Buddha in the Brahmanical *vratas* for extracting the donations, mostly for the brahmana priests followed by the Buddhist and poor people. The essay is based on the evidences located in brahmanical religious texts, stone and copperplates land grant inscriptions. Definitely, this a novel research and had added a new perspective to the developments of early medieval period of Indian history.

The recordings of Buddhist endowments with guilds at Nasik that have been harnessed from the inscriptions form an interesting read and provides an insight into the networks and sources of the wealth which made the *Sangha* a rich entity. The deliberations around the guilds of weavers are convincing. Throughout Buddhist philosophy, Dana has been eulogized in different ways,

it has also been called as *karma*. The protection offered by this *karma* against sin has motivated the monks and nuns to donate and their contribution constitutes 30 per cent of the total donation, making the ascetics single largest community of the donors. These growths made the monks/nuns to indulge in economic activities, which became the 'immense pot-power of Buddhist discipline'. The insight in the riches (3 lakh gold coins/gold hoards in Gilgit) of *Sanaghas* is well documented through inscriptional evidences and variety of manuscripts in 'Ascetic Donations at Early Buddhist Sites'. The deliberations around the *dana parami* (the perfection of giving), in the essay 'The Culture of 'Generosity' and the Ethics of Altruism' puts forward the three important forms of *dana* namely, *amisadana*, *abhayadana* and *dhamma* and suggests that the blend of compassion with wisdom leads to moral excellence and spiritual upliftment. The examination of the Pali Text (*Parajika-pali*) brings in a new addition to the forms of *dana*, where 'sexual intercourse has been considered as the "best donation"...and upmost almsgiving'.

The philosophical aspects of the material and spiritual generosity, has been defined through the principles of self-observing and practical realizations, which finally culminates in intellectual formation of these experiences. Thus, making a large corpus of symbiotic relationships between material and spiritual aspects. A separate chapter on 'The Practice of Dana in Ancient Indian Buddhism' shrouded in ethical categories, propounded by Buddhism

is an appropriate addition to this collection of essays. 'The Matrix of Patronage' defines the Monasteries and Temples as wider economic and administrative units, which maintained law and set the legislations. The diminishing involvement of the women in Buddhist activities from seventh century onwards which led to the complete eclipse of the office of *bhikkuni* in North India has been linked well into the rise of social and feudal hierarchy due to the land grants.

Two chapters on the donation made in the North-Western India are based on the Kharoshti inscriptions, defining the *dana* as a cardinal principal of Mahayana Buddhism. This work is a wholesome diet for the ones who look to understand the social, economic and the cultural aspects of the Buddhism, which has flourished only through the Dana and its active extensive tentacles. Presently, this work is the most complete research on the philosophy, influence, working, components, procedures and evolution of the Dana. The evidentiary base of all the essays is very strong and providing well for the arguments propounded by the contributors. The arrangement of chapters in chronological sequence or as per geographical layout of the subcontinent would have provided a better shape to the book. A glossary would have been of great help for the readers.

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