

Ellison Banks Findly, *Dāna: Giving and Getting in Pali Buddhism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003, xvi + 432 Pp., Rs. 495. (Hardback).

In the *Ariyapariyesanasutta* of the Pāli Majjhimanikāya the Buddha gives an account of his beginnings as a teacher: “Monks, I now exhorted two monks; three monks walked for almsfood. Whatever the three monks who had walked for almsfood brought back, that the group of six lived on. And then, monks, I exhorted three monks; two monks walked for almsfood. Whatever the two monks who had walked for almsfood brought back, that the group of six lived on” (Majjhimanikāya I, pp. 173,2-7).

If we can date the beginning of Buddhism to the moment when the Buddha first taught his message, then we can see that from that moment the Buddhist community was dependent upon the generosity of donors.

The fact that Jain renunciants, followers of Mahāvīra, and doubtless adherents of other religious movements also, were also able to beg at the same time indicates that there was already in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE a tradition of giving to renunciants of any persuasion, and it is noteworthy that it was not just one-to-one giving, but donations large enough for a group to live on. It is unlikely that at the very early stages of Buddhism there was any body of teaching by the giving of which the majority of renunciants could repay the alms they received.

The title of the book under review includes the phrase “Pali Buddhism”. This presumably means the sort of Buddhism which is displayed and described in texts written in the Pali language, i.e. Theravāda Buddhism. Alternatively, Pāli Buddhism might mean the type of Buddhism described in the Pāli Canon. Against this interpretation is the fact that the non-canonical *Milindapañha* and *Cūlavamsa* are included in the list of primary texts in the Bibliography.

In the Introduction (pp. 1-18) Professor Findly reminds us of the *dakṣiṇā* given to brahmanical priests, and suggests that this played a considerable part in the development of the idea of *dāna*. The offering of *pinḍa* to ancestors in all probability also played a significant part in the development of the practice (p. 2). Clearly begging by renunciants (with the consequent giving by laymen) was no new thing.

In the chapter “Buddhist Donation: A Religious Response to a Changing World” (pp. 21-40) we see that at the very beginning of Buddhism, *dāna* was concerned only with the giving of food. Soon, however, it was extended to robes, medicine and lodging (making up the four requisites (p. 33)), and from lodging for an individual to lodging for a group and then the provision of rich ecclesiastical endowments. In subsequent chapters Findly considers at very great length the institution and development of *dāna*. Much of the material does not fit neatly into her chapter headings, with the result that there is a certain amount of repetition, e.g. in the discussion of the four requisites or of the relationship between *dāna* and Vedic *pinḍa*.

“Redefining Relationships: The New Donor” (pp. 49-86) deals with the way in which the gift of *dhamma* which the renunciant gave in return for the householder’s *dāna* led in time to the donor becoming an adherent to that *dhamma*,

and becoming a Buddhist (or Jain, etc.) layman (*upāsaka*), although not necessarily to the point of refusing *dāna* to renunciants following another *dhamma*. The fact that the donor might well be the householder's wife, in the absence of her husband from home, led to an increasing part being played by women in religious life.

The extension of *dāna* from mere gifts of food to other requisites has already been mentioned. "Resources to Requisites: Gifts to the Gone Forth" (pp. 105-57) deals with the elaborate set of conventions which evolved around the central concept of *dāna*. What should be given, how and to whom, and in what circumstances it should be given were all codified in great detail.

In "Giving Gifts" (pp. 179-206) Findly points out the importance of all such giving being undefiled, and describes the evolution of rules stating what things were acceptable and what, therefore, were suitable as gifts. She writes of what she terms a "brilliant move" by the shapers of early Buddhism (p. 194), whereby wealth is not condemned — that would have alienated the very people the movement wanted to attract as donors — but attachment to wealth. In the chapter "Receiving gifts" (pp. 214-43) Findly writes of the need for the recipients to be regarded as worthy of the gifts bestowed upon them.

In the section "Making, Using, and Transferring Merit" (pp. 249-80) Findly asks why householders made donations to renunciants. The answer is "to make merit". A layman became a donor to gain merit, to amass good *kamma*, to gain a better state of rebirth (*gati*) in his next existence. For a layman, amassing good *kamma* to ensure a good rebirth was as important as destroying *kamma* was for the ascetic. At first the merit was acquired only by the donor but later, as Findly points out, it was believed that it could be transferred to someone else. The final stage of transference came with the idea that merit could be transferred to the dead.

Findly refers (pp. 249, 269) to Spiro's idea of karmic and nibbanic ways to salvation, and to those who disagree with this theory. It might be thought that the ways to release through *kamma* and *jhāna* are in competition, but it is worthwhile pointing out that these ideas were in fact not mutually exclusive but rather alternatives and in fact complementary. Two ways are essential if the system is to survive. This is part of the reason why the Buddha taught two ways to salvation. We may assume that such differences in teaching arose from the very beginnings of Buddhism, so that there is no question of one aspect being older than the other.

Some scholars¹ have found it difficult to justify the dependence upon the laity, as it may involve self-sacrifice on their part, but I have suggested elsewhere² that both the Buddha and the Jina correctly realised that no religious institution could survive without the laity being involved in an active way. If the

¹ See Grace Burford, *Desire, Death and Goodness: the conflict of ultimate values in Theravāda Buddhism*, New York, 1991, p. 190.

² K.R. Norman, "The role of the layman according to the Jain Canon", in M. Carrithers & C. Humphrey (edd.), *The Assembly of Listeners: Jains in Society*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 31-39 [pp. 35-36] (= K.R. Norman, *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, Oxford, 1993, pp. 175-94 [pp. 180-81]).

laity renounce all their wealth and become beggars, then that is the end of the institution. The Buddha was a pragmatist. If all could follow the Buddha and gain *nibbāna*, then Buddhism would end overnight, as all gained the goal. The fact is that while some are seeking to gain the goal, they require food. The essential concomitant of a wandering beggar is a non-wandering donor, whose generosity (*dāna*) enables the wanderer to live and gain release (*mokṣa*).

There are those who say that the lay estate was instituted by the Buddha for those who could not make total renunciation, or that the lay estate was admitted by the Jina only in deference to human frailty, but this is to believe that both the Buddha (and the Jina) were so lacking in worldly wisdom that they could not see that if all laymen renounced the world and gave away their possessions, Buddhism (and Jainism) would have found it difficult to survive, even at the “primitive” level of the early non-property-owning religions. Without *dāna* there could be no ascetics, and therefore no transmission of the doctrines of Buddhism (and Jainism). If it were insisted that kings should renounce their kingdoms and wealth, this would have been tantamount to throwing away rich and powerful patrons, who might have been expected to protect them against the ever-present threat of brahmanical revival, patrons like Aśoka who, the *Mahāvamsa* (*Mhv* V 73 foll.) tells us, at the beginning of his reign fed daily 60,000 brahmins but replaced them by 60,000 Buddhists, and subsequently endowed vihāras, built stūpas, erected pillars, etc.

Findly mentions (p. 270) the *Petavatthu* and the *Vimānavatthu*, but perhaps does not lay enough stress upon the fact that the importance of *dāna* was emphasised by a whole genre of literature which came into being. Texts such as the *Dasavatthupparāṇa* were written to encourage the faithful to give generously by telling them of the rewards which had been gained by others who had been generous donors. The *dāna* literature is all part of the threats and promises which were employed in Buddhism to cajole the faithful (and not so faithful) into following good practices and avoiding bad. So there emerges a genre of Pāli “rewards and punishments” literature such as the *Vimānavatthu* and *Petavatthu*.

In “Renunciation and Property” (pp. 292-328) Findly deals with the seeming paradox, whereby a renunciant renounces all property, but nevertheless seems to possess a bowl and robes. The answer would seem to be that what is renounced is not property as such, but attachment to property. What a renunciant has is not property, but “a bundle of rights and responsibilities” (p. 294). For example, material for kaṭhina cloth is given to the Saṅgha, and portions of it are given to named monks for the making of kaṭhina cloth. The renunciant reaffirms ownership over the cloth by making it into a robe. Similarly, the giving of effort in other ways, e.g. the washing of a bowl or the sweeping of a *vihāra*, helps to reflect the bundle of rights for the one making the effort.

In the section “Monastic Strategies for Encouraging *Dāna*: Curbing Misbehavior and Generating Goodwill” (pp. 337-62) Findly writes of the need to enlist the sympathy and goodwill of the donor by careful observance of high standards with regard to food, dress, appearance and behaviour.

The section "The Renunciant as Facilitator: The Case of Ānanda" (pp. 368-96) gives an account of the way in which Ānanda, the Buddha's attendant and companion, facilitated the dynamics of the *dāna* practice, and so contributed to the needs of the early Saṅgha that it is not exaggerating to say that without him "the shape of Buddhism would probably not be what it is today" (p. 370). He was in fact so attached to the Buddha and the activities of the laymen that he was unable to attain *arahant*-hood during the lifetime of the Buddha. It was only the night before the First Council, at which only *arahants* could be present, that he made a final effort and attained the goal.

In the last section of the book ("Final Thoughts", pp. 403-4) Findly sums up the way in which the *dāna* process evolved from the religious traditions of earlier times, developed in the light of economic and social changes, and became a vital part of a Buddhist context which offered nibbāna to its renunciants, and a good rebirth to laymen after enjoying a happy and peaceful state of mind in their present existence in this world.

Although Findly refers to Jains and Jainism in several places in the book, she stresses, understandably in view of her title, the Buddhist contribution to the development of Indian society. There is a danger that readers of this book will not realise that they are being given a somewhat one-sided view of the institution and development of *dāna* in Indian society, for it is not made clear how similar the concept of *dāna* is in both Buddhism and Jainism, and how much the followers of the latter religion contributed to its development. The fact that Jainism was, like Buddhism, dependent on *dāna* from the start has already been mentioned, as has the Jina's views on the necessity of there being both renunciants and non-renunciants, but the parallels are much wider than that.

The growth of great ecclesiastical endowments can also be observed in Jainism where the *dāna-vrata* became one of the most important elements in the practice of the religion. The Jain text *Dānāṣṭakakathā* encouraged generosity, while each of the ten stories about Jain laymen in the *Uvāsaga-dasāo* ends with a statement about the heaven in which they will be reborn as a god (*deva*) as a result of their meritorious deeds. The Jains too had punishment literature, such as the *Vivāgasutta*. The Jain author Vasunandin expressly stated that the masses must be coerced by the fear of punishment and the hope of material reward, rather than being led into a religious life by the ideal of *mokṣa*. In Jainism too there were, and are, debates about ownership of property and ostentation in giving.³

The very extensive endnotes to each section of Findly's book indicate a wide range of reading of both Buddhist and Brahmanical texts and also of secondary literature. The size of the book is perhaps unnecessarily extended by the length of some of the quotations included in the text. Once Findly has unearthed a grain of information she seems to delight in sharing it with her readers. In the context of *dāna* it might be thought superfluous to devote more than half a page to the

³ See Josephine Reynell, "Renunciation and Ostentation", in *Cambridge Anthropology*, Vol. 9 no. 3, 1985, pp. 20-33, and K.R. Norman, op. cit. (in note 2 above), pp. 31-32 (= *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, pp. 175-76).

statement (p. 148) that the regulations for houses include such details as the fact that doors could have bolts, locks, and keys, when the reference to the Vinaya passage in which these matters are given is listed, and a simple statement on the lines of "details of all fittings are specified" would have sufficed. The same applies to the detailed information about the etiquette for a renunciant newly arrived at a monastery (p. 149), or the listing of the various colours in connection with the rules about robes of many colours (p. 344). Nevertheless there may well be many readers who will be delighted by such minutiae.

For the most part, Findly quotes relevant Pali passages in translation, although sometimes both Pali text and translation are given. The translator of passages is occasionally named (e.g. on p. 210), but usually no name is given, and the reader has to assume that the quotations are taken from the translations which are listed on pp. 407-9. This is not always the case. It is not clear who is responsible for the translation "the gift not given" which is given for *adinnādāna* (p. 215). This seems to be based upon a confusion of *dāna* "giving" with *ādāna* "taking", whereas the translations given by Rhys Davids and Walshe in the works listed on pp. 408-9 follow the usual "taking what is not given" (i.e. "stealing"), as Findly correctly translates on pp. 297 and 352. On p. 345 Findly translates the word *saṃharāpeyya* (Vinaya, IV, 259-60) as "let [hair] remain unshaven". This is presumably a paraphrase of I.B. Horner's "let grow" (*Book of the Discipline*, Vol. III, p. 247). As Miss Horner herself later admitted (Vol. V, p. 186, note 2) this translation is incorrect, and the verb should be translated "remove".

The Bibliography (pp. 405-20) is in four sections: Primary Texts in Pali (of which all are canonical except for the *Milindapañha* and the *Cūlavamsa*, as already noted), Primary Texts in Sanskrit, Primary Texts in Translation, and Secondary Sources.

Strangely, the Pali Text Society's edition of the *Dhammapada* (O. von Hinüber and K.R. Norman, PTS Oxford, 1994) is not listed. Nor is this reviewer's translation of the *Dhammapada* (*The Word of the Doctrine*, Oxford, 1997) included, although it would seem more convenient to have referred to that in the discussion on the meaning of *saddhā* (p. 213), rather than to an article dating from 1979.

There is a detailed Index (pp. 421-32), which, not unreasonably, omits such words as Buddha and Dhamma which are "too frequently mentioned to include". Considering the importance of the relationship between *dāna* and Vedic culture, and the number of times it is mentioned, it is surprising that the words Veda and Vedic do not feature in the Index.

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