The Venerable Sangharakshita

Lecture 157: India Talk

... and Friends,

Kulamitra has spoken of my giving a lecture this evening, or suggested that I might be giving a lecture this evening, but in fact I'm not. At most I'm giving a sort of talk. I'm giving a sort of miscellany of impressions. So I hope that nobody is in fact expecting too much, because for three whole months I was not only in India but I was immersed in India. I was immersed in the Indian Buddhist movement. I was immersed in our own movement out there in India, and I think that if I was to sit down seriously and put my mind to it, I could very easily write a whole book about the experiences of those three months, because they were so rich and so diverse, so variegated, so multifarious. Perhaps even a whole volume wouldn't be enough. So I'm not going to be able to do justice to those three months in India just in the course of forty or fifty minutes of speaking. At best I can offer you just, so to speak a slice of the cake. A slice which may, I hope, whet your appetite for more, because you will be getting more in different forms because accompanying me for much of the time was Nagabodhi with his cine camera and he has, I hope, a cinematographic record which, when it's all been put together, edited, provided with commentary, background music and so on *[Laughter]* - not I hope the inevitable sitar, which I didn't hear once during the whole three months! *[Laughter]* - you'll be able to get a fuller and even richer impression.

But for the benefit of those of you who perhaps don't know very much about me or very much about the movement or very much about India or our work there, perhaps I'd better start by just filling you in with a bit of background. I was not just in India. I was not just among Buddhists. More specifically most of the time I was among ex-untouchable Buddhists who are in a way a very special category of Buddhists. So the question naturally arises, who are these ex-Untouchables? What in fact is an ex-Untouchable? What is an Untouchable? So here I have to give you, I think, a little bit of information about the Indian background and specifically the Hindu background, the orthodox Hindu background. According to orthodox Hinduism, as embodied in various shrutis and shastras as they call them, society is made up of four main castes. There are the Brahmins who are the teachers; there are the Kshatriyas who are the landowners, the warriors, the fighters, the administrators, the rulers; there are the Vaishyas who are the traders and sometimes also the agriculturalists, and then there's the Shudras who are the servants, the serfs who wait upon the other three castes; and then there are the Untouchables. And the Untouchables are outside the caste system altogether. By the way all of these castes are hereditary. You are born into a caste, you belong to a caste because your father and his father and his father had belonged to that caste. It's an entirely hereditary system. And these four main castes are subdivided into two thousand, and there are roughly two thousand of these hereditary, partly occupational, partly tribal, castes in orthodox Hindu society, even today. In fact they are still very much present. Their presence is very powerfully felt even in Indian politics but we won't go into that at the moment.

But outside this caste system proper, outside the four main castes with their two thousand sub divisions, there are the Untouchables. The Untouchables are, certainly were, quite literally untouchable. They usually lived near a Hindu village, not too near. They were dependent upon the caste Hindu occupants of the village for their subsistence. They weren't permitted to own land, they weren't permitted to wear proper clothes. They weren't even permitted to eat proper food. They did the most menial work of the village, that is to say scavenging work, removing night soil, removing dead bodies, carcases of calves, dogs and so on, and in return for that they were given cast off clothing. Sometimes they were given to right to occupy a certain piece of land near the village, and they were given scraps and leavings of food, but they were not supposed to be given anything more than that, and this system obtained in India in most parts of India, if not in all parts of India, where the orthodox Hindu social system was set up, for hundreds upon hundreds of years right down practically to the present day. Well yes we can say right down in fact to the present day.

So this is the background. We have these Untouchables living in small communities near the caste Hindu villages and doing that sort of work, and of course perhaps another point I should mention is that they were not permitted to have any sort of orthodox Hindu religious teaching. They usually had sort of gods of their own, goddesses of their own, spirits of their own whom they worshiped. They weren't properly assimilated into the Hindu fold, though they were usually regarded as Hindus, at least for statistical purposes.

Now amongst these Untouchable communities there was one in particular with which we are concerned tonight; one with which I've been very much concerned during my time in India, and they are called the Mahars. The Mahars are one of the ex-Untouchable communities of the state of Maharashtra, mainly of the state of Maharashtra. India consists of some dozen or so quite large states, most of them bigger in

extent than the United Kingdom itself, and Maharashtra is one of these. It's situated in the Deccam as it's called, which is sort of South India or getting towards South India, and it stretches from, one might say, Bombay in the West, Bombay being the capital of Maharashtra state now, to Nagpur in the East and beyond - Nagpur being practically in the middle of India. So you can see it's sort of South Western India in which we find this state of Maharashtra. The population incidentally is a little bit less than the population of the United Kingdom, though the area is greater. So we find these Mahar people mainly in the Maharashtra state, and they were originally scattered among the different villages. Maharashtra state, like the rest of India, consisted mainly of village communities with just a few very big cities - Bombay, Nagpur, Sholapur - and so on. So these communities of Mahars, along with other very much smaller ex-Untouchable communities, they lived near the caste Hindu villages and here they carried out the sort of duties that I described. In Maharashtra, one might say perhaps, their position was even worse than it was in many other parts of India, even right down to the present day. Within living memory their conditions have been very very bad indeed. For instance they weren't allowed to go through the Hindu village at certain times of day when their shadow might fall on other people. This is within living memory. They had to carry a spittoon hung round their neck to spit into - Indians are always spitting you probably know - because they weren't supposed to spit on the wayside in case a caste Hindu foot stepped on it, and they were also supposed to carry a small broom with which they swept their steps or the imprint of their steps behind them, so that no trace of their passage should be left. All these practices and customs were enforced within living memory, within the memory of all the people among this community. And of course they subsisted on cast off clothing, leftovers of food, and had no rights at all. You may be interested to know that there in India some of our Indian Order members, some of our older Indian Order members, remember as small children experiencing this system of being sent by their parents to the caste Hindu houses for the scraps of food and the cast off clothing which was all that they were entitled to in the way of wages, apart from the bodies, the carcases of the dead animals that they removed. They were entitled to those, they were entitled to the skin, to the bones, but that's all. So this was their plight. They had no education. They were not allowed to have access to water, to the village well. I've had my own experience in this connection traveling among these people years and years ago. When I've been staying with them they haven't sometimes been able to offer me proper drinking water, only muddy water from the river, because that's all they were permitted to draw. So I had my own personal experience of these sort of conditions.

So the condition of these Mahars was very very miserable indeed. There were some alleviating factors. Some of them got into the British Army, at least into the East India Company Army, and that way they got a bit of education. But in modern times they've produced one very remarkable figure, one very remarkable man whom they regard nowadays as their emancipator. Before I go on to speak about him perhaps I should say a bit more about the numbers of the Mahars. Usually, if one takes Maharashtra state as a whole, the Mahars are about one tenth of the whole population, but on the whole they tend not to be sort of congregated together. They usually exist in small communities near the caste Hindu communities, for which they do scavenge and work. So they're in a minority everywhere, or practically everywhere, so this also conduces to their state of oppression and servitude. The fact that they're in a perpetual minority and they're in a minority everywhere in the State. Though in modern times, in quite recent times, there has been of course a sort of flow of population to the big cities so we've got quite big ex-Untouchable Mahar communities now in different parts of Bombay, in Pune, in Nagpur and so on. But the majority of these people, they still live in the villages in the way that I've described, under the conditions that I've described to some extent. So the population of Maharashtra is I think about 35 to 40 millions now - the population of that state so let's say these Mahars form about one tenth, so there's about nearly four million of them in the State of Maharashtra.

So these Mahar people, these ex-Untouchable Mahars, they produced a great leader called Doctor Ambedkar. His full name was Bhimrao Ambedkar, and he was born towards the end of the last century. He was a quite remarkable man. He managed to get education. He had a sort of military background. His father had a sort of military background. His father had been with the British Army, had got a little of education, so his son managed to get an education in India, although that was very very difficult and eventually pursued higher studies in England - London School of Economics actually - Germany and in America; and he returned to India, returned to Bombay, in the early thirties determined to do something for his community. So to cut a very long story short he did quite a lot. He started all sorts of institutions, started a great propaganda, all calculated to raise the standard of living of his people in every way, and to induce or persuade other Hindus, caste Hindus, to treat them more as human beings. So he wrote, he fought law cases, he became quite an expert on law, education, sociology, politics. He entered politics of course eventually, stood for Parliament and so on. At the end of his career he was a minister in the Central Government of Independent India. He became eventually law minister. So this great figure, Doctor Ambedkar, was trying as hard as he could to alleviate the condition of the Mahar people, but again and again he came up against one obstacle, and that was orthodox Hinduism. Orthodox Hinduism would simply not admit that these ex-Untouchable people, who of course in a way were still untouchable in their

eyes - they were only ex-Untouchable in law, in a law which was not enforced. He found that the Hindus, the caste Hindus, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, even the lowly Shudras, were not prepared to treat the Mahars on a footing of equality, in fact resisted so doing very very strongly.

So at first Ambedkar had the idea of trying to win over the Hindus, trying to reform Hinduism, trying to persuade the Hindus to treat the ex-Untouchables better, but after two decades of effort he declared himself quite - well quite frustrated - in his attempts, and he came to the conclusion that orthodox Hinduism cannot be reformed, and he decided that a change of religion was needed and he made a famous declaration which everyone of his followers knows, that which was that 'I may have been born a Hindu but I do not intend dying one'. And after that he was searching around for some other religion to follow, some other faith. He looked at Christianity, he looked at Islam, he looked at Sikhism, he looked at Marxism, but in the end he decided to become a Buddhist and to advise his people also to become Buddhists. He felt that if they got out of the Hindu fold altogether, if they adopted another religion, that would give them self-respect and they would be able to say that they are, in this case, Buddhists, that they're not Hindus, they're not Untouchables - they're just like anybody else, they're just human beings following the path of the Buddha. So he thought that the best thing that they could do was to get out of the Hindu fold, get away from Hindu society completely, change their faith. And for one reason or another - I'm not going to go into that this evening; this would take us too far afield - he decided to become Buddhist himself and to advise his followers to become Buddhists. So in 1956 there was a great ceremony in Nagpur and he and about half a million of his followers they became Buddhists, and after that the movement spread, but he died unfortunately six weeks after this great mass conversion.

Now I myself had some personal contact with Doctor Ambedkar, starting from 1950 and continuing through the early fifties, right up to 1956. I'm not going to go into the details of my contact with him - perhaps they aren't really strictly relevant this evening - but I had a fair amount of contact with him, and at the time of his death I happened to find myself in Nagpur where the great mass conversion ceremony had originally taken place only six weeks earlier. So at that time all his followers, they just came to me and they were terribly distressed having lost their leader, and they had become very disheartened, wondering what was going to happen next, now that he was no longer there to guide them. Anyway I spent some days in Nagpur. I gave in the course of four days some thirty five lectures in different parts of the area, sort of rallying them and telling them that all was not lost etc., etc. So in that way they started developing quite a lot of confidence in me, and thereafter I used to go down to the plains from Kalimpong practically every winter and tour among these people, tour sometimes from village to village, town to town, trying to spread Buddhism amongst them. Rather I should say not trying to spread Buddhism - in a sense it was already spread because they considered themselves as Buddhists - but since they considered themselves as Buddhists, trying to clarify for them what that meant. For instance explaining things like the Three Refuges, the Five Precepts, the Eightfold Path, Four Noble Truths; things that they hadn't as yet heard about in most cases. The situation was, in a sense, as bad as that. But anyway in the course of years and traveling all around Maharashtra among these people, I did become quite well known to them and they developed quite a lot of confidence in me. However, in 1964 I came back to England, stayed for two years, then decided to stay on, decided to start a new Buddhist movement, decided to start FWBO/WBO. So while I was doing all that of course I was, perforce, having to neglect my work in India. This was a conscious decision because I felt I'd done as much in India as I could for the time being. There were various difficulties - again which I won't go into now, but I felt I couldn't do much more, I had to leave it - so I took up the work in England. But India was never really out of my mind, and I kept up my contact with my friends there, and I used to insist on the 'Newsletter' being sent there. Some people used to wonder in the early days of the 'Newsletter', well why is Bhante so keen on sending it to these people in India that we've never heard of? Some of them used to think it was almost a waste of a good 'Newsletter' to send it off to India where we didn't have any activities, but anyway it was of the nature of an investment as we afterwards discovered.

So I had these people in mind all the time. I never forgot them, and of course as you all know, four of five years ago - yes just under five years ago - Lokamitra had a visit for yogic purposes; he met some of my friends and he came back, and then I put it to him that he should go and start up FWBO activities. So he did. That was four years ago. He's been there now for four years and he has no thought of coming back. He has no feeling to come back. I suppose he will come on visits and all that, but he feels himself very much at home there, and has pledged himself to stay there as long as is really necessary, and he's happy there. Anyway the FWBO having been started in India, and more especially in Pune, I went out there, or rather I paid them a couple of visits some three years ago on my way to New Zealand and on my way back from New Zealand. And on each occasion I stayed only for a few weeks, though long enough to ordain a few people. At that time I think a dozen people were ordained on the recommendation of Lokamitra mainly and Padmavajra. Two of them were people who I'd known very very well, had very close friendship with years and years earlier - that is to say Dharmarakshita and Dharmalochana. So I had just

that very little contact then, and of course just recently I've had this three month long visit to see what has been happening, how they've all been getting on, and what stage the FWBO, or as we call it in India Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana, has reached. I'm afraid you'll have to get used to this expression if I use it again in the course of the talk, just to give you a little practice in hearing it.

So yes I was away three months. I've been back now over a month, so this is a bit late really for giving a talk - I ought to have given it the day after I returned. But never mind. Better late than never. In the course of the month or so I've been back I've been meeting various people, and of course they've known that I have been away in India for some three months, so quite a number of them were asking me, 'Well did you enjoy your trip to India?' So I had really to think about this. Did I enjoy my trip to India? I thought well I'd better give an honest answer, so did I enjoy my trip to India? Well I can't say just like that, 'Oh yes I enjoyed my trip to India' - it isn't really so simple, that is to say if I'm honest. I suppose officially I am supposed to have enjoyed every minute of it! Most people rather like the idea of Bhante enjoying every minute of his three months in India, but I have to confess that I didn't always enjoy every minute of my visit to India. I have to admit that there were, yes, some - in fact very many - very pleasant, very delightful moments, but there were other moments, and even hours, which were quite painful in one way or another. So I'd better be quite honest, so to speak, to begin with and admit that - that it wasn't an unmitigatedly blissful experience always being in India.

So let me talk a bit about these experiences, both pleasant and painful. In my mind, in my recollection the painful experiences are associated largely with travel. I was very glad to be in India, I was very glad to meet people, I was very glad to give lectures, I was very glad to go - well I won't say I was glad to **go** from place to place - but I was glad to be now in this place and now in that place. But the actual getting from one place to another in India was sometimes a very painful experience. Apart from that one might say, speaking of India generally, there's such a lot of noise. I didn't enjoy the noise of India. If there are any of you who haven't been out there and think of India as a quiet, peaceful, yogic, retreat-like place, with sages in meditation all over the place, you've got a rude awakening coming to you if ever you go to India! India is very noisy. Life in India is noisy. People are noisy, especially in the big cities, especially places like Bombay, even Pune, even Aurangabad, but Bombay especially perhaps, very very noisy. Whenever I come back from Bombay - I felt it very much this time - when I returned to London everything is so quiet, *[Laughter]* everything is so peaceful! I came straight from Heathrow through London, beautiful quiet peaceful London, right through the middle of it - so peaceful, so quiet compared with Bombay - straight to Bethnal Green, straight to Sukhavati, and as I came through Bethnal Green it was so peaceful. It was just as though all the people of Bethnal Green were on retreat *[Laughter]* in comparison with Bombay. There seemed to be hardly a sound, and people just walking so quietly and peacefully in the streets. No one shouting, no one quarreling, no one fighting, no dogs barking etc., etc. But another thing that I found quite unpleasant apart from the noise was the dust. India seemed full of dust. Maharashtra seemed full of dust, the villages were full of dust, the roads were full of dust, the cities were full of dust, especially the cities, and the cities weren't just full of dust, they were polluted. Pollution has got very very much worse in India, certainly in the big cities since I was there years and years ago. In Bombay now it's quite terrible. In the evening especially there's like an almost a sort of pea soup of pollution sort of hanging over Bombay. I had the experience of going down from one part of Bombay to another by car for an evening engagement, for a meeting, for a lecture, and the trip only lasted half an hour, but in the course of the trip I was exposed to so much pollution that I at once got a sore throat, at once. I arrived at the meeting with a quite severe sore throat and I kept getting sore throats much of the time that I was in India; certainly whenever I went to Bombay I could look forward to getting a sore throat because the pollution was so bad. There's a reason for that. It's very largely due in Bombay to the increase in the number of taxis and the increase of the number of scooters. I'll just a bit about scooters shortly. *[Laughter]* But the result is that there's so much pollution and I mentioned this in a lecture. In the course of one of my lectures in Bombay I spoke about pollution and how much worse things were, because maybe I thought Bombay people aren't noticing that things are getting worse and worse, and I mentioned it particularly because there was an old friend of mine in the audience, in fact he was up on the platform, who was a former mayor of Bombay, so I thought well maybe he's got a bit of influence still, maybe he will do something about this. So I said, 'I'm sorry to say that your Bombay is really polluted now. You'd better do something about it fast.' I think it was even worse than Athens and that's saying quite a lot. So I certainly didn't enjoy this part of my trip - the noise, the confusion, the dust, the pollution - I didn't enjoy all that, and especially I've especially horrific memories of some of the railway towns that I visited in the course of my trip. There's nothing like them in England, even up North. Well perhaps I shouldn't even mention the North *[Laughter]* in this connection. Railway cities in India, or railway towns are really absolutely awful. I've really no words to describe them. They are horrible sort of hovel like settlements that have sprung up around great big railway junctions, and these junctions are really very very big because there's a quite vast railway system in India, and all over the place there are these big junctions. Trains by the dozen sort of puffing through them every half hour, or every ten minutes, and there's a pall of smoke, a pall of pollution

hanging over the whole city or the whole town rather. And since the town - well I don't know whether it's city or town - population can be anything up to half a million, there's just around the railway station which is the sort of satanic centre of the whole complex there's just huddle upon huddle of hovels of various kinds with maybe sometimes more modern buildings in between, but everything is so dirty, so confused, so horrible. There are ash heaps everywhere. There's dirt everywhere, poverty everywhere, and of course sometimes we had meetings, public meetings, right in the middle of such places - in the cross-roads in fact - they seemed to be favourite place, right next to the stations. An open space in the middle of the cross-road they'd just sort of stop the traffic coming and there'd be clouds of dust still unsettled and they'd put up the stage there and people would gather - three, four, five thousand people, and yes there one would have to give one's talk with the trains puff-puffing and toot-tooting in the background, what to speak of other noises and disturbances, and sometimes one has to raise one's voice against all this, and try to be heard, despite the microphone and loudspeaker system.

So this sort of aspect of India and this aspect of my trip I must confess I didn't enjoy at all. But still these were only minutes, these were half hours. Only the odd day. In fact sometimes even here the experience was very mixed. I remember one of these railway towns in particular - which one was it? It was Manard(?) That was especially horrific! But there were compensations because Nagabodhi happened to be with me and we had a little discussion about the contribution of pollution to the visual arts, because we were staying in some hotel - it was what they call a hotel in India, but you wouldn't call it a hotel here. We'd call it a doss-house, a doss-house - and this was right next to the station, right next to the station, so when you got up in the morning there was a layer of grime all over the place. Anyway we cleared out from this doss-house, through this pall of pollution, but there were some really beautiful atmospheric effect in the evening time, and there were some mountains in the distance, and sunset was absolutely magical. There was a brilliant pink sky with these very sinister sort of inky blue mountains seen through this sort of iridescent pall, this haze of pollution, and it looked really beautiful just for half an hour. But it was such a mixed experience. It was painful and it was pleasant at the same time. It was disastrous and it was delightful. It was diabolical and it was heavenly! All at the same time which is a bit confusing, not to say disorientating.

But there were quite often experiences which were unmitigatedly pleasant, and for me these occurred especially in the countryside, when we were driving through, especially in central Maharashtra, from one town to another, from one village to another. The countryside was very very pleasant. There's been a lot of irrigation work done in that area. A lot of these areas are much greener than they were before. People are growing much more in the way of crops, and especially I couldn't help noticing that wherever we went the sugar cane crops, the fields upon fields of sugar cane. So in a way I felt a little bit at home because in Norfolk too lots of sugar cane - no,no, not sugar cane - sugar **beet** is grown. And I noticed that in Maharashtra they had exactly the same sort of factories - sugar factories - as we have in Norfolk. It seemed extraordinary. Exactly the same materials they are built of - sort of aluminium; they're the same size, the same proportions, same design, just as though you'd taken one from Norfolk and just put it down in Maharashtra or vice-versa. So this made me feel a little bit of home, though usually I don't like factories. But it was very pleasant driving through the countryside. Much of Maharashtra is very flat, it's very dry, it's very barren but here and there you get cultivation, you get green fields, you get orchards, you get all sorts of what we would regard as exotic fruits, like bananas and chikkus and pomegranates and so, and oranges, though not at that time of the year. So I enjoyed this very much - Northern Maharashtra with the little villages, some of them of course quite squalid but picturesque nonetheless, and you see people working and you see cows, you see horses and goats; lots of little children, lots and lots of them and people working in the fields, little temples, and I really enjoyed all that. And sometimes these very low mountains with very interesting shapes in the distance, so I found this very delightful. It was a very delightful time of year.

I also in one or two places did a bit of sightseeing. I think about two days that I was able to devote to sightseeing, or part of which I was able to devote to sightseeing. And for some reason or other - it might have been something to do with the area in which I found myself on those sightseeing days - I decided to see something of Muslim architectural remains. There are quite a few Muslim, mainly Moghul remains in Maharashtra State itself, especially around Aurangabad where I spent a week, and also around Ahmedabad where I spent - Ahmedabad being in Gujerat - another week. And I especially was interested in the tombs of some of some of the famous Sufi teachers - I'd never seen any of these before so I decided to go along and see some of them - and it was really quite interesting because usually in India Hindus and Buddhists on the one hand and Muslims on the other from a religious point of view they don't mix very much. You can imagine it's not easy to mix, as it were, religiously or spiritually with a Muslim - they've got rather decided ideas about certain things. But anyway I did go along to some of these tombs, and of course in some cases there were quite a lot of people, quite a lot of pilgrims visiting them because - I don't know whether you know it but worshiping at the tombs of dead Sufi saints is quite a feature of Islam in

India. It's not considered strictly orthodox. Middle Eastern Muslims wouldn't feel at all happy about it, but it's a very definite feature of the religious life of Muslims, many Muslims, in India. And some of these tombs are very beautiful from an architectural point of view. So I saw some of them and I also experienced the atmosphere of some of them. One in particular had a very strong atmosphere which seems to be coming from the actual tomb which was in a way quite strange and quite interesting. And of course I was wearing my yellow robes - perhaps that hasn't been clear - in India I was wearing my yellow robes all the time, because if one doesn't wear one's yellow robes in India well people start wondering what exactly you are. It's much simpler and easier if you just wear them. Then it's 'Oh yes, he's a bhikkhu'. They know exactly where they stand. So I was wearing my yellow robes even when I went to these Sufi tombs, and these Sufi tombs are very often associated with mosques, and of course Muslims at first sight they can't tell the difference between say a Buddhist bhikkhu and a Hindu sanyassin or Hindu swami, and of course they don't usually like Hindus anyway, not to speak of Hindu monks, going into their mosques. So were some quite odd looks given to me when they saw me in my yellow robes in the precinct of the mosque or of the tomb, and usually there were several of our Buddhist friends, Indian Buddhist friends, with me, and so on several occasions Muslims would sort of quietly come up to them and say 'Who is that?' They clearly weren't happy at the thought that a Hindu might be there. So these Indian Buddhist friends of mine used to say, 'Well he's from England,' and the strange thing was as soon as they heard 'He's from England' it was all right. *[Laughter]* They didn't mind. So that was, I thought, distinctly odd. The fact that an Englishman was visiting their mosque or their tomb didn't bother them at all. They only seemed bothered by the fact that it might possibly be some kind of Hindu monk. So after that I didn't have anything to worry about. So yes I enjoyed my little bit of sightseeing. I also took the opportunity of visiting Ellora which I hadn't seen before. I'd seen Ajanta but not Ellora, but anyway I'm not going to say too much about that.

I must also admit that I enjoyed giving my lectures. Perhaps I enjoyed the actual giving of my lectures, and even the preparation of my lectures, as much as anything, and I gave quite a lot. I think I gave about thirty five substantial lectures during the time that I was there, plus little talks. And I very much enjoyed meeting old friends. There were people that I hadn't met for twenty odd years. Others I'd met on my last visit three years ago, but there were some I hadn't met for many years, and I couldn't help noticing that so many of my friends, very good friends, even quite close friends, seemed to be in their eighties. How they'd got there I couldn't imagine because *[Laughter]* I don't feel as old as that myself. In fact I'm not quite as old as that, but it seemed as though so many of my really good old friends were already in their eighties, so this rather set me wondering I must confess. But, anyway, in one way or another, for one reason or another I must say that I felt very much at home in India. In some ways I was rather surprised by the extent to which I did feel at home *[Radio interference with a voice saying 'You're coming through nice and clear. I've come through the tube and I'm at the old fire station'!]* in India. I think last time I had two very short visits there - on the way to and on the way back from New Zealand. I didn't stay long enough to realize how much at home I did feel. I felt it very very much this time. I felt as though everything there was very familiar to me. I knew it very well. I knew the ropes as it were, I knew the customs, I knew the manners, I knew the people, I knew the language, I knew what people would think on certain issues. I knew how they would react. I'd know what they were thinking without having to ask. In short I felt very much at home in India indeed. And this again set me thinking. It seems as it were quite strange that I should be able to feel so very much at home in two such very different places, for yes I do feel very much at home in England. I feel very much at home in London, having been born and brought up here. I feel very much at home in Norfolk, and I feel no less at home in India, especially in Maharashtra. In fact if I was pressed I might even say that I feel more at home in India. I think partly because the Dharma, certainly among our ex-Untouchable Buddhist friends, is more all pervasive, and I think partly because there is very often a sort of positivity in Indian society, among Indian people, that you don't quite get here. One might almost say, if it wasn't for fear of being misunderstood, there's a sort of friendliness there that very often one doesn't experience here. And of course I do have so many friends there. I've probably got far more friends, numerically speaking, in India than I've got here. I've probably got hundreds of friends here but I've probably got thousands of friends in India.

So from that point of view also I do feel very very much at home. So it seemed in a way strange that I could be able to feel so much at home in two such very different places. It's like being equally at home in two different worlds, because they are very different. It's as though almost as one might sort of go to the moon and feel very much at home there, just as much as on the earth. So it's as though well there are sort of two very different sides to oneself, one might even say, because on the one hand you're very much at home here and on the other hand you're very much at home there. It's almost as though you're two people, but at the same time you're not two people - you are just one person. One could say well one aspect of you, one part of you feels at home here and another aspect, another part, feels at home there, but no it isn't really quite like that because the whole of you feels quite at home in each of these two places, even though they are so different. So maybe that should give one something to think about.

Anyway, this is all in a way quite preliminary. I hope I'm not taking up too much time, but it's probably time I gave you - though actually we're about half way through, don't worry! *[Laughter]* - gave you - we're not going to be here all night! - it's time I gave you a sort of sketch of my itinerary. I've mentioned various places but you may not have a very clear idea of exactly where I did go, so perhaps I'd better say without more ado that I actually visited three states. India comprises about a dozen major states, plus various other territories. I think all these states are probably bigger than the United Kingdom. Some are as big as Spain or as big as Germany. I visited Maharashtra, which is certainly greater in extent than the United Kingdom; Gujarat which is probably a little bigger, and Rajasthan which is very much bigger. I visited these three states and gave lectures in all of them. I also visited the union territory of Delhi where indeed the capital of course is. But I spent most of my time, I did most of my work in Maharashtra among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists, among the Mahar Buddhists, that being the centre of the Buddhist movement in India and where we had most of our own activities. I started off by giving some lectures in Pune. Then I went up into the hills, into the Western Ghats and I gave a lecture at Panchgani and then another one at Mahad. Mahad is associated with the life of Doctor Ambedkar because it's there that he did something that really upset the Hindus. He burned the Manusmrti. The Manusmriti is one of the orthodox Hindu law books which say that even Shudras - and Shudras of course are a bit bad with numbers - but even Shudras if they happen to hear the words of the Veda, the sacred words which only caste Hindus can hear then molten metal should be poured into their ears and it says things like that. So Doctor as a gesture he burned the Manusmrti on a very famous occasion. So I was there celebrating with other Buddhists the anniversary of that great occasion, and there was a sort of cenotaph, a sort of column that they'd erected and I was shown this - they were very proud of this - Nagabodhi took photographs and I gave a lecture and so on.

Then of course there were lectures in Bombay after that, and here I must give you a bit of a picture of these lectures, some of these lectures anyway: in Bombay I gave quite a number of lectures in the course of a few days, but anyway the most spectacular was one at a place called Worli. Worli is a sort of working class area in Bombay. It's quite extensive, and there are lots of ex-Untouchable Buddhists living there. They mostly live in great slum block. There is row upon row of these slum blocks. There are tens of thousands of these people - perhaps a hundred thousand or more - living in the same area. It's very slum like.

[End of Side One Side Two]

Traveling wasn't easy. Sometimes transport broke down. Sometimes cars didn't turn up. Trains were late etc., etc. But anyway there was a party of ten or twelve of us traveling around. I had with me just for those three weeks, Nagabodhi, Lokamitra, Punya I think part of the time, Jyotipala part of the time, Kevala part of the time, Vimalakirti all the time, Dharmarakshita all the time, and a number of other Order members and mitras. So we needed three cars to transport ourselves. Sometimes we had to go by train or partly by train, partly by car. Some of us taking the bus sometimes, some of us going by car, some of us by train. The logistics of it were sometimes extraordinarily complicated. Anyway Lokamitra managed it all somehow. We took with us all our tape recording equipment, all of which had to be set up under very difficult conditions everywhere we arrived. As soon as we arrived Purna and one or two of our young friends had to go straight along to the place where the meeting was going to be held with not even a cup of tea after a long journey and set up everything at once, and test it and check it and there were all sorts of complications and difficulties and things going wrong, you can imagine, because they wanted to tape everything that I said, every lecture that I gave. And we also carried around an enormous quantity of literature for sale. This is perhaps something I should mention. We've got an enormous amount of literature now available in Marathi, much of it translated from lectures which I have given or things I've written, and we had an enormous sale of books or booklets and magazines and so on, FWBO or Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana publications at every one of our meetings. Sometimes at some meetings, when they were very big, we had four bookstalls, one at each corner of the meeting, all selling publications like hot cakes. So we had to carry this enormous stack of material around with us, plus of course bedding - blankets, sheets and all the rest of it - because sometimes we just didn't get those where we stayed at night. We stayed the night in all sorts of places. Doss-houses as I call them. There were one or two that could be classed as hotels, and there were private houses, but very very poor people's houses - one must remember that. With no privacy virtually and not quiet and very inadequate sanitations and so on. Sometimes we stayed in quite palatial rest houses which are usually made available to only high ranking government servants and ministers in the government. Sometimes we were able to make use of these and then we really revelled in luxury for a few hours, but despite the difficulties the programmes as a whole were very very successful. I myself during that tour period had to follow a very strict programme. Every minute almost was regulated because I had to prepare a talk come what may. Despite the conditions I had to prepare a talk. It had to be a good talk, because well people were coming in their thousands to hear. It was going to be tape recorded, it was going to be translated and published in a magazine or a booklet; so I had to turn out something of some value. So I used to have to rigidly seclude myself for up

to three hours every day regardless of wherever I was and prepare my talk, which I usually prepared quite carefully, and I must say, yes I did quite enjoy preparing them. So, as I said, these three weeks in Marapura, the Marapura area, central Maharashtra, these were the most strenuous and demanding weeks of the whole tour, and I must admit that once or twice my physique didn't quite stand up to it, but nonetheless I was able to carry on.

Then after that tour, after a few days in Pune and less than a day perhaps in Bombay, we all went up or many of us went up to Ahmedabad which is the - I won't say the capital as Gandhinagra is now the capital but the - biggest city, population two million, in the state of Gujerat, and we had a week there, during which I gave a number of lectures also and fell a bit ill again. Then we went up into Rajasthan, the state of Rajasthan, still going north, and spent a couple of days in Ashmir where I had lots of connections, as in fact I had had in Ahmedabad, and then on to Delhi. So in all these places I gave talks. Then we came back to Pune, back to Bombay, then of course I came back to England.

So as you can gather, I was mainly concerned during my the three months giving public lectures and having sort of maximum exposure, maximum contact with people, putting forwards the Dharma as much as I possibly could, and I found the experience of giving all these lectures very very useful and very very satisfying, because everywhere I went I felt people really did want to hear the Dharma. Don't forget until recently they haven't had much in the way of literature to read in their own language. A lot of these people also are still illiterate, especially the women, so it's only through the spoken word that many of them have an opportunity of learning about the Dharma, and it's really quite an experience to have thousands of people sitting in front of you all **really** wanting to hear the Dharma, really wanting to hear what you have to say. It **means** a lot to them. It's a sort of almost vital need. It's not out of dilettante interest. After all these people - I'm talking now mainly about the ex-Untouchables, the Mahars - they've left Hinduism for the sake of a better life in every respect. Not just spiritually but socially, politically, economically and so on; and they feel they can get that through Buddhism. They feel that through Buddhism they can create a new society as well as improve themselves. So Buddhism means a very very great deal to them, and a lecture on Buddhism means a very very great deal to them, and I think I can say that a lecture from me meant a very great deal to them because most of them had had contact with me before, most of them had heard about me before, and they really did want to hear what I had to say.

So there were the lectures, taking up so much of my time, not only giving them but also preparing them. I also of course inevitably met people individually, privately. Had interviews so to speak. Also just met old friends in a more social sort of way. I also attended a couple of retreats, short retreats, in fact ordination retreats in the course of which there were altogether some eight ordinations. We now have eight more upasikas in India, all of them of Indian origin.

Anyway this is just a sketch of the actual tour. So let me give you a few more impressions. Let me give you a few sort of general impressions about - I'm afraid time is passing but anyway I'll try to be a bit quick! - a few general impressions about India, before we come onto specifically Buddhist impressions.

My main impression, general impression, was that people in India are becoming more prosperous. After all I've been familiar with India since 1943 - that was when I arrived there first. So that is practically forty years, and certainly people are much more prosperous than they were. They are certainly much more prosperous than they were fifteen to twenty years ago. It is quite noticeable. Let me just give you a very simple illustration. Twenty to twenty five years ago what were the status symbols? The status symbols were a wrist watch, a fountain pen and spectacles. If you were a sort of youngblood of the village who'd had a bit of English education and had got a little sort of clerkship in some local office and you wanted to sort of show that you were a cut above the rest of the villagers, you sort of sported a fountain pen and a European style jacket - a fountain pen which very often didn't work. A watch, which also might not work, and you see people just shaking the watches like that and showing off that they had a watch; and spectacles, but they'd just go to the bazaar and buy spectacles. No question of any tests, no optical examination, no question of going to the optician. You just bought a pair of spectacles because it was a status symbol. So these were the simple status symbols some twenty five years ago. But towards the end of my stay in India, my sort of permanent stay, the status symbol was the transistor set, usually the Japanese transistor set. The youngbloods of the village they were sporting these, and were carrying them around and holding them to their ear and older villagers would gape in open mouthed wonder and astonishment at this sort of magical box. But anyway that was the status symbol. But what is the status symbol now? The status symbol now it seems is the wretched scooter! *[Laughter]* You see them all over the place. You see them in the towns, in the cities. You see them in the villages. You see them going along the village roads, chug, chug, chug, chug, and of course they're adding to the pollution problem, especially in cities like Bombay.

But the meaning of it is that economically things are definitely improving. I don't know the sort of technical detail. I can't provide you with any statistics about India's economic growth or anything like that but I certainly notice that people on the whole - certainly people that I'm in contact with and people that I just observe in passing - seem broadly speaking, somewhat more prosperous than they were. You feel that the economy is expanding, and it's very strange. It gives the whole of life there in India a strange sense of expansion, because there's a sort of general expectation that things are going to get better; that your children are going to have a much better life than you've had. That things in five years time are going to be much better than they are now, much better that is by Indian standards - we might say just a little bit better, but there is this sort of general feeling of sort of buoyancy, that things are moving, things are getting better, they're getting materially better, and this is very strong among the Buddhists in particular, the ex-Untouchable Buddhists. And this also communicates itself to Buddhism. They feel well with the help of Buddhism things are getting better. We're becoming better Buddhists than we were. The Buddhist movement is growing, the Buddhist movement is expanding, the Buddhist movement is becoming more influential. So you get a feeling of sort of hopefulness and buoyancy and expansion such as you **don't get here**. In England it's almost as though the air, the atmosphere is that of a dying economy. Do you know what I mean? Not an expanding economy, and that seems to affect the whole of life, it seems to affect the whole atmosphere. In India it's not like that at all. The keynote seems to be growth and expansion, even though on a very modest scale, perhaps not from the point of view of the industrialized societies of the West, but it imparts a sort of tonic to everything. There's a sort of optimism, a sort of hopefulness, a sort of positivity which you get with this. Perhaps which is not confined to this - perhaps goes a bit beyond this- but I certainly was very aware of this in the case of India generally and in the case of the ex-Untouchable Buddhists perhaps in particular.

But coming onto the ex-Untouchable Buddhist in particular, I should perhaps mention that after Ambedkar's death there was quite a jostling for power among his lieutenants, his leading followers, to use that expression, and things were in quite a bad way for quite a number of years. That's one of the reasons why I left, or one of the reasons why I felt that I couldn't get very much further with my own work among these people. Because one had to be so careful not to tread on the toes of the so-called political leaders among the Buddhists who were very very jealous of anybody else having any sort of influence over these people. But anyway while I was busy in England these people sort of - well they blotted their copy book let's say. I found it about three years ago but I found it all the more so now, that the Buddhists have lost faith in the politicians, they've lost faith in their own political leaders, and they're thinking much more in terms of - well of just Buddhism, and they've also lost faith in the Buddhist organizations in India which they've known. They never had much faith in, for instance, the Mahabodhi Society, but they lost faith even in their own organizations including even those which Ambedkar started, because the people running them didn't really have much knowledge about Buddhism, couldn't really do very much. So what we find now is that more and more people among these ex-Untouchable Buddhists are looking to, even turning to, the FWBO, to the Trailokya Bauddha MahaSangha Sahayak Gana, and I was very very glad to see, but astonished to see, how the FWBO in India had grown since my last visit only three years ago. I was fully prepared to see the movement three or four times bigger than it was, and I think I can say it's twenty to thirty times bigger than it was. It's grown to an enormous extent. The fact that we don't as yet have any permanent building of our own means very little, because the activities are going on, lectures are going on, classes are going on, retreats are going on, publications are going on; we're expanding our sphere of activities and influence. We're coming into contact with tens of thousands of people, all of whom have not only heard about us but know something of us, have some contact with us, and are looking towards us more and more, and especially the more educated and influential among them. In fact we're beginning to attract quite a bit of support. People offering us money, offering us land. This is happening now. There is quite of support forthcoming from among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists themselves, especially as I've said those who are a bit more educated or a bit more influential.

For instance, just to give an example, there is an organization called 'People's Education Society' started by Doctor Ambedkar - this has been functioning very very well. He started it years and years ago. It has a number of colleges and high schools which it runs in the state of Maharashtra, and of course several people on the governing body of the 'People's Education Society' are old friends of mine, which helps. But anyway they're collectively so impressed by the work of the FWBO, the Trailokya Bauddha MahaSangha, that they've placed all their schools and colleges at our disposal for retreat purposes during vacation time. We don't have to pay anything. We can have any of the buildings that we like. They're just placed at our disposal. They've got such confidence in us. They're so pleased with what we are doing. They say they haven't seen any Buddhist organization functioning like this before. They haven't seen anybody like Lokamitra, haven't seen anyone like Purna or Jyotipala, not to speak also of our Indian friends like Vimalakirti and Buddhapriya, Dharmarakshita. Well yes they've seen Dharmarakshita before because he used to translate for me twenty, twenty five years ago. But they're so impressed and so pleased and so happy with what is going on, they just haven't had the opportunity to come in contact with the

Dharma in that sort of way before. And not only among the 'People's Education Society' - they insisted by the way on giving me two separate receptions on two separate occasions, but there's a tremendous demand in all parts of Maharashtra and beyond for lectures and study classes and retreats, and of course for publications. I mentioned that we've got quite a few publications in Marathi mostly - Marathi being of course the language of the Maharashtra state, one of the leading North Indian languages. During my visit some four new publications were brought out or launched, and Lokamitra launched his new publications in style. Nagabodhi was very impressed! *[Laughter]* Not just released at a strategic point in the meeting, usually a large public meeting with thousands of people present, the new publication is held up for everybody to see; not only that usually Lokamitra gets some prominent local person to actually publish it and he takes a copy, he wraps it up in coloured paper and ties it all up with ribbon and then this person had to come up onto the stage and open it and to look at it in wonderment and hold it up for everybody to see. Lokamitra then gives - I was going to say a short lecture, no it sometimes goes on for forty minutes - extolling this publication. He gives a detailed account of what it contains and why it is so useful and why people should buy it, and the fact it is so cheap. So at the end of the meeting the new publications sell just like the proverbial hot cakes. And, not only that, at the end of every meeting all the publications of course are on sale and Lokamitra gives a lecture extolling every single one of them. I must admit, having attended so many meetings and having heard this piece so often I'm afraid I got a little bit bored with it, but it was new of course for the people that we were visiting, the people attending that particular meeting. So sometimes six or eight different publications were described in detail, extolled and plugged. Sometimes Lokamitra did it, sometimes Nagabodhi was induced to do it, sometimes Vimalakirti did it, but they really do it, and the result is publications sell. People feel oh they must buy this, it's really good, it's really necessary. So I noticed Nagabodhi looking very very thoughtful *[Laughter]* on several occasions. In fact on more than one occasion he confessed that he was almost green with envy, he said.

And of course not only are there the books and the pamphlets but there's the quarterly magazine, *'Buddhayan'*. There's nothing like it in Maharashtra. They now print five thousand copies which all sell. Don't forget in India, in a place like India, you don't get one person buying one copy and reading his own copy and keeping it to himself and maybe just showing it to a friend, no. You get fifteen or twenty people reading the same copy, whether it's a newspaper or a magazine, because a lot of people just can't afford to buy it, so things are shared around. So if we sell five thousand copies, it wouldn't be an exaggeration perhaps to say that those five thousand copies reach fifty thousand people. There's of course growing literacy. People want literature more and more, simple stuff, so the material in *'Buddhayan'* consists mainly of translations of lectures that I've given. They've just come to the end of the translations of the lectures I gave on my visit three years ago. This time I've managed to supply them with material for eight years. So they're going to bring out some of the lectures in book form, because if I go next year well they'll have another load of lectures to translate and publish. But *'Buddhayan'* is doing so well and the lectures are mainly quite straightforward, even elementary; there are talks and articles by Lokamitra, by Jyotipala, by Vimalakirti, though I think mainly it's my own material.

Anyway this perhaps gives you just some idea of our activities and the sort of impact that we're making, and some of you might be a bit surprised that people should be turning to the FWBO, even though it might be disguised as Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana, which I hope you have learned by this time. Because after all the FWBO was started in England and this is India and India is the land of the Buddha and all that. Aren't we rather taking coals to Newcastle, but it doesn't seem so. In fact thinking things over it does seem very much as though there's a certain similarity between the positions of Buddhists in England, certainly, Buddhists in the United Kingdom, and Buddhists in India. Certainly Buddhists in Maharashtra, the ex-Untouchable Buddhists. And the main point of the similarity is this. That they're all new Buddhists, that is to say they're all people who've **chosen** to be Buddhists. They haven't inherited their Buddhism. They don't just blindly follow tradition, and this I found is a point that Lokamitra stresses very very much. He says in nearly all his lectures - certainly when speaking in a new place - that we are all new Buddhists, just like you. You are new Buddhists just like us. Buddhism isn't something that we've inherited from our forbears. It's something that we've decided to follow. But of course it isn't easy if you're born as a Buddhist, if you can be born as a Buddhist in fact, you tend perhaps to follow very mechanically. You think you know it already. Buddhism isn't very fresh or very alive for you, but if you **choose** it, after a lot of thought, for yourself, after perhaps a lot of suffering, then you've got a very very different attitude towards it.

So because Indian Buddhists are new Buddhists and because Buddhists from the United Kingdom or Buddhists from New Zealand for that matter, because Purna is from New Zealand, are new Buddhists, well they've got a much better basis for understanding than either of them have with Buddhists perhaps who are Buddhist by tradition, by birth and by inheritance. And not only that, even apart from that, they just like our approach, they like the FWBO approach. It makes sense to them. They find it meaningful. They like our methods, they like our system, they like our meditations, they like our retreats, they like our study

groups, they like our Mitra system. It's as though the whole FWBO system was designed specifically for the Indian situation. It's really extraordinary! As everybody knows, well no it was started in England mainly for the benefit of Westerners. Not only for the benefit of people from different parts of the United Kingdom but people from America, people from Germany, people from Holland. We at that time didn't think very much in specific terms of the needs of our friends in India, but transporting the whole system, so to speak, lock, stock and barrel as set forth by Subhuti in his new book, to India, it seems to meet their needs just like a glove. As though it was actually tailored for them, which is very extraordinary, but they are quite at home with our system. It makes sense to them, and of course the fact that it comes from England and isn't of Indian origin is an additional recommendation, because they tend that anything of Indian origin is tainted with Brahminism, tainted with the Hindu caste system, and of course there is some truth in that.

There's also the point that Buddhists from Buddhist countries, even Buddhist monks, lamas, have done practically nothing for the ex-Untouchable Buddhists. There's four million of them, and there's hardly anybody gone to work among them from Ceylon, from Thailand, from Burma, from Tibet, no one seems to bother. It's only apparently the Buddhists from the West who bother, and they appreciate this very much, and they're not at all, as it were, put off by the fact that we are English or New Zealand or whatever. They rather like that, because they feel we're likely to be free from any Hindu influence, and they're very afraid of that Hindu influence, because they've suffered from it very much. There are a couple of things I mentioned in lectures which seem especially to appeal to them. Things which I hadn't mentioned much before, certainly hadn't mentioned twenty years ago. They very much like this idea of a Buddhist movement being self supporting financially, and especially through its co-ops. They really like this idea very much. This whole idea of religious mendicancy, sort of depending for the support of the religious activities on charitable donors, they don't like that system very much - it smacks too much of beggary, and of course they were forced formerly to live as beggars so they don't like that. The idea that you don't ask the public for anything, that you work yourself, that you have your co-ops, that the profits from the co-ops go towards running the Buddhist activities - they really like this idea, they really appreciate it in a way that I really can't describe. And then another point I mentioned this time, and made a point of mentioning it was **teamwork**, that in the FWBO we don't have leaders. In India they've a great weakness for leaders. They're always clamouring for a leader, someone to lead them. This is a great weakness in the Indian character. It's a weakness in their politics. I mean look for instance at the way Mrs Gandhi's surviving son is being groomed, apparently, to succeed his mother. Why? Because he's his mother's son, he's his grandfather's grandson. For no other reason apparently. He's a nice young man but he was interested formerly just in flying aeroplanes. He wasn't interested in politics, but anyway his elder brother who was interested in politics died and so India's got to be provided with a leader of course. It has to come from above, come down from heaven as it were, so this young man is being groomed, rather late in life actually. So Indians are always looking for leaders. They're always sort of looking for help from outside, always looking for some big influential person, whether political or religious, to solve all their problems for them, and they can just blindly follow.

So I really hammered this sort of ideology in my lectures, and I must say, incidentally, that the way I speak in my lectures in India is rather different from the way I speak here, though the language may be the same, but I'm very very much more blunt. One or two of our English friends were a bit shocked at the bluntness and crudity of some of my expressions, but you are speaking much of the time to illiterate people. People who are not fairly educated, people with very sort of - what shall I say? - rough and ready minds. They see things a bit in black and white terms. They're not concerned with refinements of thought and language. They want it sort of strong and straight from the shoulder. They like that. So this is the way I was talking to them most of the time, and this was the way in which I was sort of hammering this idea of leadership and saying 'in the FWBO we don't have leaders. We have teams of people working together. This is the spirit of Sangha, that people work together and do things together as teams', and this idea also they really liked because they've already been fed up with their so-called leaders, people who tried to lead them and who failed dismally, and they like the idea of just teams of people doing things together.

So these were just a couple of the ideas that I stressed. There are others things in common as between Buddhists in or from the UK and these Indian ex-Untouchable Buddhists. We are all trying to get away from religious conditioning, previous religious conditioning of one kind or another. We, in many cases, are trying to get away from our Christian conditioning, our Protestant conditioning, our Catholic conditioning, our conditioning of guilt very often. I can remember on one of the women's study retreats up at Padmaloka last year, some of the ladies really went to town about the Virgin Mary. Apparently they'd really suffered at the hands of the Virgin Mary. I won't go into the details but, yes, they'd suffered at the hands of the Virgin Mary and they weren't very pleased with her or very happy about her. So we suffer, or many of us do, from our Christian past conditioning. These people suffer from their Hindu conditioning. They suffer from their Hindu past. They suffer of course from the Hindu caste system itself, and they feel very very

strongly about this. This is still a problem. By becoming Buddhists, yes, they've gained self respect, they've improved themselves in all sorts of ways, but a lot of Hindus still regard them as Untouchables and try to treat them as such, and become very very resentful when the ex-Untouchables, the Buddhists, get, as the Hindus think, above themselves. If they dress a bit too well the Hindus think that Hinduism is being insulted, because their holy books say that these people shouldn't dress well. This is quite a point. If a woman wears a nice sari or a man wears a good suit, or if they wear ornaments, they are sort of insulting the Hindu religion. They're getting a bit above themselves and they have to be punished. So all the time that I was in India every few weeks there'd be cases reported in the newspapers of ex-Untouchables being attacked. Not so much in Maharashtra but especially in the united provinces, being attacked. Women being raped, people being murdered, houses being burned. So one has this in the background all the time as a constant reminder. Supposing we here in London, we were to read in the newspapers from time to time last night five Buddhists in, say Birmingham, stabbed to death, ten Buddhists in Glasgow burned to death when their house was set on fire, and so on. Supposing we were reading these sort of things in the papers from time to time. What would we feel? But this is the sort of experience that these people have from time to time. So they feel very very strongly about Hinduism. They feel under constant threat of attack by the caste Hindus.

I remember in the course of my tour of Marapura I was staying at a railway place called Dund and we were put up in a very poor sort of house. I had a little room to myself, and there was a bed, a wooden bed with a mattress. For some reason or another - I don't know why - I looked underneath the mattress, and there was a big knife. So the reason was clear. Self defence. Just in case they were attacked one night by caste Hindus. All right they've got a knife. They don't believe, I'm afraid, to this extent in non-violence. If they can they retaliate, but usually they're vastly outnumbered and they're just killed. So this was a bit of an eye opener in a way as it was a sort of reminder, these are the conditions under which these people have to live.

Nonetheless I did also detect on this visit some change of heart among some Hindus. In fact there was a Hindu organization called Vishvahindu Parisa which pursued me and was asking me to give lectures and so on, and I gave one lecture for them at which I really spoke my mind about Hinduism. I called it 'Religion and the Secular State'. I won't give you a summary. You might see the English transcript at some time, but anyway there were signs of a change of heart to some extent among some Hindus. But I remember this lecture I gave with this Hindu organization was in Aurangbad and there's a very interesting experience here in this connection. The day before the lecture the office bearers of this organization wanted to invite me to their office in Aurangabad city just for a cup of tea, so Lokamitra and I went along, or we were to go along, and from there we were to go directly to a locality, Buddhist locality, ex-Untouchable locality, for an evening meeting. There was a lot of confusion .The car didn't turn up - I won't give you the whole story - but anyway with great difficulty we found this office, and we were an hour late and I gave a little talk, they gave us tea. About thirty people had gathered to brief me about their organization and so no. So from there we went to the meeting, the Buddhist meeting in the Buddhist locality. We found one of the Indian Order members beside himself with anxiety. As soon as he saw Lokamitra he really scolded him. He said, 'Where have you been? Where have you been taking Bhante?' So Lokamitra said well we've just had tea with these people. So he said, 'You took Bhante to have tea with those people'. He said, 'Do you realize you might have been poisoned!'. So Lokamitra was a bit taken aback, but this Indian Order member seriously thought that we might have been in danger. He didn't trust any Hindu, any Hindu organization one little bit. He seriously thought, when we didn't turn up, not knowing what had happened before we went to this office, he seriously thought that the Hindus might have lured us to this office of theirs to give us some poisoned coffee or something - this is not uncommon in India - just to get us out of the way. He was really as worried as that and he really scolded Lokamitra that he'd just taken me there and we hadn't taken a sort of troupe of our own people with us etc., etc., so this also showed me the depth of the suspicion and well hatred one might almost say, because the ex-Untouchable Buddhists have really suffered at the hands of orthodox Hinduism, orthodox Hindus, and continue to do so.

Anyway one can see also from this, though there are many similarities between Buddhists in the UK and Buddhists in India there are differences too. Their point of departure is social. Their original point of departure is social. They wanted to emancipate themselves from the caste system through Buddhism. They wanted to get back their self respect as human beings through Buddhism. They've done that to a great extent. In the West usually those of us who become Buddhists, our point of departure is not social. Our point of departure is psychological. We are thinking in terms of maybe solving our psychological problems, getting rid of our existential traumas and all the rest of it. We're not so bothered with society. Well society is pretty well organized compared with society in India from the material point of view. So their point of departure is more social, and ours is more psychological. I think the fact that their point of departure is social, the fact that they are having, or have had to emancipate themselves from the tyranny of the Hindu caste system, the fact that they're still oppressed by Hindus, the fact that they can be attacked and **murdered** at almost any time, this gives a sort of edge to their being Buddhist. It gives a sort of urgency

to it, because they see Buddhism as the lever, the means, to raise them above all this, to solve all these sort of problems. It might be difficult for you to understand that. Why or how Buddhism could help them, but it boils down essentially to the question of self respect. Buddhism, one might say, has given them back their self respect. They feel that they're not Untouchables. They feel that they're human beings. They feel that Buddhism sees them just as human beings, and taking their stand on that they can work for the amelioration of their life in all its different aspects, and certainly, as I indicated earlier on, there has been a great improvement in their life, in their standard of living even, over the years that I've been in contact with them. I really noticed this at some of the meetings. When I used to address meetings, say some twenty years ago, the majority of the people in the audience would be very poorly dressed, if not almost in rags. One doesn't see that now. Most of the people are dressed reasonably well by Indian standards and the women have mostly got new saris with fancy borders. You didn't see that fifteen or twenty years ago, not to that extent. So yes things are improving and they're improving educationally, economically, socially, with Buddhism as a sort of lever of this upward movement.

So in a way we might say Buddhism is sort of more important for them. It's more vital, so they take it much more seriously. Buddhism has got all sorts of implications for them that it doesn't have perhaps for us, so they approach it in a much more wholehearted sort of way. They really are into it. I'm not saying everybody is into it equally, but you can find a very large number of people among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists.....

[Recording Ends]