

BUDDHISM and RIGHTS: THE EXAMPLE OF THE KARUNA TRUST

By Dharmachāri Adarsha.

1. Introduction

The spread of Buddhism to the West has sometimes been compared to its entry into China over a thousand years ago. There too it encountered an extant highly developed culture, and there too an accommodation had to be found with the indigenous culture. In the West, most attention has arguably been given to the meeting of Buddhism with Western philosophy and psychology. Such attention, however, is not merely a matter for the academic theorists; practising Buddhists in the West also have to learn how to live this tension of being on the cusp of interacting traditions. We have to ask ourselves how we live our lives, how we make decisions, caught as we are between the sometimes conflicting claims of our avowed Dharma and our inherited western traditions.

Karunā is a particular case in point. Karunā is a Buddhist international development organisation: it is run by western Buddhists who fundraise in the West to support projects for 'ex-untouchable', tribal and Himalayan people in South Asia. The projects tackle prejudice and discrimination in relation to social exclusion, particularly in relation to caste and gender. We have to hold the tension of being within the Buddhist tradition and yet also within a very different tradition based on different values and practices – that of International Development.

Until recently this was less of an issue because of the tendency of FWBO organisations to be fairly insular and the people working within them tending to be 'home-grown' in terms of their skills. Increasingly, however, we have recognised that to be as effective as possible we need to be open to interaction with the development sector, and to be able to learn and share and grow. Additionally, within our team increasingly we have people who have previously worked within the international development and UK charity sector, who have the specialist skills we need, and who also bring in the practices, views and values of those contexts. The result of this is that we have to get clearer on where we stand: what does it mean to be a Buddhist International Development Organisation? What is particular about being Buddhist? What can we draw on and learn from the development sector without losing or overly compromising that which is particular to us as Buddhists? It is with these questions in mind that I want to turn to the issue of human rights, the use of rights language and their role, if any, in Karunā's work.

2. The Rights-based Approach.

For some years now international agencies have been developing 'rights-based approaches to development', and the language of 'Human Rights' has become a dominant discourse in development. In Karunā we can see advantages in talking in terms of rights. It can help our external communication with donors, supporters, other development agencies and even some of our partners, who use such language themselves. It can help counter our historical isolation in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) world. More significantly, we feel it can provide a new lens through which to view our own work and to develop and improve it as we had been experiencing some dissatisfaction with the effectiveness and efficiency of some of our work. We want to encourage a more transformative and empowering approach, and we find elements of this within current 'rights-based approaches' with their focus upon the achievement of a Human Right as enshrined in international charters, such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and guided by values of inclusion, participation, accountability and empowerment!

Here is an example of how such a rights-approach could positively affect our projects: our approach to date has been that if there is a deficiency in access to and quality of education within a community, Karuna provides funds to our project partner to employ a teacher, rent a building and run a kindergarten for the community. A rights-based approach first identifies the right in question, in this case the Right to Education which is found in multiple international treaties, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and Convention of the Rights of the Child, and, one hopes, in the Constitution and legislation of the country in question. It then asks questions regarding the involvement of the community in the project – are they participating in how the school is run? Is there inclusion of all sections of the community or are some sections excluded? Is there empowerment of the community through training in effective governance of schools? And is the community able to hold various stakeholders to account, such as ensuring teachers turn up, that Government spends its budget appropriately and that the donor is directing its funds in the most effective way? The approach thus opens up a wider perspective on tackling the deficiencies in access to and quality of education.

This approach can therefore provide a useful function. However, certain questions arise: does this use of rights language bring us into conflict with the Buddhist tradition? Are there rights in Buddhism? And does it bring us into conflict with Sangharakshita's teaching? 'Buddhism', he says, 'exhorts us to perform our duties rather than struggle for our rights'ⁱⁱ

3. The Development of the Rights Discourse.

Before looking at whether there are 'rights' in Buddhism we need to ask what rights are and where they have come from. The concept of a right has a long history within Western culture. Damien Keown suggests that the contemporary notion of a right as an exercisable power vested in or held by an individual arises from a more impersonal understanding of what is true or right. The word 'right' itself is etymologically associated with the Greek *orthos* and Roman *rectus* meaning upright and straight. This property of a physical object was then conveyed to the moral realm - as a standard of conduct. The next step was the transition from the moral use of 'right' to the notion of a right as a personal entitlement. This is believed to have taken place during the late Middle Ages (13th century onwards). Subsequently the notion of natural rights and their inalienability developed alongside the long transition in Europe from tradition to modernity, and it is clear that Christian doctrine had a strong influence in this process. The idea of rights developed as 'natural', and not conferred by any judicial or political process but rather supported by these structures.ⁱⁱⁱ The belief here is of a universal moral law derived from God, where humans are created in the image of God and each is worthy of dignity and respect; and that as each of us is a member of the human community under God, then other memberships, such as of state or ethnicity, are secondary^{iv}.

So, in terms of contemporary human rights discourse we can think of a 'right' as something an individual possesses, and this possession is an entitlement or benefit^v. This is clearly stated in United Nations (UN) rights declarations which emphasise the universality and inalienability of rights. However, it can also be seen as something that a group possesses, and it is this sense that much of the use of rights talk has emerged in recent history and shaped international development discourse. The use of rights language was and remains a defining feature of resistance and liberation movements in developing countries. In nationalist and anti-colonial movements of the mid-twentieth century the demands for self-rule were framed through an appeal to the right to citizenship, and this needed to be fought for since the colonial powers were not willingly granting fundamental freedoms to the masses. It was the act of struggling for social justice and a fair political system that called upon the use of rights language to achieve these ends.^{vi} Through this means improvements in the collective well-being were sought whereby the uplift of an entire community or grouping of people occurs, rather than merely an individual or a few individuals. This strategy continues to be employed by social movements who seek improvements for

women, indigenous people, children, sexual minorities, people with disabilities, and other oppressed or minority groups.

Therefore, in spite of the strong Christian influence (which in some developing countries could have been an advantage), an appeal and recourse to rights has brought about great gains such as national independence across Africa and Asia, recognition of civil liberties for all American citizens, and tangible efforts to achieve equality for women. Rights in these instances have been used in a highly pragmatic way, if not also an idealised way, in order to successfully achieve positive social change. Debates continue about whether rights are truly universal or embedded in Western discourse, or whether they apply to the individual or the group. There is no single definition of a right which is universally accepted, and the arena is still highly contested. Rights are already the dominant discourse in international law, and are becoming increasingly so in international development; for these reasons, the language of rights requires to be engaged with. Many non-Western groups cite the Western bias in the notion of rights, and while they may have a point, the fact remains that every country has signed up to the main UN charter which includes the responsibility to adhere to the principles of Human Rights. Buddhists are in a similar position as these non-Western groups by virtue of having a distinct worldview. This article attempts to assess what, if any, uses there are for this discourse for a socially-engaged Buddhist organisation.

4. Finding Rights in Buddhism.

Once we have some understanding of what 'rights' are and from where they have arisen, we are in a position to put the question: are there grounds for claiming rights in Buddhism? I say 'grounds' because there is no word in Sanskrit or Pali that conveys the idea of 'right' or 'rights' as subjective entitlements. 'Rights' is not explicitly Buddhist language, which has required scholars concerned with this issue to extrapolate a possible ground for rights from various Buddhist teachings.

Damien Keown's view is that rights are implicit in Buddhism. His argument is that as the Dhamma establishes reciprocal duties, as it does in the case of the duties of husbands and the duties of wives, it follows that the duties of one correspond to the entitlements or 'rights' of the other. Craig Ihara criticises Keown for assuming that reciprocal duties always correspond to reciprocal rights, whereas – he quotes Joel Feinberg - 'there are numerous classes of duties...that are not logically correlated with the rights of other people'^{vii}. For instance duties of charity require us to contribute - but no charity, as we know all too well within Karunā, can consider that contribution necessarily follows. Another example, one that will be considered in detail later on, is that of caste duty. Here is a case of conflicting ideologies since the duty of all Hindus is to carry out their caste dharma, which can result in severe violence of being perpetrated by 'higher' castes against 'lower' castes. Such a duty does not correlate with enshrined legal and constitutional rights against harm, violence and torture.

More significantly, Ihara argues that 'rights in the sense of subjective entitlements are conceptually incompatible with classical Buddhist ethics'^{viii}. He offers an example: try to conceive of the relationships ballet dancers have to each other in terms of rights that they have in relation to one another. A rights perspective would then confer an importance on the point of view of individual dancers and mean that mistakes are construed as injuries to specific persons rather than failures to perform one's role properly. The ballet would no longer be a cooperative enterprise with common objectives, but would focus on preserving the potentially conflicting interests of the individuals involved, and so emphasis negative individualism at the expense of collective collaboration. So too, he suggests, Buddhism, thought of as a cooperative system, would be transformed by the introduction of rights (as subjective entitlements), which would reduce relationships between people to just the duties and rights individuals have to and against one another. Another way of putting this is that

the introduction of rights changes obligations and duties from being seen as role-responsibilities of people involved in a cooperative scheme (society), to seeing them as constraints on individuals in their interactions with other individuals all of whom are otherwise free to pursue their own objectives^x. So Ihara is saying that if we focus on rights, it changes the way we relate to duty and obligation and this fundamentally changes the way we view the world, the way we act, and the very nature of Buddhist ethics.

Ihara's view is similar to Sangharakshita's views on the subject. He chooses not to go into the issue of whether the term 'rights' is consistent with Buddhist doctrine; instead he takes the view that 'the idea of rights without duties or duties without rights is an absurdity...being nothing but the same object looked at from different points of view, approached from opposite ends'.^x He uses the analogy of a walking stick, the end being 'rights' and the handle being 'duties', and he makes the point that we need to grasp the handle: 'in human relationships it is duties that need to be performed, rather than rights demanded'. Further, he brings out the principle behind this, which is that duties are based on giving, whilst rights are based on grasping, and so the performance of duties results in the 'gradual loosening of the bonds of selfishness and egotism' whereas insistence upon rights strengthens egotism. He further elaborates that we need to put our focus upon duties not upon rights because peace, both within ourselves and in the world, arises from casting aside ego and embracing selflessness. A focus on duty, which is based upon the realisation of emptiness and the mutual interpenetration of phenomena, assists peace. A focus on rights associated with western political systems is based upon the existence of separate exclusive ego-entities considered valuable and significant in themselves. Such systems, to the extent that they insist on the agitation for rights, justify hatred and excuse violence, and thus tend towards internal and external conflict.

So we return to our initial question: are there rights in Buddhism? It appears then that the concept of rights is inconsistent with many Buddhist teachings, and its introduction would both significantly distort Buddhist ethics, and be detrimental to Buddhist values and praxis. With regard to whether a Buddhist organisation like Karunā should use a language of rights, I would, with Craig Ihara, hold an intellectual presumption against the language of rights, but not to the extent that such a presumption should be respected under all conditions^{xi}. This stance is a pragmatic one which accepts the obvious benefits of this approach whilst recognising its philosophical short-comings and potential difficulties in terms of Buddhist practice.

5. An Example of Rights in the Dalit Situation

As a Buddhist practitioner born and raised in a society where my basic needs are met and I am able to enjoy fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of religion, of speech, and of political association, I can resonate strongly with Sangharakshita's reminder that I should focus upon my duties rather than my rights. Surrounded by such privileges which are unparalleled at any point in history, this reminder can lure me out of a state of craving for what I do not have and encourage me to appreciate for the many benefits I enjoy in this society. However, the conditioning of Dalit people after millennia of caste-based oppression is very different to mine, and this conditioning leads to them not yet believing themselves as fully equal, as fully human even, compared to caste Hindus. Is it then enough to say that they should do their duty and appreciate their lot in life?

For a start this is problematic because of the indigenous cultural associations of the notion of duty. There is already a powerfully entrenched and forcefully maintained notion of duty in South Asian societies – caste dharma. You have to do the duty that your birth prepares you for; if you are born a beggar, it is your duty to be a beggar. In this context it is this specialised and, we might think, perverted sense of duty that is a big part of the problem. Dr Ambedkar, the great Dalit leader of the early 20th century, pointed out that it is not possible

to appeal for 'the annihilation of caste' to a caste-Hindu on the basis of duty (that is to appeal to an ethical or moral code) because their sense of duty is based on Hindu scriptures which in fact instruct them that their duty is to maintain that inequality^{xii}.

Secondly there is the issue of the prevailing power imbalance – it is not a level playing field. I would certainly feel uncomfortable telling a Dalit person that he or she should do their duty (even according to Buddhist ethics rather than caste-dharma) without supporting them in challenging the systemic injustice that they experience. Arguably, such a challenge could create a society with greater freedom to practice Buddhism.

So in such an unequal situation, there is likely to be little redress through relying upon the duties of the underdog. Instead then, should we not support marginalised people to assert their rights with all their energy and by all means against those with power to grant rights? There is a caveat here. Sanghararakshita, in the essay mentioned above, suggests that the 'remedy for any injustice or inequality in human relationships, whether domestic, social, civic, political, cultural, racial or religious, is not an insistence upon the rights of one party, but on the duties of the other'. Dr Ambedkar similarly placed great importance upon the duty-bearers. Despite formidable legal protection in the Indian Constitution whose purpose is to safeguard the interests of minorities and the disadvantaged, and to make the practices of untouchability illegal, he recognised that 'social conscience is the only safeguard of rights'. Even though he placed rights in the constitution, he recognised that these were meaningless unless within society people uphold these in their conscience, i.e. that they do their duty:

The idea of making a gift of fundamental rights to every individual is no doubt very laudable. The question is how to make them effective? The prevalent view is that once the rights are enacted in law then they are safeguarded. This again is an unwarranted assumption. As experience proves, rights are protected not by law but by social and moral conscience of the society. If social conscience is such that it is prepared to recognise the rights which law proposes to enact, rights will be safe and secure. But if the fundamental rights are opposed by the community, no Law, no Parliament, no Judiciary can guarantee them in the real sense of the world. What is the use of Fundamental rights to the Untouchables in India? As Burke said, there is no method found for punishing the multitude. Law can punish a single solitary recalcitrant criminal. It can never operate against the whole body of people who choose to defy it. Social conscience is the only safeguard of all rights, fundamental or non-fundamental.^{xiii}

This would suggest that a strategy which only involves aggressive lobbying for rights is inherently flawed. Moreover, it suggests that there should be a wider perspective which involves working towards social solidarity or trust and that without this, everyone loses. However, Dr Ambedkar does also say that 'lost rights are never regained by appeals to the conscience of the usurpers, but by relentless struggle.... Goats are used for sacrificial offerings and not lions^{xiv}'. Sangharakshita also indicates that those with duties sometimes 'need to be reminded' to perform these. If one takes into account the inherent reluctance of mainstream Indian society and government to uphold its duties, one can see that Dalits do need to follow Dr Ambedkar's 'final words of advice' that they should 'educate, agitate and organize'. It does not take too great an effort of the imagination to apply these words to the principles of rights-based approach: education links to empowerment, agitation to accountability of the duty-bearers, and organisation to inclusion and participation of relevant sections of the community.

This would suggest that advocating for 'rights' is indeed a necessary and important language to use as one tries to challenge oppression. Yet, as I have stressed, this should be done as an *upāya* or skilful means; a means to an end, not as an end in itself, and in this regard the advice of both Sangharakshita and Dr Ambedkar should be heeded that it is duties, or social conscience, that are crucial, and therefore our work should be within a

context of encouraging all people towards widening their awareness of their social responsibility, their duty, towards others less fortunate than themselves.

5. Towards a Dhamma-based Approach to Development.

We have already seen above that when a development programme is designed and implemented with a Human Rights focus it uses the principles of participation, inclusion, empowerment, and accountability as a guide to achieving the right in question. This collection of principles can be likened to a “broad lens” which can inform the means by which a programme aims to explore and remedy the gaps in achieving the right. This idea is akin to the social conscience described by Dr. Ambedkar. The pragmatic application of a rights-based approach to development can therefore be compatible with both the ideal of Dr. Ambedkar of achieving the right in reality through changing the consciousness of society, and that of Sangharakshita for whom reminding people to perform their duties is essential. Does this mean Buddhists should accept the approach whole-heartedly, given the caveat that it is a skilful means that helps to achieve a positive outcome?

There are multiple critiques of rights-based approaches. One that is relevant to this paper has been developed by a leading scholar in development thinking, Robert Chambers, who picks up on the weakness of an exclusive rights focus. He traces shifts in approaches to development over the past 50 years from what he terms a ‘benevolent approach - for welfare’ with the core value of ‘doing good’; through a ‘participatory approach - for partnership’; through to a ‘rights based approach for empowerment’. He then posits the development of an ‘obligations-based approach (OBA) - for responsibility’. Whilst a focus on the rights of the “have-nots” has been a significant step in development thinking and praxis, it leaves out the obligations of the “haves”; the very issue we have been discussing above. This is not just the “haves” in developing countries, those corrupt bureaucrats who siphon off cash for their own gains, or ruthless business people or politicians who are hungry for power and tread on anyone who gets in their way. It applies to all of those on the planet who are privileged. It calls us to question the ethics of part of the world living in immense wealth, and a majority of people living on or just above poverty levels. To reiterate the point made by Feinberg, the duties of some do not necessarily lead to the fulfilment of the rights of others. The OBA calls on us to consider morally our duties in the light of the poverty and oppression that affect a majority of humans. Chambers himself describes his embarrassment at being asked his salary (well over £50,000 per annum I suspect) by a poor farmer and his tactics for avoiding an answer in order to prevent further embarrassment. So, whereas the dominant basis of the rights-approach is political – about lobbying for rights according to national and international rights frameworks – the basis for the OBA is ethical and behavioural. It is about reciprocal learning rather than influencing government and empowering people; and accountability is personal rather than institutional. The table below outlines Chambers thinking:

Table 2.1 Four approaches to development^{xv}

Approach	Benevolent, for welfare	“Participatory” for “partnership”	Rights-based, for empowerment	Obligation-based, for responsibility
Core concept or value	Doing good	Effectiveness, efficiency	Rights of “have-nots”	Obligations of “haves”
Dominant basis and mode	Technical	Social	Political	Ethical, behavioural
Process	Blueprinted	Consultative	Transformative	Reflective
Relationships of aid providers to	Paternal, providing funds,	Instrumental to programmes and projects	Influencing governments. Empowering	Reciprocal, learning and being guided

recipients	assistance		people	
Primary stakeholders perceived as	Beneficiaries	Implementers	Citizens	Guides, teachers, sources of insight, inspiration and commitment
Accountability	Upward to aid agency, taxpayers, INGO supporters	Upward with some downward	Multiple * – upwards, downwards, horizontal. . .	Personal – internal, values, and then mainly downward
Procedures	Bureaucratic conformity	More acceptance of diversity	Negotiated, evolutionary process	Critical reflection, immersions, experiential learning
Organisational drivers	Pressure to disburse	Balance between pressure to disburse and results	Pressure for results and impact assessment	Space for agency, expectations of responsible use of discretion

- Multiple accountabilities include international human rights monitors and INGOs, and intra-community and intra-group accountabilities.

Note that the four approaches are not comprehensive; there are others, notably variants of participation. Nor are they mutually exclusive. They are delineated so as to sharpen and clarify characteristics. In practice they coexist and overlap. The challenge is to get the mix and balance right for each person, group, context and time.

This model was very interesting to us in Karunā as it seems to support our approach but from the development angle. Firstly, since an OBA contains both a focus on the “have-nots” and a wider perspective addressing the “haves”, it supports the suggestion referred to above that rights can be used tactically within a wider duty-oriented perspective. Secondly, the ethical and behavioural basis and the personal nature of the OBA has a strong resonance with Karunā’s approach. For 29 years we have supported projects that are run by people who, similar to ourselves, live their lives upon the ethical/behavioural basis of Dhamma practice, and we tend to relate personally to them rather than through institutionally bounded systems and procedures. Over the past 10 years whilst we have been expanding our work to include projects that are not run by FWBO/TBMSG Buddhists^{xvi}, there too it has been done on the basis of a common resonance with the individuals running the projects, who live their lives based on similar values.

Thirdly, Chambers is vague on how one actually implements an OBA, presumably because no-one in the development field has actually done it, and it currently remains in the realm of theory. There are also some examples of tentative moves towards this, for instance increasing funds are being made available for awareness-raising in relation to development issues among the European population with a view to people taking greater interest in and responsibility for the issues; also social funds are increasingly becoming available from corporate bodies, which could be taken as a sign that the business sector wishes to take greater responsibility. In Karuna we have experience of putting such an approach into practice. I think this is because to be dhamma-based is actually to be obligations (duty)-based. As a concrete example, our taking stipends rather than salaries reflects our obligations as “haves” through personal reflection via a ‘dominant mode or basis’ that is

'ethical, behavioural'. Also, our door-to-door fundraising method encourages UK citizens to support our work by drawing on their sense of responsibility as people living a relatively privileged and affluent lifestyle with the power to make a difference to the lives of others through their contribution. So it would seem we have something to offer to the development world in terms of actualising an OBA approach to development.

A fourth point of interest for us was that the model usefully revealed a tension in our approaches to our partners, particularly our TBMSG Buddhist partners. That tension is produced by our overall approach which is a mixture of the first 'benevolent, for welfare' approach and the fourth 'obligations-based' approach. Over the past 29 years we've sought to 'do good' through a 'paternal' relationship, seeing our primary stakeholders as 'beneficiaries'; there's been procedural 'bureaucratic conformity' and therefore a lack of diversity and evolution in the work, and we've been driven by a 'pressure to disburse'. In recent years we've been trying to move into the second approach, focusing more on 'effectiveness and efficiency', with a greater interest in 'results'. However, because of simultaneously being part of a Buddhist Movement, we've also been operating out of the fourth approach which has been 'ethically/behaviourally' driven, with accountability being largely 'personal'. This appears to have created a tension, but perhaps this model provides a theoretical tool for clarifying the situation.

7. Conclusion

This paper has set out to question the role of rights language and practice in Karunā's work. To sum up: firstly I have traced the origins of 'rights' in western discourse and suggested that rights are philosophically inconsistent with the Dhamma. Secondly that whilst this is the case, there is an argument to be made for using rights language tactically, within a context of duty, and I have supported this by reference to Dr Ambedkar, Sangharakshita and others. Thirdly, I have looked at Robert Chambers' Obligations Based Approach which supports such a tactical stance from the angle of development.

One way forward could be for Karunā to term our approach an 'Obligations-Based Approach' or a 'Dhamma-Based Approach' – depending on whether we are speaking to a Development sector audience or a Buddhist audience – which brings our overall orientation firmly in line with an emphasis on duties. Within this, in relation to the "have-nots", we can use a language of rights since there does not seem to be a better language that our partners can use which enables them to tackle the systemic discrimination they suffer, and because this perspective does lend itself to bringing about meaningful social change. In relation to the "haves", the emphasis would be on duties, as currently is our approach when fundraising on doorsteps or among the team in terms of lower salaries.

To re-emphasise a point already made, there seems to be a 'middle-way' to be found between taking on rights-language and -practice wholesale on the one hand, and sticking to the traditional Buddhist notions of duties on the other. This is highlighted in the thinking of Dr. Ambedkar and to some extent by Sangharakshita. It seems to be the rule that when Buddhism enters a new culture some adaptation has to take place in order for existing paradigms and practices to be assimilated into what can be recognised as Buddhism. I hope that this article has made a convincing attempt to assimilate the rights discourse into a Buddhist framework.

Dharmachāri Adarsha Dec 2007

Dharmachāri Adarsha worked for Karunā Trust from 2004 to autumn 2008. He prepared this article in late 2007. Sadly, he died suddenly in India before a final draft could be completed.

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ⁱ International Human Rights Network, p 2.

ⁱⁱ Sangharakshita, p 45.

ⁱⁱⁱ. See Keown (1995), <http://www.buddhistethics.org/2/keown2.html>.

^{iv}. Stackhouse (1984) in Keown (1995) p 35-6.

^v. See endnote iii.

^{vi} See Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall (2004) p 19.

^{vii}. Feinberg (1989) p 61-74.

^{viii}. Ihara (1995), p 6.

^{ix}. Ibid p 7.

^x. Sangharakshita p 41 .

^{xi}. Ihara ibid p 7.

^{xii}. Ambedkar, B.R (1936), <http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/02.Annihilation%20of%20Caste.htm>.

^{xiii}. <http://ambedkar.org/>

^{xiv}. <http://ambedkar.org/>

^{xv}. Chambers (2004) p 32.

^{xvi} The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), with which Karunā is associated, was founded by Sangharakshita in 1967. The Indian counterpart of the FWBO, the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana (TBMSG), literally “Association of Helpers of the Spiritual Community of the Three Worlds”, was founded in 1978.