



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings by Richard F. Gombrich

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such matters is to some extent unavoidable. More importantly, care has been taken to have a balanced representation of the four recognized groups within Dravidian: South (Tamil, Kannada and Tulu), South Central (Telugu, Konda and Gondi), Central (Kolami and Gadaba) and North (Malto and Brahui). The slight imbalance between the first two and the last two is justified by the greater number of languages in these groups. Almost all the chapters devoted to individual languages have been written by internationally recognized specialists on the language in question. The three exceptions, the result of the late withdrawal of three anticipated contributors (an unavoidable hazard of multi-author works), are based by the editor on recent authoritative studies. The 12 chapters devoted to single languages are preceded by a substantial introduction to the Dravidian languages by Steever and a chapter on the Dravidian scripts by William Bright. The latter, because of improvements in available computer software, is much more elegantly presented than was possible until very recently.

The form of the language chapters follows a similar, though not identical pattern: an introductory section (generally on 'background and history'), phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon and special features—this last sometimes being replaced by an account of dialect differences. The average proportion of space devoted to these different topics is 9, 10, 61, 15, 3, and 3% respectively. Superficially, the main surprise in this, at a time when it is syntax among levels of linguistic description that tends to excite the greatest amount of interest, is the allocation of four times as much space to the internal structure of words as to the structure of sentences. While the result is that some of the questions that the reader might ask about syntax remain unanswered, the justification rests in the complexities of Dravidian morphology. Even with the generous share of words that this topic enjoys, it has proved impossible, for instance, to enter in detail, in the sections on verbal morphology, into the vast subject of the expression of mood and aspect in Dravidian. Enough is said, however, to show what are the shared typological characteristics of languages in the family. The same holds for the sections on syntax. The reader will be left with a clear idea both of typical Dravidian sentence patterns and of the ways in which the various languages differ among themselves.

What this book does not do is devote a significant amount of space to the question of the possible external affiliations of the Dravidian family. The reason for this is simple and clear: no totally convincing demonstration has been produced to show that Dravidian is genetically related to any languages spoken outside South Asia. There are several possibilities, but no absolute certainties.

The Dravidian languages is aimed at a number of different audiences: the cultured layman with an interest in language, the general linguist who is curious about the form of expression in specific languages of universal linguistic categories, and the Dravidian linguist seeking information about languages of the family outside his own area of expertise. The careful editorial guidance and the quality of the various

contributions have ensured that these diverse goals are achieved to the greatest possible extent.

There are some signs, though happily very few, of the possible effect of publisher's deadlines. Some of the bibliographies, which appear at the end of individual chapters rather than at the end of the book (and therefore show a certain amount of duplication), contain author and date but no title (as, for example, Burrow (1943) and Elfenbein (1996) on p. 414). There is also unnecessary variation in section numbers and headings in the different chapters. None of this detracts from the usefulness of the volume, which has in its essentials the qualities of a standard work of reference. The index with which the book concludes belongs to the more usable and helpful variety.

R. E. ASHER

RICHARD F. GOMBRICH: *How Buddhism began: the conditioned genesis of the early teachings* (Jordan Lectures, 1994, Vol. xvii). xi, 180 pp. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, 1996. £25.

Richard Gombrich's Jordan lectures took the form of a lecture 'for the general public' together with four seminars discussing previously circulated papers. Although some significant changes have been made, they are published in a form which is 'not greatly altered'. It is perhaps a little disappointing that more has not been revised and added, since it leaves it sometimes a little unclear how the ideas being put forward relate to the work of earlier scholars. Yet this has the advantage that the clarity of the arguments is unimpaired—arguments which are put forward with all Professor Gombrich's usual lucidity and succinctness. A great deal of ground is covered and in fact one particular usefulness of this book is that it can act as a guide to his articles on early Buddhism, published in various, sometimes obscure, locations for a decade and more. Indeed, it would have been better still if more of this material had been incorporated.

The initial chapter, entitled 'Debate, skill in means, allegory and literalism', retains the format of a public lecture for a SOAS audience. After some homage to Karl Popper and a tilt at essentialism, Gombrich discusses the relation between what the Buddha said and the texts which report his words, considerably clarifying his position on this complex issue. He then goes on to outline the processes and mechanisms which he sees as operating in the evolution of early Buddhism. After discussing the context of debate within which Buddhism arose, he concludes 'that the Buddha was against discussing theory in the abstract, that he did not pick arguments, and that when discussion arose he avoided head-on confrontation by adopting "skill in means".' He rightly emphasizes, as others before him, that although the term 'skill in means' is late, the exercise of skill to which it refers is 'of enormous importance in the Pali Canon'. It follows from this that we should

expect the Buddha to have expressed his message in many different ways. Since the variety of different backgrounds from which converts came would have further increased diversity, Gombrich suggests that change 'is unlikely to have been unilinear: several currents must have intermingled'.

All of this helps to introduce what are perhaps the two main concepts utilized as a key to the processes of change involved in the development of early Buddhist thought: allegory and literalism. These are dealt with in more detail in the subsequent chapters. With the notion that some of the Buddhist texts are intentional allegory I have little problem. If anything, I would perhaps see rather more in some of the allegorical material than Gombrich, although I have more difficulty with some of the uses made of the concept of intentional literalism—especially in the extended form of 'scholastic literalism'. The chapter ends with some discussion of passages in which the Buddha is portrayed as criticizing literalism, but I do not think that the literalism that the Buddha criticizes is quite what Gombrich has in mind. The Buddha objects to literalism when it is at the expense of meditative experience and understanding, but it is not at all clear that he objected to creative development of his teaching. Rather the contrary. The texts are full of examples of a disciple who expands his teaching in detail and is praised for doing so.

The next two chapters 'mainly pursue the theme of how the Buddha's teachings emerged through debate with other religious teachers of his day' (p. 3). Some of the topics discussed in the first of these two chapters include: was the Buddha a philosopher *malgré lui?*; what is the right view?; the relationship between the worldview of the Buddha and that of the Upanishads; the evolution of the word '*dhamma*'; no-self and *nirvāna*; conditioned origination. In fact, Gombrich at this point puts forward the claim: '... just as Being lies at the heart of the Upaniṣadic worldview, Action lies at the heart of the Buddha's' (p. 48). Not surprisingly, he goes on to criticize views which he understands as creating an excessive separation between Buddhist teachings about *kamma* (action) and those connected with enlightenment. In the process he offers an account of the notion of *kamma* and then turns to the development of the idea of 'transference of merit'. At this point he considers the Mahāyāna criticism of early Buddhism for 'lack of warmth' (p. 58) and lays stress on the centrality of the Buddha's teaching of love and compassion.

The third chapter is entitled 'Metaphor, allegory, satire' and rightly stresses the importance in *Suttanta* of these and other literary forms. Gombrich raises many 'questions about how literally various features of the early texts are to be interpreted' (p. 65). In the process he examines some of the canonical texts concerned with the life-story of the Buddha, including portions of the *Sutta-nipāta* and also the *Aggañña-sutta*. Some of his suggestions are perceptive; others one would like to take issue with.

The particular concern of the penultimate chapter is with how the Buddha's early followers 'in attempting to preserve the Buddha's teachings, subtly and unintentionally may have

changed them' (p. 3). Most of the chapter is concerned with examining the early sources for the two pairings: *saddhānūsāri(n)/dhammānūsāri(n)* and *ceto-vimutti/paññā-vimutti*. Essentially, the point is that these terms were eventually misinterpreted in the Buddhist tradition and came to authorize attainment of enlightenment without meditation (p. 131). This is too large a topic to address in a short review; so I confine myself to commenting that for the Pali Abhidhamma tradition *paññā* can never arise in unskillful (*akusala*) *citta*. Unless we are to suppose that scholarship is only possible in a morally pure state, this must mean that it is something rather different to ordinary intellect and, indeed, for both the later texts and many earlier ones too, the development of insight requires a process of existential change, leading through disenchantment (*nibbidā*) to a passion-free state.

The final chapter is rather tangential to the themes addressed in the rest of the book and of minimal importance for the history of earlier Buddhism. It involves a reinterpretation (and emendation) of the canonical material concerning the conversion of the brigand Aṅgulimāla so as to see him as having been a practitioner of some kind of Śaiva cult and also a reinterpretation of verses in the *Theragāthā* as referring to the goddess Kālī. If this could be established, it would obviously be of considerable significance for the history of Shaivism, but I do not yet find the evidence added entirely convincing.

Let me conclude that I found this work very stimulating and enjoyable to read. Gombrich indicates at the beginning that this is work in progress and that many of the conclusions are tentative. Part of his wish is to stimulate research into some of these questions. I have no doubt that the clarity of his presentation of the issues and the liveliness of his style will do much to further that objective.

L. S. COUSINS

GÜNTHER-DIETZ SONTHEIMER and HERMAN KULKE (ed.): *Hinduism reconsidered. Revised edition.* viii, 359 pp. New Delhi: Manohar. 1997. Rs 550.

This is the second, enlarged, edition of the text first published in 1989, which was the result of a panel of the ninth European Conference of Modern South Asian Studies held at Heidelberg in 1986. Four new papers have been added to the original 13, with an introduction by Aditya Malik replacing a short introduction by David Shulman. Romila Thapar's paper is a slight modification of a previously published essay and Anncharlott Eschmann's paper is also republished here in a form slightly revised by Herman Kulke. As the preface to this second edition reminds us, three of the original participants, Richard Burghart, Horst Krüger, and the co-editor, Günther-Dietz Sontheimer, are sadly no longer with us, and Anncharlott Eschmann died in 1977.

The aim of the volume is to evaluate critically concepts and frameworks in the study of