

# Religious Philosophy, Social Work and Social Engagement of Buddhist and Hindu Movements

## Introduction

Buddhism as well as Hinduism (in its various branches and varieties) have for a long time been considered as quietist religions which are not concerned with social and political issues. Buddhists in general used to claim that all ethical action towards the world is founded on the personal constitution of the individual being. A person on the way to enlightenment and detachment from all desires and thirst for belongings will almost automatically be a nucleus of peaceful effects for his/her environment. Everything starts with contemplation and individual spirituality. This still is a far spread mentality among Buddhists.

Hinduism, particularly Vaishnavism, is placed between a traditional ethical set which is not substantially different from other religions, on one hand, and caste ethics which suggest that a faithful Hindu should behave along the lines of his or her place in traditional society. This conflict of traditional ethics and caste ethics is formulated in the Bhagavadgita<sup>1</sup> in the dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and God Krishna. More than Krishna, it is the God Rama about whom the idea of a just and peaceful rule called *ramraj* has been generated. It is part of the belief of many Rama-believers such as was the family of Mohandas K. Gandhi, particularly his mother. Gandhi elaborated the concept of *svaraj* (self-rule) in combination with *ramraj* (God's rule) according to him stemming from the Bhagavadgita which should be a realisation of God in the hearts of all people leading to internal and external self-rule. This he also defended against Muslims who claimed that Rama was a Hindu Goddess and could not be apt for being the basic concept for all Indians. For Gandhi, after all, Rama was another name for God in general, thus for Allah (Klimkeit 1981: 296–299).

Starting from the 1980s, worldwide Buddhism has been reshaped by Buddhist action groups and movements which operate in networks and cooperate with Christians and other non-Buddhist groups. The Dalai Lama

1 The Bhagavadgita is the chapters 25 to 42 of the 6<sup>th</sup> book of the great epic work Mahabharata.

and the Japanese Buddhist monk and writer Maruyama Teruo pointed out that Christian social activities and networking have been a major source or motivation for Buddhists to join hands in social justice oriented action and to create international links. One major place for this engagement was the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) which was founded in Thailand in 1989 in the monastery Suan Mokkh ('garden of liberation').

This chapter draws attention to concepts of 'engaged Buddhism', followed by considerations on the Sarvodaya movement in India and Sri Lanka, inspired by Gandhi and others. The bulk of this chapter, however, will give some insights into the foundation and history of the two major Buddhist networks and introduce some major thinkers and patrons of engaged Buddhism like Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa, MARUYAMA Teruo, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa and the economic concept of Robert Aitken. Finally, the chapter focusses on the question of whether social justice is originally a Buddhist claim or rather a 'side effect' or part of other philosophical elements (see Jones 2003; Kraft 1992). In considering this question, this chapter also explores how social justice became part of Buddhist activities along with the human rights networks of other religions.

The major Buddhist movement associated with the issue of social justice is the INEB, the term engaged Buddhism has allegedly been coined by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh and is supposed to be close to 'worldly Buddhism' or 'Buddhist humanism'. The latter definition alludes to concepts which are popular in new religious movements like the Japanese Sōka Gakkai and Risshō Kōsei-kai. The work of Thich Nhat Hanh has been very important for popularising ideas of socially and ecologically engaged Buddhist thinking which has already been there before.

## Buddhist Peace Fellowship

A major predecessor of INEB is the US-based Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF), closely related to the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. "In 1968, Buddhist poet Gary Snyder wrote a challenging piece called 'Buddhism and the Coming Revolution'. In it, he says, 'The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both'.<sup>2</sup> Telling its own history, the BPF refers to this poem by Snyder when it was founded ten years later in 1978 by Robert Baker Aitken and Anne Hopkins Aitken as well as Nelson Foster

2 <http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/about-bpf/history/> (last accessed, 5 March 2019).

in Hawaii. It now has its headquarters in Oakland in California.<sup>3</sup> Its major focusses are non-violent action, disarmament, environmental issues and social justice issues. Two major tools of public relations and political education are the *Turning Wheel Media* and the curriculum *The System Stinks* (which was a favourite protest sign of Robert Aitken, cf. Aitken 1996a) which is a one-year curriculum. *The System Stinks* gives a systematic view to the roots of Buddhism according to BPF along the five precepts of Buddhism with the aim of true peace and building social justice in today's world.<sup>4</sup> After having had its locations concentrated in Hawaii and the San Francisco Bay area, BPF can now be found at many places across the USA and has a membership system at the time of publishing embracing several hundred people.<sup>5</sup>

### *The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)*

INEB was founded 1989 in Thailand mostly initiated by the Thai philosopher, human rights activist and publisher Sulak Sivaraksa and the Japanese Nichiren Buddhist thinker MARUYAMA Teruo. Maruyama was a monk in a monastery of Nichiren-shu who left the temple for some years to be active as a writer and returned to the temple in the 1990s. Other leading figures of the early INEB were the Thai monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and his translator and disciple Santikaro Bikkhu. The INEB held its annual meetings in Thailand, mostly in the monastery Suan Mokkh, and entertains an office in Bangkok. The international meetings now have switched to a biennial rhythm and take place also in other countries like Sri Lanka or Malaysia. The INEB has a *think sangha* which has its own meetings and is moderated by Jonathan Watts with an office in Kamakura (Japan). The INEB is not an organisation with membership structures but functions through people being linked and many of them subscribing to the magazine 'Seeds of Peace' published from Bangkok three times a year. The meetings are attended by members of human rights groups, political activists and interested individuals, the focus is on networking for Buddhist social action

3 <http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/about-bpf/history/> (last accessed, 9 October 2016).

4 <http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/our-work/training-and-education/the-system-stinks/tss-2013/>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist\\_Peace\\_Fellowship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_Peace_Fellowship) (last accessed, 9 October 2016).

5 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist\\_Peace\\_Fellowship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_Peace_Fellowship) (last accessed, 5 March 2019). There are no precise membership numbers as the BPF is a loose network and has no membership administration.

groups, many of them in Buddhist minority situations, looking for international solidarity and encouragement.<sup>6</sup>

### *Buddhist social thinkers*

#### *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa*

Buddhadasa (1906–1993) was one of the great pioneers of Buddhist social thinking in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Until his death in 1993, the INEB conferences were held at his monastery Suan Mokkh, and he was a popular dhamma talker during the conferences. His controversial idea of a dictatorial dhammic socialism or dictatorial dhammic socialist democracy was an attempt to counter the dehumanising effects of modern economic systems. Buddhadasa defines the term as being against tyranny and arbitrary decision processes and figures an expeditious economic process which efficiently handles matters as he feels that democracy may be too long-winded and slow. “We tend to shy away from the word *dictatorship* because we are so infatuated with liberalism” (in Thai language: *saerri niyam*). The term dictatorship has two meanings: As a principle of action or an idea as, for example, a political ideal, it is not acceptable. But as a method of action it can be useful for it simply means to handle things expeditiously. If a socialist country is fully democratic, when problems seem to take a long time to solve, they will be treated ‘dictatorially’, i.e. they will be dealt with expeditiously and it will be an ‘expeditious democracy’. A dhammic socialist democracy is ‘dictatorial’ in this sense” (Buddhadasa 1989: 185; Sivaraksa 1990; Zöllner 2006). Buddhadasa has the vision of a return to the society of the Indian emperor Ashoka (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.) which according to Buddhist tradition was a time of communal belonging and using of resources in accordance with the ten Buddhist precepts. Nobody shall own resources in excess, people share with each other. Buddhadasa has attracted criticism in basing his ideas on the feudalistic structures of Thai agriculture and being incompatible with modern economic thinking developed by politically involved Buddhists, like e.g. Robert Aitken, as outlined below (Dehn 2004: 105).

## Santikaro

The American monk Santikaro has been active in the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and used to translate the dhamma talks of Buddhadasa and edit their English versions. He interprets the idea of dictatorial dhammic socialism in a way which is close to the thinking of Mohandas Gandhi: small economic units which produce for their own needs and need trade only within a very limited range. He elaborates on decentralised political units which can easily administrate and manage themselves and provide social justice to everybody as there is social control of resources and no space for accumulation. Santikaro reformulates the Four Noble Truths as a guideline to solve social problems, along these questions: (1) What are the problems? (2) Where do they come from? (3) What are they aiming at? (4) How do we go about proceed (Santikaro 1996: 86–133)? He points out that suffering (*dukkha*) needs to be understood as social suffering in close connection with personal suffering. He explains structures of selfishness and greed in Buddhist terms:

- greed (*lobha*) is generating capitalism with all its consequences, ideology of consumption, exploitation, and poverty;
- anger (*kodha*) leads to militarism, unjust economic structures, gender inequality, unjust international trade relations;
- hate (*dosa*) leads to discrimination of various types, racism, prejudices against Islam, thinking in terms of class hierarchies, mental marginalisation of social groups;
- unknowing (*moha*) concerns the realm of education and media and all dynamics of disinformation, public lies, deprive people of education and of knowledge of their rights.

Unknowing is the root cause of all individual and social suffering. Santikaro expresses it according to the world view of Thai: Unknowing means to forget or to not take into account that we all are friends and intertwined in birth, aging, illness, and death, in short ‘comrades in suffering’ (Santikaro 1996: 94–104). He explains the Noble Eightfold Path of traditional Buddhism as the Noble Elevenfold Socially Relevant Path consisting of considerations towards correct religion, correct education, correct leadership, correct organisation and government, correct communication, correct culture, correct economy, correct ecology, correct play, correct control, correct community and correct solidarity (Santikaro 1996: 129).

## Robert Aitken

Robert Aitken (1917–2010), the co-founder of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, elaborates upon some ideas about a social and economic system according to Buddhist concepts, drawing from E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973) (Aitken 1996a). He again refers to Buddhadasa who gave a contemporary explanation of the teaching of pratyaya-samutpada which means existing or being in mutual interdependence because all beings have originated and grown in mutuality for eternal times. He quotes Buddhadasa: "The whole cosmos is like a cooperative. Sun, moon and stars co-exist in a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees and the earth. The parts of our bodies function as a cooperative. When we become conscious that the world is a cooperative company based on mutuality, and that all humans are friends in the process of birth, aging, suffering and death then we can build a noble, a truly heavenly environment. If ever our life should not be based on this truth, we will all perish" (Aitken 1996b: 52, retranslated by UD). Aitken supposes that the future of not only the Buddhist community but also of society at large will be in the hands of small independent sanghas in accordance with the pattern of the original sangha of the Buddha. They will be independent but networking spiritually and economically and using the power of the small unit which is independent and at the same time connected. Aitken holds the Basic Christian Communities of Latin America as an ideal. He asserts that big units and corporations are deemed to perish; only the small and intertwined cooperating bodies will survive and be able to provide a humanising and sustainable living including social justice for its members. He points out that banks can have a very positive function through fostering culture and by offering loans helping people to afford things which they would not be able to achieve, but demands that, as in some Islamic countries, interests should be abolished and banks use other means to get their activities refinanced (Thich 1994: 1–7).

## Thich Nhat Hanh

One of the major masterminds of social and ecological thinking in worldwide Buddhism is the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926) now living in his community *Order of Interbeing* in Plum Village (*village des Pruniers*) 150 km southeast of Paris. He is one of the patrons of the INEB. Thich Nhat Hanh offers an interpretation of pratyaya-samutpada which indicates

traditional Buddhist thinking beyond its borders. He differentiates between the ‘small self’ (the subject of self-centeredness) and the ‘big self’ which includes and embraces the world of all beings. “The human being breathes and thinks that this activity is limited to the lungs inside the human body. But the woods, the ozone layer, the air, rivers are part of my big self and of my living and breathing. My true self is the wood, is the river, is the ozone sphere. He points to the interbeing of all things and beings which means that all wounds which are cut somewhere into a tree, killing animals, killing people far away from me, reducing woods and other natural areas for building highways etc. are wounds which hurt all other beings”.<sup>7</sup> They may not be aware of it. The same may apply to exploitation or lack of social justice which affects me even if I am not the one to be deprived of a just and equal living and of human rights. The order of interbeing is actively involved in social action and peace projects, and Thich Nhat Hanh was proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967 by Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>8</sup>

## Maruyama Teruo

MARUYAMA Teruo (1932–2011), one of the masterminds of the INEB, explicitly refers to his exposure to the Philippines in 1980 where he found socially active Christians who were thinking about a ‘potato theology’ of the poor and oppressed people, in contrast to a grassroots theology potatoes can be eaten by humans, not so much grassroots (Maruyama 1991: 29–32). He frequently quotes the 13<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist monk, Nichiren for his social involvement and his criticism towards the socially and religiously unbalanced policy of the powers of his time. Similar to Christian theologians of liberation, Maruyama demands in line with his teacher and patron UEHARA Senroku that religion be challenged by its present context, the social, political and historical problems (Maruyama 1991: 70). He sharply criticises the individualistic and subjectivist approach of most Buddhist schools, and Japanese Buddhist sects which concentrate on Zen meditation and Yoga exercises caring only about the personal path to enlightenment without looking at society and its problems. For Maruyama, it is not the interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures which shall guide the approach to reality, but he demands first of all to have a close look at the social reality

7 Direct and indirect quotation from Thich Nhat Hanh 1994: 1–2.

8 [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%ADch\\_Nh%E1%BA%A5t\\_H%E1%BA%A1n\\_h](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%ADch_Nh%E1%BA%A5t_H%E1%BA%A1n_h); <http://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/>; <http://www.intersein.de/> (last accessed, 9 October 2016)

and from this context and the questions arising from it dig into historical research and get answers to the questions (Maruyama 1991: 71).

## **Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar**

The Indian lawyer and politician Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) was one of the leading figures after Indian independence and the first law minister and mastermind behind the Indian constitution. He used Buddhism as a weapon against social injustice by converting to Buddhism on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1956 in Nagpur, the city in which emperor Ashoka in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. is said to have converted to Buddhism as well. It was Ambedkar's intention to protest against discrimination towards Dalits, the 'untouchables' of Indian Hindu society, by escaping the Hindu system. His formal conversion taking the three refuges and the precepts on this particular day was the final point of a path which had begun in 1950 when he caught interest in Buddhism. Before he had considered converting to Sikhism because there he also found strong appeal in fighting injustice of the cast system, but finally turned to Buddhism. Along with him around 500,000 Dalits took the same way.<sup>9</sup> Ambedkar died several weeks after this event but his followers initiated a movement of New Buddhism protesting against social injustice and the cast system and marking the 14<sup>th</sup> October as a yearly day of conversions to 'Ambedkar Buddhism' (Ambedkar 1995; Omvedt 1994).<sup>10</sup> Ambedkar used the teaching of the Buddha which ascribes Buddha to nature and the capacity to enlighten every human being irrespective of cast (and class), and made it a tool for protest, taking mass-conversion as a political measure and demonstration.

## **Buddhist social action**

Besides the various new approaches to social thinking in Buddhism there has been a large range of social actions by Buddhists fighting political oppression, social injustice and human rights violations. In many cases the opposed projects were connected with ecological aspects, such as the

9 Other sources speak of 388,000 Dalits, e.g. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhimrao\\_Ramji\\_Ambedkar](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhimrao_Ramji_Ambedkar). In <http://ambedkar.org/> "millions of followers" are mentioned who embraced Buddhism together with Ambedkar on 14 October 1956 in Nagpur (which probably is an exaggeration) (last accessed, 3 May 2019).

10 <http://www.ambedkar.org/>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B.\\_R.\\_Ambedkar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._R._Ambedkar) (last accessed, 9 October 2016).  <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb>



petroleum gas pipeline of Myanmar and Thailand which is proposed to connect the Yadana gas fields in the Burmese Gulf of Martaban and the power plant in Ratchaburi in Thailand. This would require the removal of 17 hectares of jungle and areas which are home to many rare animals. Buddhist monks “ordained” many trees in this area and made them “holy” by their action. For the government this meant they needed to neglect tradition and culture in order to pursue their plans in fact it had reports issued but was finally given the green light to proceed under the condition that the loss of jungle wood is compensated by replanting (cf. Bangkok Post, 3 November 1997).

The Cambodian monk Maha Ghosananda has for many years conducted peace marches starting from Phnom Phenh which are strictly under the condition of “non-violence, neutrality, and the spirit of compassion”. The participants are prepared with a two-day-training on how to react non-violently to violent attacks (cf. BuddhanezInfo No. 8/1999). In Vietnam it was the self-immolations of Buddhist monks in opposition to the Diem regime at the beginning of the 1960s and against social injustice until the present. Self-immolation has been a controversial issue in Buddhism regarding its value as a demonstration toward the ruling powers as well as regarding its legitimacy according to the Buddhist scriptures (Pali canon).

### **The Sarvodaya Movement in India and the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka**

The Hindu aspect of this paper is much smaller than the Buddhist one and rather mediated as more often than in other religions social ideas of Hindu thinkers profit from secular social and economic concepts, as it was prominently the case with M. K. Gandhi.

The Sarvodaya Movement in India is a movement mostly connected with the Gandhi-follower Vinoba Bhave. He made use of the sarvodaya idea stemming from the thus titled book of Gandhi which was a paraphrasing translation of John Ruskin’s *Unto this Last*. The term had been invented by Gandhi from the Sanskrit words *sarva* (all) and *udaya* (uplift). He used the book for formulating and propagating his own ideas which were the dignity of labor, an equitable distribution of wealth, communal self-sufficiency and individual freedom (Naravanasamy 2003). Gandhi focused on a realisation of his ideals in his own ashram as the major elements were a decentralised form of independent economy based on autarky and democracy in small rural units. As ‘Objects of Sarvodaya Movement’ in its website it states:

“The Sarvodaya Movement has as its target the establishment of a whole network of such self-supporting village communities. The family relationships which are confined at present to the blood group will be extended to cover the whole village where distinctions based on race, creed, caste, language and so forth will completely be eliminated. Agriculture will be so planned that all the people will have enough to consume. Industry will be conducted on a cottage basis till all the people in the village are gainfully employed. The needs of the village will be determined by the people of the village themselves, through Village Council, representative of the whole village.”<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore as for the economic objectives, it is stated in the policy page of the movement:

“Village industries are promoted by encouraging the production and sale of Khadi clothes, honey, soap, leather goods, ghani oils, etc. This is to provide the village with a means to arrest the exodus of their youngsters to the city in search for employment.”<sup>12</sup>

The Sarvodaya Movement in India is not explicitly a Hindu religious movement. The sources it draws from, especially M. K. Gandhi and Vinobha Bhave, have been nurtured by Hindu ideas and transposed into social thought and economic ethics. For that matter, the movement may not be typical for a NGO applying religious dimensions, but for a movement whose ideas cannot be understood in its details without a look to the sources it uses as its inspiration. It is also dedicated to research and to the documentation of the work of Gandhi who as to his popular fame and for most people has been more a politician and congress leader than a religious thinker.

The Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka, which was founded by the Sri Lankan Buddhist A. T. Ariyaratne in 1958 and has as its full name Lanka Jatika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya, is now one of the biggest NGOs in Sri Lanka and Asia at large. It is by claim a movement within the range of Theravada Buddhism but has adopted many elements which stem from Hindu background. It starts with aspects of the philosophy of M. K. Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, first of all the principle of *ahimsa* and other ethical foundations which are taken from the set of Buddhist ethics and contemporary Hindu social action thinking. After some time Ariyaratne increasingly tried to distance himself from the Sarvodaya movement in

11 Dr Shubhangi Rathi, Gandhian Philosophy of Sarvodaya & Its Principles ([http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/gandhi\\_sarvodaya.html](http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/gandhi_sarvodaya.html)) (last accessed, 19 January 2017).

12 <http://www.mkgandhi.org/about-us.html> (last accessed, 19 January 2017).

India and stress the particular Buddhist background of the Sri Lankan movement. There are also issues which are part of the Sarvodaya philosophy in India, such as the caste system (Dalits), but not in Sri Lanka. There are more similarities than differences as Gudrun Löwner in her comparison between Indian and Sri Lankan variants of Sarvodaya stresses (Löwner 1999: 185–187). As for the philosophy of the Sri Lanka movement, the website offers the following explanation:

“Drawing inspiration from teachings of the Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi, and based on the principles of Truth (*satya*), Non-violence (*avibimsa*) and Selflessness (*pararthkama*), our philosophy includes... Four sublime abodes for *individual awakening*: Loving kindness (*Meththa*), Compassion (*Karuna*), Joy of living derived from making others happy (*Mudhitha*), Equanimity (*Upeksha*), & Four treatments for *group awakening*: Giving (*Dana*), Kind and Intelligible Words (*Priya Vachana*), Right Livelihood (*Artha Charya*), Equality (*Samanathmatbawa*).”<sup>13</sup>

The claim and vision of Sarvodaya is rather universal and all-embracing:

“Create a no poverty, no affluence, and a conflict-free society. Uplift and empower the most disadvantaged people in Sri Lanka. Total Awakening and Well-being of All (individuals, family, village, nation, and the world) on every plane (spiritual, moral, cultural, social, economic and political).”<sup>14</sup>

Sarvodaya has a clear-cut missionary approach leaving no doubts about the Buddhist background by using the Lotus symbol at every occasion. The activities aimed toward rural development based on Gandhian principles have happened in various kinds of relation to the government, cooperative, neutral or antagonistic whereas Sarvodaya's claim is to be a liberation movement (Löwner 1999:188).

## Concluding Remarks

The concepts, groups and movements mentioned in this paper as well as the examples of action against social injustice and political oppression show that Buddhist thought has a rather mediate relation to issues of social and political life, justice, and human rights. As for Hindu NGOs, in most cases there are Gandhian ideas in the background and even more mediated than Buddhist concepts as Gandhi was not primarily a Hindu social thinker but rather broadly based on the ideas of the Bhagavadgita, the Sermon on the

13 <http://www.sarvodaya.org/philosophy-and-approach> (last accessed, 9 October 2016).

14 <http://www.sarvodaya.org/philosophy-and-approach> (last accessed, 9 October 2016).

Mount in the New Testament (Matthew Ch. 5–7) and others, and social concepts focussing on decentralisation. In Buddhism, for social issues the most frequently used idea of *pratitya-samutpada* points to the universal linkage of all living beings and to the interdependence of everything. This track of argumentation is taken by thinkers like the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, as it can be used for ecological visions and for the claim of solidarity. Another line is the view of history which is taken by Maruyama Nichiren, the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Japanese monk, as a sample of socio-political involvement which links karmic thinking to correct social performance of the ruling powers. Santikaro takes a more general approach and reinterprets the basic Buddhist message of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold/Elevenfold Noble Path as a social message for involvement in society.

They all have in common their close contact with activities beyond Buddhism and Hinduism, with Christian action groups which network in broad scope, as well as with secular groups and networks of other religions which have social activities closer at the heart of their philosophy. Maruyama explicitly claims this has been influenced by witnessing the effectiveness of Christian NGOs in the Philippines. It can be called another form of syncretism on a level which is usually not embraced by this concept, but might as well be part of it as ethical and practical influences may also have repercussions on the philosophical and dogmatic level.

Trying to reflect on the issue of what might be the surplus of NGOs with Buddhist or Hindu inspiration compared to social action groups working on a purely secular basis. As to these observations, there is no significant difference in the substance of activities, besides the differences regarding professionalism. In general, religious groups or organisations work on a motivational base which is sustainable and would also hold them with involvement even in case of failures, backdrops, or lack of money. But there are motivations beyond religious ones such as humanist attitudes or a fervent ardour for a new society as many secular social action groups would harbour, it should have the same function. Beyond the intrinsic aspect of motivation of the activists there is the aspect of funding: it might make sense but is beyond the scope of this chapter to search whether religiously oriented groups and organisations have better chances to acquire funds from public fund holders, donations etc. As to my knowledge Buddhist and Hindu thought oriented groups are doing an important job which usually as to its social components and ideas is compatible to the rationale and standards of professional secular (non-religious) organisations. Anyway, the complexity of the many groups and their backgrounds and histories does not allow any detailed comparison beyond selective perceptions.

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