Spring 5-22-2021

Boundation & Bindās: Ambedkarite Youth In A Global Buddhist Movement

Mallory Jacklin Hennigar
Syracuse University, malloryhennigar@gmail.com

Abstract

In this dissertation I engage with the stories of young adult Indians from Scheduled Caste and Tribe and Other Backward Caste backgrounds who have come to study at Nagaloka Centre, a Buddhist training center in Nagpur, Maharashtra. Some of them are Ambedkarites or people who take Dr. B.R. Ambedkar – leader of the Dalit community and author of the Indian constitution – as their hero and exemplar. Some of them are Buddhists or people who follow the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha in one manner or another. Some of them are just young people in tough situations, seeking a way out. All of these young people have come from different states across India to live together at Nagaloka Centre and take either an 8-month *dhammasekhiya* (*dhamma* training) course or a 3-year Bachelor's degree in Buddhism & Ambedkar Thought. Over the course of this dissertation, I will explore the entanglements of emplacement, belonging, ethics, and aspiration within the stories of Nagaloka's students through the frame of boundation and *bindās* (restriction and release). Life at Nagaloka does not always, or perhaps even often, live up to its ideal, but in all its tensions, flaws, and conflicts, the students do experience a way of living life that differs from the norm in important ways. With this dissertation, I explore the resonances of what it feels like to be a young person and what it feels like to be a part of a developing religious movement – to anxiously and hopefully desire change, something more, *freedom*, all while being restricted and 'pressurized' by obligation and cultural memory.

Boundation & *Bindās*:
Ambedkarite Youth in a Global Buddhist Movement

By

Mallory Hennigar

B.A., McGill University, 2012

M.A., Syracuse University, 2014

M.Phil., Syracuse University, 2017

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Religion

Syracuse University

May 2021

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all the young women who have studied and will study at the Nagarjuna Training Institute at Nagaloka Centre. Their intelligence, compassion, and courage are an endless source of inspiration and hope for a better world.

I dedicate this work to the 16th batch of NTI students whose friendship I cherish.

Jai Bhim! Jai Savitribai Phule! Jai Birsa Munda! Jai Bharatiya Ladkiyan-Auraten!

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I thank Nagaloka Centre in Nagpur, Maharashtra and all the students who were studying there during the 2017-18 semester. This dissertation is entirely indebted to their hospitality, care, and friendship.

I also want to thank Dean Lella Karunyakara of the Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishvavidyalaya in Wardha, Maharashtra for integrating me into his School of Culture and the wonderful community of scholars he has built there. Dr. Kirin Kumbhare and Dr. Rakesh Phakaliyal in the School of Culture offered incredible support to me during my studies in India. I particularly want to thank MGAHV graduate students Akash Khobragade, Asmita Rajurkar, Suhas Kamlakar, Naresh Kumar Sahu, and Sudhir Jinde for their invaluable advice on my research and for including me in their community.

Without the assistance of the American Institute of Indian Studies the research for this dissertation would not be possible. Not only did they provide me a Junior Fellowship to fund my dissertation research, but also language training in both Hindi and Marathi. Similarly, the South Asia Center of Syracuse University has been invaluable to my development as a scholar. I'd like to thank Dr. Sue Wadley, Dr. Carol Babiracki, and Dr. Emera Bridger Wilson for their support throughout the years of my study. I'd also like to send some extra thanks to my Hindi teacher Dr. Tej Bhatia.

Dr. Joanne Waghorne, Dr. Ann Gold and Dr. Gareth Fisher have supported the development of this dissertation since the very beginning. I am grateful to have had a committee of brilliant and supportive professors who I could trust. I'd further like to thank my committee members Dr. James Watts and Dr. Radha Kumar for their contribution to this project.

An immense thank you to my dear friends Julie Edelstein and Alisa Weinstein who I could always count on for advice, support, love, and constructive conversation throughout every stage of this dissertation and my research. Thank you to my friend Marek Ahnee with whom I began to dream of completing this work. Thank you to John Borchert for supporting me through the process of completing this project.

Thank you to my parents and sisters who have supported me through every up and down in graduate school and beyond.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrative Material

Note on Language & Transliteration

This dissertation includes words transliterated from languages written in the *Devanāgarī* script including Hindi, Sanskrit, Pali, and Marathi. Because these languages are all closely related to each other, Hindi and Marathi speakers will interchangeably include words from any of these languages in their speech. The entry for each word in the glossary notes to which language or languages the word belongs. There is a different connotation if a speaker chooses to use the Pali or Sanskrit cognate of a word. Among the community with which I worked, Pali is considered to be the language of the Buddha, while Sanskrit is the language of the Vedas (the oldest scripture of Hinduism). In the context of this research, many Buddhists prefer to use the Pali term because they consciously reject the authority of the Vedas. For example, the difference between Pali '*dhamma*' and Sanskrit '*dharma*' is not only morphological but also semantic (i.e. one would not use the word *dharma* to refer to the Buddha's teachings). In general, the difference between Pali and Sanskrit cognates is not particularly important in the same way to the majority of the Buddhist world, and is only relevant on a literary and historical basis in terms of which language the document being referred to has been recorded in. In my writing, I reflect the word choices of my interlocuters.

Throughout this text, words transliterated from other languages are denoted by italics script except in the case of names of people and places and other proper nouns. The system of transliteration I use in this dissertation is consistent with the ISO 15919 system (see below). The only exception to this is in the case of text conversations I held over the internet, for which I preserved the style of transliteration the speaker used.

अ	a	क	k	ट	ṭ	प	p	ह	h
आ	ā	ख	kh	ठ	ṭh	फ	ph	श	ś
इ	i	ग	g	ड	ḍ	ब	b	ष	ṣ
ई	ī	घ	gh	ढ	ḍh	भ	bh	स	s
उ	u	ङ	ṅ	ण	ṇ	म	m	क़	q
ऊ	ū	च	c	त	t	य	y	ख़	k͟ha
ऋ	ṛ	छ	ch	थ	th	र	r	ग़	ġ
ए	e	ज	j	द	d	ल	l	ज़	z
ऐ	ai	झ	jh	ध	dh	व	w	फ़	f
ओ	o	ञ	ñ	न	n			ड़	ṛ
औ	au							ढ़	ṛh

Introduction

Ranju and Mamta journeyed for eleven or more long hours in the crowded General cabin of a train from Western Odisha to begin their Bachelors' program. The two young women met each other and a group of other Odishi students for the first time when they disembarked at the Kamptee train station in Maharashtra as they were arranging an auto to take them to their new school. When they first peered beneath the concrete gates that mark Nagaloka's entrance and saw the fifty-six-foot golden Walking Buddha statue, Ranju thought, "Wow! What kind of place is this?" Both young women had never seen anything like it. This would be the first of many new encounters they would experience during the three years they would spend at Nagaloka Centre.

While the gigantic Buddha statue impresses visitors with its size and grandeur, people unfamiliar with the Buddhist community that practices at Nagaloka will also be intrigued by the images in the Buddha Sūrya Vihār. The *vihār*, a meeting place and meditation hall with cool concrete floors, brick walls, and arched ceiling, is the oldest building on campus. Towards the back of the cavernous room sits an elegant bronze statue of Maitreya Buddha, the future Buddha. At his feet sit two framed portraits – one of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution and a prominent leader of India's Dalit movement, and one of Urgyen Sangharakshita (born Dennis Lingwood), the British founder of the Triratna Buddhist Community. Maitreya, Sangharakshita, and Ambedkar all share an orientation toward the future, like the young people who come to study at Nagaloka. The students sit on cushions facing these images and learn to recite the Buddha *vandanā* (praise, worship)[1] and to practice *vipassanā*

[1] The Buddha *vandanā* recited at Nagaloka is a series of Pali hymns that are sung from a booklet published by an Indian Triratna Buddhist Community press called Triratna Granthmālā which includes the Pali alongside Hindi translations. It was edited by a series of Triratna Order members including Dhammachari Vivekaratna. The Pali verses are not unique to the Triratna Buddhist Community, but I have not found any information about from where the tunes to which the verses are sung originate.

(insight) meditation techniques from their teachers, most of whom are *dhammacārī* (ordained lay Buddhist leaders) within the Triratna Community.

In this dissertation, I engage with the experiences of young adult Indians from Scheduled Caste and Tribe and Other Backward Caste backgrounds who came to study at Nagaloka Centre, a Buddhist training center in Nagpur, Maharashtra. Some are Ambedkarites, that is people who take Dr. B.R. Ambedkar – leader of the Dalit community and author of the Indian constitution – as their hero and exemplar. Some are Buddhists, people who follow the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha in one manner or another. Many are Ambedkarite Buddhists, combining both of these identity categories. Some of them are just young people in tough situations, seeking a way out. These young people have come from different states across India to live together at Nagaloka Centre and take either an 8-month *dhammasekhiya* (*dhamma*[2] training) course or a 3-year Bachelor's degree in Buddhism & Ambedkar Thought.

There is much to tell about Nagaloka Centre – how it was founded, who runs it, its goals and achievements – but at its core, Nagaloka is a place built on dreams and ideals. The founders of Nagaloka belong to the Triratna Buddhist Community – a UK-based transnational movement that shares a long history with Ambedkarite Buddhists. Nagaloka was the dream of Lokamitra – an Anglo British-born, naturalized Indian, Triratna member who has entirely devoted his life since 1977 to spreading the *dhamma* in India where Buddhism has only recently revived after a long dormancy since its decline in the 10th century. Lokamitra, along with Nagmitra, Vivekaratna and Maitreyanath, some of his Indian collaborators, worked together to build Nagaloka as the first step to fulfilling their dream to spread Buddhism across India, to create *Prabuddha Bhārat* (Enlightened India). The students about whom I write and with whom I lived

[2] *Dhamma* is the Pali cognate of Sanskrit *dharma* and is used to refer to the teachings and way of life of the Buddha by this community. *Sekhiya* is a Pali word meaning training.

during my ten months of fieldwork at Nagaloka belong to the sixteenth batch of participants in the training program. In the 16th batch, there were 63 *dhammasekhiya* trainees who joined the course and 82 students on campus pursuing the Bachelor's program (Nagaloka Annual Report 2017-18: 8). While the first training groups in the early 2000's consisted of local Maharashtrian youth, in the 17th batch, they admitted a total of 160 students from across India combined into both the *dhammasekhiya* and BA course which was quite a large increase even from the 15th batch which consisted of 103 students in both programs (Nagaloka Annual Report 2018-19: 3; Nagaloka Annual Report 2016-7: 6).[3] With each batch, the organization hopes that more people across India will gain exposure to Ambedkar's vision for Buddhist India and an all-India network of Buddhists will join in the work to enact *Prabuddha Bhārat* (Enlightened India). This is the dream upon which students are given admission and allowed to live and learn tuition-free at Nagaloka for the duration of their studies.

As an ethnographer based at Nagaloka, I could not help but be inspired by the visionary egalitarian ideals. But, living day in and day out in the thick of things, I witnessed and experienced the friction between the reality and the dream of Nagaloka alongside its residents. Life at Nagaloka does not always, or perhaps even often, live up to its ideal, but in all its tensions, flaws, and conflicts, the students do experience a way of living that differs from the norms of their home life in important ways. With this dissertation, I explore the resonances of what it feels like to be a young person and what it feels like to be a part of a developing religious movement – to anxiously and hopefully desire change, something more, *freedom*, all while being

[3] It is difficult to compare the figures reported by Nagaloka among the 15th, 16th, and 17th batches. The 17th batch was quite large as they admitted 160 students. While it may appear that they admitted 145 students to the 16th batch, that number is representative of the total number of students that were resident on campus, including 2nd and 3rd year BA students. Therefore, we can see that the 17th batch of incoming students was much larger than the previous batches.

restricted and 'pressurized' by obligation and cultural memory of both their own birth communities and ironically by the practices they learn at Nagaloka. Over the course of this dissertation, I explore the entanglements of place, belonging, ethics, and aspiration within the stories of Nagaloka's students through the frame of boundation and *bindās* (restriction and release).

Boundation & *Bindās*: Youth & New Religious Communities

'Boundation' is an Indian English word that is understandable to other English speakers but is context specific and unique to the dialect. The young people at Nagaloka were heavily laden with burdens and obligations, or in their words, "boundations." Typical young people's concerns of performing well in school to improve their chances of getting a good job were intensified by many of Nagaloka students' poverty. Gaining their degree at Nagaloka was the only chance that many of the students got to earn their BA due to their family's finances and the infrastructural inequalities they faced growing up in rural areas. While a BA in Buddhism and Ambedkar Thought was not an ideal precursor to lucrative employment, students hoped that any degree was better than none in finding a good job. In addition to improving the situation of their families, many also felt that if they could get some measure of success, they could benefit their whole community. Impending marriages also added another layer as students tried to enjoy the benefits of their youth for as long as they could convince their parents to hold off the arrangements. This anxiety fell unevenly across the genders, as boys generally had more time to postpone and less to lose from marriage than a girl who had no guarantee that her in-laws would allow her to have much of a public life.

These kinds of restrictions and obligations were referred to as ‘boundation’ by the students. While these pressures of the home and family could be sometimes forgotten while they were away, the boundations of Nagaloka were a much more constant topic of conversation. Life at Nagaloka was restrictive and controlled. The students were subject to a tight schedule and a series of rules regarding their behaviors and movements. ‘Here it’s only boundation, restriction,’ was a common kind of complaining refrain from the students, ‘we are boundedly forced to do work duty and meditation. What is the benefit (*fāydā*) of being forced to meditate?’ In comparison to their own heavily scheduled days, my condition as a roaming interloper, whiling away my hours with anyone who had the time and inclination to chat, was looked upon with envy by many students. While the students were under boundation, I was *aikdam bindās*, absolutely carefree.

Bindās is a staple term in Indian youth vocabulary so much so that it is now the name of a youth-oriented television network. The spirit of *bindās* is often performed in a Bollywood-inspired style by the speaker with dragged out vocal fry, a lean back, some crossed arms, raised eyebrows, and a dip of the head. Part of the word’s meaning overlaps with the American English slang ‘cool,’ although it also more specifically denotes being carefree, without restriction, the ability to act exactly as one pleases without concern. While *bindās* can also be used as an insult to call someone aimless, for instance by a parent to describe their lay-about child, I am not using it in that sense. For anyone who takes Dr. Ambedkar as a hero, there is perhaps no stronger reprobation than ‘aimless.’ For these Ambedkarite youth, *bindās* represents the dream of being free to devote one’s time to the pursuits one finds important, free from obligations that distract from achieving one’s aims – it represents a dream of autonomy in a world that is filled with obligation, restriction, and boundation.

One of the key problematics that defined life at Nagaloka was finding a pathway between boundation and *bindās*. I came to understand boundation and *bindās* through conversations with the students about their everyday concerns. Balancing responsibility and restriction against dreams of liberty and autonomy permeated Nagaloka residents' internal struggles, the conflicts that occurred between them, and the debates about how to live as a Buddhist. I will explore the tension between boundation and *bindās* within four areas of life that I frequently discussed with Nagaloka's students: questions of location (where am I and how did I get here?), questions of identity (where do I fit in?), questions of ethical living (how should I live?), and questions of aspiration and life direction (what do I want?).

Youth in India

Youth as a cultural category is tied to modernity. Beginning in the 1900's, a growing number of people across the world began to participate in modern education systems spread by European colonialism. The increasing participation in standardized education delayed marriages and created a period between being dependent on one's parents and assuming adult responsibilities, bringing the concept of "youth" as a liminal period into being (Clark 2012: 4). Youth are often understood by their society as the embodied representation of cultural change, and therefore are the target of fears and anxieties of adults (Bucholtz 2002: 531; Smith 2012: 573). For example, the Cultural Revolution of China was a movement of the youth, with Mao conceptualizing youth as the vanguard – this is perhaps the most dramatic end of the spectrum in what kinds of associations youth can have for any given culture (Clark 2012: 5). While youth are the social target of anxiety about cultural change, it is also the case that young people are particularly susceptible to the mental strain of large-scale cultural shifts (Bucholtz 2002: 529-

531). Bearing the burden of societal fears about losing traditions and ways of life can lead young people to feel immense social pressure (Bucholtz 2002: 529-530). For example, scholars who have studied suicide epidemics among young people in Pacific, Native American, and Sri Lankan communities have concluded that increased pressure due to cultural shifts are the leading cause of these devastating tragedies (Bucholtz 2002: 530).

The struggle between boundation and *bindās* is the primary way that I saw the overwhelming polarities that define youth as a category playing out in my field site. In his study of youth self-representation in a Tamil college, Constantine Nakassis writes: "To say that young people are liminal is perhaps to state the obvious…. Youth are neither children nor adults, neither dependents nor quite independent. They are not fully subordinate to adult authority, as are children, yet they are also excluded from institutions and economies of adult authority and status" (2016: 16). It is this liminality which causes them to be the focus of so much anxiety of their society. For example, older adults are deeply concerned about how and whether youth will uphold the cultural norms they have lived by and devise many methods to ensure that cultural transmission goes smoothly to the younger generation. As Turner argues in his definitional study of liminality, the neophyte's liminal period must be controlled by the adults who use this time to "inscrib[e] the knowledge and wisdom of the group" onto them (Turner 2008: 103). While Turner's study focused on traditional societies, the anxiety about making sure young people navigate this period of their life well has only been exacerbated by extended periods of youthfulness in countries like India that have adopted modern educational systems. As Nakassis argues, "the college is perhaps the liminal institution par excellence in Tamil Nadu (as it is elsewhere)" (2016: 16).

College life in India is further explored in Craig Jeffrey's *Timepass* (2010), as he examines the lives of north Indian university graduates who are unable to secure employment, thereby uncomfortably extending their period of liminal youth while also cautiously enjoying their unwanted free time. As they wait to gain employment, these young men often engage in organizing protest against the university and the state, acting as "agent provocateurs" who make "small but significant gains through their petitioning and demonstrations" (Jeffrey 2010: 133). Jeffrey emphasizes that unemployed youth are highly focused on the feeling of time passing them by and their inability to progress to stages of adulthood in a proper time frame (2010: 72-3, 75, 79, 101-2). Cultural geographer Sara Smith also emphasizes temporality as a key factor in the social construction of youth. In Ladakh, where tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim populations there are incredibly high, Smith argues that "the trajectory of this territory is embedded in the bodies of young" (2012: 572). She further argues that "young unruly lives comprise a means to access the unknown future" for their parents (2012: 573).

Like many other studies of youth in India, I focus on young people within a collegiate institution (Lukose 2009; Jeffrey 2010; Nakassis 2016). In her study of youth and global consumer culture in Kerala, Ritty Lukose (2010) emphasizes the college as the primary site where the older generations' anxiety about youth and the future of their country is mediated. As Jocelyn Chua (2014) demonstrates in her work, the burden of cultural anxiety on youth can easily become too heavy, leading to fatal consequences. While Nakassis, Lukose, Jeffrey, Smith, and Chua all show the immense pressure that the majority of young Indians face as the embodiment of the future of both their family and their community, young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds feel this pressure in specifically intense ways and often become the scapegoats of the frustrated upper classes. The insidious idea that people who join the university

with the help of reservation policy, a system of affirmative action, lack sufficient merit for admittance creates an incredibly hostile environment for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Caste classified students regardless of their level of ability. The 2016 suicide of Rohith Vemula, a Dalit student at Hyderabad Central University, was a national wake up call to examine the conditions of minorities within universities and a rallying cry for those facing oppression to speak out (Rao 2016).

Youth are feared for what changes their actions may bring and can also be mobilized as a force for social change. Young people also often see themselves in this same ambivalent way. Young people are often much more willing to follow social norms and maintain cultural stability than adults fear (Bucholtz 2002: 529-530; Nakassis 2016: 16-7; Smith 2012: 573-4). I noticed this feeling of ambivalence and a fear of wasting the supposed power and freedom of youth at my field site. Some students were exceedingly concerned with using their youth to make sure that they were working towards building a society in which they wanted to live and which would make their parents and mentors proud, balancing both social expectations of their elders and their hope that they could change society to be more egalitarian. Some students were focused on trying to meet the difficult social expectation that they become educated and were much more cautious about advocating larger scale social changes.

Nagaloka's students benefit because they are gaining an education in a truly anti-caste institution. While the practice of discrimination based on caste is illegal in India, there are far fewer Indian institutions that actively take a stand against caste, like Nagaloka, than tacitly support its continuation. However, this does not mean that they are immune to the more generalized pressures of youth. They feel pressure from their families to gain a strong foundation through their education on which they can build their adult lives and they feel a sometimes,

though not always, conflicting pressure from the institution to absorb and embody their Buddhist ideals. In addition to these authoritative influences, the students are also testing the boundaries of their own authority. Whether it be through organizing group protests or trying to find a boyfriend or girlfriend, the students are always trying to find a bit of *bindās* in their lives structured by social boundation.

Developing Religious Communities and/as Youth

The tension between boundation and *bindās* is not limited to young adult people. These are also defining forces for young organizations and communities establishing their footing, like the community at Nagaloka Centre. As a relatively newly established religious community and organization, Nagaloka first opened the *vihār* (meditation hall) to community members in 1997 (Nagaloka.org, "About"). The community of Buddhists at Nagaloka aims to define Buddhism on their terms while also seeking to be publicly recognizable as Buddhists in the local and international spheres.

At the beginning of my research, I encountered people who were doubtful that I would find "real Buddhism" at Nagaloka. For instance, I stayed with an upper-middle class Bania[4] family in Pune while I studied Marathi language. When I told the patriarch that I was interested in studying Buddhists who were followers of Ambedkar in Nagpur, he told me that he thought they weren't real Buddhists because they had only converted for political purposes. As soon as Ambedkar announced his intention to leave Hinduism in 1935, this kind of criticism that paints Ambedkar and his followers as political opportunists followed. For instance, Indian National Congress member C. Rajagopalachari accused Ambedkar of choosing conversion as a way to

[4] The Banias are a very prominent Gujarati trading caste. M.K. Gandhi is perhaps the most famous Bania.

maintain a hold of his leadership position and to "derail the dalit platform from real political emancipation" (Viswanathan 1998: 220). In Pune I also spoke with a well-respected artist and activist who warned me that she didn't think anyone still went to study at Nagaloka. It was her impression that people who studied there in the past did not speak highly of their experience. She said that people who come for training aren't educated enough to understand Buddhism and the teachers there don't make the *dhamma* interesting or accessible to the students. Perhaps misunderstanding the intention of my study, she encouraged me to read the *Milinda Pañha*[5] instead, from which she had learned more about Buddhism than from any teachers. These criticisms from within the Dalit community were more surprising to me than from the middle-class Bania man. Her comments speak to a concern about the inferiority of Buddhist practice in India due to a lack of financial and educational resources within Scheduled Caste communities. Based on her comments it appears that she equated understanding Buddhism with being able to read and comprehend Buddhist texts, an activity that she didn't suppose many people in the community practiced.

Not only did Nagaloka face doubts about the legitimacy and efficacy of their Buddhist practice and identity, they also faced criticisms from Dalit political activists who thought they were too focused on religious practice. Dr. Karunyakara, my supervisor at my host institution for my research visa, appreciated that Nagaloka offered opportunities to students from rural areas, but was critical of the style of Buddhism that was taught there. He was the Dean of the School of Culture, within which were the Buddhist Studies and Dalit and Tribal Studies programs. He would become frustrated with students who would disappear for a week on meditation retreats. He did not think that meditation was beneficial to the students because first, it distracted them

[5] *Milinda Pañha* or *Questions of Milind*, is a text that records a dialogue between a Buddhist teacher Nagasena and a king Milind from the second century BCE.

from their program of study and, second, in his view, was not work that actively bettered society. As I will explore further in Chapter 3, some of the students who had backgrounds in Dalit activist organizations felt similarly that meditation was the antithesis of the kind of social justice work to which they were committed. In a 1991 article in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Dalit academic and activist Gopal Guru offers a scathing criticism of the activities of the Triratna Buddhist Community in India, arguing that the methods they use in their meditation retreats "strip off the political content of Ambedkar ideology" (341). He compares the effects of Triratna meditation retreats to the "co-option of Ambedkar into the Hindu fold… by the Hindutvawadi[6] forces" (Guru 1991: 339).

There are many other Dalit and Ambedkarite Buddhist groups within India, especially in Maharashtra, but the Triratna Community is somewhat unique due to its relationship with a pre-established international Buddhist organization. The involvement of foreigners creates suspicion for some like Guru who implies that the British organization cannot fully understand the issues at hand for Ambedkarite Buddhists (1991: 340-1). For people like Guru, Ambedkar has enough authority as an Indian and a well-respected leader to be the final word on what Buddhism is and how it should be practiced in his community. The main issue for many social activist-minded people is not whether Buddhism is being practiced in a globally recognizable form, but rather that practicing Buddhism is helping the Dalit community to live on their own terms in a dignified way. However, the involvement of foreigners creates an air of authority for others. For example, from this perspective, foreign interest helps to raise the platform of the anti-caste work that Buddhists are doing in India to the global stage. There is the potential that foreigners who never

[6] Hindutva is a term meaning "Hinduness" that is the core tenet of Hindu nationalism. A Hindutvawadi is a person who subscribes to the ideas of Hindu nationalism, i.e. someone who believes that India should be run by a Hindu government.

thought about caste will now have a personal stake in understanding and helping to eradicate this form of social injustice because their fellow Buddhist who belongs to their community is suffering. It is arguable that the involvement of Indians, citizens of the land of the Buddha's birth, in their movement also offers an air of legitimacy to the non-Indian members of Triratna.

The Indian branch of Triratna therefore is always in a balance of pushing against expectations of failure and suspicion while trying to innovate and grow a new organization. Similar to a young adult who must balance the legacy of the traditions from which they come and the expectations of their community against their need to establish themselves in the world, this relatively young organization seeks to prove itself as legitimate in the process of learning to be Buddhist in a way that suits their ideals and desires. I offer a snapshot in the early lives of young people and a young organization helping each other to grow. In the process, both the youths and the organization learn to navigate between the poles of boundation and *bindās*.

B.R. Ambedkar & the Triratna Buddhist Community

Nagaloka is the result of the convergence of two movements: B.R. Ambedkar's Navayana Buddhism and Urgyen Sangharakshita's Triratna Buddhist Community. These two Buddhist communities' stories have been intermingled since the earliest days of both groups' existence. While there has almost always been an overlapping sector of these two communities, the larger populations of both have diverged from each other. This is due in large part to the fact that both movements are headed by highly charismatic leaders, and only a portion of each community accepts both Ambedkar and Sangharakshita as valuable teachers on their Buddhist paths. While there are many sources that explore both Navayana and/or Ambedkarite Buddhism[7]

[7] It has previously been suggested to me by readers of my work that the term 'Navayana' is preferable or more accurate than 'Ambedkarite.' I prefer to use the term Ambedkarite Buddhism over Navayana Buddhism as I heard

and the Triratna Buddhist Community, this brief introduction will focus on the most salient pieces of each group's history for the residents and students at Nagaloka.

B.R. Ambedkar, MA, PhD, DSc, MSc, Bar-at-Law, LLD, DLitt, & Buddhist

Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956) was the youngest child of the fourteen children of Ramji and Bhimabai Sakpal. Ramji was the headmaster of an army normal school for the British Indian Army, stationed in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh at the time of Bhimrao's birth (Rodrigues 2002: 7; Zelliot 2013: 67). Ambedkar's family had a long history of service with the British army. Many Mahars, the *jātī* or caste group to which Ambedkar's family belonged, had joined the army as the colonizers took hold in the subcontinent (Rodrigues 2002: 7). While the Mahars held relatively high status among the untouchable *jātī* as village caretakers and watchmen, they were still nonetheless considered untouchable by *savarṇa* Hindus (i.e., Hindus whose *jātī* were classified within the four Vedic *varṇa*) (Zelliot 2013: 15). As a child, Ambedkar's family were devotees of the *bhakti* poet-saint Kabir, and his father was influenced by Maharashtrian anti-caste activist Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (Rodrigues 2002: 7). As members of the British Indian Army, the family had access to education. Ambedkar was exceptionally bright and the beloved pupil of his Brahmin schoolteacher who gave the boy his own last name that he would permanently adopt when he entered it in the school roll (Zelliot 2013: 67). As a student, he was untouched by his teachers, even despite being loved by them, and faced all the humiliations of his *jātī*, including being forced to sit on a separate piece of gunny sack that he had to bring to and from school, not being allowed to touch the water jug that all others could use, and being forced to sit in the very back of the room (Ambedkar 1993: 661-691).

Ambedkarite used more frequently by my interlocuters as a descriptor than Navayana. I will explicate what I mean by Ambedkarite when I use it in this dissertation later on in this Introduction.

Despite these obvious disadvantages and challenges, Ambedkar was highly successful in his educational career. He became the second from his *jātī* to matriculate into the Bombay University, an occasion which was celebrated when a teacher K.A. Keluskar is said to have given Ambedkar a copy of his new book *Life of the Buddha* (Zelliot 2013: 68). This gift has become the crucial first portents in the story of Ambedkar's long journey to eventually embrace Buddhism. In 1913, Ambedkar secured a scholarship from the Maharaja of Baroda to enable students from backward castes to study abroad (Rodrigues 2002: 8). Ambedkar enrolled in Columbia University in New York City where he earned an MA and PhD in Economics. He further went on to study at the London School of Economics, from which he eventually was forced to return to India in order to repay his scholarship with public service to the district of Baroda (Rodrigues 2002: 8). It was due to his experiences of caste discrimination in Baroda during this time that he became inspired to begin working to gain political power for the Depressed Classes (Rodrigues 2002: 9). While he would shortly return to London to complete his M.Sc. and D.Sc. at LSE after which he would attempt to pursue further study in Berlin, he returned to India to start a legal practice in 1923 (Rodrigues 2002: 9).

Ambedkar's education is one of the most important elements in the retellings of his story by the students of Nagaloka. His thirst for knowledge, his dogged persistence to gain his qualifications, and his multiple degrees all stand out as elements of his heroism from the perspective of his young followers. At events that celebrate his life, it is common to see Ambedkar's name followed by a litany of three-letter abbreviations that demonstrate his numerous qualifications: MA, PhD, DSc, MSc, Bar-at-Law, LLD, DLitt. Many Nagaloka students dream of such a list of abbreviations also following their names one day. Students take

Ambedkar's motto "Educate, Agitate, Organize,"[8] to heart. They focus on gaining as much education as they possibly can in accordance with his advice and his life story.

Ambedkar went on to build a sense of community among the Depressed Classes in Maharashtra through milestone events such as the First All India Conference of the Depressed Classes in 1920, the foundation of the Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha (Outcast Welfare Assembly) in 1924, as well as leading the Mahad *satyāgraha* (non-violent resistance movement in Mahad, Maharashtra protesting unequal access to well water), publicly burning of the *Manusmṛti* (*Law Book of Manu*) in 1927, and inaugurating his fortnightly Marathi language journal *Bahishkrit Bharat* (Outcast India) all in 1927 (Rodrigues 2002: 9-10).

Ambedkar began to gain public recognition as an advocate for the Depressed Classes. He was appointed as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Bombay Province for a five-year term in 1927. In 1930 he attended the first in a series of peace talks known as the Round Table Conference in London as a representative of the Depressed Classes (Rodrigues 2002: 11). It was at this landmark conference that Ambedkar famously began to butt heads with Mohandas K. Gandhi over who spoke for the Depressed Classes' best interests (ibid). Gandhi's staunch belief in the necessity of unity for all Indian people clashed with Ambedkar's will to guarantee a voice for minority communities through the establishment of separate electorates. When the British government granted a separate electorate to the so-called untouchable community in 1932, Gandhi vowed to fast until death unless the decision was changed. Ambedkar was forced to give up his hard-won victory or else be blamed for killing the Indian independence movement's most

[8] The slogan "Educate, Agitate, Organise" is attributed to the British poet George Bernard Shaw in 1892 in his capacity as a member of the Fabian Society, a democratic socialist organization (See: Pease, E. 1916. *The History of the Fabian Society*, 49). The London School of Economics, where Ambedkar studied between 1916-17 and 1920-23, was founded by members of the Fabian Society (London School of Economics, "Our History," https://www.lse.ac.uk/about-lse/our-history#:~:text=LSE%20first%20opened%20its%20doors,Adelphi%20Terrace%2C%20overlooking%20the%20Thames.)

prominent leader. This concession resulted in what is known as the Poona Pact which granted reserved seats within the Hindu electorate for members of the Depressed Classes, meaning that the general Hindu electorate had a say in which Depressed Class candidates were elected into those seats, greatly weakening the voice of the minority community (Rao 2009: 138).

Ambedkar's deep frustration and anger continued to build in the following years due to his conflict with Gandhi, the Congress Party, and the multitude of other Hindu reformers who sought to 'uplift' the untouchables. At an inauguration of a library in Nasik, Maharashtra in October 1935, Ambedkar spoke these indelible words: "I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu" (Jadhav 2013: loc. 4436). He told the audience that "we have decided to remain separate from Hindus, to live with self-help and struggle to attain self-elevation" (Jadhav 2013: loc. 4420). His decision to reject Hinduism and lead his community elsewhere was immortalized in print in his most famous work *Annihilation of Caste* which he published in 1936 when he was barred from delivering it as a speech to a Hindu reform group meeting. He concludes the document by emphasizing his argument that caste is at odds with independent nationhood:

> You must make your efforts to uproot caste, if not in my way, then in your way. I am sorry, I will not be with you. I have decided to change…. But even when I am gone out of your fold, I will watch your movement with active sympathy and you will have my assistance for what it may be worth. Yours is a national cause…. Yours is more difficult that the other national cause, namely Swaraj [lit. 'self-rule,' independence]. In the fight for Swaraj you fight with the whole nation on your side. In this, you have to fight against the whole nation and that too, your own. But it is more important than Swaraj. There is no use having Swaraj if you cannot defend it. More important than the question of defending Swaraj is the question of defending the Hindus under the Swaraj. In my

> opinion [it is] only when the Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength enough to defend itself. Without such internal strength, Swaraj of Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery. Good-bye and good wishes for your success. (Ambedkar 2002: 304-5)

With *Annihilation of Caste* Ambedkar firmly rejects alliance with Hindu reform movements, asserts himself as a nationalist who will continuously and strenuously work towards independence, and leads his community in a new religious direction.

Vasant Moon, who was a child growing up in Nagpur during the mid-1930's, remembers the "great mental upheaval" that Ambedkar's rejection of Hinduism caused among the Mahars (Moon 2001: 40). He describes attending meetings of young Mahar activists during which they discussed conversion and decided to stop celebrating all Hindu festivals in favor of Ambedkar *Jayanti* (Ambedkar's birthday) (Moon 2001: 40, 43). Moon poetically observes that because of this growing sentiment against their old Hindu practices, "the culture that had been stamped on people's minds for years and years began to be wiped out. And a new generation emerged" (Moon 2001: 45). Moon's memories speak to the powerful influence that Ambedkar had upon the Mahar communities in Maharashtra whose youths began to literally smash their families' Hindu *mūrtis* even before accepting a new religious identity.

Ambedkar finally embraced Buddhism in October 1956, mere months before his death at age 65. Between 1935 and his final commitment in 1956, he began to research and refine which religion he would accept, knowing that it would be a decision that would influence millions of his followers. He strongly considered Christianity, Islam and Sikhism (Zelliot 2001: 193), but in the end, he chose Buddhism. This choice has been analyzed and debated by a number of scholars including Eleanor Zelliot (2001), Gail Omvedt (2011, 1994), Gauri Viswanathan (1998),

Anupama Rao (2009), and Ajay Skaria (2015). Most of these authors focus on the facts that Ambedkar chose Buddhism because the movement has its roots in India, that Buddhists were not a highly politicized group within India at the time, and that Ambedkar was able to interpret the Buddha's teachings as completely compatible with the principles of modern democracy. Skaria (2015) emphasizes that Ambedkar chose to convert to Buddhism rather than remain a secular atheist because of his critiques of Marxism and the problems with the Marxist regimes in China and Southeast Asia that he was witnessing. Indeed, in a 1950 speech, Ambedkar argued that "religion is necessary for the mankind. When religion ends the society would perish too" (Ambedkar 2014 v2: 4590, *sic*).

Perhaps the most important, innovative and often startling element of Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism is his insistence that democracy is baked into the Buddha's teachings. In a 1954 English language broadcast of All-India Radio, he boldly proclaimed: "Positively, my Social Philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Let no one, however, say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French-Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my Master, the Buddha" (Ambedkar 2014 v1: kl. 765). Buddhism is a moral system that inculcates democratic values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar saw these three values as interdependent in the Buddha's thought:

> In his philosophy, liberty and equality had a place; but he added that unlimited liberty destroyed equality, and absolute equality left no room for liberty. In His Philosophy, law had a place only as a safeguard against the breaches of liberty and equality; but He did not believe that law can be a guarantee for breaches of liberty or equality. He gave the highest place to fraternity as the only real safeguard against the denial of liberty, equality;

> and fraternity was another name for brotherhood or humanity, which was again another name for religion. (Ambedkar 2014 v1: kl. 765-77)

To fully accept the political ideals of the state, Ambedkar believed that people needed to have a religion that accorded with these ideals: "Indians today are governed by two different ideologies. Their political ideal set out in the Preamble to the Constitution affirms a life of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Their social ideal embodied in their religion denies that" (Ambedkar 2014 v1: kl. 777). He sees Buddhism as a universal system that ensures the equal treatment of all people legally and socially.

In making his decision to convert to Buddhism, Ambedkar visited the Third International Buddhist Conference in Rangoon, Burma, the International Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Colombo and Candy, Sri Lanka, and also conversed with the British-born Buddhist monk Sangarakshita (Rodrigues 2002: 17; Sangarakshita 1986: 15-18). While Ambedkar named the kind of Buddhism he followed Navayana or 'new vehicle,' breaking with Theravada or Mahayana lineages, his conversion was performed by Burmese Bhikku Chandramani Mahasthavir and was attended by Sri Lankan monastics as well (Rao 2009: 119). From quite early on in his life, Ambedkar was a cosmopolitan thinker. He incorporated all that he learned abroad into his devoted work for the burgeoning Indian nation. While various scholars have debated why Ambedkar finally chose Buddhism over other religions, I contend that Buddhism was attractive to Ambedkar in large part because it offered an enormous international community with which his community would forge a connection, while also rooting them deeply into the story of India. In his book *The Untouchables,* Ambedkar argued that those people who became untouchables were originally Buddhists: "the Broken Men were Buddhists. As such they did not revere the Brahmins, did not employ them as their priests and regarded them as impure.

The Brahmin on the other hand disliked the Broken Men because they were Buddhists and preached against them with contempt and hatred with the result that the Broken Men came to be regarded as Untouchables" (Ambedkar 2002: 401). This narrative emphasizes the centrality of Untouchables to India's history where they fought for a great and noble cause and encountered discrimination based on their commitment to justice and equality. Therefore, encouraging his followers to become Buddhists offered them a sense of their own history as a unified group within India while also linking them to other Buddhists who lived outside of India.

Ambedkar took his twenty-two vows to become a Buddhist on October 14, 1956 in Nagpur. Because of this, Nagpur has become an incredibly important city within the movement for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Caste people to embrace Buddhism. The site at which Ambedkar's conversion took place is now known as Dīkṣā Bhūmi, meaning place of conversion. A stupa designed by the Indian architect Sheo Dan Mal was built there between 1978 and 2001 (Bose 2017: loc. 2992). The site is used as a gathering place for various celebrations and events. For instance, I attended a conversion ceremony there on December 25, 2017, where a group of people from Other Backward Caste communities took the same vows Ambedkar wrote to become Buddhist. There are yearly celebrations there on October 14 (solar calendar) and Aśoka Vijayā Daśamī (lunar calendar)[9] for Dhamma Dīkṣā Day – the anniversary of Ambedkar's conversion – which draw hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to the site. The importance of the city of Nagpur is why Nagaloka is located there.

From Dennis Lingwood to Sangharakshita to Global Buddhist Movement

[9] Aśoka Vijayā Daśamī celebrates the anniversary of the day that Emperor Aśoka became a Buddhist. It is also the same day as Daśaharā, a Hindu festival that commemorates the defeat of the demon Rāvaṇa by Lord Rāma.

Dennis Lingwood was born in London in 1925, and was according to his follower Vajragupta, a sickly, studious, and introverted child (Vajragupta 2010: 2). At fifteen years old, he first read Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*,[10] the experience of which he later wrote about, saying: "the realization which dawned most clearly upon me…was the fact that *I was not a Christian* – that I never had been, and never would be" (Sangharakshita 2005: "Chapter One: Early Memories"). In a fashion similar to the story of Ambedkar, Lingwood first encountered Buddhism through a book at the age of sixteen. Unlike Ambedkar, however, he claimed to be immediately affected by reading the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Sutra of Hui-Neng*, later writing that at that time he understood that he was a Buddhist and always had been (Sangharakshita 2005: "Chapter One: Early Memories"). Lingwood was drafted into the army during World War II and was posted to India (Vajragupta 2010: 3). His biography by follower Subhuti explains that he was initially posted to Delhi and then secured a transfer to Colombo, Sri Lanka (Subhuti 2013: "The Journey to the East"). Frustrated with the Buddhists in Colombo due to their form of Buddhist practice not lining up with his own text-based universalist approach, Lingwood connected with the Ramakrishna Mission, the organization founded by Vivekananda of 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago fame (Subhuti 2013: "The Journey to the East"). He was then transferred to Calcutta, where he continued his relationship with the Ramakrishna Mission "without ever losing his basic loyalty to Buddhism," and then was transferred to Singapore where he began to learn meditation practice (Subhuti 2013: "The Journey to the East").

[10] *Isis Unveiled* is the key text of Helena Blavatasky who founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. The Theosophical Society combined many Asian religious ideas with European esotericism and helped to popularize many Asian religious concepts and terms (through the Theosophical Society's lens) in Europe and America. The Theosophical Society was a major precursor and influence on the New Age movement of the 1970's (Hanegraaff 2007: 30). Blavatsky claimed to have received much of her written work from figures she called the Mahatmas through channeling (Hanegraaff 2007: 83).

In 1946 Lingwood learned that his army unit was being demobilized, so he left camp as a deserter (Subhuti 2013: "The Journey to the East"). He learned that if he went back to England after being demobilized he would not be allowed to return to India and continue his life as a monk because the Labour government was "discouraging any drainage of manpower out of the country" (Sangharakshita 2011: "Chapter Two: The Story So Far"). Instead, he returned to Calcutta to work with the Ramakrishna Mission and the Maha Bodhi Society. According to Subhuti, working with these groups "convinced him of the corruption of religious bodies and strengthened his determination to renounce the world" (ibid). Lingwood then decided to burn his passport and give away all his possessions to begin his search for a spiritual teacher (*Times* 2018: 52; Vajragupta 2010: 3). Vajragupta writes that Lingwood wandered with an Indian friend in southern India for two years, but "had a disappointing experience of Buddhist teachers in India; there were not many who seemed interested in teaching the Dharma" (2010: 3). Again, this spiritual biography emphasizes Lingwood's frustration with 'organized religion' like the Maha Bodhi Society. At this point, the story is also preparing its readers for India's "Buddhist revival" that Sangharakshita will help to initiate among Ambedkar's followers as he comments on the spiritual bankruptcy of Buddhist groups in India. During this two-year period Lingwood lived as a renunciant, taking the name Anagarika Dharmapriya – Anagarika referring to a person who is not ordained as a monk but has given up worldly status,[11] and Dharmapriya meaning lover of Dharma. While living in a cave near Ramana Maharshi's[12] ashram, the Anagarika had a vision of Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of the Pure Land known for his great compassion, which he took

[11] Another well known Anagarika from this period was Anagarika Dharmapala, the Sri Lankan founder of the Maha Bodhi Society. Much later in life, Sangharakshita wrote a biography of Dharmapala who appears to have been an influential figure in his own life. He self-published the book *Anagarika Dharmapala: A Biographical Sketch* in 2014.

[12] Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) was a Tamil *Śaiva sanyāsī* saint in the Advaita Vedanta philosophical tradition.

as a sign that he should seek ordination as a monk (Subhuti 2013: “The Journey to the East”). While the Maha Bodhi Society rejected Anagarika Dharmapriya and his friend’s request to be ordained, the Burmese monk U Chandramani gave them novice ordination into the Theravadin tradition in 1949, at which he was renamed Sangharakshita, meaning protector of the Buddhist community, the name which he was known by for the rest of his life (Subhuti 2013: “The Journey to the East”).

Sangharakshita did not immediately return to England after his ordination, instead working “for the revival of Buddhism” in Kalimpong, a Himalayan city in West Bengal “which contained a large proportion of nominally Buddhist peoples” (Subhuti 2013: “The Journey to the East”). There, he founded a branch of the Young Men’s Buddhist Association, a group associated with the Maha Bodhi Society (ibid). Living close to the border, Sangharakshita came in contact with many Tibetan Buddhists who were escaping Chinese occupation of their land (Subhuti 2013: “Helper of the Oppressed”). He received ordination from a number of Rimpoches from the Nyingmapa tradition and from one Gelugpa Rimpoche (Subhuti 2013: “Helper of the Oppressed”). He also received ordination into the Mahayana tradition in 1962, “thus giving him ordination and initiation within all three *yānas* of Buddhism” (Subhuti 2013: “Helper of the Oppressed”). It is notable that in the Triratna narration of his story, he emphasizes that he was ordained into all three of the major Buddhist lineages. Based on this authority, he will later create his own Triratna lineage that does not include ordination and does not require the validation of Theravada, Mahayana or the Vajrayana lineages. His lack of affiliation with a lineage also makes his group a good partner for Navayana Buddhists who reject the authority of the three major lineages.

Sangharakshita's path first crossed with Ambedkar's in the early 1950's through correspondence and three meetings. According to Vajragupta, Ambedkar and Sangharakshita discussed conversion and how the ceremony should be organized. He asked Sangharakshita if he would perform the ceremony, but Sangharakshita recommended U Chandramani, the Burmese monk who had conducted his own ordination (Vajragupta 2010: 40). Sangharakshita happened to be in Nagpur at the time of Ambedkar's death and was invited to speak at his funeral: "Other speakers were approaching the microphone, but were so upset and demoralized they could hardly speak…. Then it was Sangharakshita's turn. He realized that it had fallen to him to try and lift their spirits, to remind them that Ambedkar's life need not be wasted, but that his life's work would live on in them" (Vajragupta 2010: 41). Sangharakshita continued teaching in Maharashtra from 1957 to 1964, spreading the Dharma to Ambedkar's followers (ibid).

In 1964, Sangharakshita returned to England at the request of other British Buddhists (Subhuti 2013: "The Return Journey").[13] At this point, he still intended to return to India, but the challenges and opportunities that awaited him in the UK proved to be more alluring to him. In 1967 he founded the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, ordaining the first thirteen members a year later (Subhuti 2013: "The Return Journey"). By the end of the 1970's, the FWBO had spread outside of the UK into Europe (Baumann 2000: 378). By the 1990's FWBO was among the three largest Buddhist organizations in the UK along with the New Kadampa Tradition and Soka Gakkai International (McAra 2007: 15). Of these three groups, his was the only one that was founded by a British-born individual, with SGI originating in Japan and New Kadampa tracing its origins to Tibetan Vajrayana. During the 1980's and 90's the organization spread to Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, North and South America and throughout

[13] I haven't been able to find any explanation for how he managed this after having deserted the army.

Europe (Baumann 2000: 378). According to their current website, there are around 1900 Order members in 27 countries across the world (TheBuddhistCentre.com 2020: "Order Members"). In a study from 2000, Martin Baumann claims that the vast majority of the FWBO's supporters and members are located in India (378). In consideration for the fact that so many members lived outside the "West," Friends of the Western Buddhist Order changed its name to the Triratna Buddhist Community in 2010 (Vajragupta 2010: 175). Additionally, Sangharakshita argued that it would create a sense of unity for the organization to be known by one name – Triratna – rather than by the various acronyms that resulted from the translation of FWBO into various languages (ibid). Triratna means "Three Jewels" which is a term found throughout the Buddhist world that refers to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. According to the introductory material on their website, this name was chosen because "Sangharakshita considers the defining act of a Buddhist to be Going for Refuge to these Three Jewels. This is the central principle or orientation of the Triratna Buddhist Community and everything we do" (TheBuddhistCentre.com 2020: "What is Triratna?"). The idea of the three jewels is common to all Buddhists, regardless of their lineage, so in choosing the name Triratna, Sangharakshita emphasizes the supposed universality of his interpretation of Buddhism.

The original Order members were ordained as *upāsaka* and *upāsīka*, or lay Buddhists. As time went on, Sangharakshita became less satisfied with the categories of lay and monastic. In 1982 he suggested that members should be ordained as *dharmacārī* and *dharmacāranī*, meaning 'dharma-farer' or 'practitioner of the dharma' (Subhuti 2013: "The Third Order of Consciousness"). *Dharmacārī* and *dharmacāranī* take ten precepts and a new Pali or Sanskrit name (Baumann 2000: 377). In India, Order members prefer to use the Pali *dhammacārī* and *dhammacāranī* as they see Sanskrit as a Brahminical language. Order members often live in

single-sex spiritual communities together, “to enable the development of ‘spiritual friendship’ amongst each other” (Baumann 2000: 377). Further emphasizing their neither monastic nor lay status, “members of the Order are men and women, single, married, or those living in celibacy, some with full-time jobs and others who devote all of their energy to the further development of the FWBO” (Baumann 2000: 377). Most Order members that I met in Nagpur were married and lived with their spouse. Some members would take extended retreats where they lived away from their spouse and dedicated their time to meditation or work for the Order. Many of the *dhammacārī* and *dhammacāranī* who were settled in Nagpur lived in a neighborhood near to Nagaloka. Many of them participated in the community events that took place at Nagaloka, such as the weekly meetings on Sunday or monthly full moon gatherings, and they also sometimes offered their services as teachers or mentors to the students.

Martin Baumann and Christopher Queen (2000) classified the FWBO as a Socially Engaged Buddhist Movement. Socially Engaged Buddhism, refers to “a contemporary form of Buddhism that engages actively yet nonviolently with the social, economic, political, and ecological problems of society” in contrast with the Buddhist monastic tendency to disengage from society and its problems (King 2009: 1). Baumann argues that the ethical principle of Right Livelihood is extremely prominent in the practices of FWBO members as they “attempt to change existing sociopolitical structures of Western, industrial society” (2000: 372). Indeed, many Indian Order members that I met have devoted their lives to working towards social change, especially in regards to working towards social equity. They often give up more lucrative careers in order to devote their lives to spreading the *dhamma* by working at Triratna affiliated institutions such as Nagaloka, their Pune-based charity Manuski or other meditation and charity centers.

Lokamitra & the TBMSG

Arguably the most important Triratna Order member in the story of Triratna in India is Dhammachari Lokamitra. Born in London in 1947, schoolteacher Jeremy Goody left his job to become Lokamitra and work for the Order in 1974 (Tang 2012; Vajragupta 2010: 32). In 1977, Lokamitra travelled to India as a monk to study yoga with BKS Iyengar (Vajragupta 2010: 32). As I heard Lokamitra tell the story, he landed in India and had to take a long multi-day train journey across the country to reach his destination. Sangharakshita had told him that if he stopped in Nagpur on his journey, there would be many friends there who he could meet and would help him. Purely by coincidence, Lokamitra stopped in Nagpur on October 14, the day celebrated as Dhamma Dīkṣā Day. He was shocked to see so many Buddhists and Buddhist flags flooding the train station. He was soon swept up into the celebration and he was asked to be a speaker at the event. At the time, he knew very little about Ambedkar or his followers, but he spoke about his teacher Sangharakshita and was surprised to find that many people in the crowd remembered him (Vajragupta 2010: 42).

When Lokamitra returned to England, he told his teacher about what had happened to him in India, and Sangharakshita encouraged him to return and continue his work there. In 1978 Lokamitra moved to Pune, and he remains there today. Lokamitra has since become an Indian citizen and lives in Pune with his wife who is an Indian-born member of the community and their two children. He was encouraged by his Indian friends in the Order to marry into the community so that others would accept him as one of their own.

When he arrived in India, Lokamitra began to travel across Maharashtra, teaching the *dhamma* and organizing meditation retreats. He came to understand how difficult it was for the

Buddhist community there to organize as they faced caste oppression and poverty. When Sangharakshita came to India in 1979, he inaugurated the Indian branch of the FWBO known as Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (Association of Helpers of the Spiritual Community of the Three Worlds[14]) or TBMSG as it is most frequently called (Vajragupta 2010: 43). In 1990, the TBMSG opened the Mahavihara (Great Meditation Hall) in Dapodi in Pune. From this central location, many people could study for ordination and participate in meditation (Vajragupta 2010: 45). Single-sex retreats at retreat centers in Bhaja (opened in 1983) and Bor Dharan (opened in 1992) allowed women to participate fully and work towards *dhammacārinī* ordination (Vajragupta 2010: 45).

Lokamitra had focused much of his efforts in the city of Pune in western Maharashtra. He was working most closely with people who came from a Mahar background and were already quite familiar with Ambedkar. By the 1990's he was becoming frustrated with what he considered the narrow-minded vision of many of these Mahars who were so quick to criticize the caste system, but would rather their children marry Brahmins than people from other SC subcastes that they considered socially inferior. Out of this frustration, Lokamitra's dream for Nagaloka was born. Working together with many Indian Order members including Dhammacharis Vivekaratna, Maitreyanath, and Nagamitra, the Buddha Surya Vihar on Nagaloka's campus was opened in 1997. The Nagarjuna Training Institute was completed in 1998, which offered free training in Buddhist *dhamma* and practice and Ambedkar's thought to young Indians. While at the beginning the classes consisted of many local students, it was always the dream of Nagaloka's founders for students from all across India to come for training there. Lokamitra, Vivekaratna and the others all knew that the only way to overcome casteism was to

[14] The Three Worlds or *trailokya* refer to three realms in which one could receive karmic rebirth. The reason for choosing this name for the group seems to refer to the Mahayana concept of helping all living beings in all realms.

include students from any background from across India in their program. While students most often come from SC, OBC, and ST backgrounds, *jātī* is tied closely to regional boundaries. Cross-regional relationships are almost always relationships that cross caste boundaries.

Lokamitra is a highly respected figure by all the students I met at Nagaloka. Even those who criticize the program there will lay no blame at the feet of Lokamitra who they see as tirelessly working for the betterment of society. They are often impressed by his ability to work for people to whom he has no blood ties and are deeply moved by his obvious high respect for Babasaheb[15] Ambedkar. Even though he has lived and worked in India for over forty years, many people still think of him as a foreigner. Because of this, many people think he cannot fully understand certain social situations. For instance, if students had a criticism of someone's actions at Nagaloka, they would often assume that Lokamitra was entirely innocent of what was going on. While it seemed highly unlikely to me that Lokamitra was as socially unadjusted as the students seemed to think, I was also impressed by his dedication to working for this cause that on the surface had little to do with him. While some saw him as a figurehead, he had clearly developed strong and deep bonds with the members of the community that were demonstrated by the projects he collaborated on like Nagaloka, the Manuski Center in Pune, and the retreat center in Bordharan.

Lokamitra has also been very successful as a spokesperson for Indian Buddhists abroad. Largely due to his attendance at conferences across Asia, internationally prominent Buddhists of the status of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have stayed at Nagaloka and participated in a conference there in 2014. Through participation in International Network of Engaged Buddhist Conferences, representatives from Nagaloka have helped to gain the attention of groups in

[15] Babasaheb is an honorary title given to Ambedkar by his followers that literally means "Sir Father" or can be translated as "Respected Father."

Taiwan and Malaysia who have offered scholarships and other opportunities to Nagaloka students.

Jai Bhīmwāle Log: Terminology and the Forging of Community

The vast majority of Nagaloka's students belong to communities that have been designated Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or Other Backward Castes by the Indian government.[16] This means that many of the students self-identify as Ādivāsī, Mūlnivāsī, SC, OBC, and occasionally, Dalit and Bahujan. They range in age from 18 to 26 years old and have a variety of educational backgrounds. Some students enrolled in the *dhammasekhiya* program are simultaneously enrolled in Bachelors' degree programs at universities in other states, while others have only completed high school education when they arrive at Nagaloka. Many students also consider themselves Ambedkarite or a part of the Ambedkarite Movement, which they often refer to simply as, The Movement. The brief summary of what all of this means is that the students come from communities regarded as among the lowest in the caste hierarchy, but it is critical to take some time unpacking the vocabulary that surrounds the complex issues of social exclusion and discrimination.

The Constitution of India protects its citizens from discrimination on the basis of religion, gender, and caste, but it also enshrines a system of affirmative action which requires citizens to be officially designated as belonging to 'backward' or 'under-developed' caste communities in order to receive benefits (Bayly 1999: 268). These official designations are Scheduled Castes

[16] I hesitate to say every student for a few reasons. I heard of one alumnus who was from a mixed caste background, so I am not certain that he was designated under one of these government categories, but his family was committed to an anti-caste ideology. I also met one alumnus from Sri Lanka who was not at all interested in caste, but was interested in the Triratna Buddhist Community because he did not like the Buddhist organizations that he found in Sri Lanka.

(SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). The term "scheduled" refers to the intention by the government to uplift them so that in time, they will live at the same level as advantaged communities (Bayly 1999: 246). Scheduled Castes generally refers to those people who were considered "untouchable" and therefore outside the Hindu *varṇa* system, whereas Scheduled Tribes is an even more amorphous category of people lived in remote locations in hills and jungles and were also excluded from the *varṇa* system (Bayly 1999: 9). The category of Other Backward Castes, which, also ill-defined, was meant to refer to people belonging to the Shudra *varṇa* or 'peasants' was not offered any reservation benefits in the original Constitution. Immediately after independence, groups began forming to agitate for the rights of Other Backward classes:

> the claim of these aspiring representatives of the 'Other Backwards' was that their social and material 'backwardness' was not just an affliction of untouchables and so-called tribals….spokesmen for these groups argued that their 'communities' too had been collectively demeaned over the centuries by the pretensions of the pure Brahman and the 'lordly' Rajput. (Bayly 1999: 288)

The Mandal Commission Report of 1980, which was meant to provide a recommendation as to whether or not to offer reservation benefits to OBC's, ruled in their favor, which eventually opened doors for reservations for these communities as well (Rao 2009: 172).

The Sanskritic term Ādivāsī translates to "original inhabitants." Many people who are classified as belonging to Scheduled Tribes identify as Ādivāsī. The term Mūlnivāsī, also means "original inhabitants," but is usually used in a more specifically Buddhist context. Eleanor Zelliot (2010) writes that those who identify with the term Mūlnivāsī are declaring a lineage to the Buddha's Sakya clan. She observed this phenomenon largely in southern India among young intellectuals (2010: 1), but I met young activists in Western Odisha who belonged to the

BAMCEF organization who chose to identify as Mūlnivāsī. Most people were classified as SC by the government.

The term Dalit emerged in the early 20th century in popular use to refer to people who were oppressed by the caste system (Rawat 2015: 343). While the term has long been linked to the lineage of Maharashtrian anti-caste activists, scholar Ramnarayan Rawat has proven that the term was being used by northern Hindi language authors who were inspired by reform movements like the Arya Samaj which rejected caste by birth in favor of merit (2015: 343-4). Ambedkar used the term Dalit in 1928 in his publication Bahishkrit Bharat (Rao 2009: 15), but in most of his popular writings such as *Annihilation of Caste*, he used English terms like Depressed Classes and untouchable.

At Nagaloka, the term Dalit was very rarely used. Some people at Nagaloka considered the word Dalit to be offensive and demeaning. I also heard students argue that Ambedkar never used the word Dalit, so it was not a word they identified with or used. Usually, I heard the term SC used instead of Dalit. The term Dalit is most popular within academic communities. The term Dalit was celebrated and enshrined within the Dalit and Tribal Studies department at the Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishvavidyalaya with which I was affiliated during my fieldwork. Students there were taught to proudly declare themselves as Dalits and to not identify with other labels that were considered either demeaning or intended to disguise their association with Ambedkar and the anti-caste movement.

There were many students at Nagaloka who were classified as ST including many from the Chakma, Gond, and Santal tribal communities. These students used the term Ādivāsī and the English word tribal to identify themselves. For example, during an alumni conference on campus

a group called the Tribal and Adivasi Buddhist Sangha was inaugurated under the guidance of a TISS professor Dr. Bodhi S.R.

Another term associated with caste identity is Bahujan, meaning "majority." This term usually refers to those people who belong within the OBC category or the agrarian peasant classes of people who were classified as Shudra in the *varṇa* system. Anti-caste educational activist Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) considered the driving force of history to be a conflict between caste elites and the *bahujan samāj* (majority community), referring to the fact that the upper castes made up a significantly smaller percentage of the population than the laborers (Rao 2009: 44). In 1984, Kanshi Ram, a SC politician from Uttar Pradesh, formed the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), with the goal of uniting various minority populations within India to form the majority or Bahujan (Chandra 2000: 27). Presently, the term Bahujan is being used, often in tandem with Dalit as Dalit-Bahujan, as an identity category. For instance, the popular academic and activist Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd has titled a book *Post-Hindu India: a discourse on Dalit-Bahujan, socio-spiritual and scientific revolution* (2009) in which he discusses the Dalit-Bahujan culture that he argues will overtake mainstream Hindu culture. While the term Bahujan is highly political and politicized, it is sometimes used more casually as a way to politely refer to OBC classified people. The students who most often used this kind of terminology had worked with the Kanshi Ram founded organization BAMCEF (The All-India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation).

The identity marker Ambedkarite was perhaps the most often used self-descriptor I heard the students use. Being an Ambedkarite meant accepting Ambedkar's philosophy as one's own and acting in accordance with the way one thought he would act. In a short piece in which he attempts to distill what it means to be Ambedkarite, Anand Teltumbe writes: "Following

Ambedkar means being inspired by his vision of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' and acting in accordance with his advice 'educate, agitate, organise' so as to realise his goals of annihilation of castes and the achievement of socialism. It means being enlightened and not self-blinded" (Teltumbde 2013: 11). This sentiment mirrors the kinds of things I would often hear students who called themselves Ambedkarites say. Valerian Rodrigues astutely points out that choosing to identify as Ambedkarite over Dalit emphasizes "a distinctive perspective on life rather than a condition of being" (2015: 8). Further, I argue it is a more dynamic category that emphasizes ethical action over ontology.

I would like to end this discussion of identity labels with one last example. Jai Bhim (Victory to Ambedkar – Bhim referring to his first name Bhim Rao) is the greeting that Ambedkarites use to address each other. An autorickshaw driver once responded to my request to take me to Nagaloka Centre on Kamptee Road by saying, "*Hān, hān, we Jai Bhīmwāle log*?" or other words, "Yes, sure, those people who say Jai Bhim?" Despite all the nuances of identity and preferences of terminology, I don't think that there is one person associated with Nagaloka who does not say "Jai Bhim."[17]

My Place at Nagaloka

I discovered Nagaloka while browsing the internet in Syracuse, New York. I was searching for a place where I could learn more about Ambedkarite Buddhism. I was fascinated by Nagaloka's connection to the Triratna movement, and thought it could be a good starting point to meet Buddhists who were inspired by Ambedkar. I first arrived at Nagaloka in June 2016 with the help of a pre-dissertation research grant and the Buddhist family members of a

[17] While it is true that everyone says Jai Bhim, some also say "Jai Bhim, Namo Buddhāy." One student was also famous for saying "Jai Bhim! Jai Savitribai Phule! Jai Birsa Munda!" for gender equality and inclusion of Adivasis.

Syracuse University student who lived in Nagpur.[18] June is the hottest part of the year in Nagpur and classes were not in session. Nevertheless, Dhammachari Asangavajra, who was working at the time, agreed to give us a tour of the place and encouraged me to come back in August to meet some students. I stayed at Nagaloka for one week in August 2016 and lived in the girls' hostel. I attended classes and made some connections with the first-year students. I spoke with the campus director, Tejdarshan, about the possibility of returning in a year to conduct research for my dissertation. He assured me that I would be welcome to come and conduct my study, which I eventually would do beginning in September 2017.

I lived at Nagaloka Centre in a private room in the girls' hostel from September 2017 through June 2018. I attended daily meditation sessions with the students, ate meals with them, and socialized with them. I participated in meditation retreats that were offered periodically and incorporated community members who were not students at Nagarjuna Training Institute. I also participated in celebrations, workshops, and conferences that were periodically held on campus.

I originally attended classes with the students over the course of a week, but I decided not to continue attending class as my presence was disruptive to the teachers and students and attending classes was not particularly useful in answering my research questions. Over the course of the program, there were very frequently guest teachers who would come for a week or even only a few class sessions to conduct workshops. As an older and very clearly foreign person in the room, I often stood out and I felt that the attention I was garnering was both distracting to the teachers who were there to teach the Nagarjuna Training Institute students and to the students

[18] The previous semester, I had conducted a short ethnographic study of the campus Soka Gakkai International group. Because SGI is a Japanese-origin Buddhist group, I was surprised when the entire membership were Indian international students who were practicing Hindus. One of the young men in the SGI group was friends with another student who was from Nagpur, named Rahul Gondane. He gave me Rahul's contact information and Rahul was able to give me the information for his cousin Disha who lived in Nagpur. Disha and her parents helped me get to know Nagpur and took me to Nagaloka for the first time. I am incredibly grateful for the kindness of the Gondane family who were at the time virtual strangers to me.

who I felt should have the full focus of their instructors. Practically speaking, I found that when I attended lessons it took up a great portion of my day and the time it took to transcribe notes left me with insufficient time to conduct interviews.

The largest portion of my data was made up of informal interviews I conducted daily with students during their free time, meals, and work periods, as well as participant observation at meditation classes and during retreats, conferences, and other celebrations. I lived as a single young woman on campus and was treated by male students and teachers as a part of the community of young women students. Male teachers and administrators rarely initiated conversation with me unless they were already introduced to me by another female. Because I was an unmarried woman, I was not allowed to visit the boys' hostel or experience their meditation classes. This means that all of the information I have about the experience of young men at Nagaloka comes from interview rather than from experience. For this reason, most of this dissertation focuses on the experience and voices of the young women who were students at Nagaloka from 2017-18.

Students who were unfamiliar with me were also hesitant to initiate conversations with me because they were uncomfortable speaking English. Even though I tried to make it well known that I spoke Hindi by introducing myself in Hindi to the group, many students still didn't seem to believe that I would understand Hindi well enough to converse easily with them. Once students learned that I could speak with them fluently in Hindi, they would more frequently and freely approach me for conversations.

After the training session ended, I spent time in April and May travelling to visit students' homes in Gondia, Maharashtra; Balangir and Kalahandi, Odisha; and Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. I also travelled to Mumbai to visit some important sites to the community of

Ambedkar's followers. I had relationships with two Mahar Buddhist families who lived in Nagpur and had no connection to Triratna or Nagaloka, which offered a small window into other Buddhist ways of life in the city. The Dalit and Tribal Studies department at the Mahatma Gandhi Hindi University in Wardha also offered me an extremely warm welcome into their community. The relationships and experiences I made there offered me a much better grasp of a more common experience of university student life that helped me to understand the contrast with Nagaloka students' experiences.

Chapter Outline

I will illuminate the tension between boundation and *bindās* within four existential quandaries that were omnipresent in my conversations with Nagaloka's students: emplacement (where am I and how did I get here?), belonging (where do I fit in?), ethics (how should I live?), and aspiration (what do I want?). In describing life at Nagaloka in this way, I explore how it feels to be a young person who is being introduced to a new set of religious practices, communities, histories and ethics in a society that has consistently been disappointing them and letting them down.

In the first chapter, "Emplacement," I begin with physical spatial descriptions of Nagaloka as an orientation and move on to discuss the rules and regulations that define the use of that space for the students and other residents. I share students' stories about how they decided to make the leap to attend the program at Nagaloka to provide a sense of the kind of people who populate the space and the goals, dreams, and anxieties that they bring with them. I end with reflection on how the fact that Nagaloka is situated in a tense place between ideals and realities

makes possible the heightened experience of both boundation and *bindās* among the students who study there.

The second chapter, "Belonging," begins with a discussion of the special place of friendship in the Triratna Buddhist Community and then considers the potentials of friendship as an analytic category in the study of religion in South Asia. I then move on to analyze the friendships I observed at Nagaloka, comparing state-wise friendships and *kalyān mitratā* or 'spiritual friendships.' I illustrate how those students most invested in state-wise friendships had the most difficulty acclimating to life at Nagaloka and struggled to experience Buddhist practice as *bindās*.

The third chapter, "Ethics," examines how students struggle with the question of how they should live as they are faced with moral systems and ethical practices that they sometimes find contradictory. I begin with an overview of how I will use the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' in this chapter. I then move on to discuss the issues central to how Nagaloka residents thought about how they should live as Buddhists and how they should live as Ambedkarites and conclude with some reflections on how people resolve or fail to resolve the tensions between Buddhist and Ambedkarite morality and ethical practices.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, "Aspiration," I show that aspiration does not need to center on the middle-class to be a useful term to think with. Nagaloka students' aspirations are many and varied, some do hope for middle class comforts, while others aim for artistic success, for social revolution, or for marriage with the one they chose to love. Aspirations are not necessarily aiming upward but can move in many directions. Second, I write against the unacknowledged pull to tell stories of aspiration in terms of success or failure. I will show that aspirations are heavily influenced by the places and people the aspirant meets along the journey. Changes and

shifts in aspirations are not inherently failures. Finally, I propose that rather than as a means of judging the potential success or failure of a given person or community to ascend to the global middle class, aspiration is more useful as a way to understand how people and communities learn to navigate between boundation and *bindās*.

I conclude with some reflections on how my research contributes to the study of caste in India, Buddhism in a transnational postcolonial context, and youth in religious studies. The broadest aim of my research is that it will help scholars and activists to gain insight into how to better understand and support processes of social change that are driven by socially, economically, and historically disenfranchised communities. I aim that putting the experiences and voices of young people at the forefront of this work will demonstrate that taking youth cultures seriously is a way to gain insight into a social community's biggest roadblocks and clearest pathways forward. Furthermore, I intend that this work will contribute to other studies that demonstrate the importance of friendship as a micro-level social structure that has power to initiate, drive, and sustain social change.

Chapter One

Emplacement: *Where am I and how did I get here?*

"For me, Nagaloka is like a kind of heaven," Tirtha from Odisha told me. When I asked him why, he said "at Nagaloka there are resources I can't get on my side (i.e., in my village)."

"*Dīdī* (older sister), why did you come here?" one of the young women in the Bachelors' program asked me, "This is a bad place… we are trapped here."

I became used to students' wildly vacillating descriptions of Nagaloka the longer I lived there. In fact, both above-mentioned students expressed seemingly opposite views before I left. Tirtha had a reputation among his peers for publicly arguing with teachers about the strict campus rules, while the female student later told me that she thought the wardens were too lenient. What remained consistent among student comments, whether positive or negative, was that Nagaloka was a strange and different place. In this chapter, I discuss the qualities that make students experience their time at Nagaloka as both a trap and a heaven, as both boundation and *bindās*.

Nagaloka is a space where people are attempting to live out the Ambedkarite Buddhist ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. These ideals are constantly being challenged, questioned, and disturbed by the behaviors and ideas of its residents. I begin with physical spatial descriptions of Nagaloka as an orientation and move on to discuss the rules and regulations that define the use of that space for the students and other residents. Next, I share students' stories about how they ended up deciding to come to Nagaloka to provide a sense of the kind of people who populate the space and the goals, dreams, and anxieties that they bring with them. I end with reflection on how the fact that Nagaloka is situated in a tense place between ideals and realities makes possible the heightened experience of both boundation and *bindās* among the students who study there.

Figure 1: View of the Walking Buddha statue from the main entrance pathway. The boys' hostel is to the right of the Buddha and to the left is an apartment building outside of the boundaries of Nagaloka.

Figure 2: Nagaloka's main entrance, the Walking Buddha visible in the background.

Where am I?

Students described the awe they felt when they first arrived at Nagaloka's gate and saw the 56-foot golden walking Buddha statue for the first time (Figure 1 & 2). Ranju and Mamta from Odisha told me how they had never seen anything like it before. They wondered what this strange place that they had decided to spend three years at would be like. Like the students, I also felt disoriented when I first came to Nagaloka. The campus is situated in the village Bhilgaon between Nagpur (population about 2.5 million) and a small neighboring city Kamptee (population about 86,800). Nagaloka is about ten and a half kilometers from Nagpur city center, taking around half an hour to reach by car or two-wheeler. The area surrounding Nagaloka is not very densely populated in comparison to Nagpur or Kamptee proper, and its nearest neighbors

are wedding lawns which are located beyond the campus' Upaya guesthouse building (on the border at the top of Figure 3), residential buildings which share the boundary wall behind the Walking Buddha (on the border at the left of Figure 3), and a road leading to Bhilgaon (on the borders at the right and bottom of Figure 3). The campus is delineated by brick and concrete walls or chain-link fences on all sides. Between the hours of 10 AM and 8 PM the campus is freely open to visitors; outside of these times, the front gate is locked and guarded (Figure 2). Many *dhammacaris* and *dhammamitras*[19] live in Bhilgaon and will come to Nagaloka to volunteer and socialize, for *dhamma* talks, and for *pūrṇimā* (full moon holiday).

Figure 3: Map of Nagaloka produced by the architect Christopher Benninger. Buildings 9, 11, 16 and 21 are not in existence, although there is a building similar to 9 connected to 5 directly across from where it is situated in this plan. In *Benninger, Christopher. (2015).* Christopher Benninger: Architecture for Modern India. *Pune: India House Art Gallery, 254.*

[19] *Dhammacari* refers to people who have taken the most number of vows and are most committed in the Triratna community. *Dhammamitra* are people who are on track to becoming *dhammacaris* – they have taken a fewer number of vows.

Nagaloka Restaurant and Nagaloka Enterprises, a Buddhist gift shop, are situated inside the gates to the right of the entrance in full view of visitors. The businesses are owned and run by three alumni of the training program: Niranjan from Bihar, Maitri from Arunachal Pradesh, and Dharam from Uttar Pradesh. Over the course of my fieldwork, at various times they employed a rotating crew of between six and eight alumni – many from Arunachal and Uttar Pradesh, one of Niranjan's cousins from Bihar, and one Muslim woman from Bhilgaon to help them run the businesses. Niranjan started the business on a table by the entrance in 2011 when he was 19 years old and freshly graduated from the training program. The business has grown yearly, leading to his partnerships with Dharam and Maitri. He brought Maitri on in part to help him arrange his inter-state marriage to a Nagpuri girl. Dharam met his wife during his training at Nagaloka, and while the two are both from Uttar Pradesh, they come from different districts and different castes which caused some disturbance in their family – a scenario that occurs every so often at Nagaloka. Nagaloka Enterprises offers an important support system for such alumni who are living out Nagaloka's anti-caste ideals. Nagaloka Enterprises pays rent to Nagaloka to run their business there.

Aside from the walking Buddha and Nagaloka Enterprises and Restaurant, visitors can enjoy the campus' beautiful flower gardens. Two women and one man are the groundskeepers and gardeners at Nagaloka and they are assisted by the students during afternoon work duty. In the early days of Nagaloka, they used to farm vegetables and plants on the grounds and sell them to help run the center, but now the flowers are used for *pūjā* (honoring ritual), making *raṅgolī* (decorative designs made on the floor of a worship space), and welcoming important guests. Vegetable growing has stopped altogether. The students would often admire the natural beauty of Nagaloka in comparison to the dust and crowd of Nagpur or the ugliness of Bhilgaon, but would

wistfully list off all of the more beautiful plants and more tasty vegetables that were growing in their village at any given time of year.

Facing the enormous walking Buddha statue is a life-size statue of Ambedkar (Figure 4). This statue is unusual because he is dressed in *kurtā* and *dhotī* (traditional Indian men's wear of long shirt and trousers wrapped from a single cloth) as he was on the day of his *dīkṣā* (initiation) ceremony when he embraced Buddhism. Aside from small busts, most full-sized Ambedkar statues found across India depict him "in his business suit with the Constitution in one hand, the other arm pointing to the sky" (Jaoul 2012: 101). His typical suit "represents Ambedkar as a man of international stature, rather than in traditional Indian dress (as Gandhi and other Congress leaders are represented)" (Jaoul 2012: 105). While Nagaloka's *dhotī*-clad Ambedkar is not entirely unique, it does stand out in comparison to most of his representations by emphasizing his Buddhist identity. On Nagaloka's campus, Ambedkar's most important role is as *bodhisattva* rather than as the rational cosmopolitan author of the Constitution.

Figure 4: Students performing pūjā at the campus' Ambedkar statue on the anniversary of his death.

Figure 5: The inside of the Buddha Surya Vihar prepared for a program. Notice the Maitreya Buddha image and the garlanded image of Ambedkar below.

The oldest building at Nagaloka is the Buddha Surya Vihar, the main meditation hall and community gathering space. Inside is an image of the Maitreya Buddha (the future Buddha yet to come) at whose feet rests a framed portrait of Ambedkar (Figure 5). This building is used daily by the boys for their meditation practice, every Sunday morning for community *pūjā* and meditation, as well as any time there is a function or *śivir* (meditation retreat). In front of the *vihār*, the campus' bodhi tree grows. Square to the *vihār* is the Nagarjuna Training Institute building, where the students have their classes and in which the library is contained. Inside this building is a mural of Ambedkar's *dīkṣā* painted by important Pune-based Dalit artist, Sudhir

Waghmare. Behind the classroom building, nestled in a bamboo grove is Grudrakuta, the girls' hostel, named after Vulture Peak, the Buddha's favorite retreat. The significantly larger and more recently completed boys' hostel, Bodhichitta (meaning: awakening mind), is located behind the golden Walking Buddha statue at the center of campus. Some other buildings on campus include Adhisthana (meaning: benediction from a teacher), a small dormitory; Shakyakula (meaning: Shakya clan), a dormitory where the some of the teaching staff stay; Parmita (meaning: perfection) and Upaya (meaning: expedient means), two guest houses and conference centers; Sambodhi (meaning: perfect enlightenment), a small meditation hall; the kitchen, the canteen, and the administrative building where the offices are held.

The campus and its buildings were designed by Christopher Benninger, an American-born naturalized citizen of India, who has also designed many other Triratna centers in Maharashtra. According to the description released by his firm, "the campus configuration is influenced by the [*stūpa* at the] Deer Park at Sarnath" (Benninger 2015: 252). Designed with a single architectural vision, the campus therefore has a very cohesive and unique appearance. The buildings are "constructed of exposed brick, brick vaults, long span concrete shells and Kota Stone[20] flooring" (Benninger 2015: 253). Due to the concrete shell construction, the ceilings in many rooms – including the girls' dormitories and the Buddha Surya Vihar – are all arched, making the installation of ceiling fans impossible. The students found these odd design features unique to Nagaloka and utterly impractical.

Its liminal location as a highway pull-off between the more populous centers of Nagpur and Kamptee, its enormous Buddha statue and beautiful gardens, and its unique architectural elements, all combine to make Nagaloka feel distinctive from other places that visitors and

[20] A limestone mined from the Kota district of Rajasthan.

students have been. While sights and sounds from the wedding lawns and nearby Bhilgaon are inescapable, on most days, being on campus felt quite insular. With about 100 boys and 80 girls and about 30 staff members, campus life was imbued with a strong sense of community.

Managing the Timetable: Classes, Meditation, & Work Duty

When students first arrive at Nagaloka, many have no idea to what they have committed themselves. Many have fallen on economically hard times or are feeling lost or dissatisfied in their lives and have received the advice from a mentor that they should take advantage of Nagaloka's free education. Most students are drawn to Nagaloka by the opportunity to learn about Ambedkar who is conspicuously absent from public school curricula that most of Nagaloka's students have previously attended despite his having been head of the drafting committee of India's constitution. Depending on students' prior involvement in anti-caste activism and Ambedkarite movements, they might have some minimal preexisting knowledge about Buddhism. Very few students, usually those from Maharashtra or neighboring Madhya Pradesh, have practiced meditation before in *vipassanā* retreats and are eager to have the chance to continue. Students belonging to the Chakma community offer a third kind of perspective of people who practice Buddhism in a very different way than the Triratna Buddhists and have extremely limited, if any, knowledge of Ambedkar. The Chakmas are a tribe originally from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in present day Bangladesh who due to colonial and partition violence now live scattered across northeastern India (Singh 2010: 1). The Chakmas are considered by the Indian government to be a Buddhist community, and most Chakma people practice Buddhism while they often live in majority Christian and Hindu states like Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (Singh 2010: 114). Chakma people belong to the Theravadin lineage, therefore, their practices

and perspectives on Buddhism differ quite significantly from the Triratna Buddhist Community (Geary & Mukherjee 2016: 36). Regardless of their background, most students expect that Nagaloka will be a somewhat typical college environment where studying academic subjects is the ultimate priority and students take advantage of amenities such as janitorial staff and serviced mess halls for meals so that they can spend more hours in study. Students who remain in their parents' home during their time at university are usually treated to the same level of uninterrupted time to dedicate to study. All of these expectations are subverted upon their arrival at Nagaloka.

The students were introduced to Nagaloka with a week-long *śivir* (meditation retreat) where they were taught *ānāpānasati* and *maitrī bhāvanā*[21] meditation techniques and introduced to the *pūjā* style practiced by Triratna members. The students quickly learn to respect Dhammachari Vivekaratna, the program director who took the lead in training the students in meditation and how to participate in *śivir*. Having been a member of the TBMSG for much of his life, after Vivekaratna retired from his paying job, he has donated his time to teach young people about Buddhism and to ensure the success of the Nagarjuna Training Institute. Upon their first *śivir* at the start of their training program, Vivekaratna told the students that studying meditation is equally if not more important to their time at Nagaloka than their classes. He encouraged anyone who was not willing to commit to sincerely learning meditation to leave and join a regular college. All the *śivir* I observed and participated in followed this pattern. Participants (including students and sometimes outside guests) woke at 5:30 AM for 6:00 AM *chikun* (the Hindization of Chinese *qi gong*) exercises and an hour-long session of *ānāpānasati* meditation beginning at 6:30 in the Buddha Surya Vihar. Meditation was followed by announcements and a

[21] *Anapanasati* meditation practice focuses on counting breaths in order to calm and control the mind, while *maitribhavana* meditation practice focuses on developing compassion.

forty-five minute to an hour-long work period. There was then time to bathe and dress for the day before 9:00 AM breakfast. At 10:00, *sūtta* (scripture, discourse of the Buddha) study began. During a week-long *śivir*, one *sūtta* was chosen by the *śivir* leader for the group to discuss. Usually, during this sixteenth batch, Vivekaratna lead the *śivir*. He began his *dhamma* talk on the chosen *sūtta* at 10:00 which lasted for about an hour. He would elaborate on the story and moral lesson of the *sūtta* by providing contemporary examples to which the students could relate their own experiences. For instance, in his discussion of the *Kālāmasūtta* which offers criteria for how to assess the validity of truth claims, Vivekaratna expanded on the Buddha's advice to be wary of charismatic figures through such diverse examples as Winston Churchill, Osho-Rajneesh, and Ambedkar himself. He told the students to measure the claims of such figures against their own experience. He warned the students that just because someone has a good speaking style and voice it does not mean that what they say is true: even Ambedkar could not speak truth all the time.

After Vivekaratna's explication of the *sūtta*, the assembled participants broke into small discussion groups of between 8:00 and 10:00 with one appointed group leader. The group leaders were chosen from among a group of volunteering *dhammacārī, dhammacārinī, dhammamitra*, or in some cases, an advanced student or campus-dwelling alumna/us. The groups were always single-sex. The conversations in the groups that I participated in were usually quite spirited, with girls sharing many examples from their own experience that backed up or contradicted Vivekaratna's earlier discussions. The groups aimed to formulate a list of questions that they wanted to bring back to the whole group when study resumed. For instance, after Vivekaratna's explanation about learning to assess the speeches of charismatic people, the young women in the conversation group I participated in discussed the challenges of spreading this perspective. One

student shared her experience that if she ever contradicted Ambedkar, people just told her to shut up. Another student explained that it was especially difficult to have conversations with her parents where she questioned charismatic authorities in which they had *andhaviśvās* (blind faith). She explained that her parents had little education and little time to think critically about important topics.

Lunch was served at 1:00 before everyone reconvened in the Buddha Surya Vihar for question and answer sessions with the *śivir* leader at 2:00. Every group wrote a list of questions and submitted them anonymously. Vivekaratna took every question seriously and tried his best to clearly explain his answers. After the discussions about the *Kālāmasūtta*, one group asked if they should believe what teachers say or if they should think about it. Vivekaratna urged them to think about every claim first before accepting it as fact, even if the claim is spoken by a teacher! At 3:00 PM, the entire group participated in *maitrī bhāvanā* meditation. By 4:00 PM, evening work period commenced, followed by free time from 5:00-6:00 and dinner at around 6:00. Everyone returned to the *vihār* for evening *pūjā* led by one of the *dhammacārī* or *dhammacārinī*, which consisted of lighting candles and incense, performing *pañcāṅg praṇām* (a set of three prostrations before the Buddha and Ambedkar), reciting the Pali Vandana, reading from Ambedkar's *Buddha and his Dhamma* or the *Dhammapada*, and some minutes of quiet sitting. This style of *pūjā* shares some similarities with Hindu *pūjā* practiced in temples and homes in Nagpur. Hindus also show respect to images of the deity through prostration, offerings of incense, and by reciting verses for them. However, unlike for Hindus, the image of the Buddha is considered only a reminder of the great teacher rather than as a physical embodiment of him. The image is respected, but it is not bathed, fed, or dressed in the same manner that Hindu *mūrtis* (images of god) are. Additionally, *prasād* (offerings) in the form of food or flowers are a key

element of Hindu *pūjā* that is not present in Buddhist *pūjā*. While the space that houses the Buddha's image is often adorned with flower *raṅgolī*, candles, and incense, these are not considered *prasād*, but decorations that respect the memory of the Buddha and create a proper environment for concentration. *Pūjā* would end by 9:00 PM after which participants went to bed. They were encouraged to keep *maun* (silence) between the end of nightly *pūjā* and morning meditation, if not throughout the entire *śivir*, excluding *sūtta* discussion group where everyone was vociferously encouraged to participate. Additionally, participants were supposed to reflect and keep a journal about their thoughts and experiences during *śivir*.

The students' regular days were based on a similar schedule. Instead of convening as an entire group in the Buddha Surya Vihar, only the boys met there in the mornings and evenings, and the girls met in the small meditation hall on the ground floor of their hostel. While the boys complained about having to go outside during the chilly early morning and evening hours to attend meditation, the young women remained protected at these vulnerable dark hours within the confines of their hostel (in spite of the fact that the campus is locked and guarded at these times). Some of the girls felt that there was favoritism shown towards the boys as they were allowed regular access to the grander hall. The hour and a half-long morning session would include *chikun* (qi gong), *pūjā* (worship ritual), and *ānāpānasati* (mindful breathing) meditation. On a regular day there was no afternoon meditation session, and the evening session included *pūjā* and *maitrī bhāvanā* meditation. During the day, students took their courses or had scheduled study time in the library. This schedule was maintained every day of the week excluding Sundays which started with *pūjā* and meditation. After breakfast, students were free to leave campus or spend their time as they wished until they reconvened for dinner.

During work periods, students were broken up into small single-sex groups and were assigned a weekly-rotating schedule of chores. In the morning chores included cleaning the hostel, sweeping and cleaning the grounds close to the hostel, cleaning the canteen, food preparation, breakfast serving, and post-breakfast pot-cleaning. Evening chores included cleaning and decorating the *vihār*, cleaning the classroom and other community buildings, and groundskeeping. Boys were assigned groundskeeping chores that required heavy lifting, while girls were exclusively in charge of *raṅgolī* construction, but other than that, similar chores were required of students of both genders. Often boys and girls had a chance to interact during these chores depending on if the areas they were assigned to care for overlapped. Outside guests to Nagaloka (including myself) were not included in these rotating chore charts, but they were expected to clean up their own rooms and keep the facilities they used neat.

The students found this schedule very rigorous and difficult to maintain. During the function held to close out the *dhammasekhiya* (*dhamma* training) program, eight students had the chance to speak to the group about their experiences. All eight of the students mentioned the difficulty of learning to "manage the timetable" at Nagaloka. During the day-to-day conversations I had with students, they usually referred to work periods and particularly meditation classes as "boundation." The extra-long meditation periods during *śivir* were torturous to those students who disliked or struggled with meditation. While the wardens complained to me that the students were undisciplined and shirked work duty or fell asleep during meditation, I was shocked that the students participated to the degree that they did given the fact that the vast majority of them were completely unaware of what would be expected of them at Nagaloka until after they had arrived and had committed to the program.

I asked the students if they usually did work around their family home, and received a variety of answers. Rani from Jaipur, Rajasthan was one of the younger daughters in a very large family. Her father was a politician in the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) – the most popular and successful national Ambedkarite party presently headed by Mayawati, the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. Rani had come to Nagaloka with her younger brother Rahul to participate in the *dhammasekhiya* program while they were completing their Bachelors' degrees in Jaipur. She told me that she hated work period at Nagaloka and was not used to doing work at all. At home she would spend most of her time lying in front of the TV watching serials. Her *bhābhī* (sister-in-law) did all the housework. I asked her what would happen when she was a *bhābhī* one day and she looked at me with confusion. Other girls were very happy and proud to do work. Ravita from Kanpur, UP loved cutting grass and other outdoor work. She told me that this was the work she did in her family. Similarly, Mamta from Odisha proudly told me that one of her best qualities was her strength. She used to come home from school daily and help her family in the fields. Cousin-sisters Sanika and Hemlata from Odisha told me that they did work at home, but they wouldn't be required to do work if they didn't feel like it and work was not on a set schedule. When I visited their home during their vacation in March, I saw them happily helping their families cook, clean, and care for the younger children.

While certain tasks were more hated than others and work duty was more onerous to some students than others, generally, there were fewer complaints about work duty than about meditation. One day before evening meditation I was sitting with some students in the hostel. Priyanka from Bihar was in a bad mood because she had been waiting for her brother to arrive at Nagaloka all day with no avail. One of the other students and I had been complaining about meditation and Priyanka chimed in: "They always tell us that meditation will cure everything,

but will it get me a job?" She said that their teachers' way of thinking is old-fashioned. "They used to cure snakebites with natural remedies in the old days and that worked for them, but for these times we have medicine. Meditation is like this," she said. While Priyanka didn't offer a modern alternative to meditation, her comments implied that whatever inspired people in the Buddha's time to practice of meditation is entirely irrelevant to modern people. She told me that when I write my book, I should tell everyone that meditation is *fāltū cīz*, a useless thing. "All I do is sit and think about negative things – they tell us to let go of negative things and fill our minds with positive thoughts, but it's not so easy!" She told me that she wanted to speak up and say that meditation is a waste of time, but she didn't because she didn't want to cause problems.

Julie from Odisha and Samiksha M. from Madhya Pradesh were two of the more activist-minded students on campus. They would often discuss with each other and with me about whether Ambedkar would approve of meditation. Julie told me that she thought for someone like Babasaheb who was constantly working for society, study and reading could be a kind of meditation. Samiksha was in her second year at Nagaloka and said she felt the benefits of meditation, but I would rarely see her in the evening meditation group which was not required past the first year. She was highly devoted to her studies and would spend that time completing school work. While I never heard her disparage meditation and she would claim that she found it useful, her actions lead me to believe that she preferred to spend her time focused on her work. I will discuss the ethical implications of meditation practice further in Chapter 3, but the required meditation classes were one of the most cited causes of the students' feelings of being under boundation at Nagaloka.

Rules and Regulations

In addition to the timetable, Nagaloka students were also bound to follow a set of rules while they lived on campus. The most difficult of these rules was that students were not allowed cellphones or to contact their families on days other than Sundays outside of emergencies. As young people who were outside of their family home or at the very least outside of their home-state for the first time in their lives, this restriction on communication was extremely stressful. Sometimes the students' families and friends did not understand the necessity for such a rule and would guilt the students for being in such poor contact. Because of this, there were many illicit cellphones smuggled into the hostel by second- and third-year Bachelors' students. There was supposed to be a landline for incoming calls provided to the students in their hostels for their use on Sundays, but the phone in the girls' hostel was out of commission for the first half of their program. During this time, the students' families would call the wardens' cellphones. Overwhelmed by the volume of calls, the wardens would not always pass on the families' messages to the students and would sometimes be brusque or rude, causing a lot of tension between the students and the wardens.

The students' secret cellphones also caused tension between the students themselves. After the students who I had known as first years returned from their vacation to begin their second year in June, many brought phones with them. Ranju from Odisha complained to me that one of her friends had a hidden cellphone. Ranju was losing sleep because her friend was using the cellphone at night after the wardens had gone to bed in their separate room. Her friend was also distracted by the phone and spent less time talking to Ranju during their free periods. She wished that the wardens would crack down on cellphone use and enforce the rules more strictly.

Another contentious rule was the Single Sex Policy, known as SSP for short. All aspects of life at Nagaloka were divided by gender. Boys and girls took the same classes together and

participated in *śivir* together, but the institution mandated that girls always sat on one side of the room and boys on the other. SSP dictated that boys and girls should not speak to one another outside of the classroom. This rule was blatantly disregarded by practically every student. Even two of the most rule-loving students, Rashmi*[22] from Madhya Pradesh and Surya from Rajasthan, struck up a friendship due to their shared appreciation for Buddhist austerity. There were many romances among the students – some more publicly displayed than others. For instance, everyone including the wardens knew that Ram and Bharati were sweet on each other, but they kept their meetings brief, innocuous, and inoffensive to observers. On the other end of the spectrum, Shivani and Lucky's romance was extremely public and continued despite repeated reprimands from the administration and Lucky's sister Neelam. Shivani became so frustrated that she chose to leave Nagaloka and only returned during exams to finish her degree, while Lucky was a *dhammasekhiya* student who was just about to finish his program by the time the issue came to a head. I write freely about them because I know the two have continued their relationship with their parents' permission outside of Nagaloka. Two *dhammasekhiya* students, one male and one female, who were older than the rest – about 26 – struck up a friendship. The man was married and the woman unmarried. They became subject to a great deal of gossip among students and staff, leading to both of their departures from Nagaloka due to their frustrations with the false accusations. The woman got married shortly after her return home. Another such case occurred when one of the girls' wardens accused a female student of flirting with one of the senior staff members. This student also decided that she couldn't abide with Nagaloka's strictures and returned home early.

[22] Any name marked with an asterisk (*) is a pseudonym. I will mark the name the first time it is used in every chapter although the pseudonyms will remain consistent throughout the entire document.

SSP was not only contentious among the students but also among the staff and teachers. While it was clear to me that certain staff members really believed in the moral necessity of SSP, others thought that it was a shame to divide the genders. Many staff members saw inter-caste and inter-state marriages in a very positive light and a sign of social progress, so they were conflicted about disallowing the young men and women to mingle. An American *dhammacārī,* Viradhamma, who has been annually visiting Nagaloka since its early days explained to me that SSP was considered necessary by the administration because they feared gaining a bad reputation that would dissuade parents from allowing their children, and especially daughters, to attend. He recounted that when he first began visiting, the women lived in a hostel off campus and had to be bussed in for daily lessons. After classes ended, they would bunch up together as if they were in a scrum to exit the room without interacting with the male students. Viradhamma was relieved that the rules and attitudes had relaxed since those days and commented that the liberal ideas of foreigners probably couldn't help but seep into the fabric of Nagaloka. During certain programs that were headed by more activist-minded people for a broader audience, the alumni gathering, for example, men and women sat next to each other in the Buddha Surya Vihar and even dined together. In these instances, the desire to develop community and egalitarianism trumped the fear of gossip.

The staunchest defenders of SSP tended to be the girls' wardens. One night during Nagaloka's annual alumni event, the organizers threw a party. The boys and girls all gathered together in front of the campus' statue of Ambedkar for some cake and to take turns singing Ambedkarite or Buddhist songs. Eventually, popular songs were allowed, and the students danced joyfully together around the image of Babasaheb. They were supervised by adult mentors throughout the event. When I returned to the girls' hostel that night, I heard the warden

disapprovingly say about the casual mixing of genders at the party: “Then what makes us different from outside people?” While I was previously told that SSP was in place in order to uphold the institution’s moral reputation, here the warden seems to be making a judgment about the general moral laxity outside of Nagaloka. I think that the warden was implying that young people without proper adult supervision will get up to immoral behavior and will put themselves and their reputations at risk for the sake of having fun. She understood the benefit of sending a child to Nagaloka to be that they would not have the chance to participate in these kinds of risky behaviors. This warden also considered Nagaloka’s student population to be at-risk youths who had the chance to transform their lives in the confines of the campus. I think she saw the party as an example of the kind of behavior that she would have expected from them outside of Nagaloka and not representative of the moral reform that was supposed to be taking place there.

On Sundays, boys and girls would often spend time together outside of Nagaloka. Julie from Odisha organized a group with all the Odishi students to develop a plan for activism after they had left Nagaloka. She would always feel inspired and energized by the sharing of experience and ideas that would happen during these meetings. She enthusiastically reported back to me their plans for how they would work together to support awareness campaigns and fight Brahminical abuses of Dalit and Tribal people.[23] She was frustrated with SSP because she saw Nagaloka as an important place to network and build community with other students from other cities or villages that she would not have met otherwise. As someone who had grown up in hostels due to her family’s poverty and was heavily involved in the Ambedkarite movement in her district, she was used to spending time with men and boys and did not face any criticism from her family for doing so.

[23] I was not invited to these meetings and, as I don’t speak Oriya, I would have needed interpretation into Hindi or English from Julie anyway.

The enforcement of SSP would wax and wane throughout the program due to the administrators' ambivalence surrounding it and many of the students' complete disregard of it. Sometimes the students would be reminded that certain areas of campus were off limits to them during free periods so that they would not have occasion to meet someone of the opposite gender, and sometimes everyone would be mingling on the main walkway in full view of all adults. The relatively small size of the campus made it difficult to restrict these interactions and allowing either boys or girls sole access to the main walkway during the evening free period seemed unfair to members of the other gender. Once a couple was found meeting alone inside the Buddha Surya Vihar. This offended everyone who I heard make a comment about it, even students who completely disregarded the rule to be silent inside the *vihār*. The general feeling was that there were plenty of places to meet and the Buddha Surya Vihar should not be degraded in this way.

Displeasure with the food was another constant topic of discussion between the administration and the students. The menu was set on a weekly schedule. Breakfast included a cup of *cāy* (tea) – sometimes with milk and sugar and sometimes without milk – and either *pohā* (flattened rice), *mūng dāl* (sprouted lentils), *upmā* (semolina porridge), *daliyā* (bulgar porridge), or *iḍlī sāmbhar* (steamed rice dumplings and lentil soup) depending on the day of the week. Lunch consisted of rice, *dāl* (lentil soup), one or two *roṭī* (flatbread), and a vegetable, and for dinner there was simply rice and *dāl*. The style and preparation of *dāl* varied based on the day of the week. The Rajasthanis simply could not fill themselves on only one or two *roṭī* a day, the Odishis were used to sugar in their *upmā* instead of salt and peas, and the Arunachal Pradeshis were eating completely new styles of food altogether. Many of the girls missed eating meat as the diet at Nagaloka was completely vegetarian.

Related to this issue of diet was a general complaint of weakening health. Rani from Rajasthan, for instance, showed me photos of her before she came and bemoaned how much weight both she and her brother Rahul had lost. The food disagreed so much with one student that she developed aggressive piles to the extent that she had to go home to recuperate. Many of the female students suffered from excessive menstruation that only began upon their arrival at Nagaloka. This resulted in weakness, fatigue and sometime fainting among the young women. Many of the girls had preexisting anemia and other blood-related diseases which only further complicated these issues. The girls were always taken to get medical treatment when necessary by their hostel wardens, but the cause of the multiple cases of menorrhagia was never determined. While I lost quite a bit of weight while on the Nagaloka diet, I never suffered from any of the health issues that were rampant in the girls' hostel.

The intense friction between the girls and their wardens, and I was told, between the boys and theirs, majorly contributed to students' experience of the rules and timetable as boundation. With more girls enrolled in the program than ever before on campus, a second girls' warden was hired to help the more experienced one with her duties. The more recent hire was a *dhammacārinī*, while the other was not, leading to tension between the two wardens over seniority. It was difficult to find adult women suited to the job of warden who would also be willing to live away from their families in a hostel with eighty girls. The senior warden had lived a very unconventional life for a woman from her background,[24] had many chronic health issues, and was unmarried, while the other was heavily involved in Triratna and her husband, who was very well respected in the organization, was on a year-long retreat, leaving her otherwise alone in

[24] This warden wished to remain anonymous. She told me many stories from her life, but when I asked her if I could include them in my writing she told me that I could, but that I should not include her name. Due to the very distinctive nature of her stories, it would almost certainly violate her wish for anonymity to include them as anyone within the community could determine her identity from these narratives.

her home for the year. Neither had any special training or experience in caring for young women, although both were very sincere practitioners and meditators. It was, undoubtedly, an exceedingly difficult job.

The girls, suffering from homesickness, various anxieties, and often health issues, did not feel that these wardens, with their often prickly personalities, loved or cared for them sufficiently. They told me that no matter how hard they worked, their work was never recognized by the wardens. This feeling lead to bitterness and further disregard of the campus' rules by the students. While I didn't hear this myself, I was told that the newer warden teased the girls for not knowing how to use a water heater or a cooler and made them feel lesser than for their rural backgrounds. The worst of her behavior was exhibited one morning during meditation when after two girls fell asleep, she shouted at the entire group, telling them that the only reason they were at Nagaloka was because they were bad people who were a shame to their parents. I vividly remember the students speaking to me after this outburst, telling me that none of what she had said was true and that their parents loved them. While the warden immediately recognized the excess of her reaction and apologized, the students felt the wounds of her words. The more senior warden was no help in defending the girls against the newer warden's abuses. She tended to be not particularly charitable to the young women who she felt were not devoted enough to their studies or taking proper advantage of the chances they were getting at Nagaloka. Coming from an extremely troubled background herself, she tended to choose some favorite students who she would be lenient with and speak roughly with the rest of them.

It was on these two women that the burden of introducing meditation practice to the novice students fell most heavily. It was therefore not a wonder to me or to the program director Vivekaratna that the students did not take to meditation. In my interview with him, he told me

that they had failed this year's batch of students and he felt that the problems with the wardens were the major reason for this failure. He said that it was necessary for the wardens to show the students love and compassion, otherwise the students would not be open to the new ways of thinking and living that they introduced to them in the classrooms. He told me that he didn't care if the wardens were *dhammacārinī* or *dhammamitras*, it only mattered that they were kind, loving people. Having struggled with how I should respond to the problematic behavior of the wardens, I was relieved to know that Vivekaratna was aware of the problem and eager to amend it. At the end of the sixteenth *dhammasekhiya* batch's tenure, these wardens moved on to other things due to changes in their family and personal lives and three new wardens were hired.

Nevertheless, the students' feeling of suffering and boundation on campus was heightened by the aggressive and thoughtless behavior of the wardens, leading to what Vivekaratna and others I spoke with called a total failure. When the strange and stringent rules and regulations of Nagaloka were enforced by such characters, it made it almost impossible for the girls to trust in the process. Vivekaratna praised a former alumna who had served as a warden in the past for her ability to love and care for the students, leading to a much better experience for those batches of students. Many of the second-year students I spoke with told me that the first years were not trusting that the rules were there for their own benefit and this was what was causing the problems for them. Samiksha M. from MP told me that she thought that the first-years had not been introduced to meditation properly which is why they weren't enjoying it. She also thought that the people who acted like Nagaloka was a prison were ridiculous and that they shouldn't stay if they weren't interested in learning discipline.

How did I get here?

While thus far I have focused on the 'where am I?' portion of my framing question, I will now elaborate some of the students' stories to explain how they came to Nagaloka and why they stayed. Money troubles were a common thread throughout the students' explanations for why they came to Nagaloka. Julie, a *dhammasekhiya* student, was an extraordinarily intelligent young woman. She grew up in hostels due to her mother's illness and her father's work in Andhra Pradesh, away from their home in western Odisha. During my first conversation with Julie, she told me that she dreamed of traveling and becoming a journalist. In our second, she explained to me that any time her father would give her pocket money, she would go out and buy books on revolutionaries. She was a great admirer of Marx and believed that Indian Marxists completely missed the point. We talked in English about Marx's adaptation of the Hegelian dialectic. I was astounded by what she had been able to teach herself as an 18-year-old who had only ever received Odia-medium education in Kalahandi. Julie had gained admission to a Bachelors' program at a university near her home, but she was unable to find proper housing that she could afford. Frustrated and unwilling to waste a year, one of her 'brothers' who she had met due to her involvement in local Ambedkarite activism told her about the free education at Nagaloka and she decided to come. She was skeptical of religion and the Buddha but was willing to learn.

Leeta, from Bhubaneswar, Odisha, similarly found herself with a place at a university that she was unable to afford. She told the other students how her neighbors criticized her parents' granting permission for their daughter to leave the state and their watchful eye. They wondered if anyone would want to marry a girl who was used to straying so far from home. Sarla, a BA student from western Odisha, told me that as a younger daughter in a large family, she was convinced to come to Nagaloka because it was the only way she could pursue further education. Ravita a BA student from Kanpur, UP was another daughter whose parents couldn't

support her education. She learned about Nagaloka from her Buddhist 'sister' who was involved with Triratna. She told me that she was so close to this sister that many people thought they were actually blood relations. Mamta a BA student from Balangir, OD similarly was convinced to come to Nagaloka over another nearby university because her activist-minded 'sister' who was studying at JNU in Delhi encouraged her to take the chance to study Ambedkar. Her mother and grandmother cried as she left home for Nagaloka, begging her not to go so far away. Usha* from Chhattisgarh was the fourth member of her family to complete the training at Nagaloka and the youngest student in her batch. Her choice to come to Nagaloka was driven by her respect for her elder siblings and the family's devotion to Buddhism.

Samiksha M. from Madhya Pradesh was another truly brilliant student. I had met her during my preliminary fieldwork in August 2016 when she had just started her BA program. She spoke some English then, but quite shyly, and we mostly communicated in Marathi and Hindi. When I met her again in 2017, I was astounded by her raised confidence and fluent English. She told me about her violent home life had led her to move in with Nagpuri relatives to finish high school. Desiring to continue her education, but having no help from her parents, she turned to Nagaloka. She told me that when she goes back to her family home, her father only asks her for money and has no idea what she has been doing. He does not understand how she is able to support herself as a student without familial assistance and assumes she must have taken a job.

Baby from Etawah, UP explained that she ran to Nagaloka because she didn't want to get married at 21. I would sometimes hear male students say disparagingly that many girls only came to Nagaloka because they were trying to avoid marriage. While marriages could be put off by extending one's education, they could rarely be avoided by young women altogether. Therefore, the boys' criticism of these young women's decision to pursue education was short-

sighted. It is also the case that a young woman's educational background can entirely alter her marriage prospects as families have certain expectations for the educational qualifications their ideal daughter-in-law should possess. While some families see a benefit to having an educated woman in their family, others worry that she will want to pursue work outside the house rather than caring for her family. Baby had a genuine thirst for knowledge and strongly loved both Buddha and Ambedkar. Her brother told her that she should take the opportunity of studying at Nagaloka to improve her English, which was extremely poor. She would often try to practice English with me by phonetically memorizing phrases without seeming to understand the words' meanings. She told me that she dreamed to be a singer and she had written some original songs in praise of Babasaheb. Like another Odishi girl, Sindhu, Baby cut her hair short into a "boy cut" about halfway through her first year at Nagaloka. While many people told Sindhu that she looked like BSP leader Mayawati, any time another girl would be walking with Baby they would get jokingly asked if she was her boyfriend. I would also often see Baby sitting at the feet of any *bhante* (saffron-clad Buddhist wandering ascetic) who came to campus. She had a reputation amongst her peers for being very serious about Buddhism. Once Baby told me that she worried about how her mother was coping with taking care of the buffalo all by herself, but she tried not to think too much about that and focus on her studies.

Priyanka from Bihar came to Nagaloka on the advice of her brother to avoid marriage. After she returned home, I heard from the other girls that her parents were trying to arrange her marriage and she was fighting them fiercely. When 18-year-old Mamta from Jamshedpur, Jharkhand returned home, even though she told me that she had plans to pursue a BA, her marriage took place within two months. Smriti from Lucknow, UP came to Nagaloka on the

advice of her activist brother to avoid her marriage and gain knowledge about Ambedkar and Buddhism.

Rani from Jaipur and Neelam from Jodhpur, Rajasthan both came to Nagaloka with their younger brothers while completing their Bachelors' at universities in their hometowns. They were excited by the opportunity to learn about Ambedkar, and Neelam's brother Lucky told me that they also hoped that studying meditation would help cool Neelam's notoriously hot temper (according to him, meditation only helped her temper a little). Vandana from Sitapur came with her brother Deewakar who was already an alumnus of the program. Both were in progress to completing their Bachelors' in UP. While Vandana completed the *dhammasekhiya* course, Deewakar worked in the Nagaloka Restaurant. Their father was an Ambedkarite and Buddhist and encouraged them to come to Nagaloka to learn more.

At 25 years old, Rashmi from Madhya Pradesh was one of the older *dhammasekhiya* students. She came to Nagaloka completely on her own volition without seeking permission from her parents. She had visited Nagaloka with her family once before and wanted the opportunity to study meditation more thoroughly having previously participated in a *vipassanā* retreat. She packed up her bags and got on the train alone, only telling her family she had come after she reached her destination. During her final days at Nagaloka, she told me that she was sad to leave. She loved her family, but at Nagaloka she felt that she was in control of her own life, she felt freedom. Her father came and whisked her home before the farewell program even took place.

Samiksha K. from Maharashtra had one of the most unique stories I heard. She was enrolled as a science student at a different university where she said she felt very dull, she would just sit in the corner of class and not speak with anyone. She was browsing the internet one day and discovered Nagaloka. She begged the director to allow her late admission to the BA program

there against her parents' advice. She told me that Nagaloka has given her so much. When I asked her for examples of what she has gotten, she told me that it has given her a relationship with herself. She has learned that there are two Samikshas[25] – the Samiksha outside who everyone can see and is affected by the outside world and the Samiksha inside who is always positive and thinks the best will happen. She told me that since she has realized this through meditation, she couldn't be depressed even if she tries. Like Rashmi, she had participated in a *vipassanā* retreat with her father before coming to Nagaloka, so she was familiar with meditation before making the commitment.

Prakash was an alumnus of the fifteenth batch of *dhammasekhiya* students from Odisha who was taking a computer course at Nagaloka. He told me that before coming to Nagaloka, he sat around at home with no motivation and nothing to do. One of his friends told him to start practicing meditation at the Kalinga Mitra Trust (KMT), a Buddhist organization in Balangir started by Nagaloka alumni. The friends he made at KMT told him he would have a good experience at Nagaloka, so he came. He told me that at first, he didn't take it very seriously and didn't think he would get much out of the experience, but he learned that you can get good things out of Nagaloka. He said that he learned discipline which has helped him to learn English through self-study. Many of the young men from Odisha had come into contact with KMT and had very positive views on meditation. Having spent most of my time with the young women who were usually more suspicious of the practice, I was surprised that their male counterparts scolded me if I told them I didn't enjoy meditation. Even Navin* who was involved in a fist fight in his hostel and constantly getting into some kind of trouble lectured me at length about the benefits of meditation.

[25] Confusingly, there were in fact two distinct students named Samiksha that were simultaneously studying at Nagaloka. This is not what she means here, however. She is referring to a feeling that there are two sides to herself.

One motivating factor in the boys' tendency to express an unmitigated love of meditation to me was due to the fact that they didn't have the opportunity to get to know me well and wanted to present themselves in a good light to the foreign researcher. The vast majority, if not all, other foreigners who came to Nagaloka were very clearly Buddhist and had their own meditation practice, so I think students who didn't have the chance to talk to me assumed that I was also a Buddhist. However, I do think something more was going on in this division between male and female attitudes towards meditation. These young men who participated in KMT had gained a new social circle by practicing meditation. Young women were not given the same amount of freedom by their family to participate in these kinds of groups, especially if there would be young men also in attendance. Young men who had a place to go practice meditation in a group outside of their home generally had positive things to say about the practice.

Narendra, a BA-program alumnus from a tribal community in Chhattisgarh, was then studying for his MA in Wardha. He told me that his family was just his mother and him after his younger brother died. Before coming to Nagaloka, he was on a bad path, getting involved in smoking and drinking. He says meditation has completely changed him and now he wants a PhD. Similar to the trope of 'avoiding marriage' among female students, among male students, this kind of reform story was common. In my interview with Vivekaratna, he also alluded to the number of boys whose behaviors completely changed after practicing meditation.

Purushottam, an alumnus of Nagaloka and employee of Nagaloka Enterprises, was from nearby Ramteke, Maharashtra. His father was a furniture-maker, but he didn't train his sons in the traditionally hereditary trade, instead sending him to Nagaloka to get education and job opportunities he could not provide. Surya from Jaipur was the son of a men's tailor whose sister was a ladies' tailor. He also came to Nagaloka in hopes of getting a good education instead of

following in his father's trade. He had heard that he could learn computers and full English for free at Nagaloka – neither of which he experienced. He wasn't disappointed in his experiences at Nagaloka, however, because he had really enjoyed learning about himself through meditation.

Mohan from Aurangabad, Maharashtra was one of the most well-spoken and thoughtful young men I spoke with. He came from a poor family to Nagaloka because he didn't know how to spend his time. His peers considered him to be extremely well-versed in Buddhism and Ambedkarism and other students would encourage me to speak with him. Unlike many of the other men I spoke with, he was less positive about meditation and thought that activism was a more useful way to spend time. He was suspicious of the influence of Mahayana on Triratna members as he found these ideas to be less grounded and more superstitious than those found in non-Triratna-affiliated Ambedkarite Buddhist groups he had encountered.

Hope & Disappointment, Boundation & *Bindās*

As is clear from these stores, kin or kin-like relationships within activist groups are crucial in spreading awareness and encouraging students to enroll at Nagaloka. Students also were likely to come if they were facing dire financial straits or had limited support from their families. Education was a major priority for most students who had dreams of a better life or had imbibed the Ambedkarite motto "educate, agitate, organize!" The fact that knowledge about Ambedkar and Buddhism is so difficult to obtain was a driving factor for many of the students who were not suffering with finances. I would also contend that the drive to do something different, the opportunity to leave their village and their state and to experience something new, motivated many of the students to take the risk to come to Nagaloka.

Coming to Nagaloka *was* indeed a risk for the students even though it was not often spoken of as such. Over the course of my fieldwork I heard people scoff at the students who struggled with Nagaloka's rules and regulations, saying that if they didn't like it, they should leave. For many of the students, leaving was not a viable option. BA students feared that dropping out of one BA program would extinguish their chances of earning one altogether. Others had taken a stand of independence against their family's wishes for them and leaving the program behind incomplete would only exacerbate these conflicts and pressures. The argument that a student could just leave if they were unhappy disregarded the realities of poverty that many students faced. While students who came from more financially stable backgrounds and had familial support to attend Nagaloka could easily leave (as one student did), this story was not the norm within the student population. Especially in the unfriendly interactions with the wardens, the pains of poverty were made explicit. Julie expressed to me her anger that the wardens seemed to think that just because the students were poor and receiving a free education and lodgings at Nagaloka, meant that they had no right to complain about unfair treatment. Julie told me that she could live without coolers or water-heaters, but she only wanted to feel that she was cared for and loved. Ranju and Mamta told me that their parents loved them and if they found out how they were being talked to by the wardens, they would tell them to come home immediately. It was in instances like these when the strong, independent students who made their way to Nagaloka against various odds felt like they had walked into another trap.

However, even for those who struggled at Nagaloka, there were feelings of friendship, self-discovery, and hope for a brighter future. For girls like Samiksha K. and Rashmi, Nagaloka lived up to its ideals. They trusted in the process and accepted the rules because they freely and knowingly chose to commit to life at Nagaloka. Samiksha M. had more realistic expectations of

what a donation-run organization can provide, and she was able to thrive at Nagaloka even though she did not whole-heartedly embrace meditation practice. Prakash also spoke to me about adjusting one's expectations to get the best experience possible from Nagaloka. Even those students who were skeptical about the aims and methods of the Triratna Buddhist Community left with new ideas about how to incorporate the Buddha into their lives as a hero and icon like Ambedkar.

The students who struggled at Nagaloka struggled with disappointment in their dream for what Nagaloka would be. The kinds of people who come to Nagaloka tend to be risk-takers and idealists with dreams for a better life. Even those from comfortable middle-class families like Rani, Rahul, Lucky and Neelam from Rajasthan for example were inspired by Ambedkar's vision for a casteless India because of their life experiences. Students come to Nagaloka in the face of boundation with the hope that they can experience some alleviation of these pressures. When they arrive, Nagaloka looks and feels different than places they have been to before, they meet different people who speak different languages, they are expected to do things they have never done before. And yet, there is too much that remains the same: regional hierarchies, gender hierarchies, age hierarchies, class discrimination, gossip and rumors, and above all, the feeling of being forced to do something that only increases their sense of powerlessness.

Place, Age, & Dreams of the Future

In her study of Ladakhi youths, geographer Sara Smith argues that attending to both the cultural constructions and lived experiences of youth illuminates "the intersection of the temporal and the territorial" (2012: 573) through the "understanding of young people as an embodied future territory" (2012: 574). She poses the provocative question: "How does an

inability to know the future except through the forward projection of young people's lives and behavior connect to sociospatial life and attempts to manage and bound political and bodily territory?" (Smith 2012: 573). Smith pinpoints the embodied futurity of young people as a cause for the moral panic surrounding understandings of youth by young adults themselves and members of their preceding generations (Smith 2012: 574). Her views are informed by the Ladakhi context where there is a delicate political balance between the Muslim and Buddhist communities. She describes the ways that adults are concerned by young people's supposed inclination towards violent communal conflict and their disregard for their respective communities' traditions, ethics, and boundaries, while youths themselves are cynical about their perception of "the political use of religion by adults" which they also argue promotes violence and tension (Smith 2012: 579). Influenced by other cultural geographers focusing on the religious lives of youth (Hopkins, Olson, et.al. 2010), Smith's examination of the moral policing not just of youth by adults but of adults by youth is invaluable in understanding intergenerational religious perspectives. As a geographer, her focus on religion is mainly as an aspect of identity that carries geopolitical force. Young people's practice and expression of religion is intrinsic to the direction in which Ladakh grows and stays the same.

Similarly, at Nagaloka, young people's practice and expression of Buddhism is understood as crucial to realizing a unified Dalit Buddhist community, a casteless India, and an egalitarian world. Listening to any one of the speeches given by the adults at Nagaloka to their students or even by observing the rules of conduct set for student life within the campus, the ways in which the older generation means to enact their vision for a communal, national and global future through their influence over the younger is apparent. As with Smith's findings, I

also observed that young people are equally committed to their role as bearers of a bright future, resulting in moral questioning of themselves, their age peers, and their elders.

To return to Nagaloka as both a heaven and a prison, as a place where one might suffer under boundation while another experiences *bindās*, I argue that the dynamics of an ideal dreamed-of state in Smith's study of Ladakh is mirrored on a different scale at Nagaloka. As a bounded religious and moral community center, everyone has an idea about how Nagaloka should and could be running. Both the place and the people in it are often held to utopic standards, which leads to disappointment. I found that people tended to blame any failures of Nagaloka's vision on members of the opposite age group – for instance, some older people thought that with every passing year the students were getting worse in their behavior and morals and the younger generation would criticize members of the older generation by saying they were power hungry hypocrites. The stakes for these criticisms were heightened because not only did these failures mean the decay of Nagaloka itself, but also the decrease in potential fulfillment of the dream of *Prabuddha Bhārat*. While for some, these disappointments were insurmountable, for others, hope, friendships, and persistent stream of new experiences and ideas kept the dream of Nagaloka alive. People like Vivekaratna and Lokamitra have devoted their entire lives to this dream and feel satisfaction in the small, yearly steps towards their goal they have been able to make. There is a core group of students and alumni who are inspired by this energy and continue to work towards fulfilling Nagaloka's dream.

Smith's work helps to explain why people's reactions to Nagaloka are so polarized. The place in itself as a training center for youth represents communal anxiety for the future. The young people, as the embodiment of futurity, feel this anxiety at various points as both pain-inducing tension or potentially intimidating but exciting opportunity. Like Smith, I found it

crucial to listen to and record the stories and thoughts of the young people as they navigated these pressures.

Prabuddha Bhārat

On special occasions like Dhamma Dīkṣā Day in October, commemorating Ambedkar's embrace of Buddhism, or the annual alumni conference, inspirational speakers would come to Nagaloka to engage with the students and spread excitement about Buddhism. Lokamitra, the British-born Triratna member who has dedicated his life to spreading the *dhamma* in India among Ambedkar's followers, was usually chief among the guests. Manjula Pradeep, a world-renowned human rights' activist and lawyer who has boldly represented victims of sexual assault, another such inspiring speaker. Lokamitra, Manjula Behen, and others would speak to the students about *Prabuddha Bhārat*, Enlightened India, as the ultimate goal. *Prabuddha Bhārat* is a casteless India, an egalitarian and democratic India. It can only be enacted by young people, just like Nagaloka's students and alumni, showing dedication to the cause.

Students loved these inspirational speeches and deeply admired these speakers who had devoted their lives to their causes. But even at these events, which were attended by alumni who had traveled from far and wide to return to Nagaloka, I would hear criticisms of the place. One alumnus who now lived in Delhi told me that he hoped that I was paying attention to what was actually happening at Nagaloka instead of only listening to the words that people said. Another told me to pay attention that many of the female alumnae didn't come to the conference which, according to them, was proof that women suffered more at Nagaloka and therefore didn't want to return. I learned to take these criticisms with a healthy serving of salt. Nagaloka was a place where grand ideals like *Prabuddha Bhārat*, were tested out in real life. The enactment of these

ideals sometimes looked and felt like oppression to young people. Errors in the behavior of the administrators who were meant to uphold these ideals had grave consequences on students' impressions of the level of hypocrisy within the organization. Used to being disappointed and victims of systematic oppression, the students were hyper-sensitive to people in power who made promises and commitments that they were not keeping.

Nagaloka felt like a prison, a trap, or a trick to students who wanted to believe in the big dreams like *Prabuddha Bhārat*. They listened eagerly to Lokamitra and Manjula Behen, but suffered under the treatment of their wardens, struggled with questions unsatisfactorily answered by their teachers, and dealt with self-doubt and anxiety for their future. The Buddha and Ambedkar, and on a smaller level, Lokamitra and Manjula, are heroes to the students because they are examples of people who have taken control of the direction of their lives and made a difference in other people's. Nagaloka is a kind of heaven to people like Rashmi or both Samikshas because they gain some measure of control over their lives there too. On the other hand, students like Ranju and Mamta worried about harsh realities more than living up to ideals. They were concerned that their choice to pursue education at Nagaloka would not lead to the job opportunities that they so hoped this chance to receive a BA would provide.

Nagaloka is both heaven and prison, a little bit of *Prabuddha Bhārat* and a little bit of everyday India. As a place, it is both stuck in slow-to-change localized reality and built on universalist dreams. Like the students themselves, the flourishing of Nagaloka's ideals are held back by the boundations of everyday life.

Chapter Two

Belonging: *Where do I fit in?*

Samiksha K. from Maharashtra and Rinky from Jharkhand were two second-year BA students who were perpetually in each other's company. They were both serious and quiet girls. I noticed that they were often together and mentioned it to some of the other students who told me that they were *kalyāṇ mitra*. *Kalyāṇ mitra*, which the students translated for me as "spiritual friends," was a term they learned at Nagaloka. Like anyone who finds themselves away from home and their usual community, the students of Nagaloka found new social networks, friendships, and ways to belong in their temporary home. By becoming *kalyāṇ mitra*, students like Rinky and Samiksha developed a new kind of bond that emphasized their shared Buddhist values and identity.

Religion, caste, and kinship are common ways that scholars think about belonging in India. Education and internal migration have offered challenges to these normative social structures by creating opportunities for new kinds of relationships between members of different castes and religions (D. Gold 2014; A. Gold 2017; Jeffrey 2010, 94-5; Lukose 2009; Stocker 2017). Class and regional affiliation sometimes arise as new factors of identity that organize social relationships in these contexts. In this chapter, I approach the question of belonging in contemporary India by exploring friendship on Nagaloka's campus.

Kalyāṇ mitratā or spiritual friendships were specifically marked as Buddhist and were highly valued, special friendships on campus. *Kalyāṇ mitra* were the most freely chosen friends, driven not by caste, class, or regional similarities, but by mutual caring and love for each other. I argue that the students who were most engaged in and receptive to Triratna Buddhist practices and values felt special bonds to teachers, *dhammacārīs,* and classmates regardless of their regional background or affiliations. These bonds offered relationships outside of the

"pressurized" familial relationships or bounded regional and linguistic relationships, creating feelings of freedom and expansiveness, or *bindās*. While sometimes these friendships used fictive kinship terminology, they were more often ways of experiencing or leveraging release from familial pressure. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the "moral force" of friendship as a relationship predicated on choice rather than on blood ties (Killick & Desai 2010: 2) makes it a particularly crucial bond to discuss in the context of an anti-caste Ambedkarite Buddhist community.

This chapter begins with a discussion of friendship as a concept. I provide an overview of friendship in North Indian popular culture, then discuss the special place of friendship as a keystone concept in the Triratna Buddhist Community, and subsequently consider the potentials of friendship as an analytic category in the study of religion and caste in South Asia. I then analyze the friendships I observed at Nagaloka, contrasting state-wise friendships based on regional affiliation with *kalyān mitratā* or 'spiritual friendships' based on Buddhist identification. I illustrate how those students most invested in state-wise friendships had the greatest difficulty acclimating to life at Nagaloka and struggled to experience Buddhist practice as *bindās*.

"*Yah dostī ham nahīn toṛeṅge*": Friendship in North Indian Popular Culture

One of the most beloved films in the history of Bollywood is the comedy *Sholay* (1975, directed by Ramesh Sippy) which features the legendary stars Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra in the lead roles as criminal best friends. The film includes a song that celebrates the friendship of the two lead characters as they gallivant across the countryside on a motorbike: "*Yah dostī ham nahīn toṛeṅge / toṛeṅge dam magar terā sāth na choṛeṅge / e merī jīt terī jīt, terī*

hār merī hār / sun e mere yār / terā ġam merā ġam terī jān merī jān / aisā apnā pyār / khānā pīnā sāth hai, marnā jīnā sāth hai (2) */ sārī zindagī* (We will never break this friendship / until I take my last breath I will not leave your side / oh my win is your win, your loss is my loss / listen to this my friend / your sorrow is my sorrow, your life is my life / such is our love / we eat and drink together, we live and die together (2) / for all of life)." While by the time of my fieldwork this film was over forty years old, the song was still well known by my youthful interlocuters and still represented the idealized close friendships between young men.

In Hindi, the word *dostī* is the most used word meaning "friendship," while a friend can be called *dost* or *mitra*, *sahelī* for female-female friendships, or *yār,* which is the most casual and is used in a similar context that an American English speaker might say "dude" or "bro." In India, friendships represent idealized homosocial relationships that build obligation towards each other based on choice in contrast to the many mandatory familial relationships. In India, male friendships are arguably the most publicly visible relationships. As Nita Kumar notes in her essay on friendship in India: "one regularly encounters males, typically young, walking or standing together with their arms entwined around each other, sometimes hugging or touching, often holding hands as they walk. Women, though much less visible on the streets, behave similarly among themselves" (2017: 237). Kumar's description is certainly characteristic of the way young people behaved as they walked around Nagaloka's campus.

At the end of the *dhammasekhiya* training program, I travelled with a group of young men and women from Odisha and Maharashtra to the nearby home of a female student from Gondia, Maharashtra. The students enjoyed each other's company in the more relaxed setting of their friend's home outside of the monastery-like confines of Nagaloka. They ate together, discussed politics and religion, sang, and watched television. One afternoon as we relaxed in

front of the TV, two of the boys curled up on the bed together and fell asleep in each other's embrace. Julie, one of the young women in the group, observed to me how sweet and tender male friendships are. She mused that young men are much more loving towards their friends than young women. When I asked her why that was, she didn't have a clear answer, but she again appreciated that young men can depend on each other for anything like brothers.

I think that Julie's comment about the close bonds in male friendships is linked to the very different role of girls and women from boys and men within their family system. During a discussion group at a *śivir* (meditation retreat), Leeta from Odisha explained how her mother refused to feed her *piṇḍa* (rice balls) during rites that honored the family ancestors.[26] Leeta asked her mother "aren't I a part of this family too?" Her mother replied that she is a daughter and will be sent off to another family, so she is not really a part of her natal family. While it is most likely that in day-to-day life Leeta's mother does consider her daughter a beloved family member, because Leeta will not contribute heirs to her natal family's patrilineal line, she is therefore excluded from participation in such a ritual. Young women's lives can take sudden turns when they are married. They are separated not only from their natal family, but also from their home village and all the relationships they once had there. By comparison, young men's lives are quite stable. In an ideal situation, a man, especially if he is the eldest son, will live in the same house for his entire life. The bonds that young men build in their home villages can be strengthened by a guarantee of continued physical proximity to their friends. While young women have their impending marriage over their heads, threatening them with the pain of separation from everyone they love, young men are free to develop life-long bonds.

[26]The goal of the *sapiṇḍikaraṇa*, the funerary ritual involving *piṇḍa*, is to unite "the spirit of the recently deceased person with previous generations in his patrilineage, and thus with the ancestors in the ancestor-realm" (Gold 1988: 90). This merging of the spirit of the recently deceased with his ancestors is accomplished by slicing the *piṇḍa* into thirds and rerolling each third into three balls which represent three generations of ancestors (Gold 1988: 91).

While I spent time with graduate students in their twenties at the Mahatma Gandhi Anterrashtriya Hindi Vishvavidyalaya, I also observed male friendship groups in action. Young men are given a much longer leash by their parents and guardians to roam freely through spaces than young women. For instance, the women's hostels at the university had curfews while the men did not. The women's hostels were located within the gates of the university, while the men's hostel was outside it. Within family contexts, this same double standard also often exists between male and female siblings. With this greater freedom, young men can engage in more indiscreet activities than their families are likely to know about or condone. For these young men, their friends are secret-keepers and conspirators in these endeavors.

Before I had spent much time in India, I thought that the sentiment of Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra's song in *Sholay* was over the top. The more I came to understand the friendships among the young men I met over the course of my fieldwork, it became clear to me that the song was closer to life than I first imagined. That Bachchan and Dharmendra play two petty criminals in the film echoes the ways that male friendships enable risky behaviors that push the boundaries of social acceptability like drinking, meat-eating (or specifically beef-eating in the case of non-vegetarian communities) and pursuing girlfriends or other sexual experiences. Male friends act as secret keepers, confidantes, and enablers for each other as they explore the world outside their family circle.

Female friendships are vitally important in women's lives, but as Kumar (2017) indicates, they are far less visible in the public sphere and there are far fewer examples in film and media of the power and importance of female friendship. Among high-grossing Hindi films from the last twenty years, there are many that celebrate male friendship notably including *3 Idiots* (2009), *Zindagi Na Milegi Do Bara* (2011, trans: "You Don't Meet Life Twice"), *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001,

trans: "The Heart Wants") among countless others; and a few that explore friendships between men and women, most commonly resulting in romance like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998, trans: "Something Happened"), *Dostana* (2008, trans: "Friendship"), or *2 States* (2014).[27] One film that focuses on women's friendship is *Chak De! India* (2007, trans: "Let's Go! India"), in which members of a women's Indian national field hockey team must bond despite their cultural differences under the wise guidance of their coach and mentor played by Shah Rukh Khan. There are various films that focus on groups of women supporting each other like *Angry Indian Goddesses* (2015), *Pink* (2016), and *Parched* (2015),[28] but unlike the films about male friendship, they do not focus on light-hearted hijinks and self-discovery, but rather on helping each other through intensely traumatic situations including sexual violence and domestic abuse. In mainstream Hindi cinema, there is a permeating message that a woman's friendships should not trump her devotion to her family members except in cases of abuse, whereas male friendships are a necessary part of his life that help him to establish his identity outside of his home and family.[29]

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, *kalyān mitratā* is a form of friendship for young women that offers them a support system outside of their home and family. While it remains more difficult for young women to access and engage in these types of friendships than it is for

[27] This genre of film which explores male-female friendship have more to do with the issues around the increasing presence of women in co-educational institutions. While in these films, the female characters usually seek friendship with their male counterparts, this friendship inevitably results in romantic love. *Dostana* (2008) is an interesting exception. Set in Miami, Florida, three non-resident Indians, two men and one woman, get an apartment together. The two male friends answer the woman's roommate ad and are so excited by the prospect of living in the apartment that they pretend to be gay so that she will allow them to live with her. Both men eventually fall in love with the woman, but by the end of the film, she has fallen in love with and marries a third man she met at work and the two roommates begrudgingly accept her as a friend rather than as a romantic partner.

[28] It is a curious coincidence that each of these films have English language titles, perhaps in reference to the fact that the storylines of the films include characters who rebel against Indian social norms.

[29] This brief discussion of Hindi film is not exhaustive, but merely meant to demonstrate broad themes I have observed within some of the most popular films in Hindi cinema. My broad observations are supported by the more in-depth analysis of films by scholars like Kumar (2017).

young men, Nagaloka offers a model and a possibility of a friendship that can help women lead lives that push on the boundaries of the roles expected of them by their families.

Spiritual Friendship in the Triratna Buddhist Community

A conversation between Ananda and the Buddha recorded in the *Upāddha Sūtta* is the key source for understanding and interpreting *kalyāṇamittatā*[30]: "[Ananda:] 'Venerable sir, this is half of the holy life, that is, good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship.' [Buddha:] 'Not so, Ananda! Not so, Ananda! This is the entire holy life, Ananda, that is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship. When a *bhikkhu* has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path'" (Bodhi 2000: 1524). In her analysis of Thai activist monk Payutto's commentary on the *Upāddha Sūtta*, Sallie King elaborates that:

> …persons having *kalyāṇamitta* gain several benefits. Monks would be aware of the rules of the order, which will help them to be virtuous. (By extension, a lay-person would be aware of the Lay Precepts, which would also help them to be virtuous.) They would have the opportunity to hear and discuss the Buddhist ideals, which will hone and polish their character and cleanse their minds. They will have the support of a community that will help them to make their efforts well established – that is, to form good habits and practices. (King 2005: 97)

In the context of this Sūtta, a *kalyāṇamitta* is a teacher whose guidance "make[s] it far more likely that such a person [with a guide] would make progress on the Buddhist path" (King 2005: 98). The concept of *kalyāṇamitta* emphasizes that following the eight-fold path towards

[30] Pali equivalent of Hindi *kalyān mitratā*, "spiritual friendship."

achieving *nirvāṇa* is, or at least can be, a social pursuit. In other words, community and social conditions allow a Buddhist to more easily live in a way that will allow them to progress on the eight-fold path. Due to this social focus, it is not surprising, therefore, that the *Upāddha Sūtta* is a text with commentary by socially engaged Buddhists.

In March 2017, about a year and half before his death, Sangharakshita reflected on the *Upāddha Sūtta*, writing: "Friendship is…an area of freedom. With a friend one does not have to act a part, or be guarded, or conceal what one really thinks. One can say to a friend what one cannot say to one's wife, or to one's parents, or to one's employers" (Sangharakshita 2017: 2). For Sangharakshita, the concept of friendship, both spiritual and otherwise, was central to the Buddhist community of converts he was building, evidenced in a variety of ways but most apparently through his original name for the community: Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.[31]

On their website, "Spiritual Friendship" is singled out as one of the "Principles" of Triratna[32] (https://thebuddhistcentre.com/text/spiritual-friendship). In Martin Baumann's 2000 article focused on Friends of the Western Buddhist Order in the UK, he found that "many, although not all, order members live together in residential communities to enable the development of 'spiritual friendship' amongst each other" (Baumann 2000). Furthermore, members were encouraged to engage in occupations that not only support the ethical principles of Triratna, but where they work cooperatively or in teams (Baumann 2000). Windhorse Publications, the Triratna press, has published three books focused on the topic of spiritual friendship (Subhuti 2008, Maitreyabandhu 2014, Jenkins 2007). Their website also offers 57

[31] Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) was renamed Triratna Buddhist Community in 2010.
[32] Other principles included in this list are "going for refuge," "monk or lay?" – referring to the dhammachari system, "bodhisattva ideal," "stream entry," and "culture & the arts" (https://thebuddhistcentre.com/text/spiritual-friendship).

different audio recorded lectures on the topic (https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/search.php?q=spiritual+friendship&r=10&o=rd&b=p&l=en&at=audio).

> The Triratna website includes an introductory explanation of spiritual friendship:
>
> Sangharakshita maintains that in practising Buddhism we need other people to learn from. Buddhism, he argues is best 'caught' not taught. He believes that our relationships with teachers and fellow practitioners must be characterised by honesty and clear communication. He also stresses the value of friendships with peers, in particular having at least one friend (not a lover) with whom we can be intimate and completely open. Through friendship we have the opportunity to develop the virtues of generosity, compassion, patience and forgiveness. Sangharakshita would like spiritual community – particularly the Order he himself founded – to be a 'network of friendships'. (https://thebuddhistcentre.com/text/spiritual-friendship)

'Family' serves as the invisible foil to 'friendship' in this description. The community is built on converts to Buddhism who have left their family's traditional religious practice to belong to the Triratna community – a likely reason for Sangharakshita to celebrate friendship.

While King and the Buddhist commentators she writes about emphasize the *kalyan mitra* as a teacher or guide, in Sangharakshita's work, the concept of spiritual friendship is broader. Sangharakshita values peer-to-peer friendships as relationships where real spiritual growth can and often does occur due to the openness and honesty that is enabled through the bonding of absolute equals.

Sangharakshita often wrote and spoke in a way that elevates conversion and the convert. His book entitled *Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism* (1994) emphasizes the necessity of

actively embarking on the Buddhist path rather than passively accepting it: “This degeneration of Going for Refuge into a formality is a very unfortunate development. Nothing in the Buddha’s teaching is meant to be practised mechanically or as a matter of mere tradition, without an understanding of its inner meaning and its relevance to one’s own life” (7). Sangharakshita embraced the concept of Buddhist conversion and expected that belonging to the Triratna Community was an exclusive commitment of its members (i.e. that members are not engaging in other religious or spiritual practices; Baumann 2000). He also strongly implies that converts are spiritually superior to “traditional” Buddhists and members of the *saṅgha* who unconsciously follow their family’s religious traditions. Sangharakshita’s stance on conversion is based in modernist views that understand religious practice primarily as a form of individual self-constitution through choice. His vision of the Triratna community as a “network of friendships” (https://thebuddhistcentre.com/text/spiritual-friendship) emphasizes the role of relationships in building and sustaining the Buddhist community, but these relationships are between other self-determined individuals who have consciously chosen to follow the Buddhist path. Because friendship is the relationship most linked to individual choice, his championing of friends further supports the importance of individuals coming together to compose the Triratna Buddhist Community.

Ambedkarite Buddhists are also converts, but their choice to convert is usually driven by their admiration for Ambedkar, which generally stems from a sense that the convert has of sharing a caste-background with him. It is important to reiterate that the majority of Ambedkarite Buddhists are not Triratna members. Indian Triratna members take Ambedkar as their inspiration, but also emphasize that Buddhists need to understand the *dhamma*. *Dhammacarī* like

Vivekaratna[33] told the students that to be Buddhist, they had to make the choice, do the work, and follow the path themselves. In an interview with *dhammasekhiya* student Lucky from Rajasthan on Facebook Messenger, he used language inspired by his time at Nagaloka when answering my question if he had been Buddhist since birth: "Birth se koi buddhist nhi hota…. Dhamma ki jo practice krta hai wahi buddhist h"[34] ("No one is a Buddhist from birth…. That person who practices *dhamma*, he is a Buddhist.").

In public lectures given at Nagaloka's campus, Lokamitra[35] criticized non-Triratna Buddhists for not taking the time to learn about Buddhism, bringing up examples of families he met who called themselves Buddhist but kept images of the Buddha alongside the old gods – he even showed a photo slide of such a display – and told the crowd that anyone who worships gods is not actually Buddhist. Lokamitra also said that *saṅgha* members shouldn't keep Buddhism to themselves – the goal of the *saṅgha* is to bring about a better world where everyone can empower themselves with no social barriers and relate on the basis of fraternity and *mettā* (compassion, loving-kindness). Indian Triratna members work to transition people's inspiration from Ambedkar, which is usually due to their sense of belonging to the same or similar caste as Ambedkar, into an interest in self-development and social work through Buddhist practice based in an understanding of philosophical principles. On the broadest scale, this is a transition from feeling obligated or inspired to adopt Buddhism due to a caste-based affinity for Ambedkar to feeling a bonds of friendship and concern for society as a whole.

Kalyāṇamitta & Karma: *Comparisons to Other Buddhist Communities*

[33] Vivekaratna is the dhammachari who was the director of the Nagarjuna Training Institute at Nagaloka.
[34] I preserved the casual/slang spellings Lucky used when he communicated with me.
[35] Lokamitra is the British-born Triratna member who has dedicated his life to spreading Buddhism in India.

There are some resonances between the concept of *kalyāṇamitta* and the Chinese Buddhist concept of *yuanfen* which is translated by Gareth Fisher as "pre-fated bond" (Fisher 2014: 85). At Fisher's field site, the courtyard of a Buddhist temple in Beijing, lay practitioners narrativized their lives by emphasizing that all relationships and interactions were the result of *karma* from previous lives. These Buddhist practitioners thought that relationships that were built upon one chance encounter or coincidence were especially strong examples of *yuanfen*, and that often these relationships were the most crucial to the practitioner's spiritual development (Fisher 2014: 86). Fisher's informants were disenfranchised and alienated by China's changing economic and political structure, and he argues that they were able to employ the concept of *yuanfen* to better understand their moral purpose in society (Fisher 2014: 84-5).

In the context of Nagaloka, Buddhist scholars might expect to encounter discussion of a similar pre-fated bond between *kalyāṇamittas*. However, I did not find that students or administrators often discussed *karma*, karmic bonds, or past lives at Nagaloka. While it is certainly true that *karma* can help suffering practitioners understand their pain, as evidenced by Fisher's study, among many others, I found that the members of the Ambedkarite community that I encountered generally tended to steer away from understanding suffering through *karma*. A primary reason for this is because Ambedkar refutes that the Buddha taught that *karma* effects the lives of individual people (Ambedkar 2011: 132). In *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, Ambedkar writes: "The Law of Kamma[36] has to do only with the question of general moral order. It has nothing to do with the fortunes or misfortunes of an individual. It is concerned with the maintenance of the moral order in the universe" (Ambedkar 2011: 132). By this, Ambedkar means that the result of the sum of human actions effect the entirety of the world (2011: 131).

[36] *Kamma* Pali equivalent of *karma*.

People should be motivated to do good in order to benefit all beings, but they should not expect that doing good will result in immediate effects on their own lives (Ambedkar 2011: 131-2). Ambedkar also refutes the concept of rebirth as it is traditionally understood by many Buddhist communities: "[The Buddha] believed in the regeneration of matter and not in the rebirth of the soul. So interpreted, the Buddha's view is in consonance with science. It is only in this sense that the Buddha could be said to have believed in rebirth. Energy is never lost" (Ambedkar 2011: 176). Because in Ambedkar's interpretation *karma* is no longer attached to a particular being, rebirth, which is a process driven by *karma*, no longer makes sense. Instead, Ambedkar universalizes and rationalizes rebirth using scientific laws about energy and matter.

Ambedkar insists that *karma* has only universal and not particular effects because caste relies entirely upon *karma*. From a Hindu perspective, a person is only born Brahman or Shudra based upon their previous life's *karma*. *Karma* is a lynchpin in the argument that oppressors use to justify injustice against lower caste people (Singh 2018: 2695). Of course, it is also possible to argue that no one should be treated badly because of a past life's *karma* because everyone deserves compassion and has the potential for Buddhahood, as many Buddhists across the world who fight for social justice do. This argument does not take away the sting of lower caste people being somehow responsible for their own suffering in the caste system. Ambedkar and his followers reject the premise that they are in any way responsible for their own oppression.

Friendship & the Study of South Asian Religion

For the students at Nagaloka, Triratna's views on friendship were only one layer of their experience of their relationships on campus. While the particularities of the Triratna Buddhist Community draw attention to friendship as a category for analysis, my experiences at Nagaloka

further demonstrated visceral ways that friendships impacted students' religious life. While ethnographic research is based on developing and sustaining friendships, it is a largely under-theorized relationship perhaps due to its flexible definitional boundaries (Killick & Desai 2010: 1-3; Risseeuw & van Raalte 2017: 1-2). Killick and Desai argue that the fluidity of friendship is what makes it "exciting and problematic for the people that practice friendship, and for the social scientists that study it" (2010: 1). At Nagaloka, where students were far from home and familiar people, building friendships was crucial for their success and happiness during their stay. The kinds of friendships they developed also had a major impact on the degree to which they incorporated Triratna Buddhist practices they learned at Nagaloka into their lives.

I contend that it is especially important to think seriously about friendship in contemporary India. As is evident in the title of Stephanie Stocker's (2017) dissertation alone, *Caste and Equality: Friendship Patterns among Young Academics in Urban India*, understanding various forms and functions of friendship is crucial for understanding the changing landscapes of caste. Higher-education institutions in urban and suburban settings are places where young people make friendships that challenge caste norms. Caste undeniably takes new shape in the city, creating more flexible boundaries but also creating new points of tension between individuals and groups (Roberts 2015).

The ideal of friendship is based on modern values of egalitarianism and free choice (Stocker 2017: 14-6). Being associated with so-called pre-modern village life, caste is not supposed to flourish in modern educational institutions that are based on hierarchies of merit rather than birth (Stocker 2017: 17-8). In Stocker's interviews, students talked about how their friendships with their university peers were based on their shared qualifications as educated people rather than their caste backgrounds (Stocker 2017: 72). Based in the slums of Chennai,

Nathaniel Roberts (2015) found a parallel discourse to Stocker among Dalits with no more than a third-grade education. His informants considered themselves more educated than their village-dwelling kin: "To live in the city was to be 'modern' and 'educated.'… What being 'educated' in fact meant to these urban Dalits was being casteless" (Roberts 2015: 241). While Roberts' informants exclaimed that "'there is no caste in the city,'" he admits that "caste remains salient as a basis of informal exclusion and discrimination in the city" although it "does not retain the power to organize social life or to coerce in the same ways that it does in the villages" (Roberts 2015: 242). After all, in his later ethnography based on the same research, he calls his field site a "Dalit slum," indicating that while there were many *jātis* (sub-castes) living in the slum, they all belonged in the Scheduled Caste governmental category (Roberts 2016: 4). Stocker's findings also indicated that despite students' insistence that caste was not a factor in their relationships with their peers, "the articulation of caste boundaries occurs in a more subtle way," including using *jāti* distinctions as an explanation for academic failures and university-related frictions, as well as a series of stereotypes about what kinds of students (i.e. lazy, studious, unprepared, etc.) come from which castes (Stocker 2017: 101).

Discourses around reservation policy also muddy the distinction between hierarchies of merit and birth. I heard stories of inter-caste friendships ruptured when an SC-categorized student earned a place in a university with a lower score than her non-backward caste friend. SC and ST students must contend with the fact that their peers and teachers often consider them not to have earned their spot based on merit, leading to resentment against them rather than compassion for them. In his speech at Nagaloka's Alumni Conference, Dalit educator and activist Anoop Kumar spoke about his own feelings of inferiority because of reservation while in school and the harmful effects of the concept of merit for Dalit students. High-profile suicide

cases of Dalit university students like Rohith Vemula[37] have brought attention to the dangerous and hostile environment for Scheduled Caste and Tribe students in universities. Nagaloka's alumni conference offered programming to help prepare students looking to continue their education for the discrimination they might face and educated them about sources of support like Dalit student organizations. Even within these Dalit student groups, inter-caste friendships are forming as they foster Dalit identity among their members who come from various Scheduled Castes and Tribes and sometimes even Other Backward Castes (OBC) (Pathania 2018). People's understanding and experience of caste is greatly changed in these urban settings where broad categories such as Dalit, Tribal, Bahujan, Mulnivasi, SC, ST, and OBC bind them together, rather than their *jāti* as such. Student groups and other urban organizations try to fill these categories with pride and invest their members with knowledge to combat discrimination.

While discourses about the relationship of modernity and caste in education tend to mask tense caste relations more than amend them, I argue that friendship is an alternative or parallel structure to family that offers the potential to continue to shift caste relations. I follow Killick and Desai's (2010) approach to understanding the relationship of kinship to friendship. They argue that while friendship and kinship are not at all mutually exclusive and are often inextricable, they maintain an analytic distinction between the two concepts because "this approach emphasizes what [they] feel is usually the most important aspect of friendship to its practitioners, that it is a relationship that stands in contrast to other ways of relating" (Killick & Desai 2010: 2). Furthermore, differentiating between friendship and kinship "appears to be of

[37] A PhD student at Hyderabad Central University who committed suicide in 2016. Due to continual roadblocks that were based in casteism and were meant to stop the progress of his education and career by university administrators, his death was considered an institutional murder by many and sparked protests across India over the mistreatment of SC and ST students at universities. For further information, for example, see: Vajpayi, Ananya. Mar 9, 2016. "The Enduring Curse of Caste." *New York Times*. New York: New York Times.

crucial importance in giving friendship its moral force in so many societies around the world" (Killick & Desai 2010: 2). Friendship at Nagaloka often employed the language of kinship to express various levels of intimacy or respect but did stand in contrast to familial relationships.

Examples of the Use of Kinship Language

Throughout India it is standard for people to address those outside of their families with kinship terms. I will explain how kinship terms were used on campus, but members of the Nagaloka community would also use these terms in any other context in which they would find themselves. Students who were of the same gender and same age-group referred to each other simply by their first names or often by affectionate nicknames. Women or girls who were older than the speaker were referred to as "*dīdī*" (elder sister), or auntie, depending on their relative age and marriage status. For instance, even though one of the wardens was in the age range to be called auntie, she had never been married so it was more respectful to call her *dīdī* so as not to draw attention to her age. While the vast majority of students were younger than me, the few who were in my age group or slightly older always called me *dīdī* as a sign of respect and also sometimes to avoid having to remember or pronounce my foreign name. The students would call elder boys "*dādā*" (elder brother). They would sometimes call boys who were in their same age group, the English "bro" or Hindi "*bhai*." "Bro" and "*bhai*" were useful to indicate the non-sexual nature of their relationship even when "*dādā*" was not appropriate due to being in the same age group. Female teachers were referred to as "ma'am" and male teachers as "sir." The unmarried girls' warden was referred to as either "ma'am" or "*dīdī*," while the married one was usually called "ma'am," or sometimes "mummy" in reference to the fact that she was serving in the role of mother of the dormitory. Dhammacharis such as Lokamitra, Vivekaratna, Nagmitra,

and Maitreyanath were always referred to as “Sir” and never “uncle” by the students. The men who were hired to work on campus as the gardener and the cook, and any unidentified visitors to campus, were usually called “*kākā*” (uncle). The use of these kinship terms had little to do with whether the student considered the person they addressed as a friend or not, although the terms of reference did create boundaries around the kind of friendship that could be established. For instance, a mentorship relationship could only be established with the elder person as the mentor and the younger as the mentee and not between two people of the same age. Furthermore, a person might call someone “*dādā*” who was a very close friend or a stranger they had just met.

Friendships at Nagaloka: *Kalyāṇ Mitratā* versus State-Wise Friendships

Here I turn to a discussion and analysis of the kinds of friendships that I observed on Nagaloka’s campus. I noticed both the teacher or mentor style and peer-to-peer style *kalyāṇ mitratā* relationships. Students who experienced *kalyāṇ mitratā* found it much easier to experience Buddhist practice as *bindās* and benefited immensely from their time spent at Nagaloka. These *kalyāṇ mitratā* style relationships were contrasted by state-wise friendships between students. State-wise friendships were much more common relationships that were based on the shared home-state of the students. These students had cultural and linguistic similarities that bonded them rather than a shared interest in spiritual development. These students tended to experience their time at Nagaloka as boundation and did not integrate the Buddhist teachings they learned at Nagaloka as seamlessly into their lives.

State-wise Friendships

Students made their first friends at Nagaloka with people from their home-states with whom they could speak their local languages including Chakma, Tamil, Marathi, Rajasthani, Odia, and, of course, Hindi. The wardens would often scold the students for speaking their local language and encourage them to take the chance to improve their Hindi, after which, they would turn back to each other and begin speaking Marathi again. Shared language wasn't the only bonding factor, however, as most of the students from Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Delhi, spoke Hindi as their primary language and still tended to more readily develop friendships with students from their own state.

Nagaloka's students from Jharkhand belonged to the Santali tribe and hailed from the Jamshedpur region.[38] Even amongst themselves, they spoke Hindi rather than Santali language. Their state and tribal identity formed a cohesive friendship group distinct from the other Hindi-speakers. The Chhattisgarhi students also usually spoke Hindi rather than a local language.[39] Some of the Chhattisgarhi students were from tribal communities, but they were not all from a single community like the Santali and Chakmas. In the sixteenth batch, the Chakmas were from the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh in northeastern India at the border with China, except one boy from Tripura.[40] Other students and teachers referred to them as Chakmas instead of as Arunachal Pradeshis, reflecting the primacy of their tribal and linguistic identity. They were

[38] The Jharkhandi students who were present at Nagaloka during my fieldwork were from either the district East Singhbum, the biggest city of which is Jamshedpur, or from neighboring Seraikela Kharsawan district. Jamshedpur, otherwise known as Tatanagar, is the most populated city in Jharkhand, the first planned city in India, and is the headquarters of Tata Steel. All of the Jharkhandi students whose addresses I collected were from within 30 km of Jamshedpur.

[39] The Chhattisgarhi students whose addresses I collected were from towns in the Bijapur district (southeastern Chhattisgarh), Jagdalpur city in Bastar district (southwestern Chhattisgarh), and Ambikapur in Surguja district (north-central Chhattisgarh).

[40] The Chakmas are a tribe originally from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in present day Bangladesh who due to colonial and partition violence now live scattered across northeastern India and face discrimination in Arunachal Pradesh due to their refugee status (Singh 2010: 1). Already disenfranchised by the mainland Indian government, native Arunachal Pradeshi tribes resent the incursion of Chakmas on their lands (Singh 2010: 1).

the only group on campus regularly referred to by their tribal or caste name. Along with speaking Chakma language, the Chakmas were also unique in that they grew up in Buddhist families. One day in classes someone raised a question of why Nagaloka's Buddha statue was so large in comparison to the Ambedkar statue, leading to a debate about whether Buddha or Ambedkar was more important. All the students agreed to the superiority of Ambedkar, except the Chakma students from Arunachal Pradesh who preferred Buddha.

Other students would comment on the supposedly strange practices of the Chakmas. For instance, Chakmas offer food to the Buddha during *pūja*, like *prasād* in a Hindu context. After group discussion during the *Kālāmasūtta shivir*, students asked Vivekaratna if these offerings were proper Buddhism or superstition. Vivekaratna answered this question by saying that during *pūja* one should treat Buddha as a guest in the home as a marker of respect. Offering food is a way of doing this. Coming from northeastern India, the Chakma students stood out from the other students in many ways. In the line at the canteen for dinner Sisina was complaining about the food with me one night. She asked if I usually ate meat at home – chicken-wicken, mutton, fish, *vagairah* (etcetera) – I told her, yes, I did, that in my place we even eat beef. She then leaned in to whisper to me that in her place they also eat frog, but she doesn't tell the other girls that.

The Chakmas explained their community's social situation to other students as equivalent to casteism. They faced oppression from other tribal groups in Arunachal Pradesh even though they all practice Buddhism. I never heard Chakma students speak about their refugee status or why they were oppressed by other tribal communities. The teachers explained the fact that the Chakmas faced oppression even within majority Buddhist areas by telling students that the

oppressors were not demonstrating real Buddhist practice and that these people lacked an understanding of Buddha's teachings.

In one conversation I had with a computer teacher, a young married woman from Nagpur, she brought up to me how interesting it was to teach at Nagaloka because she met people from all over India. She pointed out the Chakma students and noted how they all have different names than mainland Indians. She listed them off: Sisina, Soshina, Iliza, Rima, Rosini. I interjected to say that the name Rosini is very similar to "Roshini," which is a common Sanskrit-derived name for Indian girls. Still, the teacher told me, "it's a little different." In fact, there were many Chakma students who had common names like Asmita, Anisha, and Chandraprabha. One of the wardens also favored the Chakma students. She asked the Chakma girls to lead *pūja* on the night of her birthday in their own language. The warden had spent a lot of time in Taiwan and often complained to me about how Indian Buddhists did things in a very bad way. I found it telling that she invited the Chakma girls to lead *pūja* on her special day. I didn't hear people make comments about the Chakma students' fair skin or other aspects of their appearance very often, but still these non-malicious forms of exoticism occurred.

Given their many unique characteristics as a group, it was not a wonder to me that the Chakma students usually stuck together closely. When the only Chakma girl who was there for the 8-month *dhammasekhiya* instead of the 3-year BA left in March, all the Chakma girls gathered together at her last nightly *pūja* on campus and cried bitterly. They hadn't known each other before coming to Nagaloka, but they had bonded there far from home. They had all reached Nagaloka with the help of Phulari, an alumna of Nagaloka who was pursuing a Masters' in Social Work at Nagpur University. If they got permission from the administrators, cleaned up after themselves, and obeyed campus rules, Nagaloka alumni were usually allowed to live on

campus while they pursued degrees in nearby universities. This arrangement provided young people a safe, secure, and financially viable option to continue their studies. Phulari told me that she felt badly that she didn't have a lot of time to spend getting to know the new batch of students, but she was very busy with schoolwork. Phulari spent her time with the other alumnae who were living on campus pursuing degrees: one other Chakma girl, some Chhattisgarhis, and a Maharashtrian. There was also a strong contingent of male Chakma students. Maitri, a young Chakma man who was one of the partners at the alumni-run campus shop Nagaloka Enterprises, had settled in Nagpur after becoming a partner in the business and marrying a Nagpuri woman. The other Chakma students were often at the Nagaloka Enterprises shop talking with Maitri or his younger brother Dayanand. This strong base of Chakma people associated with Nagaloka helped the students feel at home away from home. While they were well-liked and friendly with their classmates, none of the first-year Chakma students had any especially close friendships with students from other states.

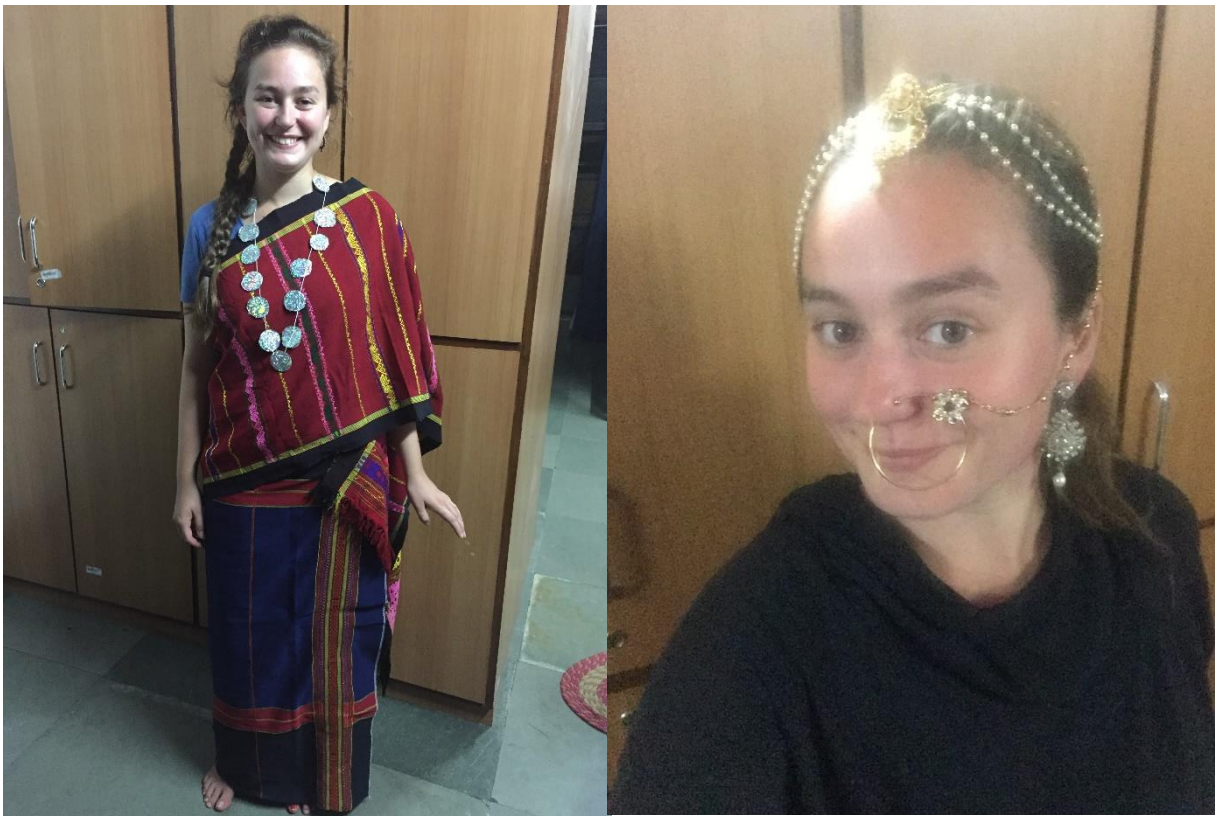

Figure 6: Students enjoyed dressing me in the clothing they brought from home that represented their regional style of dress as a way of sharing their culture with me to bond us in friendship. They also enjoyed the novelty of having photographs of a foreigner in their traditional clothing. At left I am dressed by Chakma students from Arunachal Pradesh and at right I am dressed in jewelry of a Rajasthani student.

Along with the Chakmas, the Rajasthanis and Odishis spoke their local language amongst themselves more often than Hindi. The students would remark to me about the different "toning" or accents that people from different parts of the states had. The Jaipuri contingent had a different way of speaking than the Jodhpuris – imperceptible to my untrained ear. Leeta from Odisha's capital city of Bhubeneshwar spoke standard Odia and the others from Western Odisha spoke various village dialects. Julie from Kalahandi, Odisha told me that these different dialects could also be heard as markers of caste. The Odishi students were more comfortable speaking in Odia than Hindi, although they all spoke Hindi fluently.[41] All the Odishi students I interviewed

[41] Aside from Leeta from Bhubeneshwar in eastern Odisha, all the other Odishi students were from various villages in the western districts of Balangir or Kalahandi.

had Odia medium primary education and many of them were not comfortable with the Devanagari writing system.[42]

There were fifteen female students from Odisha during the time of my fieldwork at Nagaloka. Given the size of the group, there were certain students who were closer companions with each other than others, but anytime there was any kind of problem with one of the Odishi students, all the others rallied around. There were only three Rajasthani girls, but there was a large contingent of male students, including brothers of two of the girls, and they had the same mentality as the Odishis. The major fights that happened on campus were between the Odishi and Rajasthani contingents. I heard that the administration felt that the groups from these states were too big and that this was the reason for the fighting. There were many more students from Arunachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh than from Rajasthan, as well as large contingents from Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, however, so their hypothesis about the size of the group didn't stand up under scrutiny. The only observation I can make about the situation is that within both the Rajasthani and Odishi student groups there were many outspoken and outgoing individuals, which when compounded with the extremely close bond that each group felt with the others from their state, led to conflicts.

[42] Devanagari is the alphabet used for many Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi. Odia is written in Odia script. Being unfamiliar or uncomfortable with Devanagari was not unique to the Odishis – Tamil and Chakma students also struggled with this.

Figure 7: Three young women from Odisha who became close friends during their time studying at Nagaloka.

I asked one local Nagpuri friend who was unrelated to Nagaloka what he thought about the conflict between the Rajasthanis and Odishis and he said that it was obviously because they were from two warrior cultures. These kinds of stereotypes about people from different states are rampant, even within Nagaloka. Converse to the stereotype about warrior cultures, there is a conception that tribal people are especially peace-loving and avoid conflict, which I heard multiple times, even from a teacher who spoke at Nagaloka and identified as belonging to a tribal community. Of course, I saw arguments within the hostel involving students from tribal communities. Often it does seem that people have a certain level of pride about perceived positive elements of the stereotypes about their culture and that they will try to live up to those

expectations.[43] It is true that the arguments that were the most explosive, disruptive, and difficult for the staff to deal with were between the Rajasthanis and Odishis. Due in part to the variation of personalities within those large groups and due to their pride in being part of a culture that doesn't back down, the fights between the Rajasthani and Odishi contingents effected the experience of everyone on campus.

It was important to the administration that the students make friends outside of their state because creating an all-India network of Triratna Ambedkarite Buddhists is among the main missions of Nagaloka. The administration had various strategies for breaking up the blocks of state-wise friends. Every couple of months the wardens reassigned rooms and beds within the hostel. Every time this happened, the students would revolt and complain to Vivekaratna because they didn't like to have to repack and shift their things. Shifting rooms was meant to allow students to get to know different people outside their usual friend circles. The discussion groups during *śivir* and work period groups were also preassigned to ensure that there was a good balance of students from different states in each group. Even still, students would try to sneak into groups that their friends were in and fight against the administration's noble efforts to blend the community of students.

Of the styles of friendship that I discuss in this chapter, state-wise friendships were the most similar to kin relationships. They were based on obligation and a sense of likeness. Students felt almost instantaneously that they belonged with other students who shared their home-state and language. Even if a student didn't particularly feel an affinity to someone else

[43] Of course, this pride does not apply to stereotypes about "backwardness" which are often thrown about by one community towards another. The majority of students at Nagaloka came from a community that another community in India would consider to be "backward" or not reaching the standards of modern society. "Backwardness" was not an epithet that I ever heard Nagaloka students use to refer to any of their peers, but I did hear some students call their own home culture or family "backward."

from their state, they would feel allegiance to each other in times of conflict. There were exceptions to this. Sarla from Odisha and Priyadarshini from Tamil Nadu were constant companions. Priyadarshini was the only female student from Tamil Nadu and Sarla spent very little time with the other Odishi students. The two bonded because Sarla spoke Tamil after living with her sister in Andhra Pradesh on the border of Tamil Nadu for six months.

First-year students who were away from home for the first time in their lives sought comfort in forging friendships with people from their home-states. While for the most part the students from any given state were all from different villages and cities and had not met before coming to Nagaloka, they made fast friends and formed strong support groups for each other. After the first year, students were more likely to branch out and make closer friends with other students from different states. There were fewer second and third-year students than first-years since the first-year cohort included the *dhammasekhiya* students who then left after eight months. Second- and third-year students still fell back on students from their home-states when they needed support.

Figure 8: A group of students and alumnae from Jharkhand posing together

Kalyāṇ Mitratā

For some students, the concept of *kalyāṇ mitratā* was something of a joke. The term itself is extremely formal, using Sanskrit-based words rather than the more colloquial *dostī* (friendship). I observed that most students were uncomfortable using the term *kalyāṇ mitratā* sincerely, but nevertheless, it was valuable to notice when the term was used, even as a joke. Students used the term *kalyāṇ mitratā* to draw attention to extremely close friendships – friendships that were so intimate that the observer felt at least a little bit excluded by their bond. *Kalyāṇ mitratā* was most frequently applied to students who were rule followers and

demonstrated some commitment to the Buddhist values they learned at Nagaloka. For example, two students who were extremely close friends but used their friendship to sneak out of the hostel at night and eat all the food in the canteen would not be considered *kalyāṇ mitra* (nothing like this ever happened – I just concocted this scenario as an extreme example). A *kalyāṇ mitratā* brought out students' best behavior and was a source of improvement in both friends' lives. In this chapter, I apply the term *kalyāṇ mitratā* to relationships that I observed to fit the mold laid out by Sangharakshita in Triratna doctrine. I provide examples of mentorship and peer-to-peer relationships as *kalyāṇ mitratā*. In doing so, I utilize the definitions provided by Triratna textual sources as a metric of what qualifies these friendships as spiritual friendships, although the examples I chose to bring up here were often brought to my attention because Nagaloka students called them *kalyāṇ mitratā*. My analysis will demonstrate that students who embraced core Triratna principles, like *kalyāṇ mitratā*, found *bindās* within Buddhist practice.

Mentorships

The *kalyāṇ mitra* in the form of the beneficial teacher described by the *Upāddha Sūtta* was a model for how *dhammacārī* and teachers interacted with Nagaloka's students. Rinku, an alumnus who worked at Nagaloka Restaurant, told me that the *dhammacārī* were his best friends ("*dhammacārī log mere* best friends *hain*"). Dhammachari Nagmitra traveled to Rinku's village in the Badaun district of Uttar Pradesh to attend his wedding. When Rinku's grandparents tried to conduct a Hindu ritual as part of the wedding, Rinku called upon Nagmitra to help explain to them the error of their ways. Even though Rinku always called Nagmitra "Sir," this did not disqualify him from being his friend. While the *dhammacārī* are his teachers, Rinku told me, they treat him as their equals. He never touches their feet in greeting, but instead "*galle lagāte*

hain," they hug. When they give him knowledge, he sits on a chair beside them, not at their feet. Touching feet and sitting beneath the teacher is a hallmark of a traditional *guru*-disciple style relationship in India. Nagmitra is among the *dhammacārī* who had met Sangharakshita and spent time in England. The strong influence of Triratna principles was noticeable in Rinku's description of his relationship with him. These *dhammacārī* spread the *dhamma* by building close relationships that more closely resemble friendships than traditional Indian *guru*-disciple relationships that are predicated on large power differentials.

I suggest 'mentorship' as a word for the kind of friendship described to me by Rinku. Alumni like Divya from Tamil Nadu and Prakash from Odisha did use the English word "mentor" to describe their relationship with *dhammacārī* and other older friends who guided them, but it was not an especially commonly used word among the students. Instead, I found that it was most common for students to use English words like "guide" or "best friend" to describe these kind of friends. The use of English terms indicates that this style of friendship is so distinct from peer-to-peer *dostī* (friendship) and non-egalitarian *guru*-disciple relationships that a different term is needed altogether. Surprisingly, I never heard a student call a *dhammacārī* their *kalyāṇ mitra*. The kind of relationships I observed do match up with Sangharakshita's interpretation of *kalyāṇ mitratā* based on the *Upāddha Sūtta*, so I analyze them here as a subtype of *kalyāṇ mitratā*.

Finding mentors among the *dhammacārī* was much easier for male students and alumni than for female students. While *dhammacārī* were open to developing mentor-style friendships with female students, gender norms made it difficult for these relationships to take hold due to the female students' caution and suspicion of older unfamiliar men's intentions. Any time a strange man visiting campus would speak to me, the girls I was with would become extremely

protective. One night a group of them sat me down and told me that I was a very simple girl and should not trust anyone who talks to me – I should never speak to someone unknown or give them my phone number. I told them that this was impossible given the fact that I was an ethnographer, but they insisted that I would be too naïve to know if someone was tricking me and should exercise extreme caution. I observed many of the female students taking this tact with any man, especially if they were older than them. They did not trust them simply because they had the name *dhammacārī.* In fact, the *dhammacārī* title sometimes added a layer of suspicion if the students perceived the *dhammacārī* to not be living up to their vows in some manner.

In class, Nagmitra told the sixteenth batch of students that he'd happily come to any of their homes to help explain Buddhism to reluctant parents.[44] I came across him in Uttar Pradesh doing just that. I travelled to the home of Deewakar and Vandana from Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh with another student, Smriti, from nearby Lucknow. Nagmitra was touring with another alumnus Manvir from Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. After attending Rinku's wedding, he was travelling around Uttar Pradesh to alumni homes and alumni-organized programs (it was around the time of Ambedkar Jayanti – the holiday celebrating Ambedkar's birth). While we were eating lunch at Deewakar and Vandana's family's home, Nagmitra noticed that Smriti and Vandana were having what appeared to be a serious conversation as they helped prepare the food (See Figure 9). He told me that once he had caught Smriti and Vandana passing notes in class and he wanted to open a dialogue with them about it. They only apologized and wouldn't tell him if or why they were bored even though he was genuinely interested in their reply. When he was abroad in

[44] I witnessed Nagmitra's visit to a few family homes in Uttar Pradesh. On both occasions that I was present for, he was treated with great respect by the families as an honored guest. They valued the effort he took to travel to their villages and to educate their children. While the culture of honoring both guests and teachers means that he would be treated well when visiting the homes of his pupils, whether or not his message was acceptable to every reluctant parent he encountered is a different issue. Nagmitra is a kind, charismatic and down-to-earth man. These qualities probably helped him in his cause.

England, he was impressed with how openly the children communicated with their teachers. He said that in India, teachers and parents never ask their children to be creative, only to listen and obey. I knew Smriti and Vandana to both be very opinionated and outspoken young women. They had shared with me their views on a variety of personal, social, and political issues very candidly while we were at Nagaloka. Despite Nagmitra's wish to have open communication with them, their respect for him as a teacher combined with their high boundaries with members of the opposite sex made it difficult for them to respond in kind.

Figure 9: Smriti and Vandana having a serious discussion as they helped prepare food at Vandana's family home.

There were some female teachers as well as a few *dhammacārinī* who were regularly on campus, but all of them were from Nagpur area and had usually travelled less extensively than their male counterparts. While Nagmitra grew up in Kamptee, a suburb of Nagpur, he also spoke fluent English and had spent a great deal of time in England. Similarly, fixtures on campus like Tejdarshan, Bodhidhamma, Maitreyanath and Vivekaratna had a great deal of experience with

foreigners and international travel. The *dhammacārinī* tended to be local women who were heavily involved in Triratna religious activities like meditation groups and retreats but did not have much opportunity to leave home to do social work or spread the *dhamma*. Ravita, a B.A. student from UP, learned about Nagaloka from her *dīdī* from home who was a *dhammamitra*, but I never heard any of the students speak of a *dhammacārinī* they met at Nagaloka as having a mentor-like role in their lives. The culture that restricted women's movement made them less capable of providing the kind of mentorship that male students could expect from male teachers and *dhammacārī*.

Peer-to-peer

While there were few close friendships between students that crossed state-lines, the ones that did usually had an impact. Rinky from Jharkhand and Samiksha K. from Maharashtra were the strongest example of *kalyāṇ mitratā* on campus. Not only did the girls' friendship cross state lines, but also class lines. Samiksha was from, in her words, a comfortable middle-class family. She had left her BS at another university after feeling unfulfilled and came to Nagaloka to pursue her passion for Buddhism and meditation. She was an extremely serious student and had an intellectual approach to her Buddhist practice that I did not often encounter in my discussions with other students. Rinky was an extremely shy and quiet girl who came from a lower income family than Samiksha. Both girls were quiet and serious, and while I didn't know Rinky very well due to her shy nature, it was apparent that the two were especially close. Samiksha was the only remaining student in her year from Maharashtra, although there were other Marathi-speaking students from Madhya Pradesh that might have been more expected friends for her than Rinky. Samiksha's devotion to Buddhism and meditation and her unique background which

already caused her to stand out, made her a likely candidate to forge friendships out of shared interests rather than based on shared background. Samiksha and Rinky truly seemed to fulfill the category of spiritual friendship as they helped each other succeed in their studies and in their Buddhist practice. Both girls were among a small group of students who chose to take an exam to earn a scholarship to study abroad in Thailand for their MA (more on this in Chapter 4) – Samiksha earned a spot and Rinky did not, probably due to Samiksha's mastery of English. Nevertheless, we can see in their friendship that they supported each other to achieve their goals outside of their family system.

Similarly, I met two alumni, Narendra from Chhattisgarh and Sanju from Maharashtra, who were studying for the MA in Buddhist Studies at Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University who told me that they were best friends. They met during their tenure at Nagaloka and continued studying together and living as roommates in Wardha. Both boys were from poor tribal backgrounds. Sanju's father was a laborer and his brother a farmer, but it was his dream to pursue education. Narendra lived alone with his mother after the death of his younger brother and, according to him, he was headed down a bad path by partaking in smoking and drinking. Coming to Nagaloka turned things around for him – now he meditates and has a new way of living. Living and studying Buddhism together, the two young men support each other's dream to get education and also support each other's Buddhist practice. Many alumni I spoke to had not kept up their meditation practice. Living with another alumnus helped these two maintain a good environment and keep up the good habits they learned during training. They often returned to Nagaloka for holidays or events, especially because they lived in nearby Wardha. They would use this time to reconnect with other alumni and *dhammacārī* – the two were particularly close with Nagaloka's directing manager, Tejdarshan.

Friendships like these represent the ideal of *kalyāṇ mitratā* that Nagaloka hopes their students and alumni will fulfill. Both of these sets of friends completed their BA at Nagaloka and therefore had a longer adjustment period and more time to become close than those participating in the more abbreviated *dhammasekhiya* program. Some of the students who weren't as invested in Buddhist practice did not take *kalyāṇ mitratā* seriously. Julie, for instance, told me that she thought friendship was based on personality and behavior, not on spirituality.

There were examples of inter-state friendships that were not so successful in developing Buddhist practice among the pair. Smriti, 22, from UP and Neha, 23, from Maharashtra were two of the older students among the sixteenth *dhammasekhiya* batch. Their age and shared sense of humor was probably what helped to create a bond between them. The two girls were outspoken critics of Hindu customs and traditions and both dreamed of helping with social work in their hometowns. In one particularly memorable conversation I had with the two of them, they asked me if I knew what a *śivaliṇgam* [45] was and if I shared their opinion that it was shocking and disgusting. Neha exclaimed that Hinduism was just layers and layers of *andhaviśvās* (blind faith) and *gāliyān* (obscenity). Once when I was walking with the two of them, Smriti told me about how Hindu people are very confused and don't know reality. She explained that Ravan, the villain of the Hindu epic the Ramayana, was from the Shudra caste. She believed that Ram was driven to defeat him because the Kshatriya king thought that Ravana was too powerful for his caste.[46] Smriti told me that her Hindu parents always compare couples to Ram and Sita, but she thought that Ram was a murderer. 'So, do they want me to live with a murderer who will treat me badly and abandon me?'[47] she asked rhetorically.

[45] A *śivaliṇgam* is an aniconic representation of the god Shiva which takes the form of a phallus.
[46] The details of the Ramayana that Smriti reported to me as fact seem to be based loosely on anti-caste activist and Tamil nationalist Periyar E.V. Ramasami's retelling of the story (Richman 1991).
[47] Not a direct quote – we had this conversation in Hindi.

I visited both Smriti and Neha's homes after the conclusion of the *dhammasekhiya* course. Neha lived in Gondia, a small city[48] about four hours away from Nagpur by train. Her older sister had a government job working at Pench National Park, but Neha lived at home alone with her mother. Her father had passed away many years prior and had been an abusive drunk – a fact which Neha openly shared and tried to make light of by saying that his profession had been Chief Officer of Drinking. He had actually been a government employee of some kind. Neha and her mother's home was perfectly comfortable with many amenities like a gas range, a refrigerator, television, fan, and four rooms plus a roof terrace. Smriti lived in downtown Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh, with her father who was a pharmacist, mother, four brothers and sister-in-law. Her eldest brother was married though unemployed and her second eldest brother was an agricultural scientist who was developing soilless sod to help families keep buffalos on small plots of land. Due to the number of people in the family, Smriti's family was under some financial stress, but they still managed to send their younger son for private education and maintain a middle-class lifestyle complete with fish tank (her youngest brother loved and collected plants and animals).

As the second daughter of a widow, Neha was the more strapped for cash of the two friends. Smriti was famous among her peers for always coming back to campus on Sunday with new clothes. Neha had borrowed 500 rupees from Smriti to buy toiletries which she took longer than Smriti expected to repay. This created some nagging tension between the two which then later escalated when Smriti put her feet on some of Neha's clothing she had laid on her bed. When Neha reacted angrily to this sign of disrespect, Smriti responded that Neha's clothes were worthless anyway. This resulted in the two ceasing to speak to each other. Neha had overlooked

[48] Gondia had a population of 132,813 according to the 2011 census.

Smriti's sometimes rude and brash way of speaking before, but this was the last straw. Smriti was uninvited from the trip to Neha's home with a group of other students. After their fight, Smriti spent her time with the other students from Uttar Pradesh instead. Before Neha left Nagaloka for good, Smriti apologized and the two made up for the last day. In this case, even shared interests in social justice issues could not overcome financial tensions.

Samiksha M. from Madhya Pradesh was one of the friendliest girls on campus. She didn't necessarily have any one best friend but had many close friends from a variety of states. In conversations with me she would criticize other students for not taking the chance to meet people from other states. She asked me how the other girls thought they would build *Prabuddha Bhārat* (Enlightened India) if they were all broken up into small groups – how would they be able to change anything that way? While she was very social justice oriented, she was much more accepting of Triratna Buddhist methods of social justice than other students who maintained friendships only within their state groups. While I was still at Nagaloka, she had begun working there for pay while finishing her studies. Her job consisted of helping coordinate guests staying in the guest houses. Samiksha M., along with Samiksha K., was the other female student to gain a scholarship to study in Thailand. She built a variety of different kinds of relationships at Nagaloka – mentorships, inter-state friendships, and even sometimes acted as a mentor to others. Her family was poor and unable to support her education and her father was disinterested in helping her even if he could have. The relationships she built at Nagaloka helped her to achieve her dreams of education and also encouraged her to engage in Buddhist practice and thought.

I first learned about *kalyāṇ mitratā* when I heard someone apply the term to me and Julie, a *dhammasekhiya* student from Odisha. While Julie did not believe in spiritual friendship herself, others saw our friendship and couldn't imagine how we could overcome so many social barriers

to become friends. When I first met Julie, she told me that she really liked my behavior and that I seemed like one of her family members to her. I was unsure how to take this declaration considering that we had only just met. We began to meet and talk regularly, however, and we developed a close bond. I was nervous about how this relationship with one student would affect my relationships with others. Julie said that other students would come up to her and ask how she managed to create such a bond with me despite the fact that I was from another country, that we had some language barriers, that I was older than her by eight years, and that our financial situations were clearly very different. While she believed that our personalities and shared interests made us friends, other more Buddhist-minded students determined that it was a sign that we were *kalyāṇ mitra*. Especially because there were so many differences between us, this spiritual explanation helped to make sense of it to people.

At the beginning, I worried about how my friendship with Julie might affect my relationships with other students. I wondered if I would be considered an adoptive Odishi by others or if it would stop certain people from wanting to talk to me. In the end, I found that neither of these fears came to pass. Students were still perfectly willing to stop and chat and gossip with me – even the Rajasthanis who were often at odds with the Odishis. I was disconcerted when people came up to me and said things like: "Hello! Where is Julie? She is your best friend, no?" I worried that this was a sign that people thought I would be unwilling to make new friends or talk to new people. I noticed, however, that this was the way that students related to each other. They would often be talking about who was best friends with who and naming people as their best friends. It was a way of forming their sense of belonging at Nagaloka and identifying which support networks they were a part of. As a lone foreigner, farther from home and family than anyone else, Nagaloka's residents were often puzzled by why I was

spending so much time there for my studies. Placing me in the network of campus friendships helped them to understand my place, what drew me to Nagaloka, and what kept me there.

The Role of Friendship

The relationships that students built on Nagaloka's campus were crucial in determining whether they felt like they belonged within the Triratna Buddhist Community or not. As young people, they were often very sensitive to perceived slights or favoritism and sometimes loyalties shifted dramatically. Small faults in a *dhammacārī*'s behavior could be used as an excuse for students to write off Triratna Buddhism altogether. Especially for girls who lacked opportunities to develop mentor relationships, it could be difficult to become attached to the Triratna community.

I saw photographs from a 2019 *dhammamitra* induction ceremony at Nagaloka on Facebook. Becoming a *dhammamitra*, meaning literally friend of the *dhamma*, is the first step a person can take to show commitment to Triratna Buddhism before embarking on the path to becoming a *dhammacārī* or *dhammacārinī.* [49] While this was a public ceremony including members of the general Nagpur community, I also recognized a few student faces in the photos. At the time of the photo, Reenu, Pooja, Priyanka, and Kesar would have just completed their BA, and Ravita and Baby, their second year. Priyanka told me that when she first came to Nagaloka she didn't like it at all. Her father had known that it was a Buddhist place and that there would be work duty and had thought it would be a good place to send her, but she hadn't known any of those things. When I first met her in 2016, she was a *dhammasekhiya* student, but when I

[49] Most people who become *dhammamitra* will remain *dhammamitra* rather than pursuing *dhammacārī* status. The *dhammamitra* ceremony is more or less equivalent to a standard *dhamma dikṣa* ceremony where the initiate takes the five lay precepts. For *dhammamitra* ceremonies, inductees all wear sky blue, a color associated with Triratna Buddhism – blue being associated with Ambedkar and Dalit movements in general.

returned in 2017, she had transferred into the Bachelors' program. Because she had already received financial support to complete the *dhammasekhiya* program, she had to pay fees to enroll in the BA program,[50] but still chose to do so because she realized that she liked Buddhist literature and she that this was something different that she hadn't learned before and she wanted to spend some more time learning. Before, she was confused, she told me, but then she decided on this. When she travelled to Odisha with me, I also learned that Priyanka had met her boyfriend at Nagaloka. She was from Chhattisgarh and he was from Odisha.

Another student who took *dhammamitra* vows in 2019, Baby, came to Nagaloka hoping to avoid a marriage, but her interest in Buddhist practice grew exponentially as her relationships there developed. She had cut her hair into a "boy cut" and took any opportunity to discuss Buddhist matters with any *bhante* (monastic) or *dhammacārī* who had time to spend with her. It seemed clear to me that she was not interested in leading a conventional life outside of Nagaloka. It therefore wasn't surprising to me that Priyanka and Baby were among the group to become *dhammamitras* – they had found their place at Nagaloka and a community of people who offered them more support to follow their dreams than their families were able to.

While family may or may not offer support to these young people, the friends they make at Nagaloka open them up to new networks that offer them opportunities that they may not have had access to without these friendships. The students who remain in state-wise friendships limit themselves substantially in terms of whether they will gain access to new opportunities, but they also tend to be far less likely to engage in Buddhist practice both on campus and after they depart if they do not feel that they have become a part of the broader community at Nagaloka. The

[50] Students must choose whether they would like to enroll in the BA or the *dhammasekhiya* training program before they arrive at Nagaloka. They will receive financial support for whichever track they choose. Since Priyanka had already taken advantage of the *dhammasekhiya* program, she did not receive full financial support for her BA program at Nagaloka.

"failed" sixteenth batch that I lived with seemed to produce less students who successfully broke out of their comfort zones to engage with people different from themselves and participate fully in Buddhist practices than other batches. Even so, it was telling that so many of the students remained in state-wise friendships due to the stresses and anxieties that this year produced. Those who did not flourish at Nagaloka felt that the wardens and teachers were not properly caring for them and so created kin-like networks among their peers who shared their language and background. That they did not feel accepted by the broader Nagaloka community, for various reasons, kept them from being able to trust the new religious practices and ideas they were learning.

Living at Nagaloka felt like suffering for students who did not make friendships with people from outside their states. While they hoped that pursuing education would help them to gain some freedom outside of the restrictive family circle, Nagaloka's rules and regulations seemed too harsh to students who did not feel that there was love for them within Nagaloka's walls. For those students who were able to make connections and fit in at Nagaloka, their friendships gave them greater control over their decisions in their lives. They had support from someone, even if it wasn't from their family. Many students would tell me that they never dreamed that they would have friends from so many different states in India. It was an exciting and freeing prospect to be able to call upon someone in any corner of the country. When I spoke with one alumna who was very skeptical of Triratna Buddhism and mainly developed friendships with people from her state, she was disappointed that many of the friends she had made no longer kept in contact with her after she left. In contrast, those students who continue to return to Nagaloka for alumni programs and other events, and continue to engage in Buddhist practices

and participate in developing Buddhism in their own regions seem to maintain their friendships with other alumni, teachers, *dhammacārī,* and other community members longer.

Chapter Three

Ethics: *How should I live?*

One night in November between dinner and meditation, girls were gathering on the cool first floor of the hostel to relax and chat as they often did. Julie from Odisha and Rashmi* from Madhya Pradesh got in an argument. Julie said that Babasaheb never meditated, but Rashmi insisted that he did. Rashmi argued that even if Babasaheb didn't meditate, Buddha meditated and he was Ambedkar's inspiration. Besides, she pointed out, there is a good feeling that comes from meditation. Julie declared that she didn't think there was profit in sitting in meditation twice daily if everyone was just sleeping through it anyway – Babasaheb never stopped working! Neither student was convinced by the other, but both claimed that they knew Ambedkar best.

Julie and Rashmi's disagreement exemplifies the ethical tensions that were at the heart of life on campus. While the label 'Ambedkarite Buddhism' implies that one can easily live as both an Ambedkarite and Buddhist, or even that the two categories are synonymous, much of the intellectual work of Nagaloka's residents was in determining how Ambedkarism and Buddhism fit together. The bulk of students' ethical concerns centered around determining how to live as an Ambedkarite, how to live as a Buddhist, and whether they had to prioritize one system over the other in order to meld the two together. This concern has been central to many of Ambedkar's followers, even outside of Nagaloka. Ambedkar's death left a hole in leadership of the newly forming religious community, leaving how to be a good Navayana Buddhist a very open question.

Nagaloka offers one answer to the question of how to live as an Ambedkarite Buddhist. They teach students that Ambedkarism and Buddhism are complementary and, specifically, that participating in the Triratna Buddhist Community's practices is a way to demonstrate their commitment to living in accordance with Ambedkar's thought and teachings. Students at

Nagaloka were consciously and regularly thinking about how they should live and whether they should accept the values and ethical practices that they were taught during their training period. Would Ambedkar really have endorsed Triratna Buddhist practice? Would their mentors and guides at home accept Triratna Buddhist practice? The students weighed whether identifying with the Triratna Buddhist Community and Nagaloka could help them on their quest for dignity, opportunities for upward mobility, and self-determination.

Students come to Nagaloka seeking *bindās* in lives filled with boundations. Ethics and morality are at the crux of students' determinations about which experiences cause them to feel either boundation or *bindās*. Ethics allow a person to act in accordance with morals – in other words, ethical behaviors generate moral systems. Practices of discipline, or ethics, are a means of transforming boundation into *bindās*. As explained by anthropologist of ethics James Laidlaw: "Freedom… is the always qualified and provisional outcome of ongoing efforts and reactions; it therefore stands not in opposition to but requires self-discipline" (2014: 108-9). A student must accept the moral system within which practices of discipline are embedded to feel the restriction of discipline as a path towards self-determination. In other words, there is a feeling of *bindās* that comes from choosing which boundations to live by. For students like Julie, meditation was pure boundation – she experienced a dissonance between this ethical practice and her sense of morality. Others like Rashmi were able to successfully blend their sense of self with the moral narrative and ethical practices so that she felt disciplines like meditation and keeping *maun* (silence) as *bindās*.

This chapter examines how students struggle with the question of how they should live as they are faced with moral systems and ethical practices that they sometimes find contradictory. I begin with an overview of how I will use the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' in this chapter. I then

move on to discuss the issues central to how Nagaloka residents thought about how they should live as Buddhists and how they should live as Ambedkarites and conclude with some reflections on how people resolve or fail to resolve the tensions between Buddhist and Ambedkarite morality and ethical practices.

Ethics and Morality

The central puzzle of Navayana Buddhism is that Ambedkar provides a moral framework but does not offer any practical means of inculcating these morals in Navayana Buddhists. Morality is at the center of Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism. In *Buddha and his Dhamma* he writes:

> Morality is Dhamma and Dhamma is Morality. In other words, in Dhamma morality takes the place of God, although there is no God in Dhamma. In Dhamma there is no place for prayers, pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies, or sacrifices. Morality is the essence of Dhamma. Without it there is no Dhamma. Morality in Dhamma arises from the direct necessity for man to love man. It does not require the sanction of God. It is not to please God that man has to be moral. It is for his own good that man has to love man. (Ambedkar 2011: 172)

Ambedkar's claim that morality is Dhamma emphasizes his view that Buddhism is human-centered. Practices directed towards a god are unnecessary. To act in accordance with Ambedkar's Buddhism, one must accept the responsibility they have for all other human beings.

Both Ambedkar and Sangharakshita spoke and wrote about 'morality' more frequently than 'ethics,' but the two terms are used synonymously in their work. For instance, Sangharakshita sometimes translates the Sanskrit term *śīl* as morality (2016: 182, 249, 287, 333)

and infrequently as ethics (2016: 470). In 1981, Sangharakshita gave a speech in Pune called "The Buddha's Religion is Morality," in which he analyzes Ambedkar's 1950 essay "Buddha and the Future of his Religion." Using this essay, Sangharakshita argues that *śīl* is equivalent to morality which is equivalent to the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity (2016: 182, 186). In his book *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, Sangharakshita further explores Ambedkar's idea that "dhamma is morality" (2016: 144). What makes Buddhist morality or *śīl* different is that in other religions morality is divinely sanctioned (Sangharakshita 2016: 99, 144). This is a problem because the ethical treatment of fellow human beings can be disregarded in the name of divinity. Sangharakshita then offers his interpretation that Ambedkar asserts that "morality… has no place in religion, for religion is concerned with the relation between man and god, morality with the relation between man and man" (Sangharakshita 2016: 144).

In *The Buddha and his Dhamma,* Ambedkar lays out the moral framework of Buddhism for his followers and makes an argument as to why these principles should be followed. He does not however provide practical information about how one should live as a Buddhist, rather, he says: "In Dhamma there is no place for prayers, pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies, or sacrifices" (Ambedkar 2011: 172). Sangharakshita, Lokamitra, and the other Triratna members supplied information to new Ambedkarite Buddhists about how to develop the morals that Ambedkar valued in their lives through practice. For instance, in a speech entitled "Things that can Help us to Change" delivered in India in 1982, Sangharakshita explains: "These are the *pancasilas*. Buddhists recite them every day…. But it is not enough just to recite them. You must also practice them. If you don't practice them, you are not a real Buddhist. *Sila* is the foundation of our whole practice of the Dhamma. If we practice *sila* then we will change" (Sangharakshita 2016: 374). He further emphasizes the importance of living morally in his 1982 speech "Why

Choose Buddhism?": "All the religions say that you must love other people. The Christian Bible says that you should love your neighbor as yourself. But how are you to do this? The Bible doesn't tell you…. Christianity doesn't tell you, Hinduism doesn't tell you, Islam doesn't tell you, but Buddhism gives you a step by step method" (Sangharakshita 2016: 470). The step-by-step method Sangharakshita provides is *maitrī bhāvanā* meditation which is a practice of developing compassionate love for others (Sangharaskshita 2016: 470). In a 1991 article in *Economic and Political Weekly,* taking a stand against Dalit critics of meditation, Lokamitra argues that one can look to *The Buddha and his Dhamma* for evidence that Ambedkar insisted that *maitrī* and mindfulness were necessary for society (1303). He further argues that it is near impossible to cultivate *maitrī* and mindfulness without a meditation practice (Lokamitra 1991: 1303). Here it is useful to intervene with anthropological theory of ethics and morality to make a distinction between the emphasis on 'moral codes' that we see in Ambedkar's writing and the 'ethical practices' that are espoused by Triratna Buddhists.

Following Foucault, Laidlaw distinguishes between "moral codes – rules and regulations enforced by institutions such as schools, temples, families, and so on, and which individuals might variously obey or resist – and ethics, which consist of the ways individuals might take themselves as the object of reflective action, adopting voluntary practices to shape and transform themselves in various ways" (Laidlaw 2014: 111). In this formulation, morality is the more stable and durable frame with which people engage through the development and practice of ethics. Ethics and morality are related in that "ethics, including these techniques of the self and projects of self-formation, are diagnostic of the moral domain," but "although thus intimately related and in practice inseparable, moral codes and ethics must be distinguished analytically, because they may change independently" (Laidlaw 2014: 111). In their ethnographies, both

Anand Pandian (2009: 13) and Sabha Mahmood (2005: 28-9) utilize this same Foucauldian distinction between morality and ethics, and I follow these definitions in this dissertation as well.

What is significant about the community of Buddhists that follow Ambedkar's teachings is that there is a demonstrable lack of communal consensus about which ethical practices are needed to uphold moral principles. Ambedkar provides a moral foundation both through his writings and as an exemplar to his followers, but his oeuvre lacks a strong sense of ethics, leaving his followers bereft of a clear understanding of how to enact the moral world he envisions for them, which is not necessarily the case in any given moral system. Sangharakshita and Lokamitra offer an attempt to fill this gap by introducing meditation, *pūjā*, study and other practices to inculcate Buddhist ethics in the community. Many scholars with study subjects ranging from yoga (Waghorne 2020: 117-18; Samuel 2008: 2), Tamil farmers (2009: 4-5), and Muslim women's prayer (2005), have observed that participating in embodied practices associated with a particular moral community is a primary way for a person to develop themselves as an ethical member of that community. The ethical practice of an individual aligns them with the moral community. In the Ambedkarite Buddhist community, there is no consensus about which practices a person can participate in to demonstrate their interest in or commitment to the moral community. The Triratna community has offered meditation, *pūjā*, and study as the set of ethical practices that build and sustain their community.

Jarrett Zigon and Joel Robbins innovate on this Foucauldian model in attempts to theorize how cultural changes to morality effect ethical practices. Like Foucault, Zigon sees moralities as institutional, discursive, and embodied systems, and ethics as self-reflexive practices that respond to moralities (2008: 162-5). However, for Zigon, ethics are experienced in moments of "moral breakdown" or crisis points when the regular unconscious flow of morality is

interrupted for an individual or group, forcing them to creatively readjust their practices to respond to these crises (Zigon 2008: 165). In his view, ethics are therefore the means by which moralities shift and change. He describes practices of prayer, confession, and therapeutic processes that took place in his field site, a Russian Orthodox drug rehabilitation program, as "ethical work" which cultivates drug addicted individuals into socially "normal" or well-adjusted people (Zigon 2011: 17). At Nagaloka, meditation, *maun*, work periods, and discussion groups similarly served as "ethical work," cultivating Hindu caste-minded people into Buddhist egalitarians.

Robbins sees the two phenomena that Zigon labels 'morality' and 'ethics' as two forms of morality: 'morality of reproduction' and 'morality of freedom' (2009: 278). Moralities of reproduction tend to preside in cultural situations that are settled or stable in which people will tacitly choose to live in accordance with dominant social mores, whereas moralities of freedom are prevalent in societies where hierarchies of values conflict with each other and "people become consciously aware of choosing their own fates" (Robbins 2007: 296, 300). I agree with Cassaniti & Hickman's evaluation that neither Robbins nor Zigon's theoretical orientations help to understand the ways that "actors can be quite morally conscious (even hyper-conscious) of their actions when engaged in intentional reproduction of various cultural norms or practices. This intensive self-reflective, agentive moral reproduction is an important dimension of moral experience that is rendered impossible in a theoretical stance that assumes a strict separation between freedom and reproduction" (2014: 258). Nevertheless, Robbins and Zigon's framework does help to think through the place of Ambedkarite Buddhism within the society in which its embedded. Ambedkarite Buddhism reflects a "morality of freedom" as a means of resistance to

Hindu caste-based Indian society and that, to maintain this morality of freedom, regular "ethical work" is necessary (Zigon 2011: 17).

While like Zigon and Robbins I am interested in how systems of morality and ethics change, I ultimately find Laidlaw's connection of morality, ethics, and freedom more useful in thinking about balancing boundation and *bindās* on Nagaloka's campus as an ethical dilemma. Laidlaw identifies "reflective freedom" as the "precondition of ethical life" (2014: 177). While for instance Mahmood (2005) and Zigon (2008, 2011) focus on learning ethical behavior such that it becomes part of the workings of the unconscious moral self, Laidlaw emphasizes that "each ethical subject must find his or her own way" by consciously managing the conflicts between various moral demands "through reflective and thoughtful self-direction" (2014: 168). He goes on further to argue that "a form of life… which answers to diverse and conflicting values, must needs be lived as something more internally complex and ironic than the execution of a consistent project and the achievement of a self-consistent moral will, and this is true even for people who accept and articulate just such a self-representation" (Laidlaw 2014: 169). While therefore Mahmood pits herself against what she describes as liberal ideas of freedom, arguing that the women in the Islamic piety movement choose to bend to authority rather than value self-determination (Mahmood 2005: 14-7), Laidlaw argues that the women in her study are demonstrating autonomy in shaping their ethical selves "in the form of an integrated and self-consistent will, although the ethnography suggests that, in conditions of value pluralism and value conflict, such an attempt will always be self-limiting and to some degree self-contradictory" (Laidlaw 2014: 177-8).

This relationship between morality, ethics, authority, will, and autonomy that Laidlaw describes, best honors the students' experiences of boundation and *bindās*. In reaching towards

bindās, the students are not rejecting all sources of authority, but are in fact seeking authorities in the form of guidance, inspiration, and *ādarś* (an ideal). The concept of "ideals" or "inspirations" were prevalent not only among the students at Nagaloka, but among other Ambedkarite youth I met.[51] Upon first meetings or as a way to get to know each other, young Ambedkarites frequently asked me who my inspiration was and what my goals were. While Ambedkar was always listed as an inspiration, they usually also mentioned at least one or two teachers, mentors, or guides, or sometimes a family member, as "*mere ādarś*" ("my ideal example") or "*mere prerṇā*" ("my inspiration"). For example, Maiske Sir, the principal of the Nagarjuna Training Institute at Nagaloka, was described as *ādarś* by Smriti from UP in her graduation speech from the program. In her speech Smriti called attention to his intelligence and dedication to his studies, his work for society – meaning his work against casteism, and his role as a teacher and support system to the students, as reasons why he was an ideal role model for the students. These models were held to very high standards by the students and were applied to for all kinds of advice. Observing and following *ādarś* were among the most important ways that students learned ethical behaviors.

Bindās requires self-discipline: to live with one's *ādarś* as a model means molding one's self to fit the ideal by adopting their ethical practices. These practices of self-discipline become boundation, however, if they do not allow the student to work towards expressing "an integrated and self-consistent will" (Laidlaw 2014: 177-8). Furthermore, the student wants to perceive that their *ādarś* also possesses "an integrated and self-consistent will" or else they will reject their guidance as hypocrisy. It is this will that the students hope to cultivate and makes them feel as though they are living *bindās*. While as Laidlaw suggests, many of the students' behaviors

[51] I met other Ambedkarite youth at the Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishvavidyalaya in Wardha, MH where I was affiliated as a foreign researcher. While many identified as Buddhist and some as Christians, most (but not all) were skeptical of Triratna although they admired their work with rural students.

demonstrate internal inconsistency, in the context of an educational institute, the "conditions of value pluralism and value conflict" are persistent, constantly forcing them to make ethical choices (Laidlaw 2014: 178).

While Laidlaw emphasizes the importance of the discriminating person to understanding ethical life, I think the sociality of ethical life has been underemphasized in many of these anthropological theories of ethics and morality. Not only do students feel that they are under boundation of ethical practice if their sense of a consistent self is challenged, but also if their sense of belonging to community is challenged.

Here, I will take a step-back to unpack the term "community" before proceeding. In the context of India, the term "community" is used as a neutralizing stand-in for a variety of politically charged categories like caste and religion. In fact, communalism, or the "condition of suspicion, fear and hostility between members of different religious communities," is often touted as the greatest threat to the Indian nation by politicians, especially as it relates to conflicts between Hindus and Muslims (Pandey 2006: 6). When an Indian person speaks of their community, they are referring to their caste and religious affiliation. As a movement that shifts people's community affiliation, I find it appropriate to discuss community rather than culture (Robbins 2004: 1-15) or sociality (Zigon 2011: 159-61) in the context of Indian Triratna.

Returning to the example at hand, Nagaloka students' sense of self is almost entirely defined by their sense of belonging to a community. As Durkheim argues, the higher moral power that a person draws upon is society itself, or in other words, the pull to participate in a moral universe is motivated by the drive to belong to a social community (2001: 170-1). Participating in ethical practices and accepting moralities is a way of expressing and promoting belonging to these communities.

Ambedkar was also concerned with morality as a force of belonging, although arguably he did not fully appreciate the dynamics of how ethical practice is crucial to building a moral community. It is his words from *The Buddha and his Dhamma* that perhaps best summarize the fraught relationships between morality, community, and the individual for Ambedkarite Buddhists. Ambedkar points out that even a gang of thieves has a morality, but "this morality is marked by isolation and exclusiveness. It is a morality to protect 'group interest'. It is therefore anti-social" (Ambedkar 2011: 173). He observes that Indian society is made up of a variety of anti-social moralities that all clash and conflict with each other due to the hierarchy of caste: "A society which rests upon the supremacy of one group over another, irrespective of its rational or proportionate claims, inevitably leads to conflict" (Ambedkar 2011: 173). He argues that the only way to avoid hierarchy-based conflict "is to have common rules of morality which are sacred to all" and "universal," which will "safeguard the growth of the individual" (Ambedkar 2011: 173). According to his view, this common morality must be based in the principle of universal fraternity which he defines as "nothing but another name for the brotherhood of men—which is another name for morality. This is why the Buddha preached that Dhamma is morality; and as Dhamma is sacred, so is morality" (Ambedkar 2011: 172-3). Ambedkar sought a universal morality that sanctifies fraternity over all else in order to secure the rights and freedoms of individuals. While he leaves a logical treatise that expounds Buddhist morality in *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, his sudden death left his followers with no clear method as to how to ethically enact this principle of fraternity.

As evidenced in Chapter 2, the creation of bonds of friendship are crucial to developing this sense of fraternity that Ambedkar advocates, and yet as I also demonstrated in that chapter, it is extremely difficult for students to let go of their community-based identity to make fraternal

bonds with students they don't believe that they have a shared identity with. While Ambedkar might have argued that the state-wise friendship bonds between students were communal or "anti-social," these are the bonds that most inspire students to act ethically. As young people who come from communities that are excluded from mainstream society, it is difficult to trust that others who do not share their background have their best interests at heart. The "ethical work" developed by the Triratna Buddhist Community like *maitrī bhāvanā* meditation and discussion during *śivir* are meant to help break down these barriers and create fraternity between students.

How should I live as a Buddhist?

Life at Nagaloka teaches students Indian Triratna Buddhist ethics. Morality like discipline, punctuality, self-respect and respect of others, *maitrī* (compassion, love, friendship), and the *pañcaśīl* (five precepts) are inculcated through ethical practices such as *dhyān* (meditation)[52], *pūjā, pañcāṅg praṇām* (prostrations),[53] work period, *maun* (silence), and *sūtta* study. These ethical practices are new to students and they often commented on the strangeness

[52] Most Nagaloka residents would use the English word "meditation" when they spoke and so I will defer to this usage. If a Hindi word was used, it was *dhyan*. Non-Triratna Ambedkarites and Ambedkarite Buddhists sometimes corrected me if I used the Hindi word *dhyan* and told me I should use the word *vipassana*. Lokamitra addresses a similar misconception in his 1991 article defending TBMSG Buddhism in the Ambedkarite community against the critique of well-known Dalit activist and scholar Gopal Guru who claims that participants practice transcendental meditation at TBMSG retreats: "Transcendental meditation is what the Maharishi Yogi's system is called and consists of mechanically chanting a mantra. TBMSG's system of meditation is quite different. It does not consist of chanting a mantra and going into trance as Gopal Guru makes out. Meditation in Buddhism is a conscious process and does not involve going into a trance-like state" (1303). All of this points to a sense of distrust and confusion about meditation among Dalit activists. A Dalit studies professor complained to me about two of his students participating in a 10-day *vipassana* retreat, arguing that they were simply wasting their time by not focusing on their studies or social work.

[53] The practices of *pūjā* and *pañcāṅg praṇām* are drawn from the Hindu tradition, but are re-framed as ceremonies that show respect to the memory of the Buddha rather than as a method to commune directly with the Buddha as would be the case in a *pūjā* performed for Hindu gods. Moreover, these kinds of practices are found throughout the Buddhist world and help Indian Triratna Buddhists to demonstrate their knowledge of and sense of belonging to a global Buddhist community.

of them and the time it took to become accustomed to them. At the beginning of the 8-month session the boys would spend their work periods chanting the Pali *Vandanā* together at the suggestion of their warden because they couldn't remember the words and rhythms of the verses during morning and evening *pūjā*. Students balked at the requirement to perform *pañcāṅg praṇām*, the set of three prostrations before the Buddha, because it seemed to honor the Buddha as a god. Various students told me that they didn't want to do it, that they could feel respect for the Buddha "*andar se*" (inside) and that should be enough.

The students thought that keeping *maun* and meditation were the strangest and most difficult practices. During the *śivir* on *Kalamasūtta*, Vivekaratna and the other administrators struggled to keep the students focused on meditation and study. A fight was brewing between the Odishis and the Rajasthanis throughout the whole week, which culminated in a screaming match between the two groups in the Buddha Surya Vihar, the main meditation hall. The fight was precipitated by Rani from Rajasthan's claim that Navin* from Odisha had kissed her face against her wishes. Rani's younger brother Rahul physically fought Navin in the hostel after hearing about this, dragging other boys from Rajasthan and Odisha into the argument as well. The Odishis – both boys and girls – became furious at what they believed were the false accusations against Navin and demanded justice or they threatened to leave Nagaloka en masse.

On Wednesday, the third day of *śivir* and the anniversary of Ambedkar's *mahāparinirvaṇ*,[54] Vivekaratna asked everyone who had missed that morning's *ānāpānasati* meditation to stand. By standing, the students would be forced to take responsibility for not meeting their commitment to participate in the *śivir*. Everyone already knew who had not attended the morning's meditation, but by standing the students were held accountable for their

[54] The anniversary of Ambedkar's death or the day he reached final enlightenment (*nirvana*).

lack of commitment to developing themselves as ethical subjects. Rahul was among those who stood, and Vivekaratna focused on these boys, scolding them for staying up later than their 10 PM curfew. A few girls also stood. I noticed Prajita from Maharashtra scolding another girl who was like a younger sister to her, telling her to be honest and stand, while the younger sister insisted that she *had* been at meditation. At the time I didn't know about the fight in the hostel the night before and wondered why Vivekaratna did not specifically call out any girls for their absence as he did with Rahul. The students, like the younger girl that Prajita was scolding, seemed to understand that their leader's frustration was focused on the young men, and therefore didn't feel the need to draw attention to her lack of attendance. Vivekaratna told the students that in practicing meditation and keeping *maun* they were learning how to deal with their emotions and that this is part of their study at Nagaloka. There are plenty of colleges, he told them, where they could do other studies – residential training was meant to help them change their lives. "I think you should do meditation for *discipline* [in English]. But in your minds, there are many doubts. If you have doubts about meditation, then you will not do it. Then also, you do it only for the fear of punishment." His disappointment was palpable. For those students who held deep respect for Vivekaratna, which there were many, this disappointment was a strong motivation to continue developing their ethical practice of meditation.

Vivekaratna was famous for telling students to save their breath apologizing. He told them that instead of saying sorry, they should just change their behavior. I heard him tell students this during the *Kalamasūtta śivir* and some alumni who worked at Nagaloka Restaurant had told me that he had told their batch the same. In other words, he taught them that cultivating themselves as ethical beings through practice had no alternative – no matter how sorry they were for disobeying him, the only acceptable apology was practice.

In my interview with Vivekaratna, conducted in English, I asked how he responds to other Ambedkarites' critiques of meditation. For instance, the activist-minded Ambedkarite Buddhist professors at Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University who were not associated with Triratna[55] complained that meditation was nothing but a distraction from participating in the public sphere and making real social change. Vivekaratna told me that in Triratna they engage very seriously with the world, especially through the practice of *maitrī bhāvanā* (loving-kindness meditation). He told me that if I were to ask critics of meditation if they speak from experience, I would find that they have never meditated themselves. I did indeed find it to be true that most meditation skeptics had never committed to a practice of meditation, myself included. Vivekaratna told me that if I asked members of BAMCEF or communist groups[56] what constructive work they have done in their life, they will not have an answer that compares to the work of TBMSG (Triratna). "We are molding human beings," he told me. He said that in the early years of Nagaloka when he was engaging more with students directly and had less responsibilities, he would see dramatic changes in them. Parents would come to him and say that their children's behavior had completely changed – they were obedient, more focused, less angry. After practicing meditation, he said, he has seen men stop drinking and beating their wives.

[55] There were some professors at the university who were affiliated with Triratna and their opinions on meditation aligned with the Triratna Community. They were generally found in the Buddhist Studies department whereas the critics were found in the Dalit and Tribal Studies department. While I had requested affiliation with the Buddhist Studies department, the Dean of the School of Culture, in which both of these departments are contained, decided that I would benefit most from his guidance, which limited my interaction with the Buddhist Studies community. All of the professors that I interacted with in the School of Culture, whether in the Buddhist Studies or Dalit and Tribal Studies department, self-identified as Ambedkarite Buddhists (although there were some professors who were strongly influenced by Christianity as well and had what I observed to be a kind of Christo-Buddhist worldview).
[56] Two other kinds of anti-caste organizations. BAMCEF stands for "The All India **B**ackward **a**nd **M**inority **C**ommunities **E**mployees **F**ederation" and was founded by Kanshi Ram, the now deceased leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). BAMCEF and the BSP claim to be inspired by the philosophies of Ambedkar and Buddha, among others. There are various communist groups known as Naxalites or Maowadis (Maoists) especially in the Eastern states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana that are made up of primarily Tribal and Dalit people that are known for violence and are heavily monitored, oppressed, and feared by the state.

According to my interlocuters, practicing meditation creates noticeable, visible change. There is proof of meditation done well. I was repeatedly told that restless, aimless boys become settled and disciplined, and that angry hearts and minds soften. In group discussion during *śivir* on the topic of using evidence to decide for oneself about truth, Neha, an easy-going, friendly and thoughtful 21-year old *dhammasekhiya* student praised Rashmi from Madhya Pradesh for doing meditation well. She told the other students to look and see the "glow" on Rashmi's face. During the next day's group discussion Rashmi told the others that Neha did meditation very well. The group leader Mamta, an alumna from Chhattisgarh, agreed, saying that there was indeed a "glow." Ranju and Haripriya from Odisha told me that they also saw that Vivekaratna's face always had a "glow" from how well he practiced meditation. I asked them whether Jilani, a senior student from Jharkhand who was universally beloved for her kind and gentle nature, also had this glow. If someone had asked me who had a "glow," I probably would have chosen her, but they told me no, she didn't. Apparently, they weren't impressed by her attendance record at meditation class. When I asked Julie whether she thought Vivekaratna's face glowed from meditation, she just looked at me incredulously. "Who told you that, Di?" she asked, and was shocked when I told her it was her own closest friends who she assumed had the same distrust of magical-type explanations that she did.

Ranju used to tease her best friend Mamta regularly for falling asleep during meditation practice. Ranju was only able to determine that Mamta was falling asleep because she had her eyes open and was herself not properly meditating, but nevertheless Mamta was very offended by this claim. She vehemently maintained that she was not sleeping during meditation. She told me, "*acche se* meditation *kartī hūn*" ('I do meditation well'), but no one believed her! Eventually after enough repeated teasing over time, Mamta became extremely angry with Ranju for not

believing her. After verbally exploding at Ranju and their other friends who also thought the joke was very funny, Mamta confessed to me the pain she felt at not being believed and feeling so angry. I was initially surprised that Mamta was so upset by the accusation that she wasn't properly meditating. She would usually be among the group of students to tell me that I shouldn't bother coming to meditation because I wasn't 'boundedly forced' to go. Nevertheless, it was important to her as a Nagaloka student and as a Buddhist to meditate "*acche se*" ('in a good way', 'well').

On the fourth day of the *Kalamasūtta śivir,* when news about the fight between the Odishis and Rajasthanis had spread, Vivekaratna opened his lesson for the day by telling the students that meditation has no power if you don't do it and that there hadn't been a single day of the *śivir* with 100% attendance. To practice meditation well, the participants need to create a proper *māhaul* (atmosphere, environment), he told them, and for this *śivir*, the *māhaul* had been ruined by the behavior of the students. The necessity of a proper environment for meditation indicates the social nature of the practice. The meditation environment for the entire campus was easily ruined by one or two people, especially because many of the students had "doubts" about meditation to begin with.

The nightly meditation practices in the girls' hostels were often chaotic. During my first night in the hostel, Kajal*, the eldest *dhammasekhiya* student, told the girls to be quiet and on their best behavior because I was there. Once I became a regular fixture, the girls did not feel any pressure to exert any extra discipline due to my presence. Some students would bring books to try to covertly study during meditation time. Others would open their eyes, searching for other opened eyes to meet their gaze, or otherwise checking who was sleeping, or glancing down at a watch to see how much time remained. One night in late November, which was about midway

through the 8-month course, Rashmi, the defender of meditation from the opening pages of this chapter, stood up after *pūjā* to make a speech. She told the other students that she thought they should always be silent and not talk within the meditation hall. Like Surya Buddha Vihar, she told them, this is a *pūjāsthān*, a place for worship. Even as she spoke, requesting silence, many of the students were talking over her and having side conversations amongst themselves. During the subsequent meditation session, students were shifting around and whispering. The songs and fireworks from the neighboring wedding lawn were drawing many of their attention out the window.

In the morning, Rashmi asked me what I thought of her speech. I told her it was good. She said that meditation is very important to her, which is why she decided to speak up. I asked some other students what they thought about her speech. Ranju said it was *jhūṭī*, untrue, and the others laughed. Later at dinner, however, Julie told Rashmi that she really liked what she had said. Rashmi then began telling the other girls about her experiences at *vipassanā* retreats. She said that on these retreats, she was told by the leaders that if they meditated well, it would make the gods happy. That made all the girls, Rashmi included, laugh and exclaim at what bad thinking this was.

A major piece of setting the tone for *śivir* and daily meditation was *maun*, silence. Every time Vivekaratna made announcements during *śivir*, he encouraged students to keep *maun*. The predictability of this repeated request would eventually be met with giggles, eye rolls, and silently mouthed or whispered "*maun*" from the students who anticipated his words. He encouraged students to keep *maun* not only between the end of nightly *pūjā* and morning meditation, but also throughout the entire *śivir*, excluding *sūtta* discussion group where everyone was vociferously encouraged to participate. At one point, he asked the students to keep *maun*

during lunch period, an idea some students found so ridiculous that they laughed aloud. During regular, non-*śivir* days, perhaps the least diligently followed rule on campus was that students were meant to keep *maun* all night between the conclusion of evening meditation and the beginning of morning *pūjā*. I was always privately amused in my room as I listened to the hostel wardens' nightly ritual of shouting at the students to keep *maun* in their bunks.

To create the proper *māhaul* (environment), *maun*, and meditation depend on every participant valuing these ethical practices enough not to make noise. Even if they do not think the practices work for them, they must at minimum respect that others value these practices and require their silence for optimum conditions. It is on this basis that even skeptics would ideally begin to value meditation because even if they have internal resistance to it, the social pressure more or less forces them to sit in silence and participate. In the case of the 16th batch, social pressures tended the other way – the strongest willed students also had the strongest and loudest voices, and they used them to voice their distrust and dissatisfaction with meditation practice. In other words, there was more peer pressure to not practice *maun* than to do it well. While the wardens told me that the problem with the students was a lack of discipline, it seemed to me that the problem with the students was a lack of feeling of cohesive campus community. They did not feel responsible or accountable to their peers or their wardens as a whole. They did not want to participate in these ethical practices that would bond them as a united community because they did not feel a sense of belonging to that community or a sense of acceptance into it. Students like Ranju, Mamta, Haripriya, and Neha all commented on the wonderful effects of meditation done well had on others like Vivekaratna and Rashmi, but they never quite felt that meditation was for them, they never felt like they belonged to an ethical community of meditators. Instead, as I will argue in the following section, the 16th batch developed a sense of community from their shared

sense of Ambedkarite morality, which they expressed ethically through their practice of speaking their discontent. The students' lack of participation in meditation was not primarily driven by a lack of discipline or even from the lack of respect for the value of discipline. Instead, it was driven by their stronger sense of belonging to a different moral community whose ethical practices they determined to be in conflict with those they were being taught at Nagaloka.

How should I live as an Ambedkarite?

Prominent Dalit activist and scholar Anand Teltumbde argues that "following Ambedkar means being inspired by his vision of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' and acting in accordance with his advice to 'educate, agitate, organize,' so as to realise his goals of annihilation of castes and achievement of socialism" (2013). My experiences in the field lead me to believe that this definition would be acceptable to the majority of people who call themselves Ambedkarites (regardless of their opinions about Teltumbde). While I've heard some debate about whether the proper order is 'educate, organize, agitate' or 'educate, agitate, organize,' these are the three ethical practices that any Ambedkarite would agree on, or at least must contend with. Students modelled their behavior on what they imagined Babasaheb might be doing in their position. Would Babasaheb spend his time meditating or studying? Would Babasaheb sit silent in the face of injustice? Wouldn't Babasaheb put working for society above all else? In addition to liberty, equality and fraternity, additional morals that support Ambedkarite ethics include courage, tenacity, unity, and justice.

"Are you Ambedkarites or not?" Vandana from Gujarat asked her fellow residents of the girls' hostel, rallying them to lodge a complaint against their hostel wardens. Vandana was from a middle-class SC family. Her father, a success story of reservation benefits, was a judge, and

she had consequently grown up with Ambedkar as a hero. She was herself in the process of earning a BS in Mathematics at a university in Gujarat. She famously had a particularly difficult time abiding by Nagaloka's rules and most of her peers and teachers were overwhelmed by her perpetually energetic personality. For example, she once forced a female teacher back down into a chair so that she could sing happy birthday to her at the end of a class session. She tried to cultivate a friendship with the campus cook to get access to extra or special food and described herself to me as "very much a foodie." I also saw her scold a random stranger on a public bus for throwing trash out the window instead of depositing it in a bin.[57] She did not fit in very well at Nagaloka due to the combination of her outspoken personality and her middle-class background. Vandana returned to Gujarat in November 2017, about three months before the end of the program, after a warden insulted her by falsely accusing her of flirting with an older man. She was a girl who her peers described as "crazy" and "bold." She would talk to anyone with little regard for how it appeared, and it was on this basis that the warden constructed the rumor, which I believe was excessively hurtful and untrue.

Despite the confusion and amusement that her behavior produced in her peers, the other students were inspired by her call to act as Ambedkarites. The girls decided to organize and agitate for what they felt were their rights. They wrote a formal letter as a group in which they listed their complaints about the wardens, many of which were rather serious. For instance, since there was no working landline in the hostel, the girls' parents were instructed to call the wardens' cellphones to communicate with their children in an emergency. While the wardens had agreed

[57] Most Indians have no concept of littering in a public place. Vandana's attention to this indicates her absorption of PM Modi's "Clean India" initiatives which, among a wide assortment of other goals, encourages Indians to treat public spaces with the respect they would their own homes. While her outspokenness can be chalked up to both her Ambedkarite values and her outgoing personality, I would argue that her interest in this issue of littering speaks to her middle-classness.

to this stopgap solution, they were overwhelmed with the volume of calls, resulting in frustrated rudeness and miscommunications. For instance, a warden told one student's mother that her daughter was in the hospital, when in fact she was perfectly healthy and on campus. The hostel was also over-capacity – there were more girls in attendance than in any previous year.[58] This resulted in over-crowded and over-heated bedrooms. In one room, there were sixteen girls sleeping with a single plug-in fan.[59] Their request for a second fan was denied by the wardens. They also felt that the wardens were overly aggressive and harsh in their language towards them. Vivekartna and Maiske heard the students' complaints with compassion and dismay and acted to at least try to resolve them by overriding the wardens' decisions and providing the students with fans and a functional phoneline. They also had a private discussion with the wardens regarding the issues brought to them by the students. Most importantly, Vivekaratna and Maiske's concerned response assured the students that they were indeed cared for at Nagaloka.

The students had deep respect and fondness for their principal Maiske Sir[60] who was a retired engineering professor volunteering his time at Nagaloka. He was the only authority figure that the students interacted with who was not a Triratna member, although he did consider himself Buddhist. He taught the Ambedkar Thought classes in which he primarily instructed the students about the Constitution and the rights guaranteed them in it,[61] as well as Ambedkar's thoughts on Indian society. The students began calling Maiske "*hamāre* Babasaheb" ("our Babasaheb"), despite his repeated admonishment and embarrassment.

[58] This issue has since been remedied in subsequent years by moving second and third year girls into a second hostel usually reserved for visiting alumni.
[59] As I mention in Chapter 1, due to the design of the ceilings there are no ceiling fans in the hostels.
[60] Indian students refer to any teacher as Sir or Ma'am (in addition to their first name, or sometimes in addition to their last, as was the case with Maiske Sir). For instance, Vivekaratna was also called Vivekaratna Sir by the students.
[61] *Buddha and His Dhamma* was covered in their Buddhism classes.

Maiske offered occasional public workshops on Nagaloka's campus on issues relating to Ambedkar and Ambedkarism. I attended one such workshop in October 2017 entitled "The Failure of Ambedkarite Organizations in a Post-Ambedkar Era & the Way Out." In attendance were eleven men from the Nagpur area, one woman who was a doctor, three resident NTI alumni, and me. The biggest problem facing Ambedkarites today, argued Maiske, was that they are not unified under a single vision. Ambedkarites need to unite under the moral values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, he urged, and to do that the movement needs to train its members with this value system. Members of the movement must put their own aims on the backburner and work towards fulfilling the collective aims of the group. He instructs people to look at Ambedkar's writings for inspiration and guidance. He posed the questions: What does Ambedkar expect from us? What should we do if we don't want to sit *cup cup* [silently]? He told the participants that none of us have the authority to doubt Ambedkar's suggested methods – we need only read his advice and follow it. Maiske told us that according to Ambedkar, first we need education programs in order to eliminate confusion about the values and aims of an Ambedkarite movement. Then organization and agitation will be possible if all are united by the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity with the vision to destroy Brahminism, the spirit of inequality. The students who could not attend this public workshop that was scheduled concurrent to their regular classes, asked me if they could copy my notes, to tell them what Maiske had said. Their interest in the topic was so great that Maiske eventually ended up teaching them an abbreviated version of the three-day workshop's material in class.

As evidenced by their nickname for him, the students considered Maiske to be the strongest Ambedkarite voice on campus. They were inspired by his devotion to his ethical practice of using his knowledge to educate the youth and the wider community. Students would

beg him for extra classes on Ambedkar and social issues which he sometimes was able to provide. Whereas Vivekaratna was the model of a good Buddhist, Maiske was the model of an Ambedkarite. While of course the two men were themselves more complicated than these simplified descriptions, as the two strongest authority figures on campus they were ideal models of ethical behavior for the students. Choosing the ethical system that they would adopt was inspired by witnessing the self-determined role models like Maiske and Vivekaratna, among others.

At one point, the Odishi students felt that Maiske was showing preference to the Rajasthani students, fanning the flames of the already brewing tension between the two groups. Some Rajasthani students had gone to Maiske to request special classes in a certain topic relating to Ambedkar and he had asked them to gather the names of other students who were interested. Soon, there was a rumor flying around that Maiske Sir was teaching secret classes to certain students and excluding others and cries of "injustice" were sounded by Odishis. This perceived exclusion was felt with an extra sharp sting by students who looked up to Maiske as *hamāre* Babasaheb. The misunderstanding was cleared up in the end, and the *dhammasekhiya* students left on good terms with Maiske Sir.

Pursuing education and studying was the most important way that students expressed themselves as Ambedkarites. Some students like Julie from Odisha were already accomplished activists, and many others like Lakshmi, Smriti, and Vandana from Uttar Pradesh, Samiksha M. and Rashmi from Madhya Pradesh, and Neha from Maharashtra regularly talked to me and each other about their plans to do social work in their villages and cities. Most students, however, were focused entirely on gaining their education by whatever means necessary. Of course, students were motivated to pursue education because they saw it as a path to success for their

family and themselves (further explored in Chapter 4), and in many cases they were also driven by intellectual curiosity and love of learning, but I argue that studying and learning well was also seen as a moral duty for Ambedkarites. In accordance with "educate, agitate, organize," both getting education and teaching others is understood as a mandate given by Ambedkar.

Some of the female students' parents did not necessarily wish for them to get an education, especially out of state. In many cases, young women were encouraged to come to Nagaloka by other young Ambedkarites who they looked up to as mentors or *ādarś*. Ravita from Kanpur, UP was a first-year BA student. Her father died when she was 7 and she had three older siblings – two brothers and a sister. When she was in 10th standard, her mother told her she had to stop going to school, but she told me that somehow she "managed" to complete high school. She came to Nagaloka with the help of her "*dīdī*" – a mentor who she looks up to as an older sister. She said that they are so close that most people think they are biological sisters. Her *dīdī* is an Ambedkarite Buddhist and encouraged her to continue to pursue education and to be an example for her community about the importance of education. Mamta from Odisha had a similar story of taking the advice of her Ambedkarite "*dīdī*" to come to Nagaloka against her mother and grandmother's wishes. Ranipriya and Urmila from Odisha were not particularly devoted students, but they came to Nagaloka on the advice of their brother Bhupendra who was an alumnus. Bhupendra and Ranipriya's parents had wanted her to marry and stop her education, so Bhupendra took financial responsibility for her so that she could come to Nagaloka to continue her studies. He told me that after his training at Nagaloka, he felt it was his duty to help his sisters get education.

These stories indicate a generational and ideological break in these cases. These young mentors challenge their mentee's parents' wishes for them by encouraging them to seek higher

education. The families of these students were all Hindu and were generally unaware or disinterested in Ambedkarism, whereas the young mentors were motivated Amedkarites. They prioritized education for young women over marriage or reputation. For instance, Leeta and Sindhu from Odisha shared in group discussion during *śivir* that their parents had been reluctant to let them leave the state because they were concerned by what the neighbors might think. They worried about who would marry their daughters if people knew they had been far from their watchful parental gaze. Seeking education was a higher moral priority for these young Ambedkarites than traditional values that were found in their homes.

There were also cases of students who came from Ambedkarite homes where the parents were more concerned that their child was receiving education than the child was. Nisha from Odisha's father was involved in Ambedkarite groups and unions in their home city. Nisha was not an especially devoted student, spending more time with her campus boyfriend than studying. Unlike her parents, she was a Christian, following the example of an aunt. Her father, who had a government job at the railways, was constantly visiting Nagaloka to check up on her and make sure she was learning well. There was another case of one family from Chhattisgarh of which a brother, two sisters and a cousin-sister had all attended training at Nagaloka. They were all fervently pursuing higher education, the brother enrolled in a PhD in Buddhist Studies at Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishvavidyalaya, the cousin-sister pursuing a degree in Chinese. Their youngest sister was one of the youngest students to participate in the *dhammasekhiya* program.

While there were some cases of agitation and organization on Nagaloka's campus, there was not much to agitate against in comparison to the situations students faced *bāhar* (outside). Social workers and activists were sometimes invited guests or speakers on campus from whom

students learned more about how they might work for society after they left Nagaloka. Nagaloka was a place where Ambedkarite students were drawn, at least in part, because education was a moral imperative and study was an ethical practice. They often faced barriers getting education at more traditional institutions, or simply wanted the chance to gain knowledge about topics that were not discussed regularly in their universities or communities. Taking the model and words of Ambedkar seriously, they grabbed any chance they could to learn more.

How should I live as an Ambedkarite Buddhist?

During Nagaloka's 2017 alumni conference, Lokamitra was asked to give a series of lectures to the present and former students. He spoke in English with his long-time collaborator and friend Maitreyanath translating his words into Hindi for the audience.[62] On November 8th Lokamitra spoke to them about the importance of knowing Ambedkar's thoughts. He said that when he first began his work in India, he read all he could about Babasaheb. He realized that there was so much confusion in the community about what Ambedkar wrote. People were turning to violence in Ambedkar's name.[63] In the villages, people were returning to their gods or worshipping Buddha like a god, they would say that their caste was Buddhist. Some people said that Ambedkar's embrace of Buddhism was a mistake, and that people should turn to communism instead. Others said don't practice *dhamma*, only focus on getting educated. Lokamitra told the students that in 1984 he asked a group of Maharashtrian college students if they knew Ambedkar's 22 vows and no one did. People hadn't been given guidance in the

[62] Lokamitra is fluent in Marathi but often uses a translator if delivering a speech to Hindi-speakers.
[63] While I don't know specifically which violence Lokamitra was referring to here, there is a (under-researched) militant/self-defense group founded by Ambedkar that remains present in Maharashtra to this day. The Samata Sainik Dal (Soldier's for Equality) was founded by Ambedkar in 1927 with the intent to "vigorously pursue the agenda of social equality" and "protect Dalits from physical attack and intimidation" (Rodrigues 2002: 10; Rao 2009: 321). The organization of the Nagpur branch of the SSD occurred in 1938 (Moon 2001: 64). The organization's website can be found at http://www.ssdindia.org/.

dhamma, he said, because their leaders focused on other things. Lokamitra told the alumni that at the time of his conversion Ambedkar was upset with his core group of collaborators because none of them understood the importance of his conversion. Lokamitra argued: "If people don't know why Babasaheb converted, then how will they make progress?" He told the students that it's their right to disagree with conversion, but first it is their duty to understand why Babasaheb converted before they decide that conversion was a mistake.

Lokamitra went on to tell the students that in the 1980's the terms Ambedkarite and Ambedkarism became popular – anyone who appreciated Babasaheb was thought of as an Ambedkarite. Lokamitra argued that this is dangerous – it's not enough to appreciate Babasaheb, one must also try to fully understand his beliefs and what he stood for. *Dhamma*, Lokamitra said, wasn't just one part of Babasaheb's thinking, but was the heart of it, giving life to every part of the body of his thought. Lokamitra said that at first when he read that Babasaheb learned liberty, equality and fraternity from Buddhism he was utterly confused, especially as a Westerner. But he has since come to appreciate that through Buddhism Ambedkar has brought out the essence of these principles. Lokamitra told the students that Ambedkar has contributed enormously to Buddhism in the modern world. He told them that he doesn't bring foreign Buddhists to Nagaloka just for the students' benefit, but also for the benefit of the guests to learn about Ambedkar's important interpretation of the *dhamma*. When you come to Nagaloka, Lokamitra told the students, your hearts and brains are cleared of all matters related to caste and that happens through *dhamma* and a deep understanding of Babasaheb.

Like the argument between Julie and Roshini that I opened this chapter with, Lokamitra's speech to the students centered around the importance of knowing Babasaheb. As Lokamitra describes, I also rarely encountered a person who had spent time reading Ambedkar's writings.

Most of the students' knowledge of him came from listening to speeches like Lokamitra's, lectures from their teachers, or from conversations with mentors. At both Nagaloka and in the Ambedkarite Buddhist community at the university in Wardha, teachers told me about the importance of their students developing a reading habit, but students struggled to follow their mentor's advice.[64] For Lokamitra, knowing Babasaheb means understanding his thought by engaging with his writing. It is through coming to know Ambedkar through the written word that Lokamitra was able to develop his interpretation of Ambedkarite Buddhism centered on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In an introductory speech Lokamitra gave at the start of a program on October 2, 2017 consisting of non-Triratna Ambedkarite Buddhists he had invited, he was perfectly willing to admit that *Prabuddha Bhārat* cannot be created by the Triratna community alone. He told the crowd that while Triratna's primary focus has been on *dhamma*, others have been focused on social work, land rights, economics, and other important issues. It is only by working together, he said, that they can bring about Ambedkar's vision of casteless India. While others may not agree, for Lokamitra, Buddhist morals should undergird any Ambedkarite project. For him, Ambedkar is fundamentally a Buddhist thinker.

The question "did Ambedkar meditate?" which was extremely pertinent to students like Julie, was not a question that plagued Lokamitra. Lokamitra seemed ultimately concerned with "what would Babasaheb think?" rather than "what would Babasaheb do?" Squaring Ambedkar's thought with one's actions is a different process than trying to live life as closely to Ambedkar's as possible. Lokamitra and the Triratna Buddhists take Ambedkar's morals and develop their

[64] The reasons for why students struggled to develop a reading habit is beyond the scope of my dissertation here, but I propose that one possible explanation for this is the overall Indian cultural emphasis on learning aurally and orally directly from a *guru* (teacher) rather than through independently writing and reading. As this is a broad generalization, I'm certain that there is much more to say about the caste and class stratification of these particular students in relationship to the patterns of pedagogical techniques they were exposed to in their primary education, largely at public local language shcools.

own ethical practices to express them. Students who looked to Ambedkar as their most valued inspiration, however, took Ambedkar's life as the model for their ethical actions.

During the last week of her tenure at Nagaloka, Julie told me that she had finally decided to keep *maun* at night to see for herself if it did anything. She did not last even one night however because her friends Neha and Smriti teased her in the hostel by calling her 'Gandhi's daughter.' As a virulent critic of Gandhi due to his opposition to Ambedkar's policies, her friends' equation of silence with Gandhian-style austerities convinced her that it was a useless exercise. When holding up *maun* to the litmus test of "what would Babasaheb do?", these three girls came to the conclusion that it was antithetical to Ambedkarite morality. For them, there was an unbridgeable dissonance between their understanding of Ambedkarite values and the ethical practices that they learned at Nagaloka. They knew how to be disciplined – each of the three of them were engaged in social work – they just didn't want to belong to a group that they thought Babasaheb might not belong to.

Most students had ambivalent relationships with meditation, *maun* and the other Triratna ethical practices. A second-year BA student from Chhattisgarh, Reenu, told me that in her mind she often wondered about meditation. She said that a person can use meditation at any time to refresh their mind, but the opportunity to get new knowledge is rare. She thought that the wardens shouldn't be forcing them to go to meditation. She said the rules and regulations of Nagaloka were for the students' own good, but even so, sometimes she questioned them. In a previous conversation she told me that she thinks Babasaheb is the ideal person and she often remembers how many degrees he earned and wants to earn as many degrees as she can. Second-year students were not required to go to meditation classes, but I noticed that Reenu was almost always in attendance. Samiksha M., another second-year student, told me that she liked

meditation, but she was rarely found in the meditation hall. Instead, she spent most of her time assisting Tejdarshan, Nagaloka's director, or studying. In my conversations with the female students, they often felt that meditation was getting in the way of their studies. Sarla from Odisha told me that she wished she was just in a regular science Bachelors' program so that she could devote her time to study and small daily chores. Julie also told me that she thought that for Babasaheb, work and study were kinds of meditation. She didn't believe that he would stop being productive to sit silently. Priyanka from Bihar similarly complained that there weren't enough hours for study and that meditation would not get her a job.

Other students described meditation as a path to knowledge. Samiksha K. from Maharashtra told me that meditation had given her a relationship with herself that she didn't have when she was a B.S. student at another institution. In a chat on Facebook Messenger in November 2018, Lucky, a Rajasthani *dhammasekhiya* student from the 16th batch told me: "Meditation se insaan wo haasil kar sakta hai jo ki uske paas bahot mushkil se aata hai. Wo hai confidence. Wo hai pyar. Wo hai khud ko jaanane ka raasta. Mujhe bahut pasand h. Mushkil hai"[65] ("From meditation, a man can achieve that which is very difficult for him. It is confidence. It is love. It is a way to know yourself. I like it very much. It is difficult."). Similarly, Navin from Odisha was shocked when I told him that I didn't like meditation. He told me that it is very important to know yourself through meditation. I jokingly replied that I didn't want to know myself, at which he frowned and looked disturbed, indicating that my comment was not what he expected someone like me, a foreign adult woman, to say. Prakash, an alumnus from the 15th batch told me he enjoyed meditation while at Nagaloka for introspection. Surya from Rajasthan told me that he had come to Nagaloka to learn English and computers, which he did not achieve,

[65] I preserved the casual/slang spellings Lucky used when he communicated with me.

but that he didn't regret coming because he really enjoyed meditation. He said that he thinks it's very good to learn about yourself, to take time from thinking about other people and only think about yourself. I found Surya's comments interesting, especially given that *maitrī bhāvanā* meditation, which was practiced nightly, is a practice in which the meditator specifically focuses on other people. Surya's comments point more towards the fact that being in retreat at Nagaloka allowed him space to think of himself as an individual distinct from his family unit. While perhaps his teachers would not necessarily want him to think only of himself in meditation, they do encourage him to use the practice to take responsibility for his own life and actions.

Noticeably, when I spoke to male students about meditation, they mentioned getting to know themselves as an important benefit of the practice, whereas the only female student who mentioned this to me was Samiksha K. Even other female students who told me they liked meditation like Reenu or Samiksha M. usually saw meditation as a distraction from studies and never mentioned it as a way to know themselves better. Instead, they mentioned the benefits of calming their mind and gaining confidence. While I had time to get to know the female students much better than the male students which could be a reason why more young women were open to sharing their dislike of meditation with me, it is still notable that young men spoke about introspection and self-knowledge more often than the young women.

During my preliminary fieldwork in August 2016, I spoke with Samiksha M., who was then a first-year B.A. student, about *maitrī bhāvanā* meditation. We had just left a class with Maiske Sir where they had discussed the Indian social system and compared it to other societies around the world. We were walking together to the dining hall for lunch. Samiksha was deep in thought after this class and wondered aloud to me how they could, or even if they should, develop compassion for Brahmins. She referred to the fourth stage of *maitrī bhāvanā* where the

practitioner feels love for her enemy. In a question and answer session in 1982, Sangharakshita was asked a similar question: "Don't we strengthen the power of our enemies by doing the *metta bhāvanā* for them and thereby put ourselves in danger?" (Sangharakshita 2016: 517). He replied: "We don't develop *metta* towards our enemies simply to stop them harming us. We develop *metta* because this is part of our own personal development…. Eventually we will want to teach the *metta bhāvanā* even to our enemies, because if they also were to do the *metta bhāvanā* they wouldn't be our enemies any more, but that may take a long time. In the meantime we just have to get on with our own practice…" (Sangharakshita 2016: 517-8). The issue of what to do about Brahmins was one that was difficult for many students. During question and answer at *śivir*, Vivekaratna answered a question about whether or not they should have friendships with Brahmins. He said that Brahmins worked with Ambedkar and Ambedkar worked with Brahmins. He argued that Brahmins are more likely to let their children marry outside of their caste than Dalits – so who then is acting as a Brahmin?

In late November I had a long talk with Julie as we walked around the Buddha statue before dinner. She told me that the more she learned about Buddhism, the more she felt in crisis. If impermanence is the center of Buddhism, then why do we accept things from Buddha's time? It felt to her like there were so many traditions that innovation wasn't possible. She said that in class that day the teacher told them that first we think god is responsible for our condition, then our parents, then we blame Brahmins, but when you become a Buddhist you realize that you are responsible for everything and everyone. She told me that after she heard that she thought: so, then I am responsible for casteism? I deserve to be beaten by Brahmins? It is my fault or my parent's fault that I am poor? While this is of course not what the teachers meant the students to think, Buddhist empowerment does require the practitioner to see themselves as a part of the

chain of causality. This can easily cut both ways and cause, as Julie experienced, moral breakdown.

In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar writes that "[The Buddha] was nothing if not rational, if not logical. Anything therefore which is rational and logical, other things being equal, may be taken to be the word of the Buddha" (Ambedkar 2011: 185). In the *Kalamasūtta*, the topic of December's *śivir*, "the Buddha advises the Kalamas to discover truth for themselves through a process of investigation unbiased by faith or tradition" which is sometimes celebrated, as is the case at Nagaloka, for giving "Buddhism the status of being at least 2,000 years ahead of the European Enlightenment and holds out the promise of a humanistic and rational religion" (Evans 2007: 91). At Nagaloka, the students are encouraged to think of Buddha as a rational teacher and to use logic to decide for themselves what they think about the ideas they are being presented with. *Dhammasekhiya* training is about giving the students information, confidence, and resources so that they can determine for themselves how they should practice or if they should practice Buddhism. Any practice that was deemed illogical was called *andhaviśvās* (blind belief, superstition) by students and teachers. For instance, Smriti told me that the biggest problem in her family was *andhaviśvās* as they were Hindus. Samiksha M. also criticized the Chakma practice of offering food to the Buddha as *andhaviśvās*. Vivekaratna told the students not to follow anyone *andhe se* (blindly) whether it be the media or their teachers – he instructed them to listen carefully and then reflect. Following tradition for the sake of tradition, he instructed them, was *galat bāt* (a wrong/mistaken thing). The students are being shaped as ethical subjects who must be perpetually conscious about the choices they make. They are meant to feel a boundation to act ethically as they are encouraged to develop themselves as reflective, self-actualized subjects.

At Nagaloka, the ideal of living as an Ambedkarite Buddhist means being in a perpetual state of ethical development. It means constantly and consciously struggling to blend "educate, agitate, organize" and "liberty, equality, fraternity" with *maitrī, paṇcaśil,* meditation and *maun*. It is a process of becoming a self-actualized person who works for the good of the universal whole. In practice, however, these ideals are faced with practical realities. Nagaloka's students seek guidance, a sense of belonging, to help their family and their community and to honor them. They are motivated to become ethical subjects primarily in so far as it helps them to feel connected to someone or something.

Chapter Four

Aspiration: *What is my aim?*

In my first conversations with Nagaloka students, I would almost invariably be asked "what is your goal?" by my interlocuter. I told Niranjan, the owner of Nagaloka Enterprises, that my aim was to write my dissertation well and then get a teaching job at an American university. He crinkled his nose and shook his head and told me that I should work for society and take some time to volunteer to teach English in India. Vandana, a *dhammasekhiya* student from Gujarat, had a similar response to my academic dreams: "but how will you give back to society?" she asked me. Other students, however, shared my career-driven aims. During work duty Ravita and Akanksha from UP and Priyanka from Chhattisgarh shared their dreams with each other as they crouched down to clear weeds and leaves from the walkways by the Golden Buddha. Ravita wanted to join the Indian Police Service, Akanksha the Indian Administrative Service, and Priyanka wanted to be a Supreme Court judge. Leeta from Odisha told me that she only dreamed of being a professional dancer as we enjoyed boxed mango juice in front of a convenience store in the village of Bhilgaon. Baby from UP also had artistic ambitions. She hoped that her self-written songs about Babasaheb would bring her fame and fortune. After a visiting journalist came to Nagaloka and gave a talk, Samiksha from Madhya Pradesh, Lakshmi from UP and Julie from Odisha all told me that they dreamed of becoming journalists to spread awareness about issues within their communities.

After I left Nagaloka and began writing about students' aspirations, my progress was stalled by my curiosities about the next stages of their lives as they worked towards fulfilling their dreams. Did they achieve their aspirations? Would they ever? I wanted to know the continuations of the stories I had been told so that I could capture the full narrative of students' aspirations within my writing. When I reached out to students over the internet, I found out that

the burning ambitions that students held when I knew them had often been replaced with entirely new plans. Some aspirations were fulfilled, some had ended, but rarely did I encounter a student or alumna who spoke of failure. Therefore, in this chapter I retell pieces of life stories as journeys directed by aspiration. The aims of this chapter are threefold. First, I will discuss the term aspiration and its links to neoliberal ideals. While neoliberalism is the broad context in which aspirations function, its role in students' lives is ambivalent. Nagaloka students' aspirations are many and varied, some hope for middle class comforts, while others aim for artistic success, for social revolution, or for marriage with the one they chose to love. Aspirations are not necessarily aiming upward but can move in many directions. Second, I write against the unacknowledged pull I have observed in secondary literature to tell stories of aspiration in terms of success or failure. I will show that aspirations are heavily influenced by the places and people the aspirant meets along the journey. Changes and shifts in aspirations are not inherently failures. Finally, I propose that rather than as a means of judging the potential success or failure of a given person or community to ascend to the global middle class, aspiration is more useful as a way to understand how people and communities learn to navigate between boundation and *bindās*.

Aspiration – does it get us anywhere?

Aspire and its nominal form aspiration come from the Latin verb *aspīrāre* meaning "to breathe into or forth" and also, "to breathe desire towards" (Oxford English Dictionary). The English word aspiration retains the Latinate double meaning of the process of breathing and "a steadfast desire or longing for something" (OED). Similar to *prāṇa* in the Vedic world, in ancient Rome, breath or *spīritus* was synonymous with life. An aspiration is that which a person puts

their spirit into, that for which they desirously pant with tongues out, breathing hard. Distinct from ambition which is driven by a desire for recognition by others, and different from a hope, a wish, or a dream, aspiration depends on direction and effort: pouring life's breath towards the goal.

Setting an aspiration means planning a course for a journey. Oftentimes, aspirational maps are charted hastily over terrains that are largely unknown, leading to unexpected diversions that may change the journey irrevocably or add new focus to reaching the destination. The aspirant-traveler does not move through the world alone. While the aspirant patiently huffs and puffs towards her goal, she might catch a cross-breeze or some tailwind from the aspirations blown about by others around her. As Arjun Appadurai asserts, "aspirations are never simply individual," but are "formed in interaction and in the thick of social life" (2004: 67). Indeed, aspirations are formed out of a complex interplay of culture, community norms, the specificities of time and space, education and mentorship, and human passions and interests, among other things.

Aspiration is a concept tightly bound up with the global rise of neoliberalism and consumerism (van der Veer 2015: 4; Lukose 2009). Neoliberalism is an economic philosophy and related form of governmentality in which the values of individualism, entrepreneurialism, and market competition are enshrined (Ganti 2014: 94). The rise of neoliberalism as a governing philosophy across the world has led to increased global inequality, marginalization, dispossession, and disenfranchisement through the privatization of public resources, the gentrification of cities, and the reduction of social welfare (Ganti 2014: 94). Neoliberalism promotes the ideal of the self-possessed individual even as its processes diminish the vast majority of individuals' capacity to thrive. As the government takes a less active role in

providing resources to its citizens, the entrepreneurial and independent citizen is upheld as the ideal (Spohrer, Stahl & Bowers-Brown 2018: 329). From this perspective, aspiration becomes a tool of governing the citizenry: "Being 'aspirational', then, becomes the quality sine qua non of the ideal citizen-subject as an individual willing to strive towards (socially sanctioned) goals through continual self-improvement" (Spohrer, Stahl & Bowers-Brown 2018: 329).

In his essay "The Capacity to Aspire" (2004), Appadurai argues that: "The capacity to aspire is… a navigational capacity. The more privileged in any society simply have used the map of its norms to explore the future more frequently and more realistically, and to share this knowledge with one another more routinely than their poorer and weaker neighbors" (69). Appaduari is referring to the idea that the privileged in society have a more well-developed "navigational capacity" because they already benefit from the social norms upheld by neoliberalism. Those who are wealthy and socially secure meet little resistance working towards the socially sanctioned goals that tacitly uphold their own social standing. Appadurai's theorization of aspiration as "navigational capacity" is especially useful to think through how race, class, wealth, education, and morality interplay to create "horizons of aspirations" in a neoliberal world (Appadurai 2004: 69).

The increasing rise of individualism in the global spread of capitalism culminating in neoliberal governmentality, while representing an unattainable and in many ways damaging ideal, also has created movement and possibility within the social structure of caste. In his essay, "From Village to City: Hinduism and the 'Hindu Caste System'" Nathaniel Roberts (2015) provides insight into the way that city life and urbanism has provided slum-dwelling Tamil Dalits a sense of pride and self-possession even though they live in extreme poverty:

> To live in the city was to be 'modern' and 'educated,' a state they contrasted specifically with that of their country cousins. This had nothing to do with formal schooling. Many of these slum dwellers had no more than a third grade education, no better than their rural counterparts. What being 'educated' in fact meant to these urban Dalits was being casteless. This was not merely a matter of not believing in caste. Of course they knew that *jāti* categories correspond to no inherent differences among human beings… But all this was obvious; their country cousins knew it as well as they did. What being educated and modern signified, rather, was not a state of mind so much as a state of being, the state of being urban. (241-2)

The anonymity of city living, which is psychologically harmful in so many cases and does indeed contribute to the poverty of the Tamil slum-dwellers with whom Roberts works, also allows for the breakdown of inegalitarian caste structures. In the city, they could sit anywhere, live anywhere, talk to anyone without being known by their caste (Roberts 2015: 242). While of course their financial situation disallows them from actually living anywhere and talking to anyone, the possibility exists which is enough for them to feel they are a part of the modern world.

Furthermore, in the city, participating in Hinduism becomes a choice for Roberts' interlocuters rather than a conscription. He argues that "Dalits also bring a uniquely democratic sensibility to Hinduism" that challenges the "group-based morality that nationalist Hindus attempt to impose" (2015: 248). Roberts' work does the important job of incorporating the voices of arguably the most marginalized people in the city even when their opinions and views go against the perspective of mainstream scholarship. While it might be easy and perhaps trendy

to demonstrate how neoliberal values are contributing to the worsening living conditions of this population, Roberts' work honors the fact that his interlocuters are filled with hope.

It is undeniable that the aspirations of Nagaloka's students are influenced by individualism and are often thwarted by harsh neoliberal realities. I also want to honor the students by using this chapter to tell their stories as they told them to me. In the self-narration of their lives, aspiration serves as a north star, as a way for them to organize and make sense of their story. If aspiration is navigational capacity, for some it can be an ill-equipped life raft keeping them afloat. Nagaloka is a place that offers students a way to learn navigational skills so that they can pilot their raft. At Nagaloka, students can find a pathway to think of themselves in a global context, like the population in Roberts' study, even if they never leave their home state again after finishing their tenure in Nagpur.

Aspiration in South Asian Studies.

In scholarship on South Asia, aspiration is most commonly used as a key term to understand the rising middle class (Chua 2014, Fernandes & Heller 2006, Mathew 2018, Moodie 2015, Ortegren 2019, *forthcoming*; Zabiliute 2016). In their volume on India's middle class, Donner and De Neve (2011) note that "in contemporary India an ever-increasing number of citizens describe themselves as being 'middle-class'," even despite the fact that "even the most cursory glance at contemporary India reveals that the communities and individuals described as being middle-class in fact differ widely not only in terms of economic position and consumption practices but also in terms of status and values" (3). Donner and De Neve further argue that while the middle class is homogenizing through the ability of people from a widening array of backgrounds being able to participate in consumerism, the boundaries of middleclassness are

always blurry because the processes that set these limits are always mediated by caste, religion, and regionalism (2011: 7). In other words, the values and practices that are accepted as middle class are always contested because they are imported from various regional caste communities. For example, even while more and more people from low caste communities are able to participate in consumerism and acquire goods that provide them with social capital, the riots by upper caste people that followed the publication of the Mandal Commission Report which advocated for stronger measures to ensure that lower caste people receive affirmative action benefits, prove that the boundaries of the middle class extend beyond who can participate in the consumer economy (Donner & De Neve 2011: 4). The Indian middle class (and arguably the global middle class) is built on the belief that "privileges result from individual merit and hard work," which is why they fight so vociferously against affirmative action reservations (Donner & De Neve 2011: 4). Dalit, SC, ST, and OBC people all push at the boundaries of who is acceptable within the Indian middle class, proving that class does not negate caste but runs parallel to it.

Jocelyn Chua's study of middle-class Keralan youth suicides relies on the term aspiration. She argues that the gap between the widening aspirational horizons and young people's ability to reach them has resulted in a suicide crisis (2014:3). Jennifer Ortegren's study of ritual innovations among "aspirational middle class" women during *Gaṇeśa Caturthī* also focuses on the potential for these women's failure to rise in class status through the evaluation of their actions by their peers (2019: 62). In these cases, studies of aspiration hinge on success and failure of people's ability to fulfill their ambitions. Ortegren and Chua use aspiration as a way of discussing how and why people fail to meet the benchmark of gatekeepers who they hope will accept them into a new higher-classed social group. The ideal of the middle-class remains at the

center as the studies either tell the stories of lower-class people hoping to join the middle-class or middle-class people aiming to globalize. I argue that these studies focus on success or failure as the centerpiece of a person's aspirational story, a trope that I would like to draw attention to and avoid in my own work.

I want to emphasize that readjusted aspirations are not failures, as the examples I will provide demonstrate. However, I must also mention that learning to balance aspirations between boundation and *bindās* is a vital skill. I was told many stories of young people's suicide by the students. At times it seemed as though almost every student knew another young person who had committed suicide. While Jocelyn Chua's (2014) study points out that advantaged youths gain more attention for their suicides, self-harm due to failed hopes are not restricted to the middle classes. Especially in the wake of Rohith Vemula's extremely publicized suicide which is considered institutional murder by many (Teltumbde 2016; Hegde 2016), preventing suicides of young members of disadvantaged classes was a topic much discussed on Nagaloka's campus both in community forums and in private conversations. Vemula was an active and public member of the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) on Hyderabad Central University's campus (Rao 2016: 223). After an altercation between the ASA and the campus student wing of the BJP at an ASA protest of the censorship of a film that revealed violence against Muslims in a north Indian town, the ASA activists were suspended from the university, meaning that the disbursement of their stipends was also suspended, they were barred from public university spaces, and evicted from their hostels (Rao 2016: 223). The blame for this harsh treatment of Vemula is placed at the feet of the university's vice chancellor Appa Rao Podile who was encouraged by a Hyderabadi federal BJP minister, Bandaru Dattatreya, to stamp out the "casteist, extremist and anti-national politics" of the ASA (Teltumbde 2016; Rao 2016: 223). In short,

Vemula's dreams and his research at the university were destroyed because he opposed the politics of the ruling party of India and because he was a proudly self-identified Ambedkarite.

The importance of organizations like Nagaloka which is making a conscious effort to give students tools to navigate society and to link them with organizations which will provide them support in their academic endeavors, is evident in light of the stakes of the pressure that young ST, SC, and OBC students feel in government-run institutions. As I will discuss in the examples I provide, Nagaloka often gives alumni and students who have no other options a safe place to regroup and a community to rely upon while they enter potentially unsafe territory.

Megan Moodie's *We Were Adivasis: Aspiration in an Indian Scheduled Tribe* (2015), approaches aspiration from a different perspective than many other studies by discussing the collective aspirations of the Rajasthani Dhanka community who are classified as a Scheduled Tribe. She frames her arguments about the Dhanka people's vision for their community's future using "collective aspiration as a kind of general term to describe practices and dispositions cultivated as part of striving for upward mobility and social uplift" (33). She argues that framing her stories around collective aspiration avoids the "familiar narrative about a group's 'arrival' – in modernity, in the middle class, or in consumerist culture" (34). Of course, the community is already a part of a nation and society that is shaped by all of these forces even though they are discursively excluded from them. Instead, Moodie focuses on the community's choices for how they incorporate or reject mainstream middle-class values. Their goal is not to become middle class, but to expand the possible life pathways for their children while maintaining their own cultural identity.

I appreciate Moodie's attempt to open aspiration to horizons beyond modernity and the middle class and focus on the specific visions of the community. In my study of young Dalits, I

found that aspiration is better understood if delinked from the notion of 'upward' motion altogether. Young people's aspirations move in every direction – sometimes in two contradictory directions at once. At Nagaloka, students are given space and encouragement to aspire against the grain of consumer culture and middle-class values, even as many students continue to work towards more mainstream goals. One of the questions I brought to Nagaloka was about whether and in what ways the organization could help students fulfill their aspirations. My assumptions about what these aspirations would look like – good jobs, social respectability, and access to global networks – were shaped by academic discourses about the Indian middle class. What I found was that students' aspirations rarely fit a mold that I expected and were much more malleable than studies of aspiration usually depict. While as in Moodie's study, some students felt the boundation of their family and community's expectations on their aspirations, others felt the *bindās*, the freedom described by Roberts' (2015) interlocuters that they could escape caste and community and be themselves.

I will now tell some of the student and alumni stories that I was told at Nagaloka. It is my intention that these stories will demonstrate that while students' lives are certainly shaped by the social realities of neoliberalism and caste discrimination, they are able to use their aspirations to navigate a path for themselves, and sometimes their communities by extension, that affords them a feeling of dignity and self-respect. These stories demonstrate that the capacity to aspire is about learning to respond to and navigate through boundations to attain a feeling of *bindās*. *Bindās* is not the same as individualism, but rather a feeling that comes from empowerment and respect.

Samiksha M., from Madhya Pradesh

I first met Samiksha in August 2016 when I visited Nagaloka during my preliminary fieldwork. She had arrived at Nagaloka about a month earlier to begin her Bachelor's program there. My impressions of her then were that she was a somewhat shy, studious girl who was incredibly intelligent. I bonded with her at that time because I had come to Nagaloka fresh from a Marathi language course. I was having difficulty switching back to communicating in Hindi after my Marathi immersion and Samiksha was one of the few students whose mother-tongue was Marathi. Her village was in Madhya Pradesh close to the Maharashtrian border. At that time, we communicated primarily in Marathi, but also in English which she spoke well but without much confidence.

I attended one of Maiske Sir's classes with Samiksha. He discussed social systems and compared and contrasted India and the US – his main goal was for the students to understand the endemic nature of Brahminical social domination. While some students lacked the patience to pay attention to Maiske Sir's serious lectures,[66] Samiksha was very thoughtful after class. She expressed to me her concern and doubt about whether SC people would ever be able to change their situation considering the amount of power that Brahmins hold despite making up such a small percentage of the Indian population. Samiksha was shocked that she had never heard about Babasaheb in school, especially when she found out that he was born in her home-state of Madhya Pradesh.[67] She told me that during Independence Day celebrations at school, everyone would give speeches about Gandhi – all her peers knew so much about Gandhi, but so little about Ambedkar who was the author of the constitution and a Marathi speaker like them.

[66] After this particular class session, one of the other *dhammasekhiya* students told me she was a bit confused by the lecture. "Are Brahmins SC?" she asked me. From comments like this it is clear that the students' background with social activism varied widely.

[67] Ambedkar's family was from Ratnagiri in Maharashtra, but his father's employment in the British Indian Army brought the family to Mhow, Madhya Pradesh where he was born.

When I returned to Nagaloka a year later, Samiksha was a second-year Bachelors' student. I was impressed by both her raised confidence and her improved English skills. She told me that she read the Hindi-English dictionary every night to improve her vocabulary. One night in December after dinner we were walking around outside before meditation. Samiksha pulled a piece of paper out of her pocket and showed it to me. The handwritten heading read: "The Modern Alphabet." In a grid she had written all the letters of the alphabet with a corresponding word, for instance: "A – Ambedkar, B – Buddha, C – Compassion, D – Dhamma," and so on. She wrote in the bottom corner "By a Human Being." She told me that she wanted to paste it on the foot of the Walking Buddha statue. We clandestinely walked up to visit the statue and she pulled out some adhesive putty. I stood guard while she affixed her acrostic to the statue. I couldn't imagine the shy Samiksha I had met during her first year posting "The Modern Alphabet" by the feet of the Buddha. While her sign of off "by a Human Being" was foremost a way to anonymize what she considered to be a slightly rebellious act that could potentially result in punishment, it still marked a pride and confidence in herself. She might have simply not signed the document, instead she declared her humanity without caste, religion, gender, region, or age. Her time studying at Nagaloka had made her bolder and had helped to clarify her ideas about modernity and its importance to her. Buddhism, Ambedkar's thought, equality, humanity, and English language were all a part of her vision of modernity. She used these tools of modernity that she learned at Nagaloka to help choose the direction of her aspirations.

One day after lunch Samiksha and I were walking around the campus. She told me that one of her female teachers had come to campus with a limp. The teacher told the students that she had an accident on her Scooty,[68] but Samiksha knew that she had been beaten by her

[68] An electric scooter which is a very popular vehicle for working women to operate rather than a motorcycle or car. They are less expensive than the other two vehicles and are less powerful and fast.

husband. Her husband had a suspicious mind, Samiksha said, by which she meant that he didn't trust his wife easily and blamed her for things out of her control. Samiksha understood this because her father also has a suspicious mind. She explained that some men become suspicious and angry after they drink, but her father had a suspicious personality without drink. It was even more dangerous because it was his nature, which she argued, could be changed much less easily than alcoholism. She told me that she could not ask me to come visit her home because I would not be comfortable there. A wall of their family home had collapsed, and her father had not yet tried to repair it. When she went home, he always asked her for money, but he didn't know or really care how she was supporting herself or what she had been doing. Growing up, she and her sister were always afraid of him and afraid of what would happen when he came home. Finally, the two girls had moved in with a Nagpur-dwelling relative to finish high school out of the reach of his violence and anger. Without any other options, she turned to Nagaloka for her BA. Her first aspirations were to find a safe place. That took her to Nagpur and then to Nagaloka where she learned that she could aim for more.

When another student was having doubts about Nagaloka and meditation, her peers told her to speak to Samiksha. They talked all night about the Ambedkarite movement and Buddhism and the doubtful student felt assured and inspired after their conversation. Samiksha was friends with many different students. She told me that she was frustrated by other students' reluctance to become friends with students from other states. She often expressed to me that even though she sometimes felt restricted by Nagaloka's rules, she was certain that they were there for the benefit of the students. She trusted that the administrators and teachers had their best interests in mind. The only exception to this were the girls' hostel wardens who Samiksha distrusted like most of

the other students. The structure that other students felt as boundation offered Samiksha a safe place to learn, to reflect, and to aspire.

Samiksha did some work at Nagaloka during her studies to help her earn some money to buy necessities since her family was unable, and perhaps unwilling, to provide for her. As a Marathi and English speaker, she was well employed assisting Priti, a *dhammasekhiya* alumna, who managed functions, guests, and the rental of hostel rooms by outsiders at Nagaloka. Samiksha told me that she didn't feel good if she didn't keep busy. This work often kept her from participating in nighttime meditation sessions which didn't seem to bother her much. Working provided her with some financial security, but also solidified her relationships with the administrators at Nagaloka. Like other students with unstable home situations, her feeling of acceptance by Nagaloka's staff and administration helped to make the campus a home for her.

During the holiday at the end of the semester, Samiksha decided to accompany me on my trip to Odisha to visit some recent alumnae. She told me that she had never experienced caste before. In her village, everyone was SC so she had never really thought about caste much. However, she also told me that in school she had usually signed her papers merely Samiksha M., so people would not be able to identify her caste by her surname. She had heard so many stories about casteism from the Odishi students, and so she told me she wanted the chance to experience it herself. She also wanted the chance to visit the dam at Hirakud that they had studied in class. They were taught that this dam was built on Ambedkar's plan. Samiksha, some other Odishi students who lived a train ride away from the dam, and I visited the place together. It was tourism but also a kind of pilgrimage to a place associated with Ambedkar. We missed the express train to Hirakud, at which point, I suggested that we cancel the trip altogether as I wasn't sure I could manage two five-hour train rides and sightseeing in the summer heat. All of my

companions insisted on going despite the inconvenience. To my knowledge, Samiksha did not experience any blatant casteism on her trip to Odisha, but she did feel proud and inspired by Ambedkar's vision that she witnessed on our trip to the Hirakud Dam.

In 2019, Samiksha completed her BA at Nagaloka. She and four other Nagaloka students took an exam and earned full scholarships from the International Buddhist College in Thailand where they are enrolled in an MA program in Buddhist Studies. She was able to gain this opportunity due to Lokamitra's work at International Engaged Buddhism conferences. He impressed some Malayasian Buddhist monks at such an event and, motivated by a desire to spread Buddhism among youth to ensure the survival of the religion, they offered to provide scholarships to this institution to five Nagaloka students per year. Only students who were proficient in English were eligible to earn the scholarship, so Samiksha's self-study was crucial to her ability to take advantage of this opportunity. Without the resources, stability, and community that she gained at Nagaloka, she would not have been able to prepare for this opportunity.

During her second year of studies of her BA, Samiksha expressed an interest in becoming a journalist. She asked me for guidance, hoping that I would have a clearer vision of how she could accomplish this goal. I bought her some books on journalism that she could study, but she worried that since she had a BA in Buddhist Studies, she wouldn't be able to gain admission to an MA in Journalism. She thought that it was important for more SC people to become journalists so that the news was more accurately reported with less bias. In February 2020 in a conversation with Samiksha over Facebook Messenger, she told me she wasn't sure if she still wanted to pursue journalism. In Thailand she is studying Buddhism and Chinese language so she thinks maybe she will try to do something with this. From feeling frightened in her village, to

taking the best opportunity she had to pursue higher education at Nagaloka, to traveling abroad to earn an MA, Samiksha ended up being pushed by her aspirations to places she never imagined. One way to narrate her story could be that her choices were few and she was carried along a narrow path with little agency, but this was not the story she told about herself nor representative of the strong-willed, kind-hearted, and sharply intelligent young woman I knew. Samiksha aspired to knowledge and security and her time at Nagaloka greatly helped her to get on a track to follow these aspirations. At Nagaloka Samiksha also began to value Buddhism, modernity, and social justice, and she gained a new *ādarś* (ideal) in Ambedkar. These new values helped her to chart the course of her aspirations.

Phulari from Arunachal Pradesh

Nagaloka helps program alumni to fulfill educational aspirations beyond the completion of the BA or *dhammasekhiya* program that they provide on campus. Alumni were often able to secure safe housing on campus at low or no cost if they were enrolled in postgraduate programs at Nagpur University. One such student was Phulari from Arunachal Pradesh. She was pursuing a Master of Social Work degree at Nagpur University and living in a shared room with other alumnae from Arunachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in one of the smaller rooms in the girls' hostel. Phulari told me that her parents always supported her and let her travel freely even though the distance between Nagaloka and home was so far.[69] She said they think that if it's her time to die, then she will die and if not then she won't, so they can't stop her from living her life as she wishes to live it. Her father had lost his job after being burned in an accident and couldn't work. Therefore, her family could not support her financially at all, but she appreciated their emotional

[69] The distance between Nagpur and Arunachal Pradesh's capital city Itanagar is over 2,100 kilometers. The distance takes over two days to traverse by train.

support. Many Indian families, even those who had children enrolled at Nagaloka, were not so willing to allow their daughters to travel on their own. The kinds of freedoms that Phulari enjoyed were often the result of hard-fought battles between daughters and their parents, but of course the financial stress her family was under probably contributed to their willingness to allow Phulari to travel for educational and occupational opportunities. Like the other students from Arunachal Pradesh, Phulari was a part of the Chakma tribal community.

Initially after Phulari completed her studies at Nagaloka, she wanted to teach children, but the pay for the job she found was only 1500 INR[70] per month, so she declined it. Another Nagaloka alumna from Arunachal Pradesh, called Phulari and told her she could come back to Nagaloka to stay while she completed an MSW at Nagpur University in exchange for some work on campus. Phulari's time at Nagaloka had inspired her to want to work for society in some way, but she also needed to find a way to make sufficient income to support herself. She hoped that furthering her education would help to open more doors for her to find a job that met these requirements.

[70] 1500 INR is about 20 USD.

Figure 10: Phulari and I on Nagaloka's campus

Phulari thought that life at Nagaloka was a little boring – it was always the same every day and people always said the same thing over and over. For instance, every time there was a program or speakers they would talk about liberty, equality, and fraternity over and over. She thought that a lot of these people would say much more than they do, especially when it came to equality. She noticed that the people who organized the alumni programs[71] would often invite speakers from JNU and HCU[72], but they didn't generally invite people from smaller state universities even though most of Nagaloka's alumni studied at such places.

[71] The alumni programs were usually organized by a small group of alumni from across India that the administration had targeted for their interest in Nagaloka and it's work.

[72] JNU is Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi and HCU is Hyderabad Central University. Both of these universities are among the top institutions in India and are central or national level universities. Nagpur University is not a central university, but a state university. There are only 20 central universities in India – they are established

She did appreciate aspects of living at Nagaloka, however. She appreciated the sense of belonging and community she felt there because she felt alienated at her university. She found it difficult to connect with people in her university classes because they would ask her so many stupid questions. As a woman from Arunachal Pradesh in Northeastern India, she looked different from other people from mainland India and often faced people's ignorance and stereotypes. She said the only way she could deal with these kinds of problems was through meditation. She told me that she was impressed that I was able to adjust to life at Nagaloka so quickly and easily. When she first came to study there, she didn't speak to some girls because they had dark skin – she practiced some racism, she admitted.[73] But eventually she realized that they also weren't trying to talk to her because they thought that she didn't speak Hindi. One girl who she thought was very dark and she didn't like at all, has now become one of her best friends. There are opportunities to learn so many languages at Nagaloka by talking to many different people, but she thought that most students don't take advantage of this opportunity. Phulari had helped the new group of Chakma students to make the long journey to Nagaloka. She regretted

by an act of Parliament. They receive more funding from the federal government and are therefore more competitive than state universities.

[73] Phulari here told me that she practiced some "racism," which we could take in two ways. In the first, she sees herself as a northeastern Indian as a different race than mainland Indians. In the second, she is actually practicing something more akin to "colorism" or the practice of discriminating based on the shade of a person's skin tone. Both of these forms of discrimination are common in India and are linked although not entirely equivalent. The Aryan race theory, which was promoted by the British colonizers in 1816, argued that lighter-skinned invaders entered India, bringing their Indo-European language and culture with them, pushing the Dravidian natives who spoke Tamil and supposedly had darker skin into southern India (Anand 2013: 168-9). Some north Indians do see themselves as racially superior to Tamil-Dravidian Indians in the South due to this racial schematization. However, many mainland north Indians also see themselves as racially superior to northeastern Indians like Phulari even though she has a fairer skin tone than many mainland north Indians. I interpreted Phulari's mention of practicing "racism" as referring to a practice of colorism which is a much more common and everyday kind of discrimination practiced throughout India. The relative fairness or darkness of a person determines their marriage prospects, for example. Darker complexioned men and women both struggle to gain a marriage partner and face much more discrimination and criticism based on their looks. Before a child is born, people will discuss how fair or dark the child is likely to be. Being too fair is also bad. For example, Euro-Americans (like me) often face criticism for their ugly hair color and are told to die it black. African and people with African heritage face extreme discrimination on the basis of their color. For example, one American woman with whom I was taking a Hindi class was asked why her skin was not striped when she told a rickshaw driver that her mother was white and her father was black. In any case, both racism and colorism are practiced in India and while they are linked there are some divergences.

that she had little time between her studies to get to know them. Phulari told me that she doesn't want one vision of success. She wants to try to be good at many different things, therefore she will definitely be successful. This was an interesting approach to the issue of aspiration. She built in many different opportunities for success so that if she met with more boundations, she could still overcome them.

Phulari's aspirations were driven by her need to find a way to support herself financially, but as with Samiksha, her experiences at Nagaloka lead her to develop new values that would help to direct her course. Phulari adopted a cosmopolitan way of thinking after spending time immersed in the campus culture. She began to value the opportunity that living at Nagaloka gave to learn about many local Indian cultures and languages. Perhaps her not so pleasant experiences in the more homogenous Nagpur University culture further instilled an appreciation for living in a multi-cultural community. Phulari's choice to get an Masters of Social Work and her desire to teach children also reflect her aim to give back to society and make a difference. While these careers do not generally lead to high salaries, the Nagaloka community has helped to support her as she works to achieve independence. Even though Phulari struggles with finances, Nagaloka has helped her to build a set of ethical principles and supported her enough for her to be able to live by them.

Rekha from Odisha

Rekha was another student I met during my first visit to Nagaloka. She was close to me in age and therefore older than most of the student body. In 2017, her sister Sonika and her cousin-sister[74] Hemlata also joined her at Nagaloka to earn their BA. Their whole family

[74] A cousin-sister is a female cousin in the paternal line who is usually raised in the same living compound or village as the relative in question. For example, in this case, Hemlata was Rekha's father's younger brother's daughter who

practices Buddhism now, although during their childhood the family was Hindu. Rekha's elder brother, the oldest son of the extended family, learned about Ambedkar and Buddhism and brought these ideas into the home and they were gradually accepted by everyone. The rooms of the house where the oldest brother, his wife and baby lived were painted with a wedding announcement adorned with an image of the Buddha. I stayed three nights at Rekha's family home in Titilagarh, in Western Odisha. Depending on who I asked, there was an estimate of between 50-200 households in her village, many of them made up of her family members. The nearest village is made up of people belonging to OBC castes. Their village has electricity, but in the summer it often cuts. Rekha's *bhābhī*[75] (sister-in-law) implored me to write about how in the heat of summer the family often didn't have access to water from their well and the tankers came too infrequently, leaving them for days without water. There were no "toilet bathrooms" in the village, or in other words, no toilets.[76]

Rekha was a kind and responsible girl. During the second year of her BA she was an assistant warden and often lead meditation classes as part of her duties. Her friendly nature made it difficult for her to control the chattering students as they would not usually take her scolding seriously. She was generally well loved and looked up to by her peers.

grew up in a neighboring house on the same plot of land as Rekha's home. All these children are raised together more or less as siblings. Hemlata called Rekha's father her *baḍe papa* or elder father. This way of conceiving of familial relationships is extremely common across northern India.

[75] *Bhābhī* is a colloquial term for sister-in-law or specifically, brother's wife.

[76] A "toilet bathroom" is used to refer to a bathroom that houses a toilet of any variety. In Rekha's village, everyone defecated outdoors. Women could urinate in the bathroom which also was used for bathing. For more information about toilet bathrooms and the recent politicization of toilets and its links to caste, I refer you to *Where India Goes* by Diane Coffey and Dean Spears. Delhi: Harper Collins, 2017.

Figure 11: Rekha at the Hirakud Dam in Odisha

As age-mates, Rekha and I sometimes talked about love problems. Rekha had a boyfriend back home in her village in Odisha. She always referred to him as her "BF," short for boyfriend. At twenty-six, marriage was on her mind. She told me that a person simply must get married by thirty and that she was going to fix her marriage as soon as she was done with her BA at Nagaloka. After her marriage, she planned to continue onto her MA. Rekha's BF was two years younger than her and had a job at the railways. Her family liked him, but they didn't always approve of his family – his father drank a lot and spoke roughly. According to Rekha, her BF did not have any bad habits like smoking or drinking and was a good Buddhist. She encouraged me to also find a *dhamma*-practicing boy to marry. I explained to her the reasons for one of my

previous break-ups which she found unsatisfactory – physical distance and growing apart should be no barrier to real love. At the time of this conversation, her BF was angry with her because she could not take time away from school to attend his uncle's wedding. This was causing her some distress because he was refusing to talk with her.

Before coming to Nagaloka, Rekha had been enrolled in a BA program but was having trouble passing and focusing on coursework because of personal issues she was having with a previous boyfriend. She had dropped out and taken some time away from her studies, which was why she was a bit older than the average BA student in India. At that time, she told me, she was not as invested in Buddhism and had less focus. She decided to come to Nagaloka for the opportunity to finish her BA. She was benefitting from the structure and rules that Nagaloka provided her – they allowed her to develop a stronger sense of her aspirations.

As of summer of 2019, I heard that Rekha finished her BA program at Nagaloka and was arranging her marriage to her BF. I had visited her boyfriend's home during my stay in Titilagarh and I could understand her family's concerns about his family. I also worried for her and wondered if her plan of pursuing an MA would come to fruition. One benefit of this marriage was that she would not have to maintain any distance from her natal home if they persisted in the usual custom of her moving into her husband's family home. I found the relationship between Rekha and her BF to be unique among the students I met. The fact that both her and boyfriend's families were aware and accepting of their relationship and choice to marry each other was not a circumstance that many Indian youths enjoyed. It is also unusual for a woman to marry a man who was younger than her and it is quite rare to marry someone from her own village.

Throughout her life, Rekha aspired to love. She had spoiled her first chance at a BA due to her emotional entanglements with a less than suitable boyfriend. Her life shifted course after

she began to take Buddhism more seriously and re-committed to her education. Nagaloka gave her a chance to strengthen her Buddhist foundation and gain her qualifications even though she was a non-traditional Indian BA student. With the confidence she gained from her education at Nagaloka, Rekha continued to aspire for love, but she required different things from her partner. She emphasized to me the importance of her BF's strong Ambedkarite Buddhist values. These values meant that he would allow her to continue their education even after their marriage. I would guess that his Buddhist values also made the rather unorthodox marriage possible. Rekha's family valued Ambedkar's call to educate and adopt Buddhism, so they accepted their daughter's choice of a young man who was Buddhist and would allow her to pursue her education further. His government railways job also ensured that they would have a reliable income. Rekha's parents' support of her relationship allowed her to be open and honest in areas that other young Indians cannot be and helped her to make sure she did not let her relationship compromise her education as it had done in the past. For example, even though Rekha was extremely distressed that her boyfriend was angry with her because she was not able to attend his uncle's funeral, she felt a moral imperative to obey the rules of Nagaloka and to respect her parents' wishes that she pursue her studies. Nagaloka helped Rekha to solidify her understanding of strong Buddhist values which in turn taught her to prioritize her own education and discipline over emotion.

Smriti from Uttar Pradesh

Smriti was a bold and outspoken young woman. She was always fastidious with her appearance and enjoyed wearing the latest fashions, which was a big part of her reputation at Nagaloka. Of all the students, she was the most clear participant in consumer culture and used

clothing and fashion to demonstrate her middle-class status. She was the only sister of five children with two older brothers and two younger. She lived in her family home in Lucknow with her mother, father, eldest brother and his wife, and her two younger brothers. Her second eldest brother, Rahul, was earning a graduate degree in agriculture at a university in Kanpur. Smriti was completing a BA at a nearby university in Lucknow but was having trouble passing some of her exams. Her advancing age (she was 22) was encouraging her parents to begin arranging her marriage. Smriti wished to remain single, so her brother Rahul supported her to take admission in Nagaloka's *dhammasekhiya* program.

Rahul had always been the rebellious one in the family. When I visited their family home in April 2018, he told me about how he used to sleep in the train station after having brutal arguments with his father over his career path and political views. Their father was a pharmacist and had earned a middle-class lifestyle for his family. As a young man, Rahul learned about Ambedkar and wanted to become a Buddhist and get involved in anti-caste activism. Their father was upset by this and wished the family to remain Hindu. At first, he also did not support Rahul's dreams of working as an agricultural scientist. Rahul was working on research to try to alleviate rural poverty by developing soilless sod with which landless families could feed buffalos and other similar projects. His father did not think that such idealistic goals would help his son earn a satisfactory living.

Rahul was Smriti's biggest support in her family. Their eldest brother had married, sold off all the land he had gotten in his dowry, and was presently unemployed and totally dependent on his father. On the other hand, Rahul's career risks seemed to be paying off. When I met the family, tensions had cooled down and their father was coming around to support Rahul's ambitions. I went with the family to Mayawati's Ambedkar Park on Ambedkar Jayanti

(Ambedkar's birth anniversary)[77] – it was the first time that either Smriti's father or eldest brother had ever been there despite living nearby. They also accompanied Rahul, Smriti and I to a Buddhist celebration in Maal, a village just outside of Lucknow. Rahul and Smriti were pleased that their father was finally assenting to their participation in such events, never mind that he was also coming along and trying to understand their perspective on religion and social issues.

Rahul loved Smriti and wanted to support her in any way he could. He told me that he thought she was a very good girl with a kind heart. He had encouraged her to go to Nagaloka to broaden her mind and get some new experiences. She loved her brother for his belief in her and for his constant efforts to help her. When she was at Nagaloka, Rahul had come to visit Smriti. She was extremely proud of him and introduced him to all her best friends. He taught them about his agricultural research and about in-home mushroom cultivation by which women can make a profit without leaving home. One of the wardens was especially inspired by this information and later tried to encourage some of the students to go into the mushroom business with her.

I knew Smriti to be a genuinely kind and caring person, but she struggled at Nagaloka with her temper. Her peers considered her rude because of her brash, off-handed remarks. As I described in Chapter 2, her close friendship with Neha broke up because of Smriti's thoughtless words said in anger. Once on Sunday while I sat with some girls playing carrom[78] in the hostel, Smriti came up the stairs telling someone to look at the new clothes she had bought. Another girl with whom I was playing the game rolled her eyes and made a comment under her breath about

[77] Mayawati was the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1995, 1997, 2002-3 and 2007-2012. She represented the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which is an Ambedkarite party founded by Kanshi Ram in 1984. Mayawati was Kanshi Ram's self-appointed successor. The party aims to unite the interests of OBC and SC people who represent the majority of India. Mayawati's construction of Ambedkar Park was incredibly controversial in UP. She used public funds to build the 108-acre memorial to Dalit-Bahujan heroes like Ambedkar and the Phules. For more information see: Bose, M.B. 2017. "A Modern Chakrabartin: Mayawati's New Buddhist Visual Culture;" Jaoul, N. 2006. "Learning the use of symbolic means: Dalits, Ambedkar statues and the state in Uttar Pradesh;" and Sinha, A. & Kant, R. 2015. "Mayawati and memorial parks in Lucknow, India: landscapes of empowerment."

[78] An Indian board game, similar to pool but on a small scale played with fingers and sliding disks.

how Smriti came home with new clothes every Sunday. I never knew Smriti to be a particularly studious person, but she had plenty of strong opinions and ideas that she developed through lively conversations and attention to those she respected. Some of her ideas were influenced by her brother Rahul, but she was open to discussion with students on campus who had similar interests in working for society. While she cultivated a middle-class identity with her fashions, this did not stop her from developing close friendships with students from various financial backgrounds. I went with Smriti to visit another student, Vandana, at her home in Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh where there was neither toilet, nor electricity, nor barely any proper road to take us there. Smriti was extremely close friends with Vandana and while we visited her home, she helped her prepare lunch for the guests and discussed social issues and their plans for the future. When we left, Smriti told me that even though Vandana's family were poor, they were big in heart. She loved Vandana and hoped that they could work together to improve society. When it came to commitment to bettering society, Smriti did not condescend to Vandana despite their disparate financial situations, but saw her as a partner.

Figure 12: Smriti passionately discussing social issues with a woman in Sitapur, UP

Meditation and the kind of Buddhism that was taught to the students at Nagaloka did not seem to appeal to Smriti. For her, influenced by her brother Rahul, Buddhism was all about social justice and change. While we were at Nagaloka she boldly criticized Hindu traditions for their *andhaviśvās* or blind belief. At her home, however, she showed me photos of her mother performing *pūjā* on the car her sister-in-law brought to the family on her marriage without criticism. It was much easier for her to abstractly criticize Hindu practices as *andhaviśvās* than to disrespect the actions of her beloved and devoted mother. I would not have seen Smriti's

ambivalence on these issues if I had not been able to visit her home. Her mother worked tirelessly to keep the family home in order and to care for all her children. At the end of the day after she had cooked all their meals, she would clear off the kitchen workspace and make her bed there. Smriti valued her brother's support and worldview because of the freedom and her potential to contribute positively to society that it provided, but she was nevertheless respectful and cognizant of all the hardship her mother endured. When I was staying at her home, Smriti asked me what kinds of clothes my mother wore. I told her that my mother and I dressed in a similar way – jeans-top.[79] She pointed out to me that her mother always wore *sāṛī* and was very traditional. I noticed that Smriti's sister in law always wore a *sāṛī* as well. Smriti's attention to fashion sometimes irked her peers at Nagaloka, but after visiting her home, I understood that it marked her desire to not fall into what she understood to be traditional married women's roles.

In 2019 Smriti began a BA program at Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University in Chinese. She told me that she is studying Chinese to help to expand her brother Rahul's business. Rahul has begun giving training sessions in hydroponics across India and he hopes to also offer training in China which is why he is supporting his sister's education. Smriti also informed me that her friend Neha from Nagaloka also hopes to work for her brother Rahul's hydroponic training business. The two siblings are supporting each other and other young women to live a life with more financial independence than their own mother had.

Smriti's background differed from many of the students in the 16th batch. While there were other young women from middle class backgrounds, it was most often the case that their parents were already Buddhist and involved in the Ambedkarite movement. For instance,

[79] The young Indian women I met usually referred to the globalized American-inspired dress style as jeans-top, modeling the phrase after the more recognizably Indian top and bottom dress sets like *kurtā-pajāmā*, *salwār-kamīz*, *lehengā-cholī*, etc.

siblings Rani and Rahul from Rajasthan's father was a politician in the Bahujan Samaj Party and Vandana from Gujarat's father was a judge who was a devoted follower of Ambedkar. Unlike these other middle-class peers, Smriti's aspired to a new way of life, different than that of the women in her family. Her brother's philosophy, inspired by Buddhism and Ambekdar, lead him to encourage his sister to get education and to live a life that pushed the boundaries of their parents' expectations for her. His growing financial and business success has allowed him to support her in these aspirations. Nagaloka offered Smriti a sense of community with other young women who valued education over marriage, but it also offered her a way to demonstrate to her parents that she wasn't done with single life yet. Smriti remains close with many of the Nagaloka students, especially those from the Lucknow area, and to the time that I am writing she remains single.

Baby from Uttar Pradesh

When I first met Baby, she told me that she wanted to learn English and to be a professional singer. Any time we would find ourselves walking together, she would try to practice speaking English with me. She would attempt to memorize whole English phrases and repeat them back to me. I tried to break down the words to help her understand them better before she spoke, but she was impatient to learn whole sentences. My inexpert English teaching skills did not match her eagerness to learn quickly and our conversations would inevitably revert to Hindi.

Baby's singing voice was not especially melodious although her songwriting skills were impressive, at least to me. She wrote two or three original songs about Ambedkar in Hindi that she would perform any time she got the chance. She sang at birthday parties in the girls' hostel,

during holiday talent shows, or when prominent guests came to visit. She sang to me as we would walk around the campus after dinner, telling me about her wish to be a famous singer. Her peers, craving novelty and a sweet Bollywood-esque singing voice, eventually had little patience for her performances.

Baby was an exceedingly small young woman, less than five feet tall and thin and wiry. When she came to Nagaloka, Baby had shoulder length brown hair. About three months into her first year of her BA, she chopped it into a "boy cut"[80] close to her head. Baby tended to wear slightly more masculine styles of clothing like plaid shirts with collars and aviator sunglasses, and after her haircut she was often referred to as the boyfriend of whoever she was walking with. She was prone to fits of melancholy and was often seen walking by herself. One student told me that it was due to jealousy because one of her close friends was spending time with other girls, but I only heard this from one source and not from Baby directly. Once she told me that she was sad because she was thinking of her mother having to manage all the housework, like caring for the buffalo, without her help.

In discussion group during a *shivir*, Baby explained that a big motivating factor in her decision to come to Nagaloka with her brother was that her family was pressuring her to get married. She was 21 years old, but she wasn't interested in marriage. During this discussion, she also talked about her experiences with casteism in her village in Etawah, in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Some boys from another caste tried to intimidate her and she beat them with a stick until they ran away. I was impressed that a girl of such small stature could intimidate a group of boys. The other girls in her group were amused by the story, but lightly chastised her for her

[80] The other students at Nagaloka referred to any girl's haircut that went above the ears as a boy cut.

aggression. While it was clear that she was valuing her time at Nagaloka and taking the Buddhist practices she learned very seriously, she also worried about her family at home.

While Baby was very friendly, kind, and well-liked by her peers, she was also quite a serious person. She always meditated earnestly and came on time to every meditation session. She was among the very few students who took *maun* (silence) seriously at night and during *śivir*. I saw from photos shared by a Nagaloka community member on Facebook that Baby became a *dhammamitra*[81] in a ceremony on Nagaloka's campus on *Buddha Pūrṇimā*[82] in May 2019 just after completing her second year of her BA. There was only one other second year female student who participated in this ceremony, the other five were third years. Students are by no means pressured to become *dhammamitra* by their *dhammacari* teachers. They are always offered the option to participate in Triratna activities and events, but the community is not interested in having members who are not dedicated to the practice.

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown in India, all the 16th batch BA students were unable to complete their final BA examinations. Like the others, Baby had to go home with exams postponed. When I spoke with her in May 2020 over What'sApp, she told me that she planned to pursue an MA in Buddhism at Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University in Wardha since that is also the subject of her BA.

Baby's aspirations went in many different directions, but as her time at Nagaloka progressed, she focused on pursuing education and dedicating herself to Buddhist practice. Baby clearly loved her family and village life, but she aspired to a life different than those of most young women in her village. At Nagaloka she was able to develop her contemplative and serious

[81] Friend of the *dhamma*. This is the first phase of joining the Triratna Buddhist Community and showing commitment to the Buddhist path. The initiates publicly declare that they take refuge in the three jewels.
[82] *Buddha Pūrṇimā,* also known as the Vesak moon, is a full moon holiday that commemorates the birth of the Buddha. Usually falls in May or April.

nature by learning about Buddhist ideas, history, and practices. Nagaloka's openness to supporting young women's desire to fulfill educational aspirations before taking on the responsibilities of marriage was just the kind of community that Baby sought. In Baby's case it was not that her family thought she should not pursue further education, but that they could not imagine how it would be possible for her. Nagaloka offered Baby this possibility and in doing so, directly helped to shape the direction of her aspiration.

Priti from Maharashtra

I met Priti during my preliminary fieldwork in 2016. At that time, she was a *dhammasekhiya* student on campus. Priti's mother was a widow with four children, which caused the family to suffer financially. Priti could not continue her education because of her family's difficult financial situation, and instead took courses in stenography, clothing design, and beauty. She worked doing bridal *mehandī* and *raṅgolī* design as well as making clothes. At Nagaloka she would sometimes help other students make clothes and drew *mehandī* on them. She would often design stunningly beautiful flower *raṅgolī* in the *vihār*. While she enjoyed these bridal arts, she saw them more as hobbies and wanted a career with which she was contributing more to society and she dreamed of becoming an IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer. Considering her background, this dream would be exceedingly difficult to achieve as IAS qualifications are extremely rigorous, but she felt that her teachers at Nagaloka would support her in any way they could.

When I returned to Nagaloka in 2017, Priti was working coordinating guests' stays in the conference halls and rooms. I had reached out to her to help me arrange my stay at Nagaloka and she greeted me and showed me to my room when I arrived. She was kept very busy with this

work, so we didn't have as much time to talk as we did when she was a student. She complained about not being able to get home to see her family in Gondia as often as she liked even though it was only about a three-hour train ride away and that she was gaining weight from being so busy. While it seemed that she sought a new career in order to gain some independence from her family, she nevertheless missed being in their company while she worked at Nagaloka. She seemed to have some ambivalence about her choice to strike out on her own.

Her marriage to another *dhammasekhiya* alumnus took place in November 2018. The ceremony was conducted by her friend, Nagaloka's administrative director Tejdarshan and a group of other *dhammacari* who were often at Nagaloka. Over the internet, I asked her if she would leave her job after her marriage, but she told me that she would continue. She has continued to work at Nagaloka, arranging guests' stays and helping them with any issues or needs they might have. She also works on other community outreach programs based at Nagaloka such as a children's summer camp that ran in April-May 2019 which included arts and crafts activities as well as meditation courses, and a Sunday morning children's meditation session called "Balsanskar" [83] that began in May 2019. Priti advertised this Balsanskar class on her Facebook page, writing: "Good News! Now your children can learn Meditation, Good Habits, Prayer, Motivational stories, Drawing, Basic Buddhist studies…many more… Every Sunday Morning…" Priti organizes these classes with another local female *dhammamitra* with a young daughter who often volunteered her time with Nagarjuna Training Institute programs.

While Priti was not able to pursue her dream to become an IAS officer that she expressed to me when I met her in August 2016, she has embarked on a new career due that only became possible after she participated in the *dhammasekhiya* program. She was also able to marry a man

[83] *Balsanskar* is highly Sanskritized Hindi. *Bāl* means child or children. *Sanskār* is a difficult word to translate and has meanings such as ritual and ceremony, as well as improvement, purification, and refinement.

who is an alumnus of the *dhammasekhiya* program and shares the same Buddhist values and goals as her. When she came to Nagaloka, she aspired to change her career to one that would help her support herself and her family while also working for society. Joining the Nagaloka community has allowed her to work towards this aspiration, perhaps not exactly in the way she first envisioned, but in a way that is fulfilling nonetheless. Becoming a member of the Nagaloka team allowed Priti to work towards her own interests rather than solely for the sake of improving the lives of her younger siblings.

Prakash from Odisha

When I met Prakash, he was enrolled in the Computer Skills and English program at Nagaloka having already completed the *dhammasekhiya* course as part of the 15th batch. He told me that before coming to Nagaloka, he only had motivation to sit around at home. One of his friends told him to start practicing meditation at the Kalinga Mitra Trust (KMT), a Buddhist organization in Balangir founded by Nagaloka alumni which eventually lead him to enroll at Nagaloka itself. Prakash loved speaking and writing in English and would sometimes ask me to proofread poems he had written. Knowing I was a foreigner with different views than Indians, he felt safe about asking me for love advice. He asked me what I thought about love during student life.[84] He said he had a friend who committed suicide because of love and now he was afraid to fall in love himself. Prakash told me that he killed his emotions. Opportunities for love had come his way, but he never took them because of his fear. His poems reflected some of this tension he felt about love. Prakash's goal was to get admission to an MA program in English. His brother

[84] Prakash's question to me here seemed to refer to the Hindu concept of *āśrama* or life-stages. The first *āśrama* is known as *brahmacharya* which refers to student life but means celibacy or abstinence. Any kind of relationship with the opposite sex is not supposed to be a part of student life but is reserved for *gṛhastha* or the householder phase. Sexual activity is thought to cloud the mind. See Alter, J. 2011. *Moral Materialism*.

had gotten a job as a nurse at a hospital in Bhubeneshwar, so he was helping Prakash financially while he pursued his educational dreams.

Prakash told me that while there were some things about Nagaloka that he didn't agree with, it was worthwhile to take what you could get from the place because there were many benefits, both spiritual and practical. He explained to me that when he first came to Nagaloka he didn't take it very seriously, but eventually he learned self-discipline there. He used this skill to help him learn English. He would study by reading the English newspapers every day. He criticized Nagaloka for being too Maharashtrian – the wardens and teachers were almost exclusively Maharashtrian both because the center was based in Nagpur and because the Triratna movement was based in Pune. He told me that there had once been an Odishi warden but he only stayed one year. Prakash also worried about what would happen to the place after Lokamitra got too old to be involved. These concerns demonstrate some of the on-the-ground issues that Nagaloka faced around community and belonging. While ideally a person's language and community didn't matter, some students felt ostracized by the lack of familiarity. Unlike Samiksha and Phulari who enjoyed their ability to mix with students from various states, Prakash tended to socialize mainly with other Odishis.

After finishing his skills program at Nagaloka, he became a student at a non-profit Ambedkarite coaching center called Nalanda Academy in Wardha. He hoped that they would be able to help him gain admission to an MA program. As of 2019, Prakash's efforts culminated in the fulfillment of his goal: he enrolled in an MA in English at a central university.

Prakash aspired to educational success. He was inspired by his experiences at Kalinga Mitra Trust in Odisha and at Nagaloka to cultivate discipline and work towards education. Prakash seemed to deeply fear distraction from his goal. Our conversations and his poetry

indicated to me that he was quite fascinated with the idea of falling in love, but his fear of being shaken off the course of his goal by a relationship and the memory of the suicide of his friend kept him from investigating this fascination. Prakash is an example of an ideal Nagaloka success story from the perspective of the school leaders. He went from being an uninspired and despondent youth, to a driven and hard-working MA student in a central university. In his retelling, coming to Nagaloka was a key element in shifting his life path from having practically no ambition, to diligently working towards fulfilling his aspirations and becoming a representative of his community. When Vivekaratna described what was fulfilling to him about working at Nagaloka, it was in large part working with students who had stories like Prakash's. The transformation of a student from a unmotivated to a self-disciplined youth is exactly the kind of work that Nagaloka hopes to achieve.

Niranjan from Bihar

Niranjan was an alumnus of the *dhammasekhiya* program. After completing the program at 19 years old, he founded Nagaloka Enterprises. At first, Nagaloka Enterprises was simply a table by the entrance and by 2017 it consisted of a bookstall, a statuary and Buddhist goods shop, as well as a restaurant. In 2019, he expanded to another gallery location in Indora, a nearby neighborhood in Nagpur. When I met Niranjan at 26 years old, he was the proud owner of a flourishing business. He was earning his MBA degree at the Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University in Wardha, Maharashtra but he told me that his teachers were so impressed with him that one of them had offered to become partners in his business with him. He didn't take much stock in his classes therefore, but he saw it as a practical matter to get the degree. Niranjan was a mild mannered, soft spoken young man, but nevertheless was good at

networking. He was especially proud that he had helped many of the Nagarjuna Training Institute alumni find their feet. Some of his former employees have set up their own shops in Odisha and Uttar Pradesh and he felt gratified about having taught them the ropes of running their own business. He also had another shop in Bihar that a brother helped him run. In 2017-18, he mostly worked on buying for the shops while his partners focused on the day-to-day aspects of running the business. He told me that he planned to go abroad to purchase for the store. In 2019 he hoped to go to China and he also wanted to go to Thailand in the future to find items that Indian Buddhists would enjoy. He said he makes long-term plans for his business and maps them out.

Figure 13: Nagaloka Enterprises. The temporary bookstall would often be set up to the left of the door in this picture.

The Nagaloka Enterprises bookstall was set up in a temporary structure just outside of the store. It was often left unattended with a sign that instructed customers to pay inside. I asked

Niranjan if people often stole from the shop and he said people are welcome to take things if they want to do that kind of thing – that he would rather just trust people. There were unassociated salesmen who set up stalls and tables that sold Buddhist goods outside the gates of Nagaloka. I asked Niranjan what he thought about that and he said they were welcome to sell things as they wished.

Niranjan told me that he bought some land in Bihar to set up schools for poor children. He started this venture at first by going directly to the slums to try to teach children, but it was too difficult because the facilities were so poor. During monsoon, for example, the weather would stop them from having classes because their homes would flood. I asked him if the children would have difficulty getting to the new school and he said that it was fairly easy, but perhaps after some time he would try to make it residential. In addition to this, he also helps to organize *śivir* and gatherings amongst Nagaloka alumni in Bihar since he is one of the more senior alumni from that area. Niranjan told me that even though he doesn't stay at Nagaloka because it is too difficult to work his hours and then also get up early to meditate with the group, he does meditate twice daily for 5-10 minutes before sleep and after waking.

Niranjan combined social work, business, and Buddhism together in how he conducted his life. His time and training at Nagaloka gave him a basis upon which he built success and independence for himself and attempts to teach and pass on these skills to others both within the Nagaloka community and in his community at home in Bodh Gaya, Bihar.

Niranjan aspired to financial independence and ethical business. As of 2020, he remains unmarried because he values his freedom. He has helped countless alumni get their financial bearings, learn business skills, and he has assisted with coordinating many marriages of his employees, including Deewakar's (whose story I will discuss next). He valued his experience at

Nagaloka and has used his own skills to continue to enhance the experience of tourists to the campus as well as students who are looking for further training. While perhaps he might have built a successful business without having training at Nagaloka, the ethical values that inform his business practices are those instilled by Nagaloka's training program. He got support from the community at Nagaloka in the early days of his business, and he continues to give back to that community and to his community in Bihar with the same generous spirit. While Niranjan continues to set new goals for his business and his philanthropy, he also works diligently to help his friends achieve their aspirations.

Deewakar from Uttar Pradesh

Deewakar was a *dhammasekhiya* program alumnus who worked at Nagaloka Restaurant during the time of my fieldwork. While I would often find many of his co-workers relaxing at the tables or sitting on benches outside the restaurant looking for someone to talk to, Deewakar was always diligently working. If there were no other customers in the restaurant aside from me, the employees would sit at the table and chat with me, but Deewakar was always the one making and bringing the tea to us. His sister Vandana was a member of the 16th batch of *dhammasekhiya* students. He had accompanied her on her travels and stayed at Nagaloka to work and earn some money to try to establish himself while he studied for his BA exams that he was enrolled in back in Uttar Pradesh. Deewakar and Vandana were the oldest of eight children. They lived in a village with no electricity or running water in Sitapur, UP on sprawling farmlands that their father tended to with the help of his brothers' families. Their father also had a government job as a custodian at a government building in Lucknow which took about an hour and a half to commute to daily by motorbike. Vandana told me that her mother was also enrolled in a local

college. As children Deewakar and Vandana grew up Hindu, but now the whole family had embraced Buddhism due to her father.

After Vandana's *dhammasekhiya* program ended, she and Deewakar returned to Sitapur to take their BA exams. Deewakar also needed to help work the family farm. I received messages from him in late 2018 and early 2019 that he had taken a job cleaning a train. He did not like the job, but he told me that he needed to earn money to establish his own household and get married. Deewakar was in love with a Muslim girl from Nagpur. He told me about her one day when he was polishing a big Buddha statue that was for sale at Nagaloka Enterprises. He pulled out his phone and showed me pictures of her. I asked if his family knew about her. He said that he had told his mother and she had given him tepid assent to pursue the relationship.

Deewakar's girlfriend's family, however, did not find out about their daughter's relationship with him until July 2019. Deewakar sent me messages in great distress, telling me that he had a problem. I asked what kind of problem he had, and he said, "Dharamik problem chal raha hai (*sic*., It's a religious problem going on)." He told me that his girlfriend's family had taken away her phone and told her she couldn't go to work anymore after they found out about Deewakar. "Ap jante ho ki dil ka dard duniya ka sabse bada dard hai (*sic*., You know that the pain of the heart is the biggest pain in the world)," Deewakar messaged me. Her family told him that the only way they would allow their marriage is if he left his family behind, changed his religion, and moved in with them instead. He was willing to change his religion, but not to leave his family. It stood out to me that Deewakar characterized the problem as primarily a religious or "dharamik" one. "Didi apke yaha bhi dharamo ki ahamiyat life se jyada di jati hai kya didi (*sic*., Didi in your place [i.e. in America] also are religions given more importance than life?)" he asked me, "Wewajah log juda kar dete hai (*sic*., Needlessly they tear people apart)." I feared for

Deewakar and hoped that his interreligious relationship would not end in any violence as they frequently do. Eventually, however, Deewakar's girlfriend's family consented to their marriage. They married in Nagpur at the end of 2019. They both moved back to Deewakar's family home in February 2020.

Like many young people, Deewakar aspired to make his own choices in life, and particularly, in love. Thankfully, he had his own parents' support even though his role as the eldest son still gave him a lot of responsibility. His family's acceptance of Buddhism and trust in the values and mission of Nagaloka, offered him a chance to gain some freedoms. While students were enrolled at Nagaloka they were subject to strict rules about interaction with the opposite sex and male and female students had relatively little interaction with each other. But, because Nagaloka is a place where young people from across the country meet each other, it is a place where couples who will eventually form inter-caste and inter-state marriages[85] first meet each other. Deewakar did not meet his future bride on campus, but at her workplace in Nagpur, so he was not breaking any campus rules. The community at Nagaloka Enterprises helped him to earn enough to support himself and to eventually convince his girlfriend's family that he was a worthy husband for their daughter.

Most of the employees of Nagaloka Enterprises were also aspiring to find their own love match. Rinku, for instance, had worked there for almost two years, hoping to meet a girl that he could take home to his family. All his relationships failed, his time ran out, and he married a girl of his parents' choosing. Maitri from Arunachal Pradesh had successfully married a young woman from Nagpur in 2017 and had been able to settle there with the help of Nagaloka

[85] In some sense, all inter-state marriages are inter-caste marriages since castes vary from state to state or language group to language group. This was how one of the Nagaloka students explained the importance of inter-state marriages to me.

Enterprises. Nagaloka Enterprises was a community of young men who had studied at Nagaloka and were helping each other build their independence through business and supported each other's romantic relationships.

Figure 14: Deewakar's family farm in April 2018.

While some employees like Maitri made long term commitments to Nagaloka Enterprises and settled away from their families in Nagpur, Deewakar returned to his family farm after his marriage. His love for the land and their crops were evident. Up to the time I am writing this, he continues to send me photos of their crops. While in the future he may change direction again

due to financial pressure, for now, due to COVID-19 both Deewakar and his new wife are happily settled in Sitapur with his family and new baby.

Conclusion

In each of these stories, Nagaloka was a temporary resting place for students on the journey of their aspirations. Each student's aspirations were re-charted after spending time there. The stories of these students illustrate how the path of aspiration is always calibrated between elements of boundation and opportunities to reach towards *bindās*. *Bindās* did not mean individualism for these students. Many students, like Phulari, Priti, and Deewakar, for example, were consciously keeping their families' wishes and needs in mind. Most of the students were especially concerned that their work benefitted others and improved society in some way. Working towards fulfilling their aspirations was a way for students to feel pride and self-respect and a way for them to connect to Ambedkar and their mentors.

While poverty is a limiting factor for many of these students, they still have a full capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004: 69). For instance, those students who said they wanted to join the IAS probably could not reach that goal, but they were still able to adjust their goal to meet their aspiration to have a secure job that allows them to work for society. Certainly, I do not discount the structural disadvantages that most of Nagaloka's students suffered from daily (and which kept these students from having a chance to join the IAS), but their ability and capacity to aspire remained fully functional despite them. This is because their aspirations were not unidirectional – they did not solely face towards joining the mainstream middle-class and participating in consumerism. Instead, at Nagaloka students were supported to aspire to devoting their youth towards the financially unprofitable endeavor of studying Buddhism, or towards

doing social work with what resources they could spare, or towards challenging social norms by choosing a spouse from outside their own community. The community that forms at Nagaloka offers students a place to turn for support in times of crisis and to reevaluate the direction of their aspirations. Sometimes the shifts that studying at Nagaloka make in the aspirational direction of students is less immediately perceptible, but the experiences and relationships that form there at this crucial stage of life continues to impact them.

Institutionally, Nagaloka has many aspirations. Perhaps the most essential is to help to spread the teachings of Buddhism across India. Students come to Nagaloka with their own aspirations and take what or who sticks with them from their experiences there. Both the students' aspirations and the institution's shape and form each other over time. As an institution that hopes to radically shift social norms, they offer a fertile ground on which students can foster aspirations that take them in many different directions.

Conclusion

My time living at Nagaloka with the 16th batch of students forced me to reflect on the process of change – a process which evokes fear and excitement in human beings, and which the Buddha taught was the source of all the suffering in the world. Nagaloka, like other Socially Engaged Buddhist communities, aims to create social change by means of living by and teaching Buddhist principles. They aim their educational programming at young people because, as the old adage says, they believe that they are the future, and therefore, have the greatest potential to create change. The kinds of change that Nagaloka and many of the students wish to enact is the most difficult to accomplish – they hope to initiate the overturn of millennia of structural social discrimination and the wounds that it has caused. This kind of largescale change evokes fear in many and is embraced by few. It is my most general hope that my research at Nagaloka will help people – scholars, activists, and others – to gain some insight into how to lend support to this kind of change in some manner.

One way that I see my research contributing to this large-scale aim is by my choice to foreground the voices and experiences of young people. By engaging with young people's experience, I learned that the concerns and hopes of the youth are indicators of the key anxieties and desires of the community at large and provide insight into the biggest roadblocks and pathways forward for the community as they work to reach their aims. Because young people represent "a means to access the unknown future" for communities (Smith 2013: 573), their actions come under intense scrutiny and their behaviors often respond to the burden of this pressure. For example, the students at Nagaloka were deeply concerned with determining how to live in a way that honored Ambedkar's legacy. While of course this is an obvious concern of the organization overall, as anyone there would say, I more fully understood the contemporary issues

and anxieties that define the difficulties associated with living in accordance with Ambedkar by observing and communicating with the youth who were attempting to do this.

As I more fully explored in Chapter 3, adults at Nagaloka who felt secure in their connection to the Triratna Buddhist Community, many of whom had taken *dhammacārī* vows, spoke confidently that Ambedkarism and Buddhism were practical synonyms. My observations and conversations with the youth, however, brought the central tensions of merging these ideals to the fore. Many students struggled to conceptualize how to live ethically as an Ambedkarite and a Buddhist. While the example of Ambedkar's life taught the students to be always working, aiming for educational qualifications, developing expertise, and speaking up for social justice, the Buddhism they were being taught at Nagaloka asked them to sit silently, reflect inward, and study an ancient subject that they felt was unlikely to earn them much acclaim or social standing. While if I had only interviewed the *dhammacārī* I would have heard about their clear plan of how they educate young people about the ideas and practices of their community, by living with the students, I gained perspective on exactly why many of the students were not receptive to the organization's methods that year.

As a scholar of religion, working with young people provides a window into the process of how a community passes on tradition. Geographers of religion Hopkins, Olson, Pain and Vincett (2011) observe that when it comes to young people's religious experience, most studies place young people in the role of "passive recipients of religion and the behavioural characteristics associated with particular kinds of faith affiliation," rather than as active participants in shaping religious community and identity (315). In my field research, I noticed that the tendency to think this way is often shared by adults within a community. The girls' wardens, for instance, chalked up the failures of the 16th batch of students to a lack of discipline.

They blamed the students for not serving as empty vessels into which they could pour their knowledge. Vivekaratna more wisely understood that the issue had to do with students feeling a dissonance between what they were taught and how they were being treated by staff. As other studies described by Hopkins, et. al. (2011) and my own study prove, young people play an important role in contributing to how traditions develop. I argue that by paying attention to the thoughts and actions of young people, scholars of religion can gain a better understanding of the process of the transmission of tradition.

My experiences at Nagaloka also taught me that friendship is a social force that should not be underestimated by people interested in understanding or creating social change. In the field of religious studies, I argue that studying friendship is crucial to engaging with conversion as a concept. As I have shown, when a person decides to join a religious community, they are oftentimes rejecting the practices of their parents and other family members. While Gauri Viswanathan (1998) drew attention to the fact that conversion was an inherently political act that challenged the secular power of the state (3), on the micro-level, conversion also challenges the power structures within a given family or community, and in the cases I show in this dissertation, challenges caste structure. Viswanathan (1998) does discuss instances of conversion within their cultural context, but she continues to focus on specific individual's conversion experiences throughout her book. Even within a volume entitled *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, they contend that "conversion is usually an individual process" (2003: xi). I do not deny that conversion entails a process of cleaving away as these other studies suggest, but it also is a process largely motivated by a desire to join, or perhaps prioritize, a different social structure rather than to individuate. As the Triratna Community illustrates, friendship becomes a key relationship within convert communities. Friends provide a new support structure within the new

religious community, and it is very often the case that friendships are a motivation to join a new religious community in the first place.

I think it is also worth reflecting on the fact that many ethnographers engage in friendship as a method in their research. Ethnographers depend on friends made in the field for access, support, and interpretation of new experiences, among many other things, while they are far from home, family and things to which they are familiar. Friendship is often a gateway to new ideas and experiences for ethnographers in much the same way that it is for new members of religious communities.

My time at Nagaloka illuminated the importance of friendship as a relationship that can motivate a person to make changes to their way of life. Friendship is especially valuable in the study of caste in South Asia as evident from work like Stephanie Stocker's (2017) dissertation. While my research showed in a limited context that inter-caste friendships can be motivation for a person to think and act differently, Stocker's research demonstrates that there are often boundaries to the changes a person is willing to make based on their inter-caste friendships. Because friendship often functions outside of or parallel to familial structures, it provides a gateway of potential for changing caste relations. I would urge other South Asianists interested in caste to consider friendship as a potential area of study or lens through which to conceptualize their work.

Living at Nagaloka also caused me to question the extent that studies of transnational Buddhist communities may also benefit from thinking about the role of friendship in these groups. While generally transnational religious communities are theorized with the help of Anderson's (1983) "imagined community," places like Nagaloka serve as crossroads where the imagined global community becomes physical and immediate. What are the possibilities for

transnational friendships within these communities? What are the limits? For instance, people like Lokamitra attempt to forge friendships between Buddhists from China, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Thailand with Indian Buddhists. These friendships helped Nagaloka's students to gain opportunities to study in some of these countries. While this was not necessarily the focus on my study, it provides an interesting jumping off point for other studies of transnational Buddhist communities.

The relationship of Indian Triratna Buddhists to the British Triratna Community is certainly an interesting and challenging one to think about from an academic perspective. One way to conceptualize this relationship is that where Indians are seeking guidance from British people about how to practice Buddhism. Perhaps from a bird's eye view, this is indeed what is going on in this relationship, but once I lived at Nagaloka my perspective on the matter changed. On the individual level, there are close friendship bonds that have been forged between British and Indian Buddhists based on shared goals and shared vision for global equality. While Lokamitra's relationships to Nagmitra, Maitreyanath, Vivekaratna and other *dhammacari* is the most obvious example of this present in my work, there are many other Indian Triratna Buddhists who have forged true friendships with foreign Triratna members that have changed the direction of both parties' lives. Certainly, there are power and culture differentials between the two parties, but that doesn't change the facts of friendship.

The world is built on layers of inequality and injustice. These inequalities and injustices need to be exposed, examined, and corrected. More often than not, the damage that these deep and painful wounds have caused seems irreparable. I do not suggest that people forgive and forget this pain, but I do hope that the research I presented in this dissertation may encourage thinkers and activists to work towards finding avenues forward towards healing and correcting it.

My time at Nagaloka taught me to value the effort it takes to reach out to take constructive action towards healing seemingly unsolvable problems. In reflecting back on the life I lived with the Nagaloka community, despite all of the issues and remaining problems that the organization deals with, I most remember the feeling of being filled with hope that change is possible. It is my intention that my writing in this dissertation captures a bit of this hope. To my reader, I may seem naïve to suggest listening to young people and building friendships as a way forward. I do not make these suggestions out of a misunderstanding of the mountain of structural and systemic violence that led to the deeply painful kinds of suffering that are caused by caste discrimination and colonialism. Instead, I point my readers in these more hopeful directions as a way to honor the work being done at Nagaloka. I choose to support the hopeful voices of the young people and teachers who live and work at Nagaloka Centre.

Since I returned to the US from Nagaloka in 2018, the world has changed immensely. I have been able to keep in touch with many of Nagaloka's 2017-18 batch of students with the help of the internet. The BA students who began their first year in 2017 were sent home in the Spring of 2020 without having the opportunity to complete their final exams due to COVID-19. Like the rest of the world, their lives are on pause. And yet, it is my aim that this research offers a glimmer of hope that change for the better is possible even in an ever-imperfect world.

Glossary

Ādarś: (Hindi) Ideal. Used in this dissertation in reference to a person, but can be applied to places and ideas as well.

Ādivāsī: (Hindi) literally, "original inhabitants." Many people who are classified as belonging to Scheduled Tribes identify as Ādivāsī. See Introduction for a further discussion.

Ambedkarite/*Ambeḍakarvādī*: (Indian English/Hindi) A person who takes Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as their exemplar and ideal. Colloquially, I found this term to be preferred over identity terms like "Dalit" (see below) by people outside an academic context to identify themselves as actively working against the caste system and caste-based prejudice.

Ānāpānasati: (Pali) Literally meaning mindfulness (*sati*) of breathing (*ānāpāna*). In this context, it refers to a style of meditation in which the practitioner focuses on the breath and the body. In the Triratna Buddhist Community, *ānāpānasati* meditation consists of four stages. During the first stage, the practitioner counts every out breath up to ten and then begins again at one. The second stage follows the same pattern except that the practitioner counts inhalations instead of exhalations. During the third stage, the practitioner simply observes the breath without counting, and during the fourth stage, the practitioner focuses on the place at the tip of the nose where the breath enters and exits the body.

Andhaviśvās: (Hindi) Blind faith, superstition.

Babasaheb: (Marathi/Hindi) A honorific title given to Ambedkar by his followers. *Baba*, meaning father, and *saheb*, meaning "sir," the title means "respected father."

Bahujan: (Pali) meaning "majority." This term usually refers to those people who belong within the OBC category or the agrarian peasant classes of people who were classified as Shudra in the *varṇa* system. See Introduction for a further discussion.

Bhante: (Pali) Cognate of the Sanskrit *bhavantaḥ* literally meaning "your good self," *bhante* is used as a respectful form of address for monastics in Theravada contexts. It is a gender-neutral term and can be used for monks or nuns.

Bhābhī: (Hindi) Sister-in-law.

Bindās: (Hindi) Part of the word's meaning overlaps with the American English slang 'cool,' although it also more specifically denotes being carefree, without restriction, the ability to act exactly as one pleases without concern. *Bindās* can also be used as an insult to call someone aimless, for instance by a parent to describe their lay-about child. *Bindās* represents the dream of being free to devote one's time to the pursuits one finds important, free from obligations that distract from achieving one's aims – it represents a dream of autonomy in a world that is filled with obligation, restriction, boundation. See Introduction for a further discussion of how this term is used in this dissertation.

Bodhisattva: (Pali) A being who vows to save all other beings from suffering before reaching *nirvāṇa* (enlightenment) themselves. The ideal being from a Mahayana perspective.

Boundation: (Indian English) Restriction, constraint, obligation, duty. See Introduction for further discussion of how this term is used in this dissertation.

Chikun: Hindization of the Chinese *Qigong* which is a practice that combines body posture with breath to balance *qi* or life force.

Dalit/*Dalit*: (English/Hindi & Marathi) A person who was formerly considered untouchable. A politicized term that is most acceptable in academic contexts.

Dhamma: (Pali) Refers to the teachings and way of life of the Buddha by this community. Pali cognate of Sanskrit *dharma*.

Dhammacārī (masculine)*/ dhammacārinī* (feminine): (Pali) literally dharma-farer or practitioner of the *dharma*. The term used for ordained members of the Triratna Buddhist Community that denotes neither lay nor monastic status. When used as a title, most TBC members use the spelling Dhammachari and Dhammacharini which I will preserve in the text.

Dhammamitra: (Pali) literally friend of the *dharma*. A person who has taken the lay precepts within the Triratna Buddhist Community. Becoming a *dhammamitra* is the first step in demonstrating commitment to the TBC.

Dhammasekhiya: (Pali) Meaning "dhamma training." The term used to describe the 9-month training program at Nagarjuna Training Institute at Nagaloka.

Dīdī: (Hindi) older sister. A respectful way to refer to a woman who is older than the speaker, but not old enough to be their aunt.

Dīkṣā: (Hindi) Initiation or conversion. A *dīkṣā* was traditionally the ceremony during which a monk took his vows. In this context, it is used to refer to the ceremony in which Ambedkar took his lay vows.

Dostī: (Hindi) Friendship.

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO): (English) The original name of the community that changed its name to the Triratna Buddhist Community (TBC) in 2010.

Kalyāṇ mitra: (Hindi & Sanskrit) virtuous friend, best friend or spiritual friend. A concept from Buddhist literature that is emphasized by the Triratna Buddhist Community. *Kalyān mitratā* refers to spiritual friendship. See Chapter 2.

Kalyāṇamittatā: (Pali) Spiritual friendship. *Kalyāṇamitta* refers to a spiritual friend. See Chapter 2.

Karma/Kamma: (Sanskrit/Pali) cosmic or universal principle of cause and effect.

Mahāparinirvaṇ: (Sanskrit) The physical death of someone who has reached *nirvāṇa* and will not be reincarnating in the future.

Mahar: Ambedkar's *jātī* (sub-caste) community. The vast majority of Ambedkarite Buddhists also were born into this *jātī.*

Māhaul: (Hindi-Urdu) atmosphere, environment, surroundings.

Maitrī /*mettā*: (Sanskrit/Pali) literally means friendship or loving-kindness. An important concept in Buddhism, one of the ten *pāramitās* (perfections). Especially relevant to the Triratna Buddhist Community – see Chapter 2.

Maitrī bhāvanā/*mettā bhāvanā*: (Sanskrit/Pali) A form of meditation in which the practitioner is meant to cultivate feelings of friendship and loving-kindness for the world. *Maitrī*/*mettā* meaning friendship, and *bhāvanā* meaning feeling, the meditation practice helps a practitioner practice compassion for all beings. Within the Triratna Buddhist Community (and many other Buddhist communities), *maitrī bhāvanā* meditation practice consists of five stages. During the first stage, the practitioner feels *mettā* for herself. In the second stage, the meditator focuses on feeling *mettā* for a close friend, and as one moves to the third stage, the practitioner focuses on a being towards which they have neutral feelings. The fourth stage challenges the practitioner to develop feelings of *mettā* towards a being they hate, or feel is an enemy. Finally, in the fifth stage, the practitioner thinks of all the four previous beings together and tries to expand feelings of *mettā* out to their town, their country, the whole world, and the whole universe.

Maun: silence

Mūrti: (Sanskrit/Hindi) an image. In a religious context, an image of a god. In a Hindu context, an image which a god can be invited to inhabit.

Mūlnivāsī: (Hindi) literally, "original inhabitants," but it is usually used in a more specifically Buddhist context. Eleanor Zelliot (2010) writes that those who identify with the term Mūlnivāsī are declaring a lineage to the Buddha's Sakya clan. She observed this phenomenon largely in southern India among young intellectuals (2010: 1), but I met young activists in Western Odisha who belonged to the BAMCEF organization who chose to identify as Mūlnivāsī. Most of these people were classified as SC by the government. See Introduction for further discussion of this term.

Nirvāṇa: (Sanskrit) attainment of total understanding of the universe, enlightenment.

Other Backward Caste (OBC): (Indian English) a government designation which generally refers to people belonging to the Shudra *varṇa* or 'peasants' was not offered any reservation benefits in the original Constitution. See Introduction for further discussion of this term.

Pañcaśīl: (Sanskrit & Pali) the five precepts taken by lay followers of the Buddha.

pañcāṅg praṇām: (Sanskrit) a set of three prostrations performed at the feet of the Buddha. Known as *pañcāṅg* or 'five parts' because five parts of the body (knees, chest, chin, temple and forehead touch the ground.

Piṇḍa: (Sanskrit/Hindi) rice balls used in Hindu funerary rituals.

Prabuddha Bhārat: (Hindi) Enlightened India. The ideal Indian nation from the perspective of Ambedkar and his followers.

Prasād: (Sanskrit/Hindi) offerings given to the god in Hindu ritual that is then also taken back in part and often consumed by the ritual participant who offered it.

Prerṇā: (Sanskrit/Hindi) inspiration, both in the sense of a sudden idea and in the sense of a motivational person or concept, etc.

Pūjā: (Hindi) Worship ritual.

Pūrṇimā: (Hindi) Full moon. Important marker as South Asia traditionally used a lunar calendar.

Jātī: (Hindi) caste or sometimes called sub-caste in reference to the fact that this system runs parallel and is somewhat combined with *varṇa*. *Jātī* is a more specific caste name that sometimes refers to an occupation that can be classified within the four-fold *varṇa* system. *Jātī* can often be inferred by someone's surname.

Raṅgolī: (Hindi) literally meaning colorful circle, a *raṅgolī* is a temporary decoration made on the floor or ground, most commonly out of colored sand. The *raṅgolī* at Nagaloka were most often made from the flowers grown on campus. The making of *raṅgolī* is a women's artform and brings auspiciousness to the place in which it is made.

Saṅgha: (Sanskrit & Pali) the Buddhist community. It can be used to refer to the entire global Buddhist community or the particular community to which a Buddhist belongs.

Savarṇa: (Sanskrit), literally "with caste." Refers to people who can be classified within one of the four *varṇa* and therefore does not refer to out-castes or people considered to be untouchable.

Scheduled Caste (SC): (Indian English) a governmental designation which generally refers to those people who were considered "untouchable" and therefore outside the Hindu *varṇa* system (Bayly 1999: 9). See Introduction for further discussion of this term.

Scheduled Tribe (ST): (Indian English) another governmental designation which refers to an amorphous category of people who are thought to have traditionally lived in remote locations in hills and jungles and were also excluded from the *varṇa* system (Bayly 1999: 9). See Introduction for further discussion of this term.

Stūpa: (Sanskrit/Hindi) a Buddhist reliquary, most commonly taking the shape of a dome.

Śīl: (Hindi) ethics or morality. See Chapter 3 for further discussion of this term.

Śivir: (Hindi) meditation retreat.

Sūtta: (Pali) cognate of Sanskrit *sūtra*. In a Buddhist context, *sūtta* refers to a remembered and subsequently recorded discourse of the Buddha.

Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG): (Hindi & Marathi) The India-based branch of the FWBO. In English, Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana translates to the "The Auxiliary Union of the Buddhist Federation of the Three Worlds." The "three worlds" refers to three destinations for karmic rebirth in Buddhist cosmology. Technically the group has been renamed to Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha or the Triratna Buddhist Community to reflect

that they are of a piece with the global community and not simply an auxiliary unit, but many people still commonly refer to the group as TBMSG in India.

Navayana: (Hindi, Marathi & Sanskrit) Meaning, new vehicle, this designation was created by B.R. Ambedkar to distinguish his new Buddhist lineage from Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana lineages.

Vandanā: (Hindi & Sanskrit) lit. praise or worship. Usually refers to a collection of songs and chants that praise the Buddha especially when called *Buddhavandanā*.

Varṇa: (Hindi & Sanskrit) the four-fold caste system described in the *Ṛg Veda* which includes *Brāhmaṇ* (priests), *Kṣatriya* (warrior-kings), *Vaiśya* (craftspeople and merchants) & *Śūdra* (laborers and farmers).

Vihār: (Hindi & Sanskrit) monastery, or in this case, meditation hall.

Vipassanā: (Pali) lit. insight. Meditation, particularly a style of meditation practiced within the Theravada tradition.

Bibliography

Alter, Joseph. 2011. *Moral Materialism: Sex and Masculinity in Modern India*. Delhi: Penguin.

Ambedkar, B.R. 2014. *Annihilation of Caste*. Edited by S. Anand. Brooklyn: Verso.

---. 2011. *The Buddha and his Dhamma*. Edited by Aakash Singh Rathore & Ajay Verma. Oxford: Oxford UP.

---. 1993. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol 12, edited by Vasant Moon. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra.

---. 2002. *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, edited by Valerian Rodrigues. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.

Appadurai, Arjun. 2013. *The Future as a Cultural Fact*. London: Verso.

---. 2004. "The Capacity to Aspire." In *Culture and Public Action*. Ed. by Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

---. 1996. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Baumann, Martin. 2000. "Work as Dharma Practice: Right Livelihood Cooperatives of the FWBO." In *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, edited by Christopher S. Queen. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 372-393.

Bayly, Susan. 1999. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Benninger, Christopher. 2015. *Christopher Benninger: Architecture for Modern India*. Pune: India House Art Gallery.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. 2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the* Samyutta Nikaya. Boston: Wisdom.

Bose, Melia Belli. 2017. “A Modern Chakravartin: Mayawati’s New Buddhist Visual Culture. In *Urban Utopias,* edited by Tereza Kuldova and Mathew A. Varghese. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bucholtz, Mary. 2002. “Youth and Cultural Practice.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31: 525-552.

Buckser, Andrew and Stephen D. Glazier, editors. 2003. *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

Cassaniti, Julia & Jacob Hickman. 2014. “New Directions in the Anthropology of Morality.” *Anthropological Theory* 14.3: 251-62.

Chandra, Kanchan. 2000. "The Transformation of Ethnic Politics in India: The Decline of Congress and the Rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Hoshiarpur." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 1: 26-61.

Chua, Jocelyn. 2013. *In Pursuit of the Good Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Clark, Paul. 2012. *Youth Culture in China: From Red Guards to Netizens*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Donner, Henrike, and Geert De Neve. 2011. “Introduction.” In *Being Middle-Class in India: A Way of Life,* edited by Henrike Donner. New York: Routledge, 1-22.

Durkheim, Emile. 2001. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Carol Cosman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Evans, Stephen A. 2007. “Doubting the Kalama-Sūtta: Epistemology, Ethics, and the ‘Sacred.’” *Buddhist Studies Review* 24.1: 91-107.

Fernandes, Leela and Patrick Heller. 2011. “Hegemonic Aspirations: New Middle Class Politics and India’s Democracy in Comparative Perspective.” *Critical Asian Studies* 38: 495-522.

Fisher, Gareth. 2014. *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Ganti, Tejaswini. 2014. "Neoliberalism." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43: 89-104.

Geary, David and Sraman Mukherjee. 2017. "Buddhism in Contemporary India." In *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism,* edited by Michael Jerryson. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 36-60.

Gold, Ann Grodzins. 2017. *Shiptown*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

---. 1988. *Fruitful Journeys*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Gold, Daniel. 2014. *Provincial Hinduism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Guru, Gopal. 1991. "Hinduisation of Ambedkar in Maharashtra." *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 7: 339-341.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 2007. "The New Age Movement and Western Esotericism." In *Handbook of New Age,* edited by Daren Kemp & James R. Lewis. Boston: Brill, 25-50.

Hegde, Sasheej. 2016. "The Gift of a Life and Death: Rohith Vemula and 'Us.'" *Economic and Political Weekly* December 3. Web.

Hopkins, Peter, Elizabeth Olson, et.al. 2011. "Mapping intergenerationalities: the formation of youthful religiosities." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36(2): 314-27.

Ilaiah, Kancha. 2009. *Post-Hindu India: A Discourse in Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution*. New Delhi: Sage.

Jadhav, Narendra, ed. 2013. *Ambedkar Speaks: 301 Seminal Speeches*, Vol. II. New Delhi: Konark Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Jaoul, Nicolas. 2006. "Learning the use of symbolic means: Dalits, Ambedkar statues and the state in Uttar Pradesh." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 40 (2): 175-207.

Jaoul, Nicolas. 2012. “Learning the Use of Symbolic Means: Dalits, Ambedkar Statues, and the State in Uttar Pradesh.” In *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery*. Ed. Gary Michael Tartakov. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 98-126.

Jeffrey, Craig. 2010. *Timepass: Youth, Class & the Politics of Waiting in India*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Jenkins, Sara. 2007. *Hello at Last: Embracing the Koan of Friendship & Meditation*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.

Keane, Webb. 2016. *Ethical Life: Its Natural and Social Histories*. Princeton: Princeton UP.

Killick, Evan, and Amit Desai, eds. 2010. *The Ways of Friendship: Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Berghahn.

King, Sallie. 2009. *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

---. 2005. *Being Benevolence*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Kumar, Nita. 2017. “The Performance of Friendship in Contemporary India.” In *Conceptualizing Friendship in Time and Place.* Edited by Risseeuw, Carla, and Marlein van Raalte Leiden: Brill, 229-249.

Laidlaw, James. 2014. *The subject of virtue: an anthropology of ethics and freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Lokamitra, (Dh.). 1991. “Ambedkar and Buddhism.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 26.20: 1303-1304.

Lukose, Ritty A. 2009. *Liberalization’s Children: Gender, Youth and Consumer Citizenship in Globalizing India*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mahmood, Sabha. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton UP.

Maitreyabandhu. 2014. *Thicker than Blood: Friendship on the Buddhist Path*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.

Mathew, Leya. 2018. "Aspiring and Aspiration Shaming: Primary Schooling, English and Enduring Inequalities in Liberalizing Kerala (India)." Anthropology & Education Quarterly 49 (1): 72-88.

Moodie, Megan. 2015. *We Were Adivasis: Aspiration in an Indian Scheduled Tribe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moon, Vasant. 2002. *Growing Up Untouchable in India*, translated by Gail Omvedt. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Moore, Brenna. 2015. "Friendship and the Cultivation of Religious Sensibilities." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83.2: 437-63.

Nagaloka Annual Report 2018-19. Nagaloka Centre. https://www.nagaloka.org/annual-reports/.

Nagaloka Annual Report 2017-18. Nagaloka Centre. https://www.nagaloka.org/annual-reports/.

Nagaloka Annual Report 2016-17. Nagaloka Centre. https://www.nagaloka.org/annual-reports/.

Nakassis, Constantine V. 2016. *Doing Style: Youth and Mass Mediation in South India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Omvedt, Gail. 2011. *Understanding Caste*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

---. 1994. *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*. New Delhi: Sage.

Ortegren, Jennifer. 2019. "Ganesha Chaturthi and the Making of the Aspirational Middle Classes in Rajasthan." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 23(1):

---. forthcoming. *Gender, Aspiration, and the Making of Middle Class Hinduism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pandey, Gyanendra. 2006. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pandian, Anand. 2009. *Crooked Stalks: Cultivating Virtue in South India*. Durham: Duke.

Pathania, Gaurav J. 2018. *The University as a Site of Resistance: Identity and Student Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rao, Anupama. 2009. *The Caste Question*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

---. 2016. "Editorial." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36.1: 222-4.

Rawat, Ramnarayan. 2015. "Genealogies of the Dalit Political: The Transformation of Achhut from 'Untouched' to 'Untouchable' in Early Twentieth-Century North India." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 52, no. 3: 335–55.

Richman, Paula. 1991. "E.V. Ramasami's Reading of the Ramayana." In *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, edited by Paula Richman. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Risseeuw, Carla, and Marlein van Raalte, eds. 2017. *Conceptualizing Friendship in Time and Place*. Leiden: Brill.

Robbins, Joel. 2009. "Values, Structure, and the Range of Possibilities: A Response to Zigon." *Ethos* 74.2: 277-85.

---. 2007. "Between Reproduction and Freedom: Morality, Value, and Radical Cultural Change." *Ethos* 72.3: 293-314.

Roberts, Nathaniel. 2016. *To Be Cared For: The Power of Conversion and Foreignness of Belonging in an Indian Slum*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

---. 2015. “From Village to City: Hinduism and the ‘Hindu Caste System.’” In *Handbook of Religion and the Asian City: Aspiration and Urbanization in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Peter van der Veer. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rodrigues, Valerian. 2015. “Ambedkarite.” In *Key Concepts in Modern Indian Studies*, edited by Gita Dharampal, Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach, Rachel Dwyer, and Jahnavi Phalkey, 7-8. New York: NYU Press.

---. 2002. “Introduction.” In *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, edited by Valerian Rodrigues, 1-44. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Samuel, Geoffrey. 2008. *Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Sangharakshita. 2016. *The Complete Works of Sangharakshita: Dr. Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I, Vol 9*. Eds. Kalyanaprabha & Vidyadevi. Cambridge: Windhorse.

---. 2017. “The Good Friend, the False Friend, and the Spiritual Friend.” https://www.sangharakshita.org/pdfs/the-good-friend.pdf.

---. 2011. *Moving Against the Stream: The Birth of a New Buddhist Movement*. Cambridge: Windhorse.

---. 2005. *From Genesis to the Diamond Sutra: A Western Buddhist’s Encounters with Christianity*. Cambridge: Windhorse.

---. 1994. *Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism*. Cambridge: Windhorse. https://www.sangharakshita.org/_books/meaning-of-conversion.pdf.

"Sangharakshita; Obituaries Controversial Buddhist convert who deserted the army and was plagued by sex allegations after founding an influential order in Britain." *Times* [London, England] 9 Nov. 2018: 53. Business Insights: Essentials.

Singh, Bhrigupati. 2015. *Poverty and the Quest for Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Singh, Deepak K. 2010. *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas Between Bangladesh and India*. New Delhi: Sage.

Singh, Vikash. 2018. "Myths of Meritocracy: caste, karma and the new racism, a comparative study." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41(15): 2693-2710.

Sinha, Amita and Rajat Kant. 2014. "Mayawati and memorial parks in Lucknow, India: landscapes of empowerment." *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 35 (1): 43-58.

Skaria, Ajay. 2015. "Ambedkar, Marx and the Buddhist Question." *South Asia* 38.3: 450-65.

Smith, Sara. 2013. "'In the heart, there's nothing': unruly youth, generational vertigo and territory." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38 (4): 572-85.

-----. 2017. "Politics, pleasure and difference in the intimate city: Himalayan students remake the future." *Cultural Geographies* 24(4): 573-588.

Spohrer, Konstanze, Garth Stahl & Tamsin Bowers-Brown. 2018. "Constituting neoliberal subjects? 'Aspiration' as technology of government in UK policy discourse." *Journal of Education Policy* 33.3: 327-342.

Stocker, Stephanie. 2017. *Caste and Equality: Friendship Patterns among Young Academics in Urban India*. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Subhuti. 2008. *Buddhism & Friendship*. Birmingham: Windhorse Publications.

---. 2013. *Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.

Tang, Xiangyang. “Enlightened Existence: British-born Buddhist monk takes pleasure in working for marginalised Indians.” *Bangkok Post* 20 Jan 2012: Online. Life: Social & Lifestyle.

Teltumbde, Anand. 2016. “Rohith Vemula’s ‘Dalitness.’ *Economic and Political Weekly* July 9. Web.

---. 2013. “Ambedkarites against Ambedkar.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 48.19: Online edition.

Turner, Victor. 2008. *The Ritual Process*. New Brunswick: AldineTransaction.

Van der Veer, Peter. 2015. “Introduction.” In *Handbook of Religion and the Asian City: Aspiration and Urbanization in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. by Peter van der Veer. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1-17.

Vajragupta. 2010. *The Triratna Story*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.

Viswanathan, Gauri. 1998. *Outside the Fold*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Waghorne, Joanne. 2020. *Singapore, Spirituality, and the Space of the State: Soul of the Little Red Dot*. London: Bloomsbury.

Zabiliute, Emilija. 2016. “Wandering in a mall: aspirations and family among young urban poor men in Delhi.” *Contemporary South Asia* 24(3): 271-284.

Zelliot, Eleanor. 2010. "India's Dalits: Racism and Contemporary Change." *Global Dialogue (Online)* 12, no. 2: 1-9.

---. 2013. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Delhi: Navayana.

---. 2001. *From Untouchable to Dalit*. New Delhi: Manohar.

Zigon, Jarrett. 2011. *"HIV is God's Blessing": Rehabilitating Morality in Neoliberal Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

---. 2008. *Morality: An Anthropological Perspective*. Oxford: Berg.

Vita

Author:
Mallory Jacklin Hennigar

Place of Birth:
Beverly, MA

Date of Birth:
June 26, 1991

Degrees Awarded:

- *Syracuse University – Syracuse, NY*
  M.Phil., 2017
- *Syracuse University – Syracuse, NY*
  M.A., 2014
- *McGill University – Montreal, QC*
  B.A., 2012

Employment:
Syracuse University – Syracuse, NY
Teaching Assistant, Religion Department (2014-17, 2018-20)

Awards and Fellowships:

- FLAS Fellowship (Syracuse University, 2020-21)
- Summer Dissertation Fellowship (Syracuse University, Graduate School, 2019)
- American Institute of Indian Studies Rajendra Vora Fellowship for the Study of Society and Culture in Maharashtra (2017-18)
- Bharati Memorial Award (Syracuse University South Asia Center, 2016)
- FLAS Fellowship: Marathi (2016)
- Gabriel Vahanian Scholarship: Sanskrit (Syracuse University, Department of Religion 2015)
- FLAS Fellowship: Hindi (2012 & 2014)
- Syracuse University Graduate Fellowship (2012-14)