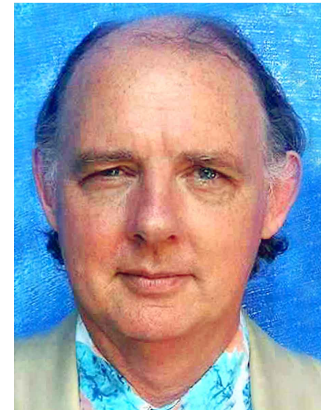


## Subhuti in India December 2009

a collection of Facebook reports by Dharmashalin

Following yesterday's report of Shakyajata's Indian travels and Dhamma work, today FWBO News brings you an update on another Order Members' work there. Subhuti is one of the Order's most active Dharma teachers; he is currently in India on a six-month teaching visit, criss-crossing it North South East and West... FWBO News has recently stumbled across his Facebook page and brings you a digest of some of the stories there.



For more news of Subhuti, we'd recommend you become a 'fan' of his Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dharmachari-Subhuti/195954395099>

The reports were written by Dharmashalin, Subhuti's secretary and travelling companion.

## Rambles around the Laws of Life 16-18/12; Mahavihara, Pune

Back again at the Mahavihara in Pune, this time Subhuti experimented with a different way of communicating the Dhamma. Rather than giving large public talks we organised a more intimate series of Rambles; open to all but relying on word of mouth and posters at the centres to let people know.

The Rambles format is a medium Subhuti uses in the UK; unlike a simple talk it's a bit more relaxed with opportunities for questions and a somewhat different atmosphere. We'd never tried this in India before, and it was reasonably effective - although the Indian need for Garlands etc maintained something of a more formal air.

The subject of these rambles were the 'Laws of Life', as Subhuti presents Pratitya Samutpada in India. Because of the Hindu associations with the word Karma, it is strongly negative for Dalits because it is the cornerstone of their religious oppression - one naturally has to be careful with which terms are used.

The Laws of Life are a frequent theme for Subhuti, for without an understanding of Pratitya



Samutpada the whole of the Dhamma slides into superstition. Why do we practise the precepts - they are not rules from the Buddha but an evaluation of the way in which life works. He spent a lot of time emphasising this point - there is no controller, nor can the system be 'fixed', the making of offerings is deeply embedded in Indian culture - what Subhuti calls 'cosmic corruption'. The first 5 niyamas are 'scientific' they operate in a manner that cannot be manipulated, but can be understood and controlled (to some extent.)

Entrance to the Shrine room

Following on from this are the areas in which we have control, much of life is beyond our direct ability to decide - but of course, crucially, we have a choice in how we respond. This is the karmic level and the point at which we can work towards inner contentment even in difficult situations.

On the second evening we celebrated Subhuti's birthday with some beautiful singing and lots of cake!

## Raipur - Chhattisgarh Satyaloka Blessing 14/12/09

After the Statue inauguration finished we caught the train to Raipur. Raipur is the state capital of Chhattisgarh, a relatively recently created state.

Chhattisgarh is one of the more backward states in India, famous for steel, coal and Naxalite insurgency. That said you can see changes and development, particularly within Raipur, which having become a state capital is modernising quickly.

We have two Dhammacharis here in Raipur, both Buddhists from Maharashtra who have moved here because of government jobs. Another example of Dr Ambedkar's message of self improvement through education and reservations being realised. They now dedicate themselves to spreading Dhamma. One of them, Nagaratna, is particularly fond of the story of Emperor Asoka, who sent his son and daughter to work for the Dhamma. In his case, his successful son has sent him to work for the Dhamma.



### Breaking the ground

Subhuti (half-visible in the white hat), breaks the soil at Satyaloka. They've received a grant of 10,000,000 INR (£15,000) from the Government to build a shrine hall.

Our reason for visiting on this occasion was to dedicate the piece of land they've been donated – which is going to be a retreat centre. In the morning we drove out to the land itself; performed the dedication ceremony, 'turned the earth' and laid an inscription stone.

He had been asked to choose a name for the new Centre, which is now called 'Satyaloka; the place of Truth'. Of course this is an encouragement to live an upright good life but there is a more local connection that prompted him to choose this name. A local religious teacher named Guru Garsidas, had preached extensively on Satya, his disciples, very poor tribal people, are called Satnamis. Subhuti hopes that we can help them connect with the Dhamma and the choice of name is a linking point.

Garsidas is an interesting example of 'underground Buddhism' there are quite a few non-Brahminical religious figures who have strong parallels with Buddhism. In this case he was strongly anti-caste, encouraged his people to lead good lives on the basis of the 5 satyas (almost identical with the 5 precepts.)

Then Subhuti gave a talk; firstly rejoicing in the generosity of those who were donating the money, then he talked about how valuable retreats are as a taste of a different life, particularly an experience of the 'casteless society'. This has been one of his major themes of late. People need an experience of how life can be different and this is what a retreat gives them. Then he finished by encouraging the donors themselves to come on retreat – 'it's not enough to give money, although of course very good, you yourselves must practise the Dhamma.' Particularly amongst the upwardly mobile new middle classes of Buddhists this is a very important message. They've achieved Dr Ambedkar's first objective – they've improved themselves, but now the need is to help others and realise there's more to life than material success.

In the evening he gave a talk to a mainly Maharastrian crowd of successful Buddhists who are here on government jobs. He pursued a similar theme of rejoicing in their generosity and personal success and then inspiring them to practise the Dhamma deeply and authentically for themselves and for the benefit of the wider society. To this end he used the structure of the 5 Dhammakranti Principles; Improve your life, Transform your mind, Form Sangha, Spread the Dhamma and Help those less fortunate.

These five principles act as a distillation of an active Buddhist life balancing self and other and ensuring that we don't get isolated from the suffering around us, whilst not getting overwhelmed by the vastness of it. To hear more on the Dhammakranti principles listen to

[www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC216](http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC216)

## **Inauguration of Nagaloka Buddha 13th December**

We went up to Nagpur for the inauguration of the large Standing Buddha Statue donated by friends from the East. The statue itself is very well done and well located within the complex.

The event itself had been well publicised and there were loads of people there. At least 10,000 for the main talks and then several tens of thousands more passing through – fairly accurate reports put it at 100,000. There was a very positive, friendly, joyful atmosphere amongst those attending.

During the official program Subhuti gave a short talk on the significance of the Nagaloka Training Institute and the new Buddha figure. He spoke about us increasingly having an effect all over India, in terms of the work by NTI students and other groups - we now have NTI students from most States in India. Then he spoke of the effect of having such a large Buddha there, something Subhuti has been emphasising recently is the importance of physical symbols; both in terms of pride and positive identity, but also as manifestations of the Dharma – just looking up at that big Buddha striding across India has an effect.

Well done to all those involved in Nagaloka and particularly this project - it really is a huge achievement!



People crowding to make offerings to the Buddha.

There was a constant stream of people making offerings to the Buddha all day, in fact this continued the next day as publicity from Papers and TV drew even more people.



The crowd during the formal program

Here are the people listening to the formal speeches.



## 6th of December Program - Ghaziabad just outside Delhi

From Hyderabad we flew up to Delhi to commemorate the anniversary of Dr Ambedkar's death. Although we arrived very late one of our friends took us to the house in which Dr Ambedkar died. There was a very special atmosphere there- peaceful, thoughtful but not depressed. Although the original building has been knocked down we know where his bed was and were able to stand on the spot where he met Bhante. Quite a moving experience!

The next day there was a big program held in Ghaziabad, just outside the Capital Province, within Uttar Pradesh. The event had been organised by some of our Mitras, it is great to see people taking initiative and organising programs, especially in areas when there are no Order members. This of course allows us to spread our approach to the Dhamma more widely.

Subhuti was one of the main speakers; his theme was 'the four things Dr Ambedkar gave us' naturally with a focus on his final gift; the Dhamma. The other gifts were; his work for the uplift of society, the example of his life, and his physical life (it could be argued that he worked himself to death.)

From there we rushed back to the airport to catch an evening flight down to Pune - quite an adventure.



Subhuti at the podium



The crowd.

## **Dhammakranti Gulbarga 29/11-5/12**

From the 29th of November to the 5th of December we held our first Dhammakranti Retreat in Karnataka. The retreat was held in a large Vihara built under the patronage of the Union Labour Minister, Shri. Mallikarjun Kharge ji. Indian politicians have access to large funds for public development and that money can be put to good use, in his case he is inspired to provide a visible source of pride and positive self identity for Buddhists all over India - he believes that will start a chain reaction leading to more people becoming interested in and seeking to practice the Dhamma.

Buddhism in India has been forgotten and then neglected for many years so the building of symbols is extremely important to people's confidence and faith. That is certainly the case here where you can see people gaining confidence just through seeing such an impressive complex. It is extremely well maintained by those placed in charge, again this has a positive effect on those visiting. As part of the retreat we circumambulated the main temple every day doing walking meditation and chanting this had a strong effect on the atmosphere and visitors found it very impressive.



We had over a thousand attendants thanks to the hard work of our team; both from Karnataka and Maharashtra who travelled around the surrounding areas telling people about the retreat and encouraging them to come.

Kumarjeev was the main organiser and along with his team of young men and women from NNBY (National Network of Buddhist Youth) they worked very hard and helped establish a very positive atmosphere.

The theme of the retreat was 'Changing our minds to form the casteless society.' This theme was explored through the path of Dana, Sila, Samadhi, Prajna. The key Dhammic issue was the need to develop Prajna in overcoming ignorance, greed and hatred. This links with the work of Dr Ambedkar as the main way these forces of separation and delusion manifest in India is through Caste. So to change Caste requires the development of Wisdom as Caste is a particularly solidified manifestation of the delusion of separation and fixed self.

Of course to develop wisdom we need to work on the preliminary stages; Subhuti gave a talk on Sila drawing on examples from Dr Ambedkar's life, people find this extremely moving and there were lots of tears, and not just the ladies, (excerpts from this talk on YouTube.)

On retreat we emphasis more meditation as Indian family life is particularly demanding. We always see people very quickly getting into meditation and over the days the shrine room becomes stiller and stiller. On this retreat we did lots of walking meditation (as you'll see on YouTube.)

The last night saw 14 Mitra ceremonies and a very extensive photo session (maybe 1.5 hours!)



Sanchi style gate-

Kharje ji has taken aspects of Buddhist architecture from many different sources, here we see a Sanchi gate.



The Dhammacharis and Dhammacharinis.

During the mitra ceremony these Dhammachari(ni)s welcomed the 14 new Mitras into our international Sangha.

## NNBY

During the marathon photo-shoot that followed the end of the retreat we see most of the young members of NNBY having their photo taken with Subhuti. (There was quite a queue.)



## Senior Teachers meeting 23-26/11

For three days Subhuti met with twenty or so of our most experienced Dhamma workers, unfortunately not all of those invited were able to attend.

The focus of the event was two-fold; firstly giving them some Dhammic food, as they spend most of their time teaching others, it's important that they receive some guidance themselves. This took the form of discussion around the System of Meditation.

One issue that came up was the fact that Bhavana has a different meaning in modern Indian languages, it exclusively means feeling. This of course leads to confusion in the Metta Bhavana practise as people think that it is about having a feeling rather than cultivating an intention, which of course is a karma which then leads to pleasant vedana. This proved to be a very useful distinction to make, it was suggested that a different word needs to be used to make it clear. In my experience it is similar to a common misunderstanding people can have in the West, in some ways the issue of words actually makes it easier to get hold of.

We also looked more closely at the 6 element practice, particularly as a means of cultivating wisdom and non-attachment. Without these qualities we will always be blown about by the worldly winds -



sometimes responding well and other times losing perspective. Although important everywhere the pressures that Indian family life and work bring means that these qualities are of vital import. In this context this is important as these people are those who communicate the Dhamma to others - they really benefited from going into these practices more deeply.

The other element was starting to look at how to take the movement forward, this was not done in a formal manner but more through encouraging them to think about how and what can be done. This of course is important in continuing to step away from Europeans setting the direction, as senior Indian Order members continue to take more responsibility.

***Dharmashalin, November/December 2009***