

Die Auseinandersetzung mit der „Selbstbesinnung im Westen“ (S. 24ff.) wie auch jene Passagen, in denen sich Mohr mit dem „Laienbuddhismus im Westen“ (z.B. S. 152ff.) befasst, sind jedoch interessant und geben Anregungen für die weitere Forschung, was das Buch, trotz verschiedener Abstriche, lesenswert macht.

Rotraut Wurst

SID BROWN, *The Journey of One Buddhist Nun. Even Against the Wind*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001. 180 pages, US\$ 19.95. ISBN 0-7914-5096-1 (pb.)

In her doctoral thesis, published in 2001, Sid Brown was confronted with the problem that “there is no one entity that is Buddhism nor one that is *maechi*” (p. 143). This led her to confine herself to the life of an individual Thai nun, *maechi* Wabi, which she used “as a prism” (p. 143). This way the reader becomes acquainted with “gender in Thailand, Buddhism, meditation, *maechi*, and monasticism”, as Sid Brown writes in the appendix of her book (p. 144).

As a German, I had a distinct idea of how a thesis should be: Theoretical, dry, and scientific, of course, certainly not an entertaining novel. And then I read this book by Sid Brown, that from the very first page was enjoyable and informative, but written in such an interesting way that one can really taste the atmosphere of Thailand and sense how Thai *maechi* feel and think. The narrative is so gripping that one can immerse oneself in the atmosphere of the country, and the life of the nun, who exemplifies the situation of Thai nuns, the so-called *maechi*.

Sid Brown describes the life of *maechi* Wabi, with whom she stayed in her *sammak*, her nunnery, in Thailand, and with whom she talked, making interviews with her, talking about her life in the nunnery, about her family, her childhood, and her reasons to go forth.

*Maechi* Wabi recognizes clearly that the monks do not keep their vows correctly. And she says several times that it is *maechis* who do so, by helping the lay people and playing a different role than that traditionally assigned to women, who are supposed to be only wives and mothers.

Interestingly, Brown mentions that *maechi*, who “have long been ignored officially” (p.30) were running an “Institute of Thai *Maechi*” (p.30), and that the first meeting of *maechi* took place in 1969, initiated by the *sangharaja*. “People from foreign countries had become interested in Buddhism” (p.33), and so the founding of the institute depends to some extent on this interest of Westerners, especially of Western feminists. Discussing the problem of *bhikkhuni* ordination, Brown mentions *maechi* Kanittha, and her endeavours to improve the situation of Thai *maechi*, but, surprisingly, she does not refer to the recent discussion in Thai Buddhism on *bhikkhuni* ordination, published by Prof. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh – known since her ordination as Venerable Dhammananda –, in *Yasodhara. Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities*. So the developments of the last few years, including the discussion about *bhikkhuni* ordination with nuns and monks from the Mahayana tradition, which was ini-

tiated by Sakyadhita Sri Lanka in 1996 for Sri Lankan *dasa sil matas* and nuns from different traditions – Thai nuns, too –, desirous of becoming *bhikkhunis*, is missing. This topic has been discussed since 1987, when Sakyadhita International, the International Network of Buddhist Women, was founded, and since then conferences have been held every two years.

Brown focuses exclusively on Thai Buddhism, not dwelling on changes in Buddhism world-wide. Her focus lies on *maechi* Wabi's life as "a prism". So she is interested in the development of this prism, this particular biography. And Brown shows *maechi* Wabi's problems as a nun, living together with other women, the conflicts that occur with other nuns, and her approach to these problems by meditating. This makes it necessary to explain what meditation means. The different methods of insight and calming meditation are also explained. Brown focuses *maechi* Wabi's problems with meditation, for example, her clinging to special visions which made her feel confident (p. 51). So Sid Brown writes, "(...) to understand *maechi*, we must understand the roles meditation plays (...)" (p. 68) And, as far as women are concerned, the most important aspect is that meditation is the only way women, whether *maechi* or laywomen, "could legitimately be alone (...)" (p. 68). And that means being free of all those "social, familial demands on Thai women to interact and nurture others" (p. 68).

After crises and struggles *maechi* Wabi finally came to Dhammcharini Samnak, run by the Institute of Thai Maechi, where Brown became acquainted with her and they became friends (p. 136). She graduated from high school, and is one of those *maechi* "who have been ordained the longest" (p. 115). Living in Dhammcharini Samnak she now sometimes thinks of going "on a two-year meditation retreat to deepen her understanding of Buddhism (...)" (p. 136).

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SUBRATA K. MITRA AND V.B. SINGH, *Democracy and Social Change in India. A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the National Electorate*. New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London: Sage Publications, 1999. 341 pages, £ 29.99. ISBN 0-7619-9344-4 (US, hb.) /81-7036-809-X (India, hb.)

In the year 2002 India celebrated the golden jubilee of her parliamentary democracy, witnessed some of the worst instances of rioting and bloodletting, and also successfully held free and fair elections in one of her main trouble spots, Jammu and Kashmir. Time and again in India, just when democracy seems to be at its lowest ebb, it bounces back, thus fascinating and baffling both admirers and critics alike. In this rigorously and yet elegantly argued book Mitra and Singh attempt to answer the perplexing question that seems to perennially plague both observers and students in and of India; why has democracy worked, survived and brought about change in a country with not only inadequate but also 'inappropriate' basic hardware, numerous contradictions, hurdles and problems?