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Gender and the Greening of Buddhism: Exploring Scope for a Buddhist Ecofeminism in an Ultramodern Age

Emma Tomalin

University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT
e.tomalin@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract

Despite its popularity and appeal for many, ecofeminism has been criticized for essentializing and romanticizing women's roles as close to nature thereby reproducing colonialist and biologically determinist discourses that contribute to discrimination. In response there have been attempts to defend ecofeminism, arguing that such critiques are hyperbolic and that we need ecofeminism more than ever (Philips and Rumens 2016). In a climate of renewed interest in ecofeminism, I ask why is it that some faith traditions are represented to a far greater extent in ecofeminist literature than others? I pick up on this discrepancy within ecofeminism's engagement between different religions through examining Buddhist responses to gender and ecology. In the paper I adopt a theory of ultramodern Buddhism, developed by Halafoff and Rajkobal (2015), to understand Buddhism in the contemporary era. Three main research questions are addressed: 1) *to what extent has 'green Buddhism' been gendered?;* 2) why has there has been virtually no attempt to bring together feminist analysis with responses to Buddhism and environmentalism? Why have they been approached separately?; and 3) in what ways are Buddhist women (and men) combining gender analysis and environmentalism in practice in reference to or outside the framework of ecofeminism? To better understand why a Buddhist ecofeminism has not been named and claimed by Buddhists in either the West or Asia, there is a need for local level empirical studies that examine subjective understandings of relationships between gender and environmentalism in the lives of ultramodern Buddhist practitioners rather than assuming a standard ecofeminist position as the primary reference point.

Keywords

Buddhism, ecofeminism, gender, nature, environmentalism

Introduction

Ecofeminist discourses began to emerge in the late 1970s, promoting the view that there is 'a connection between the domination of nature and the domination of women' (Ruether 2005: 91). While the Italian legalist Lorenza Carlassare writes that 'ecofeminism does not lend itself to easy generalization' since it 'consists of a diversity of positions, and this is reflected in the diversity of voices and modes of expression' (1994: 220), an emphasis upon overcoming dualistic thinking is a shared characteristic across different expressions of ecofeminism which are otherwise rather difficult to characterize into distinct types without being reductionist and exclusionary (Moore 2016: 21). Although not all expressions of ecofeminism engage with religious identities, strong parallels exist between ecofeminism and

feminist critiques of religion that became more strongly articulated from the 1960s. In particular, feminist criticism of religion drew attention to the ways in which apparently masculine ways of viewing the world and the divine, including the relationship between the material and the spiritual, relied on dualisms that subordinated women and their roles, which critics viewed as socially constructed rather than natural.

Despite its popularity and appeal, ecofeminism has been criticized for appearing to essentialize and romanticize women's roles as close to nature thereby reproducing colonialist and biologically determinist discourses that actually contribute to discrimination rather than overcoming it (Tomalin 2008; Leach 2007). As Philips and Rumens argue 'the accusations and pressures with which ecofeminism was assailed were such that many erstwhile ecofeminists no longer called themselves such' (2016: 5; see also Gaard 2011; Studgeon 1997). In response to this castigation there have been attempts to defend ecofeminism, arguing that critiques have a tendency to be hyperbolic and to wrongly identify all forms of ecofeminism with cultural ecofeminism which does make 'an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature' (Gaard 2011: 31). One of the most recent anthologies in this area argues that these accusations 'now seem outdated and irrelevant', and that we need ecofeminism more than ever as it provides a 'deployment of radical ideas, strategies and politics which re-connect the human and more-than-human world' through a recognition that 'nature must be included in theorizing and acting against constellations of injustice and exploitation' (Philips and Rumens 2016: 9, 5).

In a climate of renewed interest in ecofeminism, my aim is not to engage with debates about the shortcomings of ecofeminism and its religious turn, as I have done elsewhere (Tomalin 2008, 2013), but instead to address another issue that has received much less attention. In reviewing the literature on religious ecofeminism why is it that some faith traditions are represented to a far greater extent than others? In terms of the so-called world religions there is a sizable literature from within Christianity and Judaism, some from Hindu commentators and an emerging debate within Islam, but virtually nothing from Sikhism or Buddhism. Outside of the world religions, indigenous and New Age spiritualties, particularly those that promote Goddess worship, have a highly developed ecofeminist contribution. I pick up on this discrepancy within ecofeminism's engagement between different religions through examining Buddhist responses to gender and ecology. In particular, I examine why an enunciated Buddhist ecofeminism is not apparent and whether there is evidence of other ways of combining gender analysis and environmentalism within Buddhism outside the framework of ecofeminism.

In addition to this absence of an enunciated Buddhist ecofeminism, where we do find Buddhist responses to ecological concerns these are more likely to be written by men, to focus what monks are doing (e.g. the so-called 'ecology monks' in Thailand, Cambodia, Burma and Sri Lanka, where some monks are ordaining trees in order to project them[1]). Moreover, these responses do not tend to use a gender lens to examine Buddhist responses to issues such as climate change, either philosophically or with regard to social action. Overall we know much less about the environmentalist activity of female Buddhists, both lay and ordained, including those in Asia and the West.

I am not the only scholar to have noticed that 'to date almost nothing has been written, at least in the English language, that calls itself 'Buddhist ecofeminism' (Gross 2011: 17). The 'Buddhist feminist theologian' Rita Gross has also asked,

[1] See, for instance, http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2006/Nardi.htm, http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=1, and, http://members.foei.org/en/what-we do/land-grabbing/latest-news/the-story-of-tree-ordination-in-sri-lanka.

> Why is there nothing on Buddhism and ecofeminism, given the large body of literature on Buddhism and ecology, the influence of feminist analyses of Buddhism, and the prevalence of ecofeminism in contemporary Western discourse? (2011: 17).

Gross provides some answers to this question but her discussion leaves other things unanswered. I explore this question further and begin to map out a research agenda to take this topic forward.[2] Examining the absence of an enunciated Buddhist ecofeminism will improve our understandings of theory and practice around the intersections between gender, religions and environmentalism in ways that move beyond the tendency to view this nexus primarily through the lens of a 'standard' ecofeminism (Page 2007; Tomalin 2008).

To begin, I present my rationale and theoretical framework. I adopt a theory of ultramodern Buddhism (Halafoff and Rajkobal 2015) to understand Buddhism in the contemporary era and the engagement of Buddhists in both Asia and the West with social issues around inequality and justice, including those relating to gender inequality, the environment and climate change. Then I address three main research questions: 1) to what extent has 'green Buddhism' been gendered?; 2) why has there has been virtually no attempt to bring together feminist analysis with responses to Buddhism and environmentalism? Why have they been approached separately?; and 3) in what ways are Buddhist women (and men) combining gender analysis and environmentalism in practice in reference to or outside the framework of ecofeminism?

Rationale and Theoretical Framework

For more than a decade I have been involved in research with Buddhist women in different parts of the world, examining their campaigns for full ordination (the Bhikkhuni ordination), their involvement in social welfare projects, their sharing of strategies to improve their status and living conditions, as well as the ways in which they link transnationally with other lay and ordained Buddhist women (Tomalin 2006, 2015). Although we cannot say that all Buddhist women across the globe are consciously members of a global Buddhism women's movement, in this era of 'thick globalization' (Vasquez and Marquardt 2003: 36) there are significant transnational flows of teachers, ideas, practices and material resources between different settings. These collectively aim towards improving the lives and opportunities of Buddhist lay women and nuns globally but are articulated in ways that reflect local contexts, or – in other words -- are 'glocal' in nature (Robertson 1994). 'Members' of this global Buddhist women's movement are often outspoken about gender inequality and about environmentalism, and have produced academic and activist writing on each of these topics. Yet it is noticeable that -- with a few exceptions -- they have not tended to bring them together (as other religious ecofeminists have) to develop a Buddhist ecofeminism, but have tended to analyse them separately. And where they have been analysed simultaneously the word ecofeminism is typically not used (Kaza 1993; Thanissara 2015).

For instance, one organization that plays a central role in this global Buddhist women's movement is Sakyadhita.[3] Established in 1987, it holds a conference every two years attracting nuns from Asia and the West, lay Buddhist women and scholars. Women are invited to make presentations in their own languages and the presentations are translated into different languages and published in a booklet. Most of the papers deal with issues that could

[2] Rita Gross passed away in 2015 and I intend for this paper to continue a discussion that she was unable to pursue.

[3] See http://sakyadhita.org.

be classed as relating to gender analysis or even feminism, with some presenters comfortably identifying with that term. Fewer of the papers deal with environmental issues although this is a topic of interest. However, none have undertaken a serious engagement with ecofeminism from a Buddhist perspective, particularly in terms of making a link between the oppression of women and the destruction of the natural environment.[4]

Postcolonial feminist critics draw attention to the ways in which discourses such as ecofeminism can impose analyses upon 'marginalized', typically non-western, women that they would not necessarily understand to be relevant to their situation. Mohanty, for instance, is critical of 'a scholarly view from above of marginalized communities of women in the global South and North, calling instead for attention to historical and cultural specificity in understanding their complex agency as situated subjects' (Mohanty 2013: 967; 1993; Pui Lan 2002; Narayan 1997). This kind of critical analysis is important and relevant. But in an era of thick globalization (Vasquez and Marquardt 2003: 36), that has intensified since the 1960s, with increased transnational flows of ideas and practices between and within religions and around different social movement aims and strategies. In such a milieu, apparently western approaches such as ecofeminism are also likely to spread and mutate, taking on a variety of localized manifestations, sometimes using the original language and analyses and sometimes not. This does not mean that we should not continue to be attuned to the colonialist use of certain philosophical and analytical approaches to essentialize and idealize what Mohanty and other postcolonial feminists call 'Third World women' (1993, 2013; Crowley 1991). But it does mean that we cannot always assume that philosophies such as ecofeminism necessarily and always deny 'Third World women's' agency when they may adopt this position themselves, either in fragments or entirely. As Narayan reminds us 'a great many issues that politically engage feminists cannot be neatly classified as "Western" or "Third-World" issues…but they have different dimensions and raise specific questions for feminists of color where these issues intersect with specific race and class structures within their communities' (1997: 152-153).

However, the lack of focused and detailed ethnographic research about the diversity of subjective ways that women globally relate to the intersections between gender, nature and religion means that in the absence of alternative frameworks this set of relationships is subsumed under the banner of ecofeminism (Moore 1988). This is a feature of ideologically committed ecofeminists, mostly situated in the Global North, who believe that there are shared characteristics across cultures that can explain both the oppression of women and of nature, shaping the basis for their social action. It is also a feature of those who tend to lump together everything that touches on gender and nature as 'ecofeminism'. Both of these moves serve to obscure the ways that the intersections between gender, nature and religion might be experienced outside of standard ecofeminism discourse, with the latter move, I argue, failing to do justice to any distinctive contribution that ideologically committed ecofeminists might have to make. I argue that we need to build on the reflexive awareness that postcolonial critique demands of us by remaining alert to power differentials and hierarchies, but that in

[4] The only discussion I have found in the Sakyadhita literature about ecofeminism is an article by South Korean Jeong-Hee Kim (2008) where she mentions ecofeminism, renaming it as 'biofeminism' (see 2005 also). Another scholar uses the term 'saeng-myung (life) feminism' (Young Suk Yi 2009) as more fitting for a Korean setting. And as Trinlae writes, another South Korean who constructs 'an indigenous Buddhist ecofeminism from a culturally-situated perspective, is theologian Hyun-Shik Jun…[whose]…paper takes a philosophical approach, comparing Hegelian, Madhyamaka, and Korean Tonghak non-duality philosophy and arguing their synthesized application… to custom-fit the ecofeminism articulated by theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther' (2015: 3).

an ultramodern era, boundaries between East and West, Third World and Western, traditional and modern, are actually rather difficult to maintain as part of an analytical approach (Halafoff and Rajkobal 2015). Instead, to avoid both of the moves outlined above, a greater voice needs to be given to Buddhist women, in Asia and the West, to articulate the ways that they experience the intersections between gender and nature, whether this absorbs fragments of ecofeminism or not. It may be the case that in today's globalized world ecofeminist discourse is becoming a compelling discourse for women across cultures, that it really has 'captured the market'. In that case, how are women adapting ecofeminism in line with their own cultures and social situations, as well as developing alternative responses? We cannot assume that this is a straightforward and one-way process and that when women adopt approaches such as ecofeminism, either fully or in fragments, this necessarily indicates a lack of agency. However, I will also argue that it is interesting to look at places where approaches such as ecofeminism are not adopted and what this tells us about agency and identity.

In order to better understand contemporary global Buddhism in an era of thick globalization I adopt the theoretical framework of 'ultramodern Buddhism', proposed by Halafoff and Rajkobal (2015). They argue that we need to develop a new framework that takes us beyond earlier theories of 'modern Buddhism' (Lopez 2002) or 'Buddhist modernism' (McMahan 2008), which have been used to describe the spread of Buddhism from Asia to the West and also the adaptation of Buddhism in Asia towards western versions of modernity. As Halafoff and Rajkopal write, 'features of Buddhist modernism include: aligning Buddhist cosmology with a scientific world-view; de-emphasizing ritual and superstitions; social and political engagement; individualism; democracy; and egalitarianism' (2015: 117). However, the growing intensity and reach of transnational interactions, brought about by travel and technology, including, I argue, the connections and exchanges made via the Internet and social media, demonstrates for Halafoff and Rajkopal that 'binary opposites of tradition/modernity and "the West/the Rest" are no longer applicable to contemporary Buddhism, but rather "plural modernities" are evident, "entangled in the interplay of the global and the local"' (2015: 117).

Drawing on Willaime (2006), Halafoff and Rajkopal adopt the idea of ultramodern Buddhism to understand Buddhism at the turn of the twenty-first century (2015: 118). Ultramodernity is marked by uncertainty, where the promises of modern progress and equality have not been achieved and communities experience a sense of despair about and fear for the future. As Beckford has demonstrated (1990), religious traditions and organizations have found themselves very well placed to deal with the challenges thrown up by this radical uncertainty and have 'come to play a central mobilizing role among social movements of people questing for self-determination, political participation, and equitable and sustainable development, seeking to defend the lifeworld against state and market penetration' (Halafoff and Rajkobal 2015: 119). Concerns over environmental destruction and climate change, and the emergence of approaches such as ecofeminism and its religious varieties, as well as the origins of Buddhist women's organizations such as Sakyadhita, can all be located within such a global movement towards challenging inequality and injustice. Ultramodern actors create hybrid responses to social crises drawing upon a bricolage of meaningful ideas and practices (Tomalin 2008: 225).

Having outlined my rationale and theoretical framework I will now address my first research question: *to what extent has 'green Buddhism' been gendered?* This will be examined both in terms of using gender analysis as an analytical framework and with respect to the visibility of women's voices and experiences in accounts of Buddhist environmentalism.

*Is 'Green Buddhism' G*endered?

So-called 'green Buddhism' can be considered an ultramodern movement. It is a radical, reflexive and hybrid response to concerns over environmental destruction and climate change, drawing upon Buddhist resources and wider fragments borrowed from the different environmentalist philosophies and activisms to shape this response. There has been a good deal of sophisticated reflection around Buddhism and ecological ethics from scholars (Harris 2000, 1995, 1994, 1991; Keown 2007; Cooper and James 2005) and practitioners (Halifax 1990; Hayward 1990; Batchelor and Brown 1992). This includes an emphasis on interdependence of all beings, a focus on compassion, and a belief in non-dualism (e.g. Gross 1997; Kaza 2002; Grosnick 1994). Key Buddhist figures such as the Dalai Lama have spoken out in support of environmentalist behaviour, condemning modern wasteful lifestyles. Also at the core of Buddhist teaching is the idea of the acceptance of change and impermanence, and this has been applied to thinking about environmentalist concerns. According to another major Buddhist figure Thich Nhat Hanh: 'If we can accept the death of our own human bodily form, we can perhaps begin to accept the eventual death of our own civilization… Acceptance is made possible when we know that deep down our true nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death' (quoted in Stanley n.d.). This view on impermanence has led some commentators to doubt whether Buddhism can support an ecological ethic since teachings about impermanence could suggest that there is nothing we can do about environmental change and that the best route is to focus on personal spiritual development and enlightenment. Thus, another Buddhist response to environmental decline is to accept the inevitability of it (Harris 1991, 1994).

However, this is not the focus of my research questions. In order to begin to address the issue of the extent to which green Buddhism is gendered, I undertook a broad-brush examination of the corpus of Buddhism and ecology literature through a study of the annotated English language bibliography of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology website. This is not a complete list of everything written in English on this topic, not least because it only goes up to 2006, but it is a good starting point to get a relative sense of the emphasis on gender analysis in this area.[5] This reading list has 362 entries with roughly 85 having a female author or co-author, with most of these being western Buddhists or academics. I carried out a search for key words that would reflect any emphasis on gender issues: woman (0), gender (2), women (13), feminist (4), feminism (5), ecofeminist (3) and ecofeminism (6). Two articles, which I return to below, make up most of these instances of gender-relevant terms (Kaza 1993; Deicke 1990).

However, other terms are noticeably absent in the annotations within this bibliography in addition to gender-relevant terms, namely global warming and climate change, issues that have become more prominent in environmentalist discourse over the past decade or so. I decided to look at the Buddhist response to global warming and climate change, a more recent development in the religious response to environmental crises, and to see if this newer body of literature and activism has more to say about gender than earlier phases of Buddhism and ecology discourse. A key example here is the Tibetan Buddhist influenced website 'Ecological Buddhism: A Buddhist Response to Global Warming', set up to support the publication of a book, A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency (Stanley et al. 2009). Also presented on the website is The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change that emerged from the contributions to the book. This declaration more recently was the basis for the Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World

[5] See http://fore.yale.edu/religion/buddhism/bibliography/, and http://fore.yale.edu/religion/buddhism/bibliography_part2/.

Leaders 2015[6] presented to the climate conference in Paris in November 2015.[7] To give an excerpt:

> Today we live in a time of great crisis, confronted by the gravest challenge that humanity has ever faced: the ecological consequences of our own collective karma. The scientific consensus is overwhelming: human activity is triggering environmental breakdown on a planetary scale…. We have a brief window of opportunity to take action, to preserve humanity from imminent disaster and to assist the survival of the many diverse and beautiful forms of life on Earth. Future generations, and the other species that share the biosphere with us, have no voice to ask for our compassion, wisdom, and leadership. We must listen to their silence. We must be their voice, too, and act on their behalf.[8]

What is evident about gender issues in this book and on the website? The book itself has six parts, with part three presenting Asian Buddhist Perspectives. However, this includes twelve short chapters by Tibetan male teachers, hardly representative of Asian Buddhist perspectives. Throughout the rest of the book there are only three contributions by women and all are situated in the Global North. Nor does the website reflect any attention to female voices or perspectives, for instance, on their role in Buddhism and its relationship to environmentalist action. Moreover, The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change has far fewer female signatories, and the majority of these appear to be women located in the USA. My aim here is not to criticise this particular offering – the book and the website – but to locate it within a broader Buddhist environmentalist milieu that hardly pays any attention to gender issues and analysis either in the literature, both scholarly and practitioner, as well as within the different initiatives that have been set up to support environmental activism.

Moreover, apart from a few exceptions I have been unable to find much sustained evidence in the published literature, either scholarly or practitioner, of a link being made between gender inequality and a Buddhist response to environmentalism. It is striking that even within feminist responses to Buddhism, an ecofeminist argument linking ecological and gender concerns has not really been designated and enunciated.

This brings me to my second research question: why has there has been virtually no attempt to bring together feminist analysis with responses to Buddhism and environmentalism? Why have they been approached separately?

Buddhism and Ecofeminism

Before proceeding it is probably helpful to outline some of the main features of what I am calling 'standard' ecofeminism. While ecofeminism is not a unified system of thought and is very diverse in its expressions, I suggest that there are three shared characteristics. First is the idea that 'there are important connections between the domination of women (and other human subordinates) and the domination of nature, and that a failure to recognize these connections results in an inadequate feminism, environmentalism, and environmental philosophy' (Wilson 2005: 333–334; see also Warren 1996). Second, taking this idea of the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature further, ecofeminism draws attention to the intersectionality of all forms of domination and

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[6] See http://fore.yale.edu/files/Buddhist_Climate_Change_Statement_5-14-15.pdf.
[7] See http://gbccc.org.
[8] Quoted in http://fore.yale.edu/files/Buddhist_Climate_Change_Statement_5-14-15.pdf.

marginalization, relating, for instance, to class, race, ethnicity or gender. Third, ecofeminism attributes domination and marginalization to tendencies to think dualistically and to assign uneven value to different items, including for instance, the spiritual and material, male and female, or the rational and intuitive. Hence, many ecofeminists are attracted to philosophical and spiritual traditions that aim to dispel dualistic thinking, including Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies, even if most within these traditions have neither heard of nor choose to identify with ecofeminism.

Two exceptions to the general lack of an enunciated Buddhist ecofeminism can be found in the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology annotated bibliography. The first is a very short piece written by Carla Dieke that appears in an edited book (Badiner 1990). She draws attention to tensions between ecofeminists and deep ecologists, where although both promote an 'egalitarian ecocentrism', the latter is critiqued by ecofeminists for not paying attention to the idea that the destruction of nature is underpinned by androcentric forces, with some critics also arguing that this means that women are less culpable for environmental destruction. Dieke is critical of this view, arguing that the environmental crisis is too serious for men and women to not work together and that 'to accuse people of androcentrism is no inducement for transformation' (1990: 167). She writes that 'I would prefer to ignore the gender distinctions entirely. It is not that they aren't valid or interesting, but in the end I don't think they're helpful in solving our global environmental problems' (1990: 168).

The second exception, and the only example in the annotated bibliography that looks something like ecofeminism, is Stephanie Kaza's 1993 chapter 'Acting with Compassion: Buddhism, Feminism and the Environmental Crisis'. Kaza is a practicing Buddhist and Professor of Environmental Studies who self-identifies as a feminist and teaches courses on ecofeminism. In this article, she explores principles held by Buddhists and feminists relevant to the ecological crisis, and discusses the work of feminist women involved in environmental activities as Buddhist practitioners. She begins her discussion by arguing that in the two decades between Earth Day 1970 and Earth Day 1990, 'Buddhism, feminism, and concern for the environment in America grew and changed tremendously reflecting a period of serious questioning of values and social structures' (1993: 52). She writes that,

> I believe there is a powerful confluence of thought, practice, commitment, and community in the lives of feminist Buddhists working for the environment who have lived through this history of startling change. In these two decades, leadership and participation of women in Buddhist practice have paralleled the rise in feminist theory research and explorations in conservation biology and restoration ecology. A whole new generation of young people has been raised in families with feminist and/or Buddhist parents concerned about the environment. Feminists, Buddhist women practitioners, and environmental advocates are no longer isolated from one another (1993: 53).

However, she argues that the existence of unequal power relations within Buddhist communities in the West could prevent the evolution of a Buddhist environmental ethic. She points out that an inquiry into gender conditioning in Buddhism 'is not widespread and not necessarily well-received by American Buddhist centers or teachers' (1993: 64)[9] but that,

> The environmental crisis is driven by the complexities of power distribution, giving preference and status to some governments, some corporate ventures, some ecosystems some species some cultures over others. An effective Buddhist

[9] This was much more so the case when she was writing in the early 1990s than it is today, but it is still an issue nonetheless.

> environmental ethic is strengthened by the dimension of power analysis presented by feminist theorists…Without this awareness the critical role of power can be overlooked by the Buddhist practitioner focusing on the beauty and miracle of interdependence (1993: 64).

Thus, for Kaza, the existence of gender inequality within Buddhist communities is relevant for thinking about Buddhist responses to the environment and in this respect she comes very close to what we might think of as a Buddhist ecofeminism. While the chapter appears in an edited volume about ecofeminism (Adams 1993), Kaza only uses the term three times and does not lay claim to an ecofeminist identity herself or promote or define a Buddhist ecofeminism. Nonetheless, like ecofeminists, she analyzes the roots of women's oppression and environmental destruction as having links in dualistic thinking that give rise to unequal power relationships. In terms of Buddhist approaches to environmentalism and gender inequality, Kaza's approach is unusual with most commentators not analyzing these together or identifying with the term. What reasons can we give for this absence of Buddhist ecofeminism amongst Buddhist practitioners in the West and Asia?

Why is there no Enunciated Buddhist Ecofeminism?

The Buddhist feminist scholar Rita Gross begins her discussion of why there is almost 'nothing on Buddhism and ecofeminism' (2011: 17) by outlining three themes that are recurrent within ecofeminism. She then examines whether any of these are incompatible with Buddhism. Gross is also interested to examine the ways in which 'A fresh analysis of…the ecofeminist conversation could be relevant to Buddhists' (2012: 26). First, according to Gross, ecofeminism rests on the idea of a special relationship between women and nature (as either inherent or culturally/socially constructed) that leads women to play a leading role in activism on behalf of the planet. Second, she suggests that ecofeminism promotes the view that 'all forms of oppression are linked and intertwined' (2012: 23). And finally, she argues that ecofeminism demands an 'adjustment in worldview' (2012: 24).

Taking these three themes one by one, Gross suggests that the idea of a special relationship between women and nature is problematic for Buddhists, particularly when it entails an essentialist view of women. Although, as we have already seen, most ecofeminists today rigorously defend themselves against charges of essentialism, this is nonetheless a hangover that for Gross makes it difficult for Buddhists who reject essentialism to identify with ecofeminism (2012: 21-22).[10] She also suggests that ecofeminism can appear to support a view that women are morally superior to men, which does not sit comfortably with the Buddhist tradition's rejection of essentialized gender traits (2012: 22).

The second ecofeminist theme, she suggests, makes a much more promising contribution to Buddhist engagement with environmental and other social problems, where 'ecofeminism's insistence on an integrated analysis of oppression and social injustice in which issues of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and environmental degradation are linked as parts of a larger system of domination instead of being analyzed separately' (2012: 26). This, she argues, serves to counterbalance the focus in much Buddhist analysis on the role of individual karma and ignorance as the cause suffering, rather than the way in which 'humanly constructed institutions cause suffering and to think about collective ways of changing those institutions' (2012: 26). Although 'Engaged Buddhism' has developed conversations about

[10] This portrayal of Buddhism as non-dualistic reflects Gross' position as a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism and is not true of all forms of the tradition.

the integrated nature of social issues, as Gross points out, 'it is strangely silent on gender issues' (2012: 26). However, she argues that

> Western Buddhists tend to believe that Buddhism does not need gender analysis because Buddhism does teach that enlightenment is beyond gender. [And] Asian Buddhists sometimes claim that because feminism is a Western system, it should be avoided altogether. Feminism is too confrontational and ideological, it is often claimed (2012: 26).

The final theme of 'an adjustment in world view' is, for Gross, not so relevant or new for Buddhists and reflects ecofeminism's emergence from a western Christian worldview. The adjustment that is required is a shift to non-dualistic thinking, and 'Buddhism is fundamentally non-dualistic' (2012: 27) even if Buddhists and Buddhist communities do not always put these insights into practice (2012: 28), for instance, with respect to gender dualities.

Thus, for Gross ecofeminism is not a palatable option for most Buddhists. However, it is also the case that many within a Buddhist milieu who otherwise are concerned about gender inequality and who may adopt a feminist identity do not analyze this alongside ecological concerns. Even when they do, as with Kaza (1993), they do not adopt the term ecofeminism. Gross is an example of someone who has written several articles on Buddhist ecology (Gross 1995, 2000, 2001) but does not apply a feminist lens to this work, although she is first and foremost known for her work on gender and Buddhism. To explain this she tells us that she reserves the term feminism for talking specifically about gender issues, as it is a contested and important term that should be used sparingly. She writes that 'many of the topics discussed by ecofeminists do not strike me as being inherently about gender. They easily slide into more general ecological issues' (2012: 29). Rather confusingly, this would seem to act against her call to see social issues as interrelated. It is not just that she does not use the term but she does not make the conceptual link between the oppression of women and the destruction of the environment in her work on Buddhism and ecology.

Nonetheless, there is a tendency to sometimes view Gross as an ecofeminist (e.g. Sponsel 2012: 38). We find a similar identification with ecofeminism being made with the work of the deep ecologist and Buddhist Joanna Macy (e.g. 2003; Macy and Johnstone 2012) even though we do not find the basic ecofeminist elements in her work, nor does she identify as an ecofeminist or discuss it. Thus, some commentators blur the boundaries between ecofeminism and other environmental philosophies, particularly when they are held by women and even more so when they are held by women who also engage in gender analysis elsewhere in their writing or social action.

While this process of blending fragments of contemporary eco-philosophies with religious resources to create hybrid responses to environmentalist concerns is a feature of ultramodernity, such a move does justice neither to what 'standard' ecofeminism might have to offer nor to other ways of envisioning the intersections between gender, religion and nature. The scholar of religions Tovis Page, for instance, draws attention to the website of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology which includes a link to a section on 'gender', 'but when one clicks on this link, an overview of ecofeminism appears, along with a comprehensive bibliography of ecofeminist books and articles' (2007: 299).[11] She argues that ecofeminism has 'cornered the market' and that 'instead of appearing as one of various approaches to the study of gender, religion, and ecology, ecofeminism is presented as the only approach—indeed, as essentially synonymous with the analytical category of gender'

[11] See http://fore.yale.edu/disciplines/gender/.

(2007: 299). Indeed, as I have also argued elsewhere, 'considerations of women, religion and the environment have been captured by ecofeminist discourse' (2008: 254). That is, these considerations have tended to be dominatned by rather essentialist 'spiritual/cultural ecofeminist discourses' that depict women as 'close to nature' and contend that 'there has been little attempt in other academic, activist or policy literature to consider the ways in which gendered natural resource use and management is crosscut by issues of religious and cultural attachment' (2008: 245-46).

To return then to Gross' interest in examining how 'a fresh analysis of…the ecofeminist conversation could be relevant to Buddhists' (2012: 26), the final section of the paper addresses my third research question: in what ways are Buddhist women (and men) combining gender analysis and environmentalism in practice in reference to or outside the framework of ecofeminism? My aim is to examine some more recent examples within ultramodern green Buddhism and to suggest that something like a Buddhist ecofeminism might be emerging in some places but not (yet) in others. The emergence of a Hindu ecofeminism, for instance, was, I suggest, a product of the global influence of the work of Vandana Shiva (cf. 1998). To date there has not been a similar promoter of Buddhist ecofeminism, which lacks a reference point for such an approach to be developed and debated. There is evidence that ecofeminism is being picked up by some Buddhist women, in form and/or in name, from progenitors such as Vandana Shiva. However, we also know little about how the links between gender, Buddhism and nature are experienced and articulated elsewhere in Asia in particular.

Gender, Buddhism and the Environment: Looking to the Future

In the final section if this paper I will discuss some examples that suggest something like a Buddhist ecofeminism is beginning to emerge. Evidence is still rather small scale and seems to be confined to Buddhist women in the Global North who have been more exposed to ecofeminist thinking than those in Asia. First, I will look at a recent text by a western female Theravada practitioner, Thanissara, which appears to resemble a Buddhist ecofeminism, yet as with Kaza's chapter (1993) does not fully buy into the term (2015). Second, I will look at an example of environmental activism within a new Buddhist nunnery in California, Aloka Vihara, established in 2009, where I have found identification with the term. However, because it is crucial that we broaden our scope to also look at what Asian Buddhists are doing, I will finish the section by looking at the example of the so-called Drukgpa nuns in Nepal who have a strong track record in promoting environmentalism in the Himalayan region and beyond.

Thanissara writes that,

> We need to understand the ways in which Buddhism perpetuates misogyny and hatred of women. Patriarchal religions that denigrate women, the body, and sexuality tend not to challenge the denigration of the Earth, but instead operate within hierarchies that oppress through race, class, and gender to preference privilege—all of which leave a distorted and often abusive inheritance (2015: 11).

She emphasises the importance of social action as well as private practice in order to address pressing issues such as climate change. However, the unequal treatment of women in Buddhism has implications for dealing with climate change in a number of ways, she argues. For instance, 'the dominance of patriarchy and its entitlements, and the denied feminine, is not only an unhealthy paradigm within Buddhism, but it permeates our global society at a deeply systemic level and contributes to the causes of catastrophic climate change' (2015:

30). She continues that 'an exploration and reclamation of the feminine principle, in us all, which balances out the preference for the solo and transcendent with capacity within the relational and emotional spheres, is also essential' (2015: 155). This can be achieved through promoting 'the lifting up and support of current and emergent female teachers and leaders, whether lay or monastic' (2015: 154). In addition to re-valuing the 'feminine' she also suggests that in a time of such pressing need for social action and diverse and representative voices, to ignore women and nuns makes little sense: 'with the clock ticking down on our capacity to secure a sustainable world, it is irrational and churlish to block the restoration of full ordination for women' (2015: 154). She continues,

> As we negotiate our way through the times ahead, we will need to create strong and resilient, heart-full communities that can stand up together. Overall, a nihilistic, life-denying, relationally challenged Buddhism, which generates splits based on disdain for the world, and negative feelings about women and the larger domain of the feminine, is a disservice to the overall transmission of the Dharma. This is particularly true in our current times, because traditional patriarchal religions that look to heaven, paradise, and nirvana for salvation have been slow to speak out in defense of the Earth (2015: 8-9).

While not using the terms ecofeminism/ecofeminist (or even feminism/feminist) to label her position, the overall tone of the book does at times appear to profess an essentialism about 'the feminine' that is sometimes found in ecofeminism, for which it has been castigated, and the presence of which made it hard to see a future for Buddhism and ecofeminism for thinkers like Gross. For instance, Thanissara argues that 'the feminine archetype of kind and careful nurturing, that cares for the Earth and her people, is important at a time when we can lose so much through a dominant, militaristic, capitalistic paradigm that sees the Earth, her people, and her species as a means to increase wealth and power' (2015: 19). However, she also draws attention to the fact that if women's voices are not listened to regarding their experiences of the relationships between Buddhism and environmentalist ethics, then the global Buddhist community is unlikely to be able provide a response that could be as effective as possible.

The second example of potential Buddhist ecofeminism is a new Buddhist nunnery in California, Aloka Vihara, established in 2009. In 2005, a group of lay practitioners set up a foundation called Saranaloka, 'for the purpose of bringing Theravada Buddhist nuns of the Forest Tradition from Chithurst and Amaravati monasteries in England to the United States to teach and to establish a training monastery for nuns in the United States'.[12] By 2009 Saranaloka had supported the opening of Aloka Vihara in San Francisco, a monastic residence for a small group of nuns, and in 2014 this moved to Placerville, in the Sierra Foothills. Aloka Vihara has an Eco Dhamma webpage outlining the community's environmentalist activities as well as providing resources on environmental issues. However, this public face of the community does not claim an ecofeminist space or even a feminist space per se. This community of nuns has been prominent in campaigning for full ordination for women in Buddhism (the Bhikkhuni ordination) and is deeply committed to environmentally friendly lifestyles and ecological activism, being involved in the Buddhist Climate Action Network (BCAN) and the local Sacramento and Sierra Nevada BCAN. Yet there does not appear to be an explicit attempt to bring these two areas together here and to analyse them side-by-side. However, an interview with one of the nuns called Santacitta,

[12] See http://saranaloka.org/about/saranaloka-foundation/.

reproduced online, explains her motivation to leave the UK and to set up a new community in the USA where she could take full ordination. She explained that,

> Having read about feminism, and studied other things, the connection between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women…it wasn't a far stretch to feel connected to the environmental movement and that was what gave me the extra kick to leave it all behind. So the ordination wasn't the real motivator, only when I connected it with the bigger whole, such as the environmental movement… only then did it become a big impetus…Vandana Shiva has been a big influence in that respect, hearing her talks and reading her work seeing so clearly the connection between the oppression of women and the environment (quoted in Weil 2015).

In a blog post, Santacitta again mentions the ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, linking Shiva's writing to a Tibetan Buddhist perspective that emphasizes the interplay between male and female energies in the universe. While in this piece she does not use the term ecofeminism to describe herself, as with Thanissara and Kaza there is an implicit ecofeminism in that she links the oppression of nature to the oppression of women. She writes that 'we urgently need to redefine our priorities and see the links between the oppression of women and the feminine principle in general, and the oppression of nature' (quoted in Weil 2015).

While these two examples suggest that something like ecofeminism is perhaps beginning to find a place within Buddhism, both are from the Global North where women have had greater exposure to ecofeminism discourse. There is, however, also some evidence from Asia of emergent ecofeminisms, but ones that are influenced by local cultures and religions. Some South Korean women, for example, are engaging with the term ecofeminism in ways that reflect their location. For instance, Hyun-Shik Jun constructs 'an indigenous Buddhist ecofeminism from a culturally-situated perspective…to custom-fit the [Christian] ecofeminism articulated by theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther' (Trinlae 2015: 3). And Jeong-Hee Kim mentions ecofeminism, renaming it 'biofeminism' (2005).

Examples of Buddhist nuns in Asia engaging in environmental activism are not difficult to find, although we know little about how they link their activism with their status as nuns or whether they link the oppression of nature with the widespread oppression of women across the globe. For example, in 2005 a Buddhist nun named Jiyul Sunim went on a hunger strike to protest the construction of a tunnel for high-speed trains through Mount Cheonseong in South Korea. This tunnel was 'home to about 30 endangered species and marshlands that are thousands of years old. For example, the mountain is a rare habitat for the salamander, which used to be a common in Korean mountain valleys but gradually disappeared after new roads and travel attractions were built nearby'.[13] An article by Eun-Su Cho discusses Jiyul Sunim's activism, describing her as having developed a Korean Buddhist 'ecofeminism' (2013).

Another example of Buddhist women's environmental activity concerns the so-called 'Kung Fu' or 'Drukpa nuns', living in a monastery near Kathmandu -- Druk Amitabha Mountain Nunnery -- set up in the 1990s by the spiritual head of the Drukpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa. These nuns have made recent international headlines in several respects, regarding their relief work following the earthquake in Nepal in 2015 (Lakshmi 2015); a 'world tour' where they displayed their Kung Fu skills and, according to the Gyalwang Drukpa, their male spiritual leader, they aimed 'to raise awareness about gender equality and the need for the empowerment of women' (Evans

[13] Online at: http://www.caudata.org/forum/f1-general-topics/f5-general-discussion-news-members/33965-buddhist-nun-fasts-save-salamander-habitat.html.

2012); and their environmentalist activity. As the Washington Post reported, the nuns are known for their 'edgy campaigns against toxic waste, and for women's empowerment and walkathons against the prevalence of plastic products in everyday life' (Lakshmi 2015). An award winning film has been produced called Pad Yatra, that focuses on the yearly pilgrimages the nuns make to different parts of South Asia to spread education about environmentalism and other social issues.[14] In September 2016 they cycled from 'Kathmandu to the northern city of Leh in India to raise awareness about human trafficking in the remote region' that has escalated after the earthquake in 2015 (Bhalla 2016).

Today around 500 nuns live at the monastery, where they have received training to carry out rituals usually reserved for monks, and also play a central role in running a café, a gift shop and hostel.[15] They also carry out other traditionally masculine roles, working with computers and fitting and fixing solar panels as part of a project supported by a company called Peak Power Pvt. LTD.[16] The Gyalwang Drukpa views the solar project as providing an example to the rest of the Himalayan region, where power shortages are commonplace. The Washington Post again reported that 'after the earthquake, the nuns repaired the solar panels at the nunnery, laid new tiles in the front yard and are rebuilding their broken compound wall' (Lakshmi 2015).

This paints a picture of these nuns as very different to most living in Asia, and while there are other examples of Buddhist women engaging in environmental activities in Asia, their portrayal as experiencing gender empowerment while engaging in environmentalist activity makes the Drukpa Nuns a good case study for exploring ecofeminism. However, most of what we know about these nuns is filtered through the words of their leader. Their voices are unheard and we do not know how they think about their position as nuns or their environmentalist activity. The next best approach for now, then, is to examine the extent to which their leader is an ecofeminist. Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae, a North American scholar/PhD student who ordained as a Buddhist nun in India in 1998, undertakes such a survey of the Gyalwang Drukpa's writings. She finds that while he does not use key terms found in ecofeminist writing such as patriarchy and feminism, like ecofeminists he invests 'much personal time and energy in promoting the causes of women and the environment' (2015: 2-15). However, the 'ecofeminist insight that the subordination of women and nature are intertwined' (Christ 2006: 291) is not evident in the thinking of the Gyalwang Drukpa (Trinlae 2013). Trinlae concludes that although not sharing every feature with ecofeminists from the West, 'by way of his words and deeds, [the Gyalwang Drukpa] has in fact succeeded in characterizing a Drukpa Vajrayāna Buddhist genus of ecofeminism' (2015: 14). Trinlae suggests that the reason why he does not analyse these together is because

> The two factors of gender discrimination and environmental degradation are not coincident in the Himalayan and Vajrayāna Buddhist sociocultural context. It may be true, that wherever disrespect for the environment exists, disrespect for and discrimination against women will also be found. But there is no evidence for the converse, that wherever there is disrespect for women, there is necessarily disrespect for the environment, nor that social esteem for women on par with

[14] See http://www.drukpa-nuns.org/index.php/activities-of-nuns/173-the-eco-pad-yatra-2011 and http://www.drukpa-nuns.org/index.php/activities-of-nuns/141-sikkim-eco-pad-yatra-http://www.padyatra.org.

[15] See http://www.drukpa.org/index.php/en/centres/monastic-centres/nepal/303-druk-amitabha-mountain.

[16] See https://energypedia.info/images/5/58/Flyer_PEAK_POWER_PVT._LTD..pdf.

> respect for men necessarily follows from respect for the environment or positive feminine theological symbolism (2015: 10).

While robust evidence for this view is not given, her biography indicates several decades of experience of living and practicing in South Asia. Her claim, which we might assume is not ungrounded, suggests that the relationship between gender discrimination and the destruction of the environment might not be as clear-cut across cultures as the standard version of ecofeminism typically leads us to believe. Further historical and contemporary cross-cultural research will be necessary to understand this better. This leaves us with options regarding the question of whether the Gyalwang Drukpa is an ecofeminist, regardless of whether he uses this term himself. Either we say 'no' since he does not make this link between gender discrimination and the destruction of the environment or we agree to use this term and widen our understanding of what ecofeminism means. As Trinlae emphasizes as the motivation for her article, 'no published English-language research has been identified which empirically investigates the subjective meaning of feminism or ecofeminism concepts among Vajrayāna Buddhist or ethnically Himalayan populations' (2013: 2).

Conclusion

The main aim of this paper has been to examine why an enunciated Buddhist ecofeminism is not apparent and whether there is evidence of other ways of combining gender analysis and environmentalism within Buddhism outside the framework of a standard ecofeminism. In order to ascertain whether something resembles an ecofeminist position I suggested that three elements are typically present: that the domination of women and of nature are linked and should be analyzed together; that all forms of domination and marginalization have intersecting causes and solutions; and that domination and marginalization are a product of dualistic thinking. It is not only the case that green Buddhists have not named and claimed a Buddhist ecofeminism, but neither have they tended to link the domination of nature to the domination of women. Instead these have tended to be analyzed separately, and where we do find these dealt with together, the label ecofeminism has typically not been invoked. I argued that the account given by Rita Gross is only partially helpful, in pointing out the mainly Christian roots of ecofeminism, since she does not sufficiently consider whether ecofeminism is even familiar to Asian Buddhist audiences and what kinds of alternatives to western ecofeminism they might express.

A postcolonial feminist critique of ecofeminism has paid attention to this kind of power imbalance, arguing that ecofeminism is a western framework for interpreting the links between gender and nature that will not necessarily resonate with the experiences of women in the Global South (Tomalin 2008; Leach 2007). Ecofeminism has instead had the effect of essentializing women's relationship to nature and of denying their agency within the gender-nature nexus, according to this critique. While this critique should be taken seriously and there is some evidence that it is at least partially true, it is also the case that many ecofeminists feel they have been unfairly branded in this way and are trying to reclaim ecofeminism as a viable and ethical social philosophy that is important in contemporary global societies. Moreover, we do find 'fragments' of ecofeminism, in name and/or form in ultramodern green Buddhism. However, the lack of attention in green Buddhism to gender analysis, to women's voices, and documentation of their ecological activity, needs to be addressed as it gives a rather one sided and narrow view of relationships between Buddhism and ecology.

I adopted a theoretical framework of 'ultramodern Buddhism' as a helpful tool in making sense of this particular nature of the Buddhist response to ecofeminism, as either

absent or fragmentary, and in the sense of being adopted in form but not name, or in name but not form. While postcolonial feminists argue that ecofeminism developed in the West and silences the voices of Third World women, it is also the case that, in an ultramodern era of thick globalization, ideas travel and mutate and can take on localized forms. However, this is not an area of investigation that can ultimately be tackled through religio-philosophical debate. It instead requires ethnographic research that focuses on how are women adapting ecofeminism in line with their own cultures and social situation, as well as developing alternative responses.

The lack of focused and detailed ethnographic research about the diversity of subjective ways that women globally relate to the intersections between gender, nature and religion means that in the absence of knowledge about alternative frameworks this set of relationships is subsumed under the banner of ecofeminism. In many ways the research for this paper is therefore unsatisfactory since it does not rely on actual interviews and ethnography with the Buddhist women I have been writing about. However, as Gross stated, it is important to examine the ways in which 'A fresh analysis of…the ecofeminist conversation could be relevant to Buddhists' (2012: 26). Future scholarship therefore needs to focus upon ethnographic research to improve understandings of theory and practice around the intersections between gender, religions and environmentalism in ways that move beyond the tendency to view this nexus primarily through the lens of a 'standard' ecofeminism.

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