

International Conference on Buddhist Women in Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
December 29, '97 - January 4, '98

**A Visit to the Khmer Past**

*Marja-Leena Heikkila-Horn (Finland) and Friends*

On 5th January, we left Siem Reap for a three-day Angkor tour, the ancient capital which is situated about 320 kilometres north of Phnom Penh. Some went by plane and others by boat. Those who went by express boat apparently had a more unforgettable five hour trip on the roof top as the guide book said, "if the boat overturned the passengers inside would be likely to have little chance of survival due to dangerous overcrowding". It was a strange experience to see so many fishermen looking at our boat in an eerie silence but it was even more frightening to find ourselves in the middle of the huge Tonle Sap Lake where I heard breakdowns were frequent.

In spite of all the worries, we all arrived safely at the landing place, then travelled by bus to guest houses in the town of Siem Reap. The major monuments were located about six kilometres from this town. In the afternoon, we visited the group of Roluos temples and the most famous and significant of all the monuments of Angkor, Angkor Wat. We stayed to see the most beautiful sunset at this monument which was constructed as a funerary temple for Suryavarman II to honour Vishnu with whom the king identified himself. The name, 'Angkor' is used to refer to the period of the Khmer Empire from AD 802 to 1432. It is also a general term for the amazing monuments built during that period when the Khmer Empire reached its prime in cultural and artistic achievements. Henri Mouhot is credited as the first European to have discovered the ruins in 1860 and he managed to raise an interest in them. But they seemed to have been known by foreign traders and visitors for some time.

From Angkor Wat, we went to Angkor Thom where we saw the city walls and gates, the Royal Enclosure, Phimeanakas, the Terraces of Elephants and the Leper King, and the most mysterious and breathtaking Buddhist monument of all, the Bayon temple, located in the exact centre of the city of Angkor Thom.

Heikkila-Horn who is a historian on Southeast Asia writes, "One of the most impressive and dramatic temples in the area is Bayon which is entirely dedicated to the worship of King Jayavarman VII. Bayon was constructed in the 12th century as a Buddhist temple decorated with 54 towers, each one of which portraying the smiling faces of King Jayavarman himself. Officially, the statues depict Avalokiteshvara, but as the king himself was dwelling on such a high spiritual level, he found it obviously more than natural to picture the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, 'the Lord who looks down in compassion', as himself. He also wanted a monument to remind his subjects of the way he wanted to be worshipped and remembered after his death.

Bayon is undoubtedly one of the most picturesque temples in the area. The two hundred and sixteen smiling faces of the king give it a mysteriously serene atmosphere. His eyes seem to follow us - benevolently, as can be expected of a Bodhisattva. His smile seems to change when its rocky curves are looked at from different perspectives. It is definitely a wonderful piece of art and can be compared with Leonardo da Vinci's "La Gioconda."

There were many other temples which we visited on the second day. These were Preah Khan, Kravan, Banteay Kdei, Srah Srang, Ta Prohm, Takeo, Baksei Chamkrong and Bakheng temples. We climbed the Bakheng mountain to catch the sunset. But one of the most unforgettable temples may be Ta Prohm which was left in its natural state. Heikkila-Horn writes, "One of the temples we saw first was Ta Prohm. Ta Prohm was constructed by the orders of King Jayavarman VII as a Buddhist temple dedicated to his mother in the 12th century. We saw the entrance gate which was decorated with the smiling face of the king himself. The temple was covered with thick tropical vegetation and it struck me as the most dramatic and photogenic temple of all. The atmosphere reminded us of when Monsier Henri Mouhot and his group of explorers discovered its ruins in the 1860s. We could feel as if we were part of his entourage when climbing on the fallen piles of stones, crawling through small openings amongst the ruins and wondering at the size of the huge trees which nowadays support the essential parts of the temple construction."

One the third day, we visited Pre Rup, Banteay Samre, Neak Pean temples, and probably the most memorable and beautiful temple of all, Banteay Srey, 37 kilometres outside Siem Reap. It is a small pink Hindu temple dedicated to Siva built in the 10th century but its intricate reliefs and decorative carvings inspired by Indian epics such as Ramayana were in an excellent state of preservation. One of the female divinities with beautiful plaited hair, loosely draped skirt and perfect proportion was often seen on the front of t-shirts that local children came to sell to us. (You can see her smiling face at the very end of this Newsletter.) The temple was definitely 'the jewel in the crown of classical Khmer art'.

The whole experience left us with a sense of deep mystery and awe. On the other hand we were relieved to find that there seemed to be little evidence today of any major damage from the civil war since 1972. In these ruins and temples, we noticed numerous images of sensuous divine nymphs, known as 'apsaras', graciously decorating the walls of Khmer temples. Heikkila-Horn says that "the Khmer apsaras are the most unique characteristic of the Khmer temples and cannot be found in any other temple or palace constructions in Southeast Asia." She continues, "the beautiful dancing apsaras, graciously carrying the Khmer cosmography on their heads, seem to symbolise the endurance and patience of the Khmer people who have survived 1,000 years in spite of egotistic and megalomaniac rulers."

Many of the scenes and legends depicted in Khmer Art we see at temples are inspired by the great Indian epics; Ramayana and Mahabharata. Ramayana is a series of adventures and ordeals centred around Rama and his loyal wife Sita, and the battle of Kurukshetra is the main subject of Mahabharata. Southeast Asian rulers have legitimated their right to rule on religious and moral basis driven from these epics as the leading heroes of Mahabharata and Ramayana happen to be the avatars of God Vishnu, which was not a distant idea to Khmer kings.

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**LETTERS FROM MEMBERS**

**“Cherry Blossom and Green Tea”**

*by Elizabeth Harris (UK)*

Elizabeth Harris has recently been invited to visit Japan by a Japanese Buddhist Organisation to promote Inter-faith Dialogue.

In April this year, I was part of an inter-faith group of ten which visited Japan from Britain in response to an invitation from Rissho Koseikai (one of the new Buddhist organisations in Japan) made through the Inter-Faith Centre in Oxford. We were given ten intense but most enjoyable days, starting in Tokyo and ending in Kyoto and Nara, via the Mount Athos of Japan, Mount Hiei.

Both Japan and Japanese Buddhism was new to me, and I knew little about Rissho Koseikai before I went. The organisation was founded by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano in 1938 and the movement now claims over six million members in Japan and elsewhere.

The hospitality we received was immeasurable. Some members had to buy an extra bag to accommodate the gifts we received! It would be impossible to count the cups of green tea we drank. That we were an inter-faith group which included Bahais, Christians and Hindus seemed particularly welcome. At Kyoto, we were part of an excellent consultation, which brought together representatives from Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity, and a number of New religious organisations in Japan such as Oomoto and Konkokyo.

Our group split up at one point to spend time with different RKK branches and I went to Koganei on the outskirts of Tokyo. There was a vibrant, warm community of several hundred, which came together as a 'church' on Sunday morning to chant extracts from the Lotus Sutra and to meet afterwards in smaller 'hoza' (counselling groups). “RKK is hoza” is how one person put it. 'Hoza' gives its members a community rather than the family in which to discuss their problems. I was impressed.

RKK seems to be a movement which is succeeding in making Buddhism relevant in a materialistic society with many internal tensions. It turns people not only inward to the Buddha nature within but also outward to society with its 'skip a meal programme' to raise money for disaster relief and its concern for world peace and inter-faith dialogue. 'Give and give' rather than 'give and take' is its motto and, if the loving kindness heaped on us is anything to go by, I can believe it.

The cherry blossom was out when we arrived. Impermanent, exquisitely beautiful, fragile, present for only a week a year. It has become a symbol of Japan and we were privileged to see it. Yet I left Japan feeling that all is not well with the country. RKK flourishes, so do many numerous orthodox religious movements, but on the economic and social front, there are problems which will tax the strength of all religions there.

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***From the Conference***  
*By a participant*

The conference was interesting and memorable in many ways. We were especially impressed by the 'strong' presence of Asian nuns. They seemed shy and quiet but their presence was overwhelmingly felt. Nancy Barnes (USA) commented how she was impressed by the way 'these nuns presented semi-formal papers about their own traditions and personal experiences, how they asked and answered questions, and entered vigorously into discussions during the panels, in the workshops, and in private conversations'. We also noticed how very forthcoming the Cambodian 'donchees' were although it must have been strange and daunting for them to attend their first international conference. Throughout the conference, they were one of the most diligent participants, attending lectures from early morning, sitting in the front few rows, and patiently listening to the simultaneous translation through earphones. They kept their spirit high in spite of mounting fatigue and occasional tense moments. What impressed me most was how eager they were to learn! On one informal occasion with them, I was talking about the 'five dukkha' (suffering or obstacles in this context) of women. Initially, they were quietly taking notes. Then one of them blurted out, "I know what you are talking about. But I didn't know that this was in the Buddhist text". It was as if she had made a big discovery.

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**From the Editor**  
*by KokoKawanami*

Well, this is the first Sakyadhita Newsletter that I have edited since I took over the heavy responsibility of Editor at the Cambodia conference in January this year. To be honest, it has been a struggle as I knew nothing about Desk Top Publishing and I had to literally start from scratch. Having no previous experience editing a newsletter and having to juggle between full-time work and home responsibilities, like all our voluntary members, I often thought of giving it all up. I apologise for that reason that it has taken me so long to have this issue published. As you know Sakyadhita International has embarked upon its restructuring programme since the

beginning of this year. We are in the process of re-evaluating our past 11 years and setting up new targets to take the Organisation into the 21st century. We want to make the running of Sakyadhita more efficient and effective, more transparent and more decentralised so that members can contribute and take part more easily. It is not an easy task as we are all volunteers and for that reason I would like to invite everyone to participate in the debate of the 'Present and Future of Sakyadhita'. In this process, I hope we can sustain our good intention and enthusiasm. Please voice your views, and write to me about how you would like to see Sakyadhita develop, in which direction, and how you would like to contribute to the running of Sakyadhita. We could start a debate in the next Newsletter! I would also like to hear more from non-Western members and from the nuns themselves. Please send me articles, news about your recent activities, information you would like to exchange, anything that you would like me to put into the Newsletter. If you can help with typing, proofreading and so on, that would also be very much appreciated. After all, you are Sakyadhita.

I would like to thank Nancy Barnes for helping me with proof reading, Liz Harris for her encouragement, and Gabriele Kuestermann for her ever formidable presence. Without them, I wouldn't have made it. And finally, if there is anyone who is willing to work with me putting the next issue together, please let me know. The Newsletter can be much improved and come out more frequently, but in order to achieve that I need your help.

Yours,  
Koko

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**“Higher Ordination for 22 Nuns on March 12, '98 in Sri Lanka”**

*by Ranjani de Silva (Sri Lanka)*

After an interval of 1,000 years in Sri Lanka, a Higher Ordination for 22 nuns (samaneri) was conducted on March 12, '98 at the Sima Malaka (Chapter House), Dambulla Raja Maha Vihara. It was led by Ven. Inamaluwa Sumangala Nayaka Thera, Ven. Talalle Dhammaloka Thera and Ven. Dr. Mapalagama Vipulasara Thera. The Bhikkhunis who had already received Higher Ordination in Bodhgaya took part and assisted the Bhikkhus in this historical event in the Theravada tradition.

All the leading newspapers carried photographs and articles of the ceremony and thousands of devotees attended and paid homage. They offered 'dana'; food and drinks to both Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, and to guests who attended the ceremony. The Bhikkhunis were selected and trained over a ten months' period before the Higher Ordination. They were given the 'samaneri sila' (the Ten precepts for novices) a few months before the event although they had been observing them for the last ten years. Thus they were also known as 'sila matha' (the Ten precept nuns). They were between the ages of 30 to 55 years and had received their education equal to Senior School Certificate. Many of them had degrees and diplomas in Pali and Buddhism. They were studying

the Bhikkhuni Vinaya and were being prepared for the retreat season to attend to all the monastic rules and regulations, the same for the Bhikkhus. These Bhikkhunis had been performing their duties to their community and observing the Ten precepts so well that the general public were in full support of them. From March 30 to April 8, a residential training programme was organised to train pre-school trainers at the Institute for International Buddhist Women. It was conducted by the project commissioner for Sri Lanka Girls Guide Association.

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International Conference on Buddhist Women in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

December 29, '97 - January 4, '98

### **Lectures and Workshop**

The lectures and workshops took place from December 30, '97. Every morning, the sessions started with meditation before breakfast. The plenary session on the first day focused on Cambodian Buddhist women. Hema Goonatilake from the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh, who worked so hard as the conference organiser, gave a talk about 'Rediscovering Cambodian Buddhist Women of the Past.' She emphasised the importance of re-evaluating the role of Buddhist women which tends to become invisible or ignored by so-called 'History'. Heike Loeschmann, another Cambodian specialist who has worked with 'donchee' (Cambodian nuns) for many years spoke from her experience about the 'Revival of the Donchee Movement in Cambodia'. Kassie Neou, from the Cambodian Institute for Human Rights, asserted the importance of the role of 'Buddhism as a Tool for Human Rights', and spoke about how Buddhism has survived and remained in the hearts of the Cambodian people in spite of the efforts by the Khmer Rouge to destroy it. Nancy Barnes from the United States spoke about her experience working with Cambodian immigrants in her paper 'Khmer Women: Buddhist Survivors'. She told us that Cambodian women have emerged as leaders in the United States who have worked to heal and restore the social cohesion of Khmer immigrant communities. In the afternoon, we had an interesting workshop on 'Buddhist Women and Media' led by Norma Fain Pratt and Elizabeth Harris. They looked at the trends of recent publications on Buddhist women and led the discussions on the role of media, how we should access media and deal with media representations on Buddhism.

The following day, the session focused on Buddhist women of the Himalayas, and we heard talks from experiences in Bhutan, Nepal and Tibetan communities. Ven. Kanna Lekshe Tsomo gave an insightful talk about the 'Change in Consciousness: Women's Religious Identity in Himalayan Buddhist Cultures', Tashi Zangmo from Bhutan shared with us her valuable experience of 'Growing up as a Buddhist Woman'. Yolanda van Ede from the Netherlands gave us a fascinating account 'Of Birds and Wings', about the history of Sherpa nuns she encountered during her

fieldwork in Nepal Himalayas. Ven. Wangino also from Bhutan, who is a student at the Sanskrit Bharati Matarnandit in Delhi, spoke in her convincing way about the 'Challenges in Education for Buddhist Nuns'.

The workshop for the second day was a little different from that of the previous day and its emphasis was on Peace Education. But its message was important. It made all its participants reconsider how to create an environment of non-violence and how Buddhist teaching could contribute in the process.

By the third day, everyone was looking tired. The initial euphoria was wearing down a little, and jet lag and tropical heat were getting to us. Still many continued to attend the morning meditation session at 7:00 am before breakfast, helped by the thought of wonderful and tasty food prepared daily by our Cambodian host ladies. The plenary session on the third day was on Buddhist women in South Asia. Bhikkhuni Kusuma from Sri Lanka who was ordained as a Bhikkhuni at Sarnath, Varanasi on December 8, '96, gave an interesting talk on the 'Inaccuracies in Buddhist Women's History', dealing primarily with the inaccuracies of the history of Bhikkhunis. Ninnala Salgado from the United States also gave an insightful view on the 'Diversity among Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka'. She spoke of the choices open to women who chose to renounce in Sri Lanka and looked at the diversity of lifestyles and experiences as female ascetics.

The workshop continued into the afternoon and the unifying theme of the day was 'Arts'. Anand Kumar Srivastava and Sushma Kulshreshtha, both Sanskrit scholars from India, gave talks on 'Involuntary Graces of Women' and 'Music and Dance' from their studies of Asvaghosa. Trina Nahm-Mijo from Hawaii spoke about 'Engaged Buddhism: Moving and Recreating Women's Stories', and told us how cultural artists who deal with themes such as overcoming violence and oppression use various media to communicate. In the evening, she gave a very expressive dance performance 'Chungshindae', and through the movement she retold the story of the unbearable suffering experienced by young Korean women who were forced into sexual service to Japanese soldiers during World War II.

As the conference progressed into the fifth day, it seemed that fewer people were coming to the main conference hall. However, it was not only the heat and general fatigue that had built up but also because people were making new friends and lively talks and discussions were taking place elsewhere. The focus on the fifth day was on Burma and Thailand. Koko Kawanami, from England talked about the issue of celibacy, 'Can Women be Celibate?' exploring the concept of celibacy and sexuality for Buddhist women. Marja-Leena Heikkila-Hom, from Finland spoke about the 'Status and Values' of nuns called 'sikkhamat' in one of the new Buddhist organisations in Thailand, 'Santi Asoke'. She showed how their moral values differed from that of mainstream Thai Buddhism. Ven. Axiyanani, who was ordained in Yangon, shared with us her unique and fascinating experience as a Buddhist nun in Myanmar (Burma).

In the afternoon, there was a lot of discussion on 'Religious Diversity', 'Dialogue' and 'Building Interfaith Networks'. It was good to be reminded that Buddhism was not the sole religious tradition that we were working with as many of our Sakyadhita members are not necessarily Buddhists, and to realise that we can respect and learn from other religious traditions. After all there is so much scope for collaboration.

The final day was on Buddhist women in China and Japan. Rev. Mother Mahaviro from the Infinite Wisdom International in Australia spoke about the 'Universal Nature' which ultimately brought the diverse and different traditions together. Elizabeth Zielinska read the paper on behalf of Paula Arai who couldn't attend titled, 'In Gratitude to Ananda: a Japanese Nun's Ritual'. It had a fascinating description about a ritual dedicated to Buddha's disciple Ananda who was thought to be understanding and kind to women. Ester Bianchi from Italy also gave a rich description of a Chinese nunnery in Sichuan Province, 'Tiexiangsi: a dGe lugs pa Nunnery in Contemporary China. It was interesting to know how Tibetan Buddhist teaching had persevered in spite of adaptation and strong Chinese influence. After the last morning session, the sessions were closed by chanting from the Mahayana, Zen, Theravada, and Tibetan traditions. The conference generated much lively discussion, and participants talked and exchanged information throughout the period even during breaks, in the afternoons, and in the evenings. I think everyone felt the experience to be unifying yet at the same time it provided a wonderful forum to express ourselves and hear other views from members of different national and cultural backgrounds.

On the final day of the conference, the last item on the programme was the election of the new Executive Committee. The names of the new Executive Committee members can be seen in the next section. All the members who had paid their membership fees had the right to vote but we also realised the shortcomings of this election procedure (the Executive Committee is now in the process of working on an improved election procedure).

Throughout the conference, Emily Mariko will be remembered by everyone. In her charming and quiet ways, she pursued her mission to cover and film all the important sessions and events, and I believe that the video from the conference is available now. We all shared our valuable and memorable experience in Cambodia and hope that it will be possible for those who were not there to come and share it with us through this video.

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**Letter from the Treasurer...**

*by Gabriele Kuestermann (Germany)*

Dear Members and Benefactors of Sakyadhita International,  
First of all, I wish to thank all of you who have over the past years contributed with your punctual payment of membership fees and donations to the constant development of Sakyadhita. In addition, I do want to thank all of you who have been assisting our Secretary Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo in her never ending work for Sakyadhita International so that she could cope with the demands of running the Organisation. Without the enormous efforts of Ven. Karma Lekshe



Tsomo and all of you assisting her, Sakyadhita would not be in existence anymore ..... Instead, Sakyadhita International is increasing its influence through conferences in different Asian countries, and through the Newsletter which informs the interested public on the situation of Buddhist women and about the possible means to improve their access to education and towards a Bhikshuni Sangha.

I have to say that the annual membership fees of U S \$20 or \$ 10 are hardly enough to pay for the publication of two editions of the Newsletter you are receiving as members. We are relying entirely on the extra donations and on the voluntary work of members (We had to raise the fees). Therefore, please do not be astonished if I ask you to continue your support for Sakyadhita! Extra donations would be welcome and necessary for the following:

1. (a) Communication costs
- (b) Administration
- (c) Newsletter production and mailing costs to institutions and persons who might be interested.
2. Conference costs
3. Nun's Fund - to enable them to attend the conferences and additional seminars in the interval period.

If you think it is worthwhile to support Sakyadhita International, please do not hesitate to donate as best you can. When sending your donation in US \$ cheque to Karma Lekshe Tsomo or transferring your donations in D M to my Treasurer's account in Germany, please point out exactly how and for what purpose you would like your donation money to be used, i.e. 'Membership for the year 19.....,' 'Communication,' 'Newsletter,' 'Conferences,' or 'Nun's Fund.'

Please also do not forget to write your full name and address.

Finally, I am urgently requesting all members and all of you who are receiving the Newsletter to let us always know if you change your address. The failure in not receiving the Newsletter is nearly always due to the lack of a correct and full address or to the fact that membership fees have not been paid. If this is the case, it would mean that you have given up your membership. Probably, our dear members didn't meant to skip their membership but just forgot to send the cheque because the amount is so 'small,' at least for our members living in industrialised countries. Members living outside the United States and where a national Sakyadhita section is operating, make arrangements to collect the annual membership fees for Sakyadhita International there, and send one cheque for all of your local members to our Secretary accompanied by a list of names and addresses of the members. This would considerably save time and money otherwise lost to transaction costs.

I am inviting everyone to give your comments and to make helpful suggestions with regard to my requests... Thanking you all in advance for your co-operation and with my warm wishes for your well-being,

Your Treasurer,

Gabriele

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**Sakyadhita Member's Forum**  
*By Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo*

### Sakyadhita's Beginnings

Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women was founded in Bodhgaya, India in 1987 at the conclusion of the first International Conference on Buddhist Women. Sakyadhita is committed to helping women pursue the Buddhist ideal of positive human development and to promoting the spiritual and social welfare of the world's women. The Sakyadhita Newsletter and Website have become valuable links for Buddhist practitioners, scholars, and others interested in the topic of women in Buddhism.

### Sakyadhita Conferences

Sakyadhita has held five international conferences on Buddhist women, in Bodhgaya, India (1987), Bangkok, Thailand (1991), Colombo, Sri Lanka (1993), Leh, India (1995), and Phnom Penh, Cambodia (1997-8). It held a North American retreat in 1990 and a North American Conference at Claremont Colleges in 1998. A Southeast Asia Regional Conference is planned in Singapore in November 1998. The sixth Sakyadhita International Conference is being planned for Lumbini, Nepal in February 2000.

### Sakyadhita's Future

Since its inception in 1987, Sakyadhita has faced many challenges and accomplished a great deal. Responses to the new website and to the recent gatherings in Cambodia and Claremont, USA, indicate that there is a tremendous interest in the goals of Sakyadhita. Now is the time to channel and optimize all the good energy and ideas that resulted from these gatherings. To expand its work, Sakyadhita needs committed leaders, dedicated members, and a stable financial base.

### Sakyadhita Publications

The proceedings of the first Sakyadhita International Conference are published in *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (Snow Lion, 1989). Talks from Sakyadhita retreat held in Santa Barbara in 1990 are included in *Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes* (Snow Lion, 1995). The proceedings of the second, third, and fourth Sakyadhita Conferences are being published as *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations* (SUNY Press). The proceedings of the fifth Sakyadhita Conference are being published as *Swimming Against the Stream: Innovative Buddhist Women* (forthcoming).

### Sakyadhita Website

From humble beginnings, the 'Daughters of the Buddha' have now moved into the age of technology with the creation of a Sakyadhita Website. In the spirit of Sakyadhita, this has been a cooperative venture, with Julia Milton, Brian Wagner, and Karma Lekshe Tsomo contributing

ideas on design and content. A new 'Members' Forum' has been added, so please check the site regularly. Sakyadhita Website Committee welcomes ideas and suggestions for improving the website. Written submissions and links to other sites of interest to Buddhist women may be sent on disc to Sakyadhita International or transmitted electronically. The Sakyadhita Website address is:

<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~tsomo>

#### Video of Cambodia Conference

"Women in Buddhism: Unity and Diversity" introduces the wide variety of viewpoints and lifestyles among women involved in Buddhism around the world. Based on the fifth International Conference on Buddhist Women held in Cambodia in January 1998, it investigates women's potential according to Buddhism and the numerous artificial obstacles they face in practice. It also offers glimpses of the diverse ways in which Buddhist women live their lives and express their spirituality.

Copies are available for \$20 per copy (\$30 for PAL copies) from:

Sakyadhita International  
47-710-2 Hui Kelu Street  
Kaneohe, HI 96744 U.S.A.

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International Conference on Buddhist Women in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

December 29, '97 - January 4, '98

**'Women in Buddhism: Unity and Diversity'**

*by Ranjani de Silva & Koko Kawanami*

The fifth international conference on Buddhist Women was held in Phnom Penh from December 29, '97 January 4, '98. The theme was 'Diversity and Unity', marking the tenth year for the activities of Sakyadhita International since its establishment in 1987. The conference was attended by more than 110 foreign delegates and 200 participants from over 26 countries. Our conference coordinator in Cambodia, Dr. Hema Goonatilake, worked very hard to make it all happen and received the guests and delegates. It was remarkable to see so many people attend in spite of recent political problems and worries about safety in Phnom Penh.

The opening ceremony on December 29 was a grand occasion at the Devavinicchaya building in the Royal Palace, under the auspices of Her Majesty Norodom Monineath Sihanouk, the Queen of the Kingdom of Cambodia. It was organised in collaboration with the Association of Donchees and laywomen of Cambodia. The Sangharaja of Cambodia, the Venerable Maha Ghosananda, and other distinguished guests, international members and friends of Sakyadhita, participated.

Her Majesty the Queen of the Kingdom of Cambodia conveyed greetings from His majesty the King Sihanouk who had kindly donated the amount of US \$4,000 towards the conference expenses. She spoke about the importance of the role of Buddhist women in Cambodia in bringing peace and praised their contribution towards reviving the spirit of Buddhism. Mrs Ranjani de Silva, President of Sakyadhita gave an inaugural address, and Venerable Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda addressed the importance of 'Creating Peace' in the world.