

## Advance Praise

*Democracy's Dhamma* is a lively account of the emergence of what we might call a modern Buddhist cosmos in South and Southeast Asia. Through the mapping of pilgrimage and memory circuits, tales of unusual lives and journeys into the *dhamma*, and a review of ideas to do with Buddhism in the time of democracy and socialism, Gitanjali Surendran has created an unusual diorama—for us to re-examine the making of modern India. Buddhism by the Bay (of Bengal), a formulation that the book invokes, helps situate anti-colonial and anti-caste thought and struggles in India within a wider and older geography.

**V. Geetha**, feminist historian and writer, author of *Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and the Question of Socialism in India* (2021)

Surendran's volume offers a robust account of Buddhism as a philosophical movement that has historically progressed and continues to be a presence in the intellectual and social life of South Asia. The volume becomes more intense in the Bengal context which reveals a multilayered and multifaceted intellectual response to Buddhism. Surendran makes painstaking efforts to draw many leading thinkers from modern India in the interpretative framework of Buddhism. It makes for a fresh and hence fascinating reading of Buddhism in South Asia.

**Gopal Guru**, former professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University

*Democracy's Dhamma* expertly details the remarkable networks and projects of the South and Southeast Asian activists, scholars and pilgrims who brought Buddhism back to its birthplace. Matching scholarly insight with writerly elegance, Surendran demonstrates how essential the re-emergence of Buddhism was to the project of Indian democracy itself, from what she strikingly analyses as Nehru's 'civil religion' to Ambedkar's poignant vision of fraternity and democratic social life.

**Karuna Mantena**, professor of Political Science, Columbia University

Over the centuries Buddhism has shaped India profoundly, much more so than Indians themselves realise and understand. But the rediscovery of India's Buddhist heritage—a global enterprise if ever there was one—is really a post-mid-19th-century development in which many remarkable personalities from South and Southeast Asia played a pivotal role. Surendran tells this fascinating story of the rediscovery of India's Buddhist heritage especially—one that was to

have a deep and enduring impact on India's nationalist movement as is evident in, for instance, the choice of the national flag and the national symbol. She shows us the essential role that Buddhism has played in the projection of India's soft power over the past seven decades, quite apart from the fact that it has become part and parcel of the ongoing struggle for social justice and empowerment within the country. Surendran's landmark study is a product of deep and original research that sheds new light on the 'The Light of Asia' and his legacy in India.

**Jairam Ramesh**, member of parliament, former minister and author

## DEMOCRACY'S DHAMMA

In 1956, B. R. Ambedkar publicly converted to Buddhism, raising questions about his turn from constitutionalism to religion. The answer lies in Buddhism itself. In the late colonial era, the struggle to produce an appropriate Buddhism for a nation-in-the-making reveals a secret history foundational to modern India. Thinkers, activists, reformers, pilgrims and monks from around South, Southeast and East Asia discussed universalism, nationalism, modernity, democracy and caste radicalism and advocated an Indian return to Buddhism and the Buddha. This book traces this genealogy through the Buddhist itineraries and political projects of figures such as Anagarika Dharmapala, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vinayak D. Savarkar, Rahul Sankrityayan and Ambedkar to reveal how Buddhism emerged as democracy's *dhamma*, the religion of democracy.

**Gitanjali Surendran** is professor of History at Jindal Global Law School, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat. She is the author of *Anand Bhawan: An Intimate History* (2018) and other essays and media pieces on modern South Asian intellectual, political and cultural history.

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# DEMOCRACY'S DHAMMA

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Buddhism in the Making of  
Modern India, c.1890–1956

GITANJALI SURENDRAN



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*For Santana and Surendran*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ADD</b>	Anagarika Dharmapala's Diaries, National Archives of Sri Lanka and Mahabodhi Society, Colombo
<b>BAWS</b>	<i>B. R. Ambedkar Writings and Speeches</i> , Volumes 1–17, edited by Vasant Moon and published by Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 1989–2003
<b>BC</b>	<i>Bauddha-Charyya-Paddhati</i> , by Bodhanand Mahasthavir (Lucknow: Bharatiya Baudh Samiti, 2002 [first edition 1947])
<b>BTS</b>	Buddhist Theosophical Society
<b>CW</b>	<i>The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda</i> , Volumes 1–9, Mayawati Memorial Edition published in Kolkata by Advaita Ashrama, 2002–2005
<b>EB</b>	<i>The Essence of Buddhism</i> , by Lakshmi Narasu Pokkala (Nagpur: Buddha Bhumi Prakashan, 2002 [first edition 1907])
<b>INC</b>	Indian National Congress
<b>MB</b>	<i>Mul Bharatnivasi aur Arya</i> , by Bodhanand Mahasthavir (New Delhi: Samyak Prakashan, 2009)
<b>MBJ</b>	<i>The Journal of the Mahabodhi Society</i> . It had three names throughout this period of 1892–1956: <i>The Journal of the Mahabodhi Society</i> (up to vol. 8, no. 12, April 1900), <i>The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World</i> (from vol. 9, no. 1, May 1900, to vol. 31, no. 12, December 1923) and <i>The Maha-Bodhi</i> (from vol. 32, no. 1, January 1924, to December 1960)
<b>MNA</b>	Myanmar National Archives, Yangon
<b>NAI</b>	National Archives of India, New Delhi
<b>PMML</b>	Prime Ministers Museum and Library (formerly known as Nehru Memorial Museum and Library), New Delhi



<i>RMB</i>	<i>Religion of the Modern Buddhist</i> , by Lakshmi Narasu Pokkala (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2002 [first edition 1922])
SCF	Scheduled Caste Federation
<i>SW</i>	<i>Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru</i> , edited by S. Gopal, published in Delhi by Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund
TS	Theosophical Society