

## **An initial response to the Observer article from the Adhithana Kula**

On July 21st 2019, *The Observer* featured [an article critical of the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community](#). As senior members of Triratna, we wanted to respond to some of the content, and to the general areas of concern raised around the conduct of members of the Order as they relate to the wellbeing of anyone connecting with our community.

The [Adhithana Kula](#) is a grouping of senior members of the Triratna Buddhist Order who hold particular responsibility for the wellbeing of our community around the world. It was formed in February 2017 in response to renewed concerns about past controversies within Triratna, including sexual misconduct in the 1970s and '80s by our community's founder Urgyen Sangharakshita. In 2016, Sangharakshita wrote [a statement of acknowledgment and apology](#) about this.

[Read about our work around misconduct in Triratna and about what we do and do not teach](#)

More recently, along with Triratna's Ethics Kula (including our Safeguarding team) we have come back together to engage with the work of meeting any new concerns that may arise, being as open and clear as possible using the following principles:

1. To prioritise the wellbeing of anyone coming forward with accounts of harm experienced within our community, past or present, providing clear and well-publicised channels for reporting them to us safely.
2. To ensure the Safeguarding policies and procedures we have in place at our Buddhist Centres meet the highest standards and are compliant with regulatory and legal requirements for charities in the UK. This includes making sure that wherever a case may be criminal it is reported to the police, without exception.
3. After legal process has been addressed, when reports of ethical misconduct are made and the parties involved ask for support, to provide processes for reaching meaningful resolution. (See below for more on Restorative process and the specific work of the Ethics Kula around disputed cases).
4. In cases of serious ethical breaches by members of the Order, to have clear policies and procedures around probation, suspension or expulsion.
5. To provide clear and consistent information about our work online and elsewhere (including its difficulties and challenges) in as open and transparent a way as possible when, as is often the case, issues of confidentiality are involved.

We were somewhat surprised therefore to hear from *The Observer* newspaper last week that they intended to run a new critical article about Triratna, based initially on someone having sent them a [survey report](#) by the Interkula group of Triratna Order members, which refers non-specifically to anonymous accounts of misconduct within our Order. We had seen the survey report some time ago and took note of its recommendations.

We will write more in the next few days about this survey and its subsequent interpretation by *The Observer*, as well as addressing some other details and inaccuracies in the article.

For now, our focus properly remains on supporting individuals seeking resolution of past painful experience within Triratna, and on [reviewing and updating annually our own Safeguarding practices and recommendations](#) for when things go wrong in future (as they inevitably will at times in any community).

As ever, we urge anyone who feels they have experienced harm in connection with our Order and community – and anyone who has anything they wish to bring to our attention – to please email us in confidence at [safeguarding@triratna.community](mailto:safeguarding@triratna.community).

### **A formal statement from our Safeguarding officer**

Our overall Safeguarding officer Munisha made the following statement to *The Observer*, some of which was used in the piece itself:

*“As Triratna’s overall Safeguarding officer I share the concerns of the Interkula and their survey respondents that misconduct in Triratna be addressed thoroughly and effectively. I and senior members of the Order have been working on this since 2015, and all our work is documented publicly here on Triratna’s main web platform: <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/adhithana-kula/triratna-controversy-faq>*

*I’m extremely sorry if misconduct reported to any member of the Order was not properly addressed at the time. Triratna has had Safeguarding procedures in place since 2015 and today every Triratna centre in the UK has a Safeguarding officer to whom concerns can be reported. It’s recommended that Centres post details of how to reach this person on their noticeboards and websites.*

*The Interkula’s survey includes accounts of misconduct which we would be keen to address. However, some of these are references to misconduct experienced by unnamed others and we can only address a case where a named complainant is willing to tell us their story first hand. Since the survey was anonymous it’s not possible to identify and reach out to these respondents or the people they refer to and the survey did not provide respondents with information on how to report to us.*

*However, given the confidentiality required in Safeguarding work it is possible that some third-party cases referred to by survey respondents have in fact been addressed without the respondents knowing about it. It is not uncommon that people report rumours or concerns about others which we have dealt with months or years ago.*

*It is the policy of Triratna’s central Safeguarding team that anything reported to us of a criminal – or even potentially criminal – nature is reported to the police, without exception. Anything reported to us has been dealt with according to the requirements of law, the Charity Commission and Safeguarding best practice and thoroughly documented in case of external review. If there is anything we have not dealt with, this is simply because no complainant has approached us to make us aware of their experience, or we have not been able to identify and contact them. I would strongly encourage anyone who has not yet come forward with an account of their own experiences, or with information about cases involving others, to contact me at [safeguarding@triratna.community](mailto:safeguarding@triratna.community) or make a report to the Charity Commission at <https://forms.charitycommission.gov.uk/raising-concerns/>.*

*Keen to make sure Triratna’s Safeguarding meets the highest standards, in May this year the Safeguarding team began dialogue with the [Social Care Institute for Excellence \(SCIE\)](#) with a view to an external review of our work so far.”*

## **Safeguarding in Triratna and our responses to legal and ethical issues**

Our collective work around addressing past ethical misconduct within the Triratna community has been broad and relatively deep:

[Listen to a talk that evokes the kind of “Restorative” culture we have tried to uphold around all this work](#)

[Read a very comprehensive set of Frequently Asked Questions about our areas of engagement](#)

[View a full archive of previous attempts to address some of the same issues](#)

[Read the 2019 model Safeguarding policies for Triratna](#)

We continue to encourage the formal reporting of harm or misconduct and, in full compliance with the law, we are committed to doing whatever is necessary in order to bring any issue to an appropriate resolution. We continue to strengthen our community's proactive Safeguarding work to ensure the wellbeing of all who wish to engage with Buddhist values as a way of making sense of life.

Through the work of the Triratna Ethics Kula, our Order has also been developing new procedures enabling us to address more effectively instances where a serious allegation is made against an Order member which they don't accept, and which cannot be addressed by legal process. This is work in progress and will develop as our understanding and experience grow.

[Read about how this kind of approach has been applied within Triratna](#)

As mentioned, much of this kind of work necessarily happens behind the scenes and often involves respecting confidences required by law or requested by someone making a complaint. With that in mind we will also continue to seek external input to the ways in which we address these matters, and to check that our work so far has been conducted in line with best practice.

We remain determined to meet ethically all unresolved issues – past, present and future – based on a deep concern for the welfare of anyone affected negatively by their experience within Triratna. If there is anything you wish to bring to our attention, please do email us at [safeguarding@triratna.community](mailto:safeguarding@triratna.community). We will always be glad to make ourselves available to you.

With metta,

The Adhithana Kula

*Mahamati, Parami, Ratnadharini, and Saddhaloka (Triratna's College of Public Preceptors)*

*Aryajaya and Lokeshvara (International Convenors to the Triratna Buddhist Order)*

*Dhammarati (Convenor of Triratna's International Council)*

*With the assistance of Amaladipa and Munisha (Triratna's Safeguarding team), and Candradasa (The Buddhist Centre Online).*