

# Development of Different Schools of Thoughts in Buddhism

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**B**uddhism is religion of kindness, humanity and equality and was founded by Gautama; afterwards called Buddha towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It is one of the three great world religions. However like Christianity and Islam, it made its appearance in historical time. No one today will deny that Buddhism and its founder lived in India some centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. Buddha lived for eighty years and entered into *Mahaprinirvana* at Kusinara or presently known as Kushinagra. At the time of Buddha's *Mahaprinirvana* his most famous disciple Ananda was along with him, but the oldest and the most revered among the followers, Mahakassapa was not present there. When Mahakassapa was proceeding from Pava to Kushinagra with his associates, the news about the demise of Buddha was brought to him by a naked ascetic of the Ajivika sect. This news also reached the Mahakassapa's associates, one of them Thera (A monk or nun of ten year's standing from his Apasampada is called Thera (Bhikkhus) or Theri (Bhikkusni). A monk or nun of twenty years standing is known as *Mahathera* or *Mahatheri* respectively) named Subhadda who was recorded to have had exhorted the monks. Mahakassapa stated how this Subhadda rejoices at the death of the master saying, "now we shall be able to do all that please us, and that which does not please us we shall no longer be forced to do."<sup>1</sup> The irreverent remarks of Subhadda filled the Mahakassapa with alarm for the future safety and purity of *Dhamma*.

There were many others who felt that with the passing of the master, the teachings he had taught would disappear. The remarks of Subhadda and feelings of others and the account in the Tibetan *Dulva* and also that of Hiwn-Tsang refer to this general necessity of convening a council. It was the indication of division in the Buddhist order. The Buddha during his life time allowed things to be decided democratically by the Sangha and after his death too he did not want to restrict the freedom of the Sangha by appointing his own successor. He wanted the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* to be its guides after his death and anything which was not authorized by the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* was to be rejected by the *Sangha*. Immediately after the *Mahaprinirvana* of Buddha his followers assembled together under the presidency of Mahakassapa. After some deliberation, the town of Rajagraha was selected for the meeting of the council. Firstly Mahakassapa choose 499 *Arahats* (the holy one) and Ananda was included later on. The meeting actually took place

in the second month of the rainy season. Kasyapa presents officially to the *Bhikkhus*, the resolutions formulated above, “.....let the *Sangha* decide that these five hundred *Bhikkhus* shall take up their residence during the rainy season at Rajagraha in order to chant together the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* and that no other *Bhikkhus* shall spend the rainy season at Rajagraha .....”<sup>2</sup> Then in this first Buddhist council *Vinaya* and *Dhamma* was settled down under the leadership of Upali and Ananda. During the Buddha’s period his teachings were orally transmitted from one to another and there was no written record. In the first Buddhist council, the Buddha’s teachings were compiled and later on these teachings had spread in different countries and the teachings also took place in that countries language. The collection of Buddhist teachings in Pali is known as *Tripitaka*. In it there are three systematic collections, (i) the *Vinaya Pitaka*, the popular book of discipline, (ii) the *Sutta Pitaka*, the popular book of discourses, (iii) the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, the collection of commentaries on philosophy based on psychological ethics.

The proceeding of the first council was simple. With the permission of the Sangha, the Venerable Mahakassapa asked the question on *Vinaya* of the Venerable Upali. All these questions related to the four *Prajikas*, the matter, the occasion the individual concerned, the principle rule, the amended rule as well as to the questions as to who be guilty, and who innocent of these *Parajikas*. In this way the *Vinaya* text was agreed upon at the council. The turn of Ananda came next to settle the *Sutta*. The subject matter of the *Sutta Pitaka* in all the five *Nikayas*, were formulated as questions for Ananda who gave appropriate answers. These questions followed the lines adopted in those on the *Vinaya*, the occasion of the sermons and the person or persons with reference to whom they were given. The answers given by Ananda settled the corpus of the *Sutta Pitaka*. Through these processes the *Vinaya* and *Sutta Pitaka* was settled down. There is however, no mention of the *Abhidham Pitaka* as having been the subject of discussions at the first council. In the first council, an important event was also the trial of Ananda, in which different charges was laid against Ananda, and he was compelled to justify these charges. Another important event of the first Buddhist council was the passing of the highest penalty on Channa who was the charioteer of the master on that day of the great renunciation. When the punishment was announced to Chana he was seized with profound repentance and grief and was purged of all this weakness. He became an *Arhat* and the punishment automatically ceased to be effective.

The dissent even existed during the lifetime of the Buddha. This is found in the current stories about his cousin Devadutta. He seemed to have aimed at stepping on the place of the Buddha and getting the management of the followers into his own hand. When the Buddha did not allow him to do so, he attempted in conjunction

with Ajatshatru, to put the Buddha out of the way. He made many attempts to destroy the great teacher, but he failed and through another way Devadutta went to the Buddha and formally called upon him to insist on the stricter rules, which he advocated. His new way again failed and he turned to his own place, and founded a new and stricter order, which gradually grew in number and was openly supported by Ajatshatru<sup>3</sup>. During the life time of Buddha there was another occasion when a split in the Sangha became imminent. This incident took place when he was at Kosambi on account of a minor difference of opinion between the *Dhamadharas* and the *Vinayadharas*.<sup>4</sup> In the *Nikayas* and other early Buddhist texts there also appear a few references to the possibility of discord in the *Sangha* and the condemnation of *Sanghabheda*, to the five extreme offences like patricide, matricide and so forth. Immediately after Buddha's death in the account of first Buddhist council also, a rift is noticeable in the refusal of *Thera* Purana of Dakkhinagiri to accept the texts adopted by Mahakassapa and his followers as *Buddhavacana*. His insistence on the introduction of a few disciplinary rules clearly shows a lack of unanimity among the monks. Buddhism underwent innumerable changes after the *Parinirvana* of the Buddha; his teaching was accepted and followed by only a few thousand people during his period. But it is now a religion of millions of people and of different races.

One hundred years after the setting of the first Buddhist council dissension arose among followers regarding the ten points (*Das Vatthuna*). It is recorded in the Cullavagga that the monks of the Vajji were in the habit of practicing the ten points, which regarded as unorthodox by Yasa of Kosambi. At that time in Vaishali many *Bhikkus* of the Vajji-klan shamelessly taught the ten points as lawful, namely 'Salt in horn,' 'Two fingers breadth', 'Visiting the village,' 'Dwelling,' 'Consent', 'Example', 'Unchurned milk', 'Unfermented palm – wine', 'Seat without Finge', 'Gold and so forth'.<sup>5</sup> The practice of all these ten points was declared illegal and immoral in the extreme. Though the majority of the Buddhist monks were in favour of these indulgences, there was a minority which strongly condemned them. Here it is said that by means of these ten points members of the order dragged others after them, drew them as under, hold separate session of the chapter at which the business of the order was conducted and recited the *Patimokha* at such separate session. This is a step towards the foundation of sect. The second council was held at Vaishali and the unanimous verdict of the assembly declared the conduct of the Vajjian monks to be unlawful. The decision of the council was not accepted by the majority of the monks. They too held a council, much more numerous than that of this stricter opponents and hence this council is called *Mahasanghika*<sup>6</sup> or great council (*Mahasangiti*), which ultimately led to the origin of different sects in Buddhism. We find within a few hundred years after the demise of the great teacher his followers were divided into two great parties known as *Mahayana* and *Hinyana*.

Later on from these sects, eighteen or more sects came into existence. When Buddhism reached in different countries again, it appeared in different sects in those countries.

It is a fact that the Buddha advised his disciple not to follow his teachings blindly, but to analyse them according to their own intellect and experience. The Buddha had liberal view regarding the adaptations regarding his teachings. He told his followers to analyze his teaching well. Only then adapt them, but not for the sake of showing him respect. Probably due to the liberal viewpoint of the Buddha there arose a number of Buddhist schools in India and other parts of the world. The Buddhist community did not remain united for long and soon fell apart into a number of schools. Indian Buddhist tradition generally speaks of 'eighteen' such schools, but that is a mere traditional number and in fact more than thirty are known to us, at least by name.<sup>7</sup> According to the Ceylonese sources the first schism took place hundred years after the *Nirvana*. The remaining sects must have arisen between the second and the third councils, i.e. between 100B.C. and 247B.C., most of them belong to the second century after the Nirvana, but the last six in the third century. The Dhammarucis, according to the *Mahavamsa Tika* at the time of *Vattagamani*, the *Sagaliyas* at that of *Mahasena*.<sup>8</sup> A hundred years after the Buddha's *Mahaparinirvana* dissension arose among the monks in regard to the actual doctrine of the master and their interpretations which ultimately led to the origin of sects in Indian Buddhism. After Buddha's *Parinirvana* the Buddhist council was held to settle down the differences among his followers, but these failed to narrow down the differences. The monk and followers of the Buddha went in different ways, instead of uniting under this council. The second council was held regarding the practices of 'ten points'. In one passage these 'ten points' constitutes such a division in order. The same ten points were elsewhere stated harmful to the laity. Here it is stated that by means of these ten points member of the order drag others after them, draw them as under, hold separate session of the chapter at which the formal business of the order is conducted with recitation of *Patimokkha* (the 277 rules of the order) at such separate session. This was the step towards the foundation of a sect.<sup>9</sup> There is no place for doubt that the council marked the evolution of new schools of thought. In consequence, the council came to an abrupt end, and the long-feared schism came into being, threatening the solidarity of the *Sangha*. All the accounts, however, unanimously record that a schism did take place about a century after the Buddha's *Mahaparinirvana*, because of the efforts made by some monks for the relaxation of the strict rules observed by the monks. The monks, who deviated from the rules and did not subscribe to the orthodox views, convened another council, in which ten thousand monks participated. It was a great congregation of Monks (*Mahasangiti*), for which they were called the *Mahasanghika* as distinct from the orthodox monks,

the *Theravadins*. Thus occurred the first schism in the *Sangha*, which accounted for the origin of the two schools the *Theravada* and the *Mahasanghika* in the early Buddhist *Sangha*. Within a few hundred years after the demise of the Buddha as many as eighteen sects or more came into existence, along with a few of them disappearing shortly after their appearance. In the history of the succession of schools, it is found that the first schism in the *Sangha* was followed by a series of schism leading to the formation of different sub-sects, and in the course of time eleven such sub-sect arose out of the *Theravada* while seven developed from the *Mahasanghikas* and still later their appeared other sub-sect also. This split went on widening and in the course of time several sects came into existence out of those two primitive schools. All these branches appeared one after another in close succession within three or four hundred years after the Buddha's *Mahaparinirvana*.

It is generally agreed that the Buddha taught different doctrines and practices for different groups of trainers and these have been codified by Tibetan doxographers, who categorize Buddha's teachings in terms of three different vehicle, the Lesser Vehicle (*Hinayana*), the Great Vehicle (*Mahayana*) and the Vajra Vehicle (*Vajrayana*), each of which was intended to appeal to the spiritual capacities of the particular groups. Lesser vehicle was presented to people with an interest in a personal salvation in which one transcends suffering and is liberated from cyclic existence. The Great Vehicle included people with the capacity to feel compassion for the sufferings of others with an interest in a path in which one seeks enlightenment in order to help sentient beings overcome their sufferings. *Vajra* Vehicle practitioners are those who have a strong interest in the welfare of others, coupled with a strong determination to attain enlightenment as quickly as possible and the spiritual capacity to pursue the difficult practices of *Tantras*. Buddhism in Tibet is a tradition in which all the major ways of Buddhist training such as *Hinayana*, *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* teachings are preserved and are being thoroughly studied, practiced and realized by a number of followers.

Indian Buddhism is commonly divided into four main schools, Great Exposition school, Sutra school, Mind only school and Middle way school, Each of these is associated with particular teachings, lineages, texts, doctrines and practices. But the Buddhist and other followers of Buddhism regard all the temples, monasteries and teachers of different sects, equally holy for congregation and pilgrimage.

## References

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8. *Mahavamsa*, Appendix-B. New Delhi, 1986, p. 286.
9. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethies*, New York, Vol. XI, 6<sup>th</sup> impression, p. 307.