Development of Different Schools of Thoughts in Buddhism

Dr. Ashwani Kumar

Buddhism is a religion of kindness, humanity and equality and was founded by Gautama; afterwards called Buddha towards the end of the 6th 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 Mahaparinirvana at Kushinara or presently known as Kushinagar. At the time of Buddha's Mahaparinirvana, 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 Kushinagar 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 Apasampasa 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 exorted the monks. Mahakassapa stated how this Subhadda rejoiced 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."

The irrevocable remarks of Subhadra 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, Dalu and also that of I 1 lwn-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 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 Mahaparinirvana of Buddha his followers assembled together under the presidency of Mahakassapa. After some deliberation, the town of Rajagaha was selected for the meeting of the council. Firstly Mahakassapa chose 499 Arhats (the holy one) and Ananda was included later on. The meeting finally took place
in the second month of the rainy season. Kasapa 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 Rājagaha in order to chant together the Dhamma and the Vinaya and that no other Bhikkhus shall spend the rainy season at Rājagaha ......."

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 country's 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 Parajikas, the matter, the occasion the individual concerned, the principle role, 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 Abhidhamma 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 Channa 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 Devadatta. 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 Devadatta 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. 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 Dharmadhara and the Vinayadharas. 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 Sanghabhedas, 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 Dukkhisthigiri 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 Vatinhuna). 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 Yasas of Kosambi. At that time in Vaishali many Bhikkus of the Vajji-clan 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.” 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, held 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 Mahasanghiketi 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 Hinayana.
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 analyze them according to their own intellect and experience. The Buddha had liberal views regarding the adaptations regarding his teachings. He told his followers to apply, re-apply his teaching well. Only then adapt them, but not force 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. 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 200 BC and 247 BC, most of them belong to the second century after the Nirvana, but the last six in the third century. The Dhammapari, according to the Mahavamsa Tika at the time of Yatagamuni, the Sagariva at that of Mahasena. A hundred years after the Buddha’s Mahaparinirvāna dissensions 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 Parinirvāna 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 under, hold separate session of the chapter at which the formal business of the order is conducted with recitation of Patimokkha (the 227 rules of the order) at such separate session. This was the step towards the foundation of a sect. 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-fated 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 Mahaparinirvāna, 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 Theravāda. Thus occurred the first schism in the Sangha, which accounted for the origin of the two schools the Theravāda and the Mahasanghika in the early Buddhist Sangha. Within a few hundred years after the demise of the Buddha as many as eighteen sects of monasticism arose to exist, 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 schisms leading to the formation of different sub-sects, and in the course of time eleven such sub-sects arose out of the Theravāda 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 these two primitive schools. All these branches appeared one after another in close succession within three or four hundred years after the Buddha’s Mahaparinirvāna.

It is generally agreed that the Buddha taught different doctrines and practices for different groups of trainers and these have been codified by Tibetan dnosographers who categorize Buddha’s teachings in terms of three different vehicle, the Lesser Vehicle (Himayana), the Great Vehicle (Mahanayana) and the Vajra Vehicle (Vajrayana), each of which is 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 Tantyas. Buddhism in Tibet is a tradition in which all the major ways of Buddhist training such as Himayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings are preserved and are being thoroughly studied, practiced and realized by a number of followers.

Indias 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 Buddhist regard all the temples, monasteries and teachers of different sects, equally holy for congregation and pilgrimage.
References

2. 1 bid., p. 4.
6. 1 bid., Chapter- V, p. 26; 1 bid Chapter- V, p. 31.