

The Mission Accomplished

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The Mission Accomplished

A historical analysis of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta of the
Digha Nikaya of the Pali Canon.

by

Ven. Pategama Gnanarama Ph. D.

The Mission Accomplished is undoubtedly an eye opening contribution to Buddhist analytical Pali studies. In this analytical and critical work Ven. Dr. Pategama Gnanarama enlightens us in many areas of subjects hitherto unexplored by scholars. His views on the beginnings of the Bhikkhuni Order are interesting and refreshing. They might even be provocative to traditional readers, yet be challenging to the feminists to adopt a most positive attitude to the problem.

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A masterly treatment of a cluster of Buddhist themes in print

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A historical analysis of the Mahāparinibbana Sutta of the
Dīgha Nikāya of the Pāli canon



Ven. Pategama Gnanarama Ph.D.

Cover: Mahāparinibbana; an ancient stone carving from Gandhara
— Loriyan Tangai. Photograph reproduced by Mr K. C. Wong.

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“It is out of faith that you have spoken Ananda! But Ananda; the Tathagata knows for certain that in this whole assembly of monks there is not one monk who has any doubt or uncertainty about the Buddha, or the Doctrine or the Path, or the Practice. For even the least one, Ananda, of these five hundred monks has become a stream Winner, is no longer liable to be born in a state of woe, certain of Nibbana.”

Mahaparinibbana Sutta; D. ii, 155.



To my revered guru Venerable Pātegama Paññārāma Mahā Thera. In grateful remembrance of his impressive qualities as a Teacher.

“In five ways... do teachers see for the good of their pupils:

1. Train them well
2. Make them master that which they themselves have learnt well
3. Instruct them in the lore of every art
4. Speak well of them among their friends and companions
5. Provide for their safety in every way”

D. 111, 189.

“*Ācariyā... pañcahī thānehi antevāsim anukampenti:*

1. *Suvinītaṃ vinenti*
2. *Suggahītaṃ gāhāpenti*
3. *Sabbe sippasutaṃ samakkhāyino bhavanti*
4. *Mittāmaccesu paṭiyādenti*
5. *Disāsu parittānaṃ karonti”*

D. 111, 189.

Introductory

In this work, I have attempted to trace in historical perspective the themes found in the *Mahāparinibbana Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* of the Pali canon. The Sutta was subjected to critical analysis in regard to its form and contents paying due attention to deviations and the early teaching of the Master.

When the '*Parinirvāṇayaṭa Pasu Siyavas Tunak*' authored by me was published some time ago, some of my friends who evinced an interest in the work persuaded me to produce an English version of it, for the sake of English-speaking students of Buddhism, Pali and Buddhist History. Some of the discussions in the present work are based entirely on what I have written in Sinhala and some are quite new. Here the term *Sutta* as well as *Suttanta* have been invariably used to denote a discourse, a canonical dialogue.

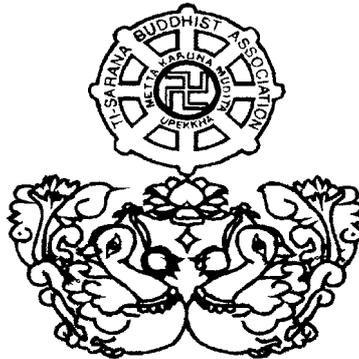
As far back as 1912 Winternitz remarked: "It is by comparing the Pali text minutely with the Sanskrit in which fragments of a *Parinirvana Sutra* have come down to us with the Tibetan and Chinese translations that we can discern which parts of the Sutta are ancient and genuine".¹ Nevertheless, by analyzing the text I have shown that even in the Pali recension itself there are evolutionary tendencies related to the early phase of Buddhism and ecclesiastical history.

1. Winternitz M. — History of Indian Literature Vol. ii, p. 41 fn
German original was published in 1912.

I am extremely grateful to;

- Mr Ananda Ang Hock Ann, who was initiative in preparing the book for print.
- Sumedhā who devoted her time for computer type setting with care and patience.
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March 1997



Chapter 1:

The Mahaparinibbana Sutta &

its Different Versions

The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* belonging to the *Mahavagga* of the *Dighanikaya* of the Pali canon is the longest *sutta* to be found in any of the Pali canonical works. The *sutta* begins a few days before the rainy retreat when Vassakara, the minister, visited the Buddha in Rajagaha on the initiative of King Ajatasattu and continues the narrative beyond the three months of the rainy retreat and records the Passing Away of the Buddha, the Cremation and the division of relics finally ending with the erection of eight cetiyas or monuments enshrining the relics of the Buddha.

Although the theme of the discourse should be the Great Decease as suggested by the title, however there are numerous details relating to the doctrine and discipline which could be categorized under different heads. It is neither a pure dialogue nor a pure narrative.

There are of course numerous recensions of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. Among them the Pali version is the oldest in respect of language and contents. It runs into ninety-six pages in the transliterated Pali Text Society (London) edition of the text. The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is of utmost historical and cultural value and therefore it has become a sourcebook for students of Buddhism, Buddha biography and history of Buddhist thought and literature.

Winternitz, referring to the nature and the character of the discourse, says: “It is neither a dialogue nor a speech on one or more chief points of the doctrine but a continuous record of the latter part of the Buddha’s life, his last speeches and sayings and his death.” And further, assessing the historicity of the *Sutta* he rightly remarks that the oldest parts of this extensive record, surely, belongs to the oldest parts of the *tipitaka* and to the earliest beginnings of a poetic treatment of the life of Buddha. But referring to the diversity of subject matter he says: “It is composed of parts which belong to different ages.”²

When compared with the extant Buddhist Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese versions of the text, the fact that the Pali version is comparatively earlier in language and contents is categorically beyond contention. Hence, while pointing out the importance of the *Sutta*, he asserts that ‘the memory of the Master has been preserved and handed down with fidelity and devotion’.³

All the scholars who have dealt with the Pali version of the *Sutta* are emphatic about its importance. According to B. C. Law: “The Mahaparinibbana Suttanta which is one of the most important suttas as it furnishes us with a highly interesting narrative of the peregrination of the Buddha during the last year of his mortal existence.”⁴ Geiger is more precise when he refers to the *Sutta* as a ‘running description of the events of the last weeks of the

2. Winternitz M. — History of Indian Literature Vol. II, p. 38.

3. Op. cit., p. 39.

4. Law B. C. — A History of Pali Literature, Vol. I, p. 98–99.

life of the Buddha'.⁵ Venerable A. P. Buddhadatta while asserting the significance of the *Sutta* for the study of the last days of the Buddha, observed the biographical and doctrinal data embedded in the *Sutta* and says that 'it is not a single *sutta* but a unified compendium of the life and teaching of the Buddha'.⁶

Rhys Davids, however, points out that only one third of the *Sutta* is original while the rest of the passages are found in identical or almost identical words elsewhere in the canon. He is convinced of the gradual growth of living traditions. He says: "It is well known that all the ancient sacred literatures of the world have grown up gradually, and are a mosaic of earlier and later material. The Buddhist Pitakas form no exception."⁷

The Tibetan translations of the text are later than the 7th century, because Buddhism was introduced to Tibet in the same century. There are three Tibetan translations of the text namely; *Dulva* xif 535b–625b; *Mdo viii* fl–231; and *Do f231–234*. W. W. Rockhill used the first of these texts and the other Tibetan texts in narrating the life of the Buddha as recorded in the Pali version. He has noted the differences at the relevant places.⁸

A. K. Warder has made reference to three Chinese versions, named T1, T2 and T5 as they are popularly

5. Geiger W. — Pali Literature and Language, p. 17.

6. Buddhadatta. Ven. A. P. — Pali Sāhityaya (Sinhala), p. 35.

7. Rhys Davids. SBB, Vol. III, Dialogues of the Buddha, Part II, pp. 76–77.

8. Rockhill W. W. The Life of the Buddha, p. 1.

numbered. Referring to these versions Warder says: “The huge, unwieldy text which resulted might be compared in size and its rambling organisation with the longest *Mahayana Sutras*, or on the other hand with the contemporary Brahmanical *Harivamsa* (a long ‘supplement’ to the *Mahabharata* narrating the life of *Krishna*) or *Puranas* (except that Brahmanical texts are mostly in verse).”⁹

Besides these, there are several other translations in Chinese. They are of different length. Pachow points out that their sizes vary to such an extent that some of them consist of thirty to forty fasculi while others two or three fasculi only. They are called *Chuan* in Chinese. At a glance indeed we find that their differences are great.¹⁰

He has selected four versions of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* found in *Nanjio* for comparison with the Pali version which have many facts in common and bear similarity to the Pali text.

1P *Buddhparinirvana Sutra*
 Nanjio No. 552 translated by *Po-Fa-Tsu*,
 A.D. 290–306, *Tsin* dynasty A.D. 265–316, 2 fasculi.

11B *Mahaparinirvana Sutra of the Dirghagama Sutra*
 Nanjio No. 545 (2) translated by *Buddhayasas*
 together with *Chu Fonien* A.D. 412–413 of the latter
 Tsin dynasty A.D. 384–417, 3 fasculi.

9. Warder A. K. *Indian Buddhism* p. 415.

10. *Sino-Indian Studies* Vol. I, Part 4, July 1945.

111N *Parinirvana Sutra or Vaipulya Nirvana Sutra*
Nanjio No. 119, Translated under the Eastern *Tsin* dynasty A.D. 317–420. The name of the translator is unknown, 2 fasculi.

1VF *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*
Nanjio No. 118, Translated by *Fa-Hien* of the Eastern *Tsin* dynasty A.D. 317–420, 3 fasculi.
Besides these texts the numbers 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 542 and 1121 mentioned in *Nanjio's* catalogue may be used for further references.¹¹

The *Sarvastivada* version of the text has been edited by *Waldschmidt* (*Abhandlungen Deutch Akademi der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 1957, 1962) and also by N. Dutt in *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. iii, p. 415. An earlier attempt in comparing the different versions of the text is found in *Journal Asiatique* 1918–1920 under the title *Comparative Study of the Different Parinirvana Texts* by *Prazylaski*.



11. One Chinese translation of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta by Carlo Punini is found in *Giornale Della Societa Italiana*, 21,1908, p. 59ff and 22, 1909, p. 1ff.

Chapter 2:

The Structure of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta

The structure and the constituents of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* have to be viewed historically for obvious reasons. It is evident that the *Sutta* has not been compiled by a single compiler in a specific period in history. In the forthcoming chapters we shall show how some of the concepts have evolved due to numerous historical circumstances and how they found their way into the *Sutta* thereby ensuring the growth of the *Sutta* in size and contents. It is to be emphasised that a good number of *Suttas* found in the *Nikaya* works have to be analysed in historical perspective in regard to their form and contents. G.C. Pande has actually followed this method in his work “*Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*” and there he has attempted laboriously to stratify the different layers not only of the *Nikaya* works but also of the individual *suttas* found in those canonical works.

In determining the date of a particular piece of canonical writing, one has to take both the external and internal evidence in regard to that particular passage, into account.

Firstly, we can go back to the account in the *Cullavagga* where the proceedings of the first council have been recorded according to Ananda’s rehearsal of the *suttas* just after the recital of the *Vinaya* by Upali. But it is to be noted that the report of the rehearsal is confined to a brief statement where only the two *suttas* of the *Digha Nikaya* have been mentioned by name. The record of the

Sutta Pitaka rehearsal has been concluded by merely stating that all the works of the five *Nikayas* were obtained from Ananda¹² on being questioned by Maha Kassapa. It was Buddhaghosa who particularised the exact number of the texts contained in each basket or *Pitaka*.

These classificatory remarks are found in the commentary on the *Vinaya Pitaka* called *Samantapāsādikā* and in the commentary on the *Digha Nikaya* called *Sumangalavilasini*. Both of these works were written by Buddhaghosa. There is no doubt that the *Cullavagga* is fully ignorant of the classification of the canon as given by Buddhaghosa in those two works. Evidently Buddhaghosa has attempted to accommodate all the works known to him by the 5th century A.D. in the threefold classification of the canon.

Therefore the chronology of the canon and the individual *suttas* have to be established by a careful analysis of the canonical texts themselves. Further, in stratifying the individual *suttas*, their contents, ideologies and the mode of expression have to be taken into consideration. It is to be stressed that only such an attempt would reveal the evolutionary tendencies embedded in the canonical works.

In regard to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, too, we must employ the criterion suggested in the foregoing discussion, because the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is the longest *sutta* in the Pali canon written in narrative style covering a long period exceeding four months. Besides, incidents found in the *Sutta* seem to have been inserted at different stages of its development. Due to these reasons, the inter-

12. Only the *Brahmajāla* and the *Sāmaññaphala Suttas* have been mentioned by name. — Vide, *Cullavagga* Chap 11.

nal and external evidence has to be carefully analysed in stratifying the material found in the *Sutta* itself.

The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is a narrative of *Akhyāna* type having five chapters of considerable length. It has been included in the *Mahavagga* of the *Digha Nikaya* and obviously it is the longest *sutta* in any of the *Nikaya* works. The *Sutta* begins with a discussion between the Buddha and the minister, Vassakara, in Rajagaha just a few weeks before the rains retreat and goes on to furnish us with details as to how the Buddha had spent the succeeding three months of the rains retreat, the Great Decease, the distribution of relics and the erection of eight memorial mounds with those relics enshrined. There is no doubt that the demise of the Buddha is the main theme of the *Sutta*, but it provides us with very many details that could be classified under different heads into a number of *suttas*. The *Sutta* is full of narratives and episodes as well as the direct utterances of the Exalted One Himself.

Naturally, when taken as a whole, it depicts a period of evolution of early Buddhist thought. By discerning the trends of early Buddhist thought subjected to evolution, one can recognise the different strata in the *Sutta*; for just a few years after the decease of the Blessed One, many docetic elements have been attributed to His human personality. The *Sutta*, in accordance with the old Theravada point of view, still preserves some factual statements which dealt with the human personality of the Buddha, side by side with the docetism attributed to him. Hence the self-contradictory nature of some of the statements have to be viewed from different angles and when they

are analysed and the docetic elements segregated, the Buddha is seen as a man of wisdom and strength.

In the discussions on the lesser and minor offences, the conditions of welfare meant for the monks, the four great authorities, the life span of the Buddha, the probable date of the Great Decease, the verses of the *Mahāparinibbana Sutta*, the *suttas* extended on the themes found in the *Mahāparinibbana Sutta* etc. we found that the structural constituents of the *Sutta* belonged to different stages of evolution. The multiplicity of the subjects discussed in the *Sutta* is a clear indication to its later compilation which invariably challenges its authenticity. Supernatural phenomena intermingled with the flow of gentle as well as realistic occurrences found in the *Sutta* cannot be taken as historical truth. It is more plausible to regard place names such as *Gotamatittha* and *Gotamadvāra* found in the *Sutta* as names introduced after the demise of the Buddha.¹³ Undoubtedly, the list of the causes of earthquakes can be easily set aside as late material interpolated in elucidation of the super-human qualities of the Buddha.

The eight causes of earthquakes naturally depict how the redactors of the *Sutta* turned apologetic in regard to giving up of the term of life in order to attain *Parinibbana* by the Buddha.

The causes of earthquakes said to have been explained by the Buddha to Ananda are;

1. The great earth is established on water the water on

13. One Chinese version translated them to mean 'The Buddha's little stream' and 'The Buddha's little gate' — SIS. Vol. II, Part I April 1946.

wind and wind rests upon space. As the mighty wind blows, the waters are shaken and by the moving waters, the earth shaken.

2. A recluse, a brahmana, a god or a fairy of great power can make the earth move and tremble and shake violently.¹⁴
3. When the Bodhisatta deliberately leaving the heavenly world descends into the mother's womb, then the earth quakes and trembles.
4. When the Bodhisatta deliberately quits his mother's womb then the earth quakes and trembles.
5. When a Tathagata arrives at the supreme enlightenment then the earth quakes and trembles.
6. When a Tathagata delivers his first sermon then the earth quakes and trembles.
7. When a Tathagata consciously rejects the remainder of His life term and then the earth quakes and trembles.
8. When a Tathagata passes entirely away in that utter passing away in which nothing whatever is left behind then the earth quakes and trembles.

-
14. There is no doubt a real truth in the idea that deep thought can shake the universe and make the palaces of the gods to tremble, just as faith is said in Matthew XXI, 21 to be able to remove mountains and cause them to be cast into the sea:

SBB Vol. III and Part II p. 115 footnote.

In this context Buddhaghosa too, comes out with a lengthy description of a monk who wields his supernormal powers.

DA. (SHB) Vol. I, p. 381.

These eight causes of earthquakes are totally absent in the Tibetan version of our text. Rhys Davids, too, observed that these passages dealing with earthquakes are ‘quite out of place.’¹⁵

In the years that followed the demise of the Buddha many may have asked why actually the Buddha passed away inspite of His supernormal powers. Therefore with these lists of eight causes of earthquakes answers have been suggested that He could have lived if He had wanted to but He would not because on the one hand Ananda did not beg Him to live for an aeon and on the other hand there were some natural happenings preventing Him from living such a long period.

The worship of sacred relics and sacred places, the persons worthy of memorial mounds and pilgrimages to those sacred places, the concept of the Cakravartin etc. have been evolved in course of time out of original rudimentary thoughts. Prof. Upendra Thakur, too, indirectly vindicates this supposition, for he, while referring to the *Bodhi* tree at Bodhgaya, a place of worship found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* in this context, says that it is strange to note that neither in the Buddha’s life time nor during the two centuries following His demise did any of His followers or lay admirers visit the spot as a regular place of worship.¹⁶

The putting up of memorial mounds is a pre-

15. SBB Vol. III Part II p. 113 footnote.

16. Bodhi — Rashmi, Souvenir of the First International Buddhist Conference, New Delhi, 1948, p. 12.

Buddhistic practice. Jains as well as Buddhists imitated it in conformity with their religious concepts. When we turn to Buddhism now we see how it has become an integral part of popular Buddhism. They have been erected enshrining the relics not only of the Buddha but also of His disciples as well. Further more, significant events of the Buddha's life, too, were commemorated by erecting these cairns. Sir John Marshall strongly believed that the worship of these cairns where relics of the Buddha had been enshrined was begun by Emperor Asoka during his time.¹⁷ However it is reasonable to believe that it was Asoka who popularised the concept of worshipping them. The record of eight representatives from neighbouring eight kingdoms rushing to the cremation ground demanding the relics of this great son of India, could be taken as a historical truth.

On the whole what has happened here in the *Sutta* is that the compilers are struggling hard to describe past events on concepts evolved in later times with a sophisticated religious bias. The *Mahavamsa*, the chronicle of Sri Lanka, continuing the relic-worship further says that the Buddha had predicted that King Dutthagāmini in future would erect the Suvannamali Cetiya enshrining His relics in Sri Lanka.¹⁸

17. Marshall, Sir John — Monuments of Sanchi p. 21.

18. Parinibbāna mañcamhi — Nipanno lokanāyako
 Dhātūhipi lokahitaṃ — Kātuṃ devindamabravi
 Devindaṭṭhasu donesu — Mama sārīta dhātusu
 Ekaṃ dinnam rāmagāme — Koliyehi ca Sakkataṃ
 Nāgalokaṃ tato nītaṃ — Tato nāgehi sakkataṃ
 Laṃkādīpe mahāthūpe — Nidhānāya bhavissati

— Mahavamsa Chap. XXXI, 17–19.

The concept of the Cakravartin is also a pre-Buddhistic one. Though these kings were termed Cakravartins or universal monarchs, Parānavitana stressed that they could have been rulers of some North Indian territories.¹⁹ The concept of the Cakravartin is found in the *Maitrayani Upanishad* for the first time.²⁰ As given there, the Cakravartin is a monarch who wields his power over a vast territory. There are references in Pali canonical works too; showing how the concept grew among the Buddhists of North India.²¹ According to Buddhist concept, a Cakravartin is a monarch who rules his kingdom in conformity with the ten principles. Those are set out in detail in the *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya*.

He, in accordance with the good law, being virtuous sees to the welfare of:

1. Wife and children
2. Army
3. Warrior caste
4. Brahmin householders
5. Citizens
6. Brahmins and recluses

He also:

7. Sets free four-footed animals and birds and looks after them.

19. Parānavitana S — Stupas in Ceylon p. 2.

20. ERE.

21. M. iii, p. 65; A. i, 76.

8. Takes steps to see that criminal acts do not take place in his own territory.
9. Provides monetary assistance to the poor for their occupational and welfare works and
10. Approaches self-controlled brahmins and recluses and seeks their advice to improve his character.

The concept as seen in the Canon is parallel with that of the Buddha. Ultimately, by saying that the cremation of the Buddha was carried out as that of a Cakravartin the Buddha is compared to and identified with a Cakravartin, a universal monarch. Therefore the detail as given in *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* in regard to the cremation is as late as the period of Asoka.

There is a very brief *sutta* dealing with the Great Decease in the *Samyutta Nikaya*.²² Thomas thinks that it is a summary of a long *sutta*, which existed earlier.²³ But, presumably, the brief *sutta* dealing with the Great Decease has been developed into the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* in the course of time. Winternitz too subscribes to this view, for he says: “There must already have been a short *sutta* of the perfect *Nirvana* (of the Buddha) which by means of interpolations and addition grew longer in the course of time till it become the great *sutta* of the perfect *Nirvana* which we now have in our canon.”²⁴

22. S. i, p. 157.

23. Thomas E. J. History of Buddhist Thought p. 145.

24. Winternitz M. — History of Indian Literature Vol. II, p. 39.

Winternitz in his attempt to identify the genuine material in the *Sutta* states: “Such passages as those in the second section (second chapter) where the story is related of the first illness of the Buddha, which befell Him at Beluva and which He overcame by the strength of His will where He assures Ananda that he is not one of those teachers with the ‘closed fist’ who keep something for themselves, but that He had proclaimed the whole truth and where He disclaims the idea that He should ever have wished to pose as a leader of the community, are surely, ancient and original.”²⁵

Here we see how the Buddha was answering Ananda; for Ananda said: “Though at the sight of the sickness of the Exalted One my body became weak as a creeper, and the horizon become dim to me and my faculties were no longer clear, yet notwithstanding I took some little comfort from the thought that the Exalted One would not pass away until at least He had left instructions as touching the Order.”²⁶

The Buddha was categorical in His reply: “I have preached the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrine, for in respect of truth Ananda, the Tathagata has no such thing as the closed fist of a Teacher, who keeps some things back.”²⁷ Here the Buddha further denies the intention of leading

25. Op. Cit.

26. Apica me bhante madhuraka jāto viya kāyo. Disāpi me na pakkhāyanti Dhammāpi maṃ nappatibhanti bhagavato gelañña. Apica me bhante ahoṣi kācideva assāsamattā na tāva bhagavā parinibbāyissati na yāva bhagavā bhikkhu saṃghaṃ ārabha kincideva udāharati’ti D. ii, p. 99.

the order and that the order depends upon Him²⁸ and exhorts them to be islands unto themselves and to be a refuge unto themselves.²⁹ These genuine expressions evidently go against what the *Sutta* has to say on the rites of cremation and the building up of memorial mounds.

Even in the last few hours of His existence the Buddha was mindful to instill energy, exhorting the monks to exert themselves and strive for Liberation and asked them repeatedly to get their doubts cleared before His passing away.³⁰ Even though He said so for the third time the monks remained silent. Then for the fourth time the Buddha asked them to communicate their questions through another.³¹ But nobody had any question to ask the Buddha. Certainly these passages are genuine and original.

Besides these, the following passages also must be

-
27. Desito āṇanda mayā dhammo anantaraṃ abāhiraṃ karitvā natthi
āṇanda tathāgatassa dhammesu acariyaṃuṭṭhi D. ii, p. 100.
cf. “If you should have to carry me about on a litter Sariputta,
verily there is no change in the Tathagata’s lucidity of wisdom.”
MLS. I p. 110.
Mañcakena’pi maṃ pariharissatha; neva atthi tathāgatassa
paññaveyyattiyassa aññathattaṃ D. ii, p. 155.
28. “Tathāgatassa kho āṇanda na evaṃ hoti ahaṃ bhikkhu saṃghaṃ
pariharissāmī’ti vā mama uddesiko bhikkhusaṃgho’ti vā. D. ii, p. 100.
29. Tasmātiha ānanda attadīpā viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā
D. ii, p. 100.
30. Mā pacchā vippaṭisārino ahuvattha. sammukhībhūtā no sathā ahosi. Na
mayā sakkhimha bhagavantaṃ sammukhā paṭipucchitum’ti. D. ii, p. 155.
31. Siyā kho pana bhikkhave satthugāravenā’pi na puccheyyātha
sahāyako’pi bhikkhave sahāyakassa arocetu. D. ii, p. 155.

taken as original and genuine. The passages dealing with the story of *sūkaramaddava* and its ill-effect on the Buddha,³² the request to spread the double robe at the foot of a tree, asking three times for water from Ananda particularly saying that He (the Buddha) was thirsty; the Buddha's taking a bath in the river Kakuttha, the weakness shown afterwards, the instructions given to assure Chunda the smith in order to dispel his doubts and remorse, the fanning of the Buddha by Thera Upavana, the lamentation of Ananda, His asking the monks to get their doubts cleared before His demise etc. belong to the original stratum of the *Sutta*.

Fleet thought that the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* as we now have it, had not been composed till 375 B.C.³³ Nevertheless, it is plausible to think that the *Sutta* has been developed by additions and interpolations for a period of a few centuries. According to Winternitz: "It was a favourite practice to utilise this famous and popular sutta for inserting especially important texts into it with a view to enhance their prestige by this means."³⁴

Perhaps its last and final redaction must have been carried out at Aluvihara in Sri Lanka when the entire canon was committed to writing in the first century A.D. Although there are many interpolations and additions, the passages dealing with the human nature of the Buddha can be considered genuine and authentic in view

32. D. ii, p. 127.

33. JRAS 1096 p. 65.

34. Winternitz M. — History of Indian Literature Vol. II, p. 40.

of the simplicity of the narration.

The sources of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* are many and varied. Subhadda's utterance as found in the *Sutta* is important in this connection, for the *Cullavagga* and the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* state the episode in two different ways. While the *Sutta* records it in narrative style, the *Cullavagga* gives it in Maha Kassapa's words as his own experience.³⁵ Secondly, according to the *Sutta* Maha Kassapa's pronouncement comes after Subhadda's utterance.³⁶ Oldenberg went to the extent of denying the authenticity of the first council, basing his hypothesis on this difference. Evidently neither the historicity of the first council nor the reality of Subhadda's utterance could be disproved by either of these textual renderings.³⁷

A good number of incidents and discourses found in our *Sutta* could be traced to many of the canonical works such as *Anguttara Nikaya*, *Samyutta Nikaya*, *Udana* etc, but it does mean that these works were the sources of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. Rhys Davids has taken trouble to identify those passages in different texts which bear resemblance to our *Sutta*. By his study he has shown that only a very little portion is original to the *Sutta*. The rest could be found scattered all over the four *Nikayas* as well as in some works in the *Khuddaka Nikaya*.³⁸

It is very difficult to work out a criterion to differen-

35. D. ii, p.162.

36. Cullavagga chapter II.

37. See the 5th chapter where the problem has been discussed at length.

38. See Dialogues of the Buddha II Introduction to Mahaparinibbana Sutta.

tiate the mass of early material from the late, because most of the early material is interwoven with material evolved in subsequent centuries. Not only the *Digha Nikaya*, the other *Nikayas* as well have been subjected to a final redaction. In this regard Rhys Davids' chronological table is suggestive. The works had not been committed to writing at the beginning and a good number of the original collection must have been lost in the course of time.³⁹

The Chronological table of Buddhist Literature from the Buddha's time to the time of Asoka as given by Rhys Davids:

1. The simple statements of Buddhist doctrine now found in identical words, in paragraphs or verses recurring in all the books.
2. Episodes found in identical words in two or more of the existing books.
3. The *Silas*, the *Parayanas*, the octaves, the *Patimokkha*.
4. The *Digha*, *Majjhima*, *Anguttara* and *Samyutta*.
5. The *Sutta Nipata*, the *Thera* and *Theri Gathas*, the *Udanas* and the *Khuddaka Patha*.
6. The *Sutta Vibhanga* and the *Khandakas*.
7. The *Jatakas* and the *Dhammapada*.
8. The *Niddesa*, the *Itivuttaka* and the *Patisambhida*.
9. The *Peta* and *Vimana Vatthus*, the *Apadanas*, the *Cariyapitaka* and the *Buddhavamsa*.

39. Rhys Davids T.W. — Buddhist India p. 103.

10. The *Abhidhamma* books, the last of which is the *Kathavatthu* and the earliest probably the *Puggalapaññatti*.

In order to understand the real nature of the redaction of the texts Buddhaghosa's commentaries can be cited, for they substantiate valuable information which is applicable to all canonical works, specially to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. We would just like to point out a fact that could be applied directly to our proposition.

Buddhaghosa did not write all of his works simultaneously. It is generally accepted that the *Atthasalini*, the commentary on the *Dhammasangani* had been written when he was in India and later when he came to Sri Lanka, the *Samantapasadika* and rest of the commentaries were written subsequent to the *Visuddhimagga*. But these works do not in any measure provide us with evidence to this affect, because very many cross references have been made in the commentaries after they were completed. For example *Atthasalini* said to have been written in India, has made references to the *Samantapasadika* and vice versa. In the same way the *Sumangalavilasini* refers the reader to the *Papañcasudani* and the *Papañcasudani* to the *Sumangalavilasini*. This being the case, Buddhaghosa's commentaries do not betray any evidence to ascertain the order of their composition.⁴⁰ Therefore one can quite reasonably think that the same process must have been followed in the canonical redaction, too.



40. Jayawickrama N. A. Inception of Discipline p. XXXI.

Chapter 3: *Three Extended Discourses*

There are three extended discourses having direct connection with the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. The discourses which have found their way to the *Digha Nikaya* itself are the *Sampasadaniya*,⁴¹ *Janavasabha*⁴² and *Mahasudassana Suttas*.⁴³

Among these the *Sampasadaniya* is said to have been delivered by Thera Sariputta, when the Buddha was residing at *Pavarika* Mango Grove. This event is stated in brief towards the middle of the first chapter of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*.⁴⁴ The *Janavasabha Sutta* is stated to have been delivered by the Exalted One Himself when He was once staying at Brick House in Nadika and the third discourse referred to is the *Mahasudassana* addressed to Ananda in order to reveal the ancient glory of the city of Kusinara. Notably a brief reference to the *Janavasabha* is found in a paragraph in the second chapter of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*.⁴⁵ The Buddha referred to the past glory of Kusinara when He was being dissuaded to pass away in Kusinara by Ananda. The incident occurs in the fifth chapter of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*.⁴⁶

41. D. iii, pp. 99–116.

42. D. ii, pp. 200–219.

43. D. ii, pp. 169–198.

44. D. ii, pp. 84–86.

45. D. ii, p. 94.

46. D. ii, pp. 146–149.

It is to be noted that both the *Mahasudassana* and the *Janavasabha Suttas* are found in the *Mahavagga* of the *Digha Nikaya*; but the *Janavasabha* is the first of the three *Suttas* included in the *Mahavagga* without the adjective “Maha” added to it. The *Sampasadaniya* comes in the third *Patika Vagga* of the *Digha Nikaya*. It would reveal undoubtedly the nature of the format and the contents of the text.

The *Mahasudassana Sutta* has a *Jataka* version too. The material found in the *Sutta* has been woven together in conformity with the structure and the pattern of the *Jataka* tales and included as the 95th story of the *Jataka* collection. In the *Jataka*, the descriptive style found in the *Sutta* has been avoided in order to relate the story in narrative style.

Referring to the portion of the legend of King Sudassana which is omitted in the *Jataka* tale Rhys Davids says that it throws an unexpected light upon the tale; for it commences with a lengthy description of the riches and glory of the king. He is convinced that it is ‘nothing more nor less than a spiritualised sun myth’.⁴⁷ It is emphasized in the *Sutta* as well as in the *Jataka* that everything other than righteousness is insignificant. Besides the details given as to the magnificence of the king could be regarded as the greatest possible glory and luxury of the most glorious and righteous king. Most of the luxuries are of an outdoor kind and could be compared to the concept of *Sukhavati* found in Japanese Buddhism. The short

47. SBB Vol. III, Part II p. 146.

account found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* must have served as the theme of the *Mahasudassana Sutta*⁴⁸ and in turn the latter must have been the basis of the *Mahasudassana Jataka* in the *Jataka* collection.

The connection between the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* and the *Janavasabha* also has an interesting point in understanding the structural constituents of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* and the popularity of the themes discussed in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*.

The *Janavasabha* begins with a list of North Indian cities and records how the Buddha has predicted the immediate birth of virtuous inhabitants of those cities. The list of cities consisted of Kasi, Kosala, Vajji, Malla, Ceti, Vamsa, Kuru, Pancala, Maccha and Surasena. In order to prove the case as it were the *Sutta* quotes the sermon of the Buddha said to have been delivered in Nadika and found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*; but the method adopted in the opening passage of the *Sutta* directly points to the fact that the Nadika episode is not an integral part of it. Rhys Davids has shown that the Nadika paragraph may have existed as a source from which the material had been drawn for both the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* and the *Janavasabha*. However the *Sutta* has enlarged and extended the original episode as we found it in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* therefore the later character of the *Janavasabha* can be established beyond contention.

When we come to the *Sampasadaniya Sutta*, too, we

48. SBB Vol. III, Part II p. 234.

are placed in a somewhat precarious position. The form and contents of the *Sutta* is suggestive of its later origin. The 'lion's roar' of Sariputta found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is the subject matter of the *Sampasadaniya Sutta*, but it is neither found in the Tibetan nor in the Chinese version.⁴⁹ Moreover, both the chief disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, passed away a few months before the Buddha's demise.⁵⁰ On the other hand, had it not been ignored by the compilers of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, it would not be known that they were completely unaware of the passing away of Sariputta. As it has been established on canonical grounds, the passing away of Sariputta is anterior to the period portrayed in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, it is plausible to think that the episode in question must have been added at a somewhat later stage to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*.

The *Sutta* speaks not only of previous Buddhas but also of future Buddhas, a concept which gained ground in later Mahayana Buddhism, resulting in a full-fledged Buddhism. Further, Sariputta as found in both *Suttas*, states emphatically that there is no other recluse or Brahmin surpassing the Buddha in enlightenment and goes on to say that all the Buddhas, belonging to the past, present and future realize Buddhahood by destroying five hindrances and developing the four kinds of mindfulness along with the seven constituents of Enlightenment. He

49. I. Rockhill W. W. — The life of Buddha p. 126.

II. Sino-Indian Studies Vol.i, Part 4 July 1945.

50. DPPN Vol. I and Vol. II.

asserts that he has come to know this by reflecting in accordance with the Dhamma, the doctrine.

Basically, it should be noted that this is an elaborated path alien to early Buddhist thought as depicted in the canon.⁵¹

The *Sampasadaniya* however elaborates on the ‘lion’s roar’ of Sariputta and specifies sixteen qualities of the Buddha. Therefore it is evident that the brief episode in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* has been supplemented by more and more details and that there must have been a common source for both the discourses: the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* and the *Sampasadaniya*. Thereby it furnishes some data for us to form an idea as to the structure of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*.

What we have to keep in mind with regard to the additions in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* and the elaborated discourses on some of the themes discussed above is that they must be viewed from a historical perspective in relation to the ideologies expressed in them. The Buddha, though He was born in Kapilavatthu also lived in larger cities such as Rajagaha in Magadha, Savatthi in Kosala and Kosambi in Vatsa and visited many an independent state frequently in His preaching tours. Notably He travelled very often between the Magadha and Kosala kingdoms until He ultimately settled down in Savatthi to spend the last twenty years of His mortal existence. Therefore, there must have been a great unrest among the

51. ‘This represents a particular interpretation of the ‘way’ and its very eagerness to establish it as bonafide may be considered suspicious.’ See Pande G.C. — *Origins of Buddhism* p. 102.

disciples who admired the life and deeds of the Buddha, in respect of His Decease in a *Sala* grove situated in an insignificant town, namely, Kusinara, ruled over by the Mallas. As given in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, Ananda tried to dissuade the Buddha from passing away in Kusinara, saying: “Let not the Exalted One die in the little wattle and daub town (*kuḍḍanagaraka*), in this town in the midst of the jungle (*ujjāṅgala nagaraka*), in this branch township (*sākhā nagaraka*). For Lord there are other great cities such as Champa, Rajagaha, Savatthi, Saketa, Kosambi and Benares. Let the Exalted One pass away in one of them.” He added reasons for his plea: “There, there are many wealthy nobles and Brahmins and heads of houses, believers in the Tathagata.” It was on this occasion that the Buddha had been represented as relating the past glory of Kusinara where king Mahasudassana reigned with great majesty.

Certainly, the wealthy householders of different clans could easily venerate the dead body of the Master had He passed away in a large city reputed for wealthy followers; but it occurred otherwise and the Buddha Himself went to Kusinara on foot, travelling a long distance. Therefore the *Mahasudassana Sutta* as well as the glory of King Mahasudassana as found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* would have served as an ‘excuse’ for the demise of the Buddha in Kusinara.



Chapter 4:

The Date of the Great Decease

The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* furnishes us with a detailed account of the last days of the Buddha's career. Mixed with supernatural elements, the narrative continues to relate how the Buddha passed away with full presence of mind.

The Buddha approached the *sala* grove of the Mallas in Kusinara and asked Ananda to prepare a couch with its head to the north between the twin *sala* trees and laid Himself down on His right side with one leg resting on the other. Although the Buddha was weary, He was fully mindful and self-possessed.⁵² It was a very busy night for the Buddha. The *Sutta* gives a description as to how He spent the night giving instructions to the monks who surrounded Him at those last few hours of His existence.

The account as found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is touching and cannot be read without being moved; but it should be stressed that very many an interpolation has found its way into the *Sutta* in the course of its historical development. These interpolations however can be identified by a critical approach to the *Sutta*.

It is noteworthy that the events connected with the

52. Āyasmā āṇando bhagavato paṭissutvā antarena yamakasālānaṃ uttarasīsakaṃ mañcakaṃ paññāpesi. Atha kho bhagavā dakkhiṇena passena sīhaseyyaṃ kappesi pāde pādaṃ accādhāya sampajāno

D. ii, p. 137.

Buddha's decease are scattered all over the discourse. The Buddha's entering upon the rains retreat at Beluva Village is found in the second chapter (*bhānavāra*).⁵³ The relinquishing of His span of life is found in the third⁵⁴ and in the fourth chapter it is stated how the Buddha fell ill after partaking of Chunda's⁵⁵ meal. The Buddha's lying down between the twin *sala* trees is found in the fifth⁵⁶ and the Great Decease or the *Mahaparinibbana* in the sixth.⁵⁷ Evidently a number of discourses and events have been woven into the major theme of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. Here in the fifth chapter events such as the gods being present to worship the Buddha, sacred places of worship, persons worthy of monuments, how the dead body of the Master should be honoured, the lamentation of Ananda, etc. are given in detail.⁵⁸

Now in the sixth chapter the Buddha addresses the monks and asks them whether there are any doubts or misgivings as to the teacher or the doctrine or the path or the method enunciated by Him; but nobody had any question in regard to any of these issues. Then the Buddha uttered His last words: "Behold now brethren I exhort you saying decay is inherent in all component

53. D. ii, p. 98.

54. D. ii, p. 120.

55. D. ii, p. 127.

56. D. ii, p. 137.

57. D. ii, p. 156.

58. D. ii, pp. 137–153.

things. Look out for your salvation with diligence.”⁵⁹ Then comes the last moment of the Teacher’s life. The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* vividly portrays how the Buddha passed away with mind well composed.

“Then the Exalted One entered into the first stage of meditative absorption (*paṭhamajjhāna*), and rising from it He entered the second (*dutiyaajjhāna*), and then passed on to the third (*tatiyaajjhāna*). Rising out of the third meditative absorption He passed into the fourth (*catutthajjhāna*) from which He entered into the state of mind in which the infinity of space alone is present (*ākasañāñcāyatana*) and then proceeded to the state of mind in which the infinity of thought alone is present (*viññānañcāyatana*), then to the state of mind where nothing at all is present (*ākiñcaññāyatana*) and then to the state between consciousness and unconsciousness (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*) and then lastly to the state of consciousness where both sensations and ideas have completely passed away.” Then the Buddha regressively descended to the first stage of meditative absorption and entered the fourth meditative absorption respectively, then on passing out of it, immediately expired.⁶⁰

According to the description given above, the Buddha went through all the stages of *jhāna* belonging to both realms of forms (*rūpāvacara*) and formlessness (*arūpāvacara*) and then returning gradually to the first entered

59. Handa dāni bhikkhave amantayāmi vo vayadhammā saṃkhārā appamādena sampādetha D.ii, p. 156.

60. D. ii, p. 156.

back to the fourth, one after the other and departed from life. However, E. J. Thomas was not satisfied with the procedure stated in respect of the Buddha's passing away. Therefore he hypothesizes that the older tradition must have been different from what is found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. For he says: "The reason of this order of the stages is probably that the attaining of Nirvana from the fourth stage of trance was the original form of the legend and that when the other stages were added this circumstance of the fourth trance coming last was still preserved in the above way."⁶¹

Anagarika Govinda, discussing the point at length from a different perspective, remarks: "This confirms our assumption that the death consciousness coincides with the fifth *jhana* from where two ways are open to the meditator that of the remembrance of former lives or that which leads to the *arūpalokajhānas*" and further admits the possibility of entering into all the nine states before departing from life.⁶² Rhys Davids in his translation of the *Digha Nikaya* simply dismisses the list without any comment saying that the list of states is a technical, scholastic attempt to describe the series of ideas involved in what is considered the highest thought. He further observes: "No one of course, can have known what actually did occur

61. Thomas E. J. — The Life of the Buddha, p. 153.

According to T1 the Buddha ascended gradually up to *saññāvedayitanirodha* and then came back to the first *jhana* and breathed His last.
— Sino-Indian Studies Vol. II, Part I, April 1946.

62. Govinda Anagarika — The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy, p. 96.

and the highest boundary lines between the nine stages are purely conjectural.”⁶³

The passing away of the Buddha took place, according to the discourse, in the third watch of the night that is between 2 o'clock and 6 o'clock in the morning. Thera Anuruddha and Thera Ananda spent the rest of the night in religious conversation and in the morning, Ananda, on the request of Anuruddha, conveyed the message of the Buddha's passing away at Upavattana Sala Grove to the Mallas.⁶⁴ What is problematic to the student of history is the date of this significant event of the Teacher's demise. Had it taken place on the full moon day of Vesak (April–May)?

Many scholars have attempted to arrive at a conclusion with the aid of internal as well as external data, but unfortunately their conclusions differ considerably. The facts and figures found in the *Sutta* in this regard, would undoubtedly enable us to look into the structure of the *Sutta* from a historical perspective.

The *Sutta* does not specifically mention that it had happened on the full moon day of Vesak (Pali, *Vesākha*). According to the discourse it is to be concluded that the Buddha relinquished His span of life at the beginning of the rains retreat.⁶⁵ Therefore it could not be taken to mean the full moon of Vesak in the following year, as the Buddha had specifically stated that He would pass away

63. Rhys Davids —SBB Vol. III, Part II, p. 174, footnote.

64. D. ii, p. 158.

65. D. ii, p. 106.

in three months time. The retreat begins from the full moon of June–July (*Āsālha*). Are we to conclude that the discrepancy is due to a missing link, as it were, of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*? However it is advisable to analyse the data found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* in this connection in order to understand the sequence of events.

Thomas was precarious about the traditionally ascribed day of the Buddha's passing away. He preferred to identify a date somewhere in December as the date of the Buddha's demise. Analysing the data found in the *Sutta* he says: "These data imply that it took place at the end of December and this agrees with the statement that the *sala* trees were in flower out of season. Later tradition however places the day on the full moon day of *Vesakha* (April–May) which was also the day of His birth and Enlightenment."⁶⁶ Obviously, he has counted three months onwards from the conclusion of rains retreat.⁶⁷ If it happened in April–May he contended that the statement as to the *sala* trees being in bloom out of season held no water, for *sala* trees usually begin to bloom by the beginning of March.⁶⁸

Although the Buddha observed the rains retreat in the village called Beluva, no *Pavarana* at the end of the third month is mentioned nor any reference to the Buddha's continuous staying at the place.

66. Dulva does not mention this event. See Rockhill, p. 135.

67. Thomas E. J. — The History of Buddhist Thought, p. 145.

68. Brandis D. Indian Trees, p. 69. Quoted by E. J. Thomas in his Life of Buddha.

Buddhaghosa indeed seems to have noticed the contradiction found between the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* in regard to the date of the Buddha's demise as accepted by Theravada Buddhists all over the world by the 5th century A.D. and the date that could be deduced from the narrative of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. Hence in his commentaries on the *Vinaya* and the *Digha Nikaya* he tried to solve the contradiction by saying that the Buddha having subdued his physical pain entered into a stage of meditative absorption so that the pain may not arise for the forthcoming ten months. Thereby of course, Buddhaghosa could have prolonged the date of the passing away until April-May of the following year.⁶⁹ The *Sutta* however does not state how long the Buddha had to bear up under the physical suffering caused by dysentery worsened by Chunda's food.

It is clear that Buddhaghosa's attempt was to justify the tradition which was in vogue during his time by extending the event up to the full moon day of *Vesakha* of the following year.

The commentator seems to have fallen into difficulty by his attempt to extend the period. Because, in order to avoid the discrepancy between the text and the tradition which had been firmly fixed by the time, Buddhaghosa came out with a different discussion deviating from the text, portraying a picture of the Buddha's wanderings of these last days of the His life. By him, Mara is brought

69. ...mahāvipassanāya vedanaṃ vikkhambhetvā dasamāse mā
 uppajjathā'ti samāpattiṃ sampajji. — DA. Vol. I, p. 379.

before the Buddha when He was proceeding from Beluva to Savatthi and then to Rajagaha and again to Vesali.⁷⁰ But according to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* the Buddha having set out from Nalanda proceeded towards Kusinara across Pataligama, Vesali, Pava and other cities without turning North-West for Savatthi which was some two hundred miles away from the route.⁷¹ When the Buddha was in Vesali, Mara, the Evil One, is said to have come to the Buddha saying: “Pass away now Lord, Let the Exalted One now die. Now is the time for the Exalted One to pass away.”⁷² Undoubtedly this request of Mara also could be easily set aside as legendary. It is to be noted that it has not been stated in the Tibetan version of the text.⁷³

Yuang Chwang recorded that according to the Sarvastivadins the Buddha’s passing away had taken place on the eighth day of the second half of the month of *Kartika* i.e. October–November.⁷⁴ In spite of the fact that it is contrary to the traditional view of Theravada it seems that it is somewhat closer to the sequence of events found in the *Sutta*. Fleet, on the other hand, arguing on data available to him conclusively asserted that the Buddha expired on the thirteenth October 483 B.C. According to him the

70. DA. Vol, I, 380 ff.

71. D. Vol. ii, pp. 105–137.

72. Parinibbātu idāni bhante bhagavā, parinibbātu sugato;
parinibbānakālo idāni bhante bhagavato D. Vol. ii, p. 105.

73. Rockhill W. W. — The Life of the Buddha, p. 132.

74. Beal S. — A Buddhist Record of the Western World, p. 33.

passing away of the Buddha had taken place some sixty-one years after the year generally accepted, i.e. 544 B.C.⁷⁵ Wickramasinghe⁷⁶ as well as Geiger⁷⁷ after him accepted 483 B.C. as the year of this event. Geiger discussing the point in detail says: “Nevertheless it does seem that on the much disputed question of the year of the Buddha’s death, there is a tendency towards unison. Marked differences in views are disappearing. The accepted dates are far less removed one from another.”⁷⁸ Scholars are much more concerned about the year but not the date of the demise of the Buddha. Most of them relied upon the year of consecration of Asoka found in the Sri Lankan chronicle *Mahavansa*.

As found in the *Mahavansa* the Buddha passed away in 544 B.C. but 483 B.C. was found in a Cantonese tradition of 489 A.D. Therefore Majumdar and others discussing the issue concluded that the true year of the Buddha’s demise is 490 B.C.⁷⁹ According to Chandra Vidyabhusan, too, the approximate date of the Buddha’s demise is 490 B.C.⁸⁰

75. JRAS — 1909.

76. Wickramasinghe M. — *Epigraphia Zeylancia* Vol. I, p. 142.

77. Geiger W. — Introduction; *The Mahavansa* p. xxv.

78. Geiger W. — Introduction; *The Mahavansa* p. xxii.

79. Majumdar R.C. — *An Advance History of India*. p. 59.

80. We shall not be far wrong if we place Buddha’s birth in 570 B.C. There is a positive statement in the chapter V of the *Mahavansa*, that Asoka was installed on the throne of Magadha 218 years after the Nirvana of the Buddha. As Asoka’s installation took place about 272 B.C. the date of Buddha’s Nirvana could approximately be placed in 490 B.C.

“— Vidyabhusana S.C. — *History of Indian Logic*, footnote p. 224.

Hajime Nakamura opines that the date of the Buddha's demise has to be calculated with reference to the date found in the Chinese version of the *Samyabhedoparacana-cakra* of Vasumitra according to which the number of years that passed between the date of the Buddha and the appearance of Asoka was 116 years. This places the passing away in 383 B.C.⁸¹ This opinion does not tally with many of the accepted views.

Oldenberg was somewhat hesitant to give a specific date of the Buddha's demise, but said: "The year of his death is one of the most firmly fixed dates in ancient Indian history, calculation by which some possible error is confined within tolerably narrow limits, gives as a result that he died not long before or not long after 480 B.C."⁸²

As revealed by our discussion there is no evidence to show that the decease of the Buddha took place on the date generally ascribed to it. Although incomplete, because of the realistic nature of this particular narrative found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* it could be recognized as one of the oldest strata of the *Sutta*. According to all the available sources the Buddha attained Enlightenment at the age of thirty-five and lived up to the ripe age of eighty serving the world for forty-five years. The fact that the Birth, the Enlightenment and the Decease of the Buddha have taken place on the full moon days of Vesak is a long established tradition among Theravadins.

81. Nakamura Hajime — The Date of the Mayuryan Dynasty pp. 1–16.

82. Oldenberg H. — Buddha p. 196.

Chapter 5:

The Mahaparinibbana Sutta & the First Council

The connection between the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* and the first council has been discussed by many a scholar and different views have been put forward by them in regard to the authenticity of the council on the basis of the evidence found in the *Sutta* and in the *Cullavaggapali* of the Pali canon. According to the *Cullavagga* the irresponsible utterance said to have been uttered by Subhadda who had entered the order in his old age, is the cause that led to the convening of the first council.⁸³

Two concluding chapters i.e. chapters XI and XII of the *Cullavagga* deal with the first two councils held within a hundred years after the demise of the Buddha. The text dealing with the first council at length, has recorded the utterance of Subhadda in Maha Kassapa's words whereas in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* Subhadda himself is represented as saying that they are freed from the great ascetic and now they can do or not do what they like.⁸⁴

Therefore as the fundamental reason that is said to have led to the council is found in the body of the *Sutta*, an examination of the connection between the *Sutta* and the council would necessarily become an integral part of the study of the *Sutta*.

With the demise of the Buddha the conservation of

83. Cullavagga ch. II.

84. D. ii, p. 162.

the doctrine and the rules of the order became the duty of the leading disciples, for the doctrine and the rules of the order had come to occupy the place of the Teacher in His absence. In fact, the Buddha Himself in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* addressing Ananda had said: “It may be, Ananda, that in some of you the thought may arise that the word of the Master is ended, we have a Teacher no more; but it is not thus, Ananda, that you should regard it. The doctrine and the rules of the order which I have set forth and laid down for you all, let them after I am gone be the Teacher to you.”⁸⁵

Undoubtedly, Mahakassapa must have played a leading role in initiating the council in order to take steps to safeguard the doctrine and the rules of the order. Nevertheless, analysing the evidence found in the different sources, scholarship is divided as to its historicity. As stated by N. Dutt, the opinions expressed with regard to the historicity of the first council cannot be underestimated.⁸⁶

A vast number of both eastern and western Orientalists, such as Thomas, Majumdar, Law, Oldenberg, Poussin, Prasilaski etc., have expressed their views either to prove or to disprove its historicity, with the aid of Pali, Buddhist Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan sources.⁸⁷

85. Siyā kho pana, āṇanda, tumhākaṃ evamassa, atītasatthukaṃ natthi no satthāti. Na kho pana etaṃ āṇanda daṭṭhabbaṃ. Yo kho āṇanda mayā dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto, so vo mamaccayena satthā'ti. — D. ii, p. 154.

86. Dutt N. — Early Monastic Buddhism, p. 324.

87. I. Thomas E. J. — History of Buddhist Thought, pp. 27–9 II. Law B. C. Buddhistic Studies, Chapter I.

The opinions expressed by these scholars with regard to the council and causes that led to the convening of the council could be revalued and verified not only in the light of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* but on other canonical evidence as well.

The record of the first council as found in the *Cullavagga* of the Pali canon is regarded as the earliest of the different traditions preserved by many Buddhist sects. The *Cullavagga* emphatically states the conduct of Subhadda as the leading cause of summoning the council. Mahakassapa, proceeding towards Kusinara from Pava, came to know from a wandering ascetic that the Exalted One had passed away seven days before. Some of the monks who were in the company of Mahakassapa and were not free from passions ‘stretched out their arms and wept, and some fell headlong on the ground and some reeled to and fro in anguish at the thought, too soon has the Happy One passed away; too soon has the Light gone out in the world.’⁸⁸

Subhadda, who had entered the order in his old age is said to have consoled them, saying: “Enough sirs, weep not neither lament; we are well rid of the great *samana*, we used to be annoyed by being told ‘this beseems you, this beseems you not’, but now we shall be able to do whatever we like and what we do not like, that we shall not have to do.”⁸⁹

88. Tattha ye to bhikkhū avītarāgā appekacce bāhā paggayha kandanti. Chinnapapātamaṃ papatanti avatṭanti. Vivatṭanti atikhippaṃ bhagavā parinibbuto, atikhippaṃ sugato parinibbuto, atikhippaṃ cakkhumā loke antarahito’ti. D. ii, p. 162.

Though with slight variations, this incident is found in the Vinaya of the Dharmaguptas, Mahasanghikas and the Sarvastivadins. According to the *Asokavadana*, the Buddha before his passing away addressed Mahakassapa and asked him to collect the *Pitakas* and asked the gods to protect them. N. Dutt, however, states that the record found in *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* translated into Chinese somewhere between 290 A.D.–306 A.D. is more realistic and trustworthy than the rest of the Buddhist Sanskrit and Tibetan records.⁹⁰

Nevertheless Oldenberg referring to the tradition of the first council found in the *Cullavagga*, comes out with a different story. To him it was a mere fabrication invented during the second council which was authentic and historical. For he says, discussing the point in question: “What we have here before us is not history but mere invention of no very ancient date, apart from internal reasons that might be adduced to prove this, we are able to prove it by comparing another text which is older than this story and another of which cannot yet have known it.”⁹¹

Here he is pointing to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* where the Subhadda episode is recorded and attempts to reject the authenticity of the council on the ground that the council is not found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. There-

89. Alaṃ āvuso mā socittha, mā paridevittha. Sumuttā mayam tena mahā samaṇena. Upaddutā ca homa idaṃ vo kappati idaṃ vo na kappatīti. Idaṃ pana mayam yaṃ icchissāma, Taṃ karissāma. Yaṃ na icchissāma na taṃ karissāmāti. D. ii, p. 163.

90. Dutt N. Early Monastic Buddhism pp. 325 – 8.

91. Oldenberg H. Vinayapitakaṃ Vol. 1. pp. xxvi.

fore he further states: “This silence is as valuable as the most direct testimony. It shows that the author of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* did not know anything of the first council.”⁹²

Continuing his argument further he totally rejects the authentic settlement of the canon in the first council. “It can hardly seem strange that, in order to give this continuance the right legendary expression, an authentic settlement of the Doctrine by the Community was invented, and that, for the strict preservation of the chronological continuity, this settlement was supposed to have taken place directly after Buddha’s death. To finish the picture of these proceedings, the Council of Vesali furnished the necessary materials.”⁹³

We shall examine what internal and external evidence we can adduce against this argument put forward by Oldenberg. Was there actually a council held after the demise of the Buddha? If so, what were the historical and social factors that led to it? These questions are to be critically examined in this connection. How far is it reasonable to reject the entire tradition of the first council merely on the ground that it has not been recorded in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*? Very many scholars who have dived deep into the problem throw a flood of light on the question of the first council as well as the structure of the *Sutta*. We propose to subject all this to critical analysis. In this connection it is to be stated that the Mulasarvastivadians have preserved the record of the successive events

92. Oldenberg H. Vinayapitakam Vol. I. pp. xxix.

93. Oldenberg H. Vinayapitakam Vol. I. pp. xxix.

beginning from the Great Decease up to the first council as a continuous narrative. It was Finot who pointed out that the narrative from the *Parinirvana* up to the first council had been preserved as a complete whole even before the breaking away of Sarvastivadins from the original Sangha.

The Mulasarvastivada *Vinaya* work, *Samyukta Vastu*, gives the record of both events i.e. *Parinirvana* and the convening of the council as a continuous record, whereas the Theravadins included events pertaining to the Great Decease in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* while supplementing the *Cullavagga* with the record of the first council.

These two events cover a comparatively long period, for the council is recorded to have taken place three months after the demise of the Buddha. On the other hand the immediate reason that motivated Mahakassapa to summon the council is connected with discipline, because Subhadda attempted to persuade the monks to disregard the *Vinaya* rules set out by the Buddha. Therefore Finot contends that in that context, the *Vinayapitaka* could be regarded as the most appropriate place to have records of the procedure adopted at the council as well as the steps taken to safeguard the purity of the teaching.⁹⁴

Finot's contention has been proved by Obermiller too, with the aid of Tibetan sources. He has shown that a detailed description of the Great Decease and the council found in Buston's 'History of Buddhism in Tibet' is originally a part of the Tibetan *Kanjur* which is a Tibetan translation of the *Vinaya Khsudraka*.⁹⁵ He is of the opin-

94. Indian Historical Quarterly 1932 p. 242 ff.

ion that the chapters eleven and twelve have been added to the original *Cullavagga* of the Pali Canon at a much later date; but Dutt, taking the composition of both *Vinaya* and *Sutta Pitakas* into account, points out that it is plausible to think that as the eleventh and twelfth chapters of the *Cullavagga* are records of the two successive councils, the eleventh chapter must have been taken out from an original continuous narrative where the Great Decease and the proceedings of the first council had been narrated and later included in the *Cullavagga*. He further states that his argument is substantiated by the fact that the eleventh chapter of the *Cullavagga* begins with “*Atha kho bhagavā*” the recurring phrase in the *Sutta Pitaka* with which the *bhānavaras* begin in the *Sutta Pitaka* as against “*Tena kho pana samayena*” found in the *Vinaya Pitaka*.⁹⁶ Thus it is evident that Oldenberg’s opinion does not hold water and is totally disproved by the findings of Finot and Obermiller.

The first council is named *Vinayasangīti* in the *Cullavagga*, which too, has been adduced as a point for his argument by Oldenberg for he says: “The influence exercised by the tradition of the second council upon the first also explains why the first is called a *Vinayasangīti* in the *Cullavagga*, although, it was believed to have had to do first as well with the *Dhamma* as with the *Vinaya*. The Second Council confined itself wholly to the domain of the *Vinaya* and did not occupy itself with the *Dhamma* in

95. Indian Historical Quarterly 1932 p. 781 ff.

96. Dutt N. Early Monastic Buddhism pp. 325–8.

the strict sense of the word.”⁹⁷

Theravadins were necessarily *Vinayavadins*. Even the Buddha said that He was a *Vinayavadin*. Much canonical evidence could be cited to this effect. In the *Pasadika Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya*, the Buddha categorically says: “And so Chunda, concerning things past, future and present the Tathagata is a speaker of the hour, a speaker of fact, a speaker of good, a speaker of the norm, a speaker of the discipline, for this is He called Tathagata.”⁹⁸ Besides, *theras* such as Mahakassapa showed a particular inclination to the *Vinaya* or the discipline. It is because of the *Vinaya* that governs the behaviour of monks that they were distinguished from the different sects of *sramanas* that lived during the time of the Buddha. Therefore the consolidation as well as the conservation of the *Vinaya* was a fundamental duty of the *theras*, because it would help to preserve the pristine purity of the order, which would in turn ensure the longevity of the order itself. Subhadda, too, anticipated that they would be free to behave as they wished without any disciplinary obligation when the Buddha was no more. Hence, the necessity arose to preserve the originality of the *Vinaya* as expounded by the Buddha himself.

Even Buddhaghosa in his introduction to *Samanta-*

97. Oldenberg H. *Vinayapitakam* Vol I. pp. xxiv footnote.

Oldenberg's same introduction appears in the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. I Mahavagga P.T.S. Edition Oxford University Press 1929.

98. Iti kho cunda atitānāgatapaccuppannesu dhammesu “tathāgato kālavādi bhūtavādi atthavādi dhammavādi vinayavādi, tasmā tathāgatho'ti vuccati.” D. iii, p. 135.

pasadika has portrayed this selfsame partiality to the *Vinaya* shown by the *theras* of yore, very vividly.⁹⁹

However, our oldest chronicle, the *Dipavamsa*, in a number of instances refers to the first council very freely as ‘*dhamma sangaha*’, ‘*pathama sangaha*’, ‘*dhammavinaya-sangaha*’, ‘*saddhammasangaha*’ and ‘*sangaha*’. Which shows that chronicler was well aware of the events that took place at the council and that he had a traditional knowledge in regard to its proceedings.¹⁰⁰ The concluding stanza at the end of chapter eleven of the *Cullavagga*, too, mentions the council as an assembly for the recitation of both the doctrine and the discipline.¹⁰¹

Moreover, as revealed in the text itself, the council has been held as a formal act of the order (*Vinayakamma*).

99. Samantapāsādikā p. 3 ff.

100. I. Varam varam gahetvāna akāsi dhamma sangahaṃ	DV. VI 3
II. Sattamāsehi niṭṭhāsi paṭhamo Sangaho ayaṃ	DV. VI 5
III. Pañcasatehi therehi dhamma vinaya saṃgaho	DV. VI 10
IV. Akamsu dhamma saṃgahaṃ vinayaṃ capi bhikkhavo	DV. VI 12
V. Yāva tiṭṭhati saddhamma- saṃgahaṃ na vinassati	DV. VI 23
VI. Evaṃ sabbamga sampannaṃ dhamma vinaya saṃgahaṃ	DV. VI 27.

101. ekenuna pañca satam — āṇandampi ca uccini
dhammavinaya samgītiṃ — vasanto guhamuttamo
Uddānagāthā Cullavagga ch. II.

Mahakassapa, addressing the monks just after the cremation said: “let us, friend, rehearse the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*. In future what is contrary to the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* will prevail; the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* will be disregarded. Those who hold views contrary to the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* will become powerless.”¹⁰² Therefore, N. A. Jayawickrama rightly remarks: “though both *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* are said to have been rehearsed, here the council is called *Vinayasamgiti*.”¹⁰³

What was the actual reason for summoning the council? Could Subhadda’s utterance found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* be the immediate cause that tempted Mahakassapa to take steps to hold a council? Thomas, discussing the council, says: “It is true that we cannot say that the reason given for Mahakassapa summoning the council was the actual one.”¹⁰⁴ *Mahavastu* says that the argument as to what were the lesser and minor rules resulted in summoning the council.¹⁰⁵ Kern quoted even

102. Handa mayaṃ āvuso dhammaṃ ca vinayaṃ ca samgāyeyyāma. Pure adhammo dippati. Dhammo patibhāhīyati. Avinayo dippati. Vinayo patibhāhīyati. Pure adhammavādino balavanto honti. Dhammavādino dubbalā honti. —*Vinaya ii*, p. 284.

But Prof N. A. Jayawickrema takes ‘pure’ in the above passage in the sense of—in the past—and two verbs ‘dippati and patibhāhīyati’ as historic present. — Vide, *Inception of Discipline* p. 97.

Miss Horner however takes ‘pure’ to mean ‘before’ Vide, *The Book of the Discipline Vol. V. p. 339 SBB xx*.

103. Jayawickrema N. A. *Inception of Discipline*, p. 67.

104. Thomas E. J. *History of Buddhist Thought*, p. 29.

105. *Mahavāstu I*, p. 69.

by Thomas says that it is not incredible to think that the disciples after the death of the founder came together to come to an agreement concerning the principal points of the creed and the discipline.¹⁰⁶

In fact both Thomas and Kern lead us to think in any case there might have been a council following the decease of the Buddha.

The monks in general had already had an experience as to how the followers behave with the death of their founder, in the absence of preventive measures taken in the initiative of a leading personality. In this context, incidents following the death of Niganthanataputta could be quoted. When the Buddha was staying at Pava, Niganthanataputta passed away. The followers thereafter became quarrelsome and began to interpret the doctrine at will. The *Samgiti Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* gives in detail how they behaved. It reads thus: “After his death the Niganthas became divided, falling into opposite parties and into strife, disputes broke out and they went on wounding each other with wordy weapons:

‘You don’t understand this doctrine and discipline — I do!’

‘How could you understand this doctrine and discipline?’

‘You are wrong! I am right! I am speaking to the point!’

‘You say first what you should have said last!’

‘Your challenge is taken up!’

‘You are proved to be wrong!’

‘Be gone! Get rid of your opinion!’

You would have thought that the followers of Nigan-

106. Kern JHC. *Manual of Indian Buddhism*, p. 103.

thanataputta were bent on killing each other.”¹⁰⁷

As a result the lay followers boycotted the Jain order. “Even the lay followers of the white robe, who followed Nathaputta showed themselves shocked repelled and indignant.”¹⁰⁸ Now, Sariputta addressing the monks relates the situation of the Jain order after the death of Mahavira and continues: “But to us, friends, the Norm has been well set forth and imparted by the Exalted One. It is effectual for guidance conducive to self-mastery and is imparted by the One Perfectly Enlightened. Herein there should be a recital by all in concord, not a wrangling that thus this holy life may persist and be long maintained.”¹⁰⁹ The Buddha on this occasion had already entrusted Sariputta to admonish the monks saying: “Let a religious discourse occur to thee. My back is aching; I will stretch.”¹¹⁰

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107. Tassa kālakriyāya bhinnā nigaṇṭhā dvedhika jātā bhaṇḍana jātā kalahajātā vivādāpannā aññamaññaṃ mukhasattīhi vitudentā viharanti. Na tvaṃ imaṃ dhamma vinayaṃ ājānāsi, ahaṃ imaṃ dhamma vinayaṃ ājānāmi. Kiṃ tvaṃ imaṃ dhamma vinayaṃ ājānissasi? Micchā paṭipanno tvamasi, ahamasmi sammāpaṭipanno, sahitaṃ me. Asahitaṃ te, pure vacanīyaṃ pacchā avaca. Pacchā vacanīyaṃ pure avaca. Avaciṇṇaṃ te viparāvattaṃ. Āropito te vādo. Niggahīto tvamasi. Cara vadappamokkāya. Nibbeṭhehi sace pahosī’ti. Vadho yeva kho maññe nigaṇṭhesu nātaputti’anuvattati. D. iii, p. 210.
108. Yepi te nigaṇṭhāssa nātaputtassa sāvakāyesugihī odātavasanā tepi tesu nigaṇṭhesu nātaputtiyesu nibbinnarūpā paṭivānarūpā. D. iii, p. 210.
109. Ayaṃ kho pava āvuso amhākaṃ bhagavatā dhammo svākkhāto suppa-vedito, nīyāniko upasama samvattaniko Sammāsambuddhappavedito. Tattha sabbehi eva samgāyitabbaṃ, Na vivaditabbaṃ yathayidaṃ brahmacariyaṃ addhaniyaṃ assa ciraṭṭhitikaṃ. D. iii, p. 211.
110. Paṭibhātu taṃ sārīputta bhikkhūnaṃ dhammī kathā. Piṭṭhi me āgilāyati. Tamahaṃ āyamissāmi’ti. D. iii, p. 209.

Here Sariputta recites the teaching in numerical order as found in the *Anguttara Nikaya*, up to ten. At the end the Buddha praises Sariputta, saying: “Excellent, Sariputta, excellent! Excellent Sariputta, have you uttered the scheme of reciting together for the monks.”¹¹¹

Yet, in another *Sutta* in the *Digha Nikaya* the Buddha speaks Himself of the fate of the Jain monkhood just after the death of Mahavira and addresses Chunda thus: “Wherefore, Chunda, do you to whom I have made known the truths that I have perceived, come together in company and rehearse all of you together those doctrines and quarrel not over them, but compare meaning with meaning and phrase with phrase and in order that pure religion may last long and be perpetuated.”¹¹²

Here the Buddha has asked categorically for the recital of the teaching and to take steps to safeguard it for benefit of the posterity. As revealed in the above discussion, Sariputta, too, cherished the idea of holding a recital.¹¹³

The founder who directed the course of history on to a different path by creating a particular monastic institution, however, did not name a human successor to succeed

111. Sādhu sādhu sārīputta sādhu kho tvaṃ sārīputta bhikkhūnaṃ
saṃgītipariyāyaṃ abbhāsī’ti. D. iii, p. 271.

Rhys Davids puts the word “chanting together” for saṃgāyitabbam.

Dialogues of the Buddha Vol. IV, Part III p. 249.

112. Tasmātiha cunda ye vo mayā dhammaṃ abhiññā desitā yattha
sabbehi eva saṃgamma samāgemma atthena atthaṃ byañjana
byañjanaṃ saṃgāyitabbam. Na vivaditabbam yathayidaṃ
brahmacariyaṃ addhaniyaṃ assa ciraṭṭhitikaṃ. D. iii, p. 127.

113. In the Dasuttara Sutta also Sariputtta emphasises how the teaching
should be recited. D. ii, p. 272 ff.

Him. The *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* were there to take His place. When the question of leading the dispensation after the Buddha was raised by Ananda the Buddha said that the *Dhamma Vinaya* should be the teacher after Him.¹¹⁴

Therefore taking measures to preserve and to consolidate the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* was a duty as well as a responsibility of the *theras*. On the other hand it was a fulfillment of a sacred task hitherto neglected and could not be accomplished during the lifetime of the Buddha. Certainly it is a task permitted by the Buddha and the Thera, Sariputta, in connection with the different interpretations ascribed to the Jain Teaching after the death of Mahavira.

In the *Gopakamoggallana Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* the brahmin Vassakara asked Ananda as to whether there was any monk appointed by the Buddha to succeed Him, to which Ananda replied in the negative. Then he asked whether there was any monk or monks who had been appointed by the *Sangha* to lead them. Ananda's one and only reply was 'brahmin, we are not refugeless; we have the *Dhamma* as our refuge'.¹¹⁵

That unity prevailed among the *Sangha* was a matter of great concern to those who knew the situation of the Jain Order just after the death of Mahavira. On the contrary, even without the founder, the institution of the *Sangha* was forging ahead.

114. See above footnote 3.

115. Na kho mayam brāhmaṇa appaṭisaraṇā sappatisaraṇā mayam
brāhmaṇa dhamma paṭisaraṇā M. iii, p. 7.

The *Sutta* referred to earlier perhaps puts the situation in much clearer terms. When Ananda was asked by Gopakamoggallana whether there was anyone comparable to the Buddha, he emphatically said that the Buddha was unique in every respect and the monks were only followers.¹¹⁶

With this background it is evident that immediate steps had to be taken for the conservation and consolidation of the teaching.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that the eleventh chapter of the *Cullavagga* dealing with the proceedings of the council was included there just after the first council, although, when that chapter was written down the *Abhidhamma* had not yet been developed into a separate *pitaka*. It betrays the knowledge of the five *nikaya* works of the *Sutta Pitaka* and also the *Maha Vibhanga* and the *Bhikkhuni Vibhanga* connected with the *Patimokkha* precepts. Hence, the chapter in question should be at least a century later than the actual event recorded there. It can be surmised that the both chapters eleven and twelve must have been added to the text just after the second council to close the *Cullavagga*. It seems that there is a temporary slackening, as it were, of literary activity as soon as the memories of the ancient *theras* were committed to writing.

On the strength of the above evidence it could be said that the utterance of Subhadda was a historical truth

116. Natthi kho brāhmaṇa ekabhikkhupi tehi dhammehi sabbena sabbam samannāgato yehi....” M. iii, p. 7.

and that it had become the immediate cause that prompted the *theras* to summon a council.¹¹⁷

The first council however cannot be compared to any other religious council held elsewhere. Both the first and the second councils had been held before the dawn of the Christian era. According to the earliest available record in the *Cullavagga* the first council was convened by the *Sangha* themselves. The disciples who were competent and named as pre-eminent in respective disciplines took the responsibility of the business. The event by no means can be compared with the first ecumenical council of the Christian Church which probably Oldenberg had in mind when he wrote the introduction to the *Vinaya-pitakam Vol 1*.¹¹⁸



117. In regard to the venue of the council different views have been put forward by many a school. See 2,500 years of Buddhism p. 36.

118. The council was held at Nicaea (now Izuik, Turkey) in 325 A.D. It was summoned by the Byzantine emperor, Constantine, to select the authoritative word of God and suppress arianism from about fifty versions of the Gospel. Initially, although 2,048 bishops assembled, Constantine stepped in as the arbiter and disqualified 1,730 bishops who were said to be 'illiterate simple folk.' The remaining 318 were said to have expressed their agreement with the pre-conceived views of Constantine.

Chapter 6:

The Earliest Record of a Cremation Ceremony

In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* there is an account pertaining to the cremation ceremony of the remains of the Buddha, performed with due respect and veneration by the Mallas in Kusinara, which throws light on funeral rites and rituals prevalent in the 6th century B.C. in India.

When the Buddha was still living, according to the *Sutta*, Ananda asked the Buddha as to how they should behave in respect of the Buddha's remains. Thereupon the Buddha is said to have replied that His remains should be cremated as that of a *Cakravartin*. The Buddha is said to have explained how the remains of a *Cakravartin* were to be cremated: "They wrap the body of a king of kings (i.e. Cakravartin), Ananda, in a new cloth till they have wrapped the body in five hundred successive layers of both kinds. Then they place the body in an oil vessel of iron. They then build a funeral pyre of all kinds of perfumes and burn the body of the king of kings. And then at the four crossroads they erect a cairn to the king of kings. This, Ananda, is the way in which they treat the remains of a king of kings."¹¹⁹

When the Buddha passed away between the twin *sala* trees at the *sala* Grove, the Mallas in Kusinara having collected various kinds of flowers and perfumes, as much as possible, along with five hundred sets of clothes and musical instruments approached the *sala* grove and venerated the remains of the Buddha for a week.

119. D. ii, p. 143.

SBB. Vol, III, Part II, p. 157.

It is interesting to note that the building up of memorials is not found in IP. 11B and 111 N. See Sino-Indian Studies Vol. ii, Parti, April 1945.

When the cremation was to take place, apparently there had been divergent opinions between some of the Mallas and the *theras* in regard to the venue of the ceremonial cremation. The Mallas wanted to carry the coffin in procession towards the southern direction and cremate the remains somewhere outside the southern part of the city. When eight Mallas tried to lift up the coffin with this intention it is said that it could not be moved; because the intention of the gods was to carry the coffin in procession towards the northern direction and enter the city through the northern gate and hold the cremation ceremony on the eastern side, outside the city. However it has been stated that the gods' wish had been fulfilled. The site chosen for the cremation was Makutabandhana Cetiya of the Mallas.¹²⁰

It is plausible to think that there were divergent opinions in regard to the route of the funeral procession. Buddhaghosa also says that the Mallas wanted to hold the cremation ceremony in a place outside the city. He further states that the remains of the Buddha were being kept for veneration in a place similar to the southern gate of Anuradhapura and they wanted to have the cremation in a place similar to Jetavana in Anuradhapura.¹²¹ But

120. D. ii, pp. 157–160.

121. Dakkhinato nagarassā'ti anurādhapurassa dakkhinadvārasadise
 ṭhapetvā sakkāra sammānaṃ katvā Jetavanasadise ṭhane,
 ṭhapessāmā'ti attho DAcom. p. 418.
 But Digha Nikaya Tika commenting on 'jetavana sadise ṭhāne' takes
 it to mean Jetavana in Savatthi: 'Sāvattiyā jetavana sadise ṭhāne'
DAT. p. 402.

When the remains were being led in this way it is said Bandula Mallika offered the remains with Mahālatāpasādana, her ornamental wearing.

the *theras* intention, which was the gods' intention too, was to lead the funeral procession through the northern gate and go through the centre of the city holding the cremation ceremony outside the eastern gate. Ultimately, however, the funeral procession went along the route proposed by the *theras*. Evidently, this gave the opportunity for a multitude of people to witness the funeral procession. On the contrary, there is no evidence to show that a particular Buddhist tradition has been followed in leading the procession through the northern gate.

As found in the *Jataka Nidana* the prince Siddattha, as soon as he was born in a *sala* grove in Lumbini, having pondered over the four directions, proceeded towards the northern direction¹²² in seven strides, but at the Enlightenment He is said to have sat under the Bodhi tree facing the eastern direction.¹²³ We have also noticed that the Buddha asked Ananda to prepare the couch with the head facing the north where He eventually passed away.

It is recorded that the remains of the Buddha were kept in an oil vessel of iron as that of a *Cakravartin*. The text is “*āyasa tela doniya*”, where Buddhaghosa has taken it to mean “an oil vessel of gold.” The word ‘ayasa’ has been used in Sanskrit to mean gold, but in many a usage of the word this is the only context in Pali it has ever been

122. Evaṃ catasso dīsā catasso anudisā ca heṭṭhā uparī’ti dasapi disā
 anuviloketvā attano sadisaṃ adisvā ayam uttaradisā’ti
 sattapadavītihārena agamāsi Nidāna Kathā, JA. p. 51.

123. Bodhisatto bodhikkhandhaṃ piṭṭhito katvā puratthābhimukho
 daḷhamānaso hutvā Nidāna Kathā, JA. p. 69.

used to denote gold.¹²⁴ Rhys Davids prefers to render ‘*ayasa*’ as ‘of iron’. However the Chinese versions give different details in regard to the cremation ceremony. The 1P altogether ignores the story of the oil vessel and puts the body in an artificial vessel. But according to 111N they put the remains in a gold coffin first and then in silver, brass and iron coffins respectively. Further it elaborates on the funeral proceedings. Descriptions of the cremation ground and chariot are given in detail. 11B also provides us with a slightly different version in this regard, according to which the body was first wrapped with a thousand pieces of cotton cloth and then kept in an oiled coffin and then in an iron coffin and again in a sandal wood coffin.¹²⁵ It is clear that these are later elaborations.

Another interesting point which gave rise to a particular tradition with the lapse of time is the way how the Buddha lay down for the Great Decease between the twin *sala* trees. The Buddha, according to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, tells Ananda: “Spread over for me, I pray you Ananda, the couch with its head to the north, between the twin *sala* trees. I am weary Ananda, and would lie down.”¹²⁶ At a later stage the statement was understood to mean that the Buddha wanted to lie down for His Decease with His head towards the northern direction. The text

124. Vide: Sanskrit — English Dictionary by Monier Williams.

Sinhala Texts reads ‘*ayasāya teladoniya*’. However both forms are derived from Sanskrit ‘*ayas*’ (iron).

125. Sino-Indian Studies Vol., II, Part I, April 1945.

126. *Imgha me tvam ānanda antarena yamakasālānaṃ uttarasīsakaṃ mañcakaṃ paññāpehi, kilanto’ smi ānanda nipajjissāmī’ti* D. ii, p. 137.

however is: “*uttarasāsakaṃ mañcakaṃ paññāpehi*” which refers to the couch having its head towards the north and not a purposive request to prepare a couch to lie down with the head turned northwards. In fact Buddhaghosa, too, takes the text in this sense. For he says: “*Tasmiṃ kira uyyāne rājakulassa sayana mañco atthi. Taṃ sandhaya paññāpehī’ti aha. Thero’pi taṃ eva paññā’petvā adāsi.*” Here he has clearly shown that the Buddha had no particular intention of lying down with His head towards the north.¹²⁷

Dhammapala, the sub-commentator, too, takes this in this sense.¹²⁸ When the couch was prepared, the Buddha laid Himself down on His right side with one leg resting on the other. Rhys Davids also does not attach any special significance to the phrase. He says: “There is no further explanation of the term ‘*uttara-sāsakaṃ*’ which may have been the name for a slab of wood or stone reserved for the use of the leaders of the neighboring republic, but available at other times for passers-by.”¹²⁹ Besides, Dhammapala totally rejects the view of some others that the Buddha wanted to lie down facing north with His head towards the east.¹³⁰ Therefore it is clear even in the seventh century A.D. when The *Digha Nikaya Tika* was written

127. DAc., p. 399.

128. Yaṃ pana pāliyaṃ uttarasāsakaṃ mañcakaṃ paññāpehī’ti vuttaṃ taṃ pacchimadassanāya daṭṭhūṃ yogyatāvasena vuttaṃ DAT., p. 411.

129. SBB Vol. III, Part II, p. 149 (footnote).

130. Keci pana uttaradisā vilokanamukhaṃ pubbadisā sāsakaṃ katvā mañcakaṃ paññāpehī’ti attho’ti vadanti. Taṃ tesam matimattaṃ DAT., p. 411.

that Buddhists did not attach special significance to either the north or east in respect of the demise of the Exalted One.

There is no doubt that the remains of the Buddha were carried in a grand procession to the cremation ground. The Mallas showed utmost attention in paying respect and honour to the Sakyan sage who passed away in their small kingdom. Therefore everywhere in Kusinara is said to have been spread knee-deep with *mandarava* flowers. Rites and rituals accorded to a *Cakravartin* were followed in cremating the remains. The paragraph attributed to the Buddha in the *Sutta*, which speaks of the ceremonial cremation of the Buddha undoubtedly was not spoken by the Buddha. It is very difficult to believe that the Buddha had spoken of His own ceremonial cremation.

When compared with the life and career marked with simplicity the Buddha would never have insisted on such pomp and ceremony after His demise, and hence these paragraphs put into the mouth of the Buddha could be considered to be of later origin. Probably they were interpolated within the first century after the Buddha when legends were being concocted in order to reveal that the Mallas have paid the greatest homage to the remains of the Sakyan Sage who happened to pass through their own territory. The four Mallas who had washed their heads and wore new garments, came forward to set fire to the funeral pyre; but the pyre refused to catch fire till Mahakassapa arrived there with five hundred monks. Having arrived; 'he arranged his robe on one shoulder and after bowing down with clasped hands he

then walked respectfully around the pyre and then uncovering the feet he bowed down with reverence at the feet of the Exalted One.' Those five hundred monks too bowed to the remains with clasped hands and thrice walked reverentially around the pyre. Then the pyre caught fire by itself.¹³¹

Referring to Mahakassapa's bowing down at the feet of the Master, Rhys Davids quotes Spence Hardy who compared this with a custom among the Jews; where just before the Jew is carried out to be buried the relatives and associates stand around the coffin, beg pardon for any offence committed against him and request a favorable mention of them in the next world.¹³²

When the cremation was concluded it is stated that out of five hundred pieces of raiments only the very innermost and the uppermost were consumed by fire and there burst forth streams of water from the store-house of the water (beneath the earth) and extinguished the funeral pyre.¹³³ The Mallas also brought water scented with all kinds of perfumes in order to extinguish the funeral pyre of the Exalted One. Thereafter the Mallas kept the bone-

131. SBB Vol. III, Part II, p. 185.

According to Dulva, Mahakassapa removed all cloths and wrapped the body with his own cloths LB., p. 149.

132. SBB Vol. III, Part II, p. 186 (footnote).

Also Spence Hardy — Manual of Buddhism p. 348.

133. According to Dhammapala the funeral pyre is three thousand feet in height and it is because of the height they needed so much water.

Dulva records that the Mallas extinguished the pyre with milk LB., p. 150.

remains in their council hall surrounded with a lattice work of spears and a rampart of bows and paid respect with dance, song, music, perfumes and garlands.¹³⁴

When we do away with the exaggerations and allegorical elements it is reasonable to presume that the funeral ceremony of the Buddha had been performed by the Mallas as best as they could adhering to traditional rites and rituals prevailing in royal circles. The tradition as recorded in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* pertaining to the remains of the Exalted One is undoubtedly very old; but the passages put into the mouth of the Buddha to reveal that the remains should be cremated in accordance with the pomp and ceremony accorded to a *Cakravartin* is indicative of the later redaction of the text.

In different traditions the cremation as well as the rites that accompanied the cremation have been elaborated on independently. Among them the Pali tradition is the oldest from a historical point of view.



134. D. ii, p. 165.

Chapter 7:

The Dispensation & the Position of Women

In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* there is a very brief conversation between the Buddha and Ananda expressing the attitude to be cultivated by monks towards womenfolk. It appears suddenly without any connection to the narrative that preceded or succeeded it, placed after the list of four sacred places which should be visited by believing clansmen.

Ananda asks advice from the Buddha:

“How are we to conduct ourselves, Lord, with regard to womenkind?”

“As not seeing them, Ananda.”

“But if we should see them, what are we to do?”

“No talking, Ananda.”

“But if they should speak to us, Lord, what are we to do?”

“Keep wide awake, Ananda.”¹³⁵

When we look at the first and the second replies given by the Buddha the impression we get is that the Buddha wanted the monks to avoid any kind of communication with womenfolk by not seeing them. The third reply given to Ananda’s inquiry, however, reminds the monks to be mindful when communicating with them. The first and second replies have been worded in such a way as to make us understand that the Buddha’s intention was to avoid any kind of communication whatsoever with

135. D. ii, 141.

women. Yet the third reply tells the monks only to be mindful when communicating with them.

It is worthwhile to find out the attitude of the Buddha towards women in general as revealed by the scriptures, and to analyse the above conversation ascribed to the Buddha and Ananda on this evidence.

The attitude to be cultivated in perceiving visual and auditory objects is set out in the *Indriyabhavana Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya*. Herein the Buddha asks Uttara, the brahmin youth, as to how his teacher, Parasariya, trains his disciples in respect of the development of sense faculties. Replying to the Buddha he says that Parasariya instructs the disciples to develop their sense faculties by not seeing material shapes with the eye and by not listening to sounds with the ear. Then the Buddha says: “If this is so, according to Parasariya, on account of not seeing and not hearing, the deaf and blind must have their sense faculties developed!” The Buddha, then explaining the Buddhist method of training pertaining to sense faculties, says that critical evaluation of sense objects and the maintenance of equanimity are the methods by which incomparable development of the sense faculties can be achieved.¹³⁶

In the *Samannaphala Sutta* too, the Buddha addressing the king, Ajatasattu, clarifies the attitude of a monk towards visual objects thus: “When, O King, he sees an object with his eye he is not entranced by the general that which might give occasion for evil states, covetousness and dejection to flow in over him, if he were to dwell unrestrained as to his sense of sight. He keeps watch over his

136. M. iii, 298 ff.

faculty of sight and he thereby attains mastery over it.”¹³⁷

The attitude to be cultivated by the discerning disciple towards the phenomenal world is summarised nicely in the *Samyutta Nikaya*: “Thoughts of lust in man itself is desire, not the beautiful things found in the external world. Let the beautiful things be as they are. The wise discipline their craving with regard to them.”¹³⁸

In another lively dialogue between the Buddha and Chitta, the householder, Chitta explains how he understood fetters (*samyojana*) and the things that tend to fetter, saying: “Suppose, my lord, a black steer and a white steer are yoked together by one rope or one yoke. Now he who should say that the black steer is a fetter to the white one, or the white one to the black one, would he in so saying be saying rightly?”

The Buddha replies: “Not so housefather. The black steer is not a fetter to the white one, nor is the white one a fetter to the black one. The fact of their being yoked by one rope or yoke, that is the fetter (*samyojana*).”

Then Chitta develops his thesis: “Well my lord, just as the eye is not a fetter to objects, nor objects a fetter to the eye. But the desire and lust that arise owing to the pair of them, that is the fetter. The ear is not a fetter to sounds... the nose is not a fetter to smell..., nor the tongue to taste, nor taste to the tongue, but the desire and lust that arise owing to the pair of them, that is the fetter.

137. D. I, 70 and also D. iii, 225, S. iv, 104, A. I, 113.

138. Na te kāmā yāni citrāni loke — saṃkapparāgo purisassa kāmo
tiṭṭhanti citrāni tathe’va loke — athe’ttha dhīrā vinayanti chandaṃ

Likewise the mind is not a fetter to mental states, nor mental states to the mind, but the desire and lust that arise owing to the pair of them, that is the fetter.”

The Buddha then praises Chitta for his discriminate understanding: “Good, housefather. Well gotten by you, housefather, that in you the eye of wisdom matches the profound teaching of the Enlightened One.”¹³⁹

The selfsame train of thought is perhaps more explicit in the Buddha’s address to Bahiya: “Then Bahiya, thus must you train yourself; in the seen there will be just the seen, in the heard just the heard, in the imagined just the imagined, in the cognised just the cognised. Thus you will have no ‘thereby’. That is how you must train yourself. Now, Bahiya, when in the seen there will be to you just the seen, in the heard just the heard, in the imagined just the imagined, in the cognised just the cognised, then Bahiya, as you will have no ‘thereby’ you will have no ‘therein’. As you Bahiya, will have no ‘therein’, it follows that you will have no ‘here’ or ‘beyond’ or ‘midway between’. Just that is the end of unsatisfactoriness.”¹⁴⁰

On the strength of the scriptural evidence quoted above, presumably the first two replies said to have been given by the Buddha to Ananda’s query are hyperbolic exaggerations of the issue. But as the Buddha maintained everywhere, one should be mindful in perception and should not be entranced by the general appearance and

139. Na kho cakkhu rupānaṃ samyojanaṃ, na rūpā cakkhu tassa...
yaṃ ca tassa tadubhayaṃ paṭicca uppajjati chandarāgo taṃ tattha
saṃyojanaṃ — S. iv, p. 163.

140. Udāna Pāli, 8.

details of the object. However, the Buddhist stance as depicted in the third reply is supposed to have been given by the Buddha. The first two questions said to have been asked by Ananda and the replies said to have been given by the Buddha take us back to the succeeding three centuries after the Buddha's demise. The examination of the legendary material concerned with the inauguration of the order of nuns may be worthwhile in this connection.

What was the Buddha's attitude to womenfolk? Was it the same as the attitude of contemporary brahmanic society? Or was it different from it? As we know there are numerous references to women in the canon expressing sentiments deviating from the contemporary social position of women. As recorded in the *Cullavagga Pali* the Buddha set up the order of nuns on the request of Ananda who represented Mahapajapati Gotami. Had the Buddha been hesitant and reluctant as recorded there, laying the Eight Important Observances (*aṭṭhagaru dhammā*) to be adhered to by women who enter the order, perhaps the conversation referred to could have been accepted without questioning its authenticity. Prof. J. Dhirasekera has shown, although there had been different views about the establishment of the Bhikkhuni order, no sooner had it been set up than it became an integral part of the dispensation.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the monks and nuns, male and female lay devotees were considered as constituents that jointly illuminate the dispensation.¹⁴² Therefore when we analyse the record depicting the setting up of the nuns'

141. Dhirasekera J — Buddhist Monastic Discipline, 142 ff.

order, some discrepancies of that record come to light.

As given in the *Bhikkhuni Khandhaka* of the *Cullavagga Pali*, Mahapajapati Gotami approaches the Buddha at Nigrodharama in Kapilavatthu and begs ordination for women even for the third time. Afterwards, rejecting her plea, the Buddha proceeds to the Gabled Hall in Vesali. Gotami, having had her hair cut off, donned yellow robes and came to Vesali with several Sakyan women and stood at the porch of the gateway. Ananda, seeing Pajapati Gotami, 'her feet swollen, limbs covered with dust, with tearful face and crying, standing outside the porch of the gateway' inquired of her as to why she was there. When he was informed of her desire to enter the order, he approached the Buddha and begged ordination for her. There, the Buddha is said to have refused ordination for women even for the third time. Then Ananda puts the plea in another way by asking the Buddha, whether women having entered the order are capable of realising the fruit of a Stream Winner, Once Returner, Non-Returner and Arahantship. Then the Buddha says that the realisation of the stages of sanctification by women is a viability. The account in the *Cullavagga Pali* then proceeds to record the Eight Important Observances for women to be adhered to by those who are desirous of entering the order. These observances alone were sufficient for Mahapajapati Gotami to become the first higher ordained nun in the order.

142. Bhikkhu ca sīlasampanno-bhikkhunī ca upāsikā
upāsako ca yo saddho-yā ca saddhā upāsikā
ete saṃghaṃ sobhenti-ete hi saṃgha sobhanā

The Eight Important Observances (*Aṭṭhagarudhammā*) are:

1. A nun who has been ordained (even) for a century must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day.
2. A nun must not spend the rains (*vassa*) where there is no monk.
3. Every half a month a nun should request two things from the order of monks: the asking as to the date of the Observance (*uposatha*) day and the coming for the exhortation (*ovāda*).
4. After the rains, a nun must ‘invite’ before both orders in respect of three matters; what was seen, what was heard and what was suspected.
5. A nun offending against an important observance (*garu dhammā*) must undergo *mānatta* discipline for half a month before both orders.
6. When, as a probationer, she has trained in the six precepts for two years she should seek ordination from both orders.
7. A monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun.
8. From this day onwards, nuns should not admonish monks. Monks should admonish nuns. All these observances are to be honoured, respected, revered, venerated and never to be transgressed during the lifetime of the nun.¹⁴³

143. Vin. ii, 252 ff. same is found in the A.I.V. 272 ff.

On a later occasion Gotami seeks the permission of the Buddha through Ananda to institute paying respects and salutation between monks and nuns according to seniority, which the Buddha is said to have rejected outright by saying that followers of other sects were also not in the habit of honouring and saluting *women*. The most noteworthy thing is that the Buddha is said to have levied a precept of wrong doing prohibiting the monks to salute and honour *women*!

Now the most curious remark of this record is the Buddha's assertion that because of the opening up of the order to nuns, the lifespan of the *Saddhamma* has been subjected to a reduction by half. That is, the *Saddhamma* that would last normally for a thousand years would last only for five hundred years due to the admission of women to the order! Therein the Buddha is said to have revealed that even as those households which have many women and few men easily fall prey to robbers, even as a whole field of rice attacked by mildew does not last long, even as a whole field of sugar cane attacked by red rust does not last long, even so whatever doctrine and discipline where womenfolk are ordained will not last long. Even as a man looking forward may build a dyke for a great reservoir so that water may not overflow, even so the Eight Important Observances were laid down by Him for nuns, looking forward not to be transgressed during their lifetime.¹⁴⁴

Buddhaghosa, while commenting on the passage in

144. Vin. ii, 254 ff.

question, informs us that because of the laying down of the observances comparable to a dyke of a reservoir, the *Saddhamma* would last fully for five thousand years. During the first thousand years the world would be blessed with Arahants having the four analytical knowledges (*catupatisambhidā*). Then in the next four periods of a thousand years each, Arahants who have destroyed all cankers (*khīnāsava*), Non-returners (*anāgāmi*), Once-returners (*sakadāgāmi*) and Stream-winners (*sotāpannā*) will appear in the world. “In this way” he continues: “penetration of the doctrine (*paṭivedha sāsana*) together with learning the doctrine (*pari yatti sāsana*) would last for five thousand years. Recluseship would last for a long time even after the penetration of the doctrine.”¹⁴⁵

The historicity of the record concerning the inauguration of the nuns’ order and the laying down of the Eight Important Observances as recorded in the *Cullavagga* are questionable for several reasons.

Firstly, Buddhaghosa, being apologetic, says that the Buddha had refused six times the request of Gotami because women were thereby led naturally to be more careful as they had received ordination with difficulty by repeated request, so they would try to conduct themselves well.

How far is it reasonable to adopt such a negative attitude towards a step which was to be taken shortly?

Secondly, later in the narrative why has *dhamma-vinaya* (doctrine and discipline) been changed to *saddhamma* (good dhamma)?

145. “Bhikkhunī Khandhaka Vaṇṇana — Vin A.

Thirdly, has not the strength of the observances been nullified by stating that the dispensation would last only for five hundred years even though a precaution comparable to a dyke of a reservoir has been taken when levying those observances?

Fourthly, does not the statement found in the *Cullavagga* become meaningless when compared with Buddhaghosa's calculation of the lifespan of the dispensation as 5,000 years?

Fifthly, when Mahapajapati Gotami wanted to relax the observance of having to maintain honour and salutation according to seniority among the monks and nuns, why does the narrative *shift the accent from nuns to women* to say that other religionists also do not honour and salute women?

Sixthly, if the order of nuns was set up by laying down the Eight Important Observances as a precaution by the Buddha Himself, how far is it reasonable for the *theras* to persuade Ananda to confess an offence of wrong doing (*dukkata*) at the first council?

Seventhly, if the order of nuns was established solely on the persuasion of Ananda, should he not have been commended at the council for the initiative taken by him in paving the path of realisation for womenfolk of different social grades?

Eighthly, why does the *Cullavagga* account mention that Mahapajapati Gotami alone received Higher Ordination by accepting those observances?

According to the *Cullavagga* record, the rest of the Sakyan ladies were ordained by monks, not by the

Buddha; nor did they claim any allegiance to adhere to those observances.

Ninethly, as given in the sixth observance, a woman should seek ordination from both orders. Is it not an impossibility as the nuns' order had not been set up yet at the beginning?

According to the record referred to, there were three phases in the evolution of the institution of Higher Ordination for nuns. In the first phase it was the monks who ordained them. But in the second phase nuns were twice given Higher Ordination by both communities respectively: monks and nuns. In the third phase the nuns themselves, as a separate independent body, conferred Higher Ordination. This shows that the nuns' order was made an independent institution after the training they received under the supervision of the senior monastic institution.

Tenthly, what is the reason for re-wording some of these observances as rules of the *Patimokkha* to be adhered to by nuns while all the eight rules had been designated as observances not to be transgressed as long as life lasts?

The second observance speaks of the same transgression found in the sixth rule of the *Arama vagga* of the *Bhikkhuni Vibhanga*.¹⁴⁶ The third is worded in the ninth rule of the same *Vagga*.¹⁴⁷ The seventh and the eighth can

146. Yā pana bhikkhuṇi abhikkhuke āvase vassaṃ vaseyya pācittiyaṃ.

147. Anvaddhamāsaṃ bhikkhuṇiyā bhikkhusaṃghato dve dhammā paccāsiṃsitabbā: uposathapucchakaṃ ca ovādūpasamkamaṇaṃ ca, taṃ atikkāmentiyā pācittiyaṃ'.

be considered as an echo of the quarrels between two monastic groups and not laid down on imaginary grounds of transgression. Particularly the seventh is found as a rule in the *Arama Vagga*.¹⁴⁸

Eleventhly, why do these observances not mention the type of transgression involving them?

Twelfthly, what is the reason for imposing these observances on nuns upon purely imaginary grounds of transgression?

The disciplinary rules both in the *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha* and the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* have been laid down as a result of concrete cases of misbehaviour, but not on imaginary grounds.

Thirteenthly, there is an apparent contradiction in the record of the behaviour of Mahapajapati Gotami.

If she first willingly accepted those observances professing to protect them as long as life lasts, then why did she later ask for an alteration of the first observance?

Fourteenthly, how far is it historically correct to ask the nuns to inquire the date of observance (*uposatha*) from the monks as the rules of the *Bhikkhunī Patimokkha* had not been promulgated yet?

The code of the *Patimokkha* rules had to be recited at the fortnightly gathering for observance or confessional meetings. However, at the outset no rules as such had been promulgated by the Buddha for nuns. Therefore the question of *uposatha* sessions would not have arisen.

148. Yā pana bhikkhunī bhikkhum akkoseyya vā paribhāseyya vā pācittiyam’.

Fifteenthly, is not the conferment of Higher Ordination on the rest of the Sakyan women an infringement of the sixth observance as it has stated that it is only after two years training in six precepts that a nun could seek Higher Ordination?

Their ordination was performed by monks after Gotami's. The six precepts mentioned here are: abstention from killing, stealing, sexuality, lying, consuming liquor and eating at wrong times. Had they accepted the eight observances, that in itself could have been their Higher Ordination. Since they had not received Higher Ordination accordingly, they should have been ordained in conformity with the provision of the 6th observance.

If these eight observances are historical we will have to consider that the *Bhikkhunī Vinaya* is anterior to the *Bhikkhu Vinaya*, because the Buddha is supposed to have begun levying disciplinary rules for monks only after some twenty years of his career, whereas according to circumstantial evidence, the Bhikkhuni order was set up about five years after the Enlightenment. However words such as *upasampada*, *vassa*, *uposatha*, *pavāraṇa*, *garudhamma* and *mānatta* found in the observances clearly indicate a post-vinaya period of the order of nuns.

Prof. Dhammanada Kosambi rejects the Eight Important Observances and the prediction in the *Cullavagga* categorically and calls them inauthentic. "Even before any transgression", he says: "it is unprecedented to impose these observances on bhikkhunis." He maintains that this is a deviation from the normal method of levying *vinaya* rules. According to him, by the word *saddhamma*

in the account, Theravada is meant. The monks might have composed those observances somewhere in the 2nd or the 1st century B.C. when Mahayana was flourishing vigorously and might have been interpolated into the *Vinaya Pitaka* in order to sustain their prestige in the dispensation. The import of the prediction is that Mahayana was coming into prominence some five hundred years after the Buddha's demise. He further stresses the fact that had the first order of nuns been inaugurated by the Buddha, the record is worthy of our attention. But as revealed by Indian religious history there were many kinds of pre-Buddhistic nuns including the Jain nuns' order.

Presumably, the genuineness of the report of the setting up of the order of nuns is questionable in many respects. The anachronism of the record is more real than apparent.¹⁴⁹

After the demise of the Buddha, the *theras* had the responsibility of maintaining discipline in the order on the one hand, and strengthening and safeguarding the dispensation from different polemics on the other. Although there were eminent nuns well-versed in the Dhamma and Discipline, we have no record of their participation at the first council. Nor do we have any report of the steps they had taken after the council. Because of the close association between the members of the two orders many problems must have had arisen resulting in adverse reper-

149. Kosambi Dhammanada-Bhagavan Buddha 166–8 (Sinhala translation of the Hindi original).

cussions on the dispensation as a whole. It is stated that when monks visited the nuns' monasteries for *Patimokkha* recital which had been enjoined by the Buddha, people used to make sarcastic remarks at both parties to the effect that monks were paramours and nuns were their concubines.¹⁵⁰ These criticisms were not beneficial for the healthy growth of the two orders which depended wholly on the munificence of the laity. Besides there were many instances of unseemly behaviour between monks and nuns. The *Bhikkhuni Khandaka* provides us with many such instances.

Some of the *Patimokkha* rules also have been levied to arrest this situation. For example: the fourth and seventh forfeitures (*Nissaggiya*) have been enforced on account of obtaining the services of nuns by monks. Expiation (*Pācittiya*) no. 26 has been laid down because of serving women. Expiations 25, 29 and forfeiture 5 deal with the exchange of robes by monks and nuns. Expiation 29 and confessions (*Pāṭidesanīya*) 1 and 2 speak of the intimate communication of a nun's feelings to monks. Expiations 27, 28 and 30 have been levied to arrest unbecoming social relations with nuns. As lay devotees did not tolerate the transgressions of the standard of demeanour expected from recluses, they seem to have criticised them in strong terms.

In Jain monasticism nuns were considered subordinate to monks. Their freedom of movement was also

150. Jāyāyo imā imesaṃ, jāriyo imā imesaṃ, idāni ime imāhi saddhiṃ abhiraṃsanti — Vin. ii, 256.

more restricted than their male counterparts.¹⁵¹ This tendency is however a reflection of the age-old brahmanic attitude to women. Women had been deprived of ‘initiation’ (*upanayana*) by which brahmin law-givers degraded women to the position of Sudras. They were not allowed to perform sacrifices. There were no religious vows nor holy observances for them; obedience to husbands alone was sufficient for them to be born in heaven.¹⁵² In the *Bhagavadgita*, too, the selfsame train of thought has been mentioned in the words of Krishna who said that women as well as Vaisyas and Sudras were born of evil.¹⁵³ Manu went on to emphasise the duty of women towards their husbands to the effect that they should honour their husbands as gods even though they were immoral and devoid of commendable good qualities.¹⁵⁴

Brahmins who had been brought up in this cultural milieu must have had some strong feelings against women even though they had been ordained. So much so that the traditional Indian outlook on women inherited by Indian society must have had an impact on the *Sangha* in general. Therefore, instead of taking steps to ameliorate the tension between the two institutions, the *theras*

151. Deo SB — History of Jain Monachism, 52.

152. Nāsti strīnam prthg yajño-na vṛtam nāpyapoṣaṇam
patissusruyate yena-tena svarge mahīyate — Manusmṛti, V, 155.

153. Mām hi pārtha vyapāsritya ye’pi syuh pāpayonayah
striyo vaisyas tathā sūdras te’pi yānti param gatim — Bhagavadgita, x 32.

154. Visīlah kāmavṛtto vā-gunau vā parivarjitah
upacaryāh striyā sādhyā-satataṁ devavad patih — Manusmṛti, V, 154.

seemed to have developed a negative attitude towards the nuns' order. The Buddha wanted the nuns' order to be furthered under the guidance, supervision and protection of the monks' order, the senior monastic organisation. Once, the nuns inquired of the Buddha as to how they should behave with regard to the rules that have been already laid down for monks. The Buddha then asked them to hold them as common wherever applicable and continued to lay down new rules for the nuns' order in new situations involving particular nuns. As recorded in the *Bhikkhuni Khandhaka*, gradually the *bhikkhuni* order was made an independent unit by itself by making provisions for them to perform all ecclesiastical acts by themselves. With the lapse of time, objectionable behaviour between the members of the two orders may have complicated the relationship between the two organisations.

It is on considering this background that we have to understand the conversation attributed to the Buddha and Ananda in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. *Bhikkhunis* were after all women in the eyes of the *theras*. They seemed to have thought that under the prevailing conditions women were to be 'excommunicated' altogether. What seems to be the Buddha's original instruction is still preserved in the third reply given to Ananda but with all probability, the concocted conversation seems to have been incorporated into the text widening the gulf between men and women, which had been narrowed down by the Buddha by giving equality of status to women socially as well as religiously with the creation of the order of nuns.

Chapter 8: *Traces of Docetic Elements*

The docetic elements attributed to the historical Buddha after His demise have brought about various changes in different schools of Buddhist thought. Among these, the *Trikaya* concept is the most important Buddhological development with numerous forms of interpretations which came into existence with accretions of docetic elements into the human person of the Buddha. It began with conceptualizing that the Buddha had a human life that could be prolonged at His will for any number of years by wielding the psychic powers that He had cultivated in this very mortal existence.

For example, one of the *Vaipulya Sutras*,¹⁵⁵ the *Saddharmapundarika*, recognised as an important work of the Mahayana canon, speaking of the lifespan of the Buddha, asserts that the Buddha had not announced His final extinction.¹⁵⁶ The work is generally considered to have been composed about the first century A.D.¹⁵⁷

155. The Vaipulya Sutras are popularly called “nine dharmas”, which comprise nine texts considered to be an attempt at a classification of the ‘Mahayana Canon’. See History of Indian Literature Vol.II, p. 283, M. Winternitz Tr. by V. Sirinivasa Sharma (Motilal Banarsidas–1983) (HIL).

156. SBE, Vol. XV, pp. 302–303.

157. ‘We shall most probably be right in placing the nucleus of the work as far back as the first century A.D. , as it is quoted by Nagarjuna, who probably lived towards the end of the 2nd century A.D.’ — Winternitz, HIL, Vol. II, pp. 291–292.

There the Buddha is represented as saying:

“I have not accomplished my Bodhisattva course and the measure of my lifetime is not full. Nay young men of good family; I shall yet have twice as many hundred thousand myriads of *kotis* of aeons before the measure of my lifetime be full. I announce final extinction, young men of good family, though I am not finally extinct.”¹⁵⁸

Here the Buddha is represented as giving a very descriptive account of His extraordinary powers of living for myriads of *kotis* of aeons before His final decease. Moreover very many transcendental powers have been ascribed to the personality of the Buddha, for, further it emphatically states that the Buddha might go on for hundreds of thousands of myriads of *Kotis* of aeons explaining the manifold virtues of *Dharmaparyayas* through different principles of the law.¹⁵⁹

Western scholars who studied Buddhism through these Buddhist Sanskrit and Tibetan sources went to the extent of naming the Buddha in a mythical terminology. So much so that Eugene Burnouf as well as H. H. Wilson thought that the Buddha might not have been a historical person at all. Emile Senart who based his theories on *Lalitavistara*, another *Vaipulya Sutra* of the nine *Dharmas* of Mahayana, wrote the *Legend of the Buddha* and described that the Buddha was nothing but a myth. The Dutch savant, H. Kern, however, explained that the life of the Buddha was a myth of a different kind. According to him,

158. SBE, XV. p. 304.

159. op. cit. , XV, p. 367.

the Buddha may have existed, but what has been told of the life of the Buddha was a sun-myth; an allegorical description of the sun's motions, in which the Buddha was the sun, the first five disciples were the planets.¹⁶⁰

On the other hand, early Pali *Nikaya* works do not provide us with a connected life story of Gotama the Buddha. Nevertheless, there is plenty of material depicting the human nature of the Master which could be freely utilised to portray the human attributes of His character.¹⁶¹ When Dona questioned the Buddha as to who He was, the Buddha replying to him said that He was neither a god nor a *gandhabba* nor a *yakkha* nor a (common) man, but a Buddha who had destroyed all the cankers that caused one to be born in those existences.

Not in any way did the Buddha deny His human nature, because He was a human being extraordinary: “born in the world, brought up in the world, but lives above the worldlings without being smeared by the taints of the world.”¹⁶²

However, supernatural elements have crept into some of the discourses in the canon even at an earlier stage of the development of the canonical writings. To quote an instance in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya*, where the Buddha describes Himself as ‘a worn out cart’ at the age of eighty side by side with a reference to His

160. Buddhist Studies in the West — E. J. Thomas, UCR, Vol. VI, No. 2, 1948.

161. See for instances Pabbajjā, Nālaka and Padhāna Suttas of the Suttanipāta and the Ariyapariyesana and Mahāsīhanāda Suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya.

162. A.ii, p. 37 ff.

aeon long lifespan.¹⁶³ Again *Apadana Pali* a work of the *Khuddaka Nikaya* of the *Suttapitaka* speaks of Buddhas and disciples living in a heavenly abode engaged in a happy game of questioning and replying to each other which is undoubtedly a reminiscence of the *Sukhavati* heaven of the Mahayana tradition.¹⁶⁴ However the text in question is of later origin and the reciters of the *Digha Nikaya* are said to have declined to accept its authenticity.¹⁶⁵

Presumably, the teaching began with attributing supernatural qualities to Gotama the Buddha and paved the way for a fully developed Buddhology in time to come. Due to this phenomenon of resorting to docetism in portraying the life of the Buddha, Buddhist Sanskrit writers in particular went to the extent of saying that the historical Buddha was only a manifestation, a *Nirmanakaya* of an eternal Buddha. The concept is seen invariably in some form or another in works such as *Lalitavistara*, *Mahavastu*, *Saddharma-pundarika*, *Divyavadana* and *Suvarnaprabhasa*.¹⁶⁶

163. Ahaṃ kho pana āṇanda etarahi jiṇṇo vuddho mahallako addhagato vayo anuppatto, āsitiko me vayo vattati. Seyyathāpi āṇanda jajjarasakaṭaṃ vedhamissakena yāpeti evameva kho āṇanda vedhamissakena maññe tathāgatassa kāyo yāpeti D.ii, p. 100.

164. Sāvakā Buddhe pucchanti buddhā pucchanti sāvake aññamaññaṃ ca pucchanti aññamaññaṃ vyākaronti te.

Buddhā paccekabuddhā ca sāvakā paricārikā
Evaṃ sakāya ratiyā pāsāde abhīramanti te.

Thera Apadana, verses 33, 34.

165. DA (HBE) p. 11.

166. Suvarnaprabhasasutra goes to the extent of saying, 'How could there be relics in a body having neither bones nor blood,' (anasthi rudhire kāye kuto dhātur bhavisyati) p. 15.

Now we shall examine how the seeds of docetism have crept into the Pali canon in a period as early as the first council and later, during the time of the third council — how the definitions and interpretations were formulated refuting those docetic ideologies found in the canon itself, in conformity with the specific *Vibhajjavada* teaching established at the third council.

As found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* the Buddha is said to have addressed Ananda saying that whoever had cultivated four paths to psychic powers could remain in the same birth for an aeon or for that portion of the aeon which he had yet to run.¹⁶⁷ The Buddha further is said to have revealed that as He has thoroughly cultivated and practised them, if He would, He could have lived for an aeon or that portion of the aeon which He had yet to run.¹⁶⁸ But it is stated that even though a suggestion so evident and a hint so clear were given by the Blessed One Himself, Ananda was incapable of comprehending the words of the Master, because Ananda at that time had been possessed by the Evil One.¹⁶⁹ As found in the records of the first council in the *Cullavagga Pali*, the negligence displayed by Ananda in not entreating the Buddha to live for an aeon was one of the charges levelled against him at the first council. Ananda, though he categorically denied the charge of negligence on his part, in utter devotion to the *theras* who participated in the council, humbly

167. D. ii, p. 117.

168. Ibid.

169. Yathā taṃ mārena pariyuṭṭhitacitto, ibid.

admitted that he had committed an offence of wrong doing, a *dukkata āpatti* by his negligence.¹⁷⁰

Now as mentioned in both the works, namely in the *Mahāparinibbana Sutta* and in *Cullavagga Pali*, had Ananda entreated the Buddha at the proper time to live for an aeon, the Buddha would have consented to live for an aeon as He had already cultivated and developed the four paths of psychic powers. So it has been argued, interpreted and explained that it was because of Ananda's negligence that the world had been deprived of the Buddha at the age of eighty. Otherwise, He would have lived for an aeon or for that portion of the aeon which He had yet to run.

How far does this record tally with the physical condition of the Buddha as revealed in the *Mahāparinibbana Sutta* itself? Moreover, how do we account for the concept of living for an aeon with a human body, contrary to the fundamentals of the teachings of the Buddha?

When this episode is taken as a unit by itself, apparently it depicts many discrepancies worthy of our attention.

Firstly, the Buddha is said to have told Ananda: "I, too, O Ananda, am now grown old and full of years, my journey is drawing to its close. I have reached my last days, I am turning eighty years of age and just as a worn-out cart, Ananda, can be kept going only with the help of thongs, so me thinks, the body of the *Tathagata* can only be kept going by bandaging it up."¹⁷¹ This being the condition of the Buddha's physique, the assumption that the Buddha could

170. See Vinaya Cullavaggapāli, Chapter XI for details.

171. D. ii, p. 100.

have lived for an aeon is factually wrong and unjustifiable.

Secondly, a person born to human parents, bearing a human body would not live so long a period of time.

Thirdly, if the Buddha could live for an aeon, if He so desired (*akamkhamāno*), another's plea would be naturally superfluous.

Fourthly, according to *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* the Evil One asked the Buddha to pass away, reminding Him of a promise given to him by the Buddha in the fifth week after the Enlightenment at the *Ajapala* banyan tree.¹⁷² But early records of the weeks that followed the Enlightenment are silent about this request. There Brahma Sahampati pleads with the Buddha to preach the doctrine instead.¹⁷³

Fifthly, the Evil One, just after a prolonged conversation with the Buddha, says: “and now Lord, this pure religion of thine, has now become successful, prosperous, widespread and popular in all its full extent. Pass away now. Therefore, Lord, let the Exalted One now die. The time has come for the Exalted One to pass away.” Then the Buddha addressing the Evil One proclaims that He would pass away after a period of three months.¹⁷⁴

If this is the sequence of events as recorded in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, how could Ananda be blamed for the Buddha's demise? As given in the text, the outcome of the conversation between the Buddha and the Evil One is

172. Trevor Ling asserts that the invitation of the Evil One to the Buddha for Parinibbana is a legendary one. See *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil* p. 140.

173. D. ii, p. 112 and also *Vinaya Mahāvaggapāli* p. 3 ff.

174. D. ii, p. 106.

conspicuous. The Buddha had accepted the Evil One's request to pass away, therefore if Ananda had been charged earlier, he had to be exonerated at the council held in Rajagaha.

Sixthly, the Buddha's ability of extending His life-span for an aeon was communicated thrice to Ananda by the Buddha when He was at the Capala shrine. In fact, this is the only place in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* where this event has been mentioned, but; later when Ananda pleaded with the Buddha to live for an aeon, He refused the request by saying that He had reminded Ananda about this when He was at many places such as Gijjhakuta, Gotamaka Nirodha, Corappapata, Sattapanni Cave, Kalasila Rock, Sitavana, Tapodarama, Veluvana, Jivakambavana, Maddakucchi in Rajagaha and Udena, Gotamaka, Sattamba, Bahuputtaka, Sarandada and Chapala shrines in Vesali.¹⁷⁵

This additional list of places must have been added on a somewhat later occasion to lay a considerable amount of emphasis on the apparent negligence of Ananda.

Seventhly, Ananda has been accused twice of the same offence. The Buddha is said to have already told Ananda that he had committed an offence of wrong doing by not requesting the Buddha to live for an aeon. Again at the first council Ananda is reported to have been forced to confess that he had committed an offence of wrong doing for the same offence.¹⁷⁶ It seems that the gravity of the

175. D. ii, p. 113 ff.

176. (a) D. ii, p. 118.

(b) Vinaya Cullavaggapāli Chap. XI

offence has been highlighted for the second time, too.

Eighthly, The Buddha asks Ananda as to why he has troubled Him even until the third time, if he had faith in the wisdom of the Buddha.

The statement actually does not agree with what we find in the preceding passage in the discourse where it is stated that the Buddha had given a promise to the Evil One and Ananda who had been possessed by the Evil One, was incapable of understanding what the Buddha had said in this regard.¹⁷⁷

Ninethly, as found in the discourse itself, Ananda had been possessed by the Evil One and therefore he missed the opportunity of entreating the Buddha to live for an aeon.¹⁷⁸ If it is so, how could Ananda be blamed on this count?

Tenthly, the concept of extending the lifespan in this manner is totally an over-estimation of the strength of psychic powers.

Now, what is the significance of this episode? What would be the truth underlying it?

After the demise of the Buddha, the disciples did not like to accept the fact that He underwent a natural death. They were so moved by the loss of their beloved Teacher who was then no more. So they began to refuse to accept that the Buddha had passed away. The necessity of an alternative to satisfy their psychological need must have been strongly felt. Here is a personality who preached

177. D. ii, p. 113 and p. 115.

178. Yathā taṃ mārena pariyuṭṭhitacitto

D ii, p. 102.

from village to village against the prevailing superstitious beliefs and the tyranny of Brahmanism. He denounced theism outright, but the followers who were born and bred in a theistic environment looked at Him in the long cherished theistic perspective which was an integral part of India's cultural setting. Subsequently, therefore, in Mahayana, the Buddha was elevated to the position of God who manifests from time to time in human form, a concept elaborated in the *Bhagavadgita* too. As Winternitz puts it, 'at times the Buddha of the *Saddharmapundarika* reminds us of Krishna of the *Bhagavadgita*'.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, he being cautious, further says, 'it seems to be however risky to assume that the 'Lotus' was directly influenced by the Krishna cult, *Vedanta* and the *Bhagavadgita*'.¹⁸⁰

It has been categorically stated in the *Bhagavadgita* that Vishnu, the protector of the world, to keep the world going on the lines of righteousness, assumes different births to re-establish right when wrong prevails. The relevant text reads: "*For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age.*"¹⁸¹

Commenting on this train of thought Radhakrishnan says: "The *avatara* points out the ways by which men can

179. HIL Vol. II, 290.

180. See footnote 2 of HIL Vol. II, p. 290.

181. Paritrānāya sadhūnām
vināsasya ca duṣkṛtam
dharmasamsthāpanārthāya
sambhavāmi yuge yuge

—Bhagavadgita Chap. iv, 8.

rise from their animal to spiritual mode of existence by providing us with an example of spiritual life. The Divine nature is not seen in the incarnation in its naked splendour but is mediated by the instrumentality of manhood.”¹⁸² But, in accordance with the tendency towards synthesis, which is evidently a characteristic of Hinduism, the Buddha was made an *avatara*, an incarnation of Vishnu. Hence with the typical Hindu approach Radhakrishnan goes on to assert that *avataras* help us become what we potentially are. So by drawing similarities between Hindu and Buddhist systems of thought, he says that there is no subjection to one historical fact and that we all are capable of rising to Divine status and that *the avataras* help us to achieve that inner realisation.¹⁸³ To substantiate his case Radhakrishnan, to whom Buddhism is nothing but an offshoot of Hinduism, quotes the *Tevijja Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* which reads thus: “know Vasettha, that from time to time a Tathagata is born into this world, a fully enlightened one, blessed and worthy, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy with the knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to erring mortals, a teacher of gods and men, a Blessed Buddha. He proclaims the truth both in its letter and in its spirit, lovely in its origin, lovely in its progress, lovely in its consummation. A higher life doth He make known in all its purity and in all its perfectness.”¹⁸⁴

The passage in question does not in any way refer

182. Bhagavadgita Ed. by S. Radhakrishnan p.156.

183. op. cit. p. 157.

184. op. cit.

to an appearance of an incarnation of a primordial Buddha from age to age in the world, as Radhakrishnan makes us believe. It specifically suggests the birth of individual Buddhas from time to time. Nowhere do we come across in the canon any reference to an incarnation of a primordial Buddha who appears in the world at different intervals.

The *Kathavatthu* is said to have been composed at the third council by Moggaliputta Tissa and recognised as authentic as to be included in the canon in the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*. It refutes the proposition that one who has cultivated and developed the four paths to psychic powers could live for an aeon as a dogma untenable in Theravada.¹⁸⁵

It has been attempted to prove this proposition by quoting the selfsame statement found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* which we have discussed above. But Theravada, categorically denying its validity on canonical grounds, quotes the *Anguttara Nikaya* to assert that there is neither a recluse, nor a brahmin, nor a deity, nor an Evil One, nor a Brahma who can transcend old age, disease, death and retributive effects of actions.¹⁸⁶

The commentary on the *Kathavatthu*, written by Buddhaghosa, says that the possibility of extending the lifespan for an aeon is a notion that had gained ground among the Mahasanghikas. Further, the commentary adds that it has been caused by ignorance as to the field

185. KV, 11, 5.

186. A. ii, p. 5.

of psychic powers.¹⁸⁷

It may be that this particular teaching may have been a fundamental dogma of the Mahasanghikas who broke away from the original *Sangha* after the second council which was held in Vesali, a hundred years after the Buddha's demise.

It is interesting to note as to how Buddhaghosa has commented upon this controversial phrase in the *Digha Nikaya* commentary, where he says: "Here aeon (i.e. *kappa*) means span of life, the completion of the lifespan of men in whatever period of time," and defining the phrase '*kappavasesa*' he says: "Little or more or some additional years other than the hundred years that is already spent."¹⁸⁸

If this definition is to be accepted, naturally, it gives rise to three other problems, namely:

1. Had the usual lifespan of an individual been meant by the term '*kappa*' found in the text of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, why does the compiler of the *Kathavatthu* attempt to refute this identical proposition as a heresy, in decisive terms?

2. Why does Buddhaghosa who interpreted '*kappa*' in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* to mean 'usual lifespan of an individual', say while commenting the same proposition in the *Kathavatthu*, that 'whoever had cultivated four paths to psychic powers could remain in the same birth for

187. KVA (HBE) Part I, p. 167.

188. Ettha kappamti āyukappam, tasim tasmim kāle yaṃ manussānam āyuppamānam hoti taṃ paripuṇṇam karonto tiṭṭheyya DA. p. 384.

an aeon or for that portion of the aeon, which he had yet to run' is a dogma upheld by Mahasanghikas?

3. What motivated Buddhaghosa to interpret in two different ways the word '*kappa*' identically in the same context in his commentarial works on the *Digha Nikaya* and the *Kathavatthu*?

Evidently, *Buddhaghosa* was motivated by obvious reasons to give two different interpretations to this identical phrase found in the two texts in the selfsame context. The word '*kappa*' has never been used in the Pali canon, in any context to indicate the lifespan of an individual.¹⁸⁹ Mainly the word has been used to mean:

- Cosmic life
- Appropriateness or suitability
- As the first member of a compound to give different meanings e.g. *kappabindu*, *kapparukkha*, *kappanjaha* etc.

Cosmic life is divided into three: *mahakappa*, *asamkhyakappa* and *anantarakappa*. The second meaning is to be seen in the ten points adduced at the second council.

When it is said that Devadatta is being tormented in hell for a '*kappa*' definitely an aeon is meant and not a lifespan of an individual.¹⁹⁰ The second meaning is seen in the ten points adduced at the second council and in the verb *kappati*.

However about the first century B.C. Theravada

189. See Pali – English Dictionary (P.T.S.).

190. A. ii, p. 142 and A iii p. 402.

thought had taken a distinctive turn, which is evident from the interpretation given to the controversial term in the *Milindapanha*. There Nagasena interprets it to mean the lifespan of an individual. So arguing on a different basis he emphasizes that the intention of the Buddha was to bring the field of psychic powers to light and not His own ability of extending the lifespan for an aeon.¹⁹¹

It is clear that both the *Kathavatthu* and the *Digha Nikaya* commentary looked at the controversial phrase from the traditional Theravada point of view. Although the *Kathavatthu* attempted to refute the proposition totally, the *Digha Nikaya* commentary, keeping in line with the *Milindapanha*, however, suggested an objective import by shifting the emphasis from the Buddha to psychic powers. The shift of emphasis was devised in conformity with the specific Theravada doctrine clarified and established at the third council headed by Moggaliputta Tissa to whom the compilation of the *Kathavatthu* has been traditionally ascribed. When all these interpretations are taken into consideration, we see that there is a conscious attempt on the part of the Theravada teachers of yore, to maintain their specific train of Buddhist thought in contrast to numerous sectarian views. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, docetic elements had entered into the canon of the *theras* even before the breaking away of the *Mahasanghikas* from the original *Sangha*.

There is no doubt that the concept of living for an

191. Tena hi mahārāja bhagavā iddhibalaṃ parikittayamāno evarūpaṃ
buddhasīhanādaṃ abhinadīti.... ~ Iddhibalapañha Milindapañha

aeon must have been conceived in regard to the Buddha in the minds of early disciples who looked at the Buddha in esteem and veneration. The Teacher who was full of compassion and wisdom and who had worked for the good and well-being of all, irrespective of caste and social position, was no more. Three months before the demise, the Buddha Himself had pronounced that His age was full and ripe and that His earthly career had come to an end.¹⁹²

The verses said to have been uttered by Brahma Sahampati, Sakka and Anuruddha who are said to have witnessed the Buddha's demise are devoid of emotion and this is quite befitting. They reveal the inherent nature of compounded things. Brahma recounts that all have to lay aside their body which is an aggregate of mental and material qualities and that even the unique Teacher has to pass away.¹⁹³ Sakka, too, tells about the fate of all compounded things. They are produced and then dissolved. Everything is impermanent. Their appeasement alone is Bliss.¹⁹⁴ Among mortals, Anuruddha was at the death bed at the last moment and gave vent to his expression without being moved thus:

“When He who from all craving want was free
Who to Nirvana tranquil state has reached
When the Great Sage finished His span of life
No gasping struggle vexed that steadfast heart.

192. Paripakko vayo mayhaṃ parittaṃ mama jīvitam
pahāya vo gamissāmi kataṃ vo saranamattano

D. ii, p. 120.

193. D. ii, p. 157.

194. op. cit.

All resolute, and with unshaken mind
He calmly triumphed o'er the pain of death
E'en as a bright flame dies away, so was
The last emancipation of His heart.”¹⁹⁵

The Buddha was no ordinary man. His life and deeds reveal His super-human qualities. He is extraordinary and unique. He diverted the course of human history to a different direction, but He also died as anyone else. The difference lies in the way He faced death. He bore the pain of death and calmly attained emancipation of His heart just as a flickering flame is blown out. Nevertheless, many of the devoted disciples who survived the Buddha's demise did not like to observe this event in such a simple way. The thought that it was a result of the negligence on the part of the disciple who was always with Him as His shadow, was a consolation for them. In other words, if not for Ananda's slackness, they imagined, the Buddha would have lived for an aeon. Furthermore, the Buddha had not appointed anyone but the doctrine to succeed Him. This fact too might have motivated the disciples to look at the Buddha from a docetic angle.



195. Nāhu assāsapassāso t̥hitacittassa tādino
anejo santim̐ ārabbha yaṃ kālam akarī muni
Asallīnena cittena vedanaṃ ajjhavāsaya
pajjotasseva nibbānaṃ vimokkho ahu cetasoti

D. ii, p. 157.

Chapter 9:

The Earliest Phase of the Concept of Authority

The Four Great References (*Mahapadesa*) found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is of special importance to the students of Buddhist religious thought. Presumably it takes one to a period when the compilers of the canon were very ardently canvassing for ‘safety measures’ to be adopted for the smooth functioning of the order. In order to safeguard and perpetuate the word of the Master an effective methodology had to be evolved which would ensure the unity of the teaching as well as the concord among fellow monks. Disruptive and dissenting elements had to be kept at bay for the maintenance of peace and solidarity among the community of monks.

The Buddha is said to have expounded these four great authorities at the end of His last journey and are found in the fifth recital or chapter (*Bhānavāra*) of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*.¹⁹⁶ When critically examined this particular teaching can easily be recognized as a somewhat later stratum of the discourse, which evidently has been introduced in a subsequent stage of the evolution of the *Sutta* to guarantee the authoritativeness of the scriptures rehearsed at the first council.

The Four *Mahapadesas* as given in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* are as follows:

1. *Buddhāpadesa*
2. *Sanghāpadesa*

196. D. ii, p. 123.

3. *Sambahulattherāpadesa*
4. *Ekattherāpadesa*

If one were to say that he heard it (1) from the mouth of the Buddha or (2) from the mouth of a company of monks or (3) from the mouth of many *theras* or (4) from a learned *thera* ‘deeply read’ (*bahussuta*) holding the faith as handed down by tradition (*agatāgama*), versed in the truth (*dhammadhara*), versed in the discipline of the order (*vinayadhara*), and versed in the summaries of the doctrine and the law, the word of that monk neither should be received with praise nor should be treated with scorn. The *Sutta* further states: “His every word and syllable should be carefully understood and then put beside the *suttas* and compared with the *Vinaya*. If when so compared they do not harmonise with the *suttas* and do not fit in with the rules of the order, then those views should be rejected and if they harmonise should be accepted as the word of the Teacher.”¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, on an occasion, correcting the wrong view held by Sati, the Buddha stated that in case he could not understand the meaning of what the Buddha had said, he could question the Buddha about it or else those who were experienced monks (*viyattā bhikkhu*).¹⁹⁸

What was actually meant by the word *Mahapadesa*? Buddhaghosa tells us that there are four *Mahapadesas*, each in the *Sutta* as well as in the *Vinaya*.¹⁹⁹ The *Maha-*

197. Same is repeated in A. 11, p. 167.

198. M. i, p. 134.

199. Dco. i, p. 393ff (SHB).

padesas found in the *Vinaya* embrace only the discipline while those which were in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* cover both the fields of doctrine and discipline.

The *Vinaya Mahapadesas* are:—

1. *Akappiya* (Improper)
2. *Akappiyānulomiya* (Accordance with the improper)
3. *Kappiya* (Proper)
4. *Kappiyānulomiya* (Accordance with the proper)

They are found in the *Bhesajjakkhandhaka* of the *Mahavagga Pali* and are beyond the field of our discussion.²⁰⁰

Sukumar Dutt in his *Early Buddhist Monarchism* though, takes the *Mahapadesas* to mean ‘standard of judgments’.²⁰¹ Later in the *Buddha and the Five After Centuries*, he remarks: “Four tests for the authenticity of a rule or a doctrine are laid down, and they are called the Four Great Authorities”.²⁰² It is to be noted however that they are neither ‘standards of judgments nor tests for authenticity’. The authentic standards or criteria are the *Suttas* and *Vinaya* themselves.

Rhys Davids in the *Dialogues of the Buddha* has translated the word as ‘Great Authorities’ but was somewhat apologetic in the footnote where he says: “The meaning of *Mahapadesas* is not quite clear. Perhaps it should be rendered ‘True Authorities’. I have followed Buddhaghosa in taking *apadesa* as the last part of the compound.”²⁰³

200. Vin ii, p. 118.

201. Dutt S. *Early Buddhist Monachism* pp. 18–19.

202. Dutt S. *The Buddha and Five After Centuries* p. 98.

203. Rhys Davids — *Dialogues of the Buddha* (SBB) 11, Part 111, p. 133.

Buddhaghosa breaks up the word into *Mahā + apadesa* and derives the latter from *apadisati* (*apa + √ diś*) ‘to point out’ to mean ‘reference, proposition, reason or authority’.²⁰⁴ We are not concerned with Miss Horner’s rendering of ‘*sāpadesam*’ to mean in a different context ‘with similes’.²⁰⁵ These are four kinds of references or propositions which could be forwarded by monks in support of their particular views. Hence they have to be tested or verified before acceptance. Therefore the *Sutta* and the *Vinaya* themselves are ‘authorities’ or the ‘standards of judgment’ indeed! These so-called Authorities have to be regarded as mere references and therefore Prof. K. N. Jayatilleke aptly refers to them as the Four Great References.²⁰⁶

Evidently, with the introduction of these particular references a new era in the history of Buddhist thought has arisen. Even during the lifetime of the Teacher there were some who explained the teaching on their own accord. Sati and Arittha are two of them whose misunderstanding could be corrected by the Buddha Himself.²⁰⁷ Even though the Buddha could exercise the privilege of correcting any individual who distorted the teaching when He was alive, the situation was quite different in His absence. Hence an appropriate procedure had to be ironed out to deal with wrong views after His demise. The

204. Mahaokase mahā apadesa vā. Buddhādayo mahante apadisitvā
vuttāni mahakāranānti attho Dco. i, p. 393 ff.

205. Middle Length Sayings 1, p. 288.

206. Jayatilleke K.N. — Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge p. 401.

207. M. i, p. 130 and p. 477.

Pasadika Sutta gives us in detail the proposed corrective procedure that has to be followed for the proper evaluation of a forwarded proposition.²⁰⁸

According to the *Sutta* four kinds of propositions could be formed in connection with the teaching. They are:

1. Holding wrong meaning and proposing wrong form of words.
2. Holding wrong meaning but proposing right form of words.
3. Holding right meaning but proposing wrong form of words.
4. Holding right meaning and proposing right form of words.

With regard to the first three the *Sutta* advises one not to be hasty in setting aside or upbraiding and says: “Neither setting aside nor upbraiding are you to explain to him with careful attention both the meaning and phraseology.”²⁰⁹

Among these, the fourth is regarded as the acceptable and proper form of expression. Here the monk who holds the view is encouraged and persuaded to compare and contrast his own view with what had been taught by the Buddha in respect of the particular proposition. Here the person concerned is induced to verify by himself as to whether his view is befitting. The person concerned is the judge himself and not an outsider or an outside authority.

208. D. iii, p. 128.

209. ...anussaretvā anapasāretvā so eva sādhuḥkaṃ saññāpetabbo, tassa ca atthassa ca tesam ca byañjanānaṃ nisantiyā D. iii, p. 128.

The *Nettipakarana* is supposed to have been written before the commentarial period. In discussing these Great References, it however comes out with a definition different from the tradition handed down to us by Buddhaghosa. According to this interpretation, the whetstones are not the discourses and the discipline *in toto*, but the *suttas* dealing with the Four Truths and the discipline leading to the abandonment of lust, hatred and delusion. A new criterion is also added. It is dependent origination.²¹⁰ It may be that either the author of the *Nettipakarana* was not ready to accept the whole mass of discourses and discipline found in the canon said to have been recited at the first council, or that he preferred to adhere to a teaching prevailing in his scholastic tradition.

With the exposition of Buddhaghosa we come to the third phase of the evolution of the concept. In his commentary to the *Digha Nikaya* where these *Mahapadesas* have been commented upon, he defines the two terms, *Sutta* and *Vinaya*, in three different ways.

1. (a) *Sutta* is two *Vibhāṅgas* —
i.e. *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhuni vibhāṅgas*, which comprise the *Parajika Pali* and the *Pacittiya Pali* texts of the *Vinaya Pitaka* of the Pali canon.

- (b) *Vinaya* is *Khandakas* and *Parivara Pali* —
i.e. *Mahavagga Pali*, *Cullavagga Pali*, and *Parivara Pali* of the *Vinaya Pitaka* of the Pali canon.

210. Katamasmiṃ sutte otaretabbāni : catusu ariyasaccesu. Katamasmiṃ vinaye sandassayitabbāni? : rāga vinaye, dosavinaye, mohavinaye. Katamasmiṃ dhammatāyaṃ upanikkhipitabbāni : paticcasamuppāde.
— Yuttihāra Niddesa, *Nettipakarana*.

2. (a) *Sutta* is the entire *Sutta Pitaka* comprising the *Digha*, *Majjhima*, *Samyutta*, *Anguttara* and *Khuddaka Nikayas* of the Pali canon.
 (b) *Vinaya* is the entire *Vinaya Pitaka* as described in no. 1 above (Both a and b).
3. (a) *Sutta* is both the *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma Pitakas* i.e. the five *Nikayas* of the *Sutta Pitaka* and the seven works of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*.
 (b) *Vinaya* is the entire *Vinaya Pitaka* as described in no. 1 above (Both a and b).

Now according to Buddhaghosa's third description the *Sutta* and *Vinaya* embrace all the canonical works of the *Tipitakas*.

At the end of these descriptive definitions Buddhaghosa records the opinion of Sudinna who held the view that all that had been uttered by the Buddha are *Sutta* and that which pacifies lust etc. is *Vinaya*. Therefore he conclusively states: "the expressions referred to should be compared and contrasted with the Buddha's teaching found in the three baskets."²¹¹

Historically, the *Pasadika Sutta* provides us with the first stage of the attempt of seeking authority in respect of the word of the Master while the *Nettippakarana* portrays the intermediary stage. Buddhaghosa, in his commentary to the *Digha Nikaya*, comes out with the third stage of the

211. Tasmā sutte'ti tepitake buddhavacane otaretabbāni. Vinaye'ti etasmim rāgādivinayanakāraṇe Dco. i, 394.

evolution of the concept bearing the imprint of established Theravada tradition.

Now, if we turn back to the first of these references, it runs thus: “if a monk were to say that he heard it from the mouth of the Exalted One Himself and that he received it from His own mouth, it should not be received with praise nor treated with scorn but put beside the *Sutta* and compared with the *Vinaya*.”²¹²

We know of a historical personage who used the same phraseology and showed an unbecoming attitude to the first rehearsal of the doctrine and discipline. He is none other than Purana who has been very often quoted by some Western scholars to show that the council was a kind of party meeting. If their assumption is to be accepted every assembly which meets with a person or persons having opposite views would have to be considered a party meeting! It was Dr. Sukumar Dutt who showed for the first time that the first Great Reference was a reply directly intended for monks such as Purana.²¹³

Purana came to Veluvana in Rajagaha from a tour in Dakkhinagiri with a retinue of five hundred monks. The monks in Rajagaha then told him that a council had been held for the rehearsal of the doctrine and the discipline. Purana being indifferent to the rehearsal replied that he would bear in mind as he heard from the Buddha Himself.²¹⁴ Evidently, he was not ready to

212. D. ii, p. 124.

213. Dutt S — Early Buddhist Monachism p. 18.

214. Vin. ii, p. 189 ff.

endorse the recital of the doctrine and discipline at the council held in Rajagaha. Similar instances might have multiplied in the course of time. The Buddha must have been quoted by those who virtually did not want to come in line with the ideology of the *theras* who took part in the first council. Paribrajaka Potali's statement that he heard it from the mouth of the Buddha Himself was rejected by Thera Samiddhi.²¹⁵ Claims such as these would certainly nullify the laborious task of the *theras* who took the utmost care to codify and conserve the teaching of the Master for the sake of posterity. Therefore the first of these references could be regarded as a direct reply in refuting the views maintained by Purana and such others.

Not only from the Buddha, but also heard even from the learned *theras* should not to be accepted without proper consideration for which the *Suttas* and the *Vinaya* recited at the First Council are the criteria. Words such as *āgatāgama*, *mātikādhara* etc. found in this context in the text depict a comparatively later period when the theories of the four *Agamas* and the *Abhidhamma* were taking shape. Obviously, it was a period posterior to the first council.

Nanjio gives eight references in all, four white and four black. Though the contexts in them are the same as those in the Pali *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the method of relating to them are some what different. By dividing each authority into acceptance and refusal, these have been mul-

215. M. i, p. 359.

tiplied to eight.²¹⁶ But on the other hand, all the Chinese texts consulted by Pachow give only four references, as in Pali, with only slight variations. According to one (he names it IP) the person who does not give up his wrong view must be excommunicated. Two other texts (he calls them 11B. and 111N) closely agree with the Pali text but one of the texts (i.e. 111N) gives *Dharmapada Sutra* and *Vinaya* as standards of judgment while in another text (he calls it IVF) the entire *Tipitaka* has been recognised as the standard.²¹⁷ Evidently, all these versions are later than the Pali version. *Dulva* according to *The Life of Buddha* of W.W. Rockhill does not make any reference to the *Mahapadesas*.

Obviously, the Four Great References found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* could be regarded as a later development ascribing authoritativeness to the doctrine and the discipline as rehearsed at the first council. It is to be noted that a person who lived during the time of the Buddha can only profess that he heard it from the Buddha Himself. Hence if we presume that a person of twenty-five years of age during the time of the Buddha survived the Buddha for another seventy-five years having a maximum lifespan of a hundred years he only can say that, he heard from the Buddha Himself. Accordingly, the evolution of the concept of these references could be ascribed easily to the first century after the demise of the Buddha. The forced recognition of the entire canon of the *Suttas* and the *Vinaya* is the latest addition to the tradition.

216. Nanjio No. 1121 fasculi 37 shxv 112 pp. 77–8.

217. Sino-Indian Studies Vol. 11 Part 1 April 1946.

Chapter 10:

The Theravada Attitude to Discipline

The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* deals with some important points in respect of the attitude of the *theras* towards the *Vinaya* which was considered by them the lifeblood of the dispensation. When the *Vinaya* and the *Sutta* rehearsals were over, Ananda informed the assembly that the Buddha had enjoined the *Sangha* to abrogate the lesser and minor rules if they so desired. The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* and the *Cullavagga* record this incident in two different ways. The *Sutta* states this in a verb of the imperative mood while the *Cullavagga* uses an optative, thereby revealing, as it were, Ananda's willingness as such, to the abrogation of the rules in question.²¹⁸ The problematic situation created in the first council with reference to the identity of the lesser and minor rules, clearly indicates the position taken up by the *theras* headed by Mahakassapa who chaired the first council.

As recorded in the *Cullavagga*, altogether five charges were levelled against Ananda when the rehearsal of the *Dhamma-vinaya* was over.²¹⁹

1. Ananda's failure to ask the Buddha as to the contents of lesser and minor rules.

218. Ākhaṃkhamāno ānanda sangho mamaccayena
khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni samūhanatu. D. ii. p. 154.
...samūhaneyya. Vin. ii, p. 287.

219. Vin. ii, p. 288ff.

2. Sewing the Master's garment used for the rainy season by resting his feet upon it.
3. Permitting women to worship the body of the Master and thereby allowing the body to be defiled by the tears shed by them.
4. Negligence displayed in not requesting the Master to live for an aeon (*kappa*).
5. Persuading the Buddha to admit womankind into the dispensation by speaking on behalf of them before the Buddha.²²⁰

But the most striking thing is, according to Rockhill who gives a record of the first council as found in the Tibetan sources, Ananda had been charged before the council proper, which was held for the purpose of rehearsing the word of the Buddha and was sent away being asked to attain sainthood before returning. This very Ananda without whom the rehearsal of the *Dhamma* could not have been accomplished!²²¹ Rockhill gives seven charges in all.

220. Rockhill gives a description of the womenkind to this charge which is not found in the Pali source, viz: 'How comes it that when the Blessed One said that women were as dangerous as snakes and that it would be wrong to admit them to the order, thou did ask that they might be allowed to enter it?'

In constructing the life of the Buddha he has used Tibetan Bkah-hgyur and Bastun-Hgyue. See Rockhill. W. W. — *The Life of the Buddha* p. 151.

221. According to Rockhill Ananda recites *Dhamma* before *Vinaya* in the first council. Rockhill. W. W. — *The Life of the Buddha* pp. 151–154.

The fourth and the sixth of his list are not found in the Pali record. However they are not of special significance. The reasons for not providing the Buddha with pure water when He was thirsty have been recorded in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* in detail,²²² which is the fourth charge levelled against Ananda in Rockhill's list. The sixth is the exhibition of the secret parts of the Buddha's body, which the Buddha Himself had done when He was alive, in order to dispel doubts in the mind of a brahmin.²²³

What is significant is the fifth charge given in the Rockhill's list which is the first in the Theravada list found in the *Cullavagga*. Notably, the Theravadins gave precedence to a charge that dealt directly with the disciplinary code.

The Buddha who enjoined the disciples to regard the *Dhammavinaya* as the Teacher when He is no more, further asked them to abrogate the lesser and minor rules after His demise if they desired to do so. Could there be any reason for this pronouncement? What was the purpose of it? What prompted the Buddha to permit them to abrogate those rules?

As found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* when the Buddha asked Ananda to levy *Brahmadanda* to Channa, Ananda was mindful enough to beg for an explanation of

222. D. ii, p. 129.

223. In order to dispel the doubts arisen in the mind of brahmin Ambattha, the Buddha is said to have exercised His supernatural powers in order that he may see the private parts of the Buddha's body. (Atha kho bhagavā thāthārūpaṃ iddhābhisamkhāraṃ abhisamkhāsi yathā addasa ambattho mānava bhagavato kosohitaṃ vatthaguyhaṃ. D. i, p. 106.

Brahmadanda from the Buddha.²²⁴ But in this particular case why did Ananda not inquire from the Buddha what those lesser and minor rules were. The problem has to be investigated comparatively, because the step taken in this regard has paved the way subsequently for lasting consequences resulting in the division of the original *Sangha* into different schools.

Ananda placed the problem of lesser and minor rules just after the rehearsal of *Dhammavinaya*. He informed the assembly that the Buddha had given permission to abrogate them after the Buddha's demise if the *Sangha* so desired. Then the question was discussed at length and ultimately, as opinions differed, they came to the conclusion that they would not repeal any of the lesser and minor rules. What is more relevant in this connection is the different opinions expressed in regard to the rules under discussion. Some of the participants went to the extent of declaring that most rules other than the four defeats (*Parajikas*) were lesser and minor rules.²²⁵

Were the *theras* who took part in the council ignorant of the rules in question? Certainly it would be much more plausible to place the problem in historical perspective. Jotiya Dhirasekera, approaching the problem from a different angle, states: "It is important to recognise the fact that there seems to have existed even during the time of the Buddha, a category of *sikkhapadas* carrying the designation of lesser and minor rules or *khuddanukhud-*

224. D.ii, p. 154.

225. Vin. ii, p. 287.

daka”,²²⁶ which probably suggests the existence of a code of discipline where rules were codified in respect of the gravity of the offence involved.

The second of the *Sahadhammika Vagga* of the *pacittiya* rules directly deals with these lesser and minor rules which says that if any monk ‘voices dissatisfaction’ when the *Patimokkha* is being recited, saying what is the use of these lesser and minor rules which result in remorse, weariness and perplexity, commits a *pacittiya* offence.²²⁷ Evidently, when the *Vinayapitaka*, where the above rule is included, was being recited at the council, Upali who had been assigned the pre-eminent position among *Vinayadharas* as well as Ananda along with other *theras* were present with Thera Mahakassapa in the chair. But nobody posed the question as to what were the rules intended by the phrase ‘*khuddanukhuddaka*’. The silence on the part of the participants show that they were well aware of the nature of *khuddanukhuddakas* or lesser and minor rules.

However one thing is clear from the rule. The lesser and minor rules are part and parcel of the *Patimokkha* and that they are to be recited fortnightly at the *Patimokkha* recital along with the rest of the rules. The present *Patimokkha* consists of the following rules : *parajikas*, *sanghadisesa*, *aniyatas*, *nissaggiya pacittiyas*, *patidesaniyas*, *sekhiyas* and *adhikarana samathas*.

226. Dhirasekera Jotiya — Monastic Discipline p. 165.

227. Yo pana bhikkhu pātimokkhe uddissamāne evaṃ vadeyya kiṃ panimehi khuddānukhuddakehi sikkhāpadehi uddiṭṭhehi yāvadeva kukkuccāya vihesāya vilekhāya samvattant’ti sikkhāpada vilekhane pācittiyam. 2nd Precept. Sahadhammika Vagga; Vin. iv p. 143.

As both the *Mahavagga* and the *Cullavagga* are not recited at the *Uposatha* ceremony held fortnightly, the rules in question should be in one of these groups. It is said in the *Pacittiya Pali* that the group of six (*Chabbaggiyas*) are the cause of levying this *Vinaya* rule. Further it is said that they, giving popularity to this idea in order to discourage the monks, caused them to refrain from *Vinaya* study; but what we understand from the rule is that it is a *pacittiya* offence to voice dissatisfaction while the *Patimokkha* recitation is in progress. This discrepancy however reveals, on the other hand, that there were some monks who wanted to leave out the lesser and minor rules not only from the fortnightly recital but from the *Vinaya Pitaka* as well.

When the question of their identity arose at the end of the council, Upali the *Vinaya* expert, should have been consulted by the *theras*. But according to *Cullavagga*, *Upali's* opinion was not sought. The old commentary embedded in the *Pacittiya Pali* also does not comment on the phrase, '*khuddanukhuddaka*'. Even Buddhaghosa in his *Vinaya* commentary *Samantapasadika* dismisses the expression by merely saying 'with lesser and minor rules' (*khuddakehi ca anukhuddakehi ca*).²²⁸ Neither the *Pacittiya Pali* nor the *Samantapasadika* are helpful in getting the import of the phrase clarified.

Nevertheless, the same problem was placed before Nagasena by Milinda some five centuries after the rehearsal, which Nagasena solved by giving a very terse reply:

228. Pañcasatikakkhandha Vaṇṇanā; Vin. ii, p. 350.

“O King; wrong doings are the lesser rules, wrong utterances are the minor rules.”²²⁹

The most striking incident in the record of the first council is the silence of the *theras* in regard to the *Pacittiya* rule. When it was being rehearsed, as it seems, there was no question as to the definition of lesser and minor rules at all which shows that the rules in question were known to them. But the paradox is at the end of the council, when they could not even come to a decision as to the identity of those rules. However, it is noteworthy how Nagasena came out with a ready reply with a precise definition.

The Buddha’s intention was to hand over the controlling power of the *Sangha* to the *Sangha* themselves. He wanted to create an atmosphere amicable for free administration and growth of the dispensation. Therefore not only legislative but executive power as well were relegated to the *Sangha* themselves. Nevertheless, when the Buddha was alive the *Sangha* had no authority to levy disciplinary rules and in every way the Buddha was held supreme. It was the Buddha who had the authority to levy disciplinary rules when there were complaints in regard to the misconduct of individual monks. Conflicting views that could arise by the account of the *Cullavagga* and the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* could be dispelled by discerning the Buddha’s attitude towards monastic discipline.

How far is it reasonable to charge Ananda at the end of the council for not inquiring from the Buddha as to

229. Dukkaṭaṃ mahārāja khuddaka sikkhāpadaṃ dubbhāsitaṃ anukhuddaka sikkhāpadaṃ —Khuddānukhuddaka Pañha; Milinda pañho. p. 132.

what were the lesser and the minor rules? Buddhaghosa, commenting upon the incident, points out: “The import is, if the *Sangha* desires, let the *Sangha* repeal them. Why did the Buddha, without directly asking them to repeal them, use these optional terms? Because He foresaw the power of Mahakassapa. Indeed even the Buddha though enjoining the *Sangha* to repeal them after His demise realised that Mahakassapa would not do away with those rules in question. Hence the Buddha left the problem to be decided by the *Sangha*”.²³⁰ He further states that Thera Nagasena has replied in order to ensure that there should be no opportunity for opponents. Buddhaghosa therefore concludes: “This being the case Mahakassapa suggested that they should not repeal the lesser and minor rules.”²³¹ Thereupon the assembly agreed to leave them as they were. As commented upon by Buddhaghosa, what we can understand is, Ananda would not have been charged at the council for the question of lesser and minor rules.

Dhammapala in his sub-commentary, commenting upon the problem, states three opinions that could be deduced from the decision of the council:

1. There shall be monks who do not like to observe the lesser and minor rules but they will be prompted

230. Yadi icchatī samūhaneyyā’ti attho. Kasmā pana samūhanathā’ti ekam-sena avatvā vikappavacanena eva ṭhapesi’ti. Mahakassapassa ca balaṃ diṭṭhattā passati hi bhagavā samūhanathā’tipi vutte’pi samgītikāle kassapo na samūhanissati. Tasmā vikappeneva ṭhapesi. DA. i, p. 415.

231. Nāgasenatthero hi paravādino okaso mā ahoṣī’ti evamāha. Mahakassapatthero khuddānukkhuddakāpattim na samūhanissāmī’ti kammavācaṃ sāvesi. DA. i, p. 415.

to think that even though the Buddha had enjoined them to repeal them they are bound by them because of the decision of the *Sangha* at the first council.

2. The entire dispensation belongs to the monks themselves. It is clear from the fact that even though they had been allowed by the Buddha, they did not like to repeal the lesser and the minor rules.

3. The monks prefer to observe these rules even though the Buddha had asked them to do away with them. This is clear evidence to the magnanimity of the *Sangha*.²³²

Now, it is clear from the above discussion that both Buddhaghosa and Dhammapala do not in any measure level a charge against Ananda in regard to the so-called negligence shown by him in not inquiring from the Buddha as to what those rules were. If this is the case it is very difficult to justify the accusation against Ananda at the first council. Indeed, with the demise of the Buddha, the Thera Mahakassapa had to act responsibly which he did. The enthusiasm shown by him just after the cremation is commendable and he continued to put forth his effort to maintain peace and unity in the order.

After the demise of the Buddha, he had determined to convene a council in order to conserve the doctrine and discipline and hand it over to future generations undistorted and intact. A statement found in the *Digha Nikaya* could be cited in this connection, where it is stated categorically that the monks of the Buddhist order would not at any cost transgress those obligatory rules levied by the

232. DAT. p. 419.

Buddha. It runs thus: “It may happen Chunda; the wanderers teaching other views than ours may declare: the Sakyan recluses are inconsistent in the doctrine they hold. To them thus declaring this might be replied: Brother, the Exalted One who sees, Worthy, Supremely Enlightened hath taught and made known to His disciples doctrines not to be transgressed so long as life shall last. Just as a pillar of stone or iron, with base deep-planted, well fixed, unshaking, unquivering even so are those doctrines.”²³³

This clearly depicts the attitude of the *theras* in regard to the rules in question. It would actually mean that the disciples of the Buddha, unlike the disciples of Niganthanataputta do not transgress the rules laid down by the Master even under provocation.

Even though the Buddha had not appointed a successor, the solidarity seen in the community of monks after His demise was commendable. It was a matter of grave concern for those who anticipated a decline in the order with the demise of the Teacher. When this question was raised by the brahmin Vassakara, Ananda replied: “O Brahmana; rules have been levied by the Buddha, the Fully Enlightened, Omniscient and Perfect One for monks and the recitation of the same is enjoined and we who live in each locality get together and recite the rules which are obligatory. When we come across anyone who has transgressed, we deal with him in accordance with the *Dhamma*, in accordance with *Vinaya*. It is not that we deal with him, it is the law that deals with him.”²³⁴

233. D. iii, 133 ff.

The *Sangha* depend on the laity for their sustenance. The goodwill and munificence of the laity are directed towards them only when they are convinced of the piety and demeanour of *Sangha* living up to the disciplinary measures in force. Therefore the disciples who disregard the discipline and live on their own accord, will undoubtedly subject themselves to despise and scorn. Hence it is clear from Ananda's reply to Vassakara that even Ananda had the impression that the solidarity would prevail among the *Sangha* as long as the discipline stands as the guideline for them.

Nagasena, in replying to Milinda with reference to lesser and minor rules, says that the Buddha's concern was the response of the *theras* and states further: "The monks, the sons of Sakya, will observe an even extra hundred and fifty rules with the intention of getting rid of suffering. If this is the case, how could one think of repealing the already levied hundred and fifty rules?"²³⁵ When we take these into account it is extremely clear as to what the *theras* wanted to emphasise. After the recital of *Dhamma-*

234. Here Dhamma obviously includes both doctrine and discipline because, the obligations of a monk are discussed here in detail.

Atthi kho brāhmaṇa tena bhagavatā... sikkhāpadaṃ paññattaṃ pātimokkhaṃ uddiṭṭhaṃ. Te mayaṃ yāvaticā ekaṃ gamakkhettaṃ upanissāya viharāma te sabbe ekajjhaṃ sannipatitvā yassa taṃ vattati taṃ ajjhesāma; tasmin te bhaññamāne hoti bhikkhussa āpatti, hoti vītikkamo taṃ mayaṃ yathādhammaṃ yathā satthiṃ karema. Na kira no bhavanto kārenti, dhammo no kāreti'ti. M. iii, p. 7 ff.

235. Dukkhaparimuttīyā mahārāja buddhaputtā aññampi uttariṃ diyaḍḍha-sikkhāpadasataṃ gopeyyuṃ. Kiṃ pana pakati paññattaṃ sikkhāpadaṃ muñceyyun'ti —Khuddānukhuddaka Pañha, Milindapañho p. 132.

vinaya, Mahakassapa and the *theras* put off the question of lesser and minor rules as they could not come to a decision with regard to their identity. This is what we find in the *Cullavagga* account dealing with the first council held at *Rajagaha*, just three months after the demise of the Buddha. Different views have been put forward in regard to the apparent riddle of lesser and minor rules, a problem already solved by a resolution unanimously voted for, stating the intention of not repealing any of them.²³⁶ These views seem contradictory and meaningless, because one will not be able to repeal any law if he is not aware what sort of law it is. Therefore it is plausible to think that if those *theras* who participated in the council did not know what these rules were in the real sense of the phrase, they should have declared that those rules were not known to them.

The history of Buddhism in India shows that the question of lesser and minor rules subsequently contributed to the breaking away of Mahasanghikas from original *Sangha* thereby giving birth to two different sects or schools of Buddhis viz.: Theravada and Mahasanghika. Thereafter on various doctrinal issues many Buddhist sects came into being and during the time of Asoka in the 3rd century B.C. it is said that there were not less than eighteen schools.²³⁷

Had the *theras* abrogated those lesser and minor

236. This decision was taken as a procedural act.

237. Barua is of the opinion that the division of the original sangha into different sects has resulted in the doctrine flourishing in vigour and strength. Barua B.M.; Ceylon Lectures p. 229.

rules at the First Council, the question of the ten points practised by Vajjian monks would not have arisen and the *Sangha* would have remained one and the *theras* of the second council would not have taken such strict measures to prevent the practice of ten points professed by the monks of the Vajjian confederacy which had been governed by democratic principles.²³⁸ Moreover the unity of the *Sangha* would have prevailed and the history of Buddhist thought would have taken a different course.

The intention of Mahakassapa is distinctly seen in this connection. To put it in his own words: “Not to enforce new rules and not to do away with those that are in force” was the motive of Mahakassapa, to which he managed to get the consent of the other participants, too.²³⁹ He had been commended even by the Buddha for his austere life. Evidently, by the time of the Buddha’s demise, what was proper and improper for the monks and what were the obligatory rules for them had been known even to the lay followers. Negligence in this regard therefore would naturally lead to an unbecoming repercussion on the order. People would be in an uproar, that the discipline existed only as long as the funeral

238. Vide for Vajjis:

I. Rhys Davids — Cambridge History of India p. 157.

II. Majumdar R.C. — Corporate Life in Ancient India p. 208ff.

239. yadi sanghassa pattakallaṃ sangho apaññattaṃ na paññāpeyya
paññattaṃ na samucchindeyya yathā paññattesu sikkhāpadesu
samadāya saṃvatteyya. Vin. ii, p 188.

pyre was burning.²⁴⁰ Therefore it was incumbent on them to devise ways and means to win the confidence of the laity at large, for the sustenance and growth of the dispensation wholly depended upon the liberality of the lay followers.

According to Sarvastivada, Mahisasaka and Dharmaguptaka sources, Ananda reports the Buddha's request to the assembly and adds further that the ill-health of the Master prevented him getting a clarification as to the identity of the lesser and minor rules. The Mahasanghikas however state that though the Buddha had asked Ananda to remind Him of abrogating these rules before His demise Ananda had not complied with the request.²⁴¹ Although the opinions are divergent in regard to the lesser and minor rules, all these schools including Theravada are unanimous in stating that the intention of the Buddha was to do away with them if the *Sangha* desired to do so.

In this context it would be very interesting to note how the two works, the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* and the *Cullavagga*, refer to the abrogation of the lesser and minor rules. The Buddha in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* enjoined Ananda to remove or to abolish (samuhanatu = sam + ūhana + tu, from √ han to kill, imperative 3rd person singular) the rules in question if the monks so desire after His demise. But Mahakassapa as found in the *Cullavagga*

240. Sace mayam khuddānukkhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni samūhanissāma bhavissanti vattāro dhūmakālikam samaṇena gotamena sāvakanam sikkhāpadaṃ paññattam. Vin. ii, p. 288.

241. Dhirasekera Jotiya — Monastic Discipline pp. 167–8.

categorically states that they are not to break up or to extirpate (samucchindeyya = sam + ud + chid + eyya; from √ chid to cut; optative 3rd person singular) the rules already in existence.²⁴²

So his determination of keeping the rules as they were is clearly seen in his attempt at shifting the emphasis from ‘samuhanatu’ to ‘samucchindeyya’. His attitude towards the discipline is also worthy of note, for he had to bear the responsibility with none to share it all railing round him for guidance and patronage. Ultimately, at the end of the proceedings, all agreed “to establish nothing that has not been prescribed and abrogate nothing that has already been established and act in accordance with the rules of the order as now laid down.”²⁴³

Now we have come to a position where we are capable of analysing a statement which seems to be a factual interpolation, found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* referring to the enforcing of new rules for the order. The foregoing discussion would undoubtedly throw a flood of light on the matter in scrutinising new material which found its way into the *Sutta* due to a particular preventive measure taken by the redactors of the canon. The statement: “So long as the brethren shall establish nothing that has not been prescribed and abrogate nothing that has already been established” comes in an appropriate context in the *Cullavagga*, because levying new rules by the monks is a situation contemplated to have been, after

242. cf with footnote 1.

243. Paññattam na samucchindeyya.

Vin. ii, p. 288.

the demise of the Teacher. Therefore evidently, the above reference in the *Cullavagga* is befitting the context, for it was not necessary to formulate rules by the monks for the order when the Buddha was still living. But how far is the statement relevant to the narrative of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*? The commentary on the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is also not capable of dispelling our doubts arising from the context in which it occurs.

The Buddha in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* preaches seven conditions of welfare to the Licchavis of Vesali as found in the *Anguttara Nikaya*. He preached these conditions to the Licchavis when He was residing at the Sarandada Shrine in Vesali. When the brahmin Vassakara visited the Buddha at Rajagaha and intimated to the Buddha as to King Ajatasattu's intention of building a fortress in order to conquer the Vajjians, the Buddha questioned Ananda as to whether they were practising the seven conditions of welfare He had preached to them on a previous occasion. This is found in detail in the *Anguttara Nikaya*, but the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* excludes the first part of the discourse and continues the story beginning from the inquiry of the Buddha. Obviously the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is not worried about the first part of the discourse, only the appropriate portion having been quoted and inserted in it.²⁴⁴

Some ideas pertaining to the political and social philosophies of the Buddha can be seen in these seven conditions of welfare. According to *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* when

244. D. ii, p. 73 ff.

Vassakara went away, the Buddha asked Ananda to assemble all the monks residing in Rajagaha and preached to them five sets of seven conditions of welfare along with a set of six conditions. Though the first set of seven has a direct bearing on our present discussion the rest are quite out of context. Both are found in the *Anguttara Nikaya* as well.

In one of these conditions of welfare it is stated that the approval given to elderly monks, who bear the burden of the order, to perform procedural acts, result in the progress of individual monks who are still being disciplined in the Path.²⁴⁵ This indirectly suggests that there had been a considerable amount of conflicting opinions among the *Sangha* by that time, and both the conservatives and the liberal new entrants to the order were contesting each other in order to establish their own way of thinking and interpretation. Probably with the demise of the Buddha there might have been the temptation to effect internal changes to the discipline in the order. Hence it is reasonable to think that these conditions of welfare for the order must have been taken from the *Anguttara Nikaya* and included in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* by the unknown compiler of the discourse.

How did the third in the first set of seven conditions of welfare of the order, which reads: “So long as the brethren shall establish nothing that has not been already prescribed and abrogate nothing that has already been established and act in accordance with the rules of the

245. A. iv, p. 20.

order as now laid down” find a place in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*?²⁴⁶ This seems to be an anachronism. This actually is the point expressed by Mahakassapa at the end of the first council held three months after the Buddha’s demise. On the other hand it goes against the Buddha who permitted Ananda to do away with the lesser and minor rules after His demise.

Even during the life time of the Buddha the order of monks was taking a monastic turn. The early itinerant mendicant life was gradually evolving into a settled life in monasteries. King Bimbisara, with the permission of the Buddha offered Veluvana in Rajagaha to the Buddha, to be used it as a resort for the Buddha and the community of monks.²⁴⁷ Since then monasteries were built by the laity and offered to the community. Consequently life in monasteries evolved in a certain pattern and with more leisure and comfort the monks took themselves to literary and religious activities and much later in history to social activity as well. Forest dwelling though regarded as the ideal life of a monk, in the succeeding centuries it was practised less and less.²⁴⁸ Very many preferred to live in monasteries in constant association with lay followers.

There were of course some who resorted to forest life. Besides, the *theras* always encouraged the initiates to

246. D. ii, p.77.

247. Vin. i, p. 35. Thereafter a rule was passed allowing monks to accept such an ārāma.

248. cf. “the primitive principle of wandering and eremitical state of life was however never given up by the Buddhists. It remained but only in the form of an ideal” — Dutt S. The Buddha and Five after Centuries p. 67.

take up forest dwelling. Mahakassapa who had spent the greater part of his life in forests is foremost among them. The attitude to forest life is clearly seen in the sixth condition of welfare meant for monks: “So long as the brethren delighted in a life in the forest so long may the brethren may be expected not to decline but to prosper.”²⁴⁹ Moreover there was a conscious attempt on the part of the *theras* to create an atmosphere for discipline and control, for it is said in the fourth condition of welfare: “So long as the brethren honour and esteem, revere and support the elders of experience and long standing, the fathers and leaders of the order and hold it a point to listen to their words, the brethren may be expected not to decline but to prosper.”²⁵⁰

Therefore it could be surmised that the first set of seven conditions of welfare found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* meant for monks must have been modelled on the conditions preached to the Vajjians by the Buddha. Also these conditions could have been used as guidelines to overcome diverse views arising in the community. The rest of the sets of conditions could have been taken from the *Anguttara Nikaya* or from some other source unknown to us and included here to make the episode a relevant whole. It should be stated that a good number of

249. Yāvakīvañca bhikkhave bhikkhu araññakesu senāsanesu sāpekhā bhavissanti D. ii, p. 77.

250. Ko nu kho bhante hetu ko paccayo yena pubbe appatarāni eva sikkhāpadāni ahesuṃ; bahutarāya bhikkhu aññāya sanṭhahimsu... yena etarahi bahutarāni ceva sikkhāpadāni appatarā ca bhikkhu aññāya sanṭhahanti'ti Sutta 13; Kassapa Sanyutta; S.

these forty-one conditions of welfare must have been preached by the Buddha and included in the discourse in its historical development. It may be a period anterior to the first schism in the community. If they had taken them from the *Anguttara Nikaya* and interpolated them in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, one may naturally ask why those which had direct relevance to our discussion have not been taken from the *Anguttara Nikaya*; the clarification of which is to be attempted after a structural analysis of the *Anguttara Nikaya*.

The fact that the *theras* did not tolerate changes effecting the order in any way, could be seen in many instances. Mahakassapa on one occasion expressed his grave concern in regard to the bare fact that there were few who attained realisation when there were so many precepts whereas there were many who attained realisation when there were few precepts. Yet another *thera*, called Parapariya, totally condemned the behaviour of the monks saying that they were then different in conduct.²⁵¹ Therefore it was necessary to devise ways and means to make the monks live in accordance with the ancient traditions. Hence the word of the “*theras* who have experience and who are long-standing, the leaders of the order” had to be pinpointed along with the relative importance of listening to them.

The points so far discussed could be summarized

251. Aññathā lokanāthamhi
tiṭṭhante purisuttame
iriyam āsi bhikkhūnam
aññathādani dissate

—Pārāpariya Theragatha; Theragatha.

thus: There was a decision as to what the lesser and minor rules were. This decision had been taken even during the life time of the Buddha. It had been known even to Ananda. Therefore he did not think of asking the Buddha for clarification as to what was meant by the phrase "*Khuddanukkhuddaka*". Subhadda's utterance, too, could be taken as suggestive of the widespread opinion that these rules had to be done away with. The *theras* who knew what had happened to the Jain Order after the passing away of Mahavira inclined to take measures to conserve the discipline intact. Therefore, Ananda who intimated to the assembly what the Buddha had asked him, was lingering between two worlds. He was certainly facing an embarrassing situation; on the one hand his utmost respect towards the *theras* and on the other hand the responsibility arising from the permission given to him by the Buddha in regard to the rules in question tormented him. But in the end he was asked to admit an offence of wrong doing which he admitted in view of his respect towards the *theras*.

Both Nagasena and Buddhaghosa looked at the problem with the responsibility of upholding the tradition, whereas Dhammapala commented upon the phrase very freely. Conditions of welfare meant for the order also an echo of the procedure adopted at the council, must have been included in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* in order to give authority to the word of the *theras*. Nevertheless we do not know for certain whether these conditions have been taken from the *Anguttara Nikaya* or from any other source by the redactors of the canon.

Chapter 11:

Pataliputta & the Buddhist Concept of Gods

In the opening passages of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* there is an account of the building of a fortress at Pataligama together with a statement as to how the deities in thousands inhabited the plots of land there in recognition of the future greatness of the place.²⁵²

The discourse begins with the sending of the brahmin Vassakara, the chief minister, as his own emissary, to the Buddha by Ajatasattu, the son of the queen consort of the Videha clan and the King of Magadha,²⁵³ in order to get information as to what the Buddha has to say about his (Ajatasattu's) intention to destroy the Vajjians of the Licchavi confederacy. When Vassakara conveyed the resolved effort of Ajatasattu, the Buddha thereupon inquired from Ananda whether the Vajjians were practising the seven conditions of welfare preached to them by the Buddha Himself on a previous occasion.²⁵⁴ Ananda answered in the affirmative. Then the Buddha, according to the discourse, is said to have pronounced that as long as the Vajjians adhere to the seven conditions of welfare,

252. D. ii; p.72.

253. Rājā māgadho ajātasattu vedehiputto.

254. Social and political implications of these seven conditions of welfare have been quite comprehensively discussed by many scholars.

Vide: Majumdar D. R. — *Corporate Life in Ancient India* p. 535ff and Rhys Davids — *Cambridge History of India*, p. 157.

they could not decline but would prosper. Then Vasakara endorsed what the Buddha said and disclosed the King's preconceived plan of eliminating the Vajjians. Realising that they could not be defeated without diplomacy (*upalāpana*) or breaking up their alliance (*mithubheda*), took his leave and went away.

Afterwards when the Buddha was invited to the *avasathāgāra* by the villagers of Pataligama, the Buddha with His divine vision saw deities in their thousands inhabiting the plots of land there and inquired of Ananda in the morning as to who was building a fortress there. Ananda then disclosed that the ministers Sunidha and Vassakara were building a fortress for Ajatasattu, the king of Magadha, in order to keep back the Vajjians. Thereupon the Buddha is reported to have said: "They act, Ananda, as if they had consulted with the deities of Tavatimsa... and as far as Aryan people resort, as far as merchants travel, this will become the chief city, Pataliputta, a center for the inner change of all kinds of wares; but three dangers will hang over Pataliputta, that of fire, that of water, and that of dissension among friends. Wherever ground is occupied by powerful deities, they bend the hearts of the most powerful kings and ministers to building dwelling places there and deities of middling and inferior power bend in a similar way the hearts of middling and inferior kings and ministers."²⁵⁵

As revealed by these references the compiler of the

255. D. ii; pp. 87–8. This episode has not been discussed by Marasinghe in his 'Gods in Early Buddhism'.

discourse knew how the village called Pataligama was fortified to become Pataliputta in time to come. Not only that, He was aware that it would become a city of commercial importance, however the three misfortunes of fire, water and dissension would hang over it. Certainly, premonition and subsequent prediction ascribed to the Buddha could be easily set aside as a record of past events.

The text in this way provides us with information pertaining to the rise and fall of Pataliputta as well as a record of an ancient belief in gods which gained much popularity in later Buddhist thought. Here it is given intermingled in one episode.

Malalasekera maintains that the date at which Pataliputta became the capital of Magadha is uncertain.²⁵⁶ Hiuen Tsang recorded that it was Kalasoka who moved the seat of government to Pataliputta (skt: *pataliputra*).²⁵⁷ According to Fleet it was during the reign of Kalasoka that Pataliputta came to be recognised as a capital of some importance.²⁵⁸ Our discourse on the other hand speaks of Pataligama, and not of Pataliputta, which is evidence revealing the authenticity, reliability and the age of the Pali tradition. Sukumar Dutt is of the opinion that those paragraphs dealing with Pataligama are as late as the Maurya period. For he says: "From historical sources it is known that Chandragupta made it his capital in the 4th century B.C.

256. DPPN, Vol II p. 178.

257. Beal S. Records II, p. 85.

258. JRAS, 1906, p. 670.

and the prophecy about its future greatness which the legend puts here into the mouth of the Buddha serves to date the passage within the Maurya era.”²⁵⁹ It is however very difficult to understand how he could so easily dismiss the historicity of this event of shifting the capital to Pataliputta which in all probability should be accredited to Ajatasattu.

Although Ajatasattu took the initiative of founding the fortress in view of keeping back the Vajjians, certainly there is no historical evidence to show that he shifted the capital there. When the Buddha’s body was cremated it was in Rajagaha that he built pagodas enshrining the relics he received from Kusinara.²⁶⁰

Pataligama situated at the confluence of the Ganga and the Sona rivers was an important centre commercially as well as strategically. Though Ajatasattu waged war against the Vajjians in Vesali from the fortified Pataligama he may not have shifted the capital there. Udayi, the son of Ajatasattu, may have shifted the capital there as the Jains maintain.²⁶¹ The reference made to Munda in the *Anguttara Nikaya* is also to be noted in this connection, for he too is said to have lived in Pataligama.²⁶²

The kings who ascended the throne after Udayi were weak rulers. There was a succession of parricides as

259. Dutt — Buddha and Five After Centuries p. 48.

260. D. ii; p. 164.

261. DPPN Vol. II, p. 178.

262. A. iii, p. 57.

it were, and Pataliputta was subject to internal dissension. Sisunaga, who ascended the throne in the end, carried his capital to Girivraja at first then to Vesali (skt: *Vaisali*). After him it was Kalasoka who made Pataliputta his capital.

It was then that Vesali was graced by the presence of a sovereign who was a Buddhist and the sponsor of the second council which was held some hundred years after the Buddha's demise.

Pataliputta was the capital of the Magadhan empire for about seven hundred years. It could maintain that position throughout having little break of continuity during the first hundred years of its existence.²⁶³ It could be surmised therefore that the prophecy of the downfall of the capital is indicative of the reign of Sisunaga, who shifted the capital elsewhere within the first hundred years of its inception. So when all is taken into account we can quite justifiably assign the period of first hundred years after the Buddha for the origination of the Pataliputta legend found in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. During the Maurya period the fame of Pataliputta spread far and wide, but we do not know how far fire and water contributed to its downfall.²⁶⁴

Deities inhabiting the plots of land is a concept not found in any other early canonical reference. The concept, as pointed out by Rhys Davids, gave rise to 'quake science' called '*vatthuvijjā*' which Buddhaghosa explains

263. Majumdar and others — An Advanced History of India p. 61.

Raichaudhari H. C. — Political History of Ancient India 6th edn.
(see for a detailed study).

264. Rhys Davids — Buddhist India, p. 262.

in detail in the commentary.²⁶⁵ Under *Mahāsīla*, resorting to this science has been condemned by the Buddha in the *Digha Nikaya* itself.²⁶⁶ Beliefs which had prevailed in India from time immemorial seemed to have been incorporated with the development of the popular character in the religion. This process of assimilation can be seen in all world religions. It is a skilful means to popularise any belief system granting access to non-believers. When Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka the process of assimilation was at work and some of the local practices were incorporated into Buddhist practices with justifiable interpretations. When Buddhism was introduced to Tibet it is well known how Buddhism mingled with local cults and rituals, adapting the new religion to the local temperament.²⁶⁷

What is the place occupied by gods in early Buddhism? A god (*deva*) by definition is a supernatural being having a shining body. They dwell in association with earth, sky or atmosphere. The belief in gods is an ageold concept found in almost all the ancient civilisations of the world, in some form or other.

The *Rig Veda* which is the earliest Indo-Ariyan religious document, as we now have it, is full of information in regard to the belief in gods. There was polytheism, because of its peculiarity Max Muller called it (kat) henotheism,

265. DA (SHB) Vol. I; p. 373.

266. D. i, p. 18 & SBB Vol. III, Part II p. 92.

267. Sangharakshita — Survey of Buddhism p. 101.

See also 2500 Years of Buddhism p. 225.

which later gave way to monotheism and monism. Fundamental concepts found in the *Rig Veda* have been evolved in the subsequent epochs of *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* and later systematised with a theistic bias. Now the entire universe is full of deities high and low, benevolent and malevolent, compassionate and mischievous while possessing individual distinct characteristics.²⁶⁸

However two trains of thought can be distinguished from the very beginning. One began with the deification of nature and natural phenomena, finally attributing creation and sustenance to a particular creator god. In different stages many qualitative and quantitative changes took place. The other one is the attempt to trace everything to a neuter principle which later came to be recognised as *Brahman* or the universal soul. The first tendency began with the deification of not only fire, water, wind, etc. but also deifying emotions such as *sraddhā* (faith), *manyu* (anger) and natural phenomena such as thunder and dawn.²⁶⁹ The fact that it is a poor attempt in understanding nature and natural phenomena is evident from the qualitative epithets used to identify these gods and the anthropomorphism ascribed to them.

268. Vide: Macdonell A. A. — Vedic Mythology & Vedic Reader.

269. Compare with the Mara's retinue found in the Padhāna Sutta of the Sutta Nipāta, where lust, detachment to good conduct, hunger, thirst, sloth & torpor etc. have been named as the followers of the Evil One.

Kāmā te paṭhamā senā
Dutiyā arati vuccati
Tatiyā khuppipāsā ca
Catutthī taṇhā pavuccati

Pañcamī thīnamiddham te
Chaṭṭhī hiri pavuccati
Sattamī vicikicchā te
Makkho thambho te aṭṭhamī.

Nevertheless, the deification of incomprehensible natural phenomena was found to be unsatisfactory. Fire, water and wind when enraged destroy everything that people possess. The sun and the moon who wield their power from the sky are gods that can be seen with the naked eye (*pratyaksa devāh*). The practical ability as well as the extraordinary power each possesses must have been instrumental in ascribing divine qualities to natural phenomena.

But, as seen from the *Rig Veda* itself there was a growing dissatisfaction in regard to the multiplicity of deities which naturally paved the way for monotheism. Nevertheless, at the beginning there were no specific attributes as to the identity of the creator god.

As found in the *Rig Veda* it has been often pointed out that monotheism evolved out of the unification of deities of various characteristics and abilities. The god invoked for a particular sacrifice is incumbent and supreme only for that particular moment. Similarly epithets used for a particular god were used invariably for another. The god of war of the Vedic Aryans, Indra, has been extolled and worshipped, with oblations, but he was not elevated to the high position of a creator god. However the attempts at the conception of a unitary world is also seen distinctly in the *Rig Veda* itself.

Once it has been stated that Brahmanaspati, just as a smith would, forged everything²⁷⁰ and yet again that Visvakarman established all things.²⁷¹ Besides these, in another

270. RV. 10. 72, 2.

place the formation of everything has been ascribed to Purusa, the 'world person'.²⁷² In another instance, Hiranyagarbha is said to have created the world and heaven²⁷³ and likewise again Prajapati and Brahma are said to have created the world respectively.²⁷⁴ By the end of the Vedic period Prajapati came to the forefront as the father of all beings. Though he could maintain his position up to the period of *Upanishads*, Brahma who emerged in the Brahmana epoch overthrowing or absorbing all other conceptions of creation, began to enjoy a fundamental position which he has never lost in Indian theism.²⁷⁵

When Yanjavalkya was questioned by Sakalya as to the number of gods he replied that there were three thousand and six gods and when questioned further he maintained, though reluctantly, that there was only one god.²⁷⁶

It is to be realised that neither (kat) henotheism nor monotheism was a satisfactory answer to the problem of genesis. As a result there was a certain amount of scepticism among the Vedic Aryans themselves in regard to both tendencies, and they inclined to question the existence of gods. A hymn to Indra in Hota's words runs thus:

271. RV. 10. 81.

272. RV. 10. 90.

273. RV. 10. 121. I.

274. Hume R. E. *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* p. 14 ff.

275. *op. cit.*

276. *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 3. 9. I.

“Where is that ferocious one (Indra)?
They say that he is not.”²⁷⁷

On another occasion when there was doubt as to whom the hymns be chanted it is stated that Indra himself appeared before the sacrifice.²⁷⁸

The *Nāsadīya Sūkta* which is said to be the most profound hymn on creation or *Visrsti*, tells us that gods are later than creation. As gods are later than creation no one knows how creation has taken place, because there was nobody to witness how it was being created.²⁷⁹ According to the hymn there was “That One” (*tadekam*) at the beginning but neither being (*sat*) nor non-being (*asat*). K. N. Jayatillake critically examining the *Nāsadīya Sūkta* has pointed out that what the hymn has stressed is the impossibility of knowing creation.²⁸⁰

Yet in another *Sūkta* in the *Rig Veda*, dissatisfaction in regard to the multiplicity of gods has been stated thus: “Him who is the One existent, sages name variously as

277. Yasmā ꣳcchanti kuha seti ghoram
Utemahur naiso astityenem

RV. 2. 12.

278. RV. 8. 100.

279. Arvāgdevāsyā visarjanenātha
ko veda yata ābabhu va.

RV. 10. 129. I.

280. The controversial last verse of the *Nāsadīya Sūkta* is;
Iyam viśrstir yata ābabhūva
Yadi vā dadhe yadi vā na
Yo syādhakṣah parame vyomant
So amgaveda yadi vā na veda

RV. 10. 129. 7.

See K. N. Jayatilleke — Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge pp. 25–26.

Yama, Agni and Matarisvan.”²⁸¹

We know this monistic neuter principal was later developed into the theory of *Atman* by the Upanisadic seers with its microcosmic and macrocosmic aspects, thereby making a remarkable contribution to Indian philosophical thought.²⁸²

Now we have come to a position capable of investigating the concept of gods in early Buddhism. Had the Buddha accepted the Vedic gods *in toto*? Or had they been entertained in Buddhism without any modification? In this connection it is to be pointed out that some scholars seem to have thought that everything in Buddhism is derived from the *Upanishads*.

For example Chandradhar Sharma’s unwarranted superficial conclusion could be cited. He says: “The heterodox Buddhism derives its idealism, monism, absolutism, the theory of momentariness of all worldly things, theory of karma, the distinction between the empirical and absolute standpoints, and the theory that ignorance is the root cause of this cycle of birth and death and that Nirvana can be attained by right knowledge alone, from the *Upanishads*.”²⁸³ He does not subscribe to the view that some of the main *Upanishads* have been recast after the rise of Buddhism,

281. Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti
Yamamagnih mātariśvāna māhuh.

Rgveda I. 164.

282. I. Kāṭha upanisad 5 10.
II. Brhadāranyaka upanisad 2.4. 7–9, 4.4. 19–20.
III. Isa upanisad 4–5.
IV. Svetasvatara upanisad 4. 2.4.

283. Sharma Chandradhar — A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy p. 31.

because in vindication of his thesis that every branch of Indian philosophical thought sprang up from Upanisadic thought, he quotes Bloomfield and Radhakrishnan elsewhere in his work.²⁸⁴ Though they are led to these conclusions out of over enthusiasm and partiality, it is highly interesting to perceive how Buddhism maintained its identity within the framework of age-old beliefs, rites and rituals. We do not deny that the main trend of Upanisadic teaching was known to the Buddha and that Buddhism has had an impact on it. Hume has shown evidence of Buddhist influences in the *Brhadaranyaka*, *Mundaka* and *Prasna Upanishads*.²⁸⁵ Jayatilleke adds *Maitri Upanishad* also to the list.²⁸⁶ Hume asserts that it has long been suspected that the later Siva sects which recognised the *Atharvaveda* as their chief scripture were closely connected with the Buddhist sects.²⁸⁷

As shown by the foregoing discussion the belief in gods is pre-Buddhistic and it wielded a certain amount of influence on Indian Society being an integral part of Indian religions; but at the same time there was skepticism during the time of the Buddha with regard to the existence of gods. In other words doubt as to the existence of gods prevailed in the 6th Century B.C. just as much as in the Vedic period.

Sangarava as well as Vidudhabha asked the Buddha

284. Ibid p. 30.

285. Hume R. E. — The Thirteen Principal Upanishads p.6.

286. Jayatilleke K. N. — Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge pp.65–68.

287. Hume R. E. — The Thirteen Principal Upanishads p. 7.

directly whether there were gods. Vidudhabha put the question subsequent to some other questions but Sangarava came out straight without any relation to the circumstance.

In the *Kannakatthala Sutta* Vidudhabha asks the Buddha:

“Revered Sir, the Lord speaks causally, and it is in reference to cause that the Lord speaks. But Revered Sir, are there *Devas*?”

“How can you Sir, speak thus: — But Revered Sir, are there *Devas*?”

“Be it that these *Devas* Revered Sir, are returners to a state of being such or so or be it that they are not returners to a state of being such or so?”

“Sir, whatever *Devas* have been malevolent are returners to a state of being such or so, whatever *Devas* have not been malevolent are not returners to a state of being such or so.”²⁸⁸

Sangarava also puts the same question directly: “But now good Gotama are there *Devas*?”²⁸⁹

“Certainly Bharadvaja it is known to me that there are *Devas*.”

“But why do you, good Gotama, on being asked if there are *Devas* say that it is certainly known to you that there are *Devas*? Even if this is so, good Gotama, is it not vain falsehood?”

“If on being asked, Bharadvaja, ‘are there *Devas*’ one

288. M. ii, pp. 130–131.

MLS II, pp. 311–312.

289. Kim pana bhante atthi devā’ti — M. ii, p. 212.

were to say ‘there are *Devas* and certainly they are known to me’, then the conclusion to be reached by an intelligent person is indubitable, namely, that there are *Devas*.”

“But why did not the revered Gotama explain this to me at the beginning?”

“It is commonly agreed in the world Bharadvaja that there are *Devas*.”²⁹⁰

These instances are clear evidences of the Buddha’s attitude to the concept of gods. The worship of gods was not an integral part of the Buddha’s teaching, but as the Buddha said to Sangarava, their existence is a commonly agreed one.²⁹¹

With the spread of Buddhism far and wide popular characteristics gradually began to grow and as a result, Buddhism depicted in works such as *Vimanavatthu* and *Petavatthu* considerably differed from that of the *Nikaya* works. The personal characteristics of the deities in the Vedic pantheon absorbed into Buddhist myths and legends have been made ethical in accordance with the Buddhist teaching and so they have been subjected to impermanence. Thus the commonly accepted belief in gods, in Buddhism, is found in Buddhist garb. Now, they are being reborn in the circle of births and deaths just as human beings, in accordance with the merits they have accumulated.

The Vedic Indra, who drinks pots of soma, becomes a Buddhist *upasaka* (a lay devotee) always supporting the

290. M. ii, pp. 212–213.

MLS. II, pp. 401–402.

291. Ucce sammataṃ kho etaṃ Bhāradvāja lokasmiṃ yadidaṃ devā’ti

M. ii, pp. 212–3.

cause of Buddhism. Stories have been concocted to reveal meritorious deeds done in the previous lives by him resulting in his supremacy over the gods. Thus in due course the ethical basis essential for his character was supplemented with a distinctive Buddhist ethical perspective.²⁹² Though he indulges himself in sensual pleasures he looks after the virtuous lest they suffer from calamities.

Nevertheless, as a teacher the Buddha is above all of them (*satthā devamanussānam*). Brahma, because of the process of assimilation, is depicted as a pious adherent of the Buddha. He, at the beginning of the Buddha's career, invites Him to preach the doctrine:

‘There has appeared in Magadha before thee
An unclean dhamma by (mind) with stains devised.
Open this door of deathlessness; let them hear
Dhamma awakened to by the stainless one.

As on a crag on the crest of a mountain standing
A man might watch the people all around,
E'en so do thou, O Wisdom fair, ascending,
O Seer of all, the terraced heights of truth,
Look down, from grief released, upon the peoples
Sunken in grief, oppressed with birth and age.

Arise, thou here! Conqueror in battle!
Thou leader of the caravan, without a debt!
Walk in the world. Let the Blessed One
Teach dhamma; they who learn will grow.’²⁹³

292. Vide — The Place of Indra in Early Buddhism. UCR. Vol. III, No. 1 p. 41.

By this process of assimilation a psychological necessity of the followers of the new faith has been substantiated with popular beliefs which are not detrimental to the ultimate objective of realisation.

There is no place for a creator god in Buddhism. The Buddha totally rejected the theory of creation (*issaranim-māna vāda*). The position enjoyed by Brahma as creator is now no more. It is said in the *Brahmajala Sutta* that the world was created by Brahma is a wrongly conceived notion. In another occasion the Buddha says that the aspiration to unite with Brahma is an utterly futile attempt.²⁹⁴

According to the *Mulapariyaya Sutta*²⁹⁵ one who has realised the truth would not entertain any form of view relating to god or gods. On the other hand there are lists

293. Pāturahosi magadhesu pubbe
Dhammo asuddho samalehi cintito
Avāpure taṃ amatassa dvāraṃ
Sunantu dhammaṃ vimalenānu buddhaṃ

Sele, yathā pabbatamuddhani — t̥thito
Yathāpi passe janataṃ samantato
Tathūpamaṃ dhammamayaṃ sumedha
Pasādamāruyha samanta cakkhu
Sokāvatiṇṇaṃ janatamapeta soko
Avekkhassu jāti jarābhibhūtaṃ

Uṭṭhehi vīra vijita samgāma
Satthavāha aṇana vicara loke
Desassu bhagavā dhammaṃ
Aññātāro bhavissantī'ti

MLS. Vol. I, p. 212 M. i, p. 168–9.

294. D. i, p. 17.

Vide. Gunapala Dharmasiri's discussion on "God as Creator and Designer" in his thesis "A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God."

295. M. i, pp. 2–3 and M. II, p. 37 ff.

of popular gods in both the *Atanatiya*²⁹⁶ and *Mahasamaya Suttas*²⁹⁷ and very often seven kinds of gods are mentioned in the canonical works. They are:

1. *Cātummahārājika*
2. *Tāvatisa*
3. *Yāma*
4. *Tusita*
5. *Nimmānarati*
6. *Paranimmita vasavatti*
7. *Brahmakāyika*²⁹⁸

These gods belonged to the heavens indicated by their names. Besides these we come across many other different kinds of gods, namely:

- *Ābhassara*²⁹⁹
- *Khiddāpadosika*³⁰⁰
- *Gandhabbakāyika*³⁰¹
- *Cattaro Mahārājika*³⁰²
- *Bhummādeva*³⁰³

296. D. iii, p. 144 ff.

297. D. ii, p. 252 ff. See also “Gods in Early Buddhism’ p. 123 ff.

298. D. i, p. 216; A. i, p. 210. 332. S. i, p. 133; Niddesa II, p. 307; Vibhanga p. 422. Vim. A. p. 18.

299. D. i, p. 17.

300. D. i, p. 19.

301. S. iii, p. 250.

302. S. v, p. 409.

303. Peta A p. 5.

- *Manāpakāyika*³⁰⁴
- *Manopadosika*³⁰⁵
- *Valāhaka kāyika etc.*³⁰⁶

As found in early Pali works to a certain extent gods have been deprived of their “divineness” that they enjoyed as eternal beings. Now they live on merits transferred to them being subject to death. It is emphatically stated in the *Ratana Sutta* that they should protect the people who make offerings to them day and night.³⁰⁷

When Buddhism turned to be a religion, the protection of the gods was sought more and more. Thereby a worldly need of the general folk was fulfilled. Later gods are said to have dwelled in not only plots of land and houses but one’s daily occupations as well. The multiplicity of gods found in Buddhism is called a product of cultural synthesis by Marasinghe.³⁰⁸ The record in the *Mahāparinibbana Sutta* therefore could be recognised as a clear instance of accommodating a popular belief which is not contradictory to the moral path enunciated by the Buddha.

304. A. iv, p. 265.

305. D. i, p. 20.

306. It iii, p. 254.

307. Tasmā hi bhūtā nisāmetha sabbe
 Mettaṃ karotha mānusiya pajāya
 Divā ca ratto ca haranti ye baliṃ
 Tasmāhi ne rakkhatha appamattā Sutta Nipāta. Verse 225.

308. Marasinghe M. M. J. — Gods in Early Buddhism p. 99.

Chapter 12:

The Stanzas in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta

There are a number of stanzas (*gāthā.*) scattered all over the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. Some of them are comparatively old while some are of later origin. A few are introduced as the utterances of the Buddha while some others are versifications of the preceding prose passages. Yet another group of verses seems to have been taken from a floating mass of narrative ballads and embodied in the *Sutta* to make it a complete whole. Undoubtedly, these stanzas of different character and contents belonged to different epochs in the evolution of the Buddha biography.

Historically, Prince Siddattha's renunciation was a happening which created a great sensation among the people at large. He left wife and child behind abandoning royal pleasure and donned the yellow robe of a mendicant to live on what was received at another's doorstep. He went against the caste and social position of an individual highly recognised in those days and was capable enough to make an impact on society with compassion which knew no bounds. It was a selfless and impressive life devoted to the service of mankind.

Therefore from very early times, ballads of a popular character must have been composed narrating the life and deeds of the Master. The *Pabbajja*, *Padhana* and *Nalaka Suttas* in the *Sutta Nipata* are remnants of these narrative ballads and they have their counterpart in the *Akhyana* of Sanskrit literature. They have the common characteristic of alternation between dialogue and stanzas. Discussing the

structure of this kind of ballad poetry, Jayawickrama says: “The *Pabbajja Sutta* is essentially a narrative ballad, which on account of the highly interesting dialogue it contains, can be called a ‘dialogue ballad’ at the same time.”³⁰⁹

No less an authority than Winternitz remarks that they are precious remnants of the ancient sacred ballad poetry from which the later epic version of the Buddha grew in the same way as heroic poetry grew out of secular ballads or *Akhyana*.³¹⁰

Oldenberg, about a century ago, referring to the stanzas in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, said: “These very old verses which plainly and truly depict a plain situation, belong beyond all doubt to the most trustworthy reminiscences which we have of Buddha’s life. In the face of wild phantoms of later works like the *Lalitavistara* they should not be forgotten by those who are in doubt as to whether the biography before them is that of a man or of a sun-hero.”³¹¹

Therefore it is evident that there must have been ballads composed on the life of the Buddha and from them those that dealt with the last days of the Buddha’s life were incorporated into the *Sutta* in the course of its historical development. However these could be easily recognised and could be taken out without harming the narrative of the *Sutta*. In many places narration in the ballads is in the third person and, occasionally, in direct speech.³¹²

309. UCR Vol. III, p. 181.

310. Winternitz M — History of Indian Literature Vol. II, p. 96.

311. Oldenberg H — Buddha p. 200.

The English translation of Oldenberg’s Buddha first appeared in 1982.

In total there are thirty stanzas in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* and by analysing the formation, the contents and the sentiments expressed, they can be assigned to various stages of development.

At the end of the first chapter we come across the first three stanzas of the *Sutta*, said to have been uttered by the Buddha to the Magadhan ministers, Sunidha and Vassakara.

- I. Wheresoe'er the prudent man shall take up his abode,
Let him support the brethren there, good men of self-control,
- II. And give the merit of his gifts to the deities who haunt the spot.
Revered, they will revere him: honoured, they honour him again;
- III. Are gracious to him as a mother to her own, her only son.
And the man who has the grace of the gods, good fortune he beholds.³¹³

These three stanzas fit in nicely with the foregoing prose passage, nevertheless concepts which took strong footing in later popular Buddhism are quite clearly visible in them. *Dakshinā* (Skt. *dakshinā*) recommended here is of importance.

312. The last three verses of the Pabbajjā Sutta in the Sutta Nipāta, could be cited in this connection

Ujum janapado rājā himavantassa passato
Dhanaviriyena sampanno kosalesu nīketino
Ādiccanāma-gottena sākiyā nāma jātiya
Tamhākulā pabbajito'mhi rāja na kāme abhipatthayaṃ
Kamesvādīnavam disvā nekkhammaṃ datṭhu khemato
Padhānāya gamissāmi ettha me rañjati mano SN 422-4.

Here one is requested to offer to the self-controlled virtuous ones and transfer the merits thus accrued to the deities. They, in turn, just as a mother looks after her one and only son, would look after him. The term *dakkhinā* used in this connection goes back to pre-Buddhistic times. Originally, it was used to indicate the fee or the present given to the officiating priest as a reward.³¹⁴

Thus it has come to be used in Buddhist circles invariably to mean gifts to the monks. However as early as the latter part of the Buddha's life we see the shift of accent from the offering of requisites to monks to the transferring of merits thus accrued to the dead or to the deities. The *Therigatha* as well as its commentary, take it in the same sense.³¹⁵ Rhys Davids has aptly translated the word.

Therefore *dakkhinā* is a gift of charity given to the community of monks as well as the transference of merits thus accrued to the departed or to the deities. Hence Buddhaghosa says, commenting upon the word, "*Sanghassa dinne cattaro paccaye tasam gharadevatānaṃ apadiseyya*

313. English translation of the Pali verses given in the SBB Vol. III, Part II, by Rhys Davids are quoted throughout.

- I. Yasmiṃ padese kappeti vāsaṃ paṇḍita jātiyo
Sīlavantetthe bhojetvā saññate brahmacārino
 - II. Ya tattha devatā āsuṃ tasmim dakkhināmādise
Te pūjitā pujayanti mānitā mānayanti naṃ
 - III. Tato naṃ anukampenti mātāputtaṃ'va orasaṃ
Devatānu kampito poso sadā bhadraṇi passati
- D. ii, p. 88.

314. William Monier — Sanskrit — English Dictionary.

315. I. Padakkhiṇaṃ ca katvāna ādisissāmi dakkhiṇaṃ -Therigatha p. 307.
II. Pattidāna — TheriA p. 178.

pattim dadeyya.” (merits accrued by giving the four requisites to the *Sangha* would be transferred to the deities associated with the house.)³¹⁶ Towards the end of the career of the Buddha we see therefore how this religious concept was being evolved within the confines of Buddhist teaching. It was destined to play a prominent role in popular Buddhism in years to come.

However, some of the Chinese texts give different verses: *IIB* gives the same set of verses, while *IP* and *IIIN* give different sets of verses,³¹⁷ being absent in the Tibetan version as well.³¹⁸

The fourth stanza of the *Sutta* found at the conclusion of the first chapter is controversial.

It runs thus:

They who have crossed the ocean drear
 Making a solid path across the pools —
 Whilst the vain world ties its basket rafts —
 These are the wise, these are the saved indeed!³¹⁹

It has been pointed out that the stanza is older than the preceding prose passage in the *Sutta*. Pande suggested that those who misunderstood the deep meaning of the stanza have taken it to mean a miraculous crossing of the

316. DA. (SHB.) p. 374.

317. Sino — Indian Studies Vol. I Part 4 July 1945.

318. Rockhill W. W. — Life of Buddha p.128.

319. Ye taranti añṇavaṃ saraṃ
 Setuṃ katvā visajja pallalāni
 Kullaṃ hi jano pabandhati
 Tiṇṇā medhāvino janā

D. ii, p. 89.

Ganges.³²⁰ In *Udana Pali*, the stanza appears with the preceding prose passage and is taken to mean a miraculous crossing of the Ganges by the Buddha.³²¹

But, taken as an independent unit by itself, it gives a different meaning. It could just be a paean of joy uttered by the Buddha in which sense it has been explained by Dhammapala even more comprehensively than by Buddhaghosa.³²² There is definite evidence to show that the prose and the verse are of diverse origin. The stanza is not found in the Tibetan and also not in many Chinese versions. *IP* does not mention it. *IIB*, *IIIN* and *IVE* gives altogether a different verse.³²³

The fact that it has no place either in Tibetan or in Chinese versions does not necessarily mean that it is a later interpolation.

Rhys Davids, preferring to take the traditional meaning, gives an explanation of the verse and says: “That is, those who cross the ocean drear of *taṇhā* or craving avoiding by means of the dyke or causeway of the Aryan Path, pools or shallows of lust and ignorance and delusion, whilst the vain world looks for salvation from rites and ceremonies and gods.”³²⁴ He draws our attention further to the *Dhammapada* stanza No. 91 where the crossing

320. Pande G. C. Studies in the origins of Buddhism p. 102.

321. *Udana Pali* vii, i.

322. *Tiṇṇā medhavino janā taṇha saraṃ pana ariya magga samkhātaṃ setuṃ katvā nittiṇṇāti yojanā* — DT 395.

323. *SIS* Vol. I, Part 4 July 1945.

324. *SBB* Vol. III, Part II, p. 95.

over of the flood of *Samsara* to the further shore is given allegorically in contrast to the people who wander about this side of the bank.³²⁵ Taking all these into account, it could be surmised that the stanza and the passage preceding it represent two different epochs in the evolution of the *Sutta*.

Two stanzas found in the second chapter next to the stanzas quoted above remind us of the first paean of joy uttered by the Buddha just after his attainment of enlightenment at the foot of the Bodhi tree in Gaya.³²⁶ The word *bhavanetti* and *punabbhava* lead us closer to the concepts peculiar to Buddhism as found in the early teachings of the Master.³²⁷

I. By not seeing the Aryan Truths as they really are,
Long is the path that is traversed through many a birth;

325. Appakā te manussesu

Ye janā paragāmino

Athāyaṃ itarā pajā

Tīramevānudhāvati

Ye ca kho sammadakkhāte

Dhamme dhammānuvattino

Te janā pāramessanti

Maccudheyyaṃ suduttaraṃ

These are the nos. 85 and 86 in Radakrishanan's edition of the Dhammapada.

326. Anekajāti samsāraṃ — sandhāvissaṃ anibbisam

Gahakāraṃ gavesanto — dukkhājāti punappunaṃ

Gahakāraṃ ditthosi — punagehaṃ na kāhasi

Sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā — gahakūtaṃ viṣaṃkhitam

Viṣaṃkhāragataṃ cittaṃ — taṇhānaṃ khaya majjhagā Dhp 153.

327. Bhavanetti is the cause of or the leader of renewed existence (BSKT. Bhavanetri).

II. When these are grasped, the cause of rebirth is removed,
The root of sorrow uprooted, and then there is no more
birth.³²⁸

In the Buddha's first paean of joy also mentioned above similar sentiments have been expressed in metaphorical terms.

The first stanza in the third chapter runs thus:

His sum of life the sage renounced,
The cause of life immeasurable or small;
With inward joy and calm, he broke,
Like a coat of mail, his life's own cause!³²⁹

Although it is given in the third person singular, the text and the commentary take it to mean a paean of joy uttered by the Buddha.³³⁰ But as it seems, it has been taken from a floating mass of ballad poetry and embodied into the *Sutta* when the compilation of the *Sutta* was going on. The stanza and the reason for its utterance is found in the *Udana Pali*, too.³³¹ Rhys Davids remarks: "This verse is obscure and possibly corrupt."³³² The commentator, Dhammapala, has attempted to explain it very enthusiastically and that expla-

328. I. Catuṇṇaṃ ariyasaccānaṃ yathā bhūtaṃ adassanaṃ
Samsaritaṃ dīghamaddhānaṃ tāsū tāsveva jātisū

II. Tāni etāni diṭṭhāni bhavanetti samūhatā
Ucchinna mūlaṃ dukkhassa natthi dāni punabbhavo D. ii, p. 91.

329. Tulamatulaṃ ca sambhavaṃ bhava samkhāramvossajī muni
Ajjhattarato samāhito abhindi kavacamivatta sambhavaṃ D. ii, p. 107.

330. Abhītabhāvanapanatthaṃ udānaṃ udānesi'ti veditabbo. DA. p. 387.

331. Udāna Pāli VI, 1.

332. Rhys Davids — SBB Vol. III, Part II, p. 113.

nation is generally accepted by the Theravadins.³³³ Mullar and Windish agree in saying that the verse found in the *Divyavadana* with the fourth line “*ahinat koṣamivaṇḍa sambhavam*” is older than the Pali verse.³³⁴ Apparently the Pali verse is much older than the Buddhist Sanskrit one in view of the language and the concepts expressed therein. Therefore the compilers must have thought it befitting to insert it into the *Sutta*.

The three stanzas with which the third chapter has been concluded undoubtedly belonged to the oldest strata of the *Sutta*. They depict the life and career of the Buddha in simple but meaningful terms.

Free from pedagogical expressions and classifications found in the foregoing passages of the *Sutta*, here the Blessed One unfolds that He has come to the end of his earthly career and admonishes the monks to be diligent, mindful and ethical in their own interest. These verses are said to have been proclaimed by the Buddha just after the pronouncement of His decease which was to take place in three months from that day.

- I. My age is now full ripe, my life draws to its close:
I leave you, I depart, relying on myself alone!
- II. Be earnest then, O brethren, holy, full of thought!
Be steadfast in resolve! Keep watch o'er your own hearts!
- III. Who wearies not, but holds fast to this truth and law,
Shall cross this sea of life, shall make an end of grief.³³⁵

333. DAT. p. 396.

334. JA. 1918 – XI 511 – 12.

We come across the following two verses in the fourth chapter.

- I. Righteousness, earnest thought, wisdom, and freedom sublime —
These are the truths realised by Gotama, far renowned.
- II. Knowing them, he, the knower, proclaimed the truth to the brethren.
The master with eye divine, the quencher of griefs, is at peace.³³⁶

Though they are in the third person singular the commentary takes them to be of the Buddha. The word *Parinib-*

335. I. Paripakko vayo mayhaṃ
Parittaṃ mama jīvitam
Pahāya vo gamissāmi
Kataṃ me saraṇamattano

II. Appamattā satīmanto
Susīlā hotha bhikkavo
Susamāhita saṃkappā
Sacitta manurakkhatha

III. Yo imasmiṃ dhammavinaye
Appamattā vihessati
Pahāya jāti samsāraṃ
Dukkassantaṃ karissati

D. ii, p. 120.

336. I. Sīlaṃ samādhi paññā ca
Vimuttī ca anuttarā
Anubuddhā ime dhammā
Gotamena yasassinā

II. Iti buddho abhiññāya
Dhammamakkhāsi bhikkhūṇaṃ
Dukkassantakaro satthā
Cakkhumā parinibbuto

D. ii, p. 121.

buto which appears in the pali verse, is taken to mean the ‘destruction of passions’.³³⁷ In regard to the context in which they occur, evidently the interpretation is meaningful; but when taken independently they create a different atmosphere. Further, contrary to the most popular division of the three steps: *Sīla*, *Samādhi* and *Paññā*, it adds a fourth called *Vimutti*. In the *Anguttara Nikaya*³³⁸ these two verses have been quoted in reference to a teacher named Sunetta. This ancient teacher, though enjoying long life, could not overcome birth, decay and death as he was not endowed with noble morality, concentration, wisdom and liberation. These stanzas have been quoted in the *Kathavatthu* in connection with the destruction of cankers by worldings.³³⁹

The discrepancy of the context has been recognised by Rhys Davids, for he says: “The stanzas... when spoken by the Buddha of another teacher are quite appropriate. On the other hand put as the *Digha* puts them, into the mouth of the Buddha as spoken of himself, they are not in the best of taste, and sound forced.” Furthermore he pointed out conclusively, that there could be no doubt that they had applied originally to Sunetta the teacher and later to the Buddha Himself.

The following verses;

337. In order to refute Childer’s misinterpretation, Rhys Davids gives a number of Textual quotations

Vide. SBB Vol. III, Part II, p. 132.

Kilesa parinibbānena parinibbuto

DA. p. 393.

338. A. iv, p. 104.

339. Kathavatthu i — 5.

- I. When he had eaten Chunda's food,
The copper-smith's — thus have I heard —
He bore with fortitude the pain,
The sharp pain even unto death!
- II. When he had eaten, from the truffles in the food
There fell upon the teacher sickness dire,
Then after nature was relieved the Exalted One
announced and said:
'I now am going to Kusinara.'³⁴⁰

These two stanzas are said to have been kept by the *theras* of the recital.³⁴¹

- I. The pairs of robes of cloth of gold,
All burnished, Pukkusa had brought,
Clad on with them the Master then
Shone forth in colour like to gold.³⁴²

This stanza is also said to have been kept at the recital.³⁴³

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340. I. Cundassa bhattaṃ bhuñjitvā — Kammārassāti me suttaṃ
Ābādhaṃ samphusi dhīro — Pabālhaṃ māranantikaṃ
- II. Bhuttassa ca sūkaramaddavena
Byādhippabālho udapādi satthuno
Virecamāno bhagavā avoca
Gacchāmaṃ kusināraṃ nagaraṃ D. ii, p. 128.
341. Imāpana dhammasaṃgāhakaṭṭhārehi ṭhapitā gāthā'ti veditabbā
DA. p. 396.
342. Siṃgivaṇṇaṃ yugaṃ maṭṭhaṃ
Pukkuso abhihārayi
Tena acchādito satthā
Hemavaṇṇo asobhatha D. ii, p. 134.
343. Saṃgitikāle ṭhapitā DA. p. 397.

- I. The Buddha to Kakuttha's river came,
Whose clear and pleasant waters limpid flow,
He plunged beneath the stream wearied and worn,
The Buddha without equal in the world!
- II. When he had bathed and drunk, the teacher then
Crossed o'er the brethren thronging round his steps;
The Blessed Master, preaching the while the truth,
The Mighty Sage came to the Mango Grove.
- III. There spake he to the brother Chundaka: —
'Spread me the fourfold robe out as a couch.'
Urged by the Holy One, he quickly spread
The fourfold robe in order on the ground,
The Master laid him down, wearied and worn;
And there, before him, Chunda took his seat.³⁴⁴

These three stanzas are also said to have been added by the reciters.³⁴⁵

344. I. Gantvāna buddho nadiyaṃ kakutthaṃ
Acchodakaṃ sātodakaṃ vip̐pasannaṃ
Ogahi satthā akilantarūpo
Tathāgato appaṭimo ca loke

II. Nahātvā ca pivitvā cundakena satthā
Purekkhato bhikkhugaṇassa majjhe
Vattappavattā bhagava' dha dhamme
Upāgami ambhavanaṃ mahesi

III. Āmantyi cundakaṃ nāma bhikkhu
Catugguṇaṃ santhara me nipajjaṃ
So modito bhāvitattena cundo
Catugguṇaṃ santhari khippameva
Nipajji satthā akilanta rūpo
Cundo'pi tattha sammukke nisīdi.

D. ii, p. 135.

345. Imāpi gāthā samgītikāleyeva ṭhapitā

DA. p. 397.

These verses actually point to the fact that there were different ballads of popular character composed on the life and deeds of the Buddha. The verses do not furnish us with fresh information but deal with what is found in the foregoing prose passages. When the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* was being compiled, all those verses which deal with the last few days of the Master's career were inserted into the narrative.

The next stanza;

To him who gives shall virtue be increased;
 In him who curbs himself, no anger can arise;
 The righteous man casts off all evil ways,
 And by the rooting out of lust, and bitterness,
 And all infatuation, is at peace!³⁴⁶

is regarded by both the text and the commentary as a paeon of joy uttered by the Buddha Himself.

The fifth chapter has only one stanza.

But twenty-nine was I when I renounced
 The world, Subhadda, seeking after Good.
 For fifty years and one year more, Subhadda,
 Since I went out, a pilgrim have I been
 Though the wide realm of System and of Law —
 Outside of that no victory can be won!³⁴⁷

The stanza is a versification of the prose preceding it. The commentary, though, does not speak of it, yet silently

346. Dadato puññaṃ pavaḍḍhati
 Saññaṃato veraṃ na cīyati
 Kusalo pajahati pāpakam
 Rāgadosamohakkayā sa nibbuto

D. ii, p. 136.

admits it to be of the Buddha. Sometimes it may be that the prose must have been written in explanation of the stanza taken from a different source.

The four stanzas which are said to have been uttered immediately after the demise of the Buddha by Brahma Sahampati, Sakra, Anuruddha and Ananda respectively and found in the sixth chapter are quite interesting.

Brahma Sahampati:

- I. They all, all beings that have life, shall lay
Aside their complex form — that aggregation
Of mental and material qualities,
That gives them, or in heaven or on earth,
Their fleeting individuality!
E'en as the teacher — being such a one,
Unequaled among all the men that are,
Successor of the prophets of old time,
Mighty by wisdom, and in insight clear —
Hath died!

Sakka:

- II. They're transient all, each being's parts and powers,
Growth is their very nature, and decay.
They are produced, they are dissolved again:
To bring them all into subjection — that is bliss.

Thera Anuruddha:

347. Ekuna tiṃso vayasā subhadda
Yaṃ pabbajim̐ kiṃ kusalānu esi
Vassāni paññāsa samādhikāni
Yato ahaṃ pabbajito subhadda
Ñāyassa dhammassa padasavatti
Ito bahiddhā samaṇo'pi natthi

D. ii, p. 151.

- III. When he who from all craving want was free,
 Who to Nirvana's tranquil state had reached,
 When the great sage finished his span of life,
 No grasping struggle vexed that steadfast heart!
- IV. All resolute, and with unshaken mind,
 He calmly triumphed o'er the pain of death,
 E'en as a bright flame dies away, so was
 The last emancipation of his heart.

Thera Ananda:

- V. Then was there terror!
 Then stood the hair on end!
 When he endowed with every grace —
 The supreme Buddha — died!³⁴⁸

According to IIB of the Chinese translation not less than eighteen people are said to have uttered stanzas on the Buddha's demise.³⁴⁹ Rhys Davids has shown how the Chinese translation of the verse said to have been uttered by Sakka has lost its point due to the mistranslation of the clauses.³⁵⁰

Pande as well as Prazilaski regard these verses as belonging to the earliest strata of the *Sutta*.³⁵¹ In the *Maha-sudassana Sutta*³⁵² the verse of Sakka is spoken by King Maha Sudassana to his queen and the verse uttered by Ananda comes before Anuruddha's in the *Samyutta Nikaya*.³⁵³

It is rather convincing how the early compilers of the canon have selected four personalities to express their feelings just after the demise of the Blessed One. Brahma

Sahampati represents the Brahma World while Sakka, the king of Gods, the Deva Realm. Thera Anuruddha, being an Arahant, was indifferent and unmoved and says how the Sage died (*kālaṃ akari muni*) with pains subdued, triumphant and resolute. He represents the community of the monks. To Ananda who is still a trainee on the path, the

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348. I. Sabbe'va nikkhipissanti
 Bhūtā loke samussayaṃ
 Yattha etadisā satthā
 Loke appaṭipuggalo
 Tathāgato balappatto
 Sambuddho parinibbuto
- II. Aniccā vata samkhārā
 Uppāda vayadhammino
 Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti
 Tesam vūpasamo sukho
- III. Nāhu assāsa passāso
 Ṭhitacittassa tādino
 Anejo santiṃ ārabha
 Yaṃ kālaṃ akari muni
- IV. Asallīnena cittena
 Vedanaṃ ajjhavāsaya
 Pajjotasse'va nibbānaṃ
 Vimokkho cetaso ahu
- V. Tadāsi yaṃ bhimsanaṃ
 Tadāsi lomahamsanaṃ
 Sabbakāravaruṇete
 Sambuddhe parinibbuto

— D. ii, p. 157.

349. Sino – Indian Studies Vol. I Part 4 July 1945.

350. SBB III, Part II, p. 176.

351. Pande G. C. — Origins of Buddhism p. 100.

352. D. ii, p. 169.

353. S. i, p. 157 ff.

decease of the Buddha was an occasion of terror and awe which caused his hair to stand on end. He obviously represents the common run of men who have not yet destroyed their passions. Ananda was very much attached to the Buddha and hence he was greatly affected by the incident.

Prazilaski had good reasons to believe that these verses are fairly old, but their order is different, not only in the Samyutta Nikaya but also in the Chinese versions.³⁵⁴

The following two verses are ascribed to the Brahmin Drona who was entrusted to divide the remains of the Exalted One equally into eight parts.

- I. Hear, gracious sirs, one single word from me.
Forbearance was our Buddha want to teach.
Unseemly is it that over the division
Of the remains of him who was the best of beings
Strife should arise, and wounds, and war!
- II. Let us all, sirs with one accord unite
In friendly harmony to make eight portions.
Wide spread let cairns spring up in every land
That in the Light of the World mankind may trust!³⁵⁵

354. JA. 1918 T XI pp. 11–12.

355. I. Sunantu bhonto mamma eka vākyam
Amhāka buddho ahu khantivādo
Nahi sādhu yaṃ uttamapuggalassa
Sarīrabhāge siyā sampahāro

II. Sabbeva bhonto sahitā samaggā
Sammodamānā karomatṭhabhāge
Vitthāritā hontu disāsu thūpa
Bahūjanā cakkhumato pasannā

D. ii, p. 166.

The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is concluded with the following four stanzas and they are, according to Buddhaghosa, kept by the *theras* of Tambapanni (i.e. the *theras* of Sri Lanka).³⁵⁶

- I. Eight measures of relics there were of him of the far-seeing eye,
Of the best of the best of men.
In India seven are worshipped,
And one measure in Ramagama, by the kings of the serpent race.
- II. One tooth, too, is honoured in heaven, and one in Gandhara's city,
One in the Kalinga realm, and one more by the Naga race.
- III. Through their glory the bountiful earth is made bright with offering painless —
For with such are the Great Teacher's relics best honoured by those who are honoured,
- IV. By gods and by Nagas and kings, yea, thus by the noblest of humans—
Bow down with clasped hands! Hard, hard is a Buddha to meet with through hundreds of ages!³⁵⁷

Though Buddhaghosa asserted that these stanzas are of Sri Lanka origin, it is more plausible to think that they were not composed but inserted into the *Sutta* by them as they are found in the Tibetan version, too.³⁵⁸

Both Buddhaghosa and Dhammapala further say

356. Aṭṭhadonā cakkhumato sarīramti ādi gathayo pana tambapaṇṇi therehi vuttā.

DA. p. 432.

that there were some additions made to the *Sutta* even as late as the third council,³⁵⁹ which is a separate question. The stanzas that have been composed on the memorable events of the life of the Buddha must have been selected and have been inserted in the course of its development. The stanzas referred to as *Udanagatha* by the commentary also fall into this category. These stanzas of unknown authorship must have been added from time to time. These additions must have been carried on until the canon was committed to writing by the *theras* in Sri Lanka in the first century B.C.

In this way prose passages also must have been

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357. I. Aṭṭhadonaṃ cakkhumato sarīraṃ — Sattadonaṃ jambudīpe mahenti
Ekañca donaṃ purisavaruttamassa — Rāmagame nāgarājā mahe'ti
- II. Ekā hi dāṭhā tidivehi pūjitā — Ekā pana gandhāra pure mahīyati
Kalinga rañño vijite punekaṃ — Ekaṃ puna nāgarājā maheti
- III. Tasseva tejena ayaṃ vasundharā — Ayāga seṭṭhe hi maṇi alaṃkatā
Evaṃ imaṃ cakkhumato sarīraṃ — Susakkataṃ sakkata sakkatehi
- IV. Devinda nāginda narinda pūjito — Manussa seṭṭhe hi tatheva pujito
Taṃ vandatha pāñjalikā bhavitvā — Buddho have kappasatehi
dullabho D. ii, p. 167.
358. DA. p. 432.
The last verse which says that forty teeth and all hair and hair of the body (loma) were taken away by the respective deities of the world circles found in the Sinhala edition has not been translated by Rhys Davids.
- Cattāliṣa samādanta
Kesā lomā ca sabbaso
Devā harimsu ekekaṃ
Cakkavāla paramparā D. ii, p. 168.
359. Evametam bhūtapubbamti dutiya saṃgīti kārehi ṭhapitaṃ imaṃ
padaṃ maliādhātu nidhānampi tassa atthaṃ katvā tatiya saṃgīti-
kārapī ṭhapayimsu. D. A, p. 423.

interpolated. Sometimes explanatory prose passages must have been added in elucidation of the verses interpolated earlier on. Hence in the course of time, the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* grew into a veritable mosaic and the *theras* in Sri Lanka, when writing down the canon in the first century B.C., gave the final touch to conclude the canon once or for all. Possibly as we have seen, interpolations have been inserted even as it became the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* in contrast to the *Parinibbana Sutta* found in the *Samyutta Nikaya*.



Chapter 13:

Philosophical Concepts & The Path of Training

In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* there are references to some Buddhist philosophical concepts. They are scattered over the chapters II, III and IV of the *Sutta*.

When taken as a whole, some of these lists of philosophical concepts gives us the idea of interpolations free from any logical connection to the narrative of the *Sutta*. It seems that there must have been a certain amount of enthusiasm to establish the ‘way’ as practised by the *theras* by the time of the Buddha’s decease and to give authoritative renderings of the same in contrast to the numerous conceptualisations.

Two of the lists are the eight positions of mastery and the eight stages of deliverance.

They are as follows:

Eight Positions of Mastery (*Aṭṭha Abhibhāyatana*)

1. “When a man having subjectively the idea of form sees forms external to himself which are finite, and pleasant or unpleasant to the sight, and having mastered them, is conscious that he knows and sees — this is the first position of mastery.”

2. “When a man having subjectively the idea of form sees externally forms which are boundless, and pleasant or unpleasant to the sight, and having mastered them, is conscious that he knows and sees — this is the second position of mastery.”

3. “When a man without the subjective idea of form sees forms external to himself which are finite, and pleasant or unpleasant to the sight, and having mastered them, is conscious that he knows and sees — this is the third position of mastery.”

4. “When a man, without the subjective idea of form, sees externally forms external to himself which are boundless, and pleasant or unpleasant to the sight, and having mastered them, is conscious that he knows and sees — this is the fourth position of mastery.”

5. “When a man without the subjective idea of form sees externally forms external to himself that are blue, just as the flax blossom is blue, blue in colour, blue in appearance, and reflecting blue; or again, as that fine muslin of Benares, of delicate finish on both sides, is blue in colour, blue in appearance, and reflecting blue, — when a man without the subjective idea of form sees externally forms which, just in that way, are blue, blue in colour, blue in appearance, and reflecting blue, and having mastered them, is conscious that he knows and sees — this is the fifth position of mastery.”

6, 7 & 8. (The sixth, seventh, and eight positions of mastery are explained in words identical with those used to explain the fifth; save that yellow, red and white are respectively substituted throughout for blue; and the Kani-kara flower, the Bandhu-jivaka flower, and the morning star are respectively substituted for the flax blossom, as

the first of the two objects given as examples.)³⁶⁰

Eight Stages of Deliverance (*Aṭṭha Vimokkha*)

1. “A man possessed of form see forms — this is the first stage of deliverance.”
2. “Unaware of his own form, he sees forms external to himself — this is the second stage of deliverance.”
3. “With the thought ‘it is well,’ he becomes intent — this is the third stage of deliverance.”
4. “By passing quite beyond all idea of form, by putting an end to all idea of sensory impact, by paying no attention to the idea of multiformity, he, thinking ‘it is all infinite space,’ reaches (mentally) and remains in the state of mind in which the idea of the infinity of space is the only idea that is present — this is the fourth stage of deliverance.”
5. “By passing quite beyond all ideas of space being the infinite basis, he thinking ‘it is all infinite reason,’ reaches (mentally) and remains in the state of mind to which the infinity of reason is alone present — this is the fifth stage of deliverance.”
6. “By passing quite beyond the consciousness of the infinity of reason, he, thinking ‘nothing at all exists,’ reaches (mentally) and remains in the state of mind to which nothing at all is specially present — this is the sixth stage of deliverance.”

360. D. ii, p. 110 and SBB Vol. III part II p. 118.

7. “By passing quite beyond all idea of nothingness he reaches (mentally) and remains in the state of mind to which neither ideas nor the absence of ideas are specially present — this is the seventh stage of deliverance.”
8. “By passing quite beyond the stage of ‘neither ideas nor the absence of ideas’ he reaches (mentally) and remains in the state of mind in which both sensations and ideas have ceased to be — this is the eighth stage of deliverance.”³⁶¹

Rhys Davids, referring to the eight positions of mastery says: “The so-called eight Positions of Mastery are merely an expansion of the first two of the eight Stages of Deliverance and the whole argument is also expressed in another form in the passage on the nine successive ‘Cessations’.”³⁶² But it is clear that the first of the eight stages of deliverance has been split into two in the list of the eight positions of mastery and with the second and the third in the list of the eight stages of deliverance all eight positions of mastery belong to the world of forms (*rūpaloka*) whereas the eight stages of deliverance cover not only the world of forms but also the world of formlessness (*arūpaloka*). The eighth of the list speaks of the state of mind in which both sensations and ideas have ceased to be. This indeed is the stage of experiencing supreme Bliss of Emancipation in this very life. Undoubtedly, all these psychic stages were also known in early Buddhism.

361. D. ii, p. 112 and SBB Vol. III part II p. 119.

362. SBB Vol III part II p. 118 Footnote.

The ethical as well as the idealistic nature of early Buddhism could be determined by these positions or stages of mastery and deliverance. Mastery over sense faculties brings about mental culture and dispels delusion in the perceptual process. Although these lists are quite out of context, here the redactors of the *Sutta* must have thought of interpolating them in recognition of the significant place they occupy in Buddhist teaching. They have been referred to in many places of the early works of the Pali canon.³⁶³

It is said in the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* that the Buddha had mastered up to the seventh psychic stage i.e. up to the psychic stage belonging to the world of formlessness under the ascetic Alarakalama and the eighth i.e. the fourth psychic stage belonging to the world of formlessness under the ascetic Uddakaramaputta. The ninth, where the cessation of sensations and ideas exists, was discovered by the Buddha Himself by means of prolonged meditation.³⁶⁴

The list of the thirty-seven factors or the aggregates

363. References to eight positions of Mastery

D. iii, p. 260.

M. ii, p. 13.

A. i, p. 140.

A. iv, pp. 305, 348.

S. iv, p. 77 (6 positions).

References to eight stages of Deliverance.

D. ii, pp. 70, 111.

D. iii, pp. 34, 35, 230, 262, 288.

M. i, p. 196.

A. i, p. 40.

A. iv, p. 306.

364. M. i, p. 165.

of Enlightenment are mentioned only in name.³⁶⁵ As Rhys Davids points out: “This summary of the Buddha’s last address may fairly be taken as a summary of Buddhism, which thus appears to be simply a system of earnest self-culture and self-control.”³⁶⁶ Warder has treated these thirty-seven factors comprehensively, comparing them with relative Mahayana texts and Chinese translations.³⁶⁷

At the outset of his discussion, Warder says that this summary appears to have been common to all schools of Buddhism and remarks further: “Apart from the versions of the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* which gives it such prominence, we find the same list of seven topics, from the four bases of self-possession to the excellent eightfold way, in many other texts of all known schools.”³⁶⁸

The seven factors or the thirty-seven aggregates of Enlightenment are:

1. The four foundations of mindfulness (*Cattaro Satipaṭṭhānā*)
2. The fourfold great effort (*Cattaro Sammappadhānā*)
3. The four bases of psychic powers (*Cattaro Iddhipādā*)
4. The five spiritual powers (*Pañca Balāni*)
5. The five spiritual faculties (*Pañca Indriyāni*)
6. The seven factors of enlightenment (*Satta Bojjhangā*)
7. The Aryan eightfold path (*Ariyo Aṭṭhangiko Maggo*)³⁶⁹

365. D. ii, p. 120 – These are called “ Sattatiṃsati bodhi pakkhiya dhammā”

366. SBB Vol. III part II p. 129.

367. Warder A.K. — Indian Buddhism pp. 81–106.

368. op. cit. p. 81.

369. SBB Vol. III, part II p. 128.

There are of course many places where references have been made to these philosophical concepts in the early Pali *Nikaya* works.³⁷⁰

Undoubtedly, they represent the genuine teaching of the Blessed One. Warder has attempted to trace them in different Mahayana texts and identify their relationship with the original teaching as found in the Pali canon. His strenuous effort is commendable for two reasons. Firstly, he recognises the earliest strata of the canonical works and thereby indirectly establishes the 'Path' as enunciated by the Buddha. Secondly, he tries to identify the trends of development of these thoughts in subsequent Buddhist Sanskrit works.

Of course, the list is more or less like a summary of

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370. I. The four foundations of mindfulness (*Cattaro Satipatthānā*)
D. ii, 83, D. iii, 101, D. i, 56 and 339,
A. ii, 218, A. iii, 12, S. iii 96,153 etc.
- II. The four great efforts (*Cattaro Sammappadhānā*)
Vin. i, 22, D. ii, 120, M. iii, 296, M. ii, 96 etc.
- III. The four bases of psychic powers (*Cattaro Iddhipādā*)
D. ii, 213
M. i, 103, A. i, pp. 39, 297 A. ii, p. 256 A. p. iii, 82 etc.
- IV. The five spiritual powers (*Pañca Balāni*)
A. iii, p. 12, D. ii, p. 120, M. ii, p. 12 M. iii, p. 296, S. iii, 96,153,
S. iv, 366 etc.
- V. The five spiritual faculties (*Pañca Indriyāni*)
M. i, 295, S. iii, 46,225, S. iv, 168, A. ii, 151 etc.
- VI. The seven factors of enlightenment (*Satta Bhojjhangā*)
D. ii 79, 83, 120, 302, D. iii, 101, 128 M. i, 11, M. ii 12, S. i, 54,
S.v, 82, A. i, 14, A. iv, 23.
- VII. The Ariyan Eightfold Path (*Ariyo Aṭṭhangiko Maggo*)
D. i, 156, 157, 165 M. i, 118 It 18, Suttanipāta 1130.

the ethico-philosophical path proclaimed by the Buddha throughout His career of forty-five years. Subsequent to His demise, the stamp of authority was however given by the *theras* by including them in the *Sutta*.³⁷¹

Two concepts found in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* in relation to the supreme Bliss of Emancipation are *ceto-vimutti* and *paññāvimutti*.³⁷² Rhys Davids, however translates these two terms as ‘emancipation of mind’ and ‘emancipation of heart’ respectively and passes it off without any comment on his part justifying his rendering ‘heart’ for ‘*paññā*’ which obviously stands for insight or reason in the text referred to.³⁷³ The Pali-English Dictionary (P.T.S.) while translating the word *paññāvimutti* as ‘emancipation through insight’, renders *paññāvimutto* as ‘a person freed by reason’,³⁷⁴ which actually suggests the earliest meaning of the two terms found side by side in the canonical works. Horner, too, recognises that *paññāvimutta* is not ‘emanci-

371. Pande, concluding his discussion on these thirty-seven factors of Enlightenment, says, “The Bodhipakkhiya dhammas, thus, seem to form a list of lists containing qualities and practices found useful by early Buddhists. Some of these, like good conduct (*Sammāsankappo* etc.), cultivation through will (*Padhāna*, *Viriya* etc.), mindfulness (*Sati*) and concentration (*Samādhi*) were already emphasised in the earliest Gospel. It must however be remembered that the meaning of those terms, as for instance of *Sati*, was then probably simpler than in later times. The place and significance in the oldest Gospel of other qualities like *Saddha*, and of practices, like the *Iddhipadas* are not so certain.”

Studies in the Origins of Buddhism p. 526.

372. D. ii, p. 91.

373. SBB Vol. III, part II p. 98.

374. See Pali-English Dictionary P.T.S.

pation from' but 'emancipation through' and renders it as the 'person freed by means of intuitive wisdom'.³⁷⁵

The first member of the compound, *paññāvimutti*, is definitely instrumental in meaning and it comes from *paññāya*³⁷⁶ and is to be rendered as 'through' or 'by means of' which is also vindicated by the *Kitagiri Sutta* of the *Majjima Nikaya* quoted above. The *Sutta*, defining the term *paññāvimutto*, says that he is a person who has destroyed all cankers by means of insight (*Paññāyaca assa disvā āsavā parikkhīnā honti*) and consequently the total effect is the freedom from both bondages, emotional and intellectual. The two terms *cetovimutti* and *paññāvimutti* have been defined in the *Anguttara Nikaya* in a different manner, taking into account the stage of perfection indicated by the two terms, according to which *cetovimutti* is freedom from passion while *paññāvimutti* is freedom from ignorance.³⁷⁷

The commentary on the *Digha Nikaya* in elucidating the word '*paññāvimutto*' as 'one who is emancipated through insight' (*Paññāvimutto'ti paññāya vimutto*) goes on to say that a person emancipated through insight is a

375. Middle Length Sayings Vol. II, p. 152.

376. Due to haplology it becomes *paññā* just as in the case of *paṭisaṃkhāya + yoniso = paṭisaṃkhāyoniso*

377. *Rāgavirāgā cetovimutti avijjāvirāgā paññāvimutti.* A. i, p. 61.
When there is pollution through ignorance wisdom is not developed. Thus deliverance of the mind (*cetovimutti*) is due to the mind being cleansed from lust. Deliverance of wisdom (*paññāvimutti*) is due to the mind being cleansed from ignorance. Ven Piyadassi. — The Buddha's Ancient Path, p. 205.

person who has not realised the eight respective stages of deliverance but has been emancipated by the power of insight without any substratum of body and mind being left behind,³⁷⁸ according to which the *paññāvimutto* has not traversed the path of the normal course of training marked with the four psychic stages of the world of forms and the four of formlessness, but has realised the Truth and got himself emancipated then and there by his power of insight.

Ceto of the compound *cetovimutti* is *cetas* in sanskrit and is contracted to *ceto* in Pali. *Cetovimutti* is the emancipation of mind which follows the destruction of the fluxes in the mind itself. (*Āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ*).³⁷⁹

The word *cetovimutti* appears in the first sermon of the Buddha where the Buddha says that His *cetovimutti* is unshaken and that it is His last birth and there are no more births for Him. By using the word *cetovimutti* alone, total emancipation is meant in the context because wisdom and vision resulting in Enlightenment have preceded *cetovimutti*.³⁸⁰

378. Paññāvimutto'ti paññāyavimutto, aṭṭha vimokkhe asacchikatvā paññābaleneva nāmakāyassa ca rūpakāyassa ca appavattanaṃ katvā vimutto'ti attho. DA. i, p. 352.

379. Vin. i, p. 11.

cf. Cetosamatha (calmness of mind)	— Theragāthā, p. 118.
Cetosamādhi (concentration of mind)	— D. i, p. 15. D. iii, p. 30.
Cetopaṇidhi (resolution)	— Vimānavatthu p. 47.
Cetopadosa (corruption of the mind)	— A. i, p. 8.

380. Ñānaṃ ca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi. Akuppā me cetovimutti ayamantimājāti natthidāni punabbhavo'ti S. v, p. 420 ff. and see also D. i, p. 56, 167 and 251 for akuppā cetovimutti.

Evidently, the two terms separately connote the emancipation in respect of the person perfected, liberated. In the commentarial age attempts have been made to differentiate *paññāvimutti* by giving prominence to the intellectual advancement of the person who achieves liberation without being trained by the normal course of training.

The path is described as consisting of three steps: *Sīla* (morality) *Samādhi* (concentration) and *Paññā* (wisdom). This classification of gradual ascent of the training is found in numerous places in the canon.³⁸¹ Buddhaghosa, in writing his thesis *Visuddhimagga*, followed the selfsame method of classification and based his exposition on a canonical stanza to this effect.³⁸²

The *Mahāparinibbana Sutta*, too, speaks of these three steps of the Path of training summarily³⁸³ and later in the fourth chapter speaks of four steps thus including an additional one called *Vimutti* (release). It seems that the compilers of the *Sutta* tended to highlight the climax of the process of Buddhist training with Release so much so, it could be rightly remarked that the fourth step is but an elaboration of the third, *Paññā* or wisdom.

The classification of these three steps is however posterior to the first sermon of the Buddha where the

381. S. iii, p. 83, PS. I 46, A. i, 234 ND. I 39.

382. *Sīle patiṭṭhāya naro sapaññū*
Cittaṃ paññaṃ ca bhāvaye
Ātāpi nipako bhikkhu
 So imaṃ vijataye jaṭaṃ. See *Visuddhimagga*, p. 1.

383. D. ii, p. 81, D. ii, p. 122.

Noble Eightfold Path has not been classified in conformity with these gradual steps.³⁸⁴ This is because, according to the interpretation of the Noble Eightfold Path which classifies it to three steps of training, the first two belong to wisdom and the next three to morality. The last three come under concentration. According to the order of this division of the Path, *Paññā* comes first and then come *Sīla* and *Samādhi*;

1.	<i>Sammā diṭṭhi</i>	}	<i>Paññā</i>
2.	<i>Sammā samkappa</i>		
3.	<i>Sammā vācā</i>	}	<i>Sīla</i>
4.	<i>Sammā kammanta</i>		
5.	<i>Sammā ājiva</i>		
6.	<i>Sammā vāyāma</i>	}	<i>Samādhi</i>
7.	<i>Sammā sati</i>		
8.	<i>Sammā samādhi</i>		

The division of three steps in its gradual order was very popular even during the time of the Buddha and these steps have become part and parcel of the Buddha's teaching, just as much as the Noble Eightfold Path in early Buddhism.

Mrs. Rhys Davids is of the opinion that the Eightfold Path is a later systematisation. The omission of the item from the eighth *Nipata* of the *Anguttara Nikaya* and the *Sangiti Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* has been adduced in this connection.³⁸⁵ What puzzled Mrs. Rhys Davids has

384. S. v, p. 420 ff, See also D. i., p. 157.

385. Rhys Davids, Mrs. — What was the Original Gospel of Buddhism? p. 60.

been already explained by Bhikkhuni Dhammadinna in the *Culavedalla Sutta*. Visakha asks her whether the three steps are arranged in accordance with the Aryan Eightfold Path or the Aryan Eightfold Path is arranged in accordance with the three steps. Dhammadinna replies that the three steps are not arranged in accordance with Noble Eightfold Path, but that the Noble Eightfold Path is arranged in accordance with the three steps.³⁸⁶ This is certainly clear evidence to show that both classifications are genuine teachings as practised by the early disciples of the Master. Relying on Mrs. Rhys Davids' conjuncture, Pande went on to say that it is not wise to attribute the formula of the Eightfold Path to the Buddha Himself in the absence of more convincing evidence.³⁸⁷ If it is so, on the contrary, one can argue if the Noble Eightfold Path is a later systematisation as they maintain, it could have been tabularised in conformity with the three gradual steps found in the canonical works themselves!

The Buddha might have referred to the 'Path' generally without going into the description of the constituents in some instances while defining the Path as eightfold on other occasions. The problem is solved when the Path is taken as an integrated whole, not as a Path consisting of gradual ascending steps.

In many places of the *Sutta* there are references to these three steps, viz.; Morality or virtue (*Sīla*), Concentration (*Samādhi*) and Insight (*Paññā*). When the Buddha

386. M. i., p. 301.

387. Pande. G. C. — Origins of Buddhism. p. 518.

was in Rajagaha He emphasised the importance of Morality which being the basis of Buddhist training, has to be followed at the outset by a disciple.³⁸⁸

The realisation is to be achieved as a result of deliberate and gradual mental exercise. Therefore the Path is divided into three successive stages through which the individual is introduced to a graduated course of discipline in respect of his mind and body. The disciplinary training that one has to undergo in becoming a Buddhist is, therefore, called gradual discipline (*anupubba sikkhā*), gradual action (*anupubba kiriyā*) and gradual practice (*anupubba patipadā*).³⁸⁹ The onward march of the graduated course of training terminates with the acquisition of wisdom.

Further, in the discourse to Bhaddali, elucidating this course of training, the parable of the thoroughbred horse has been drawn. Addressing Bhaddali, the Exalted One says thus: “As a skilled horse-trainer, having received a skilled thoroughbred horse, first of all accustoms it to the training in respect of wearing the bit, whatever the contortions, capers and struggles while it is getting used to training it was not used to before, yet because of the continual training (*abhinha karaṇa*) gradual training (*anupubba karaṇa*), it is brought to perfection in that respect”. The Buddha goes on further to explain how the horse-trainer gets it used to further training in respect of wearing the harness, in respect of going straight on, in respect of going in a circle, in respect of its hoofs, in respect of galloping, of

388. D. ii, p. 82.

389. M. i, p 480 ff.

neighing, of royal tricks and royal acrobatic feats, in respect of matchless speed, matchless swiftness and matchless manners. The horse-trainer exerting constantly, gradually produces a horse endowed with the ten qualities worthy of a king, reckoned as an attribute of royalty.”³⁹⁰

So the physical and mental training in Buddhism is aimed at producing a man of vision, where morality plays a basic role in governing his behavioural pattern as the initial step of the graduated course of training.

In this connection the *Pahārāda Sutta* also can be cited, where eight wonderful (*acchariyā*) qualities of the ocean are compared to eight equally wonderful qualities of the dispensation. Just as the mighty ocean slopes away gradually, shelves away gradually, no abruptness like a precipice, even so in the discipline of the Dhamma, there is a gradual discipline, a gradual action, a gradual practice with no abruptness such as a penetration of gnosis.³⁹¹ The Eightfold Path and the graduated course have to be considered mutually inclusive.

When these successive stages have been cultivated, the mind is set free from the intoxication of sensuality (*kāmā-sava*), from the intoxication of becoming (*bhavāsava*), from the intoxication of wrong views (*ditṭhāsava*) and from the intoxication of ignorance (*mohāsava*).³⁹²

By these basic tenets, the ethical behaviour of the trainee is ensured while emphasising the importance of

390. M. i, p 437 ff.

391. A. iv, p. 197 ff.

392. D. ii, p.82.

ethical living for the betterment of the individual and society. In this connection, the *Sutta* gives in detail lists of the fivefold losses and fivefold gains in respect of moral behaviour.³⁹³

The place occupied by morality in early Buddhism remained intact throughout the ages and became an integral part of every form of Buddhism practised all over the world irrespective of the distinction of Theravada and Mahayana. Theravadins further magnified the importance and gave much more dignity and superiority to discipline (*Vinaya*) over Morality (*Sīla*) and pronounced that the *Vinaya* or discipline of the Buddha was the very life blood of the dispensation.³⁹⁴



393. D. ii, p.86.

394. Vinayo nāma jinasāsanassa āyu. Vin A. P. 18ff.

Chapter 14:

The Buddha in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta

The Buddha who devoted forty-five years of the best part of His life for the welfare of humanity has now reached the end of His journey. Until the last moment of His mortal existence He has followed an active daily routine and has spent every second of His life purposefully while enlightening others in matters related to this life and the next. Although now He is weak and feeble in body He is strong and efficient in mind; His self-confidence and determination is as fresh as ever. As the *Sutta* portrays Him in many an instance, the Master in His eighties is failing in physical health due to advanced age and the active life He spent touring many parts of North India while subsisting mostly on whatever food He received at peoples' doorsteps. But He is sound and stable in carrying out the mission He undertook at the age of thirty-five. Further the *Sutta* records a number of instances of His incomparable compassion which He bestowed on all generously as a Teacher par excellence by disseminating freely what He had realised at the foot of the Bodhi Tree.

When Ananda sees that the Buddha is severely ill he loses his peace of mind. As the Buddha sits down on the seat spread out under the shadow of the monastery after His recovery, Ananda says: "I have seen Lord; how the Exalted One is in health, and I have seen how the Exalted One has to suffer. And though at the sight of sickness of the Exalted One, my body became weak as a creeper, the

sense of direction lost in me, and my faculties no longer clear, yet not withstanding I took a little comfort from the thought that the Exalted One would not pass away until at least He has given some instructions touching the Order.” Herein the Buddha questions Ananda as to what the monks expect from Him and stresses the fact that the Dhamma has been preached by Him fully, without reserving anything such as the ‘teacher’s fist’ (*ācariya muṭṭhi*), and that He has made the Dhamma known to others without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric, that He has no intention of leading the Order nor does He harbour the thought that the Order is for Him.³⁹⁵

The ‘teacher’s fist’ is one of the dilemmas put forth by King Milinda to Thera Nagasena. If the Buddha said that He had no ‘teacher’s fist’, then why did He refuse to answer the ten questions put to Him by Malunkyaputta? Nagasena solves the dilemma to the utter satisfaction of the king. The Buddha is not concerned with what is not pragmatic. Therefore he had no closed fist amounting to reserving any part of the doctrine secretly to be imparted to a selected few.³⁹⁶

Therefore in this context addressing Ananda the Buddha says: “Be islands unto yourselves. Do not betake yourselves to an external refuge. Betake yourselves to the Dhamma as refuge.” One becomes the master of oneself by taking the Dhamma as the criterion of judgment.

395. D.ii, p. 99.

396. Milindapañha I, 144.

At the end of the second chapter again we find an account revealing the deteriorating physical health of the Buddha. Therein the Buddha says: “I too, O Ananda, am now grown old, and full of years, my journey is drawing to its close, I have reached my sum of days, I am turning eighty years of age; and just as a worn-out cart, Ananda, can be kept going only with the help of thongs, so, I think, the body of the *Tathagata* can only be kept going by mending it. It is only, Ananda, when the *Tathagata*, by ceasing to attend to any external object, plunges into the cessation of any separate sensation, in that mind-concentration which is concerned with no material object — it is only then that the body of the *Tathagata* is at ease.”³⁹⁷

In the third and fourth chapters, the Buddha continues His preaching tours in spite of His deteriorating physical condition. The Buddha consoles Ananda who is overwhelmed by grief over the impending decease of the Master: “Do not let yourself be troubled. Do not weep! Have I not on former occasions told you that it is the very nature of all things most near and dear unto us that we must divide ourselves from them, leave them, sever ourselves from them? How then Ananda can this be possible, that anything whatever born, brought into being, organised and containing within itself the inherent necessity of dissolution not to be dissolved? No such condition can exist. For a long time Ananda, you have been very near to me by acts of love, kindness and goodness that never varies and is

397. D. ii, p. 100.

beyond all measure. You have done merits, Ananda! Be earnest in effort and you too will soon be free from influxes.”³⁹⁸

The record of the wandering ascetic, Subhadda, found in the fifth chapter is also another instance depicting the Buddha’s great compassion as a Teacher. Subhadda, who wanted to approach the Buddha in order to get some questions settled, was obstructed by Ananda. The Buddha, overhearing the conversation between the two, asked Ananda to allow him to come as he had come not to annoy the *Tathagata* but to know the answers to some of his problems and that he would quickly understand the Buddha’s explanation.

Subhadda wanted to obtain a final word about the six heretical teachers from the Buddha. But the Buddha, instead of giving him a detailed account of their teaching, explained the special features of His teaching saying that where there is no Noble Eightfold Path there are no Stream-Winners, Once-Returners, Non-Returners and *Arahants* and so void are the systems of other teachers of true Saints. However, as long as monks live the perfect life, the world would not be bereft of *Arahants*.³⁹⁹

The Buddha had no intention to be the leader of the *Sangha* any longer nor had He any secrets undeclared. Here is a Teacher who instilled earnestness and diligence in all alike who happened to come to Him. He did not go after gain and fame. Nor did He want to create a person-

398. D, ii, p. 144.

399. D, ii, p. 151.

ality cult around Him while He was living or after His demise. As a Teacher full of compassion who changed the course of history by appealing not to dogmas and mere faith, but to the reason of each and every one irrespective of one's race, caste or social position.

While lying on the couch between the twin *sala* trees before the Great Decease, the Buddha in addressing Ananda explains how monks and nuns, male and female lay devotees should honour the *Tathagata*: “Monk or nun, male lay devotee and female lay devotee whosoever lives in accordance with the Dhamma, adheres to right conduct and practices the Dhamma — it is he who rightly honours, reveres and venerates the *Tathagata* with the worthiest homage. Therefore Ananda, you must train yourself herein that you live according to Dhamma, adhere to moral conduct and practise the Dhamma.” Herein the Buddha appeals to the disciples to honour Him by practising the Dhamma, in resorting to moral conduct and not by material offerings.⁴⁰⁰

The last meal of the Buddha has become a controversial issue. The meal of *sūkaramaddava* has been interpreted in number of ways. To our surprise *Dulva* does not mention anything about this dish. The Buddha however, reminds Ananda to dispel whatever doubt that might arise in the mind of Chunda, the smith, who may think that the Buddha might have fallen ill due to the partaking of the meal of *sūkaramaddava* prepared by him.⁴⁰¹

400. D, ii, p. 138.

401. D, ii, p.135.

According to Dulva, Chunda, the smith, placed a special bowl of food in front of the Buddha, but a cruel monk concealed it for himself. Chunda then offered the Buddha a bowl of delicious food. When the meal was over the Buddha concluded thanks — giving a few verses and suggested to Ananda to proceed toward Kusinara. Going through Pava they crossed the Hiranyavati river and entered the forest. The Buddha then expressed His willingness to take rest and asked Ananda to bring some water from the Kakuttha river.

Sukaramaddava is controversial. We do not know why it is not found in Dulva. The commentary records several different opinions about it. However, the stanza in the text which deals with sukaramaddava belongs to an earlier stratum. Undoubtedly the Buddha has partaken of sukaramaddava, we do not know for certain what it was. These are the different opinions about it

(a) Pork of a young pig (Nāti tarunassa nāti jinnassa ekajetṭhaka sūkarassa pavattamamsaṃ. Taṃ kira muduñce'va siniddhañca hoti. Taṃ paṭiyādāpetvā sādhukaṃ pacāpetvā'ti attho —Dcom)

(b) Soft rice cooked with five kinds of food obtained from cows.

(c) A chemical food prepared by Chunda in order to prevent the Buddha's demise.

(d) Bamboo shoots trampled upon by pigs (sūkarehi maddita vaṃsakalīro — Udāna Com on Udāna viii, 5)

(e) A kind of medicinal herb.

(f) A kind of truffle grown under the ground.

The first three of these are by Buddhaghosa. Dhammapala, the author of the Tika, takes it to mean 'soft pork of a wild boar' (vanavarāhassa mudumamsaṃ). According to him it is called 'maddava' because of softness and special method of cooking (Mudumamsabhāvena ca abhisamkhara-navisesena ca maddavan'ti vuttam) K. E. Neumann in his German translation of the Majjhima Nikaya quotes names of several medicinal herbs beginning with the adjective 'sūkara' from the Rajanighandu e.g. 'sūkarakaṇḍa', 'sūkariṣṭa etc.

The last one is the opinion of Rhys Davids. I hope it is worth quoting what he has to say on this issue: "Buddhists do not attach much importance to the point. They have been mostly vegetarians, and are increasingly so. But their scheme of ethics works from within; and the Buddha expressly refused, in the case of Devadatta's schism, to lay down any hard and fast rule as to abstinence from flesh as food. It is perhaps of importance that the food prepared by Chunda and eaten by the Buddha is called Bhatta (below 21). Here he refers to the phrase in the verse: "Cundassa bhattaṃ bhuñjitvā: this is not used elsewhere for meat" — Dialogues of the Buddha iii, 137 fn.

The sixth chapter begins with an instruction to the *Sangha*. The Buddha asks the monks to consider *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* as the Teacher after His demise: “It may be Ananda, that this thought may arise in some of you — the word of the Master is no more. We no longer have a Teacher — It is not thus that you should think. The Doctrine and the Discipline which I have taught you shall be your teacher when I am no longer with you.”⁴⁰²

By this time, Channa, the erstwhile companion who helped the Bodhisatta to renounce the world, had become stubborn. The Buddha had not taken any disciplinary measure against him. In consideration of the situation that may arise after Him, the Buddha asks Ananda to impose the ‘Higher Penalty’ (*Brahmadanda*) on Channa after His demise.⁴⁰³ The Buddha was mindful even to entrust the *Sangha* with the authority to decide whether the lesser and minor rules were to be repealed after Him.⁴⁰⁴

As the last moment of His mortal existence comes closer and closer the Buddha encourages the monks to get their doubts cleared, if there be any: “If you have any doubt as to the Buddha or the Dhamma or the Path or the Method, inquire freely. Do not be depressed afterwards

402. D, ii, p.154.

403. Here ‘brahma’ means ‘higher’. So the penalty is considered to be a higher penalty. According to the *Saddaniti* the word ‘brahma’ is used in five senses (i). Mahabrahma (ii). Brahmin (iii). Parents (iv). Tathagata (v). Higher. The penalty is characterised by neither speaking with nor exhorting him.

404. Ibid.

with the thought — Our Teacher was with us, but we could not bring ourselves to inquire directly from Him.” For the second and the third time the Buddha insisted that they get their doubts cleared. But nobody spoke up. For the fourth time the Buddha proposes a way of getting their doubts cleared: “It may be that you put no questions out of reverence to the Teacher. Let your questions be communicated to a friend; so that he may ask me.”

The Buddha has accomplished His mission. Nobody had any question to ask for clarification. For, even the most backward among the gathering is no longer liable to be born in a state of suffering and is assured of attaining Arahant hood.

Now the Buddha addresses the monks: “Behold now monks; I exhort you decay is inherent in all component things. Work out your salvation with diligence!”⁴⁰⁵

This was the last word of the *Tathagata*. The disciples were alert and attentive to know what the Buddha had to communicate to them at this last moment of His existence. So, as they have preserved in the discourse, the last utterance of the beloved Teacher is also a word encouraging the disciples to be diligent and work out their own salvation by themselves. It is an exhortation symbolising the forty-five years of Buddha’s service to mankind. Guidelines have been set out in the doctrine and the discipline. The world would not be bereft of *Arahants* as long as each is conscious of his own salvation.

He did not claim any connection either with Brahma

405. D, ii, p. 156.

or any other god in the Vedic pantheon. When the quest for Truth at last resulted in the dawn of Full Enlightenment He was known as 'Buddha', the epithet by which He was popularly known. Dona, a brahmin, seeing the wheel symbol in His footprint, wanted to know who He was and inquired whether He was a god or a *gandhabba* or a demon or a man. The Buddha replied that He had destroyed all defilements by which all these different kinds of beings were born and asked the brahmin to take Him to be a Buddha and compared Himself to a lotus born of mud but unsullied by muddy water; a human born in the world but not of the world.⁴⁰⁶ He never claimed that He was a Saviour or a Messiah or a Prophet or a Divine Messenger. But He in referring to His mission humbly asserted that He was only a 'Path Revealer' (*maggakkhāyin*), one who points out the way.⁴⁰⁷

When we examine these records of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* we see that the Buddha was ever vigilant in His mission even at the eleventh hour of His mortal existence. He had already completed what a compassionate Teacher should do for His disciples. Once addressing Chunda He says: "Whatever, Chunda, is to be done out of compassion by a teacher seeking the welfare of His disciples that has been done by me out of compassion for you."⁴⁰⁸ It is a sincere and unreserved regard for their well-being, governing their conduct. For, in another con-

406. A, ii, p. 35.

407. M. iii, p. 5; cf. with Maggadesaka SN. p. 84.

408. M, i, p. 46.

text the Buddha addressing the monks says: “Become heirs of the Dhamma (*dhammadāyāda*), O monks; not heirs of material things (*amisadāyāda*). I have sympathy for you — how may my disciples become heirs of the Dhamma, not heirs of material things.”⁴⁰⁹ He expected the disciples to practice the *Dhamma*, not to cheat others for profit and fame, but practice self-restraint culminating in realisation. Hence the Buddha admonishes the undesirable elements among the disciples in strong terms: “Those designing, stubborn, babbling, aggressive, insolent and uncontrolled ones are not my legitimate followers.”⁴¹⁰

The Buddha was born as a prince at Himalayan Foot Hills and renounced royal pleasure at the age of twenty-nine. After a very strenuous search for six years He attained Enlightenment, the self-illumination without any external help whatsoever. Until the last breath of His life He dedicated Himself to the noble task of enlightening others. Sir Edwin Arnold writing the introduction to his classic ‘Light of Asia’ observed three facets of the life of the Buddha blended into one and stated that “He combined the royal qualities of a prince with that of an intellect of a sage and the devotion of a martyr.”⁴¹¹ Certainly, the magnanimous character of the Buddha founded on royal birth, the perfect wisdom that He achieved as the great sage (*mahāmuni*) and the dedicated service to enlighten others, made Him supreme.

409. M, i, p. 12; A, ii, p. 24.

410. A, ii, p. 24.

411. Introduction — Light of Asia.

Appendix 1: Who is the Tathagata?

When the Buddha refers to Himself the word *Tathagata* has been used throughout in the discourses. At the same time very many scriptural references can be quoted to show that the term is an epithet or a common noun denoting not only the Buddha Gotama but previous Buddhas as well. Mahanama, the commentator of the *Paṭisambhidamagga* asserts that *Pacceka Buddhas* are also meant by the term.⁴¹² Besides, as the Buddhist ideal is symbolised in *Arahant-hood*, *Arahants* or the Perfected Ones are called *Tthagatas*. In fact, Mahanama specifically mentions it in another context of his annotations in the above mentioned commentary.⁴¹³ There is yet another meaning given by the commentators, defining the word in the four alternatives of the set of questions ‘to be set aside’. In this instance, they unitedly define the term as ‘being’ (*satta*) in accordance with the theory of no-soul (*anatta*) upheld in Buddhism.⁴¹⁴ Although some scholars have expressed their bewilderment with reference to the meaning ‘being’ given to the word by the commentators, apparently it is also one of the meanings deducible from the dialogues found in the canon.⁴¹⁵

It is conspicuous therefore that according to the

412. Tathāgato’ti sammāsambuddho, paccekabuddho’pi ettha eva saṃgahīto. — *Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā* (Sinhala Edition).

413. Tathāgato’ti satto arahā’ti eke. — *ibid* p. 311.

414. Hoti tathāgato’ti ādisu satto tathāgato’ti adhippeto.
— DA, i (Sinhala Edition) p.83.

Tathāgato’ti satto. — DA, ii (Sinhala Edition) p. 667 and above 2.

415. For example see *Rahatanvase* by Ven. Henpitagedara Gnanaseeha.

canon and the commentaries the word *Tathagata* has been used it least for four different denotations:

- A) A Buddha
- B) A *Pacceka*buddha
- C) An *Arahant*
- D) A Being

Because of the commentarial interpretations and the different implications found in the scriptural references, Western Pali scholars seem to have faced some difficulty in rendering the word in English. Although almost all of them have overlooked the meaning ‘being’ given to it, they are more or less successful in giving an overall English rendering to the word. For instance, Mrs Rhys Davids rendered it as “He who has won through to the truth”⁴¹⁶ probably taking *tatha* in the sense of truth. Miss I. B. Horner in her earlier writings translated it as ‘Veritable Truth Finder’⁴¹⁷ but later simply as ‘Truth Finder’.⁴¹⁸ F. L. Woodward has preferred to give the rendering ‘Liberated Being’.⁴¹⁹ The P.T.S. Dictionary, while considering the term is of pre-Buddhistic origin, says that it has not been found in any of the pre-Buddhistic works, but non-Buddhists at the time of the Buddha seem to have had familiarity with the implication of the term.⁴²⁰ Prof G. P.

416. Rhys Davids Mrs. — Dhammasangani Tr. 1099.

417. Horner I. B. — Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected. First published in 1936.

418. The Book of Discipline. P.T.S. First published in 1938.

419. Kindred Sayings Vol IV, p. 274.

420. Pali-English Dictionary P.T.S. 296.

Malalasekera while saying that there was probably no fixed tradition on the point says that the name could be applied to any *Arahant* and not necessarily to a Buddha.⁴²¹ Apparently all of them have tried to incorporate comfortably all the first three meanings of the term found in the canon and the commentaries but noticeably ignoring the meaning ‘being’ given to it in relation to the list of questions ‘to be set aside’. Ven Nyanatiloka rendering it as the ‘Perfect One’ elucidates the literal meaning of the word: “One who has ‘thus gone’ or ‘thus come’ and gives an overview of its usage in the canon as well as in the commentaries.⁴²² Certainly all these renderings cover many a definition given to the word.

A) A Buddha

Buddhaghosa gives two different meanings to the word in two different contexts: one is the Buddha, the other is ‘being’. No less than eight definitions have been given to attest that a *Tathagata* is none other than a Buddha.⁴²³ It should be stressed here that his definitions of the term are by no means inordinate or unwarranted, for most of them are based on canonical references. His definitions are as follows:

1. *Tathā āgato’ti tathāgato* (He who has thus come)
2. *Tathā gato’ti tathāgato* (He who has thus gone)
3. *Tatha lakkhaṇaṃ āgato’ti tathāgato* (He who has come to the characteristic of that which really is)

421. Dictionary of Pali Proper Names i, 989.

422. Buddhist Dictionary 178.

423. DA. i, p. 59–67.

4. *Tatha dhamme yathāvato abhisambuddho'ti tathāgato*
(He who has fully realised things as they really are)
5. *Tathā dassitāya tathāgato* (He who has seen things
as they really are)
6. *Tathā vāditāya tathāgato* (He who speaks as he does)
7. *Tathā kāritāya tathāgato* (He who does as he speaks)
8. *Abhibhavanatthena tathāgato* (He has overcome all)

Later, the definitions from 3 to 8 were put into mnemonic verses. The commentator, Dhammapala, gives them in the *Digha Nikaya Atthakatha Tika*.⁴²⁴

424. Pahāya kāmādimale yathā gatā
samādhi ñānehi vipassi ādayo
mahesino sakyamuni jutindharo
tathāgato tena tathāgato mato

Tathaṃ ca dhātāyatanadilakkhaṇaṃ
sabhāvasāmaññavibhāgabhedato
sayambhuñānena jino samāgato
tathāgato vuccati sakyapuṃgavo

Tathāni saccāni samanta cakkhumā
tathā idappaccayatā ca sabbaso
anaññaneyyena yato vibhāvitā
yathāvato tena jino tathāgato

Anekabhedādisu lokadhātusu
jinassa rūpāyatanādigocare
vicitta bhede tathameva dassanaṃ
tathāgato tena samanta locano

Yato ca dhammaṃ tathameva bhāsati
karoti vācaya anulomam attano
gunehi lokaṃ abhibhuyya iriyati
tathāgato ten'pi lokanāyako

Yathābhinihāram ito yathāruciṃ
pavattavācā tanucittabhāvato
yathāvidhā yena purā mahesino
tathāvidho tena jino tathāgato

—DAT, p. 141–2.

In all of these instances the term has been defined in relation to the unique qualities found in the Buddha, whereby the Buddha is recognised to be the pre-eminent and the foremost among the *Arahants*. In the foregoing definitions from 1 to 7 *tathā* or *tatha* has been taken to be the first member of the compound. *Tathā* is an indeclinable derivative while *tatha* is used in the phrase ‘*cattāri tathāni*’ to denote the objective nature of the Four Noble Truths.⁴²⁵ We find the word *tathatā* elsewhere conveying the import of objectivity in defining dependent origination together with *avitathatā* (necessity), *anaññathā* (invariability) and *idappacayatā* (conditionality).⁴²⁶ Therefore *tatha* is correspondence, coherence and correlation in relation to objective nature of truth which the Buddha has realised. The use of *tathā* in the definitions 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7 having the sense of ‘thus’ or ‘still the same’ also equally vindicated by scriptural definitions of the term. The *Anguttara Nikaya* records two discourses corroborating the Buddhaghosa’s definitions from 3 to 8.⁴²⁷

It is stated there that the Buddha knows the world (*loko*) and He is detached from it (*visaṃyutto*), knows the arising of the world and He has abandoned it (*lokasamudayo pahīno*), knows the cessation of the world and has realised it (*lokanirodho sacchikato*) and knows the path leading to the cessation of the world and has developed it (*lokanirodhagaminiṭṭipadā bhāvito*). The word the

425. ‘Cattāri tathāni’ — S.v. p. 430, 435.

426. S. ii, p. 26.

427. A. ii, p. 23, p. 24.

Buddha utters is just so and cannot be otherwise, therefore He is *Tathagata*. Just as He says, He does; just as He does He says, therefore He is ‘*Tathagata*’.⁴²⁸ And also He is the Conqueror (*abhibhū*), Unconquered (*anabhibhūto*), Omniscient (*aññadatthudasō*) and Omnipotent (*vasavatti*).⁴²⁹

The first two where the Buddha Gotama is represented as one of the Buddhas appearing in the line of previous Buddhas is also based on the Buddha’s claim that the Path declared by Him is an ancient Path and that He is a Buddha of the Buddha lineage (*Buddhavansa*).⁴³⁰ This is a fact upheld by the early disciples as well. For, elder Sarabhangā says in the *Theragāthā*: “By the very path by which Vipassī went, by the very path by which went Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandhā, Konagamāna and Kassapa by that straight path went Gotama”.⁴³¹

428. D. ii, p. 224, p. 229. The term is also applied to disciples of the Buddha:
Yathāvādi tathākari ahu buddhassa savako
acchidā maccuno jālaṃ tataṃ māyāvino dalhaṃ — Sn 357.

429. Also in the *Itivuttaka*, p. 122.

430. *Buddhavansa* is said to have been preached on the request of Sariputta by the Buddha at Nigrodharama in Kapilavatthu — *Buddhavansa* i, p. 74.

431. Yen’eva maggena gato vipassī
yen’eva maggena sikhī ca vessabhū
kakusandhakonagamāno ca kassapo
ten’eva maggena gato ca gotamo — *Theragāthā*, p. 490.

Buddhaghosa also gives a verse to this effect:

Yatheva lokamhi vipassī ādayo
sabbaññubhāvaṃ munayo idhāgatā
tathā ayaṃ sākya muni’pi āgato
tathāgato vuccati tena cakkhumā

There is yet another descriptive definition of the term which has no correspondence to the first or the second member of the compound. It is found in the *Digha Nikaya* and can be compared with the 8th of Buddhaghosa's list of definitions. Herein the *Tathagata* is defined more or less in accordance with the career of the Buddha. The Buddha is called *Tathagata* because He is:

Speaker of the hour	(<i>kālavādi</i>)
Speaker of Truth	(<i>bhūtavādi</i>)
Speaker of Good	(<i>atthavādi</i>)
Speaker of Law	(<i>dhammavādi</i>)
Speaker of Discipline	(<i>vinayavādi</i>)

with regard to everything (*dhammesu*) past, present and future.

At the first stage however the word in question has been used exclusively to denote the Buddha and the Buddhas in the past, present and future. As the Buddha also preferred to use the term while referring to Himself, the original denotation of the word *Tathagata* should have been the Buddha which is a fact vindicated by the *suttas* quoted above.⁴³²

B) A *Paccekabuddha* and

C) An *Arahant*

Later even during the time of the Buddha there was a tendency to extend the meaning of the word to denote *Arahants*, the Perfected Ones who have attained the highest

432. D. iii, p. 135.

ideal of the Buddhist religious training. This meaning is attested by the commentator Mahanama as well as by the discussions of the Buddha and the disciples found in the discourses dealing with the questions ‘to be set aside’ (*ṭhapanīya*). Although we do not come across any canonical reference to *Paccekabuddhas* as *Tathagatas*, the commentators seem to have thought that it is quite legitimate to use it even for the *Paccekabuddhas* too, as it had been already in vogue to denote *Arahants* as well.

In connection with Anuradha’s inquiry we come across two discourses dealing with a *Tathagata*. The two slightly differ from each other in regard to the explanation given. However according to both, when once Anuradha was staying in a forest hut near Vesali, a group of heretical wanderers visited him and posed the four alternative questions pertaining to the existence of a *Tathagata* after death:

1. Does a *Tathagata* exist after death?
2. Does a *Tathagata* not exist after death?
3. Does a *Tathagata* exist and not exist after death?
4. Does a *Tathagata* neither exist nor not exist after death?

Anuradha replied that a *Tathagata* is spoken of in other than those four ways. Being dissatisfied with his answer they, saying either he must be a novice not long ordained or if he was an elder he must be an ignorant fool, went away. Anuradha being hurt wanted to know the answers to these questions in accordance with the Buddha’s teach-

ing so that he might answer without misrepresenting the Buddha.

In this instance the Buddha explains *Tathagata* in relation to impermanence of the five aggregates of a *Tathagata* and bases the argument on non-substantiality just as we find in the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*. The well-taught *Aryan* disciple feels aversion to these five aggregates and at last attaining realisation he comes to know: “Ended is birth, lived is the holy life, done is the task, for life in such conditions there is no hereafter.”

Now the Buddha puts a set of counter questions to Anuradha and asks him as to who is a *Tathagata* in actuality; whether he could be identified with any constituent of the five aggregates. Anuradha replies in the negative. Then the Buddha establishes: “Since in just this life a *Tathagata* is not met within truth, in reality how do you define Him after His death in any of these four alternatives; after His death He is proclaimed other than in these four ways.”⁴³³

In a discussion between elder Sariputta and elder Kotthita the elder Sariputta says that these questions are based on the wrong identification of a *Tathagata* with the each constituent of the five aggregates.⁴³⁴ The same explanation is given in several *suttas* in different phraseology.⁴³⁵ The elder Kotthita in another instance asserts categorically that by the destruction of craving there is nothing more left to point to as a continuance (into the

433. S. iv, p. 377.

434. S, iv, p. 386.

435. S. iv, p. 391 and p. 395.

next life).⁴³⁶ The elder Moggallana replying to Vaccha says that those questions are asked because of taking the five sense faculties as one's own.⁴³⁷

The conversation between the Buddha and Vaccha throws much light on the problem. Vaccha says that Purana Kassapa and other teachers, when speaking of a disciple who had passed away, describe him in terms of rebirth: so and so is reborn thus and thus. With regard to a disciple, a superman who has won the highest they say so and so is also reborn thus and thus. Hence he wanted to know the destiny of the person who has realised the Buddhist ideal. The Buddha's reply reveals the doctrinal position clearly: "Just as, Vaccha, a fire with fuel blazes up, but not without fuel; even so, Vaccha, do I declare rebirth to be for what has fuel, not for what is without fuel."⁴³⁸ When Vaccha questions the Buddha to know the difference between the fuel of a flame which was being flung a long way by the wind and the fuel of a person who was born again the Buddha explained that in the former case the wind was the fuel and in the latter, craving. Vaccha was thoroughly convinced and said that the explanation of the Master and the disciple (*Moggallana*) were identically same in both letter and spirit.⁴³⁹

436. *Tanhāsaṃkhaya vimuttassa āvuso sārīputta bhikkhuno vaḍḍhiṃ natthi paññāpanāya* — S. iv, p. 391.

437. S. iv, p. 395.

438. *Seyyathā'pi vaccha, aggi saupādāno jalati no anupādāno, evam'eva khvāhaṃ vaccha, saupādānassa upapattiṃ paññāpemi no anupādānassa* — S. iv, p. 399.

439. *ibid.*

The elder Sabhiya Kaccana elucidates the four alternatives to Vaccha exactly in the same way: “As to the reason and grounds for describing him as embodied or disembodied, as conscious or unconscious, as neither conscious or nor non-conscious, how can he be so defined as such reasons and grounds have ceased entirely, wholly and utterly in every way?”⁴⁴⁰

The *Avyakata Samyutta* gives a quite number of *suttas* dealing with the problem of a *Tathagata* which has puzzled many a truth seeker at the time. It seems that most of them are interested in finding out what the Buddha has not preached rather than what He had preached. In a lively discussion between Sister Khema and King Pasenadi Kosala she says that a *Tathagata* could not be named after his bodily form, feeling, perception, mental activities and consciousness, because those five constituent factors of an individual “are abandoned, cut down at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, made into something that is not of a nature to spring up again in the future” by the *Tathagata*.⁴⁴¹ He is “deep, boundless, unfathomable, just like the mighty ocean”.⁴⁴² She emphasises what she says drawing a simile of an accountant who is not capable of reckoning the amount of water in the mighty ocean and grains of sand in the river Ganges. She stresses the fact that the *Tathagata* is indefinable by any of the four alternatives.

440. S. iv, p. 402.

441. S. iv, p. 376.

442. Gambhīro appameyyo duppariyogāho seyyathā’pi mahāsamuddo — S. iv, p. 377.

In the *Majjhima Nikaya* the Buddha expresses the same, asserting that a *Tathagata* is untraceable after death (*ananuvejja*).⁴⁴³

Perhaps the destiny of the Perfected One after his death is more explicitly illustrated in the answer to Upasiva's questions in the *Suttanipata*. Upasiva wanted to know that "he who has gone out does he not exist or (does he remain) in a state of perpetual well-being".

*Atthaṃgato so uda vā natthi
udāhu ve sassatiyā arogo — Sn 1075*

Then the Buddha says: "There is no measuring of one who has gone out Upasiva. That no longer exists for him by which they might speak of him. When all phenomena have been removed, then all ways of speaking are also removed."

*Atthaṃgatassa na pamānam atthi
upasivā'ti bhagavā
yena naṃ vajju taṃ tassa natthi
sabbesu dhammesu samūhatesu
samūhatā vādapathā'pi sabbe — Sn 1076*

D) A Being

According to the commentators the term '*Tathagata*' in the context of the four alternative questions means 'being' (*satta*).⁴⁴⁴ They seem to have maintained that those ques-

443. M. i, p. 140.

444. See above footnotes 2 and 3.

tions have been asked either due to eternalist or nihilist or sceptic points of view.⁴⁴⁵ As Buddhism classifies an individual into ever-changing five aggregates, in the ultimate sense there is no individual other than a mere designation. Therefore an individual reborn is neither the same nor another as Nagasena explained to King Milinda in the *Milindapanha*.⁴⁴⁶ The commentators seem to have avoided unnecessary philosophical complications by defining the word in the context as ‘being’. Even in the reply given to Anuradha by the Buddha, one can quite conveniently deduce the allusion to being for, *Tathagata* is nothing but a conglomeration of five physical and psychical factors just as much as a being is.⁴⁴⁷ In truth and in reality (*saccato thetato*) a *Tathagata* is not found even when he is existing, which is quite applicable to any individual in spite of the attainment of *Arahanthood*. Therefore the commentators seem to have had maintained an old tradition without committing themselves to either eternalism or nihilism or scepticism.

[‘PDFmaker’ comment: part of text from the original book missing here from this page] ...come from there.

445. Hoti tathāgato’ti ādisu satto tathāgato nāma. So parammaranā hotī’ti gaṇhato paṭhamā sassatadiṭṭhi, na hotī’ti gaṇhato dutiyā ucchedadiṭṭhi. Hoti ca no hotī’ti gaṇhato tatiyā ekacca sassatadiṭṭhi. Neva hoti na hotī’ti gaṇhato catutthā vikkhepadiṭṭhi — Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā (Sinhala Edition) p. 270.

446. Milindapañha I, p. 40.

447. Ettha te anurādha diṭṭhe’va dhamme saccato thetato tathāgato anupalabbhiyamāne kallaṃ nu tam vyākaraṇaṃ... tathāgato aññatra imehi catuhi ṭhānehi paññāpayamāno paññāpetī’ti — S. iv, p. 377.

Without permission he has gone. He has gone as he had come. This being the case why there be wailing?”⁴⁴⁸

So in the highest sense the being that is reborn is neither the same nor another. There is no continuity of the identity of any being. It is difficult to give a categorical reply to the propositions involved in the four alternatives without analysing the conceptual frame of the propositions to remove the ambiguity implied. It is probably on these grounds, in the opinion of the commentators, that the Buddha maintained silence in regard to the destiny of a *Tathagata* after death.



448. Anabbhito tato āga-ananuññāto ito gato
yathāgato tathā gato-kā tattha paridevanā? — Therigatha, p. 129.

Appendix 2: Omissions & Additions in the Tibetan Recension

W.W. Rockhill has based the last days of the Buddha's career in his *Life of Buddha* on *Dulva* xif 535b–625B. In many places the text varies with the Pali version in respect of the subject and the context. Those differences are listed below. Numbers refer to the chapter and the section of the Pali text.

I. 6

In connection with this incident, as given in the Tibetan, the Buddha tells Vassakara that once the Vajjians were not on good terms and there was dissension among them and so the Buddha preached the Seven Conditions of Welfare for their unity. Then Vassakara begs the Buddha to explain those conditions to him. LB 123–4

I. 11

According to Rockhill, except 5 and 7 of the first group of seven, all other conditions are identically the same in the Tibetan version. LB 126

I. 13

While at Ambalattika, the Buddha preaches the Four Noble Truths and proceeds directly to Pataligama. LB 126

1. 34

Neither the two stanzas addressed to Sunidha and Vassakara nor the last verse are to be found. LB 127

II. 4

Proceeding to the Simsapa Grove, the Buddha preaches the benefits of Morality, Concentration and Wisdom to the monks. LB 128

II. 13

The entire section is not found in the Tibetan. When the Buddha sees Ambapali approaching, He advises the monks to be mindful. LB 129

II. 14

The Buddha's sojourn at Ambapali's Mango Grove is not to be found. LB 129

II. 19

The incident of Ambapali's encounter with the Licchavis is not to be found. When the Licchavis were about to leave, a Brahmin youth called Kapila approached and praised the Buddha in three verses. Being pleased, the Licchavis presented their upper garments to the youth. LB 129–30

II. 19

The offering of Ambapali's monastery to the Buddha and the Sangha is not mentioned. LB 130

II. 22

The Buddha says this as there was a famine in Vesali. LB 130

II. 24

Not found in the Tibetan version.

III. 9

The entire section is not found in the Tibetan. Only three reasons for an earthquake are given. LB 132–33

IV. 1, 2, 3

Not to be found. When the Buddha visits the village of the Earth, Chunda Kamaraputta also comes to listen to the Buddha.

IV. 11

Dulva does not mention the four *Mahapadesas*.

IV. 18

No references to *Sukaramaddava*.

IV. 24

On the request of Ananda, the Buddha does not drink but only washes His body with the water from the Kakuttha river. LB 134

V. 3

Having taken a bath at Hiranyavati, the Buddha rests awhile, and later advises the monks to live in accordance with the *Dhamma*, *Vinaya* and *Matika*. It does not mention the incident that *sala* trees were in bloom out of season. LB 135

V. 6

Upavana's episode comes after the story of Mahasudassana.

V. 7, 8, 9

Not found in the Tibetan version.

V. 12

This story also comes after the story of Mahasudassana. It says that the funeral pyre of a Universal Monarch must be extinguished with milk. Besides, it mentions only a Buddha and a Universal Monarch as worthy of monuments. LB 137

V. 15, 16, 17

Not found in the Tibetan version.

V. 18

Upavana's episode comes after this.

V. 30

Subhadda passes away before the Buddha by performing numerous miracles and converting 500 Mallas. The Buddha relates a Jataka and another story and grants permission to ordain Sakyans without the probationary period, then relates the twelve limbs of the doctrine. 1. *Sutra* 2. *Geyya* 3. *Vyakarana* 4. *Gatha* 5. *Udana* 6. *Nidana* 7. *Avadana* 8. *Itivrttaka* 9. *Jataka* 10. *Vaipulya* 11. *Adbhutadharmas* 12. *Upadesa*

(Rockhill says that this portion is an interpolation)

Then the Buddha advises the monks to codify the minor precepts and minor matters. Afterwards, the Buddha shows his body to the monks saying that the opportunity to see the body of a Buddha is extremely rare. LB 138–40

VI. 12

Before Ananda's departure a special precaution has been taken to inform King Ajatasattu of the Buddha's passing away, on the instructions of Thera Mahakassapa.

VI. 21

The Tibetan version deviates from the theme of the Pali version.

VI. 23

The Mallas extinguish the pyre with milk.

Appendix 3: Subjects discussed in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta

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<i>Sīlaṃ saṃādhiṃ paññā ca</i>	D. II. 123
<i>Siṃgī Vaṇṇaṃ yugaṃ maṭṭhaṃ</i>	D. II. 134
<i>Sunantu bhonto mama eka-vākyam</i>	D. II. 166
<i>Tadāsi yaṃ bhiṃsanakaṃ</i>	D. II. 157
<i>Tāni-etāni diṭṭhāni</i>	D. II. 91
<i>Tasseva tejena ayaṃ vasundharā</i>	D. II. 167
<i>Tato naṃ anukampenti</i>	D. II. 89
<i>Tulamatulamaṃ ca sambhavaṃ</i>	D. II. 107
<i>Yasmiṃ padese kappeti</i>	D. II. 89
<i>Ye tattha devatā āsum</i>	D. II. 89
<i>Ye taranti aṇṇavaṃ saraṃ</i>	D. II. 89
<i>Yo imasmiṃ dhammavinaye</i>	D. II. 120

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Appendix 6: Abbreviations

- A. *Aṅguttara Nikāya*
- AA. *Aṅguttara Nikāya*
Atthakathā, i.e.
Manotathapūranī
- D. *Dīgha Nikāya*
- DA. *Dīgha Nikāya Atthakathā, i.e. Summangalavilāsinī*
- Dhp. *Dhammapada*
- DAT *Dīgha Nikāya Atthakathā Tīkā*
- DPPN. Dictionary of Pali Proper Names
- Dv. *Dīpavaṃsa*
- ERE. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics
- GS. The Book of the Gradual Sayings, V.
Aṅguttara Nikāya

- GSAI. Giornale della societa Asiatica Italiana
- IHQ. Indian Historical Quarterly
- It. *Itivuttaka*
- J. *Jātaka*
- JA. Journal Asiatique
- JPTS. Journal of the Pali Text Society
- JRAS. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
- KS. The Book of the Kindred Sayings, V.
Samyutta Nikāya
- Kvu. *Kathāvatthu*
- Kvua. *Kathāvatthuppakaranatṭhakathā*
- M. *Majjhima Nikāya*
- MPS. *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta or Suttanta*
- MA. *Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā,*
i.e. Panpañcasūdanī
- MLS. Middle Length sayings,
Majjhima Nikāya
- MV. *Mahāvamsa*
- Nd. I. *Mahāniddeśa*
- Nd.II. *Cullaniddeśa*
- OUP. Oxford University Press
- PLL. Pali Literature and Language

PTS.	Pali Text Society
PVS.	<i>Petavatthu Atthakathā</i> , i.e. <i>Paramatthadīpanī</i>
S.	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
SA.	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i> <i>Aṭṭhakathā</i> , i.e. <i>Saratthappakāsinī</i>
SBB.	Sacred Books of the Buddhists
SBE.	Sacred Books of the East
SHB.	Simon Hewavitarne Bequest
Sn,	<i>Suttanipāta</i>
Sna.	<i>Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā</i> i.e. <i>Paramatthajotikā II</i>
SS.	Sino – Indian studies
Th. I	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Th. II	<i>Theragāthā</i>
UCR.	University of Ceylon Review
Ud.	<i>Udāna</i>
UdA,	<i>Udāna Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Vbh.	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
VbhA.	<i>Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā</i> i.e. <i>Sammohavinodanī</i>
Vin.	<i>Vinaya</i>
VinA.	<i>Vinaya Aṭṭhakathā</i> i.e. <i>Samantapāsādikā</i>