

Theravāda and Monk's Duties in Contemporary Theravāda Countries

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Abstract

Buddhism is one of the world's religious conviction accepting in the universe today. It is founded by Gautama Buddha over 2,500 years ago. Buddhism spread out of India after the 3rd century B.C with the help of Emperor Asoka and it's originated in Indian. Theravāda is the dominant most of southeast Asia. It's also one of the two primary schools of Buddhism; the other is called Mahāyāna. Someone will tell you there are three primary schools, and the third is Vajrayāna. But all schools of Vajrayana are built upon Mahāyāna philosophy and call themselves Mahāyāna, also. Theravāda makes two historical claims for itself. One is that it is the oldest form of Buddhism being practiced today and the other is that it is directly descended from the original Samgha - the Buddha's own disciples - and Mahāyāna is not. For the disciple of Buddha, specially monkhood, is had two kind of duties called learning and practicing to attain final goal (Nibbāna).

This paper will approach three stapes of study: the first is introduction with the situation of three kind of Buddhist school population, the second is definition of Theravāda and the third is will examining to the duties and obligation of monkhood with the special reference pāli texts.

KEYWORDS: Buddhist Population, Theravāda, Nine missions, Buddhist councils, Two kinds of monk's duties.

Introduction

Buddhism is deeply influenced the character and evolution of Asian civilization. It is based on the teachings of the Buddha, who lived around the fifth century B.C.E. In present-day the number of Buddhists populations is around as follows: in Theravāda, 150 million; Mahāyāna, approximately 360 million; and in Vajrayāna, 18 million. In this Buddhists population about 7 million Buddhists are outside of Asia. This gives an overall total of around 535 million Buddhists. (Common Buddhist text: guidance and insight from the Buddha, p.11)



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Mahāyāna Buddhism is generally regarded as one of the largest schools of Buddhism. Of all the Buddhists in the world, approximately 53.2% identify as practitioners of the Mahāyāna tradition in the south-eastern, southern, and eastern regions of Asia. Neither researchers nor Mahāyāna followers agree on the origins of this sect of Buddhism. Instead, these individuals suggest that Mahāyāna offered an additional ideological focus to the earliest Buddhist teachings. Additionally, researchers are unable to find a difference in the scripture or written guidelines between Mahayana and the earlier divisions of Buddhism. This particular sect of Buddhism has gone on to influence a number of other Buddhist groups, including Korean Seon, Nichiren Buddhism, Japanese Zen, and Chan Buddhism.

Vajrayāna Buddhism, also known as Esoteric Buddhism, is sometimes classified as a variation of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Many scholars, however, consider it an independent branch of the Buddhist faith. This sect can primarily be found in Bhutan, Mongolia, Tibet, and the Kalmykia region of Russia.

The original sect of Theravāda Buddhism has more than 150 million practitioners, also known as Theravadins, around the world. Nowadays, the Majority-Theravāda countries include Cambodia (95% of the population), Thailand (90%), Myanmar (89%), Sri Lanka (70%), and Laos (67%).

What is Theravāda?

In this previous effort, the word Theravāda is a compound of two members; Thera and Vāda; Thera means “elder”, especially “an elderly Buddhist monk”; here it stands for the inflected form Theranaṃ “of the Elders”; the second member Vāda coming from the root vad, “to speak” signifies “speech”, “talk”, “word”, “doctrine” or even “ism”. The word Theravāda is frequently translated into English as “the Doctrine of the Elders” or “the isms of Theras”. (Therīgāthā Aṭṭhakathā, p. 6)

The word ‘thera’ indicates something that is foremost, that is stable or firm. What is foremost or stable, according to the commentary of Theragāthā, are morality (sīla),

concentration (samādhi) and wisdom (pañña). Those who are endowed with these foremost or firm qualities are called Thera. (TheragathaAṭṭhakathā, p. 6)

According to the definition “TherānaṃvādoTheravāda”, Theravada means the teaching of the Theras. Theravada is believed to be the doctrine of Lord Buddha. The Buddha had established the foundation of the Theravada in Mahāparinibbāna Sutta,(MahavaggaPali, p.62) the Buddha preaches as follows;

1. Monks should not preach the Dhamma which Buddha has never preached (Apaññattaṃnapaññapenti).
2. Monks should not dismiss the Dhamma which the Buddha preached (Paññattaṃnasamucchindanti).
3. As Buddha preached it, they will be practiced (Yathapaññatteporānevajjidhammesamādāyavattanti).

The lord of Buddha gave this Sutta one year before his parinibbānaat the assembly of all in Rājagaha. Mahākassapatheraprescribed the principle of aparihāniyalaid down by the Buddha as mention above as their policy at Rājagahain division of Magadacountry. The Buddha said in Mahāparinibbāna Sutta as follows:

“Ananda, if the Saṃghaso desired, it may remove, after my passing away (parinibbana), the minor and less minor rules.” (MahavaggaPāli, p.126)

This statement of the Buddha was a subject for discussion at the First Buddhist Council. When the Mahākassapatheraasked what minor rules were and what the less minor rules, the Arahats at the council gave different answers, thus confusing the issue. It apparently gave Mahākassapatheraa ground for his momentous decision which was as follows:

“Suṇatu me āvusosaṃgho ... Yassa nakkhamati so bhāseya” (CulavaggaPāli, p, 485).

This Pālican be translated into English thus: “Friends, let Saṃghalisten to me. There are some rules with regard to people. Even lay people know that it is allowable for monks who are the disciples of the son the Buddha, and it is not allowable for monks who are the disciples of the Buddha. If we remove the minor and less minor rules, there will be people say, “The monk, Gotamahas laid down the rules for his disciples that last for only the time for the smoke to clear. So long as their Teacher lived they abide by the rules. From the time their Teacher passed away they no longer abide by rules”(CulavaggaPāli, p, 485).

Therefore, Saṃghadoes not lay down the rules that were laid down by the Buddha, nor does not remove the rules that were, laid down by the Buddha. The Saṃghatakes (will take) upon itself the rules as they were laid down by the Buddha. If the not laying down of what have not been laid down and not removing of what have been laid down are agreeable to venerable, let him keep silence. The venerable to down whom they are not agreeable, should keep out.

Saṅgiti or Saṅghayanāliterally means “to recite together”. But it implies more than that. It implies the Saṅghaassembly, the SaṅghaCouncil, the Saṅghaparliament. After the consideration, the members of the Saṅghain the assembly unanimously conformed to the principle prescribed by Mahākassapathera. Before His

mahāparinibbāna, the Buddha said, “I, Ānanda, have preached the Dhamma and prescribed the Vinaya. They will be your teacher when I am no more”., (SilakkhandhavaggaAṭṭhakathā, p. 3)

The Saṅghain this assembly agreed to this point that the Buddha’s speech showed that if Vinaya and Dhamma were abolished, the master would be removed. They were pleased that the Dhamma was not small but great and splendid. Thus the duty to present or Vinaya teaching was assigned to Venerable Upāli, and all Dhamma teachings to Venerable Ānanda. The 500 Arahattaras who took part in this council unanimously confirmed the Vinaya and Dhamma teachings presented by Venerable Upāliand Venerable Ānandarespectively.

Three months after the demise of the Buddha the First Great Council was held in SattapāniCave Pavilion at Mount Vebbhāranear the city of Rājagaha. Subhadda, who became a monk in his old age, disparaged the Buddha’s teaching on the seventh day after the Buddha has passed away. On hearing those insulting words, Venerable Mahākassapadecided to hold the First Great Council and King Ajātasatthusponsored that council. Five hundred arahats, including Venerable Upāliand Venerable Ānanda, took part in that council. It took the monks seven months to recite the whole of the Vinaya and the Dhamma and those monks sufficiently endowed with good memories retained all that had been recited. This first Saṅghacouncil is accepted by all monks. There was not a schism at that time. (The teaching of the Buddha, p. 1. 221)

The Second Great Council was held at Vālukāmmamonastery, near the city of Vesāliin 443 B.C (100 B. E). It was held because the monksof the Vajjiclan fromVesalipreached and practiced ten unlawful modifications in the rules of the Order. The seven hundred arahats led by Venerable Yassa, Venerable Sabbakāmiand Venerable Revatatook part in that council while King Kālāsokaof Vesaliand the people gave necessary supports to that council. It lasted eight months. Finally, a group of monks left the Council and formed the Mahāsamghika- the Great Community. Even though it was called the Mahāsamghika, it was not known as Mahayana. And in the second Great Council, only matters pertaining to the Vinaya were discussed and no controversy about the Dhamma is reported. (The teaching of the Buddha, p. 1. 222)

The Third Great Council was held at Asokārāmamonastery in the city of Pataliputtain 308 B.C (235 B. E). Sixty thousand ascetics infiltrated into the SamghaOrder gave the necessary support to the council. It lasted nine months. At the end of this council, the president of the council, Venerable MahāmoggaliputtaTissa, compiled a book called the Kathāvattthurefuting the heretical, false views and theories held by some sects. The teaching approved and accepted by this council was known as Theravada. After the Third Council, nine missions were sent to nine different places to propagate the Sāsana. (The teaching of the Buddha, p. 1.222)The commentary on PdārājikaPāliof Vinaya Pitakamentioned about the missionaries to the nine directions. (PdārājikaṇḍaAṭṭhakathā, p, 1.47)

Nine Missions

After the Third Great Council, Venerable MoggaliputtaTissaforesaw with his supernormal power that the teachings of the Buddha would flourish well in the countries outside Majjhimadesa. Therefore, he selected the arahats who were able to

perform missionary work, and consued with King Asoka to send them to nine countries as follows.

1. A mission led by Venerable Majjhantikawas sent to KasmiraGandharaProvince,
2. A mission led by Venerable Mahārevatawas sent to MahimsakamandalaDistrict (Mysore Province),
3. A mission led by Venerable Rakkhitawas sent to Vanavasi(Malaba) of South Dakkhinapatha,
4. A mission led by Venerable Yonakadhammarakkhitawas sent to Aparanta(Koja of west India),
5. A mission led by Venerable Mahādhammarakkhitawas sent to MahāratthhaDistrict (Bombay),
6. A mission led by Venerable Mahārakkhita was sent to Yonaka Province (Persia of Greek Empire),
7. A mission led by Venerable Majjhimawas sent to Himavantaregion (Himalaya region),
8. A mission led by Venerable Soṇaand Venerable Uttara was sent to Suvannabhūmi(RāmaññaProvince) and
9. A mission led by Venerable Manindawas sent to Tambapaṇṇi(Ceylon). (PdārājikaṇḍaAṭṭhakathā, p, 1.47)

Each mission comprised five monksin order to enable them to attend to Samghaaffairs. The missions went to their respective places during the Third Great Council in the year 235 B. E. But Venerable Mahinda left for Sri Lanka only in the year 236 B. E. (The teaching of the Buddha, p, 2. 267-270)

The Fourth Great Council was held at Cave Ālokain Malaya district, Sri Lanka, in 94 B.C. (450 B. E). The people of Sri Lanka were hard hit by rebels, hunger and starvation of twelve years. So the monks had to make strong efforts to maintain the Buddha's teachings. The elder monksforesaw that if there would appear such danger in future, the monks would not be able to memorize the discourses and the disciplines by heart because of the declination of their power of mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. Therefore, they held the Fourth Great Council.

It was during the reign of King Vattagāmanithat five hundred monks,led by Venerable Mahādhammarakkhita, inscribed the entire words of the Buddha's teaching on palm leaves. The heads and elders as well as the people of Malaya district gave all round support to the council. The fourth Great Council continued for one year. (The teaching of the Buddha, p, 1. 223)

The Fifth Great Council was convened at Mandalay, Myanmar in A. D. 1871. The scriptures inscribed on palm leaves could not last for long time. Besides, there might be many variations in rewriting the scriptures from copy to copy. Therefore, the scriptures were inscribed marble slabs in order to dispel these disadvantages.

Two thousand and four hundred monksled by Venerable Jāgarābhivamsatheraof DakkhinrāmaMonastery, Mandalay, convened to recite and approve the scriptures. King Mindon initiated and supported the Fifth Great Council to the end. The scriptures were inscribed on seven hundred and twenty-nine marble slabs in the precinct of LokamārajinaPagoda at the foot of Mandalay hill. It took seven years, six

months and fourteen days to finish this work. Then the monks recited to approve the inscriptions for five months and three days. (The teaching of the Buddha, p. 1. 224)

After the Fifth Great Council, the Pāli Texts were translated into Myanmar language, and the Doctrinal Order was promulgated to the whole country for purpose of purification and propagation of the Buddha's teachings.

The Sixth Great Council was held at Kaba-Aye Mahāpāsāṇa Cave in Yangon, Myanmar in A.D. 1954. The country of Myanmar had been one of the British Colonies for one hundred years and during this period the Buddha Sāsana had deteriorated to some extent. So the Sixth Great Council was held aiming at the purification and promotion of the Buddha Sāsana. Two thousand and five hundred monks from the five countries of Theravada Buddhism participated in that council. Nyaung Yan Sayadaw, Venerable Revata presided over it; the Mahasi Sayadaw, Venerable Sobhana and the Mingun Sayadaw, Venerable Vicittasārābhivṃsa took the leading roles in that council.

The doctrinal questions asked by the people of five Theravada Buddhist countries: **Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia**, particularly, were solved. Twenty-five other countries also gave much help to that council. At the council, not only the canonical Pāli Texts of the Buddha but also the commentaries and sub-commentaries were re-examined. (The teaching of the Buddha, p. 1. 225)

In this way, Venerable Mahākassapa and the custodians of the Dhamma held the great councils up to six times and approved the words of the Buddha without any change and modification. The teaching of the Buddha thus approved is called Theravada Buddhism.

What is the Monk's Duties?

Those who joined the Order gave up everything, their homes, pleasures of the world, and sensual delights so that they could walk spiritual path as shown by the Buddha. It was incumbent on each monk to undertake one of the two duties once he had given up the household life. They are;

- (1) The duty of learning and teaching (Ganthadhura) and
- (2) The duty of practicing meditation for the attainment of the Path and Fruition (Vipassanadhura). (Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, p. 3)

Duty of learning and teaching (Ganthadhura)

The first duty of monks is Ganthadhura, the duty of learning and teaching the teachings of the Buddha. By doing their duties, the monks would administer to the social and spiritual needs of their followers imparting to them the knowledge of the Dhamma. The lay people in turn supported the monks with their essential needs of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. In course of time, Buddhist monastery had become not only a spiritual centre but also a centre for learning and culture.

The teachings of the Buddha spread in this way far and wide into the people. The discourses and the saying of the Buddha were learnt by rote, memorized and repeated day in and day out until they had learnt word perfect each discourse together with the

explanations given by their teachers.

Although there is evidence that the art of writing was definitely known and well established during the Buddha's time, no Buddhist scriptures were put down in writing and recorded in any form of script. According to custom, the teachings of each spiritual teacher were regarded as sacred and imparted only to those who had shown genuine interest in the teaching by undergoing along period of studentship.

The method of oral transmission played a vital role in learning teachings. This is customary to learn religious and philosophical teachings of the sages in India of those days. They were handed down from teacher to pupil in memory by continued repetition, word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence, and paragraph-by-paragraph. In this manner, their teachings were transmitted from generation to generation.

The Buddha's teachings were also handed down orally in this manner uninterruptedly from one Arahant to another and his disciples until many centuries. Later they were written down on palm leaves in Sri Lanka during the reign of King Vattagāmani. Even after the Buddha's teaching had become recorded in writing, the tradition of committing the Dhamma and Vinaya to memory continued. It is still surviving in Theravāda countries

During the lifetime of the Buddha classification and codification of Dhamma and Vinaya must have been carried out. The Pāli terms such as Dhammakathika one who preaches the Dhamma; Dīghbhanaka one who recites the long discourses; Vinayadhara one who memorizes the Vinaya have been found in the Piṭaka.

The experts who specialize in one particular branch of scripture being given separate seats and beds also could be found in the texts. So even in those earliest days attempts had already been made to systematize the Buddha's teachings, co-ordinate and correlate the numerous teachings of the Buddha by classifying them and arranging them in some form of system. Such systematization was obviously inevitable if only to facilitate memorization since only verbal transmission was employed to pass on the Teaching from the Master to pupil. But it was only at the time of the convening of the first council that formal compilation of the teachings took place as a whole and arrangements into separate divisions.

In the first council it was deemed advisable to entrust different sections of the Canon to different groups of monks who were already noted for their proficiency in those sections.

The rough out the interval of 45-years, whatever the Buddha taught to human world has only one taste. It is nothing but emancipation, vimuttirasa. It is twofold being made up of two components: The Dhamma and the Vinaya. It is threefold according to the first, intermediate and last words, pathamamajjhimapaccimavacana. It is also threefold according to Pitakas; Vinaya, Suttanta and Abhidhamma. The teaching is fivefold according to the divisions into five separate collections called Nikāyas; Dīgha, Majjhima, Samyutta, Aṅguttara and Khuddaka. (Sīlakkhandavagga Aṭṭhakathā, p. 23)

A monk who enters into the Buddhist Order has to do for propagation of the Buddha's teachings. At first a monk has to learn Pāli Canon, Commentaries and sub-

commentaries and then he has to teach his pupils and has to preach the Dhamma to the people for understanding the Four Noble Truths. Therefore, Ganthadura, duty of learning and teaching, is the most important duty for every monk.

Duty of practicing meditation (Vipassanādura)

Monks must practice meditation for attainment of final goal; Nibbāna. Bhāvanā is a Pāli word, meaning repeated contemplation or mental development which is greatly beneficial to one who practices it. It is of two kinds:

1. Tranquility Meditation (Samathabhāvanā) and
2. Insight Meditation (Vipassanābhāvanā). (A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma, p. 329)

The Definition of Tranquility (Samathabhāvanā)

Samatha means tranquility or concentration (Samadhi) that calms down that heat of defilements such as greed (lobha). When a worldly person contemplates repeatedly on a meditation object, his mind gradually becomes concentrated on the object. At that time, defilements such as greed (lobha), anger (dosa), do not arise and his mind will be peaceful and tranquil. Such tranquility is called Samatha. If an Arahant who destroyed all defilements practices the mundane jhāna, his purpose is not to gain calmness, because he has already calmed himself. In general, Samatha means all meditations which calm down the heat of defilements, turbulent minds and lower jhāna factors.

There are forty objects for Tranquility Meditation. They are ten meditation devices (kasīna), ten impurities or loathsome things (asubha), ten reflections (anussati), four sublime states (brahma-vihāra), four non-material (ārūpa) realms, one perception (saññā) and one analysis (vavatthāna). (A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma, p. 330)

The Definition of Insight (Vipassana)

In this universe, there is no person, beings and things but only mind and matter. The knowledge which can discern significantly the characteristics of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha) and insubstantiality (anatta) is called Insight (Vipassanā). Those who lack Insight Knowledge regard the combination of mind and matter as human being, celestial being, brahma, man, woman, etc., and the combination of corporeal entities as houses, schools, trees, forests, mountains, etc. They also miscomprehend these beings and things to be permanent (nicca), happiness (sukha), substantial (atta) and pleasant (subha).

Although the blind worldly persons think so, a virtuous person who has practiced Insight Meditation penetrative knows that all beings and things are the aggregates of physical and mental phenomena, and that they are impermanent (anicca), suffering (dukkha), insubstantial (anatta) and loathsome (asubha). Such knowledge is called Vipassanā. (The teaching of the Buddha, vol -2, p. 78)

The purpose of monastic life and monkhood is to become Ariyas (noble persons) and to attain Nibbāna, attainment of final goal according to Buddhism. There is no way to become Ariyas and to attain Nibbāna in the world but practicing meditation. Practicing meditation is two kinds: Tranquility Meditation (Samathabhāvanā) and Insight

Meditation (Vipassanābhāvanā). A monk who want to attain Nibbāna must practice both of meditation. Therefore, Vipassanādhura, duty of practicing meditation, is the most important duty for every monk.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Buddhism has been flourishing in south-east Asia after the 3rd century. In modern times there are mainly two schools of Buddhism, i.e., Theravada, which is practiced chiefly in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos; and Mahayana, which is practiced in China, Tibet and Japan ant other. Theravada Buddhism is the way of the Elders, was the original and only tradition from the earliest times up to date and the focus of this study has been a meaningful of Theravada definition and the duties of monkhood.

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