

# REVISITING THE TIMES OF ŚĀKYAMUNI BUDDHA

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## 1. Introduction

In retrospect, right after the world war II, we experienced a brilliant recovery of humanity in all fields of activities, among which Buddhist Study was too galvanized for new research and theorization, especially on the life of the Buddha and his early religious community. Geographically, it was focused on the North-east of the subcontinent bordering India and Nepal in search of Śākyamuni's home ground. Scholars were debating whether ancient Kapilavastu was the site of Tiraulākoṭ or whether it was that of Piprahwā.

In the North-west region too, covering the portions of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, scholars argue as to whether the Buddha image should be theorized to have first appeared in Central Asia or in the region of Mathurā of the subcontinent. I was fascinated with these subjects of enquiries and discussions, and after visiting the North-east, the ancient region of the Śākyas, I developed my own theory about the biographical basis of Śākyamuni Buddha. My twofold questions at that time were:

- (1) What really motivated prince Siddhārtha to renounce his secular position? and
- (2) What was the ultimate goal with his religious organization (Saṅgha)?

After half a century of Buddhist Studies, we have recognized a new trend of critical studies emerging as a depth analysis of the canonical literature, which has not hitherto been tried in Bud-

dhist studies. For one reason, the Pāli canon and other canonical scriptures are regarded to have been sacred and inviolable; while another reason is that historical facts and contexts, with which the canons were compiled, were irretrievably lost. However, linguistic analysis and computerization of these ancient texts today have made it possible to survey the vast quantity of materials. As a result, an attitude of demythologization has emerged in contemporary scholarship to examine the outstanding problems of centuries, such as, miracle stories, incoherent passages, and so forth, vis-à-vis the essential messages of the Buddha's teachings.

A recent monograph *After the Buddha* by Dr. Mettanando Bhikkhu<sup>1</sup> of Thailand is such an example. The author has detected that non-Buddhist religious and cultural elements have been interpolated in the canon. As he brilliantly points out, Brahmanical and Hindu criteria are definitely identifiable as having been incorporated with some part of the canons, for instance, the regulations of Buddhist nuns and Nunneries.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to establish a linkage between what I have accomplished decades ago in clarifying Śākyamuni's life in the Jātaka literature (Birth Stories or Biographical Records) with a new trend that is focused to the critical examination of the early Buddhist canons. Secondly, it is intended to call attention to the new trend of Buddhist Studies that is directed to the Buddhist canons per-se distinguished from non-Buddhist, i.e., Brahmanical and Hindu cultural influences.

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<sup>1</sup> Mettanando Bhikkhu, holding a professional medical degree, was ordained in the Tharavādin school of Buddhism and proceeded to the Western education for religious studies, acquiring BA and MA in Oxford University in Sanskrit, Th.M. in Divinity School, Harvard University, and Ph.D. from Hamburg University. The work in question has not been published yet, but the manuscript is available at his place: 7/4 Pridi Banomyong, Soi 20, Suhumvit 71, Bangkok 10110.

## 2. Toynbee's Theory of Challenge and Response to Explain the Rise of Buddhism in History

As to the historical meaning of Buddhism and its religious organization, we have two major interpretations respectively proposed by Spengler and Toynbee in modern times. According to Oswald Spengler, the historic religions, such as, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, were a result of a genuine act of creation preceded by the history of each culture, and hence, the rise of Buddhism was an Indian creation resulting from a grand procession of preceding thought movements embodied in the Ṛgveda, Brāhmaṇas, and Upaniṣads. Accordingly in his interpretation, the rise of Buddhism is regarded to have embodied "India's cultural destiny."<sup>2</sup>

In opposition to this "destiny" interpretation, Arnold Toynbee recognized in every epoch-making historical event an exchange of historical challenge and human response at the particular time and place. A challenge means a historical crisis accompanied by some form of ordeal. Human response, irrespective of whether it was due to an individual or a group of individuals, means a counter action to such a challenge as a way of resolving the crisis. It should be a deliberate solution configured for societal problem, and if such a response is inadequate, the result is a failure in the form of some aborted phenomena, which then leads to an eventual disintegration of a given culture or civilization. Toynbee was convinced that, just like any other world religion, the beginning of Buddhism was a deliberate configuration of societal problem solution. He evaluates it as the most remarkable response of the human race towards "a state of society in which the whole of mankind would be able to live together in harmony as members of a single all-inclusive family."<sup>3</sup>

These interpretations obviously represent a macrocosmic and pan-Indian generalization on the origin of Buddhism. I am disappointed, however, with Spengler's idealist interpretation, because his interpretation does not differentiate Buddhism from other manifestations, such as, Hinduism. He regards Buddhism and Hinduism as essentially identical on account of their common culture. I hold that Spengler's inarticulated view is inadequate to explain the historical meaning of Buddhist spirituality, and that it does not contribute to eradication of an erroneous cliché that Buddhism is a part of Hinduism.

I am therefore ready to explore Toynbee's empiricist theory of "historical challenge and response" in order to analyze the origin of Buddhism. In general, a historical religion is theorized to have arisen through a charismatic leader regarded as founder of religion, and the legitimacy of his moral authority is the revelation he received from the supreme transcendent being. We observe this same pattern of the Judaic religion of prophets described in the Old Testaments, the Christian religion of the church fathers depicted in the New Testaments, and the Islamic religion of Prophet Muhammad expressed in the Koran. Toynbee points out that these monotheistic religions commonly concentrated an entire sanctity to a unique omnipotent, anthropomorphic creator god outside the universe, and by restricting divinity to that single anthropomorphic feature as ultimate source of spirituality, excludes sanctity from all other members of the universe, including human nature.<sup>4</sup>

In Brahmanical Hindu tradition too, though having no historical figure as its founder, faith is upheld in the divine nature of language that Brahmā or Ātma abides as an eternal, transcendent reality beyond the world of phenomena. The re-

<sup>2</sup> Oswald Spengler: *The Decline of the West*, abridged English edition prepared by Arthur Helps, from the translation of Charles Francis Atkins; N.Y.: Alfred A. Knoph, 1962, p. 244.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold Toynbee: *A Study of History*, abridged one-volume edition by the author and Jane Caplan, Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 321.

nowned Prof. Murti emphasizes the divine nature of this ultimate reality such that the Upanishadic principle was revealed in the divine word of Vedas through human language and epistemological faculty of the sensitive soul.<sup>5</sup>

The difference between Western theism and Indian monism is that the former comprises a set of anthropomorphic features, whereas the latter embodies a totally neutral principle. The Buddhist spirituality as declared by the Buddha stands diametrically opposite to the Upanishadic principle in terms of three-fold natures of reality; What-ever is (1) is momentary (*anitya*), (2) it is suffering (*duḥkha*), and (3) it is without its own reality (*anātma*). It is obvious that this Buddhist notion of reality repudiates the monotheistic eternal, self-assertive almighty God as a whole. The question is: How and why does this Buddhist principle of anātma embody ultimate spirituality for all Buddhists and humanity as a whole? How could this principle, by being neither the supreme being like god nor being the transcendent principle like Brahmā, legitimize the Buddha to be a religious authority and moral leader to organize the community of his disciples and lay followers?

### 3. Śākyamuni's Renunciation and Max Weber's Theory of Breakthrough Action for Social Change

The problem, however, is that we cannot find from the canonical scriptures necessary stocks of concrete descriptions of facts and events as part of Śākyamuni's biography, except legendary stories collected in the Jātakas. More precisely speaking, if Śākyamuni's renunciation and formation of the Saṅgha were his response to some historical challenge imposed upon him, it is imperative to determine such a crisis and ordeal in terms of concrete facts and events as cause of his breakthrough action. To repeat, to confirm Toynbee's theory

that Śākyamuni's renunciation and formation of the Saṅgha were the response he set forth against some historical challenge, we have to see Weber's sociological theory of break-through in religion as co-reference.

Sociology is fundamentally concerned with that part of human phenomena which manifests as societal action. Sociologist's interest in religion is to measure the potential force of religion towards social change. Weber, for instance, introduced a concept of "breakthrough" and a theory of religious typology in order to explain ways religion in general contributes to social change. Any historic religion and, in this matter any epochal movement in religion, began by way of breaking away from the established normative order of a society by the founder's claim of his moral and spiritual legitimacy. The ways of expressing this legitimacy or religious orientation which can exert leverage towards evolutionary social change take variations of religious types.

Weber theorized four types of religion by cross-tabulating the types of asceticism, mysticism, other-worldliness, and inner-worldliness. He thus managed to produce the category of ancient Buddhism as "otherworldly mysticism." What he meant by this type of religion is an ascetic religion seeking to avoid subjective desires, because these interfere with the pursuit of salvation, and that it also seeks to dissociate one's self totally from the worldly concern.<sup>6</sup> This categorization is satisfactory as far as the direction of religious transcendence is indicated, but I am not satisfied with his emphasis of withdrawal aspect of the early Buddhism. The term 'mysticism' does not fit with Buddhism as a whole. If Śākyamuni's action is regarded to have been a total breaking away from secular society as an exemplary mystic, it is wrong and even misleading. In my view, following the fashion of Toynbee's theory, Śākyamuni's renunciation and eventual formation of Buddhist Saṅgha must have

<sup>5</sup> T.R.V. Murti, "The Philosophy of Language in the Indian Context," *Studies in Indian Thought*, p. 361; Also, see: *Anvikṣikī*, Vol 1, No. 1; Jan. 1987: *T.R.V. Murti and Indian Philosophical Tradition*, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Max Weber: *The Sociology of Religion* (tr. by F. Fischhoff), Beacon Press, 1963, p. 51; Esp. see Introduction by T. Parsonns, pp. xlvi-lii.

meant to be a positive way of dealing with some crisis of history to resolve it.<sup>7</sup>

It is insufficient and misleading, however, to assert that Śākyamuni's breakthrough as his renunciation meant to be from Brahmanical society, because his renunciation was primarily from his own Śākyan society and from his relationship to his kinsmen. Indeed, his breaking away from the latter constituted the crux of his entire career. The following are Weber's criteria to conduct the analysis of break-through in general: (1) Under what cultural definitions of the religious situation the process of change and breakthrough could occur; (2) Through what agency and form of organization the process of change and breakthrough could take place; and (3) What situation would break-through be most probable.<sup>8</sup>

Let us see how Śākyamuni's renunciation can be measured in relation to his Śākyan society according to the above criteria.

#### 4. The Śākyan Society characterized in Jātaka Literature and Śākyamuni's Renunciation as Break-through

I think it is still a mystery why traditional and modern scholarship did not attempt to analyze Śākyamuni's renunciation and eventual formation

of his Saṅgha in reference to the tragic ordeal of Śākyan society and the destruction of their state. It is also strange that the descriptions of Śākyan society and its tragic history were preserved only in the form of legendary Jātaka stories. Moreover, the meaning of these records were never brought forth for open analysis as historical facts.<sup>9</sup> In fact, our knowledge about Śākyamuni's biography have come from two sets of different accounts. According to Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacaritam* (*The Deeds of the Buddha*), the poetic passages depict the Buddha to have been Prince Siddhārtha of the Kingdom of the Śākyas, and all accounts of his youth refer to his monarchical upbringing. On the other hand, the Jātaka stories describe Siddhārtha to have been born as son of the chieftain of the Śākyan tribal republic. The autonomous body of Śākyan society exercised collective decision making through parliamentary polity under the overlord of Kauśāla. Scholars argued that some of the rules of the proceeding were adopted by the Buddhist Saṅgha as model of their autonomy.

The evolution of Śākyan society was relatively independent from that of the Brahmanical society that spread in the subcontinent.<sup>10</sup> This can be inferred from the fact that the Śākyas had a unique social structure consisting of three social strata: (1) landed clansmen in the position of the governing

<sup>7</sup> S. Ichimura: *Critical Buddhist Spirituality: Prajñā and Śūnyatā*, Article One "Śākyamuni's Critical Spirituality and India's Crisis"; Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Weber, *op cit.*, esp. Introduction by T. Parsons, pp. xlviff

<sup>9</sup> After Śākyamuni realized enlightenment, he associated with King Bimbisāra of Magadha and Kauśāla king Prasenajit. The latter's prime minister promoted the policy to receive a proper Śākyan maiden as the king's first queen. Mahānāma's daughter born of a slave woman, became the queen of the Kauśāla king Prasenajit and begot a prince, who later on destroyed the Śākyan autonomous state. This may have happened while the Buddha was still active in life. Cf. (Bhaddasālahajāta No. 465, IV, 144-153). This was the beginning of the tragic Śākyan history. These socio-cultural analyses were and have been obliterated.

<sup>10</sup> In the older scriptures like *Suttanipāta* 991, the Buddha is often called a descendant of the Sun dynasty (ādityabandhu in Sanskrit) in the lineage of Okkāka in the House of Ikṣvāku. The House of Ikṣvāku, for instance, appears in the Ṛgveda X, 60, 4. A detailed history of the Śākyas is given in Buddhaghōṣa's *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* (ed. by Rhys Davids and Carpenter, PTS. Pt. I, 258 ff) and *Paramatṭha-jōtika* (Commentary on *Suttanipāta*) I, 232-6. Also Dīgha Nikāya 16, III. The banished four princes of King Okkāka, third successor of the Ikṣvāku, went away toward the Himālayas taking their five sister princesses with them. They founded Kapilavastu on the site occupied by Sage Kapila. These princes married their sisters respectively and made the eldest princess Queen Mother. This peculiar custom was not without parallel, because the Ptolemies are said to have held a similar custom to maintain the purity of the royal blood among them. Cf. Weber, *General Economic History* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950; p. 35). Being informed of his sons' success in their new settlement and maintenance of their race, King Okkāka rejoiced in uttering "Aha smart men (Śākyā)," i.e. "Able men." This term is said to have become the origin of their clan name.

councilors who were engaged in military service for the protection of their farm territory; (2) regular clansmen who were either voluntarily or physically unable to maintain such a role and were engaged in cultivation; and (3) household slaves or workers whose status was either due to capture, debt, voluntary self-degradation, or judicial punishment. Importantly, Śākya society did not comprise either the stratum of Brāhmaṇa or that of Vaiśya or that of Śūdra. In Buddhist literature, social order always begins with Kṣatriya first and then Brāhmaṇa, and so on, whereas in Brāhmaṇical literature, it always begins with Brāhmaṇa and then Kṣatriya and so on. In short, Śākya society obviously developed as a separate entity from the evolution of the Brāhmaṇical society.

The fate of Śākya society, or for that matter any clan-oriented society at that time, was that the republic polity depended not on the individual but on the clan itself. It is known, as said before, that the historical evolution of Śākya society had been relatively independent from that of the Brāhmaṇical world, because Śākya clansmen maintained a shrine of their own tutelage, Śākyaavardhana, “The one who prospers the Śākyas,” relying on the culture of ancestor worship inseparably tied to their clan membership. This means that the clan membership was inseparably attached to (1) the politi-

cal right to participate in the decision making of the republic, (2) economic privileges based on the patrimonial proprietorship, and (3) socio-religious status derived from the strict accordance to clan tutelage and ancestor worship.

The Jātakas explain why the Śākya predicament developed in relation to its overlord Kauśala by referring to a deadly dilemma.

The Bhaddasāla Jātaka narrates that the Kauśala king Prasenajit (Passenadi in Pāli) requested the Śākyas to send their maiden with proper familial background to become his first queen. In their parliamentary argument the Śākya clansmen were split into two groups as pro and con and thus unable to reach a decisive conclusion. Accordingly, the Śākya elder Mahānāma,<sup>11</sup> sought a solution by himself, sending to Kauśala king his daughter (Bhaddasāra by name) born of a house slave woman.

Besides a series of cover-ups for concealment of the real status of this lady, upon its eventual revelation, Śākyaṃuni is said to have made efforts towards mending the predicament. These phenomena are no longer fictitious in the light of Indian history and culture.

The Śākya tragedy unfolded in the following way:

In Kauśala, a prince named Viḍūḍabha (Pāli) was born to King Prasenajit and Queen Bhaddasāla. When the prince visited in his youth his mother’s country, he suffered an abusive word from a Śākya member in reference to his mother’s status in society. Viḍūḍabha is said to have been enraged and, after having his father abdicated from the throne, he avenged by destroying the Śākya state. An episode is given in the Jātaka that the Buddha waited for the prince’s military marching under an old roadside tree and remonstrated him three times not to invade into the Śākya territory. There were the follow-up stories which recorded ensued battles and Śākya surrender,



*Ruins of Kapilavastu Palace in Nepal*

<sup>11</sup> According to one source, Mahānāma is said to have been the son of Dhotodana (3rd brother of Śuddhodana), *Vinaya in Four Divisions* (Ch. 15), in Chinese translation (Taisho. vol. 22, p. 101b), Buddhaghōṣa, however, reported him as the Buddha’s paternal uncle. Fleet, *JRAS*, 1906, p. 168.



Area locally known as Sagarhawā in Nepal where Śākyas were massacred by Vidhudav.

and Viḍūḍabha's disappearance. According to this Jātaka, the tragic event took place while the Buddha was still active in life.<sup>12</sup>

The time of history was such that the Śākyan clan society was pressured not only from outside but also from within to succumb to their fateful orientation. On account of these binding principles, the Śākyas are said to have been fiercely proud of their blood, culture, and society, and especially their having descended from a mythological Indo-Āryan lineage.<sup>13</sup> Śākyas exercised an iron fist control in maintaining the principle of endogamy against any marital exchange with outsiders, except with their agnate clan members, like the members of the neighboring state of Kolya, from which Śākyamuni's mother came. It is clear that the ultimate basis of clan polity and its legitimate membership was the principle of endogamy. The deadly dilemma that reads: "If the Śākyas refused, the Kauśālas would invade to destroy the Śākyan republic, or if they accepted, this would

necessarily lead to the loss of autonomy and eventual disintegration of their clan state." Indeed, such a dilemma could impose a monumental obstacle against any of necessary adjustments when required in socio-cultural evolution.

## 5. Kṣatriya of the Śākyas and Brāhmaṇa Society

In the light of the foregoing analysis, the Śākyan dilemma as started from the Kauśāla king's matrimonial proposition is far more real and deadlier as the Śākyan crisis context than we have imagined. King Prasenajit's thought may have been far more friendly and admiring gesture toward Śākyamuni, and the Śākyan reaction seems to have been hyperbolic due to their paranoia. Yet, the course of the dilemma was proven not otherwise to lead toward a tragic end. In this respect, the Ambaṭṭha Sutta and Sanskrit version<sup>14</sup> describe the direct confrontation of the two different cultures in the format of civility between Śākyamuni in proxy of the Śākyan Kṣatriya and Ambaṭṭha representing the Brāhmaṇa society. According to the Pāli version, the original ancestor to whom the Brāhmaṇa tradition referred as Kanhāyana (dark skinned) was believed to have exercised a legislative control of the masses through the use of superstitious magic against the despotic Āryan military power of kings (kṣatriya).<sup>15</sup>

The Buddhist movement was spreading in Kauśāla and alarmed the Brāhmaṇa leaders. A young intellectual, Brāhmaṇa, Ambaṭṭha, was once sent by his mentor, renowned Brāhmaṇa Puṣkarasvādi (Pāli: Pokkharasādi) to visit Kapilavastu for a survey of the state of the Śākyan capital.

<sup>12</sup> Jātaka IV, 145. See Buddhaghōṣa's account [Fleet, *JARAS*, 1906. [p 172-173)].

<sup>13</sup> King Okkāka: ancestor of the Śākyas and Koliyas as detailed in the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta*. The king had four sons and five daughters with his first queen Bhattā. When Bhattā died, after the birth of these nine children, the king married another young and beautiful princess and made her the chief queen. The king made the prince Jantu born of the new queen his heir apparent permitting the four princes born of the late queen to be exiled together with the five princesses. These self-exiled princes and princesses pioneered to build the Śākyan state. G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, (London and Boston, KTS 1974), Vol. II, pp. 460-461.

<sup>14</sup> The Pāli version included in *Dīgha Nikāya* III, 9607 and a Sanskrit version preserved in the Dharmaguptaka school translated into Chinese as *Chang-a-han-ching* No. 20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* depicts Kanhāyana as ancestor of the Brāhmaṇa race and revolutionary against the despotic power of a legendary Indo-Āryan king Okkāka, whom Śākyans believed to have been their ancestor.

At one occasion when the Buddha approached the Brāhmaṇa village Icchānaṅkala accompanied by his disciples to sojourn overnight, Ambaṭṭha was instructed once again by his teacher to meet the Buddha and examine if he was endowed with the characteristic marks of the enlightened person as Tathāgata. The village Icchanāṅkala was a grant of King Prasenajīt to the Brāhmaṇa Puṣkarasvādi as his fief exempted from tax collection and hence it was a prosperous locality for a large group of monks to sojourn for alms-round. When Ambaṭṭha was debating with the Buddha on the meaning of truth, the Buddha called Ambaṭṭha as Mānava (“Student”) and points out that Ambaṭṭha’s manner of debating would not fit to the occasion. In response, Ambaṭṭha accused the Buddha three times in reference to the Śākya clansmen’s rudeness to him. He said when he visited Kapilavastu once before, he was mistreated, that none of the clansmen who has gathered together for some council meeting, stood up to honor him.

In the follow-up statements, Ambaṭṭha explained to the Buddha about the Brāhmaṇa society, saying: “There are four status differences (varṇa or caste) in their society: Kṣatriyas (king status), Brāhmaṇas (priest status), Vaiśya (general householder status), and Śūdra (servitude status). Although the three class members other than Kṣatriya always treat a Brāhmaṇa with respect, reverence, and service, but the Śākya clansmen did not conform to the general norm of society. These sons of the Śākya are so lowly like menial workers, vulgar, and inferior, that they do not pay reverence to the Brāhmaṇas.”

In response, the Buddha countered Ambaṭṭha for his claim that his familial ancestor’s name was Kanhāyana (dark), and that the family descended from their pure matrimonial lineage of seven generations.

The Buddha spoke to him, saying that then, the Śākyas are the master family because they

descended from King Okkāka (of the House of Ikṣvāku) as their ancestor through seven generations of the pure matrimony.<sup>16</sup> Immemorial past, the four princes of the king Okkāka were exiled to the frontier of the southern skirt of Himalayan forest. Later on they invited king’s four daughters to join them respectively as their wives. The Buddha also refers to another legend that King Okkāka impregnated a Brāhmaṇa woman and had her beget a dark skinned child (Kanha or Kṛṣṇa). Because the child spoke to the parents upon his birth, he was named as Kanhāyana (“voicing king” [sheng-wang] in Chinese translation). When grown up to adolescent, Kanhāyana revolted against the king Okkāka’s rule and requested him to grant one of his princesses as his wife. Though the king wished to kill him by bow and arrow, his action was frozen by magic spell casted on him, and Kanhāyana escaped to the southern continent. Years later, he returned with more powerful magic and organized the force of people to speak to the king.

Because of a fear of people’s uprisings, now the king granted the princess to Kanhāyana as his wife. From then on came the descendants of the Kanhāyana family through the seven generations of pure matrimony.

This story reflects the legend that the Brāhmaṇa lineage descended from the child born from a cross-caste matrimony between Indo-Āryan Kṣatriya (the master) and Brāhmaṇa priestly class woman in the servitude.

The Buddha tried to let Mānava (Ambaṭṭha) admit the origin of caste duties (*dharma*s) by four alternatives. (1) If a woman is a daughter of the true Kṣatriya lineage of seven generations, and If she is granted to a Brāhmaṇa as wife and bears a child, can this child join the status of the Kṣatriyas, receive his seat and water from the hand of a Brāhmaṇa, learn to recite the laws of Kṣatriya duties, inherit his father’s wealth and business? Ambaṭṭha replied: No, sir. (2) If a woman is a

<sup>16</sup> The following words of Śākyamuni are excerpted from my English translation of the *Chang-a-han-ching* (the Sanskrit original *Dīrgha-Āgama* that belonged to the Dharmaguptaka School and was translated into Chinese by Śramaṇa Buddhayaśas (Khotanese monk of Kashmirian Buddhism). The English text has not been published yet but will be scheduled for publication under the Numata Buddhist Foundation Project of English Translation of the Chinese Tripiṭakas (an on-going project).

daughter of the true Brāhmaṇa lineage of seven generations, and if she is granted to a Kṣatriya as wife and bears a child, can this child join the status of the Brāhmaṇas, receive his seat and water from the hand of a Brāhmaṇa, can he learn to recite the Brāhmaṇa duties, inherit the father's wealth, and succeed his father's livelihood? Ambaṭṭha replied: Yes, sir. (3) If a Brāhmaṇa dislikes to be a Brāhmaṇa and tries to join the Kṣatriyas, can he sit and stand among them to receive water and recite the rules of the Kṣatriya duties, inherit his father's wealth and succeed his father's livelihood?" He replied: "No, sir." (4) If a Kṣatriya dislikes to be a Kṣatriya himself and tries to join the Brāhmaṇas, can he sit and stand among them to receive water, recite the laws of the Brāhmaṇa duties, inherit father's wealth, and take over the same livelihood? Ambaṭṭha replied: "Yes, sir." The Buddha thus concluded: "Because of these laws, Oh, Mānava, of all women, a Kṣatriya woman is superior, and of all men, a Kṣatriya man is superior. It is not a Brāhmaṇa to be superior.

After laying down the two sets of norms of duties and their complicated alternatives, the Buddha began to explain from his conviction how different it is for him to think about the matter of racial or caste difference and how universal it is for him to think about the norms of human duties beyond the difference. He gives a set of lengthy discourses on who the Tathāgata is, what the Dharma is, what norms positive and injunctive rules (Vinaya) the Buddhist communities upheld, and so on.

Altogether, the Buddha seems to have intended to wrap up with the truth that no one is more remote to knowledge and virtue than those who dispute about marriage qualifications in terms of birth, family or self-esteem. He denounced that as long as one is trapped to the conventions of matrimony, birth, family or conceit, he would be totally obstructed from approaching the truth. This admonition was plainly directed not simply

to Ambaṭṭha's caste-bound mentality but also to the Śākyan clannish obsession.

The members of the Buddhist Saṅgha were strictly regulated by the Vinaya code of disciplines to be celibate, dissociated from any profession, subsisting solely on daily alms-begging and accepting whatever alms food from whatever household in due order. These rules were the effective counter-measures to deal with the afore-mentioned magic-ridden mentality and social compartmentalization. The principle of endogamy imposes its force upon a set of subsidiary rules, such as, commensalisms, cross caste-contact, hereditary succession of livelihood and property, and so on.<sup>17</sup>

The destruction of the Śākyan autonomy itself was only a part of the tragedy. The real tragedy was that on account of such a little pride of ignorance of his own people, the Buddha's endeavor to build a universal society based on his religious conviction was temporarily set back at that moment. In the canonical discourse (*suttas*) and disciplines (*vinaya*), the Buddha widely exercised his evangelical persuasion in associating himself with his powerful contemporaries, such as, Magadhan king Bimbisāra, Kauśāla king Prasenajit, the Elders of the Licchavi (Vajjian) Republic, and promoted his personal influence upon them. He helped his religious communities evolve in business society, farming villages, warrior clan communities like Licchavis and Mallas, for the goals of peace and coexistence. But his close friends and patron kings were gradually succumbed to their adversary situations. Bimbisāra was abdicated by his heir prince Ajātaśatru and so was Prasenajit by the prince Viḍūḍabha. The legacy of Indo Āryan kings was gradually eliminated through mutual ideology of imperial kingship, eventually succumbed to the legislative power of Brāhmaṇas.

The greater factor of this history was the change of times and transitional upheavals that took place during the eighty years of Śākyamuni's life time.

<sup>17</sup> One of the caste rules is commensalism which requires that one may sit at the table only with one's caste members, prohibiting otherwise. The status of the cook too was regulated in the matter of food. Transgression requires a set of ritualistic cleansing.



In the macrocosmic panoramic view, however, the Buddhist Saṅgha and more opened society participated in the social and political policy of the Mauryan Buddhist ruler Aśoka in developing the status-free open society and the paternalistic welfare state by theorizing the ideal of Cakravartin.<sup>18</sup>

## 6. The Śākyan and the Brāhmaṇa Conflict After the Demise of the Buddha

It is generally believed that Śākyamuni passed away in Kuśinagara of the Malla country on the way of his final journey from Rājagṛha to Śrāvastī immediately after the summer retreat. The Dīgha-Nikāya in the Pāli Canon that belongs to the Theravāda school of Buddhism comprises the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* as No. 16 (a, b, c) and the Sanskrit version that belongs to the Dharmaguptaka school comprises the same text *Dirghāgama* (*Chang-a-han-ching*: No. 2 (a, b, c) under the title [*Last*] *Journey and Sojourns* (*Yu-hsing-ching*). According to Dr. Mettanando's monograph: *After the Death of the Buddha*, there had been some degree of dissension and inner rift between the different groups of disciples in the Saṅgha. Whatever episode that has been analyzed above from the Jātaka texts seems to have embodied some degree of historical reality and social contexts, in reference to which Śākyamuni tried to persuade the Śākyan clansmen to renounce and join the Saṅgha. When the Buddha returned to Kapilavastu for the first time to have a moment of reunion with his father Śudhodana and step mother Prajāpatī, the Buddha obtained a good number of new converts from younger generation. He had the Nyagrodha monastery built outside Kapilavastu for their training center, and eventually he had his son Rāhula and his step brother Nanda born of Prajāpatī, and other related to renounce the family life and

join the Saṅgha. These Śākyas naturally formed a group central to the organization and polity of the Saṅgha.

There was another group, to which Dr. Mettanando specially calls attention in his monograph, was headed by Mahākāśyapa, known as the Buddha's foremost disciple. Being elder than the Buddha in age, he was from a wealthy Brāhmaṇa family in Magadha. Since he was trained in his youth in the Brāhmaṇa tradition for literary sources, rituals and ceremonies, he may have been generally accepted as best fit to the task of the council meeting to compile the canons of teachings (*sutta*) and that of disciplines (*vinaya*). His relationship with Ānanda was rather rocking, of which Dr. Malalasekela commented as a little jealousy on the part of Mahākāśyapa.<sup>19</sup> Sāliputra, however, seems to have appreciated Mahākāśyapa in great esteem, and the both monks contributed to the edition of *Kassapa Samyutta* where these two were engaged in discussion.<sup>20</sup> With his honorable manner and discipline, continually traveling with a group of his disciples, Mahākāśyapa could rightly be expected as successor of the Buddha. After three months from the Buddha's demise, he organized the First Council and presided the proceeding of canonization of *Sutta* and *Vinaya* within the months of the summer retreat.

For twenty five hundred years, no one doubted about Mahākāśyapa's contribution to the continuity of Buddhist tradition. Now, Dr. Mettanando has brought forth a serious charge against Mahākāśyapa's breach of action as might have involved an infraction of adopting the Brāhmanical concept of law while undertaking the proceedings of the First Buddhist Council. As far as the Theravādin tradition is concerned, this charge is possible because the institution of nunnery was eventually ended in India and in Theravādin

<sup>18</sup> The ancient mythological name of the universal King; Wherever he directs his expedition, the golden wheel with a thousand spokes turns in mid-air to proceed; he is victorious even without a battle.

<sup>19</sup> Malalasekera: *op. cit.*, p. 482.

<sup>20</sup> Sāliputra () seems to have held kāśyapa in great esteem, and the *Kassapa Samyutta* contains two discussions between them: one on the necessity for zeal and ardour in the attainment of Nibbāna, and the other on the existence of a Tathāgata after death. *Ibid.*, p. 482p

countries, in contrast to the Mahāyāna Buddhist countries, where the Buddhist nunnery continued to evolve in prosperity. We know that the nun's ordination and the nunnery were sanctioned by the Buddha himself for the request of Mahāprajāpatī and other Śākya women. The Buddha is said to have permitted the nun's ordination and their nunnery with a good side effort offered by Ānanda. According to Dr. Mettanando, the First Council was not too friendly to the institution of Buddhist nunnery, it is a legal squeezing and had its hidden agenda to suppress the movement of Buddhist nuns and the systematic development of the Buddhist nunnery.

Dr. Mettanando is further critical to the way the First Council was carried out. After the cremation of the Buddha, the sacred ashes were distributed by a Brāhmaṇa Droṇa to eight communities. Thus, Ajātaśatru, king of Magadha, obtained one eighth, and it was planned to build a memorial stūpa at the city gate of Rājagṛha. Naturally, whatever was concerned with the demise of the Buddha, the king and Buddhist citizens were still keen in their memory of the Buddha. In organizing the council meeting, Mahākāśyapa, however, requested the five hundred elders whom he hand-picked to take summer residence in Rājagṛha as the basis of alms-round and the rest of the Saṅgha members to take their summer retreat elsewhere<sup>21</sup>. He neither requested a help from Ajātaśatru nor from lay Buddhist community for logistic cooperation, nor did he invite them to participate in the council. Although no issue has been raised in Buddhist history on the legality of the First Council, the event took place as if it were a private sectarian meeting of the elders, because neither the majority of Buddhist monks and nuns were invited to the council. Moreover, those elders who were called to take residence in Rājagṛha, were advised to repair their residence by themselves for a duration of

one third of the summer period.<sup>22</sup> Even if it was attempted to justify an assemblage of the saintly elders for an exclusive meeting, Dr. Mettanando asserts that this is clearly a direct contradiction to the Buddha's advice given to Cunda, that "all the four groups of Buddhists [monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen] should assemble together, should take council together, examining meaning with meaning, detail with detail. By this method, the holy life will last long and securely for the benefit of the many, for the welfare and happiness of deities and humans."<sup>23</sup>

Another point Dr. Mettanando presents as questionable is that the discourse on *The Buddha's Demise (Mahāparinibbāna sutta)* which intermixed with a number of miracle stories, orchestrated the funeral proceedings for the scenario that Mahākāśyapa was central figure and chief mourner of the event, that the Buddha's corporeal body and crematory fire's ignition altogether waited for several days. Funeral pyre of cremation was ignited all by itself, when Mahākāśyapa is said to have stood in front of the pyre, official mourner's position as successor to the dead. This is strange because the Buddha's farewell preaching at his deathbed clearly suggested for surrounding disciples that after he was gone, one must rely on Dharma as one's candle light and refuge. This is very characteristic of Buddhist spirituality. Accordingly, Dr. Mettanando became suspicious of the intent of the editor or composer of the discourse.

Dr. Mettanando suggested that the way Mahākāśyapa and his group hand-picked participants for the First Council were under the influence of Brāhmaṇa tradition. The primary reason of this suspicion is that these elders were commonly unfriendly toward the Nuns nor did they accommodate the development of the institution of the Buddhist nunnery. They accused even Ānanda that he helped the Śākya women to receive or-

<sup>21</sup> Mettanando, *op.cit.*, pp. 62=63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69; *tasmātiha Cunda ye te mayā dhammā abhiññā desitā. Tattha sabbe h'eva saṅgama samāgama attena aṭṭhaṃ byañjanena byañjanaṃ saṅgāyitabbaṃ vivaditabbaṃ.*

dination and organize the nunnery. In this connection, Mettando points to the legal wrangling when the council members accused Ānanda of his report that according to the Buddha Vinaya rules can be abrogated only when it is found to be minor and when the Saṅgha wishes to do so. Ānanda, however, did not ask the Buddha what would such minor rules could be. In general, when an abrogation of minor rules is in session, and an apparent contradiction could not be resolved in the council, the council disallowed any changes to the rules. Mahākāśyapa took an advantage of this rule and called for resolution that the council would not change the Vinaya rules on the pretext that Ānanda did not ask the Buddha of such minor rules.

Secondly, Dr. Mettando argues that Mahākāśyapa's preemptive declaration that no rules should be changed, is against the nature of Vinaya. The Vinaya rules are different from that of Manu's caste law books. He explains that the system of the Vinaya is a different type from that of Manu's law, because the rules are not eternal and they are subject to amendment. Insofar as one stays as practi-

tioner in Buddhist monastery it is useful for daily life but not necessary for the outside world. I shall add here to say that the concept of Vinaya comprises both ethical and monastic rules, but from the practical points of view it is mainly a set of monastic rules. Śīla on the other hand embodies ethical and moral principles.

Dr. Mettando's paramount question is: Whether the Buddha himself imposed the eight fundamental rules upon the group of Śākyan women represented by his own aunt and step-mother Mahāprajāpatī<sup>24</sup>. Examining the contents of these rules and the underlying thoughts on the discriminatory set of rules between male and female trainees and ordained, I cannot imagine how and why could the enlightened Buddha who essentially revolted to the Brāhmaṇical rules and socio-legal system could bring forth the set of eight conditions before the Śākyan women's wishes? Dr. Mettando tried to mitigate the readers' shock by comparing the rules with those of Manu's law book.

The Hindu caste rules are to essentially conceal women's life within household life from cradle to

<sup>24</sup> The following is quoted from Dr. Mettando's citing of the eight *Garudhammas*, (*Ibidem*, p. 75-76), which were the conditions the Buddha is said to have offered to Mahāprajāpatī for his permission of the nun's ordination and the nunnery:

1. A nun, even if she has been ordained for 100 years, must respect, greet and bow in reverence to a monk, even if he was ordained that same day. This duty is to be faithfully and respectfully performed without fail throughout her life. (Monks pay respect to each other according to their seniority, the number of years they have been ordained.)
2. A nun is not to stay in a residence where there is no monk. This duty is . . . (A monk may take an independent residence.)
3. A nun is to look forward to two duties: asking for the fortnightly Uposātha (meeting day) and for an instruction by a monk every fortnight. This duty . . . (Monks do not depend on nuns for this obligatory rite, nor are they required to receive instruction.)
4. A nun who has completed her rains-retreat must offer herself for instruction to both the community of monks and the community of nuns, based on what is seen, what is heard and what is doubted. This duty . . . (Monks only offer themselves to the community of monks.)
5. A nun who violates a monastic rule requiring probation (saṅghādiśeṣa) must serve a minimum fifteen day probation, with reinstatement requiring the approval of the communities of both monks and nuns. This duty . . . (Five-day minimum for monks, with no approval by the nuns required for reinstatement.)
6. A woman may only be ordained by both monks and nuns and may be ordained only after a two-year postulancy, training in six dharmas, or precepts. This duty . . . (Men have no mandatory postulancy, and their ordination is performed by monks only.)
7. A nun may not reprimand a monk. This duty . . . (A monk may reprimand a monk and any monk may reprimand any nun.)
8. From today onwards, no nun shall ever teach a monk. However, monks may teach nuns. This duty . . . (There is no restriction on whom a monk may teach.)

graveyard confining a woman to a single male figure, say father, brother, husband, and son throughout the different stages of life [Manu *Dharmaśāstra* Chap. V: Laws of Householder's Period, woman's duties (Nos. 147-169)]. In contrast, the eight rules of Buddhist nuns and trainees, regulate their discriminatory roles and positions in relation to monks in general. This is far worse psychologically because of experiencing discriminations in human interaction. In Buddhism, it is not stigmatized for any ordained to return from the Saṅgha to ordinary society. Hence, the harshness of these rules may have worked out only to have them return to lay womanhood.

Mettanando also explains the two years of postulancy requirement prescribed in the sixth rule. During two years, a candidate trainee ought to keep six precepts (not to kill, not to steal, no sexual activity, no false speech, no drinking intoxicants, no meal taking after midday). A Vinaya recorded a case that after ordination, a nun was found pregnant, and also another delivered a baby after ordination. The Buddha allowed the baby to be raised in the nunnery till matured.<sup>25</sup> When Prajāpatī and Śākya women became nuns, they obviously did not go through two years of postulancy. It follows that the preemptive resolution of the eight rules for nuns at the First Council is something not normal, and Dr. Mettanando has succeeded in presenting his theory that the Brāhmaṇical influence undermined the First Council meeting, especially in suppression of the Nun's order.

## 7. Conclusion:

Prior to placing my conclusion, I am obliged to add here two bright news over the antiquity of North-east India as accomplished by Dr. Mettanando, in order to compensate the preceding dark, gloomy subjects of conflict derived from cultural difference and violent conflict forgotten behind an opaque screen that separates us from the past history.

The first and foremost delightful news is that the cause of the Buddha's demise which had been the age-old problem for all Buddhists has been identified beyond doubt. Dr. Mettanando followed the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* in detail and once for all, pathologically diagnosed the Buddha's illness. The Buddha as human individual passed away due to the natural cause of old age. His physically tough ascetic life style of mendicancy continued for forty-five years, and he was constantly traveling on foot for evangelical purposes, and partaking of a meal only once a day before noon to nourish his body, even nightly rest would have been frequently out-door. Such a life style must have gradually taken a heavy toll of his physical strength. The Buddha must be physically aged in outlook as well as within his body. He had frequent backache and abdominal pain in his final year. A severe abdominal pain and bleeding per rectum occurred once during the latest summer retreat near Vaiśālī. When he reached Cunda's house, though the Buddha's outlook was normal, his digestive system had been severely damaged already. The intestinal tract had been partially dead due to the lack of blood supply and the rest of the digestive tract was compensating it through alternative routes. The special cuisine *sūkaramaddava* cooked by Cunda triggered the similar symptom of pain while the Buddha was eating the meal. So he asked Cunda not to provide the same food to the rest. Pain did not subside, illness proceeded, bleeding of fresh blood per rectum continued. Having managed to proceed his way, barely ambulatory, he was finally collapsed in Kuśīnagara resulting in a shock and shivered, wanting of a drink of water due to the loss of blood.

Dr. Mettanando explains this stage of illness as follows:

“It is most likely that the Buddha suffered from a degenerative disease of the superior mesenteric artery, disease commonly found in the elderly. An infarction precipitated by the

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 79.

consumption of a large meal would then have been the cause of the Buddha's demise. The food, which required a large supply of blood for its digestion triggered severe abdominal pain as intestinal tissue died from insufficient blood supply. The thickening and hardening of the vessel walls the major obstruction of the blood flow to the intestine.

This hypothesis is consistent with the information given in the narrative of the discourse, including the history of an earlier illness during his last rains-retreat. The Buddha's request to have the food buried, sudden severe pain, his urgent repeated requests for water, the request for the fourfold cloak, the request to stop fanning him and the duration of the illness until he passed away in the night.<sup>26</sup>

The second point of good news is that despite the gloomy discriminatory environment and cultural conflict, the Buddhist nuns managed to express their achievement of spirituality in one of the dual text of Anthologies collected and edited by enlightened monks and nuns known as *Theragāthā* (*The Songs of the Elders*) and *Therīgāthā* (*The Songs of the Sisters*). With the foregoing analyses of history and context, especially the fate of Buddhist nunnery through analysis of the First Council, the meaning of messages included in these two volumes reach our modern readers in quite different ways and meanings. Dr. Mettanando places a special importance on these texts, claiming that despite the dark suppression and hidden agenda of the First Council to rid of the nuns and their institution, the Pāli canon managed to record the evidence of equality of human spirituality, between male and female. The authors of *Theragāthā* are counted 265, and those of *Therīgāthā* are 73. Nuns' anthology constitutes approximately 20 % of the entirety whereas monks' anthology 80 %. If this is a ratio that nuns who managed to achieve the saintly status (Arhatship) and to include their anthologies into the collection, it is a remarkable

accomplishment. Mettanando calls the *Therīgāthā* as an evidence of the early Buddhism's golden age:

Virtually all canonical material from the very early days of every world religion was composed by men. This is also true of Buddhism, the religion of peace, liberation and wisdom. The *Therīgāthā* is the only book composed entirely by women that found its way into the Tripiṭaka. Those authors were honored as Arahants. Moreover, in the over 2,500 years since the demise of the Buddha, no other Pāli book is known to have been composed by a woman.

The *Therīgāthā* is a monument to the period of Buddhist history in which women made their greatest achievements. It was a golden age, in which Buddhism offered truly equal opportunities and rights to all of its ordained members regardless of sex. It was a time in which women were trusted and fulfilled their greatest potentialities, achieving the highest spiritual states, along with social acceptance and recognition. The time in which the *Therīgāthā* was composed was, in fact, the only time in which women had equal rights in Theravāda Buddhism. That time was the life of the founder, and the acceptance, recognition, and equality of women emanated from the Buddha himself<sup>27</sup>.

I am obliged to end this paper without a specific theory or agenda as a conclusion, but with an emphatic suggestion that a new opening of research and enquiry is in the horizon. When you look for historical sources of materials on the subject of Śākyamuni's background, we come to know that there are only two types:

- (1) Legendary collection of Jātakas texts (Biographical Stories), and
- (2) Official records of Tripiṭakas.

Both these materials are difficult sources for academic research on history, because it is generally believed that the Jātakas are legendary stories

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 99-100

and not historical facts, or at least, it seems to have been warned that they should not be activated to become actual human history. Likewise, the canonical scriptures must not be regarded as part of history and ought to be dealt with as part of religious phenomena. When I went into reading Jātakas, I was more and more convinced that the most of the contents, as far as these are related to Śākyaans, were applicable as historiography to explain the secular history of Śākyamuni's clan, society and culture. In order to make the Jātaka stories a real historiography, I was obliged to search for some reliable theories that gave life to each segmented story, and explain the phenomena described in it to be real history. I borrowed the theories of Arnold Toynbee and Max Weber to the extent that the records were not simply stories, but bearing some definite historical facts and meanings under these theories.

Side by side with historiographical reconstruction of the Jātakas, I tried to use the geographical contexts, to identify Lumbini, Tilaurākoṭ and Piprahwā, to check the Piprahwā nirvāṇa stūpa and Kuṣānagara nirvāṇa stūpa in relation to the Kuṣāṇa patronage. The Śākyaan people definitely existed, but suddenly disappeared when the Kuṣāṇa power receded to its northwest regional ruling. The Piprahwā stūpa must have been totally concealed around the time of the Śākyaan people's disappearance. By the fifth century Fa-Hsian found the Kapilavastu region to have been most dissolute, uninhabited region, covered by forests with roaming wild animals. Hsuan-tsang too did not see the Piprahwā Stūpa two centuries later, because it was kept hidden until accidentally opened by an English colonial family in the eighteenth century. In a decade or so ago, the site of the Lumbini stūpa and the shrine of Māyā Devī were archeologically excavated, from which, as expected, the statue enshrined by Aśoka came to light. Although the world Buddhists and UN development project earnestly tried to rebuild various monuments and social institutions in the region of Lumbini and Śākyaan legacy, the progress was staggeringly slow, and the prospect has been darkened by the social

unrest of Neo-Maoist movement and the Hindu oriented weak Nepalese government. I was really afraid that it was an end of academic interest and research as far as the beginning of Buddhism is concerned.

At this juncture, therefore, I welcome Dr. Mettanando's daring proposition that the Buddhist Canons should be reexamined especially for scrutinizing the Brāhmaṇical manipulatory influence onto the Buddhist Canons. The subject of cultural conflict has become the central issue of human society in the twenty-first century. The North-west of the subcontinent and Central Asia has been a war zone already half a decade.

The Buddhist and human world already lost the two colossal Buddha statues at Bamiyan on account of religious and cultural difference. Destructive actions still go on. I feel a profound chill when I think of Buddhist scholars' visiting to the region once again. We have today an entirely new problem of Buddhist spirituality. We are facing the religious and cultural conflicts of monotheistic religions which are far more formidable than the conflicts of Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist religions and cultures. On the other hand, the revival of Buddhism in India has been hopelessly slow. Even the goal has moved away remoter than the time of those idealists who endeavored for national independence.

We still hear about social unrest due to cross-caste confrontation, and human tragedy due to sexual discrimination. It reminds us of the fate of Buddhist nuns and the nunnery. It is felt that the revival of Buddhism in India and the justice of Buddhist nuns and nunnery are cotemporaneous, indeed.

