

Origin, Evolution and Objectives of the Ascetics Movement in India **P2**

* Renunciation (anagarika) aids the realization of the Arahat ideal, for which purpose a pure life of celibacy is enjoined, culminating in mental tranquility and obtained by freedom from desires. Towards realization of the Arahat ideal, a path, a course of training was laid down by the Buddha. This was the Noble Eightfold Path.

* It was on the basis of this ideal that Gotama founded the Order of monks. In the Bhayabherava Sutta, MN4, he says:

“Sons of respectable families who have gone forth out of faith in Me, of them I am the Leader, I am of great service to them, I am adviser and they emulate my views.”

* In a highly idealized religious system there was no need to form any ritual or religious practice in admitting disciples or followers. In the early stage we find no clearly defined system of admission or ordination by any religious ritual. It is merely stated that Gotama said ‘Come monk, and practice the religious life in well-propounded Dhamma, leading to the extinction of all suffering.’ The significance of this phrase is two-fold.

1. In its idealistic sense it denotes that those desirous of joining the sect of Gotama should place their faith in the Dhamma and go forth in the system, which has Dhamma as its spiritual guide. ‘Going forth’ is in certain instances called ‘going forth in the Dhamma Vinaya’.

2. In another sense, taken more practically the phrase means that since an Order was not clearly formed, Buddha, by uttering this phrase expresses the desire that the prospective candidate joins his group and practices the higher life in accordance with the Dhamma.

* It is interesting to note that at this stage both pabbajja (admission) and upasampada (higher ordination) were simultaneously conferred on a person desirous of joining the sect. In its later history this ritual became a very elaborate one and full membership of the Order depended solely upon it.

BPFE 102 – Emergence of Buddhism and Basic Buddhist Teachings

* The history of the early Sangha in its land of origin has to be studied in two distinct phases:

a) The primitive Sangha, generally referred to as the ‘Catuddisa Sangha’, where monks were emerging from the Parivrajaka stage to a gradually semi-organized sect.

b) The second stage marks the Sangha as an organized Order with elaborate rules affecting its members and groups and ecclesiastical functions.

These rules of discipline had not been formulated at the inception of the Sasana.

* With the increase in the number of his followers Gotamas’s group gradually evolved into one of the prominent sects of the time

➔ Sakyaputta Samana

* In the Buddhist Sangha, there are certain characteristic features which were common to other recluses of the time. However, in its ideal and aim of recluship, it differed widely from them. With the evolution of the Sangha from a sect to an Order, legislation was necessary.

* The history of the Buddhist Sangha and its evolution from a wandering sect to a fully-fledged monastic Order with rules, the duties of each member of the Order and other obligations, is treated in detail in the Vinaya texts.

* In its dynamic process of growth, the Sangha had to face various contingencies and rules had to be made in preparation for most of them.

* At the earlier stage, the monks were guided by disciplinary measures generally in practice among other recluses. Those who entered the order for the sole objective of realizing Truth were admonished to build up their character on the threefold division of training, which are namely Sila, Samadhi and Panna. When there were lapses in disciplined behaviour the Buddha says in the **Kakacupama Sutta, MN 21** that it was enough for them to be reminded of it.

* However, as time went by, 20 years after the inception of the Sasana, rules were necessitated due to various reasons. The rules were introduced gradually, beginning with the colour for dyeing of robes. The Buddha

was said to be the first to introduce monastic rules and monastic administration.

* The framing of rules for the monks as the Order advanced is clearly highlighted in the Bhaddali Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya 65, which indicates that rules of Vinaya were late innovations. The discussion in this Sutta between Bhaddali and Buddha clearly amplifies the point. It runs thus:

What is the cause Reverend Sir, what is the reason why there were formerly fewer rules of training but more monks who were established in profound knowledge, and what is the cause, Reverend Sir, what is the reason why there are now more rules of training but few monks who are established in profound knowledge?

But when, Bhaddali, the Order has arrived at greatness, then some conditions which cause cankers appear here in the Order and then the Teacher lays down a rule of training for disciples so as to ward off those very conditions which cause cankers. Not until the Order has arrived at the height of gain, at the height of fame, at much learning, at long Standing, Bhaddali do some conditions which cause cankers appear here in the Order... and then the Teacher lays down a rule of training.

* Thus according to the Buddha, he would levy rules when the conditions for causing cankers appear in the dispensation. These are:

- 1) Greatness in long standing
- 2) Greatness in geographical expansion
- 3) Greatness in gains
- 4) Greatness in learning

* The territorial expansion and the influx of new adherents necessitated new procedural measures to be introduced for the healthy growth of the newly established monastic order.

* The sikkhapadas, which were the formal precepts laid down by the Buddha for his early disciples, are discussed in detail in the Samannaphala Sutta of the Digha Nikaya. They are broadly divided into Cula Sila and Maha Sila. The monks who joined the sect were termed the sekhas, those desirous of training in the precepts. By keeping the precepts the disciple becomes restrained.

* The purity of mind brought about by virtuous conduct was the aim of recluse life. It was to regulate the virtuous life that Buddha laid down precepts at this stage of the monastic Order, and not for outward conduct.

The benefits of levying Vinaya rules are:

- 1) For the excellence of the order
- 2) For the comfort of the order
- 3) For the restraint of evil-minded men
- 4) For the ease of well-behaved monks
- 5) For the restraint of cankers belonging to this life
- 6) For the destruction of the cankers belonging to other world
- 7) For the benefit of the non-believers
- 8) For the increasing of the number of believers
- 9) For the establishment of the good dhamma
- 10) For the encouragement of disciplinary behavior

* The importance attached to keeping these precepts is witnessed in the last sermon of the Buddha where he states that so long as the monks adhered to the precepts and abided by the virtues, their prosperity was assured.

* The steps taken were helpful for the progress of the community in two ways:

Firstly, these disciplinary rules were able to arrest those unseemly behaviour of monks. It maintained a cultured behaviour on standards accepted by the lay society thereby paving the path for the development of healthy social relations with the lay society, as depicted in the **Sigalovada Sutta**.

* Secondly, to enhance the uniformity in all patterns of behaviour and to make the monks conscious that they belonged to an integrated body

different from all customs, traditions and manners followed in lay society, thereby helpful to the development of the Sangha community.

* The training rules bind the sangha together by the common bond of brotherhood irrespective of its members' former social positions and to integrate them into one unitary organization cherishing collective consciousness of helping each other for each other's welfare.

* The vinaya and the dhamma are said to be working hand in hand and to be interdependent on each other. The Dhamma being the light and the Vinaya being the path leading to Nibbana.

The Happiness of Renunciation

Sayings of the Buddha

There are two kinds of happiness, O monks: the happiness of the householder and the happiness of the ascetic. But the greater of the two is the happiness of the ascetic.

There are two kinds of happiness, O monks: the happiness of the senses and the happiness of renunciation. But the greater of the two is the happiness of renunciation.

Anguttara-Nikaya, Duka-Nipata

The wise man will give up a lesser happiness to obtain a greater happiness.

Dhammapada, v. 290

Ah, happily we live, hateless among haters;
Amidst men of hate, hateless we dwell!
Ah, happily do we live healthy among those ailing;
Amidst ailing men, healthy we dwell!

Ah, happily do we live, greedless among the greedy;
Amidst greedy men, greed-free we dwell!

Ah, happily do we live, free of impediments!
Feeders on joy shall we be even as the Radiant Gods.

Dhammapada, vv. 197-200.

Happy is he contented in solitude,
Seeing the Truth he has learned,
Happy is he, who abstains from harming,
Living restrained towards all that lives.
Happiness true is freedom from passion,
If senses' cravings are left behind.
But highest happiness is his
Who has removed the self-conceit.

Udana, II. 1