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DISSENT AND DEVIANCE IN BUDDHIST MONASTICS: NON-CONFORMITY IN THE AGE OF THE BUDDHA

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ABSTRACT

Religious dissent and non-conformity are well embedded in the broader canvas of Indic religions. In a larger perspective, religious dissent was against certain established practices and beliefs of the religion. Deviances in religious practices broke the established procedures to benefit the self and others. Both had an emphatic impact in the social and spiritual domain as an influence and phenomenon. Buddhism has also faced dissent, deviance, and non-conformity since its origin. The incidents of Chabbaggiyā Bhikkhus, the Kosāmbī dispute, and the episode of Devadatta are some of the significant events that gave the nascent religion a shock but also the strength to plug the loopholes for the future. The majority of these deviances in the period of the Buddha were related to social and material milieus and resolved by the Saṅgha either accommodating the views of the doers or introducing prohibitory rules by considering them as rule breakers. The non-conformity raised by Devadatta was termed as his ambition, and his demands are related to the functional aspects of the Saṅgha. However, the Buddha did not endorse his view; instead, he made it optional. The Buddha as a paramount authority was able to see dissents or deviance in a holistic perspective. The paper will examine the nature, procedure, and ramifications of dissents and deviances in the age of the Buddha.

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INTRODUCTION

In metalinguistic wisdom, words like dissenter, deviance, and non-conformist in Buddhist reference, can be conventionally used for monks and nuns who tried to deviate from the accustomed form of the *Vinaya* or the protestant groups not following the specific rules of the Saṅgha and proposing their own set of rules. Terms like non-conformity, dissent, and deviance are often interchangeably used here to represent the protestant dissent and deviance within the Saṅgha. The non-conformity of rules and the origin of deviance is a form of an organizational dispute over some established set of rules or practices. One group made the allegations that others were deviating from the established path and procedures. The continuous cry or criticism by a section of monks creates a conducive environment and a sense of grievance for sectarian conflict and schism.¹ It manifested itself as an attempt to incorporate the un-*Vinayic* structural changes in the established procedures of Saṅgha, and these nonconformists always emphasized deviation from rules set up by the Buddha because of quantifiable gains or their ambitions. In the life of the Buddha, these denominations were generally linked to the structural form and practices of the Saṅgha. In the majority of the cases, doctrinal issues were not involved. However, after the *mahāparinibbāna* of the Buddha, sometimes peculiar situations arrived when the monks protested not as deviants but as saviors to save the original structure of the Saṅgha. In the 2nd century BCE, the ‘Westerners,’ the monks from Kosāmbī, Avanti, and Mathurā, protested against the violation of rules by the ‘Vajjians,’ the monks from Vesālī who were considered deviants.

Asanga Tilakaratne says that dissent in early Buddhist tradition can be sentenced as a paradigm shift from established monastic procedures, and the non-conformity is linked to disagreement with ecclesiastically established conventions. These dissents or deviance are considered ‘wrong view’ (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) and categorized as an evil and damaging prospect. The schism (*saṅghabheda*) represents a group of monks and nuns who claim their establishment is the true representative of the religion. This is treated as a severe offense, and the errant monks are essentially characterized as destabilizing factors in the monastic order.² Deviance and non-conformity in the early Buddhist context were an infringement of established rules and practices by the monks and nuns for seeking material comfort. The majority of such occurrences transpired intentionally to seek personal benefit by deviating from disciplined and inflexible monastic rules. It is well argued that dissent may raise questions about a particular practice or rule, which has a limited impact on the system. The protest was more extensive and organized, and the protestants proposed a new or modified ideology and methodology among their followers, who endorsed his view as legitimate and vice-versa. It was considered illegitimate and redundant by those who believed it a possible source of non-conformity.³ Such occurrences were a regular feature of the Indic religions and were dealt with by their founders and followers with utmost sincerity and judicious accomplishments.

¹ John Wilson, “The Sociology of Schism” in *A Sociological Year Book of Religion in Britain*, vol.4 (London: SLM Press, 1971), 3-6.

² Asanga Tilakaratne, “Dissent in Buddhism: Its Doctrinal (Dhamma) and Monastic Disciplinary Perspectives,” in *Buddhist Ethics: Collected Papers of Asanga Tilakaratne* (Malabe, Sri Lanka: Sarasavi Publishers (Pvt) Ltd, 2020), 63-65.

³ Romila Thapar, “Dissent and Protest in Early Indian Tradition,” *Diogenes* 29 (1981): 32-33.

BEGINNING OF NON-CONFORMITY IN SAṄGHA

The Buddha was born in a social environment where the juxtaposition of many religious ideas was at work. At one end, the Brahmana literature was expounding and propagating the sacrificial ideology of *yañña*. The metaphysical and epistemological worldviews of the *Āraṇṇīkas* and *Upaniṣadas* were preaching alternative karmic principles developed from their dissent from sacrificial rituals. Samanic movements invigorated different ideologies, from extreme materialism to rigorous asceticism from existing traditions. Among the Brahmanical and Samanic religious traditions, Buddhism, one of the most astounding, organized, and philanthropic monastic traditions, originated on the root of dissent. Siddhārtha's quest for emancipation saw his differences with his two teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Udraka Rāmaputta, and his five companions of Uruvelā, who later became his first disciples. With the Buddha as the *Bhagavā* and *Sattha* (lord and master), the bhikkhus of *cātuddiśamsaṅgha* were committed to the emancipation of humanity (*Bahujan hitāya*) and attainment of *arahanthood*. Saṅgha, as a nascent institution, was founded in Vārāṇasī and became the most flourishing organization in the first few years of the *Buddhasāsana*, comprising monks and nuns from different religious and monastic traditions. Initially, its growth in different geographical spaces with members from different belief systems was considered a significant factor for fissiparous tendencies in the Buddhist monastics.⁴ Since the embryonic stage of the Saṅgha, the Buddha realized that people from different traditions and cultures embraced the monkhood, and their inherent values may differ. The possibility of potential disputes, fissiparous tendencies, and schism was checked by incorporating a wide range of monastic and non-monastic subjects in the *Vinaya*. Initially, schismatic proclivities were rarely treated as a severe issue. The internal conflict, favoritism, breaking of the *Vinaya*, etc., are attributed to some disciplinary issues and were internally resolved. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* indicates the Buddha's concern about the future of the Saṅgha and possible fissiparousness in the ranks of the Buddhist monks and nuns. He warned them to peacefully adhere to all ecclesiastical activities (*samaggā*), assemble and meet frequently, follow the community elders, and avoid fruitless arguments that will endure and strengthen the Saṅgha.⁵ The cause of deviance may be when a particular sacred authority perceived the changes or new interpretations in monastic practices or teachings as a transgression of the rules. If the apparent wrongdoers are unwilling to reform or amend the interpolated practices, that group is considered a class of heretics.

Sometimes, the changes could be mistaken and unintentional, and the person supposed to be the wrongdoer did not deliberately deviate from the *Vinaya* practices. Still, it happened because both parties were not ready to adjust and amend. In another instance, the competing parties charged each other as deviant, and conflicting groups either adopted a conciliatory approach or formed their sectarian group under the paramountcy of the ultimate authority, i.e., the Buddha. It also happened that monks from different religious traditions embraced Buddhism and became *arahant*; they taught some of the practices of their earlier religions. For example, Sona Kolivīsa, in his novicehood, did rigorous asceticism and once started bleeding. When the Buddha came to know, he admonished him by giving the example of a lute that exerting too much pressure on wires will break it, and loosening of the wire will not yield sound. Engage in the *majjhima* that will produce the best result.⁶ The *Vinaya* was a reconciliation between the two extremes

⁴ Anand Singh, "Wandering Alms Men and Their Saṅgha," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 99-100.

⁵ *Dīgha Nikāya*, II.72.

⁶ *Mahāvagga*, IV.2.5.

of sensuality and self-mortification. Some of these practices were welcomed and accommodated in the vast paraphernalia of Buddhist monasticism, but some were denied and rejected.

Cultural pluralism, changes in monastic structures, regional variations, weather conditions, personal ambitions, and individualism have been the specific causes for the deviation of the rules and preponderance of schismatic tendencies in Buddhism. Early signs of dissent could be either a demand for some privileges or restoration of the same that was deprived because these were considered non-Buddhist. The heresy of the monks of Kosāmbī, Chabbaggiyā Bhikkhus, and Devadatta could be such examples. Sometimes, the privileges taken by a group of monks were not considered appropriate by the other group of monks, and their practices were challenged. The cases of the Vajjian monks and Mahādeva could be such examples. As a great preceptor and religious leader, the Buddha showed utmost catholicity and pragmatic thinking. He acknowledged that every religious preacher deliberates some propensity of truth in their preaching and practice. The Catholicity of the Buddha could be visualized from the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, where he summarised the opinions of his predecessors, contemporaries, and adversaries. It was preached between Rājagaha and Nālandā, where different sects and traditions flourished. The Tathāgata entrusts his fellow monks that they should not show any resistance, displeasure, or hatred against other religious sects or persons. His calmness and accommodative views could be visible when he answered the question of wanderer Suppiya and his disciple Brahmadata. While narrating the talk on wanderers (*paribbājakakathā*), he expounded on the different kinds of views among the Indic ascetic traditions of the Middle Ganga Valley. Some of the critical views were categorized under the broader umbrella of *pubbantakappika* (speculation about the past), *sāssatavāda* (eternalism), *ekaccasāssatavāda* (partial eternalism), *antānantavāda* (finite and infinity of the world); *amarāvikkhepavāda* (endless equivocation); *adhiccasamuppannavāda* (fortuitous organization); *aparantakappika* (speculation about future); *saññivāda* (percipient immortality); *asaññivāda* (non-percipient immortality); *nivasāñā-nasññivāda* (neither percipient nor percipient); *ucchedavāda* (annihilationism); *diṭṭhidhammānibbānavāda* (doctrine of *nibbāna* have and now); *paritas-sitavipphandits* (agitation and uncertainty); *phassapaccayavara* (conditioned by contact).⁷ The *Sutta* gives the fair idea that the Buddha was well-versed in different thoughts during his time. He did not accept the core values of any of such beliefs, as these were not free from biases and prejudices. Some of the monks who joined Buddhism belonged to these sects and traditions. Though they joined the order, some of the thoughts of their earlier faiths were kept alive, which later on mingled with the ideas and practices of Buddhism and paved the way for the creation of ripples in the broader horizon of the Saṅgha. Emile Durkheim says that in early Buddhism, the gods and spirits had no role or, if at all, had only a minor role. There was no godhood, and their primary mode of worship was meditation, followed by the regulated path of monasticism. But in the later stage, the Buddha himself was accepted as divine.⁸ However, the transformation of Buddhism from the period of Buddha to the last phase of multiple doctrines, schools, and gods had a long process. This historical process indicates that the vague idea of divinity for the Buddha and his superhuman power (*iddhi*) was always present in Buddhism. It blossomed at a broader scale when

⁷ *Dīgha Nikāya*, I.70

⁸ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Form of Religion* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 46-47.

the followers of Mahāyāna developed the Scholastic form of Buddhism.⁹ When the Buddha was alive, the Saṅgha became unified because, on every occasion when the dispute began, he or the imminent monks deputed by him intervened in the issue and resolved the crisis. On many such occasions, the gravest of the problems were resolved, and the possible danger of schism was avoided. The *Catuma Sutta* informs that the Buddha once resided in a monastic dwelling near the Śākya village of Catuma. Some monks continuously make noise and disturb the proceedings of the Saṅgha. The monks were instructed to leave the monastery, but the Śākyans and Brahma Sahampati requested the Buddha to reconsider their decision, and they were acquitted of their wrongs. The Buddha preached to them this *Sutta* to get rid of anger, greed, and sensual pleasure.¹⁰ The monks and nuns who joined the Saṅgha came from different socio-economic backgrounds, and some could not adopt the mental, physical, and material austerities. These microelements intended either to return to their previous fold or were keen to twist the *Vinaya* for their survival.

EARLY DEVIANCES: CASE OF CHABBAGGIYĀ BHIKKHUS AND KOSĀMBĪ MONKS

The episode of the Chabbaggiyā Bhikkhus could be the best example to understand this kind of situation. This group of six monks (Chabbaggiyā) who twisted the *Vinaya* had many followers of the monks and nuns. The names of Chabbaggiyās were-Assaji, Punabbasu, Paṇduka, Lohitaka, Mettiya, and Bhimaja. These six are known in the Pali literature for their un-*Vinayic* conduct.¹¹ Their disciples, both monks and nuns, were mentioned as the breakers of rules.¹² The *Samantapāsādikā* informs that these monks were from Sāvattthī, and their dire financial conditions led them to join the Saṅgha. Sāriputta and Moggallāna ordained them. After joining the Saṅgha, they divided themselves into three groups: Assaji and Punabbasu lived in Kītāgiri, Mettiya, and Bhimaja in Rājagaha, Paṇduka, and Lohitaka at Jetavana.¹³ The *Vinaya Piṭaka* records that Assaji and Punabbasu, with their followers, were often un-*Vinayic*. Despite their monkhood, they used to grow flowers, make garlands and wreaths, and offer them to women. They did not follow the *nissāya*, partook in food at the wrong time, used perfume, and indulged in music, singing, etc.¹⁴ When some virtuous monks informed the Buddha of their nefarious conduct, he immediately sent Sāriputta and Moggallāna to resolve the issue and enforce the act of *pabbajāṇiyakamma* (banishment). When the order was read, the Chabbaggiyās became enraged but were later evicted from the Kītāgiri monastery.¹⁵ Most of them and their followers were notoriously known for their transgressive actions against a virtuous group of monks known as Sattarasabaggiyā Bhikkhus, a group of seventeen monks. The Sattarasabaggiyās were known for their dedication to Dhamma, and their patrons developed a monastery at Sāvattthī for them. When it was on the verge of completion, the Chabbaggiyās forced the Sattarasas to evacuate. The Sattarasa requested that they share the space with them as the monastery is a common property of the Saṅgha, but the Chabbaggiyās forcefully evicted them.

⁹ Marco Orru and Amy Wang, "Durkheim, Religion, and Buddhism," *Journal of Scientific Study of Religion* 31(1992): 51-55.

¹⁰ *Majjhima Nikāya*, I 456 ff.

¹¹ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, I, 84ff, 104, 106, 111.

¹² *Ibid.*, II.66,252, 269, 271.

¹³ *Samantapāsādikā*, III.613ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III.625

¹⁵ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, II.9-15.

When the Buddha heard about the incident, he rebuked them and urged his fellow monks to facilitate the stay of other monks in a *vihāra* (*senasanamgahetum*). The Buddha also suggested appointing a monk free from partiality, malice, silliness, and fear as a regulator to allot space to every monk in a *vihāra*.¹⁶ The Bhikkhunīs associated with the Chabbaggiyās were also reported un-*Vinayic* on many occasions. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* mentions many bathing *ghāts* of the river Acirāvatī, where the monks and nuns used to go for the baths. On some of the *ghāts*, the courtesans used to come for the bath. The Buddha prohibited the nuns from going to those baths. Despite the prohibitory orders, the Chabbaggiyā nuns did not stop visiting there, and punitive action was taken against them. Some were also engaged in garland making, which was not allowed.¹⁷ Sāriputta ordained Assaji and Punnabasu, but soon after joining the Saṅgha, they developed differences with his teacher. Once, the Buddha was traveling to Sāvattthī with a vast entourage of monks. Assaji and Punnabasu were told to make arrangements for the stay of these monks. Both agreed to make arrangements for all except Sāriputta and Moggallāna.¹⁸ It is believed that the Chabbaggiyā monks were the followers of the Lokāyata (materialist) before joining Buddhism. They were known to deviate from the *Vinaya* rules and often reported indulging in luxuries. They were not against the Buddha, but they could not transform themselves in a strict monastic environment of Buddhism and sought the opportunity to dilute the true spirit of the *Vinaya*.¹⁹ Some were known for their dedication to the Buddha and strived hard to be a true *Vinayic*. Among them, the group of Panduka and Lohitaka were the most righteous and did not transgress *Vinaya*.²⁰ But their company with the other fours was the reason for their bad reputation. Most of them vacillated between monastic and *saṃsāric* traditions and finally succumbed to the worldly path. Their illegitimate behavior and indulgence in food compelled the Buddha to regulate the rules for the partaking of the food. The two rules for the regulation of alms, *piṇḍacarikavatta*, and *bhattaggavatta*, were specially framed because of the indecent behavior of the Chabbaggiyās.²¹ Their conduct gives the broad spectrum of the functional aspect of the Saṅgha that the majority of the monks and nuns coming from different traditions could transform themselves to embrace the true spirit of Buddhism. Still, many, like the Chabbaggiyās, did vice-versa to mold the rules for a pleasant life.

The Kosāmbī dispute was another major event in the lifetime of the Buddha that shook the nascent fabric of Buddhism. The Ghositārāma Vihāra was an important monastery in Kosāmbī during the time of the Buddha. One episode happened when the Buddha was visiting this Vihāra, i.e., Māgandiya episode, and another in Vihāra itself. The *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā* informs that Māgandiya's village was at Kammāsadamma, and the Buddha visited the place on his way to Kosāmbī at the request of Ghosita, Kukkuta, and Pāvārika. The incident related to Māgandiya happened during the 9th *Vassavāsa* when Māgandiya offered the hand of his beautiful daughter to the Buddha, and on refusal, he took it as an insult. He and his daughter did bad mouthing for the Buddha, but the Buddha emerged clean. Attracted by the beauty of

¹⁶ *Cullavagga*, VI.11

¹⁷ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, IV.259ff

¹⁸ *Ibid.* II. 171

¹⁹ Nand Kishore Prasad, *Studies in Buddhist and Jain Monasticism* (Vaishali: Research Institute of Prakrit, Jainology, and Ahimsa, 1972), 66.

²⁰ George Peiris Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 2007), 926.

²¹ *Cullavagga*, VIII.5, 8.

Māgandiya's daughter, King Udayana of Kosāmbī married her. In the palace, she intrigued against the chief queen Sammāvatī, a devout follower of the Buddha, and burnt her to death. It is believed that she took revenge on the Saṅgha by this vile action.²² The *Māgandiya Sutta* mentions that he debated the Buddha on philosophical ideas but succumbed to his erudition. The Buddha disputed his view that metaphysics and disputations are the soul of purity and guided him that purity comes from inner peace. The true ascetic propagates peace, and one should not indulge in disputes.²³ His dissent was much remembered and debated in the Ghositārāma Vihāra for a long time. Another dispute erupted in the same monastery between the two groups of monks; one group was the specialist of the *Vinaya* (later known as *Vinayadharas*), and the others were more inclined towards Dhamma (later identified as *Dhammadharas*). On one occasion, a follower of the Dhammadharas went to the toilet and, after refreshing himself, inadvertently left some water in the toilet pot. Soon after, one of the *Vinayadharas* went to the same toilet and found some water left in the vessel. They objected to the water being left in the toilet pot after the toilet service. They demanded action against the errant monk as he committed a mistake and broke the rule. The *Dhammadhara* monk apologized and informed the fraternity of the monks that it was inadvertently done. He had no intention to break the rule. However, neither party listened to the other, and the matter was reported to the Buddha, who was residing in the same monastery when this incident happened.²⁴ The Buddha admonished the monks to stay united, but they were not ready to relent. In anguish, the Buddha left Kosāmbī, leaving the monks to their fate. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* informs that when the people of Kosāmbī learned the reason for the Buddha's absence, they became highly enraged and stopped giving alms to the monks. In the meantime, the monks realized their fault and visited the Buddha residing at that time at Sāvattihī.²⁵ The dispute in Kosāmbī shows how a trivial issue can be transformed into a significant disagreement and the seed of factionalism because of the monks' loyalty to a particular view or teacher, and it can jeopardize the unity of the Saṅgha. The Buddha knew that Saṅgha was still in the formative stage, and even a minor dispute could lead to schism and downfall. He was not interested in looking at the right or wrong, intentional or unintentional breach of rule, but more engrossed with the fundamental issue of how the entrants of the Saṅgha, unknown to each other, can relate themselves and develop a brotherhood. He instructed the monks to resolve the issue among themselves and develop loving-kindness. Disputes and strife occur everywhere, but differences should not be transformed into schisms. The Saṅgha is formed on the foundation of brotherhood, and unrealistic expectations could be dangerous. The *Kosāmbiya Sutta*²⁶ mentions six ethical points to be followed by every monk and nun to establish unity and avoidance of discord in the Saṅgha- i. action of loving-kindness in public and in private; ii. Maintenance of verbal acts of loving-kindness in private and public with other brethren; iii. maintenance of mental acts of loving-kindness in public and private and towards fellow monastics; iv. Share things with fellow monks; v. Dwell in public or private places in common; vi. Should develop an eightfold path.

²² *Udāna*, VII.10; *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, I.199, III.193ff.

²³ *Suttanipāta*, VV.47, 835.

²⁴ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, I.337-57; *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, I.44ff.

²⁵ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, I 337-57, *Udāna*, IV.5.

²⁶ *Majjhima Nikāya*, I.320ff.

DEVADATTA: A DEFIANT MONK

Devadatta earned a vicious image among the Buddhists because of his conspiracies, demands, and the ensuing conflict with the Buddha. Buddhist canonical and non-canonical literature and Buddhist Sanskrit literature denounced him for his evil characteristics, having evil companions, and having developed obsessions.²⁷ He was the son of Suppabuddha, the maternal uncle of Siddhārtha, and brother of Bhaddakaccana or Yaśodharā.²⁸ When Kaludāyī invited the Buddha to visit Kapilvastu, he consented and later visited with many monks. During his wanderings in Kapilvastu, he converted many Śākya, including Devadatta, Ānanda, Bhagu, Kimbila, Bhaddita, Anuruddha, and Upali.²⁹ Devadatta became an ardent monk in very little time and developed a rare kind of *iddhi* that is possible for those who are evolved (*puthujja-nika-iddhi*).³⁰ The Buddha declared him one of the eleven chief monks whom he praised.³¹ In his early phase of monastics, he was considered the foremost, but later on, he became jealous of the Buddha's prominence in society and vied for the same stature through vicious means.

The *Vinaya Piṭaka* informs that Devadatta influenced Ajātaśatru by impressing him with his miracles. He transformed himself into a young boy wearing a girdle of a snake and sitting on the lap of Ajātaśatru. When Ajātaśatru became frightened, and then Devadatta returned to his original form. Ajātaśatru was very impressed by him, and he rewarded him with 500 chariots and served him daily with 500 five hundred types of dishes.³² It is believed that eight years before the *mahāparinibbāna* of the Buddha, Devadatta visited him and requested to declare him as his successor as the Lord was getting old. However, his submission was declined. The Buddha told him that he would not hand over the leadership of the Saṅgha even to Sāriputta and Moggallāna. Why should I entrust the responsibility to you, the corpse (Chava), and lickspittle (*khelopaka*)?³³ E. Lamotte has examined Pali's term *khelopaka* or *khelāsika*, which was implicated as an abusive term 'eating phlegm' in many Pali literature, and endorses that the explanation given by Buddhaghosa in the *Samantapāsādikā* is the most authentic. It means the subsistence earned from the wrong way of livelihood should be vomited (discarded) by the venerable monks like spittle.³⁴ Devadatta was charged with the blame of living in luxury and abundance.

The Pali sources inform that he enjoyed sumptuous food, i.e., five hundred vessels of three-flavored rice and the other excellent dishes sent by Ajātaśatru.³⁵ Probably, the Buddha's remark was against his lifestyle rather than personal. The *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta* says that Prince Abhaya Kumāra, son of Bimbisāra, at the instigation of Jain monk Nātaputta, visited the Buddha and asked how a great person like the Buddha could condemn Devadatta to go to hell. The Buddha replied, 'If a word is false, the Tathāgata never utters it, be it pleasant or disagreeable. But if a word is true, justified, and useful, be it unpleasant or

²⁷ *Cullavagga*, VII.3

²⁸ *Mahāvastu*, II.22; *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, III.44.

²⁹ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, II.182

³⁰ *Ibid.* II.183

³¹ *Udāna*, I.5

³² *Vinaya Piṭaka*, II.184ff; III.171f; 174f; IV.71; *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, I,112ff.

³³ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, II.188; *Majjhima Nikāya*, I.393

³⁴ *Samantapāsādikā*, VI.1275 (*Khelāsako ti ettha micchājīvena uppannapacayā ariyehi vantabbā khelasadisā.*); Etienne Lamotte, "Did the Buddha Insult Devadatta?" *Buddhist Studies Review* 14 (1997): 4-5.

³⁵ *Jātaka* no.186, 508,

disagreeable for others, the Tathāgata reserves the right to utter it appropriately. And why? Because the Tathāgata has compassion for all beings.³⁶ Lamotte says that the word *khelopaka* may be unsound to listen to, but the Buddha uttered it for the good of Devadatta.³⁷ Pali sources mention that after this incident, Devadatta started conspiring against the Buddha and tried to kill him. His mentor Ajātaśatru consented to help him, and Devadatta was given some royal archers to kill the Buddha. These archers were placed at different Rājagaha gates and instructed to kill the Buddha when he came for alms. When one of the archers saw the Buddha, he was mesmerized by his omnipresence and accepted his guilt before him. The Buddha pardoned and consoled him. Soon, the conspiracy became known and aborted. In his next attempt, Devadatta conspired to kill the Buddha by hurling a big stone boulder at him when the Buddha was treading on the slopes of Gijjhakūta. Though the Buddha was miraculously saved, a splinter struck the Buddha's foot and caused a minor injury, which Jīvaka treated. Devadatta's next attempt was to send a fierce royal elephant of Ajātaśatru, Nālagiri, on the path of the Buddha to kill him. When Nālagiri saw the Buddha, he submitted at his feet. The Buddha blessed him.³⁸

His last attempt to displace the Buddha was to create a schism in the Saṅgha. In this conspiracy, he was supported by other monks- Kokālika, Katamoraka-tissa, Khandadeviyaputta, and Samuddadatta. He put five demands before the Buddha: (1) bhikkhus should always reside in the forest, (2) bhikkhus should not accept invitations to meals and always live on alms, (3) always wear robes made of discarded rags, and (4) dwell at the foot of a tree (*bodhirukkha*), (5) that they should abstain completely from fish and flesh.³⁹ The Buddha did not make these rules obligatory but permitted the monks to follow these rules except for sleeping under a tree during the rainy season if they desired. On refusal, Devadatta charged the Buddha to live in abundance and informed Ānanda to hold *uposatha* independently. He persuaded five hundred monks to join him in Gayāśīsa.⁴⁰ The Buddha sent Sāriputta and Moggallāna to Gayāśīsa to guide and bring back the non-conformists in Buddhist Saṅgha. Judging they had joined him, Devadatta exulted and welcomed them despite Kokālika's warning. It is said that Devadatta preached to monks very late and desired to rest. He asked Sāriputta to address the monks. Sāriputta and Moggallāna persuaded the five hundred monks to return with them. It is mentioned that Kokālika knew the intention of both monks and kicked Devadatta in the chest to awaken him. When Devadatta discovered the plot, hot blood oozed from his mouth, and for the next nine months, he became seriously ill.⁴¹ As his end approached, he wished to see the Buddha, though the latter had said it would not be possible in this life. Devadatta, however, started the journey to Jetavana, and after reaching there, he stopped near a pond to refresh himself. Here, the earth swallowed him up, and he reached to Avīcī Hell.⁴² It is said that at the moment of being swallowed by the earth, Devadatta uttered a stanza in which he declared that he had no refuge other than the Buddha.⁴³ G. P. Malalasekera has provided

³⁶ *Majjhima Nikāya*, I.392-6.

³⁷ Lamotte, 'Did the Buddha Insult Devadatta?' 15.

³⁸ Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, vol. I., 1108-1109.

³⁹ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, III.196-197.

⁴⁰ *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, I.122-.

⁴¹ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, IV.199-200 (The Vinaya account does not mention the kicking, but it is discussed in the Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, I.143).

⁴² Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, Vol. I, 1110 (The *Vinaya Piṭaka* informs that he went to Niraya Hell, staying there for an aeon, III. 201-202).

⁴³ *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, I.147; *Milindapanha*.108.

a list of *Jātakas* where Devadatta was considered depraved, wicked, and always engaged in atrocious delinquencies.⁴⁴ A. M. Hocart says that the rivalry shown in the Buddhist literature between the Buddha and Devadatta is more socially oriented than his ambitions. Joking relations as a social custom was prevalent among the cross cousins of the Śākya and Koliya. Later on, this custom was abandoned, and the symbolic antagonism was transformed into a power struggle between the religion's founder and his cousin.⁴⁵ Kalipada Mitra accepts Hocart's view that cross-cousin marriage was prevalent in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh in the ancient past. He says the Buddha's diatribe against Devadatta is not exclusive as narrated in the Pali literature. Several other instances are recorded in Pali literature where the Buddha admonished the monks. Pindola Bhārdvāja was admonished by the Buddha when he used his *iddhi* to get a sandal-wood alms bowl. He adhered to the Buddha's advice, subjugated his intemperance, and became an *arahant*.⁴⁶ The disliking for Devadatta may be because of his misuse of *iddhi*. It was common practice in those days to develop insight through meditation. The great ascetics like Makkhaliputta Gośāla, Puraṇa Kassapa, Ajita Keśakambhī, Pakudda Kaccayana, Saṅgha Belatthiputta, and Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta also developed some types of *iddhis*. Probably, it was one of the characteristics of *arahants* of the time.⁴⁷ Given his demand for including his five cardinal points as a mandatory practice in the Saṅgha, these practices are not new, as some ascetics of the time were used to engage in rigorous practices. Mahāvīra and Makkhaliputta Gośāla did rigorous asceticism together for some time in Nālandā and, after that, parted ways with each other. Mahāvīra abandoned his clothes during his wanderings, and Ājīvika were also known for their austerities. They took food offered to them only in their hands.⁴⁸ The only standpoint that differs in the case of *iddhi* is that Devadatta used it for personal gain, and the Buddha prohibited it. Devadatta was, in that way, closer to Ājīvika and its founder, Makkhaliputta Gośāla.

Some instances are known where the Saṅgha looks anxious about the apparent outlook of comfort among the people. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* mentions the story of a young child, Upali from Rājagaha, whose parents are worried about his future and discuss his occupational training. After much consideration, the parents wished him to live a life of ease and ordained him at sixteen with other novices of the same age. They thought that their child would live a happy life. Because of ignorance of monastic rules, these novices started demanding food early in the morning. Later on, the minimum age for monkhood was amended to get it fixed at twenty years.⁴⁹ As a leading monk of his time, it was possible that Devadatta was pained to listen to the antagonistic views propagated by the rival sects about Buddhism and proposed a more solitary life to the Buddha as it was first designed by the Lord. Still, later on, rules were changed to a permanent monastic. The Buddha did not oppose his view but was more pragmatic as every monk couldn't be an *Āraṇṇīka* (forest dwellers). Some prominent monks contemporary to the Buddha, like Mahākassapa, lived aloof in the caves and forests and were very strict disciplinarian. Devadatta did not practice his proposed rules if we believed in Pali literature. He lived in luxurious cave dwellings built by Ajātaśatru either in Giriyaka (Rājagaha) or later on in Gayāśīsa. It is also noted that Ajātaśatru used to send sumptuous food to

⁴⁴ Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, Vol. I, 1110-1111.

⁴⁵ A.M. Hocart, "Buddha and Devadatta," *Indian Antiquary* 52 (1923): 267-72.

⁴⁶ *Anguttara Nikāya*, I.23

⁴⁷ Kalipada Mitra, "Cross-Cousin Relation Between Buddha and Devadatta," *Indian Antiquary* 53 (1924): 101-102.

⁴⁸ B.M. Barua., *The Ājīvikas* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1920), 8-12.

⁴⁹ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, I.77f.

Gayāśīsa for Devadatta.⁵⁰ However, he was an ardent practitioner of the *dhutaṅgas* and slightly devoid of the middle path. Even the Buddha came across many kinds of teachings and meditation practices in his early days of wandering. Few of them were experimented with and adopted by him, and many of them were discarded. During his early years of wanderings as Siddhārtha, he embraced many forms of rigorous asceticism like control of mind, fasting unto death, etc. Eventually, he discovered the middle path, which was made obligatory when he developed his monastic tradition.⁵¹ Buddhaghosa says that the practices of *dhutaṅgas* were created in the age of the Buddha, but its present form was developed in the later stage of Buddhism.⁵² Yoshihiro Matsunami says that out of five precepts demanded by Devadatta, four were imparted to the *sāmaṇeras* when they entered novicehood. However, slight variation is noted among the different *Vinaya* traditions. The Pali texts mention the four: subsisting on food from alms, robes made of rags, use of *rukkhamūla* as shelter, and medicine extracted from herbs and urine (*putimuttabhēṣaja*). The difference between these rules and the five precepts of Devadatta is that the latter called for strict enforcement, while the Buddha allowed flexibility in some instances of deviations.⁵³ Even the Buddha himself endorses that these rules should not be liberally interpreted and deviation or unintentional breach should be allowed only in exceptional cases.⁵⁴

Asanga Tilakaratne says that two traditions of living in the settled monasteries on the periphery of the town and living in the *Ārañña* have existed since the establishment of *sāsana*. It isn't easy to perceive the fundamental nature of forest-dwelling in early Buddhism. During the *upasampadā*, the novices were reminded of four requisites in which forest dwelling was included. In the case of Devadatta's five demands, the Buddha made them optional, showing that they were not obligatory even in the formative phase of Buddhism. It was not a question of living in settled monasteries or the forest but teaching and carrying the fundamental monastic virtues or developing defilements in attitude and practice.⁵⁵ Even the monks of the highest order were also engaged in physical austerities. Even Sāriputta is known as a paradigmatic saint of settled monasticism.⁵⁶ The transformation of Devadatta from an ascetic to a demon was a slow and intentional process in Buddhism in the Pali tradition. The canonical literature does mention that he was

⁵⁰ Anand Singh, 'Giriyaka Hilltop Buddhist Monastic Complex (Rajgir): Understanding Antiquarian Remains and Physical Spaces', *Ancient Asia*, Vol.12: 13, 2021, 1–19 (My identification of Devadatta's cave in Rājagaha is one of the best caves of the region and can be rated only after the Saptapanni, Barabar, and Nāgarjunī clusters of caves. The physical verification of the cave suggests that it is not a natural cave but man-made. The chiselled marks are still showing on the wall of the cave. It has a vast hall with a tiny cavern on the right side, meant for meditation by the monk who occupied it. Outside the cave, a small cavern is also excavated. The cave is undoubtedly Buddhist, as the Dharmachakra, which has six lotus petals, is engraved at the entrance. The structural arrangement suggests Ajātsatru built this cave and replicated the model of Gijjhakuta in it. Singh, 'Giriyaka Hilltop Buddhist Monastic Complex (Rajgir)', 4-8).

⁵¹ Bhikkhu Analayo, "The Buddha's Pre-awakening Practices and Their Mindful Transformation," *Mindfulness* 12 (2021): 1893.

⁵² *Viśuddhimagga*, II.1-3.

⁵³ Yoshihiro Matsunami, "Conflict within the Development of Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 6 (1979): 333.

⁵⁴ Akira Hirakawa, *Studies in Primitive Buddhism* (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1964), 476; Hajime Nakamura, *The Formation of Primitive Buddhism* (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1974), 430-435.

⁵⁵ Asanga Tilakaratne, "Personality Differences of Arahants and the Origins of Theravada, A Study Two Great Elders of the Theravada Tradition: Mahākassapa and Ānanda" in *Dhamma-Vinaya: Essays in Honour of Venerable Professor Dhammavipharī (Jotiya Dhirasekera)*, ed. Asanga Tilakaratne et al. Colombo: Sri Lanka Association for Buddhist Studies, 2005, 245-246.

⁵⁶ *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, I.23.

ambitious and deviated from the path delivered by the Buddha but categorically emphasizes that in the end, he repented his decision and accepted the authority of the Buddha. His last wish seemed to be to meet the Buddha at Jetavana and ask for forgiveness, but he died on the way very near to his destination. One of the essential sources of water of Sāvattthī was declared a crater created for wicked Devadatta to facilitate his way to hell, known as Avīci.

Devadatta developed dissent out of certain monastic practices that crept into the Saṅgha. His reservation was consciously developed as he opposed some rules and provided an alternative solution, as he recommended in his five points. Probably, his vision was not to disrupt the structure of the Saṅgha but to carve out a niche for himself. However, he was not as charismatic as the Buddha. Hirakawa says that narratives against Devadatta mentioned in the Pali texts are doubtful. Many are less historical and intruded in later periods in the Buddhist canonical and non-canonical sources. The *patimokkha* was developed much before the designed conspiracies of Devadatta and shows fissiparous tendencies in the Saṅgha that the Buddha countered occasionally.⁵⁷ The narratives mentioned in Pali and Sanskrit sources show a definite pattern to describe the character of Devadatta. The early Pali texts show him as a person of great knowledge, but his position in the Saṅgha started to dwindle from bad to demonic in later Pali and Sanskrit texts. These texts always tell that Devadatta met on every occasion to harm the Buddha, who was wicked. He was overtly ridiculed and demonized. His five precepts are considered a mode of confrontation to challenge the authority of the Buddha. The references to Devadatta as wicked in the Pali sources suggest that Devadatta was used as a symbol for whatever jeopardizing the unity of the Saṅgha. He was considered a fool and victim for any eventuality, and when he is sanctified, the Saṅgha again becomes peaceful.⁵⁸ Reginald's assumption is true that Devadatta always led an austere forest life, and narratives of his wickedness against the Buddha were not real or early. Such fictitious narratives were added later on when Buddhism, over time, became more settled in the organized monasteries.⁵⁹ Andre Bareau says the early Pali texts dominated by the Thearvādins emphasize that Devadatta was the first one who created dissension among the ranks of the Saṅgha (*saṅghabheda*) in the Buddhist monastics. The basic difference between him and others is that in the case of Devadatta, Saṅgha was still under the Buddha. In his absence, the patriarchs and their groups were faithful to the teachings of the Buddha but not to other elders who had different interpretations of the *Vinaya* or the *Sutta*.

The authors of the *Vinaya* texts lived after the *mahāparinibbāna* of the Buddha when the nature of the Buddhist monastics was completely transformed. They resided in the settled monasteries in a more comfortable way than known in the age of the Buddha's first disciples. They believed this transformed outlook in conformity with the teachings of the Buddha as the Saṅgha became familiarised with these changes over time. They, therefore, could not understand the true nature of the reform and Devadatta's intention. For them, the purpose of Devadatta was vicious, and his acts were directed to harm the Buddha and his disciples.⁶⁰ The non-conformists of the period of the Buddha, like Devadatta, were marginalized

⁵⁷ Akira Hirakawa, *Studies in Primitive Buddhism* (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1964), 58.

⁵⁸ Yoshihiro Matsunami, "Conflict within the Development of Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 6 (1979): 336-337.

⁵⁹ Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 162-163.

⁶⁰ André Bareau, "Devadatta and the First Buddhist Schism," *Buddhist Studies Review* 14 (1997): 20-24.

in later Buddhist traditions because the stands taken were considered deviant from those conventional to the Saṅgha. He is epitomized in the vast historiography of Buddhism as deviating, dissenting, and cataclysm.

Though dissents and non-conformity that occurred during the period of the Buddha were resolved, those tensions continued to be reflected in canonical and non-canonical traditions. The adherents of Devadatta did not fully detach from Buddhist congregations. Still, they followed a covenant obligating their religious life to a tradition organized in agreement with the standards framed by their master. In the seventh century CE, Xuanzang informs that in Karnasuvarana, the monks who resided in at least three monasteries did not take milk products as food because Devadatta prohibited it.⁶¹ However, Paola Tinti argues that not only followers of Devadatta but also some other sects did not partake in milk products. The followers of the Mahīśāsaka and Dharmaguptaka sects avoid milk from their diet. So, it is possible that Xuanzang was not able to identify those monks.⁶² Devadatta was very close to Ānanda, Sāriputta, and Moggallāna. The *Dulva* tells him the brother of Ānanda.⁶³ These three erudite monks never criticized Devadatta and vice-versa. It is also ponderable that despite Kokālika's severe anxiety and apprehensions, Devadatta permitted Sāriputta and Moggallāna to interact with the 500 monks who went to Gayāśīsa along with him. It seems that Devadatta's deep sleep due to fatigue was not the reason but his intention and willingness that led Sāriputta and Moggallāna to take 500 monks back to Buddhist Saṅgha. He knew the organizational capacities of both the *aggasāvakas* and did not even condemn their act despite the provocation of Kokālika. His inner consciousness and probably repentance led him to realize his fault. He again turned back to his brother to apologize, but his tragic death near Jetavana left his desire unfulfilled.

SILENCING OF DISSENT AND DEVIANCE

Sometimes, a section of monks deviated from the absolute path, and their actions were considered intellectual deprivation and a hurdle in realizing their aim. Such a notion of manipulative, demanding, and advantaged status was challenged by punitive actions or reforms within the community, which could be peaceful and suitable by accepting the culturally available means or exemplifying the original source, i.e., the Buddha. It is believed that some interested groups imbibed some cultural and religious identities due to the numerous factors and the choices and means to be rejected most peacefully by the Buddha or the elders of that period. When such contentions and possibilities arose in Buddhism, in many such cases, the authorities rejected cultural borrowings and *Vinayic* reinterpretations and relegated these schismatic views to an alien status. Since the new interpretations of the rules were not accorded the legal status by the Buddha and the eminent Theras of the time, their potentially existing rational grounds to be part of the great fabric of the original Buddhism also got demoted to a subordinate position, as it happened in the case of the Chabbaggiyās and Devadatta. The privileged status of some of the monks and their exclusive monopolistic claims to have the proper knowledge of the teachings delivered by the Buddha led to fundamental conditioning and made the ground for possible schism. Some local factors, like the changing nature of

⁶¹ Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India (AD 629–645)*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Low Price Publication, 2000), 191.

⁶² Paola G. Tinti, "Did Hsuan Tsang Meet the Followers of Devadatta?" *Buddhist Studies Review* 14 (1997): 41-43.

⁶³ William Woodville Rockhill, *The Life of Buddha* (New York: Kegan Paul and Company, 1884), 13.

the economy and interventions by the local authorities, also played the role of catalysts. Still, it isn't easy to ascertain how these factors operated within the monastic traditions to create deviations. It is ponderable that some monasteries tried to legitimize radical religious and social modifications in the monk community. When it was left unregulated, they became the potential cause of a rift, and when the rift crept in, the Saṅgha became more prone to deviations. Growing changes in the socio-cultural environment, some liberal outlooks about the possessions of the monks and nuns, and laxity in the monastic leadership encouraged subtle conditions for modifications and structural changes in the Saṅgha and its ideological base. The examination of reasons for the origin of different sects in early Buddhism gives immense knowledge of why they adhered to new interpretations of the Buddha's teachings and their living traditions. It provides the broad spectrum of why or how sectarianism, disagreements, conflict, and, finally, schism occurred in the Saṅgha. Much of the early significant disputes in the Saṅgha occurred over the interpretation of ways and means of living monastic traditions and only minor differences over interpretations of a particular rule of the *Vinaya* like the Kosāmbī dispute, reservations raised by Devadatta etc. Even the significant differences between the Vajjians and the Westerners were more related to the functionality and living tradition of the Saṅgha and less to the doctrinal interpretations. The fissiparous tendencies also started creeping in over the authoritarian nature of some elders who could not understand that their stature was not at par with the Buddha and were very prone to be treated as deviant by their respected colleague of the Saṅgha. Its nascent beginning could be visualized in the case of Ānanda-Mahākassapa dialogues in the age of the Buddha but came out in the open at the start of the First Buddhist Council. The reactions of Bhikkhu Gavampati and Bhikkhu Purāṇa on the procedures and findings of the First Council are other examples.⁶⁴ Both were prominent monks and companions of the Buddha.

The dissent and deviations in early Saṅgha inculcated relative deprivation of rights and privileges among a specific section of the monks. It became more vocal when the social and geographical base of the Saṅgha became widened due to the ever-increasing number of members belonging to different cultures and social backgrounds. In such a phase of rapid growth, some of the monks significantly differed from each other, and many were not even acquainted with the core values of the Buddha's movement. The socio-cultural diversities increased the frequent echoing of different opinions and the eruption of sectarian ideas. Despite conciliatory approaches, the tendencies of discontent, heresy, and schism were sensed by the noble monks like Ānanda and Cūṇḍa, and they feared the unity and efficacy of the Saṅgha in the absence of the Buddha. When the Tīrthāṅkara Mahāvīra attained *nibbāna*, an open fight started among their followers to declare themselves as the natural successor of the Jain Saṅgha and other monastic affairs. His death began the schismatic tendencies that finally resulted in the division of the Jain Saṅgha into Digambara and Śvetāmbara. On this occasion, the Buddha told Ānanda that his *Vinaya* and *Suttas* could contain the possible schism in the future.⁶⁵ The *Saṅgitiparyāya Sutta* discussed the potential occurrence of schisms and recommended the appropriate measures to include them. The *Sutta* describes the *dasadhamma* (ten conditions) to avoid deviance from rules and perpetuate the true nature of the Saṅgha.⁶⁶ The Buddha

⁶⁴ Anand Singh, "Identification of Dakkhinagiri and Monastic Cave of Bhikkhu Purāṇa at Rājagīra: Archaeology Substantiating Buddhist Scriptures," *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 23 (2023): 23-49.

⁶⁵ *Dīgha Nikāya*, XVI.50; *Majjhima Nikāya*, II.103-104.

⁶⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya*, III.207ff.

acknowledged that in his absence from this mortal world, schismatic tendencies would occur in the Saṅgha as the Theras may interpret the teachings differently. Subjects like adhering to the rules of residence, food, robes, or some minor disciplines should not cause the elders to worry. Still, deviance from the key teachings of the Buddha, like the *cāraṇasatya*, *paticcasmuppāda*, *karma* theory, etc., is a matter of fear for the Saṅgha.⁶⁷ He always thought minor differences might occur when the religion grew and the missionaries went far and wide. The minor changes in the functional aspects of the living tradition of the Saṅgha were not problematic, but the fundamental teachings should not be misunderstood. Nalinaksh Dutt aptly remarks that the Buddha clearly instructed the members of the Saṅgha that in case of errors done by a member inadvertently or intentionally, it is the responsibility of the senior members of the Saṅgha to get them corrected. On many occasions, it was not a sign of dissent or deviance but a breaking of the rules due to ignorance or laxity in personality traits.⁶⁸ The Buddha even cautioned the monks not to accuse or blame their fellow monks without knowing the real intention. To be judgmental without knowing the appropriate cause will jeopardize the true nature of the Saṅgha. The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* informs that Ānanda complained to the Buddha about a monk Bāhiya, a disciple of Anuruddha who was highly quarrelsome and did not adhere to the advice of elders. The Buddha told Ānanda that such incidents are common in any organization and petty issues should be resolved within themselves. Bāhiya resided in the Ghositārāma Vihāra in Kosāmbī and supported the dissent caused by the Kosāmbian monks. It is believed that despite knowing his disciple's fault, Anuruddha did not intervene.⁶⁹ The Buddha was always conscious of perceiving and imagining the relationship between schism and its socio-economic environment and factors as the disenchantment with the existing paradigms set in and became the cause of dissent and anxiety. At this moment, the Saṅgha became proactive with all its conciliatory, sanctioning, and prohibitory powers to ascertain the real cause and provide a rational solution. The enormous expansion of the Saṅgha in all parts of the Indian subcontinent created a situation in which *Vinaya* could no longer be considered uniformly accepted, insulated, or directly positioned in ethical terms. Due to the various factors, especially in the Magadha region, the rules were interpreted flexibly even during the time of the Buddha, and the post-Buddha era witnessed a shift from a strict and centralized monastic framework to a new pattern of socio-cultural milieus and flexible terms of references percolated with multiple cultural variances. Such structural changes in the functional aspects of the Saṅgha were not sudden or spontaneous, as generally argued, but transformed at different levels over the centuries with some legal and ethical ramifications.

CONCLUSION

Despite the voluble approach and numerical strength of Chabbaggiyās, the rebellious attitude of a section of monks of Kosāmbī, the dissent of Devadatta, and many minor incidents, the Saṅgha was able to resolve the differences. In the absence of the Buddha and other contemporary *aggasāvakas* like Sāriputta, Moggallāna, Rāhula, etc., the eminent monks of that age were not able to cope with peculiar fissiparous tendencies as some of their contemporaries were not ready to accept them as a legitimate successor of the Buddha. The propensity of dissidence was prone to grow because an influential section of monks did not believe in the self-declared legitimate authority of the time. The Buddha's appeal to the monks at

⁶⁷ *Majjhima Nikāya*, II.245; *Dīgha Nikāya*, III.117.

⁶⁸ Nalinaksh Dutt, *Buddhist Sects in India* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1998), 36-37.

⁶⁹ *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, II.239.

the beginning of his journey from Vesālī that the *Vinaya* and *Suttas* are the sole authority to guide the Saṅgha pave the notion that only two are the legitimate authorities and the monks, either elders or juniors, are the agency of dissemination of the knowledge prescribed in them. The Buddha demanded and ensured that all the members of *cātuddisamsaṅgha* must conform to the *Vinaya* and the *Sutta* that shaped the exceptionally strong, closely knit, and cohesive Saṅgha. Still, the absence of his authority also ushered in personality clashes and differences among some elders who were almost equal in status and reputation with other bhikkhus. After the Buddha, many monks, like the Vajjians, saw the possibility of pluralistic ideas and the interpretation of the Buddha's teachings by acknowledging multiple possible paths to access the actual teachings of the *Bhagavā*. Such diversity of views in interpreting the teachings of the Buddha and the rules of the living tradition of Buddhism created a host of distinct collectivities and the development of different sects. It was understood that any religious discord and possible dissension among the ranks of their inmates is a social process. During the history of Indian Buddhist monasticism, the psychological and sociological factors that led to the development of schismatic tendencies had already taken root. Over a more extended period, it caused the creation of parallel literature with different kinds of interpretations of sacred laws. It sometimes recommended a different path of practice of the religion.

Interestingly, all groups believed in the uniformity of the Buddha's teaching but had diverse views and interpretations about its functional aspects.⁷⁰ A few centuries after the *mahāparinibbāna* of the Buddha, the religion became universal and saw an unprecedented level of expansion accompanied by the accommodation of different kinds of views earlier not known or absorbed in Buddhism. The Saṅgha did not accept any such ideas and termed those as nonconformism. When the adherents of these indoctrinated traditions started growing, the Saṅgha responded effectually to the new religious situations. Still, the section of the monks who were termed non-conformists represented a sizable number within the Saṅgha. It is believed that non-conformists consolidated their position in the Buddhist clergy by increasing their societal acceptance and evolving their distinctive Buddhist culture. It became a central milieu of discussion and a bone of contention between the traditionalists and so-called non-conformists in the Second Buddhist Council that paved the way for the first Buddhist schism in the real sense. Despite the differences in rank and order, the monks of different traditions used to reside in the same *vihāra* and participated in ceremonies performed by other sects. Lamotte says that-

“When disputes arose among the brethren over points of doctrine or discipline, attempts at reconciliation were resorted to. If these failed, the brethren separated, and each party held its position. Hence, several separate schools or sects were created at the heart of early Buddhism. Over time, the dispersion of the Samgha across vast spaces merely accentuated the fragmentation of the Community. Nevertheless, the wisdom of the monks, as well as their tolerance, prevented rivalries from taking on a bitter nature and ending in religious warfare. Disputes never went further than an academic stage. No matter their particular adherence, the bhikṣus continued to associate with each other and offer each other the greatest hospitality.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Nancy T. Ammerman, “Schism: An Overview,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mercia Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 98-102.

⁷¹ Étienne Lammotte, *History of Indian Buddhism* (Peeters Publishers, 1988), 65.

With the growth of the Saṅgha, personality differences among the elders of the time and adaptation to settled monastic life influenced the future path of Buddhism. Differences, deviances, and freedom of conscience helped Buddhism consolidate and reform in its formative phase. In the later phase, a schism occurred, but the universal attributes of Saṅgha flourished.

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