

Menander-I Soter

(Milinda) [150 to 130 BCE]



Menander - I (Milinda).

Coin of Menander. Greek legend: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ ΜΕΝΑΝΔΡΟΥ (BASILEOS SOTEROS MENANDROU) lit. "Of Saviour King Menander". Reign 155 BCE - 130 BCE - Religious beliefs Buddhism

The Greek king Menander-I soter means (The Saviour) known as Milinda in Pāli, was one of the rulers of the Indo-Greek Kingdom in northwestern India in present day Pakistan from around 150 to 130 BC a Greek-Indian dynasty.

His territories covered the eastern dominions of the divided Greek empire of Bactria and extended to the modern Indian states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh and Jammu region. His capital was sagala, a prosperous city in northern Punjab believed to be modern Sialkot a few kilometers west of what is now the border between India and Pakistan. He is one of the few Bactrian kings mentioned by Greek authors, among them Apollodorus of Artemita, who claims that the Greeks from Bactria were even greater conquerors than Alexander the Great, and that Menander was one of the two Bactrian kings, with Demetrius, who extended their power farthest into India.

He is also the first historical Westerner documented to have converted to Buddhism, renowned for his open-minded dialogues with followers of other religions. His reign was long and successful; generous as per the findings of coins testify the prosperity and extension of his empire. King Menander-I embraced the Buddhist faith, as described in the Milinda Pañha, a classical Pāli

Buddhist text on the discussions between Milinda and the Buddhist sage Ven. Nāgasena. Known as Menander's Buddhist teacher,

After the reign of Menander-I, Strato I and several subsequent Indo-Greek rulers, such as Amyntas, Nicias, Peukolaos, Hermaeus, and Hippostratos, depicted themselves or their Greek deities forming with the right hand a symbolic gesture identical to the Buddhist vitarka mudra (thumb and index joined together, with other fingers extended), which in Buddhism signifies the transmission of the Buddha's teaching. At the same time, right after the death of Menander-I, several Indo-Greek rulers also started to adopt on their coins the Pāli title of "Dharmikasa," meaning "follower of the Dharma" (similar to the title of the great Indian Buddhist king Emperor Ashoka as Dharmaraja "King of the Dharma"). This usage was adopted by Strato I, Zoilos I, Heliokles II, Theophilos, Peukolaos and Archebios.

Altogether, the conversion of Menander-I to Buddhism suggested by the Milinda Pañha seems to have triggered the use of Buddhist symbolism especially all the kings after Menander-I who are recorded to have ruled in Gandhara displayed Buddhist symbolism in one form or another. Both because of his conversion and his unequalled territorial expansion, Menander-I may have contributed to the expansion of Buddhism in Central Asia. Although the spread of Buddhism to Central Asia and Northern Asia is usually associated with the Kushans, a century or two later, there is a possibility that it may have been introduced in those areas from Gandhara "even earlier, during the time of Demetrius and Menander"



Indian relief of probable Indo-Greek king, possibly Menander, with Buddhist triratana symbol on his sword. Bharhut, 2nd century BC. Indian Museum, Calcutta (drawing).

Bronze coin of Menander - I with a Buddhist wheel." Of Saviour King Menander" with eight-spoked wheel.



Emperor Kanishka

(78 C.E. - 144 C.E)

The greatest king of Kushan dynasty that ruled over the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan, and possibly regions north of Kashmir in Central Asia. He is, however, mainly remembered as a great patron of Buddhism.

Most of what is known about Kushan Emperor Kanishka derives from Chinese sources, particularly Buddhist writings. When Kanishka came to the throne is uncertain. His accession has been estimated as occurring between his reigns is believed to have lasted 23 years. The year 78 marks the beginning of the Saka era, a system of dating that Kanishka might have initiated.

Through inheritance and conquest, Kanishka's kingdom covered an area extending from Bukhara (now in Uzbekistan) in the west to Patna in the Ganges Valley in the east, and from the Pamirs (now in Tajikistan) in the north to central India in the south. His capital was Purusapura (Peshawar). He may have crossed the Pamirs and subjugated the kings of the city-states of Khotan, Kashgar, and Yarkand (now in Chinese Turkistan), who had previously been tributaries of the Han emperors of China. Contact between Kanishka and the Chinese in Central Asia may have inspired the transmission of Indian ideas, particularly Buddhism, to China. Buddhism first appeared in China in the 2nd century A.D.

As a patron of Buddhism Kanishka is chiefly noted for having convened the great Mahayana Buddhist council in Kashmir that marked the beginnings of Mahayana Buddhism. At the council, according to Chinese sources, authorized commentaries on the Buddhist canon were prepared and engraved on copper plates. These texts have survived only in Chinese translations and adaptations. Kanishka was a tolerant king and his coins show that he honored the Zoroastrian, Greek, and Brahmanical deities as well as the Buddha. During his reign contacts with the Roman Empire led to a significant increase in trade and the exchange of ideas; perhaps the most remarkable example of the fusion of eastern and western influences in his reign was the Gandhara school of art, in which Greco-Roman classical lines are seen in images of the Buddha.

Kushans

The Kushans were patrons of the arts and of religion. A major branch of the Silk Road carrying luxury goods and ideas between Rome, India, and China passed through Afghanistan, where a transshipment centre existed at Balkh. Indian pilgrims traveling the Silk Road introduced Buddhism to China during the early centuries AD, and Buddhist Gandhara art flourished during this period. The world's largest Buddha figures (175 feet and 120 feet tall) were carved into a cliff at Bamiyan in the central mountains of Afghanistan during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.

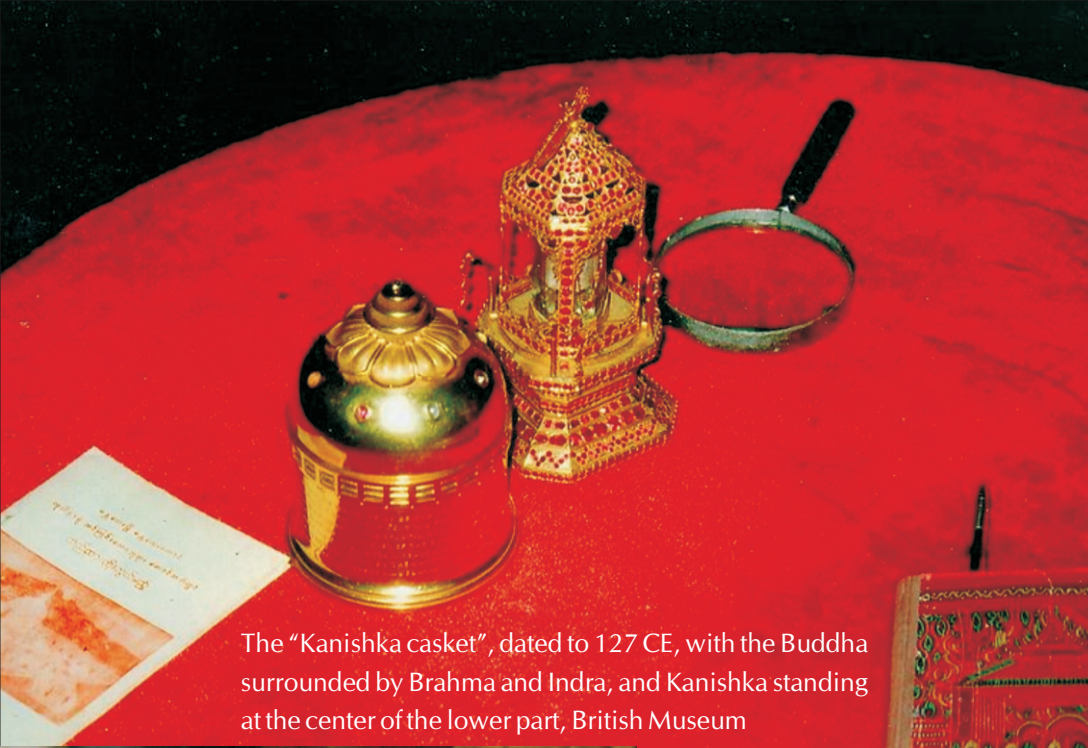
Emperor Kanishka ruled over an empire that stretched from the Pamirs to Bengal. His capital was at Peshawar. A patron of Buddhism, he built many Buddhist monuments, helped found the Gandharan school of sculpture, and encouraged the spread of Buddhism to central Asia.



The larger statue of the Buddha in Bamiyan, viewed from different sides



Kanishka coin with Greek lettering "BODDO" (i.e. Buddha)



The "Kanishka casket", dated to 127 CE, with the Buddha surrounded by Brahma and Indra, and Kanishka standing at the center of the lower part, British Museum



This picture is of the ruby and gold relic casket holding a crystal reliquary with three fragments of bone, believed to be relics of Gautama Buddha, buried by the Kushan Emperor Kanishka in the 2nd century A.D. at his stupa in Peshawar (now in Pakistan) from where they were sent by the British for safekeeping to Mandalay, Burma in 1910. To the left of the ruby and gold casket is a miniature golden stupa in which the relics were transported to Mandalay

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha

Emperor Harshavardhana

Harsha (606 CE)

An Indian emperor who has ruled Northern India for about forty one years after the downfall of the Gupta Empire. He was the son of Prabhakaravardhana and younger brother of Rajyavardhana, Harsha ascended the throne at the age of 16. His empire was spread over the states of Punjab, Bengal, Orissa and the entire Indo-Gangetic plain, lying to the north of the Narmada River. They are the worshipper of sun, nevertheless, his brother followed Hinayana Buddhism while, Harsha himself followed Mahayana Buddhism. He has propagated Buddhism by constructing numerous stupas He also made numerous endowments at Nalanda University, two of his seals where found out in Nalanda during the course of the excavation

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha

Pāla Empire

(750-1174 CE)

After the Buddhist king Harsha Vardhana, Buddhism faced the possibility of extinction. The Palas emerged as the champion of Buddhism, and they patronized Mahayana Buddhism. All the rulers bearing names ending with the suffix Pala (Modern Bengali : pâl), which means protector. The Palas supported the Universities of Vikramashila and Nalanda which became the premier seats of learning in Asia. The Nalanda University which is considered one of the first great universities in recorded

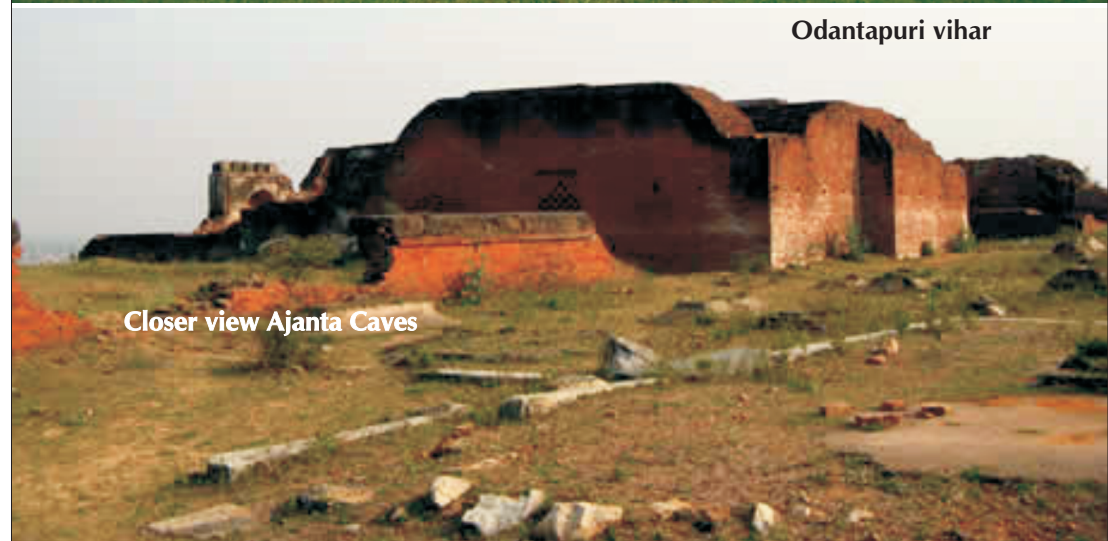


Buddha's sculpture - 11th century, Pala Empire

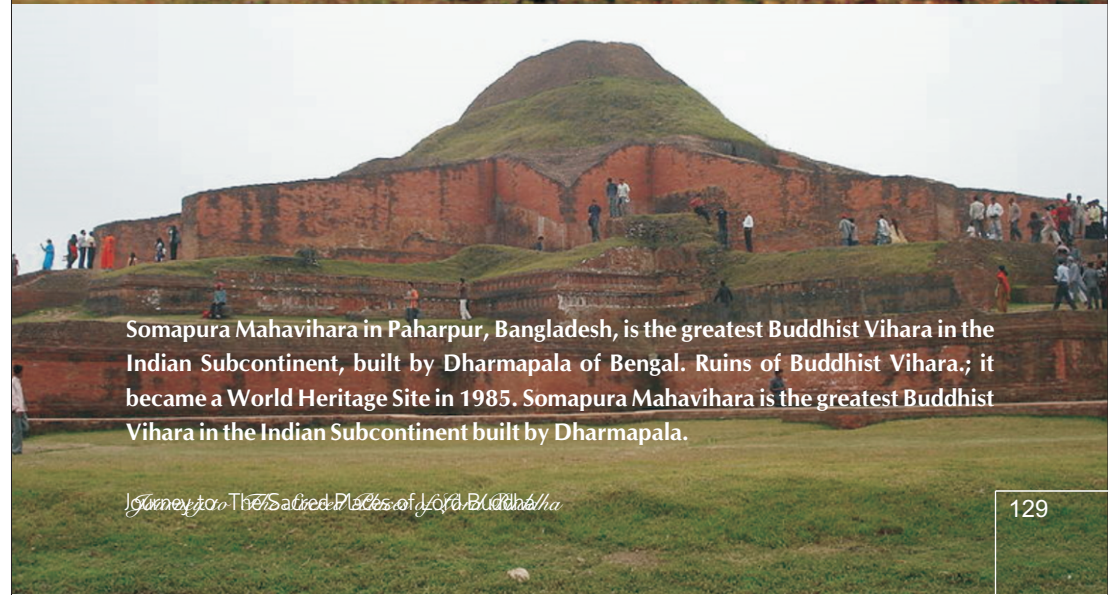
history, reached its height under the patronage of the Palas. The Palas were also responsible for the spread of Mahayana Buddhism to Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and the Malay archipelago. Bengal became famous in the Buddhist world for the cultivation of Buddhist religion, culture and other knowledge in the various centres that grew under the patronage of the Pala rulers. Buddhist scholars from the Pala Empire travelled from Bengal to the Far-East and propagated Buddhism. The most brilliant side of the Pala Empire was the excellence of its art and sculptures. Palas created a distinctive form of Buddhist art known as the "Pala School of Sculptural Art." The gigantic structures of Vikramashila Vihara, Odantapuri and Somapura Mahavihara were masterpieces of the Palas. These mammoth structures were mistaken by the forces of Bakhtiar Khilji as fortified castles and were demolished.



Vikramashila Vihar



Odantapuri vihar



Somapura Mahavihara in Paharpur, Bangladesh, is the greatest Buddhist Vihara in the Indian Subcontinent, built by Dharmapala of Bengal. Ruins of Buddhist Vihara.; it became a World Heritage Site in 1985. Somapura Mahavihara is the greatest Buddhist Vihara in the Indian Subcontinent built by Dharmapala.

REVIVAL OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA

Sir. Alexander Cunningham

(23 January 1814 – 28 November 1893)

Sir Alexander Cunningham Born on 23rd January in the year 1814 in London to the Scottish poet Allan Cunningham, was a British archaeologist and army engineer, known as the father of the Archaeological Survey of India. Both his brothers, Francis Cunningham and Joseph Cunningham became well-known for their work in British India.

He joined the Bengal Engineers at the age of 19 as a Second Lieutenant and spent the next 28 years in the service of British Government of India. Soon after arriving in India in June 1833, he was actively involved in the excavation sites in India at Sarnath, Sanchi and Mahabodhi Temple. In the case of Mahabodhi, Cunningham's work of restoring the Temple was exemplary and completed by the pioneer of Buddhist revival in India, Anagarika Dharmapala.

After a detailed study of Buddhist literature and the sculptures from the site, he published a book titled "The Stupa of Bharat" in 1876, which is still an authentic book about the Bharat stupa. The famous 8 Buddhist stupas have been built on the relics of Buddha in his honour.



Sir. Alexander Cunningham

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha

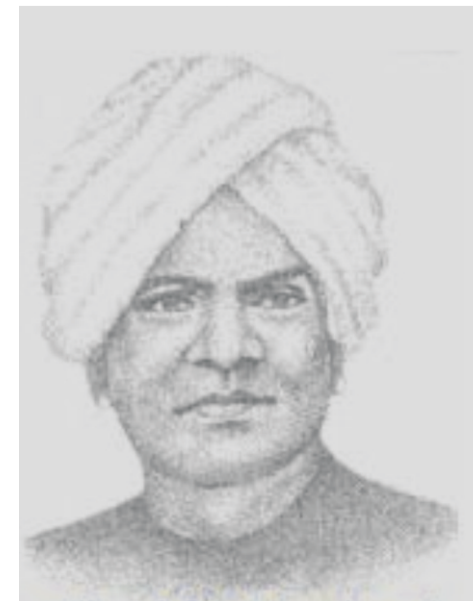
Pandit. Iyothee Thass

(1845-1914)

Iyothee Thass was born on May 20, 1845 in a Dalit family from Coimbatore district (Tamil Nadu). He learnt and became an expert in Tamil literature, philosophy and indigenous medicine and could speak Tamil, English, Sanskrit and Pāli.

In 1890 Pandit C. Iyothee Thass, founded the Sakya Buddhist Society (also known as the Indian Buddhist Association). The first president of the Indian Buddhist Association was the German born American Paul Carus, the author of The Gospel of Buddha (1894).

Thass, a Tamil Siddha physician, was the pioneer of the Tamil Dalit movement. He argued that, the Tamil Dalits were originally Buddhists and led a delegation of prominent Dalits with his followers and expressed a sincere desire to convert to Buddhism to Henry Steel Olcott and sought his help in the re-establishment of "Tamil Buddhism" Olcott helped Thass to visit Sri Lanka, where he received Diksha from Bhikkhu Sumangala Nayake. After returning to India, Thass established the Sakya Buddhist Society in Madras with branches in many places including Mysore state now Karnataka.



Pandit. Iyothee Thass: (1845-1914)

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha

Anagarika Dharmapala

(founder of the Maha Bodhi Society) (1864 - 1933)



Anagarika Dharmapala

same year he was ordained as Bhikkhu.

Anagarika Dharmapala: (17 September 1864 - 29 April 1933) was a leading figure of Buddhism in the twentieth century. He was a pioneer in the revival of Buddhism in India after it had been virtually extinct there for several centuries, and he was the first Buddhist in modern times to preach the Dharma in three continents: Asia, North America, and Europe. He was a major reformer and revivalist of Sri Lankan Buddhism.

He was born Don David Hewavitarne in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to Don Carolis Hewavitharana and Mallika Dharmagunawardhana (the daughter of Andiris Perera Dharmagunawardhana), who were among the richest merchants of Ceylon. His younger brother was Dr Charles Alwis Hewavitharana.

Sri Lanka was then a British colony known as Ceylon, so Hewavitarne's state education was an English one: he attended C.M.S Boys School [Christian College], Kotte, St Benedict's College Kotahene and S. Thomas's College, Mt Lavinia.

This was a time of Buddhist revival. In 1875 in New York, Madame

When the revival of Buddhism was in progress in India, then the Sri Lankan Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala founded the Maha Bodhi Society. Its activities expanded to involve the promotion of Buddhism in India. In June 1892, a meeting of Buddhists took place at Darjeeling. Dharmapala spoke to Tibetan Buddhists and presented a relic of the Buddha to be sent to the Dalai Lama.

Dharmapala built many viharas and temples in India, including the one at Sarnath, the place of Buddha's first sermon. He died in 1933, the

Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott had founded the Theosophical Society. They were both very sympathetic to what they understood of Buddhism, and in 1880 they arrived in Ceylon, declared themselves to be Buddhists, and publicly took the Refuge and Precepts from a prominent Sinhalese Bhikkhu. Colonel Olcott kept coming back to Ceylon and devoted himself there to the cause of Buddhist education, eventually setting up more than 300 Buddhist schools, some of which are still in existence. It was in this period that Hewavitarne changed his name to Anagarika Dharmapala.

'Dharmapala' means 'protector of the Dharma'. 'Anagarika', a term coined by Dharmapala, means "homeless one." It is a midway status between monk and layperson. As such, he took the eight precepts (against killing, stealing, harmful speech, sexual misconduct, eating after noon, entertainments, fashionable attire, luxurious beds and intoxication,) for life. These eight precepts were commonly taken by Sri Lankan laypeople on observance days. But for a person to take them for life was highly unusual. Dharmapala was the first Anagarika - that is, a celibate, full-time worker for Buddhism - in modern times. It seems that he took a vow of celibacy at the age of eight and remained faithful to it all his life. Although he wore a yellow robe, it was not of the traditional Bhikkhu pattern, and he did not shave his head. He felt that the observance of all the Vinaya rules would get in the way of his work, especially as he flew around the world. Neither the title nor the office became popular, but in this role, he "was the model for lay activism in modernist Buddhism." In fact, he is widely considered a bodhisattva in Sri Lanka.

His trip to Bodh-Gaya was inspired by an 1885 visit there by Sir Edwin Arnold, author of *The Light of Asia*, who soon started advocating for the renovation of the site and its return to Buddhist care.

Dharmapala eventually broke with Olcott and the Theosophists because of Olcott's stance on universal religion. "One of the important factors in his rejection of theosophy centered on this issue of universalism; the price of Buddhism being assimilated into a non-Buddhist model of truth was ultimately too high for him. Dharmapala stated that Theosophy was "only consolidating Krishna worship." To say that all religions have a common foundation only shows the ignorance of the speaker Dhamma alone is supreme to the Buddhist

At Sarnath in 1933 he was ordained a Bhikkhu, and he died at Sarnath in December of the same year, aged 78.

Maha Bodhi Society Bengaluru



Maha Bodhi Society was founded and established in the year 1956 by Most Venerable Acharya Buddharakkhitaji. He became monk on the Buddha Poonnima Day of 1949 at Kusinagar under the illustrious monk Venerable Candamani Mahathera. Abbot of Maha Parinibbana Vihara, Kushinara, U.P and under took intensive study of Buddhism and Pali in Sri Lanka and Burma.

He has started many branches in India and abroad to study and practice Dhamma and Meditation for the benefits of all. MBS is a charitable Organization with the main objective of reviving the compassionate teachings of the Lord Buddha in the land of its origin, India and to put into practice the precious teachings of the Buddha through selfless service programs.

It is also dedicated for the welfare and happiness of people irrespective of religion, race, color or sex. Since its very inception the Society has been actively engaged in rendering various spiritual and humanitarian services. The main activities are Monastic training center, Publication of books & now Ven. Acharya has founded Bhagavan Buddha University of Pali & Theravada Buddhism to conduct research & translate & to Tipitaka into different languages.



Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha



Holy Bodhi tree which is a sapling of the original Holy Mahabodhi Tree of Buddhagaya.



Deekshabhoomi At Nagpur

Deekshabhoomi is situated in Nagpur the city of Orange in Maharashtra. It is also famous for a Zero Milestone place. Nagpur was also the home land for Nag people who embraced Buddhism. At this place Dr.Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar embraced Buddhism along with five lakhs people on 14th October 1956 which was the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's Parinibbana under Mahasthavir Candamani Maha Thera from Burma, now called Myanmar, this fulfilled his long standing vow because since, then many people from different parts of India embrace Buddhism and are still continuing.

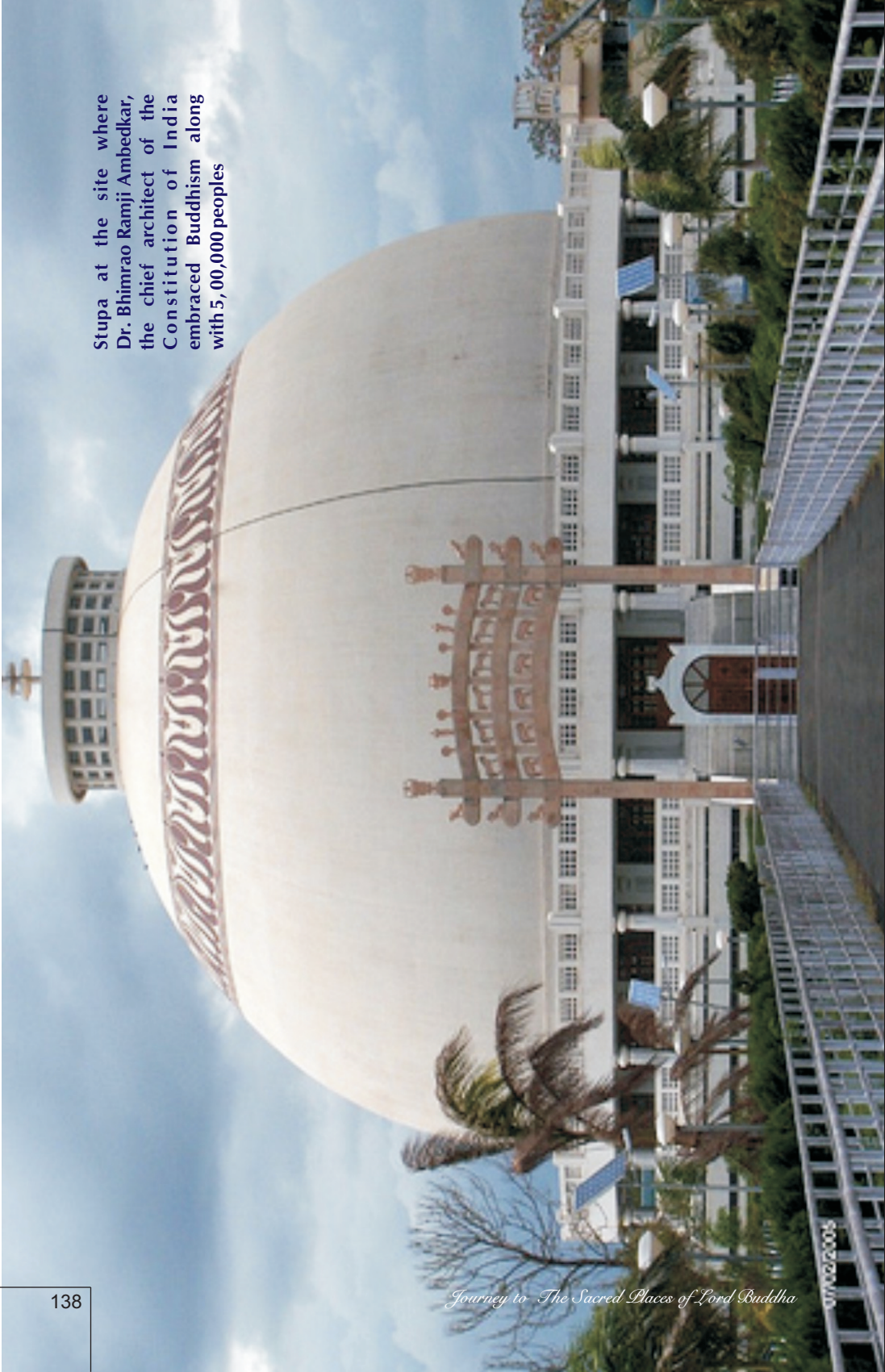
A great stupa has been built at this place which symbolises Dr.B.R.Ambedkar's call to embrace Buddhism. This stupa and the gates are remodeled in line with the ancient Stupa at Sanchi.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that only buddhism can keep India united and so he put Buddhist symbols like the Wheel of Dhamma and the Asoka's emblem as national symbols and the Mathura Buddha adorns the house of Parliament that inspires Indian lawmakers. Dr. Ambedkar's movement has contributed greatly for the Buddhist revival in India.



Dr. Ambedkar and
Mrs. Savita Ambedkar with
Mahasthavir Candamani at Nagpur.

Stupa at the site where Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution of India embraced Buddhism along with 5,00,000 peoples



Vipassana Research Institute - Igatpuri

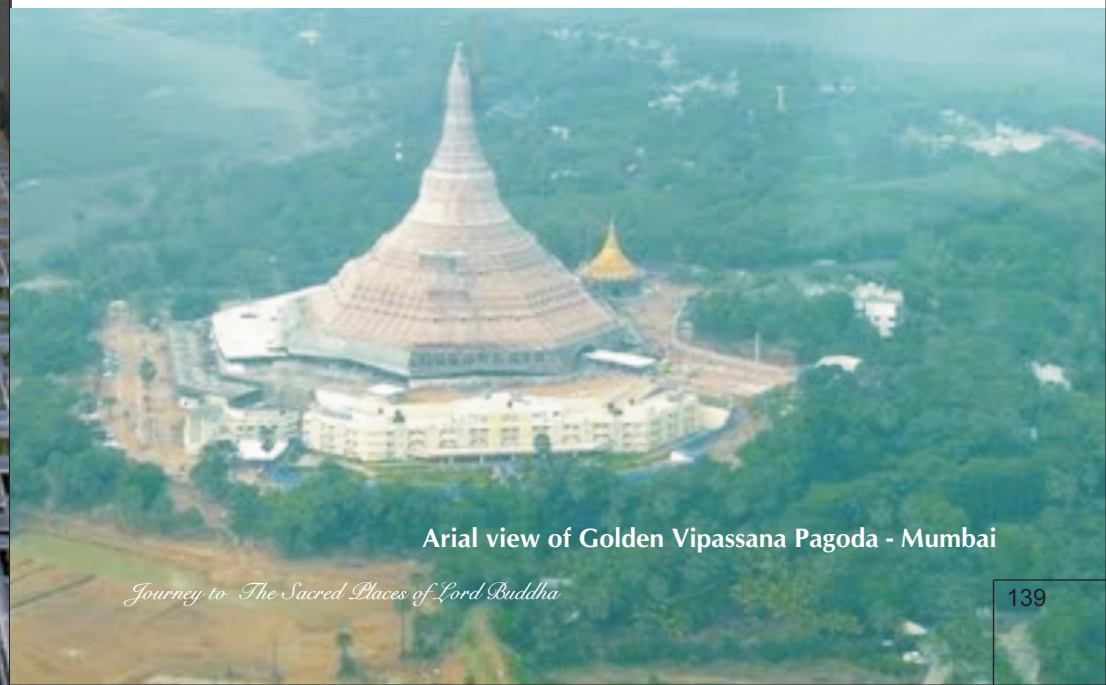
The Vipassana Research Institute (VRI) was established in 1985 by Sri Satya Narayan Goenkaji at Igatpuri – Maharashtra for the sole purpose of conducting research and investigation on Vipassana Meditation Technique and its effects in controlling and purifying the mind, and also applying the same in day to day life. The Institute is focusing mainly and involved in translation of all pāli texts for better understanding of Dhamma.

Sri Satya Narayan Goenka born in 1924 at Mandalay - Myanmar became an industrialist. In an effort to overcome his chronic migraine disease he undertook Vipassana meditation under a renowned meditation teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin .



Sri Satya Narayan Goenka

S.N.Goenkaji often emphasises that, "The Buddha never taught a sectarian religion; he taught The Dhamma - the way to liberation - which is universal" and presents His teachings as non-sectarian and open to people of all faiths or no faith. He also built a nearly 100-meter-tall Global Pagoda at Mumbai to serve as an inspiration for spreading vipassana meditation around the world.



Arial view of Golden Vipassana Pagoda - Mumbai

THE SACRED PALI TIPITAKA

And

THE SIX SANGAYANAS (BUDDHIST COUNCILS)

- Venerable Acharya Buddharakkhita



Pāli Cannon, Tipitaka, based on Buddha Vacana, flows from the Enlightenment (Bodhi) of the Buddha. Bodhi is the fount whence flow the Buddha's Sacred Words. So, in India, when Buddha Vacana declined and was subsequently lost, the practice of Bodhi, known as, Theravāda, also declined. Buddha Vacana to be revived, would, therefore, require the practice of Buddha Dhamma, Theravāda, which alone preserves the

original teaching, and Bodhi as discovered only by the Buddha, will have to be rediscovered by all seekers of ultimate truth. Therefore, it is said, that Bodhi – Enlightenment, is something that has, the 'here and now', quality of being verifiable, (sanditṭhiko), and that invites personal investigation through practice (ehipassiko), and that is to be always personally realized by the wise (paccattam veditabbo viññūhi) and no other entity whether a god or a guru can become a substitute.

Now these are the attributes around which Buddha Vacana, i.e. the Tipiṭaka, revolves. Theravāda Tipiṭaka, therefore, is not simply a mere religious literature, or a theoretical repository. From the time Gotama attained Bodhi at Buddhagaya, and became the Buddha, till he attained Mahāparinibbāna at Kusinārā, during these 45 years, all that he taught was the subject matter of Tipiṭaka, which has been preserved in three distinct forms. First of all, as the heritage of genuine knowledge, pariyatti; secondly as devoted practice of authentic knowledge; and thirdly, realization, through practice of the knowledge of the Ultimate Truth, the goal of enlightenment, or spiritual deliverance, from the suffering of worldly existence. So Tipiṭaka is very much a living heritage of a noble spiritual life, that aims at perpetuation for posterity. Now this definition of Tipiṭaka is indeed very different from it being a theistic religious scripture, that is, being the diametrically opposite of a doctrine or authority 'āgama pamāṇam'.

The word Tipiṭaka comprises of **Ti**=three + **Piṭaka**=basket.

These three Piṭakas are –

1. The Vinaya Piṭaka,

2. The Sutta Piṭaka,

3. The Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

The Vinaya Piṭaka contains the rules of monastic discipline of the Holy Order (Saṅgha)

The Sutta Piṭaka contains the discourses on various aspects of the Buddha's Teachings.

The Abhidhamma Piṭaka contains the analytical expositions of the higher psychological and philosophical teachings of the Master.

In the very lifetime of the Exalted One, his teachings had been systematically collected and classified under different heads. For instance, in the Udāna Pāli, there is the account of one Bhikkhu Sona who had been a monk for only a year. Now he arrived to meet the Buddha after a long journey from Avanti. The Buddha asked him: "Monk, be so good as to recite the Dhamma".

"Very well, Lord", he said. And recited from his memory the entire Eighth Chapter (Aṭṭhaka Vagga) of the Sutta Nipāta comprising 16 discourses (Suttas).

"Paṭibhātu taṃ, Bhikkhu, Dhammo bhāsituṃ'ti". "Evaṃ, Bhante'ti kho āyasmā Soṇo Bhagavato paṭissutvā soḷasa aṭṭhakavaggikāni sabbāneva sareṇa abhaṇi." (Sutta Nipāta 772-981).

"When the Venerable Sona had finished his recitation, the Exalted One appreciated by saying: 'Well done, monk! You have got it by heart, well done, monk! You have also considered and reflected on these sixteen suttas of the Eight Chapter. You have a pleasant voice with a distinct and faultless pronunciation, so as to make the meaning clear.' "How many years of seniority of Rain's Retreat (Vassā) do you have monk?" "I have one year, Lord."

"Atha kho Bhagavā āyasmato Soṇassa sarabhaṇṇa pariyosāne abbhānumodi: 'Sādhu, sādhu, bhikkhu! Suggahitāni te, bhikkhu, soḷasa aṭṭhakavaggikāni sumanasikatāni, sūpadhāritāni, Kalyāṇiyāsi vācāya samannāgato vissatṭhāya anelaḡalāya atthassa viññāpaniyā.'" "Kati vassosi tvaṃ, bhikkhū'ti?" "Ekavasso ahaṃ, Bhagavā'ti."

Reference of this kind are abundant in the canon. Particularly significant are the following epithets which clearly allude to the systematization of the Canon in the present form, such as: **Dhammadharo** - Reciter of the Dhamma; **Vinayadharo** - Reciter of the Vinaya; **Mātikādharo** - Reciter of the Mātika or Abhidhamma; **Bahussuto Dhamma Vinaye** - Erudite in the Teachings and

Disciplines; **Āgatāgamo** - Well-versed in the Canon or scriptures; **Bhāṇako** - Reciter of the Scripture from memory etc.

The Asokan inscriptions (about 220 years after the Mahāparinibbāna of the Buddha) also mention words like **Peṭaki** - Reciter of the three Piṭakas and **Paṇcanekayiko** - Reciter of the five Nikāyas etc. and then there is also the famous title of **Dhamma Bhaṇḍāgārika** bestowed by the Buddha himself on the Venerable Ananda who was a master of the entire Tipiṭaka as well as the commentarial literature that grew around the teachings quite rapidly.

This entire Pāli cannon, as it existed in the time of the Exalted One, is available today because of the foresight and the large hearted approach of the great Elders, the Theras; Therefore all Buddhists regardless of traditions, should be ever grateful to all those wise Theras, particularly, to the two Chief Disciples, eighty Great Disciples and five hundred Pre-eminent disciples, all Arahats, and all endowed with supernormal power of Paṭisambhida ñāna, analytical supernormal Direct Knowledge, and power, by which they could remember every word of the Master and also fully understand the underlying meanings. Thus these Theras were true exponents and great teachers of the Dhamma, in the lifetime of the Supreme Master.

Again it is these great teachers of Dhamma and the illustrious Elders of the Holy Order, Saṅgha, who after the Master's Mahāparinibbāna, protected and preserved, for future generation, this incomparable treasure-house of wisdom. The Vinaya records that after the Buddha's Final passing away a situation arose, which compelled the great elders and teachers of the Buddha Sāsana to immediately decide upon convening a great Buddhist Council, Dhamma Saṅgiti. The purpose being to recite the entire Teaching and Discipline, bestowed by the Buddha, in order to be able to preserve in their original form, these three dispensations, namely, Knowledge, Practice and Realization - Patiyatti, Paṭipatti and Paṭivedha, of the Supremely Enlightened One.

The situation referred to is about a former barber, Subhadda by name, who having become a monk in his old age, rather irreverently remarked to a group of bhikkhus, saying: "Enough, brethren, don't lament. We are well rid of the Great Recluse, Mahāsamana", referring to the Buddha.

"We were much troubled by the Rules of Discipline which he had laid down, saying: 'This is allowed and this is not allowed to us', but now we will be able to do what we want to do, and we need not do what we don't want to do."

The old man, Subhadda, wanting to make a comfortable living, became a fake monk. For it was easy to get in, for him into the Saṅgha because there was no caste or any other restriction. The Saṅgha had many kings as its members, just as it had also a Subhadda. Now Subhadda's statement was heard by the Venerable Mahākassapa, who then was the seniormost and highly revered head of the Saṅgha. He thought that Subhadda's attitude posed a great threat to Buddha Sāsana.

So he immediately had five hundred pre-eminent Arahats disciples, all masters of the Dhamma, assembled. These Holy Theras decided to conduct **the first Buddhist council, Paṭhama Saṅgayanā**, at Rājagaha, in Sattapanni cave; and this at the earnest wish of King Ajātasattu who made every arrangement to support this historic council. The Venerable Mahākassapa himself presided over it. The council recited for seven months, the entire Tipiṭaka as found today.

The two great reciters were - the Venerable Arahats Upāli who was pre-eminent in his mastery of Vinaya and who therefore recited the Vinaya, and the Venerable Ananda who was the Dhammabhaṇḍagārika and had complete mastery over all the three Piṭakas. Thus the pure teachings of the Buddha continued to be preserved till the present generation by the great Theravāda Mahā Saṅgha.

The great Arahats Elder Mahākassapa adopted the following procedure. First he congregated the Saṅgha and proposed that, in order to preserve the purity of the Buddha Vacana, and for the benefit of the future generations, a council of reciters, Dhamma Saṅgiti, be immediately convened. The Saṅgha agreed and selected Rājagaha to be the venue and authorized the Venerable Mahākassapa to choose the reciters. He chose five hundred pre-eminent Arahats disciples who were endowed with Paṭisambhida ñāna, supernormal power of retaining in memory and reciting the entire Buddha Vacana.

Then he informed the king Ajātasattu of Magadha of this decision of the Saṅgha. Ajātasattu, the powerful monarch of Magadha, had become an ardent lay follower of the Buddha, and had earlier requested to select Rājagaha. So a huge structure was constructed with elaborate architectural features outside the Sattapanni cave, and he made every arrangement for the council. Thus three months after the Buddha's Great Demise, five hundred pre-eminent Arahats Theras, Enlightened disciples of the Buddha, met at Rājagaha and recited the Master's entire teachings for seven months. The

Venerable Mahākassapa presided over this unique event known as the first great council.

The Venerable Upāli Thera, whom the Master himself had placed as the authority on Vinaya, recited section by section with all historical details the whole of Vinaya Piṭaka. The Venerable Ananda Thera, whom the Master had designated as the Treasurer of the Teachings, Dhammabhandagārikā, recited the entire Dhamma, i.e., Sutta and Mātika or Abhidhamma Piṭaka. Thus the systematization of the Teaching which had begun at the Master's time, came to be authenticated once for all, in the first Saṅgāyanā, by the immediate and distinguished, eminent Arahats.

This sacred canon is the one of its kind in the history of world religions, and is the fruit of the unique decision of faithfully preserving and handing down of the Buddha's Teaching upto our time, through a long line of a teacher to pupil tradition. Later there had been five more Saṅgāyanās, the latest being in the year 1956, conducted by the government of Myanmar and known as the sixth council.

Each Council had a task to accomplish, the sole purpose being to preserve the teaching, from being adulterated by interpolation, by adding and subtracting procedures. The Second Council, Dutiya Saṅgāyanā, was conducted a hundred year after the Mahāparinibbāna of the Buddha, at Vesālī. It was necessitated by a dispute on ten points of Vinaya. Some Vesālīan monks, all ex-princes and upper class elites, wanted to water down the monastic rules to suit their lax life.

First of all they wanted to handle and possess money, hoard food stuff, drink fermented drinks, all in violation not only of the letter of the monastic code of discipline, but also of the spirit of the holy life itself, based as it is, on renunciation of all worldly pleasures. Again a great Arahata endowed with Paṭisambhida ñāna, the Venerable Sabbakāmi Mahāthera, was authorized by the Saṅgha to clear up the holy order, by rejecting the ten rules which the lax monks wanted to be incorporated.

The second Saṅgāyanā was conducted by 700 Paṭisambhidā Arahats for eight months with the support of king Kālasoka at Vālukārama in Vesālī. Venerable Sabbakāmi was at that time 160 years old. He had been ordained by the pre-eminent Arahata Mahāthera the Venerable Yasa, who was the sixth great Arahata disciple of the Buddha after the first five, Pañcavaggiya Arahata bhikkhus. Venerable Yasa was the son of Sujātā Mahā Upāsikā who

offered the pāyāsa to the Bodhisatta, the food which sustained the Buddha, forty nine days, during which he remained sunk in Samādhi.

The monks who were sent away, later, formed the mahasingika order. And this was the starting point of dissension and break up into many groups, leading to formation of different sects like Mahasangikā, Mahayāna etc. By the time of Emperor Asoka, a hundred and fifty years later, there were eighteen sects among those Mahāyāna monks, mostly hailing from the upper caste groups. It would appear that castism had played an insidious role in the formation of splinter groups among these worldly minded affluent Mahāyāna sects. The decline of Buddhism in India can be related to this development.

The Third Great Council, Tatiya Saṅgāyanā, was conducted at Paṭaliputta, Asokārama, 250 years after the Mahāparinibbāna of the Buddha with the support of the great Buddhist Emperor Asoka. In the third Saṅgāyanā, one thousand Paṭisambhida Arahats recited the entire teachings for nine months. Asokārama monastery in the city of Paṭaliputta became a great centre for training of Dhammadutas (Messengers of Dhamma), with the full support of king Dhammāsoka. This Saṅgāyanā was necessitated by the large number of fake monks who just put on the robes of bhikkhus with ulterior motives.

Because the king was a devout follower of the Buddha, and who respected the monks very much, sixty thousand pretenders claimed to be bhikkhus, mostly hailing from upper caste ascetic sects, mendicants and plain cheats, went about making a good living by putting on the robes of Buddhist monks and deceiving the public. At the beginning people tolerated them, but later when they began to create problems in the monastery of genuine monks, King Asoka had to do something because he constantly was getting complaints.

Those pretenders not only were morally depraved, but held heretical views, which threatened to pollute the Dhamma and Vinaya by spreading false teachings in the name of the Buddha. So something had to be done in order to preserve the purity of the Buddha Dhamma, as well as the Saṅgha, by expelling the fake monks. So king Asoka requested his guru, the Paṭisambhidā Arahata Moggaliputta Tissa to arrange for cleaning up the Saṅgha of imposters.

As a result 250 years after the Buddha's Great Demise, the Venerable Arahata Moggaliputta Tissa, Mahāthera arranged for a test at

Asokārama in a very large scale, where every monk, including the sham ones, in Paṭaliputta as well as in other places, was interviewed as to his beliefs and practices, his behaviour and way of life. Out of several lakh of monks, 60,000 heretical ascetics and mendicants were found as imposters. So they were disrobed publicly by offering either a job or some means for livelihood and thus helped them to live a decent life. Since they were now well supported, they became peaceable men. The Arahāt Moggaliputta Tissa also wrote a very valuable religious book, Kathāvatthu by name, with one thousand questions and answers to enable the Saṅgha to identify who is, or is not, a genuine bhikkhu. This was done to protect the original teachings of the Buddha.

The Fourth Great Council, Saṅgāyanā, was conducted not in India, but in Sri Lanka, 450 years after the Buddha's Mahāparinibbāna, at Aloka Cave in Aluvihāra, near Matale. Venerable Rakkhita Mahāthera presided over this council in which five hundred Arahāt Theras participated with the full support of king Vaṭṭagamini Abhaya. This Saṅgāyanā was necessitated by the prevalent materialism and moral decline due to war and a hostile king who persecuted the Buddhists and destroyed many Buddhist temples and monasteries. This Saṅgāyanā, not only recited but rendered into writing the Tipiṭaka and preserved it from external threats, like war etc. Tipiṭaka was written for the first time by dozens of experts who inscribed the texts of the entire Tipiṭaka on Ola leaves. Thus, Tipiṭaka was committed to writing for the first time in first B.C. to preserve the Buddha Sāsana in the soil of Sri Lanka after the Venerable Arahāt Mahinda, had successfully spread the Dhamma in a very firm and well established manner.

Both bhikkhus and the kings of the successive generations thereafter actively worked to preserve and perpetuate the Dhamma. 125 years after Mahinda Sri Lanka was thrown into a turmoil of war, famine and pestilence, caused by the invasion of the Chola ruler of South India. The Saṅgha was forced to abandon the holy city of Anuradhapura and go to the forest solitude of Kandian hills. Those holy Arahats endured great hardships during the foreign occupation to preserve the treasure of the Dhamma. Five Hundred Arahats gathered in the remote rock cave of Aluvihāra presided over by the Venerable Rakkhita Mahāthera and recited not only the entire Tipiṭaka but decided to commit into writing the sacred Tipiṭaka and its commentaries which had been brought from India by Arahāt Mahinda and his companion.

The king Vattagāmini Abhaya made the necessary arrangement for conducting the fourth great council under the direct supervision of king's Chief Adigur, the royal recorder. It is also mentioned that each of this Ola manuscript were meticulously checked over a hundred times by each of these holy Arahats before printing them as authentic documents of the Tipiṭaka and its commentaries. This written version has been preserved upto our time with utmost fidelity and care by successive generations of kings and elder Theras of the Mahā Saṅgha.

The Fifth Great Council, Pañcama Saṅgāyanā was conducted 2440 years after the Great Demise (Mahāparinibbāna), of the Buddha, in 1871, under the auspicious of king Mindon Min of Myanmar. Firstly, the sacred Pāli Cannon and the commentaries were recited for five months by 2400 distinguished Theras country at Dakkhinarāma Monastery in Mandalay. Then these recited texts were carefully inscribed on 729 marble slabs and enshrined in a library called mystery library. Each of the slabs is separately housed in a beautiful pagoda style pandal and scrupulously kept under perfect condition to this day. This fifth great council was presided over by the three eminent Mahātheras, Venerables, Jāgarābhivaṁsa, Narendrābhīdhaja and Sumaṅgalasāmi, one after another, with 24000 erudite Theras participating.

The purpose of fifth Saṅgāyana was to prepare a uniform edition of the Tipiṭaka and inscribe it on marble slabs for the long endurance of the Buddha Sāsana.

The sixth great council.

To commemorate the 2500 Buddha Jayanti, in May 1954, an international Mahāsaṅgha of 2500 distinguished Theras from various Buddhist countries – Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia, India, Bangladesh, and from other countries like China, Japan, Nepal, etc., participated in the sixth great Buddhist Council held at Yangon under the auspices of the government of Myanmar. The Prime Minister U. Nu played the major role to organize this Saṅgāyana, which has brought out a splendid recension of the Tipiṭaka, its commentaries and sub-commentaries (Aṭṭhakatha and Tika), in Myanmar script. The concluding day of the sixth Saṅgāyanā on the full moon day of Vesakha, May, 1956, marked the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's Great Demise. The sixth council, 1954 – 56 A.D., was conducted in Mahāpasana cave in the vicinity of Yangon with the most Venerable Revata Mahāthera presiding. The

purpose of the Saṅgayana was to reauthenticate the original teachings and to propagate the noble Dhamma of the Buddha all over the world.

From the above account it is clear that in the first Saṅgāyanā the Sacred Pāli cannon was authentically collated and established to preserve the purity of the Buddha's original teaching; in the second, all controversies regarding monastic discipline, as contained in the Vinaya Piṭaka, were firmly uprooted once for all; in the third, all philosophical interpolations and metaphysical speculations, were nipped in the bud and the purity of the Buddha's Dhamma re-affirmed; the fourth Saṅgayana committed the Tipiṭaka and the canonical literature into writing on Ola leaf.

Thus the preservation of the original teachings by the Theravāda bhikkhu Saṅgha has been successfully carried out, as also a strong foundation for a flourishing post canonical literature laid. The fourth and fifth Saṅgāyanās further consolidated the process of writing down the Pāli cannon by inscribing the whole Pāli Tipiṭaka on Ola leaves and marble slabs.

The sixth Saṅgāyana, re-authenticated the dhamma teachings for propagation throughout the world. And today the Pāli Tipiṭaka has been translated into scores of languages, both eastern and western. In India itself, today, the Bhagawan Buddha University of Pāli and Theravāda Buddhism conducts courses by means of distant education mode atleast through a ten-language network with the facility for transcription in as many scripts.

May all beings be ever happy!

Source: Prepared, Compiled based on various Buddhist sites from Internet / Books listed under Reference

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