

The Foundation of Theravada Buddhism in South East Asia in Reference to Ceylon

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Buddhism arose in India in about 6th century B.C. and soon began to play a vital role in Indian history. The populace of Buddhism to other countries outside India with personal endeavours can be dated from 3rd century onwards and India played a vital role in disseminating the message of Buddha in neighbouring lands. Buddhism underwent dynamic changes in India, the Mahayana replacing the Hinayana as major school of Buddhism from about 1st C. A.D. Around time 3rd C.A.D Ceylon where the Buddhism had enthusiastic reception comprehensive sway and rapid expansion, become the main center of orthodox Buddhism. Hinayana Buddhism had flourished from India to South East Asia as well and these countries began to look to Ceylon for religious inspiration. The 11th century became a very significant period in history of Theravada Buddhism. The common bond and meticulous observation of Theravada Buddhism brought Buddhism in South East Asia, Ceylon playing a leading role in exchange of ideas between them and ethical discipline.

Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka by there Mahendra in 3rd Century B.C. in reign of Devanampiya tissa. The coming of sacred relics the alm bowl of Buddha, the Buddhist text and Bodhi tree from India and construction of Mahavihara at Anuradhpura in 3rd BC were great important events associated with introduction of Buddhism in Ceylon. It is generally known facts, that at time of introduction of Buddhism in Ceylon, there was no organized religion in Ceylon with expansion royal patronage Buddhism became the accepted religion of the country. According to Pali text many Buddhist monk from other countries attended the foundation laying ceremony of Mahathupa during the region of Dutta Gamini (101-77 BC). This perhaps shows that Ceylon was fast becoming a popular center of Buddhism. The Buddhist were committed to writing for the first time in 1st Century AD. Inspired Buddhism and under the able guidance of Buddhist clergy, Ceylon developed her arts, literature and other aspects of this culture.

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The Mahavinara, the seat of Theravada Buddhism and citadel of orthodoxy, expressively played an important role in history of Buddhism in Ceylon. Its conflict with Abhay vighraha built by Vattagamini Abhayvighrahavihar and other rival sect of Buddhism form the main theme of religious history of Ceylon. Almost all the king patronized either Abahyvighrahavihar or Mahavinara. Although the Ceylonese chronicle and other text to rise of new sects opposed to Theravada and inspite of patronage offered to Abahyvighrahavihar by few rulers and occasional disagreement between Mahavinara and the state regarding religious matters, the Mahavinara and its tradition remained pre eminent throughout the religious history of Ceylon.

In the following third century AD Vaoharika Tissa by suppressing Vetulyavada restored the religion. The suppression of Vetuvalay by king Gothavhaya took place in first half of fourth century. Sanghmitre a mahayana monk arrived in Ceylon. During this time it was patronized by Mahasena (324-362AD). After his accession due to Mahavira hostile attitude towards him many monk belonging to this sect fled to Rohan in southern Ceylon and Malay Hills.

Lanapasade of Mahavira were demolished by this ruler. But Meghvanna Abhay, a minister of Mahasena restored the Mahavihara. The Jetwana vihara was constructed by king Mahasena within the precincts of Mahasvhaba. In spite the protest of latter Vihar and it was dedicated to tissa a friend of king who dwelt in that place. But the king disrobed Tissa. This shows that Mahasena towards the end of his reign was very helpless to do anything against the followers of Mahavihara.

The Chinese traveler Fa-hien who visited Ceylon in period of Buddha Ghosh was in the 5th Century stayed at Abhavighrahavihara.

He says that 5000 monks dwelt in Abhavighrahavihara and 3000 monk dwelt in Mahavira. But it is doubtful that Mahavihara lost its popularity as told by Chinese traveller.

It was about this time (409-43) is time sign of Mahavnanna Buddha ghosh a great comentrator on hearing the fame and scholastic activities of Mahavinara came to Anuradhapura and translated the Singhales commentaries of 6h tripitak into Pali language and metaphysical stand point..

It was in the beginning of 6th century a further purification of Buddhism in time of Magglana this son Dhatvsena also purified Buddhism Sangha towards the ends of 6th Century. The followers of Vetuvalaya were defeated by Jyotipalthera in Public controversy. After the defeat the monks of Abhavigrahvihara dismissed pride and lived in Mahavihara and worked for transcendent truth and emancipation.

In the seventh century the king of Kalinga visited Ceylon and become monk under Jyotipal. The recital of Tripitakas was held under the patronage of Dall Magglana III in (611-617) and impetus was given to Buddhism literary activity. King Silameghvahan invited the monks of both Mahavihara and asked them to observe Uposam ceremony. But the king failed.

Dhattopatisa II wanted to erect a Vihara for Abhavigrahvihara. The monks of Mahavihara opposed to do so. This shows they were powerful enough to criticize king. But Dhattopatisa II carried out plan. During this period all three Nikayas flourished under royal patronage. During period there was prior for 40 monks to study of Santra without affiliation to any Nikaya.

The Cullavansa refers to construction of Abhavigrahvihara by Sena I (831-51) by offering of Vihara by king to Mahasangh.

The Vajra was introduced to Ceylon during Reign of Sen I. The Vajra or or Vijravadin seem to identical with Vajraynist. The followers of tantric schools, which refurnished in North East India. A recital of Abhidhanna was held under the patronage of Sen II. He caused the whole of Rattansutta to be written on golden plate. He purified sangha and inspired fraternity. He erected Parovena called Samuddagiri and gave it to paramssullakh. According to Cullavamsa Parivena lived in period of Sen II. Although the Dhamruchikha and other sects were patronised by Kassap IV who assisted Mahavanna, Kassap also reformed samgha.

These evidence show that Mahavihara played up role in development of Thervada Buddhism in Ceylon up to 10 CAD. The rise of Abhavigraha vihara was in rise in history writing of Ceylon. Although it received favoured treatment in important phase but it could not over shad Mahavihara ultimately. The Ceylon chronicles make reference to size of new sects which were opposed to Mahavihara the citadel of orthodoxy remained predominant centre Thervada Buddhism during this period.

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