

The Sects of the Buddhists.

T. W. Rhys Davids.

The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 1891

pp.409—422

We find in the *Dīpavaṃsa* (Chapter V. 39-48) a list of the eighteen sects (or schools rather) into which the Buddhists in India had, in the course of the second century of the Buddhist era, been divided. In the *Mahāvāṃsa* (Chapter V.) there is a similar list, evidently drawn from the same sources, but omitting (in Turnour's texts) numbers 1-7 of the older list. It is curious that precisely where these names ought to come in (at line 5), the text given by Turnour is evidently corrupt, a half-sloka at least being missing, and probably more.¹

So far as is yet known these eighteen sects are not elsewhere mentioned in Pāli literature, excepting only in the commentary on the *Kathā Vatthu*, edited by the late Professor Minayeff, for the Pāli Text Society, in 1889. The book itself, composed by Moggali-putta Tissa, about 240 B.C., deals with a number of ethical points which were then matters of controversy; and it is the greatest pity that, owing to want of funds, the Pāli Text Society has not yet been able to publish it. But the commentary, short as it is (only 200 pages in the journal of the Pāli Text Society), gives the name of the particular sect against which certain of the arguments are directed.

These data are very important. Following the list of the eighteen sects in the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa* above referred to is another list of six later sects, the names of which, with one exception, are derived from places, presumably the places where the sects in question took their origin. Now we find that in a large majority (about ninety as against about forty-five) of the cases in which the commentary gives the name of the sect referred to, the names are those of these six later sects. And of the forty-five directed against the eighteen older schools, sixteen are directed against one, nineteen against another, and seven against a third (only four others of the eighteen being mentioned at all, and three of these four being referred to only once.)

There is every reason to believe that the commentator's statements as to the sects against whom his author's arguments were directed are, so far as they go, correct. When we have the text before us we may be able to specify others. But we may fairly draw the conclusion that already in the time of Asoka only seven of the eighteen sects had retained any practical importance at all, and that of these seven only three, or perhaps four, were still vigorous and flourishing.

This will be made plainer by the following table, in which I have first arranged the list given in both the Ceylon chronicles (and derived by both from the history handed down in the *Mahā Vihāra* at Anurādhapura) in such a way as to show the relationship of these eighteen Hīnayāna sects one to another. To each sect I have then added the pages of the commentary on the *Kathā Vatthu*, in which it is specifically referred to by name.²

1 Since the above was written I find that the missing passage has actually been found by Baṭuwan Tuḍāwa. It contains exactly what we find in the *Dīpavaṃsa*.

2 The *Mahā-bodhīvaṃsa*, being edited this year for the Pāli Text Society, also gives the eighteen schools of Buddhists in India. But its data are merely derived from the older Ceylon sources, and it adds nothing new. All our Ceylon information is really derived from the *Mahāvihāra* at Anurādhapura. Three of the eighteen sects have been found in inscriptions of the second and third century A.D.--The *Bhadraṇīyā* in the "Archaeological Survey of Western India," II. 85; IV. 109-111--the *Cetikā*, *ibid.* IV. 115, and "Arch. Survey of Southern India," I. 100--and the *Mahāsamghikā* in the "Arch. Survey of Western India," IV. 113.

TABLE I. SECTS OF THE HĪNAYĀNA.

(A. The eighteen sects.)

1. Thera-vādino.
 2. Vajjiputtakā.
 4. Dhammuttarikā.
 5. Bhaddayānikā, 58.
 6. Channagarikā (Dīp. Chanda°, and C^y on Kathā Vatthu Channa°) 3.
 7. Sammitiyā, 42, 58, 67, 68, 97, 106, 110, 111, 112, 114, 123, 127, 129, 150, 156, 160, 161, 162, 174 (total 19).
 3. Mahimsāsaka, 60, 90, 92, 111, 123, 160, 173, 181.
 8. Sabbatthivādā (Dīp. Sabbattha-), 43, 58, 132.
 10. Kassapikā, 50.
 11. Saṅkantikā.
 12. Suttavādā.
 9. Dhammaguttikā.
 13. Mahāsaṅgītikārakā = Mahāsaṅghikā, 123-129, 131, 135, 136, 147, 152, 154, 158, 176, 189, 190 (total 16).
 14. Gokulikā, 58.
 16. Bahussutakā = Bāhulikā.
 17. Paññatti-vādā.
 18. Cetiya-vādā.³
 15. Ekabyohārika.
- All these 18 arose in 100-200 A.B. (Dīp. 5. 53=Mah. 5. 8).

(B. Later sects in India.)

1. Hemavatikā.
- 2-5. Andhakā, 52, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 65, 67, 68, 71, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 92, 93, 101, 102, 103, 105, 109, 110, 111, 115, 117, 118, 121, 122, 130, 133, 144, 149, 150, 151, 156, 161, 162, 163, 172, 173, 174, 177, 180, 184, 185, 189, 190, 193, 197, 198 (total 55).
2. Rājagirika, 1, 94-99, 140, 154, 163, 164.
3. Siddhatthikā, 94-99, 163, 164.
4. Pubbaselikā, 54, 56, 90, 106, 108, 109, 112, 114. Andhaka
5. Aparaselikā, 54, 55, 56, 143, 148, 159, 187.
6. Vādariyā (so in Mah. The Dīp. 5. 54, has Aparo Rājagiriko, and the C^y on the Kathā Vatthu, p.5, calls them Vājariyā and Vājiriyā).

³ This school was very probably the source of the schools of the Eastern and Western Caves at Dhanakaṭaka (the Pubba- and Aparaselikā of Table I. (B.)) as its name occurs once on the Amaravati Tope in the description of one of the donors, a member of the order resident in one or other of these mountain Vihāras.

TABLE I. HĪNAYĀNA (continued)
(C. Later sects in Ceylon.)

1. Dhammaruciya (B.C. 90).
2. Sāgaliya (A.D. 251).
3. Dāthāvedhakā (A.D. 601).

But the commentator mentions also five sects with names not occurring in Table I. I give these sects, therefore, in a separate table, again adding all the pages in which they are referred to.

TABLE II.

1. Uttarāpathakā, 73, 81, 82, 92, 105, 117, 118, 119, 132, 137, 139, 141, 144, 145, 148, 149, 151, 160, 170, 172, 177, 179, 180, 183, 188, 191, 193, 194, 195, 197, 198 (total 34).
2. Vibhajjavādino, 6 (=Thera-vādino).
3. Vetulyakā, 167, 171, 197.
4. Suññatavādā, 167.
5. Hetuvādā, 153, 154, 156, 158, 166, 181, 184, 198.

We can now, therefore, in a third table, give the names of the sects which are, so far, known to have been considered as of real practical importance in the time of Asoka, or rather when the Kathā Vatthu was composed.

TABLE III. SECTS IN ASOKA'S TIME.

1. Thera-vādino (=Vibhajja-vādino), the old school, to which Moggaliputta Tissa himself and the authors of the Ceylon commentaries, etc., belonged.
2. Sammitiya (derived from the above, but existing only on the Continent).
3. Mahimsāsakā, with their subdivision, the
4. Sabbatthi-vādino.
- 5-8. The Andhra sects, with four subdivisions. (see Table I. B.).
9. The Mahāsaṃghikā.
10. The Uttarāpathakā.

It will not be possible till we get the text of the Kathā Vatthu to show the exact nature of the differences by which these sects were distinguished. But it is already clear from the commentary, which shows the nature of the questions at issue, that they one and all looked upon Arahātship (not Bodhisatship) as the ideal of a good Buddhist, and were really much alike in essentials, not differing more than the various sects of Protestants do to-day.

The above results are entirely confirmed by such other evidence of value as is accessible to us. We have two important Hīnayāna books in Sanskrit, the Divyāvadāna and the Mahāvastu, accessible to scholars in critical editions. The former mentions no sects, and though its ethical teaching, as is natural in a story-book, is put in the background, it contains very little that is contradictory to the older teaching. The latter purports to belong (see vol. i. p. 2, line 13) to the Lokottaravādins, a sect of the Mahāsaṃghikā (who are supposed to have been the furthest removed from the school of the Theras). But there is very little in its teaching which could not

have been developed from the Thera-vāda; and it also differs from the Pāli texts in the lower general tone—in the prominence given to legendary matter, and in the consequent inattention to ethical points, and the details of Arahatsip—rather than by the enunciation of new and divergent doctrines.

We find a similar confirmation of our Kathā Vatthu commentator if we look at the names of the sects referred to by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims. These are shown in the following table.

TABLE IV. SECTS MENTIONED BY FA HIAN AND YUAN THSANG.

A. By Fa Hian

In Lob and Karaschar	the Hīnayāna,	Ch. 2.
" Khoten	" Mahāyāna,	Ch. 3.
" the Dard Country	" Hīnayāna,	Ch. 6.
" Udyāna	" Hīnayāna,	Ch. 8.
" Panjāb	" both,	Ch. 14, 15.
" Kanauj	" Hīnayāna,	Ch. 18.
" the Middle Country	" 96 sects,	Ch. 20 (apparently not Buddhists).
" Kosambī	" Hīnayāna,	Ch. 34.
" Patna	" Mahāsamghika,	Ch. 36.
" India	" 18 sects,	Ch. 36.
" Patna (and China)	" Sabbatthi-vādā,	Ch. 36.
" Ceylon	" Mahīmsāsakā,	Ch. 40.

B. By Yuan Thsang.

In Gaz	the Sabbatthivādā,	1. 49. (trans. Beal).
" Bāmiyan	" Lokottaravādino,	1. 50.
" Kapisa	mostly Mahāyāna,	1. 55.
" India	" 18 schools (apparently both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna!)	1. 80.
" Gandhāra	" Hīnayāna,	1. 104.
" Po-lu-sha	" Hīnayāna,	1. 112.
" Udyāna	" Mahāyāna,	1. 120,
	and also Nos. 3, 8, 9, 10, 13, of Table I. (A),	1. 121.
" Takshasilā	" Mahāyāna,	1. 137.
" Kashmīr	" Mahāsamghikā,	1. 162.
" Sāgala	" Hīnayāna,	1. 172.
" Kulūta	" Mahāyāna,	1. 177.
" ?	" Hīnayāna,	1. 179.
" Mathurā	both,	1. 180.
" Sthāneṣvara	" Hīnayāna,	1. 184.
" Srughna	" Hīnayāna,	1. 187.

" Rohilkund	" Hīnayāna (Sabbatthivādino) 1. 190, 192, 196.
" Goviṣāna	" Hīnayāna, 1. 200.
" Pi-lo-shan-na	" Mahāyāna, 1. 201.
" Ahikshetra	" Sammitiyā, 1. 200.
" Kapītha	" Sammitiyā, 1. 102.
" Kanauj	both H. and M., 1. 207.
" Navadevakula	" Sabbatthivādino, 1. 224.
" Audh	both, 1. 225.
" Hayamukha	" Sammitiyā, 1. 230.
" Prayāga	" Hīnayāna, 1. 231.
" Kosambī	" Hīnayāna, 1. 235.
" Visākhā	" Sammitiyā, 1. 239-40.
" Srāvasti	" Sammitiyā, 2. 2.
" Kapilavastu	" Sammitiyā, 2. 14.
" Benares	" Sammitiyā, 2. 44, 45.
" Ghazipur	" Hīnayāna, 2. 61.
" Mahāsāla	" Mahāyāna, 2. 65.
" Śvetapura (?)	" Mahāyāna, 2. 75.
" Vajjians	both, 2. 78.
" Nepāl	both, 2. 81.
" Magadha	" Mahāyāna, 2. 82.
" "	both, 2, 103, 104.
" Gayā	" Mahāyāna of the Sthavira School, 2. 133.
" Pigeon Vihāra	" Sabbatthivādā, 2. 182.
" Mongir	" Sammitiyā, 2. 186.
" Campā	" Hīnayāna, 2. 192.
" Po-chi-po Vihāra	" Mahāyāna, 2. 195.
" Puṇḍra	both, 2. 195.
" Bengal	" Sthavira, 2. 199.
" Bhāgalpur	" Sammitiyā, 2. 201.
" Orissa	" Mahāyāna, 2. 204.
" Kalinga	" Sthavira school, 2. 208.
" Kosala	" Mahāyāna, 2. 210.
" Dhanakaṭaka	" Mahāyāna, 2. 221.
(Here are the Pubbasela and Aparasela Vihāras.)	
" Kāñcipura	" Sthavira, 2. 229.
" Ceylon	" Sthavira, 2. 247.
" Konkana	both, 2. 254.
" Mahrattas	both, 2. 257.

" Baroach	" Sthavira, 2. 260.
" Mālva	" Sammitiyā, 2. 261.
" Kachch	both, 2. 266.
" Valabhī	" Sammitiyā, 2. 266.
" Surat	" Sthavira, 2. 269.
" Gurjara	" Sabbatthivādā, 2. 270.
" Ujjen	both, 2. 270.
" N. Sindh	" Sammitiyā, 2. 272.
" Parvata (Po-fa-to)	both, 2. 275.
" Kurāchi (?)	" Sammitiyā, 2. 276.
" Lang-kia-lo	both, 2. 277.
" Persia	" Sabbatthivādā, 2. 278.
" Pi-to-shi-lo	" Sammitiyā, 2. 279.
" O-fan-cha	" Sammitiyā, 2. 280.
" Fa-la-na	" Mahāyāna, 2. 281.
" Ghazni	" Mahāyāna, 2. 284.
" Hwoh	both, 2. 288.
" Och	" Sabbatthivādā, 2. 304.
" Kashgar	" Sabbatthivādā, 2. 307.
" Cho-kiu-kia	" Mahāyāna, 2. 308.
" Khoten	" Mahāyāna, 2. 309.

On these lists it may be noted that Fā Hian knows of the list of eighteen Hīnayāna sects (see Ch. XXXVI.); but he mentions by name only three; and those three are precisely those three of the eighteen which, in our Table No. 1, are shown to have been, together with the Sammitiyā, the most important in Asoka's time. Further, Fā Hian only knows of one other sect, the Mahāyānists, and of them only in Khoten and the Panjab. Similarly the Kathā Vatthu mentions only one other sect as at all of equal importance with those just referred to; and that sect is that of the "Northerners," the Uttarāpathakā. The undesigned coincidence between the two authors is as complete as it is striking.

Yuan Tshang goes into much greater detail, but his statements are quite consistent with those of the earlier authors. He finds the Mahāsamghika only in Kashmīr, and there only in small numbers (100), and a subdivision of that school, that is the Lokottara-vādins, only in Bāmiyan. Further down on the continent that school seems, in his time, to have passed over bodily to the Mahāyānists. But the Hīnayānists are still much the more widely distributed, and also more numerous; and of their subdivisions it is precisely those mentioned as important by the earlier writers who recur in Yuan Tshang. He also in most cases gives an estimate of the actual number of Bhikshus in each country. But before discussing these numbers it is necessary to notice the statement, astounding at first sight, that the 20, 000 Bhikshus in Ceylon were then principally Mahāyānists.

Yuan Tshang admits that the Ceylonese were originally Hīnayānists, but he explains the change by a division of opinion which took place between the Bhikshus resident at the capital, in the Mahā Vihāra, and in the Abhayagiri Vihāra (the latter drifting towards the Mahāyāna). This division he dates about 200 years after Mahinda's time, that is to say, shortly before the Christian era. He is referring evidently to the same schism as that described in the commentary on the Mahāvamsa (Turnour, p. 53)), which is there dated about 90 B.C., and is said to have arisen between the residents at these two great Vihāras. As the whole of the voluminous Pāli literature of Ceylon in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and later centuries, is written entirely from the Thera-vāda standpoint, it is clear that Yuan Tshang, who did not himself visit Ceylon, either misunderstood or was misinformed as to the side on which the preponderance, in his time, lay. And when he adds that the particular school of the Mahāyānists to which the Ceylonese Buddhists belonged was the Sthavira or Thera school, it can scarcely be doubted that he (or his informant) had in view the Theravāda school to which we know the Ceylonese almost exclusively adhered. A Thera school of the Mahāyānists has not been found mentioned in any other author, and the Sthavira school is elsewhere referred to as identical with the Thera-vāda, the most fundamentally Hīnayānist of all the sects.

Taking this to be so, it will be of value to arrange in another table, according to sects, the data given by Yuan Tshang, adding the numbers of the Bhikshus where he gives numbers.

TABLE V. NUMBERS GIVEN BY YUAN TSHANG.

1. Sthavira sect (Thera-vādino).

In Gayā	1000 (in a Vihāra founded by a Ceylon king).
" East Bengal	2000
" Kalinga	500
" Kāñcipura	10,000
" Ceylon	20,000
" Bharukaccha	300
" Suratt̥ha	<u>3000</u>
	36,800

2. Sammitiyā (No. 7 of Table I).

In Ahikshetra	1000
" Sankassa	100
" Hayamukha	1000
" Visākhā	3000
" Sāvatti	few
" Kapila-vatthu	30 (text has 3000)
" Benares	3000
" Migadāya	1500
" Mungiri	4000
" Bhāgalpur	2000
" Mālva	2000

" Valabhī	6000
" N. Sindh	10,000
" Kurāchi	5000
" Pi-to-shi-lo	3000
" Avanti (?)	<u>2000</u>
	43, 630

3. Sabbatthivādino (No. 8 in Table I.)

In Balk	200
" Ma-ti-pu-lo (Rohilkund)	800
" Pigeon Vihāra	200
" Kanauj	500
" Gurjara	100
" Persia	several hundred
" Och	several hundred
" Kashgar	<u>10,000</u>
	More than 12,000

4. Lokottaravādino (probably = No. 14 of Table I. A.).

In Bamiyan	1000
------------	------

5. Hīnayāna, without mention of any one of the eighteen sects.

In Sāgala	100
" Sthāneṣvara	700
" Srughna	1000
" Govisāna	100
" Kosambī	300
" Ghazipur (near Benares)	1000
" Campā	<u>200</u>
	3400

6. Mahāyāna.

In Kapisa (Hindukush)	6000
" Uyyāna (so at I. 120. But the schools are given, p. 121, and they all belong to the Hīnayāna!)	
" Kulūta (on the Upper Biyās)	1000
" Pi-lo-shan-na	500
" Ti-lo-shia-kia (20m. W. of Nalānda)	1000
" Po-chi-po Khāra	700
" Orissa	10,000
" South Kosala	10,000
" Dhanakaṭaka	1000

" Fa-la-na	300
" Ghazni	1000
" Cho-kiu-kia	500
" Khoten	<u>1000</u>
	32,000

7. Bhikshus studying both Hīna- and Mahā-yāna.

In Mathurā (on the Jumna)	2000
" Kanauj	10,000
" Audh	3000
" Vajjians	1000
" Nepal	2000
" Magadha	10,000
" Puṇḍra	3000
" Konkana	10,000
" Mahrattas	5000
" Ujjen	300
" Po-fa-to	1000
" Lang-kia-lo	6000
" Hwoh	200
" Och	<u>1000</u>
	54,500

Totals of above.

Hīnayāna

Sthavira	36,800	\	
Sammitiyā	43,630		
Sabbatthivādino	12,000	}	96,430
Lokottaravādino	1000		
(No name)	3400]	
Mahāyāna			32,000
Both Hīna & Mahāyāna			<u>54,500</u>
(Total numbers of the Order)			182,930

These numbers are exclusive of those, not many cases, where it is said there were 'few' at any place. They show that Yuan Tshang estimated the Buddhist Bhikshus in India and the adjacent countries to the N.W. towards the close of the seventh century of our era at less than two hundred thousand. And further that, in his opinion, about three- fourths of them studied at that time what he called the 'Little Vehicle,' and about one-fourth of them what he called the 'Great Vehicle.'

Besides the above statements, we have others from Tibetan books of the tenth and following centuries, which will be of value, inasmuch as they attempt to give not only the genealogy of the sects (their relation to one another), but also a summary of their special doctrines. Mr. Rockhill, to whom we owe the best existing summary of these statements,⁴ says of these as to doctrine that " the theories of the different schools are unfortunately given... so concisely that it is a difficult, if not an impossible task, to give a satisfactory translation of them." And the statements as to the origin of the sects are so confused, and even contradictory, that very little can be made out of them. Tāranātha (of the seventeenth century) gives another account of the origin of the sects drawn principally from the same Tibetan sources as Mr. Rockhill summarises at greater length (Tāranātha, pp. 270-273). It is plain that all these Tibetan data rest upon earlier Sanskrit summaries, and go back eventually to a tradition which, when it is fully known, will probably confirm, and even perhaps add to, the data derived from the other sources.⁵

I would add that in an essay in the Asiatic Researches (Vol. XVI. pp.424 fol., written in 1828), Mr. Hodgson has given us a somewhat extended summary of four later schools in Nepal, none of which are even mentioned in the foregoing works. These are:

TABLE VI. NEPAUL SECTS.

1. The Svābhāvikā.
2. The Aiṣvarikā.
3. The Karmikā.
4. The Yātnikā

They are all probably Mahāyānist, and if so are the only subdivisions of that school known to us by name. Mr. Hodgson does not refer to any Sanskrit authority, and is apparently quoting the verbal statements of a Nepal paṇḍit. And, notwithstanding the lapse of time, the sects thus named have not yet been found in any Buddhist author.

Finally we have the following list of Buddhist schools known to Sāyana-Mādhava, in the fourteenth century A.D. in South India.⁶

1. The Vaibhāshikā.
2. The Yogācārā.
3. The Sautrāntikā.
4. The Mādhyamikā.

The conclusion I would venture to draw is that our best authorities are really at harmony; and that the history of the Buddhist sects is not the confused and hopeless muddle it has been often supposed to be, but only awaits the publication of the texts, and especially of the Kathā Vatthu, to be capable of reconstruction in an intelligible and fairly satisfactory way.

4 In his " Life of the Buddha," Chapter VI.

5 Mr. Beal, in the "Indian Antiquary." ix. 300, gives us the same details as we find in Mr. Rockhill, but through a Chinese instead of a Tibetan translation.

6 Sarva Darśana Sangraha, Chapter III.