

Notes & Topics

TARANATHA: RGYA-GAR-CHHOS-HBYUNG

Dam-pahi-chhos-rin-po-chhe-hphags-pahi-yul-du-ji-ltar-dar-bahi-tshul-gsal-bar-ston-pa-dgos-hdod-kun-hbyung, described in brief as Rgya-gar-chhos-hbyung (History of Religion in India) composed in 1608 A.C. by Kun-dgah-snying-po, celebrated under his monastic name Taranatha, remains a classic source for the history of Buddhism in India. The archaeological explorations and the finds of literary treasures in India and Inner Asia during the first half of the current century have not diminished its value as is evidenced by the demand for a fresh translation in English of this work. Professor Nalinaksha Dutt, the doyen of Buddhist scholars in India, has kindly agreed to make a translation for publication by the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. We have persuaded him to give a synopsis of the work for the *Bulletin*. The first instalment is published below.

MRT

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS I-XIII

Though it is full of superstitious beliefs, fanciful traditions and wild stories, Taranatha's 'History' preserves an indispensable account of the spread of Buddhism in India and particularly of the lives of distinguished Acharyas of India who composed learned philosophical works as also of the missionaries engaged in the spread of Buddhism in India. The 'History' lacks any chronological sequence or any systematic narration. This synopsis in English seeks to set in order several events and facts.

CHAPTER I

In the introductory chapter, references are made to the dynasties of several kings, viz., Kshemadarsin (Ajatasatru), Asoka, Chandras, Indo-Scythian rulers, Sakas, Guptas and Palas. Similarly there are references to the kings of the south. It goes back even to Tretayuga and Satyayuga as also to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and even to Kalidasa.

The first Council was held 15 years after Buddha's death. As Mahakasyapa had then passed away, Ananda presided over the Council. (Note: Apparently this is unauthentic).

CHAPTER II

The time of King Subahu

During the reign of King Subahu, son of Ajatasatru, Ven. Sanavasika held the headship of the Sangha (Sanghanayaka). He resided at Sravasti. At that time Madhyantika resided at Varanasi with a large number of disciples. The alms-givers resented the presence of such a large number of monks, and so Madhyantika went with his disciples to Usira mountain near Kashmir and propagated the religion in Kashmir.

CHAPTER III

Events of the time of King Sudhanu, son of Subahu

Sanavasika passed over the headship of the Sangha to Upagupta, son of a spice-dealer of Mathura.

CHAPTER IV

Events of the time of Upagupta

Upagupta settled down at Mathura in the Nata-Bhata monastery. He converted a large number of the inhabitants, who suffered in the hands of Mara, who also troubled Bhagavan Buddha. He, however, controlled the Mara. Upagupta lived there till the end of his life. Some of the lay-devotees built Kukkutarama near Usira mountain or Urumunda.

A Brahmani had three sons, of whom one worshipped Mahesvara, the second Kapilamuni and the third built the Mahabodhi Temple.

CHAPTER V

Events of the time of the Ven. Dhitika

In Ujjayini lived a sagacious and wealthy Brahmana, who had a son called Dhitika. He met Upagupta in Mathura. He practised the eight Vimoksha meditations and propagated the religion in Kamrup, where in the pleasure-garden of the rich householder, Ghoshavanta, a great Vihara was built by him.

CHAPTER VI

Biography of King Asoka

Asoka's brothers were ruling in different places, viz., Sravasti, Saketa, Varanasi, Champa, Vaisali and Rajagṛha. But all of them retired when they heard that Asoka was made the ruler of Magadha. Asoka became proficient in the sixty sciences and eight crafts, art of writing, calculation, etc. One of the brothers was Lokayatika and another worshipped Mahadeva, the third Visnu, the fourth Vedanta, the fifth Nirgrantha Pingala and the sixth Brahmana Kausika Brahmacarya. Asoka relied on the words of those who believed in Dakinis and Rakshasis and held Uma of the cemetery (i.e. Smasanakali) in high esteem. He conquered the hill tribes and realised from them taxes and tributes. He enjoyed all kinds of pleasures, and so he was called Kamasoka. His brothers became his enemies and so he subdued them after a protracted fight. He ruled over the whole of Northern India from the Himalayas to the Vindhya. He was cruel and ill-tempered, and being guided by Brahmanas he became perverted. He killed 10,000 men. His hangman could not kill a bhikkhu, who by his miraculous power brought forth rain and extinguished the fire consuming human beings. He went out of the city of the dead and met the bhikkhu. The king then heard a discourse from him and became repentant. An Arhat of Pataliputra absolved him of his sins. Thereafter, he supplied food daily to 30,000 monks.

At that time merchants used to go by boats to bring jewels. They took the help of an Arhat. Nagas troubled them and so Asoka conquered them. In this way Asoka's dominion extended over all the provinces of Jambudvīpa upto the Himalayas and also the snowy mountain ranges lying on the other side of the Li country and all the countries upto the ocean on the east, south and the west along with the 15 dvīpas. He adorned the country with Chaityas, containing the relics of Buddha. Henceforth he became known as Dharmasoka. The king offered 1000 millions of gold coins to the clergy of Aparanta, Kashmir and Tukhara.

Asoka's grandson Vitasoka was given the rulership after him.

Taranatha claims as his sources Kshemendra's *Avadanakalpalata*, *Asoka-avadana*, *Vinita-avadana*, *Naga-avadana*, *Stupa-avadana*, *Utsava-avadana*, *Suvarnaphara* and *Kunalavadana*.

CHAPTER VII

Events contemporaneous with King Asoka (perhaps Kalasoka)
Venerable Dhritika imparted instructions to many disciples. He

fell sick. The disciples said that correct instructions could not be had from an ailing teacher. But they betook themselves to the ten breaches of the disciplinary rules.

These were:

1. Practice of carrying salt in a horn for use when needed.
2. Practice of taking food after midday, when the shadow was two digits wide.
3. Practice of going to a neighbouring village and taking a second meal there.
4. Observance of *Upasatha* in different places within the same parish (*sima*).
5. Performing an ecclesiastical act and obtaining its sanction afterwards.
6. Use of precedents as authority.
7. Drinking of milk-whey after meal.
8. Drinking of palm-juice, which was not yet toddy.
9. Use of a borderless mat to sit on.
10. Acceptance of gold and silver. (In Taranatha this list is confused and so it has been put here in a correct form).

The second Buddhist Council was held at Vaisali 110 years after Buddha's death to suppress these indulgences but it was not effective on all the monks. Kalasoka was the then ruler of Magadha.

CHAPTER VIII

Events at the time of Vitasoka

Asoka's son Kunala was dwelling in the Himalayas. He was blinded by the machinations of Asoka's second queen Tishyarakshita.

CHAPTER IX

Events at the time of second Kasyapa

Kasyapa was a native of Gandhara. At this time lived the son of Vitasoka called Surasena, who possessed immeasurable wealth. He maintained the monks of the four quarters for three years and offered gifts to all the Chaityas in India. At that time Yasa was born in Mathura. He erected a monastery on the bank of the river Saravati. He maintained 100,000 monks. Then Mahadeva, son of a merchant, committed the three deadly sins (*anantarya-karma*). He went to Kashmir and became a monk, and mastered the three Pitakas. He propounded five unorthodox views. These were:

- 1 The Arhats are subject to temptation
- 2 The Arhats may have residue of ignorance
- 3 The Arhats may have doubts regarding certain matters
4. The Arhats gain knowledge through others help
5. The Path is attained by an exclamation as "aho". (These have been put here in a correct form.)

After the death of Kasyapa the second, Mahaloma became the head of the Sangha.

CHAPTER X

Events of the time of Mahaloma and others

After the death of Surasena, his son Nanda ruled over Central India for 29 years. At this time appeared the four main Buddhist sects.

One of Nanda's companions was Panini, who was born in Bharukaccha. Panini obtained Sravakabodhi. According to the Tibetan tradition, Indravakyarana was older than Panini's work. Chandravakyarana agrees with Panini and Kalapavyakarana agrees with Indravakyarana.

CHAPTER XI

Events of the time of King Mahapadma

In the north, King Agnidatta maintained 1,000 monks for 30 years Mahapadma maintained the whole Sangha of Kusumapura Sthiramati, a follower of Naga, proclaimed the *panchavastu* and thereby increased the discord. (*Panchavastu* refers perhaps to the above mentioned five points of Mahadeva).

The Vibhasha sastras were compiled. According to the Vaibhashikas their seven Abhidharma texts should be recognised as Buddhavachana. According to the Sautrantikas, the Vibhashas were composed by imperfect Sravakas. Vasubandhu seems to have agreed with the Sautrantikas at a later time. It was contended by some that Sravakas were not able to realise the Truth. In Odisha Manjusri promulgated the *Prajnaparamita* texts. This marked the beginning of Mahayana teachings.

CHAPTER XII

Events at the time of the Three Collections

King Kanishka became a devotee of Buddhism. The Agamas of the Sautrantikas were Drshtantamalagama, Pitakadharmamushti etc. Parsva appeared and propounded the Vyakarana-sutras (texts containing prophecies).

At Kundalavanavihara in Kashmir or Kuvana monastery in Jalandhara the Buddhist Council was held under the auspices of King Kanishka. Further schisms took place in the Sangha. At this time the Mahayana teaching of *Anutpattika-dharma-kshanti* (non-origination and non-decay of all worldly objects) was popularised.

CHAPTER XIII

Events at the time of the propagation of Mahayana

After the Buddhist Council King Kanishka died. At that time a householder Jati maintained Vasumitra and 3,000 monks. In Pushkalavati Kasnika's son maintained 100 Arhats and 10,000 Bhikshus for five years. In the east at Kusumapura lived the Brahmana Viduh, who had made ready 1,000 copies of the Tripitaka and offered them as gifts to the bhikshus. In each Tripitaka there were one lac slokas. In the town of Pataliputra lived Arhat Asvagupta who meditated upon the eight *Vimokshas*. Along with him Nandimitra and other Arhats realised the Truth by various methods. In the west lived Lakshasva, who exerted considerably according to the teaching of Buddha. In the south-west, Saurashtra, lived Brahmana Kulika, who invited Arhat Nanda for the teaching of Mahayana doctrines. At this time many Kalyanamitras appeared and received instructions from Avalokitesvara, Guhyapati, Manjusri and Maitreya and practised *Dharmasantana-samadhi*. Among them may be mentioned the names of Mahabhadantas Avitarka, Vigata-raga-dhvaja, Divakaragupta, Rahulaamitra, Jnanatala, the great upasaka Sanghatala and other teachers of the doctrine, 500 in number. At this time there were existing the following texts:

Arya Ratnakuta-dharmaparyaya in 1,000 sections
Arya Avatamsaka sutra in 100,000 discourses
Arya Lankavatara sutra in 25,000 slokas
Arya Ghanavyuha in 12,000 slokas
Arya Dharmasangiti in 12,000 slokas
and a number of other works.

The King was informed that there were several teachers but no students. He erected viharas on the top of Mount Abu and from the king's parishad he sent 500 persons with strong disposition to take ordination. He had copies of the texts made according to the number of students. These were later sent to the Vihara of Sri Nalanda. Thereafter Mahayana spread in all directions. But this did not please the Sravakas, who declared that the Mahayana doctrines were not delivered by Buddha. The Mahayanists took ordination according to the Hinayana schools and lived mostly with them.

Mudgaragomin Brahmana worshipped Mahesvara but his brother became a devotee of Buddha. Mahesvara showed great veneration to 500 Arhats coming from Manas-sarovar and so Mudgaragomin also became a devotee of Buddha. They became upasakas and composed the *Visishta-stava*. They made provisions for 500 Sravakas at Vajrasana and for 500 Mahayanists in Nalanda. The fame of Nalanda was raised by Mudgaragomin and his brother and was further raised by Rahulabhadra and still further by his disciple Nagarjuna.

NALINAKSHA DUTT
