

On the Relation Between *Buddhacarita* and *Āśrama*

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The *buddhacarita* may be, in a sense, called a genuine biography of Gotama Buddha, Śākyamuni, the founder of Buddhism. It contains words and deeds in his life which are divided into eight parts and named "Eight Phases".

What is a cardinal element of the *buddhacarita*? There have been various standpoints about it. When making much account of *siddhamārga* we examine the *buddhacarita*, we can find a consequent passage to open up out of *siddha-buddhamārga*. This is *vāhamārga*, meaning mission in a biblical sense. While *siddhamārga* means accomplishing the teachings of Buddha, this *vāhamārga* is a mission of the teachings of Buddha. Generally speaking, a mission may not only aim at preaching, but also relate closely to *vihāra*, *pravraja*. And *vihāra* has weight with a mission, *vāhamārga*. If *vihāra* should have been carried away from the *vāhamārga* by Buddha, Śākyamuni, the latter itself eventually should be unsubstantial and one-sided. To the latter, naturally, both the mission and *vihāra* are indispensable as well. Indeed, Śākyamuni's mission, i. e. *dharmacakravarta*, with preaching and pilgrimage, drove along as two wheels. And at last he carried it to perfection in Kusinārā (Kūśinagara).

His last *dharmacakravarta* in Kusinārā, as the *buddhacarita* tells us, seems to give a dramatic impression which is deserved to be offered to a perfect conqueror over the three-fold world, though anyone except few followers was not present there. This last consequence is requested to examine in detail. But it is here enough to find both preaching and pilgrimage run through as two wheels to the last mission from the beginning in his life.

It is interesting that preaching and pilgrimage during some three scores of rainy days were prerequisite even to the last mission. A buddhist monk used not to pilgrimize, that is, go about as a begging monk, but stay at the same

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place for such a rainy season. He could not ignore the rigid limitations of natural environment around him even though he required himself as a motto that a buddhist monk must not stay at the same place. Or, even then, some ascetic exercises proper for a rainy season might be established and practised among travelling buddhist monks. The word *vārṣika* bears witness of the existence of such a practice of austerities. Śākyamuni, however, recognized himself to stand on the end of his life in a travelling of preaching and pilgrimage including *vārṣika*, and told the the followers so. After having been ill in bed, he had incessantly missionized in order to bear witness of his purely altruistic actions. And in spite of his senile decay and failing health, he ventured himself on the last mission there with Subhadda, a travelling ascetic.

Now at that time Subhadda, a wandering ascetic, was dwelling at Kusinārā. And Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, heard the report: 'To-night, in the last watch, the monk Gotama will pass into *nirvāṇa* (*nibbāna*).'

Then Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, drew near to the sal-tree grove Upavattana of the Mallas, and to where the venerable Ānanda was, and having drawn near, he spoke to the venerable Ānanda as follows: 'Ānanda, to-night the monk Gotama will pass into *nirvāṇa* (*nibbāna*). Let me, then, Ānanda, have an opportunity of seeing the monk Gotama.'

When Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, had so spoken, the venerable Ānanda spoke to him as follows: 'Enough of that, brother Subhadda; trouble not The Tathāgata. The Blessed One is weary.'

Now The Blessed One chanced to hear the conversation between the venerable Ānanda and the wandering ascetic Subhadda. And The Blessed One called to the venerable Ānanda: 'Enough, Ānanda; hinder not Subhadda. Let Subhadda, Ānanda, have an opportunity of beholding The Tathāgata.'

Then Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, drew near to where The Blessed One was; and having drawn near, he exchanged greetings with The Blessed One. And seated respectfully at one side, Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, spoke to The Blessed One as follows: 'Gotama, all those monks and *brāhmaṇas* who possess a large following and crowds of hearers and disciples, and who are distinguished, renowned leaders of sects, and highly esteemed by the multitu-

des, —to wit, Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta, —have they all done as they maintain, discovered the truth, or have they not? or have some of them done so, and others not?’

The Blessed One spoke as follows: ‘Subhadda, the noble eightfold path is found, therein also are found the monk of the first degree, and the monk of the second degree, and the monk of the third degree, and the monk of the fourth degree.

What time my age was twenty-nine, Subhadda,
I left the world to seek the highest good.
Now fifty years and more have passed, Subhadda,
Since I renounced the world and lived ascetic
Within the Doctrine’s pale, that rule of conduct
Outside of which no genuine monk exists.’¹⁾

There are the four different *samaṇa* in the eight paths of righteousness: the first *samaṇa* is the conqueror by the paths, the second, the preacher, the third, the practician, the forth, the contaminator. Through his last mission in Kusināra, Śākyamuni bore boldly witness of the purely altruistic self-discipline as a truly righteous man (*samaṇa*, *śramaṇa*). The mission of Śākyamuni, therefore, came to be glorified with such purely altruistic austerities as the image of *nibbāna* shows us.

The purely altruistic austerities in the mission of Śākyamuni followed necessarily from the attainment of Buddhahood. In other words, beginning with the period of seeking after truth before the attainment of Buddhahood, they pervaded the pilgrimage as a travelling ascetic though his life.

But from the point of view of *āśrama*, this pilgrimage corresponds to the third *vānaprastha* (the period of forest) and the fourth *saṃnyasin*. (the period of an itinerant monk). In the Dharmaśāstra as a collection of *āśrama* an explanation of *vānaprastha* reads as follows:

A twice-born *snānaka*, who has thus lived according to the law in the order of householders, may, taking a firm resolution and keeping his organs in subje-

1) Cf. Mahā-Parinibbāna-Sutta 6f., Dīgha-Nikāya, II (H. C. Warren’s Tr.).

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ction, dwell in the forest, duly.

Let him offer those five great sacrifices according to the rule, with various kinds of pure food fit for ascetics, or with herbs, roots, and fruit.

Let him perform the *Bali*-offering with such food as he eats, and give alms according to his ability; let him honour those who come to his hermitage with alms consisting of water, roots, and fruit.

Let him be always industrious in privately reciting the Veda; let him be patient of hardships, friendly, of collected mind, ever liberal and never a receiver of gifts, and compassionate towards all living creatures.

Having collected food according to his ability, he may either eat at night, or in the day-time, or at every fourth meal-time, or at every eighth.

In summer let him expose himself to the heat of five fires, during the rainy season live under the open sky, and in winter be dressed in wet clothes, gradually increasing his austerities.

Making no effort to procure things that give pleasure, chaste, sleeping, on the bare ground, not caring for any shelter, dwelling at the roots of trees.

These and other observances must a *brāhmaṇa* who dwells in the forest diligently practise, and in order to attain complete union with the supreme Soul, he must study the various sacred texts contained in the Upaniṣads²⁾.

Against the above-mentioned would appear to dawn upon us the outline of *vānaprastha*, and there also some remarks on the *saṁnyāsin* run as follows:

Having thus passed the third part of life in the forest, he may live as an ascetic during the fourth part of his existence, after abandoning all attachment to worldly objects.

He who after passing from order to order, after offering sacrifices and subduing his senses, becomes, tired with giving alms and offerings of food, an ascetic, gains bliss after death.

Let him not desire to die, let him not desire to live; let him wait for his appointed time, as a servant for the payment of his wages.

Against an angry man let him not in return show anger, let him bless when he is cursed, and let him not utter speech, devoid of truth, scattered at the

2) Cf. *Manu-Smṛti*, VI, 1 ff. (G. Bühler, *The Laws of Manu*, pp. 198ff.)

seven gates.

Let him go to beg once a day, let him not be eager to obtain a large quantity of alms; for an ascetic who eagerly seeks alms, attaches himself also to sensual enjoyments.

By the restraint of his senses, by the destruction of love and hatred, and by the abstention from injuring the creatures, he becomes fit for immortality³⁾.

Therefore, after passing through the period of house affairs as the second stage of life, Śākyamuni entered into the period of forest as the third stage during which he, sometimes, would accept *dāna*, alms, and enter into the perfect state of spiritual concentration (*samādhi*). Sometimes he felt pity for all living things. And then he practised austerities while fasting and sitting on the rock under the tree was assiduous in practising austerities in preparation for the period of pilgrimage as the fourth stage. The fourth stage as the period of pilgrimage is the last stage of life upon which he overcame worldly affairs, went about as a begging monk, and at last for the sake of such pious acts as not killing animals, detachment and pity, was given immortality. It is, therefore, clear that both the third and the fourth stage corresponds to the *śrama-ṇamārga* attained to perfection by Śākyamuni which includes such virtues as living a cloistered life, searching for truth, attaining Buddhahood, mission and entering *nirvāṇa*. Why did he not accord himself with the highest *ātman* through studying Veda, offering the supreme sacrifice and learning Upaniṣad? It was because that Buddhist scriptures did not succeed to the traditional rites and informations, and that the period of forest aimed at the attainment of Buddhahood in preparation for the period of pilgrimage as the period of cloistered life and searching for truth although there was no sign of it in *śrama-ṇamārga* practised by Śākyamuni. And it would be admitted that considering words and deeds of the Upaniṣadian sage as a previous example of a immortal life, the period of pilgrimage corresponded to the mission and entering *nirvāṇa* in regard to Śākyamuni.

Who was the Upaniṣadian sage, then? Well, of course, he was Yājñavalkya himself. He had two wives, Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī called by name. One was

3) Cf. *Manu-Smṛti*, *ibid.* (G. Bühler, *ibid.*, pp. 204ff.)

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a *brahman* scholar, the other, a wise woman. One day, when leaving home to live a new life, Yājñavalkya said to Maitreyī as follows:

‘O Maitreyī, my dear, I am going to renounce this life for monasticism. Allow me to finish between you and Kātyāyanī.’

‘My Lord, if this whole earth, full of wealth, belonged to me, tell me, should I be immortal by it, or no?’

‘No, your life will be like the life of rich people. But there is no hope of immortality by wealth.’

‘What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal? What my Lord knows, tell that clearly to me.’

‘You have been truly dear to me, and you have increased what is dear to me. Therefore, if you like, my dear, I will explain it to you, and mark well what I say⁴⁾.’

From these conversations continued Yājñavalkya’s remarks on *ātman* saying eternal farewell to Maitreyī. In brief, lifeless, imperishable and fearless *ātman*—this is the greatest problem of ours. But it is not able to objectify it because this *ātman* is the sentient subject itself. It is impossible to determine it as either this or that for ever. Accordingly it is called *netinetyātman*. It is interesting that after saying so, Yājñavalkya left home to make a pilgrimage.

A pilgrimage as a travelling monk is not only a way of life which Yājñavalkya devised by himself, but also a true brahmanian way of life which had been inherited from his ancestors. He, therefore, willingly obeyed to it, and then recommended it to King Janaka in order to search for *ātman*. Of *ātman* he told King Janaka as follows:

Such as one the *brāhmaṇas* desire to know by repetition of the Vedas, by sacrifices, by offerings, by penance, by fasting. On knowing him, in truth, one becomes an ascetic. Desiring him only as their home, mendicants wander forth. Verily, because they know this, the ancients desired not offspring, saying: ‘What shall we do with offspring, we whose is this Soul, this home?’ They, verily, rising above the desire for sons and the desire for wealth and the desire for worlds, lived the life of a mendicant. For the desire for sons is the

4) Cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*, 4, 5, 2ff.

desire for wealth, and the desire for wealth is the desire for worlds; for both these are but desires. That Soul is not this, it is not that (*neti, neti*). It is unseizable, for it cannot be seized. It is indestructible, for it cannot be destroyed. It is unattached, for it does not attach itself. It is unbound. It does not tremble. It is not injured.

This has been expressed by the following hymn: This is the eternal glory of a *brāhmaṇa* (knower of *brahman*). It neither increases nor decreases through work. One should know the nature of that alone. Knowing it one is not touched by evil action⁵⁾.

We can, therefore, find it that a pilgrimage was already a traditional brahmanian way of life. Besides Yājñavalkya told King Janaka how to search for *ātman* and enter into the perfect state of spiritual concentration of *yoga*. By attainment of it, Yājñavalkya said, King Janaka could recognize the existence of *ātman*. Considering how to apply King Janaka thereto, the following quotations shows us then characteristics of a cloistered life and pilgrimage.

Therefore he who knows it as such becomes calm, subdued, withdrawn into himself, enduring and concentrated, and sees the Self (*ātman*) in his own self; he sees all as the Self. Evil does not overtake him, but he overtakes all evil. Evil does not burn him, but he burns all evil. He becomes sinless, taintless, free from doubts, and a *brāhmaṇa*. This is the *brahma*-world, O Emperor, and you have attained it⁶⁾.

It, thereupon, seems to be a merely amplification of *ātman* theory that we can not recognize it without entering into the perfect state of spiritual concentration. It may, however, suggest that anyone ought to devote himself to search for *ātman* as a travelling ascetic, as soon as either an ordinary person or a man of real power had completed his house affairs. Indeed, promoted by Yājñavalkya's suggestion, King Janaka said as follows:

'I will give you, Sir, the empire of Videha, and myself also with it, to wait upon you.'⁷⁾

5) Cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*, 4, 4, 22f.

6) Cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*, 4, 4, 23.

7) Cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*, *ibid*.