

中華佛學學報第 07 期 (p449-475)：(民國 83 年)，臺北：中華佛學研究所，<http://www.chibs.edu.tw>  
Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal, No. 07, (1994)  
Taipei: The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies  
ISSN: 1017—7132

# The Riddle of the First Buddhist Council

I

## — A Retrospection

Biswadeb Mukherjee

visting professor Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies

p. 449

## Summary

An account of the First Buddhist Council has been given in the Cullavagga XI as well as in the corresponding sections of the other Vinaya versions.

The present paper deals with certain problems related to this Council, especially the problems of this account being legendary or historical. Oldenberg pointed out that some parts of the Cullavagga XLI agree verbatim with certain sections of the Mahāparinibbānasutta that deal with the news of the death of the Buddha and the diverse reactions of the monks to this news. But the MPS is silent about the Cullavagga account of the proposal to hold a Council in order to chant the dharma and vinaya, and other episodes related to this Council. This silence on the part of the MPS led Oldenberg to conclude that the chanting together with all the incidents inseparably connected with it are to be regarded as myth. Moreover the episodes of the ‘khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni’ and the monk Channa are nothing but imaginary continuations of the data already given in the MPs. It is obvious that Oldenberg thinks that portions of the MPS which is an earlier work, were either copied or elaborated later by the Cullavagga. And whatever extra material is found in the later work of the Cullavagga, is unhesitatingly assigned to the realm of fantasy. As Poussin puts it, the whole of the Cullavagga XI, according to Oldenberg, is a case of forgery.

Poussin refuses to follow the lead of Oldenberg. He points out that a theory based on the silence of a text can never be anything more than a mere hypothesis, and so can never lead to anything tangible. Consequently Poussin tries to approach the problem from a different standpoint. He, following Minayeff, came to believe that the Cullavagga XI is an intricate mosaic of earlier and later

p. 450

traditions, and these two types of traditions contradict each other. The chanting, a tradition of later origin, is not in harmony with the earlier traditions of the episodes of the 'khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni' and the charges against Ānanda, and, therefore, is to be regarded as a legend.

Poussin gives different reasons for contradiction in different cases. The charges against Ānanda show that the orthodoxy has not yet developed the concept of arhat, where ;

In the episode of the 'khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni' takes us to a time when the official version of the 'vinaya' is still in a fluid state. On the other hand the chanting of the 'dharma' and 'vinaya' by five hundred

arhats reveals a state of things where a complete canonical version of the 'vinaya' is already a matter of common knowledge, and the developed concept of arhat is an accepted dogma. The episodes of 'Channa, Ānanda and the 'khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni' bear marks of great antiquity and may be accepted as genuine traditions of an earlier origin. Minayeff took the episode of 'khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni' as the core of the vinaya tradition while Po us sin regards the narration of the faults of Ānanda as the ancient nucleus around which the vinaya account grew.

The contention of Po us sin that the episodes of Channa, Ānanda etc. belong to an earlier tradition and they contradict the later tradition of chanting has been shown to be mere assumption which cannot be supported by any known tradition. Moreover the non-mention of the First Council in the MPS which was actually composed later than the Cullavaggā XI, also does not pose any problem. In the earliest period the materials concerning 'dharma' and 'kṛtya' formed two mutually exclusive categories. This would explain why the account of chanting which belongs to the category of kṛtya finds no mention in the MPS which is a part of the 'dharma' literature.

Thus the arguments in favour of the chanting of the dharma and vma being a legend are not tenable. On the other hand we have very positive grounds to accept the account of the Cullavagga XI including the narration of the chanting as history. All unanimous traditions mentioned in all the 6 Vinaya-versions such as the chanting and the episodes discussed in this article belongs to the earliest strata of tradition known to the undivided Buddhist community and as such are quite near to the time when the chanting and other episodes occurred. Such an

p. 451

early tradition has every right to be trusted as history unless there are