

### 3. Personality Differences of *Arahants* and the Origins of Theravada

#### A Study of Two Great Elders of the Theravada Tradition: Mahakassapa and Ananda\*

##### Introduction

At the very outset of this paper I would like to record, with deep sense of gratefulness, my appreciation of Dhammavihari Thera (formerly Jotiya Dhirasekera) from whom I learned so much about Buddhist studies and research. Although I have not been a formal student of him, working for him as a research assistant, first when he was the Editor-in-Chief of *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* and subsequently the Director of Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, was very much an 'on the job' training in Buddhist research. All those who have come into contact with him know of his sharp critical eye from which errors do not find easy escape. I dedicate this paper to him, an Elder of Theravada in our own times.

An often discussed subject in early Buddhist discourses is the post-mortem status of an arahant. The four questions whether an arahant exists, does not exist, both or neither, after his death is a frequently asked set of questions in these discourses. In contrast, there is relatively less discussion on the arahant who is living. Still less is discussion on differences in qualitative sense among arahants. A reader of the Pali Canon tends to get the idea that arahants are basically a homogeneous group of people. This is not hard to understand in the context of early Buddhism represented in the Pali *nikāyas* which seem to consider the Buddha himself as one of the arahants.<sup>1</sup> The tradition, nevertheless, did

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1 The Buddha is seen comparing himself with the first sixty disciples who attained

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recognize differences between the Buddha and arahants. As has been explained in discourses such as Gopakamoggallāna-sutta (M III, 15-20) the Buddha was ‘knower of the way, an understander of the way and skilled in the way’ (*‘maggaññū, maggavidū, maggakovido’*) whereas the disciples are ‘the followers of the way’ (*‘magganuga’*). In discourses such as Nagara-sutta (S II, 104-7) the Buddha, who discovered the noble eightfold path and reached nirvana having followed the path, has been compared to a pioneer who discovers a lost path following which he reaches an ancient city. Although this distinction has been made, the early discourses do not make much of a distinction between arahanthood attained by the Buddha and an arahant who follows the advice of the former. According to the Sāmaññaphala-sutta (D I, 47-86) in which the Buddha is presented as detailing the fruits of monkhood to be realized within this life itself, there are three kinds of knowledge, namely, the knowledge of recollecting one’s own past births (*pubbenivāsa anussati ñāṇa*), the knowledge of departure and arrival of beings (*sattānam cutūpapāta ñāṇa*) and the knowledge of the extinction of defilements (*āsavakkhaya ñāṇa*), marking the culmination of the path leading to the nirvanic goal. Now it is these very same three knowledges that the Buddha realized when he attained Buddhahood and the disciples realized when they attained arahanthood by following the Master. Perhaps this may have prompted the early Buddhists to talk about similarities rather than differences of arahants.

We, nevertheless, know that talking about similarities is not always revealing. Talking about differences, may lead, on the other hand, to contradict what discourses seem to be saying in one voice.

There are discussions on the differences among arahants in so far as their positive spiritual faculties are concerned. The idea behind naming different arahants as having achieved excellence in different aspects of spiritual development is that there are differences in abilities and propensities among arahants.<sup>2</sup> What is mentioned in this manner may be considered not very significant in so far as they lead only to minor variations in behaviour. Obviously this seems to be the way that these

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arahanthood when he says: “Monks, I am freed from all traps, divine and human. You too are freed from all traps, divine and human.” Even the compiler of the book who, obviously, belongs to a later period, though we do not know how later he may have been, confirms this usage when he says: “by that time there were sixty one arahants in the world.” (Vin I, 20-21)

2 See section called *Etadagga-pāli* in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* for a detailed account of the areas of excellence and those arahants who were identified.

differences have been understood in the tradition. If the differences, however, go beyond that and if such differences among the key disciples of the Buddha were so important as to influence the course of the *sāsana* I think it is worth discussing them.

In undertaking to write this paper I believe that the personality differences between the great elders of the Theravada tradition have influenced its future path in a decisive manner. In fact, according to the tradition Ananda Thera was not an arahant until after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha. Except his involvement in the first *saṅgāyanā* almost everything else we mention of him belongs to his life as a non-arahant. But there is no doubt that, in so far as the history of Theravada is concerned, Ananda was the most notable and influential non-arahant bhikkhu during and after the Buddha. The thesis of the paper is that the formation of Theravada tradition owes much to sharp personality differences and the resultant differences of the ways of living of the two elders Mahakassapa and Ananda. In order to support this thesis first I will make a study of the lives of the two elders including their function and role in the first *saṅgāyanā* and subsequently I will show how some of the key trends in Theravada have their origin in the life and the philosophy of these two great elders.

## **Mahakassapa**

In the Theravada tradition the great elder Mahakassapa occupies a very special place. Though he is not the oldest nor is he one of the two highest among the disciples of the Buddha (namely, Sariputta and Moggallana) Mahakassapa has played a crucial role, quite different from the roles played by other important arahants, in the formation of the *sāsana*. For instance, the two highest disciples of the Buddha, Sariputta and Moggallana, have played a very important role in spreading the word of the Buddha and maintaining the stability of the *sāsana*. No doubt these leading disciples and many others with similar ranking were quite prominent during the time of the Buddha. Mahakassapa's case, however, is different. Compared to other great disciples Mahakassapa's physical presence was less visible among the Sangha for he had chosen to live in the forest during most of his monastic life although he made frequent visits to see the Buddha. In the history of Buddhism, however, his presence has been quite visible. At the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha Mahakassapa comes out of his seclusion and takes over the *sāsana* and lays the foundation of what has come to be known as Theravada.

Although Mahakassapa was a disciple of the Buddha like any other his relationship with the latter seems somewhat different from that of other great or ordinary disciples. The usual nature of the relation between the Buddha and a disciple seems to have been characterized by a deep sense of respect on the part of the disciple and hence creating a distance from the master. With Mahakassapa, although he too had a great respect for the Buddha, relationship was closer in the sense that the latter had considered the former to be equal to him in some sense.

There is a very interesting and unusual incident taking place between the Buddha and Mahakassapa right after the latter's realization of arahant hood. It is the act of exchanging robes: the Buddha on seeing the fine upper robe offered to him by Kassapa as a seat-spread appreciates how refined it was. Upon this Kassapa offered his robe to the Buddha and he, in turn, gave Kassapa his own upper robe which was quite coarse and unrefined. In the Theravada tradition, of course, this is understood as a very special favour on the part of the Buddha bestowed on Mahakassapa. Apart from that, however, the tradition does not seem to attribute any further significance to this act. The later Mahayana tradition, however, seems to read this act in a different manner. According to the Chinese tradition Mahakassapa is believed to be the first patriarch who received the Buddha's robe. It is significant that they believe that Ananda, who in turn received the transmission of Dhamma from Mahakassapa, is the second. The Mahayana idea seems to be in consonance with the later development of esoterism in the Buddhist tradition, but Theravada did not develop such an attitude and hence did not develop any particular individual monk to be the in-charge or owner of the Dhamma. Nevertheless, in the Theravada tradition too, it is recorded that Mahakassapa had the Buddha's alms bowl in his possession as the de facto head of the *sāsana* and subsequently he chose Ananda to be his successor to receive the Buddha's alms bowl (Nyanaponika and Hecker 1997, 132). The significance of the story, however, is that both Hinayana and Mahayana traditions accept the authority of Mahakassapa without debate. Another story that testifies to the high recognition that Mahakassapa enjoyed among the Buddhist traditions other than Theravada has been told by Hui Neng, the sixth patriarch of Mahayana tradition. The story (occurring in Taisho -1228) is as follows: Once the Buddha sitting in the middle of monks picked up a flower and raised it up. Of the monks gathered only Mahakassapa could understand the meaning of this act by the Buddha and smiled by way of response. It is

said that through this silent conversation between the Master and the Disciple Zen tradition was born.

The Theravada tradition does not highlight very much Maha Kassap's wisdom as Mahayana seems to be doing. On the contrary, it highlights his austere way of life. *Āṅguttara-nikāya* contains a long list of disciples of the Buddha acclaimed as excelling in different aspects of religious life. While Sariputta, the first great disciple, is acclaimed as excelling in wisdom Mahakassapa is acclaimed as excelling in observing austere practices (*dhutaṅga*) (A I, 23).

There are instances in the discourses that cause us to think that the Buddha considered Mahakassapa in some sense as worthy of acting on behalf of him. According to one discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* (section on Kassapa) the Buddha makes the following request from Mahakassapa:

Exhort the Bhikkhus, Kassapa, give them a Dhamma talk. Either I should exhort the Bhikkhus, Kassapa, or you should. Either I should give them a Dhamma talk or you should.

(S II, 203-204; Bodhi 2000, 667)

When the Buddha says "either I or you, Kassapa..." the indication is that Mahakassapa is second only to the Buddha or it could even be interpreted as saying that both the Buddha and Mahakassapa are equal in this regard. In fact the commentary seems to come close to this second reading. It says:

He (the Buddha) says this in order to appoint Mahakassapa to his own position. But weren't Sariputta and Moggallana around? They were, but he thought: "They will not live much longer, but Kassapa will live until the age of 120. After my *parinibbāna* he will hold a recital of the Dhamma and the Vinaya in the *Sattapaṇṇi* cave, and he will enable my Dispensation to endure for a full 5000 years. Let me appoint him to my own position.

(SA II, 173)

Whatever manner should we understand the statement one thing is clear: the Buddha has placed Mahakassapa on a position second only to that of himself.

In another discourse the Buddha compares his higher attainments with those of Mahakassapa. These attainments include the four *rūpa jhānas*, four *arūpa jhānas*, various kinds of psychic power (*iddhividha*),

divine ear, understanding the minds of other beings and persons, recollection of past births, divine eye and the taintless liberation of mind. The Buddha says:

Bhikkhus, by the destruction of the taints, in this very life I enter and dwell in the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, realizing it for myself with direct knowledge. Kassapa too by the destruction of the taints, in this very life enters and dwells in the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, realizing it for himself with direct knowledge. (Bodhi 2000, 674)

The discourse poses several problems about the nature of an arahant. The higher attainments listed here are usually described as common property of many arahants.<sup>3</sup> If that is the case what is the meaning of the Buddha's highlighting of Mahakassapa's attainments in particular? Since Mahakassapa is a *sāvaka* of the Buddha like any other his realization is ultimately dependent on the guidance given by the Buddha. In this sense, he cannot be different from any other arahant. It is commonly accepted that there can be differences among arahants in so far their super-human attainments are concerned. But again the understanding given in most of the discourses is that anyone attaining arahanthood does so by achieving 'three sciences' (*tisso vijjā*). As described in the Mahāsaccaka-sutta (*Majjhima-nikāya*: 36), it is the same three sciences that the Buddha realized in attaining the Buddhahood. Therefore, there cannot be, according to the discourses, a difference among arahants in their destruction of taints, the final knowledge which completes one's transfer from being an ordinary worldling (*puthujjana*) to a consummate noble person (*ariya puggala*). The attainment of arahanthood of any arahant is described in the words (quoted above) used by the Buddha in describing Mahakassapa's attainment.

Although all the arahants are similar to one another in being taintless, they could be different in their ability and mastery over some of the psychic attainments. In this sense one arahant can be considered as lower or higher to another arahant, not in kind but in degree. In fact, in describing Mahakassapa in those words, the discourse does not say anything new or extra-ordinary about him. Either the discourse says that Mahakassapa is equal to the Buddha in all respects, which is impossible,

3 Whether or not all the arahants have these attainments for their credit is an unresolved question in Theravada tradition. The early discourses do not seem to have clear position on this although the later commentarial tradition seems to have believed that what it calls *sukkha-vipassaka* (dry insight worker) is one who attains arahanthood without attaining *jhānas*.

or it says that he is like any other arahant, which is to make the discourses meaningless. We must not forget, however, that, describing the event of exchange of robes, the commentator describes Mahakassapa as '*buddha paṭibhāga*' or 'one comparable to the Buddha' (Ibid 176). This indicates that the tradition placed Mahakassapa much higher than the other arahants, next only to the Buddha.

In the tradition there are several other instances indicative of the very special status of Mahakassapa. As Mahakassapa himself describes, he was already a renunciant when he met the Buddha. He asks the Buddha to accept him as a *sāvaka* and the Buddha does so and instructs him. He says (S II, 221) that he achieved liberating knowledge on the eighth day of his admission to the *sāsana*. It is on this day that the Buddha exchanges robes with him. This, no doubt, is a very high honour conferred on the new comer (As we discussed earlier it had lot of implications for the later Buddhist tradition). In describing this extraordinary act, the commentary says: The Buddha exchanged the robe with the Elder saying: This robe worn out by wearing by the Tathāgata cannot be worn by one who has only a little virtue. This must be worn by one who is strong, capable of completing practice of virtues and a born-wearer of rag-robes (ThagA III, 135).

The commentary further says that Mahakassapa also realized the gravity of the event; never became arrogant to think that there is nothing more to be achieved but stayed alone with the Buddha and attained arahant hood. In one of the dialogues with Ananda (which we will discuss in detail later) Mahakassapa reminds the latter of all the special ways the Buddha had treated him and the exalted position given to him. In addition to this, there is a belief that Mahakassapa was looking very much like the Buddha physically. According to a story occurring in the *Pūjāvaliya*, an ancient Sinhala literary work belonging to the 13<sup>th</sup> century (ch.34), due to this physical similarity, an elderly female devotee, who offered alms to Mahakassapa regularly, mistook the Buddha to be Mahakassapa and offered alms to the former. Not knowing what happened, Mahakassapa came after the Buddha to receive alms from the devotee. Recognizing her 'mistake' she took back what she offered to the Buddha and gave it to Mahakassapa. It is said that Mahakassapa felt very uncomfortable about the whole episode and as a result made a determination to live in the forest as long as the Buddha was alive.

Another characteristic of the relation between the Master and the disciple emerges from an incident in which Mahakassapa is portrayed

as not quite accepting but politely refusing a request made by the Buddha. At one point the Buddha makes the following suggestion to Mahakassapa:

You are old now, Kassapa, and those worn-out hempen rag-  
robes must be burdensome for you. Therefore you should wear  
robes offered by householders, Kassapa, accept meals given on  
invitation and dwell close to me. (S II, 202; Bodhi 2000, 666)

Mahakassapa responds to this by reminding the Buddha that he has been observing these practices for a long time in his life and that he has been doing so for his own happiness as well as out of kindness to the later generations. The Buddha withdraws his request and allows Mahakassapa to continue with his austere practices. The behaviour of Mahakassapa in this context is not typical of a disciple of the Buddha. Usually, what could have happened at this kind of occasion is that the disciple would abide by the request of the Master. We must not forget, however, that the issue does not involve any ethical or moral issue and, furthermore, Mahakassapa does not directly refuse the Buddha's request. He simply makes his intentions very clear and the Buddha respects them. According to the *Jātaka* stories, Nyanaponika and Hecker maintain that Mahakassapa was connected with the Bodhisatva for nineteen times and of them six times as his father, two times as his brother and other times friend or teacher (Nyanaponika and Hecker 1977, 119). It is noteworthy that Mahakassapa in the past has had connections with Buddha only as his senior, superior or colleague but not as his junior or inferior. All this evidence points to one conclusion: the relationship between the Buddha and Mahakassapa was substantially different from the kind of relationship that is typical between the Master and a disciple.

It is possible that at least some of the disciples of the Buddha were not very convinced of the high position occupied by Mahakassapa. An important clue is available in the comments made by the disgruntled nun Thullananda. The episode, which we will refer to again in our discussion of Ananda, is connected to Ananda's wandering on tour in the area called *Dakkhinaṅgiri* mostly with new recruits to the *sāsana* without much training. By the time the group returned Rajagaha a large number of these monks had left *sāsana* to return to lay life. Seeing this Mahakassapa reprimanded Ananda rather severely and called him a youngster who did not know his limits (Nyanaponika and Hecker 1977, 677).



Hearing the conversation between the two elders, Thullananda, a nun who did not like Mahakassapa calling Ananda a youngster, expressed her displeasure by remarking: how can master Kassapa **who was formerly a member of another sect** (*aññatitthiyapubbo samaṇo*), think to disparage master Ananda ...? (emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> This piece of gossip provides a glimpse of the kind of perception, at least, some of the disciples had towards Mahakassapa. Here again, if this statement is meant to say that Mahakassapa, before becoming a follower of the Buddha, was a follower of a different religious group it does not say anything extra-ordinary for there were many others like him who were former members of other religious groups. For instance, even the two chief disciples of the Buddha belonged to Sanjaya Belatthiputta's group before they became the followers of the Buddha. But we do not find any similar remarks made on them. If so what is so special in Mahakassapa's position to be singled out? A possible explanation of the situation is that Thullananda's remark arises from the unusual manner Mahakassapa was admitted to the disciple-hood by the Buddha. In accepting Mahakassapa as a disciple it seems that the Buddha had to assert his superiority over the former by saying the following:

Kassapa, if one who does not know and see should say to a disciple so single-minded as yourself: "I know, I see," his head would split. But knowing Kassapa, I say, "I know, I see."

(Ray 1994, 678)

The statement can be interpreted as the Buddha trying, so to say, to justify his position as the teacher of Mahakassapa. This is also somewhat unusual to the normal practice. As we saw in the discussion above there is no direct reference in the discourses that the Buddha gave him *pabbajjā* or *upsampadā* when he was accepted as a disciple. Mahakassapa was accepted as he was. Perhaps as a result of this Mahakassapa may have been perceived by others as still not totally belonging to the *sāsana*. He may have been perceived as some kind of outsider.

As was noted earlier, the life of Mahakassapa was characterized by austerities. In the *Theragāthā* the following account attributed to Mahakassapa himself elaborates on his attitude to monastic life accompanied with unexpected experiences at times:

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<sup>4</sup> According to *Mahāvastu*, as reported by Reginald A. Ray, (2000, 106) the bhikkhunī does not stop at this; 'she commits open insult against him by uncovering herself in front of him.

Down from my mountain lodge I came one day  
 And made my round for alms about the streets  
 A leper there I saw eating his meal  
 In (silent) courtesy I halted at his side.  
 He with his hand all leprous and diseased  
 Put in my bowl a morsel; as he threw,  
 A finger, mortifying, broke and fell.  
 Leaning against a wall I ate my shares  
 Nor at the time nor after felt disgust  
 For only he who takes as they come  
 The scraps of food, medicine from excrement,  
 The couch beneath the tree, the patchwork robe  
 Stands as a man in north, south, east, or west.

(Davids, Mrs 1980, 362; Verse 1054-7)

The attitude to austere practices in the early monastic tradition seems to be one of accepting them as valuable but not making them compulsory or encouraging them for their own sake. In a well known incident Devadatta demanded that some of these practices be made compulsory for all monks for all the time which the Buddha refused (V II, 196-8). The Buddha's response was that one may do or do not do according to one's wish. There are instances (S II, 202-3), however, the Buddha joining Mahakassapa in praising those disciples of early times who followed such practices and expressing disappointment on the more recent disciples who, were not keen in following such practices. It is clear, however, that Mahakassapa's unique point was that he made a life-long commitment to follow such austerities. This way of life, as we will see later in this discussion, is bound to have a great influence on the future shape of the *sāsana*.

Another visible characteristic in Mahakassapa's life was his lack of enthusiasm in the affairs of women. According to one discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* (S II, 214-7), which we will discuss again later) Mahakassapa was not very keen to visit bhikkhunīs. Ananda had to ask three times before he finally agreed to do so. The incident, however, ended up in a disaster when a nun called Thullatissa made a disparaging comment on Mahakassapa. According to the context of the event it is not clear whether the Bhikkhunī's remarks are due to displeasure towards Mahakassapa or whether due to her high regards for Ananda. If it is the latter the bhikkhunī could have uttered a similar remark to anyone other than Ananda; Mahakassapa became victim merely by accident. There

is another incident referred to earlier in which, hearing Mahakassapa making some critical comments on Ananda, a nun called Thullananda expressed her disapproval in very strong terms. This incident too may be due to the high regards the nun had toward Ananda. Or the events could be due to some less than favourable attitude the particular nuns had toward Mahakassapa. When we couple these episodes with Mahakassapa's apparent reluctance to teach bhikkhunīs we may assume that he was not very enthusiastic about bhikkhunīs in particular and womenfolk in general.<sup>5</sup>

Mahakassapa's position as the head of the Sangha is highlighted at the instance of the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha. The Mahāparinibbāna-sutta of the *Dīgha-nikāya* says that people could not kindle the funeral pyre of the Buddha till Mahakassapa arrived in there with his group from his forest abode. Once he arrived in there and saluted the feet of the Buddha, the Sutta says, the pyre got kindled automatically. It is clear, from the cremation of the Buddha onwards Mahakassapa took over as the leader of the Sangha. The subsequent incidents such as the first council took place under the direct guidance and direction of Mahakassapa. This, however does not mean that Mahakassapa started occupying the place of the Buddha. It only shows that he was accepted by the Sangha as the 'Saṅghathera' or the eldest in the group (More on this issue later).

## Ananda

If Mahakassapa is the embodiment of austerity, solitude and aloofness from society Ananda represents almost the total opposite: busy city life immersed in public relations and social engagements. The two eminent elders seem to occupy two different poles in the monastic life. We will come to this comparison later. Initially an account of Ananda as the chief attendant of the Buddha, treasurer of the Dhamma and the champion of the *bhikkhunī sāsana* is called for.

Ananda becomes prominent in the *sāsana* mainly for two reasons: for being the attendant of the Buddha and for keeping in memory what the Buddha said or the word of the Buddha (*Buddha vacana*). According to the tradition, Ananda was appointed by the Buddha to the position of his attendant fulfilling an aspiration he has been cherishing for a long

5 The tradition has that although Mahakassapa, as a wealthy householder, got married to an equally wealthy lady they, by mutual consent, did not have any physical contact.

time in his samsaric existence. In accepting the position, according to the Vinaya, Ananda came forth with a set of eight conditions. The Buddha accepted these conditions and ever since Ananda was the disciple physically closest to the Buddha attending to his daily needs, arranging meetings with the Buddha for those who came to visit him and serving as the intermediary between the Buddha and the rest. In the list of disciples excelling in various aspects of the *sāsana* life, Ananda was acclaimed the highest among those who are learned (*babussuta*), mindful (*satimanta*), with good behavior (*gatimanta*), resolute (*dhitimanta*)<sup>6</sup> and attending (on the Buddha) (*upaṭṭhāka*) (A I, 24-25; Woodward 1797, 19-20).

Being closest to the Buddha naturally Ananda had most opportunities to hear what the Buddha said. Since Ananda, as the attendant to the Buddha, went everywhere the Buddha went again he was the most obvious choice for keeping in mind what the Buddha said. In a rare case when Ananda was not present with the Buddha, the latter would say to former what he had taught in his absence. In this manner Ananda became the most ‘heard’ (*babussuta*) monk in the *sāsana* and naturally he was described as the ‘treasurer of the Dhamma’ (*dhamma bhaṇḍāgārika*).

As the closest disciple of the Buddha, Ananda played a decisive role in persuading the Buddha to establish the *bhikkhunī sāsana*. The story of *bhikkhunī sāsana* as told in the early Buddhist sources is beset with problems. The impression given in the *Vinaya Cullavagga*, which is the basic source of the event, is that the Buddha agreed to establish the order for bhikṣuṇīs simply and solely because he could not escape from persuasive Ananda. According to the report in the Vinaya, Maha Pajapati Gotami, the step-mother of the Buddha, had asked for permission from the Buddha when he was staying at Kapilavatthu, his native place, to receive ordination (*pabbajjā*) which the Buddha had refused even for the third time. Gotami did not give up her hopes and went, accompanied by a large number of similar-minded ladies, by walking to Vesali where the Buddha was subsequently residing, and waited outside of the place where she was hoping for a change of mind of the Buddha. Seeing Gotami in a depressed and sad mood Ananda offered to speak on behalf of her on the matter. He made a strong appeal for Gotami’s case reminding the Buddha that she was the one who really brought him up in the absence of his real mother. The Buddha would not be convinced and he would

6 The term ‘*gatimanta*’ is rendered as one who has mastery over the sequential structure of the teaching and ‘*dhitimanta*’ as steadfast in study (Nyanaponika and Hecker 1997, 169).

refuse Ananda's request even for the third time. Finally Ananda puts the crucial question to the Buddha, namely, whether or not a woman is capable of realizing the four stages of arahanthood in the *sāsana*. To this the Buddha gives a categorical and an affirmative answer, and if it was the case, the Buddha did not seem to have alternative but to agree to Ananda's request (Vin II, 253). Consequently, it is quite natural that bhikkhunīs had developed a sense of great respect and indebtedness towards Ananda. It is also quite natural that, as we will be looking at in detail shortly, that some bhikkhunīs were not willing to see or hear anything that they perceived as damaging to their revered 'patron saint'. The two instances connected with Mahakassapa and some bhikkhunīs need to be understood in this context.

Encounters between Ananda and Mahakassapa are quite unique in Theravada tradition in the sense that they highlight glimpses into personality differences between two key disciples of the Buddha. We know that in the Vinaya there are references to 'bad' monks who found some way or other to behave notoriously. They are duly criticized by both good monks and the Buddha. In the discourses we find some monks such as Sati (M I, 256) and Ariṭṭha (M I, 130) who held wrong views, and they have been duly reprimanded by the Buddha or by fellow monks. What we have with Mahakassapa and Ananda, however, is quite different. The differences between Mahakassapa and Ananda do not involve any violation of Vinaya rules; nor do they involve any wrong views or wrong presentation of the Dhamma. What we witness is personality differences between two eminent disciples of the Buddha, one as an arahant and the other as a stream-winner.

There are two discourses, which we have already referred to, in the section reserved for the sermons related to Mahakassapa (*Kassapa saṃyutta*), of the *Samyutta-nikāya* (S II, 194-225), which betray such differences. The first of the two discourses contains the episode of Mahakassapa visiting reluctantly a bhikkhunī monastery in order to preach doctrine to bhikkhunīs. At the end of the sermon a nun called Thullatissa made the following disparaging remark.

How can Master Mahakassapa think of speaking on the Dhamma in the presence of Master Ananda, the Vedehā sage—this is just as if a needle-peddler would think he could sell a needle to a needle-maker. (Bodhi 2000, 336)

Mahakassapa overhears this and expresses his displeasure at this rudeness whereupon Ananda said to former: "Be patient, Kassapa, women are

foolish”. Mahakassapa seems to understand this remark as an effort to defend the wrong-doer nun and warns Ananda sternly: “Hold it, friend Ananda! Don’t give the Sangha occasion to investigate you further”, and goes on to remind Ananda that it is he, and not Ananda, that was praised very highly by the Buddha in the presence of the Sangha as being capable of attainments similar to those of the Buddha himself. Here Mahakassapa refers to an earlier occasion, discussed above, when Mahakassapa’s higher attainments were compared by the Buddha with those of himself. Finally Mahakassapa concludes:

Friend, one might just as well think that a bull elephant seven or seven and half cubits high could be concealed by a palm leaf as think that my six direct knowledges could be concealed.

(Bodhi 2000, 676)

If the remarks were to come from a non-arahant, one could well suspect signs of a ‘power struggle’ dormant in these remarks. It is not easy for us to make a judgment about the actual intention or the tone of the conversation. Since Mahakassapa is an arahant, we know, according to the tradition, that he is incapable of reverting to ‘*dosa*’ or anger which he has eradicated in attaining arahant-hood. Therefore it is possible that the words were uttered in kindness, but there cannot be any doubt about the strongness and the critical character of the expression (highlighted above) and the reprimanding ‘tone’ contained in the repeated series of questions put to Ananda by Mahakassapa reminding him of the great attainments achieved by himself. One could well argue that all these are signs that Mahakassapa had such a great ego and arrogance, but this is not possible for an arahant. It is possible that Mahakassapa’s strong remarks come not only from this incident but also from his prior impression that Ananda had too much involvement with bhikkhunīs, and in his capacity as one next only to the Buddha naturally the great Elder was concerned about the overall welfare of the *sāsana*. Being only a stream-winner, however, it is, at least theoretically, possible that Ananda could be vulnerable to this kind of laxity in behaviour. But, again, as we saw earlier Ananda is one who has been acclaimed by the Buddha as the highest among those who are with good behaviour and resolute character, among other qualities. Besides, there is evidence to the very strong moral character of Ananda. According to an instance occurring in the *Anguttara-nikāya* (A II, 144-6) once a bhikkhunī wanted to seduce Ananda and sent for him saying that she was not well and wished to see him. Once at the bhikkhunī’s residence Ananda realized her real intention and admonished her on the futility of sexual gratification,

helped her calm her mind and left himself intact. It looks that his good looks attracted many a opposite sex to Ananda. But the Theravada texts do not contain anything suggestive of any laxity on the part of Ananda.

The episode described in the second discourse (referred to earlier) happens when Ananda returns from a tour in *Dakkhīnagiri* with a group of his pupils. In the course of this tour some thirty younger disciples of Ananda who were not well-grounded in the *sāsana* reverted to household life. Having returned to Rajagaha Ananda visits Mahakassapa and the following conversation takes place:

Friend Ananda, for how many reasons did the Blessed One lay down the rule that bhikkhus should not take meal among families in groups of more than three?

The Blessed One had laid down this rule for three reasons, Kassapa Thera: for retraining ill-behaved persons and for the comfort of well-behaved bhikkhus, (with the intention) ‘May those of evil wishes, by forming faction, not create a schism in the Sangha! and out of sympathy towards families. It is for these three reasons, Kassapa Thera, that the Blessed One laid down this rule.

Then why, friend Ananda, are you wandering about with these young bhikkhus who are unguarded in their sense faculties, immoderate in eating, and not devoted to wakefulness?

One would think you were wandering about trampling on crops; one would think you are wandering about destroying families. Your retinue is breaking apart, friend Ananda, your young followers are slipping away. But still this youngster does not know his measure!

Ananda’s response to the comments was the following:

Grey hairs are growing on my head, Kassapa Thera. Can’t we escape being called a youngster by Mahakassapa Thera?

(Bodhi 2000, 677)

It is having heard this conversation that bhikkhunī Thullananda alluded to the fact that Mahakassapa formerly belonged to another religious group (which we discussed earlier). In the explanation that follows Mahakassapa gives a detailed account of his faith in the Buddha, on the special manner the Buddha treated him by exchanging robes with him (S II, 21) and how the Buddha acknowledged his higher attainments.

Looking at this second episode, we can see that Mahakassapa's accusation to Ananda comes for some justifiable reasons. Ananda's decision to go on a tour with a group of young and immature monks seems to be an act resulting from lack of responsibility. But, since we are not told of Ananda's side of the story, we are not in a position to judge one way or the other. Calling Ananda youngster who does not know his limits, however, is a very severe accusation for which there is no textual support. The remarks made by Ananda in turn, nevertheless, show how frustrated he was at being called a youngster.

The first council that took place three months after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha was headed by Mahakassapa and it is yet another important series of events that shed light on the two personalities. Having decided to hold the council, the members of the Sangha asked Mahakassapa to select participants for the purpose. He selected 499 arahants. At this point monks said the following to Mahakassapa:

Honoured Sir, this Ananda, although he is still a learner, could not be one to follow a wrong course through desire, anger, delusion, fear; and he has mastered much Dhamma and discipline under the Lord. Well, now, honoured sir, let the elder select Ananda Thera as well. (Horner 1975, 394)

Mahakassapa selected Ananda accordingly. Ananda played a major role in being the key resource person for the basket of discourses (*sutta piṭaka*). At the end of the whole process, Ananda informed the Sangha that the Buddha at his last moment allowed the monks to abolish lesser and minor rules of training. Then there arose a question as to what were these 'lesser and minor rules of training'. The group could not come to a consensus. At this juncture Mahakassapa reminded the Sangha that there were Vinaya rules which affect householders and since they are aware of them, if the Sangha were to abolish some of these rules people would criticize the Sangha saying that the disciples of the Buddha have changed the Vinaya rules once their Master is gone and brings forth the following motion:

If it seems right to the Order, the Order should not lay down what has not been laid down, nor should it abolish what has been laid down. It should proceed in conformity with and according to the rules of training that have been laid down.

(Horner 1975, 399)

The Sangha passed this motion and thus a tradition of Theravada



was born which, up to this date, remains unchanged formally by the Theravada Sangha. Right after passing the motion, however, the elders gathered accused Ananda of minor offence (*dukkata*) of not making clear this issue from the Buddha and demanded that he must confess. Ananda agreed to confess, but said that he does not think that it amounts to a minor offence for he could not do so solely out of lack of mindfulness.

Subsequently, the Sangha came out with another list of what they thought to be minor offences on the part of Ananda. They are; (i) that he sewed the Buddha's robe for the rains sitting on it; (ii) that he had the Buddha's body first of all honoured by women who defiled the Buddha's body by their tears; (iii) that he did not invite the Buddha to live longer even when the Buddha was alluding to the possibility very clearly; and (iv) that he made an effort for the going forth of women in the Dhamma and Discipline proclaimed by the Buddha. To the first accusation Ananda responds by saying that although he did so, it was not out of disrespect; for the second he said that he had to give priority to women for it was not proper to let the women be there at the site of *parinibbāna* at an improper time; for the third he said he forgot to invite the Buddha for his mind was possessed by Mara; and for the last on initiating the bhikkhunī Order he said that he did so out of kindness for Maha Pajapati Gotami, the foster-mother of the Buddha. On these issues Ananda's position was that none amounted to a minor wrong doing, nonetheless, he would confess out of respect for the Sangha.

The first *saṅgāyanā* seems not only the first effort at organizing the word of the Buddha to form an accepted version of it but also the formal beginning of the tradition that subsequently came to be known as Theravada. The attitudes expressed and the decisions made at this meeting seem to have had tremendous influence in determining the subsequent history of the organization. The account in the *Cullavagga*, discussed above, makes it abundantly clear that the two key personalities in the whole exercise were Mahakassapa and Ananda (Although Upali Thera was the resource person for the Vinaya he does not seem to be emerging prominently). In the next section we will discuss the implications of the first *saṅgāyanā* on the history of Buddhism in more detail.

### **Doctrinal and historical implications**

It must be clear from the above discussion that both Mahakassapa and Ananda are among the most prominent in the *sāsana* and they

encounter each other in *sāsana*-activities quite often. It is ultimately on these two individuals the future path of the *sāsana* rested. Some of the developments which still affect the nature of the *sāsana* may justifiably be traced to the personality differences of these two elders.

As we noted earlier, Mahakassapa was basically a forest-dwelling monk who practiced austere ways of living. Secluded life away from crowds was the outstanding character of his behaviour. Ananda was the complete opposite of this and he represented the urban city living in an environment of established monasticism. The two modes of life, city living and forest living have been there from the beginning of the *sāsana*. The exact attitude of early Buddhists to forest living is hard to determine even though it seem to have been taken as the ideal. For instance, when one receives *upasampadā* (formal acceptance to the Sangha), one is reminded of the four requisites of monastic life, namely, rag robe, alms food, urine-medicine and living in the forest as the ideal although other kinds of requisites given by house holders are also acceptable (V I, 96). However, the Buddha's somewhat negative response to Devadatta's request to make compulsory these practices and abstaining from meat eating reveals that these practices are only optional. It is said that some religious people adhere to austerities in order to attract attention and thereby to increase their gains. Sariputta, described by a modern writer as "paradigmatic saint of settled monasticism," (Ray 2000, 131) says that what really matters is not whether one lives in a village or in a forest but whether or not one is seen or heard to have defilements in his behaviour (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 2009, 112).

Somewhat opposite sentiment has been expressed by the Buddha in responding to some remarks made by Mahakassapa<sup>7</sup> on the deteriorated character of the Sangha at that time. When Mahakassapa said that now the bhikkhus are difficult to admonish, the Buddha responded by saying that bhikkhus in the past were forest dwellers, alms-food eaters, rag-robe wearers and so on and that they spoke in praise of such practices but it is no more (S II, 208). Here the Buddha is seen talking very highly of these qualities and practices which Sariputta thought some people could

<sup>7</sup> In discussing an instance when a nun supportive of Ananda disparages Mahakassapa for being harsh on Ananda, Raynold A. Ray sees a pattern in this kind of behaviour of city dwelling monks toward forest dwellers. It is an aspect of this pattern that city dwelling monks level "vicious and unfair attacks on forest monks". In this particular case, it is Ananda who was thought to be responsible. Although Mahakassapa happened to be a forest dweller and Ananda a city dweller it is hard to imagine that these particular events were triggered owing to this conflict. At least we do not have evidence to support this conclusion.

misuse. Taking all these occurrences together we have to conclude that the early Buddhist stand on the issue is at best inconclusive.

The two modes of living have been there with the Sangha up till today with all the tensions seen from the time of the Buddha. As the current practice has evolved, in the Theravada tradition, the practice of forest-dwelling (*araññavāsi* (Pali) or *āraṇyavāsin* (Sanskrit)) is seen to be the ideal but practiced by only a few. Those others who are city-dwellers (*gāmaṇvāsi* (Pali) or *grāmaṇvāsin* (Sanskrit)) see themselves as falling behind the ideal but show, however, their allegiance to the ideal by organizing or joining with the laity in making pilgrimages to these places or by arranging *dāna* every year or so to those who live in forest hermitages. As we know, the Buddha himself was not a forest dweller; but he had a period of six years in the forest before he attained the Buddhahood. Having attained the Buddhahood it was meaningless for him to be in the forest for the very idea of the attainment was to teach people to make an end to their suffering. In this sense, living in the forest exclusively was not meaningful for even an arahant. Once attained arahanthood one has to show, out of kindness, the path to others. Even from Mahakassapa's life we know that he was not an absolute forest dweller. The very fact that we talk about him or any one of that sort is that they bring their experience back to people. If one were to be in the forest absolutely without having anything to do with the society then there is nothing for us to talk about him. According to the Vinaya, for a monk to be exclusively in the forest (not withstanding the fact that survival in such manner is very doubtful) without having himself located within a particular Sangha is impossible; he must mingle with the rest of his group at least every fortnight to perform *uposatha*.<sup>8</sup> Although it is theoretically possible for a group of monks to organize itself exclusively as a forest group which has nothing to do with lay society, it does not seem to have happened for practical reasons. The meaning of the practice, thus, seems to be serving a practical purpose, namely, retiring into forest as a means of re-strengthening one's inner balance. Although Mahakassapa, who climbed the mountain every day and enjoyed in being in *jhāna*, (Higher states of mind characterized by calmness, purity and gradually increasing aloofness from sensory perceptions) seems to be the 'extreme'

8 *Upasatha* is the practice, prescribed by the Buddha for the *upasampadā* monks, of getting together every fortnight to confess the disciplinary violations if any and listen to the *Pātimokkha* (code of disciplinary rules to be observed by monks who have received *upasampadā* or the higher ordination) recited by a capable member of the group. The practice is meant to assure the purity as well as the solidarity of the Sangha.

example we have from the time of the Buddha, he himself was not without social engagements in his own way.<sup>9</sup> Ananda's entire religious life seems to have been devoted for social engagements, namely, working for others including primarily the Buddha, with probably no records of forest dwelling at all. Both are eminent disciples of the Buddha in their own ways. The monk's life today may well be described as one oscillating between these two great disciples of the Buddha.

The idea that one who enters the *sāsana* has to engage in either in what is called the 'yoke of text' (*gantha-dhura*) or the 'yoke of insight' (*vipassanā-dhura*) seems to be a development belonging to the period after the Buddha. The commentaries, however, want us to believe that this division was already existent during the Buddha's time itself (*Bhante ahaṃ mahallakakāle pabbajito ganthadhuraṃ pūretuṃ na sakhissāmi, vipassanādhuraṃ pana pūressāmi, kammaṭṭhānaṃ me katheta: Dhpa I, 8*). It is not hard to imagine that there was some kind of organized effort, while the Buddha was still alive, to memorize what the Buddha said. But if we go by the *Cullavagga* record of the first council we see in it the real beginnings of an institutional effort to organize and preserve the word of the Buddha. The reason was basically religious: once the Buddha attained *parinirvāṇa* it was the dhamma that occupied the place of the Master. When the Buddha was alive one could go to the Buddha if there was any doubt about any matter relating to the Dhamma or the Vinaya. Now it was the very Dhamma and the Vinaya as taught and enacted by the Buddha left to be consulted (*Yo vo ānanda mayā dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto so vo mam' accayen satthā: D II, 154*). Hence the need to make the Dhamma and the Vinaya readily available in order to be consulted. The leading role played in the whole process by Ananda, who was acclaimed by the Buddha as possessing the highest learnedness (*bhussuta*) and memory (*satimanta*), is clear. This does not mean that Mahakassapa was away from textual interests. In fact, it is he who initiated the first council. And according to the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* (the commentary to the *Dīgha-nikāya*) account of the first council the Vinaya and the each division of the Canon was assigned to the leading arahants and their pupils, and thus *Samyutta-nikāya* was assigned to Mahakassapa and his pupils for preservation through memory (DA I, 15). Judging by the overall behaviour and attitudes of Mahakassapa it may be more accurate to assume that the circumstances after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha forced him to take interest in these matters. Otherwise,

<sup>9</sup> Mahakassapa's dislike for the wealthy, including the divine beings, and kindness to the poor, the deprived and the sick is clear in the events recorded in discourses.

he was more prone to meditation which was the main preoccupation in forest life. In the *gāthās* (stanzas) attributed to him (in the *Theragāthā*) nothing is mentioned about his being learned or anything related to studies. Instead a lot is mentioned in praise of secluded meditative life.

The two yokes mentioned seem to have been incorporated into a broad scheme of concepts encompassing all the aspects of Buddhist life, namely, the idea of threefold *sāsana*, namely, *pariyatti* or study of the Canon, *paṭipatti* or the practice and *paṭivedha* or the realization. As commentaries report, there arose during the reign of Vaṭṭagāmiṇi Abhaya among the Sri Lanka Sangha a debate as to which aspect of the *sāsana* is more critical. The debate arose among the *pānsukulikas* (wearers of rag robes) and *dhammakathikas* (preachers of the Dhamma), a development in the Theravada comparable to *ganthadhura* and *vipassanādhura* or *araññavāsi* and *gāmaavāsi* referred to earlier, when everybody including the monks had to suffer owing to a long-lasting famine and a series of foreign invasions. Consequently, the practice of memorization of the Dhamma became almost extinct in the country. Finally, when the situation regained normalcy those who survived got together and arranged to write the word of the Buddha preserved up to that time in memory. Naturally, this was an occasion when the memorization of the Dhamma appeared to be very crucial for the existence of the *sāsana*. It is on this background the debate arose among the monks. In the debate *dhammakathikas* won the day by establishing that the practice of the Dhamma is impossible in the absence of knowledge what the Dhamma is (AA I, 92). Adikaram thinks that this turn of events marks a significant shift in attitudes of the early Sri Lanka Sangha, a shift not very desirable for the spiritual wellbeing of the Organization. He comments on the outcome of the debate:

Practice was relegated to the background and preaching gained supremacy. The Sutta defeated the Vinaya. How different this was from the older attitude! *Vinayo nāma sāsanaṃ āyu*” Vinaya is the very life of the religion of the Buddha cried out in bold terms the theras of old. The change in attitude although no attention has been paid to it in the commentaries, is of the utmost importance in the history of Theravada Buddhism. This school of Buddhism claims its descent from Upali, the greatest *Vinayadhara* among the disciples of the Buddha. Mahinda, too, the founder of this school in Ceylon insisted of the Vinaya by a Ceylonese bhikkhu as it was only then he maintained, that the

*sāsana* would take root in Ceylon. Mahinda's Buddhism was religion predominantly of practice, and the victory, mentioned above, of Suttanta over Vinaya would not have been one after the heart of the great missionary. (Adikaram 1946, 77-78)

The same series of events are perceived quite differently by Walpola Rahula, another eminent scholar in the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Rahula does not see any signs of decadence in these events, as Adikaram does. Rahula dismisses Adikaram's attitude as one "of a devotee lamenting over the "degeneration" and "corruption" of the Faith" (Rahula 1993, xi). These two rather polar views held by two of the eminent scholars of modern Theravada are indicative of the persistence of the division up till today. In this manner, the two vocations (*dhura*) and the two modes of living (in *gāma* or in *ārañña*) have been persistent in the *sāsana* throughout. Although the particular ways of description and establishment of categories came later, one can see the seeds of these historical developments in Mahakassapa and Ananda.

Another important Theravada perception that continues up till today is its attitude toward women in general and the *sāsana* of the Bhikkhunīs in particular. It is a historical fact that the Order of bhikkhunīs is long discontinued in the Theravada tradition. The stalwarts of the Theravada have always maintained, following the Vinaya, that re-introduction of higher ordination *upasampadā* for bhikkhunīs is impossible without an already existent bhikkhunī Sangha. This standpoint comes fundamentally from two positions, both advocated and upheld by Mahakassapa. One is the attitude of the Sangha headed by Mahakassapa at the first council on the issue of changing the minor rules. As we saw earlier, at the end of the formal recitation of the canon<sup>10</sup> Ananda informs the Sangha that the Buddha before his *parinirvāṇa* had given permission to abolish the minor rules if the Sangha so desired. At this there arose a question as to what the minor rules were. The elders could not come to an agreement. It is in this state of indecision that Mahakassapa proposed that the Sangha should not abolish any of the

10 Some scholars such as Steven Collins are of the view that the Pali Canon was put together in Sri Lanka by the Sangha of the Mahavihara as a response to the challenging situation created by the newly arisen Abhayagiri sect (1990, 89-126). While it could be believed that the controversy between the two monasteries had something to do with committing the canon into writing the canon itself may taken to have given at least its initial form and continued to be understood in that manner ever since the first council held right after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, the first time the monks realized that the Master was no more to go and consult, so his Dhamma had to be organized in an orderly manner.

already existing rules; nor should the Sangha approve any new rules that have not been enacted by the Master. The members of the first council accepted this by maintaining silence. It is important to note that the Theravada tradition still upholds this decision for it has not been changed or abolished although in the history they have had several councils ever since.<sup>11</sup> In understanding the position of the present Theravada leaders we need to keep in mind this historical tradition. In fact, the Theravada Sangha is still bound by the decision made at the first council, and by not approving the re-establishment of *bhikkhunī sāsaṇa* the Theravadins are merely adhering to an age-old historical tradition (although whether or not doing so is the morally right thing to do is a different matter). It is clear that the strong Vinaya emphasis adhered to by the Theravada is mainly due to Mahakassapa. Although the Sangha accepted the proposal of the Great Elder still they accused Ananda of a minor offence of not making it clear from the Buddha and this move shows that at least some of the elders were not unwilling to change or abolish some of the rules.

The other is the general attitude to women held by the elders at the first council. In our study of Mahakassapa we found that he was not enthusiastic about teaching Dhamma to bhikkhunīs. Two instances in which he agreed to do so he had to be coaxed to it by Ananda, and both incidents ended in disaster. These incidents also suggest that the dislike between Mahakassapa and bhikkhunīs was mutual. Now in the first council, as we saw earlier, one of the charges brought forth by the elders against Ananda was that it was wrong for him to make women, who soiled the body of the Buddha with their tears, pay their homage before others. This can be interpreted as resulting from the popular perception supported by Brahmanism that women must not be accorded a honour over men. Ananda's response reveals his awareness of realities of life and respect for social norms. The other charge which has direct bearing on the issue is that he persuaded the Buddha to establish the bhikkhunī Order. This charge strongly suggests that the majority of the senior members of the Sangha did not like the existence of the bhikkhunī Order. Although this charge against Ananda is given as coming from the elders and not directly from Mahakassapa who was the head of the council it is imaginable that it was fully approved by the latter. This historical event that took place at the first council surely has been instrumental in determining the subsequent behaviour of the Theravada with regard

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11 When the Burmese named their 1955 council the sixth, they acknowledged five previous councils: three in India, the fourth in Sri Lanka in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. and the fifth in Burma (present Myanmar) during the reign of king Min Dong.

to the Bhikkhuni Order. It is clear that the attitude still exists. Ananda as the patron of the Bhikkhuni Order did not think what he did by initiating the Bhikkhuni Order was wrong. The subsequent history of Theravada, however, shows that Mahakassapa's opinion has prevailed over that of Ananda.

Earlier we referred to how Mahakassapa was accepted by the Sangha as the *saṅgha-thera* after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha. The Mahāparinibbana-sutta account reveals how Mahakassapa took over the leadership of the Sangha right after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha. It is necessary to understand this development in the context the assertion made by the Buddha before his *parinibbāna* to the effect had after him the Dhamma he taught and the Vinaya he promulgated will be the teacher. Some times, this is understood as the Buddha rejecting a leadership in the form of an appointed person for the Sangha. I think that this is a misunderstanding. The issue in the Mahāparinibbāna-sutta is the possible anxiety on the part of the disciples that once the Buddha is gone they would be left teacher-less. The word used here is *satthā* which is usually used to refer to the Buddha himself. The Buddha makes the following statement:

Ananda, it is possible that the following occurs to you: 'the teaching no longer has a teacher, there is no teacher for us' (*atītasatthukaṃ pāvacaṇaṃ n'atthi no satthāti*) (D II, 154). Ananda, it should not be understood in that manner; Ananda, the doctrine I have explained and the discipline I have prescribed will be your teacher at my passing.

In making this statement what the Buddha does is to elevate the Dhamma and the Vinaya to the position of the *satthā*. In fact, no one including the Buddha could 'appoint' another as the *satthā* for, in order for this to happen, that other person has to be a Buddha himself. If the other person was himself a Buddha, question would not arise. But this difficulty cannot arise in appointing one to the position of Sangha-thera. What really seems to have happened after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha is somewhat similar to the second. A revealing discussion occurs in the Gopaka Moggallana-sutta (M III, 7-15) initially between Ananda and Brahmin Gopakamoggallana and subsequently between the former and Vassakara, the Chief Minister of King Ajatasatthu. Gopaka Moggallana asks from Ananda whether there was any single monk "who possesses in each and every way all those qualities that were possessed by master Gotama." To this, Ananda replies in the negative. Subsequently,



Vassakara enters the discussion and asks from Ananda whether there is any one monk appointed by the Buddha or by the Sangha as the refuge of the Sangha once he is gone. To this Ananda replied in the negative and explained that this did not mean that they were without refuge and that they had the Dhamma taught by the Buddha as their refuge. Being satisfied with explanation the Brahmin asks a further question, namely:

Is there, Master Ananda, any single bhikkhu whom you now honour, respect, revere, and venerate, and on whom you live in dependence honouring and respecting him? (Bodhi 1995, 882)

Ananda's response to this question was in the affirmative. What this discussion makes very clear is that although there is no any other person equal to the Buddha, there were many who were revered as virtuous monks whom the rest of the monks respected and depended on. The case with Mahakassapa is similar to this. He was not the Master but he was the most respected of all.

Some could take this case of Buddha's not appointing a successor to himself and trace all the maladies of the Buddhist tradition to it. This is not reasonable for what the Buddha did not appoint was a teacher replacing or on behalf of himself, which is technically impossible. As Ananda himself admits, there was none equal to the Buddha in all respects for such a person himself has to be a *Sammā-sambuddha*. What is possible, however, is that there can be a leader for the Sangha. In fact, as Ananda explains later in the discussion, the Sangha in each locality comes together under the guidance of a *saṅgha-thera* in the group and recite the Vinaya in every fortnight and abide by it. This allows for a decentralized self-rule among various groups of the Sangha. On the same grounds, it is also possible to have a Sangha-thera appointed by the entire Sangha to be the leader of the whole group. The idea that the Buddha's reluctance to appoint any one single bhikkhu as the successor to himself as the *Sammā-sambuddha* should not be taken as indicating that the Buddha did not allow for a leadership in the Sangha. Mahakassapa exemplified this possibility.

It is well known that the Theravada tradition lays more emphasis on Vinaya. The strict adherence to Vinaya has been seen as its hallmark. As we saw above Mahakassapa's decision not to abolish any of the rules prescribed by the Buddha and not to formulate any new rules crystallizes this attitude. It does not seem that the modern scholarship has paid sufficient attention to this phenomenon. I, nevertheless, believe that

this trend has had far reaching implications on the overall character of the Theravada tradition. In the first *Saṅgāyanā*, according to the *Cullavagga* account, Mahakassapa chooses, with the consent of the rest, Vinaya to be recited first. The account of the event given in the commentaries is somewhat different. In it Mahakassapa is seen asking from his fellow elders as to what they should recite first. The answer he gets from them is as follows: “Venerable Sir, Kassapa, the Vinaya is the life of the *sāsana*; the *sāsana* exists when the Vinaya does” (DA I, 11). Here the primacy of the Vinaya is asserted by the rest of the Sangha but not by Mahakassapa. Whatever that may be, this emphasis seems to be closer to Mahakassapa’s sentiments than to those of Ananda. In the first glance one cannot see anything wrong with this emphasis on Vinaya. In the long run, however, this move can be interpreted as taking the Vinaya on its own disregarding the Dhamma basis of it. In fact, as has been shown by scholars such as Jotiya Dhirasekera,<sup>12</sup> the Vinaya gets its validity and meaning from the Dhamma. In this sense, the real life of the *sāsana* is not the Vinaya but the Dhamma, and hence one could well say that both the *sāsana* and the Vinaya will exist if the Dhamma were to exist. The subsequent developments in the Vinaya show how, at times, the Theravada tradition found ways and means to manage to do whatever they wished to do without changing the letter of the Vinaya rule. The spirit of the Vinaya really lies in the Dhamma; but in some later developments one could clearly see that not too much care has been given to retain the spirit. Mahakassapa’s move to recite the Vinaya first, according to *Cullavagga* account, may be because he felt that Ananda cannot be given the key position over Upali who has been an arahant much before the former. But the matter seems to be going beyond this consideration to the personal history of the two elders. As we observed earlier it is possible that there was an element of difference in perspectives between the two elders. If that was the decisive factor in reciting the Vinaya before the Dhamma, the implications seem to go far beyond personal matters of the two elders. One could argue that ‘*sāsana*’ in this context did not mean the dispensation of the Buddha in the broad sense of the term, but simply the monastic organization. Granting this, still it seems that what is meant is only the male Sangha (bhikkhu but not bhikkhunī Sangha). Certainly the ‘*bhikkhu-parisa*’ alone, not the ‘*catu-parisa*’ (four groups) together, has played the key

12 In this valuable contribution to Vinaya studies, Dhirasekera (1984) brilliantly establishes how Vinaya was founded on the Dhamma and how it derives its validity from the same source.

role. This may have been natural and acceptable in the context. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the organization depended on its members' adherence to its legal code. It makes perfect sense that the life of the *sāsana* as an organization is its code of law. If we understand the statement in this sense, that too says a lot about the nature and the way of thinking of the elders. It is clear that this move was instrumental in making decisive changes in the events of the future *sāsana*. As is evident from the subsequent commentarial literature, the end result of this emphasis was a monastic organization which lay more emphasis on the letter than on the spirit of the Vinaya, namely, Dhamma.

## Conclusion

The personality, attitudes and the behaviour of the two great elders not only shaped the history of the *sāsana* at its formative years but also it continues to do so even at present. As we saw earlier all the traditional modes of monastic life of the Sangha such as, *gāmvāsi* and *araññavāsi* (busy life of social service in the city and solitary and meditative life in the forest), *dharmakathika* and *pamsukūlika* (life of comfort and ease and life of austerity characterized by wearing rag-ropes and feeding Oil alms-food), and *ganthadhura* and *vipassanadhura* (life of erudition and learnedness and life of contemplative practice) may well be traced back to Ananda and Mahakassapa respectively. These divisions have been among the Sangha all the way through. In fact, they have been universal characteristics of the entire Sangha no matter whether they are Theravada, Mahayana or Vajrayana. The ideals behind Ananda and Mahakassapa do not need to be perceived as contradictory. They can be quite complementary. The life of any member of the Sangha may well be taken as oscillating between these two ideals although the degree of oscillation may differ from individual to individual. The ideal disciple of the Buddha is one who strikes a balance between these two poles, a feat by no means looking easy.