

Development of Communal Life at an ĀVĀSA

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ABSTRACT:

This article explores the structure and organization of Buddhist monastic communities, with a particular focus on communal property ownership and the roles of various officers within the community. In Āvāsas, designated areas for monks, communal facilities such as vihāras, kitchens, bathhouses, and promenades were provided within Bhikkhu colonies or donated Ārāmas. Property within these areas belonged to the Sangha as a whole, rather than to individuals. The article highlights rules regarding the non-transferability of certain items and outlines procedures for resolving disputes over agricultural rights. Various officers were appointed to manage different aspects of community life, including overseeing provisions, distributing necessities, managing chambers, and supervising novices and servants. The roles of permanent and temporary officers are described, demonstrating the intricacies of governance within Buddhist monastic communities.

KEYWORDS:

Āvāsas, Ārāma, Vihāra, Buddhist monastic life.

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The Āvāsa where on ordination the monk settled down, was a Bhikkhu colony within fixed boundaries, consisting of vihāras and parivenas, or in an Ārāma or park donated by some wealthy lay devotee. Though the vihāras stood separately, scattered over the ārāma, all properly was joint and intended for the common use of the entire Sangha. There were a lumber room (Kotthaka), a common room (Upatthāna-sālā), a ‘fire-room’ or kitchen (Aggīsālā), a ware-house

(Kappiya-kuṭi), a privy (Vacca-kuṭi), a promenade (Caṅkama), an arcade for walking exercises (Caṅkamanasāla), a common bath (Jantāghara), bath-rooms (Jantā-gharasālā), a pavilion (Maṇḍapa, probably for holding assemblies in), a well (Udapāna), a walled-round and covered well (Udapāna-sālā). The right of property in these things was vested in the corporate body and not in any individual. No real property was private.

Small utensils and light furniture (lahu bhaṇḍaṃ lahu parikkhāraṃ) were divided among the monks present there, but heavy utensils and heavy furniture (lahu bhaṇḍaṃ lahu parikkhāraṃ) were not to be thus allocated and distributed, for they belonged not to the particular Sangha of which the deceased had been a member, but to the whole Bhikkhu community, present or future (āgatānāgatassa cātuddisassa saṅghassa).

According to Pācittiya, 82, property given to the Sangha could not be appropriated by an individual. An individual might claim the right of user, but not the right of property in anything. If a person wished to make a gift, even of food, to an individual Bhikkhu, he had to send it to the Sangha saying, “This is to be given to the Sangha with special reference to so-and-so” This principle of communal ownership of property is emphasized in Mahāparinibbāna Sutta.

The old rule is more categorically laid down in Cullavagga, where the following five descriptions of things are said to be non-transferable and non-apportionable, viz.,

- A. the Ārāma or the Āvāsa site,
- B. Vihāra or its site,
- C. bed, chair, bolster, and pillow,
- D. brass vessel, brass jar, brass pot, brass vase, razor, axe, hatchet, hoe, and spade, and
- E. creepers, bamboos, Muñja or Babbaja grass, common grass, clay, wooden things, and crockery.

Now suppose several Bhikkhus built by begging the building materials a Vihāra for themselves. It would not thereby become the

property of those Bhikkhus, but of the whole Sangha, and any incoming Bhikkhu might claim a Senāsana in that vihāra as of right. ‘six Bhikkhus’, celebrated as mischief-makers in the canonical legends, sought to oust those who had built a vihāra for themselves by their labor.

This story is told in Cullavagga, difficulties would sometimes arise about agricultural rights between the Sangha as a body corporate and outsiders. A rule for the determination of such rights is laid down in Mahāvagga. If seedlings belonging to outsiders grew on the grounds of the Sangha, the Sangha might appropriate the crops after giving a part to the other. If, on the other hand, seedlings belonging to the Sangha grew up on the grounds of an outsider, the Sangha might likewise take the crops after giving the same portion to the outsider.

For the conduct of the multifarious business of community life, there existed several officers in anāvāsa, all appointed by the usual Ñatti. The following is a classified list of Sangha officers:

(A) Connected with commissariat:

1. Bhaṇḍāgārika-Overseer of stores.
2. Kappiya-kāraka-It was the duty of this officer to ascertain what provisions were allowable and what not. He would receive gifts of money from laymen and convert them into proper commodities.
3. Bhattuddesaka- Apportioner of rations. His function was to dole out rations by ticketing each person’s share.
4. Civabhājaka-Distributor of robe.
5. Yāgubhājaka-Distributor of Yāgu (a kind of rice pulp).
6. Phalabhājaka-Distributor of fruits.
7. Khajjakabhājaka-Distributor of dry food (what the Bengalis call Khājā).

(B) Connected with chambers, wardrobe, etc:

1. Senāsana-paññāpaka-Chamberlain. His business was to arrange

seats and allot them to the Bhikkhus. The seats were arranged three times a year-on the day of the commencement of the later Vassa, and on the day after the Pavāranā.

2. Civara-paṭiggāhaka-Receiver of robes. Laymen used to make gifts of robes to the Sangha, specially at the close of the rain-retreat, which it was the business of this officer to receive.
3. Sāṭya-gāhāpaka-Distributor of undergarments.
4. Patta-gāhāpaka-Distributor of alms-bowls.
5. Appamattaka-vissajjaka-Disposer of trifles. His business was to distribute among the members of the Sangha such small articles as needles, scissors, sandals, girdles, butter, honey, etc. according to their needs.

(C) Superintendents:

1. Nava-kammika-Superintendent of new buildings.
2. Ārāmika-pesaka-Overseer of Ārāmikas. The Ārāmika was a servant employed by the donor of an Ārāma to keep the grounds in order. This office's business was to supervise the work of such servants.
3. Sāmaṇera-pesaka- Superintendent of Sāmaṇeras. His function was to look after the novices who had not yet obtained Upasānpadā.

The above, with the exceptions perhaps of the Nva-kammika, were permanent officers. Temporary officers. e.g. Kaṭhina vatthāraka (distributor of robes), Salāka-gāhāpaka (polling officer at an assembly) etc., might be appointed for temporary purposes. Designations of other officers also occur elsewhere than in the Vinayapīṭaka, e.g.

1. Pānīya-vārika-officer in charge of drinks.
2. Bhājana-uārika-Officer in charge of utensils.
3. Upadhivāra-Probably a agent.
4. Paraṇḍa-vārika-Officer in charge of the groves.
5. Muṇḍasenāsara-vārika-Officer in charge of lodgings temporarily not in use.

In conclusion, this article sheds light on the intricate organization and communal ethos of Buddhist monastic communities, particularly emphasizing the collective ownership of property and the diverse roles fulfilled by appointed officers. Through *Āvāsas*, these communities provided monks with essential facilities while upholding the principle that property belonged to the Sangha as a whole. The discussion of rules regarding property transfer and agricultural rights showcases the importance of maintaining communal harmony and fairness. Moreover, the delineation of various officer positions underscores the meticulous management required for the smooth functioning of monastic life. Overall, this exploration underscores the cooperative spirit and structured governance inherent in Buddhist monastic communities, offering insights into their enduring traditions and organizational principles.

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