



Bhante Santi - "Schism, communion and harmony in the Pāli Vinaya"

The initial motivation for my research on schism was that it seems to me that the concepts of schism and its closely related opposite, harmony, are frequently misused in a way that suppresses genuine, well-intentioned calls for reform within the Buddhist monastic Order. My intention is to clarify the precise meaning of the interrelated concepts of schism in the Order (saṅghabheda), harmony (samaggī) and communion (saṃvāsa) in order to diffuse the unreasonable fear of schism that obstructs resolution of the issues creating disharmony in the Buddhist community now. However, in this presentation I will try to focus on the aspects of schism more relevant to academics not personally involved with the issue.

The points I will address in my presentation will include:

What exactly is schism? At what point does a schism formally occur? Are the accounts of this in the Saṅghabhedakkhandaka and the Upālīpañcaka (Parivāra) consistent or compatible? How do modern Theravādins understand schism? How meaningful are the traditional concepts of schism, harmony and communion within the Saṅgha today? Do all schismatics go to hell regardless of their intention? Is schism really always wrong? I will try to compare and critique briefly modern comments by IB Horner, Ven. Āhanissaro and Ven. Brahmavaṃso with the Vinaya texts.

How can we make sense of the scattered references to saṃvāsa? I will explain two kinds implicitly differentiated in the texts and how they might apply in different cases. What does the precise definition of schism mean for the process of sect formation in Indian Buddhism? Does nikāyabheda always equal saṅghabheda? If not, how can we tell the difference in the literary and epigraphical records?

How many different sects are there actually within modern "Theravāda"? I will propose a nomenclature that I think would be acceptable to both the sects themselves and their opponents.

This topic is part of a much larger research project on the communal side of the Vinaya and the historical evolution of Buddhist monastic cultures since the earliest texts. I would also like to summarise the other topics I am researching and appeal for feedback and discussion.

Biography:

Bhante Santi (Kester Ratcliff) was born in England in 1983. He became interested in Buddhism as a child and started reading Suttas and meditating daily as a teenager, soon after that he decided on becoming a Buddhist monk. After school, completing A-levels in Biology, Chemistry and Physics, he went to the International Forest Monastery in Thailand (Wat Pah Nanachat), established by Ajahn Chah, to ordain and received full ordination in June 2002. Since then he has lived in several forest monasteries in Thailand associated with Wat Pah Nanachat, spent a year in Bodhivana monastery (VIC), and is now living at Santi Forest Monastery (NSW) with Bhante Sujāto, who is his teacher.



In Thailand he also had the opportunity to learn from some of the living meditation masters of the Thai Forest tradition. He learnt Pāli by himself. His individual studies have focussed on the Pāli Suttas and Vinaya and scholarly analyses of early Buddhism. Recently, he is most interested in trying to broaden his contextual understanding of the tradition and is working on a comprehensive comparison of the earliest Buddhist monastic culture with later developments.