

Early Buddhism

Of those things that arise from a cause,
The Tathāgata has told the cause,
And also what their cessation is:
This is the doctrine of the Great Recluse

Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā
tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha,
tesañca yo nirodho
evaṃ vādī mahāsamaṇo

Ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ
teṣāṃ tathāgataḥ hyavadat teṣāṃ
ca yo nirodha evaṃ vādī
mahāśramaṇaḥ

ये धर्मा हेतु प्रभवा
हेतुं तेषां तथागतः ह्यवदत्
तेषां च यो निरोध
एवं वादी महाश्रमणः

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[illegible]

What are we doing here?

- Understand Buddhism
- Appreciate historical context
- Approach the Buddha's words
- Find peace & true freedom



Roots of Indology

William Jones, 1786

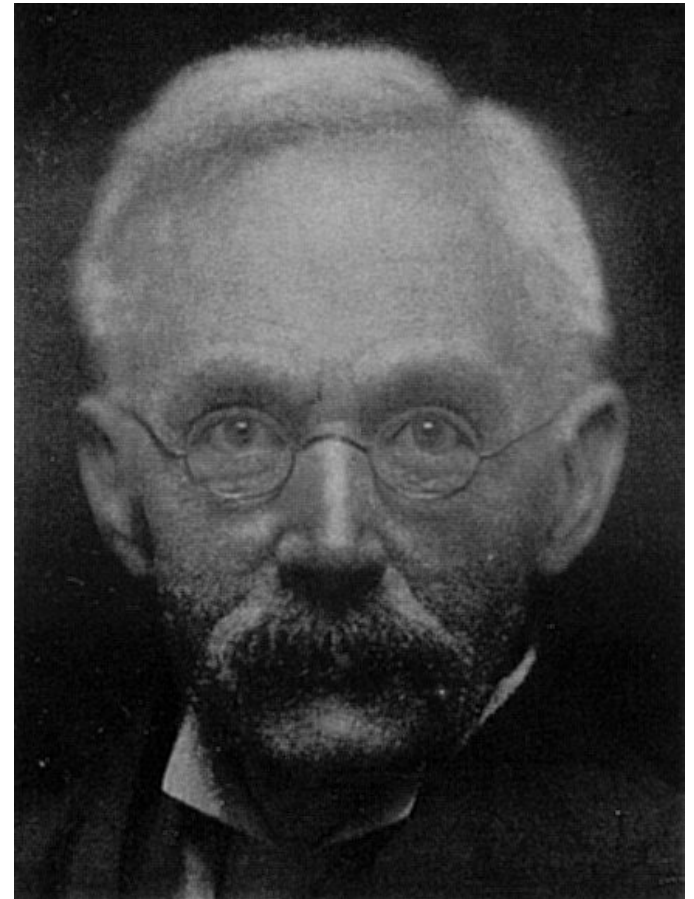
The Sanscrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists; there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothic and the Celtic, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanscrit; and the old Persian might be added to the same family.

Discovery of Early Buddhism

T.W. Rhys Davids
(1843–1922)

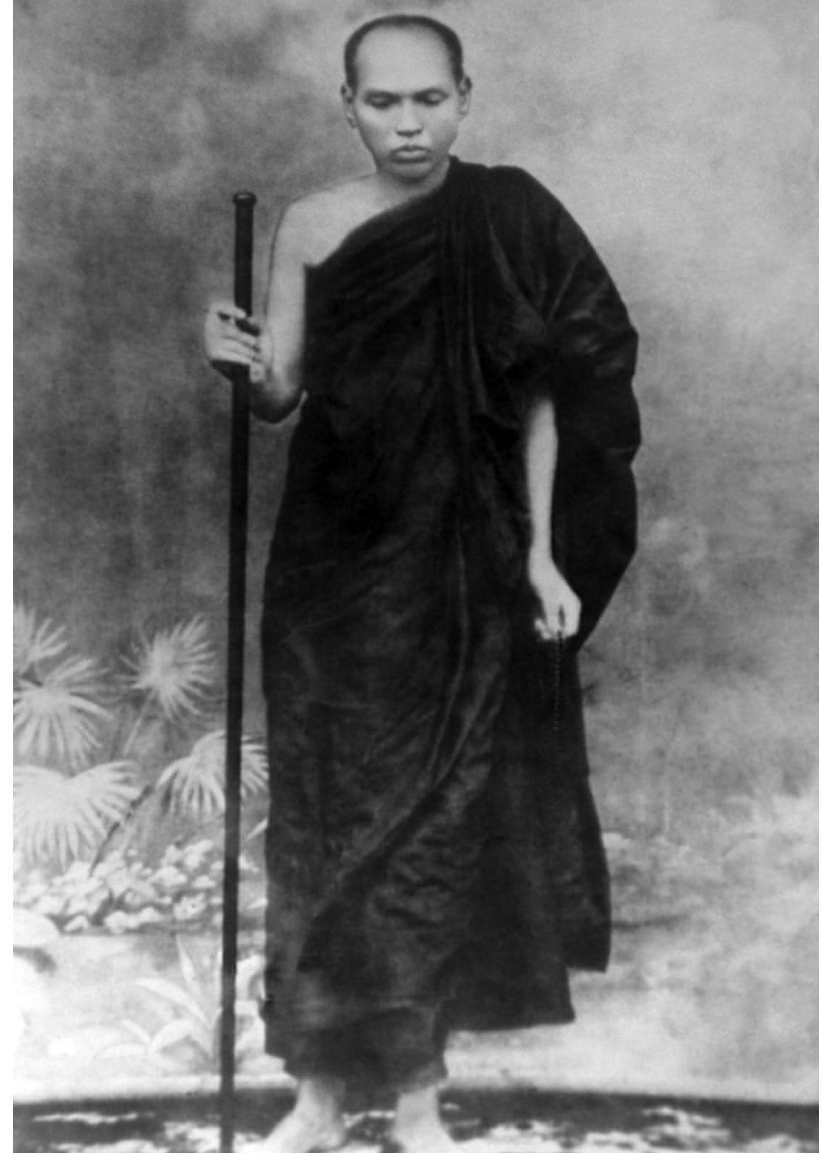
Founder Pali Text
Society

Edited, translated, Pali
texts, compiled
dictionary, published
popular books



Early Buddhism & tradition: Burma

- Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923)
- Published many books and studies
- Wrote in Pali and Burmese
- Advocated breath meditation and vipassana
- Introduced lay meditation



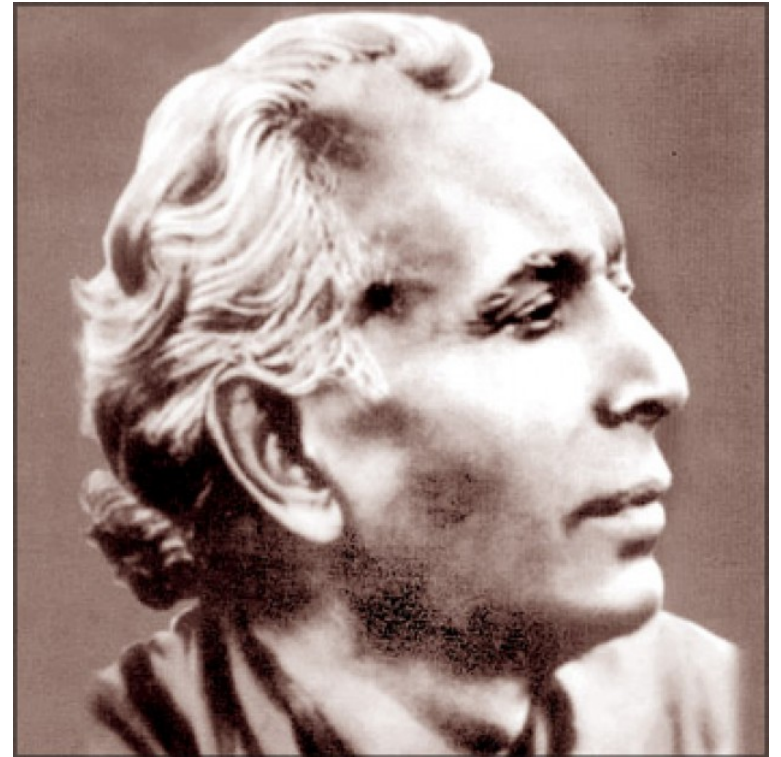
Early Buddhism & tradition: Thailand

- King Mongkut (1804–1868) reformed Sangha, emphasized Vinaya and study of Pali texts
- Ajahn Mun (1870–1949) founded modern forest meditation tradition



Early Buddhism & tradition: Sri Lanka

- Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933)
- “Protestant” reform of Sinhalese Buddhism
- Revived Indian Buddhism
- Closely connected with Theosophical Society
- Buddhist interfaith



First Western Buddhists

- Madame Blavatsky (1831–1891) founded Theosophical Society, mystic
- Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) introduced Buddhist schools, Buddhist catechism, helped design Buddhist flag



*To the Aryan Theosophical Society, of New York -
With H. P. B.'s & H. S. O.'s good wishes
London, October, 1888.*

Early Buddhism, New Traditions

Star Amphitheatre, Balmoral Beach (1923–1951). Built for the lectures of Krishnamurti; supposed to be place for receiving coming savior.



First western awesome yogi

- Alexandra David-Néel (1869–1969)
- Belgian-French explorer, spiritualist, opera singer, freemason, Buddhist, anarchist, and writer
- 1912 met 13th Dalai Lama
- 1914–1916 lived in a cave in Sikkim
- Visited Tibet in 1916, 1924, & 1937
- Returned to France in 1946, lived as recluse in Digne



Mahāyāna

- Taishō Tripiṭaka (1920s): edited in Japan by students of Max Mueller, used Western critical apparatus, influenced by Pali texts.
- Master Yin Shun (1906–2005) deeply researched early Buddhism, had great influence in modern Taiwanese Buddhism, including the advent of “engaged Buddhism”. Master Cheng Yen of Tzu Chi was one of his students.



Timeline

- Buddha: 480–400 BCE
- Chandragupta: 322–298 BCE
- Second Council: 300 BCE
- Aśoka: 268–234 BCE
- Mahāsaṅghika Schism: *circa* 150 BCE

Buddhist schools

There were “18” early (pre-Mahāyāna) schools. These emerged gradually after Ashoka (c. 200–100 BCE). The most important are:

- Theravāda (Mahāvihāravāsin)
- Sarvāstivāda (Most suttas, vinaya, abhidhamma)
- Mūlasarvāstivāda (Vinaya in Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit)
- Dharmaguptaka (Vinaya, Dīrgha Āgama, 1 abhidhamma)
- Mahāsaṅghika (Vinaya, some suttas)
- Mahīśāsaka (Vinaya)

What do we have?

- Pali Buddhist Texts
- Buddhist texts in Chinese translation
- Some texts in Tibetan, Sanskrit, other
- Little archeology before Ashoka (c. 150 years after the Buddha)

Pali Tipiṭaka

The entire canon of one early school, in the Middle Indo-Aryan language of Pali, which was an Indian dialect perhaps from Avanti.

- **Suttapiṭaka:** Dīgha, Majjhima, Saṃyutta, Aṅguttara, Khuddaka Nikāyas
- **Vinayapiṭaka:** Bhikkhu & bhikkhuni vibhaṅga, Khandhakas
- **Abhidhammapiṭaka:** Seven books.

Chinese canon

Earliest translations by An Shigao (安世高, died 168 CE). Most translations around 400–440CE. No significant collections have been translated into English; translations of Madhyama and Saṃyukta are underway.

- **Sutta:** translations of Dīrgha, Madhyama, Saṃyukta, Ekottara Āgamas, and other materials
- **Vinaya:** 5 complete Vinayas and other materials
- **Abhidhamma:** 7 books of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, 1 of Dharmaguptaka

Other

- A few dozen early suttas in complete or quoted form in Tibetan. Many translated in Peter Skilling's *Mahāsutras* (PTS).
- Several texts in Sanskrit and other Indic languages recovered from monasteries in Nepal/Tibet, or from archeological finds, mostly fragmentary. Much of this material is unpublished, less is translated.

How do we know what is early?

- Testimony of tradition
- Concordance of suttas
- Evolution of doctrine
- Evolution of language
- Political, social, technological conditions
- Candragupta & Aśoka

Politics

- Mix of kingships and aristocracies
- 16 great countries
- Shifting sands: smaller countries being swallowed by Magadha and Kosala
- Ambition of kings (Raṭṭhapāla)

Technology

- Iron
- Wooden buildings
- Fired bricks becoming used
- Northern Black Polished Ware

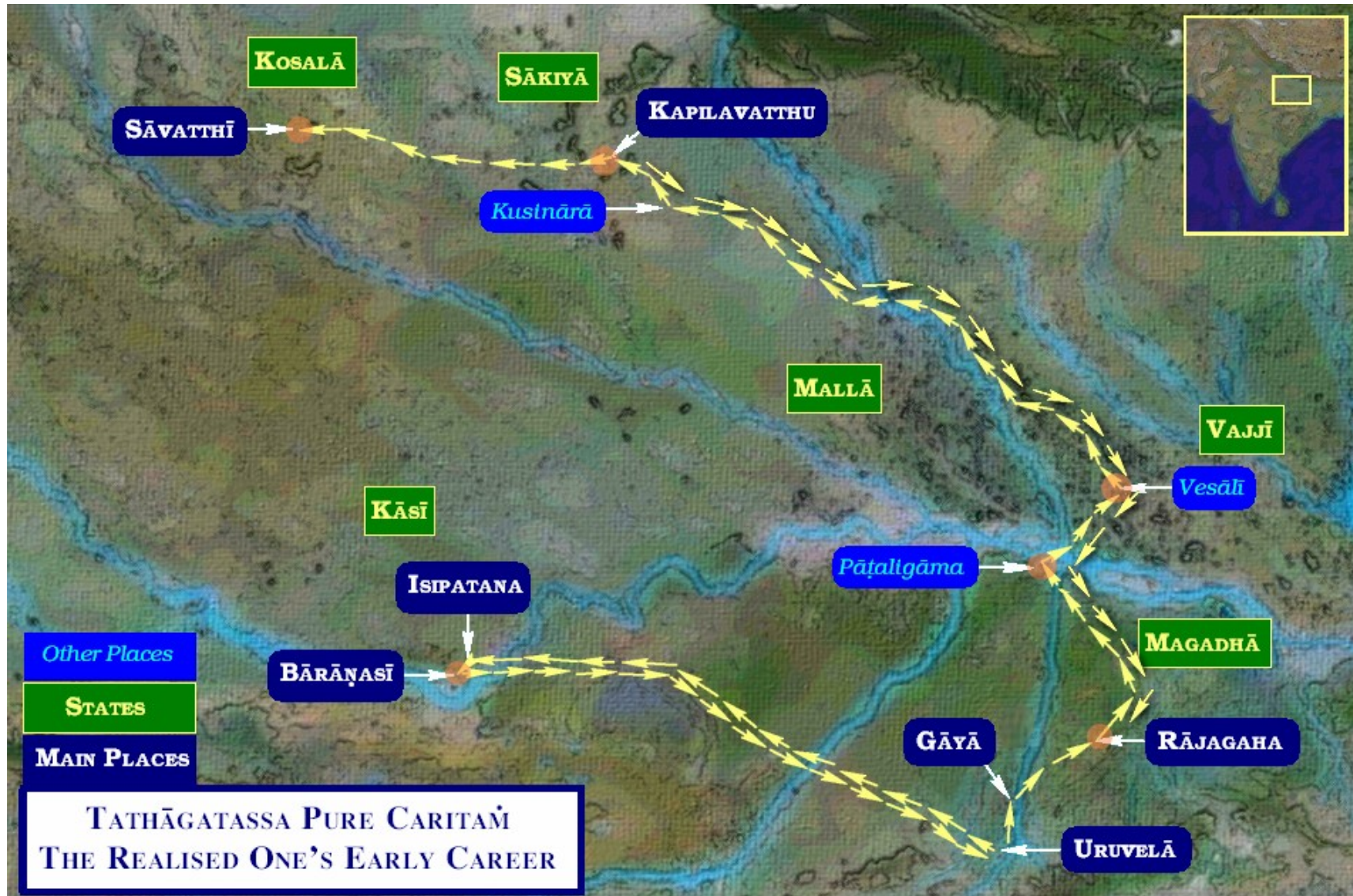
Society

- Money is now used commonly
- Cities are emerging
- Trade is limited but growing
- Agricultural rather than pastoral
- Growing sense of a unified cultural region
- Unification of Ganges/Yamuna for trade

Geography

- Only Ganges area is well known, and up to Gandhāra (Afghanistan)
- Other areas referred to occasionally as foreign: Aparantaka (West India), Kāliṅga (East coast), Yona (Persia/Greece), Bāveru (Babylon)
- By the time of Candragupta/Aśoka, this had extended to Greece, Sri Lanka, South India, Egypt, (Burma?); shortly after, China.

Geography



Walk from Patna to Libya



What is early?

- Most doctrinal passages attributed to the Buddha in the Suttas.
- Some of the framing narratives and teachings by disciples in the Suttas
- The *pāṭimokkha* & some other Vinaya material.
- Some verses (Dhammapada, etc.)
- Occasional passages and quotes in later literature.

What is not early?

- Abhidhamma (c. 200+ years after the Buddha)
- Jatakas (c. 100–400)
- Other late books of the Khuddaka, e.g. Peta-, Vimanavatthu, Cariyapitaka, Buddhavaṃsa, etc.
- Most of the Vinaya (c. 100–200)
- Mahāyāna (c. 400–1000)
- Some additions to the Āgamas, including certain verses, legendary elaborations, proto-

Buddha: his life

- Fragments of the Buddha's life are found in the Early Buddhist Texts (e.g MN 26)
- Past lives: Pacetana
- Existential crisis spurs spiritual search
- Renunciation, Awakening, Return

Attadaṇḍa Sutta (SNp 935–40)

Fear is born from arming oneself.
Just see how many people fight!
I'll tell you about the sense of urgency
That made me tremble:

Seeing creatures flopping around,
Like fish in water too shallow,
So hostile to one another!
— Seeing this, I became afraid.

This world completely lacks essence;
It trembles in all directions.
I longed to find myself a place
Unscathed — but I could not see it.

Seeing people locked in conflict,
I became disenchanted.
But then I discerned here a thorn
— Hard to see —
lodged in the heart.

It's only when pierced by this thorn
That one runs in all directions.
So if that thorn is taken out —
one does not run, and settles down.

Dhamma: Apanṇaka (MN 60)

- Acknowledgement of genuine differences
- Limits of knowledge
- Apanṇaka Sutta teaches reflective method.
- Lays out way of practice for overcoming limits

Dhamma: 4 noble truths (MN 141)

- Rational, experiential approach; medical analogy.
- The student explains in detail the Buddha's first sermon
- Analytical style, example of *vibhaṅga* (compressability). Forerunner of abhidhamma.

Dhamma: Nalanda (SN 47.12)

- Personal connection
- Śāripūtra acknowledges his limits
- Role of inference (*anvaya*)
- Essence of meditation: abandon 5 hindrances, 4 focuses of mindfulness, develop 7 awakening-factors

Sangha: Raṭṭhapāla (MN 82)

- The disciple, a variant of the Buddha's life
- Realistic details
- Social, economic, political context
- Teaching to king

Questions for discussion

- Why am I here?
- What is early Buddhism for me?
- What aspects of my tradition do I think are important?
- What is authentic or inauthentic in the Buddhism I have learned?
- Is early Buddhism better?

Discussion topics

- How does the social and political culture affect our understanding and practice of Dhamma?
- How do the means of learning Dhamma influence our development?
- What can we learn from the traditions?
- How do we relate to a time and place so distant to us as ancient India?