STUDIES IN THE PHENOMENON OF MONASTICISM

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In Buddhism and Christianity

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Preface

One of the noblest contribution of Indian spiritual tradition to the religious practices of the human race in general is monasticism, which entails in itself living alone away from the society and family on very frugal meals and to remain involved or engrossed in the prayers and meditation. I consider monasticism as a kind of by-product of Yogic practices, the roots of which go back probably up to Indus Valley — as the figure of an alleged yogi in Padmāsana (by some identified as Shiva!) shows.

A large part of my youth has been spent in Europe — first as a post-doctoral fellow of German Academic Exchange Service and later as Professor in different universities. While studying at the university of Freiburg, I was regularly attending the lectures on Buddhism by Prof. Ulrich Schneider, who was an erudite scholar of Pali and Buddhist studies. He frequently embellished his lectures with slide-shows in order to give an idea of Buddhist moments and monasteries to the students. Apart from the Buddhist philosophy and ethics, the area which, I liked most, was the way of living of the monks in the Buddhist monasteries and used to compare their way of living and activities with the Jain and Hindu *mutts* following the teachings of Shankaracharya / Ramanujacharya etc. in India.

After coming from Germany, I got busy in my academic

work and other duties at various institutions but the subject of similarity between Buddhism and Christianity always fascinated me and I continued to study on it whenever and whatever came to my notice. I went through the whole *Bible* once again noting the teachings of the Jewish saints. It became quite clear to me that the Old Testament of the *Bible* has nothing to do with Buddhism because the teachings of the Jewish holy fathers incorporated in the Old Testament are meant only for the people of Israel to lead a virtuous life in harmony with each other whereas it has no spiritual content and it is the New Testament which contains a lot of matter which has strong connection with the Buddhism. I am convinced that it is impossible to think of its author or authors without any previous, at least, rudimentary, knowledge of Buddhism and Buddha's teachings.

Therefore, in 2010, when I was serving as Professor and Head of the Kalakosha Division of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, I unexpectedly got an invitation from Prof. Peter de Souza, the then Director of IIAS, Shimla, to join the Institute as National Fellow. I was immensely happy and thought that this was the best opportunity to work on my favourite theme of examining the similarity and relationship between Chrishanity and Buddhism.

I spent two very happy years at Shimla and worked on the subject. During this period I also visited a number of European countries, especially Germany, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia and stayed in Christian monasteries there in order to get a first-hand knowledge of them. But still the subject proved to be too large and too vast to be completed within some degree of satisfaction, at least. A lot was to be procured, read and interpreted which demanded much more time and leisure. However, as the period of my stay could not be extended. I decided to jot down what I could do within that short span of time so that it may serve at least as a sort of introduction to this vast subject which need to be explored and exploited more thoroughly.

I am a senior citizen of 85 years at present with limited capacities of body and mind, but if God permits, I wish to go still deeper into the subject. Till that time let the scholars be content with what I can offer under those circumstances in which I penned them down.

G.C. Tripathi

Indian Ascetic Tradition and the Early Buddhist Monasticism

The word 'monk' is derived from the Greek '*monachos*' which means 'single', 'solitary', hence living alone, an 'eremite' or Eng. "hermit". A '*monasterium'*, therefore, is originally a dwelling for such a single living, a cell occupied and inhabited by one single person. Later it comes to be applied to a cluster of such cells which are built in close vicinity of each other with a place of worship—a church or a Chaitya in the centre or nearby. Under 'monasticism' or 'monachism' we, thus, understand the phenomenon of living away from the society, either as a single or in a group, for spiritual gains or for accruing religious merit, supporting one's life with the barest minimum. At present the word 'monachism' is used in the sense of single living, living alone like a monk, and 'monasticism' in the sense of living in a monastery along with other fellow monks.

Monasticism in India is an outcome - a kind of byproduct - of its age-old ascetic tradition. It may have been deeply associated with the ancient tradition of Yogic practices, for the existence of which also, a hoary antiquity is claimed and the discovery of the bust of a bearded man in a meditative posture from an Indus Valley site, is cited as an evidence thereof. The *Rigveda* speaks of the supernatural powers of the "*Vātaraśanā*[1]" ascetics (*vāta* = wind/breath, *raśanā*=girdle) who could control their breath and subsisted practically on air, with very little

intake of food. Mention of a *Keśin* – an ascetic with matted hair – is also found in the *Rigveda* (X.136) who is said to be a companion of the god Rudra and is capable of drinking poison, a kind of Śaivite hermit, therefore. The great god Śiva himself is depicted as a Yogi, *par excellence*, meditating forever in the fastnesses of the Himalayas and it is a common belief since old times that the existence and the order of the universe depended on the penances of Śiva and the continued austerities of his human followers. Śiva is also termed as *yogīśvara*, the foremost of the yogins. Yoga is an integral part of austerities. Austerities without yogic practices, especially deep meditation or samādhi, do not lead to perfection. The most commonly used word for penance or austerity is *tapas*/*tapasyā* which originally means 'heat' 'energy' or 'spiritual fervour' and refers to accumulating transcendental and supernatural powers through self-mortification.

The Vedic tradition sharply distinguishes between a *Ṛṣi* and a *Muni*. *Ṛṣi* is a sage-poet, composer of hymns, a person of high spiritual development, who can see beyond time and space (i.e. is a '*krāntadarśin*'), one who has perfected his soul through severe austerities by virtue of which he is capable of communicating with gods and to know their mysteries. He can pass the knowledge received from these gods to human beings, and can thus function as an intermediary between the gods and the humans. The hymns of Vedic Saṃhitās (collection) are believed to have been "visualized" by them. The word is, thus, confined in its use for Vedic seers.

The word *muni* is usually derived from the root √*man*=to think, to ponder. Munis are basically 'thinkers' who ponder over the philosophical problems pertaining to humans and the universe and seek solutions for them. They are the interpreters of the sayings of the *Ṛṣi*s and are usually depicted as living in a forest or in an *Āśrama*, as a recluse or a hermit, but not necessarily so, and may or may not be eremites. Their speculations on the mysteries of the world and their mystic explanations and

interpretation of the Vedic ritual is available to us in the texts called *Āraṇyakas*. *Araṇya* means forest and the texts containing philosophical speculations of the forest-dwelling hermits are *āraṇyakas*. These *āraṇyakas* are precursors of the *Upanishads* and provide the fundament on which the magnificent edifice of the *Upanishads* is built. Another expression for a *Muni* is *Vaikhānasa*. They are the ones who live in forests, mostly as singles, observing celibacy and subsisting on the products of the forest. About them the *Mahābhārata* says that they live upon the fruits of the forest, flowers, roots or bulbs of the plants. They are persons of very strong will:

mūlair eke phalair eke puṣpair eke dṛḍhavratāḥ /
vartayanti yathānyāyam vaikhānasamatâśritāḥ //

Many such *munis* had academies in their Āshramas where even princes were sent to learn the scriptures and principles of state administration. Very often the difference between a *Ṛṣi* and a *Muni* is blurred and sometimes the *Munis* are also designated or even addressed as *Ṛṣi*s though they may not have visualised and composed a Vedic hymn.

Those who indulge in severe austerities having given up all pleasures and comforts of life and body are *tapasvins*. Performance of *tapasyā* has the purpose of accumulating spiritual energy. It is believed that pursuit of worldly pleasures leads towards sinful activities and abstinence from them results in purification of the body and soul. Severe austerities accompanied with such abstinence generate spiritual energy which may be utilized for any desired purpose. It may as well lead to spiritual perfection and enlightenment, as in the case of Buddha. It may also annihilate one's previous bad *karmans* and their results as believed by the Jain monks (*nirjarā*). It may endow a person with supernatural powers and capabilities, the powers to let happen or ward off something, to grant favour or to harm somebody, and the like. A *tapasvin* is usually also a *yogin*. Yoga, and especially its highest component *samādhi*,

forms an essential part of Tapasyā. Tapasyā is done usually for personal benefit, for individual and personal gain, which includes attainment of spiritual perfection, but may also have other goals in mind. By virtue of his accumulated spiritual energy, a Tapasvin can force even a divine being to come down, to appear before him in person and to grant his wishes.

A monk is a combination of all three. He combines in himself the traits of a *Ṛṣi*, a *Muni* and also a *Tapasvin*, but in a lesser degree. He is not an extreme *Tapasvin*. We know that Buddha has forbidden this and has advocated the 'middle path' (*madhyamā pratipatti*) which envisages avoiding of both extremes, not too much indulgence in worldly pleasure and also not practicing an excessive degree of self-mortification. So a monk, does not practice hard austerities like a *Tapasvin*, he has no belongings except three robes, a long walking stick (staff) and a bowl, he eats only once in a day in the afternoon, satisfied with whatever he gets and how much he gets in his begging bowl. He avoids sensual pleasures, observes perfect celibacy, is not allowed to visit any musical or dance performances, reads, writes, meditates and – very important – he preaches the doctrine, the path of salvation, to others. He is compassionate, helps the people in distress, especially the ailing and the sick. He is, thus, not individualistic or self-centered like a *Tapasvin*, but is a kind of activist with a social agenda which is to uplift the society morally and spiritually. He has the traits of a *Muni* when he explains the *dhamma* (< dharma = the precepts) to the public in his preachings or in his writings. A perfect monk is also a kind of *Ṛṣi* who possesses spiritual enlightenment.

As is well known, the Buddhist monks are designated as *śramaṇas*. The title of *Mahāśramaṇa* is reserved for Buddha himself. The word śramaṇa is formed from the roof *śram* which means to toil, to exert oneself, to labour. This toil, exertion or labour is not meant to be solely physical labour; it includes mental and spiritual labour as well and, in fact, these two in a much higher degree. For Buddhist monks, at least, physical

labour stands at the end of this list, but not so for the Christian monks for whom it is as important as their daily prayers: '*Ora et labora*' = "pray and work" is their basic doctrine taught by St. Benedict.

Śrama and *tapas* - labour and austerity - these two elements are mentioned again and again in the Vedic literature as the basic sources for creation. Whenever the creator-god Prajāpati wants to create something, the texts of Brāhmaṇas like Śatapatha almost invariably mention that "he toiled and performed austerities" (*aśrāmyat tapo'tapyat*) and out of the *śrānta* and *tepāna* Prajāpati i.e the Prajapati 'who has toiled and has accumulated spiritual energy', something came into existence.

The famous "creation hymn" of the *Rigveda* (X.129), the so-called 'Nāsadīya-sūkta also reports that in the very beginning of creation, when there was neither '*being*' nor '*non-being*', the 'seed' or the 'nucleus' of creation which was covered all around with the great void, gave rise to that indistinct, indescribable "One" by virtue of the force of *tapas*, the spiritual energy:

tucchyenâbhvapihitam yadâsīt
tapasas tan mahinâjāyataikam/ X.129.3

Though the monastic way of living is found in almost all major religions in some form or the other, yet in two of the major world-religions, Buddhism and Christianity, it found its utmost development and contributed a great deal towards forming, sustaining and strengthening these religions. The Jainas in India also have had a strong tradition of monasticism which is still alive and which has contributed a lot towards shaping the social and religious values of Indians: especially the widespread vegetarianism in India along with strong emphasis on *ahimsā* (non-violence) is usually ascribed to them. The Hindu monasticism, like that of what we observe in the *mutts* (the monasteries of the Hindus), is of later origin and has come up in imitation of Buddhism.

The monastic way of life has often been dubbed by some as

"escapism", an act of running away from the responsibilities of life; a sort of weakness which exhibits lack of self-confidence. But it is certainly not so. In fact, it calls for extraordinary strength and courage to be a monk. It is not easy for anybody to shun the comforts of a settled life, the loving care and protection of the family and society and to live in utter penury, taking an extremely frugal meal only once a day, that too earned by hard work or by begging.

It should also not be viewed as a revolt or protest against tradition or an established religious set-up. In the case of Buddhism, many of the indologists have viewed it as a form of protest, a counter movement against the Brahmanic orthodoxy and ritualism. However, the monastic way of life and ritualistic practices were current side by side at all times in India, even in the Vedic age. Monasticism was not invented by Buddha. We know the names of a number of eremites whom Buddha visited and stayed with, before he embarked upon his own meditative practices in the quest of fulfilment. These eremites were Arāla kalāma, Ajita Keśakambalin and Sañjaya, besides the 'Nirgranthas' (now known as 'Jainas').

The Vedic Āraṇyakas, the forest-dwelling eremites, were also followers of the traditional orthodox religion though they shunned ritualistic practices and preached instead philosophical interpretations and explanations of them. All the *Ṛṣi*s of the *Upanishads* remained within the fold of Vedic religion, did not walk out of it and developed great philosophical ideas based on the earlier concepts embedded in the Vedic Saṃhitās. Sage Yājñavalkya is supposed to be the compiler of the Saṃhitā of the White Yajurveda, (a collection of prayers and *mantras* for use in different sacrifices). In the last phase of his life, he becomes a *vānaprasthin* i.e. he goes to live in a forest and spends the rest of his life as an eremite. Bṛhadāraṇyaka *Upanishad* mentions that his second wife Maitreyi also follows him to the forest. Monasticism has been a way of life in ancient India, an important stage in the life of a human being, especially men, although not exclusively.

Neither in India nor in the western world – I mean in Christianity – the monasticism had the aim of re-forming or transforming the existing religious tradition. It was very much a part of it. However, there is no denying the fact that it has often done it unwittingly – especially in India, though in Christianity it has rather strengthened it. It has preserved religion and culture in the times when the political power was weak. During the disintegration of the Roman Empire, monasteries provided islands of tranquillity and offered opportunity for pursuit of intellectual activity. On the other hand, there are instances to show that when these centres of religious culture were destroyed, the practice of a religion among the masses became weak and slowly died out.

Exactly this happened with Buddhism in India. When the Buddhist monastic universities like Nālandā and Vikramashilā, as well as a large number of monasteries in Eastern India especially in Bihar (whose very name means 'Buddhist monastery' and which was the last stronghold of Buddhism!), were destroyed between the 12th and 14th centuries and most of the monks were also put to death, along with them, Buddhism itself became extinct from that part of India. The laity slowly turned to other systems of belief. Less damage, on the other hand, was done to Jainism since during the early medieval age it had a large support base in its laity.

Buddha did not start monasticism in India, as we have seen. He was one of the Parivrājakas, the itinerant or peripetic monks. The only difference that these Buddhist Parivrājakas had from the individual monks, was that they owed allegiance and loyalty to one single Master and one Teaching. During Buddha's times, and even many hundred years thereafter, the monks did not lead a settled life in a monastery. They had to be on move constantly, and were allowed to remain static and live in a monastery only during the four months of the rainy season. Early monasteries were more or less rain-retreats which slowly over the time developed into permanent monasteries.

Common features of all monks are:

1. They opt for a rigorous and more intensive practice of a particular religion or a religious sect of an order. The aim is personal spiritual gain promised by the religion.
2. They possess the bare minimum to support their life.
3. Their entry into the monkhood is usually accomplished by means of an initiation ceremony which is necessary not only for monastic self-consciousness but also for public perception. This ceremony is considered often as a new birth and the initiated gets a new name and a new identity. The caste-affiliations cease to exist even with the Hindu monks. Monks coming from different strata of society form a separate social group of their own. The ordinated Hindu monks previously belonging to upper castes, cast away their sacred thread and are not obliged to perform any religious ritual which was incumbent upon them before they entered into monkhood.
4. Due to this they enjoy a special social status even though they may not interact with the public so frequently.
5. They are dedicated to a strict personal and religious discipline which is normally self-imposed but is also strictly watched and supervised by the head of the monastery who is respected as a spiritual leader.
6. The special status of a monk is marked by his special appearance, donning special clothes or robes ('*habit*'), special tonsure (which may include total shaving of head), special signs or marks (e.g. on the forehead of Hindu monks), a rosary or a cross, carrying of a staff, etc.

Buddha set the yardsticks for an idealistically pious Buddhist – wandering, begging and preaching. As the number of followers grew, however, Ārāmas or Sanghârāmas (community dwellings) were gifted by kings and merchants for the rain-retreats or as permanent residence of the monks. We hear of prominent gifts to the Buddhist monks by kings

like Bimbisāra, and of the Jetavana, the garden bought by the rich merchant Anāthapiṇḍaka as a present for Buddha. The merchant could purchase the said garden only by covering the whole site with coins, which was the price demanded by its original owner. These were the first monasteries of Buddhism.

For a Buddhist, the ideal has always been to be a monk. Although anybody can become a lay-Buddhist who expresses his trust in the *Master*, the *Teaching* or the law and the *Sangha* (ecclesiastical community) i.e. *Buddha*, *Dharma* and *Sangha*, by declaring '*buddham śaraṇam gacchāmi, dharmam śaraṇam gacchāmi* and *sanghaṃ śaraṇam gacchāmi'*, yet the true Buddhist is considered to be a monk, a hermit, a meditating *yogin*. According to Buddhism, only a monk who has purified himself with meditative cum yogic practices and has become spiritually so advanced as fit to be called an *arhata*, a venerable one, is entitled to get *nirvāṇa*. A Buddhist householder may gradually work his way through several lives by practicing *dhamma* to become an *arhata* and only in that stage he may attain the state of *nirvāṇa* as a result of his spiritual perfection.

However, there were reactions against this view in the later development of Buddhism, namely in Mahāyānic sects of northern Buddhism, which developed the concept of *Bodhisattvas*. The Bodhisattvas are those holy souls which have already achieved perfection and may enter into the state of Nirvāṇa any time, but who wilfully give it up and opt not to enter into nirvāṇa till the last creature of this universe has attained it, and to make it possible, they mercifully help and guide everyone to achieve this highest goal of life, much like the various saints of Christian faith. Shiniren (1175-1262 CE) and other Buddhist sects of Japan express absolute faith in Amitābha, the Buddha of love and compassion, and believe that by his grace even a householder may achieve nirvāṇa.

The Buddhist Sangha demonstrates autonomy and democracy. During the time of Buddha, there were 16 *janapadas* or tribal states, which had a democratic system of governance.

A kind of senate or a body of old and experienced persons was elected by the senior members of the tribe in an open gathering which was responsible for taking all important political and social decisions. The ruler, most probably was also elected and was the executive head. Buddha was born as a member of the Śākyagaṇa, the tribe of the Śākya Kṣatriyas settled in the Terai of Nepal and had imbibed these democratic principles of governance. It has been pointed out by all Buddhist scholars that he organised his Sangha according to the democratic pattern and principles, which were followed in the community of the Śākyas. Every monastery had full autonomy in its working and administration. There was no central power to control or supervise it. Buddha never designated any successor and advised his disciples to be their own lamp (*ātmadīpo bhava, ātmaśaraṇo bhava*).

This absence of a central authority like the one which exists in the Roman Catholic Church has also been cited as one of the reasons for the disintegration and gradual weakening of Buddhist monasteries in India and elsewhere. The Buddhist monasteries functioned under an abbot called *Mahāthera* who was elected by the *bhikkhus* (monks) living in the monastery and all the *bhikkhus* were invited at all important discussions and deliberations pertaining to *vinaya* (i.e. conduct rules for monks) and administration.

The Buddhist monkhood emphasised personal poverty and subordination within the community which also meant obedience to the elected abbot. In the early stage of the foundation of Sangha, the *bhikkhus* had to make their robes from rags (the term used for robe is *chīvara* which means rag) discarded by householders and had to sleep under trees. Later, when the Sangha developed and got support from the rich laity, they were granted possession of five items, namely: three pieces of ochre coloured monk's robe including a cord girdle, a staff, an alms bowl, a strainer for removing impurities from drinking water and a razor. Gifts of other articles invariably became the

property of the monastery. No *bhikkhu* was allowed to accept any money from anyone.

When, due to the influence of Brahmanic tantrism, the Buddhist *dhāriṇīs* (prayer verses) assumed the character of *mantras* and were meant to be recited for a number of times each day, a rosary was also granted to the monks. The introduction of rosary among the Christian monks is similarly late and was introduced around 1200 AD in Europe mainly for concentrated utterance of the prayer to Holy Mary. A Christian rosary contains 100 beads divided into 10 sections as against 108 beads of a rosary used by the Hindus and Buddhists alike.

The Buddhists also have 10 commandments. Five of them are general and are applicable to all Buddhists whether monks or lay followers. They are *ahiṃsā* (non- violence, not-killing or injuring any creature), *asteya* (not taking away or stealing the belongings of others; a *bhikkhu* can only take which is explicitly offered to him, and it should be an item which he is allowed to possess), the third is *śauca*, which means honesty on the one hand and purity of mind and body on the other, then comes *satya*, truthful speech and truthful, non-hypocritic behaviour, and at the end a strict *abstinence from alcohol*.

The additional commandments for the monks are:

1. No acceptance of money or precious articles from the donors.
2. Not sleeping on comfortable beds.
3. Not eating at forbidden times, also not more than once in the afternoon.
4. Not visiting the entertainment programmes like the performances of dance, music or drama.
5. Not donning ornaments of any sort, no garland or flowers, no application of scents and fragrant substances.

All these commandments were strictly observed in Buddhist circles. One may notice that observance of celibacy is not mentioned explicitly in case of the monks. But it is a

natural outcome of the way of living of a monk in a monastery.

It is interesting to note that though there is a total prohibition on drinking alcohol and if a monk confesses before the abbot to have consumed even a few drops of it, or is seen drinking it, it is considered to be a serious offence which attracts severe sanction or punishment in form of his having to remain without food for a day or two, or to expiate and atone for it through other observances. Yet there is no such prohibition with regard to eating of meat and if a monk receives some meat in his begging bowl, he is obliged to take it without uttering a word or showing his resentment. He has only to ensure from the householder that the meat is from the an animal which has not been specifically killed for him.

In fact Buddha does not allow his *bhikkhus* to be fastidious or choosy about the food. They simply have to respect and eat the food that they receive without questioning and without discarding it.

The midnoon has been fixed as the time for begging, because by this time the members of a household have already eaten and the *bhikkhu* gets the left-over from the cooked meal. He then has the satisfaction that he has not deprived anyone from his well-earned meal.

The rite of initiation with which a person is accepted as a member of the community of monks is known as "*Upasampadā*". In the early stages of the spread of Buddhism, Buddha himself ordained his disciples who wanted to enter into monkhood. The famous case of ordaining his first five followers at Sarnath, who had previously deserted him when he had given up the rigorous ascetic practices and had embarked upon his 'middle path', is well known and is documented at several places in the Buddhist literature. However, when the number of followers grew immensely, it become impossible for him to arrange such ceremonies. The right of ordaining was then delivered to certain selected, experienced and senior bhikkhus known as *Theras* but the condition was put that this should be done in the presence of at least ten senior *bhikkhus*.

A two-tier system was evolved later. A person seeking admission in a monastery was not ordained right away. He had first to successfully complete his probation period. The novices could be accepted from the age of 15 onwards, whereafter they were put on probation for five years under the tutelage of a senior monk who trained and guided them. This period was known as *parivāsa*. The head of the novices was shaven at the time of their entry and they were given ochre robes. All other rules of the monastery were applied to them although a little leniency was shown for minor transgressions. A proper ordination ceremony, the *upasampadā*, took place at their attaining the age of 20, if they still wanted it and were found fit by the seniors for this purpose.

Since the state of monkhood is an ideal in Buddhism, some families in Srilanka and especially Thailand send their boys to live for a short time in monasteries as novices for learning about their religious culture. After some time they would leave the monastery and dedicate themselves fully to their education and profession.

The initiation into monkhood is, however, reversible. That is to say, a monk can leave the monastery anytime and go back to the worldly life.

The main activity of the monks in the monastery consisted of *meditation*, *prayer* and *study of the scriptures*. Writing commentaries on scriptures or explaining the texts to the monks and novices also formed part of the activities of the senior monks. The Buddhist monks - unlike their Christian counterparts - never specialized in the art of calligraphy and book illustrations. They were satisfied writing on birch barks, starched cotton cloths or scratching letters on palm leaves.

The Christian monks, on the other hand ,developed great specialization in producing writing material i.e. mostly parchment, inventing good quality of ink and pen and, most importantly, in innovating the forms of the characters of the Latin script. They also invented or procured through import inks of different colours and even the ink of gold from India.

Beautiful miniatures were painted and incorporated in the text of the important works especially in the *Bible*.

The main activity of the *bhikkhus* consisted of pondering over the basic teachings of Buddha and interpreting the texts very minutely which often resulted in the formation of new schools or sects of Buddhism.

Because of the religious injunction of observing absolute *ahiṃsā* neither Buddhists nor Jainas could till the land and pursue the activity of agriculture because digging, ploughing, irrigating and other such activities would kill a number of small creatures living on or under the earth. A sizable number of the laity of the Jainas, which had been converted from farmers, took mostly to trade and money-lending.

Manual labour in the Theravada and in the Indian Mahāyāna was seen as a disturbance in the ongoing religious routine of meditation and prayer. It was considered a worldly pursuit of earning livelihood which the monk has already given up and has left behind at the time of entering into monkhood which is meant exclusively for attaining spiritual fulfilment.

It was however not perceived so in many of the Mahāyānic sects developed in China and Japan. Zen sects of both China and Japan made a positive virtue out of manual labour. Zen masters stressed that meditation, prayer and study are not the only source of enlightenment. The same can be attained through manual labour as well, in case it is done precisely, perfectly and with love and devotion. If a monk does not do so, he is an 'unproductive parasite' (Pai-ching') of the society.

Monasticism went to East Asia along with Buddhism, but *without its custom of begging* which was totally foreign to the culture of China and Korea, whereas it was firmly enshrined in Indian tradition. In India not only the monks and Saṃnyāsins belonging to the 'fourth stage' of life, but also the Brahmachārins or students studying in *gurukulas* (academies) sustained themselves from alms. The tradition goes back to Vedic times, and the Gṛhyasūtras (domestic rituals) prescribe

a strict code of conduct to be observed by students going out for begging from the ladies of the homes. As for the East Asia, though one may sometimes observe some Korean or Japanese monks going in a row to receive their food from some generous householder who knows of their coming in advance, yet it is done merely for honouring an age-old custom associated with Buddhism and followed by Buddha himself.

The *rite of confession* in front of the Abbot of the monastery plays an extremely important role in the daily life of a monk. The ceremony is called *Pratimokṣa* and there are sūtras or texts which enlist a number of transgressions which a monk has to deny at a congregation held in the main hall with the words "*na mayā kṛtam*" (= I have not done it). Such confession sessions take place every fortnight on Uposatha days (fullmoon and newmoon). The number of sūtras differ in Pratimokṣa according to sects and may go well over two hundred. The sūtras name the transgressions and are recited collectively. After the recitation of each sūtra, a pause is inserted to allow confession of the transgression of that particular item by any monk. Atonement or punishment is prescribed in the *vinaya* (code of conduct) in accordance with the gravity of the offence. It may simply be muttering of a certain prayer or mantra a number of times, withholding of food from the monk for a day or two or, and for a very grave sin even expulsion.

That the transgressions by the monks of the code of conduct were not rare, is proved by the Kaushāmbi Pillar edict of Ashoka in which he admonishes the monks of a monastery to behave properly without quarrelling with each other, and to follow the conduct rules laid down by Śākyamuni (Buddha), otherwise the king would be compelled to expel the trouble-making monks from the monastery in white garments i.e. after de-robing them.

We may in the end cast a glance on the daily routine of a monk in a Cylonese monastery. As I have said before, the main activity of a monk consists of the chanting of sūtras one

by one so that after a certain time the whole *Suttapiṭaka* is fully covered, further, study of *Vinaya* (the code of conduct of the monks), study of Sūtra texts with commentaries or with explanations from the elders, meditation and seeking of alms.

They get up at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, come to the chaitya hall (chapel), prostrate before the image of Buddha and utter the famous three refuges: '*buddham śaraṇam gacchāmi*' etc. After washing themselves they chant sections from the sūtras and meditate. Then they leave the monastery and make their early morning-round seeking alms for breakfast, in case it is not provided in the monastery. But usually the monastery has arrangement for this. The breakfast is followed by morning chants and a period of instruction in *vinaya*. Main meal is at noon time or past-noon and it is the only one. Nothing is taken in the evening. There is a small period of rest in the afternoon followed by reading of the scriptures, study of allied texts by Buddhist philosophers and, if it is an Upošatha day, taking part in the confessional ceremony. Thereafter evening meditation, followed by taking rest and going to bed at around 10 p.m. Community meetings are held twice a month in the afternoon which all monks are expected to attend. Topics of common interests are the agenda of discussion.

Let me point out that though there are striking similarities in the ideals and lifestyle of the Christian and Buddhist monks yet there are differences in one or two very crucial points, especially in the culture of putting in physical labour. Although a few earlier groups considered prayer itself as a work, it was condemned by St. Augustine in his tract '*Labora Monachorum*' which stresses the necessity of work for monks. The Christian monks took to the activities of agriculture and horticulture and this in a very big way. Most of the best varieties of vegetable and fruits, as well as medicinal herbs and plants growing in Europe today, were either brought by them from elsewhere or nurtured and developed by them. Mat-weaving, carpentry, baking bread, brewing beer and producing wine were their

main activities. Those who knew Latin and the Latin or Greek scripts produced wonderful calligraphic works in form of illustrated manuscripts of the Bible and other writings of the Saints.

The ideals of a Christian monk are almost the same as those of a Buddhist monk: *Poverty*, *Charity*, *Celibacy*, *Humanity* and *Obedience*. Self-mortification in the form of fasting is also quite common, though this along with other forms of penance is met with more prominently in the Eastern Church i.e. in Syria, Greece, Palestine and Turkey where the repetition of the so-called "Prayer of Heart" and various names and attributes of Jesus and especially of Holy Mary play a vital rôle.

From Spiritual Knowledge to the Worldly Knowledge

Development of Buddhist Monasteries into Universities

Since Buddhist Philosophy sees *Avidyā* or, Ignorance, as the cause of all evil and the chief source of the chain of birth and death, every Buddhist monk endeavours to attain as much knowledge as possible in his life.

Buddhist *Avidyā* is not mere lack of information, it is an expression of a particular human condition which results in bondage, bondage to a long chain of births and deaths. To attain "perfect knowledge" *(prajñāpāramitā)* is therefore the main goal of monkhood. In the text of *Milnidapanha,* the Buddhist sage Nāgasena states that "enlightenment *(bodhi)* is the mark of wisdom. When wisdom springs in the heart, it dispels the darkness of ignorance and causes the radiance of knowledge to arise..."

Prajñā (wisdom) is a means *(hetu)* for its realisation through the eightfold path of right *belief*, *right thinking*, *right speech*, *right deeds*, *right livelihood*, *right endeavour*, *right reflection* and *right meditation* and if a monk adheres to these virues, they lead the aspirant to '*ultimate prajñā*' (which is its *phala* or result)*, i.e. prajñā-pāramitā* — the perfect/ supreme wisdom — which is the realisation of ones real and pristine identity which is blissful and is perfectly devoid of all sufferings and greeds.

One who has achieve*d prajñāpāramitā* becomes *Bodhisattva*, a Buddha-to-be, only short of *nirvāṇa*. He uses his perfect knowledge of every object and every phenomenon of the world to help all beings to attain this knowledge and through it to achieve the state of *nirvāṇa*.

Prajñā according to Buddhist texts is the application of mind to the discovery of truth, to the knowledge of the true nature of being and a means to destroy the false views concerning the Self, the worldly objects and characteristics of these objects. The perfection of wisdom consists in realising *śūnyatā* (emptiness) as the basis of all phenomena. *Śūnyatā* is the ultimate and permanent reality of all worldly phenomena. They emerge out of *śūnyatā* and get merged into *śūnyatā*. Realisation of this basis, the primeval source of all phenomena, leads to omniscience which is ascribed to Buddha.

The Buddhist text of *Abhidharmakosha* deals with the educational principles observed in the monasteries which pertain to the different stages of gradually attaining *Prajñā.*

The first stage is to *hea*r the teacher or the master and to learn (*shruta-mayī)*, the second to *reflect* upon the truth taught by the teacher *(chintā-mayī)* and the third *to contemplat*e and meditate upon it to feel it and to imbibe it (*bhāvana-mayī*).

Of these steps of acquiring perfect wisdom, the Buddha lays special stress on the second, that is on *reflection*. A student or monk should take or believe nothing on authority but should reflect himself in order to know the truth. If it does not convince him he should not accept it, because he then cannot proceed further to its third stage. He cannot make it a part of his meditation / contemplation.

The text of *Anguttara Nikāya* records one of the sermons of Buddha which he gives to a spiritual aspirant named *Kalāma.* After expounding his doctrine he makes a general statement saying: "*one should not accept a doctrine because it is well-reported* (i.e. *only if the people talk highly about it*), *or has the sanction of tradition, or was so held and accepted in past, or finds place in a scripture, or seems logical and methodical, or just*

for the sake of showing tolerance towards its followers, or because it suits your purpose, or because it has been propounded by a renowned and respected great master." The only criteria for accepting it should be *your own realisation of its merit*, your own individual realisation and personal conviction !

On this point Buddhism radically differs from the orthodox Brahmanism which attaches great importance to its ancient scriptures because of an excessive amount of Śraddhā (faith) towards the ancient seers (Ṛṣis) and treats them as absolute authority.

Buddhist learning implied spiritual experience and insight, and the focus and stress of diverse subjects of the monastic curriculum was based upon the ultimate aim of overcoming *Avidyā* or Ignorance, which one has about the nature of the worldly objects and worldly happenings, rather than on accumulating fresh and new information.

However with the passing of the time, with the rise of the popular School of Mahāyāna and with the importance given to laity in their educational institutions, other popular subjects had to be included like literature, grammar, etc. But still the monasteries and the monastic universities continued to provide highest stimulation to independent thinking and reflective meditation.

Institutionalization of Monasteries

We have noted that if anyone wanted to become a monk and to enter a monastery, he had to first approach an ordinated monk of considerable seniority as his tutor *(upādhyāya)*. He is accepted by a senior monk after a strict interview in which the candidate is thoroughly questioned about the reasons of joining the monastery. After getting convinced and having judged the candidate's aptitude for a monastic life, he is provisionally taken by the tutor and after watching him closely for a few days, he is presented to the committee of the seniors on the next occasion. If accepted, he gets the designation of *Samanera,*

i.e. a '*Shramana* (monk) in waiting', and spends at least five years with his tutor who teaches him the rules of monastic discipline and also the basic Buddhist texts. This tutor is called "benevolent friend" (*kalyāṇamitra*) and is the guide and spiritual mentor of the novice.

The term for the Samanera attached to 'a tutor is '*a Companion'* or *'Saddha-vihārika'* ('moving about in the company' of so and so). He is to assist his tutor in many ways, help him take bath by fetching water, also to take care of his personal comforts and to accompany him everywhere. This he does as a sort of assistant or attendant to his tutor. The tutor for him is more or less like a father or a guardian who tells his pupil (or the novice) what to cultivate and what to avoid, about what he should be earnest and what he should neglect. Further, what is beneficial for his personal well-being and for his health, what places he should visit and which persons he ought to keep contact with. The tutor should be both mild and strict with the novice, ignore his minor mistakes but admonish him firmly for serious violations of the rules of conduct.

Besides his tutor, the Samanera has a real great teacher, as well, an Ā*chārya* who is supposed to be a man of high learning and noble character, the most learned in the monastery. He is the main teacher for all the monks and novices, teaching the art of meditation and concentration. The disciples under him are known as A*ntevāsins* ('those who live close to him').

The text of *Milindapanha* enumerates the qualities of a teacher as follows:

> "He should be a man of modest, amiable and righteous character, learned in tradition and in scriptures, lovable and worthy of reverence, clever in admonition and in imparting instructions, able to arouse the interest and fantasy of the pupil."

For religious teaching the method of conversation adopted by Buddha was follo**o**wed which consisted of discourses, parables interspersed with similes, analogies drawn from experience

of day-to-day life, very much like we find in the sermons of Christ. A lot of stress was laid on memorizing texts. All explanations of the teacher were oral. Xuan Zang in the early 7th century points towards the sorry state of learning of the monks of Udyān/uḍḍīyāna (Swat Valley, N.W. India) saying that "they can very efficiently recite the Sūtras but have not penetrated into their deeper meaning."

As per the report of a Tibetan monk who visited Nālandā in the 8th century the subjects of study in most of the great *Vihāras* were Logic, Grammar, Literature, Medicine, Fine Arts and Philosophy or Metaphysics. The exact translation of his statement is: ".....In order to vanquish and to help others as well to obtain knowledge through knowledge of ones own self, a good monk is earnestly dedicated to study. Accordingly, the science of grammar, logic and literature are studied in order to vanquish the others (religious adversaries) in disputations and discussion; the science of medicine *(chikitsā)* and arts *(shilpakarma)* for rendering help to others and that of metaphysics *(adhyātma-vidyā)* to acquire knowledge of one's own self."

While most of these subjects were also pursued in Christian monasteries, the exceptional importance attached to the discipline of Logic in the curriculum of a Buddhist monk is noteworthy. Since there was a great opposition to Buddhism in the circles of orthodox Brahmanism and frequent and bitter disputations as well as intellectual discussions, both oral and written, were going on between the proponents of the two groups, a good command of Logic was necessary for the Buddhist scholars. Buddhist works on Logic, composed in Sanskrit, are of very high scholarly order and have contributed immensely towards the development of Indian Logic by giving rise to counter-works produced by Brahmanical logicians. It is also interesting to note that the Buddhist monks did not remain confined to the study of logic, but also pursued Sanskrit grammar and lexicography etc., as well. They produced their own works on grammar simplifying the system of Pāṇinian

grammar and the most celebrated lexicon of Sanskrit language, namely *Amarakosha* (3rd - 4th c.), is also a Buddhist work. They have also produced a number of works of literary beauty which are mostly based on the life of Buddha, i.e. *Buddhacaritam* of Aśvaghoṣa or on his many previous lives (*jātakas*).

The Buddhist works *Mahāvagga* and *Chullavagga* supply details of medical and surgical knowledge known to the monks. The cause, nature, progress and treatment of the diseases are also discussed at great length in the work "*Milindapanha*" which presupposes a good knowledge of medicine and surgery among the monks. In the complex of the monasteries, there used to be a house where sick monks were treated. This was known as "*Ārogya-vihāra*" (= place for regaining health). The remains of such a hospital-cum-monastery have been excavated near Patna (in Bihar) in the middle of the last century and the building has been identified as such with the help of an inscription and a seal containing the legend "seal of the community of the sanatorium-monastery". A sealing from Rajghat near Varanasi again testifies the existence of a hospital at Sarnath. The third such evidence comes from Nāgārjunakoṇḍā in Andhra Pradesh where on the walls of a ruined monastery the words "main hospital" ("*mukhya jvarālaya")* appear.

Buddhist monasteries in India were ideally suited to provide care to old and infirm, to the sick and dying. There was, moreover, a distinct social need for such services. Because of the taboos concerning purity and pollution, Brahmanical groups were neither equipped nor willing to provide services of this sort to the community, though the services of private physicians could have been available to the people.

One of the incidents mentioned in a Sūtra underlines the importance of such medical care in the monasteries.

It is narrated that Buddha once finds a poor monk lying sick in his own filth. He cleans him with his own hands and washes him. Then he exhorts the other monks in the following manner:

> "Monks, apart from you, these fellow monks, who are sick, have no mother, no father, nor their relatives here. As a consequence, fellow monks must attend to one another. A tutor must do it for his co-residential novice pupil, a pupil for his teacher. A teacher for his students and students for his ailing teacher. One who is bereft of the Community (i.e. is not part of the Sangha) and is brought to the monastery, the Community must appoint a monk to take care of him and after determining the state of illness - two or even more attendants should be provided to him."

Such words contained in the Buddhist scriptures and ascribed to Buddha himself must have led the monks to include the study of medicine in their courses of study and to establish homes for the sick and ailing monks. It appears that with the inclusion of such worldly subjects as grammar, logic and medicine, there arose a separate class of monks who were mainly scholars and specialists in their discipline whereas spiritual personalities interested in Nirvāṇa or final liberation were only of secondary importance. We find this happening already in the 1st century CE in Shrīlaṅkā when we *r*ead in the chronicle of the kings that King Bhatikabhaya (30-60 CE) supplied requisites and gave special grants to the medicinal scholars of a monastery. There were two types of monks during this time in Shrīlaṅkā: one *were* called '*granthadhara*' (those who engage themselves with books) and were more secular and the others '*vipassanādhara*' (i.e. those who engage themselves with meditation) and were more religious. Acceptance of the new idea that 'learning is the basis of religion' seems to have given rise to this innovation. However, it was not a regional development, but was valid for the whole history of Buddhist Sangha. It brought monastic learning into a larger framework. Confined no longer to the study of their canon, it came into the general plan and pattern of Indian learning. Since its remote beginnings in the Vedic Schools, this learning had grown from century to century branching off with the growth

of specialisation into various independent disciplines which then slowly became part of Buddhist learning as well.

Texts on most, or almost all, disciplines in ancient India were in Sanskrit and not in Pali, the language of the works of Buddha. The School of "Great Vehicle" (Mahāyāna) also supported the study of Sanskrit and produced all its works in Sanskrit. It was, therefore, the medium of instruction in Buddhist universities as well.

According to the Chinese Traveller *I-tsing*, both monks and laymen, Buddhists and non-Buddhists, could visit the great monasteries which had developed into centres of learning. These monasteries by the 4th-5th century had grown up into the seats of liberal learning, but had not changed their character as monastic establishments even though the students from all over the country were given access to the monastery as day-scholars. This is attested by the travelogue of *Fa-hsien* who came to India in the early 5th century.

Another traveller in the 7th century, i-tsing, reports that there are two types of young boys coming to learn in the monastery: one category is that of white-robed laymen who read chiefly Buddhist scriptures with the intention and hope of becoming, in future, a Buddhist monk. The second category consists of persons who come to learn only secular literature without having any intention to quit the world.

Both these groups have to exist and subsist at their own expenses. But the former are treated more liberally and are sometimes fed by the Sangha and the latter get something to eat only if they work for the monastery.

Some of these great monasteries which had grown into Seminaries of learning developed an organisational and academic structure which is similar to the modern-day universities.

There were at least five of them located in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa and were supported by the contemporary rulers, besides having large land-grants donated over centuries by previous

rulers. Their names in order of importance are: Nālandā, Vikramśilā, Odantapur, Jagaddala and Somapur. Besides these, there are traces of Buddhist universities in Ratnagiri in Orissa and Valabhī in Gujarat. But archaeological excavations are expected to bring many more to fore in some unforeseeable future.

The greatest and the oldest of all universities not connected with any particular sect or religion, was located in Taxila (Takṣaśilā) where the great political economist Kautilya Viṣṇugupta was teaching. It was in its full bloom in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC and the Greeks have lavished very high praise on it.

Nālandā

The most famous of all these universities was Nālandā (Nālandā-Mahāvihāra) and also the one which existed for the longest period of time: i.e. from approximately 440 AD to 1200 CE. It has been vividly described and glorified by two Chinese and one Orient traveller: Xuan Zhang, I-tsing, and Prājñavarman. Nālandā is a small town to-day marked by ruins of its Mahāvihāra complex, situated not too far from Rajagriha, the ancient capital of Magadha Empire. A new institute of Buddhist studies was established here after the Independence of India which has published valuable Buddhist texts and the whole of Buddhist Pali canon in Devanāgarī script. Nālandā was situated on a trade-route coming from East and North towards Rajagrha/Patna. The credit of founding this Mahāvihāra goes to the ruler Kumāra Gupta (the son of the famous ruler Chandragupta) whose period of rule lasted from 415 to 455 CE. He was not a Buddhist, but an orthodox Hindu of Brahmanical faith, however open and generous towards all religions. The Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsian visited India in 402-411 AD, he was also in Bihar for some time, but has not mentioned the Vihāra which means that it did not exist till

then. One of the titles of Kumāra-gupta was *Mahendrāditya* and the Vihāra which he founded in Nālandā was known as *Shakravijaya* (=Indra's victory). Hence the monastery was also known after him, Shakravija-Vihāra.

According to Prājñagupta, the foundation stone was originally laid by this king, but the work could not proceed much. The successors of Kumāra Gupta (Buddhagupta, Tahāgatagupta, Bālāditya, and Vajra etc.) embellished the Vihāra with their own monasteries around the main one in different directions. There were, thus, five monasteries built during the Gupta period, within a time-frame of 150 years.

After Vajra, a king of central India, built a monastery on the North side and a high wall was erected covering all these monasteries with a gate. The whole was, thus, converted into a Mahāvihāra in which the monasteries got united as one aggregate. The seals of the monastery belonging to the Pāla-Period (8-12 c.) underline the corporate corrector of the Vihāra: *"nālandā mahāvihārassa..."*

The Gupta kings, though Brahmanical, had great respect and regard for Buddhism. Bālāditya was trained under Vasubandhu who was a great Mahāyānist and the king Vajra is also described by Xuan Zang as "firm in the faith" of Buddha.

Active patronage and promotion to Nālandā by kings of Gupta dynasty became a rule. *I-tsing* narrates that the subsequent rulers had bestowed around 200 villages to Nālandā and the revenue from these villages was sufficient to support it. It may be surmised that the establishment of Mahāvihāras by the Gupta kings was done not for the purpose of promotion of Buddhism but for the promotion of learning in general, because they were the only learned institutions promoting studies of all sorts including the disciplines of their own branches.

Harshvardhana (606–647 CE) was also a king of staunch Brahmanic faith, but he supported the University in a very generous way.

Nālandā developed into a monastic institution by the

end of the 6th century. Its fame reached across India and it attracted a number of students from China and Korea along with neighbouring countries of Shrilanka, Burma, Siam and Indonesia. About the time when Xuan-Zang was in India, Tibetans also learned about Nālandā and they started coming to it for higher learning which was of University grade. Nālandā had to cope with rush for admission to its various schools of study. To have undergone a course here was a matter of prestige and many, according to Chinese sources, usurped the name of Nālandā for their benefit.

Hence registration and admission was tightened up. It was made conditional on success in a number of intellectual tests, thus described by Xuan-Zang. "If men of other quarters desire to enter and take part in discussions (classes of scholars), the keeper of the gate (*men-chi*) proposes some hard questions. Many are unable to answer and retire. One must have studied deeply both the old and new books (i.e. of both the Buddhist schools) in order to get admission. Those students therefore, who come here as strangers have to show their ability by hard discussions, those who fail compared to those who succeed, are seven or eight to ten."

It does not appear that any fixed period of residence was prescribed. It was determined perhaps by the time taken by the learner to complete his study on the subject selected. The conferment of a *degree* or *diploma* at the end of the course does not appear to have been the custom of the university. Perhaps a certificate - as was in vogue up to 19th and even 20th centuries - was sufficient to certify the credentials of a student.

Xuan Zhang studied *Yogāchāra philosophy* with his guru Shīlabhadra for six years and *I-tsing* for ten. Both had already a sound grounding in philosophy before they joined, which means that the university was not meant for freshers. It was an advanced centre of learning which honed the academic skills of the brilliant students to the maximum.

Another Chinese monk, *Huui-li*, describes in his memoirs

the courses offered at Nālandā in the following manner: "... the priests (monks) belonging to the convent and strangers who come from outside to join it... all study the philosophy of Great Vehicle (*mahāyāna*) and also the works of the eighteen sects of the Small Vehicle (*hīnayāna*). Studies are not confined to that, even the Brahmanical texts like the Vedas are studied. Besides this they study logic (*hetuvidyā*), grammar (*śabdavidyā*), medicine (*chikitsā*), the works on Tantra and systems of Indian philosophy like Śāṃkhya and many other subjects like literature, political administration and worldly behaviour (*nīti*)."

But Buddhist philosophy was really the forté of Nālandā learning. A detailed history of Nālandā is also simultaneously the history of the Great School (Mahāyāna) of Buddhism. Its subtlest teachings have taken birth here and have emerged out of discussions, dissentions, disputations and interactions of scholars among themselves. Xuan Zhang reports: "the day is not sufficient for asking and answering profound questions. From morning till night they engage in discussions, the older and the young mutually help each other. Those who cannot discuss questions out of Buddhist texts are not respected and get ignored. Learned men from different cities who desire to become quickly renowned in discussion, come here in multitude to settle their doubts and then the fame of their wisdom spreads far and wide..."

The routine of daily life at Nālandā was mainly divided between two engagements – study and religious rites. Time was regulated by water clocks (clepsydra). Boys were appointed to announce the hours with the help of gongs and they were paid by the kings. There was, however, no congregational worship. It was held in different halls. I-tsing reports: "... the number of monks in Nālandā is immense and exceeds three thousand. It is difficult for so many to assemble together. There are eight halls and three hundred apartments in this monastery. The worship can take place only separately and individually as it suits each member. As far the general service, a priest is sent out every

day to go round from place to place chanting hymns preceded by monastic lay-servants and children bearing incense and flowers. The priest goes from hall to hall and in each he chants his service -- three or four verses in high tone... So far as the individual meditative practice is concerned, each one does it mornings and evenings in his own cell."

Extensive archaeological excavations have been carried out at Nālandā which have brought to light a host of interesting information about the university and its structure. The library building, according to the Chinese travellers, was a four storeyed structure containing more than a million books. It exists even today in a ruined form. King Devapāla of Sumātrā (810-850) had given a grant of the revenue of five villages for making copies of the manuscripts. At least five manuscripts copied at Nālandā still exists in Nepal and elsewhere which include *Prajñāpāramitā and Arthaviniśchayasūtra* .

On the northern end of the campus was a grand staircase leading to the administrative office on the first floor. Rooms were smaller and without any beds which shows that they were not meant for students. The cells of the students of Nālandā were more spacious than in other monasteries, the beds more wide and mostly with a small chamber for keeping manuscripts and any such articles. Lighting arrangements could not be traced. Bathrooms were not provided. There were ten great ponds within the monastery in which the students and the monks could take bath. A community kitchen could also not be located. It is also possible that everybody made his own arrangement of food, i.e. he cooked his food in his own cell. It is also possible that the food for a certain block of students was cooked in a kitchen and then was brought to the students in their cells. A small water tank and a platform for washing clothes has been provided in every room.

Nālandā was destroyed in the winter of 1198 C.E. by the Muslim invaders led by Bakhteyar Khilji and it is reported in the Muslim chronicles that the invaders used hundreds and

thousands of manuscripts as fuel to warm the water for their bath.

Vikramashilā and Odantapur met the same fate very soon thereafter.

A Tibetan monk with the Sanskrit name *Dharmasvāmī,* knowing nothing of the fate of Nālandā came to seek admission to the university in 1234 C.E., but alas, too late! However, he could somehow complete his studies of Sanskrit grammar, half of it sitting at the feet of a nonagenarian teacher Rahula Shrībhadra in a ruined corner of Nālandā, and the other half in another dilapidated temple when both of them had to flee from Nālandā - the student carrying his guru on his back - at the second raid of invaders on Nālandā. His personal accounts of Nālandā have been used by the ancient Tibetan scholar Tārānāth in his "History of Buddhism". Dharmasvamī had seen the ruins of 80 Vihāras damaged by "Turushkas" in the campus of Nālandā and many more beyond it. Seven great and lofty pinnacles (*shikharas*) in the centre and fourteen out to the north could still be seen damaged by Muslim raids.

The Mahāvihāra of Odantapur was situated not too far away (10 km) from Nālandā. It was a donation by Gopal (660-705 CE), the founder of Pāla dynasty of Eastern India and was established in the last part of the 7th or the early part of the 8th century.

The first Tibetan monastery at San-Yas was built on its model in 749 C.E. Vikramashilā is said to have been located in the easternmost part of the Magadha (Bihar) on the lower course of Gaṅgā. Its foundation is ascribed to king Dharmapāla (765-829 CE.). Both Odantapur and Vikramaśilā were great centres of Vajrayāna Buddhism and the scholars of these two Mahāvihāras have contributed substantially to the spread of Tantric Buddhism in Tibet.

The Life and Activities in a Buddhist Monastery

Monasteries and monastic life have become a part of Buddhism in the course of its development, just as it has been in the case of Christianity. Buddha was a mendicant i.e. a wandering preacher. He went from place to place teaching his *dhamma* to whosoever was willing to listen to him, and it seems, that there were many. Only during the time of the four months of Indian monsoon when it rains heavily, making the travel difficult, temporary shelters were sought by Buddha and his followers for a short stay. The travels were resumed after the rainy season was over. Though the teachings of Buddha impressed a number of rich people and even kings who donated rain shelters to Buddha and his fellow monks, yet we do not hear of any permanent structure of the sort of a monastery during Buddha's time. In fact the ancient Buddhist texts quoting the views of Buddha regarding the lifestyle and conduct of a monk refer to the following 13 precepts for a wandering monk:

1. to live in a forest as far as possible.
2. to reside under the shade of a dense tree.
3. to live in a cemetery.
4. to live away from settlement under the open sky in fresh air.
5. to sleep at night wherever he may be at that time.
6. to sleep in sitting posture if required.

7. to wear robes made of rags, collected from the heaps of discarded old cloths.
8. not to possess more than three pieces of the robe at a time.
9. to live on food obtained from begging.
10. to beg with a bowl and not to collect in a day more than what a bowl can contain.
11. to beg from door to door, not collecting the entire food from one home.
12. to eat only once a day in one sitting.
13. to refuse food in access of requirement or regulations.

It is clear from the above–noted precepts that they are concerned with a kind of *pre-monastic* life and not the way of life that the monks usually lead in a monastery.

Ascetic Life

There were quite a few followers of Buddha who followed the above precepts and did not like to live in a community but preferred to live alone as *eremites* or hermits in a forest or in a deserted structure, or in a cave, and subsisted on the produce of the forest —fruits, roots and flowers, or by begging, if living near a town. They were followers of the more ancient, pre-Buddhist ascetic tradition of India. In a very popular Buddhist text called *Milindapanha* which contains questions of an Indo-Greek king Menander on various aspects of Buddhism and the answers to them by the monk Nāgasena. Nāgasena's verses are also found in the texts praising the practice of ascetic life as superior to the life in a monastery but the monk adds that a person who does not find peace living and wandering alone, may live in the community of the likeminded persons in a monastery.

The presence of such monks near *Rājgriha* practising severe austerities is attested by the memoirs of the Chinese traveller Xuan Zhang in the early 7th century. They did not accept any invitation for food anywhere and did not accept any gifts

from anyone, and a few of them even ended their lives sitting perpetually in meditation.

Over the years, however, monasteries came into existence, perhaps already during the lifetime of Buddha, because the rules of monastic discipline (*vinaya*) are said to have been framed by Buddha himself. It is, however, beyond doubt that though Buddha did frame the basic rules of Vinaya, yet the majority of the Vinaya-rules must have come into existence by and by with the experience of community, living in a monastery.

The Chinese traveller I-tsing who visited India in the 8th century and stayed in our country for ten years has left a vivid account of contemporary Buddhist institutions for us. According to him, if a person wanted to enter into a monastery as a monk, he first had to get into contact with a senior monk who was to be of at least ten years of standing as a monk, and to request the monk to accept him as a novice under him. The monk functions as the tutor for the newcomer who is called a companion, *a saddha-vihārin* (moving together) to the monk. The term for tutor *is upādhyāya* and there is a strong and permanent bond between the tutor and the aspirant. The aspirant has to look after the physical comforts and necessities of his tutor and to accompany him everywhere he goes as an attendant. In lieu of this, the tutor has to teach his companion the rules of conduct of a monk, to correct him if he makes a mistake and to help him achieve his spiritual development. He is the local guardian of the young entrant till he receives monkhood.

In the very beginning of the acceptance of the young boy as an aspirant for the monkhood, the tutor tells him to refrain from the following eleven actions:

1. to touch fire
2. to eat too much
3. to sleep without garment
4. to injure any living being
5. to uproot growing sprouts or plants

6. to throw filth (ease himself) upon green grass
7. to climb high trees
8. to touch jewels and gold
9. to eat remnants of the food of someone else
10. to dig the ground
11. to refuse the offered food

In addition to the above eleven, the twelfth instruction is 'to keenly observe the behaviour of the seniors', 'learn to distinguish between good and bad' and 'to follow strictly the instructions of his tutor'.

The boy is observed closely for ten days by the Upādhyāya and if he is satisfied with the nature and the conduct of the boy, he arranges for him an upper garment *(saṅkakṣikā)* and a lower garment *(nivasana)* and introduces him to the Sangha (community). A committee consisting of more than ten senior monks examine his suitability. These senior members of the Sangha ask the boy some important questions and, when satisfied, they give their consent for his provisional admission. The boy is made to utter the three refuges*:* '*buddham saranam gacchāmi, dhammam saranam gacchāmi, sangham saranam gacchāmi'* (I take refuge in Buddha, his Teachings and in the Community). The aspirant is then accepted as a novice, is called *samanera,* a junior monk; and is placed under the custody of a teacher-monk (Āchārya) for the study of Buddhist texts and to learn the practice of meditation, etc. Both Upādhyāya and Āchārya are now responsible for the spiritual development of the boy.

The Āchārya, thereupon, administers the five cardinal vow*s (pañcha-shīla)* on him which are incumbent upon all the Buddhist laymen and monks:

1. not to take the life of any creature (*ahiṃsā*).
2. not to take what is not given (= not stealing*, aparigraha*).
3. no sexual misconduct (=observing celibacy*, brahmacharya*).
4. not to tell any lies (*satya*).
5. not to drink alcohol (*amādya*).

There are another five *vo*ws which are valid only for monks:

6. not eating in the afternoon, and certainly not after sunset.
7. not going to any public performance of stage plays, dance and music.
8. not adorning oneself with garlands or using perfumes, etc.
9. not receiving any gold, silver or money from anybody.
10. not using any high and comfortable beds for sleeping.

This first provisional admission into the monastery is called *pabbajjā* (*Sans. pravrajyā)* which literally means "going away" from home or the world, 'homelessness'.

There are certain types of persons who were excluded from admission into monkhood from the very beginning. These are:

a. officers serving under the kings
b. boys whose parents have not given consent
c. physically and mentally handicapped
d. person suffering from incurable or serious diseases
e. slaves
f. debtors
g. jail breakers
h. scourged offenders
i. declared thieves
j. murderers

In the Buddhist text, *milindapanha,* the senior monk Nāgasena explains to the Greek king Menander: "*the Śangha is not open to all and sundry. Some want to leave the world in terror, some harassed by the tyranny of kings, some to be saved from being robbed, some are troubled by their moneylenders and some want to have an easy livelihood. Their motivation coming to a monastery is therefore to be thoroughly checked.*"

The actual initiation ceremony of a Samanera takes place usually after five years of probation, or earlier, if it pertains to a *bhikkhu* of older age. It takes place in the presence of all the

senior monks of the monastery including the Mahāthera and is called *Upasampadā.* It is a small ritualistic ceremony followed by the newly initiated monk, touching the feet of all present senior monks to receive their blessings. He receives three new pieces (*tri-chīvara*) of monk's robe and a begging bowl, which he carries in front of everyone who blesses him with the words "may the bowl be auspicious". The third piece of the robe received at the initiation ceremony is a covering for the upper body which is tied at the waist, wrapped around the legs and drawn from the back over the hips to the left shoulder and allowed to fall down on the back so that the right hand is free, may also be taken *o*ver the right shoulder and allowed to fall in front. This is the main garment of a monk.

The robe of a monk could be made of cotton, silk, wool, linen or jute (hemp). The monastery usually receives these materials from various donors. They are then coloured in the monastery with red chalk powder (Gairika; of ochre colour) or turmeric, etc. The size, colour and the way of wearin*g chīvara* differed from school to school, according to the reports of Chinese pilgrims.

The ten *mahāśīlas* (commandments) are again read out to him by the administrative officer (*karmācharya*) and he is asked to follow them very strictly because from now on, his infringements will attract severe penitence.

The Buddhist Sangha has originally been anti-hierarchical. With the growth of the Sangha, some positions of seniority were created for the sake of organisation. There were positions like *mahāthera* (abbot), *thera* (senior monks), *madhya* (midseniors) and *navaka* (newly admitted).

The Mahāthera is the spiritual head of the entire monastic unit. He is not only the chief priest but also the main supervisor of all the activities of the monastery. He is the one who assigns various duties to the *theras*, like recitation of *pratimokṣa*, the sentences to absolve a monk from a fault, guilt or sin; taking notes after deliberations on certain points of dispute or for

delivering discourses at evening congregations, etc. In his absence, the second seniormost monk discharges his duties. Since the Mahāthera is usually an old monk, he is allowed to use *a palanquin* when he goes out on visits to other monasteries.

The monks who have passed at least ten rain-retreats (varṣâvāsa) are called *thera* and only they are eligible to become an Upādhyāya. An ā*charya* is a learned scholar who has profound knowledge of all the Buddhist texts and the Buddhist philosophy. He is the one who imparts the teaching of Buddhist precepts to the newly admitted monks and outside students visiting the monastery. He is exempted from all sorts of physical work, from serving under the Mahāthera, and is allotted a bigger place of residence. He usually does not preach or give daily sermons which is the duty of the *theras* or the Mahāthera.

Monastic Routine

Three important texts of Buddhism deal with the daily routine of a Buddhist monk. We can reconstruct the daily activities of the monks on the basis of these.

Daily life to a large part was regulated by means of sundials (*velācakras)* and water clocks. From the description of Chinese travellers we know that the total duration of the day and night was divided into eight sections *(prahara)* of three hours each, and after each section, four beats of a drum and two serenades of conch-shell were sounded, which were followed by additional beats as per the section of the day (1 to 8).

Monks got up early, took care of their personal cleanliness, then met in the congregational hall for offering a collective prayer to Buddha. They paid respect to Buddha also by circumambulating the *stūpa (*originally a relic-shrine) and worshipping his image. Thereafter they clean the monastery and attend upon their elders and teachers for their personal requirements. According to the description of the Chinese monk, I-tsing, small morning walk was also a part of the daily

routine of the monks. The rest of the time, till the hour of begging, is utilised for learning the scriptures and uttering the prayers.

They set out on their begging-round shortly before the noon-time. Meals are to be taken shortly after mid-day. No breakfast is allowed prior to that. After getting over the initial drowsiness due to meals, the monks sit down separately at secluded places in or outside the monastery for meditation. Late afternoon and evening twilight is spent in the worship of images, Chaityas and Stūpas with chanting of hymns. Worship mainly consists in the circumambulation of the shrines thrice, offering of flowers, lamps and incense. It is followed by recitation of Buddhist Sūtras by some senior monk from a manuscript in an assembly in which all the monks of the monastery are present.

The time from then onward to the point of going to bed is utilised for personal learning, prayer and meditation. The second and the third sections of the night are meant for taking rest while they are supposed to get up between 3 and 4 o'clock during the last part of the night.

This regular routine has certain variations as per the traditions of individual monasteries. Within the same monastery also, the routine changes on the two fasting days of the months, or when monks are involved in such activities as preparing, washing and dying their robes or repairing, renovating, or cleaning the *vihara,* also while working in the gardens.

Though procuring of his midday meal by begging was the usual practice of a monk prescribed, and himself practised by Buddha, yet there were occasions when Buddhist monks were invited for lunch by rich members of their community. Except fish and meat, no restrictions were placed on the items which the *bhikkhus* could take. Bhikkhus are also not allowed to refuse any item which they receive in their bowl. However, the Buddhist texts are replete with injunctions for moderate eating.

As Buddha puts it: "A monk takes food with reflection and judgement, not for sport, not for indulgence, not for personal charm, not for beautifying, but just enough for the support of his life, for the upkeep of the body, for remaining unharmed..."

Another text (Mahāvastu, 111, 38) states that "though his stomach be empty, he should eat sparingly without being greedy and without having the desire to relish the food."

The statement of Buddha in the *Ratnamegha-Sūtra* (a sermon by Buddha) is also quite revealing in this context: "He eats in order not to become too emaciated and not too stout. Too emaciated he fails in health, too stout he becomes lazy and sloth. Therefore while partaking of the food; he must have health in view."

With the passing of time due to generous land-grants of the munificent kings and donors, the monasteries became rich and received a large amount of grain from their tenants who cultivated their land. Such monasteries established their own kitchens and the monks had not to go out begging for their food. This was the case in such great Mahāvihāras (great monasteries) like Nālandā and Vikramśilā which developed into full-fledged universities.

Two compulsory fasting days per month were incorporated in the daily routine of the monks. They were the full-moon and the new-moon days of the lunar month. These fasting days are called *Uposatha* and play a very important rôle in the religious life of the monks. In the afternoon all the monks of the monastery are called together to a congregation where the rules of discipline preached by Buddha are recited by a senior monk. They are also exhorted to follow strictly the eight-fold path enunciated by Buddha for their spiritual elevation. This path consists of: *right belief, right thinking, right speech, right action, right way of living, right effort, right recollection and right meditation.*

On this occasion, the instructions to the monks contained in *pratimokṣa s*ection are recited and every monk is called upon to confess any breaches which he might have committed.

Grave or minor punishments are prescribed accordingly. Most of these instructions are concerned with the way of life and the conduct of the monk and are to be followed as guiding principles. Others are in the form of commandments and their breach may lead to the expulsion of the monk from the monastery.

In the later period the ceremony of the *Uposatha* day emerges as a colourful festival, with monks worshipping and paying homage to the images of their patron-saints. These patrons were the direct disciples of Buddha who had memorised the various sermons of Buddha and recited them later, to be recorded (Sāriputra, Maudgalāyan, Maitrāyani putra and Upāli etc.). Further, Ānanda, Buddha's most favourite disciple, is worshipped by the nuns because he persuaded Buddha to give his consent to accept women as nuns in his order. Rāhul, the son of Buddha who was initiated into monkhood as a young boy, is worshipped by the young Samaneras.

Another very important occasion for Buddhist monks was the time when they passed four months at one single place as their rain-retreat, called *varṣâvāsa.* Also in the times when the monks lived well-settled in a monastery the custom of rain-retreat was strictly observed. During this period the monks gave discourses on various themes connected with the teachings of Buddha, explained the texts to the laity, removed their religious doubts and solved their personal problems. This was the time when the lay-followers visited the monastery and there was a close interaction between the monks and the laity. The lay followers vied with each other to donate cloths, food-articles and other necessary items to the monks and the monastery.

The text of *Dīghanikaya*, however, prohibits the monastery to accept cooked food, raw-meat, sheep, goats, fowls, swine, elephants, cattle and horses. But food-grains, nuts and fruits, as well as articles useful for the monks like small woollen carpets, shoes, wooden items like bowls, laddle, light furniture as also metallic implements like needles, razors, axes, chisels, hammers,

etc. can be gifted to the monastery. Earthen vessels for storage of water were also a favourite items of gift. Readymade robes or clothes are not given, only unstitched cloth is accepted.

The rainy season was supposed to last for 120 days and only in an exceptional case, a monk was allowed to leave the monastery maximum for forty days. The last day of the rainy season was celebrated in a very big way and is known a*s Pāvarana,* which literally means "covering or clothing" (the monks with robes). On the pre-pāvarana day a senior monk, usually from another monastery, was invited in the evening to recite a Buddhist Sūtra to an assembly of Buddhist monks and laities and to give a discourse on it. It was also a kind of assembly for confession and remission (*pratimokṣa*) in which the monks asked their fellow monks to point out and to forgive any offences or misconduct which they might have unknowingly committed towards each other during the past four months.

The next morning is spent going round the town and worshipping Chaityas (Buddhist shrines) with flowers and incense. They return by noon, take food and rest. In the afternoon a special ritual is observed which is called *Kaṭhina.* It is minutely described in the travelogue of I-tsing. According to him this is the day on which the rich merchants of the lay community distribute new robes to the monks which they shall be using for one year. Long rolls of cloth are donated to the monastery for the use of the monks after receiving the permission of the Mahāthera. Cutting into pieces and stitching of the robes take place in the monastery, followed by washing, dying and drying the same, for which three days are required. The function brings the laity and monks together. The *bhikkhus* receive the articles which they require for the whole year and reciprocate the generosity of the laity by giving them spiritual discourses on the religion and philosophy of Buddha and explain them the conduct-rules meant for the members of the laity.

When the monasteries grew large due to increasing

influx of monks and also became rich due to munificent and generous grants of the rulers, necessity arose for their proper administration. An administrative officer titled *Karmādāna (or Karmāchārya)* was appointed to look after the secular affairs of the monastery who was usually paid by the local ruler or the founder of the monastery. He also supervised the timely commencement of various services and also preparation of food for the daily consumption of the monks and for congregational feasts. He had to work under the instructions of the Mahāthera. In some monasteries, a few senior monks were entrusted with different duties like looking after the lodgings and dormitories of the monks, or to take care of the guests. The one who was to keep record of the store was called *Bhāṇḍāgarika* and the one who was entitled to receive gifts of all sorts from the laity was *Pratigrāhaka*.

According to the texts of *Mahāvagga* and Cullavagga, the officer should be free from lust, desire, hatred, delusion and fear. He should be fair and impartial and should have the ability to distinguish between what is proper and what is improper.

By examining some ancient inscriptions found in old Buddhist Vihāras of early centuries of our era (e.g. Sanchi 2nd-1st BCE) which record votive donations, the name of the Vihāra occurs in conjunction with the Pāli word *goṭhi* which has the sense of a "committee". Now since a donation to the Vihāra is unlikely to come from the Committee of the same Vihāra and the Vihāras were founded usually by rich merchants or rulers, it is inferred that there was most probably a Committee or a Trust sort of body which looked after the external affairs of the monastery including the proper supply of food and clothing of the monks, whereas the management of internal administration as well as of the spiritual matters were taken care of by the monastery itself. Same seems to be the case with the great monastery of Nālandā which developed into a university. Since it was founded by rulers of the Gupta dynasty, they or their successors must have had some say in its external

administration and the founder families in the same way in the Vihāras established by them.

The Community or the Sangha of the Buddhists appears from the very beginning to have been an organisation governed by certain rules which were intended to make the members properly regulate their course of action and behaviour in order to make satisfactory progress on their spiritual journey. These are enumerated, listed and explained in the texts known as *vinaya* which means discipline. An important part of *vinaya* is *patimokkha* (Sans. *pratimokṣa*) which means 'to get relieved of the possible offence done intentionally or unintentionally', an act which directly violates the rule or goes against the spirit of the rule.

Every Buddhist monastery was an independent unit not bound to any overarching Pan-Indian organisation but only to the teachings and instructions of Buddha contained in the *vinaya*. All transactions pertaining to the community life in a monastery were done in a joint meeting of all monks called *Sanghakamma.*

Buddha's last instructions quasi on his deathbed given to his closest disciple Ānanda speaks against the idea of individual leadership or personal guidance in the future policy of Sangha.

With the increase in the membership of the Sangha and of the population of monks in a monastery, it became difficult to call all of them for deliberations. A body of twenty and upward monks was then allowed to be formed whose members were elected by the entire body of the monks in a monastery and this Committee was deemed to be competent to take decisions in the interest of the monastery. The Committee was presided by the senior-most bhikkhu (*Sangha-sthavira)* of the monastery.

However by the 2nd-3rd centuries, we find that this *Sangha-sthavira* becomes very important and more rights are ceded to him. It is he who appoints competent members of the assembly to carry out various duties, like recitation of *patimokkha* and delivering discourses at the *Uposatha (*fasting) ceremony.

The functions of the Assembly include the ordination of new monks, the holding of fortnightly discourses on *Uposatha* days (on New- and Full-moon days), proper recitation and observation of *Patimokkha* rules, giving assent to gifts received during the *Prāvaraṇa* (covering with cloth), arranging celebrations, summoning and questioning the guilty *bhikkhu*, yearly assignments of rooms, arrangement of the affairs of a deceased monk, distribution of his property, etc.

His main function is, however, supervising and managing the economic affairs of the monastery, such as clothings, meals, articles of worship, construction, cultivation of donated land through labourers or tenants, preservation of gardens, etc. Some of these functions may also be carried out by its external Committee or the Trust as well, if there is one.

Monastic Etiquette

A monk cannot behave himself in the way ordinary people do, or can afford to do. He is a spiritual person. Therefore, a behaviour full of dignity and humility is expected of him. There is a special section in the book of *Pratimokṣa-sūtra* which contains rules of conduct for a monk. These are more or less by way of friendly suggestions and advices. Their violation does not attract any punishment but it definitely 'lowers' the estimation of the *Bhikkhu* in the eyes of his fellow monks and in the society. The text of *Visuddhi-magg*a ('Path of purification') ordains: "A bhikkhu is to be respectful, deferential, possessed of conscience and shame, and should wear his inner and outer robes properly. His manners should inspire confidence. Whether moving forward or backward, looking ahead or aside, bending or stretching, his eyes are downcast, he never stares at someone, never looks straight into the eyes of the person he is talking to, has good demeanour, is restrained, keeps his sense-organs *(Jñānêndriyas)* and organs of action (*karmêndriyas*) under control, knows the right measure of eating, is committed to wakefulness, wants little, always content with what he has, is

strenuous, a careful observer of good behaviour of others, ready to learn, and highly respectful towards his teachers and elders. He addresses his elders *as Ārya* (the noble one), or a*s Bhadanta* (fortunate one, blissful one) or as *Bhagavān* (the benevolent one) and they respond towards their juniors addressing them as *Āyuṣman (*one who has long to live), an address which also contains a kind of blessing."

The juniors were enjoined to show respect towards their seniors greeting them with the word *vande* ('I bow to y*ou')* and the seniors accepted the salute with the word: '*ārogyam astu*' (may you remain healthy !) by raising their right hand and showing the palm towards them. While bowing to a highly respected person like his own Guru or Mahāthera who is sitting on the ground or on a chair, the monk should first adjust his dress properly, tie it up tightly and take care that while bowing to the Guru or while his forehead touches the ground, no part of his body is visible which is not meant to be exposed.

There were also rules of formal greetings und showing respect towards the visiting monks to a monastery which varied according to the rank of the visitor and his position in the Community.

If the visitor was a monk from another monastery, his bowl, staff and habit, etc. were taken and kept aside. He was offered water and liquid food, asked to take rest. Thereafter, a bath and serving of food etc. followed. He was bidden farewell after a few days or accepted as a member of the Community, if he wanted to become a part of it.

Common visitors, not belonging to order and lay-Buddhists, etc. were received for a shortwhile; according to Fa-hsien for three days, and according to I-tsing for five days at a time.

Certain injunctions regulated the daily life and conduct of a *bhikkhu*, as for example, rules regarding his personal hygiene, his appearance, his way of talking, preaching, as well as how to approach a layperson for alms, his mode of eating, washing of

bowls and placing of it at an appropriate place. All such rules are listed in the *Patikokkha* and are read out every fortnight to the common assembly of monks on the Uposatha days.

While going to collect the alms, the rules demand that he stand in front of the house at a place where he could be seen from inside, showing his bowl but not uttering a word, totally silent. After waiting for some time he should move on silently.

If the food is given, he is not supposed to scorn or reject it, if it is some article that he does not like or eat, he is not supposed to annoy the donor by his persistent request for something special. After getting the alms, he is not to utter any words of gratitude or blessings. Looking kindly and friendly towards the donor, he should move further and whether he gets something or not at a house, he should neither be enraged nor feel dejected but keep the same frame of mental indifference and equanimity. Proper restraint and decorum was essential if *bhikkhus* were invited for meals in laitys' homes. Vegetables were to be taken in proper proportion with rice and made up into round morsels of moderate size. The mouth was not to be opened till the morsel was brought close. It was to be taken without stuffing the cheeks, shaking the hands, scattering the lumps, putting out the tongue, smacking the lips, making sound, licking the fingers, hands or even the bowls.

The school of Mahāyāna enjoins that every monk after taking food should wash his bowl and other articles properly and keep them at the designated place.

The way and method of preaching the *dhamma* is also laid down. While speaking to the laymen, the preacher should not have any staff, weapon or knife in hand, no covering on head should be there, no garland around the neck, no shoes on his feet. Seated on a low seat he cannot preach the *dhamma* to persons sitting on a higher seat, nor to persons lying or standing nearby. Also not to a person walking on his side while travelling. The teaching is to be taken seriously and not casually.

These rules are obviously intended to keep up the dignity of the preacher, to avoid the awkwardness of situation and the ineffectiveness of the preaching itself. The aforesaid rules of restraint, if practised properly, present the monk as a gracious, firm, reverent, modest and calm person.

Final Rites of a Monk

The cremation has been and is even today the usual and customary way of disposing the dead in India. Buddhism did not invent any new method.

The body of a dead monk was washed, cleaned and smeared with scented oil, then wrapped in white cloth and consumed to ashes on a pile of firewood during which the 'Sūtra of impermanence' is recited by a monk-priest. On the other day, bones of the body are collected, put in an earthen jar with some gold-leaves, jewels, pearls and flowers and the mouth of the jar is covered with an inverted lid.

Such jars were then kept in a shrine in a row or kept in small Stūpas built especially for this purpose. Large Stūpas were erected for very important monks which received worship from the laity and the monks alike.

There is mention of a practice which enjoins that if a layman bequeathed his property through a will to a monk, or if a monk was attending upon and serving an old and ailing layman, then in the case of his death and under the circumstances that he had no heirs, the monastery of the monk became heir of the property. Out of this property half of the wealth remained with the monastery for general use and the other half was sold and its income was evenly distributed among all monks.

Tracing the Roots of Christian Monasticism

Christian Monasticism has been defined as: "*Living for God in pursuit of the perfection of Self in the community of brothers and sisters for the sake of Church and the World (Society)*."

Monasticism has been an integral part of Christianity since the later half of the 3rd century and especially since the 4th century. For a long time it existed and developed independently outside the organised church to get ultimately united with it in the year 451 CE at the council of Chalcedon when monasteries were put under the control of the local or regional bishop.

It is not possible to think of the phenomenal development of Christian spirituality, its spirituality, its theology, philosophy; and at the same time the art, architecture, language and literature of Europe in general, without the contribution of Christian monastic orders. It were the monks who kept up the lamps of knowledge burning during the dark middle ages. They preserved the classical texts of Greek and Latin for us, evolved a calligraphically beautiful script from older Roman letters for continuous writing, experimented with plants and herbs for curing diseases and introduced new, exotic fruits and vegetables in Europe, established hospices for ailing and disabled, actively pursued missionary activities and at times worked as politicians or advisors to the local rulers. Although vowed to a life of retreat and renunciation, they served the

society as no other group of people. Many of the important universities of medieval Europe starting from Bologna to Sorbonne and *Ox*ford owe their origin to monasteries in which disciplines like theology, philosophy, mathematics and astronomy were pursued and which have a rich collection of manuscripts. The association of monasticism with Christianity, already at the relatively early stage of its development and without Jesus Christ himself preaching or living as a monk, can possibly be explained due to the fact that in the beginning, the gospel was preached in a milieu and to a community to which monastic practices were well known. There were Buddhist monks in Syria and Alexandria, there were Essenian Jews in Palestine and Jordan and later, but still before the emergence of desert monasticism with St. Anthony the Great and Abba Amun, there were the Manichaeist monks in Mesopotamia, Syria and Upper Egypt.

Of these the **Essenians** are perhaps directly responsible as catalistists for the emergence of early Christian monasticism. With the discovery in 1948 of the writings of the Jewish sect of Essenians found in several caves of a mountain lying near the ancient town of Qumran which is situated near the Western bank of the Dead Sea in Palestine, it is now proved beyond doubt that ascetic practices were common among a selected group of Jews already in the 2nd century BCE.

The sect of Essenians, was originally a class of priests who were against the control of the Great Temple of Jerusalem by the dynasty of the Hasmoneans. This was a group of ruling priests like the Egyptian pharaos. They flourished in Palestine and also in the neighbouring state of Jordan for about 200 years from 150 BC to around 70 AD. It got scattered, although perhaps did not become totally extinct, around 70 AD after the destruction of the Great Temple of Jerusalem. The documents called the **Dead Sea Scrolls** shed light on the beliefs and the practices of the Essenians. They were discovered by nomadic Bedouins who frequented the area around Qumran with their

goats and sheep. They sold them to antiquity dealers, from whom they were subsequently acquired by various museums and state governments of Israel, the USA and England.

The first scroll was discovered in 1948 and a number of them continued to come to light in the next few years, also. They are about 900 in number, big, small, complete and fragmentary, and very few of them have been properly cleaned, opened, decyphered and published yet. They are on all sorts of writing substances; on leather, parchment, papyrus or even etched on thin metallic foils. Some of the scrolls on papyrus have turned into a solid mass and one is still devising techniques to separate pages from each other. They are mainly written in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. Radio-Carbon examination of the different scrolls has shown that they were written between 1st century BC to the 1st century CE. The historians have reconstructed the circumstances in which the Essenians had to bring this precious manuscript treasure to safety by hiding it in various caves in the mountains surrounding their town. In order to suppress a revolt by the Jews of Judaea, a Roman troupe of some 5000 soldiers marched from North of Israel/Palestine towards Jerusalem, conquered in June 68 CE, the town or Jericho, not too far from the Dead Sea, and put up their camp there. The Essenians of the *Chirbat* (monastic complex, 'vihāra') of Qumran fearing the sack of their colony – which actually really happened later – hurriedly brought their literary treasure, these manuscript scrolls, in safety and hid them in eleven different caves all lying nearby the town of Qumran. The more important manuscripts were deposited safely in earthen jars, but later – due to the paucity of time or to the non- availability of such vessels – the scrolls were put in caves just like that and the entrance to the cave was covered with stones, in the hope of retrieving the manuscripts when the storm was over which was unfortunately never to happen. In 1948 – as mentioned – a nomade discovered a few of these scrolls in a cave which is now designated as QI (Qumran 1)

by the scholars. The discovery went on for further 8 years or so with the cave No 11 coming to light in the year 1956 which yielded a wonderful scroll of Psalms used by Essenians in their prayer and liturgy. Many of them are part of the Old Testament but some are entirely new, not known from any other sources. They were published by J.A. Sanders in 1967 who also first deciphered the scrolls. From the writings of the Roman historians Plinius the senior, Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, we know quite a bit about the Essenians. According to these authors, they w*ere* a group of cenobitic (Gk. *Koinobia* = community) people living in a community, not as a monachos or a solitary monk. These cenobitic people, about 4000 in number*, w*ere living in a *cenobium* (much like a monastery) observing strict celibacy. Anybody wishing to join had to undergo a probationary period of one year after which he had to remain a novice for two years, learning about the precepts of the order and practising them. After successful completion of this period of three years, he was accepted as an initiate in the Community and was given a white robe which was their common *habit*. The Essenians believed in the immortality of soul and also in future life in heaven. They were strict vegetarians and shunned alcohol. They practised meditation but also chanted prayers and psalms, had developed a full-fledged liturgy and a particular form of worship to their Supreme Being. They were respected and feared among the Jews and it was generally believed that they possessed the capacity to look into the future events and to make exact predictions. One of the most characteristic features of the religious practice of the Essenians was a very strict observance of the rules of purity of both body and soul. They attached great importance to ritual baths and firmly believed that the practice of taking bath in their consecrated holy pond frees them from all sins and all ills committed till that time. The holy pond had two flights of steps, one for descending into water and the other for coming out of it in purer form, cleansed of

all physical and internal impurities. Due to this extraordinary belief in the purificatory nature of water, John the Baptist, who baptised Jesus Christ and many other Jews — mostly with the water of the Jordan river – is considered to be an Essenian by many *s*cholars, or was at least someone who was greatly influenced by their ideology. The Essenians were in a hurry to cleanse their souls since they firmly believed in the impending dissolution of the world, the *apocalypse* (= '*pralaya'* in Sanskrit), which according to their calculation wa*s* to take place in 70 BCE. When it did not happen, the date was advanced to 70 CE., to the year in which – though the apocalypse did not take place even then- their Chirbet, the town of Qumran and the Great Temple of Jerusalem were all destroyed. Since there was a gate on the South-Western part of the Holy Mountain, Zion, in Jerusalem, which was named after the Essenians and called "Essenian Gate", it is presumed that after the destruction of Qumran, the rest of the group fled to Jerusalem where they had originated from, and settled there. Most probably many of them adopted the new faith and became Christians. These new converts to Christianity seem to have played a significant rôle in kindling the idea of monastic life in Christianity. They must have brought many of their beliefs and practices into the new religion.

Pythagoras and the Christian Monasticism

There have been some attempts as well, mostly by classical philologists, who regarded Greece as the Mother of all culture and all new ideas, to look for the origin of Christian monasticism in the so called "Pythagorean circle" which was a group of some 300 students and truth-seekers living with their Master in a quasi–coenobitic manner. It was a close group which owed its respectful allegiance to their master and obeyed his commands. All of them had a common dress, a white long cloak or Toga (resembling the robe of the Premonstratensians in medieval

ages). No one was allowed to keep any money and was expected to live in strict celibacy. Thus, some of the elements of the later Christian monasticism like *poverty*, *celibacy* and *obedience to a rule and to a renowned master* existed already in the 6th century BC in South Italy, it is pointed out. Pythagoras was born on the island of Samos in Ionia in the year 580 (or 570) before the beginning of the current era and is said to have visited a number of countries in quest of knowledge as a *y*oung student. He started his journey with Egypt, then came to Phoenicia, Babylonia, Persia and is said to have come into contact with people of different religions and with the *Gymnosophists* of India as well. The word means "nacked philosophers" with which the Greeks always meant Indian wisemen, who were barely or sparsely clad, perhaps the Digambara-Jainas or Hindu Sādhūs wearing only a *kaupīna*. These long study-tours and stays cost Pythagoras 20 long years of his life and when he returned to *Samos,* he was 40 years old. He started a school in his home town, without much success and, due to political troubles, had to migrate to South Italy where he founded a sort of resident school in *Kroton* which attracted a number of students, not surprisingly, because the Romans venerated the Greek wisemen and philosophers. Pythagoras was not only a philosopher but also a mathematician, a musicologist and a physician. He is also the one who among the Greek scholars is best known to the Indian students due to his geometrical theorem. According to his later biographers (Laertius), he was married to *Theano* and had two children. Already during his lifetime, his disciples had raised him to a semi-divine status as, for example, an incarnation of God Apollo having a golden thigh, or as one who could converse with animals and could be present at many places at the same time. Pythagoras believed that the human soul (*psyche*) is a *part of divine*, is *immortal* and is subject to *re-incarnation* in a human body or animal-form after the body perishes. He used the term *metempsychosis*= 'transmigration of soul' for this phenomenon. He is said to be

aware of his previous four births, in the first of which he was a hero mentioned in the Iliad of Homer. Because of his belief in successive reincarnations of soul in this world, he taught vegetarianism to his disciples although on one occasion he is reported to have carried out an animal sacrifice to a Greek God.

Pythagoras must have prescribed a certain code of conduct for the inmates of his Academy and there could have been certain chants and pra*y*ers uttered regularly by his disciples in honour of Greek gods.

The secret group of Pythagoras did not find favour with the local residents of *Kroton* after a certain time. Consequently, his Academy was burnt down around 500 BCE. Many students were killed, Pythagoras left the city and migrated to *Metapontion* (Latin=*metapontum*, today *Metaponto*, a Greek colony in South Italy near Taranto) where he died probably in 480 BC.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly what Pythagoras actually taught and what was later ascribed to him because of the great respect towards him as the father of Greek philosophy. The community of the followers of Pythagoras was a secret group of selected people and his teachings were known as symbolic or mystic, esoteric. It is howe*v*er certain that he did not teach a monastic or anchorite way of living and by the time the Christian monasticism makes its appearance, Pythagoras is not of much importance or influence, any more.

Neo-platonism is not only on the scene but also on rise and right there in Alexandria, in Egypt, in whose desert we meet the first eremites – the desert Fathers - towards the end of the 3rd century and the beginning of the 4th century. By this time the principles of *non-injury* to any living being, *abstention from eating meat, celibacy* combined with *meditation and prayer* are known, and better known, from other sources as well. The source of the revolutionary ideas of Pythagoras (vegetarianism, immortal soul as part of a Supreme being, rebirth etc.) seem, although shrouded in mystery, more of an Indian origin, Pythagoras appears to be the most "Indian Greek" among the

ancient philosophers of Greece whereas I do not see much of a Pythagoras in the early Christian eremites. Pythagoreans were seekers of knowledge, lovers of Ōoǿčā ('sophia' = jñānam).

Monks are not *seekers of knowledge*, they seek *spiritual perfection*. They live either each one for himself alone, or as a monk in a lonely place, or later, when a sort of monks-colony, a *coenobium,* comes into existence, each one keeps having his own cell, separate and away from each other. They meet only once a week on Sabbath day in a make-shift church to carry out liturgy, to discuss common problems of the Community and – very important – to sell some articles for their living like ropes, wooden utensils or mats, etc. which they have prepared in their cells out of reeds and other forest-products. Work is most important for a Christian monk. He does not live on alms or support of laity or of rich patrons like a Pythagorean, which was highly influenced by Buddhist monastic system.

On the other hand, there is a strong possibility of a Manichean order exerting decisive influence on the emergence of early Christian monasticism and on shaping its nature. Manichaeism was concurrently prevalent in a big way in the same geographical area in which Christianity was gaining ground. Mani, the founder of this religious order, was an Iranian born in 216 CE in Ekbatan (today Hamadan) in Babylonia which was under the rules of the Parthian kings of Iran, the Sassanide king Shapur-I at that time. His parents were Zoroastrians with good knowledge of Buddhism while the families around him were mostly Christians. He seems, therefore, to have deeply imbibed the precepts of Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Buddhism during his upbringing. While sitting in a temple, on a hill, a divine voice directed him *not to eat meat*, *not to drink alcohol* and *to keep away from women*. He joined the Judo-Christian sect of Elkesaites, let himself be baptised and learned about the apostles of the Old and the New Testaments and of their teachings. He is said to have received revelations from his twin "alter ego" twice, at the age of 12 and 24, which

explained to him the futility of over-emphasis on washing and consecrating everything before use which the Elkesaites were in habit of doing as their religious practice. He left the sect and turned to Greek Christians. Thereafter he travelled to Arachosia (Afghanistan) and to the North-West part of India and let himself be better acquainted with the monastic life and philosophy of Buddhism. He then settled in Persia (Iran) where he conceived and developed a form of syncretic gnosticism which contained in itself elements of all the three religions which he knew well, with a strong leaning towards ascetic/monastic practices. Sassanian King Shapur-I (240-273 CE), who was ruling over Iran during this period, supported him strongly due to political reasons as the followers of all these three religions were living in his empire which extended from Afghanistan to Babylonia. Mani travelled extensively from China to Egypt and preached in many languages which he knew well, very carefully using the cultural motifs and metaphors of the region in which he preached. His syncretic religion became immensely popular and got great positive response from the people right between Turfan and Egypt which is evident from the fact that tracts on his religion have been found in languages as varied as Chinese and Assuitic (a dialect of upper Egypt). Following Buddhism he divided his followers between Electi (*śramanas*) and Commoners or Catechumen (*upāsak*as). He prescribed commandments for both of them which have great similarity with the commandments of Moses and Buddha. For *Electi* (monks) the five commandments were: observation of Truth (*satya*), Non-Violence (*ahiṃsā*), Celibacy (*brahmacarya*), Purity (of mind and body, *śaucam*) and Poverty (non-possession of material wealth, *aparigraha*). The additional commandments for the laity differ from region to region, from culture to culture. They include forbiddance of false testimony, greed, idolatry and sorcery.

With the passing of time the popularity of Mani became unbearable to the Zoroastrians and, at the instigation of their

highest priest Kartir, the Sassanide King Bahram-I put Mani in prison in 279 CE where he died shortly thereafter, perhaps by a fast unto death. In Manichaeism the monks are supported by laity which is also expected to build monasteries etc. for them. Monks start their prayer before noon and perform it four times a day. Sunday is a fasting day for all followers. Monday is the day of confession (*pratimokṣa* of Buddhism) for the monks before the Head (=Buddhist '*Mahāthera*') of their monastery and for the lay followers before the monks.

It is believed that some of the extreme practices of the Christian monks of the Eastern Church (especially in Syria and Greece) emerged out of the desire, or as a sort of competition to outbid the Manichaean monks in their ascetic practices. Christian **Stylists** like Symeon, *Dendrites* of Syria and those who moved around fettered in heavy chains are cited as examples.

Due to its syncretic approach Manichaeism was very popular in the ancient world and posed a great threat to the spread of Christianity. A number of Christian Holy Fathers in their writing have criticised the views and practices of the Manichaeans. In fact till about 1950, whatever we knew about Manichaeism was mainly based on such polemic writings of Christian Fathers till some of the original works of Mani were discovered.

The age of the 2nd and 3rd centuries in Asia is marked with two important characteristics. The first is a very close *cultural contact* between various countries starting from the western part of India over Iran, Syria, Mesopotamia and right up to Egypt. This had happened due to a number of events of great political importance, notably:

a) the expansion of the rule of **Achaemenians** of Iran from Punjab to Egypt between the 6th and the end of the 4th century (330 approx.) before the common Era.
b) the conquest of this vast territory by **Alexander the Great** and his endeavour to promote friendship by intermarriages, etc. between the two arch-enemies, the Iranians and the

Greeks, as well as the coming up of Greek/Ionian colonies all along this tract up to the North Western part of India.

c) **Emperor Ashoka's** endeavour to strengthen the political relations with Greece (Macedonia), Ionia, Syria and Egypt by sending his political emissaries as well as Dhamma preachers to the contemporary rulers of these countries.

All this led to the formation of an intellectual atmosphere in which ideas travelled *v*ery rapidly from one region to the other. There was a f*r*ee movement of merchants and monks, explorers and adventurers. All travelled from one place to the other. In one of the old Buddhist Jātaka stories, called '*Baberu Jātaka'*, we hear of Indian merchants who took periodical voyages to the land of Bāberu (Babylon) to sell their merchandise. On one of those journeys they are said to have brought a nice peacock to Baberu which enchanted the Babylonians by its sheer beauty.

There was a road from Pataliputra (Patn*a*/Bihar) to Taxila (Gandhara/South Afghanistan) which met there with another road coming right from Syria via Iran and Arachosia (Afghanistan).

The Port city *o*f Alexandria in Egypt founded by Alexander the Great had developed into a world city of great commercial and intellectual importance with a number of Greek philosophers and scholars making it their home. There was also a sizable population of Buddhist monks in this city as reported by Greek sources. The Manichaean monks had also appeared on scene during the first half of the 3rd century CE. In spite of the exodus of the majority of Jews from Egypt during the centuries preceding and following the birth of Christ, a close cultural and commercial contact existed also between Palestine and Egypt.

Essenians in Palestine had demonstrated how a person can live away from society in a cenobitie way of life pursuing spiritual goals. Ascetic practices were therefore known, they were in the air when we meet the first Christian monks in the Egyptian desert. Even before these first eremites in the

Egyptian desert there were certainly spiritual practitioners in the early Christian communities of Palestine and Egypt, living as recluse. It is reported by **Philo of Alexandria** in his biography of the first great desert Father St. Antony (In the book *vita Antonii*) that before migrating to West and before making the desert his home, Antonius visited and passed some time with some holy persons of Egypt.

Antonius (St. Antony the Great) is hailed as the founder of the Christian *anchorite wa*y of life – the Christian monasticism. He became a model for a number of like-minded religiously inspired persons, seeking spiritual perfection in monkhood. Interestingly the first signs of Christian monasticism start emerging not in Palestine, but in the neighbouring state of Egypt, and the first anchorites are not Jews but Romans, Egyptians and Greeks who had adopted the new faith.

Antonius - the name suggests that he was a Roman - was born in the year 251 CE in a highly cultivated Copt (Egyptian Christians) family in the town of *Koma* situated in Central Egypt. He was given a well-founded education in Alexandrian schools and took position for the Christians during their persecution under the Roman Emperors in the years 303-311. Antonius was inspired by the sentence occurring in the new testament of Bible: Mathew 19.21*: 'should you want to attain perfection, go, sell what you have, give the proceeds to the poor, so shall thou become reassured of heaven', (*compare it with the Buddhist and Jain commandment of *'aparigraha'* !). So at the age of 20 when both his parents had died, he sold off his large agricultural estate, entrusted his younger sister to the care of a community of initiated virgins and started living first at the periphery of his town under a spiritual master, then moved farther West to live in deserted and dilapidated structures including an old castle and finally moved out to the desert where he erected a thatched shelter for himself in the **Scete** (sketis) and lived like a solitary monk. To achieve spiritual perfection he fought bravely and successfully against the demons of temptation and

other hurdles created by Satan (Buddhist Māra). Much though he wished to remain alone, he could not do so. His fame as an arrived and holy person attracted a number of like-minded truth seekers who started building their temporary or semi-permanent structures around the place of the Master.

It may be mentioned here that this unexpected arrival of a large number of monks was also caused by the persecution of Christians by Diocletian, Roman Emperor and the Governor of Egypt. Many Christians died as martyrs, those who wanted to avoid death in the hands of Roman soldiers, fled to the desert longing for martyrdom in the cause of their religion, living as monks, away from society, sacrificing all comforts and killing all desires.

However, the presence of this unexpected colony of eremites disturbed Antonius in his spiritual pursuits and in the later part of his life he left this place and built a shelter for himself on the top of a lonely mountain near the Red Sea where he spent the last years of his long life of 105 years, still not being able to keep away from the society. Already during his lifetime he attained a kind of semi-divine status with the result that not only common people but also clergymen visited him to discuss matters related to Church administration.

Shortly after the death of Antonius, the Bishop of Alexandria, **Athanasius**, playing a very important rôle at the beginnings of the Christian Church, wrote the '*Vita Antonii*', a detailed biography which described Antonius as the "Father of Monachism", the first Appa or Abba, giving vivid details of his fight against wild animals and demons of darkness, a subject which became an important motive for depiction in the medieval art of Europe and which reminds us of a similar incident in the life of Buddha whom *Māra* — a personified form of lust and temptation — tried to detract from his pursuit of Enlightenment with offers of wealth, power and women, however failed to do so at the end.

Thirty-eight of the maxims of Antonius are collected in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* of **Evagrius**.

According to the biography written by Athanasius, it was not only the victory over various demons but also the performance of great miracles and numerous good deeds which caused the making of a saint. The real Antonius does not totally correspond to the picture given in his *vita* as living only in recluse. He was also a great scholar, friendly adviser and a great traveller. It is also said that Antonius at the end of his life became founder of a monastery fitting into the constitutional framework of the Church. It is, therefore, believed that putting the communities, living outside the ecclesiastical organisation, under episcopal control was a matter of concern for Athanasius. The '*Vita Antonii*' remains the model for many future descriptions of the life of Saints.

A friend and disciple of Antonius, **Abba Amun** (Ammonius) formed another colony of monks around 325 CE in **Nitria**. The monks lived at the outskirts of that town in the desert. The colony soon became too congested and overpopulated during the following 10 years. On one of his visits to Nitria, Antonius advised Amun to establish another colony of monks moving towards South, away from the city which Amun did in the year 338/39. Cells were built by the monks for themselves and the place came to be known as **Kellia** (cluster of cells). However, the cells this time were so wide apart from each other that one could neither see nor hear the other. Nitria and Kellia remained connected to each other, especially because the church for both these colonies was located in Nitria only. The monks were on their own for five days of a week but on Saturday-Sundays, they assembled in church to collectively carry out liturgy and to have a collective dinner. This congregation was known as **synaxis**.

The excavation of the ancient sites of the monasteries, especially of Kellia by the French archaeologists Antoine Guillomont and his wife Claire from 1964 onward, have

brought to light the basic structure of the cell of a monk. The outer wall of the cell was usually made of baked bricks and the inner chambers with unbaked ones. There was a big compound inside usually with a well (15-20 ft. deep) and either inside or outside, a small garden for growing flowers or vegetables to enrich the diet of the monks.

There were two rooms in a cell and the one looking towards east was used to perform prayers and meditation. It was called "*oratorium*" (worship-room). Manuscripts of the holy texts were also kept in it. It usually had a niche on the wall facing the east with a wooden cross in it. In the absence of a niche, the cross remained suspended from a wooden peg. The other room was used for taking rest and for other mundane (secular) purposes. Important spiritual fathers had larger cells with more rooms which were used for instructing young novices and for their possible residence in the company of their master. There were no beds in the rooms as the monks slept on mats spread out on the ground. Intake of food was allowed only once a day at the nineth hour (around 3.00 p.m.). The meal consisted of flat bread (*pītā*), olive oil and salt, occasionally enriched with salad or home grown *v*egetables. Most of the monks procured their bread from Nitria on Saturdays when they assembled at the central church. The money the monks needed to buy bread, was earned by selling simple artifacts that they manufactured from reeds and grass growing in the desert from which they were weaving ropes, mats and baskets, selling them at the weekly small market in Nitria.

Work and labour was indispensable for a monk, it was prescribed as one of his foremost duties. "*ora et labora"* (pray and work) has always been the principal maxim of the Christian monks.

During the 4th century, while the three monastic complexes in the Egyptian desert, Sketis, Nitria and Kellia, were fully functional, teaming with hundreds of monks living alone in their individual cells, pursuing their spiritual goal, another

great holy personality arose on the scene: **St. Pachomius** a great visionary who had a completely different view about monastic life and way of living. He was the founder of the *cenobitic c*ommunities. Pachomius was also an Egyptian – an Egyptian Greek – who was born in the year 292 CE. At the age of 20 he was recruited in the military service of the Roman King Constantin but was allowed to leave after three years because no wars were fought at that time. He let himself be baptised, became a disciple of a strict Christian eremite, **Palamon**, and lived the life of a solitary monk for some time. He realised that *living alone* as a monk has its own hazards of psychological and physical nature. He could easily become prey to depression and illness. He had seen the monks in Nitria enjoying Community meals on weekends. He, therefore, thought that monks living together in groups would be the ideal form of asceticism. With the help of his teacher Palamons, Pachomius established a monastery (monasterium) in a deserted village called Tabennese in the years 320/25 CE. which became the first monastery of Christianity. The growing number of followers made it necessary to organise different groups of village-like structures in which the monks had to follow the instructions of a senior monk, a kind of provost. Pachomius also set up rules or a code of conduct for the monks to regulate the community life. **The Coinibium** established by him, was – to use a Buddhist term – the first **vihāra** of Christianity with its own *vinaya* prepared by him.

The main rules prescribed by Pachomius for the monks are:

1. Equality of all monks and similar observation of prayers/ liturgy. No craving for individual excellence or effort to surpass others through exclusive ascetic practices. All have to wear an identical black robe called *schema* bound with a leather belt around the waist.
2. Strict adherence to the Evangelium.
3. Absolute obedience towards the head of the monastery and observance of the rules laid by him.

4. Poverty, non-possession of any personal property, also not to keep articles in the cell which are not allowed in the monastery.
5. Observing the vow of celibacy.
6. Performing physical and mental labour for the sake of the monastery and the society.

Pachomius did not compose any work containing these rules. *We* learn about them through **Hieronymus** (347-420), author and translator of them into Latin. These rules are believed to have been communicated to Pachomius by Engels and were inscribed on a metallic plate. It is said that his military training made of him a strict disciplinarian who awarded hard punishment to erring monks.

His sister **Maria** established the first **monastery for nuns** and by the end of their lives there were nine male and two female monasteries in Egypt with spectacular numbers of monks and nuns. It is very striking to read in the history of Egyptian monasticism written by later Roman authors like **Lausivius** that at one time there were 10,000 monks and 20,000 nuns in the Egyptian desert. The figures are not mathematically exact, of course, and may not be taken seriously, but notable is the fact that Lausivius speaks of the number of nuns greater than that of the monks. Historians have wondered what could be the possible reason for this phenomenon. It may lie in the social and religious conditions of the time. To a married woman, Christianity offered little more than the antiquated ideal of a good housewife. She had no function in the Church or Community. She remained principally excluded from participating in the liturgy or functioning as a priest or preacher. But on the other hand the **virginity** consecrated to God and in the service of God, was hailed and glorified to fullest extent. Special texts were written (e.g. St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthago, in his "*de habitu virginum*" (in praise of virginity). Note some of his words: "*Virgins are the flowers blooming on the tree of Christianity, beautiful ornaments of the spiritual grace, happy*

investment for future gains, a pure and unspoiled object of fame and respect, a prototype of divine glory similar in holiness to Christ. In fact one sees the intention of God to help the human attain spiritual perfection materialised in virginity."

"*What we (male) shall become later once, you are it already. You already possess the glory of divine life which we shall achieve after the final judgement. As long as you are pure and unspoiled, you are similar to Engels*," writes an author addressing the virgin nuns. The well-known parable of strewing the seeds in Math.13.1-9 is interpreted in the way that the martyrs shall get 100 times of what they have given, the virgins 60 times and the other Christians only 30 times. It is obvious that such a promise must have proved to be a great incentive for many girls and unmarried women. The Church promoted it because the women were needed as nurses in hospitals and for rendering services to the community. It has been also pointed out that with an increasing number of men becoming monks it was difficult for Christian women to get a Christian husband and mixed marriages were looked down upon.

The reason why such a huge number of people took refuge in these remote monasteries has not yet been object of an intense research. At that time under special political conditions, it was the safest way for a criminal derelict to become a Christian to avoid punishment and there might have been other criminal acts as well as a reason why people fled into the desert.

In order to draw a comparison between Buddhist and Christian monasticism, it may be pointed out that whereas a number of parallels exist, there are at least *three* major differences:

1. Buddhists can enter the monastery as a monk after a probationary period but can also leave at any time if they decide to do so. Provision can be made for any male or female to spend some time in a monastery. There was no rule like – 'Once a monk, always a monk'.
2. Women get admission in Buddhist monasteries, but in less number and rather reluctantly. They need not to be

virgin at the time of admission. Buddha ordinated his foster mother and nurse at a very late stage of her life, at the request of Mahāprajāpati Ānanda.

3. With some exceptions, Buddhist monks are usually neither allowed nor supposed to work. They are entirely devoted to spiritual pursuits. It is for the laity to support the monastery with alms and donations.

It is said that some of the Pachomian monasteries over the time became so work-orientated that they grew into real production-units of manufactured goods, a kind of small factories turning out handicrafts, and that they got destroyed at the surplus of wealth produced by them.

The rule of Pachomius under which thousands lived in the Egyptian desert, was only *one of the many*. Other rules were developed for cenobitic communities in Northern Africa, in Asia and in Southern Europe before finally, in the second half of the 5th century, the rule of **Benedict of Nursia** (480-547) was accepted by the majority of monastic institutions.

Christianity Spreading Slowly to the North-West

With the translation of the *Bible* into Latin by **Hieronymus** (the *vulgata* i.e. the first raw translation), Christianity made a decisive path around the North-Western region of the Roman Empire, where Latin had become the most important language for religion and learning.

There was also **Ambrosius**, the Bishop of Milano, who in his tractat *De officiis ministrorum e*stablished a prescribed form of ritual for venerating God. And finally there was **Augustinus** (350-430), Bishop of Hipporegio in North Africa. Two of his books especially*, De Confessiones* and *De Civitate Dei,* were of major importance for the later establishment of monasteries in Europe and for their various rules.

Cenobitic communities in the West started first of all in and around Rome. There, mostly wives of Roman senators

organised Christian communities in the country-houses of their estates which later developed into monasteries. Such establishments are noted, as for example, the ones of the ladies *Marcella* (385), *Melania* (400) and *Ascella* (405). These might have been a sort of protest actions against the Roman civilisation.

A further development of monastic way of life came forth in France where **Martin** *of Tours*, son of a Roman senior officer (316-397) founded the first monastery, Martin was born at **Savaria** in Hungary where his father was stationed. Later he moved to **Pavia** in Italy. At the age of 10, Martin joined the group of catechumen, candidates for baptism. Christian religion was legal at that time after the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constatine but had more adherents in the Eastern Empire (converted Jews and Greeks). When Martin was 15 years old, he had to join the Roman military service and was posted in France (Gallia). One day he saw a poor beggar and impulsively cut his own military cloak in half, sharing it with the beggar. On the same night he had a vision, seeing Jesus wearing the same half cloak. He was baptised and left military service becoming a disciple of **Hilary of Poitier**, the chief proponent of *Trinitarian Christianity* against the *Arianism* of the Imperial Court. He returned to Italy but was expelled by the Arian bishop of Milan. Then he decided to seek shelter on the Island of *Albenga* in Liguria where he lived as a hermit. With the help of Hilary, he established a monastery nearby which later became the Benedictine Abbey of League, while he travelled and preached throughout western France. Numerous local legends about him survive upto this day. In 371, Martin was acclaimed 'bishop of Tours' where he had destroyed pagan temples and sculptures. Here it should be noted that the Gallic population still observing the Druidic folk religion, did mind the cutting of a tree but not the destruction of the Roman sanctuaries. In 372, Martin founded the monastery *Marmoutier* on the river Loire and gave it an own abbot. It became a spiritual

centre with rules similar to those of Pachomius, providing the necessary leadership for ecclesiastical institutions at a time when the structures of the administration of the Roman Empire slowly fell in decadency and a great migration period started. Between the 4th and the 6th century, a number of German tribes started moving towards the West, building new empires e.g. the Frankish Empire which under its ruler Clovis (481–511) reached its maximum expansion. The conversion of **Clovis**, king of the Franks to Christian faith was most decisive for the spread of the new religion in western Europe. In the battle against the Alemannes (a major group of Germans), when he feared for his victory, he prayed to the Christian God and won the battle. His baptism was not so much because of his personal conviction, but more because of political exigency. Mass conversions and mission orders followed. The conversion of Clovis is thus strongly connected with the development of medieval monasteries in the West. Bishops and kings started establishing monastic institutions and used them as support base for their territorial influence. Monasteries were established also along or near the borders of non-Christian areas in the East and North.

Now, and before we come to the supra-regional monastic rule of St. Benedict, we have to cast a glance on the development of **monasteries in Ireland** where **Palladius** was sent by *Pope Celestin* to organise the Christian community, as its bishop, in a celtic Druide society. There existed around 150 small kingdoms and there were no urban structures which were suited for the Roman episcopal model. Instead of the episcopal seats the monasteries took over to build the spiritual centres of the country.

In the 5th century **St. Patrick** from England became the Apostel of the Irish, working as missionary, bishop and supporter of foundations of the monasteries. The monasteries played an important rôle for the stabilisation of the social and political influence of their aristocratic founders or founder-families

who were offering their territory to the monastic institution and often took the position of the first Abbot. This position was almost hereditary in the family for sons or daughters. The abbot was not only the father of his monk community but also the active organiser of the surrounding community of lay followers.

Columban the older (521–597) played a double role in the monastic world. On the one hand he was a highly educated member of a royal family, founder of two monasteries in his realm, and on the other he had established the Island monastery **Iona**, opposite the Scottish west coast. There he lived a scarce and simple life with his monk community often cut off from the others because of bad weather conditions. *Iona* became an attraction because of the literary activities of its abbot and monks. In the 7th century, monks from *Iona* founded new monasteries in East England and Scotland.

During the 7th and the 9th centuries, the Irish monasteries developed into important spiritual centres where the monks were committed to regular studies next to worship and work. These monasteries established schools in which the *artes liberale*s (Rhetorics, Grammar, Dialectic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy and *M*usic) were taught as a basis for further higher studies. The monks had to be fluent in Latin in order to be able to copy liturgical texts without making mistakes. Copies of manuscripts were of high quality as the monks showed great veneration for the books, being considered as holy objects with charismatic powers, comparable to the power of relics. In the Irish **scriptoria** of the monasteries, monks produced copies and commentaries of the *Bible*, annals and texts on law and justice, as well as penitential catalogues according to which sinners had to undergo punishment. These catalogues were in force for the clergy and the laity in the same way. Some of the writings of Irish and Anglo-Saxon monasteries became quite famous, for example "*de locis sanctis*" ('About holy places'), a travel guide book of the holy places in Palestine written about 700 CE by

an abbot, who had never visited Palestine, consulting only various sources he had to his disposition.

Another famous monk and scholar of an Anglo-saxon monastery was **Beda Venerabilis** (672-735) He wrote "*Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*" ('Story of the Church of English People') and "*De ratione temporum/Liber de temporibus*" ('Principles of Counting Time'/ 'A book on the Times'). Both these mentioned works are remarkable due to the fact that, together with the historical chronicles of their times, the monks start using for the first time the dates of the historical events from the birth of Christ and thus start the reckoning from a new era which according to them started with the birth of Christ. It was their firm belief that a new modern era has started with the birth of Christ[1]. In his first book *On the Church of English People*, he worked in the way a modern historian would work today: Every statement is systematic and has been culled not only from literary sources but also from documents of various kinds with great difficulty and expenditure of time and money. He has also taken note of the oral tradition as well as the reports of the contemporary writers. A letter to Albinus – the abbot of Canterbury – the documents (letters) of abdication to the king of Northumbria, etc. provide information on the composition of the work. Albinus provided reliable information to **Beda** contained in the official documents and what happened during his time there (Manfred Fuhrmann, S. 366).[2] In spite

[1] Diese beiden letzteren Abhandlungen in Verbindung mit einer Weltchronik und der üblichen Einteilung in 6 Zeitalter zeichneten sich dadurch aus, dass sie zum ersten mal die Datierung nach Christi Geburt praktisch anwandten d,h, Christi Geburt tatsächlich an den Beginn einer "modernen" Zeitrechnung setzten.

[2] Alles ist systematisch und mit großer Mühe und Aufwand nicht nur literarischen Quellen abgewonnen, sondern Urkunden aller Art, mündlicher Tradition und Berichten von Zeugen. Ein Brief an Albinus, Abt von Canterbury, und v.a. Die Dedikationsepistel an den

of exaggerated descriptions of a few miracles of Christ, Beda remains an important source of information for the coming centuries.

Another type of monasticism emerged in Ireland, which was of great importance for the not yet Christianised regions of the former Roman provinces. It was the type of monk who left behind everything that gave him security in life (country and monastery, language) and went for '*peregrinatio in eremo*', 'pilgrim in a foreign country' in succession of Jesus Christ who had given to himself and his disciples the fundamental precept of the mission to live their religion in an exemplary and persuading way.

One of these Irish missionaries of **Columbian the Younger** (543-615) who at the age of 50 left the influential monastery of Bangor with a group of disciples, crossed the sea and landed in France where he founded two monasteries *Anagrates* (591) and *Luxeuil* (592/93) which in future will play a major rôle. Though getting permission and support of the Merovingian King *Childebert* II (575-96) for the foundation of the monasteries, Columban came into trouble with the Franconian Church organisation because the Irish monasteries followed another dating of the Easter festival, so that the highest Christian Festival was celebrated on two different days. Furthermore, the Irish monks refused to accept the supervision of their monastery by a Franconian bishop and more so because they were hindered in their pastoral care of the laity by the Franconian clergy. Columbian fell out of favour with

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König von Nothumbria geben Auskunft über die Entstehung des Werkes. Albinus übermittelt Beda, was immer sich an Dokumenten und mündlicher Überlieferung im Sprengel von Canterbury auftreiben ließ. Ein Londoner Priester besorgte aus den päpstlichen Archiven zu Rom Briefe Gregors und seiner Nachfolger, und ringsum wurden die Äbte, Bischöfe und Mönche aufgefordert, Material zu schicken. Ein moderner Historiker würde lediglich in anderer Weise Sachkritik üben. Beda's Werk strotzt von Mirakeln.

the successor King **Theuderich** as he refused to consecrate his two illegitimate sons. He and his monks again followed their principle of self-chosen homelessness and moved to the still pagan region of the Lake of Constance. But there also they met the influence of King Theuderich. So, in their missionary efforts they crossed the Alps to settle in Italy where they founded the Monastery *Bobbio* which later became a spiritual centre for North Italy.

One of Columbian monks and disciples, was **Gallus**, who accompanied his master from Ireland to the Lake of Constance but then, as result of a controversy, did no longer follow him. The **Columban Vita** reports that Gallus suffered severe illness and did therefore not *v*ow to unquestioning obedience and submission to his abbot, who wanted him to follow. He was punished with a lifelong prohibition of celebrating the mass (liturgical service).

Gallus continued to live in a retreat, reaching to the non-Christian audience and was quite successful in doing so. Two generations after his death, in the year 720, a monastery was established near the place of his retreat, the Monastery of **St. Gallen**, following the Irish monastic tradition. Among the European monasteries, St. Gallen was one of the most powerful and its library was a famous place for studies.

Among many other Irish monks **Kilian** (died 689) is also to be noted. He worked as a missionary in the East of the Franconian Empire, around Würzburg and in Thüringen.

Next to the Irish there were also the Anglo-Saxon monks who in the 7th-8th century worked in the tradition of the homeless and itinerant preachers, as missionaries, bishops and founders of monastic institutions. In the life of **Bonifatius** one can clearly see the connection between monastic socialisation and missionary activity, as well as close correlation of mission, Roman church organisation and the constellation of political power.

Bonifatius was born around 672 in Exeter. He was baptised with the name **Wynfreth** and as a child was given to a

monastery where he got his education and made his monastic career. He, 40 years old, went on *peregrinatio* (pilgrimage) to Friesland, and returning to England, unsuccessfully started on a second pilgrimage to Thuringia in Germany (720 AD); but this time equipped with a special pontifical permission from Rome where he also got his name *Bonifatius*. From that time onward he was officially entitled to establish monasteries and organise clerical institutions in the newly Christianised countries. He also obtained a writ of protection from *Charles Martell* (688-741), the ruler of the Franconian Empire.

This man, once in total retreat in a convent, was now a strong fighter for the Christian God. There is a story about him telling that in order to prove that his God was more powerful than others, he cut the oak tree of the Germanic God *Donar* without fearing his reaction. This way of destroying sanctuaries of other religions and thereby to hit the adversary, was already a well-known method during the Roman Empire. In the year 732, Bonifatius was elected Archbishop and Papal emissary for the whole regions of Thuringia and Saxonia and finally founded the Monastery of *Fulda* in 744 AD, giving his missionary activities a real strong centre. There the monks got physical and material security in a well organised community. Liturgical texts were also unified there. As abbot and archbishop, Bonifatius still acted as a link between ecclesiastical institutions and worldly powers. He died in 754 AD on a missionary journey to Friesen where he was murdered on his way by a group of bandits, although he always travelled in a company. His monastic rules were those which he had learned and observed in England. In his ninety letters, all preserved and edited, show a vivid exchange of communication with various monasteries, clergymen, political leaders of north and south Europe and the Roman Curie. Bonifatius also ordinated three nuns of the English nobility and established for them three monasteries in Germany.

Peeping behind the Walls of Christian Monasteries

The history of Christianity links the foundation of Christian monasteries with St. **Pachomius**, a Copt or Egyptian of Greek origin (292-346 CE) and a disciple of the eremite **Palamon** who was a strict Christian ascetic. Although the earlier Christian eremites like *St. Anthony* and *Abba Amun* had preferred a solitary way of life in the quest of their spiritual perfection, yet the 'demons' who haunted and disturbed these lonely monks – as so vividly described by Bishop *Athanasius* in the biography of St. Anthony (*Vita Antionii)* - were a strong reason for Pachomius to opt for a community living, a *koinonia*, in which a monk lived in a group and yet was alone in his cell for prayer and meditation. It is impossible to assume that Pachomius had not heard, or had no knowledge, of coenobitic living of Buddhists in India and cylone. For, during this time, Manichaean and most certainly also Buddhist monasteries were in existence and quite conspicuous in Syria and Egypt. Although his own preceptor (*Palamon*) was a *monachos* living like an eremite, Pachomius, looking at the physical and psychological hazards of solitary living opted for a communal life within the protected walls of a monastery under the supervision of a superior monk, a father figure, an Abba (= father) or Abbot (*Mahāthera* of Buddhist monasteries) who took care of his fellow monks.

The first Christian monastery was founded by **Pachomius**

in the year 325 CE in a deserted Egyptian village called *Tabennisi* near Theben situated in the southern part of this country. Since no peaceful community-living is possible without adhering to a certain discipline, he also developed a code of conduct for his inmates and wrote down rules which were to be strictly followed by all. His is, therefore, the first *regula* in the history of Christian monasticism. In framing these rules he perhaps drew upon the rich experience of the previous 'desert fathers' whose teachings and sayings were later collected in the work titled *Apophthegmata Patrum*. It is also not improbable that he had visited a few of the Manichaean and/or Buddhist monasteries and learned their way of living. Being an ex-service man who had served in the Roman army for a couple of years, he was a strict disciplinarian and it is reported that he demanded of all inmates of his monastery to strictly abide by the prescribed code of coenobitic living and that he was not averse of imposing even physical punishment on the erring monks. In the set of rules *(regula)* that he composed for coenobitic living and which are the first of their kind, he underlines the importance of *obedience* and *discipline*. For the first time, all the inmates get a specific form of clothing following the practice of Buddhist monks which was a loose cloak of dark colour with a leather belt. Adherence to the teachings of Evangelium was stressed, poverty was glorified and importance was given to physical labour, but indulgence in excessive individual ascetic practices, like the ones that previous desert fathers had performed, was totally prohibited.

The principle of *Obedientia,* obedience to the rules of the monastery and obedience to the orders of the Abbot and Prior, etc., becomes and remains one of the indispensable features of the Christian monastic life in the years to come; his disciple *Schenoudi* makes it a part of the *profess* of a monk at the time of his ordination, and it is again given utmost importance, for example, in the **Rules of St. Benedict** *('Regula Benedicti' 6*th C.), along with *Celibacy* and *Poverty*.

The Christian monasteries are usually built on a square or a rectangular plan with a garden, lawn or an open space in the centre. There are wide corridors all around with cells for the monks usually on the three sides of the building whereas the fourth side is reserved for the use of the community like a dining hall (refectory), an assembly hall (chapter), and a small shrine or chapel which is very often dedicated to the Divine Mother. All cells open up and are accessible through the corridor which is also used by the monks for small contemplative walks. The Abbot and the Prior (the seniormost monk after the Abbot who is in-charge of the proper functioning of the monastery) have separate and bigger cells for themselves at one of the corners of the corridor. The part of the building which is the residence of the monks is called *clausur,* or "closed area" and access to it is prohibited to outsiders. All monasteries have a thick enclosure around.

A church has become an indispensable part of the monastery since medieval age. In early ages, it was mostly meant exclusively for the use of the monks, but has gradually became accessible to the lay community as well. However, in all such cases the monks have their own private approach to the church so that one cannot watch the monks coming from their cells to the chore to attend different services or for liturgy. Some still existing monasteries of the pre-medieval ages and the ruins of some belonging to this period show that the existence of the church in the monasteries goes back to only one thousand years. Before 1000 CE or so the monasteries had simply one big room looking towards the East with a cross or a cross plus Jesus or the holy Mary hanging on the wall with a semi-circular table to put flowers and lamps, etc., on it. The room was known as 'oratorium', i.e. a pray*er* room. The monks assembled here many times during the day to sing prayers in the glory of God and the Saviour. Ritual and services were not so elaborate in those days. Many big monasteries today have even two churches, the inner one for the monks and the outer one

for the common people. If there was only one big church, it was divided into two sections separated by a metallic grill. The lay following can visit the church but watch the service being conducted sitting on benches/chairs outside the cordoned off area. In the churches forming part of the female monasteries (nunneries), the grill is usually not there but there is a clear-cut division between the sacred and the profane through a wooden barrier.

The inner courtyard of the monasteries is used by the monks for taking walks, for murmuring silent prayers, for reading a book or for simply meditating. Though monks have to live generally under a strict vow of silence, at a certain fixed time after the prayer of the noon, they are allowed to have conversation with one another on spiritual matters in this courtyard. The same place is also used for monthly shaving of hair and for drying the washed *habits* (gowns). The other occasion on which the monks are allowed to speak is the general meeting in the chapter hall. '*Chapter*' is a technical word in the terminology of the monasteries and it refers to that democratically elected apex body of the monks which is responsible for the proper functioning of a monastery, a sort of Executive Council, one may say. The body is elected by all *friars* (brothers) living in a monastery who have been admitted to the Order and usually serves a term of three years. The same practice prevailed in the Buddhist monasteries as well and it was ordained by Buddha himself that all monasteries are to be autonomous and their affairs should be looked after by a periodically elected body of monks.

The 'Chapter hall' derives its name presumably from the fact that this was the first meeting place of the monks in the morning, and each morning one chapter from the Rules of the monastic Order was read out to them. The monks are expected to confess openly if they have broken any rule and to accept punishment imposed by the Prior or Abbot for the sake of their spiritual perfection. Other monks are also encouraged to point

out the transgressions of their fellow colleagues, if the monk in question fails or forgets to mention his breach. This is not taken amiss and considered to be necessary in the interest of the person concerned. This practice has an exact parallel in the Buddhist monastic system which also foresees the recitation of the *pratimokṣa-sūtra*s ('maxims for absolution from sins') which explain the code of conduct which a monk is expected to follow. The whole corpus of *Pratimokṣa-sūtras* consists of 230 to 250 such injunctions and prohibitions (depending upon that particular school; for the nuns there are a few more) and they are recited by a senior monk in the assembly of monks in the evening of every new-moon and full-moon day which are the days of total fasting and internal purification.

There are altogether seventy-three chapters in the Rule of St. Benedict *(regula Benedicti)* which are however supplemented by a few chapters containing "*constitutiones*", i.e. 'established customs' (of a particular monastery). These 'customs' have great significance for the activities and functioning of a monastery and they have great varieties. Not only do they differ from place to place but sometimes also from monastery to monastery and take into account the local geographical, historical and social conditions.

The assembly in the morning is also used for discussing the urgent works to be done on that day and duties to perform them are assigned to persons concerned. Every monk in the monastery has one or the other duty to perform. "*Ora et labora*" ('pray and work') is the maxim of the monastic life since the foundation of coenobitic living which became even stricter after St. Benedict included it in his rule and made it quasi compulsory for every monk. Changes in the duties of the monks, e.g. for cooking, washing or working in gardens etc., are therefore also discussed and decided on this occasion once a week.

The daily routine of the monks is rather hard and tough, not leaving them much time for leisure. It is also highly regulated

and regimented. After a five, or at the most six, hours of sleep from 8.30 p.m. to 1.30 a.m., or latest by 2.30 a.m., the monks have to wake up and hurry towards the church of the monastery for a congregational prayer which is known as *'vigil'* or *'nocturn'*. During the prayer which is offered in standing position – as all other prayers as well – the Prior of the monastery passes by the rows of the monks with a lamp throwing light on the face of each monk to check whether they are fully awake or still half asleep. The next prayer takes place after about three hours and the monks are not supposed to go to bed again but to utilize this time in still meditation, reading a book or copying a manuscript. This pre–dawn prayer taking place at about 5.00 a.m. in summer is called '*laudes*' ('glorification', scil. of God).

The day in the monastery is divided into twelve equal parts or *hora* of equal duration, but may not be of sixty minutes each. The length of a *hora* depends upon the time of the year. The days in summer in Europe are much longer than in India, and much shorter in winter. The first hour of an average day is 6 o'clock in the morning when a long morning prayer called *'prim*' (i.e. the first) is offered in the church. All the following prayers take place after a gap of 3 hours each. The prayer taking place at 9.00 a.m. is called the '*terz*' (the third hourly), the next at the noon-time is known as the '*sext'* (the sixth hourly), further the '*non'* (at about 3.00 p.m.) and the evening prayer, offered between 5.30 p.m. and 6.00 p.m., is known as '*vesper*' i.e. the evening. The last one is aptly termed as *'complet*' and takes place usually at 8 o'clock. It has to be finished latest by 8.30 p.m. after which monks retire and take rest. The evening meal, a light one, is usually served between the *vesper* and the *complet.* The monks thus have to leave their cells altogether eight times to be present in the church. They usually go in files or at least leave the church in a well-formed file with senior monks in front and the junior ones following them.

The garments of the monks are known as '*vestis'*. The main garment is a loose and wide cloak falling down in folds from

shoulders to the toes and is mostly made of linen or wool. The garments of some of the early monks were also made of goat-skin which was also the case with Indian mendicants or forest dwellers, since their garments are referred to a*s ajinam (aja* = goat in Sanskrit, the term is later used for dearskin as well). This long cloak-like garment has a striking similarity with Buddhist gown, called *chīvara,* except for its colour. It is often presumed by the scholars that it was taken over or inspired by the contemporary clothing of the peasants of the country and represent humility and poverty. Though it is definitely a mark of simplicity, yet it is wrong to associate this loose garment with the common daily dress of the farmers because it is not practical for working in the fields. It is not known whether the farmers or the village folk of Egypt, Israel or Syria ever had such loose cloaks as their usual daily wear. It appears to have been a common *habit* (dress) of the philosophers, ascetics and mendicants, etc. of the ancient world and a certain influence of Buddhist and or Manichaean apparel cannot be ruled out.

In addition to two pieces of this gown, the monks were provided with two *tunics* for the upper half of the body which also covered the shoulders and further two *kukulle* or loose caps as head-coverings. Sometimes they were stitched together in tunics or gowns. When monks were working in gardens or fields they wrapped an apron around their body, called '*skapulier*'. When they travelled, they were also provided a pair of trousers as innerwear. Socks and shoes were worn the whole day. The gown was tied up on the waist by a leather belt or by a long coloured rope made of cotton or silken threads which also hung down from the garment. The main *habit* of nuns was not much different from that of the monks except that they had a veil like the one worn by the brides at the time of wedding, since the virgins were considered to be the brides of Jesus Christ.

The colours of the *habits* of the monks belonging to different orders differ. Whereas the Benedictine monks wear black

robes, the Cistercians have it white, the Franciscans brown and the Dominicans grey. This gives them an individual identity.

The dining room in a monastery is known as *refectorium* (refactory), i.e. a place where one *re-strengthens* or refreshes himself (cf. the French word *restaurant,* a place for restoration of the weak or tired body). It is reported that originally there was a provision of only one meal between the *sext* an*d non*, just like in Buddhist monasteries, but since it appeared to be too little for the monks living in cold climate, a light evening meal was also introduced as a sort of 'pittance' or compassion. The main meal was served immediately before or after the prayer of the noon and the second one shortly before the sunset, never in the dark (cf. the eating habits of the Jainas !). In the main meal, two warm or cooked dishes were served along with bread and fruits at the end which were mostly from the garden of the monastery. Cooked beans, millet porridge and vegetables were the most common items to be served.

Meat, especially the red meat, was not on the menu, unless it was considered necessary for an ailing or convalescing patient. However fish and fowl were very common and coveted items. There are many references in older records of the gifts of good varieties of fishes, even the most exotic ones like the salmon, and different kind of fowls to the monasteries by rich people of the town. Many monasteries maintained their own fish ponds. Water always accompanied the meal. However, in France and Italy, a small quantity of wine was also available to the monks whereas in countries like Germany, bier, brewed in the monastery itself, was served. A number of monasteries are famous for their quality of bier and some modern breweries sell bier which they claim to be brewing since many hundred years according to the old recipes perfected in the monasteries of the locality.

Absolute silence was observed while eating. No conversation was allowed. This was also necessary because while the monks proceeded with their meals, readings from

the scripture or other religious texts were going on which the monks had to listen attentively. If a monk needed anything he had to communicate it to the person serving the food by a certain sign or gesture. It is reported that in the monastery of Hirsau – one of the most ancient and important monastery situated in the Black Forest in Germany — there were as many as 359 signs for asking anything while dining ! It is indeed a tremendous amount of learning, if the number is correct. For getting an additional bun of bread (*brötchen*), for example, the monk raised his right hand and joined his thumb with the index finger. For getting cheese the person placed his right palm on the left and pressed them together. Two fingers under the lips indicate requirement of water and touching the throat with fingers means that the person wants vinegar. For getting an additional serving of fish, one had to copy the movement of fish in waters and for getting cherries the person kept his index finger under one of his eyes. The Abbot dines with the monks, but sits on a separate table and is served by two novices who are also allowed to eat later on the same table standing, after the Abbot has left. They are not allowed to sit on chairs since they are not yet proper ordinates.

The Abbot of each monastery was authorized to increase the ration of his inmates if he thought that they were undernourished, or also, for example, during the days when monks performed hard work in the field. But the ration, of food and wine both, could also be lowered or even denied by way of punishment. There was usually no dearth of food in the monasteries. They were well provided for by munificent land grants and donations of rich patrons. The person responsible for procurement, storage and cooking of food was known as *Cellerer*. He was a senior Dean and had a number of helpers under him, especially the cooks and the gardeners, etc.

Although the rule of Benedict speaks of the provision of less than one pound (acc. to modern calculations, a little more than 300 grams) of bread to each monk per day, records show that

in some monasteries enormous amount of bread was consumed by the monks. The monastery of Cluny (Burgundy, South France) provides an excellent example in this regard where every monk was provided with a loaf or loaves weighing 3 kg every day which he kept in his cell and consumed between the two meals: before the first meal, or in the night whereas the working maid in the monastery at Schaffhausen (Switzerland) used to get only 2.5 kg of bread each day for the consumption of her whole family. The Benedictine monastery of Cluny is also otherwise notorious for its extravagance during the middle ages where the Abbot **Petrus Venerabilis** (1092-1156 CE) allowe*d four c*ourses of meal to his monks with the justification that a monk should not only have enough to eat but also have sufficient choice and variety in his meal. St. Theresa von Avila (a Spanish nun 1515-82 CE) is said to have justified good meals with the remark: "Do something good to your body so that the soul has pleasure to live in it !"

The bread was normally baked with a mixture of the flours of rye, wheat and oats. Soft white bread baked from fine wheat flour was served only to the ailing, weak or old. It was considered to be something very special and as such the head of the monastery had always claim on it. But on certain festive occasions monks were also fortunate to have it on their tables. It is reported that in some monasteries, if the bread did not turn out to be white enough, some chalk powder was also added to the flour !

To monasteries goes the credit of evolving some of the wonderful recipés for baking of biscuits, ginger-bread and cakes. In an old cook-book recovered from the monastery of Hirsau (south Germany), we find the following recipé for preparing honey cookies (measurements translated into modern units): "Take 300 gr. of Honey and 20 gr. of Sugar, mix them well, cook the mixture, put 200 gr. of walnuts, 400 gr. of wheat flour, 1 tsp. of cinnamon, 1/2 tsp. of the powder of nutmeg, the same amount of cloves and black pepper and

30 ml. of liqueur in it. Mix well, take it down, roll it out on a fatty surface while the dough is still warm, to the thickness of some 3 mm., cut it out into small pieces with the help of moulds and after putting it on a form, bake it in the oven...". We can imagine the goodies that some of the monks were enjoying in spite of the prescribed ideal of ascetic life. St. Benedict had allowed the consumption of wine to the monks very reluctantly and had considered about one-fourth litre (one 'hemina') as sufficient for one monk per day. But hardly any monastery restricted itself to this measure. **Bernhard of Clairvaux** (who later founded the order of Cistercians, 11th c.) bitterly criticized the monks of Cluny who, according to him, "drank so much that they went to bed in an utterly drunk state". The wine that the monks enjoyed most was a sort of spicy, sweet wine which was prepared out of red wine diluted a little with one-eighth part of water, mixed with one-eighth part of honey and a number of spices including cinnamon, cloves, ginger and saffron. The whole mixture was then boiled a little, taken down, strained and put in bottles. Champaign is also an invention of the monasteries.

Different opinions prevailed in different Orders about the consumption of dairy products and eggs. Stricter monks like Cistercians refused to take them arguing that they are animal products, but monks in Cluny enjoyed eating eggs in all possible forms. In the repertory of the chef of this monastery, one finds mention of vari*o*us forms of eggs: eggs with black pepper, eggs with eel, eggs in white sauce, stuffed up eggs and eggs fried in lard. According to an old record, which appears to be rather incredible, on some occasions the consumption of eggs rose to as high as 30 per person per day! Since it was not allowed to have eggs on the 'days of fasting', they were processed in the forms of cakes, pastries and even in form of ravioli (dough packets containing egg inside) so that they remain invisible and the rule may thus be bypassed. The *c*onsumption of milk does not find mention in ancient records and the cheese too,

when eaten, came perhaps from outside since the existence of a cow-shed or stall or the establishment of a dairy with cows and milk processing unit is not referred to in any of the old records of the monasteries.

There are days when the monks are expected to fast, and most of them sincerely observed the rule. There are altogether 150 such days. Wednesday is a fasting day because on this day Judas accepted bribe money to betray Jesus, Friday is a fasting day because he was crucified on that day; added to these are the 40 lean days before Good Friday/Easter, yet these are actually not the days of total abstention and absolute fasting. Many monasteries just skip the meat (the 'main' dish) and serve the fish instead which is considered to be a kind of vegetable. Fish is a common item of midday meal on Fridays in several families across Europe. And even on such days when an absolute fast is to be observed as on Good Friday (i.e. the day on which Christ was crucified), drinks are allowed however, especially bier (which the Germans call 'liquid bread') in good quantities. It is taken freely without any sense of guilt because Benedict has made no mention of it in his rule. It was believed that drinks do not disturb or break the fast*: 'Liquida non frangunt jejunium'.*

The most important duty of a monk is to work for God, to render service to God; *opus dei,* in the words of Benedict. There should not even be an hour in which he is not thinking of God and not glorifying him. Even while the monks are eating, therefore, they have to listen attentively to the passages from the *Bible* or some other edifying religious text which may include theological or philosophical exposition of Christian precepts. Every week, one particular monk with good voice is chosen to perform the pious duty of reading out such passages throughout the entire duration of the meal for one week and he himself takes the meal after the other monks have already left the dining hall.

Contrary to the Buddhist monks, the Christian monks were well fed. This was also one of the reasons why in the early

and high middle ages, a lot of young people of poor families wanted to enter into the monasteries. Here they had the best of both worlds. They were well fed, well taken care of, if fallen ill, educated in the school attached to the monastery, commanded respect in the society and also could hope befitting reward after death in heaven, since they had devoted their lives in the 'service' of God.

It is reported that young boys who wanted to enter into the monastery had to come and stand in front of the monastery in open, from morning till evening for anything up to six months in order to demonstrate their resoluteness and to prove that they are serious about taking up a monk's life. After a long wait outside, they were called in one day and interviewed. Questions were asked about their social status, financial conditions and about their real motive of joining the monastery. At least thrice they were rejected. But if they were persistent enough and came again with the same request, it gave ground to the Provost to review their case. If he was satisfied about the genuineness of the motive of the aspirant and was convinced that the person has a spiritual bent of mind and is also tough enough to bear the hardships of a monastic life, he was admitted informally as a *lay brother* and assigned the duties of performing stray works in the kitchen, in gardens, fields, or given the task of weaving, stitching, washing, etc. His services were, in a way, free for all and he could be called by any ordinate monk to perform any of his personal work as well, like washing of his habit or so. After spending a period of three months to two years, according to the custom ('constitutiones') of the monastery, he was taken as a novice on probation for a period of two to three years. He is a potential monk during this period, can participate in a number of religious activities mostly as an assistant or helper in the liturgy, etc. He mixes up freely with the monks, though not yet allowed to eat with them. During this period he is free to leave the monastery and go back to his family, if he discovers that the life of a monk is

ultimately not for him. After the successful completion of his probation period, he is ordinated, i.e. made a member of the Order as a monk. On this occasion, he has to offer respect to his elders by lying prostrate on ground and sitting at the feet of each and every monk. He has to utter a *profess* in a solemn manner that he has cast off his previous life and is now entering a new divine life forever. The oaths of obedience, celibacy, poverty and stability is also administered on him by the Prior of Abbot. He may now no more leave the monastery on his own, except when sent out or deputed to undertake some work outside. He can also not change his monastery. However, he can be sent to some 'daughter' monastery of the main one or can be assigned to look after a diocese.

It is quite common, not only in Europe but elsewhere as well, for prominent monasteries to open their 'branches' which are affiliated to the main ones. If there are too many scattered all around, they are grouped in provinces and each province has many convents under the main monastery of which it is in charge. The provincial head, the chief 'executive' monk, is usually referred to as *praela*tus, (Lat.= 'placed in front') and he is elected by the monks of all convents under him. Every such 'daughter' monastery functions under a Prior who manages all local affairs, but for spiritual guidance and other policy matters, all Priors are to work under one Abbot, living in the main monastery. The system started already during the lifetime of **Pachomius** who had established nine monasteries for male monks and two for nuns which were closely knit together. Every three months, Pachomius called the Priors of these monasteries to the seat of the 'mother' monastery in Tabennisi for a general meeting and is reported to have visited the 'daughter' monasteries quite regularly.

The monasteries also catered to the educational needs of their novices and young entrants because many of them were to become clerics and priests in future. The major portion of those who joined the monastery were simple people, with,

what we call, 'village' background. There was no system of public education and the only schools available in Europe of those times were run by churches for teaching Latin and to train the students to become clerics in churches, or to be helpful in missionary activities. Under these circumstances it was necessary for well-endowed monasteries to run schools for their inmates. Very often some rich and well-to-do families brought their young children between the age group of 5 to 10 years and dedicated them to the monasteries for being trained as monks. In most of such cases, a handsome amount of money or land was also donated to the monastery to defer the costs of the maintenance of these, and other, children. Such children of tender age were known a*s oblati* (Lat. Oblatus=offered, pl.), eng. 'Oblates'. This was done in the pious belief that if a member of the family lives as a monk in the monastery, and is thus nearer to God, he would constantly pray for the welfare of the family and no evil will befall on the family members. We may compare it with the practice of dedicating a girl child by some Hindu families to the temples to be trained as temple dancers or of dedicating a male child by the Hindus of Punjab to the Guru to become a 'Sikh' (disciple, Sans. *śīṣy*a) in order to 'protect the faith'. However, very often such dedications *w*ere also politically motivated. Royal houses dedicated the younger son (or sons) of the family to avoid clash for the throne in future among the brothers. Apart from these, there were also adult males, newly converted from the so-called 'heathen' stock, who also needed to be introduced into the new faith and new beliefs, by means of a certain training in reading and writing.

It was necessary, therefore, to have two different grades of classes for these two types of students. Whereas the novices and the *conversi* (newly converted) were given lessons in rudimentary Church Latin and training in singing psalms correctly with good pronunciation, much more care was taken of and time spent on the *oblati.* Every *oblatus* was given a guardian (usually a senior monk) who took personal care of

his boy and accompanied his ward the whole day wherever he went. He taught him how to behave properly like a monk, what are the rules and traditions of the monastery, what are the basic tenets of the Christian faith, etc. We have an almost exact parallel of this practice in Buddhism in which every new entrant is assigned to an Āchārya and an Upādhyāya. Āchārya is the spiritual preceptor of the novice, whereas the Upādhyāya is his worldly teacher as well as mentor who introduces him into the practices of monkhood and also guides him through the affairs of the monastery.

The teaching in the classes was mostly oral, since the books were rare or hardly available. There was usually one book which was with the teacher. It is well known that many monks who rose to high or even highest positions could hardly read or write, although they knew their psalms and prayers correctly by heart. In many cases even the Abbot could not read because he had never visited a school and was appointed as the head of the monastery by the local ruler or the body which had founded the monastery.

The *oblati an*d other young novices were trained altogether in seven 'liberal arts' *(septem artes liberalis).* The first phase of learning consisted o*f Trivium,* the group of *three* basic subjects: Grammar, Rhetoric and Dialectics. *Rhetoric* included correct pronunciation, good syntax of a spoken sentence and the art of public speaking. *Dialectics* is explanation of theological concepts, dogmas and beliefs of one's own religion as well as of its philosophical structure. After finishing the *trivium*, the students were introduced into *Quadrivium,* the set of *four* subjects which comprise Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy and Music. Astronomy was necessary for a proper calculation of the day and timings of a religious event, and music for singing of psalms and prayers with proper cantation. In some monasteries, I have been told (e.g. Neustift in Tirol, Italy) that music was given the utmost importance, novices were given intense training in it and it was a subject which they had to

learn from the *v*ery beginning till the end of their study. Rod was never spared in schools and even at the slightest mistake of the student, physical punishment was inflicted on him.

Books containing liturgy for services in the church as well as collections of psalms and prayers etc. for use of the priests and the monks were prepared in the *Scriptorium* (a room in which books were written or copied) of each monastery itself. Copies of *Bible* and other Greek and Latin texts were also constantly made. It was the job of the professionals who were employed by the monastery and who lived there as lay-brothers. Copies of the *Bible* were made mostly on parchment which was prepared out of the inner thin hide of sheep or goats. It is mentioned that for writing a complete *Bible* in Latin language, the hide of about 400 lambs was required. There was a long process of removing the hair, making it smooth and drying it in such a way that it does not become hard. It has to remain soft and supple. Manuscripts have been found to have been written with ink of different colours, especially the initial letters which were drawn very artistically. Colours were prepared not only from various vegetable and animal ingredients, ranging from glands forming under the leaves of oak tree (green) to the blood of the Mediterranean snails (crimson red), but also from *lapis lazuli* (blue) and gold leaves (this was mostly imported from India!). Due to the constrains of the writing instrument (reed pen, feather or brush) and also for the sake of faster copying, the characters of Roman alphabet which had only that single form which we know as 'capital letters', slowly changed their form and took the shape of 'small letters' which were also very highly embellished. A scribe was usually not the painter. The work of illustrating the manuscripts was done after the writing was over and skilled painters were also employed by well-endowed monasteries for this purpose as well. Because of high price and intense labour involved in producing a book, it is obvious that the libraries (*bibliothek*) of most of the monasteries were not especially rich in their collection of MSS. However,

it is astonishing to note that some of the libraries (e.g. library of the Cistercian monastery of Strahov in Prague) had, and still have, as I have personally seen during my stay there, many thousand well-bound volumes of manuscripts. Number of books start increasing in fact after the introduction of printing technique in Europe (i.e. from the middle of the 16th century, or from 1550 CE onwards).

Ascetic Tradition of India and its Ramification Towards the West

To Indian religious culture goes the credit of evolving the two unique features of Asceticism and Monasticism. The Homo sapiens – and their ancestors, the primates – were by their very nature 'Gregorian beings' and required the help of each other to survive. Early human beings must have taken quite a long time to form a well-functioning, ordered society with individual families as its units. But the *sapientia* (wisdom) is (unfortunately!) not always an asset. Some of the 'wise men' started pondering over the purpose of life and its ultimate goal, and became convinced that being born, growing, working and finally dying, could not be the sole aim of human life. They left the group or the society in which they were living and tried to make use of their life in some other way. Death and what lies beyond, was also a great mystery. The idea of a total annihilation is unpleasant and hardly acceptable to any human being. The ideas like the existence of an immortal substance in our body which survives the death, or that of the other world, or of another fresh life in a different form, emerged and with that arose the necessity of getting prepared and well equipped for this future event. Family and the society was considered as an impediment in the way of pondering over these matters and in the pursuit of 'final goals'. Such persons preferred a life of seclusion in forests or mountain caves where a few thousand

years ago their forefathers were living, not as an organised society, but more or less like individual beings, mostly in forests.

A group of such forest-dwellers are known as *Āraṇyakas* or *Vaikhanasas* in our ancient literature and it is believed that the Vedic texts which have come down to us under the title *Āraṇyakas* owe their origin to them. The Ṛiṣis in these texts speculate on a number of questions dealing with the origin of the universe and the creation, on the nature of the substance of life (*ātman*) and bodily energy (*prāṇa*); also on the nature of sound and speech, etc. Various views that they advocated and propagated, gradually developed into different philosophical directions and took the shape of esoteric knowledge which is enshrined in the *Upanishads* and which ultimately served as the basic source of the philosophical structures of all major religions originated in India.

Every society then evolved a set of rules, a code of conduct, incumbent upon all of its members, for its proper maintenance.

Once such a society was functioning smoothly, a reverse trend raised its head. Some people got weary of living as a part of a well organized society because they felt that it curtails a lot of their personal freedom. Instead of rearing a family and looking after children, they would rather work for their 'spiritual uplift', for the attainment of the 'perfection of their souls' for the realization of which the family and/or the society were considered as hindrances. They left their hearth and home, and started living either on the fringes of the Village settlements subsisting on begged food, or in forests, nourishing themselves with forest produce. These forest-dwellers went out sometimes alone, sometimes with their families and created an impermanent structure as their habitat where they lived with their family and their pet animals, especially the cows and dogs (a domesticated descendent of wolf !) The Ṛiṣis in these texts speculate on a number of questions dealing with the origin of universe and of creation, on the nature of the substance of

life (*ātman*) and of bodily energy (*prāṇa*), also on the nature of sound and speech etc. Various views that they propounded and propagated, gradually developed into different philosophical directions and took the shape of esoteric knowledge which is enshrined in the Upanishads and which ultimately served as the basic source of the philosophical structures of all major religions originated in India.

Although not all thinkers and philosophers whose views are available to us in the *Upanishads* were hermits dwelling in the forests, yet the majority of them certainly were. They had their *Āshramas,* 'habitats of peace and tranquility', in the forests which served not only as places for performing austerities but also as 'academies' to which the students in search of knowledge and seekers of truth thronged. The students lived with these enlightened souls for years together serving them, but also supported by them and returned with the spiritual wisdom acquired from their preceptors in order to form families and to live like house-holders. Such house-holders too wished to spend the last years of their lives in such penance-groves performing austerities i.e. *tapas* or *tapasyā,* in order to achieve spiritual perfection before their death, in the hope of a better future thereafter. On the other hand, the quest for spiritual perfection was so strong in some persons that they did not wait till they became old. They left the world for forests as soon as they realized the uselessness of continuing to live in an organised way within a family, and in a society, and set spiritual enlightenment as the goal of their lives. There are even references in our Purāṇic literature of certain children of tender age like Prahlāda and Dhruva indulging in severe *tapasyā* and gaining spiritual perfection even before they attain their youth.

Tapas in Sanskrit is derived from the root *tap* which simply means "heat'. But the word which is used to denote physical heat is *tāpa w*hereas the word *tapas* is used in the sense of 'spiritual fervour', 'spiritual energy', also 'supernatural and superhuman capacity gained by virtue of accumulating this kind of energy

in body'. The concept of *tapas* is so old in Indian thought that the term in this very sense occurs already in the *Rigveda* and its use becomes more and more common in the Upanishads. "That particular seed of creation which was still unmanifest and lay enveloped in void, got sprouted and attained a manifested form through the force of *tapas*", so says the third verse of the *Rigveda* X.129 (Nāsadīya-sūkta)[1]. Prajāpati, the Lord of creation of the Brāhmaṇa-texts, brings out this creation out of himself after accumulating *tapas* and after 'exerting' *(shrama)* himself: *tasya śrāntasya tepānasya mukhāt śrīr udagāt,* "while he (Prajapati) was performing austerities and toiling, glory came out of his mouth', says a passage in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Spiritual force and austerities, mental and physical labour, *tapas* and *śrama* both, are thus both needed to achieve something or for bringing something into being.

The root *śram* in the sense of 'striving to achieve spiritual enlightenment' is first found in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 11.7.1 and this concept of toiling, exerting oneself (viz. to achieve spiritual perfection), is later picked up by the monastic schools of Bauddhas and Jainas to denote their monks a*s shramaṇas.* They purposefully avoided the Brahmanic terms *tapas* and *tapasyā* (out of which the words *tāpasa* or *tapasvin* are formed which denote a person engaged in *tapas*/*tapasyā*) because it has a different connotation and a different association, with a stay in forest, prolonged fasting, deprivation, bodily sufferings or even self-torture. Buddha did not want this. He is a believer in *'madhyamā pratipatti', '*the moderate way of the middle'. His monks toil, they exert themselves both in physical and mental ways, but they are far away from severe austerities or giving themselves up to extremes of bodily sufferings. However the belief that human body is impure, full of sins, a cage for the soul which is a divine substance consisting of pure consciousness; and the more we undergo bodily sufferings, the purer our

[1] *Tucchyenâbhvapihitam yadâsīt,*
tapasas tan mahinā jāyataikam/

person becomes, this notion of *tapasyā*, remains deeply rooted in Indian philosophical thought. The Jainas have carried it to the extremes and fasting unto death, to happily adopt a voluntary death *(sallekhanā),* in order to get rid of the supposed or committed sins or evils is considered to be the most desirable form of extinguishing the worldly existence for a Jaina saint or monk.

The idea of *tapasy*ā in the form of abstinence from food and bodily torture also reached the middle east, especially to Syria where sometimes it was a part of the Eastern Christianity. We have there *Stylites* like **Simeon** who stood on a pillar for many years, or persons who fettered themselves willingly and went around with heavy chains. Persons like **St. Antonius** and others, leaving the world and going to the Egyptian desert to live in ca*v*es or pits dug in the earth or in shelters made of twigs and leaves and passing their time in prayer and meditation, also evoke in mind the image of Indian *tapasvins* who likewise preferred to live in forests or mountain caves – never in desert though, and practiced austerities sitting cross-legged on rocks.

The idea of *brahmacharya,* a word the use of which is later limited in the sense of 'celibacy', also deserves mention in this context. *Brahmacharya* comprises in itself the whole set of values, morals and the way of leading one's life which helps one realize the nature of that ultimate, mystical Substance, the Supreme Consciousness, which is both the efficient and the material cause of this universe, and is expressed by the word: *brahman. Brahma-chary*a is t*o live* or t*o lead* (the Sans. Root √*char)* one's life in the quest of *Brahman* –which is both, the 'spiritual knowledge' as well as the 'object' of that spiritual knowledge, the Supreme, Impersonal, universal Being. Realization of the nature of Supreme Consciousness and also of the absolute identity of one's own self with It, helps one conquer the fear of death, leads him to the state of immortality. If one's intrinsic nature is identical with the Supreme Consciousness of the universe, there cannot be a final annihilation of the Self.

That is why there occur such statements in the *Upanishads* as *'brahmacaryeṇa tapasā deva mṛtyum upāghnan', "*the gods killed the death through (i.e. by practicing) *tapas* and *brahmacharya".*

Celibacy was considered as one of the indispensable, or at least a major, requirement for the spiritual practices leading to the realization of Brahman. The state of celibacy was also considered to be essential for the conservation of one's own 'glow' (*tejas,* spiritual fervour). A person who is given to lust and whose thoughts are directed towards the pleasures of flesh, cannot devote himself with full concentration to spiritual practices. Practice of celibacy is a means to self-empowerment, it makes one strong within, empowers the practitioner to have full control over his natural drives and strong emotions and to be content within himself (the '*ātma-tuṣta*' of the Bhagavadgīta III.17). Celibacy is, therefore, the prime requirement for spiritual pursuits. This seems to be the reason behind the Sanskrit word *brahmacarya* attaining with the time the narrower meaning of 'celibacy'.

It may be noted that in Indian thought the celibacy does not simply means abstinence. It is much widely defined in the Smṛti texts. Pure celibacy contains in itself eight features and indulgence in anyone of these leads to the infringement of the *v*ow of celibacy for a Brahmachārin and a monk. A celibate should not: *think* (secretly) of a woman*, talk* about a woman*, dally* with a woman, *observe* attentively a woman, *share his feelings* with a woman*, imagine* in his mind a physical union with any woman, try to have closeness of women and finally, to indulge in self-satisfaction or to have an actual *sexual union:*

smaraṇam kīrtanam kelih prekṣaṇam guhyabhāṣanam/
saṃkalpo'dhyavasāyaś ca kriyānirvritir eva ca //

This emphasis on celibacy for physical, mental and spiritual development is mainly and typically a phenomenon of Indian thought. Among the philosophers of Greece, it is only Pythagoras (6th C. BCE) who laid stress on it for the inmates of his academy. But Pythagoras is the most 'Indian' of all Greek

philosophers with his belief in the immortality or *indestructibility of the soul*, its *transmigration* into any human or animal form, *chain of re-birth* and his strict adherence to *vegetarianism*. His biographer **Diogenes Laertius** makes him even visit the North-Western part of India and to have interaction with Indian *Gymnasophists* (naked saints). In Judaism and Islam, celibacy is of no consequence for the seekers of truth. In Christianity, it became a must for the eremites, desert fathers and monks but later in middle ages, we find a mixed approach to it.

Many great religious personalities and philosophers appeared in the first millennium before the current era, and even earlier, in a number of countries especially Egypt, Israel, Greece, India and China but perhaps it was only the Buddha who really thought of founding a well-organized and closely knit group of the followers of his teaching, a *sangha,* i.e. a congregation, or a *church* in Christian terminology. Vow *(profess*) of loyalty to the Sangha (*'sangham sarnam gacchāmi*') becomes one of the three main pre-requisites for initiation into Buddhism. During the three last years of his apostolic activity, Christ did not get sufficient time to organize his followers into a congregation, nor did he perhaps think of it, though he knew very well about such organisations because he had passed a certain years of his life in Alexandria where a number of Buddhist monks were living (some of them were sent there by Emperor Ashoka during the reign of Ptolemy-II [mentioned as '*turumāya*' in his inscriptions]) and Christ had certainly close contact with them as many of his preachings contained in the *Bible* clearly show. His followers were not many and in their country they could not openly express their allegiance to a new prophet. Christ perhaps also did not think that he is going to be the founder of an entirely new religion, as many modern scholars have rightly pointed out[2] who would like to see his

[2] *vide: The Bible*, *Authorized King James Version* with an introduction and notes by Robert Caroll & Stephen Prickett, OUP 1998, Introduction, xvi, fn. 8, 9

teachings as a 'reformed' or a 'neo'-Judaism or, at the most, a sect of Judaism. The task of organizing the scattered group of Christians into a 'Church' was left to **Paulus**.

Monasticism had all along been an integral part of Buddhism. Buddha himself was hailed as *'mahāśramaṇa'*[3]. He had performed austerities, had indulged in severe ascetic practices for six full years (from the age of 29 to 35). Christ did not have this record. He was an itinerant preacher, very much like the Buddha after his enlightenment. Monasticism did not have any roots in Judaism. It was also not known in the country of Egypt which had been the earlier home of the Jews. It is true that the act of 'fasting' and 'praying' is often referred to in connection with prophets like **Moses** in the Old Testament and that forms part, in some way, of both Judaism and Islam even today, but that particular form of fasting is not of the kind which an ascetic usually indulges in. Some Western scholars like to trace the roots of Christian monasticism in the Pythagorean Brotherhood which existed in the academy of this legendary philosopher in the 6th-5th century BCE. We shall return to him later, but let it be clearly borne in mind that the academy of Pythagoras was not a place for practicing asceticism and his inmates were not monks. It was an educational body, much like the *āśrama* of an Indian Riṣi, in which simple eating habits for knowledge-seekers prevailed and where celibacy was observed.

There is thus enough justification for writing off all these cultures, Egyptian, Hellenic and Judaic, as the originators of the kind of monastic and eremitic practices which suddenly erupt in the beginning, the 4th CE in Christianity, some 300 years after its beginning and long after the Christian Church has

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[3] Cf. the following very popular verse which is found in many a Mahāyānic inscription:

ye dharmā hetuprabhavā, hetus teṣām tathāgato'pyāha/
teṣām ca yo nirodho, evaṃ-vādī mahāśramaṇaḥ//

been formed; also significantly not in Israel but in the deserts of upper Egypt. The new phenomenon finds its expression in the religious practices of such eremites as **St. Anthony**, **St. Makarius** (300-370 CE) and others which were, for that time and for that locale at least, not only quite strange but also rather 'outlandish'.

The monistic and eremitic way of religiosity might have been quite new for Christianity and for the country of Egypt, but it was nothing new in the history of mankind and in the history of religions. It was, and had been since long, an integral part of Indian spiritual and religious practices. How old are these practices in India, nobody knows. Purāṇas are full of the stories of ascetics and of religious personalities who got involved in severe asceticism. *Upanishads* refer to a number of sages who have attained 'perfection' through austerities. If we take the word '*vāta-raśanā*'–muni drapped in coloured garment occurring in the Rigveda (X.136.2) in the sense of a Yogin who has 'full control over his breath', or understand it as a mendicant whose life hangs only from the 'rope of his breath', further, if we understand the word *vrātya*, immensely glorified in book XV of the Atharvaveda, with Prof. Hauer in the sense of a person who has 'voluntarily accepted the moral code of vow*s (vrata) f*or his own spiritual discipline', we have distinct traces of eremitic practices already in the early period and some would even like to extend it back to the period of Indus Valley culture which has yielded a male bust of a person supposedly involved in Yogic meditation.

Contrary to the common perception of a lay man, there is enough evidence to prove that all advanced civilizations in ancient times had close cultural and trade relations with each other. Trade links between people of Indus valley and Sumer have been established beyond doubt. Brisk trade existed between India and Babylon. An interesting story is told in the Buddhist *'Bāberu-jātaka'* how the people of Babylonia (*bāberu*= Babylonia) appreciate an Indian crow, which the traders have

brought there for sale, and consider it to be a very beautiful creature (bird), till the next time a peacock is brought to their city which leaves the flabbergasted viewers gasping for breath! it is well known that most of the Jātaka stories are pre-Buddhist in their origin. Buddhists have only moulded them slightly as per their tenets and adopted them for propagation of their religious precepts.

But *apropos* Peacocks. These birds were really exported to Middle East and Egypt (port of Alexandria) from where many of them found their way to Rome. The word for peacock in Hebrew *is thuki* or *thukin* which is derived from the Tamil *tokai* meaning peacock; *toka* is tail. Indian monkeys were also a hot item for export. In Hebrew it is called *kophu* which is simply Sans. *kapi.* On the obelisk of *Shalmeneser-III* of Assyria constructed in 860 BCE, figures of Indian monkeys and elephants are depicted which were exported from India, first via a sea route up to Makran (South Persia) and from there by land route to Babylonia/Sumeria or Assyria.

The Hebrew expression *for* cotton, is *Karpas* which is simply Sans. *Kārpāsa*. Much of the cotton cloth which has been used to wrap mummies in Egypt has gone from India. The so-called 'Egyptian cotton' is not produced in Egypt. It was produced in India and re-exported to Rome via Alexandria. Gujarat (Sopara or Śūrpārak, Bhrigukaccha or Bharoch), Maharashtra (Pratishthan, Paithan) and especially south India (Arikamedu near Pondicherry and Nelcynda in the central Travancore region in Kerala etc.) had brisk trade relations with Middle East countries, Egypt and Rome. Rome was the biggest consumer of Indian goods which landed first at the port of Alexandria. Hundreds of Roman coins have been discovered in south India from various places which seem to have had workshops or trade centres of Roman businessmen settled in India. There is much more abundance of gold in south India even today in comparison to north, much of which is supposed to be of Roman origin. **Pliny**, the elder, deplores in his work that "India

swallowed up a colossal sum of 50 million sesterces annually just for the sake of certain eastern fripperies like pepper and other effeminate objects. India and its luxuries are turning Rome into a city of wimps". There was once also a procession in the city of Rome demanding ban on the import of '*lānā indicā*' (=Indian wool) with which they meant the fine Indian muslin, citing as the reason that the ladies dressed in near-transparent muslin from India, moving around in the city, looked so attractive that they posed a great threat to the Roman morals ! King **Sennacherib** *(*704-681 BCE), the mighty ruler of the Neo-Assyrian empire who built a wonderful palace in his capital Nineve (Northern Irak) mentions in one of the inscriptions discovered from the ruins of his palace that he had used a part of land around his palace to grow "trees bearing wool", i.e. cotton. Herodotus (around 400 BC) uses the same expression in Greek for cotton and the word "Baumwolle" (tree-wool) is still the expression used in German for cotton. By the way, the English word 'Cotton' is also derived from the Indian word *Katān (<Sanskrit root √Kart = to Weave, also 'to cut').*

Indian items exported to Rome via Alexandria were mainly ivory, pearls, and diamonds. India was the only diamond producing country till 18th century, followed later by Brazil around 1765 and South Africa in the second half of the 19th century! Among the various spices in the tomb of pharaoh Ramses one has found coriander which has been proved to have come from India by the botanists of the *Museé de l'homme*, Paris, in 1975-76, Other items exported to the Roman empire were, rubis (*padmarāga*), emerald (*marakata*) and semi-precious stones like amethyst, cat's eye (*vaidūrya*), moon-stone (*chandrakānta*) and garnet, etc.; further, textiles, perfumes, sugar and, last but not least, steel ('vooz', a word derived from Dravidian word 'ukku') and swords. South India (especially Karnataka) produced excellent quality of swords because of a good content of carbon and some other metallic elements in its iron ore. Sharp, supple and strong Indian steel-swords won unqualified admiration of

Greek soldiers in their fights in Punjab and evoked strong desire among them to possess them. They became prized possessions of Roman generals who were prepared to pay its prize in equal amount of gold ! These swords were later produced in Syria with the steel ingots imported from India and became famous under the name 'Damascus swords'.

The items that Rome exported were glass and glassware of every kind, tin (required for producing bronze), Mediterranean corals *(vidruma* in Sans.= 'a branching off tree' referring to coral reefs), and amphorae, etc. Trade relations between India and Rome via. Egypt through Oman, Yemen and the Red Sea got intensified during the time of **Augustus Ceaser** (ruled from 27 BCE to 14 AD CE), especially when Egypt became a part of the Roman empire. Pāṇḍyas sent trade missions to Rome to the emperor Augustus in 26 BCE and also in subsequent periods. Indian goods were carried by sea up to Red Sea coast and from there by land route to Alexandria. After annexation of Egypt by Rome in 30 BCE, Augustus is reported to have dug wells all along the caravan routes through the desert of Egypt from the port right up to the mouth of Nile where Alexandria is situated. The Western Gangas of Talakkad in Karnataka had also flourishing trade with Roman empire which is corroborated by the discovery of a large hoard of Roman coins of Alexandrian variety in the temple town of *Mudukt*herai on the banks of Kāverī which must have been sent in lieu of Indian goods exported to Alexandria which served as an entry port for Indian goods to Europe.

In the first quarter of the 1st century (24 CE), an enterprising Greek sailor living in Egypt sailed to India from a port in Red sea along the coasts of Arabian sea and Persian gulf and recorded the details of his voyage and his experiences in an interesting work titled in English as "*The Periplus of Erythrean Sea*" and which has become a classic. The vast stretch of ocean comprising Red sea, Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea was known as *Erythrea* in those days. The book is a sailor's guide for his

navigation to India highlighting the various ports and harbours for halts and guiding the merchants as to what goods can be acquired from where and also what could profitably be sold where. The work *Periplous* makes a mention of altogether nineteen such ports "to which great ships sail due to the vast quantities of pepper, camphor, sandalwood...". With the discovery of Monsoon winds in the year 44 CE such journeys became even more common. There is also an interesting, although rather imaginative, description of India in the writings of a Roman historian **Apuleius** (124 AD): "... the Indians are a people of great population and vast territories situated far East from us and at the end of the earth where the stars first rise, beyond the learned Egyptians and the superstitious Jews, Nabataean (Syrian) merchants and the Parthians of flowing robes...wherefore I do not so much wonder at the Indians' mountains of ivory, enormous har*v*ests of pepper, stockpiles of cinnamon., huge stocks of tempered iron, mines of silver and smelted streams of gold; nor the Ganges, the greatest of all rivers and the king of the waters of dawn running into a hundred streams..."

The connections of Greeks with India are better known. These became stronger after the invasion of **Alexander** and establishment by him of Satrapies (*Kṣatrapa* >*Satrapa*) in Bactria and Arachosia, etc. But even before that, the western part of India formed part of the great Achamenian empire which extended up to Ionia and Egypt. It is impossible that there was no movement of traders and scholars from the eastern part of an empire to its western end and *vice versa*. Skilled Indian marksmen fought in the armies of **Kyros** (*kuruḥ*, Cyrus) and Darius (dhārayad-vasu), etc. with their long bows, the lower end of which they put on the ground to keep it steady. There are depictions of such fighters in the Achamenian and Parthian sculptures. Greek **Heliodoros** settled in north-west India, visited Vidishā in the 1st c. CE and dedicated a stone pillar with Garuda on it to the temple of Vāsudeva. In the

1st A.D. King **Menander** ('milinda') had a discussion with a Buddhist monk *Nāgasena*, the record of which is available in the Mahāyānic Buddhist text called *Milinda-panha* ("questions of *milinda* or Menander"). Even before him **Magasthenes** had come to India (towards the end of 4th C. BCE) as an envoy to the court of Chandragupta, Greek texts sporadically makes mention of Indian holy persons visiting Ionia and making great impressions on the people there. **Pythagoras** (6th c. BC) is reported to have visited Egypt, Babylonia, Persia and western part of India in the course of his travels in the early part of his youth before he established an academy in southern part of Italy. Much of his teachings like belief in the *immortality* soul, *rebirth*, *retribution of the deeds* (Karma-siddhānta), *vegetarianism* etc. are revolutionary for the Greeks because these ideas and practices have no previous history in that part of the world. However, these were long since cherished values of Indian philosophy and recur again and again in the Upanishads (1200 BCE to 500 BCE). Exhortation to the visitors to 'know themselves' *('gnothi seauton',* = "know thyself") through the words inscribed on the top of the main entrance-gate to the famous temple of Apollo in Delphi seem to have been taken from some (Brihadāraṇyaka ?!) Upanishad where the sentences like '*ātmānam viddhi' 'ātmanām vijānihi' 'ātmā vā are vijijñāsitavyaḥ'* can be found scattered throughout in a number of chapters. Similar is the case with another aphorism *'meden agan' (*= 'nothing in excess', for which comapre the Sanskrit aphorism: *'ati sarvatra varjayet'*) inscribed in the same location which reminds one of the Buddhist doctrine of the 'middle way' and which teaches avoidance of excessive indulgence on the one hand and excessive abstinence on the other.

The coastal city of Alexandria which was founded by Alexander after his conquest of Egypt was ruled by the Ptolemaic Greeks for about three hundred years, till it was conquered by the Romans (Augustus Caesar, 30 CE). The predominant

culture of the city for more than 500 years (from roughly 300 BC to the end of 200 CE) was Hellenistic, we may also call it Greco-Roman. It was full of thinkers and scholars from all over the civilized world of that time and housed a wonderful library of approximately 7,00,000 scrolls. It was also a melting point of various cultures and various philosophical thoughts. Not long after the foundation of the city in the middle of the 3rd century BCE, emperor Ashoka sent a peace mission to the-then ruler of Alexandria, Ptolemeus II (*'turumāya'* of Ashokan inscriptions, 285-246 BCE) to apprise him of what he held as the basic tenets of political, social and moral '*dhamma*'. It is impossible that in the wake of these cordial political relations, and given the long history of cultural contacts and trade relations between Egypt and India, also in view of a very open and inviting intellectual atmosphere of Alexandria, some Buddhist scholars (with the mission to preach and teach their *dhamma*) as well as Buddhist monks did not visit and settle down there. They certainly had the support of the contemporary Indian ruler (Ashoka) who had taken keen interest in promoting *dhamma* in Śri Lankā and sent his *dhamma-dūtas* to Antioch (Syria) and other south European countries (including Macedonia, the country of Alexander, an aggressor who had attacked India only 75 years ago).

Even if **Ptolemy II**, the ruler of the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria, did not personally invite these spiritual persons from the land of Ashoka, from a country which was long since famous for its spirituality in the Hellenistic world, he at least, is not reported to have created any problem for them. Since there existed a brisk trade between India and Egypt and, as it is reported, around 120 ships sailed for India from Egypt every year, a group of Indian traders must have been living in Alexandria and elsewhere, much like Roman trader groups in south India. A number of scholars firmly believe that not only this community of traders, but also quite a few philosophers and monks were also living in Alexandria as the development

of certain philosophical schools in the first three centuries of Christian era, like, for example, *Neo-Platonism* and the *Gnostics* clearly proves.

We have a number of references in the contemporary writings to prove that Egypt, Syria and the Greco-Roman world were familiar with the existence of Indian (mainly Buddhist) monks and their ascetic practices, as also with the rudimentary teachings of the Upanishads and the Buddhism. **Nicolaus of Damascus** (1st c. CE) has given an account of an Embassy sent by an Indian king named '*Pandion*' (Pandyan kingdom of Kerala) to *Augustus Caesar* around 13 CE. He met with the Embassy at Antioch. "The embassy was bearing a letter in Greek and one of its members was a '*Sarmano*' (*śramaṇa*) who later burnt himself alive in Athens to demonstrate his faith". The event made a sensation and was quoted by *Strabo* and *Dio Cassius*. A tomb erected at the spot to commemorate this unusual event was still visible at the time of Plutarch and carried the inscription: *"Zermanochegas indos Bergoses*" (i.e. [in memory of] an Indian Śramaṇa (monk] from Barygaza i.e. (Bhrigukaccha, Gujrat).

Clement of Alexandria (150-211 CE) writes: ".... Thus Philosophy, a thing of highest utility, flourished in antiquity among the Barbarians shedding its light over the nations... First in its rank were the prophets of Egyptians, and the Chaldeans among the Assyrians, and the Druids among the Gauls, and the *Sarmaneans* among the Bactrians (s*armanaioi baktron).* The Indian Gymnosophists are also in the number which have two classes among them, some are called *Sarmanae* (*sarmanoi*) and the other *Brachmanae". We* see that the philosophers of the 2nd c. Alexandria are well aware of the existence of both the Buddhist and the Brahmanic wisemen of India. Gymnosophist, '*naked philosopher'* is the term most commonly used for Indian mendicants (not monks) because of their sparse clothing, it may also have been coined originally to denote th*e digambara* Jainas.

The Egyptian philosopher **Porphyry**, (233-305 CE) who

was a direct disciple of the great Neo-platonist **Plotinus**, whose philosophy is known to contain a number of elements of Indian, Greek and Persian thoughts and Egyptian theology, seems to have a far better knowledge of Indian Śramaṇas for whom he quotes the authority of **Bardesanes.** In his *On Abstinence from Animal Food*, Book IV, he mentions that his source of information is the Babylonian scholar Bardesanes "who lived at the time of our fathers and who was familiar with those Indians who came together with *Damdamis* to meet Augustus Caesar". What he reports about the 'Samanas' is as follows:

> "For the society of Indians being distributed into many parts, there is one tribe among them of men whom the Greeks are accustomed to call '*Gymnosophists*'. But of these are there two sects, over one of which the Brahmins preside, and over the other the Samanas. The race of the Brahmins receives divine wisdom of this kind by succession, in the same manner as the priesthood. But the Samanas are elected and consist of those who wish to possess divine knowledge. All the Brahmins originate from the same stock, for all of them are derived from one father and one mother. But the Samanas are not offspring of one family, being collected from every nation of Indians .... The Samanas are, as we have said, elected persons. When anyone is desirous of being enrolled in their order, he proceeds to the ruler of the region [to inform him of his intention) after abandoning (first) the city or the village in which he has been living and also the wealth and all the property that he possessed. Having the superfluities of his body cut off, he receives a garment and departs to the Samanas [i.e. gets united with them). He, thereafter, does not return either to his wife or children, should he have any; nor does he pay any attention to them or think that they at all belong to him. And with respect to the children indeed, the king provides what is necessary for them, and the relatives provide for the wife. Such is the life of the Samanas that they live out of the city and spend the whole day in conversations pertaining to divinity. They have also houses and temples built by the kings".

> "They are so disposed with respect to death that they unwillingly endure the whole duration of the present life as a certain servitude to nature, and therefore hasten to liberate their souls from the bodies with which they are connected. Hence frequently even when they look well and are neither oppressed nor driven to desperation by any evil, they depart from life".

There is no doubt as to the fact that what **Porphyry** describes in these words, is an idealized picture of an Indian monk which is based partly on hearsay and partly on the observation of the monks by previous scholars in India (Bactria) and Syria. How*e*ver, it is also true that such pictures contributed a lot towards guiding the early Christian monks on the paths of their spiritual journeys.

Bardesanes from whose work Porphyry has given the above extract was a gnostic ('*gnosticus*') who was a noble, born of Parthian (Iranian) parents in the city of Edessa (now Urfa in southern Turkey), most probably in the year 154 CE and lived up to 222 CE. Edessa at that time was a splendid capital of Abgar dynasty (Nabatean Arabic), which lasted from 132 BC to 244 CE. They were the vassals of the Parthian kings. Being open towards East, West and South, the city was a converging place for and residence of philosophers and thinkers from Parthian empire, Greece, Egypt and Babylonia. The empire of Parthians, also called *'Arsacid* Empire', (247 BCE to 224 CE) included portions of Bactria and Gandhar which were very strong centres of Buddhism and Buddhist monasticism. It is, therefore, not surprising that Bardesanes had reliable knowledge about Buddhist monks.

Being of noble descent Bardesanes studied in Greek academies together with prince **Abgar IX** who later became king of Edessa and when Bardesanes gave up his belief in Gnostics and adopted Christianity as his faith, he persuaded his classmate, the great king Abgar (177-*212* CE) also to do the same and was ultimately successful in converting him too,

who then became the first king to be converted to Christianity. Bardesanes was not only an eminent scholar and philosopher, but also a great poet who is hailed as the first poet of Syrian language. His philosophical thoughts became one of the major sources, a hundred years later, for the development of Manichaeism and he is, further, credited to have composed some 150 songs and prayers with Gnostic or Christian content in Syrian language.

Bardasanes is believed to have written an independent work in Greek on India, especially on its religious and philosophical beliefs, which has not survived but two long excerpts from it are available in the Syrian work of **Porphyry** titled *'kitāba d' namose datrawwata'* ("A Book of the Rules of the Countries")*. Bardesanes reports in these available fragments of his meeting with the members of an embassy sent to the Roman emperor *Aurelius Antonius Augustus* who ruled for a short period of four *y*ears from 218 to 222 CE. Since this last year is also the year of death of Bardesanes, it seems that he met these people latest in 219 or 220 because we have also to leave margin for the composition of his last work. But the problem is that during this time Bardesanes was not living in Edessa but in Armenia where he had fled in 216 due to a Roman invasion of the city. The historical facts are a little dishevelled, but what is important for us are the facts reported by this author on Indian religious persons. Just as emperor Ashoka clearly distinguishes between *Brāhmaṇas* and *Śramaṇa*s in his inscriptions, the former expression for the religious leaders of those following the orthodox Vedic religion, and the latter for the elite group of the monastic orders of Buddhism, Jainism, and possibly also of the Ājīvakas (for whom he dedicated a rock shelter in Barabar hills), so also Bardasanes differentiates clearly between the two which means that he is aware of the existence in India of 'Hinduism' (i.e. the orthodox Vedic religion) as well. He also has a basic idea of the Indian caste hierarchy and knows that the office of priests is hereditary. He mentions that

a monk has to leave his family and friends behind and never to keep contact with them. He mentions the robe of monks and of the custom of shaving their head. He alludes to their food habits and also of them being totally vegetarian. Also that they live in houses (monasteries) erected for them by kings or munificent philanthropists. That they pass their time discussing about and pondering over divine matters is obvious and goes without saying. His remarks about considering the life as full of suffering and welcoming death may seem a little exaggerated, but is not too much off the mark. But the most important fact, perhaps, that he knew, was that the Sarmanaes (derived from Sans. *śramaṇa*) or *Samanas* (the Pali or Prakrit version of the same) are an elite group, anybody can join this group, but besides this elite group (monks), there are also a large number of lay believers in this religious system who form the majority, and support this elite group.

One may thus rightly conclude that during the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries at the latest, in the region permeated with Hellenistic culture i.e. in Syria, Babylonia, Armenia, Greece and Egypt, acquaintance with Buddhism and with Indian monasticism is an established fact. It is also very likely that this form of religiosity, in which one lives as a recluse without any encumbrances of family and children, dedicating his whole time, energy and attention towards his spiritual perfection and enlightenment, came to be considered as the best way of achieving the goal of life.

In Central and West Asia, this way of life was first adopted and efficiently put into practice by the gifted and learned prophet **Mani** (216- 276 CE), an Iranian of noble descent (Arsacide or Parthian) born in Babylonia. He also divided his followers into *electi* and *auditores*, those who are 'elected' to lead the life as a monk and are competent to preach the mysteries of religion, and those who simply '*listen*' to the sermons and expositions of the these monk-priests and teachers. The Persian terms used for these two categories of the Manichees

are *ardavān* (i.e. respectable, from the root *arda,* Sans. √*arh*=to worship, cf. the Persian word *ardās*=prayer) and *niyoshagān* (i.e. the hearer) which are literal translations of the Buddhist terms *arhat* and *shravaka* respectively, meaning exactly the same. The *electi a*re meant to be supported by the *auditors* (= 'hearers', *scil.* of sermons), exactly like in Buddhism. **Mani** also established monasteries for his *electi* in which they sometimes indulged in severe austerities – just like Indian *Sādhūs*, but a practice banned by Buddha for his monks. Mani certainly knew about Buddhism and Buddhist monasticism, but he did not want to learn the organizational aspects of his 'monks' *(electi)* and monasteries in Syria or Babylonia. He undertook a journey to Bactria and western part of India, as is clearly mentioned in his biography, to have "first hand knowledge of these aspects. One of the most knowledgeable scholar of Manichaeism, Geo Widengren remarks in his work '*Mani and Manichaeism"* (p. 95). "It is quite possible that Mani consciously copied Buddhism in its organizational aspect".

Mani was a far sighted religious leader (or, let us call him a 'prophet') and a great syncretist. Three religions held sway during his time over the large part of Asia: Buddhism, Zarathustrism and Christianity. Gnostics and Neo-platonists were also on scene, mainly in Alexandria, but they were not an organized group, nor a religious community. However, they were a great intellectual force which could not be ignored. The great empires of the Achemenians, of Romans, Parthians, Sasanides and the conquest of Alexander had ushered in an era which we may call the first or the earliest phase of 'globalization'. He thought of creating a new, universal, religion, of which he *w*as to be a Prophet, by synthesizing the selected elements of all these religions and also incorporating a few elements of Gnosis. He firmly believed that such a system of religious beliefs would have trance-national acceptance which was also the need of the day and he succeeded a great deal in his efforts. His religion was accepted and adopted by

people right from Egypt to China and it became even the state religion of the Uighur people in the early 8th century and had it not been so bitterly criticized and contested as 'heresy' by the early Christian Fathers and its followers persecuted, it is very likely to have displaced Christianity. We must not forget that **St. Augustine** (354-430 CE), one of the four founding Fathers of Western or Roman Church, was originally a Manichee, a follower of Manichaeism, in the formative years of his youth for at least nine years before he was baptized (in 387 CE) by **Ambrosius**, the Bishop of Milan. He has mentioned it quite clearly in his quasi-autobiographic work *Confessiones*". ("*da mihi castitatemet continentiam sed noli modo* i.e. 'when as a youth I was enjoying the pleasures of life', a line from the early poems of Augustus)

According to **Mani**, the universe is distributed in the realms of Light and realms of Darkness; light above and darkness below. This dualism he has inherited from Zoroastrianism: which believes in two equally potential and powerful powers: power of good and powers of evil, *Ahur Mazda* and *Angra Mainyu* respectively. For Neo-platonically influenced Mani, light represents spiritual world and darkness the material world. In the beginning (before creation), equilibrium exists but it is broken when 'darkness' rises above and strives to engulf a part of light in which it is also successful. The '*God of Greatness*' sends his first Cosmic human beings with his five sons (Reason, Mind, Intelligence, Thought and Understanding) to fight against the forces of darkness but they find themselves helpless. The Man, conquered and arrested by forces of darkness, sends a distress call to his father and the Father calls back, sends him a word (*logos*) *w*hich assumes the form of divine saviour figure, the Jesus ("In the beginning there was word...' the first sentence of word = Christ), of which Mani is the Paraklet, etc.

The cosmology of Mani's religion is too complicated to be given here. It is more or less a novel creation of Mani on the basis of elements taken from Zoroastrianism, Mandaeism and

Gnostic. The main thrust is on a constant struggle between good (spirit) and evil (body and its cravings) in which the body (the person) is a looser in the beginning and remains overpowered by the forces of darkness till the '*God of Greatness*' (**Zurvan**, a pre-Zoroastrian god, deification of endless time and endless space, eternity and infinity; Sans. 'Ānantya', cf *śatyam, jñanam anantam brahma'* of the Upanishads) sends a messenger to rescue him. **Jesus** was such a messenger who was last sent and **Mani** proclaimed himself as his *Paraklet* (advocate) the prophesy of whose (Mani's) coming is found in the gospel of John. What we are, however, concerned within the present context, is the organizational aspect of his monasteries, the ascetic practices of the *electi*, their daily routine and their food habits (vegetarianism etc.). **Arthur Vööbus** in his *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* remarks: "It must be considered an important merit of Manichaeism that it brought the fertile and receptive ascetic movements of Mesopotamia into contact with various forms and manners of Indian asceticism. It is apparent that already Mani had Buddhist monks as paradigms before his eyes, and it is also possible that he and his companions knew still other models from India".

It is significant to note that in all these three ancient monastic religions, Buddhism, Manichaeism and Christianity, *confession* of the breach of any teaching plays an important part. Rigorous ethical requirements bring with them quite often transgressions and render the practice of confession and repentance an essential institution. The nature of confession in Buddhism and Manichaeism is more or less similar whereas in Christianity it has taken a different form. In Buddhism, what we call 'confession' is called *'pratimokṣa'* i.e. absolution. The corpus of *pratimokṣa* is a set of some 235 rules which are mostly structured in form of prohibitions, starting like: "*A monk should not*..... (do this and this)". These rules are recited loudly by the Abbot or some senior monk in the fortnightly grand assembly of monks which is held on full-moon and new-moon

days, both of which are meant for total fasting and internal purification for the monks. After a rule is read out, every monk responds to it by saying '*na mayā kṛtam'*— 'I have not done it', or to confess candidly that he has committed such a breach of the rule and then willingly accept the prescribed punishment for it for the purification of his self. Three collections of the confessional formulae of Manichaeism have fortunately been preserved for us: an independent text in Sogdian, a slightly amended translation in Turkish and a Chinese version. The Turkish text is titled as "*Xwāstwānīft*" and it is a confessional formulary for laymen. A number of anti-doctrinal conduct and moral lapses are enumerated, after reading of which by an elderly master chosen from among the *electi*, the person or the persons present in the congregation have to say in Sogdian or Parthian language*: 'man āstār hirzā*', i.e. 'absolve my sin'. An example of the nature of these formulae provide for example, the following sentences: "*Should I have ever said that Ohrmazd and Ahriman were younger and elder brothers, then I repent now and beg for forgiveness of my sins*" *(man āstār hirza !);* "*God is the source of all good and evil*", (*m.a.h.*), "*It is only God who alone confers life or death*", *(m.a.h.).*

One notices that the nature of these formulae is much like the formulae of *Pratimokṣa* of Buddhism. They are basically used to remind a lay believer again and again of the fundamental tenets and teachings of Manichaeism and to strengthen them in his mind. To absolve the guilt of a religious transgression, or to prevent its occurrence, appears to be of a secondary motive.

Confession of a guilt or sin in Judaism and early Christianity (cf. Math.3.2, 8) had the form of a general prayer unto God to forgive the sinner through his grace and to absolve him of his guilt, committed wittingly or unwittingly (cf. Math. 6.9-15). Same is the case with Hindu prayers of *aparādha-kṣamāpana-stotras* for forgiveness uttered unto ones *Iṣtadevatā* although these Sanskrit ślokas are usually highly poetical. Atonements or *prāyaścittas* are also a means to get rid of a sin arising out of any

breach of the prescribed ethical or moral code of conduct and they are prescribed in great detail in the Hindu Dharmaśāstric literature. Later the Christian ecclesiastical authorities and ordained priests are given powers to absolve the sins of an offender, if he confesses them before the priest[4] and repents for having committed the breach. It is a personal and confidential affair between the offender and the priest and need not take place in public. Though the way a confession is carried out in Christianity has changed its form, yet it may be interesting to investigate how the *prayer unto God* seeking forgiveness for known and unknown transgression becomes replaced by the rite of 'confession' in which the priest himself is empowered to absolve the repentant of his sin. In fact, the priest before whom such a confession is made is considered to be a representative of Christ, or Mani in our case, who acts on behalf of Christ, Mani or God. A parallel in this regard may be noticed between Buddhism-Manichaeism on the one hand and Christianity on the other with the line of development of the notion running from Buddhism through Manichaeism to Christianity. There are quite a few other elements of similarity as well, between the phenomena of Buddhist and early Christian monachism and in their coenobitic organizations and they have caught attention of the earlier scholars too. But the approach to explain them has mostly been marked with a bias on one side or the other and the tendentious writings have not allowed a fair appraisal of the situation.

We may start first with a few similarities in the legends of Buddha and Christ.

Striking similarities are there, for example, in the manner of their unusual conception and birth, special astronomical happenings at their births, Holy (or royal) persons coming to

[4] It is done in a special chamber of the chief priest (i.e. Father) of the Church away from the eyes of the common visitors, as I have been told by my Christian friends in Europe and the …

greet the baby, efforts of evil beings (Devil or Māra) to bring both away from the path of virtue, their similar statements on sin and virtue, explanation in the New Testament of the fate of a blind by pointing out to his deeds in previous existence, mention of walking on waters of both spiritual leaders (and of St. Peter), feeding of a large congregation of followers with the minimum available food, wondrous happenings at the time of the death of both and the last, but not the least, the main message of both which is of *love* and *compassion, i.e. karuṇā* and *maitrī*, towards all. The ethical and moral values propagated by Buddhism and noted down in the texts like *Dhammapada* (in Pali, 1st c. BC-CE) and *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Sanskrit) have very often one-to-one similarities with the teachings in the *Book of Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* of King Solomon. These include stress on *peace*, *tolerance* (*kṣamā*), *viewing this world as illusion and a place of suffering*, *necessity of meditation* and of *overcoming ignorance with wisdom and enlightenment*. It has also been pointed out by Foucher *(The Beginning of Buddhist Art*) that the iconography of Mary breastfeeding the child Jesus was unknown in the West until the 5th-6th century whereas the depictions of the Buddhist Mother goddess *Hariti* breastfeeding her child are much older in the Buddhist art of Gandhar. Further, Missions and Missionaries established in the areas like Antioch and Egypt by Buddhists pre-date all Christian organizations, and not only monasteries but also these serve as models for Christ and Christians. Buddha, in fact, should certainly be termed as really the first active 'missionary' in the religious history of the world. Before him holy men were certainly there, but they did not vigorously went from place to place convincing the people to follow their views and also did not care to establish a congregation (*sangha*, church) of their followers.

The legend of the life of Buddha (Bodhisattva) was so popular in antiquity that it was converted into a beautiful literary novel, with Christian content, in the 6th century and is known as '**Barlaam and Josaphat**'. Whether the original was in

Arabic, Syrian or Greek, it is difficult to say, but it is the Greek version prepared by a Georgian monk **Euthymius** of Athos which became very popular, it was translated into Hebrew and Latin and thereafter in almost all important European languages. At present there are around 140 known manuscripts of this work, done mostly in the middle ages (10th to 15th c.). Many of them are also illustrated. Josaphat is presently a part (i.e. member) of the corpus of Christian saints who is assigned the 19th November as his day. Now **Josaphat** is a a corrupt form of *Bodhisattva* through Persian *bodisav,* Arab. *budasaf* > *yudasaf* and ultimately Gk. *Josaphat*. He is a prince, son of a king named **Avenir/Avenna** of India who hates Christianity. When the child is born, holy persons come to see him and the soothsayers make the prophesy that he will be a great king who will rule over the holiness. The king is alarmed and when the boy attains youth, he keeps him interned in his palace. But when he complains about it to his father, he allows him to go for a walk everyday in the evening. On his first day he meets a blind, the second day a lame and the third day a person struck with leprosy. He is highly depressed and disgusted with the world. On fourth day he meets the eremite **Barlaam,** who in the guise of a jeweller tells him the importance and brilliance of a rare gem which is the *Christian faith*. He gets converted and allows himself to be baptized. Upon returning home, he declares it to his father. The father is unhappy. He calls magicians and some heathen philosophers to convince the prince to give up his faith. A disputation is arranged. The prince defeats all philosophers and many of the heathens get converted to the new faith. The magician **Theodas** (with a Greek name! Sans. *Devadāsa*) brings beautiful ladies to seduce the prince and invokes devils to frighten him, but Josaphat prays and thus remains steadfast. In the end, Theodas is also converted. The king ultimately accepts it and cedes him half of his kingdom in which he can follow his religion. Josaphat builds a number of churches in his kingdom and promotes Christianity. He leads a happy life but his father

suffers. Ultimately Avenir, the father, also accepts Christianity and retires to a hermitage where he dies after a couple of years. When the father dies, Josaphat lays down his crown and goes to a desert where he again has to fight with demons and has to withstand seductions, but he does not deviate from his path.

There, in the same desert, he also discovers the body of his teacher **Barlaam** and gives it a decent burial as per the Christian rites. Towards the end of his life, he attains perfection and dies as a holy man.

It is not surprising that with the movement of merchandise from East to West over the Silk Route, and in the wake of large movements of people right from western part of India to Egypt during the three great Persian empires of Acheminides, Parthians and Sassanians, and also during the time of Alexander who is said to have promoted not only the shifting of large groups of population from West to East and East to West, a number of religious ideas also travelled freely across this part of Asia and were readily accepted elsewhere. They became a part of the religious thinking and cultural values of those people. Striking similarities between Buddhism and Nestorian Christianity with regard to scriptures, doctrines, saints' monastic life, meditation practices, etc. have been noted as early as the 13th century by such international travellers as *Giovanni de Piano Carpini* and *William Ruysbroeck*. When Christian missionaries made more direct contact with Asian communities in the 16th century (e.g. Francis Xavier) such accounts became more accurate and with the introduction of Sanskrit and Indological studies in Europe, they achieved a scientific temper. *Rudolf Seydel* writing in 1896-97 (1. *The Gospel of Jesus in relation to Buddha legend* & 2. *The Buddha Legend and the Gospel of Jesus*) discovered around fifty similarities between Buddhist parables and teachings in the old and the new Testaments. The first half of the 20th century saw some of the scholars falling apart in two camps propagating two extreme views. On the one hand, there were scholars like Indologist E. Washburn Hopkins (the

famous author of *Epic Mythology*) who went as far as to say "...Finally the life , temptation, miracles, parables and even disciples of Jesus have been derived directly from Buddhism' *(History of Religions).* The famous French Missionary-scholar Albert Schweitzer (who is known to have converted many an African tribes to Christianity) rejects it outright and states: "... the hypothesis that Jesus' novel ideas *were* borrowed *directly* from Buddhism is unproved and unthinkable".

The Tuebinger Indologist Richard Garbe produced a full-fledged monograph in 1914 *(Indien und das Christentum: Eine Untersuchung reigionsgeschichtlicher Zusammnhänge)* on the connections between Indian philosophy and Christian thought in general, and the points that he highlighted and considered as Indian borrowings in Christian monasticism, were*:*

1. The phenomenon of *Celibacy*, for both males and females as a necessary pre-condition for spiritual development of practitioners. This is not a part of Judaic or early Christian tradition and appears late (in the 4th c.) in Christian thought and practice.
2. A Strict adherence to *vegetarian* diet which the early eremites and desert fathers like Antonius adopted willingly and of their own. Since this is not the normal and the usual source of nourishment for the people of the European and West-Asian region (nor perhaps of Indians of those times !), it appears that the Buddhist (and Manichaen) monks have served as an ideal and model, so also for having a frugal meal only once a day in the afternoon.
3. The obligation of *Tonsure*, i.e. shaving off hair either completely or in a particular manner which finds a much later acceptance in Christianity since during the Roman period it was a mark of being a slave, who was not allowed to have hair, whereas it was an integral part of the ordination ceremony of the Buddhists.
4. The institution of *Confession* is developed in the Buddhist monasticism, for the first time in the history of religions,

for both monks and nuns separately, but it is introduced in the Christianity only in the 3rd century of the current era.

5. The use *of bells* first in the monasteries and then in the churches which are of later origin in Christianity whereas their use in Buddhist monasteries is attested by Bardesanes of Edessa already in the 2nd century.
6. A parallel of great significance is the w*orship of the relics* of saints and holy persons in Christianity. Many shrines and churches are built all over Europe on them. This has exact and striking parallel with Buddhism in which *stūpas o*r *dagoba*s (*dhātugarbha*-s) w*e*re *e*rected on the relics of the Enlightened one. The ashes of Buddha were divided into ten parts after his cremation and distributed to the rulers of those kingdoms where he had wandered. A crystal jar which originally contained such ashes — as is evident from the inscription on it – was recovered from the stūpa of Bhattiprolu (reconstructed or renovated in the 2nd century BCE). The inscription is said to be contemporary to Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*) and may be seen in the National Museum, Delhi.
7. Though the introduction of *rosary,* especially in the Eastern Orthodox church, for counting numbe*r of* prayers uttered and also for the sake of concentrating on it, is perhaps of late introduction but the very term *rosary* (a string of roses') betrays its origin and proves it as having been introduced from India. The term *rosary* is a literal rendering of the Sanskrit term *japa-mala* (a garland for uttering [and keeping count of the Mantras]) in which the term *japa* was misunderstood by foreigners as *japā*, which means 'rose' (in fact, *rosa sinensis*, the Chinese rose) in Sanskrit !

Even before a proper structure of the dogmatic, philosophical and theological teachings of Christianity with its monastic practices came into being, we have evidences of the existence of certain monastic groups in Alexandria which are very likely to have been influenced by Buddhism. One of such

groups called *Therapeutae* has been mentioned and described by **Philo**, a Neo-platonist Jew, in his work *De Vita Contemplativa,* "On the Contemplative Life" written in the year 10 CE. This was an ancient order of mystic ascetics who lived in many parts of the ancient world but were especially concentrated around the Lake Mareotis near Alexandria. He compares them with the Essenians both of whom were known for rigorous ascetic practices. By the time of Philo, the origin of the Therapeutae was already lost in public memory and Philo is even unsure about the etymology and meaning of this word which he provisionally explains as "healers" or "physicians of soul". The word was later taken into the medicinal terminology of Latin in this very sense and the English words 'theraputic', 'therapy', etc. are derived from it.

According to Philo the *Therapeutae* lead a chaste life with utter simplicity. They have temperance as a sort of foundation for the soul to rest upon and build up other virtues on this foundation. They abandon their property without being influenced by any attraction and flee without even turning their heads back again. They are dedicated to contemplative life and their activities for six days of the week consisting of ascetic practices, fasting, solitary prayers and the study of scriptures in their isolated cells, which are parts of a large house with its separate holy sanctuary and an enclosed courtyard. The sanctuary is a consecrated room where they are initiated into the mysteries of the sanctified life. Twice everyday they pray, in the morning and in the evening. The interval in-between is entirely spent in spiritual exercises. For six days they seek wisdom by themselves, but every seventh day they meet for a general assembly in a common sanctuary; the men on one side of an open partition and the women modestly on the other to hear discourses after which they have meals together. It is difficult to say which religion these Therapeutae followed, may be they were Jews, but certainly strongly influenced by Buddhist practices. Let us not forget that we are in Alexandria

and some very serious scholars (Robert Linssen, "**Zen Living**"; E.R.Gruber & H. Kersten "**The Original Jesus**" 1995) think that they could have been the descendants of Ashoka's emissaries to the West, or a later group which came in the wake of intense trade and cultural contacts with India and served as a model for the later practices of Christian monasticism. It is interesting that the linguist **Zacharias P. Thundy** ("*Buddha and Christ*, Leiden, Brill, 1993, p. 245) firmly believes that the word *therapeuta*e is simply a Hellenization of the Pali term for the traditional Buddhist faith, namely *Theravada or therapatha,* "the way of the elders". We have mentioned that the term *therapeuta*e, although looking very Greek, is not a Greek word; at least Philo did not know its exact meaning and the origin. Gruber and Kersten even claim that Jesus was brought up by the Therapeutic teachers of the Buddhist Theravada school, then living in the *Bible* lands, especially in Egypt which was enriched with religious diversity. Already in 1930, the New Testament scholar of Oxford, Barnett Hillman Streeter, had pointed out four remarkable resemblances between the teachings of Buddha delivered from the *Gṛidhrakūta* mountain and the teachings contained in the famous 'Sermon on the Mount' (St. Mathew, Ch. 5). In view of any concrete evidence, it may be difficult to subscribe to this view, but because of the priority of Buddhist thoughts and its quick spread towards North, West and South and in view of close links between Egypt and Israel, let us say the cities of Alexandria and Jerusalem, it looks unlikely that Christ was totally unaware of the main elements of Buddhist teachings.

Not only is there a strong likelihood of the existence of Buddhist thought in Alexandria but also the main teachings of the *Upanishads* seem to have percolated in the philosophical speculations of the Alexandrian scholars. We find their clear traces in the so-called Neo-platonic school of philosophy which comes to its full bloom in the 3rd century in the writings of **Plotinus**, a disciple of *Ammonius* and also *Porphyry*. Like

the Ṛṣis of the *Upanishads*, these philosophers hold that there is only *One Ultimate Reality*, whom they describe in Greek as '*to hen'*, the One, and which, at the same time, consists of the characteristic of 'goodness' (Greek: '*ta kalon')* as well. It reminds one immediately of the Vedic-Upanishadic expression *'ekam sat'* for Brahman, (RV I.164.46) where the word *sat* not only stands for '*reality*' but also means '*good*'. This 'One' is Infinite, is source of all life, the absolute cause and *the only real existence* above all forms of existences, transcending all reality and thought and is itself unknowable. The emphasis on *kalon*, i.e. *sat* or good is obviously directed against the beliefs of Zoroastrians and Manichaeists who postulate two independent original powers: one *good* and the other *evil*.

Again in the philosophy of Gnostics, which is contemporary in its development with Neo-platonism, the stress on acquiring Knowledge (Gk. root *gno* = to know = Sans. *Jñā*) and the firm belief that one can attain spiritual enlightenment and the ultimate aim of human life through exact and real Knowledge about Himself and also about Supreme Being, reminds us of the famous statement of the Upanishads (a *mahāvākya*): *'ṛte jnānān na muktiḥ'...* (= 'no deliverance without knowledge'). Such instances and references could still be multiplied and all this goes to pro*v*e a strong probability of the existence of Indian i.e. both Upanishadic and Buddhist thoughts in the region of Syria and Egypt which have formed basis of, or influenced, many religious beliefs and practices of this region, especially Christianity and to a lesser degree perhaps, also Manichaeism.

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