



The Consecration and Abolition of Buddhist Monastic Territory (Sīmā)

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Abstract

The proliferation of the Saṅgha Order depends on the performing of monk's ordination (Upasampadakkamma). The Buddhism will continue to survive as long as the next generation of monks is continuously practicing Vinaya (code of Buddha's disciplines)-"vinayonāmasāsanassaāyu". Vinaya is the lifeblood of Buddhism, so too Monastic Territory (Sīmā) is indispensable for practicing that Vinaya, "sīmāvipatti hi upasampadādisabbakammavipattimulam". To perform all the Vinaya rules, Sīmā plays an essential role; without a Sīmā, saṅgha can do none of the Vinaya. To consecrate a new Sīmā, it must necessarily abolish the unknown old one since the Buddha did not allow to consecrate two Sīmās at the same place. However, the journey of Buddhism has been 2565 years long so that no one can know where the exact location of an old Sīmā is. To be clear on that sort of suspicion, saṅgha must firstly abolish the old Sīmā and then consecrate a new one. This paper gives explanations about the issue of Buddhist Sīmā especially on the abolition and consecration of Sīmā in order to overcome the Vinayakukkucca (doubts on Vinaya). Besides, since Sīmā has complicated in its aspects, this paper will also provide the different views of ancient teachers over the case of Sīmā for the better understanding.

Introduction

According to *Uposathakkhandhaka* section in *Vinaya MahāvāPāli text*, the Buddha allowed the *saṅghato* consecrate *Sīmā* in relation to Unity - "*Sāmaggi*"¹ However, among the *saṅgha*, there arose an unclear thought that how far does this unity extend; as far as one residence or one district or all over the earth. "*Kittāvatānu khosāmaggihoti. Yāvatāekavāso. Udāhusabbāpathavi*"² Then the Buddha told them unity extended as far as one residence. Here also arose a question that how far does one residence extend. At that time the Buddha prescribed them to consecrate *Sīmā*; "*Anujānāmibhikkhavesīmāṃsammannitum*"³ This is the origin of *Sīmā* in Buddha *Sāsanā*. According to this, "*sinīyatesamaggenasaṅghenakammavācāy abandhiyateti sīmā*,"⁴ *Sīmā* means a place where the *saṅgha* fastens a *Samghakamma* or a place where a *saṅghakamma* is tied through *Kammavācā*. The Abolition of Buddhist Monastic Territory (*Sīmā*)

Later on, the Buddha allowed the *saṅgha* with regard to abolition of *Sīmā* the text mentions in brief and just gives a *Kammavācā*. Commentary, of course, explains in detail. Buddhist in the past might had consecrated a *Sīmā* in the newly consecrating area but left no record. With such a presumption, monks consider the theory of *Vimativinodanī* and *Vinayālaṅkāra* as an alternative procedure to revoke/abolish the unknown location and thus take them for granted. According to those commentaries a *Sīmā* can be abolished for two reasons; (1) to enlarge a small *Sīmā* – "*mahantaṃvākātuṃ*"⁵ and (2) to reduce a larger *Sīmā* – "*khuddakaṃvākātuṃ*."⁶ To be free from *Sīmāsambheda* (touching and connecting) and *Ajjhottharaṇa* (overlapping) with other *Sīmā*, the abolition should be needed before consecrating a new *Sīmā*. Even if there was no an old *Sīmā*, one can overcome the doubts by revoking it.⁷ And the abolition should be needed before consecrating a new *Sīmā*, or extend or reduce the size of an old *Sīmā* -



"tatosīmāyasīmaṃsambhindantenāsammato ...kātabbāṃ."⁸ Baddhasīmā may vanish when the teachings of Buddha disappears or is revoked by Kammavācā -"ayaṃ hi sīmānāmakammavācāyavāasīmāhoti, sāsanantaradhānenavā."⁹

According to Mahāvaggacommentary, it is impossible to abolish without knowing the old Sīmā - "nacasakkāsīmaṃajānantehikammavācākāt urṃtasmānasamūhanitabbā".¹⁰ But it is not important in Sīmā abolition either knowing the old Sīmā and its boundaries or not. The important matter is that being inside the old Sīmā and reciting Kammavācā with the intention of abolition.¹¹ So Vimatiṭṭikā, Vinayālaṅkāraṭṭikā and the ancient teachers have pointed out the methods of Sīmā abolition. Modern Sīmā abolition methods are referring to the abolition of Khaṇḍhasīmā but not the Mahāsīmā. It is impossible to know the exact location of Mahāsīmā which is 3 yojanas (about 36 miles) wide because it can only be in the time of the monks who possess supernormal power like Ven. Mahamoggallāna - "Tiyojanikāpimahāsīmāyo...kārakāṃvadēyya".¹² Even if there were such kind of Mahāsīmā, it is difficult to revoke it, as it will not be easy to collect the monks within that area. There can be no Khaṇḍhasīmā without Mahāsīmā. The Khaṇḍhasīmā, therefore, used today does not mean to the real Khaṇḍhasīmā but it is similar to it.

There are two concepts concerning with the invitation of all monks from the whole village (Nethein) in the abolition Kamma; one is that not necessary to collect all monks from the whole village and another is to collect them. The former is agreed by NyaungLwuntSayadaw (I), BhaddantaÑāṇindaMahāthera¹³ and VisuddhārāmaSayadaw¹⁴ by interpreting of Vimatiṭṭikā in the text as meaning; "one can revoke a place where is within the monastery or within the place where can be reached by throwing a stone from that monastery - "Vihāraparikkhepassaantocabahicasamantā.

.. sīmāyasamugghāte"¹⁵. Besides MyinchanSayadaw¹⁶ said that " it is going to abolish the old Baddhasīmā (man-made) but not the Gāmasīmā (natural village Sīmā) so it is no need to collect all saṅgha from the whole village but the saṅgha from within the old Baddhasīmā could reach."¹⁷

The latter is agreed by MinekhineSayadaw¹⁸, Kyunywar Sayadaw by holding the views of Vinayālaṅkāraṭṭikā meaning that the abolition Kamma is one of the monastic legal procedures which is laid down by the Buddha and it is under the completion of participants (Parisāsampatti) - "ñattidutiyakammātāparisāsampattijananattham"¹⁹ But it actually means for if there was a Mahāsīmā to avoid from Vaggakamma²⁰. And in the Pacittayādhiatṭikā, Naethin is needed only for Sīmā consecration and it does not mention to do Naethin for abolition.

There are many ways using for Sīmā abolition methods by different teachers who are the most venerable ones in Buddhism. The abolition methods like Naung Saung Panti (the rectangular sector methods), KoeTharna (nine divisions methods), KyakKhye Khat (Diagonal methods), etc., which are handed over by the ancient teachers, are useful, easy to follow, and clear for new generation. The ways of abolishing methods are different.

According to Visudārāyama Sayadaw, the more the participant Samghā it has the safer to get a successful Sīmā. However, of course, the abolition area should be 12 feet more than the actual size to overcome the doubt of Sīmāsambheda (at least a tip of a hair). So here is the best way instructed by Sayadaw U Pa Khan Gyi that is the Thein KyoPhyat (cutting the line of Sīmā) method.²¹ It has to revoke first the surrounded land of Sīmā at the Sīmamtarika. That would be very safe because if the Sīmamtarika revoke first, the old Sīmās, which might be in the middle, can revoke by doing so. To dispel the doubts, at least three or four abolition methods should be used.



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There are two methods of Sīmā consecration. They are: (1) The method of consecrating by applying Visuṃgāma and (2) The method of region-wise Sīmā or consecrating by without applying Visuṃgāma.²² Of these the first one is determined by the government as the Visuṃgāma (Abaddhasīmā). In which saṅgha can perform all saṅgha kamma after getting permission from the government.

To become a Visuṃgāma, it must apply permission from the government. It can only be within Gāmakhetta. But the whole Gāmakhetta cannot be taken as Visuṃgāma. The only small area of Gāmakhetta can make as Visuṃgāma. The king or president can determine as Visuṃgāma. However authorized servants can also do it. "yampiekasamiriyevagāmakkhetteekāmpad esaṃyayamvisuṃgāmohotūtiparicchinditvā raja

kassacidetisopivisuṃgāmasīmāhotiyeva": a plot of land which the king gives to someone within a particular village area having demarcated it, labeling it as 'a separate village', is indeed identified as a separate village boundary, Visuṃgāmasīmā.²³ Therefore it must apply to get permission from the government. Either lay person or monk can apply for permission. In Myanmar, it is a custom to apply the permission by layperson to the government. One important thing is that the place which belongs to Sāsanā has to transfer to the government. Finally, the authority has to give the plot by defining it as Visuṃgāma.

It has to be determined by Ṇattidutiyakammavaca as Baddha Sīmā. After getting government's permission, one can consecrate a Baddha Sīmā. Commentaries mention Visuṃgāma is Abaddha Sīmā. But later on, monks consecrate Visuṃgāma to turn it into Baddha Sīmā. The reason for that if the government revokes the status of Visuṃgāma, it will be invalid Sīmā.

Therefore, it will need to consecrate by Ṇattidutiyakammavaca as Baddha Sīmā. As long as the Buddha Sāsanā exists, the Baddha Sīmā can exist as well.²⁴

The consecration of region-wise Sīmā is more difficult than Visuṃgāma Sīmā. But there has been consecrating of region-wise Sīmā from ancient times up to nowadays if it is not so difficult to collect monks in the whole local area or one does not want to wait for a long time to get the official order for Visuṃgāma Sīmā. If one understands how to consecrate a region-wise Sīmā, one also understands how to consecrate Visuṃgāma Sīmā.

Conclusion

Having studied the facts regarding Sīmā, Sīmā is the vital need in order to survive Buddha Sāsanā extensively and continuously. Whatever saṅghakamma is done by monks, it must be done in the Sīmā collectively and harmoniously. In order to extend and prolong the Buddha Sāsanā, the generation of monks must be survived continuously. To survive the monks' generations continuously, there is nothing but Sīmā. If there is no Sīmā, the monks cannot be generated. If there are no monks, Buddha Sāsanā will be extinct immediately. All in all, it can say that the Sīmā is the taproot of Buddha Sāsanā.

The unsuccessful Sīmā is the cause of dissolution for all kinds of saṅghakamma – "sīmāvipattīhi

upasampadādīsabbhakammavipattimūlaṃ."

So, one should not act carelessly related to Sīmā. One who wants to consecrate a new Sīmā must learn or have knowledge about Sīmā. He should invite the most venerable monks who are trustworthy and have strong experience concerning with performing in Sīmā consecration and abolition Kamma because Sīmā is fill with many controversial issues in its subject. Moreover, one should invite the young monks to participate in those Kamma to teach or hand over those methods, as they are the future leaders of Buddha Sāsanā.

References



- 1 *Vinaya Mahāvagga*. p. 144
 - 2 *Vinaya Mahāvagga*. p. 144
 - 3 *Vinaya Mahāvagga*. p. 133
 - 4 *Vinayālaṅkāraṭīkā, Sīmāvinicchayatā, Vol, I.* p. 298
 - 5 *MahāvaggaAṭṭhakathā*. p. 322
 - 6 *MahāvaggaAṭṭhakathā*. p. 322
 - 7 *Vimativinodanīṭīkā. Vol, II.* 168; *Vinayalaṅkāraṭīkā. Vol, I.* 344; *Vijitāyone Thein Note Thein Thamote Nee Myo Zone Kyanmahā.* pp. 40-41
 - 8 *Vinayalaṅkāraṭīkā. Vol, I.* p. 353; *Vijitāyone Thein Note Thein Thamote Nee Myo Zone Kyanmahā.* p. 64
 - 9 *MahāvaggaAṭṭhakathā.* p. 322; *Thein MyoZonBhāsāṭīkā (2nd Edition).* p. 8
 - 10 *MahāvaggaAṭṭhakathā.* p. 332; *Vijitāyone Thein Note Thein Thamote Nee Myo Zone Kyanmahā.* p. 71
 - 11 *Vinayalaṅkāraṭīkā. Vol, II.* p. 357; *Vijitāyone Thein Note Thein Thamote Nee Myo Zone Kyanmahā.* p. 71; *Vimativinodhanīṭīkā. Vol, II.* p. 156.
 - 12 *Vinayalaṅkāraṭīkā. Vol, I.* p. 465; *Vijitāyone Thein Note Thein Thamote Nee Myo Zone Kyanmahā.* p. 67
 - 13 *The author of Vijitāyone Thein Note Thein Thamote Nee Myo Zone Kyanmahā*
 - 14 *The author of VisuddhāyonAshonAphyat*
 - 15 *Vimativinodanīṭīkā. Vol, II.* p. 156; *Vinayalaṅkāraṭīkā. Vol, I.* p. 366; *Vijitāyone Thein Note Thein Thamote Nee Myo Zone Kyanmahā.* p. 63
 - 16 *KoesaungKamsaungkammavācā written by Abhidhajamahāraṭṭhaguru*
 - 17 *Vijitāyone Thein Note Thein Thamote Nee Myo Zone Kyanmahā.* p. 65
 - 18 *The author of VithiponeSanponeTheinpone Kyan*
 - 19 *Vinayalaṅkāraṭīkā. Vol, I.* p. 352; *Thein Thin Tan (3rd Edition).* pp. 175-176; *Thein Myo Zone Basaṭīkā (2nd Edition).* p. 15
 - 20 *An act of the separated monks' group*
 - 21 *Vijitāyone Thein Note Thein Thamote Nee Myo Zone Kyanmahā.* p. 31
 - 22 *Ashin Silananda -Thein- Thin- Tan.* p. 73
 - 23 *MahāvaggaAṭṭhakathā.* p. 333
 - 24 *MahāvāggaAṭṭhakathā.* p. 332
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