

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT OF KAṬHINA

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The *Kaṭhina pinkama* (the ritual of *kaṭhina*) can be introduced as one of the extremely important features in the Buddhist culture. However, it seems that there is no proper understanding of the *Kaṭhina* because the basic concept of *kaṭhina* has been alienated from the early Buddhism. The basic Buddhist teaching on the *kaṭhina* seems to have been promulgated some time after the early period of Buddhism. Based on the ‘rainy retreat’, the *kaṭhina* ritual has been incorporated in the *vinaya* (discipline) tradition as a later act of *vinaya*. The basic objective of this essay is discussing the philosophical importance of the *kaṭhina*. There are a few occasions through which a philosophical approach can be obtained on the specific acts of *vinaya* related to *kaṭhina* and the subsequent rituals:

1. Building mutual relations between the lay and the clerical social systems
2. The union of spiritual and worldly objectives
3. Rules of *vinaya* and the rituals developed around them

Although the early background of *kaṭhina* appears to be in the form of an ‘act of ‘*vinaya*’ for the *bhikkhu*-s, in later times it seems to have been evolved into a special ritual created on the contact with the Buddhist culture as a common need of both the clergy and the laity. It seems that discussing the philosophical value of this ritual would be more interesting in a discussion on the *kaṭhina*. In this regard a few topics on the *kaṭhina* seems to be of special relevance: (1) What is *kaṭhina*? (2) On what grounds Buddha approved of the *kaṭhina*? (3) What was it approved for? (4) Why is called *kaṭhina*? (5) Who should offer the *kaṭhina*? (6) Whom should it be offered to? (7) Of what should it be given? (8) When should it be given? (9) Where should it be given? Through these covering questions the *kaṭhina* could be discussed.

At present, what is meant by *kaṭhina* is Buddhist religious process that has been developed in association with the *kaṭhina*. It may be better to recognize it merely as ‘*kaṭhina pinkama*’ or

‘meritorious deed of *kaṭhina*. But it would be more instructive to examine what was meant by the *kaṭhina* at the time of the living Buddha. There are two main issues in this regard: That is, was it the ‘*kaṭhina*’ robe that was meant by *kaṭhina* or some other tool that was used in the making of the *kaṭhina* robe? The *Khuddaka Vatthukkhandha* in the *Cullavaggapāli* says: ‘At that time the monks planting stakes here and there sew robes well. Those robes sometimes have unequal hems. Buddha having seen this said ‘Monks, I approve of the *kaṭhina* and the string that binds the *kaṭhina*’.¹ Thus Buddha has approved of the *kaṭhina*. This shows that what was meant by the *kaṭhina* was a tool used for sewing the robe. Later on Buddha advised to sew the robes by keeping them on a flat surface and to prevent it from getting soiled to keep it on a spread of grass.² After this the *Khuddaka Vatthukkhandha* carries a few a few *vinaya* rules related to *kaṭhina*. When the *kaṭhina* began decaying, to attach a hem to it, to use ‘*daṇḍakaṭṭhana*’ in the middle of the robe, to use a ‘*vidala*’ of its size for to make it two fold, the eakle, the rope to tie the ‘*mahākaṭṭhana*’ and the *daṇḍakaṭṭhana*’ and the ‘string’ to bind the ‘*daṇḍakaṭṭhana*’ have been approved . Furthermore, Buddha has instructed not to step on the ‘*kaṭhina* tool with wet foot, and to use a hall on rainy days for the safety of the *kaṭhina* robe, and to find a higher stage to protect it from flooding, A roof for the *kaṭhina* hall, and also to whitewash the walls and to decorate it with floral patterns. ³ (A special description of this is in *Kaṭhinakkhandha* of *Māhavaggapālī*)

What becomes clear from this is that the ‘*kaṭhina*’ is not the robe but a tool used to sew the robe. Subsequently the robe sewn by using the that tool came to be called a ‘*kaṭhina* robe. It is not clear, however, the reason for calling the robe offered to monks at the end of the rainy retreat ‘the *kaṭhina* robe. A tool similar to what weavers used in weaving cloth, according to the *vinaya* was also known as ‘*kaṭhina*’. It was used to pull the four corners of the robe tightly and to keep it maintain its edges equally. It is reasonable to think that this tool was called ‘*kaṭhina*’ because of its hardness and its usefulness to keep the four corners symmetrical.

The offering of a robe to the *bhikkhu*-s upon completion of the ‘*vas*’ or rainy retreat has been mentioned in the *vinaya*. A special account of this ritual is found in the ‘*Kaṭhinakkhandha*’ in the *Mahavaggapālī*. In addition to this, more information can be found in the *Parivārapālī*, *Pācittiyapālī* and *Samantapāsādikā* (*vinaya* commentary). In regard to the *kaṭhina* robe, the

terms, '*kaṭhināṭthara*' and '*kaṭthinuddhāra*' are important. *Bhikkhu*-s also differ in their views on this subject. The spreading of the '*kaṭhina*' robe and lifting or 'taking up' can be given as the literal meanings of these terms. However, it seems that the use of these terms has been changed in the popular Buddhism and also it has become a point of debate. By examining the *Mahāvaggapāli*, we can see that the clothes offered to the monks who had observed '*vas*' and placing them on the *kaṭhina* and the lifting of the finished robe from the *kaṭhina*' was what was meant by these terms.

Further, during these acts, the monks who had observed '*vas*', were required to perform some acts of *vinaya* which make the '*kaṭhina*' a special event among acts of *vinaya*. The commentary on the *Mahāvaggapāli* says that when there are no monks among those who observe the '*peravas*' to perform the '*kaṭhina*' ritual, *bhikkhu*-s who are versed in the *Khuddakavatthu* must be brought.⁴ The *Mahāvaggapāli* mentions about seventeen kinds of robes that are suitable for spreading the '*kaṭhina*'. In that list, new clothes, clothes similar to new clothes, clothes made with pieces cloth, rags picked from the garbage, clothes which had been thrown away and picked up, clothes received by not praising the gift, clothes which are not temporary, clothes which had not been saved before, clothes which had not been '*nisagi*' (what ought to be abandoned), clothes which had been marked with '*kap*' drops, clothes with five sections which are cut from the '*tani pata*' (single fold) robe, or from the loin cloth on the same day, clothes which do not belong to any person or abandoned in the '*sīma*' of that location the cloth shared by the *bhikkhus* of that '*sīma*' has been described as the well spread out *kaṭhina*⁵.

Kaṭhina robe was approved on account of *bhikkhu*-s who lived at Pāveyyaka in the country of Kosala. Once, while Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery, thirty monks living in Pāveyyaka, thirty monks who were observing the austere practices of '*piṇḍapatika*', '*pansukūlika*' and using only three robes. One day at the conclusion of their '*vas*' ritual, they set out on their way to Sāvatti to see Buddha. But on the way they got drenched in a heavy rain, slipping on mud, their robes getting discolored and dirty, suffering in the cold, went shivering to see Buddha. When they were sitting at a side, seeing them Buddha said, Monks, I approve a *Kaṭhina* for the welfare of the monks who have completed the rainy retreat'.⁶ Thus Buddha allowed the *kaṭhina* for the monks who complete the '*peravas*' ritual. It is well known that the sixty *Arahant*-s, were sent out by Buddha to spread the message of his Dharma, and when they

were touring the country through villages and towns, Buddha has recommended a *kaṭhina* robe for those *Arahant* monks for the benefit of the faithful devotees. These decrees of Buddha to suit the social conditions of that time and so as to preserve the conduct of *bhikkhu*-s, seem to have been practiced well by the monks. Several new trends appeared in the Buddhist society based on the observation of ‘*vas*.’ Among them, acceptance of ‘*vihāra*’ and other dwelling places is an important one. A number of rituals and practices developed in relation to this which is considered to be conducive for the spiritual development of the monks. Invitation to observe ‘*vas*’, special places or locations suitable to live during the period of ‘*vas*’, ‘*sattāha karaḍa*’ and ‘*kaṭhina*’ are some of these, major ones. The approval of the ‘*kaṭhina*’ robe in addition to the three robes, may be taken as a landmark in the Buddhist monastic culture.

The origin of ‘*vas*’ and offering of robes highlight the prominence of the laity⁷. For example, we can take King Bimbisara’s invitation to observe ‘*vas*’ and Visākhā’s eight boons. The simple meaning of ‘*kaṭhina*’ is ‘hardness.’ One of the meanings could be for the terms ‘*kaṭhina dussa*’ or ‘*kathina cīvara*’, in the sense of spreading out the ‘robe on the tool known as ‘*kaṭhina*’ or based on the results of offering the *kaṭhina* robes as that is believed to be of tough quality with its nature of lasting long. In relation to the meritorious deed of the *kaṭhina* offering’, ‘like the great earth, like the Mahāmeru that cannot be shaken by the wind, like a thick cloth which cannot be torn, there are strong results in the offering of *kaṭhina*, the religious literatures has pointed out. In relation to this there are some reasons for gaining positive results:

- Offering the *kaṭhina* robe to a *bhikkhu* who had observed ‘*vas*’ and lived according to it properly, virtuous, competent in the *vinaya* and pure in regard to the ‘*uposatha*’ (sacred day) practice.
- The robe to be properly made with the supervision of the *saṅgha* from beginning to end
- Offering the ‘*kaṭhina*’ robe in the ‘*uposatha*’ house by order of Buddha and the decision of the *saṅgha* and the cooperation of both the *saṅgha* and lay devotees for performing this act of *vinaya*.

- This is a special meritorious deed which can be accomplished only once every year, and this robe could be given only to a *bhikkhu* who has observed ‘*vas*’ and only one *kaṭhina* could be spread out by that particular monk.

These points are of importance regarding the *kaṭhina*. The occasions above mentioned provide a new approach to the ritual of *kaṭhina* ethically as well as philosophically. This is an exclusive phenomenon which touches both the mundane and supra- mundane strata in describing the ‘*kaṭhina*’. In this case, the virtuous bhikkhu who observed ‘*vas*’ and the faithful devotees, -both the parties- this ritual leads them, towards welfare in this world as well as in the next. Thus it becomes a ‘*pūja*’ or offering according to *vinaya* and ‘*āmisā*’ (of four requisites for a monk) significance.

- The monk observing ‘*vas*’ mindfully for a period of three months, practicing moral practices such as ‘*sīla*’, for realizing supra-mundane’ welfare and for personal comfort in this world, obtaining a robe gives a special significance to the ‘*kaṭhina*’ robe.
- By attending upon the monks observing ‘*vas*’ and providing them with the fourfold requisites, generating powerful ‘*karmic*’ intentions, and the resulting proximity between the laity and clergy, help lay devotees to approach safely on the path of liberation
- The opportunity through the offering of the *kaṭhina* robe to attain the pleasure of intention and in this world and pleasure of the fruits of the results of merit.

It is necessary to examine to whom the *kaṭhina* should be given. According to the *Kaṭhinakkhandha* in the *Mahāvaggapāli*, a *kaṭhina* robe could be given to any one out of the fivefold ‘worthy’ persons whether human or God who has been invited or not to observe ‘*vas*’. The donor of the ‘*kaṭhina*’ has a duty in this connection. The person who does not know the custom, should ask ‘Reverend Sir, to whom should the ‘*kaṭhina*’ be given? And taking a cloth sufficient for one of the three types of robes, at sunrise, saying ‘*vatthaṃ kaṭhina cīvaraṃ dema*’ (We give you this cloth for the ‘*kaṭhina*’ robe’), the Commentary explains.⁸ Further the monks should advice on how many needles, thread, dye, etc. for the monks making the robe as well as

gruel and rice etc. When asked to whom the *kaṭhina* should be given, the reply should be ‘to the Chief monk’. Further, on this occasion,

- If a certain monk is using decayed robes, and also if there are several monks using decayed robes, the senior most monk among them should be given the robe
- Among the senior monks, the one who has a large group and who is capable of making the robe in one day, such a monk deserves to be given the robe.
- Just in case the senior monk is incapable of making the robe in one day but a junior monk is capable of doing that, the latter deserves to receive the robe.

Further, the Commentary says that if one of the three robes is in a decayed condition of a certain monk the robe should be given to him and it should not be given to a *bhikkhu* who is too greedy. In the ritual of offering the *kaṭhina* ‘it is carried out by repeating the (*karma vākya*) formula ‘*sunāthu me bhante...*’ (Reverend Sirs, may I have your attention) as prescribed in the *vinaya*. At that time, by cancelling the old robe, the new one is ‘determined’ or accepted for use. By the term ‘*kaṭhinattharaṇa*’ all the stages in the ritual of *kaṭhina* are covered. The Commentary on the *Mahāvagga* has borrowed from the *Parivārapāli* the method of ‘spreading out the *kaṭhina*. ‘There by both the ‘*kaṭhinatthāraka*’ and the receiver, the *kaṭhina* has been spread out. The monks does not ‘spread out’ the *kaṭhina*. The *saṅgha* –community- does not spread out the ‘*Kaṭhina*’, instead the individual does the spreading out of the *kaṭhina*’. By participation of the *saṅgha* and the community, the *kaṭhina* is deemed to have spread out; spread out by the Community and spread out by the individual. Thus this ritual has been described through several stages. However, for the acts of *vinaya* related to the ‘*kaṭhina*’ and the occasion, the participation of both the *saṅgha*, the devotees and the donor of the *kaṭhina* as well as the receiver is mandatory. The offering of the *kaṭhina* can be performed from ‘*ava pālaviya*’ (the day after the Full Moon) in the month of ‘*vap*’ (October-November) up to the Full Moon day of the month. (Nov-Dec). The *saṅgha* perform the offering or transferring of the ‘*kaṭhina*’ within the formal boundary (*sīmā*).

More than for other acts of *vinaya*, the *bhikkhu*-s seem to be paying greater attention to the ritual of ‘*vas*’. The most pertinent reason for this could be the opportunity it provides to attract the participation of the donors. The reasons for the lay Buddhists to pay such strong interest in this

atthataṃ hoti kaṭhinaṃ, saṅghāṭiyā atthataṃ hoti kaṭhinaṃ, uttarāsaṅgena atthataṃ hoti kaṭhinaṃ, antaravāsakena atthataṃ hoti kaṭhinaṃ, pañcakena vā atirekapañcakena vā tadaheva sañchinnena samaṅgalīkatena atthataṃ hoti kaṭhinaṃ, puggalassa atthārā atthataṃ hoti kaṭhinaṃ; sammā ce atthataṃ hoti kaṭhinaṃ, tañce sīmaṭṭho anumodati, evampi atthataṃ hoti kaṭhinaṃ. Evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, atthataṃ hoti kaṭhinaṃ”.

MV II (PTS), 255.

⁶ “*anujānāmi, bhikkhave, vassaṃvuṭṭhānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ kaṭhinaṃ attharituṃ. Atthatakathinānaṃ vo, bhikkhave, pañca kappissanti – anāmantacāro, asamādānacāro, gaṇabhojanaṃ, yāvadatthacīvaraṃ, yo ca tattha cīvaruppādo so nesaṃ bhavissatīti...*”

MV II (PTS), 254.

⁷ “*kathañhi nāma samaṇā sakyaputtiyā hemantampi gimhampi vassampi cārikaṃ carissanti, haritāni tiṇāni sammaddantā, ekindriyaṃ jīvaṃ viheṭhentā, bahū khuddake pāṇe saṅghātaṃ āpādentā. Ime hi nāma aññatitthiyā durakkhātadhammā vassāvāsaṃ allīyissanti saṅkasāyissanti....*”

MV I (PTS), 136.