



Theravada: Exploring the Original Teachings and Historical Legacy

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Abstract

This article investigates Theravāda Buddhism as the most historically grounded school of Buddhist thought, emphasizing its preservation of the earliest recorded teachings of the Buddha. It argues that Theravāda upholds doctrinal purity through a rigorous commitment to the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Three Characteristics (Tilakkhaṇa), Dependent Origination, and Insight Meditation (Vipassanā). Drawing upon both canonical and comparative sources, the article traces the doctrinal, institutional, and textual evolution of Theravāda from the First Buddhist Council to the present day. The findings illuminate Theravāda's enduring relevance, particularly its unique claim to canonical authenticity and its impact on contemporary Buddhist practice.

Keywords: Theravada, Three Characteristics, Dependent Origination, Insight Meditation, First Buddhist Council

Introduction

Theravāda Buddhism, translated as "The Teaching of the Elders" (*Thera-vāda*), represents the most ancient and conservative strand of the Buddhist tradition. Rooted in the Pāli Canon and monastic lineage, it emphasizes personal liberation (*Nibbāna*) through a disciplined path of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The term "Theravāda" itself—derived from *Thera* (elder) and *Vāda* (doctrine)—encapsulates

the foundational aim of preserving the Buddha's original teachings (*Dhamma-Vinaya*) as codified by the earliest disciples during the First Council.

Despite its widespread contemporary identification as a distinct sect of Buddhism, Theravāda's historical and doctrinal identity remains the subject of ongoing scholarly inquiry. This study seeks to critically evaluate how Theravāda Buddhism evolved from an early oral tradition into a formalized canon and institution, and how it distinguishes itself from other Buddhist schools such as Mahāyāna. The rationale for this study lies in reassessing these developments not merely as historical facts, but as interpretive frameworks that continue to shape Theravāda's authority and legacy.

Modern scholarship frequently equates Theravāda with the earliest Buddhist teachings and the Pāli Canon. However, this identification raises two central issues. The first one is terminological ambiguity. The term "Theravāda" is often retroactively applied to the Dhamma-Vinaya preserved at the First Council (5th century BCE), although it did not appear as an institutional school until centuries later in Sri Lanka (3rd century BCE). This temporal and semantic disjunction creates confusion regarding the scope and identity of Theravāda. The second one is, historical discontinuity. The oral transmission of texts from the First Council to the written Pāli Canon in the 1st century BCE introduces concerns about textual fidelity and the selective preservation of certain teachings over others. These unresolved questions warrant a critical re-evaluation of what constitutes "original" Buddhism, how authenticity is defined, and whether Theravāda can legitimately claim unbroken continuity with the teachings of the historical Buddha.

This study aims to clarify the scope of Theravāda: To differentiate Theravāda as the doctrinal transmission of the Elders (*Dhamma-Vinaya*) and historically institutionalized school that emerged post-Ashokan era and to trace the evolution of Theravāda from the First Buddhist Council through subsequent councils leading to the stabilization of the Pāli Canon in Sri Lanka and to examine textual authenticity of Theravāda's canonical texts in comparison with parallel Buddhist traditions (e.g., Sarvāstivāda, Mahāsāṅghika) in order to evaluate claims of preserving the "original" teachings. In addition to this, the study aims assess contemporary relevance by exploring Theravāda's doctrinal positions and meditative techniques, and its influence on modern interpretations of mindfulness, ethics, and spiritual practice.

Theravada in Canonical Interpretation

The Apadāna calls disciples like Sāriputta "*Thera*" and their teachings "*Theravāda*" in this doctrinal sense. According to the Chariya Pitaka, Thera, might have come from "stha" in

the sense of standing over or lasting (one year or more).¹ “Thavara” means old age, then old, venerable. Alternatively, it may come from “Sthaa” with the derivation “Stheula” in sthura (sthula etymology under thula), thus “thera” means “venerable.” This term is used with reference to the Bhikkhus of Gotama the Buddha’s community as an adjective (adj.) meaning senior, as seen in Vinaya I.47 (Thera Bhikkhu opposite Navaka Bhikkhu).

The term “Thera”² denotes “the Elder monk” or “the Senior monk”, such as “Thera Bhikkhu”, a senior Bhikkhu, opposite to “Navaka Bhikkhu”, a novice monk. Theranuthera Bhikkhu refers to senior monks and those next to them in age, dating not from birth but from admission to the Order. These grades of seniority are distinguished as Thera Bhikkhu, Majjhima Bhikkhu, and Navaka Bhikkhu.³

The book *Seekers Glossary of Buddhism*, introduces Theravāda as “Doctrine of the Elders,” “Teaching of the Elders,” “School of Seniors,” and “Southern Buddhism,” is one of the most prominent and historically significant branches of Buddhism.⁴ According to the Mahāvamsa, the chronicle of Sri Lanka, it is considered the most orthodox of the Buddhist traditions. Over time, it has branched off into seventeen other schools due to schisms within the Order⁵. The followers of Theravāda are called Theravadins, and their lineage is referred to as Theravāsa.⁶ The succession of Theravāda monks is defined as Theriya-parampara.⁷

The original Pāli Sutta, like Mahāparinibbāna Sutta in the Dīgha Nikāya records the Dhamma and Vinaya shall remain as the sole teacher of the Bhikkhu Sangha after his passing away:

"Ananda, the Dhamma and Vinaya I have taught and prescribed shall be your teacher after my passing⁸."

1 TW Rhys Davids & William Stede (1997). *Pali English Dictionary*, Motilalal Banarassidass Publishers, Delhi, pp. 310

2 Hermann Oldenberg (1879). *Vinaya Pitaka* 1, 47, Pali Text Society, London, pp. 290

3 T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter (1889). *Dīgha Nikāya* I., Pali Text Society, London, pp. 78

4 STC (1998). *Seekers Glossary of Buddhism*: Sutra Translation Committee of the U.S & Canada, pp. 622

5 Malalasekera, G. P. (2002). *Dictionary of Pali proper names* (Reprinted ed., Vol. 2, pp. 1046–1047). Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. (Original work published earlier)

6 Malalasekera, G. P. (2002). *Dictionary of Pali proper names* (Reprinted ed., Vol. 2, pp. 1046). Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. (Original work published earlier)

7 Malalasekera, G. P. (2002). *Dictionary of Pali proper names* (Reprinted ed., Vol. 2, pp.1047). Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. (Original work published earlier),

8 *The Buddha's last bequest*. (1964). (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Trans.). Buddhist Publication Society. (Original work published earlier).

(Yo vo, ānanda, mayā Dhammo ca Vinayo ca desito paññatto, so vo mamaccayena satthā⁹).

Here, the Dhamma-Vinaya is implicitly the "Teaching of the Elders" who upheld it. Thus, Theravada does not solely define or limit as Canon or School or Tradition. This term developed as a distinct identity emerged later, a sectarian identifier, a school, or tradition (3rd century BCE onwards) to distinguish one group from others e.g., Mahāsāṅghikas, Sarvatsivada.

Historical Development and Legacy

- **The First Council and the Preservation of the Teachings**

Following the Buddha's Mahāparinibbāna (final passing away), the First Buddhist Council was convened at Rājagaha under the leadership of Mahākassapa, patronized by King Ajatashatru around 483 BCE. Nalinaksh Datta writes: "The session of the First Buddhist Council took place soon after the Mahāparinirvana of the Buddha (486 B.C.) in the eighth year of the reign of King Ajatasattu, who ruled for 32 years from 493 B.C."¹⁰ The council sought to compile and preserve the Buddha's teachings through oral recitation. Venerable Ānanda recited the Dhamma (discourses), and Upāli recited the Vinaya (monastic discipline). This oral tradition was meticulously maintained for centuries before being committed to writing in the Pāli language in Sri Lanka during the Fourth Council in the first century BCE. Even during the lifetime of the Buddha, disruptive Bhikkhus like Devadatta, and Chabbaggiya Bhikkhus tried to bring schism to be more liberal from the hard and fast rules of the Buddha. Senior monks like Mahakassapa were much concerned about the preservation of the teachings in the long term. He played a historic vital role of chairmanship, summoning the Sangha to conduct the 1st council after three months of the Mahāparinibbana. During the proceedings of the First Council, it was observed that Mahakassapa was keen on securing the approval of all senior monks, particularly Gavampati and Puraana, for the texts established by his Council as Buddhavachana. Gavampati remained neutral; he did not wholeheartedly accept the proceedings of the council as final, while Puraana expressed his inability to accept them as the words of the Teacher.

- **The Second Council and the Early Schisms**

The Second Council was held at Pataliputra, presided by Sabbakami Thera 116 years after the Mahāparinirvana, (either 110 or 137 years) after the Mahāparinirvana, around 386

⁹ Davids, T. W. R., & Carpenter, J. E. (Eds.). (1890–1911). *Dīgha Nikāya* (Vol. 2, pp. 154–155). Pali Text Society.

¹⁰ Dutta, N. (n.d.). *Buddhist sects in India* (Chap. 1). Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd.

B.C., in the tenth year of King Kalashoka's reign. Its purpose was to address disputes over monastic practices and suppress ten un-Vinayic acts¹¹ (dasa vatthu kappa) practiced by a group of monks in Vaisali (Vajjiputtakas), and maintain the purity of the Vinaya, which led to the first schism between the Mahasanghikas and Sthaviravadins.¹² It also aimed to resolve five propositions put forth by Bhikkhu Mahadeva, particularly regarding the issue of Arahats. The members consisted exclusively of Bhikkhus (not necessarily Arahats). The president of the Council was Baspa (lit. "Tears"). This Council, provoked by Mahadeva's teachings, resulted in the division of the Sangha into two schools: Sthavira and Mahasanghika.¹³ Vasumitra, followed by Bhabya and Vineetadeva, writes that due to the five propositions pronounced by Mahadeva, the Sangha became divided into two schools: Mahasanghika and Sthaviravada. Over the next few centuries, philosophical debates and regional variations led to the emergence of eighteen schools:

Sthaviravadins (Elders): Theravada, Sarvastivada, Vibhajjavada, Pudgalavada, Dharmaguptaka, Kasyapiya, Mahisasaka, and Sautrantika.

Mahasanghikas (Great Assembly): Mahasanghika, Lokottaravada, Caitika, Bahuśrutīya, Prajñaptivāda, Ekavyavahārika, Kukkutika, Jetavaniya, Andhaka, Gokulika

These divisions were not hostile but represented the natural evolution of ideas over time. Many of these schools contributed to the development of later traditions like Mahayana and Vajrayana.

• **Third Council: Re-purification of the Teachings and the Global Mission**

Theravada continued as unbroken school of elders and was re-purified and reaffirmed by expelling monks who held heretical views and non-Buddhist elements that had joined during Emperor Ashoka's generous patronage of the Sangha. The Third Council was held around 250 BCE, with the patronage of *Ashoka the Great (Mauryan dynasty)* presided by Moggaliputtatissa Mahathera, in Pataliputra (modern Patna), India. This Council was a pivotal event in Buddhist history, especially in the shaping and spread of Theravāda Buddhism. The outcome of this council was the compilation and systematization of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, which was added to the canon. The Kathavatthu, a critical text on doctrinal debates, was also composed. Ashoka sent missionaries to spread Buddhism across Asia, including Sri Lanka and Central Asia.

11 Ibid, pp 15, 1. Singilona kappa 2. Dvangula kappa 3. Gamantara kappa 4. Avasa kappa 5. Anumati kappa 6. Aacinna kappa 7. Amathita kappa 8. Jalogim patum 9. Adasakam nisidanam 10. Jataruparajatam

12 Ibid., pp.1

13 Nalinaksha Dutta, *Buddhist Sects in India*, Chapt. 1, Motilal Banarassidass Pvt. Ltd, Delhi, pp. 1

Under Moggaliputta Tissa Thera's guidance, Ashoka dispatched nine missionary missions to different regions. These were led by monks trained in the Theravāda tradition, spreading the Dhamma far and wide. The known areas include:

Mission No.	Region/Area	Led by	Modern Equivalent
1	<i>Kāshmīra-Gandhāra</i>	Majjhantika	Northern Pakistan, Kashmir
2	<i>Mahisamaṇḍala</i>	Mahādeva	Central India (modern Maharashtra)
3	<i>Vanavāsa</i>	Rakkhita	South-west India (Karnataka region)
4	<i>Aparantaka</i>	Yonaka Dhammarakkhita	Western India (Konkan coast, Gujarat)
5	<i>Mahārāṭṭha</i>	Mahārakkhita	Western India (Maharashtra)
6	<i>Himavanta</i>	Majjhima	Himalayan region
7	<i>Suvaṇṇabhūmi</i>	Soṇa and Uttara	Southern Myanmar and Thailand
8	<i>Lankādīpa</i> (Sri Lanka)	Mahinda (Ashoka's son)	Sri Lanka
9	<i>Yona</i> (Greek territories)	Dhammarakkhita	Hellenistic world (Bactria, possibly Egypt, modern Afghanistan/Iran regions)

- **The Fourth Council and The Historic Codification of Teachings in Written Form**

After the historic Buddhist mission of Mahinda Thera, the Theravada tradition continued to Tambapanni (Sri Lanka), where the Fourth Buddhist Council took place under the patronage of King Vattagamini Abhaya in 29 BCE. Its purpose was to write down the Pali Canon on palm leaves for the first time. This historic first written version of the Tripiṭaka (Pāli Canon) was committed to writing in the 1st century BCE at the Aluvihāra (Aloka Vihāra), Matale, Sri Lanka. This significantly contributed to the preservation of Theravada texts in written form, making the canonical texts (Tipitaka) available throughout the Buddhist world to this day.

Prior to this event, the teachings of the Buddha, the Vinaya Piṭaka (discipline), Sutta Piṭaka (discourses), and Abhidhamma Piṭaka (philosophical analysis) had been preserved through oral transmission for about four centuries. However, due to political unrest and famine, many monks who had memorized the texts were dying or fleeing, which led to concerns that the teachings could be lost. As a result, the Sangha decided to write down the Tripiṭaka on palm leaves to preserve it for future generations.

This was a monumental moment in Buddhist history, marking the transition from oral to written scripture, and it ensured the survival of Theravāda teachings up to the present day.

- **The Fifth and Sixth Council: Verification of the Pāli Canon**

The Fifth Buddhist Council was held in Mandalay, Burma (Myanmar) in 1871 CE, convened under King Mindon Min. Its purpose was to recite and verify the Pāli Canon to ensure its authenticity. The outcome of this council was the inscription of the entire Pāli Canon on 729 marble slabs, creating the world's largest book at Kuthodaw Pagoda.

The Sixth Buddhist Council (1954-1956 CE) was held in Yangon (Rangoon), Burma (Myanmar), with the patronage of the Government of Burma and support from Theravāda countries. Prime Minister U Nu was instrumental in its organization. The purpose of this council was to purify and modernize the Pāli Canon and to commemorate 2,500 years since the Buddha's Parinibbāna. In this council the Pāli Canon was re-examined and edited. and

- **Core Teachings of Theravada Buddhism**

Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariyasaccāni*) is the foundation of Buddhist philosophy, addressing the nature of suffering, its origin, cessation, and the path leading to liberation. In the Rohitassa Sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya the Buddha states: "In this very fathom-long body along with its perception and thoughts, do I proclaim the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and, the path leading to the cessation of the suffering."¹⁴

Key teachings in the quote represents our own psycho-physical unit (body and mind) itself embodiment of world (*Loka*), Four Noble Truth, and Eight Noble Path. "Fathom-long body" (*byāmamatte kaḷevare*), the physical body (approx. 6 feet tall) is the microcosm of suffering (*dukkha*). The World (*loka*), non the external universe, but the subjective experience of suffering (SN 12.44). Four Noble Truths Framework is Dukkha (1st Noble Truth), origin (*samudaya*), craving (2nd Noble Truth), Nirodha (cessation), Nibbāna (3rd Noble Truth), Path (*paṭipadā*), Eightfold Path (4th Noble Truth).

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the first and foremost Sutta in the Samyutta Nikāya 56.11 elaborates these core teachings. *Dukkha* (Suffering), life is inherently unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), *Samudaya* (origin), Craving (*taṇhā*) is the cause of suffering; Nirodha (Cessation), Ending craving leads to liberation (Nibbāna), Magga (Path), the Noble Eightfold Path is the way to end suffering.

Sacchavibhanga sutta further descriptively elaborates the four Noble Truths. Narada Thera emphasizes on four noble truths thus; "The Buddha himself discovered by His own institutive

¹⁴ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* 4.45, PTS edition "Imasmin yeva byamamatte kalebare, sasanhimhi samanake lokam ca pannapemi, loka samudayamca, loka nirodhamca, loka nirodhagamini patipadanaca"

knowledge¹⁵. The Buddha is first and the foremost spiritual teacher to reveal these for noble truths; the actuality of life, experiencing and exploring the true nature as it is with his years of self-inner-research and investigation. (*yathabhuta nyana dassana*). These truths are not essentially Buddhist teachings, but all-pervading, all-embracing universal truths equally experienced in any part of our globe by humans and non-humans. Whether the Buddhas arise or not these truths exist, and it is a Buddha that reveals them to the deluded world. They do not or cannot change with time because they are eternal truths. The Buddha was not indebted to anyone for His realization of them. He himself said: “They were unheard before, *vision arose, knowledge arose, wisdom arose, true knowledge arose, and light arose.*”¹⁶

Path to Liberation

Theravāda teaches that liberation (Nibbāna) is achieved through individual effort in purifying the mind. This path involves: Sīla (ethical conduct), Samādhi (concentration/meditation), and Paññā (wisdom/insight). The Arahant ideal, a being who has attained Nibbāna through eradication of defilements is upheld as the model of spiritual achievement. Unlike Mahāyāna, which emphasizes the Bodhisattva path, Theravāda focuses on the personal realization of enlightenment.

Eight Noble Path (The Middle Path): The Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Atthangika Magga*) also known as Middle Path is the most scientific strategy to attain sublime bliss of Nibbāna, the final freedom from Suffering, forms the cornerstone of the Theravāda approach to enlightenment. It is arranged in three primary categories: Virtue, Concentration and Wisdom (*sīla, samadhi and panna*). Ven. Thera Piyadassi in his book, *Buddha's Ancient Path* evaluates: “This path is unique to Buddhism and distinguishes it from every other religion and philosophy ...”¹⁷. Sīla (Ethical Conduct), Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood Samādhi (Concentration): Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration, Paññā (Wisdom), Right View and Right Intention.

Theravāda highlights the interdependence of these elements, emphasizing that wisdom arises from ethical conduct and mental discipline. Besides, the Three Marks of Existence (Tilakkhaṇa) Anicca (Impermanence): All conditioned things are transient. Dukkha (Unsatisfactoriness): Nothing in samsāra brings lasting happiness. Anattā (Non-Self): There is no permanent, unchanging self is the part of core teaching in Theravada Buddhism. It is

15 Narada, (1998). *The Buddha and His Teachings*, Buddhist Missionary Society, Malaysia, Reprinted by CBBEF, Taiwan.

16 Ariyapariyesana Sutta (MN 26) Majjhima Nikāya: *Pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*"

17 Piyadassi Thera (1987). *The Buddha's Ancient Path*, Third impression, reprinted, The CBBEF, Taiwan, pp. 78

the actuality of life and world which emphasize that nothing is perfect and nobody is perfect.

Dependent Origination (*Paticca Samuppāda*): the causal relativity is a central doctrine explaining the cyclical nature of existence and how ignorance leads to suffering. A 12-link chain explaining how suffering arises due to ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*). Bhikkhu Bodhi in his *The Great Discourse on Causation* elucidates on Dependent origination thus, "This doctrine shows the impersonal, condition-driven nature of existence, breaking the illusion of a self-creating ego."¹⁸

Kamma and Rebirth: The Law of Action and Re-action Kamma (Karma) and Rebirth¹⁹ is another key teaching in Theravada Buddhism. The Buddha stresses that our intention/volition (*Chetana*) itself is karma. The Buddha says: "I declare, O Bhikkhus, that volition (*cetana*) is kamma. Having willed one acts by body, speech and thought"²⁰. Intentional actions (*kamma*) shape future rebirths. Wholesome actions lead to happiness; unwholesome ones lead to suffering.

The ultimate aim of the Buddha's teachings is the complete cessation of suffering by uprooting greed, hatred, and delusion are the primary roots of unwholesome karmic actions that perpetuate the cycle of birth and death. Theravāda focuses on the purification of the mind by cleansing and uprooting these three evil roots through rigorous and pragmatic mental, psychological, and spiritual practices. Rupert Gethin in his book *The Foundations of Buddhism* says "Kamma is not fatalism; it's about ethical responsibility and the possibility of change through right action."

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

Sapta Bojjhanga, the seven factors of enlightenment are the key enlightening stages to attain enlightenment discussed in Theravada. Bhikkhu Bodhi in his book *The Noble Eightfold Path* asserts thus: "The Bojjhaṅgas are the nutrients of enlightenment, balancing energy (*virīya*, *pīti*) with calm (*passaddhi*, *upekkhā*) under the guiding light of mindfulness."

These seven mental qualities lead to awakening (*Bodhi*):

- Mindfulness (*Sati*) – Foundation for all other factors
- Investigation of Dhammas (*Dhamma-vicaya*) – Wisdom into the true nature of

¹⁸ *Paticcasamuppāda Sutta, Samyutta Nikāya 12.1*

¹⁹ *Nibbedhika Sutta, Anguttara Nikāya 6.63*

²⁰ Narada (1998). *The Buddha and His Teachings, Chetanaham bhikkhave kammam vadami- chetayitva kammam karoti kayena vaca manasa* p. 348, Buddhist Missionary Society, Malaysia, Reprinted by CBBEF, Taiwan.

phenomena

- Energy (Viriya) – Persistent effort
- Rapture (Pīti) – Joyful interest in meditation
- Tranquility (Passaddhi) – Calming of body and mind
- Concentration (Samādhi) – Unification of mind
- Equanimity (Upekkhā) – Balanced detachment

The Ten Perfections (*Pāramī* / *Pāramitā*) – The Training Perfections

The Ten Pāramīs in Theravada are the essential training-perfections that must be cultivated by Bodhisattvas over countless lifetimes to attain Buddhahood:

- Dāna (Generosity) – Giving without attachment
- Sīla (Morality) – Ethical purity
- Nekkhamma (Renunciation) – Letting go of sensual pleasures
- Paññā (Wisdom) – Insight into impermanence, suffering, non-self
- Viriya (Energy) – Unrelenting effort in good deeds
- Khanti (Patience) – Endurance of hardship
- Sacca (Truthfulness) – Commitment to honesty
- Adhiṭṭhāna (Determination) – Unshakable resolve
- Mettā (Loving-kindness) – Boundless goodwill
- Upekkhā (Equanimity) – Balanced mind in all conditions

Theravada Buddhism use Vipassanā (insight) meditation plays a critical role in Theravāda practice, focusing on cultivating direct experiential understanding of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). The distinctive two types of meditation in Theravada Buddhism are: Samatha (Calm Abiding) and Vipassanā (Insight). In this school personal liberation is the foremost priority. The Buddha emphasizes in the Dhammapada, thus:

Attahi attano natho - Kohi natho parosiya

Attana 'va sudantena – Natho labhati dullabham 160²¹

[Oneself is one's own protector (refuge); what other protector (refuge) can there be?

With oneself fully controlled, one obtains a protection (refuge) which is hard to gain.]

attaname 'va patham patirupe niveseyya²²

[One should first establish in what is proper] and

Attana 'va katam papam –attanaava sankilissati

Attana 'va akatam papam - attanava visujjhati

Suddhi asuddhi pacchattam - nannamannam visodhaye²³

[By oneself, indeed, is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself, indeed, is one purified. Purity and impurity depend on oneself. No one purifies another]

Key Features of Originality of Theravada

Theravāda affirms its status as the original teaching of the Buddha by grounding its authority in the Pāli Canon, which is recognized as the earliest complete collection of the Buddha's discourses. It counters the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna characterizations of being a "lesser vehicle" (Hīnayāna) by emphasizing several key points. This tradition's Canonical Authenticity is Pāli Canon, composed of the Vinaya, Sutta, and Abhidhamma Pitakas, is widely regarded as the most historically accurate and complete record of the Buddha's original teachings. Historically, Theravāda has maintained an unbroken lineage of monastic practice and scriptural study since the time of the Buddha, demonstrating fidelity to early Buddhist doctrines. Theravāda clarifies that the Arhat's attainment of Nibbāna is the culmination of the path taught by the Buddha himself. The focus on personal liberation is not selfish but represents the realization of the ultimate goal of freedom from suffering. It acknowledges that its teachings are universally applicable and open to all who seek liberation, rejecting the notion that it is limited to a select few. The rigorous adherence to ethical precepts demonstrates Theravāda's commitment to the foundational practices taught by the Buddha as prerequisites for mental and spiritual development. By asserting these points, Theravāda presents itself not as a diminished or limited vehicle but as a faithful preservation of the Buddha's original path to enlightenment.

21 K. Sri Dhammananda (2010). *The Dhammapada*, printed to mark 60th Anniversary of the WFB held in Sri Lanka, pp. 337

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 159

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 165

Theravada Revival in Nepal

Theravāda faced periods of decline due to invasions, colonialism, and internal stagnation. However, revival movements such as the Buddhist modernist reforms in Sri Lanka and the vipassanā meditation renaissance in Myanmar revitalized interest. Monastic leaders and lay Buddhists like Mahāsi Sayādaw, Narada Thera, Ajahn Chah, Anagarika Dhammapala, and Satyanarayan Goenka helped reform and internationalize Theravāda.

Ven. Narada Thera in 1946 and Ven. Madame Pannaseeha Mahathera in 1951 played a historic revival mission in Nepal called “Good-will Mission” with pioneership of Dr. Bhikkhu Amritananda Thera in order to revive Theravada Buddhism during the Rana regime in Nepal. Similarly Buddhist monks and lay Buddhists like Mahapragya, Pragyananda, Dharmaloka Theras and Dharmaditya Dharmacharya played historic vital role in revival of Theravada Buddhism in Nepal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the discussion reflects that Theravāda’s foundational claim is well-supported by its historical and textual lineage but must be contextualized within the broader, pluralistic development of Buddhism. Its contributions to meditation practice, ethical conduct, and philosophical inquiry remain central to Buddhist studies, while its interactions with other schools provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the Buddha’s enduring legacy.

Theravāda remains a vital link to the earliest formulations of the Buddha’s path to Nibbāna. Its unwavering commitment to the original teachings, focus on ethical living, and disciplined meditation offer a profound and time-honored guide for those seeking liberation from the cycle of suffering.

It maintained well the foundational doctrines of the Buddha, the simplicity of understandable practices, and even current trends of Applied Buddhism or Engaged Buddhism are drawing much from Theravada thoughts.

Theravāda Buddhism remains a vital spiritual tradition that preserves the teachings of the historical Buddha in a form closely aligned with early canonical texts. Its rich doctrinal heritage, meditative practices, and ethical framework offer timeless guidance in the pursuit of liberation. As it continues to adapt to contemporary realities, Theravāda's relevance endures both in its traditional homelands and across the globe.

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