CHAPTER - III.

THE MIECEHAS IN EARLY BUDDHIST LITERATURE.

In Buddhist literature we come across with the words Milakkha, Milukkha and Miläsa. As has already been pointed out, the terms Milakkha and Milukkha are linguistically equivalent to Sanskrit Mlecha. Even Mlecha and Miläsa are the same.

The Vinaya Pitaka lays down "... If an Ariyaka disavows the training in the presence of a Milakkhu and he does not recognise it, the training is not disavowed." Here training means — training in the higher morality (sila), higher thought (citta) and higher wisdom (panna). In other words, it is related to Buddhist faith.

The text thus clearly distinguishes between an Ariyaka and a Milakkhu. Racially they might have had belonged to different stocks.

The Anguttara Nikaya refers to the Milakkhas as a people of Jambudvipa. According to this text, they lived in the outlying countries, which lay beyond the pale of Buddhism. They are described as unintelligent.

According to the Digha Nikaya as well the Milakkhas dwelt in the bordering countries.
That the Milakkhas/Mleochas lived in a region or regions within the Indo-Pak sub-continent is hinted at in the *Anguttara Nikāya*. The bordering countries of Jambudvīpa are regarded in the *Dīgha Nikāya* as inferior to the middle countries, where Buddha was born. A distinction has sometimes been made between the outlying countries (*paccantimesu janapadā*) and middle countries (*majjhima janapade*) in Buddhist Canonical texts.

The geographical extent of Majjhimadesa is given in the early Buddhist literature. According to the *Vinaya Pitaka*, the boundaries are as follows: "the little town Kajangala in the eastern direction .... the river called Salalavati in the south-eastern direction .... the little town called Setakappika in the southern direction .... the Brahmin village called Thūnā in the western direction .... the mountain called Usiradhvaja in the northern direction ....".

Thus Majjhimadesa of the Buddhists lay between Kajangala, i.e., Kankjol, near Rajmahal in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar in the east and Thūnā, i.e., Thaneshwar in the west, the river Salalavati in the south-east, Setakappika, i.e., Śvetakarnikā in the south and Usiradhvaja, i.e., Usiragiri, a mountain to the north of Kankhal near Hardwar in the
The paccanta (pratyanta) janapadas of the Buddhists lay beyond the regions specified above.

Some idea with regard to the culture of the people of the outlying regions may be gleaned from the Buddhist Sanskrit text Lalitavistara. The people are described as dark (anda''), speechless (mūka), dull (jāda) and discourteous (abhavya). It is further stated that the birth of Buddha and Bodhisattva in the pratyantajanapada is very rare compared to that in the Madhyadesa.

Nevertheless, the Milakkhus referred to in the Vinaya Pitaka, as distinguished from the Ariyakas, were not probably disassociated from Buddhism. The statement that "if a Milakkhu disavows the training in the presence of an Ariyaka and he does not recognise it, the training is not disavowed ..." hints at the Buddhist faith which a Milakkha could have adhered to. The above statement in the Vinaya Pitaka may also indicate the presence of the Milakkhus in Madhyadesa inhabited by the Ariyakas.

That the Milakkhus lived in an area yielding lac dye seems to be implied by a passage of the Theragāthā. It speaks of the white, yellow and red turban, the last being reddened with Milakkha dye. It may be held that the Milakkhus dealt in
lac-dye.

The Milakkhas or Milāccā are depicted in the Jātaka stories as barbarians, inhabiting the outlying provinces (paccanta gāme) and living on hunting wild animals. The Mahaukkusa Jātaka, clearly describes them as dwelling in forests which abounded in wild life. They were like nomads roaming over jungles, leading a primitive way of life.

The Samkhaphala Jātaka refers to their habit of eating flesh of reptiles. That they did not practise cultivation seems to be evident from the fact that when they were given sixteen oxen instead of a snake, they preferred consuming the meat instead of employing them in cultivation.

The only Jātaka reference to the religion of these Milakkhus is found in the Bhuridatta Jātaka. The relevant passage runs as follows:

"Sikhiṃ hi devesa vaḍanti hi'eke,
Āpaṃ Milakkhā pana devam āhu."

It has been translated by Cowell in the following manner — "Some worship as a god the crested flame / The Barbarians give to water that high name. //". It may thus indicate that the so-called Milakkhus worshipped water as their god, in contrast to a different people who worshipped fire. Whether it bears
any covert allusion to their proximity to the sea or maritime enterprises is not clear.

The meagre information that we get from the early Buddhist literature indicates that the Milakkhus lived in the Indo-Pak sub-continent and that they did not belong to the Majjhimadesa, i.e., Madhyadesa or Middle countries. On the contrary they dwelt in the pratyanta or frontier states. The Milakkhus/Milakkhas could have embraced Buddhism if they liked to do so. Racially, they were different from the peoples who belonged to the Brahmanical culture.

The manner in which the Jataka stories portray the Milakkhas/Milakkhus implies that their position was no better than that of barbarous tribes, living in forests and on hunting like the wild tribes referred to in Sanskrit literature as Sabaras, Pulindas, Niṣādas, Kirātas, etc.

The connotation of the term Mleecha thus had already undergone a radical change by the period when the Buddhist texts, referred to above, were written and compiled. Nowhere in the Buddhist texts the term concerned has been used in the sense of a language or as denoting the speakers of a language. On the other hand, it has always been used in the sense of a people or peoples different from the followers of the Brahmanical culture.

Notes and References ... p.72
NOTES AND REFERENCES.


Ariyakāna milakkhukassa santika sikkhe pacikkhati so ca na pativijānāti .... (Vinaya Pitaka, Vol.III, p.27).


10. Ibid.


18. See n. 6.


contd ... p. 74.
"Scorning their own, the yellow gear,
Some will wear red of foreign dye,
And others will be found to wear
White robes of some sectarian flag."


20. No. 486.
22. No. 524.
"Vanijā ratthādhipa gacchamāno pathe addasāsim hi
milāsputte /
Pavattakāyam uragam mahantam ādāya gacchante pamodamāne //"  
24. No. 543.
25. Fausboll, op. cit.