CHAPTER VIII
LATER DEVELOPMENT OF
SARVASTIVADA SCHOOL OF BUDDHISM

During Emperor Asoka’s reign in 237 B.C.C, the Sarvastivada school broke away from Theravada. After Emperor Asoka’s death, his son Jaloka introduced Sarvastivada school to Kashmir from there it eventually spread to present day Afghanistan. ¹

Indian and Tibetan Mahayana texts present the philosophical views of the Vaibhasika and Santrantika schools, these two Hinayana schools are divisions of Sarvastivada School. The Tibetan monastic rules of discipline are from the Mulasarvastivada School, another division of Sarvastivada School.

During the period of fourth Buddhism council, within the Sarvastivada school various differences of interpretation of the teachings gradually arose. The first to appear was the Vaibhasika School. Then around 50 B.C.E, Sautrantika developed each had its own Abhidharma.

The most famous of the Kushan rulers was king Kanishka who ruled, according to some sources from 78 to 102 CE and from other sources, from 127 to 147 CE. In either case, the Sarvastivada school held its fourth council during his reign, either in his capital city of Purushapura (modern day Peshawar) on in Srinagar, Kashmir. The council reflected the Sautrantika Abhidharma and codified its own Abhidharma. In the great commentary (Skt Mahavibhasa), the council also over saw the translation, from Prakrit into Sanskrit of the

Sarvastivada version of the three Baskets like collections and the writing down of the text. The Sarvastivada was also known by other homes, particularly hetuvada and Yuvtivada. Hetuvada comes from hetu-cause which indicates their emphasis on causation and Yuvtivada comes from yukti reason or even logic, which shows their use of rational argument and syllogism.

The Gandharan most important text, the Astagrantha of Kalyayaniputra was written in Sanskrit making necessary revisions, this revised text was now known as Jnanaprasthama had a Sanskrit course of knowledge through the Gandharan Astagrantha had many Vibhasha, the new Kashmira a stagrantha i.e. the Jnanaprasthama had a compiled by Kashmira Sarvastivada synod.

The Jnanaprasthama and its Mahavibhasas, which took more than a generation to complete, were then declared the Vaibhasika orthodoxy, said to be Buddha’s word Buddhhabasita. This new Vaibhasika orthodoxy however, was not readily accepted by the Gandharan Sarvastivadins, though gradually they adapted their views to the new Kashmira orthodoxy. The Gandharan Sarvastivadins used the same Vinaya from Mathura as a matter of fact, their Abhidharma was meant for meditation at practices. They made use of the Hrdaya which is a manual for attaining arhat. However the long Gandharan Vinay was abridged to a Sanskrit Dashabhanavara in the Kashmira synod by removing the Avadana and Jatakas stories and illustrations. After the declaration of the orthodoxy, the Gandharan non-Vaibhasika Sarvastivadins, the majority were called Sautrantika (those who uphold the sutras) interestingly, the Kashmira orthodoxy, the Vaibhasika disappeared in the later part of the 7th century. Subsequently, the old Gandharan the non Vaibhasika Sautrantikas, were named mula Sarvastivadins who then at a later date went to in Buddhist traditions, the
Vaibhasika were so called on account of their dependence on Vibhasha commentary, the Sautrantas for recognizing the sutras (original text).

Vaibhasika School was first known as the Sarvastivada. The term Vibhasha it is to be remembered here-signifies detailed explanation in accordance with delivered by the master himself. The Ceylonese tradition gives the alternative name of Vibhajjavada to Theravada but it will be observed that the term Vibhajjavada is applied to Sarvastivada or other sect as well. It is very likely that the term Vibhajjavada implied that the adherents belonged to the main sect with some special views, for which they distinguished themselves Theravada Vibhajjavada or Sarvastivada Vibhajjavada. The Sarvastivada School with which we propose to deal, branched off from the Theravada, the most orthodox school of Buddhism. It is most widely spread group of school in India. It is the school that continued to flourish widely long after the Pali school had been cut off from its Indian home. It is to be noted that the Sarvastivadins was also called the hetuvadin and Muruntaka. The Mahavyutpatti gives two names of Sarvastivada, viz., Mulasarvastivada and Aryasarvastivada. According to a tradition the Sarvastivadins were split up into four different schools, viz, (i) The Mulasarvastivadins, (ii) the Dharmaguptas, (iii) the Mahisasakas, and (iv) the Kasyapiyas. We have already pointed out that Taranatha maintains that Vibhajjavadin sprang up out of this school (Sarvastivada). There is, however, another tradition which maintains that this school was divided into seven sects. They are as follows: (1) Mulasarvastivadins, (2) Kasyapiyas, (3) Mahisasakas, (4) Dharmaguptas, (5) Bahuṣrutiyas, (6) Tamrasatiyas, and (7) Vibhajjavadins. The Dipavamsa (V, 47) points out that the Sarvastivadins branched off from the Mahisasakas, a branch of the orthodox group, the Theravadins. It should, however, be remembered that the Vaibhasikas are identified with the Sarvastivadins. In the words of Yamakami Sogen, “in later times, the so-called Vaibhasikas came to be identified with the
Sarvastivadins; and the no names became mutually interchangeable, although, properly speaking, the Sarvastivadins originally formed a section of the Vaibhasikas”.

The Sarvastivadins, as well as the Theravadins, each have a literature of their own. The former claims the enormous Buddhism literature in Sanskrit to its credit, but it is a matter for deep regret that the works are preserved in Tibetan or Chinese translations. Many such lost valuable works are now being recovered and restored to Sanskrit from their Tibetan or Chinese translations. The number of books of real interest is still large enough and these are sure to yield valuable results if studied with care and industry. We are, however, told that these two schools, viz., the Theravada and the Sarvastivada, attained sufficient importance during the days of kings Asoka and Kaniska. Both of them are of outstanding importance for the history of Buddhism in India and abroad. It may be said that the adherents of the schools could produce such a vast literature and win over a large section of the populace to their side through their royal efforts and patronage only and thus bring Buddhism to the forefront of Indian religions. The geographical distribution—it is to be remembered here—of the schools also throws much light on their development. The Sarvastivadins were chiefly confined to Northern India—their chief seat being Kashmir—the Theravadins to Magadha and Kosala—the primitive sphere of Buddhism. Dr. N. Dutt says:—“The latter (Sarvastivadins) had its sphere of activity in Northern India extending from Kashmir to Mathura and was responsible for the propagation of Hinayana Buddhism in Central Asia whence it was carried to China.” Thus we see that the most widely extended school was the Sarvastivada—the main branch of the Theravada school—which must have been closely connected with the Theravada for a long time; hence there is some agreement between the doctrines of the two schools.
The Mahavyutpatti \(^2\) gives two names Mulasarvastivada and Aryasarvastivada. I-tsing maintains that the appellation Mulasarvastivada was given to this school when there were further sub-divisions of it in the 7th century CE. In the words of Prof. Winternitz, ‘The relationship between the Sarvastivada and the Mulasarvastivada is however, by no means, clear. Bu-ston is, however, of the opinion that the Sarvastivadins, who maintain the reality of all elements, are so known since they admit that all the objects-present, past and future-really exist. He further adds that like the upper caste, which introduces the body of rules and usages of a country or race, the Sarvastivadins, who used Sanskrit, account for the root (mula) of all the schools, and hence they are called the Mulasarvastivadins. All these traditions have tried to establish the great antiquity of the Mulasarvastivadins, though, in fact, this sect came into being at a late date and claimed that it preserved the original tenets (mula) of the Sarvastivada School.

The Sarvastivada School gave rise to a total of nine other schools. It was the most influential school of Hinayana in India, and had an important influence on Mahayana thought as well, its doctrines were widely studied in China and Japan. \(^1\)

The confusion regarding this school among various authorities is largely due to the fact that there were two groups of this school which were prominent at two different periods. According to Pali sources, this school, along with the Vajjiputtakas, branched off from the Sthaviravadins and gave rise to the Sarvastivadins, while Vasumitra tells us that this school was derived from the Sarvastivadins. The earlier Mahisasakas may probably be traced back to Purana who, as mentioned earlier, withheld his consent to the decisions arrived at the first Council of Rajagrha. This school, it appears, also spread to Ceylon. Mahisasakas believed in

the simultaneous comprehension of truths. For them the past and the future did not exist, while the present and the nine asamskrta dharmas did. These nine asamskrta dharmas were: 1) Pratisankhya-nirodha, cessation through knowledge, 2) apratisankhya-nirodha, cessation without knowledge, i.e. through the natural cessation of the causes, 3) akasa space, 4) anenjata, immovability, 5) Kusala-dharma-tathata, 6) akusala-dharma-tathata, and 7) avyakrta-dharma-tathata, that is, suchness of the dharmas that are meritorious, unmeritorious and neither the one, nor the other, 8) marganga-tathata, and 9) pratitya-samutpada-tathata, or suchness of the factors of the Path and suchness of the Law of Dependent Origination.

This school was popular in Central Asia and China, and had its own Sutra, Vinaya and Abhidharma, literature. The rules of its distinctive Pratimoksa were followed in the monasteries of China.

The Kasyapiyas differed on minor points from the Sarvastivadins and the Dharmaguptikas and were closer to the Sthaviravadins. Hence they are also called the Sthavariyas. Tibetan sources refer to them as Suvarsaka. The Kasyapiyas believed that the past which has borne fruit ceases to exist, but that which has not yet ripened continues to exist, thus partially modifying the position of the Sarvastivadins, for whom the past also exists like the present. The Kasyapiyas are sometimes represented as having effected a compromise between he Sarvastivadins and the Vibhajyavadins and also claim a Tripitaka of their own.

According to Pali sources the school of the Sankrantivadins is derived from the Kasyapiyas and the school of the Sautrantikas from that of the Sankrantivadins, while according to Vasumitra the two are identical. As the very name suggests, this school believed in Sanskranti or the transmigration of substance from one life to another. According
to its followers, of the five skandhas of an individual, there is only one subtle skandha which transmigrates, as against the whole of the pudgala of the Sammitiyas. This subtle skandha according to the Kasyapiya School is the real pudgala. The latter is the same as the subtle consciousness which permeates the whole body according to the Mahasanghikas, and is identical with the alaya-vijnana of the Yogacarins. It is possible that this school borrowed its doctrine of subtle consciousness from the Mahasanghikas and lent it to the Yogacara school. It also believed that every man had in him the potentiality of becoming a Buddha, doctrine of the Mahayanaists. On account of such views his school is considered to be a bridge between the Sravakayana often, though no justifiably, called the Hinayan and the Mahayana.

The Bahusrutiya School is mentioned in the inscriptions at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda and is a later branch of the Mahasanghikas. It owes its origin to a teacher who was very leaned in Buddhist lore (Bahusrutiya).

As for the fundamental doctrines of the Bahusrutiyas, they maintained that the teachings of the Buddha concerning anityata (transitoriness) dhukha (suffering), sunya (the absence of all attributes), anatman (the non-existence of the soul) and nirvana (the final bliss) were lokottara (transcendental), since they led to emancipation. His other teachings were laukika (Mundane). On this point the Bahusrutiyas may be regarded as the precursors of the later Mahayana teachers. According to them, there was no mode which led to salvation (nirvanika). Further, the Sangha was not subject to worldly laws. They also accepted the five propositions of Mahadeva as their views. In some doctrinal matters they had a great deal in common with the Saila schools, while in others they were closely allied to the Sarvastivadins.
According to Paramartha, this sub-sect made an attempt to reconcile the two principal systems of Buddhism—the Sravakayana and the Mahayana. Harivarman’s Satyasiddhisastra is the principal treatise of this school.

The Bahusrutiyas are often described as “a bride between the orthodox and the Mahayana school”, as they tried to combine the teachings of both. Harivarman believed in atma-nairatmya (the absence of soul in individuals) and in dharma-nairatmya (the soullessness of all things). Like the followers of the orthodox schools, he believed in the plurality of the universe which, according to him, contained eighty-four elements. Like the Mahayanists, he maintained that there were two kinds of truth—conventional (samvrti) and absolute (paramartha). He further maintained that, from the point of view of conventional truth, atma or the classification of the universe into eighty-four elements existed, but from the point of view of absolute truth neither existed. From the point of view of absolute truth there is a total void (sarva-sunya). He believed in the theory of Buddha-kaya as well as Dharma-kaya, which he explains as consisting of good conduct (sila), concentration (Samadhi), insight (prajna), deliverance (vimukti) and knowledge of and insight into deliverance (Vimukti-jnana-darsana). Although he did not recognize the absolute transcendental nature of the Buddha, he still believed in the special powers of the Buddha, such as the ten powers (dasa balani), and the four kinds of confidence (vaisaradya) which are admitted even by the Sthaviravadins. He believed that only the present was real, while the past and the future had no existence.  

The Sarvastivada comprised two sub schools, the Vaibhasika and the Sautrantika. The Vaibhasika was formed by adherents of the Mahavibhasa Sastra, comprising the

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orthodox Kashmir branch of the Sarvastivada School. The Vaibhasika-Sarvastivada, which had by far describes the accommodations reached between the Hinayana and Mahayana traditions, as well as the means by which Mahayana doctrines would become accepted. The Mahavibhasa also defines the Mahayana sutras and the role in their Buddhist canon. Here they are described as Vaipulya doctrines, with “Vaipulya” being a commonly-used synonym for Mahayana. The Mahavibhasa reads.

What is the Vaipulya? It is said to be all the sutras corresponding to elaborations on the meanings of the exceedingly profound dharmas.

At least one Sarvastivada master was known to have stated that the Mahayana Prana sutras were to be found amongst their Vaipulya sutras. The Manjusrimulakalpa also records that Kaniska presided over the establishment of Prajnaparamita doctrines in the northwest of India. The similarly massive Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra (100 fascicles in Chinese) also has a clear association with the Vaibhasika Sarvastivadins.

Regarding divisions of practice, the Mahavibhasas Sutra is known to employ the outlook of Buddhist practice as consisting of the Three Vehicles. References to Bodhisattvayana and the practice of the Six Paramitas are commonly found in Sarvastivada works as well. The Sarvastivadins also did not hold that it was impossible, or even impractical to strive to become as fully-enlightened Buddha (Skt. Samyaksambuddha), and therefore they admitted the path of a bodhisattva as a valid one.

The Mahayana branch of Buddhism popularized the concept of a Bodhisattva (literally enlightened being or “a Buddha-to-be”) and the worship of the bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas like Manjusri, Avalokitesvara, maitreya became the focus of popular
devotional worship in the Mahayana sect. According to the Mahayana tradition, the key attributes of the bodhisattvas are compassion and kindness.

Madhyamika (Middle Way), a Mahayana tradition popularized by Nagarjuna and Asvaghosa. Yogacara (consciousness only), was founded by Asanga and Vasubandhu.

**Relation to the Mulasarvastivada**

A number of theories have been posited by academics as to how the two are related which Bhikkhu Sujato summaries as follows:

The uncertainty around this school has led to a number of hypotheses. Frauwallner’s theory holds that the Mulasarvastivadavinaya is the disciplinary code of an early Buddhist community based in Mathura, which was quite independent in its establishment as a monastic community from the Sarvastivadins of Kashmir (although of course this does not mean that they were different in terms of doctrine). Lamotte, opposing Frauwallner, asserts that the Mulasarvastivada Vinaya was a late Kashmir compilation made to complete the Sarvastivadin Vinaya. Warder suggest that the Mulasarvastivadins were a later development of the Sarvastivada, whose main innovations were literary, the compilation of the large Vinaya and the Saddharmasmrtyupasthana Sutra, which kept the early doctrines but brought the style up to date with contemporary literary developments.  

Enomoto pulls the rug out from all these theories by asserting that Sarvastivadin and Mulasarvastivadin are really the same. Meanwhile, Willemen, Dessein, and Cox have developed the theory that the Sautrantikas, a branch or tendency within the Sarvastivadin

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group of schools, emerged in Gandhara and Bactria around 200CE. Although they were the earlier group, they temporarily lost ground to the kasmir Vaibhasika School due to the political influence of Kaniska. In later years the Sautrانتikas became known as Mulasarvastivadins and regained the ascendancy. I have elsewhere given my reasons for disagreeing with the theories of Ecomoto and Willemen, et al. Neither Warder nor Lamotte give sufficient evidence to back up their theories. We are left with Frauwallner’s theory, which in this respect has stood Sarvastivada, is a Sanskrit term, which can be glossed as: “the theory of all exists”. The Pali equivalent is Sabbatthivada.

Although there is some dispute over how the word “sarvastivada” is to be analyzed, the general consensus is that it is to be parsed into three parts: sarva “all” or “every” + asti “exist” + vada “speak”, “say” or “theory”. This equates perfectly with the Chinese term, shuoyiqieyou bu, which is literally “the sect that speaks of the existence of everything”, as used by Hsuan Tsang and other translators.

Though the Sarvastivadins would themselves claim that their teaching of “All exists” (Sarvasti) is a direct teaching of the Buddha himself, as shown by their attributing the earliest Abhidharma texts to direct disciples of the Buddha, notably to Sariputra and constant reference to this sutras throughout, the school in its Entirety is more rightly to be considered as part of the age of scholastic Buddhism. It was the most influential school in the Northwestern part of India. In a Chinese context, the word Abhidharma refers to the Sarvastivada Abhidharma, although at a minimum the Dharmaguptaka, Pudgalavada and Theravada also had abhidharmas. During the first century BCE, in the Gandharan Cultural area (consisting of oddiyana, Gandhara and Bactria, Tokharistan, across the Khyber Pass), the Sthaviriyas used Gandhari to write their literature in the Kharosthi script. During this time, the Sarvastivada Abhidharma primarily consisted of the Abhidharmaharidaya authored
by Dharmashresthin, a native from Tokharistan, and the ashtagantha authored/compiled by Katyayaniputra. Both texts were translated by Samghadeva in 391 CE and in 183 CE respectively, but they were not completed until 390 in southern China. Although the Sarvastivada was the central thesis, there were different theories on how ‘sarvam’ and even ‘Asti’ were actually to be explained and understood among the Gandharan diverse Sarvastivadins Vasubandhu’s Koshabhasya, an elaborate yoga manual based on the Hrdaya describes four main theses of sarvastivadins accordingly as they teach a difference in existence (Bhavanyathatva), a difference in characteristic (Laksananyathatva) a difference in condition (Avasthanyathatva) and mutual difference (Anyonyathatva).

Later Sarvastivada takes a combination of the first and third theses as its model. It was on this basis that the school’s doctrines were defended in the face of growing external and sometimes even internal, criticism.

The doctrines of Sarvastivada were not confined to “all exists”, but also include the theory of momentariness (ksanika), conjoining (samprayukta) and simultaneity (sahabhu), conditionality (hetu and pratyaya), the culmination of the spiritual path (marga), and others. These doctrines are all inter-connected and it is the principle of ‘all exists’ that is the axial doctrine holding the larger movement together when the precise details of other doctrines are at stake. The sarvastivada was also known by other names, particularly hetuvada and yuktivada. Hetuvada comes from hetu- ‘cause’ which indicates their emphasis on causation and conditionality. Yuktivada comes from yukti- ‘reason’ or even ‘logic’, which shows their use of rational argument and syllogism.
When the sarvastivada school held a synod in Kashmir during the reign of Kanishka II (ca. 158-176), the Gandharan most important text, the Astagrantha of Katyayaniputra was rewritten in Sanskrit making necessary revisions. This revised text was now known as Jbanapraṣṭhāna, Course of knowledge. Though the Gandharan Astagrantha had many vibhasas, the new Kashmir Astagrantha i.e. the Jnanapraṣṭhāna had a Sanskrit Mahavibhasa, compiled by the Kashmir sarvastivada synod. The Jnanapraṣṭhāna and its Mahavibhasa, which took more than a generation to complete, were then declared the Vaibhasika orthodoxy, said to be ‘Buddha’s word’, Buddhābhāsita. This new Vaibhasika orthodoxy, however, was not readily accepted by the Gandharan sarvastivadins, though gradually they adapted their views to the new Kashmir orthodoxy. The Gandharan sarvastivadins used the same Vinaya from Mathura. As a matter of fact, their abhidharma was meant for meditational practices. They made use of the Hṛdaya which is a manual for attaining arhat.

However, the long Gandharan Vinaya was abridged to a Sanskrit Dashabhāṇavara in the Kashmir synod by removing the Avadana and Jatakas, stories and illustrations. After the declaration of the Vaibhasika orthodoxy, the Gandharan non-Vaibhasika Sarvastivadins, the majority, were called ‘Sautrantikas’ (those who uphold the sutras). Interestingly, the Kasmira orthodoxy, the Vaibhasika disappeared in the later part of the 7th century. Subsequently, the old Gandharan Sarvastivadins, the non-Vaibhasika Sautrantikas, were named ‘Mulasarvastivadins’, who then at a later date went to Tibet.

It has been suggested that the minority Vaibhasika were absorbed into the majority Sautrantika sarvastivadins as a possible result of the latter’s adaptations. Moreover, Mishrakabhidharmahrdaya, a little which means that Sautrantika views were mixed with ‘Vaibhasika views’ was composed by Dharmatrata in the 4th century in Gandharan area.
Vasubandhu (ca. 350-430), a native from Purusapura in Gandhara composed his Kowa based on this text and the Astagrantha. While in Kasmira, he wrote his Karikas which were well received there but he faced intense opposition, notably from Samghabhadra, a leading Sarvastivada pundit, when he composed his bhasya. By his bhasya, Vasubandhu made it clear to the Vaibhasikas that he was a Sautrantika, which is why he was fiercely opposed by the Sarvastivada Vaibhasika in Kasmira. In reply to Vasubhandhu’s bhasya, Samghabhadra wrote a text, the Nyananusara ‘according to reason’. This work is presently only extant in Chinese.