

# ***Titthiyaparivāsa* vis-à-vis Noviciation in Theravādin Monasticism**

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## **Abstract**

Dhirasekera claims in his work *Buddhist Monastic Discipline* that there is a “considerable difference” between the Vinaya and Sutta traditions as regards the probation procedure for former alien ascetics aspiring to full ordination in the Buddhist Order. I argue, however, that he is only following Buddhaghosa’s assumptions to arrive at that conclusion. I question these assumptions and attempt to prove that such a difference between Vinaya and Sutta traditions is only apparent, not real.

## **1 Introduction**

*Titthiyaparivāsa* is, as Dhirasekera describes below, a particular type of probation:

[It] pertains to persons who, having been previously members of any other heretic group, latterly seek admission to the Buddhist Order. Every such person is put under probation for a specified period of four months during which he must conduct himself honourably to the satisfaction of the Bhikkhus in authority. (2007, 217)

He also speaks of “a considerable difference between” (ibid., 219) the Vinaya and Sutta traditions as regards the starting point of probation. He observes:

This statement of the Sutta version is clear enough on the point that both *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* come after the period of Parivāsa [“probation”]. ...

The details of Khandhakas [in Vinaya Piṭaka] on this point place the Parivāsa on the newcomer after his admission as a *sāmaṇera*. (ibid., 220)

The typical Sutta statement that Dhirasekera refers to is as follows:

*Yo kho Seniya aññatitthiyapubbo imasmim̐ dhammavinaye ākaṅkhati pabbaj-  
jam, ākaṅkhati upasampadam, so cattāro māse parivasati. Catunnam̐ māsānam̐  
accayena āraddhacittā bhikkhū pabbājenti upasampādenti bhikkhubhāvāya.  
[Emphasis added] (M I 391)<sup>1</sup>*

Seniya! a former member of other schools, seeking the *going-forth and ordina-  
tion* in this Dhamma and Vinaya, stays four months on probation. At the end  
of four months, monks *whose minds are conciliated*<sup>2</sup> let (him) go forth, and get  
(him) ordained for the status of monkhood.

In the sutta text above, the Buddha describes the general procedure that former  
ascetics of non-Buddhist schools must follow if they wish for full ordination in the  
Buddhist Order. And we can see clearly see therein that *pabbajjā* (“going forth”) and  
*upasampadā* (“ordination”) come only after probation, just as Dhirasekera points  
out. However, Buddhaghosa “attempts to dismiss the word *pabbajjā* out of the  
context as having no meaning of its own” (Dhirasekera 2007, 220) when he explains  
the text above:

*Tattha pabbajjanti vacanasiliṭṭhatāvasena vuttam. Aparivasitvā yeva hi pabba-  
jjam labhati. upasampadatthikena pana na atikālena gāmapavesanādīni aṭṭha-  
vattāni pūrentena parivasitabbam. (Ps III 106)*

In the speech *yo kho Seniya aññatitthiyapubbo*, etc., The term *pabbajjam* is men-  
tioned by virtue of the adherence of speech.<sup>3</sup> In fact, (one) gets *pabbajjā* without  
undergoing probation. One wishing for *upasampadā*, on the other hand, should  
undergo probation by fulfilling eight practices of not going into the village beyond  
proper time, etc.

Why does Buddhaghosa try to nullify the term *pabbajjam*? When we look at  
the probation procedure (Vin I 69–71; Horner 1938–66, 4: 85–89) found in  
Khandhakas, we can see as follows:

1. The first step of the probation procedure is identical with the procedure for  
conferring novicehood (Vin I 82; Horner 1938–66, 4: 103–104).

<sup>1</sup>Texts identical with this except the candidate’s name can be found at (D I 176; S II 21; Sn 102,  
etc.)

<sup>2</sup>Walshe translates *āraddhacittā* as “who are established in mind” (1995, 269) and explains it  
as “i. e., properly qualified.” (ibid., 574) while *Dialogues* renders it as “exalted in spirit” (Rhys  
Davids and Rhys Davids 1977, 2: 168). But see (Pandita 2009, 4) for the correct rendition and  
comments.

<sup>3</sup>The Pali term *siliṭṭha* has the Skt. form *śliṣṭa*, of which one sense Apte gives is “Clung, adherence  
to” (Apte 1989, s.v. *śliṣṭa*). Then *vacanasiliṭṭhatāvasena* should be literally translated as “by  
virtue of the adherence of speech”. What Buddhaghosa appears to mean is that *pabbajjā* and  
*upasampadā* are commonly used together so *pabbajjā* also appears here on account of habitual  
usage, not because it is really meant.

2. In Buddhaghosa’s opinion, the first step is supposed to confer novicehood upon the candidate even though the Mv text does not explicitly say so:

*paṭhamam̐ kesamassunti ādinā tassa ādito’va sāmaṇerapabbajjam̐ dasseti.* (Sp V 991)

With the statement “Firstly, hair and beard . . .”, etc., (The Buddha) indicates his (i. e. the candidate’s) going forth as a novice at the very beginning.

Now Buddhaghosa’s standpoint becomes clear. He appears to have two assumptions:

1. The act of *going forth* (*pabbajjā*) in Suttas is identical with *going forth as a novice* (*sāmaṇerapabbajjā*) found in Vinaya. So if we tried to literally interpret the Sutta text cited above, the conclusion would have been that both noviciation and ordination come only after the probation period.
2. The first step of the probation procedure in Vinaya is meant to confer novicehood upon the candidate under probation. It means that the candidate is already a novice after the first step of probation and he will need, at the end of probation, only to undergo the ordination procedure for achieving the status of a full-ordained monk.

Based on these assumptions, Buddhaghosa attempts to dismiss the term *pabbajjam̐* as of no significance so that he can erase the apparent difference between Sutta and Vinaya traditions. On the other hand, Dhirasekera also accepts these assumptions, but, instead of following Buddhaghosa in dismissing *pabbajjam̐*, he interprets it literally and claims that there is “a considerable difference” between Sutta and Vinaya traditions.

But I find it difficult to accept this difference as real. Why? We should not forget that the maintainers of both Vinaya and Sutta traditions are monks belonging to the same Theravadin school and for them, it must have been a common experience to see the members of other religious sects getting converted and ordained in the Order. If there were really a wide difference between two traditions regarding the ordination of such converts, it would have certainly produced a schism in the Order. However, there is no historical record of such an event. So this ostensible difference seems only to indicate that there must be something wrong with how the texts themselves are understood.

Therefore, in this paper, I would question the assumptions of Buddhaghosa and Dhirasekera, and I would attempt to prove that there is no real difference between Sutta and Vinaya traditions in this regard.

## 2 The Sense and Usage of the Terms *Pabbajjā* and *Upasampadā*

First I would look at the non-religious senses of those terms, from which I would attempt to see how legal senses have evolved in Vinaya. *Pabbajjā* has the Skt. form *pravrajyā*, among the senses of which “Immigration, going abroad” (Apte 1989, s.v. *pravrajyā*) is closest to that of the Pali form, which is usually rendered as “going forth”. On the other hand, *upasampadā* means “arrival, coming to” since it is derived from *upa + sam + √pad*, which means “1. To come to, to arrive at ... 2. To get, to obtain” (ibid., s.v. *upasampad*).

Suppose we meet these two terms together in a certain context, in which *pabbajjā* means “going abroad” and *upasampadā* means “arrival in the foreign country destined for”. Then we can find three facts as regards the relationship between these two terms:

1. When there is no real distance intervening between the departure and destination points, like in the case of one just crossing the border between two adjacent countries, *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* are two facets of the same event.
2. When there is a real distance between the departure and destination points, *pabbajjā* technically covers *upasampadā* and *more*, that is, *pabbajjā* will cover the whole state that starts when one leaves, and ends when one comes back into, the borders of one’s own country, whereas *upasampadā* will mean the state which will begin only when one lands in the country destined for, and will end as soon as one leaves its borders.
3. The term *upasampadā* always implies *pabbajjā* since one cannot “arrive” in a foreign country without “going abroad”.

Then, in the context of Vinaya, *pabbajjā* will naturally mean “leaving one’s original environment”. In the case of Yasa (Vin I 15–18; Horner 1938–66, 4: 21–26), for example, it would mean giving up a lay person’s life and environment while in the case of Pañcavaggiya monks (Vin I 12–13; Horner 1938–66, 4: 18–19), who were already ascetics when they were converted, it would mean giving up their former beliefs, practices and institutions. On the other hand, *upasampadā* will come to mean “getting a full-fledged membership in the Order”.

Now we have to consider the relationship of these two terms when they occur together in the Vinaya context. Here also we can find similar facts:

1. For those who got directly ordained without passing through the novice stage, *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* are two different aspects of the same event. For persons like Pañcavaggiya monks and Yasa, etc., direct ordination means

both giving up their former state of laity or different religious beliefs as well as gaining full membership in the Order. In these cases, *pabbajjā* cannot certainly mean novicehood.

2. When there are two distinct stages of renunciation, i. e., noviciation and ordination, the term *pabbajjā* technically covers *upasampadā* and *more*, that is, *pabbajjā* will cover the state beginning from the noviciation and ending at death or, if one chooses, coming back to lay life whereas *upsampadā* will cover the state beginning from the ordination up to death or, if one chooses, giving up the ordained status to become a novice or a lay person.
3. The term *upasampadā* always implies *pabbajjā* since one cannot gain a full-fledged membership in the Order without giving up the former environment of laity or non-Buddhist asceticism.

Does it mean that it is not justifiable to interpret *pabbajjā* as the intermediate stage of noviciation (*sāmaṇerapabbajjā*), like Buddhaghosa and Dhirasekera do? It is in fact justifiable in some contexts where the state of *upasampadā* must be counted out. One example will be as follows:

*na upasampādetabbakavīsativāraṃ niṭṭhitam ... na pabbājetabbadvattimsavāraṃ niṭṭhitam* (Vin I 91)

Told is the Portion on Twenty (Cases) where one should not ordain (Horner 1938–66, 4: 115) ... Told is the Portion on Thirty-two (Cases) where one should not let go forth (ibid., 4: 116)

As shown above, after the section on non-ordainable persons comes the section on persons disqualified for going forth. The only way to prevent confusing these two categories is to interpret “going forth” here as referring to noviciation only. And we cannot complain of inconsistency here; just as the term *soldier* in the phrase “generals and soldiers” can refer to lower-rank soldiers even though generals are technically also *soldiers*, so also can *pabbajjā* refer to the intermediate stage of noviciation in some contexts even though *upsampadā* is also technically covered by the state of *pabbajjā*.

However, the mere occurrence of *pabbajjā* or its variants like *pabbajjenti*, etc., is not conclusive proof that noviciation takes place. For in the procedure of ordination by Going for Triple Refuge (*tisaraṇagamanūpasampadā*), at the time of which noviciation did not exist yet, we can see the Buddha using the coupled variants of *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* together to refer to the same event of ordination:

*anujānāmi bhikkhave tumheva dāni tāsū-tāsū disāsū tesu-tesu janapadesu pabbājetha upasampādettha. evañ ca pana bhikkhave pabbājetabbo upasampādetabbo ... anujānāmi bhikkhave imehi tīhi saraṇagamanehi pabbajjam upasampadan ti.* [Emphasis added] (Vin I 22)

“I allow, monks, that you yourselves may now let go forth, may ordain in any quarter, in any district. And thus, monks, should one let go forth, should one ordain: ... I allow, monks, the going forth and the ordination by these three goings for refuge.” (Horner 1938–66, 4: 30)

I conclude, therefore, that the typical sutta statement that Dhirasekera has cited is open to two different interpretations:

1. When monks are satisfied with a candidate under probation, they confer upon him novicehood first and ordination afterwards (Dhirasekera’s interpretation). Here *pabbājenti* refers to noviciation whereas *upasampādenti*, to ordination.
2. Or monks would take him through the ordination procedure at once. Here both *pabbājenti* and *upasampādenti* refer to the same event of ordination like in the procedure of *tisaraṇagamana* ordination shown above.

Which is the correct one? To answer this question, we need to go into the canonical text of Vinaya where the probation procedure is described in detail.

### 3 The Probation Procedure and Possible Interpretations

The presently available Vinaya texts give a detailed procedure of how a former ascetic of non-Buddhist schools can get ordination in the Order of Buddhist Saṅgha (Vin I 69–71; Horner 1938–66, 4: 85–89). It can be summarized as follows:

1. Such a candidate should have his hair and beard shaved, cover himself with yellow robes, have his upper robes on one shoulder, salute the feet of monks, sit on his haunches, and declare his taking refuge in the Triple Gem.
2. He should approach the Saṅgha and make a formal request for *upasampadā* (“ordination”).
3. Then the Saṅgha should hold a formal Saṅgha function (*saṅghakamma*) to put him on probation for four months, during which monks would observe him:
  - a) If he abstains from entering the village too early and coming back too late.

- b) If he abstains from frequenting certain improper places.<sup>4</sup>
- c) If he has, as regards his duties towards other fellow Brahma-farers, dexterity, vigor, know-how, the ability to manage himself or direct others.
- d) If he has high motivation in learning and discussing the higher morality, the higher thought, the higher wisdom.
- e) If he is pleased by the criticism of his former sect.
- f) If he is displeased by the criticism of the Triple Gem.
- g) If he is displeased by the praise of his former sect.
- h) If he is pleased by the praise of the Triple Gem.

4. If he succeeds in all those factors, he should be given full ordination.

But which type of ordination? Pali records maintain that the ordination procedure used to initiate people into the monastic order has evolved, during the Buddha’s lifetime, through three stages: (a) the stage of *ehi bhikkhu*, the Buddha’s personal invitation that means “Come, O monk.” (Vin I 12; Horner 1938–66, 4: 18–20) (b) the stage of *tisaraṇagamana*, the candidate’s avowal of faith in Triple Refuge (Vin I 21; Horner 1938–66, 4: 29–30) (c) the stage of *ñatticatutthakamma*, a monastic procedure performed by the Saṅgha community itself (Vin I 55–56; Horner 1938–66, 4: 71–72). So which type of ordination was prevailing when this procedure came to be established?

It is probably safe to answer that it must be the last type, the ordination by *ñatticatutthakamma* since:

- a) The first step of the probation procedure is identical with the ordination by *tisaraṇagamana* (Vin I 21; Horner 1938–66, 4: 29–30), clearly indicating that the latter is no longer the norm for full ordination.
- b) Probation is to be conferred by a formal *Saṅgha* function (*saṅghakamma*), so we can infer that the full ordination, the objective itself of probation, would also require an act as serious if not more.

### 3.1 The First Interpretation

Both Buddhaghosa and Dhirasekera interpret the first step of the procedure above as taking on the novicehood. What are the grounds for this interpretation? Obviously as follows:

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<sup>4</sup>These improper places are: a) a place of prostitutes b) that of widows c) that of spinsters d) that of gays e) that of nuns.

1. The initial statement of the whole procedure mentions both *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* as follows:

*yo bhikkhave añño pi aññatitthiyapubbo imasiṃ dhammavinaye ākaṅkhati pabbajjam, ākaṅkhati upasampadam, tassa cattāro māse parivāso dātabbo.*  
[Emphasis added] (Vin I 69)

But, monks, whoever else was formerly a member of another sect and *desires the going forth* in this *dhamma* (sic.) and discipline and *desires ordination*, to him you should grant probation for four months. [Emphasis added] (Horner 1938–66, 4: 85)

2. The first step for granting probation is identical with the procedure for conferring novicehood (Vin I 82; Horner 1938–66, 4: 103–104).
3. With all other stages, only full ordination is mentioned, not the novicehood.

So the only feasible interpretation seems to be treating the first step as an act of taking on novicehood.

If we adopt this interpretation, noviciation cannot be the *pabbajjā* which is granted after the probation per the sutta statement we have discussed above; rather will *pabbajjā* mean “leaving the probationary status” while *upasampadā* will mean “getting fully ordained in the Order”—both terms referring to the same event from different perspectives. Interpreted in this way, no difference remains between Vinaya and Sutta traditions.

However, this interpretation has a problem. If the candidate under probation is a novice, he is obliged to observe the rules prescribed for novices. Whether he is able to do so properly or not should also be observed by monks. However, all the factors supposed to be observed do not cover these rules. Does it mean that he does not need to observe them even though he is a novice? There is no obvious answer available to this question; so I have attempted here to give an alternative interpretation.

### 3.2 The Second Interpretation

In Mv, the topic of probation for former alien ascetics comes before the topic of noviciation. Assuming that this fact is chronologically significant and taking also into account the fact that noviciation is entirely not mentioned in the probation procedure, I hypothesize that noviciation did not exist yet when this probation procedure was established. According to this hypothesis, the extant probation procedure should be interpreted as “it is”.

The first step of the procedure is meant not to confer novicehood upon the candidate but rather to help the candidate live together with monks so that they



can observe and evaluate him during the probation period. During that period, he is neither a monk nor a novice; he is only a person under probation, no more, no less. This is also the reason why novice precepts are not mentioned as observable.

Then the inevitable question will be: why was the probation procedure not updated after the status of noviciation had been established? To answer this question, we must firstly investigate if there was any need to update the procedure. The probation procedure available at present, as far as I can see, would have needed updating: (a) if noviciation for a former ascetic requires probation too (b) and/or if noviciation is a legally compulsory step towards ordination. However,

1. Probation appears not necessary for novicehood since:
  - a) Former asceticism in another school is never mentioned as a factor in judging a would-be novice. (See Vin I 91; Horner 1938–66, 4: 115–116)
  - b) Novicehood itself can be viewed as a sort of probation since novices are not full-fledged members of the Order and always have to live under the supervision of monks.
2. The legal right to bypass the novice stage if otherwise qualified seems to have always been valid, which we can infer from the fact that *Pali sources nowhere mention novicehood as a requirement for full ordination* (See Vin I 85–91; Horner 1938–66, 4: 108–115), even though the custom of direct ordination might have disappeared in real practice after the noviciate system had been introduced.

Then it is no wonder that the probation procedure has been left untouched in its pre-noviciation state.

From this hypothesis, we can deduce three legally possible paths for a former ascetic to achieve ordination in the Order:

1. A candidate can follow the path exactly described in the probation procedure to bypass the novice stage and get direct ordination.
2. Or he can officially become a novice first and request for probation. (In his case, the first step of the probation will actually be taking on the novicehood just as Buddhaghosa maintains.) Then he would be observed not only regarding the factors officially stated in the procedure but also regarding his observance of novice precepts. If he can satisfy the observer monks on both accounts, he can get ordained at the end of the probation.
3. Or he can go through the exact probation procedure and at its end, he can choose to get novicehood first and ordination later. Is it possible to take on

novicehood even if one is qualified to be fully ordained? Of course it is possible, for there is no rule in the Pali Vinaya to force ordination upon a person if he is content with novicehood only.

Of them, the path (2) was seemingly not in practice at the Buddha's time, for if it were, the precepts for novices must have somehow been referred to in the extant probation procedure. However, they are never mentioned therein. Therefore we can conclude that the path (2) was not in practice during the Buddha's times. Then only the paths (1) and (3) remain for consideration.

If we consider the paths (1) and (3), we can see that both paths are applicable to the Sutta text we have seen in which a former ascetic achieved *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* only after probation. How? When a former ascetic followed the path (1), *pabbajjā* will refer to his act of leaving the probationary status while *upasampadā*, his achievement of full ordination—both terms referring to the different aspects of the same event. On the other hand, if he follows the path (2), *pabbajjā* will refer to his gain of the novice status, while *upasampadā*, to his gain of full ordination—two different events.

Then which path has the higher probability to be in real practice at the Buddha's time? If we look at the conditions that have forced the status of novicehood on certain candidates to monkhood, we can see that these were their youth and immaturity (Vin I 78–79; Horner 1938–66, 4: 98–99), which would not usually be the case for those who had already been ascetics in other schools. Therefore I believe that it was the path (1) which was in actual practice during the Buddha's times.

#### **4 Conclusion**

We have seen that the Vinaya text on the probation procedure for former members of other religious schools is open to two different interpretations, and that even though both interpretations do not necessarily contradict the typical Sutta text on probation, the one adopted by Buddhaghosa would lead to unnecessary complications while the other has no such problems. So I believe that the latter should be adopted.

On the other hand, the latter is based on the concept of novicehood being only a legally optional step towards fully ordination for persons otherwise fully qualified. *Seen other way around, the extant probation procedure itself can be viewed as the proof of this concept.* And this concept is actually not new. The Burmese monasticism has always believed that it is legally possible to directly ordain qualified lay persons even though it does culturally insist on all candidates' passing through the novice stage before ordination (I cannot comment on other

traditions). If this concept is really sound, it might provide solutions to the legal problems as regards the Buddhist noviciate system. Which kind of problems?

Unlike for nuns, no probationary training was imposed on a man who wished to join the *Saṅgha*. So a youth under twenty could receive lower ordination (i. e, go forth), become a novice, and take higher ordination as soon as he reached twenty. But what happened if he was over twenty, normal and healthy, and had no need to undertake preliminary training? Did his going forth and ordination take place simultaneously through the *ñatticatutthakamma*? Or, following the changes which had taken place (*tīhi saraṇagamana* for *pabbajjā* and *ñatticatutthakamma* for *upasampadā*), did a man over twenty have to go through both stages? ... (Juo-Hsüeh 2000, 369)

With the questions above, Juo-Hsüeh Shih opens the Pandora's box as regards the legal ambiguity of the noviciate system (ibid., 369–370). But all these problems are based upon the assumption that, as per the finalised form of Pali Vinaya, novicehood is a legally compulsory step towards full ordination. However, when we abandon that assumption and view the novicehood as purely optional for persons otherwise qualified for ordination, there is no room left for ambiguity. If a youth is over twenty, normal, healthy and had no need to undertake preliminary training, whether to take on novicehood before ordination would be only a culturally dictated choice for him and his master, not a legal necessity.

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