

The Buddhist Standpoint with regard to the Partaking of Garlic by the *Ubhatosaṅgha*

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Introduction

Garlic is a popular food among people and most citizens enjoy the taste of it in a delicious curry and as an additional ingredient mixed into congees, curries and soups. In Ayurvedic treatments, it plays an important role as a medicine. In accordance with the *Pāli Vinaya Piṭaka*, there is sufficient evidence to prove that garlic was a popular food in India at the time of the Buddha. And also, *Pāli Vinaya* literature clearly mentions that garlic was a most popular food among the Buddhist *Saṅgha* community of that period. Besides, in Sri Lanka, Buddhist lay followers offer garlic curry as an efficacious health food to the *Saṅgha* at alms giving ceremonies. Although the Sinhala Buddhist monks and nuns practice a flexible principle with regard to having garlic, Buddhist followers who are living in some Mahāyāna countries refuse all foods which contain garlic. Sri Lankan lay followers who know this matter well regarding this Mahāyāna practice, are confused and question whether garlic is permissible or not for the Buddhist *Saṅgha*.

In accordance with Theravāda *Vinaya Piṭaka*, the Buddha has established two *Vinaya* rules and has taken a decision not to allow the taking of garlic as a food for Buddhist *Bhikkhu-s* and *Bhikkhuni-s* because of some disciplinary problems which had arisen in the Buddhist community of that time. Hence there is a contemporary necessity to point out the exact Buddhist stand with regard to the acceptability of garlic as a food by the *Ubhatosaṅgha*. Therefore, the main object of this paper is to examine the *Vinaya* rules relating to consuming garlic by the Buddhist *Ubhatosaṅgha*. The Collection of *Theravāda Vinaya* in early Buddhism and the Commentaries (*Aṭṭhakatā*) are meant to promote this message.

The word *Lasuṇa*

Garlic is one of the crops which is in the lily family and it represents the *Amaryllidaceous* cast. The biological name of the garlic is *Allium Sativum*. *Porrum Sativum* and *Allium Ophiscorodon* take similar meanings for it. In the Sinhala Language, garlic is used as *Sudulūṇu* and in the Tamil language it is used as *Vellavengāyam* or *Vellāyippundu*. In the Sanskrit language, the word *laśuna* is used to identify garlic. *Raśuna*, *rasoṇā*,

rasonaka, ariṣṭa, dīrghapatraka, kanda, mahakanda, ugragandha, vamāri, yavaneṣṭa are synonyms for it.¹ The Hindi word *lāsan* has been derived from the Sanskrit *laśuna*. In Prakrit Language, both words *lasuṇa* and *lasaṇa* are used for garlic and the Pāli term *lasuna* could be derived from them. In the Pāli literature both *lasuna* and *lasuṇa* occur for the garlic.

The Monier William's *Sanskrit - English dictionary* has mentioned that *laśuna* is one of the ten kinds of onion.² Therefore, it is clear that the Sanskrit word *laśuna* is not used to identify other onions and it is used only for garlic. But in Sinhala language, the word *lūṇu* is in common usage for all kinds of onion and there are few adjectives which come before the word *lūṇu* and those help to recognize what kind of onion is meant. As examples, garlic is called *sudulūṇu* because the skin of its pod is white in color and so are its cloves. Red onion is called *ratulūṇu* due to the red skin and the onion that is imported from Bombay is called *Bombai lūṇu*.

The first usage of pāli word *lasuna* in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* can be found in the *Pācittiya-pāli* of the *Bhikkhuni Vibhaṅga*. Apart from this, it can be found in the *Khuddhakavatthukkhanda* of the *Cullavaggapāli* and also the *Apadānapāli* and the *Vimānavatthupāli* of the *Khuddakha Nikāya* use the word *lasuna* with a similar meaning. It is clear that the word *lasuna* which is included in the *Pāli Vinaya Piṭaka* was used only for garlic and two facts can be found to prove it.

01. The *Pācittiya-pāli* mentions that it exist as bundles (*bhaṇḍika*)³

02. The *Cullavaggapāli* mentions that it causes a bad aroma from the mouth after having garlic.⁴

It is a well-known thing that garlic and red onion exist as bundles. But a bundle of garlic has more cloves than a bundle of red onion. *The Encyclopedia of Britannica* says that it could include twenty (20) cloves in a well grown pod of garlic.⁵ The *Samantapāsādikā (Vinayaṭṭhakathā)* takes the word *bhaṇḍika* as an adjective and introduces a new word for garlic. That is *bhaṇḍikalasuṇa*. The *Aṭṭhakathā* mentions that those contain not only one or two cloves, but those have more cloves. The *Tikā* doesn't care for the word *bhaṇḍikalasuṇa* and tries to give another word for garlic. That is *ganḍika lasuṇa*. The word *ganḍika lasuṇa* is used because it has more cloves.⁶ In Sanskrit language, the word *ugragandha* is used as a similar word for garlic because of its bad aroma.

¹ Source [Online]. <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries>, [25. 10. 2010, 2. 30 p.m.].

² *A Sanskrit- English Dictionary*, Ed: Williams, Monier. (Delhi; Motilal Banarsidass Publishers). pp. 871, 899.

³ *Pācittiya-pāli, Bhikkhuni Vibhaṅga*, 1993: 258.

⁴ *Cullavaggapāli*, (CS), Version 4.0.

⁵ *The New Encyclopedia of Britannica*, Volume IV, Editor: Benton, William. (1983), Source [Online]. www.britannica.com, [25. 10. 2010, 10. 30 a.m.]. p. 420.

⁶ *Vinayaṭṭkā*, (CS), Version 4.0).

The *Pācittiyapāli* says that *lasuna* originated in the Magadha region in India.⁷ Therefore the *Samantapāsādikā* has called the word *Māgadhaka lasuṇa* also for garlic. The *Apatti Desanā* of the *Pācittiyapāli* introduces the other four kinds of onion as well. Those are;

01. *Paḷaṇḍuka* - it is yellow colored and has only one pod⁸
02. *Bhañjanaka* - it is red colored and has two pods.⁹
03. *Cāpalasuna* - it has only a root, not a pod and it may refer to leeks.
04. *Haritaka* - it is a green colored onion.

In accordance with this context, there arises a problem regarding the usage of the word *lasuna*. It has been clearly mentioned in the above explanation that the word *lasuna*, *laṣuna* and *lāsan* are used systematically in the Pāli, Sanskrit and Hindi languages. But in post canonical literature an attempt is seen to use the word *lasuṇa* to denote all kinds of onion. Specially, the *Samantapāsādikā* has used the word *bhaṇḍikalasuna* while the *Vinayaṭīkā* has used the word *gaṇḍikalasuna* for garlic. And also, in the *Apadānaṭṭhakathā*, the word *rattalasuna* is used for *bhañjanaka* (red onion). The commentator Buddhagosa has recorded in the *Samantapāsādikā* that he has taken some ideas to describe the *lasuṇa sikkhāpada* from *Aṭṭhakathās* of the *Mahāpaccarī* and the *Kurundī*.¹⁰ Therefore, there is a possibility to say that the word *lasuṇa* has been used to mean all kinds of onion in the *Aṭṭhakathā* era. In the same *Aṭṭhakathā*, it is pointed out again that the garlic was born in the Magadha region. Although all other onions can be grown in Sri Lanka, the garlic is not grown. Then it is clear that the word *lasuṇa* has been used for all onions in Sri Lanka. But the *Anāpattidesanā* of *Pācittiyapāli* has included the word *Cāpalasuna*. It is clear that the *Anāpattidesanā* also was prepared by Tipiṭaka editors when it was written. However, after the examination of the *Piṭaka*, the *Aṭṭhakathā* and the *Ṭīkā* carefully, it can be pointed out that Buddhist *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis* were prevented from eating the garlic only among other onions.

Usefulness of Garlic

In accordance with scientific analysis, garlic contains the following elements.

01. Oil
02. Daily Disulfide (C₆H₁₀S₂)
03. Daily Disulfide (C₆H₁₀S₃)
04. Ally Propyl Disulfide (C₆H₁₂S₂)

⁷ *Pācittiyapāli*, Bhikkhuni Vibhaṅga, 1993:258.

⁸ *Book of the Discipline*, Expiation, Pali Text Society.

⁹ *The Manusmṛti*, V. 5. 19.

¹⁰ *Bhikkhunivibhaṅghavaṇṇanā*, the Hevāvitāraṇa Edition: 686.

Garlic is used as a valuable and popular food in both the eastern and western worlds as a result of the above contents which have a high medicinal value. Garlic has been popularized as a food in western countries during the time of the 2nd world war. It has been used as a charm and a medicine in the ancient and medieval periods.¹¹ The *Samantapāsādikā* which explains the usefulness of garlic says that it is very valuable as an additional ingredient to mix with soups and meat. It mentions that garlic can be eaten mixed with soups, meat, oil, salads, leaves or curries as well as added into rice and congees.¹²

In addition, garlic is a valuable medicine and it contains the strength of curing illnesses. In Āyurvedic medicine, garlic is used as a medicine for three kinds of illnesses such as wind, bile, phlegm. The western medical research has also confirmed that the garlic has a skill to cure illnesses such as diabetes, heart ailments, and blood pressure. Apart from these, it is also considered as an aphrodisiac medicine in the Āyurvedic method.

Rules and Regulations related to Partaking of Garlic in Indian Society during the Buddhist Era

It has been identified that the *Śramaṇa* tradition which originated in religious ideas existing among tribal societies before the arrival of the Āryans (*Āryāgamana*). Scholars say that the *Brāhmaṇa* tradition was established by the Āryans who migrated to India with new religious ideas.¹³ There is no doubt that the natives who laid the foundation for the *Śramaṇa* tradition represented the *Anārya* society partook of garlic as a popular food. There is an important piece of evidence in the *Apadānapāli* in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* to prove that the ascetics who led a wandering life partook of garlic as a popular food. In accordance with the record, Lasuṇadāyaka who was one of the disciples of the Gotama Buddha was an ascetic in the time of the Vipassi Buddha. At that time, he had gone to the dwelling place of the *Saṅgha* with a pingo full of garlic and offered it to the *Saṅgha*.¹⁴ As a result of that meritorious deed he had a birth in heaven for an eon (*Kappa*).¹⁵ The *Apadānaṭṭhakathā* has presented two opposing ideas for the meaning of the word “*Lasuṇa*”.

01. The commentator, who begins the *lasuṇadāyakatheraṭṭhakathā* says that the onion brought by him was garlic and he offered it to the *mahāsaṅgha* for medical purposes.¹⁶ But the *Khuddaka Nikāya* doesn't mention that he offered garlic to *Bhikkhū*-s for medical purposes. Therefore, it is clear that the commentator has tried to justify the partaking of garlic by *Mahāsaṅgha* according to the *Vinaya* rules.

¹¹ Benton, William. 1983:420.

¹² *Samantapāsādikā nāma vinayaṭṭhakathā*, (CS), Version 4.0.

¹³ Marasinghe, M. M. J., 2009:01- 40.

¹⁴ *Khuddaka Nikāya*, *Apadānapāli*, Kundāna Vagga, *Lasuṇadāyakatherāpadāna*, (CS), Version 4.0.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Apadānaṭṭhakathā*, (CS), Version 4.0.

02. The commentator has tried to explain that the onion that was brought by the ascetic was red onion“ (*Lasuṇaṃ upajīvāmīti rattalasūṇaṃ ropetvā tadeva gocaraṃ katvā jīvikaṃ kappemīti attho.*). In this case, it is important to know that the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and the *Samantapāsādikā* use the word ‘*bhañjanaka*’ to identify only the red onion. And also, the *Aṭṭhakathā* doesn’t take the word ‘*bhañjanaka*’ as a synonym for ‘*ratta lasuṇa*’.

Thus, it can be decided that the commentator has attempted to comment on the *Lasunadāyaka* in order not to contradict the *Vinaya* rules established by the Buddha. But, the commentator has not paid attention to the fact that the story included in the *Therāpadāna* is related according to the order of the Buddha, Vipassi. As a result of the unnecessary attempt of the commentator, another problem has arisen. That is, which kind of onion has been offered to the *Mahāhāsaṅgha* by the ascetic, *Lasunadāyaka*? However, there is a possibility to decide this issue in that he brought garlic because there is a common agreement that the *Sutta Piṭaka* is more credible than the post canonical texts. Besides, it can be clearly proved that members of the *Ubbhatoṅgha* has partaken of garlic till the Buddha established certain *Vinaya* rules. The *Kaṅḅikadāyikā Vimānavatthu* of the *Vimānavatthu* mentions that as the fruit of offering a congee containing garlic, cloves and long pepper, *kaṅḅikadāyikā* who was a Buddhist female lay devotee was born as an angel.¹⁷

According to the *Vimānavatthuaṭṭhakathā*, she is the wife of a physician who had treated the Buddha when the Buddha was staying in the *Andhakavinda* forest. He was suffering from a stomach ache and in the meantime venerable *Ānanda* had got that congee as a medicine from her while he was seeking alms.¹⁸ Therefore, the Pāli literary sources have proved that Buddhist monks led by the Buddha who represented the *Samāna* tradition have taken garlic as a food and a medicine.

The *Brāhmaṇa* rules regarding partaking garlic are more different than the *Śramaṇa* tradition. In Accordance with *Brāhmaṇa* teachings, a Brāhmin who gets the *Upanayana* (*Dvija*), should not eat any kind of onion as well as garlic. The *Manusmṛti*, the great law of the Brāhmins mentions that the first observance of a Brāhmin that should be followed is to restrain himself from eating onion (garlic, red onion and Bombay onion).

However, it can be recognized that there are two justifiable reasons to prohibit eating garlic.

01. Understanding that it disturbs the life of chastity because garlic is an aphrodisiac medicine

02. Spreading a bad aroma from the mouth after taking garlic

Specially, Brāhmins who as lay people spent a worldly life popularized the consumption of garlic and most probably fed wives and their children on it. Therefore, it is impossible to decide that the first reason mentioned above was an attempt to establish the

¹⁷ *Khuddaka Nikāya, Vimānavatthupāli*, (CS), Version 4.0.

¹⁸ *Vimānavatthuaṭṭhakathā*, (CS), Version 4.0.

Brāhmin convention. However, it is important to note that the *Manusmṛti* has prohibited eating all kinds of onion. And also, there is no sufficient evidence to prove the second reason also. Therefore, I am arguing to prove another fact which could have happened.

Local core-value system of the Indian *Anārya* tradition was completely rejected by the Āryans after their Indian invasion and they established their own cultural background. As a result of the caste system of the Āryans, the native tribal people of India were dispelled from the major society. Although the Anāryans were dispelled from society, Āryans didn't stop all their connections with them. There was an obligatory link between the Āryans and Anāryans due to the fact that Āryans expected that the Anāryans should be their hirelings. Hence, all the subordinate services and occupations of society were done by the Anāryans. Though Āryans accepted their service they didn't accept the Anariyan cultural, ethical and social patterns of their life styles as well as religious ideas. It can be concluded that all native foods which were preferred by the Anāryans may also have been rejected by the Āryan society. There is sufficient evidence in the *Manusmṛti* to affirm that garlic was a popular food of the Anāryans and that the major society wished to prohibit eating it. According to the *Manusmṛti*, if a *brāhmin* (*dvija*) eats any kinds of onion (garlic, red onion or Bombay onion), that is a course that can lead him to become a *Caṇḍāla*.¹⁹

Caṇḍāla is one of the native clans that have been living in India when the Āryans migrated to India. They represented the major clan among the other four clans of the lowest castes of the society such as *Veṇa*, *Nesāda*, *Rathakāra*, *Pukkusa*. According to Brāhmanic rules, if one maintains a relationship with a *Caṇḍāla*, he will become an impure person and a *Caṇḍāla*.²⁰ Hence, it is clear that the rule of the prohibition of partaking of garlic was established because garlic was a popular food of Anāryans.

The Theravāda *Vinaya* Rules on Partaking of Garlic

According to some Mahāyāna *Vinaya* texts, consumption of garlic is a minor offence and monks or nuns who have consumed garlic is not allowed to enter a temple or *saṅgha* community for five days due to the bad aroma of garlic. If he or she has eaten onion, they are prohibited to enter the *saṅgha* community for three days. Nuns are specially prohibited to waste time cultivating garlic according to the Mahāyāna *vinaya* tradition.

In Vajrayāna *Vinaya* it is clearly mentioned that garlic has originated from a lump of blood which dripped from a demigoddess's womb. Therefore garlic is considered as a polluted food and that it will cause one to sleep heavily, eclipse thoughts, disturb sensibilities and moreover it will obstruct the higher attainments of the mind.²¹

¹⁹ *The Manusmṛti*, V. 5. 19.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Domsum Gyen*, editor; Kunkhen Padmakarpo, Taipei; The corporate Body of the Buddha (Educational Foundation, 2005).

Although the Theravāda *Vinaya* literature has not mentioned such facts, the Buddha has twice delivered discourses to the effect that the *Ubhatosaṅgha* should desist from eating garlic. And also, it can be seen that the *Theravāda Vinaya* rules with regard to the partaking of garlic have been established on reasonable grounds.

**01. The Vinaya rule and amendment for the *Bhikkhu-s* - *Cullavaggapāli*,
*Khuddakavatthukkhanda***

Once when the Buddha was teaching the *Dhamma* sitting surrounded by a large assembly, a certain monk who had eaten garlic sat down at one side, thinking that it will disturb other monks due to the bad smell of garlic he had eaten. The Buddha saw the monk, who was sitting down at one side and addressed him and asked “Why is that monk sitting to one side?” Then the *Bhikkhu-s* explained the reason to the Buddha. On that occasion, the Buddha explained to the monks that they should refrain from eating any foods that would cause a disturbance to *Dhamma* talks. Hence, the Buddha established a *Vinaya* rule saying;

“Garlic should not be eaten. Whoever should eat it, there is an offence of wrongdoing.”

“*Na bhikkhave lasuṇaṃ khāditabbaṃ. Yo khādeyya āpatti dukkaassā*”²²

At that time, *Arahant* Sāriputta had wind in his stomach (*Udaravātābādho*). Then the *Arahant* Moggallāna approached the venerable Sāriputta and asked when he had the wind in his stomach before, and by what means did he get comfort. Venerable Sāriputta answered that taking garlic made him comfortable. The Buddha was informed of the matter by the *Bhikkhu-s*. Then the Buddha amended the earlier rule by laying down another new rule.

“I allow you, monks to eat garlic in the case of illness.”

“*Anujānāmi bhikkhave ābādapaccayā lasuṇaṃ khādituṃ*”²³

02. The rule for the *Bhikkhuni-s* - *Pcittiyapāli*, *Bhikkhuni Vibhaṅga*, *Lasuṇa Vagga*, *Paṭhama Sikkhāpada*.

According to the *Nidāna* story of the *Sikkhāpada*, the Buddha had established a *Vinaya* rule for *bhikkhuni-s* saying that they should refrain from eating garlic. Once, when the Buddha was staying at the Jetavanārāma in Sāvatti, a certain lay devotee wished to offer garlic to the *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha*. Therefore, the keeper of the field was instructed by him saying that if the *bhikkhunis* came, to give two or three bundles of garlic for each *bhikkhuni*. At that time, there was a festival in Sāvatti and the garlic was used up as soon as it was brought in. The *Bhikkhuni-s*, having approached the lay follower, requested some garlic. He instructed them to go and take garlic from the keeper of the field. At that moment, *Bhikkhuni*

²² *Cullavaggapāli II, Khuddakavatthukkhanda*, Tipiṭaka.org.cscd.

²³ *Ibid.*

Thullanandā had gone to the field, and, not knowing moderation, had taken away a large quantity of garlic. The keeper of the field looked down upon, criticized and spread it about saying how can these *Bhikkhuni*-s, not knowing moderation take away so much garlic? The Buddha was informed about this incident by the order of the *bhikkhuni*-s. On that occasion, the Buddha addressing the monks, gave a reasoned talk:

In a previous existence, the *Bhikkhuni* Thullanandā was the wife of a certain Brāhmin and there were three daughters, by name, Nandā, Nandavatī and Sundarīnandā. Then, the Brāhmin having passed away was born in the womb of a certain swan and his feathers were made all of gold. He gave a feather one by one to them. Then, the greedy wife of the Brahmin saying that; “this swan is giving us a feather one by one” took hold of that swan and plucked him. Although the feathers grew again they turned white. Then the Buddha addressed the monks saying “So at that time, the *Bhikkhuni* Thullanandā lost the gold through too much greed and now she will lose the garlic.” Therefore, the Buddha advised her saying “One should be pleased with what is received, for too much greed is bad”. Finally, the Buddha established a new *Vinaya* rule saying “Whoever nun should eat garlic, there is an offence of expiation”

“*Yā pana bhikkhuni lasuaṇaṃ khādeyya pācittiya*”²⁴.

In the analysis that was put forward by the editors of the *Vinaya piṭaka*, the above *Vinaya* rule was added for further explanation. In accordance with that analysis;

01. If she says, “I will eat” and accepts, there is an offence of wrong doing.
02. For every clove of garlic there is an offence of expiation.
03. If she thinks that it is garlic when it is garlic and eats, there is an offence of expiation.
04. If she is in doubt as to whether it is garlic, there is an offence of expiation.
05. If she thinks that it is not garlic when it is garlic and eats, there is an offence of expiation.
06. If she thinks that it is garlic when it is not garlic and eats, there is an offence of wrong doing.
07. If she is in doubt as to whether it is not garlic and eats there is an offence of wrong doing. If she thinks that it is not garlic when it is not garlic and eats there is no offence. There is no offence if it is *Paḷaṇḍuka*, *Bhañjanaka*, *Hharitaka* or *Cāvalasūna*. And also if it is in a concoction of broth, in a concoction of meat, in a concoction of oil, or if it is in a salad or dainties is also not offence. And if she is mad also then no offence. And also, the first person has committed it, then also no offence.

Hence in the Theravāda *Vinaya* literature it is clearly mentioned that the garlic can be eaten as a medicine or an additional ingredient which is mixed with other foods. But,

²⁴ *Pācittiyapāli*, 1993: 259.

there is no doubt it cannot be eaten as a separate food. And also cannot be eaten if there is the perception of garlic.

Conclusion

I have discussed the problem regarding the prohibition of eating garlic among the three traditions of *Bāhmana-s*, *Śramaṇa-s* and Buddhists. Though the *Brāhmana-s* were against the eating of garlic on the basis of racial deference, *Śramaṇas* were allowed to eat it. The Buddhists allowed it as a medicine and as an ingredient but have taken steps to control the overuse as it would be a reason to disturb to the Dhamma talks. But the Theravāda *Vinaya* tradition has not taken the aphrodisiac feature as a reason to prohibit eating garlic as well as Brāhmin tradition. But some Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna texts have tried to explain the bodily reactions that could have happened after taking garlic. The analysis of the situation shows the Buddhist standpoint is based on entirely different ground and in my article I attempted to point it out.

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