

Origin and Evolution of Buddhism in American Continent.

Buddhism existed India in the 6th BC century and many kings, house holders, and ordinary people got the ultimate bliss of Nibbāna. As a result of the third Buddhist council, Buddhism was spread beyond India, for nine countries which are situated in Asian continent but later, it was transmigrated western countries too. With the approaching Buddhism into the West, people used to read, investigate, and write about Buddhism those who were in West. The popularity which the Buddha has gained in the last few years is truly remarkable. Some come back, the life Magazine brought out an illustrated article on Buddhism in its series on the great religion of the world. The international enthusiasm for Buddhism was so much that Life had to issue three million additional copies to meet a most legitimate demand. Way back in 1951, the Penguin Series brought out a book on Buddhism. Only 40,000 copies were printed at first. Today the sales have exceeded 200,000. These facts declaim for themselves and these facts are proved how western peoples are engaging Buddhism day to day.

The aim of this article is to explain how the beginning of Buddhism and evaluation in America. When considering the main task can be explained using two facts as follows.

- Arriving Buddhism due to specific persons and incidence.
- Arriving Buddhism due to migrants.

Before the Journey of Marco Polo (1271-1295) and the subsequent colonial expansion of European powers into Asia, Western civilization came into only encounters with Buddhism. During periods of military or economic expansiveness, Europeans had some slight contact with India. Militarily, Alexander the Great brought Greeks and Indians together by crossing the Indus River in the spring of 326 B.C, but he and his successors returned with no substantial knowledge of Buddhism that we know of.¹ By present it is difficult to prove with evidences that western people have had knowledge about Buddhism but using this fact can be postulated they may be had some knowledge about Buddhism before the journey of Marco Polo.

¹ King, N.O, Ed by Nagendra Kr Singh, 1999, *International Encyclopedia of Buddhism*; Vol. 73, p-245, New Delhi, Anmol Publications PVT. LTD.

In the 18th century, the period of colonial, westerners revealed the facts of Buddhism with evidence while there were ruling the colonized countries. After invention India by British and kept administration by them; in the 18th century Mr. Max Muller who came to India from German to Study the culture and religion. He studied Hinduism in the first place, but inevitably Buddhism. The great German scholar Max Muller, for so many years Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, performed an inestimable service to the study of both Buddhism and Hinduism with his sacred books of the East. The study of *Pali* in the West really goes back to the pioneer work of the Frenchman Burnouf and the German Lassen as early as 1826, and the Dane V. Facusboll translated the Dhammapada into Latin in 1895, an English man Robert Caesar Childers, produced the first Pali Dictionary in 1875². Because of these scholarly works did by Westerners, the message of Buddhism reached to the west.

After few decades of American civil war, the main teachings of the Buddhism were started to spread in America through the writings of *Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whiteman, and Henry David Thoreau*. They wrote books about Asian religion and elaborated with attracted paints; these causes arose the curiosity regarding Buddhism in American minds. Later on, above authors were followed by *Jack Kerouac, Garry Snyder, Allen Gilbert, Ann Waldman* and they too wrote books about Buddhism. Because of their books, the idea about Buddhism was established in Westerner's mind which is that there is an importance teaching in Asian religions than Western religions.³

Beginning of Theosophical society in New York 1870 and world's religion parliament in Chicago 1893 were caused to spread Buddhism into American continent. Henry Steel Alcott, one of members of Theosophical society gave a specific attention toward Buddhism after reading a pamphlet published in Chicago about a huge debate which was held in Panadura 1873. As a results of this debate he came to Sri Lank with Helena Blavatsky to study Buddhism and revival Buddhism in Sri Lanka on May 16, 1880. The book, *Light of Asia* written by Sir Edward Arnold in 1979, can be considered as another interesting of Buddhism in America.

² Walshe M.O'C. Ed by Nagendra Kr Singh, 1999, *International Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*; Vol. 73, New Delhi, Anmol Publications PVT. LTD. P-245

³ ලිලාරත්න.එස්, 2012, උතුරු ඇමරිකාවේ ථෙරවාද බුදු දහමේ ඉතිහාසය සහ සිංහල විහාර වංශය, සී/ස ඇස්. ගොඩගේ සහ සහෝදරයෝ(පුද්) සමාගම, කොළඹ 10, පි-2

Entering to Buddhist order by the western person can be mentioned as a turning point of Buddhism in the west. The first Englishman to take the robe as a Bhikkhu was Allan Bennett, who became the Bhikkhu Ananda Metteyya in Burma in 1902. The plan was made for a Buddhist mission to England, and in 1907 the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland was founded, with Professor Rhys Davis as President. It cannot be said that the mission was a success. The Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland scarcely survived World War I. It finally petered out in 1923 after the death of Rhys Davis.

Beginning of Buddhism in America through the migrants who migrated from Japan and China is the second reason. As a result of World War II, in the 1860s and 1870s, hundreds of thousands of Chinese immigrants went to the West Coast of America and Canada to work in the gold mines and on the railroads. Japanese labourers followed.⁴ From 1868, significant numbers of Japanese and Chinese immigrants also went to work on the sugar plantations of Hawaii, which was annexed as an American territory in 1898. Asian immigration to California was halted in 1902, but continued in Hawaii, which thus became an important center for the transmission of Buddhism to America.⁵

Many immigrants who came from China to America belong to “*Pure Land*” Buddhist Tradition. Japanese immigrants became overtly active in religious matters earlier than the Chinese, many coming from an area where the *Jōdo-Shin* sect was strong. ⁶In 1889, the first Buddhist Temple was established in Hawaii by *Sōryū Kagahi*, the Japanese monk who belonged to *Hampa Hongwan Ji* sub sect, which was the largest Buddhist denomination in Hawaii and North America in 1800. In addition to that in 1899, Sub-sect was established in North America as Buddhist Mission by monk *Sokei Sōnada*.⁷

During the Second World War, Japanese had to face a hard time. Even though they were put into prison, Japanese reorganized in search of acquiring their freedom and they established an

⁴ Prebish, C. S (1999), *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America*, Berkeley, University of California Press. p 4-5

⁵ Peter Harvey (2013) *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teaching and History Practices* (2nd ed), Cambridge University Press, New York, p- 424.

⁶ Williams, D. R., and Queen, C. S., eds. (1999), *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent scholarship*, Richmond, Curzon Press. p -3-19.

⁷ Prebish, C.S. and Baumann, M., eds. (2002), *Westward Dhamma: Buddhism beyond Asia*, University of California Press. California, p -191-200

Organization as “Buddhist Church of America”. To help pass on its traditions, the Mission and the Church organized a Young Men’s Buddhist Association, Sunday schools, Buddhist women’s societies, and educational programs. These Western-influenced activities had already begun to develop in Japan itself at this time.⁸ The title ‘Church’ indicates further Westernization, as do the titles ‘minister’ and ‘bishop’ and the style of religious services, which are held on Sundays, use organs and have included the singing of hymns such as ‘*Buddha, lover of my soul...*’, though Christianized elements have reduced since the mid-1990s.⁹

The Institute for Buddhist Studies, for training BCA priests, was established in 1966; one of the Church’s members was an astronaut killed in the 1986 Challenger space-shuttle disaster and, in 1987, the US Defense. The department allowed the Church to put forward chaplains to work in the military. However, membership has declined, from around 65,000 in 1977 to 50,775 in 1995, probably due to the BCA being seen as just for Japanese Americans, and rather undynamic and conformist.¹⁰ In 2010, it listed fifty-four temples on its website – down from sixty-three in 1987.¹¹

Whatever hardships were faced by immigrants they could spread Buddhism in American land successfully. Hence thousands temple can be seen many parts of the America by present. Auspicious result of spreading Buddhism in America is, thousands of Americans are Buddhist in present time and they lead their life by practicing the teaching of Buddha. Even though Mahayana tradition was spread through USA, people had not any idea about Theravada Tradition. But it was changed and people got an idea about Theravada Tradition because of the World Parliament of Religion which was held in Chicago, 1893.¹²

The origin of Theravada Buddhism in America can be traced to a speech made by *Anagarika Dharmapala* at the World Parliament of Religions meeting in 1893.¹³ *Anagarika Dharmapala* initiated a short surge of interest in Buddhism by their speeches at the Parliament.

⁸ Peter Harvey (2013) *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teaching and History Practices* (2nd ed), New York, Cambridge University Press. p- 425.

⁹ Prebish, C. S. and Baumann, M., ed, (2002) *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, Berkeley, University of California Press. p- 163.

¹⁰ Prebish C.S. (1999) *Luminous Passage: the practice and study Buddhism in America*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p- 132-33.

¹¹ Peter Harvey (2013) *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teaching and History Practices* (2nd ed), New York, Cambridge University Press. p- 426.

¹² Choe & McNally (2013) *Buddhism in United States: an Ethnographic Study*; *International Journal of Religion Tourism and Pilgrimage* Vol. No 01: Iss 1, Article 9. P -95

¹³ Wendy Cadge (2017) *Theravada Buddhism in America*, Available from <http://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/089002.html> [02,09,2017]

Dr. Paul Carus resolved to publish works on Buddhism, especially Zen, through his Open Court Publishing Company, and himself produced *The Gospel of Buddha*, a popular anthology of Buddhist texts.¹⁴ In 1896, Dharmapāla returned to America for a year at the invitation of Carus, travelling widely and teaching Buddhist doctrine, psychology and meditation. Even though *Anagarika Dharmapala* gave a contribution to spread Theravada Buddhism in America, but he could not able to establish a Sri Lankan temple in America.

The first Sri Lankan Buddhist temple was built by Venerable Madihe Pannasiha Thero in Washington DC, 1965. The first Vesak festival celebrated in Sri Lanka temple and 22 devotees observed eight precepts of American history on fourth may of 1969. The second Sri Lankan Buddhist temple (Dharmavijaya Temple) was established by Venerable Walpola Piyananda there in no 256, 12th Street, Washington DC, 1980. In addition to that Venerable Walpoloa Piyananda Thero gave contribution to establish number of Sri Lanka Buddhist temple in America such as *Houston Buddhist Viharaya, Florida Buddhist Viharaya, Georjin Buddhist Viharaya, and Portland Buddhist Viharaya*.

Thousands of Buddhist temple have been built by present and American live according to Buddhism by practicing the teachings of Buddha. Buddhism is one of the largest religions in the United States behind Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Religion	Number 1990	Number 2001	Change
Jewish	3, 137,00 (1.8%)	2,831,000 (1.3%)	-9.7%
Muslim	527,000 (0.3%)	1,104,000 (0.5%)	109.5%
Buddhist	401,000 (0.2%)	1,082,000 (0.5%)	169.8%

Above table shows the tendency of being Buddhist in America.¹⁵ American Buddhists include many Asian Americans, as well as a large number of converts of other ethnicities, and now their children and even grandchildren.¹⁶ In 2012, *U-T San Diego* estimated U.S. practitioners at 1.2

¹⁴ Peter Harvey (2013) *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teaching and History Practices* (2nd ed), Cambridge University Press, New York, p- 431.

¹⁵ Eller JD (2007) *Introducing anthropology of religion culture to the ultimate*. Routledge, New York, p305.

¹⁶ Kenneth K. Tanaka (*January 2001*). "*American Buddhism's Racial Divide: Buddhists in the United States are split into two camps: Asian Americans and 'New Buddhists.'* Can they be brought together?", Available from <http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/2000/01/american-buddhisms-racial-divide.aspx> [10 August 2017].

million people, of whom 40% are living in Southern California.¹⁷ In terms of percentage, Hawaii has the most Buddhists at 8% of the population due to its large Asian American community.¹⁸

In recent years, Buddhism has been spreading globally in diverse ecological, linguistic and cultural contexts.¹⁹ In North America, for example, thousands of meditation centers and groups are appearing, and Buddhist meditation centers, social justice movements, eco-Buddhists, Buddhist Internet sites, and university courses in Buddhism are flourishing.²⁰

Whatever hardships were faced, Buddhism has been spread through America. There are 2209 Buddhist temples by present time. Those temples can be categorized as follows,

Buddhist groups, centers, monastery/temples and organizations in the USA

Eastern Buddhism, 1,049:

Zen, 677: Thich Nhat Hanh Community of Mindful Living (199); Sōtō (138); Non-specific or mixed Japanese Zen (136); Chan (60); Rinzai (45); Korean Kwan Um Zen (44); other Korean Zen (30); other Vietnamese Zen (25)

Pure Land, 145: Jōdo-shin (102); Chinese Pure Land (29); Jōdo (8); Vietnamese Pure Land (6)

General Mahāyāna, 113: Vietnamese (38); Chinese (13); Korean (10); Japanese (9); Non-specified (43) Nichiren, 53: Nichiren Shōshū and Nichiren Shū (24); Sōka Gakkai International (24); Risshō-kōseikai (5) Other, 61: Chinese Humanistic Buddhism (25); Shingon (23); Tendai (8); Korean Won (3); Chinese Mantranaya (2)

Northern Buddhism, 656:

Gelugpa, 174: mainline Gelugpa (96); New Kadampa Tradition (78)

¹⁷ Rowe, Peter (16 April 2012). "Dalai Lama facts and figures", Available from <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2012/apr/16/all-about-dalai-lama> [10 August 2017]

¹⁸ Adults in Hawaii, Available from <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/hawaii/> [10 August 2017].

¹⁹ Glazier SD (1997) Anthropology of religion: a handbook. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

²⁰ Choe, Jaeyeon and McNally, John (2013) "Buddhism in the United States: an Ethnographic Study," International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 9, Available from <http://arrow.dit.ie/ijrtp/vol1/iss1/9> [10 August 2017]

Kagyüdpā, 160

Nyingmapa, 141: general Nyingmapa (114); Dzogch'en (27)

Kagyüdpā/Nyingmapa, 84: Shambhala (64); other forms of this mix (20)

Non-specific or unidentified, 61

Other, 36: Ri-may (non-sectarian) (19); Sakyapa (13); Jonangpa (2); Sakyapa/Nyingmapa (1);

Bon (1)

Southern Buddhism, 373:

*Monastery/temples, 190: Thai (98); Thai Forest Sangha (5); Sri Lankan (28); Laotian (27);
Cambodian (17); Burmese (7); Vietnamese (3); Bangladeshi (1); mixed (2); for nuns (2)*

Vipassanā, 97

Non-specific, 63

National organizations, 12: Burmese (4); Cambodian (4); Indian (2); Sri Lankan (1);

Vietnamese (1)

Other, 12: Thai Forest Tradition (9); Dhammakāya (2); Samatha Trust (1)

Mixed, 131:

General Buddhist, 115

*Other, 16: Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (6); Engaged Buddhist (4); Vipassanā/
Zen (3); Vipassanā/Vajrayāna (1); Chinese and Sri Lankan Forest Sanghas (1); Tendai/
Vajrayāna (1)²¹*

It is clear that Buddhism came to America in various ways. Sometimes immigrants had to sacrifice their life when established Buddhism. Anyhow it has been established successfully by the present time.

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²¹ Peter Harvey (2013) *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teaching and History Practices (2nd)* Cambridge University Press, New York. p – 433

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