



Buddhist Education: The History and Background of the Saṅgīti-sutta

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The Saṅgīti-sutta from the Dīgha-nikāya was the subject of my PhD dissertation. What I would like to put forward in this article is the history of the discourse, to enable additional dialogues amongst other Buddhist scholars – certainly those senior who have superior knowledge and insight. I hope this will strengthen better and respectful engagements amongst us, certainly in the field of Buddhist education. I begin with Jainism's perspective of Buddhists, and the Buddhist perspective of Jainism - as presented in Buddhist discourses. With this established, the historical perspective can be understood towards the creative-generation and motivation behind issuing the Saṅgīti-sutta and, therefore, we today know why we have it, and why we should use it in Buddhist education.



I believe that the Saṅgīti-sutta was issued as a defensive stance against allegations of mindlessness and uttered offensively to protect and establish themselves against doctrinal decay - so the 230

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guiding-principles contained in the discourse could be understood as required criteria inside the Buddha's system of learning – and quite possibly this may have officially established Buddhism, as a recognized sect, rather than just an assemblage of teachings by some random guru.

Nigantha Nāṭaputta (Mahāvira) in the Tipiṭaka

In an attempt to be objective, and not present one-sided information, many Jain texts were examined to determine the manner in which Buddhists are depicted in their texts, and if any material exists pertaining to the death of their leader, it is because Buddhists discourses do discuss these events; Buddhists often don't know what is inside Jain literature. Consider the following material from Jain literature²:

“See! There are men who control themselves, (whilst others only) pretend to be houseless (i.e. monks, such as the *Bauddhas*, whose conduct differs not from that of householders).”³

Such external criticism shaped the Buddhist monastic regulations over the years; more:

“Through wrong instruction the (would-be) sages trouble themselves (for pleasures); thus they sink deeper and deeper in delusion, (and cannot get) to this, nor to the opposite shore.”⁴

Consider this criticism or Jain-opinion⁵ from the *Udumbarika-Sīhanāda-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*:

² According to Hermann Jacobi in *Jaina Sutras, Part I, Sacred Books of the East Volume 22*, found at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jai/sbe22/sbe2285.htm> “The *Kalpa Sutra - Lives of the Ginas*”, Mahāvira died after 72 years of life, in Papa in the writer's office of King Hastipala, single and alone, after giving a long lecture. Further, *Jainism: An Indian Religion of Salvation* by Helmuth von Glesenapp & Shridhar B. Shrotri (1999), states: Mahāvira had just preached for six days straight, in front of many people, but when the crowd was asleep, he could have taken his final rest, and when they awoke, they realized Mahāvira had died.

³ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jai/sbe22/sbe2204.htm> - accessed 2 October 2008.

⁴ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jai/sbe22/sbe2211.htm> - accessed 2 October 2008.

⁵ Walshe, Maurice, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha – A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 386.



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“...householder, do you know whom the ascetic Gotama talks to? Whom does he converse with? From whom does he get his lucidity of wisdom? The ascetic Gotama’s wisdom is destroyed by the solitary life, he is unused to assemblies, he is no good at conversation, he is right out of touch. Just as bison circling around keep to the fringes, so it is with the ascetic Gotama. In fact, householder, if the ascetic Gotama were to come to this assembly, we would baffle him with a single question, we would knock him over like an empty pot.”

The expression above seems to be an early representation of the ascetic Gotama before he was a well-known and established-respected teacher, perhaps, and to the Jains, Buddhists don’t appear to be very mindful. Being mindful is the often stressed-trait in the Theravāda tradition. Therefore, the literature of the Buddhist canon is quite diverse in various matters and mentions Nigantha Nāṭaputta, better known outside Buddhist literature as Mahāvira (Great Hero), several times entering into various doctrinal debates and confrontations with Buddhists.

Consider the doctrinal stance of the Buddhists towards the Jains: “...the doctrine of the foolish Niganthas will give delight to fools but not to the wise, and it will not withstand testing or being smoothened out.”⁶ With these arguments established, an examination of the interactions that transpired between Buddhists and Jains should be undertaken, to highlight how the death of Mahāvira greatly inspired Buddhism and thus, eventually the *Saṅgīti-sutta*.⁷

⁶ Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 489.

⁷ Venerable Dr. Ashin Nyanissara Thera, *Saṅgīti: A Perspective, Prospect and their Impacts*: Researcher’s summary of the text: Venerable Nyanissara starts by defining the term *Saṅgīti*, then erroneously relocates the setting of the discourse, but claims it took place about 10 months before the death of the Buddha (and therefore about four months before Sāriputta dies); and that this setting should be about ten years after the death of Nigantha Nāṭaputta, Mahāvira. He mentions Jain doctrine differs (thus Sāriputta wanted a uniform doctrine to replace any divisions); he states that half the disciples present belonged to Sāriputta and the other to Ānanda. Then Nyanissara states that Sāriputta taught the Dhamma-vinaya as known up to that time, and concludes with this: “It was the first Mahāsangīti led by Sāriputta Thera while the Teacher was still alive. This *sangīti* has been overlooked by many scholars.” p. 7.

Whereas Walshe concludes his translation (p. 510) with: “...Well indeed have you proclaimed the want of chanting together for the monks!”, Nyanissara (p. 7.) translates: “...Well indeed have you Sāriputta, proclaimed the way of extracting the teachings to the Bhikkhus.” This is perhaps a radical departure from Walshe’s translation, but would indeed fit within the context of the existing matrix-system for the presentation of the discourse. Sāriputta, thus extracted the core





The Upāli-sutta⁸ has Mahāvira staying in the same place as the Buddha, with a large assembly of followers. There is a discussion near the beginning of the discourse concerning aspects of the Jain doctrine. A skilled Jain disciple converses with the Buddha. The Buddha asks one of the Jain disciples a question concerning evil action. The Jain responds that Mahāvira teaches three types of rods for the performance and perpetration of evil action: the bodily rod, the verbal rod, and the mental rod. The Jain responds three times to the statement that the bodily rod is the most reprehensible for the performance and perpetration of evil action. The Buddha tells the Jain that he replaces the word *rod* for the word *action*. The Buddha responds to the Jain, that he teaches mental action is the most reprehensible concerning evil action. In fact, this manipulation of existing vocabulary is excessively illuminated throughout the great new text by Professor Richard Gombrich.⁹

Later in the sutta, the Jain layman Upāli hears of this teaching through the Jain disciple reporting the above conversation to Mahāvira. Upāli boasts that he can defeat the Buddha in a verbal debate, but the Jain doctrine is refuted and defeated. The agenda-inspired lay disciple then, after several similes given by the Buddha becomes satisfied after the first, but desired to hear the Buddha's ideas on other scenarios. The Buddha praises him for his investigation. Upāli, then departs and returns to Mahāvira. As the warning from the Jain disciple said that the Buddha is a skilled magician who can convert the disciples of other sectarians, near the end of the sutta, Upāli converts and invites Mahāvira and his remaining assembly to his (Upāli's) dwelling for alms and enters into a debate. Instead of Mahāvira being converted via debate by Upāli, he is encompassed by a great sadness at the elaborate verse of praise for the Buddha, as well as the loss of his disciple to the Buddha. Mahāvira vomits and spits up hot blood dying soon after.

details, without explanation, and left the structure for later generations to elaborate on, to form their Abhidhamma texts, as history suggests. Sāriputta extracted all of the Dhamma-Vinaya of the Buddha known to him at that time, and presented it to both Sanghas. Everyone approved and the Buddha certified the discourse with his own approval.

⁸ Bhikkhu Nānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 477-492.

⁹ Richard Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*.



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The Pāsādika-sutta also has a description of what transpired after the passing of Mahāvira. The sutta says that after Mahāvira died in Pava, the sect split and the disciples of Mahāvira disputed various points of their doctrine, not seeing things the same way, seeing methods in certain orders, or out of order, etc. They were:

“...quarrelling and disputing, fighting and attacking each other with worldly warfare... Even the white-robed lay followers were disgusted, displeased and repelled when they saw their doctrine and discipline was so ill-proclaimed, so unedifyingly displayed, and so ineffectual in calming the passions, having been proclaimed by one not fully enlightened, and now with its support gone, without an arbiter.”¹⁰

This was reported to the Buddha by the novice Cunda. The Buddha, however, tells Cunda that he does not blame the pupils for the fighting, because the teacher was to be blamed, the doctrine was to blame, because the teacher was not fully enlightened. Thus perhaps, the Buddhists should then know their doctrine, so that the teacher could not be blamed for any negligence. This sutta mainly expresses that a disciple should practice the doctrine proclaimed by his teacher, according to certain proper conditions – again, basically: there is a correct teacher for a pupil to be under and the general doctrine (well-explained) for the going forth into the life of a bhikkhu.

Additionally, along with the purpose of the monk-robés often chanted in the monasteries today, there are further details on how one should train. Then the sutta goes into various aspects of Buddhist philosophy: if one trains to higher levels of morality and with higher levels of Dhammas, then the ultimate results of Buddhist training become evident for the practitioner. This follows the model of gradual training adopted and adapted for the presentation of Dhammas throughout the Saṅgīti-sutta. Aspects or details inside this *Pāsādika-sutta* could form a skeleton-outline of an Abhidhamma text if further examined as I have done elsewhere.

¹⁰ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 427.





The Sāmagāma-sutta¹¹ discusses the death of Mahāvira, and again points to the schism that developed after his death. The verbal assault-daggers were being tossed by his pupils, and disgusted lay followers, etc., as mentioned above. The sutta is an exposition on how the Buddha's disciples are supposed to behave after his death to ensure the continuation of his teachings. Again, from the Sāmagāma-sutta, Mahāvira just died. Jains fight and split. This is reported to the Buddha, who is speaking to Ānanda, and states: disputing over livelihood or the Pātimokkha is trifling; but should any dispute arise in the sangha about the path or the way - such a dispute would be for the harm and unhappiness of many, for the loss, harm, and suffering of gods and humans. Therefore, in this discourse, Ānanda replies to the Buddha that no one argues about the dhamma, only over livelihood and the Pātimokkha. So the Buddha explains: six roots of disputes; four kinds of litigation; seven kinds of settlement of litigation; and the six *sāraniya-dhammas* – which lead to harmony amongst people who have to live near another.

Therefore, as we have seen, Jain literature seems to pass over the death of Nigantha Nātaputta, perhaps because he was just one of many leaders in a long line of religious ascetics. His role as a protagonist seems, then, rather weak, or as a normal man; in fact, he, perhaps is only the *Great Hero* from the perspective of what he offered the Buddhist tradition. What did the death of Mahāvira contribute to Buddhism? Precisely, as mentioned above, numerous discourses, at least fourteen, involve interaction with Jains and Buddhists as if they were ascetic/religious siblings, each dispute leads to the establishment of greater Buddhist ideologies. Buddhists, witnessing the social discomfort faced by leaderless Jain disciples, reacted by rehearsing doctrine to benefit future generations.

Benefit, here, should be illustrated to stress that a discourse mentions teachings to benefit from – and so some scholars have made the assumption that this is suggestive of a late-era discourse. Buddhists are very conscious of delaying or preventing any decay in the Buddha's tradition, so this discourse seems reactionary, to some extent. Of course, this may be solely from the perspective

¹¹ Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 853-860 (Sutta #104).



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or hindsight of Buddhist monks fortunate enough to witness the behaviors of Jain disciples.

Buddhism sought, then, to eliminate any religious insecurity, perhaps placing emphasis on confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha as a demonstration. It can be said that Buddhism was strengthened due to the mistakes in the Jain tradition or from philosophical-errors. Indeed, had it not been for the disassembling of the Jain tradition which acted as the catalyst for the setting of the *Saṅgīti-sutta*, this profound discourse may not have occurred.

Now, the *Saṅgīti-sutta* is a very long sutta, but a portion recounts the death of Mahāvira and the sectarian split that arose from his death. Here, Venerable Sāriputta presents 230 aspects of Dhamma to some 500 Buddhist monks for reciting, in order to prevent any future-arising schism; this recitation was well-received, and no one argued against the pronouncements.¹² The *Saṅgīti-sutta* is a major step in the development of Buddhism – to protect the Dhamma from decay and propagate what has been established towards the future generation's appreciation. Although the Buddha outlived his chief disciples and chief opponents, having the Jain sect co-existing in the same geographical region was highly beneficial to the Buddha's doctrine. He or his major disciples could better or clearly debate and define Buddhist philosophy vis-à-vis the positions of antagonists; thus the discourse establishes itself in the Buddhist tradition and at the same time defends the created Buddhist tradition against potential doctrinal errors, a sign of its prominence and preeminence. 230 doctrinal positions were given and arranged numerically, perhaps for easier recollection within an oral-tradition.

Important Perspective on Buddhist Councils

Charles Prebish writes an influential article pertaining to Buddhist councils.¹³ He mentions the coming together of monks following the Buddha's death as the first council because it was there that power was settled along with matters of discipline. However, Prebish is interested in the death of the Buddha, the background of

¹² Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 480.

¹³ Charles S. Prebish, "A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, February 1974.





the Mahāparinibbāna-sutta, and Vinaya accounts of the incident – standard scholarship that fails to look into the background of other conceptual-gatherings, initially – as I accomplish here in this article. Now, a brief review of problematic points inside Prebish's 36-year old article:

“Virtually all the researchers have concluded that the [1st] council was not a historical event.”¹⁴ “...reliance on the Pāli texts was predominant, a flaw...”¹⁵ Prebish cites La Vallée Poussin, a scholar writing on the episode of: “Subhadra, who believed himself freed from all rule by the disappearance of Buddha...”¹⁶ – which is, to a minor extent, an echoing of the Jain dissention following Mahāvira’s demise.

Mahā Kassapa’s decision to initiate a council was not very different from the decision of Sāriputta to give the Saṅgīti-sutta, both were encouraged by someone. With the Chief Disciple dead, who could speak on social-regulations and Dhamma? Only Upāli, the Vinaya expert, and Ānanda with his great memory. Restated, Mahā Kassapa’s decision for a council was nothing novel, as the setting for the Saṅgīti-sutta occurred maybe several months before this episode of the Buddha’s demise. Perhaps the symbolism to gather 500 arahants was to duplicate the assembly of 500 disciples of Sāriputta, the number of attendees for the Saṅgīti-sutta. Further, Prebish writes, while citing another scholar, Andre Bareau:

“As to why Rājagrha was chosen, the answer is clear enough: “it was only in the ancient capital of Magadha that the members of the council could find sufficient shelter and refuge.”¹⁷

Clearly, these scholars neglected to read the Saṅgīti-sutta, because the Mallas were not only present during the cremation of the Buddha, but supported the setting of the Saṅgīti-sutta and the 500 monks in attendance there. As to the number 500, Prebish

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 244, citing Andre Bareau, *Les Premiers Conciles Bouddhiques* (1955).



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is not clear and claims it is an artificial amount¹⁸, but again, this is merely an equal number to the setting of the Saṅgīti-sutta. If that number is artificial, no one can be certain today, but it is indeed the ‘same’ number suggested for both episodes.

This initiated the curiosity and desire to undertake a deeper look into the Saṅgīti-sutta to study the processes that developed following the death of the Jain leader, as the earlier mentioned discourses suggest rather than thinking that the death of the Buddha triggered important events. It was indeed, the death of the Great Hero, a non-Buddhist, which served as the catalyst for Buddhists to gather and proclaim doctrine and discipline. Richard Gombrich writes extensively on the debt that Buddhists owe to the Jains, and the occasion for the discourse is yet another profound circumstance.

This gathering of monks listened to Venerable Sāriputta’s discourse, which was sealed by the Buddha’s approval. The setting was in the Ubbhataka Meeting Hall, which had never before been used, offered to the Buddha to be the first user, and therefore deserves more respect as an early emergency first council. The setting for the Dasuttara-sutta’s location, the Gaggara Lotus Pond in Campā, was without the Buddha present so this discourse cannot be advocated as prominent; other literature forgets this fact.

Rajagaha was the location of the council that took place after the death of the Buddha. Prebish inserts that Rajagaha was chosen because it had sufficient facilities to support the many monks but again, the Mallas supported 500 guests as well! The setting for Sāriputta’s Saṅgīti-sutta may be a form of a lesser council, perhaps because it wasn’t legitimized politically, sponsored or held under auspices of political-authority, rather it was held by ‘mere’ invitation of a tribal republic, to open or consecrate a building. This observation of ‘sanctioning’ manipulates true authority and undermines the original intentions of the Buddha to be freed from political matters.

The sangha has been forever altered by decisions held at Rajagaha; the resultant history of Buddhist Councils are written by others, elsewhere. The Saṅgīti-sutta is an extensive illustration

¹⁸ Charles S. Prebish, “A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, p. 244.





of dhamma-concepts that were detailed and fully sponsored by the Buddha, as the most purified-authority. The other councils held later, were influenced by external agents, all during the beginning of the age of Buddhist schisms.

Below, Prebish tries to establish criteria, as formulated by Andre Bareau, for traditional recognition of Buddhist councils, and I apply the criteria to the discourse to see if the setting of the Saṅgīti-sutta could be determined to be council-like in nature (thus, subjecting the discourse to the criteria for the context of a council). My criteria and evaluation of the criteria is weaved into the conditions imposed by Prebish, and related to Bareau's seven conditions, listed first and in italics, along with my necessary response:

1. *The essential function of the council* was to recite together without disagreement so that the dhamma would last for a long time.
2. *Convocation¹⁹ of the council* – in direct response to the death of the Jain leader, whose sect fell into schism. Because large groups of monastics dwelled together, the gathering was not because of the death, but the discourse given among a large order of bhikkhus, whereby a large collection of witnesses could listen to Sāriputta proclaim his discourse, which turned out to be the Buddhist dhamma to recite – and this material was uttered to protect against schisms so that all would hear, and this was thus approved – this group of 500 now possessed this knowledge. While this was not a purposeful convocation, it may be determined to be an incidental gathering of ordained people for an event that was significant to be modeled as how to perform ceremonial endeavors.
3. *The degree of universality of the council* was spoken by Sāriputta, supported by the Buddha before 500 monks (at this point there is no universality), but progressing: that the material is still traditionally maintained in the Tipiṭaka of different traditions should arguably merit some universality.

¹⁹ www.dictionary.com, “convocation”, in Easton’s 1897 Bible Dictionary: “A meeting of a religious character as distinguished from congregation, which was more general, dealing with political and legal matters...” Only the monks were in attendance and Sāriputta detailed discipline and doctrine to be recollected, and everyone agreed. Accessed: 01 November 2009.

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4. *The ceremonial aspect of this council:* Let me be clear: this event was not a ceremony, and there shall never be the claim of such; but what is stated are detailed events inside the discourse descriptive enough to emulate for future endeavors and as the first incident, vinaya-regulations suggest that these may be copied for future ceremonies. Observe the following details: the Mallas prepared this building and invited the Buddha to use it first; the Mallas spread out 500 seats, put out water pots and oil lamps, perhaps out of courtesy; after everyone entered with freshly washed feet and settled, the Buddha gave a long discourse, not mentioned in the sutta for this occasion; the elderly Buddha lays down to stretch his aching back, and must let the Chief Disciple, Sāriputta to preside over the sanghas (the sanghas of Sāriputta and Ānanda), who thus gives an extensive, authoritative discourse to the 500 monks who are free from sloth and torpor. The sutta ends with monks rejoicing and proclaiming that Sāriputta's words were well spoken, and this was further confirmed by the Buddha. Apart from ceremonial aspects of preparing seats and feet washing, there were few other 'ritual' aspects contained in this sutta - the discourse mentions: the Buddha adjusted his robe and brought in his bowl, and after he washed his feet, he entered the meeting-hall and sat down against the central pillar, facing east. Then the monks after washing their feet, entered the hall and sat down along the western wall facing east. Then, afterwards, the Pava Mallas washed their feet, entered the hall, and sat down along the eastern wall facing west, with the Buddha in front of them.²⁰ When the Mallas departed for their evening sleep, they got up, saluted the Buddha, and went out ensuring the Buddha remained on their right side – fully illustrating a ceremonious and reverential occasion.

5. *The functions and authority of the members of the council:* The Buddha is the great teacher, Sāriputta is one of his chief disciples, the discourse was given in the community of the sleeping Mallas (who served no more significance for the discourse, apart

²⁰ Other discourses just do not venture into the in-depth details of these actions, and because these actions are specifically illuminated here, the modern researcher determines this was left for historical reasons: for future scholars to understand how to hold a group-meeting – another aspect to be remembered, apart from the 230 Dhamma-components. It would be useless to mention this unless this was the ceremonial-procedures or respectful actions of the era.





from just preparing the vicinity for use), and confirmed before 500 members of the order. The discourse met the approval of the Buddha and can thereby be certified as official doctrine. As far as the functionality of the members, the event was perhaps dictatorial in nature. The Buddha told Sāriputta to give the evening teaching, he had the freedom to say anything, but used this timely occasion to emphasize the doctrine for the creation of this now auspicious occasion, preserved in the Tipiṭaka. Buddhism could be perceived to be an official ‘school’ following this certification by the Buddha. Furthermore, Sāriputta dies before the Buddha and the Rajagaha council, so fellow disciples must have retained memory of this event, most likely Ānanda, because of the stock introductory phrase, “Thus I have heard”... and the insertion and maintenance of this sutta into the Tipiṭaka asserts its further authority. None of the officially recognized gatherings were attended by the Buddha – these later recognized-councils nearly lacked official authorities or immediate messengers of the Buddha – Venerable Ānanda attained to the criteria moments before the beginning of the first council, but could recall the Saṅgīti-sutta. Obviously, with the Buddha dead, the standard-recognized first council did not run as ‘approved’ by the Buddha.

6. *The judiciary power of the council:* The 500 monks agreed in silence, as witnesses to the doctrinal utterances, and were additionally subjected to the Pātimokha as understood up to that period of time. If the Dhamma was not unanimously accepted, the monks would have spoken up, or the Buddha would have rebuked Sāriputta, as he did on other occasions or to anyone needing corrected; and there should be some legality behind verbal agreements – the acceptance of the discourse would mean submission to the intentions and any enforcements of the teaching.
7. *The relation between the king and the council:* this does not apply, as there appeared to be no direct ruler of the Mallas – all their verses across the Tipiṭaka are spoken as a collective voice (republic-democracy) – there might not be a king governing the council, but by consent/influence by majority. All the Mallas (lay people) were sleeping during the discourse; all of the monastics listening were in concurrence without disagreement.



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In italics, above, we read Prebish and Bareau's seven stipulations, with my responses gained from engaging in this study. As my intention is to support the significance of the *Saṅgīti-sutta*, the criteria are only applied for it, not towards other discourses or existent-known councils. To be distinct, the difference between the *Saṅgīti-sutta* and other discourses is the intention of the delivery, based on a significant event, which led to other events (other discourses are not designed as such): the deliverance of the *Saṅgīti-sutta* as a gathering towards solidifying Buddhist doctrine. Further, other, later-Buddhist schools have taken this material, and preserved their account of the events: The Sarvāstivādins took their interpretation and resultant Abhidhamma material in one direction and even have the Buddha speaking lines that are attributed to Sāriputta in the Theravada tradition; while Theravada Buddhists maintained their opinions – discrepancies and arguments in a vibrant social-philosophical and psychological tradition – as I show in other areas of my unpublished-dissertation.

That concludes answering to Prebish and Bareau's seven stipulations for a council – thus it can be certain that this *Saṅgīti-sutta*'s occurrence warrants redefinition as a first response to a critical situation, which can be interpreted to be an early-minor practice council – and minor (although similar) in terms of what would happen in the future: preparations or an exercise for meeting following the death of the Buddha; later gatherings, perhaps only improved upon this initial episode.²¹ As discussed above, each of Prebish and Bareau's criteria have been answered – to the best ability of interpreting the *Saṅgīti-sutta*'s dearth of available proofs and dearth in additional scholarship. Whether or not the criteria that Dr. Prebish supposes is idealistic or genuine - the material-criteria proposed exists or is resident in the *sutta*, as historical-evidence of the integrated aspects of what goes into a council. There is no reason to believe otherwise, that the *Saṅgīti-sutta* setting could not

²¹ For instance, for the discourse, there were only 500 monks; but for the 1st Council, there were 500 Arahants; Sāriputta spoke the discourse alone, but the 1st Council was presided over by an elder-senior monk, with two different topic-experts issuing segments – discipline and discourses respectively. Additionally, the monk Revata was believed to be traveling nearby and came upon the council and was asked to adhere to the Dhamma dictated at the Council, but Revata declined and stated he would rather adhere to the Dhamma as mentioned by the Buddha. It is suggested that Revata was the younger brother of Sāriputta, and could have been privileged to hear and thus maintain his older-brother's discourse.





be determined, minimally, as a trial-run or a practical exercise for future Buddhist councils, and the preservation of Buddhist doctrine. The Saṅgīti-sutta was not another mere teaching; it was a planned, mentally-calculated response by one of the recognized greatest chief disciples – ten years in the making, perhaps his *magnum-opus* – and now a remnant of a form of Buddhist textbook for future educational endeavors!

A key element in future Buddhist councils was to collect, cleanse, and correct the doctrine from errors or heresy, and this was done by full consensus at the risk of a schism (whereas, Sāriputta looked externally against the Jains for his clarified-examples, and there was no internal bickering needing refereed by any political authority). Conditions later degenerated to the extent that the Sangha needed to have a neutral observing ruling authority to govern over the future disputes in later councils. As a result, these famed Buddhist Councils seem to be more internally disastrous than the calling for the Saṅgīti-sutta, which was delivered in a more pristine-era of Buddhist discipleship - an era of less infighting or sectarianism.

To whatever extent that someone wishes to accept what this section has tried to argue for, certainly: the importance to establish Buddhist doctrine was the goal of the Saṅgīti-sutta – and this can no longer be ignored. If the Prebish-Bureau manufactured criteria are applied, the Saṅgīti-sutta does not exactly fulfill all of the suggestive criteria presented by the scholars – if, even their criteria is legitimate criteria; but, this discourse, has been examined and is now determined to be: the most preeminent Theravāda Buddhist doctrinal discourse, because of its delivered intent – the establish Buddhist doctrine or material for Buddhist Education. Later Buddhists studied this material and elaborated on the components to manufacture their respective Abhidhamma-materials, as I have shown elsewhere in my unpublished dissertation.

Additional Considerations to Establish Preeminence

Readers should not think that the Saṅgīti-sutta was examined in isolation - that no other discourses were examined. Other discourses mandated the same scrutiny, but since certain criteria were not met through the criteria established by Charles Prebish above, these other



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discourses could not qualify, and below explain one example. From the deficiencies involved in this forthcoming example, the Saṅgīti-sutta draws more attention upon itself, as preeminent.

Perhaps someone might impose the comparison between the Saṅgīti- and Dasuttara- sutta's for similarities and discrepancies; because those are the formulas secured in the Tipiṭaka, intentively, for chanting – this was done for the Dasuttara-sutta (found as an arranged appendix in the dissertation, for visual reference and proof of conducted research). Furthermore, an endeavor was undertaken to determine what unmentioned discourse the Buddha possibly gave to the Mallas immediately preceding Sāriputta's teaching. Only three²² were found: the Pāsādika-sutta from the Dīgha-nikāya concerns itself with finding a good senior teacher with a well-proclaimed doctrine, with Ānanda in the audience; the Sāmagāma-sutta from the Majjhima-nikāya concerns itself with discipline after the death of the Buddha – again with Ānanda as audience; and a story concerning Cunda the silversmith, from the Anguttara-nikāya is concerned with a multitude of numerical dhammas. All of these three discourses occur after the death of Mahāvira and can be divided into numerical portions or expandable sets of Dhamma – but deeper exploration into these suttas fall outside the scope of this contribution. What is important, as mentioned earlier, was to collect all of the discourses related to the death of the Jain leader, to see why the Saṅgīti-sutta was given. Now, of interest to disseminate is the following, from the Pāsādika-sutta²³:

A dispute about livelihood or about the Pātimokkha would be trifling, Ānanda. But should a dispute arise in the sangha about the path or the way, such a dispute would be for the harm and unhappiness of many, for the loss, harm and suffering of gods and humans.

²² Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 427-439; Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp 853-860; F.L. Woodward, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, pp. 175-180.

²³ Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 854.





With these events, likely to precede the Saṅgīti-sutta by days, Sāriputta was able to calculate or contemplate what the Buddha had been saying following the demise of Mahāvira. The earlier mentioned discourses suggest the obvious need to follow a qualified teacher with a qualified doctrine; then we are told that disputes over discipline are trivial – although addressed through a discourse on how to prevent disputes. Sāriputta was given his chance to speak – after the Buddha urged him to deliver a religious discourse, but this seems more academic, in today's perspective; thus the discourse becomes very timely, calculated, and appropriate to a decaying situation, potentially in the face of future conflict.

Moreover, the Saṅgīti-sutta was given by a chief disciple and approved by the Buddha, stimulated by the schism over doctrinal-differences that occurred in the Jain sect, following their leader's death. Perhaps this is what Hajime Nakamura, suggests when he writes:

“With the lapse of time the fear appeared that the Order might decline and that the teaching of the Buddha might be brought for naught.”²⁴

Thus, Sāriputta offered this discourse as a summary and as an example of the Buddha's doctrine to be maintained for the prosperity of Buddhism, in order to prevent Sangha schisms, and to reinforce what should be recalled. Again, as Sāriputta stated:

“Friends, this Dhamma has been well proclaimed by the Lord, the fully-enlightened One. And *so we should all recite it together without disagreement* (my emphasis), so that this holy life may be enduring and established for a long time, thus to be for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of devas and humans.”

²⁴ Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, p. 74.

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In the above case, Sāriputta led his particular Sangha group (different major disciples had groups throughout ancient India), and this is perhaps a basis for the Jain confusion over his role in the Buddha's dispensation. Sāriputta then issued forth various dhammas, expounded by numeral-sets: ones-through-tens – to ensure everyone understands the approved doctrinal-sets. After this sutta was issued, the Buddha rose from resting his aching back, and proclaimed: "Good, Good, Sāriputta! Well indeed have you, proclaimed, the way of chanting together for the monks!"

To conclude this section on Buddhist councils, the gathered-assembly drew together and listened to what should be recollected and chanted, and all agreed; and I have endeavored to prove that the gathering effectively answers the seven imposed council-conditions by Prebish . If one is not convinced from the current endeavor – one would now find it difficult to argue against the Saṅgīti-sutta as being a very important, historic, Theravāda Buddhist discourse.

Conclusion

In its entirety, this Saṅgīti-sutta is an impressive, lengthy work, covering all aspects of the Buddha's doctrine, dhamma-sets and social-regulations, as can be seen elsewhere in the unpublished dissertation. To recite this fully would take a considerable amount of time. However, if chanting or examining the Dhamma's within is conducted in one's own language, as during the days of the Buddha, the monks would gain comprehension or insight into all of the teachings – such was the inspiration for this dissertation. The best question to ask now is: Why do Buddhists not follow the advice in their sacred literature?²⁵ If the discourse was to be used for the education of Buddhist monastics, why has this practice been discontinued? Now, I must conclude answering only possible situations; the answer lays somewhere between the following circumstances:

²⁵ See, Daniel M. Veidlinger, *Spreading the Dhamma*, p. 19, citing Steven Collins: "Theravāda Buddhism did not arise around the Tipiṭaka, but rather produced it."

Also see – Justin Thomas McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves & Lifting Words*, p. 7: "To understand the history and teachings of Buddhism in Southeast Asia one must start with how Buddhists teach Buddhists to be Buddhists, and it is only by understanding this method and the texts that reveal it that one can begin to do so." This is through narratives, rituals, and grammatical texts:

- Nissaya: means "resource" – written for sermon preparations and guides to understand source texts.
- Nāmasadda: more literal word for word translations from short passages
- Vohara: idiomatic or common speech "oratory" ... or mechanical techniques – lifting words skillfully



EVOLUTION OF RECOMMENDED BUDDHIST CHANTING/LEARNING

Historical Recommendation:	From Source or Authority:
Respectful exchange of greetings; then a discourse; finally keeping the Buddha on one's right side while departing	Numerous occurrences in the Tipiṭaka, before the Saṅgīti- sutta
Saṅgīti-sutta	Sāriputta & Buddha; Buddhist Councils
Specific extracts from: Vinaya, Anguttara-nikāya, Majjhima-nikāya and Sutta-nipāta	Emperor Asoka's 3 rd Minor Rock Edict: "I desire that all monks and nuns may constantly listen to and remember ; likewise the laymen and laywomen. I have had this written that you may know <i>my intentions</i> ."
IMPORTANT NOTE: Reverential Chanting develops sometime between Asoka's Reign and I-Tsing's Pilgrimage	
Reading of a short sutta, praise of the Triple Gem, another sutta is read, prayers for merit	I-Tsing, as witness during his pilgrimage to India, in the evening hours
Recitation of several suttas	Mahāvamsa of Sri Lanka
"Tam Wat Phra"	Ancient Teachers in Sri Lanka/Thailand
"Tam Wat Chao" and "Tam Wat Yen"	Phra Vajiranana (King Rama IV of Thailand)
"He (Venerable Ājariya Mun Bhūridatta Thera) guided them in the correct way of practice, such as paying daily homage to the Buddha and performing morning and evening chanting, and they gladly followed his instructions." ²⁷	

Because, the Saṅgīti-sutta mentioned Mahāvira - the entire Tipiṭaka was examined to gain introspection into or determine the nature of this important historical religious-figure. Fourteen Theravāda Buddhist suttas assisted in learning more about the main non-Buddhist antagonist. It is often demonstrated that Buddha's doctrines are scrutinized against Jain doctrines, some of which

²⁷ Ācariya Mahā Boowa Nāgasampanno (trn. Bhikkhu Sīlaratano), *Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta Thera*, p. 91.



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are mentioned here. The death of Mahāvira and the schism of his followers was an equally important historical factor for the presentation of the Saṅgīti-sutta. His death was the motivating catalyst for coming together to hold a gathering for hearing the exact teachings of the Buddha – to attempt to unify Buddhists and protect against doctrinal schisms – as would later occur throughout the centuries, in various nations. Prebish composed criteria for Buddhist councils – arguably the Saṅgīti-sutta is one of the earliest gatherings to gain an entire summarized-spectrum of Buddhist teachings. This auspicious gathering demonstrated the significance for detailing the extensive nature of doctrinal elements - conducted by one of the most preeminent Buddhist disciples. The chart, shown above, pertaining to historical chanting recommendations, demonstrates that political authority got involved in matters of Buddhism, and imposed its own will upon the Sangha. The Sangha, as it seems, has lost the authority to educate itself within its traditions, and willingly subjugated itself under political authority rather than remaining aloof from these influences, and continues to neglect its own traditional recommendations. Who chants the Saṅgīti-sutta, officially, today?





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