

## A STUDY OF MONASTIC POSSESSIONS AS REFLECTED IN THE BUDDHIST VINAYA AND OTHER SOURCES

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The distinguishing feature in early Buddhist monastic life was its simplicity. Material renunciation formed the basis of the lives of early Buddhist monks. The term '**pabbajjā**' commonly designated to define a monk, characterises a state of going forth into homelessness, renouncing all earthly possessions and material gains. The followers of Gotama Buddha, generally known as '**Samana Sakyaputtiya**', in their early stages of monastic life abandoned all possessions and roamed about the country, similar to other recluses of the time. They had no fixed abode and existed on the barest necessities of life. They lived at the foot of trees, donned robes made from cloth picked up from dust heaps, sustained themselves on alms and for medicaments used a decoction of putrid urine. This attitude reflects the lives of these monks in their early stage of wandering. With the evolution from eremitical life to that of a domiciled life these rigid practices were abandoned. Fixed abodes, robes of various material, numerous forms of accepting food and medicaments came to be sanctioned. The early basic requisites came to be known as the '**Cattāro nissayā**' (four requisites) and the optional extras as '**atirekha lābha**'.<sup>1</sup>

The **Sutta Vibhaṅga** and the **Khandaka** sections of the **Vinaya Piṭaka** elaborates on this process of evolution and gives us a clear picture of the numerous changes occurring in the life of an individual monk as well as the entire community. According to the evidence of the early **Vinaya**, the only possession a monk was entitled to were the three fold robes (**Ticīvara**) and the begging bowl. These were sufficient for his modest life and sustenance. Gradually as necessity demanded further items for daily use such as the razor, belt, stool, water strainer, needle and thread were added to these possessions. These were referred to as the basic monastic requisites (**Samaṇakaparikkāra**).<sup>2</sup>

As itineracy fell to the background we notice the monks gradually coming to reside in semi permanent structures. This occurred first during the rainy retreat (**vassa**) where monks took shelter in temporary huts constructed of sticks and thatched with straw or dried leaves. These huts were demolished after the rain season and monks continued their perigrinations once again. Living in any form of permanent structure at this early stage was discouraged. This is witnessed in a legend in the **Vinaya Sutta Vibhaṅga**, where the monk Dhaniya KumbakāraKaputta, who constructed a hut of mud, fired it and built a beautiful dwelling, was demolished on the instructions of the Buddha, stating that it was