

“The last meal of Buddha”

Article – 1 of 2



AN INTRODUCTION TO “THE LAST MEAL OF BUDDHA” (Dr. SUNIL JAYASINGHE)

The life story of Lord Buddha is not without controversy. Some sages during his time and after, envied by his wealth of disciples, began to denigrate his life by concocting stories that raised many unanswered questions.

Dr. Sunil Jayasinghe, a professional engineer turned researcher into archaeological and theological aspects, authored the book “The last meal of Buddha”, in 2011. One of his objectives was to lay down the truth, as revealed by authentic evidence and careful research.

According to Dr. Jayasinghe, one of the foremost leaders of this denigration effort, to have irrefutably reaped fruits was a Hindu sage named “Adi Shankara” or Sankaraachariya who lived in 788-820 A.D. He strived to revive the then debunk, and splintered religions and the belief systems that existed prior to Buddha; worship of gods, evil spirits, the dead, trees, rocks and animal sacrifices to please the spirit world.

“Today’s Hinduism can be partly credited to his intrusion to stifle the advance of Buddhism in India and the neighboring countries”... mentions Dr Jayasinghe,”How he did this was, by a very simple synoptic allusion of a word that is found in the commentaries of the Buddhist chronicles, which was translated by an early Hindu scholar, who later became a Buddhist monk, by the name Buddhaghosha”.

Dr. Jayasinghe states in his book that Sankaracharya determined to revive the cult of worshipping mythical gods that existed for thousands of years in India sort the assistance of his teacher to study Buddhism. His canine piercing eyes found the exact word that rhymed to cause the supposition among the Indians who mostly detested eating dead carcasses, especially that of swine. Almost all of India had by then embraced Buddhist philosophy.

The word that detested the ears and the sight of the Indians was “Sukara” referring to a pig or a hog.

It is stated in the commentaries by Buddhagosa, that Lord Buddha passed away after consuming “Sukara Maddava” for his Last Meal. This cannot be denied as it is found in the commentaries and also in the original scriptures, which may have also been mentioned in the very early chronicles, **“Maha atta katha”, that were burnt by the Indian monk Buddhagosa.**

It is not the fact that Lord Buddha consumed “Sukara Maddava” for his last meal that became a pivoting point to Buddhism in India, but rather how it was interpreted as flesh of Pig by Sankaraachariya to implant a seed that created immense doubt raising an ambiguous question; whether a teacher who preached a solemn philosophy of nonviolence and uncompromising compassion practiced what he preached. Sankarachariya picked on the inclusion, and with great efficacy lured the masses by connoting and describing ‘Sukara Maddava’ ... as pork.

The **early Buddhist scholars failed to search the original texts aspiringly**, to check on what was stated in the “Maha Parinibbana Sutta” to determine the veracity of this supposition.

The commentaries came to stay and were taught in almost all Buddhist schools throughout the world.

Dr. Jayasinghe, during his assignment as a Project Manager in the Canadian International Development Agency in 1982, was serving in **Nepal and happened to have the rare opportunity to have relished a mushroom dish that had a very strong pungent flavor**, and a coarse texture than any other mushroom he had before. With heightened curiosity he managed to find **what the natives named it** as, and how it was harvested.

In the remote edges of the trails in Brindnagar, Dialek and Jumla, when the spring sun shone through the wooded edges, on the slopes of the Himalyan valley, in the midst of moist air, Dr Jayasinghe saw the locals tie their **hogs on leashes and hunt for mushrooms.**

These hogs, like dogs have a very strong sense of smell and detects the mushrooms that are beneath the soil digging through with the aid of their snout and their hind legs. The **mushrooms harvested with the assistance of pigs** were called **“Sukara Maddava”** in the early Kahrostriian and Magda Pali languages, which literally meant **“dug by pigs”** .



These mushrooms have a **very high medicinal value** compared to any other vegetable known to mankind.

It is a fitting act by **Chunda Karmara Putta** to have offered this **variety of mushrooms** to the ailing Buddha who was 80 years of age, with the intent of giving some solace to a prevailing health condition he was suffering from.

Sankarachariya's sinister interpretation, backed by Hindu fundamentalists, of hog mushroom as hog-flesh (pork), referring to commentaries of **Ven Buddhagosha, held sway throughout the Buddhist world, for lack of scholarly analysis** on the part of erudite Buddhist monks.

Events leading to Buddha's Parinirvana and thereafter, are clearly stated in the "Mahaparinibbana Sutta". Cause of Parinirvana is neither hog mushroom (poisonous mushroom), nor pork!!

Again in **2007** Dr. Jayasinghe had a similar experience in France, tasting **hog mushrooms**, while engaged in a research project with Dr. Elaine Pannita.

In 2010 while listening to a Dhamma sermon in Pasadena he brought to the attention of the monks and the lay audience, that the passing away of Buddha cannot be attributed to his last meal that was popularly known as "Sukara Maddava". An enthusiastic discussion began among the scholarly audience. The substance of the discussion was made known to the Most Venerable Agga Maha Pandita Kotugoda Dhammawasa Maha Thero, a highly respected and literary laureate of the Thripitaka, who was then on a visit to Los Angeles. **The venerable monk requested Dr. Jayasinghe to publish his findings.**

The Book "Last Meal of Buddha" is the result of an unyielding effort by Dr. Jayasinghe, to bestow to the Buddhists and the world at large, the unmitigated truth of a sacred event and thereby to eradicate the myth revolving around the passing away of Lord Buddha.

Today the book is recommended as reference material in Ruhunu University of Sri Lanka and recommended as such in the "Buddha Net".

The most venerable Agga maha pandita Kotugoda Dhamawassa Maha Thero himself has written a book in Sinhalese acknowledging his concurrence with the findings of Dr. Jayasinghe

A public lecture on "The last meal of Buddha will be delivered by Dr. Jayasinghe at 2.P.M in Sarathchandra Buddhist Temple, 10717 Oxnard Street, North Hollywood, CA 91606, on Sunday the 23rd. All are welcome.

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Sukara Maddawa" could be interpreted as tender pork. But it could also have a different meaning as food that pig loves, known as "truffle," a **kind of mushroom** that grows underground that **pigs are drawn to by its fragrance and would dig up with its snout to eat**. It is basically an underground fungus, usually grows at the base of an oak tree. It is also known as "Black diamond: due to its extremely high price, being sold as a delicacy or aphrodisiac at \$100.00 a pound, and as high as \$3,600 per pound for the highest quality truffle.

Watch this "60 Minutes episode, July 1, 2012"
Truffles: The Most Expensive Food in the World
<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7413524n>

It has been scientifically discovered that truffle makes pheromone, an androgen-analog substance, with its fragrant smell, attracting pigs to hunt for it and luring it with the sex hormone to dig with its snout for food, and spread its spore around in the process. In fact, pigs have been trained for truffle hunting. **The only problem is that those mushroom hunters have to compete with the pigs for the truffles which could be eaten instantaneously by the pigs whenever it was found.**

Subsequently, dogs have been trained for this same purpose of truffle hunting instead, without having to share the reward on the discovery.

'**Chunda**' who was a stream-enterer, revered the Buddha so much and was quite aware of the Buddha's **illness of chronic dysentery** with **bloody diarrhea** (usually caused by amoebic dysentery or shigellosis), was trying to prepare the finest food for the Buddha, and could even prepare a form of **medicinal dish** for him.

He could have mistaken a poisonous mushroom for truffle (a delicacy or aphrodisiac), and used it to prepare the dish for the Buddha.

It has been known that mushroom poisoning could make people violently sick suddenly, and may even cause death, within an hour or hours of consumption, which would fit well with the recorded history of the Buddha's last meal in the Pari-Nibbana Sutta of the Buddhist Canon (Tipitakka).

It was recorded that the Buddha got sick shortly after eating the dish served by Chunda, and almost immediately after leaving Chunda's house, possibly within the first 4-5 km. distance. It was recorded that the Buddha sent Ananda, his personal attendant, to fetch for water to quench his thirst after he started having **bloody diarrhea and became dehydrated**. The place was between Chunda's residence and the Gugutnadhee River, which is **10 kilometers (6 miles)** away from the house, where the Buddha later took a bath.

He subsequently walked to the Sal Grove at Kusinara, where he laid to rest at his deathbed, between the 2 Sal trees. **It is located 24 km (14 miles) away from Chunda's house**, based on the driving distance measured from the current historical landmark of those locations, which was basically the distance the Buddha walked on his last day.

We can also calculate the **Buddha's normal walking pace** which was about **28 km/day (16.5 miles/day) at his prime age of 35 years old**, when he walked from Bodhagaya, the place of his enlightenment, to Sarnath, the place of his first sermon at the Deer Park, to meet and teach Puncavakkhee, the First Five Disciples. He basically **travel 250 km by foot in 9 days**, averaging **28 km/day** in his normal healthy state.

This would **also mean that the Buddha completely recovered from his chronic dysentery** he suffered 6 months earlier before his death, and he was in relatively good health and was capable of traveling through many provinces of Vesali, as well as making morning alms rounds on a regular basis, before he arrived at the Pavala-Chedi and made the final vow to enter Pari-Nirvana 3 months before the actual event.

In fact, by comparing his normal walking pace of 28 km or 16.5 miles/day to the distance he traveled on **his last day of 24 km or 14 miles from** Chunda's residence to his resting place at the Sal Grove, Kusinara, **it demonstrated that he was in fairly good physical shape, not crippling with chronic debilitating illness. He even maintained his strength to travel 24 km. or 14 miles, even after being suddenly struck by an acutely severe intestinal catastrophe on his last day.**

This also pointed out that the **dish he consumed could not simply be tender pork**. For the *pork to be harmful, it has to carry parasites, e.g., trichinosis (which would take 1-3 days for the onset of symptoms to occur), or cysticercosis from taenia solium or pork tapeworm* (which would take months or years before having symptoms).

But the Buddha got sick with a sudden and severe onset of illness within hours of consuming the food, which killed him on the very same day.

Food poisoning with *Staphylococcus Aureus* enterotoxin would take 8 hours after eating the contaminated food.

Bacillus Cereus enterotoxin would take 1 – 6 hours after eating the spoiled food, e.g., spoiled fried rice, with nausea, vomiting, and subsequent diarrhea about 6 – 24 hours later.

Botulism toxin from spoiled canned food would take 12 hours or more before the onset of symptoms, which would also include difficulty breathing and swallowing, not present in his case.

Pathogenic *E. Coli* would require an incubation period of many hours for the pathogen to invade the intestinal walls, usually occurred in children, before developing abdominal pain, fever, bloody diarrhea, and may not always cause death.

Cholera would be unlikely with the Buddha as the only person who got sick, because it is an endemic or epidemic disease, causing severe watery diarrhea and dehydration, and it would need many hours after consuming the contaminated food, before the onset of symptoms.

Overall, the most likely cause of the Buddha's death was from consuming bad food, particularly a poisonous mushroom (mistaken as truffle, a delicacy or aphrodisiac, prepared with the intention to nurture or cure the Buddha's chronic illness). Yet spotted as poisonous mushroom by the Buddha, an experienced forest dweller for 6 years as an ascetic before his enlightenment, he went ahead consuming the dish (to fulfill his vow of entering Pari-Nirvana), and advised Chunda to bury the rest of the dish without serving anyone else. Poisonous mushroom, rather than bad or infested pork, would therefore be the most likely candidate to produce such a sudden onset and violent symptoms, as described.

In summary, "Sukara Maddawa" very likely represents a kind of mushroom that pleases the pig, i.e., truffle, but the dish was erroneously prepared using a poisonous mushroom mistaken for truffle.

Mushroom poisoning is a common worldwide occurrence from consuming poisonous mushroom, erroneously collected by inexperienced mushroom hunters mistaken them as edible mushroom, and frequently cause sudden and violent illness, and sometimes death.

Yet, with the Buddha's great compassion, he asked Ananda to convey his message to Chunda, preventing him from being condemned by others, by stating that:

"The merit of offering the last meal to the Buddha is equal to the merit of offering the meal to him just before his enlightenment, and merits of these two are above and beyond any

other food offering. The merits Chunda made would reward him with longevity, honor, happiness, prosperity and power.”

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พระพุทธรเจ้าเสด็จดับขันธปรินิพพานด้วยโรคอะไร?

น.พ.คงศักดิ์ ตันไพจิตร, ดร.นนุช ตันไพจิตร, ดร.สุนทร พละมินทร์