

THE IMPORTANCE INFORMATION OF TIPITAKA

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ABSTRACT

The Sangītivamsa, an 18th-century text from Thailand, combines many of these themes, since it gives an account of the Buddha lineage; presents a history of Buddhism in India, Sri Lanka, and, especially, Thailand; and provides an account of the decline of the Buddhist age. *Mahāvamsa* is the great chronicle of Sri Lanka, although the author wanted to write about religion. He had written a lot about the history of Sri Lanka and India. The author of *Mahāvamsa* is Mahānāma Thera. He was a monk who lived in the *Mahāvihāra*. *Mahāvamsa* was written using *Dīpavamsa* as the source. The *Mahāvamsa* is called ‘an epic poem’. The language is lucid and flowing as well as poetical. Earlier document known as “*Dipavamsa*” also come down to us which is much simpler and contain less information than Mahavamsa, probably compiled using previously mentioned “Mahavamsa Atthakatha”. Overall, the Chronicle has over 200,000 words of text in about 960 printed pages. First part (Chapters 1-37) the Mahavamsa, the second part (Chapters 38-79) the Culavamsa part 1, and the third and final part (Chapters 80-101) the Culavamsa part 2.

Key-Note: Mahavamsa, Literature, Tipitaka, Language, Thailand, Srilanka...etc.

Introduction:

Some vamsas are devoted to chronicling particular objects or places of note in Buddhist history. The Dāthāvamsa, for example, tells the history of the Buddha’s tooth relic until it reached Ceylon in the 9th century ce. The Thūpavamsa, dating from the 13th century, purports to be an account of the history and construction of the great stupa in Ceylon during the reign of King Duttagāmaṇi in the 1st century bce. The Sāsanavamsa, compiled in the 19th century, is a Burmese text of ecclesiastical orientation that charts the history of central India up to the time of the third Buddhist council and then provides an account of the missionary activities of monks in other countries. The Sangītivamsa, an 18th-century text from Thailand, combines many of these themes, since it gives an account of the Buddha lineage; presents a history of Buddhism in India, Sri Lanka, and, especially, Thailand; and provides an account of the decline of the Buddhist age.

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1. Structure of Pali Suttas

As seen in the Fourth Chapter, the Ten Points of Vesālī monks and Five Points of Mahādeva had caused the schism in the Saṅgha. Here will be an attempt to investigate the controversial Ten Points of Vesālī Monks and the Five Points of Mahādeva, on the basis of Vinaya and other interactional concepts of literature, establishment and development of Ancient Buddhism. To find the truth of the protest from Vesālī monks and Mahādeva, here will be a discussion on philosophical and historical matters.

Historically speaking, after the Second Council, two Buddhist sects appeared: the Theravāda (Sthaviravāda) and Mahāsaṅghikas. The Theravādins were split up into eleven sub-sects known as Theravāda (or Ārya Sthaviranikāya), Mahāsāsaka, Dhammagupta, Sarvāstivāda, Sammitya, Kāsyapīya, Sankantika (Saurāntika or Sankrāntika), Vātsīputrīya (or Sammitīya), Dharmottarīya, Bhadrāyānīya, and Shan-nāgarika. The Mahāsaṅghikas were split into seven sub-sects known as the Mahāsaṅghika, Gokulika (Kukkulika), Paññattivāda (Prajñaptivāda), Bahusrutīya, Chetiyavāda, Ekvyavahārika and Lokottaravāda. Besides these eighteen, we are told, there arose a few more sub-divisions known as the Siddhatthika or Siddhārthika, Rājagirika, Aparasaila, Vetulyaka, Hemavatika (Haimavata), Vajiriya, Hetuvāda, and Sāgalīya¹. In the academic field, these sects are summarized into the two main sects: The Theravāda and Mahāyāna.

This chapter does not aim at the origin and development of these two sects, but it focuses on the progress and the establishment of their suttas. Here is an attempt to re-examine the method used by researched works to examine the role of Vesālī monks and Mahādeva and the accusing judged by the intellectual. To do so, I believe that it will be found out what is the real meaning of so-called orthodox and heresy in Buddhism. Moreover, I aspire to testify that Buddhist doctrine is dynamic teachings, which focuses on the final goal, the personal enlightenment, and not on the means to achieve it. Therefore, my choice in this chapter concentrates on these above-mentioned issues.

In an article on orality in *Pāli literature*, Steven Collins shows that the monastic Buddhist traditions was, even after the introduction of writing, largely an oral and aural one². The traditional method of educating monks and nuns was for these students to hear and commit to memory the words of their teacher, and most of the words in the Pāli literature referring to the learning process are related to speaking and hearing³. Collins maintains that the oral or aural aspects of Pāli literature, are important “both as a means of preservation and as a facet of the live experience, the ‘sensual dimension’, of Buddhist scriptures.”⁴

While Buddhist vocabulary was rife with visual metaphor, vision in a literal sense and visual imagery were not emphasized as a way of communicating the teachings, as the anionic nature of early Buddhism indicates. The earliest phases of Buddhism produced none of the elaborate monuments and sculptures so characteristic of its later developments. Even after texts were being written down, it was not for the purpose of their being read privately-the Vinaya gives detailed lists of all the items of property a monk may have but never includes books or writing utensils.⁵

Rather, the Buddha’s words were committed to the palm leaf so that they would be preserved and read aloud in the context of instruction or public recitations. Recently scholar works show that it is only after the Buddha has been gone for some four hundred years that the Saṅgha wrote down his words. For an orthodoxy trying to maintain the authenticity of its founder teachings, writing was probably seen as a danger that eventually became a necessary evil.⁶

Pāli commentaries claim that the writing down of suttas began only after there was merely one man left alive who had particular text committed to memory and that the text was written down for fear of its being lost forever.⁷ The repetition of words that were heard from the Buddha by a disciple, then transmitted to his disciples, and so on through a lineage of hearers. In the early Buddhist tradition, then, the written word had little inherent value; it was seen, at best, as a merely instrumental vehicle for the spoken word.

¹ Buddhist Councils, Dutt, Law Volume, I. p.283. Quoted at S.R.Goyal, AHOIB, Book Two, p.14.

² Notes on Some Oral Aspects of Pali Literature, Steven Collins, Indo-Iranian Journal 35, 1992, p.121-35.

³ For example, Collins (p. 124) notes the following: vāceti, “to make the pupil recite”; uddisati, “teaches, recite”; sunāti, “listens; ugganhati, “grasps in memory”; ādhīyati and pariyāpunāti, “learn (by reciting)”; sajjhāyati, “recites”; and dhāreti, “retains (what he has learnt in memory).”

⁴ Collins, p.129.

⁵ Ibid., p.128.

⁶ OWA, David McMahan, p.254.

⁷ OWA, David McMahan, p.254.

2. The establishment of Mahāyāna Suttas

In the Mahāyāna, however, the written work took on quite different significance, especially with regard to *Mahāyāna suttas*. Writing was crucial to the development and character of the Mahāyāna in at least three respects: first, written texts were essential to development of its tradition; second, they provided a basis for one of the most important aspects of early Mahāyāna practice, that is, the worship of written sutras themselves; third, writing contributed to a restructuring of knowledge in such a way that vision, rather than hearing, became a significant mode of access to knowledge.

The Mahāyāna arose at about the same time when writing was becoming prevalent in India, and writing provided a means by which the teachings could be preserved without the institutional support of the Saṃgha. Closely connected to this issue is another implication of the uses of writing in the Mahāyāna - and particularly in its written sutras-namely, that it challenged the traditional notions of sacred space. As a developed minority movement, the early Mahāyāna was enabled through writing to expand and develop by granting to the book the sacrality of the Buddha himself.

A further way in which writing was significant to the Mahāyāna-was that it shifted access to and organization of knowledge from a primary oral and auditory mode to a primarily visual mode. In order to explore some of the implications of this shift, it is necessary to make a digression into some general theoretical observations about these two cognitive-perceptual orientations and the effect that they may have on consciousness and culture. While these general observations about hearing, vision, and writing may be useful to a greater or lesser extent depending on the specific cultures to which they are applied.

3. Buddhavacana and Mahāyāna Texts

Of course, the implicit advantages of writing and written *suttas* were not the only factors in the relative success of the Mahāyāna movement(s) in South Asia. Aside from being composed in the propitious medium of written language, the content of Mahāyāna sutras written in South Asia went to great lengths to attempt to establish the movement's authority and legitimacy-something that would have been quite difficult for what was probably a minority reform movement facing well-established and powerful monastic institutions with their own claims to authority and legitimacy. Before examining a specific instance of such a use, though, it would be helpful to place this claim in context by discussing some of the ways in which the early Mahāyāna struggled against the more orthodox school's claims to exclusive authority based on possession of the Buddha-vacana, the words of the Buddha. As we have seen, the early Buddhist community's identity involved its role as the keepers of the Buddha-vacana given by Gotama and, according to tradition, memorized by his disciples and passed orally from generation to generation. This community considered itself to be those who heard, either directly or through others, the words of the Buddha.

Thus, the hearers of the Buddha-vacana were not only those who were actually present at the talks of the Buddha, but also disciples who received the teachings through hearing oral recitation. Although not the only criterion for legitimacy, the most important and unambiguous way in which a teaching was understood to be authentic was that it was considered to be the very words that the Buddha spoke⁸. Thus the Buddha-vacana was the primary seal of authenticity.

Concern for the word of the Buddha continued in the Mahāyāna but became a more complex issue. A sutta is a composition containing a talk given by the Buddha and is therefore by definition Buddha-vacana. Whether from the Pāli canon or the Mahāyāna, all suttas start out with the narrator uttering the same words: "Thus have I heard" (Pāli: *evam me sutam*); (Sanskrit: *evam mayā srutam*). Following this is a description of the particular place the sermon was heard, individuals and groups that were present, and so forth-all reports that would seem to provide verification that the original hearer was in fact in the specified place at the time of the talk.

Yet it is clear to modern scholars, as it probably was to most Buddhists in ancient India, that the Mahāyāna suttas were composed quite a long time after the death of Gotama and that it is highly unlikely that the "historical" Buddha ever spoke any of them. Thus, the need to explain the existence of these sutras and the

⁸ The other three criteria were that it will be the words of a formally constituted Saṃgha, of a small group of elders, or of a single learned monk. It should also be in harmony with the other suttas and the Vinaya.

attendant novel doctrines was of great concern to the. Mahāyāna and is an issue addressed, directly or indirectly, in many suttas and commentaries.

It is impossible to reconstruct precisely the attitudes and motivations of these early Mahāyāna sutta writers-to imagine what they conceived of themselves as doing when, hundreds of years after the Buddha's death, they wrote the words "evam mayā srutam." Perhaps they had powerful insights that they were convinced and inspired by the Buddha, or perhaps stories and ideas generated in the environments of the stupa. Cults eventually were considered to be part of the Buddha's dialogues.

These late sutta writers may have simply had a far more liberal interpretation of what counts as the word of the Buddha than did their orthodox contemporaries. It is conceivable that many doctrines and practices that we now consider uniquely Mahāyāna were in existence from very early but were simply marginalized by those 'who determined the legitimacy of teachings; thus we know nothing about them until the Mahāyāna became more organized and began writing its own texts.

Despite the inevitable obscurity to historical investigation of the intentions of these late sutta writers, many indications do exist as to how Mahāyānists construed their creative reformulations of the Dhamma and justified them to themselves and to outsiders once they were written. A number of explanations were offered for the emergence of these new suttas. According to one ancient reconstruction of the Mahāyāna, the Śrāvakas (Pāli: sāvakā) did not have the capacity to understand the advanced teachings of the Great Vehicle, so they were taught to otherworldly beings and bidden until teachers emerged who could understand them.⁹

Another explanation was that the original hearers did not understand the content of these talks but transmitted them anyway for later generations better equipped to comprehend them. The claim was prevalent that certain teachings were revealed only to a select few. Many Mahāyāna commentators went to great lengths to reconcile the teachings of the Hinayāna with those of the Mahāyāna by a careful reworking of the story of the Buddha's life in which every teaching ever attributed to him was understood to be given to particular disciples on various levels of spiritual attainment. In these scenarios, less spiritually developed people were given teachings of the Hinayāna, while bodhisattvas and other nearly enlightened being received the higher teachings of the Mahāyāna.

The doctrinal differences of the concepts Nibāna, Arhat and Buddha between the suttas of the Pāli canon and the Mahāyāna have been widely debated by scholars, but seldom has attention been given to what the strikingly contrasting establishment styles of the Pāli and Mahāyāna suttas. David McMahan in his article: "Orality, Writing, And Authority in South Asian Buddhism: Visionary Literature and The Struggle For Legitimacy In The Mahāyāna"¹⁰ expresses some valuable arguments as followed: scholars have had many productive debates on whether the doctrine of Nirvāna, Arhat and Buddha is radical departure from Pāli or Mahāyāna, but the most important element to discuss deeply on this issue center the establishment styles of suttas in which these doctrines emerge in the Mahāyāna suttas is so strikingly divergent from that of the Pāli suttas that an exploration of what might contribute to this divergence might be as fruitful for the study of the Indian Buddhist world as that of their doctrinal differences. We see that even just attention on only the introductory passages of certain suttas opens up a number of important issues in the study of Buddhism.¹¹ For instance, there are two suttas in the introductory passage. The first is an early Pāli text, the Salāyatana-vibhanga Suttaṃ, which discusses the sense, fields (āyatana). It begins: "Thus have I heard. At one time the Lord was staying at Sāvatti, in Jeta Grove at Anāthapindika. The disciples greeted the Lord, and the Blessed one said: "Disciples, I will now discuss the distinctions between the six sense fields".¹² This, of course, is the standard introduction that is common to virtually all of the Pāli suttas. The Buddha then goes on to give a straightforward presentation of the doctrine of the six āyatana in the typical repetitive style of the text Nikāya, with many formulaic expressions repeated often throughout the text for purpose of memorization. Compare this with the introduction to the Gandavyūha Sūtra, a Mahāyāna text from about the second or third century C.E., which is set in the same location: "Thus have I heard. At one time the Lord was staying in Sāvatti (Sanskrit: Śravastī), in a magnificent pavilion in the garden of Anāthapindika in Jeta Grove, together with five thousand Bodhisattas (Sanskrit: bodhisattvas), led by Samantabhadra and Manjusri."¹³ So far, except for the mention of

⁹ K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003, p. 6.

¹⁰ OWA, David McMahan, *History of Religions*, Feb. 98, Vol. 37 Issue 3, p.249.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² MN, *Salāyatana-vibhanga-suttaṃ*, ed. Robert Charles, London: Luzac, for the Pāli Text Society, 1960, pp.215-22.

¹³ *Gandavyūha Sūtra*, ed. P.L.Vaidya, *Buddhist Sanskrit Texts no.5*, Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960, p.1.

the bodhisāttvas, the two passages are almost identical, but the similarities dissolve quite abruptly. After the names and good qualities of a number of the bodhisāttvas present are listed, the bodhisāttvas observe that most beings are incapable of comprehending the great merits and abilities of the Tathāgata, and they ask the Buddha telepathically, not to tell them, but to show them (saṁdarsayet) these things. In response, the Buddha enters a state of profound concentration, and suddenly, the pavilion became boundlessly vast; the surface of the earth appeared to be made of an indestructible diamond, and the ground covered with a net of all the finest jewels, strewn with flowers of many jewels, with enormous gems strewn all over. The Jeta grove and Buddha-fields as numerous as atoms within untold Buddha-fields all became co-extensive.¹⁴

The text goes on in this vein for quite a few pages, describing in the most lavish terms the luxuriant scene that suddenly arises before the group right there in Jeta Grove, and the sight of so many of the Buddha's talk. After the initial description of the scene, bodhisāttvas from distant world systems begin to arrive, and with each of their appearances, more wonders are revealed penetrating to the farthest reaches of the most remote worlds, then zooming back to the body of the Buddha, to the tips of his hairs or the pores of his skin, within which are revealed countless more world systems.

What can account for the striking stylistic differences between these two texts, and why would many Mahāyāna sutras make such a radical departure from the accepted genre of suttas composition established by the earlier suttas? For a full understanding of the stylistic differences between Theravāda and Mahāyāna sutras one factor must be seen. One is that the Mahāyāna was a written tradition, while many pre-Mahāyāna Buddhist works of literature are written versions of a vast corpus of orally transmitted sayings. One of the important changes in Indian culture at the time of the arising of the Mahāyāna was the development of writing. The beginnings of the widespread use of writing in India contributed to some of the transformations Buddhism faced a few hundred years after the founder's death and was crucial to some of its most significant cultural and religious developments. Literacy disrupted the continuity of the oral-and aural-sense world to the visual world. The transition from pre-Mahāyāna to Mahāyāna Buddhist literature, then, provides a valuable case study of the changes that may occur during the transition from oral to written culture.

Conclusion:

Thus the Buddha's words were preserved accurately and were in due course passed down orally from teacher to pupil. Some of the monks who had heard the Buddha preach, in person were Arahants, and so by definition, 'pure ones' free from passion, ill-will and delusion and therefore, without doubt capable of retaining, perfectly the Buddha's words. Thus they ensured that the Buddha's teachings would be preserved faithfully for posterity. Even those devoted monks who had not yet attained Arahantship but had reached the first three stages of sainthood and had powerful, retentive memories could also call to mind and word for word what the Buddha had preached and so could be worthy custodians of the Buddha's teachings. One such monk was Ananda, the Buddha's cousin and chosen attendant and constant companion during the last twenty-five years of the Buddha's life. Ananda was highly intelligent and gifted with the ability to remember whatever he had heard spoken.

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¹⁴ Ibid., pp.4-5.