

研究成果報告

Kingship, Language, Canon and Epic-Buddhism and Sinhala Consciousness

Pochi Huang

Graduate Institute of Religious Studies

National Chengchi University

Introduction

The communal violence between Sinhala-Buddhists and Tamil-Hindus in Sri Lanka turned into civil war after 1983. Hundreds and thousands of people died for it. Anthropologist Tambiah wrote three consecutive monographs updating the communal violence in South Asia: the first two books are devoted entirely on Sri Lanka.¹ The situation in Sri Lanka remains uncertain although the government and the rebels have signed a permanent ceasefire agreement and the peace-talks to end the long-running conflict sponsored by Norway are proceeding at this moment.

One cannot help but asking the following questions: how can an “other-worldly”, universal religion, like Buddhism eventually become a “this-worldly” and parochial social-political ideology; how can a religion of non-violence become deeply involved in violent, mundane struggle; how can a universal religion subject to ethnical consciousness, become the emblem of nationalistic politics; how can a religion of equality become politically hegemonic, discriminating against minorities?

Nonetheless, for the intricacies involved in the above issues, I am unable to give any ready-made answers to them and will leave aside all considerations of cause and effect. Here, I will only explore cultural nuances of Buddhism in the history of Sri Lanka. This will help us reevaluate the transformation of Buddhism in modern Sri Lanka. It will also give us a different perspective

¹ Tambiah, 1986; 1992; 1996.

regarding the current discourse on nationalism.²

1.

This essay investigates the relationship between Buddhism and the problem of so-called “Sinhala national consciousness”. As pointed out by Tambiah, in Theravāda countries, especially in Sri Lanka, there is an intricate relationship between religion, state and ethnicity. First, the relationship between Aśoka and Buddhism is portrayed as an ideal state. Thus, king, as a *dharmrāja* should not only protect people but also *sāsana* in particular. In this connection, the Sinhalese is also destined to be the defender of Buddhism politically as well as culturally. Tambiah argues:

The Asokan mythology is well entrenched in the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia, particularly the formula that the king is the patron and protector of the religion, that he must, of necessity, be a Buddhist himself, and that such a king is an embodiment of dharma. In Sri Lanka, these elements were further elaborated into ideology that the identity of Sinhalese society was a Buddhist society, its national consciousness indissolubly linked to with Buddhism, and that it was a specific historic task entrusted to the Sinhalese to defend the religion against its enemies. (Tambiah, 1976:520)

In other place, Tambiah refers to the mythologization of Aśoka as: “there is the highly idealized and embellished partisan view stated in the Buddhist chronicles and legends that Asoka was the great *dhammika dhammaraja*[righteous king of righteousness]...the great patron of Buddhism, its defender...”(Tambiah, *ibid*: 54) It is well-known that the original ideal of Buddhist universal kingship is called *Cakkavattin* (Sk. *Cakravartin*). In

² Since Kedouire (Kudorie, 1961), nationalism is considered to be an invention of modern Western civilization. At the same time, discourse on nationalism is deeply intertwined with Christian experience of modern state (and accordingly their colonial experiment). The dissemination of nationalism from the West becomes the mainstream and the dichotomy between Pre-nationalistic and Post-nationalistic culture is posed. Anderson is one of the main exponents. He argues, for example: ‘It is easy to forget the minorities came to existence with majorities...and, in Southeast Asia, very recently...They were born of political and cultural revolution brought about by the maturing of the colonial state and by the rise against it of popular nationalism.’ (Anderson, 1998:318; we will come to grips with more of his thesis in this paper.) This Euro-centric discourse is predominating: “Given the historical novelty of the modern concept of ‘the nation’, the best way to understand its nature, I suggest, is to following those who began systematically to operate with this concept in their political and social discourse during the Age of Revolution, and especially, under the name of ‘the principle of nationality’ from about 1830 onwards.” (Hobsbawm, 1990:18)

Theravāda tradition Aśoka is looked up as the exemplar of *Cakkavattin* and the protector of Buddhism.

It is interesting to observe here that Aśoka not only provides the model for an ideal Buddhist kingdom, but also that of an ideal Buddhist society in the Theravāda kingdoms. This kind of ideal sovereignty cum society, as it is clearly articulated in the Theravāda tradition of Sri Lanka is worth noting here. We will see the transformation of Buddhist ideal of the relationship between politics and society.

However, in this paper I will argue that “Sinhala consciousness” is a complex comprised of many interrelated components in the process of formation of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Some of them are even in contradiction. The whole issue is much more intriguing than what Tambiah contends here. On the other hand, as indicated above by Tambiah, the historical consciousness associated with Buddhism is the most prominent phenomenon in the Theravāda lands. Here, it is fascinating for us to observe that Buddhism as a universal religion is associated with individual cultures or societies. In this sense, Buddhism, unlike Hinduism, becomes a historical religion connected with particular ethnicity and other mundane entities like politics or societies. Thus, the so-called “Sinhala consciousness” as we shall see, has much to do with the legacy of Buddhism. Accordingly, this group consciousness is not confined to Sri Lanka only. In other Theravāda countries, like Burma and Thailand, the distinctive consciousness of being historically linked with Buddhism is notable, as also observed by Tambiah:

One of the most important features of ... Theravada Buddhist politics is their active *consciousness of historical continuity*, a consciousness that was accentuated and burgeoned at the end of the colonial period and at the dawn of independence. This consciousness may have suffered eclipses and amnesia during various periods of decline, but at times of resurgence and expansion old literary texts and mythologies always provided the models for revival and rent an air of authenticity to the claim of continuity. (Tambiah, *ibid*:518)

It is clearly here that beside Buddhism, this historical consciousness is also associated with some old literary texts and mythologies. Tambiah mentions that “the Mahavamsa, composed by monks, is the great religious cum political

chronicle of the Sinhalese.” (Tambiah, *ibid*: 520)

Evidently, from the very beginning, Theravāda Buddhism has been associated with certain distinctive characteristics. Among them, kingship and historical consciousness are the two most salient features. These two important traits make Theravada Buddhism highly politicized and self-conscious and they are embodied in the *Mahāvamsa*, the most important Buddhist chronicle in Sri Lanka.

2.

Examining the shift of Buddhism from the Indian Subcontinent to Sri Lanka in terms of political ideas, we find the matter of kingship is most conspicuous. I call the transformation from a universal king as portrayed in the *Dīgha Nikāya* to what is endowed by king Aśoka as illustrated in *Mahāvamsa*, a first transformation of kingship in Theravāda Buddhism. From Aśoka as the sustainer of universal dharma to the protector of *sāsana* in different Theravāda countries a process of universal dharma or religion domesticated. The compilation of *Mahāvamsa*, as we shall see later, is an excellent example, elucidating a domesticated universal religion. There are two salient features regarding this transformation. First, a universal religion has become a parochial religion which not only marks civilized beginning of the local history but also starts to assume its ethnic connection. Consequently, ahistorical Buddhist scriptures became chronicles dating and narrating the destiny of Buddhism within worldly social-political milieu.³ (This is related to Anderson’s thesis of territorialization of religious faiths which have been attributed by him as one of the salient features of modern nationalism. I am going to argue against it.)

The experience of Buddhism in Sri Lanka (as well as in other Buddhist countries) shows the chasm between the Buddhist idea of universal religion and universal kingship. Religious expansion of Buddhism in Asia did not

³ This transition can also be seen from a wider perspective. Reynolds and Halisey describe the development of Buddhism from “a civilizational religion” to “a cultural religion” (Reynolds and Halisey, 1987). This is complementary to my thesis. Buddhism as civilizational religion means “a religion that was associated with a sophisticated high culture and transcended the boundaries of local regions and politics.” (*ibid*: 8) Historical developments “eventually transformed Buddhism into a series of discrete cultural traditions.” (*ibid*: 15) The effect of this transformation on the structure of Buddhist community is worth noting here: “The demise of the international Buddhist elite and the weakening of the large and powerful establishments were counterbalanced by the strengthening of Buddhist life as the grass-roots level. Smaller, local institutions that for long time had coexisted with great monasteries took new importance as focal points in Buddhist community life.” (*ibid*: 18)

necessarily create parallel territorial extension politically. We do have a stretching Buddhist civilization, but this is not synonymous with the creation of a “universal” Buddhist kingdom. The existence of the Buddhist world is radically different from the classical Islamic universe where the expansion of religion is closely connected with political aggrandizement.

At this point, we shall bring the issue of the great religious communities before the emergence of modern nationalism as discussed by Anderson (Anderson, 1991: 12-14) into our discourse, as it is relevant to the development of Sinhala consciousness in Sri Lanka. Anderson contends that classical communities are linked by sacred language, for example, Christendom and Latin, Middle Kingdom and Chinese, Islamic Ummah and Arabic. He also argues: “In the Islamic tradition, until quite recently, the Qur’an was literally untranslatable (and therefore untranslated), because Allah’s truth was accessible only through the unsubstitutable true signs of written Arabic.” (Anderson, *ibid*: 14) Here, Anderson argues for the indissolubility link between sacred language and holy scripture in Islam. What then is the situation in Buddhism as a universal religion concerning the ideas of language and scripture? Anderson points out that the Buddhist world stretches from Sri Lanka to the Korean peninsula, (Anderson, *ibid*: 1911:12) and asserts:

All the great classical communities conceived of themselves as cosmically central, through the medium of a sacred language linked to a superterrestrial order of power. Accordingly, the stretch of written Latin, Pali, Arabic or Chinese was, in theory, unlimited. (Anderson, *ibid*: 13)

Does there exist a similar relationship between language and religious communities in Buddhist countries, like in the Islamic world, where religious communities considered themselves cosmically central and coexistent with sacred language? It will be shown that the complicated relationship between scriptural language, religious community, and political territory, in different Buddhist traditions, is much more intriguing than what Anderson has suggested. As we have touched upon the rift between the religious universe and the political world in Buddhism, we shall begin with the ideas on the relationship between language and scripture in Buddhism, which have far-reaching implications for later development of the Buddhist universe.

In Pāli Vinaya as well as in different Chinese versions of Vinaya, we find that

the Buddha did not consider Sanskrit the scriptural language, and encouraged the monks to use dialects to propagate Buddhism. (see Brough, 1980:35-42; Ji, 1991:31-42) Thus we find the following description on language and Buddhism in Pāli Vinaya:

O Monks, do not render the word of the Buddha into Sanskrit language. Whoever does so, is guilty of a *dukkata*. I give you, O Monks, permission to learn the word of the Buddha in their own dialects. (*na bhikkhave buddhavacanaṃ chandaso āropetabhaṃ yo āropeyya, āpatti dukkaṭassa. anujānāmi bhikkhave sakāya niruttiyā buddhavacanaṃ pariyāpunitun ti : Vinaya Piṭakaṃ 2: 139*)⁴

The idea of language in Buddhism, as depicted here, is very different from Islam from the very beginning. To keep one particular sanctified, scriptural language immune from contamination was not the concern of the Buddha. The propagation of the teachings matters, but not the purity of signs. Therefore, though in Theravāda countries, Pāli is considered to be the language of the canon, it is not the case in either Tibet or China where translations will take the place of original languages.⁵ Accordingly, “the pure world of signs”, either Sanskrit or Pāli, does not universally hold as the only canonical language to “the Buddhist world from Sri Lanka to Korean peninsula”.

⁴ There are two problems regarding translating this passage. One is *chandaso*, another one is *sakāya niruttiyā* (instr. case of *sakā nirutti*). However, it is clear that the Buddha made a contrast between these two languages. Reading from the context, and as suggested by Rhys Davids and Oldenberg, *chandaso* here means (earlier) Sanskrit (Rhys Davis and Oldenberg, 1885, 3:150). If this is the case, then *sakāya niruttiyā*, as a contrast to the refined language used by brahmaṇa, expectedly means one’s own dialect. (see also next footnote) This is confirmed by different Chinese renderings of the Vinaya (See Ji, 1991:31-42). For the discussion of this two expressions, see Bechert, 1980.

⁵ Thus, the idea of Urkanon suggested by Lüders might mean much to a Theravādin, but not to the Mahāyanānist. This difference is visible, as shown in the ideas concerning with Buddhist language, in the understanding of the expression “*sakāya niruttiyā*”. While it is not difficult for us to understand from the context by the expression “*sakāya niruttiyā*” Buddha, against the suggestion of his Brahman disciples, encourages them to speak their own languages so they might propagate his teachings more extensively. In commentating *sakāya niruttiyā*, Buddhaghosa says :*ettha sakā nirutti namā sammāsambuddhena vuttappakāro Māgadhi kavohāro* (here, his own dialect means Magādhī type of speech as spoken by the Buddha. *Samantapāsādikā* 1214:18-19). Brough calls this commentary ‘Buddhaghosa’s sectarian comment.’ and argues that the problem concerning *sakāya niruttiyā* would never arise if Buddhaghosa’s comment had not survived (1980:36). This, as I would argue has something to do with Theravāda idea of language and scripture. We shall discuss the implications of Theravādin understanding of language and scripture later.

Moreover, as we have discussed in our first part, that a universal Buddhist overlord like Middle Kingdom or Islamic Empire is out of the question so long as political order is subsumed under the religious order. Hence, we find that there are many Buddhist kingdoms, but they do not politically solidify one alliance. On the other hand, in East Asian countries like China where while Buddhism is religiously influential, it is Confucianism that has been politically dominant.

3.

To return to the thesis of Pāli: it is the sacred language of the Theravāda Buddhism. In Theravāda Buddhism, to consider Pāli as the synonym of scriptural language is a rather late invention. It is through the misunderstanding of the compound of *pālibhāsa*. This expression should mean Pāli language rather than language of the canonical texts as it is assumed now. (Collins: 1998:46) We do not find the usage Pāli in the Tipiṭaka (canonical scripture), When Buddhaghosa used the expression Pāli in his commentary work *Visuddhimagga* (107, 450 etc), he did not have Pāli as a language in his mind. Pāli there simply means text (in the text, *pāliyaṃ*) in direct contrast to commentary (in the commentary, *aṭṭhakathāyaṃ*). Collins summarized:

But the primary use of the distinction *pāli* and *aṭṭhakathā* is not to classify documents into different categories... and still less to denote explicitly a closed list of texts, as the terms 'canon' and 'commentary' might imply; rather, it was to distinguish between the precise wording of a text, in the text-critical sense, and the more flexible task of 'saying what it means', which is the literal translation of *aṭṭhakathā*. (Collins, 1990: 91) ⁶

In spite of the fact that Pāli originally means text rather than canonical language, in Theravāda tradition, we do have the transmission of canon and commentaries written in Middle Indo-Aryan language which is called Pāli in modern time. Indeed, this scriptural language of Theravāda Buddhism is

⁶ 'A fuller translation of *pāli* might be "text for recitation". The texts in question are those of the earliest stratum of Buddhist scriptures as they are preserved by a particular Buddhist tradition, the Theravāda. In that tradition those texts are collectively referred to as the *Tipiṭaka*, which literally means: "that which is three baskets", and they are supposed to be "the word of the Buddha" (*Buddha-vacana*). The *Tipiṭaka* is usually referred to in English as "the Pāli Canon".' (Gombrich's new introduction in Geiger, 1994:xxiii)

considered to be sacred, and we have Pāli cannon.⁷ However, in examining *Mahāvamsa* closely, we do not feel that chroniclers considered Sri Lanka the center of the Buddhist universe. The center remains in India. Therefore, the chroniclers did not aspire to universal glory of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Rather, their mission was to protect *sāsana* locally, confined within Island, against the intrusion of invaders. It is very different from “Middle Kingdom-which, though we think of it today as Chinese, imagined itself not as Chinese, but as central.” (Anderson, *ibid*: 12)

Reading from the lines of *Mahāvamsa*, one sees that the development of Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been connected with two major themes. Buddhism in Sri Lanka is directly descended from the Buddha himself. The authenticity of the transmission of Sinhala Buddhism is therefore assured. As pointed out by Collins that “*vamsa* texts produced in Ceylon and later in mainland Southeast Asia served as the *heilsgeschichtliche* purpose of connecting these areas with India.” (Collins, 1990:100) Second, Buddhism in Sri Lanka is religiously, historically and politically linked to the lot of the Island only. Eventually, Buddhism has become an emblem of Sinhala destiny. Buddhism in Sri Lanka, therefore is not a constant religious expansion with unlimited territorial aggrandizement in practice, but the transformation of a universal religion into local cultural identity.⁸ This situation is also different from what Anderson has argued for the formation of old religious communities:

Yet, such classical communities linked by sacred language had a character distinct from the imagined communities of modern nations. One crucial difference was the older communities’ confidence in the unique sacredness of their languages, and thus their ideas about admission to membership. (Anderson, 1991:13)

We do have Theravāda hegemony in the later thirteenth century, but only

⁷ “To choose Pali as the prestige language for textual embodiments of ideology ... was to privilege Sinhalese monastic lineages, the closed canon of Mahāvihāra, and more generally the systematic and narrative thought of the Pali imaginaire.” (Collins, 1998:72)

⁸ Collins’ observations are apt here: “From the second century BC until the British conquest in the nineteenth the island [Sri Lanka] was repeatedly fragmented into regional power-bases and reunified “under one umbrella” of a king...The image of royal power as an expanding circle was applied here to an island, and so a sense of territorial boundedness arose, which is both rare before modern times and analogous, at least in this respect, to nationalist views of legitimate power; it may in this respect be called a kind of pro-nationalism.” (Collins, 1998:68)

briefly by a century or two. (Collins: 1998:70) Also, in northern Thailand, for example, we do see Buddhism as the marker of civilized identity which distinguishes Shan from the neighboring hill-tribes.⁹ This is a matter of “admission to membership” indeed. However, the situation is different in Sri Lanka. In traditional Sri Lanka, it is not the categorical distinction between the civilized and the barbarian that counts. As both Sinhala and Tamils have their sacred scriptures and languages and considered themselves civilized, the problem of the civilized and the barbarians did not arise. It is rather a matter of Buddhist and non-Buddhist. There does exist certain sense of imagined separate religious communities between Sinhala-Buddhists and Tamil-Hindus.

If we compare Sinhala nationalism and Hindu nationalism in modern expression we will have a better understanding of cultural configuration in South Asia. While within Hindu context, religion is entrenched with cultural myths and social formation, for Sri Lankan Sinhalese, religion is deeply embedded in political territory. Thus, in mobilizing against British colonization, the Hindu nationalists recruited traditional cultural symbols of Hinduism to evoke national sentiment. In Sri Lanka, the sense of identity goes with political history of a religion. As there is no founder in Hinduism, Hindu society and religion are not connected with “a historical evolution”. In Sri Lanka, the advent of Buddhism and its subsequent development in the Island, as portrayed in the chronicles, *Mahāvamsa* in particular, initiate the Sinhala into a religious-cum-political sense of identity. The communal symbols of Ayodhya-Hindu (or Rāma’s) temple and Muslim Mosque are vastly different from that of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi and Eḷāra in terms of cultural configuration. In view of that, in South Asia, the Sinhala sense of nationalism is clearly distinguishable from the Hindu.¹⁰

⁹ “‘Buddhist’ ...carries connotations of civilization and order. When lowlanders state they are Buddhist they are making an appeal to this civilizational aspect along with any religious claims. It identifies them as civilized along with members of other world religions and separates them from uplanders, “hill tribes,” who have no religion. This sense of Buddhism makes no reference to doctrine or practices and is best understood as a marker of civilized identity or a rhetoric of justification.’ (Tannenbaum, 1995: 10)

¹⁰ As observed by Daniel: ‘There are other ways of formulating this distinction between the Sinhala and Tamil views of the past. It may be seen as one between political and cultural history, or objectivist history and transcendental history. To the extent that such formulations appear reasonable, they do so only because they are underwritten, as it were, by two distinct orientations to the past. What these Tamils and the greater Indian cultural traditions share is more a consciousness of the present, one’s present heritage of the past, than the past as past. “History” is one thing, “heritage” is another. The one is sharply defined and clearly instantiated, even if only in the imagination; the other is vague, though rich, potentiality’

Mahāvam̐sa is indeed, the scripture that provided the nationalists under British colony the consciousness of being a people with distinct religious tradition as well as political identity. The situation of the modern nationalism in Sri Lanka is not as Gellner argued: "The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred and patch would have served as well." (Gellner, 1983: 56) Rather, it is a conscious and deliberate effort to make present the continuation of the past.

4.

How do we define the narrative nature of *Mahāvam̐sa*? This is a challenging question as it has been associated with Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in the modern era. Leaving this point aside, as an important text through which Sinhala identity is manifest, its influence far surpasses *Dīpavam̐sa* and other chronicles of the Island. (Kemper, 1991) Scholars like Kapferer tends to disparage its cultural meaning and regard narrative stories concerning Vijaya and Duṭṭhagāmaṇi as legends. (Kapferer, 1988: 34)¹¹ However, in editing and translating *Mahāvam̐sa* Geiger already used the term "Duṭṭhagāmaṇi Epic" (Geiger, 1908: 20-2; 1912:146) which I think is appropriate for the narrative of this cultural hero. Can we hold the *Mahāvam̐sa* as a whole, an epic for its elegant style, rhyming composition and cultural implications? Personally, I strongly agree with the view of epic as defined by Cross:

I believe it is permissible to define epic as the traditional narrative cycle of an age conceived as *normative*, the events of which give meaning and self-understanding to a people or nation. The Homeric epics shaped the Greek self-consciousness and gave normative expression to Hellenic mythology. The Hebrew epic recounted crucial events of developing nationhood and gave classical expression to Yahwistic religion. (Cross, 1998:27-8)

(Daniel, 1996:27) Indeed, as pointed by Kemper: "The first compilation of Sri Lankan Tamil history is the *Yālpāna-Vaipāva-malai*, written in 1736 at the initiative of a Dutch official administering Jaffna. The relative youth of this chronicle has meant that that Tamil writers have no counterchronicle of comparable age, and they are forced to argue about their own origins on Vijaya's turf." (Kemper, 1991:116)

¹¹ On the other hand, he elevates and puts the ritual of sorcery and the accompanied mythology on a par with nationalist consciousness. (Kapferer, 1988, 1997; for criticism, see Kemper, 1991: 9-10)

If the ancient Israelite religious experience as defined by Cross is the process “from Epic to Canon”, the Sinhala Buddhist experience in Sri Lanka is the opposite: “from Canon to Epic”. Witnessing from *Mahāvamsa*, the Theravāda Canon had been transformed into Sinhala Epic and the Buddha is changed into Duṭṭhagāmaṇi. The transformation from Canon to Epic is crucial for the domestication of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The epic composers use sacred canonic language to depict the unfolding of Buddhism in the Island. In narrating political history of Buddhism in the Island, *Mahāvamsa* has left a legacy which makes Buddhism a sacred, cultural symbol of the Sinhala. Eventually, it makes possible the formation of communal consciousness.

The formation of communal consciousness depicted here is different from what happened in the Indian Subcontinent. While the configuration communal discord in the Indian Subcontinent is drawn more on a religious line (Hindu-Muslim) than the ethnical, the communal conflict in Sri Lanka is ethnical-cum-religious (Sinhala-Buddhist vis-à-vis Tamil-Hindu). Being conscious as a people with distinctive religious destiny, the Sri Lankan Sinhalese resort to the primordial events to reaffirm their group identity. Thus, in Sri Lanka, we find that there is an intricate historicized cultural myth endorsing the sentiment of communalism. In an elaborate interweaving of history and myth, as manifested profusely in the compilation of *Mahāvamsa*, the Sinhala-Buddhist religious expression becomes transparent. This cultural-historical identity also makes Sri Lanka different from other Theravāda Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia in the sense that Laṅkā is the chosen land of the Buddha and Sinhala is the guardian of Buddhism is sanctified in *Mahāvamsa*:

When the Guide of the World [the Buddha], having accomplished the salvation of the world and having reached the utmost stage of blissful rest, was lying on the bed of his nibbāṇa, in the midst of the great assembly of gods, he, the great sage, the greatest of those who have speech, spoke to Sakka [Indra] who stood there near him: ‘Vijaya, son of the king of Sihabāhu, is come to Laṅkā from the country of Lāḷa together with seven hundred followers. In Laṅkā, O lord of gods, will my religion be established, therefore carefully protect him with his followers and Laṅkā. (*Mahāvamsa* 7:1-4; trans. by Geiger.)

Here, we find that Sri Lankan Sinhalese (after *Sihabāhu*) are entrusted to protect

Buddhism. Indeed, in *Mahāvamsa*, the advent of Vijaya in Laṅkā coincides with *parinibbāna* (entire cessation of re-births; passing away) of the Buddha. This mythological glorification of the origin of Sinhala kingdom carries religious cum political overtones. Indeed, the sanctification of a people with a religious mission in *Mahāvamsa* is destined to evoke profound political inspiration in the era of modern nationalism. In Hsüan-tsang's two accounts of the myth concerning the kingdom of Sinhala, the origin of Sinhala has nothing to do with Buddhism at all. (Hsüan-tsang: 1985: 868-878). Gunawardana argued: "In essence, the Vijaya myth is presenting what may be termed a political definition of the Sinhala identity." (Gunawardana, 1990: 55). In citing this myth as the deliberate attempt of the monk authors of *Mahāvamsa*, de Silva contended:

This was to become in time the most powerful of the historical myth of the Sinhalese and the basis their conception of themselves as the chosen guardians of Buddhism, and of Sri Lanka itself as 'a place of special sanctity for the Buddhist religion'. This intimate connection between the land, the 'race' and the Buddhist faith foreshadowed the intermingling of religion and national identity which has always had the most profound influence on the Sinhalese. (de Silva, 1981:4)

The second event related to communal consciousness is the career of King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi (reigned from 161-137 BCE according to de Silva). In *Mahāvamsa*, he is portrayed as an ideal Buddhist king who slew Tamil King Elāra and thirty-two Tamil princes, and unified Sri Lanka under the banner of Buddhism. His mission as prophesied by soothsayers was the following: "The queen's son, when he vanquished the Damiḷs [Tamils] and built up a united kingdom, would make the doctrine shine forth brightly." (*Mahāvamsa* 22: 47; trans. by Geiger.)

Here, the antagonism between the Sinhala and the Tamil is assumed. Even though King Elāra was a righteous king, protecting Buddhism was depicted as King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's sacred duty. He was engaged in the pursuit of an inner calling: "not for the joy of sovereignty is this toil of mine, my striving (has been) ever to establish the doctrine of the Saṃbuddha." (*Mahāvamsa*: 25: 17; trans. by Geiger.)

His war against the righteous king Elāra and the killing of Tamils are justified on the ground that the *sāsana* has to be prevailed over the island. In other words, the glory of Buddhism should be the primary concern of a Sinhala king. Even more audacious is the claim made by the arahants who are supposed to practice the ethics of *ahiṃsa*. After his campaign, when the king was full of remorse for his *hiṃsa* against a “million” Tamils, which reminds of us king Aśoka after his campaign against Kalinga, he was comforted by the arahants who declared thus to the king:

From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven. Only one and half human beings have been slain here by thee, O lord of men. The one had come to the (three) refuges, the other had taken on himself the five precepts. Unbelievers and men of evil life were rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts. But for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways. (*Mahāvamsa*: 25: 109-12; trans. by Geiger.)

Killing living beings, even beasts, is not allowed in Buddhism as it is obviously against *ahiṃsa*. The *pāpa* of a king Duṭṭhagāmaṇi created by killing is easily explained away and justified by the arahants:

Should a man think on the hosts of human beings murdered for greed in countless myriads, and should he carefully keep in mind that the evil (arising from that) and should he also very carefully keep in mind the mortality as being the murder of all, then will he, in this way, shortly win freedom from suffering and a happy condition. (*Mahāvamsa*: 25: 116; trans. by Geiger.)

Here, the killing out of personal greed and killing for the sake of *sāsana* are clearly distinguished. Thus, King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi is blameless, because his deeds bring glory to the *sāsana*.¹² Indeed, when he passed away, King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi went to Tuṣita heaven and destined to become the disciple of Metteya, the future Buddha. (*Mahāvamsa*, 32:75-83)

However, to count unbelievers as beasts fit for slaughter really carves out the

¹² As commented by Kemper: “The religion, according to Mahāvamsa, cannot prosper as long as a heretical king sits on the throne, so Duṭṭhagāmaṇi [Duṭṭhagāmaṇi kills Elāra and defeats his thirty-two generals. The presence of outsiders prevents the creation of a united kingdom, and the lack of a united kingdom threatens the survival of the religion.” (Kemper, 1991:70)

antagonism between Sinhala-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu. This antagonism has its devastating repercussion in contemporary Sri Lanka. De Silva has summarized the import of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's slaughter of Eḷāra:

The long-fifteen-year campaign waged by Duṭṭhagāmaṇi against Eḷāra, which culminated in a duel fought in accordance with *kṣatriya* rules of chivalry and the latter's death, is dramatized as the central theme of the latter's chapters of the *Mahāvamsa* as an epoch-making confrontation between the Sinhalese and Tamils, and extolled as a holy war fought in the interests of Buddhism. Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's triumph was nothing less than the consummation of the island's manifest destiny, its historic role as the bulwark of Buddhism: the Southern kingdom ruled by the Sinhalese Buddhist had prevailed over the northern kingdom ruled by Dravidian usurper who, despite his admirable qualities as a man and ruler, was nevertheless a man of 'false' beliefs. (de Silva: 1981:15)

Thus, the modern antagonism between the Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus was already foreordained to happen.

Conclusion

From the Buddhist experience in early Sri Lanka, we find many significant phenomena have taken place. We find that the idea of a universal king dissimilating *dhamma* becomes that of a local ruler protecting *sāsana*. Aśoka turns into Duṭṭhagāmaṇi. The pluralistic language policy of the Buddha is converted into the insistence Pāli as the sanctified words by Buddhaghosa. Epics have replaced Canon. Eventually, a world religion has evolved into an ethical-communal persuasion with historical consciousness. All these variations compel to rethink the meaning of Buddhism as a universal religion and Theravāda as the "original" Buddhism.

Bibliography

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Community. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London/New York: Verso.

1998. *The Spectre of Comparisons. Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*. London/New York: Verso.
- Brough, J. 1980. "Sakāya Niruttiyā:Cauld kale het" in *Die Sprache der ältesten buddhistischen Überlieferung*. pp.35-42.
- Buddhism and Asian History*. 1987. Eds. Kitagawa. J. and Cummings. M. New York: Macmillan.
- Collins. S. 1990. "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon" in *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15: 86-126.
1998. *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities. Utopian of the Pali Imaginaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cross. Frank Moore. 1998. *From Epic to Canon. History and Literature in Ancient Israel*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Daniel, E. 1996. *Charred Lullabies. Chapters in An Anthropology of Violence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- de Silva, K. M. 1981. *A History of Sri Lanka*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Die Sprache der ältesten buddhistischen Überlieferung*. Bechert, H. Ed. 1980. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
- Dīgha Nikāya*. 1890-1911. Eds. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter. 3vols. Pali Text Society.
- Geiger, W. Ed. 1908. *The Mahāvamsa*. London: Pub. for the Pali Text Society by Frowde.
- Trans. 1912. *The Mahāvamsa. or. The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*. London: Pub. for the Pali Text Society by H. Frowde.
1994. *A Pāli Grammar*. Trans. By B. Ghosh. Revised and edited by Norman, K. R. Oxford: The Pali Text Society.
- Gellner, E. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Gombrich. R.1994. "Introduction: what is Pāli" in Geiger's *A Pāli Grammar*: xxiii-xxix.
- Gunawardana, R.1978. " The kinsmen of the Buddha: Myth as Political Charter in the Ancient and Early Medieval Kingdoms of Sri Lanka." In *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*. pp. 96-106.
1990. "The people of the lion: the Sinhala identity and ideology in history and historiography" in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*. pp. 45-86.
- Hobsbawn, E. 1990. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Hsüan-tsang (玄奘). 1985. *Ta T'ang Hsi Yü Chi*. 《大唐西域記校注》 Edited and Annotated by Ji Xianlin et al. Beijing: Chung Hua Bookstore.
- Ji, Xianlin (季羨林). 1991. *Collected Essays* 《季羨林學術論著自選集》. Beijing: Beijing Normal College.
- Kapferer, B. 1988. *Legends of People, Myths of State. Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kedourie, E. 1961. *Nationalism*. 2nd (revised) edition. London: Hutchinson.
- Kemper, S. 1991. *The Presence of the Past. Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*. 1978. Ed. by Smith. B. Pa.:Anima Books.
- Reynolds, F. and Hallisey, C. 1987, "Buddhist religion, culture, and civilization" in *Buddhism and Asian History*: 3-28.
- Sammantpāsādikā: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Vinayaṭīka*. 1966-82. 8 vols. Eds. Takakusu J. and Nagai. M. London: Pali Text Society.
- Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*. 1990. Ed. Spencer. H. London and New York: Routledge.
- Tambiah, S. 1976. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer. A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against its Historical Background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
1986. *Sri Lanka. Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
1992. *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
1996. *Leveling Crowds. Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Tannenbaum, N. 1995. *Who Can Compete Against the World? Power-protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview*. Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies.
- Vinayaṭīka*. 1881-83. 5 vols. Ed. Oldenberg. H. Repr. 1966. Oxford: Pali Text Society.