BRIEF REVIEW OF BUDDHAGHOsa'S WRITINGS

Buddhaghosa stands as a pre-eminent and the greatest commentator and exegetist in the history of Pāli literature. What Ṣevāna did for the Vedic literature, Buddhaghosa accomplished for the Pāli Tripitakas. Many points of Buddhist theology and crucial philosophical questions would not have been clearly intelligible to later generation but for the immense labour that Buddhaghosa bestowed upon the exegesis of the Pāli texts.

Buddhaghosa wrote all the commentaries at the Mahāvihāra in Amurādhapura of Ceylon except Nāṇodaya. Buddhaghosa had drawn his material from the Mūla or Mahā-āṭṭhakathā, the Uttarā - Vihāra āṭṭhakathā, Mahā paṭcareya, the Kurunda or Mahā kurunda āṭṭhakathā and Andhaka āṭṭhakathā.

Mahāvamsa¹ and Sāsanavamsa² record the list of the works of Buddhaghosa. He translated the whole of the Sinhalese commentaries on the Tripitaka into Pāli originally composed by Mahinda. It is proposed to discuss in detail about each of his works.

The first work of Buddhaghosa according to Mahāvamsa is known as Nāṇodaya.³ He wrote it before leaving for Ceylon.
Nānodaya (Skt Jñānodaya) "Dawn of knowledge" is a philosophical treatise. It does not appear to have been preserved.

There is no mention of this work in Pāli literature. However, Vissudhimagga appears to have largely incorporated the main contents of this philosophical work. The Ceylonese chronicle further tells us that Buddhagbosa also wrote before his departure to the Southern Island, the Atthasālinī a commentary on Dhamma - Saṅghani Sāsana - Vamsa lends support to this statement. But the Buddhagboipatī does not say anything about this work. The Saddhamma Saṅgaha5 has an interesting account of it. Buddhagosa while travelling in Jambudvīpa came to a vihāra, where the Mahāthera Revata dwelt. There he began writing the Atthasālinī a commentary on the Dhamma Saṅghani after completing the Nānodaya. Thera Revata seeing him thus engaged in writing Atthasālinī informed him that the commentaries (Atthakathās) and the opinion of the teachers (Ācariyaveda) did not exist in Jambudvīpa. They were translated into Simbalese by Mahinda and were to be found in Ceylon. We were further told that Buddhagbosa immediately after having rendered the Mahāpaccariya atthakathā which occurs in the Abhidhammapitaka from Simbalese into Magadhi, composed the commentary (Atthakathā) on the Dhamma Saṅghani named Atthasālinī.6

From the first statement we gather that the work Atthasālinī was produced at Gayā before Buddhagbosa proceeded
to Ceylon. This is what we learn from Mahāvamsa too. But from the subsequent quotations we are told that the same was written after several other works. These two statements though appear to be contradictory, were reconciled by Mrs. Rhys Davids. Accordingly Atthaśālīṇī was at first written at Gaya but subjected to a thorough revision after Buddhagbosa studied the great Atthaśālīṇī in Ceylon. This seems to be quite natural and reasonable too since the commentary is quite an abstruse philosophical thesis. The Sādhanaṇa Sāhagbe further states that Buddhagbosa, while revising his commentary derived materials from the Mahāpaccarī which contained many more detailed expositions on the subject matter.

Buddhagbosa quotes from or refers to many works, such as the Saneṇaṭa pāsādikā and the Visuddhimagga. Therefore, we may have to take that Atthaśālīṇī was re-written in the light of the additional knowledge acquired by him in Ceylon.

Another work of Buddhagbosa was the Visuddhimagga which is verily an encyclopaedia of Buddhism. That the Visuddhimagga³ (path of purity) was Buddhagbosa's first production in Ceylon is beyond dispute. It is said to have been composed under romantic circumstances. It is called a marvellous production.⁹ It has earned its author an everlasting fame and considered to be the only book where the
entire Buddhist system is well depicted. It aims at a systematic arrangement of the subject matter of the Pitakas. "It is not a commentary on any text, but claims to be a compendium of the whole of Buddhist system, conduct, meditation, contemplation, the elements of being, the senses, the truths, the chain of causation and the rest." The character and contents of the Visuddhimagga have been thus described by Spencer Hardy, "The Visuddhimagga, a compendium formed by Buddhaghosa, presents an abstract of the doctrinal and metaphysical parts of the Buddhistical creed, which as being the work of the last commentator on the Buddhistical scriptures, acquires an authority and authenticity which no compendium exclusively formed by any orientalist of a different faith, and more modern times can have any claim to..." The character and contents of the Visuddhimagga have been thus described by Spencer Hardy, "The Visuddhimagga, a compendium formed by Buddhaghosa, presents an abstract of the doctrinal and metaphysical parts of the Buddhistical creed, which as being the work of the last commentator on the Buddhistical scriptures, acquires an authority and authenticity which no compendium exclusively formed by any orientalist of a different faith, and more modern times can have any claim to..."

An account of the contents of the Visuddhimagga is recorded in the Sumangali Vilësinñ which runs thus, "The nature of the Silakathe, Dhutasamahá, Kammatttherani together with all the Cariyavidhani, Jhanari, the whole scope of the Samapatti, the whole of abhimna, the exposition of the Pramä, the Khandhe, the Dhatu, the Pratanni, Indriyani, the four Cariyaseccani, the Paccayakara, the pure and comprehensive Naya and the indispensable Magga and Vipharsanabhavana." Gray in his appreciation of this work remarks, "If he had written nothing else, it alone would have secured
him undying fame." 

The Visuddhimagga is in fact an abridged edition of the three Pitakas, the Vinaya, the Sutta and the Abhidhamma, whose main arguments and conclusions are here condensed into a single treatise. It deals with Kusala, Akusala, Ayyākata- dhama, Ayatana, Dhaṭu, Satipatthānas, Khemmas, Pakati and many other topics of Buddhist philosophy. It contains the whole of the Buddhist philosophy in a nutshell. Sīla (conduct, precept), Samādhi (concentration) and Pañña (wisdom) are the three essential matters which are dealt with in this work. The vocabulary is very rich as compared with the archaic simplicity of the Pitakas. Big words are often used and long passages are frequent. The quotations in the Visuddhimagga from the Pitakas, the Sinhalese commentaries, the Póranas etc., are numerous. The Visuddhimagga is really an encyclopedia of Buddhism, a good abstract of Buddhist doctrines and metaphysics and a vast treasure house of Buddhist lore.

Samantapāsādikā

It is a commentary on the five books of the Vinaya Pitaka and was written at the request of the Thera Buddhāsirī. The author informs us in the preface of this work that this was the first commentary he wrote on the canonical texts and
apologised for undertaking to write, first of all, a commentary on the *Vinaya Pitaka*, contrary to the usual order of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. He also says that *Vinaya* is the foundation of Buddhist faith. It supplies valuable information with which we can reconstruct the social, political, moral, religious and philosophical history of ancient India. The rules of morality are well explained.

The *Semantrapasadika* opens with a long introduction called *Bahir-Nidāna-Kathā*. It describes the three *Saṅghitīs* more or less on the same lines as we find at other places in the *Atthakathās*, *Mahāvamsa* and *Dīpavamsa*. It states that the *Vinaya Pitaka* consists of *Pātimokkha*, two *Vibhaṅgas*, the two *Khandhakas* and the *Parivāra*. It sets out the exact extent of the *Dīhanikāya*, the *Majjhima-Nikāya*, the *Samaṭṭhāṇikāya*, the *Anguttaraniṇīkāya*, and the fifteen books of the *Khuddaka-Nikāya*. The books of the *Abhidhamma-Pitaka* have also been enumerated according to the old tradition.

*Semantrapasadika* gives an account of the transmission of the *Dhamma* to North-West boundaries of the country, other parts of India and to *Suvarnabhūmi* i.e., Burma. It also gives detailed account about the mission of *Mahinda* to *Tambapāni-Dīpa* i.e. Modern Ceylon. It provides us with the list of
previous names and descriptions of the Lanka during the times of the previous Buddha. The *Samantapāśādhikā* is followed by the four *Nikāyas*. Unlike other commentaries, *Samantapāśādhikā* is free from any elaborate tangle of similes and metaphors. It is written in a simple language.

**Sumangala Vilāsinī**

It is a famous commentary on the *Dīgha - Nikāya* written by Buddhaghosa at the request of the Sanghathera Datha. It is divided into three parts:

1. Śīlakkhandha, 2. Mahāvagga and 3. Patheya or Patika Vagga. *Sumangala Vilāsinī* contains a vivid picture of sports and past times, geographical position of the countries. It is rich in historical information, folk lore, social, political and philosophical history of India. It gives information regarding the daily life of a Bhikkhu. The most essential points of Buddhism, the details of *Arahatship*, are not only described in full but also compared with the Brahman ideal on the one hand and with the ordinary morality of a good layman on the other.

In the introductory verses, Buddhaghosa gives a history of its composition. The *Visuddhimagga* according to him, explains the meaning of the four *Āgamas*. The
Susaṅgala Vilāsini is based upon the authority of the four Agamas and can be directly traced back to the Āgamas in Sinhalese. Its language is less confused than that of his other works. It reveals the erudite knowledge of Buddhagbosa.

Kāṇākhevitarani

It is a commentary on the Pātimokkha, a book of the Vinaya Pitaka, and was written on his own initiative. The date of the work is between 410 A.D. and 432 A.D. It embodies certain rules of discipline which can easily be remembered by Bhikkhus and Bhikkunis. While commenting on the Pātimokkha, Buddhagbosa has brought in much new information incidentally throwing light on the later development of the monastic life of the Buddhists. The work is remarkable for the restraint and mature judgement that characterise Buddhagbosa's style. The manuscript of an ancient Sinhalese glossary on this work is preserved in the Government Oriental Library, Colombo.

Pāpañcasūdani

It is a commentary on Majjibima Nikāya. This is said to have been written in compliance with a request made to Buddhagbosa by the venerable Thera Buddhīṭṭa while they
were staying together at Mayūrasuttaoattana, in South India. Out of the first ten Sutta of the commentary, Buddhaghośa discusses the four Suttanikkhepas, Balaβojbha, Dhammacakka, the origin of all the Dhammas, Nibbāna, Earth, Tathāgata, Abhisambuddha, destruction of sin, false belief, Saddha, faith, four Puggalas, obstacles in the path leading to Nibbāna, contact, old age, death, suffering, right recollection, mindfulness, pleasing sensation, and lastly emancipation.

In Pāpancaśudani Buddhaghośa records that to facilitate an easy understanding of the three Pitakas, the teachers conversant with the local dialects expounded either through the medium of Demila or Andhaka and the like. Here he points out that Buddha too adapted his teachings to the needs of his audience when he recounted them either from the popular stand point or from the scientific or philosophic stand point. It is full of legendary materials and historical and geographical details.

Sāvatthapakāsini

It is a commentary on the Sāmyutta Nikāya. Buddhaghośa wrote it at the request of venerable Thera Jotipāla. 'It has been published in two volumes by P.T.S. Palm leaf manuscripts are also available.' It is rich in legendary, historical and geographical materials and it throws a good deal of light
on the social, religious, political, and economic life of India and Ceylon. Buddhabhosa gives an interesting piece of information regarding a class of heretical Brahmin teachers known as Nakha or samkhyas, Pāsanda宽带ma had adopted novel methods to instruct the masses in the law of Karma by drawing pictures in a portable gallery, illustrating the happy or unhappy results of human deeds on earth and appropriately labelling them with inscriptions. The class of painting produced by them was known in the Buddha's time as "Carane-citta or Rambling Painting."

Buddhabhosa refers to the four Buddha (Cattāro Buddha), Sabbañña Buddha (all knowing), Paiceko Buddha (individual), Catusaeco Buddha (master of four truths) and Suta Buddha (Buddha who is heard). He also explains Saddhamma as the term which includes the five Silas, ten Silas and four objects of recollection or mindfulness.

Another important information in the work is that Buddhabhosa gives a list of Mahāyāna tenets that are evidently of Dhereni and Gubyesamye and Veidalva class. He declares them as unauthentic and unauthoritative on two fold ground.

1) They had not been endorsed by the first three Buddhist councils and 2) They deal with themes which do
not fall within the scope of the recognised topics of Buddhism.

**Manorathapūrani**

It is a commentary on *Anguttara Nikāya* written at the request of Thera Bhaddanta, by Buddhaghosa. It is divided into eleven parts and deals with sloth and stupor, haughtiness, desire for sensual pleasures, friendliness, mental emancipation, suffering, right realisation, functions of the mind, bojjhāṅga (supreme knowledge) thirty-two signs of a great man, Fuggala (human types) and Tathāgata, realisation of the four Patisambhidās or analytical knowledge. He gives a valuable information about Theras and Theris who were placed foremost by the Buddha for having excelled others in certain special gifts, acts or attainments.

Buddhaghosa gives an account of the Jambudvīpa and the Anotatta Lake with its four outlets on the four sides known as Sāhanukha, Hatthinukka, Assamukha and Usshabamukha, the channelling out of the four rivers especially of the origin of the Ganges.

Buddhaghosa gives a description of the three tanks and places of the Bodhisatta, Prince Siddhartha. He gives definition to the four sacrifices called Sassamadha, Purisamadha, Samāpasa and Vaiśepyya in terms of the four Saṅgahavatthas.
The complete work has been published in Ceylon, Burma and in India by Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda.

Kuddhakankikāya Atthakathā

It is a commentary on the four books Kuddhakankikāya. It is also known as Paramatthajotikā. Like other commentaries it also contains valuable legendary stories which help us to rebuild the social, political, philosophical and religious history of India at the time of Buddhagbosa. It is heavy and laboured in style. This is edited and published by the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda.

Abhidhamma Pītaka

Buddhagbosa wrote commentary on Abhidhamma Pītaka in seven volumes. They are 1) Atthasālinī, 2) Sammohavinodani, 3) Dhātukathapakaranatthakathā, 4) Puggala Paññatti pakaranatthakathā, 5) Kathavattbu Atthakathā, 6) Yamakapakaranatthakathā and 7) Patthunapakaranatthakathā.

We shall now discuss each of the book:

1) Atthasālinī: It is a commentary on Dhammasangani the first treatise of the Abhidhamma Pītaka. It contains historical and geographical information and explanation of certain technical terms of Buddhist psychology. In
Atthasālinī the chapters are clearly marked and the treatment is more scientific than Dhammasangani. Buddhaghosa deals with various questions both literary and philosophical. He defines Abhidhamma as one which excels all other Dhamma. It is one of the best known works of Buddhaghosa.

2) Sammohavinodanī: It is a commentary on the Vibhanga and contains a gist of Pūranatthakathā. Sammohavinodanī and Visuddhimagga comment on the same subject. It is divided into 18 parts dealing with exposition of the five Khandhas. The 32 parts of the body are discussed in the Dhatus section and noble truths in the truth section. It also deals with Avijjā, Kāya, Jāti, Jara, Tanhā, Domanassa, Nibbāna, Nāmerūpa Bhava, Bodhi, Maccariya, Marana and Māyā. The Paccavakona section has a discussion on the subject of dependent origination.

3) Dhatukathāpañcakaraṇa Atthakathā: It is a commentary on Dhatukathā i.e., the third book of Abhidhamma. It contains 14 sections. 4) Puggalapaññatti Atthakathā: It is a commentary on Puggalapaññatti. The Pannattis or concepts are classified and defined according to three different Nirās or methods namely the Pālinga, the Atthakathānyaya and the Ācāryanāya.

5) Kathavatthuppakaraṇa Atthakathā: It is a commentary on Kathavattu (points of controversy). It deals with the two truths Dukkham and Dukkhasamudayam which are mundane (belonging
to the word of rebirth) and other two truths Nirodha and Nirodhaeminipatipada are super mundane (belonging to the path). It also describes meditation on formlessness. It helps us to clarify many knotty points.

6) *Yamakapakaranatthakathā*: It is a commentary on *Yamaka*. It is divided into ten chapters dealing with teachings of Goutama, Khandhas, Ayatana, Dhātu. Four Aryan truths, Kēvasamkhāra, Kāma, Rāga, mind and mental states, Kusala, Akusala and Avyāktadhamma.

7) *Pattānapakaranatthakathā*: It is a commentary on *Pattāna*, the seventh book of *Abhidhamma* known as *Mahāpakaranas*. It is the most difficult commentary. The twenty-four *Paccayasa* or relations are discussed in the first two sections.

*Dbammapadātthallathā*

It is a commentary on *Dhammapada* and contains a number of illustrative tales like Jātakas. It derives number of its stories from the four *Nikāyas*, the *Vinaya*, the *Udāna*, the works of Buddhaghosa and the *Jātaka* book. It is a commentary on the stanzas of the *Dhammapada* consisting of 423 sayings of the Buddha in verses. The analysis of each story consists of eight sub-divisions (1) Citation of the stanza (gātha) to which the story relates, (2) mention of the person or persons
with reference to whom the story was told, (3) story proper or more strictly story of the present, closing with the stanza or stanzas, (4) word for word commentary, (5) brief statement of the spiritual benefits which accrued to the hearer or hearers, (6) story of the past, or story of the previous existence and identification of the personages of the story of the past with those of the story of the present.

The Jātaka book consists of 550 stories relating to the previous birth of Buddha. Each Jātaka consists of a verse together with a commentary without which the same will be unintelligible. A frame work of story stating when and where and on what occasion the story is supposed to have been spoken by the Buddha and finally the conclusion in which the characters of the story are identified with the Buddha and his contemporaries in a previous birth.

We have pointed out the characteristics of a Jātaka story and also of a Dhammapadaatthakatha story and it is not unreasonable to infer that in general character and structure of parts the Jataka book and the Dhammapada-atthakatha are not unidentical.

Doubts have been raised whether the work can really be attributed to Buddhaghosa. It is a work of immense bulk consisting not merely of the Āṭṭhakathās i.e., explanations
of the words and expressions in the text, but also a large number of illustrative tales of the nature of the Jātaka stories. The scheme of the commentary is systematic and can easily be followed. Each story has been amplified by a good story and at the end of each story interpretations of words have been given. The language is easily intelligible. The Dhammapadaatthakathā contains material which can be used for the study of social, religious, political and economic conditions of India till the 5th century A.D. Besides this it contains a number of humorous tales, animal stories and legends of saints. Some stories of Dhammapada are derived from Vinaya Pitaka e.g., Devadatta, Channa etc., and some from Vīdāna e.g., Mahañakassapa and Visakha. All these facts indicate that Buddhaghosa is the author of the Dhammapadaatthakathā and there is hardly any doubt about his authorship.

Besides these commentaries, it is recorded in the Sāsanavamsa, that Buddhaghosa wrote Pitakattavalekkhamaganda. A sanskrit work "Padyacūdamani"19 attributed to Buddhaghosa has been published by the Government of Madras and is edited by S. Kuppuswami Sastry. It is a mahākavya on the life of the Buddha. There is nothing in the book itself to show who the author was, except only a few words of usual modesty in the second and third stanzas of the first canto. The colophons at the end of the cantos describe the work as
written by Buddhaghosa or Buddhaghosaśārya. The identification of the author as Buddhaghosa is disputed by Winternitz while other scholars identify with a famous celebrity. Winternitz opinion is that the author of this Mahākāvya is certainly not the famous commentator but some Buddhaghosa, who knew the epics of Asvaghosa and Kālidāsa and made liberal use of them or perhaps an anonymous writer, who simply assumed the name of Buddhaghosa.  

These commentaries as it appears from tradition were originally the products not of a single author but of a community of monks. Mahinda translated them into Sinhalese and Buddhaghosa retranslated them again into Pāli. But Buddhaghosa while retranslating them gave meanings and explanations to the words and Suttas for the benefit of later generation.

His works contain many interesting accounts regarding history, religion, social and economic condition in the ancient times.
REFERENCES

   Winternitz observes on this work that "There is a tradition that he wrote a work (which has not come down to us) Nāpodya (the downing of knowledge) and the Atthasalini in India before departing for Ceylon".
6. Ibid., p.56.