CHAPTER - I

LIFE HISTORY OF BUDDHAGHOSA

Buddhagbosa was the most distinguished exegetist of the Theravāda school of Buddhism. He is cherished all over the world with reverence and gratitude for his exposition of the Pāli Tripitaka. In this chapter an attempt is made to examine the biographical details of Buddhagbosa.

The source material concerning Buddhagbosa's life are as follows: (a) The last section of Mahāvamsa, also known as Cūlavamsa deals with the history of Buddhagbosa.¹ (b) The eighth chapter in Buddhagbosuppatti gives a description of the life of Buddhagbosa.² (c) In sāsanaVaṃsa, the life history of Buddhagbosa is given in the chapter entitled "Sekha deepaka SāsanaVaṃsagga"³; (d) Gandhavamsa⁴ also provides the life history of Buddhagbosa but it is stated in the work that the account is based on the Mahāvamsa. (e) Sadanāma Siṅghe⁵ narrates the life history of Buddhagbosa which as stated in the work, is based on the Mahāvamsa. (f) The Burmese work, 'the Mālāmka-ravatthu'⁶ is composed in 1773 A.D. and it gives the life and legends of Buddhagbosa.

Besides the above literary works, the epigraphical evidence is also utilised. The inscription from Kaheri mentioning Buddhagbosa is also examined to determine the
date of Buddthagbosa.

Before we examine the literary accounts it is worthwhile to notice the date and sources of these works.

The Culavamsa, the last chapter of Mahāvamsa was rendered by Dhammakitti. Geiger and Winternitz assign 13th century A.D. for this work. Hence the life sketch given in this work is based on the traditional accounts known during 13th century which by then got mixed up with fact and fiction.

The Buddhagbosuppatti is written by Mahāmāyagala in Ceylonese. Winternitz and Geiger ascribe to 14th century A.D. It is referred to in the Sāsenevamsa, a later work. The biography of Buddhtagbosa, as the author points out had made use of the data left by Puñmavatiya by the former teachers.

The Sāsenevamsa is a work of recent times. It is dated in the year 1223 of the Burmese era i.e., 1861 A.D. Although it is a late composition, the work incorporates the data drawn from the works like the Sāsenevamsa, Samentapasādika, Dipavamsa, Mahāvamsa and the Burmese chronicles.

The Gandhavamsa, another late work is variously dated by Winternitz and Geiger. The former ascribes it to 17th
century A.D. while the later dates to 19th century A.D. Geiger describes this as "a sort of literary catalogue, a list of authors and works."

The *Saddharmrma Saṅgha* was written by Bhadmakirtti. This work was composed during the late 13th and early 14th centuries A.D.

The above works are the only source to reconstruct the life and times of Buddhaghosa. The original writer of the *Atthakathās* has merely mentioned his name as Buddhaghosa but had not written anything about himself. Therefore the life of Buddhaghosa has remained controversial.

The summary of the accepted account of the life of Buddhaghosa in the *Mahāvaṃsa* is as follows. 3

A young brahmana born near Bodhi tree, well versed in all branches of the arts, in the Vedas, and in the doctrines of various systems who was skilled in disputation and also fond of controversy, wondering about Jambudīpa for the purpose of debate. As he arrived one night at a Buddhist monastery and had given a clear exposition of the doctrine of Patanjali, his arguments were refuted by a Mahāthera named Revata. On the other hand the young Brahmin was unable to follow the Buddhists arguments and finally asked for instruction.
He entered the novitiate learning and accepting the three Pitakas. The name Buddhaghosa was given to him because his voice was deep like the Buddha's. In the Vibhāra where he was converted, he composed treatise called Nānodaya, wrote the Atthasālinī commentary upon the Dhammasaṅgani and finally undertook a short commentary on the Tipitakas. Whereupon the Thera Revata spoke, only the texts, not the commentaries, have been brought here (from Ceylon) the traditions of the various teachers are not available. However, in Ceylon, the authoritative and quite orthodox commentaries compiled by Mahinda are extant in the Simbales. Go there, study them, translate them into the Magadhi language. They will benefit all.

So, Buddhaghosa arrived in Ceylon in the reign of King Mahānāma. In the Mahāpaddhatī hall of the Mahāvihāra, he heard the Simhalese commentaries as well as the Thavādā tradition from Senghapāla. It seemed to him the doctrine of the Buddha. But when he asked for access to all the books, in order to write a commentary, the order gave him two stanzas as text. Upon these he wrote the Visuddhimagga, an epitome of the three Pitakas with commentaries. At the first reading of this work, the gods bid the book away and repeated the performance after he had done the work again. The third time the deities produced the former copies to show the people
his skill. And they were found after comparing the three books, not the least variation from the Theravāda, in composition, in meaning, in sequence, not even in the very letters.

He was immediately acclaimed by the order as a veritable Mettāyeva Bodhisattva and the Attakathās were given to him. Living in the pure Vihāra, rich in all such books, he translated them from Sinhalese into the 'Original Language' Makadhi. This work benefited people of all languages, all the teachers of the Theravāda honoured it as a sacred text.

Thus having finished his task Buddhagosa returned to the land of his birth, to pay reverence the great Bodhi-tree.

The 'popular novel' called Buddhagosuppatti, was composed in Burma by an Elder called Mahāmaṅgala, perhaps as early as the 14th century. The precis of it is as follows:

"Near the Bodhi Tree at Gaya there was a town called Ghosa. Its ruler had a Brahman chaplain called Kesī, married to a wife called Kesini. An Elder Bhikkhu, who was a friend of Kesī, used to wonder, when the Buddha's teaching was recited in Sinhalese and people did not therefore understand it, who could be able to translate it into Magadhan (Pāli)."
He saw that there was the son of a deity living in the Tavatimsa Heaven, whose name was Ghosa and who was capable of doing it. This deity was persuaded to be reborn in the human world as the son of the Brahman Kesī. He learnt the Vedas when he was seven years old and mastered them by another seven years. One day he sat down in a place sacred to Vishnu and ate peas. Brahmans angrily rebuked him, but he uttered a stanza, 'the pea itself is Vishnu; who is there called Vishnu? And how shall I know which is Vishnu?', and no one could answer him. Then one day while Kesī was instructing the town's ruler in the Vedas a certain passage puzzled him; but Ghosa wrote down the explanations on a palm leaf, which was found later by his father.

Once when the Elder Bhikkhu was invited to Kesī's house for a meal, Ghosa's mat was given to him to sit on. Ghosa was furious and abused the Elder. Then he asked him if he knew the Vedas and any other system. The Elder gave a recitation from the Vedas. Then Ghosa asked him for his own system, whereupon the Elder expounded the first Triad of the Abhidhamma schedule, on profitable, unprofitable and indeterminate, thought-arisings. Ghosa asked whose the system was this. He was told that it was the Buddha's and that it could only be learnt after becoming a Bhikkhu. He accordingly went forth into homelessness as a Bhikkhu, and
in one month he learnt the three Pātakas. After receiving the full admission he acquired the four discriminations. The name given to him was 'Buddhagbosa.'

One day the question arose in his mind: 'which has more understanding of the Buddha-word. I or my preceptor?'

His preceptor, whose cankers were exhaustive, read the thought in his mind and rebuked him, telling him to ask his forgiveness. The pupil was then very much afraid, and after asking for forgiveness, he was told that in order to make amends he must go to Ceylon and translate the Buddha-word from Sinhalese into Magadhan. He agreed, but asked that he might first be allowed to convert his father from the Brahmanical religion to the Buddha's teaching. In order to achieve this he had constructed a brick apartment fitted with locks and furnished with food and water. He set a contrivance so that when his father went inside he was trapped. He then preached to his father on the virtues of the Buddha, and on the pains of Hell resulting from wrong belief. After three days his father was converted, and he took the three refuges. The son then opened the door and made amends to his father with flowers and such things for the offence done to him. Kesī became a follower of Buddha's word.

After a few days, he set sail in a ship for Ceylon with some merchants. The Mahāthera Buddhodatta had set
sail that day from Ceylon for India. The two ships met by the intervention of Sakka, Ruler of Gods, on the third day of their journey. When the two Elders saw each other, the Elder Buddhaghosa told the other, "The Buddha's Dispensation has been put into Sinhalese; I shall go and translate it and put it into Magadhan," the other said 'I was sent to go and translate the Buddha-word and write it in Magadhan. I have only done the *Vinālenkāra*, the *Dantavamsa*, the *Dhātuvaamsa* and the *Bodhivamsa*, not the commentaries and the sub-commentaries (Tika). If you, Sir, are translating the dispensation from Sinhalese into Magadhan, do the commentaries to the three *Pitaka* and *Atthakathās*. Then praising the Elder Buddhaghosa, he gave him the gall-nut, the iron stylus and the stone given to him by Sakka, Ruler of Gods, adding 'if you have eye trouble or backache, rub the gall-nut on the stone and wet the place that hurts; then your ailment will vanish' use the iron stylus for writing quickly. Then he recited a stanza from his *Vinālenkāra*. The other said 'Venerable Sir, your book is written in very ornate style. Future clau's men will not be able to follow its meaning. It is hard for simple people to understand it.' --- Friend Buddhaghosa, I went to Ceylon before you to work on the Blessed One's Dispensation. But I have little time before me and shall not live long. So I cannot do it. Do it therefore your-
Then the two ships separated. Soon after they had completed their voyages the Elder Buddhadatta died and was reborn in the Tusita Heaven.

The Elder Buddhaghosa stayed near the port of Dvijathāna in Ceylon. While there he saw one woman water-carrier accidentally break another’s jar, which led to a violent quarrel between them with foul abuse. Knowing that he might be called as a witness, he wrote down what they said in a book. When the case came before the king, the Elder was cited as a witness. He sent his notebook, which decided the case. The king then asked to see him, but the brahmans where he resided being unwilling to have his worth extolled informed the king that he, contrary to priestly procedure, has come for the purpose of trade. It is not befitting for him to see Buddhaghosa. The king, however, recognised his goodness and gave expression to his own opinion in these words, there are indeed many priests in the Island of Ceylon, but never before has one been seen like this. He goes to heaven who honours and reverences one like him replete, in virtue, quick-witted and highly observant of duty."

After this the Elder went to pay homage to the Senigberāja, the Senior Elder of Ceylon. One day while the Senior Elder was teaching Bhikkhus he came upon a difficult
point of Abhidhamma that he could not explain. The Elder Buddhaghosa knew its meaning and wrote it on a board after the Senior Elder had left. Next day it was discovered and then the Senior Elder suggested that he should teach the order of Bhikkhus. The reply was: 'I have come to translate the Buddha's Dispensation into Magadhian.' The Senior Elder told him, 'if so, then construe the three Pitakas upon the text beginning "when a wise man, established well in virtue..."' He began the work that day, the stars being favourable, and wrote very quickly. When finished, he put it aside and went to sleep. Meanwhile Sakka Ruler of Gods abstracted the book. The Elder awoke, and found it missing. He wrote another copy very fast by lamp-light; then he put it aside and slept. Sakka abstracted that too. The Elder awoke, and not seeing his book, he wrote a third copy very fast by lamp-light and wrapped it in his robe. Then he slept again. While he was asleep Sakka put the other two books beside him, and when he awoke he found all three copies. He took them to the Senior Elder and told him what had happened. When they were read over there was no difference even in a single letter. Thereupon the Senior Elder gave permission for the translating of the Buddha's Dispensation. From then on the Elder was known to the people of Ceylon by the name of Buddhaghosa.
He was given an apartment in the Brazen Palace, of whose seven floors he occupied the lowest. He observed the Ascetic Practices and was expert in all the Scriptures. It was during his stay there that he translated the Buddha's Dispensation. When on his alms round he saw fallen palm leaves, he would pick them up; this was a duty undertaken by him. One day a man who had climbed a palm three saw him, he left some palm leaves on the ground, watched him pick them up, and then followed him. Afterwards he brought him a gift of food. The Elder concluded his writing of the Dispensation in three months. When the rainy season was over and he had completed the *Pavārana* Ceremony, he consigned the books to the Senior Elder, the *Saṅgharāja*. The *Saṅgharāja* apprised him and said, that even as a blind man sees not level and unlevel places, so we see not the words of Buddha. The religion of Buddha is difficult of acquirement. We discern it easily now by virtue of your translation. Then the *Saṅgharāja* had the books written by the Elder Mahinda piled up and burnt near the great Shrine, the pile was as high as seven elephants. Now that this work was done, and wanting to see his parents, he took leave of the Ceylonese priests before going back to India. Before he left however, his knowledge of Sanskrit was queried by Bhikkhus; but he silenced, this by delivering a sermon in that language in the Great Shrine. Then he departed.
On his return he went to his Preceptor and cleared himself of his penance. His parents too forgave him his offences; and when they died they were reborn in the Tusita Heaven. He himself, knowing that he would not live much longer, paid homage to his Preceptor and went to the Great Enlightenment Tree. Foreseeing his approaching death, he considered thus: 'There are three kinds of death: death as cutting off, momentary death, and conventional death. Death as cutting off belongs to those whose cankers are exhausted (and are Ārahants). Momentary death is that of each consciousness of the Cognitive Series beginning with life-continuum consciousness, which arise each immediately on the cessation of the one preceding. Conventional death is that of all (so called) living beings. Mine will be conventional death.' After his death he was reborn in the Tusita Heaven in a Golden Mansion seven leagues broad surrounded with divine nymphs. When the Bodhisatta Metteyya comes to this human world, he will be his disciple. After his cremation his relics were deposited near the Enlightenment Tree and shrines erected over them."

According to Burmeses tradition, Buddhaghosa was born in northern India in the 5th century A.D. Not far from the great-Bo-tree at Gayā was a village named Ghosa or Ghosagama, because it was inhabited by a large number of
A king ruled at that time and had a brahmin chaplain named Kesī. Kesī's wife was named Kesini. Buddha-gosa was their son. His name was Ghosa. At the time it was difficult to understand the teachings of the Buddha as they were written in Simhalese. It is said that when Ghosa was seven years old he acquired mastery over three Vedas. Kesī used to give instruction in Vedas. One day he went to the king with his son, while instructing the king, he came across a passage in which some knotty points were involved. He could not make out the meaning and returned home with king's permission. Ghosa helped him in finding the meaning to them and Kesī was greatly pleased.

Ghosa requested a great Thera (elder) to recite three Vedas. He was charmed by his recitation and wanted to know his cult. The Māhāthera then recited the contents of the Abhidhamma, with special reference to Kusaladhamma, Akusaladhamma and Vāyākatadhamma. He also explained some difficult problems of Buddhist Philosophy. While listening to the expositions of the Buddha's teachings, Ghosa was greatly pleased and informed his parents of his intention to renounce the world. He said, "I shall take ordination from the Mahāthera, learn the cult of Buddha and then I shall come back home having disrobed." Ghosa was ordained and was given the Tavakammatthana. He was mediated there on
and became established on the three refuges. Later, he practised the ten precepts having acquired a firm faith in the teachings of the Lord. According to the Saddhamma-Sangaha, it was Revate who gave him ordination, after he had embraced Buddhism Ghosa had wandered through Jambudipa and defeated everybody by answering questions put to him. He then came to a monstery which was an abode, of many monks, of these the Thera Revata was the foremost. Ghosa was one day chanting the mantras and the Thera listened to his recitation and said, "who is this braying like an ass?" Ghosa replied "Oh monk, do you know the meaning involved in the braying of an ass?" Then Thera said 'Yes, I know.' He was there upon asked knotty questions concerning the three Vedas, the Itihāsas etc. The Thera answered them correctly. The Thera put a question to Ghosa from the Cittayamaka in the book of the Yākṣih. Ghosa was unable to answer it and asked for ordination. The Thera ordained him and accepted him as a monk. Once a thought arose in the mind of Ghosa about the superiority of his knowledge and compared with that of his preceptor. The preceptor read his thoughts and said to him, "If you think like that, it is unworthy of you." Ghosa begged his pardon. The preceptor replied, "I will pardon you if you go to Ceylon and render the teachings of the Lord into Māgadhi language from the language of Ceylon."
Ghosa agreed to go to Ceylon after he removed the false belief of his father. He went to his father who enquired whether he would be a house-holder now. He remained silent trying to find means to make his father give up his false belief. He was successful in that and his father gave up his false beliefs and became a follower of the Buddha.

After having established his father in the function on the first stage of sanctification (Satapatti-phala) Ghosa returned to his preceptor. As soon as he received permission from his preceptor, he sailed for Ceylon. On his way he met Buddhadatta (q.v.) who was then returning to Jambudīpā from Lanka. On his way to Ceylon, before he met Buddhadatta, Ghosa, reached Nāgāpattana. Having reached Lanka he met the Sangharāja Mahāthera, saluted him and set on one side just behind the monks who were learning Abhidhamma and Vinaya. One day the chief of the congregation could not make clear the meaning of a knotty point. Ghosa knew all about it and wrote out on a blackboard its meaning. The Sangharāja was deeply impressed and after making inquiries asked him to teach the three Pitakas to the monks. Ghosa refused and told him the purpose of his coming to the Island. The Sangharāja thereupon asked him to write an exposition on the significance of a stanza uttered by the Buddha with reference to the three Pitaka. Ghosa agreed and it is said
that he saying "All right" completed the Visuddhimagga in a single afternoon. After writing it he fell asleep. Sakka, the chief of the gods, stole it. Ghosa wrote it out again by lamp-light. It was stolen by Sakka for the second time. Ghosa not finding it wrote it a third time and fell asleep, having tied the manuscript to the garment he wore. Sakka then left the two books, stolen by him, on his head. Ghosa was delighted to see his books and showed all the three copies to the chief of the congregation of monks. The three books were then recited. It was found that all three were exact copies of each other in every detail. The chief was very much pleased and gave him permission to render the teaching of the Buddha from Simbalese into Māgadhi. He spoke highly of the merits of Ghosa and from that time he became famous as Buddhaghosa among the inhabitants of Ceylon.

While in Ceylon Buddhaghosa lived in the lower floor of a seven-storyed building where he was engaged daily in translating the teachings of the Buddha. According to Spence Hardy, Buddhaghosa dwelt in the secluded Cetiya-Vihara, occupied with the work of translating, according to the grammatical rules of Māgadhi, which is the root of all languages (mālābhāsa), the whole of the Simbalese Attakathās into Pāli. While he was in Ceylon he went out for alms every morning and collected fallen palm leaves for the
purpose of writing on them. This was noticed by a toddy-seller who actually saw him engaged in writing on them. One day the toddy-seller took a potful of food and presented to Buddhaghosa who asked him to go upstairs and present it to a superior Thera on the upper flat, who said, "Buddhaghosa is worthier than we are, daily he translates the teachings of the Buddha into Magadhi. Give the food to him. The toddy-seller did so and met the Thera on the upper flat. This was done, Buddhaghosa's task of translating was finished in three months. The chief of the congregation praised him such and set fire to all the work written by Mahinda in Sinhalese. Buddhaghosa asked the congregation the permission to go back home and see his parents. When he was about to go back home the Sinhalese's monks spoke ill of him saying that he did not know Sanskrit. In the midst of the congregation he ascended the pulpit to display his knowledge of Sanskrit. Since then the monks has no doubt as to his knowledge of Sanskrit.

One day two maid-servants of two brahmis fell out with each other. Buddhaghosa was the only person who saw them quarrelling. The matter was referred to the tribunal and the king decided the case, relying on the written evidence of Buddhaghosa. The king praised him remarking that he was a man of quick wisdom. On his return from Ceylon Buddhaghosa
went to his preceptor in Jambudīpa and informed him that he had written the *Pariyatti*. He then went to his parents who gave him excellent food.

Some scholars believed that Buddhabhosa after completing his work in Ceylon went to Burma to propagate Buddhism. The Burmese ascribe the new era in their religion to the time when the great exegete reached their country from Ceylon. It is believed that Kaccāyana's Pāli grammar was brought from Ceylon and translated into Burmese by Buddhabhosa. He is also credited with writing a commentary on it. It is not mentioned either by the Pāli grammarian Mogallāna (A.D. 1153-1186) or by the Prakṛt grammarian Hemchandra and others. It is also said that the Burmese code of Manu is introduced into Burma by Buddhabhosa but we do not find any reference in the code itself.

According to Hackmann, "There is ground for doubting the statement that this man brought Buddhism to Burma. The chronicles of Ceylon to which we owe the information about Buddhabhosa, and which must have been well-informed on the subject, give no account of his journey to further India. Indeed one of the most important inscriptions in Burma, which was erected at the end of the fifth century A.D., at the instance of a king of Pegu, who was among the most devoted adherents of Buddhism and which throws a backward
glance over the history of Buddhism in Burma, makes no mention whatsoever of Buddhaghosa. The Burmese tradition which refers to him does so on account of his translations and writings having become fundamental in the country, probably also because his intellectual influence may have inaugurated a new epoch in Burmese Buddhism.

Although the chronicles of Ceylon and the inscriptions found in Burma in fifth century are silent about Buddhaghosa's visit, his works *Atthasāliṇī* and *Visuddhimagga* were well known and were held in high esteem by the Burmese. According to Law, "Even now Buddhaghosa is so much adored and worshipped by the Burmans that he appears actually to have lived amongst them."  

The critical examination of *Buddhaghosuppatti* reveals that the author had little authentic knowledge, at his command and he had collected only the legends that were known about Buddhaghosa. These legends are of little value, and Gray rightly commented that it reads like an "Arthurian Romance." The interview that took place between Buddhadasa and Buddhaghosa as recorded in *Buddhaghosuppatti* runs as follows: "I went before you to Ceylon to compile Buddha's words, I am old, have not long to live and shall not, therefore, be able to accomplish my purpose. You carry out the work satisfactorily." 15 But according to *Vinayavinicchaya*, 16 we find that
Buddhadatta requested Buddhaghosa to send him the commentaries written by him and he would summarise them. Buddhaghosa accordingly sent his commentaries to Buddhadatta and he summarised Abhidhammavataya on Abhidhamma and Vinayavinicchaya on Vinaya. We notice that in Mahavamsa that Buddhaghosa was sent to Ceylon to translate the Sinhalese commentaries. This statement is a contradiction to Buddhagosuppatti. But Vinayavinicchaya is more authentic than Buddhagosuppatti.

It is recorded in the sixth chapter of Buddhagosuppatti, that Buddhaghosa rendered the Buddhist scriptures into Magadhi. In the seventh chapter it is stated that after completing his work in three months the works of Mahinda were piled up and burnt in a holy spot near the Bodhi Tree which are of the height of seven middle sized elephants. As pointed out earlier Buddhaghosa translated only the Sinhalese commentaries but not the Buddhist texts. The statements of Gandhavamsa, Mahavamsa and Sasanavamsa states that Buddhaghosa was sent to Ceylon by his teacher Thera Revata to translate the Sinhalese commentaries into Magadhi since they were not available in Jambudivepa and only the canonical texts were available. The Sinhalese commentaries were authentic interpretations of the canonical texts and were taken by Mahinda to Ceylon and were carefully preserved.
The birth, early life and conversion of Buddhaghosa as given in Buddhagosupatti closely resembles with those of Mahinda, Moggaliputta Tissa and Nāgasena. Mahinda went to Ceylon with Buddhist scripture and propagated Buddhism in the Island. He translated the commentaries into Sinhalese and commended much respect in the Island. Likewise Buddhaghosa also won great fame and his retranslation of the commentaries from Sinhalese into Māgadhi is highly commended by the people of Ceylon.

The story of Moggaliputta Tissa's conversion into Buddhism closely resembles with the story of Buddhaghosa's conversion. It is as follows, "Once Tissa was out while a Thera paid his daily visit to his father's house. The men in the house not finding any other seat, offered him the seat of Tissa. Tissa came back and saw the Thera sitting on his own seat, offered him the seat of Tissa. Tissa came back and saw the Thera sitting on his own seat. He became angry and spoke to him in an unfriendly way. Thereupon the Thera asked him, young man, dost thou know the Mantra? Tissa asked the Thera the same question. The Thera replied, "Yes, I know." Then Tissa asked the Thera to explain some knotty points in the Vedas. The Thera expounded them and in the end asked Tissa a question from the Cittayamaka. Tissa was
bewildered and asked the Thera, 'What mantra is that?' On the Thera saying, that it was Buddha-mantra. Tissa said, 'Impart it to me.' The Thera said, 'I impart it only to one who wears our role.' Thereupon Tissa was converted to Buddhism. Buddaghosa's conversion to Buddhism is also same.

There is much resemblance in the life of Nāgasena and Buddaghosa as follows. Nāgasena was also a Deva living in a happy world before his birth and came to earth only at the request of the Arahats to uphold the teachings of Buddha. Buddaghosa was also a Deva and came to earth at the request of the Arahats to translate the scriptures from Sinhalese into Pali. Nāgasena and Buddaghosa showed great signs of intelligence in their boyhood and mastered the Vedas in a short period. Both were converted to Buddhism by Thera's who used to visit their houses at very early ages. Nāgasena thought one day after his ordination that his teacher was a fool. His teacher being an Arahant came to know what was passing in his mind and reprimanded him for entertaining such thoughts. Nāgasena asked his teacher to apologise him. But his teacher said to him, "I will not forget you until you go and defeat the king Milinda who troubles the monks by asking questions from the heretic's point of view." We get the same incident in Buddaghosuppatti.
regarding Buddhaghosa's voyage to Ceylon and rendering the scriptures into Pāli. The incidents in the lives of both these celebrities are very much similar. B.C. Law commenting on the possible sources of Buddhist legends opines that "The stories in the *Milinda Pañha*, the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Buddhaghosupattī*, are so alike that one cannot resist the temptation of saying that the author of the *Buddhaghosupattī*, who must have been familiar with both the *Milinda Pañha* and the *Mahāvamsa*, borrowed the incidents from these works and grafted them on to his own."¹⁹

The *Mahāvamsa*'s chapters regarding the life of Buddhaghosa were written by Dhammakitti in the thirteenth century. It means that several centuries had passed from Buddhaghosa's time. He must have definite tradition to guide him and might have availed himself the tradition that was preserved at the Great Minister Hall in Anuradhapura for written documents. The following points of Dhammakitti are very important from the point of reconstructing the personal history of Buddhaghosa. They are as follows: (1) the contemporaneity of Buddhaghosa's visit to Ceylon and stay there during the reign of king Mahānāma who became the king of the Island in the fifth century, (2) His birth and early education in a Brahmin family of Bodhagaya, (3) His proficiency in the Vedic and Brahmanical sciences and arts, particu-
lerly in the system of Patanjali, (4) His subsequent wandering in India as a disputant, (5) His defeat in a philosophical controversy at the hands of the Buddhist Thera called Revata who was evidently the head of a Buddhist monastery somewhere in India, (6) The writing of a treatise by the name नवद्वादय and a commentary on the धर्मसंगीति called अध्यायिंक, (7) His stay at the Mahāvihāra of अनुरःद्वापुरा when the Ven. Sanghāpāla was its head, (8) His intimate acquaintance with the three Pitakas, (9) The writing of the विसुध्दिहिमग्गा as a monumental work of exposition by way of interpreting two verses from श्रमयुत्त निकाया and (10) The translation made by him of all the Pitaka commentaries from the Sinhalese into मागाद्धि meaning Pāli.

The Age of Buddhaghaosa

The question which arises at the very outset is concerned with the age in which Buddhaghaosa had flourished. We have seen in महावंसाच्या supplement (Cūlavāṁsa) written by धम्मकित्ति in the thirteen century A.D. refers to Buddhaghaosa’s career in Ceylon to the reign of महानाम (A.D. 412 to 434). This period of Buddhaghaosa is also confirmed by the Burma records and other chronicles. Buddhaghaosa in his विसुध्दिहिमग्गा refers to Ven. श्रमग्गापला as the saint Thera who was the then head of the Mahāvihāra at अनुरःद्वापुरा and with his permission he wrote his first work विसुध्दिहिमग्गा in
Regarding Sanghabala, Buddhaddatta also refers to him in his Vinaya manual called "Uttara Vinicchaya." If we closely examine into the references to Sanghabala we can notice that in the case of Buddhaghosa the reference attaches a greater amount of personal dignity to Sanghabala who is acknowledged as the head of the Mahāvihāra and at his behest he undertook to produce his masterly treatises. In the case of Buddhaddatta, the reference is to an equal in rank who courteously and lovingly asked him to write the Vinaya manual. This is the only common reference we can find from their works to confirm that Buddhaddatta and Buddhaghosa are contemporaries and Buddhaddatta would have to be regarded as the elder contemporary. They are represented certainly as contemporaries in later Buddhist historical traditions.

In the Colophons of his works Buddhaddatta is called as a native of Uragapura (Uraiur) near Trichirapalli. He himself speaks of Cola kingdom and associates his literary activity with the reign of the Acutavikκanta of the Kalabura family. He refers to a grand monastery built by Venbadēśa (Visnudēśa) or Kambadēśa (Krṣṇadēśa) in a city called Bhūtemangalam on the bank of the river Kāverī as his residence. This is identified with a village by that name near Uraiur on the Koradeschery-Manargudi road. T.V. Mahalingam on the contrary identifies with Bhutankudi near Papanasam which is also near Uraiur. The king Acyuta Acyutavikṛnta
or Acyutavikrama belonged to the Kalabhra who had vanquished the Cera, Cola and Pandyya kings. The Kalabhra had ruled the Cola country during Pallava king Simhavishnu defeated the Kalibhra chiefs in the last quarter of the sixth century. It is certain that Buddhadatta’s contemporary king Acyuta Acyutavikranta of Kalabhra dynasty reigned in the Kaveri valley prior to the establishment of the Pallava rule there by Simhavishnu towards the close of the sixth century. The Skandapurana preserves the tradition of an unnamed ancient prosperous king of Cola dynasty during whose reign flourished a piousVaishnava saint called Visnudasa who successfully stood against the performance of the costly Brahmanical sacrifices involving the slaughter of animals. But unfortunately Buddaghosa does not mention any contemporary king of India. In the epilogue of Samantapasadika, a commentary on Vinaya, Buddaghosa states that he began to write this work in the 20th year and completed it at the commencement of the 21st year of the reign of a contemporary king of Ceylon Srinivasa. Bhikkhu Nyanamoli had identified Srinivasa with the king Mahanama.

Buddaghosa’s literary career may be confined to the reign of king Mahanama i.e., early part of the 5th century A.D. According to Fa-Hien who is generally regarded as the earliest Chinese pilgrim who visited India and Ceylon during
the reign of Chandragupta-II, the son and successor of Samudragupta, whose contemporary, king of Ceylon was King Kitti-Siri-Meghavanna. It was during the reign of Meghavanna that the famous Tooth relic of the Buddha is said to have been taken from Dantapura in Kalinga to Ceylon where it is being honoured till the present time. While in Ceylon Fa-Hien witnessed a grand procession organised at Abhayagiri Vihāra in honour of the Tooth relic led by the reigning king every year, and also witnessed the eloquent Buddhist preacher from India delivering a discourse exhorting his audience to do meritorious deeds and based it upon the wonderings of the Buddha's bowl until the advent of the Future Buddha Maitreya. The powerful preacher from India is not Buddhagbosa. Buddhagbosa himself records in his Visuddhimagga about the tradition of an earlier Indian visitor who was a trader from Pātaliputra and was ordained as a monk in Ceylon where after finishing the study of the two Vinaya mātikās (Paṭimokkhas) he took to his life of meditation, making it a point not to stay at a monastery for more than four months. So the powerful Indian preacher at the time of King Meghavanna who is a contemporary to Samudragupta is not Buddhagbosa and he visited Ceylon earlier than Buddhagbosa.

None of the kings of India and Ceylon who are incidentally mentioned in the Visuddhimagga and other works of
Buddhaghosa can be referred to a period later than the third century A.D. and according Mrs. Rhys Davids, the eighteen Buddhist sects and many later sects were mentioned by Buddhaghosa as they were all existing in his time. The later sects comprise the Andhekas with the Pabbaseliyas and so on. Their main doctrine is aptly described as Mahāsunnatā-vēde meaning the doctrine of the great void.

These sects find mention in the Indian inscriptions which are all pre-Gupta in date. They are conspicuous by their absence in the Gupta and other later inscriptions.

It is certain that the Samentapāsādika, a commentary on Vinaya was written prior to A.D. 489 which is the date of its Chinese translation.

The Dīpavamsa which is the earlier of the two Pali Chronicles of Ceylon is quoted by name in its general introductions to the Kathāvatthu Atthakathā and the Samentapāsādika. An earlier Atthakathā Mahāvamsa is presupposed by them instead of Mahānāma’s Mahāvamsa. Both the chronicles close their account with the reign of king Mahāsena, the father and predecessor of king Kitti-Siri-Meghavanna (A.D. 334-62), the contemporary of Samudragupta.

The Kathāvatthu Atthakathā and the Samentapāsādika in their general introduction quote the names of two Pāli
Chronicles of Ceylon Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa. Dipavamsa is an earlier one than Mahavamsa and also the Mahavamsa quoted by them is an earlier Atta kathā other than the Mahānāma's Mahāvamsa. The two chronicles close their accounts with the reign of king Mahāsena, the father and predecessor of king Kittī-Siri-Meghavanna (A.D. 334-62) the contemporary of Samudragupta. Dipavamsa closed its account finally before the reign of Dhātusena (A.D.460-78) who made endowments for its wide popularity. The age of Buddhagosa under these circumstances can be fixed not later than the reign of king Mahānāma who is considered as the contemporary of Kumāra Gupta of the Imperial Gupta Dynasty. An interesting piece of evidence which throws welcome light on the age of Buddhagosa is an epigraph from Kanheri. This inscription occurs under a standing Buddha in the porch of the great temple at Kanheri. This inscription is in Sanskrit language and is translated by George Buhler. He gave the date of this inscription to 4th and 5th century A.D. The contents of the inscription as translated by Buhler is as follows, "This image of Bhagavat (Buddha) is the meritorious gift of the ascetic Buddhagbosa, the guardian of the great Gandhakāti (this temple-cave) and pupil of the reverenced Dharmavatma,
a teacher of the three Pitakas, who follows the religion of divine Buddha. Dr. Stevenson has assumed the identity of the Buddhaghosa of this inscription with the great Pāli scholar. Dr. Stevenson's identification raises doubts about the Pāli scholar Buddhaghosa to this Buddhaghosa. It must be observed that Dr. Stevenson had mere similarity of the name in support of his assumption.

Buddhaghosa's age can be fixed to the 5th century A.D. i.e., the reign of king Mahānāma of Ceylon.

**Nativity**

Though Buddhaghosa was a great historical personage and who was responsible for the number of commentaries on the Tripiṭakas, still the place of his birth is a problematical one. Buddhaghosa left no records pertaining to himself except his inner life and experience through his works like many Indian celebrities. Regarding his early life and parentage, we get references made by him in his own commentaries and the meagre accounts given in Dhammakitti's Mahāvamsa and Buddhaghosuppatti and nothing more authentic information to reconstruct his life history.

The Mahāvamsa, while recording the events of the reign of Mahānāma, who ruled in Ceylon in the early years of the 5th century records that Buddhaghosa was a Brahman
youth, born in the neighbourhood of the terrace of the great Bo-tree, being well founded in all the branches of 'Sastras' and the three 'Vedas' soon attained great fame as an indefatigable schematic disputant. A certain Mahāthera Revata finding in him the qualities necessary for an expounder of the words of the Buddha, initiated him into Buddhism and entrusted him with the work of translating the Sinhalese version of Atthakathās into Māgadhi for the welfare of the whole world and for this mission, Buddhagbośa went to Ceylon. Thus the details regarding his place of birth in Mahāvamsa is quite meagre and vague.

The Burmese tradition and Buddhagosuppatti also strengthens the Mahāvamsa's version. According to Bishop Bigandet, A Religious of Thaton, named Buddhagbośa made a voyage to Ceylon in the year of Religion 943 (400 A.C.). The object of his voyage was to procure a copy of the scriptures. He made use of the Burmese or rather Talaing characters in transcribing the manuscripts. B.C. Law also accepts the Mahāvamsa's tradition and considers Buddhagbośa as a native of Māgadha. In the preface to Visuddhimagga of the Harvard series, D.D. Kosambi had discussed about this point. While considering the merits of the Mahāvamsa's accounts and the Burmese tradition, Kosambi's opines: "from the narrative of Mahāvamsa one fact remains - that Buddhagbośa came from India
to Ceylon in the reign of Mahanama and is confirmed by Burmese authorities too but they believe that he being a Talaing by birth went from Thanton to Ceylon. Kosambi was of the belief that he was a Telanga from Telugu country of South India and not a Burmese Talaing, that Talaing was only a corruption of the original name, that Buddhaghosa was a Telugu by birth and came from Telugu country.

We can examine the internal evidences in his works. Firstly, we can confirm that he went to Ceylon from Kanchipuram the capital of Chola country in South India. Next if we see the story of the merchant Visākhā's voyage to Ceylon as narrated in Sumhaṅga-lā vilāsini that Buddhaghosa had no direct knowledge of Pātaliputra. According to him that Visākhā was a rich merchant in Pātaliputra. He wanted to adhere to Buddhism and came to know that Tamraparni would be an ideal one since it was adorned with the rows of religious shrines, ample space for sitting and lying, where the climate and residences, the people and the doctrines were cogenial, in short, it was easy to obtain everything there. He gave his wealth to his wife and sons and came to a seaport to reach Ceylon. Buddhaghosa did not clearly mention the sea-port from where Visākhā went to Ceylon. Buddhaghosa's description of Pātaliputra as a town situated on the seacoast is a clear example that he had no direct knowledge.
about Pātaliputra. His legendary description of Bo-tree (Asvattha) is unexpected from a person born in the vicinity of the Bo-tree i.e., Māgadha. Buddhaghosa mentioned the rivers Bāhuka, Adhikakkē, Bāhumati and Sarasvatī but could not locate them, and mentioned seven sacred rivers in Vatthupamasutta but the information about them is very meagre.

He described Prayāga as a bathing ghat of the Ganges but in fact it was the confluence of the Ganga and Yamunā and Gaya as a bathing place erected by Mandalavāpi (Mandalavāpi Samthāna Titthamēva). The word Phālgu (Phaggu) is known as the name of the river of Gaya in Indian literature but Buddhaghosa describes it as the asterism of Phālguna (Phoggunanakkhattameva) and explains further the significance of the name of Phaggu lay in fact that the people came there for bathing preferably under the constellation of Uttaraphālguṇi in the month of Phālguna and this special emphasis on Gaya is for the reason that it was the best of the tīrthas of the time (Ioka Gaya Sammattērā). He did not explain the importance of the river in Gaya instead of it he described it as a tank (Gaya-Pokkherani). This description is unexpected from a person who is inhabitant of Gaya. All these internal evidences clearly establish that Buddhaghosa does not belong to North India and particularly to that portion of North India which is known to the Buddhists as the Middle country (Majjhmadśa).
If we further examine his works, like *Sumamgalasāvīlasini* and others, we can conclude that Buddhaghosa is a Telugu person from Telugu country in South India. Buddhaghosa had a fair geographical knowledge about the Andhra country and is evident from his description of Daksinapatha and his elaborate description of the island in the middle of Godavari river in the *Suttanipata* commentary. This is possible to a person who only has an eye-witness familiar with the land. He mentions Assaka and Alaka (same as Malaka) as Andhaka or territory in *Sumamgalasāvīlasini*. Further he describes the river Godavari as dividing line between Assaka and Alaka, i.e., Asmaka and Mūlaka. Asmaka is identified with the Godavari Valley between the Nirmal range and the Balaghat range in the north and south respectively. It corresponds to the modern Nizamabad district of A.P. and Nanded district of Maharashtra. Alaka or Mūlaka occupies the land between Doulatabad and the river Godavari. It corresponds to the modern Aurangabad. All his contemporaries and associates mentioned by him are all South India and the Viśeras and places where he lived before going to Ceylon are in South India.

Buddhaghosa further describes Andhakas (men of Adara) and Damilas (Dravidians as Mleccha, Non-Aryan people). He distinguishes Māgadhī (Pāli) as an Aryan language and differentiate from the non-Aryan languages such as Cēda (language of
Oriya), Kirāta, Andbaka (language spoken by Andbakas), Yavana (literally the language spoken by foreigners living in India). Damila (language spoken by Dravidians or Tamils). He characterizes the Damila, Kirāta and Yavana dialects as language abounding in consonants in Aṅguttara Atthakathā. Buddhagosa describes an interesting Telugu custom of bleaching human bones in सुम्प्लेंगलाविलेसिनī.

Buddhagosa further refers to Dheṇyakataka on the bank of river Krishna and Dentapura. The former is the renewed Amaravati - Dheṇyakataka in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh and the later is Dantavallar near Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh. His stay at Mayūrasuttapattana and Kāṇcī, the description of Teṇraparnī all goes to prove that he was a native of Dakshināpatha.

Buddhagosa in his colophon to his Visuddhimagga says, us that he was a native (Yattabena) of Morandakhetaka and his colophon for Majhina Nikēva Atthakathā informs us that he lived for some time in Kāṇchipurā i.e., modern Kāṇcī and for some time in Mayūrasuttapattana i.e., modern Mylapore in Madras. This Morandakhetaka village is identified as Kotanamalipuri and Gundlapalli in the Palnad taluk of the Guntur District in Andhra Pradesh. The contemporary Telugu name for Morandakhetaka is equivalent to these two names i.e., "Nemali" is the Telugu
equivalent for Pāli "Mora" and in Sanskrit it is "Mayūra" and means a peacock and Gunda or Gundlu in Telugu is equivalent for 'Andu' in Pāli means Egg. These two villages are fully of numerous Buddhist remains and now deserted. They are 51 miles from Nagerjunakonda and 53 miles from Amaravati, the two powerful and great Buddhist centres in Andhra. Buddhabhosa might have influenced by these two mighty centres of Buddhist thought. However in Buddhabhosa's time Andhra country witnessed the rise of Brahmanical religion for the Pallavas, Anandagotra, Visnukrishna patronised Brahmanical religion. The above evidences point out that Buddhabhosa was a native of Andhra and in his wanderings he became a convert to Buddhist creed. Mahādeva went to Ceylon from Palnadu with thousand monks following him at the invitation of king Devanampiya Tissa of Ceylon for the inauguration of a stūpa in Anuradhapura long before Buddhabhosa.

Caste

According to Mahāvamsa that Buddhabhosa was born in Brahmin family and was brought up in Brahmanical tradition. Other works also record the same. Kosambi in his introduction to Visuddhimagga expressed that Buddhabhosa could not have been a Brahmin. He says that, from Vedic times, every Brahmin has been expected to know the famous Purusārthas.
Buddhaghosa as Kosambi observes with this and while commenting on Bandhupadapace (children of Brahman’s feet) he describes the opinion of Brahmins as that Brahmins came out of Brahma’s mouth, Kshatriya’s from his breast, Vaishya’s from his navel, Shudras from his legs and Shramans from his soles. Kosambi further observes that Buddhaghosa makes fun of the Brahmins. Although Kosambi says that the above are inconclusive to say that Buddhaghosa was not a Brahmin, he nevertheless favours that Buddhaghosa belongs to Gahapati class identifying with farmer community. 56

The works of Buddhaghosa do not give any definite clue to test the Mahavamsa’s claim that Buddhaghosa was born in a brahmin family. We are already told that Buddhaghosa is translating and editing the material placed before him and there is no chance for him to display his knowledge, experience and opinion. The description of Purusaśukta of Buddhaghosa can be explained fully from Buddhist point. The authorities of the Great Monastery are firm to oppose unorthodoxy and might have not given him a free hand to correct their traditions to accord with Brahmanical texts or with other alien sources through he wished to do so. We cannot forget the fact that there are many non-Buddhist literature like “vowel augmentation of syllable” 57 and ‘Indriy-attha’ 58 (rulership) had a place in his works but
they are already said to be in the material supplied to him by the elders for editing. If we observe these facts that it is certain that he ignored the Mahāyāna teachings and names as well as much Brahmanical philosophy though he might have known about them. Non-mention of correct interpretations and of encyclopaedic learning cannot be considered as his ignorance on these subjects. We are sure that his work was to retranslate the works into Pāli and not his personal knowledge or experience. Miss I.B. Horner renders the Vinaya definition of Gaṇapati as "He who lives in a house" ( añcet aśāram ajjhāvasati). The term ajjhāvasati however has the distinctness of ownership. Hence the definition of Gaṇapati given in the Vinaya refers not so much to "one who lives in a house" but to one who has the full ownership rights of the household. The term Gaṇapati is thus applied to a household head. The term Gaṇapati seems never to have been applied to the Kṣatriyas and the Brāhmaṇas but they were always referred to by this term.

In the Deccan the farmers are referred to as Halikas. In the Sātavāhana and Ikshukiy epigraphy, the title Gaṇapati is given to merchants, cultivators, Brāhmaṇas. Hence the term Gaṇapati is generally applied to a household head of standing.

Hence, on the above showing, we need not doubt the traditions account which uniformly records that Buddhaghosa
was a brahmin by birth.

Next in 5th century, the people of farmer community cannot have the chance to get the knowledge of Vedas and other sacred literature. It is evident that Buddhaghosa had a fair knowledge of Vedas and Brahminical scriptures before his conversion to Buddhism. The Talaing chronicles of Burma also confirm that he was a Brahmin who went from Thaton (Burma) to Ceylon to translate the Buddha-word into Talaing and bring it back.

Buddhaghosa's career in South India and Ceylon

It is clear that before going to Ceylon he stayed in many places like Kāñčipurā, Mayūrasutta-pattana and Nāgar- pattana from his personal references in the Nīgamanas to his commentaries. Buddhaghosa's works contain his reminiscences of the Andhakas (Andras) and Damilas (Drāvidas) who were known to him as Milakkhas (Mlecchas) or non-Aryan people. Buddhaghosa acquired sufficient proficiency in the three pītakas after his conversion to Buddhism and wrote a treatise called Nānodaya (The awakening of knowledge) before going to Ceylon.

He went to Ceylon after finishing Nānodaya and his career in South India. Ceylon was known to him as the Island of Śīhala (Simhala) or Tambapanni and the language
Buddaghosa's knowledge and his intellectual capacity was tested before he was allowed to translate the Sinhalese commentaries into Magadhi. Buddaghosa produced his monumental work Visuddhimagga to prove his erudite knowledge and intellectual capacity. The internal evidences of his works prove that he wrote the works after studying the Sinhalese commentaries and acquainting himself with the current views of the teachers, particularly those attached to Mahāvihāra and the library of the Mahāvihāra was known as Ganthakāra. Immediately after Visuddhimagga, he wrote commentaries on the four Nikāyas, followed by his commentaries on the seven Abhidhamma books.

He wrote the Visuddhimagga at the behest of Saṅchārapāla and among the four Nikāyas, the Summaṅgala Vilāsinī was written at the request of Dathanēka of the Summaṅgala Vihāra, the Pāpaṅcasuddhā at the request of Buddhāmitta of Mayurāsaṅguttapattana and the Saratthapakkāsini and Manorathacūrēni at the instance of Jotipāla of Kāṇḍhipura. The Abhidhamma commentaries were written at the request of a Bhikkhu or Yati, Buddaghosa who was identified as Culla-Buddaghosa. The literary career of Buddaghosa was ended with the writing of the Abhidhamma commentaries.
Buddhagosa's work are full of his personal reminiscences of Ceylon and are discussed in the fifth chapter of my present work.

Regarding the last days of Buddhagosa we have no authentic information. According to Mahāvamsa that after finishing his work in Ceylon, he returned to India to worship the great Bo-tree. The Buddhaghosupatti on the other hand records that Buddhagosa went to Sudhāmavati (Thantoon) in Burma where he was regarded as the second Buddha. He spent his last days in retirement from his literary activity worshiping the Bo-tree and passed away peacefully to reborn in the heaven of Tusita. It is also said that after his death, his body was cremated in a funeral pyre made up of sandalwood and the remains were deposited in the stūpa erected near the Bo-tree by the people living with him. Examining the available accounts on Buddhagosa we can conclude that the information regarding his last years of life after his return from Ceylon is highly scanty.
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