CHAPTER - II

PREDECESSORS AND SUCCESSORS OF BUDDHAGHOsa

The predecessors of Buddhaghośa were primarily concerned with the question of the origin and development of the Atthakathās or commentaries on the Tripiṭakas; their work was by and large remained in oral tradition. Buddhaghośa tells us in the prologues to the commentaries written by him that the Atthakathās which were rehearsed by the leading theravās of the past in the First Buddhist Council were rehearsed subsequently also in the later councils. Thera Mahinda took them to Ceylon and translated them into Sinhalese. These were banded down through the succession of teachers representing the line of Mahinda's pupils. Buddhaghośa based his commentaries on the Atthakathās that were brought by King Mahinda and on the commentarial tradition developed and cherished at Mahāvihāra of Anurādhapura. The succession of teachers from the days of Sāriputta, Upāli, Ānanda and Mahākassapa in India and from the time of Mahinda in Ceylon, were in one sense or another, the illustrious predecessors of Buddhaghośa. Buddhaghośa also mentions Porānakathārās, Bhānakas, Tēpataka Tērēs, and Atthakathacārīyas as his predecessors in Suśravatāla Vilāsini.1
Buddagbosa in his works like *Sumhaŋgala Vilāsinī*, and *Sanphantaṃpāṣedika*, mentions the Thera at whose request he has written the particular commentary. Hence they may be considered as his contemporaries. They are *Buddhasiri*, *Buddhamittra* of *Mayūra-Pattana*, *Jotipala* of the *Kāṇḍīpurā*, *Buddhadeva*, *Thera Sona* and *Thera Pathāna* of the *Sumāngala Parivena*.

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branches respectively. The works that were arranged and settled in the first council were taught by the Ācharyās to the Bhikshus orally. Buddaghosa in an Samantapāsādika gives a detailed account of the Vinaya and the Dhamma that were recited at the first council. In the third council which was held under Moggaliputtațissa, the compilation of the true doctrine was done. These written Atthakathās and the Tripitakes were carried to Ceylon and translated by Mahinda into Sinhalese. Buddaghosa drew materials for his commentaries from the Sinhalese Atthakathās of Mahinda. All of them become the predecessors of Buddaghosa.

Porānakattherās

Porānakattherās are those who learn the Dhamma from their teachers and maintain the views of their teachers. They do not entertain any doctrinal views of their own.² According to Gandhavamsa, the theras who took part in the proceedings of the first three Buddhist councils were the earliest contributors of the commentary literature and were known as the 'Porānakattherās' or Porānakarīya. Buddaghosa cites in the name of Porāna certain traditional sayings of legendary or doctrinal character. The Perivēra is the only saying which finds a place in the late canonical text.³ It is the one regarding the line of the Vinaya teachers traced
from Thera Mahinda and his four companions, Itthiya, Uttiya, Sambala, and Bhaddusāla who came to Ceylon and taught Vinaya, the five Nikāyas constituting the Suttapitaka and also the seven books of the Abhidhammapitaka. Parānattbakkathā theras were nameless theras or sages of the old and their sayings were preserved in Simhalese's commentaries by way of quotations. They throw very valuable light on many matters of diverse interest like historical, religious, social and fanciful legends. Buddhaghosa used all these things in his Atthakathās which were retranslated from Simhalese into Pāli.

Bhānakas

The function of the Bhānakas was to preserve and transmit the canonical texts by oral tradition. These texts were being handed down by this method from teacher to teacher (Acariya - parama - paraṣya) until they were committed to writing in Ceylon during the reign of Vattagāmani and in India during the reign of Kaniska. In the days when writing was not utilised for recording literature the service of the reciters of the texts was not only useful but indispensable. Buddhaghosa in the introduction of his Sumānake Vilāsini connects the origin of the different schools of the Bhānakas with the first Buddhist council. As soon as the Vinaya texts were recited by Upāli, Mahākassapa entrusted him with the task of preserving them by chanting among his adherents.
Similarly the task of chanting the Dīgha-Nikāya was entrusted to Ānanda and his adherents, that of chanting the Majjhima Nikāya to the adherents of the school of Sāriputta, that of chanting the Anguttara to the adherents of Anuruddha. The chanting of the Samyutta Nikāya was kept in his own custody. Several monk donors are represented as Bhānakas in the votive inscriptions on the outer railings of the stupas of Bherut and Sāñchi.

*Milinda Pañho* mentions six kinds of Bhānakas. They are the Dīgha-Bhānakas, the Majjhima Bhānakas, the Samyutta Bhānakas, the Anguttara Bhānakas, the Khuddaka Bhānakas and Jātaka Bhānakas. These Bhānakas originally belonged to different schools of reciters of the canonical texts, developed in Ceylon and also into different schools of interpretation and opinion.

The Bhānakas were mainly classified into three categories i.e., Dīgha-Bhānakas (Reciters of the Dīgha), Majjhima-Bhānakas (Reciters of Majjhima) and Samyutta-Bhānakas (Reciters of Samyutta). They explained higher knowledge and subjects of recollection. The explanations given by the Majjhima reciters differ from those of Dīgha and Samyutta reciters. According to *Sumhaṅgala Vilasini Majjhima* Bhānakas counted fifteen books as belonging to the Khuddaka Nikāya, while the Dīgha Bhānakas recognised just twelve books.
to the exclusion of the **Khuddapātha**, the **Buddhavamsa**, the **Cariyā-pitaka** and the **Apadāna**.¹⁰

Buddhaghosa in his **Visuddhimagga** also mentions the **bhāṇakas** as the reciters of the canonical texts who preserved them orally from the time of the Buddha till they were written. He further mentions **Abhayathera** of Ceylon as a **Dīgha-bhāṇaka**, **Revatha Thera** as a **Mahīma-bhāṇaka** and **Cūla-sivatthera** as a **Samyutta-bhāṇaka**.¹¹

**Atthakathācariyas**

They were a class of teachers, literally "the commentary teachers." Their views were held as authoritative in matters of interpretation of doctrinal points. **Atthakathācariyas** is a vague term. According to the agreed opinion of the scholars, Mrs. Rhy Davids said that "it refers to the Theras connected with the commentary tradition of Ceylon, the scholastic method of interpreting the **Buddhavacana** as well as the tenets of Buddhism. In other words, the tradition of this class of teacher is really the tradition of the earlier commentaries in Sinhalese which Buddhaghosa undertook to present in the Pāli works."¹²

Buddhaghosa in his **Atthagālimi** refers to the views of the **Atthakathācariyas**. According to them "An act done
with a needle is called a needle work, ... an act done by an individual is similarly called and individual work. The individual and the work done by the individual are mutually settled. A bodily act is called an act done by body. The body and the bodily act are mutually settled."\(^{13}\) Likewise the Rajjha\(\text{a}\) is so called because it is a constituent of enlightenment.\(^{14}\)

According to Cūlavamsa's account also Buddhaghoṣa was directed by Indian teachers to proceed to Ceylon since the authoritative Atthakathās were preserved there only.\(^{15}\) These Atthakathās were written by different Atthakathāchariyas and Buddhaghoṣa translated them into Pāli.

**Contemporaries**

**Buddhadatta:** He was a contemporary of Buddhaghoṣa and also elder to him. Buddhadatta was also the celebrity of the Mahāvihāra of the Anurādhapura. In the Colophons of his works Buddhadatta is called a resident of Uragapura. Dr. Bhandarkar had identified this with Tiruchinapalli.\(^{16}\) Uragapura is identified by Nilakantha Sastri as Uraiyyur, a suburb of Tiruchirapalli in Tamilnadu.\(^{17}\) He describes Kēveripattana and states that he composed Abhidhammāvatāra in the great monastery erected by Kanbāda (Kisnedāsa) at Kēveripattana on the banks of the river Kēverī. In the
closing stanzas of the *Vinayavinhaya*, Buddhadatta informs us that he composed the work for the sake of Budhhasiha in a monastery erected by Venbudissa in a city called Bhūtāmaṅgalaṃ on the banks of Keverī. This town is identified with a village by that name on the Korada Chery - Mannergudi Road. Buddhadatta further notes that the work was begun and completed when Acyutavikkaṇṭa of the Kalabarakula (Kalamba) was ruling the earth. Acyutavikkaṇṭa was the king of Kalabhrā line who ruled the Keverī valley after ousting the Colas.

He went to Ceylon prior to Budhagbosa to study the Tripitakas and wanted to translate them into Pāli. He could not finish his task due to old age and returned to India.

While returning to India Buddhadatta met Budhagbosa in the middle of the sea, when he was going to Ceylon to study the scriptures. Gray gives a detailed account of their discussion in Budhagbosauppatti. According to it, "Budhagbosa set out in a boat with some merchants on his journey to Ceylon. On the same day Buddhadatta set out from Ceylon for Jambudvīpa. On the third day of their being at sea their boats, through the supernatural power of the devas, came into conversation, and on Buddhadatta finding the object of Budhagbosa's voyage, he said, "I possess the Jīrālankeśa
as well as the Dhētuvaśa and the Buddhavaśa but not the Atthakathās and Tikās but if you render Buddha's words in Magadhi make a transcript also of the Atthakathās, Tripitakas and of the Tikās." Encouraging Buddhaghosa thus, he made over to him the iron stylus and medicinal plum which he himself had received from Sakka, the former for writing quickly and the latter to be used as a medicament to his back ache while writing and he further said, "Reverend Buddhaghosa I went before you to Ceylon to compile Buddha's word. I am old, have not long to live, and shall not therefore be able to accomplish my purpose. You carry out the work satisfactorily." The two then parted.20

These facts clearly establish Buddhadatta as a contemporary to Buddhaghosa though an older to Buddhaghosa. Buddhadatta was a poet of considerable reputation. He wrote:
1) Uttarviniccaya, 2) Vineya viniccaya, 3) Abhidhamma-vatāra, 4) Rupārūpavibhāṅga known as Buddhaddattas Manuals and 5) Mādhyaratthavilāsini, a commentary on the Buddhavaśa.

Visuddhimagga and the Abhidhammavatāra have so many points in common and it is clear that the two commentators drew the materials from the same source. Buddhadatta opens his scheme with a four-fold division of the compendium, e.g., mind, mental properties, material quality and Nibbāna. Buddhaghosa expounds his psychology in terms of the five Khandas.
Buddhadatta has rendered great service to the study of the Abhidhamma tradition which has survived in Theravāda Buddhism to the present day. The legendary account is that Buddhadatta put in a condensed form that which Buddhaghosa handed on in Pāli from the Sinhalese commentaries. According to Mrs. Rhys Davids, "But the psychology and philosophy are present through the prism of a sound and vigorous intellect, under fresh aspects in a style often less discursive and more graphic than that of the great commentator, and with a striking rich vocabulary."\(^1\)

Like Buddhaghosa, Buddhadatta too employed the simile of the purblind and the lame to explain the relation between Nāma and Rūpa.\(^2\) Buddhadatta's division of the terms into Samṹha and Asamṹha is another interesting point.\(^3\)

According to Rev. A.P. Buddhadatta, Buddhadatta was either older than Buddhaghosa or of the same age with him.\(^4\)

**Buddhasiri:** Buddhaghosa, in the colophon of Semantapāsaddikā mentions that he wrote the commentary at the request of the Thera Buddhasiri.\(^5\) Buddhaghosa does not mention the place of his residence while writing Semantapāsaddikā. Likewise he mentions Thera Sona and Thera Dathanagā as his contemporaries who requested him to write the Āṭṭakathā and Sumjāνgala Yilēsini.\(^6\)
Buddhamitta: Pāpeñcasūlani was written at the request of the Thera Buddhamitta while living at Mayūra pattana. Saratthappakāsini was written at the request of Thera Jotipāla while residing at Kāñchipurā. Evidently both were residents of South India. Further details about these monks were not given. All these four Therās are the contemporaries of Buddhaghosa who resided with him in different vihāras.

Successors

Buddhaghosa is credited with having written commentaries on the whole of the Pāli Tripitaka. In fact he has written commentaries on a large portion of the Tripitakas but not on the whole. The work thus left unfinished by him was taken up by others who came after him and it will be interesting here to give an account of persons who, following in the footsteps of the great commentator, served to make the Pitakas easily intelligible to succeeding generations. The most illustrious successor among them was Dhammapāla.

Dhammapāla: Dhammapāla means "defender of the faith." He was a native of Kāñchipurā in South India and lived in the later 5th century A.D. It is confirmed by Yuh-chwang who visited Kāñchipurā in 640 A.D. According to Sāsanaveda, Dhammapāla lived in Pederatittha or Padera (Pederatittha) in the kingdom of Damila (Drāviḍa) in the neighbourhood of
Ceylon. He belonged to the same school of Theravāda Buddhism like his two great predecessors and was a celebrity of the school of the Mahāvihāra at Anuradhapura. His commentaries were based on the Pūranatthakathā as developed and cherished in the Mahāvihāra. He wrote eight books on Khuddaka Nikāya, a commentary on the Nettippakaranā and a tika on the Visuddhimagga known as the Paramatthāmañjusa. There are also another two works of his known as Cintathappa Kesini and Cintthavannana.

A careful study of the published works of these commentators gives us the view that they hold very similar views; they appeal to the same authorities, they have the same method of exegesis, they have reached the same stage in philological and epistemological science and they have drawn the material from the same source. According to Mrs. Rhys Davids Buddhaghoṣa and Dhammapāla seem to have been educated at the same University.

Mrs. Rhys Davids further observes: "In the fifth century or sixth century A.D. either before or just after Buddhaghoṣa had flourished and written his great commentaries, on the prose works of the Vinaya and Sutta Pitakas, Dhammapāla of Kāṇchipura (now Conjeeveram) wrote down in Pāli the unwritten expository material constituting the then extant three Atthakathās on the plasma and incorporated

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* Pūranatthakathā
* Khuddaka Nikāya
* Nettippakaranā
* Visuddhimagga
* Paramatthāmañjusa
* Cintathappa Kesini
* Cintthavannana
* Buddhaghoṣa
* Dhammapāla
* Kāṇchipura
* Conjeeveram
* Atthakathās on the plasma
it into his commentary on the three other books of the canon, naming the whole "Paramatthadīpāni" or "Elucidation of the ultimate meaning." He not only gives the ākhyāna in each plasma, but adds a paraphrase in the Pāli of his day of the more archaic idiom in which the gāthās were compiled.  

Dhammapāla's explanation of the terms is very clear. His commentaries throw very valuable light on the social, religious, moral and philosophical ideas of his time. Dhammapāla follows a regular scheme in his commentaries. First comes an introduction to the whole collection of the poems, giving the traditional account of how it came to be put together. Then each poem is taken separately. After explaining how, when and by whom it was composed, each clause in the poem is taken separately. Then each clause in the poem is quoted and explained philologically and exegetically. His prose style is lucid and clear. Dhammapāla had evidently a great admiration for Buddhaghosa and faithfully followed the lead given by him. The views of Buddhaghosa were upheld throughout his works.

Gulla-Buddhaghosa: According to Gandhāvānsa he is ascribed with the authorship of two works called Jātattagānīdēna and Sotattaragānīdēna. We do not get any information more than that on him.
Upasena: He is the author of two Pāli commentaries on the Culla and Mahā Niddesas. They were known as Saddhammapajotikā and were written on the method and in the style of the Paramatthajotikā, the commentary on Sutta-nipāta. In the epilogue to his work he tells us that he resided in a monastery erected for him by Kittisena, a scribe at Anurādhapura and finished his work in the 26th year of the reign of king Siri-Sanghabodhi who is also called Siri-Nivāsa.

Mahānāma: He was another Thera of Ceylon. He completed the task left unfinished by Buddhaghosa and his other predecessors. He wrote the Saddhammapakasini as a commentary on the Patisambhidāmagga. It is simple and clear in style. He followed in the footsteps of the great Buddhaghosa. His exposition of the four Patisambhidās is very close to Buddhaghosa’s explanation of Niruttipatisambhida in Sammohavinodini.
REFERENCES

5. Ibid., pp.16-17.
18. Ibid., p.102. f.n. 6.
19. Ibid., p.102.
22. Ibid., p.179.
30. Thera and Therigāthā, Udāna, Itivuttaka, Petavatthu and Vimāṇavatthu, Gariyapitaka and Āpāna.