CHAPTER ONE

VAMSAA LITERATURE IN CEYLON (SRI LANKA).

Ceylon is now known as Sri Lanka. It is regarded as the "fountain-head" of Theravāda Buddhism. The Theras of Sri Lanka occupy the pride of place in the field of Pāli literature for their valuable contribution to the political history as well as to the religious history of their country and India, the origin of Buddhism. Like the Vamsa-Brāhmaṇa and the Vamsas in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upanisad, Sri Lanka has the Dīpavaṃsa, the Mahāvaṃsa, the Mahābodhivaṃsa or the Bodhivaṃsa, Dāthavaṃsa, the Thūpavaṃsa etc. B.C. Law says that the Pali word vaṃsa (Sanskrit vaṃśa) means "line of a pedigree or genealogy". He describes thus: For the Pali word vaṃsa (Sanskrit vaṃśa) means "line of a pedigree or genealogy", hence also "the Chronicle" or the "history" of a race, dynasty, line of teachers and so on; hence the meaning was extended to embrace any "history" going back to the earliest beginning, in such titles as Dīpavaṃsa,

1. We can now mention Srilanka in place of Ceylon in all six Chapters.
3. B.C. Law, on the Chronicles of Ceylon, p. 29.
Similarly in the Sanskrit titles Harivamsa, Raghuvaṃśa etc. He mentions further that the word vaṃśa means tanti (lineage). It is to be noted here that the history of the Vaṃsa literature is very old in India and the Vaṃsa literature is not fully developed there. The vaṃsa Brāhmaṇa only says about the lineal succession of the Brāhmaṇa teachers of old, but the vaṃsa literature of Sri Lanka refers to two paramparās, viz. the rajaparamparā, i.e., "the succession of kings", and the theraparamparā, i.e., "the succession of elders". Thus the vaṃsas of Sri Lanka are mentioned "as a distinct and a remarkable type of historical or semi-historical literature." The theras had a prominent role in the history of Buddhism and they were the authors of the vaṃsas or the chronicles of Sri Lanka.

Let us now turn to give a brief survey of the Vaṃsa literature written in Sri Lanka.

3. Ibid., p. 30.
4. Ibid., p.30.
5. Ibid., P. 43.
The Dīpavāṃsa or the History of the Island is regarded as the oldest Pāli work of the vaṃsa literature. B.G. Law says, "the main reason advanced for regarding this Pāli chronicle of Ceylon as a work of antiquity is that it stands, as distinguished from the rest which are chronologically later, as the literary production of a school or community, and not as the composition of an individual author. It is considered to be the last of the literary works of Ceylon which had no special authors." ¹

Several scholars think that the Dīpavāṃsa was written in Sri Lanka on the basis of the commentaries (atṭhakathās). ² It is known from different texts that the Sihala Mahāvaṃsaatṭhakathā also called the Sihalaatṭhakathā or Perāṇatṭhakathā or merely the Atṭhakathā was the primary source from which not only the Dīpavāṃsa but also the Mahāvaṃsa took their materials for writing. The Mahāvaṃsa-tika describes that these two chronicles also obtained their materials

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¹ B. C. Law., On the chronicles of Ceylon, P. 1.

from the Uttaravihāra-atthakathā and the Uttaravihāra-Mahāvamsa, the Vinayaṭṭhakathā, the Dīpavamsaṭṭhakathā, the Sīmā-kathā, the Cetiya and the Mahā-cetiya-vamsa-ṭṭhakathā, the Sumedha-kathā and the Sahassa-vatthu-ṭṭhakathā but these are not available to us now. The Dīpavamsa is a historical poem and it is written in Pāli verses. But there are two prose passages. B.C.Law states that "one of which is based upon a canonical text such as the Vinaya account of the second Buddhist Council, and the other is modelled evidently on the Jātaka Nidāna-kathā whether these are later interpolations or remnants of the prose texts which are versified afterwards is still a disputed question."

2. B.C.Law - Dīpavamsa, p. 5.
3. Dīpavamsa, ch. IV, vv. 46-52, p. 38:
   V.52: "Tena kho pana samayena vassa satamhi nibbuse bhagavatā Vesālikā Vejjiputtaṃ Vesaliyaṃ dasa vatthuni dīpenti: Kappati sīgilonakappo, Kappati dvangulakappo, Kappati gāmantarākappo, Kappati āvāsakappo, Kappati anumatikappo, Kappati āginnekappo, Kappati amathitakappo, Kappati jalogim pātum, Kappati adasakaṃ, nisidanaṃ Kappati jātarūparajātan ti.
4. Ibid., ch. XII, vv. 29-31, p. 71.
   V.30: "Māraśa Tvaṃ pi bhagavatā āsamah sādhanāṃ anupavattasati kārissati jinasāsanaṃ anupavattasati dhammacakkham, satta mahādūkkhā uddaritvā thale patiṭṭhāpanati, bahujanahitāya patipappajjissati bahujanasukhāya lo akānukampāya atthāya sukhaṃ devamanussānanti."
   V.31: "Evam ca pana bhagavatā nidahiṣṭhy idāni etarahi therena ca anatto bhikkhuhi ca Dīpavasadanaya........................
Jātaka, I, p. 48.
The Dīpavamsa does not mention the nature of its author. But several scholars say that it refers to nuns (therīs). From this they think that it was written by nuns and they write it from time to time.

The Dīpavamsa mentions the Therīs. It first of all refers to the well-known Therīs and gives an account of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī who became a very well-known figure in the literary world of Sri Lanka in the lifetime of the Master. She knew the Vinaya very well. In the second stage, it describes the Therīs and Saṅghamittā was very prominent among them. She came to Sri Lanka in the reign of Devānampiya Tissa from India and she was well-versed in the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma and in Anurādhapura the five Vinaya texts and the seven Abhidhamma Treatises were recited by her.

Immediately after them, the Dīpavamsa speaks of the Therīs of the island who received their ordination from the Therīs of India and became famous for their special attainments.

"Saddhammanandi Sonā ca Giriddhi pi ca Dāsiyā Dhammā ca Dhammapālā ca Vinaya ca Visāradā dhutavādā ca Mahilā Sabhanā Dhammatāpasā Naramittā mahāpannā Vinaya ca Visāradā thānīyovādakusalā Sātā Kālī ca Uttarā etā tadā bhikkhuṇīyo upasanpāna dīpalaṅjaka abhiṅṇātā ca Sumanā saddhāmavāṣaṃāvode etā tadā Bhikkhuṇīyo dhutarāgā samāhitā.............."¹ G.P. Malalasekera mentions that it is not a work of a single author. H.R. Perera² mentions that it was not written by one individual author but is the result of some previous works to which some changes have been made from time to time and this present form belonged to the fourth century A.D.

The Mahāvamsa, "the Great Dynasty of Sinhalese kings" was another important work of the Vamsa literature. Mahānāma composed it in verse on the basis of the Sīhalatṭhakathā-Mahāvamsa of old.⁴ He belonged to the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. or the early sixth century A.D. and he was its author.⁵ W. Geiger describes, "the Mahāvamsa is a work of art

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¹, ², ³, ⁴, ⁵: See the references at the end of the text.
created by a man who well deserves to be called a poet, and who mastered frequently crude material, if not with genius, yet with taste and skill.¹ He mentions further that "the Mahavamsa is already worthy the name of a true epic. It is the recognised work of a poet, and we are able to watch this poet at work in his workshop. Although he is quite dependent on his materials, which he is bound to follow as closely as possible, he deals with them critically, perceives their shortcomings and irregularities, and seeks to improve and to eliminate."² We learn from different sources that Mahānāma took the help of the same sources as the Dipavamsa and it is for the reason the two works - the Dipavamsa and the Mahāvamsa agree word for word in many passages.³

The Culavamsa on the "Lesser Dynasty of Sinhalese Kings" is a continuation of the Mahāvamsa.⁴ From it we get a connected account of the island up to modern times. Different authors from time

1. G.P. Malalasekera, the Pali Literature of Ceylon, P. 212.
2. The Dipavamsa and the Mahāvamsa and their Historical Development in Ceylon by Wilhelm Geiger and tr. E.M. Coomaraswamy, P-2;
wrote this connected history. We learn from several texts that after the death of Mahānāma, the Mahāvaṃsa's author, the Cūlavamsa was written by the theras, who belonged to different periods, in order to give a continuous history of the island up to modern times.¹

The Cūlavamsa

B.C. Law describes, "The Mahāvaṃsa proper with Duṭṭhagāmanī as its hero was composed by Mahānāma, the Cūlavamsa with Parakkamabāhu the Great as its hero was composed by Dhammakitti, the second portion of the Cūlavamsa with Kittisiri as its hero was composed by Tibbatuvāve Siddhattha and concluded with a chapter added by Hikkāduve Sirī Sumangala. A landable attempt has been made by the Venerable Yogirala Paññānanda to bring it down to modern times."² G.P. Malalasekera gives an account of the Cūlavamsa. He says, "With the death of Mahā-Sena in A.D. 302 ended the "Mahāvaṃsa" or "the Great Dynasty" of Sinhalese kings. The sovereigns of the "Cūlavamsa" (or the Lesser dynasty), says the Rājāvalī, were no longer of the unmixed blood, but the offspring of parents only

2. B.M. Barua, Ceylon Lectures, P-99; B.C. Law, On the Chronicles of Ceylon, P-12.
one of whom was descended from the Sun, and the other from those who had brought the Sacred Bodhi-tree or the Sacred Tooth; On that account the fertility of the land was diminished, and the kings who succeeded Mahā-sena were no longer reverenced as of old."¹ B.C. Law also discusses the Cūlavamsa. He mentions,² "In adopting the little of Cūlavamsa for the continuation of Mahānāma's work Geiger seeks to justify it on two authorities: (1) a statement in the Cūlavamsa, chapter 99, V. 76, and (2) a statement in the Sinhalese Rājāvaliya. The two statements are found on a proper examination to be of the same import. Both propose to divide the kings of Ceylon into those of the Mahāvamsa meaning the great dynasty and those of the Cūlavamsa i.e., the lesser dynasty. According to the Rājāvaliya, the line of the kings of the first dynasty ended with Mahāvamsa, and the line of the kings of the later dynasty began with Kitti-Siri-Meghavanaṇṇa, the son of Mahāsena. The later dynasty is called Cūka or lesser or lower because the pedigrees of the kings belonging to

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¹ G.P. Malalasekera. The Pali Literature of Ceylon, P-63.
it is heterogeneous, being an intermingling between the descendants of those monarchs who brought to the island the sacred Bo-Branch, and those who brought the Tooth Relic. But this division of the kings of Ceylon cannot be taken as an evidence to prove that the chronicle composed by Mahānāma had ended with the reign of Mahāsena."

The Mahābodhiyavamsa or the Bodhiyavamsa, "The History of the Bodhi Tree" is a prose work. M. Winternitz refers to its Gāthäs only at the end of the chapters and towards the end of the whole work. He states that Upatissa, who was a Buddhist monk, wrote this work in the first half of the eleventh century A.D. But according to W. Geiger, it was written in the tenth century A.D. D. M. de Z. Wickremasinghe fully agrees with his date. S. Arthur Strong has edited it in 1891 and thinks that

2. Ibid... 218.
3. Ibid... 218.
5. D. M. de Z. Wickremasinghe, Catalogue of the Colombo Museum; P-XIV.
the author of the Mahābodhivamsa belonged to the period of Buddhaghosa. He describes that Gandhavaṁsa mentions its author. The author of the Mahābodhivamsa compiled this work at the request of Dāṭhānāga, who became known as Dāṭhā. The Gandhavaṁsa says that Buddhaghosa wrote the Sumangala-Vilāsinī at the latter's request. But G.P. Malalasekera states that Dāṭhā and Dāṭhānāga were two different persons. Saranankara Saṅgharāja of the eighteenth century A.D. mentions that the Bodhivaṁsa was written at Dāṭhānāga's request. The Sāsanavaṁsa refers to Upatissa as the author of Bodhivaṁsa. Vilgammūla Mahāthera wrote the Eko-Bodhivaṁsa which is an enlarged Sinhalese translation of the Pāli work. It was written by him in beginning of the fourteenth century A.D. He says that Upatissa wrote the Pāli Bodhivaṁsa. Guruḷugomī belonged to the

6. Ibid, P - 158.
second half of twelfth century. He compiled the Bodhivamsa-parikathā or the Dharma-pradipikā, a commentary in the Sinhalese language on the Pali Bodhi-vamsa. According to him, Upatissa was the author of the Pali Bodhivamsa. The Cūlavaṃsa says that Dāthānāga was king Mahinda IV's contemporary. The latter took the throne in the middle of the tenth Century A.D. Both D. de Z Wickremasinghe and Wilhelm Geiger think that Dāthānāga was contemporary of king Mahinda IV and they state that the Mahā-Bodhivamsa was compiled in the last quarter of tenth century.

The Dāthāvaṃsa or the Dantadhātuvaṃsa "the History of (Buddha's) Tooth" was written in partly Sanskritized Pali. It is an epic. G.P. Malalasekera describes, "It is written in sonorous language and gives vivid descriptions, in the manner of Sanskrit poets......... Except where the author attempts vivid descriptions,

The poem presents one of the finest specimens of the stern simplicity, chasteness, and beauty of rhythm of Pali poetry, clothed in elegant diction free from high-flown metaphors and ornately elaborated ideas. In vocabulary and literary beauty the Dāthāvaṃsa is very rich. B.C. Law states, "Kern rightly remarks that it belongs to the class of compendiums and contains repetitions of passages from more ancient works with more or less apocryphal additions." The Dāthāvaṃsa deals with the history of the Tooth- Relic of the Buddha. This work is important because it informs us Pāli as a medium of epic poetry. Dhammakitti Thera wrote this work. His native place was the city of Pulatti. He was a famous monk. He was well-versed in the Tarkaśāstra (Systems of Logic), Sanskrit, Māgadhībhasā, Vyākaraṇa (grammar),

4. Ibid, P - 579.
5. Ibid, P - 579.
Kāvya (poetry), āgama (religious literature), the doctrine of Buddha etc. He was a disciple of the Thera Sāriputta. It is known from the religious texts that King Parakkamabāhu I of Sri Lanka appointed Dhammakitti as his Rajaguru at the request of his queen. Dhammakitti wrote the Dāthā vaṃsa at the request of Parakkama, who was the commander-in-chief of Sri Lanka. Parakkama was a very powerful man. He helped Līlavāti, who was the queen of Parakkamabahu I, to occupy the vacant throne of Sri Lanka and he then became Prime Minister. We learn from the religious texts that Dhammakitti wrote the Dāthāvaṃsa during her reign. The Sāsanavaṃsa and the Gandhavaṃsa say that it was written by Dhammakitti. According to M. Winternitz and B.C. Law, the

2. Ibid., p - 579; ibid., p - 22.
3. Ibid., p-580; ibid., p - 23.
4. Ibid., p - 580; ibid., p - 23.
6. Ibid., p - 22.
7. B.C. Law, A History of Pali Literature, p-580; Sāsanavaṃsa, ed Mable H. Bode, p - 34; Gandhavaṃsa, ed by Minayeff, p - 62
Dāṭhāvamsa was written in the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D.¹ Dhammakitti says that he based his work on an older Dāḷadāvamsa which was written in the Sinhalese language. This is not available now.² It is very probable that he based his work on ancient tradition and added some ideas in it.

The Pali Thūpavaṃsa or "the History of the Topes" belongs to the thirteenth century A.D.³ From its colophon we learn that Pāli Thūpavaṃsa was written during reigns of Vijayabāhu III and Parakkamabāhu II. The Thera Vācissara was its author.⁴ The author in colophon states that King Parakkamabāhu was his relative and it was due to him he got the post of the Librarian of the Royal Library (Dhammāgāra).⁵ He knew the Tipiṭaka well. His other works were Līnatṭhadīpanī-tikā on the

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4. Ibid., p-219; G.P.Malalasekera, the Pali Literature of Ceylon, p-217.
Patisambhidamagga, the Saccasankhepa-atthadipana and the Visuddhimagga-
sankhepa-atthappakasana in Sinhalese. According to G. P. Malalasekera,
the author was the younger Vacissara and he was the pupil of Sariputta.
The Culavamsa mentions that Vacissara belonged to the reign of King
Vijayabahu III, who was the father of Parakkamabahu II and he was a
very famous Thera of his time. It is known from the Culavamsa that he
got to the kingdoms of Pandya and Cola in order to search the
Suddha’s Tooth-Relic and bowl. He wanted to bring them in Sri Lanka.
The Raja-Ratnakara was the Sinhalese chronicle and was written by
the Mahathera of Valagampaya. He mentions Vacissara III. But G. P.
Malalasekera describes that Vacissara III was Vacissara, who was the
author of the Thupavamsa.

2. The Decline of Colonnaruwa and the Rise of Dambadeniya by
Amaradasa Liyanagamage, p-6.
Culavamsa: LXXXI, 20-23.
The Hatthavanagallavihāravāma was written in the reign of Parakkamabāhu II in the middle of the 13th century A.D. It was written in simple Pāli. It discusses the life and career of Siri-sanghabodhi and the history of the Hatthavanagallavihāra or the history of the ancient temple at Attanagalla of the western province of Sri Lanka. It was composed in verse but there is also prose narrative. It is a poem "with a strong influence of Sanskrit, displaying at the same time a fair degree of literary merit."²

The Hatthavanagallavihāravāma.

It has eleven chapters. It contains historical account. We do not know the author's name. It is not mentioned in the text. But in the introductory verses, the author mentions that his teacher Anomadassi requested him to write an account of Hatthavanagallavihāra and he composed it.³ This Anomadassi who wrote the Daivajñā-Kamadhunu belonged to the reign of Parakkamabāhu II.⁴ He was known as the Sabbayatirāja. The Cūlavāma refers to Anomadassi as a mahāsāmi.⁵ It is very probable

5. The Decline of Polonnaruwa and the Rise of Dambadeniya by Amaradasa Liyanagama, p-16.
that he was the teacher of the author of the Hatthavanagallavihāravamsa. C. E. Godakumbura and Amaradasa Liyanagamage say that the Hatthavanagallavihāravamsa was written before A.D. 1266.¹ This text while giving a history of the reign of Parākkamabahu II refers to the invasions of Sri Lanka by Chandrabhānu.² There were two invasions of Chandrabhānu but the work does not clearly mention whether it was the first invasion in 1247 A.D. or the second invasion in 1261-62 A.D. It states that Chandrabhānu died in battle. It gives us indication that it mentions the second invasion. From these facts we conclude that the Hatthavanagallavihāravamsa was written between 1261-62 A.D. and 1266 A.D. "Even if the lower limit is stretched further, it can be safely dated between 1247 and 1266 A.D."³.

The Pali Nalāṭadhātuvaṁsa or Lalāṭadhātuvaṁsa or simply the

2. Ibid, P-17.
3. Ibid, P-17.
Lalāṭavaṃsa deals with a history of the frontal, bone relic of the Buddha. It has five chapters. G. P. Malalasekera says, "It is a work, undoubtedly, of great antiquity, and evidently belongs to the cycle of sages and legends of Rohaṇa and Malaya. It therefore contains many popular traditions not found elsewhere, especially grouped round the family and contemporaries of Kākavaṇṇa-Tissa, father of Dutugamunu." We do not know the name of its author. This chronicle does not say anything about its date. But G. P. Malalasekera mentions that it was written in the tenth or eleventh century A.D. He describes, "The similarity of treatment between the Lalāṭavaṃsa and the Mahā-Bodhi-vaṃsa leads me to assign both works to the same period of Pāli literature namely to the tenth or the eleventh century A.D."

2. Ibid., P - 255.
3. Ibid., P - 256.
4. Ibid., P - 256.
Acariya Vimalasara Thera wrote the Sāsanavamsa-dīpa in Sri Lanka in A.D. 1800. The author says that it is a "history of the Buddhist church, written in Pāli verse and compiled from Buddhist holy scriptures commentaries, histories, etc." It has eleven chapters. It is an important chronicle no doubt. Because from it we learn about the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

2. Ibid., P - 311.