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**A PHILOLOGICAL APPROACH  
TO BUDDHISM**

The Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai Lectures 1994

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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AMg	Ardha-Māgadhi
AO	Acta Orientalia
B.C.E.	Before Common Era
BHS	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
BHSD	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary
BHSG	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar
BSO(A)S	Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies
BSR	Buddhist Studies Review
BUp	Brhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad
C.E.	Common Era
CP I–V	K.R. Norman. Collected Papers, Volumes I–IV (1990–94)
CPD	A Critical Pāli Dictionary, Copenhagen
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DEDR	T. Burrow & M.B. Emeneau, <i>Dravidian Etymological Dictionary</i> (Revised edition, 1984)
DPPN	G.P. Malalasekera, <i>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</i> (1937–38)
EV I, II	K.R. Norman, <i>Elders' Verses</i> I (1969), II (1971)
GD I, II	K.R. Norman, <i>The Group of Discourses</i> I (1984), II (1992)
IJ	Indo-Iranian Journal
IT	Indologica Taurinensia
JA	Journal Asiatique
JBuRS	Journal of the Burma Research Society
JOI(B)	Journal of the Oriental Institute (Baroda)
JPTS	Journal of the Pali Texts Society
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
m.c.	metri causa
MIA	Middle Indo-Aryan
MRI	<i>Minor Readings and Illustrator</i>

MW	M. Monier-Williams, <i>Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> (1899)
OUP	Oxford University Press
PDhp	Patna Dharmapada
PE	Pillar Edict
PED	The PTS's Pali-English Dictionary
Pkt	Prakrit
PTS	Pali Text Society
RE	Rock Edict
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
Skt	Sanskrit
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies (London)
SWTF	Goerg von Simson (ed.), <i>Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden</i> (1973–)
Überbl	O. von Hinüber, <i>Das ältere Mittelindisch im Überblick</i> (1986)
WZKSO	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens

Abbreviations of the titles of Pāli texts are those adopted by the CPD.  
Editions are those of the PTS, unless otherwise stated.

## IX

### Buddhism and the Commentarial Tradition

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Commentaries were probably needed from the very beginning of Buddhism. We can assume that the earliest form of commentary was simply the explanation of one word by another, and we need not doubt that the Buddha on occasion replaced words by synonyms, to make his teachings more easily understood. We find some sort of evidence of this in the words of the Buddha himself, where he gives, for example, seven different words all meaning “bowl”,<sup>1</sup> which he says are “country language” (*janapadanirutti*). This is presumably something which he found from experience, i.e. as he moved from one place to another, he found that the word used for a particular object in one area was quite different from that used in another area for one and the same thing. Anyone who has ever looked at Sir George Grierson’s *Bihar Peasant Life*,<sup>2</sup> will know exactly the problems which the Buddha faced. Grierson moved around the area for which he had responsibility as a civil servant, recording the wide range of different names which the villagers of Bihar used for all the items of everyday domestic and village life. The Buddha must have found a situation which was very similar to this 2 ½ millennia ago.

The earliest extensive portion of Theravādin commentary material we have is that found in the Vinaya-piṭaka. We know that, at the suggestion of King Seniya Bimbisāra of Magadha,<sup>3</sup> the Buddha instituted a fortnightly recitation of the Pātimokkha (following the practice of other sects which recited texts). We are therefore certain that the Pātimokkha existed from the very early days of Buddhism. The Pātimokkha does not have a separate existence in the Theravādin tradition, but is embedded in the Vinaya-piṭaka. If it is the earliest text for which we have direct evidence of recitation, it is not surprising if it was the first text that needed explanation. And so we find a simple type of commentary upon it, whereby words are for the most part explained by synonyms or clarification of terms, e.g. the first word of the first *pārājika* rule is *yo* “whoever”, and it is explained: “‘Whoever’ means he who on account of his relations, his social standing, his name, his clan, his morals, his dwelling, his field of activity, an

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<sup>1</sup> M III 234, 34 foll.

<sup>2</sup> Grierson, 1926.

<sup>3</sup> See Vin I 101, 18 foll.

elder, or a novice, or one of middle standing, this is ‘whoever’”.<sup>4</sup> The nature of that commentary is made clear by its name: *pada-bhājanīya* “analysis of words”. The commentary is so early that, like the Pātimokkha itself, it is embedded in the Vinaya-piṭaka after each of the Pātimokkha rules, and therefore the text and the commentary have been handed down together.

The earliest Theravādin commentarial text is one which is actually given separate canonical status. It is the Niddesa, a commentary upon two *vaggas* and one *sutta* of the Sutta-nipāta. Here again we find a great deal of explanation by means of synonyms. We also find another characteristic feature of this type of commentary. Whenever a particular word occurs in the text, the same explanation is given *verbatim*, e.g. whenever there is a reference to *kappa* “figment”, or a verb based upon the root *kapp-*, we are told that there are two types of *kappa*, i.e. *tanhā-kappa* and *diṭṭhi-kappa*, and the identical explanation is given, even if the words recur in successive verses. In the third lecture, I pointed out that this kind of fixed repetition is typical of the oral nature of an early text, giving support, if it were needed, for the assumption that the Niddesa is very old and was composed well before the writing down of the canon.

Even the early commentarial passages in the canon itself are not merely lists of synonyms. Commentaries have two functions, although not all commentaries perform both of them all the time: they explain the meaning of the words and they explain the meaning of the phrase or sentence in which the words occur. In the Araṇavibhaṅgasutta “The discourse on the undefiled” of the Majjhima-nikāya,<sup>5</sup> the *araṇa* “undefiled person” is defined in one paragraph by the Buddha. The remainder of the *sutta* is devoted to explaining the meaning of each sentence of that paragraph. Similarly, the Niddesa is not merely a list of synonyms. It also includes exegetical passages, giving us some idea of what the early commentarial tradition thought was the meaning of the relevant portions of the Sutta-nipāta. It is, however, not an organic structure of exegesis, but a series of disconnected phrases, which serve as explanations of the individual words, not in the particular context of the Sutta-nipāta, but in any setting.

The chronicles tell us that, at the time of Aśoka, Mahinda took Buddhism to Sri Lanka.<sup>6</sup> The story, as related in the Dīpavaṃsa, the Samantapāsādikā, and the Mahāvaṃsa, tells how King Tissa met Mahinda, exchanged greetings with him and had a discussion. All three sources agree that the first sermon which Mahinda preached to the king was the Cūlahatthipadūpamasuttanta “The short

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<sup>4</sup> Vin III 23, 37 foll.

<sup>5</sup> M III 230–37.

<sup>6</sup> Dīp 12.9; Mhv 13.21.

sermon on the elephant's footprint".<sup>7</sup> The Mahāvamsa<sup>8</sup> states that Mahinda preached the true doctrine in two places "in the speech of the island" (*dvīsu ṭhānesu dhammaṃ bhāsivā dīpabhāsāya*), implying that in the other places he did not "translate".<sup>9</sup> The Dīpavamsa and the Samantapāsādikā make no mention of this "translation" process, and although there are instances of the Mahāvamsa including authentic historical material which was either unknown to, or consciously omitted by, earlier chroniclers, it is possible that the need for "translation" was deduced by the author of the Mahāvamsa from the statement repeated at the beginning of Buddhaghosa's commentaries, that they were translations into Pāli of the commentaries which were brought to Sri Lanka by Mahinda and put into Sinhalese for the benefit of the islanders.<sup>10</sup> The author of the Mahāvamsa may well have thought that if Mahinda needed to "translate" the commentaries then he must have "translated" the canonical sermons too. The fact that the "translation" process is said to have happened in only two places suggests, however, that the statement is based upon tradition. If it is true, we may deduce that in some places Mahinda preached the *suttas* in their canonical form, whereas in two places he added an exegesis, in Sinhalese Prakrit.

There is no evidence about the language of the commentaries which Mahinda is said to have brought with him to Sri Lanka. They could have been in the same language as the canonical texts, whatever that was, or they might have been in the language of the missionaries, in so far as they may have spoken a different Prakrit. We have no evidence earlier than Buddhaghosa's statement which I have just mentioned,<sup>11</sup> that Mahinda did bring commentaries with him, but we have no reason to doubt that commentaries were brought from India either by Mahinda or other missionaries coming after him. The commentaries seem to have contained much information about India, and particularly North India, which could only have been brought from there. As we shall see, the Pāli commentaries sometimes employ a form of words in their explanations which is closer to the versions found in Sanskrit or the Gāndhārī Prakrit than the Pāli version which is being commented upon,<sup>12</sup> and this can only be explained by assuming that the Pāli commentary and the Sanskrit and Gāndhārī versions go back to a common source, which must have been in North India.

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<sup>7</sup> = M I 175–84.

<sup>8</sup> Mhv 14.65.

<sup>9</sup> I use "translate" to mean the change from one dialect of Middle Indo-Aryan to another, however closely related.

<sup>10</sup> *Sīhaḷadīpaṃ pana ābhatā 'tha vasinā Mahā-Mahindena ṭhapitā Sīhaḷabhāsāya dīpavāsīnam atthāya* (Ps I 1, 23\*–24\* and Lamotte, 1988, 557).

<sup>11</sup> Ps I 1, 21\* foll.

<sup>12</sup> See Brough, 1962, 226.



There is evidence for dialect differences in the early commentarial material. We know from the Aśokan inscriptions that in the third century B.C.E. there was a dialect variation in the treatment of consonant groups. In the East the dialects tended to resolve consonant groups by inserting an epenthetic (*svarabhakti*) vowel. In the West such consonant groups were simplified by assimilation. We occasionally find that a word is found in the Pāli canon which shows one regional variation, while the explanation of the word which is preserved in the commentaries shows a cognate form from another dialect, e.g. we find in the Dhammapada<sup>13</sup> the phrase *vissam dhammaṃ samādāya*, usually translated “having adopted the whole law”, assuming that *vissa* is from Sanskrit *viśva* “all”.<sup>14</sup> The commentary, however, explains this as “*vissa* means taking up a *dhamma* that is uneven (*visama*) or a *dhamma* that is foul-smelling, concerned with physical activities, etc.”.<sup>15</sup> The alternative explanation signified by “or” (*vā*) shows that the commentator was uncertain about the meaning of the word, but nevertheless the tradition of the Sinhalese *aṭṭhakathā* he was following had preserved an alternative dialect form.

One Sanskrit version of the verse has *veśma-dharma*<sup>16</sup> and it is probable that the Gāndhārī<sup>17</sup> version also has *veśma-*. The meaning therefore is “domestic manner (of life)”.<sup>18</sup> In the Pāli version *vissa* stands for *vēssa*, where *-ss-* results from the assimilation of *-śm-* > *-ss-*. The first explanation in the commentary shows the alternative development of an epenthetic vowel being inserted, i.e. *veśma* > *\*viśma* > *\*visma* > *visama*, which the commentator took to be the equivalent of Sanskrit *viśama* “uneven”. Another Sanskrit version of the same verse actually has *viśama*,<sup>19</sup> which is clearly a backformation from the same tradition which preserved the Pāli commentarial reading *visama*. We may presume that the verse was uttered at least twice, once in an area where consonant groups were assimilated, and once where they were resolved. These explanations in different dialects must therefore antedate the introduction of the canon into Sri Lanka, and they show that the dialect variation already existed at an early date, perhaps at the time of the Buddha.

Other explanations which depend upon non-Pāli and non-Sinhalese Prakrit forms must also antedate the introduction of the canon into Sri Lanka, e.g. the

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<sup>13</sup> Dhṃ 266.

<sup>14</sup> It is so taken by *PED*, s.v. *vissa*1.

<sup>15</sup> *vissan ti, visamaṃ vissa-gandhaṃ vā kāya-kammādikāṃ dhammaṃ samādāya*, Dhṃ-a III 393, 2–4.

<sup>16</sup> Udāna-v 32.18.

<sup>17</sup> GDhṃ 67.

<sup>18</sup> Brough, 1962, 266.

<sup>19</sup> Mvu III 422, 13\*.

explanation of *coḷa*<sup>20</sup> “top-knot” by *cora* “thief” must depend upon a source which, like Māgadhī, confused *l* (*l*) and *r*. Similarly, *abhibhāsana*<sup>21</sup> “illuminating” is explained as *tosana* “delighting”,<sup>22</sup> but this is really the explanation of *abhihāsana*,<sup>23</sup> and shows that the explanation must have been made in a dialect where both *abhibhāsana* and *abhihāsana* appeared as *abhihāsana*.

*The Critical Pāli Dictionary*<sup>24</sup> refers to nominative singular forms in *-e* in two commentarial passages<sup>25</sup> and claims that these are from the <*Sīhaḷa*->*Aṭṭhakathā*, because Proto-Sinhalese, like Māgadhī, was an *-e* dialect. These two passages are virtually identical, and it seems unlikely that, of all the hundreds of Sinhalese Prakrit forms in *-e* which must have been in the Sinhalese commentaries, Buddhaghosa not only forgot to “translate” into Pāli the first time he gave the explanation, but also repeated his error a second time. We may therefore deduce that Buddhaghosa deliberately quoted the passage with the *-e* forms (attributing it to the *Aṭṭhakathā* the second time), perhaps because it was invested with such authority in the Sinhalese commentary that he felt obliged to quote it *verbatim*. We may note that something very similar to the passage occurs in the *Kathāvatthu*,<sup>26</sup> and there is evidence<sup>27</sup> for believing that it was a common phrase in the early Buddhist tradition in Magadha. I conclude, therefore, that these forms are not remnants of the *Sīhaḷa*-*aṭṭhakathā*.

Childers was of the opinion<sup>28</sup> that the commentaries brought by Mahinda were in Pāli. If Childers was right, we have to assume a progression from Pāli to Sinhalese Prakrit and back to Pāli again. While this is not impossible, it does raise the question of why the Pāli of the canon was sacrosanct, while the Pāli of the commentary could be translated. It also raises the question of the nature of Pāli. If it means the language of the Theravādin canon, then it is unlikely that at the time of Aśoka, when Mahinda came to Sri Lanka, the language of that canon was already a western Prakrit with a certain amount of Sanskritisation introduced into it. I think that the Sanskritisation came later, perhaps because of the rise of the Mahāyāna. It would seem more likely that the commentaries already represented a heterogeneous mass of material, in various dialects, and

<sup>20</sup> Th 170.

<sup>21</sup> Th 613.

<sup>22</sup> *abhibhāsanan ti tosanam appaṭṭisāra-hetutāya cittassādhippamodanato*, Th-a II 260, 2–3.

<sup>23</sup> *abhihāsana* < \**abhihassana* < *abhiharṣaṇa*.

<sup>24</sup> *CPD*, s.v. *avitakka*.

<sup>25</sup> *ese eke ekaṭṭhe same samabhāge tājāte tañ ñevā ti*, Mp I 71,13; *ese eke ekaṭṭhe same sabhāge tājāte tañ ñevā ti*, II 273, 16–17.

<sup>26</sup> *ese se ekaṭṭhe same samabhāge tājāte ti*, Kv 26, 20–21 *et passim*.

<sup>27</sup> See Norman, 1979A, 279–87 (281) (= *CP* II 59–70 [61]).

<sup>28</sup> Childers, 1875, x.

probably including comments on readings which differed from those in the canon as established in Sri Lanka.

In the fifth lecture, on Buddhism and writing, I quoted the passage in the *Dīpavaṃsa* which stated that prior to the reign of Vaṭṭagāmini Abhaya the *tipiṭaka* and the *aṭṭhakathā* were transmitted orally, but in his reign they were written down. We tend to concentrate on the fact that it was the *tipiṭaka* which was written down, without thinking much about the commentaries because, to us, the word “commentaries” implies the works composed, in particular, by Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla in the fifth and sixth centuries C.E. respectively. The reference in the *Dīpavaṃsa* must, however, be to whatever commentarial material was available in the first century B.C.E., and which had hitherto been transmitted orally in conjunction with the canonical texts to which it referred.

The fact that the commentarial material was already of a disparate nature would probably have led to an attempt to impose homogeneity upon it, and also to make it more intelligible to the Sinhalese bhikkhus by translating it into the vernacular language. Because it was in the vernacular it would have been easy for additions to be made to it. That there was a continuing commentarial tradition in Sri Lanka itself is shown by the fact that Buddhaghosa quotes (from the Sinhalese commentaries he was using) the names of individual Sinhalese theras whose views he is accepting or rejecting.

According to the *Cūlavaṃsa*, there were no commentaries available in India in the fifth century C.E., and so the thera Revatta suggested to Buddhaghosa that he went to Sri Lanka and translated the *Sīhaḷa* commentaries into *Māgadhī*.<sup>29</sup> At the beginning of the *Samantapāsādikā*, Buddhaghosa states that his work will be based on the *Mahā-aṭṭhakathā* and the *Mahāpaccariya*, while also taking into account such commentaries as the *Kurundi*. He also quotes from the *Andhaka* and the *Saṅkhepa*, and the *Paccarī*, but it is not clear whether this last named is the same as the *Mahāpaccariya*.

There has been much speculation about the *Andhaka-aṭṭhakathā*; It is said<sup>30</sup> that it was handed down at *Kāñcipura* in South India. It is further stated<sup>31</sup> that it was very likely written in the *Andhaka* language. Probability then becomes certainty, and we then find statements such as “the references relate to ... the Sinhalese and some of the Dravidian commentaries”,<sup>32</sup> and “Buddhaghosa drew his material not only from Sinhalese and Dravidian but also from ... *Pāli*”.<sup>33</sup> Comparable statements are made about *Dhammapāla*: “*Dhammapāla* ... very

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<sup>29</sup> Mhv 37.230.

<sup>30</sup> C.A.F. Rhys Davids, 1974, xxviii.

<sup>31</sup> Adikaram, 1953, 12.

<sup>32</sup> Adikaram, 1953, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Adikaram, 1953, 16.

probably was a Dravidian by birth. It is also likely that he made use of Dravidian commentaries”.<sup>34</sup>

There was, in all probability, some connection between the Andhaka commentary and either the Andhaka country or the Andhaka sect, and it is very likely that the sect was so called because it came from the country. Probably the Andhaka commentary came from the Andhaka country originally, for Buddhaghosa quotes it<sup>35</sup> as referring to conditions in that country. It must, however, like the other commentaries, have had a core of material which came from North India, for Buddhaghosa quotes the Andhaka-aṭṭhakathā when he is talking about the *Magadha-nāḷī*<sup>36</sup> “a particular measure” but quotes the Mahā-aṭṭhakathā for the *Damiḷa-nāḷī* in the same passage. The fact that the Andhaka commentary is usually quoted only to be refuted<sup>37</sup> tends to support the view that the basis, at least, of the Andhaka commentary belonged to the Andhaka sect.

About the language of the Andhaka commentary nothing can be said definitely, but it would seem clear that by Buddhaghosa’s time it was no longer available in South India. The statement that no commentary was available in India,<sup>38</sup> which is given as the reason for Buddhaghosa to go to Sri Lanka, was not likely to have been included in the Sinhalese commentaries upon which the Mahāvamsa was based while there were South Indians such as Dhammapāla available to refute it, if it was false. It is in any case clear, from Buddhaghosa’s statement,<sup>39</sup> that the view of the thera Mahāsumma was regarded as authoritative in the Andhaka-aṭṭhakathā, that the commentary must have been introduced to Sri Lanka some time before Buddhaghosa, for Mahāsumma is a Sinhalese thera who is datable to the first century C.E. Since, however, Buddhaghosa stated plainly that he translated *Sinhalese* commentaries into Māgadhī, we can be fairly certain that if the Andhaka commentary was originally composed in a Dravidian language, it had already been translated into Sinhalese Prakrit by Buddhaghosa’s time.

It is usually stated<sup>40</sup> that no material was added to the Sinhalese commentaries after the first century C.E., but a very careful study<sup>41</sup> of the individuals mentioned in the commentaries has shown that King Mahāsenā is mentioned by name in the Samantapāsādikā.<sup>42</sup> Since this king is datable to 276–303 C.E., this

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<sup>34</sup> Adikaram, 1953, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Sp 747, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Sp 702, 23–27.

<sup>37</sup> e.g. Sp 697, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Mhv 37.227.

<sup>39</sup> Sp 646, 11.

<sup>40</sup> e.g. by Adikaram, 1953.

<sup>41</sup> Mori, 1988, 119–67 (143).

<sup>42</sup> Sp 519, 26.

shows that additions to the *Sīhala-aṭṭhakathās* continued to be made until the very end of the third century or the beginning of the fourth.

The author of the commentary upon the *Sutta-nipāta* notes that the Sinhalese commentary did not comment upon two verses in the *Sutta-nipāta*,<sup>43</sup> and he therefore excludes those verses from the number of verses in the original *sutta*.<sup>44</sup> This statement has been taken<sup>45</sup> as pointing with more or less certainty to an addition made to the canon in Sri Lanka. The verses could equally well, however, have belonged to a different recension from that being used by the *Mahā-aṭṭhakathā*, and been either unknown to the author of the *Sīhala* commentary or ignored as being less authentic. It is clear that different recensions of some texts did find their way to Sri Lanka. Buddhaghosa and the other commentators frequently record the existence of variant readings, and it is questionable whether these would all have been in one and the same version of the canon. It is interesting that the commentator on the *Sutta-nipāta* did not invent a commentary upon these verses. It would seem that the commentary was, as far as he was concerned, closed.

If the Buddha himself explained X by Y in one place, but Y by X in another, then we can see that X and Y were both *Buddhavacana*, and this situation might lead to a different sort of commentarial tradition, whereby the commentarial explanation in one tradition was the canonical reading in another tradition, and vice versa. I have just mentioned the comparable situation with regard to *vissa*, *veśma* and *visama*.

It has been shown<sup>46</sup> that in a number of cases other (non-Pāli) traditions preserve as canonical forms which are akin to those in the Pāli commentary, showing that those traditions thought that they were *Buddhavacana*. For example, where a verse in the *Dhammapada*<sup>47</sup> includes the words *adhisessati*, *chuddho*, and *apeta-viññāṇo*, the *Gāndhārī Dharmapada* equivalent<sup>48</sup> has three different words in their place (*vari śa 'iṣadi*, *tuchu*, and *avakada-viññaṇa*). The glosses in the Pāli commentary, however, are the equivalents of the *Gāndhārī* forms (*upari sayissati*, *tuccha*, and *apagata-viññāṇa*, *Dhp-a I 320–21*), which clearly shows acquaintance with the same tradition as underlies the *Gāndhārī* version. A possible explanation of this is that the Buddha uttered the same sermon on more than one occasion, sometimes making changes, as the occasion

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<sup>43</sup> Sn 677–78.

<sup>44</sup> *avasāne gāthādvayaṃ eva pana Mahā-aṭṭhakathāyaṃ vinicchitapāṭhe n' atthi, tenāvocumha "vīsatiḡāthāsū" ti*, Pj II 477, 13–14. This seems to be the only statement of this kind in the cty.

<sup>45</sup> Adikaram, 1953, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Brough, 1962, 192.

<sup>47</sup> *Dhp* 41.

<sup>48</sup> *GDhp* 153.

or locality demanded. When tradition preserved more than one version, it sometimes kept one as an explanation of the other.

Another example of this parallelism between canonical and commentarial traditions, which seems to cross the boundaries of sect, can be seen in Buddhaghosa's commentary on the incident where bhikkhus ask for permission to change the Buddha's words *chandaso*. He glosses: "Let us translate *chandaso* means, let us translate into Sanskrit (or into the refined language) as (we translate) the Veda".<sup>49</sup> Here "into the refined language" (*sakkata-bhāsāya*) seems to correspond to phrases in two of the Chinese versions of the same incident. The Dharmaguptaka version includes the request in the form "in accordance with the fine language (or perhaps texts) of the world", while in the Vinaya-māṭṛka version the Buddha states that his doctrine "is not concerned with beautiful language". It seems very likely that both these canonical phrases are based upon originals which included the equivalent of *saṃskṛta* or *satkṛta*.<sup>50</sup>

It is an interesting fact that in his commentary on the heretics' views which are quoted in the Sāmaññaphala-sutta,<sup>51</sup> Buddhaghosa seems to include phrases which are akin to those in the Tibetan version of the Pravrajyā-vastu.<sup>52</sup> He glosses: "cooking means beating others with a stick",<sup>53</sup> which seems to be a combination of two phrases in the Tibetan: 'Who grills and lets grill, who beats and lets beat'.<sup>54</sup> At the end of his explanation of Ajita's doctrines, he comments: "fools give, the wise take".<sup>55</sup> The Tibetan version states: 'Thus (only) the fool accords instruction, the sage receives instruction'.<sup>56</sup>

These parallels suggest that the commentarial and canonical traditions which underlie them are equally old, and the material upon which they are based must pre-date the separation of the sects. It seems probable that some of this material, since it is accepted as canonical by some sects, must go back to the earliest days of Buddhism, perhaps to the time of the Buddha himself. A close comparison of the Theravādin commentaries with non-Theravādin canonical texts might well bring to light other parallels of this nature. This might help us to date the various strata of the commentarial tradition, which would, in turn, enable us to estimate its value more accurately.

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<sup>49</sup> *chandaso āropemā ti, vedaṃ viya sakkata-bhāsāya vācanāmaggaṃ āropema* (Sp 1214, 16–17).

<sup>50</sup> See Brough, 1980, 35–42 (39).

<sup>51</sup> D I 52 foll.

<sup>52</sup> Vogel, 1970.

<sup>53</sup> *pacato ti, pare daṇḍena pīlentassa* (Sv 159, 16–17).

<sup>54</sup> Vogel, 1970, 26.

<sup>55</sup> *bālā denti, paṇḍitā gaṇhantī ti dasseti* (Sv 166, 16).

<sup>56</sup> Vogel, 1970, 22.

Sometimes there is mention of an event in a commentary, with no reference at all to it in the canon, although it appears in the canon of another school. As I mentioned in the eighth lecture, a problem arises from the fact that some of the best known stories in Buddhism are known in Pāli only in the commentaries, e.g. the story of the *kṣatriya* maiden Kisāgotamī.<sup>57</sup>

In some cases, portions of Buddhist history seem not to have reached Sri Lanka at all, e.g. the early history of Devadatta's hostility to the Buddha, and the reason why the Buddha called him "lick-spittle",<sup>58</sup> *kheḷāsika*.<sup>59</sup> Buddhaghosa does not know the reason, and the incorrect explanation he gives<sup>60</sup> is followed by modern translators and commentators, so that, for example, Miss Horner translates it "to be vomitted like spittle". Some of the Chinese versions of the Vinaya, however, do know the correct meaning of *kheḷāsika*, and tell a story, perhaps invented to explain the word, of Devadatta eating Ajātaśatru's spittle.

Sometimes the commentators give explanations based upon individual syllables of words, e.g. *bhikkhu: saṃsāre bhayaṃ ikkhanatāya*, "because of seeing danger in *saṃsāra*" Vism 16, 21; *bhagavat: vanta-gamano bhavesu*, "he has rejected going in existences" Pj I 107, 26\*; King *Pasenadi* is so called because: *paccāmittaṃ parasenaṃ jināti*, "he conquers the hostile army of another" Ud-a 104, 27. Since the Sanskrit form of his name was *Prasenajit* [Pkt *Pasenai*], the commentarial explanation is correct to include "he conquers", and this makes it clear that when this explanation was composed (which might have been long before Dhammapāla) the name still had the spelling with *-j-*, or the tradition at least knew that the correct form was *-j-*.<sup>61</sup>

The fact that the commentary explains the syllable *-di* by *jināti*, shows that the text and the commentary were transmitted separately,<sup>62</sup> with neither having an effect upon the other. The reason for the *-d-* of the text form is not clear. It is claimed by some as a Sinhalesism, because *j > d* in Sinhalese. If this were the explanation, I should have expected the commentary to show the change, not the text. The disagreement between the canonical text and the commentary is probably due to the fact that they were in the keeping of different groups, i.e. the *bhāṇakas* responsible for the canonical text were not also responsible for the safe keeping of the commentary upon that text.

Other explanations are given in accordance with the type of etymologising in Sanskrit literature known as *nirukti* or *nirvacana*, which was taken over into

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<sup>57</sup> See Collins, 1990, 89–126 (117, note 55).

<sup>58</sup> At Vin II 188, 37 and Dh-p-a I 140, 1. See Lamotte, 1970, 107–15.

<sup>59</sup> See Norman, 1979B, 325–31 (329, note 23) (= CP II, 187–93 [191, note 2]).

<sup>60</sup> Sp 1275,17.

<sup>61</sup> Aggavaṃsa has a rule to deal with this: Sadd sūtra 88 (622,24): *do jassa: Pasenadi*.

<sup>62</sup> For similar separate transmission of text and commentary, see von Hinüber, 1981, 74–86 (78).

Buddhist literature. It often resembles folk etymology in its mode of operation, but this is to misunderstand its purpose. Quite frequently words are explained by means of others which are similar in appearance but are, in fact, in no way related to them. Such etymologies are found in the canonical texts from an early period, and are then taken over into the commentarial tradition, e.g. *brāhmaṇa*, based upon a root *brah-* meaning “to be strong”, is explained in a Dhammapada verse by means of a different root *brah-* “to remove”.<sup>63</sup> A *brāhmaṇa* was a remover—of his evil deeds, of course. Similarly a *samaṇa* is so called because he has put to rest his evil deeds, explaining *sam-* (Skt *śram-* “to strive”) by *sam-* (Skt *śam-* “to be quiet”).<sup>64</sup> The word *rājā* “king” is explained in the Dīgha-nikāya by “he pleases others by righteousness”, explaining *rāj-* “to rule” by means of *rañj-* “to be delighted”.<sup>65</sup> The fact that a comparable etymology is given, or alluded to, several times in the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa<sup>66</sup> shows that this is not a Buddhist invention.

Some of these explanations seem ludicrous in western eyes, and this has led to some modern commentators trying to see the joking nature of the Buddha at work in them. It has been claimed that the Buddha is here parodying the etymologies (*nirukti*) found in brahmanical texts.<sup>67</sup> I cannot rule out the possibility of the Buddha joking, although it is noteworthy that joking is not a well-known or highly approved Buddhist pastime, but I can see no evidence that these etymologies were really intended as jokes. Certainly in a series of etymologies of this type in the Sabhiya-sutta of the Sutta-nipāta, dealing with the words *kusala*, *paṇḍita*, *muni*, etc., no joke seems to be intended, and I find it hard to understand why we should think that some etymologies are meant to be humorous, and others not.

I am reminded of talking to various people about Sanskrit, and being asked by one if Sans-script was so called because it had no script and could not be written down, and by another if Sand-script was so called because the early Indians had no writing materials and had to scratch the characters in the sand. These folk-etymologies seemed comical to me, but both questioners were very serious about them.

These *nirvacana* etymologies are sometimes of value (beside the etymological theorising they contain) because they give information about the dialect(s) in which they were first given, and such information about the earlier history of the

<sup>63</sup> *bāhita-pāpo ti brāhmaṇo*, Dhṛp 388.

<sup>64</sup> *samitattā hi pāpānaṃ samaṇo ti pavuccati*, Dhṛp 265.

<sup>65</sup> *dhammena pare rañjeti*, D III 93,14. See Gombrich, 1992, 159–78 (174).

<sup>66</sup> See Hara, 1969, 489–99.

<sup>67</sup> See Gombrich, 1992, 174.



text may not be available in other ways.<sup>68</sup> For example, to explain *brāhmaṇa* by using the form *bāhita* shows that in the dialect in which the etymology was invented the word *brāhmaṇa* had the form *\*bāhaṇa*, while some of the etymologies in the Sabhiya-sutta make sense only if we assume that they were first composed in a dialect in which *-t-* and *-j-* became *-y-*.

The fact that, despite the displacement of *pādas*, etc., which makes the etymologies in the Sabhiya-sutta very hard to understand, the commentary still contains the correct traditional explanation of some of the words included in the *sutta*, e.g. *kusala* and *ājāṇiya*, shows that the *sutta* tradition, which is very corrupt, and the commentary tradition, were quite separate, as in the case of the name *Pasenadi* which I have just mentioned, and the commentary went on transmitting the correct explanations even though the text which was being commented upon no longer had the correct readings.<sup>69</sup>

The growth of homonyms in MIA often meant that two or more explanations were possible for a word, depending upon which etymology was being considered. This sometimes enables a Pāli commentary to give a richer and fuller exegesis than would be possible in Sanskrit, where a redactor had to decided upon one form or another. The BHS equivalent of *sammappadhāna* “right effort” is *samyakprahāṇa* “right abandoning”. I mentioned in the sixth lecture the suggestion<sup>70</sup> that the Sanskrit version is an incorrect backformation from an MIA form *sammappahāna* which might have either meaning. This view is supported by the fact that Buddhaghosa’s explanation of the term actually includes the idea of abandoning,<sup>71</sup> and this suggests that the commentarial material was first composed in a dialect where the form of the word was *sammappahāna*.

Where the commentators no longer knew the meanings of words, they sometimes had to deduce them by devising etymologies which we can see are incorrect. In Pāli the consonant cluster in the word *-jñā* “knowing” becomes *-ññ-*. The consonant cluster *-ny-* also becomes *-ññ-*. When dealing with the word *vadaññu*, which is derived from Skt *vadānya* “bountiful, liberal, a munificent giver” or “eloquent, speaking kindly or agreeably, affable”,<sup>72</sup> the commentarial tradition wrongly took the final element *-ññu* to be from *-jñā*, and the word is explained as *vacana-vidu*,<sup>73</sup> i.e. understanding *vadaññu* as the equivalent of *vada-jñā* “knowing the utterance (of the Buddha)”.

<sup>68</sup> See Norman, 1980B, 173–84 (177–78) (= CP II, 148–64 [154–55]).

<sup>69</sup> See Norman, 1980B, 173–84 (178) = (CP II, 148–64 [155–56]).

<sup>70</sup> See Gethin, 1992, 70.

<sup>71</sup> Gethin, 1992, 71.

<sup>72</sup> See MW, s.v. *vadānya*.

<sup>73</sup> P II 415 (ad Sn 487).

Another development from Sanskrit *-jñā* is Pāli *-jina*, with an epenthetic (*svarabhakti*) vowel evolved between *-j-* and *-ñ-*. The resultant form is identical with the word *jina* “conqueror”, and the commentaries consequently explain compounds ending in *-jina* as “conqueror”, e.g. *magga-jina*<sup>74</sup> “conqueror (of the defilements) by means of the road”,<sup>75</sup> whereas we are probably to see its meaning as “knowing the road”. The same type of explanation is given for *khettajina* “conquering the field”. Here we can see that *-jina* is certainly from *-jñā*, because there is a Sanskrit equivalent *kṣetra-jñā* “knowing the field”.<sup>76</sup>

We are inclined, in western philology, to believe that there is only one correct answer to a question of etymology. In India, however, there was a custom of seeing more than one meaning in any word or phrase—the so-called *śleṣa*. So, instead of saying the meaning is either this or that, as we would do, commentators very often say that the meaning is this *and* that. Sometimes the meanings they give include what we would regard as the correct etymology, but sometimes they are all, from our point of view, incorrect. These are not, however, intended as western-style etymologies, but they have rather a religious, or even mystical, purpose.

So the word *bhagavat* is explained with the words: “The reverend one (*guru*) has blessings (*bhagī*), is a frequenter (*bhajī*), a partaker (*bhāgī*), a possessor of what has been analysed (*vibhattavā*), has caused abolishing (*akāsi bhaggaṃ*), is fortunate (*bhāgyavā*), has well maintained himself in being (*subhāvitattano*) in many ways, has gone to the end of being (*bhav-anta-go*), thus he is called *bhagavat*”.<sup>77</sup> These multiple explanations would not be regarded in the tradition as specifying the meaning of the word *bhagavat*, but as attributes or epithets of the *bhagavat* himself, and would form the basis of a sort of litany “the *bhagavat* has blessings, etc.”, i.e. they would be taken as facts, not as explanations of the term *bhagavat*.

Similarly with *arahat*, which is explained: “One is an *arahat* because one’s defilement are far from one (*āra-kilesa*)”.<sup>78</sup> “The *bhagavat* is *arahanta* because of remoteness (*āraaka*), because of the destruction of his enemies (*ari*) and of the spokes (*ara* = *rāga*, etc.), because of his being worthy of requisites, and because of the absence of secret ill-doing (*pāpakaraṇe rahābhāvā*).<sup>79</sup> The inclusion of an

<sup>74</sup> Sn 84

<sup>75</sup> Pj II 162: *maggaḥ jino ti maggena sabbakilese vijitāvī*.

<sup>76</sup> See Dhadhphale, 1980, 205, and Norman, 1980B, 173–84 (183, note 6) (= CP II, 148–61 [149, note 3]).

<sup>77</sup> Pj I 107,19 foll.; translated at MRI, 116.

<sup>78</sup> Ps I 42,19, quoting M I 280.

<sup>79</sup> *ārakattā arīnaṃ arānañ ca hatattā paccayādīnaṃ arahattā pāpa-karaṇe rahā-bhāvā ti imehi tāva karaṇehi so bhagavaṃ arahāna ti vedītabbo*, Sv 146,10–12; cf. Vism 198,11 foll. cf. *ārakattā arahā hoti*, A IV 145, 2; *kilesārīnaṃ hatattā arahatā* (instr.sg.), Mp V 84, 22.

explanation based on *ari* is interesting because the Jain form is *ari-hant*, i.e. with an *svrabhakti* vowel *-i-* instead of *-a-*.

A number of non-Buddhist terms were taken over and applied in a Buddhist sense, e.g. the Buddha is called a *yakṣa* and a *nāga*. Since it was thought inappropriate to call the Buddha by the name of a minor supernormal being, i.e. a “snake-god”, other explanations were invented. One is a *nāga* because one does not perform *sin* (*na + āgu*), or one will not go to rebirth again (*na + gam* “to go”), or will not come back again (*na + āgam* “to come”).

Sometimes the explanations which the commentators give include forms which suggest that they were first given in some other dialect. So, among the explanations of *tathāgata*, we find some based upon forms with *gada* instead of *gata*, i.e. they are taken from, or through, a dialect which voiced *-t-* to *-d-*. *Tathāgata* is explained as: “He is thus gone (*tathā gata*), thus come (*tathā āgata*), he has thus known (*tathā ājānana* [verbs meaning ‘go’ also mean ‘know’]), has uttered what is real (*tathā gadanato*)”.<sup>80</sup> We are also told that just as a physician overcomes snake-bite by an antidote (*agada*), so the *tathāgata* overcomes the world with the antidote of truth.<sup>81</sup>

Commentators not always well informed, and we can see that they or the sources they were following were sometimes mistaken. For example, in the commentary on the *Sutta-nipāta*,<sup>82</sup> *Ādiccabandhu* is said to be the name of a *pratyeka-buddha*, presumably because it occurs in the verses ascribed to the *pratyeka-buddhas*. The word is, however, used so commonly as an epithet of the Buddha that I find it hard to believe that it does not apply to him in this verse.<sup>83</sup>

Ignorance about rare grammatical forms also led commentators astray. The word *phalesin* is a future active participle,<sup>84</sup> and means “about to fruit”. It occurs in a verse in the *Theragāthā*<sup>85</sup> where the trees are described as being in blossom and about to fruit. The commentator, unacquainted with the form, analyses *phalesin* as coming from *phala* “fruit” and *esin* “seeking”, and describes the trees as “seeking their fruit”. The word occurs again in a verse<sup>86</sup> where a foolish action is likened to a man who cuts a tree down just when it is about to fruit. Here the error in the translation “a man seeking fruit cuts a tree down” is masked by the fact that this too would be a foolish action.

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<sup>80</sup> MRI 217 foll.; cf. Ud-a 131, 15.

<sup>81</sup> See also Ud-a 132, 9 for *agada/āgada*.

<sup>82</sup> Pj II 105, 27.

<sup>83</sup> Sn 54.

<sup>84</sup> See Geiger, 1994, § 193A.

<sup>85</sup> *aṅgārino dāni dumā bhadante phalesino chadanam vippahāya*, Th 527ab.

<sup>86</sup> *yathā phalesī mūle taruṃ chettu tam eva icchasi*, Th 1121ab.

Although some of the commentarial material must go back to very early times in Buddhism, perhaps to the time of the Buddha himself, nevertheless, as we know well from other religions, all texts are interpreted in the light of the age and culture of the reader, which may differ considerably from the age and culture of the original composer of the text. We have, therefore, to decide how we should interpret a canonical text. Do we interpret it in the light of our knowledge of the culture of the time, the culture of the first commentary upon it, the culture of the second commentary on it, the culture of present-day Buddhists in South or South-east Asia, or our own western culture?

An examination of the Niddesa and the explanations it gives enables us to see that the composer of that text was already interpreting the ideas of the Sutta-nipāta in a different way from the original hearers of the text, as far as we can judge.<sup>87</sup> We also have a commentary upon the Sutta-nipāta attributed to Buddhaghosa, and he too interprets the Sutta-nipāta in the light of his own culture, or at least the culture of those who wrote the material in the Mahāvihāra which he used in his work. Again there are differences of interpretation, as the commentaries tried to interpret things in their own way, although, of course, this does not necessarily mean that their interpretation differed from that of the Buddha's contemporary audiences.

The way in which interpretations changed can be seen easily from an examination of the meaning of the phrase *tasā vā thāvarā vā*.<sup>88</sup> If we base our translation on the meaning of the related Sanskrit words, then Sanskrit *trasa* means "moving" = "the collective body of moving or living beings" (as opposed to *sthāvara*),<sup>89</sup> and Sanskrit *sthāvara* means "standing still, not moving, fixed, stable, immovable".<sup>90</sup> The phrase, therefore, means "(all creatures) moving or unmoving". By the time the Pāli commentary was written, however, the interpretation of the words had been changed. The commentator states:<sup>91</sup> "*tasa* is a synonym for those who have cravings or fears: *thāvara* means that they are standing still. This is a synonym for those who are rid of their cravings, i.e. *arahats*". To the commentator, therefore, the phrase had taken on a Buddhist flavour: "Ordinary individuals who still had cravings, and *arahats* who were freed from them". This explains why Miss Horner translated the compound *tasa-thāvara* as "those who have craving and those who have none",<sup>92</sup> although it is

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<sup>87</sup> See Burford, 1991, 9.

<sup>88</sup> Sn 146.

<sup>89</sup> See MW, s.v. *trasa*.

<sup>90</sup> See MW, s.v. *sthāvara*.

<sup>91</sup> *tasā, sa-taṇhānaṃ sa-bhayaṇaṃ c' etaṃ adhivacanaṃ, tiṭṭhantī ti thāvarā, pahīnataṇhāgamanānaṃ arahantānaṃ etaṃ adhivacanaṃ*, Pj I 245 (ad Khp IX.4 = Sn 146).

<sup>92</sup> Horner, 1957, 290 (= M II 105).

very likely that to the original hearers the meaning was far less restricted, and more on the lines of the meaning in Sanskrit.

There are many other comparable examples of development of meaning. In the Uruga-sutta of the Sutta-nipāta we find the refrain: “That monk leaves behind this shore and the far shore as a snake leaves behind its old skin”.<sup>93</sup> What does the phrase “this shore and the far shore” mean in this context? In some Pāli texts “this shore” means “this existence” and “the far shore” means “*nibbāna*”. By the time the commentator wrote in the fifth century C.E., the idea of leaving behind the far shore in the form of *nibbāna* was a Mahāyāna idea, which as a Theravādin he was very reluctant to accept. To understand the phrase therefore entails the discussion of the question of whether the Mahāyāna idea could have been in existence at the time when the *sutta* was composed, and, if not, what “far shore” could mean in this context. My own belief is that the reference is not to *saṃsāra* and to the far shore of *saṃsāra*, i.e. *nibbāna*, but to this world and the next, and I believe that the verse was first formulated in a situation where the author was considering this world and the afterlife, rather than the endless stream of *saṃsāra*. When the Buddhists took the verse over, however, they had to make it fit into the *saṃsāra* system. In an attempt to avoid the Mahāyāna idea, the commentary on the Sutta-nipāta gives seven explanations,<sup>94</sup> including the lower fetters and the higher fetters, and the world of men and the world of gods.<sup>95</sup> It is interesting to note that, in the Sanskrit Udāna-varga, where the editions of Chakravarti and Nakatani read *orapāraṃ* “near and far shore”,<sup>96</sup> Bernhard’s edition reads *apāraṃ* “this shore”, which suggests that the redactor of that version also thought that the abandoning of *pāra* was unacceptable.

The Buddhaghosuppatti<sup>97</sup> states that the commentaries given by Mahinda, and the additions thereto, were burned in a great bonfire when Buddhaghosa had finished writing his commentaries. Although this has long been recognised as being merely an exaggerated way of saying that the Sinhalese commentaries fell into disuse, there is evidence to show that the earlier commentaries were not, in fact, completely superseded. It is clear that the commentaries which Buddhaghosa used to write the historical introduction to the Samantapāsādikā were not destroyed, for they were available to the author of the Mahāvamsa and even to the writer of the Mahāvamsa-ṭīkā some centuries later.<sup>98</sup> The same applies to the commentaries on canonical texts. The Mahāvamsa-ṭīkā refers to the *Sīhaḷa-aṭṭhakathā* on the Majjhima-nikāya and includes information not

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<sup>93</sup> *so bhikkhu jahāti orapāraṃ urago jiṇṇam iva tacam purāṇaṃ*, Sn 1–17.

<sup>94</sup> Pj II 12–14, discussed by Brough, 1962, 201 foll.

<sup>95</sup> *oraṃ manussaloko pāraṃ devaloko*, Pj II 13, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Udāna-v 18.21, etc.

<sup>97</sup> Bu-up 7.

<sup>98</sup> Malalasekera (1935, cix) dates Mhv-ṭ to the eighth or ninth century

given in the Papan̄casūdanī.<sup>99</sup> The *īkā* on the Sāratthappakāsinī includes a variant reading for a passage in the Majjhima-nikāya,<sup>100</sup> which is not only not given by Buddhaghosa,<sup>101</sup> but which shows by its form *ahunā* (< *adhunā*) = *idān'eva* that it was taken from a dialect other than Sinhalese Prakrit and Pāli, probably a North Indian Prakrit, and perhaps even from a commentary brought over by Mahinda. Nevertheless, at some unknown date the Sinhalese *aṭṭhakathās* must have fallen completely into disuse, and they seem now to be irretrievably lost. Only the Pāli commentaries which were based upon them are now extant.

In time, of course, the commentaries themselves became less intelligible, and required explanation. This led to the appearance of *īkās*, which were in effect commentaries upon the *aṭṭhakathās*. Sometimes, as I have just said, these commentaries, although late, nevertheless preserved readings and explanations which are superior to anything found in earlier commentaries. In time came a further expansion of commentarial material, with *anuīkās*, and other commentaries being written, and the production of such works has continued right up until the present time, as Buddhist commentators have used all the facilities of Indian philology to explain the meaning of the *Buddhavacana*, as it has been re-interpreted again and again in the light of ever-changing cultural patterns.

How are we to evaluate the commentarial tradition? It is clear that sometimes it is very useful:

- (1) The commentaries sometimes explain something we could not otherwise understand. Mrs Rhys Davids, for example, paid tribute to the indispensability of the commentary on the Therīgāthā,<sup>102</sup> when she was translating that text. Despite all its errors, it nevertheless gives correct explanations of many passages which would otherwise be quite unintelligible. The same is probably true of almost all commentaries.
- (2) Commentaries sometimes contain readings which are better than those in the canonical texts we possess. So in the descriptions of famine which occur in the Vinaya and the Saṃyutta-nikāya, there is a word *dvīhitikā*, which is explained as being made up from *du* “two” or “difficult” + *īhita* “effort” or “activity”, i.e. the word means either “there is two-fold effort, i.e. begging will be either successful or unsuccessful” or “life will be difficult”. The commentary upon the Saṃyutta-nikāya, however, gives a variant reading *duhitikā*, which it

<sup>99</sup> Mhv-ṭ 193, 305.

<sup>100</sup> MI 255,16 (which is quoted at Spk I 13, 29).

<sup>101</sup> Both PTS editions read *ahu tañ ñeva aññatarassa*. Spk-pt (Be 1961) 41, 25 reads *ahunā idān'eva*. (Information received from L.S. Cousins in a letter of 25 December 1973).

<sup>102</sup> C.A.F. Rhys Davids, 1909, xvi–xvii.

says has the same meaning as *dvīhitikā*. Nevertheless, if *duhita* is taken as the opposite of *suhita* “satiated”, then we can see that \**duhita* would mean “hungry”, and *duhitika* “stricken by hunger, or connected with hunger”.<sup>103</sup>

- (3) As I have stated, commentaries show us how Buddhist thought has developed since the time when the canonical text they are commenting on was composed.

They were not always quite so useful:

- (1) Sometimes the tradition has lost the meaning, and the commentator resorts to giving several explanations, all unlikely, and all very difficult to understand. This produces the familiar cry: “I can understand the text, but not the commentary”.
- (2) Sometimes the explanations are of a circular nature, e.g. “wise means possessed of wisdom”,<sup>104</sup> and are only intelligible if the meaning is already known.
- (3) Sometimes the explanations are wrong, as I have already pointed out.
- (4) Sometimes the commentary explanation has had an insidious effect upon the canonical text, i.e. what was originally written in the commentary was sometimes included in the text (as “glosses”), or had an effect upon the words in the text, in that the text was changed to fit the meaning given by the commentary. It has been pointed out<sup>105</sup> that the threefold categorisation of *kamma* (*karma*), which is found in some Theravādin canonical texts, is due to the misunderstanding of the absolute *upapajja* or *upapajjam*.<sup>106</sup> This was thought to be incorrect, and it was consequentially “corrected” to the “locative” *upapajje*. As a result of this, what had originally been a two-fold classification, i.e. “one feels the result [of a bad deed] in the here and now or, having been reborn, in some future period” became “... in the here and now, or in (a future) rebirth, or in some future period”. This misinterpretation seems to have come into existence in a 15th-century *ṭīkā* on the Nettippakaraṇa, from which it was introduced into manuscripts of the Netti itself, and then into manuscripts of the Majjhima-nikāya and the Aṅguttara-nikāya, on which the Netti passage was based.

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<sup>103</sup> von Hinüber, 1981, 74–86.

<sup>104</sup> *paṇḍitā ti paṇḍiccena samannāgatā*, Sp 552, 24.

<sup>105</sup> von Hinüber, 1971, 241–49.

<sup>106</sup> The extension of an absolute by a nasal can be found elsewhere in Pāli. See Geiger, 1994, § 214.