

Research

Ethical and Literary Impact of Buddhism on Myanmar

Dr - Tin Tin New^{1*}, Yee Mon Phay²

¹Professor, Department of Oriental Studies, Mandalay University, Mandalay, Myanmar

²PhD Candidate, Department of Global Studies, School of Liberal Arts, Shanghai University, Shanghai, China

*Corresponding author

Accepted: 25 August, 2019 ; Online: 31 August, 2019

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3382346>



Abstract *Pārāyana is the path leading to the Nibbāna, the other shore of saṃsāra. The name Pārāyana is referred to the Pārāyana Sutta recited by Nandamātā. It contributes to the development of the Myanmar literature through creative thinking, word by word and literary translation composed the named Pārāyana Vatthu. The Venerable Mahāsīlavamsa of Innwa period composed the Pārāyana Vatthu. It is the first vatthu in the history of Myanmar literature. The Pārāyana Vatthu is not a translation of the Pārāyana Vagga. It is a work based on the Pāḷi sources. The Pārāyana Vagga is the 5th Vagga of the Sutta Nipāta of Khuddaka Nikāya. The theme is the Dhamma leading to the other shore of saṃsāra, Nibbāna. The term "Pārāyana" from Pārāyana Vagga and Pārāyana Vatthu means the same concept: the essence of the Buddha's teachings is the attainment of Nibbāna. This paper attempted to find out the ethical and literary impact of Buddhism on Myanmar with reference to these two kinds of literature.*

Keywords *Parayana, Buddhist literature.*

Introduction

The Pārāyana as explained in the Pārāyana Vagga is as follows:

"Ekamekassa cepi pañhassa atthamaññāya dhammamaññāya dhammānu dhammam paṭipajjeyya, gaccheyyeva jarāmarañassa pāraṃ, pāraṅgamanīyā ime dhammāti, tasmā imassa dhammapariyāyassa pārāyanant'eva adhivacanam."²

"If a man, having understood the meaning and tenor of each question lives according to the Dhamma, then he will go to the further shore of decay and death, for these Dhammas lead to the further shore and therefore this order of Dhamma is called the way to the other shore".

The next explanation is "apārapāraṃgaccheyya, bhāvento

Magga muttamam, maggo so pāraṅgamanāya, tasmā Pārāyanam iti".³

"From this shore he went to the other shore entering upon the most excellent way; this way is to lead to the other shore, therefore it is called the way to the other shore". Moreover, as explained in the Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā is "tasmāpārāyanantitassapārabhūtassanibbānassaayantivuttamhoti". Thus Pārāyana is the path leading to the Nibbāna, the other shore of saṃsāra. The PārāyanaVagga and PārāyanaVatthu agree with the title because they give the practices leading to the Nibbāna. The PārāyanaVatthu is not a translation. It names Pārāyana after the recitation of the Pārāyana Sutta by the woman, Nandamātā at the end of the Pārāyana Vatthu.²

PārāyanaVagga in Pāli Literature

The Sutta Nipāta is the 5th book of KhuddakaNikāya. It consists of five vaggas or chapters: Uruga, Cūla, Mahā, Aṭṭhaka and Pārāyana. The 5thvagga, Pārāyana contains Vatthugāthās, the 16th questions (pucchās), the Pārāyanathutigāthā and Pārāyanaanugītigāthā.

The Brahmin, Bāvarī lived on the bank of the Godhāvarī in the Assaka territory. Another brahmin came and asked for five hundred pieces of money. But Bāvarī could not give him the money and cursed him that his head might cleave into seven on the seventh day. A deity comforted Bāvarī by referring him to the Buddha. Bāvarī then sent his 16 pupils to the Buddha. He made them to ask questions in mind. They were his birth, family, marks, hymns, disciples, the head and head-splitting. They went to the Rock Temple (PāsānakaCetiya) where the Buddha was staying. On their arrival, Ajita, the pupil of Bāvarī asked the questions in mind. The Buddha answered that he was 120 years old, his family was Bāvarī, three marks on the limbs, he was perfect in three vedas, he recited 500 pupils and he reached perfection in his own dhamma. The Lord said ignorance is the head and knowledge cleaves the head. Then the Buddha continued to answer the questions of the disciples of Bāvarī.

The Lord replied Ajita that the world was shrouded by ignorance. Mindfulness was to prevent the craving and knowledge could stop it.

In his reply to Tissametteyya, he called him a great man who had overcome the craving in the world.

In his reply to Puṇṇaka, he who was calm and free could cross over birth and old age.

¹Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā, Vol.II, 320.

²Aṅguttara Nikāya, 444.

In his reply to Mettagū, the Lord Buddha said that the origin of the pain was attachment(Upadhi). The wise could cross the stream of birth and old age.

In his reply to Dhotaka, the Lord said that the one to learn his own extinction should be calm and independent. He must not have thirst for reiterated existence.

In his reply to Upasīva, the Lord said that the one who had abandoned doubts and sensual pleasures could attain Nibbāna.

In his reply to Nanda, the Lord said that the one was called a muni who was free from craving and independent.

In his reply to Hemaka, the Lord said that the one who realized the dhamma, the destruction of passion and desire was the imperishable state of Nibbāna.

In his reply to Todeyya, the Lord said that the one was called a muni in whom there were no lust, no craving and no doubt.

In his reply to Kappa, the Lord said that they who have seen the dhammas did not fall into the power of Māra and his companions.

In his reply to Jatukaṇṇi, the Lord said that they whose greediness for name and form were gone, he might not fall into the power of Māra.

In his reply to Bhadrāvudha, the Lord said that a monk must not grasp after anything because Māra could follow him.

In his reply to Udaya, the Lord said that the one who did not delight in sensation, there was no consciousness for him.

In his reply to Posāla, the Lord said that the Buddha knew all the faces of consciousness. He understood that the bonds of pleasure did not originate in nothingness. He saw clearly in this matter, that was the knowledge of a perfect, accomplished Brāhmaṇa.

In his reply to Mogharāja, the Lord said that the one who was always thoughtful, having destroyed the view of oneself, could might overcome death. The king of death would not see him.

In his reply to Piṅgiya, the Lord said to abandon the craving not to never come to exist again.

The above mentioned replies are the theme of the PārāyanaVagga.

Pārāyana Vatthu in Myanmar Literature

The Venerable Mahāsīlavamṣa took the materials from the piṭaka and composed the PārāyanaVatthu.

In the history of Myanmar Literature, the Innwa period began with Pyo(lyric) together Vatthu(novel). There the PārāyanaVatthu was the first work. Vatthu is a kind of literature in which the character of the people is described. So it is attracted. ThePārāyanaVatthu consists of the four chapters including eight stories of the two monks, lay devotees, nuns, female devotees and other short stories.

The first chapter contains the story of the Venerable Sāriputta and Moggallāna. The second chapter contains the story of the banker, Citta and Hatthālavaka. The third chapter

contains the story of Uppalavaṇṇātherī and Khemātherī. The fourth contains the story of noble women Uttarā and Nandamātā. The recitation of Pārāyana Sutta by Nandamātā is put in the last chapter, referring to this sutta, the vatthu is named Pārāyana.

It is recorded as the first vatthu in the history of Myanmar Prose literature. It is a kind of an admonition for the monks, lay devotees, nuns and female devotees. The eulogy of the author as mentioned in the conclusion, the Āsīsapatthanā is "May observe the practice of the eight noble persons and the like noble practice in the time of the future Buddha, Arimetteyya." In fact it is an ethical prose in Myanmar Literature leading the people to be the pious ones. He advised the people to admonish their sons and daughters to model on the eight noble persons. The Venerable Mahāsīlavamsa seems to use his piṭaka knowledge to take the people to the other shore of the saṃsāra, Nibbāna. Thus he composed the story in prose taken out the materials from the piṭaka.

Sources of Pārāyana Vatthu

The Pārāyana Vagga is a famous one in the life time of the Buddha. While the Buddha was staying at the deer park in Benares, the monks were discussing about the question of the Metteyya put to Buddha at the Pārāyana meeting. It is mentioned in the Majjha sutta of Mahāvagga, Aṅguttara Nikāya¹ as follows:

"Yobhanteviditvāna, majjhemantānalippati. Taṃbrūmimahāpurisoti, sodhasibbinimaccagā'ti."

The Buddha replied that he was a noble one who knew the two extremes through knowledge had not indulged in the passion. In this way it is mentioned in Nandamātā sutta, Mahāyaññavagga, Aṅguttara Nikāya.² At one time, the venerable Sāriputta and Moggallāna wandered in the country, Dakkhiṇāgīri. At that time, early in the morning, as female devotee, Nandanātā recited the Pārāyana Sutta in stress and intonation. The great Deva, Vessavaṇṇa, on his tour, hearing the sutta, stopped and listened to her up to the end. Then he praised her.

In the first chapter, the story of the Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the author explained the four facts on the gāthās recited by the Venerable Assaji.

- (1) The five aggregates are conditioned on things.
- (2) The cause is the craving.
- (3) The cessation is the Nibbāna.
- (4) Leading to the Nibbāna is the Eight-fold Noble Path.

The source of the above explanation is "Ye dhammāgāthā of the Vinaya Mahāvagga² and Apadāna."

"Ye dhammāhetuppabhāvā, tesamhetumtathāgatoāha. Tesañcayonirodho, evaṃvādīmahāsamaṇo."

"All the Phenomena which are born of causes, Tathāgata has preached of their cessation. The Great Samaṇa is the holder of such he has a doctrine.

In the second chapter⁴ it was mentioned about the ogre. Ālavaka who was suppressed by the two great Devas, Sātāgīri and Hemavata saying that he was a newly born calf near the bull with great hump. This reference is taken from Sutta Nipāta and Saṃyutta Aṭṭhakathā⁵.

"Yotvaṃtamupadhāyacalakkakudhamahāusabhasamīpetadahujātavacchatoviya,
tidhāpabhinnamattavāraṇasamīpebhiṅkapotakoviya,

bhāsuravilambakesaraupasobhitakkhandhassamigaraññosamīpejarasiṅgāloviyakhāyasi"

In the same chapter⁶, the ogre Ālavaka offered the prince, Ālavaka to the Buddha is mentioned. That reference is taken from the Saṃyutta Aṭṭhakathā⁷ as follows:

¹Pārāyana Vatthu, 16.

²Vinaya, III, 51.

³Apadāna, Vol, I, 27.

⁴Pārāyana Vatthu, 66.

⁵Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā, Vol I, 218; SaṃyuttaAṭṭhakathā, Vol I, 294.

⁶Pārāyana Vatthu, 112.

⁷Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā, Vol I, 231.

"Imaṃkumāraṃsatapuññalakkhaṇaṃ,
sabbaṅgupetaṃparipuñṇabyañjanaṃ.
Udaggacittosumanodadāmite,
paṭiggahalokahitāyacakkhuma.

In the third chapter¹, it is mentioned the regret of the queen Khemā it is a long time for her not seeing the Buddha with a beautiful girl fanning near him. That reference is taken from Apadāna.²

"Disvātamevaṃcintesi, ahoyamabhirūpinī.

Na mayanenanettena, diṭṭhapubbākudācanaṃ"

In the same chapter, the author composed about the brahmins who were crazy with the beauty of Ummādanī³. That reference is taken from the Jātaka commentary as follows:

"Tetaṃdisvāsatiṃpaccupaṭṭhāpetumaṃsakkontākilesamadammattāhutvāattanovippakatabhojanab
hāvaṃnajanīṃsu. Ekacceālopaṃgahetvā "bhuñjissāmātisaññāyasīseñhapesuṃ,
ekacceupakacchantarekhipiṃsu, ekaccebhittiṃ pahariṃsu."⁴

In the fourth chapter⁵, it is mentioned about Khujjuttarā, a hunch-backed woman in prose. It is taken from Aṅguttara⁶, Itivuttaka⁷ and Dhammapada⁸ commentaries.

"Kasmāpanakhujjāahosīti?

Anuppannekirabuddheyaṃbārānasiraññoḡehevasantiekaṃrājakūlupakampaccekabuddhamkhujjadhātukaṃdisvāattanāśahavāsīnammātugāmānampuratoparihāsaṃkarontikhujjakārenavicari. Tasmākhujjahutvānibbatti.”

In the same chapter⁹, the questions in the mind of the pupils of Bāvarī and the reply of the Buddha is mentioned in the Suttanipāta.¹⁰

Thus the author composed his PārāyanaVatthu based on the Piṭaka sources.

-
- 1.Pārāyana Vatthu, 126-128.
 - 2.Apadāna, Vol II, 226.
 - 3.Pārāyana Vatthu, 156.
 - 4.Jataka Atthakatha, Vol V, 222.
 - 5.Pārāyana Vatthu, 182.
 - 6.Aṅguttara Aṭṭhakathā, 336.
 - 7.Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā, 28.
 - 8.Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, Vol I, 144.
 - 9.Pārāyana Vatthu, 230.
 - 10.Suttanipāta, 433.

4.The Genre of the PārāyanaVatthu

The Pārāyana is the first vatthu in Myanmar Literature. The theme is the practices leading to Nibbāna. It is a kind of literature of knowledge and admonition. It concerns with the Dhamma. It is written in prose of his own style of the author. It also used the method of word by word and literary translation.

The Venerable Mahāsīlavamsa was endowed with piṭaka knowledge and he was a master of Myanmar prose writing.

In the first chapter, he extracted the concept of "Ye dhammā" gāthā of the Vinaya Mahāvagga and gave its meaning as follows:

- (1) The five aggregates are conditioned on things.
- (2) The cause is the craving.
- (3) The cessation is the Nibbāna.
- (4) Leading to the Nibbāna is the Eight-fold Noble Path.

In the same chapter, the two great Devas, Sātāgīri and Hemavata suppressed the ogre, Ālavaka is mentioned as follows:

"You are a newly born calf near the bull with the hump. You are a baby elephant of today born near an elephant on musth. You are a fox near the king lion covered with brilliant feathers on the back. You are an ugly crow near the king dragon who has a large body of 50 leagues in length.

This Pāḷi original is taken from the Sutta Nipāta and Saṃyutta commentaries. In the same chapter, it is mentioned the ogre, Āḷavaka offered the prince Āḷavaka to the Buddha. He composed this in both methods of word by word and literary translation.

The young boy is sent for my food. Now I offer you this boy. May the Buddha accept him for his welfare because you are the noble one who has sympathy towards the people. After that he gave the Pāḷi and nissaya translation (verbatim translation) of the gāthā. The Pāḷi is already mentioned and here is the nissaya as follows:

Cakkhumā-Lord Buddha, the owner of the bodily eye, ahaṃ –I, udaggacitto-being joyful, sumano-glad, dadāmi-offer, te-to you, imaṃ-this, kumāraṃ-boy, satapuññalakkhaṇaṃ-who is endowed with hundred good marks, sabbaṅgupetaṃ-all limbs, paripuñṇabyañjanaṃ-full marks, paṭiggaha-may accept, lokahitāya-for the welfare of the people.

In the third chapter, it is also rendered the repentance of queen Khemā in both word by word and literary translation.

Seeing the Buddha shining in splendour with the six rays like the sun, fanned by an attendant, she thought thus. I had taken the mistake. For a long time I have never been seen beforehand the Buddha fanned by the attendant like a goddess. Why do not I become even an attendant of this girl? Oh, it's my fault. Thus she repeatedly praised the girl.

Disvā-having seen, taṃ-the fanning girl, cintesi-she thought, evaṃ-thus. Ayaṃabhirupinī-the girl is very beautiful, aho-very wonderful kudācanaṃ-at any time, mayā-I, nadiṭṭhapubbā-have never been seen beforehand, anenanetena-with this eye.

While amazing at her, the Buddha created the fanning girl to become a lady. Then he created the lady to be an old woman with thin skin, broken tooth and grey hair. Thus amazing, she came nearly to death. She could not be able to hold the fan. She fell down with the fan in hand and she was out of breath. Its word by word translation is as follows:

Tato-while Khemā was amazing, sā-the girl fanning the Buddha, jarābhibhūtā was conquered by the old age. Vivaṇṇā-she became pale. Vigatānanā-the eye and the

face became worse, bhinnadantā-the teeth were broken, setasirā-the hair became grey and, salālāvanāsuci-because of discharge from wound, the mouth was disgusting.

In the third chapter, the author composed about the brahmins who were crazy with the beauty of Ummātantī.

The brahmins were not able to control themselves on seeing Ummātantī. Some put the morsel on the head instead of into the mouth. Some put the morsel in the armpit.

The author wrote this composition referring to the Jātaka commentary.

This fourth chapter, the story of Khujjuttarā, the hunch-backed woman is mentioned. At that time between Kassapa and Gotama Buddha,

she was the queen of the king of Beneras. She became deformed because she had mocked at a separate Buddha (pacceka Buddha) who was hunch-backed with her friends. She became a maid servant of the queen, Sāmāvātī of Utena. Her name was Uttarā but she was named Khujjuttarā because of her hunch-back.

The author took this reference from Aṅguttara, Itivuttaka and Dhammapada commentaries.

In the same chapter, the questions of the Bāvarī's pupils in mind and the reply of the Buddha orally are mentioned. The author took the Pāḷi from PārāyanaVagga and translated it word by word.

Jānāhi-know, avijjā-the ignorance, muddhāti-as the head. Jānāhi-know, vijjā-knowledge, saṃyuttā-fixed with, chandavīriyena ca-chandādhīpati, vīriyādhīpati and, saddhā sati samādhī-faith, mindfulness, effort, muddhādhīpātīnī-as the cause of head splitting.

So as above mentioned, the style of writing is prose in Myanmar Literature, word by word of Pāḷi and literary translation.

Conclusion

PārāyanaVatthu is named not only because of the Pārāyana but also the pious practices extracted from the piṭaka. The Buddhist ethics lead to Nibbāna, the other shore of the saṃsāra. To appreciate the prose writing skill and to assess the depth of the Buddhist philosophy of the Venerable Mahāsīlavamsa at Innwa period is his style of writing (in prose, word by word and literary translation) and the piṭaka knowledge.

The Pāḷi sources in the PārāyanaVatthu contribute to the development of Myanmar Prose Literature through creative thinking and translation in Innwa period.

References

- Department of Religious Affairs (1961). PārāyanavaggaVatthugāthā, SuttanipātaPāli (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1958). PārāyanavaggaVatthugāthāVaṇṇanā, SuttanipātaAṭṭhakathā, Vol-II, (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1960). Nandamātā Sutta, MahāyaññaVagga, AṅguttaraPāli, Vol-II (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1958). Sāriputtamoggallātanapabbajjakathā, MahāvaggaPāli (Vinaya), (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1960). Sāriputtattherapadāna, ApadānaPāli, Vol-I, (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1958). Āḷavakasuttavaṇṇanā, SuttanipātaAṭṭhakathā, Vol-I (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1957). Āḷavakasuttavaṇṇanā, Yakkhasaṃyutta, SaṃyuttaAṭṭhakathā, Vol-I (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1960). Khemātherīapadāna, ApadānaPāli, Vol-II (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1959). Ummādantījātakavaṇṇanā, Jātakatṭhakathā, Vol-V (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1960). Khujjuttarā – SāmāvatīVatthu, AṅguttaraAṭṭhakathā, Vol-I (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1958). Nidānavāṇṇanā, Itivuttaka, Aṭṭhakathā, (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1958). SāmāvatīVatthu, Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, Vol-I (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Department of Religious Affairs (1961). PārāyanavaggaVatthugāthā, SuttanipātaPāli (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā edition), Yangon, Myanmar.
- Venerable Mahāsīlavamsa (1963). PārāyanaVatthu, Hantharwady Press, Yangon, Myanmar.



Dr- Tin Tin New

Professor, Department of Oriental Studies
Mandalay University, Mandalay, Myanmar



Yee Mon phay

PhD Candidate, School Of Liberal Arts, Department of Global
Studies, Shanghai University, Shanghai, China.



© 2019 by the authors. ASU ,YN ,PSAWT. Author/authors are fully responsible for the text, figure, data in above pages. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

