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The Buddha's Attitude Towards Social Concerns as Depicted in the Pali Canon

Dr. Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi

There has been much written on the subject of the Buddhist attitude towards social issues and concerns in general and conflict situations like war in particular. A very comprehensive and fundamental study on war and Buddhism was published by Paul Demiville⁽¹⁾ in 1957. Since then scholars have shown a keen interest on this topic out of various reasons and motivations. For instance, there are some recent illuminating analyses by Lambert Schmithausen⁽²⁾, Steven Collins⁽³⁾ and Peter Harvey⁽⁴⁾, just to name a few of them. There are also quite a few number of books, essays and articles published (or at least presented at different conferences and symposia) during past decades⁽⁵⁾, especially on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. I hope, we will also be able to listen, today and during next two days, to some interesting and informative lectures at this conference on different aspects of this special issue, that is to say, the armed conflict between Tamils and Singhalese in Sri Lanka, from different angles, with different approaches.

I myself have chosen to speak on the Buddha's attitude towards social concerns. War is necessarily a social concern and in most cases it is inflicted on the society by rulers or persons with ambition for power, territorial and other material gains. Wars are unfortunately also being waged on the grounds of religion as well as ideology. Wars have been a

commonplace thing throughout the whole history of mankind. They have been always both offensive and defensive of nature. Killings-sometimes in the form of massacres-, plunder and complete destruction of property, raping as well, are often involved in wars. This is to the effect that a Buddhist who would be engaged in fighting a war would break at least the first three precepts which he is normally supposed to observe as strict as possible. A careful and conscious abstaining from killing any living being is emphasized for both Buddhist mendicants and Buddhist laity. Refraining from taking what is not given to oneself is expected. While sexuality in every form is prohibited for the Buddhist monks and nuns whereas the laity is expected to avoid every sexual misconduct or misdemeanour very carefully. Therefore one would expect the Buddha to condemn participating in every form of wars as vehemently as he could. But when one goes through the canonical texts one would notice inevitably how rare there are statements to be found which are directly concerned about this subject matter. The Buddha was almost always depicted as hesitant and reserved when he was asked to comment on events like war and other social concerns. In the rare cases where he is seen as discussing such problems he is rather concerned about the psychological, moral and salvific relevance of the problem for each and every individual, rarely about what we call today a social problem.

I am not very much interested in exploring how pacific Buddhist thought was and how much influence it exercised in many parts in Asia during its expansion as a universal religion and after that period. This, I hope, will be explored by most of the speakers of present conference. That is why I am proposing to confine myself only to the attitude of the Buddha towards the social concern as documented in the Pali canon. Scholars are holding controversial opinions about what actually the Buddha was in his function as a religious leader. While Richard Gombrich assumes: "I do not think the Buddha took a serious interest in politics or

intended his teaching to have a political consequences," Trevo Ling emphasizes: "He may justly be described as a social and political theorist".⁽⁶⁾ Collins rejects both these stances saying: "This is a quest I have explicitly disvowed. From the perspective of this book, in which the Pali imaginaire constitutes an aspect of Buddhist ideology in the civilizational history of Southern Asia, the articulation of order to be found in Pali texts is necessarily both cosmological/soteriological and social." He asserts his opinion also elsewhere in his book (p. 56 f.): "I do not mean to argue that the Buddha was not a celibate ascetic who taught his monastic followers a way to final salvation, seen as a definitive and complete release from rebirth. But there is no need to assume that when he taught non-celibate householders, as the texts say, the way to heaven (and other things), he was doing something extraneous to his real message. We cannot know how far the individual whom we know as Gautama Buddha did or did not set out to create the World Religion which we know as Buddhism, nor how much of what it became he would have accepted or rejected ... Speculative reconstructions of early Buddhism from textual evidence is, I believe, in the long run inevitably compromised by the fact that the texts as we have them were intended, in the traditional period, to construct an ideal in the past which could be set against a present reality, which was a priori different and defective." I do not agree.⁽⁷⁾ I think our endeavour to find a development of certain ideas and practices is not so hopeless that Collins would like to make us believe. It is self evident that the Buddhism was essentially an ascetic movement in its earliest phase. I rather incline to take the stance of Gombrich but am not at all sure whether it was only the lack of the interest in political affairs which motivated the Buddha to be involved in them. I believe that Buddha's approach to the solution of the suffering of the world is necessarily a different one. It was neither political nor social but salvific in its outset. I am coming to this point later in my paper.

I am not going to suggest that the Buddha has never thought of discussing the social issues. There are indeed some passages in canon where he criticises poverty as a root cause of crime (*Cakkavattisihanada* D I 65; *Kutadanta* D I OA135) and decline of moral behaviour in the society. On many occasions, according to the canon, he polemicizes against the claim of the Brahmins to belong to the highest caste,⁽⁸⁾ thus the superiority over the other castes, without criticizing the caste system as such as an existing social reality. Even though he demonstrated the vanity of such a division which, according to him, does not exist biologically or otherwise. He never demanded to abandon the caste system as a social factor. For sure, he refused to introduce an hierarchical order which would be based on a similar system for his own religious community.⁽⁹⁾ He expected the laity to observe the five rules of training (moral precepts) as an integral part of their everyday life so that they could live peacefully and in harmony, without harming the interest of others and at the same time securing their own safety and welfare. The moral precepts are not only a codex of negative ethics i.e. non-violence but also to be understood as cultivating of positive qualities such as benevolence, friendliness, laying aside the weapons, having respect for the life of every living being, sympathy and kindness towards them and to be concerned about the welfare of all sentient creatures. It is not only refraining from taking what is not given to oneself is praised and encouraged but also spending money for the poor and needy. It is not only avoiding of sexual misbehaviour which is recommended but also respecting the mutual relationships between partners based on trust, and not impeding the existing social ties and patterns. The Buddha expected the laity to perform their duties as parents and children, husband and wife, relatives and friends, employers and employees and also fulfil mutual obligations among clergy and householders. But all this is very little when one compares the bulk of literature which treats mainly his soteriology, the prime concern of the mendicants, that is to say, getting rid of the vicious cycle of rebirth and attaining the supreme

happiness of nirvana which presupposes leaving behind the society and dedicate himself to the path of purifying oneself of all the negative aspects of existence.

And, to my mind, only from this angle, that is to say, from the angle of soteriological relevance, the Buddha Gautama observed many issues of his time. Everything he preached and taught had this setting of soteriological framework and he even tried to trace all the evils of the various social problems down to the psychological state of mind of the individuals. That means, what matters is primarily 'mental states and behaviour' of each and every individual. If every person behaves well he obtains various advantages for himself by improving his mental states for the benefit of own salvation. At the same time this person contributes essentially to the welfare of the society as a whole being, a part of it. From the dimension of soteriology, in the first place, this is mainly profitable for him. When one considers things from this angle then one understands clearly why Buddha's doctrine could be defined as solipsistic or private ethics. I would like to clarify this with an example. By cultivating meditation of the four so-called 'Unlimited' (appanna) or the "Sublime States [of mind]" brahmavihara) the meditator basically tries to purify his mind from ill-will and cruelty by radiating the whole world with boundless benevolence and compassion. By doing so he hopes to succeed in achieving the final liberation ultimately. When the canonical suttas (such as A IV 150 or V 342) discuss the advantages of practising these mental attitudes they exclusively mention those which the practitioners derive from them. It is perhaps considered self-evident that the habitual practice of this meditation manifests in daily activities of the meditator. His performances become gradually more altruistic, and this is definitely for the benefit and the welfare of others.

Before I shall proceed further I just would like to make some preliminary remarks on the nature of the Buddhist ethics and the

psychology behind it. Perhaps you might be aware of that the main criteria for judging one's actions as morally good/pure or bad/impure is to consider whether the relevant action one has committed or going to commit is harmful for oneself or for others or for both. This consideration is emphasized and is recommended for application before committing these actions through body, word and mind. Crimes those are committed, bring unpleasant results in this very life in the form of punishments by the law of the state or in the form of one's own bad consciousness, especially at the moment of death. Morally bad or good actions are not motivated in Buddhism by punishments or rewards by a personal God. In the canonical texts they are often motivated by the doctrine of *karma*. If one acts in a morally positive way, he is rewarded automatically by the mechanism of karma granting him/her a desirable rebirth, whereas the one who commits bad run into a unpleasant state. Another motivation given is referring to the Golden Rule, i.e. that just as oneself dislikes being treated badly, so do also the other living beings. Therefore one has to treat them as one wishes to be treated by them (another idea of motivation - which is already found in the canon but not used for the purpose of justifying why one should not harm others and should be benevolent and affectionate towards the others - is based on the idea that in course of the beginningless samsara every sentient being has already been one's father or mother or another close relative.)

In the light of the set of these criteria the war is to be necessarily regarded as evil because the actions involved in war are harmful for all the participants. It goes without saying that not only the victims suffer in war but also the malefactor; not only that he could easily get wounded or even killed but also he who accumulates bad karma by inflicting suffering upon others. Lambert Schmithausen has in one of his articles on War and Buddhism drawn our attention to the fact that in ancient India war was the duty of a "special social caste, that of the Ksatriyas, which normally included the kings who are often represented as waging

war and actively participating in them". So it was the affair of the king and his warriors when they were involved in war. The Buddha seemed to have purposely avoided criticising or making comments on king's affairs following his own rule "*anujanami bhikkhave rajanam anuvattitum*" (Vin I 138: I ask you, o monks, to act according to [the law and order of] the king), perhaps also with the intention not to endanger the existence of his own religious Order.

Once a warrior has joined to the Order of the monks he is obliged not to take part in wars, and observe the precept of not killing very strictly. Therefore it is self-evident that he does not take any life, not even in self-defence or to protect a friend. He is supposed not to encourage somebody to kill others or kill himself. The monks are advised not to watch military parades or manoeuvres and stay with them longer than necessary. It is perhaps considered inappropriate for a monk and he could possibly be suspected of espionage. According to the Vinaya the Buddha advised the monks not to ordain the deserters of the army presumably to avoid conflicts with the king (Vin I 73).

The only war in which a monk could take part in was in his own spiritual war against his "unwholesome states of mind". Being a Ksatriya himself the Buddha applied the war metaphor often in his teachings against all kinds of negative psychic factors which prevent him achieving his final liberation. That was what really matters, that was the genuine message which he actually wanted to deliver." If one man conquers in battle a thousand times a thousand men, and if another conquers himself, he is the greatest of conquerors" emphasizes the *Dhammapada* (103).

This is the only attitude the Buddha considers the war with, therefore I think that Schmithausen is not off the mark when he mentions. "One might thus be tempted to consider the possibility that the Buddha (or early Buddhism) somehow took for granted the unrelated

co-existence of private non-injury and warfare as the duty of kings and warriors." I myself too incline to think that the Buddha was more concerned about the individuals who were seeking their salvation as private persons. It was to them the Buddha directed his message without being much concerned about the society as a whole. In a particular spiritual frame work he ventured to reform or transform the individuals, as I have tried to show in the context of the *brahmavihara*-meditation; this kind of well developed inner state of mind of the practitioner does not remain without yielding good results for the society outside.

This spiritual perfection of individuals was the single aim of the Buddha for which he dedicated his whole life and energy. Even though the Buddha had close contacts with some of the kings of his time like Pasenadi Kosala or Seniya Bimbisara⁽¹⁰⁾ he had restricted his instructions to the matters of general ethics and soteriology. It solely was the responsibility of each person to see into how he applies them to the specific situations of life like war.

Let me illustrate my point by giving you some examples. In Samyuttanikaya, when the Buddha was informed by the monks about the war between Ajatasatthu and Pasenadi Kosala, and the king Pasenadi was besieged by Ajatasatthu, the Buddha commented only about the ill-will and suffering which was caused by a defeat. Only those spiritually advanced persons who have given up both victory and defeat could be really happy he insisted.⁽¹¹⁾ When later Ajatasatthu was conquered by king Pasenadi the Buddha is again seen commenting on the viciousness of the cycle of violence where the slayer gets a slayer in return and a evil doer another evil doer who abuses the first. No comment whatsoever on war or waging war was made but only a general principle of moral is given which is rather applicable on a individual level, implicitly criticizing both of the kings.

The second example is a little episode where a soldier approaches the Buddha with a question whether a warrior who dies in the battle goes to heaven. The Buddha refuses twice to give an answer. On being pressed he replies that on the contrary the war-hero definitely goes to a particular hell because of two reasons. Firstly, he has a evil state of mind at the moment of death because he wishes the enemies to be destroyed. Secondly, he cherishes the wrong view that by being killed in the battle he would go to heaven. This is a very interesting anecdote because in the course of this discussion the soldier is more worried about being misled by his teachers and teacher's teachers in this way than being killed in the fight and going to hell consequently.⁽¹²⁾ This story has a special bearing for us at present where this kind of brainwashing has become a common thing by different religious groups and political organisations. It has become a 'burning' issue after the recent incidents in the USA and elsewhere. This canonical passage tells us unmistakably that not only the killing in war but the mere intention to do so produces bad karma, thus should be avoided. This holds good for any war, including the defensive ones. There is no canonical passage which contradicts this opinion. As far as I can see, this is the unequivocal stance of early Buddhist stand point on war.

As I have just mentioned, according to this *sutta* (Yodhajiva) and many other Pali *sutta* the last thoughts at the moment of death could play a decisive role in determination of the place of next rebirth. Interestingly enough, there this very concept of karmic retribution is used to explain how two great Buddhist kings, namely the emperor Asoka of India and king Dutthagamani Abhaya in Sri Lanka were born in heaven in spite of waging brutal wars before they become devoted Buddhists. The *Visuddhimagga* (VIII 14) mentions that Asoka was grieved at the time of his last breath.

sakalam medinim bhutva datva kotisatam sukhi

atthamalakamattassa ante issaratam gato/

teneva dehabandhena punnamhi khayam agate

maranabhimukho so pi asoko sokam agato//

In a modern sub-sub-commentary *Abhidhammatthasangaha* called *Paramatthadipani-anudipani*,⁽¹³⁾ written in the beginning of 20th century in Burma by Ven. Ledi Sawyado (Nanadhaja) this fact is described very laconically by saying that the Sinhalese texts (without any further specification) mention of king Dharmasoka's having evilsome mental factors at his death. (*gatinimittam pana kammabaleneva ti yuttam siya ... papapakkhiyesu duggatinimittesu, kalyanapakkhiyani suggatinimittani ... dhammasokaranno maranakale papapakkhiyanam upatthanam katthaci sihalaganthe vuttam*: p. 183: *Catthasangayana CD-Rom Version 3*). The same *Paramatthadipani-anudipani* states elsewhere that also the king *Dutthagamani Abhaya* had bad visions of the hells or bad existences (*duggati*) as the death approached but succeeded in being born in heaven by remembering a meritorious deed which he had accomplished⁽¹⁴⁾ in the past.

Dutthagamani-ranno vatthum hi ca sonatthera-pituno vatthumhi ca tesam maranasannakale pathamam duggatinimittani upatthahanti. Pacca ranno ekam pubbakatam kayanadhammam anussarantassa therapitu ca tamkhane eva ekam kalyanadhammam karontassa tani duggati nimittani antaradhayanti. Sagganimittani patubhavanti. Ubho pi cavitva sagge nibbattant' ti. (*Anudipani*: p. 153: *CSCD*)

In both cases the texts do not express explicitly why these two kings were unhappy⁽¹⁵⁾ at the moment of their death but I think one could easily guess the reason. After all, both of them killed thousands in battle⁽¹⁶⁾ which they regretted later.⁽¹⁷⁾ I admit this text is composed very recently and not in Sri Lanka but in Myanmar, but they belong to the same tradition of Theravada and based on traditional interpretations

which are to be taken seriously. In the case of Dutthagamini Abhaya it represents a slightly modified version from Mahavamsa and some atthakathas where the king Dutthagamini Abhaya is only portrayed as seeing auspicious signs in the sky when he was lying on the death bed.⁽¹⁸⁾

I presume this is a very good example for trying to find a solution to a problem without violating the original norm of early Buddhism. To my mind the Buddha preached the doctrine of liberation, that is to try to get rid of the samsara as soon as possible, this world is incomplete, unsatisfactory and full of suffering, therefore need to be get rid of. The aim of the Buddha is not to improve the world or society by introducing new ideas, norms and structures, he teaches how to behave as long as one lives on the earth in order to avoid conflicts and to have a wholesome state of mind. The war is like many other calamities quite common and inevitable and very similar to natural phenomenon. The *suttas* which are quoted to legitimize the war by modern interpreters with or without nationalist sentiments like *Cakkavattisihanadasutta* or *Kutadantasutta* do not say explicitly or implicitly that one should wage wars. They are describing ideal societies either in the past or in the future, where the kings rule the earth without violence. Therefore they cannot be taken as attestations for legitimizing war.

But as Schmithausen observes: "Norms are not necessarily invalidated by the fact that they are occasionally violated by certain individuals or groups." And these persons seek for legitimations or making compensations by "making merit". I am not sure how far we can detect in the Pali canon the "two modes of *dhamma*" which is to be recognized according to the attitude taken towards violence, which was suggested by Steven Collins 1998. According to Collins, in the first mode *dhamma* is an ethic of reciprocity, in which the assessment of violence is context-dependent and negotiable. In the second *Dhamma* is an ethic of

absolute values, in which the assessment is context-independent and non-negotiable. I admit this division is illuminating and helpful in interpreting relatively late canonical passages like those of *Jatakas* and post-canonical Pali text such as *Mahavamsa*. But I think the Buddha's attitude to the war was absolute, context-independent and unnegotiable.

To my mind the later compensation for the crimes by making merit in South and Southeast Asia which was suggested by Schmithausen has another aspect which is essentially connected with it. As the two passages from the *Visuddhimagga* and *Paramatthadipani-anudipani cuticitta (cetana/panidhi/sankhara)* that is to say the mind (strong intention/resolution/impulse) at the death moment plays a great role in deciding the next rebirth.⁽¹⁹⁾ This fact is compatible with the Buddha's teaching and well-documented in the canonical *suttas*. It was originally taught by the Buddha only to explain this mechanism which is also decisive along with one's *karma*. As far as I can judge this idea also accepted at least as a method of compensation which is included in the karma-mechanism.

Let me say some words as concluding remarks. The Buddha was remarkably silent in commenting on waging wars and on killings involved in wars. But at least on one occasion he says, the one who dies a hero's death goes to hell because of the evil state of his mind and because of his wrong view that the warrior who falls in the war goes to heaven. This stance is not challenged by any other nikayic *sutta*-passages. A few *suttas* which seem to tolerate a kind of non-violent besiege of the earth or justifiable punishments of the criminals are portrayals of an utopian or ideal societies and to be recognized as such. And even in the *suttas* like *Cakkavattisihanadasutta*⁽²⁰⁾ the "Wheel-turning King" who conquers the foreign kingdoms and countries are doing so without utilizing any weapons and without any killings.⁽²¹⁾

Even though applicable on a broader level, ethical instructions in Early Buddhism are essentially individual and soteriologically relevant.

Notes

(1) Paul Deminville, "Le bouddhisme et la guerre." Postscript to Renondeau 1957: 347-385. (Repr. in: P.Deminville, *Choix d'ntudes bouddhiques*. Leiden: Brill 1973: 261-299). [Return to text.](#)

(2) Lambert Schmithausen, "Buddhismus und Glaubenskriege." *Glaubenskriege in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (ed. P. Herrmann):63-92. Gttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996 and "Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude towards War." *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, Leiden 1999, 45-67; "Buddhismus und Gewalt" (Vortrag im Rahmen der Vortragsreihe: *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart* - Weiterbildendes Studium Universitt Hamburg, Vol. II, 1998, pp. 8-21). [Return to text.](#)

(3) Steven Collins, *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali imaginaire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999 (Sixth Chapter: 414-496). [Return to text.](#)

(4) Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, Cambridge University Press 2000: pp. 239-285. [Return to text.](#)

(5) Just to mention two articles which were presented recently: "In Defence of Dharma: Just-War Ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka" by Tessa Bartholomeusz (paginated version of this article can be obtained from Florida State University: tbarthol@mailers.fsu.edu: 1998) and "Buddhism in War: a study of cause and effect from Sri Lanka" by Elizabeth J Harris, Paper given at the XIIth International Association of Buddhist Studies Conference, Lausanne, August 1999. [Return to text.](#)

(6) Gombrich 1988 (p. 81: *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Benares to Colombo*, London) and Ling 1973 (p. 173: *The Buddha: Buddhist Civilization*

in *India and Ceylon*, New York), cited also in Collins 1998 (p. 418: *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*, Cambridge). [Return to text.](#)

(7) Collins 1998 (p. 57) argument runs as follows: "There are certainly historiographical methods for extracting documentary-style data from such texts, whose work like aspect was very far from empirical history of the modern sort. But any endeavour to narrate an event-history based on early Pali texts must reproduce the long-discredited positivist approach to myth: remove the supernatural, or otherwise unbelievable, and a "kernel" of empirical history remains. For example, if the Buddha is represented as conversing with one or more gods, this approach holds that the meeting with gods did not happen - since we know they don't exist - but what he is represented as saying, nonetheless, reliable documents his real, historical teaching." Collins declares that "This book (*Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities*) aims not to think in terms of the historical Buddha, what he intended, and what happened to his original message." It is not very surprising that many mythological elements creep into hagiographies and other religious documentations. I myself have seen this happening even today. One can even observe how different fantastical descriptions of the Buddha's life and his activities are being formed gradually which elevates him gradually from a normal human being to an omnipotent supernatural god-like personality. Even Pali canon which portrays him realistically has a lot of frame anecdotes in which some of his statements and teachings are embedded. I consider this as a very natural process. Even today in many orthodox Buddhist countries there are people who take these stories for granted, and perhaps even more who try to grasp the essence and message of his teaching. They do not know that this is called an "outdated-positivist" approach of the present day scholars and even less care about that. I wonder if a devotee today in Sri Lanka or in any other Buddhist country would give much thought to the fact whether the queen Mahamaya was

conceived on a uposatha-day pure and without any sexual contacts, whether she gave birth to him from her right hand "side" as some Mahayana texts mention or whether it was the real God Brahma who persuaded the Buddha to teach his doctrine. According to the Pali canon the Buddha himself used this kind of approach to verify statements of other contemporary religious teachers (D I 239: *Tevijjasutta*; M II 169: *Cankisutta*). [Return to text.](#)

(8) M I 84 (*Madhurasutta* 84: *Mahakaccana*); M II 84; II 153 and D III 81. [Return to text.](#)

(9) M I 89: *pubbe khattiyo ti samanna sa 'ssa antarahita, samano t'eva sankham gacchati*. [Return to text.](#)

(10) M II 166. [Return to text.](#)

(11) Cp. *Manusmṛti* 7. 198-200: *samna danena bhedena samastair uta va prthak/ vijetum prayatetarin na yudhyeta kadacana// anityo vijayo yasmad drtyate yudhyamanayoh/ parajayad ca samgrame tasmad yuddham vivarjayeh// trayanam apy upayanam purvoktam asambhave/ tatha yudheta samyatto vijayeta ripun yatha//* Especially the verse 199 reflects a similar attitude to wars like that of the Buddha. Here it is said that one has to avoid war because the siege and defeat in war is necessarily to be transient. [Return to text.](#)

(12) Not only killing living beings is condemned in the earliest Suttas in the Pali canon but also to cause to kill, to approve others' killing (S V 354; Sn 394) and to praise the killings of others. (*attana ca panatipati hoti, paran ca panatipate samadapeti, panatipate ca samanunno hoti, panatipatassa ca vanna bhasati* (A II 253, A V 305). It is explicitly stated that those who commit these offence go to hell (A II 254). [Return to text.](#)

(13) According to the *nigamagatha* this auto-sub-sub-commentary (*Anudipani*) to the *Paramatthadipani* seems to be written by a Burmese

monk, born in the town Diparanga in Myanmar (Mrammadesa) in the year Kali or Saka 1208 (+ 638 = AD 1846: I owe Ms Friedgard Lottermoser for this information of reckoning of Burmese years. In addition to this she informed me that the author is Ven. Nanadhaja who became later famous for his erudition under the name Ledi Sawyado. In the Buddhist world he is well-known as a meditation master who had a great influence in popularizing the *vipassana* method of meditation. This learned monk seemed to have got instructions to write a new commentary to the *Abhidhammatthasangaha* as he was not satisfied with the old commentary the *Abhidhammatthavibhavini* which was known and respected in Burma as the 'Singhalese commentary'. The materials that were collected by Ven. Nanadhaja for this purpose from his teacher and from other old sources were destroyed on fire. So he gave up the idea of writing the commentary and retreated to a forest monastery, which was also mentioned in the *nigamakatha*. According to this he was living in the residence called Langha in the village of Mumvragama of the city Diparanga. Invited by the interested he composed this sub-commentary based on material of which he could still remember. According to Ms Lottermoser there was an uproar among some of the monks who considered it unthinkable to challenge the authority of the 'Singhalese commentary' and revise some opinions on doctrinal matters). The *Anudipani* mentions the finishing date of the composition as 1278 (AD 1916). The *Paramatthadipani* itself was finished in 1897 AD. [Return to text.](#)

(14) Anguttaranikaya-a II 213: *aparabhage ranno tathagatassa sariradhatunam atthamabhagam patitthapetva visaratanasatikam mahacetiyan karentassa aparinitthite yeva cetiye kalakiriyasamayo anuppatto. athassa mahacetiyaassa dakkhinapasse nipannassa pancanikayavasena bhikkhusanghe sajjhayam karonte chahi devalokehi cha ratha agantva purato akase atthamsu. raja "punnapotthakam aharatha'ti adito patthaya punnapotthakam vacapesi. atha nam kinci kammam na paritosesi. so "parato vacetha"ti aha. potthakavacako "culanganiyayuddhe parajitena te deva atavim*

pavisitva nisinnena ekam sarakabhattam cattaro kotthase kareva bodhimatumahatissattherassa bhikkha dinnn"ti aha. raja "thapehi"ti vatva bhikkhusangham pucchi, "bhante, kataro devaloko ramaniyo"ti? sabbabodhisattanam vasanatthanam tusitabhavanam maharajati. raja kalam katva tusitabhavanato agataratheva patitthaya tusitabhavanam agamasi. idam balavakammasa vipakadane vatthu. This fact is also mentioned by Steven Collins 1998 (p. 355). [Return to text.](#)

(15) *Paramatthadipani* p. 257: *tato hi kesa ci pathamam kammabalena va karanantarenena va papapakkhiyesu upatthahantesu puna dutthagamaniranno viya pubbakatam balavantam punnam anussarantanam va sonattherapitu viya tankhaneyeva pasadajanakam punnam karontanam va paccha kalyanapakkhiyani tatha kesa ci pathamam kalyanapakkhiyesu upatthahantesu dhammasokaranno viya paccha kenaci karanena domanassam uppadetva papakammasa okasam karontanam papapakkhiyani upatthahanti ti.* [Return to text.](#)

(16) Cp. *Mahabharata* (12. 98. 4-5). It seems this kind of strategy was often used by the kings of ancient India and legitimated through the concept of *rajadharama*. [Return to text.](#)

uparundhanti rajano bhutani vijayarthinah/ ta eva vijayam prapya vardhayanti punah prajah//

apavidhyanti papani dana-yajna-tapobalaih/ anugrahena bhutanam punyam edam pravardhate//

Kings those who wish to conquer [others] inflict misery on people. But, after having conquered they make them prosper again.

They (i.e. the kings) overcome their bad deeds through the power of generosity, sacrifices and religious austerity; their merit increases by helping living beings.

(17) Mahavamsa XXV 103: *sayito sirisampattim mahatim api pekkhiya/ katam akkhihinighatam saranto na sukham labhi//*; 104: *piyangudipe arahanto natva tam tassa takkitam/ pahesum attha arahante tam assasetum issaram//*; 109: *saggamaggantarayo ca natthi te tena kammuna, diyatthamanuja vettha ghatita manujadhipa//*; 110: *saranesu thito eko, pancasile pi caparo, micchaditthi ca dussila sesa pasusama mata//* Sumangalavilasini (D-a) II 640 gives a contradictory account of this event: *ayam panattho dutthagamaaiabhayavatthuna dipetabbo: so kira dvattimsa damilarajano vijitva anuradhature pattabhiseko tutthasomanassena masam niddam na labhi, tato: "niddam na labhami, bhante"ti bhikkhusanghassa acikkhi. tena hi, maharaja, ajja uposatham adhitthahiti. so ca uposatham adhitthasi. sangho gantva: "cittayamakam sajjhayatha"ti attha abhidhammikabhikkhu pesesi. te gantva: "nipajja tvam, maharaja," ti vatva sajjhayam arabhimsu. raja sajjhayam sunantova niddam okkami. therā: "rajanam ma pabodhayittha" ti pakkamimsu. raja duttiyadivase suriyuggamane pabujjhitva there apassanto: "kuhim ayya" ti pucchi. tumhakam niddokkamanabhavam natva gatati. natthi, bho, mayham ayyakassa darakanam ajananakabhesajjam nama, yava niddabhesajjampi jananti yevati aha.* [Return to text.](#)

(18) See for instance: Mahavamsa XXXII 63 ff.; A-a II 214. Anudipani p. 262 too gives a similar account: *tatha pi chadevalokato attano santikam agate dibbaratheyeva gatinimittam katva cavantanam dhammika-upasaka dutthagamani abhayarajadinam vasena tam pi kammanimittam viya.* [Return to text.](#)

(19) A I 8-9: *idham bhikkhave ekaccam puggalam padutthacittam/pasannacittam evam cetasa ceto paricca pajanami. imamhi ce ayam samaye puggalo kalam kareyya, yathabhatam nikkhitto evam niraye/sagge. tam kissa hetu? cittam hi 'ssa bhikkhave paduttham/pasannam* (cp. also A I 32); A IV 302 (Cittagahapati); M III 213 (Mahakammavibhangasutta); M III 99 (Sankharupapattisutta); A III 380 (so

tamhi samaye labhati tathagatam dassanaya); S V 70 and S V 380 (Sarananisakya). See also Collins 1998 (pp. 355 and 304). [Return to text.](#)

(20) Steven Collins 1998 (p. 66) raises the problem of the antiquity of the concept of *cakkavatti/cakravartin* by asking "...should we infer that texts which speak of such a thing (= large scale political formation) are later than Asoka?" without answering the question directly, even though he suggests "... we may conclude with him (= Gombrich 1988, p. 82) that 'it was an institutionalized fantasy'" Collins prefers to take this sutta as a parable than a myth. (p. 480-1. For more information about his views see pp. 214; 356, 470ff.; 480ff) A.L. Basham (The Wonder that was India, p.84, fn.) proposes: "...This text (*Cakkavattisihanadasutta*: probably the oldest occurrence of the *Cakravartin* concept) either inspired Asoka or was inspired by him, and the very late character of the Sutta rather suggests the latter." [Return to text.](#)

(21) D III 59: *so imam pathavim sagarapariyantam adandenasatthena dhammena abhivijiya ajjhavasi*; Sn 1002: *sace agaram ajjhavasati vijeyya pathavim imam, adandena asatthena dhammena manusasati*//. These textual passages indicate that the wheel-turning kings rule over their kingdoms righteously without using the force of weapons after conquering them whereas A IV 90 says even the act of conquering itself is also without any killing or force of weapons (*adandena asatthena vijeyya pathavim imam asahasena dhammena samena manusasiya, dhammena rajjam kareva asamim pathavimandale ...*). [Return to text.](#)

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