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Buddhaghosa and the Traditional Classifications of the Pali Canon

OF the wealth of commentarial tradition available to Buddhaghosa when he began his monumental work of writing the Pali Commentaries, the statements of the “Ancients” regarding the various classifications of the Word of the Buddha form a very interesting field of investigation. He places great reliance on the ancient tradition which was handed down in Ceylon from the earliest beginnings of commentarial and exegetical activity among the members of the Saṅgha. The Theravāda tradition of India was firmly established in Ceylon by Mahinda who is accredited with the task of compiling the first Sinhalese Commentaries. How far they were actual commentaries, as we understand by the term *Aṭṭhakathā*, we cannot say for certain, but the explanations of the Word of the Buddha given by him in the spoken Prakrit of Ceylon, which incidentally was quite akin to his own tongue, as may be seen from a comparison of the lithic records of the two countries in this period, may have acquired the same degree of sanctity and authority as the Teaching itself. This perhaps marked the beginnings of the Great Commentary of the Mahāvihāra, the *Mūla-Aṭṭhakathā*. The *Kurundī*, *Paccariya*, *Andhaka*, the *Saṅkhepa* and a host of other *Sihala Aṭṭhakathā*, not all of them necessarily in Sinhalese Prakrit like the *Andhaka*, and a large number dealing with portions of the Canon, together with a diversified tradition not only of the so-called *Porāṇā*, the *Porāṇācariyā*, the *Pubbācariyā* or the *Therā*, but also of each monastic group, went a long way in making the commentarial tradition of Ceylon a highly complex one when Buddhaghosa arrived on the scene. At his disposal was a complex mass of material representing various shades of opinion and doubtless belonging to different schools of thought. It was a herculean task before him to separate the various strands and compile commentaries giving a consistent point of view. The voluminous nature of the material at hand was a great drawback to him, and patiently he had to wade his way through different interpretations of the same passage in many different traditions, through conflicting theories and contradictory statements. Some interpretations he accepted, others he modified, still others he rejected while he was often compelled to condense protracted exegesis or expand on insufficient explanations. The serious restrictions

under which he had to work are best indicated by his own words at Vism. 522, when says that in explaining the proposition *avijjāpaccayā saikhārā* he had to abide by the universe of discourse adopted by the Vibhajjavādins, not cast aspersion on the views of the “Teachers,” not be inconsistent with his own system of thought, not trespass on the views of dissentient schools, not reject the Sutta, be in conformity with the Vinaya, see to the broad guiding principles and so on. In the opening verses of the Samantapāsādikā he himself states : “I shall now begin this exposition in conformity with the method of treatment found in the Sacred Texts . . . And in commencing the exposition I shall practically base it on the *Mahā-Atthakathā* as well as the *Mahā-Paccariya* without discarding the relevant statements and the rulings given in the recognised commentaries such as the *Kurundi* ; and thenceforth I shall proceed with the correct exposition of the Tradition of the Elders embodied therein . . . Since in the past, commentaries were written without ignoring the judgements (of the Sons of the Conqueror) I shall therefore avoid the incorrect statements handed down in those commentaries. . . . Thence giving up recourse to a different tongue, condensing protracted exegesis, without excluding any formal decision nor deviating from the method of exposition . . . I will offer explanations in harmony with the *Sutta* taking into account the statements of those who are well versed in the *Suttanta*.”

It is against this background that the conflicting tradition regarding the classification of the Buddha-Word is to be viewed. Buddhaghosa in his Samantapāsādikā (Vol. I, p. 16 ff.) Sumaṅgalavilāsini (Vol. I, p. 15 ff.) and Atthasālinī (p. 18 ff.), has preserved for us the greater part of this tradition systematised as best as he could in the light of all the information available to him.¹ For obvious reasons the lesser known divisions handed down by the *Bhāṇakā* have not been included as they were seen to overlap with other existing divisions. The *bhāṇavārā*, however, are included not as separate divisions but incorporated in the Piṭakas. Buddhaghosa lays down the *mātikā* of the classification of the Pāvācana as :— All this forms the Word of the Buddha which should be known as uniform in sentiment, twofold as the Dhamma and the Vinaya, threefold according to the first, intermediate and last words, and similarly as Piṭakas, fivefold according to the Nikāyas, ninefold according to the Aṅgas and forming eighty-four thousand divisions according to the Sections of the Dhamma (Smp. I, 16).

1. The references from Smp. are given below. The other two sources contain more or less the identical words and hence are not mentioned.

The Uniqueness of Sentiment

His explanation of the uniqueness of sentiment is an echo of the passage : *seyyathāpi bhikkhave mahāsumuddo ekaraso loṇaraso evam eva kho bhikkhave ayam dhammo ekaraso vimuttiraso* (Even as O monks, the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, even so O monks this Dhamma has but one sentiment, the sentiment of emancipation. Ud. 56, Vin. II, 238 etc.). Buddhaghosa expands on this when he says :— During the interval of forty-five years from the time he realised the unique and perfect Enlightenment until he passed away in the element of Nibbāna being free from clinging to the material substratum, whatever the Exalted One has said either as instruction to *devas*, men, *nāgas*, *yakkhas* and other beings, or on reflection, has but one sentiment and that is emancipation (Smp. I, 16).

Dhamma and Vinaya

When he explains the twofold division into the Dhamma and the Vinaya it is noteworthy that he has a definite thesis to maintain. In the earliest known references to the Buddha's Teaching the term *dhammavinaya* is used as a synthetic whole to signify the *Sāsana* in a large number of phrases (See D. I, 229, M. I, 284, II, 181 ff. A. I, 283, III, 279, S. I, 9, III, 65, Ud. 56, Vin. II, 238 ff.). The two are mentioned separately in phrases such as *Dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto* (The Dhamma and the Vinaya which have been proclaimed and laid down respectively—D. II, 154). Both these usages go back to the very words of the Buddha himself. The words of Mahākassapa in the *Cullavagga* account of the First Council (Vin. II, 285) are quoted by Buddhaghosa in support of his contention that the term Vinaya referred to the Vinaya Piṭaka and the Dhamma the rest of the Word of the Buddha excluding the Vinaya (Smp. 17). If he had not qualified his statement in this manner he would have naturally fallen into the error of talking about a “*Dvipiṭaka*.” Firstly, such a thing conforms to no known tradition and secondly it would have left the Abhidhamma out. This is his first attempt in his description of the classification to include the Abhidhamma in the Dhamma. As far as all evidence goes there is nothing to indicate that the division into Piṭakas, which was the accepted classification of the Canon at a subsequent date, was known so early. The Buddha makes no reference to a Sutta Piṭaka or a Vinaya Piṭaka let alone the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. The practice of arranging the teachings of a particular school or sect in *piṭakas* was known quite early, as may be seen in the phrase *mā piṭakasampadānena* (Not by its inclusion in Baskets—A. I, 189) occurring in the Kālāma Sutta, yet it is too premature to talk of the Three Piṭakas in Pali. It took one thousand years after the Parinibbāna for the crystallisation

of the commentarial tradition at the hands of Buddhaghosa, and his explanation that the Basket of the Discipline is the Vinaya, the rest of the Word of the Buddha is the Dhamma, merely reflects the conditions prevalent in his day. He makes a deliberate attempt to include the Abhidhamma Piṭaka under the Dhamma rehearsed by Ānanda at the First Council. The account here repeats the words of the *Cullavagga*, “*Yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ, ahaṃ Ānandaṃ dhammaṃ puccheyyanti.*” (If it meets with the approval of the Saṅgha I will question Ānanda on the Dhamma—Vin. II, 287), but attempts to read a new meaning into the term Dhamma (Smp. I, 15). Perhaps the special division of the entire Teachings of the Buddha into five *nikāyas* (Smp. I, 26) discussed later, defining the *Khuddaka Nikāya* as: “The rest of the sayings of the Buddha including the entire Vinaya Piṭaka, the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and the fifteen divisions commencing with *Khuddakapāṭha*, enumerated earlier, (Sum. I, 18), leaving aside the Four *Nikāyas*—was intended to include the Abhidhamma Piṭaka under the Dhamma. Buddhaghosa specifically states that Upāli explained the Vinaya which formed a part of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* while Ānanda explained the remaining sections of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (Smp. I, 16) which therefore necessarily included the Abhidhamma. This division has more or less disappeared in the Pali tradition though some schools like the Dharmaguptakas regularly refer to the *Khuddaka* as a miscellaneous Piṭaka (not a *Nikāya*) giving it more or less the status of the Vinaya Piṭaka or the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, while they insist on the division of the Sutta into four Āgamas and not five.² Elsewhere Buddhaghosa recognises the tradition of the Four Āgamas at Sum. I, 2,

*Majjhe Visuddhimaggo esa catunnam pi Āgamānaṃ hi
thatvā pakāsayissati tattha yathābhāsitaṃ atthaṃ*

(also reflected in Dpv. IV, 16). Perhaps here too he unwittingly reproduces the tradition in which *Khuddaka* had no real status.

First, Intermediate and Last Words

The division into the first, intermediate and last words is of no great significance except that Buddhaghosa records a slight confusion between the two passages at D. 153-154 and Vin. I, 2 verse (also found at Ud. I.) regarding the first utterance of the Buddha.

The Division into Piṭakas

As regards the division into Piṭakas Buddhaghosa says, “Herein, the collocation of all that has been both rehearsed and not at the First Council,

2. *Vide.* Étienne Lamotte: (1) Problèmes Concernant les Textes Canoniques “Mineurs” *J. A.* 1956, No. 3 and (2) *Khuddakanikāya and Ksudrakapiṭaka, East and West*, VII, 4.

both *Pātimokkhas*, the two *Vibhaṅgas*, the twenty-two *Khandhakas* and the sixteen *Parivāras*, is called the Vinaya Piṭaka;” and proceeds to mention the number of suttas comprising each of the first four *Nikāyas* naming the opening sutta in each case and the *Nikāya* itself (Sum. I, 18). Next he enumerates the works comprising the *Khuddaka Nikāya* and the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. Leaving aside the various problems connected with the number of works comprising the *Khuddaka* and how the figure fifteen is arrived at by the different Theravāda countries,³ the significance of the phrase, “both rehearsed and not” demands attention. The Canon rehearsed at the First Council could not have included all the works that were rehearsed at subsequent Councils. As far as historical evidence goes, the bulk of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* was rehearsed for the first time at the Third Council and a fair proportion of the works comprising the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, on their internal evidence, appears to be centuries removed from the time of the First Council. Buddhaghosa, on the one hand, recognises that many sayings of the Buddha had escaped the attention of the *Saṅgīti-kāraka* monks, and on the other, that many additions to the collections were made at a date subsequent to that of the Council.⁴

Next he proceeds to define each of the terms Vinaya, Sutta and *Abhidhamma* in true scholarly fashion where he is not restricted by tradition which required him to guide his arguments in specified channels. His real genius and depth of vision are clearly evident in the explanations he offers. In each case he gives a stanza and amplifies its meaning in prose.

Vinaya is defined at Smp. I, 18 as,

Because it contains manifold distinctive modes of practices and restrains both bodily and verbal acts, the *Vinaya* is called so by those who are adept in the purport of the Discipline.

The prose explanation follows :

Here the word “manifold” is used with reference to the divisions such as the injunctions of the fivefold *Pātimokkha*, the seven classes of offences beginning with the *Pārājika*, the *Mātikā* and the *Vibhaṅga*. They have

3. *ibid.* Also *Vide.* J. Dhīrasekera: *Buddhaghosa and the Tradition of the First Council U.C.R.*, XV, 3—4.

4. The Theravāda tradition certainly does not unequivocally say that all the works known to the Three Piṭakas were rehearsed at the First Council. Even reading between the lines of the accounts recorded one millennium after the event one easily sees how Buddhaghosa has left room for the discerning reader to judge the true state of affairs. Professor Ét. Lamotte (*ibid.*) is rather harsh on the poor “tradition singhalaise,” for at no stage does Buddhaghosa say that all the works of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* as it is now constituted existed at the time of the First Council.

become distinctive on account of the application of corollaries which serve the purpose of relaxing rigid rules. It regulates body and speech as it prohibits physical and verbal transgressions. Therefore it is called Vinaya on account of the diversity of means, the distinctive practices and the disciplining of the body and speech.

His definition of *Sutta* follows at Smp. I, 19 :

Because it points out meanings, expresses them clearly, fulfils them, flows with meanings, affords perfect protection and shares the properties of a thread, *Sutta* is given the name *Sutta*.

For it conveys meanings which are diversified as subjective, objective and the like. Here the meanings are clearly expressed as they have been declared in accordance with the intentions of those who are amenable to Discipline. Here it fulfils the meanings in the same manner as when it is said that corn yields a harvest. It flows with meaning in the same manner as when it is said that the cow yields abundant milk. It has been said that it protects and guards them well. It shares the properties of a thread even as a plumb-line serves as a measure to the carpenters ; even so is this to the wise, as when flowers strung together with a thread are neither scattered nor dispersed. Likewise, by means of this the meanings have been grasped.

He defines *Abhidhamma* at Smp. I, 20 as :

Since here are found conditions which possess growth and their own characteristics, are revered and differentiated and said to be excellent—on account of these it is called *Abhidhamma*.

And this prefix *abhi* is seen to denote growth, possession of own characteristics, reverence, differentiation and excellence. Therefore it has come to be used in the sense of growth in statements such as, “ acute and painful sensations come upon me, they do not recede,” (S. I, 80). In statements such as “ all those memorable nights that had been set apart ” (M. I, 20), it is used in the sense of own characteristics ; in statements such as “ king of kings, Indra among men,” (Sn. 553) in the sense of reverence ; in statements such as “ capable of being disciplined in the fundamental tenets of the Dhamma and the essential rules of the Vinaya,” (Vin. I, 68 cp. Vin. I, 64, D. III, 267, M. I. 472) in the sense of differentiation. It means

(that they are able to master) the Dhamma and the Vinaya without confusing either with the other. In statements such as “ in surpassing splendour ” (Vv. I, 9, 1), it is used in the sense of excellence. Herein, as stated in expressions such as “ he develops the path for the arising of form ” (Dhs. 97), or “ he lives suffusing one quarter with thoughts of love ” (D. II, 186), phenomena which have reached a state of development have been referred to. On account of their being characterised by sense-data and so forth according to such attributes as “ visual object and auditory object ” (Dhs. 27), they possess their own characteristics. According to such designations as, “ conditions pertaining to a Learner, to a Man Perfected and those that are transcendental ” (cp. Dhs. 184), it is implied that they are revered and are worthy of reverence. On account of their true state being delimited in such manner as “ there arises contact and there arise sensations ” (Dhs. 17, 23) and so forth, they are differentiated. They are called phenomena of excellence in statements such as “ states waxed great, states immeasurable, state incomparable ” (cp. Dhs. 185) and so forth.

The term *Piṭaka* is next defined and explained at Smp. I, 20 with the words :

Those versed in the meaning of the term *Piṭaka*, used it with reference to learning and a vessel. By combining (the two meanings) the three (divisions) commencing with the Vinaya should be known so.

In signifying learning it is called a *piṭaka* in statements such as “not by including in a *piṭaka*” (A. I, 189) and so forth. In statements such as, “ Then a man might come along bringing with him a hoe and a basket ” (M. I, 127), it signifies some kind of vessel.

He concludes by explaining that each of the terms is taken and a compound is made with *piṭaka* in both meanings to form the three terms Vinaya *Piṭaka*, *Sutta Piṭaka* and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. Next follows at Smp. I, 20 ff. a long explanation and elucidation of Vinaya, *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma* which sheds much light on Buddhaghosa's masterly touch of genius, but for want of space it is excluded from here.

The Division into Nikāyas

Buddhaghosa says :— All this falls into the fivefold division : *Dighanikāya*, *Majjhimanikāya*, *Saṃyuttanikāya*, *Anguttaranikāya* and *Khuddakanikāya* (Smp. I, 26). He proceeds to give details of each of the four major

Nikāyas mentioning the name of the opening Sutta, the number of Suttas in each and the arrangement of the Suttas. A few more details are given here than in the description of the division into Piṭakas. A stanza follows the explanation of each of the Nikāyas given at Smp. I, 27 thus :—

The thirty-four long suttas whose arrangement is in three vaggas is called the Dighanikāya the first in serial order.

That which contains a hundred and fifty suttantas and two other suttas, comprising fifteen vaggas is called the Majjhimanikāya.

Seven thousand suttas and seven hundred of them as well as sixty-two suttantas—this is the Saṃyutta collection.

Nine thousand suttas and five hundred suttas and fifty-seven other suttas form the number in the Aṅguttara.

Curiously enough, when he comes to the question, “What is the *Khuddakanikāya* ?” his answer is :— The rest of the sayings of the Buddha including the entire Vinaya Piṭaka, the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and the fifteen divisions commencing with the Khuddakapāṭha, leaving aside the Four Nikāyas (Smp. I, 27). The stanza next follows :—

The rest of the word of the Buddha, excluding these four nikāyas such as the Dīgha, is considered as the *Khuddakanikāya*.

He concludes the section abruptly by saying : “Thus it is fivefold according to Nikāyas” (Smp. I, 28).

The remarks made earlier in connexion with Buddhaghosa's explanation of the Dhamma and the Vinaya and the question of the Four Āgamas have to be borne in mind. The very nature of the Khuddaka being a miscellaneous collection has made it possible for all manner of works to be included in it. The tradition of the Four Āgamas has more or less disappeared in Pali except for a few stray references cited earlier. But at the same time, there is adequate evidence to show the precise nature of the Khuddaka, whether as a *nikāya* or a miscellaneous *piṭaka*, as taken by some of the Sanskrit Schools.⁵ The growth and expansion of the Khuddaka seems to reflect, for the most part, the expansion of the Tripitaka into its present shape. If one does not read too deeply into this traditional explanation preserved by Buddhaghosa, one sees the nucleus of both the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma in the Khuddaka. The Khuddaka Nikāya as consti-

5. Vide Ét. Lamotte, *ibid.*

tuted at present contains no texts which can be designated as Vinaya, but it cannot be said the same of the Abhidhamma. All the works which could form a Vinaya Piṭaka are now found in the extant Vinaya collection but not all the Abhidhamma works have found a “*nivāsa*” in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. The Paṭisambhidāmagga now reckoned with the Khuddaka certainly could not have been the only work of its class in the Khuddaka. For no known reason it has failed to find a place in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. It can be due to one of two reasons ; either it had gained canonical status after the closing of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka or it was left behind in the Khuddaka at the time other works dealing with Abhidhamma topics belonging to it were shifted to an altogether new collection. Further, there is also no known reason why the Dīghabhāṅakas should include the Khuddaka Nikāya in the Abhidhamma, except perhaps that this indirectly refers to the origin of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka in the Khuddaka Nikāya.⁶

Coming to the Vinaya, the conjecture that it belonged to the Khuddaka at some stage finds support in the definition of Sutta in the Navaṅga Division. The entire Vinaya Piṭaka is included in the Aṅga called Sutta. Though it is difficult to say what precisely was meant by the term Sutta here, the memory of a Sutta origin of the Vinaya Piṭaka (not Vinaya) seems still fresh in the Theravāda tradition when Buddhaghosa recorded it. Further, the title Sutta Vibhaṅga cannot be a mere accident. Though there is no

6. Professor Ét. Lamotte in the *J. A.* No. 3, p. 253 points out the stanza at Dpv. V, 35.
Parivāraṃ atthuddhāraṃ Abhidhammappakaraṇaṃ
Paṭisambhidaṇi ca Niddesaṃ ekadesaṇi ca Jātaṃ
ettakaṃ vissajjetvāna aññāni akarimsu te ;

which refers to the Mahāsaṅghikā who rejected the works (or parts of works) mentioned in it. The reasons are not hard to find, as all these works maintain strictly the Theravāda point of view. When the *Dīghabhāṅakā*, the earliest *Bhāṅaka-paramparā* in Ceylon (definitely several centuries earlier than Buddhaghosa) rejected Khp. Cp. and Ap., it speaks indirectly of the relative age of these works compared with the remaining twelve. The *Majjhimbhāṅakā* too did not recognise the novices' handbook, Khuddakapāṭha, and it is their tradition that is preserved in the *Atthasālini* (p. 26) that Khuddaka Nikāya consists of the fourteen books commencing with the Dhammapada. The observations made by him about Sudinna are not warranted if the trend of the whole argument of Buddhaghosa is taken and not the isolated line, *asuttanāmakam Buddhavacanāṃ nāma n'atthi*, torn out of its context. In discussing the *mahāpadesa*, *sutte otaretabbāni vinaye sandassetabbāni* Sudinna states as the first alternative meaning that the term *sutta* meant that aspect of the *vinaya* covered by the Sutta Vibhaṅga and *ainaya* the Khandhakas, and that the two words together denoted the Vinaya Piṭaka. As the second alternative the entire three Piṭakas are covered by the two terms *sutta* and *vinaya* as *sutta* includes the Sutta and Abhidhamma Piṭakas and *vinaya* the Vinaya Piṭaka. The point that Sudinna makes is that there is no section of the Word of the Buddha which cannot be designated as Sutta and hence all three Piṭakas are Sutta ; Vinaya is but a topic. Hence Buddhaghosa's conclusion : *Tasmā sutte'ti teṭṭake Buddhavacane otāretabbāni, vinayeti etasmiṃ nāgaggi-ādi vinayakāraṇe saṃsandetabbāni'ti ayam ettha attho.*

Hence “in the sutta” means that it should be made to descend into (i.e. be compatible with) the Three Baskets and “in the vinaya” means that it should be compared with such disciplinary measures as the extinction of the fires of lust and so forth.

possibility of superimposing the Navaṅga Division on the Piṭakas or Nikāyas it seems quite probable that if at all the Vinaya Piṭaka had a Sutta origin it must have had its beginning in Khuddaka and not elsewhere. Piecing all the scanty evidence available, it appears that this lesser known tradition of the division of the *entire* Teachings into Five Nikāyas marked a phase much earlier than the actual division of the Canon into Piṭakas. This seems to represent an intermediate stage between the original Dhamma-Vinaya taken as a whole (See D. I, 229, M. I, 284, II, 181 ff. A. I, 283, III, 279, S. I, 9, III, 65, Ud. 56, Vin. II, 238 ff.) and the subsequent division into Piṭakas. Professor Lamotte observes “ This division of the whole of the canonical texts into five Nikāyas is not an exclusive peculiarity of the Sinhalese Theravādin School. In fact it goes back a long way and was in use on the continent in the 2nd century before our era. The inscriptions of Bhārhut (Lüders’ List, 867) and Sāñcī (idem, 299) call *pacanekāyika* or *pacanekayika* the monks conversant with the whole of the canonical texts. Wrongly most of our explainers took this term as a reference to the five Nikāyas of the Sutta-piṭaka. In fact the word *pañcanaikāyika* is exactly synonymous with the epithet *traipiṭika* (versed in the three piṭakas) occurring in the inscriptions of Sārnāth (Lüders, 926, 927), Śrāvastī (918), Mathurā (38) or Kāñheri (989).”⁷

The very nature of the Khuddaka permitted the entry of all works outside the four major Nikāyas into it, and served a useful purpose in providing a home. The internal evidence from all these works (outside the four major Nikāyas) points to their gradual growth in course of time.⁸ Scholastic activity among members of the Saṅgha was at its highest during the first few centuries after the Rājagaha Council. Members of the Saṅgha living in the large monastic institutions began examining and analysing the Pāvācana and made numerous compilations rearranging the Buddha’s Dhamma. Both the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma are products of such scholarly activity ; and among this category should also be included the majority of the works comprising the extant Khuddaka Nikāya.

As the original Khuddaka Nikāya grew in bulk it was considered to be unwieldy. Hence the formation of two other collections, the Vinaya Piṭaka and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. The term Kṣudraka Piṭaka used by

7. Ét. Lamotte, *East and West*, VII, 4, p. 343.

8. *Vide.* N. A. Jayawickrama : A Critical Analysis of Pali Sutta Nipāta Illustrating its Gradual Growth, U.C.R. Vol. VI, No. 1 to Vol. IX, No. 2. as regards the development of the Sutta Nipāta.

the Sarvāstivādi group of Schools is but a distant memory of the actual state of affairs amongst the earliest literary tradition of the Buddhists of all Schools, but while the original School had dropped this designation as it no longer was applicable, the younger Schools stuck to the old nomenclature. This has actually given rise to four Piṭakas in these Schools, thus :— (1) The Vinaya Piṭaka, (2) The Sūtra Piṭaka, (3) The Abhidhamma Piṭaka and (4) Kṣudraka Piṭaka⁹.

The Nine Aṅgas

Just as the Buddha refers to his Teaching as the Buddha-vacana, the Pāvācana or Dhamma-Vinaya he also uses the term Navaṅga-Sutthu-Sāsana (M. I, 133, A. II, 103 etc.)¹⁰. As a term it goes back to the earliest times, but it is extremely difficult to say whether any precise classification was intended at any stage. It is a mere description of the literary types and not a division into water-tight compartments. There seems to be a good deal of overlapping, for the same piece can belong to several of these categories at the same time. Even after reading the traditional explanations handed down by Buddhaghosa the reader is left right where he began, perhaps a little more confused than at the beginning. Buddhaghosa begins by saying, “ All this is comprised under the ninefold division ” which he enumerates at Smp. I, 28. He gives examples from extant works or pieces and proceeds to define each class. As stated earlier, he cites all the works of the Vinaya Piṭaka, four Suttas from the Sutta Nipāta (Sn. Nos. 16, 13, 37, 52 respectively)¹¹ and says that these and other sayings of the Tathāgata bearing the name Sutta should be known as *Sutta*, (Smp. I, 28). These examples are representative of a type of discourse coming under this particular description. They cannot be classified under a precise division as into *piṭaka*, *nikāya*, *vagga*, *bhāṇavāra*, or *khandhaka*. They present no uniform class of teaching. While the better known Suttantas of Dīgha and Majjhima Nikāyas find no mention here, four Suttas from Sutta Nipāta are cited. Judging from these examples and those that follow for the other eight Aṅgas it appears that the real significance of the early Navaṅga Classification, whose existence is echoed even in the very words of the Tathāgata, (M. I, 133, A. II. 103 etc.) has been lost by the time Buddhaghosa began to record the Theravāda commentarial tradition. The more precise division

9. *Vide.* Ét. Lamotte, J.A. 1956, No. 4. p. 256.

10. The Sanskrit Schools add Nidāna and Avadāna after Udāna. They often wrongly Sanskritised the Pali Itivuttaka as Itivuttaka while the correct form Ityukta is also preserved. They substituted the unfamiliar Vedalla with Vaipulya giving it an equally meaningless interpretation and appended Upadeśa “ instruction ” as the twelfth Aṅga.

11. Representative Suttas form a Nipāta of Suttas, which itself represents a cross-section of Suttas. *Vide.* N. A. Jayawickrama, Criteria for the Analysis of the Sutta Nipāta, U.C.R., VI, 1.

into Piṭakas and other sub-divisions has ousted all other divisions leaving only a vague memory behind or giving new connotations to them as in the case of Dhamma in Dhamma-Vinaya which is made to include the Abhidhamma as well, in the light of the subsequent developments in the Pali literary tradition. Hence Navaṅga has become a relic of a by-gone age whose memory but lingers but not the true significance.

Coming to *Geyya* the position is no better. Suttas containing stanzas, particularly like the entire Sagātha Vagga of the Saṃyutta are called *Geyya* or Recitation (Smp. I, 28). Judging from the explanation here, *Geyya* (from *√gai gāyati*, to sing), seems to represent the *ākhyāna-type* containing stanzas punctuated with narrative prose. Generally, in the old *ākhyānas*, the stanzas alone had a fixed form while the prose-narrative was given by the reciter in his own words. This appears to have been so even in Pali, but as time went on the prose too became fixed, and often the next step was to versify the narrative as well, as may be seen in Pabbajjā and Padhāna Suttas of the Sutta Nipāta. (Sn. Nos. 27, 28). But all the same, the stanzas were *gāthā* and not *geyya*. Unless there is an early confusion as to what *geyya* should be, the explanation here seems to be highly inadequate, except perhaps, if it is conceded that *geyya* has become a technical term meaning *gāthā* interspersed with prose, then the term is acceptable. If some discrimination is made against the narrative prose, restricting Canonical status to the stanzas only, there is some justification for the explanation, but again, it would be encroaching on the meaning of *Gāthā*. It is quite possible that the true significance of this term too has been lost, and one may not be far wrong in designating as *geyya* those lyrics and lyrical ballads found scattered throughout the Sutta Piṭaka.

There seems to be no difficulty where *Veyyākaraṇa* (Exposition) is concerned. The whole of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka falls into that category but it is doubtful whether “all the sayings of the Buddha containing no stanzas” (Smp. I, 28) would be called Expositions. The phrase, “not included in the other eight Aṅgas” (ibid.) shows how Buddhaghosa records a tradition with which he was not quite familiar. It is quite unlike what he would normally say, and it can be definitely asserted that the tradition of the Navaṅga classification was long dead by Buddhaghosa’s time.

There is perfect justification for Dhammapada, Theragāthā and Therīgāthā to be designated as *Gāthā*, (Smp. I, 28) but the criterion for judging whether a particular piece in Sutta Nipāta is *sutta* or *gāthā* is highly nebulous,

except perhaps, if Buddhaghosa is taken very literally, when the *vatthu-gāthā* of Nālaka and Rāhula Suttas, and the entire Pārāyaṇa Vagga together with the *vatthugāthā* and epilogue alone among the pieces of Sutta Nipāta are considered as *gāthā* (Sn. Nos. 37, 23, 54 ff. respectively). This appears to be highly unsatisfactory and is perhaps far from what Buddhaghosa meant. There seems to be no clear line of demarcation between *sutta* and *gāthā*, except that prose is excluded from *gāthā*.

The extant collections of *Udāna* and *Itivuttaka*, perhaps unknown during the life-time of the Buddha, and probably finalised centuries later are conveniently identified with the Aṅgas bearing the same names. There are many *udānas* not only of the Buddha but also of his disciples and lay disciples, scattered all over the Pali Canon outside this meagre collection of 82 suttantas. So also are the quotations from Buddha’s words found to occur in other discourses often prefixed with the statement, “For it has been said . . .” and sometimes with no such introduction, which have failed to find a place in the *Itivuttaka* collection of 112 suttantas.

As in the case of *Udāna* and the *Itivuttaka* there is no justification for equating the Aṅga called *Jātaka* with the extant *Jātaka* collection numbering about 550 stories. Firstly, the stories themselves have no Canonical status, which is reserved for the *Jātakapāli*—the stanzas only. Secondly, there is no reason why *Jātakas* of Canonical antiquity such as those incorporated in other suttantas e.g. *Kūṭadanta* and *Mahāgovinda Suttas* in *Dīgha Nikāya* (D. I, 127 ff. and D. II, 220 ff.), should be excluded. The definition given here is highly arbitrary. Buddhaghosa is seen to give explanations in the light of the knowledge of his day. How else could he explain them if the tradition was all forgotten, while at the same time, there is a fruitful source to draw from in the collections that had grown to his day, for ready identification of these lesser known Aṅgas of hoary antiquity :

All the Suttantas connected with wonderful and marvellous phenomena handed down with words to such effect as, “O monks, these four wonderful and marvellous qualities are seen in Ānanda,” (D. II, 145) should be known as *Abbhutadhamma*, (Smp. I, 28). The example given is not a suttanta by itself but a brief statement incorporated in the *Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta* (D. II, 72 ff.). Entire suttas dealing with “Marvellous Phenomena” are hard to find, though there are numerous examples of this category of saying scattered all over the Canon.

Two of the examples given for *Vedalla* have the title *vedalla* and all six suttas named at Smp. I, 28-29 deal with subtle analysis to a much further degree than even in a *veyyākaraṇa*. These suttas are described as "having been preached as a result of repeated attainment of wisdom and delight." (ibid.). The word *veda*, generally translated as wisdom has also the meaning of "exhilarating joy," cp. *vedajāta*, which seems to fit in with the context better, specially when it is coupled with *tuttihi*, and this has become the starting point for Buddhaghosa's explanation of the term *Vedalla*. It is not a mere coincidence that the list of Twelve *Aṅgas* at Mahāvīyutpatti 62, has substituted *vedalla* with *vaipulya* (from *vipula*), generally identified with *Vaitulya* in Ceylon.¹² This is a clear indication that the Mahāyānists had already lost the significance of the term and have found it necessary to substitute it with a more familiar term. For the Theravadins, at least, the memory of the term remained, and by the time of the Commentarial epoch attempts are made to revive meanings of unfamiliar terms in the light of the then-current tradition. Hence a curious secondary derivative of *veda*, whether it means wisdom or ecstasy, is conceived of to explain the term *Vedalla*, whereas even the method of subtle analysis found in the six suttas quoted as examples has not touched a familiar chord in Buddhaghosa. To my mind *vedalla* means "subtle analysis" though such application is hardly justifiable as it runs counter to the accepted tradition now preserved by Buddhaghosa. The word itself comes from an older *vaidārya* from *vi + √dā* to tear apart, hence analyse or break down into fundamentals.

Units of Doctrine

Buddhaghosa next proceeds to explain the *Units of the Dhamma* :—

All these, the entire sayings of the Buddha have eighty-four thousand divisions according to the Units of the Dhamma as laid down at Smp. I, 29 in the following manner :

I have taken eighty-four (thousand) from the Buddha, and two thousand from the monks : and these are the eighty-four thousand extant Units of the Dhamma.

A Sutta of unitary application is one Unit of the Dhamma, and whatever is of multiple application, the number of Units of the Dhamma in it corresponds to the number of topics of application. In metrical compo-

12. Skr. *Vaitulya*, P. *Vetulla* is the secondary or abstract form of *vi-tul-ya* (f.p.p. of \sqrt{tul} to weigh. Hence *Vetullavāda* means a divergent system of thought or discrepant view or *heresy*. The term appears to be of Ceylon origin. The equation of *Vaitulya* with *Vaipulya* (from *vipula*) is not quite historical. *Vaipulya* is explained as, "instruction developed through question and answer." cp. *Vedalla* as *vedaṇ* ca *tuttihi* ca *laddhā laddhā pucchita-suttantā*.

sitions the question and the answer form two different Units of the Dhamma, in the *Abhidhamma* each analysis of a dyad or a triad or the analysis of each thought-process forms a separate Unit of the Dhamma. In the *Vinaya* there are the context of rule, enunciation of rule, analysis of terms, secondary conditions of guilt,¹³ conditions of no guilt, and the demarcation of the threefold category of offence.¹⁴ Each category here is a separate Unit of the Dhamma. In this manner it has eighty-four thousand divisions according to the Units of the Dhamma (Smp. ibid.).

Conclusion

The foregoing observations show in what perspective the whole problem has to be viewed. The seven classifications discussed above are made on different bases and it is not easy to identify one with another although occasional points of contact are discernible. Any attempt made to equate one mode of classification with another, with the exception of the divisions into *Nikāyas* and *Piṭakas* will end up in failure producing no definite results. If the works in the extant *Khuddaka Nikāya* are to be equated with the *Aṅgas*, whether as nine in the Pali version, or as twelve in the extended version, it would involve a serious violation of correct historical analysis. On a superficial basis one may attempt to identify the extant *Udāna*, *Iti-vuttaka* and *Jātaka* with the *Aṅgas* bearing the same names and go a step further equating *Thera* and *Therīgāthā* with *Gāthā*, *Sutta Nipāta* with *Sutta*, *Apadāna* with *Avadāna* the eleventh *Aṅga* of the twelvefold division, which would leave the works *Khuddakapāṭha*, *Dhammapada*, *Vimānavatthu*, *Petavatthu*, *Niddesa*, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, *Buddhavaṃsa* and *Cariyāpiṭaka* out of the scene completely. Such a process would be highly irregular as all these, with the exception of *Niddesa* and *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, belong to the *Aṅga* called *Gāthā* while the latter two are *Veyyākaraṇas* of two different types. As stated earlier, one should not be too hasty in identifying one with the other merely on the grounds of similarity of name.

13. Burmese texts add *atthi āpatti*, "there are conditions of guilt," after this, but the pattern of *Vinaya* rules in the *Sutta Vibhaṅga* to which this description applies, does not include it here, whereas it is found along with the rule itself. After *padabhāṇaniya* comes the *antarāpatti* followed by *anāpatti*.

14. The threefold category of offence pertaining to each ancillary *Vinaya* rule covered by *antarāpatti* is given e.g. *Pācittiya* 36 on *anattirittabhojana* at *Vin. IV, 84* :—

Pavārite pavāritasaññī anattirittena khādanīyena vā bhojanīyena vā abhihaṭṭhuṃ pavāreṭhi āpatti pācittiyassa. Pavārite vematiko . . . āpatti dukkaṭṭassa. Pavārite apavāritasaññī . . . anāpatti. Tika-pariccheda is seen here. Next comes the ancillary rule about *yamakālika* etc. which is followed by *Apavārite pavāritasaññī āpatti dukkaṭṭassa, apavārite vematiko āpatti dukkaṭṭassa, apavārite apavāritasaññī anāpatti. Tikapariccheda* is seen to occur here too. Next follow various conditions of *anāpatti*. Each of these categories comes under any one or more of the three *dvāras, kāya, vacī* or *mano* and it is not necessary for all three *dvāras* to function with regard to every offence.

All these classifications have some historical basis. The fact that only a few of them are recognisable now does not necessarily imply that they only were the "real" classifications while others were figments of the fruitful imagination of Buddhaghosa or of his predecessors in this field i.e. the Porāṇā and the authors of the *Sihala Aṭṭhakathā*. The classification into Piṭakas appeals to us more as we are able to recognise these divisions easily. Two of the classifications are practically of no great significance viz. *rasavasena* and *paṭhama-majjhima-pacchima-Buddhavacana-vasena*, but the other five definitely represent distinct land-marks in the development and growth of the Pali Canon. The earliest limit of the older of these classifications is easily seen but not the lower limit. We do scant justice to this tradition if we fix the lower limit to the period of Buddhaghosa.¹⁵ Merely because he records a tradition it does not on that account follow that the tradition is his creation, and it is a total disregard of historical evaluation to bring down the dates of any of these divisions to the 5th century of our era even on the strength of anachronistic explanations of divisions that Buddhaghosa was hardly familiar with. The internal evidence of the works that comprise these divisions and the external evidence from post-Canonical works like the *Milindapaṇha* and *Nettipakarāṇa* are ample testimony as regards the period to which these works belong. If one goes on the superficial evidence of names only, keeping the dates of parallel texts of a subsequent period belonging to the Sanskrit Schools as guidance one is led to conclusions which are far from the true state of affairs. If these works are to be dated with some degree of accuracy each one of them will have to be studied very closely.

On the results of this cursory examination one may conclude that the classification into Dhamma and Vinaya was a broad-based one with no reference to any Piṭakas as Buddhaghosa tries to show and that it was as old as Pali Buddhism itself. Similarly the Navaṅga division, which does not take into cognisance a single work as such, was equally old, going back to the very words of the Buddha. There is an historical basis for the division into five Nikāyas and it really marks the formative period in the development of not only the Pali Canon, but also that of the literatures of the various Ācariyavādas represented in a later day by the Sanskrit Schools. The Nikāya division was the stepping stone to the more systematic division into the Piṭakas. It specially marks the period of the early expansion of

the Pali Canon, probably about the time of the Second Council, culminating in the division into Piṭakas. The exact date of the division into Piṭakas is yet to be fixed but tentatively it may be suggested that the beginning of this tendency was probably prior to the Third Council. The last division of them all the Dhammakhandhas appears to be a scholastic flourish which may yield its own secret with more thorough investigation.

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15. It is rather difficult to agree with the view of Professor Lamotte (*J.A.* 1956, No. 3, p. 261) Rien ne permet d'affirmer que cette collection ait été compilée avant l'époque de Buddhaghosa au V^e siècle de notre ère. Adoptée par les religieux de Mahavihāra d'Anurādhapura, elle fut loin d'être admise par les autres écoles singhalaises.