

## *The Sahassavatthu-atthakātha or Sahassavatthuppaḥarāna*

A PRELIMINARY STUDY.

THE author of the work is not known. In his introduction the author, after venerating the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, salutes the *Sīhaḷācariyas* (Teachers of Ceylon) and says that for his work he borrows material from the *Sīhaḷatthakathā* (Sinhalese works) and the traditions of the teachers.<sup>1</sup>

The date of the work is doubtful. But the very name *Sahassavatthu-atthakathā* suggests that it belongs to a period at least earlier than the 11th century A.C. The word *atthakathā* had, during the early Anurādhapura period, a wider connotation than it has at present. Today it means only the Pāli commentaries on the *Tiṭṭaka*. But during the early Anurādhapura period the term was applied to all kinds of literary works other than the *Tiṭṭaka*. At that time there were only two forms of Literature—*Pāli*, signifying the Text of the *Tiṭṭaka*, and *Atthakathā*, signifying all the other literary works including the commentaries on the *Tiṭṭaka* and such works as *Mahābodhivaṃsatthakathā* (a work on the History of the Great Bodhi Tree), *Cetiyaṃsatthakathā* (a work on the History of the Cetiya), *Mahācetiyaṃsatthakathā* (a work on the History of the Great Cetiya), *Dīpaṃsatthakathā* (a work on the History of the Island), and *Mahāvāṃsatthakathā* (a work on the History of the Great Dynasty). These were all written in Sinhalese. The word *Sīhaḷatthakathā* was evidently used to denote Sinhalese works in general. There was then no form of literature known as *Ṭikā*. The term *Ṭikā* came into vogue only during the Poḷonnaruva period. So far as we know, Ānanda's *Mūlatikā* was the first *Ṭikā* and it was written about the 11th century A.C. Ānanda was the teacher of Buddhappiya, the author of the Pali Grammar, *Rūpasiddhi*. The *Moggallāyana Vyākaraṇa*, of about the middle of the 12th century A.C., knew Buddhappiya's *Rūpasiddhi*. Therefore we cannot be far wrong if we place Ānanda somewhere in the 11th century. Prior to this period all works other than the *Tiṭṭaka* seem to have been known under the generic term *Atthakathā*. The name *Sahassavatthu-atthakathā* tempts one therefore to assign it at least to a date earlier than the *Ṭikā* period.

Both the *Mahāvāṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa-atthakathā* are referred to in this work; reference is also made to an opinion expressed by *Uttaravihāravāsins*. The reference to *Mahāvāṃsa* shows that the work is later than the 5th century A.C. The mention of *Sīhaḷatthakathā* (in the introduction) and

1. *Sahassavatthum bhāsissam. Sīhaḷatthakathānayaṃ gaṇhitevā'cariyavādaṃca*

the *Mahāvamsaṭṭhakathā* (in the body of the work) shows that the *Sahassavatthu* belongs to an early period, for the reference to *Sīhaḷaṭṭhakathā* is not to be found in works, either in Pāli or in Sinhalese, written later than about the 10th or 11th centuries. That the *Mahāvamsa-ṭṭhakathā* was read by students at the time the *Sahassavatthu* was written is evident from the fact that the author of the work refers his readers to the *Mahāvamsaṭṭhakathā* for further details.<sup>2</sup>

The *Mahāvamsaṭṭhika* which belongs approximately to about the 10th century A.C. has three references<sup>3</sup> to the *Sahassavatthakathā*. The first two (the one about Suranimmala and the other about Goṭha-imbara) are found in the MSS. But the third one (about Prince Sāli) cannot be traced. In fact the story of Sāli is altogether omitted in the available MSS. They contain only one sentence about Prince Sāli: *Sālivājakumāravatthum Mahāvamsa vuttanayena vedītabbam. Sālivājakumāravatthum dutiyaṃ*. That is all. Whether the copyist of the archetype of these MSS. omitted the story merely referring the reader to the Mhv. in order to save himself the labour of copying a long story, or whether these MSS. represent an abridged form of the original *Sahassavatthu* cannot be decided unless and until some more MSS. can be consulted. But in the *Kasavāhinī*, which is generally believed to be a work based on the Shv., is found<sup>4</sup> the reference to Sāli as given in the *Mhv. Tīkā*.

Vedeha, the author of the Rsv. says in his introduction that his book is based on a Pāli work written by a thera named Raṭṭhapāla who resided in Guttavaṅka Pariveṇa at the Mahāvihāra in Anurādhapura. Can the Shv. be the work here referred to?

The late Hugh Neville, in the Catalogue of his manuscript collections now in the British Museum (No. 115), has suggested that the *Sahassavatthupakara* formed the basis for the Pāli *Kasavāhinī* and that it was a work of the Dhammaruci sect. But Malalasekera sees no reason to justify this assignation to the Abhayagiri sect.<sup>5</sup>

A sentence in the story of Goṭha-imbara which reads *Uttaravihāra-vāsino pana evaṃ vadanti*<sup>6</sup> (thus the residents of the Uttaravihāra say) definitely proves that the Shv. was not a work of the monks of the Uttaravihāra, i.e. of the monks of the Dhammaruci sect.

2. *Ayam pana saṅkhepo. Vithāro pana Mahāvamsaṭṭhakathāyaṃ vutto. Atthikehi tato gahetabbo. (Dhammāsokamahārājassa vatthu)*

3. MT. ed. Malalasekera. pp. 451, 452, 607.

4. Rsv. II, p. 116.

5. *Pāli Lit. of Ceylon*, pp. 128, 129.

6. This sentence occurs in the Rsv. also. There *kira* is substituted for *pana*. (Rsv. II p. 88) *kira* is more idiomatic in this context.

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The introduction of the Rsv.<sup>7</sup> says further that Raṭṭhapāla's work was a translation into Pāli of stories told in Sinhalese by Arahants of old. A perusal of the Shv. shows quite clearly that the work is a very literal and often crude translation into Pāli of a Sinhalese original. The language of the Shv. is often ungrammatical, unpolished and abrupt, and has no pretence to literary elegance whatever. The work abounds in direct translations of Sinhalese idioms and usages which may be called "Sinhalese-Pāli" e.g.

*Kālasigālaṃ piṃbero aggahesi (Kālasigālassa vatthu)*

*Tava saḥāyakaṃ suvaṇṇapatakaṃ māritacoroti āha (Byagghassa vatthu)*

*Etassa manussassa geha-dinnamanusso (Coragehe vasita-manussassa vatthu)*

*Mayhaṃ āhāraṃ khādītva āgama-kālaṃ maṃ ito muñcanupāyaṃ karohīti (Coragehe vasita-manussassa vatthu)*

*Tava kathana-paccekabuddho nāma kīdisoti (Dhammāsokamahārājassa vatthu)*

*Sīhaḷadīḷe uttarapacchīyaṃ (Dantakuṭumbikassa vatthu)*

*Taṃ pūjaṃ karanasamaye (Kañcana-deviyā vatthu)*

Such sentences as these which are abundantly scattered throughout the work cannot be fully understood and appreciated without a sufficient knowledge of Sinhalese.

Sometimes such usages as *poḍaṃ kīḷituṃ* "to fight" or "to wrestle" (*Goṭha-imbara vatthu*) are met with. But they are not found elsewhere in Pāli. Perhaps the word *poḍa* may be a Pālicised Sinhalese word for "fight," like *piṃbaro* (Sinh. *piṃburā*, පිඹරු) for "python" or "boa," (the usual Pāli word for which is *ajagara*) or like *pacchīyaṃ* (Sinh. *pasā*, පසා) for "direction" or "side" or "district" or "province" (usual Pāli for which is *passa*)

Ungrammatical sentences like -

*Āloketvā attano gate (Coraghātakassa vatthu)*

*Atha nāvā sattadivasam gatakāle samuddamajjhe bhijji (Dantakuṭumbikassa vatthu)*

*Rañño putto vijāyi (Coragehe vasita-manussassa vatthu)*

are not wanting. Side by side with these ungrammatical and crude forms we find good idiomatic usages such as—

*yathā dhotena pattena (Tissadahara-sīmaṇerassa vatthu)*

*Dukkhāpetvā<sup>8</sup> (Coraghātaka-vatthu)*

There are sentences which exhibit also an influence of the *Jātakatṭhakathā*.

7. Rsv. I, Intro. vv. 5-7

8. Cf. *Sukkhāpetvā* in the *Janavasabha Sutta*, D.N.

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The *Rasavāhinī* introduction adds that the stories told in Sinhalese by the Arahants of old had their origin in various places—*tattha tatthūpapannāni vatthūni*. Several examples in the Shv. show that the stories were evidently based on oral reports from various places. The relation of a story or an incident sometimes concluded with *iti vadanti* "so they say." For example,

*Tāvatiṃsabhavane nibbattiṃsūti vadanti (Kākassa vatthu)*  
*Catuhī māsehi gatoti vadanti (Cūlanāgattherassa vatthu)*  
*Gahetvā agamaṃsūti vadanti (Tambasumanatherassa vatthu)*  
*Aladdhatthhānaṃ nāma natthīti vadanti (Pīva pabbatavāsī-Tissattherassa vatthu)*

The author of the *Rasavāhinī* admits that his work is simply a revision of Raṭṭhapāla's Pāli translation which abounded in faults such as repetition.<sup>9</sup>

No one who goes through the Shv. can help feeling that it needs revision very badly not only in language, but also in its arrangement.

Usually there are 10 stories to a *vagga* (chapter). But one *vagga* has 5 stories, another 9, while a third has 11. Very often the name of a story at the beginning is different from the name given at the end. The titles of stories are generally descriptive and long, and are meant to indicate the nature of the story. e.g. *Cūlagallaratthe āsanāsālam jaggantassa upāsakassa vatthu*; *Mahāgāme Tissamahāvihāre dhammasut-nesādassa vatthu*. It is in this descriptive fashion that stories among the Sinhalese villagers are named even today.

The literary style of the fourth *vagga* is entirely different from that of the rest. The story begins with a *gāthā* which gives the gist of the story in brief. At the end of the story, immediately after the words *tena vuttaṃ*, the same *gāthā* is repeated. Sometimes, after the *gāthā* at the beginning, the story opens with *taṃ yathā'nusuyyate*. The fourth *vagga* seems to have had some Sanskrit influence.

There is no system in the arrangement of the stories either. They are all mixed. The stories from Jambudīpa are scattered among those of Laṅkā. The story of Kākavaṇṇatissa (9th of the IVth *vagga*) is really the story of three people, namely, Kākavaṇṇatissa, Duṭṭhagāmaṇi and Velusumana. But at the end of the *vagga*, without relating it, the story of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi is given as the tenth one. It simply says: *Duṭṭhagāmaṇi-Abhayamahārāṇṇo vatthu Mahāvamse vitthāritam eva. Taṃ tato gahetabbam*. This was evidently considered as good as relating the whole story.

The fifth *vagga* gives the names of the ten generals of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi as though the author intended to relate the stories in a series. But the stories

9. *Punaruttādi dosehi tamāsi sabbam ākulaṃ anākulaṃ karissāmi* Rsv. I. Intro. v. 7.

of Nandimitta (story 6, vagga II) and Velusumana (included in story 9, vagga IV) are given earlier. So the series begins with Suranimmala, but ends after relating only four stories. Again, the first story of vagga VI contains only the following abrupt sentence: *Saṅkhepena Duṭṭhagāmaṇi-rañño vatthum paṭhamam*. The second, the story of Prince Sāli is not given either, but the reader is requested to learn it from the *Mahāvamsa: Sālivājakumāravatthum Mahāvamsa vuttanayena veditabbam. Sālivājakumāravatthum dutiyam*. Yet it is counted as having being actually told.

The commentary on the *gāthā* beginning with *Aniccā vata sankhārā* (in the first story, *Dhammasouḍaka*, of vagga I) is very elaborate and fanciful. Yet it contains phrases with deep philosophical meaning. This is the only commentary on a *gāthā* in the whole book.

The *Sahassavatthu* presents a great deal of historical material not found in other sources. It offers, for example, a clue towards the identification of *Dubbittihimahārāja* found in the *Rasavāhinī*.<sup>10</sup> *Brāhmaṇatīyaṃ corabhayaṃ* is the usual phrase found in Pāli commentaries and chronicles, though *-tīyaṃ* is inexplicable. But the Shv. gives the name four times and invariably calls it *Brāhmaṇa Tissa-corabhayaṃ*. The story of Phussadevatthera is entirely a new thing not found in the Rsv. There is a story of Phussadeva in the Rsv. ; but there he is the well-known general of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi. Phussadeva Thera of the Shv. is the son of Saddhātissa's sister. *Kāṭakanāravāsī Phussadevatthero nāma Saddhātissa-mahārāṇo bhagīniyā putto*—thus the therā is Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's nephew. The information that Duṭṭhagāmaṇi or Saddhātissa had a sister is not found anywhere else.

The story of Phussadeva Thera is found in several other works. In the *Sārasaṅgaha*,<sup>11</sup> under *Sammajjanānisamsa*, the story is given as illustration to prove the merits of sweeping. Many details are omitted. Only the portions connected with sweeping and Māra's appearance are given. In the Shv. story, Māra appears only once. But here he appears on three successive days, as a monkey, a bull and a lame man. The Thera is called Kālandha-kālavāsī Phussadevatthero. The *Saddharmaratnākara*,<sup>12</sup> (a Sinhalese work of the early part of the 15th century) calls him Kālakanda Phussadeva. (According to this book Kālakanda Vihāra was in Rohaṇa). Here also Māra appears three days successively as a monkey, a bull and a lame man. Many details are omitted. Only the portions connected with sweeping and Māra's appearance are given. Here too, the story is cited as illustration to praise the merits of sweeping. The *Visuddhimagga*<sup>13</sup> knows him as Kāṭakandaravāsī Phussadevatthera. He attained Arahantship by looking at the figure of

10. See my Note, University of Ceylon Review, Vol I. No. II, p. 82.

11. *Sārasaṅgaha* ed. Somānanda. (Colombo 1898) p. 33.

12. *Saddharmaratnākara* ed. Dharmakīrti (Colombo 1912) p. 334.

13. Vism. P. T. S. edition p. 228 168.

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Buddha created by Mara. No other details are given, not even that he swept the yard, nor that Māra appeared in various forms. The three stories given above do not mention that Phussadeva was Saddhātissa's sister's son. But all the four stories agree that Phussadeva Thera attained Arahantship by looking at the figure of the Buddha created by Māra.<sup>14</sup>

The name *Sahassavatthu* suggests that the book should contain one thousand stories. But in fact there are only 94. Such round numbers as thousand and five hundred were generally used in ancient literature to denote large numbers. But 94 is too small to allow the word *sahassa* even for such a usage.

In this connection Malalasekera offers an interesting suggestion. He thinks that the word *sahassa* may be the Pāli equivalent of the Sanskrit word *saharṣa*, which means "gratifying, delightful, mirthful, gladsome."<sup>15</sup> Then the title *Sahassavatthu-atthakathā* or *Sahassavatthupparakaraṇa* means "Book of Gratifying Stories," which is quite a plausible title. The suggestion seems to me to be all the more reasonable when we compare this with the title of *Rasavāhini*, which means "mellifluent" or "river of taste" or "flow of taste" or "joy-giver" or "pleasure-producer." Then the two titles *Sahassa* and *Rasavāhini* mean essentially the same thing. This also suggests that the Rsv. was based on the Shv.

There are numerous sentences in the *Rasavāhini* which agree word for word with those of the Shv. In the *Kiñcisanghāya vatthu* of the Rsv. the *gāthā* uttered by the *devatā* living in the king's *chatta* (parasol) is the same, except for one or two words, as the one found in the Shv. The *gāthā* uttered by Goṭha-imbara, after attaining Arahantship, is the same in both works except that the Rsv. *gāthā* is touched up in order to make it more elegant and grammatical.

These considerations prompt the question: "Cannot our *Sahassavatthu* be the work of Raṭṭhapāla of Guttavaṅka Pariveṇa at the Mahāvihāra in Anurādhapura which Vedeha, in the 14th century, revised and re-named as *Rasavāhini*?"

Although the *Sahassavatthu* is crude in its language and arrangement it has much historical value. There is no doubt that the work is based on some reliable old Sinhalese records which were available to the author at the time.

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14. The *Jātaka* cty. calls him Kaṭakandhakāravāsi Phussadevathero, but gives no details of his life whatever. (*Jātaka*. V, S.H.B. (1935) p. 163.

15. It may (philologically) be argued that *saharṣa* ought to give *sahamsa* and not *sahassa*, just as *utkarṣa* gives *ukkamsa* or *praharṣa* gives *pahamsa*. But examples like *varṣa* > *vassa* and *karṣaka* > *kassaka* justify the derivation of *sahassa* from *saharṣa*. This may also be considered as a popular derivation, judging from the literary standard of the Shv.