Was There A Gonisa-vihara in Ancient Ceylon?

IF we take Geiger's translation of the *Cūlavaṁsa* as our authority, a monastery named Gonisa-vihāra played an important part in the early up-bringing of Dhātusena, the warrior king of the fifth century, who re-established Sinhalese sovereignty after a period of Tamil rule, constructed the great irrigation reservoir named Kalāvāva and came to a tragic end at the hands of his son Kassapa I. The *Cūlavaṁsa*, after recounting Dhātusena's parentage, informs us that, as a small boy, he had adopted the life of a *sāmaṇera* under the tutelage of his uncle, an unnamed *thera* who resided in the Dīghasanda-āvāsa of the Mahāvihāra. Two incidents which portended the great destiny that awaited Dhātusena, and the measures adopted by his uncle, the *thera*, to protect the small boy, and to fit him for his future career, are narrated in a passage, vv. 17—21 of chapter 38 of the *Cūlavaṁsa*, which has been translated by Geiger as given below :

' Now once as the latter (*i.e.* Dhātusena) was reciting (sacred texts) at the foot of a tree a cloud began to rain. A snake seeing this, encircled him in her folds and covered the book and the boy with her hood. The uncle saw that. Another time another penitent in his wrath threw dung at his head but failed therewith to disturb his spirit. The uncle beheld that too and thinking : " that is in very truth a most excellent being, without doubt he will become king, he must be protected", he went along with him into a vihāra, and instructed him in the Gonisa-vihāra with the object, " he must be made a master in state-craft " '.

According to Geiger's own admission, this translation cannot be taken as adequately conveying the sense of the original Pali, the least unsatis-factory feature to the student of history being the degradation of the Nāga (a divine being) who protected Dhātusena into a common snake, and the change of his sex. Geiger's own note on his performance is as follows : " The passage is somewhat dubious. In the first place, I believe that the words *ādāya taṁ vihāraṁ upāgato* mean : he fetched him out of the Dīgha-sanda-pariveṇa. As that lay in Anurādhapura, the youthful Dhātusena was here not safe enough from possible machinations of the king. His uncle took him to the Gonisa monastery (*gonisādi-vihāra* means the monas-

tery whose name begins with *gonisa*). We do not know where this monastery was, as it is not otherwise mentioned—possibly in the south of the capital. For the rest I follow the conjectural *nītimā* of M. Geiger which makes the sense far more pregnant. As his uncle regards Dhātusena as the future king, his task is to acquaint him with *nīti*, i.e. state-craft."

Before we come to deal with Geiger's rendering of *gonisādi-vihāra*, we might dispose of his interpretation of *ādāya taṁ vihāraṁ upāgato*. This phrase occurs after the recounting of the portentous happenings, and the reflection of the *thera* that the boy should be protected, but before the mention of the *thera's* resolve that the boy should be trained in a place other than the Dīghasanda-pariveṇa. The two incidents witnessed by the *thera* are said to have occurred while the boy Dhātusena was studying, seated under a tree, and the statement in the chronicle that the uncle ' took him, (i.e. the boy) with him and came to the *vihāra*' refers to his coming to the Dīghasanda-pariveṇa from under the tree. It was after returning to the residence from the arbour that the thought occurred to the *thera* that the boy should be instructed at a place more suitable for the formation of his character than a monastic residence in Anurādhapura was for that purpose. According to the sequence of events in the narrative of the *Cūḷavaṁsa*, it was after the *thera* had been warned in a dream that the Tamil king ruling at Anurādhapura was designing to capture Dhātusena that the *thera* took him away from the Dīghasanda-pariveṇa. And this account is given in the third verse following the phrase *ādāya taṁ vihāraṁ upāgato*. The word *āgāto*, ' came,' cannot also be interpreted as ' fetched out' as Geiger has done. The *vihāra*[1] in this phrase, thus, cannot refer to the monastic residence meant by *gonisādi-vihāra*.

The half verse occurring in Geiger's text of the *Cūḷavaṁsa* as *gonisādi vihāre ' yaṁ kattabbo nītimā iti* has been translated by Wijesinha as saying ' I must render this youth accomplished at the Gonisāda Monastery'. Turnour, the first translator of the chronicle, has completely misunderstood the passage and translated it by ' Beloved, do not omit, night or day, to improve thyself in what thou shouldst acquire'. The text followed by Wijesinha appears to have had *gonisāda* in place of *gonisādi*, and he has taken this to be the proper name of a place, as Sumangala and Batuvantudave, who translated the chronicle into Sinhalese, have also done with regard to *gonisādi*.

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1. For the use of the word *vihāra* with the meaning of a ' monastic residence ' in particular, and not ' monastery ' in general, see *Khuddasikkhā*, v. 156, and the old Sinhalese gloss thereon. Also consult the term *vihāra-gonisādikā* used by Buddhaghosa in the *Samantapāsādikā* (P.T.S. Edition p. 1099), discussed below.

Geiger's reading *gonisādi* is supported by several manuscripts and, as will become clear also from the evidence to be discussed in the sequel, is acceptable. He agrees with his predecessors, Wijesinha, Sumangala and Batuvantudave, in seeing a proper name in this, but differs from them in taking the element *gonisa* as the proper name, and treating *ādi* as introduced for the purpose of satisfying the metrical requirements, as for instance in expressions like *Kadalyādi-nivāta* (*Cv.*, 48.50) for *Kadalī-nivāta* and *Vijayādibāhu* for *Vijayabāhu*. This device, which does not say much for the literary skill of an author, has been rarely resorted to in the *Cūḷavaṁsa* ; as a rule, *ādi* is introduced between the two elements compounded in a proper name, and not between two words in a compound comprising a proper name and a common name. According to the manner in which Geiger has broken up *Gonisādi-vihāra*, it would correspond to a phrase like *Anurādhādipura* for *Anurādhapura*, a type of usage not met with in literary works. Geiger himself has pointed out that a monastery named Gonisa has not been met with anywhere but in this doubtful passage. Geiger's interpretation of this phrase, therefore, raises doubts in one's mind, as to its acceptability. Aggamahāpaṇḍita A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, the accomplished Pali scholar who has pointed out and corrected many a slip in the distinguished philologist's translation of the Ceylon chronicles, has nothing to say on the passage that we are discussing.

The word *gonisādi*, with or without the suffix *ka*, occurs in several places in the Pali literature, not as a proper name, but in fact as the name appropriate to a particular type of monastic establishment. In the *Khudda-sikkhā* (v. 144), *gonisādi* is enumerated among the four types of *kappiya-bhūmi* or *kappiya-kuṭi*, i.e. buildings in which it is permissible for monks not only to live, but also to cook food. Here, the *Khudda-sikkhā* follows the injunction attributed to the Buddha Himself in the Mahāvagga, V. 33, 4 : *Anujānāmi bhikkhave catasso kappiya-bhūmiyo, ussāvantikaṁ, gonisādi-kaṁ, gahapatiṁ, sammutiṁ ti.* Rhys Davids and Oldenberg have rendered the word by 'ox-stall' in their translation of the *Vinayapiṭaka*, and this meaning has been given to the word in the Dictionary of the Pali Text Society. Miss I. B. Horner, in her translation of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, renders *gonisādika* by 'that connected with what is fortuitous.'[2] Miss Horner has consulted Buddhaghosa's *Samantapāsādikā* on the meaning of the word, but her interpretation, which hardly conveys a clear idea as to the character of a *gonisādikā*, is due to her not properly grasping what the commentator says. Buddhaghosa's comments on the word are : *gonisādikā duvidhā ārāmagonisādikā vihāragonisādikā ti. Tāsu yattha n'eva ārāmo na senāsanāni*

2. *The Book of Discipline* (Sacred Books of the Buddhists) Vol. IV, p. 328 & f.n. 4.

parikkhittāni honti, ayaṁ ārāmagonisādikā nāma, yattha senāsanāni sabbāni vā ekaccāni vā parikkhittāni, ārāmo aparikkhitto, ayaṁ vihāragonisādikā nāma iti ubhayatrā'pi ārāmassa aparikkhittabhāvo yeva pamāṇaṁ.[3] " *Gonisādikā* is twofold, an *ārāma* (monastery) which is a *gonisādikā* and a *vihāra* (monastic residence) which is a *gonisādikā.* Of these two, where neither the *ārāma* (monastery as a whole) nor the individual residences (*vihāra*) are enclosed, this is an *ārāmagonisādikā ;* where the residences, all or some (of them), are enclosed, but the monastery (*ārāma*) as a whole is not enclosed, this is a *vihāra-gonisādikā.* Thus, in both cases, it is the fact of the monastery being not enclosed that is the criterion." According to this explanation of Buddhaghosa, a *gonisādikā* is a monastery which as a whole is not enclosed with a fence or wall ; the individual residential buildings within it may or may not be enclosed. This interpretation is in accord with the definition of a *gonisādikā* in the *Khuddasikkhā,* v. 147 : *yebhuyyenāparikkhitto ārāmo sakalo'pi vā vuccate gonisādī ti.* " A monastery which is for the most part or totally not enclosed (with fence, etc.) is called a *gonisādi.*" Here, it would be noted, the word occurs just as it does in the *Cūḷavaṁsa,* without the suffix *ka,* the use of which, thus, is seen to be optional, and does not affect the meaning of the word. The *Sikhavaḷaṅda-vinisa* (Sir D. B. Jayatilaka's edition, p. 52) defines *gonisādi* in similar terms.

The word *gonisādi* as the first element of a compound occurs in the *pada-bhājaniya* or explanatory section of the Vinaya-piṭaka.[4] The Sutta-vibhaṅga, III, 46, in enumerating the different types of villages, says: *gonisādi-niviṭṭho pi gāmo.* Buddhaghosa's explanation of this compound is: *gonisādiniviṭṭho nāma vīthisannivesādivasena anivisitvā yathā gāvo tattha tattha dve tisso nisīdanti evaṁ tattha tattha dve tīṇi gharāni katvā niviṭṭho*[5] " *Gonisādi-niviṭṭha* is a village which, not being planned by laying out the streets, etc., is established by erecting here and there two or three houses, in the same manner as cows lie down by twos or threes here and there."[6] It is this explanation of *gonisādi* that Miss Horner has applied to *gonisādikā* occurring in the enumeration of the four *kappiya-bhūmiyo.* In this instance, however, *gonisādi* qualifies *niviṭṭha,* the latter word referring to the manner of the laying out of a village. The same meaning cannot, therefore, be applied to the word when it is used as a substantive denoting a particular

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3. *Samantapāsādikā*, P.T.S. Edition, p. 1099.

4. *Vinayapiṭaka, op. cit.* III, p. 46.

5. *Samantapāsādikā*, (P.T.S. Edition) pp. 298—9.

6. The planning of the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya can be characterised as *gonisādi-niviṭṭha*

type of monastic establishment. In both cases, it seems that we have secondary developments in the meaning of the word *gonisādi* or *gonisādikā*, of which the etymology would indicate 'a place where cattle lie down'. The word was probably applied originally to the unenclosed part of a village set apart for cattle to roam about or lie down, i.e. the village pasture. The extension of the use of the word to an unenclosed monastery, where the cattle were free to roam about, or lie down, is but natural. The straggling appearance of houses in a village that had grown haphazardly suggested a parallel with the appearance of cows lying down in a pasture, and resulted in the extension of the use of the word in the compound *gonisādi-niviṭṭha*. The word *gonisādikā*, with its original meaning of 'pasture', appears to have been the origin of the word *gonaki*, occurring in some Old Sinhalese inscriptions of about the third or fourth century, denoting a certain type of land appertaining to tanks in ancient Ceylon, most probably the open land above a tank bed wherein cattle were allowed to graze and lie down.[7]

Whatever the significance of the word *gonisādi* or *gonisādikā* may be where it is applied with reference to a village, the Pali commentaries leave no room for doubt about the meaning of the word where it refers to a monastic edifice or establishment. And it is with that meaning, i.e. 'unenclosed', that the word must have been used by the author of the *Cūḷavaṁsa*. We have now to consider how that meaning is appropriate to the context in which *gonisādi-vihāra* occurs in the chronicle.

According to Geiger's translation of the relevant passage in the *Cūḷa-vaṁsa*, it was with the object of making Dhātusena 'a master in statecraft' that the *thera*, his uncle, resolved to move him out of the Dīghasanda-pariveṇa to another *vihāra*, which, according to Geiger, was named Gonisa. But this idea of making the boy Dhātusena 'a master in statecraft' has been read into the text by introducing thereto the word *nītimā* which is not found in any of the manuscripts of the *Cūḷavaṁsa*. The text edited in Sinhalese characters by Sumangala and Batuvantudave has *dhītimā*[8] in place of *nītimā*. Being not a critical edition, according to Western standards of scholarship, it is not stated by the editors whether the reading *dhītimā* is supported by the manuscripts utilised by them, or whether it is an emendation of a corrupt reading. Even if *dhītimā* is an emendation, it is preferable to Geiger's emendation into *nītimā*, for most of the manuscripts contain the reading *vītimā*, and *vī* is more likely to result from a scribal

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7. The word *gonaki* is met with in the Vessagiri Rock-Inscription of Sirināga II (*Ep. Zey.* III, p. 222) where the published text needs emendation and in an unpublished slab-inscription of Kaniṭṭha Tissa discovered at the Ruvanväli Säya.

8. Translated into Sinhalese as *nuvanäti*.

error from *dhi* than from *nī*, the difference in appearance between the syllables *vi* and *dhi* being not very marked.[9] With regard to the sense also, the reading *nītimā* is hardly appropriate to the context. The incident refers to a time when Dhātusena was of tender years, and hardly likely to profit by a course of instruction in political science. And why was Gonisa-vihāra a suitable place to impart to Dhātusena skill in statecraft? According to the narrative in the *Cūḷavaṁsa*, it was to a monastery in the outlying districts that Dhātusena was taken from Anurādhapura; it is hardly likely that professors of political science were available in such places.

The word *dhitimā* means 'one who is courageous', and this would be not only in keeping with the sequence of events in the narrative, but also would make the correct interpretation of the phrase *gonisādi-vihāra* significant. The boy Dhātusena was being brought up by his uncle as a *sāmaṇera*, to make him fit for the religious life, at the Dīghasanda-āvāsa in the Mahāvihāra of Anurādhapura. The Mahāvihāra was an enclosed monastery, and the Dīghasanda-āvāsa or parivena, as such monastic edifices usually were, must have been enclosed by a *prākāra*. The boy thus was leading a sheltered life, subjected to a strict discipline, which gave him no scope for self-assertion. The first incident noticed by the *thera*, according to the story, was the protection of the boy during a shower of rain by a super-human being, i.e. a Nāga. This convinced the *thera* that the boy was destined to be king of the Island. The next incident noticed by the *thera*, that of the boy remaining unruffled when dirt was thrown over his head by a fellow-pupil, must have indicated to the *thera* that the qualities being inculcated in Dhātusena by his life in the monastery were hardly of the type required of one who had to wrest the sovereignty from enemies. Meekness of character and not hitting back when hit, are admirable qualities in a *bhikkhu*, but not in a prince who had to fight his way to the throne. What a boy intended for such a career had to acquire was not humility, but personal bravery and courage, the ability to fend for himself in a difficult situation. These qualities could hardly be inculcated in a boy of tender years in a cloister at the capital city. On the other hand, if the boy was brought up in a *gonisādi* monastery, which was not protected by being enclosed, and which, being in the country, would be frequented not only by cattle, as the name indicates, but even by wild beasts, he would learn to fend for himself and become courageous (*dhitimā*). Thus, what the *thera* was concerned with was the psychological training of the boy's

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9. We apologize for being unchivalrous in this preference, for the emendation *nītimā* is due to M (i.e. Frau) Geiger.

character, not to stuff his mind with theories on state-craft. The thera's resolve to move Dhātusena away from Dīghasanda-pariveṇa on these considerations was confirmed by the warning, received in a dream as stated in the chronicle, or in a less miraculous manner, that the Tamil ruler of Anurādhapura was becoming suspicious of the boy, and had planned to apprehend him. The boy was taken away not too soon, and we find the thera going past the Kalā Oya with him, evidently to a monastery in an outlying district, which would most probably have been of the gonisādi type. The interpretaion that we have given of gonisādi-vihāra and the preference of the reading dhitimā to nītimā make the passage in question appropriate to the context, and we offer the following translation in place of the extract from Geiger's translation quoted towards the beginning of this paper :

' One day, (Dhātusena, seated) at the foot of a tree, was studying by himself. (Then) a cloud rained ; a Nāga, seeing (that), protected the book and the boy, by enclosing him in his folds and also covering (him) with his hood. The uncle saw that. Another ascetic being angered with him, scattered dirt on his head, (but Dhātusena) did not show hatred in mind towards him. The uncle saw that, too, and (reflecting)" this is indeed a noble being, he would certainly become king and should, (therfore), be protected", came (back) to the residence (vihāra) accompanied by (the boy) and trained him with the thought that he should be made courageous (by being brought up) in a monastery that is not enclosed '.

There was thus no monastery called Gonisa-vihāra in ancient Ceylon; there must have been scores of gonisādi monasteries, just as they are found today in Ceylon. In fact, the majority of monasteries at the present day are of the gonisādi type. The Malvatte Vihāra in Kandy and the Vidyā-laṅkāra Pirivena near Colombo are two prominent examples.

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