

## Mahanama, the Author of Mahavamsa

FOR about a thousand years, it has been accepted by the literati of Ceylon that the *Mahāvamsa*, the well-known Pāli chronicle of Ceylon, was the work of a *thera* named Mahānāma. The earliest reference to Mahānāma's authorship of the *Mahāvamsa* is found in the *Vamsatthappakāsini* (*Vpk*), the commentary (*ṭikā*) of the chronicle, which, in its colophon, calls the main work 'the Great Chronicle in versified words (*Padyapadoruvamsa*), which was composed, by the *thera* whose appellation has been taken as Mahānāma by his seniors, who resided in the Mahāpariveṇa caused to be built by the general Dīghasanda and who was well versed in the meaning and context of the Great Chronicle, merely substituting (Pāli) for the language of the *Sīhalaṭṭhakathā* which existed in the ancient Sinhalese language, but taking (as it was) the essence of the meaning, and in consonance with the spirit of the tradition'.<sup>1</sup> The exact date of the *Vpk* has not yet been determined. Geiger is of opinion that it was written in the tenth century.<sup>2</sup> Though this view is not based on any conclusive evidence, one can be certain that this commentary was written earlier than the time of Parākramabāhu I. The author of the *Vpk* states that he composed his work at a time when the Island was going through various tribulations, including domination by a foreign country.<sup>3</sup> The last condition can apply, before the time of Parākramabāhu, only to the period of Cōḷa occupation in the first half of the eleventh century, which we may therefore conclude as the date of the *Vpk*.

1. *Mahāvamsatthakusalena Dīghasanda-senāpatinā kārāpita-mahāpariveṇa-vāsinā Mahānāmo ti gurūhi gahitanāmadheygena therena pubba-Sīhalabhāsikāya Sīhalaṭṭha-kathāya bhāsantaram eva vajjiya atthasāram eva gahetvā tantinayānurūpena kutassa Padyapadoruvamsassa* (*Vpk.*, p. 687).

2. Malalasekera's attempt to ascribe the *Vpk* to an earlier date is not based on sound reasoning. He would identify the author of the *Mahāvamsa* with the first Mahānāma of the Bodhi-Gayā inscription (about which more in the sequel), and the commentator with the second Mahānāma, a pupil of the former's pupil, of the same document. He also would identify this Mahānāma II with the Mahānāma who was the author of the *Saddhammapakāsini*, commentary to the *Paṭisambhūdāmagga* (*The Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, pp. 142 ff.) The author of the *Saddhammapakāsini* has definitely stated that his work was completed in the third year after the death of Moggallāna (the First) i.e. in or about 515 A.C., and the *Vpk* has a reference to Dāṭṭhopatissa the nephew, i.e. Dāṭṭhopatissa II. (659-667). It is clear that *Vpk* cannot be earlier than the reign of Dāṭṭhopatissa II.

3. *Videsissariyabhaya-dubbutṭhībhaya-rogabhayādi-vividhantarāya-gutta-kali-kāle pi* (*Vpk.*, p. 687).

The *Cūlavamsa* (*Cv*), in its account of the reign of Dhātusena, states that this king in his boyhood was brought up under his uncle, who had adopted the religious life and was living in the monastic residence founded by Dīghasanda.<sup>4</sup> The name of the *thera* has not been given in the chronicle, but in its account of the reign of Moggallāna I, the younger son of Dhātusena, it is stated that the rock of Sigiri, converted into a monastery, was granted to the Elder named Mahānāma of Dīghāsana-vihāra.<sup>5</sup> Assuming that 'Dīghāsana' is a variant of, or an error for, 'Dīghasanda', it has been proposed to identify the Mahānāma-thera to whom the Sigiri-vihāra was gifted by Moggallāna I, with Dhātusena's uncle, and to take that he was the Mahānāma, the author of the *Mahāvamsa*. It has thus been assumed that the *Mahāvamsa* was written in the reign of Dhātusena (459-477). The passage in the *Cv* under the reign of Dhātusena, *datvā sahasaṃ dīpetuṃ Dīpavamsaṃ samādisi*, has been interpreted by an eminent scholar as a reference to the composition of the *Mahāvamsa*.<sup>6</sup> G. Turnour, the first translator of the *Mahāvamsa*, accepted that Mahānāma, the author of the chronicle, was the same as the uncle of Dhātusena,<sup>7</sup> but Geiger was of a different opinion. Says he: 'I am fully convinced that we must entirely separate the Mahānāma, author of *Mahāvamsa*, from the uncle of Dhātusena.'<sup>8</sup>

Two inscriptions of a Sthavira named Mahānāman of Ceylon were discovered in 1880 at Bodh-Gayā, in the course of the excavations conducted at that site by General Cunningham and J. D. M. Beglar, and published by J. F. Fleet, at first in the *Indian Antiquary* for 1886 (Vol. XV), p. 356 ff, and later in his monumental work on the Gupta inscriptions. Of these two epigraphs, the shorter one is indited on the pedestal of an image, and states, in not very correct Sanskrit, that the image was a gift of the Śākya Bhikṣu, Sthavira Mahānāman, a resident of Āmradvīpa. Mahānāman's connection with Ceylon is not evident in this record, but is categorically stated in the longer one, which is inscribed in North Indian characters on a stone slab, and consists of nine stanzas of various metres in elegant Sanskrit.

4. Chapter xxxviii, v. 16.

5. Chapter xxxix, v. 42.

6. *Cūlavamsa*, xxxvii, v. 59. See J. F. Fleet in the *JRAS* for 1909, p. 5, n. 1 and W. Geiger, *Cūlavamsa*, translation, part i, p. 35, note 2.

7. *The Mahāvamsa*, with the Translation subjoined, Cotta Mission Press, 1937, Introduction, p. liv.

8. W. Geiger, *Dīpavamsa und Mahāvamsa und die geschichtliche Überlieferung in Ceylon*. English Translation: *Dīpavamsa and Mahāvamsa*, by Ethel M. Coomaraswamy, Colombo, 1908, p. 42.

The purpose of the document was to record the construction of a shrine for the Buddha at the Bodhi-maṇḍa by Sthavira Mahānāman, who is described as born in Ceylon and residing at Āmradvīpa. The pupillary succession of this Mahānāman is traced from a Śramaṇa named Bhava, through Rāhula, Upasena I, Mahānāman I and Upasena II. This inscription is dated in the year 269 of an unspecified era, which, if taken as the Gupta era, would give the equivalent of 588-89 A.C.

The discovery of an inscription of a Sthavira Mahānāman of Ceylon naturally raised the question whether he could have been identical with the author of the *Mahāvamsa*. Hence, in editing the record, Fleet remarked: 'The chief interest of the inscription, lies in the probability that the second Mahānāman mentioned in it, is the person of that name who composed the more ancient part of the Pali *Mahāvamsa*, or history of Ceylon. If this identification is accepted, it opens up a point of importance in the question of dates. On the one hand, there can be no doubt that the date of the present inscription has to be referred to the Gupta era, with the result of A.D. 588-89. On the other hand, from the Ceylonese records, Mr. Turnour arrived at A.D. 459 to 477 as the period of the reign of Mahānāman's nephew (sister's son) Dhātusena; and it was during his reign that Mahānāman compiled the history. The recorded date of the present inscription, therefore, shows—if the identification suggested above is accepted—that the details of the Ceylonese chronology are not so reliable as they have been supposed to be; or else that a wrong starting point has been selected in working them out, and that they now require considerable rectification.' When he prepared the Index of his *Corpus*, however, Fleet was not so certain that the date of the Bodh-Gayā inscription of Mahānāman has to be referred to the Gupta era, and admitted the possibility of the Kalacuri (Cedi) era having been used. The equivalent in the Christian era in that case would be 518 A.C.<sup>9</sup>

A Sthavira of Ceylon named Mahānāman and his companion who had a name beginning with Upa, are also mentioned in a Chinese account of the travels of Wang Hsien-ts'c who visited India in the seventh century.<sup>10</sup>

9. J. F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. III)*, pp. 275-6 and 325.

10. M. Sylvain Lévi, 'Les Missions de Wang Hsien-ts'c dans l'Inde' in *Journal Asiatique*, 1900, pp. 297, 331 and 401-468. The portion of this paper relating to Ceylon has been translated into English by John M. Seneviratne and published in *JCBRAS*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 74-123.

Says the Chinese traveller:— ‘Formerly, the king of Cheu-tzeu (Ceylon), named Chi-mi-kia-po-mo, which means in Chinese “Cloud of Merit” (Koung-to-iun) (Śrī Meghavarman), an Indian (fan) king, directed two bhikkhus to visit this monastery (the monastery built by Asoka to the east of the Bodhi tree and later enlarged). The elder monk was named Mo-ho-nan, which means “great name” (Mahānāman); the other Iou-po, which means “giver of prophecy” (cheou-ki) (Upa . . .). These two bhikkhus made homage to the Throne of Diamond (*Vajrāsana*) of the Bodhi tree. The monastery did not offer them assylum, and the two bhikkhus returned to their native land. The king questioned them: “You went to pay your homage to the holy places, what good fortune do the omens declare, O Bhikkhus ?” They replied: “In the great country of Jambudvīpa, there is no spot where one can live in peace.” The king, hearing these words, sent some people with precious stones to offer as presents to the King San-meou-to-lo-kiu-to (Samudragupta). And that is why, up to this day, it is the bhikkhus of the kingdom of Ceylon who reside in this monastery.’<sup>11</sup>

Hsuan Tsang also refers to the monastery of the Sthaviras at Mahābodhi. ‘The younger brother of a king of Ceylon, who had gone on a pilgrimage to the holy places, met with a bad reception at the place. Returning to his native isle, he persuaded his elder brother to build, near the Bodhidruma, with the consent of the king of India, a monastery intended to give lodging to Sinhalese monks’.<sup>12</sup> Hsuan Tsang does not give the name of the king of Ceylon concerned, nor of his younger brother, nor of the Indian monarch. But Wang Hiuen-ts’c enables us to understand that the Indian monarch who permitted the building of a Sinhalese Monastery at Bodh-Gayā was the great Gupta emperor Samudragupta. The Ceylon king had the name of Śrīmeghavarman,<sup>13</sup> and has been taken to be same as the elder son of Mahāscna who began his reign in or about 303 A.C.<sup>14</sup>

Sylvain Lévi, who for the first time drew attention to this important synchronism between Indian and Ceylon history, was struck by the similarity of the event reported by the Chinese traveller, to that recorded in

11. *JCBRAS*, Vol. XXIV (No. 60), p. 75.

12. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Vol. II, pp. 133ff; *JCBRAS*, Vol. XXIV, p. 75.

13. The Chinese form of the name contains the element *varman*, found in many Indian Kṣatriya names.

14. The dates as settled in the paper ‘New Light on the Buddhist Era in Ceylon,’ *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, pp. 129-155.

the Bodh-Gayā inscription of Mahānāman. The Sthavira Mahānāman who built a shrine for the Buddha at Bodh-Gayā was taken by him to be identical with Mahānāman mentioned by Wang Hiuen-ts'e. With regard to the latter's junior companion Upa . . ., Sylvain Lévi stated: 'The alteration of the names Mahānāman and Upasena in the spiritual genealogy of the Sinhalese monk, would lead us to believe that another Upasena is here in question.'<sup>15</sup> But the date of the Bodh-Gayā inscription, if referred to the Gupta era, would be a serious obstacle to such an identification. Sylvain Lévi proposed to deal with this obstacle in a bold manner. Says he: 'The dilemma, as almost always happens, presents a means of escape, and we must have recourse to a third solution. The mention of Samudragupta and of Śrī Meghavarṇa as contemporaries of Mahānāman excludes henceforth the assignment of the date 269 to the Gupta era. The *Mahāvamsa*, in fact, makes Kitti Siri Meghavarṇa reign from 304 to 332 A.D., and if Sinhalese chronology is not irreproachably accurate, it at least gives very little room for correction. In order to decide the preliminary question raised by Mr. Fleet, I have consulted the references to Ceylon found in the Chinese annals, a translation of which is annexed to this memoir. The accuracy of the Sinhalese annals is triumphantly vindicated by this test . . . There can no longer be any question of carrying back the date of Mahānāman's inscription to the Gupta era. The Kalacuri Era, which Mr. Fleet himself, seized with doubts, suggests as an afterthought in the Index to the Corpus (*s. v.* Mahānāman II) is scarcely more apposite. The year 518 A.D. is impossible, as is the year 588. The most likely hypothesis, therefore, in the circumstances, is to consider the date 269 as expressed in the Śaka Era, which gives us 347 A.D. It falls thus in the reign of Samudragupta, but the date, it must be confessed, is fifteen years posterior to the date of Mahānāman according to the chronology of the *Mahāvamsa*. It is by no means any discredit to these venerable Annals to attribute to them an error so slight, in regard to an epoch so remote.'<sup>16</sup>

If the Bodh-Gayā inscription under discussion is dated in the Śaka era, there can be no possibility of the Sthavira Mahānāman mentioned therein being identical with the author of the *Mahāvamsa*. But V. A. Smith has pointed out that palaeographically the inscription must be of a date later than Śaka 269. He also cites against Sylvain Lévi's hypothesis, the unlike-

15. *JCBRAS*, Vol. XXIV (No. 60), p. 76.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79. Though Sylvain Lévi's hypothesis with regard to the date of the Bodh-Gayā inscription has not been able to prevail, the synchronisms between Ceylonese and Chinese history (*JCBRAS*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 82 ff), which he brought to light in justification of that hypothesis, remain as a most valuable contribution to Sinhalese chronology.

lihood of the Śaka era being used at that time in that part of India. In his view, Mahānāman of the Bodh-Gayā inscription was a personage different from the Sthavira of that name mentioned by Wang Hiuen-ts'c.<sup>17</sup>

Two commentators of Pali texts, one named Upasena and the other Mahānāma, who could have been related one to the other as teacher and pupil, though not expressly stated so, are also known to have flourished in Ceylon during the period to which the author of the *Mahāvamsa* is generally assigned. Of these, Upasena-thera was the author of the *Saddhammapajjotikā* (*Spj*), the commentary of the *Niddesa*. In the colophon to that work, Upasena-thera states that he, a resident of the Mahāpariveṇa of the Mahāvihāra at Anurādhapura, wrote the work when residing in a *pariveṇa* to the west of the Mahāthūpa, built by a minister named Kittisena, of which he was made the incumbent. The work was completed in the twenty-sixth year of a king Sirinivāsa Sirisaṅghabodhi.<sup>18</sup> 'Sirinivāsa' and 'Siripāla' are given as epithets of the king in whose reign the *Samantapāsādikā* was written by Buddhaghosa<sup>19</sup> and 'Tiripali,' the old Sinhalese form of 'Siripāla,' occurs as a title of Mahānāma in his inscriptions.<sup>20</sup> The *Spj* was thus written in the 26th year of Mahānāma, who came to the throne in 410 A.C., i.e. in 436 A.C. Mahānāma, however, according to the chronicles, ruled for only twenty-two years; but there was political confusion following his death,<sup>21</sup> which led to the capture of power by Tamil invaders. As there was no legitimate occupant of the throne for some years after Mahānāma, his regnal years would have been used for dating purposes even after his death, just as Jayabāhu's regnal years were used in documents, after that monarch had ceased to rule, in the first half of the twelfth century.<sup>22</sup> According to a Burmese source,<sup>23</sup> Upasena was also the author of the *Samantabhaddikā*, the commentary of the *Anāgata-vamsa*. This work is still in manuscript, and the verses forming its colophon are in a corrupt state. But it can be gathered from them that the author of

17. *Indian Antiquary* for 1902 (Vol. XXXI), pp. 192-197.

18. *Saddhammapajjotikā*, edited by A. P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, Pali Text Society, London, Vols. I-III, 1931, 1939 and 1940. See Colophon, Vol. III, pp. 151-152.

19. *Samantapāsādikā*, P.T.S. Edition, part VII, p. 1415; *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, p. 390.

20. *Ceylon Journal of Science, Section G*, Vol. II, p. 19. The late Buddhadatta Mahāthera, unaware of the inscriptional evidence about Mahānāma being called Siripāla, has gone astray in his views about the age of Buddhaghosa (*Pali Sāhityaya*, Part I, p. 167 ff.)

21. Nicholas and Paranavitana, *Concise History of Ceylon*, pp. 94 and 122.

22. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. V, p. 17.

23. *Anāgata-vamsaya*, edited by Vaṭaddara Medhānanda-svāmīn-vahansē, Colombo 1934, p. iii.

the work lived in the Kālavāpi-vihāra built by Dhātusena.<sup>24</sup> It is quite possible that an author who had already produced a work in 436 A.C., was still active in the reign of Dhātusena, whose reign began in 459 A.C.

Mahānāma was the author of the *Saddhammappakāsini* (*Spk*), the commentary of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*. In its colophon, it is stated that the work was composed by the *thera* named Mahānāma (*Mahābhiddhānena*) in the third year from the passing away of King Moggallāna, while residing in a *pariveṇa* in the Mahāvihāra established by a minister named Uttara.<sup>25</sup> A *senāpati* named Uttara figures in the reign of Moggallāna I as the founder of a religious establishment,<sup>26</sup> but not in the accounts of any of the other monarchs who bore this name. The reference therefore is to Moggallāna I whose reign ended about 512 A.C. The *Spk* was thus written about 514 A.C., seventy-eight years after the *Spj*. There are a number of verses which are common to the Introductions of the *Spj* and the *Spk*. These verses are in a metre different from the rest of the verses in the Introduction of the former work, but in the latter they are in the same metre. It therefore appears likely that the verses in question have been taken from the *Spk* and interpolated in the *Spj* at a later date, possibly by Mahānāma himself, or one of his pupils. This might have been done without any compunction if the two authors belonged to the same spiritual lineage. As the canonical works commented upon by the two authors have both been attributed to Sāriputta, there was room for such interpolation, but the Introduction of the *Spj* would not show a gap if these verses are taken away. Of the two authors Upasena and Mahānāma, the latter is undoubtedly the superior in literary style, at least so far as the Introductory verses are concerned. There are also some common passages in the colophons of the two works.

Sylvain Lévi has evidently accepted the arguments put forward by V. A. Smith against the hypothesis that the Bodh-Gayā inscription of

24. *Kālavāpi-vihāramhi nānārukkūpasobhite*  
*Kārite Dhātusenena raññā Lamkāya sāmīnā.*

Kālavāpi-vihāra is the modern Vijitapura-vihāra. See Buddhadatta Mahanayakathera, *Palī Sāhitya*, Part i, p. 153; W. A. de Silva, *Catalogue of Palm Leaf Manuscripts* Vol. I, p. 128. The *Gandhavamsa* ascribes the *Anāgatavamsa-aṭṭhakathā* to an author named Upatissa, not Upasena. But the two names Upasena and Upatissa can easily be confused one with the other, as has indeed been done by the editor for P.T.S. of the *Spj*. In his introduction, he refers to the author of the *Spj* as Upatissa, in spite of the fact that the name of the author is given in two places in the colophon as Upasena.

25. *Saddhammappakāsini*, edited by C. V. Joshi, P.T.S. Vol. I, 1933; Vol. II, 1940; Vol. III, 1940, p. 703-4.

26. *Cūlavamsa*, chapter xxxix, v. 58.

Mahānāman is dated in the Śaka era; but, twenty-five years after the article containing that hypothesis was published, the eminent French savant wrote another paper on the document, this time studying it from a different angle.<sup>27</sup> His unrivalled knowledge of the Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist literature, and his acquaintance with Sanskrit *kāvya*s, enabled him to suggest better readings of the text of the record in one or two places, and to point out the exact significance of certain words and phrases which had not been correctly understood by Fleet. We need not pass in review all these details, interesting though they are, but the recognition by Sylvain Levi that there is a reference by *dhvani* (suggestion) in the first verse of the inscription to the well-known work of Vasubandhu, the *Abhidharmakoṣa*, is of considerable importance for an investigation into the identity and date of the Sthavira Mahānāman who set up the record. The verse is given below :—

*Vyāpto yenāprameyaḥ sakalaśaśirucā sarvataḥ satvadhātuh  
Kṣuṇṇāḥ pāśāṇḍayodhās sugatipatharudhas tarkaśastrābhīyuktāḥ  
Sampūrnno dharmakoṣaḥ prakṛtiripuhṛtaḥ sādhitō lokabhūtyai  
Śāstuh Śākyaikabandhor jjayati cirataram tad yaśassāratanttram.*

Fleet translates this as: 'Victorious for a very long time is that doctrine replete with fame, of the Teacher, the chief kinsman of the Śākyas, by which, lustrous as the moon, the inscrutable primary substance of existence has been pervaded in all directions; by which the warriors, who are heretics, obstructive of the path of beatitude, have been broken to pieces, being assailed with the weapon of logic; (and) by which the whole treasure of religion, that has been stolen by the enemy which is original nature, has been recovered for the welfare of mankind.'

Now, as Sylvain Lévi argues, this is an excellent translation so far as the expressed meaning of the words goes, but in Sanskrit the soul of poetry is suggestion. It is patent to anyone that the stanzas which comprise this inscription are meant to be poetry. And the poet has given many indications of the suggested meaning. In the first place the word used for doctrine, coming with emphasis at the end of the stanza, is *tantra*, among the numerous meanings of which are 'treatise,' 'a book,' in addition to 'doctrine' that has been adopted in Fleet's translation. The word *dharmakoṣa*, occurring in the third line, suggests to the discerning reader's mind the title of the book meant by the poet, namely the *Abhidharmakoṣa*. Then,

27. 'L' Inscription de Mahānāman à Bodh-Gaya: Essai d' Exégèse, Appliquée à l' Epigraphie Bouddhique' in *Indian Studies in Honour of Charles Rockwell Lanman*, Harvard University Press, 1929, pp. 35-47.



the word used to denote the Buddha, *Śākyaika-bandhu*, occurs nowhere else, the well-known epithets of the Buddha with the word *Śākya* as the first member of a compound being *Śākyasiṃha*, 'the Lion of the Śākyas', *Śākya-muni*, 'the Sage of the Śākya clan' and *Śākya-puṅgava*, 'the Bull among the Śākyas', and *Aditya-bandhu* with *bandhu* as the second member of the compound. The poet has evidently coined this compound meaning 'the Chief kinsman of the Śākyas,' so as to evoke in the mind of the reader the word *bandhu* in the name of Vasubandhu, the author of the *Abhidharmakośa*. The description in the first line, when applied to the *Abhidharmakośa*, refers to the fact that the treatise gives physical and psychological descriptions of existence (*sattva*) in the whole world (*dhātu*). The second line refers to the refutation in the *Abhidharmakośa* of the heretical doctrine of *puḍgalavāda*. The word *sampūrṇaḥ* before *dharmakośaḥ* suggests the word usually coming at the end of a treatise, to say that it has been completed. Sylvain Lévi also thinks that the phrase *prakṛtiripuḥṛtaḥ* indicates that Vasubandhu's treatise had revived the Abhidharma system after it had suffered an eclipse since the days of the *Jñānaprasthāna* etc.

Even though we may not agree with Sylvain Lévi in all the details of his argument, few who are acquainted with the ways of Sanskrit poets will deny that in this verse there is a suggestion of Vasubandhu and his *Abhidharmakośa*. The chronological implication of this conclusion is not of great importance, for on palaeographical grounds the record of Mahānāman has to be assigned to a period considerably later than that in which Vasubandhu is believed to have flourished. More important is the question that naturally arises in one's mind, that is, why was an eulogy of Vasubandhu and his work embodied by *dhvani* in an inscription set up by a Sthavira from Ceylon, in a monastery intended primarily for occupation by Sthavira monks from that Island. Vasubandhu, as is well-known, wrote the *Abhidharmakośa* from the standpoint of the Sarvāstivāda, which was one of the sects considered as heretical by the Theravādins of Ceylon; he later became a convert to the Vijñānavāda school of the Mahāyāna.<sup>28</sup>

In my opinion, the eulogy of Vasubandhu and his work is only apparent, and has been purposely brought in by the poet to create a deeper suggestion with regard to a work which, in the opinion of the poet, excelled that of Vasubandhu. The crux of the suggestion is the phrase *Śāstuh Śākyaika-bandhoḥ*, used to refer to the Buddha, which, as has been pointed out, suggested the name of Vasubandhu by sound (*śabda-dhvani*). But when

28. Sir Chas. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. II, p. 89.

the meaning is further analysed, it evokes in the mind of the knowing person a name quite other than that of Vasubandhu. Applied to the Buddha, it has been correctly rendered as 'of the Teacher, the chief kinsman of the Śākyaas' by taking *Śākyaika-bandhoḥ* as a *samānādhikaraṇa-viśeṣaṇa* of *Śāstuh*. But the phrase can also be analysed by taking the compound *Śākyaika-bandhoḥ* as qualified by the preceding *Śāstuh* in the possessive relation. In that case, the meaning of the phrase is 'the preeminent Śākyan kinsman of the Teacher (Buddha)'. It is well-known that the Buddha had kinsmen among the Śākyaas as well as the Koliyaas. Of the notable figures among the Śākyaas, his father Śuddhodana was more than a kinsman, and would hardly come in for consideration in this connection. Next to Śuddhodana, the most important Śākyan noble mentioned in the Pali Piṭakas was Mahānāma.<sup>29</sup> By means of *arthadhvani*, therefore, the phrase *Śāstuh Śākyaika-bandhoḥ* would create in the mind of the knowing person the idea 'of Mahānāma,' which, taken together with *tantra*, conveys the meaning 'the treatise of Mahānāma.' With this suggested meaning, the last line of the verse means 'Victorius for a long time be that treatise of Mahānāma, replete with fame.' The first three lines of the stanza, to each of which the relative pronoun *yeṇa* 'by which' has application, describes what had been effected by that treatise. We take the third line first: (*yeṇa*) *prakṛtiripuhṛtaḥ sampūrṇaḥ dharmakoṣaḥ sādhiṭaḥ*. Leaving the phrase *prakṛtiripuhṛtaḥ* for later consideration, the rest of the sentence means 'by which has been established (*sādhiṭa*) the complete treasury (*koṣa*) of the doctrine (*dharmā*). *Sādhiṭa* is from the root *sādhi*, among the many meanings of which (see Monier-Williams, *s.v.*) is 'to establish a truth, to substantiate, prove, demonstrate,' taken as applicable in this context. We have already seen that a Sthavira named Mahānāma wrote a commentary called the *Saddhammappakāsaṇi* to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* which is a work of the Khuddaka-nikāya, attributed by Theravāda tradition to no less a personage than Sāriputta, the chief disciple of the Buddha, and which, considering its contents, can truly be called a *Dharma-koṣa*. Dr. Barua has pointed out that the Pali *Paṭisambhidāmagga* has treated of the same topics, though the arrangement is different, as the *Jñāna-prasthāna*, the principal Abhidharma work of the Sarvāstivādins,<sup>30</sup> from which is ultimately derived the material contained in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakoṣa*. The reference, by *dhani*, to this work as the full or complete Dharmakoṣa, implies that Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakoṣa* is neither full nor complete. By writing a commentary to that work, Mahānāma has established as authoritative the statements contained therein.

29. For references to Mahānāma the Sakyan in the Buddhist scriptures, See Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, *s.v.*

30. B. C. Law, *A History of Pali Literature*, Vol. I, p. 337.

The phrase *prakṛtiripuḥṛtaḥ* admits of satisfactory interpretation if it be taken as referring to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* of which the treatise of Mahānāma-thera in a commentary. We are told by the *Dīpavaṃsa* that, after the second council, the Vajjiputtakas made their own collection of the scriptures, which was known as the Mahāsāṃgīti, and formed a sect in opposition to the Theravāda. In their collection of scriptures, they rejected some books which were considered as canonical by the Theravādins. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* was one of these.<sup>31</sup> The *Dīpavaṃsa* also, in recounting the various innovations in doctrine and observances introduced by the Mahāsāṃghikas, uses the phrase *pakatibhāvam vijahetvā*, 'having discarded the original state (Skt. *prakṛti-bhāva*)'.<sup>32</sup> According to the Theravādins, their sect was the original Saṅgha and may be called the Prakṛti, 'the original form' of the Buddhist doctrine and organisation'. The sects opposed to them may therefore be referred to as Prakṛti-ripu, and a scripture rejected by these non-Theravāda sects may be described as 'one which has been taken away (*hṛta*) by the opponents of the original Nikāya (*Prakṛti-ripu*). This explanation of the phrase makes the word *sādhita* all the more significant. The achievements referred to in the first and second lines of the verse have as much application to the *Saddhammappakāsīnī* as to the *Abhidharmakoṣa*. The opening stanza of the Bodh-Gayā inscription of Mahānāman may thus be taken as containing an eulogy by suggestion (*dhavani*) of a treatise by an author named Mahānāma, which has established a complete compendium of Buddhist doctrine. The only work now extant, which corresponds to this description, is the *Saddhammappakāsīnī* of Mahānāma-thera, the commentary of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.

An allusion of even greater significance in establishing the identity of Mahānāman who set up the Bodh-Gayā inscription is contained in verse 7 which, after eulogising him, records the foundation of a shrine of the Buddha by him. The first half of this stanza, in which the allusion occurs, reads :—

*Āmradvīpādhivāsī pṛthukulajaladhis tasya śiṣyo mahīyān  
Lamkādvīpaprasūtaḥ parahitanirataḥ sanmahānāmanāmā.*

31. *Dīpavaṃsa*, chap. V, vv. 30-37. Reference may be made in particular to vv. 36-37.

*Chaddetvā ekadesaṃ ca suttam vīnayaṃ ca gambhīraṃ  
Patirūpaṃ Sutta-Vīnayaṃ taṃ ca aññaṃ karimṣu te  
Parivāraṃ Athuddhāraṃ Abhidhammappakaraṇaṃ  
Paṭisambhidāṃ ca Nīdhesaṃ ekadesaṃ ca Jātakaṃ  
Ettakaṃ vissajjetvāna aññāni akarimṣu te*

32. Chap. v, v. 44.

*Nāmaṃ līgaṃ parikkhāraṃ ākappakaraṇāni ca  
Pakatibhāvaṃ vijahetvā taṃ ca aññaṃ akaṃsu te*

Fleet's translation of these two lines runs as follows: 'His (Upaśena-sthavira's) disciple, greater (even than himself), (is) he who has the excellent name of Mahānāman (II); an inhabitant of Āmradvīpa; a very ocean of a mighty family.'<sup>33</sup> To anyone acquainted with Sanskrit *alamkāra-śāstra*, Fleet's rendering of the metaphor expressed by the compound *prthu-kula-jaladhi* (a very ocean of a mighty family) would at once strike as lacking in something. It would, for example, be quite appropriate to describe some person as the full moon which swells the ocean of a family that is named; but it does not betoken a poet worthy of the name to simply characterise the person eulogised as the 'ocean of a mighty family'. If we translate the compound in its direct meaning, therefore, the metaphor has an apparent blemish. To leave an apparent blemish is one of the methods adopted by a poet to draw particular attention to a passage or a phrase of which the intended meaning is not on the surface, but for which one has to probe deeper. When we give more than passing attention to the compound *prthu-kula-jaladhi*, it does not take us long to realise that *prthu* is a synonym of *mahā* and *kula* of *vaṁśa*. Thus we have a periphrasis of *Mahāvaiṁśa*, a name which has a special relationship with that of Mahānāma. But this, in itself, does not complete the metaphor. The association of the word *kula* with *jaladhi* (ocean) will further suggest to any one conversant with Buddhist cosmology the poet's intention with regard to the metaphor. The word *kula* not only means *vaṁśa* (family), but also the *kula-parvatas* which, in Buddhist cosmology, denote the circles of mountains concentric with Meru, which rise from the Ocean, being like Meru itself half submerged in the Ocean called Sīdanta-sāgara.<sup>34</sup> It is thus clear that we have here an example of *śleṣa* (double entendre), the word *kula* being connected not only with *prthu* which precedes it, but also with *jaladhi* which follows it. The meaning of the compound intended by the poet, thus, is 'he who is the Ocean to the *kula-parvata* which is the *Mahāvaiṁśa*'. Just as the *kula-parvatas* rise from the Ocean, so has the *Mahāvaiṁśa* risen from the Ocean of the intellect of Mahānāman. Stated in plain language, Mahānāma was the author of the book named *Mahāvaiṁśa*.

The identity of Mahānāman, who caused the foundation of a shrine for the Buddha at Bodh-Gayā, and set up an epigraph recording that fact,

33. J. F. Fleet, *op.cit.* p. 278.

34. The seven *kula-parvatas* in uddhist cosmology are : Yugandhara, Īśadhara, Karavīka, Sudarśana, Nemindhara, Vinataka and Aśvakarma. See *Dharmapradīpikā*, edited by Dharmakīrti Śrī Dharmārāma Nāyaka Sthavira, Sixth Edition, 1951, p. 61. Compare also the Abhayagiri Slab-inscription of Mahinda IV, Ep. Zey., Vol. I, p. 221, l. 8 of Transcript : *pirivar var-piriven kula-gal-māndhi Ruwan-maha-paha Ruwan-suner tevna*.

with the author of the *Mahāvamsa*, is thus established. If we, therefore, are certain of the date of that inscription, the date of the author of the *Mahāvamsa* could also be precisely determined; but, unfortunately, the Bodh-Gayā inscription of Mahānāman does not specify the era to which the date given therein has to be referred. In the circumstances, the question whether the author of the *Mahāvamsa* was also the author of the *Spk* becomes one of great chronological significance. We have seen above that the opening stanza of the Bodh-Gayā inscription contains a veiled eulogy of the *Spk* of an author named Mahānāma. This may be due to the *Spk* being the work of Mahānāman II himself, who was responsible for the inscription, or of the earlier Mahānāman, who was the teacher of the teacher of the second Mahānāman. In my view, the greater probability lies with the first of these two alternatives, though the second cannot be altogether excluded. Should one prefer the second alternative, Mahānāman I having written the *Spk* in 514 A.C., Mahānāman II, the pupil of his pupil, who wrote the *Mahāvamsa*, could very well have flourished in 588 A.C., the date of the Bodh-Gayā inscription if the era to which its date has to be referred is the Gupta. This would make the author of the *Mahāvamsa* flourish in the reign of Aggabodhi I, much later than the period to which the *Mahāvamsa* is usually assigned. The reign of Aggabodhi I is dealt with at considerable length in the *Cūlavamsa*;<sup>35</sup> special mention is made in the chronicle of twelve Sinhalese poets who flourished in his reign, and it is somewhat difficult to believe that the fact would have been ignored if such a literary celebrity as the author of the *Mahāvamsa* also shed lustre on his reign.

If we adopt the first alternative, the fact that the author of the *Mahāvamsa* completed his other work in the third year after the demise of Moggallāna II, i.e. 514 A.C., would admirably fit in with 518 A.C., the date of the Bodh-Gayā inscription, if the unspecified era to which it refers was the Kalacuri or the Cedi epoch. This was the time when the empire of the Guptas was rapidly declining, and it is not unlikely that eras other than the Gupta came to be used in regions which had once acknowledged their suzerainty. According to Kielhorn, Fleet and D. R. Bhandarkar, the records of the Mahārājas of Uchchakalpa, who exercised sway over a territory not very distant from Bodh-Gayā, are dated in the Cedi or the Kalacuri era. More recently, Professor V. V. Mirashi has expressed the view that these inscriptions are dated in the Gupta era; but, in my opinion, the reasons

35. Chapter XLII, vv. 1-39.

adduced by Bhandarkar and others in favour of the Kalacuri era have not been satisfactorily refuted.<sup>36</sup>

Thus we conclude that the author of the *Mahāvamsa* was identical with the author of the *Spk*, and the Sthavira from Ceylon who caused a shrine for the Buddha to be built at Bodh-Gayā. This conclusion makes it impossible for the *thera* who was the uncle of Dhātusena to have been the author of the *Mahāvamsa*, as was believed by Turnour. The young boy Dhātusena was taken away from the Dīghasanda-senāpati-pariveṇa to a place of safety by his uncle for fear of Paṇḍu, the period of whose rule fell between 432 and 437 A.C. The *thera* was then old enough to be the incumbent of a *pariveṇa* and to ordain a *sāmaṇera* as his pupil. Mahānāma wrote his *Spk* in 514, and was active at Bodh-Gayā in 518, more than eighty years after the advent of Paṇḍu. On the other hand, it is not impossible that Upasena II of the Bodh-Gayā inscription, the teacher of Mahānāman II, was the same as the author of the *Spj*, and was Dhātusena's uncle. The *Cūlavamsa* does not give the name of the *thera* who was Dhātusena's uncle, but states that he resided in the Dīghasanda-pariveṇa. The *Vpk* refers to the Pariveṇa built by Dīghasanda as the Mahāpariveṇa, and Upasena-thera, in his *Spj*, says that he was a resident of that monastic establishment. Upasena-thera wrote this work in the 26th year of Mahānāma, i.e. 436 A.C., when the actual ruler at Anurādhapura was Paṇḍu, and when the boy Dhātusena was living under the care of his uncle as a *sāmaṇera*. In the reign of Dhātusena himself, Upasena-thera was living in the Kālavāpī-vihāra built by that king, and it is not impossible that it was to this *thera*, then in advanced old age, that Dhātusena went for consolation during his last tragic days (*circa* 476), as described with such pathos in the *Cūlavamsa*, (chap. XXXVIII, vv. 93ff.). The interval between the date when we first hear of Upasena (436 A.C.) and this date is forty years, not too long to fall within the life span of one and the same person. Upasena II is eulogised in superlative terms in the epigraph set up by his pupil: 'whose special characteristic of affection, of the kind that is felt towards offspring—for any distressed man who came to him for protection, and of any afflicted person whose fortitude has been destroyed by the continuous flight of the arrows of adversity—extended in conformity with the disposition of a kinsman (even) to any cruel man who might seek to do (him) harm; (and) by whose fame arising from good actions, the whole world was thus completely filled'.<sup>37</sup> The Sanskrit passage thus translated by Fleet might well apply to the relations which the Thera of the Dīghasanda-pariveṇa had with Dhātusena, and the tragic events

36. See D. R. Bhandakar, *List of Inscriptions of Northern India*, (Supplement to *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XX), p. 159. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIII, p. 171.

37. J. F. Fleet, *op.cit.*, p. 277.

which he witnessed in his old age due to the unbridled cruelty of his royal kinsmen.

The above interpretation of the Bodh-Gayā inscription excludes the possibility, put forward by Sylvain Levi, that Mahānāman II of that record was the same as the Ceylon Sthavira Mahānāman who, with another companion, visited the holy places in India in the reign of Samudragupta, as recorded by Wang Hicun t'se. The events referred to by the Chinese traveller and the inscription are not quite the same. The first is the foundation of a *saṅghārāma* by the emissaries of the Sinhalese king, the second the building of a shrine of the Buddha by a Sthavira. But the possibility of Mahānāman I of the epigraph being identical with the Mahānāman mentioned by the Chinese traveller is worth considering. Even this is not possible if the Ceylon king referred to as Chi-mi-kia-po-mo by the Chinese writer be identified as Sirimeghavaṇṇa, the elder son of Mahāseṇa, as is now accepted by all writers on Ceylon history. Sirimeghavaṇṇa reigned from 303 to 331, and that period is obviously too early for the teacher's teacher of a Sthavira who was active in 518 A.C. The Indian ruler referred to as San-mcou-to-lo-kio-to by Wang Hiuen-t'se can be no other than Samudragupta. When Sylvain Levi made these identifications, the only known Sinhalese king of the period with a name corresponding to the Chinese transcription was of course Sirimeghavaṇṇa. But now, after the publication of several inscriptions of kings of the fourth and fifth centuries, we know that the title 'Sirimegha' was borne by a number of rulers, in addition to the well-known Sirimeghavaṇṇa, the elder son of Mahāseṇa. And the element in the king's name transcribed as *po-mo* in Chinese corresponds not to *vaṇṇa* but to *varman*, the normal ending of Kṣatriya names. Sirimeghavaṇṇa's younger brother, referred to as Jeṭṭhatissa in the chronicles, is called Sirimeka (Sirimegha) Jeṭṭatissa in an inscription of his son and successor, Buddhādāsa.<sup>38</sup> The last named king's eldest son and successor, Upatissa, has also been referred to as Upatissa Sirimeka in an inscription of his found at Anurādhapura.<sup>39</sup> Upatissa reigned from 368 to 410 A.C., so that the first twelve years of his reign fall within the reign of Samudragupta, who was on the throne up to about 380 A.C.<sup>40</sup> It is therefore quite possible that the Sinhalese monarch who sent envoys to Samudragupta and obtained permission to build a Saṅghārāma at Bodh-Gayā was Upatissa.

38. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. III, p. 122f.

39. *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. XVIII, p. 131.

40. *History and Culture of the Indian People: The Classical Age*, edited by R. C. Majumdar, Bombay, 1954, p. 16.

A point in favour of this identification is that, according to Hsuan Tsang, the Sthavira from Ceylon who went on a pilgrimage of the holy places in India and met with an inhospitable reception—the circumstance which led to the founding of the Sinhalese *vihāra* at Bodh-Gayā—was a younger brother of the king.<sup>41</sup> We do not know of a younger brother of Sirimeghavaṇṇa who had become a *bhikkhu*. But a younger brother of Upatissa was a *bhikkhu* during that king's reign, and his name was precisely Mahānāma,<sup>42</sup> the same as that of the Sthavira from Ceylon who went on a pilgrimage to India in the time of Samudragupta, and failed to receive hospitality in that land. This Mahānāma gave up the religious life and ascended the throne after his elder brother had been slain by the queen, perhaps not without his instigation. It is possible that after coming to the throne he was known by the name he bore as a *bhikkhu*. Buddhaghosa never refers to King Mahānāma by that name. The reason perhaps was because he had it when he was wearing the yellow robe.

If Mahānāman I of the Bodh-Gayā inscription was identical with Mahānāma, the younger brother of Upatissa, as well as with Sthavira Mahānāman mentioned by Wang Hieun-ts'e, the companion of the last named, whose name began with Upa—cannot be identical with Upasena-sthavira, the pupil of the first Mahānāman and the teacher of the second. Mahānāman I's pilgrimage (assuming that he was the same as Wang Hieun-tse's Mahānāman) could have been undertaken between 368 and 380 A.C., the years that were common to the reigns of Upatissa I and Samudragupta. Even if the pilgrimage was undertaken in the last year of Samudragupta's reign, i.e. 380 A.C., the companion of Mahānāman must have been then about 20 years of age so as to undertake such an arduous journey, and he could not have lived up to 477 A.C., the end of Dhātusena's reign, up to which Upasena II should have been alive according to our identification of him with the uncle of Dhātusena. Moreover, the Chinese source does not refer to the younger companion of Mahānāma as the latter's pupil, and there is no certainty that the name was Upasena. On the other hand, there is no reason against Upasena-thera, the author of the *Saddhammapajjotikā*, identified above with Upasena II of the Bodh-Gayā inscription, being a pupil of Mahānāman I, if the latter was the brother of King Upatissa. Mahānāma remained in robes up to 410 A.C., the last year of Upatissa, and if he ordained a boy of twelve years two years before he gave up the robes, that *sāmaṇera* would have become a *thera*, 40 years old, in the 26th

41. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Vol. II, p. 133.

42. *Cūlavamsa*, chapter xxxvii, vv. 209-210.



year after the accession of Mahānāma, i.e. 430 A.C., when Upasena wrote the *Spj*. And this *thera* could well have been alive, at the advanced age of 81, when Dhātusena died 41 years later.

Āmradvīpa, of which Mahānāma-sthavira is said to have been a resident, in the inscription on the image-pedestal as well as in the longer epigraph, has been taken by Cunningham as Ceylon.<sup>43</sup> But, as Sylvain Lévi has pointed out, no such name of Ceylon is found anywhere else and, in stanza 7, it would have been redundant to state that Mahānāman was born in Ceylon (*Laṅkādvīpa-prasūtaḥ*) if Āmradvīpa already mentioned denoted that Island. Obviously, Āmradvīpa was not a *dvīpa* of the same category as Laṅkādvīpa. Sometimes the word *dvīpa* is found in toponyms indicating unirrigable high land surrounded by stretches of paddy fields. The expression *adhivāsī* of Āmradvīpa, applied to Mahānāman, would indicate that at Āmradvīpa, there was a monastic establishment in which that Sthavira resided as its superior. It might have been in Ceylon, or in India in the vicinity of the Bodhimaṇḍa. The story of Silākāla gives us an indication that this Āmradvīpa was in the vicinity of the Bodhimaṇḍa. This prince, it is said, fled to India when Kassapa I was king, and adopted the life of a *bhikkhu* at the Bodhimaṇḍa-vihāra, and was known in later times, even when he had reverted to the lay life, as Amba-sāmaṇera. The *Cūlavamsa* explains that this appellation was bestowed on him by the Saṅgha to whom he on one occasion gave the gift of a mango.<sup>44</sup> This reason for the name is very inadequate and unsatisfactory; the likelihood is that Amba-sāmaṇera is a shortened form of Amba-dīpa (Āmradvīpa)-sāmaṇera, i.e. the novice of Āmradvīpa. Perhaps the establishment at Āmradvīpa was subsidiary to the Sinhalese Saṅghārāma at Bodh-Gayā, and constituted one of the endowments of the latter.

The spiritual lineage of Mahānāman is traced back to Mahākāśyapa, the foremost among the disciples of the Buddha at the time of the Master's *parinirvāṇa*. Verse 2 of the inscription contains an eulogy of Mahākāśyapa in which there is a reference to the belief that the corpse of the Saint will be preserved up to the time of the Maitreya Buddha. This belief, contained in Sanskrit Buddhist writings, is not known to canonical Pali books, but is found in the apocryphal text called the *Sampiṇḍa-mahā-nidāna*.<sup>45</sup> The

43. Cunningham's interpretation of 'Āmradvīpa' was perhaps due to the reason that in old geography books, the Island of Ceylon was compared to a mango in shape.

44. *Cūlavamsa*, chap. xxxix, vv. 44-48.

45. Buddhadatta Mahānāyaka-thera, *Pāli Sāhitya*, part ii, p. 453.

*bhikkhus* of Ceylon who traced their spiritual ancestry to Mahākāśyapa were custodians of the Saṃyukta-nikāya, and counted among them a large number who had adopted the religious life after renouncing royal splendour. This school of monks is said to have had their headquarters in the vicinity of Mount Laṃkā (Laṃkācala). In the Chinese history of Vajrabodhi, the name Laṃkāparvata<sup>46</sup> is given to Samantakūṭa (Adam's Peak), which is well-known as bearing a Footprint of the Buddha. If the Laṃkācala of Mahānāman's inscription meant the same sacred mountain, the author of the *Mahāvamsa* may be taken as having had connections with that part of the Island. If not, the mountain now known as Lag-gala was probably indicated by Laṃkācala. In any case, if we identify Upasena II, the teacher of Mahānāman II, as the uncle of Dhātusena, we may conclude that when that *thera* decided to have Dhātusena brought up in a *gonisādi* monastery,<sup>47</sup> it was to Laṃkācala that he directed his course from Anurādhapura, as is indicated by his crossing of the Kalā Oya on the way.

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46. *JCBRAS*, Vol. XXIV, p. 88.

47. *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. XV, pp. 127-135.