

The *Dīpavamsa* in Ancient Sri Lankan Historiography

It is common knowledge that chronicle writing was a very popular literary form in ancient and medieval Sri Lanka. Chronicles were written on a variety of subjects, mostly religious. Objects of worship such as the Relics of the Buddha, the Bodhi tree, the Stupas and even individual temples formed the subject of chronicles, punctuating the literary history of Sri Lanka. Among these texts, two, which attempt to relate the history of the island stand out in somewhat bold relief—the *Dīpavamsa*, the Chronicle of the island, and the *Mahāvamsa*, the great Chronicle. The latter is by far the better work, both in style and form, and it is more informative and more comprehensive. Naturally the *Mahāvamsa* has captivated the interest of modern scholars, and this text has become almost synonymous with ancient Sri Lankan historiography. It is not only the modern scholar who has not been able to resist the *Mahāvamsa*, for it had become a sort of model for subsequent chroniclers. Much more important is the fact that later scholars continued the *Mahāvamsa* from where its first author left off at the beginning of the fourth century A. D., thus producing a continuous record. The process of continuing the *Mahāvamsa* has still not stopped, and today in Sri Lanka, the Government has appointed a team of scholars to add on to the existing *Mahāvamsa*, the history of the 19th and 20th centuries—and this in Pāli verse according to the old format.

If I may digress a bit at this point—the reactions of some of the more reputed scholars in Sri Lanka today to this project are interesting, if only from a purely historiographical point of view. The questions that are being asked are not only relevant to the contemplated section of the *Mahāvamsa*, but to the whole process of chronicle writing in Sri Lanka from the earliest of times. While some scholars have politely declined to participate, others have raised awkward questions. What purpose is this going to serve? What is the readership the writers have to have in mind? How many can and will read the history of 19th and 20th century Sri Lanka in Pali verse? Similar enquiries regarding the earlier phases of the chronicle should yield interesting insights to the origin and process of history writing in ancient Sri Lanka.

To return to the point at issue, the spotlight has nearly always been on the *Mahāvamsa*, and by comparison, the *Dīpavamsa*, the older chronicle, which covers the same ground as the first part of the *Mahāvamsa*, has suffered a certain amount of neglect. There is fair consensus on the view that the *Dīpavamsa* represents the earliest stage of the chronicle, and that the oldest layers of traditional history have to be sought in it. A second and more important reason for this enquiry is to try and plot a different

approach to the problem from what has been done so far. Most scholars working on the chronicles have been largely concerned with the question 'how' and have not always asked the question 'why'. By and large, their writings are devoted to explain the process of historical evolution and the probable steps leading to the historical chronicle represented by the *Dīpavamsa* and the *Mahāvamsa*. These enquiries have no doubt been extremely revealing and have in no small way helped our understanding of the evolution of the Pāli chronicles.

To raise some of the neglected questions – why did chronicle writing come about in Sri Lanka? What triggered off some of the early traditions that are incorporated in the chronicles? What were the concerns and commitments of the tradition-makers? Neither the *Dīpavamsa* nor the *Mahāvamsa* record contemporary events. They both look at the past through certain traditions available at the time. What was their present which made these traditions relevant? In other words for what purpose were they remembering the past? What sort of audience did the chroniclers have in mind? It is obvious that the authors selected their material from what they knew of the past. Why did they select what they did and not other information which brings to mind the oft-quoted statement of Geiger, "not what is said but what is left unsaid is the besetting difficulty of Sinhalese history."¹ I am in no way suggesting that I have found definitive answers to these questions. But an attempt at answering them would reveal important facets regarding the origin of history writing in Sri Lanka.

Opinion regarding the *Dīpavamsa* has varied between such devastating statements as "the *Dīpavamsa* stands unsupported on its own tottering feet"², and the more balanced view that it is based on one or more sources on the same lines as the *Mahāvamsa*.³ The weaknesses of its composition such as mistakes of grammar and metre, gaps in the story, a clumsiness of style and numerous repetitions have been noticed.⁴ It is generally accepted that the *Dīpavamsa* stands very close to its source or sources, and hence reflects those sources.⁵ Memory verses, the very occasional prose passage, and different versions of the same episode have been considered to be tell-tale signs of what was originally an oral tradition. Much of this can be conceded although some judgements need modification. It has sometimes been thought that the *Dīpavamsa* is the work of more than one author and that it was accomplished in a number of stages.⁶ I have no doubt that the chronicle as we have it today constitutes a single composi-

1. W. Geiger, *Cūlavamsa* I (Eng. transl.), P. T. S., 1929, p. v.

2. O. Frpnke, *Journal of Pāli Text Society*, 1908, p. 1.

3. H. Oldenberg, *Dīpavamsa* (Dv.), 1879, p. 1 foll.

W. Geiger, *Mahāvamsa* (Eng. transl.) P. T. S. 1934, p. IX ff.

4. Oldenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 6 – 7.

W. Geiger, *Dīpavamsa and Mahāvamsa*, 1908, p. p. 11 ff.

5. Oldenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

6. B. C. Law, *On the Chronicles of Ceylon*, 1947, pp. 1 – 9.

on, but the reasons for the other view are obvious. For, within the *Dīpaṃsa* can be noticed different strata of tradition. Some of them seem to answer the demands of different periods and others suggest different concerns. While the various arguments in the *Dīpaṃsa* reflect a response to certain demands, commitments and situations, the work as a whole too had purpose and definite ends in mind.

The chronicle opens with an account of the three visits of the Buddha to Sri Lanka, and goes on to give the genealogy of the Buddha, which is wound up with the synchronisation of dates between the life of the Buddha and the dynasty of kings ruling at Magadha. A crucial point here, is an attempt to fix the date of the death of the Buddha which is calculated as the eighth year of Ajātasattu. Next, we have the story of the three Buddhist Councils at which the Theravāda point of view is said to have been upheld, and all other views rejected. The account of the Third Buddhist Council, which brings in the Asokan connection in a big way, ends with the sending out of Buddhist missionaries to various countries including Sri Lanka. With the scene having shifted to Sri Lanka, chronologically, one is shunted back to the date of the *parinibbāna* or the death of the Buddha, on which day is contrived the arrival of the earliest colonisers of the island led by Vijaya, who becomes its first king. The narrative proceeds with dynastic history up to the reign of Devānampiyatissa, bringing us to the point at which the Buddhist mission led by Mahinda arrives in the island. The establishment of Buddhism is the major theme of the chronicle, taking up almost a third of the book. Into this is once again woven the Asokan contact, and the island's connection with the three Buddhas prior to Gautama Buddha. From this point onwards, the *Dīpaṃsa* consists largely of dynastic history with the occasional pause over rulers like Bhātika Abhaya, who made some special contribution in the service of Buddhism. The last ruler of the chronicle is Mahāsena, and here the main concern of the author is the rise of heretical beliefs, and the king's support of them.

The objectives with which the *Dīpaṃsa* looks at the past seem to circumscribe the chronicle within a religious orbit. In it, it is possible to identify three major concerns for which the chronicler seeks legitimation in the past. One is the projection of Sri Lanka as the island of destiny—'the *dhammadīpa* concept.' The second and most pressing theme is the insistence on the view, that the Theravāda form of Buddhism is the authentic form of Buddhism. Thirdly, there lies as a sort of continuous undercurrent, the advocacy that the highest obligation of rulers was to honour and serve Buddhism, that is the Theravada form of it. One can of course see that these three major themes are interconnected, which reiterates the point made earlier that the objectives of the *Dīpaṃsa* are of a somewhat limited nature.

The notion that Sri Lanka was the 'Island of Destiny', where Buddhism was going to shine in all its splendour, is not one which is carried through the text. It would have been strange if it was, for, by the fourth century A. D., when the *Dīpavamsa* came to be written, Buddhism was firmly established in Sri Lanka, and for this there is independent archaeological evidence. At this point, it was not necessary to use the past as propaganda to spread or conserve Buddhism, and there was no threat to Buddhism as such, to seek sanctions in the past. The idea, however, had relevance in an earlier period, when the rapid gains made by Buddhism had to be consolidated. The *dhammadīpa* concept finds expression mostly in the stories connected with the visits of the Buddha and that of Mahinda to Sri Lanka. The Buddha is made to see the island at two of the most crucial times of his life—at the time of enlightenment⁷ and at the time of death.⁸ In the first instance, he sees its destiny as a stronghold of Buddhism which will be introduced to the country by Mahinda. On his deathbed, he sees that Vijaya will arrive in Lanka on that very day, to start human habitation, and requests the God Sakka to protect the island, a task which he transfers to the God Uppalavanna. On the eve of Mahinda's departure to Lanka, Sakka is made to remind him of the Buddha's predictions and his (Mahinda's) role in their fulfilment.⁹

The Buddha not only predicts the island's destiny but is also instrumental in securing it. His first two visits to the island were for the express purpose of suppressing the Yakkhas and Nāgas—the demons and serpents who were inhabiting the country so that, it would become a fit abode for human beings.¹⁰ One notices the very harsh and condemnatory words in which these non-humans are described. Epithets such as frightful, cruel and blood-thirsty, full of desire and anger towards other beings, back-biting, pitiless and given to injuring others—and this does not exhaust the list.¹¹ The Nāgas fare slightly better at the hands of the author of the *Dīpavamsa*, but even in their case, the descriptions are by no means complimentary.¹² However, they are considered to be powerful beings, but not too powerful for the Buddha whose might overwhelms them. In fact, at one point, the Buddha is described as a mighty Yakkha subduing the Yakkhas.¹³ He is said to have used terrifying methods, and it has been pointed out, that the Sri Lankan chronicles cast the Buddha in a mould quite different to his Canonical image as the Compassionate One, who

7. Dv. 1. 14 - 22.

8. Dv. 9. 21 - 5.

9. Dv. 12. 29 - 31.

10. Dv. 1. 20 - 1; 2. 11 - 4.

11. Dv. 1. 46 - 7, 71.

12. Dv. 2. 5 - 7.

13. Dv. 1. 54.

overcomes turbulent elements with kindness and love—*mettā*.¹⁴ It is very likely that such stories arose out of the need to draw people from animistic beliefs, and to prove the superiority of Buddhism over them. While Gautama Buddha rids the country of demonic and Nāga forces, giving over the protection of the country to Buddhist gods, the three former Buddhas, when they arrive, rid the island of famine, pestilence and drought. These stories from the past were intended to establish the efficacy and credibility of the Buddhist religion, and perhaps had a mass audience in mind. They do not represent the initial period of winning converts to Buddhism, but a period of consolidation when the Buddha was already a revered figure.

Briefly, the story of this land of destiny starts with a fresh cycle of events. Three previous cycles are remembered when Buddhas had sanctified the island, and had established their religion. By pushing back the country's association with Buddhism, the message that is conveyed is that Sri Lanka was and is the land of Buddhism. A fresh start is made with the Buddha Gautama. The Yakkhas are got rid of, the country is sanctified by the presence of the Buddha, and protected by the gods. Vijaya arrives under the benevolent eye of the Buddha, who passes away on the same day. As prophesied, Buddhism is brought to the island by Mahinda. The planting of a branch of the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, the enshrinement of the bodily relics of the Buddha in a *stūpa*, and the establishment of the order of Buddhist monks and nuns from among the highest in the land, seals the destiny of Sri Lanka as the island of Buddhism, the *dhammadīpa*.

Why did people need these stories? Were they responding to a challenge from other religions? Inscriptional evidence suggests the rapid spread of Buddhism after its introduction, but it is very possible that after the initial euphoria generated by the new religion, people were slipping back to their old animistic beliefs. Hence the need for stories of the Buddha overpowering the spirits. However, the Mahinda stories seem to speak from a position of strength. One does meet with the occasional challenge thrown out to the more organised religions like Hinduism and Jainism. Asoka's disillusionment with all other religions, and his conversion to Buddhism, and the rejection of Brahmanical Hinduism by Moggali-puttatisa, illustrate this attitude.¹⁵ It should however be noted that there is no condemnation of these religions in a Sri Lankan situation, at least not within the framework of the *Dīpavamsa*. Therefore, it is not possible to argue that Buddhism was threatened by these religions. I would like to suggest that the *dhammadīpa* concept was born in an atmosphere when it was found necessary to conserve the status quo by seeking authority in the past.

14. R. A. L. H. Gunawardene, "The Kingdom of the Buddha: Myih as Political Charter in the Ancient and Early Medieval Kingdom of Sri Lanka," *The Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1976, pp. 54 - 55.

15. *Dv.* 5.57 - 8, 62 - 8; 6.24 - 30.

A major argument in the *Dīpavamsa* is the case for the authenticity and purity of Theravāda Buddhism. Placed before its audience is a record of the true faith and its fight against heresies. The dialogue is between the Theravāda and the non-Theravāda within Buddhism. The polemical use of the past for sectarian ends did not start among the Sri Lankan Buddhists. The break-up of the Buddhist clergy into rival sects occurred long before the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka by the Theravādins. They had entered into bitter controversy with their opponents, and the search for the past had begun.

The case for the Theravāda is first met with in the account of the first two Councils in the *Cullavagga* in the *Vinaya Pitaka*.¹⁶ From this it would seem that dissent within the Buddhist clergy arose immediately after the death of the Buddha and, before further damage was done, the leading monks of the time assembled at Rajagaha and rehearsed the teachings of the Buddha, thus creating an authority to which the Buddhists could turn, now that the Buddha was not there to appeal to in the event of doubt. The *Cullavagga* speaks of a more grave danger which faced the orthodox Buddhists a hundred years later, when a group of monks from Vesālī began to advocate heresy. Once again, we are told, that the chief monks of the time held the Second Council, which refuted the position taken up by the monks of Vesālī. The Third Council which is believed to have taken place in the reign of Asoka is not mentioned in the *Cullavagga*. There is no doubt that the *Cullavagga* account is an answer to a challenge experienced around the time the Canonical literature was composed, when the past was needed to exercise authority over the present. This process of legitimation and authentication is brought down a step further in the *Dīpavamsa*, where orthodox Buddhism is said to have been rehearsed a third time at the Council held at Pāṭaliputra during the time of Asoka.¹⁷

Some may perhaps argue that the chronicles were merely recounting the Canonical tradition, bringing it up-to-date with the account of the Third Buddhist Council. It is not possible to concede this, for the accounts of the First and Second Councils in the chronicles, not only have a local audience in view, but convey a sense of fresh urgency, and a feeling that it meets a new situation and challenge. There are many new elements in the Sri Lankan tradition not noticed in the *Cullavagga*. The leading monks of the First Council are said to have been those, who were specially commended by the Buddha during his life-time, and it is emphasised that they had all learnt the doctrine at the feet of the Buddha.¹⁸ The Theravāda is called the *aggavāda*, the highest doctrine.¹⁹ A general

16. H. Oldenberg (ed.), *Vinaya Pitaka* Vol. II, pp. 284 ff.

17. *Dv.* 7.39 - 43.

18. *Dv.* 4.11.

19. *Dv.* 4.15.

challenge is thrown out to all opponents. It is contended that "neither monk nor brahmin, however clever, will be able to subvert the religion, which stands like the Sineru mountain."²⁰ There is a repetitive insistence that the doctrine as rehearsed at the Council is indestructible, "neither God, nor Māra, nor Brahma, nor any earthly being can find in it the smallest ill-spoken word... The Theravāda is founded on true reason, free from heresies, full of true meaning..."²¹ Describing the Second Council held a hundred years later, the chief monks who participated are made to derive their authority from the monks of the First Council. Not only were they pupils of these monks, but they had actually seen the Buddha.²² The final claim is that the Theravada stands like a great Nigrodha tree and the heretical schools are like thorns which had grown on it,²³ a mistaken simile, for the Nigrodha tree has no thorns. The Third Council held during the reign of Asoka, two hundred and eighteen years after the death of the Buddha, was also convened to dispel false doctrines and practices. There is severe criticism of heretics, who had infiltrated the *Saṅgha* for gain.²⁴ Thus, it is claimed, that the orthodoxy of the Theravāda was upheld through three Councils from the time of the death of the Buddha.

The chronicler does not stop at re-stating past traditions to authenticate the position of the Theravāda. He introduces further evidence to press his point regarding the historicity of his assertions. The First and Second Councils were separated by a hundred years, and there were one hundred and eighteen years between the Second and the Third. An unbroken line of eminent Buddhist teachers (*ācariya paramparā*), each of whom held the position of 'the Chief of the Vinaya' (*vinaya paṃokkha*) is introduced to bridge the Councils.²⁵ The emphasis is on the handing down of the Vinaya, for this was the area of dispute before the rise of Mahāyāna doctrines and even after, in the Sri Lankan situation. The author's dilemma is clear, for there is many an assertion that the entire doctrine was handed down by these monks. Beginning with Upali, who spoke on the Vinaya at the First Buddhist Council, the list extends to Moggaliputtatissa, the Chief monk of the Third Council, and Mahinda who introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

Underpinning all these arguments is an elaborate backdrop of dates bringing the evolution of the Theravāda within a definite chronological framework. This is intended as the most persuasive part of the entire exercise, and demonstrates a concern for evidence to prove the point that is being made. Linking the events of Buddhism with notable personalities and dates was meant to provide historical verification of the tradition.

20. *Dv.* 4.19 - 20.

21. *Dv.* 4.20 - 4.

22. *Dv.* 4.49 - 50.

23. *Dv.* 5.52.

24. *Dv.* 7.34 - 41.

25. *Dv.* 5.76 *et seq.*

The dates of the *upasampadā* or higher ordination of the Vinaya teachers are linked to the chronology of the Magadhan line of kings, and their dates are in turn synchronised with the Sri Lankan king - list.²⁶ The starting point is the Parinibbāna, which was in the eighth year of Ajātasattu, and the first year of Vijaya in Sri Lanka. A typical example of these chronological synchronisms reads as follows:- the twenty fourth year of Ajātasattu is the sixteenth year of Vijaya, the sixtieth year of the Thera Upāli when the *upasampadā* of the Thera Dāsaka took place. The dates on which the Theras passed away are also worked out against the Magadhan regnal years.²⁷ This chronological information seems to have been particularly important, and one suspects that questions were, or had been asked about dates. They are worked out in a variety of ways. After the initial synchronisms, the *Dīpavamsa* sets out the number of years each Vinaya teacher lived after the demise of his predecessor.²⁸ The list is repeated once again with the number of years each one lived after the *upasampadā* and then again the number of years they held the rank of Vinaya chief.²⁹

The synchronisation of dates relevant to Theravāda Buddhism with the Magadhan chronology has not been noticed in the canonical texts, although one cannot ignore the possibility that the chronicles derived it from an Indian source. But the re-arrangement of these dates with the juxtaposition of Sri Lankan dates was obviously of local authorship, catering to a local audience. The working out of these dates would have been only achieved some time after the introduction of Buddhism, and could not have formed part of the argument advanced to win the first converts in the island. The case for the authenticity, purity, and historicity of Theravada Buddhism, as made out in the *Dīpavamsa*, was without doubt, meant for a sophisticated audience, who needed convincing, and reflects a period when this form of Buddhism came under attack, and when its position was challenged.

Just as some of the comments in the *Dīpavamsa* regarding the circumstances leading to, and the results of the Buddhist Councils, sound like an over-reaction to those situations, the statements which describe the purpose of Mahinda's mission to Sri Lanka seem somewhat out of context. In one of the few prose passages found in the text, Mahinda is made to say "(The Island) is covered and enclosed by the overclouding darkness of ignorance and of (worldly) existence; it is ruined by envy and selfishness; it cannot rise from the delusions which are produced by the fault of idleness; it has entered on a wrong way and goes far astray from the true path; . . . high-born people have been (as it were) people covered with sores and

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Dv.* 5.97 *et seq.*

28. *Dv.* 5.89 - 94.

29. *Dv.* 5.95 - 6.

have become (feeble like) Muñja or Babbaja grass. Tambapanni has been entirely subdued by obstacles and passions in consequence of the obscurity of error and the darkness of ignorance and of (worldly) existence; it is covered, pervaded, veiled, overshadowed and girt round with that great darkness, the obscurity of error."³⁰ This seems harsh condemnation of a people who were considered ripe for conversion, and who are described in an earlier stanza as *nipunā Tambapannikā* "clever Tambapanninans".³¹ Such accusations as "straying away from the true path" and "covered by the darkness of error, seem to be levelled at a different set of people, a group who had entered a path which the author considered to be false, in other words, non-Theravadins. This is an instance where the author is carried away by his emotions, and it only reveals the intensity of the conflict, which gave rise to traditions, which not only fight for the past but also for the present.

What this present was is a moot point. It has already been suggested that the *Dīpavamsa* embodies traditions of varying antiquity. It is widely accepted that the historical traditions which formed part of the Sinhalese commentarial literature had reached a definitive stage around the first century. A.D.³² They formed an important part of the source material of the *Mahāvamsa* and no doubt served the *Dīpavamsa* as well. But do the ideological struggles reflected in the *Dīpavamsa* hark back to the first century A.D.? The answer is not easy,

The period around the first century A.D. saw the rise and expansion of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India. Although the impact of this form of Buddhism has been noticed in Sri Lanka, one can only chart its progress through the documentation of those opposed to it, an altogether unsatisfactory procedure. Theirs is a success story against the intrusion of unorthodox views, and begins in the reign of Vattagāmaṇi Abhaya (89-77 B.C.) However, the hard evidence points to the first century A.D. as the period of serious challenge to the traditional continuity of orthodoxy. The conflict, when it began, seems to have centred round problems of Vinaya or discipline, which explains why our sources concentrate on the succession of Vinaya teachers. The *ācariya paramparā* of Sri Lankan theras as given in the *Samantapāsādikā*, a Vinaya Commentary, is believed to come down to about the first century A. D.,³³ and the same appears to be true of the history of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka spelt out in the *Dīpavamsa*.³⁴ This particular section of the *Dīpavamsa* speaks of a present where there were both *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*, who upheld the Vibhajjavāda (Theravāda) and who preserved the tradition of the Vinaya,

30. *Dv.* 12.32 - 3.

31. *Dv.* 12.34.

32. E. W. Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism*, 1946, pp. 85-7.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Dv.* 18.1 *et seq.*

This present is difficult to identify, but the list of Vinaya teachers, both monks and nuns, show that in or around the first century A.D., there was an appeal to the past which finds expression in some of the traditions in the *Samantapāsādikā* and the *Dīpavamsa*.

This period of challenge and response was not one of limited duration, and it seems to have escalated with time. The conflict later crystallised into a dichotomy between two leading monasteries, the Mahāvihāra and the Abhayagirivihāra, the former being the seat of orthodoxy. A preoccupation with problems of discipline suggests that the battle was fought on this front, although the doctrinal struggle surfaces from time to time. The *Samantapāsādikā* takes notice of a conflict over discipline which took place around the beginning of the first century A.D., in the reign of Bhātika Abhaya. State intervention was found necessary to resolve the problem, which had turned into a confrontation between the Mahāvihāra and Abhayagirivihāra. The minister Dīghakārayana, who was appointed the arbiter, is said to have decided in favour of the Mahāvihāra. Naturally, decisions other than those in favour of the Mahāvihāra will not find mention in the commentaries. The *Dīpavamsa* records the intervention of the minister Kapīla, in the reign of Vohārikatissa (A.D. 209 – 231), to suppress heresy, Vitandvāda, as it is called. It is on this same note of controversy that the *Dīpavamsa* ends. The reign of Mahāsena, at the end of the third century A.D., seems to have witnessed a great upheaval, and the account of it leaves little doubt as to the intensity of feeling. The two leading figures in the opposing camp are described as the wicked Mitta and the evil Sona, and there is a savage attack on their followers—shameless individuals who misled the king and who were only monks in appearance. They were like stinking corpses, like blue flies (obviously the kind that settles on stinking corpses). They are said to have preached false doctrines but the two examples quoted seem somewhat of an anticlimax. These evil monks are said to have thought it not proper to calculate a person's age for the purpose of higher ordination from conception, and the second seems even more trivial, they allowed the use of ivory fans.³⁵ Once again it is the conflict relating to the rules of discipline that are highlighted. Obviously this is not the entire story.

What is interesting about this episode as reported in the *Dīpavamsa* is that the account practically stops mid-stream. One misses the announcement of the triumph of orthodoxy. The report is wound up with the statement that, because of his association with wicked men, Mahāsena did much good and evil, and passed away according to his actions. The *Dīpavamsa* ends with a general admonition that one should not associate with evil men. In the *Mahāvamsa*, the Mahāsena episode is carried to its logical conclusion. The king realises his folly and rehabili-

35. *Dv.* 22.68-74.

tates the Mahāvihāra, which according to the *Mahāvamsa*, was physically destroyed by the opposing faction. Here one can see the growth of the tradition and the rounding off of rough edges. The *Dīpavamsa* story without these embellishments seems to stand very close to the event. It would seem that the *Dīpavamsa* took form in this atmosphere of religious conflict, and explains the entire rationale for it. The writing of history is often considered a means to attain definite ends. Prophecies and events were marshalled out to argue the case for the Theravāda in the face of a growing crisis in faith. The *Dīpavamsa* reflects a historical awareness which comes during a period of instability. By and large the *Dīpavamsa* records the battle, the *Mahāvamsa*, the victory.

If one accepts the position that the reason behind the *Dīpavamsa* was polemical, the question which rises immediately is, to whom was it addressed. The internal evidence in the chronicle suggests that an important section of the audience envisaged were the rulers and the leaders of society. We have enough evidence outside the chronicles that the economic viability of the religious institutions of this period depended largely on royal patronage, and the patronage of those who were in a position to transfer resources. The emphasis laid on the acceptance of Buddhism by Asoka, his benefactions to the *saṅgha*, and the building of monasteries becomes intelligible in this context. Much is made of the patronage extended to Buddhism by Devānampiyatissa and the religious activities of rulers up to Mahāsena. Monks and nuns admitted to the *saṅgha* are almost always from the highest in the land. The episodes relating to the reigns of kings like Mahāsena and Vohārikatissa demonstrate that rulers and officials identified themselves with one or other of the rival sects, and securing their attention was of decided advantage. Thus the Mahāvihāra monks campaigned, keeping in mind both their own members, and the ruling classes, whose support was necessary for stability and continuity. The use of Pāli as the language of the chronicle had wider implications. It was not long after the composition of the *Dīpavamsa* that the decision was taken to translate the Sinhalese Commentaries into Pāli. This represented an attempt at making available the literature of the Theravādins to a wider Buddhist public, and very possibly the *Dīpavamsa*, too, comes within the orbit of the same movement.

In Sri Lanka, the Buddhist vihāras were the centres of learning and education. That the literature, which grew out of them, composed by monk authors, should reflect their concerns, is not in the least surprising. These concerns produced a historical awareness which was documented

from time to time. If one is talking of imperatives for the writing of history, the problems of the Theravādins produced such imperatives. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that it was the dynamics of Buddhism which generated history writing in Sri Lanka. It is unfortunate that we have been left with only the Theravada version of it, but history usually tends to be the record of the winners.

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