

The Reply

THE examination of the Chronology of the Pali Chronicles of Ceylon led me to three main conclusions: 1. The dates of the early kings of Ceylon from Vijaya to Elāra are altogether unreliable. 2. The traditional date of Ceylon for the *Parinibbāna* of the Buddha, 544-3 B.C., is untenable as it places Asoka's consecration about 60 years earlier than he lived, and that this excess of 60 years has to be deducted from the regnal years of the kings from Devānampiya Tissa to Elāra. 3. The date of 483 B.C. or any date near it for the *Parinibbāna* cannot be accepted as it is based on a list of Magadha kings from the 9th year of Ajātasattu to the consecration of Aśoka to whom the Pali chronicles allot 218 years. But of these Susunāga, Kālāsoka and his ten sons, who are credited with 68 years, do not occur in the Indian lists in this position. The *Parisiṣṭaparvan*, which gives a list from Śrenika (Bimbisāra), leaves them out altogether, while the Purāṇas place Śiśunaga and his three immediate successors before Bimbisāra. Of these the *Divyāvadāna* places Kākavarṇin alone after Bimbisāra. But since he is stated to be an ancestor of the Buddha's contemporary, Prasenañjit, he ought to have been placed before Bimbisāra, who too was a contemporary of Prasenañjit. From these facts, following Dr. E. J. Thomas, I drew the inference that it is the Pali chronicles that had misplaced these rulers, and therefore it is not possible to accept the figure 218 for the kings from Ajātasattu's 9th year to Asoka's consecration and on account of that the date 483 B.C. for the *Parinibbāna*.

None of these conclusions or the evidence adduced in their favour have been directly challenged by Prof. Barua. But he questions four other statements, one of which he attributes to Dr. S. Paranavithana.

1. Dr. Paranavithana stands for the correctness of the Buddhist traditional date of the Buddha's demise suggesting 544-3 B.C. as the year of the commencement of the Buddha Era.

Does Dr. Paranavithana stand for the correctness of the Buddhist traditional date of 544-3 B.C.? This is what he wrote: "The dates given above (Vasabha to Kittisena, A.D. 66-534) are in accordance with the chronological table appended to L. C. Wijesinha's translation of the *Mahāvamsa*. They have been computed, on the basis of the Buddhist era starting 543 B.C., current in Ceylon, by adding up the lengths of reigns given in the chronicles and taking into consideration the traditional dates in the Buddhist era given in literary sources for certain important events. Wickremasinghe (E.Z. III, 1-47) and Geiger (*Cūlavamsa*, translation, Vol. II, pp. 1-47) have both elaborated chronological tables prepared on the assumption that a Buddhist era with 483 B.C.

as its epoch was current in Ceylon during the earlier period of its history. Wickremasinghe holds that such an era was in use for the whole period dealt with in this chapter while Geiger opines that its use extended up to the end of Mahāsena's reign."

Dr. Paranavithana then examined the evidence for the theory that Ceylon in its earlier period assumed a Buddhist era beginning with 483 B.C. and concluded such an assumption unjustifiable. "There is no valid ground," he continued, "to doubt the general accuracy of the chronicle for the three or four centuries preceding Mahānāma's reign (412-434). The great majority of the kings of this period are mentioned in contemporary records and when regnal years are given in these records they do not come in conflict with the data furnished by the chronicles... Vincent Smith, than whom there was no severer critic of the Sinhalese chronicles, confesses that 'there is not I believe, any reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of the Ceylonese dates even for the much earlier time of Duthagāmaṇi, about B.C. 161' (IA. xxi, 195). The question is not whether the *Parivirāna* of the Buddha actually took place in 483 or 543 B.C., but whether a Buddhist era with 483 B.C. as its starting point was current in Ceylon at any period. The evidence available not only disproves the contention of Wickremasinghe, Geiger and others, that such an era was in use during the period covered by this chapter (A.D. 66-534), but establishes that dates were computed during this period in the traditional Buddhist era of Ceylon having 543 B.C. as its epoch."¹

Thus all that Dr. Paranavithana claims is a substantial accuracy for the dates of kings as far back as Duthagāmaṇi (161-137 B.C.). Nowhere does he stand for the correctness of the date 544-3 B.C. or even for any date prior to 161 B.C. Thus "the general impression gaining ground in India" is clearly unwarranted by anything he has said.

2. "If such be the credibility of traditional chronologies how can Dr. Mendis be certain about the contemporaneity of Devānampiya Tissa with Devānampiya Asoka?"

I admit there is no direct evidence for my statement that there is no reason to doubt that Devānampiya Tissa was a contemporary of Aśoka. In studying the Pāli chronicles I gained the impression that their chronology was "formed on the basis that Aśoka and Devānampiya Tissa were contemporaries."² A similar impression appears to have been made on the mind of Geiger. After doubting the dates from Vijaya to Asela he says: "But even in that historical period one fact stands out clearly and distinctly from the wavering traditions concerning the times immediately before and after. That is the reign of Devānampiya Tissa and the arrival of Mahinda in Ceylon."³

I may add that this impression has some support from an inscription, according to which Uttiya, the successor of Devānampiya Tissa granted a cave to the Saṅgha.⁴ Thus if Buddhism existed in Ceylon in the time of Uttiya it certainly supports at least to some extent the tradition that Buddhism was introduced into Ceylon in the time of his predecessor, Devānampiya Tissa.

3. "Where is the authentic evidence for the statement that the commentaries of the Pāli Canon were 'written down' in the time of Vaṭṭagāmaṇi Abhaya?"

This statement given in the *Dīpaṅṅama* and the *Māhāvamsa* is accepted for more than one reason. The *Māhāvamsa* accounts from this time are found generally reliable and are as a rule in harmony with the large number of inscriptions belonging to the period beginning with Vaṭṭagāmaṇi Abhaya. Dr. Adikaram has shown that the introduction to the *Samantha-pāsādikā* contains internal evidence to support the view that the *Vinaya Aṭṭhakathā* on which it was based was written about this time.⁵

4. The chief criticism, however, is levelled against the statement, "There is even better evidence for placing the *Parimibhāna* about 365 B.C., a 100 years before the consecration of Aśoka."

The evidence for the date 483 B.C. has to be traced to the Pāli chronicles, and it has been shown already that this date is untenable. On the other hand there is evidence in support of the date 365 B.C. both in the *Dīpaṅṅama* and the *Sarvāstivāda* texts.

Prof. Barua does not agree that there is any evidence for this date in the *Dīpaṅṅama*. In the first passage referred to, as Oldenberg pointed out, there is a gap between the prophecy regarding the time of the First Council and that regarding the Third, and therefore he thinks it is legitimate to accept a second prophecy about the Second Council between them.⁶ In the second passage the rise of Moggaliputta Tissa a hundred years after⁷ is a sequel to a reference to the Second Council which took place a hundred years after the *Parimibhāna*. "This decides once for all that the prophecy about the time of the Pāṭaliputra Council cited by Dr. Mendis from the *niḍḍesa* section of the *Dīpaṅṅama* is no evidence at all in support of the Sarvāstivāda tradition placing Asoka a century after the Buddha's demise."

The *Dīpaṅṅama* is not the work of a single author. It is a compilation of passages taken from more than one source. It contains repetitions as well as omissions. It has been shown that it has three chronological lists of early kings

1. *A New History of the Indian People*, VI, p. 262.
2. *University of Ceylon Review*, V, p. 43.
3. Geiger: *Māhāvamsa*, Eng. Trs. p. 22.

4. *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report*, 1905, p. 45.
5. *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, p. 3. *University of Ceylon Review*, IV, p. 9.
6. *Dīpaṅṅama I*, 24, 25.
7. *Ibid.* V, p. 55.

which do not always agree.⁸ It has double versions of other accounts which too differ in some respects.⁹ Therefore it is not safe to assume that either V. 55 is necessarily a sequel to V. 53 or it is legitimate to expect a second prophecy about the Second Council after I. 24.

Even if it is accepted that the prophecies indicated that the Third Council was to take place 118 years after the Second Council it will still place the Third Council 218 years after the *Parivibbāna*. But according to the chronology of the Pali chronicles the Third Council took place not 218 but 236 years after. How then can we assume that the prophecy meant that the Third Council was to take place 118 years after the Second Council? Prof. Barua has no explanation for this discrepancy, to which I referred in my article which he criticizes.¹¹

In further refutation of the Sarvāstivāda tradition which placed Aśoka a 100 years after the *Parivivāna* Prof. Barua repeats the view of Geiger that the Sarvāstivādins confounded Dharmāśoka with Kālāsoka.¹²

This is an assumption which has yet to be established. The inclusion of Kākavarṇin in the *Divyāvadāna* after Muṇḍa as pointed out already, is obviously an error as there he is represented as an ancestor of Prasenajit. The probable reason the Sarvāstivādins did not place the Second Council in the time of Kālāsoka is that while according to the list of Magadha kings in Ceylon the king who ruled 100 years after the death of the Buddha was Kālāsoka, in India Kākavarṇin was believed to have ruled before the time of Bimbisāra.¹³

8. *University of Ceylon Review*, V, p. 40.

9. *Ibid.* IV, p. 18.

10. With regard to the reading *due vassasatan'attharasāni ca* found in some of the Mss. (Mss.) however insert *due* before *vassasate*. Which is the original reading: Oldenberg following the best Mss. accepted 118 as correct, and this is made practically certain by the fact that two of the Mss. that read *due* have had this word inserted later no doubt to make the statement conform with the calculation finally adopted. Oldenberg supposed that a śloka had been omitted referring to the second Council, but evidently none of the scribes knew of it when they attempted to improve the passage. This would not be the only instance in which the *Dīpaṅṇavaṇṇa* has not harmonized its statements, and in any case neither 118 nor 218 agrees with the final calculation that the third Council was held 236 years after Nirvāna.

11. *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. V, p. 48, note 43. Geiger (Mah.— Eng. Trs. P. lvi. note 5) says: "When the Dip. I, 24-25, says that the First Council took place four months after the Nirvāna and the Third Council 118 years later there is here a manifest error, for which the clumsiness of the author of the Dip. is responsible. The date 118 is evidently reckoned from the Second Council, mention of which has dropped out, and it refers as in Mah. V, 100 not to the beginning of the Third Council but to the birth of Moggalliputta Tissa."

Thus Geiger too accepts Oldenberg's suggestion that the reckoning may be from the Second Council, but he probably saw that the date was wrong even then for the Third Council. Hence he suggests that it refers to the birth of Moggaliputta Tissa. But this too cannot be accepted. Moggaliputta Tissa's birth is clearly much earlier as he was ordained in the 2nd year of Candragupta (Mah. Eng. Trs., p. xlix).

12. *Mahāvamsa*; Eng. Trs. p. lix.

13. *University of Ceylon Review*, V, p. 44.

Even if the inclusion of Kākavarṇin were not an error still he may not have been king 100 years after the death of the Buddha as the *Divyāvadāna* leaves out Nāgādāsaka and Susunāga his predecessors, who according to the Pāli chronicles ruled for 42 years.

Prof. Barua gives further three reasons in support of the date 483 B.C. or some date approximate to it:

1. Mahāvīra was a contemporary of the Buddha and predeceased him. The Jaina date for his death is 527 B.C.

No importance can be attached to this date. "The traditional date of Mahāvīra's death on which the Jains base their chronological calculations," wrote Jarl Charpentier, "corresponds to the year 470 before the foundation of the Vikrama Era in 58 B.C., i.e., 528 B.C. This reckoning is based mainly on a list of kings and dynasties, who are supposed to have reigned between 528 and 58 B.C.; but the list is absolutely useless, as it confuses rulers of Ujjain, Magadha, and other kingdoms; and some of these may perhaps have been contemporary and not successive as they are represented."¹⁴

2. A century as an interval between Buddha's demise and Asoka's consecration is too short a period for the gradual development of the Kingdom of Magadha into a full-fledged empire.

This is a matter on which many may differ from Prof. Barua. The expansion of the Gupta Empire under Samudragupta or of the Coḷa Empire under Rājārāja I does not show that such a long period of time was necessary for the development of such an empire in ancient India.

3. According to the Chinese dotted record kept up in Canton till A.D. 489 the Buddha Era commenced in 486 B.C.

What was this dotted record? According to tradition after the death of the Buddha and the closing of the Vassa, Upāli marked the *Vinaya Pīṭaka* with a dot, and did the same every following year while he lived. After Upāli's death the practice was kept up from teacher to pupil till 489 A.D. when Sanghabhadra added the last dot after his Vassa residence at Canton. The number of dots then was 975, and this places Buddha's death in 486 B.C.¹⁵

It is strange that Prof. Barua and Prof. Raychaudhuri¹⁶ attach so much importance to such a record. "Max Muller pointed out," says Fleet, "certain objections which might be urged against this tradition: 1. That, according to the Mahāvamsa, the Pīṭakas and their Attakathā were not reduced to writing until the time of King Vattagāmani Abhaya of Ceylon, more than four

14. *Cambridge History of India*, I, p. 155.

15. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 1896, p. 436; 1897, p. 113; 1905, p. 51; 1909, p. 9.

16. *An Advanced History of India*, p. 58.

centuries after the death of the Buddha. 2. That even if Upāli did write a copy of the Vinaya Piṭaka, it is not probable that that identical copy should have been carried to China. And he expressed the opinion that the process of adding one dot at the end of every year during so long a time as 975 years would be "extremely precarious." To this Fleet adds that in A.D. 535 it was found that the register had not been kept after A.D. 489 or 490 and the requisite number of dots were added to bring the record up to date. "We may reasonably ask," he continues, "may not something of the same kind have happened previously also, and may not mistakes in the reckoning have been introduced thereby."¹⁷

There is no doubt that the evidence for the events referred to so far is far from satisfactory. But even what is available does not seem to be stronger for 483 B.C. than for 365 B.C. I may add that I have nowhere vouched for the accuracy of the latter date or drawn any conclusion from that alone.

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¹⁷. *J.R.A.S.*, 1909. p. 9.