

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CHOLAS TO BUDDHISM IN SOUTH ASIA

R.G.D. JAYAWARDENA

*Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya*

The objective of this research work is to investigate briefly certain obscured contributions of Tamils to Theravada Buddhism in South Asia with reference to the chronicles, historical records and inscriptions. Indeed, all these records consist of observable data very relevant to our research. Statements recorded in South India and Sri Lanka will be the basis for our investigation.

The name Dameda or Chola mentioned in both inscriptions and chronicles refers to an ethnic group called Tamil. We find this term associated with the name of a person or a bhikku. It is easy to recognize in "Dameda" the prototype of Demela, or Demale, a particular ethnic group of South Asia. According to a picture present in Pali chronicles, they were an incorporated ethnic group with Buddhism and had wrong view. Most Buddhist historians have regarded the Cholas as non-Buddhists who were against Buddhist culture. The literary works of Buddhists are a bound by the nature of things to direct their attention primarily to the Sinhalese Buddhists. Without tolerant exposure on this notion, it is difficult to assure and appreciate. Many accounts and facts suggest that some Tamils were donors, guardians and scholars of Buddhism. According to Huen sian in the 6th century A.D. ten thousand Theravada bhikkus lived in Tamil territory. The question arising from his report is whether they were a fraternity of Sinhala or Tamil bhikkus. A number of authors and scholarly successors who wrote down texts can be identified as Tamil bhikkus who dwelt in South India. They were known as Cholia Bhikkhus. The term Dameda Samane in the inscription of Anuradhapura refers to a group of bhikkus other than Sinhala bhikkus. S. Paranavitana's explanation of the *demata samana* in the Talgahatota inscription means Tamil monks. An eminent writer who illuminated the Chola region named Dipankara buddhappiya in Baladithyaramaya and Chudamanikarma viharaya composed Rupasiddhi. He is believed to be a Choliya. The Concluding verses of the Paramattha Vinichchaya notice a place where the composer was had welt in a place belonging to Chola region.

Some Tamils were probably active Buddhists and donors. But not precisely we are able to prefigure that some Tamils contributed to Buddhism. The Geiger translation of the Chulavamsa agreed that 'damilaala' opposite word and close meaningful reference to the original manuscript. 'Damilaala' indicate real meaning than 'gamikaala'. However his translation indicates that 'gamikala' dedicated ayaena pabbata vihara to a Tamil monk and that he also offered a village call Maha ummara. Brahmi inscriptions in caves refer to a 'dameda' who was a Tamil merchant who dedicated a cave for a bhikku. An inscription found in Kataragama mentions that Dathika and Tiritara gifted to Kataragama temple. The Aragama inscription mentions that Parinda dedicated a temple. However all in all this evidence suggested that Tamils contributions led to the development of Theravada Buddhism in South Asia.

The collection of facts from chronicles, historical records and inscriptions will be analysed separately. The methodology adopted is to make an investigation through the analysis.

The outcome will be a critical assessment of the contributions of the Cholas to Buddhism in South Asia, through a comparison.