LEARNING FROM THE MISREAD: A STUDY OF SOME PALI ANOMALOUS FORMS IN THE SAGĀTHAVAGGA

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The origin of both the Pali language and the Pali canon is debatable. There are, however, traces in the Pali canonical texts themselves to show that they are in the present form after being subject to processes of translation and transmission. Translation was from several ancient Māgadhī idioms or Eastern dialects of the Ganges basin and Kaliṅga to the composite language what we call Pali, and the transmission was from an oral tradition to a hand-written one. Some of these traces are known as Māgadhisms or Eastern forms and these forms are so rare in the present version of the Pali canon that the extant ones have also been subjected to misreading and misinterpretation even within the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. The main purpose of my research is to recover some of these archaic forms from the Sagāthavagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya. In this paper I present only the forms found in the Dhajaggasutta and the Sakalikasutta.

In the Dhajaggasutta the <yaṃ ... so> construction of the sentence <mamaṃ hi vo dhajaggaṃ ullokayataṃ yaṃ bhavissati bhayaṃ... so pahīyissati>, the relative clause <yaṃ bhavissati bhayaṃ ...> has been linked with the main sentence <so pahīyissati>. Here <yaṃ> is a neuter nominative singular of the relative pronoun <ya(d)> and it goes with <bhayaṃ> which is also a form of neuter nominative singular. <so> in the main clause, however, is the masculine nominative singular of the demonstrative pronoun <ta(d)>, and it does not match in gender with the relative clause's <yaṃ> and <bhayaṃ>. This grammatical error is a result of using the masculine nominative singular <so> in the main clause, and it is likely to be a corruption of the Eastern form <se>. By considering a few other rare examples extant in the Pali canon, where the neuter nominative forms of <ye ... se> are used instead of <yaṃ ... taṃ>, it is possible to amend the sentence to its archaic version to read <ye bhavissati bhayaṃ ... se pahīyissati>.

In the Sakalikasutta, the terms <nāgavatā, sīhavatā, ājānīyavatā, dhorayhavatā, nisabhavatā, dantavatā> are problematic since there are no such Pali forms found elsewhere in the Pali canon. The commentator glosses, for instance, <nāgavatā> with <nāgabhāvena> but I doubt its correctness. The sentence reads <nāgavatā ca pan'uppannā sārīrikā vedanā ... adhivāseti avihaññamāno>, and in my PTS edition with a clue I gathered from a Lanna manuscript I changed it to <nāgo'va tā ca pan'uppannā sārīrikā vedanā ... adhivāseti avihaññamāno>. But now I have a better idea about it. Here we have an anomalous form, a Māgadhī form, that is, <nāga> of <nāgavatā> is another nominative singular form of <-a> stems of some Eastern dialects. To show the extent of this form, another example is also found elsewhere in the Pali canon. I argue that if it is the case we do not have to change anything in the text except the breaking down of the word to read <nāga va tā> where the feminine form <tā> match well with the feminine noun <vedanā>.

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