

TEXTUAL CRITICISM AS PRACTICED BY EARLY SINHALESE SCHOLARS

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The scientific process of emending manuscripts is known as 'Textual Criticism'. The method has been practiced in both Eastern and Western literatures from the early times. However, the term 'Textual Criticism' was first used in the mid 19th century.

In this research my attempt is to show that Sri Lankan and Indian scholars practiced 'Textual Criticism' as a technical activity and it can be compared with the modern method mentioned above.

The Buddhist tradition of 'Textual Criticism' is an important branch of the Indian tradition. The *Suttapiṭaka* contains seven-fold process of analyzing *Dhamma*. In the process of studying *Abhidhamma*, the method adopted is described in five steps. The three *sangayanas* in Tripitaka held in India took a considerable part in re-constructing the original words of the Buddha. What had taken place at these *sangāyanās* was a laborious process of the discussion of the texts orally transmitted and arriving at a consensus with a view to establishing an authoritative text.

The history of text editing in Sri Lanka extends as far back as the 1st century B.C. That was the instance of texts transmitted hither to orally being written down at *Aluvihāra*. This is not a mere copying but also involved reading and emendation.

My main task here is to probe into the editorial actions of Buddhaghosa in the translation of Sinhalese commentaries into Pali. His task was not a mere translation, but to edit the Sinhalese works according to the *Pāli* ('*tantiyānuccavikaṇ bhāsaṇ*'). The procedure applied by him, as described himself in his works is as follows: by taking the substance of the old commentaries (*pōrānatthakathānam sāram ādāya*), including the opinion of the elders (*antogadhathēravādaṇ yuttamatthaṇ apariccajantō*), exceeding any error of transcription (*pamadālēkhaṇ vajjaitvana*), condensing detailed accounts (*viitharamaggaṇ ca samāsayitvā*), including authoritative decisions (*viniccayaṇ sabbamasēsayingvā*), without overstepping any Pali idioms (*tantikkamaṇ kinñci avokkamitvā*). Whenever the commentator had to give his own opinion on any point of suspect, he did not fail to mention that the views are his own (*ayam pana mē attanō mati*). At the points that he cannot give a proper decision, Buddhaghosa records the whole incident and delegates the judgment to the reader (*yahtā wā tahtā wā hōtu*). This method of analyzing fact is known as *Mahāpadesa* in early Buddhism. On many occasions in commenting he consulted manuscript of various schools, and faithfully recorded the variant readings that he found in the texts. His main effort was to arrive at the basic text with supreme authority.

As the Encyclopaedia Britannica points out, the method or the critical process applied in restoring text has been resolved into three stages, namely (1) Critical Recension, (2) Examination and (3) Emendation. Emendation is further linked with conjecture. I shall take into consideration these modern methods and try to investigate the achievement of Buddhaghosa in his editorial works of translation Sinhala texts into Pāli.