SŪTRA SANNAYAS AND SARAṆAṂKARA: CHANGES IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BUDDHIST EDUCATION[1]

Introduction

A striking feature of Buddhist manuscript evidence from eighteenth and nineteenth-century Sri Lanka is the large number of Sinhala-language commentaries on Pāli *suttas*. These commentaries, known as *sūtra sannayas*, and/or as *sūtra vistara sannayas*, were composed in large numbers beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century. In what follows, I present the historical context for this change in Buddhist textual practices, explaining how the emergence of these commentaries was part of broader changes in Sri Lankan Buddhist monastic life. Examining two *sūtra sannayas* more closely, I explore several features of their commentarial style which made them useful in training monks as preachers. I go on to analyze the impact of this new commentarial style on Buddhist communities in Sri Lanka more generally, arguing that they played a central role in the formation of a new Buddhist "textual community."

What is a *Sūtra* Sannaya?

A *sūtra sannaya* is a type of commentary, distinguished by the type of text on which it comments and by the way in which it comments. As the name suggests, *sūtra sannayas* are commentaries written on Buddhist *suttas* (*sūtras*, to use the Sanskrit term which was usually used by the Sinhala writers of these commentaries), or the discourses attributed to Sakyamuni Buddha. In principle, a *sūtra sannaya* could be written for any *sutta* found in the Pāli *tipiṭaka*. In fact, the manuscript evidence shows that *sūtra sannayas* were written for a much smaller number of *sūtras*, which appear to have been the favourite discourses of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Buddhists. Judging from extant manuscripts, the *paritta* (or *pirit*) *suttas* -- including Metta Sutta, Maṅgala Sutta, Karaṇīyametta Sutta, and Dhajagga Sutta, for instance -- were among these favourites. Among the other popular *suttas* we find Dhammacakkappavattana

[1] This paper is respectfully dedicated to Professor P.B. Meegaskumbura, who has so generously shared his knowledge with me, and to Godwin Samararatne, whose kindness and wisdom have enriched my visits to Sri Lanka. Any faults herein, of course, are solely mine.

Sutta, Mahāsaṭipatthāna Sutta and Brahmajāla Sutta.[2]

A *sannaya* is an explanation or exposition (*vyāhyāva*) which may be an elucidation of meaning (*arthavivaraṇaya*) or an exposition of detail (*vistara kathanaya*).[3] Here the distinction between elucidation of meaning and exposition of detail roughly parallels that between *padavaṇṇanā* and *aṭṭhavaṇṇanā* in the Pāli commentarial traditions. That is, in both instances, the first commentarial style--*arthavivaraṇaya* or *padavaṇṇanā*--focuses on the immediate meaning of the word or phrase by unpacking grammatical compounds and providing synonyms while the second -- *vistara kathanaya* or *aṭṭhavaṇṇanā* -- explores the broader possibilities for meaning by placing a word or phrase within a more extensive narrative context.[4]

The *sūtra sannayas* produced in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Sri Lanka consistently combine the two functions of elucidating basic meaning and providing more detailed exposition. The commentary written in Sinhala for a Pāli *sutta* within a *sūtra sannaya* will, for instance, provide a simple translation of a Pāli word or phrase, which also clarifies tense, number, etc. However, the style of commentary used in the *sūtra sannayas* does not restrict itself to a word-for-word translation, or to an analysis of grammatical structure. Rather, *sūtra sannayas* typically introduce phrases, and sometimes longer sentences and even short narratives, to elaborate the Pāli word or words in question.

A simple example can be drawn from the opening lines of a *sūtra sannaya*, which comment upon the "evaṃ me sutaṃ" which starts a Pāli sutta. The Sinhala commentary typically first explains that "me" means "by me." It then goes on to explain, for instance, that the manner in which the sutta was heard is the manner in which it was heard by the Venerable Kassapa at the First Council. Other straightforward examples include the way in which the Pāli term "bhagavā" is often given a lengthy comment which elaborates particular virtues

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[2] Somadasa's (1959) *Laṃkāvē Puskoḷa Pot Nāmāvaliya* is one source of evidence for the popularity of particular *sūtra sannayas*. My recent work in temple libraries in the Kandy and *Sat Koralē* areas shows that the *sūtra sannayas* mentioned here also consistently dominate temple collections.

[3] See Sorata (1963) sv. sanna.

[4] See Bond (1982, esp. pp. 149-50) for a useful discussion of Pāli *aṭṭhavaṇṇanā*.

of the Buddha, or the way in which the Sinhala comment explains how certain Pāli place names are derived (such-and-such happened there, etc.). Below I will present some examples of more elaborate *sūtra sannaya* commentary.

To clarify the structure and function of *sūtra sannayas* we can also use the Sinhala-language distinction between *arthavyākhyāna* and *dharmavyākhyāna*. While *arthavyākhyānas* focus on authoritative sources word for word, *dharmavyākhyānas* (like the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*) are bound only to convey the idea of the original. As commentarial works which contain a substantial proportion of detailed exposition, the *sūtra sannaya's* function is not exhausted by the relatively restricted exegetical aims of *arthavyākhyāna* texts. Their adherence to the word order and structure of the Pāli texts upon which they comment, however, prevents them from attaining the level of sustained and independent narrative characteristic of *dharmavyākhyānas*. A *sūtra sannaya* is best understood as an intermediate form between the narrowest and broadest Sinhala exegetical styles.

Sūtra sannayas appeared as early as the twelfth century but were, in Somadasa's words, only "a minor literary genre prior to the eighteenth century" (1987, x). The production of *sūtra sannaya* texts began in the twelfth century and ceased in the fifteenth for reasons which remain unclear. It is likely that the early *sūtra sannayas* drew on earlier (5th-7th century) translations of Pāli *suttas* into Sinhala but this cannot be confirmed as none of these earlier translations are extant.[5] Śrī Dharmakirti analyzes the prominence of *sannayas* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in terms of linguistic change within Sinhala culture, arguing that works written in the Sinhala language of the earlier Anuradhapura Period were no longer accessible to later readers of Sinhala and that new commentarial works were necessary to mediate between Pāli and Sinhala (1961, 136).

Why Write *Sūtra Sannayas*?

For those interested in placing textual production within a broader historical context, the sudden emergence of *sūtra sannaya* commentaries in the eighteenth century provides an intriguing puzzle, leading us to ask: what changes in Buddhist institutions and/or devotional practices brought the *sūtra sannaya* to prominence at this time?

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[5] In this regard see Godakumbura (1955, p. 23).

When we look for other evidence of Buddhist life during this period which might shed light on such questions, we find that the first *sūtra sannaya*--called Sārārthadīpanī (or, Illuminator of Excellent Meaning) -- written since the fifteenth century was written sometime between 1739 and 1747 by a novice monk named Vēliviṭa Saraṇaṃkara living in the Kandyan Kingdom. We also find evidence which points to a reorganization of monastic institutions in the mid-eighteenth century, one which included the development of a new educational system in which Pāli instruction and trained preaching played a major role. In what follows I will explore the reasons or the popularity of *sūtra sannayas* in this context, and the way in which they were used within the newly organized monastic, and especially educational, system.[6]

Decentralized Monasticism

In the early part of the eighteenth century, upasampadā festivals ceased to be held because the necessary monastic quorum no longer existed. Thus, despite the fact that upasampadā was reintroduced twice from Southeast Asia, in 1596 and 1697, the community of upsampadā monks did not take strong hold. The last upasampadā monk during this period was Hulaṃgamuvē Jinadāsa, who died in 1729 (Dewaraja 1988, 166). The absence of higher ordination during this time is important not only because it may have allowed for (and resulted from) altered expectations of monastic discipline but also because it meant the absence of certain collective monastic observances, like the recitation of the pātimokkha on uposatha days and the delegation of authority over younger monks during upasampadā, which helped to create and maintain a clear and centralized system of monastic organization and administration.

Despite the fact that monks no longer attained upasampadā, and no longer participated in many of the acts of the monastic community for which upasampadā monks are responsible, many Buddhist temples were not uninhabited. They were, instead, maintained by men who lived as novice monks, or by monks who had chosen to give up their upsampadā status while

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[6] Others have noted the popularity of *sūtra sannayas* in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka, and have linked this popularity to the preaching practices of that period (Sannasgala 1964, 492 and Somadasa 1987, ix). However, the precise institutional context in which the *sūtra sannaya* commentarial style developed, and its impact on Sri Lankan Buddhism, has not yet been examined.

retaining temple positions. Although such monks did not have upasampadā status, it appears that at least some of them (those in the wealthier temples or with good family connections) had high social standing and participated actively in the administration of the Kandyan Kingdom.[7] These monks, sometimes called gaṇinnānses, also preached to lay men and women. According to some accounts, these monks were also active as doctors and astrologers, while looking after temple lands and living with wives and children.[8] This may be true, at least in part, but it is difficult to develop a clear picture of the ganinnānse lifestyle because, as I have argued elsewhere, our evidence of it consists of highly rhetorical statements written by monks and laymen who wished to distance themselves from their gaṇinnānse predecessors (Blackburn 1997).

There is evidence to suggest that learning was not absent from Sri Lankan Buddhist communities after the death of Parakramabahu VI in 1465, but that it became increasingly determined by local factors, lacking the strong educational infrastructure which had characterized the most stable political domains during the reign of Parakramabahu VI of Kotte (De Silva 1992, 95-7; Mirando 1985, 19-20).

Two particularly influential eighteenth-century hagiographies are usually cited as evidence for the low level of Buddhist education from the late fifteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. These works, the Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva and the Saṃgharājavata, describe the life and work of the monk named Vëliviṭa Saraṇaṃkara who became a key monastic leader in the mid-eighteenth century and was active in the process of monastic reorganization which I will describe in more detail below. These works describe Saraṇaṃkara's attempts to educate himself in heroic terms, emphasizing, in particular, the lack of teachers skilled in Pāli, and the dearth of Buddhist manuscripts.[9] Although, as I hope to show below, it is important not to underestimate the impact of Saraṇaṃkara's learning and leadership on Buddhism in Sri Lanka, careful historical work requires that we do not too quickly dismiss the years immediately preceding his labours as an age of ignorance.

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[7] For details in this regard, see Dewaraja (1988).

[8] See, for instance, Ratnapala (1971, p. 97; pp. 107-8), SSC (14), and SV (58, 80). In what follows, SSC refers to pages from *Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva*, SV to verses from *Saṃgharājavata*, CV to verses from *Cūlavamsa*, and SD to pages from *Sārārthadīpani*.

[9] See, for instance, SSC (15-21).

If Vācissara is correct, both gaṇinnānses and lay people living in the early eighteenth century were familiar with portions of the jātaka corpus, although for many that familiarity would have come through Sinhala rather than Pāli, and through hearing rather than reading. Vācissara describes a style of religious instruction in which gaṇinnānses recited Pāli jātakas before explaining their meaning in Sinhala (1964, 50).

Robert Knox, in his account of Kandyan culture written about his stay in the region during the 1660s, gives clear evidence of religious instruction in which a sonorous recitation (probably in Pāli) is followed by an explanation of its meaning in more accessible language (1966, 141). It is likely, especially in the light of Hēvāvasam's comments on seventeenth-century Buddhist literature (1966, 8-9) that this preaching worked with a jātaka-based corpus.

The early works of Saraṇaṃkara themselves indicate that, in addition to the jātakas, other Buddhist works were available. Sārārthasaṇgrahaya, written at the invitation of King Narēndrasiṃha, clearly shows the influence of the Visuddhimagga, Milindapañha and Saddharmaratnāvaliya. Sārārthadīpanī, the first of the new generation of *sūtra sannayas*, written between 1739 and 1747, draws on the fifth-century Pāli aṭṭhakathā tradition for *paritta suttas*, either directly or as mediated through thirteenth-century works.

If eighteenth-century sources like the Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva are accurate in this regard, it appears that Saraṇaṃkara sought out Buddhist texts and teachers from various Buddhist temples as he began to write his own works and to train his students.[10] We have accounts of Sarṇaṃkara's Pāli studies with Levuke and Palkumburē Atthadassi, and know that Atthadassi was the chief student of one of the last upasampadā monks in the eighteenth century, Vaṭapulūvē, and that Atthadassi taught Levuke (Hēvāvasam 1966, 20). The situation in southern Sri Lanka appears to have been similar. Siṭināmaluvē Dhammajoti, a monk from Tangalle who became one of Saraṇaṃkara's first students, is reported to have travelled from temple to temple in the southern region, collecting available works in both Pāli and Sinhala before going to the Kandyan Kingdom to study with Saraṇaṃkara (Hēvāvasam 1966, 33). Abhayaratna describes a situation in which texts related to the tipiṭaka teachings were safeguarded, and in which particular works were considered to be particularly useful as baṇa pot (works of basic education for beginning monks) were copied and used, as were the jātakas (1991, 231).

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[10] SSC (15-16).

All of this suggests that in the early part of the eighteenth century, Buddhist education was not absent, but that it depended greatly on local circumstances: educational opportunities depended on the student's commitment to seeking learning, the knowledge of nearby teachers, on the texts which those teachers had obtained through their own monastic lineages and on the texts which were favoured for preaching and ritual purposes.

Centralizing and Systematizing Monastic Education

In the 1740s, a new monastic group began to form under the leadership of Vëliviṭa Saraṇaṃkara. This group, called the Silvat Samāgama (the Disciplined Group), are said to have been attracted by the commitment to learning and monastic discipline showed by the novice Saraṇaṃkara. Saraṇaṃkara, who came from a prestigious up-country family with ties to the court of the Kandyan Kingdom, was born in 1698. In 1714 he became a novice monk under Suriyagoda Kitsirimevan Rājasundara, who had received upasampadā during the reign of King Vimaladharma Sūriya II, and had subsequently given up his upasampadā status to live as a gaṇinnānse (Hēvāvasam 1966, 19). After learning Pāli grammar from Levuke and Atthadassi, Saraṇaṃkara in turn taught his two chief followers, Siṭināmaluvē and Ilipängamuvē, and continued to study on his own. As these three travelled throughout the Kandy and Sat Koralē regions, they began to attract others to the Silvat Samāgama.

The fortunes of the Silvat Samāgama waxed and waned in response to competition from other monks affiliated with the two main temples in Kandy -- the Malvatu and Asgiriya Vihārayas -- and in accord with court politics. Eventually, Saraṇaṃkara received more consistent support from King Narēndrasiṃha, who sponsored the establishment of Niyamakanda as an educational centre. Saraṇaṃkara's fortunes grew further in the early years of Kīrti Śrī Rājasiṃha's reign. In 1753, with royal support, a group of monks was brought to the Kandyan Kingdom from Siyam to restart the practice of upasampadā. From 1764 onwards, independent upasampadā festivals were held at both the Malvatu and Asgiriya Vihārayas for monks affiliated with the new Siyam Nikāya, the monastic fraternity established in 1753 with the arrival of upasampadā from Siam. The growth of the Siyam Nikāya involved monks from the Kandy and Sat Koralē regions as well as from the south. The 1750s and 1760s saw the rise of new monastic lineages affiliated with the Siyam Nikāya, and an elaborate system of monastic administration which linked together monks from large parts of Sri Lanka.

The changing nature of Buddhist education in the eighteenth century, and the place of *sūtra sannaya* commentaries within this education, cannot be adequately understood without reference to the rise of the Silvat Samāgama and the formation of the Siyam Nikāya. Under Saraṇaṃkara's leadership, monks of the Silvat Samāgama began to study in new ways. This training, in turn, shaped the nature of monastic administration within the emerging Siyam Nikāya. Saraṇaṃkara's power and the authority of the Siyam Nikāya were due, to a significant extent, to the way in which these monks were able to identify themselves as, and be identified as, authoritative by virtue of their education. In addition, the educational system which developed under Saraṇaṃkara created and helped to sustain the strong linkages between the up-country, Sat Koralē and the southern temples, which began to make the Siyam Nikāya a large and influential monastic institution.

For the sake of convenience, it is possible to divide the emergence of this new monastic educational system into four stages. The first was the development of temple schools in places influenced by the Silvat Samāgama. The second was the establishment of Niyamakanda as an educational centre prior to the reintroduction of upasampadā from Siam. The establishment of a number of other educational centres in the up-country after 1753 marks the third stage, and the introduction of the new up-country educational system to temples in Sat Koralē and the southern areas under Dutch control forms the fourth.

According to Hēvāvasam (1966, 20), education under Saraṇaṃkara's leadership was characterized by four class divisions. The first class was for students without knowledge of the Sinhala alphabet, the second for students with some knowledge of the alphabet, and the third was for students who were already somewhat skilled at reading manuscripts. The first three classes included both lay and monastic students. The fourth class, restricted to novice monks, was devoted to a more detailed study of manuscripts for those who were inclined to take upasampadā. Abhayaratna (1991, 233; 242) states that the third level of education focused on subjects relating to exposition, and that baṇa daham pot were used to provide novice monks with an introduction to the dhamma.

The approach to learning established by Saraṇaṃkara was apparently intended to make students familiar with Sinhala and Pāli grammar (and in some cases also Sanskrit), to increase their understanding of both dhamma and vinaya, and to accustom them to expository discourse (Abhayaratna 1991, 241). *Sūtra sannayas* were appropriate for use in the third and fourth class. Extant manuscript evidence suggests that some *sūtra sannayas* were sometimes included with other basic texts in the baṇa daham pot used by novice monks but were

most often studied separately in order to become familiar with a single sutta or group of related *suttas*.

Several aspects of the mid-eighteenth-century educational context made the *sūtra sannayas* a particularly valuable part of the emerging educational system. The fact that Buddhist monastic education during the period immediately preceding Saraṇaṃkara was decentralized and unsystematic meant that the presence of teachers trained in Pāli and in the more sophisticated literary Sinhala at local temples was by no means guaranteed. During the first stage of the emergence of education influenced by Saraṇaṃkara, students studied first from the itinerant teachers of the Silvat Samāgama and were then forced to work independently. *Sūtra sannayas* were a natural pedagogical tool in this context, since these commentaries provided a copy of Pāli *suttas*, explained the narrative and grammatical contents of a Pāli *sutta*, and suggested patterns of exposition suitable for preaching. Even in the absence of a teacher, a student with a knowledge of the alphabet and a limited understanding of Pāli language could work alone.

In the second and third stages, when students studied at Niyamakanda and other educational centres later established in the up-country, *sūtra sannayas* appear to have served several purposes. The descriptions of study provided by the Saṃgharājasādhucariyāva suggest that the composition and study of *sūtra sannayas* provided a way for those skilled in Pāli to demonstrate that skill and to provide texts for the use of students. In the context of these educational centres, the study of *sūtra sannayas* written by these monastic teachers provided a natural way to deepen students' familiarity with Pāli grammar and with the contents of specific *suttas* used in preaching and ritual recitation.

In the fourth stage, when students trained in the up-country educational centres returned to southern and Sat Koralē temples to teach students there and develop their own student following,[11] the *sūtra sannayas* served an important purpose in bringing the grammatical and interpretive skills of up-country educators to the temples in other regions. The use of *sūtra sannayas* meant that even a monk who had spent a short period of time at up-country studies could bring the tools for further study and teaching with him when he left. The use of *sūtra sannayas* in this way helped to standardize the educational experience

[11] On which, for valuable details, see Hēvāvasam (1966).

of monastic students over a relatively large geographical area.[12]

Many monks did, in fact, spend short periods of time in the Kandy area. After the reintroduction of higher ordination from Siam in 1753 and the appointment of Saraṇaṃkara to the position of Saṃgharāja, or leader of the monastic community, monks from all parts of the island who sought full ordination were required to come to the capital of the Kandyan Kingdom, the hill town of Kandy, in order to receive higher ordination at the Malvatu and Asgiriya Vihārayas. Their stay in Kandy was not limited to the ordination ritual but included a stay, of perhaps two months,[13] at one of several newly established centres for monastic instruction in the Kandy region (Dewaraja 1988, 118-9; Malalgoda 1976, 65). These monks remained a part of the Kandyan educational environment even after their departure for home temples, by sending their brighter students to up-country educational centres when possible (Hēvāvasam 1966, 42-71), maintaining links with Kandy for the higher ordination of novice monks and receiving guidance from Saraṇaṃkara with regard to monastic education and discipline (Vācissara 1964, 211). Ties between Kandy, the Sat Koralē and the southern region strengthened significantly after 1753 despite unsettled political conditions.

It appears, from the accounts found within several works written during the eighteenth century by those affiliated with Saraṇaṃkara's monastic community, that the monks of the Silvat Samāgama, and later of the early Siyam Nikāya, emphasized the importance of Pāli study and trained preaching in monastic education. We do not yet have enough detailed information about monastic education in earlier periods of monastic reorganization to fully evaluate the novelty of these preoccupations. It is clear that skill in Pāli was a crucial

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[12] This is not to say that everyone who encountered a *sūtra sannaya* encountered precisely the same text in the same way, since there were certain to be slight differences in redaction and interpretation. However, since *sūtra sannayas* were typically written by highly esteemed teachers, as the *Saṃgharājasādhucariyāva* indicates, it is likely that their contents would have been relatively stable and interpretation of them relatively conservative. The two manuscript copies of Saraṇaṃkara's *Sārārthadīpanī* at which I have looked (British Library OR 6600 (151) and Colombo Museum Library 1465), for instance, are virtually identical to the 1891 printed edition.

[13] According to the Vihārādhipati at Mädavela Rajamahavihāraya, 15 July, 1997.

marker of monastic leadership and expertise, as we see in contents of the Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva, where reading and reproducing Pāli commentarial literature, and the composition of Sinhala commentaries for Pāli texts, are repeated tropes in monastic biography.[14]

The Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva also contains consistent references Saraṇaṃkara's skill as a preacher, and to the ability of key monastic students to preach the dhamma. Saraṇaṃkara is described, for instance, as someone who "has many manuscripts written and expounded, has preaching studied and encourages preaching to the populace."[15] Another monk, Irivinnē Vipassi "lived in the Badhagamu monastery and was very skilled in writing the small letters used in writing memorization books appropriate to grammar and preaching."[16] Moreover, accounts of Saraṇaṃkara's students' skill in preaching suggest a sophisticated level of exposition ability possible only after considerable training. They were able to declare the meaning of the Pāli nikāyas, commentaries, etc. and to preach in a royal assembly relying on works like the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta and the Brahmajāla Sutta while providing various elaborate and special explanations for three nights running.[17]

Shifts in narrative emphasis between the Mahāvaṃsa, early chapters of the Cūlavaṃsa and the final chapters of the Cūlavaṃsa written by Buddharakkhita also point to the critical importance of preaching to the monks of Saraṇaṃkara's period. Looking at these works we find that, at the time of Saraṇaṃkara, instruction, rather than construction, is considered the crucial mode of devotional activity.

Using *Sūtra Sannayas*

Although *sūtra sannayas* were used to help monks learn to read Pāli *suttas* and to train monks as preachers, these commentaries were almost certainly not used directly as a text from which to preach. Although Somadasa (1987, ix) and Vācissara (1964, 19) suggest that *sūtra sannayas* were at least sometimes used directly, during two-seated preaching in which Pāli recitation and Sinhala

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[14] SSC (37-53).

[15] SSC (22).

[16] SSC (51).

[17] SSC (55).

exposition proceeded in tandem, a loose examination of extant *sūtra sannaya* manuscripts makes this seem quite unlikely. The size of the script used in writing *sūtra sannayas* is consistently small enough to make them awkward as a preaching aid. This becomes even clearer when *sūtra sannaya* manuscripts are compared with *paritta* manuscripts, or "*pirit pot*." Many of these collections of Pāli *paritta suttas* are written in a strikingly large clear hand, large enough to serve as a reminder during the act of recitation itself.

Sūtra sannayas were written, read and copied as a guide to the comprehension of Pāli *suttas*. Their word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase translation of Pāli *suttas* helped to clarify Pāli meanings and structures, while additional commentarial detail helped to create an interpretative foundation from which monks preached. As two monks recently reminded me, one learns how to explain ideas to others by exploring their meaning in one's own studies.[18]

Let us look more closely at two *sūtra sannayas*, as examples of the genre, to see how they helped students develop an expository command of Pāli *suttas* and how Saraṇaṃkara and other teachers were able to use these commentaries while building new educational networks. Since composition of *sūtra sannayas* began again with Saraṇaṃkara's Sārārthadīpanī, a collection of *sūtra sannayas* on *suttas* from the *paritta* collection, I have chosen to use the *Mettā Sūtra Sannaya* and *Dhajagga Sūtra Sannaya* from Sārārthadīpanī.

The *Metta Sūtra Sannaya* begins with a lengthy origin story which explains the context in which the Buddha taught the Mettā Sutta. The sutta was preached, we are told, to show that a monk who cultivates mettā, or loving kindness, as a meditative technique deserves the support of the laity. The Buddha made this point in order to arrest an exodus of monks from the order, caused by a previous sermon in which the message of the Aggikkhandopama Sutta overwhelmed many of the listening monks and drove them to live as devout laymen. The story concludes with a reference to the benefits of cultivating loving kindness, thus reinforcing the importance of the sutta's contents.

After a full repetition of the origin story in Pāli, the sutta itself begins. The Buddha announces that there are eleven benefits of loving kindness and

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[18] Śrī Narēndrārāma Rajamahavihārayādhipati, 30 June, 1997 and Mulkirigala Rajamahavihārayādhipati, 6 July, 1997.

proceeds to enumerate them, introducing the list with the words: "monks, there are eleven welcomed benefits of loving kindness -- mental liberation --when it is followed, developed, made much of, practised, made a foundation, when it is familiar and well undertaken" and concluding the list with a similar sentence: "monks, these are the eleven welcomed benefits of loving kindness -- mental liberation -- which is followed, developed, made much of, practised, made a foundation, when it is familiar and well undertaken."[19]

The commentary provided for these lines indicates the way in which the *sannaya's* narrative detail reinforces patterns of explanation and association through the repetition of phrasing and the consistent use of simile. Comment on both instances of "which has been practised," for instance, proceeds with identical phrasing: "which has been accomplished, as a plough is put down after use."[20] The commentary also maintains throughout the verbal association between mental freedom and freedom from the obstructions to liberation which are imaginatively described as enemies. Similes such as these help to animate the commentary.

As the sutta unfolds, the *sannaya's* amplification of the original Pāli becomes increasingly vivid. The comment on the benefits of "awaking happily" and "avoiding nightmares" first reproduces a brief Pāli commentarial passage and then expands this into a dramatic account in Sinhala reinforced by another Pāli commentarial passage which follows. The first Pāli commentarial passage says, "While others wake unhappily, rolling over, yawning and moaning, not waking thus one wakes steadily and happily, like a blossoming lotus."[21] To this the Sinhala commentary adds:

> If other people awake unhappily, tossing and constricting [their bodies] and feeling uneasy, [this] person awakes differently, comfortably, without movement, like an opening lotus... if [he] dreams he has appropriate dreams. [In the dream he] is worshipping devotional memorials or listening to religious instruction. While other beings have nightmares like being thrown down

[19] SD (87).

[20] SD (87-90).

[21] SD (87).

> a mountain or being oppressed by beasts of prey or being surrounded by thieves, this person doesn't have such nightmares.[22]

Here the *sūtra sannaya* provides the details of cause and effect which can be used to help develop a preacher's exhortation.

The *Metta Sūtra Sannaya* then proceeds to comment densely upon two further benefits of loving kindness. After explaining the benefit of being "dear to people" the *sannaya* comments upon the next benefit of being "dear to non-humans."

> Or, if the person is dear to humans he is also dear to non-humans, like the elder monk Visakha. The story of the elder monk Visakha was put down in detail in the explanation of meditation through amity in the Visuddhimagga and has been included in the Maṅgalasūtrakathā of my Sārārthasaṃgrahaya. This should be understood by looking at it as it appears there.[23]

To explain the benefit of being "unharmed by poison, sword or fire" the *sannaya* provides a brief word gloss before turning to a Pāli commentary to provide illustrative examples:

> ... examine the commentarial section written for this... It is said that fire [doesn't affect] the body of one living according to loving kindness (like the laywoman Uttaraya) or poison [one] like the monk Cullasiva who preached the saṃyutta [nikāya, a section of the Pāli canon] or sword [one] like the novice Saṃkicca. [These things] don't have an effect, don't enter, don't disturb that person's body.[24]

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[22] *ibid.*

[23] *ibid.*, (88).

[24] *ibid.*, (88-89).

These passages from the *sūtra sannaya* help us to see that one of the ways in which *sūtra sannayas* were useful in educating preachers was their invocation of particular characters as illustrative examples. In some cases, as in the references to Uttaraya and Cullasiva, above, the preacher seems to have been expected to have further details about the illustrative character in mind as part of an established repertoire. In other cases, as with the reference to Visakha, the author of the *sūtra sannaya* provides explicit direction to the commentary's user about the way in which the character's story can, and should, be understood.

Within the broader context of a newly organized monastic community under Saraṇaṃkara's leadership, and the program of education associated with it, Saraṇaṃkara's reference to his own work, Sārārthasaṅgrahaya, is significant, for it helps us to see some of the subtle ways in which the new *sūtra sannaya* commentaries helped to shape and unify a community of monastic students under Saraṇaṃkara's guidance. Other *sūtra sannaya* composers, like those mentioned in the section from Saṃgharājasādhucariyāva mentioned above, participated in this process also by including their own guiding references in these commentaries.

The *Dhajagga Aūtra Sannaya* starts with the Pāli sutta directly, without an elaborate origin story. The Pāli sutta begins with the Buddha addressing a company of monks gathered in a monastery in Jeta's grove. He recounts an instance of divine battle in which Sakka, lord of the gods, addressed these gods living in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven saying,

> If, sirs, going into battle you feel fearful, or stiffen with dread, or your hair stands on end, then you should look at the top of my battle standard. Whatever hair-raising fear or stiffening with dread you might experience will disappear as you look at the top of my standard.[25]

The Sinhala commentary begins by providing a relatively simple word gloss and explanation of this passage. Soon, however, the *sannaya* intensifies the narrative

[25] *ibid.*, (109).

with a vivid excursus in which Sakka and his standard are described from the perspective of his watching subjects:

> The chariot of Sakka, king of the gods, was one hundred and fifty yojanas long. From the middle of the chariot to its far end was fifty yojanas. From the middle of the chariot to its front was fifty yojanas. The [central] box was fifty yojanas. Doubling that measurement they say you come up with three hundred yojanas. A white umbrella measuring three yojanas was raised up on top. A thousand horses were yoked [to the chariot] and that's not all regarding the rest of the accoutrements. Its standard was two hundred and fifty yojanas high. When the wind hit the standard it made a sound like that of the five types of instruments [as if saying], "look at this standard!" To those looking at that chariot our king arrived and stood in the midst of a retinue like an upright pillar. Fear disappeared [as they thought], "why should we fear?"[26]

Sakka's voice resumes the sutta's Pāli narrative with further instructions to his subjects in which he offers alternative sources of solace to those who do not (presumably cannot, perhaps because of their vantage point) look at the top of his standard. The symptoms of fear are guaranteed to disappear for those looking at the top of battle standards belonging to Pajāpati, Varuna and Isana. Once again, after a minimal word gloss on these lines of the Pāli sutta, the *sannaya* introduces a narrative aside which articulates the divine hierarchy of the Tavatiṃsa heaven.

> These three divine kings have complexion and longevity equal to that of the divine king Sakka's. Among them, the divine king Pajāpati holds the seat second to the divine king Sakka's. Varuna the divine king receives the third seat. The divine king Isana receives the fourth seat.

[26] *ibid.*, (110).

> Thus should their personal power be shown.[27]

At this point the Buddha's voice resumes in the Pāli *sutta* as he sets the stage for a specifically Buddhist challenge to Sakka's power as a defense.

> If that hair-raising fear, or stiffening with dread which occurs to those looking at the top of the divine king Sakka's standard--or the top of the divine king Pajāpati's standard, or the top of the divine king Varuna's standard, or the top of the divine king Isana's standard--doesn't disappear, what is the reason? Monks, Sakka, lord of the gods, is not without passion, not without hatred, not without delusion. He has fled, afraid, tense, trembling.[28]

Once again Sārārthadīpanī's commentary moves beyond a limited gloss to the Pāli words quoted above in ways which explain the narrative movement of the sutta and, even more importantly, reinforce a specifically Buddhist explanation of Sakka's weakness.

> ... the point is: if fear [felt by those looking at Sakka's standard] has been held at bay it doesn't remain so for long if they are looking at the standard of a Sakka who is disposed to flee, shaking, because he has not destroyed the defilements [mental impurities which impede progress toward liberation]. After describing the way Sakka, king of the gods and one of the four divine kings praised here, shook with fear and fled what more could one say about the other three? Thus, by association with the statement that Sakka, king of the gods, trembled and fled I have indeed said that the remaining three were disposed to flee, trembling with fear. Or, it should be understood that [this] isn't stated separately since the trembling and flight

[27] *ibid.*, (112).

[28] *ibid.*

> of the other three who follow him [Sakka] is understood by saying that he shook with fear and fled. This is because Sakka, king of the gods, dominates the others.[29]

Here Sakka's failure to destroy the defilements further elucidates the Buddha's previous statement that Sakka is still bound by passion, hatred and delusion--a standard negative triad in Buddhist discourse.

The Buddha's first alternative to seeking refuge in Sakka and his companion gods is refuge in the Buddha himself, but the transposition is not straightforward. The scene changes and gods in battle are replaced by meditative monks. Sakka is also displaced indirectly after his frailty, in Buddhist terms, is shown by the section of sutta and commentary we have just examined.

> Monks, I speak thus. If, monks, you are fearful, overwhelmed by hair-raising fear when you are in the forest, at the foot of a tree or in an empty building, at that time you should remember me thus: he is fortunate, an arahat, perfectly enlightened, endowed with wisdom and virtue, in very good circumstances [Pāli: sugato], knower of the world, unrivalled, guide of people who must be trained, teacher to gods and men, Buddha, fortunate one.[30]

Sārārthadīpanī's commentary to these lines of the Pāli sutta deserves a close examination. The narrative detail provided for each epithet of the Buddha is elaborate and, taken together, provides something like a summa of a Buddha's enlightened state. This is an excellent example of the way in which the *sannaya's* provision of detail sustains patterns of association to be used in reflection on, exposition of, and engagement with, the teaching.

Look, for instance, at the *sannaya's* treatment of several epithets. Once again the canonical Pāli appears in capitalized text.

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29 *ibid.*, (112-13).

30 *ibid.*, (113).

> ARHAT, an arahat; because he doesn't do improper things in private, because he is worthy of things like the four requisites, because he has destroyed the enemies, the defilements.... IN VERY GOOD CIRCUMSTANCES [sugato], called "sugato" because of speaking well and having gone well, and because of having gone to nirvana which is termed a good place, and because of having a good journey...GUIDE OF PEOPLE WHO MUST BE TRAINED, because of establishing malleable people in the refuges, moral conduct, etc. and training [them]; TEACHER FOR GODS AND MEN, because he gives instruction in the various appropriate ways with compassion for his world and other [worlds], for gods and men... FORTUNATE ONE [bhagavā], called "bhagavā" because he has destroyed all of the defilements such as passion and because he possesses merit accomplished through the perfections such as generosity and moral conduct.[31]

Creative etymology takes a central role in the commentary's elucidation of detail as we see in the comment on "arahat" and "sugato" in particular. Exegesis of "arahat" plays on the Pāli word for "private" [rahas] as well as the Pāli verb "arahati" (to be worthy of) and the Pāli noun "arī" (enemy) while that for "sugato" explores possible uses of the root "gam" (to go) for which the past participle is "gato" here combined with the prefix "su-"meaning "good." Note that the *sannaya's* explanation of "bhagavā" heightens the contrast between the Buddha and Sakka with the description of the Buddha as one who has destroyed the defilements such as passion, the cause of Sakka's weakness earlier in the sutta.

By providing elaborate detail for each of the Buddha's epithets the commentary also evokes aspects of Buddhist devotion which occur independently of the Dhajagga Sutta in Buddhist practice. This is a particularly striking example of the ways in which the contents of a *sūtra sannaya* echo and sustain broader patterns of association in Buddhist discourse. The epithets found in the Pāli sutta discussed above have a long history in meditation practice and are now

[31] *ibid.*, (113).

regularly chanted in devotional recollection of the Buddha and are known in that context as the 'iti pi so gathā' or the verses which explain the Buddha's nature.[32] There is evidence from the eighteenth or early nineteenth century that they were also used as protective verse.[33]

In the final portions of the sutta the Buddha exhorts the listening monks to recollect the teaching if they do not recollect him, and to recollect the monastic community if not the teaching. Any of these three refuges, declares the Buddha, will vanquish hair-raising fear and paralysis. As the Buddha announces the value of recollecting the teaching and the monastic community he declares the standard epithets appropriate to each refuge, epithets which, like the Buddha's epithets, are part of evotional recitation. Once again the commentary, with its detailed explanation of these epithets, participates in a complex of echoes and expository elaboration.

The conclusion of the *Dhajagga Sutta Sannaya* further reinforces the contrast between Sakka and the Buddha which has been gathering momentum as the sutta and its commentary progress. The Pāli sutta's section on recollection of the monastic community ends with a summary statement linking the efficacy of recollecting the monastic community to the character of the Buddha: "Monks, the hair-raising fear or paralysis which arises will disappear for those recollecting the monastic community. Why? The Buddha, monks, an arahat, perfectly enlightened, without passion, hatred and delusion, fearless, unparalyzed, courageous didn't flee." The commentary to these lines draws attention to the earlier characterization of Sakka as fearful and defiled through its re-articulation of the sutta word by word. And, in a subtle but powerful conclusion which unites the force of creative etymology and the developing contrast between Sakka and the Buddha as sources of refuge, the *sannaya* runs: "the Buddha said this; said this Dhajagga Pirit; further the 'sugato,' In Sakka's place, said..."[34] The Buddha has, in the course of the *sūtra sannaya*, redefined the terms of power, replaced Sakka as refuge and overtaken Sakka's place at the head of his own retinue.

In this *sūtra sannaya*, as in the *Metta Sūtra Sannaya*, the commentarial details provided in Sinhala enrich the sutta's narrative and provide natural points

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[32] See, for instance, Visuddhimagga p.7.

[33] Jonathan Walters. Personal communication.

[34] SD (113).

of elaboration for a preacher inclined to heighten the sutta's drama or to elaborate the Buddha's power. In doing so, the *Dhajagga Sūtra Sannaya* uses vivid imagery and word play which can become part of the student's own expository repertoire.

Textual Communities

In seeking to understand the role of *sūtra sannayas* within a changing monastic environment and a new system of Buddhist education, I have stressed the ways in which these commentaries helped students study Pāli language, and to develop the command of specific *suttas* necessary for their work as preachers. The fact that *sūtra sannayas* were used in these ways within an extensive and clearly structured educational system under Saraṇaṃkara and others associated with the new Siyam Nikāya suggests that *sūtra sannaya* commentaries had a significant impact on lay and monastic Buddhist communities in much of Sri Lanka. In order to describe this impact more clearly, I draw on the concept of a "textual community" developed by Brian Stock in his study of the impact of literate textuality on eleventh-century European culture.

There Stock uses the term "textual communities" to describe "groups of people whose social activities are centred around texts, or, more precisely, around a literate interpreter of them." Although texts, in Stock's view, need not be written nor their auditors literate, they exert a formative influence on the textual communities' behaviour and attitudes. In particular, he claims, a culture in which texts and the literate are accepted as authoritative and influential is characterized by a move toward what he calls "an intellectualism inseparable from the study of texts" (1983, esp. 522-4). I do not embrace Stock's view that an increasingly literate and textual culture is characterized by specific forms of rationality or the implication that text-centred activities necessarily dominate cultures in which texts and their interpreters are accorded authoritative value. Despite these reservations, however, Stock's terminology can be used in a more limited sense which helps to illuminate the effect of the emergence of *sūtra sannayas* on Buddhists in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka. For these purposes, I adapt the term "textual community" to mean a group of individuals united by their exposure, through reading and listening, to certain ideas and patterns of discourse which draw upon and are sustained by written textual sources.

This usage of the term textual community provides a useful way of looking at the interlocking processes of monastic education and the performance of preaching, both of which were informed by the use of *sūtra sannaya* commentaries initiated by Saraṇaṃkara and carried out by his students.

Monastic education, characterized by reading, listening, memorizing, composing and copying, gave students many opportunities to engage the contents of favourite Pāli *suttas* through *sūtra sannayas*. In doing so, these students accumulated a textual familiarity which included patterns of association between *suttas* and between *suttas* and other Buddhist texts, as well as strategies for the exposition of important *suttas* and key ideas contained within them.

Monastic students trained within the educational networks established by Saraṇaṃkara and sustained by the emergence of the Siyam Nikāya formed a textual community in the sense I outlined above. They were not the only textual community formed by and around the *sūtra sannaya* commentaries, however. Because the commentarial detail of *sūtra sannayas* fed into the act of Buddhist preaching, these commentaries played a pivotal role in the creation of a wider textual community of lay people and monastics, whose level of formal education varied widely but whose imaginative dispositions may have had much in common because of their shared experience of particular Pāli *suttas* and interpretations of them. The interlocking practices of education and preaching in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka created a situation in which complex combinations of oral and written culture helped to sustain certain "habits of thought,"[35] or dispositions to reflect on ideas and behaviours in particular ways, common to a range of readers and listeners, regardless of their educational level or status.

In developing the idea of shared habits of thought formed and sustained by a textual community and applying it to eighteenth-century (and later, but that is another story) Sri Lankan Buddhists, I do not mean to suggest that all members of this textual community thought alike, even about matters relating to morality and devotion. Rather, members of this new textual community shared a certain kind of narrative experience, and a language to be used in thinking about the topics found in Pāli *suttas*.

As Carruthers puts it in her description of a different set of readers and listeners,

> The Latin word textus comes from the verb meaning "to weave" and it is in the institutionalizing of a story through memoria that textualizing occurs. Literary works become institutionalized as they weave a community together by providing it with shared experience and a certain kind of language ... (1990, 12).

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[35] A phrase taken from D'Avray (1985).

Conclusion

Responding to evidence of changing textual preoccupations among Buddhist authors in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka, I have tried to show the way in which the renaissance of Sinhala commentaries on Pāli *suttas*, in the form of *sūtra sannayas*, was linked to broader changes in Buddhist monastic organization and education. Uniting a literary analysis of *sūtra sannayas* and a historical analysis of religious institutions, this study suggests some of the ways in which a new educational infrastructure shaped the Buddhist environment of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Sri Lanka.

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M. BLACKBURN