

The Second Great Commentator, Ācariya-Dhammapāla.

AFTER the Great Commentator, Buddhaghosa, had composed the commentaries of the Vinaya and the four Nikāyas, and the Abhidhamma-commentaries had been translated by someone else at his instigation, there remained the commentaries on Khuddakanikāya to be compiled. One of these, *viz.* Buddhavaṃsaṭṭhakathā, was composed by Buddhaghosa's contemporary, Buddhadatta. Most of the other coms. on the Khuddaka-nikāya were composed by the Elder Dhammapāla of Badaratittha-vihāra.

His works are :

1. *Thera-Therī-gāthathakathā*, consisting of 92 bhāṇavāras.¹
2. *Udānatthakathā*, consisting of 34 bhāṇavāras.
3. *Itivuttakathakathā*, consisting of 34 bhāṇavāras.
4. *Petavatthuathakathā*, consisting of 15 bhāṇavāras.
5. *Vimānavatthu-atthakathā*, consisting of 17 bhāṇavāras.
6. *Cariyāpīṭakathakathā*, consisting of 28, bhāṇavāras.
7. *Nettipakaraṇathakathā*, consisting of 27 bhāṇavāras.

Except the last one these coms. are designated as *Paramatthadīpanī*.

8. *Paramatthamañjūsā*, a sub-commentary or *ṭikā* on the Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa, is the monumental work of Dhammapāla. It contains 88 bhāṇavāras.

*Sāsanavaṃsa*² states that the same author is the composer of the sub-commentaries on Dīgha, Majjhima, and Saṃyutta-nikāyas. I am not in a position to verify this statement as these *ṭikās* are still in MS. form.

He composed all the volumes known to us while residing at Badaratittha-vihāra as he himself has stated in the colophons of these works. Where this Badaratittha was is not stated by him except in the colophon of *Netti-Com.* The following lines are there :

“Saddhammāvataratṭhāne paṭṭane Nāgasavhaye
Dhammāsoka-mahārāja-vihāre vasatā mayā
ciraṭṭhitthaṃ yā tassa āraddhā atthavaṇṇanā.”

What is stated here is that he lived in a vihāra built by the great king Dharmāsoka at Nāgapaṭṭana. The name *Badaratittha* is not found in these lines ; but at the end of the closing verses he gives the following in prose :
“*Badaratittha-vihāravāsīnā ācariya-Dhammapālena katā Nettipakaraṇassa*

1. A *bhāṇavāra* contains 8,000 letters.

2. Composed in Burma and published by P. T. S., p. 33.

atthavaṇṇanā samattā." (=Here ends the com. on Nettippakaraṇa, composed by ācariya Dhammapāla, who resided in Badaratittha vihāra).

By this statement it is clear that Badaratittha was at Nāgapaṭṭana. This Nāgapaṭṭana is situated on the coast line of Tanjore District. Dr. G. P. Malalasekara, in his *Pali Literature of Ceylon*, states that "Badaratittha is on the south-east coast of India, just a little to the south of Madras." (p. 113). He does not explain how he came to this conclusion. It is true that Kāñcīpura (= Conjeevaram) is in the neighbourhood of Madras; but Nāgapaṭṭana lies more than a hundred miles away from Madras. According to John Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in India*, (p. 427). "Nāgapaṭṭana, 34 miles east from Tanjore, on branch line, is a flourishing port on the Coromandal Coast, doing a brisk trade with the Straits Settlements and Coast Ports, and contains the large workshops of the South Indian Railway . . . From Nāgapatam steamers belonging to B.I.S.N. Company run once a week to Colombo via. Palk Strait and Pamban, opposite Ramesvaram, but this is now more conveniently reached by railway from Madura."

Sāsanavaṃsa, too, states that Nāgapaṭṭana is not very far from Ceylon, and therefore Dhammapāla who resided there is to be reckoned as a Ceylonese Elder. The statement there is (p. 33): *So ca ācariya-Dhammapālatthero Sīhaḷāḍḍipassa samāpe Dami aratthe Padaratitthamhi nivāsītattā Sīhaḷāḍḍipe yeva sāgahetvā vattabbo.*"

Perhaps Dr. Malalasekara has surmised 'Badaratittha' to be in the locality of Kāñcī. Our author nowhere mentions the name of Kāñcī in his Colophons. But it is clear from the Northern records that he was born in Kāñcīpura, (present Conjeevaram). This is situated in the Chingaleput District, Madras Presidency, 45 miles west-south-west of Madras (on the Chingaleput-Arkonam line S.I. Railway). The following description is given in *India's Sacred Shrines and Cities*,³ (p. 35) about Conjeevaram :

"Conjeevaram is one of the most ancient and celebrated towns of South India. It is also one of the seven sacred places of India, the others being Ayodhya, Muttara, Haridwar, Benares, Avantika, and Dwaraka . . . It was originally the capital of Pallavas who ruled over South India between 4th and 8th centuries, A.D. Even earlier it had come to be a fertile cultivated district, situated at the northern fringes of the Chōla kingdom, known as Tondamandalam. The Pallavas were great patrons of learning and art, and upholders of Hindu religion. Under their rule, the city became a literary and religious centre. Sanskrit scholars like Dinnāga the Buddhist logician and others lived in the city. It is to this period that those glowing descriptions of the city in the ancient classical works like Tamil 'Manimekalai' refer. We read that the city was strongly fortified, was resplendent with towering palaces, was surrounded by a moat and had big streets fit for cars to run in . . ."

3. G. A. Natesan & Co., Madras.

"Hiuen Tsiang who visited it in the 7th century, says that the city was 6 miles in circumference and that its people were superior in bravery and piety as well as in their love of justice and veneration for learning to many others whom he met with in his travels."

Mr. R. Gopalam, M.A., of Madras gives the following account in his *Pallavas of Kāñcī*,⁴ (p. 27) :

"Kāñcī which is one of the seven great holy cities of India is believed to have had a history much anterior to the beginning of the Christian era. From the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang we learn that in the days of Buddha in the fifth century, B.C. he frequented the region around Kāñcīpura and made conversions. From the same source we learn also that Asokarāja built several stupas none of which has survived to the present day. It would be remembered that Dharmapāla, the celebrated Buddhist savant and scholar at Nālandā, hailed from Kāñcīpura... Whether Asoka ordered stupas to be built at the city of Kāñcīpura or not, it is not possible to say.⁵ The presumption that he might have done so gains strength in view of the discovery of Asoka's inscriptions as far south as Siddāpura in the region of Mysore, and from the fact that his inscriptions mention the Chōlas, the Pāndyas and the Keralaputras. At any rate Hiuen Tsiang says that he noticed a stupa about 100 feet high built by Asokarāja."⁶

About his date.

Mrs. Rhys Davids, in her Introduction to the *Psalms of the Sisters* (XVI), states: "In the fifth or sixth century, A.D., either before or just after Buddhaghosa had flourished, and written his great commentaries on the prose works of Vinaya and Sutta Piṭakas, Dhammapāla of Kāñcīpura (now Conjeevaram), Madras Presidency, wrote down in Pali the unwritten expository material constituting the then extant three Atthakathas on the Psalms, and incorporated it into his commentary on three other books of the Canon, naming the whole 'Paramattha-dīpanī' or Elucidation of Ultimate Meaning."

Dhammapāla certainly must have flourished after Buddhaghosa as the former has written a commentary on Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*. The Northern Buddhist records inform us that there lived, during the 6th century, A.D., a great Buddhist savant named Dharmapāla, who was once the Superior of the world-renowned university of Nālandā. Hiuen Tsiang, the well-known Chinese traveller, came to Nālandā about 635 A.D. At that time the Superior of this seat of learning was *Sīlabhadra*, the successor and pupil of

4. Madras University Publication, 1928.

5. As to the statement of Dhammapāla himself, in the Colophon of Nettiatthakathā, that he lived in a monastery built by Dharmāsoka at Nāgapaṭṭana, it is most probable that the king would have ordered some stupas to be built in this famous city of Kāñcī.

6. "Buddhist Records of the Western World," ii, p. 230.

Dharmapāla. Dharmakīrti, the famous Buddhist logician, who flourished during the last half of the 7th century, was also a pupil of Dharmapāla.⁷ According to these facts Dharmapāla's date must be about the beginning of the 7th century and the last half of the sixth.

(Hiuen Tsiang has not given the name of the king who was reigning when he visited Kāñci or the name of the king who was the patron of young Dharmapāla. According to the *History of the Pallavas of Kāñci* (p. 68). Simhavarman III, would have been the patron of Dharmapāla. Simhavishnu, the successor of the above has ruled A. D. 575-600, this was the period when Dharmapāla acted as the Superior at Nālandā. Therefore Simhavishnu's father would have been the patron of young Dharmapāla).

Thus we have established the date of one Dharmapāla. All records, which make mention about this Superior of Nālandā, agree in stating that he hailed from South India. The fact that our Commentator Dhammapāla was a South Indian and that he lived in the south for a considerable time is evident from his own colophons in his Pali works. He must have lived in a period little later than that of Buddhaghosa in order to comment on the Visuddhimagga. As this Superior Dharmapāla's date suitably falls within this period I suppose these two eminent persons to be one and the same.

Now the problem is how to reconcile their divergences, one being a Theravādin and the other a Mahāyānist of the Yogācāra school. In those days changing of one's philosophy and embracing that of another school was not rare. For instance, the famous Buddhist savant, Vasubandhu, was at first a Sarvāstivādin of the Hinayāna School, and he composed the well-known *Abhidharmakośa* as an adherent to that school. Later on he changed his ideas, at the instigation of his brother, Asaṅga (who was a great sage), and became a Mahāyānist, and then composed some volumes challenging the Sarvāstivādin ideals. Likewise our author has composed Pali commentaries in the earlier part of his life and has become a Mahāyānist in his later life. In many of these commentaries he has written his name as "*ācariya-Dhammapālena*" omitting the word *thera* (= Elder). Only in two works I found the word *thera*. This fact shows that he was not much advanced in years when he composed these works.

Here I would quote some passages from the Introduction of Professor P. V. Bapat, Ferguson College, Poona, to his valuable work, *A Comparative Study of Vimuttimaggā and Visuddhimaggā*, (p. L).*

"At the end of the commentaries on works like Thera-Therī-gāthā Petavatthu, Vimānavatthu, and Nettippakaraṇa, we find the same information about Dhammapāla that he lived in Badaratitthavihāra. So it appears to be evident that the author of Paramatthamanjusā and the author of the commentaries on Theragāthā... and Nettippakaraṇa, are one and the same person. *Sāsanvaṃsa*, (p. 33) tell us the same fact about Ācariya Dhammapāla, and further we learn that Dhammapāla also composed the *Īkās* on the

⁷ See p. 189. "Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism." By Ryukan Kimura.
*Poona, 1939.

Dīgha Majjhima and Samyutta Nikāyas... It further states that Badaratittha is in the country of Damiḷas, not far from the island of Ceylon."

"This ācariya Dhammapāla is supposed, though there is no direct evidence for this, to have lived not long after Buddhaghosa himself. There is only an indirect evidence that we get from their works. Both belong to the same tradition and seem to be drawing upon the same old material... So it is very likely that there was not a very long time that elapsed between Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla. When the famous Chinese traveller, Yuan Chuan,⁸ speaks of his visit to Kāñcipura in South India in or about 640 A. D., he tells us that Kāñcipura was the birthplace of Dharmapāla. Although there is no definite proof to show that he was the same as our Dhammapāla, still it is very likely, says Dr. Rhys Davids,* that the reference is to our Dhammapāla."

Now I may quote from the records of Hiuen Tsiang, to which many writers have already referred. This is the only source from which we can learn some of Dharmapāla's life: "The city of Kāñcipura is the native place of Dharmapāla Bodhisattva. He was the eldest son of a great minister of the country. From his childhood he exhibited much cleverness, and as he grew up it increased and extended. When he became a young man, the king and queen condescended to entertain him at a (marriage) feast. On the evening of the day his heart was oppressed with sorrow, and being exceedingly afflicted, he placed himself before a statue of Buddha and engaged in earnest prayer. Moved by his extreme sincerity, the spirits removed him to a distance and there he hid himself. After going many hundred li from this spot he came to a mountain convent, and sat down in the hall of Buddha. A priest happening to open the door, and seeing this youth, was in doubt whether he was a robber or not. After interrogating him on the point, the Bodhisattva completely unbosomed himself and told him the cause; moreover he asked permission to become a disciple. The priests were much astonished at the wonderful event, and forthwith granted his request. The king ordered search to be made for him in every direction, and at length finding out that Bodhisattva had removed to a distance from the world, driven by the spirits, then he redoubled his deep reverence and admiration for him. From the time that Dharmapāla assumed the robes of a recluse, he applied himself with unflinching earnestness to learning. Concerning his brilliant reputation we have spoken in the previous records." (Vol. ii, p. 229).

The "previous records" that he mentions are in the first volume of the same book; they run as follows:—"By the side of the city† is an old sanghārāma, of which the foundation walls alone exist. This was where Dharmapāla Bodhisattva refuted the arguments of the heretics. A former king of this

⁸ This is another way of spelling 'Hiuen Tsiang.'
*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, pp. 701-702.
†He is speaking about Kusapura in Kausāmbi.

country, being partial to the teaching of heresy, wished to overthrow the law of Buddha, whilst he showed the greatest respect to the unbelievers. One day he summoned from among heretics a master of śāstras, extremely learned and of superior talents, who clearly understood the abstruse doctrines (of religion). He had composed a work of heresy in a thousand ślokas, consisting of thirty-two thousand words. In this work he contradicted and slandered the law of Buddha, and represented his own school as orthodox. Whereupon the king convoked the body of Buddhist priests and ordered them to discuss the question under dispute, adding that if the heretics were victorious he would destroy the law of Buddha, but that if the priests did not suffer debate he would cut out his tongue as proof of the acknowledgement of his fault. At this time the company of the priests being afraid they would be defeated, assembled for consultation, and said, "The sun of wisdom having set, the bridge of the law is about to fall. The king is partial to the heretics, how can we hope to prevail against them? . . . The assembly remained silent, and no one stood up to suggest any plan."

"Dharmapāla Bodhisattva, although young in years, had acquired a wide renown for penetration and wisdom, and the reputation of his noble character was far spread. He was now in the assembly, and standing up, with encouraging words addressed them thus: 'Ignorant though I am, yet I request permission to say a few words. Verily I am ready to answer immediately to the king's summons. If by my lofty argument I obtain the victory, this will prove spiritual protection; but if I fail in the subtle part of the argument, this will be attributable to my youth. In either case there will be an escape, so that the law and the priesthood will suffer no loss.' They said, 'We agree to your proposition,' and they voted that he should respond to the king's summons. Forthwith he ascended the pulpit."

"The heretical teacher began to lay down his captious principles, and to maintain or oppose the sense of the words and arguments used. At last, having fully explained his own position, he waited for the opposite side to speak. Dharmapāla Bodhisattva, accepting his words, said with a smile, 'I am conqueror! I will show how he uses false arguments in advocating his heretical doctrines, how his sentences are confused in urging his false teaching.' The opponent, with some emotion, said, 'Sir, be not high-minded. If you can expose my words you will be the conqueror, but first take my text fairly and explain its meaning.' Then Dharmapāla, with modulated voice, followed the principles of his text, the words and the argument, without a mistake or change of expression."

"When the heretic had heard the whole, he was ready to cut out his tongue; but Dharmapāla said, 'It is not by cutting your tongue you show repentance. Change your principles—that is repentance.' Immediately he explained the law for his sake; his heart believed it and his mind

embraced the truth. The king gave up his heresy and profoundly respected to law of Buddha."⁹

In the *Life of Hiuen Tsiang* by his pupil Hwui Li¹⁰ some more details are given about Dharmapāla. There, in Book IV, (p. 139), after relating the life story of Dharmapāla the following account is given: "In consequence he was able to penetrate the meaning of all the schools, and exercise himself in the art of religious composition. He drew up the following works: the *Śābdavidyā-samyukta-śāstra*, in 25,000 ślokas; a commentary on the *Śāśāstra-vaiṣṭyāyam*; on the *Vidyāmātrasiddhi*; and on *Nyāyadvāra-tārakaśāstra*—altogether several tens of books: very extended and highly significant of his eminent virtue and great talent."

Now some information is necessary about the university of which our author once was the Superior. It is better to quote again the words of Shaman Hwui Li and the Master of the Law (= Hiuen Tsiang) themselves. In Book III of the *Life*, (p. 112) is the following statement:—"The Saṅghārāmas of India are counted by myriads, but this is the most remarkable for grandeur and height. The priests, belonging to the convent, or strangers (residing therein) always reached to the number of 10,000, who all study the Great Vehicle, and also the works belonging to the eighteen sects, and not only so, but even ordinary works, such as the Vedas and other books, the Hetuvidyā, Śābdavidyā, the Chikitsāvidyā, the works on magic (*Atharvaveda*), the Saṅkhyā, besides these they thoroughly investigate the *miscellaneous* works. There are 1,000 men who can explain twenty collections of Sūtras and Śāstras; 500 who can explain thirty collections, and perhaps ten men, including the Master of the Law, who can explain fifty collections. Śīlabhadra alone has studied and understood the whole number. . . . Within the temple they arrange every day about 100 pulpits for preaching,¹¹ and students attend these discourses without any fail, even for a minute. The priests dwelling here, are, as a body, naturally dignified and grave, so that during the 700 years since the foundation of the establishment, there has been no single case of guilty rebellion against the rules."

From p. 111, of the same book: "Moreover the whole establishment is surrounded by a brick wall, which encloses the entire convent from without. One gate opens into the great college, from which are separated eight other halls, standing in the middle of the Saṅghārāma. The richly adorned towers, and the fairy-like turrets, like pointed hilltops, are congregated together. The observatories seem to be lost in the vapours (of the morning), and the upper rooms tower above the clouds."

9. Vol. I, pp. 238, 239. "Buddhist Records of the Western World," translated from Chinese by Samuel Beal, B.A., D.C.L.

10. Translated by the same. Trübner & Co., London.

11. Now-a-days we call them "Chairs for Lecturing."

“ All the outside courts, in which are the priests' Chambers, are of four stages. The stages have dragon-projections and coloured eaves, the pearl-red pillars, carved and ornamented, the richly adorned balustrades, and the roofs covered with tiles that reflect the light in a thousand shades, these things add to the beauty of the scene.”

Hiuen Tsiang himself speaks of this university in the following terms :—
“ The priests, to the number of several thousands, are men of highest ability and talent. Their distinction is very great at the present time, and there are many hundreds whose fame has rapidly spread through distant regions. Their conduct is pure and unblamable. They follow in sincerity the precepts of the moral law. The rules of this convent are severe, and all the priests are bound to observe them. The countries of India respect them and follow them. The day is not sufficient for asking and answering profound questions. From morning till night they engage in discussion ; the old and the young mutually help one another. Those who cannot discuss questions out of the *Tripitaka* are little esteemed, and are obliged to hide themselves for shame. Learned men from different cities, on this account, who desire to acquire quickly a renown in discussion, come here in multitudes to settle their doubts, and then streams of their wisdom spread far and wide. For this reason some persons usurp the name of Nālandā students, and in going to and fro receive honour in consequence. If men of other quarters desire to enter and take part in the discussions, the keeper of the gate proposes some hard questions; many are unable to answer, and retire. One must have studied deeply both old and new books before getting admission . . .”

“ But with respect to those of conspicuous talent of solid learning, great ability, illustrious virtue, distinguished men, these connect their high names with the succession of celebrities belonging to the college, such as *Dharmapāla* and *Chandrapāla*, who excited by their bequeathed teaching the thoughtless and worldly ; *Guṇamati* and *Sthiramati*, the streams of whose superior teaching spread abroad even now ; *Prabhāmitra*, with his clear discourses ; *Jinamitra*, with his exalted eloquence ; the pattern and fame of *Jñānachandra* reflect his brilliant activity, *Sighrabuddhi* and *Śilabhadra* and other eminent men whose names are lost. These illustrious personages, known to all, excelled in their attainments all their distinguished predecessors, and passed the bounds of the ancients in their learning. Each of these composed some tens of treatises and commentaries which were widely diffused, and which for their perspicuity are passed down to the present time.”¹²

It was stated above that Ācārya Dharmapāla belonged to the Yogācāra School. About these Yogācārins Professor Kimura gives the following

12. “ Records of the Western World,” pp. 170-172.

description in his *Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, (p. 176):—“ Among the Mahāyāna teachers, those of the Yogācāra school mentioned above, tried not only to establish the relation and comparison between the Primitive and Developed Buddhism by the application of terms ‘ Mahāyāna ’ and ‘ Hīnayāna,’ but also emphatically asserted to prove that the Mahāyāna Buddhism is Buddha's true doctrine. For example ; Dharmapāla, in his *Vijñaptimātra-siddhi-śāstra*, quoted Maitreya's explanation on the said point.”

He has given more details about this fact and students of the subject are referred to Prof. Kimura's work for further data.

It may be mentioned in conclusion that some other facts recorded by Hiuen Tsiang regarding a contemporary teacher by the name of Bhāvaviveka throw some further light on the life of Dharmapāla. While describing Dhana-kaṭaka (in Kalinga) he records (Vol. II, p. 223) : “ To the south of the city a little way is a great mountain cavern. It is here the master of sāstras, Bhāvaviveka remains in the palace of Asuras, awaiting the arrival of Maitreya Bodhisattva as perfect Buddha. This master of sāstras was widely renowned for his elegant scholarship and for the depth of his vast attainments. Externally he was a disciple of Kapila, but inwardly he was fully possessed of the learning of Nāgārjuna. Having heard that Dharmapāla of Magadha was spreading abroad the teaching of the Law, and was making many thousand disciples, he desired to discuss with him. He took his religious staff and went. Coming to Pātaliputra he ascertained that Dharmapāla Bodhisattva was dwelling at Bodhi-tree. Then the master of sāstras ordered his disciples thus: ‘ Go you to the place where Dharmapāla resides near Bodhi-tree, and say to him in my name, ‘ Bodhisattva (*i.e.*, Dharmapāla) publishes abroad the doctrine of the Buddha . . . Swear to accomplish your object, and then you will be in the end guide of gods and men.”

“ Dharmapāla Bodhisattva answered the messenger thus : ‘ The lives of men are like a phantom, the body is as a bubble. The whole day I exert myself ; I have no time for controversy ; you may therefore depart—there can be no meeting.”

Dr. Kimura, in his “ Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism,” has mentioned (p. 168) that Bhāvaviveka flourished about the end of the 5th century A.D. And in another place (p. 184) of the same book he has defined Bhāvaviveka's date as about 528-560, A.D.

Dharmapāla, however, would have flourished during the last half of the 6th century in order to become the tutor of Śilabhadra who was the Superior of Nālandā when Hiuen Tsiang visited that institution about 635, A.D. Śilabhadra was then 70 years old.