

In Search of Shin Mahā Buddhaghosa

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I. Introduction

Buddhaghosa whose name means "voice of the Buddha" was the greatest commentator and scholar. His best known work Visuddhimagga, or Path of Purity, was called as an Encyclopaedia of the canonical literature (and was looked upon as a treasure trove of variegated jewel of Dhamma). The Visuddhimagga, so called because it explains the ways (magga) to attain to purity (visuddhi) is a systematic presentation of the entire doctrine of the Buddha. Moreover, he translated the Atthakathās from the Sinhalese into Māgadhi and his work was honoured by the teachers of the Theravāda as a sacred text.

Visuddhimagga is divided into three parts: conduct, concentration (or mental training), and wisdom. Its style is clear and lucid and many a dry doctrinal discussion is enlivened by occasional parables and legends. Compared to the archaic simplicity of the Pitakas, the vocabulary of the Visuddhimagga is surprisingly rich. If Buddhaghosa had written nothing else, Visuddhimagga alone would have secured for him undying fame (Gray 2001, 31).

At the end of the Third Buddhist Council, Asoka (3rd century B.C.) sent missionaries to further India. The Thera Mahinda who was sent to

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Sri Lanka disseminated the dhamma of the Buddha. Similarly, the two theras, Sona and Uttara went to Suvannabhūmi (coastal Myanmar) and taught the Tipitaka. With the passage of time, successive waves of dhammadhutas brought atthakathās and did missionary work not only in Myanmar but in Southeast Asian countries. The A.D. 4th century Srilankan chronicle, Dipavamsa (which gave the earliest account of the mission), another Chronicle of Srilanka, Mahāvamsa, a century later and the bilingual Kalayāni inscriptions in Pāli and Medieval Mon on stone pillars set up by Ramadipadi popularly known as King Dhammaceti, the Mon King of Bago, in A.D. 15th century gave the account of the mission.

Myanmar and Srilanka kept on maintaining constant cultural contact when the Mahāvihāra school of studies in Srilanka had become world famous. So learned bhikkhus of Srilanka brought with them the Pāli canonical and extra canonical literature (atthakathā) in the form of palm-leaf manuscripts. Thus, the treatises of atthakathā reached coastal Myanmar and spread through out the country.

The extent of the influence of Buddhaghosa's atthakathā on other Southeast Asian countries cannot be known but the influence on Myanmar is great. The serious study of these atthakathās came to have a great influence in the life of Myanmar clergy and laity. The impact of the atthakathā literature, as distinct from the Pāli Tipitakas, has been greater in Myanmar than in other Theravāda Buddhist lands. The Myanmar bhikkhus have all along had not only the help of the atthakathās in their sincerely serious study of the pitakas, but also the Myanmar translations of the same, in the form of nissayas and various grades of sub-commentaries known as tikas, mūlatikās, madjutikās and anūtikās together with their gratis.

Buddhaghosa's Jātaka commentary had long become the code of conduct for every Teenager. It provides noble examples of selfless social service rendered by the Bodhisatta, whether he was reborn as the

son of a sovereign or a village headman, a caravan leader, a buyer and seller, a trader and hawker or a craftman or whatnot. All the birth-stories according as contained in Buddhaghosa's *atthakathā*, the teenager of Myanmar learn as *sāmaneras*, Buddhist novices, from their spiritual preceptors. So it is little wonder that *Jātaka* commentary plays a prominent part in the stone and terracotta sculptures and mural paintings of Bagan which have all along adorned all the temples since A.D. 11th-12th centuries. Even the Pathodawgyi, classically known as Mahāvijayarānsi, at Amarapura, south of Mandalay, built in 18th century A.D. is to be seen adorned with scenes of alabaster sculptures of the *Jātaka atthakathā*. Moreover, Thagyapaya in Thaton, Dhammarajika at Pwesaw in Bagan and Mangalarceti in the north of Myinkaba, Bagan are also adorned with *Jātaka* plaques.

The influence of Buddhaghosa's commentaries can be found not only on pagodas but in Myanmar literature. The Pāli commentaries written by Buddhaghosa have been of bountiful benefit to the intelligentsia of Myanmar by supplying sufficient material for the literary efforts of learned clergy and laity of ancient and present Myanmar. The history of the *Jātaka atthakathā*'s impact on Myanmar literature was written by the late Sayagyi U Lu Pe Win. He puts thus, "Early in A.D. 15th century, during the Ava dynasty Shin Mahāsilavamsa wrote two epic poems known as the *Hsutaunggan pyo* and *Paramidawgan pyo*, which are versified translations into Myanmar of the *Nidānakathā* of *Jātaka atthakathā* as well as the *Sumedhakathā* and *Durenidana* of the *Apadāna atthakathā*. A contemporary of this poet, Shin Mahārattasāra wrote two epic poems known as *Kogan pyo* and *Thanvara pyo*. The former is the versified Burmese translation of *Hatthipāla Jātaka* and the latter that of the *Samvara Jātaka* of Buddhaghosa's *Jātakatthakathā*. A few decades later, two pupils of the latter, Aggasamadhi and Shin Tejosāra wrote six epic poems known as *Nemi Bongan Pyo*, *Nemi Ngayagan pyo*, *Thuwunnayham Thahtaygan pyo*, *Hmyarhmangan pyo*,

Thitsargan pyo, and Shwehinthamin pyo, of which the first five were the work done by the former and sixth by the latter. The first two are virtually the versified translations of the Nemi Jātaka, the second three are those of the Suvannasāma Jātaka and the sixth is that of the Suvannahamsa Jātaka.

In the middle of the 18th century A.D. Letha Sayadaw of Minbu, U Obhāsa and his contemporary U Paññtaikkha wrote ten Zattawgyi vatthus, which constitute the Myanmar prose translation of the entire Mahānīpāta of Buddhaghosa's Jātakatthakathā. In the latter part of the same A.D. 18th century, the popular Pyesayadaw translated into nissaya Myanmar Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga and Atthasiālīnā the latter of which two happens to be the commentary on Dhammasangani, the first of the seven books of the Abhidhammāpitaka. If so happened that these two nissayas written by Pyesayadaw gave guidance and invaluable help to the late professor U Pe Maung Tin in the latter's translation into English of Visuddhimagga which he entitled in English as "the Path to Purity" and the Atthasālini which he named the Expositor."

"Pārayana voutthu of Shin Sīlavamsa has been recognized by scholars of Burmese language and literature to be the earliest product of prose work written entirely Burmese. The next work of Burmese prose in its chronological order is the Yasavaddhana vatthu written by Taungphilar Sayadaw who also draw his material from Buddhaghosa's birth stories, during the reign of Mahārājādhipati the last of the line of ten Kings of Nyaungyan or second Ava dynasty"(Lu Pe Win 1975).

The greatest service of Buddhaghosa to the progress of Buddhist knowledge was his series of masterly commentaries on practically all the texts of the Tipitakas. Samantapasādikā, dealing with the vinaya texts, is voluminous work, containing, besides commentary, vast material for portraying the social, political, religious, philosophical life of ancient India(Munshi 1954, 396). Moreover, the interpretations

provided by Buddhaghosa have generally constituted the orthodox understanding of Theravāda scriptures. So he is generally recognized by western scholars and Theravādins as the most important commentator of the Theravāda.

The chronicals of Myanmar firmly maintained that Shin Mahā Buddhaghosa was of Mon origin and a native of Thaton. They state that his return from Srilanka, with the Pāli scriptures, the commentaries, and grammatical works, gave a fresh impetusto the religion. So Buddhaghosa tradition has been carried from generation to generation. Nowadays, three Bodhs - Buddha, Buddhaghosa and U Bodh - are highly recognized in Myanmar. In other words Buddhaghosa is placed next to the Buddha, which has shown Myanmar's admiration for the commentator.

In Indo-China and Cambodia Buddhaghosa is regarded as the Apostle of Buddhism. On the other hand King of Thailand honoured Buddhaghosa by rewarding one thousand pounds, a princely sum in the early 20th century, to the translator of Visuddhimagga into any European language.

Columbia University had been trying for about 20 years to translate Visuddhimagga. At last American Buddhist scholar Henry Clarke Warren and Dharmananda Kosambi, who was well versed in Sanskrit but not in Pali, tried to translate Visuddhimagga. However, the translators gave up the translation because they lacked an in-dept knowledge of Pali.

With the encouragement of Ms. Rhys David of Pali Text Society of London, U Pe Maung Tin accepted the responsibility for the translation of Visuddhimagga.

There are three portions - Sila, Samādhi and Pañña - in the famous book. U Pe Maung Tin took responsibility for Sila portion, U Shwe Zan Aung and Ms. Rhys David for Samadhi and Pañña. U Pe Maung Tin finished the translation of Sīla portion and submitted it to the Oxford

University and was awarded B. Litt. On the other hand, U Shwe Zan Aung, who had taken responsibility to translate Samādhi portion of Visuddhimaga could not finish in time. He was promoted from Deputy Commissioner of Excise to Commissioner. So he was too busy in the new important post and could not carry on the translation. At last the translation of Samādhi portion fell into U Pe Maung Tin's lap. Similarly, Ms. Rhys David, who was called Pāli Dei Wi by Ledi Sayadaw, stopped translation because it was too difficult and subtle(Malay Lon 1975, 456-457). All three portions of Vissudhimagga were translated single-handedly by U Pe Maung Tin and was published by the Pāli Text society of London in 1922, 1929 and 1931 consecutively(Maung Thway Thit 2008, 13). U Pe Maung Tin donated the one thousand pounds awarded by the King of Thailand to the Pali Text Society of London.

From the foregoing facts, it is obvious that Buddhaghosa is very famous not only in the Buddhist countries but in the western world. But unfortunately Buddhaghosa tells us little or nothing about himself. Moreover, his actual works show us nothing about his life. Though the exact date of birth of Buddhaghosa cannot be known a lot of evidences are found that he was very famous in the 5th century A.D.. According to the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethic, it writes thus" It tells us that, during the reign in Ceylon of Mahā-Nāma young Brāhman born in India who wandered over the continent maintaining thesis against all the world. In consequence of a discussion that took place between him and Revata, a Buddhist bhiksu, he became interested in Buddhist doctrine, and entered the order that they might learn more about it. Before leaving for Sri Lanka Buddhaghosa had composed his first work the Janodaya(Uprising of Knowledge), and also an essay entitled Atthasalini(Full of Meaning)(Hastig 1951, 886). The biographies of Buddhaghosa found by us were emerged after a lapse of nearly eight hundred years. So all facts and particulars stated there in cannot be

taken as a genuine one with a high degree of certainty. So a growth of conflicting statements regarding his life have been created.

The Glass Palace Chronicle or Hmannan Yazawin refers to the two traditions. One which says that he came to Srilanka from the Thaton Kingdom to bring copies of the Pitaka and the other which says that he came to Srilanka from the middle country in Northern India. The Myanmar texts refer to Gola, a city near Thaton in lower Myanmar as the birthplace of Buddhaghosa. Born in Thaton, Buddhaghosa took his journey to Sri Lanka in the year of religion 943(A.D. 400). He came to Myanmar from Sri Lanka to the popularization of Buddhism. The Myanmar describe an important phenomenon in the history of Buddhism in Myanmar when Buddhaghosa returned to Myanmar from Sri Lanka after the completion of his work from Sinhalese into Pali.

Buddhaghosa is said to have brought over the Pali texts and commentaries, together with a copy of Kaccayana, from Ceylon to Thaton and thence introduced Myanmar code of Manu into Myanmar(Ray 1946, 24-25). Most of Myanmar and Mon chronicles firmly maintain that he was of Mon origin and a native of Thaton. But some local and foreign scholars think differently over the nativity of the Thera.

The Sāsanavamsa, the Sāsanalankāra Sardan, the Buddhaghosupatti and Sāsanabahusutappakasani Kyan describe that Buddhaghosa was a native of Ghosa village near the Maha Bodhi tree in Buddha Gaya. They mention his parents a Brahman named "Kesiya" and a Brahmanic woman named Kesiya of Ghosa village(Pannasami 1952, 32). The Sāsanavamsa states that he was known by the name of Buddhaghosa, for the fact that his birth took place at the time when Brahmins were muttering to one another "Please eat and please drink"(Pannasami 1952, 32).

According to the account of the life of Buddhaghosa in the Mahāvamsa, he was born in a Brāhmana family in the neighbourhood of Bodh-Gayā.

He was converted to Buddhism by a monk named Revata, who induced him to go to Ceylon in order to study the authoritative and orthodox commentaries which were not available in India. So Buddhaghosa reached Ceylon in the reign of King Mahānāman(A.D. 409-31), and heard the Singhalese commentary and the Theravāda tradition from Sanghapāla at the Mahāpadhāna hall of the Mahavihāra. There he composed the Visuddhimagga, and was acclaimed a veritable Mettesya Buddhisattva. And then translated the Atthakathās from the Singhalese into Māgadhā, and his work was honoured by the teachers of the Theravāda as a sacred text. After finishing his task Buddhaghosa returned to the land of his birth to pay homage to the great Bodhi tree(Mahavamsa 37).

The account was hitherto accepted as correct by almost all writers on Pali literature. Dharmānanda Kosambi, however, does not accept the view that Buddhaghosa was a native of Bodh-Gayā or that he was a Brāhmana, and believes him to be a Telangana from the Telugu country of Southern India, and not a Burmese Telaing as recorded in the Burmese tradition(Munshi 1954, 395).

However, some contend that as Buddhaghosa was a Brahman, he might have been a native of Majjhimadesa. As for this assumption, Forchhammer is of the opinion that although he was a native of Thaton, he was not a Mon. James Gray continues that he was a Brahman from Golamattikanagara which was then a flourishing Brahman colony, having maritime contacts with Deccan and the Great Kelāsa monastery, about ten or twelve miles, south-east of the port, was the home of a large number of Buddhist rahans of the Brahmanic race(Gray 2001, 26). Forchhammer adds that the Gola or Gaudas migrated to Golamattikanagara over 2,000 years ago(Forchhammer 1889, 9).

U Lu Pe Win States that there are two Buddhaghosas - Cula Buddhaghosa and Mahā Buddhaghosa. Cula Buddhaghosa of Suvannabhūmi, coastal Burma, visited Sri Lankā and came back with MahāBuddhaghosa, the

great commentator and author of Visuddhimagga, who had previously reached Srilanka from Bodh Gaya, in Majjhimadesa, India. According to the ancestral tradition(ācariyaparampara) of the Mon monks, the two theeras Buddhaghosa, senior and junior, brought with them all the atthakathā books (now numbering fifty two) for the dissemination of Buddha's dhamma in the then greater Mon area(Lu Pe Win 1975).

This acariaparampara of the Mons has long been confirmed and corroborated by archaeological discoveries in Thaton. The Jātaka plaques of Thagyaphaya and Jātaka sculptures in relief on the boundary pillars of stones at the Kalayāni Sīma, in Thaton have reflected the centuries' old Buddhaghosa tradition.

Relating to the date of Buddhaghosa's departure for Ceylon, the Great chronical(Mahārajavamsa) places it in the 930th year of the religion(387 A.D.)(Luce 1960, 47). According to the "Buddhaghosa Parables", Reger and Bigandet date his departure to the 943th year of religion(400 A.D.)(Gray 2001, 24). The Vamsadipani assigns his departure to 372 A.D.. Ven Samsarābhivamsa states that he departed for Ceylon in the 957th or 930th year of religion(Samvarābhivamsa 1990, 319). The Thaton Chronicle mentions that he brought back Pitakas and their commentaries to Thaton during the reign of king Dhammapāla, who is contemporary with king Mahānāma of Ceylon and Kyaungdurit of Bagan. He is said to have reached Ceylon eleven years earlier than Fahian(Māmaka 2007, 104).

In connection with the sea-route taken by Buddhaghosa, James Gray describes that travellers from Thaton had to go over to Ceylon via ports on the eastern coast of India, adding that Nagatapattani and Komalapattam had a regular service of vessels with Pathein. Buddhaghosa, in order to get to the nearest Indian port on this journey to Buddhagaya, may have proceeded from Golamattikanagara en route to Pathein, but first going to Hamsavati(Bago)(Gray 2001, 27). The Glass Palace Chronicle narrates that he crossed over to Srilanka from

the port of Pathein through the ports on the eastern coast of India(Luce 1960, 47). The Sāsanavamsa and the Buddhaghosuppatti express that he first went from Gaya to the harbour of Bhangari in Deccan and thenceforth proceeded to Srilanka(Gray 2001, 32).

The controversy surrounding the Thera's return journey from Sri Lanka raises questions. The Buddhaghosuppatti says that he went back to Jambūdīpa. The Sāsanalankāra states that he went back to Jambūdīpa after rendering all commentaries into Māgada. The Thaton Chronicle states that when Buddhaghosa arrived back at Thaton from Sri Lanka, King Dhammapāli welcomed him with great pomp and ceremony. It is said that a stupa was built at the place where the barge which took Buddhaghosa landed. It is today called "Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda". It is described that Pitakas brought by the Thera was kept in a cave, which is now known as Pitaka Taik Ceti. The monastery where Buddhaghosa stayed together with descendants of Sona and Uttara was known as Rahandārama Monastery. The large ordination hall (sima) constructed near this monastery was called Buddhaghosa Sima(Panna 1927, 94-96).

Apart from the Myanmar tradition, which itself is not unanimous, there is no other evidence to suggest that Buddhaghosa was a Mon from Rammandadesa. Foulkes and Smith(Hackman 1988, 68) even doubted if there was even a historical personage as Buddhaghosa. But that argument should be ignored for the celebrated Buddhist scholar has long been proved to have been a real personage. More weighty arguments in opposition are offered by Professor Hackmann and Prof. Louis Finot.

"There is ground" says Prof. Hackman, "for doubting the statement that this man (Buddhaghosa) brought Buddhism to Burma. The chronicles of Ceylon to which we owe the information about Buddhaghosa and which must have been well-informed on the subject, give no account of his journey to further India. Indeed, one of the most

important inscriptions in Burma, which was erected at the end of the 15th century A.D. at the instance of the King of Pegu makes no mention whatsoever of Buddhaghosa. The Burmese tradition which refers to him does soon account of his translations and writings having become fundamental in the country, probably also because his intellectual influence may have inaugurated a new epoch in Burmese Buddhism(Hackman 1988, 68)."

Prof. Finot, the distinguished French scholar, also speaks the same voice.

"In Indo-China, he (Buddhaghosa) passes for the grand apostle who brought to those peoples the treasure of the sacred books. Each country of the Peninsular is a claimant; the Burmese make him a monk of Thaton, modern Cambodia places him at the beginning of its religious tradition and has kept his name as one of the most elevated titles of ecclesiastical hierarchy. The (Burmese) chronicles either secular or ecclesiastical are only the echo of Sihalese history, altered by an insatiable national vanity ... they substitute Thaton for Magadha as the point of departure or of return in the voyage of Buddhaghosa to Ceylon. Not only is this tradition apocryphal; it is not even old, it cannot go back in any case further than the 16th century. We have a decisive proof of it in the inscriptions of Kalyānī ... If the belief in the introduction of the scriptures to Pegu by Buddhaghosa had asserted at that time, the pious king would have no doubt reserved to it a place of honour in his abridgement of the history of the Church. But he does not mention the name of the great commentator; thus it follows that in his time no connection had yet been established between Buddhaghosa and Thaton(Bagchi 1923, 63-67)."

Nobody can deny that there is a great weight in these criticisms which are reasonable. Moreover the omission of any account of the great scholar's adventure in further India in the Sri Lankan chronicles as well as in the Kalyānī inscriptions throw some doubt on its authenticity.

Furthermore the Kalyānī inscriptions do not mention anything about the part played by Buddhaghosa in the introduction of the Buddhist texts and atthakatthas to the lower Myanmar. This would have been undoubtedly an important event in the history of Buddhism in Myanmar. The Kalyānī inscriptions record the more important events relating to growth and development of the history of Buddhism in Myanmar. But it keep silent on Buddhaghosa. It is an undeniable fact that Buddhaghosa's endeavours gave an impetus to the development of Theravāda Buddhism in lower Myanmar.

From epigraphical sources found in Hmawza, it is clear that Theravāda Buddhism existed in lower Myanmar in the 6th century A.D.. This is corroborated by the facts recorded in some of the Chinese traveller's accounts. Among them I-tsing's record is very useful. He visited India and some parts of south-east Asia from China at the end of the 7th century A.D. and he spent in those regions for about twenty-five years (A.D. 671-695). While mentioning the names of several places in South-east Asia he states in his account that the inhabitants of Shi-li-Cha-ta-lo revere the three gems. This Shi-Li-Cha-ta-lo has been identified with Srikshetra or Pyi(Takakusa 1896, 9-10).

Thus I-tsing's account shows that Buddhism flourished at Pyi in the 7th century A.D. Not only I-tsing's record, the chronicles of the Tang dynasty of China (A.D. 613-907) refer to the religion of Pyi. These Chronicles mention a Piao (Pyu) Kingdom which had eighteen vassal states mainly in Southern-Myanmar(Hazra 1982, 67).

The capital of this kingdom has been identified with Shih-li-cha-ta-lo of the Chinese traveller. The chronicles of the Tang dynasty state, "when the P'iao King goes out in his palanquin, he lies on couch of golden cord. For long distances he rides an elephant ... the wall of his city built of greenish glazed tiles, is 160 li round, with twelve gates and with pagodas at each of the four corners. The people live inside ...

They are Buddhist and have a hundred monasteries. At seven years of age, the people cut their hair and enter a monastery; if at the age of twenty they have not grasped the doctrine they return to lay estate ... The fact shows that Buddhism flourished at Pyi during the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.. This Pyu Kingdom of Pyi mentioned above came to an end in the ninth century A.D.(Hall 1976, 134-135).

The epigraphs prove once and for all that this Buddhism was known and practiced at old Pyi (Hmawza) as early as in the 5th and 6th centuries A.D.. These finds in old Pyi known to scholars for years are very important by themselves. Considering the period to which they belong and the tradition of art and paleography which they are affiliated to were more or less associated with Buddhaghosa.

According to Dhammakitti's account in the *Mahāvamsa*, Buddhaghosa flourished in the first half of the 5th century A.D.. This account is supported by Burmese tradition and other internal evidences from the works of Buddhaghosa himself (Law 1997, 9-11). From the 5th century onwards down to the middle of the eleventh there is a continuous record of a very flourishing state of Buddhism in and around the kingdom of old Pyi, in lower Myanmar. This country saw, in the old kingdom of Pyi, a sudden awakening of Theravāda Buddhism, a new start of an old faith. It is possible to connect the impetus, this outburst of Buddhist religious activity, suddenly in about the 5th century, with the Buddhaghosa legend. In any case the appearance of Theravāda Buddhism in the old Pyi as evidenced by her old epigraphs and sculptures thus almost coincides with the period in which Buddhaghosa flourished. When we examine the Myanmar tradition from this point of view, the story of the great scholar's visit may seem with foundation. Furthermore, one has also to bear in mind the possibility of earlier missionaries – Sona and Uttara. The surgence of the religion in Myanmar from about the 5th century referred to above suggests that there must have taken place a movement that spurred into

activity elements that had already been in existence for some time past.

The foregoing facts suggest that Buddhaghosa went over to Sri Lanka at the end of 4th century A.D. or at the advent of the 5th century A.D. and that his native land may be either Myanmar or India. Generally, it is known that Theravāda Buddhism declined gradually in India after the death of king Śrīdhamāsoka. His successors were not Buddhists. King Sunga who occupied the throne in the 301 year of religion after assassinating "Vihadatta", the last king of the Mauryan Dynasty was a staunch follower of Brahmanism (Samsarabhivānisa 1990, 327-328). In about the 5th century A.D., Theravāda Buddhism might have been exterminated but only Mahayana Buddhism would have flourished in India. So the assumption that Buddhaghosa, a monk well-versed in Tipitaka, came from India does not provide a rounded picture of his life.

Buddhaghosa, in his *Anguttaranikāya Atthakathā*, also portrays the oceanic journey on the way from Sri Lanka to Suvannabhūmi. If the Thera was a native of India, he would have no reason to proceed to Suvannabhūmi. Instead, he would return to India and make all-out efforts to revitalize Theravāda Buddhism there. With regard to this point, Eliot mentions in his work "Hinduism and Buddhism thus: ... If the Buddhaghosa's object was to invigorate Hinayānism (Theravāda) in India, the result of his really stupendous labours was singularly small, for in India, his name is connected with no religious movements. If we suppose that he went to Sri Lanka by way of the holy places in Majjhimadesa (now Bihar) and return from Coromandal coast of Madras to Burma where Hinayānism afterwards flourished, we have at least a coherent narrative ..."

This excerpt implies that if Buddhaghosa was a native of India, he would make relentless efforts to rejuvenate Theravāda Buddhism and his contribution to Buddhism would have been recorded in the history of India. However, now, any of his contributions is found recorded in

the religious history of India. So he can hardly be a native of India. Furthermore, it would be more logical to assume that he returned to Thaton by way of Majjhimadesa and South India.

This assumption is further proved by the discovery of Buddhist scriptures written in Kamdaba scripts dated to the 5th century A.D. of South India in Srikhestra near Pyi and Kunzeik village on the Gulf of Muttama (Sein Win 2004, 3-9). The 5th or 7th century Jātakas from the Thagya Phaya, associated with Buddhaghosa's atthakathās, are found in Thaton.

Dr. Dhamma Nanda Kosambi, who had thoroughly studied Buddhaghosa's atthakathās, remarks that Buddhaghosa is not from north India. He may be a native of Myanmar, for a lot of atthakathās written by him are found in Myanmar (Māmaka 2007, 345-346).

Chinese monk Fahian, a contemporary of Buddhaghosa, who visited India between 399 and 413 A.D. recorded Mahāyāna Buddhist Treatises only but did not make any mention of Buddhaghosa (Samsarabhivamsa 1999, 345-346).

All in all, conclusive evidences proving the nativity of Buddhaghosa have not been discovered so far. But the above extracts have forced to convince us that he was the native of Thaton and brought Tipitakas and their commentaries there, which gave much impetus to the flourishing of Theravāda Buddhism in Myanmar.

Key Words : Buddhaghosa, Mahavamsa, Jātaka, Visuddhimagga, Theravāda Buddhism.

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붓다고사(Buddhaghosa)는 불교승려이자 작가로써 상좌부불교에서 가장 뛰어난 승려로 유명하다. 그는 청결을 의미하는 Visudhimagga의 작가로서도 유명한데, 이 작품들은 정전(正典)문학의 백과사전이라 불리고 있으며, 담마의 다양한 보물 컬렉션이라 할 수 있다. 붓다고사는 Visuddhi의 순결함에 도달하기 위해 magga 형식을 설명하고 있고, 불교교리 전체를 조직적으로 설명하고 있다. 붓다고사는 스리랑카어로 쓰여진 atthakathā를 Magadyhi(빨리어)로 번역했다. 이러한 업적으로 그는 명예를 얻었고, 이 작품은 상좌부불교(Theravāda)를 연구하는 학자들 사이에서 신성한 텍스트로 여겨졌다. 최초의 붓다고사에 관한 전기문은 6세기에 쓰여진 Mahavamsa에 나타난다. 마하밤사에 따르면, 그는 큰 보리수가 있는 인도 마가다국에서 브라만으로 태어났다고 전해진다. 그러나 Buddhaghosa의 atthakathā를 연구한 Kosambi박사는 붓다고사는 북인도로부터 온 인물이라고 보았으며, 붓다고사가 미얀마 사람일지도 모른다고 추정했다. 그 이유는 다수의 atthakathā가 미얀마에서 발견되었기 때문이다. 미얀마뿐만 아니라, 태국 그리고 캄보디아 역시 붓다고사가 자국인이라고 주장하고 있다. 5세기부터 더 나아가 11세기 중반까지 하(下) 미얀마의 고대 쁘왕국에서 불교가 매우 번성했다는 지속적인 기록이 있다. 이는 5세기에 붓다고사 전설과 함께 불교를 활성화시켰으며, 상좌부불교와 관련된 조각품들과 비문을 연구하는데 반영되었다. 붓다고사의 자타카 해설은 붓다의 역사적 탄생을 다루고 있으며, 미얀마의 모든 청소년에게 오랫동안 교육자료로 활용되어 왔다. 또한 자타카 해설은 비석에서 중요한 부분을 차지하고 있으며, 테라코타 부조나 11세기와 12세기의 벽간사원의 벽화에서도 사용된다. 이처럼 미얀마에서 비석과 테라코타 부조, 그리고 수많은 벽화들이 발견되는 것을 통해 붓다고사가 미얀마 출신이었다는 것을 확인할 수 있다.

주제어 : 붓다고사, 마하밤사, 자타카(본생담), 비수디마가, 상좌부불교