Wheel Publication No. 124/125

Buddhism in South India

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Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy • Sri Lanka

The Wheel Publication No. 124/125

Abridged and translated from *Dakuṇu Indiyāve Bauddha Itihāsaya* (1964) by Amarasiri Weeraratne.

clearly marked as such.

The Introduction of Buddhism to South India

t is not generally known that Buddhism flourished in South India in ancient times. The ancient chronicles of Sri Lanka such as the Dīpavaṃsa and Mahāvaṃsa are silent on the subject.

While studying Tamil literature, I became interested in this subject, which is one of which we should not be ignorant. Therefore, in order to acquaint myself with it, I had to peruse books on the history of South India and Sri Lanka, the Pāli texts and commentaries, in addition to studies in Tamil literature. The Tamil book entitled Bauddhamum Tamil Ilakkiamum (Buddhism and Tamil Literature) by Seeni Vengadasamy of Madras was particularly helpful to me.

In this work I propose to deal with the arrival of Buddhism in South India, its spread and its decay. I shall also touch on famous Buddhist cities, the impact of Buddhism on the local Hindu religion, and on Buddhist teachers and their literary work. There is a division of opinion regarding the period in which Buddhism was introduced to South India. However, on perusal of Tamil literary works, a solution to this

problem can be found.

The earliest literary work in which Buddhism is traceable is a book called Puraṇānūru. No trace of Buddhist influence can be found in books written prior to this. In the Puraṇānūru there is reference to the Sivi Jātaka. The full impact of Buddhism in South India is unmistakably shown in *Sīlappadhikāram* and *Maṇimekhalai*, which are two epic works of the 3rd Sangam period [1] in Tamil literature (2nd century CE). Of these, *Maṇimekhalai* is a purely Buddhist work, which in addition to the narrative, contains also expositions of the Buddhist doctrine. [2] Extracts from other poems written by the author of *Maṇimekhalai*, Sīthalai Sāttanār, are found in other Tamil literary works. Quotations from Ilambodhiyar, the Buddhist poet, are found in the Natrinai (p.72). Thus we are able to arrive at the conclusion that Buddhism came to South India before the 3rd Sangam period of Tamil literature (2nd century CE).

Tamil literary works provide a clue to finding the time of the advent of Buddhism. Apart from this, the inscriptions of King Asoka also shed much light on the subject. Two inscriptions of King Asoka found at Girnar in Surashtra are particularly helpful.

> "The merciful Emperor, endowed with favours from the gods, has arranged for medical facilities to be provided to men and beasts, in Coḷa, Cera, Pāṇḍya, Tāmrapārṇi (Sri Lanka), and in the kingdom of the Greek king Antiochus."

From this it is clear that the Emperor Asoka provided medical facilities in the kingdoms of South India. Nothing is mentioned here of the spread of Buddhism. Yet in edict number XIII found near Peshawar, there is reference to the Buddhist missions of Asoka. Among the countries referred to are Coḷa, Pāṇḍya, and Sri Lanka. This inscription was written in 258 B.C. and is direct evidence of the Buddhist missions of Asoka to South India and Sri Lanka. As Buddhist missions to Sri Lanka had to come by way of South India, the spread of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and South India should be considered contemporary events.

At the third Buddhist Council convened under the patronage of King Asoka, missionaries were selected to be sent to various countries round about India. The Emperor Asoka's son Mahinda Mahā Thera was selected to propagate Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In the 3rd century B.C. the Venerable Mahinda arrived in Sri Lanka with his Buddhist mission. He ordained many disciples and started missionary activities on a big scale. His chief disciple was the Venerable Ariṭṭha who assisted his teacher in his missionary endeavours.

It is unfortunate that Sri Lanka's ancient chronicles, which have taken pains to give details of the life and missionary activities of King Asoka, should have omitted to record the introduction of Buddhism to South India. The historian Vincent Smith has advanced the view that as South Indian Tamils constantly harassed the Sinhalese with invasions the Buddhist monks who wrote the chronicles were prejudiced

against them and did not wish to give them a place in their books.

Despite this omission, it is now accepted by all scholars that Buddhism was introduced to South India by the Venerable Mahinda himself. The aforementioned facts alone are sufficient to establish this assumption. Although our chronicles say that the Venerable Mahinda arrived in Sri Lanka through his supernormal powers, scholars are of the opinion that he travelled by sea and called at Kāveripaṭṭanam in South India. He sojourned here in a monastery called Indra Vihāra, which was one of the several monasteries constructed in this part of the country by the Emperor Asoka.

The celebrated Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang arrived at Kāñchipura in South India in 640 A.C. during the course of his travels. He mentions a stūpa 100 feet in height which existed there. With regard to the Buddhist monuments in the Pāṇḍya country Hiuen Tsang writes as follows:

> "Near the city of Madura there is a monastery built by Mahinda Thera, the brother of King Asoka. To the east of this there is a stūpa built by King Asoka."

The monastery and stūpa were in a dilapidated condition at the time. Tamil literature does not mention anything about these two shrines.

The commentator, Dhammapāla Thera, mentions in his works that he resided in a monastery which was built by

King Asoka in a place called Bhadaratīrtha.

Several Sinhalese princes, including Mahā Ariṭṭha, were ordained by Venerable Mahinda in Sri Lanka. All of them assisted the Mahā Thera in his missionary activities. Further, there is evidence that they assisted the Mahā Thera in propagating the Dhamma in South India.

Early in the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, rock caves were made habitable and offered to the Saṅgha. Such caves are still to be seen at Vessagiri, Chetiyagiri and Tonigala. Similar caves are to be seen in the Madura district of the Pāṇḍya country. Beds cut in the rocks for monks to rest upon are seen in these caves. Inscriptions are also found indicating the names of the donors. The Brāhmī script used by King Asoka in his inscriptions has been utilised in some writings. One such cave in the Pāṇḍya country is situated in a place called Arittapattī. This name is derived from Venerable Ariṭṭha who resided in this particular cave conducting his missionary activities.

From the aforementioned facts it may be concluded that Buddhism was introduced to South India by King Asoka and his son, the Venerable Mahinda, about the same time as the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

The Rise, Spread, and Decay of Buddhism in South India

It is well known that the three Buddhist Councils held in India contributed much to the spread of Buddhism throughout India and in other countries. In particular the third council convened by King Asoka delegated various Arahants with the task of leading missions to selected lands. Both in the time of the Buddha and in subsequent times Buddhist monks went about from village to village spreading the word of the Master. Those who went to South India had to take up the challenge from Jain and Hindu opponents and engage themselves in debate with them, apart from struggling against other difficulties and obstacles. The monks thus endeavouring to spread the Dhamma met with encouragement and support from kings, wealthy merchants and noblemen. As a result of this they went out to each and every village and city of South India and propagated the Buddha Dhamma, building monasteries and erecting centres of Buddhist learning. Some of the monks residing in the monasteries became skilled medical practitioners. They provided free medical services and free education in the monastic school thus rendering invaluable

service. They got the people to assemble at the monastery premises, and preached Jātaka tales, the life of the Buddha, read Suttas from the Buddhist scriptures, and thus increased the knowledge of the Dhamma by explaining and clarifying what the people could not understand. With the help of kings and rich men they maintained alms-halls for the benefit of the blind, deaf and maimed. Thus on account of their social services and devoted work in the propagation of the Dhamma, Buddhism spread rapidly in South India.

Another point in their favour was that these monks ignored caste differences, and this was a great relief to the masses of depressed classes who suffered acutely on account of caste-discrimination. The oppressed classes found their emancipation in Buddhism. Opposition to the rigid and inhuman caste system was one of the major reasons for the popularity of Buddhism.

One can gain a good idea of the popularity of Buddhism in South India by reading the *Sīlappadhikāram* (*The Book of the Anklet*) [3] by the Jain poet Ilango Aḍigal, the *Maṇimekhalai* by the Buddhist poet Sāttanār, the *Thevāram* hymns of the Hindu saints such as Appar, Sundarar, and Tirujñāṇasambandhar. All these poets lived in the 2nd to 7th century CE Further the works of the Vaishnavaite saints of the 8th and 9th century, extolling the virtues of their god, and the Periyapurāṇam by the 12th century poet Sekillār, and the Nīlakesī written by the Jains against Buddhism, give a clear picture of the popular place Buddhism held for several centuries in South India.

Buddhism, which flourished in South India from the 3rd century CE, began to decline gradually from about the 7th century for several reasons.

The Vedic religion of North India, Jainism, and the Ājīvaka faith had preceded Buddhism in South India. These religions had turned South India into a debating ground. It is not clear what the indigenous religion was, before the arrival of these faiths from the North. The religions contending for popularity vied with one another to win over kings and influential men. At the start it was Buddhism that emerged triumphant from this struggle for popularity.

The Ājīvaka religion was left behind in this struggle. Only the Buddhist, Jain and the Vedic religions were left to contend. Now Buddhism had to contest with two rival faiths which were envious of its popularity and planned to destroy it. The Buddhist position was undermined by the combined efforts of these two rival faiths. Buddhism itself split into several sects. The Nīlakesī mentions three rival Buddhist sects, Mahāyāna, Śrāvakayāna, and Mantrayāna. The Hindu saint Tirujñāṇasambandhar mentions in his *Thevāram* that during his time Buddhism was divided into six sects. This disunity itself contributed to the decline of Buddhism.

Further, the Buddhist monks gave up the social and welfare work which had brought them popularity. They became self-centred and deteriorated from their high principles.

Hence they lost the support of the kings and influential men. Thus a weakened Saṅgha found itself unable to withstand the combined onslaught of the two rival faiths. With the decline of Buddhism in the 5th and 6th centuries Jainism gained ascendancy. At this time the Vedic religion was not influential in South India. With the upsurge of Jainism, the Jains concentrated their attack on Buddhism. The Buddhist monks found themselves not equal to the task of defending Buddhism. It is mentioned in a Jain work that the Jain teacher Akalankar defeated Buddhist monks in controversy and chased them off to Sri Lanka. But in spite of these setbacks Buddhism was by no means eradicated. For several centuries Buddhism still survived, though in a state of decline.

The Vedic religion of the Brahmins, which had hitherto been in a weak position, began to make headway and gain the support of the kings and men in high positions. Thereupon Brahmanism got the upper hand over Jainism. It was at this stage that Buddhism disappeared from South India. This Brahmanism had been unpopular for several centuries on account of its animal sacrifices and observance of the caste system. The depressed classes detested this religion as it forbade them to study the Vedas. After the 5th century, Brahmanism began to change its emphasis on these unpopular doctrines. It also incorporated popular South Indian gods such as Kālī, Skanda, Gaṇapati, and Vishnu into its pantheon. This new phase of the Hindu religion adopted hymns overflowing with faith as a means of

gaining popularity. Just as the Jains when they gained power directed their attacks on Buddhism, Hinduism with its new orientation directed its onslaught on Buddhism as well as Jainism.

Hindu saints such as Tirujñāṇasambandhar, Appar, Sundarar, Tirumangai-ālvār, Peri-ālvār and other such, appeared in the 7th and 8th century CE and were responsible for the renaissance of Hinduism. They successfully engaged Buddhist and Jain teachers in controversy. Hinduism at that time was not broken up into sects such as the Shaivaites and Vaishnavaites. Hence Buddhists, themselves divided, were unequal to the attack of the united Hindus.

The *Thevāram* psalms of Tirujñāṇasambandhar mention that he engaged Buddhists in controversy and converted them to his faith. *Tiruvāsagam*, written by Manikkavāsagar of Sidambaram, mentions that he defeated Buddhist teachers in controversy and made them flee to Sri Lanka.

Tirumangai-ālvār mentions in his works that he stole a golden image of the Buddha from a monastery in Nāgapaṭṭanam and offered it to build up the Tiruvarangam Hindu temple. Though Buddhism suffered such hazards and became weakened it was not until the 14th century that it disappeared from South India.

The continuation of the Mahāvaṃsa mentions that in the 13th century King Parākramabāhu of Dambadeniya brought down Buddhist monks and scriptures from Coḷa to revive

Buddhism in Sri Lanka. During this period there was a great deal of cultural intercourse between South India and Sri Lanka. The chief of the monks who were brought from South India was Venerable Dhammakitti. He wrote the continuation of the Mahāvaṃsa from the time of King Sirimevan up to his time. He is also considered to be the author of the Pali poem *Dāṭhāvamsa*, though there is division of the opinion about this. The Venerable Dīpaṅkara of Coḷa, known as Buddhappiya, also came to Sri Lanka for his studies in Buddhism. The Pali poem *Pajjamadhu* (*Nectar of Verses*) was written in adoration of the Buddha by him. He is also the author of *Rūpasiddhi,* a Pali grammar. The Venerable Buddhamitta and Mahā Kassapa were also two Coḷian Bhikkhus who came to Sri Lanka. They studied the Dhamma here and rendered great service in the cause of the religion. From these facts it will be seen that up to the 13th century Buddhism was still strong in South India. Up to the 14th century there were Buddhists, monasteries and centres of Buddhist learning in some parts of South India. After that Buddhism disappeared, leaving only traces of its heyday in the many ruins and the influence it brought to bear on Hinduism.

Buddhist Monuments in South India

In order to find out where Buddhism flourished, and in what condition it existed prior to the 14th century it is necessary to study the ruins of Buddhist buildings in the chief kingdom of South India, namely the Coḷa country.

The capital of Coḷa was Kāveripaṭṭanam. It was so called because it was situated on the mouth of the river Kāveri. From the very start this city was a centre of Buddhist activities. The Jātaka book mentions this city as the home of the sage Akitti who gave away his wealth to the poor, became a hermit and lived in a wood close to the city. As large numbers of people flocked to pay him homage he found no leisure there. Therefore he left the place and went to Karaitivu island off the North coast of Sri Lanka.

The Venerable Mahā Mahinda, while leading the Buddhist mission to Sri Lanka, sojourned in this city. I have previously mentioned a monastery here. The Tamil poems *Sīlappadhikāram* and *Maṇimekhalai* refer to this monastery as the Indra Vihāra. It is derived from the elder's name Mahā Indra (Mahendra) in its Sanskritised form. In the 2nd century a Bhikkhu called Aravaṇa Aḍigal occupied this

monastery. It is mentioned in the poem *Maṇimekhalai* that there was a small Buddhist shrine in a park called Upavana and a replica of the Buddha's footprint was worshipped there. In the same poem it is said that King Killivalavan, who reigned in the 2nd century, became a Buddhist and converted the prison to a preaching hall at the request of the nun, Maṇimekhalai. Later he built a Buddhist monastery there.

The Rasavāhinī, a Pali book of Buddhist stories written in the 13th century in Sri Lanka, mentions that a king of the Coḷa country erected a temple to the god Siva, but being converted by Buddhist monks, he made the temple a Buddhist Vihāra. The Venerable Buddhadatta, commentator of great fame, mentions in his books that he resided in a monastery at Kāveripaṭṭanam. He was supported by the king of the time. Among the Tamil commentators and Buddhist teachers he stands out pre-eminent.

In the introduction to the Pali Abhidhammāvatāra, the Venerable Buddhadatta says that he lived in a monastery at Kāveripaṭṭanam constructed by a minister named Krishnadāsa. He describes in verse this flourishing city with its wide streets filled with busy people. Again in the *Madhurattha Vilāsini,* his commentary to the Buddhavamsa, he mentions that he wrote this book while residing in the same monastery.

Among the famous Buddhist centres of ancient Coḷa was the city of Bhūtamangala. Here too the Venerable Buddhadatta

resided in a monastery built by one Vishnudāsa. The Pali work Vinaya Vinicchaya was written by him there. He describes the city of Bhūtamangala in the same strain as he wrote of the Coḷian capital, Kāveripaṭṭanam. Bodhimangai was another city where Buddhism found a foothold. It was here that the Buddhist teachers Buddhanandi and Sāriputra lived. The Periyapurāṇam mentions a debate between Tirujñāṇasambandhar and these two teachers. The very name Bodhimangai is suggestive of its Buddhist associations.

Ponpaṭṭri of the Tañjai district was another Buddhist stronghold. Here the Buddhist teacher Buddhamitra lived in the 11th century. The Tamil grammar *Vīrasolium* was written by him. The book was so named in honour of the Coḷian King Vīrājendra.

Nāgapaṭṭanam

This city, situated near a port of the Coḷa country, was an important Buddhist centre from ancient times. Here a monastery called Badarotīrtha Vihāra was built by King Asoka. In the 8th century B.C. Venerable Dhammapāla resided here and wrote the Nettippakaraṇa commentary. In the year 720 A.C. a Vihāra was constructed with the assistance of king Narasinhapothavarman for the use of Chinese mariners who called over here for purposes of

trade. This was known as the Chinese monastery. Marco Polo, travelling from China to Venice, mentions this monastery.

In the 8th century the Vaishnavaite teacher Tirumangai-yālvār stole a golden Buddha image from a Buddhist Vihāra in Nāgapaṭṭanam and used the gold for renovating a Hindu temple. This fact is mentioned in the *Guruparamparai Parbhāram*, a Tamil work of the period. During the reign of the powerful Coḷa king Rājarāja (985–1014 A.C.), a monastery called Siri Sailendra Cūḍāmaṇi Vihāra was built here. The King of Srī Vijaya in Sumatra had helped the Coḷian king to put up this shrine. A copper plate with an engraving of the lands endowed by this king to the monastery was removed to Leiden museum, where it is preserved.

In the 14th century, too, Chinese merchants called at this port for merchandise. They engraved an inscription at the Vihāra. Chinese records also make reference to this inscription.

In the 15th century eleven Burmese Bhikkhus and one envoy despatched to Sri Lanka by the Burmese king Rāmpatirāja were shipwrecked while returning to their native land. Fortunately they reached Nāgapaṭṭanam and resided in the Chinese Vihāra. This is confirmed by the Kalyāṇi Sīmā rock inscription in Burma.

Sir Walter Elliot mentions that to the north of Nāgapaṭṭanam a large *gopuram* (temple tower) existed by

the sea in 1836. It served as a lighthouse for mariners. In 1867 the government of India permitted Christian missionaries to demolish this Buddhist structure and erect one of their buildings. While the large tree by the gopuram was being uprooted, five Buddha statues were found. Four of them were of metal and one was of porcelain. One depicted the Buddha in the posture of expounding the Dhamma. When Lord Napier, the British Governor, visited the place, the missionaries presented him with these antiquities. In the pedestal of the Buddharūpa an inscription in 12th century Tamil was found. It read,"May it be auspicious! The Teacher to whom Agama Paṇḍitar went for refuge for the emancipation from Saṃsāra."

There is at present a Brahmin village in Nāgapaṭṭanam called Putaṃkoṭṭam. Mr. S. Krishnaswāmy Iyengar mentions that this village was constructed after demolishing a Buddhist monastery there. In Madras museum are to be found several types of Buddha images and Buddhist carvings. From these facts one can conclude that Nāgapaṭṭanam was a stronghold of Buddhism. It was the pride of Indian Buddhists for several centuries. The great commentator, Buddhaghosa, embarked for Sri Lanka from this port. The village Buddhakuḍi, as the name implies, was the abode of Buddhists. After the 15th century, particularly with the arrival of the Europeans, Buddhist remains are lost.

Of the ancient Coḷian cities, Uraiyūr, called Uragapura in Sanskrit, was the home of the celebrated commentator Buddhadatta. This city too was a Buddhist centre from the

time of the arrival of Buddhism in the South.

So far we have discussed only the celebrated centres of Buddhist learning in the Coḷa country. Apart from these there were also a large number of minor towns where Buddhism was active. Of these, Buddhamangalam, Saṅghamangalam, Kumbakonam, Mayūrapaṭṭanam, Alamkuḍipaṭṭi and so on are also important centres of Buddhist culture. Towns having names including the words Buddha, Saṅgha, Ālam (i.e. Bodhi tree), unmistakably reveal their Buddhist past. In some of the Hindu temples of these cities Buddha statues are seen with Hindu variations.

The Thoṇḍaimaṇḍala region of South India was also an area inhabited by Buddhists but unlike the Coḷa country it had no great centres of Buddhist activity. Only a few Buddhist cities such as Kūvam, Saṅghamangai, Tiruppādirippuliyūr and Kāñchipuram existed there. Of these, Kūvam was a Buddhist stronghold from the early days. A large Buddha statue, which was found here, is to be seen at the Madras museum. Even today Saṅghamangai is considered a Buddhist village. The very name reveals its connection with the Buddhist Saṅgha. This is the birthplace of Sākiya Nāyakar, a Buddhist teacher who is said to have embraced Shaivaism at a later stage. Tiruppādirippuliyūr was a centre of Buddhist learning. A Buddhist University is said to have existed there.

Kāñchipuram

The chief city of the Tondaimaṇḍala region, Kāñchipuram, occupies an important place in South Indian Buddhist history. From early times it was a meeting place for the four chief religions which contended for supremacy in this region. By far most of its population was Buddhist. Hiuen Tsang, who visited it in the 7th century, mentions that king Asoka had erected a stūpa there. In the Tamil classic *Maṇimekhalai* it is mentioned that King Killivalavan built a cetiya in the city in honour of the Buddha. It is further mentioned in the same work that the king offered a park named Tarumadavana to the Buddhist order. A shrine containing an imprint of the Buddha's feet was erected in the park. The Buddhist teacher Aravaṇa Aḍigal is reported to have migrated from Kāveripaṭṭanam to the city.

Maṇimekhalai, having become a Buddhist nun, lived in this city to the end of her days. Even today there is a Hindu temple called Maṇimekhalāi Amman Kovil in this city. This is a Buddhist temple converted into a Hindu shrine. Ācāriya Dharmapāla, rector of the Nālandā University and Anuruddha Thera, author of Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, were natives of this city. The well known commentator of the early 5th century Ācariya Buddhaghosa mentions in the concluding stanzas to his commentary on the Aṅguttara Nikāya (Manorathapurāṇī) that at the time of compiling the work he lived at Kāñchipura with his friend Bhikkhu Jotipāla. Again in the Papañcasūdani, the commentary on the Majjhima Nikāya, he mentions that the book was written when he was residing at Mayūrapaṭṭanam with a

Bhikkhu named Buddhamitta. In the Samantapāsādikā, the Elder states that when residing at Kāñchipura he saw the Telugu commentary known as the Andhaṭṭhakathā.

Hiuen Tsang, who arrived at Kāñchi in 640 A.C., mentions that about 100 Buddhist monasteries were there at the time with about a thousand monks in them. He also mentions that the Buddhist teacher Ācāriya Dīgnāga was a native of Sinhavaktra (modern Siyamangala) near Kāñchi. Mahendravarman, the Pallava king, wrote his Sanskrit work, *Mattavilāsa-Prahāsana,* in the 8th century. In this he refers to the existence of many Buddhist Vihāras at Kāñchi, the chief of which was Rāja Vihāra.

Of the Pallava kings who reigned at Kāñchipura, Buddhavarma was a Buddhist. He erected Buddhist monasteries and supported them. It is mentioned that King Himasītala of the 8th century was a supporter of the Buddhists. The Jain named Akalanka defeated the Buddhist monks in a debate in the presence of the king. He converted the king and made the Buddhist monks flee to Sri Lanka.

At present there is a shrine called Kāmākriyamman Kovil in Kāñchi. This was originally a shrine of the Mahāyāna Buddhists dedicated to the goddess Tārā. Indian archaeologists are of the opinion that it was later converted to a Hindu place of worship. In fact even today there are Buddha statues in the Kovil. There is a standing image there called 'Sāttan', a word derived from the Pāli word *'satthā'*, teacher, namely the Buddha. According to the Hindu story,

this Sāttan was the son of their goddess Kāmākriyamman. The present Kacchīsvara Kovil, Ekāmbaresvara Kovil and Kurukāṇil Amarandāl Kovil are converted Buddhist shrines. In these are found Buddha images done up as Hindu gods. The Buddhist temple at Kaccikkunāyanār Kovil has been so demolished that nothing of it remains. There are inscriptions which mention land endowments to this Buddhist Vihāra.

An eminent poet of Java writing in the 14th century mentions the existence of thirteen Buddhist monasteries in Kāñchi. He mentions that at this time Buddhism and Vaishnavism had got so mixed up that it was difficult to distinguish one from the other. The conversion of Buddhist Vihāras to Hindu Kovils, parading Buddha statues in the guise of Hindu gods and transferring the Buddhist history of these shrines to Hindu ones are a source of grief to the Buddhist who sees them. Apart from the many statues found broken up, the use of numerous Buddhist images for building walls, foundations, and other building work is also a source of grief to the Buddhist. Apart from the loss sustained by Buddhism, Buddhist art in Asia has been deprived of valuable treasures.

From these facts it is seen that Kāñchipuram was a great centre of Buddhism even as Anurādhapura was in Sri Lanka. Renowned Buddhist teachers such as Aravaṇa Aḍigal, Maṇimekhalai, Dinnāga, Bodhidharma, the commentator Ācariya Dhammapāla, Anuruddha and Buddhāditiya lived in this city. The present Tirumāli

Vaishnavaite shrine was formerly a Buddhist centre. Here too are found a large number of rock caves. Asoka characters (of the Brāhmī script) are found in them. Mr. V. R. Rāmachandra is of the opinion that these were occupied by Buddhist and Jain monks.

Similarly, Buddhist towns and villages existed in the Pāṇḍya country. This region was the birthplace of Ācariya Dhammapāla, Vajirabodhi, and other Buddhist scholars. There are many rock caves here which were once inhabited by Buddhist monks.

Finally, we have to consider the Cera kingdom and its Buddhist centres. This region is also called Kerala, or the Malayālam country. King Elāra, who conquered and ruled Sri Lanka (220 B.C.), was a native of Kerala.

City of Vañchi

This was the capital of the Cera country. Sīllappadhikāram, the Tamil poem, describes the capitals of the chief kingdoms of South India, Coḷa, Cera, and Pāṇḍya. It is mentioned in the *Maṇimekhalai* that the great grandfather of Kovalan, hero of the Sīllappadhikāram, built a Buddhist shrine (*stūpa*) at Vañchi. He was won over to Buddhism by a Bhikkhu living in a place called Pādapanka Jamalaya. He spent all his wealth on Buddhist causes. In the 2nd century this cetiya and several others existed at Vañchi. It is mentioned in the

poem *Maṇimekhalai* that Kovalan's father, Maṇimekhalai and the Bhikkhu Aravaṇa Aḍigal went to Vañchi and worshipped its many Buddhist shrines.

Several Hindu temples bearing such names as Sāttan Kāvu and Aiyappan Kovil exist today in the Malayālam country. All these were former Buddhist shrines. Sāttan, as mentioned before, is a name for Buddha. Kāvu is a garden or monastery. Hence Sāttankāvu means"Monastery of the Buddha."

Madhurā

Another region where Buddhist cities and villages existed is found in the Pāṇḍya country. Its capital Madhurā was a centre of Buddhist activity. Madhuraikkāñchi, a work written in the last Sangam period of Tamil literature, mentions the existence of Buddhist monasteries and Buddhists in this city. In the poem *Maṇimekhalai* the existence of a shrine dedicated to Cintādevī is referred to. Historians are of the view that this is a shrine dedicated to the Mahāyāna goddess Tārā. This view is confirmed by the fact that Tārā was also known by the name Cintādevī.

Hieun Tsang, who arrived here in the 7th century, mentions that he saw the ruins of a monastery built by King Asoka. He also saw the ruins of a Vihāra constructed by Mahinda Thera close to this. No reference to these monasteries is

found in Tamil literature. Whoever built these vihāras, the fact that Buddhist monasteries existed in Madhurā, is established. Reference has already been made to Ariṭṭapaṭṭi which derived its name from the rock cave used by the Buddhist teacher Ariṭṭha from Sri Lanka. Inscriptions in Brāhmī characters have been found in the rock caves that were occupied by Buddhist monks.

Podiyakanda, mentioned in Tamil literature, also became a centre of Buddhist activity. The Mahāyānist teacher Vajrabodhi (661–730) was born here. He went out to China and Japan to propagate Dhyāna (Zen) Buddhism. The present Tanjore district was known in ancient times as Tanchai. Ācariya Dhammapāla, who wrote commentaries to thirteen books of the Khuddaka Nikāya (Sutta Piṭaka), was a native of this province. There is evidence of this region being inhabited by Buddhists.

It was the custom from the Buddha's time to erect monasteries in parks and gardens. This practice prevailed both in India and Sri Lanka. Further, Manavūr and Tuḍitapura were Buddhist cities with numerous shrines. In a paraphrase written to the Tamil poem Yakka yāgapparani there is reference to a city called Buddha-pura (Buddhist city). This has so far not been identified.

From the foregoing one can get a glimpse into the flourishing state of Buddhism in Coḷa, Pāṇḍya, Cera (Kerala) and the Thondaimaṇdala regions which comprise South India. From the available literature and the ruins, we

get the impression that Buddhism was prevalent all over South India. Sekkilār, the author of the Periyapurāṇam, a Hindu religious work, mentions that in the 7th century the Shaivaite religion was moribund, Buddhism was triumphant and victorious. He says that the Shaivaites prayed to Shiva to destroy Buddhism and build up Hinduism. By Shiva's divine providence Tirugnānasabandhar was born to redeem Shiva's faith. Sekkilār cannot be incorrect with regard to the flourishing state of Buddhism that he refers to.

The Impact of Buddhism on Hinduism

When Buddhism made its exit, it left behind indelible impressions of its impact on the life and religious thought of South India. Buddhist ideas were incorporated into the Hindu religion. Modern Hinduism is imbued with Buddhist as well as Jain ideas. Not only this, the Hindus made an attempt to absorb the Islamic faith. During the time of King Akbar, a new Upanishad named Allah-Upanishad was composed.

Let us now consider the Buddhist ideas that have been introduced into Hinduism. Many South Indian Hindus do not even know that some of their ideas have come to them from the impact of Buddhism when it flourished in their land. Although Buddhism was wiped out, the fact remains that the Hindus worship the Buddha as the ninth Avatar or incarnation of their God Vishnu. That became necessary because the worship of the Buddha was popular among the masses and hence the necessity to incorporate him into the Hindu pantheon. One cannot say with precision during which period this occurred. In Amarasiṃha's Sanskrit dictionary of the 8th century it is mentioned that the

Buddha was the son of King Suddhodana and Queen Māyā. In the book on Vishnu's nine incarnations (*Dasāvatāralarita*), written in the 11th century, it is mentioned that the Buddha is the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. Therefore we may conclude that this incorporation of the Buddha into the Hindu pantheon occurred between the compilation of these two works.

While one branch of Hinduism, the Vaishnavaites, made the Buddha an incarnation of their god, the other branch, the Shaivaites, not to be outdone by them, also made the Buddha one of their gods, calling him Sāstā Aiyanār and Dharmarājan. Again the Buddha was called Vināyaka and was equated to the elephant-faced god Ganesh. Vināyaka was a name used by the Buddhists for the Buddha. The Hindus call Ganesh, 'Vināyaka.' The Dharmarāja Vihāra and Vināyaka Vihāra were converted into Dharmarāja Kovil and Vināyaka Kovil.

The Buddha categorically denounced animal sacrifices which the Vedic Brahmins taught were highly meritorious. On account of the Buddhist influence some Hindus renounced the slaughter of animals and adopted the first Buddhist precept. Thus with the help of Buddhist teachings the Hindus managed to reform their religion which was losing ground and became moribund.

The Bodhi tree is a sacred object to Buddhists because the Buddha attained Enlightenment under one such tree. Tamil Buddhist poets writing in adoration of the Master referred

to him in such terms as, 'the Noble One who attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree', and 'the mine of mercy who sat under the Bodhi tree.' The Shaivaite teachers Apper, Sundarār, Tirujñāṇasambandhar, in their Thevāram hymns refer to Buddhists as *'bodhiyār'* or worshippers of Bodhi-trees. One of the Buddhist poets of the Sangam period was called Ilambodhiyār. In the anti-Buddhist poem, *Nīlakesī*, written by the Jains, reference is made to the worship of Bodhi trees by Buddhists. This Buddhist practice is retained up to date by the Hindus of South India. They do not even know that this practice of theirs is a legacy from their Buddhist ancestors.

Buddhist monks erected monasteries in villages, resided there and taught the Dhamma. This practice was adopted by the Hindus who opened *'maḍams'* (resting places) for similar purposes. It is also a well known fact that the Advaitavāda of Saṃkarāchāriya, which also goes by the name of Māyāvāda, Ekātmavāda and Smārtavāda, was influenced by Mahāyāna philosophy. Having studied the Buddhist philosophies of Sunyavāda and Vijnānavāda he adopted these systems to his teachings. The Hindu teacher Rāmānuja called Saṃkara's Advaitavāda 'hidden Buddhism.' Mādhavāchārya, an exponent of Dvaitavāda, refuted Saṃkara's philosophy, saying it was Buddhism in a different garb. The Padmapurāṇa too calls this teaching 'hidden Buddhism.' Thus from the very mouth of Hindu teachers we have evidence of the strong influence exercised by Buddhism on Saṃkara.

Further, popular gods and goddesses of the Mahāyāna Buddhists were given Hindu names such as Kālī, Pidārī and Draupadī and were worshipped in the original shrines. The shrine of the Buddhist goddess Maṇimekhalai at Kāñchi became Kāmākriyamman Ālayam. The shrine of the Mahāyāna goddess Tārā became Draupadiyamman Kovil. These are two more of the many Hindu kovils in South India which were originally Buddhist shrines.

These are some of the legacies which Hinduism derived from Buddhism. The erection of *'maḍams*', Saṃkara's Advaitavāda, the conversion of Buddhist deities to Hindu gods, Buddha being made an incarnation of Vishnu, the reduction of animal sacrifices, are the six items where the influence of Buddhism is seen to advantage. These practices and teachings are carefully adhered to even today. Though Buddhism was expelled from South India, yet many vestiges of it have remained. Buddhism lost in South India. Yet the Buddha's teachings and philosophy did not fail to win over the minds of men.

Tamil Literary Works by South Indian Buddhist Authors

South India produced many Buddhist teachers who made valuable contributions to Tamil, Pali and Sanskrit literature. They composed numerous works on a variety of subjects such as religion, philosophy, history, grammar, etymology, astronomy and medicine. Reference to their works is found in Tamil literature and other historical records.

It is most unfortunate that of the large number of books written from the 3rd to the 14th century only very few are available today. One literary work and a book on grammar are all that remain to us. The names of some other books are available. The large number of books that were destroyed is lost to posterity.

The Jains and Buddhists propagated their faith in the local languages. The Buddhist monks who came to South India studied the local language, preached and wrote books for the edification of the native population. Though their literary works were destroyed by enemies they have left enduring marks of their influence.

In the 4th century the celebrated commentator Āchāriya

Buddhadatta lived in Buddhist cities such as Uragapura (Uraiyūr), Kāveripaṭṭanam, and Bhūtamaṅgalam and wrote several commentaries in Pali. Rhys Davids mentions that he took material for his commentaries from the Buddhist literature available to him in Tamil. In the paraphrase of the Nīlakesī and Vīrasoliyam there are extracts from Tamil Buddhist poems which existed at the time. Today it is not possible to say from which books the extracts were taken. There is no doubt that many Buddhist works in Tamil existed during the heyday of Buddhism.

It is possible that books were destroyed during religious controversies. This happened several times in Sri Lanka, too. The Jains and Shaivaites opposed Buddhism tooth and nail. It is likely that these adversaries destroyed Buddhist books. After the decline of Buddhism the tussle for supremacy was between the Jains and Hindus. In this the Hindus came out triumphant while Jainism began to decline. The Jains, who were scattered all over, took sufficient precautions to preserve their Tamil literature. The Buddhists were not able to do even this, and all Buddhist books except two were lost. Although the Tamil books were destroyed, the Pali books written by Tamil Buddhist scholars are preserved in Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar) and Siam (Thailand), even today. As Tamil Buddhist books were not used outside India these books perished with Buddhism in South India. In the 14th century Venerable Totagamuve Rāhula, Buddhist scholar in Sri Lanka, made use of a Tamil glossary to the Jātaka, when he wrote the Pañcikāpradīpa.

Even this book has been lost. The loss of Tamil Buddhist literature was a death blow to Buddhism in South India.

The Poem Maṇimekhalai

The five Epics in Tamil literature are *Sīlappadhikāram*, *Maṇimekhalai*, *Valaiyāpathi*, *Kuṇḍalakesī*, and *Jīvaka Cintāmani*. It is a strange fact that not one of these was written by Hindu Tamils. *Maṇimekhalai, Valaiyapathi* and *Kuṇḍalakesī* are the works of Tamil Buddhist poets. The remaining two are Jain works. Although the epics of the Jains are preserved intact, of the Buddhist works only *Maṇimekhalai* remains to tell the grandeur and glory of Buddhism in a land where it is no more. The story of *Maṇimekhalai* is unknown in Pali, Sanskrit and Sinhala literature. It is a treasure house of Buddhist doctrinal expositions, and a narrative of unusual charm. It is a monument of the glorious days of Buddhism in South India.

The beautiful Hindu maiden, Maṇimekhalai, studied the six systems of philosophy in Hinduism, and other prevalent religions of the time. She compared them to the teachings of the Buddha and became impressed with the latter. Later, on hearing doctrinal expositions from the Buddhist teacher Bhikkhu Aravaṇa Aḍigal, she became a Buddhist nun and devoted her time to the propagation of Buddhism in South India. These are the highlights of the story. There is

doctrinal exposition in the poem dealing with the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), mind (*citta*) and mental states (*cetasikas*) and Buddhist practices like *sīla* and non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) are well explained.

The aim of the author was to compare Buddhism favourably with the other prevailing religions. He takes the occasion to criticize Jainism, the chief opponent of Buddhism at the time. While exposing the weaknesses of the contemporary religions he enthrones the Buddha Dhamma as the perfect religion. His intention was thereby to propagate Buddhism. The poem contains 30 cantos and its story is a continuation of the *Sīlappadhikāram*. This poem is invaluable to the student of South India's Buddhist history. *Maṇimekhalai* is a mine of information on the history of South India, Buddhism and its place during that period, contemporary arts and culture, and the customs of the times. Its author was Sīthalai Sāttanār, bard of the Buddha in Tamil literature.

Kuṇḍalakesī

This is one of the five great classic epics in the Tamil Language. It is now lost, but quotations from it are found in books by authors who had access to this classic. The poem was written for the purpose of showing to advantage

Buddhist philosophy by comparative evaluation with Vedic and Jain philosophies. The Jains wrote Nīlakesī as a reply to this book, and this is still preserved intact. That *Kuṇḍalakesī* is a Buddhist work needs no further proof. The biography of the Bhikkhunī *Kuṇḍalakesī* is found in the commentary to the Therigātha, Dhammapada Commentary and in the Aṅguttara Nikāya. The story of *Kuṇḍalakesī* in the Tamil work is the identical biography with a few differences. The commentary to the work Nīlakesī also touches on the story of *Kuṇḍalakesī*. The story was taken from the *Kuṇḍalakesī* in order to present the Jain reply to Buddhist criticism. *Kuṇḍalakesī* was originally a Jain nun who went about India expounding Jainism and challenging anybody to refute her views. Venerable Sāriputta, a disciple of the Buddha, took up the challenge one day and in the ensuing debate *Kuṇḍalakesī* was defeated. She renounced Jainism and became a Buddhist nun. The author of the poem depicts the Buddhist nun, *Kuṇḍalakesī*, championing the Buddhist doctrines and refuting Jainism. This drew the Jain reply Nīlakesī which alone is now available. *Kuṇḍalakesī* was written prior to the 5th century. It is said the author was a Buddhist named Nāgaguttanār. The Vinaya sub-commentary named Vimativinodanī refers to the *Kuṇḍalakesī* as a work by a Tamil Buddhist teacher written to refute heretical views. The Pali text is as follows:

> *"Pubbe kira imasmiṃ damiḷa-raṭṭhe koci bhinnaladdhiko Nāgaseno nāma Thero Kuṇḍalakesīvatthuṃ paravāda-mathanañāya dassanatthaṃ damiḷa-kabbarūpena karonto …"*

> "Formerly, in this Tamil country an elder named Nāgasena compiled a work in Tamil containing the story of Kuṇḍalakesī, for refuting heretical doctrines, adducing arguments for demolishing the views advanced by non-Buddhists."

The Pali name Nāgasena may have been Tamilised to Nāgaguttanār. The destruction of *Kuṇḍalakesī* was a severe blow to Buddhism. A splendid source of Buddhist history, the record of the culture and other details of the times was lost with that work.

Valaiyāpathy

This work too is now lost and no details can be given. It is not even certain whether this is a Buddhist or Jain work. Some scholars are of the opinion that it was a Buddhist book. They base their evidence on quotations from the Valaiyapathy found in other literary works. As the author of *Valaiyapathy* has quoted the *Tirukural,* it is possible that the author drew his inspiration from the latter.

Vīrasoliyam

This is a Tamil grammatical work written on the lines of the

Sanskrit works on the subject. The author was Buddhamitra, a Mahāyānist Bhikkhu. A commentary to this was written by his pupil, Perum Devanār. The work was so called in honour of the king of the time who was a patron of the author. This book is now in disuse. Being the work of a Buddhist author who used examples from lines describing the virtues of the Buddha, it became distasteful to Hindu scholars. It was compiled in the 11th century. With the help of Vīrasoliyam and its glossary one can get a glimpse into Buddhism in South India at the time. Some of the historical facts mentioned in this work about Coḷian kings are confirmed by inscriptions engraved on rocks. Moreover, in the glossary one comes across the names of several works in Tamil literature. Even in examples given for the purpose of elucidating rhetorical devices there is always mention of the Buddha and his virtues. This work enables us to get a general knowledge of Tamil literature and its history. Like all other Buddhist works it was on the verge of extinction when it was rescued by a Sri Lankan Tamil scholar, C. Y. Thāmotharam Pillai. Even now this book is not available in South India.

Siddhāntattokai

This too is a Buddhist work which has now been lost. From the name it appears to have been a work on the Abhidhamma. It is not certain whether it is the work of one

author or several authors. In a paraphrase to the Shaivaite religious book named Sivagnāna Siddhiyār, its author Jñānaprakāsar, a Shaivaite scholar, makes reference to some quotations from this poem. In a paraphrase of the Jain work Nīlakesī there is reference to Sidhāntattokai. From these facts it can be concluded that it was a Buddhist work. Apart from this there is no other source of information about it.

Tiruppadigam

From the title it can be inferred that this was a panegyric on the Buddha. Jñānaprakāsar, who wrote a paraphrase to the Hindu work *Sivajñāna Siddhiyār* quotes a verse and says, 'this is taken from the Tiruppadigam.' The author of the paraphrase to the Nīlakesī quotes two verses from this work, but does not mention from where he got the quotation. But, as he has quoted one of the verses which Jñānaprakāsar has acknowledged while quoting, it can be assumed that he was quoting the Buddhist work mentioned above. These two verses are hymns in praise of the Buddha, referring to his dāna and sīla pāramitā. Hence this was probably a Tamil book of Buddha-hymns, which is now lost. No details of its author, its length or when it was written are available.

Bimbisāra Kadai

That such a book existed can be seen from a reference to it in the paraphrase to the Nīlakesī. There, four verses are quoted and the remark is made, 'this quotation is from the *Bimbisāra Kadai*, a Buddhist work.'

The Hindu scholar Jñānaprakāsar too quotes verses from this Buddhist work and acknowledges the source. Details regarding this book too are not available as it has been lost and is now forgotten. The theme of the book must have been the life of king Bimbisāra who was a devoted follower of the Buddha. From the available quotations one gets the impression that like the *Maṇimekhalai* this was written in the Āsiriyappā metre in Tamil poetry.

Eminent Buddhist Teachers who Lived in South India

The fact that Buddhism flourished in South India is amply proved by Buddhist ruins, the present day customs, manners and ideas of Buddhist origin and the books written by Buddhist authors of South India. In addition, there is evidence of many South Indian Buddhist teachers, both lay and monastic, who graced the land of their birth. We shall here include brief references to them.

1. Ilambodhiyār

The last Sangam of Tamil literature was held in the 1st or 2nd century A.D. Ilambodhiyār, the Buddhist poet, lived during this period. Several of his verses are found in the 72nd verse of a work called *Naṭṭrinai,* composed during the last Sangam period. His very name indicates that he was a Buddhist.

2. Aravaṇa Aḍigal

Information about this Buddhist teacher is found in the *Maṇimekhalai*. He lived for a long time at Kāveripaṭṭanam. During his youth he travelled north up to the river Ganges and south to Srī Pāda (Adam's Peak) in Sri Lanka. The author of *Maṇimekhalai* portrays him as a versatile exponent of the Dhamma who engaged himself in Buddhist missionary work. He was the head of the Buddhist monastery at Kāveripaṭṭanam. It was to him the bereaved Mādhavī, mother of Maṇimekhalai, went for consolation after the murder of her husband, Kovalan. There, both mother and daughter were instructed in the Dhamma and they undertook to observe the Buddhist precepts. Later when Maṇimekhalai was imprisoned by the Queen of the Coḷa country, it was the intervention of this Buddhist teacher at the palace which obtained her release. From the story it is evident that even the royal family held him in reverence. When Kāveripaṭṭanam was ravaged by a tidal wave, he left for Vañchi. After living there for a short time, he finally settled down at Kāñchipura. He lived during the latter part of the 1st century or in the early part of the 2nd century.

3. Bhikkhunī Maṇimekhalai

She is the heroine of the Tamil classical poem *Maṇimekhalai* by Sīthalai Sāttana. In Kāveripaṭṭanam there lived a wealthy man named Kovalan. He had a mistress named Mādhavi

who was a dancer by profession. Their daughter was Maṇimekhalai. She grew up amidst riches and became a skilful musician and dancer. Attracted by her beauty and talents, the son of the king of Coḷa, Prince Udaya, fell in love with her. In order to get rid of her father, he had him charged on a false accusation when he went to Madhurā. On this charge Kovalan was executed. When his wife came to hear of this horrible crime, she was deeply moved and became disgusted with the world. She went with her daughter Maṇimekhalai to the Bhikkhu Aravaṇa Aḍigal who consoled her in her grief by preaching the Dhamma, and both mother and daughter became Buddhists. Maṇimekhalai's grandmother tried to persuade both of them to continue their profession as dancers, and Prince Udaya too made advances to Maṇimekhalai. But this was of no avail. Sensual pleasures had no appeal for her, and her mind being firmly set upon the religious life she became a Buddhist nun. The prince visited her several times and tried to persuade her to revert to the lay life. On a pilgrimage to Sri Lanka, Maṇimekhalai worshipped at the Nāgadīpa shrine on an island off the northern coast of Sri Lanka. There she worshipped the Buddha's footprint, and while at the shrine, saw a vision of her previous birth wherein the prince had been her husband. A deity at the shrine gave her a miraculous bowl from which she could feed any number of people without the supply of food becoming exhausted. When she returned to Kāveripaṭṭanam she gave alms daily to the poor in a public hall. The king of Coḷa was pleased

with her good work and gave her permission to ask for a boon. She asked that the royal prison be converted to an alms-hall, and this was done.

A woman named Kāyacaṇḍikā left her husband and came to Kāveripaṭṭanam where she lived on alms along with other beggars fed by Maṇimekhalai. She was beautiful and resembled Maṇimekhalai in some ways. Her husband too arrived at Kāveripaṭṭaṇam in search of her. He saw the Prince Udaya speaking to Maṇimekhalai in the alms-hall. During this conversation Maṇimekhalai spoke of the transient and worthless nature of the human body, and urged the prince to renounce his passion for her.

Kāyacaṇḍikā's husband mistook Maṇimekhalai for his wife. He thought a young man was paying amorous attention to his wife. He hid in the alms-hall and when a suitable occasion came he attacked the prince and struck him with a sword, killing him on the spot, not knowing his true identity. This incident became known to the public and religious men residing at the alms hall reported it to the king. The king ascertained the facts and saw to it that Maṇimekhalai was given protection from men who might try to avenge the death of the Prince on her. The queen managed to get Maṇimekhalai imprisoned on a false charge. Later, when the facts of the case were known, the Queen relented; she freed Maṇimekhalai and begged her pardon.

Maṇimekhalai, finding that she was not safe in the city, went on a pilgrimage to Java. Returning from there, she

arrived at Kāñchi, where she studied various religions under several teachers. Finally, she returned to Kāñchi where the Buddhist teacher Aravaṇa Aḍigal lived. She pursued further studies in Buddhism and lived the holy life of a Buddhist nun to the end of her days. She lived in the 2nd century A.C.

4. Sīthalai Sāttanār

He was the author of the Tamil epic *Maṇimekhalai*. A Buddhist poet of the Sangam period, he was a master in the exposition of the Dhamma. The three Sangams were convocations held under royal patronage of the Tamil kings of Coḷa, Cera, and Pāṇḍya. These convocations were organised on the lines of the Buddhist Councils. Sāttanār is called a Sangam poet because he took part in one of those convocations. The full name of the author of *Maṇimekhalai* was Madhurai Kūlavāṇikan Sīthalai Sāttanār. Madhurai refers to his native city, Madhurā. Kūlavāṇikan indicates his profession as that of a grain merchant. Sīthalai means 'from whose (fore-) head pus flowed.' It is told that when he found mistakes in the works of contemporary poets scrutinized by him, he used to strike his forehead with his iron style and this caused frequent wounds which suppurated. Sāttanār was his personal name, often abbreviated to Sāttan. He was not only a first class poet and an eminent literary critic, but also an able exponent of the

Buddhist doctrine.

Well versed in religion, logic and philosophy, he showed the superiority of Buddhism, evaluating it against the background of contemporary religious thought. He was held in honour by Ilango Aḍigal, the distinguished author of the Tamil classic *Sīlappadhikāram*. His classic *Maṇimekhalai* is a lasting monument to his scholarship, encyclopaedic knowledge, and excellence as a Tamil poet. From chapter 27 of the *Maṇimekhalai* one can see his proficiency in the six systems of Hindu philosophy. There were several other poems by him, verses from which are found in poems such as *Nattriṇai, Kurunthokai Puranāṇūru* and *Ahanāṇūru*. The aim of writing the *Maṇimekhalai* was the propagation of the Buddha Dharma. It is seen that *Maṇimekhalai* was written after the Tirukkural was composed, because there are two verses from the Tirukkural quoted in *Maṇimekhalai*. Therefore it can be assumed that Sāttanār lived in the latter half of the 2nd century.

5. The Coḷian Bhikkhu Saṅghamitta

Well known to all students of Sri Lankan history, he was a Mahāyānist Bhikkhu who caused a great upheaval there in the 3rd century. He was a Tamil who hailed from Coḷa. King Gotābhaya (253–266 A.C.) expelled 60 Bhikkhus from Sri Lanka for being incorrigible heretics. They went to South

India and lived in the Coḷa country. Saṅghamitta met them and made up his mind to avenge his brethren of the Mahāyāna sect. He came to Sri Lanka and started to propagate the Mahāyāna faith. The Bhikkhus of the Mahāvihāra, the sect of orthodox Theravāda, reported him to the king. The king asked them to debate with Saṅghamitta in his presence and promised to support the victorious party. The Mahāvihāra Bhikkhus were led by the Elder Saṅghapāla, an uncle of the king. Saṅghamitta triumphed in this debate and the king kept his promise. The king entrusted the teaching of his two sons to this teacher, who found the younger and more able prince receptive to his influence. The elder prince disliked his teacher.

When the elder prince Jeṭṭhatissa became king, Saṅghamitta left the island as he felt that he was not safe. Ten years later, when the king died and his younger brother ascended the throne, Saṅghamitta returned and he himself crowned Mahāsena as king of Sri Lanka.

Now Saṅghamitta planned to destroy the Mahāvihāra, the seat of Theravāda Buddhism. He told the king that the Mahāvihāra monks were not following the true teachings of the Buddha, and got the king to forbid his subjects to support them. The monks of the Mahāvihāra finding that the people did not support them with their daily necessities of life, left the capital, Anurādhapura, and went to the southern part of Sri Lanka. Saṅghamitta now pointed out that property without an owner belonged to the state and the king handed over the monastery to Saṅghamitta. He had

the great monastery demolished, and made use of all the articles that were in it to build up the Abhayagiri Vihāra, the centre of the Mahāyānist teachings.

The queen was grieved to see the ancient religion of Sri Lanka, the pristine doctrines of the Buddha, ruined by this monk from South India. She had him and his collaborator, the minister Sona, assassinated. Thus ended Saṅghamitta's scheme to convert Sri Lanka to the Mahāyāna doctrine. There is no report that he had written any book.

6. Nāgaguttanār

He was the author of the Buddhist poem *Kuṇḍalakesī*. We know him as its author, because in the commentary to Nīlakesī a verse is quoted from the *Kuṇḍalakesī*, and it is followed with the remark, 'this is a verse from Nāgaguttanār.' Yet according to the Pali commentary called Vimativinodanī, the author of *Kuṇḍalakesī* is called Nāgasena. It is possible that this name was converted into Nāgaguttanār by Tamil writers. No further details about this poet are available. As the Nīlakesī was written early in the 10th century, we have to conclude that *Kuṇḍalakesī* was written prior to this.

7. Commentator Ācariya Buddhadatta

Ācariya Buddhadatta, held in profound veneration by Buddhists as a commentator of the Buddha-word, was a Tamil from South India. He lived in the famous South Indian Buddhist cities, Kāveripaṭṭanam, Uragapura, Bhūtamaṅgalam, Kāñchi and also at the Mahāvihāra Monastery, Anurādhapura, Sri Lanka. The commentary called Madhurattha Vilāsinī was written when he resided in a monastery built by a Buddhist minister named Krishnadāsa, at Kāveripaṭṭanam. Madhuratthavilāsinī is a Pali commentary to the Buddhavmsa of the Sutta Piṭaka. He wrote the renowned treatise on Abhidhamma, Abhidhammāvatāra, at the invitation of a Bhikkhu named Sumati. He is also the author of the Pali work on the Vinaya called *Vinayavinicchaya*. It is mentioned in the book that this was written in the reign of the Coḷian king, Acyutavikrama. While residing in Anurādhapura, Sri Lanka, he wrote the *Uttaravinicchaya*. The Pali poem of adoration to the Buddha *Jinālaṅkāra Kāvya* is another of his excellent literary works.

In this work he describes his native Coḷa country and its cities such as Kāveripaṭṭanam and Bhūtamaṅgalam in mellifluous verses. He was a senior contemporary of the great commentator Buddhaghosa, who has paid a glowing tribute to him in one of his works. ‘After his (Buddhadatta’s) demise even men like me are considered scholars,’ says Ācariya Buddhaghosa. Ācariya Buddhadatta is second only to the great Buddhaghosa in erudition, scholarship, and ability as a commentator to the Buddha-word. He lived in the 5th century.

8. The Mahā Thera Buddhamitra

He lived in South India in the 5th century. He should not be confused with the Bhikkhu Buddhamitra, the author of *Vīrasoliyam,* the Tamil grammar. This Mahā Thera resided at Mayūrapaṭṭanam (the present Māyāvaram). At that time the celebrated commentator Buddhaghosa was his guest. Papañcasūdani, the commentary to the Majjhima Nikāya, was written at his invitation. In the conclusion to the Papañcasūdani, Ācariya Buddhaghosa says:

> *Āyācito sumantinā therena bhadanta buddhamittena pubbe mayūrarūpapaṭṭanamhi saddhiṃ vasante.*
>
> 'When I was formerly living at Mayūrapaṭṭaṇam, with the Thera Buddhamitta, I was invited to write this.'

9. Bodhidharma

He was formerly a prince hailing from a royal South Indian family. A Mahāyānist Buddhist teacher named Prajñottara won him over to the Mahāyāna faith and ordained him as a monk. During his youth he worked for the propagation of his faith in South India. Towards the latter part of his life he left for China as a Buddhist missionary. At Canton he met the Emperor Wu-ti, but failed to impress him. Thereupon he

went to the North of China and founded the Dhyāna school of Buddhism (Chinese: Ch'an; Japanese: Zen). He lived there till he passed away. He deprecated the making of offerings to the Buddha; it was purity of the mind and enlightenment that he stressed.

10. Ācāriya Dignāga

Hiuen Tsang in his Records of the Western World gives an account of this teacher. He was a native of Sīyamangalam which is situated to the south of Kāñchi. He studied comparative religion and philosophy and became a monk of Vātsīputrīya Nikāya. Later he went to North India and became a Mahāyānist under the influence of Vasubandhu. At Nālandā he defeated non-Buddhists in a debate, and won the admiration of the monks of the university. A philosopher and a debater of great repute, he toured India, lecturing and debating. Finally he settled down at Kāñchi. He is the founder of the Viññāṇavāda school of Buddhist philosophy. Among his pupils was the vice-chancellor of the Nālandā University, Dharmapāla Mahā Thera. His numerous works include the *Nyāyapravesa* (Introduction to Logic) and *Nyāyasamucchaya* (*Compendium of Logic*), two Sanskrit books. There is no mention of any books in Tamil by him. He lived between 345–425 A.C.

11. Vice-Chancellor Dharmapāla of Nālandā

He should be differentiated from the commentator Dhammapāla, who lived at Badaratīrtha and was a master of the Theravāda. The Thera Dhammapāla of Nālandā on the other hand was a distinguished exponent of the Mahāyāna doctrines. He was the third son of a Tamil king who ruled at Kāñchi. Although his father arranged to have him married, he secretly went to a Buddhist teacher and entered the Order. He travelled in India and abroad and acquired a great store of knowledge. He excelled in all arts and sciences.

Whilst on a lecture tour he arrived at Kosambī. There Buddhists were locked in a great controversy with their opponents and were faring badly. Coming to the rescue of the Buddhists he displayed his brilliant oratory and encyclopaedic knowledge, tearing to shreds the arguments of his Hindu opponents. By this victory he won over the king, who was on the spot with a large number of distinguished visitors. The Elder's fame spread far and wide and he was offered the vice-chancellorship of Nālandā University, a position reserved for India's foremost Buddhist scholar.

His pupil was Sīlabhadra himself, a versatile scholar under whom Hiuen Tsang studied Sanskrit when he was at

Nālandā. Sīlabhadra succeeded his teacher.

The vice chancellor died young at the age of 32. It is a great mistake that some scholars have made trying to identify Aravaṇa Aḍigal, mentioned in *Maṇimekhalai*, with, the vice chancellor Dharmapāla.

12. Badaratīrtha Dhammapāla

He is the Ācariya Dhammapāla mentioned in Pali literature as a great commentator. A native of South India, he lived in the city of Tañjā where the river Tāmraparṇi flows. This is identified with Tanjore of the Coḷa country. Other scholars are of the opinion that Ācariya Dhammapāla was a native of a town by the name of Tanjavur in the Pāṇḍyan country. It is also evident from the Nettippakaraṇa commentary compiled by him that he also lived at Badaratīrtha Vihāra at Nāgapaṭṭanam. He went to Sri Lanka and resided at the Mahāvihāra, Anurādhapura. During this time the commentaries on the Thera- and Therīgāthā, Udāna, Itivuttaka, Peta Vatthu, Vimānavatthu, Cariyā piṭaka and the Nettippakaraṇa were written. All these commentaries are named Paramattha Dīpanī. He also wrote a voluminous sub-commentary to the *Visuddhimagga,* called *Paramatthamañjūsā.* He lived somewhere about 796 A.C. In the Nettippakaraṇa commentary he says:

‘Saddhammotaraṇṇaṭhāne

Paṭṭane nāga savhaya
Dhammāsoka Mahārāja
Vihāre vasatā mayā.

> ‘(I wrote this commentary) while I was residing at the monastery built by King Asoka at Nāgapaṭṭanam, which is like unto a port for embarking on the ocean of the Dharma.’

The Sāsanavaṃsa refers to him as follows:

> ‘Ācariya Dhammapāla, who compiled a number of commentaries such as the one on the Itivuttaka, was a resident of the Badaratittha Vihāra in the Tamil country. Hence he may be considered as a Sinhalese Bhikkhu. Further he is the author of the sub-commentaries on the Visuddhimagga, Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya and the Samyutta Nikāya.’

13. The Theras Buddhanandi and Sāriputra

These two Elders are reported to have lived at Bodhimangai in the Coḷa country. We have an account of them in the Periyapurāṇnam, a Shaivaite work which records a debate between Buddhists and Shaivaites. During this time the Shaivaite teacher Tirujñāṇasambandhar went round the city

which was a stronghold of Buddhism He rode in procession raising triumphal cries, blowing conch shells and trumpets. The Buddhists of Bodhimangai told him, 'You cannot thus go in triumphal procession through our city! Come let us debate on religion.' Tirujñāṇasambandhar accepted the challenge. The Buddhists retained the Elder Buddhanandi as their spokesman. Tirujñāṇasambandhar's assistant, by exercising his magical powers through a mantram, caused a thunderbolt from heaven to strike the Elder down. The Buddhists persisted, saying 'Do not come to display magical powers, come to debate on doctrinal matters.' Tirujñāṇasambandhar is said to have defeated Buddhanandi Thera. No further details of these two Elders are available. Tirujñāṇasambandhar lived in the 7th century A.C.

14. Vajrabodhi

He was a native of Podiyakanda in the Pāṇḍya country. His father was a royal chaplain. He went to Nālandā in North India for his studies and returned when he was 26 years old. At that time his country was in the grip of a severe drought and the king Narasinhapothavarman appealed to Vajrabodhi for help. He was able to cause rain to fall by the exercise of his occult powers. Vajrabodhi was a Mahāyānist Bhikkhu adhering to the Vajrayāna faction. He visited Sri Lanka and resided there for six months at the Abhayagiri Vihāra. During this time he attempted to spread

Mahāyānism in Sri Lanka, but returned soon to his native land. From there he went to China with his pupil, Amoghavajra, and did missionary work there. He passed away in the year 730 A.C. In accordance with his wishes his pupil returned to Sri Lanka and India to propagate the Vajrayāna doctrines. He is said to have been received with honour by Sīlamegha, King of Sri Lanka.

15. Buddhamitra

Apart from his name the concluding verses to his Tamil grammar *Vīrasoliyam* reveal his deep faith in Buddhism. He was the local ruler in a province of South India. His book was named after Vīracola alias Vīrarajendra, the Coḷa king, who invited him to write his work. This king ruled from 1063 to 1070. The inscriptions of the time eulogise him very highly. So does Buddhamitra who calls him 'the ruler who subdued the whole earth.' Both Buddhamitra and his royal patron lived in the 11th century. Buddhamitra was a Mahāyānist Bhikkhu. He should not be confused with another Theravāda Bhikkhu of the same name, with whom Ācariya Buddhaghosa resided when he wrote the Papañcasūdanī. The paraphrase to Buddhamitra's *Vīrasoliyam* was written by his pupil Perumdevanār. He too was a devoted Buddhist.

16. Dīpaṅkara Buddhappiya Thera

In Sri Lanka he is known as the Coḷian Buddhappiya Thera, or Coḷian Dīpaṅkara. He is the author of the Pali grammar, *Rūpasiddhi*, used in monastic colleges even today. This is a very popular book written on the lines of Kaccāyana's grammar. His book of the Pali verses in praise of the Buddha is called *Pajjamadhu* (*Nectar of Verses*). It is a standing monument to his excellence as a poet and his deep love for the Buddha. In Sri Lanka he studied Buddhist scriptures under the Venerable Ānanda Vanaratana. He returned to Coḷa and lived as the abbot of the Baladitya monastery.

In the concluding stanzas to his *Rūpasiddhi* he mentions that he was born in Coḷa and resided for some time in Sri Lanka. He was a master of Pali literature and grammar While he sojourned in the island, 'he was like unto a banner hoisted over Sri Lanka.' He lived in the 12th century.

17. Coḷa Kassapa Thera

He was a master of the Tipiṭaka and the Pali language. Among his works are the commentary on the Abhidhamma, works called *Mohavicchedanī*, the commentary to the Vinaya Piṭaka, Vimativinodanī, and the Anāgatavaṃsa. In the

Sāsanavaṃsa (*History of Buddhism*), and a Burmese Pali work called the *Ganthavamsa*, it is mentioned that he was a Tamil from Coḷa. In the concluding stanzas to *Mohavicchedanī* he mentions that he was a resident of a monastery called Nāgana in Nāgapaṭṭanam of the Coḷa country.

18. Anuruddha Thera

He lived in the 10th or 11th century and his birthplace is said to have been Kāveripaṭṭanam. His most famous work is a manual of Abhidhamma, the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha,* which has served as an introduction to the Abhidhamma philosophy for over eight centuries. It is still very popular e.g., in Burma (Myanmar) and Sri Lanka. Throughout the centuries, many commentaries have been written on it and in our times it has been translated into Western languages. Another two treatises on the Abhidhamma, written in verse, have been attributed to Anuruddha Thera, *Paramattha-vinicchaya* and *Nāmarūpapariccheda;* but his authorship of these two is doubted by some scholars, as also that of the Anuruddha-śataka.

19. Dhammakitti Thera

He was a Coḷian Bhikkhu of the 13th century who came

from South India to Sri Lanka. He wrote the first part of the *Cullavaṃsa*, which is a continuation of the Mahāvaṃsa, the famous chronicle of Sri Lanka. His addition to it extended from King Sirimevan up to his own time. Also a *Chronicle of the Tooth Relic* (*Dāṭhāvamsa*) has been ascribed to him.

Further, we could infer from historical information that a large number of learned Buddhist monks and laymen lived in the various cities and villages of South India. Most of the books they wrote, except two, have perished. From the list of names of the Buddhist villages and hamlets, from the names of Buddhist monks and laymen still available, from the large number of Buddhist ruins still surviving, we can draw the inference that Buddhism once flourished in South India from the 3rd to the 13th century of the Christian era.

From the history of Sri Lanka we can get further information about the state of Buddhism in South India in the 14th and 15th centuries. King Pandit Parākramabāhu early in the 14th century got down a learned Bhikkhu who was a linguist, to help in the translation of the Jātaka book to Sinhala. A minister of King Bhuvanekabāhu IV of Gampola, named Senādhilaṅkāra, caused a Buddhist monastery to be built at Kāñchipura. This is evidence of Buddhism in South India even at this late stage. From these facts we can conclude that right up to the coming of the Europeans Buddhism existed in South India.

Though Buddhism in India had to yield to Hinduism, yet the period when Buddhism flourished was one of which the

Tamil nation can rightly be proud in view of its outstanding contribution to Buddhist literature in Tamil, Pali and Sanskrit. Now, after the time of religious rivalries is passed, this period may well be remembered as a strong bond between the Tamil nation and the Buddhist countries.

Appendix — Extracts from the Maṇimekhalai

Translated by

Rao Bahadur Krishnaswāmi Aiyangar

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(The footnotes have been added by the Editor of The Wheel Series.)

Modern inter-religious conferences seem to have had a precursor at the time when the *Maṇimekhalai* was composed. Book I contains the royal announcement of the annual Indra Festival, celebrated at Puhār (Kāveripaṭṭanam), in which we read:

> "Let those well-versed in the holy teachings take their place under awnings or in canopied halls. Let

those well versed in various religions assemble in the halls of learning set apart for discussion. Give up feeling of enmity even to those who are inimical to you." (Book I. Transl. p. 115)

From Book V

The hermit Saṅghadharma taught her (i.e. Maṇimekhalai's friend, Sutamatī) the teaching of the Buddha:

> "My king possessed of all good qualities by nature, the embodiment of all good qualities without diminution, having learned by experience various kinds of life in this world, took it upon himself to use his life not for the attainment of his own salvation, but for the exercise of kindness to living beings, in order that the whole mass of living beings might attain to that salvation. Thus turning the wheel of the law he conquered desire." (p. 123).

… Just then appeared, in the guise of a lady of the city, the goddess Maṇimekhalai, with a view to witnessing the celebration of the great festival just then taking place in the city. She went round the pavilion containing the seat of the Buddha, reciting the following laudation:

> "Shall I describe you as the knowing One, the pure One of good deeds, the ancient One, the exalted One,

who knew how to lead life in this world? Shall I describe you as the One who got beyond the reach of love, who was the sure guardian of all, as the One who destroyed the enemy, evil conduct? How shall I describe the feet of him who set the wheel of thousand spokes in motion, without a thousand tongues to describe with." [4] (p. 124)

Book VI relates that for protecting young Maṇimekhalai from Prince Udyakumāra, who was in search of her, the goddess Maṇimekhalai put her to sleep by a charm and 'carried her through the air thirty yojanas south', to an island called Maṇipallavam, which has been identified with the island Nāgadipa, off the coast of Sri Lanka. The story continues: … Maṇimekhalai woke up from her sleep on the sandy beach of Maṇipallavam. Looking round she found nothing that was familiar to her and felt herself as strangely placed as a soul in a new birth… She wandered about till she came to what seemed to be a seat of the Buddha. The seat had been placed there by Indra and had the miraculous power to let those who worshipped it know their previous life, as Buddha himself had delivered a sermon sitting on it. This happened on the occasion when two neighbouring Nāga chiefs, related to each other, fought for possession of it. As the war proved destructive, Buddha appeared before them and pacified the combatants by preaching a sermon. (Book VIII, p. 131–132).

At sight of this, Maṇimekhalai forgot herself in wonder. Her

hands automatically folded over her head, from her eyes flowed tears of joy; she 'circumambulated' the divine seat three times and prostrated before it. Getting up, she looked at the seat again, and began to recollect all that had taken place in her previous existence. (Book IX, p. 132).

Maṇimekhalai walked about admiring the beauty of the sand dunes, flower gardens and cool tanks. In a short while there appeared before her a lady who addressed her: 'Who are you that have arrived here alone like a woman who had suffered shipwreck?' (After replying to her), Maṇimekhalai wished to know who the other lady was. The lady said that in the neighbourhood of that island was another called Ratnadvīpa (The Island of Jewels). 'There on a high peak of the hill Samantakūṭa [5] there are the footprints of the Buddha. Having offered worship at the footprints, I came to this island long ago. Since then I have remained here keeping guard over this 'Dharma-seat' under the orders of Indra. My name is Tiva-Tilakai (Dvīpa Tilakā). People following the Dharma of the Buddha strictly, offering worship to this 'Buddha seat' will gain knowledge of their previous birth, knowing their past as a result of this worship. It is only those few who are fit to acquire Dharmapada forsooth. Since by such worship you have acquired knowledge of your previous birth, you must be such a great one. In front of this seat there is a little pond full of cool water overgrown with all varieties of water-lily. From that will appear a never-failing begging bowl by name Amuda-Surabi (Amṛta Surabhi). The bowl appears every

year of the day (of full moon) in the season of the early sun, in the month of Rshabha, in the fourteenth asterism, the day on which the Buddha himself was born. That day this year is today and the hour is just now. That Bowl, I ween, will come into your hand. Food put into it will be inexhaustible. You will learn about it from Aravaṇa Aḍigal who lives in your own native city."

Maṇimekhalai, on hearing this, making her obeisance to the 'Buddha seat' went along with Tiva-Tilakai, circumambulating the pond and stood in front of it. The bowl emerged from the water, and turning round to the right reached the hands of Maṇimekhalai. She felt delighted beyond measure and uttered the following chant in praise of the Buddha:

'Hail! holy feet of the Hero that subdued Māra!

Hail! holy feet of Him, who destroyed the evil path!

Hail! holy feet of the Great one! Labouring to set others in the path of Dhamma!

Hail! holy feet of the Perfectly Wise, who gives to others the eye of wisdom!

Hail! holy feet of Him, whose ears are deaf to evil words!

Hail! holy feet of him, whose tongue never uttered other than truth!

Hail! holy feet of him, who visited hell itself to destroy

suffering there!

Hail! holy feet of him, that destroyed the sorrows of those of the Nāga world!

To praise you is beyond the power of my tongue; to bow at your feet is alone possible for my body.'

To Maṇimekhalai in this attitude of prayer, Tiva-Tilakai expounded the sufferings of hunger and the merit accruing to those that enable creatures to appease hunger. 'Hunger', she told Maṇimekhalai, 'will destroy good birth, will kill nobility, will cut off the hold that learning has upon the learned people as the great support of life will deprive people of all feeling of shame, will spoil qualities that are beautiful, will make people stand at the door of others with their wives. Such indeed is the nature of the sinful craving hunger.

'Food provided to allay the hunger of those that cannot otherwise satisfy it, is true charity, and all right kind of life in this world comes to such people. Among those that live in this world, those that give food are those that give life. Therefore to those that are hungry give that which will destroy hunger.' (Book XI, p. 137).

Book XXX

Maṇimekhalai, who had already learned all that had happened in her previous birth, after having taken upon herself the duty of giving gifts (dāna) and walking the path of right conduct (sīla), worshipped three times the triple jewel of Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha, placing herself entirely under its protection, and then saluted the Bhikkhu Aravaṇa Aḍigal. The Bhikkhu, in expounding to her the righteous path of the Dharma, said:

> "At that time when the world was full of beings poor in understanding, the Buddha, at the earnest entreaty of all the celestial beings of Tusitaloka, appeared on earth leaving that heaven of joy empty. Then, seated at the foot of the Bodhi tree, he conquered the enemy Māra and became the victor (jina). The good teaching of the Four Truths which the beautiful victor imparted after having pulled out by the roots the three faults, [6] were taught with ineffable beneficence in the pact by innumerable other Buddhas. These Truths provide the means of crossing the ocean of existence by destroying the twelve primal causes (nidānas). [7] These latter appear one from the other in order as cause and effect, and being capable of reappearance, (each link) as consequent upon that which is before it, assume the form of a never-ending circle. When in this order of cause and consequence the first ceases to exist, the next follows in cessation; when it comes into existence, that which follows it does so inevitably. So these are properly

described as a chain of causes and conditions. Thus arranged these twelve primal causes fall into four divisions, [8] showing three links. [9] Appearance in birth or rebirth is of three kinds (human, heavenly or of the nether world), and is of three divisions, past, present and future. [10] These also produce the faults, deeds and there consequences, [11] and are impermanent and cause only sorrow. He who gets to understand this character of these primal causes, he knows what will assure him the permanence of release (Nirvāna).

Further it becomes the means for the cultivation of the Four Truths [12] and is constituted of the five skhandhas. It is capable of being argued in the six forms beginning with the 'assertion of truth.' [13] It results in the four forms of excellence. It is open to question in four ways and being capable of respective answers in four ways similarly. It is without origin and without end. It is a series of continuous becoming without ever reaching final destruction. It neither does nor can it be described as being done. It is neither self nor is it possessed by another self. It is nothing that is gone, nothing that is to come. It cannot be brought to an end nor is it to end itself. It is itself the result of the deed, birth and cessation. Such is the nature of the twelve causes and conditions beginning with ignorance and called the primal causes. These twelve are:

- Ignorance (*pedamai*, Sanskrit: *avidyā*),

- Action (*seykai*, Sanskrit: *karma*),
- Consciousness (*uṇarvu*, Sanskrit: *vijñāṇa*),
- Name and form (*aru-uru*, Sanskrit: *nāmarūpa*),
- Six organs of sense (*vāyil*, Sanskrit: *saḍāyatana*,)
- Contact (*uru*, Sanskrit: *sparṣa*),
- Sensation (*nuharvu*, Sanskrit: *vedanā*),
- Thirst or craving (*vetkai*, Sanskrit: *tṛṣṇā*),
- Attachment (*parru*, Sanskrit: *upādāna*),
- Becoming or existence (*pavam*, Sanskrit: *bhava*),
- Birth (*torram*, Sanskrit: *jāti*),
- The result of action, old age and death (*vinayppayan*, Sanskrit: *jarā-maraṇa*).

  If people understand the twelvefold nature of the chain of cause and effect, they then understand the supreme truth and will enjoy permanent bliss. If they do not, they are bound to suffer in the depths of hell.

(1) Ignorance consists in not understanding what was explained above, in being liable to delusion and in believing in what one hears to the neglect of that which one is able to see for oneself, as believing in the existence of the horns of a rabbit because someone else says that they do exist.

(2) In the three worlds, life is illimitable, and living beings in them are of six classes. They are men, gods, Brahmas, the

inhabitants of hell, the crowd of animals and spirits. According to good deeds and bad, birth will take place in one or other of these. Ever since it assumes the form of embryo, the results of these deeds will show themselves either in the happiness of mind or in anxiety of suffering. Of these evil deeds, killing, theft and illicit sexual behaviour show themselves as evils springing up in the body. Lying, speaking ill of others, harsh words and useless talk, these four show themselves as evils of speech. Desire, anger and illusion are three evils that arise in the mind. [14] These ten the wise would avoid. If they should fail to do so, they would be born as animals or spirits or beings of the nether world, and make themselves liable to extreme anxiety of and suffering. Good men, on the contrary, would avoid these ten, and assuming the good discipline (sīla) and taking upon themselves to do deeds of charity (dāna), will be born in the three higher classes of beings, such as devās (gods), men or brahmas, and live a life of enjoyment and happiness as a result of good deeds.

(3) Consciousness (*uṇarvu*) consists in feeling like one asleep, without the feeling leading to any action, or to any satisfaction. [15]

(4) Name and form consist in that which has the feeling described above, and constituting mind and body.

(5) Organs of sense are, on examination, those that carry consciousness to the mind (*vijnāña* or *ullam*).

(6) Contact consists in *vijnāña* and the organs of sense

experiencing touch with other things (*veru pulangal*).

(7) Sensation (*nuharvu*) consists in the mind or vijnāña enjoying that of which it has become conscious.

(8) Thirst or craving consists in not feeling satisfied with that which is thus enjoyed.

(9) Attachment consists in the desire for enjoyment impelling one into action.

(10) Becoming consists in the accumulation of deeds indicating the consequence to which each leads. [16]

(11) Birth (*tonral*) consists in the result of deeds leading to the conscious taking of birth in one or other of the six forms of birth in the inevitable chain of cause and effect.

(12) Disease (*piṇi*) consists in the suffering of the body by a change from its natural condition in consequence of the result of deeds. Old age (*mūppu*) consists in the loosening of the body as one draws nearer and nearer to the end. Death (*sākkāḍu*) ultimately consists in the human body, composed of life and body, disappearing as the setting sun.

From ignorance arises action; from action springs consciousness; from consciousness come name and form; [17] from name and form spring the organs of sense; through organs of sense contact becomes possible; contact results in sensation or experience; experience produces desire; from desire springs attachment; from attachment comes into existence collection of deeds; as the result of this collective deed arise various other forms of birth; birth inevitably

brings along with it age, disease and death, and the consequent anxiety and the feeling of incapacity to get rid of it. This never-ending suffering is the ultimate result.

In such a never-ending circle of experience, when ignorance ceases, action will cease; with action consciousness will cease; with consciousness name and form (mind and body) will cease; with the cessation of name and form, organs of sense will cease; with the cessation of the organs of sense, contact will cease; contact ceasing, sensation or experience will cease; with sensation or experience ceasing, desire will cease; desire ceasing to exist, there will be no attachment; without attachment, there is no accumulation of deeds; without the accumulated mass of deeds, there will be no becoming; with the cessation of becoming, there will be no birth, no disease, no age, no death, and in consequence, no anxiety and no helplessness. Thus this never-ending series of suffering will be destroyed.

Of these twelve primal causes, the first two, ignorance and action, are regarded as belonging to the first section. All those that follow, spring from these two. The following five, namely, name and form, organs of sense, contact experience, these five, as springing from the former two, are regarded as constituting the second division. Thirst, attachment and the collection of deeds constitute the third division as the result, as evil in the enjoyment of the previous five, and in consequence, as action resulting therefrom. It is from the folly of desire and consequent attachment that becoming arises. The fourth division includes birth, disease, age and

death, since these four are experienced as a result of birth. [18]

Action is the cause of birth and consciousness springs out of it, where these two meet they mark the first conjunction. Where sensation and craving meet, it marks the second conjunction. The third junction comes in where the accumulation of deeds results in birth. Thus are marked the three points of junction in this chain of twelve causes and conditions.

The three forms of birth are those of men, gods and animals. These result from the consciousness in previous births as a result of the conformations springing out of ignorance. This happens either from the delusion that this kind of birth is actually cessation of birth or the taking of birth in a new form without the consciousness, or the new birth coming with consciousness and the new form existing together. The three times are the past, present and future. Of these, the past includes ignorance and action. To the present refer consciousness, name and form, the organs of sense, contact, sensation, thirst (or craving), the becoming and birth. To the future belong birth, disease, age and death. The resulting anxiety and helplessness are evils that spring out of the previous series of present action.

Desire, attachment and ignorance, and the birth resulting therefrom, constitute action in the present and cause future birth. Consciousness, name and form, organs of sense, contact, sensation (or experience), birth, age, disease and death, are the consequential experience in life, both present

and future. These are full of evil, of deeds, and of consequences resulting from these deeds, and thus constitute suffering. Being such, they are all impermanent. While the nature of release (vīḍu), consists in the understanding that there is nothing like a soul in anything existing.

Consciousness, name and form, the organs of sense, contact, sensation, birth, disease, age, death, with the resulting anxiety and helplessness, these constitute disease. For this disease, the causes are ignorance, action, desire, attachment and the collection of deeds. For suffering and birth, attachment is the cause; for bliss and cessation of birth, non-attachment is the cause. Words that embody this idea constitute the Four Truths, namely, suffering, the cause of suffering, the removal of suffering and the way to the removal of suffering.

There are four kind of questions and answers:

(1) To give a definite reply; (2) To separate the component parts of an issue and answer these separately; (3) To answer by a counter question, and (4) To keep silence in answer to a question. [19]

To a question whether a thing that comes into existence will also go out of existence, if the answer is 'it will', this is to give a definite reply.

To a question whether a dead man will be born again or not, the inquiry whether in life he was without attachment or not, is to answer by separating the issues involved and to

give separate answers to it.

To a question whether it is the seed that is first or the palm-tree, the enquiry which seed and which particular tree, is answer by a counter question.

To a question whether 'the sky flower' is new or old, silence is the best answer; this is one way of getting round an inconvenient question.

Bondage and release result from the *skandhas* (the aggregates of experience). There is no agent outside entitled to bring them into contact. For the skandhas and their manifestations as described above, the cause is the group of three evils: desire, anger and illusion.

Examine separately and understand that everything is impermanent, full of suffering, without a soul and unclean; thus treating it, give up desire! Realizing that friendliness, compassion and joy (at the well-being of others) constitute the best attitude of mind, give up anger! By the practice of hearing, (*sruti*), contemplation (*cintana*), experiencing in mind (*bhāvanā*) and realizing in vision (*darsana*), reflect, realize and give up all illusion! In these four ways get rid of the darkness of mind!"

In these auspicious words, free from inconsistency, (*Aravaṇa Aḍigal*) exhibited the illuminating lamp of the knowledge. Maṇimekhalai, having assumed the habit of an ascetic (*tāpasī*) and having heard the excellent exposition of the Dharma, devoted herself to penance [20] that she may get rid of the bondage of birth."

Notes

1. The *Sangam* was a convocation of Tamil poets and literary critics to whom poetic works were submitted for their approval or otherwise.
2. See Appendix.
3. Translated by Rāmachandra Dikshitar. Oxford Union Press, 1939.
4. An alternative rendering of this passage:

> "O Lord! You are the Wise, the Pure, Pious and the Ancient, above all others in austerity.
>
> O Lord! You destroyed the evils and discarded anger: you are the Omniscient.
>
> O Lord! You conquered Māra; you are the blissful and you condemned the unholy and false ways.
>
> O Lord! Your feet are marked with thousand-spoked wheels.
>
> You do not have thousand tongues
> How shall I praise thee?"
>
> From *The Story of Buddhism with Special Reference to South India,* published by the

Department of Information and Publicity, Government of Madras, 1960.

5. This refers to the Sri Pāda peak ("Adam's Peak") in Sri Lanka.

6. The three roots of evil (*akusala-mala*): greed, hate, and delusion.

7. The twelve primal causes which make up the links of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).

8. The four sections (*cattāro saṅghā*), see *Visuddhimagga* (tr. by Ñāṇamoli), Ch X VII, § 290,

9. The three links (*ti-sandhi*). See *Visuddhimagga* XVII, § 289.

10. See *Visuddhimagga* XVII, § 287.

11. See in *Visuddhimagga* XVII, § 298, the threefold round (*ti-vatta*) of defilements (*kilesa*), kammic action (*kamma*) and kamma-result (*vipāka*).

12. See *Visuddhimagga* XVII, § 300.

13. "Six forms," see ib. § 299.

14. These are the 'ten unwholesome courses of action' (*dasa akusala kamma-patha*).

15. This might be a reference to the definition of consciousness, in this context, as rebirth consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*) which is a kind of subliminal consciousness (*bhavaṅga-citta*).

16. This refers to a twofold division of becoming (*bhava*), the kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*) and the rebirth-process (*upapattibhava*).

17. I.e., mind and body.

18. See Vism II, § 290.

19. See *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, Threes, No 68; Fours, No. 42.

20. *Noṭṭā.* Better to be translated as"religious life."

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