

A Research on Mahāyāna Influence on Teravāda Tradition in Anuradhapura Kingdom

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1. Introduction

During the lifetime of the Lord Buddha, there were various divisions in the Buddhist Doctrine. Ideologically different groups were seen in the Buddhist discipline and after the Buddha's parinirvāna this situation gradually escalated in Buddhist Practice. In the first Dharma Council (Sangayanā), the musician Theras worked to maintain pure Buddhism by filing a unified opinion. But the situation changed with the sectarian split in the Second Dharma Council (Sangayanā). There were two major divisions, Theravada and Mahayana, and their sub-divisions also developed over time. Theravada Buddhism came to Sri Lanka after the Third Dharma Council (Sangayanā). A lot of information available in this regard in the history of Buddhism Mahayana Buddhism gradually came to Sri Lanka, in the second part of the Anuradhapura kingdom and it is obvious that, an attempt was made to make Mahāyāna tradition bring in to the platform of governing authority of Buddhist practice. Here it is questioned whether the Mahayānic influence was undermining Theravada during the Anuradhapura period.

2. Study of sources

Literary sources and archeological sources have been used as sources in this study. When considering the literary sources, Deepavaṃsa, Mahavaṃsa, Vansaththappakāsiniī the Mahavaṃsa commentary and Nikāya Sangharaha were used here and Pahiyan's peregrinate report, a foreign source written at this time are mainly considered. Also, this research has been done using the inscriptions containing information about the Mahāyāna influence of the Anuradhapura kingdom and all information has been comparatively used with secondary sources.

3. Research methodology

In order to conduct qualitative-research, mainly primary sources analyzed and information thus collected was analyzed systematically. Based on this overall information a revelation was made regarding the influence of Mahayāna Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the Anuradhapura era and its form was analyzed and the historical background related to the matter was discussed.

Introduction of Mahāyānism to Sri Lanka and its-expansion

Two hundred and thirty-six years after Buddha's Parinirvāna Arhath Mahā Mahinda Thera came to Sri Lanka with a group of Buddhist followers as missionaries of Buddhist establishment to introduce Buddhism which, was organized by the Emperor Ashoka after the third Dhamma council. King Devānampiyatissa, who was the ruler of Sri Lanka at that time, accepted this religion and he himself embraced Buddhism taking actions to consider it as the state religion of Sri Lanka. A unique event that happened there and establishment of an institution called Mahāvihāra was a major incident of the history. Leadership of Mahāvihāra has been prepared in danger in the reign of Valagambāhu because of establishing a new monastery called Abhayagiri. (MAHAWAMSA, 33.81-85)

The disciplinary problem caused by the personal offering of a monastery to Kupikkala Mahatissa Thera, who had helped King Walagambahu when he was in difficult condition which paved the way to separate Buddhist monks into two groups.

The development of Abhayagiri monastery took place along with the Mahavihāra due to king's full support. After that Abhayagiri monastery became a powerful religious institution as powerful as the Mahavihāra. Even though the monks of Abhayagiri worked in the same way as in the early Buddhist period, it does not appear that they held monopolistic ideologies of dhamma or discipline as much as in the Mahavihāra. They gave opportunity to new ideologies. (Buddhadatta, 2014, 230).

It seems that various religious groups in India came to Abhayagiri and lodged there because it provided an opportunity for new ideas. In between, there may have been groups holding Mahayāna views. The day of King Vohārikatissa strong Mahayanic influence was taken place. It is very important here to investigate the information given by the sources of Mahavaṃsa, Deepavaṃsa and Nikaya Sangharaha regarding the issue of the day of King Voharika Tissa.

Analyzing the information shown in these sources, it appears that some kind of foreign connection came to light at that time. The other one was Dammaruchika which was aided by Abhayagiri sector. After that Vaitulyavāda ideas were investigated by the Minister Kapila and king ordered to destroy all of them.

A monk named Usseliatissa lived in Abhayagiri who embraced Vaitulyavāda. It is stated in the Nikaya Sangharaha that a monk named Usseliatissa, along with three hundred other monks, separated from Abhayagiri and went to live in Dakkhinagiri Vihara identified as Sagalikas. Mahayana ideas could not be stopped from spreading from India at that time. Because of that king Gotabhaya had to take actions to depress those ideas in a very repressive manner.

The sources described the form of the Mahayana during the reign of King Gotabhaya by having Abhayagiri as the center. King Mahāsenas time the development of Mahāyana was above board and it paved the way to build another monastery called Jetavana. (Nikaya Sangraha, 1997,15)

King Gotabhaya entrusting the education of his two sons to Sanghamitra shows that the great temple with Theravāda monks was in decline at this time. Because the favors shown by the kings to the great temple in the past are very special, but at this time, it can be concluded that the entrusting of their princes or future kings to Sanghamitra Thera was due to a weakness of the great viharas who acted as pilots of the Buddhism. However, during the reign of King Mahasen, the space was gradually prepared for the restoration of the great temple, and the construction of the Jetavana.

During the reign of King Shilākāla, Mahayāna ideas came back to Sri Lanka. In the twelfth year of his reign, a Mahayanic book called Dharmadhatu was brought to Sri Lanka by a merchant named Purna. King Shilākāla, who lived as a monk in India before came to the power in Sri Lanka, may have studied this dharma. However, a problematic situation has arisen here regarding the giving of a book with Mahayanic ideas to Jetavana by the Abhayagirikans.

At this time, a certain Mahayana tradition known as Vajriyaism came to Sri Lanka. Nila Patadharshanists, who were inclined towards Tantric dharma, wore black robes instead of yellow robes. It is said that instead of the jewels of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, women,

Sura and Kama Deva were also thinned. Information about Sammitiya Nikaya, a Mahayanic sect during the reign of King Kumaradasa, and how the book Nila Pata Darshana was composed, is shown in the Nikaya Sangha. (Nikaya Sangraha, 1997, 23) There is no information about the Mahayanic ideas after King Sena II of the Anuradhapura period with the formation of politically revolutionary atmospheres in India, the source of religious ideologies is not seen. Later, Mahayanic ideas were integrated into Sri Lankan culture and became another aspect of the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition.

4. Conclusion

During the Anuradhapura era, the Theravāda Buddhist foundation had gained prominence in the spiritual and cultural life of that period. But Mahayana Buddhism had also gained acceptance during that time. However, it cannot be directly said that the Mahayanic influence continued to overshadow Theravada. But the entire priority of the Buddhist Sangha in Ceylon was for the propagation and protection of Theravada, and after a period Mahayanic elements may have been incorporated into the Theravada Buddhist base. However, at the end, it can be concluded that although the Mahayanic influence gradually increased, it did not completely subdue Theravāda. Theravāda Buddhism, with patronage and protection, was acting as a major trend in Buddhist life at the time.

5. Keywords

Anuradhapura period, Abhayagiriya, Buddhist culture, Mahayana, Theravada

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