

Buddhism and the Sinhala Writing Tradition

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this Paper is to study the influence of Buddhism on Sinhala language. Sinhala language has a continual history, which dates back to thousands of years. It seems to be a language with written evidences of great history, which dates at least to the 3rd century B.C. Though several evidences could be presented to confirm that there was a writing practice using Sinhala language (*Heḷa Basa*) after the arrival of Prince Vijayain Sri Lanka that tradition developed systematically after the introduction of Buddhism as by Venerable Mahinda in 3rd century B.C. He acquainted a *Brāhmī* alphabet becomingly the *Brāhmī* scripts in Asoka inscriptions to expand the writing methodology in the island. In addition to that he translated Pali commentaries into Sinhala and that literary activity caused to spring a sophisticated Buddhist literature after -wards. The *Brāhmī*alphabet expanded in its evolution of Pali and Sanskrit scripts under the influence of Buddhism in the course of the time. Though Sinhala wordstock is an interesting combination of borrowed words from various languages, it should be mentioned that a considerable amount of Paliand Sanskrit words could be identified in the Sinhala tongue which have entered as homogeneous or derived words under the influence of Theravāda or Mahāyāna Buddhism. A special attention has been given to explore the Sinhala wordstock which has expanded with such kind of words, as a morphological study. There is a developed literary tradition in Sinhala language which possesses written evidence since the third century B.C. Sinhala language together with a Buddhist literary tradition evolved gradually and signs of Diglossia began to emerge in the course of time. While the spoken practice rapidly evolved by contacting with other languages as well as it developed as a living language, however writing on the other hand had barriers. As a result the difference between the writing and speech (colloquial practice) expanded. The Buddhist influence is visible explicitly not only in written Sinhala but also in colloquial Sinhala. The attempt of this article to study this language form nourished by Buddhism comprehensively.

Keywords:- Derivation, Borrowing Homogeneous words., Derived words, Folk Religion, Colloquial Sinhala.

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given to explore the Sinhala wordstock which has expanded with such kind of words, as a morphological study.

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INTRODUCTION

The third Buddhist council headed by Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa was one of the most important events in the history of Buddhism. Its most significant outcome was to bring Theravāda Buddhism to Sri Lanka. This council was convened around 250 BCE by king Asoka, the greatest ruler of India. The third Buddhist council had a vital objective. This was to spread Buddhism beyond India by sending missionary monks to nine different countries. However the most important mission came to the island of Sri Lanka. This mission was led by none other than King Asoka's own son, Venerable Mahinda, who was to convert the king of Sri Lanka and all of his followers and subjects too. Ven. Mahinda before his passing away introduced not only the Buddha's teaching but also writing, new forms of art, architecture and literature to Sri Lanka society.

Ven. Mahinda performed a vital task to introduce a new writing tradition to Sri Lanka. Specially he introduced a Brahmin alphabet to expand the writing methodology. So many evidences can be found out to prove that there was a writing tradition using Sinhala language after arrival of prince Vijaya in Sri Lanka. But it was development systematically after venerable Mahinda's arrival in Sri Lanka. He translated Pali commentaries into Sinhala Commentaries. Ven. Mahinda with mission utilized Sinhala Language to Preach dhamma.

Some devotees who embraced Buddhism restored some caves and they were offered to Buddhist monks. These offerings were written on inscriptions in Sinhala language. This language and shape of letters had very close resemblances with the language in inscriptions of Ashoka. Accordingly Buddhism influenced to the Sinhalese Language from 3rd B.C.E. to present time not only for writing but also speaking. Sinhalese Language has borrowed so many Buddhist words to his word stock (Vocabulary). The Buddhist influence on Sinhala language can be seen in Orthography (letters) Etymology(words) and syntax (Sentences)

APPROACH OF VENERABLE MAHINDA AND SINHALA WRITING TRADITION

Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka by Mahinda and Saṅghamittā, both of whom are believed to be children of Asoka. Not only were the people of Sri Lanka brought under the influence of a new religion, but the mission paved the way for the magnificent achievements of Mauryan civilization to reach the shores of this Island. However as a result of the new religion and civilization Sri Lanka became the spiritual center of Theravāda Buddhism.

A significant outcome of the arrival of ven. Mahinda was to introduce a new writing tradition and a literary tradition. However it should be mentioned that so many evidences can be

found out to prove that there was a writing tradition using Sinhala language after arrival of prince Vijaya in Sri Lanka.

According to Pali chronicles such as the *Mahāvamsa* (great chronicle) the *Dīpavamsa* (History of the island) and Pali commentaries such as *Samantapāsādikā*, *Vinayaṭṭakathā* there had been not only a spoken practice but also a writing practice after the arrival of prince Vijaya. According to those sources, following incidents can be submitted briefly to prove that matter.

Vijaya arrived at Tambapanni from north India after he was banished by his father because of his unruly behaviour. Together with seven hundred of his colleagues, he came in search of a new home. The area where they landed was the abode of *Yakkha* (the inhabitants of Yakkas) and there was a *Yakka* city called Sirisavattu. There Vijaya met a *Yakkinni* (Female Yakka) by the name of Kuweni (Kuwannā). Prince Vijaya achieves the leadership assassinating inland Yakka (This is their tribe) leaders with the assistance of Kuweni (Kuwannā) ¹

Vijaya becomes a powerful monarch but could not be consecrated without a royal queen. The necessity of a Kattiya princess arose. As a result Vijaya sends a letter with a delegation to Madurāpura in India. Pandi the king of Madurā sends his daughter to island with a reply letter² The symbols used in these letters are not found. However they have utilized a language. It is crystal clear what Vijaya spoke was understood by Kuweni and what Kuweni spoke was understood by Vijaya. Thus these languages in two countries should be similar each other.

After the crowning ceremony king Vijaya who got married a princess from Pandyan Kingdom of India gave up Kuweni and two children. They went back to their relatives (Yakkhās) where the Yakkhās killed Kuweni and two children fled to Malaya area (The central hills of Sri Lanka in the past). Other maidens of high birth also arrived and married the king's other followers. These followers of the king founded other settlements. King Vijaya ruled the island for 38 years. As Vijaya had no children from his second marriage, in last years he sent prince Sumitta a letter again to send a suitable person to the island to accept the kinship after Vijaya's ruling. As Sumitta was too old then his son Panduvāsadeva decided to accept Vijaya's offer of the throne of Lanka. Panduvāsadeva arrived in Sri Lanka with 32 sons of Sumitta, and Sumitta's ministers.³ According to *Mahāvamsa* king Panduvāsadeva had ten sons and one daughter. The eldest son was Abhaya and the daughter was Cittā. As her sight caused mental disturbances in men, she was called Ummāda Cittā. It was predicted that Cittā would have a son who would kill the uncles of him (Panduvāsu deva's Sons). As a result she was imprisoned in a turret and guarded by one hundred men. However these all strategies were unsuccessful and Cittā conceived a child. She named the son as Pandukābhaya⁴

When Pandukābhaya was young, he was taught by a Brahman named paṇḍula. Pre-Buddhist Sri Lankan lay society was divided into four parts.⁵ They are,

- 1; Brahmins (Chaplains)
2. Kshatriya (Kings)
- 3; Vaiśya (Trader, Farmers
4. Sudra (Lowcast people)

Brahmins were the educated clergy men of the time and were teachers of kings and princes. They had the knowledge of Four Vedās called Rig, Yajur, Sāma and Athrvan. Panḍulaat Panḍulagama also was perfect of four vedās. The name “ Vedapāragu” has been attributed to him.⁶ Panḍula Brahmin taught the prince Panḍukābhaya and his own son the skills worthy of a king. Prince learnt well and achieved the literary ability.⁷ As well as king Abhaya has sent Panḍukābhaya a secret letter⁸. So it is clear that both of them were literate.

According to above mentioned facts, we can prove undoubtedly that there was a writing method in pre Buddhist era. However this writing tradition was developed systematically after the arrival of Ven. Mahinda. He introduced a Brāhmi alphabet to expand the art of writing in Sri Lanka. After the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka, some devotees who embraced Buddhism restored some caves and those caves were offered to Buddhist monks. These meritorious activities were written on inscriptions. There, the above mentioned Brāhmi alphabet was utilized. Following Brāhmi inscriptions belong to 3 - 2 B.C.E.

1. Jhotiś(e)na - teraśa ativaśika Bata Śumanadataterāśa len(e) Śagaśa⁹
(The cave of the elder, Lord **Sumanadatta**, Disciple of the elder **Jotisena**, (is given) to the Saṅgha)
2. De (Va)napiya - mabarajhaha bariyaya bak(iniya) upaśika - Varupa(data)ya (le) ne¹⁰
The cave of the female lay - devotee **Varunadattā**, sister of the wife of the great king Devanapiya.
3. 1) Baḍakarika - Prumaka Tiśś - puta Parumak Aśada.¹¹
2) Gutaha leṇe
The cave of the chief **Āsāthagutta**, son of the chief **Tissa**, the Treasurer
4. Mahajhaha Gamani - Tiśaśa bariya upaśika - Kitakaya leṇe śagaśa¹²
The cave of the female lay - devotee **Kitaka**, wife of the great king **Gāmaṇi Tissa**, (is given) to the Saṅgha.
5. Gapati - Vega - jhitaya upaśika - Viśa (kaya lene)¹³
The cave of the female lay - devotee **Viśākhā**, daughter of the house - holder **Vega**.

The language and the shape of the letters have very close resemblances with the language in inscriptions of Asoka such as Sindhapur, Bhramagiri, Runmindei. After the arrival of Ven. Mahinda and his delegation used Sinhala Language to preach Damma. As a result it caused to develop the language perfectly. This language was introduced as Prākṛit Sinhala.

In this era Pali language influenced to Sinhala Language mostly, not only for writing practice but also for literary tradition. Reason for this situation was the influence of the Buddhism. Prākṛit Sinhala and Pali language were very similar in pronunciation and the word order in the

sentence. When we translate few Brāhmi inscriptions in to Pali, this resemblance can be identified clearly.

- Devanapiya Maharajhaha bariyaya bakiniya upaśika varunadataya leṇe¹⁴
Devāimpiya Mahārajassa bhariyāya bhaginiyā Upāsikā varunadattāya Lenan.
- (Gamani) uti Devanapiya maharajhaha jhaya śumana - deviya lene agata anagata catudiśa sagaśa¹⁵
Gamani Uttiyassa Dēvānam piya mahārājassa jāya śumanādeviyā Leṇan āgatanāyātassa Cātudisassa saṅgassa,
- Taladara Nagayaputa Devaha lene agata anagata catudiśa śagaśa¹⁶
- Tulādhara Nāgassa puttassa Devassa lenan Āgatānāgata cātuddisassa saṅghassa.
- Badakarika parumaka senaha bariya Sumanaya lene śagaśa¹⁷
Bhāndāgarika parumaka senassa bhariya sumanaya lene sagasa.

The influence of Pali language can be identified in orthography. Etymology as well as in syntax. Many scholars have proved that Sinhala is an Indu Aryan Language, rejecting Dravidian opinions. Above mentioned resemblances, between Pali and Sinhala can be utilized as an evidence to prove that Sinhala Language is an Indu Aryan language.

How ever as there were some limitations in early Sinhala language when Buddhist terms come through Pali i, the pronunciation has been changed.

“Buddaṅ (o) Saranaṅ (o) Gacchāmi”

In this Pali sentence for the end of first two words zero (o, Niggahīṭaya) has been used. But as there was not Zero (o) in the prakrit Sinhala the pronunciation of above mentioned stanza has changed as,

“Buddam (m) Saranam (m) Gacchāmi

The Brāhmin alphabet in which limited letters were included, developed gradually by the passage of the time. According to the advice in Siyabaslakara which was written as an adaptation of Kāvyaadarshaya of Daṇḍīn, the early Sinhala literature didn't exceed the Buddhist concepts.

“Peden Budusiritā”

Although this instruction was given for the poetry, it influenced to the Sinhala prose as well. When we have a search in to Sinhala literary tradition, this matter can be identified easily. This Buddhist influence can be seen in Sinhala grammatical tradition also.

Sidat Sangarā is the oldest and reliable grammar of the Sinhala language extant. This book has been written in 13th century B.C. i.e. In Dambadeniya era. The author has not forgotten to commence his task according to traditional way.

*“Mahada Gandakili kara
Saunē Gewā dathata*

*Duhunan Denum Sandahā
Karanem sidat sangarā*¹⁸

I offer my heart as a room full of fragrance for the Buddha who understood and concluded everything which is to know and Sidat Sangarā is done for the knowledge of bigginers.

The author hasn't forgotten to give priority to respect the Buddha before the commencement of analysis of contemporary Sinhalese grammar which was used for the poetry.

BUDDHIST INFLUENCE FOR THE EXPANSION OF SINHALA WORDSTOCK

After establishment of Buddhism in the island ven. Mahinda took various strategies to spread Dhamma with the help of King Devānampiyatissa. One was to introduce a new alphabet to expand the writing tradition and the other was to translate Pali commentaries in to Sinhala language. This step caused to develop Sinhala language with its wordstock. Buddhism was established in Sinhala as Heḷaṭuwā. This "Atuwa" influenced for the post Sinhala literature. A.W. Adhikarom mentions a list of "Heḷaṭuwā" in his book named Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon. The are,

- Mahatṭhakathā
- Mahāpaccariyaṭṭhakathā
- Uttaravihāraṭṭhakathā
- Kurundi Aṭṭhakathā
- Andhakaṭṭhakathā
- Sankhepaṭṭhakathā
- Saṃyuttaṭṭhakathā
- Aṅguttaraṭṭhakathā
- Abhidhammaṭṭhakathā
- Sīhalaṭṭhakathā
- AṭṭhakathāCariyā
- Ācariyā
- Ācariya wāda
- Ācariya mata
- Therasallāpa
- Parasamuddavāsithera
- Vitaṇḍavāda
- Porānā
- Poranakatherā
- Porānacāriyā
- Bhāṇakā¹⁹

The commentator ven. Buddhagōsha came to the island in 5 century B.C. He translated these Aṭuwā in to Pali language to expand the knowledge of Buddhism of all Buddhists in the world. He used this "Heḷaṭuwā" to write down commentaries such as the Samntapāsādikā. However as a result of this translation, Heḷaṭuwā disappeared from the island. But it caused to expand the Sinhala language.

Some parts which were extracted from those Atuwā can be identified in the *Dampiyā Aṭuwā Gaṭapadaya, the Jāthaka Aṭuwa Gatapadaya, the Visuddhi mārgayathe*

Abhidarmāthasangrahaya. Influence of these Aṭuwā, can be seen in Sinhala word stock, derivation, sentences patterns, and literary practice. When we analyse the literature in Anuradhapura Polonnaruwa and Dambadeniya that matter can be understood clearly.

When we pay our attention to the history of Buddhism taking Tripitaka (three basket)s in to books in the day of King Vaṭṭagāmini at Aluwiḥaraya (The temple of light) in Matale can be identified as a significant incident. This vital task caused to stabilize the Buddhism and for the creation of a new literature. All those literary texts based on Buddhist perspectives. They were nourished by Pali language. *the Amāwatura, the Butsarana, the Saddhammaratnawaliya, the Saddammalankāraya, the Darma Pradīpikāwa* are good examples for this matter.

When we use a word borrowed from another language without changing its form, it is called homogeneous words. These words are utilized in mixed Sinhala language. Sinhala word stock has expanded from such kinds of words achieved from Buddhism. Here usually “j” (wa) or “h” (ya) are added to the end of the words. These letters are called suffixes.

Pūjāwa (offering)

Wandanāwa (worship)

Ārāḍhanāwa (invitation)

Sālāwa (hall)

Sīmāwa (limit)

Kathinaya (Katina)

Dānaya (Alms)

Tūpaya (Pagoda)

Bōdhiya (Bodhi)

Vankagiriya

Mūsilaya

Following words also can be utilized as homogeneous mixed Sinhala words related to Buddhism.

Kusalaya (merit)

Samādhiya (concentration)

Śarīraya (Body)

Jātiya (birth)

Jarāwa (old age)

Viyādhiya (decay)

Maraṇaya (death)

Śokaya (grief)

Gītikāwa (Verse)

Taṇhāwa (desire)

Paticaca Samuppādaya (theory of Cause and effect)

Other Pali words have entered to Sinhala language as derived words. When a word is used changing its form to another language that word is called a derived word. Such kinds of words can be identified in Sinhala language commonly.

- cankamana → Sakmana - Walking
- Majjhima patipadā → Maḍum Piliweta- middle Path
- Vassāvāsika → Waṣisalu - robe
- gilānapaccaya → Gilanpasa- medicine.
- Besajja → Behet - Medicine
- Vandanā → Vedeema -Worship
- Paṭimāghara → Pilimage -Shrine room

- Taṇhā → Thaṇa - desire
- Dharma → Dahama- Canon
- Paripāti → Piliwela - order
- Ānisansa → Anuhas - efficacy
- Paritta → Pirit- Pirith
- kleṣa → Keles - defilements
- Vibhanga → Bedīma - division
- Nibbana → Nivana - Nibbana
- Rājā → Raja - King
- Chakkavatti → Sakviti - universal
- Mātā → Mava - Mother
- Loka → Lova - World
- Soka → Sowa - grief
- Pitā → Piyā - Father
- Dhītā → Duwa - Daughter ect

Large amount of worlds have been used to introduce the lord Buddha. When we have a look in to Sinhala prose and poetry, many words can be identified. There is no a limit of words for Buddha.

Diyanā	Dinisuru
Dinaiuru	Narasī
Narapawara	Naradamseri
Pasas	Paṇas
Bagawat	Budu
Anadiwara	Isuru
Thilonā	Thilōguru
Dasabala	Dasabul
Damraja	Dinidu
Dininda	Diyabap
Diyes	Mahaisi
Mararupu	Muni
Munidu	Mokeduru
Lowaga	Lovidu
Vinā	Vināyaka
Satara	Savana
Savaṇi	Saman Baduru
Sirigana	Sirimat
Sugat	Sugatidu ²⁰

After establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka many people gathered around this new religion. They gave up there mythical beliefs. People didn't forget to get the blessing of triple gems, for there all special activities in the life. All male and female devotees giving up their selfhood, hatred, delusion developed the loving kindness, happiness and equanimity. The village was organized according to four concepts of tank stupa, village and temple. All villagers gathered to the temple or monastery to listen dhamma sermons in the evening. Bhikkhus not only preached dhamma but also taught children, held discussions. held various meritorious activities. As a result many Buddhist words included in Pali language. Transferred

to Sinhala language specially from damma sermon. Such words added to colloquial Sinhala can be given with few titles.

➤ Proper nouns.

- Saddhātissa
- Saṅghatissa
- Saṅghadāsa
- Saṅghabodhi
- Buddhadatta
- Dammasēna
- Dammakitti
- Dammarāja
- Mahinda
- Ānanda
- Māyā
- Gōtami
- Vishāka
- Anula
- Sāmā

➤ Buddhist Retuals

- Bodhipūjā
- Pirith
- sajjāyana
- Kathina
- Giribhanda
- Yugāsana
- Perahāra

➤ Pair of words

- Bana Daham (Damma Sermons)
- Melowa Paralowa (This world and next world)
- Sirit Virit (Formalities)
- Paul Pansal (Family and temple)
- Vehera Vihara (Shrines)
- Ancca Dukkha (Impermanence and suffering)
- Vandana Mana (Worship)

➤ Buddhist Environment

- Bodhiya (Bodhi tree)
- Viharaya (Shrine room)
- Maluwa (yard)
- Pilimaya (statue)
- Dange (House of Alms)
- Aramaya (Monastery)
- Pansala (Temple)

A special usage of words are used for activities of Bhikkus is in the temple or the monastery. These words have formed according to devotee's respect for the clergy.

Vaḍi (comes)

Vaḍi (goes)
Valadai (eats)
Vadārai (says)
Vādasiti (live)
Ṣaṭapei (sleep)
Dāḥaṭh (betel, aricunut , lime)
Paṇ (water)
Danaya (Alms)
Paṇpahasuwei (bathes)
Apawathwei (Passes away)

In Sinhala literary tradition ,as a classical text “Sinhala Pansiya Panas Jātaka potha” (Book of birth stories) achieves a Signification pace. There was no any other book which was very popular among readers. Sinhala Jātaka Potha caused to make good formalities in Sinhala society. Pople could make a spiritual life according to these stories, even at present. Following words taken from “Jātaka Pota” are used in colloquial Sinhala commonly. These words have been attributed the people with various qualities.

Kevaṭṭayek
Pinguṭṭara wagei
Kālagola
Mūsilayek
Kālakaṇṇiyek
Bakatapas
Porisādayek
Guttila wagei
Pabawati wagei
Senakayek
Bhūtayek
Disāpāmok wagei
Murugasan warṣāwak
Jūjakayek
Wessantarakāle

When we study modern colloquial Sinhala , some Buddhist terms can be found out preceded with modern technical terms , Such as,

- Offering of Songs
- a campaign of Sila
- a campaign of alms

The accuracy of using those terms should be discussed. However according to above facts, we can identify clearly the Buddhist influence for the expansion of Sinhalese word stock.

End Notes

¹Mahāwamsa ; (Ed) Wilhelm Geiger ; vii chapter

²Mahāwamsa ; (Ed) Wilhelm Geiger ; vii chapter

³Mahāwamsa ; (Ed) Wilhelm Geiger ; chapter VIII

⁴Mahāwamsa ; (Ed) Wilhelm Geiger ; chapter IX

⁵Walpoala , Rahula, History of Buddhism in Sri Lanka

⁶Mahāwamsa ; (Ed) Wilhelm Geiger ; chapter IX

⁷Mahāwamsa ; (Ed) Wilhelm Geiger ; chapter X

⁸Mahāwamsa ; (Ed) Wilhelm Geiger ; chapter VIII

⁹ Senarath Paranavitana - Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol.1 Ins No. 01

¹⁰IC, I, No, 02Ez.V.pp. 210f

¹¹ IC, I, No, 03

¹²IC, I, No, 04

¹³ IC, I, No, 05

¹⁴Senarath Paranavitana - Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol.1 Ins No. 02

¹⁵IC, I, No, 46Ez.V.pp. 210f

¹⁶IC, I, No, 80Ez.V.pp. If

¹⁷ IC, I, No, 64Ez.V.pp. 223f

¹⁸Sidat Saṅgarā (Ed) Munidāsa Kunaratunga

¹⁹A.W. Adikaram. Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon, Pages 41" 42

²⁰A.M. Gunasekara A comprehensive Grammar of Sinhalese Language, Pages 400" 4

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