

For Research Purpose.

SANSKRIT BUDDHISM
IN BURMA

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NIHAR-RANJAN RAY

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To
Dr. BIMALA CHURN LAW
M. A., B. L., Ph. D.
as a token of
admiration and gratitude

P R E F A C E

This monograph, like my earlier one on *Brahmanical Gods in Burma* (Calcutta University, 1932), attempts to explain one of the many aspects of the culture-complex of early Indo-Burmese history; at the same time it seeks to initiate another chapter in the history of the expansion of Indian religions and culture outside India's natural geographical boundaries. It was originally conceived as a part of a more comprehensive work on the *History of Buddhism in Burma: from the earliest times to the British conquest*¹, mainly from the historical point of view; but the importance of the subject, as subsequently it appeared to me, justified an independent treatment, and when Prof. Dr. J. Ph. Vogel, Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Archaeology in the University of Leiden, approved of my choice, I decided to present it as a dissertation for the Degree of Doctor in Letters and Philosophy of the University of Leiden which with the now well-known Kern Institute as an adjunct has developed into an important centre of Oriental study and research. The following pages embody the results of my researches in this particular subject.

The title of the dissertation, *Sanskrit Buddhism in Burma*, requires a word of explanation. *Mahāyāna Buddhism in Burma* was out of the question, as my researches led me to infer that the Sarvāstivāda was also at one time prevalent in Burma, as also Tantrayāna and Mantrayāna. The choice lay therefore between adopting either *Northern Buddhism* . . . or *Sanskrit Buddhism* . . . ; but as Northern Buddhism is an expression to which exception has often rightly been taken by scholars, I adopted the latter, to indicate nothing more than those forms of Buddhism whose canons are supposed to have been written and preserved in Sanskrit. It is just a convenient title, and nothing more.

¹ This is now ready for publication.

The subject of this dissertation is but little known, and very little has so far been done to elucidate the vague general ideas that exist to-day amongst scholars about it. The most important contribution was made by M. Charles Duroiselle in his admirable article on "The Aris of Burma and Tāntrik Buddhism" in the *An. R.A.S.I.*, 1915—'16; but his work has not yet been followed up except in some meagre and stray notices in the *J.B.R.S.*, the *An. R.A.S.I.*, and the *An. R. A. S. B.* which have been referred to in their proper places in the body of this monograph. No apology is therefore needed, I hope, when I venture to present the subject in the form of a short treatise; but it must be considered as nothing more than a beginning in the study of a subject which requires further elucidation; and I am almost certain that further archaeological research especially with regard to the wall-paintings of Pagan from their iconographic standpoint, and the examination of the contents of old monastic libraries in Upper Burma, will add to our knowledge of the subject.

The materials used in preparing this monograph are mostly archaeological, but it will be seen that I have also drawn from literary sources, but only so far as they are substantiated by archaeological evidence so as to cover all relevant inscriptions, sculptures, paintings and monuments known up to date from Burma. While a fair number of them have already been published in the Reports of the Archaeological Surveys of India and Burma, there has been incorporated information from a large number of sources that are here brought to light for the first time. Apart from new materials that are now made known, there will be found many instances where new interpretations of old materials have been put forward. Thus, I have been led to infer the prevalence of the Sarvāstivāda in Old Prome, the definite existence of Mahāyānist and Tantric texts in the monastic libraries of Upper Burma, and of hitherto unrecognized representations of gods and goddesses belonging to the Mahāyāna and its allied pantheons. I have also been able, I hope, to establish the identity of the Samaṇakuṭṭakas with the Aris, both branded as heterodox sects; to indicate the time when and place whence the Mahāyāna and its allied cults penetrated Burma, and the fact of their existence for a long time even after the glorious reformation of Anawrahta in 1057—1058 A.D. I have also given sufficient indications of the part played by the followers

of these cults, whose number must have been considerable at one time, in the religious life of Upper Burma. Some of the identifications of gods and goddesses may be held as doubtful — the identification marks and attributes in a number of instances are either absent or indistinct —, but we trust that the major conclusions based on them and on other materials, equally important, will endure. These conclusions have been summarised in the final chapter.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my most pleasant duty to record here my deepest feeling of regard and gratitude to Prof. Dr. J. Ph. Vogel who as my promoter took pains to go through the entire manuscript with scrupulous care, suggesting improvements, and always favouring me with his wide knowledge and experience. He did much more than this: he threw the doors of the Kern Institute open to me for my studies; he did all that he could to make my five months' stay in Leiden profitable; and, most of all, it was through his kind efforts and by virtue of his recommendations that the Ministry of Education of the Government of Netherlands gave me special leave to go in for the highest academic distinction of the University of Leiden in so short a time. To him, and also to Mrs. Vogel, I take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks and gratitude.

I owe my stay in Europe for about a year and a half to the kind and affectionate patronage of Mr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee, M.A., B.L., Barrister-at-Law, who as Vice-Chancellor, and President of the Council of Post-graduate Teaching in Arts, University of Calcutta, made it possible for me to enjoy special study leave privilege that enabled, among other things, the preparation of this humble work. Even in the midst of his heavy duties he has always cared to keep himself in touch with the work I have been doing in Europe; his words of encouragement and his affectionate concern for success in my endeavours have been a source of strength and inspiration to me. My feeling of regard, loyalty and gratitude towards him are too deep for words; and I cannot do more than merely record my indebtedness to him.

This monograph owes its publication in its present form to the generosity of Dr. Bimala Churn Law, M.A., B.L., Ph.D., who is

widely known in India and Europe for his valuable contributions to the study of Pāli literature and Buddhism as well as for his kind patronage of scholarship. To him I dedicate this humble piece of work as a token of admiration and gratitude.

Kern Institute, Leiden
November 25, 1936.

NIHARRANJAN RAY

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>An. R.A.S.B.</i>	Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of Burma (Rangoon).
<i>An. R.A.S.I.</i>	Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India (Simla and Delhi).
<i>B.E.F.E.O.</i>	Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient (Hanoi).
<i>Cal. Rev.</i>	The Calcutta Review (Calcutta).
<i>Ep. Birm.</i>	Epigraphia Birminica (Rangoon).
<i>Ep. Ind.</i>	Epigraphia Indica (Simla and Delhi).
<i>Ind. Hist. Quart.</i>	The Indian Historical Quarterly (Calcutta).
<i>J.A.</i>	Journal Asiatique (Paris).
<i>J.A.S.B.</i>	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Calcutta).
<i>J.B.R.S.</i>	Journal of the Burma Research Society (Rangoon).
<i>J.I.S.O.A.</i>	Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art (Calcutta).
<i>P.T.S.</i>	Pali Text Society (London).

Other abbreviations are easily intelligible

INTRODUCTION

As seen on the map of Asia, Burma looks as if it were an outstretched hand of the Indian continent rather than a part of the South-East-Asiatic countries bordering the Indian Ocean, which collectively we know as Further India. Indeed, ethnologically and linguistically, and also geographically, Burma is more a component part of the whole area now covered by Burma, Siam, Indo-China and the Malay Peninsula, than of India proper to whose cultural influence she, like the rest of the countries of Indo-China, submitted herself for centuries. But notwithstanding that strong cultural domination by India, mainly exerted through the all-pervading faith of Theravāda Buddhism, Burma maintained from the very beginning of her history a distinct political, social, and even cultural character. Unlike Ceylon, Burma hardly ever merged herself into the currents and cross-currents of Indian historical and cultural evolution, and it is only with the British conquest and consequent unification of Burma with the Indian empire, evidently for administrative convenience, that the country came within the domain of practical Indian life and politics. Otherwise, there is no historical reason why Burma should be considered, as it is so often done, as a part of India. Her history runs a parallel course, so far as relations with India are concerned, with that of the other countries of Further India, and the islands of the Malay Archipelago, collectively known to historians as Indonesia. The Indo-Burmese chapter of the history of Burma can be understood in its proper perspective and real significance only when we take this vital historical fact into account. It is also a key to a better understanding of the history of Indian cultural influence in Burma.

BURMA PROFESSES THE BUDDHISM OF THE THERAVĀDA SCHOOL

Like Siam, Burma till to-day is professedly Buddhist, following the Pāli canon of the Southern School. Nowhere else in the countries

and islands once won over to Indian cultural enterprise is Indianism to-day a living and regulating factor of any importance ¹; and nowhere an Indian faith is of deeper significance, or wields a stronger influence in the socio-political life of the people than Buddhism does in Burma. Indeed, Burma owes her spiritual and cultural existence to the undying appeal of Theravāda Buddhism which has remained the chief factor in the life and character of the average Burman as of the entire Burmese nation.

The story of the introduction of Buddhism in Pagan in Upper Burma, repeated again and again in Pāli and Burmese chronicles and Mon inscriptions of Burma ², is much too well-known to need any description here. Suffice it to say that it was introduced from Thaton, the Talaing capital of Lower Burma, known in ancient days as Ramaññadesa, the land *par excellence* of the Talaings, while Upper Burma was known as Mrammadesa, the land *par excellence* of the Burmese. This historic event took place in the third quarter of the eleventh century of the Christian era, in 1057, or, perhaps, 1058, to be more exact, when Pagan was fast rising to importance.

At the end of a long siege Thaton ceased to be a royal capital, and Anawrahta (1044—1077), the victorious king of Pagan, returned to his capital with the most valuable treasures of the faith, nearly the entire host of monks, and with them thirty-two white elephants, each laden with scriptures and relics, all belonging to Manuha, the Talaing king of Thaton. Thaton was annexed and Manuha kept for the rest of his life a captive at Myinpagan, a suburban village near Pagan, while his scriptural treasures were housed in the Bidagataik (Tripiṭaka library), the library building standing to this day not very far from the famous Ānanda Temple. The host of captive monks were released and pushed into the service of propagating the religion of Śākyamuni far and wide in the realm of the new dynasty

¹ Except perhaps in Bali where Brahmanism wields a strong influence even to-day, and where one can also detect some faint traces of Buddhism.

² For example, the *Sāsanavamsa*, the *Hmannan Yazawin*, the most important Burmese chronicle, and the long Kalyāṇi Inscriptions of King Dhammaceti of Pegu (*Ep. Birm.* III, ii.).

See also my *Brahmanical Gods in Burma*, Calcutta University, 1932, pp. 1—2. Also my forthcoming volume on *History of Buddhism in Burma*, chap. I (ready for the press).

of kings. Thus, once again the superior culture of the vanquished predominated over that of the victors, and the Southern Buddhism of Lower Burma gradually spread throughout Upper Burma till it embraced, after various vicissitudes of fortune, the whole country under one religious organisation. From the eleventh century onwards, Burma has never wavered from her faith in Buddhism.

The question now will naturally be asked: When did Thaton receive the faith of Theravāda Buddhism, or more correctly speaking, the Hīnayāna form of Buddhism? Are we to accept the tradition, so insistent in Burmese records, of the Asoka mission of Soṇa and Uttara to Suvāṇṇabhūmi? Shall we also believe the later tradition, equally vocal in Burmese chronicles, of Buddhaghosa's crossing over to Burma and preaching there the religion of the Master?

Available evidence is so meagre that none of these questions can be answered satisfactorily. Recent criticism has thrown doubt on both traditions¹, referred to above, though evidence is daily accumulating in favour of an early introduction of Buddhism in Burma.

All that can be asserted with certainty at this stage of historical research is that the introduction of the faith must have taken place not later than the 6th century, but the actual circumstances are unknown. The earliest epigraphic records found in Burma hail not from Thaton, but from the small village of Hmawza, six miles north of the modern town of Prome. The village which is scattered over with ancient remains has been identified with the old capital city of the Pyus, the P'iao of the Chinese; indeed it was the heart of the country known to the Chinese as Shih-li-ch'a-ta-lo and to the Burmese as Thārikhittara (Sanskrit: Śrīkṣetra).

The inscriptions referred to consist of two gold plates discovered at Maunggan², a small village close to Hmawza; three fragments of a stone inscription³ found while clearing some *debris* round the base of the Bawbawgyi Pagoda in Hmawza proper; a line of inscription

¹ Foulkes, "Buddhaghosa", *Ind. Ant.*, XIX, 1889, p. 122; Smith, "Asoka's alleged mission to Pegu", *Ind. Ant.*, XXXIV, 1905; Hackmann, *Buddhism as a religion*, p. 63; Finot, "The Legend of Buddhaghosa", *Cal. Rev.*, 1923, pp. 63—67.

² *Ep. Ind.*, V, pp. 101 ff; Finot, „Un nouveau document sur le buddhisme in birman", *J. A.*, Juit-Aout, 1912, p. 121 ff.

³ Finot, *ibid.*; *An. R.A.S.B.*, 1924, p. 22.

recorded the foundation of a Buddhist sanctuary ¹. This inscription studied along with other early inscriptions of Kamboja, particularly with the Viṣṇuite inscription of Prince Guṇavarman, found among the ruins of the monuments of Pràsàt Pràm Lovên on the hill of Thap-muòì ², reveals the interesting fact that in contemporary Kamboja as in Borneo, Brahmanism and Buddhism existed side by side. It is significant that in Burma, too, during the early centuries of definite Indian contacts, a similar state of affairs is equally noticeable; no less important is also the fact that, as in Kamboja, so in Burma, the prevailing cult of Brahmanism was that of Viṣṇu ³. Another early dated inscription of Kamboja (Śaka year 586=664 A.D.), the Vat Prey Vier Sanskrit inscription, is also definitely a Buddhist record, speaking of two bhikṣus, Ratnabhānu and Ratnasimha, who were born of the same mother (*sodaran*) ⁴. That in Kamboja, Buddhism flourished already in the later half of the fifth century A.D. is also attested to by Chinese texts which have yielded to M. Pelliot the important information that in 484 A.D. Jayavarman (king of Fou-nan, who is also referred to in the inscription discovered at Tà Prohm, cited above) sent the Indian monk Śākya Nāgasena to present a memorial in the Chinese Imperial court which began with a panegyric of the Emperor as one of the patrons of Buddhism, in whose empire the Law flourished more and more ⁵.

RELATIVE POSITION OF THE DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF BUDDHISM IN FURTHER INDIA AND INDONESIA

SARVĀSTIVĀDA

It is difficult to ascertain to which school this early Buddhism of the Hinduised countries of the South-Eastern seas owed its origin. It is possible that the Hīnayāna of the Sthaviravāda school may have preceded the Sarvāstivāda and the Mahāyāna, but there is no definite evidence to help us in our assumption. If the language (Sanskrit) of the inscriptions of the Malay Peninsula, West-Borneo

¹ Coedès, *B.E.F.E.O.*, XXXI, pp. 1—12.

² Coedès. *ibid.*

³ See my *Brahmanical Gods* . . . , pp. 15—49.

⁴ Bergaigne, *Inscriptions* . . . , pp. 61—62; Chatterji, *Indian cultural influence in Cambodia*, p. 55.

⁵ Chatterji, *Indian cultural influence in Cambodia*, p. 22.

6. When and whence did these cults of Sanskrit Buddhism penetrate Burma? And, finally,
7. What was the relative position of the orthodox and heterodox schools of Buddhism in Burma? Did the latter influence the former in any way?

These problems will now be discussed one by one in the following chapters.

scepticism attaches little value, is now confirmed by the actual existence of Mahāyāna and Kālacakra texts in Burma ¹.

¹ Tāranātha's fuller account of Buddhism in Burma will be dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

