

A SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The thesis proposal for the Master of Philosophy Research Degree, The School of History, Philosophy, Religion, and Classics - Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Queensland.

Applicant: Ven. Udagama Dhammaseeha Thero

Topic:

An Annotated Translation of Ōpamma Vagga Commentary (Papañca Sūdanī) of Middle Length Discourse (Majjhima Nikāya), together with a Comprehensive Introduction.

Introduction

Papañcha Sūdanī (hereafter-PS) is the commentary on the Majjhima Nikāya (hereafter-MN). It was composed in the early 5th century A.D. by the great Buddhist commentator, Ācariya Buddhaghōsa at the request of Buddhhamitta. PS is based on the ancient commentaries which no longer exist, that had been preserved for centuries by the Sangha of the Mahāvihāra at Anurādhapura, Sri Lanka. The commentaries provide exposition of the meaning of the text as well as the background to the events that led to the promulgation of the discourses. MN has three volumes and each has fifty Suttas or discourses with the exception of twelve Vibhīngas (expositions). These discourses are grouped under 15 Vaggas. Each Vagga contains ten Suttas. The Ōpamma Vagga (Section of Parables) is the third among fifteen Vaggas. PS gives detailed exposition and background to the discourses of this Vagga. They are as follows:

1. Kakacūpama Sutta Vaṇṇanā
2. Alagaddūpama Sutta Vaṇṇanā
3. Vammika Sutta Vaṇṇanā
4. Rathavīnita Sutta Vaṇṇanā
5. Nivāpa Sutta Vaṇṇanā
6. Ariyapariyesana Sutta Vaṇṇanā
7. Cūlahathipadōpama Sutta Vaṇṇanā
8. Mahāhatthipadōpama Sutta Vaṇṇanā
9. Mahāsārōpama Sutta Vaṇṇanā
10. Cūlasārōpama Sutta Vaṇṇanā

In my research, I will be providing an elaborated introduction and an annotated translation to the commentarial exposition of these Suttas.

Significance and the background to the study

The scholars, who have previously studied the Pāli Canon, and translated the discourses paid little attention to its commentaries and sub commentaries. In the available translations of commentaries a large section of the valuable teachings of the Buddha have not been given adequate attention. Furthermore, there appear to be certain misinterpretation of passages. Difficult words and abstruse points of the discourses that occur in the Pāli Canon cannot be sufficiently supported without due reference to their Pāli commentaries. Pāli commentaries preserve the earliest interpretation of the texts. Though Pāli commentaries were properly documented in the 5th century A.D., the interpretation and exposition of the texts are based on a much earlier tradition of interpretation that was common to Theravāda School. As such the available interpretation belongs to a quite close period of the original texts of the Suttas. Therefore, Pāli commentaries provide a source to make them understand how the early scholars had interpreted the texts of the Pāli canon.

It seems Pāli commentaries, expositions and their interpretations provide a background to the context and the cultural side of the discourses. The words and terms often get their meanings in the relevant cultural context. In comprehending a Sutta, knowledge of its context and cultural background is vital to grasp the meaning and relationship of the discourses. Pāli commentaries have been able to interpret the Suttas in their natural contexts and provide a background to the students who follow the Pāli canon.

The knowledge I aim to harness from the thesis, is expected to generate a wide perspective of the modern reading of the Pāli canon in the selected middle length discourse.

The outcome of the thesis is expected to lift the barriers that inhibit comprehensive understanding of the discourses, and make available translations to facilitate the reading of the discourses alongside their commentaries.

Scope and Methodology of Research

The main objective of my study is to present a comprehensive translation of Ōpamma Vagga of Papañca Sūdanī. Since there has been no previous English translation of the commentarial exposition of Ōpamma Vagga, I will be providing an English translation of this section of the middle length discourses

The translation would be complemented by annotations. Whenever necessary, grammatical explanations would be given with detailed meaning as originally intended by the commentator. In addition, without due references to sub commentaries, a reader may not be able to achieve a proper understanding of passages in the original text. So, I shall refer to relevant passages of the aforesaid sub-commentaries wherever necessary.

The texts which shall be used for this translation is taken partially from the edition of the Pāli Text Society, London, with a few changes based on the Sinhalese editions. For this purpose, the relevant portions of the two editions of MN would be consulted in order to determine the most appropriate readings.

In my general introduction, I propose to discuss the importance of the original text as a commentary on the *Sutta Pitaka*.

Sources to be used

Primary:

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Secondary:

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