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ALLUSIONS TO THE RĀMĀYAṆA
IN BUDDHIST SANSKRIT LITERATURE *

Introduction

Possible circumstances leading to references in two *Mahāyāna* Sanskrit *Sūtras* to *Laṅkā*, *Rākṣasas*, *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣana* were analyzed by me in two earlier studies:

- i. “Historicity of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*”, in *Buddhist Essays: A Miscellany*, H, *Saddhātissa* Commemorative Volume, London, 1992.
- ii. “Sri Lankan Attitude to the *Rāmāyaṇa*: A Historical Analysis”, in *Indologica Taurinensia*, vol. XIX-XX, 1993-94.

The conclusions then reached appear to need revision.

A recurring question is why the two major non-orthodox religions of India found it necessary

- (i) to represent *Rāvaṇa* – the villain of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* – as a virtuous person with deep religious inclinations, and
- (ii) to ascribe to *Vibhīṣana* a role different to that of the epic which depicts him as a friend of *Rāma* and thereby an adversary of his own brother *Rāvaṇa*.

* I am indebted to Dr. Darui Long (University of Calgary, Canada); Mr. Tom Graham, (Hsi Fang Translation Center, San Diego); and Mrs. Ling-Ling Kuo, Miss Mu-Tzen Hsu, Miss I-Chen Chen and Miss Lejun Bu of Hsi Lai University for assistance with Chinese Texts.

The Jaina epic in Prakrit, *Paumacariya* of *Vimalaśūri* (1st century CE or more likely 3rd century C.E.), has *Rāvaṇa*, *Vibhīṣaṇa* and *Hanumān* as ardent converts to Jainism. The monkey hero is portrayed as an ally of *Rāvaṇa* and not of *Rāma*. The *Mahāyāna* Buddhists in *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and *Mahāyānādhisamayasūtra* make the two *Rākṣasa* brothers of *Laṅkā* not only contemporaries but also disciples of the Buddha. The latter claims that *Vibhīṣaṇa* attained Buddhahood.

Did the Buddhists follow an innovation of the Jainas or did they act independently and reach the same result? The most significant factor characterizing the period when the rehabilitation of *Rāvaṇa* was undertaken by the Jainas and the Buddhists is that *Rāma*, the righteous hero of the epic, was in the process of being deified as an reincarnation or *Avatāra* of *Viṣṇu*. Did the Jainas and the Buddhists react to it by sanctifying his adversary, *Rāvaṇa*? This appears quite plausible as far as the Jaina initiative was concerned. Hence the question was raised: What was the more pronounced objective of the Buddhists: (i) claiming *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣaṇa* to be in the Buddhist fold, or (ii) associating Sri Lanka with the growth of *Mahāyāna*? Assuming that both were equally important to Buddhists, if the latter was not their main motive, I had no hesitation to hazard the theory that the episodes of *Rāvaṇa* inviting the Buddha and bringing him to *Laṅkā* to preach the *Vijñānavāda* and of *Vibhīṣaṇa* going to the Buddha to be instructed in the *Mahāyāna* doctrine could have developed in Sri Lanka itself and found its way to India and China as well as the rest of Asia through the visits of *Mahāyāna* scholars. I suggested that (i) the popularity of *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* gave the Buddhists the idea that the two characters connected with *Laṅkā*, namely *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣaṇa*, could be utilized to attribute to *Mahāyāna* doctrines a greater antiquity (that is, *Mahāyāna sūtras* as preached by the Buddha himself and, therefore, not later developments by at least a century or two); and (ii) this literary innovation could have originated in Sri Lanka in an institution like the *Abhayagiri* and traveled to other parts of Asia where the *Mahāyāna* tradition spread.

The purpose of this paper is to reexamine the allusions to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Laṅkā*, *Rākṣasas*, *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣaṇa* in Buddhist Sanskrit literature and ascertain when, where, why and by whom the two characters *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣaṇa* were portrayed as adherents to *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.

The Earliest Allusion to Rāmāyaṇa Story

In *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā* of *Kātyāyanīputra* is mentioned the story of *Rāvaṇa*, *Sītā* and *Rāma*, wherein *Rāvaṇa* kidnapped *Sītā* and *Rāma* rescued her. The unnamed literary work in which the story occurs is said to contain 12,000 verses. The reference is made in the course of a comparison between Buddhist *sūtras* and “outside literature”.

When you see the truth, you develop consciousness (*Vijñāna*). Every doctrine has its own truth. It is not the same as in outside literature which has more or less doctrines but no truth ...

Buddhist *sūtras* which are infinite without boundary are not like that.¹

The sentiment expressed in the *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā* is not dissimilar to that in the Pali commentaries: the *Rāmāyaṇa* or more precisely the story of the abduction of *Sītā* by *Rāvaṇa* is assessed as a fabrication with no foundation in truth.² But, unlike the Pali commentaries, the Sanskrit work, the *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā*, is aware of the poem and its size. Whereas the Pali commentaries were produced in Sri Lanka and their writers knew of the Indian epic only indirectly, the Sanskrit Buddhist literature originated in the same region where the *Rāmāyaṇa* was evolving but had not reached its present form. The Buddhists, therefore, had known a fairly early version of only 12,000 verses.

The *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā* can be dated in the first century CE (i.e. the time of Aśvaghōṣa and the Council at Jalandhar under the patronage of Kushān Emperor Kaniṣka I). On the assumption that the *Rāmāyaṇa* developed into its present form of 24,000 verses a century or two later, the existence of a version of half that size at the time of composition of the *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā* is conceivable.³

This version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was undoubtedly the model for Aśvaghōṣa who adopted its semi-ornate poetical *Kāvya* style (cf. *Rāmāyaṇam ādikāvyaṃ* for his two Buddhist poems: the *Buddhacarita* and the *Saundaranandakāvya*). Although scholars are

1. Cf. *Mahāvibhāṣā Section 46: Taisho 1545*, vol. 27, tr. by Hsuang Tsang, p. 27.

2. Cf. *Dīghanikāya Commentary*, PTS. I, p. 76; *Majjhimanikāya Commentary*, PTS. I, p. 163.

3. Cf. Guruge, 1960/91, p. 28.

divided on who borrowed from whom, the similarity between the descriptions of the nocturnal harem-scene in the *Rāmāyaṇa*⁴ and in the *Buddhacarita*⁵ and their adherence to norms of ornate court poetry has to be noted as striking.⁶ *Jātakamālā* shows similar stylistic features which are traceable to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁷ There is adequate evidence to prove that the Buddhist Sanskrit Literature originated with the literary influence of the Indian epics of which the *Rāmāyaṇa* was specially significant.

Vibhīṣaṇa in the Mahāmayūri

Another early reference to a *Rāmāyaṇa* character in a Sanskrit Buddhist work is in the *Mahāmayūri*. Among the tutelary gods listed in it is *Vibhīṣaṇa*. The reference is significant because the country with which he is connected is not *Laṅkā* as the *Rāmāyaṇa* has it but *Tāmrparṇī*: i.e. *Vibhīṣaṇas tāmrparṇyām*.⁸ This unusual magical text of *Mahāyāna* Buddhists was translated into Chinese in the fourth century CE. The original Sanskrit version therefore could have preceded it by a century or more. *Tāmrparṇī* is the historical name by which the island of Sri Lanka was known in pre-Christian times. It is referred to twice in Aśokan inscriptions by that name (Edicts RE II and XIII).⁹ Its derivative *Taprobane* was the name used in Greek literature as well as in Ptolemy's map.

Whether *Laṅkā* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is actually Sri Lanka has been a bone of contention among scholars. That the author or authors of the *Rāmāyaṇa* based the descriptions of *Laṅkā* on conditions prevailing in Sri Lanka of about the third century CE was the conclusion that I could reach after a careful analysis of the data.¹⁰ What this single line in the *Mahāmayūri* proves is that the equation of epic *Laṅkā* with Sri

4. *Rāmāyaṇa* V., 9-11, ff.

5. *Buddhacarita* V., 47, ff.

6. Cf. Winternitz, 1981, p. 491.

7. Cf. Johnston, in JRAS, 1929, p. 89.

8. Cf. Sylvain Lévi, in JA V, 1915, p. 33.

9. Cf. Guruge, 1993, pp. 555 and 568.

10. Cf. Guruge, 1960/91, pp. 60-70 and p. 328.

Lanka was already established in *Mahāyāna* Buddhist circles at a very early time when the island was known as *Tāmraparṇī*, locally, and Taprobane, abroad.

References in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*

The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* contains two chapters, namely the First and the last, which abound in references to many characters and places of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The last chapter called *Sagāthakam* is an independent work in Sanskrit verse.

In an ancient version, the *sūtra* had a different name (? !) and did not contain these two chapters. It is about this original version that Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki said: “There is no doubt that the *Laṅkāvatāra* is closely connected in time as well as in doctrine with *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* generally ascribed to *Aśvagoṣa*.”¹¹ The earlier version without these chapters was a straight-forward work on *Vijñānavāda* and was translated into Chinese by *Guṇabhadra* in 443 CE in four volumes. But in two later translations by *Bodhiruci* in 513 CE in ten volumes and *Sikṣānanda* in 700-704 CE in seven volumes, these chapters were included. The conclusion drawn from this fact is that they were added to the text between 443 and 513 CE.¹² It was at this point that the book acquired its name *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, or more precisely *Ārya-Saddharma-Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, meaning “*The Discourse of the Descent of the Noble True Doctrine to Laṅkā*.”

The colophon to the first chapter is “The first chapter called ‘Rāvaṇa asking for Instruction’.” This brief colophon differs from those of some other chapters wherein the name of the *sūtra* is also mentioned: viz.

Chapter II: “Here ends the Second Chapter ‘The Collection of all the Dharmas’ taken from the *Laṅkāvatāra* of 36,000 (verses).”

11. Cf. Suzuki, 1932/1978, p. xxxix.

12. It “represents a mature phase of speculation and not only criticizes the Sankhya, *Pāśupata* and other Hindu schools, but is conscious of the growing resemblance of *Mahāyanism* to Brahmanic philosophy and tries to explain it” – Eliot, quoted in William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous 1934 p. 402.

Chapter III: “Here ends the Third Chapter ‘On Impermanency’ in the *Laṅkāvatāra-Mahāyāna-Sūtra*.”

Chapter VIII: “Here ends the Eighth Chapter ‘On Meat-eating’ from the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the Essence of the Teaching of All the Buddhas.”

Chapter IX: “Here ends the Ninth Chapter called ‘*Dhāraṇī*’ in the *Laṅkāvatāra*.”

Sagāthakam: “Here ends the *Ārya-saddharma-Laṅkāvatāra-Mahāyāna-Sūtra*, together with the verses.”

Based on the diversity of the colophons, Suzuki says,

It is noteworthy that the chapter endings are not the same throughout the entire text. Generally, reference is made to the *Sūtra* itself at the end of a chapter, stating that the chapter bears such a title belonging to such a *Sūtra*. But in the present case [i.e. Chapter I] there is no mention at all of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* as if this Rāvaṇa section were something quite independent. While there is no doubt its being a later addition, seeing what a complete piece of narrative it forms by itself, and again seeing that the rest of the text makes no further reference to Rāvaṇa, the trend of the discourse as presented by the Buddha shows that it is closely related to the *Sūtra*, especially when it emphasizes at the end of the importance of self-realization against the inanity or futility of the verbal teaching ordinarily given out by a master.¹³

There is ample evidence that the writer of the First Chapter was fully conversant with the subject-matter of the original *sūtra*. He was able to create a fitting preamble (though mythical) to the *sūtra* in the form of a dialogue between the Buddha and Rāvaṇa. But how well did he know the *Rāmāyaṇa*?

In the following, his familiarity with the epic is patent:

- Description of *Laṅkā* “which is situated on the peak of mount Malaya on the great ocean and which is adorned with flowers of jewels of various kinds” (twice)
- Rāvaṇa the “Lord of *Laṅkā*.” (27 times)
- Rāvaṇa as having ten heads (twice)

13. Cf. Suzuki, 1932/1978, p. 21.

- *Aśokavaṇa* with shining woods, the delightful garden of *Rāvaṇa* (twice)
- *Puṣpaka*, his aerial vehicle – “floral celestial vehicle” (3 times)
- *Kumbhakarṇa* (though not called a brother of *Rāvaṇa*) as a *Rākṣasa* leader (once)

On the contrary, confusion is noted as regards the population of *Lankā* and *Rāvaṇa*'s ethnicity. Were they *Rākṣasas* or *Yakṣas*? Five times *Rāvaṇa* is referred to as the King of *Rākṣasas* and once he is said to be accompanied by *Rākṣasas*. This description is in keeping with the epic. But on four occasions *Rāvaṇa* is referred to as the King of *Yakṣas*. Five references present him as accompanied by *Yakṣas*. Three times the residents of *Lankā* are said to be *Yakṣas*. In a context where different kinds of music are compared, *Nāgas*, *Yakṣas* and *Rākṣasas* are mentioned in that order. Thus references to *Yakṣas* outnumber those to *Rākṣasas* by 13 to 7. It is surprising because the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* has barely two references to *Yakṣas* (i.e. NW I, 23, 2 and BE VII, 14, 5). In a derogatory manner, they are called a tribe of little energy (*alpavīrya*) who could not stand firmly before *Vaiśravaṇa*, a *Rākṣasa*.¹⁴

Significantly, an adversarial position is ascribed to the *Rākṣasas* in Chapter IX of the *Sūtra* which contains the *Dhāraṇi*: it says, “Those magic phrases are given by the Blessed One to guard against the interference of the *Rākṣasas*”.¹⁵ As beneficiaries of the *Dhāraṇi* is a long list where immediately after gods and goddesses are mentioned *Nāgas* and *Yakṣas* (ibid. p. 224).

In addition to these allusions to epic names in the First Chapter, the *Lankāvatārasūtra* refers to *Rāma*, *Vālmīki* and *Rākṣasas* in its final chapter in verse: *Sagāthakam*. A series of prophecies is attributed to the author of this part of the *sūtra* who describes himself as follows: “I belong to the *Kātyāyana* family, descending from the *Śuddhāvāsa*; I teach the *Dharma* in order to lead sentient beings to the city of *Nirvāṇa*” (v. 772). In the following occurs a reference to *Rāma*:

After the passing of the Leader of *Śākya*s, these will follow me: *Vyāsa*,

14. Cf. Guruge, 1960/1991, p. 88.

15. Cf. Suzuki, 1932/78, p. 225.

Kaṇāda, Rishabha, Kapīla, and others. Then one hundred years after my passing, Vyāsa's Bhārata will appear, the Pāṇḍavas, the Kauravas, *Rāma*, and then the Maurya. The Maurya, the Nanda, the Gupta, and then the Mleccha who are bad kings; after the Mleccha will rage a warfare, and then the age of vice; and after this age of vice, the good Dharma will no longer prevail in the world (vv. 784-786).¹⁶

Later on, another prophesy places *Vālmīki* in a vague and jumbled list of authors and seers:

“There will be Pāṇini, author of the *Śabdaneṭri*, *Akshapāda*, *Vṛihaspati*; Praṇeṭri the Lokāyata will be found in *Brahma-garbha*. Kātyāyana will be the author of a *sūtra*, and Yājñavalkya will be like him; Bhuḍhuka will write astronomical works; they will appear in the age of vice. Balin will appear to promote the welfare of the world, the happiness of mankind, he will be the protector of all that is good; Balin the king will be a great ruler. Vālmiki, Masurāksha, Kauṭilya, and Āśvalāyana, who are highly virtuous *Rishis*, will appear in the future. Siddhārtha of the Śākya family, Bhūtānta, Pañcacūḍaka, Vāgbaliratha, Madhāvin will appear in the times that follow. (vv. 813-817)

The Wei dynasty (eighth century) Chinese translation of the *Sūtra* concludes with a list of persons who are said to have rejoiced over the Buddha's presentation of the *Sūtra*: In it are included *Rāvaṇa* the King, *Kumbhakarṇa* and other *Rākṣasas*, *Nāgas* and *Yakṣas* (ibid. p. 295). Though this addition could have been by *Sikṣānanda* the translator, the inclusion of the following names signifies their affiliation to the Buddha and Buddhism as described in Chapter I:

- *Lankā* as inhabited by the Buddhas of the past (ibid. p. 5)
- *Yakṣas* who are free of faults as making offerings to the Buddhas of the past and believing in *Mahāyāna* teachings (ibid. p. 6)
- *Kumbhakarṇa* and *Rākṣasas* as devoted to *Mahāyāna* and making offering assiduously to Buddhas (ibid. p. 6)
- *Rāvaṇa* as conversant in Buddhist lore and capable of formulating a detailed question which presumes a knowledge of *Mahāyāna* doctrines (ibid. pp. 6-8 and 16-18).

16. Cf. Taisho No. 671, Vol. 16, p. 584.

Observations on the Laṅkāvatārasūtra

Several issues may be raised on the allusions to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. How did the confusion on *Rākṣasas* and *Yakṣas* and on the ethnicity of *Rāvaṇa* arise? Why are *Nāgas* and *Yakṣas* mentioned together as residents of *Laṅkā*? From where did the author of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* get his information on them? How could the *Dhāraṇi* of the *sūtra* present *Rākṣasas* as malevolent beings from whose interference the faithful had to be safeguarded? How were *Yakṣas* and *Nāgas* identified in the category of the faithful? Answers to these may be found in the Sri Lankan Chronicles, the *Dīpavaṃsa* (4th century CE) and the *Mahāvāṃsa* (6th century CE).

Sri Lankan Chronicles begin with accounts of three visits to the Island by the Buddha. The purpose of the first visit is given as follows: “For *Laṅkā* is known to the Conqueror as a place where his doctrine would shine in glory, he thought: ‘The Yakkhas must be driven away from *Laṅkā* which was filled with them.’”¹⁷ The rest of the account deals with the banishment of Yakkhas from the Island to a place called *Giridīpa* by means of the Buddha’s magical power (ibid. I, 21-30). Here the Yakkhas were adversaries and the Island had to be freed from them before the dynasty which eventually would embrace Buddhism was founded.

The second visit is said to have been to settle a conflict between two *Nāga* kings of the Island. At least four *Nāga* kingdoms were in existence and one of them in *Nāgadīpa* – a name which has been applied to the northern and northwestern region and so named and correctly located by Ptolemy in his detailed map of Taprobane. *Nāgas* were pacified by the Buddha, according to this account, and the third visit was in response to an invitation by the *Nāga* king, *Maṇiakkhika* of *Kalyāṇi* (ibid. I, 44-76).

The Chronicles record a significant divergence when they move from the legendary and mythical to more or less historical events. The Yakkhas were present in the Island when Vijaya, the founder of the Sinhala Kingdom, arrived there and the first to meet him was a female

17. Cf. *Mahāvāṃsa* I, 19-20.

Yakṣa servant who had taken the form of a bitch.¹⁸ *Kuveṇi* who was to be his mistress was a *Yakkhini* who had taken the guise of a woman-hermit. It is with her aid that Vijaya raided a wedding feast in the *Yakṣa* city of *Sirīsavatthu*, and gained control of their realm. But the *Yakṣas* were not decimated for they continued to have their kingdom at *Laṅkāpura*. *Kuveṇi*, when abandoned by Vijaya, went there with her children and was killed by the *Yakṣas* for her treachery. Her children are said to be the ancestors of the aboriginal tribe of Pulindas, generally identified as the *Veddahs*.¹⁹

Yakṣas are mentioned again in the *Mahāvamśa* in connection with *Paṇḍukābhaya*. In his seventeen-year campaign to overthrow his uncles from power, he had traveled widely in the Island and befriended its varied settlers. Among them were *Yakṣas*. For them he is said to have provided a settlement in the new capital he built and his friendship with *Yakṣas Cittarāja* and *Kālavela* is specifically mentioned (Ibid. X, 62-104). But right through in these accounts, *Yakṣas* are depicted as non-human and capable of taking different guises.

The term *Yakṣa* continues to be in usage in Sri Lanka in the sense of non-human beings who are normally malevolent but had been tamed and utilized in projects by powerful men. It is among the aboriginal *Veddahs* that it has a religious significance. In their form of ancestor-worship, which is central to their beliefs and practices, the spirits of dead relatives are called *Nāyakku* (= *Ñātiyakṣa*).

Allusions in the *sūtra* to characters and places of the *Rāmāyaṇa* come from at least four sources:

- (i) An earlier version of the First Chapter, where the information on *Laṅkā*, *Rāvaṇa*, *Kumbhakarṇa* and *Rākṣasas* tallies with that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.
- (ii) Additions to the First Chapter either in Sri Lanka or elsewhere by someone who wanted to bring in the Sri Lankan tradition with regard to *Yakṣas* and *Nāgas* (Apparently, no contradiction was observed because the terms, *Rākṣasa* and *Yakṣa*, were regarded as synonyms).

18. Cf. *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* which says, “*Yakṣas* are endowed with many forms” - Suzuki 1932/78, p. 5.

19. Cf. *Mahāvamśa*, VII, 16-18.

- (iii) Chapter IX whose *Dhāraṇi* was developed in India and therefore reflects the epic position that *Rākṣasas* were malevolent.
- (iv) The references to philosophers, scholars and poets in the last chapter, *Sagāthakam*, by a writer in India who was familiar with the names but had no idea of the chronological sequence.

It is conceivable that the idea of associating *Rāvaṇa* with the *Mahāyāna* form of Buddhism originated in the earlier version of the First Chapter in India. It is, therefore, more likely to be a response to either the deification of *Rāma* or the Jaina initiative to make *Rāvaṇa* a devotee of Jainism. Did both the Jaina and the Buddhist moves to vindicate the adversaries of *Rāma* arise among the Dravidians of Southern India? The recent phenomenon of the Dravidian identification with the *Rākṣasas* and *Rāvaṇa* seems to have had its precursor at the time when the preamble to the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* was added. The omission of *Vibhīṣaṇa*, who allied himself with *Rāma* according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is significant, especially as *Kumbhakarna* is mentioned and extolled as a Buddhist devotee.

The Chapter had seen at least one modification by someone who was familiar with the Sri Lankan tradition on Yakkhas and *Nāgas*. Apart from this, no conclusive evidence exists to support my earlier view that the First Chapter could have been added by the *Mahāyāna* adherents of Sri Lanka to enhance the antiquity of their doctrines. So has A. K. Warder's statement that the *Laṅkāvatāra* is "connected with" Sri Lanka (1980, p. 352) to be reviewed.

The *Dhāraṇi* of Chapter IX has been developed in a circle where the *Rāmāyaṇa* position that *Rākṣasas* were adversaries was accepted.

The references to *Rāma* and *Vālmīki* in the last chapter have no religious significance. Among the chronological mistakes are (i) dating Nanda Dynasty after the Mauryas and (ii) placing the Buddha after Pāṇini. One important conclusion derivable from the listings in *Sagāthakam* is that this interpolation is subsequent to Mleccha invasion (i.e. Hun invasion of 6th century, which led to the fall of the Gupta Empire). Chronologically significant is that the reference to Mleccha invasion is in the Chinese translation of Bodhiruci of 513 CE.

Allusions to Lankā, Vibhīṣaṇa and Rākṣasas in the Mahāyānādhi-samayāsūtra

The *Mahāyānādhisamayāsūtra* exists in two Chinese translations:

- (i) by *Jñānayaśas* in 570 CE during the Northern Chou Dynasty (557-581 CE); and
- (ii) by *Divākara* (613-687 CE) during the T'ang Dynasty.

It is included in Taisho as No. 673. It also has several titles in Chinese, namely, “*Mahāyāna Same Nature Sūtra*”, “The Buddha’s Ten Lands (*bhūmi*) *Sūtra*” and “The Practice of all Buddhas for Entering the Wisdom Storehouse of Vairocana”.

Here the main character is *Vibhīṣaṇa*, the King of *Rākṣasas* of *Lankā*. *Vibhīṣaṇa* occurs 36 times in the *sūtra*, *Lankā* 77 times and *Rākṣasas* 22 times. *Rāvaṇa* is conspicuous by its absence. Hajime Nakamura’s statement “*Vibhīṣaṇa*, the *Rāvaṇa* king” is in all likelihood a typographical error, unless, of course, it appears so in a Japanese version which he consulted.²⁰ My own statement, “This refers to both *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣaṇa* but in a curious way. It calls *Vibhīṣaṇa* the ‘*Rāvaṇa* king’”²¹ needs correction or revision for the same reason.

The *sūtra* says that *Vibhīṣaṇa*, the *Rākṣasa* king of *Lankā*, heard the Buddha delivering a sermon to 1250 *Bhikkhus* plus bodhisattvas etc. at the lotus pond in the great garden at the top of Mount Meru – a place where mantra gods lived inaccessible to ordinary human beings. *Vibhīṣaṇa* contemplates on the Buddha’s qualities and gets miraculously admitted to his presence. In gratitude the King of *Lankā* makes offerings and praises the Buddha in a hymn. After further offerings in which the *Rākṣasa* joined him, *Vibhīṣaṇa* takes a vow of Bodhi (symbolically described as ‘he wore the armour of Bodhi’) and poses questions to the Buddha such as

- (i) How does one obtain perfect wisdom?
- (ii) What is the word for sentient beings?
- (iii) What is the essence of a sentient being, on what to they depend

20. Nakamura, 1987, p. 232

21. Cf. *Indologica Taurinensia*, XIX-XX (1993-94), p. 141.

- for their existence and what are the causes for their existence?
- (iv) Why do sentient beings give up this life and this body to receive a new life and body?
- (v) Is there an intermediate existence between death and rebirth – a stage varying from seven to forty-nine days?
- (vi) What are the components of supernatural perception of sentient beings?
- (vii) To what would the Buddha's teachings be compared?
- (viii) To what would the efforts to follow the Noble Eightfold Path be compared?
- (ix) What are similar to meditation *samādhi* and other magical powers, and to the seven characteristics of Bodhi (=Bodhyaṅga or Bojjhanga)
- (x) How many ways are there to aid in attaining Bodhi (*i.e.* 37 *bo-dhipākṣikadharmas*)?

Also asked were three questions on the fate of those who had become monastics and later flouted the rules. The *sūtra* gives the Buddha's replies and preaches the way to liberate oneself. The dialogue terminates with *Vibhīṣaṇa* attaining 'unexcelled and complete enlightenment' (*anut-tarasamyaksambodhi*). Added to the *sūtra* is an epilogue in which the Buddha tells Makara, the king of sea-serpents, the story of a previous life of *Vibhīṣaṇa* as a young *Rākṣasa* by the name of *Vibhīṣaṇa*. Apart from the name of *Vibhīṣaṇa* and his designation as the *Rākṣasa* King of *Laṅkā*, the *sūtra* has no information which relates to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

What was the intention of the author of this *sūtra* when *Vibhīṣaṇa* was chosen to be the interlocuter? What motivated the association of *Rāvaṇa* with the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* would not apply to *Vibhīṣaṇa*. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, this younger brother of *Rāvaṇa* allied with *Rāma* and was rewarded for his defection by being made the King of *Laṅkā*. Could it be that the *Mahāyāna ānadhīsamayasūtra* was responding to the First Chapter on the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* by taking an opposite position? But one important factor has to be noted. *Rāvaṇa* is an after-thought in *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*. In the other, *Vibhīṣaṇa* is integral to the *sūtra* and the carefully worded questions put to his mouth enables a coherent, well-organized presentation of a number of important teachings of the Buddha. What is more? Despite the title of the *sūtra* and reference to *Mahāyāna* in two contexts in the body of the

sūtra, its contents are not in any way restricted to *Mahāyāna*. On the contrary, at least one doctrine, which is more widely accepted in *Mahāyāna* than in Southern Buddhism (namely, that of an intermediate stage of seven to forty-nine days between death and rebirth), finds refuted in this *sūtra*.

Is there any link between the *Mahāmayūri* and this *sūtra*? If the country of *Vibhīṣaṇa* was given as *Tāmrapaṇi*, there would have been no doubt. As the *sūtra* exists, such a link cannot be established. The little information it contains appears to be derived from the *Rāmāyaṇa* or a continuing tradition which finds mention in Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*. *Vibhīṣaṇa* as the ruling *Rākṣasa* King of *Laṅkā* is mentioned in this Kashmiri chronicle²² in two sections: in III 72-78 as a contemporary of *Meghavāhana* (1st century CE) who is said to have defeated *Vibhīṣaṇa* and brought his flags to Kashmir; and in IV 503-506 as a contemporary of *Jayapīḍa* (751-782 CE) who obtained *Rākṣasas* from *Laṅkā* through *Vibhīṣaṇa*'s intervention to drain a deep lake to build Jayap. The mere supposition that *Vibhīṣaṇa*'s reign spanned many centuries is proof of the mythical nature of the references.

No evidence exists to establish Sri Lankan origin or modification of this *sūtra*. It is true that *Vibhīṣaṇa* has been at the centre of a cult in the Island from ancient times. The *Vibhīṣaṇa* temple at Kelaniya drew the attention of a major Sinhala poet in the 15th century CE and continues to attract devotees. The poet *Toṭagamuve Śri Rāhula* in his "*Sālahiṇi-sandeśa*" praises *Vibhīṣaṇa* for having considered the past, the present and the future and sided with *Rāma*. Yet, no affiliation with Buddhism has been attributed to *Vibhīṣaṇa*, even though the main temple dedicated to him is in the premises of the ancient and prestigious Buddhist temple at Kelaniya (6 miles to the east of Colombo).

Observations on the Mahāyānadhīśamayasūtra and the Mahāmayūri

A cult connected with *Vibhīṣaṇa* has been associated with Sri Lanka from very early times when it was internationally known as

22. Though not relevant to the subject under discussion, it may be noted that *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* represents *Laṅkā* and *Vibhīṣaṇa* exactly as they are in the *Rāmāyaṇa*: Mount Rohana, mines of manifold gems, and diadem of the ocean (III, 72); "*Vibhīṣaṇa*", the friend of mortals through his attachment to *Rāma* (IV, 505).

Tāmrparṇi or *Taprobane*. How he acquired this position is unknown. Whether the *Rāmāyaṇa* position that he allied himself with *Rāma* against his own brother had anything to do with *Vibhīṣaṇa*'s deification cannot be ascertained.

On the contrary, the representation of *Vibhīṣaṇa* as the *Rākṣasa* King of *Laṅkā* is based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* account that *Rāma*, in appreciation of the defection of this younger brother of *Rāvaṇa*, gave him that position. Which came earlier: Deification of *Vibhīṣaṇa* as the tutelary god of Sri Lanka or the elevation to kingship by a foreign conqueror? If *Vibhīṣaṇa* was already a cult-figure in the third century CE when the *Rāmāyaṇa* used the information on Sri Lanka to describe *Laṅkā* of its story, *Vibhīṣaṇa* could have been conveniently brought into the epic as a good *Rākṣasa*. The context in which his name occurs in the *Rāmāyaṇa* would permit such an assumption. The neutral *Vibhīṣaṇa* is not integrated into the story in the way that *Kumbhakarna* and *Indrajit* are incorporated into the core of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*.

The *Mahāyānadharmasūtra*, just as the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, reflects a compelling tendency among *Mahāyāna* Buddhists to depict the *Rākṣasas* as pious and dedicated adherents to their tradition. After a detailed examination of many theories posited for the identification of the *Rākṣasas*, I felt that they were a tribe of primitive and ferocious people with cannibalistic tendencies, who occupied the southern outposts of the subcontinent and spread as far south as Sri Lanka.²³ But when the derogatory terms used in the epic to depict the enemies of *Rāma* are discounted and the statements pertaining to *Rākṣasa* culture²⁴ are reevaluated, *Rākṣasas* may be identified with the non-Aryan settlers of the south of the subcontinent. If so, one may seek a motivation for associating *Vibhīṣaṇa* with *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in the religious situation of South India in the second and third centuries CE.

According to the *Mahāvamsa*, sixty monks of the Abhayagiri monastery were adjudged to be pro-*Mahāyāna* and hence opposed to the *Mahāvihāra*. They were banished to South India in the reign of *Goṭhābhaya* (circa 249-260 CE). In the land of the Colas (*i.e.* roughly

23. Cf. Guruge, 1960/91, pp. 85-88.

24. e.g. *Brahmarākṣasas* – GE I, 11, 21; *ṛṣisattama* – NW V, 91, 45+50; palaces and mansions – NW III, 41, 21+22; *Rāvaṇa* speaking Sanskrit.

the State of Tamilnadu), these monks not only flourished but also propagated among Cola disciples their teachings, which were referred to as *Vaitulyavāda*. It was one of such disciples by the name of Sanghamitta who came to Sri Lanka to avenge his teacher and almost destroyed the *Mahāvihāra* monastery in the reign of Mahāseṇa.²⁵ The land of the Colas is thus portrayed as a centre of the *Mahāyāna* tradition.

As Dravidians, the Colas could have identified themselves as adversaries of Aryans whose incursions to their territory had been both peaceful as with the settlement of seers and ascetics who established hermitages²⁶ and not so peaceful as the invasion of *Paṇḍyans* who established their reign in Southern Mathura (= Madhurai).²⁷ At a time when *Mahāyāna* Buddhism flourished in their territory, the Colas who were on the ascendancy politically and culturally would have found in the epic story an inducement to glorify the two *Rākṣasas* of renown, namely *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣaṇa*.

A South Indian origin for the First Chapter as well as *Sagāthakam* of *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* would explain the familiarity with the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the pronounced vagueness of names connected with both Sri Lanka and Northern India. As regards *Mahāyānadharmasamāyāsūtra*, a South Indian origin may be the reason that *Vibhīṣaṇa*'s alliance with *Rāma* was glossed over in favour of the sentiment that he was another *Rākṣasa* of renown.

Conclusions

The re-examination of the significant elements in the two *Mahāyāna Sūtras* lead us to the following responses to the question when, where, why and by whom the *Rāmāyaṇa* characters and places were brought into Buddhist Sanskrit literature:

1. The tendency to present *Rākṣasas* as promoters of the *Mahāyāna* form of Buddhism is traceable to South India which at the relevant period in history was a strong centre of that tradition.²⁸

25. Cf. *Mahāvamśa*, XXXVI, p. 110-117 and XXXVII, p. 3-28.

26. Cf. Guruge, 1960/91, p. 13

27. Cf. Guruge, 1989, p. 96-98.

28. Cf. Warder's theory that *Mahāyāna sūtras* were a product of South India, 1980, pp. 352-354.

2. The Dravidians of South India identified themselves with the adversaries of Aryan *Rāma* and considered *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣaṇa* to be among their prominent ancestors. (This sentiment persists and is marked by anti- *Rāmāyaṇa* protests and the burning of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* which have been pursued by a nationalistic political party of Tamilnadu.)

3. They were conversant with the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the extent that some details could be accurately included but their knowledge of Sri Lankan tradition and information on philosophers and poets of Northern India was patchy. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism had made them proficient in Sanskrit.

4. One important lapse in their knowledge of Sri Lankan historical tradition is the synchronization of the Buddha with *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣaṇa*. The Sri Lankan Chronicles speak of Yakkhas and Nāgas and not *Rākṣasas* as residents of the Island at the time of the Buddha. Sri Lankan Buddhists ascribed no historical significance to the *Rāmāyaṇa* which was considered to be fiction.

5. The motive for South Indian *Mahāyāna* Buddhists to glorify *Rāvaṇa* and *Vibhīṣaṇa* as pious, dedicated and erudite Buddhists with a special *penchant* for *Mahāyāna* might have come from a desire to ascribe antiquity to their own tradition. Whether the opposition and even hostility shown to *Mahāyāna* teachings in Sri Lanka added a further motive to highlight two “Kings of Laṅka” as *Mahāyāna* devotees needs to be further examined.

6. In the light of these findings, my earlier suggestion that the Abhayagiri Monastery of Sri Lanka could have figured in the modification of the *Laṅkāvatāra* and the origin of the *Mahāyānadharmasūtra* is less tenable than what is now offered.

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