

The Origins and Evolution of Sri Lankan Historiography

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Abstract: This study investigates the origins and evolution of Sri Lankan historiography, with a research problem that focuses on identifying the key factors that contributed to its development and understanding how those factors influenced the evolution of this tradition. The research methodology used a qualitative approach and a systematic literature review of historical documents, including the Tripitaka, its commentaries, the Mahāvamsa, and other relevant sources. Content analysis was used to identify patterns, themes, and trends in the evolution of Sri Lankan historiography. The findings suggest that Buddhist monks played a vital role in compiling historical information from the Tripitaka and Aṭṭhakathā, introducing Buddhism and related history to Sri Lanka. Over time, this information was gradually abstracted from the Tripitaka commentaries and developed into a different tradition. This study contributes to the scholarship of Sri Lankan history by providing a comprehensive understanding of its origins and evolution, identifying critical historical accounts and their evolution. Furthermore, this research serves as a basis for further exploration into the role of Buddhism in shaping Sri Lanka's historical tradition.

Keywords: Buddhism, Historiography, Mahāvamsa, Oral tradition, Sri Lanka

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INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a land of rich cultural heritage and history, and it is well known for its continuous history, which is constructed by historians using literary and archaeological sources. The process of compiling historical information raises questions about the origins of historical information, its compilation process, and the factors that influenced it. Historiography is the study of the methods and principles used in historical research and writing and the analysis of historical information. Sri Lanka's historiography is fascinating, as it offers insight into the country's cultural, social, and political development. Mahinda Thero introduced Buddhism and related history to Sri Lanka through oral generations and has incorporated their memories of the expansion and development of the Buddha's time. It is clear from the references in the Vamsatthappakāsinī about the Sīhalaṭṭhakathā Mahāvamsa that this historical information grew gradually and was abstracted from the Tripitaka commentaries and developed as a separate tradition. A different history of the discipline and a particular account of sacred objects have been maintained by word of mouth from generation to generation. However, how and why this oral tradition was transitioned into written records remains a significant issue in studying Sri

Lanka's historiography. This article examines the origins of Sri Lanka's historiography. The primary research problem is to identify the factors that led to the development of Sri Lanka's historiography and how they shaped the transition from an oral tradition to a written one. The research will be conducted using a qualitative methodology that involves a comprehensive review of historical documents, literary sources, and archaeological evidence. The study aims to contribute to understanding Sri Lanka's cultural, social, and political development and shed light on the evolution of its historiography. In the following sections, this article will review the literature on the historiography of Sri Lanka, discuss the methodology employed in the research, and present the study's findings.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

'History' encompasses different definitions, etymologies, and interpretations, varying across cultures. However, the consensus is that history involves reflecting past events based on factual evidence left behind by people of the past. The study of history primarily focuses on human phenomena, intending to provide knowledge of past human experiences to present and future generations (Gunawardena 2005:1). Historiography, on the other hand, is the scientific study of historical information, which is then recorded based on time and space (Bentley, 2012). Historiography refers to the method and pattern of writing history. Different nations have different ways of writing history, with the Greeks and Chinese being among the earliest pioneers of historiography (Gunawardena 2005:1). In contrast, India and Sri Lanka were engaged in historiography with a cyclical conception of historical events {Simhala Viśva Kośaya III, 1967: 514}. With the spread of Christianity, the Western world began historiography to write down the history of people aiming for the Kingdom of Heaven. This tradition, which took a deterministic form, is called Christian synthetic thought (Iggers, 2005). Following the 18th century, the historical tradition changed with the spread of the ideas of Hegel and Marx, who identified secular determinism or classless communist society as the pinnacle of human civilisation. With the eastward expansion of European hegemony from the 16th century onwards, traditions of modern European historiography were also established in the East (Fukuyama 1992: 2).

SRI LANKA'S HISTORIOGRAPHY TRADITION AND ITS ORIGINS

Leslie Gunawardena argues that China and Sri Lanka were the leaders in recording the history of their respective countries. Sri Lanka has continuously worked to maintain and record its history (Gunawardena 2005:3). While the earliest works containing historical information on Sri Lanka are not available today, it is possible to identify them by name or from later works. Although those works do not survive, it is clear that much of their content has been preserved by later sources. The earliest chronicles written in Sri Lanka contain the religious and historical events that happened in the country in the past. For that, people, offerings, and sacred places were based. However, the factors that influenced the writing of such historical information and its origins need to be explored.

According to some scholars, the ancient texts mentioned in Sanskrit literature were a source of historical information in Sri Lanka (Abhayagunawardena & Dissanayake 1993: III). They argue that the Purāṇas, stories of Indian gods, influenced the compilation of historical information in Sri Lanka through the five main features of those ancient texts. These features include character stories, clan characteristics, and chronicles of gods and sages. Additionally, the Purāṇas emphasise five characteristics, namely, *Sarga* (creation of the world), *Pratisarga* (pre-emergence and creation), *Vaṃsa* (chronicles of gods and sages), *Manvaṃtarāni* (the eras that began with him, known as the Manu Period), and *Vaṃsanaucharitha* (anecdotes of Surya Lunar dynasties) (Pargiter 1913).

Moreover, the Purāṇas mention *Varnāshrama dharma*, Sacrificess of *brāhmaṇas*, *Yāga Karma*, *Śiva*, *Vishnu Pudaupajah*, and effort, and they gradually developed into the Eighteen Purāṇas, which are mainly divided into *Vishṇu*, *Shiva*, and *Brāhmaṇ*. Similarly, the Vedic literature has a chronicle literature called *Vaṃsa Brāhmaṇa*, which details the lineages of ancient Brahmin teachers. Furthermore, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* Upanishad highlights that excellent spiritual knowledge was passed down to generations of sages, including a detailed chronicle of the *Yājñavalkya* category in the sixth *Brāhmaṇa* of the fourth Adhyāsa (Pargiter 1913: 164).

However, even if some commentators think that the historical tradition of Sri Lanka started following the ancient texts, it is not an opinion that can be quickly confirmed. Some scholars accept that Sri Lanka received the inspiration for history writing from India, citing Sanskrit influence, among other reasons. Nonetheless, no national historiography has been born in India. Some scholars believe that ancient historical works of India existed and may have been destroyed, but C.H. Phillips counters that there is no reason to destroy historical works alone (Phillips 1961: 47).

Moreover, although Purāṇas mention detailed chronicles of kings and epics like Mahābharata and Raghuvāṃsa, ancient features are found in chronicles, including Mahāvāṃsa, Dīpavāṃsa, and Hatthavanagallavihāravāṃsa, which describe royal characters in exaggerated detail. However, highlighting royal characters is not the only thing found in chronicles, as they also describe news beyond that. Thus, the idea that the compilation of historical information started similarly to the characteristics of the Purāṇas found in Sanskrit literature does not seem to be very reasonable. Instead, it appears that news can be gleaned from chronicles that are more meaningful than the Purāṇas, but systematic, religious, and historical.

Many people believe that the reasons that influenced the compiling of historical information were received during the Buddhā's time (Phillips 1961: 47). There is a stronger and more intense sense of history in Buddhist texts, such as the enacting of disciplinary rules and preaching of sutras, which are recorded in the Tripitaka with the treasure of time, place, and those involved.¹ There is no clear indication that they were particularly interested in gathering historical news or narratives during the Lord Buddha's lifetime. Nevertheless, certain Buddha's discourses reference the emergence and evolution of significant persons or objects.

The *Mahāpadāna Sutta* and the *Mahā Sudassana Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* reveal the character stories of six Buddhas and the history of the *Kusāvati* kingdom, respectively. No self-esteem or praise is given to the subject of the characters and objects; the Buddha needed to prove impermanence, provide new knowledge, and correct a wrong opinion. The *Mahā Khandhaka* of the Mahāvagga Pāli of the *Vinaya Pitaka*, the *Pancasatika Khandhaka*, and the *Satta Satika Khandhaka* of the *Culla Vagga Pāli* are also historical documents containing news of Buddhist order.

The Buddhist Theras, or elders, played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting the Buddha's teachings to future generations. One of their key responsibilities was to present information about the Buddha's biography and his previous incarnations, or *Jātakas*, to instil respect and devotion to the Buddha in people. This practice became more prevalent over time. Later monks also annotated the 'Buddhavāṃsa', a generational story about the previous Buddhas, to maintain credibility and bring Buddhism to the ordinary people. The 'Buddhavāṃsa' is the only book in the *Sutta Pitaka* that bears the name of 'vāṃsa,' a genealogical chronicle. Later, the 'Anāgatavāṃsa,' describing the character of Maitreya Buddha, was added as a chronicle (Law 1947: 52). The *Apadana Pāli*, which describes the past lives of the Buddha and other prominent disciples, is also found as a chronicle in the *Sumangalavilāsinī* (Cowell, 1895). These chronicles were essential to Buddhist tradition, as they provided a framework for understanding the Buddha's teachings and the lineage of those who carried

them forward. In academic discourse, there has been some contention over the integrity of historical information contained in Sri Lanka's pre-Buddhist period (Although Ananda Guruge and others this was commented that they believe that the growth and systematicity of Sri Lankan historiography had been gained after the introduction of Buddhism. (Abhayagunawardena & Dissanayake 1993: XXI). Moreover, scholars have noted that the reliability of the historical information in the Mahāvamsa is not uniform throughout the text. The seven chapters dedicated to the pre-Buddhist period are considered the least reliable.

Lakshman S. Perera has mentioned that all the authors of chronicles were pious and devout monks, and their religious concepts were linked to writing the history of Sri Lanka. (Perera: 40). The historical tradition of Sri Lanka has been subject to various influences and has taken on diverse forms concerning ritual and purpose. However, the arrival and spread of Buddhism on the island profoundly impacted the development of Sri Lanka's historical tradition, leading it down a distinct path.

BUDDHIST TEMPLES AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SRI LANKA

E.H. Carr has noted the importance of examining the historian behind the historical work (Carr, 1961: 9). Buddhist monks who played a pivotal role initiated the writing of Sri Lanka's history. The development of Sri Lanka's historical tradition was closely linked to the monasteries where the monks resided. Sirima Kiribamune has articulated this perspective.

“Buddhist monks wrote historical literature based on chronicles such as the Mahāvamsa in Buddhist monasteries. The growth of the historical writing tradition of Sri Lanka should be analysed in light of the strong association with Indian Buddhist literature and the reasons that led to the arrival of Buddhist doctrine to Sri Lanka”(Kiribamune 2005: 112-113).

Although the eldest chronicle is the Dipavamsa, the origin of the historical compilation can be traced back to the attempt to provide Aṭṭhakathā in Sinhala to the Pāli Tripitaka. Following the arrival of Mahinda Thero to Sri Lanka, the *Tripitaka*, initially in the *Māgadhi* or Pāli language, was introduced to Sri Lanka.² Mahinda Thero played a crucial role in establishing Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka at a time when Buddhism comprised various sects in contemporary India. Each sect wanted to maintain a history associated with their tradition to demonstrate their identity. Hence, the lineage from Buddha was introduced to Sri Lanka along with Buddhism through the history of Theravada. *Upāli Thero*, *Dāsaka*, *Sōnaka*, *Siggava*, *Moggaliputtatissa* Thero, and Mahinda Thero are among the prominent figures mentioned in the lineage.³ They confirmed their identity by pointing out that the *Dhamma* they preached was pure Buddhism and that they were descendants of prominent Theras in the Buddhist order.

Mahinda Thero introduced Māgadhi or Pāli to Sri Lanka, which was the language of Theravada Buddhism. It can be inferred that there were commentaries to explain this doctrine. Those commentaries may have collected significant information about the history of the Buddhist order (Sāsana) and the Magadha dynasty. As a result, local monks attempted to compile commentaries in Sinhala to bring this doctrine closer to the local people. These commentaries were not written scriptures but an explanation of *Dhamma* in the Sinhala language. Over time, it can be assumed that the Sinhala commentaries constantly added religious news and information about patrons.

As these traditions were passed down from generation to generation in Sri Lanka, they were combined with the events related to the restoration of order in Sri Lanka, such as the introduction of Buddhism under the patronage of King *Dēvanampiyatissa*. The monks maintained Buddhism through the oral tradition and transmitted their memories of events related to Buddhism to their generations. The writing of *Dhamma* and Aṭṭhakathās during the reign of King *Valagambā*,⁴ which were brought orally

in Sri Lanka, also had a significant impact on the compilation of historical information (Rathanasara 2021: 85). It is plausible to suggest that the collection of historical information, along with the *Dhamma* brought from the oral tradition, may have been recorded in books.

The Mahāvihāra monks may have attempted to separate the history of introducing Buddhism and the series of events related to it from the Tripitaka commentaries and maintain it separately. The Sīhalatthakathā Mahāvamsa, Sīhalatthakathā, and Porāṇatthakathā, mentioned in Vamsattappakāsini as sources for Mahāvamsa, are the result of that effort (Vamsatthapakasinī 1935: 120, 129, 290, 293, 438, 35, 49). At the beginning of the Mahāvamsa, the author cites the sources on which he is based, including the “*Kato “pēsō”*” in Porāṇa reference made by the ancients, which implies that there was already a collection of historical information before the Mahāvamsa.⁵ “*Porāṇa*” means ancient, former, or past (Weerasekara 1968: 285) and is put in the *Tatiyā* inflectional plural. The author of the Mahāvamsa states that he is going for a revision of this work.⁶ The author of Vamsattappakāsini: who comments on the Porāṇa mentioned here, has emphasised that it means the Mahāvamsa of Sīhalatthakathā itself.⁷ The Mahāvamsa intended to abandon the Sinhala language of the Sīhalatthakathā and move to the Māgadhi language.

Over time, a tradition emerged that was separate from the Mahāvihāra tradition, called *Abhayagiriya*. Like the Mahāvihāra, they endeavoured to maintain a collection of historical information associated with the patrons of their monastery and sect. Inspired by Buddhism, the monks of the Buddhist monastery were keen on recording the history of their sect and monastery and showing the relationship between Buddhism and the country’s history.

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF BUDDHIST TEMPLES

The usage of the term “*Itihāsa*” by monastic monks for history prompts an inquiry into its connotations. The Eastern interpretation of “history” differs from its modern, literal interpretation. According to the *Abhidhanappadipika* Pāli Nighandu, the term was limited to fiction (*Abhidhānappadīpikā*: 1865). In place of “*Itihāsa*,” Buddhist scholars have utilised the term ‘*vamsa*’ Mangala Ilangasinghe argues that the compilation of historical information in Sri Lanka encompasses contemporary aspects of history writing despite the literal meaning of “*Itihāsa*” (Ilangasinghe 2003: 11). Additionally, he asserts that Buddhist history writers possessed scientific training and literary skills that enabled them to gather, interpret, and record facts. However, according to Kalhana, who wrote *Rājatarangani*, these elements alone were inadequate to compose history in the Theravada tradition.⁸

Since monastic monks at the centre of the monasteries compiled this historical information, the religious perspective heavily influenced it. Although the Buddhist tradition did not begin its history with the first five monks (*Paṃcavaggiya Bhikkhu*) with the Parinirvāna of the Buddha, it is evident that the Theras of dhamma councils regarded the Parinirvāna of the Buddha as the starting point for the history of the Sasana, which they observed. Thus, the Buddhist monastic historical tradition is pragmatic based on reality. Nonetheless, this view is not entirely accurate, as information about the *Mahāsammata* Dynasty, the Buddha’s visit to Sri Lanka, and the arrival of Prince *Vijaya* to Sri Lanka is found in the chronicles. Furthermore, not all historical compilations possess these qualities and are subject to variation depending on the author. A religious backdrop supports the collection of historical information centred on Buddhist monasteries. Vamsattappakāsini demonstrates that it was a presentation of Buddhist history. The *Dīpavamsa*’s reference to ‘Listen attentively to’ highlights the religious context of historiography.⁹ The compilation of Buddhist historical information aims to showcase the relationship between Buddhism and Sri Lankan history. Examples include the arrival of Prince *Vijaya*’s association with the Buddha’s parinirvana day. While presenting facts with a firm

grasp of time, the authors carefully express their intent. Their purpose, as stated in “*Sujana Pasāda Saṃvēgatthāya*,” (Mahāvamsa Pāli. end of every chapter), is not solely to provide a history essay but to evoke sensibilities in the people. These works are not the product of a single person but rather the contribution of numerous generations. Therefore, the authors acknowledge that they are only editors and, without revealing their names, show the same respect to their sources that they were taught.

EARLY STAGES OF HISTORICAL INFORMATION COMPILATION IN SRI LANKA

Sīhalaṭṭhakathā Mahāvamsa

The early stages of historical information compilation in Sri Lanka involved the revision of old work by the author of Mahāvamsa, who indicated that he was revising an old work (Mahāvamsa Pāli. Ch. 1. v. 3). Vamsattappakāsini: a commentary on Mahāvamsa, mentions that the old work is the Sinhala Mahāvamsa written by the monks of Mahāvihāra (Vamsattappakāsini: 35-36), and suggests that the form of the Sīhalaṭṭha Mahāvamsa should be investigated. While the Sīhalaṭṭha Mahāvamsa does not exist, it is possible to reveal some information about this work by association with Vamsattappakāsini (Vamsattappakāsini: 120, 129, 290, 293, 438). The compilation of Mahāvihāra historical information is considered to have been done in prose, as the use of the name Aṭṭhakathā and the fact that the Pāli Mahāvamsa is written in verse suggest that the original work was written in prose. The Mahāvamsa author mentions that he referred to this Sinhala prose Mahāvamsa edition because of three errors in it. Therefore, it is better to consider the Mahāvamsa as an edition of the old Sinhala prose Mahāvamsa rather than as a collection of new information.

It is believed that the Sīhalaṭṭha Mahāvamsa may have existed as a preface to the Sinhala Mahāṭṭhakathā, which provided commentary in Sinhala for the Tripitaka. However, as the amount of historical information increased, it may have become an independent work separated from the Mahāṭṭhakathā. Geiger suggests that the preface, which was initially attached to the Mahāṭṭhakathā, may have contained only information up to the time of Mahinda Thero (Geiger 1908: 64). After being separated from the Mahāṭṭhakathā, it may have been maintained in Sinhala in prose, adding later material. The Sīhalaṭṭha Mahāvamsa may have been detailed up to the time of Dutugemunu. However, problems arise regarding the authenticity of the information mentioned in the Mahāvamsa after King Valagambā, and there is little detail. The lack of details may be because the Sinhalese commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā), which is the source of the Mahāvamsa, recorded little information about this era.

The recent history of the Sīhalaṭṭhakathā is not descriptive, missing facts, and includes false information. Geiger suggests that the first part of the Sīhalaṭṭhakathā may have been recorded with the Tripitaka, and the later parts may have been written later (Geiger 1908: 27). King Mahāsēna’s activities may have been a strong factor in the poor compilation of the recent historical information of the Sīhalaṭṭhakathā. In addition, the destruction of the Mahāvihāra during the King Mahāsēna period may have resulted in the loss of records of the old Sīhalaṭṭhakathā, and later monks who could not provide those records may have done so with such weaknesses in loading the information. It seems that the compilation of historical information of the Sīhalaṭṭhakathā Mahāvamsa was temporarily halted in the face of the challenges faced by the Mahāvihāra during the King Mahāsēna period.

Porāṇa

Porāṇa represents a valuable example of the compilation of early historical information that is no longer extant. This historical text is mentioned seven times in Vamsattappakāsini and is referenced in the

Pāli Aṭṭhakathās of the Tripitaka. According to Oldenburg and other experts, the “Porāṇa” Aṭṭhakathā describes Vamsatthappakasini (Oldenberg 1879: 3; Adikaram: 1946: 65). Vamsatthappakāsini also cites nine verses and two prose passages from the Purāṇas, with these same verses appearing in Dīpavaṃsa but with some variations. Although scholars have paid particular attention to the Purāṇas, it is unclear whether sufficient evidence has been discovered to warrant further extensive study. Nonetheless, it is significant that Porāṇa compiles early historical information, which can be considered an important opportunity for compiling the first historical information.

Vinayaṭṭhakathā

The Mahāvihāra is known for preserving a continuous record of information related to Shasanika history. One example is the commentary on Vinaya written in Sinhala, which likely contains information on the compilation of Vinaya sermons and the role of the different schools of Vinaya in conducting them. This information is also found in the preface of the Pāli text Samantapāsadikā, which Adikaram believes drew from the Vinayaṭṭhakathā rather than the Sīhalatṭhakathā (Adikaram 1946: 14). The Vamsatthappakasini also extracts information from the Vinayaṭṭhakathā, such as the reference to Gokanna as “*Rōhita Miga*” in the ceremonial offerings of King Ashoka (Vamsatthappakāsini: 73-207). Similar facts are present in Samantapāsadikā (Samantapāsadikā 1924: 52, 73.), suggesting that a Sinhala Vinayaṭṭhakathā may have existed before Samantapāsadikā. However, Samantapāsadikā is not simply a Pāli translation of Vinayaṭṭhakathā but was prepared critically in association with other sources. Geiger argues that the earliest historical traditions of the Mahāvihāra likely stem from a common root (Geiger 1908: 70).

Uttaravihāraṭṭhakathā

Like the Mahāvihāra, the Abhayagiri sect also maintained its own history, though little is known about it today. The Vamsatthappakasini mentions the Uttaravihāraṭṭhakathā (Vamsatthappakāsini: Ibid, Pages 177, 189, 247, 249, 289.), Uttaravihāra Mahāvamsa (Vamsatthappakāsini: 134), and Aṭṭhakathā of the Uttara Vihāra (Vamsatthappakāsini: 125, 155) as sources of historical information for the Abhayagiri sect. The Vamsatthappakāsini suggests that the Uttaravihāraṭṭhakathā may have been more detailed in some places than the Sīhalatṭha Mahāvamsa and provides information on the Mahāsammatha dynasty, the Magadha dynasty, and King Vijaya and Pandukābhaya periods (Vamsatthappakāsini: 125, 134, 155, 177, 187, 247, 249, 290). Kiribamune proposes that the historical story may have been described from the Uttaravihāraṭṭhakathā to the establishment of Buddhism (Kiribamune: 2005: 119).

The Vamsatthappakasini often refers to the Uttaravihāraṭṭhakathā when there are differences between the two works but provides little explanation for why (Vamsatthappakāsini: 187). When there are no differences, the facts are described in the same manner as in the Mahāvamsa. Many accept that the chronicle is an edition of the monks of the Abhayagiri sect, compiled over time like the Sīhalatṭha Mahāvamsa. As the Vamsatthappakasini was still in circulation in the 10th century, it is clear that the earliest compilation of historical information in Sri Lanka was done in association with monasteries.

Unfamous Early Works

Sirima Kiribamunye suggests that, like the Mahāvihāra Abhayagiri, it is plausible that other temples may have also preserved their collections of monastic history Buddhism (Kiribamune: 2005: 119). Still, there is no visible evidence of this. Each temple has preserved its history and the history of the sacrificial objects associated with Buddhism, such as Sri MahāBōdhiya Ruwanvelisaya, which has maintained the record of the sacred things.

The *Vamsattappakāsiniya*, which recounts the story of the arrival of Mahā Bōdhi (Bōdhi āgamana), has referred to additional information on this topic in *Bōdhivamsatthakathā* (*Vamsattappakāsini*: 676). Although Geiger asserts that the existing Pāli *Bōdhivamsa* is the same as the *Bōdhivamsatthakathā* (Geiger 1908: 32, 34.), it can be concluded that the Pāli *Bōdhivamsa* was written more recently based on linguistic characteristics and related facts. Consequently, it is possible that the *Bōdhivamsatthakathā* mentioned in this context does not exist.

Cētiyavamsatthakathā can be identified as a work written to document the history of Mahāthupa or Ruwanweli Sai. *Vamsattappakāsiniya* has introduced this work as *Cētiyavamsatthakathā*, *Mahācētiya Vamsatthakathā* (*Vamsattappakāsini*: 508, 548). Likewise, the Pāli *Thupavamsa*, written after the 10th century, also mentioned the *Thupavamsa* that existed in Sinhala and Pāli before it.¹⁰

Moreover, many currently unavailable works can be inquired about through *Vamsattappakāsini*. These include *Sahassavatthuatthakathā* (*Vamsattappakāsini*: 451), *Dīpavamsatthakathā* (*Vamsattappakāsini*: 411, 683), *cūlasīhanāda sūtra varṇanā siṃhala atuvāva* (*Vamsattappakāsini*: 173, 305), *Gaṇṭhipadatthavarṇanā* (*Vamsattappakāsini*: 148), and *Sīmākāthā* (*Vamsattappakāsini*: 362). As *Vamsattappakāsini* cites various information from these works, it can be assumed that they represent some of the earliest historical information compilation in Sri Lanka. These works were created and inspired by Buddhist culture centred around monasteries.

DEVELOPMENTAL POINTS IN MONASTIC-CENTERED HISTORIOGRAPHY

Dīpavamsa

Dīpavamsa is considered to be the oldest extant chronicle in Sri Lanka. However, it is evident from the available information that it is not the first compilation of historical information in Sri Lanka. Although the time and authorship of its composition are still uncertain, it is believed to have been written between the King Mahāsenā era and the King Dhātusēna era. *Dīpavamsa* is an important source for the study of early historical data collection, and it represents the initial attempt to translate the oral tradition of *Sīhalaṭṭhakathā Mahāvamsa* into Pāli.

Despite being considered a poetic work, *Dīpavamsa* also contains prose. It is possible that the facts of the *Sīhalaṭṭhakathā Mahāvamsa* were translated into Pāli to facilitate the transmission of the oral tradition. Many stanzas in *Dīpavamsa* consist solely of a collection of nouns without verbs to aid memorisation.¹¹ It follows a specific sequence of historical events and is believed to be a compilation of historical information from various sources. (Perera: 38).

Mahāvamsa, at the beginning of his work, pointed out the problem of repetitiveness in older works (*Mahāvamsa* Pāli. Ch. 1. v. 2). Since the *Vamsattappakāsini* confirms that the primary source of the *Mahāvamsa* is the *Sīhalaṭṭhakathā Mahāvamsa*, it is reasonable to assume that retellings based on the *Sīhalaṭṭhakathā* itself may have been widely created. However, it should also be noted that the reconstructions are diverse. For example, in one place, *Dīpavamsa* attributes the construction of the Great Stupa to Dutugemunu (*Dīpavamsa* The Chronicle of the Island, Ch. 19. v. 10-11), while in another place, it is said to be the work of Saddhatissa (*Dīpavamsa* The Chronicle of the Island, Ch. 20. v. 1-5), There are also two different descriptions of the third Dhamma Council (*Dharma Sangāyanā*) in *Dīpavamsa* (*Dīpavamsa* The Chronicle of the Island, Ch. 7. v. 37-59). *Dīpavamsa* represents the earliest moments of historical information compilation in Sri Lanka centred on monasteries. While it is vital in terms of content, it is weak in terms of composition. Further research and development opportunities exist to explore the potential of monastic-centred historical informatics in Sri Lanka.

Mahāvamsa

The writing of the Mahāvamsa is a significant milestone in the compilation of historical information in Sri Lanka. Despite being considered a successful edition rather than an independent work, it is acknowledged for addressing issues of length, conciseness, and repetition present in earlier works (Mahāvamsa Pāli. Ch. 1. V. 3). Based on various historical sources available in the Sinhala language; the Mahāvamsa is believed to be an edition of the Sīhalatṭhatha, as noted in the Vamsattappakāsini (Vamsattappakāsini: 687). The Mahāvamsa is divided into 37 chapters, with the first thirty-seven chapters written by Mahānāma Thero, containing information from the Mahāsammata dynasty to the reign of King Mahāsen, covering fifty-eight kings. The first thirty chapters describe the reigns of fifteen kings and document significant historical events in Sri Lanka, such as the Mahindagamana, the introduction of the Sri Mahā Bōdhi, and the construction of the Abhayagiri, among others. The total number of stanzas in the Mahāvamsa written by Mahānāma Thero is 2906. The composition of the Mahāvamsa is an important landmark in compiling historical information due to its focus on time and space. The author connected events to the Magadha dynasty and documented significant events in India and Sri Lanka, providing a comprehensive overview of history. It is not merely an informational report but shows evidence of the author's skill in the modern historiographical concepts of information gathering, analysis, and composition. The Mahāvamsa author did not limit themselves to a single source but associated with many works in compiling historical information, as confirmed in the Vamsattappakāsini. This work inspired other Buddhacharyas to engage in historical information compilation, leading to the creation of the four remaining Mahāvamsa groups, known as the Geiger Chulavamsa (*Culavamsa* 1926: 1).

Vamsattappakāsini

The Vamsattappakāsini is a work that explains obscure and difficult-to-understand passages in the Mahāvamsa. The authorship and date of writing are subject to debate among scholars. However, it is widely recognised as an important milestone in developing historical information compilation in Sri Lanka. The author of the Vamsattappakāsini is careful to cite his sources, indicating a growing awareness of the importance of historical accuracy and reliability. The Vamsattappakāsini is a valuable source for understanding the earliest attempts at historical compilation in ancient Sri Lanka. While it has been referred to as the Mahāvamsa Tika, this name is a recent innovation, with George Turner being the first to use it The Mahāvamsa (*The Mahāvamsa* 1838: xxxi).

CONCLUSION

The historical tradition of Sri Lanka is said to have been influenced by the Buddhist culture, with Sri Lankan monks being directed to it through the compilation of historical information in Tripitaka and Atṭhakathā. The Buddhist monks, particularly Mahinda Thero, introduced Buddhism and related history to Sri Lanka through oral tradition, incorporating their memories of the expansion and development of Buddha's time. The references in the Vamsattappakāsini about the Sīhalatṭhakathā Mahāvamsya suggest that this historical information grew gradually and was abstracted from the Tripitaka commentaries, developing as a separate tradition. The Sri Lankan historical traditions have been maintained through word of mouth from generation to generation, with separate histories of discipline and sacred objects being preserved. The Tripitaka Sutras and Vinaya Nidanas have spent time and space compiling historical information. Monks have tried to keep these traditions in Pāli poems by editing them for ease of remembrance and international use, which Dipavamsa and Mahāvamsadi confirm.

Additionally, mentions of the Uttaravihāraṭṭhakathā suggest that various monasteries have also worked on composing the history of their sect. All the historical information compilations, starting from Sīhalaṭṭhakathā Mahāvamsa, Vinayaṭṭhakathā, Uttaravihāraṭṭhakathā, Dīpavamsa, Mahāvamsa, and Vamsattappakāsini: have been done in association with Buddhist temples. Although some argue that Sri Lankan historiography started under Indian Purāna influences, no evidence supports this claim. The primary stage of the compilation of historical information in Sri Lanka was concentrated on Buddhist monasteries, confirmed by the facts studied.

NOTES

1. “Evaṃ me sutam ekaṃ samayaṃ bhagavā antarā ca rājagahaṃ antarā ca nālandaṃ addhānamaggappaṭipanno hoti Mahātā bhikkhusaṅghena saddhiṃ pañcamattehi bhikkhusatehi. Suppiyopi kho paribbājako antarā ca rājagahaṃ antarā ca nālandaṃ addhānamaggappaṭipanno hoti saddhiṃ antevāsīnā brahmadattena māṇavena. Tatra sudaṃ suppiyo paribbājako anekapariyāyena buddhassa avaṇṇaṃ bhāsati, dhammassa avaṇṇaṃ bhāsati, saṅghassa avaṇṇaṃ bhāsati; suppiyassa pana paribbājakassa antevāsī brahmadatto māṇavo anekapariyāyena buddhassa vaṇṇaṃ bhāsati, dhammassa vaṇṇaṃ bhāsati, saṅghassa vaṇṇaṃ bhāsati. Itiha te ubho ācariyantevāsī aññamaññassa ujuvipaccanīkavādā bhagavantaṃ piṭṭhito piṭṭhito anubandhā honti bhikkhusaṅghaṇca.” *Digha Nikaya: Brahmajala Sutta*. CS CD Rom.
2. “Sīhalaḍḍipam pana ābhatātha, vasinā mahāmahindena; Ṭhapitā sīhalaḍḍhāsāya, dīpavāsīnamatthāya.” *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*, Nidānakathā, CS CD Rom.
3. “Upāli dāsako ceva, soṇako siggavo tathā;
Moggaliputtana pañcamā, ete jambusirivhaye.
Tato mahindo iṭṭiyo, uttiyo sambalo tathā;
Bhaddanāmo ca paṇḍito.” *Parivārapāli*, Bhikkhuvibhaṅgo, Soḷasamahāvāro CS CD Rom.
4. “Piṭakattayapāliṇca, tassa aṭṭhakathampi ca;
Mukhapāthena ānesuṃ, pubbe bhikkhū mahāmati.
Hāniṃ disvāna sattānaṃ, tadā bhikkhū samāgatā;
Ciraṭṭhitatthaṃ dhammassa, potthakesu likhāpayuṃ.” *Mahāvamsa Pāli*. Ch. 33. V. 102-103. CS CD Rom.
5. “Porāṇehi kato’peso, ativitthārito kvaci;
Atīva kvaci saṃkhitto, anekapunaruttako.” *Mahāvamsa Pāli*. Ch. 1. v. 2. CS CD Rom.
6. “Vajjitaṃ tehi dosehi, sukhaḅḅhāḅḅadhāraṇaṃ;
Pasādasamvegakaraṃ, sutito ca upāgataṃ.” *Mahāvamsa Pāli*. Ch. 1. v. 3. CS CD Rom.
7. “Ēvaṃ mahāvamsaṃti laddhanāmaṃ mahāvihāravāsīnaṃ vācanāmaggaṃ pōraṇaṭṭhakathaṃ eṭṭha sīhalaḍḍhāsaṃ hitvā māgadhiḅḅhāsāya pavakkhāmīti adhippāyō.” *Vamsatthapakasini*, 35-36.
8. “ślāghya sa ēva guṇavān - rāgadveṣa bahiṣkṛtā bhūtāthīkathanē yasya- sahirēva prajāpatī” *Rajatarangini*.
- 9.
10. “Kiñcāpi so yatijanena purātanena
Atvāya sīhalaḅḅanassa kato purāpi,
Vākkena sīhalaḅḅhavana’bhisaṅkhamattā
Atthaṃ na sādhaḅḅati sabbaḅḅanassa sammā;
Yasmā ca māgadha niruttikatopi thūpa-
Vaṃso viruddhanaya sadda samākulo so,
Vattabbameva ca bahumpi yato na vuttaṃ
Tamhā ahaṃ punapi vaṃsami’maṃ vadāmi;” *The Chronical of Thūpa and the Thūpavamsa*. v. 3,4.
11. “dīpaṃ puraṇ ca rājā ca upaddutaṅ ca dhātuyo thūpaṃ dīpaṅ ca pabbataṃ uyyānaṃ bodhi bhikkhunī” *Dīpavamsa The Chronicle of the Island*, Ch. 17. v. 3.

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