

# Aṭṭhakathācariyas and Aṭṭhakathikas

Sodō Mori

The study of the original sources of the Pāli Aṭṭhakathās (commentaries) as a whole rather than text-by-text has been promoted by Dr. Adikaram<sup>1)</sup>, yet his pioneering presentation is too brief and incomplete not only in terms of the enumeration of the varieties of source and reference, but also in his investigation of each. The present article aims at a thorough examination of two such sources, the Aṭṭhakathācariyas (Commentary Teachers; hereafter Ayas) and the aṭṭhakathikas (Commentators; Akas), as a part of my overall study of the Aṭṭhakathā sources.

The Ayas and the Akas are always referred to in plural form, indicating that they can not be the names of any particular individuals, but rather of certain special groups who composed and transmitted the old aṭṭhakathās (mainly in old Sinhalese) which were the sources of the present Pāli Aṭṭhakathās. In addition, as their views and understandings on many matters may be found quoted at various places throughout the aṭṭhakathās, they themselves should be placed among the body of sources. The Ayas as an authority are referred to in many Aṭṭhakathās, such as the Vis, VA, Kṅkh, DA, MA, SA, AA, KhpA, SnA, UdA, ItA, MNdA, PṭsA, DhsA, and VibhA<sup>2)</sup>; while the Akas are only mentioned at a place in the KhpA<sup>3)</sup> as discussed later. Some of these references are the same not only with the wording of the passage in question but also with the text both preceding and following<sup>4)</sup>.

As for evidence that the Ayas were indeed the composers of the old source-aṭṭhakathās, the VA points out<sup>5)</sup> some differences among the Pāli, (i. e., Scripture), the Mahā-aṭṭhakathā<sup>6)</sup>, and Aṭṭhakathā (singular) regarding the explanation of the words *ghara* (house), *gharūpacāra* (vicinity of a house), *gāma* (village), and *gāmūpacāra* (vicinity of a village). After this, the following passage appears :

..., so ca Aṭṭhakathācariyaṇaṃ eva vidito, tasmā yathā gharūpacāre thitassā' ti gharū-

*pacāralakkhaṇaṃ Pāliyaṃ avuttam pi Aṭṭhakathāya vuttavasena gahitaṃ, evaṃ sesam pi gahetabbaṃ.*

...and this [conclusion] was known to the Aṭṭhakathācariyas (Commentary Teachers), so that although the characteristics of the *vicinity of a house* implied in the phrase ‘gharūpacāre thitassa...’ are not stated in the Scripture, they are thus in the Aṭṭhakathā; so that the rest should be understood as such.

This passage shows us that what is known to the Ayas (*Aṭṭhakathācariyānaṃ eva vidito*) is precisely what is expounded in the Aṭṭhakathā (*Aṭṭhakathāya vuttaṃ*), thus apparently indicating that the Ayas were the composers of the Aṭṭhakathās. Incidentally this use of the Aṭṭhakathā in the singular usually refers to the most basic source for each aṭṭhakathā in Pāli, originating in India, and in case of the VA (i. e., *Samantapāsādikā*) is none other than the old Vinayaṭṭhakathā. It is also worth noting that the VA lists up in the following order the eminent teachers whom Buddhists should follow : in the lifetime of the Buddha, the Buddha himself ; after His decease, those of the status of mahāsāvaka, khīṇāsava, anāgāmin, sakadāgāmin, sotāpanna, tipīṭaka, dvipiṭaka, ekapiṭaka, ekasaṅgītika, ekāgama, aṭṭhakathācariya, and dhutaṅgadara. This lists also lends support to the view of the Ayas as the composers of and specialists in the source-aṭṭhakathās. In connection with the characteristics of the Ayas, their relation to the Porāṇas (Ancients) should be discussed. Among the quotations from the Ayas, as already shown (footnote 4), SA I-138, AA II-53, MNdA I-67, PtsA III-600, and VibhA p. 300 are identical with one another in the following passage :

*Bojjhanakassa puggalassa aṅgā ti vā bojjhaṅgā.*

But in the MA and UdA<sup>7)</sup>, this short sentence can be found as a quotation not attributed to the Ayas but to the Porāṇas, who are also recognized as one of the most important authorities for the Pāli Aṭṭhakathās<sup>8)</sup>. In other words, out of the seven examples of the above citation, five attributes it to the Ayas and the other two to the Porāṇas, but in all cases the wording is almost the same even in the passage preceding and following. This fact of the confusion

between the Ayas and the Porāṇas suggests the possibility of very close mutual relation. I would note further that the DAṬ<sup>9</sup>) comments that “*Porāṇā ti aṭṭhakathācariyā,*” from which it may be assumed that the Porāṇas undoubtedly become synonymous with the Ayas. Generally speaking, however, such comments appearing for the first time not in the Aṭṭhakathās but in the Ṭikās cannot fully be relied upon without more definite proof. In fact, it is rather difficult to explain the fact that many questions from the Ayas and the Porāṇas exist together in same texts of the Aṭṭhakathās. Nonetheless, there is no room for doubt that the above comment of the DAṬ expresses some form of intimate relation between the Ayas and the Porāṇas at least.

Two other similarities regarding the two can be pointed out: the first is the fact that the quotations from the Ayas contain both prose and verse just as those from the Porāṇas, in some cases<sup>10</sup>) verse and the rest prose. This is clearly different from the case of some other sources such as the Porāṇakattheras, the passages attributed to which are always expressed in prose only. Moreover as Dr. Adikaram has suggested<sup>11</sup>), the verses of the Ayas may have originally been written in Pāli, remained untranslated into Sinhalese and mixed in with the prose passages in Sinhalese; the same hypothesis being valid for the Porāṇas. Among the quotations from the Ayas mentioned before, the four verses in the SA (111-13) can be found but without attribution in the SnA and DhsA<sup>12</sup>): in the SnA these verses in question are separated by a short prose passage following each, while in the DhsA, the same four verses appear contiguously following three contiguous but unrelated verses. As already stated, these verses are not quoted in connection with the Ayas but anonymously, thus suggesting a very old source for the statements of the Ayas, especially in verse form, just like the case of the Porāṇas (numerous anonymous verses may be found through the Tipaṭaka).

The second point of similarity between the Ayas and the Porāṇas regards their views. For example the SnA<sup>13</sup>) introduces the following view of the Porāṇas on the circumstances of the naming of Sāvattthī, capital of Kosala :

*Porāṇā pana vaṇṇayanti: “yasmā tasmim̐ thāne satthasamāyoge ‘kiṃ bhaṇḍam atthi’*

(4)

Aṭṭhakathācariyas and Aṭṭhakathikas (S. Mori)

*ti pucchite ‘sabbam atthi’ ti āhaṃsu, tasmā taṃ vaccaṇam upādāya Sāvattḥi ti vuccati”  
ti.*

And the Porāṇas comment : in the caravan-group of that place, when the question was asked, “What kinds of goods are there?”, they answered “sabbam atthi (everything is)” ; therefore that place is named after the words as Sāvattḥi.

The explanation of the Ayas in some Aṭṭhathās<sup>14</sup>) runs similarly ;

*Aṭṭhakathācariyā pana bhananti : Yaṃ kiñci manussānaṃ upabhogaaparibhogaṃ sabbam  
ettha atthi ti Sāvattḥi. Satthasamāyoge ca, kim bhandam atthi ti pucchite, sabbam  
atthi ti vaccaṇam upādāya Sāvattḥi.*

*Sabbadā sabbūpakaraṇaṃ Sāvattḥiyaṃ samohitaṃ*

*tasmā sabbam upādāya Sāvattḥi ti pavuccati.*

The Ayas say : that place is named as Sāvattḥi after the fact that all kinds of living necessities and food for people are available there (sabbam ettha atthi). And when, in the caravan-group, was it questioned, “what kinds of goods are there” [they answered], “sabbam atthi (everything is)”, after which words it is called Sāvattḥi.

All the necessaries are always gathered in Sāvattḥi

Then it is called Sāvattḥi after [the word] ‘sabba’.

Needless to say, the two passages quoted above are not exactly identical, yet they have such similarity that is easy to suppose their stemming from the same source. Thus it is reasonable to judge the Ayas and the Porāṇas as not being precisely identical but at least intimately related.

Now we proceed to the matter of the Akas. Their name appears only once, in the KhpA<sup>15</sup>), in the following passage :

*Kālena dhammasākacchā nāme : padosā vā paccūse vā dve suttantika bhikkhū añña-  
aññaṃ Suttantaṃ sākacchanti, vinayadhara Vinayaṃ, abhidhammika Abhidhammaṃ,  
jātakabhāṇakā Jātakaṃ, aṭṭhakathikā Aṭṭhakathaṃ, Iti-uddhata-vicikicchāparetaccita-  
visodhanatthaṃ vā tamhi tamhi kāle sākacchanti, ayaṃ kālena dhammasākacchā ; sa  
āgamavyattiādinaṃ guṇānaṃ hetuto maṅgalaṃ ti vuccati ti.*

The occasional conversoation about the Dhamma is interpreted thus : at the time of committing an offense or at dawn, two Suttatika-bhikkhus mutually discuss the

*Suttanta*, Vinayadharas the *Vinaya*, Abhidhammikas the *Abhidhamma*, Jātakabhāṇakas the *Jātaka*, and Aṭṭhakathikas the *Aṭṭhakathā*, in order to purify sluggish, unsettled, doubtful, and defeated minds: they discuss occasionally. This is the occasional conversation about the Dhamma; it is called the auspiciousness based on the merits of the transmitted wisdom and so on.

It is quite clear from the above passage that the Aṭṭhakathikas were the specialists in the Aṭṭhakathā, camposing and transmitting it, just as the Suttantikas in the *Suttanta*, the Vinayadharas in the *Vinaya*, the Abhidhammikas in the *Abhidhamma*, and the Jātakabhāṇakas in the *Jātaka*. Consequently the Akas are none other than the Ayas, although the term “Aṭṭhakathācariyas” occurs much more commonly than “Aṭṭhakathikas”, with the latter only being found in the Aṭṭhakathās as an exception. Even so “Aṭṭhakathācariyas” seems to be the older terminology.

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(The Pāli texts quoted here are the Pāli Text Society edition.)

- 1) E. W. Adikaram: *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, Calombo 1496 pp. 1-42.
- 2) Vis I-62, 102, 332; VA I-206, II-300, 314, III-583, IV-753 (twice), 769; V-1063; Kñkh p. 4; DA I-187; II-481; MA I-59, 225, 255; SA III-13, 39, 138, 139, 185; AA II-53, 99; KhpA p. 100; SnA I-23, 43; UdA p. 55; ItA I-33; MNdA I-67; PtsA III-532; DhsA p. 85, 123, 217; VibhA p. 85, 310, 350.
- 3) KhpA p. 151.
- 4) DA I-187=MA I-255=SA III-185=VibhA p. 350; DA II-481=MA I-225; MA I-59=KhpA p. 110=UdA p. 55=PtsA III-532; SA I-138=AA II-53=MNdA I-67=PtsA III-600=VibhA p. 310; SA III-139=AA II-99. In addition, SnA I-23 and 43 are identical regarding the short quotation from the Ayas, but not the surrounding text.
- 5) VA II-300.
- 6) On this source, see my article “On the Mahā-Aṭṭhakathā” (in Japanese), *Buddhist Studies*, Vol. IX (Hamamatsu, Japan 1979) pp. 87-104.
- 7) MA I-83; UdA p. 305.
- 8) Cf. Sodō Mori: “The Porāṇas as Seen in the Pāli Aṭṭhakathās” (in Japanese), *Bulletin of Jōsai University* Vol. V (Sakado, Japan 1981) pp. 1-29.
- 9) DAṬ I-60.
- 10) VA V-1063; Kñkh p. 4; SA III-13; DhsA p. 85.
- 11) Adikaram: op. cit. p. 15.

(6)

Aṭṭhakathācariyas and Aṭṭhakathikas (S. Mori)

12) (SA III-13)

Ten' ahu Aṭṭhakathācariyā;

Patthaddho bhavati kāyo daṭṭho kaṭṭha-mukhena vā,  
Paṭhavi-dhātu-ppakopena hoti kaṭṭha-mukhe 'va so.  
Pūṭiko bhavati kāyo daṭṭho pūṭi-mukhena vā,  
Āpo-dhātu-ppakopena hoti aggi-mukhe 'va so.  
Santatto bhavati kāyo daṭṭho aggi-mukhena vā,  
Tejodhātu-ppakopena hoti aggi-mukhe 'va so.  
Sañchinno bhavati kāyo daṭṭho sattha-mukhena vā,  
Vāyodhātu-ppakopena hoti sattha-mukhe 'va so ti.

(SnA II-458)

..., yathāha:

“pathavidhātuppakopena hoti kaṭṭhamukhe va so” ti,  
patthaddho bhavati kāyo daṭṭho kaṭṭhamukhena vā,  
āpodhātuppakopena pūṭibhāvaṃ āpajjitvā paggharita-pubbamaṃsalohito aṭṭhicammā-  
vaseso hoti, yathāha:

“pūṭiyo bhavati kāyo daṭṭho pūṭimukhena vā,  
āpodhātuppakopena hoti pūṭimukhe va so” ti,  
tejodhātuppakopena aṅgārakāsuyaṃ pakkhitto viya samantā pariḍayhati, yathāha:  
“santatto bhavati kāyo daṭṭho aggimukhena vā,  
tejodhātuppakopena hoti aggimukhe va so” ti,  
vāyodhātuppakopena sañchijjamaṇasandhibandhano pāsāṇehi koṭṭetvā sañcuṇṇiyamā-  
naṭṭhiko viya ca hoti, yathāha:

“sañchinno bhavati kāyo daṭṭho satthamukhena vā,  
vāyodhātuppakopena hoti satthamukhe va so” ti,

(DhsA P. 300)

Bhūmito vuṭṭhitā yāva brahmalokā vidhāvati,  
Acci accimato loke ḍayhamānam pi tejasā.  
Koṭisatasahass 'ekaṃ cakkavāḷaṃ vilīyati,  
Kupitena yadā loko salilena vinassati.  
Koṭisatasahass 'ekaṃ cakkavāḷaṃ vikirati,  
Vāyodhātuppakopena yadā loko vinassati.  
Patthaddho bhavati kāyo daṭṭho kaṭṭhamukhena vā,  
Paṭhavidhātuppakopena hoti kaṭṭhamukhe va so.  
Pūṭiyo bhavati kāyo daṭṭho pūṭimukhena vā,  
Āpodhātuppakopena hoti pūṭimukhe va so.  
Santatto bhavati kāyo daṭṭho aggimukhena vā,  
Tejodhātuppakopena hoti aggimukhe va so.  
Sañchinno bhavati kāyo daṭṭho satthamukhena vā,

Vāyodhātuppakopena hoti satthamukhe va so.

13) SnA I-300.

14) MA I-59; KhpA p. 110; UdA p. 55; Pṭsa III-532. Among these references only the MA and KhpA add the following verses:

Kosalānaṃ puraṃ rammaṃ dassaniyaṃ manoramaṃ  
dasahi saddhehi avivuttaṃ annapānasamāyutam.

Vuddhiṃ vepullataṃ pattam iddham phitam manoramaṃ

Alakamandā va devānaṃ Sāvatti-puram uttamaṃ.

15) KhpA p. 151.

### ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Aṅguttaraṭṭhakathā
Akas	Aṭṭhakathikas
Ayas	Aṭṭhakathācariyas
ItA	Itivuttakaṭṭhakathā
UdA	Udānaṭṭhakathā
Kṅkh	Kaṅkhāvitarāṇī
KhpA	Khuddakapāṭhaṭṭhakathā
DA	Dīghaṭṭhakathā
DAṬ	Dīghaṭṭhakathāṭṭhikā
DhsA	Dhammasaṅgaṇi-aṭṭhakathā
Pṭsa	Paṭisambhidāmaggaṭṭhakathā
MA	Majjhimaṭṭhakathā
MNdA	Mahā Niddesaṭṭhakathā
Vis	Visuddhimagga
VA	Vinayaṭṭhakathā
VibhA	Vibhaṅgaṭṭhakathā
SA	Samyuttaṭṭhakathā
SnA	Suttanipātaṭṭhakathā

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