

KING MAHĀSAMMATA:  
THE FIRST KING IN THE BUDDHIST STORY OF CREATION,  
AND HIS PERSISTING RELEVANCE

*The Thesis*

The *Aggañña Suttanta*<sup>1</sup>, literally meaning the *Sutta* 'pertaining to beginnings', was appropriately labelled by Rhys Davids 'a book of Genesis'. As Rhys Davids himself pointed out, any reader of the *sutta* would note that 'a continual note of good humoured irony runs through the whole story, with its fanciful etymologies of the names of the four *varṇā*; and the aroma of it would be lost on the hearer who took it *au grand sérieux*'.<sup>2</sup>

In my book *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (1976), I analyzed the structure and implications of the creation myth contained in this *sutta*, and this reading was informed by the general themes of the book, namely the contrastive, asymmetrical and collaborative relations between the *saṅgha* (order of monks) and the polity, between the vocations of the *bhikku* and the king, between the conception of the Buddha as world renouncer and the *cakkavatti* as world ruler, and so on.

---

I thank Professor John Strong for providing me with some references and for editorial assistance.

<sup>1</sup> The twenty-seventh *sutta* in *Dīgha Nikāya* III, pp. 80-98.

<sup>2</sup> Rhys Davids (1899: 107). Rhys Davids remarks that some of the contents of this *sutta* are reiterated in a different context in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* and the *Pātika Sutta*, contained in the *Dīgha Nikāya* I and II respectively.

I maintained, as many other readers before me had done, that behind the mockery directed at Brahmanical beliefs, there is a positive countervailing Buddhist account of the origins and evolution of the world, kingship and social differentiation, concluding with an exaltation of the vocation of the *bhikku*, who seeks freedom from 'rebecoming' and from the fetters of the world process. On several occasions the Buddha seems to have played with and transformed the meaning of Brahmanical concepts for expository purposes. Today it is a commonplace idea that a text can convey multiple levels of meaning and be ridden with creative ambiguities. So it may cause surprise if someone should take an absolutist stand, and insist on a single, unambiguous formulation of authorial intent, the structure of the message, and the nature of its reception by an audience that may not only be socially diverse but also situated at different points in time.

The *Aggañña Suttanta* painted the evolution of the world and human beings as a process of progressive combination of spirituality of mind, which was the original starting-point, with gross materiality to produce in turn successive differentiations in nature and increasing moral degeneration among humans. At this point human beings gathered together and, arguing the need for the selection of 'a certain king, who should be wrathful when indignation is right, who should censure that which should be censured and should banish him who deserves to be banished', selected from among themselves 'the handsomest, the best favoured, the most attractive, the most capable', and invited him to be king in return for a tax payment of rice.

The King's name 'Mahāsammata' is usually translated as 'acclaimed by the many', 'the great elect'. There seem to be two ideas woven into this conception. On the one hand, an elective and contractual theory of kingship is implied by the fact that he was chosen by the people and voluntarily remunerated by them; on the other hand he is chosen because he is the most handsome in physical form and the most perfect in conduct, he upholds the *dhamma*, and he is 'Lord of the Fields'. He is thus in this second sense 'elect', while in the first sense he is 'elective'.

There is no doubt that the Buddhist creation story must be read as a challenge to the Brahmanical version, which postulated a divine origin to the four status orders of society, the *varṇa* (Brahman, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra), attributed a relativized and differently valued ethical code for each *varṇa*, and subordinated kingship and *artha* (instrumental and political action) to the superior Brahman as the codifier and interpreter of *dharma* (morality). By comparison the Buddhist scheme sees the world as a voluntaristic result of the cumulative *karma* of human acts, makes social strata appear under the aegis of elective kingship, elevates the ideal king to be the supreme embodiment of worldly morality and virtuous conduct, and sees all this as the basis upon which the higher morality and *nibbānic* quest of the *bhikkhu* arises and which it transcends.

*Bouquets and Brickbats*

Michael Carrithers wrote a generous and sparkling review of my *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* in an earlier issue of this journal (Carrithers 1977). Correctly drawing attention to the problem I had set myself in this book as a 'macroscopic view of religion's connection with society as a whole, especially in society's aspect as a polity' (Tambiah 1976: 3), Carrithers expatiated on the problem 'dictated not only by Tambiah's anthropological curiosity, but also by the peculiar nature of Western understanding of Buddhism'. According to Carrithers, a number of earlier investigators who by the early years of this century had explicated basic canonical texts of Theravāda Buddhism

shared, to a greater or lesser extent, two presuppositions: first, that the meaning of Buddhist doctrine was to be sought in its origins, and its oldest canonical texts; often hidden in this presupposition, however, was a second, less fruitful, bias against all subsequent developments in Buddhism as corruptions of its original purity.<sup>3</sup> In consequence little was known in the West about Buddhist history, and especially about those very ancient developments which had adapted Buddhism to be the state religion in Thailand, Burma and Ceylon. It is only in recent years that scholars have begun to unravel this history. In this perspective, Tambiah had to ask himself the question: If Buddhism was the religion of a handful of salvation seekers, as embodied in the canonical texts, then how could it possibly become a state religion? (Carrithers 1977: 98)

I may also add, using Max Weber's phrasing, how could it become a 'world' religion?

Having admirably phrased my perspective, Carrithers was moved to say complimentary things about my exposition: it 'stands out because it is dense with reflections and suggestive parallels at every turn', it 'preserves the rich ambivalence that informs Buddhist theorists themselves', and it 'is imbued with an empathy for, and a delight in the religious and cosmological thought of the Thais'. However, towards the end of his review, Carrithers offers some criticisms of my reading and interpretation of the main themes contained in the *Aggañña Sutta*, the myth of origins. The crux of his criticism is as follows. He asserts:

[Tambiah] is clear that this myth is ironical in relation to Brahmanical theory, yet he holds that it is a serious presentation of a rival cosmology. I argue, however, that it is not

<sup>3</sup> It is precisely this critique, also voiced by others, that led me to coin the label for this perspective 'the Pali Text mentality', which has been misunderstood in certain circles as denigration of the Pali Text Society itself or of all scholars of Pali Buddhism [S.J.T.].

only ironical, but a sustained and brilliant satire; that it is a satire not only of Brahmanical society, including kingship; and that it expresses, in a radical form, the views of the original Sangha of world-renouncers who are concerned with moral purity and spiritual cultivation (ibid.: 102).

Note that while maintaining that it is wholly a satire, Carrithers nevertheless smuggles in his own version of the central message implied by the myth, which is that 'the chief Buddhist principle of human life [is] morality based on wisdom', and that this 'insistence on moral purity is both chronologically and logically prior'. The latter assertion of 'chronological and logical priority', nowhere directly or literally asserted in the myth, is Carrither's own framing device deriving from what he considers to be the essence or the heart of the Buddhist religion. There is no reason for me to want to dispute the correctness of his judgement of what Buddhism's original inspiration was. But I do want to make three observations on his perspective.

The first is that in my reading of the *sutta* I drew attention to the last sequence of what I called 'the second movement' of the myth. It declares the *bhikku* (and the *arahant*), who breaks the bonds of society, destroys the 'fetter of re-becoming' and is liberated through knowledge, as *chief* among human beings. I saw as a basic structure in the myth the contrasting of two foremost beings, the *bhikku* and the king, the former being the mediator between a world of fetters and deliverance from it, *superior* to the king as mediator between social order and disorder, and the fountainhead of society. The asymmetrical evaluation that I underlined, which places the *bhikku* above the king, in no way contradicts, indeed is in accord with, Carrithers' point that the *sutta* underscores 'the chief Buddhist principle of human life, morality based on wisdom'.

The second observation, frankly speculative, is that just as I had a *problématique* and a perspective which played a role in my arrangement of the contents of the myth, Carrithers too at the time he wrote the *JASO* review was preoccupied with describing and evaluating the significance for Sri Lankan Buddhism of the forest monk communities he had studied.<sup>4</sup> Carrithers' own study of the canonical texts had convinced him that 'moral purity' exemplified by the world-renouncers, and by extension 'monastic purity' as exemplified by communities of forest monks, was the radiant centre of Buddhist life. In the last few paragraphs of his review, he is troubled by the modern developments in contemporary Sri Lanka which have made the forest monks there retreat into relative obscurity. He cites a distinguished monk-scholar, Walpola Rahula, as remarking sceptically that 'the forest monks might have some effect on society'. He takes solace in another monk's admonition to a layman that meditating monks are like a street lamp which 'goes nowhere, does nothing', yet sheds light on the world. But he clearly lacks an overall

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study* (Carrithers 1983) was the fruit of these labours.

scheme for representing the multiple strands of Buddhism, and to show what the organizing foci are today. The considerations that have inspired Carrithers to see the 'true' forest monks as the morally pure perennial reforming centre of Buddhist life also seem to have pushed the other components of the Buddhist scene - the 'domesticated' village and town monks, Buddhism's co-optation of local spirit deity cults, the political involvements of the *sangha* and its sectarian tendencies, and a host of other internal and external developments - into a secondary and derogatory position. The distribution of these components, their weight and significance in an open-ended and prospective development of Buddhism as a total phenomenon, can be seen in terms of civilizational perspectives other than Carrithers' confining retrospective view.

Be that as it may - and granted that in these days of deconstruction and the hermeneutics of suspicion, literary and cultural 'texts' are capable of different readings - Carrithers has made a declaration and a judgement about a portion of the *Aggañña Sutta* that is capable of being put to a decisive historical test. This is my third observation.

In his review, Carrithers emphasizes the satire against Brahmanical ideas, including that of divine kingship, to such an extent that the counter story of King Mahāsammata's election and his moral evaluation are dismissed as part of the rash of puns. Subsequently he wrote a brief commentary entitled 'Buddhists without History' on my trilogy on Thailand, in which he bombards 'three applications' of my alleged scholarly 'programme', one of which is again my reading of the *Aggañña Sutta*.<sup>5</sup>

Accusing me of 'a systematic and anachronistic misreading of the text', he reduces my own discussion of the *complementary and hierarchical* interlocking between king and monk, between the 'two wheels' of Buddhism, to a 'key opposition', and bluntly dismisses it in syllables not usually heard at high table (at least in Cambridge): 'The *Aggañña Sutta* is not a charter for anything... Tambiah's interpretation is either irrelevant to, or quite the opposite of, what the text itself says'. While I do not pretend to be a Pali scholar, there are grounds for questioning Carrithers' claims to complete accuracy of translation and comprehension of the text in question.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Carrithers 1987. I have elsewhere replied to his accusations regarding the other two 'applications' (Tambiah 1987).

<sup>6</sup> For example, I leave it to the pundits of Oxford's Oriental Institute to resolve this inconsistency: Carrithers says I am wrong to identify Mahāsammata 'with warriors (*khattiyas*)', while Gombrich (1988: 85) recently stated that 'he is the first king and first *ksatriya* [= *khattiyā*]'. As I shall show later, the great Buddha-ghosa seems to have seen Mahāsammata's relation to the *khattiyas* in the same way as I have done.

*The Challenge Accepted*

I shall now survey how the contents of the *Aggañña Sutta*, especially the cosmological accounts of the beginnings of the world and the characterization of Mahāsammata as the first king, have been used in the post-canonical Buddhist literature over the centuries. I hope to demonstrate how these portions of the original *sutta* have manifested a persisting cosmological significance and have acted as 'precedent', 'point of reference', and 'normative' account - that is, as a 'charter'. Moreover, their importance is further evidenced by their being subject to elaboration and to creative transformation. This evidence puts in question how something alleged to be wholly a satire and a joke could have been taken so differently and so seriously over many centuries by genuine Buddhists, great *bhikku* cosmologists and doctrinal experts, undisputed heirs of the Buddhist legacy raised in authentic indigenous Buddhist contexts.

Before documenting the strands of persisting significance, let me bury one significance that 'seemed' to be embedded in the original text but which definitely was either not taken up or not seen as part of the original message by later Buddhists. In the original text, as I have remarked earlier, Mahāsammata's election and 'acclamation by the many' seemed to indicate that his 'elective' status implied a 'democratic' and 'contractual theory' of kingship. It is interesting that twentieth-century writers on the development of political ideas in India rarely fail to refer to the Buddhist 'contractual theory' as expressed in the *Aggañña Suttanta*. For example, Ghoshal (1959: 62) refers to the *sutta*'s formulation in this mode as 'an open challenge to the Vedic dogma of Divine creation of the social order', and opines that 'the most original contribution of the early Buddhist canonists to the store of our ancient social and political ideas consists in their formulation of a remarkable theory of the origin of man and his social and political institutions'. Basham generously remarks: 'The story of the Mahāsammata gives, in the form of a myth worthy of Plato, one of the world's earliest versions of the widespread contractual theory of the state, which in Europe is specially connected with the names of Locke and Rousseau'.<sup>7</sup> Again Dumont, in his noteworthy essay on 'The Conception of Kingship in Ancient India' (1962), discusses the implications of what he identifies as the Buddhist contractual theory from the perspective of *his* view of the world renouncer as being outside caste society and therefore the only true individual in the Hindu social universe.<sup>8</sup>

Another example of a 'presentist' reading by a modern is to be found in the *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (Malalasekera 1961), edited by

---

<sup>7</sup> This quote is from a popular encyclopaedic work, Basham 1961: 82.

<sup>8</sup> Dumont's discussion of early Buddhist thought does not cover the accounts of the *cakkavatti* wherein the Buddhist ideas of kingship are carried to their ultimate and universal, ethical and material limits.

the noted Sri Lankan scholar of Pali and Buddhist civilization. There the entry on the *Aggañña Sutta* contains among other things these lines: 'The evolution of kingship from Mahāsammata, and the establishment of monarchy is then shown, rejecting the theory of divine origin of kings and replacing it with a theory of kingly duty arising from the fact of *democratic beginnings*. The Buddha then explains the gradual division of labour and how the brahmins came to practice their professions' (Jayawardhana 1961; my emphasis).

As far as I know there are no Buddhist traditions, literary or otherwise, of kings being 'democratically' elected, of 'social contract' in the sense propounded by Rousseau, of justifiable 'rebellion' or 'just war' against a king who has broken a social contract. As I have expatiated elsewhere, what we have had are millenarian movements stimulated by the prophecy of the next Buddha Metteyya's future coming during the reign of *cakkavatti* Sankha propounded first in the canonical *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*, and subsequently elaborated and developed in post-canonical times. This prophecy, by virtue of its utopian promise, has provided an ideological component for millenarian insurrections against established political authority when this has been unrighteous and oppressive. This prophecy is to be construed not as a Buddhist theory of rebellion but as a vision of great men (*mahāpuriṣa*) of personal charisma arising to replace failed leaders and to rejuvenate degenerating worlds.<sup>9</sup>

Later Buddhist literature refers back to and/or elaborates upon and transforms certain themes present in the original *Aggañña Sutta*. Let me state two of them, and later illustrate them with ample literary evidence.

1) Although the *sutta*'s aspect as a foil to early Brahmanical theory seems to bring into prominence the so-called 'contractual' basis of kingship, in the further development of the Buddhist stream of ideas in India and Southeast Asia it is not so much Mahāsammata's 'elective' ('contractual') position as his being 'the great elect', the man who 'charms others by the Norm (*dhamma*)' he observes and whose virtues clearly mark him out as the chief among men, that become the critical point of elaboration and understanding. This aspect of him links up with other canonical formulations of the ideal Buddhist king as being a righteous king, a *dharmarāja*, an upholder of 'morality', and as a *cakkavatti* (universal ruler).

In the post-canonical works and chronicles of all branches of Buddhism there is a dense linkage of three conceptions: Mahāsammata as first king, *cakkavatti* as universal ruler, and *bodhisattva* as a future Buddha. And there are numerous examples of actual historical kings claiming to be or being acclaimed (by monk chroniclers) as being these personages or having links to them on the basis of their alleged meritorious acts and righteous rule. In fact, as I shall document later, the central roles attributed to King Mahāsammata in historical Buddhist societies such as Burma,

<sup>9</sup> These issues have been developed in Tambiah 1984, where, in Chapter XX, I discuss millennial Buddhism in Thailand and Burma, and in a forthcoming essay (Tambiah forthcoming).

Thailand and Sri Lanka are ones of being the first legislator and institutor of legal and social codes and the moral regulator of society and its social divisions.

2) Post-canonical texts, treatises and chronicles of diverse Buddhist schools taking King Mahāsammata as the first model king creatively adopted him as the apical ancestor for developing a genealogical chronicle of kings (*rājavamsa*) which concludes by incorporating the Gotama Buddha and the Sakyans of Kapilavastu as belonging to the line of Mahāsammata himself. Indeed, this is one of the most frequent and important uses to which the story of the creation of first kingship in world evolution is put.

The following considerations are pertinent for understanding this development. Buddhist hagiography has always represented the Buddha as being born into a royal Sakyan ruling family. It is well known that from the canonical texts onwards, royal epithets were used to describe the Buddha (e.g. 'conqueror') and the manner in which his *dhamma* ('the king of the righteous king') conquered the world. Several canonical *suttas* not only compare the Buddha and the *cakkavatti* as two *mahāpurisa* (great men) but also assert that the Buddha has been a *cakkavatti* (and a *bodhisattva*) in his past lives, that when he was born both careers were open to him, and that he chose the path to Buddhahood as the superior path. Now what happens in post-canonical elaborations is the linking up of a number of great kings in Buddhist mythological history into a single series beginning with Mahāsammata and ending with the Buddha; not only that, but they underscore the fact that these famous kings were themselves *cakkavatti* and *bodhisattvas*, as was the Buddha in his former lives.

The final move in the genealogical project is to claim that the whole line of meritorious kings was nothing but a recurring reincarnation of the Buddha himself - the Buddha was, as *bodhisattva*, Mahāsammata; he was also famous *cakkavatti* kings like Mahāsudassana and Mandhātā etc. This unification in terms of the reincarnating Gotama as a *bodhisattva* was given further connective coherence by two other affirmations: that the Buddha had a long time ago, several lives ago, made the mental resolve to achieve enlightenment in the future ('the aspirant to enlightenment'); and that former Buddhas, for example, Buddha Dipamkara, had prophesied and proclaimed the coming of a future Buddha in the person of Gotama Sākyamuni.

#### *Some Famous Texts Incorporating the Aggañña Sutta*

Let me now turn to the business of actual documentation to illustrate the themes already mentioned and to provide materials for the development of others. I have chosen certain famous and strategic texts written in different places and at different times to describe the literary path traversed by the canonical account of

the first beginnings of the world and of the first righteous kingship.<sup>10</sup>

The *Mahāvastu* (*The Great Subject*) should be given pride of place as my earliest reference that elaborates on some of the themes present in the *Aggañña Sutta* (see Jones 1949). It is an early non-canonical text: according to Jones, its compilation was begun in the second century BC and not completed until the third or fourth century AD. Written in 'Buddhist Sanskrit', the *Mahāvastu* calls itself the *Vinaya* of the Lokottaravādins, a branch of the earliest Buddhist schismatics called Mahāsāṅghikas. But it is really a full collection of the historical facts and legends relating to the Buddha current at the time of compilation, and weaves in Buddhalogical, cosmological and doctrinal contents in a composite work.<sup>11</sup> Evidence of the fact that at least some of the contents of this text reflect traditions common to other branches or schools of Buddhism is that, aside from citing Jātaka tales, it includes, according to Jones, considerable quotations from traditional Buddhist literature, including passages that parallel those in Pali texts.<sup>12</sup>

I wish to draw attention to one section of the *Mahāvastu* which is concerned with the genesis of the world and intertwines with it

---

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that I am not providing a complete history of the use of the canonical story of origins in subsequent Buddhist literature, but only an illustration by means of some important works. Two additional references that Professor John Strong has brought to my attention are: (1) Alex Wayman's essay 'Buddhist Genesis and the Tantric Tradition', where he discusses the use of the Buddhist genesis story in one of the works of Tson-kha-pa (1357-1419) 'as a rationale for the types of meditations found in the Anuttara-yoga-tantra' (Wayman 1973: 24-5); and (2) Waldschmidt (1970), who informs us of a Sanskrit fragment found in the oasis of Sorcuq, Central Asia, around 1907-8, which contains a few passages apparently taken from a Sanskrit version of the *Aggañña Sutta*.

<sup>11</sup> As is the case with many of these texts, Buddhalogical and cosmological materials are interwoven with the doctrinal. Volume I, for example, contains the following strands. On the Buddhalogical side, the text contains the prophecy of the former Buddha Dīpaṅkara declaring Gotama to be a future Buddha, an enumeration of the ten stages in the career of previous Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Jātaka-type tales, and the encounters between Buddhas and *cakkavattis*. On the cosmological side there are, for instance, the account of Moggallāna's visits to the hells and heavens, and the story of the origins of the world and its first king Mahāsammata. On the doctrinal side, there are citations of Buddhist doctrine, and many quotations from traditional canonical texts parallel to the Pali ones - and in this respect there is 'hardly any variation from recognised Theravādin teaching' (Jones 1949: xii).

<sup>12</sup> Jones mentions the Pali texts in question, such as the *Khuddakapāṭha*, *Suttanipāta*, *Dhammapada* and *Buddhavaṃsa*.

an account of the lineage of kings (*rājavamsa*). The story of the evolution of the world and the instituting of the first kingship reproduces events and details familiar to us from the canonical *Aggañña Sutta*:

So originated the idea that Mahā-Sammata means 'elected by the great body of the people'. So originated the idea that *rājan* means he who is worthy of the rice-portions from the rice-fields. So originated the idea that an anointed [noble] means he who is a perfect guardian and protector. So originated the idea that he who achieves security for his country is as a parent to towns and provinces. That is how a king can say 'I am king, am anointed noble, and one who has achieved security for my people'.<sup>13</sup>

This account then ends with the lineage of kings succeeding Mahāsammata as the apical ancestor; the genealogy concludes by incorporating Gotama Buddha and the Śākyaans as belonging to the line of Mahāsammata himself. The genealogy goes as follows: the son of king Sammata was Kalyāna, whose son was Rava; Rava's son was Upośadha, and Upośadha's son was Māndhātara; Māndhātara had thousands of descendants all of whom were kings, the last of whom was Ikṣvāku, styled Sujāta; Ikṣvāku in turn is the progenitor of five princes who were banished from the city of Śāketa, who then with their retainers founded the city of Kapilavastu and are the ancestors of the Śākyaans, and of the Buddha himself.

My second text is Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, written around the fifth century AD. It is considered the most authoritative treatment and most complete systematization of the Sarvāstivāda school, which was 'the most powerful of the schools of northern Buddhism of the Christian era in northwest India'.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, like all great post-canonical compendiums it is a marvellous statement of fundamental Buddhist doctrines together with, as well as through, the medium of cosmological representations. The *Abhidharmakośa* is a work of eight main (and one subsidiary) chapters; its second chapter builds up the reality of all phenomena as being the result of the *dharmas* (elements) working together, and its third chapter logically follows to describe the cosmos as constituted of various forms of existence, subject to different kinds of birth, death and rebirth, all taking place in three realms or worlds of existence (*kāma dhātu*, *rūpa dhātu* and *arūpa dhātu*).<sup>15</sup> It is in this cosmological chapter that Vasubandhu introduces the

<sup>13</sup> Jones 1949: 293. I reproduce Jones's spellings in this and the following paragraph.

<sup>14</sup> See Funahashi 1961: 58-9. For an account of the text see La Vallée Poussin 1923-31 (Chapter Three of Volume II).

<sup>15</sup> This is, of course, the classical representation of the Buddhist cosmology, which has its basis in the canon, and is shared by all schools.

canonical account of world genesis. By way of commentary he asks whether men at the beginning of the cosmic age had kings. His verdict is negative, and he explains man's decline from an original divine, ethereal, luminous and beautiful existence in the *rūpa dhātu* to the state of greed and dissension as the causal factor for the origin of kingship.

My next example is a celebrated Theravāda Pali work, *Visuddhimagga* [*The Path of Purity*] of Buddhaghosa, which is acclaimed by Carrithers, following Gombrich, as 'the unitary standard of doctrinal orthodoxy for all Theravāda Buddhists', and which one expects them to have read attentively. It is worth noting that Buddhaghosa relates the process of the 'dissolution' and 'evolution' of the cosmos as a component of the section which the translator renders as 'Recollection of Past Life', which again is a section of the Chapter (XIII) which the translator entitles 'Description of Direct Knowledge: Conclusion' (see Nāṇamoli 1956). Buddhaghosa specifically refers to the *Aggañña Sutta* as his authority, and gives a version based on this original source, in the context of expounding the theme of mindfulness of death and recollection of past lives as one of the fruits of concentration in meditation.

Buddhaghosa begins with a graphic account of the destruction of the world system, first by fire (seven scorching suns follow successively the natural sun and burn up the cosmos to worse than ashes), then by rain (with several inundations and recessions of flood waters), leading to the final emergence of a new cosmos and a new world cycle. From there on Buddhaghosa relates the story of evolution very much as in the *Aggañña Sutta* - including the appearance of grosser forms of food, of the sexes, of greed and private property, of theft etc. Then he makes this important interpolation when he tells the story of the first king, *an interpolation which identifies Mahāsammata as a previous incarnation of the Buddha himself*. This is a notable addition made in post-canonical works to the characterization of Mahāsammata:

When beings had come to an agreement in this way in this aeon, firstly this Blessed One himself, who was then the Bodhisatta (Being Due to be Enlightened) was the handsomest, the most comely, the most honourable, and was clever and capable of exercising the effort of restraint. They approached him, asked him, and elected him. Since he was recognized (*sammata*) by the majority (*mahā-jana*) he was called Mahā-Sammata. Since he was lord of the fields (*khetta*), he was called Khattiya (warrior noble).... This is how he came to be known by these names. For the Bodhisatta himself is the first man concerned in any wonderful innovation in the world. So after the Khattiya circle had been established by making the Bodhisatta the first in this way, the Brahmins and the other castes were founded in due succession (Nāṇamoli 1956: 460).

I have also given this quotation *in extenso* because Buddhaghosa himself, Theravāda's doctrinal authority, has *contra* Carrithers but like myself, interpreted the *Aggañña Sutta* as stating that the circle of nobles was formed under the aegis of Mahāsammata.

At an earlier point in his text, while discoursing on 'mindfulness of death' as a subject for meditation, Buddhaghosa says, 'Although Mahāsammata, Mandhātu, Mahāsudassana, Dalhanemi, Nimi ... were greatly famous and had a great following, and though they had amassed enormous wealth, yet death inevitably caught up with them, so how shall it not at length overtake me?'<sup>16</sup> In this context, then, Buddhaghosa too provides a genealogy of kings according to the Theravāda tradition which overlaps with those provided by other traditions. We may note that Buddhaghosa identifies the Buddha as having been Mandhātu in one of his previous lives, and that the third and fourth names in the above list are the names of great *cakkavattis* mentioned in the canonical Pali text, the *Dīgha Nikāya*.

The *Mahāvamsa*, the *Great Chronicle*, composed in Sri Lanka around the sixth century AD, is itself the model, precedent and point of reference for various texts composed in Burma and Thailand.<sup>17</sup> This chronicle, which all conscientious students of Theravāda Buddhism and Sri Lankan history never fail to read, establishes at the very beginning of the text, after describing the Buddha's visit to the island, the Buddha's genealogical credentials. Geiger's translation has as the caption for Chapter Two 'The Race of Mahāsammata'. It begins thus: 'Sprung from the race of Mahāsammata was the Great Sage'. It then asserts that 'in the beginning of this age of the world there was a king named Mahāsammata', who was followed by twenty-eight royal sons and grandsons. The names include famous *cakkavatti* (universal kings) like Kalyāṇa, Mandhātu, Mahāsudassana and Accimā, who lived in the three cities of Kusāvati, Rājagaha and Mithilā. From Accimā in turn stemmed hundreds of thousands of kings who founded various other capital cities. The final descendants are the Sākyan kings of Kapilavatthu and other members of the Sākyan royal houses, those of particular note being Suddhodana and Māyā, the Buddha's father and mother, their son Siddhattha (the *bodhisattva* and future Buddha 'Our Conqueror'), his consort, and their son Rāhula. The *Mahāvamsa* triumphantly proclaims: 'Of this race of Mahāsammata, thus succeeding, was born, in unbroken line, the Great Sage, he who stands at the head of all men of lordly birth.'<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Nāṇamoli 1956: 250-1. Following this passage, Buddhaghosa lists the names of other kings of great merit who appear in the genealogy of kings stemming from Mahāsammata that I have drawn attention to in other texts.

<sup>17</sup> My source is William Geiger's (1912) translation of the *Mahāvamsa*.

<sup>18</sup> Geiger 1912: 12. *Contra* Carrithers, and in support of my reading of the *Aggañña Sutta*, I think that this statement, that the Buddha is the head of all men of lordly birth, parallels the 'suggestion' or 'implication' in the *Aggañña Sutta* that Mahāsammata, the Buddha's apical ancestor, was himself the head of all of Khattiya status.

It is worth noting that Wilhelm Geiger, who translated the *Mahāvamsa* into English, included an appendix entitled 'The Dynasty of Mahāsammata', in which he compares parallel passages documenting the line of kings descended from Mahāsammata in these texts - the *Mahāvamsa*, the *Mahāvastu* (which I have already treated) and the *Dulva*, the Tibetan translation of the *Vinaya* of the Sarvāstivādins. The overlaps in these lists, as well as Geiger's interesting comparative remarks on the common knowledge in the three Buddhist schools to which these texts belong, reinforce our sense that the subject I am treating in this essay has had a wide reach and significance in many branches of Buddhism.

From Sri Lanka, let us make the journey to Thailand. The *Jinakālamālī*, the famous chronicle composed in Pali during the reign of King Tilok (1441-1487) of the northern Thai kingdom of Lān Nā, has as its subject-matter, first, the epochs of Buddhism from its origin in India and its 'spread to Ceylon and thence to the establishment of the Sinhalese forms of Buddhism in South-East Asia',<sup>19</sup> and secondly and more extensively, the exaltation and the achievements of King Tilok and his successors (the Mengrai dynasty). The first section of this chronicle deals with the antecedents of Gotama Buddha, commencing with his status as a *bodhisattva* who made a mental resolution to aspire to enlightenment, concluding with his *parinibbāna* as the Buddha. The genealogy of 'Our Aspirant to Enlightenment', says the text, commences with Mahāsammata; indeed, it asserts that 'at the very beginning' of the Bhadda-aeon, the aeon during which 'the five Enlightened Ones, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, our Exalted One and Metteyya are born ... on account of the fact that our Aspirant to Enlightenment had first of all been selected by the common people, he became the king called Mahāsammata (Popular Choice)' (Jayawickrama 1968: 31).

The text, having claimed that as an aspirant to enlightenment the Buddha had been Mahāsammata himself, sets out a genealogy with Mahāsammata as the apical ancestor. This genealogy is a slightly extended version of the genealogy which I have already reported as contained in the Sinhala chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*. Beginning with the twenty-eight kings stemming from Mahāsammata, it traces the thousands of descendants generated by the last of them, Accimā, and concludes with the Sākyan royalty to which the Buddha and his wife and child belonged. The *Jinakālamālī* includes a formulation absent in the *Mahāvamsa* but already included by Buddhaghosa in his *Vīśuddhimagga*, that the Buddha was in a previous birth, at the beginning of our worldly aeon, Mahāsammata himself.

Like the *Mahāvamsa* (and many other chronicles giving the line of kings descended from Mahāsammata), the *Jinakālamālī* also lists various capital cities as founded by the proliferating branches of descendants at distinct points of segmentation. Tedious as it may seem, there is a good reason for my listing a good number of them. The twenty-eight kings immediately stemming from Mahāsammata

---

<sup>19</sup> Jayawickrama 1968: xv. This translation of the chronicle is my source for this discussion.

founded the three cities of Kusāvati, Rājagaha and Mithilā.<sup>20</sup> The last of these twenty-eight, Accimā, founded Kusāvati; and the hundredth descendant from him in turn founded Ayojjhā. Following a similar pattern of segmentation or branching, the proliferating royal descendants and their dynasties are linked with multiplying capital cities in various parts of India. The array of famous cities include Bārāṇasī, Kāmpila, Hatthipura, Mathurā, Roja, Campā, Mithilā, Rājagaha, Takkaśilā, Kusinārā, ending with Kapilavatthu, the Sākyan centre.

My last famous text also comes from Thailand. It portrays the way the Buddhist story of creation is incorporated in King Lithai's great cosmological work of the Sukhothai period, the *Traibhūmikathā*, first composed in AD 1345 or thereabouts. It includes portions from Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* and many other Buddhist texts, and it has been periodically copied and revised right through Thai history up to the early Bangkok period. It is quite clear that Lithai's composing of the great work was not only an act of religious piety but also a politically motivated deed - and both considerations were operative when subsequent kings of Ayūthaya and Bangkok had the work copied during periods of first assumption of the throne, which were often times of religious revival and seeking of legitimation.

In a recent English translation of an Ayūthayan version of the *Trai Phūm*, we find a concluding chapter entitled 'Cosmic Destruction' beginning with a horrific vision of the destruction of the cosmos by fire, burning suns, inundations of water and raging winds, followed by its regeneration culminating in the election of the 'Lord Bodhisatta' as thir lord and leader.<sup>21</sup> The *Trai Phūm*'s next and concluding chapter is on 'Nibbana and the Path', which proclaims the transcendental quest of the *bhikkhu* as the highest treasure, without parallels. In predictable fashion, this text too weaves into a single variegated tapestry diverse strands - cosmological description of the heavens and hells, exemplary lives of the Buddha and other Buddhist sages, the careers pertaining to *cakkavatti* kings, and doctrinal discourses on *nibbānic* release.

Looking back at the famous post-canonical texts I have reviewed here, can we say something about their shared cosmological and mytho-historical objectives that suggest or reflect the development of Buddhism over time into a totality elaborating and weaving together cosmological, doctrinal, Buddhological and mytho-historical strands?

All of them (except the *Mahāvamsa*) have cosmological descriptions, and at a certain point, accounts directly taken from, or similar to, the description of the evolution of the world found in the *Aggāṇṇa Sutta* are incorporated. A central part of the *sutta* of serious import for later Buddhists was its story of the unfolding differentiation in the natural features of the world,

<sup>20</sup> I am following the spellings given in Jayawickrama 1968.

<sup>21</sup> F.E. Reynolds and M.M. Reynolds transl. 1982. There is also a French translation by Coedès and Archaimbault 1973.

dialectically related to an increasing differentiation and degeneration among human beings, until the first righteous kingship is instituted to oversee and regulate society. This kingship is a social creation through acclamation of a person worthy of being king; it is therefore different from the 'natural evolution' preceding it.

Having incorporated this part, many of these texts then present *another* linear development not found in the original *sutta*, namely a genealogy of kings descended from the apical ancestor, Mahāsammata, and concluding with Gotama Buddha. This is a description of the long lineage of the Buddha himself, a line of meritorious kings, many of them *cakkavattis* and *bodhisattvas*, constituting a kind of mythic 'religio-political' history through time, and concluding with a climactic achievement in Buddhahood. But note that this line of kings and its segmentation in time are again linked to the founding of dynastic capital cities and towns in various parts of India. That is to say, a temporal series of kings is indexed to a spatial expansion and territorial spread of their rule. Extrapolating from this double axis of space and time, I see this duality as mapping the expanding colonization of India and the founding of political communities (polities).

Thus is the 'sacred geography' of India linked to the 'sacred time' of royal genealogy, and the peopling of India and its territorial mapping takes place under the aegis of moral kingship. But it is implied all the time that this unfolding and expanding universe through time and space takes place under the umbrella of Buddhist *dhamma* and the workings of *karma* and culminates in the climactic achievement, the Buddha himself, who uplifts the universe to a higher task. Certain later texts, as we have seen, represent the Buddha himself in his former statuses as a *bodhisattva*, who, in keeping with his mental resolve to achieve Enlightenment, was repeatedly reincarnated as a chain of kings, until he achieves his aim in his penultimate life.

Finally, it is interesting that famous synthesizing treatises like the *Vissuddhimagga* present the cosmological unfolding of the world and its cycles, and the historical becoming and rebecoming of kings, as occurring under the subject-matter of 'mindfulness of death' and process, and the recollection of past lives, which become possible as a result of mental concentration during the practice of meditation, the central practice of the *bhikkhu's* vocation and search for wisdom and liberation. Thus indeed the salvation path is proclaimed as both encompassing the world process and liberation from it.

#### *King Mahāsammata as Legitimator of Customary Codes*

I would like to close this essay with a compelling documentation of how, well into recent times, the canonical conception of first kingship acted as a charter and legitimator of legal systems and social practices of three major Buddhist societies of South and

Southeast Asia - Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand.

One critical illustration is provided by the Mon-Pagan and Thai legal codes, which, though calling themselves *dharmaśāstras* (*dharmasattham*, *thammasat*), actually attributed the establishment of their legal codes to the first king Mahāsammata, under whose benevolent aegis a brahman called Manu delivers the substantive legal code. In this formulation we see that the personages opposed on the Indian stage - Manu (Brahmanical) and Mahasammata (Buddhist) - are here brought together, Manu being made an agent of the first Buddhist king. Incidentally, this also provides a precedent for Brahmins serving in Southeast Asian Buddhist courts as pundits, judges and interpreters of law.

In *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* I stated the shift from the classical Hindu to the Mon-Burmese-Thai Buddhist formulation as follows:

In Hindu society the brahman is superior to the king, legitimates his power, and interprets law (*dharma*); in the Mon-Burmese (and Siamese) version, it is the king who, if not the maker of laws, is still the fountain of justice and a *bodhisattva* himself; and the brahman works for the Buddhist king as his subordinate functionary. Herein lies a basic difference in the ideological armatures of Indian and Southeast Asian polities (Tambiah 1976: 94).

Lingat's magisterial work, *The Classical Law of India* (1973), gives this fascinating portrayal of an ideology in the making.<sup>22</sup> He explains how 'the appearance at the Pagan epoch in Burma of a literature composed locally in Pali by Mon monks on the model of the *dharma-śāstras* in Sanskrit marks ... the first stage of an evolution which went on until it was exhausted.' The Buddhist authors faced a dilemma. They wanted to codify the rules and customs of the local people for whom they wrote on lines similar to the Indian *śāstras*, which they admired as a model. But if they could not attach the local rules to a supernatural source like the Veda, their codifications, having de-brahmanized the model, would only end up as mere handbooks of law.

The canonical legend of the Mahāsammata, the world's first king, chosen by his people to put an end to discord, alone offered elements of a solution. It must have been tempting to attribute the precepts of the *dharmasatthas* to Mahāsammata, who turned out to be a Bodhisattva. But Mahāsammata had to remain above all the model of the just king and could only be the interpreter of the law. Thus our authors, seizing upon the legend, completed it conveniently. They gave Mahāsammata a counsellor, the hermit Manu, who plays in his court the role which the *prādvivāka* does in the *dharma-śāstras*. They imagined that Sage was raised into the celestial regions and reached the *cakkavāla*, the wall which surrounds the world and which bears,

---

<sup>22</sup> See also Lingat 1950.

carved in letters high as a bull, the law which rules it. It is this very text of the law which, rehearsed from memory by the hermit Manu, is set down in the *dharmasatthas* (Lingat 1973: 267).

I have elsewhere described the course taken by the Mon-Burmese *dharmasattham* traditions.<sup>23</sup> Many treatises were produced over time, the earliest known attributed to AD 727, the vast majority being compiled in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and continuing to be produced in the nineteenth. During this long passage of time Pali versions were translated into the Burmese language and modified; portions of preceding works were deleted, and new legal usages to suit changing circumstances were interpolated with or without deletion of previous contradictory usages. In the seventeenth century, chroniclers of the Alaungpaya dynasty actively began to compose new kinds of Buddhist scriptural legitimation for the law code by citing Buddhist precedents taken, for example, from the *Jātaka* tales. Thus two processes can be deciphered here: on the one hand, the giving to old *dharmasattham* usages a Buddhist validation, and on the other, the updating of current customary practices, giving them Buddhist doctrinal support, and then incorporating them into the code.<sup>24</sup>

The Thai (Siamese) kingdoms of the past also had traditions of customary law that were similar to the Mon-Pagan formulations. I have also pointed out elsewhere (Tambiah 1976: 93-5) that Thai traditional law (*thammasat*), as revised and codified in the early years of the nineteenth century as the law of the Three Seals by the first king of the Cakkri Dynasty, Rama I, shared the same Mahāsammatā-Manu myth and many features of substantive law. It is well known that Rama I, in re-establishing Thai supremacy centred in Bangkok after the Burmese destruction of Ayūththaya, consciously restored and adapted Ayūththayan precedents and usages.<sup>25</sup> The Thai *thammasat* was restored with its traditional associations of being grounded in the sacred past; at the same time, the Law of the Seals as codified under Rama I was a conscious revision of traditional law. A central proposition that the king was the upholder of the sacred *thammasat* and that the *thammasat* was 'the fundamental statement of royal law and legitimacy in traditional Thailand' was affirmed and continued by the early kings of the Cakkri dynasty'.<sup>26</sup> Conceptions of the nature of law and the king's power to legislate did change,

<sup>23</sup> See Tambiah 1973: 138-48. The source which I myself used was Richardson 1896.

<sup>24</sup> On the subsequent fate of the *dharmasattham* during British rule and afterwards, see Tambiah 1973: 141-58.

<sup>25</sup> Rama I was, of course, preceded by King Taksin, whose capital was Thonburi.

<sup>26</sup> Engel 1975: 3. Engel confirms my treatment of the *thammasat* tradition in Thailand.

especially in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but not his role as upholder and legitimator.<sup>27</sup>

Returning to Burma, I cannot resist referring to an essay by Thuang on 'the theory and practice of kingship' (1959) as portrayed in a text which he identifies as the *Myanma Min Okchopon Sadan*. This text, composed in the latter part of the nineteenth century during the time of King Mindon, cites the story of King Mahāsammata, and gives accounts of the coronation and other court ceremonies, the king's daily routine, and so on, and traces their origins to earlier times, for example, precedents referred back to the coronation of King Anawrahta of the Pagan dynasty in AD 1044. The *Myanma Min Okchopon Sadan* describes the *Muddha Bhiseka* as the most important of the coronation rites. The text states that at one point, while the king and queen sit in state, eight princesses attired in brilliant robes prostrate themselves before them, and while lustrating the king they say these words: 'O Lord King, may you be fast in the laws practised by the Maha Thamata, the first king in the world ...' (Thuang 1959: 177-8). The princesses are followed by the daughters of 'Brahmans and rich men', who recite the same invocations.

It is ironically fitting that Sri Lanka should provide my last body of evidence for Mahāsammata's continuing relevance right into the twentieth century. When Spence Hardy put together some translations from Sinhalese texts as a representative collection of the beliefs and traditions of nineteenth-century Sinhalese Buddhists, he included not only the classical story of world genesis as a part of the Sinhalese cosmological beliefs, but also other excerpts which showed that over time, Buddhist textual and popular traditions had fused the first king Mahāsammata, the Buddha, and previous *bodhisattvas* and *cakkavattis* into one lineal chain:<sup>28</sup>

From Maha Sammata to Sudhódana, in lineal succession, there were 706,787 princes, of the race of the sun. Of these princes, Gótama Bódhisat was born as Maha Sammata, Maha Mandhātu, Maha Sudarsana... [etc.] The last birth of which he [Gotama] was a king was that of Wessantara (Hardy 1853: 134).

Happily, support for Mahāsammata's serving as a historic precedent for the institution and application of the law codes in

<sup>27</sup> See Engel 1975 for a full treatment of these continuities and changes.

<sup>28</sup> Chapter Three of Hardy's book is entitled 'The Primitive Inhabitants of the Earth; Their Fall from Purity; and Their Division into Four Castes'. It is peculiar that Weber (1958: 375) who considered Hardy's *Eastern Monachism* (1850) as 'basic' for describing the norms and structure of the Buddhist *sangha*, totally ignored Hardy's companion volume, which was intended to give us a picture of the religion of the Sinhalese laity. Elsewhere (1853: 126), Hardy again reports that the ancestry of the Buddha is traced ultimately to Mahāsammata and that a descendant of Mahāsammata, Mahāmandhātu, was a *cakkavatti*.

actual Theravada polities also comes from Sri Lanka. There too the traditional law treatise *Nīti-Nighaṇḍuva* (which was discovered in its written form in the nineteenth century but, of course, had antecedent expressions) finds its sacred authority in Mahāsammata.<sup>29</sup> Mahāsammata's election as a solution to the decay of the world is repeated, and the story is further elaborated to take account of Sri Lanka's local social contours.<sup>30</sup> Mahāsammata is declared to be the ordainer, maintainer and regulator of the Sinhalese caste system. Pieris provides us with useful documentation of the place of Mahāsammata in the validation of Sinhalese social customs. Citing Hocart (1950) and Lawrie (1898) as his authorities, Pieris writes (1956: 180):

The mythological expression of the origin of caste which has been set forth ... associated caste with the first king and law-giver. Such an idea persists in the minds of the Sinhalese villagers who believe that it was the mythical king Mahāsammata who decreed that the drummers were to perform in demon ceremonials. Here again the apparently unreal legend allegorizes empirical reality, for in Kandyan times it was considered the lawful function of the king to ordain appropriate functions to various castes: he could also degrade certain villages and families of high caste to a lower status and there are certain degraded *gattara* villages in existence to this day....

Pieris also cites a judgement made in recent times that provides additional evidence of the persistence of these validating beliefs. A *rata sabhā* (judicial tribunal) that met in the isolated district of Nuvarakalāviya ended its verdict thus: 'And by the authority of the five kings, Mahāsammata ... of the gods of the four quarters and other gods, of Sinhalese kings ... we hereby enjoin that no one should mention our decision when quarrelling, or in jest, at any time whatsoever' (ibid.: 257). So for the Sinhalese villagers, Mahāsammata is no joke.

I can personally confirm, on the basis of fieldwork conducted in the 1950s, the continuation of these same attitudes among Sinhalese villagers living in the Laggala region of the Kandyan highlands: they regarded King Mahāsammata as the institutor of the caste system and referred the degraded status of certain groups within the *goyigama* caste to a decree of this first king. Nur Yalman (1967) discovered a similar role attributed to Mahāsammata among another

---

<sup>29</sup> The exact date of the *Nīti-Nighaṇḍuva* (see Le Mesurier and Panabokke 1880) is not known. D'Oyly and Sawers, who codified the law in the early nineteenth century, were probably acquainted with an earlier work on which this version is based.

<sup>30</sup> This story of the Great Elect is apparently also referred to in the Sinhalese chronicle, the *Janavamsa*. I have not been able to consult it.

group of Kandyan villagers he studied. And Paul Wirz (1954), who made a detailed study of Sinhalese exorcism rites in Southwest Sri Lanka, documents Sinhalese myths in which Mahāsammata appears as the archetypal supreme king, who, under the aegis of the Buddha, wields power over the disease-causing demons.

### *The Return Challenge*

Carrithers, among other claims, declared that 'the *Aggañña Sutta* is not a charter for anything...'; that it is wholly a satire, all joking, and that therefore it cannot be read as at the same time presenting a serious cosmology and a moral theory of first kingship countering Brahmanical formulations.

I have presented not inconsequential evidence to prove that the same *sutta*, especially as regards its cosmological account of world evolution and the manner and purpose of the institution of the first king Mahāsammata, was interpreted much the same way as I did in my book in the Buddhist literature of *post-canonical* times from the first centuries AD to recent times. I have shown that the *sutta* has served as a charter, a precedent, a point of reference in several ways and has also been the subject of further elaboration. Its satirical dimension did not blot out other levels of meaning. One of my theses in *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* was that the canonical account of the simultaneous origins of first kingship and ordered society, and the canonical discourses relating to the *cakkavatti* as universal king, contained germinal ideas that were elaborated in post-canonical texts and in historical Buddhist polities; that these texts contained the seeds of later flowerings in an open-ended way. The new evidence I have now collected and presented, evidence not presented or developed in my book, I now offer as a positive contribution to the theme of Mahāsammata's continued and continuing relevance.

If Carrithers still maintains that his own reading of the *Aggañña Sutta* is correct, then I would like him to answer *why and how* the Buddhists of post-canonical times have, for so long, and so pervasively, both in learned texts and in popular traditions, monstrously and humourlessly misunderstood the message of that *sutta*, and, moreover, spent so much thought and energy in creatively using it to explain their world and legitimate their social practices.

Another member of the Oxford Oriental Institute who claims to know Sri Lanka has ventured a view similar to Carrithers': 'The story of "The Great Elect" is well known to Theravādin tradition, but I am not aware that it had any effect on the practice of politics and I doubt whether the Buddha ever thought it could or should' (Gombrich 1988: 86). I must confess I was not there when the Buddha gave this discourse, nor was I able to ask him what he actually meant or how he expected his future followers to take it. As for 'awareness', it can be deepened by some reading of the extensive literature beyond the Pali canon. And, by the way,

Carrithers by his own admission has not yet offered 'a full literary analysis' of the *Aggañña Sutta*. Is it not time that he gave us a systematic, fine-grained reading of this text, with close attention to all the levels of meaning embedded in it? And thereafter answer the issues I have posed?

STANLEY J. TAMBIAH

REFERENCES

- BASHAM, A.L. 1961. *The Wonder that was India*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson.
- CARRITHERS, M. 1977. Review Article of Tambiah 1976, *JASO*, Vol. VIII, no. 2, pp. 95-105.
- ... 1983. *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- ... 'Buddhists without History', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* n.s., Vol. XXI, no. 1, pp. 165-8.
- COEDÈS, G., and C. ARCHAIMBAULT (transl.) 1973. *Les Trois mondes*, Paris: Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, no. LXXXIX.
- DUMONT, L. 1962. 'The Conception of Kingship in Ancient India', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. VI, pp. 48-77.
- ENGEL, D.M. 1975. *Law and Kingship During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* [Michigan Papers, no. 9], Ann Arbor: The Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan.
- FUNAHASHI, I. 1961. 'Abhidharmakośa-śāstra', in G.P. Malalasekera 1961, pp. 58-61.
- GEIGER, W. (transl.) 1912. *Mahāvamsa*, London: Oxford University Press / Pali Text Society.
- GHOSHAL, U.N. 1959. *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Bombay: Oxford University Press.
- GOMBRICH, R.F. 1988. *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- HARDY, R.S. 1850. *Eastern Monachism*, London: Partridge and Oakley.
- ... 1853. *A Manual of Buddhism in its Modern Development*, London: Partridge and Oakley.
- HOCART, A.F. 1850. *Caste: A Comparative Study*, London: Methuen.
- JAYAWARDHANA, B. 1961. 'Aggañña Sutta', in G.P. Malalasekera 1961, pp. 258-60.
- JAYAWICKRAMA, N.A. (transl.) 1968. *The Sheaf of Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror: Being a Translation of Jinakālamālīpakaṛaṇaṃ of Ratanapañña Thera of Thailand* [Pali Text Society Translation Series, no. 36], London: Luzac.
- JONES, J.J. (transl.) 1949. *The Mahāvastu*, London: Luzac.

- LAWRIE, A.C. 1898. *A Gazetteer of the Central Provinces of Ceylon*, Colombo: George J.A. Skeen, Government Printer (2 vols.).
- LE MESURIER, C.L.R., and T.B. PANABOKKE (transl.) 1880. *Nīti-Nighandūva or the Vocabulary of the Law as it Existed in the Days of the Kandyan Kingdom*, Colombo.
- LINGAT, R. 1950. 'Evolution of the Conception of Law in Burma and Siam', *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. XXXVIII, no. 1, pp. 9-31.
- ... 1973. *The Classical Law of India*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- MALALASEKERA, G.P. (ed.) 1961. *The Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol. I, Colombo: Government of Ceylon.
- ÑĀṆAMOLI, B. (transl.) 1956. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga) by Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa*, Colombo: R. Semage.
- PIERIS, R. 1956. *Sinhalese Social Organization: The Kandyan Period*, Colombo: Ceylon University Press.
- REYNOLDS, F.E., and M.B. REYNOLDS (transl.) 1982. *Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- RHYS DAVIDS, T.W. (transl.) 1899. *Dialogues of the Buddha (Sacred Books of the Buddhists, II)*, London: Henry Frowde.
- RICHARDSON, D. 1896. *The Dhammathat, or the Laws of Menoo in Translation*, Rangoon (14 vols. in 1).
- TAMBIAH, S.J. 1973. 'Dowry and Bridewealth and the Property Rights of Women in South Asia', in J. Goody and S.J. Tambiah (eds.), *Bridewealth and Dowry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ... 1976. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ... 1984. *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ... 1987. 'At the Confluence of Anthropology, History and Ideology', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* n.s., Vol. XXI, no. 1, pp. 187-216.
- ... forthcoming. 'The Buddhist Conception of Universal King and its Manifestations in Southeast Asia', Fifth Sri Lankan Endowment Lecture, University of Malaya.
- THAUNG, Dr 1959. 'Burmese Kingship in Theory and Practice during the Reign of Mindon', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol. XLII, no. 2, pp. 171-85.
- WALDSCHMIDT, E. 1970. 'Fragment of a Buddhist Sanskrit Text on Cosmogony', in J. Tilakasir (ed.), *Añjali: Papers on Buddhism and Indology*, Peradeniya: University of Ceylon.
- WAYMAN, A. 1973. *The Buddhist Tantras: Light on Indo-Tibetan Esotericism*, New York: Samuel Weiser.
- WEBER, M. 1958. *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (transl. and ed. H.H. Gerth and D. Martindale), New York: The Free Press.
- WIRZ, P. 1954. *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*, Leiden: Brill.
- YALMAN, N. 1967. *Under the Bo Tree: Caste, Kinship and Marriage in the Interior of Ceylon*, Berkeley: University of California Press.