

# BUDDHIST TEXTS IN SANSKRIT FROM TAMIL NADU

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## Abstract

Buddhism reached South India and Ceylon at the time of Asoka from the north and thus began to spread gradually. Various centres of Buddhist religion were established in south India even in the early Christian era. Buddhism continued to exist in the Tamil land till about the 13th century. But the golden age was from 2nd to 8th century A.D. as known from Tamil, Pali and Sanskrit works. Several Buddhist scholars also went from South India to North India, Ceylon and China and wrote treatises on Buddhism or translated important Buddhist works. Renowned scholars like Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti reigned supreme during this period.

This paper shall deal with a few of the early writers of Buddhist works in Sanskrit associated with Tamil Nadu.

The earliest and most revered Buddhist monk is Āryadeva, also called Deva, Kānadeva and Nilanetra. Huen Tsang regarded him along with Nāgārjuna, Aśvaghōṣa and Kumāralabdha as "one of the four suns which illuminated the world". Traditional biographies accept him as a student and successor in the Mādhyamaka lineage. He belonged to the first half of the third century A.D.

Āryadeva occupies an important position, next only to Nāgārjuna, in the history of Buddhist philosophical thought and its exposition. He is known to have authored nearly forty major and minor works in Sanskrit, though most of them are available only in their Tibetan and Chinese versions. Of his four philosophical writings, the *Catuṣṣāṭaka* is of great importance. It is also called *Bodhisattvayogācāra* and *Vaipulya Śataśāstra*. It is in sixteen chapters, each of them having 25 *kārikās* in

32 syllabled *Anuṣṭubh* or *Śloka* metre. It is mainly concerned with the disciplined conduct (*yogācaryā*) of a Bodhisattva.

Āryadeva's *Śataśāstra* and *Akṣara Śataka* are similar to *Catuḥśataka*. There are slight differences in the arrangement of the topics and the arguments against the opponents. His works are noteworthy for their literary value also. He puts across his philosophical ideas in an interesting and direct manner.

Buddhaghōṣa, a well known figure in the field of Buddhism is known to have flourished in the first half of the fifth century A.D. He is considered to belong to Andhra and probably spent most of his early life in South India. He wrote commentaries on the *Tripīṭika*. His work *Padyacūḍāmaṇi* is a *mahākāvya* in Sanskrit in ten sargas and nearly 640 verses. This poem narrates in the classical style the birth, sad events and the ascetic life of prince Siddhartha.

Diñnāga (Dignāga) was the famous Buddhist logician of the 5th to 6th century A.D. He belonged to the Simmavatharam village near Kañcīpuram. He became a disciple of Vasubandhu and learnt all the Mahāyāna doctrines from him. He was a younger contemporary of Bhaṭṭhari whose thirty *Kārikas* in *Vākyapadīya* (III 3.55-85) are adopted by him in his work *Trikāla-(Traikālyā)-parikṣā*, a polemic against Brahminism. Several works, major and minor, are ascribed to him but the Sanskrit originals of most of them are lost. He is regarded as "the father of the medieval Nyāya and the link between the Buddhist orthodox Nyāya systems of India". His *Prajñāpāramitāpiṇḍārtha Saṅgraha* in fifty eight verses gives a summary of Wisdom-Perfection according to the *Yogācāra* standpoint. *Yogāvatāra* in nine verses deals succinctly with the concept of ultimate reality according to the *Yogācāra* school. His other works are the *Nyāyapraveśa*, *Ālambana-parikṣā* and *Pramāṇasamuccaya*. His authentic logical ideas and method of exposition are referred to in varied treatises including Sanskrit aesthetic texts like *Dhvanyāloka* and its commentary *Locanā*.

Candrakīrti, a student of Kamalaśuddhi and Dharmapāla, belonged to the 6th-7th centuries. The Mādhyamika system taught by Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, found in him a masterly exponent and systematiser. His *Prasannapadā* ('clearly worded') is the only Sanskrit commentary on *Mādhyamaka Kārikās*. Moreover, his commentary on the *Catuḥśataka* makes the metaphysics of Āryadeva more interesting and enjoyable through his apt comparisons and maxims. Besides the above two commentaries, he wrote other scholarly commentaries and

independent works like– *Catuhśatakavṛtti*, *Yuktiśaṣṭikavṛtti*, *Śūnyatāsaptavṛtti*, *Mādhyamakāvātāra* with his own commentary, *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa*, *Mādhyamakaprajñāvātāra*.

Dharmapāla (540-610 A.D.) wrote a commentary on *Vijñāptimātratāsiddhi* of Vasubandhu was translated into Chinese. He was Chief Professor at Nalanda and is said to be a contemporary of Bhāvaviveka and Bhartṛhari.

Dharmakīrti was another great philosopher, an eminent poet and a logician of the 7th century. His teachers were Iśvarasena and Dharmapāla. He wrote the following works– *Pramāṇavārttika*, *Pramāṇavinicchaya*, *Nyāyabindu*, *Hetubindu*, *Sambandhaparīkṣa*, *Vādanyāya*, and *Santānantarasiddhi*. His great classic in logic is the *Pramāṇavārttika*, a commentary and supplement to Dinnāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya*. He also wrote commentaries, on the first chapter of *Pramāṇavārttika* and on *Sambandhaparīkṣa*. Dharmakīrti was also a poet and the anthologies like the *Sūktimuktāvali* of Śrīdharadāsa and Jalhana and the *Subhāṣitāvali* of Vallabhadeva quote his verses. Ānandavardhana, while elaborating on – *lāvanyadraviṇāvayayo na gaṇitah ...* (on *Kārikā* 40) which is an instance of *Aprastutaprasamsā*, refers to Dharmakīrti as a pessimistic poet.

Anuruddha Thera was another Buddhist Sanskrit and Pali writer of 12th century who lived at Kāñcī. Among his works, the *Anuruddhaśataka* and *Nāmarūpapariccheda* may be mentioned.

Thus it can be seen from the above that all these scholars happily combined in themselves mastery in logic and other sciences with the felicity of poetic style and capacity to write lyrical verses. According to Bhāmaha, a 6th century *Alaṅkāra* writer, poetry and science (*Śāstra*) went hand in hand, and were never antagonistic to each other.

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