

## Contribution of Milindapanha to Theravada Buddhism

**Dr. M.D. Dunesh indrarathne Gunathilake**

Senior Lecturer  
University Of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

### Abstract

The Book Milindapanha is one of the most valuable and important book of Buddhist philosophy. King of Milinda is a historical personage. But his historicity is not confirmed by the Theravada tradition. Only Milindapanha but no other book of Theravada tradition and eastern historical book mention about him. But westerner historians have made records about king Milinda. Scholars have some archeological evidence related to the king. His kingdom, coins used by him and others .In addition to that there are legends about King Milinda Ven Nagasena also main character in the book. But the plight is that no other books of Theravada tradition remarkable comment or reference to the monk. Only the Milindapanha refers to him. So scholars have doubted on his historicity.

### Analysis and Discussion

The Milindapanha has mainly contains the dialogues between Ven. Nagasena and king of Milinda (Menander).Those dialogues contain Buddhist philosophies and system of thought. The major Buddhist tenets are namely, Theory of Egolessness, Kamma and its result, Nibbana and so on. These Buddhist tenets are presented in a simple but rich language .in addition to that. The presented theme is confirmed by the citation of a striking and apt simile. For example the book starts with the theory of Egolessness. Ven Nagasena tries to bring to light to king Milinda that there is no so –called person available in ultimate sense. A person or a thing is just given a designation for recognition. The word ‘man” is just a designation given to the collection of five aggregates’ for recognition. It is not an ultimate thing .This presentation is correctly and powerfully confirmed by the bringing of a simile of cart by ven. nagasena

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එවං ඛෙධස්ස සන්තෙස්ස හොති සන්තොති සම්මුති;*

*Yathā hi aṅgasambhārā hoti saddo ratho iti,  
Evaṃ khadhesu santesu hoti sattoti sammuti;*

Had Ven .nagasena or any other Buddhist monk or any one just flatly said, taught or tried to bring home that there is no “person” available in ultimate sense .it would not have been so striking and powerful expression .the listener or student of fairly good reason would have found it an uninteresting matter which is very difficult even to understand. But Ven. Nagasena has very aptly presented it with a simile of cart. It has become so striking and easily understandable. Even a person with simple and little knowledge would very easily understand the Buddhist theory of Egolessness. This is only one instance which I have cited and presented .but the book is full of interesting and valuable remarks. Such is the value of this book in the study of Buddhist philosophy .Through this system of presentation, the book Milindapanha has greatly contributed in the easy and correct learning of Buddhist philosophy .this has paved way in longstanding of Theravada Buddhism

This coin shows the second-century BCE Indo-Greek king Menander of Taxila, the capital of the western Punjab and Gandara. Menander converted to Buddhism, an act that made lasting impression. More than a century later, at the beginning of the Common Era, an anonymous author composed a book called *Milindapañha*, 'the questions of King Menander'. About 250 questions are answered by the revered monk Nagasena. The *Milindapañha* has seven sections:

1. Background history
2. Questions on distinguishing characteristics
3. Questions for the cutting off of perplexity
4. Questions on dilemmas
5. A question solved by inference
6. Special qualities of asceticism
7. Questions on talk of similes

It is interesting to note that several questions are entirely Greek in nature.

Though this book contains and maintains such great value, very few or rather no critical study has been done yet by both Eastern western scholars and critics. The oldest Roman edition was done in 1880 by V. Trenkner and published by Williams and Norgate. Later, it was reprinted in Royal Asiatic Society (James G. Forlong) (for Pali Text Society) in 1928 and again reprinted by same in 1962. This was translated into English by Mrs. Rhys Davids in 1930 and published by George Rutledge and Sons, Ltd, later, in 1969, B. Horner did another translation into English in two volumes with some rectification and addition under the name 'Melinda's question'. It was published by Luzac and Company, Ltd, Great Russell Street W.C.I. Recently, in 1993, Mr. N.K.C. Mendis did an edition of *Milindapanha* but it was only an abridged edition.

For the first time in the history of Sri Lanka, it was translated into Sinhala at the reign of King Sri Rajasingha by Ven. Hinatiye Sumangala Thero. Again we see a Pali edition of *Milindapanha* by Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitriya in 1962. These are the available editions of *Milindapanha* to modern students. (I have been able to find out only these editions) Since long, there has been no edition or translation of this valuable book. Not even a critical study has been sufficiently done in recent past. Ven. Welivitiye Sorata Thero has published a small article regarding this topic. Apart from this a very few or rather no academic study has been done regarding this book. Some articles are seen here and there but they just prove a simple introduction to what *Milindapanha* is. They are only for the new or ignorant students of *Milindapanha*.

*Milindapañha*, the eighteenth book of the *Khuddaka Nikaya* (according to the Burmese version of the Pali canon), consists of 7 parts as shown below. The conclusion to the *Milindapañha* states that it contains 262 questions, though in the editions available today only 236 can be found. Although not included as a canonical text in the traditions of all the Theravada in countries, this work is much revered throughout and is one of the most popular and authoritative works of Pali Buddhism.

Composed around the beginning of the Common Era, and of unknown authorship, the *Milindapañha* is set up as a compilation of questions posed by King Milinda to a revered senior monk named Nagasena. This Milinda has been identified with considerable confidence by scholars as the Greek king Menander of Bactria, in the dominion founded by Alexander the Great, which corresponds with much of present day Afghanistan. Menander's realm thus would have included Gandhara, where Buddhism was flourishing at that time.

What is most interesting about the *Milindapañha* is that it is the product of the encounter of two great civilizations — Hellenistic Greece and Buddhist India — and is thus of continuing

relevance as the wisdom of the East meets the modern Western world. King Milinda poses questions about dilemmas raised by Buddhist philosophy that we might ask today. And Nagasena's responses are full of wisdom, wit, and helpful analogies.

So I hope to this study a critical and research type of study of the book and bring to light its academic, historical religious and philosophical values and bring home to the students of Buddhist philosophy its importance

In the first place it has defended Buddhism from the heretics of the day. They had attacked and harassed Buddhism with intricate and complex question. The question of king Milinda is an example to the condition. They had erroneously labeled Buddhism as an nihilist. The heretics have groundlessly based themselves on the false ground of Ego and ruthlessly attacked Buddhism. The book says that king Milinda proclaimed that 'the entire India was empty of monks "අඵ මො මිලින්දො රාජා ආයස්මින්තං ආයුසාලං තුණ්හිභුතං දිස්වා අප්ඵොටෙන්වා උක්කුට්ඨිං කන්වා යොනකෙ එතදවොච "තුච්ඡො චත හො ජම්බුදිපො, පලාපො චත හො ජම්බුදිපො, නත්ථි කොචි සමණො වා බිරුන්මණො වා, යො මයා සද්ධිං සල්ලපිතුං උස්සහති කඨ්ඨං පට්ඨිනෙතු"න්ති." (Atha kho milindo rājā āyasmantaṃ āyupālaṃ tuṇhībhūtaṃ disvā apphoṭetvā ukkuṭṭhiṃ katvā yonake etadavoca "tuccho vata bho jambudīpo, palāpo vata bho jambudīpo, natthi koci samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā, yo mayā saddhiṃ sallapitum ussahati kaṅkhaṃ paṭivinetu"nti.) The monks had fled to various places fearing the question of the king. Ven Nagasena had defended Buddhism by successfully answering every question of the king. Through this answering the Buddhism has been contributed for longstanding

Again the bringing of simile for the strengthening of the presented theme has made very easy to understand the tenets of Buddhism. Buddhism is Vibhajjavadi system It analyses everything to its last particle. it divides man into Five Aggregates, VIZ. Rupa, (Form) Vedana, (Sensation) Sanna, (Perception) Sankhara (Mental Formation) and Vinnana (Consciousness). The collection of these elements makes a convention "man" This is very difficult to drive into the minds of a man because most people think that the man is one and only object. But ven. Nagasena has very easily and forcefully drove into man's mind this theory through the usage of simile

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එවං ඛධෙසු සන්තෙසු හොති සන්තොති සම්මුති;

*Yathā hi aṅgasambhārā hoti saddo ratho iti,  
Evaṃ khadhesu santesu hoti sattoti sammuti;*

(Just as the combination of parts is called 'a chariot'; Thus while there are the apparatus of experience, conventionally there is 'a being')

It is used to illustrate the idea that we are only an assemblage of parts, that nothing really exists in the absolute sense - as the sutta says when the parts come together we conventionally say 'a being'. This collection of parts is also called a mere heap of fabrication (suddha-saṅkhārapuñjayaṃ). But what are these parts? They are the *khandhas*. Traditionally these are defined as that which conventionally makes up a being. The definition is circular: a being is made up of the things that make up a being. There's not much information in that interpretation. However Sue Hamilton has given us a better way of thinking about the khandhas: they are the *apparatus of experience*. That is, instead of thinking of the khandhas as what makes up a being, we can think of the khandhas as the minimal requirements for having an experience. Briefly we have the locus of experience (form/rūpa), then "having met with sensory data (vedanā) [via the physical sense organs] we process it: we become aware of and identify the sensation (saññā), tegorise it and name it (viññāṇā), and we respond effectively to it (saṅkhāra

They are mostly presented through dialogue between the king and Ven Nagasena. Especially Milindapanha contains almost every Buddhist tenets of Buddhist philosophy in degrees less or

more. But I hope to deal with only some tenets out of them. They are the theory of non-egolessness, the theory of kamma and rebirth, the concept of Nibbana and the concept of saddha in Buddhism,

### **Non- Egolessness**

The pre Buddhist as well as post-Buddhist religious systems speak of Atma or soul>It is very complicated theory which is very difficult to understand. Almost all the beings have even a slightest belief in soul knowingly or unknowingly. But Buddhism does not entertain the theory of soul. It has its own separate and unique definition of Atta.

### **Nibbana**

This is the final goal of Buddhist. The Oxford Dictionary defines Nirvana as Extinction of individuality and absorption into the supreme spirit as the Buddhist highest good. Here the vedantic conception is confused with the Buddhist, although the latter knows nothing of absorption into a supreme spirit, Buddhism acknowledges no individuality apart from the compound of the mental and material aggregates wherein the worldly man entertains the notion of individuality through selfish craving. The Pali word Nibbana is composed of “Ni” and “vana” “Ni” is a negative particle meaning “absence” “Vana” is a figurative expression of craving or lusting. The commentaries define it in this way; It is called Nibbana in that it is a departure (Ni-kkhanta, lit “outgoing “or “gone Out”) from that craving which is called “Vana” lusting in the sense that it (Vana) operates as if it were a thread or cord to connect one life with another. The metaphorical expression referred to comprise tanha-kkhaya, the destruction of craving or thirst, one of the epithets given in the text, In this sense “Nirvana” is to be understood as the absence of craving. The meaning “extinction” which is most generally given to Nirvana is derived from the pali verb nibbati, blows out “Regarded in this sense the world is composed of Ni9r)va, to blow (as wind) or to go out, as the flame of a lamp or fire. This again is a metaphor, used to express the state of final Nirvana that result from the destruction of craving. Is the release of being. The total destruction of Raga, dosa and moha is Nibbana. It is the Arahantship. There are two aspect of nibbana. One is sopadisesa and other nirupadisesa. But it seems that some of even greatest scholars have made some mistakes in understanding nibbana, some say that nirupadisesa nibbana is experienced by an arahant nothing exists to explain.

### **Kamma (action)**

Kamma is simply action a “deed.’ Actions are performed in three ways; by body, mind and speech. Every action of importance is performed because there is desire for a result; it has an aim, an objective. one wishes for something specific to happen as the result of it. This desire, no matter how mild it may be, is a form of craving. it expresses the thirst (thanha) for existence and for action. To exist is to act, on one level or another. Organic existence consists of chemical action; psychic existence consists of mental action. So existence and action are inseparable. But some action those in which mind is involved, are bound to have intention. This is expressed by the pali word cetana, volition, which is one of the mental properties. There is another word, chanda, which stands for wishing, desiring a result. These words all.

### **Re-birth**

It is one of the topics which has been discussed even in today’s world with most interest and research. Every religion in the world discuss of this theme in one way or other. But all believe in rebirth. but buddhistic belief is different though it has separate and unique system of belief in rebirth. It says that when attachment is present there arises the issue of rebirth.

### Saddha

It is the seed for the realization of best and ultimate fruit in Buddhism and everywhere. It is the foundation for every achievement. Mainly, it is divided into Amulika and Akaravati saddha. But it is different from “Bhakti” of Theo centric religions. Bhakti arises as a result of fear to God but Saddha arises and develops as a result of wisdom.

Milindapanha has greatly contributed in the easy understanding of Theravada Buddhism through the usage of similes. Further; it has contributed for defending Buddhism from attacks of heretics and thereby for the long standing of Buddhism.

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