Budhu Dahama saha Buddhagama

Posted on



Budhu Dahama saha Buddhagama in Sinhala is a follow up to Prof Marasinghe's previous English books on Buddhism, Gods in Buddhism and Merit in Buddhism.

By Prof M M G Marasinghe

The title itself implies what the book essentially endeavours to illustrate. Buddhagama –the practice of Buddhism versus Budhu Dhahama – the teachings of Buddhism. In Prof Marasinghe's words, his attempt in this book, is to take the follower of the Buddha beyond religious rituals and offerings and set him in the path of spiritual development leading to the attainment of *nibbana*. The author explains the important elements of the ritual Buddhism, which are deviations from the original teachings of the Buddha as contained in the Pali canonical texts. Here, the

author has shown how the canonical teaching has undergone change when they reach the functional level. The variations are non-acceptable when the original concepts are compared with the functional or ritual variation.

One important concept which has thus undergone change during its transmission from the canon to the functional is the idea of the supernatural in Buddhism. The Gods in the Buddhist texts are different from the Gods believed in by many Buddhists today. While the gods in the canonical texts come voluntarily to pay their respects to the Buddha and the Arahats and worship even ordinary laymen, the Buddhists of today make offerings and make donations of merit generated from religious activities to the Gods. Both positions cannot as shown by the author be true and the wrong adoption is made obvious.

Not only are there no Gods or deities who respond to man's requests, pleas and offerings, neither are there demons and other evil spirits who bring disease, ill-luck and misfortune. Therefore, Buddhism does not accept placation of evil spirits through various rites and rituals. Though merit generation has become the central focus of religious activities today, the generation of merit cannot lead to *nibbana* without the training in moral qualities, which leads on to mental development and wisdom. Total devotion to merit generation alone without moving on to the next higher step will result in continued existences in samsara and be reduced to IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) at the exhaustion of their merit.

The author draws the attention of the reader to an important promulgation of the Buddha recorded in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta. In this the Buddha lays down that after his passing away, questions which pertain to the discipline of the disciples, interpretations of his teachings or the determination of practices derived from his teachings should be resolved according to the Buddha's declaration of the authority of the Dhamma and Vinaya. According to this, an interpretation or a practice derived from the Dhamma can be accepted only if it agrees with the core values of the Suttas and not otherwise. The author has shown instances where practices do not agree with the teachings of the Buddha as recorded in the Pali canonical texts.

Prof Marasinghe is to be commended for equipping the Sinhala reader with a wealth of information on the historical growth and development of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions from the 6th Century BC to historical times, hitherto shrouded in myth and legend. Buddha's teaching shines in splendour when uncovered and not when covered with myth and legend (*vivato virocati, na paticcanno*).

For his outstanding contribution in the field of Pali and Buddhist Studies Prof Marasinghe was recently felicitated by the University of Kelaniya with an honourary doctorate in Literature (D. Litt).