



TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION OF THE *VAJIRABUDDHIṬĪKĀ*: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF *NIDĀNAVANNAṆĀ* SINHALESE AND BURMESE EDITIONS

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The *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā*, the oldest known sub-commentary on the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, is traditionally attributed to the Most Venerable Vajirabuddhi and is thought to have been composed between the Anurādhapura and Polonnaruwa periods. In his *Sāratthadīpanīṭṭikā*, the later sub-commentator, the Most Venerable Sāriputta, criticized certain interpretations in the *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā*, noting both its doctrinal conciseness and its incorporation of linguistic features from languages other than Pāli. These characteristics appear to have influenced subsequent generations of scholars, yet no critical edition in Sinhalese script has been published to date. Presently, two principal Burmese-script editions exist: an older word-by-word Burmese translation (*Nissaya*) and the version printed at the Sixth Buddhist Council (*Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana*). A comparative study of Sinhalese-script palm-leaf manuscripts reveals notable divergences from the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* edition. Significantly, the older *Nissaya* translation aligns more closely with the Sinhalese manuscript tradition, suggesting it preserves an earlier recension of the text. This research undertook a comparative textual analysis of the *Nidānavannaṇā* section across six Sinhalese-script palm-leaf manuscripts, the Burmese *Nissaya*, and the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* edition. The findings shed light on the textual transmission of the *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā* and lay groundwork for a future critical edition in Sinhalese script.

Keywords: Pāli literature, textual editing, *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā*, Vinaya sub-commentary

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INTRODUCTION

The *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā* is the earliest known Pāli sub-commentary on the Vinaya, believed to have been composed towards the end of the Anurādhapura era and the beginning of the Polonnaruwa period. It is attributed to the Most Venerable Vajirabuddhi, a figure referenced by the later sub-commentator, the Most Venerable Sāriputta, who criticizes the *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā* for its brevity and for incorporating linguistic elements from languages other than Pāli (Devarakkhita, 1914). Subsequent scholars have also noted this distinct linguistic character of the text (Vajirañña, 2000; Kieffer-Pulz, 2013). These inherent features may have influenced later commentators and may be one of the reasons why a critical edition of the *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā* in Sinhala script has not yet been undertaken. At present, there are two principal Burmese-script editions of the text: the older word-by-word Burmese translation (*Nissaya*) and the version published by the Sixth Buddhist Council (*Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana*). This study adopts a comparative and philological approach to analyze six Sinhala-script palm-leaf manuscripts alongside these two Burmese editions in order to explore the textual transmission of the *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā* and to lay the groundwork for a future critical edition in Sinhala script.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a comparative textual and philological approach to examine the *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā*, focusing particularly on the *Nidānavañṇanā* section. The two main Burmese-script sources used were the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* (Cs) edition and the Burmese word-by-word translation (*Nissaya*). Six Sinhala-script palm-leaf manuscripts were collected from various temples across Sri Lanka and digitized for analysis. These were carefully compared with both Burmese editions to identify significant textual divergences between the manuscript traditions.

This research was guided by a comparative philological method and sought to address two central research questions:

Research questions

1. Is the Burmese *Nissaya* (Bn) edition of the *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā* more closely aligned with the Sinhala-script manuscripts than with the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* (Cs) edition?
2. What do the textual similarities and differences between the Sinhala and Burmese editions reveal about the earlier recension of the *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā*?



The methodology included collation of manuscripts and identification of variant readings, omissions, and interpolations. These variants were analyzed in comparison with the two Burmese editions to trace patterns of consistency and divergence. Special attention was also given to the presence of Sanskrit and Sinhala vocabulary and verses in order to assess the influence of non-Pāli linguistic elements on the textual transmission.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study presents a comparative textual and philological analysis of the *Nidānavaṇṇanā* section of the *Vajirabuddhiṭikā*, based on six Sinhala-script palm-leaf manuscripts and two Burmese-script editions: the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* (Cs) edition and the Burmese word-by-word translation (Bn). The findings reveal notable textual and linguistic features that contribute to our understanding of the textual history and multilingual composition of this early Vinaya sub-commentary.

(a) Textual Variants and Transmissions

Following the framework suggested by Katre (1941), the analysis categorized textual variants into confusions, omissions, and additions:

- i. **Confusions:** Transcription errors such as misreading of letters or syllables were found across Sinhala-script MSS. In several cases, these variant readings, although deviating from Cs, are semantically coherent and align with the Bn edition. This suggests that the Bn may have drawn on an earlier or similar recension to that was preserved in the Sinhala tradition. For example, instances of anagrammatism (transposition of letters) were identified in Sinhala manuscripts but corrected in both Burmese editions.
- ii. **Omissions:** Two types were observed: lipography and haplography.
Lipography: omission of words or letters during copying. For example, the word “*sotāva*” appears in Sinhala-script MSS and Bn, while Cs reads only “*sotā*,” omitting *-va*.
Haplography: Omission due to similarity in letters/words. This was minimal, with few correspondences between Sinhala MSS and Bn.
- iii. **Additions:** Two types were observed: dittography and tautology.
Dittography: Unintentional repetition of words or syllables. For example, the word “*samantapāsādikātī*” is rendered as “*samantapāsādikatātī*” in Sinhala MSS; Bn correctly reads it as “*samantapāsādikātī*,” while Cs reads “*samantapāsādiketi*.” In both Sinhala-scripts and Bn, there is a consistency of sound between *katā* and *kā*.
Tautology: Repetition of synonymous expressions. This is occasionally found, particularly in elaborative glosses.

(b) Presence of Sanskrit Elements

Ten Sanskrit verses were found in Sinhala-script manuscripts, especially in the *Nidānavaṇṇanā*, all of which have been rendered into Pāli in both Burmese editions. This suggests a deliberate *Sanskritization* in earlier Sinhalese transmission, pointing to a multilingual context in the development of this *ṭīkā*.



The Bn edition itself acknowledges the presence of these Sanskrit elements, stating they were translated into Pāli for accessibility, highlighting an active engagement with Sanskrit even in the Burmese tradition.

(c) Alignment of Editions

A pattern emerges where the Bn edition shares more readings and structural features with Sinhala-script MSS than the Cs edition does, and Cs appears more standardized, possibly reflecting later editorial revisions.

This strengthens the hypothesis that the Bn edition preserves an earlier recension of the *Vajirabuddhiṭkā*, closer to the Sinhalese textual lineage.

(d) Language mixing

Although Sinhala-script MSS do not include Sinhala prose insertions in the *Nidānavañṇanā*, they do contain numerous Sanskrit verses and terms. This supports The Most Venerable Sāriputta's criticism that *Vajirabuddhiṭkā* incorporates non-Pāli elements. The presence of such multilingual layers reflects a broader cultural-linguistic setting in the post-Anurādhapura transmission.

CONCLUSIONS

This study offers important insights into the textual transmission of the *Vajirabuddhiṭkā*, with particular focus on its *Nidānavañṇanā* section. A comparative analysis of six Sinhala-script palm-leaf MSS and two Burmese-script editions, namely the Burmese *Nissaya* (Bn) and the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* edition (Cs), demonstrates that the Bn edition aligns more closely with the Sinhala manuscript tradition than with the later standardized Cs edition. The discovery of ten Sanskrit verses preserved in the Sinhala manuscripts but rendered into Pāli in the Burmese editions. Moreover, the identification of textual variants, ranging from confusions and omissions to additions, has shed light on the editorial processes and the layered development of the text across time and regions. Collectively, these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the early Pāli sub-commentarial tradition, the impact of Sanskritization on post-Anurādhapura Pāli literature, and the philological value of unedited Sinhala-script manuscripts in recovering and reconstructing earlier versions of canonical commentarial texts.

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