

EHAMASSU RE - EXAMINED

(With a Note on the Patna Dharmapada and its Importance)

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The Problem

In the Dhammapada verse 371, the word *bhamassu* of the second line has been the subject of controversy since the beginning of modern Pali studies. I have referred to this controversy in a previous contribution (Palihawadana 1984, pp. 260-265).

The problem is, what exactly is the grammar of *bhamassu*? On the face of it, the word can only be an imperative form of *bhamati* : *bhama* + *ssu*, 2nd sing. *ātmanepada* ending. The commentary merely paraphrases the line and offers no clue as to how it understood the grammar of the word. In any case, its interpretation will not allow us to take *bhamassu* as a simple imperative form.

A Possible Solution

When we read the commentary with the rather more specific renderings in two medieval Sinhala works related to the Dhammapada (Saddharma Ratnāvaliya and Dhammapada Purāṇa Sannaya), it would appear that the tradition sees here a causative imperative 2nd singular *ātmanepada*. In that case, *bhamassu* should be a derivative of an older form *bhamessu* with the same ending as mentioned above, but added to the causative base *bhame* - (See Carter and Palihawadana, p. 503f: Palihawadana, 1984, p. 262).

Comparison with Other Versions of the Dhammapada

Having ascertained this from the traditional sources, we must proceed to compare *bhamassu* with its parallels in the other extant Dharmapadas in ancient Indian languages. Gāndhārī Dharmapada 75 *bhametsu* looks close enough to the surmised *bhamessu* to allow us to think that this was indeed the original form underlying *bhamassu*. However, the other key word of the GD line, *kamaguna* is not specific enough to be helpful, and therefore one cannot feel certain about the grammar of *bhamessu*, especially because a causative imperative in *-e-ss* is not attested elsewhere in the relevant texts.

When we turn to the Udānavarga (which seems to be the Sarvāstivāda version of the Dhammapada and which was very popular among Buddhists of Central Asia), we see the parallel of Dh. 371 in Chapter xxxi, verse 31. Its second line reads: *mā te kamaguṇo matheta cittam*. At one glance, it becomes clear that this version has dropped the problematic word and “smoothed out” the old Prakrit text to produce an acceptable Sanskrit translation. However, among the manuscript material relating to this verse that editor Bernhard has recorded there is a very suggestive v.l. which agrees with the Pali text *kāmaguṇe*. This can be regarded as a very valuable bit of evidence which shows that the Pali reading, although it may contain a distortion of an earlier text, was current among *Indian* Buddhists at least as far back as the beginnings of the Christian Era when the process of Sanskritization of Buddhist texts commenced, obliterating many important linguistic features of these texts.

The other source that remains to be examined is the Patna Dharma pada, first published in 1979. (See note below). Here, the parallel verse (PD 33) has this line in the following form.:

mā vo kāmaguṇā bhrameṃsu cittaṃ

Two important differences immediately strike the eye : (a) The verb is *bhrameṃsu* with features reminiscent of a class of 3rd person plural verbs common in Indian Buddhist (non-Pali) texts, and (b) the subject of the sentence is *kāmaguṇā*, whose parallel in the Pali version is the locative singular *kāmaguṇe*.

An Old Solution Proposed Again (with new facts and arguments)

On the basis of this form, it has been suggested (Carter & Palihawadana, p. 503 f.) that the best solution is to regard

PD *bhrameṃsu* (Sanskritized from *bhameṃsu*?)

GD *bhametsu*

Dh **bhamessu* (surmised as the original of *bhamassu*)

as Aorist 3rd plurals from the causative base of *bhram-* (Sanskrit), *bham-* (Prakrit/Pali), i.e., from *bh(r)ame-*. This is essentially what Senart, with great insight, suggested solely on the basis of *bhametsu* (Brough, p. 194f). But now, this relies heavily on the PD evidence, which surfaced only recently, as well as the above reconstruction of *bhamessu* as what gave rise to the Pali *bhamassu*.

An Implication of this Solution

This suggests that there must have been a certain uniformity in these three textual traditions as regards this line, namely that it was in the form of a statement in the third person. In that case, not only had the Pali tradition later developed a secondary form *bhamassu* out of an original *bhamessu*, but also it had lost touch with this fact and “confused” the word

with the commoner imperative form, and, flowing out of that, developed a second alteration in the line, changing the nom. plur. *kāmaguṇā* to locative sing. *kamaguṇe*, so as to make the supposed imperative verb intelligible in the context.

Aorist 3rd Plural Formsein BHS and Pali

Why did the Pali tradition have to replace *-essu* with *-assu* in the first place? Before trying to answer this, one must examine the aorist 3rd plur. forms in the old Buddhist languages (represented in the so-called Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit texts that have come down to us) in relation to the comparable forms in Pali.

Third person plural forms ending in *-eṃsu* and *etsu(h)* are discussed by Edgerton (pp.142, 161 and p. 224 under the root *bhram-*). He shows that the same ending is used in aorist verbs as well as in optative verbs. He in fact suggests that most likely these forms originated in the optative, i.e., as a "pluralization" of the common optative 3rd sing. ending *-et* (with the sigmatic aorist ending *-suh* added : Edgerton, p. 161).

The coincidence of the aorist and optative in this regard is also very well illustrated by the evidence that Gustav Roth (p. 90) notes in relation to *-ensu* verbs found in the Mahāsāṅghika - Lokottaravāda texts like the Mahāvastu and several Vinaya works and fragments. From what he says it can be seen how some of these *ensu* forms occur in contexts whose corresponding Pali versions have the optative 3rd plur. *-eyyumaṃ* form. The change into the *eyyumaṃ* form may have been also facilitated by the fact that these aorist verbs were accompanied at times by the prohibitive particle *mā* (as here : *mā .. bhrameṃsu*) which in Pali combined as easily with the optative verbs (as e. g., in *mā papicchā sangham bhindeyyumaṃ* : V ii. 196:24). The reason why in such contexts the *-eyyumaṃ* form was preferred in Pali to the *-ensu/etsu(h)* forms seems to be that in the phonological evolution of Pali there was an "aversion" to the retention of forms with *-ensu/etsu(h)*, although Aor. 3rd plurals without *-e-* were tolerated, e.g., *akaṃsu* (Skt. *akārṣuḥ*) and *karīṃsu*. It is noteworthy that *-iṃsu* was phonologically acceptable whereas *-eṃsu* was not, nor for that matter *-etsu* or *-essu*. It is simply a linguistic peculiarity of the normative form of Pali as it developed in the midst of various sister languages which were not averse to these *-ensu/etsu(h)* forms.

An important point about the grammar still remains to be clarified. In our "solution", it was assumed that *bhrameṃsu* / *bhametsu* / **bhamessu* constitutes an original causative - aorist. But the evidence cited by Edgerton and Roth refers only to aorist or more exactly "aorist-optative" form in *-ensu/etsu(h)* (and by extension *-essu*) The answer to this is perhaps that, due to the inevitable *-e* form of the causative base (e.g., *bhame-* in Pali) aorist forms of that verb may in some cases coincide with the forms that Edgerton and Roth have adduced.

Evidence of Text Comparison Summarized

The examination of the four versions of this verse then seems to tell us the following:

- (a) The Patna text has the most "transparent" reading, the one that provides the clearest clue to the whole development.
- (b) The Gāndhārī version squares almost perfectly with the PD text. Its *bhametsu* conforms to a well - attested alternant of the *-ensu* aorist form to which the PD verb belongs.
- (c) In the Pali version, *bhamassu* is unintelligible on a simple analysis. It fits even its traditional exegesis only if we assume it to be derived from an older *bhamessu*. The total evidence now available suggests that *bhamassu* cannot be an imperative. It should rather be regarded as an "aorist-optative" 3rd plural from the causative verb *bhameti*: spins, swirls, causes to wander. If we accept this explanation, we have also to stipulate that the Pali reading *kāmaguṇe* is the result of a second alteration of the text from an earlier nominative plural *kāmaguṇā*.
- (d) The Udānavarga presents a late, Sanskritized text with no trace of the original word from the root *bhram-*. It is a text which "smooths out" the problem.

Conclusion

In view of these facts, the conclusion becomes irresistible that the text of this verse had become problematic in both the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda (UV) traditions well before the Sanskritization process set in, and, as a result of this, the two schools resolved the problem each in its own manner. The probable original forms § come to light thanks to the reading *bhramem̐su* of the PD, re-inforced by *bhametsu* of the GD.

§ It is not often being argued today in academic circles that the Pali Canon contains the original documents of Buddhism, but one does come across an occasional proponent of this view. Kogen Mizuno, for example, has been recently (Mizuno, p. 170) saying that the Pali Dhammapada "can be regarded as the earliest, original collection" of this genre, from which the Patna, the Gāndhārī and the Udānavarga versions "came into existence" (p. 169) as "successively later compositions" (170). Dh. 371 is one instance a detailed examination of which in light of other versions certainly does not support such a conclusion.

NOTE I: THE FOUR VERSIONS OF THE VERSE

P D 33 *dhammaṃ vicinātha apramattā mā vo kāmagaṇṇā bhrameṃsu
cittaṃ | mā lokaguḍe gilāṃ pramatto kraṇḍe dukkham
idanti dahyamāno.*

Discern dhama with alertness. Let not the passions cause your mind to swirl. Unalertly swallowing the world's sweet things (?), let one not lament, as one burns, saying: "This is sorrow".

G D 75 *jai bhikhu ma yi pramati ma de kamaguna bhametsu cita
ma loha -guda gili pramato kani dukham ida di ḍajamano*

Dh 371 *jhāya bhikkhu mā ca pamādo mā te kāmagaṇṇe bhamassu
cittaṃ | mā lohagulaṃ gilīḥ pramatto mā kandi dukkham
idaṃ ti ḍayhamāno.*

Meditate, O bhikkhu, and be not heedless. Do you not cause your mind to swirl in passion. Do not swallow the metal ball, being heedless; burning, let one not lament, saying, "This is sorrow". (Following the commentary).

U V xxxi. 31 *ātāpī vihara tvam apramatto mā te kāmagaṇṇo matheta
cittam | mā lohaguḍāṃ gileḥ pramattaḥ krandan vai
narakeṣu pacyamānaḥ v. l. kāmagaṇṇe for kāmagaṇṇo.*

Do you live alertly, making strenuous effort. May passion not disturb your mind. Being heedless, tortured in the worlds of hell, do you not swallow the metal ball(?).

NOTE II : THE PATNA DHARAMAPADA AND ITS IMPORTANCE

In a contribution to a symposium on Buddhist studies held in 1976 at Gottingen in West Germany, Dr. Gustav Roth presented the full text of a hitherto unknown version of the Dhammapada, the fourth non-Pali text of this genre, the other three being (1) the Udānavarga which is the most highly Sanskritized version, (2) the Gāndhārī Dharmapada in the Prakrit language of Gandhāra and (3) the Dharmapada verses embedded in the Mahāvastu, the massive Vinaya text of the Lokottaravāda - Mahāsāṅghika sect, composed in the so-called Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.

The text presented by Roth is based on the photo-copy of a manuscript which Rahula Sankrtyayana found in Tibet in the early thirties of this century and which he has described in the Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society (Patna, 1935). This single extant manuscript is said to be written in "the proto-Bengali -cum-Maithili characters of the 11th/13th centuries" C. E. (Roth, p. 82).

The work was the subject of an M. Litt. thesis by N. S. Shukla of the University of Delhi who later published it under the title "The Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (sic.) Dharmapada" (Patna 1979). Gustav Roth's "edition" of the text appears in the report of the proceedings of the Göttingen symposium entitled "The Language of the Earliest Buddhist Tradition" published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, in 1980 under the editorship of Heinz Bechert. Roth calls it the Patna Dharmapada.

Rahula Sankrtyayana's own idea of this work was that it was a Sanskrit translation (14th or 15th century) of the Pali Dhammapada (Roth, p. 93). This is clearly wrong as both the arrangement of the text and its linguistic features reveal. After an analysis of the language of the text, Roth says that it constitutes "a weak attempt... to render a Prakritic text into Sanskrit" (p.93); in other words, while there is a slight veneer of Sanskritization, this is basically a Prakritic text. "The general features of the language of (this) Dharmapada... bear the characteristic marks of a western type of Prakrit which are very close to those of Pali" (p. 96). Although of all the existing versions of the Dharmapada, it comes "nearest to the Pali one" (p. 93), Roth thinks it best to describe it as a "Prakrit-Pali version... older than the existing Pali Dhammapada" (p. 94).

The work is divided into 22 chapters (*vargas*) and consists of 415 verses, although the colophon refers to 502 (*śatāni pañca dve ca gāthe*).

Since the existence of a specific "Dharmapada" implies the existence of a correspondingly specific textual tradition, in the same way as the Pali Dhammapada is part of the Theravada "scriptural" tradition, it is worth mentioning that suggestions have been offered by scholars as to the affiliation of these texts with well-known Buddhist sects (see Brough, pp. 30 ff., for example). Thus the Udānavarga has been identified with the Sarvāstivāda (Brough, p.41), the Gāndhārī Dharmapada with the Dharmaguptikas (Bernhard, 1970 p. 60 f), and the Dharmapada verses of the Mahāvastu with the Mahāsāṅghika - Lokottaravādins (Bernhard 1970, p. 60). Recently, Kogen Mizuno has suggested that the Patna Dharmapada may have been part of the literature of the Sammitīya school (Mizuno, p. 168).

The closeness of the Patna Dharmapada to the Pali Dhammapada, as well as the fact that it is only very slightly Sanskritized, makes it almost an ideal source for comparison with the Pali text whenever the latter presents a textual difficulty such as for example a questionable grammatical form, or a word which the Pali scholastic tradition itself is not able to explain to our satisfaction.

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- (09) *V.* = *Vinaya*, vol. ii. Pali Text Society Edition. London.
- (10) *Dh.* = Dhammapada, the Pali Text in No. 04 above
- (11) *GD* = Gāndhārī Dharmapada Text in No. 03 above
- (12) *PD* = Patna Dharmapada Text in No. 08 above
- (13) *UV* = Udānavarga Text in No. 02 above.