

THE HISTORY OF BUDDHA'S RELIGION

by

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The History of Buddha's Religion by late B. C. Law is a translation of the *Sāsanavamsa*, otherwise called *Sāsanavamsappadīpikā* which was written in Burma in 1861 A. D. by a monk named Paññāsāmi. Paññāsāmi's work is not a original treatise but a rendering of a Burmese text into Pali as the introduction to the pali text clearly shows. The author categorically declares, not only in the introduction but also in the colophon of the book, that he translates Burmese into pali for the reason that the original was not useful to the people of other countries. In the colophon, he was sincere enough to mention the names of Sri Lankan Buddhist monks who requested him to do this translation. I refer to these facts, though in brief, for two reasons. Firstly, the readers who go through Law's introduction of his translation would doubt the authority and authenticity of the *Sāsanavamsa*, taking it erroneously as a book written as late as the nineteenth century. Secondly, nowhere in Law's introduction is a reference made to those who instigated Paññāsāmi to translate the Burmese original into Pali. The impression that Law has attempted to give is that Paññāsāmi wrote the *Sāsanavamsa* originally in Pali on his own enthusiasm.

Judging from the fact that Paññāsāmi's translation is based on very much older material of which the chronology cannot be determined due to lack of evidence, the *Sāsanavamsa* is a source which is historically important and interesting. Paññāsāmi's attempt is not a mere translation. At the very outset he declares that he would compare the Burmese original with other texts, obviously indicating the texts like *Samantapāsādikā*, *Dīpavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa*. In fact, the *Sāsanavamsa* owes its credibility to the Pali Commentaries and Chronicles written in Sri Lanka after fifth Century A. D.

The *Sāsanavamsa* is divided into ten chapters. The first chapter deals with the story of Buddhism up to the time of the Third Council held in the time of King Asoka and the despatch of missionaries by the Elder Moggaliputta Tissa to nine territories. Subsequent nine chapters narrate the histories of Buddhasāsana in the island of Sri Lanka, Suvannabhūmi, Yōnaka, vanavāsī, Aparanta, Kasmira- Gandhāra, Mahimsāka, Mahāratha and China respectively. As Law observes the accounts of Sri Lanka and Burma seem to be more comprehensive and complete than that of any other country within the scope of the *sāsanavamsa*. Two chapters deal with Burmese history of Buddhism, chapter three being the history of Buddhism in Lower Burma and chapter six being the history of Buddhism in Upper Burma. The fact that these two chapters cover more than half of the book points to the aim and ambition of Paññāsāmi.