

A Study of the Katikāvatas in Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism

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The Katikāvatas in Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism.

The Katikāvatas have their historical origins in pre-medieval Sri Lanka and are considered a crucial aspect of Sri Lankan Buddhism. The precise source of the Sri Lankan Katikāvata tradition is a topic of scholarly debate, as the exact time period for its commencement remains uncertain. Nevertheless, the Katikāvatas hold legal authority over the administration of the monastic community known as Saṅgha and its properties.

The earliest known reference to the Katikāvata, a formal set of rules for the Saṅgha, can be traced back to the Polonnaruva period. The Polonnaruva *Gal Vihāra Katikāvata*, otherwise known as King Mahāparākramabāhu's *Mahāparākramabāhu Katikāvata*, states that it was based on the edicts issued by King Aśoka. Aśoka's edicts were enacted to preserve Buddhism against heretical notions and to help the Saṅgha maintain the purity of their lives. After the enactment of *Mahāparākramabāhu's Katikāvata*, other Katikāvatas in the Daṁbadeṇiya period and Kandyan period followed the tradition of the former Katikāvatas accordingly, until the end of the Kandyan period. At the end of the Kandyan period, Sri Lanka came under the British colonial administration. The British colonial rulers also attempted to support the Bhikkhus and monastic matters by enacting new rules such as the *Vihāradēvālagam* Act. Especially, the colonial rulers paid attention to the monastic landed properties through their new rules.

The Katikāvatas played a significant role as a regulatory body for the Saṅgha, ensuring that they remained committed to the principles and teachings of Buddhism. They also provided guidance on how to navigate the complexities of monastic life and monastic matters in medieval Sri Lanka.

Method and the Content of the Dissertation

In this study, we examined the major Katikāvatas enacted during the Polonnaruva to Kandyan periods and categorized them according to whether they were pre-colonial or post-colonial. Our approach involved the following methodologies:

- Analyzing the contents of the major Katikāvatas.
- Comparing the Katikāvatas' contents with the Vinaya rules to identify similarities and differences.
- Analyzing the impact of colonial rules on medieval Sri Lankan Buddhism, including a comparison of colonial administration with the rules in the Katikāvatas.

Primary sources for this study included Buddhist canonical texts such as the Vinayaṭīka and

the Katikāvatas, as well as secondary sources such as colonial administrative reports and relevant scholarly articles. Furthermore, we associated with Sri Lankan chronicles and inscriptional sources.

The dissertation was divided into three main sections: [1] The Origin of the Katikāvatas, [2] Bhikkhus' Life and Monastic Management, and [3] Changes in Monastic Society during the Kandyan Period under the Colonial Administration.

[1] The first chapter of this dissertation focused on the origin and historical formation of the Katikāvatas. These edicts were enacted from the Polonnaruwa period to the Kandy period (1117–1815) and can be classified into two categories: *Vihāra Katikāvatas* and *Sāsana Katikāvatas*. The primary emphasis is placed on the *Sāsana Katikāvatas*, with a thorough examination of their history, typology, and purpose. Additionally, the relationship between the kings and Buddhism, as well as the kings' efforts to oversee monastic affairs and their interactions with Bhikkhus, were thoroughly discussed in the second section of chapter two.

[2] In the second chapter, the focus was on the Katikāvatas' significance in regulating monastic affairs. These rules and regulations were designed to manage the Saṅgha, preserve the teachings of Buddhism, and ensure the proper administration of monastic properties. To achieve these objectives, the kings established guidelines for the Bhikkhus' conduct, including provisions for bad behaviors (*appratipatti*) and inappropriate behaviors (*duspratipatti*). The Katikāvatas also outlined procedures for managing monastic properties. Additionally, the kings instituted a hierarchical structure within the Saṅgha to organize and regularize the Buddhist community and maintain the monasteries.

[3] In the third chapter, the focus shifted to the Kandyan period and the significant changes that Bhikkhus experienced during this time. During that period, some Bhikkhus were even regarded as landlords and wealthy elites in the country. This transformation marked a significant shift in Buddhism and had a profound impact on political authority, given the close relationship between Buddhism and the Kandyan kingdom. Consequently, in Sri Lanka, Buddhism evolved into a religion that only allowed high-caste men to receive *pabbajjā* (admission into Buddhism) and *upasampadā* (higher ordination), and casteism became integrated into it. After 1815, the country came under British colonial rule, and the administration of monasteries and monastic properties was regulated through specific laws prioritizing Buddhism. One such law, “an ordinance to amend and consolidate the law relating to Buddhist temporalities in Sri Lanka, ordinance no. 19 of 1931,” (*Vihāradēvālagam Act*) remains in use today in Sri Lanka. This section focused on this amendment and its provisions, particularly in relation to casteism in Buddhism and British influence on Buddhism.

In conclusion, this study illuminates the development of Sri Lankan Buddhism and the experiences of Bhikkhus across different socio-economic and political contexts. It is clear that both kings and colonial rulers sought to regulate the behavior of Bhikkhus through Katikāvatas and colonial laws, demonstrating their connection to Buddhism.

Purpose

This research aimed to explore the significant role of the Katikāvatas, which were royal edicts that regulated the activities of the Bhikkhus community and preserved monastic properties in medieval Sri Lanka. It began by describing the impact of various social and economic changes on Sri Lankan Buddhism, both internally (ideologies) and externally (monastic properties), which led to the creation of the Katikāvatas. The study then provided a comprehensive

examination of the relationship between the Katikāvatas and the traditional Vinaya, as well as the role of former kings in shaping the lives of Bhikkhus in medieval Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the research investigated the situation of Sri Lankan Buddhism during the post-colonial period, with a focus on the laws formulated under British governance. The study elucidated how these laws influenced the landscape of Sri Lankan Buddhism and shed light on the dynamic interactions between the evolving socio-political context and the religious practices and regulations that had defined Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Structure of the Dissertation

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Origin of the Katikāvatas

- 1.1 Katikāvatas in Sri Lankan Buddhism.
- 1.2 Katikāvatas and the Kings.

Chapter 2: Bhikkhus' Life and Monastic Management

- 2.1 The Hierarchy of the Saṅgha in Medieval Sri Lanka.
- 2.2 *Apratipatti* and *duṣpratipatti* in the *Daṃbadeṇi Katikāvata* and *Mahāparākramabāhu Katikāvata*.
- 2.3 Monastic Management in Medieval Sri Lanka from 1117 to 1798.

Chapter 3: Changes in Monastic Society during the Kandyan Period under Colonial Administration

- 3.1 The *Vihāradēvālagam* Act and the Monasticism.
- 3.2 Caste Impurity (*kuladōṣa*) in the Katikāvatas.

Conclusion

Appendix: Translation of the Katikāvatas.