

# The Earliest *Pāli Tīkā*: A Review on Controversial Opinions of Modern Pāli Scholars

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## Introduction

The *Pāli tīkā* literature is a long and continuous tradition of the *Theravāda* school. However, modern *Pāli* scholars have not identified the earliest *Pāli tīkā* among the early *tīkā*s. They assume that the *tīkā* was either one of the *Mūla-tīkā* and the *Visuddhimaggamahā-tīkā*. On the contrary, Jayawardhana Somapāla is of an opinion that the first *tīkā* is the *Visuddhimaggamahā-tīkā*. In recent years, K Arunasiri and Vijitadhamma have referred to both assumptions. This paper therefore, attempts to review those scholars' assumptions on the earliest *tīkā* with reference to the early *tīkā*s still extant today.

## Research Objectives

This review on controversial opinions of modern *Pāli* scholars aims to identify the earliest *tīkā* composed at the dawn of *Pāli tīkā* literature. Besides, this is to reconstruct the chronology of early *tīkā*s in comparing the early *tīkā*s.

## Research Methodology

This paper attempts to review those scholars' assumptions on the earliest *tīkā* with reference to the early *tīkā*s still extant today: the *Tīkā*s contain the several references or cross references, which indicate their historicity and hierarchy. Thus, the comparative method is utilized with textual or internal readings.

## Research Problems

Modern *Pāli* scholars have not identified the earliest *Pāli tīkā* among the early *tīkā*s. They assume that the *tīkā* was either one of the *Mūla-tīkā* and the *Visuddhimaggamahā-tīkā*. Some scholars, G.P. Malalasekera, Walpola Rahula and Lily de Silva consider that the earliest *tīkā* was the *Mūla-tīkā* compiled by Ācariya Ānanda as reported in the *Pāli* chronicles. On the contrary, Jayawardhana Somapāla is of an opinion that the first *tīkā* is the *Visuddhimaggamahā-tīkā* by

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Ācariya Dhammapāla. In recent years, K Arunasiri and Vijitadhamma have referred to both assumptions.

## Research Background

The *Pāli* *ṭikā* literature, firstly originated from South India around the sixth century C.E. while Buddhism was declining there. Secondly, it was strengthened by the *Mahāvihāra* tradition of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. The dawn of the *ṭikā* literature in Sri Lanka started with the late Anuradhapura period, in the approximately sixth century C.E. During the period, major *ṭikās* appeared and led to develop for later *ṭikā* compositions. Most well-known *ṭikās* were written in Sri Lanka. Within this period, the following sub-commentaries the *Mūla-ṭikā*, the *Vajirabuddhi-ṭikā*, the *Anu-ṭikā*, the *Visuddhimaggamahā-ṭikā*, and the the *Dīghanikāya-ṭikā*, were early and influential exegeses preserving in the *Theravāda* school.

## Research Discussion

In the *Pāli* tradition, the earliest *ṭikā* is the *Linatthapadavaṇṇanā* on the *Aṭṭhasālinī* or a set of Abhidhammic commentaries. It is ascribed to Ācariya Ānanda Vanaratanatissa who lived in south India. This *ṭikā* was first renamed ‘*Mūlaṭikā*’ instead of the *Linatthapadavaṇṇanā* by the *Gandhavaṃsa*. In this regard, the *Sasanavaṃsa* gives a reason of the renaming that ‘as it was written prior to all the *ṭikās*, it is called as the *Mūlaṭikā*’. Indeed, the author had not designated his work as a *ṭikā*. Currently, the title of the *Mūlaṭikā* has been well-known due to the title in the *Gandhavaṃsa*.

Modern scholars, namely, G.P. Malalasekera, Walpola Rahula and Lily de Silva accept that the earliest *ṭikā* was the *Mūlaṭikā* as reported in the *Theravāda* tradition. Of them, Walpola Rāhula observes thus; ‘so far as we know Ānanda’s *Mūlaṭikā* was the first *ṭikā*. It was written about the tenth or eleventh century A.C’. (Rāhula p. xxviii) Similarly, Lily De Silva follows that ‘in *Pāli* the oldest *ṭikā* is said to be the *Abhidhammaṭṭhakathā Līnatthavaṇṇanā*, better known as *Abhidhamma Mūlaṭikā* compiled by Ānanda’ and ‘this *Abhṭ* is called the *Mūlaṭikā* as it is recognized to be the first *ṭikā* written in *Pāli*’. According to Lily de Silva, the traditional assumption is approved by a quotation in the *Dīghanikāyaṭikā* of Ācariya Dhammapāla that was taken from the *Mūlaṭikā*. Concurrently, she also points out that the *Dīghanikāyaṭikā* frequently refers to the *Paramatthamañjūsā* known as the *Visuddhimaggamahāṭikā* by Ācariya

Dhammapāla. It shows that both the *Mūlaṭīkā* and the *Visuddhimaggamahāṭīkā* are anterior to the *Dīghanikāyaṭīkā*. She has not identified the senior *ṭīkā* out of the two, which would decide what the first *ṭīkā* was written apparently. However, she seems to uphold the traditional assumption that the *Mūlaṭīkā* was the first work.

On the contrary, Jayawardhana Somapāla is of the opinion that the first *ṭīkā* is the *Visuddhimaggamahāṭīkā* compiled by Ācariya Dhammapāla at the *Badaratittha-vihāra* in South India. Somapāla further asserts his position as follows: ‘The first *pāli ṭīkā* is not the *Līnatthapadaṇṇanā* which is sometimes called *Abhidhammamūlaṭīkā* by Ven. Ācariya Ānanda Vanaratanatissa but the *Paramatthamanjūsā* written by Ven. Acariya Dhammapāla’.(Somapāla p. 288) According to his argument, the earliest *Pāli ṭīkā* is the *Paramatthamanjūsā* composed by Ācariya Dhammapāla of *Badaratittha* in South India. As a result, later scholars controversially hold both opinions discussed. For instance, Sri Lankan *Pāli* scholar, K Arunasiri and Vijitadhamma recently state both opinions. (Vijita, 2016, p.99)

In fact, the first *ṭīkā* was the *Mūlatīkā* of Ācariya Ānanda but not the *Paramatthamanjūsā* of Acariya Dhammapāla. The *Mūlatīkā* was written by Ācariya Ānanda vanaratanatissa at the request of Dhammamitta or Buddhamitta. In his work, Ācariya Ānanda argued with Ācariya Dhammasiri by the use of ‘*keci*’ meaning ‘someone’.( *Anuṭīkā*, vol- II, p.26 ) Ācariya Dhammasiri was one of the three students of *Buddhaghosa*, namely, *Buddhamitta*, *Dhammasiri* and *Upatissa* of Ācariya Buddhaghosa. In *Pāli* exegetical tradition, the term ‘*Keci*’ refers to a contemporary author and the *Abhayagiri* residents in order to argue with them. In addition, Ācariya Vajirabuddhi, a writer of the *Vajirabuddhiṭīkā*, obviously states above three students as his teachers. He repeatedly cites the *Gaṇṭhipada*, a work of Ācariya Dhammasiri. It shows that Ācariya Dhammasiri would be contemporary with Ācariya Ānanda. Therefore, Ācariya Ānanda used the word ‘*Keci*’ to indicate Ācariya Dhammasiri.

Ācariya Ānanda was also one of the teachers of Ācariya Vajirabuddhi. All references as ‘teacher reads’ or ‘teacher’s opinion’ found in the *Vajirabuddhiṭīkā* refer to single Ācariya Ānanda. It manifests that Ācariya Ānanda was not only a contemporary with Ācariya Dhammasiri but also one of teachers of Ācariya Vajirabuddhi. Besides, Ācariya Dhammapāla’s contributions were later than the *Mūlaṭīkā*. In this case, the three sub-commentaries such as the *Anuṭīkā*, the *Visuddhimaggamahāṭīkā* and the *Dīghanikāyaṭīkā* are sufficient to take examples. Firstly, in his

*Anuṭṭikā*, Ācariya Dhammapāla often called Ācariya Ānada of the *Mūlaṭṭikā* as ‘a Composer of the *ṭṭikā*’ (*ṭṭikākārena* or *ṭṭikākārehi*). (*Ānuṭṭikā*, vol- I, p.185; vol-III, p.43) Secondly, the *Visuddhimagga-mahāṭṭikā* argues the opinions expounded in the *Mūlaṭṭikā* as it is an opinion of someone (*Keci*) (*Visuddhimaggamahāṭṭikā*, Vol-II, p.134). Again, the *Visuddhimaggamahāṭṭikā* disagrees with the conception of the following four groups; the eye sevenfold group (*Cakkhusattakakalāpa*), the ear sevenfold group (*Sotasattaka-kalāpa*), the heart-base sevenfold group (*Vutthusattaka-kalāpa*) and the life sevenfold group (*jīviatachakka-kalāpa*). They can be seen in the *Mūlaṭṭikā*. In the above argumentations, Ācariya Dhammapāla called Ācariya Ānada as someone (*keci*).

Finally, one of his works, the *Dighanikāyaṭṭikā*, quotes a corresponding passage of the *Mūlaṭṭikā* to approve his comment. It certainly guarantees that the reference was taken from the *Mūlaṭṭikā*. Ācariya Dhammapāla called Ācariya Ānada as a teacher by name. As to this, Somapāla Jayawadana assumes that the Commentator Dhammapāla was perhaps his pupil. (Somapala, p. 166). Somapāla Jayawadana’s statement contrasts with his previous notion that the earliest *Pāli ṭṭikā* was the *Paramatthamanjūsā*.

### Research Conclusion

As mentioned above, a hierarchy of early authorship can be drawn by four *Ācariyas* in order such as Dhammasiri, Ānanda, Vajirabuddhi and Dhammapāla. The early *ṭṭikās* of these four authors have flourished before the convocation of Polonnaruva period in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the earliest was the *Mūlaṭṭikā* of Ācariya Ānanda in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E, but not the *Paramatthamanjūsāṭṭikā* of Ācariya Dhammapāla. Consequently, the date of the first *ṭṭikā* shows us the first emergence of the *ṭṭika* literature as well.

**Key words:** Pāli *ṭṭikā* literature, the Earliest Pāli *ṭṭikā*, the Mūla-*ṭṭikā*, the Visuddhimagga-mahāṭṭikā

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