

## ***Milindapñha*: The text and its times**

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The celebrated work *Milindapñha*, which is preserved in the Pālī language, is considered as ‘the most important non-canonical work of the theravāda’ Buddhist ideology. It is composed in the form of a dialogue between the monk Nāgasena and king Milinda - two people belonging to two different cultural groups of Asia and Europe- India and Greece, which has no parallel in history. Its significance lies in the fact that it represents the period that witnessed several changes in all the spheres of life in India. This period was marked by the rise of Bhakti cult, which believed in equal rights for all, assimilation of foreigners who have become too important to be ignored and also started making efforts to gain the goodwill of the native people to improve and strengthen their social status, the growth of mercantile class and the people of low origin. The *Milindapñha* is a testimony of the process of acculturation between different ideologies and social groups. The book gives a clear indication of the Greeks’ inclination towards Indian religious traditions. It also informs us about the conversion of Milinda to Buddhism, who is corroborated with Greco-Bactrian king Menander. Apart from being the earliest evidence of the existence of Three Pitakas and five Nikayas, it presents various Buddhist principles in an attractive form. One of the most significant aspects to be talked about *Milindapñha* is that it presented some unique ideas with a different approach towards various Buddhist doctrines. It addresses the problems and challenges of its times and coordinates the divergent views about the authenticity of Buddha’s sayings. The present study focuses on its significance as a religious text and historical source which has made it one of the most favored books amongst academicians. Through this text, we notice a qualitative change in Buddhist ideology to build up a tradition of hospitality towards the people of varied beliefs and traditions.

**Keywords:** *Milindapñha, Nāgasena, Menander, dialogue, Buddhism, bhakti, merit, kamma, nibbāna.*