

THE ASGIRIYA MANUSCRIPT OF THE PALI VIMUTTAMAGGA: AN INQUIRY INTO ITS AUTHENTICITY*

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The first reference to a Chinese book named 'Ciê-tou-tao-lun', which is also rendered into Pali as *Vimuttimagga* (Vim.), was made more than six decades ago by Prof. M. Nagai of Japan¹. Since then Buddhist scholars have paid attention to this book and the most fruitful results were obtained when Prof. P. V. Bapat of India made a comprehensive study of the Chinese *Vimuttimagga* comparing it with the Pali *Visuddhimagga* (Vis) of Buddhaghosa. His work entitled '*Vimuttimagga and Visuddhimagga: A comparative study*' was published in 1937 revealing much about the Chinese *Vimuttimagga* to the world.

Bapat in his aforesaid work says that Upatissa's *Vimuttimagga*, as we have it now in its Chinese translation, bears a very close resemblance to Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*.² And he tries to establish a possible reason for this resemblance in the introduction to his work.

After the publication of Bapat's work, there were some more publications that helped scholars to approach *Vimuttimagga* more closely than ever. Firstly, in the year 1958, a Japanese translation of '*Dhutāṅganirdeśa*', equivalent to the third chapter of the Chinese *Vimuttimagga*, was made by Prof. G.H. Sasaki of Japan. Secondly, Bapat also critically edited and translated into English the corresponding Tibetan chapter in 1965, entitled '*Vimuktimārga Dhutagūṇanirdeśa*'. Thirdly, an English translation of the Chinese *Vimutti-*

* When I had finished the present article substantially, I was made to pay attention to the reviews of the Pali *Vimuttimagga* written by Prof. P. V. Bapat which appeared in the *Journal of the Vidyalankara University of Ceylon*, 1972, Vol. I, No. 1., which I was unfortunately not aware of before writing my article. However, on reading through Bapat's reviews, I was convinced that the approaches I adopted through which I came to the same conclusion as Bapat's were somewhat different from those of Bapat. So I decided to get my article published without much modification while trying to minimize overlapping areas with Bapat's as much as possible.

1. *JPTS*, 1917—19, pp. 69—80

The *Vimuttimagga* was translated into Chinese by Seog-chie-po-lo (Saṅghapāla) of Fu-nan in 505 A.D. Regarding the language of the original *Vimuttimagga*, scholars have not yet come to the definite conclusion. "It is difficult" says Prof. R. Higata in "*Kokuyaku Issaikyō, Ronbū-bu*, No. 7, p. 3, Tokyo", "to decide whether the original *Vimuttimagga* was written in Pali or Sanskrit".

2. P. V. Bapat, *Vimuttimagga and Visuddhimagga: A comparative study*, p. xvii. 1937 Poona.