

***mantā*: Gerund or Instrumental?
A critical survey of Theravada commentarial exegeses**

Aruna K. Gamage, Department of Pali & Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya

The term *mantā* has wide attestations in the Pali canon. Nonetheless, the precise meaning of this term still remains to be discovered. It sometimes occurs as an isolated term while it is also used as a precedent of compounds. However, Pali commentarial exegeses that have been provided by the Theravada fraternity for this term are not satisfactory.

It is clear that the Pali commentators felt an uncertainty about the exact meaning of this term. Accordingly, they have commented on this term in two ways in the Pali commentaries. Out of those, the most popular interpretation for *mantā* is '*mantā* means wisdom.' As this translation suggests, *mantā* is a synonym for wisdom. It should be noted that this interpretation has been manipulated by Mahānidessa, a canonical commentator. However, in Sanskrit literature and in Prakrit literature, a corresponding term is untraceable. Thus, it is not unjustifiable to reach a conjecture that the aforementioned interpretation is a new import to the commentarial literature done by Pali exegetes. In other words, it is an '*ahistorical*' interpretation. In accordance with the second interpretation for *mantā*, it is an absolute gerund. Most of the scholars who have translated this term into English have been influenced by the first interpretation.

This paper critically discusses the more archaic and accurate meanings of *mantā* attempting to reach a reliable conclusion for the emergence of such a discrepancy even in some Pali canonical texts, scanning all available source materials related to Buddhist studies such as Pali canonical accounts, Prakrit attestations, commentarial exegeses, Sub-commentarial (*Tikā*) occurrences, Vedic and Upanishad texts, and Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit sources. Sanskrit/ Pali and Prakrit lexicons will also be examined when necessary.

Keywords: Mahānidessa, Pali Exegetes, *mantā*, Absolute-gerund, Theravada Tradition