



Vidyodaya Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

VJHSS (2022), Vol. 07 (02)



The First Sinhala Tripiṭakaya Translation: De Zoysa's 'Protestant' Buddhist Project for Mass Literacy in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka

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Article Info

Article History:

Received 10 January 2022

Accepted 15 June 2022

Issue Published Online

01 July 2022

Key Words:

A.P. de Zoysa

Kiriāllē Nāṇavimala

Pali Canon

Protestant Buddhism

Vernacular Buddhism

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Journal homepage:

<http://journals.sjp.ac.lk/index.php/vjhss>

<http://doi.org/10.31357/fhss/vjhss.v07i02.03>

VJHSS (2022), Vol. 07 (02),
pp. 28-45

ISSN 1391-1937/ISSN
2651-0367 (Online)



Faculty of Humanities and
Social Sciences 2022

ABSTRACT

Though the Tripiṭaka was and still remains central to Theravāda Buddhism, Sri Lankan Buddhists had not taken serious steps until the middle of the twentieth century to systematically translate the Tripiṭaka into Sinhala. Among various initiatives, A.P. de Zoysa's Sinhala Tripiṭakaya project (1950–1968) which consisted of 48 volumes, achieved a remarkable feat of success and still stands out. As an unsurpassed, noble 'Protestant' initiative of a single lay Buddhist, de Zoysa completed the translation of the entire Pāli canon into Sinhala within a decade (1950–1958). Had not de Zoysa taken up that pioneering, challenging and formidable task, Buddhists on the island would have been compelled to wait another three decades to see the completion of the Buddha Jayanthi Tripiṭaka Granthamālā (1954–1989). The Sinhala Tripiṭakaya reached many temples and homes as never before and became a beneficial resource for monastic students in their learning. The vernacular translation made the Tripiṭaka central again in the lives of Theravāda Buddhists by filling a gap that was left open wide for nearly a century since the Buddhists first acquired the printing press in the early years of the 1860s. Though some were critical of de Zoysa's initiative, he accomplished a formidable task by producing an elegant Sinhala Tripiṭakaya to attract a wider readership. With a focus on the Tripiṭaka translation, this article examines facets of academic life and intellectual work of A.P. de Zoysa (1890–1968), who single-handedly embarked on translating the Tripiṭaka into Sinhala and both the religious and historical significance of that project in enhancing Buddhist understanding of the Buddha's teachings by reaching out to a broader local, vernacular audience.

1. Introduction

The first-ever complete Tripiṭaka translation into the Sinhala language did not become an achievable reality until 1958. A leading and visible lay Buddhist gentleman of professional standing, Agampodi Paulus de Zoysa (1890–1968), single-handedly embarked on producing the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* of the Pāli canon and achieved its completion within a decade (1950–1958). This article examines the religious value and historical significance of the remarkable scholastic achievement of the Buddhist layman A.P. de Zoysa.

Until the printing of a complete set of the Tripiṭaka in English and Sinhala in the twentieth century, it is hard to substantiate that Theravāda Buddhists in mass-scale ever read the Tripiṭaka in Pāli in its entirety. Since a complete Sinhala translation of the Pāli Tripiṭaka was neither available earlier nor printed, it was not readily accessible or affordable for most. It was also not available in English until the first quarter of the twentieth century. The translation and printing projects in the twentieth century and the digitalisation of texts by the twenty-first century have made it possible for us to sit comfortably in our arm-chairs as Max Muller (1823–1900) did in the late nineteenth century concerning Vedic texts, and access Theravāda Buddhist texts whenever and wherever we want. If we all are competent in our literacy, we all could read the Tripiṭaka in Pāli or Sinhala translation and understand the *dhamma* now.

2. Materials and Methods

Though the Tripiṭaka is not read in its entirety or possessed by everyone, it still remains as the preeminent body of ‘sacred’ literature of Buddhism. In this research, I have used qualitative methodology in gathering data for this analysis of the Sinhala translations of the Pāli Tipiṭaka/Tripiṭaka. As primary sources, my research has focussed on A.P. de Zoysa’s the 48-volume-*Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* (1950–1968). I have also used

secondary materials in newspaper articles and academic publications. I have also incorporated accounts published on Tripiṭaka translators. As methods, I have employed both literary and historical approaches in the analysis of religious texts and their authors.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Pioneers, Palm-leaf Manuscripts, Editing and Printing the Pāli Tipiṭaka

Even by the end of the nineteenth century, it is likely and acknowledged that only a few Ceylonese temple libraries on the island might have contained the *Tripitaka* on palm leaves in its entirety. With the instigation of the Chief Justice of Ceylon (1811–1819), Sir Alexander Johnston (1775–1849), who had a long-held keen legal interest in a ‘Code of Laws’ for Ceylon, effectively pushed the intellectual conditions of the time for two influential English translations of *The Mahāvamsa*: one by Edward Upham (1833) and the other, more substantial and scholarly one, by George Turnour (1799–1843) that appeared in publication in 1837 by radically broadening both local and European understanding of Buddhism and the history of Laṅkā.

In preparing *The Mahāvanso in Roman Characters, with the translation subjoined* (1837) for publication, Turnour looked for palm-leaf manuscripts of the *Tripitaka*. In *The Mahāvanso* (1837), Turnour provided appendix III entitled “A Statement of the Contents of the Pali Buddhistical Scriptures, entitled the Pitakattaya; or Three Pitakas; Specifying also the number of the Talipot leaves on which they are inscribed” (Turnour, 1837, p. lxxv). Giving details of corresponding palm-leaf manuscripts of the *Tripitaka*, Turnour noted: “Some of the above books [of the *Tripitaka*] are not to be obtained in Kandy, and others only in an incomplete form”. His statement on the *Tripitaka* manuscripts on palm leaves was “partly framed from the records of the Burmese fraternities

[Amarapura Nikāya, f. 1800] in the maritime provinces" (Turnour, 1837, p. lxxv).

A couple of years later, in 1845, however, an elegant procession from Kandy had ceremoniously taken a complete set of the *tripiṭaka* on palm leaves to the Toṭagamuva temple in southern Sri Lanka. Monks gathered in Toṭagamuva then had formulated a 'Katikāvata' (Monastic Regulation) on 27 November 1845 (Gammāddēgoḍa, 2005, pp. 97–98). On the whole, even such few Ceylonese temple libraries on the island might not have been accessible to everyone for reading at leisure, and manuscripts were not easily distributable on a mass scale.

The present colossal palm-leaf manuscript collections such as (i) the National Museum Library, Colombo, (ii) the University of Peradeniya Library and (iii) the Haṅguranketa Potgul Vihāra Library (Deegalle, 2020) indicate that the *Tripīṭaka* texts included Sinhala *sannayas* among them. Buddhist discourses such as the *Satipatṭhāna Sutta* and the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* dominated the collection at the Haṅguranketa Potgul Vihāra Library, established on the ruins of the destroyed royal palace in the 1818 Rebellion by Venerable Poholiyaddē. The palm-leaf collection was assembled there after 1830 and completed in 1880 by Venerable Doraṭiyāvē Atthadassi.

The absence of a complete set of the *Tripīṭaka* in any main temple in Kandy when Turnour looked for it in the 1830s, nevertheless, is noteworthy.

In 1881, the British civil servant, Thomas William Rhys-Davids (1843–1922) established the Pali Text Society in London "to foster and promote the study of Pali texts". By 1911, the Pali Text Society had published all volumes of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Samyutta Nikāya* and *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. The completion of the publication of the *Majjhima Nikāya* in 1925 marked the remarkable achievement of the Pali Text Society by

presenting to the intellectuals of the West and East a complete and standard printed edition of the Pāli *Tripīṭaka* in the Roman script. It had already initiated an active English translation project. By 1886, it had published the *Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā* and continued editing and printing the Pāli *Aṭṭhakathās*.

Locally, however, we must also note the Simon Hewavitarne Bequest *Aṭṭhakathā* series, which was immensely useful for enhancing *Tripīṭaka* studies. At death, on 17 January 1913, the late Simon Alexander Hewavitarne (1875–1913) had written his will and left a sufficient amount of wealth to print the books of the *Tripīṭaka*. On 5 July 1916, the Simon Hewavitarne Bequest, Colombo, established the *Tripīṭaka Muddraṇa Sabhā* for printing Pāli commentaries. From 1917 to 1952, within thirty-five years, the Simon Hewavitarne Bequest achieved a significant feat of success. Leading scholarly monks of Ceylon edited the 49 volumes of the *aṭṭhakathās* for publication in the SHB series. The first volume was Bhadantācariya Dhammapāla Thera's *Paramattha Dīpanī* (1917), 'stories of good and bad deeds' of the commentary on *Petavatthu*. The 49th volume was Buddhaghosa Thera's *Papañca Sūdanī* or *Majjhima Nikāyaṭṭhakathā* (Part IV) published in 1952 (B.E. 2495).

Backwardness in Ceylon, being slow in making efforts to translate the Pāli canon to English and Sinhala appears to lie in traditional thinking of the monastic institution and members of the *saṅgha*. On 15 July 1950, in a letter written to I.B. Horner (1896–1981), Woodward wrote referring to the heavy-handedness of the *saṅgha* concerning Pāli scriptures: "Really, they object to our translations and call Caroline [Rhys-Davids'] work as heretical" (Powell, 1999, p. 285).

Dharmapāla's letters to his beloved Dēvapriya in the *Anagārika Dharmapāla Aprakāṣa Atlipi* (Dharmapāla, 2006) written from London during 1926–1928 record

certain negative attitudes that Dharmapāla held against some of the Pali Text Society scholars, such as Caroline Rhys-Davids (1857–1942). In a hand-written letter on 12 August 1926, Dharmapāla identified ‘Mrs Rhys Davids’ as “*extremely hostile to Buddhism and a crafty woman of cunning tricks*” (Dharmapāla, 2006: vol. 1, p. 110; my translation; also see vol. 2, pp. 127, 218, 251). It is noteworthy that these emotionally strong and controversial aspects of Dharmapāla’s attitudes to Caroline Rhys-Davids and others in Ceylon and abroad are purged and absent in Ananda Guruge’s *Return to Righteousness* (1965). Concerning Mrs Rhys-Davids, recently, in the *Rescued from the Nation* (2015), Steven Kemper noted a rationale for Dharmapāla’s negative views: “*By the mid-1920s, . . . the Pali Text Society in the hands of Caroline Rhys Davids, whose relationship with Dharmapala had turned sour—these connections were broken and did not recommend England to him*” (Kemper, 2015, p. 373).

3.2 An Accomplished Idea of a *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya*

De Zoysa single-handedly embarked on an ambitious project of translating the Pāli Tripiṭaka into the Sinhala language. He introduced his Tripiṭaka translation series as the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya*. It had the objective of making Buddhist texts more understandable and accessible to many Sri Lankan Buddhists. By the Buddha Jayantī year in 1956, when the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka Granthamālā just commenced (see Deegalle, 2021b), de Zoysa had almost completed the Sinhala translation of the Tripiṭaka.

After completing the Tripiṭaka translation, in 1959, de Zoysa began publishing the Pāli commentaries. The first translation was the *Visuddhimagga* of the Pāli commentator, Buddhaghosa (fifth-century CE), an essential text for Theravāda Buddhist understanding (Figure 1). By 1968, de Zoysa had achieved a remarkable feat of success by translating and publishing 48 Tripiṭaka volumes in Sinhala.

Out of that collection, 38 volumes (1–38) were translations of the Pāli canonical texts (1950–1958), and the remaining ten volumes (39–48) were translations of the Pāli commentaries (1959–1968). Had de Zoysa lived another decade, he could have completed translating the entire collection of Pāli commentaries into Sinhala.

3.3 A Brief Biography of de Zoysa: Contextualizing the Tripiṭaka Translator

In his adult life, de Zoysa served many causes (Figure 2 and Table 1). By training, de Zoysa was a twentieth-century Anthropologist of folk ritual studies of Ceylon, and by profession, a lawyer. Through dedication, commitment and constant practice, he became an effective Tripiṭaka translator.

On 5 April 1890, de Zoysa was born in Randoṃbe in Southern Province, Ceylon. After completing studies at Mahinda College (f. 1892), Galle, under the tutelage of Indologist Frank Lee Woodward (1871–1952), who served as Principal of Mahinda College (1903–1919), de Zoysa became a school teacher there for a brief period in 1910. Mahinda College provided a comprehensive liberal arts education, including several European and Oriental languages such as Greek, Latin, Pali and Sanskrit. This education there enabled de Zoysa to acquire a good grounding in Pali as well as other languages. When the Indologist Woodward (self-identified by himself in Sinhalese as “*Vanapāla*” [guardian of the forest] highlighting his philanthropy [Powell 1999: 186, 203]) became Principal of Mahinda College, due to auspices connections, de Zoysa moved there first as a student (1907–1910). In the first half of the twentieth century, Woodward became an influential and well-known Indologist through his publications and English translations of the Pāli canon. As the author of an important and popular book, *Some Sayings of the Buddha: According to the Pali Canon* (1925), which marked 27 editions until 2002, Woodward reached out to many in the West

and East. After leaving Ceylon to Tasmania, Woodward became a prolific and competent translator earning praise from prominent Indologists such as Caroline Augusta Foley Rhys-Davids (1857–1942). Woodward translated into English 18 volumes of the Pāli canon (Jayetilleke 2007; Heyward 1990). The intellectual exposure to Woodward remained a crucial strength in de Zoysa’s contribution to Buddhism in producing Sinhala translations of the Tripiṭaka. In many ways, Woodward, as a prominent figure in Pāli

studies in Sri Lanka, functioned as a mentor for de Zoysa.

Over a decade of a teaching career, from 1910 to March 1921, in addition to initial teaching at Mahinda College (1910), de Zoysa had taught in several prestigious schools in Ceylon, including Dharmaraja College (f. 1887), Ananda College (f. 1886) and Royal College (f. 1835), until he departed to England.

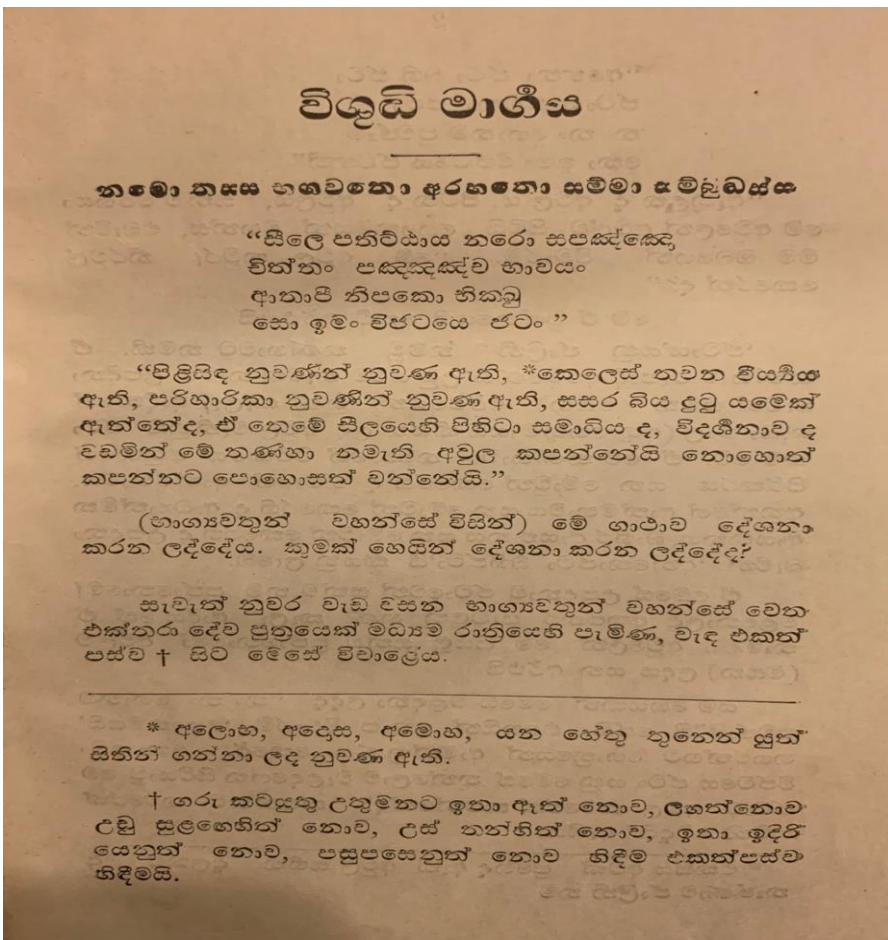


Figure 1. This is the first page of the Sinhala translation of Buddhaghosa Thera’s *Visuddhimagga* (vol. 39) published in de Zoysa’s *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* project in 1959, initiating the translation of Pāli commentaries. The note of explanation for the Sinhala term ‘ekat pasva’ added to the footnote is worth noting because of its clarity and simplicity in promoting the reader’s comprehension (Photo Credit: Mahinda Deegalle).

Table 1. A Brief Chronology of A.P. De Zoysa (1890–1968)

Date	Activity
1890	Birth on 5 April 1890
1921	In March, left for England for studies
1924	Published <i>Heroes and Saints of Ancient India</i> (Wood)
	Joined the Buddhist Lodge (f. 1924)
1925–26	Worked with the Buddhist mission of the British Mahābodhi Society founded by Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933)
1927	Earned B.A. degree from the University of London
	Became a Barrister at Gray's Inn
1928	Earned PhD degree from the University of London
1929	Published <i>A Religion for America</i>
	Married Eleanor Hutton (1896–1981)
1934	Returned to Ceylon on 21 April
1935	Practised law; became a visiting lecturer in Oriental Studies, Ceylon University College, Colombo
1936	Elected to the State Council to represent Colombo South
1939–49	Published the weekly newspaper <i>Dharma Samaya</i> through the Dharma Samaya Press
1941–43	Became a member of the Colombo Municipal Council
1946–47	Supported political <i>bhikkhus</i> like Venerable Walpola Rahula (de Zoysa, 1947)
1950–1968	Initiated translating and publishing the Tripiṭaka and Aṭuvās in Sinhala
1968	Death on 26 May 1968 (the chronology is adopted from Jayawardena, 2012, pp. 221–222)

De Zoysa's first publication, *Heroes and Saints of Ancient India*, was published in 1924 when he was living in England (Table 2). While in London, in 1924, when Christmas Humphreys (1901–1983), a British Judge and Buddhist, established and organised the Buddhist Lodge initially as a branch of the Theosophical Society, which became independent in 1926 and renamed as The Buddhist Society, de Zoysa joined the newly-established Buddhist Lodge. During 1925–1926 when Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933) arrived in London to establish Buddhism, de Zoysa joined and worked with the Buddhist Mission of the British Mahābodhi Society (Jayawardena, 2012, p. 221). In the letter written on 31 October 1926, Dharmapāla mentioned de Zoysa as 'George', who was studying law at that time and a younger brother of Robert de Zoysa

(Dharmapāla, 2006, vol. 1, pp. 141–142). Ironically, Dharmapāla held positive attitudes towards de Zoysa, in contrast to Dharmapāla's frequent negative views against most others. In Dharmapāla's judgment, the drawback of the young intellectual was that he was "*mahā viyadamkārayeki*" ['a great money spender'] (Dharmapāla, 2006, vol. 1, p. 194) because Dharmapāla himself had cultivated a very frugal and thrifty lifestyle. Professor Malalasekera's observation in 1970 that de Zoysa "*left no money and no property*" may confirm Dharmapāla's assessment of de Zoysa's prodigal lifestyle in the late 1920s. During the period of 1926–1927, Dharmapāla's assignment for de Zoysa was to look after his purchased property in London, 'Foster House' in Madeley Road, W5 (Dharmapāla, 2006, vol. 1, p. 144).

Table 2. List of A.P. de Zoysa's Publications Including Dictionaries

Date	Publications
1924	<i>Heroes and Saints of Ancient India</i> . London: Woods & Sons
1928	<i>Customs and Observances in Sinhalese Villages</i> . PhD Thesis, University of London
1929	<i>The Religion for America</i> . New York City: K.Y. Kira
1939–1949	The weekly Sinhala newspaper <i>Dharma Samaya</i> , Friday, 9 June
1944	<i>Kav Siḷumiṇa: Abhinava Sannaya</i> . Vol. 2. <i>Dharma Samaya Śāstriya Pot, No. 5</i> . Kolaṃba: Dharma Samaya Yantrālaya
1947	<i>Saṅgharatnaya Nam vū Dēśapālana Bhikṣuva</i> . Kolaṃba: Dharma Samaya Yantrālaya
1948	<i>Dharma Samaya Iṃgirīsi-Siṃhala Śabda Kōṣaya</i> (An English-Sinhalese Dictionary). Kolaṃba: Dharma Samaya Yantrālaya, 1948 (874 p); 2 nd ed. 1949 (912 p)
1948	<i>Dharma Samaya Iṃgirīsi-Siṃhala Kuḍā Śabda Kōṣaya</i> (A Concise English-Sinhalese Dictionary). Kolaṃba: Dharma Samaya Yantrālaya, 1948 (416 p); 8 th rev. ed. 1963 (448 p)
1948–1967	<i>Dharma Samaya Siṃhala Śabda Kōṣaya</i> (A Dictionary of Sinhalese Words Explained in Sinhalese and English). 2 vols. Kolaṃba: Dharma Samaya Yantrālaya, 1948–49 (2020 p). As 3 volumes in 1964–67 (2884 pages)
1955	<i>Indian Culture in the Days of the Buddha</i> . Colombo: M.D. Gunasena
1959	<i>Samanaḷa Kaṇḍu Nagina Kathā</i> . Kolaṃba: Dharma Samaya Yantrālaya
1964	<i>Buddha Kālīna Bhārata Saṃskṛtiya</i> . Kolaṃba: Dharma Samaya Yantrālaya
1964	<i>Tripitaka Sārāṃśaya</i> . Kolaṃba: Dharma Samaya Yantrālaya
2016	<i>Observances, Beliefs and Customs in Sinhalese Villages</i> . Colombo: S. Godage & Brothers (Pvt) Ltd. Also, in Sinhalese (2017).

When the London Buddhist Vihāra relocated to Regent's Park on 5 February 1928, de Zoysa, along with A.C. March and Charles Dickens, addressed the inaugural gathering (Deegalle, 2008, p. 189).

On 2 September 1928, De Zoysa became Secretary at the first Annual General Meeting of the Students' Buddhist Association of Great Britain & Ireland, founded in November 1927 (Webb, 2004, pp. 5–6). In 1927, De Zoysa earned a B.A. degree from the University of London and became a Barrister, Gray's Inn. The year 1928 was particularly significant because de Zoysa earned a doctorate from the University of London for the thesis: *Customs and Observances in Sinhalese Villages*, now published in English as *Observances, Beliefs*

and Customs in Sinhalese Villages (2016) and its Sinhala translation (2017).

In the year de Zoysa published *A Religion for America* (1929), he married Eleanor Hutton (1896–1981), mother of Dr Kumari Jayawardene. He returned to Ceylon in April 1934 with his spouse Mrs Hutton. Since 1935, de Zoysa began practising law and worked as a visiting lecturer of Oriental Studies for the University College, Colombo (f. 1921).

In 1936, being a candidate at the election, de Zoysa won Colombo South and represented Colombo District in the State Council of Ceylon from 1936–1947.

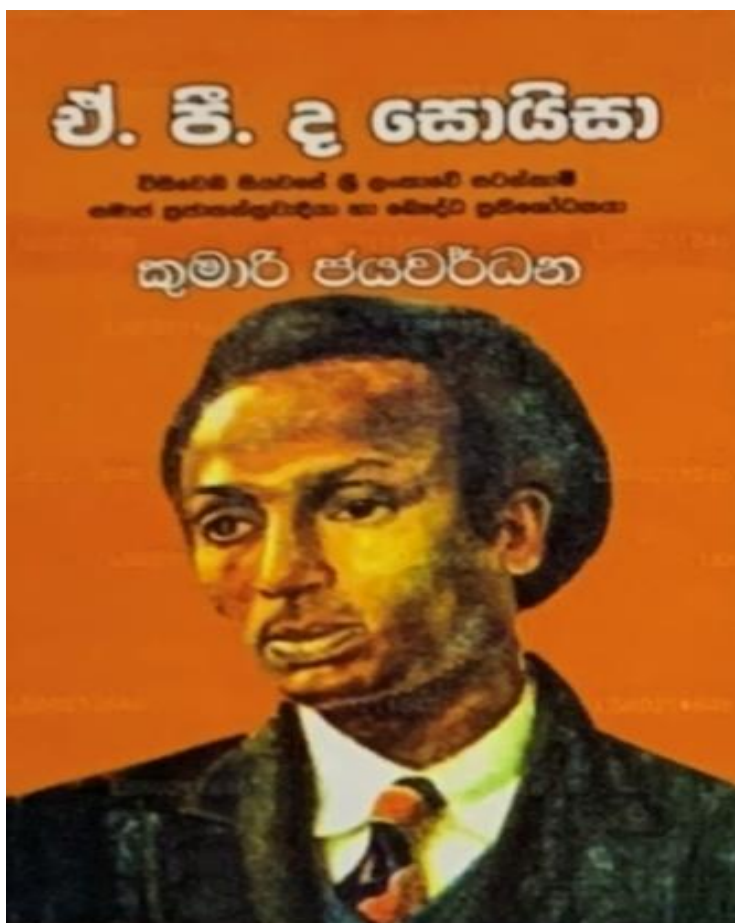


Figure 2. The cover page of de Zoysa’s biography written by his daughter, Dr Kumari Jayawardena (b. 1931). The biography is now available both in English and Sinhala (Photo Credit: Mahinda Deegalle).

In 1939, de Zoysa purchased a printing press known as ‘Dharma Samaya’ located in Maradāna. The ‘Dharma Samaya Press’ activities were very much a “one-man show”, and the press was closed down after de Zoysa’s death in 1968 (Jayawardena, 2012, p. 210). With this newly-established Dharma Samaya Press, de Zoysa’s contribution to Buddhism and Sri Lankan literature emerged. From 1939 to 1949, de Zoysa began publishing a weekly Sinhala newspaper, the *Dharma Samaya* (1939–1949). The first issue of the weekly *Dharma Samaya* appeared on Friday, 9 June 1939. De Zoysa was the newspaper editor, and the subscription was

available outside Ceylon in India, Burma and U.K. The newspaper’s title page carried a Sinhala quatrain:

*“varatara soṇḍa daham eliyen heḷi karamu
durukaramina adam gaṇaṇḍura
babuḷuvamu
sirisara daham baraṇin lova sarasavamu
varatara dam samaya lovatuḷa
paturuvamu”*

*“Let us reveal the supreme and good light
of dhamma.
Let us cause to shine by dispelling
adhamma and thick darkness.*

Let us decorate the world with the jewellery of beautiful dharma.

Let us spread in the world the supreme religion of dhamma” (My translation).

During 1940–1950, de Zoysa published *Dharma Samaya Śāstrīya Pot* series (for instance, No. 5: *Kav Siḷumiṇa: Abhinava Sannaya*, 1944), which included annotated Sinhala classics (1940–1947) (Jayawardena, 2012, p. 222). In 1945 and 1947, de Zoysa published *Kuvēṇī* and *Vihāra Mahā Dēvi*, which were historical plays. In the period between 1961–1962, he had published *Sinhala Śāstrīya Pot* (Ayurveda Books). His *English-Sinhala Dictionary* appeared in 1947. Between 1948–1949, de Zoysa published two dictionaries: *Sinhala-English Dictionary* and *English-Sinhala Dictionary*. His *Concise English-Sinhala Dictionary* appeared in 1950. In 1941, he had also published *Iskōle Hāminē*.

De Zoysa’s most outstanding contribution to Sri Lankan Buddhism was his *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* project. Devoting nearly twenty years (1950–1968), soliciting help from leading Buddhist monks and laypeople, de Zoysa accomplished a mammoth task: publication of a Sinhala translation of the Tripiṭaka containing Theravāda Buddhist canonical and post-canonical commentarial texts of forty-eight volumes for the first time.

With the experience of studying, living and working over thirteen years in London (March 1921–April 1934) and seeing the developments in the activities of the Pali Text Society and Buddhist activities of the London Buddhist Vihāra (f. 1928), de Zoysa was determined to reduce the gap between Sinhala readers and the Pāli Tipiṭaka (Deegalle, 2008, p. 227). His desire and actions were ‘Protestant’ in spirit and

inspiration, as a “zealous Buddhist”, as identified by P.V. Bapat (1956, p. 428). He was committed to promoting Buddhist literacy among Sri Lankans, facilitating and encouraging reading of the Tripiṭaka. Translating the Pāli Tipiṭaka into ‘simple’ yet ‘versatile’ Sinhala language was his intention, mission and dream. The prevalent wide communication gap between Buddhist ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ is bridged effectively by creating a new awareness of the Buddha’s teachings in the post-independent nation. In publishing Tripiṭaka texts, de Zoysa did not translate numerous repeated paragraphs because his primary motivation was to communicate the Buddha’s message effectively. Therefore, he simplified Sinhala language terminology and phrases to enable comfortable reading and understanding the Tripiṭaka’s content.

De Zoysa’s *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* translation series contains 48 books of canonical and post-canonical commentaries (Table 3). The first volume in the series was the *Dīgha Nikāya*, and the *Samyutta Nikāya Aṭuvāva* (Part I) published in 1968 became the 48th volume. By 1958, ten years before his death, de Zoysa had completed publishing all the books of the Pāli canon. Thirty-eight volumes of the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* contained all canonical books of the Pāli Tipiṭaka. Interestingly, the publication of commentaries began with the translation of Venerable Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (vol. 39), published in Sinhala in 1959 (Figure 1). This publication illustrates the recognition and esteem that Theravāda Buddhism has traditionally placed on the works of Buddhaghosa and, in particular, in his *magnum opus*, the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification).

Table 3. The List of Zoysa’s *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* Translations

(I) Canonical Pāli Texts	
1–3	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i> (3 vols.) 1950 (1956–59)
4–8	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i> (5 vols.) (1954–63)
9–15	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i> (7 vols.) (1954–55)
16–19	<i>Ānguttara Nikāya</i> (4 vols.) (1955–56)

20–26	<i>Khuddaka Nikāya</i> (7 vols.) (1956)
27–30	<i>Vinaya Piṭakaya</i> (4 vols.) (1957)
31–38	<i>Abhidharma Piṭakaya</i> (8 vols.) (1957–59)
(II) Atuvā Pot / Commentaries to the Canon	
39–40	<i>Viśuddhi Mārgaya</i> (2 vols.) (1959–60)
41–43	<i>Dīgha Nikāya Atuvāva: Sumaṅgala Vilāsiniya</i> (3 vols.) (1961)
44–47	<i>Majjhima Nikāya Atuvāva: Papañcasūdaniya</i> (4 vols.)
48	<i>Samyutta Nikāya Atuvāva: Sāratthappakāsiniya</i> (1964) (1 vol.)

In addition to the 48 volumes of the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* containing the entire Tripiṭaka (vols. 1–38) and several Pāli commentaries (vols. 39–48), de Zoysa began producing abridged versions of the Tripiṭaka. Though he was keen and determined to take the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* further to ordinary Sinhala speaking public and attempted to create a concise edition of the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya*, de Zoysa did not survive to complete that task. He was able to publish only two volumes of the *Concise Sinhala Tripiṭakaya*—the *Dīgha Nikāya* and the *Majjhima Nikāya*—out of the ten volumes he had initially planned.

The Government of Sri Lanka took up de Zoysa's idea of a concise edition of the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* to speed up reaching ordinary Sinhala speaking public. In 1990, when the Government of Sri Lanka established the new Ministry of Buddhasāsana, it undertook to produce abridged editions of the Tripiṭaka into simple Sinhala by appointing five advisors and nine editors. The Ministry of Buddhasāsana published the *Majjhima Nikāya* and the *Samyutta Nikāya* and the project has progressed for years with some tangible outcomes.

For the success of the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* project, de Zoysa recruited an able body of erudite, prominent monks and a couple of laypersons as the Advisory Board to supervise the translation. In the 2015 reprinted edition, the Advisory Board included following 13 Buddhist monks: (i) Kirivattuḍuvē Paññasāra (Principal, Vidyālaṅkāra Pirivena, Pāliyaḍoḍa), (ii) Dehigaspē Paññasāra (Vidyodaya Pirivena, Māligākanda), (iii) Bēruvala Śrī Sumaṅgala

(Abbot, Pulinalārāmaya, Kalutara), (iv) Vilēgoḍa Śrī Dharmānanda (Principal, Vidyāloka Vidyālaya, Ambalamgoḍa), (v) Baḷangoḍa Ānanda Maitreya (Principal, Dharmānanda Pirivena, Baḷangoḍa), (vi) Bellana Ṇānavimāla (Principal, Dharmapāla Pirivena, Bellana), (vii) Valagedara Somāloka (Principal, Mahācētiya Pirivena, Randoḃba), (viii) Ahungallē Vimalakitti (Principal, Sugata Śāsanodaya Pirivena, Aṃbagahapiṭiya, Valitara), (ix) Polvattē Buddhadatta (Abbot, Aggārāmaya, Ambalamgoḍa), (x) Gāllē Sumaṅgala (Principal, Vidyārāja Pirivena, Galvaḍuḍoḍa, Galle), (xi) Bambalapiṭiyē Nārada (Vajirārāmaya, Colombo), (xii) Galpottāvela Śrī Paññānanda (Principal, Sunandodaya Pirivena, Mādampē) and (xiii) Baddēgama Vimalavaṃsa (Principal, Śrī Laṅkā Vidyālaya, Maradāna). Three laypersons of the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* Advisory Board included (i) H. Nandasāra, (ii) Āryaratna Rērukāna and (iii) L.H. Jayasēna. The 1959 edition referred to earlier, however, did not include the last lay person's name. Some of the learned monks in the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* Advisory Board were also participating in other contemporary *Tripiṭaka* projects such as the prominent Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka Granthamālā (Deegalle, 2021b).

The Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka Granthamālā (1954–1989) is the distinguished contribution that Sri Lankan intellectuals of the twentieth century have made to the study of the *Buddhavacana* in the vernacular (Deegalle, 2021). No one has yet attempted to demonstrate the links of the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka Granthamālā with de Zoysa's *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya*. This is, indeed, an area

for further in-depth research. However, tentatively, I propose that de Zoysa challenged the entire body Ceylonese intellectuals, both monks and lay persons, to become more rigorous in producing a reliable and authentic translation of the *Buddhavacana* for the benefit of many.

It is appropriate, in this instance, to discuss briefly the historical and religious contexts that led to the compilation of the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka Granthamālā. In the history of producing Pāli Tripiṭaka editions in Ceylon, we must note the significant role that All Ceylon Buddhist Congress Tripiṭaka Series (1939–1967) played (Deegalle, 2002). It was primarily this ACBC Series that in the 1950s finally led to the formation of the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka Granthamālā as a significant part of the celebration of the Buddha Jayantī in 1956.

The late 1930s became an important period in terms of developments in the production of the Tripiṭaka. On 25 December 1939, the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) passed a resolution at its 21st Annual General Meeting proposing that “*the Congress should take steps to have the books of Pali Tipitaka printed in Sinhala characters with a translation into the Sinhala language*”. It was a forceful resolution. In 1940, the ACBC formed the ‘Buddhist Congress Tripiṭaka Trust’ by appointing Professor G.P. Malalasekera (1899–1973) as the general editor of the Tripiṭaka Series. As early as 1943, with the establishment of the Tripiṭaka Bhārakāra Maṇḍalaya, noting the lack of access to the Tripiṭaka for people who knew ‘Sinhala only’, the printing of Sinhala versions commenced. By 1967, the Tripiṭaka Bhārakāra Maṇḍalaya had published a few texts of the Tripiṭaka including two volumes of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.

This ACBC project gradually paved the way for the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka Granthamālā. Due to the keen and growing interests of Sri Lankan Buddhists to know the *Buddhavacana* (‘word’ of the Buddha) and

increasing political pressure from lobbyists, the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka Granthamālā began as a government-sponsored *Tripiṭaka* project in 1954. From 1954 to 1989, the Government of Ceylon Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka project had published the entire Pāli canon in the Sinhala script containing Sinhala translation (see Deegalle, 2021b). The whole of the Pāli Tripiṭaka collection in Sinhala consists of 40 volumes in 57 books. Buddhist Cultural Centre reprinted the entire collection of the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka in 2005 and now pdfs of the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka can be downloaded. It is not obvious to what extent de Zoysa’s *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* influenced the style and presentation of the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka by monastic translators. Undoubtedly, his early translation may have helped the monastic translators in resolving issues that arise in vernacular translations.

Though de Zoysa’s *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* translation project became extremely successful from any academic standard, he also faced funding difficulties in the translation project. However, de Zoysa was able to find ways of reducing publication costs. A happy note to contemporary readers is that a private, commercial publisher reprinted all 48 volumes of the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* as a set in 2015 and is now available for avid readers to purchase. De Zoysa passed on 13 April 1968 (Jayawardena, 2012, pp. 221–222; however, De Silva (2009) gives as 26 May 1968). Writing of de Zoysa, two years after his death in 1970, Professor Gunapala Malalasekera (1899–1973) noted that de Zoysa’s ambition was to produce the whole of the Buddhist canon so that everyone could read it. “*Many parts of the Buddhist Scriptures had been translated, both into English and Sinhalese from the original Pali texts, but this was the first attempt to translate the whole work*”, a task that took “*over 20 years*” (Malalasekera, 1970). By issuing a postage stamp on 5 March 2009, the Sri Lankan Government honoured de Zoysa for his outstanding contributions (Figure 5).

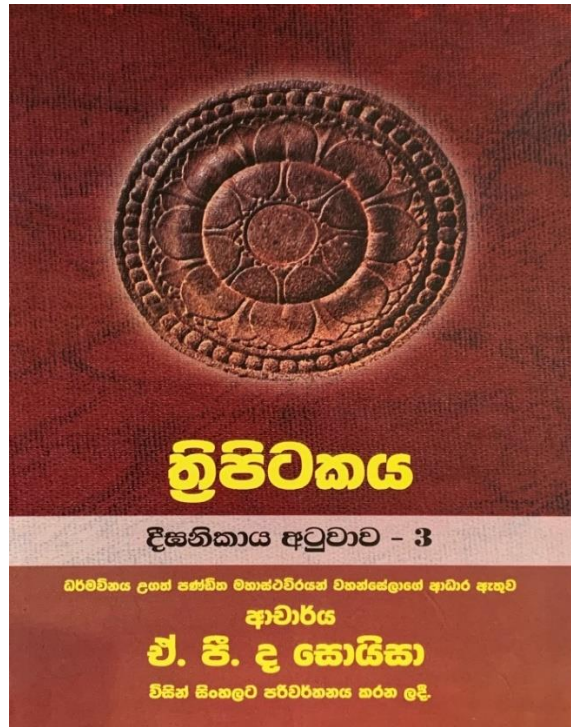


Figure 3. The front cover page of De Zoysa’s *Tripitakaya: Dīgha Nikāya Aṭuvāva*, Pt. 3 (vol. 43) translated initially into Sinhala and published in 1961 and reprinted in 2015 (Photo Credit: Mahinda Deegalle).



Figure 4. A photo was taken on 10 March 1929 after the arrival of three Ceylonese Buddhist monks led by Venerable Paravāhāra Vajirañāna (1893–1970) and accompanied by Dēvapriya Valisīṅha (1904–1968) at the London Buddhist Vihāra on 24 June 1928. A.P. de Zoysa, with a broad ‘smile’, is standing on the last row (first from left). In 1970, Malalasekera noted: ‘the smile that lights the faces of those who knew him’. Photo adapted from Webb (2004, p. 170), (Photo Credit: Mahinda Deegalle).

3.4 Sinhala Tripiṭaka Translations and Contemporary Critics

Throughout the twentieth century, there had been much discussion and interest on Pāli text editing, vernacular translation and printing of the Tripiṭaka. Venerable Kiriāllē Nāṇavimala, a scholarly monk of significant accomplishments, in particular, through his book, *Sabaragamuvē Pārāṇi Liyavili* (1937), opened up ground-breaking avenues on archaeological fronts for further research on the Śrī Pāda, entered into serious disputes on the Tripiṭaka editing and its printing. In the *Tripiṭaka Dharma Saṅgāyanā hā Tripiṭaka Suddhi* (1955), writing about the printing projects and the Tripiṭaka *Suddhi* of the Pāli canon, Venerable Kiriāllē Nāṇavimala (1908–1984) hurled a harsh criticism:

“On this island, first, the Theravāda Tripiṭaka was written down. Nevertheless, Ceylon has not been able to print the entire Tripiṭaka Pāli. Even the few already printed, many texts are published based on ideas of various individuals, in different

sizes, in a variety of paper, in multiple forms [without caring for any uniform standard].” (Kiriāllē, 1955, p. xvi; my translation).

Identifying primarily issues concerning cosmetics of Tripiṭaka printing, Kiriāllē, nevertheless, highlighted inconsistencies of various Tripiṭaka projects which paid little or no attention at all to readers’ needs. He noted the absence of a serious commitment to the very purpose of editing a text and producing a Sinhala translation. The lack of detailed and comprehensive attention to the cause stood out in many Tripiṭaka projects. Like the monk Valagedara in the *Dīgha Nikāya* (1954) edition, Kiriāllē (1955, p. 16) also lamented the absence of Tripiṭaka printing in its entirety in Sri Lanka. They were contemporary scholarly monks living in different regions on the island. Still, they were interested in editing texts, doing Sinhala translations and above all, concerned with the formidable influence of the Tripiṭaka as a textual corpus and its wider availability.

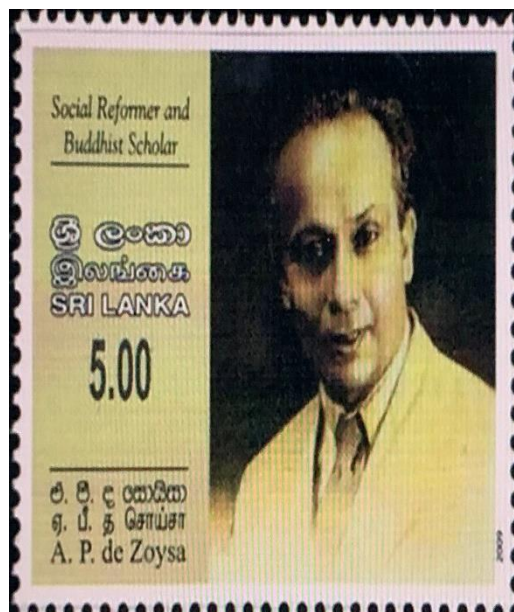


Figure 5. On 5 March 2009, the Bureau of the Postal Department of the Sri Lankan state honoured A.P. De Zoysa by issuing a postage stamp of Rs. 5.00 (Photo Credit: Mahinda Deegalle).

As shown in the *Vihāra-Devāla Pālanaya hā Śrī Pādasthānaya* (1948), Kiriāllē held strong critical views on the Tripiṭaka editions and editors. Concerning various funding requests from the Śrīpāda Aramudala (Fund) for printing the Tripiṭaka in Sinhala, Kiriāllē wrote:

“Let alone in Sinhala, in Ceylon, the Tripiṭaka books are not yet printed fully even in Pāli. How will the śāsana benefit by reprinting copies of books for sale which have already been printed and sold cheaply by various individuals from time to time? Is it not obligatory to fund the printing presses that publish the Tripiṭaka books for sale if that is the case? Suppose a case in which someone uses the funds from the Śrīpāda or donations from Buddhists to print the Tripiṭaka. In that case, those publishers should donate their publications, free of charge, to the public libraries in Ceylon and should sell only the remainder for an affordable price to readers.

A little while ago, whoever poor that had big pots made soap at home. In the same manner, in Ceylon, individuals print the Tripiṭaka. Some print the Tripiṭaka in various cheap quality papers, in different sizes, containing in abundance unedited portions of the text (asuddha pāṭha). In producing either in the Sinhala or Tamil language a sanna (vernacular translation) to the Tripiṭaka, if the Tripiṭakapāli retains its ‘purity’, there is no damage done in doing so. Besides dividing the sentences, there is no editing or modification of the previously printed Sinhala versions of the Tripiṭaka fascicles. Therefore, the [edited and published] editions will indeed be successful if those who edit or print them prepare the peḷa (pāliya) after receiving the assistance of mahātheras (senior elders) who know Pāli well. If the Tripiṭaka properly edited and published, it takes the form of a saṅgāyanā. If a Sinhala translation accompanies such printing, it becomes even more helpful. In the past,

even in the times when the mahātheras, who knew the Tripiṭaka lived, they edited the Tripiṭaka only after gathering in thousands [in Tripiṭaka assemblies]. However, on this occasion, [ironically] ‘only one layman’ is going around [the country] rehearsing the Tripiṭakapāli” (Kiriāllē, 1948, pp. 36–37; my translation).

Though I am not certain whether the last sentence of Kiriāllē’s comment referred to A.P. de Zoysa, nevertheless, the context of the Tripiṭaka editing and printing suggests that it was a reference to him because he was visible as a layman (Sin. *ekama gihiyeki* “only one layman”), lawyer and politician involved in the Tripiṭaka translation in the 1940s–1960s.

Kiriāllē’s sharp and harsh criticisms of Tripiṭaka editors (1955) such as Venerable Yakkaduṅṅe Paññārāma (1918–1986) (and perhaps also de Zoysa), and a variety of cheap Tripiṭaka editions may have significantly advanced the field of Tripiṭaka studies by making them self-conscious of their responsibility as the Tripiṭaka editors so as to not make grave blunders concerning the content of the Buddha’s teachings. No doubt that Kiriāllē’s harsh criticisms of the Tripiṭaka editions enabled the Buddha Jayantī Tripiṭaka Granthamālā (taking three and a half decades) to produce an authentic and a reliable Tripiṭaka edition (Deegalle, 2021b) by attempting to preserve the ‘original’ Pāli of the Buddha’s teachings (often conveyed as “*Tripiṭakapāli*” in the writings of Kiriāllē and others).

I argue that Kiriāllē’s criticisms also forced de Zoysa as a professional layman translating the Tripiṭaka into Sinhala to become meticulous in doctrinal accuracy and maintaining the authentic Theravāda traditional interpretation. Such objections pushed him to include leading learned monastics of the 1950s (e.g., Ven. Polvattē Buddhadatta (1887–1962), to name one) in the Advisory Board of the *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* project (see endnotes 10–11).

Amidst the accusations against controversial contemporary figures, accused of distorting and misinterpretations of the Buddha's teachings as Sinhala *Tripitaka* translators such as Venerable Kiribatgoḍa Gñānānanda of Mahamevunā Asapu project's Sinhala *Tripitaka* translation have plenty to learn from these learned monks of the 1940s (for a scathing attack on Mahamevunā Asapu, see Iñdurāgārē, 2012, pp. 115–144). Other less established controversial misinterpreters today include Sirivardhana of Vañduraṃba (Deegalle, 2016, pp. 131–140), Vaharaka Abhayaratanālaṅkāra (2009) and Mīvanapālānē Dhammālaṅkāra (2012, 2017; Deegalle, 2021a, pp. 74–78).

Recent controversial situations concerning misinterpretations of *Tripitaka* forced President Maithripala Sirisena (2019) to provide legal protection to the Buddha's 'word' (*Buddhavacana*). On 5 January 2019, the Yahapālanaya Government declared the Pāli version of the *Tripitaka* a 'national heritage'. In 2021, there emerged an equally controversial twenty-seven-page-long 'Tripitaka Conservation Bill' entitled "*The Theravada Thripitaka Conservation Act*" in the Sri Lankan Parliament (Cabinet Memorandum Number MBRCA/01/07/2021/CP/07). The *Tripitaka* draft bill pending approval added further heat to discourses on editing and translating the Pāli *Tripitaka*. The proposed Act aimed to "prevent any form of alteration, defacing, distortion, destruction, humiliation, degrading, misuse or misinterpretation of letters, terms, sentences, paragraphs and Pali grammatical and Theravada meanings of; or structure and content of Theravada Tripitaka, Atthakatha and Teeka" (clause 2).

Criticisms and debates between Kiriāllē and Yakkaḍuvē (1954–1955 and 1956; Vālaṃṭiṃyāvē, 1983, pp. 152–209) on the *Tripitaka* edition enabled others like de Zoysa to strive for a 'professional' and authentic job in the Sinhala translation of the *Tripitaka* and help

to develop and demonstrate to others the need to prepare a viable critical methodological apparatus for the study of the *Tripitaka* translations.

Like de Zoysa's Sinhala translations in the 1950s, Kiriāllē had initiated earlier a programme of editing *Tripitaka* texts and printing them to fill a vacuum. In 1937, Kiriāllē edited a complete set of the *Majjhima Nikāya* containing about 1000 pages. The series that became known as the Śrī Pāda *Tripitaka* series also remains incomplete in the process of printing the entire *Tripitaka*. It marks, nevertheless, a remarkable individual monk's achievement like that of de Zoysa. That learned monk, Kiriāllē, made a significant effort in advancing a visible and vital trend growing over time in search of the *Buddhavacana* ('word' of the Buddha).

Properly speaking, the Śrī Pāda *Tripitaka* series began in 1952. On Kiriāllē's initiative, Sydney Ellāvala, Trustee of Śrī Pāda, agreed to donate money from the Śrī Pāda Aramudala (Fund) to publish the seven books of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. As a result, Anulā Press published the entire *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* editions in the rebranded Śrī Pāda *Tripitaka* series from 9 April 1952 to 9 April 1955 (Kiriāllē, 1955, p. xvi). Kiriāllē had printed 3388 royal size pages containing 11 volumes. Around 1955, Kiriāllē established Śāstrodaya Press and printed his *Tripitaka Dharma Saṅgāyanā hā Tripitaka Śuddhi*. By then, Kiriāllē had already begun editing and publishing the *Sutta* and *Vinaya* texts (1955, p. xvi; inaccurate page numbering).

As noted above, de Zoysa's Sinhala *Tripitakaya* translation project was not without critics. However, Malalasekera (1970) commented that de Zoysa was unmoved by others' criticisms:

"He [de Zoysa] was a man of rare integrity and great courage . . . He cared neither for praise nor for blame. He loved learning and remained a student to the end of his days. When he wanted to do something, no trouble was too great. His patience,

perseverance and powers of endurance were almost limitless.” (Malalasekera, 1970).

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

De Zoysa's *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* project reached many temples and homes as never before. It became a beneficial resource for monastic school students preparing for examinations. That initiative of making the 'word' of the Buddha in the vernacular made the Tripiṭaka central again in the lives of Theravāda Buddhists by filling a gap that was left open for nearly a century since the Buddhists first acquired the printing press in the early years of the 1860s. Translating the entire Pāli canon into Sinhala was a remarkable achievement, mainly because it was a personal initiative of de Zoysa. Valuing the commitment and dedication of de Zoysa, this article has illustrated some facets of life and the work of an eminent layman. He single-handedly embarked on translating the Tripiṭaka into the vernacular. Though some contemporary monks (e.g., Kiriāllē) and laypeople may have been critical of his endeavour, because of his status as a layman and the nature of the personal initiative, indeed, de Zoysa accomplished what he set out to do by making available to us an elegant *Sinhala Tripiṭakaya* to attract a wider readership and further enhance everyone's understanding of the Buddha's teaching on a mass scale unheard before. Had not de Zoysa embarked on the vernacular Tripiṭaka initiative, Buddhists in Sri Lanka would have to wait another three decades or more to see a vernacular rendition of the Tripiṭaka by the government-sponsored Buddha Jayanthi Tripiṭaka Granthamālā.

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