

Asvaghosha in the Context of Buddhism

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Abstract:

Asvaghosha was a poet, Musician, scholar and dramatist. He was the contemporary of Kushan king Kanishka. The two well known works are: Buddha –carita and Saundarananda. At the end of these two poetic works, he clearly says. Arya Suvarnaksiputrsya Saketakasya bhikse acarya-bhadant Asvaghosaaya mahakaver Mahavadinah krtiriyam. This would mean Venerable mendicant and teacher Asvaghosa of Saketa, the son of suvarnakshi ,the great poet was perhaps converted to Buddhism by parsva who played an important role in the fourth Buddhist council held during the reign of Kanishka.

Keywords: Philosophy, Religion and work.

Introduction: -

Asvaghosha was the eminent author of Buddha charita, which was on the topic of life of Buddha. Asvaghosha was a contemporary of Kanishka. He was a poet, dramatist, Musician, Scholar and debater of the most notable case is that of Asvaghosa. He was a resident of Saketa (Ayodhya or Awadh) and belonged to a Brahman family. He was a literary giant. “Coomaraswamay Ananda states in his book which is untitled “Buddha and the gospel of Buddhism ”That it is from such ballads and anecdotes as are preserved in the Lalitavistara that Asvaghosha the greatest Buddhist poet, has composed his masterly Buddha-carita, the course of the Buddha.” The Kushan King Kanishka held the fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir. The council was attended to by 500 Arhats, 500 Bodhisattvas and 500 Panditas. Asvaghosa, the celebrated author of the Buddhacarita, the Saundrananda and the Sariputrakarma, attended this council. Buddhism exercised a great influence not only on the people of the valley but also upon those who went there for a temporary stay. On well-versed in grammar, the four Vedas, six treatises on Vedangas, conversant with Tripitakas of 18 school of Buddhism and a laureate of literature.

Asvaghosha was sarvastivadin Buddhist philosopher, dramatist and poet from India. He is considered as the first Sanskrit dramatist and is believed the greatest Indian poet prior to

Kalidasa.¹After his conversion to the Buddhist faith, he studied the Buddhist scriptures thoroughly. He was the author of two Kavyas namely buddhacarita and Saundarananda, and one Drama named sariputraprakarna. His writings bear eloquent testimony to his mastery over Sanskrit dictom and to his knowledge of Sanskrit grammar, Rhetoric and prosody, dramaturgy, Kamasashtra(erotic science), Rajadharm (Royal duties) Samkhya, Yoga and the epics and Upanishads. ²Ashvaghoha was philosopher and poet who considered India's greatest poet before Kalidasa(5th Century) and the father of Sanskrit drama; he make popular(popularized) the style of Sanskrit poetry known as kavya. Ashvashosha was born a Brahman Legend obscures the man, but it is known that he was an outspoken opponent of Buddhism until, after a heated debate with a noted Buddhist scholar on the relative merits of Hinduism and Buddhism, he accepted the value of Buddhism and became a disciple of his erstwhile opponent. While in Varanasi where the Buddha had preached his first sermon, Asvaghosha saw the city conquered by the Kushan emperor Kanishka a devout Buddhist. An enormous war indemnity was demanded ,and the ruler of Varanasi handed over instead a symbolic tribute, a begging bowl said to have been used by both the Buddha and Asvaghosha Apparently the philosopher rose to the position of spiritual counselor in Kanishka's court at Peshwar. A brilliant speaker Ashvaghosha spoke at length on Mahayana Buddhist doctrine at the fourth Buddhist council, which he helped organize. His fame lay largely in his ability to explain the intricate concepts of Mahayana Buddhism Among the works attributed to him are the Mahayana-shraddhotpada-shastra, the Buddhacarita, the in verse, and the Mahalanka.³ He was a worthy predecessor of Kalidasa. Kalidasa was indebted to him for description of some incidents, similes phrases and words.⁴The Sanskrit text of the Buddha-carita was published at the beginning of last year in the 'Anecdota Oxoniensia, and the following English translation is now inclined in the series of sacred Books of the East. It is an early Sanskrit poem written in India on the legendary history of Buddha, and therefore contains much that is of interest for the history of Buddhism, besides its special importance as illustrating the early history of Sanskrit literature. It is ascribed by Asvaghosha; and although there were several writers who bore that name, it seems most probable that our author was the contemporary and spiritual advisor of Kansihka in the first Century of our Era. Hiuen-Tsang who left India in A.D

¹ Asvaghosha-Wikipedia.org date 14.05.2021 time 11.30 am

² Jain K.C .Kalidasa and his times p.12.

³ www.britannica.com date :29.12.2016.

⁴ D.C.Ahir Heritage of Buddhism p.62.

645, mentions him with Deva, Nagarguna, and Kamaralabdha, as the four suns which illumine the World.⁵

As the Buddhism spread and more and more people took to the royal road to Nibbana, Pali gave way to Sanskrit. The Mahayana movement gave further boost to the use of Sanskrit by the Buddhists. The first great personality in the Sanskrit field was Asvaghosha. He was a great Sanskrit poet and Dramatist who flourished in the first Century AD.⁶ .⁷Asvoghosha is considered to be the first Sanskrit Dramatist of the World. He was a born Brahmin, but later turned into a Buddhist monk. He was the court poet of the Kushana king kaniska. The works of Asvaghosha reveal a definite stage in the development of Kavya literature from a more or less narrative poem to a series of set pieces on conventional topics. The grammatical application of Asvaghosha appears to be something between that of the epics and that of Kalidasa. The beautiful description of the contrast in human nature, which we find in many passages of Kalidasa are reflected in the writings of Asvaghosha.⁸ Thus Asvaghosha drag Buddhism out from the Monasteries and made it a topic of the market place and of every house. The masses where gallantly impressed by the life of the Buddha so beautifully told by the poet.⁹

Conclusion: During Conclusion we can say with confidence that Asvaghosha was a scholar, poet and Dramatist. That it is from such ballads and anecdotes as are preserved in the Lalitavistara. Ed that Asvaghosha the greatest Buddhist poet, has composed his masterly Buddha-carita, the course of the Buddha.” The Kushan King Kanishka held the fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir. The council was attended to by 500 Arhats, 500 Bodhisattvas and 500 Panditas. Asvagosha, the celebrated author of the Buddhacarita, the Saundrananda and the Sariputrarakarna, attended this council. Buddhism exercised a great influence not only on the people of the valley but also upon those who went there for a temporary stay. On well-versed in grammar, the four Vedas, six treatises on Vedangas, conversant with Tripitak as of 18 school of Buddhism and a laureate of literature. Due to this literary genius, he invited by Katyayiputra to Kashmir. He also

⁵The Buddha-Carita trst. E.B. Codwell p. Introduction.

⁶ D.C Ahir Heritage of Buddhism p.60

⁷ <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asvaghosha>. date: 02.01.2017.

⁸ K. C. Jain Kalidasa and his times p.12.

⁹ D. C. Ahir Heritage of Buddhism p.64-65.

considered as the first Sanskrit dramatist and philosopher. Asvaghosha was travelling village to village with singing to spread teaching of Buddha.