

CONTACTS BETWEEN CULTURES

South Asia

Volume 2

Edited by

K. I. Koppedrayar



The Edwin Mellen Press
Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

This volume has been registered with The Library of Congress.

ISBN 0-7734-9202-X

Selected Papers from the 33rd International Congress
of Asian and North African Studies (Toronto, August 15-25, 1990)

Design: Willard G. Oxtoby

A CIP catalog record for this book
is available from the British Library.

Copyright ©1992 The Edwin Mellen Press

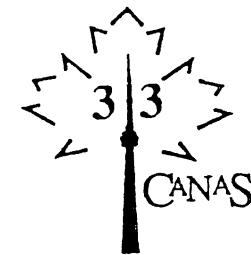
All rights reserved. For information contact

The Edwin Mellen Press
Box 450
Lewiston, New York
USA 14092

The Edwin Mellen Press
Box 67
Queenston, Ontario
CANADA L0S 1L0

Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd.
Lampeter, Dyfed, Wales
UNITED KINGDOM SA48 7DY

Printed in the United States of America



What Was One's Own Language?

Vinaya 2.139

R. Morton Smith

University of Toronto
Canada

The celebrated passage of *Vinaya* 2.139 can be given many interpretations, but I hope to have something new to say.

Certain monks damage the Buddha's words: *sakāya niruttiyā dūśenti*. The Buddha disapproves: *na chandaso āropetabbam*. These words have been taken as the Sanskrit *na chandasah*. The Buddha's words are not to be mounted into verse.

The verse is certainly not Vedic verse (which I doubt if anyone could compose by the sixth century BCE), but in a context of the second century BCE it may not be as odd as it looks. All sorts of things were being put into verse at the time, for example, the *Laws of Manu* and the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, so it is hard to think that verse would be so very damaging. As the monks in question were brahmins, the phrase *sakāya niruttiyā* if translated, "in their own language/dialect" might mean "in Sanskrit." Here we may have heretical suspicion of the brahmanical revival of Sanskrit from the time of Pūṣyamitra. If the monks were speaking Sanskrit in the Buddha's time, he could not have objected, for he was doing practically the same.

What was the linguistic situation in the sixth century BCE? *Gautama Dharma-Sūtra* and *Drāhyāyana/Lāhyāyana Śrauta-Sūtras* are virtually in classical Sanskrit. Of the authorities quoted, the ones nearer to Gautama are quoted more often and one most quoted is Rāḍha Gautama, whom my work on the *brahmana vaiśas* leads me to point towards 600 BCE. Pāṇini gives the rules for good speech around 420 BCE, Kātyāyana brings him up to date around 240 BCE. Sanskrit is superseded as the language of the upper class through developments under Mahāpadma Nanda, which led to the disappearance of old *ksatriyas* and their *purohitas* and the parallel emergence of the urban mercantile classes who formed the basis of Mahāpadma Nanda's support. Prakrit became the court language, and Aśoka's language (250 BCE) is closer to Sanskrit than Pali. It must have represented popular speech, as he would not have been addressing his subjects in a dialect with no prestige and full of archaisms. The Buddha then, who was upper class, spoke (virtually) classical Sanskrit (if we are not too pedantic about the "classical"). Pali had not developed by 250 BCE, and this stage is reached in Kharavela's inscription of 165 BCE. Buddhist Pali is stereotyped in the second century BCE. This might provide a context for refusing verse, as said in *Vinaya* 2.139.

But I think there are better reasons taking *chandaso* as the Sanskrit *chandaśas*, "at will." If these brahmin monks were speaking their own language Sanskrit (no longer available to everyone) at will, we may have an unavailing

southern protest against the more Sanskritizing Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. Buddhism attracted brahmins, who were qualified to take over the leadership by their training as the thinking class, and most of the philosophical development seems to be due to brahmins. A post-Aśokan date would again be indicated for the passage. This interpretation holds if we translate the following passage *anujānāmi bhikkave svakāya niruttiyā Buddhavacanam paryāpunītum*: "I permit the Buddha word to be received in the recipient's own dialect." We hear nothing about a Tamil or Singhalese canon; Pali remained the sacred language, and in view of its western connections and Kharavela's inscription, I doubt if local dialects were mutually unintelligible much before 300 BCE

But if we take *niruttiyā* as "explanation" (not of the single word but the sentence), in almost the sense of "paraphrase," this is not just anyone's paraphrase (*chandaso/-śas*). As heresies were arising even by the fourth century BCE and were doing well in the second to first centuries, the statement appears to be a sort of Theravāda manifesto. If, however, we take *anujānāmi* as "prescribe, advise" (for which there are *Vinaya* and *Suttanipāta* parallels), the Buddha is asking for explanation in *his* own words, not in others' extempore, which would only lead to heresy. *Svakāya* here refers to the main subject of the sentence, and this is good Sanskrit, as *sva* refers to first person. We have here recognizable authoritarianism; any innovation, even the Mahāyāna sūtras, had to be attributed to the Buddha. The teacher told the truth, the pupil learnt by rote, and it was not his job to change or challenge the truth. That the Buddha foresaw heresies is possible, and the forbidden question may be taken as a safeguard against them, but it is quite possible he did not think about them in his emphasis on the urgency of entering the stream (*sotāpatti*). A date of second-first century BCE for our passage makes sense. The Theravādins did not approve of heresies, and individualistic interpretation is not encouraged in an unindividualistic society. So the Buddha is represented as saying:

I prescribe acquiring my doctrine in my own expression/explanation (not anybody else's at his whim, or by his own ideas—*chandaso*).