

## Editorial

(CJBS 8, 2012)

It is my honour and pleasure to serve as the invited guest editor for this issue of *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies* (#8). In this issue we present a special edition devoted to an extended essay by *CJBS*'s founding editor, **Prof. Suwanda S. J. Sugunasiri**. This essay is the fruit of more than two years of research and scholarship. It demonstrates not simply curiosity, dedication, and scholarly acumen, but also honesty and integrity to his subject matter and thesis. "Arhant Mahinda as Redactor of the *Buddhapūjāva* and the *Pañca-Aṭṭhangika*- and *Dasa-sīlas* in Sinhala Buddhism" is, quite simply, a landmark in Sri Lankan and Buddhist scholarship.

The essay is an examination and investigation of the origins of the *Buddhapūjāva*. This Sri Lankan Buddhist ritual certainly has Indian influences, but as Prof. Sugunasiri demonstrates its practice arose from the indigenous conditions on the island during the early introduction of Buddhism to the populace. Prof. Sugunasiri's thesis does not end with justifying this claim, for he engages the *Buddhapūjāva* directly, seeking to uncover and understand the intentions of the redactor who established the ritual. In his own words, "...the innovative genius of the Arhant Mahinda can be said to lie in coming up with the *Buddhapūjāva*, bringing the historical strands together in a creative way and in a particular relationship between and among the parts, as a handy spiritual tool for the pragmatic use by the people of Tambapanni...the case for a Sri Lankan origin and a Mahindian hand in the *Buddhapūjāva* has been made on the basis of internal evidence. But the Canonical and the post-Canonical literature encountered...seem to provide some external evidence, too" (*CJBS* #8, 62).

Allow me then to turn not so much to the internal evidence that Prof. Sugunasiri discusses, but to the methodology that he has adopted. In many key ways, his approach mirrors the historical-critical method employed in Judeo-Christian Biblical scholarship, perhaps best exemplified in the contemporary writings of Prof. Bart D. Ehrman. Prof. Ehrman writes in *Jesus, Interrupted* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), "To engage in a historical study of the text... requires that you read and compare the texts carefully, down to the minute details" (Ehrman, 21). Prof. Sugunasiri, like every scholar, has certainly performed this part in his analysis of the *Buddhapūjāva*. Yet he has dared to ask the question about the *authorship* of the ritual, and in that sense followed through with another important aspect of the historical-critical method: "This view insists that each author of the Bible [scripture or ritual, in this case] lived in his own time and place—not in ours. Each author had a set of cultural and religious assumptions that we ourselves may not share. The historical-critical method tried to understand what each of these authors may have meant in his original context. According to this view, each author must be allowed to have his own say" (Ehrman, 12). There is though a significant difference in Prof. Sugunasiri's method, for unlike the Biblical scholarship, the author of the *Buddhapūjāva* was not known; no name was ascribed as its creator *per se*. He

asks, “What kind of evidence is there in the *Buddhapūjāva* itself that will tell us just what kind of qualifications we should be looking for in the Redactor or Redactors?” (*CJBS* #8, 25) Hence, Prof. Sugunasiri investigates the various components, soteriological and practical, that characterize the ritual. In doing so, he contends that there are 15 such qualities (*CJBS* #8, 30), which culminate in the author needing to be an *Authority Figure*. This deduction ends with a focus on Arhant Mahinda (*CJBS* #8, 30, 41), who as a *moral exemplar* satisfies all of the criteria.

Prof. Sugunasiri’s essay then proceeds to open that space which will allow Mahinda “to have his own say.” This attempt though is fraught with hermeneutical issues due to the various ways a text can be engaged. Ehrman writes, “Of course when trying to understand these different points of view we need to engage in the work of *interpretation* [emphasis added]. Contrary to what some people assume, texts don’t speak for themselves. They must be interpreted. And this can never be done ‘objectively,’ as if we, the readers, were robots; texts are interpreted subjectively by humans. From a historical-critical perspective, though, each author of the New Testament [scripture or ritual] should be read and interpreted on his own terms without having some *other* author’s terms imposed on him” (Ehrman, 286). Prof. Sugunasiri explicitly and critically wrestles with these problems in his final section entitled, “Some Methodological Concluding Remarks” (*CJBS* #8, 66-75).

The reader comes away from this essay with a profound sense of not just the breadth and depth of scholarship demonstrated by Prof. Sugunasiri, but with an understanding of the inner *workings and meanings* of the *Buddhapūjāva*. Importantly, we should also recognize the quite understated significance of this essay’s contribution to scholarly methodology. Prof. Sugunasiri has herein pioneered a *novel and effective* means for uncovering and bringing to light the authors behind Buddhist (and religious) texts, scriptures and rituals.

I would like to close my brief remarks with a gracious thank you to Prof. Sugunasiri. We have worked quite closely over the years since founding and publishing *CJBS*. I truly appreciate the mentorship and wisdom that he has shared with me. He has always been and will continue to be a person of the highest quality, virtue, and inspiration.

I thus invite you all to share in Prof. Sugunasiri’s insightful research and enjoy this special issue of *CJBS*.

This issue also has two excellent book reviews. The first is Andrew Olendzki’s insightful review of *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: its inquiry into the nature of conditioned reality*. The second, by Paul MacRae, is a critical literary essay on *The Monks and Me: How 40 Days at Thich Nhat Hanh’s French Monastery Guided Me Home*.

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In Metta!

Michael P. Berman (Guest Editor)

September 2012