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Keci, “Some,” in a Pali Commentary

by I. B. Horner

When I was translating the Buddhavaṃsa Commentary (BvA), called Madhuratthavilāsinī, under the title of Clarifier of the Sweet Meaning¹, I became interested in the references to *keci*, “some”, that occur there. These amount to seventeen. Here I propose to put forward, without criticism, merely a selection of these after making a few introductory remarks.

It would seem that even as the compilers of the Pali Canon and commentaries knew of the Porāṇā or Ancients who were their predecessors and could cite their sayings, so too the commentaries knew what can only be presumed to be some of their contemporaries who, like the compilers, devoted time and thought to the right commentarial explanations of canonical words and phrases. These commentaries, as we now have them, called these contemporaries of theirs by such terms as *eke*, or more frequently *keci*, both meaning “some”; they also knew “others” (as unspecified as are *keci*) as *aññe* and as *apare*. The indexes to some Pali Text Society publications, but by no means all, list references to the Porāṇā. None, I think, lists the references to *keci*, *eke*, *aññe*, or *apare*, with the outstanding exception of the Vocabulary to the Suttanipāta Commentary which also includes that on the Khuddakapāṭha Commentary. Here therefore a good lead is given into one of the “undiscovered corners of Pali literature” as Dr Lily de Silva calls it in her pioneer, but short discussion of attempts made in the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī-ṭīkā (DAṬ) to identify the upholders of a view introduced now and again by the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (DA) with the words *keci vadanti*, some say². She cites DA passages where the phrases *keci vadanti* and *eke vadanti* occur. She also gives DAṬ’s interpretations of DA conceptions of the views held by *eke* and *keci* and of who these *eke* and *keci* were supposed to be.

Dealing solely here with the Buddhavaṃsa Commentary (BvA), I will also deal solely with the views and readings it attributes to *keci*, one reason for this being that I find no references to *eke* there at all. To speak of *aññe* and *apare* as well would lead me too far afield, though the BvA references to them are very sparse.

It seems that the Pali Commentaries, as finally formulated, might agree with, disagree with, or make no comment on, thus apparently accepting what they record *keci* to say, *vadanti*, or to read, *paṭhanti*, presumably in the ancient commentarial manuscripts, *poṭṭhake*. This suggests that at least some of their views were considered sufficiently important or interesting for notice in the Commentaries, though of course we have no means of knowing how many were ignored or, supposing some were in fact ignored, what were the reasons for doing so. We can, however, say that such of their views as are recorded are not necessarily regarded with disfavour. They were not quoted for the sake of showing them to be incorrect or holding them up to ridicule. Rather, it might be that their views were quoted in order to support, even perhaps to justify or lend weight to the commentaries' own interpretations.

For example, of the views ascribed to *keci* fourteen times in the Suttanipāta Commentary, there appear to be twelve times when they are accepted and accepted almost as if they add to knowledge. Similarly in BvA fourteen of the sixteen or seventeen occurrences of what *keci* are recorded there to say or to read are apparently concurred with since no adverse criticism is made. This leaves only two out of the total number that incur definite disapproval.

This brings us to the question of the identity of *keci*. Who were they? Can we know for certain? One supposes that they were knowledgeable men, devoting time and thought to the Buddha's teaching and the manner in which it should be understood and perpetuated. Further to that, I can only say at present that DAṬ is of the opinion they were residents, not of the Mahāvihāra at Anurādhapura, but of the Uttaravihāra (DAṬ I 160 164 289, II 155) or of the Abhayagiri (DAṬ I 207 316)³ both also at Anurādhapura and assuming these two names do not refer to one and the same Vihāra, though it is more likely that they do.⁴

Unfortunately BvA throws no light at all on the identity of *keci*. That is one matter. How little these Theras of old realized

they were compiling for a posterity that after 2,500 years would still be enormously interested and curious! But there is nothing to be done at this distance of time. The other matter is the importance of collecting all the views that all the Pali commentaries ascribe to *keci* and so forth. There is much work still to be done on the commentaries, and many aspects remain to be explored for a fuller understanding of their structure, methods and function. Though *keci* may not be of prime significance in themselves, it is obvious they commanded a degree of interest and respect and should not be lightly brushed aside. My attempts to begin to collect the views attributed to them in BvA, and in BvA only, now follow. Only a selection is given here, however, but enough I hope to convey some idea of the treatment accorded to them. Whether other commentaries show similar or different attitudes to *keci* is a matter wide open to investigation.

(1) *BvA*, p. 13: “But some read: The Lord, chief in the world, supreme of men, was asked by a host of Brahmās, their hands clasped”, *keci pana: Bhagavā ti lokādhipati naruttamo katañjalī brahmagaṇehi yācīto ti paṭhanti*, instead of, as at BvA 5: *Brahmā ca lokādhipati Sahampati katañjalī anadhivaraṃ ayācatha*.

No comment made.

(2) *BvA*, p. 28: “Some read: in the zenith adorned with jewels”, *nabhe ratanamāṇḍitan ti paṭhanti keci*, as does Bv I 5. It would seem BvA might prefer to read *sabbaratanamaṇḍitan*, adorned with all the jewels, and saying nothing about the zenith.

No comment.

(3) *BvA*, p. 65 on Bv IIA 1: “A city named Amara means that the city was named both Amara and Amaravatī. But some explain it even here in another way. How can they when this was the name of the city?”—*keci pan’ettha aññena pi pakārena vaṇṇayanti; kiṃ tehi nāmaṃ pan’etaṃ tassa nagarassa?*

We are not told what is *keci*’s explanation.

Here there is a reprimand.

(4) *BvA* p. 76 on Bv IIA 30: “Possessed of eight special qualities means: possessed of eight special qualities spoken of thus: with the mind composed, quite purified, quite clarified, without

blemish, without defilement, grown soft and workable, fixed, immovable, I gained, I procured power in the superknowings (*aṭṭhagunāsamūpetan ti evaṃ samāhite citte ... evaṃ vuttehi aṭṭhagūṇehi samannāgatam abhiññābalaṃ āharim ānesin ti attho*). But some say: Endowed with the eight happinesses of recluses, and that these are: not appropriating wealth and grain ... (the eight are now specified, and may be compared with Jātaka v, p.252-3). These (i.e. “some”, just above) say: Endowed with the eight happinesses of recluses, I created a hermitage - thus making a connexion with the hermitage. This does not agree with the text”: *keci pana: aṭṭhahi samaṇasukhehi upetaṃ; aṭṭh’ imāni samaṇasukhāni nāma dhanadhaññapariggahābhāvo ... imehi aṭṭhahi samaṇasukhehi upetaṃ samūpetam assamaṃ māpesin ti, assamena sambandham katvā vadanti. Taṃ pāḷiyā na sameti.*

Thus the interpretations postulated by “some” could hardly be more clearly repudiated. According to the BvA compiler the interpretation is connected with a material thing, namely a hermitage, rather than with the mind or mental activities, *citta*, as is intended by the text, *pāḷi*. Not to agree with or tally with the text is quite a bad error on the part of any commentarial compiler.

Reprimand.

(5) *BvA p. 152* on Bv IV 29: “*saṃkilesamaraṇaṃ tadā ti ... keci: sammohamaraṇaṃ tadā ti paṭhanti*: dying then with defilements (present) ... some read: dying then with confusion (present)”. Confusion is one of the defilements.

No comment.

(6) *BvA p. 201* on Bv XII 26 explains *cando tāragāṇe yathā* (as the moon in a host of stars) by saying: *yathā gagane paripuṇṇacando tāragāṇe obhāseti pakāsati evam eva sabbā pi disā obhāseti ti attho*, “as a full moon in the heavens makes effulgent and illumines in a host of stars even so did he make effulgent all the quarters”. To this it adds: *keci cando pañṇaraso yathā ti paṭhanti*: “some read: as the moon on the fifteenth (day)”, and comments that “the meaning is quite clear”, so *uttānattho va*. This is because the full-moon day and the fifteenth day (of the month) are reckoned to be one and the same. Thus it is apparent that for *keci*’s wording here there is

Acceptance.

(7) *BvA p. 230* on *Bv XVIII 12* which reads *cātuvanṇaparivutam* where *vanṇa* appears to mean something like “kinds”, for *BvA* explains the compound as *cātuparisaparivutam*, “surrounded by the four companies” which, as it says, comprise warrior-nobles, brahmans, householders and recluses. It then adds *catuvanṇehi parivutan ti paṭhanti keci*, “some read: surrounded by the four *vanṇas*”. But whether *keci*’s understanding of *vanṇa* differed from the commentarial one and for *keci* meant, for example, caste, the four castes, or whether there was merely a difference in grammatical construction is not easy to know.

No comment.

I hope I have put forward enough examples to indicate that on this one subject alone the Commentaries, albeit one Commentary only, contain a wealth of interest. I believe *keci* and their interpretations are recorded with more or less frequency in probably all the Commentaries. These also, on occasion and frequently in *Samantapāsādikā*, the commentary on the *Vinaya*, name their sources, the ancient commentaries such as the *Mahā-atthakathā*, the *Kurundī* and the *Mahāpaccari*.⁵ To collect their opinions expressed and preserved in the commentaries as we have them today would be to render a good service to Pali commentarial literature, and should provide a valuable study.

NOTES

1. To be published by the Pali Text Society as *Sacred Books of the Buddhists* No. 33.

2. Lily de Silva, ed., *Dīghanikāyatthakathaṭīkā Līnatthavaṇṇanā*. [DAṬ] (London: Pali Text Society). Vol I lix f.

3. See DAṬ I p. LX.

4. See *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, s.v. both *Uttaravihāra* and *Abhayagiri* where it is said, “In the *Chronicles* *Abhayagiri* is referred to under several names”, one of which is *Uttaravihara*.

5. Mrs C.A.F. Rhys Davids in *Buddhist Psychological Ethics*, p. xxviii gives a list of six ancient commentaries, known in particular to *Buddhaghosa*.