

The Beginning of Pāli Errand Literature and Its Uniqueness

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Abstract

The term Sandesa is of Sanskrit origin and refers to that which is properly conveyed. Pāli Sandesa literature developed under the influence of the Sanskrit tradition, with works such as Mānāvulu, Vuttamālā, Sirirāma, and Garuḷa Sandesa representing its emergence and development. The research problem was to identify the distinctive features unique to Pāli Sandesa poetry and to examine how it differs from the Sanskrit Sandesa literary tradition. The objective is to analyse the specific characteristics of Pāli Sandesa literature and its divergences from Sanskrit Sandesa poetry. A qualitative research methodology was employed, and data were collected through textual analysis using primary and secondary sources. Based on the findings that Sanskrit Sandesa poetry generally begins with a blessing or a description of the messenger, whereas Pāli Sandesa compositions do not follow this pattern. For instance, the Mānāvulu Sandesa begins with a description of the city, while a messenger's blessing is absent in three Pāli Sandesa works except Garuḷa Sandesa. Pāli Sandesa literature mainly reflects religious purposes, the exchange of ideas between regions, loyalty towards the existing rulers, and appeals to deities for the protection of the kingdom. As stated in the Sāhitya Darpana, Garuḷa Sandesa is the only work that follows all the characteristics of classical Sandesa poetry. It has undoubtedly been influenced by Sinhala and Sanskrit traditions. Due to the religious nature of the Pāli language, the limited number of Pāli speakers, and its use mainly for written communication, *Pāli Errand Literature* received comparatively less attention. As a result, Pāli Sandesa poets attempted to develop a distinct literary approach with features unique to the Pāli tradition.

Keywords: *Communication, Messenger, Pāli Errand Literature, Pāli tradition, Sanskrit Sandesa poetry*

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1. Introduction

The term Sandesa is derived from the Sanskrit root “diś”, combined with the prefix saṃ (saṃ + diś), as reflected in the expression “*sandiśyateti sandeśaḥ*” (Sugatavaṃsa, Rev. H., 2015: 15). In Pāli, Sandesa is adopted as a loanword derived from the same root (saṃ + diśa), carrying forward its semantic legacy. In Pāli usage, the term encompasses multiple related concepts, including a message, a written letter, or a document (Buddhadatta Nāyaka Thera, P., 2016: 599). The word Sandesa may also denote “news,” highlighting its broader communicative function (Rhys Davids and Stede, 1966: 678). In Sanskrit, the word Sandesa extends this semantic range, referring to intelligence, message “*Sandeśaṃ me tadanu jalaja śroṣyasi śrotrapeyam*” (The Megha Dūta or Cloud Messenger, 1842: 13), information “*Nivāpya piya Sandeśaḥ sītādakṣi vadhodadhataḥ*” (Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa, 1985: 385), instructions, commands, or guidance (Alagiyavanna, 2004: 843). In Sri Lanka, the term Sandesa appears for the first time in the earliest Pāli Sandesa composition, the Mahānāgakula Sandesa, which was composed during the Polonnaruwa period “*sutvāna sandesamuḷārapīti*” (Māhānāgakula Sandesa, 2012: 99). In this work, the word Sandesa is employed with the meaning of “message”. Similarly, in “*vuttamālā sandesa satakaṃ samattaṃ*” (Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, 2003: 125), the term is again used to signify “message” in the Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, composed in the Gampola period. These works represent the earliest literary instances in which the concept and terminology of Sandesa appear in the Sri Lankan Buddhist literary tradition. In Pāli literature, words synonymous with Sandesa are used, notably dūtha (messenger). The term dūtha appears on multiple occasions in the Tripiṭaka, referring to the messenger, the duties of a messenger, the characteristics of a messenger, and the actions performed by a messenger. The Pāli terms “*pahiṇa*” and “*sāsana*” are also employed within the Tripiṭaka in the sense of Sandesa or message. When examining these words, it is evident that they are used both literally and figuratively to convey the idea of a message or communication (Sugatavaṃsa, Rev. H., 2015: 16).

2. Literature Review

When studying the composition of *Sandesa's* poetry, it is essential to first examine the beginnings of *Sandesa* in Sanskrit literature. In this regard, Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* plays a particularly important role (*Wilson, 1813*). This work is often considered the archetype of *Sandesa* poetry, establishing both thematic and structural conventions that later influenced regional and Pāli compositions. Moreover, in examining the essential characteristics that a *Sandesa* poem should possess, *Sāhitya Darpana* is considered an important reference for understanding literary aesthetics (*Ballantyne, ed., 1851*). There is a highly significant Sinhala work studies Pāli *Sandesa* poetry, focusing on Sanskrit influences, the role of the Tripiṭaka, and a historical-literary overview of *Sandesa* literature in Sri Lanka, highlighting its aesthetic and cultural significance (*Sugatavaṃsa Rev, 2015*). Similarly, an English scholarly work on *Sandesa* poetry outlines its genre, aesthetics, and literary style, and highlights the moral, devotional, and didactic relevance of Pāli *Sandesa Kāvya* (*Kumarasinghe, 2015*).

The first Pāli *saṃdesa* poem, composed in Sri Lanka, is considered to be the *Mānakulu Sandesa*. In later periods, this text underwent a critical revision, wherein detailed explanations were added verse by verse to enhance its clarity and understanding (*Gamage, 2012*). In the creation of Pāli *Sandesa* poetry, many works have followed the model of Sanskrit *Sandesa* poetry. Therefore, the *Siri Rāma Sandesa* is unique in that it was composed according to the author's personal style. Its language and literary style differ noticeably from other contemporary works (*Dhammāloka Rev, 2009*). Furthermore, the *Vuttamālā Sandesa* is significant for studying the features of Pāli language used during the Gampola period. It provides insights into sentence structures, poetic embellishments, and the use of metre in *Sandesa* poetry composition (*Abeyaratna, 2003*). The *Garuḷa Sandesa*, composed during the Colombo period, is a *Sandesa* poem that aligns with the traditional characteristics of the genre while being uniquely adapted to the Pāli language (*Amaraṇa Rev, 1959*). The *Sandesa* literary tradition has been mentioned in various sources, and its content has been briefly introduced.

Scholars have primarily focused on the four major Sandesa works that are widely accepted within the tradition. In addition to these, reference has also been made to certain texts that are classified under the Sandesa genre despite lacking some of its distinctive poetic features (*Buddhadatta Rev*, 2007).

Although the Sandesa poetry tradition has been discussed in several sources, a comprehensive scholarly investigation into its distinctive features has not yet been adequately conducted. Pāli Sandesa literature has also contributed to the development of Sinhala Sandesa poems composed in Sri Lanka; By the way, its influence and literary significance have received comparatively limited attention. Therefore, this study primarily focuses on the unique characteristics and thematic aspects of *Pāli Errand Literature*, which have been overlooked by many scholars. In particular, works such as the *Siri Rāma Sandesa* and *Garuḷa Sandesa* have not received sufficient attention in modern literary studies. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of English-language sources examining the origin, development, and distinctive features of *Pāli Errand Literature*. Based on this research gap, the present study investigates the emergence, evolution, and literary uniqueness of the Sandesa poetry tradition, with special reference to Pāli literary works.

3. Research Problem

This study focused on the origins and distinctive features of Pāli Errand literature and examined how it differed from the later Sandesa kāvya tradition recognised by scholars. Although Sandesa poetry had been widely studied, comparative analysis between Pāli Errand literature and classical Sandesa works remained limited. Therefore, the research problem was to identify the unique characteristics of Pāli Errand literature and to critically examine its key differences from the established Sandesa poetic tradition.

4. Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to investigate the characteristic features of Sandesa poetry and to compare Sanskrit Sandesa literature with Pāli Sandesa compositions.

It also explores the defining characteristics of Pāli Sandesa literature as identified by scholars. Furthermore, the study aims to analyze the content and semantic structure (*artha-pañcakaya*) of these Sandesa poetries.

5. Research Methodology

The research was based on a qualitative research methodology. Data were gathered from primary and secondary sources and analyzed through textual analysis to interpret and assess the relevant information.

6. Discussion

The Ṛgveda refers to a message being sent through a bitch named Saramā in connection with a particular task (Kumarasinghe, 2015: 20). In particular, it should be emphasised that, according to the Sanskrit literary tradition, messenger literature can be traced back to the Vedic period. The earliest reference to a messenger poem in world literature is found in ancient India. It is represented by the Meghadūta, composed by the great poet Kālidāsa.

Considering the Meghadūta as the primary source, numerous Sanskrit messenger poems were subsequently composed. Among the most notable examples are the Haṃsa-dūta of Rūpa Gosvāmīn, the Pavana-dūta of Dhosi, the Vāta-dūta attributed to Kṛṣṇanātha, the Mano-dūta of Viṣṇudāsa, another Pavana-dūta composed by Vādīcandra, the Padāṅka-dūta of Sārvabhauma, the Haṃsa-sandesa of Veṅkaṭācārya, and the Kokila-sandesa of Uddaṇḍa poetics (Sugatavaṃsa, Rev. H., 2015: 22). On this basis, the earliest stage consisted of interpersonal communication. Subsequently, literary traditions record the use of birds and beings as messengers, a motif that appears in several narratives of Sanskrit literature.

6.1 The Characteristics of Sandesa

These four components constitute the structural foundation of the Sandesa-kāvya tradition (Sannasgala, 1962: 6).

- Peṣaka (the sender),
- Hāraka or Dūta (the messenger),
- Grāhaka (the receiver),
- Sandesa (the message).

“Prasiddhaṃ nāyakī kṛtyaṃ - puruṣaṃ vatha yoṣitaṃ
sandesaṃ presayed vidvāṃ - dūttair vaṃśādibhiḥ.”

“Ithihāsa katā pūrava - māsiḥ pūrvamathāpivā
dūtantu varṇa yedadau - kuśala praśna pūrvakaṃ.”

“Varṇanātaraṃ tasya - gantavyasthāna kīrtanaṃ
paścāt tat śroṣyasītyuktavā - mārga deśādī varṇayet.”

As outlined in the Sāhitya Darpaṇa, the Sandesa poetry is expected to exhibit the following characteristics: [the hero of a Sandesa poem is typically a renowned individual of distinguished character, while the messenger is portrayed as noble or elevated in status. The Sandesa often begins with an auspicious benediction, a historical reference, or a brief narrative background. The messenger is respectfully addressed, praised, and then entrusted with the message. Thereafter, the destination and the route of the journey are described in detail, including landscapes, cities, regions, and notable landmarks. The qualities of the recipient and the importance of the location are also elaborated. Finally, the core message is delivered, usually concluding with blessings or good wishes for the messenger] (Kumarasinghe, 2015: 29-20).

In the tradition of Sandesa-kāvya, the messenger (dūta or hāraka) is classified into three distinct types. These are:

- Nisrṣṭārtha
- Mitārtha
- Sandesa-hāraka

“Nisuṣṭārto mitārtaśca - tatā sandeśahārakaḥ

kārya preṣyastridhā dūto - dūtyaścāpi tathāvidhāḥ.”

“Ubhayaor bāva muninīya – svaṃ vadati cottaraṃ

suśliṣṭa kurute kāryyaṃ - nīrṣṭārthuḥ sasmṛtaṃ.”

“Mitartha bhāṣi kāryasya - siddhikāri mitarthakaḥ

yāvad bhāṣika sandeśa - hāraḥ sandeśa hāraḥ”

(Sāhitya- Darpaṇa, 1851:37).

[The Nīrṣṭārtha messenger is one who fully understands the intentions and expectations of both the sender and the receiver. The Mitārtha messenger, by contrast, performs his duty in a limited and restrained manner. He conveys the message in accordance with the sender’s instructions, using few words and avoiding unnecessary elaboration. The Sandesaa-Hāraḥ represents the most basic form of messenger. His function is restricted solely to the verbal transmission of the message] *(Sāhitya- Darpaṇa, 1851: 64-66).*

Religious and institutional correspondence among Theravāda Buddhist regions was conducted in Pāli, demonstrating its function as a language of international Buddhist communication. The earliest extant example of this tradition is the **Mānāvulu Sandesa**, which is regarded as the first Pāli poetic epistle. The political and religious relationships between Sri Lanka and Burmā, both prominent centres of Theravāda Buddhism, likely influenced its composition. The second Pāli sandesa, the **Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka**, composed during the Gampola period, marks an important transition. Structured as a benedictory poem, it reflects devotional praise and aspirations for blessings. This development signals a new direction in the evolution of Sri Lankan Sandesa poetry. By the Kandyan period, Pāli was largely regarded as a sacred language employed in religious ceremonies and auspicious contexts. It was within this milieu that the **Siri Rāma Sandesa** emerged. In addition, Pāli Sandesa compositions appeared, of which the **Garuḷa Sandesa** is particularly noteworthy. Although the number of Pāli Sandesa works is limited in comparison to Sinhala compositions, their literary and historical value is considerable. Pāli Sandesa kāvya developed distinctive formal characteristics rooted in local tradition. Their poetic refinement, stylistic elegance, and expressive richness secure for them a respected place within the broader landscape of Sri Lankan literature.

6.2 Mānāvulu Sandesa

This *Sandesa* is known by several names, including *Mānāvulu Sandesa*, *Mahānāgakula Sandesa*, and *Rāmañña Sandesa*. The title “Mahānāgakula Sandesa” is based on the appearance of the phrase *Mahānāga-kula*, which also identifies a prominent city referred to by that name in the poetry “Rammā mahānāgakuloditamhā; purā mahānāgakulākulamahā,” (*Māhānāgakula Sandesa*, 2012: 99). The *Sandesa* was reportedly sent in response to a message conveyed through a leader of *Ñāṇābhīdhāna* to *Saṅgharakkhita Kashyapa Thero*, who was residing at a prominent monastery in *Arimaddanapura*, *Burmā*.

“Bhadantapādā vihitam hi paṇṇa;
mānīya dattam guṇarukkhaṇṇam,
ñāṇābhīdhānena padhānīnā yaṃ;
samaggasāmaggirasova tamme” (*Māhānāgakula Sandesa*, 2012: 99).

The *Sandesa* indicates that, just as the monks of *Sri Lanka*, under the patronage of King *Parākramabāhu*, undertook the restoration and preservation of the Buddhist Order in their kingdom, a similar appeal was made to the Burmese king *Siridhamma*, requesting his support in upholding and revitalising the noble Buddha’s Dispensation in *Burmā*.

“Saddhiṃ parakkamabhujena mahībhujena;
saṅgho visodhayī yathā jinasāsanetttha,
tumhe’pi tattha siridhammanarādhirāja;
mādāya sāsanaṇṇam suvisodhayātha” (*Māhānāgakula Sandesa*, 2012: 62).

The author of this *sandesa* remains unknown. Mr *Bernatt* observes that the author was clearly not *Ven. Nāgasena* himself was the resident monk of *Rambhā Vihāra*, but was likely a monk belonging to his monastic lineage (*Barnett*, 1905: 265-83). The *Sandesa* itself does not indicate its precise date of composition.

Based on historical evidence, Jayatilake suggested that this sandesa was composed during the final five years of King Parākramabāhu I's reign (1153–1186), a conclusion supported by the arrival of Ven. Chappaṭa in Arimaddanapura in 1181. At that time, the king of Burma was Narapati Jayasūra (Jayatileke, 2008: 44-46).

Comprising sixty-four verses, the Sandesa employs a variety of meters, including Saddūlavikkīḷita, Upajāti, Mandākkantā, Vasantatilakā, Vaṃsaṭṭha and so on. Mānāvulu Sandesa is presented as a highly prosperous and flourishing city, inhabited by people who enjoy comfort, happiness, and peace. Ornate gateways, monasteries, and the presence of virtuous and disciplined residents further enhance its beauty. Through these descriptions, the poet conveys the city as a space characterised not only by material abundance but also by moral and aesthetic refinement, creating an environment that embodies both serenity and grandeur (*Māhānāgakula Sandesa*, 2012: 13). In this work, the author skillfully employs metrical patterns to enhance the language's auditory appeal, creating a refined sense of sound rhythm. The verses express deep reverence for the Buddha and beautifully illustrate the people's devotion to the doctrine. The use of techniques such as metrical modulation contributes to the prominence of phonetic aesthetics, while the carefully constructed imagery of speech facilitates a clearer understanding of meaning.

“Naṭati sirasi reṇu buddhāpādāravinde;
naṭati sugatavāṇivāṇinī kaṇṭharaṅge,
naṭati hadaraṅge bhāvanānāṭakitthi;
naṭati caraṇaraṅge lokamolīnamālī” (*Māhānāgakula Sandesa*, 2012: 36).

The Mānāvulu Sandesa also provides valuable information regarding the agricultural practices of the Ruhuna region during the period in which it was composed. The Sandesa indicates the presence of banana trees in the Rambhā Vihāra at Mānāvulu. Since these trees are described as offering shade to the monks, it is reasonable to assume that they existed not merely as a few isolated plants but as a considerable grove (*Māhānāgakula Sandesa*, 2012: 24). The Mānāvulu Sandesa provides not only information concerning Sri Lanka but also valuable details about the city of Arimaddana, the Burmese capital.

Arimaddana is depicted as a prosperous and flourishing city endowed with abundant resources. It is described as a place filled with granaries and material wealth, inhabited by virtuous laypeople devoted to the doctrine as well as by noble sons of the Buddha who upheld the monastic tradition.

“Madhukaranikarānaṃ pānagārāravindā;
taṭṭarūhatarūsākhā añjalīpeyatoyā,
vividhavihagakīlāgāyanā keḷiraṅgā;
sisīramadhuranīrā pokkharañño ramenti ”

(Māhānāgakula Sandesa, 2012: 61).

In accordance with established tradition, the Sandesa poem generally begins with a messenger's blessing (dūtāsi) with the religious salutation. The Mānāvulu Sandesa does not open with any of these standard elements. The Sandesa does not refer to a messenger (dūta), opening blessings, or detailed travel itineraries. Likewise, unlike conventional Sandesa compositions, it omits descriptions of gardens, forests, water recreations, or celebratory festivities. The Mānāvulu Sandesa serves as an important source for understanding not only the religious connections but also the broader social conditions of both Sri Lanka and Burmā during that period.

6.3 Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka

The second Sandesa composed in the Pāli is the Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, written during the Gampola period. It is attributed to Gatarā Upatapasvīn, who resided at the Dedigama Rājamahā Vihāra. It is further mentioned that he was the nephew of the venerable Wilgammula Thera during the reign of King Parākramabāhu VI (Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, 2003: 12). The designation “Sataka” appears to have been applied to this work because it consists of 102 verses

“**Sarasigāmamūla mahāsāmiṇo bhāgineyyabhūtena gathārābhidhāna upatapassinā racitaṃ vuttamālā sandesa satakaṃ samattaṃ**” (Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, 2003: 125). This Sandesa was addressed to the deity Vibhīṣaṇa at Kelaniya, seeking divine protection for King Parākramabāhu VI. Mendis Rohanadhīra assumed that the work was composed between 1415 and

1467 CE, during the time of a ruler believed to have governed Dedigama contemporaneously with Parākramabāhu VI. He initially associates the poetry with this historical context, but later acknowledges that the available evidence is not sufficiently conclusive. Consequently, he advances the view that the work may instead belong to the period of King Parākramabāhu V (Rohanadhīra, 1970: 36). The messenger (dūta) is not explicitly identified in this Sandesa poem, a feature that may be regarded as a distinctive departure from the conventional structure of classical Sandesa literature. Beyond its primary communicative purpose, the concluding verses of the Sandesa indicate that the message is conveyed as an appeal to Vibhīṣaṇa of Kelaniya, seeking protection for the Buddhist dispensation, the kingdom, and the community of Saṅgha (Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, 2003: 124).

Unlike the tradition reflected in Sanskrit Sandesa literature, this poetry shows no significant dependence on Sanskrit Sandesa models. In the Vuttamālā Sandesa sataka has frequently used descriptions enriched with alliteration, compounds, similes, metaphors, and other poetic ornaments. Through these, both the embellishment of sound and the embellishment of meaning arise abundantly. This work is constantly illuminated by the influence of Sanskrit literature.

“Uttuṅgācarane pahāritaraṇe sambhāsure toraṇe;
khīrāponidhi jātapheṇa sadisappāsāda pāsādike,
yuddhabhīta vibhīsaṇvha surabhūpālassa mūlālaye;
kalyāṇagghika digghikehi lasite kalyāṇināme pure”

(Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, 2003: 109).

Describes King Parākramabāhu with great honour. The king, who was a source of prosperity for Sri Lanka, dwelling with reverence for the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, is portrayed as being surrounded by ministers who are compared to brilliant stars. The poet depicts the king as resplendent like the divine moon-king. With simple language and using similes and metaphors effectively, the poet creates vivid and admirable character descriptions, greatly enhancing the value of the work (*Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, 2003: 96*).

The Sandesa contains references to prominent monks of the time as well as to important monastic establishments. In particular, it offers credible information regarding the two principal monastic fraternities that existed in Sri Lanka during that era: the village-dwelling order (Grāhavāsī Nikāya) and the forest-dwelling order (Ārañṇavāsī Nikāya). Notable elders associated with this forest tradition include Vanaratana, Dhammakīrti, and Bhuvanekabāhu Mahā Therās, who are presented as leading figures among the forest-dwelling community (*Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, 2003: 46-52-55*).

These monks are described as being primarily engaged in the practice of insight meditation, maintaining a life detached from worldly and administrative affairs. Nevertheless, literary history indicates that, in subsequent periods, even forest-dwelling monks undertook the composition of texts centred on the qualities of the Buddha. The life of the forest monk was characterised by discipline, orderliness, and strict adherence to the discipline, which was regarded as a matter of paramount importance.

“Aparepi supesalā susikkhā;
munino āgamadhāraṇe sudakkhā,
satateva tapodhane gavesī;
vanavāsino vasantī yasmim” (*Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, 2003: 105*).

The Sandesa also provides important insights into the village-dwelling monks residing at the Dedigam hermitage. The Sandesa mentions the leading figures of this order, including Senapatimūla, Mahānethapāmula, and Sarogāmamūla Mahā Therās, who held prominent positions within the community. Village-dwelling monks maintained close ties with lay society, balancing their religious responsibilities with social engagement. A distinctive feature noted in the text is that these monks were actively involved not only in upholding the Dhamma but also in managing and participating in the life of the monastic complex. The hermitage served as a center for both students and scholars, providing an environment conducive to study, practice, and teaching.

“Tassa purassa dhajoviya niccam;

sissa subhāsita bhāratī raṅgo,

vissamaṇassa janassa nivāso;

assabhūmipado’pi virāje” (*Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka*, 2003: 98).

The text reveals that several white Buddha statues, which were objects of veneration, were installed in the city, attracting devotees from the local population. The Vuttamālā Sataka Sandesa serves as a crucial source for understanding the religious life of the population in Lanka, providing concise but vivid insights into devotional rituals and the broader spiritual culture of the period (Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, 2003: 114). The author’s efforts to depict these religious practices illustrate both the societal engagement with Buddhism and the significance of monastic leadership in maintaining the religious fabric of the community.

6.4 Siri Rāma Sandesa

The third work among the Pāli Sandesa compositions is the Siri Rāma Sandesa which appears to have been composed by the monk named Kuṇkunāve Sumaṅgala. Despite these challenges, the people maintained loyalty and devotion toward the King Sri Wickrama Rājasinghe (1798–1815). To manifest this loyalty and to invoke divine blessings for the king’s longevity, health, and prosperity, the Siri Rāma Sandesa was composed by Kuṇkunāve Thero, dedicated to Rāma, identified with God Viṣṇu, at the Haṅguranketa Devālaya. He is also referred to by the alternate name Maṅgala Devālayavāsī Sumaṅgala. The Sandesa was created at the request of the leaders of Rambukvelle Nāyaka Thero by Kuṇkunāve Sumaṅgala Thero

“Kuṅku maggāma saṅjāta - sumaṅgala jīnatrajo

akāsi pavaram etam - rāma sandesa muttamam.”

“Maṅgala devatāvāsa - sumaṅgala jīnatrajo

akāsi vimalam suddham - rāma sandesa muttamam”

(*Siri Rāma Sandesa* 2009: 71).

This Sandesa, delivered through a human messenger, consists of 150 stanzas (*Siri Rāma Sandesa* 2009: 02). The author, a learned monk well versed in Pāli literary composition, exhibits considerable proficiency in both linguistic expression and poetic technique. The poet makes use of a diverse range of metrical patterns, including Vasantatilakā, Saddūlavikkīḷita, Upendravajrā, Mālinī, and Vamsaṭṭha, among others. The Rāma Sandesa may be regarded as one of the more refined Sandesa compositions of the Kandyan period, particularly in light of its deliberate use of polished Pāli diction and established poetic conventions. Certain sections, especially the description of Senkaḍagala (Kandy), reveal a conscious effort toward aesthetic construction and literary elegance, even though the text at times displays syntactic and stylistic irregularities. A close examination of the two verses cited above reveals the deliberate employment of simile and metaphor, thereby demonstrating the literary craftsmanship of Kuṅkunāve Thero. In those verses, the king and his subjects are likened to divine beings, elevating their status through sacred imagery. In the second verse, the populace is compared to constellations, a figurative device that enhances the aesthetic texture of the composition. Such imagery reflects a refined poetic sensibility and underscores the sophistication of this Pāli literary work

“Dīpappadīpa siri Sīhala devaloke;
tatrābhijāta janatogha sudeva saṅgho,
orodha neka parivārita devakañṇā;
rājissaro suravaro satataṃ vihāti” (*Siri Rāma Sandesa* 2009: 39).

Kuṅkunāve Sumaṅgala Thero demonstrates a refined mastery of phonetic elegance and auditory aesthetics in this composition. His deliberate arrangement of syllables, cadence, and rhythmic patterns reveals a conscious effort to heighten the sonic quality of the verse. Notably, the Sandesa departs from conventional structural norms by omitting an explicit reference to a messenger (dūta).

“Parama rucira vaṇṇaṃ aṅga paccaṅga vaṇṇaṃ;
agaṇitagūṇa vaṇṇaṃ pubba rājunavaṇṇaṃ,
bhuvitata yasa vaṇṇaṃ sabba jantūna vaṇṇaṃ;
vidita nikhila vaṇṇaṃ dānasīlādi vaṇṇaṃ” (*Siri Rāma Sandesa* 2009: 43).

Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte is portrayed as a well-fortified and resource-rich urban center, encircled by formidable ramparts and refreshed by cool, flowing waters that contributed both to its aesthetic appeal and defensive strength. The royal palace was situated at the heart of the city, with the residences of high-ranking ministers located in proximity, indicating a carefully structured administrative layout. Even livestock were maintained within the urban boundaries, suggesting an organised and self-sustaining model of urban planning. Ornamental gateways fashioned from coconut timber appear to have been a distinctive architectural feature of the Kandyan period (*Siri Rāma Sandesa* 2009: 04). The region of Haṅguranketa, noted for its salt-producing areas, functioned as an active centre of trade and commercial exchange. The widespread observance of divine worship further reflects the religious commitment characteristic of the time. Taken as a whole, the *Siri Rāma Sandesa* presents a depiction of society as materially prosperous and socially harmonious. The city is represented as functioning effectively in both religious and economic spheres, thereby illustrating a stable and flourishing socio-cultural environment.

6.5 Garuḷa Sandesa

The Garuḷa Sandesa, composed in Pāli, is regarded as the final of Pāli Sandesa literature belonging to the Colombo period. The author is named Galvehera Amarañāna Thissa Thero.

“Satthāgamādinipuṇā varasisā saṅghā;
hesuṃ hi tassa bahavo iha suppatitā,
tesaṅca uttamamataroti pana uttamādi;
ñāṇābhidhānayatiso bhavate sudhīmā”
“Saṅghādhipassa pana tassa supesalassa;

dhamme ca sathavisaye katahatthañāṇo,
dosaññutaṃ upagato varasissako'maṃ;
saṃ gaṇṭhayiṃ amarañāṇasamavhaathero” (*Garuḷa Sandesaya*, 1959: IV).

Unlike the previously discussed Sandesa poetries, this work is distinctive in that it derives its title from the name of the messenger (dūta) itself. In this Sandesa, the Hāraka is the Garuḷa bird. The Garuḷa is traditionally recognised as the vehicle of the deity Viṣṇu.

“Tava patigaṇapanthi pāyaso vaṇṇayitvā;
viracitasubhabandho vattathe bhūpatīto,
natharī'va guṇamālā saṅkucitvā sakhā! te
vihitaputhulagatho hoti santappasattho” (*Garuḷa Sandesaya*, 1959: 05).

Before the composition of this Sandesa, a text entitled Garuḍa Purāṇa had already been composed, praising the virtues and qualities of the Garuḷa. **“niṭṭhito garuḷa sandeso”** The name of the Garuḷa Sandesa is explicitly identifiable within the Pāli word groups used in the Poetry (*Garuḷa Sandesaya*, 1959: 34-35). The Sandesa narrates the journey of the Garuḷa across significant locations, beginning from the Matara region, passing through the Galle road, Ratmalana, and Dehiwala, and finally reaching Colombo and Kelaniya Raja Mahā Vihāra. Along this journey, the Garuḷa visits places associated with the author's friends and well-wishers, ultimately arriving at the deity of Viṣṇu in Kelaniya after several days of travel. The narrative thus combines religious reverence, geographical references, and social connections, reflecting both the literary skill of the author and the cultural context of the period. It was composed requesting protection from the Vibhūṣaṇa Deva for the then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, his family, the ministerial council, and the people of the country (*Garuḷa Sandesaya*, 1959: 62).

This work contains 234 charming Pāli verses, composed in various poetic metres. Although poetic in style, it is historically significant. Compared to previous Sandesa kāvya, it is notable for describing persons, places, and infrastructure such as airstrips and the homes of well-wishers. It also contains lengthy descriptions of the rulers, cities, villages, and residents, offering a

vivid portrayal of the social conditions, ministers, and senior monks of the period (*Garuḷa Sandesaya*, 1959: 32). It is well-known among the gods that the one who possesses supreme power is a great Viṣṇu deity, who always protects the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha in Sri Lanka. The royal bird (messenger), endowed with your own kinsmen, live long while eliminating all obstacles and performing excellent service on behalf of the gods.

“Devānāṃ balavikkamo’ti vidito yo sammade’vabbhuvī;
laṅkāyaṃ munisāsanaṃ varaharī devo sadā pālaye,
tassā’pi vibhagādhipo hitaratho tvaṃ gāmiṇisevako ;
jivāhi sucīraṃ nijehī sahito sabbi’ tiyo hāpayiṃ” (*Garuḷa Sandesaya*, 1959: III).

Special attention is drawn to the composition style. Venerable Amarañña Tissa Thera, making use of homage verses, first performs the threefold jewel homage and then presents the messenger’s honour. The next focus of the text is to describe the messenger’s journey. The messenger is instructed to first pay homage to the threefold Bodhi of the author’s own monastery. From the 18th verse, the messenger is told that the suitable time to begin the journey has arrived. This period is considered highly favorable for the journey, and the messenger is advised to carefully study the travel route before departure.

“Itopaṭṭhāya sampatti – yātrāmaggapavattiyo
pavakkhāmi yathābuddhi - sunohi susamāhito”

(*Garuḷa Sandesaya*, 1959: 06).

The *Garuḷa Sandesa* describes the beautifully adorned seashore and river banks where devotees perform their worship with devotion. It emphasises the auspicious and sacred sites, using an elegant narrative to depict the journey and the route of the messenger.

“Sammāmukho uttamabodhirukkho;
dvīnaṃ pathānaṃhi bhavyeṃ majje,
dighā’dvanī mitta! agamma ramme;
pācīdisaṃ vatume payāhi” (*Garuḷa Sandesaya*, 1959: 30).

The Garuḷa Sandesa provides information on numerous religious centres as well as educational institutions that existed during the contemporary period. These institutions are described respectfully and without discrimination among Sinhala Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim communities.

“Tvayi gacchativehāse - yonakānaṃ manoramam,
allādevālayaṇca’pi - samolokaya pītiyā” (*Garuḷa Sandesaya*, 1959: 10).

In this regard, the Sandesa serves as an important source for understanding the religious landscape of the time, presenting information free from sectarian or communal bias.

The Garuḷa Sandesa may be regarded as a valuable documentary source for the study of religious history and interreligious coexistence in that era. The Sinhala Sandesa composers, following the classical Sanskrit Sandesa tradition, often included exaggerated descriptions of landscapes, rivers, and natural surroundings. Similarly, in this modern-era Garuḷa Sandesa, the narrative has been carefully ornamented, combining meaningful content, phonetic beauty, similes, metaphors, and alliteration, making the work aesthetic and engaging. Due to these qualities, the 20th-century Garuḷa Sandesa is regarded as an outstanding example of Sandesa poetry in the Sinhala-Pāli literary tradition. The focus was placed on the rich tradition of Pāli Sandesa literature in Sri Lanka, tracing its origin, development, and enduring influence on Sinhala literary culture. The study examined several prominent Pāli Sandesa poetries in detail.

7. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Pāli Sandesa literature is not merely a literary relic of the past but a living tradition that has shaped and continues to influence Sinhala literary, religious, and cultural life. Through meticulous attention to poetic form, ethical content, and local contextualization, Sri Lankan monks and scholars have successfully preserved and enriched this literary heritage.

The continued study and critical analysis of these texts are essential not only for understanding the historical development of Buddhist literature in Sri Lanka but also for appreciating the creative ingenuity and spiritual vision that underpin this unique literary tradition.

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