

The force behind the translation of pali Milindapanho into Sinhala

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“Milindapanho” is a remarkable Pali text which depicts the religious discourse between the Greco – Indian king Minander (Milindu) who ruled the north western region of India in the 2nd century B.C. and Arhath Nagasena thero. This book was translated into Sinhala as “Sri Saddharmadasa” by Heenatikumbure Sumangala thero, a disciple who represent the school of the venerable Veliwita Saranankara who was invited for this literary task by the Kandyan king Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe (1747 – 1781 A.D.). Sinhala literature is enriched with many scholarly works from Anuradhapura to mediaval period which were based on Pali and Sanskrit sources and they can be interpreted as translations and adaptations of the original source. Yet, a scholarly work which is created on the foundation of logic was not apparent until the emergence of Milinda Prashnaya in the Kandyan era. This Pali text which was in usage from Anuradhapura period was not translated during the literary period of Kurunegala. Kurunegala is generally accepted as the period which the culmination of translation work occurred. But Pali Milindapanho was not translated into Sinhala during that era which gives prominence to translator works. It was translated during the Kandyan period, centuries later and there should be a special reason or agent behind this phenomenon. Kandyan era portrays the deterioration of economic, political and cultural spheres. Scholars believe Milindapanho was introduced into Sinhala literary field as a result of the challenge of Christianity towards Buddhism. This research work of ours which was done by using historical and literary sources of the Kandyan period reveals the above mentioned intention was not the only cause for this translation. One intention was to provide a religious text which could be prescribed to contemporary students who lived in a period which marked the deterioration of “Dharma” and “Vinaya”. The other intention was to attract the attention of ruling king of that period, Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe, who was a descendant of the Nayakkar clan. It was feared that the king would turned in to a heretic under the influence of superstitious belief system of the era. Accordingly Sinhala Milinda Prashnaya was a scholarly religious work which was produced to fulfill the needs of Kandyan era.

Key words: Milindapanho, Literature, Minander, Nagasena

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