

A Socio-Anthropological Study of
the Kāvyaśekhara Mahā Kāvya of Śri Rāhula Sangharāja with
Special Reference to its Moral & Legal Philosophy

Dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirement of the
Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist studies of the
University of Kelaniya for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

March 2005

By

A.M.K. Attanayake

B.A Sri Lanka

M.A. (Hons.) Sri Lanka

M.Phil Sri Lanka

Supervisors

Professor Chandrasiri Palliyaguru

Professor Asanga Tilakaratne

Abstract

The present research work is a comprehensive study of the Kāvyaśekhara of Totagamuve Śri Rāhula, one of the most erudite of all ancient Sri Lanka monks. In making this study we have made a comprehensive study of the Jataka literature highlighting its moral, social and legal significance. The emphasis of the study is not to study the Kāvya as a piece of literary creation but as a source for study human society, culture, morals and law prevailed in ancient India and Sri Lanka in particular in other South and South East Asian countries that under the influence of these two cultures, namely, Indian and Buddhist cultures.

The Jātaka stories are basically meant to offer practical and moral advice to their hearers or readers. Although they are portrayed as the past lives of the Buddha we may imagine that many of these stories belong to the larger Indian tradition and not exclusive to Buddhism. The Buddhist tradition has adapted these stories to suit its own religious needs. The real significance of most of these stories is their social significance highlighted by the worldly wisdom advocated in them.

The Sattu Bhasta Jātaka, the source of the Kāvyaśekhara, is said to be an example of the perfection of wisdom (*panna-paramita*) of the future Buddha. We, however, need to keep in mind that *panna* or wisdom spoken here is not wisdom that occurs as the third and ultimate stage in the path of purification or in the threefold discipline (*tisso sikkha*). Wisdom in the Noble Path is basically to develop perception of reality as impermanent (*anicca*), sorrowful (*dukkha*) and no-soul (*anatta*). The wisdom in this context is only worldly knowledge or smartness which proves to be helpful in the day-to-day existence of the society. The great poet, Totagamuve Sri Rahula, makes use of this story not only to produce a literary

masterpiece but also an excellent study of society, law and religion in ancient India and Sri Lanka.

In the introductory chapter of this thesis we have dealt with the matters pertaining to the study of the poem, the poetry and the foundational Jātaka story. In the subsequent chapters we have discussed with sufficient details the moral and legal system along with its traditional application. The Buddhist Vinaya basically covers the rules and regulations pertaining to the life of the Buddhist monks and nuns. In the Buddhist monastic tradition, although there are punishments, they are characterized by humaneness and the need to reform the people involved. It is important for us to note that Buddhism does not talk about punishment in this strict disciplinary sense with regard to ordinary lay society. The reason is that the Buddhist Vinaya is applicable only to the monastic community, namely, monks and nuns. There is a special society designed by the Buddha in order to accommodate those men and women who wished to work for their own liberation and the liberation of others. It is natural that they had to live a different type of life for a different purpose. The Vinaya is meant specifically for them and any violation of it has to be dealt within the tradition. The lay society, however, did not strictly come under this although lay men and woman – upasaka and upasika- were an essential aspect of the 'four congregations' (*catu parisa*). The lay society came under the jurisdiction of the ruler or the king. That society was expected to follow the law imposed by the state. As a result, Unlike in the monastic organization, we do not find a 'code of law' for the lay people in Buddhism. What comes closest to what can be called 'a code of discipline for lay people' (*gihi vinyaya*) is the Sigalovada sutta of the Dighanikāya and it has been described in the subsequent commentarial tradition as 'gihi vinyaya'. But this does not amount to a full-fledged disciplinary system.

The need of a worldly system of discipline guided by worldly wisdom was fulfilled by Jataka literature. The Sattu Bhasta Jātaka is a good example for this genre of stories. Here the Buddha is depicted as rich in worldly knowledge and using that knowledge for the welfare of others. The Kāvya that has been created based on this story is a mine of information on various aspects of human society. The present study is an attempt to highlight some aspects of this wealth of information for the benefit of the modern society.

BB	Buddha Jayanti Ganta Māla
BPS	Buddhist Publication Society
Chap	Chapter
CHC	Ceylon History & Culture
DN	Digha Nikāya
Dhp	Dhammapadam
Ed	Edition / Edited
Gr	Greek
GV	Guttala Kavya
HK	History of Sākyā Kārikā
HL	History of Sinhalese Literature
Im	Previous mentioned book
J	Jātaka
J.V.	Jātaka Vibhanga
K	Khuddaka Nikāya
KV	Kavyasūtra
Lat	Latin
M	Māyā Upanishad
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
MWC	Mahā Yuga Chronicle
Pr	Previous mentioned book or books
PTS	Pali Text Society
R	Rigveda
S.B.E.	Sinhala Buddhist Encyclopedia
SED	Sinhala English Dictionary
SK	Sākyā Kārikā