LANDMARKS OF SINHALESE LITERATURE

BY

MARTIN WICKRAMASINGHE

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is a pleasure to have been able to prepare the second edition of this book after the lapse of nearly fifteen years. In the meantime, of course, the original work has gone into a large number of editions, and still continues to be the most daring and thought-provoking estimate of classical Sinhalese literature that has emanated from the hand of any critic. Most of the critical work subsequently written has been merely a re-hash of the views expressed by Wickramasinghe. By and large, his estimate of the classics has stood the test of time and has come to be generally accepted by the critical reader. After pondering these many years, one may feel that the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, for example, if judged within the tradition that it was written in, deserves more praise than Wickramasinghe is prepared to bestow on it, or that a reader's individual preference might incline him to regard Vidyācakravartī as a greater story-teller than Guruḷugōmī. However this may be, it has to be admitted that Wickramasinghe has, with remarkable insight and literary acumen, brought to the notice of the reader of the present day, the hidden *rasa* of many a classical work, and thus made the study of the classics a delight. Reading the classics is no more what it was earlier, a mere routine of paraphrasing, analysing the etymology of words, or marvelling at the grammatical virtuosity of the writer.

It will be obvious to the reader that this is not a mere history of classical Sinhalese literature. On the history of Sinhalese literature, there are other works,

both in Sinhalese as well as in English, which are scholarly and useful in their field. Wickramasinghe deals mainly with the landmarks in Sinhalese literature, and discusses their value and interest for the reader of today. He places them against the Buddhist cultural background in which they came to be written, and also against the wider background of the great Sanskrit classics which were the constant inspiration for our writers. Most important of all is that he discusses the conflict between Buddhist culture and the Brahmin culture of India, and the manner in which this conflict is reflected in the work of our writers. It is natural that he should openly express his preference for the Buddhist culture of this country, although one may not always agree with him regarding the value of this culture as a source of inspiration for the creation of great art, when compared with the "Brahmin" culture which he severely criticises. This translation should, therefore, be of interest even to readers who have no access to the originals here examined, partly because of the wider implications of the author's approach, and partly because his point of view provides, in any case, a stimulating experience to any lover of literature.

I must record here my thanks to the following for the help they gave me in the revision of this book and the preparation of an index: Miss Claudette Jayawardena, Mr. Tissa Kariyawasam, Miss Chandra Seneviratna, and Mrs. Hemamali Gunasinghe.

Ediriweera R. Sarachchandra

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I

INTRODUCTION

THE Sinhalese people claim descent from a branch of Āryans who came to this island from some part of India. There is evidence to show that before the arrival of these Āryans there were living in Ceylon a race of primitive people who have left traces of their civilisation in the form of flint weapons, dolmens and the cave paintings at Tantirimalaya. Since the polish and smoothness of these flint weapons do not show any noticeable technical advance throughout the years, it would appear that these pre-Āryan inhabitants remained for a long period of time at a very primitive level of culture. The paintings at Tantirimalaya are very probably the work of those tribes to whom the weapons belonged, though the dolmens may not necessarily be theirs. The Väddās of today are the survivors of one of the primitive races that inhabited this island before the Āryan colonisation, and we have no evidence of any other tribes living here when the Āryans first arrived. There is no evidence for the contention that the Yakṣas, Rākṣasas and Nāgas that the *Mahāvaṃsa* speaks of were primitive races who lived side by side with the Väddās. Dr. Paranavitana too, rejects this view and suggests that these Yakṣas, Rākṣasas and Nāgas were the spirits and gods of the primitive religion. The author of the *Mahāvaṃsa* referred to them as spiritual beings.

Although there is every likelihood that people from South India visited this island before the arrival of the Āryans, they have left no traces of their presence here. The Dravidian civilisation of South India was earlier than that of the Āryans, but the literature of the Dravidian languages developed only after contact with the Āryan culture. Even if a Dravidian race inhabited this island before the advent of the Āryans, therefore, it is improbable that they influenced the growth of Sinhalese literature and the arts. In fact, prior to the arrival of Buddhism in the island there is no evidence of the influence of a more highly developed culture on the culture of the country.

The introduction of Buddhism to Ceylon laid the foundation for the growth of a higher and an independent culture in the Island. Sinhalese civilisation really began in the time of Paṇḍukābhaya, but it must be borne in mind that it was the Buddhist monks who taught the people even the art of writing. Perhaps those who are inclined to accept the *Mahāvaṃsa* as undiluted history might find evidence there to doubt this statement. The *Mahāvaṃsa* says that there was communication between the kings of this country and India even before the arrival of Buddhist missionaries, and that King Paṇḍukābhaya learned the Vedas from Brahmins. But Mahānāma wrote in the sixth century, and though it might be said that he was faithful to the tradition of his time, it is by no means certain that a tradition existing in the sixth century could be relied upon for events that took place almost a thousand years before. Nor is it likely that Mahānāma subjected the traditional accounts of his time to any critical analysis. Even

if we were to believe that some form of writing was known to the inhabitants of this island before the arrival of Buddhism, we have no reason to conclude that the script then known was sufficiently developed to be suitable for literature. Such an elementary system of writing, if it did exist, was very likely superseded by the more developed system introduced by Buddhist monks.

The legend of the conquest of this island by Vijaya is undoubtedly much older than its extant form as recorded by Mahānāma, and it is most likely that it had already undergone several changes. But even in the form in which it has come down to us in the *Mahāvaṃsa* it is sufficiently suggestive of the fact that the primitive inhabitants of this country were not acquainted with the arts of agriculture. When Vijaya pointed to his hungry companions and asked Kuveṇi for food, she is said to have shown him large quantities of grain which were left in the ships of merchants she had devoured. If we were to interpret this statement we cannot take it to mean anything but that Kuveṇi and her subjects, or the primitive people who were responsible for inventing the legend, lived on the flesh of wild animals and not on any produce of agriculture. The grain they had obtained was obviously not the result of their own agricultural labours. A statement of such a nature as that made by Kuveṇi to Vijaya would be natural only to a people whose normal occupation was not agriculture. And we know that agriculture was not known to the Väddās of Ceylon till a very recent day. It is difficult to believe, at the same time, that the art of spinning was known to a non-agricultural people. It is not

impossible, therefore, that the incident of Kuveṇi sitting at her spinning wheel was one of those features added to the original legend in the course of its development.

There is no record of the language of the early inhabitants of Ceylon, but the language of the first Āryan colonisers has been happily preserved for us in the rock inscriptions. It is in comparatively recent times that these inscriptions were deciphered and philologists given a chance of studying the beginnings of the Sinhalese language. The results of the researches of scholars up to today on the history of the Sinhalese language are embodied in the introduction to the *Dictionary of the Sinhalese Language*, a monumental compilation begun under the editorship of Professor Wilhelm Geiger, Sir D. B. Jayatilaka and Mr. Julius de Lanerolle, and continued by the University of Ceylon. What follows is a summary of the views of these scholars.

Sinhalese is derived from a Middle Indian Prākrit, although it has later been considerably influenced by Tamil. The question as to whether this Prākrit was a Western one or an Eastern, cannot yet be decided in the present state of our knowledge. An examination of the legends of the *Mahāvaṃsa* has led certain scholars to suggest that there were two streams of immigration both from the West as well as the East of India, and linguistic evidence seems to support this view. The earliest specimens of the Sinhalese language contain characteristics of both Eastern and Western Prākrits.

Sinhalese Prākrit is the name given by Geiger to the language of the earliest inscriptions of Ceylon, of which there are two varieties, the rock inscriptions and the cave inscriptions. During the early days of the establishment of Buddhism in Ceylon the monks lived in caves, and these caves were inscribed with the names of their donors. The rock inscriptions are generally those made at the instance of some king or his minister in commemoration of some important events during his reign. All these inscriptions belong to a period which dates after the arrival of Buddhism to Ceylon.

The language of the earliest cave inscriptions bears a close similarity to the Māgadhī Prākrit of the Asokan inscriptions. This is to be explained by the fact that the original Sinhalese language was shaped mainly by the monks who brought Buddhism to Ceylon. Geiger divides Sinhalese into four stages according to its historical development : (1) Sinhalese Prākrit; (2) Proto-Sinhalese; (3) Mediaeval Sinhalese ; (4) Modern Sinhalese. To the first belongs the language of the cave inscriptions and the earliest rock inscriptions. Proto-Sinhalese is the language in the process of transition between Sinhalese Prākrit and the Sinhalese of a later period which has been named Mediaeval Sinhalese. During this period, roughly between the fifth and eighth centuries, the language underwent its most characteristic changes, both phonological and morphological, and developed from the Prākritic stage to that of a modern Indian idiom. The language begins a new phase of development from about the eighth century, and is so different from the language of the earlier period that it is

styled by a new name and is called Mediaeval Sinhalese. About the middle of the thirteenth century the *Sidat Saňgarā* was written and with it the literary language became standardised. Hence the language of the period following this grammar has been called Modern Sinhalese.

It should be noted, however, that Dr. S. Paranavitana, one-time Archaeological Commissioner, and now Professor of Archaeology, University of Ceylon, who spent practically his entire life editing and deciphering Sinhalese inscriptions does not accept this classification of Geiger and the other editors of the Sinhalese Dictionary. He contends that the commentaries to the *Tripiṭaka* were written during the time of Mahinda in the Sinhalese language and not in a hypothetical Sinhalese Prakrit, and that the borrowing of Sanskrit words in later times was due, not to the paucity of the vocabulary of Mahinda's language, but to the influence of the Sanskrit *Kāvya* on our writers.

Whatever language was employed during the time of Mahinda for purposes of commentarial literature, it cannot be denied that it was this same language that developed into the Sinhalese of the thirteenth century. Dr. Paranavitana appears to reject the obvious conclusion that in comparison with the later language, the earlier language must have been in an undeveloped state. The vehicle of expression coined in Mahinda's time was, naturally, unfit for expressing the thoughts and sentiments of a later age, and it

appears quite consistent with the history of the growth of languages to regard the earlier language as that from which the later language evolved.

As an example of Sinhalese Prākrit may be quoted the following line from an inscription :

taladara nagaha puta devaha leṇe
*agata anagata catudiśa śagaśa**

This language, according to the editors of the Sinhalese Etymological Dictionary, has all the characteristics of the Middle Indian Prākrits. The intervocalic gutturals and dentals are retained as in Pāli, and not dropped as happens sometimes in the literary Prākrits and always in Modern Sinhalese.

* The Cave of Deva, son of Taladara Naga presented to the monks of all the four quarters, past and present.

II

THE CULTURE OF THE ANURĀDHAPURA PERIOD

IT is worth bearing in mind, in our study of the culture of the Sinhalese, that life in ancient times centred round the pursuit of agriculture, and that the Sinhalese depended, for their agricultural purposes, on the tank. Hence it is that the construction of tanks is bound up with the growth of Sinhalese civilisation from its early beginnings. One cannot, therefore, ignore the part the tanks have played in originating the culture of the Sinhalese and in moulding its later character. For this culture grew through the years in the valleys that were studded with the tanks built by the kings of old.

The ancient Sinhalese, naturally, spent most of their time and their energies in building and maintaining these tanks which were the mainstay of their civilisation. Invaders from the neighbouring continent often destroyed their embankments, with the result that they had to be kept in constant repair. It is said that the Dutch Governor, Van Imhoff, was informed by the people living in the precincts of Yōdha Väva, that five hundred men would have to work for five months in order to repair the bund of this tank. In spite of the energy spent in the construction and maintenance of these tanks, the *Mahāvaṃsa* speaks of a time when, owing to drought, the people had to eke out a bare existence on four handfuls of rice each.

Among the things that bear witness to the unique skill and culture of the Sinhalese, pride of place must go to the tank. Archaeologists believe that the finest flowering of Sinhalese culture took place between the third and the eighth centuries of our era. It is the view of A. M. Hocart that the best irrigational works, too, belong to this period.

The culture of the time of Paṇḍukābhaya was not entirely free from elements of barbarism. Certain facts mentioned in the *Mahāvaṃsa* give rise to the conjecture that one major aspect of the religion of that time consisted of the worship of the Mother Goddess. It was only in the reign of Paṇḍukābhaya, as a matter of fact, that the quarrels among petty chieftains of various clans for the sovereignty of the Island, were finally settled. Paṇḍukābhaya, therefore, ushered in an era of peace, accompanied, no doubt, by agricultural prosperity. And at a time when agriculture was flourishing, it is not at all unlikely that there did spring up a cult of the Mother Goddess. From a statement made by Huien Tsang, too, it is evident that in the past a cult associated with licentious practices was prevalent in Ceylon. He says :

" The kingdom of Siṃhala formerly was addicted to immoral religious worship, but after the first hundred years following Buddha's death the younger brother of Asokarāja, Mahendra by name, giving up worldly desires, sought with ardour the fruits of Arahatship. He.....having the power of instant locomotion came to this country. He spread the knowledge of the True Law and widely diffused the bequeathed doctrine."

There is evidence, too, in the *Mahāvaṃsa*, for believing that along with the worship of the Mother Goddess the worship of ancestral spirits was prevalent among the Kṣatriyas of pre-Buddhist Ceylon. The immediate result of the sudden impact of a primitive culture with a more highly developed one, is, usually, that the more primitive culture absorbs elements of the higher culture. When the two cultures are of two entirely different patterns, it often happens that both cultures are mutually influenced. It is most probably in the time of Paṇḍukābhaya that either the Sinhalese or a powerful clan from among them gained sovereignty among the others and finally established their culture here.

The fact that the arrival of Buddhism to Ceylon did not cause much religious opposition or internal strife may be explained by the hypothesis that Brahminism and Jainism were already prevalent here. The cave inscriptions that date back to the very earliest times show that Mahānāma was by no means exaggerating when he states that the people of this country embraced the Buddhist faith with great fervour. Men and women vied with one another in dedicating caves to the Bhikkhus and in supplying their material needs in other ways.

Although there are certain statements in the *Mahāvaṃsa* from which we might infer that Hinduism and Jainism existed in Ceylon prior to the arrival of Buddhism, it is not likely that these two faiths were widely prevalent. The people of Ceylon, then as now, were greatly attached to the monks and admired them for their life of self-negation. Our sculpture

and our literature, as well as the *Mahāvaṃsa*, bear witness to this tender devotion of the people to a life of detachment from worldly pleasures and aspirations.

The fact that great works of sculpture came into existence long before literary works, disposes of the view that Buddhism did not encourage the arts. The remains of stone carvings now extant at Anurādhapura go to show not only the degree of skill that the Sinhalese attained in the fine arts, but also their exquisite taste. It is not likely that a people who showed such good taste in the medium of the plastic arts were unable to express themselves in the medium of literature. Dr. Paranavitana is of opinion that the Anurādhapura period must have been the age, not only of art and sculpture, but of the best literary works as well. If this be the case, how can we explain the absence of anything written before the time of the *Muvadevdāvata*, *Sasadāvata* and *Kavsiḷumiṇa*? In historical records there is mention of certain poetical works said to have been composed before the time of the earliest extant works. The *Mahāvaṃsa* states that about the sixth century, at the time of Agra Bodhi, "poets composed in the Sinhalese language poetical works in varied styles." The *Nikāya Saṅgraha* makes mention of Sakdāmala, Asakdāmala, Dāmi, Bābiri, Daḷa Biṣō, Anurut Kumaru, Sūrya Bāhu and Kasupkoṭa Āpā as poets who lived at that time. Even before this, in the time of King Buddhadāsa, certain books of the Pali canon were translated into Sinhalese. At the time of the composition of the *Sidat Saṅgarā*, there was a poem known as the *Mayūra Sandeśa*, and another by the

name of *Asakdā Kava*. How were these works lost to us ? Was it because of foreign invasions ? Or is it because the language underwent considerable changes in the period between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries ? Or may we hazard the conjecture that these were written by Mahāyānists and were consequently neglected by the Mahāvihārins who emerged triumphant from their struggle for supremacy ?

The suggestion that these earlier literary works were lost as the result of changes in the language, becomes plausible in the light of what the editors of the Sinhalese Etymological Dictionary have to say regarding the state of the Sinhalese language between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries :

" The difference between the last inscriptions of the Proto-Sinhalese period and those of the mediaeval period is indeed surprising. We must assume that the spoken language had developed much quicker and was much more advanced than that of the inscriptions. But at length the difference became so great that the archaic language was almost unintelligible to an ordinary private citizen. Therefore the kings and officials were compelled to give it up entirely and to use the language of their time in inscriptions and other documents. Thus we understand the seeming gap between the two periods of the language."

Dr. Paranavitana objects to this view. There is no evidence, according to him, for believing that there ever took place changes so great as to render unintelligible in the thirteenth century a poem composed in

the sixth. The language of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* is not vastly different from the language of the earlier verses on the walls of Sīgiriya, which belong to the eighth century. Dr. Paranavitana therefore believes that the earlier works were lost to us as a result of foreign invasions.

We do not know whether the poems supposed to have been written in the time of King Agra Bodhi were imitative of Sanskrit models composed according to the rules of *alaṅkāra*, or whether they were the works of poets who tried to create a genuine native tradition. It is noteworthy that among the verses written in the eighth century on the Sigiriya walls there are spontaneous utterances of poets who were in no way slaves to *alaṅkāra śāstra* or Sanskrit poetry :

Nil kaṭroḷ malekä ävuṇu vāṭkoḷa mala seyi
Sändägä sihi venneyi mahanelvanak hayi ranvanhun.

"Like a *vāṭakoḷu* flower entangled in a blue *kaṭaroḷu* flower, the golden-coloured one who stood together with the lily-coloured one, will be remembered at the advent of evening."

Regarding these and other similar verses on the Sīgiriya walls Dr. Paranavitana says :

"The writers of these verses usually describe things from their own observation and according to their own feelings. They do not seem to pause in order to consider whether any simile or metaphor they wanted to employ had been sanctioned by

theorists. They do not, in their descriptions, hesitate to compare things with the natural features of the country-side with which they were familiar, provided such comparison is effective ..... The simile used to illustrate a fair maiden standing by the side of a dark beauty is very apt and the image produced in the mind of one who has seen these two flowers on hearing or reading this verse ought to be very vivid, though the *vāṭa-koḷu* flower may not have had the honour of being noticed by the Sanskrit poet."

Although these early verses on the walls of Sigiriya were written by poets who were neither slaves to *alaṅkāra* nor blind imitators of Sanskrit models, it is unfortunate that the poems that have actually come down to us as literary works are the product of those who were not only unduly influenced by *alaṅkāra śāstra* but were bound by the set of stereotyped rules laid down by theorists in later times. The influence of these *alaṅkāra* rules and of Sanskrit Kāvyas composed by learned court poets in accordance with them, could be seen both in poems such as *Muva-devdāvata* and *Sasadāvata*, written after the twelfth century, as well as in the rock inscriptions belonging to the eleventh century. As evidence of this influence it may be well to quote two passages from the inscriptions themselves. The following is the introductory sentence of an inscription belonging to the end of the tenth century :

"*Taraṅga-väḷä raḷi ot maha-muhund me nil-diyul han numba-gaṅga me daḷa-leḷa-mut-harin hobnā Hat Udāgiri kuḷu me miṇi-koḍulu palan Dambadiv-poḷov-ag-*

mehesna palan miṇi-subuḷuvak bandu nan-siri-lakaḷa Siri Lakdivhi Hirgot-kulen baṭ Paḍu-Abā narnindu paraparen ā Udā Mahayāhu urehidā evhu me kulen samadā Dev-Gon-rājna kus-hi upan sāha vikmayen ek pāhāra Ruhuṇu Malamaḍulu tumā visi kaḷa e dana-viyehi Mahaveher-nakā uvanisā pihiṭi Kapugam-piri-veṇaṭ.....vadāḷamha."

"The island of Siri Lak, adorned with varied splendour, is comparable to a jewelled wreath worn by the Chief Queen, the land of Daṁbadiv, the blue robe worn by whom is the great ocean containing rows of billows which are like folds; who is resplendent with the celestial river oscillating on the braided hair as if it were a string of pearls and the jewel ear-rings worn by whom are the Eastern and Western mountain peaks. Enacted in order to make the four requisites easy for Kapugam Piriveṇa situated in the vicinity of the monastery of Mahaveher in the province of Rohaṇa by Lamāṇi Mahind who is the son of Udā Mahayā descended from the family of the Solar race in the island of Ceylon; who was born in the womb of Princess Dev Gon of equal birth unto that; and who by his daring prowess subjugated in one stroke the provinces of Ruhuṇu and Mala."

Dr. Paranavitana who edits this inscription makes the following remarks regarding it :

"The language of the record particularly in the introductory part, is highly ornate in style and abounds with metaphor within metaphor which can hardly be rendered into English literally. The

syntax is very much involved, and the arrangement of the various clauses in the two long sentences .....is rather clumsy."

The style of this inscription appears to have been influenced more by the later rules of *alaṅkāra* than by the earlier Sanskrit Kāvya itself.

In the inscriptions belonging to an earlier period, we do not find such strings of epithets attached to the names of kings. We find only such adjectives as *siddha, śrī, maharaja,* or *parumuka.* Even in the Buddhanne Hela rock inscription assigned to the early part of the tenth century we find only the expression *Abhā Salamevan Mapurmukā.* The hackneyed epithets that were tacked on to the names of kings in practically all the inscriptions of the eleventh century are evidence of the spread of the Sanskrit Kāvya among the monks and other literati of the time. The appearance of imitations of Sanskrit models in the following century is further confirmation of this hypothesis. The statement in the *Dam̃badeṇi Katikāvata,* therefore, to the effect that monks should not learn or teach such low arts as Kāvyālaṅkāra, may be due to the fact that a knowledge of *alaṅkāra* (and a misuse of this knowledge) was fast spreading among them.

The following translation of a passage from a rock inscription of the eleventh century would help us further to appreciate the extent to which the poetry of the twelfth century was, in its style and treatment influenced by Sanskrit *alaṅkāra :*

"Hail ! The great King Siri Saṅgabō Abā was born unto the great Siri Saṅgabō Abā the Kṣatriya lord descended from the royal line of Okkāka dynasty, which abounds in a multitude of boundless and benignant virtues, and which has (thereby) caused other Kṣatriya dynasties of the whole of Daṁbadiva to render homage, (he was born) in the womb of the annointed Queen Dev Gon of equal birth and descent. After enjoying the dignities of Governor and Chief Governor, he in due course became King and was annointed on his head, resplendent with bejewelled crown, with the unction of world supremacy. With his glory he illuminated Lankā with the prowess of victorious lords, displayed in the precincts of the palace constantly filled with the wonderful presents offered by the kings of various lands, he brought glory upon prosperous Lankā. With the rise of his majestic power, he drove away from Lankā the Dravidian foe, just as the rising sun dispels darkness from the sky and sheds lustre upon the world. In gentleness he was like the moon, in depth the ocean, in firmness Mount Meru, in wealth the Lord of Riches ....."

There is much in this inflated description reminiscent of the stock descriptions of kings common in works composed between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.

III

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

ALTHOUGH literature and the arts portray the social conditions of their age, it seems difficult to say this of a good part of the literature of Ceylon. For it must be admitted that the major portion of the poetical works that have come down to us seem to be strangely divorced from the life of their time.

The main fount of inspiration of the earlier writers seems to have been the later Sanskrit *alaṅkāra* and, of course, the Sanskrit poetry that was composed under its decadent influence. Poems like the *Muvadevdāvata* and *Sasadāvata* reflect the style of Māgha and his school. These poems show few traces of the influence of the society of their time. The subject matter of both these poems is drawn from two Buddhist stories which deal with the vanity of earthly existence and the futility of indulgence in the pleasures of the senses. But the Sinhalese poets who slavishly imitated their Sanskrit models spoilt these stories by introducing into them erotic descriptions not in keeping with the religious sentiments of the stories themselves. It cannot be stated in defence of these writers that they were following the literary tradition of their time. As Dr. Paranavitana points out, the poetry of this period must be regarded as products of an age which marked the beginning of the decadence of Sinhalese culture.

Guruḷugōmī was no slave to Sanskrit literary traditions. It is true that the prose work *Amāvatura* does not depict social conditions in the Ceylon of his time. But it must be admitted that he does reflect what may be called its psychological and intellectual environment. Buddhism did change the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of the people. And this change is certainly reflected in the *Amāvatura* of Guruḷugōmī. But in no wise could it be maintained that a work like the *Muvadevdāvata* reflects a society that existed at the time of its composition. Even the works of poets like Māgha do not depict a society that was current in their time. They rather reflect a sort of idealised society that was really created by writers of this school of artificial poetry. The *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kālidāsa, on the other hand, gives us a picture of the entire environment of the India of his time. The *Raghuvaṃśa* mirrors not only the grandeur of the Brahmin civilisation of India, but also some of its inherent weaknesses.

Although Kālidāsa did not go against the literary tradition of his time, he was certainly no slave to it. Kālidāsa was greatly influenced by Vālmīki. And the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki cannot certainly be classed with the gongorisms of Māgha.

Kālidāsa protests against the conservatism of the critics who praise the old poems on grounds of conventional merit. "A thing does not become good by virtue of its being old ; nor can you find fault with a poem because it is new. While the wise will praise originality, the fool admires imitation." Kālidāsa was very probably levelling this criticism against the Alaṅkārists of

his time. The following statement in his *Śakuntalā* seems also to have been directed against the theories of rhetoricians : "It is the heart that is the sole judge in matters relating to the form and content of a poem."

Even by the standards set by the earlier Alaṅkārists one could subject the rhetoricians of a later time and the poets who followed their tenets to severe criticism. On some of the principles laid down by Bharata, Kṣemendra, Ānandavardhana and Kuntaka, a good third of the work of Sinhalese poets of the classical tradition in the twelfth century could be disposed of as worthless. The sculptures of Anurādhapura and the frescoes of Sīgiriya amply prove that these poems do not in any way follow a poetical tradition native to the country. A comparison with the *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kālidāsa and the works of Alaṅkārists like Bharata, Ānandavardhana, Kṣemendra and Kuntaka will show that the poets of the classical period deserve the criticism we have levelled against them.

The best Sanskrit works in India were produced before the time of the later rhetoricians. It was after the time of Kālidāsa, the last and greatest of a line of independent poets, that the rhetoricians had their day. Rhetoric is an unimportant aspect of the wider science of poetics (*alaṅkāra*). Artificially 'manufactured' poems grew greatly in number after undue importance was given to this aspect of *alaṅkāra*.

We have stated above that poetry as well as prose had its rise in Ceylon at a time when India had seen the last of her line of illustrious poets, and when the literature as well as the arts were in a state of decadence. This decadence in India began at the end of

the Gupta period. The Gupta period is generally regarded as having begun in the second century of the Christian era and to have come to a close in the sixth century. Dr. Paranavitana remarks, in his *Sīgiriya Graffiti*, that the literature and the sculpture of India show how the artistic tastes of the people gradually degenerated after the time of the Gupta kings. This decadence is reflected in the literature and arts of our country as well. The refined taste of the Anurādhapura period is seen in its sculptures and in the paintings at Sīgiriya. How this taste gradually degenerated is seen not only in the sculptures and carvings of the time of Parākrama Bāhu and his successors, but also in the literary works of the time.

In the light of what has been said before, it is not surprising that a good deal of prose and poetry in hackneyed style was composed by our writers during the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, for Sinhalese literature began under rather unfortunate auspices.

The rise of an independent spirit in literature, was, therefore, greatly impeded by the fact that the rules of *alaṅkāra* and the decadent literature of India exerted a great influence here.

The fact that Buddhism did not encourage the reading of the *Ṛg Veda*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, may also have contributed to a situation which led to the growth of a poetry imitative of the decadent tradition from India.

Our country can boast of only one epic poem, that is, the Pali *Mahāvaṃsa*. But our ancient poets did not think of translating even this poem into Sinhalese.

Hence certain writers culled some legends of national heroes from the *Mahāvaṃsa*, and made use of them in prose works. But these legends did not appeal very much to the people. It is not surprising that legends of heroes, like some stories in the Purāṇas of the Hindus, should come to be looked down upon by the educated. Those who translated these stories into Sinhalese prose from Pali were themselves the products of an urban civilisation and an urban education. Hence their versions of these legends were lacking in the fascination of the simplicity that is inherent in the genuine saga.

Our ancient poets of the decadent period ignored not only the native legends but they neglected the environment and the society of their country and their time. This neglect of their own environment was not entirely due to their drawing on Indian themes for the subject-matter of their poems ; it was rather due to the fact that they were slaves to the later canons of *alaṅkāra*, and the fact they they imitated the artificial Sanskrit creations which went under the designation of poems. Kālidāsa was able to describe the Himālayas because he saw and felt them and drew his inspiration from their majesty and their grandeur. How could it be possible for a man who had not traversed beyond the borders of this little island to convey the beauty of the Himālayas ? What our poets described was an imaginary Himālaya which they constructed in their own minds with the help of what little they could gather from legendary accounts in books. In describing cities they mention palaces with golden roofs held up by

crystal walls with pearl festoons hanging from them, their summits decked with golden and silver banners, and such like. Their kings are no better than puppets with the same appearance, the same phenomenal splendour and fame, and the same behaviour. It is not a literary tradition of the time which influenced these writers to fill their works from beginning to end with literary lumber of this sort. Even the *Kāvyādarśa*, a book on poetics, which was held in esteem in Ceylon at that time did not approve of the creation of works of this nature. It was a conventional pattern created by writers who were lacking in originality and genius. Abhinavagupta who wrote a commentary to Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* defines originality in the following words : " Originality is that peculiar quality of genius which enables the creation of new materials. It is the ability to create works of real beauty, imbibed with genuine sentiment."

Far from adopting modern standards, if we follow the criteria laid down by Ānandavardhana and by Bharata, the father of Sanskrit poetics, we would not be in a position to avoid the conclusion that the poetry of the classical period, with the exception of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, is the work of men possessing anything but poetic genius. A cursory perusal of the *Raghuvaṃśa* would suffice to convince the reader that the *Māgha Kāvya* and the classical poetry of Ceylon do not represent a literary tradition of any value whatsoever. It is not possible therefore to subscribe to the view that our writers were following the only convention which was current in their time, and that they should be judged in accordance with it.

Though the works of the classical period do not fairly depict the society of their time, we could infer, more from their existence than from anything they tell us, that Sanskrit learning must have had wide acceptance in their day. The rich vocabulary and the elasticity of the Sinhalese language of the twelfth century for purposes of prose and verse, and also the stimulus given to the composition of poetry on secular themes by the spread of Sanskrit, should be reckoned as two factors that were responsible for the birth of the classical period. Poems such as the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, *Muvadevdāvata* and *Sasadāvata* show to what extent their authors were indebted to the works of Kālidāsa and the pundit-poets who succeeded him. In the twelfth century learning had spread among the masses as well, to an extent it had not done before. Kings encouraged literature by patronising poets as well as by writing books themselves. In the tenth century King Kāśyapa wrote religious books, while King Parākrama Bāhu II wrote the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* in the thirteenth century. The *Sasadāvata* makes mention of the fact that Queen Līlāvati was a patron of poets.

The Muvadevdāvata

When we compare the poems of the classical period with the rhymed quatrains that came into vogue later about the sixteenth century, we might be tempted to draw the conclusion that the earlier poets were great lovers of nature. But it is well to consider whether their love of nature was actually engendered by the natural beauty they saw around them, or

whether they were merely repeating the conceits and pretentions they read in Sanskrit poems. That the one thing on which the ancient Sinhalese depended for their existence, the beautiful tank, was not thought suitable for poetic description, seems rather to point to the latter alternative. We may say that the author of the *Muvadevdāvata* gives expression to the genuine feelings that arose in him at the sight of lotus leaves in a tank, glistening in the morning dew, when he says that they looked like " beauteous pearls dropped on an emerald tray" (v. 85). But even conceits of this nature are not common in the *Muvadevdāvata*. The *Muvadevdāvata* on the other hand, is full of far-fetched images manufactured under the stress of necessity, and strung together by the intellect. Far from conveying any feelings, genuine or otherwise, they are interesting to the reader only for their skill and ingenuity.

Of the three works of the classical period it is only the *Kavsilumiṇa* that deserves to be called truly a poem. As a matter of fact, it seems more appropriate to regard the *Muvadevdāvata* and *Sasadāvata* as strings of verses written in illustration of the rules of *alaṅkāra*. Descriptions of kings and cities, of the night and the dawn, of twilight and of autumn, do not, when lumped together, make a narrative poem, any more than one could make a living animal by putting together four legs, four feet, a head and a face. Even the true canons of *alaṅkāra* do not allow us to regard such a concoction as a poem. To hold on to only one aspect of *alaṅkāra*, and make that a standard of judgment for measuring a poetical work, is not

much different from the attempt of the blind men, in the well-known fable, to find out what an elephant looked like by feeling only one part of his body.

The *Muvadevdāvata* begins with the description of a city. The city of Mithilā flourishes like the giant ovary of the golden lotus of India, whose petals were its many cities. The sun is delighted at the height of the mansions of this city. The crystal walls reflect the lotus-faces and the lily-eyes of the maidens, and hence look like ponds full of lotuses and lilies. Seeing the faces of the women at the balconies, the moon imagines that they are reflections of its own orb. Swans hear the sound of the anklets of the women who are dancing in intoxication and leave their ponds for the mansions. The moon-like faces of women in the balconies attract the hearts of young men going on the road. The dust raised by the hoofs of horses is only laid by the fluid emitted from the brows of elephants as from showers of rainclouds. The people of that city were able to distinguish between the faces of the women of that city and the moon, by the dark spot that marred the beauty of the latter. Night and day the streets are lit by the glow of its jewelled spires. Hence courtesans were not much enamoured of the city.

From the *Muvadevdāvata* down to the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, this stock description of a city is repeated with an unfailing monotony. The descriptions differ only in the manner in which this same set of ideas is embellished by each author with a different figure of speech. This description of the city, compared with

a work like the *Raghuvaṃśa*, would appear to be the product of a pundit who sought to become a poet by sheer scholarship and skill in the handling of words.

Next to the description of the city comes a description of a king. This familiar current of epithets flows down like a stream across the Kōṭṭe period to the time of the Sandeśas. It remains the same in practically every author.

Our poet concludes his description of the morning by awaken ng the king from his restful slumbers. King Makhādeva, who is awakened by the songs of minstrels as by the crowing of a chanticleer, climbs up to the top storey of his mansion 'like an elephant in rut.' The barber sees a grey hair on his head, and taken aback by the sight of it, informs the king of his discovery in rather apologetic tones. The grey hair is verily a goad to the elephant of sensual pleasures ; a cluster of flowers in the creeper of decay ; a snowfall that blights the fresh lotus of passionate desires ; a sword that cuts asunder the plantain-grove of worldly comfort ; a Mount Meru that churns the ocean of the desire for a household life ; a sun in the darkness of calamity.'

The king sheds tears of joy when he hears of the grey hair on his head, and forthwith going to his court announces in public that he is going to renounce his kingdom and become an ascetic. The rays of light from his toe-nails touch the rays of light from the diadems of the kings who are prostrate before him.

One cannot understand how these kings who owed allegiance to Makhādeva could have been present at the court except on the supposition that they had left their kingdoms and were living in Mithilā. The story of Makhādeva, as it comes to us in the Jātaka version is a little prose poem. But the beauty of Makhādeva's character, and the unaffected charm of the original story are both drowned in a flood of fanciful descriptions and inflated epithets in the metrical version.

The Jātaka story describes how the king renounces the world, in the following words :

" One day King Makhādeva called his barber and told him : ' Friend, any day you see a grey hair on my head, tell me of it.' Long after that the barber discovered, among the dark hairs of the king, a single grey hair, and he said to the king : ' Your Majesty, there is just one grey hair on your head.'

"If it is so,' said the king, ' take out the grey hair and place it on my palm.'

" The barber removed the hair with a pair of golden pincers and placed it on the outstretched hand of the king.

" The king was greatly affected by the sight of the grey hair. He felt as if the king of Death had come and was standing in his presence or as if he had entered a burning hut that was thatched with leaves. He spoke to himself and rebuked himself : ' Thou art

a fool, Makhādeva, that thou couldst not curb thy desires until grey hairs began to appear on thy head. There never was a fool like thee.'

" As the king continued to think thus of his grey hair, the fear within him increased, and the sweat poured from his body. He therefore made up his mind to relinquish his earthly possessions without delay, and, presenting his barber with an entire village of the value of a hundred thousand, he called his eldest son and said to him : ' Son, a grey hair has appeared on my head..... I have now enjoyed all the comforts that one could enjoy in this world of men. I desire to enjoy the pleasures of heaven hereafter. It is time, therefore, that I lead the life of an ascetic ; do thou take over the kingship.'

" The ministers approached the king who had thus made up his mind to relinquish his kingdom, and asked him the reason for his decision. The king took the grey hair in his hand and explained the reason : ' This grey hair, the destroyer of life, has appeared on my head after having snatched away the first, middle and last stages of my life. The appearance of a grey hair on the head is like as if Death had come and were standing on my brow. A grey hair is like a messenger of the gods, sent down by Māra to warn mortals of his presence. Hence it is time to leave the world.' He spoke thus to his ministers, and relinquishing his kingdom the same day, led a life of asceticism, and, dying while still in a state of spiritual trance, was born in the world of Brahmas."

One cannot but acknowledge the simple charm of this direct and straightforward narrative of the folk poet. As soon as the barber informed the king of the

presence of the grey hair, the king asks the man to place it on his open palm. The barber pulls it out with a pair of golden pincers and places it on the king's palm. This simple incident is in keeping with human nature and with the king's character. But the attempt the poet makes to embellish the incident could not escape the ridicule of even the authors of books on *alaṅkāra*. Bharata says that the poet should make his creations conform to *loka dharma* as well as *nāṭya dharma*. By *loka dharma* Bharata meant the normal behaviour of human beings, the actions and words that would be natural to them in the various situations they find themselves in, their habits, mode of attire and such like ; in fact, the whole of life. By *nāṭya dharma* he meant those canons within a work of art, which lead to its internal unity and form. The writer of *Muvadevdāvata* is more intent on verbal gymnastics and indiscriminate splashing on of purple patches than on paying any attention to either of these canons.

After comparing the grey hair to a number of things, in a description totally out of place, the poet proceeds to tell us that the barber, as soon as he discovered the grey hair, told the king about it on bended knees. It is quite natural that as in the Jātaka story the king should ask the barber to place it on his palm. But the poet sends the king immediately to his court. Here it naturally strikes one to question whether the vassal-kings referred to were constantly living in the king's palace. Besides, one wonders whether the appearance of a grey hair on the king's head is of such constitutional importance as to merit an emergency meeting of the ministers and vassal-kings.

In the Jātaka story, the king shows the hair to his ministers and compares it to a messenger of Death, or a warning that Māra has taken his abode on his brow. But the poet compares the hair to an elephant, a snowfall, a sword and the sun. And it is perhaps his slavish mentality that prompts him to make the barber kneel down at a respectful distance from the king, instead of removing his hair and handing it to him as in the Jātaka story. It might have struck our poet, that he might be exposing himself to the displeasure of the king of Ceylon by allowing the barber to touch Makhādeva's head !

The straightforwardness of the Jātaka narrative, as well as its lively characterisation are both lost in the metrical version. Verse 105 provides an instance where even the poet's ordinary judgment and his sense of proportion seem to have left him, in his endeavour to force out artificial and far-fetched figures of speech. The poet puts the following words in the mouth of the king who expresses a desire to renounce the world :

" The life of an ascetic in the forest is like a ship in the Ocean of Sorrow, a sharp blade unto the creeper of the Realisation of the Vanity of Things, and the sole path to Nirvāṇa."

The Jātaka story depicts the king, not as a Buddhist versed in the Abhidhamma, but as a Hindu. The folk poet who wrote down the Jātaka story tells us that King Makhādeva developed his powers of meditation, and by dint thereof attained the world of Brahmas.

The poet, delighting in indulging in this florid style takes the king to the Himālayas where he could gain another opportunity of letting his fancy roam unbridled. Here he tires the reader to the point of nausea with an endless repetition of the same ideas clothed in different metaphors. In fact, there would be little left of the *Muvadevdāvata* if these repetitions are removed.

The Jātaka tales and earlier Sanskrit poetry bear testimony to the high quality of the earlier Indian culture, while later artificial poetry shows the decadence that set in subsequently. This high quality is reflected in the sermons of Buddha and the literature that grew around them. The decadence began with the inability to criticise the mass of superstitious beliefs which were ignored by Buddha and the great Vedic seers alike, the gradual growth of rite and ritual and the perverted taste of pundits who sought to win the approval of licentious kings by prostituting their talents before them. The poet of the *Muvadevdāvata* follows this later tradition and spoils, with his sophisticated imagination, the natural charm of what was the product of a genuine though primitive Buddhist culture.

The Sasadāvata

The *Sasadāvata* following on the *Muvadevdāvata* begins with the description of a city. The author concentrates his attention, at the beginning, on the women of the city, in order, perhaps, to deviate even slightly from the methods of the *Muvadevdāvata*.

The city of Śrāvasti is so high that its jewelled rampart touches the sky. This rampart is verily like unto the petals of a lotus, if the lotus be compared to the city and the city to the navel of Viṣṇu who in turn is compared to the great earth. The gods who had the good fortune to be able to descend into the midst of that city in order to indulge in water sports were joyous at heart at the sight of the damsels ! The city itself, may, with some stretch of the imagination be likened unto a damsel whose hands are the waving flags with which she beckons to the gods to come down and fill their hearts' desires. When the women of the city prepared their dart-like glances, Anaṅga laid down his arrows. The young men stared without blinking at the faces of maidens in the balconies. Hence they looked like gods (an allusion to the mythological belief that gods are distinguished from mortals by their not blinking). The falling hair of dancing maidens was like rain-clouds, their moving hands like flashes of lightning, and the sound of the music like thunder. Hence peacocks in houses began to dance when they heard this sound, as they thought it was the sound of rain. The city was full of intoxicated women, bearing in their hands vessels overflowing with wine, their eyes red like tender leaves, with girdle-bands visible because of their loosened skirts. The gems that fell from the broken girdle-bands of women in the inner chambers of the mansions were like buds that had blossomed in the thunder and rain of sexual pleasures.

The above is a very concise version of the description of the city in the *Sasadāvata*. The poet proceeds,

after this, to describe the six seasons. This part of the poem abounds in metrical devices, and is the work of one greatly skilled in the handling of verse.

After a description of snow and winter such as one who lived in Ceylon all his life could not have experienced, the *Sasadāvata* proceeds to a description of the morning. Next Jetavanārāma becomes the poet's subject. Having described Jetavanārāma the poet at last begins to narrate the story, but before long we find him digressing once more to describe Benares and the king. His picture of Benares is strongly reminiscent of the earlier one of the city at the beginning of the book and is spiced with plenty of ready-made *alaṅkāras*. At last after a description of the forest the poet comes to the story, and disposes of it in about fifty verses. The *Sasadāvata* is certainly not a poem, it is a collection of verses.

It must also be borne in mind that both the *Muvadevdāvata* and *Sasadāvata* are based on stories in which the *śānta rasa* predominates. By bringing into it conventional descriptions that are calculated to heighten the *śṛṅgāra rasa*, the poet interferes with the main sentiment of these themes. Hence, even according to the *alaṅkāra śāstra* of the time, it is not possible to assign to these two compositions a high place as poetry.

THE POETICAL IDEAL OF THE ĀLAṄKĀRISTS

It is worth our while at this juncture to enquire for a moment what the Alaṅkārists themselves held to be the marks of a great poem. Ānandavardhana says that a great poem ought to consist of the following features:

Its construction should be such that the story, whether drawn from reality or from the imagination, should be rendered beautiful by the appropriate use and descriptions of *bhāva* (simple emotions), *vibhāva* (causes of emotions), *anubhāvas* (visible effects of emotions), and *vyabhicāri bhāva* (subsidiary emotions) in order to arouse the appropriate sentiment (*rasa*). The use of *alaṅkāra* (images and figures of speech) should not be merely resorted to for the purpose of following the rules laid down, but in order to heighten the communication of feeling.

Neither of the *Muvadevdāvata* nor of the *Sasadāvata* could we say that the use of figures of speech is subservient to the main purpose of conveying the sentiment of *śānta* which is the *rasa* appropriate to their themes. Far from the conveyance of a predominant sentiment, there is hardly any story at all for conveying any sentiment whatsoever.

Bharata and Ānandavardhana have both described the plot as the body of a poem. Bharata says that the body of a poem is its story while its soul is its *rasa*. The authors of our two poems chose two stories whose predominant sentiment is the *śānta rasa*, but they were unable to invest their versions of these stories with the sentiment appropriate to them. On the other hand they artificially decked them with the sentiment of love, not by constructing and developing the story, but by erotic descriptions. They might have done this with some justification, had they altered the story accordingly. The author of *Muvadevdāvata* could have, for example, dealt with the

early life and love of King Makhādeva. Evidently neither of our poets had the imagination necessary for effecting such a change.

Ānandavardhana ridicules poems in which ornate and flowery metaphor take the first place. He calls them imitative poems. Some Alaṅkārists dubbed such poets " a flock of sheep (*gaḍḍarikā pravāha*)."

In fact *alaṅkāra* is neither the soul nor the body of a poem. It is only, as the name indicates, its ornament. Mudaliyar Gunawardhana, who devotes about a hundred pages, in his introduction to the Guttila Kāvya, to the consideration of various figures of speech according to Alaṅkārists, disposes of the theory of *rasa* in a couple of pages. Writers who edit the classics devote most of their attention to *alaṅkāra* and grammar. A good many of these modern pundits have not seen the wood for the trees. Like the scholar-poets of the classical period, they have missed the soul of poetry.

IV

THE KAVSIḶUMIṆA

THE *Kavsiḷumiṇa* is the last of the works of the classical period. Its author, King Parākrama Bāhu the Second was greatly influenced, like his predecessors, by Māgha. Though full of the usual paraphernalia of Alaṅkārists, the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* still deserves to rank as one of the greatest works in Sinhalese literature. Parākrama Bāhu exhibits many a cheap trinket picked up secondhand from the stock-in-trade of Sanskrit pedantic poets, but among his wares there are some genuine articles. While the *Kāvyaśekhara* of a later time may be regarded as the product of a happy synthesis of the Sanskrit Kāvya style with the native poetic tradition, the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* is the highest product of an unmixed classical tradition. The poem is based on a story which itself must have universal appeal. It is a story full of human interest, and as such, one that ought to afford ample scope for a writer of genius. It must be admitted, however, that in the hands of the poet the story does lose some of its human interest. And whenever the author does sacrifice this human element, he does so, unfortunately, in the interests of *alaṅkāra śāstra*.

Parākrama Bāhu had all the qualifications necessary for handling a theme of this nature. Knowledge and experience of Kṣatriya life was part of his kingly heritage. It is unfortunate however that Parākrama

Bāhu draws on this intimate knowledge but seldom. He does not make use of his experience either in his characterisation or in his treatment of the story. Instead he resorts to the stock pattern by turning out pseudo-descriptions of seasons and cities and the like. It is only when he falls back on his own knowledge and experience that he is able to produce anything that can be regarded as poetry. In describing water-sports, garden-sports, bacchanalia, battles and court-scenes, the king was not recounting some information he had picked up secondhand from some Sanskrit writer, but he was using his own experience as a Kṣatriya. It is true he was influenced in such descriptions by Māgha and Kālidāsa. But since he was describing them from his own personal experience they ring true and have a genuine air of independence, and a charm not found in the verses of the other two poems of this period.

It is interesting to consider whether the water-sports and garden-sports and the bacchanalia that Parākrama Bāhu describes with such zest were really the ritual and social practices of the kings of our country. There is reason to believe, from certain statements in the *Mahāvaṃsa* that certain erotic festivals were celebrated in Ceylon long after the spread of Buddhism here, and even in the time of Duṭu Gämuṇu. But there is no direct evidence to show that the bacchanalian festival described in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* was in actuality held here.

Besides, the description of the bacchanalia in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* is in some respects as conventional as the description of cities and such like in the Sanskrit Kāvyas. Bacchanalia are portrayed in the sculpture of

India too. This gives rise to the surmise that it was a stock theme among artists. There are certain stone carvings in India which depict a woman, intoxicated at a drinking festival, being led along by two men. The *Kāvyādarśa* lays down that a description of a drinking festival and the description of a saturnalia should form part of a *Mahākāvya*. These facts might lead us to infer that Parākrama Bāhu probably introduced into his poem a description of a drinking festival in order to conform to the pattern of a *Mahākāvya*. But the general impression that the description creates in the mind of the reader does not justify such a conclusion. The passage in the *Kavsilumiṇa* bears a stamp of genuineness which the brain-spun description of Māgha does not. It appears to be the description of one who was drawing, not from his imagination and the accounts of other writers, but from his own personal knowledge.

The private life of the Kṣatriyas of Ceylon is practically a closed book to us. Literature does not give us any details of their household lives or of the lives of the women of their harems. The diary of a certain king tells us about only one side of the life of Kṣatriyas. Details of their private lives and their social lives can only be picked up from the poetry of the time. But it is difficult to sift out, even from this information, what details actually apply to the Kṣtriyas of Ceylon. For the Sinhalese poet, writing from his reminiscences of Sanskrit poetry, had no scruples whatsoever in repeating what he had picked up from the inexhaustible source of his inspiration.

The pagan customs that were prevalent among the Kṣatriyas from ancient times continued unchanged in spite of the influence of Buddhism. Even today there are survivals among us of beliefs and customs which run contrary to the teachings of the Buddha. It is not surprising, therefore, that customs prevalent in Ceylon among the Kṣatriyas should continue up to the Daṁbadeniya period. Certain stories in the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* reveal the fact that toddy-drinking and the killing of animals for sport were widespread in Ceylon in the time of Duṭu Gämuṇu, in spite of the strong influence of Buddhism. And Parākrama Bāhu the Great went out hunting on the pretext of looking after his frontier provinces.

The authors of the Sanskrit Kāvyas were not describing drinking festivals and saturnalia entirely from their imagination. The source of their information was Vātsyāyana's *Kāma Sūtra*. Vātsyāyana gathered his material from the sexual practices prevalent in various parts of India during his time, and his avowed intention was to produce a scientific treatise giving a correct description of these practices. Vātsyāyana deserves high praise for the way he treats his material, much in the spirit of any modern scholar. Harana Chandra Chakladara makes the following remarks about Vātsyāyana in his *Studies in Kāma Sūtra* :

" Vātsyāyana does not cast a charm over illicit love, nor does he invest it with the halo of romance. He merely gives a frank and matter-of-fact account of the social sore, proceeds to a masterly analysis of the psychology of the man who seeks such love.

The jealousy, anger, hatred, passion, greed, selfishness working within the brain of the human animal cloud his judgment and pervert his tastes. He points out categorically that a scientific work (*sāstra*), dealing with a subject as a whole, must be exhaustive, but that is no reason why a particular practice described in it should be carried into effect ; for example the taste, properties and the digestive qualities of dog's flesh are given in medical works but that is no reason why it should be adopted as an article of diet by sober men."

The pornographic interest of Vātsyāyana drew many a poet to seek inspiration for their writings from him. They began to make use of the devices of poetic language for embellishing the facts that Vātsyāyana scientifically describes. Māgha's description of saturnalia brings to mind certain facts that the *Kāma Sūtra* mentions regarding the sexual practices of the people of South India. It is said to have been the practice among lovers in South India to beat their mistresses on their head, chest, cheeks and breast, in the course of their love-making. They are said to keep their nails, too, in fit condition for this purpose. Kuntala Śātakarṇi killed his chief queen, Malayavatī by beating her in this manner, and the courtesan Citrasenā died of a wound she received from a Chōḷa king. A certain actress, too, is reported to have met with her death as the result of a blow she received on her forehead from Naradeva, an officer in the army of a Pāndyan king.

The *Kavsiḷumiṇa* begins with a description similar to that found at the beginning of the *Sasadāvata*. Next follow stock descriptions of the city of Kusāvati and

the king, hardly different from the descriptions in the *Muvadevdāvata* and *Sa adāvata*. At this point however, Parākrama Bāhu makes a departure from his predecessors. Instead of hacking away at descriptions of sunsets and seasons like them, he proceeds straight off to give us the story.

"Our King Kusa will indeed be adorned by the possession of a queen. The royal family will be embellished as a pond by a swan." When the parents heard these words of the ministers, they shed tears of joy at the prospect of seeing their son take a wife. But King Kusa delivers a long sermon on the wicked ways of women and the many evils in a life devoted to sensual pleasures. However, he gives in to the persuasions of his parents, and agrees to marry if a woman could be found who is exactly similar in appearance to an image he himself makes out of gold.

It considerably detracts from the beautiful character of King Kusa to make him, an extremely ugly man, speak ill of women and of a household life. The sermon that Parākrama Bāhu puts into his mouth after his rejection of his parents' marriage proposal, cannot but make him look a hypocrite in the eyes of the reader. An ugly bachelor's disparagement of women is not less insincere than an unfortunate old maid's praise of chastity. Though the poet thus makes Kusa deliver a sermon which is not in keeping with his character, the Jātaka story at this point puts into Kusa's mouth words which throw light on his character. When the Queen mother asks Kusa what princess he would have for wife Kusa replies thus :

"I am an ugly man. If a beautiful princess is brought for me, she would fly from me as from a demon. This would bring disgrace on me. Hence there is no need for me of a householder's life. I shall look after my parents as long as they live, and later seek the life of an ascetic."

Kusa here speaks straight from his heart. Certain aspects of his character are thereby revealed to us. The folk-poet who wrote the Jātaka story had a genuine insight into human nature. The true genius of a poet could be gauged by his ability to select what is relevant to his characterisation and his story. Rājaśekhara defines *vyutpatti* as the ability to select the relevant and discard the irrelevant (*ucitānucita-viveko vyutpatti itiyayāvariyah – Kāvya Mīmāṃsā*), a statement which might very well have been made by a modern critic.

The manner in which the poet describes how the sculptor brings the golden image to Kusa is, however, quite striking. The sculptor, hearing the wish of Kusa, makes an image of a woman, with a smile on her face like the moonlight streaming from an evening cloud, and shows it to the prince. Kusa asks him to put the image away and bring from his bed-chamber the image which he himself had made. The sculptor sees only a damsel as beautiful as a goddess, and tells Kusa, "I see in thy chamber none other than thy own beloved princess." Kusa replies with a smile, "What thou seest is indeed the image made with my own hands. Do thou bring it here." But the sculptor could not be convinced that there is a golden image in the room. Nor is he able to disobey the prince's

orders. He therefore pleads again that he did not see anyone but Kusa's beloved mistress in the room. The prince thereupon orders him to bring whatever he had found in the room and thought to be his mistress.

Kusa's father, on seeing the image, gives up all hope of finding anyone like it, and reconciles himself to Kusa's ultimate renunciation of the worldly life. But the Queen mother who knew more about the world, sends Brahmins in search of a princess resembling the image. The Brahmins wander through villages and towns and past the hill country, until at last they arrive in Benares. The people of Benares who think that the image is that of a live woman, inform the king that a " woman treasure " (one of the treasures that a monarch is believed to receive in a mysterious way through his divine power) has appeared in his kingdom. King Brahmadatta rushes to the place, his shawl in his hand, and, seeing the image, thinks that a woman resembling it cannot be found in all three worlds. The Brahmins therefore leave the city and come to Sāgala.

After describing the city of Sāgala and the incident of the hunch-backed woman slapping the image in the belief that it was her protegé, the poet takes us to a royal assembly full of prostrate kings. It is highly unnatural that the King of Sāgala should summon his court and subordinate kings as soon as the Brahmins enter the city with the image. The poet is only creating an opportunity to enable him to conform to certain canons of *alaṅkāra śāstra*. He therefore sends the Brahmins to the king's court. The king sees the golden image, and after questioning the Brahmins,

orders Pabhāvatī to the court. The manner in which the poet at this point describes the beauty of Pabhāvatī, and the effect she produces on those who see her, is note-worthy. Pabhāvatī enters the hall illuminating it with her presence, drawn into it by a thousand looks as if by a thousand strings. The people in the gathering drink in her beauty with their eyes as if with bamboo reeds, and their bodies swell with horripilation.

Pabhāvatī is brought into this assembly in order that her wishes may be consulted. But she chooses to be dumb, and the king, too, leaves the assembly without a word, with the result that the canto looses much of its earlier life-like quality.

As soon as the messengers return to Kusāvati, the Queen summons her son Kusa. When the prince hears of the beauty of Pabhāvatī through the exaggerated description of the Brahmins, he begins to desire the life of sensual pleasures which he hitherto despised. The poet conveys the impression that the prince becomes enamoured of Pabhāvatī merely on hearing the description of the lady. "While the messengers described the beauty of Pabhāvatī with wonder in their hearts, the lock that fastened the heart of Prince Kusa gave way, and into it there entered the enemies of lust."

To cause Kusa, who spoke of the evil ways of women and the dangers of a household life when his parents suggested that he should get married, to be swayed by the words of the Brahmins who described the legs, calves, breasts, hair and face of Pabhāvatī,

is to make him a hypocrite. The Sinhalese poet brings the Bodhisatva's character to this level merely because of his desire, again, to conform slavishly to the standards of pedantic poetry.

When the king hears that his son desires Pabhāvatī, he immediately sets forth for the city of Sāgala, accompanied by his four-fold army. The fifth canto of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* concludes with a description of the manner in which he is received by the King of Sāgala. The sixth canto begins with a description of the evening in the city of Sāgala. This description is like an ornamental gateway through which the reader catches a glimpse of the drinking festival that is to follow. The description of this drinking festival is about the finest of all the descriptive passages in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*.

The drinking salon, full of wine goblets of various sizes, and decorated with festoons of flowers enveloped in fragrant incense, is like the dancing-hall of Anaṅga. King Okkāka who enters the salon is like Anaṅga himself. He begins drinking wine with the women of the harem. One of them offers the king a vessel full of wine, while another who is drunk offers him her empty vessel. They, as if possessed by Anaṅga, dance in intoxication, their lips and tongues smarting with the spices they chew. The king smiles when he sees a woman who is drunk blowing into her bowl of wine, imagining that the reflection of her eyes therein are two petals of lilies floating in it.

The dancing of the women bathed in the rays of the moon, their bodies white with sandal paste, is like the rise and fall of billows on the sea. The king lets his

eyes wander on to a spot on a dancing woman's body where her clothes are loose and falling off, and sorts her out from the rest. When he clasps one maiden, another looks jealously at her. A woman draws a mouthful of wine and amorously offers it to the king. The King embraces a woman ; another stares at him and her eyes reddened by jealousy are reflected in the wine, as if the goblet was filled with petals of the lily.

A flower drops from the coiffure of a maiden, and, as she blows into the bowl of wine to remove the flower, the king kisses her on the cheek.

This drinking festival which begins in the evening continues till midnight and ends with the singing of the intoxicated women. When the women depart at night the king selects his favourite and retires with her into his chamber. At the end of this description we are told how the royal bards sing their morning songs, after which the king looks at his face in a bowl of oil and enters his dressing chamber.

King Kusa's father sets out for Kusāvati accompanied by the other king's daughter and her retinue. When they reach the city, the men and women rush out to see Pabhāvatī. This piece of description is an obvious borrowing from the *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kālidāsa where the Indian poet describes the manner in which the women of the city rush out to see Prince Aja and Indumatī. Kālidāsa is himself said to have been indebted to Aśvaghoṣa for this description.

Kusa's mother, anxious to satisfy her son's desire to see Pabhāvatī by day, takes her to the stables and elephant stalls and introduces the animals to her

by name. The description of the rainy season which follows, tends to tire the reader by its excess of verbal gymnastics. The account of the water-sports which comes after the description of autumn, has a few remarkable passages, though it is spoiled by the author's fondness for seeking any sort of opportunity for dwelling upon the sensual attractions of women. The manner in which the poet tells us of Pabhāvatī's entry into the water, her fear of Kusa and her flight back to the shore where she is followed by the lamenting ripples, has a vividness and naturalness rare in other parts of the poem.

When Pabhāvatī realises that her husband is a man of the ugliness of Kusa, she leaves the city of Kusāvati and goes back to her parents. It looks as if our poet's description of Kusa's grief at being separated from his beloved wife is a reminiscence of Kālidāsa's description of Aja's grief at the death of Indumatī. But in depth of feeling and genuineness the two descriptions are poles apart from one another. There is certainly some poetic skill displayed in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* passage, but it lacks in genius and insight. Kusa is by no means a youthful sentimental lover. As an aspirant for Buddhahood we should expect him to exhibit better qualities of manliness and strength, and a more successful control of his feelings. Constantly recurring to Kusa in his grief are the full breasts of Pabhāvatī, her rounded legs, her eyes which are like the darts of Anaṅga, her bed, the coolness of her bosom and her jacket cooled by her breasts!

Compare on the other hand the words that Kālidāsa puts into the mouth of Aja grieving at the death of Indumatī : " Thou wert the mistress of my household, thou alone my counsellor of wisdom. In secret conclave thou wert my friend, my pupil in the arts of love. Hence cruel Death who has taken thee from me, has indeed taken everything I ever possessed."

Let us come back once more to the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*. Kusa, full of grief at his separation from Pabhāvatī, goes to the city of Sāgala where he works in turn as a garlander, a potter, and a cook, and seeks to win the affection of Pabhāvatī. The Jātaka tale deals with this part of Kusa's fortunes in detail, but the poem summarily disposes of it and goes on to a lengthy description of a battle. The picture of the battle lacks movement and life. The fighting armies look like rows of tin soldiers made mechanically to fall down one by one in the very places where they stood.

King Madu hears of the arrival of seven kings to ask for the hand of Pabhāvatī or to obtain it by the might of arms. He goes to battle with them, loses, and flees. Trembling with fear, he calls Pabhāvatī to him and says, " I have found a way of escaping from the calamities that have befallen me because of you. I have decided to cut you up into seven pieces and divide you among the seven kings."

The poet did, evidently, not attempt to portray King Madu as a very noble character, for he curses Pabhāvatī after losing the battle into which he boldly rushed at the beginning, and seeks to save his own life by sacrificing that of his daughter.

The development of the plot of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* becomes weak in its latter part after the marriage of Pabhāvatī, because the poet strains after opportunities for introducing stock themes, for the description of which he found ready-made models in Sanskrit poetry. It is evidently because his imagination runs dry that he omits certain important events in the story and seeks refuge in a readily available cheap print of a battle-scene. In the *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kālidāsa, on the other hand, there is a unity of plot and characterisation, so that there is not a single passage that can be removed without detracting from its predominant sentiment. Some of the passages of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, however, though in themselves good pieces of writing, do not stand in direct relation to the theme of the poem, and look like isolated compositions or huge purple patches in the style of the Alaṅkārists.

The *Raghuvaṃśa* shows how Kālidāsa took care to depict the Hindu kings as men of noble character, who respected the Kṣatriya ethical code. We have seen, however, how Sinhalese poets, in their blind worship of the Alaṅkārists, even went to the extent of misrepresenting the true character of the Bodhisatva and his parents.

Though in itself an enjoyable piece of poetry, the description of the drinking festival in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* is evidence of the lack of independence that our writers displayed. It is based on Māgha and on Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*, in which latter work the poet attempts to portray the licentious character of King Agnivarṇa.

Agnivarṇa is the last of the kings of the Raghu dynasty, and Kālidāsa's aim is to show how he brought ruin on his line by leading a life of unbridled licence. All the kings from Dilīpa down to Sudarśana are painted as men of lofty character, products of a lofty Brahmin culture, who respected the time-honoured traditions of the Kṣatriyas. But Agnivarṇa who brought ruin on this dynasty, is portrayed as a man who spent his time in drunkenness and in the pursuit of women, and finally died of a kind of consumption. Agnivarṇa would submit to any sort of indignities, if only they were administered by women. When his subjects gather round the palace to catch a glimpse of him, he shows them his foot through a window !

It is clear that Kālidāsa regarded Agnivarṇa with unmixed contempt, although like a true poet he attempts to paint his character with a certain amount of objectivity. The contempt that Kālidāsa felt for Agnivarṇa becomes evident on comparing his portrayal of this king with his depiction of Rāma. King Rāma hears of the scandal attached to Sītā's name, and though he does not believe one word of it, sends her back to the forest, in spite of his own great personal grief. Rāma is made to act in so stern a manner even towards his own loved wife, so that he may be represented as a Kṣatriya who followed the traditions of his clan, and regarded his first and most important duty as that of governing his subjects successfully. When compared with this picture of Rāma, the contempt with which Kālidāsa held Agnivarṇa becomes evident. There is a sting of scorn right through the verses dealing with Agnivarṇa.

It looks as if Kālidāsa, unable to restrain himself, kills Agnivarṇa with the dreadful disease known as *rājakṣma*.

Kālidāsa makes Agnivarṇa symbolic of the decadence which he sees in the Hindu civilisation of his time. It is perhaps to convey an impression of this impending catastrophe, a premonition of which he gets through his poetic vision, that he brings his poem to an end with the ruin of the Raghu dynasty and a picture of its last licentious ruler. But Parākrama Bāhu, not realising the intention of Kālidāsa, puts the Bodhisatva's father or brother in the place of Agnivarṇa, and makes of him, too, a lustful character who would deem it an honour to be kicked by a woman. In fact, verses 490 and 491 of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* say that the king did not feel the pain when one of the women kicked him during the garden festival, because the hair covering his entire body bristled with excitement !

Apart from the fact that our poetic tradition was inspired, as we have pointed out, by the works of a decadent epoch in India, another great misfortune was that our writers neglected the study of drama. Some of the greatest products of Indian literature were, therefore, closed to them. The pedantic attitude instilled by the study of the scholarly poetry of India, further, brought with it a contempt for the native folk poetry of this country. It is most likely that what we have surviving today as folk poetry belongs to a very early age, its language and style having changed with the times. Hence there was no chance of a genuine poetic tradition springing out of the very soil.

The classical period terminated with the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*. The next poetical works we know of belong to a time not far removed from that of the Kōṭṭe period. It is a fact worthy of note that we do not hear of any Sinhalese poem having been written for two or three hundred years after the appearance of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*.

It appears very unlikely that monks who were sincerely devoted to the ideals of their faith were ever in great praise of works like the *Muvadevdāvata*, *Sasadāvata*, or *Kavsiḷumiṇa*. Their disapproval, whether active or otherwise, is certainly to be reckoned as one of the factors that led to the close of this era of poetry. During the classical period the study of poetry began to spread amongst laymen as well as monks. Hence the commandments of the *Daṁbadeni Katikāvata* :

"Do not compose ślokas and such verses for laymen."

"Do not learn or cause others to learn such despicable arts as those of poetry and drama."

"Do not yourselves fall into disrepute and draw laymen too on to the wrong path by composing verses to flatter them and induce them to offer presents."

After the proclamation of these *katikāvat*, it is likely that monks openly expressed their contempt for the art of poetry. When there were schisms in the Saṅgha, the poets would certainly have got from the Mahāyāṇists the encouragement that was denied them by the Theravādins. But this small amount of

patronage was also probably removed when Parākrama Bāhu the Great, as the chronicles say, quelled the schisms and established the supremacy of one Nikāya in the Island. Certain poems of the Kōṭṭe period go to prove that the monks of the Vanavāsa Nikāya, for example, were among the stout opponents of poetry and the poets.

If the earliest Sinhalese poets had been of the calibre of Mahānāma or Vāttāve, the result, for our literature, might have been different. The poetry of the earlier period was not composed for the common man. It was composed for a few learned men, and for the king and his ministers, that is, for the rich and leisured aristocracy, who, satiated with food and drink, needed only the lullaby of love in order to put them to sleep.* The task of making them laugh and grow fat was already entrusted to the court jester. Poets sought the patronage of these kings and it is to the eternal credit of monks that they did not hawk love-poems before them in exchange for the material necessities of life.

It was because learning in Ceylon was in the hands of such monks that the culture of this country was saved of the lopsidedness that became a characteristic of the later civilisation of India. Theravāda Buddhism exterminated all traces of phallic worship from the religious practices of the Sinhalese, whereas in India the cult of wine and women was turned into a fine art under the guise of secret religion. "Knowledge of ultimate reality cannot be attained except

* See Vāgbhaṭa, *Kāvyānuśāsanā*

by drinking wine..... Brahma is the nectar of the gods, but wine is the nectar of mortals. Wine is called *surā* because it confers divinity (*suratva*)"* says a Tantric text. The *Nikāya Saṅgraha* tells us how this Tantrayāna attempted to establish itself in Ceylon on several occasions but was crushed by the Theravādins.

* *Madyapānam vinā dēvi tatvajnānam na .abhyate . .*
devānām amṛtam brahma tad eva laukikī surā
suratvam bhogamātrena surā tena prakīrtitā.

—Dr. R. L. Mitra, *Indo-Aryans*, Vol. II.

V

THE AGE OF PROSE

THE beginnings of the classical tradition dealt with in the previous chapter could be traced back to a time as far back as the eighth century, that is to the time of the Sīgiriya verses. The beginnings of Sinhalese prose, however, go back to an even earlier period, from the evidence of the inscriptions. But since we cannot class the inscriptions as literature, we should strictly regard literary prose as having begun with the *Amāvatura* which belongs to about the end of the twelfth century or the early part of the thirteenth.

The prose of the *Dhampiyā Aṭuvā Gāṭapadaya* contains many loan words from Pāli. Perhaps the writer was unable to find, in the Sinhalese of his time, a vocabulary adequate for expressing all the ideas found in the Pāli original which he was translating. In later times Sinhalese writers made up for this deficiency by borrowing words from the Sanskrit, and creating a prose style which came to be known as *miśra siṃhala* (lit. mixed Sinhalese). The writers of the tenth century, however, do not make use of this hybridized Sinhalese prose. We do not know whether this is to be explained by the fact that the fashion was not then in vogue, or whether these writers for some reason unknown to us, deliberately avoided the use of this style. There is little reason for doubting, however, that there already existed among

the people a language similar in vocabulary and style to the Sanskritic prose that was adopted by writers of a later time. It is because of the existence of such a language among the people, that the prose writers of the thirteenth century used it in the popular works which they began to write about that time. Sir D. B. Jayatilaka holds the view that 'mixed' Sinhalese prose first came into vogue in the time of Parākrama Bāhu the Great, and cites in support of his view the evidence of the *Gal Vihāra Sannasa*. He believes that this new literary fashion emerged as a result of the decline in power of the Sinhalese kings in the eleventh century and the consequent spread of Dravidian rule in the country. Another factor that must be taken into account is the spread of Mahāyāna among the people. It is not unlikely that the Mahāyānists whose literature was entirely in Sanskrit, borrowed words from this language whenever they found themselves unable to express their ideas in the Sinhalese of their time.

This Sanskritic Sinhalese prose which the writers of the Polonnaruva period used was, says Sir D. B. Jayatilaka, more capable of expressing ideas than the language that existed earlier. The fact, too, that the writers of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, *Muvadevdāvata* and *Sasadāvata* all wrote prose paraphrases to their poems, shows that the language of their verses was not popularly understood even in their time.

The *Sikhavalaňda* and the *Sikhavalaňda Vinisa* while being a compendium of Vinaya rules, provide valuable incidental information relating to the social conditions of their time. The difficulty, however, is

to sort out, from among the customs summarised in them, which refer to Ceylon and which to India. In spite of this, a considerable amount of material could be gathered relating to the food, household articles, and general habits of the people, which could fairly safely be taken as referring to Ceylon.

We might infer from a certain statement in the *Sikhavalaṅda Vinisa* that the caste system as it is known to us today, was not known at the time that this work was written : " The names of the castes should be known in the following manner : *säṇḍal* and *kät* castes are respectively low and high castes. *Täṅgula* and *Budula* are names that are respectively low and high, and so are *Kosiya* and *Goyum*. The profession of the carpenter is low, while that of the trader is high. The arts of wicker-work and keeping accounts are respectively low and high."

Apart from the fact that the Caṇḍāla (*säṇḍol*) caste was regarded as being low and that the Kṣatriya (*kät*) caste as noble, there is no mention here of any further caste distinctions. The glossary to the *Sikhavalaṅda Vinisa* says that by the word *täṅgula* is meant the two classes of slaves, the *avakaṇṇaka* and *javakaṇṇaka*. The word *budula* stands for such names as Buddharakṣita. It appears as if the only distinction drawn here is that the names of slaves are regarded as being disreputable, while the names of people of higher castes are naturally regarded as being respectable. The belief that carpentry is an ignoble profession, while trading is respectable, is one that still obtains among us. And wicker-work even today is regarded as a low art.

Our women of today wear shoes and sandals made of iguana-skins and crocodile-leather. That this was a fashion prevalent in ancient times is clear from a passage in the *Sikhavalañda Vinisa,* where monks are forbidden to wear shoes made of the skins of various animals such as lions, leopards, cats, squirrels, and antelopes.

The *Sikhavalañda Vinisa* forbids monks to indulge in the playing of what is termed *diya-boku.* From a reference in the *Haṃsa Sandeśa* it appears as if this " *diya-boku* " is not a musical recreation but that it is a form of water-sport. Vātsyāyana however, mentions *udaka vādya* as a form of instrumental music among the entertainments of a man of the city. Haraṇa Chandra Chakladhara, in his study of the *Kāma Sūtra* says that this expression refers to an instrument in which various notes are produced by striking cups filled with water up to different levels. If this is so it should refer to the instrument which is known in modern times in India as the Jalataranga.

Of the works belonging to the Anurādhapura period, we have surviving today only the *Sikhavalañda*, the *Sikhavalañda Vinisa* and the *Dhampiyā Aṭuvā Gāṭapadaya.* Sinhalese prose really begins with Guruḷugōmī's *Amāvatura.* The factors, both linguistic and sociological, that influenced the rise of this prose tradition that began with the *Amāvatura* can only be inferred. It is very likely that, together with 'mixed' Sinhalese becoming the language of the people, there arose a greater desire among the learned to cater to the popular taste for religious literature. The stories regarding the composition of

the *Pūjāvalī* and the Sinhalese Jātaka book show how the popular writers of these received the patronage of kings.

As a result of King Parākrama Bāhu's victory over his enemies peace was restored in the Island and there was once more a revival of art and literature as during the time of Duṭṭha Gāmaṇī. The ruins at Poḷonnaruva even today bear witness to the architectural and artistic creations that provided the background for this great awakening. Although the stone carvings and the plastic art of Poḷonnaruva lack the balance and simplicity of the art of Anurādhapura, they are a living testimony to the vastness and florid style and, perhaps, the complexity of the Sinhalese culture of the time. The *Mahāvaṃsa*, too, speaks of a revival of art and literature in the Poḷonnaruva period. The wife of Parākrama Bāhu the Great, Queen Rūpavatī, is described as " a woman of sharp wisdom, versed in the arts of singing and dancing." The *Sarasvatī Maṇḍapa*, an academy of the arts, was also instituted during this time.

The vastness of the country, and the existence of several creeds, schools and philosophies are factors that contributed to the wide variety that is a characteristic of the literature of India. In Ceylon there were other factors, besides the smallness of the country itself, that led to the production of a literature that was lacking, above all things, in variety and depth. This island was, from about the fifth century, the battle ground of two warring sects, the Mahāyānists and the Theravādins. It was only in the time of Parākrama Bāhu the Great that the Theravādins

were finally able to over-throw their opponents. Parākrama Bāhu banished the Vaitulyavādins and combined the three Nikāyas into one. Those who gained the final victory were, therefore, the Theravādins. And this was a circumstance that contributed not a little to the lack of variety and depth in our literature.

The rites and ritual, and the forms of worship of the common man, which the Mahāyāna included in its doctrines, encouraged the growth of secular arts and literature. As a matter of fact, painting and sculpture in India grew to a great extent under the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the growth of literature always goes hand in hand with the growth of the arts. Aśvaghoṣa, who is believed to have lived before Kālidāsa, is the reputed author of two of the earliest specimens of Court Poetry, as well as of Sanskrit drama. Some of the greatest thinkers of India, more daring than even the Brahmin seers of the Upanishads, were Buddhists. It is the Mahāyāna philosophers who brought the doctrine of non-soul on to a logical basis, so that in its final implications it became hardly different from a form of negative idealism. In Ceylon, however, owing to the final victory of the Theravādins over Mahāyānists, there were no clashes of opinion or controversies such as might stimulate thought. Owing to the lack of stimulating currents of thought, literature stagnated. Thus, although Ceylon was able to preserve Theravāda Buddhism and Buddhist culture in its purity, the price she had to pay was high.

The Mahāyānists worshipped the Bodhisatva as a god, and they included in their pantheon as great a number of gods as the Hindus themselves. This aspect of the religion proved to be a source of comfort and solace to all except the educated few who were able to understand the deeper philosophical side of Buddhism. And although Theravāda Buddhism finally supervened, this popular Buddhism, which consisted of the worship of Bodhisatvas and gods, still persisted in Ceylon. Very often the Mahāyāna Bodhisatvas were substituted by Hindu gods, for the Theravādins preferred an alliance with Hinduism to an alliance with Mahāyānism. The venom with which the Theravādins combatted the Mahāyāna influence is well illustrated in the story which says that the Mahāyānists were branded like cattle and banished from the Island. But in spite of the efforts of the Theravādins, they were unable to preserve Buddhism in the purity they desired. The *Katikāvat Saňgarāva* shows how by the time of the Kandy period the Buddhist clergy had degenerated to the level of magicians and sorcerers. This degeneracy was not totally due to the influence of invasions from Western countries. The following extracts from three different *katikāvatas* suggest that signs of corruption were already setting in among the Sangha as a result of their close association with the laity :

" Do not have sermons preached except by a Bhikkhu approved for the purpose."

" Do not compose and chant ślokas or similar verses to eulogise laymen."

" Do not learn or cause to learn poetry, dancing or any such contemptible arts."

" Do not accept presents which you incite the people to give, not out of faith, but by composing verses in praise of virtues which they may or may not possess, by which act, you not only offend the commandments but bring shame on the people themselves."

" Do not perform for lay devotees such duties as medical treatment."

" Do not have devil ceremonies performed in the case of illness."

The above are portions selected from the *Daṁbadeni Katikāvata*. We have remarked earlier that the earlier *katikāvat* of the Poḷonnaruva period do not contain similar injunctions. We have to infer, therefore, that hardly had a century passed since Parākrama Bāhu the Great purified the Sāsana and expelled the offending monks, before decadence again began to set in. The priesthood a hundred years after Parākrama Bāhu, sought to win the favour of the laity by composing verses in praise of them and having the devils exorcised when they fell ill. Again, five hundred years later, the monks went to the extent of themselves practising the arts of prognostication, sorcery and medicine as is amply seen from the following paragraph of the *katikāvata* of Kīrti Śrī Rājasiṁha :

" Since the time of the great King Parākrama Bāhu of Kōṭṭe who purified the Order and did many a service for the cause of Buddhism, there has been no king who looked after the Saṅgha in the same manner. As a result of this the Saṅgha has gradually degenerated, and the present condition is that there is not a single ordained monk left in the Island. Of the few novices that remain, there is a small number who are self-respecting and desirous of observing Vinaya Rules but the majority of them give instructions on such low arts as astrology, medicine and sorcery which have been forbidden by the Buddha himself. Further they perform services for the king and his ministers and thereby obtain lands and appointments, and engage themselves in agriculture and trade, live in close association with their relatives and the laity in general, and even maintain wives and children. Such being the case, a committee consisting of representatives of both the Grāma and Āraṇya Nikāyas, with Saraṇaṅkara Mahā Thero at the head, has ordered that the above *Katikāvata* be proclaimed."

This process of decay continued, until by the time of Rājādhi Rājasiṃha, thirty four years later, the Saṅgha seems to have even added to its repertory of forbidden arts and become the special custodians of the occult sciences, as the following *katikāvata* shows :

" It is wrong to give medical aid to people other than those belonging to the five categories mentioned in the Vinaya.

"It is wrong to earn a livelihood by practising the twenty-one occult arts such as prognostication.

"It is wrong to enter the houses of any laymen, whether relative or not, for the purpose of engaging in their disputes.

"It is wrong to practise or teach such low and contemptible arts as the exorcising of devils, divination by means of a light, charms for catching thieves, prognostication by signs, or uttering the oracles under the influence of spirits."

Although the clergy appears to have degenerated owing to its association with the laity, for the latter, however, the results of such contact do not seem to have been entirely unbeneficial. The growth of a popular prose literature was one of its most happy effects. The prose language, we have pointed out, increased largely in its vocabulary as a result of the inclusion of Sanskrit words in the Poḷonnaruva period. The Gal Vihāra inscription of Poḷonnaruva, as well as the *Dharmapradīpikā* and the *Daham Saraṇa* show how certain extreme tendencies in this borrowing of Sanskrit words even led to such undesirable consequences as that of making the language incomprehensible to an average layman. Guruḷugōmī wrote his *Dharmapradīpikā* as a commentary to the Pāli *Mahābodhivaṃsa*, and hence the style he employed was not unsuitable to this theme and to the students he was catering for. But in his *Amāvatura* which was meant more for the intelligent layman, he avoided Sanskrit words as much as possible. The fact that he was thinking of his reading public when he employed two different styles in these two books is evident from his statement in the *Amāvatura* : "An

analysis of the different kinds of Karma should be looked for in the *Dharmapradipikā* which is a treatise on Buddhist doctrine. This is a life of the Buddha."

GURUḶUGŌMĪ

Although the earliest poetical works that have come down to us are imitations of Sanskrit models, the same thing could not be said of the earliest prose work. The *Amāvatura* of Guruḷugōmī is written in a style and a spirit which comes very near what might be called indigenous. His language is in essence the language of the inscriptions handled and modified by a great master. Guruḷugōmī, himself well versed in the Sanskrit language, still preferred to model his writing on the direct and straightforward style of the Pāli. As a matter of fact, the Pāli style was a fitter medium for reflecting the spirit of Buddhist culture, than the ornate and verbose style of later Sanskrit prose. So the language that Guruḷugōmī created on this model stands unrivalled by even the modern language of today in its vigour and simplicity and straightforwardness. If Vidyācakravartī, the later prose writer, had followed his example and moulded the language of Guruḷugōmī to suit the temper of his own writings, we should have been able to boast today of a simple language not second to any modern language in its fitness for expressing poetic thought. Discarding the Pali style in favour of the later Sanskritic style is like rejecting the genuine article in favour of a cheap imitation. The Sanskritic style might be suitable for philosophic thought or for expressing the technical terms of science, but for the language of the emotions, whether

it be verse or prose, there is nothing to compare with a style like that of the *Amāvatura*. In fact Sinhalese prose should be purged of the ornate Sanskritic style. It only provides the untalented writer who has nothing new to convey, with a mass of verbiage with which he could disguise the commonplace thoughts of others. Classical Sanskrit prose itself never became the medium of any great literature of the emotions.

The style of the *Amāvatura* was not the spoken language of the time, it was a style consciously invented for literary purposes. The language of the *Butsaraṇa*, on the other hand, was the language that was actually current among literary circles of the time. The *Amāvatura*, like the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, was a book written exclusively for the learned reading public, whereas the *Butsaraṇa* was evidently meant to be read aloud for the delectation of the unlearned as well. Vidyācakravartī deserves our praise for having employed a language that was intelligible to a wider circle of readers and listeners, though he would have done a service for all time if he had re-moulded the language of Guruḷugōmī instead of following the model of ornate Sanskrit prose.

Guruḷugōmī's style reflects the personality of a man whose character was a synthesis of a truly Buddhist culture with the native Sinhalese temperament. His entire work is permeated with the spirit of his independent personality. It is seldom that we get an impression of the personality of Vidyācakravartī from his work. If at all we do, it is only in those portions where he escapes the trammels of Sanskrit prose and seeks to express himself in a style nearer to his native genius.

The selection that Guruḷugōmī makes from among the incidents relating to the life of the Buddha, is a further index to the quality of his mind. The stories of the *Amāvatura* are so selected as to illustrate that aspect of the character of the Buddha which is expressed by the text: *purisadamma sārathī* (Tamer of the hearts of tameable men). For this purpose he relates those incidents which illustrate the Buddha's mercy and compassion, his practical wisdom and his courage. Unlike other writers he did not introduce into his narrative the popular legendary materials or the stories dealing with the miraculous.

Guruḷugōmī begins his book with a brief but attractive account of the life of Prince Siddhārtha. From the time of his enlightenment the author concentrates on those incidents which illustrate the greatness of his character. It may strike the reader, perhaps, that the stories of the Daṇḍakāraṇya, the Kāliṅgāraṇya, Medhyāraṇya and the Mātaṅgāraṇya are digressions from the main theme. But Guruḷugōmī introduces these incidents, too, as if they were related by the Buddha as part of his experience in the course of his conversion of kings, Brahmins and householders. Hence the thread of the main Buddhacarita is not broken. In fact, there is in the *Amāvatura* from beginning to end, a unity of construction and purpose which is rare in other Sinhalese prose works. The *Amāvatura* could be compared to a work like the *Kādambarī* in respect of this unity. Vidyācakravartī, on the other hand, though he imitates the verbose style of the *Kādambarī* is unable to bring into his work this unity.

Among the stories relating to the Buddha's life narrated by other writers, the majority deal with popular beliefs regarding transmigration, or, with examples of the simple faith of the folk in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. Guruḷugōmī shows no interest in such tales. He selects only those which will help to give the reader a composite picture of the noble character of the Buddha. He also selects stories which give him scope for expressing his natural genius for satire. Though Guruḷugōmī attacks such institutions as those of caste and Brahminism, he was, like Kālidāsa, a man who respected the highest social conventions of his time, without being a slave to them.

The following illustration from the *Daham Saraṇa* would help to show how the intellect of Guruḷugōmī towers high above that of all other Sinhalese prose writers :

The Buddha Dīpaṅkara addresses His Arahant disciples in order to praise the devotion and faith of Sumedha whom he sees lying prostrate on the ground across a muddy patch of ground. Vidyācakravartī puts into the mouth of the Buddha on this occasion a string of words adorned with stock figures of speech, totally out of keeping with the situation or the character of the Buddha :

" Leaving the city of Kapilavastu, rich in all kinds of wealth, and abandoning his desire for his Queen Yasodharā of full breasts and heavy hips..... and finally having gone to the foot of the Ajapāla

tree, sprouting with young shoots, and having accepted the milk-rice from the lotus-hand of Sujātā of noble birth, he came to the river Nerañjarā which seemed to have been pierced through by the pressure of the breasts of young maidens who come to bathe in it....."

Not only this extract, but the entire speech of about three pages in length, is of the same nature, and is nothing short of ridiculous when it comes from the mouth of the Buddha Dīpaṅkara. Guruḷugōmī could not be accused of committing such an atrocity even in his weakest moments. If there ever was a Sinhalese writer who illustrated in his writing Kṣemendra's principle of *aucitya*, the selection of the appropriate and the rejection of the inappropriate, it was Guruḷugōmī. There is never a single description or a single epithet in the entire *Amāvatura* which could be regarded as unsuitable to the tone of the work, or the main thought and feeling that the writer was attempting to convey.

The *Amāvatura* begins with a list of titles of the Jātakas which illustrate the character of the Bodhisatva who is perfecting his virtues in order to attain Buddhahood. From the beginning of the second chapter to the end of the third is an account of the life of Prince Siddhārtha and a portion of his life after the attainment of Buddhahood. There is hardly any other piece of biographical writing in Sinhalese, with the exception of, perhaps, the *Guttila*, which could be read and re-read with fresh delight so often as these two chapters. From the fourth chapter to

the fifteenth chapter at the end there are stories of the Buddha's life, illustrating his qualities of wisdom, love, courage and wit. And for each theme he employs a language eminently suited to convey the appropriate mood. When he is satirising a person or institution he uses a language full of sting. When he is in a humorous vein, he uses language that naturally rouses a smile from the reader. And when he enters into poetic description he gets his ideas across straight, in unaffected words which appeal on an original and intellectual level, without seeking to arouse the stock responses of the people by the clichés that were so common in the poetical vocabulary of the day :

" On that fifteenth night on which silver rays streamed from the autumn moon as white milk from a silver vessel or as a pearl-string from a silver casket or even as a garland of jasmine flowers, sat King Ajātaśatru in his palace, under his white royal umbrella, surrounded by his ministers."

Guruḷugōmī avoids the hackneyed style of expression as well as the verbosity of most other writers, and brings into the old material a freshness of thought and imagery sadly lacking in our later literature.

The following extract from a chapter which does not pretend to be anything more than a straightforward narrative of the Buddha's life, brings into the familiar incident a charm that was hardly noticed in it earlier :

" Yasōdharā Devī, hearing that her lord, who had formerly gone about in that very city in a bejewelled chariot attended by a retinue that was like a retinue

of gods, was now begging in yellow robes, with shaven head, and carrying a bowl in his hand, peeped through her balcony window to see if he befitted his new rôle. And seeing him shedding lustre on his very path by the rays that emanated from his body which was verily immersed in a flood of light, with his incomparable Buddha-body adorned by the auspicious marks, she burst forth into the eight Narasīha stanzas in praise of his beauty, and going to her father King Suddhōdana, said : ' Thy son is begging on the wayside.'

" The king was shocked, and wrapping round him his shawl, went to the Buddha and stood before him saying : ' Reverend Sir, why dost thou disgrace me ? Pray, why dost thou beg ? Didst thou think that I cannot feed these thy monks ?'

" And he replied : ' O king, this is the practice of our race.'

" ' Reverend Sir, none of the race of Mahāsammata to which thou dost belong, did ever beg in this manner.' "

The author of the *Pūjāvaliya* takes three pages to describe this same incident. Nor with all his lengthy description does the author succeed in giving us such an interesting picture. Mark how cleverly Guruḷugōmī contrasts the naïveté of Suddhodana with the understanding faith of Yasōdharā, by placing the pictures of these two, sharply drawn, one beside the other.

That Guruḷugōmī was a stylist who had scarcely any equal in the whole field of Sinhalese literature could be seen even in translation in the following passage :

" Thus he gave up great wealth and renounced the world ; in his young age, in the happy days of his youth he left his home and renounced the world ; not heeding the wishes of his parents and the tears of his loved ones he renounced the world. Verily is he handsome and pleasant to look at. The sight of him brings peace to the mind. He is majestic ; he shines in glory like Brahma. Infinite is he, in extent, such as Rāhu the demon-king cannot himself measure. With each exhortation of his, thousands of men enjoy the nectar of Nirvāna. Hence is he of many the teacher. He lusteth not after anything. He is firm, a teacher of the results of action, a teacher of action."

With a few lines he paints many a vivid portrait :

" At that time Śakra, the king of the gods took on the guise of a demon with sharp tusks like two huge tubers of *kaňdala*, with gaping mouth and wide forehead, broken brows and dreadful mien. His hair stood erect on his head, and his body was full of hot sweat. He wore cloth of many colours, and was trembling with pride and anger. In his hands that were like two columns of fire, he bore the shining thunderbolt, and stood in the sky with his head down.....

" Saccaka trembled when he saw him. Fear entered him and his hair stood on end, while perspiration poured down his body. His entrails seemed to turn over, within him, and he cried out with a loud cry."

The story of Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā in the *Amāvatura* is one of the most caustic satires in Sinhalese literature. The withering sarcasm of this story is directed against the institution of caste, against credulous faith, and against kings and ministers who accepted the words of Brahmins as if they were sacred utterances. Sharpest of all is the satire on the Veda-intoxicated Brahmins, who believed that they would become impure if they bathed in the water on which the shadow of a Caṇḍāla had fallen. It is almost with a malicious chuckle that Guruḷugōmī describes how a Brahmin is made to drink the gruel that had been prepared from the water in which a Caṇḍāla had washed his curry-stained fingers.

There is a version of the Mātaṅga story in the *Anuśasana Parva* of the *Mahā Bhārata*, but this speaks of the greatness of Brahmins and extols their high qualities. According to the *Mahā Bhārata* story which is related by Yudhiṣṭhira, Mātaṅga who is born of a Caṇḍāla father, practises asceticism for thousands of years. Although he performed the vow of standing on one foot for a hundred years, he was yet unable to become a Brahmin. By the power of Mātaṅga's *tapas*, the seat of Indra was heated. The king of the gods, therefore, descended to earth, and requested Mātaṅga to ask for any other boon but that of becoming a Brahmin. But Mātaṅga continued with his *tapas*, desiring only to be a Brahmin. Unable to make a Brahmin of a Caṇḍāla, Indra made Mātaṅga a god.

In the Jātaka version, however, Mātaṅga, the Caṇḍāla ascetic, becomes the great Brahma himself by the simple process of observing vows for seven days!

The old story is therefore recast by Buddhist writers in order to satirise Brahmins. And in the hands of Guruḷugōmī the satire is further sharpened and the sting made more deadly.

Buddhist literature is full of stories ridiculing Brahmins as well as kings and ministers who paid homage to them. But the bitterest of them is the story of Mātaṅga. And the manner in which our author handles the story is worthy of comparison. In the Jātaka story one hardly suspects the satire on Brahmins ; it is so slight. But Guruḷugōmī turns the Jātaka story into a merciless satire on them, with all the venom of his powerful pen. Whenever he introduces professional Brahmins or the Jainas to us, he does so in words which make no pretence at hiding his whole-hearted contempt for them. The following is his presentation of the Jaina ascetic Kōrakkhattiya :

" A naked ascetic by name Kōrakkhattiya was practising a vow which he called the ' dog-vow.' He would go down on the ground with his knees and his elbows and wobble about. He would sniff about like a dog, and lick up with his mouth whatever food or drink he found on the ground. He would scratch up the ashes in the fire-place and sleep there. Sunakkhatta on seeing him thought : 'Here indeed is a holy saint. There is none so great as he. He wears no clothes because he has no desires. He does not go about deceitfully carrying a begging bowl, but eats whatever he finds on the ground. This is true asceticism. What kind of ascetics are we !' "

The story of Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā as retold by Guruḷugōmī, goes thus :

Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā was the daughter of a nobleman of great wealth. All the young men who knew her fell a prey to her charms, but she rejected all her suitors, finding fault with them for one thing or another. One day, as she was on her way to the tank for water-sport, she saw a young man of Caṇḍāla caste, through the curtain of the palanquin in which she was being carried. At sight of him she trembled in all her limbs and said : " O, what misfortune is this that has befallen me who am on my way to cleanse myself ! I have been soiled by the sight of a Caṇḍāla."

With these words she spat on the ground, and immediately turned back to go to her house. She ordered her slaves to bring water in order to wash the eyes which saw a Caṇḍāla and the mouth which uttered the very word Caṇḍāla. Her slaves were angered by this obstruction which deprived them of their usual ration of toddy, and getting hold of the Caṇḍāla by his hair, threw him on the ground and beat him with their hands and with sticks and stones. When they thought he had died as the result of their beating, they dragged him by his feet and threw him on to a refuse heap. The Caṇḍāla regained his consciousness after the men had gone away, and thought to himself : " All this I suffered owing to Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā. As surely as I am a man I will take her to wife."

He therefore went to the nobleman's house, and falling down prostrate in the garden, began to wail aloud saying: "If I am able to possess Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā I shall leave this place, else I shall die here."

Now the law has it that if a Caṇḍāla dies on a piece of land, the people of fourteen houses, seven on each side of the land, become Caṇḍālas! The people, therefore, tried to coax away the Caṇḍāla by offering him money. But he would not go, saying that he wanted Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā and not money. Then they went to Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā's parents and threatened to throw their daughter out to the Caṇḍāla if she would not go to him of her own accord. The parents, therefore, gave her to the Caṇḍāla.

When Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā came to him at last, the Caṇḍāla asked her to carry him, as he was unable to go on foot owing to the treatment he received at the hands of her servants. He climbs on to her shoulders and visits all the houses of the nobility of the city, and in the end enters his own hut in the same manner! When he reaches home he goes to the forest and clothing himself in a piece of rag picked up from a cemetery, practises penance and in seven days attains great supernatural powers. By dint of his *tapas* he flies through the air and alights in the Caṇḍāla village, and begging from door to door comes to the house where Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā lives. She recognises him and begins to weep saying: "If you intended to be an ascetic why did you bring me here and make me helpless?" And he says to her: "Do not weep, Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā. I have now the power to wash

the heads of all the kings of Jambudvīpa with the water with which you wash your feet. Do now as I tell you. Go to every place in the city and say that your husband is not a Caṇḍāla but Brahma himself."

Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā did as she was asked, and went about the city crying: "My husband, now become Brahma, will come back to me from the sky bursting forth through the moon."

And the people mocked her saying: "Look how this woman is trying to make her husband the great Brahma himself!" But as they heard her say these words again and again, they began to believe her and to go to her house and sprinkle white sand round it.

On every full-moon day Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā used to go out, as was her wont, and announce the arrival of her husband. And the Caṇḍāla ascetic would assume the form of Brahma, twelve *yojanas* in length, and bursting forth from out of the moon he would stand in front of its orb. And when the people saw him they had no cause to disbelieve Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā any more, and stood around her house with flowers and fragrant things in their hands. Then Mātaṅga descended to the earth in his normal guise, caused Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā to conceive a child by touching her on her navel. The child she bore was named Maṇḍappa.

Maṇḍappa was taught by the learned men of Jambudvīpa, and he grew to be a great admirer of Brahmins, and used to give them many gifts.

Mātaṅga, who saw with his divine eyes what his son did, thought that he had unfortunately gone astray. In fact, Mātaṅga is one day driven away by his son who refuses to give alms to anyone but a Brahmin. The gods are angry at this and make both Maṇḍappa as well as the Brahmins mad. Maṇḍappa's head begins to face the opposite direction, and his eyes assume the appearance of a dead man's. His mouth foams and his limbs become stiff. All the other Brahmins roll along the ground, foaming at their mouths.

Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā goes to Mātaṅga and asks his help in this situation. Mātaṅga says that his son is intoxicated with the Vedas. Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā begs of him to cure her son.

At last Mātaṅga promises to give her a magical remedy for the ailment of her son. And what is this panacea? The Caṇḍāla ascetic washes his curry-stained hand in his bowl and expectorates into it. He requests Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā to give the liquid to her son and the rest of the Brahmins to drink!

Diṭṭha Maṅgalikā did as she was requested, and her son and the other Brahmins were cured of their hysteria! But they were excommunicated from their caste because they had drunk of the water in which a Caṇḍāla had washed his hand.

The mordant satire in the above story is too obvious to need commenting on.

Prose writers after Guruḷugōmī did not possess his penetrating intellect and wit or his independence of outlook. He paid no pūjā to the Brahmin tradition on

the ground that it represented the words of the holy rishis, as did many a writer after him. He did not fear to lash severely at kings and ministers alike who earned his disapproval. We saw earlier how the writer of the *Sasadāvata* feared to make the barber touch the king's head. Even when it came to addressing the Buddha, Guruḷugōmī did not use the sentimental epithets and the hyperbolic descriptions of many a later writer. His was the truly intellectual attitude of the Buddhist to the world and the Buddha. It was this rational mind of his that influenced his selection of material, his ruthless rejection of tales of credulous faith and blind adoration, his indifference to the sob-stuff dear to the hearts of pious upāsikās. The result is that there is scarcely a single work in the entire field of Sinhalese literature that represents the intellectual spirit of Buddhist culture better than the *Amāvatura*.

VIDYĀCAKRAVARTI

The *Butsaraṇa* of Vidyācakravartī is more suitable to be read aloud for the edification of a gathering of faithful hearers than to be read silently to oneself. The author adopts a style, which is a combination of the Sanskrit prose style and the figurative language of the popular religious preacher. The need for a treatment of Buddhist themes in this manner, at a time when printing was unknown and the copying of manuscripts was a tedious task, has hardly to be stressed. The practice of listening to the reading of prose or metrical versions of Jātakas is widely prevalent even today when books are readily available. For his purpose Vidyācakravartī selects words which can be intoned and dwelt upon in the

chanting, unlike the words of Guruḷugōmī, the majority of which have consonantal endings at which the voice halts.

Writers after Vidyācakravartī followed the same style, doubtless for a similar purpose. Most of them were monks who lived aloof from laymen. Hence they knew little of the experiences of lay life. All that interested them in the life of the householder was that small part of it which was occupied with religion. So they dealt exclusively in their books with the religious life of the layman. And in the rare instance of the writer's happening to be a layman himself, it was not surprising that he should, on account of the dominance of the monkish attitude, have mainly concerned himself with what laymen achieved by dint of their spiritual power, and not by their worldly efforts.

Vidyācakravartī was not a man who gained his knowledge in the university of life. If he ever received any schooling therein, he certainly did not make much use of it. The knowledge he possessed was of books and not of men. The *Butsaraṇa* is the product of a mind that was untempered in the fire of worldly experience. It was a contrast to the sharp, discriminating, coldly rational mind of Guruḷugōmī. His work overflows with the sentimental faith his heart was full of. His sonorous compounds and alliterative epithets lull the devoted listener into a state of drugged *bhakti*, but often weary the critical reader.

Of the three works attributed to Vidyācakravartī, the *Butsaraṇa*, the *Dahamsaraṇa* and the *Saṅgasaraṇa*, the *Saṅgasaraṇa* contains a few expressions

which bear testimony to the poetic genius of the writer. The greater part of the *Butsaraṇa*, on the other hand, is full of oft-repeated expressions and strings of epithets. It is more a catalogue of the powers and virtues of the Buddha than a genuine prose poem in praise of him. It should be subjected to severe criticism, therefore, as a literary work. But as it is meant to be a popular work addressed to a gathering of faithful hearers, we might look in it for other merits. From this point of view, there is much to be said on its side.

There are some who criticise the *Butsaraṇa* for its verbosity and the artificiality of its descriptions, while some see in it a very vigorous and expressive prose style. But people of both camps are agreed on the value it has for the common man, both as a popular treatise on the Buddhist religion and as a book to be listened to with great enjoyment. The short life of the Buddha which is related in the opening of this book has charms for the learned and the unlearned alike. Of similar charm are the mythological narratives of the origin of the world, and the description of the Himālayās, which are contained in the Lōka Vivaraṇa Kāṇḍa. The following picture of Śakra's chariot will not fail to fascinate even the sophisticated mind for its naïve charm:

"The chariot of Śakra the king of the gods, is known as Vijayot and is hundred and fifty yojanas (a yojana is sixteen miles) in length. Its rear portion is fifty yojanas long. The body of the chariot in the middle is fifty yojanas in extent, while its height alone is fifty yojanas. In the chariot is spread a carpet which is

a yojana long, and there is a white umbrella in it three yojanas in extent. On each side there are yoked to it a thousand pure-bred horses. Its other beauties cannot be summed up. The flag fixed on it is about two-hundred and fifty yojanas in height. And when the wind beats on it there is produced a sound as sweet as that of orchestral music."

The following words of Aṅgulimāla successfully convey to the hearer the untutored faith that enters the heart of the robber and the emotional outburst when he was converted by the Buddha:

"I know thee, lord, I know who thou art. Art thou not the son of Mahā Māyā? Art thou not the son of the King Suddhōdana? And dost the lord see the sins that his servant committeth? And hath the lord come so far out of love for his servant? With all my life I fly to thee for refuge. The fire in my eye is cooled. My heart is calm. My sins have been forgiven me."

The story of the elephant Nālāgiri is told with a fervour that moves the sentimental reader to tears. The incident about Nandōpananda, enriched as it is with the sentiments of heroism (*vīra*) and wonder (*adbhuta*), goes straight to the heart of a believer. Other tales that have a simple charm are the *Tīrthaka Damana*, the *Jaṭila Damana*, and the *Gaṅgārohaṇa Kathā*.

Of all the stories handled by Vidyācakravartī in the *Butsaraṇa* the one that has the greatest appeal is the story of Vessantara. This story contains many

incidents that had for the genius of Vidyācakravartī a peculiar fascination. It is a legend that has for centuries moved the hearts of the Sinhalese people and moulded the character of their women. It has occupied, in the life of the people of this country, the same place that the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* occupied in the lives of the people of India. The metrical version of the story, written by an anonymous folk-poet, used to be read aloud to greatly moved audiences in practically every Buddhist home till recent times. This printed Vessantara poem, probably based on the *Butsaraṇa* version, went into thirty or forty editions in a few years, a fact which proves the great popularity which it enjoyed.

The character of Madri Devi has influenced that of Sinhalese women in much the same way that the character of Sītā or Savitri influenced that of Indian women. Madri Devi follows her husband into the forest when he decides to become an ascetic. There she clothes herself with bark and skins, just as the king does, "sweeps the floor, prepares her husband's sitting place, carries him there, wipes the dust from his feet and places the two children beside him." This ideal of feminine devotion has, no doubt, been instilled into the Sinhalese woman by her acquaintance with the Vessantara story.

The fact that the translator of the Jātaka commentary into Sinhalese borrowed the Vessantara story wholesale from Vidyācakravartī's version is further evidence of the success our author has achieved in evoking the feelings of his listeners. The entire story is calculated to rouse the dominant sentiments

of *karuṇā* and *śānta*. The author prepares the mind of the reader for the pathos of the scene where the mother gives away her children to the Brahmin, by dwelling at length on Madri Devi's devotedness to her husband and her passion for her children, and on the dreadful appearance and cruelty of the Brahmin. The reader is given an opportunity of gathering for himself a very real picture of the Brahmin through a conversation he overhears at a river-bank where some women go to bring water:

"One day the Brahmin women met Amittatāpā at the water-spot, and began to ridicule her saying: 'O, you sinful wretch! Do you work thus for a decrepit old toothless fellow? Your parents were moved by animosity when they gave you in marriage to this toothless haggard man. Perhaps they were disgusted of you. You are a woman who has earned no merit in your past lives. When you gave balls of rice to crows in your last birth, perhaps an old crow ate up the food. That is why you became the wife of an old wretch. How, indeed, friend, can you bear and enjoy the embraces of this wrinkled beast? What pleasure do you get when he opens his toothless mouth and grins at you? Does the touch of his scaly skin thrill you? My child, do not vex your limbs by toiling for this bag of old bones. Go and find a young man as handsome as yourself.' "

Vidyācakravarti describes to us the effects of these words on the young Brahmin woman, in the following manner:

"When she heard the words of these women, she wept aloud, and sobbed out her heart, and dashing her pot on a stone, and storming with anger and

grinding out an oath she went up to the Brahmin and said: 'I have today, you Brahmin wretch, the reward of living with a foolish old driveller like you. A very pleasant match indeed have I made! The women of the place got together and rained abuse on my head today, as if they were spitting on me. It is better that I throw a noose round my neck and kill myself rather than stay with you and be subjected to such indignities; I would rather take poison and die.' "

Vidyācakravartī puts into the mouth of Jāliya, when Vessantara hands over his children to the Brahmin, words which heighten and enhance the vividness of the above picture. When the Brahmin trips and falls down, Jāliya runs up to his father and says:

"Father, did you not yourself hear the words my mother spoke when she went to the forest commending us to your care because she had seen an evil dream? Father, have you forgotten? . . . Do look after us till our loving mother comes back and we tell her of our sorrow . . . Give us over to any one but this ugly creature. Look, his hair is brown, he is tawny-eyed and squints. His nose is crooked and his ears are pendulous. His teeth jut out, he is bent in his back and his belly protrudes. His legs are bandy, and his nails are falling off. Do not give us to such an ugly devil."

The fear that the children felt when they found themselves in the hands of the ugly Brahmin, is well conveyed in the following words:

"They ran like two frightened deer, flying through the forest in the fear that the Brahmin was following them. And when they came to the hut, they were unable to remain still, and ran into a grove of trees and hid themselves there. But wherever they looked they thought they saw the Brahmin running after them, and unable to remain there any longer for fear of him, they ran to the square pond. They climbed down to the water, one helping the other, and hid there covering their heads with lotus leaves, and listening intently to every little sound that stirred, and crying to themselves, 'O mother, think of us. O gods that protect us, go and tell our mother of our sorrow. She thinks, perhaps, that we are playing with sand and passing our time quite happily. Do go and bring her.' "

At last, when they were caught by the Brahmin, and were being taken away by him, they bid goodbye to the familiar groves and grottos, the clay figures of elephants and horses which were their playthings, and the thousand inanimate objects which they address, requesting them to inform their mother of the sorrow they were undergoing. "The trees with drooping branches on either side seemed to be sorrowing at the sight of the children walking with sore feet on the stony path. The forest trees resounding with the murmur of bees, seemed to be opening their flowery lips and telling Madri Devi of the departure of her children, and the birds and beasts were lamenting the loss of their beloved companions."

One of the finest passages in the *Butsaraṇa* is the description of the dance of Māra's daughters as they sought to entice the Buddha. Its style is reminiscent

of the *Suḷu Kaliṅgudā* of the *Dharmapradīpikā*, and some of the ideas are borrowed from the *Samantakūṭa Varṇanā* of Vedeha:

"Wonderful indeed is the sight of thee with such lovely form and such youth, all alone by thyself in this lone forest. Lord, it is meet that thou shouldst soothe, even in small measure, the heart that beats wildly at sight of thee. It is meet that no evil should befall the eye that beholds the robe covering a body such as thine. It is meet that thou shouldst cast but one glance to soothe the anguish of the heart that runs after these eyes enslaved by thy beauty. It is not meet that thou shouldst turn away from this grief of mine, as if thou wert made of stone or moulded of clay, heaped up out of straw or cut out of wood. Unhappy the woman who gets not a playmate like thee, in a flowering arbour in such lovely spring as this. Listen to the note of the royal swan,intoxicated with the honey of flowers. Hear the murmur of bees within the sāla trees. Listen to the sweet words of the kōkilas in the full-blown mango grove. Watch the peacocks dancing with their plumage spread, before the smiling pea-hens. Watch the youthful deer, maddened with the air of spring, draw his mate out from the fold with the edge of his horns, and retire into the forest glade. Watch the bowers of creepers, how they stand in readiness. Watch the stretches of milk-white sand. Watch the great falls, roaring down the rocks. How sweet are the gentle breezes wafting the fragrance of flowers. Watch the anguish thou dost cause all round by thy coldness. Come, lord, console thy sorrowing slave in the heaven of thy spacious lap."

The luxurious overflow of religious sentiment and feeling on a loudly demonstrative and uncritical level is the strength as well as the weakness of Vidyā-cakravartī's genius. The *Sivi Jātaka* of the *Daham Saraṇa* affords a good illustration of how this exuberance of feeling tends to invest his work with an interest, and, at the same time, a superficiality which bores the critical reader. He resorts to every kind of popular device in order to prolong the agony of the reader at the removal of King Sivi's eyes. The well-known physician Sīvaka, who is summoned by the king and asked to perform the delicate operation of removing his eyes, invents an unique method of doing so. He places a kind of powder inside a blue lily and asks the king to sniff at it. As he goes on sniffing it up, his eye gradually comes out of its socket, and he begins to feel great pain. In the midst of this process the physician asks the king whether he would change his mind about having his eye removed after having experienced the pain it caused him, for, says he, he could still send back the eye to its normal place. But the king angrily asks the physician to go on with the task he had been asked to do. The physician, therefore, gives the king once more the blue lily with the powder in it to sniff. Once more the eye starts coming out, and once again the physician gives the king a chance of changing his mind. But the king says: "Pull out my eyes and do not torture my ears in addition." This time, when the king sniffs up the magic powder, the eye falls out of its socket and revolves at the end of a vein. The king scans the loosened eye with the one eye he possesses, and watching the blood bathe his breast like a flood of vermilion falling down a golden rock,

dives deeper and deeper in the ocean of joy, with the man who had begged for his eye still looking on at him.

Even at this juncture the physician asks the king whether he wishes to have his eye back. The king instructs him to cut the vein and separate the eye. The physician holds the eye in his left hand, and taking his knife in his right hand, cuts the eye from the vein and places it in the hands of the king. The barbaric relish with which Vidyācakravartī describes every commonplace detail of this torture is too obvious to need commenting on.

Although Välivitiye Sōrata Thera says that the *Thūpavaṃsa* could be attributed to Vidyācakravartī, apart from those portions in it that have been bodily borrowed from the *Butsaraṇa*, there is hardly anything in it similar in style or treatment to the work of our author. Labugama Laṅkānanda Thera, in his edition of the *Thūpavaṃsa*, remarks rightly that the stories of the ten heroes of Duṭu Gämuṇu and certain portions of the life of Duṭu Gämuṇu himself are borrowed from the *Saddharmālaṅkāra*. He further states that there is hardly anything in the *Thūpavaṃsa* which is an original creation of its author. A good part of it is a mere word-to-word translation from the Pāli, and repetitions of stock descriptions are frequent.

The *Pūjāvalī* is also to be reckoned as one of the lesser prose works belonging to the same class as the *Thūpavaṃsa*. The *Butsaraṇa* is a spontaneous overflow of religious emotion, but the *Pūjāvalī* is a book

of sermons written with the express purpose of inciting its hearers to bestow alms freely on the monks. Mayūrapāda was a great adept at the art of propaganda. To no other work before the *Pūjāvalī* could this conscious and deliberate purpose of doing propaganda for alms be unhesitatingly attributed. But Mayūrapāda's motive becomes intensely clear to any unprejudiced reader of his book. The *Saddharmālaṅkāra*, written after the *Pūjāvalī*, is even more clearly motivated by the desire for alms. The gradual decline of Sinhalese prose, after the *Pūjāvalī* and similar works, is to be explained by the fact that literature was being used, from this time onwards, largely as a vehicle of propaganda.

The *Pūjāvalī* deserves credit only in so far as it encouraged writers to use a style more intelligible to the people and to abandon the indiscriminate use of Sanskrit words, where simpler words from the spoken language of the people could be substituted with greater profit. Mayūrapāda's intention was to relate tales of mystery and wonder and thereby to capture the hearts of the people. But incidentally he gives us a glimpse of the life of the people to whom he was addressing his sermons. In the story of Anuruddha comes one of these rare accounts of the life of a peasant of his time. It reminds us that the life of a peasant was by no means a life of unmixed blessings as is the fond illusion of many a champion of the past. The worst features of the feudal system are detailed in this description of the farmer's life, as related by Mahānāma to his brother. After several months of arduous toil by night and day, the greater portion of the paddy goes to the owner and not to the

man who ploughed the field and sowed it. And the day the farmer is unable to perform these laborious tasks, either owing to illness or old age, he has to starve. His landlords leave him to the mercy of his other vassals who are sufficiently educated in the virtue of charity and the rewards it would bring in the next world. He spends the last days of his life "stalking about from house to house, like a comic actor assuming a funny rôle for the amusement of his audience, leaning on two sticks, and begging in the very land which he tilled for his rice."

VI

THE PROSE OF DHARMASENA

THE pulpit-prose that was created by the authors of the *Butsaraṇa* and the *Pūjāvalī* was made into a very facile medium for narrative by the author of the *Saddharma Ratnāvalī*, Bhikṣu Dharmasena, than whom there was no cleverer story-teller in the whole history of Sinhalese literature. Just as the poetry that began with the *Sasadāvata* or the *Muvadevdāvata* followed a stock pattern in respect of subject-matter and treatment, so the prose that began with the *Butsaraṇa* tended to limit itself to a few stock themes and stereotyped modes of handling them. Dharmasena brought some relief into this monotony, drawing his subject-matter from the lives of villagers and by introducing into his style the turns of speech and idioms of the folk. After the *Amāvatura*, the only prose work to which one could turn with an ever-freshening interest is the *Saddharma Ratnāvalī*. If Dharmasena had but shown a certain amount of discrimination in the choice of his stories, he would have ranked as one of the greatest writers in Sinhalese literature. The *Saddharma Ratnāvalī* contains in the main Buddhist stories relating to the life of village folk, and these incidents are enlivened with figures of speech drawn from the village. The style Dharmasena creates thereby becomes unique and admirably suited to his matter. But one must cut patiently through the thick jungle

of his stories in order to come upon patches of beautiful scenery. The mass of his unselected material often hides from view the truly distinctive quality of his genius and the rhythm and charm of his peculiar style.

Sinhalese prose fell into an inevitable state of dullness and monotony as the result of its endless preoccupation with the same religious stories and themes. A modern reader cannot help remarking on the dryness and monotony of our prose works, however much he may be in sympathy with the intention of ancient authors. For, with books that were meant to be read aloud to a group of readers, the differences of intonation in individual reciters, as well as their other peculiarities of speech and manner, may have invested the same story with a fresh interest each time it was heard. The situation would be different, however, when these stories are read to oneself silently from a printed text. In such a case it would be only the language and style of a writer that can relieve, even in small measure, the boredom that a similarity of theme would inevitably induce. And of all prose writers it is only Guruḷugōmī and Dharmasena who created an independent style which is a true expression of their own individual genius.

Besides this, as we have noticed earlier, Sinhalese writers never attempted, whether in prose or in verse, to express the life they experienced or the society they saw around them. Steeped in Sanskrit lore, they were blind to the life of their own country. Dharmasena, however, was not a man of mere book-learning. He was versed in the wisdom of the world. Hence it

is that his *Saddharma Ratnāvalī* becomes, although in a small way, a sort of mirror reflecting the society of its time, the manners and even the very speech and customs of the village folk that Dharmasena knew so well.

Most other writers adorned the stories they gathered from books with illustrations and images which were themselves picked up from books. But Dharmasena enriched his book-learning with his observation of life, and he brought in all his experience of the world in order to add to the interest of the stories he was relating from books. With a nature mellowed and tempered by a knowledge, which, though not personal, was sufficiently capable of understanding the joys and sorrows of a worldly life, he never took a stern and unsympathetic moralist attitude to the characters of his stories who fell a prey to the weaknesses of the flesh. Nor did he think it fit to describe only the life of kings and princes. The life he saw in the palace and the life he saw in the hut of a poor peasant had no essential difference for him.

With his keen observation of and insight into life, he was able to handle certain stories out of the old legendary material, with a greater emphasis on and a greater appreciation of their humanity. His treatment of the story of Paṭācārā would make this quite clear. Dharmasena does not strive after poetical effect as does Vidyācakravartī. He gives us a straightforward Sinhalese version of the stories of the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā*. But each story gains new life as it comes to us through his pen. He adorns every story with the jewels of his own experience and

his own observation of life. He always draws from the villager's repertoire of worldly wisdom in order to illustrate what he is saying. And even when describing the characters of the stories he culled from Pali sources, he seems to have made reference to his mental notebook where he had jotted down the characteristics and personal peculiarities of the people he had actually met in life.

One of the marked characteristics of Dharmasena's genius is his sense of humour, not the biting humour of Guruḷugōmī which is tinged with satire and, sometimes, malice, but a large-hearted and loudly-laughing kind of humour. It was a humour occasioned by an indulgent amusement at the follies of mortals without a trace in it of the anger or resentment of the moralist. Thus he laughed at Cittahattha Thera who unfrocked himself and went back six times to his wife; at the eight wives of the Thera Mahā Kāḷa, already an Arahant, who tried to unfrock their husband by force and keep him at home. Nor did he ever heap invective on women except for indulging in an occasional jibe at their expense.

Once upon a time, at Sāvatthi, a certain youth went into the wood in search of a bull that had gone astray, and looking for the animal the entire morning without any success, felt hungry as midday drew near, and went into a vihāra. He ate what was left of the food of the monks and asked them: "Reverend monks, were there people who invited you to lunch today?" The monks replied: "No, faithful friend; even if we beg we always get alms like this." The boy, therefore thought thus: "I shall not get such good food, were I to work a whole year with the sweat of my

brow. Why should I exert myself so much when these monks get their food for nothing more than the trouble of going and asking for it? I shall be a monk myself."

Cittahattha, who became a monk in the circumstances described above, is introduced to the reader in the following manner by Dharmasēna: "Having comfortably partaken of the food which was given him in the name of the Buddha, he grew quite fat and healthy, and bethought himself: 'Why should I beg for my food any more?' He thereupon went home and divested himself of his yellow robes. But not having the wherewithal to support himself, he began to grow lean again on account of excessive work and insufficient food, and thought to himself once more: 'Why suffer in this manner? Let me go and get into robes.' So saying he went a second time and became a monk, and his body in which the bones jutted out as the sticks jut out of a wall which is plastered with mud, became rotund again and this led to his giving up robes a second time . . . Thus six times he entered the Order and six times unfrocked himself.

"In the intervening period between his leaving the monastery and returning to it, his wife conceived a child in her womb. On the seventh occasion that he thought of becoming a monk, he returned home from the field with his ploughshare and yoke, and went into his bedroom to get back into his clothes. His wife was sprawling on the bed, fast asleep, being quite tired with pounding rice, and her clothes had slipped off from her body. The spit was pouring down the two sides of her mouth, and she was snoring away for all

she was worth. And although her eyes were closed her mouth was wide open. The appearance of his wife seemed to the man a sign of the futility and foulness of life, as though he had seen a swollen corpse . . . and he straightaway walked out of the room wrapping his cloth round his waist. His mother-in-law was surprised at seeing her daughter's husband come back from the field and immediately walk out of the house in the direction of the vihāra with his cloth in his hand. She went into the room and saw her daughter sleeping, and thought that her appearance must have brought disgust to his mind. She therefore woke her up and said: 'Look, you wretch, your husband came home and saw you sprawling in this manner and left the house. I dare say you will not see him again.'

"She heard these words of her mother, and said: 'You mind your business, mother. Where is he to go? He will come back in a few days. Don't I know him?' "

Dharmasēna has changed the Pāli version only in a few places, but he has given the situation a humour it did not possess in the original.

We have remarked above that there was no better story-teller than Dharmasēna in the entire field of Sinhalese prose. His art is the straightforward and unsophisticated art of the folk tale. Perhaps we have no better examples of a well-related story after Dharmasēna till we come to the Jātaka translation. As an example of his art we may quote the following extract from his 'story about the son of a man who killed cattle and ate the flesh':

"He (this cattle-eater) spent the entire morning in selling the meat of the animals he had killed, and went to bathe, instructing his wife to have some meat prepared for him when he came back. In the meantime a friend of his came to his house and told his wife that he had a visitor with him and had nothing to give him along with his rice. Would she sell him a piece of meat? She answered that all the meat had been sold as they were in need of money and that there was nothing at home. He did not believe her and went on asking for at least a small piece. She confessed at last that there was only one piece of meat which her husband wished to have for his evening meal. He asked for this piece, but she replied that her husband would not eat rice without meat and that it could not, therefore, be spared. When she refused him the piece of meat in spite of his repeated requests, he walked into the house and removed it by force.

"When the hunter came back, his wife served him with rice and vegetables. The man asked her for the meat. She told him what had happened to it. He refused to eat without meat, and asked her to go and fetch it somehow. She said, 'How can I bring the piece of meat that has been taken away?'

"He pushed the rice away, and going to the back of his compound, he cut out the tongue of a bull that was standing there, and, without having the patience to cook it, he roasted it under the coals and placing it on his plate of rice, sat down to his meals again. He put a handful of rice in his mouth and followed it up with a piece of the tongue.

"At that very moment his tongue fell out of his mouth on the plate, and he suffered the result of his sins in a fitting manner."

None of the later prose writers who turned the literature into a vehicle for propaganda had anything of the genius of Dharmasena. Prose writing, therefore, steadily declined after him. The *Saddharmālaṅkāra* and the *Anāgatavaṅśa* bear sufficient evidence of this decline. The latter is quite clearly an attempt on the part of monks to appeal to the stock sentiments of pious people for their own personal gain.

The Ummagga Jātaka

The *Ummagga Jātaka* appears to us to be a satire on the line of Brahmins who were the counsellors of kings after Candragupta. Even the names of the Brahmin advisers of the king in the *Ummagga Jātaka* seem to have been coined by the Buddhist author with the purpose of ridiculing Brahmins. Kevaṭṭa, which means a fisherman, is strongly reminiscent of the name of the author of the *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya. The meaning 'crooked' conveyed by the word 'kauṭilya' is to be found in 'Kevaṭṭa' too. The profession of the fisherman calls to mind his hook, which is not only crooked but contains a bait at its end, which spells death to the unsuspecting fish. King Cūḷani's counsellor, therefore, cannot fail to bring to mind the crafty counsellor of King Candragupta. The counsellors of King Vedeha are known respectively by the names of Senaka which means a hawk and Pukkusa which

stands for a man of a low caste. Another counsellor who is introduced to us by the name of Devinda happens to be a gem-thief. The other adviser of the king has a name which means 'king of monkeys.' On the full-moon day he goes mad and barks like a dog!

One might wonder why the Buddhists should ridicule Cāṇakya, the Brahmin counsellor. Whatever the reason may have been, the fact that the Buddhists were hostile to him becomes clear from a statement in a Mahāyāna text, *Ārya Mañjuśrī Kalpa*. It says: "Cāṇakya, the chaplain of King Bindusāra, is a wicked man. Bindusāra himself was born in the line of Nanda kings as the result of his having made a *caitya* in play as a small child. He grew up to be a man of great eloquence and courage. He had as his Prime Minister the cruel Cāṇakya who was the 'soul of anger,' the incarnation of death. This wicked Brahmin lived long, being the counsellor of three kings, Sukalpa Nanda, Candragupta, and Bindusāra. After his death he was consigned to hell, where he was destined to undergo various kinds of tortures for a *kalpa*."

A Buddhist historian speaks of Cāṇakya in the above terms because he was, evidently, held in contempt by Buddhists. Cāṇakya is one of the characters of Viśākhadatta's drama *Mudrārākṣasa*. And he is introduced to us by the author as a man of furious temper and self-willed: "The lurid glow of his eyes, though subdued in consequence of the eyeballs being wet with the flow of limpid tears, is as it were again ablaze. The gloom of the knit-up eye-

brows thickens. The blows of his foot are borne with difficulty by the earth, which shakes terribly as if reminded of Rudra exhibiting the sentiment of fury in the course of his frantic dance."

Compare with the above, the words in which King Cūḷani describes his minister Kevaṭṭa in the *Ummagga Jātaka:*

"When I sit on my throne surrounded by my ministers this man lifts his forehead and looks at me through his pair of red eyes hidden by his thick brows. His appearance is as frightful, it seems to me, as that of a devil. With his uneven teeth, his wicked face and his blood-red eyes, he would instil fear into one even if seen in a dream."

This description of Kevaṭṭa in the *Ummagga Jātaka* is very reminiscent of the description of Cāṇakya put into the mouth of Candragupta in the *Mudrārākṣasa* of Visākhadatta. It is very likely that the object of both descriptions was the same historical personage, a great diplomat and statesman of ancient times. The story of the water-sprite in the *Ummagga Jātaka* bears certain resemblances to an incident related in connection with Cāṇakya. In the story of the water-sprite, the clever Prince Mantri is born of Talatā Dēvī when she was living with the Brahmin minister of her husband, old King Cūḷani, whom she had poisoned. It is said that when Alexander the Great entered India, the north of India was ruled by the son of a barber. This barber was the queen's lover, and with her help he is said to have

succeeded in killing the king. One tradition states that Candragupta was an illegitimate descendant of the line of Nanda kings. And Cāṇakya was his minister.

There is reason to surmise, therefore, that both the *Ummagga Jātaka* and the *Mudrārākṣasa* were written on the basis of the legends then current about the Nanda dynasty. The *Ummagga Jātaka* is the Buddhist version of these legends, and it satirises the Brahmins who followed the *Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra* and the kings whom they advised.

Some of the stories in the introductory portion of the *Ummagga Jātaka* are, both in style and technique, similar to modern short stories. There are others which are similar in construction to those early fables from which certain western critics trace the origins of the modern detective story. These short stories, though they are not closely connected with the main story of the *Ummagga Jātaka*, portray the wisdom of Mahauṣadha and the foolishness of King Vedeha.

There is hardly a single story in the entire field of ancient Indian literature which approaches a modern novel as closely as the *Ummagga Jātaka*. Buddhist prose literature, particularly the *Jātakas*, can boast of many a well-related narrative. But in none of them is such a degree of verisimilitude and conscious art and a vividness of characterisation achieved. Udumbarā Devī, for example, sends a letter to Mahauṣadha concealed inside a sweetmeat, when the king had gone to sleep. The critical reader might question this. But the writer steps in to reassure him. He tells the reader not to think that the place was

guarded and that such a thing was therefore impossible. For, did not the king give Udumbarā Devī permission to send anything to Mahauṣadha at any time and state that no guards would prevent her from communicating with him whenever she wished to? There are many other places where the writer of the *Ummagga Jātaka* tries thus to make his story look true and plausible. He does the same thing in the case of the characters. He makes their behaviour conform as much as possible to their nature and to the situations they are called upon to face.

The most clever piece of characterization in the *Ummagga Jātaka* is not Mahauṣadha but king Vedeha. It is the character of a foolish king surrounded by a ring of crafty people who play on his vanity and make use of his impulsiveness and his fondness for the fair sex, in order to gain their own ends. The problem of the gem is the first occasion on which the king's foolishness is revealed to us. The gem which appeared to be in the pond was found to be reflected in the water of a bowl which Mahauṣadha holds in such a way that the reflection of the branches of a tree which is close to the pond falls on it. The king, still unable to understand, thinks that the gem ought to be hidden in the well!

All the questions that were put to Mahauṣadha by *King Vedeha before he was brought to the palace* were framed by his minister Senaka. The only question which the king himself thought out, revealed his intelligence. When Mahauṣadha hears the *Elaka Praśna*, the Question regarding the Goat, he realises that the king must be a fool.

Owing to his own lack of independent judgment the king is influenced by whatever he hears. In the *Paṇḍita Praśna*, Mahauṣadha reveals the selfish and malicious character of the other ministers of the king. The king is immediately roused to wrath and orders that all four of them be put to death. They are saved finally through the intervention of Mahauṣadha himself.

The character of Mahauṣadha is not that of an ideal hero who would sacrifice his own life out of love for his enemy. It is the character of an intensely practical man who would follow the path that would be most beneficial to the good of his king and his country, even if it went against a strict moral code. He would not hesitate, for example, to have his enemy killed, or to employ crooked means for gaining victory. Notwithstanding the fact that Kevaṭṭa was an old man, he rubbed his face on the ground, until it bled. He stole a princess to satisfy the desire of the lustful old king. In all matters relating to the king and the state, his only criterion was expediency. In personal matters he showed his chivalry, kindness and unselfishness. When he was in a position to be sovereign lord of an entire kingdom, he handed his own sword to the king who had fallen into his power, and said to him: "If you have aught against me, take this sword and cut my neck."

The story of Piṅguttara in the *Siri Kālakaṇṇi Praśna* seems to be an attack on the kind of education imparted in the Brahmin schools, where the students learn books by heart but know nothing of the world in which they live. Piṅguttara is very quick at

learning the arts and sciences from his Brahmin teacher. It was because he was clever that his teacher gave him his daughter in marriage. But the man who had such a brilliant career and ends up by winning his teacher's daughter, earns his living by clearing the road all day with a miserable spade in his hand. When the beautiful Udumbarā comes to him at night, he leaves his bed and prefers to sleep under it. Finally, when she climbs a fig tree in search of a few figs to satisfy her pangs of hunger, he entwines the base of the tree with thorny creepers and runs away from her.

The very name Piṅguttara, which means 'a high-born buffalo' or 'a noble bull' seems to contain in it an attitude of wholesale contempt towards this curious product of Brahmin education.

The collection of Jātakas is full of tales which unfold the character of women and throw light into the inmost recesses of their hearts. The character of Udumbarā Dēvī in the *Ummagga Jātaka* stands out unique among the women of the Jātakas. The writer of the *Ummagga Jātaka* makes no attempt to hide the fact that Udumbarā Devī nursed a secret passion for Mahauṣadha. This affection, the author likens to the love between a brother and a sister. Neither the king nor the members of the royal family have any suspicions regarding this attachment. Even Senaka, Mahauṣadha's greatest enemy, does not make use of this fact in order to estrange the feelings of the king towards his new minister.

But there are certain incidents even in the *Ummagga Jātaka* where the author displays his lack of first-hand knowledge of the character of women. It is not surprising that monkish authors, living, as they did, aloof from the lay folk, had no deep understanding of women. The various means resorted to by Mahauṣadha in order to test the fidelity of Amarā Devī strike one as being rather naïve. Mahauṣadha, in spite of his penetrating intellect, had yet no access to the hidden spots in a woman's heart.

The character of Mahauṣadha has perhaps had the same influence in moulding the character of the Sinhalese man as that of Madri Devī in influencing the character of the Sinhalese woman. Though the Sinhalese man idealises a character like that of Siri Saṅga Bō who sacrificed his entire worldly glory in pursuit of other-worldly gain, in his practical life he admires characters like that of Mahauṣadha. The escapism of Siri Saṅga Bō may appeal to the religious instincts of the Sinhalese, but the efficient wisdom of Mahauṣadha in solving the difficulties of life appealed to the intensely practical side of their natures. Mahauṣadha's life was a struggle for survival among a set of treacherous and unscrupulous colleagues against whose evil machinations he had to safeguard not only himself but his king, queen, country, and his own wife as well. He remained loyal to his king although he often risked his life by doing so. In the end when the entire kingdom lay in his hands, and the king was at his feet, he showed the unselfishness of his aims and his sincere devotion to his task, by relinquishing all claims to it, and handing it back to his master. That his only motive was to perform

his duty faithfully in the face of all odds, in the face of all personal risks, and in the face of all suspicion, was amply proved by this last act of his.

The Decline of Prose

The *Ummagga Jātaka* saved the language from the degeneracy that was gradually creeping into it after the *Amāvatura*. Prose between the period of the *Amāvatura* and that of the *Ummagga Jātaka* employs a style that savours of the sentimentalism of its subject-matter. The language overflows with tears and with the demonstration of a faith that makes the devotee quiver. The *Ummagga Jātaka* however, by the very nature of its subject matter, uses a much more sober style, deeper in its emotional quality, and more intellectual in its appeal. Although the language came once more into its proper domain, the expression of the restrained spirit of Buddhism, decadence set in very soon. And there was hardly any prose work of note after the *Ummagga Jātaka*.

The style of the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* was the same as that adopted commonly by all religious writers of the time. The adoption of a new style known as *vṛttagandhi* in works like the *Daḷadā Sirita*, *Daṁbadeṇi Asna* and *Kuvēṇi Asna* is evidence of the fact that the writers of these books became aware of the monotony that had crept into the language by this time, both in respect of style and subject-matter. But the *vṛtta-gandhi* style died a natural death before long, as it was itself only an euphonic device incapable of expressing anything new.

This experiment with new styles was itself a sign that decadence was setting in. It was only a writer of exceptional genius that could produce anything original through the medium of a technique that was already hackneyed and worked to death. In the absence of anyone with anything new to communicate it was natural that people should seek new forms of expression in order to disguise the staleness of their ideas and feelings. There was neither any fresh impetus from India, nor any violent upheavals in society here. Not receiving any kind of inspiration, therefore, by way of literary forms or ideas, Sinhalese prose gradually went into decline.

Though the writers of the *Amāvatura*, the *Butsaraṇa* and the *Saddharma Ratnāvalī* went for their subject-matter to Pāli sources, their originality consisted in the manner in which they handled their themes, and in the stamp of individuality which they gave to their creations. Each old story received, in the mould of their genius, a new shape and a new life. When they altered the original themes, they did so in order to invest them with a new beauty. But the writers of the *Anāgata Vaṃśa* and the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* altered the old stories in order to heighten their propaganda value, to make them more suitable vehicles for preaching. The *Anāgata Vaṃśa*, a literary work of no value, is an interesting illustration of how Sinhalese prose became, in the course of time, well-nigh a public pulpit.

"As the result of an inordinate desire for carpets and floor-mats people are reborn as white lice and the like. Through desire for beds and chairs they are

reborn as bugs. Through desire for property such as fields and gardens, people are reborn as pigs and the like. Those who desire ponds and such things will be born as frogs in them. Through desire for wealth and stored-up grain, people are born as serpents, rats and the like. Through hatred men will be born as Rākṣasas and cobras, and through pride as monkeys."

The above passage from the *Anāgata Vaṃśa* shows how the writers of prose literature adapted Buddhism to the beliefs of the common folk and addressed the masses in the language which was understood by them. But the following passage from the same book illustrates how Sinhalese prose was converted by later Buddhist priests into a fakir's trumpet for the gaining of gifts from the laity:

"Give various kinds of drinks (to monks) in order to quench the thirst of sin in the hearts of people. Give clothes in order to hide fear and shame and in order to obtain a beautiful body. Give vehicles so as to gain perfection in miraculous powers and to obtain the bliss of Nirvāṇa. Give seats so that you may obtain the diamond seat under the Bōdhi tree. Give carpets and mats that you may gain the privilege of being able to lie down in the lion's pose. Give abodes in order that you may realise the accomplishment of the fifteen Caraṇa Dharmas. Offer oil and cloth for wicks in order that you may gain the eye of flesh, the eye of wisdom, the Buddha-eye, the heavenly eye and the universal eye. Free slaves in order that you be freed from the tyranny of the defilements."

Some inscriptions throw light on the fact that the freeing of slaves here referred to is the custom by which slaves offered to the temple are freed by the payment of fifty kahāpaṇas to the priests.

The *Anāgata Vaṃśa* passage quite unconsciously reveals to us that the custom was encouraged and, perpetuated by the priests for purposes of their own gain.

Certain references in the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* seem to indicate that large-scale preaching was the order of the day. To listen to the preaching of a sermon was regarded as an act of piety which could be rivalled, in its beneficial effects, only by the larger and more expensive act of arranging public preaching for the benefit of the people. It is said that a certain Bhikṣu who was going from a distant place to Māgama in order to listen to one of these sermons was bitten by a poisonous serpent. The Bhikṣu, however, caught the serpent in his hand, and, tying it up in his bag, continued to listen to the preacher. By virtue of the healing power of the sermon, he was cured of the dangerous snake-bite. The *Saddharmālaṅkāra* says: "Give lavishly of the gift of the dharma by causing preaching to be inaugurated in all temples in your name, and by giving each preacher a measure of ghee, honey, sugar-cane, and jaggery, and by presenting them monthly with four inches of *välmī* and a pair of robes. In each preaching-hall you should have a new canopy fixed, and a new pulpit-table, carpets, foot-stools and fans installed. Thus would you honour the dharma and have it preached to the people." It is obvious that it was not possible to

prevent a state of affairs where monks would be obliged to barter their spiritual welfare in exchange for the goods of this world. Depending as they did on the laity for their material wants, they had no alternative.

The *Saddharmālaṅkāra* turns an incidental flashlight on the lives of the peasant folk of Ceylon in ancient times. Dharmasena makes occasional references to conditions in Ceylon while dealing mainly with stories relating to India. The one book which deals exclusively with incidents relating to the lives of the people of this island is the *Saddharmālaṅkāra*. In fact, its value is more that of a source book on the state of society and beliefs of the people than a literary work. The picture of ancient Ceylon, painted there, is by no means a glamorous one. The conditions depicted are those of a time when the country was greatly tormented by pestilence and famine, when the Sinhalese kingdom was gradually moving towards its decline. The Tōṇigala inscription of an earlier date gives us a list of the luxurious articles of diet which a Bhikṣu of the time indulged in. But the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* does not reveal such an epicurean state of affairs where monks are concerned. We are told of monks who eked out a bare existence with the greatest difficulty, the minimum necessities of their life being threatened, for the people did not hesitate to steal their robes when they were themselves in need of clothes. The evidence we get from the *Mahāvaṃsa* and certain rock inscriptions leaves room for believing that there was a scarcity of textiles in Ceylon from the time of Duṭu Gāmuṇu. Whatever textiles were

manufactured in Ceylon seem to have sufficed only to meet the needs of a few. Cloth had, in fact, to be imported from India, and under these conditions we need not be surprised that people should have resorted to stealing the robes of Bhikṣus in time of scarcity.

About the third century of our era there appears to have been a famine both in Ceylon and in the Pāṇḍya country in South India. A certain story in the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* describes the state of Ceylon then or shortly after it: "At the time of the *bāminiṭiyā* famine in Ceylon, about five hundred households in the village of Ruvakaviṭa were giving from each household alms to about five hundred monks. When the famine increased they were not able to continue giving this amount, so they gave from each household alms to one monk. But in the end they were not able to give even this amount as their stock of rice was reduced to the amount of a single measure. They used to tie up this quantity of rice in a bag of cloth, and boiling it in water, they drank the water and hid the rice under the ground for fear of thieves. They thus began to make use of the same rice for several meals."

There are many other stories of the same nature in the *Saddharmālaṅkāra*, revealing conditions of extreme poverty and want as being the order of the day. A certain pious layman buys a meal of rice to be offered to a monk, for which he pays the price of twelve kahāpaṇas. A woman sells herself as a slave and with the money she earns, feeds a monk. The daughter of the pious layman Nakula works as a

slave in a rich household of Māgama in order to pay off a debt. Her father works as a sugar-cane crusher under a man who makes jaggery, and earns the twelve kahāpaṇas needed to release his daughter. On the way to the house of the rich man under whom his daughter was working, he meets a monk who is famishing with hunger, and taking pity on him, he buys a meal of rice with the twelve kahāpaṇas and feeds him. The *Saddharmālaṅkāra* makes frequent references to people who slept on the bare floor for want of a piece of matting to lie on, and who wore clothes so dirty that they were infested with bugs and white lice.

We cannot say for certain whether the conditions described in the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* were true only of those parts of the country that were affected by the famine, or whether they are a general description of the lives of the poorer people of the villages during all times. There is no doubt, however, that the facts were recorded by the writers of the time, not out of their love for the people, but because the incidents related were examples of piety and devotion which ought to be emulated by all good men. Most of them showed no resentment towards the feudal lords nor compassion for the suffering people, but continued to encourage them in such acts of self-sacrifice as might help the priesthood to survive during those hard times. They did not realise that the people of the country were gradually degenerating as a result of their conditions of living, and that the poverty of the people would spell in the long run starvation for them. Else they might have made some attempts to raise the people from their

fallen state. Certain inscriptions show us how landlords oppressed their tenants by charging them exorbitant rates of interest. The poor farmer, after toiling all the days of his life for a meagre handful of rice and serving in the army as well, would often have to spend his old age begging for a morsel. But some monks continued to preach that the miserable life of the farmer was due to the natural law of *karma*, and the exigencies of place and climate! Their selfishness was so great that they even approved the act of Nakula. It was in this most desperate situation that they wrote such works as the *Pūjāvalī*, the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* and the *Anāgata Vaṃśa*.

Certain stories in the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* are not only crude propaganda for alms, but they frankly encourage meanness of character and unethical conduct in the name of conventional piety. A man who joins a band of thieves for the sake of a living, earns his daily bread by betraying his companions and handing them over to authority. He is paid by the king for killing his friends in obedience to royal command. When he becomes old and can hardly move about, the king dispenses with his services. But desiring to continue in the same profession even in his old age, he learns a charm by which he is able to blow off the heads and hands and feet of anyone whom he may wish to kill. He is thus able to earn his living once more. After a time, as he lay on his death-bed, the Elder Sāriputta visits him. He tries to kill him by means of the charm, but is unsuccessful. In the end he is greatly pleased with the Elder, and

offers him his plate of milk-rice. And the merit gained by offering the plate of milk-rice becomes for this dying thief, an open sesame to heaven.

Any means at all would seem to justify the end, provided this end was the maintenance of the Saṅgha. The Putra Vastu in the Tebhātika Varga is an illustration in point. Sixty monks go to India to worship the Bōdhi tree, and landing in a sea-port in South India, wander on from there till they find themselves in the city of Pāṭalīputra. A certain poor man sees them going about begging for alms, and consults his wife as to how they might feed the monks. The wife suggests that, since they did not possess anything, they might kill their son as a means of obtaining some money. The husband is surprised at her suggestion, and asks his wife what she actually meant by her words. She replies: "Surely, lord, do you understand what I mean? When our child is dead, our friends and relations will come to see us, and they will bring with them some food, however little. With this we could feed the monks."

Her husband agrees to her proposal, and as they are neither of them able to kill the child themselves, they send him to play to a spot close to which there is a serpent-hole. The ball that the child plays with falls into the serpent-hole. When the child goes to fetch the ball from the serpent-hole, the serpent is roused to anger and begins to hiss furiously, spreading out its hood. The child, not knowing that a serpent is a dangerous creature, holds it tight by its neck. At that moment, by the power of the faith of his parents, the precious jewel hidden in the mouth

of the serpent falls into the child's hands. And the man and his wife are able, with the help of the money they realise from the sale of the jewel, to feed the monks to their hearts' content. And when they die they are reborn in heaven where they live happily.

The Nandika Vastu in the Nandirāja Varga tells us of a man who had the good fortune to be born as a nincompoop on this earth by virtue of having, in his previous birth, given the gift of a shawl to a Pratyēka Buddha. Nandika does nothing but eat and sleep, while his brothers toil hard to support themselves and their parents. He dreams one day, no doubt after a heavy meal, that his intestines came out of his mouth, spread out all over the entire extent of Jambudvīpa and entered his stomach once more through his mouth. Nandika gets up screaming aloud, and the soothsayers interpret the dream as indicating that he would become sovereign monarch of Jambudvīpa !

One day Nandika goes to the park close to the king's palace and covering himself from head to foot with a sheet, lies down and sleeps. In the meantime the king had died, and the ministers were going out in a chariot drawn by four horses, in search of someone fit to be king of the country. The horses stop in front of the place where Nandika is lying asleep. The ministers, therefore, crown Nandika king !

The Śraddhā Sumanā Vastu in the Bodhirāja Varga provides a fine example of how the author of the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* turns a realistic folk-tale, based

on a keen knowledge and observation of life, into a piece of propaganda. Sumanā the Faithful dwelt in the city of Anurādhapura, giving alms to monks, worshipping every single Bōdhi tree and Vihāra, and listening to the Bonne Loi. One day she saw a man of Ruhuṇa who had come to Anurādhapura on some business, and immediately fell in love with him. We are told that she offered herself to him in a shameless manner as though she had known him all her life. The man took her back with him to his village at Māgama. There she lived with him, continuing with her pious acts of devotion to the Saṅgha, and her usual religious practices. One day, Sumanā returned late home after attending on the monks, and her husband in anger, exclaimed: "What do you mean by neglecting the household and devoting your entire time to religious works alone?" So saying, he chased her out of the house. Sumanā spent seven days without food by the side of the wall of a dilapidated and empty old house, and realising that the man who brought her to Māgama had no love for her, she went back at last to Anurādhapura.

The original story apparently ended here. At this juncture Vedeha Thera introduces a *deus ex machina* to save the situation for his model upāsikā. God Śakra appears in human guise with a prepared meal of rice in his hand, and asks her whither she was bound. She replies that she was going to Anurādhapura. Śakra gives her the rice, saying that she looked hungry. However, Sumanā is not able to eat the rice without water, and the thought had only to occur to her when a beautiful pond, full of flowers, appears not far from the place she stood. She washes herself, therefore, and,

examining the time, sees that it is not yet midday. As she had never before eaten her noonday meal without first offering a meal to a monk, she decides to do so on this occasion, too, and speaks aloud these words: "This is the time that the Saṅgha, noble sons of the Omniscient One, go out to beg for alms. Hence, may the Saṅgha take pity on me and come in this direction."

The Sthavira Dhammarakkhita, living on the peak of Kāḷaguru hears this invitation, and wearing his robe and carrying his bowl in his hand appears near the spot where Sumanā stood. Sumanā is greatly delighted, and she fills his bowl with rice, and gives him to eat. She also offers him the cloth she is wearing, and herself wears a garment of leaves.

Quite pleased with herself Sumanā starts once more on her journey to Anurādhapura. On the way, a certain tree sprite overtakes her in a chariot full of divine clothes and divine food, and dressing her in the divine robes, takes her in the chariot in a moment to Cetiyagiri. At Cetiyagiri the deity vanishes, and another one appears in the guise of a servant. This second deity takes the divine robes which were in the chariot and places them at a spot close to the Mahāpāli dining hall, and Sumanā offers the cloth and the food to the monks who gathered together there. The king hears of Sumanā's great munificience, and finally annoints her queen.

It is quite obvious that Vedeha, the author of the original *Rasavāhinī* from which most of the stories of

the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* are translated, had an imagination not second to that of the writer of the *Arabian Nights*.

The Meghavana Vastu of the Tambasumana Varga is the story of a certain villager who amassed wealth by charging the poor exorbitant rates of interest on the paltry loans he gave them. After leading a life of unmitigated miserliness, he and his wife became rich. He insured himself against the risks of the next world by regular offerings of food and clothing to the monks. When he died he was reborn in heaven.

The Riyagal Vastu of the Tambasumana Varga is an interesting contrast to the story of Nandika. Nandika becomes king by virtue of his laziness, while the Riyagal Vastu is the story of a light-hearted young man whose best qualities of courage and heroism were brought out as the result of his being treated badly by his relatives.

Two little girls who were bathing in a stream one day, perceived a log floating in their direction. One girl exclaimed: "I want that log for myself." The others said: "Whatever happens to be on that log is mine."

While they were thus discussing the ownership of the log it came close to them. Clinging to the log was a young man, completely naked. The girls swam up to the log and brought the young man ashore. The girl who claimed whatever happened to be on the log ran home to fetch some clothes for the youth. The

other girl, however, thinking that if the log was to be her property, whatever was on the log, too, should belong to her, tore off a part of the cloth she was wearing on her waist and gave it to the young man and took him home with her.

The girl's parents inquired from the young man his name and birth and discovered that he was the son of the minister Dhanadeva of the country of Ruhuṇa. Because he was more fond of play than of work they had named him Keḷi Tissa, Tissa the Playful. He had been made a monk, but finding that he was unable to carry out the rigorous discipline of an ascetic, had divested himself of the yellow robes and plunged into the river naked. He swam awhile in the water and later clung to a log which he found floating in the water. It was thus that he was found by the two girls.

The parents of the girl gave her in marriage to Tissa. Tissa lived in the house of his wife's parents, and did nothing all day long but play. The people called him Nikaṃ Tissa, Tissa the Nincompoop. Sumanā's brothers complained saying: "The husband that Sumanā brought for herself is indeed a fine man. He fills his stomach with food and stays at home all day like a hen sitting on her eggs. Why should we toil in order to feed him?"

So one day Sumanā's parents called her and said to her: "Your husband Tissa does no work of any sort, neither cultivation nor trade. How will he live in comfort with his wife and children in the future? If he is to look after his family and see to his own welfare

as well as the welfare of his relatives, he should do some kind of work and take an interest in the field and in the cattle." So saying, they asked her to go with her husband and begin to live separately, and gave her a measure of rice and a cooking utensil.

Sumanā took the measure of rice and stood weeping in an empty house by the wayside, awaiting the arrival of her husband.

Tissa arrived shortly afterwards and finding that his wife was not at home, began to look for her, and found her weeping in the empty house by the wayside. She told him everything. And when he heard that Sumanā's parents had sent them out with only a measure of rice and a vessel, he was roused both by the treatment he received and by his wife's grief. He determined thenceforth to work hard and earn a living, and comforted his wife by assuring her that he would make good. At this juncture we see the monkish hand at work editing this most interesting record of life in a Sinhalese home. He makes Tissa say: "Do not weep, beloved wife. We shall find a means of livelihood somehow. In future let us determine not to partake of any food without first feeding the monks."

This distortion and the sermonising that follows do not entirely cloud the interest of the original tale as a commentary on the household life of the Sinhalese villager which even today has not changed in its essential features. The young man depicted in the Riyagal Vastu is typical of many a male child in a Sinhalese peasant family. Through faults of upbringing the male children grow up without any

feeling of economic responsibility. They grow up to be lazy because it is never brought home to them that they must one day shoulder the burden of the family themselves. It is only on the occurrence of a crisis that their energy and their heroism are roused.

In the midst of a collection of stories about selfish monks we find incidents related about monks whose character was indeed admirable. The Elder Abhaya, versed in the Tripiṭaka, lived in a hut in a forest grove, having abandoned his abode in the village. A layman who was greatly attached to him, clothed and fed him continuously for a period of twelve years. Although he used to give the monk sufficient cloth for his robes, he saw that the monk always wore torn robes. The layman was rather curious to know what happened to the cloth that he presented to the monk. One day, therefore, he gave the monk some cloth, and in the night, taking his sword with him, stood by the side of the road close to the Vihāra, waiting to see what might happen. After a time he saw the thief Harantika enter the Vihāra and remove the cloth. Thereupon he sprang in front of the thief from out of his hiding place, and holding him by the hair of his head, asked him: "Aren't you the thief you wretch, who has been stealing all these days the cloth I gave the monk?" The thief admitted his guilt. Then the man beat him till he was faint, and taking him to the cemetery, tied him up, hand and feet, to a corpse and left him there.

On the following day the man announced all over the village that there was a dangerous devil about the place and that the people should retire indoors early,

and remain silent. In the night the thief who was unable to free himself from the corpse went to his house and requested his wife to open the door. His wife refused to open the door for fear. In the end the thief went to the door of the monk's hut and begged of the monk to let him in and free him. The monk out of compassion for the thief, released him from his bonds and from the corpse that was tied to him, and washed him in warm water and rubbed oil all over his body to salve his wounds, and sent him away.

VII

THE JĀTAKAS

THE Jātaka collection is the product of a time when the Sinhalese language became, from being the monopoly of a learned few, the common property of the many. Guruḷugōmī wrote in a language that could be appreciated by only a handful of people. Later in the Poḷonnaruva period, grammarians attempted to fix the usage of literary Sinhalese by a comparison with Sanskrit and Pāli. But as literature spread among the masses the punditisms of literary Sinhalese began gradually to be dropped, and instead writers introduced words and idioms from the language of the common folk. Finally, when prose literature was made use of as a medium for the propagation of religion, it naturally absorbed the characteristics of popular speech.

The Sinhalese Jātakas were written in a language which was a fair compromise between the language of Guruḷugōmī and the spoken language of the time. It lacked the polish and refinement of the ancient language, but it had a spontaniety and ease which the classical language did not possess. To some extent it ignored the usage of the earlier writers, and attempted, even at the expense of grammatical conformity, to be intelligible to the masses. In fact, the translators of the Jātakas went a step further than even the author of the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* in simplicity of language. The result was that they

introduced into Sinhalese a narrative style that was hardly ever excelled in our literature till modern times.

This change in the style of writing was the natural result of the changing conditions of the time. The Bhikṣus who lived apart from the common folk all this time, began to move about freely among them. The religion was, thereby, carried to the doors of the people in a way it could not have gone to them before, and a general desire to hear the holy word must have sprung up among the illiterate as well. For this purpose, the books written in a high-flown Sanskritic style could be of no avail. Hence the translators of the Jātakas employed a language closer to the speech of the common people. And in this they were helped by the unornamented style of the Pāli, and by the fact that the subject-matter of the Jātakas was drawn from the raw material of life, though in a different country, in conditions not essentially different from ours.

The Jātaka tales are, according to some scholars, the oldest collection of folk-tales extant. Rhys Davids says that they are not only the oldest but the most valuable specimens of folk-lore that we possess. He says that some of them, migrating from their original home in India, went to the West through the Arabic translation of the *Pañcatantra* which had in its turn borrowed most of its material from the Jātakas.

Edward Wright, speaking of the migrations of the Jātaka tales, says thus in his introductory essay to the first volume of *The Masterpiece Library of Short*

Stories: "The tales spread from India to Persia and from Syria to Greece; and some of them were transcribed by Planudes, a Greek monk, in the fourteenth century, and attributed by him to Aesop. Thus under the forged title of Aesop's Fables a few of the shorter and lighter animal stories told by the Buddha have become a popular element in our culture. But as will be seen by a reference to the original fable of *The Ass in the Lion Skin* the ancient version remains superior to its various modern recensions. As Buddha told the tale, it is a vivid little picture of Hindu village life, with no shadow of improbability about it."

The Jātakas give us a picture of life in the raw, as the authors found it in the villages of North India, painted artlessly and faithfully by people whose wisdom was ripened by a knowledge of the world. Hence they are our earliest specimens of realistic literature, and have no rival, in this respect, in the entire field of ancient writing. The Arabian Nights are tales of fancy and imagination, and Sanskrit tales are romances couched in language equally romantic. The Jātakas, on the other hand, with their interest in human nature and in the hidden recesses of the human heart, are the nearest approach in Eastern literature to the modern art of realistic fiction in the West. In fact, it may be possible to trace the modern detective story, in the last instance, to the Jātakas. For the story in Voltaire's *Zadig*, which certain critics claim to be the earliest ancestor of the modern detective story, is undoubtedly of Eastern origin.

An examination of some of the Jātakas might help to confirm some of the statements made above.

The *Dharmapāla Jātaka* is an interesting record of the rivalry between the father and the son for the attentions of the mother, common among patriarchally constituted families. Princess Candrā, the wife of King Pratāpa, after having bathed her little baby boy and fed it and annointed it with sandal-paste, sits by enjoying the sight of its playful antics. In the meantime the king returns, and she does not notice him, absorbed as she is in her child. The king in uncontrollable anger, orders the child to be tortured and put to death immediately. The executioner comes robed in red and with sword in hand. He begins operations by cutting off the child's hands. The queen, unable to bear the sight of her child being thus tortured, cries out: "Cut off my hands if you want to punish me, for it is I am to blame." The executioner next cuts off the child's legs, and the mother gathers the severed limbs dripping with blood, and hugs them to her bosom, wailing aloud. Finally the executioner cuts off the child's head. And as the mother cries out in her grief, clinging to the dismembered remains of her only child, the king's anger and jealousy are roused only the more. He orders the child's trunk to be thrown up into the sky and to be sliced to pieces while falling. The mother gathers up the slices of her child's body, and hugging them, dies of grief.

A theme not very different from the above is found in the *Kṣāntivāda Jātaka*. King Kalābu spends seven days in water-sport with the women of his harem. Drunk with wine he falls asleep on the lap of one of the women. The other women, having had a

surfeit of sensual enjoyment, go to the ascetic who resides in the royal gardens, and listen to his preaching for a while. The woman on whose lap the king sleeps awakens the king who immediately inquires where the other women had gone. On hearing that they had gone to listen to the ascetic's sermons, he is infuriated, and with sword in hand he goes to kill the ascetic. He is however, prevented by the woman. The king then calls the executioner and orders him to cut the ascetic's hands and feet, and his ears and nose. Even at this stage the ascetic does not bear any feelings of anger towards the king. At length he says: "My forbearance is not in my limbs but within my heart." At which the king kicks the ascetic on his chest and kills him.

This story shows as much penetration into the motives of action as the earlier one. King Kalābu's jealousy of the ascetic is as natural as Pratāpa's jealousy of his own child. It is sex impulse and jealousy that drive both to violent action. Kalābu's anger at being rudely disturbed in his sex-play is projected on the man who usurped his place in the attentions of the women. This anger is no doubt heightened by the feeling that the ascetic was one who had conquered the very instincts that the king was indulging as a fine art, a feeling of guilt at his own libidinous conduct being inevitable in a country like India where the ascetic ideal was held up as the highest pattern of behaviour. The king would also have the feeling that his own superiority was being challenged, in a different sphere,

by another man who was able to offer the women of his harem something which appeared to be of more permanent value than the pleasures of sex.

The early Buddhist fashioners of these Jātakas deserve credit for taking up an independently critical attitude towards the rash and selfish deeds of even kings. It is seldom that we see such independence in the later writers of Brahmin literature.

The *Asātamanta Jātaka* relates how the aged mother of a professor fell in love with the young pupil of her son, and attempted to kill her son in order that she might live with the young man. That the writer should have had the courage to record such a flagrant breach of morality shows his first-hand knowledge of life, and his desire to be faithful to it.That such a deflection of maternal love is not impossible may be common knowledge for us. The author, however, seeks to reassure his readers by dwelling at length on the manner in which the old woman came to have an affection for the young man. On instructions given by his teacher the young man used to massage the old lady's hands and feet and encouragingly remind her of her youthful days and her lost charms. This had the effect, says the author, of rousing her sexual desires.

The *Andhabhūta Jātaka* sneers at those who believe in female chastity and faithfulness. A Brahmin chaplain brings home a pregnant woman of humble origin, and when she gives birth to a baby girl, brings the child up without letting it see any male. When the child grows up into a woman, the

Brahmin marries her. The Brahmin seeks thus to insure himself against any complications of family life. His young wife, however, disillusions him before long, and finds a paramour in the first man she meets after marrying the old Brahmin.

It is natural to find jibes and cynical observations on women in a literature that grew up in a community of celibate monks. Such stories are not uncommon in the Jātaka collection. But the *Mudupāṇī Jātaka* is an exception. Indeed it is rare to find a body of people leading a life of sexual abstinence looking with such liberality and sympathy on the romantic love of a young couple as they do in this Jātaka. The Bodhisatva, born as the King of Benares, has a nephew and a niece who had formed an attachment to each other. The king, however, desires to give his niece in marriage to the king of a foreign country, and to bring a princess from elsewhere for his nephew. He therefore contrives to keep the two separated from each other.

The king looks after his niece very carefully. He keeps her in his own room and makes her sleep on a low bed close to his. One very dark night in the rainy season the princess tells the king that she wishes to bathe. The king, not wishing to take the risk of sending her out, lifts her out of the window and holds her hand while she bathes. After she bathes he lifts her back into the room and keeps her on her bed. In the morning he is surprised to discover on the bed not his daughter but a young boy, sleeping soundly ! On being demanded an explanation for his mysterious presence in the room,

the boy says that he had been brought there by no less a person than the king's nephew himself. While the king held his niece out in the open, his nephew had removed the ornaments from the girl's hand and put them on the boy. The girl, then, freeing her own hand, had given the boy's hand to the king to hold, and eloped with her lover on horse-back.

At this juncture the author of the Jātaka does not make of the king the usual injured guardian and the representative of conventional morality. The king, on the other hand, is highly pleased at this clever intrigue, and fetching back his nephew and niece, marries them with great pomp, and makes his nephew the heir-apparent.

It is no less interesting to find, among the Jātakas, tales which display a sympathetic attitude towards women, in the midst of several stories reviling them with the bitterness natural to ascetics. The Ananusociya Vastu in the Fourth Nipāta of the Jātaka collection speaks of an idealised affection between a husband and wife, in terms which seem to indicate that the coarser forms of sexual appetite were sublimated in the two of them into a deep and lasting attachment, mellowing with age. The parents of the Bodhisatva wish to have their son married within their life-time, and ask him to choose a wife for himself. He, however, does not wish to be married, and expresses a desire to continue supporting his parents as long as they are alive, and to enter the forest and be an ascetic when they are no more. On the persuasion of his parents, however, he casts a female form out of gold, indicating that he would marry if they could find a girl as beautiful as the

image, and the parents send it about in a chariot to look for a woman resembling it. A lady called Sammillavāhinī is discovered, closely resembling the image, and the Bodhisatva's parents propose to give her in marriage to their son; her parents, too, favour the proposal to give her in marriage to the young Bodhisatva. The young lady is herself of an ascetic temperament, and expresses a similar desire to serve the parents as long as they live and to seek a life of lonely meditation after their death. Her parents take no notice of her foolish whims, and send her to be married to the Bodhisatva. The two are finally married and live together under the same roof observing a vow of celibacy.

On the death of his parents the Bōdhisatva wishes to hand over his possessions to his wife and leave for the forest. Sammillavāhinī, however, desires to accompany him wherever he goes. In the forest they live a life of rigorous simplicity, eating fruits and leaves, and this hard life tells on the woman, brought up as she was in ease and comfort. In the end she dies, although the Bodhisatva tends her with the greatest care. And the people of the place, seeing her beauty, weep over her dead body, and are surprised at the attitude of the Bodhisatva, who does not weep. "Sammillavāhinī cared for me and tended me all the days of her life. Now she has gone to join her dead kith and kin. Why should I weep for her?" says he.

In fact, the *Kaṇavera Jātaka* is more a criticism of men than of women. Sāmā is a courtezan sought by kings. She forms a great attachment towards a

certain thief who is being carried to the executioner, and tries to save him. The Jātaka shows us the thief as being a very handsome and brave man, and Sāmā saves him by herself committing a serious crime.

A certain rich man used to visit Sāmā and pay her a thousand gold pieces a day. When he came, she began to weep, saying that the man who was being carried away to be executed was her brother. The man thereupon promises to pay the policemen the thousand gold coins which he brought for her, and thus release the thief. The policemen, according to a previous understanding with Sāmā, release the thief and take the rich man as captive.

Sāmā lives happily with the thief and gives up prostitution. But the thief goes out with her for water-sports, and, on the pretext of hugging her, strangles her till she faints off, and thinking that she is dead, carries off her ornaments. As soon as she comes back to her senses, Sāmā begins to inquire after her husband. But there is no news of him to be had. She gives up her rich robes and her expensive cosmetics, and takes only one meal a day. Still unable to console herself, she begins to wander about from place to place, and employs travelling dancers and singers to find out information about her husband. She herself teaches these musicians a song of her own composition describing the appearance of her husband. The thief hears the song of the travelling musicians but is unable to believe that Sāmā is alive. "It is easier to believe," says he, "that the earth or a mountain has been carried away in the wind, than to believe that Sāmā is alive." But the musicians

assure him that his wife is alive and that she desires no other man, that she is awaiting his arrival ready to forgive him for his crime. And the thief flees from the musicians to a country where he would get no news about Sāmā.

This story is written with a deep understanding of feminine nature. Even the ascetic editor of the original folk-tale does not distort its frank criticism of the man's meanness, and its praise of the woman's noble character and her steadfast devotion to a ne'er-do-well who did not have a spark of goodness in him. The woman's character is transformed in the fire of her affection and she gives up her past bad ways, but the man is unable to reform himself and practises his villany on the very woman who saved his life.

The Jātakas laughed at all institutions, at women and men, good as well as bad, at Brahmins and monks and ascetics. They smiled at the hypocrisy of the conventional virtues, much in the manner of a modern author. A certain king performs the successful experiment of defrocking five hundred ascetics and employing them for military service! Another story tears the cloak of virtue off the shoulders of a typical Madame Husson's Rose King, and exposes to view his hidden weakness. The individual thus analysed happens to be, unfortunately, the Bodhisatva himself. The Bodhisatva is conceived, as usual, in the womb of the Queen of Benares. As soon as he is born, he is washed and handed to the wet nurse. The child immediately shows its disapproval of this act in terms of unmistakable protest. Thereupon it is handed to another wet

nurse, but this time the child's protest is even more vehement. Many another wet nurse being equally unsuccessful, the cause of the child's resentment is discovered by a process of elimination. When the male of the species carries the child, it remains quite contended, whereupon it becomes clear that the child has an inherent dislike for the opposite sex. Hence it is brought up entirely by males. Even the milk has to be administered in purdah. The mother stands behind a curtain, and the child sucks her breast as it emerges from out of it.

The child thus grows apart from the company of women till it reaches its sixteenth year. The king, his father, becomes rather anxious about his son's misogyny, as he would have to succeed him to the throne. But the king's women re-assure him, and promise to cure the prince of his abnormality.

One of the women stands near the palace of the prince and sings a song. Hearing that the prince was delighted with her singing, she comes nearer the palace the next day and repeats her song. The prince instructs his servants to call the singer in. He is captivated by her singing, and falls a prey to her charms, and for the first time in his life indulges his passions. Having tasted of the pleasures of sex he not only likes it, but he positively determines that no one else should be allowed the privilege of enjoying such bliss! In order to secure for himself the sole monopoly of this newly-discovered source of happiness, he steps out of the palace, sword in hand, and begins to chop off the head of every man he meets!

A beautiful story true to the psychology of a sensitive man, is the *Vāta Saindhava Jātaka.* A certain girl falls in love at first sight with a handsome young man and pines for him. Her friends inquire from her the cause of her sorrow, and inform the young man about it. She learns from her friends that the young man reciprocates her affection. She therefore decks herself in fine clothes and lying on her bed, awaits his arrival. The lover comes softly to her bedside and holds her hand. She, with the usual coquetry of the female who wishes to be pursued by the male, shakes his hand off in fun. The young man is filled with shame, as he believes that his advances are rejected by the girl. He flees from her bed-side and is never seen anymore. The girl dies of remorse and love.

The Jātaka tales are, thus, some of the most valuable literary treasures we possess. They are not primitive myth, as popularly supposed, embodying the repressed wishes of a nation, nor are they fairy tales distorting the facts of life and dealt out as dope to the masses to compensate for their miserable lot on earth. The Jātakas portray life fearlessly, as it is, and seek to make people good by holding up to their view a close-up of reality. They paint no ideal characters, conventionally good or conventionally bad, to be emulated as patterns of right behaviour. They do not invariably end happily, as a certain widely-read class of English fiction does, to create for their readers an unreal world where good triumphs and all human desires are ultimately fulfilled. They educate, not by providing model worlds and model men and women, but by holding up to view the stark realities

of life, by showing the ill-effects of uncontrolled passion on society and the moral order. It is only in the naïveté of their art that they differ from the best examples of modern fiction. In the knowledge they impart of life and the variety and fascination of its manifestations, they are in no way inferior.

The version of Jātaka stories we have is not the faithfully recorded folk-tale. They have been handled by Buddhist monks and story-tellers. Even the Sinhalese version is not a mere translation. In some of these stories there is a conscious art which resembles that of the modern short story. Many of them are examples of a more sophisticated wit and satire than are common in ordinary folk tales.

Certain historians of the modern novel trace its beginning to the folk tale. Prof. Kropotkin in his *Russian Literature* regards Gogol, Chekov, Gorki and some others as folk novelists because they depicted the life of peasants, workmen and tramps. Some of the Jātaka stories come nearer to the short stories of these Russian folk novelists than to the usual folk tales. Jātaka tales as handled by Buddhist writers eminently deserve the tribute paid to them by Edward Wright. If he had been able to explore other Jātaka tales where deeper problems of life are touched, he would have been amazed at the depth and the conscious art of these earliest recorded tales of world literature.

VIII

THE POETRY OF A NEW AGE

THE subject-matter of Sinhalese prose literature was almost entirely drawn from Pāli sources because the writers were mostly monks or the pupils of monks. This invested our prose works with a second-hand character, for the writers did not attempt to alter very much the Pāli originals. It was only when a writer of genius stamped on the old themes some part of his individuality, and enriched them with facts from his own observation of life in this country, that some kind of originality was achieved. Else the bulk of our prose literature would be mere translations.

The *Attanagaluvaṃśa* is a work which has to be placed between the prose literature of the preceding period and the poetry which came into vogue once more in the early part of the fifteenth century. It is a translation into Sinhalese from a Pāli composition written in the style of the Sanskrit Campū in mixed prose and verse. The Pāli verses are given as insets in the Sinhalese prose, with free renderings also in prose.

Though the *Attanagaluvaṃśa* is thus an entire translation from Pāli, it is a work which is not insignificant in the history of Sinhalese literature as well. The character of Siri Saṅga Bō depicted therein represents a typical conflict in the Sinhalese mind.

The escapist tendency due to an ascetic temperament and a pessimistic view of life, struggles for supremacy with the temptation of worldly power thrust in the face of the young prince by his counsellors and his subjects. He chooses the latter alternative, allowing his head to be swayed by his heart, and becomes a failure in life. He leaves a sorrowing queen and a kingdom of chaos and enters the forest to practise a life of asceticism.

Siri Saṅgo Bō was, by nature, inherently unfit for the responsible task of kingship. His inborn religious temperament was heightened by the influence of his teacher and moral preceptor, the Elder Nanda. The author of the *Attanagaluvaṃśa* describes Siri Saṅga Bō in the following words: "This religious prince had no desire whatsoever for enjoying the fruits of kingship. On the advice of the Elder Nanda he would perform his services towards the king at the proper time, going into the royal palace with the Thēra. In the afternoon he would come out of the palace with him and accompany him to the Vihāra, where he would perform religious acts at the Ruvanmäli Caitya and attend on the sick. Thus did he spend his days in righteousness."

There is a tale related in the Tamil literature of South India, bearing striking similarities to our story of Siri Saṅga Bō. It is contained in the poem *Pūraṇa Nūru* which is assigned to a period of about the second century A.D. or earlier. If this date is correct, the Tamil story was definitely current before the time of the *Mahāvaṃsa*. It is possible therefore, that the

legend was borrowed from the Tamil and connected up with the name of Siri Saṅga Bō sometime before the writing of the *Mahāvaṃsa*.

The *Attanagaluwaṃśa* contains a remarkable description of a severe drought and a rainy season that follows it. There is hardly any description in Sinhalese which equals the beauty of these Pāli verses. In reading them one is often reminded of Kālidāsa. The following is a free translation from the Sinhalese paraphrase of these verses:

"The sun shone fiercely in the summer heat. The hot wind and the baked earth feverishly drank up every available drop of water.

"The forest grove, burning in the heat of the sun, and resounding with the cry of cicadas, looked like a heated vessel humming with boiling water.

"The sky, full of white clouds, as though it had been annointed with white sandal paste, shone with excessive brilliance.

"At length dark rain-clouds arose. They stretched across the full length of the sky as though measuring the quarters from one end to the other. They arose as if they were enveloping the earth with darkness, like the majestic shadows of mountain peaks falling on the mirror of the sky.

"The clouds began to rumble with thunder, and the rains fell. And peacocks, crying aloud, spread their tail-feathers over their heads like umbrellas.

"The falling showers looked like festoons of pearls. The dust subsided, and the odour of the fresh earth was wafted in the cool breeze.

"Flashes of lightning adorned the sky like nuggets of gold. They danced rhythmically to the deep bass notes of thunder.

"And torrents of muddy water rushed about hither and thither in mad search after their enemy the summer heat."

Already before the beginning of the Kōṭṭe period in the fifteenth century, the current of prose literature had begun to dry up. Guruḷugōmī, Vidyācakravartī, Dharmasena and Buddhaputra had exhausted all the available material. The stock of Indian tales had been drawn upon, and it was probably because this source had run dry that the author of the *Saddharmālaṅkāra* drew on the Ceylon tales which he found in the *Rasavāhinī*. This was perhaps the reason for the fresh interest evinced during this period in metrical composition. But the inspiration for the new age could not be drawn from the poetry of the classical period. The poems of the classical period sprang up in the rocky soil of *alaṅkāra* and died as rapidly because their roots were not deep. They had not reached the main springs, the thought and feeling of the folk. The new poetry made an alliance with the rhythms and language of folk-verse. Just like the prose of the preceding age, it went closer to the scene in which was enacted the drama of everyday life. The literature left the courts and harems of kings and went into the countryside where it gathered a variety of rhythms from the songs of the peasant folk. For once the poet left the jewelled spires and crystal ramparts of, for the most part, imaginary cities, and attempted to describe the real things he saw. For the first time the poet gave up what was regarded as

an exclusively poetic vocabulary, which had no significance except for the learned, and began to use ordinary words full of emotional associations for the common folk.

It was perhaps as the result of a simpler language being sanctioned for poetry, that this period saw a greater number of poets than the classical period. The religion too underwent certain changes in the direction of popularization. Although Parākrama Bāhu the Great had apparently re-established the sway of the orthodox Buddhist Church, it was at this time that Mahāyāna influences were felt most in the religion. The beliefs and forms of worship of the folk religion also crept into Buddhism about this time. The Bodhisatvas of the Mahāyāna faith as well as several gods of Hinduism such as Viṣṇu and Vibhīṣaṇa entered the Buddhist Vihāra and took their permanent abode there, just as they had taken their abode in the hearts of the people some time before.

It is evident from the literature of this period that there were constant differences of opinion at this time between the Vanavāsī Nikāya (the Forest-dwelling Sect) and the Grāmavāsī Nikāya (the Village-dwelling Sect). Śrī Rāhula, as a leader of the Grāmavāsī Nikāya, did not hesitate to write poetry dealing with the physical charms of women, and he believed in certain pseudo-sciences condemned by the Buddha. He accepted, moreover, the worship of gods as part of Buddhist ritual. The monks of the Vanavāsī Nikāya, on the other hand, were as vehemently opposed to the worship of gods as to the writing of poetry. This attitude of theirs is quite clearly expressed in the

Haṃsa Sandēśa and the *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra*. The *Haṃsa Sandēśa* holds up to ridicule the art of poetry and the Sanskrit learning so highly esteemed by Śrī Rāhula. Vīdāgama was violently intolerant of the superstitious beliefs of Brahmins.

But the monks of the Grāmavāsī Nikāya had a greater influence on the people than those of the Vanavāsī Nikāya, with the result that the poetical works of the village-dwelling monks were in great vogue among the lay reading public. The poets of the twelfth century were mainly laymen, and if a poet happened to be a monk, he was not very anxious to admit the authorship of his composition. A definite change of attitude marked this new age where monks of even a particular sect could find a circle of appreciative readers among laymen.

The *Mayūra Sandēśa* was the forerunner of the rhymed verse of the Kōṭṭe period. It started the fashion, however, only in form. In substance it was not much better than the Alaṅkārist efforts of the classical period. The author, Kavīśvara, appears to have been a pundit who tried to adorn a very commonplace collection of sentiments with the most elaborate rhetorical devices that his brain could conceive. Even an occasional flash of genius cannot be seen for the jungle of intertwining metaphors.

The following verse shows to what level our poet could descend in his effort to give a new twist to an already hackneyed conceit:

Muḷu rā noviňda udähäna basimin gasini
Piya vana saňdehi saḷu aňdavati rati matini
Nopanat panat kaḷa sävuḷan naraňbamini
Vilkat sināgat vāni siyapat vatini

"The cock, separated from his beloved the whole night, climbs down in the morning from its nest on the tree, and begins to court the hen. And like a maiden smiling at this breach of propriety, the pond opens its flower lips in laughter."

Reference to farmyard routine, far from arousing any poetical sentiments about the morning, could, at best, only tickle our sense of humour. The grotesqueness of such an allusion is only heightened by its combination with the more imaginative, though worked-to-death, picture of the smiling lake with its opening flowers. There is a further confusion of feeling which jars on the reader's sensiblity. The opening of flowers in the morning has been compared by poets to the smiles of a woman. But it is a smile of joy that the poets were thinking of, and not a smile induced, as in this verse, by a sense of the ludicrous! Even according to the tenets of the old *alaňkāra śāstra*, the courtship of animals is not considered a fit theme for the evocation of poetical sentiment.

Even the description of the dancing women in the Hindu temple at Devundara transgresses one of the simplest though one of the most important canons of good art. The poet has not considered the appropriateness of his description to the situation he is dealing with. The dance at the temple is a dance of

faith performed before the gods with feelings of reverence and submission. What Kavīśvara describes is a voluptuous performance in which the dancers make no attempt to disguise the frankly seductive nature of their movements and glances. These verses could be bodily lifted from the *Mayūra Sandēśa* and tacked on to the verses describing the dancing women in the bacchanalian scene in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* without much damage to propriety.

The popular worship of gods and Mahāyāna Bodhisatvas seems to have been a definite stimulation to poetic composition during this period. Every Sandēśa describes a dance-offering made to the deity in a Buddhist temple. The *Haṃsa Sandēśa* tells us how the Vihāra hall at Kälaṇiya was converted into a cabaret as soon as the Elder Buvanekabāhu and his attendant monks had left the place after reciting *pirit*.

The only poet who describes these religious dances with the language and sentiment appropriate to the solemnity of the occasion is Śrī Rāhula:

Videna leḷena naru bara puḷulukula räñdī
Heḷana nagana ata nuvanaga bälum didī
Ruvana dilena abaraṇa käluma gata yedī
Sälena pahana siḷu väni raňgana liya sädī

"With the folds of their waist-frills spreading over their broad hips, and their jewelled costumes shedding lustre around, the women danced, following with the corner of their eyes the rising and falling movements of their hands. To an onlooker they looked like the slowly-moving flames of lamps."

The author appears to be describing, at first hand, the slow and reverential movements of a *lāsya* dance in which the hands often come together in the posture of worship. The verses of the *Mayūra Sandēśa* on the other hand, recall to mind the vigorous movements and quick rhythm of a devil-dance.

There are few Sandēśas that can be read and enjoyed as poetry. Among the few that possess some sort of merit are the *Sälalihiṇi*, *Haṃsa* and *Girā Sandēśa*. The authors of these poems at least attempt to give expression to their own feelings and to describe the sights they actually see, instead of giving stock descriptions of imaginary cities and kings in words which betray their lack of first-hand experience. The *Haṃsa Sandēśa* description of the king's court, and the *Girā Sandēśa* description of King Parākrama Bāhu, the Vijayabā Piriveṇa and its chief priest Rāhula, have the merit of at least being pictures of what the poets saw with their own eyes. The author of the *Haṃsa Sandēśa* sends the bird to the city of Kälaṇiya with the following beautiful verses:

Äma täna karana muṇi puda naraṁbana lesaṭa
Täna täna sävul gaṇa päminēta turu siraṭa
Diliyena muṇi mäṅduru pahanin ehi nosiṭa
Diva yana aṅduru men vavulan nikut viṭa

Tos vana suvaṅda piribaṅḍa mal gena ataṭa
Las nova suvaṅda tel pahanin ekalu koṭa
Räs vata danan muṇi pudayaṭa veherataṭa
Gos toda mitura vibisaṇa sura mäduratataṭa

"When fowls climb to the tree-tops to watch the people engaged everywhere in the worship of the Buddha; when bats, dazzled by the lights in the shrine, begin to fly out like lumps of darkness;

"When people gather together in the Vihāra with flowers and incense, and filling the lamps with fragrant oil, brighten up the entire place; then go thou, my friend, and enter the temple of the god Vibhīṣaṇa."

The late Venerable Dharmārāma first made the suggestion that the *Haṃsa Sandēśa* may be the work of Vīdāgama Maitreya, the author of the *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra*. Several objections to this view were later raised. Sir D. B. Jayatilaka who seemed to support Dharmārāma's suggestion at the beginning, later rejected it. In the meantime there appeared a text edited by P. D. S. Vīrasūriya, to which were appended two verses attributing the authorship of the *Haṃsa Sandēśa* to Vīdāgama. The authenticity of the two verses, is, however, not entirely above suspicion. Munidāsa Kumāraṇatuṅga believed that the *Haṃsa Sandēśa* was written after the *Girā Sandēśa*.

It appears to the present author that the *Haṃsa Sandēśa* is the work of a monk of the Vanavāsī Nikāya. The writers of most other Sandēśas send their bird-messengers direct to the god in the temple. The author of the *Haṃsa Sandēśa*, however, sends the bird to the Sangharāja Vanaratana, and requests the high priest to invoke the blessings of the gods Utpalavarṇa, Sumana and Vibhīṣaṇa on King Parākrama Bāhu by first propitiating them with a recital of *pirit*. It appears as if, by this twist he gave to the peculiar

form of the Sandēśa, he was expressing his disapproval of, or at least his desire not to identify himself with, the popular kinds of god-worship which were gaining currency in his time. The *Girā Sandēśa*, too, sends its messenger to Śrī Rāhula, but instead of requesting him to propitiate the deity with *pirit*, asks him to directly pray to the god Nātha on behalf of the king. This shows that Rāhula was regarded as a special votary of the gods.

If the *Haṃsa Sandēśa* is, therefore, not the work of Vīdāgama Maitreya, it is undoubtedly written by a monk who belonged to the same school as Vīdāgama. Vīdāgama attacked, in his *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra*, the conventional art of poetry, and the Brahmins who taught it. A similar attitude is seen in the *Haṃsa Sandēśa*. The author of the *Girā Sandēśa* describes Rāhula by saying that "the ocean of his words contained the waves of the eighteen purāṇas," while the author of the *Haṃsa Sandēśa* says that "the Venerable Vanaratana rejected the eighteen purāṇas." The *Girā Sandēśa* says further of Śrī Rāhula that "the lotus of his mouth is full of the honey of metre and rhetoric (*chandolaṅkāra*)," while the poet of the other sect in *Haṃsa Sandēśa* said that the Venerable Vanaratana regarded poetry and drama as idle if not dangerous pastimes. Whichever work happened to be the earlier, it is clear, therefore, that the *Haṃsa Sandēśa* and the *Girā Sandēśa* were the works of two monks who belonged to sects professing quite different views on certain matters. It was very likely as a result of this conflict between the two sects, that Vīdāgama in his old age made such a violent onslaught on Sanskrit poetics and on Brahmins and their gods.

The gods that came into Buddhism in the Kōṭṭe period were worshipped not only by the common folk, they were accepted by the educated as well. Of them, Utpalavarṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa were more popular than, for example, Nātha. Śrī Rāhula mentions the name of Vibhīṣaṇa with feelings of reverence and awe. In his entire *Sāḷalihiṇi Sandēśa* there is hardly a single place where he dwells at such great length or with such depth of feeling as in his reference to Vibhīṣaṇa:

Vesesin pahan pähäsara gämburu pivituru
Bäluvan älum karavana yaḷidu biyakaru
Siri pin ruvan piri e suriňdu sayura yuru
Muvekin kiyā nima viya häki da rūsiru

"What tongue hath power to sing the praises of this king of the gods. He is an ocean filled with the gems of virtue. He is full of glory, deep and pure, and is feared and loved by whomsoever sees him."

In Rāhula's earlier work, the *Parevi Sandēśa*, there is no evidence of any faith in a particular god. One finds only a description of the various parts of the body of Utpalavarṇa. And the description of the women dancing before the god is almost blasphemous !

The three verses appended to the *Sāḷalihiṇi Sandēśa* as an after-thought are also evidence of Śrī Rāhula's faith in the gods of popular Buddhism. In these verses the hope is expressed that King Parākrama Bāhu's daughter obtain a child through the grace of Vibhīṣaṇa. Although Śrī Rāhula was one of the most learned men of the time, he accepted some of the superstitious beliefs which Buddha condemned

and rejected in his day. It is not unlikely that Vīdāgama's spirited defence of Buddhism against such intrusions was indirectly an attack on Rāhula himself.

Perhaps there is hardly any language in the whole world which contains a greater amount of literature on what are popularly termed the "occult" sciences than Sanskrit. Scholars are of opinion that some of these beliefs crept into the Aryan culture from the beliefs of non-Aryan races with whom they came into contact. Hara Prasad Sastri says that Tantrism came into Indian religion from non-Aryan sources. Buddhism arose as a movement which sought to destroy these superstitious beliefs and customs, and to remove all traces of animistic worship in which people attempted to gain power for themselves by the help of external agencies. It is Buddhism that kept Ceylon free from the majority of secret cults and animistic beliefs which contaminated Indian religion. The influence of a great scholar like Rāhula might have been greater, had it not been counteracted by the strong opposition of the monks of the Vanavāsī sect. It appears, from certain verses in the *Haṃsa Sandēśa* that although Rāhula was a believer in even the spells and charms of the primitive religion, Vanaratana, the leader of the opposite sect rejected even astrology.

The monks of the Anurādhapura period, in the true spirit of early Buddhism, kept the religion uncontaminated by animistic and magical practices. It is

in the Poḷonnaruva period that monks took to the pursuit of these arts as a pastime as well as a profession, in order to wield power over the laity. Hence the need, soon after, for the *katikāvata* on the "low arts (*tiraścīna vidyā*)". And the main controversies between the Vanavāsī and Grāmavāsi sects centred round the authenticity of these practices and beliefs.

IX

THE KĀVYAŚĒKHARA OF ŚRĪ RĀHULA

ŚRĪ RĀHULA wrote three poems, two of which were Sandēśas, and the other a poem in rhymed verses composed on the pattern of a Mahākāvya. The earliest of them, the *Parevi Sandēśa*, is a youthful work which is nothing more than an exercise in rhyme and metre. The *Kāvyaśēkhara* is more a testimony to his wide learning than evidence of his poetic powers. In spite of flashes of poetic genius displayed in the *Kāvyaśēkhara*, however, Rāhula's most mature work is the *Sāḷalihiṇi Sandēśa*. There is nothing original in conception in the *Sāḷalihiṇi Sandēśa*. It is a string of everyday sentiments about the bird whom the poet selects as his messenger, and about its flight through the Ceylon countryside. The success of the poem lies in the way in which Śrī Rāhula, with a restraint that comes of mature scholarship, uses the varied resources of the classical language to convert an ordinary experience into a rich source of imaginative enjoyment. His vocabulary is, therefore, poetical in the real sense, unlike the dead and artificial vocabulary of many an earlier writer, or the prosaic and matter-of-fact language of some later poets. His images are always subservient to the main task of creating the appropriate mood, and even in his use of stock figures of speech he displays the restraint that comes of maturity and learning. He seldom spins metaphors or weaves rhythms as a mere exhibition of skill. Sometimes by the introduction of subtle variations

within the conventional pattern of the *samudraghōṣa* metre he transports the reader from one plane of feeling to the other. And throughout the entire poem is a harmonious undertone which, like the administration of the correct quantity of a drug, heightens, without dulling, the sensibility of the reader.

The story on which the *Kāvyaśēkhara* is based is, briefly, the following: An old Brahmin who had collected a thousand kahāpaṇas by begging, left the money in the care of a family of poor Brahmins. The poor people had no other alternative but to spend this money, and when the Brahmin came and demanded it back they suggested giving their young daughter to him in lieu of the money. The Brahmin had no objection to this as he himself had earlier taken a fancy to the young girl. He therefore takes her home and makes her his wife. The girl in course of time finds a lover suited to her age, and contrives to get rid of the old man. It is the Bōdhisatva who finally enlightens the Brahmin about the situation.

Obviously the story selected by Rāhula hardly suffices for a Mahākāvya in length, though the theme itself could be made a basis for an interesting character study. In order to increase its length, therefore, and partly because the author is subservient to Sanskrit canons of poetic composition, he introduces into his poem long-winded and uninteresting descriptions of Benares, its king, the Jetavanārāma, the Buddha, the king's water-sports and garden-sports, and such familiar stuff. This irrelevant material hangs loosely on to the main body of the poem, so that the entire work lacks proportion and unity.

It is also a strange thing that a monk like Rāhula should have chosen a theme like the *Sattubhasta Jātaka* where he would have to deal with certain aspects and problems of family life which would be unfamiliar to him. The insight with which he portrays the relationship between the old Brahmin and his young wife is something which he could have gained only as the result of his vast knowledge of literature. His understanding of feminine nature, and his sympathy with the young woman in the story, whose position was by no means enviable, are equally noteworthy, as most other Sinhalese poets were inclined to treat women rather unsympathetically and with a harsh moralistic attitude.

Śrī Rāhula begins his *Kāvyaśēkhara* with an invocation to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, in verses which have double meanings. Next he gives a stock description of a king who is supposed to be Parākrama Bāhu, the father of Uḷukuḍaya Dēvī at whose instance the poem was written. After telling us about the virtues of Uḷakuḍaya Devī, the poet proceeds to describe the Jetavana Vihāra where the Buddha lived, and the king of the city where it was situated. The Jetavana grove resounds with the voice of the Buddha, and the birds soon learn to cry in imitation of it. The parrots in the trunk-holes of the trees learn to repeat the sermons of the monks, so that the trees appear to be repeating Pāli stanzas. The *äsaḷa* trees, covered with yellow flowers, seem to have heard the words of the Buddha and taken to holy orders.

The second canto starts with the usual kind of description of a city and a king, followed by a lengthy description of Senaka's mother. The author dwells

with evident relish on every part of her anatomy, but the description does not end here. Rāhula's enjoyment of the female form is a poet's enjoyment of beauty. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should, at the end of these verses, compare the Bōdhisatva's mother to a poem:

Ebämini dosin mut
Rūpē lakara siri yut
Miyuru guṇa rasavat
Viyat maha kav sabaňda tän pat

"This woman of perfect form, endowed with the *alaňkāra* of female beauty, and full of charming ways as if with the *rasa* of sweetness, is verily like the Mahākāvya of some great poet."

In the third canto the Bodhisatva is born of the beautiful woman described above. Though in this canto Rāhula follows the *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kālidāsa very closely, he yet says many beautiful things of his own. This canto, in fact, contains some of the finest verses in the whole poem. The entire life story of the hero is dealt with in detail, his birth, his boyhood, his schooling and his marriage, in a most charming and homely manner. A beautiful little picture is drawn, for example, of the young boy leaving his parental home in order to receive his education in the university of Takṣaśilā:

Kāṭuva lā pirivara
Sanahā muduna manahara
Bōsat vip kumara
Yanṭa duka sē dunnu avasara

Demavpiya sinehäti
Vaňdinuva pā piyum peti
Ekumara nämī gati
Ovun kaňdulen piṭa temī gati

"Sadly they gave him leave to go, the Brahmin boy who was Bōdhisatva, stroking his handsome head; and when the boy bent to touch the lotus feet of his parents in sad farewell, their tears fell on him."

Next follow two cantos devoted to the Bodhisatva's journey to Takṣaśilā which the poet makes an occasion for describing forests and mountains and rivers and lakes and hermitages *ad nauseam*. In the university we are told that the pupil far outran the master, a reminiscence, perhaps of the author's own life. When the boy returns home his parents can hardly recognise him for the tears of joy that well in their eyes.

The marriage ceremony of Sēnaka is dealt with in great detail. These verses, too, betray the influence of Kālidāsa, but nevertheless they bear the stamp of Rāhula's genius and his special appreciation of feminine character and beauty.

The beautiful young bride comes up slowly into the midst of the gathering and climbs on to the dais (*magul pōruva*):

Yeheḷiya avut siṭa
Gā sirasa tel muruvaṭa
Sihil pän vat koṭa
Eḷaňda nähävū supirisudu-koṭa

Vaḍavana danan aṭi
Eḷaňda sudu salu äňda siṭi
Kiri siňdu raḷa dävaṭi
Räpäyi sirikata pahaḷa vana säṭi

Nilaňdun gā ägē
Digu net kälum tarangē
Säraya mal saragē
Halāhala visa pevūlāgē

"The maiden's female companion annointed her head with oil, and bathed her with cool water. Then she came, dressed in white, like Śrī Kāntā covered with the white foam of the milky ocean. And the glances from her shimmering eyes, with their lashes blacked with *aňjana*, were like the poisoned darts of Anaṅga."

Some of the marriage customs mentioned in the *Kāvyaśēkhara* are different from the customs prevalent among the Sinhalese today. It is usually the bride's mother who gives presents to the bridegroom, and it is the maternal uncle who gives away the bride. According to the *Kāvyaśēkhara*, the bride's father performs both these duties. It is very likely that the customs obtaining among the Sinhalese today are derived from the Dravidians who were a matrilineal society. The *Ṛg Veda*, depicting the marriage customs of a strongly patriarchal society, mentions the father as giving the bride away. We cannot be sure, however, on the testimony of Rāhula, that the Āryan custom was prevalent in Ceylon during the time that the *Kāvyaśēkhara* was written, for it is possible that Rāhula was describing the marriage scene from his reminiscences of Sanskrit literature.

At the end of the marriage scene Rāhula proceeds, in the style of a Mahākāvya, to describe the physical culmination of the marriage of the young couple, for which he relies mainly on the *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana. Several poets including Kālidāsa, made use of the *Kāmasūtra* as a reference book when describing the amours of their heroes and heroines. Most of them, except Kālidāsa, were led away by the pornographic interest of the *Kāmasūtra* and were unable, therefore, to make a discriminating use of it. In the case of Rāhula, it is only his insight into life and better understanding of the true spirit of the *Kāmasūtra* that gives some sort of distinction to an otherwise crude set of verses.

After his marriage Sēnaka becomes the chaplain of the King of Kāsi. His education and early upbringing, both in the poem and in the Jātaka, are Brahminic. But as soon as he takes up his new appointment he becomes a mouth-piece for the Buddhistic sermonising of Rāhula. The poet next proceeds, according to the dictates of *alaṅkāra*, to give us the usual description of the king's water-sports and garden-sports, at the end of which both the king and the queen retire for the night. At this point Rāhula resists, with difficulty, the temptation to follow the royal couple into their bedroom. The king, who is awakened in the morning by the songs of his minstrels, prays to his *iṣṭadēvatā*, after which he performs the custom of looking into a bowl of ghee and enters a preaching-hall specially made ready for the purpose. Here Sēnaka preaches a sermon to the king, and this takes up an entire canto.

The *Kāvyaśēkhara* too, confirms what we know from other sources, of Rāhula's religious beliefs. The King of Kāsi prays to his gods before he takes upon himself the five precepts of Buddhism, and Sēnaka, in his sermon, exhorts him to "pray to the gods, and to worship his teacher as though he were a god." The men and women of the *Kāvyaśēkhara* never seem to neglect their duties to the gods. Nor do they ignore the stars, either. The Brahmin woman contrives to synchronise the birth of her child with a lucky conjunction of planets, and the Brahmin looks at the face of his child at an auspicious moment. In selecting a happy augury for his son's marriage, too, the stars have the last say. In fact, Rāhula begins the *Kāvyaśēkhara* with an invocation to the Buddhist Trinity which is followed up by an invocation to the gods.

It is only in the tenth canto that the poet begins the story. The old Brahmin demands his money back, and his debtors offer him their daughter. The old Brahmin fancies the girl and offers to take her "so as not to offend the feelings of his good friends." The girl's father gives his daughter in marriage to the old man, after the customary fire-offering, and then delivers her a homily on her marital duties. Some of the things he says here are found in the *Śankha Likhita Dharma Sūtra* and in the *Kāma Sūtra*. The girl goes with the old Brahmin and lives with him. But, in spite of her father's advice, she falls in love with the first young man she meets, and betrays the old Brahmin.

Rāhula describes, with a delicate and homely touch, and not without a smile of indulgence on his lips, how

the young wife contrives to deceive her old husband and send him away in search of a servant, so that the house would be free in the meantime for her and her lover. She feigns illness and gets to bed. The Brahmin makes tender inquiries about her health, and she complains of the difficulties of her household duties, and says she is of a mind to get back to her parents' home. She needs a servant to help her in the house. The Brahmin therefore, sets out in search of a maid, and the verses he utters in farewell are typical of the feelings of a sentimental old fool who dotes on his young wife in a kind of hopeless adoration:

Pädakuṇu koṭa eḷaňda
Sivu täneka bäsa heva väňda
Biyenäkiḷī välaňda
Nikaṭa gena siňba kiyā pem bäňda

Ama rasayen sädū
Nuvanaga bälum sinidū
Maňda maňda hasa yedū
Sitami topa vata soňdura purudū

Nuvan kaṇupul leḷa
Dasanaga kiraṇa miṇi väḷa
Tunu ran liya udula
Me topa äňdi sē sitami sit tuḷa

Digu neta vata soňduru
Rata lavana baňdu vada yuru
Hasun pin piyovuru
Puḷulukuḷa ära kesē vemi duru

Topa rusiru piyabaňda
Niti balata eka täna iňda
Äsi piya väṭena saňda
Novāvena mama kesē yemi ada

"He walked round her as though round a sacred shrine, falling down and worshipping her on four sides of her. Clasping her to him with trembling limbs, he took her chin in his hands and brought it near his nose. And he made protestations of love to her in these words:

" 'Your form is like a golden creeper painted within my heart. Its flowers are your lily-like eyes and ears. Your glistening teeth adorn it like a string of jewels.

" 'Your long eyes and lovely face, your lips red as the *vada* flower, your full breasts and broad hips are always in my thoughts.

" 'I who sit and gaze at your beauty all day, impatient lest I lose a glance even during the winking of an eye, how could I leave you and go away?' "

X

THE GUTTILA KĀVYA OF VĀTTĀVE

THE evidence of certain poems of the Kōṭṭe period seems to point to the existence at that time of rival schools of opinion both among monks as well as among lay teachers. Monks took sides with the kings who were at conflict with one another. Rāhula openly supported King Jayabāhu, while certain other monks took the side of Prince Sapumal. It is not likely that Vīdāgama supported Jayabāhu. He appears to have been opposed to the policy of the kings of his time. Unlike Rāhula who sought after the favours of kings, Vīdāgama was a monk who won the hearts of the poor for his sympathy with their lot.

The *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra* often contains indictments against the king and his ministers. Very often Vīdāgama goes out of his way to introduce these characters in order to condemn them, while Rāhula sang the praises of kings, and the author of the *Muvadevdā* trembled at the very mention of the name of his sovereign. Vīdāgama makes no reference at all to the king who ruled the country during his time. He generally attacks all kings and ministers, from which we might infer that he was hostile to the kings of his time.

It is difficult to find in the history of Sinhalese literature a more courageous critic than Vīdāgama. His courage and independence of outlook are the result of

his truly Buddhist culture which prevented him from falling a prey to the influence of later Sanskrit culture. The only two Sinhalese poets who attempted writing in an original strain were Vīdāgama and Vāttāve. And both were helped in their efforts by the natural rivalries that existed between the schools. Vīdāgama's work is the product of his contempt of Rāhula and his school who were blind imitators of later Brahmin culture and institutions. And it is a widely prevalent tradition that Vāttāve wrote his *Guttila Kāvya* in order to work off an insult he had received from his teacher. Though there is no other evidence for this tradition, it suggests the possibility that Vāttāve adopted a new style of poetic composition as a result of the rivalry that sprang up between himself and his teacher. At a time when it became the fashion to attack Sanskrit learning and Sanskrit poetic traditions, it is not unlikely that writers attempted to free themselves from the trammels of *alaṅkāra*. The greatest of those who thus sought a new path was undoubtedly Vāttāve. He wrote his *Guttila Kāvya* almost as a challenge to those poets who thrived on the lavish sensuality of Sanskrit Kāvyas, while Vīdāgama wrote his *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra* as a challenge to the superiority of Hindu culture.

Vāttāve's genius is really comparable to that of the epic poets of old, and not to the court bards of a later epoch. The court poets of Sanskrit literature were obliged to praise the king and the ladies of his harem in order to win royal favour. The monks of Ceylon were, however, counsellors of the king and not professional versifiers. Some of them, however, forgot their position of independence, and assumed the rôle

of court poets. Vāttāve was the one poet who had the courage to break away from this tradition.

Vāttāve's entire poem is a reflection of the modesty and simplicity of his unsophisticated mind. Śri Rāhula begins his poem with an exhibition of his skill in versification, a result which immediately confounds the lay reader and drives him to consult the paraphrase, duly impressed by the author's learning. But Vāttāve's lines of adoration ring with the true note of an untutored faith, reminding us of the devotion of an unsophisticated village woman who rolls at the feet of a Buddha image:

Siya pin sirin saru
Detis lakuṇen visituru
Kelesun keren duru
Vaňdim muni utuman tilō guru

"I worship Him who is Lord of the three worlds, who is full of all holiness, endowed with the two and thirty marks, and free from all sin."

The translation does not in any way convey the feeling embodied in these lines, as it is entirely induced in the reader by the melody, and the arrangement of the words. The poet's humility and absolute self-effacement before the object of his adoration are brought to a climax in the two verses that follow:

Pera maha kivivaraṇa
Pävasū tilōguru baṇa
Mama mage näṇa pamaṇa
Kiyami varadak vēda kikaruṇa

"What harm if I tell, in my own little way, the holy word of the Lord, which the great poets of old proclaimed to the world once upon a time?"

Parasatu malin puda
Lat muni saňduṭa diya nada
Vana pasa malin puda
Kaḷai pavasanu kavara varadada?

"What though I bring my humble gift of wild flowers to Him who has been honoured by the gods with *pārijāta* blossoms?"

Vāttāve's spirit of humility is thrown into greater relief when we compare it with the spirit with which most other poets began their works. The author of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* implies his own greatness when he remarks, at the beginning of his poem, that there are very few indeed who could enjoy good poetry (*pedehi rasahav viňdunā denetā itā dulabō*). Śrī Rāhula meant something similar when he said that his poem could not be appreciated by all, just as the true worth of gems cannot be known except by those who are experts. The author of the *Sasadāvata*, too, begins his poem by bragging about the skill of poets in general and of himself by implication. Kālidāsa, however, is very much like our poet Vāttāve. He says at the beginning of his *Raghuvaṃśa* that the effort he is making to win poetic fame is like the effort of a short man to reach up to the height of the branch of a tree from which only a tall man could pluck fruits. The difficulty with the majority of our poets was that they were in the first instance men of learning and only secondarily, if at all, poets. The one qualification that Vāttāve possessed was that, happily, he was

not one of those men steeped in ancient lore who tried their hand at verse in their spare time. His poetry flowed from his pen as naturally as the notes from the throat of a bird. It is for this reason that his *Guttila* has the 'unpremeditated' charm of a bird-song.

The characteristic that distinguishes the *Guttila* from all other Sinhalese poems is the composite unity of its form. Most Sinhalese poets, in their desire to follow the stock pattern of the Sanskrit Kāvya, went out of their way to introduce descriptions of kings and cities and such inevitable paraphernalia as are prescribed by theorists of poetry. Their works, therefore, look more like random collections than systematized wholes. Even Śrī Rāhula is guilty of slavish adherence to the form of the Sanskrit Mahākāvya. For no other apparent reason than to satisfy the canons of a Mahākāvya he makes reference to the city in which Jētavanārāma is situated, and tires the reader with an entirely uninteresting description of it. For the same reason he introduces to us the king of Benares, only to clothe him with the usual epithets that seem to fit all kings of India from time immemorial. Other descriptions, too, have but scanty relevance to the main theme of the *Kāvyaśēkhara*.

The *Guttila*, however, is quite different in this respect. Its style is not a blind imitation of the Sanskrit Kāvya. It rather appears to be the result of a synthesis between the Kāvya style and the style of the folk-poetry of Ceylon. The narration of events one after another in rapid succession is a feature of all folk balladry. The folk-poet does not pause at

intervals and digress into irrelevant descriptions. His main purpose is the narration of the story, and to this main task he makes everything else subservient. If he introduces any ornamentation, this originates from the very nature of the subject-matter and the very mood he wishes to communicate. Vāttāve, too, introduces a few descriptions in places where they are most essential to the enjoyment of the poem as a whole. In these descriptions he follows the style of the descriptions of the Mahākāvya. He seems to have created therefore, a style of his own, by combining the best features of the ballad and the Kāvya styles.

A poet reveals his character and often the quality of his genius by the sort of theme he chooses for the subject-matter of his creations. Parākrama Bāhu chose a theme of love and adventure, the *Kusa Jātaka*, while Śrī Rāhula chose a story dealing with the problems of domestic life and the psychology of women. Vāttāve's choice of theme does not seem to be entirely irrelevant to the differences that existed at the time between sects and schools of monks. The *Guttila* itself reveals that Vāttāve disapproved of the sensuality that was displayed in the poetry of his day and of an earlier epoch. It cannot be a mere accident that both the *Guttila* and *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra*, which were written immediately after the *Kāvyśēkhara* should have deliberately avoided themes connected with sex. It is rather that a new school of poets challenged the propriety of monks to write on subjects dealing so intimately with, and presupposing such a first-hand knowledge of, the lay life.

Vāttāve is the one poet in the Sinhalese tradition who does not make use of a skill in versification for purposes of a tasteless exhibition of learning. In the case of most other poets, their display of learning was a method of covering up their lack of genius. Vāttāve's natural genius and refinement enabled him to keep his learning in the background. Having greeted the Buddha with due humility, he introduces us, in a few verses, to Salāvata Jayapāla at whose instance he composes the poem. Without any irrelevant digressions he proceeds immediately to give a short life of the Buddha after brief reference to the city of Rājagaha and the monastery of Vēḷuvana where the Buddha lived. Since the poem purports to be the story of Guttila as related by the Buddha, it becomes necessary that it should contain a short account of the life of the Buddha.

The manner in which Vāttāve relates the misdoings of Dēvadatta through the monks assembled at the Vēḷuvana monastery is noteworthy indeed. The fact that the poet limits this narration to Dēvadatta's deeds in his immediately preceding birth is a stroke of genius. It is characteristic, too, that there is a note of sympathy running through the entire story of Dēvadatta's wickedness. The monks, as they refer to Dēvadatta, seem to be feeling sorry all the while for a man gone astray. Vāttāve shows greater restraint here than most other Sinhalese poets, and a sympathetic understanding of the character of the evil-doer rather than a condemnation of his actions. The story of Dēvadatta ends up with the following verse:

Iňda iňda eka vehera
Viňda vňda daham manahara
Siňda biňda duk sasara
Anē Devdat nuduṭi mok pura

"Alas! that the unfortunate Dēvadatta, living together with the Buddha in the same Vihāra and experiencing the joy of listening to the Holy Word, yet could not free himself from Saṃsāra and enter the City of Freedom."

Invited by his disciples the Buddha begins to "reveal the past, hidden by the mist of birth and death." Guttila was musician to the King of Benares. Hence it becomes necessary to describe the city, which the poet does in nine verses. The city of Benares surpasses the city of Śakra, king of the gods. Its wall appears as something constructed to keep out the forces of evil from the city, or to prevent its exuberant charms from breaking its bounds. The bees hovering over the city enticed by the fragrance of the unguents, looked like a net-work of bells hung over it for its protection. The silver-topped houses looked like silken canopies of moonlight fixed on to bejewelled spires.

Vāttāve does not pause, like other Sinhalese poets, to describe the physical beauties of the women of the city. After introducing us, in four verses, to King Brahmadatta, he proceeds to acquaint us with the hero of the story, the musician Guttila. He tells us in a few simple and straightforward verses that Guttila grew up as the fond child of his parents from the days of his boyhood, and learned to play the

Vīṇā. He performed before the King of Benares and was taken into the royal service. Since then he lived a quiet life, devoted to his parents who had grown blind in their old age.

Next we are introduced to the villain of the story in a dramatic manner. Certain merchants are on their way from Benares to the city of Udēni. They find the people of Udēni enjoying themselves at a carnival, and themselves decide to join in the fun. This gives the poet an opportunity of describing the carnival, and here he displays his great command over the musical resources of words and their power of suggestion. To choose a metre suited to the gay spirit of a carnival would be the simplest of poetical effects. But within the metre he chooses, Vāttāve introduces such subtle rhythms and such variations of accentuation as to conjure up before our minds the different side-shows and forms of merriment at the carnival. In every verse he takes us to a different scene, changing the rhythm ever so slightly within the general pattern of the lilting metre he has chosen for the entire description:

Rägat surā pirū vitin
Surat tam̆buru peti se netin
Puvat nodäna bamana gatin
Ayek naṭati surā matin

"With goblets full of wine in their hands, with eyes red as the petals of a lotus, their bodies swaying like mad, some dance in intoxication."

Keḷimin täna täna landū
Dena men kana ama bindū
Kiyamin soṉda gī sindū
Äsuvan sita duk sindū

"Maidens sport about in places, gaily singing songs as sweet as nectar to the ear, banishing sorrow from the hearts of listeners."

The two stanzas, though composed in the same metre, convey two different moods. The slower movement of the earlier stanza, with its pause at the end of the first word of each line and its repeated "ra" sounds, brings to mind the rough play of drunken men swaying in their drunkenness and unsteady on their feet, whereas the more regular lilt of the second verse with its softer liquid sounds and its quicker pace definitely suggests a picture of women dancing light-heartedly at a carnival, and almost echoes the music of their song. The following two verses, on the other hand, represent a rapid and vigorous dance of a troupe of women to the regular accompaniment of their own jingling feet and not to the accompaniment of their voices:

Suvaňda kusum varalasehī
Pälaňda kapuru hara urehī
Nomada baraṇa lā särahī
Nibaňda keḷiti liyō purehī

Pasukara rusiren suraṁbā
Gosakara ran miṇi saḷaṁbā
Enuvara keḷi raṅga puraṁbā
Baṁbasara sita vat kaḷaṁbā

The combination of the "ra" sounds and the sibilants with the nasals in words like "*rusiren*," "*suraṁbā*," "*ran*," "*salaṁbā*" most marvellously suggest the subtle combination of a metallic and a hissing sound produced by anklets and bells on

the feet of dancers. It is not an effect consciously sought after and hence is all the more remarkable.

The merchants, intending to join in the carnival spirit, hire a Vīṇā player to provide them with music. The musician Mūsila plays before them, but with all the resources at his command he is not able to please them. The merchants tell him, satirically, that in reality they thought he was still tuning the Vīṇā and they proceed to describe their own experience of the music of a Vīṇā player of Benares called Guttila. Mūsila is full of envy at hearing the words of the merchants. He goes immediately to Benares in the company of the merchants, vowing that he would become the slave of Guttila if it was found that Guttila could play the Vīṇā better. Mūsila goes to Guttila's house, and after resting for a while, begins to play the Vīṇā which he finds there. Guttila's blind parents think that rats are running about on the strings of the Vīṇā and "*shoo*" "*shoo*" them away. Notwithstanding this unconscious insult, Mūsila falls at the feet of Guttila's parents, and asks them news of their son. Almost simultaneously with their reply that he had not gone far out, comes in Guttila himself. Mūsila asks Guttila to instruct him in the art of the Vīṇā, and he reluctantly agrees to do so at the request of his parents.

After receiving lessons from Guttila, Mūsila becomes an adept at the art of the Vīṇā. It is quite likely, therefore, that he had in him inborn musical gifts. Though it is often a pleasure to a teacher to instruct such a promising pupil, sometimes a natural jealousy

springs up in his heart under certain circumstances. It is clear in this case that the pupil far outran the teacher. And the old musician Guttila, instead of being happy at his pupil's success, becomes jealous of him. The subsequent events show how this jealousy becomes the ruin of a great artist.

This rivalry between teacher and pupil could best be understood by reference to the conditions of the time. The fact that successions of teachers had a monopoly of learning, and that, in this particular case, Mūsila's cleverness was threatening his teacher's position as a paid servant of the king, are facts that should be borne in mind before laying the blame for the downfall of this promising musician at the door of any one character in the story. To some extent Guttila should be blamed for not being able to rise above the feelings of jealousy that began to creep over him. On the other hand, the king who inflames the rivalry between the two by organising an open contest of skill, cannot gain our admiration.

The situation where Mūsila is introduced to the King of Benares is one in which we find our poet apparently napping. Earlier, Mūsila is introduced to us as a man of innate wickedness, a wickedness that was plain even in the signs on his body. In this Vāttāve uncritically follows the Jātaka writer's delineation of Mūsila's character, though there is nothing in the story itself to warrant such a view of the man. Mūsila is young and full of his newly-acquired skill in the Vīṇā, and it is natural that he should be impatient for public praise. Guttila on the other hand is a man who had already gained laurels,

and, in a man of his age, one should expect a more sympathetic understanding of his pupil's mind. Far from being sympathetic he acts in a manner that is in the highest degree selfish, and it cannot be made out that he was in any way provoked to this course of action by his pupil.

When Mūsila is introduced to him, the king expresses his willingness to employ him on half the salary that he paid Guttila. Mūsila however, with due humility, draws the king's attention to the fact that in the whole of India there are only two people who could play the Vīṇā equally well, himself and his teacher. He requests the king, therefore, to pay him as much as he paid Guttila. These words offend Guttila and for no apparent reason. Guttila himself admits that his pupil plays better than he does. A man of character would, under the circumstances, go out of his way to bring his pupil the fame and recognition he deserved. Guttila, however, is not depicted as one who was able to overcome this weakness.

During the contest that followed, it was Śakra who helped Guttila to win. After the victory Śakra conveys him to his heaven and requests him to play the Vīṇā. Guttila however replies that it is not professional etiquette among musicians to play except for a fee. If Guttila could have maintained this mercenary attitude on grounds of professional etiquette, there is no apparent justification for his regarding Mūsila's request to the king as a breach of pedagogic gratitude.

The charge that Guttila brings against his pupil, that he was ungrateful and like a 'devil in human guise' appears entirely unfair. There is not a single incident that would warrant such a conclusion, and it is likely that Vāttāve himself was misled by the fact that Mūsila was regarded as the incarnation of Dēvadatta. The Jātaka version, however, gives us a chance of admiring the character of Guttila. In certain respects Vāttāve improves upon this picture, though he does not make any drastic changes.

Next follows a series of word-pictures describing the construction of the hall where the music contest is to be held. When it is complete the king enters it dressed in silken robes like one covered in the foam of the milky ocean. The description of the gathering in that great hall is one of the weakest in the whole poem. It looks more like a collection of 'stills' than a representation of a festive gathering agog with excitement. But the entry of Guttila into the midst of those assembled in the hall is done neatly. We are told the details of how he bathed and cleansed himself in perfumed water, partook of light delicacies, and wore clothes of the softest silk. He wore round his neck heavy garlands of flowers and scented the hair on his head. As he entered with the Vīṇā in his hand, he bore an air of such confidence that all assembled there were sure that he would be victorious. As he plucks the string for the first time, they are re-assured, and so is the reader. Guttila breaks the strings of his instrument one by one and finally plays on his stringless Vīṇā. Here the poet describes, in verses of unparalleled simplicity and charm, the

effect of Guttila's music on the people assembled there as well as on the wild beasts that were roaming about in the vicinity.

The most famous verses of the *Guttila*, however, are those describing the dance of the celestial maidens who were drawn to earth by the charm of Guttila's music. The rhythmic pattern of the verses, marvellously suggests the slow movement of a classical Indian dance. In the first line itself the poet conveys to the reader the pace of the dance and a suggestion of a myriad hands moving up and down as if painting a mass of pictures on a wall. The rhythmic pattern does not yet get any prominence, as it is submerged by the interest being focussed at the beginning on the movements of the hands. The next line, however, begins with a closed syllable, and at once suggests the emphasis on the lilt of the stanza. The attention of the reader is also now carried to the movements of the feet of the divine dancers, and to the sound of the Vīṇā, both of which harmonise 'like gold mixing with quick-silver.' The pace of the poem seems to increase with every stanza, suggesting a quickening of the rhythm of the dance. The first two syllables of every line in the second stanza rhyme with one another, and represent a marked emphasis on the rhythm, and in the third stanza, instead of two long syllables as at the opening of the second stanza, we have four short syllables marking the lilt of the words more clearly. Into this underlying rhythmic structure are woven a number of well-known images which nevertheless gain a fresh significance in their new context. The side-long glances of the dancing women are compared to the

darts of Anaṅga. Their hands are like flashes of lightning, and their breasts, covered with jasmine garlands, are like swans. Their swaying bodies are like the flames of a lamp disturbed by the wind. The images fit so appropriately into the whole mood that the reader does not realise that they are trite. In the fourth verse the overtone quality definitely changes. The first two lines echo the combined effect of anklets, bells, and Vīṇā music. And the poet creates this impression by the use of sonorous words containing a large number of "ra" sounds, nasals and sibilants. Consider the effect of "*pā piyum biṅgu ron saḷā van.*" In the last verse the effect aimed at is mainly visual. The picture of the gods standing spell-bound on high, is placed side by side with that of the rapidly-moving dancers and the musician seated on a side.

As a climax to this scene of triumph we are shown how Mūsila, vanquished in his art, and seated 'bound hands and feet with the bonds of his own disgrace' is sent out of the hall by the king. Guttila receives the praises of the king and his ministers and the citizens. In the midst of the tumult Guttila gives all the presents he gets to beggars and goes back to his house in great pomp. All nature reflects the mixed mood of joy and sorrow. The sun sets as though it wished to save the festive crowd from the torment of its scorching rays, and darkness spreads all round like the sorrow that possessed the heart of Mūsila. But soon the stars burst forth like flowers sprinkled by the goddesses who were delighted with the music. The Maiden of the West clothes herself with the glow of sunset clouds and decks herself with star-bejewelled

ornaments. Nature herself seems to be preparing a pavilion for the festivities of the evening. The star-spangled sky is her canopy, the stars are multi-coloured globes of glass and the beams of light falling down from the stars are her festoons of flowers. Darkness, like a maiden, stealthily descends and polishes the earth with moonlight, like one polishing the floor of a dance-hall with sandal-paste.

Śakra goes back to heaven and describes there the wonderful music of Guttila. The goddesses demand that either they should be allowed immediately to go to Benares or that Guttila should be brought to heaven. Śakra therefore sends Mātali the divine charioteer to the city of Benares. The people of the city see the chariot and wonder what it is. Their remarks well express the reactions of an unsophisticated people in the presence of the miraculous. When Mātali descends to the ground Guttila asks him whether he was the king of the gods or the king of the Asuras who are the enemies of the gods. Mātali is inflamed with anger at this question, and replies most dramatically:

Ripuya asurā nam
Mahimiya puraṅdarā nam
Danuva iṅdurā nam
Mamaya Mātali riyädurā nam

Sworn enemy of the Asuras,
Destroyer of Cities
Is my master, King of the Gods, know you
That I am his charioteer, Mātali by name.

By the use of a combination of hard sounds and epithets like *purañdarā* which both by meaning as by sound suggests the fierce aspects of the king of the gods the poet has succeeded in conveying to his reader the indignation of Mātali as well as the dramatic quality of the situation when Mātali descends to the ground. It is significant that Vāttāve does not use the name Śakra in this verse and instead refers to the king of the gods by his name Indra. This is particularly appropriate in this connection, as the Vēdic name connotes the warrior-like and blustering qualities of the god, while the name Śakra has pious associations of a meek patron of Buddhism.

Guttila ascends to the sky in Mātali's chariot, towards dawn. Hence it is a most natural opportunity for a description of the time of day. In a series of beautiful verses the poet gives us a description of how the landscape and the sea appeared to Guttila from his chariot. He crosses a heavenly street and enters Sudharmā, the audience-hall of Śakra. Vāttāve describes heaven and the heavenly hall with the unsophisticated imagination of a folk-poet. Guttila plays his Vīṇā to the goddesses and comes down to earth where he is stormed by people eager to get first-hand information about heaven. To an audience stupefied by amazement he relates the wonders of heaven. And the naïveté of these verses is something assumed by Vāttāve for the occasion. Instead of giving a learned description of Śakra's heaven which might suit pundits but would be out of place in the present context, Vāttāve forgets his learning and enters into the mind of the sort of audience that

Guttila is expected to be addressing. He tells them about heaven in the manner of a grown-up relating a fairy-story to children.

In the absence of information regarding the life of Vāttāve we have to reconstruct his character from the only work that has come down to us in his name. His work reveals him as a man of great humility and modesty, with a devotion to the Buddha that sprang from the very depths of his being. He loved beauty and appreciated it wherever he saw it, with a restraint that was unusual among Sinhalese poets. His heart was full of compassion even towards the person who attempted to kill his adored Buddha by rolling a rock down on him, and he had the unsophisticated imagination and the genius of the folk-poet, with a mind that could fill with wonder, like a child's at the recital of a fairy tale.

Men of genius and culture, who believed in turning their senses inward from a world of evil in order to achieve individual happiness and salvation, were by no means rare in the history of our civilization. But Vāttāve was the one sincere poet who believed that the variety and wonder of this world of human beings was itself an experience worth gaining and communicating. He was possessed of a sensibility which could extract from the world of sense-perception an unique quality of experience which was untouched by its latent defilements. Even in the picture of the goddesses with their "long dark tresses entwined with *madārā* garlands and their breasts encircled with jasmine garlands" the reader does not find any trace of sensuality. Very few poets, with the exception of

Vāttāve and Vīdāgama, could describe feminine beauty without suggesting the voluptuous. Vāttāve had the restraint of Kālidāsa who described the character of even the greatest libertine without a trace of indecency. And restraint was the quality least evident in the work of the some of our poets.

XI

THE DECLINE OF ANCIENT SINHALESE LITERATURE

VĀTTĀVE breathed new life into a literature that was dying of the disease of conventionality, and Vīdāgama immediately followed in his path. Though Vīdāgama was no great poet, in daring and originality of thought he was surpassed by none. It was he who first introduced wit and satire into Sinhalese poetry. Sinhalese thus received a fresh impetus and a new direction at a time when the king and the country and the people had set their feet on the path of decline. But the fresh spark of originality was short-lived. In the period following there was a revival once more of the kind of artificial poetry that was current in an earlier day, with its display of crude sensuality and skill.

Vīdāgama, a stout defender of Buddhist culture, quickly recognised the genius of Vāttāve, and following his direction, wrote the *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra*. The indebtedness of the first few verses of this poem to the *Guttila Kāvya* is evident from the sentiments expressed as well as the very words used, and one wonders whether Vīdāgama meant them to be a conscious tribute to the greatness of Vāttāve. At the end of his poem, too, there are certain verses which appear to be obvious borrowings from the *Guttila Kāvya*.

Another writer who seems to have influenced Vīdāgama is Vidyācakravartī. It is not surprising that Vīdāgama should have gone back for inspiration to two earlier writers whose themes were of a similar nature to his *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra*. It is seldom in his work that we can trace any direct influence of Śri Rāhula, except that there are certain criticisms and satirical sayings which could be regarded as having been levelled against this poet and the school of thought he represented.

We learn that Vīdāgama presided at the ceremony of *upasampadā* held in connection with the ordination of certain Burmese monks in the time of Bhuvaneka Bāhu. It appears that Vīdāgama did not invite Rāhula to this ceremony or that Rāhula of his own accord kept away from it. Prince Jayabāhu is reputed to be the son given by the gods to Queen Ulakuḍaya on the intercession of Śri Rāhula, and it is not unnatural, therefore, that Rāhula would have nothing to do with either Bhuvaneka Bāhu who gained the throne by killing Jayabāhu, or Vīdāgama who took sides with Bhuvaneka Bāhu. Vīdāgama on the other hand was a stout opponent of the policy of Rāhula and his school who allowed Brahmanic practices and the worship of gods to contaminate the Buddhist religion. Vīdāgama also believed that the arts of poetry, meaning thereby the composition of poetry according to the orthodox scheme prescribed by *alaṅkāra śāstra*, and the arts of drama and music should be strictly avoided by monks, and he was displeased with Parākrama Bāhu for encouraging such arts. In his description of the king he does not go into enthusiastic hyperboles over his virtues, as

did most other poets. Far from that, these verses are a criticism of the king and his doings put into the mouth of his ministers.

In fact, the greater part of the *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra* is a criticism of the society of the time. Vīdāgaṁa is the only poet in Sinhalese literature who was sensitive to the sufferings of the poorer people. We noticed how the *Pūjāvalī* incidentally threw some light on the peasant life of its time. But in general Sinhalese writers have been content with dwelling on the licentious lives of kings, their water-sports and their amorous pastimes. Certain rock inscriptions reveal hard facts about the life of the farmer in ancient times. The rich men and feudal lords who supplied the farmer with seed-paddy not only sat back in their arm-chairs and extracted an interest of fifty per-cent, but expected to gain rewards in the next world for the good they had done in parting with their seed-paddy. It is perhaps because poets had to seek the patronage of kings and feudal lords that they were unable to expose this unsatisfactory state of affairs. Vīdāgama either did not get, or did not expect to get royal favours, and hence was in a position to be able to express fearlessly the sentiments by which he was moved.

Palagat atu nasā
Pala kannavun vilasā
Dana gänumak nisā
Daham nonasati danan vanasā

Hiru näṅgetudu kesē
Rakin'aṅduru giri leṇa sē
Säṅḍa danātat kesē
Dugī sata räka siṭiti sita sē

"Kings do not inflict ruin on their subjects by unjust taxation like those who destroy the fruit-laden branches of a tree for the sake of its fruits.

"Like mountain caves that preserve the darkness in spite of the fierce sun, they protect the poor although there be wicked people who exploit them."

Ät govvan marā
Tuṭu vana gajan ayurā
Duk gattan marā
Eyin tuṭu sit noveti iñdurā

Dat mädalā damana
Dähaṭi daṅḍu men dina dina
Mehe gena danangena
Pasuva nodamati nodannan mena

"They do not derive pleasure from sinful acts of oppression, even as elephants derive pleasure from killing their keepers.

"They do not employ people and cast them away when they are old, as one makes use of pieces of stick for cleaning one's teeth with, and casts them away in the end."

Vaturu väli bim peta
Nohärama karana men teta
Duk pat satun veta
Kereti niti maha kuluṇu met sita

Kusa gini vitara misa
Nokarana lesin bat kisa
Nokaravati dana räsa
Satan rakinā vitarakaṭa misa

"Just as water always moistens land, kindness towards their subjects moistens their hearts ever.

"Just as people eat only as much as is needed for satisfying their hunger, even so kings do not amass more wealth than is needed for ruling the country well."

No reader can fail to see the bitterness and the satire of these lines. Through the device of describing what an ideal king ought to do or not to do, Vīdāgama is quite clearly expressing his condemnation of the callousness of the king and his ministers and feudal lords towards the hard lot of the poor peasant. Similar statements are found scattered elsewhere right through the poem. His invective is often directed towards the monks themselves who, he thought, were trying to gain royal favours by sacrificing the main principles of their faith. Hardly anybody, whether monk or layman, Buddhist or Hindu, escaped the venom of his pen.

In describing a state of famine in the city of Vesāli, Vīdāgama finds many an opportunity to express his contempt for those who lived an idle life while others sweated, and for those poetasters who, living in a parasitic fashion, praised them for virtues they did not possess. During the famine, people were denied the minimum necessities of life. Articles of toilet, like sandal and musk, were nowhere to be had, with the result that women were obliged to observe the eighth precept, and men avoided their company as though they had become ascetics. Every one seemed to be engaged in meditation, for not a smile was seen on their faces. In

the midst of the famished crowd were the lords and ladies of the city, and about them Vīdāgama says:

Ayek raṭa vassō
Vaṭa lūya däsi dassō
Ūya pera nissō
Dänut vaṭalā duvati mässō

"Some of them were those who, in former times, were regarded as deserving all respect and reverence and luxury, and lived surrounded by slaves and citizens. Now, too, they are surrounded, but, alas! by flies."

Vīdāgama's severest attacks are, however, directed at the gods of the popular religion, and at those who held them in great reverence. Why call them gods, he asks, if they hang about at the doors of people waiting to receive their gifts like beggars? He ridicules Brahmins who regard the fire as a god, by relating an amusing anecdote: A learned Brahmin of former times went out, in his old age, to the forest with the very fire that was lit on the day of his birth and handed over to him by his teacher. In the forest he tended the fire with great reverence. One day he intended to offer to the fire-god the flesh of a cow he had received as a gift of alms. He therefore tied the cow to a tree and went to a village close by to get some salt. In his absence thieves came upon the cow and killed it and roasted its flesh and ate it. When the Brahmin returned he found only the bones and the tail of the cow. Angered at what had happened he began to rebuke the fire-god. In the end he picked up the tail of the cow and extinguished the

fire with it. Vīdāgama winds up the story with the trenchant remark that even women who tend the fire all through their lives, performing all kinds of duties towards it, are yet not immune from sickness!

His picture of Īśvara is by no means a compliment to this chief of the Hindu pantheon:

Tisulavi gat karin
Kaḷu pähä rägat ugurin
Han saḷu gataṁbarin
Aḍak umayaṅgana gat sirurin

"With trident in hand, the black colour conspicuous on his throat, wearing a gown of thin air and bearing on his body half the body of Umā;

Daḷa aḍa saṅda baṅdina
Gora sap harak palaṅdina
Raṅga karana dina dina
Mahalu gon vāhanen ävidina

"The crescent moon on his turban, and a dreadful serpent round his neck, dancing every day and going about on a decrepit old ox;

Lat maha padaviyā
Sira sura gaṅgin deviyā
Anaṅga ruva däviyā
Yeheka puda karata maha deviyā

"Raised to the supreme position, with his head washed by the heavenly river, this god who burned the body of Anaṅga, verily is he meet to be adored!"

He questions the greatness of Viṣṇu in an argument refuting the supremacy of this god:

Äma tāna uviñdu äta
Sītāva ven vanu nāta
Enisā yudat äta
Kumaṭa pävasī da mē boru mäta

Vaňduraku pinu muhuda
Eterava yā nohī iňda
Giyela ram hē bäňda
Mesē veda melova deviyan teda

"That Viṣṇu is everywhere
That Sītā was not separated from her lover,
That therefore there was a war—
Why speak such balderdash?

A stretch of water across which a monkey swam
Rāma was unable to cross,
He needed a bridge to go over it, they say:
Such is the might of these gods!"

His condemnation of Brahmins was no less venomous than his contempt of their gods. He says of them:

Boru vē maturu bäňda
Vaḷahana levan häma saňda
Bamuṇangen dulada
Väḍak vūyē lovaṭa kikala da?

"What good did ever come to this world from these Brahmins of heretical faith, who ever deceive the world with false charms and concocted Vedas?"

Even in describing the occasion on which the Buddha visited the city of Visālā, when people flocked from all parts to see Him, Vīdāgama is unable to resist the temptation to have a dig at Brahmins:

Gäsū mas godurața,
Diva yana masun vilasața
Yāgehi kiri batața
Divana bamuṇan lesin eka viṭa

"Brahmins, like fishes rushing to the bait, run all of a flock to eat the milk-rice prepared for the sacrifice. In the same way did people flock to see Buddha."

Vīdāgama winds up the argument of his poem by exhorting all people to give themselves up to the Buddha in the fullest devotion of their hearts, and to worship his relics, his image and the sacred Bōdhi tree to the exclusion of all gods, constantly thinking of the virtues of the Buddha and hoping for the sight of the next Maitreya Buddha who will appear in future.

Almost sixty or seventy years before the civilisation of this country came into contact with the civilisation of the West there arose two poets who had the courage to break away from the stagnant tradition of the past and strike out a new path for themselves and for a generation of future poets. About thirty-three years after the *Buduguṇa Alaṅkāra*, the Portuguese first set foot on the shores of this island. Although our country was often subject to foreign invasions, our culture never came into

contact with a culture that was widely different from it. Side by side with the struggle for the material conquest of the Island there was going on a less conspicuous but no less significant struggle to establish the cultural supremacy of the two peoples. Though in the end the Sinhalese people surrendered to the Western powers, they still retained their cultural independence. In the cultural struggle the Sinhalese turned out to be weaker, but they were not completely overrun by their conquerors.

XII

THE BEGINNINGS OF A NEW EPOCH

IT is to Alagiyavanna and his father that the credit should be given for keeping alive the spirit of the literary revival of the Kōṭṭe period. They both lived in the reign of King Rājasiṃha, about eighty years after the arrival of the Portuguese. The works of both father and son could be regarded as the last products of that line of Sinhalese poems that began with the *Guttila*. The characteristic that distinguished all these poets from Vāttāve to Alagiyavanna was their simplicity of style and diction, and their avoidance of ornate figures of speech. The *Kusa Jātaka*, however, in spite of its simplicity, betrays considerable influence of the stylised Sanskrit Kāvya. The *Dahamsoñḍa Kava* of his father is little different from the *Kusa Jātaka*. It is likely that, as the earlier poetical version of the same story, that is the *Kav siḷumiṇa*, became more and more relegated to circles of pundits on account of its growing obscurity, this more popular version gained currency. The story of the *Kusa Jātaka* is one of the finest romances in ancient literature. And Alagiyavanna's simple versification would have deserved greater praise and have had greater appeal as a piece of straightforward balladry had he not slavishly and quite unnecessarily tried to follow the stock pattern of the Sanskrit *Kāvya*. And not possessing either the wide acquaintance with Sanskrit literature of the earlier poets, or their mastery of the Sinhalese language, each time

Alagiyavanna attempted to piece together a stock description of a city or a king, he could not help falling back on the already existing literature for his ideas and figures of speech. The result was that the better part of what he wrote was trite and commonplace.

In the first canto of the *Kusa Jātaka* Alagiyavanna appears to have closely followed the *Guttila*, but in the second canto his indebtedness is more to Śrī Rāhula. From the third canto onward Alagiyavanna rids himself of the shackles of *alaṅkāra* and proceeds in the style of a true ballad-singer. As pure narrative in verse there is hardly anything in Sinhalese literature to rival the *Kusa Jātaka*, and it is most likely that the writers of the metrical romances which became popular in the nineteenth century were followers of Alagiyavanna's style. He narrates every incident with a keen understanding of the mind of his audience and a complete mastery over the art of good story-telling. It is the one poem in Sinhalese literature that can be read from start to finish for story interest.

Certain incidents in the original Jātaka story which were omitted by Parākrama Bāhu in his *Kavsiḷumiṇa* are included by Alagiyavanna in his poem, with the true insight of a folk poet. The author of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* was writing in a highly stylised tradition, according to which only certain subjects were suitable for poetic description. In folk literature, however, frankness is never mistaken for vulgarity. And it is for the very incidents that Alagiyavanna relates and Parākrama Bāhu omits that the *Kusa Jātaka* enjoys the vast popularity it does. The incident of the

hunchback slapping the face of the image in the belief that it was Pabāvatī, the exchange of witty repartee between the hunchback and Pabāvatī, the occasion where Kusa, hiding in the stables, throws horse-dung and elephant-dung at Pabāvatī, are as memorable and vivid in the Sinhalese mind as the characters and incidents of the *Vessantara Jātaka*. It is the humour with which they are related that constitutes their chief fascination. The extent to which Alagiyavanna has popularised the story of the *Kusa Jātaka* is evident in such expressions as "as ugly as King Kusa" or "he has a face like an oil-cake" which have crept into the language and have become household idioms.

The following are the verses in which Alagiyavanna describes how Pabāvatī's hunchbacked nurse was deceived by an image wrought in the likeness of Pabāvatī:

Ekumari haṭa dimut
Kiri mav tanaturaṭa pat
Kudu vū gatin yut
Mähäli aňgana da ovun saha vut

This lady of lovely mien
Had, in the place of wet nurse
A woman aged and crooked of limb—
She too accompanied the rest."

Ran ruva däka manā
Pabavatiya yana sitinā
Taniva topi metanā
Kumaṭa avudä'yi kiyā rosinā

"And seeing the golden image,
She thought it was Pabāvatī,
And said with anger in her voice:
'What? Alone? Why did you come
from home?'"

Tarē ata osavā
Parusa bäṇa nusudusuvā
Sari da mā näsuvā
Kiyā kansak piṭaṭa gäsuvā

"And lifting up her arm
And speaking many an angry word
'You have ruined me,' she said,
And beat her hard upon her back."

Nodäna ati sēdī
Ran ruvaṭa paharak dī
Nomañdava ata ridī
Mesē pavasayi mähäli e kudī

"Beating a golden object,
Not knowing it was metal,
With pain sore afflicted
Thus spake the old hunchback:"

'Maduva yayi säka koṭa
Pahara dī ran ruvakaṭa
Vehesa da viya ataṭa
Ahō napurak vīya ada maṭa'

"Thinking it was my child, indeed,
I beat this golden statue
And hurt my arm sore:
Alas, that this misfortune should have
befallen me!"

The author of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* distorts this simple incident by attempting to elaborate it with far-fetched conceits:

"While the love-quarrels between the forest nymphs and their lovers were thus going on, a certain hunchbacked woman came to the bank of the river. With her soft hand she slapped the ample face of that image, and at that very moment her appearance changed to that of the full moon when it falls into the mouth of the dragon Rāhu. From the pain of her hand she inferred that what she had slapped must be an image of gold, and said: 'Mine eyes, annointed with the beauty of my child, were indeed deceived. Friends, I was really deceived, even as a female bee who drinks the honey of *sapu* and *dunukē* flowers, is deceived by *varā* flowers.' "

Not only does the poet in striving after effect reveal here a lack of imagination. He paints the hunchback as a young maiden attended by her female friends, and puts the humorous incident of her slapping the image in a setting which is totally unsuited to it, in an altogether romantic environment of flowers and love-making ethereal beings.

In describing the occasion when Kusa hid in a pond and siezed Pabāvatī by her hand, he contrasts the beautiful lotuses of the lake with the ugly face of Kusa and makes the incident almost symbolic of the entire theme of the poem:

Ekal Kusa niriňdu saňda uyanaṭa pivisā
Maňgul pokuṇa kaṭa pamaṇak diyaṭa bäsā
Visal neḷum patakin vasamin sirasā
Supul piyumakin siṭi saňda muhuṇa vasā

"What time did Kusa to the park repair
And into the water of the pond descend,
Neck-deep, and on his head a lotus-leaf did place
Covering his face with a full-blown lotus flower."

Pabāvatī's feelings, after she freed herself from the grasp of Kusa, are recounted with a naïveté that truly reflects the reactions of an unsophisticated girl on a similar occasion:

Visuḷu muhuṇa dakimin ema saňdēyā
Näbuḷu yakek mā ata gati tadēyā
Avuluvamin ḷäma sōgini kaňdēyā
Kaňduḷu salā aňḍamin iki biňdēyā

Davasära iňda mohuṭa
Vaḍā me läbena säpataṭa
Apa mavu piya vetaṭa
Gamana yehekäyi sitā tara koṭa

"I saw then a hideous face jut out
And an uncouth monster grasp my hand:
My heart with fear and sorrow was possessed,
And the tears poured down my cheeks.

Rather than live all my days
With a man so loathsome,
Whatever comforts he bestow on me,
I'd go back home to my dear parents."

Gahanata itā miṭi
Kopul tala däḷi noma siṭi
Dā giya puvak säṭi
Vuvanatin daḷa rakusugē säṭi

Mā ata ällu yam
Tänättek Kusa raja nam
Evaka siṭa ada him
Memaṭa vehesuve mohuya salakam

"His nose was very short
And on his face there was no trace of hair—
'Twas like a half-burned cake of oil:
Devilish he looked indeed!

"If he who held me by the hand
Is Kusa whom they speak of so,
'Tis he indeed I do abhor,
No more shall he continue to vex me."

True to the tradition of a ballad-maker, Alagiyavanna siezes every opoptunity of inflaming the imagination of his unsophisticated audience, by dwelling at length on dramatic situations and playing on their simple feelings: When King Madu gets down the executioner and instructs him to cut Pabāvatī up into seven pieces, the poet describes with relish the frightful appearance of this man, as though actually enjoying and smiling at the fear evoked in the minds of his simple readers:

Ruduru rakusaku yut
Madu radugen niyōga lat
Vadakaru tema mahat
Pälaňda rat mal äňda surat vat

Tavarā ratañgarā
Gena muguru kara aṁbarā
Kiyamin karadarā
Bomin nopamaṇa baḍa purā rā

Bamavā surat net
Gena porō mas loṁbuvat
Bihisuṇu vesin yut
Nolasa vut saṁda raja viman pat

"The executioner, ordered by the king,
Came like a fearful devil of ugly form,
Wearing sombre robes of scarlet red,
And decking himself with flowers of blood-red hue.

His limbs entirely daubed with scarlet paint,
Carrying on his shoulders heavy clubs,
Complaining all the while of discomfort,
With endless toddy-drinking belly-full,

He rolled his blood-shot eyes on every side,
And brandished his axe threatening death to all,
Instilling, thus, fear into people's hearts,
He forthwith came and stood beside the king."

It is as a ballad-writer that Alagiyavanna could claim a place among Sinhalese poets. He did not pause for long or expend his energies over stilted descriptions of sunsets and nights and water-sports. He made a straightforward verse narrative of the *Kusa Jātaka*, keeping in mind all the time an audience that was mainly interested in the story. And with the touch of a novelist he gave life to the characters and incidents of the story, making it memorable in the minds of his readers and listeners. For we can imagine the *Kusa Jātaka* being recited to groups of people gathered together in the night, eager to see Pabāvatī avenged for the insults she bestows on

Kusa, and Kusa rewarded for his love and devotion to Pabāvatī. The poet plays on their feelings, now inflaming them against Pabāvatī, now winning their sympathy for her by bringing her almost to the executioner's door, and now making them smile at the foolish devotion of the hunchback. When his listeners are full of anger against Pabāvatī (and all womenkind) for her pride in her own beauty, he makes her fall at the feet of Kusa and beg pardon from him. King Kusa, riding in pomp on the richly-decked elephant sent by Pabāvatī's father, wins loud applause. At the climax of the story not only is Kusa's ugly face miraculously turned into a handsome one, but the seven sisters of Pabāvatī are given in marriage to the seven kings whom he conquers.

The *Paraṅgi Haṭana*, although attributed to Alagiyavanna, is very likely not his work. There is hardly anything in it which could be definitely regarded as reminiscent of Alagiyavanna's style except some verses expressing stock conceits borrowed from previous writers. This similarity, however, is a common feature in all poems imitative of the Kāvya style, and is no indication, therefore, of borrowing from any particular author. The *Kustantīnu Haṭana* on the other hand, has unmistakable signs of Alagiyavanna's authorship. Like the *Dahamsoṅḍa Dā Kava*, it too belongs to the style of balladry.

At the time that Alagiyavanna composed the *Kustantīnu Haṭana* he had become a convert to Christianity. He begins his poem with an invocation to the Christian Trinity, and the Christian sentiments expressed in it bear the stamp of genuineness. In

describing the city of Sītāvaka he compares Sītā to the Virgin Mary. And since the poem appears to have been written about the year 1619 when he was advanced in years, it cannot be maintained that Alagiyavanna's faith in Christianity and his conversion were not genuine. It is evident from his *Kustantīnu Haṭana* that he was sincere in his new faith.

The ancient line of Sinhalese poets and writers came to a close with the death of Alagiyavanna. It is only in the present day that the initial chaos resulting from the contact of our culture with that of the West is beginning to abate. The new literature that is rising from the product of this contact is yet too young to be estimated. Our account of the ancient literature must, therefore, stop at this point.

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XIII

CONCLUDING REMARKS

CRITICISM is not a thing that is foreign to our literature. Bharata's *Nāṭya Śāstra* bears evidence of the fact that the art of evaluating good and bad writing began in India in very early times. But just as literature began to decline in India after the time of Kālidāsa, criticism became stereotyped into a set of rigid rules and thus found itself on the path of degeneration.

In Ceylon, too, such polemical tracts as the *Saradam Yāgaya* and the *Na ṇa la ḷa Bhēdaya* show the existence of healthy difference of opinion among scholars about the literary merit of certain poetical works published in comparatively recent times. It is therefore very unlikely that our poets in ancient times went unchallenged in respect of the quality of their work. The very fact that Kālidāsa in his *Śakuntalā* addresses a tirade against the critics of his day goes to prove that all literary productions were subjected to sharp scrutiny in his time.

Writers who belonged to different literary schools were more opposed to one another then than even today. Schools very often separated out on differences of taste and on rules of grammar, and the controversies that most probably took place at that time between men of different tastes would have been left to posterity had it been the custom of the time to record them. Criticism of this kind does not seem

to have gone on outside the schools themselves, and its final oblivion is very likely the result of this exclusiveness.

There are certain other facts too that can best be explained by postulating the existence of a robust tradition of literary criticism from ancient times. The fact that for almost three centuries after the composition of the *Muvadev Dā*, *Sasa Dā* and *Kavsiḷumiṇa* there were no poetical works of any sort, lends colour to the supposition that these three poems were subjected to the severest criticism. Besides, both the *Muvadev Dā* and the *Sasa Dā* are little more than loosely-connected strings of verses. The *Kavsiḷumiṇa* on the other hand, possesses greater unity of construction. And it is not fanciful to suppose that this improvement in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* was due to the criticism that the two earlier works were subjected to.

It was in the Kōṭṭe period that the most heated literary controversies took place. The poems of the time unmistakably reflect the influence of criticism. The fact that the *Säḷalihiṇi Sandēśa* does not bear the slightest traces of some of the immaturities of Śrī Rāhula's earlier works cannot be explained by the mere fact that the poet was advanced in years when he wrote it. It should rather be regarded as the result of the criticism that Rāhula and his school received from poets who disapproved of his style of writing.

Criticism as it existed in the schools, therefore, is lost to us, and all we can do is to pick up scattered information about it from the works themselves that were the subject of criticism. The schools themselves sank into oblivion with much of the esoteric lore they

possessed, and it was in the time known as the "Kandy period" that an attempt was made to re-establish them. But those who were seeking to re-establish the schools were occupied with the main task of resuscitating the lost literature. They were not interested in the criticism as such. In the enthusiasm of re-discovering, re-editing and re-learning the old books, the valuable art of criticism was naturally lost sight of. Hence learning degenerated to the mere uncritical worship of the ancient literature. And particularly today, when there has set in a reaction from the de-nationalising influence of western civilisation, it is regarded as a mark of national feeling to pay unquestioning *pūjā* to the literary treasures of the past. Any attempt to evaluate the past is treated as an unqualified betrayal of the cause of our national culture.

This feeling had, no doubt, some survival value at a time when the whole of Sinhalese culture was threatened with extinction. But today, when the time has come to take a step forward instead of for ever wallowing in the past, it is very necessary that a correct estimate should be made of all those treasures which we have received as our national heritage. It would be ridiculous, for example, to regard the age of a book as the only criterion of its value. Absurd as such a suggestion might seem, it is by no means uncommon to find similar judgments pronounced on our literary works today. One further result of such an attitude is to regard all contemporary writing as not worth the serious attention of scholars. This in itself is a serious obstacle to the growth of a contemporary literature. What is very necessary today, therefore, is an evaluation of our classical literature

with the criteria available to us, both ancient and modern, and by the application of such criteria to the work produced today. It is only in this way that a direction can be given to the literature that is growing around us and striving to express itself in forms more suited to the spirit of this age.

GENERAL INDEX