

II—THE POET

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In times past, the *Jānakīharaṇa* was one of the texts studied by those in Ceylon who desired to obtain a proficiency in the Sanskrit language. This is indicated by the fact that a word for word paraphrase (*Sanne*) in Sinhalese, was produced about the twelfth century, by an unknown scholar, for the whole poem. Manuscripts of this Sinhalese *Sanne* of the *Jānakīharaṇa*, though incomplete, are still extant.

This preference shown for the *Jānakīharaṇa* by the academic men of ancient Ceylon was no doubt partly due to its intrinsic merits which secured for it a high place among the *Mahākāvyas* written in the Sanskrit language; it was also partly due to the reason that the author of this poem was a Sinhalese. The earliest reference, so far known, to the *Jānakīharaṇa* in the literary tradition of Ceylon is in the *Pārakumbāsirita* of the latter part of the reign of Parākramabāhu VI (1412—1467). Among the eulogies of a number of distinguished monarchs who were predecessors of Parākramabāhu VI in the dynasty to which he belonged, the poet has this to say of a king named Kumāradāsa (v. 23) :

Vehera dasaṭak purā karavā dasa-aṭak maha-vāv bāṇḍī
Vasara ekadā bisō abises mahanavam temagul yedi
Ājara kiviyaṛa pinin Jānakīharaṇa ā mahakav bāṇḍī
Kumaradas-rada Kālidasa nam kiviṇḍuḥaṭa siya divi pidi

‘King Kumāradāsa sacrificed his life for the sake of that prince of poets, Kālidāsa—(Kumāradāsa) who caused to be established a full eighteen *vihāras* and constructed eighteen great tanks, who celebrated the three festivals, that of the espousal of a queen, that of consecration and that of the occupation of a new palace, on the same day in the same year, and who, due to his skill as a master poet, composed the *Jānakīharaṇa* and other great poems.’

This stanza from the *Pārakumbāsirita* proves that among at least some of the literary circles in Ceylon during the fifteenth century, the *Jānakīharaṇa* was regarded as the work of a Sinhalese king named Kumāradāsa who sacrificed his life for the sake of a

great poet named Kālidāsa. The Sinhalese scholars of subsequent times had no doubt that the reference here was to the celebrated Indian poet who was the author of the *Raghuvamśa* and the *Meghadūta*. The reference in the *Pārakumbāsirita* gives no indication of the chronological position of King Kumāradāsa, to whom it has attributed the authorship of the *Jānakīharana*. This is furnished by the *Pūjāvalī*, a Sinhalese religious treatise in prose written about 1265, which says about Kumāradāsa: ‘*Ohu pit Kumāradas-
raja maha-paṇḍi va nava havuruddak rājyaya koṭa Kālidāsa nam
tama yahaḷuvā maḷa dā temē da gini vāda paralova giya ha.*’ His (Mugalan’s) son, King Kumāradas, was a great scholar and, having reigned for nine years, himself leapt into the flames of the funeral pyre, and departed to the other world on the day that his friend named Kālidāsa died¹.

The *Pūjāvalī* does not refer to King Kumāradāsa as the author of the *Jānakīharana*; neither does it refer to Kumāradāsa as a poet, but as a man of great learning. Kālidāsa, too, is merely called Kumāradāsa’s friend, and is not referred to as a poet. From these circumstances, one may argue that the tradition given in the *Pārakumbāsirita* was not prevalent in that form in the thirteenth century. On the other hand, it is also possible, as the author of the *Pūjāvalī* has summarised the history of Ceylon in a very concise manner, that he has just referred, in the barest outline, to a tradition well-known to his readers, without recounting details with which they were familiar.

Though the *Pārakumbāsirita* and the *Pūjāvalī* both refer to the manner in which King Kumāradāsa ended his life, neither authority gives details, which are also not narrated in any literary work now preserved. They have to be supplied from stories which have been orally handed down among literary circles in Ceylon. According to these, Kumāradāsa, after completing his great poem, sent copies of it to kings and learned men in India. The great poet Kālidāsa was so impressed after reading the *Jānakīharana* that he came to Ceylon to meet its author in person. A great friendship developed between Kālidāsa and Kumāradāsa, and the Indian poet remained at the court of the Sinhalese king as an honoured guest.

¹ *Pūjāvalī*, 34th Chapter, edited by Mābōpiṭṭiye Medhaṅkara, p. 18.

Kumāradāsa, it is said, was in the habit of visiting, in disguise, the house of a certain courtesan. On one of these visits, it was not possible for him, for some reason or other, to leave the courtesan's house as it was intended, and the king was forced to spend the whole night there until dawn on the following day. Before leaving the scene of his nocturnal misadventure, he composed two lines of a verse referring to his experience in an indirect manner, and wrote them on the wall of the courtesan's house, promising a rich reward to one who would complete the verse by adding two appropriate lines (*samasyāpūraṇa*). It so happened that Kālidāsa visited the same courtesan's house on the following night and, seeing the uncompleted verse written on the wall, and grasping the suggested meaning, wrote two lines and completed the stanza. The courtesan, having noticed it, desired to obtain the reward for herself, murdered Kālidāsa and hid the corpse. When the king visited her house the next day, she informed him that she had completed the stanza and demanded the reward. Kumāradāsa was so struck with the literary quality of the two lines by which the stanza had been completed, that he doubted whether the courtesan, with all her accomplishments, was able to compose them. He recognized the genius of Kālidāsa in them, and questioned the courtesan as to what she had done to him. When the truth was finally revealed by her, Kumāradāsa was overwhelmed with grief at the death of the great poet, of which he was unwittingly the cause, and himself leapt into the flames of his friend's funeral pyre, and made an end of his own life, too. The fatal verse composed jointly by the king and the poet is duly recited by the narrators of the story. It is in Sinhalese of a later stage of the language. In recent times, a Sanskrit stanza has been substituted in place of the Sinhalese. The scene of the tragedy has been localised at Mātara at the southernmost extremity of the Island.

The *Cūlavamsa* does not mention a king named Kumāradāsa. The son and successor of Moggallāna I, called Kumāradāsa in the *Pūjāvalī*, is referred to as Kumāra-Dhātusena in the Pali chronicle. An inscription which can be ascribed to the time of Kumāra-Dhātusena or Kumāradāsa on palaeographical grounds, has recorded the