

**AN EASTERN LOVE-  
STORY: KUSA JAKAYA,  
A BUDDHISTIC LEGEND**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649359684

An Eastern love-story: Kusa jakaya, a Buddhistic legend by Thomas Steele

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**THOMAS STEELE**

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A BUDDHISTIC LEGEND**



An Eastern Love-Story.



KUSA JĀTAKAYA,

A BUDDHISTIC LEGEND:

*RENDERED, FOR THE FIRST TIME, INTO ENGLISH VERSE,*

FROM THE

*SINHALESE POEM OF*

*ALAGIYAVANNA MOHOTTĀLA,*

BY

THOMAS STEELE,

CEYLON CIVIL SERVICE.

LONDON:

TRÜBNER & CO., 60 PATERNOSTER ROW.

1871.

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Inscribed,

With Much Love,

to

**C. B. S.,**

At whose Request the Translation

Was Written,

Six Happy Years Ago.

In 1975 George W. P. Campbell  
offered me a number  
of Sinhalese manuscripts  
which he had collected  
for me. Instead of  
particular tales orally  
preserved which I wanted  
I advised him to give his  
collection of MSS. to some  
Museum or library in  
Ceylon where they could be  
read or used in some  
way. J.P. 27<sup>th</sup> July 1975



## PREFACE.

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BUDDHISTS believe that their Great Teacher, GAUTAMA BUDDHA, while a Bōdhisat, before attaining to Buddhahood, underwent, as they hold do *all* sentient beings, countless transmigrations, five hundred and fifty of which he afterwards revealed to his followers. These are contained in the PANSIYAPANAS JĀTAKAPOṬA, or *Book of the Five Hundred and Fifty Births*, a prose classic translated from the ancient Buddhistic legends in the Pāli language into the vernacular tongue early in the fourteenth century, during the reign of PŪKKĀMA BĪRŪ IV., King of Ceylon. The probable date of the Pāli legends cannot be ascertained; but there can be no question they are of remote antiquity.

In one of these transmigrations, the Bōdhisat was born as KUSA, Emperor of Dambudiva or Jambudwīpa (INDIA); and his adventures, while in that life, form the subject of the KUSA JĀTAKAṬA, a favourite legendary poem of high repute among the Sinhalese, of which a rendering into English verse is now for the first time submitted to the reader. The original poem, founded on the prose legend in *The Book of the Five Hundred and Fifty Births*, was written, as the concluding stanza shows, in 1610 A.D., by ALAGIYAVANNA MOHOTĪLA, Secretary or Writer to the Household of a native chieftain of high rank.

ALAGIYAVANNA is regarded as one of the most distinguished poets of Ceylon by his countrymen, among

whom, though the circumstance may perhaps cause surprise to many English readers, poetry has, from remote times, been an object of earnest study and liking. Of the *Kusa JĀTAKAYA* it has been said, "The unity of its plan, the steady progress of its narrative, and a certain unaffected display of genuine feeling, . . . entitle it to rank as a poem of the highest merit."\* Although this measure of praise should, perhaps, be qualified, the Legend is undeniably a favourable specimen of Sinhalese poetry; and I am fain to hope that the version now offered may be of interest to Englishmen, as evidence of a vein of Oriental literature almost wholly unsuspected at home, as illustrating Buddhistic history, precept, and practice, and modes of life and feeling in the East, little known here, and as showing what engaged the thoughts of at least one builder of "the lofty rhyme" in Ceylon, at the time when SHAKSPEARE, resting from his dramatic labours, was enjoying a happy but too short afternoon of life at Stratford, and RALEIGH consoled his captivity in *The Tower* with gorgeous day-dreams, never to be realised, of golden realms he believed himself destined to discover beyond the Spanish Main.

The Legend is a love-story, and exhibits in many places great beauty and tenderness of sentiment. The student of Comparative Mythology, and the lover of old-world stories, will be interested in finding ancient Aryan incidents, which appear in the *Mahābhārata*, here worked

\* ALLEN'S *Introduction to the Sīlat Saṅgāraṃ*, a scholarly and highly interesting book. Mr ALLEN is at present engaged on another important work, *The Descriptive Catalogue of Sinhalese Authors*, undertaken at the request of the Governor, SIR HERCULES ROUSSSEAU, whose enlightened action in regard to Sinhalese literature and antiquities calls for very cordial recognition.

Engage send the Maha Bharata for the  
older form of the stories told.

up into a Buddhistic myth, in a country where an almost exact counterpart of the Judgment of Solomon,\* but not derived from Hebrew sources, has long been current. The seven kings who are to marry one bride; the hero disguised as a potter, a groom, and a cook; the miraculous birth of the hero by the favour of Indra; and many minor incidents of the poem, reveal a close connection between the Legend and the old Sanskrit epic, and, it may be added, between both and many popular tales of Western Europe.

The translation reads stanza for stanza with the original, which consists of six hundred and eighty-seven stanzas of four lines each, all feet rhyming alike, with, not unfrequently, double rhymes in the middle of the lines. The translation is in many places necessarily freer. Old Ballad Measure has been chosen as the one best adapted to convey the spirit of the original, and as affording room for amplifying, where necessary, into English verse, the remarkable compression which occasionally distinguishes Sinhalese poetry. I have been urged to publish the original text in Roman characters, side by side with the English version, as was done by Traskov in his translation of the *Mohavensā*. This would be easy, as ancient Sinhalese poetry contains none of the aspirated letters frequent in prose, and, to a certain extent, difficult to express by Roman characters; but I refrain, for the present at least, from adopting the suggestion. It may, perhaps, be carried into effect hereafter, should this venture meet with favour enough to warrant a second edition.

A few specimens of Sinhalese epigrams and stories have been appended at the end of the volume, in the hope that

\* See Note to stanza 316, p. 218.

x That was my point  
 xx If a trans. later binds himself  
 to verse - yes - amplification