

Distinctive Characteristics of Twenty-First-Century Pāli Sandesa Literature: An Analytical Study of the *Karavīka Sandesa*

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Introduction

The term Sandesa is derived from Sanskrit, which in Pāli is formed from the root “disa” combined with the prefix sam̐ (sam̐ + disa), as reflected in the expression “news or message (Davids and Stede, 1966: 678). The earliest occurrence of the word Sandesa in Ceylon Pāli literature is attested in the Mahānāgakula Sandesa, meaning “message” (Mahānāgakula Sandesa, 2012: 99). Likewise, the Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka, composed during the Gampola period, signifies Sandesa as “message” (*Vuttamālā Sandesa Sataka*, 2003: 125). *The Pāli terms “pahiṇa” and “sāsana” are also employed within the Tipiṭaka in the sense of Sandesa or message. When examining these words, it is evident that they are used both literally and figuratively to convey the idea of a message or communication.*

One of the earliest and most influential examples of messenger poetry in Indian literature is Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*. Based on the *Meghadūta* as the primary source, numerous Sanskrit messenger poems were subsequently composed. The impact of the Sanskrit Sandesa contributed to the emergence of Pāli Errand Literature, exemplified by foundational compositions such as the Mahānāginakula, Vuttamālā Sataka, Siri Rāma, and Garuḷa Sandesas. For the Sandesa to be recognised either as a mode of communication or as a literary genre, it must generally incorporate four essential elements: *Peṣaka*, *Hāraka* or *Dūta*, *Grāhaka*, and Sandesa. In contrast to the traditional Sandesa structure, which begins with *Dūtavajjanā* and concludes with Sandesadassanaṃ and *Dūtāsi*. Conversely, Pāli Errand Literature develops a distinctive literary framework beyond these conventional features. Even though the Garuḷa Sandesa demonstrates the essential Sandesa conventions. It reveals the imprint of the Sanskrit literary tradition. Due to the limited developments of the Pāli Sandesa and its considerable Sanskrit influences, this study presents a new Pāli Errand Literature entitled *Karavīka Sandesa*, while preserving the distinctive characteristics of the Pāli tradition. The research problem was that no Sandesa *Kāvya* or other scholarly composition in Pāli has been created specifically on the foundation and development of Bhiksu University in Sri Lanka. There is currently no Pāli literary work that reflects

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contemporary academic or educational institutions, particularly Buddhist higher education in modern Sri Lanka.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to compose and critically examine a contemporary Pāli *Sandesa Kāvya* based on Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka, while demonstrating its contribution to the continuation and development of the Pāli literary tradition.

Sub-Objective

To analyse the literary characteristics, structural features, and contemporary significance of the *Karavīka Sandesa* as a modern Pāli *Sandesa Kāvya* that preserves classical traditions while reflecting the academic and cultural values of Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology based on textual analysis. Classical *Sandesa Kāvya* works are used as the primary sources, while secondary sources include scholarly studies, research articles, and literary analyses related to *Sandesa* poetry and Pāli literary traditions. These primary and secondary sources are critically examined through a textual analysis framework to identify the structural features, literary characteristics, and thematic significance of the *Karavīka Sandesa*. The analysis enables the researcher to interpret, compare, and synthesise findings in relation to the development of contemporary Pāli *Sandesa Kāvya* literature.

Results and Discussion

The Selection of “Karavīka” as the Title of the *Sandesa*

The Karavīka bird is a prominent mythical bird frequently mentioned in Buddhist texts, particularly in cosmological descriptions. The term is also used metaphorically to describe one of the **mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇas**, where the ability to speak sweetly and clearly is compared to the cuckoo’s voice (DN, II, 1982: 20, MN, II, 1898: 137). In the Kammaṭṭhāna-gaḥaṇa-niddeso section of the Visuddhimagga, the term karavīka is described as referring specifically to the perception of the earth element (Vsm, 1975: 112). It is traditionally compared or translated as the cuckoo, although its literary identity is primarily symbolic. It is described in classical texts, for example, as “bhāṇin, speaking like the cuckoo,” emphasising its characteristic melodious call and symbolic significance within the literary and cosmological context (Davids and Stede, 1966: 196).

Its melodious voice, moral and spiritual connotations, and association with sacred geography make it an ideal symbol for *Sandesa* poetry. By using the name Karavīka in *Sandesa*, the poet intentionally invokes qualities of **wisdom, clarity, eloquence, and ethical authority**, aligning the literary act with centuries of Buddhist literary and symbolic tradition. The Karavīka, therefore, serves as both a messenger and a metaphor, embodying the poet's aspirations for moral and aesthetic excellence, and ensuring that the *Sandesa* achieves its dual purpose of communication and spiritual instruction. In this sense, the “karavīka” functions as a symbolic vehicle for wisdom and ethical communication, and a poetic model for the messenger's voice, making it a central and enduring symbol in Buddhist literary culture.

The Purpose and Content of Karavika Sandesa

A complete Sandesa *Kāvya* traditionally consists of four essential elements. A Sandesa *Kāvya* is considered complete when these four essential elements are present (Ballantyne, 1851:154). In the composition of the *Karavīka Sandesa*, these elements are consciously observed. The Sender (*preṣaka*) - the person who initiates or sends the message – is identified as a student of Pāli at the Bhiksu University of Anuradhapura. The Messenger (*hāraka/dūta*) - the entity that delivers the message – is symbolised by the bird named *Karavīka*. The Receiver (*grāhaka*) - the intended recipient of the message – is the Vice Rector monk of the Mahāmakut Buddhist University in Thailand, who is invited to come to the Bhiksu University of Anuradhapura. This invitation also aims to strengthen and cultivate the longstanding bonds of friendship and mutual collaboration that exist between our institutions. Finally, the Message (*Sandesa*) - the content to be conveyed – takes the form of an invitation extended to the chief monk, encouraging his visit and engagement with the Bhiksu University, situated in Anuradhapura, the historical centre of the Mahāvihāra Buddhist tradition, to foster greater academic exchange.

The composition consists of fifty-one verses in the *Karavīka Sandesa* are composed based on specific metrical patterns belonging to the classical prosody of the Vuttodaya. In particular, Meters such as Saddūlavikkīlita, Upajāti, Piyaṃvadā, Vamsaṭṭha, Mandākkantā, Vasantatilakā, Sikharaṇī, Sasikalā and Kusumilatāvellitā are employed extensively throughout the work.

The composition follows the Sandesa tradition, beginning with *Dūtavaṇṇanā*, *Bhikkhu nikhilavijjālaya vaṇṇanā*, *Mahā Bodhivaṇṇanā*, *Mahā Cetiyaṇṇanā*, *Nandana Ujjānavāṇṇanā*, *Missaka pabbatavaṇṇanā*, *Kaṇadārāvāpi vaṇṇanā*, *Jambukoḷatittha vaṇṇanā*, *Samuddaṃ tarati 'ti vaṇṇanā*, *Mahāmakut nāma nikhilavijjālaya vaṇṇanā*, and so on as well as ending with

Sandesadassanaṃ and *Dūtāsi*, while incorporating descriptive sections and adhering to Subodhālaṅkāra principles.

“Amara mandira yahaṃ virāja’ hu;

--- / U -- / - U - / U - U

pavara paṇḍita supesalā ca te,

--- / U - - / - U - / U - U

vipula vaṇṇa guṇa kitti santake;

--- / U - - / - U - / U - U

vimala yena vasate ahaṃ sukhe.” [Piyaṃvadā] (Kashyapa Ven, 2026: 43).

--- / U - - / - U - / U - U

The employment of the Piyaṃvadā metre in this verse is noteworthy, as it contributes significantly to the poetic expression of admiration towards Bhiksu University. This metre, characterised by its pleasing rhythm and refined structure, is traditionally appropriate for conveying themes of praise, appreciation, and elegance. Therefore, its selection reflects the poet’s intention to present the university as a distinguished centre of knowledge, discipline, and scholarly excellence.

The verse constructs an idealised image of Bhiksu University through carefully chosen expressions. Terms such as pavara paṇḍita (“excellent scholars”), supesalā (“well-disciplined and virtuous individuals”), and vipula vaṇṇa guṇa kitti (“extensive fame arising from outstanding qualities and virtues”) highlight not only academic achievement but also the ethical values associated with the institution. The description extends beyond a mere geographical reference, portraying the university as a sacred and intellectual space where learning and moral cultivation coexist.

Moreover, the rhythmic beauty of the Piyaṃvadā metre enhances the verse's aesthetic dimension. The harmonious arrangement of syllables complements the glorifying tone of the composition and reinforces the poet’s respectful portrayal of the university. Hence, the use of this particular metre serves both a literary and symbolic function, enhancing the representation of Bhiksu University as a place of wisdom, virtue, and intellectual heritage.

Conclusion

Based on the results, the present study on the Karavīka Sandesa underscores the enduring relevance and adaptability of Pāli Sandesa poetry in contemporary scholarly and educational contexts. By composing the Sandesa Kāvya centred on

the Bhiksu University in Sri Lanka, this research contributes to filling a gap in the Pāli literary tradition, which has rarely represented contemporary monastic educational institutions. The study also encourages further research into the creation of new Pāli literary works that honour contemporary monastic achievements, expanding the scope and relevance of Sandesa literature.

Keywords - Bhiksu University of Anuradhapura, Karavīka Sandesa, Message, Pāli Errand Literature, Pāli literary studies, Sanskrit Influences

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