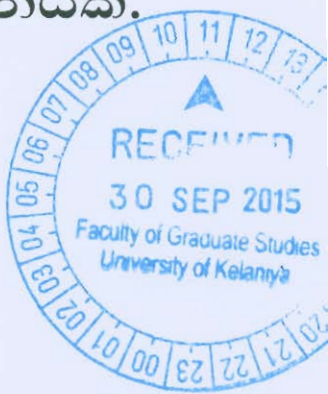


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ABSTRACT

“Sinhala Milinda Prashnaya,” is a great religious text and an endowment to the Sinhala literature, which was written during the Kandyan period. It is the Sinhala translation of the Pali text, “Milindapanho”. This remarkable text which belongs to the pre-Buddhagosa period and which comes under Therawada tradition is based on the religious discussion between the Greco-Indian King, Minander (Milindu) who ruled the North Western region of India in the 2 century B.C. and Arhath Nagasena thero. This text is considered unique among the Pali texts which are available to study theoretical concepts of Buddhism as it helps to clarify certain confusing areas in Buddhism. The book was translated into Sinhala as “Sri Saddharmadasa” by Heenatikumbure Sumangala thero, a student of Valiwita Sri Saranankara Sangaraja thero, who was invited for the task by the Kandyan King, Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe. For a long time, “Sinhala Milinda Prashnaya” was a religious text that was used frequently in the Sinhala community and it is also an important research source that helps to identify the writing style of the prose works produced during the Kandyan period. However, in comparison to the attention given by the critics to the Pali source, “Milinda panho” and the foreign translations based on it, the Sinhala translation has not received any considerable scrutiny. Therefore, this present study which was conducted based on primary and secondary literary sources, focus on a variety of issues such as the historical truth of the Milindu-Nagasena dialogue, the original nature of the Pali text - “Milindapanho”, the reasons that led to its Sinhala translation, the literary techniques and devices employed by the writer in the translation, the limitations that can be identified in the text, as well as the methods of rhetoric used in the “Milinda Prashnaya”. The Kandyan period was an era which suffered economic, political as well as cultural degradation. Critics suggest that a work such as “Milinda Prashnaya” was compiled in order to overcome the opposition faced by Buddhism because of the encroaching Christianity in the contemporary period. Catholic priests like Juse Wass and Jocomé Gonsalwes conducted lectures and wrote books critiquing Buddhism. So, it was a timely need to produce a text of this nature which elucidates the rational aspect of Buddhism and it can be assumed that the writer translated the Pali text, “Milinda Panho” in which a Buddhist defeats his opponents in debate because of this situation. This text is not a direct translation of the Pali text and the writer has effectively incorporated a colloquial style that appeals to the masses and an academic writing style, and this has helped him to retain the writing style of the original text to a considerable degree. In this manner, “Milinda Panho” can be considered a text that follows a rationale which does not deviate from the path of knowledge espoused by Buddhist philosophy and also a text which analyzes complex issues related to Buddhism. The text has also paved the way for conversational Sinhala texts which emerged during the 19th century.

Key words: Sinhala Milinda Prashnaya, Saddharmadasa, Milindapanho, Minander, Nagasena