

Tracking The Parrot's Path: A Promulgation of Cultural Heritage



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Abstract: Among multiple genres of Sanskrit poetry, the *sandēśa* or *dūtakāvya*¹ (messenger poems) have inspired curiosity among litterateur aficionados of the classics. Albeit such communications often involved exchanges of confidential messages among remote lovers, these poetries equally served as travelogues. Among the *sandēśakāvya*s composed in Kerala², *Śukasandēśa* of Lakṣmīdāsa, of the 14th century, is a remarkable literary work. Lakṣmīdāsa conveys his heartfelt feelings to Raṅgalakṣmī, his sweetheart, through a *śuka* (parrot). The messenger parrot travels from Rameswaram³, where the separated lover resides, to Guṇapuram, in North Kerala. The route covers various places of cultural and historic significance. Appending aesthetic elements, Lakṣmīdāsa maps all the major temples and sacred rivers, en route to Guṇapuram. The current paper proposes to educate and promote awareness among the current generation through promulgation of ancient cultural heritage. The ornamental presentation of prominent temples, portrayal of deities, sacred rivers, groves etc. mentioned in the *Śukasandēśa* could ignite minds of culturally inquisitive groups. It associates various ancient nomenclatures of places with modern locations, acting as a quick reference for classical researchers. The description of locations in the *Śukasandēśa* could serve as a route map, providing location sketch and ease expeditions.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Culture, Heritage-based Nomenclature, Messenger poem, Promulgation, *Śukasandēśa*

I. INTRODUCTION

Sandēśa or *dūta-kāvya* (messenger poem) as a particular genre of lyrical poetry has motivated strong interest among the connoisseurs of poetry. In this context an inanimate object (like a cloud in Kālidāsa's famous Meghadūta) or a living being (cuckoo, goose etc.) is used as a communication medium to exchange information between individuals. Frequently, the principal storyline portrays gnawing pains of emotions of separated lovers, and their yearning for reunion. The genesis of this characteristic style of poetry can be traced back to the Vedic period. In the R̥gveda [1, v. 10.106], Sarama, a dog, was sent as an emissary to the Pāṇis

demons, to retrieve the cows abducted by the latter. Śyāvaśva, of the *Atrigotra* sent message to his beloved Rathavīthi through *Rātri* (night) as a messenger [1, vv. 5.61.17-19]. Among the Purāṇas, Bhāgavata [2, v. 10.56] contains numerous anecdotes where cowherd damsels leaned on couriers such as *kurarī* (female Osprey), *cakravākī* (female *cakra* bird) etc. India's well-known epics are ripe with instances of correspondence like the message of reassurance, sent by Rāma to Sītā via Hanuman in the Rāmāyaṇa; a goose diplomat who carried pitiful heart-rending notes between Nala and Damayanti, and an offer of truce from the Pāṇḍavas to the Kauravas through Kṛṣṇa's peace mission, in the Mahābhārata. Composing the first messenger poem, the Meghadūta [3], Kālidāsa emulates the style of *Hanumatsandēśa* of Rāmāyaṇa. Kālidāsa reiterates that as an allusion, Rāma's message to Sītā, was the real inspiration behind his Meghadūta [3, v. 2.33]. Kālidāsa deployed *megha* (cloud), an inanimate object as messenger between lovers. The distracted mind of a lover, according to Kālidāsa, could use even an inanimate object as a messenger [3, v. 1.5]. Krishnamachariar points out an instance where the poet Ghaṭakarpara⁴ in one of his poems, conceived the idea of sending message through the clouds, where the piteous plight of a lady is conveyed to her distant lover [4]. Following the style of Kālidāsa, many poems were composed, conveying romantic and philosophical ideologies. Hamsasandēśa (goose as the messenger), a devotional work of Vedāntadeśika, a Tamil philosopher cum poet depicts Rāma's pangs of separation from Sītā. Here, Rāma sends Sītā an affectionate message through a royal goose. Hopkins believes that Vedāntadeśika closely followed Kālidāsa's *sandēśa* model in Hamsasandēśa, and the former's works are rich in scholastic literacy, and is steeped in devotion [5].

II. SANDEŚAKĀVYAS OF KERALA – A REVIEW

Depending on the regional, philosophical and sectarian differences, multiple *sandēśakāvya*s have been composed. According to Unni, there are almost thirty *sandēśakāvya*s composed by authors from Kerala and outside, describing various aspects of Kerala [6]. There exists two *sandēśakāvya*s by the title *Cakorasantēśa*. Here, a *Cakora* (Partridge) is used to communicate between lovers. The author of one *Cakorasantēśa* is known as Vāsudeva but more references on Vasudeva's identity remains unavailable, so are many locations described in *Cakorasantēśa*. The authorship of the other *Cakorasantēśa*

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¹International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) scheme has been used to represent Devanagari words in Roman.

²Kerala is a southern state of India.

³Rameswaram is located in Tamil Nadu, a Southern state of India.

remains unidentified. The authorship of Bhr̥ṅgasandeśa where a *bhr̥ṅga* (bee) is the messenger remains unrevealed. Another *sandeśakāvya* known as *Hamsasandeśa* uses a *hamsa* (goose) as a messenger to send message from Ceylon to Kuṭamālūr in Central Kerala. Though the *Hamsasandeśa* remains quite valuable geographically, the authorship remains anonymous. *Sandeśakāvya*s like *Viprasandeśa* by Kochunni Tampuran, *Indusandeśa* by Narayanan Nambīsan are available in fragments.

Pavanasandeśa, *Pikasandeśa*, *Sampātisandeśa* are other *sandeśakāvya*s which are yet to be published as books. Majority of the commentaries on the *sandeśakāvya*s mentioned above remain unexplored. Thus, Kerala is abuzz with an enriched heritage of *sandeśakāvya*s. Varma observes on the proficiency of Sanskrit poets of Kerala thus, “in the blessed isolation which that Land of Paraśu-rāma had for ages enjoyed, the cultivation of Sanskrit literature was far from being neglected. Sanskrit poets have flourished who would yield superiority to none in the rest of India, except perhaps to the great Kālidāsa” [7]. Along similar lines, Unni comments, “Kerala is the only region which produced works of real merit in the field of messenger poems. Among the *sandeśakāvya*s composed in Kerala, most lie dormant and unpublished, concealing valuable information on the environment, socio-political and cultural elements” [6, p. 8]. Aiyer revealed his displeasure, mentioning, “It is a pity that most of the works have not seen the light of the day” [8]. He further adds, “in a country rich in traditions such as India, *sandeśakāvya*s are invaluable oases. The importance of whose discovery and preservation is scarcely possible for anyone to overrate”. The intent of the current paper is centred on one of the *sandeśakāvya* from Kerala, entitled *Śukasandeśa* (the parrot messenger) by Lakṣmīdāsa. There are seven commentaries written on this poem, by multiple authors [6, p. 48]. *Varavarṇinī* commentary by Dharmagupta, *Cintātīlaka* by Gaurīdāsa, *Vilāsinī* by Mānaveda are the ones whose authorships are known to the world. Meanwhile, writers of highly informative commentaries, namely *Śukasandeśavyākṛti* and *Padārthadīpika* remain anonymous. *Ṭippani* or short notes on the *Śukasandeśa* by the Keralavarma Valiyakovil Tampuran and *Śukasandeśa-vyākṛtī* by Rama Pisharoti were composed towards late 19 CE. Though most of them remain unpublished, their existence show the significant part played by the poem in depicting the political, demographic, religious and environmental features of the land.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper uses qualitative content analyses as the methodology. According to Ernst, qualitative content analysis is used in social science research, in conjunction with narrative, biographical or expert interviews, followed by document analysis [9]. Hermeneutics seem to be the most commonly used qualitative analysis technique [10]. Mayring texts, Hermeneutics as a Human science to interpret central texts like the Bible [11]. The current study does not use Hermeneutics since the study does not involve any theological, psychological or philosophical interpretations of the *Śukasandeśa*. Bhavuk, while discussing the Indian literature based methodology of research, hints on developing a theory by integrating the Indian cultural aspect along with tracing the Indian traditional and scriptural wisdom [12]. Accordingly, *Śukasandeśa* is dissected and

data such as, the name of temples, deities, rivers, peculiarity of terrains and the locations are derived. Analysis of ambiguous references on temples and their locations mentioned in the *Śukasandeśa* is executed. Clarity on names of temples and locations is achieved by corroborating hints on the locations from the *Śukasandeśa*, with available evidence on the present-day locations.

Academic studies on *Śukasandeśa* are seemingly less interested to probe any further due to very small number of research publications. Hence, the analysis method adopted in this study is based on the data retrieved from the primary text *Śukasandeśa* with *Vilāsinī* commentary by Mānaveda. Few scholarly translations authored by N.P. Unni, Rāma Varma etc. and few other secondary sources were also consulted.

IV. ŚUKASANDEŚA AT A GLANCE

Śukasandeśa follows the traditional model of messenger poems, where the author emulates the style of Kālidāsa's composition. As Varma observes, ‘*Śukasandeśa* is a strict imitation of Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*’ [7, p. 402]. The poem fits in well with the definition of *Mahākāvya* proposed by the great poet Daṇḍin, in his composition *Kāvyaḍarśa* [13]. Since the *Śukasandeśa* excels in its composition through delightful portrayal of cities, ocean, mountains, sentiments of separation in love etc., it could be considered as a *Mahākāvya* (great poem). At the outset, the poet Lakṣmīdāsa warns the parrot messenger on surmounting potential hardships, on the flight path over rivers, mountains and cities. Lakṣmīdāsa used the *Mandākrānta* metre⁵ and *Vipralambha-sṛṅgāra*⁶ to convey his agonies of dissociation from his sweetheart, Apphulla alias Raṅgalakṣmī. Lakṣmīdāsa seems to be a descendant of the Nampūtiri clan, located near the Trppūtamaṅgalam temple in Kanayannūr Taluk, Cochin district [14]. After a prolonged sexual engagement with Raṅgalakṣmī, he dreamt himself being separated from his sweetheart and reaching Rāmeśwaram⁷. Yearning for the love of his sweetheart, Lakṣmīdāsa finds a parrot of supernatural intelligence to convey his deeply affectionate messages to his lover, distantly located in the north of Kerala. The *Śukasandeśa* poem is divided into two sections: the *Pūrvabhāga* (prior section) and the *Uttarabhāga* (latter section).

⁵ *Mandākrānta* is a poetic metre conventional for messenger poems. The word *Mandākrānta* means ‘slowly advancing’ and the tempo of the verses seem to be slow while being used in poetry. According to the *Vṛttaratnākara* by Kedārabhaṭṭa, *Mandākrānta* includes four *pādas* (lines) having 17 syllables each.

⁶ The *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, a treatise on the fundamentals of poetics by Viśwanātha describes *Sṛṅgāra* (erotics) as one among the poetic aesthetic sentiment. The permanent mood created through *Sṛṅgāra* being love. When two lovers are together the *Sṛṅgāra* used would be *Sambhoga* (love in union) and *Vipralambha* (love in separation) is used when the lovers are separate.

⁷ Mānaveda in his commentary *Vilāsinī* states Rāmeśwaram as the place where lord Śiva's sign, the Śivalinga was consecrated by Rāma. This corresponds to the legend in *Adhyatma Rāmāyaṇa* where Rāma travels back to Rāmeśwaram after defeating Rāvaṇa and consecrates a Śivalinga at the seashore.

The prior section describes the journey of the messenger parrot, detailing the beauty and features of the places traversed, en route to Raṅgalakṣmī, while the latter section describes the beauty and prosperity of the city Guṇapuram. The physical and mental condition of Raṅgalakṣmī is also narrated here. Scholars opine diversely about the date of composition of Śukasandēśa. Varma highlights the difficulty in finding the age of the poet or the poem [7, p. 402]. Pursuant to the name *Kolamba* (Sanskrit) used by Lakṣmīdāsa for the modern town Kollam (Malayalam) aka Quilon (anglicized). He further proffered that the poem would have been composed in a period between the 9th century and the 16th century CE, subsequent to initiation of the Kollam era. According to Sarma, since inaugurated in the city of Kollam the era is known to be Kollam era [15]. Based on multiple observations from the poem, Unni assigned the origin of the Śukasandēśa poem to a time within the 14th century [6, p. 6].

V. EXPLORING THE TEMPLES, DEITIES AND LOCATIONS

The former section of Śukasandēśa reveals the location of the poet Lakṣmīdāsa away from his residence [6, v. 2.62]. Enjoying an autumn night with his beloved, the poet dives into deep slumber and dreams of being separated from his lover and reaches a faraway jungle. Roaming around alone in the jungle he feels himself to have reached Rameswaram. The poet pleads with a parrot, to carry his heartfelt messages to his beloved, Raṅgalakṣmī. The poet unveils his foray into religion by composing lyrics in praise of the divinity of the parrot. Lakṣmīdāsa is reminded of the divine parrot of the heavens. The parrot gleefully plays in Nandanavana, the famous garden of Indra, the king of gods and is lovingly caressed by divine goddesses. Lakṣmīdāsa believes that the parrot is the one, most beloved to goddess Parvathy, the consort of lord Śiva [6, v. 1.3].

The poet reveals to the parrot that the destination to be reached is Guṇapuram, where the poet's beloved resides. The name Guṇapuram seems to have been modified to *Ṭṛkkaṇāmatilakam*, and subsequently as *Tiruvañcikkulam*, a place near present day Kodungallur, in the North of Kerala. Varma posits, Guṇapuram could be *Trikkānapuram*, a village little north of Kodungallur in Trichur district [7, p. 431]. Sastri [16] and Unni [6, p. 76] opine that *Ṭṛkkaṇāmatilakam* has been referred to as Guṇapuram in the Śukasandēśa. Additionally, Unni [6, p. 6] used the name *Tiruvañcikkulam* replacing *Ṭṛkkaṇāmatilakam*. The latter section of Śukasandēśa states that the mansion of the heroine is situated at the royal path, site of the shrine of lord Śiva, and his consort, goddess Pārvaty. Lord Śiva is designated and worshipped as *Guṇakanātha* (lord of Guṇaka) [6, v. 2.15]. Thus, we could conclude that the destination to be reached by the messenger parrot is Guṇapuram alias Guṇaka, where the heroine Raṅgalakṣmī resides.

The poet reveals his intense devotion to lord Śiva, by his request to the parrot, to embark on its task, after paying due reverence to the Śivaliṅga⁸ at Rāmeśwaram. Mānaveda in his commentary refers to the traditional belief of worshipping lord Śiva, prior to commencing any activity. The worship serves as an auspicious beginning rendering the

successful completion of the activity [6, p. 35]. As the tradition calls out, purification of one's body is necessary prior to the worship. The Liṅga-purāṇa [17] recommends three methods of purification namely *Varuṇ-snān*, *Bhasma-snān* and *Mantra-snān*⁹ before one does worship to the Śivaliṅga. Hence, Lakṣmīdāsa asks the parrot to purify being in the spritz atmosphere and to smear its body with pollens of the *Saptacchada* flower [6, v. 1.20]; these activities are quite akin to *Varuṇ-snān* and *Bhasma-snān*. Finally, Lakṣmīdāsa reminds the parrot about visualizing the form of lord Śiva, with his tawny head, body smeared with ash, giving a whitish tint and blue neck, while venerating the Śivaliṅga.

The parrot messenger then sets off along the ocean shore from Dhanuṣkoṭi at Rāmeśwaram district. Here, the ocean is metaphorically compared to the ocean of Vaikuṅṭha-loka where lord Viṣṇu dwells with his consort, Lakṣmī devi. The poet verifies the location as Dhanuṣkoṭi by stating the presence of *Rāmasetu*¹⁰, and asserting that the *seturekhā* (rocky formation of a bridge) remains as a testament to the greatness of the lineage of the Raghu dynasty¹¹[6, v.1.23]. Thus, expressing his devotion towards Śiva and Rāma, the parrot commences its travel towards Guṇapuram and reaches the banks of river *Tāmraparṇi* 6, vv. 1.25-26]. River *Tāmra* or *Tāmraparṇi* is proximal to Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. The river has numerous mango trees, lining along the banks, bearing ripe fruits. Production of white pearls is the most noted peculiarity of the river. Varma noted the existence of numerous pearl fisheries at the mouth of the river *Tāmra* [7, p. 432]. In addition, Kauṭilya's statement in *Arthashastra*¹² on the peculiar type of pearl '*Tāmraparṇika*', from the *Tāmraparṇi* river, confirms the river to be a chief centre of pearl trade, since ancient times [18].

Moving along the banks of river *Tāmra*, the poet directs the parrot to Maṇalūr the capital city of the king Vīra-pāṇḍya (brave Pandya king). Varma [7, p. 432] noted the name Maṇalūr being used in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and in *Mahābhārata*, with regard to the pilgrimages of Balarāma and Arjuna respectively. Poet Lakṣmīdāsa [6, v. 1.27] recalls the legend of Vīra-pāṇḍya, who fought with lord Indra, the rain God for rainfall in his kingdom. A devotional *Mahākāvya* by Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita titled *Śivalilārṇava* cites the legend about lord Kumara¹³ incarnating in the Pāṇḍya family as *Ugra-pāṇḍya* (ferocious Pāṇḍya king), who was an expert in martial arts, attacking lord Indra for rain in his province [19]. What seem to be conclusive here is that the Pāṇḍya lineage had many brave and ferocious kings, who were fearless and valiant enough to even challenge divine forces.

⁹ Denotes bathing, spreading sacred ash and chanting sacred syllables respectively.

¹⁰ The word *Rāmasetu* means the bridge constructed by Rāma. The historical *kāvya* *Rāmāyaṇa* mentions it to be the bridge constructed by Rāma and the army of monkeys from Dhanuṣkoṭi in Rāmeśwara to Srīlāṅka.

¹¹ Rāma was born in the lineage of Raghu of the Ikṣvāku dynasty.

¹² *Arthashastra* is a literary composition on ancient Indian economy and statecraft.

¹³ The son of god Śiva and goddess Pārvaty, Muruka is known by many names and Kumara is one of those.

⁸ Śivaliṅgas are symbolic representations of lord Śiva.

Lakshmidasa indicates that the route to Gunapuram is two-fold and cautions on shorter route being extremely dangerous for birds since an aggressively violent people of the Pulinda tribe¹⁴ resides along the route and hence Lakshmidāsa suggests the parrot to choose the longer route [6, v. 1.28]. The ravishing beauty of the Sahyādri (Western Ghats), and the important religious locations, cited later in the poem, seem revealed that the suggestion of the longer route could be intentional. The Sahyādri seem to have abundant cultivation of Bimba¹⁵ and Pomegranate. The description of climatic conditions and environmental vibrancy attracts the heart of any individual seeking tranquillity.

Travelling further, the parrot reaches Kerala, the land, believed to be formalized by sage Paraśurāma. According to the treatise *Keralolpatti*, 64 agrarian settlements were formed in Kerala by the migration of brāhmaṇas from different parts of the country, under the leadership of Paraśurāma [20]. Madhavan posits that temples controlled the land and the economy, and the brāhmaṇas were the landlords [21]. They were the overseers, preserving the temple land and wealth. Lakshmidāsa [6, v. 1.34] claims, "The parrot reached the land of 'brahma-kshatram' (brāhmaṇ-kinged)". Here, the brāhmaṇas perform the duties of 'kṣatriyas'. Varma remarks on the word 'brahma-kshatram' by the poet as a certainty of the brāhmaṇas, the priestly class becoming the lords of the land in Kerala [7, p. 434]. He further adds, aggregations of all temple property were created by the brāhmaṇas and the kings and chiefs were originally appointed by the brāhmaṇas. Thus, referring to the formation of Kerala and commenting on the ancient Kerala's political scenario, the parrot was directed to take the route, which in present times is referred to as National highway extending from Kanyakumari or Cape Comorin (anglicized) to Salem, Tamil Nadu.

After a, peek at the *Bhagavaty* temple¹⁶ located at Kanyākumari, the parrot was led to the famous hilltop Vakragiri. Vakragiri is well known today as *Marunthuvāzh Malai*, alias *Marunthu Vāzhum Malai*¹⁷ (the abode of medicinal herbs), in the Kanyākumari district [6, vv. 1.35-36]. Śucīndra the famous shrine of lord Śiva is located close to the Vakragiri. As the name suggests, Śucīndra is the place where lord Indra became pure, shedding his sins according to a Purāṇic legend [6, v. 1.37]. The tradition on proving the purity was preserved through generations, as a peculiar trial known as *haste phalāni* (ghee ordeal)¹⁸[6, v. 1.37].

¹⁴ According to Lakshmidāsa, the Pulinda seem to be a tribe of hunters.

¹⁵ A fruit of the genus *Momordika*.

¹⁶ The title Kanyākumari is derived from the ancient temple dedicated to goddess Pārvatī incarnated as Kanyā (virgin). According to the Purāṇic legend, a demon king Bāṇa was vanquished by devi Kanyā.

¹⁷ The hill is believed to be a small part of the mountain with medicinal herbs which Hanuman carried to revive Lakṣmaṇa who lay unconscious when pierced by Rāvaṇa's sphere during the war depicted in the Rāmāyaṇa.

¹⁸ Chastity is most strictly enjoined among women of the Nambūtīri Brahmins of Kerala. The adulterer, if he himself is a Nambūtīri Brahmin, is excommunicated and out casted. If direct proofs are not available, and yet morally suspicious circumstances exist, the accused man has recourse to the ghee ordeal to prove his innocence. The ordeal was performed in the Śucīndram temple. Ghee is boiled in a vessel and a small image of the sacred bull

Lakshmidāsa commented, even the parrot gets purified by visiting the Śucīndra temple [6, v. 1.40]. Hence, he calls the parrot an *Anaḡha* (pure, sinless) as it enters Syānandūra, the famous city Tiru-ananta-puram or Trivandrum (anglicised). The famous temple of Murāri¹⁹ is located in the city. The temple's prime idol depicts the form of Ananta-padmanābha, where lord Vishnu, flanked by goddesses Lakṣmī and Bhūmī, lies in tranquil repose on the serpent Ananta-śeṣa. Varma revealed the local narrative of four different names in the four Yugas²⁰ for Tiru-ananta-puram: Syānandūra-puram in Kṛta Yuga, Ānanda-puram in Treta Yuga, Ananta-puram in Dwāpara Yuga, and Padmanābham in Kali Yuga [7, p. 436]. However, this city is popularly known by the christened title of Dwāpara-yuga, 'Ananta-puram', prefixed by 'Tiru', which symbolizes auspiciousness and prosperity. *Tiru* is commonly placed in front of sanctified Hindu names. Thus, the name Tiru-ananta-puram commemorates lord Ananta as the sovereign of the land. Lakshmidāsa adds that the city has numerous sacred tanks, and there was no better place for the Lord's repose [6, v. 1.41]. In this context, Varma enlists ten *ūrthas* or bathing places surrounding the Padmanābha temple [7, p. 436]. Progressing along the oceanic route, the parrot traverses through the lineal and prosperous capital of the king of Kūpakas. According to Varma, Kūpaka is the modern day Kayamkulam [7, p. 436]. The next city en route was Kolamba, the modern day Kollam. The poet implored the parrot to be undistracted, from the mission of reaching the poet's sweetheart, by the series of wonderful sights at Kollam [6, v. 1.56]. Ahead of Kollam, the divine parrot passes over two important rivers: Kallada and Ittikara [6, p. 437]. Next, the parrot arrived into the spiritual and tranquil ambience of Vallabhagrāma, or modern day Tiruvalla, to worship lord Viṣṇu. Here, the deity is ceremoniously adorned at different times of the day, as an allegory of the progressive stages of human life as per the Hindu tradition: brahmacharya (celibate), grhastha (householder), vānaprastha (forest dweller) and sannyāsa (ascetic) [6, v. 1.58].

Proceeding further, through places like Bimbalī and Sindhuvīpa, famed for their massive elephants, the parrot flew across the Phulla, better known as Mūvattupuzha river. Śrī Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, the proponent of the Advaita school of Vedānta philosophy is known to have taken birth on the banks of river Phulla. Moving further north, Lakshmidāsa [6, v. 1.62] adds about the presence of a Vishnu temple where the deity is seen along with the serpent Ananta. Varma (1884) submitted that the Vishnu temple mentioned by the poet is located at Tṛppūnittura, near Cochin [7, p. 437]. The description of the idol corroborates the presence of Santānagopāla-mūrti (saviour of infants) in the Pūrṇatrayīśa temple, at Tṛppūnittura. Another sacred location, in close proximity to Tṛppūnittura is a Śiva temple. Lakshmidāsa [6, v. 1.65] recounted the presence of 33 deities²¹ at the Śiva

Nandi is dropped into the vessel. The accused has to pick up the image and as soon as it is done, his hand is immediately wrapped with plantain leaves. The accused is lodged separately for three days and at the end of which if his hand be found unscathed, he is declared innocent, if burnt, guilty.

¹⁹ Viṣṇu, the enemy of the demon Mura.

²⁰ Four epochs as per Hindu tradition.

²¹ A pantheon of Gods of Vedic origin. Few could be of later addition.

temple. The Cūrṇi River, presently known as the Periyar or the Alway river, a sibling of Tāmraparṇi River, flows very close to the Śiva temple. Based on the data on the location presented above, we could assume the Śiva temple to be the Āluva Mahādeva temple. The parrot, en route to Mahodayapuram, worships the shrine of lord Śiva at Jayarātheśwara. Unavailability of any documented records prevent the identification of Jayarātheśwara with any modern location. Varma ventured that Mahodayapuram was the ancient capital of the lineage of the Perumal kings' dynasty, whose notable importance gradually receded, even during the times of Lakṣmīdāsa [7, p. 438]. Presently, Mahodayapuram is equated to Kodungallur or anglicized Cranganore. Here the parrot was urged to visit the Caṇḍika temple, amidst the Kurumba forest at Kodungallur [6, v. 1.71]. The parrot reached its destination, Guṇapuram or Tiruvañcikkulam, proximate to Kodungallur, where Raṅgalakṣmī, the poet's sweetheart resides.

eagerness to aesthetically explain the route towards his beloved. He proved his scholastic mettle by his display of utmost care and attention to detail, while illustrating his envisioned parrot-emissary's flight path from Rāmeśwaram to Guṇapuram as depicted in Figure 1. The illustration reveals that the parrot travelled approximately 840 kilometres to reach its destination. En route, the poet illustrates many important temples of lord Śiva, lord Viṣṇu, goddess Bhagavaty at Kanyakumari and of goddess Caṇḍika, at Kodungallur. As Lakṣmīdāsa resorted to ancestral names for the locations, it is quite a daunting task to accurately associate them with the right modern day nomenclature. Table 1, titled Heritage-based Nomenclature lists the name of heritage sites, rivers and mountain in the medieval period with their respective modern day names. Here, the exercise was quite arduous, deciphering the historic place Guṇapuram as present day's Tiruvañcikkulam, famous for its Śiva temple and proximity to Kodungallur. Tṛippūñittura is quite well known for the presence of Pūrṇatrayīśa temple with the form of Santānagopala Viṣṇu crowned by the serpent Ananta. But the poet avoids usage of the name of Pūrṇatrayīśa, hinting the naming of the temple as a later development. The Śiva temple near Periyar seem to be the famous Alway Mahādeva temple. More data could be mined from other messenger poetries of Kerala and by scrutinizing unpublished commentaries, to uphold the veracity of the drawn inferences. Though the former part of poetry enlists information on temples, and displays the poet's devotional ecstasy, Lakṣmīdāsa reveals streaks of his erudite knowledge of Vedas and Purāṇas. Since parrot is the messenger chosen by the poet, he could have proposed an alternate direct route to reach Guṇapuram. Lakṣmīdāsa deliberately moves off-course to include picturesque places like hills and valleys, including the Western Ghats. It is well nigh certain that publication of other commentaries would uncover more facts and throw more light on the data already collected. Works like Śukasandeśa acts as a pointer to enhance awareness of the current generation pertaining to the nation's rich cultural and aesthetic heritage. The promulgation of the travelogue could inspire culturally inclined groups to explore various locations that conceal antiquities and appreciate heterogeneous aesthetic elements.

Heritage-based Nomenclature	
Medieval	Modern-Day
Vakragiri	Marunthuvāzh Malai <i>alias</i> Marunthu Vāzhum Malai
Syānandūra	Tiru-ananta-puram / Trivandrum (anglicised)
Kūpaka	Kayamkulam
Kolamba	Kollam / Quilon (anglicised)
Vallabhagrāma	Tiruvalla
Phulla	Mūvattupuzha
Cūrṇi	Periyar
Mahodayapuram	Cranganore/Kodungallur
Guṇapuram <i>alias</i> Guṇaka	Tiruvañcikkulam

Table 1: Heritage-based Nomenclature of Places, Rivers and Mountain

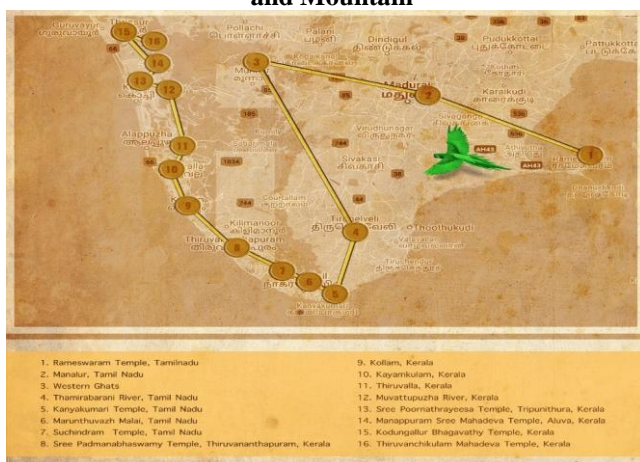


Fig. 1: Illustration of the parrot's journey from Rāmeśwaram to Guṇapuram. The route covers sixteen locations of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Śukasandeśa clearly reflects Lakṣmīdāsa's profound spasms of separation from his lover, which enhanced his

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