

Prominent Buddhist Libraries of the Dambadeniya Era: The Role of the Dambadeniya Vijayasundarārāma

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This study investigates the Vijayasundarārāma Pothgul, a monastic library central to preserving Sri Lanka's Buddhist and intellectual traditions during the politically turbulent Dambadeniya period. Following the collapse of the Rajarata civilization due to climatic crises, malaria, invasions, and shifting trade dynamics, the Sinhala kingdom relocated southwestward. Under monarchs like Vijayabāhu III, Parākramabāhu II, and Vijayabāhu VII, the polity resisted Kālīṅga-Māgha invasions and environmental challenges while safeguarding the Buddha Śāsana, Sinhala literature, and cultural institutions. The Vijayasundarārāma Pothgul, established as the kingdom's inaugural monastic library, emerged as a pivotal institution in this cultural conservation. Administered by Venerable Sangharakkhita Thera, chief monastic and intellectual leader the Pothgul systematized operations through codes like the Dambadeniya Katikāvata and Vijaya Katikāvata. It functioned as a scholarly nexus, fostering interdisciplinary studies in religion, linguistics, and literature. Affiliated with the monastic college (pirivena), it housed a curated multilingual collection of Buddhist and Hindu texts, grammatical treatises, and syncretic works in Sinhala, Pali, Tamil, and Sanskrit. Key figures, including Medhaṅkara Thera and princes Buwanekabāhu and Parākramabāhu, advanced doctrinal and literary scholarship. Sangharakkhita authored seminal texts like the Dharma Vinaya Vyākaraṇa, Subodhālaṅkāra, and Vuttodaya, Sri Lanka's first indigenous Pali grammar while supporting royal literary projects such as Parākramabāhu II's Kavsiḷumiṇa. The institution's self-sustaining structure and integration into Dambadeniya's administrative networks enabled it to sustain intellectual discourse and supply knowledge to scholars. Its role extended beyond textual preservation, cultivating a legacy of monastic leadership, scholarly patronage, and cross-cultural exchange. By analyzing institutional frameworks, textual outputs, and contributions to Buddhist education, this research underscores the Vijayasundarārāma's centrality in maintaining medieval Sri Lanka's academic heritage amid socio-political instability. The Pothgul tradition, exemplified by this institution, highlights the symbiotic relationship between monastic stewardship, literary production, and the resilience of cultural identity during periods of upheaval.

Keywords: *Buddhist intellectual heritage; Cultural preservation; Dambadeniya era; Monastic libraries; Vijayasundarārāma Pothgul*