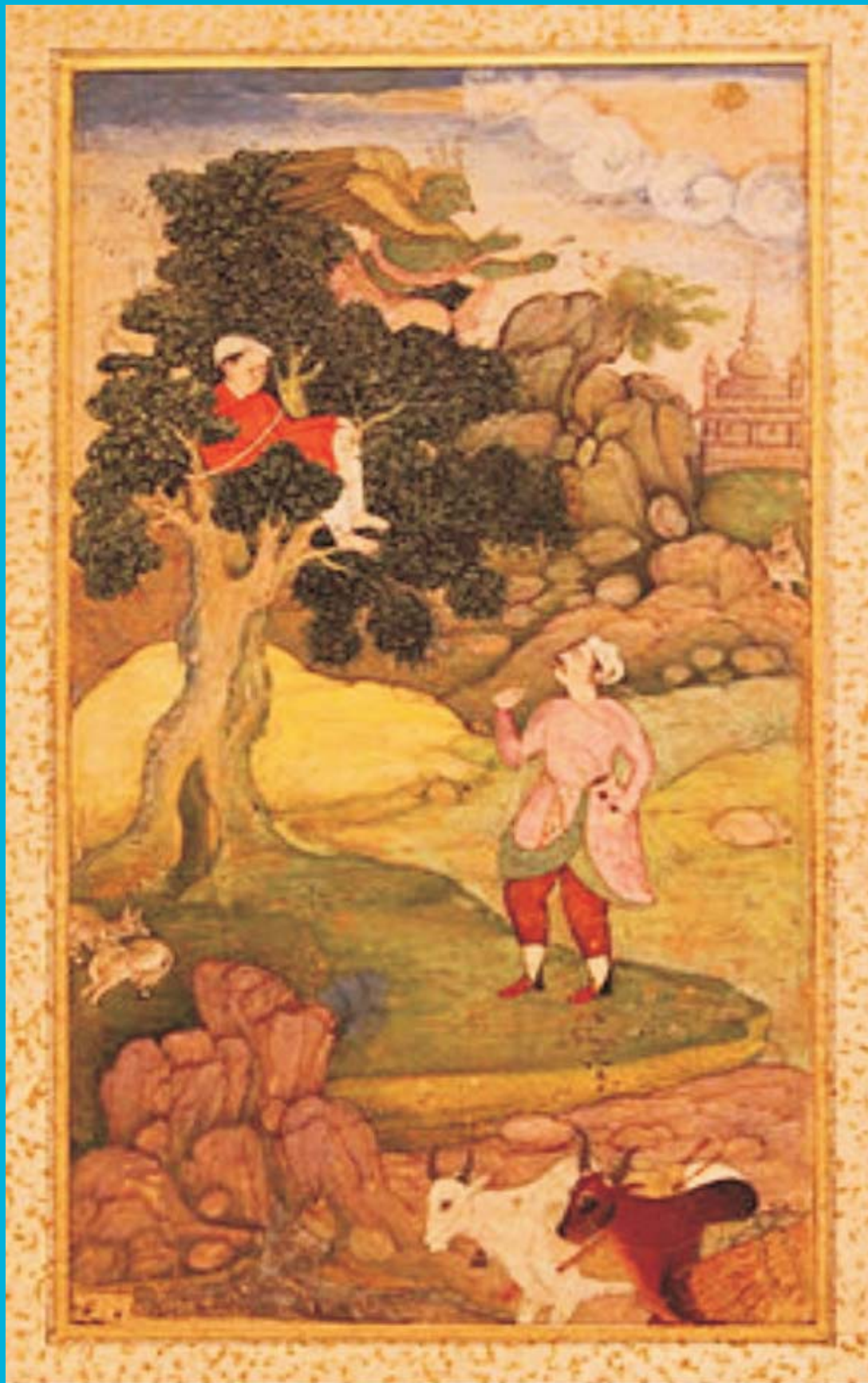


BIRTH & JOURNEY OF KATHA SARIT SAGAR



**A 16th Century folio of an Indian retelling of
the Katha Sarit Sagar : Image - Wikipedia**

Birth and Journey of Somadeva Pandit's 'Katha Sarit Sagar'



M.K.Raina

"India is indeed the home of story-telling. It was from here that the Persians learned the art and passed it on to the Arabians. From the Middle East, the tales found their way to Constantinople and Venice, and finally appeared in the pages of Boccaccio, Chaucer and La Fontaine. It was not until Benfey wrote his famous introduction to the Panchatantra that we began to realise what a great debt the Western tales owed to the East", says N.M.Penzer, the author of 10 volumes of 'The Ocean of Story' based on C.H.Tawney's English translation of Somadeva Pandit's Katha Sarit Sagar written in Sanskrit text.

Katha Sarit Sagar is, for its size, the earliest collection of stories extant in the world. Its author, or rather its compiler, was a Brahman named Somadeva. Unfortunately we know nothing of him, except what he himself has told us in the short poem at the end of his work, and what we may gather of his ideas and religious beliefs from the

work itself. The short poem of Somadeva was not included by Brockhaus in his text, but was printed later from MS material by Buhler. From this it appears that the name of our author was Soma i.e. Somadeva. He was the son of a virtuous Brahman named Rama. His magnum opus was written for the amusement of Suryavati, wife of King Ananta of Kashmir, at whose court Somadeva was poet. The history of Kashmir at this period is one of discontent, intrigue, bloodshed and despair. The story of Ananta's two sons, Kalash and Harsh, the worthless degenerate life of the former, the brilliant but ruthless life of the latter, the suicide of Ananta himself and resulting chaos is all to be read in the Rajatarangini, or Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir.

Volume 1 of the 'Ocean of the Streams of Story' translated from original Sanskrit text by C.H.Tawney was published by Asiatic Society, Park Street, Calcutta in 1880. Vol. 2 was published at the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta in the year 1884.

Sanskrit edition (Edition 4) of the Katha Sarit Sagar, edited by Pandit Durgaprasad and Kashinath Pandurang Parab, revised by Wasudev Laxman Shastri Panshikar was published by Pandurang Jawaji at Nirnaya Sagar Press, Bombay in 1930. It calls its author by the name of Somadeva Bhatta. Earlier, the one edited by Jivanand Bhattacharya Vidyasagar was printed at Saraswati Yantra, Calcutta in the year 1883.

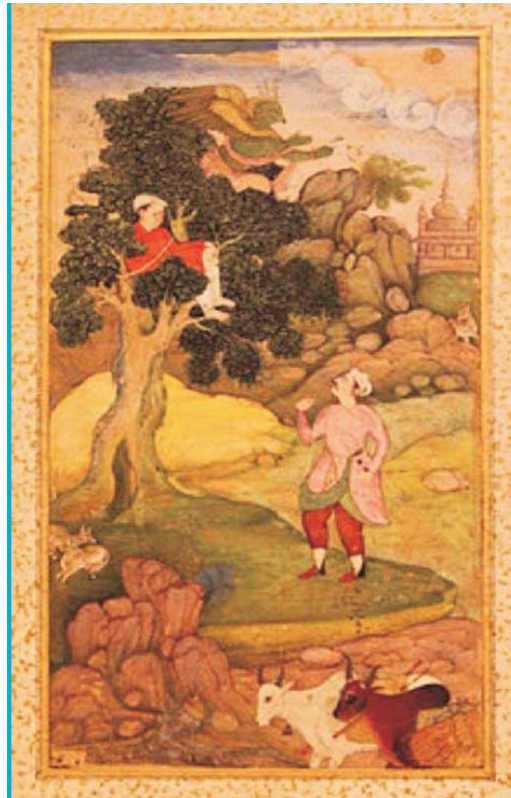
Katha Sarit Sagar is the mirror of Indian imagination that Somadeva has left as a legacy to posterity. Following out his metaphor he has divided the work into one hundred and twenty-four chapters, called Tarangas 'waves' or 'billows' while a further (and independent) division into eighteen Lambakas or 'surges' or 'swells' was made by Brockhaus, whose text is that used by Tawney. The whole work contains 21388 distichs, or Shlokas, which gives some idea of its immense size. It is nearly twice as long as the Iliad and Odyssey put together.

18 Books or Lambakas that Katha Sarit Sagar comprises, are :

1. Kathapeetham
2. Kathamukham
3. Lavanakah
4. Narvahanadattajanam
5. Chaturdarrika
6. Madanamanchuka
7. Ratnaprabha
8. Suryaprabhah
9. Alankaravati
10. Shaktiyasholambakah
11. Vela
12. Shashankvati
13. Madiravati
14. Panchalambakah
15. Mahabhishekah
16. Suratamanjari
17. Padmavati
18. Vishamashilah

Kathāsaritsāgara is a large work. Each book comprises a number of stories loosely strung together, by being narrated for the recreation or information of the same individuals, or arising out of their adventures. These are Udayana, king of Kosambi, and his son Naravahanadatta. The marriage of the latter with various damsels of terrestrial or celestial origin, and his elevation to the rank of king of the Vidyadharas, a class of heavenly spirits, are the leading topics of

most of the books; but they merely constitute the skeleton of the composition, the substance being made up of stories growing out of these circumstances, or springing from one another with an ingenuity of intricacy which is one of the great charms of all such collections.



Somadeva's narrative captivates both by its simple and clear, though very elegant, style and diction and by his skill in drawing with a few strokes pictures of types and characters taken from the real everyday life. Hence it is that even in the miraculous and fantastical facts and events that make up the bulk of the main story and of a great deal of the incidental tales, the interest of the reader is uninterruptedly kept. His lively and pleasant art of story-telling, though now and then encumbered with inflatedness or vitiated by far-fetched false wit, is enhanced also by his native humor and the elegant and pointed sentences strewn about here and there with a good taste.



Tale of the Cunning Siddhikari

Illustrations from an edition of the Kathasaritsagara, c.1590
Image Wikipedia

Who was Charles Henry Tawney and how did he get involved in translating the Sanskrit text of Katha Sarit Sagar into English?

Charles Henry Tawney (1837-1922) was Bell University Scholar in 1857, and Davies University Scholar and Scholar of Trinity in the following year. In 1860 he was bracketed Senior Classic and was elected a Fellow of his college. For the next four years, he worked as a Fellow and Tutor at Trinity, but though he had obviously excellent prospects of academical work at home, considerations of health induced him to seek employment in India. In 1865 he was selected to occupy the Chair of History in the Presidency College, just then vacated by Professor E. Byles Cowell. Mr Tawney filled this Chair with great credit from 1866 to 1872. In the latter year he was

appointed Professor of English. In 1875 he officiated as Principal in the place of Mr James Sutcliffe, and on the latter's death, in the following year, his position as Principal was confirmed. This office he held from 1876 to 1892. He also held the position of Registrar of the Calcutta University from 1877 to 1881, 1884 to 1885, and again in 1886 and 1889. He was awarded the C.I.E. in 1888 and retired from the Education Service at the end of 1892 .

Tawney had a happy familiarity with the literature of his own country, and published in Calcutta 'The English People and their Language' in 1875, translated from the German of Loth. His acquaintance with Elizabethan literature was remarkable, while in Shakespearean learning he had no living rival in India. In this connection it is to be regretted that, except for editing Richard III, he left no record of his great learning in this particular field of knowledge. There was little scope in Calcutta for the display of Mr Tawney's knowledge of Latin and Greek, and so almost as soon as he arrived in India, he threw himself heart and soul into the mastering of Sanskrit. This he achieved with the greatest credit, as the numerous works which he has left clearly show. His first publications were prose translations of two well-known plays, the Uttara-Rama-Carita of Bhavabhuti (1874) and the Malavikagnimitra of Kalidasa. In Two Centuries of Bhartrihari (1877) he gave a skilful rendering into English verse of two famous collections of ethical and philosophico-religious stanzas. But his magnum opus, to which he devoted some later years of his Indian career, was his translation of Somadeva's Katha Sarit Sagara, which was published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in their Bibliotheca Indica series. Considering the date of the appearance of this great translation, it was well annotated by most useful notes drawn from a wide reading in both classical and modern literature. The extreme variety and importance of the work, together with the recent strides made in the study of comparative folk lore, religion and anthropology, are the raison d'être of the present edition. Mr Tawney's services to Sanskrit scholarship were therefore both varied and extensive. Apart from Sanskrit and European languages, Mr Tawney knew Hindi, Urdu and Persian. After his retirement from the Education Service at the

close of 1892, he was made Librarian of the India Office. He held this post till 1903, when he was superannuated.

George A. Grierson, the renowned Sanskrit and Kashmiri scholar of his times writes in the Foreword to Volume 2 of Penzer's *The Ocean of Story*, "It was in Calcutta, in 1880, that I first met Charles Henry Tawney, who was then Principal of the Sanskrit College and had already achieved a high reputation for Sanskrit learning. A warm friendship, fostered on both sides by similarity of tastes, and on my part by his ever ready kindness and help, then sprang up, and continued unchecked from that time till his lamented death two years ago in Camberley. A master of the Sanskrit language, and widely read in other branches of knowledge, he was an ideal translator of Somadeva's famous work, into the spirit of which he readily allowed himself to enter."

Richard Carnac Temple who wrote Foreword to the Volume 1 of C.H.Tawneys Book in March 1924, says this about Somadeva, the Compiler of *Katha Sarit Sagar*: "I judge from the Invocation that Somadeva, the author of the original work, was a Shaiva Brahmin of Kashmir. His real name was Soma, *deva* being a mere suffix to the names of Brahmans, royalties and the like." He further says, "The author of the *Katha Sarit Sagar* is a Brahman, and he gives the work a Brahmanic i.e. an Aryan form, giving rise, *prima facie*, to the assumption that the origin of the tales is to be sought in the land whence the Aryans came, somewhere to the west of India proper. But it is clear that the author purported to make a general collection of tales current in India about 1000 AD, or rather he claims to have made a selection, as did his contemporary Kashmiri Brahman Kshemendra in his *Brihat Katha Manjari* out of a much older, but now lost work, Gunadhya's *Brihat Katha* or *Great Tale*. This general collection contains to my mind certain tales, customs and folk-lore which do not appear to be Aryan in origin. The writer or his original has in fact drawn on popular Indian folk-lore, whether Aryan or non-Aryan, connecting his tales by rather simple literary devices, so that they are all made to run together as parts of one general story."

Somadeva is believed to have composed his verses around 1070, or about two hundred and fifty years after Vasugupta introduced into Kashmir the Shaiva form of the Hindu religion peculiar to Kashmir, which was subsequently spread widely by his pupil Kallata Bhatta. Later on, but still one hundred years before Somadeva, it was further spread by Bhaskara, and then in Somadeva's own time made popular by Abhinava Gupta, the great Shaiva writer, and his pupils Kshemaraja and Yogaraja. The last three, who must have been Somadeva's contemporaries, were much influenced by the philosophic teaching of another Soma Somananda, to give him his full name who with his pupil Utpalacharya created the Advaita (Monistic) Shaiva Philosophy, known as the Trika, about two hundred years before Somadeva. Other important Kashmiri philosophic writers before Somadeva's date were Utpala Vaishnava and Rama-Kantha. So while Somadeva was composing his distichs for the delectation of Suryavati, the Queen of King Ananta of Kashmir, at a time when the political situation was 'one of discontent, intrigue, bloodshed and despair', it was also as has often happened in Eastern history, a time of great religious activity. The religion and its philosophy were Aryan in form, meaning by the term 'religion' a doctrine claiming to be revealed, and by 'philosophy' a doctrine claiming to be reasoned out.

In the Introduction to his book 'The Ocean of Story', N.M.Penzer says, "This tragic history forms as dark and grim a background for the setting of Somadeva's tales as did the plague of Florence for Boccaccio's Cento Novelle nearly three hundred years later. It is, however, these historical events in the history of Kashmir which help us in determining our author's date with any degree of certainty. Ananta surrendered his throne in 1063 to his eldest son Kalasha, only to return to it a few years later. In 1077 he again retired. This time Kalasha attacked his father openly and seized all his wealth. Ananta killed himself in despair and Suryavati threw herself on the funeral pyre. This was in 1081. It was between the first and second retirements of Ananta from the throne that Somadeva wrote, possibly about 1070. One can almost imagine that these stories were compiled in an effort to take the mind of the unhappy queen off the troubles and trials which so unremittingly beset her and her court.

Somadeva tells us, Katha Sarit Sagar is not his original work, but is taken from a much larger collection by one Gunadhya, known as the Brihat Katha, or Great Tale. The manuscript of this Great Tale has not been found. In his first book Somadeva gives us the legendary history of it, showing how it was related in turn by Siva, Pushpadanta, Kanabhuti, Gunadhya and Satavahana; the latter at first rejected it, and in despair Gunadhya began to burn it leaf by leaf 600,000 distichs are thus lost. Satavahana reappears and saves the rest 100,000 couplets, which became known as the Brihat Katha. He added to it a lambaka, or book, explaining its marvellous history.

The Katha Sarit Sagar is not the only rendition of the Great Tale. For twenty or thirty years previously, Kshemendra had written his Brihat Katha Manjari. Compared with Somadeva's work it pales into insignificance, lacking the charm of language, elegance of style, masterly arrangement and metrical skill of the later production. Moreover, Kshemendra's collection is only a third the length of the Katha Sarit Sagar.

Vetaal Pacheesi is a part of Somadeva's book. It contains 25 tales of a Vetaala or vampire, of which the framework is the removal of a vampire-animated corpse from its tree by King Trivikramasena and its repeated escape from his back when the king answers the puzzle question put to him by the Vetaala at the conclusion of each story. The story is in fact twenty-four tales, the frame narrative itself being the twenty-fifth. The Vetaala stories are most popular in India and have been translated into many Indian vernaculars.

Owing to enormous popularity, Vetaal Pacheesi was adapted into 1951 Hindi film Jai Maha Kali by Dhirubhai Desai starring Lalita Pawar, Nirupa Roy, Sahu Modak, Raj Kumar and S.N.Tripathi. It was remade in 1986 as Vikram Vetal, by Shantilal Soni, starring Vikram Gokhale, Manhar Desai and Deepika Chikhali. The 2017 Tamil film Vikram Vedha was a modern-day adaptation of Vikram Betal story with the characterisation of King Vikramadithyan and the celestial spirit Vedhalam derived from that plot. The title of the film

was also derived from the two key characters from the folktale. In 1985, the story was developed by Sagar Films as a Television serial titled Vikram aur Betaal, starring Arun Govil as Vikrama and Sajjan Kumar as the Vetaala. It was aired on Doordarshan, the public television broadcaster of India. A remake of that serial by the new generation of Sagar Films titled Kahaniyaan Vikram aur Betaal Ki, was aired on the Indian satellite channel Colors. Another 2006 supernatural sitcom Vicky & Vetaal was inspired by it. A web series titled The Vetala was released in 2009, written and directed by Damon Vignale. In 2018, Hindi TV adaptation Vikram Betaal Ki Rahasya Gatha was aired on &TV, where actors Aham Sharma and Makrand Deshpande played the roles of King Vikramaditya and Vetaal respectively. The children's Chandamama, featured a serial story titled New Tales of Vikram and Betal for many years. As the title suggests, the original premise of the story is maintained, as new stories are told by Vetaala to King Vikrama.

In early 1980s, stories of Vetal Pacheesi were played as a serial on the Srinagar station of All India Radio, (then Radio Kashmir, Srinagar) in the Kashmiri language. The serial was re-written for Radio by Ali Mohammed Lone and produced by Pran Kishor. Two main roles of demon Vetaal and Raja Vikram were played by Pran Kishor and Makhan Lal Saraf respectively. The serial was a hit among Kashmiri masses.

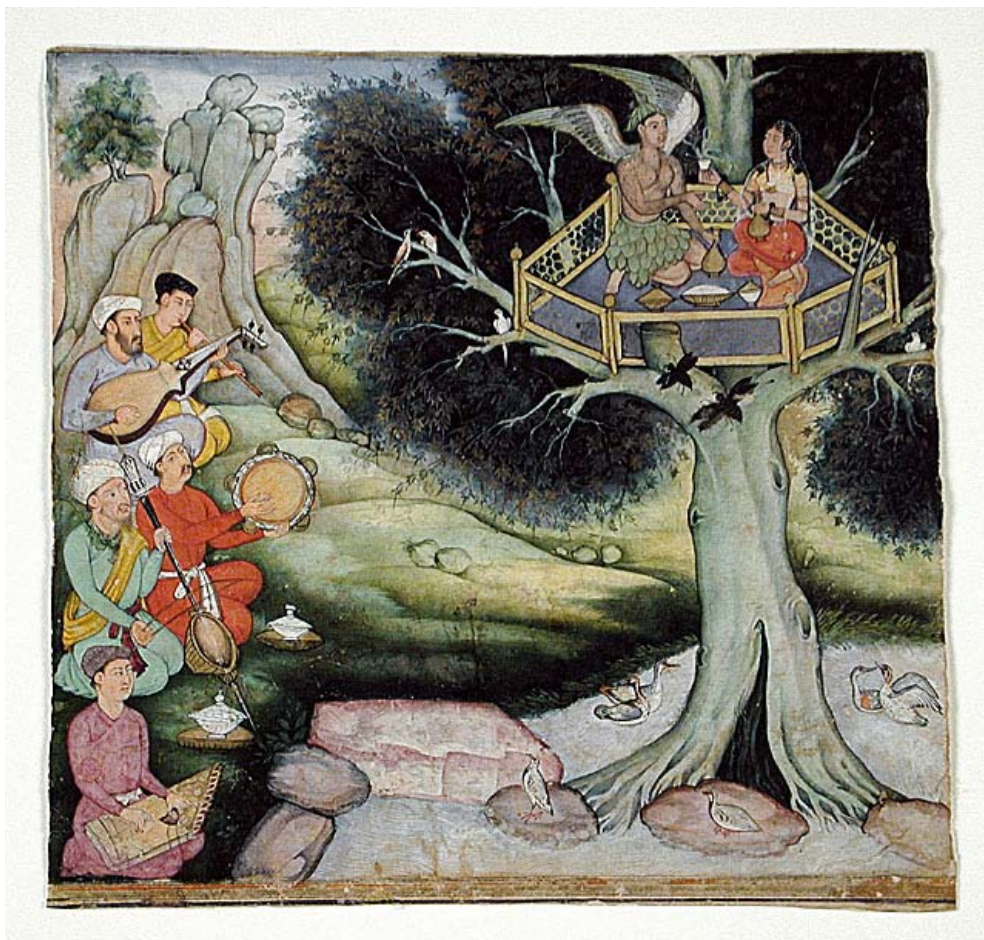
Coming back to Katha Sarit Sagar, Professor Buhler as early as 1871, proved these two important facts : Firstly, that Somadeva and Kshemendra used the same text, and secondly, that they worked entirely independently from one another. It was, however, many years before this that the Katha Sarit Sagar became known to European scholars. In 1824, the great pioneer of Sanskrit learning, Professor H. H. Wilson, gave a summary of the first five chapters (or lambakas) in the Oriental Quarterly Magazine. The first edition of the work was undertaken by Professor Brockhaus. In 1839 he issued the first five chapters only, and it was not till 1862 that the remaining thirteen

appeared. Both publications formed part of the *Abhandlungen der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*. It was this text which Tawney used for his translation published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in the *Bibliotheca Indica* 1880-1884 (the index not appearing till 1887). Brockhaus' edition was based primarily on six MSS, though in the second part of the work, he apparently had not so many at his disposal. Tawney was not satisfied with several of Brockhaus' readings, and consequently made numerous fresh renderings or suggestions largely taken from MSS borrowed from the Calcutta College and from three India Office MSS lent him by Dr Rost. In 1889 Durga Prasad issued the Bombay edition, printed at the *Nirnayasagara Press*, which was produced from Brockhaus' edition and two Bombay MSS. This is the latest text now available and proves the correctness of many of Tawney's readings where he felt the Brockhaus text was in fault.

Why did Somadeva name his work as *Katha Sarit Sagar*? N.M.Penzer says, "He felt that his great work united in itself all stories, as the ocean does for all rivers. Every stream of myth and mystery flowing down from the snowy heights of sacred Himalaya would sooner or later reach the ocean, other streams from other mountains would do likewise, till at last fancy would create an ocean full of stories of every conceivable description, tales of wondrous maidens and their fearless lovers, of kings and cities, of statecraft and intrigue, of magic and spells, of treachery, trickery, murder and war, tales of blood-sucking vampires, devils, goblins and ghouls, stories of animals in fact and fable, and stories too of beggars, ascetics, drunkards, gamblers, prostitutes and bawds."

Turning now to the actual contents of the *Katha Sarit Sagar*, the general reader will continually recognise stories familiar to him from childhood. The student of Indian literature will find well-known tales from the *Panchatantra* and the *Mahabharata*, as well as strange fantastic myths of early Rig-Veda days. He will encounter whole series of stories, such as the *Vetalapanchavimsati* or *Cycle of Demon stories*. But apart from this, the work contains much original matter, which Somadeva handles with the ease and skill of a master of his art.

The appeal of his stories is immediate and lasting, and time has proved incapable of robbing them of their freshness and fascination. The Katha Sarit Sagar, therefore, may be regarded as an attempt to present as a single whole the essence of that rich Indian imagination which had found expression in a literature and art stretching back to the days of the intermingling of the Aryan and Dravidian stocks nearly two thousand years before the Christian era.



Somaprabha and a Celestial Nymph. listening to music
Illustrations from an edition of the Kathasaritsagara, c.1590
Image Wikipedia

Who was N.M.Penzer and what did he add to C.H.Tawney's text?

N.M.Penzer was a Sanskrit Scholar. He was Member of the Folklore Society, Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute and Member of the Royal Asiatic Society. He was the author of famous 'An Annotated Bibliography of Sir Richard Francis Burton' and other books.

Regarding content of Penzer's work, George A. Grierson says, "Since the first volume appeared in 1880 there has been a great advance in that science, and throughout the quest, up to the present day, his (Tawney's) version of the Katha Sarit Sagar has been an indispensable tool in the hands of inquirers, without which much that has been discovered would still remain unknown. Now, with Mr Penzer's edition, the seed then sown by him has borne too late, alas, to rejoice the original sower rich and ample fruit, and, as Tawney himself would have done, we can welcome his admirable additions to the original notes, bringing Tawney's information up to date and making correction of such few mistakes as the advance of science has rendered inevitable. Besides these notes, Mr Penzer has added several appendixes of really absorbing interest, in which he has summarised all the information that has up to the present time been collected regarding certain important questions connected with folklore and anthropology that arise in the course of editing the work." Penzer adds, "The text is left entirely as translated by the late Charles Tawney except where certain omissions have been adjusted or more literal renderings added. In one or two cases, a short story left out by Tawney has been restored, thus making the work absolutely complete in every detail."

A.R.Right, who wrote the Foreword to Penzer's Vol 6, adds, "Mr Penzer's new edition is also expanded by the inclusion (in its second half) of valuable appendixes giving long accounts of, and notes upon, those portions of Somadeva's verses which have appeared separately under the names respectively of the Panchatantra and Vetlapanchavimsati.

In the year 1996, J&K Academy of Art, Culture & Languages published Dr. Amar Malmohi's translation of the Book 1 and Book 2 of Katha Sarit Sagar (14 Chapters) into Nastaliq script. I have re-written the main text of all these 14 Chapters in Devanagari-Kashmiri script for benefit of those who could not read the Nastaliq script, and put it on web :

<http://mkraina.com/katha-sarit-sagar-book-1-fairy-tales-folk-tales/>

I have also recorded the above 15 Chapters in 22 videos which are available on YouTube :

<http://mkraina.com/katha-sarit-sagar-video-series/>

The audio recorded in my voice is presently being broadcasted on Radio Sharada, Jammu on daily basis.

I am not sure if the J&K Academy made any efforts to further translate Book 3 to Book 18 into Kashmiri.

Important : It may not be out of place to mention that the Sanskrit word *Lambakh* used by Brockhaus to name 18 books of the Katha Sarit Sagar, has given birth to the Kashmiri word *tùt'-lambúkh* which is included in 'A Dictionary of Kashmiri Language' by George A. Grierson. It means 'a long prolix involved story, a story with a number of others emboxed in it and without any clear ending'.

Sources :

- 1) The Katha Sarit Sagara (Sanskrit) by Pandit Durgaprasad.
- 2) The Katha Sarit Sagara (Ocean of the Streams of Story) by C.H.Tawney - Vol. 1 and Vol. 2.
- 3) The Ocean of Story by N.M.Penzer - Vol. 1 to Vol. 10.
- 4) Wikipedia