

‘Pratijnayaugandharayana’ of Bhaasa as the Epitome and Emblem of Time**Dr Raviraj J.Raval^{1*}, Dr Rajeshwari B. Kubavat², Dr Priti S.Nayak³**^{1*}Senior Lecturer in English, Government Polytechnic, Rajkot. E-Mail: ravalraviraj@gmail.com (M) 08128128008²Asst.Professor in English, Atmiya University, Rajkot. E-Mail : rajeshwari_kubavat@yahoo.com (M) 08780193857³Senior Lecturer in English, Government Polytechnic, Rajkot. E-Mail: priti_snayak@yahoo.com (M) 09427431699

India is a land of rich classical heritage- the land of many great thinkers and writers and our collection of literature in Sanskrit is priceless. Known as the mother of many languages, Sanskrit is abundant in the treasure of literature. Sanskrit literature came into being with the making of Vedas and left a rich legacy of literary knowledge for the times to come. Classical Sanskrit literature is found to be in vogue when it comes to writing poetry and dance dramas. The combination of different genres of dramas (rupakas) and Sanskrit resulted into a unique amalgamation that gave us the literary treasure of Sanskrit plays.

The year 1912 has been the unique one for the field of Sanskrit literature in the sense that in this year, Late Mm. Ganapati Shaastrī of Trivendrum discovered thirteen dramas of Bhaasa which, till then, were the nameless graces. The unfound (or say confounded) treasure was recovered and Bhaasa ceased to be a mere name. The plays ascribed to Bhaasa are: *Pancharaatra*, *Karnabhaara*, *Madhyamavyayoga*, *Dutavaakeya*, *Dutaghatotkacha*, *Urubhanga*, *Pratimaanaataka*, *Abhishekanaataka*, *Baalacharita*, *Pratijayayangandharayana*, *Svapnavasaavadatta*, *Arimaaraka* and *Chaarudatta*. Unfortunately, in none of the manuscripts, the name of the writer of these plays is mentioned. Shri Ganapati Shaastrī, however, after having subjected these dramas to critical examination, came to the conclusion that all the thirteen dramas were written by one author and that author was Bhaasa- of great fame and highly praised by Kaalidaasa and other poets. Before the discovery of the plays, we had scattered references only to the genius and fame of Bhaasa in the works of the eminent poets and grammarians. Kaalidaasa has made a benign reference to Bhaasa in the prologue of his *Maalavikagnimitra* in which the assistant stage-manager raises the doubt how the audience would pay attention on a modern poet like Kaalidaasa passing over the works of such famous poets as Bhaasa, Kaviputra and Saumillika who held the stage for quite some time.¹ This reference to these poets itself indicates the calibre of these poets of which the great poet like Kaalidaasa felt worthy of mention. Then, we have the reference from Baana in the prefatory verse to his *Harshacharita* wherein Baana alludes to Bhaasa in the following words:

Bhaasa gained as much splendour by his plays with introductions spoken by the (stage) Manager, full of various characters and furnished with startling episodes, as he would have done by the erection of temples created by architects, adorned with several storeys and decorated with banners.²

Thus, in the above-mentioned reference also we find the fame and name earned by Bhaasa in his time by his outstanding dramatic compositions. Many later poets and grammarians as well have, here or there, spoken of the unique place of Bhaasa in Sanskrit drama.

Talking about the locales and settings of the plays of Bhaasa, nothing can be stated surely especially about the time of Bhaasa as the date of Bhaasa is one of the most vexed questions in the Indian chronology and one is surprised to find a difference of over fifteen hundred years in the earliest and latest dates ascribed to him by different scholars³. The earliest direct reference to Bhaasa is, as stated earlier, by Kalidasa in his *Malavikagnimitra*, and it has been almost settled, according to M.R.Kale, that Kalidasa flourished in the first century B.C.⁴. and it will not be unreasonable to suppose that at least a century must have elapsed before Bhaasa came to be so recognized in Kalidasa's time. So Kale concludes that Bhaasa could not have lived at a period later than the 2nd century B.C. Considering the language and style factors, the archaisms or solecisms in contravention of Panini, the flowing tone of Bhaasa's Sanskrit and the conversational style of his dialogues which are short, easy, graceful and colloquial, Dr G.Shastri is inclined to think that Sanskrit was a spoken language in Bhaasa's time and so he places Bhaasa just after Panini and before Panini's grammar got a strong foothold i.e. before 350 B.C.⁵ We find some evidences of history in *Pratijayayangandharayana* which refer to the royal families of Northern India whose memory would have been lost in the Post-Mauryan period after their subjugation by Mahapadmananda of Magadha before 384 B.C., and later by Chandragupta, along with many small Gana states.⁶ Bhaasa's mention of them shows that he must have been not far later in time than the period of the Nandas or Chandragupta. This would put the poet somewhere between 5th and 4th century B.C. Another view that tries to establish the time of Bhaasa discusses the matter of the Bharatavakyas of the plays of Bhaasa which generally read:

“इमांसागरपर्यन्ताहिमवद्विन्ध्यकुण्डलाम्।

महीमेकातपत्राङ्कांराजसिंहःप्रशास्तुनः॥”

Since Rajasimha is not the proper name of any historical king, different scholars identify him with different kings of the history. Konov has identified the king with Kshatrpa Rudrasimh-1, Dhruva with Shunga Pushyamitra, Bhida with Udayi⁷ etc. The first line of the Bharatavakya talks about the rule of the king which included the whole of the Northern India, bounded by Vindhya and Himavat. The investigation of the internal evidence shows 5th or 4th century B.C. as the period of the poet and Chandragupta is said to be the one such monarch of the time who had brought the whole Northern India under his sway. So the implied contention from the above discussion inadvertently and largely purport a view, however not a conclusion, that Bhasa seems to have possibly lived during the 5th or 4th century B.C.

Pratijnayaugandharayana- The Locales and Legacies

Pratijnayaugandharayana and *Svapnavasavadatta* are the two legendary plays of Bhasa dealing with the stories of Udayana Vatsaraja and the references to the legends are found in Buddhist and Jain works.⁸ *Pratijnayaugandharayana* is titled on account of the vows made by the hero of the play i.e. Yaugandharayana to set free his master along with Vasavadatta. The actions of the play take place in two cities- first act in Kaushambi of the Vatsa state ruled over by Udayana and the rest in Ujjayini or Avanti of the state of Avanti reigned by Pradyot Mahasena. Kaushambi corresponds to present Kosam, a village on the bank of the Yamuna, thirty miles away from Allahabad. Avanti of Mahasena corresponds to Ujjain. The locale of the outset of the play is Kaushambi, the capital of Vatsadesha where from Hamsaka we come to know that king Udayana was captured by the soldiers of Mahasena- the ruler of Avanti. Out of love and dedication for his king, Yaugandharayana, the trusted minister of Udayana, vows to release his master. For the well-being of the king, a feast is organized in which Brahmins are fed- the custom of the time which prevails in India even today. Pusalker observes:

Feeding Brahmins in order to propitiate untoward fate and to ward off evils was very common. It was supposed to bring peace. This attitude finds curiously enough, a parallel in the Jataka stories where the giving of gifts to the Brahmins and Shramanikas and the duty of feeding them were enjoined on the king and the commoner alike.⁹

Bhasa's plays prove the heritage for the posterity in the sense they serve as the representations of the political and cultural scenario of the time and inadvertently evolve as a hoard of values to be preserved for the ages to come. The poet was a follower of orthodox Hinduism and all the principal characters owe allegiance to that faith. In the period represented by the play, idol-worship seems to be in the developed stage. Regular temples dedicated to various deities were built at the hearts of the cities. It appears that temples contained large enclosures and there were also some smaller buildings in the main temple, such as fire-shrine etc. and the walls had on them paintings of different scenes. At the outset of the third act of the play, Vidushaka talks about the painting of the bowl of sweets at the feet of Lord Shiva in a Shiva temple of Ujjaini. Another instance of painting is found at the end of the play where, having recognized the marriage of Vasavadatta and Udayana, Mahasena holds a celebration in the palace with the images of the bride and bridegroom painted on a picture-board.¹⁰

In another scene, in a kind of prattling between Vidushaka and Rumanvana (disguised as beggar and Buddhist monk respectively), we get the general attitude of the people of the Bhasa's time regarding the Buddhist monk. When Vidushaka denies to give sweet-balls, the monk talks about his magic power. Regarding this Pusalker observes:

“The Buddhist mendicants were lightly spoken of as conjurers and the offering of peace from a Buddhist was taken as a disgrace. The Buddhist laymen were also ridiculed as Unmattopasakas (mad worshippers).¹¹

During the time of Bhasa certain rituals like Shraddha and sacrifices were performed by the Brahmins against which Buddha had led his campaign¹² which didn't find favour among the commoners- that is what transpires from the above quote. The institution of marriage is an important factor of the social structure. In the time of Bhasa it seems mainly three forms of marriage were prevalent, viz. 1, marriage arranged by guardians, 2, swayamvara and 3, Gandharva. The match between Udayana and Vasavadatta was cemented by love and hence, as stated by King Mahasena, the father of Vasavadatta, their marriage was under the Gandharva form. Marriages were contracted after considering the problem from various aspects such as lineage, the qualities of the bridegroom, valour and of course the ideology of expansionism. Bride's parents consulted each other in regard to the selection of a son-in-law, and not only did the mother exercise her right in the affair, but her view carried weight with her husband. The marriage of Vasavadatta is postponed in deference to the wish of her mother.¹³ It appears that the brides also had some voice in the selection of their husbands.¹⁴ One thing noticeable is that Mahasena performed the marriage ceremony of his daughter even after her elopement. This implies that ceremonies essential to the validity of a marriage, such as the “invocation before the sacred fire and the Saptapadi were almost invariably performed in each and every marriage.”¹⁵ It has been said that the culture and civilization of the period can be gauged from the treatment accorded to the women. The period of Bhasa is characterized by a spirit of toleration towards women. The birth of a female child was an honour and occasion for great joy and not of sorrow as expressed in *Avimaraka*.¹⁶ Maidens moved freely in the public and used no covering over their heads which elderly women generally wore.¹⁷ Married women undertook a number of fasts and religious observances (Vratas) and gave Dakshinas to Brahmins for the welfare of their husbands. The way the citizens and villagers led their lives, the particulars of the places they inhabited, and the surrounding under which they worked and lived indicate fairly the degree of civilization of the period. Speaking about the urban life, it can be said that important cities were fortified on all the sides. Underground drains, which have been a speciality of India since ancient times, are also indicative of the civilization, the reference being to streets being flooded due to the choking of

the drain.¹⁸ In another connection, we read of a tavern-keeper selling liquor, and a public drinking-house in the capital of Ujjaini.¹⁹ The following is one of the few popular songs in eulogy of drink met with in this play alone; Blessed are those, who get tipsy with wine Blessed are those, who are smeared with wine Blessed indeed are those, swimming in wine And blessed are they, who're killed by wine.²⁰

Strikingly, more is spoken and narrated about the city life in the dramas of Bhasa than about the rural life. Regarding the architecture, sculpture and art, we get scattered evidences. There were parks, both outside and at the hearts of the cities. Cool summer-houses, luxuriously decorated rooms, pleasure garden were associated with palaces. A Shiva temple with a fire-shrine mentioned in the play²¹ bears ample testimony to the advanced stage of architecture in those days. Another specimen of fine workmanship is supplied by the artificial elephant- Neelahasti- manufactured by King Mahasena to capture Udayana. The evidences of the popularity of music and hence references to the musical instruments are found in the play. King Udayana was said to be expert and adept in Vina playing, and the instrument was regarded as the constant companion of him and with it he could tame the most infuriated elephants.²² Vocal music was also much popular, and kings felt no compunction in engaging tutors for giving lessons to the princes or princesses in music. There is a mention of Vasavadatta's going for learning Vina by Angaravati- the queen of Mahasena and the mother of Vasavadatta. An important factor that catches attention in the play is the social life of the people- eating habits, living habits, pastime habits, popular beliefs and so on. A piece of mutton saturated with salt and ghee is referred to as being placed in drinking-bowl; the reference evidently is to the drunken Gatravaka who is not a Brahmin and thus it appears that flesh-eating was not current in those days especially among Brahmins.²³ Regarding Modaka (Sweetballs) and liquor-drinking, we have discussed earlier. There are references to a number of sports and festivities in the plays of Bhasa and there is a mention of wrestling as a favourite pastime in the play and even princes were fond of it.²⁴ Politics, music and wrestling seem to be the hot fields of the interest of the time.

The play, like other plays of Bhaasa, purports that people believed in magic, amulets, omens etc. People believed that through the power of magic one could disappear or assume various forms. There was belief in the infallibility and certainty of the curse pronounced by sages. Not only curses, but hints and advice of revered sages were implicitly obeyed and their propriety, wisdom or religiosity was never questioned. That is why Yaugandharayana had staunch faith in the words spoken by sage Vyasa in the guise of a mad man who said "Enjoy the feast freely, without any worry, Gentlemen. Prosperity will attend this royal household."²⁵ and using the garments left by him as a hint for the future course, he enters Ujjaini in the guise of a mad man to free his master and subsequently succeeds in that as well. And finally, the title of the play itself indicates the centrality of the importance of the vow in the time of Bhasa. Everybody valued his or her words so that it was thought unbecoming to retract or cancel one's words after announcing a particular thing.

Thus, the land of Ujjaini and Kaushambi, as depicted in this play, vividly describe the culture, the society, civilization and many such aspects in an artistic and unobtrusive way. Ujjaini or Kaushambi, here in this play, are not merely geographical places, but also the embodiments of culture, history, society and religion. Pratijnayaugandharayana may largely be regarded as a political play but still it serves as an open canvass to ransack many other things. According to Wells, "The Pratijnayaugandharayana is a political fable lacking deep poetic significance but with the bright sparkle of a truly ingratiating poetry. It has long been and will long continue to be notable dramatic entertainment."²⁶

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