

‘Plays Of Bhasa As The Emblem Of Re-Defining/Re-Writing Of The Myths’

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The dramatic practice in India is markedly different from that in the West because unlike the Western, which mostly depends on the realistic techniques, Indian theatre is non-illusionistic and formalistic. Indian drama draws heavily on classical and primitive mythologies for its theme. The audience in India favours a theatre which incorporates all the elements of dramatic art. In other words, it incorporates tauryatrika-geeta or vocal music, nrta or dance and vaadya or rhythmical accompaniment. Western drama chiefly focuses on the effective delivery of dialogues; so text in the western approach holds primary importance whereas the Indian Sanskrit drama is found more oriented towards characters' improvisation, vocal and/or gestural expressions supplemented by the appropriate movements of the face and other parts of the body as well as by musical accompaniment. Thus, it is a stylized mode of theatre which caters to an idealized audience.

The defining quality of Sanskrit drama can be said to be a spiritual equilibrium. Unlike the Western, the movement of the Sanskrit drama is circular rather than progressive. Its true Time is circular and the keynote, renewal. Therefore, it does not oscillate from evil to good, from insufficiency to sufficiency. Indian dramatic art moves in a more relaxed ambience of Time. The plays end neither in death, as in tragedy- except for Bhasa's play- *Karnabhaara*, nor in marriage, as in comedy, but in reunion which is the characteristic close, as in *Svapnavaasavadattaa*, *Mrichchhakatika*, *Shaakuntala* and so on.

The year 1912 has been the unique one for the field of Sanskrit literature in the sense that in this year, Late Mm. Ganapati Shaastri 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*, *Madhyamavyaayoga*, *Dutavaakya*, *Dutaghatokacha*, *Urubhanga*, *Pratimaanaataka*, *Abhishekanaataka*, *Baalacharita*, *Pratijyaayaugandharaayana*, *Svapnavaasavadattaa*, *Avimaaraka* and *Chaarudatta*. Unfortunately, in none of the manuscripts, the name of the writer of these plays is mentioned.

As we know, comedy is generally defined as a play with happy-ending. It operates through laughter and represents life with a positive approach. It entertains and delights the spectators or readers by producing a distinct aesthetic response. It is also an epitome of carefree mirth. However, beneath such irresponsible mirth, a deep correlation with life can be seen. At a higher level, comedy shows a way of rising above the everyday despairs and sorrows by replacing them with blissful serenity. According to Indian philosophy, such laughter, Haasa, acts as a means to achieve the level of Shaanti. According to P. Pancapagesa Sastri, "...the Yogin finds the world a bundle of incongruities. Laughter (Haasa) is the 'Sthaayin' that leads to renunciation and so to the seeking after eternal truth which leads to eternal bliss."¹

Speaking regarding the source of his plays, Bhaasa is highly indebted to the epics and the Puranas. His six plays namely *Pancharaatra*, *Urubhanga*, *Dutavaakya*, *Dutaghatokacha*, *Karnabhaara* and *Madhyamavyaayoga* are drawn from the *Mahaabhaarata* and two- *Pratimaanaataka* and *Abhisheka*- are based on the *Raamaayana*. The source of *Baalacharita* is the legend of Krishna. *Svapnavaasavadattaa* and *Pratijyaayaugandharaayana* seem to find their emergence from the legends of Udayana and the remaining two- *Avimaaraka* and *Chaarudatta*- seem to be the products of the dramatist's imagination. Though Bhaasa has drawn his plots from the epics, Puranas and legends, he has consciously deviated from the sources and has given them his own interpretation suitable to dramatic treatment and theatrical presentation- thus proving himself as an Avant-Garde in Sanskrit Drama. The originality and genius of the dramatist becomes clearly visible in the deft management of the source of his plays. The usual habit he follows is the selection of any incident or episode of significance from the epics and then rendering it into the plot of his own imagination. The adaptation of the well-known subject and colouring it with the shades of his own creative imagination is an outstanding feature of Bhaasa's dramatic genius. Many a times, Bhaasa has invented completely new incidents for his drama and thus deviated from the source-story. The final giving away of the half of the kingdom by Duryodhana in *Pancharaatra* is completely the product of Bhaasa's imagination. Even the whole plot of *Dutaghatokacha* in which Ghatokacha goes as an envoy from the Paandavas can be nowhere seen in the whole design of the *Mahaabhaarata*. Many situations in different plays have been either altered or produced by the dramatist. And it would be no exaggeration to say that so far as the plot-construction is concerned, Bhaasa sounds superior to Vyaasa and Vaalmiki at least in appeal and attitude. The happy ending of *Pancharaatra* with giving away the rightful share of kingdom and thereby avoiding the battle is the fruition of an attitude

and approach of the dramatist. To heighten the effect and impart the message of magnanimity, Bhaasa has shown Abhimanyu fighting from the side of Duryodhana in *Pancharaatra* which is not found in the plot of the *Mahaabhaarata*. Bharata's learning of the death of Dasharatha from the statue put up in the 'Statue-house' in *Pratimaanaataka* and Draupadi's picture-board in which she is drawn being humiliated in *Dutavaakya* have no parallel in the epic. While borrowing the story, Bhaasa has constantly kept in mind the dramatic appropriateness of the incidents and therefore he has, sometimes, condensed certain things as well. In that, Bhaasa has shown a great skill in selecting the material from his source, and *Abhisheka* is an instance of this. Vaalmiki describes the sorrow of Sitaa at length but Bhaasa prefers brevity. Regarding this, Keith observes:

The necessities of the drama saved Bhaasa from the one great defect of the epic style, the lack of measure, which permits the *Raamaayana* to illustrate by twenty nine similes the sorrows of Sitaa in her captivity, while in the *Abhishekanaataka* the dramatist is content with one.²

Sanskrit drama usually is a celebration of two dominant attitudes to life- the simplicity of the Dharmaic (duty-bound) life and the splendour of a courtly life. The first one involves a heroic theme in which Vira rasa predominates and in the second one, an erotic theme which has Shringaara as its basic rasa. The first category includes the play like *Pratijaayaugandharaayana*, while the romantic comedies like *Avimaaraka* and *Svapnavaasavadattaa* come under the second category. The treatment of love theme in Sanskrit dramas differ from that the Shakespearean. For instance, *Avimaaraka* deals with the love at first sight motif presented in a delicate manner and developed through the mutual infatuation of Avimaaraka and Kurangi. This love suffers separation and finally enjoys the reunion. In Sanskrit the motif of love in separation is termed as Vipralambha Shringaara- which is love in its fulfillment. This variation of love has greater appeal and hence Sanskrit dramatists have exploited it abundantly. Another example of such a love theme (Vipralambha) can be found in *Svapnavaasavadattaa*. It depicts conjugal love in most exalted form. Regarding the beauty of Vipralambha in this play, Dr.Sukathankar observes:

The aim of the dramatist is to portray on the one hand the complete self-abnegation of the noble queen, who suffers martyrdom for the sake of her lord with cheerful resignation, and on the other hand, to depict her husband as at heart true to his love, while unwillingly submitting to the exigencies of the life of a king. The burden of the story is the triumph of steadfast, unflattering, undying love for which no sacrifice is too great.³

The Pramadavana scene in *Svapnavaasavadattaa* brings out the beauty of love in separation, however in an ironical way. When Vidushaka asks Udayana who is dearer to him- Vaasavadattaa of yesterday or Padmaavati of today, Udayana answers that he admired the beauty, charm and virtues of Padmaavati but still she had not won his heart bound to Vaasavadattaa. Ironically both, Vaasavadattaa (disguised as Avantikaa) and Padmaavati are present there. Hearing this, Vaasavadattaa becomes overjoyed and thinks that she had finally been rewarded. While portraying this ideal love between Udayana and Vaasavadattaa, Bhaasa also highlights the nobility of the character of Padmaavati.

Casual anti-romantic attitude of the Romantic Comedy is totally absent in the plays of Bhaasa. This is so perhaps Bhaasa never shows his characters exaggerating about their love. The feelings of the lovers are shown so pure and intense that an idea of exaggeration even can never arise in the minds of the readers. Thus, in that way Bhaasa's plays are more realistic. Apart from the plays in which Bhaasa treats love as the main theme, there are those in which he portrays the nature of true love with subtle touches. In *Pratimaanaataka*, Raama, referring to the nature of his relationship with Sitaa, says that "rarely are couples born with natures so alike" (Act-I).⁴ In *Pratijaayaugandharaayana* the depth of the love between Princess Vaasavadattaa appears vividly from the conversation between the disguised Yaugandharaayana, Vasantaka and Rumanvaana.

In his plays, Bhaasa, at times, seems to be concerned about the social themes as well. However, the theme of social criticism is subservient to the other themes. The two topics that are conspicuous problems of the contemporary society are – the problem of primogeniture and the marriages of the daughters. The theme of daughter's marriage and its various implications are discussed in the plays of Bhaasa. Marriage of a daughter is portrayed as a means of the expansion of political power in Bhaasa's plays like *Pratijaayaugandharaayana* and *Svapnavaasavadattaa*. In *Pratijaayaugandharaayana*, the father and mother of Vaasavadattaa are much worried about the proper bridegroom for their daughter. Pradyota Mahaasena aims at fulfilling his political goal by getting his daughter married to Udayana who is noble, virtuous and brave. So, more or less, it was a political alliance and hence Wells is lead to conclude that "*Pratijyaa* is a political fable."⁵ In *Svapnavaasavadattaa*, Yaugandharaayana plans to regain the lost kingdom of Udayana by getting

the king married to the sister of the king of Magadha- Padmaavati. This idea of Yaugandharaayana seems to have found inspiration from the Arthashastra. Pusalker observes:

The influence of the Arthashastra, even on the personal lives of the kings, would be evident from the number of political marriages contracted during the period. The marriage of Padmaavati with Vatsaraaja (Udayana) forms part of the *Svapnavaasavadattaa*.⁶

According to the law of primogeniture, only the eldest son could inherit the ancestral property and this law becomes germinating point of the family feuds over property. In *Dutavaakya* and *Pancharaatra*, the family feuds over property are discussed by Bhaasa. The real clash between Duryodhana and Paandavas was about nothing but the ancestral property of kingdom basically sprouted from the law of primogeniture. However, in *Pancharaatra*, towards the end of the play, Bhaasa shows Duryodhana, munificent enough to part with the kingdom. In the same line, *Pratimaanaataka* also indirectly discusses this problem. But Bhaasa's attitude and vision of life changes the whole matter and as a result it does not turn into a feud because of magnanimity of Raama. The sub-plot of family feud over property is reconciled by the affirmative approach of the dramatist and the usurper is metamorphosed into a good human being at the end of the play.

Happy family and healthy society have always remained the indirect objects of Bhaasa as a playwright. In the plays of Bhaasa, we find a few examples of the theme of family relationships. The separated family members are reunited at the end in many plays like *Madhyamavyaayoga*, *Pancharaatra* and *Pratimaanaataka*. In *Madhyamavyaayoga*, Ghatokacha is portrayed as an emblem of the filial duty in the sense that looking at the sorry plight of the Brahmin family, he is not willing to kill the son of the family but proceeds to do so only as a part of his mother's bidding. Bhaasa arranges here the union of the father and the son, Bhima and Ghatokacha respectively. Raama in *Pratimaanaataka* also shows filial obedience and respect for the order of the elders for he willingly gives up the kingdom and sets out for the forest exile to prove his father truthful to the pledged words. Thus, family relationship is exalted in Bhaasa, for children are portrayed as willing to lay down even their lives for the sake of their duty towards their parents. In *Pancharaatra* also, the whole Kaurava family is shown happily reunited and during the course of the drama, Arjuna happens to meet Abhimanyu in the cow-raid episode.

Bhaasa draws his characters from the epics and legends but in many cases, though keeping strictly within the framework of the epic, he has gone beyond it and given his own interpretation to the characters. The characters, who are conceived as wicked in the epics, are endowed with nobility and munificence and thereby they are elevated to superior stature. As a result, we have different characters of Kaikeyi and Duryodhana in *Pratimaanaataka* and *Pancharaatra* respectively, from that of the source stories. *Urubhanga* is yet another example of Bhaasa's deviated portrayal of Duryodhana who is shown, at the final moments of his life, to have reached the state of serene calmness and stoic-like renunciation through penitence for and abnegation of power-greed and hatred and as a natural corollary, he emerges in his final moments truly a noble and exalted hero. Pusalker opines:

Duryodhana is depicted what a noble king ought to be like. Throughout in the *Urubhanga* we find that the poet is always sympathizing with his hero, who is certainly Duryodhana, and he pictures the conflict as of right with right, and that it was not only inevitable but necessary in the ends of justice.⁷

This deviation from the source story certainly results into an exaltation of the protagonist at the hands of Bhaasa. Karna in *Karnabhaara* is another instance of this. Karna's dictum "हुत्तं च दत्तं च तथैव तिष्ठति" (everything vanishes but sacrifices and charities live to the end. Verse.22)⁸ is the beacon of his character. Karna forsakes life in pursuit of a larger objective- that of everlasting glory and gladly gives away the ear-rings and armour to Indra.

Since drama also involves a kind of communication, the appropriateness and effectiveness of language as a medium is an important aspect of it. The language employed by the dramatist sets the tone of the play, imparts information and establishes the setting. It reflects the dramatist's style of writing. Bhaasa has also jumbled Vaachika with other non-verbal media like gesture and dance in the constitution of his comedies. Sanskrit drama is also multi-lingual in the sense that it employs Sanskrit as well as its dialectal variation called Praakrit. The highborn characters like sages, Brahmins and kings speak in Sanskrit whereas women, low characters and Vidushakas (though Brahmin by birth) employ Praakrit. Thus, the use of language is an indication not of social differentiation by birth alone but also of good breeding, education spirit and wisdom. In Sanskrit plays, language is employed to establish the setting of the play. Thus, the language used by the dramatist reflects the mood, atmosphere and character-types in the play. Bhaasa's language, unlike Kaalidaasa and Bhavabhuti, is not much decorative and figurative- his dialogues are generally short, brisk and witty, with many voids to be filled in by action on the stage.

Bhaasa, in his dramas, reveals a broadly comic and genial understanding of the world. He is not attached to any single philosophical belief, but he seems to have collated the basic experience from Indian philosophic thought, a level of peace and spiritual calmness. Through some of his characters, he has communicated the experience by which they transcend the merely personal and narrow, and attain a higher perspective. In order to express his exalted aesthetic perception of the world, Bhaasa has derived the incidents from the *Raamaayana* and the *Mahaabhaarata* and freely interpreted them to suit his own imagination. *Karnabhaara* and *Urubhanga* are the two examples of higher level of comedy in which Bhaasa's vision reaches a philosophical dimension. His dramas deal with life in its diversity- they have a variety of themes and employ people with varied reactions on the human condition. But beneath this diversity, a mode of projecting certain values having a particular view of the human condition is discernible.

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