

PART - II

(CULTURAL & LITERARY STUDY)

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B. LITERARY STUDY

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C H A P T E R XVI.

Literary and Poetic Background.

(Age of Māgha).

For the proper understanding and the evaluation of the poem, it is necessary to form a fair idea of the age and environment of which the poem Śiśupālavadha is a product.

The Mahākāvyas stand on a different level as compared with Ādikāvyas, viz; MBH. and Rāmā. The five Mahākāvyas, viz; two (Raghu. and Kumāra) by Kālidāsa, Kirāta by Bhāravi, NC by Śrīharṣa and Śiśu. By Māgha are called "Vidagdha" kāvyas as contrasted with the two, viz; MBH. and Rāmā. which are called "Ārṣa" kavyas. It was Viśvanātha¹ who first styled these two epics as "Ārṣa" in his Sāhityadarpana. It is a very significant adjective suggesting their nature fully. It means that they are composed by the sages and hence they are oldest, pure and ~~are~~ ² like diamonds coming out directly from the mines. Aristotle (400 B.C.) has also given the characteristics of the epics as follows:-

"As to that poetic imitation which is narrative in form and employs a single metre, the plot ought, as in a tragedy, to be constructed on dramatic principles. It should have for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle and an end. It will thus resemble a single and coherent organism and produce ^{pleasure} proper to it.... Moreover, the thought and diction must be artistic."

1. Sāh. Dar. 6. 325.

2. Poetics

While coming from the epics to the Mahākāvyas or the classical or ornate poems, we feel that we come from the small republics to the big kingdoms, from the gross into the subtle, from the rough into the refined, from the instability and disturbance to the stability and peace and from the old norms of culture and civilization to the new ones. Thus the ornate poems are like the chiselled diamonds of which the unattractive features are removed and certain others suited to their requirements are introduced.

This kāvya literature was moulded and took its form and shape under the influence of certain different currents and therefore, it will be our attempt here to indicate these currents and their influence on *Sisupālavadha*. It appears to be aristocratic ~~fx~~ from its very beginning and was fostered under the patronage of the wealthy or in the courts of princes. Its form, content and the general outlook indicates the connection between poetry and the courts of princes. The associations of *Aśvaghoṣa* and *Kaṇiṣka*, *Kālidāsa* and *Vikrama*, *Bāṇa* and *Harṣa* also show the same tendency. The royal recognition brought wealth, fame and leisure hours for serious composition to the poets. The kings also held literary assemblies from time to time. Such assemblies are mentioned in *Bhojaprabandha*, *Prabandhacintāmaṇi* and in *Mankha's Śrīkanthacarita*. Hence this literature naturally reflects the graces and the artificialities of the court-life. This influence went a long way not only fostering a certain languor and luxuriance of style, but also in encouraging a marked preference of what catches the eye to what catches the heart. *Māgha* also came under this influence. His patron

was the king who was the immediate successor of the king Vyāghra-mukha referred to by Hiuen Tsang as a young man of only twenty and probably the king Bhojadeva of Chitor (about 665 A.D.) and who is also referred to by the same Chinese traveller¹ as the reigning king of Chitor who "encouraged men of merit and learned scholars of other lands collected here in numbers" and is pointed out by us elsewhere in this thesis.

Besides the court-life, there is another powerful factor influencing the kāvyā literature. This was the Kāmasūtra or the Science of Erotics. The Nāgaraka, the polished man of the city, his habits, tastes and culture so largely mould the kāvyā literature that he may be taken as its model. He is described as the perfect man of the world, rich, cultivated, witty, skilled in arts, appreciates poetry, painting, music, discusses delicate problems in the doctrine of love and has a vast experience of the human, especially feminine character. It is because of this influence that we find the erotic descriptions of female beauties in the works of the Sanskrit poets. There are such erotic descriptions in 32 cantos² out of 96 cantos of the five classical poems. This fact clearly shows the extent of the influence of the Science of Erotics on the literature. Kālidāsa's poems Raghu. and Kumāra. contain such descriptions in the XIXth and VIIIth cantos respectively while Kirāta. and NC. in the IXth and XVIIIth respectively. Māgha's Śīśu. is also no exception and hence we find the descriptions of the water-sports (Śīśu. VIII), collection of flowers (Śīśu. VII), drinking bouts

1. Watter's 'YuanYQwang' Vol.II, p.251.

2. SKPP, p.56.

(Śiśu. X. 1-38), Bāhya Surata (external amorous sports) in X. 39-54 consisting of the casting of glances, kisses, nail and tooth-marks and embraces as well as that of Ābhyantara Surata (internal amorous sports) in X. 55-90.

The Arthasāstra or the Science of Politics too has its own share and consequently there are political discussions in this kind of literature. Māgha introduces such a discussion in the second canto of his poem. The Science of Rhetoric also exercised a great influence. It afforded a good deal of opportunity and temptation for astonishing verbal jugglery. Thus we have verses in the shape of a drum, wheel, sword etc, stanzas having the same spund when read forward and backward, verses written exclusively in two or one letters and various figures of speech. They rather display learned ingenuity than real poetry, and such artificial use of the language is generally a handicap to the quick understanding of a poem. Accordingly, the nineteenth canto of Māgha's Śiśu. contains yamakas (verses Nos. 23, 28, 31, 38, 40, 44, 48, 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 74, 76, 78, 80, 82, 88, 90, 92, 112 and 118), stanzas having the same sound when read forward and backward (verses Nos. 33 and 38), the verses composed with two letters (Nos. 66, 84, 86, 94, 98, 100, 102, 104, 106 and 108), a verse composed with only one letter (No.114) and Bandhas (verses Nos. 27, 29, 46, 72 and 120). It was Subandhu's desire to compose a work of 'pratyakṣara Śleṣa' (pun on each word) and we see the tendency towards double entendre which influenced the later poets like Bāṇa, Bhāravi, Māgha and Śrīhaṛṣa. Māgha tries this trick in

canto XVI (2-15) of the poem. This art ultimately culminated in giving a different kind of literature called "Anekārtha Sandhāna Kāvya" (the poem where one and the same stanza was made to yield many different senses). We have one instance of a verse yielding four senses in Śīsu. (XIX. 116) and one in Kirata (XV. 45). Śrī-harsa wrote a verse yielding five senses (NC. XIII. 34). But the example of Dhananjaya's Rāghava-Pāṇḍavīya surpasses all ! Even Ānandavardhana who depreciates such verbal tricks in his work does not keep himself free from ^{these} in his Devīsataka. Bhatti takes pride in ^{declaring} that ^{his} poem is meant for the learned and not for the dull-witted¹. This tendency is beautifully and correctly described by Ravindranatha Tagore when he says "The story is an umbrella-bearer, the language is the king". A critic in Bhāmaha rebelled long ago against this tendency of making one's poem unintelligible without the help of a lexicon due to the extensive use of obsolete and lexicon words employed for the sake of double entendre and other poetic feats. He denounced this tendency saying that there must be a difference between a sāstra and a poem. He regretted that if a poem was to be understood like a sāstra with the help of a commentary, it was a pleasure for the erudite only while the masses were undone. This tendency of putting form over matter, use of double entendre, verbal jugglery etc. became more powerful after Kālidāsa and the critics who were great scholars

1. Bhatti. XXII. 34.

व्याख्यागम्यमिदं काव्यमुत्सवः सुपियामलम् ।
हता दुर्मेधसश्चास्मिन् विद्वत्प्रीतया मया ॥

began to judge poetry from this point of view and tried to examine whether all the standards prescribed by rhetorecians were fulfilled or not. Hence the warning of Bhāmaha remained unheeded. The result of such a tendency was that the kavya literature abounded in involved constructions, recondite vocabulary, laboured embellishments, strained expressions and constant search after conceits, double entendres and metaphors.

In addition to the accomplished royal patron, the refined man of a city, the Arthasāstra and the Science of Rhetorics, the Sanskrit poet has to keep in his mind the Rasika or Sahrdaya, the connoisseur, whose expert literary judgement is the final test of his work. Such a critic possesses the technical knowledge of the requirements of poetry and fine capacity of ~~xx~~ aesthetic enjoyment acquired by wide culture and sympathetic identification with the feelings and the ideas of a poet. Moreover, mere initiation into the theoretical requirements would not be enough for a poet. He must also possess imagination (Śakti), culture (Vyutpatti) and practice (Abhyāsa). Great importance is attached to the education of a poet as is seen from Rājasekhara's¹ elaborate account of the studies which go to make up a finished poet. He is expected to possess, a vast fund of useful information in the various branches of learning. The longest list of such information includes Arts, Dramaturgy, Erotics, Grammar, Law, Legend, Lexicon, Logic, Metrics, Morals, Philosophy, Politics, Religion, Rhetorics and the other subjects like art of war weapons, botany, elephant lore,

1. K.M. Ch.8.

knowledge of precious stones, knowledge of the Vedic rites and ceremonies, medicine, mineralogy, veterinary science and the ways of the world. We have already shown in the foregoing chapters (IX to XV) Magha's erudition in all these branches of knowledge.

Moreover, there was a tendency to exalt the authority and to discourage the originality. Consequently the individuality was suppressed and the kāvya literature is made to conform to certain set rules and regulations and the personality of a poet is not allowed the full scope and freedom to create new forms of beauty. Thus the poetry was mechanised. All these factors limited the range and outlook of Sanskrit poetry.

In spite of all these limitations, the marvellous results achieved by the post-Kālidāśian poets like Bhāravi, Māgha and Śrī-harṣa clearly point to the fact that there was nothing wrong with the genius of the poets but there was something uncongenial in the literary atmosphere which pervaded completely with the fondness of learning and scholarship.

Śiśupālavadha is also influenced by the age of learning to which the poet Māgha belonged. The poem is clearly meant for the classes and not for the masses. If it can be said that Kālidāśa's poem is a clear lake full of all attractions, Māgha's poem is an unfathomable ocean where all cannot take a plunge. If Kālidāśa was a poet of people, Māgha was a great guide to the learned. They devoted a good deal of time in studying the poem (*मेघे माघे जतं ययः* |).

One cannot resist the temptation of quoting a fairly long passage from Tagore in this connection. He remarks "Artists and connoisseurs build their towers on the summit plateau of art. It is idle to hope that all and sundry will climb up there easily. It is because multicoloured and multisavoured clouds confer there on heights, that the plains get the benefit of their fertilising showers..... Those who are creators of Rasa could only take orders from none other than the Supreme Resident of the heart, and once this is done, when they succeed in fashioning things of beauty for all times, then these must come authentically within the right of enjoyment of all. To say that all have this right is not to say that all can profit by it, here and now good things are not so cheap as all that If you respect the masses and go on supplying them with things of quality, then by and by, their minds grow more and more sensitive to the quality. Let us appeal to the poets:- 'May you give us only of your very best without any after-thought' and to the public:- 'May you learn to accept what is of the very best'. Those who are artists and creators of Rasa can only own to two distinctions:- authentic or counterfeit, good or bad; they do not distinguish between the elite's food and the rabble's Affection is reprehensive everywhere but to contend that whatever is easily comprehensible to all, is unaffected and what only appeals to cultivated sensibility is the reverse, is to argue like a sophist."

1. Subhash I knew. pp. 221 f.

We beg to quote the words of K.Chandrasekharan and V.H.S. Sastri¹ by way of conclusion. "Even the great Valmiki, it is said, became influenced by his environment. If the waters of the Tamasā became cleared up like the minds of people, good and true, he also received an immense impetus to serenity of mood. If again one of the twin birds was pierced with an arrow and died, he became stricken with sorrow and melted into refrain of the most sublime poetry. It proves the truth that no one can escape the atmosphere in which he lives and has his being." Thus Māgha was an eminent representative of his age and in order to understand and evaluate his work, the age and the environments under which he worked should be always kept in view.

1. SL; P.E.N; Books, Bombay, 1951.