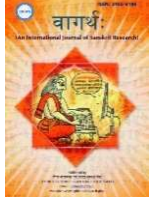




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Reconstructing *Abhirāmamaṇi* – A Lost Sanskrit play

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Abhirāmamaṇi, a play on *Rāmāyaṇa*- theme, is one of the lost treasures of Sanskrit literature. The author of this play, Sundaramiśra, flourished in sixteenth-seventeenth century. Besides the *Abhirāmamaṇi*, he had also written *Nāṭyapradīpa*, a text on dramaturgy. Sundaramiśra must have composed his play before he started writing his dramaturgical work, as he profusely refers to the play in it. Dr. V. Raghavan in his "Some Lost Rama Plays" does not refer to this lost Rāma-play.

Keywords- *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Commentator*, *Sundaramiśra*, *Intermediary scene*, *Prologue*

Nāṭyapradīpa [1] is the only available work of Sundaramiśra. No other information is available about him. Rāghavabhaṭṭa, a well-known commentator, cites the view of Sundaramiśra on *Nāṇḍī* in his *Arthadyotanikā* - a master piece work as a commentary of the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* of Kālidāsa. On the other hand, Sundaramiśra refers to Rāghavabhaṭṭa and severely criticizes him for his analysis of the plot of Kālidāsa's play. He must have been therefore a senior contemporary to Rāghavabhaṭṭa.

DATE

From one of the last stanzas of *Nāṭyapradīpa* as given in both the manuscripts, it is learnt that the work was completed in Śaka year 1535 (1613 AD).

शाके शरग्रामशरेन्दुतुल्ये (1535)
ग्रामे वरिष्ठाश्रमतः प्रसिद्धे।
तदेतदौजागरिणा निबद्धं
मुदा कवीनां कविसुन्दरेण।

The *Catalogus Catalogorum* (I.285) refers to *Nāṭyapradīpa* and confirms this date of its composition. The play *Abhirāmamaṇi* therefore was composed before 1613 AD.

ABHIRĀMAMAṆI AND NĀṬYAPRADĪPA

Sundaramiśra composed this text to simplify and present the principles of dramaturgy in nutshell, so that those who are not adept in the theory and practice of Sanskrit Drama can grasp the basic tenets of the *Śāstra*. But he covered those several topics also which were omitted by his predecessors like Dhanañjaya and Viśvanātha.

But *Nāṭyapradīpa* is a unique text offering practical criticism of about a dozen Sanskrit plays on the basis of various categories and precepts of dramaturgy. It simultaneously analyses the structure of the classics like *Mudrārāksasa*, *Śākuntalā*, *Vikramorvaśīyam*, *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Veṇīśamhāram* and *Ratnāvalī*. Many other plays like *Svapnavāsavadattam*, *Mālatīmādhavam*, *Kundamālā*, *Udāttarāghavam* and *Pāṇḍavānandam* are also taken up for reference and confirmation of definitions and theories. Of these, the last two are not available. *Nāṭyapradīpa* is thus one of the richest store-houses of references to several Sanskrit plays amongst the texts on Sanskrit dramaturgy. It not only brings out the erudition of Sundaramiśra, but also establishes the fact that the study and performances of these plays were in vogue during the Sixteenth and the seventeenth century AD. Sundaramiśra has however kept the focus on his own play *Abhirāmamaṇi* and *Nāṭyapradīpa* can be said to be the only source for the reconstruction of this play, which has otherwise been lost. A master of theories of dramaturgy, Sundaramiśra offers novel

interpretations or his own views on performance traditions and various dramatic concepts.

Sundaramiśra profusely draws examples and citations from his own play *Abhirāmamaṇi*, so much so that the play, otherwise lost, can be reconstructed on the basis of the references to it in *Nāṭyapradīpa*. It seems that Sundarmiśra wrote his treatise on dramaturgy for presenting his own play as an illustration of all the canons. Each and every category has been exemplified through *Abhirāmamaṇi*, the five junctures (sandhis) with their 64 constituents (sandhyaṅgas), five *avasthās* (states) five *Arthaprakṛtis* (nature of plot), *Nāṭyālaṅkāras*, 36 *Kāvyalakṣaṇas*, 21 *anusandhis*, *Pataḥsthānakas* etc. *Abhirāmamaṇi* is an answer for all these. In fact, in the whole tradition of Sanskrit literature on theory, this is the only example of its kind, where an author cites from his own works as attestations to the concepts and categories.

AN OVERVIEW OF ABHIRĀMAMAṆI

Abhirāmamaṇi is a play in seven acts with *prakhyaṭa* (historical) type of plot as it is based on *Rāmāyaṇa* theme. Unlike *Māhāvīracarita* of Bhavabhūti, which set a model for several Sanskrit plays based on *Rāmāyaṇa* including this play, Sundaramiśra did not conceive *Abhirāmamaṇi* as a play dominated by heroic sentiment. Love between Rāma and Sītā remains the major theme here. It is a play of *Śṛṅgāra*. But the *Vīrarasa* goes hand in hand together with the *Śṛṅgāra* here. The story of marriage and love between Rāma and Sītā- their separation and reunion is the main theme (*ādhikārika vṛtta*). The battle with Rāvaṇa does form a major episode, and because of that the play abounds in *Vīrarasa* also. However, Sundaramiśra regards the Rāma's re-union with Sītā as the fruition – the *pradhānaphala* - of his play, the victory over Rāvaṇa and regaining the kingdom of Ayodhya are *anubandhas* only – subsidiary gains (यथा प्रकृते सप्तमेऽङ्के विजयराज्यलाभफलान्तरानुबन्धेन सीतासमागमरूपप्रधानफलनिर्वाहः।). But then, he does not consider the *Vīrarasa* (the heroic sentiment) just as subsidiary in his play. He therefore makes another analysis of the whole scheme of the plot showing how all the *Sandhis*, *Sandhyaṅgas*, *Avasthās* etc. function for the realization of *Vīrarasa* also.

THE RECONSTRUCTION

Rāma and Sītā see each other in a garden of Mithilā before marriage, on the eve of the event of Sītā's *svayamvara*. Sītā's friends, Buddhisenā, Sūnrtā and Maitreyī serve as helpers in the consummation of the feeling of love. Sītā suffers from the pangs of separation. She sees Rāma in her dreams, tries to seek consolation through his portrait and in conversing about it with her friends. On the other hand, there is a *vidūṣaka* named Gomukha, and some boys (*vaṭus*) to help Rāma in this love affair. The imaginations soar high. Rāma feels the touch of Sītā's tender palms in his hands -

यदिदानीमार्यबद्धकङ्कणं तस्याः सुकुमारकरतलकोकनदं मम
करकिसलये वर्तत इवेत्याकलयामीति

There are references to their meeting in the house of Yajñyavalkya, close to the royal palace of King Janaka.

The lamentations of Rāma after Sītā's abduction by Rāvaṇa are expressive of *Karuṇarasa*. There are beautiful stanzas full of pathos describing the sadness after the demise of Daśaratha, i.e.-

तातेन यातेन दिवं प्रवृत्तः कोऽप्येष करुणाविरहैर्विमिश्रः etc.

Likewise, there are vigorous moments of exaltation in the descriptions of the heroic deeds of Rāma. Only starting words of such stanzas are cited by *Sundaramiśra*, viz. –

जेतारं जामदग्न्यस्य...

कण्ठीरवेणरिपुकुम्भिकदम्बकानि....

There are also fascinating usages of alliterations and puns like *समं प्रजानामवनं वनं वा*.

The subsidiary plot (*patākā*) is related to Sugrīva and Vibhīṣaṇa and occurs in *garbhasandhi*. There is a minor episode (*prakari*) comprised of the meeting of Rāma with the chief of Niṣāda community.

The play starts with a verse in the prologue hinting upon the theme of the play. There is a dialogue between the *Sūtradhāra* and his consort, the *naṭī*. They talk about the spring season, as the entry of Rāma occurs during this season [3].

In the prologue of the play, there is a reference to an old bow in a stanza. Śātānanda, the priest of Janaka stages his entry repeating this stanza. Thus, the author has adopted *kathodghāta* (unearthing the story) type of the variety of prologue. The *Pratimukha sandhi* begins from the second act. Rāma is being married to Sītā. There are descriptions of their joy at seeing and touching each other. However, the moments of happiness are overruled with the arrival of Paraśurāma and tussle with him continues up to the fourth act forming the *garbha sandhi* (embryo juncture) which continues up to the intermediary scene (*viṣkambhaka*) of the V act.

With the soliloquy of Śātānanda, the seed (*bīja*) of the story is sown. He describes King Janaka's anxiety for the marriage of his daughter, the condition of putting the string on Śiva's bow being too difficult. It also forms the stage of beginning (*ārambha*) out of the five stages of the plot. After the breaking of bow by Rāma, the episode of an encounter with Paraśurāma continues till the end of the fourth act. Śūrpaṇakhā manages to work as an evil spirit, and Rāma is banished for fourteen years. According to the author of *Nāṭyapradīpa*, this banishment is an *apāya* (an obstacle) but the limit of fourteen years is an *upāya* (the way) for the fructification. Mārīca manages to deceive Rāma by his disguise as golden deer (*svaṇamṛga*) and Rāvaṇa enters Rāma's hermitage disguised as a monk to abduct Sītā. In the sixth act fierce battle with Rāvaṇa is described. In the last act, Vibhīṣaṇa provides the Puṣpakavimāna for Rāma's return to Ayodhyā. The play ends with *praśasti* or good wishes for all.

अग्रे रामप्रवेशावसरेऽभिनेयवसन्तोल्लेखात् सामान्यपरमथाद्येति पदं
वसन्तपरमेवमृतुमिति निर्देशोऽप्यत्र।

यथा प्रकृतेऽभिराममणौ- प्रथितयशसो जीर्णकामुकित्यादिना
बीजसूचकविषयपराङ्मुखेत्याद्यन्तेन।

प्राधान्येन वाक्यं यथा प्रकृतेऽभिराममणौ- नेपथ्ये साधु भोः
कुशीलवकुलावतंस साधु।

Viṣkambhaka or intermediary scene has been used in first, second, fourth and sixth acts.

It seems that Sundaramiśra has largely borrowed from Bhavabhūti's *Mahāvīracarita* in conceptualizing characters like Mālyavān, Rāvaṇa's minister. It is Mālyavān who incites Vālin to kill Rāma and Vālin approaches Rāma with an intention to kill the latter. In this way, Sundaramiśra has justified the killing of Vālin by Rāma. Following Bhavabhūti again, he has also removed the stigma from Kaikeyi's character, by introducing *Śūrpaṇakhā*. *Śūrpaṇakhā* cooks up a plot out of her evil design and a fake Kaikeyi seeks the two boons from King Daśaratha. One more change that Sundaramiśra made in the original story of Rāma related to the way Vibhīṣaṇa approached Rāma for refuge. Vibhīṣaṇa first makes an appointment with Sugrīva, and it is through the recommendation of Sugrīva that he is able to win Rāma's favor. This change has been made with a view to exalt the dignity of the hero.

प्रशस्तिः शुभशंसनम्। यथा प्रकृते जगति परगुणेषु पक्षपातीत्यादीना -
शुभशंसनमर्थश्चिथा मम निराधि हृदयं तथाऽन्यसहृदयस्यापि भवत्विति
सर्वकार्यानुगता प्रशस्तिः।

Sundaramiśra takes pride in describing the innovations and novel designs introduced by him. He particularly dotes upon the use of *bindu* and its expansions in the conception of the plot.

प्रकृते नायकस्यानुचितच्छद्मना वालिवधो माल्यवत्समुत्तेजितो
रावणसौहार्देन वधार्थमागतो वाली हत इत्यन्यथा कृतः।
कैकेय्यास्तादृशवरद्वयप्रार्थनमनुचितं शूर्पणखादेशेन कृतमित्यन्यथा कृतम्।

समुत्सन्नेऽभियोगे विभीषणस्य रामसमीपागमनमनुचितं प्रागेवाभियोगात्
विभीषणः सुग्रीवस्थानमागत इत्यन्यथा कृतम्।

The dialogues in *Abhirāmamaṇi* are simple and expressive of the. Unfortunately, Sundaramiśra cites only a few full sentences, and mostly gives two or three words that occur in the beginning of a dialogue to as an illustration. Here are some examples of his diction -

शतानन्दः - विषयपराङ्मुखमनसो योगिवरस्यापि विदिततत्त्वस्य
त्यागावसरे बाढं कार्यचिन्तालवस्तु नो भवति,
साकूतमेवमेतत् कः सन्देहः, तथाहि -
नितान्तयोगाभ्यासनिर्मलचेतसाऽनेन महाराजजनकेनापि मम
पुरश्चिन्तासूचकमिति मन्त्रितम्।
जनकः - भगवत्शतानन्द महीमण्डले चन्द्रचूडचापारोपणसमर्थः
कोऽपि न सम्भाव्यते।

The flow of language and charm of alliterations makes the citations good reading -

कुलकुसुमकोमलप्रकृतिः खल्यवयं कुमारी लोककमठकठिनगात्रैः
भद्रासने भूषणभासि

Sundaramiśra has exhibited his proficiency in the appropriate use of meters. The rhythmic patterns of long meters like *Śārdūlavikrīḍita* and *Sragdharā* in this play enhance the experience of heroic sentiments. He also aptly uses small meters like *Anuṣṭup* to indicate swiftness and quick action.

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