BUDDHODAYAKĀVYA OF ŚĀNTIBHIKṢUŚĀSTRĪ
– AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The Buddhodaya is a Gītikāvya written by Śāntibhikṣuśāstrī. It is a unique literary composition in its own right. The work deals with the chosen anecdotes from the life of Buddha, starting from his birth (avatāra) to his attaining enlightenment (nirvāṇa). This literary piece comprises of ten sections named as prasanga-s. In each and every prasanga, we find ten brilliant verses composed in śārdulavikrīdita meter and three mellifluous geyapada-s. This kāvya is very special as very rarely we find Gītikāvya-s dealing with biographical theme. Modelled on the famous Gītagovinda, this metrical master piece is full of śāntarasa entwined with bhaktibhāva. The subject matter of each prasanga is as follows –

1. Janmamangala, 2. Asitāgamana, 3. Gopāparigrahaḥ, 4. Nimittadarsana, 5. Vanavijāra, 6. Abhiniskrāmana, 7. Tapasćarana, 8. Mārāvijaya, 9. Saṅghapratishṭhāpana and 10. Buddhakāyalakṣaṇa.

In this paper a serious attempt is made to study the salient features of this kāvya.

Introduction

The Buddhodayakāvya composed by Śāntibhikṣuśāstrī, a unique literary work in its own sense, belongs to the variety of literature known as Gītikāvya. The work deals with the major incidents associated with the life of Buddha, starting from his avatāra to his attaining nirvāṇa. This literary piece comprises of ten sections
named as prasaṅga-s. In each and every prasaṅga, we find ten brilliant verses composed in śārdūlavikṛḍita meter and three mellifluous geyapadas. This kāvya is very special as very rarely we find Gītikāvyas dealing with biographical theme. Modelled on the famous Gītagovinda, this metrical master piece is full of śāntarasa combined with bhaktibhāva.

About the author

The author of this work Śāntibhikṣuśāstrī, adorned with an apt title ‘Sugatakaviratna’, was born on 27th December 1912 CE in a village called Bibipur near Lucknow. His father’s name was Pandit Ayodhyaprasad Tripathi and mother was Rukmini Devi. After completing his studies in Jaipur Sanskrit College in 1938 he worked in many foreign institutions like Karl Marx University in German, Vidyalankarvishvavidyalaya in Srilanka as the head of the department of Sanskrit. He was also a visiting professor in the department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi. Apart from the Buddhodayakāvya, the author has also written a mahākāvya by name Buddhavijayakāvya, for which he was bestowed with Sahitya Academy award in 1977. He has written more than fourteen works to his credit and some of the works include the translation from Chinese Buddhist literature. After his illustrious contribution to Buddhist literature, the author attained ‘nirvāṇa’ on 15th October 1991.

Salient features of Buddhodayakāvya

Here, unlike other kāvyas, the cantos are not termed as sarga-s. Instead they are called as prasaṅga-s. The subject matter of each prasaṅga is as follows –

1. Janmamaṅgala, 2. Asitāgamana, 3. Gopāparigrahah, 4. Nimittadarśana, 5. Vanavihāra, 6. Abhinîskramaṇa, 7. Tapasçarana, 8. Mārāvijaya, 9. Saṅghapratiṣṭhāpana and 10. Buddhakāyalaksana.
In *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghoṣa it is described that before her conception queen Māyā had a dream that of Indra’s white elephant entering her womb.

प्राग्गर्भधानान्मनुजेन्रपत्नी सितं ददर्भ सिपराजमेकम् ।
स्वप्ने सवर्न्तं वपुरात्मनस्िा न तसिसमत्तं िमवाप तापम्॥¹

This is a well-known dream scene in the Buddhist literature, but it doesn’t find a place in the present work. However, the poet offers a vivid description of the events that happened after the birth of Buddha.

शान्तं बैरमहो वृकी मृगिुतान् स्तन्येन पुष्णात्यहो
तिग्मैस्िन्तनुते करैरपि लिहंसतापं न सुर्याज्ञ्ञहो।
भिजो लोकगणो विवादकलहेहतेकम्यमशादुते
शुच्यं सर्वसमं प्रशाम्पति जगद्यऽशोऽप्यहो ॥²

The wolf forgetting its enmity nurtures a deer by feeding with its milk. Here, the poet suggests that *Ahimsā* will prevail throughout the world by the birth of Lord Buddha. In *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghoṣa, we have a similar description.

वाता ववुोः स्पष्ठासुभा मनोज्ञा ददव्यासन वािांस्यवपातयन्तोः ।
िूयभस्ि एवाभ्यसधकं चकार्ये जज्वाििौम्यार्चभरनीररतोऽसनोः ॥³

As soon as Buddha was born, gentle breeze wafted spreading a divine fragrance. The sun blazed with more brilliance. Even the fire gleamed brightly unattended.

In the third *prasaṅga*, the king after deciding to arrange for the marriage of Siddhārtha, wants to know the expectations of his son. So, he enquires through the friends of Siddhārtha. In response, the prince sends his reply by means of a letter. This is beautifully composed by the poet in the form of *Gīta*.

या रूपेण भवेद्रमणीया गुणेन्नदेयेश्चित्तम् ।
या रज्येन्नदेयेव चिन्त्येश्च वहिर्म्युदावित्वम्॥
वृणुयामहं कुमारीम्।
तां धर्माश्रेयशहायां कमनीया कुमारीम्॥⁴
The prince says, “I want to marry a girl who will gladden my mind with her qualities. She will be attached to me more than the kingdom and other wealth. She will support me in fulfilling my duties”.

After the marriage of Siddhārtha with Gopā, her father Daṇḍapāṇi becomes very much happy. On seeing her daughter move around freely in the in-law’s house just like her own house he was very much relieved.

Here, we can see the influence of Kālidāsa over the poet. In Śākuntalam, sage Kanva gives a beautiful piece of advice to Śakuntalā with respect to her conduct in her in-law’s house. He says, “serve your elders; be friendly with your co-wives; although maltreated by your husband, do not react in a harsh manner; thus, do young women attain the status of ‘Lady of the house’; those acting contrary are the bane of the family”.

Both Siddhārtha and Gopā were endowed with all desirable qualities that they both appeared as made for each other. If Siddhārtha was shining like a sprout of the seed of enlightenment, so did Gopā as an embodiment of karunā and praśā. Even the pair of Manmatha and Rati were inspired by their mutual understanding.
In the *Nimittadarśanaprasaṅga*, the poet describes the disturbed mind of Siddhārtha. The prince observes his relatives who are selfish, never shying away from violence, always wielding weapons, having lots of difference of opinion. He feels pity for the people who are affected by the disputes and quarrels of others. So, he thinks for a permanent solution for this problem. ‘What could be the way to obtain peace of mind? Is unity the only solution?’ Being disturbed by these thoughts he decides to go out of the city to divert his mind. Due to the order of the king, the paths were kept beautiful. The entire environment was pleasing and full of happiness. In the meantime, the prince looks at an old man. He enquires his charioteer about the old man.

Then the driver answers. In these passages the impermanent nature of the world is very deftly delineated by the poet. These verses are permeated with philosophical insights.

This old man, once, was a young warrior. He won many battles and achieved so many things. But presently he is defeated as the old age licked away his power.
Once he was handsome and powerful. He used to deck himself with garlands and beauty cosmetics. But presently he is defeated as the old age licked away his power.

इयं गतिमकल्य भविष्यक्।
पूर्व वसुबलमस्य धारित्री।
परिभूः परमेष इदानीम्।
जरालीठतनुरेष इदानीम्॥

And the charioteer concluded his speech by saying that this is the inevitable fact. One day, this plight will come to everyone.

Prince Siddhārtha had a shock of his life. He was disrupted by the bitter truth about the order of the world. He once again went out of the city and this time he saw a man suffering with disease.

िंसवनो जरया निवृत्य गमनात् प्रत्यागातस्वान् गृहान्।
रुद्धस्तत्र पुनः पुराफःसुतु रत्नु वियासुवनम्।
वीघ्यामेव पुरस्य वीष्य मनुं रोगार्तमार्तस्वायं।
कोज्सावित्येनुयुक्तान् निजसदे यन्त्रा विवृत्याखिलम्॥

Siddhārtha enquired about the sick person. Then the charioteer gave an elaborate reply.

तपसत तनुरस्य मनो व्याकुलत्वमेति।
यातं सुखमस्य चायं वेदनामुपैति।
वश्चित इह खलु भोगात्।
एष तिपीदिति रोगात्॥

“O Prince! His body is burning. His mind is perplexed. He has lost his pleasure and is suffering from pain. He is deprived of enjoyment as he is dejected by disease.”

क्षुब्धे दोषगणे दशा सेयं सकलस्य।
दोषगणः क्नुष्ठध्रास्य समतां निरस्य।
वश्चित इह खलु भोगात्।
एष तिपीदिति रोगात्॥

“When the three doṣa-s i.e. vāta, pitta and kapha in our body get aggravated this is the condition we all have to suffer”. On seeing the pain of the sick person Siddhārtha’s mind became anxious. He felt pity for that unfortunate person. His mind was distraught at
the adversity of the world. So, he once again went out of the city. And this time he saw a person who was being carried by a group of people. But that person remained motionless. There were lots of people crying and weeping around him. Once again prince Siddhārtha asked his charioteer about this.

The charioteer replied, “O Lord! The one who is born certainly dies. Nobody can see him at the end. The life span expires. And this is the end for all”.

Here, a man eats, drinks, sleeps and wakes up. But at the end he has to go away. He laughs, sports and becomes a slave of his wife, but at the end he has to leave. He earns, saves and enjoys, fights and wins. He is born somewhere and goes somewhere else. Nobody can save him from this. This is end for all. In this earth, no one remains ageless or no one wanders deathless. One day he has to leave. The life span expires. And this is the end for all.

In these above lines the poet excels in delineating the vairāgyabhāva. The influence of Mohamudgaracan also be seen here.
Buddhist Philosophy

In the eighth *prasaṅga* the poet describes how Bhagavān Buddha conquers the Māra and attains *Bodhi*. Buddha realises that the entire world is full of misery.

दृष्ट्वा जन्मजराविपत्तिसमानस्तवान् दृष्टः दिव्यया
सर्वदृःखमिति प्रलोकधिजेयो यामेव निषाधियमे।

Further he realises that misery is the fruit of birth. *Bhava* is the cause of birth. *Bhava* arises out of *upādāna*. It results out of craving for enjoyment. This craving is the result of *vedanā*. *Vedanā* is produced because of *sparśa*. *Sparśa* comes out of *ṣaḍāyatanā* and in turn is born out of *nāmarūpa*. *Nāmarūpa* results through *viṣāṇa*. *Viṣāṇa* is produced by *saṃskāra*. And *saṃskāra* is the result of *avidyā*.

दुःखं जन्मफिं जसनर्भवक ृ तोपादानतोऽयं र्व-स्तृष्णा चेत् िमुपाददासत सवषयान्
सवसत्तस्स्पर्भवर्ात् षडायतनतस्तस्तिामरूपोद्गतं
तद्वेदनािम्र्वा ॥

If *avidyā* is uprooted the series of sorrow i.e. *duḥkhaparamparā* can be averted completely. In reality, there is no *ātmā* here. The things that are called as *ātmā* and *jagat* are just transformation of *skandhas*.

सर्वं दृःखपरम्परा जनितास्मातुं समावर्तते
साधित्वाप्रतिदृश्यत: बन्धुं भवेतूऽपूण्य परावर्तिता ।
नात्मा नित्यत्यात्र विकिरितिला नैकाश्रयाऽथो कृति:
स्कन्धानां परिवर्तनैव यद्यार्थात्मा यददेतज्जगत् ॥

And the way to destroy the *duḥkhaparamparā* is the *madhyamamārga*. Thus, Bhagavān Buddha obtains enlightenment at the time of dawn. He says, “now the night has come to end and the Sun rise has come. I realised everything. I am Buddha now”.

मागोदुःखपरम्परापहतयेऽभ्यस्तोऽिहायेन यो
शौकक्लेशविविक्षितस्म गुणवान् योगक्षमो मध्यमः।
Conclusion

In this *Buddhodayakāvya*, the poet Śāntibhikṣuṣāstrī has made some deviation in the story of Buddha. He has omitted the dream of queen Māyā. The events of the birth of Lord Buddha is not described in the order. But it is portrayed with the sentiment of Bhakti. The author has cleverly chosen those important incidents and presented them in a dramatic manner that adds to the charm of the poetry. Another unique feature of the *kāvya* is the simple style adopted by the poet. It can be called as *kadālipāka* or *drāksāpāka* which makes the readers to understand easily even the complex topics like philosophy etc. In the Buddhist canons the name of Siddhārtha’s wife is mentioned as Yaśodharā. Where as, in the present work the poet has mentioned her name as Gopā. Similarly, the poet has also chosen to describe the *nimittadarśana* following the footsteps of earlier poets like Aśvaghoṣa. Though the conquest of Cupid is dealt briefly by the poet it is impressive and full of poetic embellishments. The poet shows no difficulty in summarising the Buddhist philosophy in the form of verses. He makes it so simple, charming and lovely that the readers are transported to a new world of literary bliss.

References:

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