

A FEW THOUGHTS ON KṢEMENDRA'S NARMAMĀLA

Hardly any sphere of India literary history in general as well as in history of Sanskrit literature is studied less than satire. After S. K. De's brilliant work *Wit, humour and satire in Sanskrit literature*¹ one may find scanty notes on this subject in general works on Sanskrit literature or articles accompanying publications of satirical works or their translations. It has to be noted that Prof. A. K. Warder paid rather serious attention to problem of satire in his *Indian Kāvya literature*², some special articles written mostly by Indian authors appeared in different periodical and occasional publications. Dr. L. Sternbach contributed a lot to this sphere by number of his publications, especially by his excellent and unique *Mahāsubhāṣitasāṅgraha*³, containing a lot of satirical strophes by Sanskrit poets. It seems that time came when problem of satire in Ancient and Mediaeval Indian literature demands more than ever attention of research scholars.

Literary history of India preserved traces of satire even in very ancient layers but as distinct trend satire takes its beginning in the middle of first millenium A.D. Since this period Sanskrit literature preserved quite a number of proper satiric works in different genres. Specific character of Sanskrit literature as the treasury of literary experience of different Indian peoples accumulated and embodied in classical works, presenting common heritage of all peoples of South Asian subcontinent. It has to be marked that it also embraces in certain periods synchronically such phenomenas which relate to different stages of development of India society or even present certain anachronism in sequence of literary development as *Hanūmannāṭaka* which seems to be later than Bhavabhuti's Ramaplays, though hardly could be treated

1. S. K. DE, *Aspects of Sanskrit Literature*, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 281-83.

2. A. K. WARDER, *Indian Kavya Literature*, Vol. I, Delhi-Varanasi-Patna, 1972.

3. L. STERNBACH, *Mahā-Subhāṣita-Saṅgraha*, Vol. I, Hoshiarpur, 1974; Vol. II, Hoshiarpur, 1976; Vol. III, Hoshiarpur, 1977; Vol. IV, Hoshiarpur, 1980.

as a symbol of decay. Sanskrit literature displays also such interesting and important feature as existence within its limits certain definite literary communities, complexes of works in Sanskrit determined and born by definite ethnoses of ancient and mediaeval India.

Among such complexes we could quote example of Kashmirian literature in Sanskrit as relatively independent, distinct community representing important element of Sanskrit literature's structure. The most spectacular rise of Kashmirian literature in Sanskrit falls on period of VII-XIII centuries coinciding with growth of tendency towards strong centralised state whatever could be internal strife and controversies. Kashmirian literature in Sanskrit of this period had quite wholesome, well developed and dynamic structure.

Among important elements of this structure must be named satire born of humanistic protest against feudal oppression and directed mostly against bureaucracy which symbolised for common people the very gist of feudal state. Dāmodaragupta, Śyāmilaka, Kṣemendra and some other brightest representatives of Kashmir satire painted in their works extremely impressive picture of social and moral degradation. It is worthy to note that if Dāmodaragupta and Śyāmilaka in their critical pathos did not burden satire with any more or less definite programmatical stands Kṣemendra displayed some humanistic tendencies which could be treated as a certain though vague system.

As a preliminary attempt before any solid research let us try to analyse Kṣemendra's *Narmamālā* which was written not later 1060 A.D.⁴ It consists of three chapters which author named *parihāsa* in spite of traditional division of *kāvya* into *khandas* or *sargas*. It seems that such naming was his own invention. As a main figure — hardly he may be qualified as a hero — is taken *kayastha* as a type, embodiment of all vices inherent for any representative of bureaucracy without any difference in his caste status or official stand in bureaucratic hierarchy. Life of *kāyastha* was traced by the poet on every level in every transformation and rebirth. As social layer well knit with corruption and all possible evils bureaucracy presents for Kṣemendra that centre around which everything turns round in the country.

In some ways unexpectedly as another object of satirical denigration clergy steps out. Sharpness of Kṣemendra's satire sounds unexpectedly harsh and even sacrilegious if we try to judge it from the point of view of established opinion about early mediaeval India's way of life. It deviates so much from traditionally accepted assessments that it became a real reason for not so just appreciations of his poetry in general and *Narmamālā* in particular. Some of scholars even did not take notice of *Narmamālā* though it was published as early as in 1923. S. K. De tried for the first time to assess it from literary point of view⁵. He expressed

4. SURYAKANTA, *Kṣemendra Studies*, Poona, 1954, pp. 23, 28.

5. S. K. DE, pp. 281-83.

opinion that in Kṣemendra's satires we have « an approach to realistic satirical writing which is so rarely cultivated in Sanskrit ». Since these words were written our idea about satire in Indian literature became richer.

Satirical pathos is pathos of negation but behind it is screened positive humanistic ideal, which according to our opinion found more explicit expression in such poems as *Darpadalana*, *Sevyasevakopadeśa* etc. Basically it is ideal of virtuous person whose actions are directed for benefit of others not from above, not in the sense of dharmaśāstras' dictum, but on the same level of common life realistically understood. Kṣemendra was extremely compassionate to the people, which appears in *Narmamālā* not as an aggregate of a certain number of individuals but as a victim of feudal bureaucracy. As such it is passive though one may find hints in *Rajatarangini* concerning popular revolts and movements.

As the main force able to solve social conflicts in society Kṣemendra saw state wisdom of a ruler and particularly of King Ananta who reigned in Kashmir in the middle of XI century A.D. However rich historical data given by *Rājataranginī* do not tell us about outstanding statesman's abilities of Ananta⁶. Actually he was removed from reigns of state by his wife Queen Sūryavatī and her favourite Haladhara who were able for some time stabilise political and economic position of the country. In this respect Kṣemendra's compliments to Ananta have only meaning of literary convention, of established literary device.

Analysing *Narmamālā* we come across mainly something what contradicts established poetic norms and devices if one may say about them as established in sense of canonised. Whatever we could call deviations from literary canons are actual innovations, defined by the very task put by the poet before himself. He subjected all elements of composition to this task.

Instead of traditional mangalaśloka containing dedication to or praise of a certain god we read in *Narmamālā*'s mangalaśloka nothing else but praise of kayastha compared in his mightiness with nobody else but Maheśvara himself⁷. As it was sarcastically shown in the poem kayastha in context of Kashmir' life in XIth century actually was « a supreme god » in whose will not only a life of an individual was but even the very current of life in general. Mangalaśloka was followed by very short story about origin of the poem — a certain poet is requested by his friends to describe former tricks of kāyasthas⁸. This story is framed by the eulogy to king Ananta⁹ and actual maṅgalaśloka in which Śiva is praised¹⁰. Further three parihasa follow and each of them bring

6. KALHANA, *Rājataranginī*, VII, 135-451.

7. *Minor works of Kṣemendra*, Hyderabad, 1961, Narmamālā, pp. 307-46, I, i.

8. I, 5-6.

9. I, 2-4.

10. I, 7-8.

more innovations. First of all genealogy of kāyastha¹¹ connected with legends on struggle of asuras and devas was written by Kṣemendra in quite original way as there was no such story in whole preceding literature in Sanskrit from where such plot could be taken and elaborated by the poet. It is a kind of prophecy correlated to primaeval times about future of kāyastha who presented to reader as asuras' accountant. Moreover this prophecy comes out from Kali's mouth and Kali here is spirit of evil prevailing in last yuga named after him.

Genealogy is closed with general picture of all possible misdeeds of kāyastha who even is given name of Kāyasthanātha¹². This name could be treated as Kṣemendra's reference to Nāth movement.

Another innovation may be seen in author's personal attack on kāyasthas which is given as interpolation in this genealogy¹³. Passages of such type containing expression of author's personal attitude to concrete situations or persons or events are present in all three parihāsas. In no way it means that this expression is limited only to these passages — author's attitude saturates the whole poem but for such places poet reserved all his personal and direct attacks on kāyasthas as well as on social evils in general. Another new device is presented by Kṣemendra in combination of traditional *Śivastuti* with dirty backthoughts of hypocritic grhakṛtyādhipati, the highest of kāyasthas, whose actions are directed to squeeze wealth from the people¹⁴.

Whole gallery of lively written portraits follows — grhakṛtyādhipati, paripālaka, lekhaopādhyāya, gañjadivira, mārgapati, grāmadivira. First parihāsa ends with portrait of a wife of grāmadivira, whose behaviour brings in another gallery of portraits — viṭas, jīvanadivira, śramaṇika, dāraopādhyāya, officer (another kāyastha), vaidya, gaṇaka, khāśapati, guru, āsthānadivira, adhikaraṇabhaṭṭa. False sickness of kāyastha's wife causes necessity of sacrifice and it gave Kṣemendra possibility to present the third gallery of portraits. It opens with continuation of guru's portrait which was started in previous parihāsa. His arrival brings into the picture a whole crowd of companions. Sacrifice itself involves much more people of different professions and denominations — strumpet, who happened to be sister of kāyastha himself, brahmacharin, grhakṛtyamahattama, veśya, śalyahartā, old trader and his young wife.

Poems closes with orgiastic scene of sacrifice turned in a kind of public entertainment; it is followed by picture of crash of kāyastha, caused by dismissal and arrest of his superiors. Pitiful and miserable end of kāyastha was preceded by final interpolation — poet's vehement attack on those at power, full of haughtiness and greediness, maltreating

11. I, 9-30.

12. I, 28.

13. I, 18-23.

14. I, 40-44.

those who do not have neither high rank nor wealth¹⁵. Closing śloka underline didactic aim of the poem and contain a kind of author's signature.

History of *Narmamālā*'s text is studied rather badly and it is difficult to state whether it represents the poem as it was actually written. There are some lacunae in development of plot which are not thinkable in work of so highly experienced poet — at least some logical inconsistencies force us to suspect such lacunae. For instance it cannot be explained from where Maricha cripples in the plot¹⁶. His function is clear, but neither he was mentioned before nor appeared later. Reader also is at loss reading the story of viṭas' attempts to seduce kāyastha's wife as this story ends nowhere. Some other discrepancies of the same type could be quoted. Hardly such lacunae could be ascribed to the fact that author himself being taken away by satirical pathos was not able to avoid such discrepancies.

Another enigmatic place deserves special attention — those strange quotations which were used by dāraḥopādhyāya in his « lessons »:

bhābhūto kunakumādrau rainaisaḍṣau
... musimulakṣaṇau phenaparvau
... maṇikanakadharau divyagandhānūliptau
saṅgrāmeṇa praviṣṭau palupa...nau labhyatārā rājyalakṣmīḥ
gaṅgāyamunayorbilvavṛṣabham kūrṇakumbhayaḥ
*pañcacandrana...li paṭṭabandharā bhaviṣyati*¹⁷

Hardly they are translatable unless we find texts of those « school textbooks » from where they were taken.

The very poetic texture of *Narmamālā*, its diction and style prove serious influence of folklore material, particularly of folklore satire as well as devices of traditional Sanskrit poetics well known to Kṣemendra who himself made serious contribution to this field. Being interested first of all in creation of typical character of kāyastha Kṣemendra used some time such devices which were strictly speaking not permissible. Apart of quoted above paripālaka's monologue consisted of *Sivastuti* mixed with this highranking official's scandalous temptations and thoughts alternatively presented in the same metre, we could name also introduction into the poem samples of letter of superior to subordinate¹⁸, of what could be treated as protokol of proceedings of the council in which gr̥hakṛtyādhipati presided etc.¹⁹.

It must not be missed that giving names of gr̥hyakṛtyādhipati's servants poet used devices characteristic for folk satire having used for their names such words which designate not only personal qualities but as well express emotional assessment of each personality in very

15. III, 98-99.

16. I, 46-61.

17. II, 42-44.

18. II, 94-99.

19. I, 46-60.

eloquent manner:

*Dambhadhvajo nīsprapañco lubdhaka kalamākaraḥ
Sūcīmukho bhūrjagupto mahīmaṇḍaśca duḥsahāḥ
Upatāpo vajratāpaḥ parigho dvārabhañjakāḥ
Dhūmaketuḥ kapīmukhaḥ kuṣṣibhedo gr̥holmukhaḥ*²⁰

Apart of this we meet in *Narmamālā* parodying of so many realities of everyday life and routine, documents, proceedings, institutions, personalities, praise of guru turning into humiliating derision, counterposing of ambitious pretensions of kāyastha to his low earthly living conditions²¹. It would be only just to state that Kṣemendra in many respects continued line of Indian satire which got very strong impetus from works of Bhartrihari, Daṇḍin, Somadevasuri, Haribhadra and many others. Equally would be just to state that so far this line is rather neglected and we do not have adequate idea about development of satire in India.

Though Kṣemendra himself was a Śaiva his heritage taken as a whole nowhere displays any trace of partisan or sectarian approach to realities of life. Moreover it gives a hint to certain equidistance of the poet from any strict religious position. In all his works we find that he concentrated his attention mostly on basic problems of human life, whether he treats on Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava or Bauddha topics and here is source of his secular and humanistic approach to all such problems and of his humanistic compassion to common people.

Last decades saw some new editions of Sanskrit texts of Kṣemendra's works and their translations into English and Hindi, as well as some monographs on his creative work. Especially we would like to mention here works by Prof. O. Botto, Suryakanta, Raghavacharya and Padhye, B. Avasthi and Arora, C. Pathak etc. Extremely important for Kṣemendra studies became the latest publications of Dr. L. Sternbach. Particularly since publication of his *Unknown verses attributed to Kṣemendra*²² fund of works written by remarkable Kashmirian poet has been widened substantially. This creates possibility to see *Narmamālā* as well as any other work by Kṣemendra in wider context and give more exact assessment. It would be not out of place to remind that this publication as so many Dr. L. Sternbach's other works like for instance his *Catalogue of Sanskrit Poets Quoted in Anthologies and Inscriptions*²³ is an outcome of his *Mahāsubhāṣitasamgraha*, unique and most fundamental work providing real basis for sober solution of so many vexing questions in history of Sanskrit literature.

Moscow.

20. I, 34, 36.

21. II, 100-116.

22. L. STERNBACH, *Unknown verses attributed to Kṣemendra*, Lucknow, 1979.

23. L. STERNBACH, *A descriptive catalogue of poets quoted in Sanskrit Anthologies and Inscriptions*, Wiesbaden, 1978.