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WHEN THE KING IS CAPTURED: PERCEPTIONS
OF HEROISM IN THE
PRATIJÑĀYĀUGANDHARĀYAṆA OF BHĀSA

Kings and ministers occupied an exalted stature in ancient Indian civilization as in other parts of the world and their conduct was always supposed to be above board. Accordingly, a king or a minister was to show his valor whenever occasion demanded it. *Arthaśāstra* lists boldness and capacity to lead the army as ideal qualities of a king.¹ A king was supposed to uphold his dignity in any trying circumstance. One of the favorite stories current in India is the encounter between Alexander the great and King Porus, who even when captured, demanded that he should be treated as a king. In the words of Basham:

It was only with great difficulty, after a surprise crossing of the Jhelum that the Macedonians succeeded in defeating the troops of Porus, who was captured. Porus was a very tall and handsome man, whose courage and proud bearing made a great impression on the Greeks; when brought before his conquerors, he was found to have received nine wounds and he could barely stand; but when Alexander asked him how he wished to be treated, he boldly replied: 'as befits me—like a king!'. Alexander was so impressed by his captive that he restored him to his kingdom as a vassal and, on the

¹ See Rangarajan 1987: 97.

retreat of the Greek forces, left him in charge of the Panjāb.²

This ideal is fully reflected in the portrayal of kings envisaged in texts on dramaturgy. The *Daśarūpaka* which is quite explicit in enumerating the qualities of an ideal hero of a play who is more often than not a king:

The hero should be well bred, charming, liberal, clever, affable, popular, upright, eloquent, of exalted lineage, resolute, and young; endowed with intelligence, energy, memory, wisdom, [skill in the] arts, and pride; heroic, mighty, vigorous, familiar with codes and a just observer of laws.³

In the case of the minister, apart from courage, intelligence and heroism, fidelity to the king is reckoned to be one of the ideal characteristics. Rangarajan summarises the prescriptions of *Arthaśāstra* [1.9.1.] thus:

He should have been trained in all the arts and have the logical ability to foresee things. He should be intelligent, preserving, dexterous, eloquent, energetic, bold, brave, and able to endure adversities and firm in loyalty.⁴

In such a scenario, it is difficult to envisage Sanskrit plays depicting the overpowering and capture of kings, but this is precisely the theme of *Pratijñāyauḡandharāyaṇa* ascribed to Bhāsa,⁵ which deals with the capture and imprisonment of Udayana, the Vatsa king and the successful execution of the vow taken by Yauḡandharāyaṇa, his minister that he will free his master. In this play, both the king and the minister are represented as falling into the clutches of the rival king; both emerge victorious in their ordeal, thanks mainly to the

² Basham 1989: 50

³ *The Daśarūpaka*, II.I I have adopted the translation of George C.O. Haas.

⁴ Rangarajan 1987: 98.

⁵ I refer to the critical edition of the text prepared with a German Translation by Matthias Ahlhorn (2007).

leadership qualities exhibited by the valiant minister. The play thus gives us a rare opportunity to understand the implications of a crisis situation and the qualities like heroism, loyalty and courage shown in confronting the crisis.⁶ The present paper is an attempt to analyze the play from the perspective of the ideals of kingship and ministership.

It is a fact that the most prominent character in the play turns out to be Yaugandharāyaṇa and not Udayana himself. For that matter, Udayana does not even appear anywhere in person throughout the play, while Yaugandharāyaṇa is the central character in the first, third and fourth acts of the play. Evidently, the play does not belong to the type called *nāṭaka* which has an exalted person like a king as its hero. This leads us to the difficult question of the dramatic genre to which the play belongs. According to Keith, *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa* belongs to the genre of *prakaraṇa*, as mentioned in the prologue of the play itself [*prakaraṇamārabhāmahe*].⁷ But as rightly pointed out by Mankad, “not a single essential condition of *prakaraṇa* is fulfilled in *Pratijñā*.”⁸ Ganapati Sastri reckons it as a *nāṭikā*,⁹ and to Dr. Banerji Sastri it is an *ihāmṛga*. Warder concedes that it partakes some characteristics of an *ihāmṛga*, but is more inclined to think that it is a “forerunner of later *nāṭikā-s*.”¹⁰ The problem is far from being solved. Pulsakar rightly concludes that in Bhāsa’s time, all the dramatic compositions were known by the more generic name *nāṭaka*.¹¹ Thus no structural requirement for the play affects the central position of Yaugandharāyaṇa, the virtual hero of the piece.

The play, as its title shows, deals with the vow of the minister and the shrewdness and valor with which he fulfils it.

⁶ Herman Tieken has argued that the play in its present form ‘answers to all the qualifications of a pastiche,’ but he also concedes that it was pieced together by a single author on the basis of scenes and motifs taken from other texts. See Tieken 1993: 5-44. The fact remains that the play, especially the third act of it called *Mantrāṅkam*, has attained high ritualistic stature in the temple theatre of Kūṭiyāttam. See Rajendran 2011: 255-263

⁷ Keith 1924: 102.

⁸ Mankad 1936: 55

⁹ Keith (1924: 102) records that one of the colophons mentions it as a *nāṭikā*.

¹⁰ Warder 1974: 291.

¹¹ Pusalker 1968: 274.

The crisis is Udayana's making and the credit for resolving it goes almost entirely to the courage and wisdom of Yaugandharāyaṇa. This does not, however, mean that Udayana is anywhere depicted as a weakling and a passive spectator of the whole show. In fact, when he faces a critical situation, he is described as showing his mettle and conducting himself "as a king" like Porus—courageous and steadfast, and never intimidated by the fact that he is outnumbered by the enemy.¹² He is portrayed in the play as a real romantic hero who follows his fancies in an uninhibited manner, wandering in the forests, playing his lute with gusto and taming wild elephants with that instrument and even while in captivity, falling in love with the daughter of his captor without any thought of its consequences. In courting danger, he simply does not believe in the dictum that discretion is the better part of valor. He is portrayed as impulsive and driven by fancies. This lands him in impossible situations. Nevertheless, the fact must be admitted that there is an endearing charm about his personality.

In comparison with Udayana, the personality of King Pradyota, the rival king, pales into insignificance. While Udayana is uninhibited and impulsive, Pradyota is scheming and calculating. He is described as being intimidated by the personality of Udayana. The play portrays him as rather peeved in his approach to the latter. He believes that Udayana is haughty. He laments that while his writ like a fire cast in grass burns the entire earth, it becomes extinct in the territory of Udayana.¹³ The playwright makes Pradyota, rather ruefully, confess to his queen that even his title Mahāsena does not mean anything to Udayana. He enumerates the possible causes of this haughtiness to his queen thus:

It is the dynasty of Bharata, with its roll of illustrious names of royal sages, a dynasty which finds mention in the letters of the holy writ, that makes him so conceited;

¹² See Devadhar 1939: 7. All the English translations of the play quoted in the paper are from this text. The page numbers given are those given at the bottom of the edition and not on the top.

¹³ II.11. See also Devadhar 1939: 21.

and his hereditary knowledge of music, too makes him proud. His youth and beauty make him vain. And his people's attachment-sprung from some unknown cause-makes him confident.¹⁴

What has offended Pradyota most is the fact that Udayana has not bothered to send any messenger to his court seeking alliance with Vāsavadattā, his beautiful daughter.¹⁵ Thus, on closer scrutiny, one cannot fail to recognize a hidden admiration for Udayana in him, beneath his hostility.

In the play, thus, Udayana is the object of attraction and all the action is centered on him. Pradyota tries to trap him with an artificial elephant, knowing fully well that his army is no match for Udayana for a headlong battle. Yaugandharāyaṇa, when he learns about the treacherous scheme of Pradyota, is rightly contemptuous of the valour of the latter and his army, which he compares to a wife devoid of devotion¹⁶.

The events leading to the capture of Udayana are revealed through the dialogue between Yaugandharāyaṇa and Hamsaka, an attendant of the king who has accompanied the king to the forest and who has returned when his master is caught. The narrative is intensely dramatic, with Yaugandharāyaṇa undergoing the pain of uncertainty at every turn of events; it gives a vivid picture of the heroism of Udayana who is outnumbered and caught by the enemies. However, the third person narrative of the exploits of Udayana, who is not seen on the stage, sharply contrasts with the scene in the fourth act of the play, depicting the valour of Yaugandharāyaṇa, where he himself appears in person and the audience is thus given a choice to directly perceive the scene of his action.

Yaugandharāyaṇa is represented in the scene as feeling helpless and guilty for what appears to be a belated intervention in a crisis, if not a massive intelligence failure. From Hamsaka's account, it is known that the enemy had done his homework in a thorough manner. We learn that a foot soldier is employed to

¹⁴ Devadhar 1939: 20.

¹⁵ The king repeats his sentiments twice in the second act. See Devadhar 1939: 15; 20.

¹⁶ Devadhar 1939: 3.

beguile the unsuspecting king; following the tip given by that enemy spy, he comes near the artificial elephant which he mistakes for the emperor of elephants called Kuvalayatanu mentioned in texts on elephant science. Udayana is represented as the absolute master of the situation; he is confidence personified and does not think about any possible danger. He commands the army to watch the elephant herd while he would be bringing the other elephant with the help of his lute. At this juncture, minister Rumaṇvān, true to his dutiful character as an ideal minister, warns the king that the region, which is in the borderline, is not safe as it is infested with people of doubtful conduct. It was better that the king should be accompanied by the army.¹⁷ But Udayana is adamant in his resolve; he mounts on a horse called Sundarapāṭala and accompanied by twenty horsemen, he goes to the place where the elephant is stationed. Udayana gets down from the horse and takes out his lute after paying obeisance to gods. Then suddenly a lion appears on the scene, as if predetermined and all the footmen withdraw to have a better knowledge of it. Exactly at that time, that artificial elephant moves forward, along with mahouts and armed soldiers. Udayana now realizes his mistake and addresses each of his worthy attendants by name and clan and informs them that it is a treachery of Pradyota. He calls upon them to follow him, assuring them that he would avenge the act of the enemy with his valour. He then penetrates into the enemy's fold. When Hamsaka reaches this part of his narrative, Yaugandharāyaṇa acclaims this as the only course befitting a proud and courageous person, mortified by treachery.¹⁸ The narrative of Hamsaka becomes intensely dramatic when describing the rest of the incidents. Mounting his obedient horse, as if sportively, Udayana progresses hitting many more enemies than imaginable. But he becomes thoroughly exhausted because of the magnitude of the enemy force. All of his footmen perished except Hamsaka. The horse also is killed. At the sunset, the king falls down unconscious due to his fatigue.

¹⁷ Devadhar 1939: 6.

¹⁸ Devadhar 1939: 7.

If this account leaves no doubt of the courage and valor of Udayana, the reception accorded to the captured king is not exactly as that of Alexander to Porus. From the harsh treatment meted out to Udayana, we have to infer that if the motive of Pradyota in capturing Udayana were to have him as his daughter's husband, he had not revealed this to his soldiers. Nor do we find any code of conduct being followed by them. Their conduct is in no way better than that of a herd of hunters having a prized catch in the forest. They bind his body with creepers brought from the forest. When he regains his consciousness, they rush to his side shouting that he had killed their kith and kin. One person, turning his body to the right, even grabs his hair and draws his sword to behead him, but his effort is fortunately foiled as he falls down in the ground slippery with blood. On hearing this, Yaugandharāyaṇa expresses all his anguish to Hamsaka thus:

What, did they outrage the king?
Were handcuffs put in the place of bracelets on his arms,
with their fat shoulders, which with their sinews
expanding through exercise, resemble an elephant's
trunk-those two arms of his which with their hands make
the bow twang by making the arrows fly afar off, fixing
them in countless number, arms which do homage to
Brahmins, and honor his friends with their embraces,
when these feel wearied?¹⁹

However, if ordinary soldiers are ignorant of etiquette to a great king like Udayana, the higher echelons show greater sensitiveness in handling him. Sālankāyana, the minister of Pradyota, who had lost consciousness when being hit by the spears recovering consciousness, rushes to the spot and prevents the soldiers from any violence. He salutes the king, which Hamsaka explains as a behaviour "somewhat rare at such a time." He soothes the king with "many courteous words of comfort". He unbinds him and takes him to Ujjayinī in a

¹⁹ Devadhar 1939: 8.

palanquin, finding that he was too badly wounded to travel on horseback.²⁰

The playwright has recorded with stunning clarity what is in store for a king when he is captured by his enemies alive. Ironically, the words are put in the mouth of Yaugandharāyaṇa himself, who belongs to the side of the captive king. The context is the lively argumentation which takes place towards the end of the play, between the victorious Yaugandharāyaṇa and Bharatarohaka, the minister of Pradyota:

Bharatarohaka: Your honor, who is an adept in the laws of the State, speaks thus. What does the Śāstra say in regard to enemies defeated in battle?
Yaugandharāyaṇa: Death.²¹

Of course, this is not a distinct possibility in the play, given the hidden desire in the mind of Pradyota to get Udayana as the husband of his daughter. But his attitude to Udayana is very complex. In a rare movement of introspection, Pradyota speaks out the different stages in the evolution of his attitude to Udayana in a frank manner:

First, I hated him on account of his arrogance; and when he was brought in here, may be, I was just indifferent. But now that I hear that he is sorely afflicted in battle, that his life is in suspense, I do not know what I feel.²²

The treatment meted out to Udayana is also unpredictably different. In the first instance, Pradyota, who is overjoyed with his prized catch, commands that Udayana be received with the honor due to a prince.²³ However, he further allows everybody to see the captured Udayana about whom they have heard a lot before and who is like a furious lion, “captured for a

²⁰ Devadhar 1939: 9.

²¹ Devadhar 1939: 40.

²² Devadhar 1939: 23.

²³ Devadhar 1939: 20.

sacrifice.”²⁴ But when he learns that Udayana is severely wounded in his limbs, Pradyota becomes compassionate and asks Bharatarohaka, the minister to attend to his wounds.²⁵ He further commands:

His every glance should be respectfully attended to know every pleasure of him from his gestures. Do not tell him stories related to the battle that is past; while a blessing should be uttered when he sneezes or does anything like that. He should be honored with compliments proper to the occasion.²⁶

On learning that Udayana is lodged in the place called Peacock’s Perch (*Mayūrayaṣṭi*), he further remarks that it is not a fit place for rest and commands the chamberlain to see that he is rested in the crystal chamber protected from the heat of the day.²⁷

All this seems to be fair enough. But there seems to be a revision in the policy later. We find that in Act III, Udayana is actually chained in the prison and there is a reference to the clinking sound of his chain in the words of Yaugandharāyaṇa:

When he bathed and approached the deities, drums were beaten as the noise of the worship died away; but now, as fate would have it, his chains clank as they are displaced by his bowing to the Gods, when they are offered worship on (auspicious) days.²⁸

Devadhar rightly explains this inconsistency in the attitude to Udayana as caused by the intervention of the minister Bharatarohaka “who does not like that the captive should enjoy living in the palace, free and unfettered.”²⁹ From the play itself, we learn that when Bharatarohaka expresses a wish to see him,

²⁴ Devadhar 1939: 20

²⁵ Devadhar 1939: 22.

²⁶ Devadhar 1939: 22.

²⁷ Devadhar 1939: 22.

²⁸ Devadhar 1939: 28.

²⁹ Devadhar 1939: viii.

Pradyota suspects that it is because of the fact that he does not like the reception accorded to Udayana, whom he considers to be the enemy. Eventhough Pradyota thinks that he can bring the minister round,³⁰ it appears that the latter succeeds in chaining and transferring Udayana to the prison.

As to Udayana, he is seen unruffled in his adversity and not unduly worried. He falls in love with Vāsavadattā during his days of captivity and seems to enjoy his captive days. In the words of Vasantaka, “making the prison house his pleasure garden, he now has started the game of love.”³¹ He rejects the idea of his escape from the prison as planned by Yaugandharāyaṇa and proposes his elopement with Vāsavadattā instead, as he is “seeking to avenge his humiliation.”³² This flippant attitude of Udayana enrages his ministers, who however modify their grand scheme of escapade to suit the changed reality. In this connection, it may be recalled that by definition, Udayana falls under the category of “the self controlled and light hearted” (*dhīralalita*) hero, who, according to *The Daśarūpaka* is “free from anxiety, fond of the arts [song and dance etc.], happy and gentle”.³³

One cannot help contrasting this light hearted approach with that of Yaugandharāyaṇa, who is in a do or die situation. He takes the captivity of Udayana as a personal insult and is singular-minded to his vow to free the king at any cost. The play shows that the ideal minister cannot afford to be light-hearted like the king. Accordingly, he sets out along with Rumaṇvān and Vasantaka, his trusted companions to Ujjayinī. Disguised as a mad man, he, along with Rumaṇvān donning the guise of a Buddhist monk and Vasantaka, who is guised as a tramp, designs a grand plan to free his king treacherously from the enemy camp in a tit for tat fashion. Their original idea has to be modified a little as they learn that the captive king Udayana has fallen in love with Vāsavadattā and that Udayana will come out of Ujjayinī only with her. Accordingly, it is decided to cause

³⁰ Devadhar 1939: 23.

³¹ Devadhar 1939: 30.

³² Devadhar 1939: 30.

³³ Haas 1962: 41.

panic to the elephant Nalāgiri with loud sound from the temple so that Udayana, who can tame wild elephants with his lute is to be set free by Pradyota. The whole of Ujjayinī is filled by the spies of Yaugandharāyaṇa and when Udayana is freed, Gātrasevaka, one spy takes Vāsavadattā, to his side with his elephant Bhadravatī and both of them make their escape. Thus Yaugandharāyaṇa pays back the treachery played on his master in the same coin: if Pradyota had cheated Udayana with a fake elephant, Yaugandharāyaṇa uses an elephant itself to free his master. But he has to confront the enemy army to enable Udayana to flee. Removing the disguise of a mad man, clad in colorful robes and with a white headgear, he jumps into the army of the enemies and kills elephants and horses and their riders with his sharp sword, but his arm is fractured by the tusk of an elephant, he is captured ultimately. Bharatarohaka, the minister of Pradyota tries to taunt him for his treachery, but Yaugandharāyaṇa demonstrates that his attempts are really above board as it is the rivals who resorted to treachery in the first place. Finally, the king and the queen are reconciled to the turn of events and the valiant minister is freed. It turns out that the capture of Udayana was an attempt by Pradyota to chastise the proud and unmindful Udayana and to get him as a groom for his beloved daughter, but the fierce fight of Udayana and Yaugandharāyaṇa causing havoc in the rival army show that the events take their own course.

In this eventful drama, we can see that both the king and his minister are captured by the enemies, yet they manage to survive the ordeal with courage and dignity. It is a fact that the heroism and courage of Yaugandharāyaṇa are of much a higher order. Unlike Udayana, who enters into the territory of the enemy unwittingly, he enters the city of the enemy knowing the dangers fully well. He is totally dedicated to his master and he does not rest until he frees him from captivity. Even when he is captured, he is not worried. In his words:

Having rescued the Vatsa king from the hands of his enemies, (though) myself caught in the battle by the fault of my weapon, I have removed my master's troubles,

and so I enter the palace with joy, feeling that I have won.³⁴

He further remarks that those who have achieved their heart's desire find affliction more charming'.³⁵ He describes himself to Bharatarohaka as similar to Aśvathāman who is covered with blood and who is very happy having killed the assassin of his father.

Pratijñāyauḡandharāyaṇa is thus a gripping play abounding in thrill and suspense and it is the heroism of the minister and, to a lesser degree, that of the king which wins the admiration of the spectator. Udayana is an endearing personality not only because of his refined taste and romantic love for music, elephants and adventure, but also for his courage and unflinching heroic temperament. Yauḡandharāyaṇa is the very embodiment of courage, perseverance, intelligence and singular dedication to his master. Kosambi argues that it is loyalty which served as the ideological basis of feudal society.³⁶ There is an interesting passage in the play, put to the mouth of Gātrasevaka, the disguised soldier:

Let not a new vessel filled with water, consecrated and covered over with *Darbha* grass, be the portion of that man who fights not in return for his master's salt, but may he go to hell.³⁷

Interestingly, this passage is seen also quoted in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya (Adhikaraṇa 10, Adhyāya 3). This should serve as an epitome to the whole play, which tells the story of heroism and fidelity. In Indian aesthetic parlance, it is the aesthetic sentiment of *Vīra* which pervades the entire play making the reader oblivious of the obvious improbabilities of the incidents pinpointed by critics like Bhāmaha.³⁸

³⁴ Devadhar 1939: 36.

³⁵ Devadhar 1939: 36.

³⁶ Kosambi 1989: 208.

³⁷ Devadhar 1939: 35.

³⁸ Bhāmaha, *Kāvyaġāṅkārāsūtravṛtti*: ed. Sarma 1981: 30-31.

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