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Karabi Sarmah

Research Scholar, Department of
Sanskrit, Gauhati University,
Assam, India

The character of Draupadī as depicted in the Venīsamhāra of Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa

Karabi Sarmah

Abstract

Venīsamhāra is a famous drama written by renowned playwright Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa, an acclaimed playwright in the field of Sanskrit literature. The storyline of *Venīsamhāra* has been taken from *Mahābhārata* by Vyāsa. Draupadī, one of the courageous characters from the *Mahābhārata*, is portrayed as the protagonist of the drama. Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa has redrawn the storyline of *Venīsamhāra* in his own style although he keeps the *Mahābhārata* as the base reference. Through this paper an attempt has been made to reflect upon the manner in which Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa has portrayed the character of Draupadī in *Venīsamhāra*. In addition to that, an analysis is also done to show how the original character of the *Mahābhārata* are recreated Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa, one of the renowned Sanskrit litterateur of post-*Mahābhārata* times.

Keyword: *Venīsamhāra*, *Mahābhārata*, Draupadī, protagonist, recreation

Introduction

The Sanskrit term *kāvya* generally denotes poetical composition or poetry. Etymologically *kāvya* signifies a work done by a poet^[1]. Therefore, poetry is the expression of a poet who expresses his ideas, feelings or emotions through words. *Kāvya* technically means poetical composition with an organized plot by a single author^[2]. Regarding the definition of a *kāvya* the Sanskrit poets, especially the rhetoricians have furnished their divergent views in their respective works. Bhāmaha has said that words along with meaning constitute poetry^[3]. Paṇḍitarāja Jagannātha in his *Rasagangādhara* gives the definition of *kāvya* as *ramaṇīyarthakapratipādakāḥ śabdaḥ kāvyam*^[4]. That is the words possessing good (ramaṇīya) meaning called *kāvya*. It can be said that poetry is that which can arrest the attention of the connoisseur through nice words. Vāmana has said that a description which is full of alaṅkāra is accepted to be a piece of *kāvya*^[5]. But Ānandavardhana has argued that it is nothing but *dhvani* i.e. suggestion itself that is more charming than the expressed sense. He has accepted *dhvani* as the soul of poetry^[6] and said that it is called the best poetical composition in which the suggested sense shines more than the expressed one. But the rhetorician Viśvanātha Kavirāja, after refuting all the views of his predecessors furnished his opinion and affirms in this regard that without *rasa* a sentence cannot be called poetry as it is the soul of it without which mere unification of words and meaning becomes lifeless. The other elements such as *alaṅkāra*, *dhvani* etc. are for the upliftment of the poetry only. In Sanskrit literature, all the forms of poetical composition like *mahākāvyas*, *khaṇḍakāvyas*, *nāṭakas*, *campūkāvyas* etc. are known as *kāvya*. Therefore, the field of Sanskrit *kāvya* is very wide. The Sanskrit *kāvya* or literary composition is classified broadly into two divisions viz., *śravyakāvya* and *drśyakāvya*. *Śravyakāvya* is made for just listening (reading also) whereas *drśyakāvya* is meant for dramatic representation. Viśvanātha Kavirāja in his *Sāhityadarpaṇa*

¹kaveḥ karma kāvyam, *Vakroktijivita*, Ed., Susil Kumar De, 1961, p.3

² Williams, Monier, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p.280

³ Śabdārthau sahitau kāvyam, *Kāvyalaṅkāra*, I.16

⁴ *Rasagangādhara*, Ed., Durgaprasad & Vasudeva Lakshman, 1916, *Ānana* I, p. 4

⁵ kāvyam grāhyamalaṅkārat, *Kāvyalaṅkārasūtravṛtti*, I.1.1

⁶ Kāvyaśāstram dhvaniḥ, *Dhanyāloka*, I.1

Corresponding Author:

Karabi Sarmah

Research Scholar, Department of
Sanskrit, Gauhati University,
Assam, India

observes that *drśyakāvya*s are fit for dramatization and *rūpaka* is the general name for drama in Sanskrit [7]. Again, *śravyakāvya*s are suitable specifically for listening [8].

The Sanskrit *drśyakāvya* are again divided into various categories and sub-categories. In *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, Viśvanātha establishes ten varieties of *rūpaka* and eighteen varieties of *uparūpaka* [9].

The first variety of *rūpaka* is known as *nāṭaka*. *Nāṭakas* occupy a significant place in Sanskrit literature. The scholars have also said about the greatness of the *nāṭakas-kāvyeṣu nāṭakam ramyaṃ*. There are so many dramas in the realm of Sanskrit literature. The scholars have divided the dramas into three groups belonging to three periods, with the master poet Kālidāsa as the central figure, from whom one can look backwards and forwards. These heads are-

1. The plays before Kālidāsa.
2. The plays of Kālidāsa
3. The plays after Kālidāsa

The *Venīsamhāra*

The *Venīsamhāra* of Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa is a play after Kālidāsa. It belongs to the class of successful *nāṭakas*. This is only the available work written by Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa. He is believed to be lived in later half of 7th or the beginning 8th century A.D. and it has been assumed that the date of composition of the *Venīsamhāra* fall in the latter half of the 7th or first quarter of the 8th century A.D. The title of the drama *Venīsamhāra* means the tying up or rearrangement of the loose disheveled mass of hair. It bears the reference of the vow of Bhīmasena, which forms the central topic of the drama. It is essentially a heroic play. The plot is mainly taken from the *Mahābhārata* and covers the period which elapses between the return of the Pāṇḍavas to Indraprastha after their thirteen years exile and Yudhiṣṭhira's accession to the throne after the great war. The predominant sentiment of the drama is the heroic or *vīra*. The name is suggested by an incident related in the latter part of the Sabhāparva of the *Mahābhārata*. It is stated there that after Draupadī had been stacked and in gambling, she was dragged by hair into the assembly by Duḥśāsana at Duryodhana's bidding. Stung almost to madness by the outrageous insult, Bhīma vowed that he would kill all the Kauravas, drink the blood from the bosom of Duḥśāsana and dipping his hand in Duryodhana's gore would tie up Draupadī's hair. The theme is described in six acts.

The character of Draupadī in the *Venīsamhāra*

Though there are many plays available in Sanskrit literature and almost all those have woman characters, like- Sitā, Urvaśī, Mālavikā etc., it is for the first time Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa brought Draupadī into the stage through his *Venīsamhāra*. Draupadī, the brave woman, is the heroine of the

⁷ drśyaṃ tatrāvineyaṃ tadrūpāropāttau rūpakam. *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, VI,1

⁸ śravyaṃ śrotavyamātraṃ....., *Ibid.*, VI, 313

⁹ The ten divisions of the rūpakas and uparūpakas are as follows-
natakamatha prakaraṇam
bhānavyāyogasamavakāradimāḥ/ihāṃṛgāṅkavūthyāḥ
prahasanamitī rūpakāni daśa/nāṭikā troṭam goṣṭhī satṭam
nātyarāsakam/ prasthānollāpyakāvyaṇi prengkhaṇam rāsakam
tatha/
sanglāpakam sṛgaditam ca vilāsikā/ durmallikā prakaraṇi hallīso
bhāṇūketi ca/aṣṭadaśa prāhurūparūpakāni manīṣiṇaḥ/ vinā viśeṣam
sarveṣam lakṣma nāṭakavanmatam// *Ibid.*, VI, 3- 6

Mahābhārata. She is one of the most powerful, imposing and fascinating personalities in the *Mahābhārata*. Her personality pervades throughout the *Mahābhārata*. In our society the life of a woman is not straight forward like that of man. Woman has to pass her life in different roles throughout her life stages, like- as a daughter, as a daughter-in-law, as a wife, as a mother, as a mother-in-law etc. besides these all she is a woman. The life of Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* is also no exception. She plays all these roles nicely and proved herself a competent in every aspect of life. She is a good daughter, loving and dutiful wife, knowledgeable queen. Her steadfast devotion to duty, spirit of self sacrifice, fortitude, courage, capacity for hard work, presence of mind, perseverance, endurance, thirst for knowledge, wisdom to discriminate between right and wrong and strength to fight against injustice, truth, modesty, forgiveness, softness and harshness as the occasion demanded etc. are always attract even the women of modern era. In the *Venīsamhāra* though Draupadī is placed as the heroine, but, here Draupadī does not have all these qualities. She has been projected as queen and wife only. It is because Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa does not take the whole story of the *Mahābhārata*. So it is not possible to reflect all the qualities of Draupadī only through a portion of *Mahābhārata* as the character of Draupadī pervades throughout the *Mahābhārata*.

In drama's heroines are generally divided into three kinds-*svīyā*, *parakīyā* and *sādhārānā* [10] according to their relationship with the respective heroes. Each of these is again classified according to their nature. *Draupadī* being the wife of Pāṇḍavas belong to the type called *svīyā* [11], and by nature she can be nothing else but *pragalbhā* [12]. So far there is no discrepancy between the dramaturgies and Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa's portrayal. But when one come down to a close examination of the play, it is found Draupadī as depicted in this drama to be standing out as a unique figure in the whole of Sanskrit dramatic literature. The *Venīsamhāra* as well all know is not a play with love as its theme. Nor can one designate it as a political play like the *Mudrārākṣasa* of Viśakhadatta, nor it is a social play like the *Cārudatta* of Bhāsa. The *Venīsamhāra* contains all the elements of all the above mentioned types combined, evenly or unevenly as the case may be. It is the story of the battle between the brother princess of the Kuru family and it is hatred and self-pity that predominate in the actions of all the characters. Draupadī, the heroine, seems to lead in this characteristics venture. She enters the scene with tears streaming from her eyes and her heart burning with anger and desire for revenge. The character of Draupadī is mentioned once in the First Act and nothing is known of her till the Sixth Act, except an incidental mention of her name in the prelude to the Third Act. But behind the movement of the story Draupadī is there in the whole theme of the *Venīsamhāra*.

Draupadī's Role in the Development of the Plot

It is already stated that in the whole *Venīsamhāra*, the appearance of Draupadī is seen only in two acts, the First and the Sixth one. But without her presence the story cannot revolve. She is the reason for what the dramatist could plot out a play of six acts. The meaning of the title *Venīsamhāra* itself passes information to the audience that the story will

¹⁰ atha nāyikā tribhedā svā'nyā sādhārānā strīti...., *Ibid.*, III, 56

¹¹ Vinayārjavādiyuktā grhakamaparā patibratā svīyā...., *Ibid.*, III, 53

¹² Smarāndhā gāḍatārūṇyā samastakovidā/ bhāvānatā darabrīḍa pragalbhākrāntānyakā// *Ibid.*, III, 60

surely be the tying up or rearrangement of the loose disheveled mass of hair of a lady, what is none other than Draupadī. In this drama the character of Draupadī is unique in nature. She is the fuel of the whole drama. Though she has not appeared in the stage in every act but spectator or reader feel her existence everywhere. The main or ultimate goal of the drama is fulfillment of a wish related to Draupadī. All other characters are seen to help in achieving the goal. In the First Act she appears with her long hair loose with complaints of more insult from the wife of Duryodhana ^[13]. She was on tears while she entered the stage for the first time. A princess of royal blood by birth, endowed with the most matchless beauty, she is subjected to humiliations of the worst type in spite of her valiant husbands. Her miseries seem to have even changed her princely disposition. But her character is not like other princess. That is why her happiness and satisfaction is reflected by the fact when Bhūma argues that the fight is never an unreasonable one and hence they should go for it. Bhūma's desire to grind the Kauravas to dust in battle and quaff blood from the breast of Duḥśāsana and pound the thigh of Suyodhana with his mace ^[14] makes Draupadī even happier and more satisfied. She always inspires Bhūma's anger and provoked him for war. She expresses her feelings to Bhūma by stating that her ire is aroused only when Bhūma is on indifferent mood but not when he is in anger ^[15]. Bhūma after listening to the words of inspiration told her to consider herself as one whose insult is avenged. All these imply the important of the character Draupadī in the development of the content of the drama. Bhānumatī's insult on Draupadī adds up boost on Bhūma's anger and makes him more enthusiastic for taking up the vow. She helps in reminding Bhūma about his commitment as she addressed Draupadī as queen and stated that Bhūma is supposed to tie up Draupadī's hair with his hands red with the greasy clotted and thick blood of Suyodhana ^[16]. That is the key point of the drama from where the actual story begins. The First Act itself gives a clear picture that the following acts will also be centered at the character of Draupadī. Draupadī well understands that the whole war is going to happen as the result of all the tormentations she had suffered in the past. Draupadī, showed her care for her husbands when she advised them not to move about heedless in the battlefield as she knew it well that all her husbands were on fire because of the insult that was offered to her by the Kauravas ^[17].

From Second Act to the Fifth Act, the character of Draupadī has not been found in the stage. But one can feel her existence. All the acts or the story proceeds only to fulfill her wish of giving proper punishment to the Kauravas for their evil deeds. In the last act the reader or the viewer gets interacted with the character of Draupadī.

Anyone goes through the drama, from the name itself and through the all first five acts it is understood that there is a need of the character of the heroine in the last scene though she was not present in the other acts except the first one. The audience forgets the main character Draupadī in between the First and Sixth acts. The dramatist shows his cleverness by bringing back the character of Draupadī again to the scene in

¹³ ayi yājñāsenī pañcagrāmāḥ prārthyanta iti srūyate/ tatkaśmādīdānūmapi te keśa na sañyamyante/ *Venīsamhāra*, I, p. 20

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 15

¹⁵ nātha, udāsīneṣu yuṣmāsu mama manyurna punaḥ kupiteṣu, *Ibid.*, I, p. 18

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 21

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 26

the Sixth Act as without her the drama cannot get completion. He uses the character of heroine in developing a sequel of the drama with a flow so that it gets adjusted with the plot. Draupadī presence in the Sixth Act happens along with that of Yudhiṣṭhira. The dramatist does not bring her character all of a sudden so that audience may not reject her entry. But her presence in the last act of the story seems she is present there throughout the whole play. While the demon gives the sad news of the death of Bhūma, Draupadī's presence on the stage is a must in that situation as the fight of Bhūma and Duryodhana is to happen only because of her. It is the need of the story to convey the news to Draupadī and look for her reactions. The dramatist draws the attention of the reader towards Draupadī by plotting her character as an ideal wife as she is ready to sacrifice her life along with Yudhiṣṭhira ^[18]. This incident adjusts her character as a dutiful consort but dramatist has avoided this for the final goal of the drama where Draupadī's presence is mandatory. As the name itself explains the possible ending of the drama so her must needed presence helps in the advancement of the story towards the end. Thus as a reader or viewer of the *Venīsamhāra* one can easily understand the need of the character of Draupadī in the development of the play and Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa uses her character nicely to make his plot more interesting. It has been observed that nowhere her character has presented without any references. He stretches out the story through six acts with involvement of the main heroine Draupadī only in the first and last act.

Conclusion

Though Draupadī is the heroine of the play *Venīsamhāra*, her appearance is restricted to two acts only i.e., First Act and Sixth Act. The dramatist keeps her character as the central one. The title of the drama itself throws light to the fact that the character of Draupadī is an inseparable one in the plot. He tries to reflect the toughness of the mind of a lady through Draupadī. As a wife of five Pāṇḍavas, this lady shows here courage and valour. The sweet relationship between her and Bhūma as shown in the epic *Mahābhārata* had been also shown in the *Venīsamhāra*. Draupadī tries to achieve her silent dream of a war with the Kauravas and it is projected by her provocation to Bhūma. Though she is a follower of the Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira still she has been shown as much closer to Bhūma in the emotional aspect of life. The qualities like – love, care, emotions are also present in her character.

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¹⁸ arya kurū dārūsaṁcayam/ prajvālyatām citā/ tvarate me hṛdayam nātham prekṣitum/ *Ibid.*, VI, p. 150

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