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Nidhisha PA

Research Scholar, Department of
Sanskrit General, SSUS, Kalady,
Kerala, India

A note on minister in Śiśupālavadhā

Nidhisha PA

Introduction

In Sanskrit literature there are many works based on ministers. Kavyas like Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa, Śiśupālavadhā of Māgha, Dramas like Avimāraka and Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇa of Bhāsa, Mudrārākṣasa of Viśākhadatta, and Prose poems like Kādambarī of Bāṇabatta, and Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin can be included in this category. The most important among these is Śiśupālavadhā. It is penned by the epic poet Māgha. He is considered to have lived in the 7th century AD. The work Śiśupālavadhā is based on a story adapted from the Sabhāparva (30-42 chapters) of Mahābhārata. This kavya included in Pañcamahākāvya and Bṛhatrayī. The main theme is the story of lord Kṛṣṇa killing Śiśupāla the king of Ceḍī. This poem has the characteristic of writing the title by giving importance to the anti-hero in the history of literature. It is divided into twenty cantos covering 1645 verses. The main sentiment is Vīra. This mahākāvya discusses various parts of politics. One among them, is the details of ministers.

There are seven limbs for the administration of a country. They are Svāmi (King), Amātya (Minister), Janapada (Territory), Mitra (Ally), Durga (Fortification), Daṇḍa (Army), and Kośa. (Treasury). The country with these seven elements is called Prakṛti or Saptāṅgarājya. Books like Mahābhārata, Yājñavalkyasmṛti, Arthaśāstra, Kāmandakīyanītisāra etc. provide information about Saptāṅgarājya. In Śāntiparava of Mahābhārata point out that.

Rājñā saptaiḥ rakṣyāṇi tāni cāpi nibodha me
Ātmāmātyaśca kośaśca daṇḍo mitrāṇi caiva hi
Tathā janapadaścaiva puram ca kurunandana
Atatsaptātmakam rājyam paripālyam prayatntaḥ ^[1].
kāmandakīyanītisāra holds that
svāmyāmātyaśca rāṣṭram ca durgam kośo balaṁ suhṛt
parasparopakārīdaṁ saptāṅgam rājyamucyate. (KN 4/2)
Arthaśāstra states that
svāmyāmātyajanapadadurgakośadanḍa-
mitavyasanānām pūrvam pūrvam garīyaḥ (KAS 7/127/5),

Yājñavalkyasmṛti opines that svāmyāmātyaḥ jano durgam kośo daṇḍastathaiva ca mitrāṇyetāḥ
prakṛtayo rājyam saptāṅgamucyate (YS 1/353).

Śukrācārya while comparing the seven constituents of the state with the organs of the body called the king as head, the minister as eyes, the friends as ears, the kośa as mouth, the army as mind, the durga as hands and the rāṣṭra as legs ^[2]. The goal of the nation attached to these seven organs is ultimate progress. Therefore, each organ plays an important role in maintaining the country. Minister is the second important organ or element of a state. They are also known as amātya, mantrins, and sacivas.

The security of the state, collection of the army, suppression of the enemies, maintenance of revenue and expenditure, protection of the princes, crowning and advise the king on administrative matters are the main duties of the minister.

Corresponding Author:

Nidhisha PA

Research Scholar, Department of
Sanskrit General, SSUS, Kalady,
Kerala, India

¹ SP 69/62-63

² SN 1.61-62

It is clearly stated in epic Mahābhārata^[3] and Matsya purāṇa^[4], that a king without ministers cannot protect or govern the nation. Therefore, it is the primary duty of the king to appoint the ministers who form the backbone of the state. It has been further pointed out that states where kings appoint ministers after proper respect to seek their advice on matters of war and defence, flourish and prosper^[5]. Similarly, Kauṭilya and Manu elaborate on the importance of ministers. Kauṭilya says that the state affairs cannot be conducted by the king without the assistance of competent councillors in the same manner as the carriage with one wheel cannot move. Therefore, a king should appoint ministers and listen to their opinions.

Sahāyasādhyam rājatvaṁ cakramekaṁ na vartate.
Kurvīta sacivāmstasmāteṣāṁ ca śruṇuyānmatam. (KAS 1.7-9).

Apart from this, Kauṭilya elaborates on the qualities of the minister, the method of selecting them, and how many ministers should be with the king in the chapters 8, 9, and 10 of the first Adhikarana. Law giver Manu has also pointed out that the king alone cannot shoulder the responsibilities of running the administration of the state and hence he appoints such ministers who are found gifted with all necessary qualities^[6]. Further information about ministers is given in the seventh chapter of Rajadharma of Manusmṛti also.

The poet begins the royal affairs in the second canto of Śiśupālavadhā, in which the discussion begins with the speeches of the minister Uddhava and Kṛṣṇa's elder brother Balarāma. Śrīkṛṣṇa is confused as to which thing to do first, as the two things-killing of Śiśupāla and Yudhiṣṭhira's invitation to the Rājasūya sacrifice come at the same time. To solve this problem, he goes to the council hall with Balarāma and Uddhava. There Kṛṣṇa mentions his stand to them, making it clear that his priority is not the Rājasūya Yāga, but the killing of Śiśupāla. Kṛṣṇa invites the two to a discussion, saying that Yudhiṣṭhira can perform the sacrifice alone. After that, Balarāma and Uddhava put forward their positions.

Balarāma first comes forward to deliver his reply speech, favouring lord Kṛṣṇa's decision to kill Śiśupāla first. Māgha narrates Balarāma's comments in verses 24 to 67 of the second canto of the poem. It is possible even for a dull-witted person to elaborate, after studying the texts that policies are six, powers are three, and accomplishments and rises are three each. Because people like Uddhava possesses only book knowledge. Practical wisdom and experience are very lacking and not sure where and when to apply what. Without such experience, the oratory skills of a man are useless. It can be compared to the archer who, after missing the target, blames the error on his equipment, the wind, or the right. Buddhas have no soul other than the five skandhas similarly a king has no mantra other than the five aṅgas. In short, a king must use and exercise the five aṅgas skilfully. All diplomacy consists mainly of two things-one's own rise and the enemy's fall. Therefore, Balarāma advocates that one who is interested in his own prosperity and progress should take ruthless action for the complete destruction of the enemy. And a king should always be ambitious. He should never be satisfied with his prosperity. Fortune abandons the king who feels satisfied with his status. He then talks about enemy-friend relationships.

Friend and foe are distinguished according to karma. From here Balarāma cites the example of Śiśupāla relationship, who is the son of father's sister. Though he is an inborn friend (Sahaja mitra), he is not fit for friendship because of his misdeeds. The sastras also rule out the friendship with one who always tries to harm the king. Balarāma suggests that, since it is impossible to make friends with the raging Śiśupāla, it is better to suppress him. There are so many reasons for the rivalry between Śiśupāla and Śrī kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa abducted and married Rukmiṇī whom Śiśupāla had decided to marry, which angered Caidya. When Kṛṣṇa went to kill Narakāsura, he laid siege to Dvārakāpuri, kidnapped and injured Babhru's wife. Therefore, there is no longer any way for reconciliation between them by words of peace. Balarāma later explains to Kṛṣṇa the dangers of ignoring the enemy. Never be little the enemy's mistakes. It is folly to remain indifferent after harming enraged enemies. It is really like the fools who lie facing the wind after setting fire to dry grass. Any kind of lenient policy towards the repeated mistakes of the enemy will ultimately only lead to one's own destruction. Balarāma next points out the need to be firm and take strong measures when dealing with the enemy. One should be stern and must adopt strong measures, for softness is taken as a sign of weakness by the enemy who unhesitatingly harasses and inflicts injuries on the persons. Now he cites the example of the moon which is subjected to frequent attacks from Rāhu because of his weakness while the sun is attacked less often because of his fearful nature. And he states that enmity increases when conciliatory methods are adopted towards a vindictive enemy. Balarāma opines that punishment is the most preferable in such cases. Uddhava may agree or disagree with my opinion; it does not matter. Kings can be ruined by the wrong advice of the six policies given by the ministers. The action of such ministers is like that of enemies. They are reprehensible. The king should abandon such ministers. Balarāma next specifies when to go to war. One group argues that he should go to war when he has more power. But others consider it necessary to prepare for battle when the enemy is weakened. Both these criteria urge you, who are remaining idle, to wake up. Śiśupāla, who is grieving the loss of his friend since Jarāsandha was killed by Bhīma, will be very easy to conquer at this point. But diplomatically it is shameful for self-respecting warriors to call an enemy to battle in his hour of danger. It is an enemy in his perfection who delights him, like the full moon enthuses Rāhu. But Balarāma's side is different. If one has immense power then there is no need to follow the words of śāstras. Let out army besiege Mahiṣmaṭi empire and crush Śiśupāla. Let Yudhiṣṭhira perform the Yāga.

Minister in Śiśupālavadhā

Uddhava, the closest friend of lord Kṛṣṇa and the chief minister of Yādavas, narrates his views one by one. They are elaborated in verses 76 to 117 of the second canto of Śiśupālavadhā. A king has mainly three types of powers. They are power of counsel, power of energy and power of treasury and army. In these the subject entered by describing the relative qualities of power of energy and power of counsel. A leader or king should try to infuse oneself with sensitiveness and energy. Both are certainly the source of the rising power of an ambitious king. His opinion contradicts of Balarāma's view. According to him, a king does not need advice to do thing, only enthusiasm. Apart from this, Uddhava further elaborates the importance of consultation in matters of state. If the kings proceed with any action with much deliberation, the chances of success are high and there is less

³ SP 116,12-14

⁴ MP 215,2-3

⁵ SP 92,93

⁶ MS 7.55

chance of disappointment. As an example, he points out the sharp intellect people and blunt person. Those having sharp intellect touch on a small portion like an arrow, but do enter the matter. But a blunt person, even touching a vaster area must remain outside like a stone. Then he talks about enthusiasm. Enthusiasm along with advice is very important for the completion of undertakings. A combination of these two will only give good results. It will be easy to achieve the desired things. Only those who are ambitious and persistent can expect prosperity. A king who perceives and work hard will rise to the top, and the rest of the kings will watch this growth. In short, there should be both advice and diligence in administrative matters. Uddhava makes this clear. Then it is clarified the characteristics of the king, the king must be a unique person. Because his weapon is considered intelligence, his armour is considered secrets matters, his eyes are considered spies, and his mouth is compared to messengers. A wonderful man with these seven elements should be a true king. Without these factors, the king's kingdom will be destroyed. He then elaborates on when to exercise patience, valour, etc. Depending on the time, sometimes patience and valour should be alternated. By forgiving the enemy's harm for the time being, when the right time comes, one can attack with valour. Uddhava has a very appropriate point because science also agrees with it. Apart from these, a king should be intelligent and capable enough to judge the happenings in his and his enemy's dominions. Also, he should have thorough knowledge of the proper use of the four expedients. Chances of success depend on the proper use of them. Uddhava rightly observes the six policies that should be used with proper judgement only after comparing one's own strength with that of the enemy, and then only the seven limbs of the king become powerful. He says that if a king words wisely, they act like a medicinal tonic. Next Uddhava strongly criticizes Balarāma for calling for war regardless of whether the time is favourable or not. There is increase in strength in the case of the kings who remain quite if they perform war on proper occasions. But any venture, ignoring the real power results in weakening of wealth. In the present situation it is better to avoid confrontation with Śīsupāla. For he has the support of many kings like Bāṇa, Śālvan, Rukmin, Druma, and Kālayavana. Even a small person attains the desired aim of an action with the help from a greater person. So, Uddhava is of opinion that it is better to assess the pros and cons of the situation before declaring war against Śīsupāla. According to him if Kṛṣṇa attacks Śīsupāla, Kṛṣṇa's enemies and Śīsupāla's friends will join Śīsupāla and only the remaining will be on Kṛṣṇa's side. Thus, almost all the kings will participate in the war. Under such circumstances, there would be no king who would facilitate Yudhiṣṭhira's Rājasūya sacrifice. It will adversely affect the sacrifice of Rājasūya. Yudhiṣṭhira is a good friend of Kṛṣṇa and he excepts his participation in Yāga. So, Uddhava says it is not appropriate to declare war currently. Next, Uddhava talks about the value of friendship. The use of force against the enemy even after a long period of time, will produce the desired result. But friends, once they drift apart, it is hard to reconcile, even when one pursues their cherished desires. Uddhava reminds Kṛṣṇa of one more thing to refrain from a hasty declaration of war. Lord Kṛṣṇa had promised his father's sister that she would forgive hundreds of faults of Śīsupāla. If war is declared as requested by Balarāma, it will be a violation of the vow given by Kṛṣṇa. With all these adverse factors, it is better for Kṛṣṇa to postpone the battle for the time being. In the mean time we need to hire spies who are capable of special purpose.

Because a real spy should be the one who knows all aspects of spying, because he should be able to understand the depth of the river who in the form of enemy and decide what is appropriate by his own ability. And such skilful people are appointed, they can go to the enemy country and create differences of opinion among the enemy's especially among the ministers and the king. Uddhava advises that on this occasion Kṛṣṇa should participate in the Rājasūya Yāga. Śīsupāla may be given a chance to make hundred mistakes. Uddhava also reckons that if Kṛṣṇa participates in the Rājasūya Yāga now, the opportunity to do so will present itself. The consideration and respect that Yudhiṣṭhira gives to Kṛṣṇa during the sacrifice will in any case anger Śīsupāla and his companions. At this point, the number of Śīsupāla's mistakes can be overcome and we can prepare for war and thereby kill Śīsupāla. Therefore, by doing these things, we can do two things; participating in the sacrifice and killing Śīsupāla.

Conclusion

Ministers have a high position in the administrative matters from the monarchy to the present democracy. they always have many responsibilities. Today there has been an increase in the number of ministers as compared to earlier times. It can be understood from the views of Balarāma and Uddhava in the poem Śīsupālavadhā that the country needs a minister like Uddhava. Because he represents a minister who deals with pros and cons of situation and present and future are dealt with very thoughtfully and advices are given for prosperity. Ministers are really the backbone of the nation. Even in the absence of the ruler, if there are strong ministers, the administration can go on without interference to some extent.

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