SECTION IV

CRITICAL APPRECIATION
CHAPTER 9

A Critical Appreciation of Bhattikāvya

Appreciation as a Mahākāvya

The earliest edition of Bhattikāvya was published in 1872 in Calcutta and was edited by Jayanatha Tarkaratna with the commentaries by Jayamangala and Bharatamallika. The editor has not made any remarks about the literary merits of Bhattikāvya. A similar edition was published from Calcutta in 1876. It was edited by Jivananda Vidyasagara Bhattacharya.

The next edition of Bhattikāvya (Cantos I-V) was edited by Shri M.R. Kale in 1897. In the introduction, the editor remarks, "Bhaṭṭi eminently possessed the poetic fancy and thoughtfulness which mark a great poet...... That he possesses the power of touching the inmost cards of the mind will be apparent from the words he has put in the mouths of Rāma, Marīcha and Kumbhakarṇa".\(^1\)

Another edition was published in 1898 as vol.LVI in Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit series. It was edited by Prof. K.P. Trivedi who contributed a studied introduction with critical notes. In the introduction, the editor remarks, "The Bhattikāvya is a work of great renown ...... Still it must be said in fairness to the author that the work is by no means dry or dull, and that there are many passages in it which can stand in comparison with the best of any of the Mahākāvyas".\(^2\)

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The editor of **Bhattikāvya** (published by Nirnayasagar Press; Bombay, 1906), V.N. Shastri, observes:

> व्याकरण निर्माणार्थ सब्जी रसेत ए | 
> पराक्रमानांतर्गत काव्य भूपकाव्य विराजते ||

In his *History of Sanskrit Classical Literature* (p.117), A.B. Keith notes, "... Bhatti contrived to produce some fairly interesting and at its best, both lively and effective verse."

In his *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature* (p.143) Krisnamachari remarks, "**Bhattikāvya** is a work of great renown."

In his *History of Sanskrit Literature* (p.183), S.K. De notes, "It must be said to Bhatti's credit that his narrative flows undisturbed by lengthy digressions; that his diction ...... is without complexities of involved construction and laboured compounds; that in spite of the inevitable play of word and thought, there is nothing recondite and obscure in his ideas; and that his versification is smooth, varied and lively."

Kunhan Raja, in his *Survey of Sanskrit Literature* (p.144) remarks, "There is beauty in his language and in the way in which he presents his theme, and the work deserves the appellation of a Grand Epic and it is so recognised. Here is a combination of poetic skill with erudition and skill."

Krishna Chaitanya in his *New History of Sanskrit Literature* (p.270) says, "Nevertheless occasionally it becomes difficult to withhold our admiration from this writer, when we see that he can manage really fine poetic touches."

Thus, critics of Sanskrit Literature have appreciated the literary merits of **Bhattikāvya** to some extent.
Alleged demerits and their critical examination:
the cumbrous impact of the illustrative aspect
on the poetic element of narration

Nevertheless, they have in fact appreciated it reservedly especially in view of the observation that the illustrative aspect of the Mahākāvyas has marred its poetic element to a large extent.

This sort of observation made by certain scholars may be cited as follows:

K.P. Trivedi notes, "It cannot be expected to come up in point of beauty to any one of the well-known Mahākāvyas."

A.B. Keith notes, "Indian opinion has given Bhaṭṭi without hesitation rank as a Mahākāvi. It is dubious if any sound taste can justify this position."

S.K. De observes, "The poet suffers from a banal theme but the inventions are negligible, and the difficult medium of a consciously laboured language is indeed a serious obstacle to their appreciation. Bhaṭṭi is a writer of much less original inspiration rather than his contemporaries. even his best is seriously flawed by his unfortunate outlook and few can speak of Bhaṭṭi's work with positive enthusiasm."

The unsuperseded poetic merits of Bhāṭṭikāvyas

This sort of criticism is indeed not entirely unjustified.

2 A History of Classical Sanskrit Literature, p.117.
3 A History of Sanskrit Literature, pp.183 ff.
The self-imposed additional purpose of illustrating rules of Grammar and Poetics would naturally mar the poetic merit of the composition to some extent. But it is hardly possible to accept that Bhaṭṭi, the grammarian has here superseded Bhatti the poet. Bhaṭṭi sometimes tried to reduce or extend his narrative to suit the illustrative purpose. The same is the case with descriptions, characterisation etc. Herein, the extensions have given him more scope for his poetic composition. For instance, Canto XI illustrating Mādhurya is replete with the vivid descriptions of the amorous sports of Rākṣasa couples. Similarly in Cantos VIII and IX illustrating Adhikārasūtras, the poet has narrated Hanūmat's flight and visit to Lāṅkā at length.

The self-imposed combination of two purposes has naturally put some restraint on the poet's scope for expression of Rasa, fluent narrative, vivid description etc. in certain portions of the Mahākāvya, but the poet has not overemphasised the illustrative aspect at the cost of literary merit. Certain portions of Bhaṭṭikāvya provide good examples of the poetic genius of Bhaṭṭi. This proves beyond doubt that Bhaṭṭi by no means lacked in poetic genius, though the double purpose, imposed by him did not give full scope to it throughout the poetic composition.

As M.R. Kale remarks, "... the insuperable difficulties the author had placed in his way as a poet by proposing to teach Grammar through the medium of poetry; and considering the poem as a whole we must say that the poet has acquitted himself admirably of the almost impossible task he had set himself about,

of making poetry peaceably shake hands with grammar. Bhaṭṭikāvya in this respect will ever remain a unique triumph achieved by true genius in the annals of Sanskrit letters."

While reviewing the Sanskrit Literature of Gujarat, Prin. A.B. Dhruva observes, "By indicating instruction in Grammar as the main purpose of his composition, the poet himself does injustice to his poem."

For in some portions, the poet has adjusted illustrations of grammar in a very natural way, without marring Rasa at all, and has also made a few cantos charming and embellished by illustrations of Rasa and Alaṅkāra; likewise descriptions of the autumn moon-rise etc. and many dialogues of polity are worthy of ranking Bhaṭṭi among the Sanskrit poets of the first row."

As Prof. R.C. Parikh observes, "This confession of the A.B. Dhruva, "Gujaratam Sanskrit Sāhitya" Digdāsana, pp. 11 ff.

2 Here the learned scholar has preferred the reading ḍṛṣṭaḍāsa to ḍṛṣṭaḍāsa and noted that the saying "Mirror in the hands of the blind," seems to have great antiquity in Gujarat, if the reading ḍṛṣṭaḍāsa be genuine. (Ibid., p.12,fn).

3 Here Prin. Dhruva draws our attention to the bearing of Kālidāsa in the narration of the return of Rāma and Sītā to Ayodhyā and also in some stray lines such as

\[ \text{नन्दनेश नन्दैः यष्टुत्ययः सः} \]
\[ \text{साधिः परेणां स्नु विमुख्य सरिताम्} \]
\[ \text{―XII,40.} \]

4 Presidential address of Classical Sanskrit Section, All India Oriental Conference, XXI Session (1961), p. 18 ff.

5 etc. (XXII,33).
author and the opinion of Ksemendra have created a sort of prejudice against this Mahākāvya. Those, however, who have cared to study the work, have recognised the merits of Bhattikāvya as a Mahākāvya.

In justification of this remark, Prof. Parikh cites the following quotation from Colebrooke's Essays, Vol. II (pp. 115 ff):

"Being composed purposely for the practical illustration of grammar, it exhibits a studied variety of diction, in which words anomalously inflected are most frequent. The style is neither obscure nor inelegant and the poem reckoned among the classical compositions in the Sanskrit language."

As Krisna Chaitnya remarks, "Bhaṭṭi can manage really fine poetic touches even while teaching grammar to a reluctant readership."

While dealing with the poetic treatment of Bhattikāvya, we noticed that Bhaṭṭi has ingeniously adopted some additions and modifications in the subject-matter.

He has depicted Vīra Rasa and its accessory Bhāvas vividly. He has presented a graphic description of topics such as the autumn, the rainy season and Rāma's state in it, Hanūmat's visit

1. Suvṛttatilaka, III, 4:  


3. Vide chapters 2, 3, and 4 above.
to Sītā and his visit to Rāvana\(^1\).

The citation of verses from Bhattikāvyā as typical examples of graphic descriptions in anthologies of subhāṣītas is clearly indicative of the popularity of the poet’s imagery\(^2\).

He has employed a variety of metres and figures of speech in his compositions. Verses from Bhattikāvyā are quoted as illustrations of certain metres and figures of speech in several works on Metrics and Poetics respectively\(^3\).

The illustrative aspect of the Mahākāvyā has no doubt left some cumbrous impact on the poetic element of the composition, but the grammarian in Bhaṭṭi does not push the poet in him into the background. The Mahākāvyā of the poetic type is the principal form of his composition, wherein he has interwoven the illustrative aspect. Bhaṭṭi was no doubt a great grammarian, but

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1 Vide pp. 144 ff above, also vide K.P. Trivedi (ed.), *Bhattikāvyā*, Intro., p. xiii fn:

The following are some of these passages in the first nine cantos:— Canto I, vs.6-8; Canto II, the description of Sarad vs. (1-19), 25, 41, 47; Canto III, vs.12-14, 51-55; Canto IV, vs.35-36, 38, 39; Canto V, vs.10-45, 51, 71-74, 84-89, 102; Canto VI, 10-39, Rāma’s grief for Sīta (73-85), 104-105; Canto VII, the description of the rainy season and Rāma’s state in it (vs.1-13), 99, 106-109; Canto VIII, 82-84, 95-98, 104-126; Canto IX, 57, 107, 110-136.

2 For details, vide Appendix E below.

3 Vide Appendix E below.
his principal aim in this composition seems to write a Mahākāvya rather than a Śastrakāvya.

The illustrations are adjusted to the narrative to a far larger extent, in comparison to the narrative adjusted to the illustrations. The fact that he has not been particular about illustrating the sūtras in their original sequence, corroborates this observation. Had Bhātṭi undertaken to elucidate the rules of grammar as his principal aim, he would have treated the narrative in a very subsidiary way. Nor would he have used the forms which hardly seem regular grammatically.

But the author of this composition is in fact more a poet than a grammarian, though his literary merit is hampered by the illustrative aspect at several places. He does not fail to give full vent to his poetic genius, wherever he gets scope for it.

The literary merit reflected in these portions yields warranted evidence for his poetic genius.

This leads us to conclude that Bhattikāvya was primarily composed as a Mahākāvya, wherein the poet tried to interweave illustrations which naturally hamper the poetic merit at times.

The unique character of Bhattikāvya

But the real significance of Bhattikāvya lies in the combination of the narrative aspect and the illustrative aspect. As noticed above, it is the earliest known example of this type. The internal evidence supplied by the concluding verses (XXII, 32-34) makes it clear that here Bhātṭi has initiated this unique type of Mahākāvya.

It is generally held that Bhattikāvya was intended to
teach grammar through the medium of poetry. As sheer memorisation of dry rules of grammar would be tedious to students, the technique of transmitting the rules of grammar through illustrations interwoven in the narration of a mahākāvya would prove to be an ingenious method of teaching grammar.

The traditional account of circumstances that led to the composition of this poem corroborates this view.

Even as a grammarian Bhaṭṭi was esteemed as a sort of authority. A number of peculiar grammatical forms and usages are corroborated by verses from Bhattikāvya and great ingenuity was shown in establishing the correctness of the peculiar forms occurring in it.

Anyway, it is obvious that Bhaṭṭi has contrived to interweave the illustrative aspect with the narrative one. Therefore Bhattikāvya should really be assessed as a Mahākāvya with a double purpose rather than as a Mahākāvya of purely poetic merit or a Sāstrakāvya of a mainly illustrative character. In fact, we should examine how far Bhaṭṭi has been successful in the new technique adopted by him.

2 M.R. Kale (ed.), Bhattikāvya, Intro., p.iv:

"The traditional account of the composition of the poem is that on one occasion, the poet's lecture on Grammar was interrupted by an elephant happening to pass between him and his pupils, and that a year's suspension of grammatical studies followed, during which as a contrivance to keep up the studies on Grammar, this poem was composed to do duty for, without formally being, a grammatical work." -Prof. Kunja Lal Nag.
3 Vide Appendix E below.
This aspect of assessment is hardly taken into consideration by critics of Sanskrit literature. In this respect, Keith\(^1\) thus appreciates it negatively as follows, "The combination of pleasure and profit is by no means ill-devised." Kale and De appreciate it rather affirmatively. Kale remarks, "As a grammarian poet, Bhaṭṭi will ever remain a solitary star shining in the firmament of Sanskrit literature."\(^2\) De observes, "The work is a great triumph of artifice and perhaps more reasonably accomplished than such later triumphs of artifice."\(^3\)

A comparative study of the narrative aspect and the illustrative aspect clearly indicates that Bhaṭṭi has aimed at the double purpose from the very outset and has planned the requisite device.

He seems to have conceived ample scope for illustrating the Tiṅanta section of grammar in his composition and adjusted it to the cantos reserved for narrating the episodes of the battle and consequent dialogues and lamentations. The former were naturally narrated in the different Past Tenses, while in the latter, he could ingeniously contrive to present direct speeches in the other Tenses and Moods by simply introducing the speeches with the reporting verbs in the Past Tense\(^4\).

Next he seems to have selected Adhikārasūtras which he adjusted to the narration of the episodes drawn from the latter portion of the Aranyakāṇḍa, the Kिञ्चिन्धाकान्तa and the Sundarakāṇḍa, wherein the narrative moves rather slowly.

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1 Op. Cit.
4 For details vide chapter 7.
He treats the remaining types of sūtras as miscellaneous and adjusts them to the preceding portions of the narrative, which moves, at a comparatively quick pace.

Bhaṭṭi had a special personal leaning towards grammar and as he makes it clear at the conclusion of his composition, it can be well appreciated only by those conversant with grammar. Nevertheless Bhaṭṭi has not overemphasised the purpose of illustrating rules of grammar and not been rigid in his treatment. Even in the Tiṅntakāṇḍa, he is content with illustrating select verbs that would naturally fit in with the narrative and not avaricious in exhausting the list of verbs by overloading the narrative with them.

In Adhikārakāṇḍa and Prakīrtiṃkāṇḍa too, he has been content with illustrating some select sūtras that would suit his narrative. He is rigid neither about the number nor the sequence of the sūtras. Even in Adhikārakāṇḍa, he has illustrated Prakīrtiṃsūtras between the adhikāras.

Though Bhaṭṭi has emphasised the grammatical aspect of his composition in the concluding verses, he has not been content with illustrating 'Śabdalakṣaṇa'. In addition to 'Śabdalakṣaṇa', he also aims at illustrating 'Kāvyalakṣaṇa' and devotes one Kāṇḍa to the latter.

The poet has not been rigid even regarding the intersequence of the Kāṇḍa on 'Kāvyalakṣaṇa' and the three Kāṇḍas on 'Śabdalakṣaṇa'. With his ingenious foresight, he has interwoven this Kāṇḍa with the narration of the episodes preceding those of the battle (reserved for the Tiṅntakāṇḍa).

Though Kāvyasāstra comprised a number of varied subjects in
subsequent times, it was confined to only some of them in the times of Bhaṭṭi. Among them Gūṇas and Alāṅkāras formed the principal subjects. In the time of Bhaṭṭi and Bhāmaha, special emphasis was laid on Alāṅkāra rather than Gūṇas. Accordingly, Bhaṭṭi seems to have illustrated all the known alāṅkāras of his time exhaustively. Here he has also spared no pains to illustrate the varieties of certain alāṅkāras which were presumably recognised in his time.

In the portion of the narrative (Cantos X-XIII) selected for the Kānda on 'Kāvyalakṣaṇa', Bhaṭṭi has skilfully interwoven illustrations of alāṅkāras with the episodes narrated in Canto X, which are especially amenable to expressions of varied poetic imagery. For instance, the narration of 'Lāṅkā-dahan' by Hanūmat provides ample scope for illustrating numerous kinds of Yamaka. The employment of varied metres has naturally facilitated the poet to illustrate the different alāṅkāras in a continuous narrative.

Among gūṇas, Bhaṭṭi's choice falls on Mādhurya and Bhāvikatva and he devotes one canto each to illustrate them. Bhaṭṭi seems to have perceived Prasāda as an all pervading gūṇa in kāvya, inasmuch as he has designated the entire kānda (or 'Kāvyalakṣaṇa') 'Prasannakānda'. Hence in a poetic composition of this concept, he naturally seems to have not devoted any canto to illustrating ojas which would be incompatible with Prasāda.

Bhaṭṭi was proficient in Sanskrit and Prakrit as well. In this Mahākāvyā composed in Sanskrit, he cleverly contrived to incorporate one entire canto illustrating Bhāpasamāvesa, wherein Prakrit expressions were included into Sanskrit ones through
His meticulous planning is here well revealed in his interweaving Bhāṣāsamāvesa with the narration of the descriptive topics, Setubandha and the observation of the two military camps. He has employed the metre Āryāgiti as the principal metre in this canto. In this respect, too, he can be deemed as contributing an initiative.

General Estimate

From this it is clear that Bhaṭṭi has kept the narrative as the warp in his view and treated the illustrations as the woof crossed through it. In most of the portions he has interwoven the warp and woof with great dexterity. In this respect, he has tried to supply illustrations without hampering the literary merit of the narrative as far as possible. The later poets who composed Mahākāvyas of this type are found to have leaned more towards the illustrative and therefore been more prone to slackness in the literary merit of their compositions. In comparison to them, Bhaṭṭi seems to have been more successful in interweaving the two different threads of his composition with such dexterity that the poetic merit of the composition may suffer to the smallest possible extent. As remarked above, as a Mahākāvyā with a double purpose, it hardly presents a perfect work or even a perfect work of an illustrative character. But on being assessed as a Mahākāvyā combining the two different purposes, Bhattikāvyā obviously seems to represent a considerably successful combination produced by an ingenious coordinator like Bhaṭṭi. It is evidently on this account that Bhattikāvyā is esteemed as a
As the early example of the Mahākavya of this type, Bhattikāvyya has deservedly received special notice in the History of Sanskrit Literature. The large number of commentaries is indicative of the popularity of Bhattikāvyya among the Sanskrit Mahākāvyas of this type.

1 Suvṛttatilaka, III, 4:

शास्त्रकायम् अनुवर्तिनाय सर्वोपदेशकृत ्
भृद्धःभृद्रमायायि काव्यकारः प्रचासने ॥