Some Sanskrit Poetesses - A Study

A Summary of the Thesis
submitted to
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda
For the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(in Sanskrit)

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AUGUST – 2003
SUMMARY

HOW THE PRESENT WORK TENDS TO THE GENERAL ADVANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION:

From the time immemorial women have taken an active part in the literary pursuit of India. In each field of human progress the contribution of women has been a key factor. The field of creative literature is not an exception. From the perusal of some of the works, which have come to light so far, it is known that the area of Sanskrit Creative literature, especially the field of poetry has been immensely enriched by Sanskrit poetesses since more than two thousand years.

Starting from the Vedic period up to now, there are poetesses who invite the attention of a serious researcher towards their contribution to Sanskrit Literature. The works dealing with different aspects of human life, various features of Indian culture and society in those days have been highlighted by the Poetesses of past and present.

The study comprehensive and critical in its nature dealing with all important aspects of some prominent Sanskrit poetesses is a desideratum. As far as I know no attempt has been made to study critically the Sanskrit poetesses who have significantly contributed to the various aspects of Indology like Indian culture, historical and political conditions as well as philosophical and Mythological trends and thoughts. It is therefore an attempt made for the first time to
study critically the prominent Sanskrit works of the poetesses belonging to the Vedic age, medieval period and modern age.

The present work aims at discussing and delineating various compositions of some Sanskrit Poetesses. Since the work is comprehensive and critical in its nature it is expected to contribute to the field of Sanskrit literature in general and Sanskrit kāvya Literature in particular.
The present work is divided into the following chapters based on the prominent works of the Sanskrit poetesses studied by me.

**CHAPTER – I**

**INTRODUCTION**

**BRIEF SURVEY OF SANSKRIT POETESSSES**

In this introductory chapter, I have briefly surveyed the significant contribution of the Sanskrit poetesses right from the Vedic age upto the modern period.

There are as many as 27 female seers (*Brahmavādinī* of the *Ṛgveda*, *Bṛhaddevatā* of Śaunaka–II.82-84):

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Bhūṣaṇa} & \text{ Gṛhā ṛṣibhavya apālōpapitētā} \| \\
\text{Brāhmaṇa} & \text{ suṣṭām āgaṃtāyasya śvastāditya: II.82} \| \\
\text{Hrṣaṇī} & \text{ chandāmāta c sarman roṃśaṃvārṣe} \| \\
\text{Loṭapāgūra} & \text{ c navaktīṃ bhī nāri c śṛṅke} II.83 \| \\
\text{Śrīraṃkṣhā} & \text{ sāraparāji vāk śṛṅka maṭha c dṛṣṭiṣa} \| \\
\text{Ratnī} & \text{ sūrya c saṃkṣiṇī brāhmaṇādvyā iṁśiṣa } II.82–84 \|
\end{align*} \]

The Ātreyā house produced the poetesses Viśvavārā (RV-V.28) and Apālā (RV-VIII.91). In the *Kāśīvat* house there was a line of poetesses and of these Ghoṣā was the greatest. The examples of Apālā, Ghoṣā and Viśvavārā, however, prove that the learned and prominent ladies like them were more concerned with family life, conjugal happiness and domestic well-being than anything else. These learned ladies were not only aware of the greatness and capabilities of the personages invoked by them but they also knew
different people saved and helped by these divinities.

Some of these are merely natural phenomena personified such as \textit{Rātri, Sūryā, Nadyah}, etc. Some again are well-known mythical figures such as Indrāṇī, Aditi, Urvasī, Yamī, Śāśvatī, etc. These poetesses finally portray feminine ideas and ideals. Some of them were undoubtedly celebrated both for their poetic genius and spiritual attainments. They were well-versed in the folklore and the tradition of the time. Thus, these Rgvedic poetesses have some definite purport, purpose and precept. Their hymns throw light on the social structure of the Rgvedic society.

During the medieval period (4\textsuperscript{th}-18\textsuperscript{th} century) also we find a number of learned ladies who have contributed significantly to the Sanskrit literature. Some prominent Sanskrit poetesses of this era are – Bhāvadevi, Cinnamma, Sarasvatī, Śilā Bhaṭṭārikā, Sītā, Vijjā, Vikaṭanitambā, Madālasā, Mārulā, Morikā, Gaṅgādevī, Viśvāsadevī, Bīnabāī, Priyamvadā, Padmāvatī, Tirumalāmbā, Rāmabhadrāmbā, Devakumārikā and Lakṣmī Rājñī. These poetesses shed light on contemporary historical, religious and political situation and thus depict graphic picture of the society prevalent in those days.

The spirit of self-confidence amongst the women writers of our country is revealed even in the present times. Thus, the glorious tradition of the Sanskrit poetesses is continued even today. There are a number of Sanskrit poetesses belonging to the post independence period. Among them, the prominent female writers are Pandita
Kshama Rao, Vanmala Bhavalkar, Nalini Shukla, Pushpa Trivedi, Mithileshkumari Mishra, Uma Deshpande and Pravesh Saxena. Their style of presentation differs from that of the Vedic and medieval Sanskrit poetesses.

There are several works composed by Pandita Kshama Rao, to name a few – *Satyāgrahagītā, Mīrālahari, Uttarasyāgrahagītā, Tukārāmacaritam, Rāmadāsacaritam, Jñānesvaracaritam*, etc. Besides, there are collections of short stories, viz. *Kathāpañcakam, Kathāmuktāvali* etc.

Vanmala Bhavalkar, a poetess from Sagar University has composed two ballet titled *Rāmavanagamanam* and *Pārvatīpарамēśvaram.*

*Bhāvānjaliḥ*, a collection of *stotras* by Nalini Shukla containing the glorificatory prayers to various deities.

Pushpa Trivedi’s *Agniśikhā* comprises of 50 small poems depicting miserable condition of a lady separated from her lover.

Uma Deshpande’s *Arcanam* consists of small poems dealing with various social and cultural topics. It also depicts the biographical sketches of a few celebrated personages.

*Vyāsaśatakam* of Mitihileshkumari Mishra is a collection of 100 verses describing the scholarship and greatness of the well known sage Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsa.

Pravesh Saxena’s *Anubhūti* is a collection of 50 small poems. It also consists of translation of poems from other languages.
CHAPTER – II
TITLE OF THE TEXTS

This chapter explains the title of the texts.

CHAPTER – III
SUMMARY OF THE TEXTS

In this chapter canto-wise summary of the texts is given.

CHAPTER – IV
HISTORICAL DATA

This chapter sheds light on the historical data of some of the texts. It comprises of the description of the hero, his ancestors, his scholarship, and city.

CHAPTER – V
GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

This chapter includes mainly the description of cities, provinces, rivers, mountains, lakes, etc.

CHAPTER – VI
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DATA

This chapter provides information regarding different aspects of society reflected in the texts studied by me. It delineates the customs and traditions of those days and also the ceremonies and festivals described in the texts. It also deals with political situation prevalent in that period.

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CHAPTER – VII

THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRENDS AND THOUGHTS

In this chapter philosophical tenets occurring in some of the texts are dealt with.

CHAPTER – VIII

MYTHOLOGICAL DATA

This chapter highlights the mythological figures and episodes found in the texts.

CHAPTER – IX

LITERARY APPRECIATION OF THE TEXTS

Here an attempt is made to evaluate the texts from the literary point of view, particularly with reference to the form of the text, its definition and characteristics. It also describes the sentiments (Rasa), drawbacks (Doṣa), excellences (Guna), style (Riti), figures of speech (Alaṅkāra), propriety (Aucitya), Pāka and metres (Chanda).

CHAPTER – X

COMPARATIVE STUDY

This chapter highlights the comparative study of the texts with allied compositions.

CHAPTER – XI

GENERAL ESTIMATE AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter concludes the whole study with the resume and
evaluation of the texts studied by me. Thus I have finally attempted to estimate the contribution of the prominent Sanskrit poetesses in the light of glorious tradition of Sanskrit poetry in general and the compositions of the poetesses belonging to different eras and to various Indian regions in particular.

**APPENDIX – I**

Authors mentioned in the texts studied by me.

**APPENDIX – II**

Works referred in the texts studied by me.

**APPENDIX – III**

A list of *Subhāṣitas* from the texts.

Flora and Fauna

Bibliography
Śrī Kṛṣṇa (c. 1950-1400 BC):

God Kṛṣṇa, the perennial source of inspiration and enlightenment, is frequently referred and depicted by number of poets and poetesses since many centuries. This divine personality is also depicted by the poetesses like Lakṣmī Rājñī of the medieval period and Nalini Shukla and Uma Deshpande of the modern period:

In the text Santānagopāla Kāvyā, the poetess has described Lord Kṛṣṇa along with Arjuna who bring back successfully the children of Brahmin and is praised as a slayer of the evil persons and as the savior of the foetus of Uttarā:

The Prominent Episodes Related with God Kṛṣṇa:

The killing of Pūtaṇā, uprooting of the Arjuna trees, mother Yaśodā inflicting punishment to little Kṛṣṇa killing of the Kāliyā serpent, lifting of the Govardhana mountain, the event of gem Syamantaka, slaughter of demon Narakāśura etc. are depicted by poetess Lakṣmī Rājñī in her
Putana (sister of Kaṁsa) was sent by Kaṁsa to kill Kṛṣṇa who killed her while she was feeding him, as depicted by poetess Lakṣmī Rājñī in the following verse:

सपद्र ततच कस्मिन्योजिता विष विलसकुछं दिसती तव।
निषिद्धरी बल येन हि यूत्ता सुनिहता निहामितवालकः।

The same reference is found in Bhāgavata Purāṇa:

तस्मिन् सत्तनं दुरवर्षीयं मूल्यं घोरावऽग्रामदाय शिषोददाय।
गाढं करस्यं भगवान् प्रीष्ठं तत्त्रां: समं रोपसमनितोधिततु॥ भ.पु.-१०.६.१०॥

सा मुखः मुखालंस्मित प्रभाषणिः निष्पादकमानाखिलजीवमर्णिः।
विवृत्तं नेत्री चरणी भुजी मूहः प्रस्तवनांग्रां सिपती रुद्रे ह ॥ भ.पु.-१०.६.११॥

Yaśodā, tied Kṛṣṇa with rope to a mortar:

निषिद्धगोपवधूनिदयादि स्वजन्नी नवनीतपोमुः।
नियमनं तु कथयिदुवृक्षते कुलवती तव सीतासाक्ताः॥ सन्तानगोपाल-३.२९॥

तं मलाक्षमथम्यकं मत्तर्तिनेत्रभोजनम्।
गोपिकोलूकेण दाम्पा बम्प्य प्राप्तं यथा ॥ भागवतपुराण-१०.९.१४॥

The episode of Kāliyā Serpent, is referred by poetess Lakṣmī Rājñī in the following verse:

स्वबिष्टदृतसूर्यसुताजलं विमदयनं फणिनायकमाय।
सुरजनेन सुमैरविबिचित: स्तुतवता तव नाळतन्त्रातुरीम्॥ सन्तानगोपाल-३.३१॥

यदू विष्ठो न नमतेऽप्रका सर्वजीवसत्तमंदेव खरदन्दप्रदोभिः पाति।
क्षिणायुः प्रभत उल्लभमास्ततैसुध्वस्त्तो वसमनं परमकर्मलमावः॥ भ.पु.-१०.१६.२८॥

God Kṛṣṇa came to the rescue of the cowherds, lifted up the mount Govardhan and thus protected them all, as referred by poetess Lakṣmī Rājñī in the following verse:

रण्तविद्विश्वाः सुजे प्रशामनं स्वकरोदः पत्वत्।
गतमदेन सचीपतिना पुनर्दिविवहिताः: समपूज्यव:॥ सन्तानगोपाल-३.३३॥
The same reference is found in Bhāgavata Purāṇa:

इन्दुस्तनैकेन हहतेन कृत्वा गोवर्धनाचलम्।
दधार लीलया कृष्णरक्षाकपिव बालकः॥ भागवतपुराण-१०.२५.१९॥

Poetess depicts this episode of gem *Syamantaka* in the following verse:

दिनकुरासमरेरपि यादवाद्वः भवति दुर्विचनाच्यकितात्मनः।
अष्ट वरान्धि लब्धसुतस्तयोरसुरथःकथीः करमग्रहः॥ सं.गो.-३.४०॥

The same reference is found in Bhāgavata Purāṇa:

स्यमतकं दर्शिविचा शालित्वोरज्र आतत्मः।
विमूच्छ्य मणिना भूयस्तस्य प्रवर्षयतं प्रभूः॥ भागवतपुराण-१०.५७.४१॥

The huge fight between Kṛṣṇa and Narakāsura took place in which God Kṛṣṇa killed Narakāsura with his *Sudarśana Chakra* and released the ladies who were formerly in the clutches of Narakāsura:

नरकदेत्यजित्वशुनयन्तरीजानमृत्योऽपरिगतवतः पुनः।
सुरमुनिः प्रवर्ष निदर्शितं स्वमहिमा महिमापि च वस्य से॥ संतानगोपाल-३.४२॥

The same reference is found in Bhāgavata Purāṇa:

पुरमेवादिविश्वारातः नरकस्य युध्युध्यत॥
द्वा विद्रावितं सैन्य मर्देनान्तितं स्वकम्॥ भागवतपुराण-१०.५९.१९॥

तः भौमः प्राहर्च्चक्ष्या वचः प्रतिविद्धत यतः।
नाकम्पत्त तत्व चिन्हों मालाहत्व इव हिप्नः॥ भागवतपुराण-१०.५९.२०॥

शूलं भौमोर्च्च्युतं हनुमानादे वित्स्वैत्तिकः।
तद्विसर्गातु पूर्वमेव नरकस्ते चिन्तो यत्र हिरि॥
अपाहर्दार गजस्तिम सक्रेन्द्राय स्युनन्तिना॥ भागवतपुराण-१०.५९.२१॥

The Episode of Śiśupālavadha is as follows:

In the Rājasuya sacrifice performed by Yudhiṣṭhira, Kṛṣṇa was the recipient of all the offerings of the sacrifice (*Yajña*). Śiśupāla enraged at this, began to abuse Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa on completion of his 100th sin, killed Śiśupāla with his *Sudarśana Cakra*:
Poetess Uma Deshpande has also composed verses glorifying God Kṛṣṇa and His immortal Bhagavatagītā. According to the poetess, God Kṛṣṇa is the protector of good ones and destroyer of evil people:

कल्याणक्षेत्रसमो दाता माता च सर्वप्राणिनाम्।
ईश्वर: सर्वभूतानां हदेशे विष्णु व सदा॥ अर्चनम॥

परम्प्राण्वर्वमं तं भूकिमुक्तिपदं परम्।
धातारं सर्वभूतानां कृष्णं वन्दे जगदरुपम॥ अर्चनम॥

Bhagavatagītā is the pinnacle of the majestic wisdom of Śri Kṛṣṇa. In “Gītārthabhāvanam” poetess points out the significance of Karma, Yoga and Bhakti in human life:

यस्य नाइक्षो भावो बुद्धियो स्व पलियते।
सबन: स हि मन्तव्य: परारंह यत्ते सदा॥ अर्चनम॥

स्वकीयं सहजं कर्म सदोषमयि न त्यजेत्।
ईश्वर्य पूजनं कृपात् स्वकर्मकुसूमैवरम्॥ अर्चनम॥

Conclusion:

The historical compositions are very important because they contain the glimpses of great cultural and historical heritage of our motherland. Madhurāvijayam, Raghunātha-Abhyudaya and Vaidyanātha-prāśada-praśasti are therefore significant since they depict the prominent episodes and events that took place during 14th, 16th, 17th and 18th century AD. In the galaxy of Sanskrit compositions we find very few texts depicting the cultural and historical aspects of Indology. Thus these compositions contribute to a number of Indological branches like poetry, history, geography and sociology of the medieval period. These medieval poetesses therefore appear to be not only an erudite scholars well versed in different branches of knowledge but also prominent writers having absolute control over language and literary diction befitting the theme of the poetry.
CHAPTER – V

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

In this chapter Geographical references found in the texts Madhuravijayam, Raghunatha-Abhyudaya, Vaidyanatha-prasāda-praśasti, Santanagopāla Kāvya, Arcanam and Anubhūti are discussed briefly.

These compositions highlight provinces, cities, temples, mountains, rivers and lakes mentioned therein.

In the Mahākāvya Madhuravijayam, we find the description of a number of cities and provinces like Madhura, Kanchi, Vijaynagar, Pandya, Magadh, Simhal, Gaud, Kaling etc. (vide maps attached herewith).

The principalities ruled by the kings during the Medieval Period (Madhuravijayam)

The Vijaynagar Empire was established by king Bukka (1336 AD). Later on the Vijaynagar Empire was ruled and taken care by king Bukka’s son king Kampana (1400 AD). King Kampana was a very strong and versatile monarch responsible for dynamic development of the province of Vijaynagar. He killed Śambuvarāya who ruled over Kanchi. It can be noticed that these rulers of Pandya, Chola and Kerala had accompanied him during his invasion towards the city of Kanchi. During the invasion these feudatory kings played the role of staff bearers (Pādacārins):

आलोकशब्दमुखौरस्याग्रे पादचारिभि:
चोलकेरलपाण्डवादि वेंटिल्प्रत्ययं तं मधुराविजयम् ४.३२॥

Moreover, the rulers of Magadh, Malav, Simhal, Dravid, Kerala, Gaud were waiting for the opportunity to pay respect to king Kampana:

मधुमालवसेमण्डिः प्रतिकेरलगौलमुखौर्तपिः:
अवसरापैपर्नुवासरुसिधं प्रतिहारमुखः प्रभोः मधुराविजयम् ५.१॥
The principalities ruled by the Feudatory Kings (Ragbunatha-Abhyudaya)

The third dynasty of the Vijaynagar Empire was called the Tuluva dynasty which was ruled by king Timma, king Cevva, king Aycutarāya and king Raghunātha. King Raghunātha was a valorous and a powerful ruler who defeated Cholaga, the ruler of the Devikottah, Jaggarāya, the ruler of the Karnat region and the foreign rulers like Parangis (Portuguese), who had established their rule in Nepal (Jaffna).

King Raghunātha was also helped by the rulers of Magadh, Pandya, Simhal, Gaud, Kaling, Kerala, Tundir:

Magadh:

पार्श्वोर्मगधमालवेश्वरी बाहुधाम नूपपाकशासितुः।
हाटकाल्पितपदाधिवीजनव्याजवसरचयता विजुभितम्॥ रघुनाथायम्यदम्-5.40॥

King of Magadh is said to be one of the arms of king Raghunātha.

N. L. Dey in his book “The Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval India” states, “Magadh is the province of South Bihar and it is located on the south bank of the river Ganga.”

Dr. D. G. Vedia in his book “Viśvagunāḍarśa Campū” observes “Ancient Magadh country comprised of the Patan and Gaya districts of South Bihar.”

Simhal:

पाण्डवमण्डनूपालकायणीहस्तसत्तवारूतावलम्बनम्।
सिंहलक्षितिपरिहस्तमृतोपादलम्बितचलप्पच्यवलम्॥ रघुनाथायम्यदम्-5.34॥

N. M. Kansara in his book ‘Tilakamaṇḍari’ states, “It is an island in the southern ocean. It is identified as modern Ceylon.”

Gaud:

अर्हतलचिरानकलपम् हंसवेशरसणीवात्तन्तिताम्।
पूरिताः शिष्टिरवारिपूर्तो गौडमूर्तिराधानलितकाम्॥ रघुनाथायम्यदम्-5.42॥
Poetess Uma Deshpande, in her *Arcanam* has described various topics which can be categorised under the importance of Sanskrit language, love for the Motherland, depiction of great personalities etc.:

She has composed *Garabā* and *Hāyakū* (one of the literary forms of composition most prevalent in literature of Japan). Illustrations of *Garabā* (*Maṇḍalaṁtyaṇīgītāṇi*) are:

\[
\text{अनमानो मातरम्}.
\]

\[
\text{भावपूर्णमानसं चित्तं विनीतम्।}
\]

\[
\text{अस्माकं लोणं मातरि रे}
\]

\[
\text{मुहुःहुः मातरं रे।} \text{॥१॥}
\]

\[
\text{कारुण्यपूर्णं मातु: स्वरूपं}
\]

\[
\text{तत्स्या: हि पावनं रम्यं स्वधाम}
\]

\[
\text{पश्यामो दिव्यं मन्दिरं रे}
\]

\[
\text{पुन: पुनर्भागम: शरदा रे।} \text{॥२॥}
\]

\[
\text{भ्राजते ललिता सुरश्री:।}
\]

\[
\text{जननी गौरी रे, देवी माता भवानी।}
\]

\[
\text{अन्वा शारदा रे, भ्राजते ललिता सुरश्री।।}
\]

\[
\text{धरणी रम्या रे पूर्णा, ज्योत्स्नामयी सा . . . . २}
\]

\[
\text{आनन्दव्यासं मातसं नो माता भवानी।} \text{॥२॥}
\]
Illustrations of अनुभूति are:

सूनूता बाणी
अधिकारिणां मन्ये
अनन्य वृद्धि: ॥१॥

dुःखततस्य
का कथा मानवस्य
चन्द्रोपि सूर्यस्य कथाते ॥२॥

अहं त्वदीया
परमात्मनूः परेश !
वीचिर्जलस्य ॥४॥

मुरुंभ शैशवं
कैतकीपर्णुल्लाम्
समेश्वर प्रियम् ॥८॥

सलीला बाळा:
नभाकुण्ये तारका:
अस्पांके प्रिया: ॥११॥

युवा समर्थः
प्रकृतः सहकारः
नयनोत्सजः।

तब प्रसादः
आधारो मानवानाम्
सूर्यस्वस्तः।

प्रियविरहः
सुखशून्यो मानवः
कहणो रसः।
भारतवर्षम्
हन्तर्नुमर्नोशम्
संयोगर्म्यम्।

Poetess Pravesh Saxena’s ‘Anubhūti’ is also a collection of various poems depicting the topics like importance of Vedic Language, Nature, love towards India and nature of life:
The style adopted by these poetesses is *Vaidarbhī*.

*Gugas* like *Prasāda* and *Mādhurya* are found in the composition of poetess Kshamadevi Rao, Vanmala Bhavalkar, Nalini Shukla, Mithileshkumari Mishra, Uma Deshpande and Pravesh Saxena.

Moreover, *Aṅkāras* like *Kāvyaliṅga*, *Svabhāvokti*, *Vyatireka*, *Utpreksā*, *Upamā* etc. are found in their compositions.

Metres used by these modern poetesses are *Upajāti*, *Anuṣṭup*, *Mandākrāntā*, *Harinī*, *Viyoginī*, *Mālinī*, *Vasantatilakā*, *Śārdūlavikṛīditam*, *Śikharinī*, *Drṭavilambita*, *Vaiṣṇatha* etc.

**Conclusion:**

In the medieval period poetesses like Gaṅgādevī and Rāmabhadrāmbā have rightly followed the definition of a *Mahākāvyya* and have employed the appropriate metres and have described various aspects of nature like sunrise, sunset, rivers, lakes, ponds and warfares which took place in 14th to 18th century AD.

Similarly in the compositions *Vaidyanātha-prāśāda-praśasti* and *Santānagopāla* poetesses have followed the rules of a *Khaṇḍakāvyya* as stated by poeticians Rudraṭa and Viśvanātha.

These texts like *Madhurāvijayam*, *Vaidyanātha-prāśāda-praśasti* are composed in *Vaidarbhī* style. Poetesses have used simple language and