CHAPTER IV

THE ROLE OF SŪTRADHĀRA IN THE KĀMAKUMĀRAHARĀNA

One of the striking features of the KH is the over-bearing role of Sūtradhāra. In his KH, Kavicandra assigns so much activities to the Sūtradhāra that his presence on the stage is very much essential throughout the performance. He remains dynamic from beginning to the end of the drama—by introducing every actor and incident to the audience. He may be considered as the keyman to the entire show as he helps the audience in relishing different rasas by way of hinting at the tricky points through his narrative statements.

Dramatic literature or the drṣṭyakāvyā is regarded as the best medium for rasa-realisation by literary critics. Rasa-realisation can be had when we see things powerfully presented before our eyes—mental and physical. In a dramatic performance, the actors personating different characters with appropriate dress and mood, bring the entire events to the eyes of the audience, and thus it becomes most powerful and effective in appeal. And due to this powerful effect in rasa-realisation, the Ālaṃkārikas like Vāmana, Ānadvardhana, Abhinavagupta, Bhoja and others consider dramatic composition as the best form of literary art. Vāmana holds the view that “among compositions, dramatic is the best, for it is variegated and hence complete and wonderful like a picture”

cf. sandarbheṣu daśarūpakāṁ śreyah /

tad-hi citram, citrapaṭavat / viśeṣaśākalyād /\(^1\)

1. KLSV I. ii, 31/32
Abhinavagupta, in his *Abhinavabhārati*, calls dramatic literature as the literature *per excellence* because of its suitability for complete rasa-realisation. Bhoja, too, admits that rasa is realised by the audience when presented by clever actors.²

As the literary critics consider a dramatic composition as the best media for rasa-realisation and a successful performance of such a composition requires clever actors, and then, the need of a good director also cannot be denied. In such a situation, perhaps, the character of Sūtradhāra, which may be called stage-manager, is introduced in classical Sanskrit dramas.³ Here Sūtradhāra is the first one to appear on the stage to indicate the events to be shown to the audience. He is also called upon to create an atmosphere for rasa-realisation by way of proper arrangement and conduct of the dramatic performance.

In a classical Sanskrit drama the Sūtradhāra is an essential part of the prologue (*prastāvanā*). He is assigned with the responsibility of performing preliminaries, as well as assigning the different actors, the roles they are expected to perform. The preliminaries include the recitation of Nāndī⁴ as well

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2. cf. "sa (rasaḥ) ca anubhavaikagamyatād-asarvaviṣayatvācca dūravaseyaḥ; samyagabhinayeṣu vā vidagdhaśailuṣaiḥ pradarsyamānāḥ sāmājikairavadhāryate—“

3. In modern terminology the Sūtradhāra may be called the director of a drama whose duty is to conduct the stage performance and to look after the stage technique.

4. Nāndī is defined as—

   आश्रवचनसाहित्युक्ता सूतियर्यास्मातप्रयुज्यate ।
   देवद्विजांपदिनांतस्मान्नादिति सानिज्ञति //

   —SD. VI. 24
as making of \textit{prarocana},\textsuperscript{5} i.e. to make the audience attentive through laudation.

Thus the Sūtradhāra becomes the key-man to the whole show. “The Sūtradhāra is so called,” as Śubhaṅkarakavi opines, “because he is the first one to appear on the stage for indicating the main thread of the story of the drama.”

\begin{alltt}
\textit{nartakiyakathāsūtram prathamāṁ yena sūcyate /}
\textit{rangabhūmiṁ samākramya sūtradhārāḥ ca ucyate //}\textsuperscript{6}
\end{alltt}

But in a classical Sanskrit drama his presence remains limited in the \textit{prastāvanā} alone.

The Sūtradhāra of the \textit{KH}, on the other hand, enjoys the flexibility of the dicta of the Dramaturgy. He is assigned with the responsibility of not only to do preliminaries but also to remain dynamic during the entire performance.

The overbearing role of the Sūtradhāra is utilised by Kavicandra in his \textit{KH} as to make it effective amongst the audience who are familiar with such type of activities of a Sūtradhāra. However, this form of the role of a Sūtradhāra is found as a common feature in the Sanskrit plays composed in medieval Assam, particularly in the post Śaṅkaradeva period only. These plays do not mainly

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\textsuperscript{5} and also in \textit{Nātyaprādīpa—}
\begin{alltt}
nandanti kāvyāni kavindravargāḥ
kuśilavāḥ pārśadāḥ santāḥ /
yasmādālaṁ sajjanasindhuhamso
tasmādiyam så kathitcha nāndi //
\end{alltt}

\textit{unmukhiḥkāraḥ prasāṁsātah prarocanā...}

\textsc{—S.D. VI. 30}

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{vṛtti} on the above kārika—
\begin{alltt}
praśrutibhinayeṣu praśāṁsātah śroṭāṁ pravṛtyumukhiḥkaraṇāṁ prarocanā
d. Sangitadāmodara, 4th Stavaka
\end{alltt}

The word \textit{sūtra} means ‘arrangement’ (\textit{vyavasthā}) besides the thread (\textit{tantu}).

cf. “\textit{sutraṁ tantu vyavasthāyoh iti medini}.”
the distinct demarcation between the prastāvanā and the actual play.

The KH is marked for the absence of prastāvanā in the true sense of the term. The narratives of the Sūtradhāra in the form of conversation with his assistant, viz, Mārdāṅgika (i.e. the drummer) follow down to the actual arrival of the actors. The actual play, herein, begins with the entry of Bāṇāsura into the pleasure garden accompanied by his daughter Īšā and other attendants. After the usual benedictory verses, the Sūtradhāra (nāndyante sūtradhārali) announces that a play named Kāmakumāraharaṇa, composed by Kavicandra Dvija at the behest of the royal couple Sargadew Siva Simha and Bar-rajā Pramathesvari, is going to be enacted in the presence of the royal patrons.

The unity of time and place of Aristotalian plays is not maintained in the KH. However, the overbearing role of the Sūtradhāra helps the dramatist to do away with this difficulty. The Sūtradhāra remains on the stage throughout the whole show. He keeps the audience informed about the change of place or laps of time whenever and wherever necessary. He describes the events beforehand and hence the audience donot feel the difficulty of understanding them. The dialogues of the characters seem to be meagre compared to the

7. The Mārdāṅgika can be compared with the Pāripārvika of other Sanskrit plays. In a Prastāvanā the Sūtradhāra reveals to the audience about the ensuing performance of the stage through conversation with Pāripārvika or a person similar to that kind. cf. nāti vidūṣakovāpi pāripārvika eva vā /
śūtradhāreṇa sahitāḥ sanātāpām yatra kurvate //
citrairvākyaḥ svakāryotthaḥ prastuttāksepibhiḥ mithāḥ /
āmukham tattu vijñeyarḥ nāmnā prastāvanāpi sā //
—SD, VI, 31, 32

8. The Nāndi of the KH, is aṣṭapadānāndī.
Sūtradhāras volume of narratives and explanatory notes. He appears to be the master of the whole show because the other characters speak and act according to his biddings and thus they appear to be more or less puppets to his hands.9

Another point regarding such overbearing role of the Sūtradhāra is perhaps to do away with the statements of the playwright given in the brackets, as an indication of a coming event. As for instance, (a) (*tataḥ praviśati mṛgānusāri saśaracāpahastorāja rathena sūtaś ca*, Šākuntalam, Act I., (b) (*tataḥ praviśati āsanasto grhitavasantotsavoṣeṇī rājā viduṣakaṣca*), Ratnāvalī, Act I., (c) (*tataḥ praviśati sahadevanugamyamāṇaḥ kruddhu bhimasenai*), Beṇīṣamhāra, Act I. In the *KH*, on the other hand, the Sūtradhāra himself make such statements. For example —

Sūtradhārah : śṛṇvantu bho sāmājikāḥ, ekadā śrībāṇanarendraḥ nadyāstire devyā saha kriḍitumanāḥ svaganaiḥ pariṃtaḥ śṛūdra āgamiṣyatī vijnāya tatra vicitraraṅgasthalinī nirmāya sahadārāpasyodarāṁtyaparivāraḥ uṣāica agrataḥ kṛtvā daṇḍacchatra cāmarapatākādi vividhamaṅgala-sambhūraṁ nṛtyagītaparūḥṣaraṁ tatra praviveṣa, etc.

In this manner Kāvicandra created the role of Sūtradhāra defying the code of the dramaturgy. Instead of being confined only in the *prastāvana*, the Sūtradhāra moves freely and takes his position as a stage manager in its true sense. He conducts the whole show and narrates every event to the audience

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9. The term *Sūtradhāra* was originally applied perhaps to the exhibitors of puppet shows, who used to sit behind the curtain and made the puppets move as he moved the strings. The critics think that the Sanskrit play in its present form is a development of such show and hence the stage-manager is called Sūtradhāra as in the case of the string holder.
in minute details. This seems to be a bold step on the part of Kavicandra to neglect the established dicta of Sanskrit dramaturgist.

May we, at this point, search for the cause of inspiration on the part of our playwright to innovate such an all-comprehensive role of the Sūtradhāra? The immediate probable source of inspiration for Kavicandra might have been the Ankiya-nāṭas of Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva has established a new dramatic code in his Brajāvalī dramas. Śaṅkaradeva has composed six such plays. In these plays there is no act division although the bare framework of these plays is modelled on Sanskrit drama. The Ankiya-nāṭas contain usual Nāndī slogans besides a number of other Sanskrit ślokas in the body of the text. The preponderance of music, lyrical verses and prose narratives of the Sūtradhāra at the cost of dialogue is a marked feature of these plays. Prof. S.N. Sarmah observes, “Although dialogue and action are not neglected, emphasis is laid on the lyrical element and the prose commentaries of the Sūtradhāra who pilots the play from the beginning to the end.” Hence, the Sūtradhāra exists as a permanent character from the prologue to the Bharatavarṣa (muktimaṅgalabhaṭṭimā) accompanied by gāyanas and bāyanas. He performs the preliminary rites, recites the verses, introduces the dramatic personages.

10. The six Ankiya-nāṭa-s are:
   (1) Patniprasāda,
   (2) Keligopāla
   (3) Rukminiḥaraṇa
   (4) Kāliyadamana
   (5) Pārijatāharana
   (6) Śrīrāmavijaya

11. vide, The Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam, p. 181
maintains the link between different incidents, gives explanatory remarks or comments wherever necessary, sings songs and finally recites the concluding verse.”

One of the characteristic features of an Ankiyā-nāta is ankar-gitas that are set into classical rāgas and tālas. Unlike songs in a Sanskrit drama, ankar-gitas are sung in chorus and the Sūtradhāra usually participates with other musicians in the chorus. Hence, he is supposed to be proficient in dance and music equally.

The Ankiyā-nāta-s, according to some scholars, are said to have been fed with the histrionic representation available in the reservoir of people’s art. Hem Baruah observes — “what Śaṅkaradeva possibly did was to borrow the outline frame of his dramas from Sanskrit sources and fill it up with traditions of histrionic representation available in the existing reservoir of people’s art. Traditional people’s art may include (a) ojāpāli, i.e. the popular miniature plays with songs, dialogue and body movements, (b) yātrās, (c) puppet shows and (d) the story telling literature of Śaṅkaradeva period.

It is also observed that, Śaṅkaradeva was inspired mostly by integral Sanskrit dramas like the Prabodhacandrodaya of Śrīkrṣṇamiśra Yatindra and Mahānātaka of Hanuman in creating the new dramatic code. These dramas were marked by decadence of the Sanskrit drama and loosening of its dicta.

12. vide, *Role of Sūtradhāra in the Sanskrit plays composed in Medieval Assam*, Surabhrati, p. 69
13. Assamese Literature p. 87
Mahānāṭaka or Hanumān-nāṭaka is an irregular drama characterised by certain features. There is predominance of verse over prose. Though there are large number of characters, dialogue in the true sense is absent. Prākṛt language is not used. Unlike in other dramas, the character of vidūṣaka is absent here. Keith calls it a literary drama or tour de force and compares it with the Gītā-Govinda. This drama was popular in the centres of Sanskrit learning where it is known as ‘Hanumanti Kāvya’. Bhūṣaṇa Dvija mentions in his Śrī-Śrī-Śaṅkaradeva that Śaṅkaradeva enacted Mahānāṭaka when Jagadīśamiśra came to Barpeta. A simpler form of the Mahānāṭaka is still preserved in the Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti library containing only 26 folios with 7 lines of writing on each side of a folio. The drama has got no act division in this simple form; the whole work is reduced to one single piece and its stage direction is also very simple.

With all these peculiarities of an irregular drama and the traditional histrionic representation, Śaṅkaradeva created a new dramatic code where he created an all-comprehensive role for the Sūtradhāra, also. It is meant for introducing the characters, speak their thoughts aloud and interpreting their moods as well as for explaining the situations through verse narration even of intense impulse and dramatic complexity which were not unfolded in action. Thus “the Sūtradhāra becomes an institution itself.”

14. vide, Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts (preserved in KAS), compiled and edited by Dr. D. Chutia, 1984
15. vide, VFMA, p. 247 ff.
16. vide, Assamese Literature, p. 87
The new dramatic code established by Śaṅkaradeva has a great impact on later dramatists of this land. Even in Sanskrit plays like the present one the impact is distinctly noticed. Besides other dramatic codes of this new dicta, Kavicandra has fully utilised the all comprehensive role of the Sūtradhāra in his KH.

The Sūtradhāra of the KH, like other Sanskrit dramas composed in medieval Assam, “is proficient in dance, music, – both vocal and instrumental, and the histrionic art. He knows the technique of stage arrangements and directing the play. He makes up the deficiencies of the plot by interpolating situations even of intense impulse, and fills-up the gaps of dramatic action through verse narration.”17 The description of the battle of Hari and Hara through verse narration by the Sūtradhāra may be seen below as an instance:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hariharayuddhamavarttata ghoram} & / \\
\text{sakalasurasuradhairyavicoram} & // \\
\text{kampita bhuvanatrayamaticitram} & / \\
\text{abhimukhamubhayordastalavitram} & // \\
\text{taralitaniśitatriśūlacakram} & / \\
\text{bhīṣitavnivaruṇayamaśakram} & // \\
\text{maraṇaviśaṅkāvipulitaśokam} & / \\
\text{rahitāyudhabhātavihitavilokam} & // \text{KH. Act VI. 12-15}
\end{align*}
\]

Thus the Sūtradhāra of the KH is the master of the whole show.

17. Surabhārati, p. 71
This all-comprehensive role of the Sūtradhāra in a Sanskrit play might not appear normal if looked from the established dramaturgic point of view, but the qualities he possesses are at par with the qualities of the Sūtradhāra prescribed by the Sanskrit dramaturgists.

The Sūtradhāra must be a highly cultured man. He must be proficient in dance, music—both vocal and instrumental,—and the histrionic art (nānāgatiprasārajño), should have command over language; he should possess the knowledge of prosody and poetics, art and astronomy, geography and history (geneology of the royal families). His wife is presented in the prelude as a nice housewife. Mārguptācārya is the first one to furnish a detailed enumeration of qualities of the Sūtradhāra. It runs as follows:

\[
caturātodyaniśnāto'nekabhūṣasamāvṛtaḥ / \]
\[
nānābhāṣātattva jño nītiśāstārthatattvavit // \]
\[
nānāgatipraccārajño rasabhāvaviśāradaḥ / \]
\[
nātyaprayoganipuṇo nānāśīlpakathānvitaḥ // \]
\[
chandovidhānatattva jñāḥ sarvasāstravicakṣaṇāḥ / \]
\[
tattvagītānugalaya-kalātālāvadhāraṇāḥ // \]
\[
avadhāya prayokta ca yoktnāmupadesakah / \]
\[
everīṃ gunagañopetaḥ sūtradhāro'vadhīyate // \]

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18. The metrical enumeration of Sūtradhāra’s qualities are quoted from a work ascribed to Mārguptācārya by Rāghavabhāṣa in his commentary on the Abhijñāna Śākuntalam and Vasudeva on the Karpuramañjari. Abhinavagupta also quotes him on music (Ch. XXIX). Sāradātanaya also quotes him in his Bhāvaprakāśa on Nāṭakavastu. Thus the writings from Mārguptācārya are lying scattered in many works. T. R. Cintamani have collected the citations from Mārgupta and published in JOR, ii, 1928 under the title Fragments of Mārgupta.
These enumerated qualities may tally with the qualities attributed to the Sūtradhāra of our play.

So far as the deployment of all-comprehensive role of the Sūtradhāra of Kavicandra is concerned, the impact of the Arkiyā-nāṭas may be accepted; but the direct influence of the irregular Sanskrit dramas like the Mahānāṭaka and the allegorical dramas like the Probodhacandrodaya also cannot be denied.

In the matter of the popular saying ‘nāndyante sūtradhāraḥ’ also, which generally implies the advent of the Sūtradhāra in the stage after the recitation of Nāndī, it may be held that the statement only means the shifting of modus operendi of the play but not the persons assigned with the function. On the authority of the Nātyaśāstra it may be held that the Sūtradhāra himself should recite the Nāndī etc.

cf. “sūtradhāraḥ pathennāndī madhyamāsvaramāṣritaḥ.”¹⁹

The Nāndī, in fact, strikes the key-note of the religious motif and the Sūtradhāra’s verses throw light on the nature of the play.

The last but not least point of advantage in utilising all-comprehensive role of the Sūtradhāra in his KH by Kavicandra may be summarised with the words of V. Radhavan: “It is also true to say that all men are not able to understand the passing scences in a drama, and they need explanatory links. To them narrative makes easy understanding and gives sure Rasāsvāda.”²⁰ And the Sūtradhāra of KH, helps the audience in proper rasa-realisation.

¹⁹. NS, V. 109, Baroda edition
²⁰. Bhoja’s Śṛngāraprakāśa, p. 74