INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF SANSKRIT PROSE LITERATURE

Prose, as compared with verse occupies a lesser place in Sanskrit literature. The evident reason for inclination towards verse and consequent neglect of prose in Sanskrit is the fact that writing verse are easy to memorise. Nevertheless, prose existed and developed, however, very slowly, side by side with verse almost from the very beginning.

The oldest specimen of Sanskrit prose is met with in Saṁhitās of the Black Yajurveda. The name Black, i.e. Kṛṣṇa is assigned to it because there is a mixture of the Mantra and the Brāhmaṇa matter within the Saṁhitās. About one half of this Veda consists of hymns while the other half contains sacrificial non-metrical forms. All the four Saṁhitās of the Black Yajurveda - Taittirīya, Maitrīya, Kāṭhaka and Kaṭhakāpiśṭhala contain Brāhmaṇa like prose in amplitude. The Saṁhitā of the White Yajurveda contains only hymns unmingled with any explanatory matter. A mention may be made of the Atharvaveda also, the one sixth part of which is composed in prose. The Saṁhitā period is followed by the period of the Brāhmaṇas. The Brāhmaṇas are mostly written in prose. The prose form is found in the Āraṇyakas and older Upaniṣads. The Brhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogyopaniṣad, which are the oldest Upaniṣads are mostly in prose. The Vedāṅga literature is almost entirely written in the sūtra style of prose, i.e. aphoristic or compressed prose which is observed in works like Chandah-sūtra of Pingala and Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini. The Vedāṅga prose is simple and plain. Unlike the classical prose, it is composed of short sentences and it is devoid of lengthy compounds.
In the classical period, glimpses of prose are met with in various branches of learning, viz. scientific, Purānic, inscriptional, dramatic and didactic literature, besides the prose- kāya literature proper. Prose has been abundantly used in scientific writings ranging from works on grammar, prosody, philosophy to treatises on medicine and surgery.

The prose found in the Bhāgavatapurāṇa and Viṣṇupurāṇa represent an early stage of ornate literary prose. The inscriptional prose contains almost all the elements of poetic prose. The Girnar Rock Inscription of Mahākṣatrapa Rudradaman, dated 150 A.D. is the earliest specimen of ornate prose where long compounds are frequently used. Rare use of verbs, which is one of the chief characteristics of Bāṇabhaṭṭa’s and Subandhu’s prose is also found here. Figures of speech are also used. The Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudrārjuna by Hariśeṇa (350 A.D.) presents another specimen of ornamental prose. The tendency of setting short phrases between long compounds which is seen in Bāṇabhaṭṭa’s works is present in Hariśeṇa’s work also. It has been influenced by the contemporary prose-kāvyas which are unfortunately lost, for it contains almost all the elements of poetic prose. The existence of such prose works, however, is alluded to in the works of Katyāyana and Pataṇjali in centuries before Christ. Katyāyana (400 B.C.) commenting on Pāṇini, refers to ākhyāyikā which was an independent and distinct work, not the episodes containing in some book as the Mahābhārata. Katyāyana’s vārtika - lubākhyāhikā bahulam is composed on Pāṇini’s rule adhikṛtya kṛte granthe.1 This rule of Pāṇini states that an affix comes after a word in the second ending in construction in the sense of a book is made in relation to any subject. Adhikṛtya means aiming at, alluding to. Thus, ākhyāyikā

1. Astā., 4.3.87
Adhikṛtya kṛte granthah rāmāyaṇam. Rāmāyaṇa means a book relating to the history of Rāma. Kātyāyana’s vārtika states that when there is an ākhyāyikā, the affix is elided diversely. Thus, vāsavadattāmadhvākṛtā ākhyāyikā vāsavadattā. Sometimes, the elision does not take place as in Bhaimarthī. Again, in his vārtika, ākhyānakhyāyiketiḥāsapuraṁ bhyaṣṭḥaguaktavyaḥ on Pāṇini’s rule kratūkthādisūtrantād thak is noteworthy in this context. The preceding Pāṇinian rule is taddāladvēda. This rule states that an comes after a word denoting a subject in the sense of who has studied that or who understands that. The rule kratūkthādisūtrantād thak states that the thak comes in the sense of one who studies or one who understands after the name of a sacrifice, after uktha etc. and after a stem ends with the word suṭra. Thus, the words āgniṣṭomika, vājapeyika, aukthvārtikasūtrika etc. are formed. Kātyāyana’s vārtika ākhyānakhyāyiketiḥāsapuraṁebbhyaṣṭḥaguaktavyaḥ states that the thak comes in the sense of one who studies or one who understands after the names of ākhyāna, ākhyāyikā and after the words itihāsā, Purāṇa. Thus the words yāvakritika, praiyaṅgavika, vāsavadaṁ soumanottarika, aitihāsika, paūrāṇika etc. are formed. Patañjali (c. B.C.) in his Mahābhāṣya, while commenting upon the above mentioned vārtika-lubākhyāyikābhyyo bahulam gives the names of thākhyāyikās, viz. Vāsavadattā, Sumanottarā and Bhaimarthī. Unfortunately, nothing can be known about these works. Again, nothing known about the Carumati of Vararuci from which a stanza has in

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2. Ibid., 4.2.60
3. Ibid., 4.2.59
4. adhikṛtya kṛte granthah bahulatnu luguaktavyaḥ
dhānavadattā sumanottarā na ca bhavati bhaimarthī

Mahā. 4.8.18
cited by Bhoja in his *Sranga-prakāśa*.\(^5\) *Śūdra-kāthā*, perhaps a kāya by Rāmila and Somila, referred to by Jalhana and Bhoja.\(^6\) *Tārāṅga* of Śripālita praised in Dhanapāla’s *Tilakamaṇḍari* \(^7\) etc. also are cited by Bānabhaṭṭa in an introductory verse to his *Harṣacarita* has extolled the excellent prose works of Bhaṭṭāra Haricandra.\(^8\) But unfortunately the work is not available. It is said that the prose-composition of Haricandra acts like a king, i.e. pre-eminent like a king. It is charming or brilliant on account of the arrangement of the words. Here the letters are employed in accordance with the rules of poetics. That the poet Haricandra was acquainted with the science of poetics is evident from the verse.

In the classical period, two types of prose-style are preserved. One is the easy, clear and straight which is found in the classical literature such as the *Paṅcatantra*, the *Hitopadesa* and other didactic fables. The other is the artificial poetic prose-style which is practiced by Subandhu, Bānabhaṭṭa and Daṇḍin in their prose-works. The highly ornate prose style reaches its prominence in the works of Subandhu and Bānabhaṭṭa. No other prose-kāvyā belonging to the group earlier than Subandhu’s *Vasavadattā* is available. Subandhu flourished in the latter half of the sixth century A.D. and he exhibited the highly embellished prose style in its fully developed form. His main objective was to display his great skill in using puns and other poetic embellishments. Subandhu boastfully stated in the introductory verse to the *Vasavadattā* about his skill in composition:

\[
\text{kānakakūṇḍalamaṇḍita-gāndhāryā jaghaṇadeśa-nīveśita-vīnaya/}
\text{amararājapuro varakanyāya tava yaśo vimalaṁ pariśiṣṭe //}
\text{as quoted by M. Krishnamacharia. HC., I.12}
\]

\[
\text{tāu śūdra-kāthākārau ramyau rāmiласomilau/}
\text{as quoted by N. Sarma. Bānabhaṭṭa. A Literary Study.}
\]

\[
\text{padabandhojj valo hari kṛtavāṃṣakramasthitih/}
\text{bhaṭṭāra-haricandrasya gadya-bandho nṛpāyate //}
\text{HC., I.12}
\]
a work full of pun on each syllable.  

Bāṇabhaṭṭa rises higher than Subandhu on account of his excellent poetic merits. He has referred to the Vāsavādattā in the Harsacarita. It states that the pride of poets indeed melted away in account of Vāsavādattā when it reached their ears and thereby learnt that Bāṇabhaṭṭa has admitted Subandhu’s great genius in composing the Vāsavādattā. Daṇḍin, the other great poet of Sanskrit prasākhyāvādyā, in his Avantisundari. His style is simple and lucid, but on occasions, a diction similar to Bāṇabhaṭṭa’s also be found in the Daśakumārarcarita. As Daṇḍin praised Bāṇabhaṭṭa in his Avantisundari, it appears that Daṇḍin was either a contemporary of Bāṇabhaṭṭa or flourished a little after him.

According to the rhetoricians prose is the touch-stone of poets. It is said, gadyāṁ kavīnāṁ nikaśaṁ vadanti. Thus, prose stands as a test or standard of judging the quality of the poets. Sanskrit rhetoricians regard prose as one of the divisions of kāvya. Daṇḍin, in the Kāvyādāra, states - padyāṁ gadyāṁ ca miśraṁ ca trāṣṭuṣaṁ yataḥ samānaḥ itam. The Agnipuruṣa also declares the same - gadyāṁ padyāṁ miśraṁ ca trāṣṭuṣaṁ smṛtam. The Kāvyālaṁkārasūtravṛtti of Vāman also states - kāvyāṁ gadyāṁ padyāṁ ca. Hence, works in prose and mixed form of writing are included under the heading of a kāvya and with compositions in verse. Daṇḍin asserts that a profusion of...
compounds, i.e. ojaj is the very essence of prose.\(^{15}\) Jivánanda Vidyásagar\(^{16}\) in his commentary on the Kāvyādārśa states - ojah samāsabhūyatam bāhulyam bahupadasamāsam ityarthah \(^{16}\) jīvitam prānabhūtam. \(^{16}\) There are four varieties of prose as mentioned by Viśvanātha in Sāhityadarpaṇa. While mentioning the varieties of prose, he states -

\[
\text{vṛttagandhojjhitam gadyāṃ muktakām vṛttagandhi ca bhaved utkalikāprāyaṃ cūrnakaṃca caturvidham} \\
\text{ādyāṃ samāsaraḥītām vṛttabhāgayutāṃ param} \\
\text{anyaddrāgḥasamāśādhyaṃ tūryāṇcālpasamāsakam}
\]

Here Viśvanātha defines gadya as vṛttagandhojjhitam gadyam, i.e. prose is a series of words where there is no metrical feet. Dāndin also defines gadya in a similar way - apādaḥ padasantāno gadyam, i.e. the series of words without any metrical feet is called gadya. Apādaḥ is explained by the commentator Rangacharya Reddi Sastri as - pādaḥ chandobaddha slokacaturthāmsāḥ tadrahitāḥ padasantānaḥ padasamūhaḥ gadyam. The four varieties of prose are muktaka, vṛttagandhi, cūrnaka, utkalikāprāya. The muktaka type of prose is that where there is no compound. The vṛttagandhi type of prose is seen in the passage, which contains the foot of a metre. Vāmana defines vṛttagandhi type of prose as - padyabhāgavat vṛttagandhi. \(^{18}\) Padyabhāgavat means where there is a foot of a metre. The utkalikāprāya type of prose is that which consists of long compounds. Vāmana says - viparitam utkalikāprāyaḥ. Kāmadhenu commentary on the Kāvyālāṃkārasūtraśāstra of Vāmana reads, utkalikā utkantha / utkanthottakale samā ityamaraḥ / utkalikā prāyaḥ prayogabāhulyāṃ yasminstat utkalikāprāyaiḥ gadyaiḥ / ye?

15. ojah samāsabhūyatavametad gadyasya jīvitam / KD., 1.80
17. SD., 6. 309
18. KD., 1.23
19. Rangacharya, Ibid.
20. KLSV., 1.3.23.
21. Ibid., 1.3.25.
The bulk of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's prose consists of this type of prose. The fourth one, i.e. the cūrṇaka type of prose consists of short compounds and these four types of prose are used in the prose-works of the prominent prose-writers. They apply these types of prose in their works to suit a particular occasion. For example, Bāṇabhaṭṭa has used the muktaka type of prose which is free of compounds in the loud wailing of Mahāśvetā and Kapiṇḍjala.23

According to the Sanskrit rhetoricians, prose-kañya is divided into two main classes, viz. kathā and ākhyāyikā. A five-fold division of the prose-kañya is presented by the Agnipurāṇa.24

Bhāmaha is the earliest rhetorician who defines kathā and ākhyāyikā and points out the marks of difference between them. According to him an ākhyāyikā is a type of prose which employs words pleasing to the ear and suitable to the matter intended, which adhere with the elevated subject-matter, i.e. the story of a great king etc. in which the narrative is divided into sections called uucchvāsas. In which the hero himself gives an account of his great deeds. It has verses vaktra and aparavaktra metre intimating future events on definite occasions. The poet may describe some narrations from his own imagination. It contains the description of the kidnapping of the maiden, a battle, of a separation and of the final triumph of the hero. In kathā, on the other hand, there are neither verses in vaktra nor aparavaktra metre nor any division into uucchvāsas. It may

22. Kāmadhenu, Ibid.
23. hā hatāśmi mandabhāṅgini kathāṁ na tvaṁ jāto na vinayo na bandhuvargo na pari dhigmānḍuṣkṛtakāriniṁ yasyāḥ kṛte taveyamṛdrśi dāśā vartate.................
   Kād., pp.257-58
24. ākhyāyikā kathā khandakathā parikathā tathā / kathāniketi manyante mahākāvyāṁ ca paṇcadhā //
   Agni P., 337.12
composed either in Sanskrit or in *apabhramśa*. Here the hero does give an account of his own deeds, which is given by someone else; how could a nobleman speak of his own merits?25

Daṇḍin takes up each and every point of discrimination between an *ākhyāyikā* and a *kathā* pointed by Bhāmaha and he criticizes it. He boldly repudiates all the points of discrimination as noted by Bhāmaha and ultimately proclaims that *ākhyāyikā* and *kathā* form one and the same class of literature having two different names. Hence *kathā* and *ākhyāyikā* are but two different names for the same kind of composition. Other categories of narrations are also included here.Daṇḍin, therefore, wrote his *Dasakumāraracita* and inserted in it the characteristics of both the *kathā* and the *ākhyāyikā*.

According to Viśvanātha, the author of the *Sāhityadipika*, the *kathā* deals with a theme delineating poetic sentiments which are composed in prose. Occasionally, a verse in ṛṣya metre and sometimes in vaktra and aparavaktra also occurs. In the beginning, there should be a salutation in verse and a description of the wicked person and so on. The *Kādambarī* is cited as an example of *kathā* by Viśvanātha.

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25. prakṛtaṇākulaśravaśaśabdarthaḥpaḍaṛtīṇā / gadyena yuktodāttārīḥ socchvāsākhyāyikā maṭā / vṛttamākhyāyate tasyāṁ nāyakena svacṣṭitaṁ / vaktrand ca paravaktraṁ ca kāle bhāvyarthaśaṁśica / kaverabhiprāyakṛtaṁ uśriḥkanyāṁ (kathānāṁ) kaiścidaṁkīti / kanyāharanaśaṁścāvpralambhodayāṁvita / na vaktraḥparavaktraḥbhyāṁ yuktā socchvāsaryayapi / saṁskṛtam saṁskṛta ca eṣa kathāpabhrṁśavāk tathā / anyaiḥ svacaritam tasyāṁ nāyakena tu nocityte / svagunaviscṛtyaṁ kuryādbhijaḥ kathāṁ janaḥ //

26. tat kathākhyāyikety eka jātiḥ saṁjñaḍayayāṁkīti / aṭīṭāvāntarbhaviṣyanti saesaḥkhyānajātyaḥ //

27. kathāyāṁ sarasāṁ vastu gadyaiva vinirmitam / kvacidatra bhavedāryāṁ kvacidvaktraḥparavaktrake / ādou padyaśramaskāraḥ khaladevṛttakīrtan oun // yathā - kādambaryādiḥ //

KL., 1.25-29

KD., 1.28

SD., 6. 310
Defining an ākhyāyikā, Viśvanātha says that the ākhyāyikā resembles the kathā. In an ākhyāyikā, there should contain an account of the poet's family and sometimes, an account of other poets in verse or in it. The story is divided into sections named āśvāsa. In the beginning of each āśvāsa, there should be the verses in āryā, vaktra and aparavātra metres through which the future happenings are suggested under guise of something else. He cites Harṣacarita as an example of ākhyāyikā. That the Harṣacarita is an ākhyāyikā, Bāṇabhaṭṭa him has clearly intimated it. He has said in the introductory verse of the Harṣacarita,

\[
tathāpi nṛpaterbhaktyābhīto nirvahaṇakulāḥ
\]
\[
karomyākhyāyikāṃbhodhou jīhvāplavanacāpalam\]²⁹

i.e. “through my devotion to my king (i.e. Harṣa), I being undismayed and eager to carry out my undertaking make bold to plunge with my tongue in the ocean of ākhyāyikā.” He has meant that it is a new undertaking for one like him. In an introductory verse to the pūrvabhāga of the Kādambarī, Bāṇabhaṭṭa has clearly stated that the Kādambarī is a kathā. It reads,

\[
dvijena tenākṣatakanṭhakouṃthayaya mahāmanomohamalīmasāndhaya
\]
\[
alabdhaavaidaghyavilāsamugdhyaya dhiyā nibaddhayamatidvaiyā kathā\]

Bhānucandra, the celebrated commentator, interprets the word ātva as that which surpasses the two kathās, the Brhatkathā and Vāsavadattā. Subandhu’s Vāsavadattā is a kathā. It has no

²⁸. ākhyāyikā kathāvat syāt kavervāṃsānuṃkūrtanam /
   asyāmayakavīvānca vṛttam padyaṁ kvacit kvacit /
   kathāṃsānāṃ vyacchcheda āśvāsa iti ḫadhyate /
   āryāvaktṛaparavaktrānāṃ chandasaḥ yena kenacit /
   anyāpadesenāsvāsamukhe bhāvyarthasūcahanam //
   yathā - harṣacaritādiḥ /

²⁹. HC., v.19

³⁰. Kād., v.20

³¹. ‘dvayīm brhatkathām vāsavadattām cātikrāntā iti vā /
as quoted in TP
division called āsvāsa or ucchvāsa. In the introductory verses, Subandhu has described the character of the wicked persons which is one of the prominent characteristics of the kathā type of prose-kāvyā. It contains a long episode spoken by another than the hero, the conversation of the Mainā with his mate regarding the heroine of the story.

The Daśākumārācarīta by Daṇḍin contains the division into ucchvāsas which is a characteristic mark of an ākhyayikā. Avantisundarī is a kathā type of prose-kāvyā.

An account of ākhyayikā and kathā is given in the Agnipurāṇa also. In addition to the other characteristics of kathā and ākhyayikā as given by Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin, the Agnipurāṇa states that in the kathā another prefatory tale is prefixed to the main story. In Rudrata's Kāvyālaṁkāra, kathā and ākhyayikā are defined in detail. The definitions include all the characteristic features of the narrā and the ākhyayikā. It seems that the author had in mind the Kadambarī and the Harṣacarītā, in defining the two species of prose composition.

Given above are the views of some of the rhetoricians regarding the kathā and ākhyayikā. It may be noted that long before Bhāmaha's time, these existed two types of prose-narratives different from each other on certain noteworthy points. The remarkable difference between them inspired the writers on poetics to name and define them as two species of prose composition. Bhāmaha is the first one who points out distinctions between the two. But these were not observed strictly by the later writers. The later writers tried to re-establish the

32. Vāsava... Intro., vv. 6-9
33. Agni P., 337.13-17
34. mukhasyārthayaavatārya bhaved yatra kathāntaram /
35. KL., 16. 20-23
lish a new line of distinction between them by giving renewed observa-
tions. After having examined both the old and the new observa-
it may be concluded that while the ākhyāyikā deals with facts,
kathā is chiefly imaginary.

It has been seen above that prose was in considerable use in the Vedic period which is simple and plain. In the early classical period, however, the metrical form became prominent and dominated in all literary treatises. Gradually, an effort was made by the poets to produce poetical charm in prose so that it could compete with metrical poetry. Long compounds with alliterative words were used to introduce some speciality in prose. Hence, a peculiar poetical prose came into being which is called the prose-kāvyā. The Harsacarita and the Kādambari, the two prose works of Bāṇabhaṭṭa are acclaimed by poets as the finest models of the ākhyāyikā and the kathā.

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