CHAPTER – IV

An appraisement of the discussion of the female characters

Bhāsa has written thirteen plays. Among them Dūtavākya, Karṇabhūra and Pañcarātra has no female characters. Each and every character is strongly marked its own individual peculiarity and made to help the development of the drama in its way. The predominance of the male characters and the martial spirit exhibited by most of them is a notable feature of Bhāsa’s dramas. The delineation of the female characters show the genious, skill and scholarship of the dramatist to attract the eyes of the audience and the readers as well. More particularly the portrayal of the female characters in the Cārudatta and the Svapnavāsavadattā shows the extra ordinary power of Bhāsa as an expert painter. He has very skillfully painted the female sentiments in both the dramas.

Devakī mother of Śrīkrishna in the Bālācarita is the prominent female character and other nine characters are minor. We find Devakī’s heart is full of happiness on seeing the newly born baby in this drama. But later on she became full of sorrow thinking that the (baby) would be killed by Kaṁsa. When Vasudeva was going with the child to Gokula then Devakī said to Vasudeva. “arya I wish to see him once carefully”\(^1\).
Remembering her own misfortune Devakī desired to see her son’s face and manifested her motherly love. Vasudeva advised Devakī to enter her house when he was going out carrying his son upon his head. Vasudeva expressed Devakī’s mental anguish in this way—

“ḥṛdayeneha tatrangairdvidhābhūteva gacchati.

yathā nabhasi toye ca candralekhā dvidhākṛṭā.” (Bālacarita, Act – I, Sloka – 13)

She possessed unlimited patience. She was living a very sorrowful life.

Gāndhārī is one of the important female character we find in the Dūtaghaṭotkaca and in the Urūbhaṅga. The dramatist expressed in both the dramas the hugeness of her heart and the glory of the mother of a hero. When Duryodhana is lying on the ground after breaking his thigh by Bhīma, Gāndhārī realized Duryodhana and observing Dhiṛtarāṣṭra she said2 – “My lord! I gave birth a fearless son”. Duryodhana said his mother that in his next birth he will be the son of Gāndhārī. Gāndhārī also wish that Duryodhana will be the son of her next birth. Hearing the report of Abhimanyu’s death, in Dūtaghaṭotkaca Gāndhārī’s heart melted with grief. She said in distress “Oh child Abhimanyu, oh grand son through bad luck of us and your childlike fickleness, learning this family strife where you go? (Hā vatsa abhimanyu
Gāndhāri has no limited intelligence that Abhimanyu was an enemy's son. She consider Abhimanyu's death as putraśoka. Duhśalā, the daughter of Dṛḍtarāṣṭra and the wife of Jayadratha also felt Abhimanyu’s death as heinous. She also realized Uttarā’s widowhood with pain and said who make widow Uttarā, he will surely make his wife widow. In this way the dramatist has attributed Duhśalā’s nobleness in her character.

In the Madhyamavyāyoga Hīḍimbā and Brahmāṇī are the two female characters. Hīḍimbā is the main character. There is no any remarkable event in Brāhmaṇī’s character. Though Hīḍimbā is a rākṣasi, she who is devoted, good natured, chaste and pure-hearted woman. She thinks her husband as god-like.

In the drama Abhiśeka, Ramapati Sītā and Vālipati Tārā are the prominent female characters. Although Tārā was a wife of Vānaraking but she was expert in rājarāti. Sugrīva driven out by Vāli and again when he came to Vāli then Tārā said – Be pleased my lord! be pleased, without any cause Sugrīva doesnot come here? So, consult with the ministers and obstruct him. Thus Bhāsa has delineated Tārā as an expert politician.
Bhāsa's Sītā is the same as Vālmiki's Sītā. In the Abhiṣeka Sītā is spending her days in the Aśokavana of Rāvana surrounded by the Rākṣasīs. Even knowing her husband's valour and prowess she suffers harshful words of demon Rāvana and the Rākṣasīs. She has deep attachment for her husband.

In Pratimānātaka we find eleven female characters. Among these eleven characters Sītā and Kaikeyī are the prominent. Here we have seen Sītā's gentleness and youthfulness. Once she is wearing valkala and asks her friends whether it suits or not. It shows her noble nature that is common to all other woman. Her simplicity, sweetness, her devotion to her husband, her deep reverence to her superiors are also great. When Rāma tells her how his coronation is stopped and how he is not becoming a king, she does not at all feel sorry, but she is glad that her father-in-law is still a king (priyaṁ me. Mahārāja eva mahārājah āryaputra evāryaputraḥ). When Lākṣmaṇa appears in all the fury of his anger to incite Rāma to take up his bow, then Sītā in her simplicity and tenderness of heart says to her husband,"Noble my lord, at a time when one ought to weep, Saumitrī has taken up his bow (āryaputra, roditavye kāle saumitrinā dhanurgrhitaṁ). She does not obey Rāma's prevention and she goes to forest with him and sharing his exile. In the forest she spent her life as an ascetic and always behave in favour of the situation. She share
her husband's weal and woe. She is pure, holy and devoted wife like other women. She exhibits the tender, beautiful and noble qualities which are the glory of womanhood.

In painting the character of Kaikeyī, the poet had deviated from the original as it is depicted in the Rāmāyaṇa. Bhāsa represents her acting from pure motives in sending Rāma into exile for fourteen years. It was not out of greed for the kingdom that she insisted on the king's sending Rāma into exile, but out of painful necessity caused by the curse of Andhakamuni which lay upon the king Daśaratha. Somehow the curse of the great sage was to operate and the king was destined to die of putraśoka. She therefore, chose that the curse should operate in a manner that would at least avert the misfortune of the death of Daśaratha.

She suffers patiently and silently the public reproach and the worst treatment from her own son Bharata. Bharata hates her the moment he hears that his dear father died as a result of her greed for the kingdom. She says Bharata that she wanted to say only fourteen days but in her confusion she unwillingly said fourteen years. She also explains that her plan was known to the elders like Vaśistha, Vāmadeva and they gave their approval (Sumantra – Kumara! Vaśistha Vāmadeva prabhṛtiṁānumataṁ viditaṁ ca).
Kaikeyi’s guideless motive in sending Rāma to the forest is revealed in Act – VI and Bharata is convinced of her noble purpose and begs her pardon. But in the Rāmāyaṇa Kaikeyī is an avaracious ferocious, cruel and shameless lady. Here in pratimānāṭaka she is a virtuous woman.

In the 7th act of the drama when Rāma returns from sojourn then Kaikeyī prays Rāma to take the barden of the kingdom and said thus – child, this is indeed a long cherished desire (jāta! cirabhiḥlāsitah khalveṣa manoratha). She feels happy with heart and said – these priests and chamberlains are honouring my son with their blessings augmenting the cries of victory. The poet thus wants to show that Kaikeyī was not after all a wicked and selfish like other woman.

In the Cārudatta there are three female characters who are prominent. They are Vasantasena, Cārudattapati (Brāhmaṇī) and Madanikā.

Vasantasena was not a dhanākāṁksiṇī though she takes birth in the ganika family. Her pride was in Kulaputrajanasya śilaparitosa etc. Cārudatta was a good-natured man of Brāhmaṇa family. He is engaged in trade and earn much wealth. But by accident he became poor. Vasantasena hears the virtues and beauty of Cārudatta and she was attracted to him. When her servant called Cārudatta was poor then she said thus – For that is why I love him. (ataḥ khalu kāmyate.
Madanika, the female servant of Vasantasena is devoted to her master. She resign the prostitution and fall in love with Sajjalaka. Vasantasena the noble minded ganika, releases her from bondage. She has decorated Madanika with her ornaments and offered to Sajjalaka. Carudatt’s wife (Brahmmani) is a chaste, good-natured and devoted woman. She is not envious with her husband when she knows Vasantasena is in love with her husband. Even she did not ask any question about Vasantasena or did not mentioned anything. She never hates Vasantasena. When Sajjalaka has stolen the suvarnabhanda which was entrusted by Vasantasena to Carudatta then she (Brahmmani) gave her valuable ornaments and rescued her husband. So the Vidusaka said – this is the fruits, the collection of wife from worthy family (sadršakuladārasangrahasya falam etat). Her ideal was “patireva gatiḥ strinām.”

Svapnavasavadatta is undoubtedly the best and most matured product of Bhāsa’s genious. Rājasekhara’s tribute to this drama that even fire was unable to consume it, is not an exaggeration but only a correct appreciation of its works. Both ancient and modern critics are unanimous in giving this drama a place among the master-pieces of Sanskrit literature.
Two prominent female characters in this drama who brighten the drama by their own dignity. They are Vāsavatā and Padmāvatī. Udayana, the husband of Vāsavatā, was the king of Vatsa. He was the hero of dhīralalita type. He teaches Viṣṇu to Vāsavatā. In that occasion their attachment to each other increases day by day. Later on that attachment turns into a love. Udayana took away Vāsavatā and married her. Once his kingdom was captured by a powerful enemy named Aruni. Yaugandharāyaṇa, the expert politician and the minister, realized the situation and felt the necessity of entering into a matrimonial alliance with the king of Magadha with whose assistance he would be able to recover the lost kingdom. Udayana was devotedly attached to his queen Vāsavatā and he would not agree to marry another princess. And the king of Magadha also would not agree to give his daughter in marriage to one who has already with a wife. So Yaugandharāyaṇa consults with other ministers and queen Vāsavatā about this matter. He managed to take the queen to Lāvānakā, a village adjacent to Magadha, on the plea of hunting. While the king was out of hunting, he set up a huge conflagration and spread the report that Yaugandharāyaṇa and the queen Vāsavatā were burnt by that fire. She agrees to give second marriage for her husband. For a woman this sacrifice was a great sacrifice. She has no any jealousy for Padmāvatī. She sacrifices her life for the sake of her
husband. Her self-abnegation and self-sacrifice are beyond all praise. She behaves with great respects and affection towards her guardians and co-wife. She is disguised as Āvantikā. Her devotion to her husband knew no bounds. Her life is one of constant suffering till her happy union with the king in the last act of the drama. She spend some days in disguise with Padmāvaṭī. She desires to live with her in the hope of seeing her husband again.

Another important female character is Padmāvaṭī, the sister of Darśaka. She occupies a very respectable place in the drama from first to the last and win the audience’s and reader’s heart. She has played a very important part in the drama. Her love for Udayana, sympathy and guardianship of Vāsavadattā etc. develop the plot to a happy culmination. She is a beautiful, high-minded princess. She desires to marry Vatsaraṇāja because he is known to be tender-hearted (sānukroṣā). Though young she accepts a guardianship of such an elderly lady (queen Vāsavadattā). She has kept her promise which is implied in her proclamation. Her simplicity and innocence manifests a charm to her character Bhaṣa has painted her as perfect high-minded woman. Though co-wife she is free from jealousy. When she hears from the Jasmin-bower that the king talked with Viduṣaka in confidence that he still loves Vāsavadattā. She does not feel offended and rebukes her maid who finds fault with the king saying – My
lord is full of kindness, since he remembers even now the virtues of revered Vāsavadattā. When the kañcukī of Mahāsena king of Ujjain and the nurse of Vāsavadattā were announced, she said to the king “Āryaputra, it pleases me to hear about the well-being of my kinsman (Āryaputra! Priyam me Jñātikulasya kusālvṛttāntam Śrotum). When the picture-board, on which the portraits of the king and Vāsavadattā, were are painted, is presented to the king, Padmāvatī looking at the board, shows her respect to the portrait of Vāsavadattā by saying “āryaputra citragatam gurujaṇam drṣṭvā abhivādayitumicchāmi” (Act – VI). Lastly when the lady entrusted to her care is discovered to be Vāsavadattā, then Padmāvatī falls at her feet, begging to be pardoned for having treated her as a friend, in ignorance of her true character.

The gentle, tender and loving strategy and yet she is happy because she has secured in the king a tender husband and in Vāsavadattā a loving friend.

Vāsavadattā, one of the noble queen sacrifices her life for the sake of the kingdom and the subjects. She is confident of the success of Yaugandharāyaṇa’s plan so she suffers with great energy. She played her part with great skill and devotion.

In Svapnāvāsavadattā there are some remarkable minor characters also. In the first act we find Tāpasī. She is present at the beginning of the
drama. She is gentle, evenminded, reserved, affectionate, hospitable and wise. She is judicious also. She makes comment about Vāsavādattā thus—“since her form is such, she too is a princess, I guess”. Bhāsa has introduced her, as it would have been improper to begin the scene with the entrance of a male character. It also beings the object of the poet to bring Padmāvatī in contact with Yaugandharāyaṇa that the later might easily get an opportunity to keep Vāsavādattā to her care.

Another minor character is Cēfi the maid of Padmāvatī. Her part also helps in developing the plot. She is always conscious for the welfare of Padmāvatī. She has the liberty to cut jokes with Padmāvatī. Hearing Udayana’s merits from Brahmacārī she asks—“bhartṛdārike kimu khalu aparā strī tasya hastegamisyati.” She also tells Avantikā that Padmāvatī loves the virtues of Udayana and does not wish to marry the son of Mahāsena. The main theme of the play is the marriage of Udayana with Padmāvatī and winning back the lost kingdom with the help of Darśaka. The speech of the maid has helped in developing the dramatic plot.

In this way the dramatist Bhāsa has depicted different female characters in the form of queen, princess, hermit-woman, demoness, gaṇikā and maids etc.
Foot note:

1. अर्यपुत्र! इच्छमि तवःदेनम् सुद्रष्ठानि कर्तम्. (बलाकरिता अंक-1)
2. महाराज! अहम भितपुत्रप्रसवाची. (उरुभंग अंक - 1)
3. तारा - प्रसिद्धिः प्रसिद्धात्मेन महाराज! अल्पना करनेना नगमिष्यति
   सुग्रवव! तदन्तव्यावर्गेना सहा सन्मानत्र्यां गांतव्याम्.
   (अभिषेक, अंक - 1)
4. कैकेयि - जाता! चतुर्दशा - दिवसाः इति वांकुकामयाः
   पर्याकुलहर्दयायाः चतुर्दशा वर्षाण्युक्तम्. (प्रतिमानात्तका - 6
   अंक)
5. कैकेयि - एते पुरोहिताः कांचकुनाह पुत्रकायां अौर विज्ञाहोः
   वर्ध्यंयाताः आशीर्भिः पुजयंति. (प्रतिमानात्तका, अंक - VII)
6. "निश्चितो म्रदुर्निसमां कलापो धीरललिताः स्यात्" (S.D. - VI)
7. पद्मावति - हला! मा मावम्! सदाक्षिण्या वैरायुष्ट्राः या
   इदानिमप्यार्यायाः वासवत्तायाः गुणां ष्यां स्मारति. (S.V. अंक - VI)
8. पद्मावति - अर्ये सखिजनसमुद्वस्येना
   जान्त्यात्तिक्रताः समुदाकराः
   ताच्चिर्द्वेप्रसादयम्. (S.V. अंक - VI)