CHAPTER – V

The characterization of different female characters in different dramas and their critical appreciation

We have found that Bhāsa is one of the most ancient dramatists in Sanskrit literature. He may perhaps be called the emperor of Sanskrit literature. He is supposed by the scholars to be a post-dramatist of pre-Kalidasian era.

The 13 plays of Bhāsa are based on stories of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the stories of some of the dramas are his own inventions.

The poet meticulously portrays his dramatics personae in his dramas with great skill. Every character in his drama is strongly marked with its own peculiarity and has made to help the development of the plot in its culmination.

We have seen in the Abhiseka nāṭaka that all the characters are placed with human sentiments and characteristics.

In Abhiseka Bhāsa painted Śītā as an ideal wife. Her simplicity, the sweetness of disposition, her devotion to her lot etc are delineated with skillful touches. She has been depicted as Lakṣmī incarnate. She has the patience of job and has great devotion to her husband. She has always
been able to prove herself sinless, virtuous and righteous. She mounts on the burning fire and proves her chastity. She has full faith in her chastity and honesty.

She is a chaste lady devoted to domestic duties, modest in behaviour straightforward in her dealings, she is a partner both in times of weal and woe of her husband. So she is Svīyā type of heroine.1

Another well-known character of this drama is Tārā, the wife of Vāli. She has deep reverence for her husband and was always well-wisher of her husband.

The dramatist has painted her as an orator of righteousness and full of religiousity.

Every characters of these drama have their own speciality. Bhāsa shows his dramatic excellence in depicting the story of Vālivadha. More than he shows the meeting between Rāma and Hanuman in place of Jatayu. There is no “Setuvandhana” story in the nāṭaka which found in the Rāmāyana.

The main sentiment is Vīra. We find Karuṇarasa of Sītā’s miserable condition. Śṛṅgāra is totally absent.

Bhāsa does not follow the rules of Nāṭyaśāstra. He shows the death of Vāli on the stage which is prohibited in the Nāṭyaśāstra.
Abhiṣeka consists of six acts. It is one of the nāṭaka type of the rupakas.2

The story of the play is based on the Kiśkindhā, Sundara and Yuddha Kāṇḍas of the Rāmāyaṇa. The play begins with the coronation of Sugrīva and ends with the coronation of Rāma.

There are twelve female characters in the Avimāraka. Among these twelve characters Kurāṅgī is the prominent. She is the heroine of the play. Bhāsa painted her as a beautiful, attractive, gentle and a good friend.

In Avimāraka, the poet narrates the love affair of Sauvīra prince Avimāraka and the princess Kurāṅgī the daughter of Kuntibhoja. Their love begins with Hastisambhrama and ends with attachment of both. He has skillfully and proficiently made favourable all the opposite situation culminating into their marriage.

The fearless and unique love story of a boy and a girl is depicted in this play. Discarding obscenity the poet has very skillfully expressed deception and sambhoga śṛṅgāra.

The Avimāraka as if, the play is a Sanskrit replica of “Romeo and Juliet”. There is a great similarity between Shakespeare and Bhāsa. But nevertheless, Avimāraka can never be equated with Shakespeare’s work. This has also been echoed by H.G. Wells, “Although the Avimāraka has a
plot quite similar to that of "Romeo and Juliet", it never remotely approaches the grandeur of Shakespear's work."

The poet has introduced some supernatural and unnatural events. Vidyādhara and ring episode, unnecessarily, therefore finds space in the play. So Nārada also makes a forced entry to the world.

Nature has played an important role in Sanskrit literature. In the 3rd act description of night and the description of city are both realistic and imaginary as well. Kaṇyāpura is also beautifully delineated. In the 2nd act through Viduṣaka, city life is remarkably described by Bhāsa.

Bhāsa has been able to portray the best side of the human feelings. In the first act of the play, the conflict between the king and the minister and in the 2nd act the mental condition of Avimāraka has been beautifully expressed. The 3rd and the 5th act Kuraṅgī's love-lorn state has been expressed in an epic manner. The 6th act expressed Sauvīraṇāja's putraśoka in a blameless language –

"ye me putragataḥ soka hṛdayastho bijṛmbhate.
soadya labdha sahāyaṁ tvam bāśparūpeṇa nirgataḥ."

The language of the Avimāraka is simple and lucid. The Avimāraka is full indications of scriptures and applied knowledge.

There are ten female characters in the Bālacakita. Among the ten female characters Devakī is the most prominent.
Devakī played a very important part in Bālacarita. She is the mother of Kṛṣṇa and the wife of Vasudeva. She is depicted as loving mother. She loved her child very much, so she did not want to be separated from her child. Sending her son with Vasudeva to Nandagopa she broke down with deep sorrow. But she possessed unlimited patience. Her life is full of sorrow and sufferings. The major portion of her life she has spent in the jail of Kaṁsa. Expecting a bright future, she bore the burden of painful life.

The Bālacarita consists of five acts and based on the Sṛimadbhāgavata, the Viṣṇupurāṇa and the Harivaṁśa. It may perhaps be called a paurāṇika play. It narrates the early life of Kṛṣṇa culminating in the slaughter of the wicked Kaṁsa.

Bhāsa has introduced sufficient imaginative genious in Bālacarita. The poet has added his imaginative genious in some places. Such as the light emanating from the child, the water rushing out from the ground, the feats of Kṛṣṇa which are not found in the Bhāgavata and the Mahābhārata. These are poet's own invention. Here Bhāsa shows the death of Kaṁsa on the stage which contravences the prohibition of dramaturgy.
Though the poet depicts some female characters but there is no any heroine in the drama and śṛṅgāra rasa is totally absent. Here Bhāsa has skillfully described the Vātsalyarasa.

There are seven female characters in the Carudatta. Among them the Gaṇikā (Vasantasena) is the prominent and others are subordinate. She is the heroine of the play. She is very wealthy and graceful Gaṇikā of the city Ujjaini. Kindness affection, compassion etc. all these qualities are present in her character. Though she is a gaṇika but her importance only in love not in wealth. She is highly enamoured with the qualities i.e. virtue and beauty of Carudatta and loves him very much.

She is very noble in her manners and behaviour. Her character is full of loveliness, loftiness and full of charity which are the glory of womanhood.

Bhāsa’s Carudatta is a legendary play consists of of the four acts Prakaraṇa type. A Prakaraṇa is defined thus –

“bhavetprakaraṇe vṛttāṁ laukikaṁ kavikalpitaṁ
śṛṅgāro’ngi nāyakastu viproamatyo’thavā vaṇīk.
sāpāyadharmakāmārthaparo dhīrapraśāntakaḥ
nāyikā kulajā kvāpi vesyā kvāpi dvayaṁ kvacit.” (SD. VI)

The main theme of the plot may perhaps be adopted from the Brhatkathā and the Kathāsarit Sāgara. This play describes the virtues,
economical conditions of the hero and the love-lorn condition of the heroine and their happy union. It is a social play.

This drama has similarity with the drama composed by Sudraka entitled Mṛcchakatika.

The prologue is in prākṛt and there is no Bharatavākya.

Bhāsa delineated only three female characters in the Dūtaghatotkaca. They are Gāndhārī, Duḥśala and Pratihārī. Among them Gāndhārī is the most important and others two are not so important.

Gāndhārī is the mother of Duryodhana and the wife of Dṛṇāraṇyā. Her devotion to her husband is great. The dramatist portrayed her as truthful and chaste lady. She is intelligent and religious. She feels unhappy on seeing the family strife between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. Hearing the report of Abhimanyu’s death, impartial between enemies and friends, Gāndhārī’s heart melted with sorrow. She has no limited intelligence that Abhimanyu was an enemy’s son. She considers Abhimanyu’s death as Putra-śoka. Bhāsa painted her as a wise, outspoken, uprightness and sagacious woman. She is supporter of truth and justice.

Bhāsa’s Dūtaghatotkaca, is an one act play of Utsṛṭikāṅka variety of the rūpakas. It is based on the Mahābhārata. After the tragic death of Abhimanyu, Arjuna promised to kill Jayadratha. Śrīkṛṣṇa send
Ghaṭotkaca the son of Bhīma to the Kaurava-camp to intimate the Kurus about the promise of Arjuna. The most interesting part in the drama is the debate between Duryodhana and Ghaṭotkaca.

Ghaṭotkaca has carried the message of Śrīkṛṣṇa to the Kauravas is poet’s own invention and this episode is not found in the Mahabharata.

Dūtaghaṭotkaca is neither a comedy nor a tragedy.

There is no Bharatavākya.

Bhāsa has depicted only two female characters in the Madhyamavyāyoga. They are Hiḍimbā and Brāhmaṇī. Hiḍimbā is the main character. There is no any remarkable events in the Brāhmaṇī’s character.

Hiḍimbā is the wife of Bhīma. She has deep love for her husband and her strong desire to meet him after a long time. She is a virtuous lady even she appears to be a cruel Rākṣasī. She is gentlewoman, a chaste and loving wife of Bhīma. She is an affectionate and sensible mother to her son. She has taught her son obedience and devotion to the parents, respect for the Brāhmaṇas, pride in all his noble family and his great heroic father and self confidence. She has also trained him in warfare and has brought him up in such a way that he would become a great hero like his father. She is very clever and wise lady. She bring Bhīma to her residence on that day when other Pāṇḍavas are away.
Though Hidimba is a Rākṣasī yet she is an honest, kind, loving and benevolent lady. Her manners and behaviours are well reflected in the drama. Bhāsa portrayed her as a Kṣatriya lady.

Madhyamvyāyoga is an one act play of Vyāyoga variety of the rupakas. The play describes the story of the re-union of Bhīma and Hidimba. Bhīma rescued the son of the Brāhmaṇa from Ghaṭotkaca while dwelling in the forest.

The dialogues in this play are short, crisp, direct and forcible and simple. So it is suited as for a stage play.

This drama lays down many rules of conduct such as the mother's order is to be obeyed by Ghaṭotkaca, who feels no compunction in harassing the Brāhmaṇa though sacred. The ideal of self sacrifice is beautifully expressed in the speeches of the Brāhmaṇa and his sons. The play is bound to impress on the observer the importance of Mātrībhakti, Brāhmaṇa bhakti and of the principles of self-sacrifice.

The main sentiment of the drama is Vīra.

The Pratijñāyugandharīyāṇa has four female characters. They are Naṭī, Prīti, Afangāravatī and Vāsavadattā. Among them Afangāravatī is the main and others are not so important. She is the wife of Mahāsenā Pradyuta. She is devoted to her husband. She is an ideal woman. Like all the Indian mother she thinks about her daughter's marriage. She has
consulted with her husband about the marriage of her marriageable daughter. She loves her daughter so much. Bhāsa painted her as a true and affectionate mother and a dutiful and responsible wife who knows her duties and responsibilities.

The Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa is a legendary play of four acts of the Prakaraṇa type. The characteristics of a Prakaraṇa should is quoted here—

“bhavetprakaraṇe vṛttam laukikam kavikalpitaṁ
sṛngāro’mgī nāyakastu vipro’mātyo’thavā vaṇīk
sāpāyadharmaṁkāṁārthaparo dhīrapraśāntakaḥ
nāyikā kulajā kvāpi, veṣyā kvāpi, dvyaṁ kvacit.”

The theme of the drama is poet’s own imagination. The king Pradyuta has wanted to give marriage his daughter Vāsavadatā to Udayana and captured Udayana by fraught. Yaugandharāyaṇa the minister of Udayana vows to release Udayana and bring his king with Vāsavadatā to Vatsa. Hence the play gets its name after the solemn vow of the minister Yaugandharāyaṇa.

The poet has taken the records from the ancient history and change the whole story and create it in a new form by his own.

The main sentiment is Vīra.

We find eleven female characters in Pratimāṇataka. In this drama, among these eleven characters Sītā and Kaikeyī are prominent. Here
Bhāsa skillfully painted Sītā’s gentleness and youthfulness. Her simplicity, sweetness, her devotion to her husband, her deep reverence for her father-in-law etc. are the honest qualities of her character. When Rāma’s coronation has stopped then she feels glad and said that her father-in-law is still king.

Her ideal was “patireva gatiḥ strīnām”. So she goes to the forest with her husband and sharing his afflictions in exile. She shares her husband’s weal and woe. She is pure holy and devoted wife. She exhibits the tender beautiful and noble qualities which are the glory of a woman.

Bhāsa is an expart painter. He has painted Kaikeyī’s character which is different from the original Rāmāyaṇa. The poet 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 Andhakmuni which lay upon the king Daśaratha and the king was destined to die of Putraśoka. After the death of Daśaratha, Kaikeyī suffers patiently and silently the public reproach and the worst treatment from her own son Bharata without a word of protest. Bharata hates her the moment he hears that his father has died as a result of her greed for the kingdom. She explains Bharata that the curse would be spent out only by separation of Bharata or anyone else and hence she sent Rāma to the
forest. She also says that unwillingly she has said fourteen years instead of fourteen days. She explains that plan was known to the elders.

In the act VI Kaikeyi's pure motive in sending Rāma to the forest is revealed and Bharata convinced of his mother's noble purpose and begs her pardon. Here she is represented as a virtuous woman. But in Rāmāyaṇa Vālmiki's Kaikeyi is an voracious, ferocious, cruel and shameless. In Pratimānātaka Bhāsa's Kaikeyi is not after all a wicked and selfish woman. The portrayal of Kaikeyi as a step-mother and dealing to her stepson is well depicted.

The Pratimānātaka is a 7 acts play of Nātaka variety of the Rūpakas. The characteristics of a Nātaka is given here –

"nātakaṁ khyātavṛttam syātpaṇcasandhisamanvitam
vilāsāddharyādiguṇavaduktam nānāvibhutibhiḥ.
sukhaduhkhahasamudbhuti nānārasanirantaram.
paṇcādikā dasāpārastrāṅkāḥ parikīrtitāḥ.
prakhyātavaṁśo rājaṛṣidhirodattaḥ pratāpavān.
divyov'tha divyādivyjo vā guṇavānāyako mataḥ. (SD. VI)

This is one of the important works of Bhāsa. The poet takes the story from the Rāmāyaṇa but has introduced his own imagination for the development of the plot. In the characterization he has introduced his originality and changes the whole drama in a new form. He applies style
and language in accordance with the character and the situation of the plot. The description of the “Pratimāgrha” is meticulously done and superb.

Pratimānātaka is one of the most excellent dramas among the 13 plays of Bhāsa. The poet shows his dramatic skill and technique in this drama. Though the source of the drama is taken from the Rāmāyaṇa yet the dramatist owes his originality it can be said as successful drama of Bhāsa.

The main sentiment of this drama is Karuṇa.

There are nine female characters in Svapnavāsavadattā. Among these nine characters Vāsavadattā and Padmāvaṭi are the most important. These two female characters has brighten the drama by their own dignity.

Vāsavadattā is the wife of Udayana, the king of Vatsa. He teaches Vina to Vāsavadattā. On that occasion their attachment increases day by day. Later on that attachment turns into love. Udayana eloped with Vāsavadattā and married her. Once Āruṇi captured his kingdom. Yougandharāyaṇa the minister of Udayana thought that with the help of Magadha he would be able to recover his master’s kingdom. The minister realized the situation and felt necessity of entering into a matrimonial alliance with the king of Magadha. Queen Vāsavadattā also agrees to give second marriage for her husband. But the king was devotedly attached to
his queen Vāsavadattā and he would not agree to marry another princess. The king of Magadha does not give his daughter to one who has already a wife. He managed to take the queen to Lāvāṇaka a village of Magadha. While the king was out of a hunting, he set up a huge conflagration and spread the report that Yougandharāyaṇa and Vāsavadattā were burnt by that fire.

For the sake of the kingdom and the subjects Vāsavadattā was ready to enter her husband into second marriage to. For a woman this sacrifice was a great sacrifice. Like this liberal woman was rare in this earth. Her patience was unlimited. She has to spent the important time of her life with Padmāvaṭī in the disguise of Āvantikā. She knows that Padmāvaṭī would be the Mahīṣī of her husband but she has no any jealousy for Padmāvaṭī. Her sacrifice is great. All have praised her self-sacrifice. She behaves, with great respects and affections towards her guardians and co-wife. She has great devotion to her husband. Her life full of is constant sufferings till her happy union with her husband in the last act of the drama. She desires to live with the hope of seeing her husband again.

She is said to be the mixture of “Madhyā” and “Pragalbhānāyikā”. She is “Dhīrā” type of heroine.
Padmāvatī is another important female character in Svapnavāsavadattā. She is the sister of Darśaka, the king of Magadha. She occupies a very respectable place in the play from the first to last. Her part is very important in this play. Her deep love for Udayana, her sympathy and guardianship of Vāsavadattā etc. has been developed in the play.

She is beautiful and high-minded princess. She wanted to marry Udayana because he is Sānukroṣa (tender-hearted). Although she is young she accepts guardianship of Vāsavadattā. She kept her promise which she proclaimed. Her simplicity and innocence impart a charm to her character.

Bhāsa has painted her as a perfect highminded woman. Though co-wife she is free from jealousy.

Bhāsa’s Svapnavāsavadattā consists of six acts and based on historical legend. It is a nātaka variety of the rupakas. Here the poet is depicting a pleasant picture of fruitful love. The minister Yaugandharāyaṇa by his own judgement and ingenuity recovers the lost kingdom of Udayana. He spreads the report that Vāsavadattā was burnt by fire and planned to perform the marriage of Udayana with Padmāvatī. As a result with the help of Magadha the king recovers his lost kingdom.
Svapnavāsavadattā is undoubtedly the best and matured product of Bhāsa’s genious. Rajasekhara’s tribute to this drama that even fire was unable to consume it, is not an exaggeration but only a correct appreciation of its work. Rajasekhara says that Svapnavāsavadattā was the best and most popular of all Bhāsa’s plays. In the group of 13 plays, the Svapnavāsavadattā is surely the best play.

The main sentiment of this play is Vipralambhāsṛmgāra.

We find three female characters in Urūbhamga. Among these three Gandhārī is the prominent. She has played the pivoted role in the development of the drama. The dramatist has expressed the hugeness of her heart and the glory of the mother of a hero. Bhāsa portraits her as a righteous, truthful, chaste, glorious, holy and great hearted lady.

Urūbhamga is an one act play of the Vyāyoga variety of the rupakas. The characterization of a Vyāyoga is given here –

“khyātītīrīrto vyāyogaḥ svalparśrījanasāmyutaḥ.
hīno garbhavimarsabhyām narairbahubhirāśritaḥ.
ekmakāśca bhavedstrīnimittasamarodayaḥ,
kaśikivṛttirahitaḥ prakhyātastatra nāyakaḥ.” (SD. VI)

The story of the drama has been taken from the Gadāparva of the Mahābhārata but the poet has composed the drama with his own
imagination. The characters of this play are delineated in a lively way and has been represented as possessing true traits of human characters.

The main sentiment in this drama is Pathos (Karuna).

Bhāsa's Urūbharāṅga is a tragedy.

Bhāsa is an expert painter. He has very skillfully painted the female characters. All the female characters in his dramas are living beings. All the male and female characters are so much clear, active and excellent and they are immortal in the Sanskrit drama. His every character has its own individual peculiarity and has made to help the development of the drama in its way.

No doubt Bhāsa is a talented dramatist. His dialogues in the plays are short, crisp, direct and forcible verses are free from long and difficult compounds. The style is simple, clear and sweet. These are evident in the following lines –

“गुँधंनिम् वा विरोधितिम् सत्कृतिम् किन्तु न सत्यासा।
कर्तारां सुलभा लोके विज्ञातार्थस्तु दुर्लभाः।” (SV. Act. IV – 9)

“कांश्ठेदादग्निर्जीयते मथ्यामानां भुमिस्तौयां खण्यामादीनाः
ददाति।
सोऽसहानानि नास्त्यासाध्यां नारायण्म मार्गराबद्धाः सर्वस्यात्माः
फलांति।”

(Pratijna Act – I)
“śikṣā kṣayarāṇ gacchati kālaparyayāt subaddhamūlā nipatanti pādapāh.
jalāṁ jalasthāṇagatāṁ ca śuṣyati hutāṁ ca dattāṁ ca tathaiva tiṣṭhati.”

(Karṇa Ṣloka – 22)

“kathāṁ laṁbasataḥ śiṁho mrgeṇa vinippātyate
gajo vā suṃmahān maṭṭaḥ śṛgālena nihanyate.”

(Abhi Act. III – Śloka – 20)

Foot note :

1. “vinayārjavādiyuktā grhakarmāparā pativrata śvīyā.
sāpi kathitā tribhedā mugdhā madhyā pragalbheti.” (SD. VII)

2. “nātakaṁ khyātavrītaṁ syātpaṇcasandhisamanvitam
vilāsāddharyādiguṇavaduktam nānāvibhūtibhiḥ.
sukhaduhkhasamudbhuti nāna rasanirantarai
paṇcādikā daśapā.rarstrāmkāh pariśkritīḥ
prakhyātavanso rajārśidhirodattah pratāpavān.
divyō’tha divyādivyo vā guṇavānnavyako maṭṭaḥ.” (SD. VI).

raso’tra karuṇaṁ sthāyī bahustriparidevitaṁ
prakhyātāmitivṛttarī ca kaviruddhīya prapañcayet
bānavatsandhiṃvṛttyāmgānyasminjayaparājayau.
Yuddhaṁ ca vācā kartavyaṁ nirvedavacanan bahu.” (SD. V)

4. “khyātētiṃvṛtto vyāyogaḥ svalpapastrijanasanyutaḥ
hīno garbhavimarśābhyaṁ narairbahubhirāśrītaḥ.
ekāṁkaśaṁ ca bhavedstrinimittasamarodayāḥ
kaiśikīvṛttirahitaḥ prakhyātastatra nāyakaḥ.” (SD. VI)

5. “Tadavitathamavādīrīyaminma tvāni priyeti priyajanaparibhuktam
 yaddukulam dadhāṇāḥ
madadhivasatimāgāḥ kāmināṁ maṇḍanaśrīrvrajati hi safalatvāṁ
ballabhālokanena.”

(SD. III)

6. “nātakāṁ khyātavṛttarāṁ syātpancasandhisamanvītam
vilāsādṛdhyādiguṇavaduktaṁ nānāvibhūtībhāṅ.
sukhaduhkhhasamudbhuti nānārasanirantarām.
paṅcāḍikā dasaparāstatrāṅkāḥ parikṛtītāḥ
prakhyātavanso rājarsidhirodāttaḥ pratāpavān.
divyō'tha divyādivyo vā guṇavānmayako mataḥ.” (SD. VI).

7. “bhāsānātakacakre'pi ecchekaih kṣiptaih parikṣītum.
svapnavāsavadattasya dāhakoabhūnna pāvakāḥ.”