CHAPTER TWO

ŚRĪHARṢA AND HIS WORKS

Śrīharṣa, the author of Naiṣadhiyacarita has his unique position as a distinct personality. He is the last of the traditional epic poets. The credit goes to Kashmir for contributing such a fine specimen of compilation to poetics in Sanskrit literature. Though the poet has not mentioned the name of his birth place, suffice it to say that he is an Indian poet worthy of consideration as a glory of India, while placed in the world literature. In the concluding verse of each canto of the epic, he reveals his identity. The exact name of the poet is Śrīharṣa, and not Harṣa, for he himself explicitly mentions his name in the identical last verse of both Naiṣadhiyacarita and khaṇḍana – khaṇḍa – khādyā. He is the son of Śrīhira Paṇḍita and Māmalladevi. He tells us that he was the recipient of a unique honour from the king of Kanauj, who offered him two betel leaves as a token of respect and a seat at the royal court. It is admitted that Śrīharṣa composed this epic under the patronage of Vijayachandra of Kanauj, and he also served as the court poet of his son Jayantachandra. From this evidence, it can
be assumed that Śrīhārṣa wrote this Mahākavya in the latter half of the twelfth century. He indicates some other works of his authorship. They are sthārya – vicāraṇa – prakasana³, śrīvijaya – praśastā, khaṇḍana – khaṇḍa – khaḍya⁵, gaudorviśa – kula – praśastā, arṇava – vaṁana⁷, chanda – praśastā, śiva – śakti – siddhi⁹, nava – sāhasāṅka carita¹⁰ and isvarabhisandhi.

There is a popular belief that considers Śrīhārṣa as a nephew of Mammaṭa, the author of Kāvyaprakāśa. The story says that Śrīhārṣa after completing NC, showed it to Mammaṭa who read it and regretted that he had not seen it before writing Kāvyaprakāśa, which would have saved him the bother of finding suitable illustrations for poetic blemishes. The story may or may not be based on facts, but one thing is clear that, Śrīhārṣa violates the rules of rhetorics on many occasions.

Creative Power of Śrīhārṣa

Śrīhārṣa is occasionally influenced by his great predecessors like Vyāsa, Kālidāsa, Bhāravi and Māgha but his originality with significant novelty is extraordinary and remarkable. He mostly avoids ostentation of verbal jugglery such as various types of typical verse – framing with the artificial designs of certain
single letter, two letters and different bandhas as adopted by Bhāravi and Māgha. Śrīharṣa is very fond of pun and alliteration. So he profusely uses his calibre to show the speciality of such word – plays in his ornate style. Śrīharṣa’s work is mainly meant for the learned society. The vast knowledge of the poet is evident in his allusions to the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Dharmaśāstras, Smṛtiśastra, Nāṭyaśastra, Kāmaśastra, Purāṇas and several scriptures on Politics, Ethics, Music, Art, Psychology, Prosody, Politics, Rhetorics, Grammar, Philosophy, Astrology, Astronomy, Medical Science, Palmistry, Chemistry, Archery and the like. Naiṣadhiyacarita forms a storehouse of Indian epic learnings. Sanskrit critics of India, therefore, paid high homage to the poetic excellence of Śrīharṣa, that supersedes the literary talent of the poets like Bhāravi and Māgha. He is a versatile scholar with a very minute observation. Though originally a poet, he declares himself as a logician as well as a philosopher. Śrīharṣa, in order to defeat Udayana, resorted to cintāmaṇi mantra and attained the apex of poetic wisdom. Śrīharṣa declares that the mercy of cintāmaṇi mantra aroused his poetic talent by which he composed NC, an epic poem, embellished with erotic sentiment and aesthetic serenity. It was a belief among the people of India that the Goddess of learning was present in Kashmir and was speaking to poets by
way of approving their works. There is an incident recorded by Dr. K.S. Nagarajan\textsuperscript{14} which reveals how a poet however great, was first required to go to Kashmir and get the approval of the seat of learning for his compositions before he could be recognised as such in other parts of India. Śrīharṣa composed NC and presented it to King Jayantachandra of Kānyakubja, according to the request of the latter, and was asked to take it to Kashmir to show it to the Paṇḍits there and place it in the hands of Goddess of learning and if approved by her to bring it back and narrate to him his experiences. The poet obeyed him, and Goddess Sarasvatī at first seems to have thrown it away as a mark of disapproval on the grounds that there was a flaw in the poetry\textsuperscript{15}. But later on when he convinced her about the flawlessness of his composition she seems to have approved his work in the presence of scholars who had assembled there. The story continues to say that even though he won the test, the scholars were jealous of him, and even at his repeated request refused to take him to the King. But accidently he had to be brought into the court, as a witness to settle a dispute. There, he was recognised by the King, who understood that he was a gifted poet with an extraordinary power of retentive memory. Thus NC which is considered as one of the superb poetic compositions in Sanskrit is described as the medicine of scholars.
and became famous throughout the country. There is sufficient evidence to prove Śrīharṣa's versatile genius and rare poetic personality. He is second to none in his intellectual relevance, scriptural significance, philosophic probing and above all the emotional charm.

Rājaśekhara\textsuperscript{16} of AD 1348 accounts that the versatility of Śrīharṣa, as well as the greatness of NC, which was honoured by the personal appreciation of Sarasvatī, met with wide approval in the various assemblies of Kashmir. As a result he was decorated with the title narabhārati, but the jealous queen of the royal court who called herself kalabhārati could not tolerate his exalted position. Her persecution was so unbearable that Śrīharṣa spent the rest of his life in the ascetic serenity on the banks of river Ganga. One can doubt whether the poet indicates his own future happenings through the words of swan\textsuperscript{17}.

Śrīharṣa showed the courage to adopt a path that has not been trodden by many. It is characterised by the arrangement of novel ideas. The usages navārthaghatana\textsuperscript{18} and kāvyetinavye\textsuperscript{19} - the rarity in meaning as well as the approach of poetry - points to the fact that, Śrīharṣa is very much fascinated with novelty.
NC, in every aspect, is a Mahākāvyā which consists of twenty two cantos completed in 2827 verses. It enjoys a prominent position among the five great epics. The theme is the love between Nala, the King of Niṣadha and Damayanti, the princess of Vīdarbha, the intuitions of the Dīkpālas, the marriage after Swayamvara and the sojourn of the lovers at the royal abode. The story can not only be seen in MB but also in Purāṇas like ‘Matsya’, ‘Skandha’, ‘Vāyu’, ‘Padma’, ‘Agni’, etc., and even in the Kathāsaritsāgara of Somadeva Bhatta. In MB, the episode can be seen in the vanaparvan, and it spreads in more than 20 chapters. The episode has been remodelled by the poet by adding the sentiment of love to it. Śrīharṣa took only the first six chapters till the marriage ceremony, with which he conveys his kavitva. This work is a complete and full-fledged one, furnished with all the essentials of a Mahākāvyā. Sage Bṛhadāśva narrates nalopākhyana, one of the noted episodes of MB to Yudhiṣṭhira, in order to help him out his dilemma, highlighting the message - “विपदि चैव” - one should be brave even in extreme crisis -, while NC, is highly enjoyable with its attractive and heart-touching narration. Simply speaking, NC is a beautiful Mahākāvyā, at the same time it is quite informative.
too. The story is romantic as well as moving, and the poet elaborates the plot with a unique skill, which is unlimited. He touches upon the separation of the couple, their agony and ultimate reunion in a special manner. The ideas though at times far-fetched, are yet fine and true. The lion-share of NC is exclusively the poet's own imagination, which gives us a new experience as well as wonder. Infact in almost all places, through his novel approach, he succeeds in conveying his ideas to the readers, else his efforts would have become futile. NC is a fine specimen of poetic art, but at the same time draws attention to many other fields of knowledge.

Literary works of the age in which Śrīharṣa flourished are often marked with scholasticism. NC has earned a place of pride and recognition as a peerless piece of literary art. The observation of Śrīharṣa is that NC by variety of its sweetness puts nectar to shame, and on drinking it Gods do not esteem even ambrosia. The narration goes on with the trees, lakes, cities, swan and its flight, horse and its swiftness, marriage and ceremonies related to it, the philosophy of Cārvaka through the medium of kali, sunrise, sunset, darkness, moon etc. with a superfine imaginative power. With NC, Śrīharṣa inaugurates a new model of poetic composition. His vocabulary is extensive, but the language sometimes lacks lucidity.
Even a learned reader can rarely approach the poem with confidence. The poet seems to have compulsorily created the composition so stiff and not easily intelligible. He himself confirms that he has worked out such a literary poem in order to pulverize the pride of the vain scholars of his time. It may be recalled that challenging discussions and scholastic presentations were the intellectual fashion of his time and milieu. He is very proud of his work and out of such a self-pride he justifies the purpose of such complexity.

grantha granthiriha kvacit kvacidapi nyäsi prayatnänmayä
praññam-manyamanā haṇṭena paṭṭhī māsmin khaläḥ khelatu;
śraddhā-rāddha-guru-sālathīkṛta-dṛḍha-granthih samāśādaya-
tvetat kāvya-rasormi-majjana-sukha-vyāsa[j]janam sajjanaḥ.\textsuperscript{23}

The grandhis mentioned by Śrīharṣa are the philosophic representations which bear some hidden secrets, and can be learnt only from a Guru. The poem is not called Nalacarita, but Naiṣadhiyacarita, and Niṣadha refers also to hard, solid etc. Only when one with great faith accomplishes his sādhana, the grandhi – the tight knot – gets loosened; and such a good person who unties the knots touches the essence and bathes in the waves of rasa, found in this Kāvya.
In the midst of a pedantic jumble one however still recognises Śriharṣa’s merit and his ability to bring out the inner conflict of the human mind through the character of Nala. Romanticism of the Nala - Damayanti episode reigns superb, yet other factors of life are also taken into account in the greater perspective of human existence. Genuine feelings of its characters are reflected very much in his work. Nature is an eternal phenomenon personified with pathetic fallacies, lively, alluring and appealing in the muse of Śriharṣa. An attractive portrayal of the nature can be found in NC. The main characters are Nala and Damayanti as hero and heroine, and the Gods Indra, Agni, Varuṇa and Yama though act as anti-heroes, later turn into well wishers of Nala. Besides them, Goddess Sarasvati and the swan as a messenger play a vital role. Thus man, god, bird - all types of characters are lined up in this epic, and, though few in number, they bear qualities in abundance. The Swan is the one character which generates a unique sense of wonder in the mind of readers. The importance of wonder as an effective poetic ingredient has been grasped by Śriharṣa, and it is very evident in NC. This is to secure reader’s attention, and to enhance the readability. The unusualness, uniqueness and unfamiliarity are the very stuff with which the wonder is made. The romantic
character of the poem has been brought to light through the goodness of the swan.

Nala

In the form of benedictory verse, Śrīharṣa narrates the greatness of Nala. He tries to portray Nala, as a man with all good qualities. He discloses his passion towards Damayantī; at the same time he is a serious ruler and strict in discharging his duties. His love for art, his generosity, his firmness to keep up his words etc. are revealed in so many instances. Nala stands for duty and self-sacrifice, compassion and protection. As the plot develops, more and more qualities of King Nala gets exposed and thus the name of the epic suits it in every sense. Nala is very much appreciated for his rigid as well as flexible nature. He is treated as punyaśloka, and deserves special mention among the prayers. Salutation is offered to him in the morning. This is one of the boons given to him by Goddess Sarasvatī, that his name too will be recited like that of Lord Viṣṇu, in order to discard evils.

Damayantī

ananyasadgunavati, kamapujita are some of the titles given to Damayantī, by her creator. No other character gets such a
narration in any other work, than the Damayanti of Śriharṣa. Her birth itself is to crush the pride of beauty of all women in the three worlds and hence the name, Damayanti26. Her physical and mental qualities are enormous, and very attractively picturized, but at some instances we feel as if exhausted with the overflow of descriptions. Through the words of the swan, the poet stressfully comments that Nala and Damayanti are made for each other, and one cannot exist without the other27. Her straight-forwardness, sweetness and humbleness are some of the so many qualities the creator often mentions. In some contexts, we can see that Śriharṣa has been inspired by the description of Pārватi by Kālidāsa. Sometimes Śriharṣa makes Damayanti deliver her speech as a versatile philosopher. She is an ever-green heroine, who plays a pivotal role in this epic. Though erotic depictions are common in Sanskrit literature, the top-to-toe portrayal of Damayanti's physical form in NC has suffered a lot from the pen of some of the modern critics.

The main sentiment is erotic, which the poet himself admits28. The charm of narration is overwhelming both in separation and union. Some of the verses are seen erotic with philosophical affinity. He never gets exhausted with the narration of the sentiment of erotics. The sentiment of pathos too is handled with utmost
care and equal significance. It is in its peak while narrating the sad plight of the swan, when Nala caught hold of it. The incident is presented touchingly and in a heart-breaking manner. Though other sentiments too are interwoven in the epic, they just reveal his scholasticism, and is not as much enjoyable as those mentioned above. Several literary maxims in the form of arthāntaranyāsa, verily express the poetic excellence. The poet uses twentyone varieties of Sanskrit meters in different cantos. upajāti and vamśastah are favourite among them.

"धन्यांसि वैद्यम्" - though, contextually an addressal to Damayanti, it reveals the attachment of the poet towards vaidarbhi style. The predominance of this Rīti is very well observed in his poetic erudition. With a literary pun, he even remarks that Naiśadha which means Nala, the King of Niśadha as well as the epic, is very much attracted to vaidarbhi which means Damayanti, the princess of Vidarbha and the Rīti. The Guṇas are also treated in the right proportion.

As a patron of Indian culture and heritage, the poet pays patriotic tributes to the motherland in the speech of Damayanti. India is depicted as a holy land of deeds, enjoyment and virtues, better than heaven, the superficially attractive land of impermanent
enjoyment. So the princess cherishes her heartiest aspiration to choose Nala, the King of this mundane world, by rejecting Indra, the King of heaven. NC also communicates philosophical message for the well-being of the world.

In addition to the poetic imaginations the epic diffuses diverse data of historical, geographical, political, economical and religious conditions. Śrīharṣa’s composition seems burdensome to the readers, but it serves as a repository of epical riches. NC is not only a scholastic work but also a treasure house of so many traditional and conventional knowledge. This too can be a reason for the complications one experience, while going through the work. In fancy and imagery the descriptions are unparalleled. There is a proverbial expression that NC is a panacea of the learned. In fact, it is appropriate to characterize the pāka of Śrīharṣa’s poem as ausadha-pāka. Tradition has accorded to it a religious sanctity and it is widely believed that a recapitulation of the tale destroys the sin and ill-luck. The verse supporting this view is

$karkotakasya nāgasya damayanthyāh nalasya ca$
$ṝtupamasya rajarseh kīrtanam kalināśanam.$

This literary composition of Śrīharṣa earns high admiration from many noted scholars, both oriental and occidental. In the
decadence of Sanskrit ornate poetry, this epic is renowned as a monumental masterpiece and bears a brilliant flame of fame. In every sense it is furnished with the all-embracing epical essence of Indian heritage. The newness, the strangeness, and the uniqueness are very essential for a creative work and their vital combination is aptly made by Śriharṣa, which makes his NC an epoch-making epic in the history of Sanskrit literature.

Commentaries on Naiṣadhiyacarita

More than twenty five commentaries are mentioned by different authors. The most celebrated commentary is the Jivātu of Mallinātha. It is a work of 1500 AD. Naiṣadhiya Prakāśa or Nārāyaṇi of Nārāyaṇa of 1600 AD, deserves special mention. Some of the popular commentaries are the Dīpika of Cāṇḍupanḍita (1297 AD) the Sāhitya Vidhyādhari of Vidhyādhara (1260 AD), the Dīpika of Naraḥari (1350 AD), the Sukhāvabodha of Jinaṛāja (1400 AD). M. Krishnamachariar mentions about thirty four commentators on Naiṣadhiyacarita, in his “History of Classical Sanskrit Literature”. They are Ānanda - rajānaka, Isānadeva, Udayanācarya, Gopinātha, Jinarāja, Naraḥari, Cāṇḍupanḍita, Caritravardhana, Nārāyaṇa, Bhagīratha, Bharata - mallika or Bharata sena, Bhāvadatta, Mathurānātha, Mallinātha, Mahādeva, Vidyāvagīśa, Śeṣa
Rāmacandra, Srinātha, Vamśīvadana, Vidyādhara, Vidyāraṇya
Yogi, Viśveśvara, Sridatta, Sadananda, Gadādhara, Laksmaṇa
Bhatta, Govinda Miśra, Premacandra, Sridhara Paramananda
Cakravarti, Sarvajña Madhava, Vidyā Sridara - devasuri,
Peddubhaṭṭa and Veṅkaṭa Raghunātha.
References:

1. “श्रीहरे: सुपुष्पे जितेन्द्रिचयं मामाभ्जेवो च यम्”
2. NC XXII. 153
3. Ibid IV. 123
4. Ibid V. 138
5. Ibid, VI. 113
6. Ibid, VII. 110
7. Ibid, IX. 160
8. Ibid, XVII. 222
9. Ibid, XVIII. 154
10. Ibid, XX. 149
11. “उत्ते नैष्टे काव्ये कं माघ:, कं च भारवि:?”
12. NC XIV. 88-90
13. “नमस्ते शारदे देव काय्मोगुरवासिनि”
14. Contribution of Kashmir to Sanskrit Literature
15. NC XI. 66
16. Prabandhakosa
17. NC I. 133
18. Ibid, XIX. 67
19. Ibid, XXI. 149
20. Lambaka 9, Taranga 6, Verses 237-424
21. 53-79 Adhyāyas
22. NC I. 1
23. Ibid, XXII. 152
24. “पुण्यश्रेको नन्द्रे राजा पुण्यश्रेको युधिष्ठिरः। पुण्यश्रेक च तेवदी पुण्यश्रेको जनादेवः।”
25. NC XIV. 92
26. Ibid, II. 18
27. Ibid, II. 44 - 45
28. Ibid, I. 145, XI. 130
29. Ibid, I. 135
30. Ibid, III. 116
31. Ibid, VI. 98-100