CHAPTER IV

PRAKARANA AS A DRAMATIC FORM

Avimāraka
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Nāṭaka is the most ideal form among the rūpakas. The hero is a noble character who is a role model that the society can emulate. Prakaraṇa closely follows the nāṭaka in this respect.

The most distinguishing feature of prakaraṇa is its openness. The hero is an ordinary dīrghaśānta, the characters are drawn from different strata of society. The nāṭaka presents a monotonous type of society, the palace, the court and harem. The society represented in a prakaraṇa is more flexible, the sentiments also are more relaxed. Viśvanātha defines Prakaraṇa thus:\1

भक्षेर्य:ते वृत्ति लोकिके कविकारिणि
शृद्धारोदं नायकस्तु विषोऽभवियः सत्यवध्य चार्यः
सापायथ्यमकामायपरो धीरप्रशान्तकः।

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Prakarana is a play in five to ten acts. The theme is from the imagination of the author. The hero may be a Brahmin, a minister or a merchant devoted to dharma, artha and kāma. The major sentiment is śṛṅgāra. The heroine may be a respectable lady, a courtesan or the two combined. There is neither divine element nor royal luxury in the play.

Prakarana is a realistic type of play which derives its theme from the society and life of ordinary folk. The spectators get acquainted with the many problems that occur in the life of the ordinary people who form the major chunk of the society. Since nāṭaka takes its theme from ancient stories and legends and the hero and heroine belong to elite class there is no scope for depicting the life, problems and living standards of ordinary people. A visual artform should represent all the strata of society.

Prakarana gives enough scope for the dramatist to analyse the social life of the people, customs and morals current in the society and evil practices etc, and suggest remedial measures for solving the complicated problems and show the right path to
be followed. This shows that Sanskrit literature has kept pace with social problems and changes. The narrations contained in this type of works provide the spectator with some useful advices to those who fail to follow the norms of good conduct, one of the vital purposes of poetry. But it is unfortunate that there are only a few plays in Sanskrit belonging to this category. The earliest specimen of a prakārāṇa available to us is the Avimāraka attributed to Bhāsa.

**Avimāraka**

*This is a prakārāṇa in six acts depicting the love story of Avimāraka, the son of Agni and Sudarsana and Kuraṅgī the daughter of King Kuntībhoja. The hero was brought up by King Sauravi and his wife Sulocana. Having killed a demon disguised in the form of a sheep, he got the name Avimāraka. (avim mārayati iti avimārāḥ).*

While the hero and his parents were living incognito due to the curse of a sage, in the country of Kuntībhoja, he saved the king’s daughter, Kuraṅgī who was attacked by an elephant. They fell in love. One day Avimāraka got into her palace disguised as...
a robber with the help of the friends of Kuraṅgī and sat on her cot. Thinking him to be her friend, she embraced him. Similar scene occurs in Mālatīmādhava also where Mālatī embraces Mādhava thinking him to be Lavaṅgikā. The news reached the ears of the King. Avimāraka soon escaped and tried to commit suicide unable to bear the pangs of separation. He was dissuaded from it by a gandharva who was attracted by his grandeur and gave him a ring by the power of which he could enter into the harem of Kuraṅgī. She was then about to put an end to her life. The sight of Avimāraka relieves her.

Then Jayavarman the son of the king of Kāśi accompanied by his mother Sudarṣana came there to marry Kuraṅgī. Having known that Sauravi with his family lives in his kingdom, Kuntībhoja brings them to his palace. They all felt very sad not knowing the whereabouts of Avimāraka. At this time sage Nārada arrived there and informed that Avimāraka was there in the same palace. According to his advice the marriage between Avimāraka and Kuraṅgī was solemnised. Jayavarma was married to Kuraṅgī's sister.
In Mālatīmādhava also Kāmandakī plays such a role. There are several incidents common to both plays. The description of the nature in Mālatīmādhava resembles that of in Avimāraka. An elephant creates a fuss in one Avimāraka and a tiger in the other. Owing to these similarities it can be said that Avimāraka inspired Bhavabhūti to write Mālatīmādhava.

The salient features of Avimāraka are -

i. Love forms the theme

ii. Characters are drawn from different sources

iii. Supernatural elements are employed.

The dramatist hints at certain social problems at times. Parents were much anxious about the selection of their son-in-laws. The words of Kuntibhoja to his wife proves this. Certain matrimonial rites were obligatory even in the gāndharva form of marriage. That is why Avimāraka and Kuraṅgi were married in the presence of Nārada, Agni being the witness.

The less number of acts when compared to other prakaraṇas, meagre importance given to social criticism and the depiction of supernatural elements reveal that Avimāraka marks
the beginning stage of prakaraṇa type of drama.

Mṛechakaṭika

Mṛechakaṭika is a prakaraṇa type of drama which is unique in tenderness and depth of feeling. The name is drawn from an episode in the 6th act i.e. filling up of the clay cart of the hero’s son with gold ornaments. The work is attributed to king Śūdraka. Life of the common man is depicted in an unusual way. It satisfies all the requirements of a prakaraṇa in which the hero is a Brahmin merchant, heroine being a courtesan, principal sentiment being śṛṅgāra. The plot is imaginary and it consists of ten acts. Since the heroine is a gaṇīka the play belongs to the category of mixed type of prakaraṇa. The sentiment of pathos is well developed and subordinated to the main sentiment śṛṅgāra. Its style is sweet and simple.

The prologue of the play tells that Śūdraka was a scholar who had deep knowledge in vēdās and other branches of learning such as Mathematics, Fine arts and Art of training elephants. He had a special leaning towards prakaraṇa. He had little respect for the established traditions of his time. He dared to break the barriers
put by the tradition and the regulations imposed by the ruling and upper class people. The outcome was the emergence of a play which is most human and in which one can see the beautiful portrayal of life, love, emotion and sentiments of ordinary man. May be due to this stubbornness his name is not figured in the anthologies, treatises and poetics. He states in the prologue that he conducted a horse sacrifice, crowned his son a king, lived for a period of 100 years and ten days and entered fire in the end. Astrology and astronomy were known to him. Act IX shows his knowledge in law and legal procedure.

Mrčechakaṭika influenced Mudrārākṣasa to a great extent⁴. So he may be earlier than V śākhadatta. Even if Kālidāsa does not mention Śūdraka in his works, the latter may be considered a predecessor of the former or linguistic consideration.

Reference to Manu shows that he cannot be earlier than the beginning of the Christian era. Astronomical and legal ideas found in the plays suggest that he belonged to the 4th AD. Prof. T.K. Ramachandra Iyer places him in the 1st century A.D⁵.

The characters are drawn from the lower strata of society. Vasantasena a gaṇīka of Ujjayini has been elevated to the rank of
a lady. Unlike other playwrights he preferred to describe poverty in his play. The hero, the gambler, the Brahmin who commits burglary, the police officer who lets Āryaka escape are all poor people. Since the royal patronage nourished the poets of antiquity, they were unaware of poverty and so they ignored it and extolled the life of the elite and their luxurious life. It sheds light on the social and political condition of the country. Every day life of ancient India and the kind of luxury they enjoyed are shown in an interesting manner. Life is a blending of sorrow and happiness. Comic situations and tragic scenes in the same measure attract the common man.

**The story of Mṛcchakaṭīka**

Cārudatta, a brahmin merchant who lost all his wealth falls in love with Vasantasena, a courtesan of Ujjayini. He does not reveal it since he is poor and the love is a gaṇīka. Vasantasena who loves the noble hero, goes to the house of Cārudatta in order to convince him of her love. Accompanied by viṭa and ceṭa, Ṣakāra, the king’s brother-n-law who wants to possess her, follows her and tries to woo her. She manages to get into
Cārudatta’s house. Šakāra leaves the stage asking Maitreya to inform his master that the latter will have to suffer dire consequences unless he hands over Vasantasena to him.

The hero and the heroine meet. Vasantasena requests him to keep her ornaments for safety. Moreover, she wants to convince him that she is not after money just like other gaṇikas are. These ornaments make him miserable at the end. They serve as conclusive evidence at the trial he undergoes in the court of law.

In the second act, the state of gamblers who had great influence in the country is shown. There existed a gambling association to which officers are attached. Those who fail have to undergo hardships. They were even punished severely. Samvāhaka who was in the service of Cārudatta during the latter’s prosperity, enters Vasantasena’s house and speaks about the miseries he had to suffer due to the failure in gambling. People like Durdaraka who lost their property join the group of people who try to sabotage the ruling king Pālaka out of frustration. Some of them take refuge in Buddhism. The coming revolution is also suggested along with the love story. Vasantasena releases
him from Māthura, the keeper of the gambling house. Then Karṇapūraka enters with a prāvāraka bearing the smell of Jasmine flower and tells that Cārūdatta had presented it to him for having saved a monk from Vasantasaena’s elephant who was amock. She collects the gift in exchange of ornaments.

In the third act an elaborate and vivid description of house breaking is given. Śarvilaka enters Cārūdatta’s house and steals the ornaments deposited by Vasantasaena. He commits this in order to free Madanika, his love from Vasantasaena. Cārūdatta’s wife, Dhūta gives her gem necklace to her husband in order to compensate the loss. Her love for her husband is evident from this incident. The theft evokes laughter in the coming chapter. Stealing is described here as a fine art.

The fourth act describes the splendours of Vasantasaena’s palace: Śarvilaka comes to release Madanika who recognises the ornaments and makes the former return it to Vasantasaena under the guise that he has been sent by Cārūdatta. Then Vasantasaena releases Madanika saying that she is doing so as per the direction of Cārūdatta. This scene presents dramatic situations. Maitreya
approaches Vasantasena with the necklace and wants Vasantasena to accept it because Čārudatta lost her ornaments in gambling. This gives her a chance to go to her lover once again.

In the fifth act further development of their love which leads to consummation is described. Vasantasena with the gem necklace and stolen ornaments meets her lover in his house. She discloses everything about the burglary and the recovery of the ornaments. The unexpected rain creates an atmosphere which leads them to the consummation of their love.

The name clay-cart is derived from an episode in the sixth act where Vasantasena presents her ornaments to Rohasena, Čārudatta’s son who cries for a golden toy-cart. Later this ornament kept in the terra-cotta cart of the boy serves as a conclusive evidence to prove the charge of murder levelled against the hero by Šakāra.

Vardhamānaka was asked to take Vasantasena to the pushpakarandaka garden by Čārudatta. Unknowingly the heroine gets into the cart of Šakēra who was passing by that way. Āryaka escapes from the prison and gets into the cart of Čārudatta.
On the way the vehicle is stopped by the policemen for inspection. Candanaka one of the policemen recognises Aryaka and hides the fact. He picks a quarrel with Vīraka to prevent the other policeman inspecting the cart.

In the seventh act Cārūdatta and Āryaka meet in a lonely place. They become intimate friends. The hero helps him to escape by offering his cart. This act may be a protest against Pālaka’s rule. In the end this friendship brings a happy conclusion to the play.

Act VIII deals with the result of the exchange of carts. It has a direct bearing to the development of the main plot. There is an admixture of tragic and comic situations. After the hero’s departure, Cētā comes with the cart carrying Vasantasena knowing what actually happened. The Cētā tries to save her but fails. Śakāra tries to woo her but Vasantasena does not yield. Śakāra strangulates her and she swoons. Thinking she is dead, he decides to sue Cārūdatta in the court of justice arguing that he killed her for her riches. A bhikṣu who witnessed this act saves her. He is none other than Samvāhaka, who was saved by Vasantasena earlier.
In the IXth act an elaborate court scene is depicted which shows the author’s deep knowledge in the legal procedure.

The session begins. Śakāra accuses Čārudatta of Vasantāsena’s murder. Vasantāsena’s mother is tried first and she tells that her daughter had gone to Čārudatta. He was presented before the judge. On being examined he admits his friendship with Vasantāsena and he pleads ignorance about the murder. At this juncture Vīraka, to take revenge on Candanaka, appears before the judge and states the whole story adding that Vasantāsena was carried to Čārudatta in the latter’s cart according to the statement of the cart driver. Čārudatta denies the charge. Then Maitreya who has been sent to Vasantāsena for returning the ornaments she gave to Rohasena, comes to the court hearing about the trial. Accidently the ornaments slip down from his armpit. Čārudatta says that the ornaments belong to Vasantāsena but failed to state how he got them. The judge being convinced of the charge sent recommendations to the king to the effect that the culprit should be banished and capital punishment should not be given. The trial scene comes to a close with the order of the king to execute
Cārudatta rejecting the recommendations of the judge.

The last act (Xth) is very significant. Cārudatta is taken to the execution ground by two caṇḍālas. Then Vasanthaśena comes there escorted by the bhikṣu who saved her, and saves Cārudatta from execution. At this time the efforts of Āryaka found success. Āryaka deposes king Pālaka and installed himself on the throne. Āryaka passes orders to stop the execution and confers on him the territory of Kuśāvatī. Śakāra was brought before Cārudatta as a captive. Śakāra was re eased at the request of Cārudatta,

Dhūta and Rohasena unable to bear the pangs of separation from Cārudatta are about to commit suicide. They are also saved just in time. The new king raises Vasantasena to the status of a vadhū. Dhūta receives Vasantasena. Thus the tension is relieved and the play ends with the Bharatavākyā wishing welfare and happiness for all everywhere. Though Vasantasena was a prostitute her character contrary to her profession became a favourable factor to accept Cārudatta as her husband understanding and recognising his qualities.
Society as found in the Mṛchakaṭika

Mṛchakaṭika is a social play which provides us with a detailed account of the social, religious and political condition. It deals with the life and problems of the common people of the society.

The key to the success of this play may be the realistic description of the contemporary life of the people which in no way lessened the artistic value of the play. The touch of humanism makes the play dearer and acceptable to the spectators of the day. Caste-system was prevalent in those days. Brahmanas occupied a unique place, and they had certain privileges. They were educated and were employed to worship idols or chant mantras. They were not given capital punishment. The recommendation of the judge to banish Cārādatta is worth remembering in this context.

The contemptuous reference to each other’s low cast by Viṭaka and Candaṇaka reveals the influence of caste system on the people. But the caste didn’t have any role in determining the profession of a man. A cobbler and a barber become Police officers and a cowboy becomes a king.
As regards to marriage there is no caste restriction. A 
brahmana can marry even a courtesan. There is reference 
to hereditary profession such as the Caṇḍālas in the play. Absence 
of untouchability deserves special mention. The judiciary and 
the police department were functioning well. Speedy trial and 
impartial administration of justice deserve special mention. Severe 
punishment was given to offenders.

Women are classified into three, viz. Prakāśanārī (gaṇika), 
Aprakāśanārī (Kulavadhū) and bhūjiśya (female slave). The 
women got a fair treatment. The king was the head of the state, 
social evils like gambling, prostitution, robbery, slavery were 
prevalent in those days. Poverty was depicted as the root cause 
of all these evils.

Śūdraka was very much particular in presenting the hard 
life of the people and solutions to the problems. He raises his 
voice against the rulers whose activities are harmful to the people. 
Characters are drawn from the lower strata of society. Even a 
cow-boy is raised to the level of a king. The character Āryaka 
comes to the stage only for a few minutes. The marvellous
characterisation endears him to the spectators and everyone wishes the triumph of the revolutionary. So much importance is attached to the contemporary life of the people than the main story.

Many humourous situations make the play interesting. The Vidūṣaka makes the people laugh and think. Many of his remarks throw light on the evils of the society and act as a corrective measure.

Hāsyā is implicit in the concept of a drama as a kṛiḍāṇiyaka. It can act as a shock treatment to the cultural and social degeneration.

In the Mṛcacakāṭika all events and characters are raised to supreme human level. The political story which stands as a platform to the union of Vasantaseva and Cārudatta and causes the happy ending of the drama adds much significance to the play. It presented to posterity the sense that misgoverning should always be questioned. The character Āryaka represents the people of the country and thus his victory can be interpreted as the victory of common people.

There are all round developments of the concept of
prakarana from Avimāraka to Mṛchakaṭika. The principal improvements are:

i Two stories are intertwined in Mṛchakaṭika.

ii A powerful political story is introduced for the first time. It can’t be taken slightly that a poet tries to write a drama like Mṛchakaṭika exoneration revolution against the ruling class.

iii There is a severe criticism on the executive, judiciary and legislative bodies of the state.

iv The absence of supernatural elements.

v Abandonment of traditional concepts.

Kings and ministers were viewed very high and whatever they did were justified by the tradition. But Śūdraka very boldly threw away such concepts for the general public.

Cārūdatta

Another important work belonging to the class of prakaraṇa is the Cārūdatta, consisting four acts attributed to Bhāsa. The first four acts of Mṛchakaṭika and those of Cārūdatta are almost the same. The playwright concentrates only on the love story of
the hero and the heroine. The play is incomplete and abruptly
ends with the release and betrothal of Madanika to Sajjalaka and
departure of Vasantasena to Cārudatta’s house with the ornaments.
It is the least successful one when compared to other plays of its
class.

There is a controversy regarding the status of Cārudatta
among the scholars. Many do not believe it to be an original
play. Instead an influential section among the indologists hold
that Cārudatta is a selective abridgement of Mṛchakatika. The
political overtones of Mṛchakatika, especially the criticism
against royalty and judiciary embarrassed many in the higher order
of society. The solution was to cull out the love story bearing
apart the political theme. This is the best strategy to mask rebellion
from public attention.

Mālatīmādhava

The Mālatīmādhava, a social play presenting the victory
of love over obstacles, is a product of Bhavabhūti’s fertile
imagination. Devarāta and Bhūrivasu, ministers of the Kings of
Vidarbhā and Padmavati, have earlier decided to unite their
children in marriage. The vow was taken when they were students in the presence of Kāmandakī who was an old friend and co-student of the ministers. Now Bhūrivasu has a daughter named Mālatī and Devarāta has a son by name Mādhava and the latter sends his son to learn metaphysics at Padmāvatī and Kāmandakī is entrusted to bring about his marriage with Mālatī.

The King of Padmāvatī decides that Mālatī shall marry Nandana, the court fool. Bhūrivasu could not oppose the king. It is at this stage that Kāmandakī assumes the role of a felicitator in order to bring about this match. She also plans to bring about the marriage between Mādhava’s friend, Makaranda and Madayantika, Nandana’s sister.

Things happen according to her design. The pairs met and they fell in love. Several obstacles come on their way. The king announces the marriage of Mālatī to Nandana. Desperate Mādhava plans to sell his flesh to the goblins so as to fulfil his desire.

The Kāpālika, Aghoraghaṇṭa abducts Mālatī with a view to sacrifice her to propitiate goddess Gauri at her karāḷa temple in a cemetery in Padmāvatī. Mādhava who was in the same
cemetry saves her killing Aghoraghaṇṭa. According to the designs of Kāmandakī, Makaranda disguised as Mālatī was married to Nandana. Soon the conspiracy was open to all and consequently there was a scuffle and Makaranda emerged victorious with the help of Madhava. Meanwhile Kapālakunḍala, a female pupil of Aghoraghaṇṭa abducts Mālatī to take revenge on Mādhava. The effort to trace her was not fruitful. Bhūrivasu plans to commit suicide. Actually she was taken to Srīparvata, a mountain in Andhra, with the motive of killing her.

Saudaminī, the disciple of Kāmandakī who is learning superhuman sciences such as flight etc. at Srīparvata knows what is going on by her powers, interferes and rescues Mālatī. She brings the heroine back to Padvatī through air. The king being impressed of their valour approves the marriages of Mādhava with Mālatī and Makaranda with Madayantika in the end. Thus the play comes to a happy end.

Act I

The mukhasandhi (opening conjunction) is a combination of bija and ārambha (the beginning) and in which the seed is
sown. The first and second act together form the mukhasandhi. The promise made by Bhūrivasu and Devarūta to unite their offsprings in wedlock is the bīja from which the plot arises. In the first act Kāmandaki tells Avalokitā that she will try her best to fulfil the desire of her friends even by risking her life. This can be stated as ārambha.

Important events that happen in the first and second acts are: Mālatī saw Mādhava when he was passing by her house. Mādhava saw her at the temple of cupid. Both fell in love with each other at the first sight. He made a bakula garland for her. Mādhava happens to see his picture drawn by Mālatī. He draws by it Mālatī's picture and writes a love-stanza. In the second act the king demands Mālatī for his favourite, Nandana. Bhūrivasu could not answer in the negative even though he was against the proposal.

Lavaṅgika has given the bakula garland to Mālatī and shows her picture drawn by Mādhava. Kāmandaki gets disappointed at the news of the marriage by Mālatī with Nandana. She instigates Mālatī to marry Mādhava and informs her the
parentage of her lover. She is not ready to disobey her parents.

The mukhasandhi comprises of these events. Bindu and prayatna together make the pratimukhasandhi. Bindu is the development of some incident, which maintains the continuity of the plot and promotes its progress. The re-opening with the first actual meeting of Mādhava and Mālatī according to Kāmandakī’s arrangement is in Acts III & IV. The contrivances of the priestess grow the desire in the lovers to meet often. They meet at the garden of Śiva. Then a tiger escapes from the cage and attacks Madayantika and Makaranda rescues her. She falls in love with him. In the fight Makaranda was deeply wounded and Mādhava goes in search of him. In the fourth act Mādhava and Makaranda are seen lying unconscious and soon they recover. Then the news about the proposal of the marriage of Malati and Nandana comes and Mādhava becomes desperate. Then Kāmandakī pledges that she will try her best to bring about their union even by risking her own life. Thus the ārambha which is indicated by the verse:

वोर सप्तन्त्याँ नाम तद्भवंपुष्यं यदिः स्वयं विशंसम्।
तत्सत्यं संगमनाय वर्तं प्राणव्यवैनीपि मयं विधेयं।। iv 5
May not that evil overtake even enemies which is to be feared in your or her case: therefore I must take an effort even at the cost of my life to bring about the union by any means.

The overhearing of the conversation of Kāmandakī with Mālatī by Mādhava, the marriage proposal, the insinuations of Kāmandakī at the proposed match, and the despair of the two lovers are its important events.

The union of Patāka and Prāptyāśa forms the garbhasandhi. It starts in the fifth act and spreads over the succeeding two acts. Mādhava enters at the cremation ground to offer his flesh to the Goblins in order to propitiate them and thereby attain Mālatī. Mādhava hears the cry of Mālatī, who was brought there to sacrifice by Aghoraghaṇṭa. The hero kills the sanyasin and saves her. This incident strengthens their mutual love. In the sixth act arrangements are made for the marriage of Mālatī and Nandana. Kāmandakī causes the entire situation change. Nandana was married to the Pseudo-Mālatī (i.e. Makaranda who wore the bridal dress disguised as Mālatī) Kāmandaki unites Mādhava and Mālatī before the god. Makaranda also leaves the place with Madayantika.
The obstacle (avamarśasandhi) starts in act VII and continues to the 9th act and to the middle of the tenth act. It is the union of the prakāri and niyatāpti (the certain attainment of the goal) Mādhava goes to help Makaranda who was engaged in a fight with the city guards, they return triumphant Kapālakūṇḍala abducts Mālatī to take vengeance on Mādhava who killed her teacher, Aghoraghaṇṭa. The timely intervention of Saudaminī gets everything right. The heroine is rescued and brought back by Saudaminī.

The nirvahaṇasandhi is the combination of kārya and phalāgama. The end of the tenth act contains the conclusion. All events converge towards the final goal, the union of the hero and the heroine. The king approves not only the marriage of Mādhava and Mālatī but of Makaranda and Madayatika. Nandana also consents to this. The play ends in a happy note.

Mālatīmādhava

Fortune did not favour Bhavabhūti in his early days. He had many reverses in his first play. Mahāvīracerita was a failure on the stage. His critics were too rude to him. He wrote the
Mālatīmādhava as a revenge on them. He knew what his audience wanted. It is expressed in the verse:

भूम्ना रसानां गहनाः प्रयोगः
सोहादेहानां विश्वेश्विनी
औत्सुक्यमायोजितकामसूत्रः
चित्रा कथा वाचि निदर्श्यते

(1 - 6)

Representation profound (too difficult for ordinary people to understand) on account of the excess of sentiments delineated; (an interchange of) actions charming on account of affection, daring acts fully assisting the progress of love, interesting conversations and cleverness in speech.

The verse indicates that the audience of those days were learned people. To rise up to the expectations of his audience and critics, he gave a love drama which contains the love affairs of the hero - heroine, sub-hero-sub-heroine and between the servants. Love, adventure, frightening scenes, selling human flesh, acquiring superhuman powers, kidnapping, elopements, love marriage, a man disguising as a bride and what not there? He gave the audience
more than what they wanted and depicting everything in the world in order to keep the mouths of his critics closed.

Thus he satisfied the ordinary people by creating so many love sports and his learned critics by presenting his knowledge in various śāstras. This mood sometimes misleads him; for example Mādhava recites poetic verses before helping a girl who is in mortal danger.

The Mallikāmārūta is a prakāraṇa in ten acts written by the great poet Uddhāṇḍaśāstri who spent most of his life in Kerala. The play closely follows the Mālatīmādhava. Even the name Mallikāmārūta is suggestive of this fact. The similarity is found not only in the subject matter, characterisation, mode of presentation but even in the verses. He can rightly be regarded as a disciple of Bhavabhūti. He has inherited all the qualities of his precepto. His mental endowments elegantly touch all aspects of sṛṅgāra rasa. The popularity of the Mālatīmādhava among the Keralite might have induced Uddāṇḍa to compose a work on its model. Mālatīmādhava was quite familiar to the Kerala readers.
The story of Mālatīmādhava is well suited for theatrical presentation. Its incidents are varied and characters are diversified. The author refers to certain social problems at time such as the sacrifice of beautiful girls for personal ends. The evil designs of false ascetics are also pointed out.

It satisfies all the requirements of a prakaraṇa. The plot springs from the life of a common man and woman who belong to Brahmin families. The hero is dhīrapaśānta. It has ten acts. Even though he has taken the thread of the theme from Kathāsaritsāgara, he has developed it into a beautiful story on the strength of his fertile imagination. The subject matter is from everyday life. The chief sentiment is śṛṇgāra. The characters are drawn from ordinary life. There is of course a king but he has no importance at all. The plot is centered on the lives of Mālatī and Mādhava. The heroine is a respectable lady. So Mālatīmādhava is a śuddha-prakaraṇa.

There are references to many social problems. Many obstacles stand on the way which hinder the main object. An unfavourable betrothal affects the hero first and then abduction of
his love. Pleasure is the only objective in Mālatī and Mādhava.
Bhavabhūti elevated its attainment to the highest dramatic level.
He raises his voice against the practice of marriage for political
gains. The king’s desire to give his Minister’s daughter to his
favourite in marriage fails. Thus love or humanity wins over
tyranny or politics. Bhavabhūti tries to advocate the philosophy
of humanities in general and speaks against superstition, evil
practice etc. considering the structure of the story it can be said
that Bhavabhūti is well versed in dramaturgy and also a skilled
artist.

Merits of the Play

The language is elegant, bold and charming in its
conversational parts. The ślokas are highly musical. The love
intrigues of two pairs are so skillfully interwoven that they appear
parts of a connected whole. In the prelude of the
Mālatīmādhavate dramatist feels proud of his literary attainments
and erudition. Once again he speaks of his capacities as a dramatist
in the Xth Act as:

अस्ति वा कृतश्चित्तेवंपूर्वं महाद्वृत्तं
विचिन्तरमणीयोज्वतं प्रकाशणम्।
Has there ever been an affair (prakaraṇa), full of such incidents, so exceedingly wonderful, varied, charming and ennobling. The dramatist has shown extra ordinary skill in conceiving the plot and developing it into a well knit story.

Arthur A. Macdonell observes that Mālatīmādhava is a sort of Indian Romeo and Juliet with a happy ending. He shows rare skill in depicting contrasting sentiments by producing scenes of tender love and the horrible act of the priest of the dread goddess Durga. The IXth act is rich with the description of the natural scenery of the Vindhya range. Absence of obscenity is another praise-worthy feature of the play.

The introduction of supernatural elements, fondness of long compounds, and absence of vidūṣaka are cited as defects of the play by some scholars. While assessing the works of ancient poets, tastes and tendencies of their times should be taken into account. His own temperament might not have fitted him for accommodating humour.

The Mālatīmādhava is perhaps the culmination of the development of the concept of prakaraṇa in Sanskrit. Here the
political theme is subdued in order to make it acceptable to people of all walks of life. The interference of the rulers in the affairs of the common people is hinted at. Criticism against the ruling class is avoided. Love is prominent. Characters are drawn from different sources. There are descriptions of many things unpalatable like the funeral ground. By introducing supernatural elements the playwright has tried to disregard certain traditional concepts of that time. The play thus remains a model for prakaraṇa in Sanskrit. No serious prakaraṇa emerged after this in Sanskrit dramatic literature.

This is a matter of great concern among scholars as to why the dramatists preferred nāṭaka to prakaraṇa. It gives them greater freedom. Prakaraṇa is derived as prakṛṣṭam karanaṁ where in the action of the poet is at its best. It is the best because his imagination is not restricted as in nāṭakā where he has to abide by the story of the original. Here in prakaraṇa the poet is free to invent new stories. He can create characters as he likes; choose incidents even from the streets. It is a pity that Sanskrit poets did not use this unlimited freedom granted to them.
The reason may perhaps be that the pressure of surroundings on which the poets lived. They were patronized by royal courts. Naturally kings welcomed those creations which upheld the existing system. Subversions were not treated kindly. We have the story of Mṛcchakaṭika before us. The political rebellion in it was eased out producing another piece, Cārudatta.

There may perhaps have another reason also. When a reputed theme is handled the poet is beyond criticism. Poets might have found this more convenient not to hurt any one with their words.
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