CHAPTER - III

BHAVABHŪTI AND HIS WORKS

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CHAPTER III

BH AVABHÚTI AND HIS WORKS

Bhavabhúti offers some definite information about himself, his family, learning and his birthplace in the prologues to his three plays. His first play, the Mahāvīracarita contains more details than the other two. From the prologue of the drama it is learnt that the family name of the forbears of Bhavabhúti was Udumbara¹, they lived in a town called Padmapura in the country of the Vidarbha, the modern Bèrars², they belonged to the Kāśyapa gotra who followed the taittariya branch of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda. They were described as caraṇaguravah which indicates that they ran a school and they kept the sacrificial fires, faithful to their religious vows, performed some sacrifices and are students of theology, profoundly learned in the various branches of learning.
then in vogue. In short they led a perfect holy life which is a qualification for attaining permanent place in heaven.

It was in this illustrious family that the famous Mahākavi was born. Bhavabhūti was fifth in descent from him. Bhattagopala was his grandfather and Nīlakaṇṭha his father. He acquired fame by his learning and pious life. His mother’s name was Jatukarnī. His preceptor was Jñanānidhi who deserved the name on account of his vast learning. Since Bhavabhūti belonged to a family of vedic scholars, he acquired profound knowledge in Vyākaraṇa, Mīmāṃsa, Nyāya, Vēdās, Upaniṣads, Sāṅkhya, Ańkāra, Yōga, Brāhmaṇās, Grhya and Dharmasūtrās and dramaturgy. His writings reveal that he had studied for many years before he turned to writing. Bhavabhūti had great command over Sanskrit Language and surprising fluency. In Mahāvīracarita he calls himself a vaśyavāk. His knowledge on various subjects, science and systems of philosophy is evident from the direct and indirect references contained in his play. In the prologue of Mālatimādhava he refers to his mastery over the vēdās, the Upaniṣads and the philosophical systems of Sāṅkhya and Yōga.
What avails it to speak of the study of the Vedas and the knowledge of the Upaniṣads, and of the Sankya and the Yoga philosophies? They are of no use in dramatic compositions. If one has falcility and richness of expression and depth of meaning, then that alone serves an index to one’s scholarship and poetic excellence.

The expression found in his works give a classical stamp to his works. In the fourth Act of the Uttararamacarita, Arundhati consoles Kausalya by the following verse:

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अचिंच्छतं गच्छिता ब्राह्मणानि
ये व्याहारसेषु मा रंशयोध्वम्।
भद्रा होषा वाचि लक्षणिनिनिका
नेते वार्ति विपुलार्थं वदलिति। (IV - 18)
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Let there be no doubt with respect to the utterance of Brahmanas to whom the supreme light is revealed;
for an excellent fortune weits upon their word;
they speak not an ineffective word.

The third quarter of the above verse is similar to the fourth quarter of the following verse in Rigveda:

सकृमिच तितुजनः पुनःस्व
यया धीरा मनस्सा वाचमक्रतः
यया सख्याय सख्यानि रान्तेः
परद्वां लक्ष्मीभिन्निभिवचिच।। (8-2-23)

Name of the dramatist

There is differences of opinion about the name of the dramatist. In all his three plays, he mentions his name as Śrīkaṇṭhapadālāncanah bhavabhūtināma. The position of the word nāma makes it clear that the poet’s name was Bhavabhūti and the word Śrīkaṇṭha may be indicative of the title or distinction conferred on him in his later life. But most of the commentators of his dramas do not subscribe to this view. Vīrarāghava who commented on the Mahāvīracañcitopines that Śrīkaṇṭha was the name given by his father but later on called Bhavabhūti on account of a certain verse composed by him. He adds that the poet got the
name Bhavabhūti because the God himself came before him assuming the form of a bhikṣu and gave him prosperity. Ghanaśyāma agrees with Vīrārāghava. Jagaddhara in his commentary on Mālatīmādhava says: nāmnā Śrīkaṇṭhaḥ prasiddhyā Bhavabhūtirityarthāḥ. Tripurārj, the commentator of the Mālatīmādhava says: Bhavabhūtiriti vyavahārē tasyiva nāṁāntaraṇī! Śesarāja Śarmu is of opinion that Bhavabhūti is the acquired title. He says that such titles are preferred to the original name. The word nāma added to Bhavabhūti is indicative of this fact.

Ānathapāṇḍita quotes a verse in support of his view that the title Bhavabhūti was conferred on him by the king who was greatly delighted by the verse. S.V. Dixit, the author of ‘Bhavabhūti, His life and literature’ says that Bhavabhūti is the penname accepted by the dramatist to invite comparison with Kālidāsa even in name. If Kālidāsa is the slave of Kāli, the dramatist claims that he is the protege of Bhava, Kālī’s husband. Some believe that Śrīkaṇṭha is the real name of the poet on the analogy of Nīlakaṇṭha, the name of his father. Prof. S. Ray
suggests that this view cannot be accepted since there is no kaṇṭha common to Nilakantha and his father Bhaṭṭagōpāla. From the expression ‘śrīkaṇṭhapadalāṅcanaḥ Bhavabhūtimāma’, it can be taken that Bhavabhuti is the real name and Śrīkaṇṭha is a title due to the presence of śri, (the Goddess of speech) in his throat. lāṅcana denotes a title.

The Kerala Commentators like Pūrṇasarasvatī and Nārāyaṇa hold the view that Bhavabhūti is the real name. They say that Śrīkaṇṭhaḥ refers to the insignia worn out of devotion to the Lord. Some scholars identifies Bhavabhūti with Umbeka. This view is based on a statement seen in the colophons of some manuscripts of the Mālatiṁādhava having 500 years old, that the drama was written by Umbeka the pupil of Bhaṭṭakumarila. This view cannot be accepted since there are some objections against their identification. Neither of them states in their works that they have another name. Bhavabhūti was a brahmin where as Umbeka is a Dravidan name. Jñanānidhi is referred to as the teacher of Bhavabhūti. If Kumila, was his teacher, Bhavabhūti ought to have mentioned him. So they appear to be different.
Rājaśekhara, Kuntaka, Vidhyādhara and Śrīdharadāsa refer to Bhavabhūti as the author of verses cited as examples in their works. No work was attributed to Śrīkanṭa and this fact confirm the conclusion that Bhavabhūti was his real name.

There is a big gap of centuries between Bhavabhūti and the commentators of his works. The latter lacked actual knowledge about the facts. They depended on their own resources, myths and legends derived from the word Bhavabhūti and also to the functional etimologies to which the word Bhavabhūti lent itself.

**Date of Bhavabhūti**

Unlike the practice of today, great poets and writers in Sanskrit keep silence about their date, life and times. Bhavabhūti also does not make a deviation though he has given considerable account about his ancestors, learning, family and birth place. Relying on the data available Dr. Bhandarkar assigns Bhavabhūti to the first quarter of the 8 c. AD. or the last quarter of the 7 c. AD. Kalhana’s Rājatarāṅgini mentions King Yaśovarman of Kanauj as the patron of Bhavabhūti in the following verse:
Yaśovarman was defeated by King Lalitādirya of Kasmir. A poet, by name Vākpatirāja who wrote Gaudavahō has recorded that there was an annual eclipse of the sun on the eve of Yaśovarman’s defeat. The date calculated by Dr. Jacobi is 14th August 733 AD. According to Jain sources Yaśovarman passed away between 751 - 755 AD.

Vākpatirāja eulogises the latter in his work Gaudavaho as:

\[
\text{भवभृतिजलतिथिनिर्गतकाव्यामृतसमकाय इव स्फुरति।}
\]

\[
\text{यस्य विशेष अद्यापि विकटेषु कथानिबेशेषु।}
\]

Bhavabhūti is indeed, like the ocean. Like drops of nectar churned out of the ocean there appear even new in my descriptions of the story some excellent ideas from the kavyas of Bhavabhūti.

He thus exhibits his indebtedness to Bhavabhūti. Gaudavaho was written after 733 A.D. Vākpatirāja belonged to the second quarter of the 8 c. A.D. So Bhavabhūti might have lived towards the end of the 7th or the first quarter of the 8th century AD.
Moreover in the introduction of Harṣacarita, Bāṇa (7c. AD) does not mention Bhavabhūti along with his predecessors such as Kālidāsa.

He freely imitates Kālidāsa, Pravarasena and others. So it becomes clear that he was a successor of Bāṇa and Kālidāsa. This supports the conclusion arrived at earlier.

**Birth-place of Bhavabhūti**

Bhavabhūti offers definite information about his birth-place. In the prologue of the Mahāvīrācarita, the sūtradhāra mentions the city of Padmapura comprised in the Dakṣiṇāpatha as the birth place of Bhavabhūti. The country lying to the south of Narmada is Dakṣiṇāpatha (नर्मदायाम् दक्षिणेन देशो दक्षिणापथः says Yāsodhara, a commentator of Vatsyāyana’s Kāmasūtra). Again in the prologue of the Mālatīmādhava sūtradhāra says असि दक्षिणापथे विदम्भु पद्मपुरं नाम नगरम्. Thus it becomes clear that Bhavabhūti was a south Indian and that Padmpura situated in Vidarbha, modern Berar, is his birthplace. Some scholars do not subscribe to this view. Jagadharma, one of the commentators on Mālatīmādhava identifies Padmapura with Padmāvati. That the hero and heroine of the
play belong to Vidarbha and Padmāvati respectively shows that Padmāvati was not in Vidarbha. Mahāmahopādhyāyah V.V. Mirashi after a careful and detailed study came to the conclusion that undoubtedly Padmapura (locally known as Padampur) near Amgaon in the Bandara District was the ancestral home and the birth-place of Bhavabhūti. Later Bhavabhūti settled in the imperial capital Kanyākubja where his three dramas seem to have been produced. His plays were staged at the yātra festival of Kalāpriya (Śiva) in the southern part of Kanyākubja.

**Works of Bhavabhūti**

Three dramas, the Mahāvīrācarita, Mālatīmādhava and Uttararāmacarita, all rich in poetic beauty have come down from Bhavabhūti and his uncanny mastery in dramaturgy is clearly visible in all of them. His classical style, power of analysing emotions and vast erudition make his dramas different from the works of the earlier dramatists. Vidūṣaka is absent in his plays. The comic and witty element is very meagre. Most of the Indian poets are interested in depicting the delicate and mild beauties of nature. Bhavabhūti likes to depict her grand and sublime aspects.
His plays were staged at the yāra festival of Kālapriya (Śiva). The source of Mahāvīracarita and Uttarārāmacarita is Rāmāyaṇa. Mālatīmādhava derives its plot from the popular literature. It is not quite sure whether he has written any other work. Many stray verses believed to have been written by him indicate that he might have written more works.

Regarding the chronological order of Bhavabhūti’s plays, there are three different views.

i. Dr. A.B. Kieth and Sri. M.R. Kale are of opinion, that the first work of the poet is Mālatīmādhava, next comes Mahāvīracarita and then Uttarārāmacarita. They say that every first attempt shows some merits as well as defects and Mālatīmādhava is no exception. In its prelude he talks too much about himself and his education and vehemently tries to project himself and in the later dramas the tendency is comparatively less. Śṛṅgāra is the leading sentiment in Sanskrit. The order of the rasas is Śṛṅgāra, Vīra and Karuṇa. They argue that a beginner will not produce a play with vīra as the dominant sentiment. They further point out that the verse vaśyavācaḥ in Mahāvīracarita
clearly shows that it is the second among the dramas of Bhavabhūti. Besides, Kālidāsa who started with Mālavikāgnimitra must have inspired him to write an erotic play.

According to Dr. Bhancarkar, Dr. Belwalkar, Dr. Todar Mall and others the chronological order is Mahāvīracarita, Mālatīmādhava and Uttararāmacarita. In the beginning he had to meet with reverse. The Mahāvīracarita was not well accepted by the audience and his critics were severe on him. He lashed at them in the prologue to Mālatīmādhava.

ये नाम केवल हन्नेक प्रमुख नवान्तः ।
जानन्ति ते किमपि तात्र प्रति नेष यलः।
उत्स्माते तु मम कौँ दिपि समानधर्मः
कालो द्वारे निरवधिरित्युता च पृथ्वी ॥ (Act I - 8)

Those, who indeed speak ill of us (depreciate our efforts) in this matter, know something that is inexpressible; this attempt is not for them. There will be born (or) there is, someone of similar taste with me; for time is unlimited and the earth is wide.

He was aware of the qualities of his poetry and he left it to the
future generation to decide. Dr. Bhandarkar points out that the Malatimadhava and Uttararamacarita are replete with beautiful imagination and insight into the human heart which are absent in the Mahaviracarita. So Mahaviracarita may be his first work, the second and third being Malatimadhava and Uttararamacarita respectively. Moreover Mahaviracarita does not refer to any prior work. The words अपवांत्राय प्रबन्धन in the first act of Mahaviracarita clearly shows that it is the first work of Bhavabhuti. Bhavabhuti remarks that his plays Uttararamacarita is a wonderful creation of his master intellect in a verse at the end of Uttararamacarita. The same idea about his merit is expressed in the prologue of Uttararamacarita as:

यं बहुमणिमियं देवी वर्षस्यक्यास्तंबतः।
उत्तरं रामचरितं तत्त्वातु प्रयोक्तयते ॥

Whom, a Brahmana, this goddess of speech follows like an obedient wife, Uttararamacarita (a play) composed by him, will (now) be presented.

The learned audience judge that उत्तरं रामचरितं भवभूतिबिन्दश्चते.

All these support the view of Dr. Bhandarkar and others.
Mr. Saradaranjan Ray argues that the chronological order of the plays is Mahāvīrācarita, Uttarārāmacarita and Mālatīmādhava. In Mahāvīrācarita the dramatist says: 'चक्स्य तत्त्व समयंत मंगलि वाचः', which means that Valmiki, the first poet composed the story of Rama and me too. The use of the past tense is very important since it suggests that the whole Rama story was written by the poet. That means Uttarārāmacarita was completed before Mahāvīrācarita was staged.

The Uttarārāmacarita is a continuation of the life of Rāma and the word 'uttara' shows that it followed the Vīracarita. Thus it goes without saying that the Mālatīmādhava is the last one.

Another proof pointed out is that the language of disappointment expressed by the playwright owing to the cold welcome that the audience offered to Mahāvīrācarita. He replies to his critics in Uttarārāmacarita. Men are wicked as regards the chastity of women and speech. The words record his indifference. But, ये नाम केवलद्वय in the prologue of Mālatīmādhava shows his fury and strong disappointment. If Mālatīmādhava were the second, its failure must have evoked much more
provocative language in Uttararimacarita. But it does not happen.

Dixit, the author of "Bhavabhūti: His life and literature", after a detailed study remarks that the chronological order is Mahāvīracarita - Mālatīmādhava - Uttarāmacarita. The verse नाम केवलिह suggests that Mālatīmādhava was preceded by one or more dramas of the author and it failed to attract the audience and it may be Mahāvīracarita. Owing to the intrinsic merit of the play, Uttarāmacarita can be considered as the last. If it is accepted that Uttarāmacarita is the second, then it must be accepted that Uttarāmacarita was also a failure. Actually it is not so.

**Mahāvīracarita**

Bhavabhūti can rightly be called the father of romantic drama. The Mahāvīracarita describes in seven acts, the life of Rama upto his accession to the throne of Ayodhya. The last act describes the journey of Rama by an aerial car from Ceylon to Ayodhya in Northern India. It derives its plot from the first six books of the Rāmāyaṇa with slight variations aimed at depicting Rāma's adventures.
Bhavabhūti started writing this play while he was in Vidarbha, his native land. When the 46th verse of the fifth act has been completed, he shifted to North. The play now consists of seven acts. The manuscript of the work from the act V - 46th verse to the end of the play is available in two different recensions in North and South India. The North Indian recension is attributed to Vināyaka and the South Indian to Subrahmanya, son of Kṛṣṇasūri of Kāśyapa gotra of the 17th century A.D. Later the last portion composed by Bhavabhūti was discovered.

Rama, the hero of the play is an ideal man. He is depicted as the personification of goodness. He is magnanimous and valiant. He has great regard for the qualities of Jāmadagnya, Vāli and Rāvana and concern for the common man. Bhavabhūti has shown fair skill in depicting Sītā as a modest, virtuous and loving woman. Other female characters are not given much importance. A cursory glance on the play suggests that the dramatist has achieved a fair success in characterisation.

The dominant sentiment in Mahāvīrakarita is vīra which is prominent in the dialogue of Rāma and Vāli. Traces of it in
lower level can be seen in the dialogues of Vasiṣṭha, Visvāmitra, Janaka and Daśaradha. Raudra can be felt in the outbursts of Jāmadagnya and bīhatsa in the description of Tātaka and Kabandha.

Although the plot of Mahāvīracarita is based on Rāmāyaṇa, the playwright has made certain changes in order to suit the dramatic purpose. The public meeting of Sīta and Rama at the hermitage of Visvamitra in order to kindle the flame of love in their hearts, the introduction of a demon messenger from Ravana, the breaking of Siva’s bow at the hermitage of Visvamitra itself, his attempt to incite Parasurama against Rama are all innovations made by the dramatist. Most of the incidents are described to be the outcome of Mālyavān’s intrigues. The intention of the poet is to achieve unity of action and some of them are aimed at heightening the glory of the hero.

Literally, the play has considerable merits. It is a treasure house of idioms of Sanskrit language. The geographical and historical accounts that reflect in the play deserve special attention.

Inspite of all these merits, the audience of the day were
reluctant to accept the play. Really it should not have failed.

An evergreen Rāmakathā was presented in an unusual way by an erudite and enthusiastic poet. The extravagant style was against the taste of the spectators of the day. His ornate prose and high-sounding verses contributed much to the failure of the play. Drama is meant for the audience and not to exhibit the learning of the dramatist. People witness a play for enjoyment and not to listen to intellectual or literary acrobatics. The over-dose of vīrārasa and practical absence of śrīṅgāra and hāsyā were further reasons for the rejection of the play.

The Mālatīmādhava

Mālatīmādhava, probably the second work of Bhavabhūti, is a prakaraṇa type of rūpakā in ten acts. The subject is the love-story of Mālatī, daughter of Bhrīrivasu, a minister of Padmāvatī and Mādhava a young man studying in the city. The principal sentiment is śrīṅgāra. It is a work of his fertile imagination. The next chapter contains a detailed study of the play.

Uttararāmacarita

The third play of Bhavabhūti, Uttararāmacarita, or the Latter part of Rama’s life has earned him a unique place in the
realm of Sanskrit dramatic literature. The play is remembered along with Śākuntala on account of its intrinsic merit. It is a continuation of (Mahāvīracarita) Rama's Story down to the abandonment of Sita, her stay at the hermitage of Valmiki, the birth of Kusa and Lava and the union of Sita and Rama.

It consists of seven acts. The plot is very simple. One particular incident in Rama's life viz. Sita's abandonment is dramatised in it. Its incidents are true. Its characters are not varied. The story only provides a nucleus. The incidents are created by the poet's genius. The interesting subject and attractive language, power of characterisation etc. produce wonderful dramatic effect. Each part is properly linked with the other and is subordinate to the main objective of the play.

Uttarāmacarita is a play of dharma in the vedic and brahmanical sense. Sita was abandoned in the I Act on the ground that it was his duty to propitiate public opinion. She was restored at the end when his subjects were satisfied about her virtue. In this act he is indirectly trying to justify the acts of the elite and thereby establishes varnāśramadharma. Bhavabhūti depicts Rama
as a king more than a husband in the beginning of the play so as
to exonerate him from the crime he is going to commit.

Uttarāmacarita is essentially a problem play - the conflict
is between the personal love and the official duty. Bhavabhūti
casts his vote in favour of duty even at the sacrifice of love and
life.

The plot is derived from the epic Rāmāyaṇa and he made
certain changes in it. The story of Sita’s residence in the
netherworld under the protection of Prthvi and Gaṅgā, the stay of
the elders in Vālmīki’s hermitage, the creation of the characters
like Vāsanti, Ātreyī, Tamasā, Muralā etc. are some among them.
The most important deviation from Ramayana is the re-union of
Rama and Sita at the end. The hero of the play, Rama is depicted
as a duty-bound king as well as a loving husband. He stands for
the welfare of the people and is ready to quit everything for their
sake. Sita is a worthy wife of a worthy husband. When abandoned
she felt very sad and soon she realised Rama’s motive behind the
act. She prevents Vasantī from being harsh to Rama. Sita
identifies herself and her interests with those of her Lord.
Bhavabhūti offers a befitting reward to her love by bringing about her reunion with Rama. By presenting the picture - gallery scene, he refers to several characters.

Traces of other sentiments can also be seen here and there in a subordinate form. In the first act where Rama describes the pleasures he enjoyed in the company of Sita, there is sambhoga śṛṅgāra and vipralambhaśṛṅgāra when his grief caused by separation due to her abduction, is depicted. There is hāsyarasa in the dialogue of Sandhataki, vīraraśa in the description of the battle of Lava and Candraketu, abhutarasa in the description of the Jñabhaka missiles.

Although the principal sentiment in the play is karuṇa, it can not be called a tragedy. In a tragedy the hero meets with his ruin on account of his innate weakness of character. In this play the hero and the heroine are reunited at the end and the author brings about a happy conclusion.

This play holds a high place in the theatrical literature of the world. It excels all other works of its kind in the depiction of karuna and the description of wild scenery. Owing to lack of
action, however, it is rather a dramatic poem than a drama.

**Bhavabhūti’s concept of Rasa**

Rasa, the soul of poetry, are nine in number viz. Śṛṅgāra (erotic), hāsyā (comic), kāruṇa (Pathetic), vīra (heoric), adbhuta (marvellous), bhayānaka (frightful), bībhatsa (loathsome), raudra (furious) and śānta (tranquil). All these rasā’s find a place in Bhavabhūti’s works. Vīra, śṛṅgāra and kāruṇa are the principal sentiments in his Mahāvīra-carita, Mālatīmādhava and Īttarārāmacarita respectively. He has tried to depict all the rasās in his plays with more or less success. But he has shown extra ordinary skill in depicting kāruṇarasa and so it is said that kāruṇya

रासा कारण एवं निमित्तन्त्वः।

दूरित्वा पृथवपृथिवीमयान् विविष्ट्वः।

आज्जातस्वतृत्वात्वर्त्तिज्ञ्यायचिकारः।

नम्भो यथा सलिलकपोच हि तत्समस्तम्। (Act III - 47)

Though it is the same sentiment of pathos, it assumes different forms due to a diversity of causes, just as water, though uncharged assumes varied forms like whirlpools, bubbles and billows.
Based on this verse some scholars assert that Bhavabhūti believed in one and only rasa viz. karuṇa. Since he has tried various rasas in his works, the above view cannot be sustained. He might have meant that karuṇa could be the principal sentiment in dramas. Besides, three meanings are attached to the words - एको रस करुण एवं. Firstly it means that the events in Rama’s life has the colour of karuṇa (दुःखसंबंधनायेयं रामं चैतन्यामानितम्). Secondly, in Uttararāmacarita he deals with karuṇarasā mainly; other sentiments found in it are different forms of that very karuṇa. Thirdly the karuṇarasa of Rama, Sita and Vasanti etc. is all one karuṇa, presenting different shades just like water take different forms.

None is equal to Bhavabhūti in the depiction of deep and tender human feelings. He states that karuṇa is the only rasa which can break the hearts and make the stones weep. Moved by the description of stones breaking into tears at the sight of Rama’s grief. Govardhanācārya in his Āryāsaptaśati remarks.
It appears as if the Goddess of speech, due to her connection with Bhavabhūti, had become a daughter of the mountain! How, otherwise can one explain that the stones wept by the poet’s pathetic description.

In the treatment of both sambhāgaśṛṅgāra (when the lovers are described as enjoying each other’s company) and vipralambhaśṛṅgāra (pre-union longing of the lovers or their post union separation) he has shown considerable skill. The celebrated verse in Act I of Uttararāmacarita, ‘kimapi’ is an example of the former. In Mālatīmādhava the vipralambhaśṛṅgāra caused by separation is beautifully depicted in the IX Act where Mādhava laments unable to bear the pangs of separation after the sudden disappearance of Mālatī.

दद्धि हरयं गाढं दिब्धा तु न भिद्यते
बहरि रिकलं कायं मोहं न मुखं तेजनाम्।
ज्वलयति तनूमंदवः करोलि न भस्मसा-
तत्हरि विध्वंमण्डोद्रे न कृत्ति जीवितम्।। (IX - 12)

Acute pain is splitting my heart, it does not break it into two. This shattered body is on the verge of fainting, but it does not become unconscious. A fire is burning
within me, but, it does not reduce my body to ashes.

Fate is striking my vital parts, but does not cut short
my life.

Similarly several instances of raudra, bīhatsa, adbhuta, vīra and
bhayānaka occur in the Mālatīmādhava. His statement in the
Mālatīmādhava: भूय्या रसानं गहनाः प्रयोगः proves true considering
the above fact. He transmits the different aspects of the tender
feeling of love not only in human beings but in other creatures,
trees and even in creepers as well. Many critics of
Mālatīmādhava have remarked that vivid depiction of emotion
appealed to them most. No emotion misses his sight.
Sāgaranandin discovers that Mālatī is shown in nine states of
love leaving only the last, dying. From the foregoing account, it
becomes clear that he is unrivalled in depicting rasa.

Dramatic merits

Bhavabhūti possesses certain qualities which endears him
to the men of literary taste and he can rightly be compared to
Kalidasa. Skillful drawing of characters from various strata of
society deserves special mention. Characters like sages, kings,
priests, loving friends and diplomats appear in his plays. His female characters attract more than his male ones. He has pictured Arundhati, Sita and Kamandaka with great respect. In his time respect towards women has increased considerably than that of Kalidasa's. In Śākuntāla, women is depicted as a means for enjoyment. We get a different picture in Uttarāmačarita where she is in an adorable position.

Bhavabhūti had deep insight into the human nature. The delineation of tender human feelings attracts everyone. His plays are replete with descriptions that reveal his excellent power of imagination. Nature plays a dominant role in all his plays. Nature to Bhavabhūti is a living presence and a sympathetic actor in human drama. His pen touches almost everything in the nature both in its tender and awful forms. All his plays are replete with the beautiful description of scenery, mountain peaks, the panoramic views from top of mountains, rivers, birds, animals, caves resounding with the growls of bears, different seasons, gentle breeze. He is unconventional in the description of nature. While describing nature, he seems to be eloquent and his imagination knows no restraint.
Vedic expressions add a classical stamp to his works. The presence of supernatural elements in his plays does not go against verisimilitude. The devine element is introduced to provide a background for the human element. He tries to humanise divine personalities like Rāma, Sīvā, Parasurāma, Visvāmitra etc. Supernatural elements introduced in Mālatimādhava such as, Mādhava’s attempt to sell human flesh to goblins, Kapālakuṇḍalaka’s abduction of Mālatī and her rescue by Saudamini are intended to enhance the human values.

Bhavabhūti closely observes the minutest details of objects and gives a graphic description. Stress on the importance of social relationships, mutual love, cordial family relations, friendship and conjugal love gives his works a unique stamp. He states that the love between a husband and wife attains perfection when an offspring is born. The friendship between Mādhava and Makaranda is exemplary and each is ready to risk even the life for the other.

Beautiful definitions of Kavya can be seen in Uttararamacarita. The Nāndisloka itself in an example:
Having made an obeisance to former poets, we pray for this that we may attain the immortal goddess speech, that is a phase of the supreme soul. Before the composition poet prays that he may be blessed with words that are sweet like nectar and imperishable. He indirectly states that only who has access to such words can write good poetry; i.e., charming words constitute poetry.

His salutation is aimed at former poets like Vyāsa, Bālmiśki and Kālidāsa who were gifted with sweet words. Similar idea can been seen in the 11th Act of Uttararāmacarita where Atreyi speaks about the circumstances that led to the composition of Rāmāyaṇa.

Here Rāmāyaṇa is described as the manifestation of śabdabrahma. What he means is that words manifest as kavya.
When this manifestation ceases, nothing remains, but Brahma alone.

He lays much emphasis on the importance of duty. In Uttararāmacarita he gives a message that more importance should be given to duty than anything else.

Bhavabhūti is considerate about ordinary people. He was friendly with actors. Rāma prevented Durmukha from describing citizens as bad. Rāma, Sītā, Janaka etc. speak and behave like ordinary beings.

Bhavabhūti’s concept of love is sublime. To him conjugal love, the love between the lover and the lover, friend and friend, parents and children, king and his subjects, master and servants - all are the different shades of one and the same love. The different forms are only manifestations. He conveys that love becomes real when it undergoes the test of sorrow. The merits of his works are numerous. So his works attract men of literary taste for centuries. Time has proved that his prediction उपवियस्यवे तु मम कार्याश समानधर्मां is correct.
KĀLIDĀSA AND BHAVABHŪTI

Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti can be considered as the greatest dramatists in Sanskrit. Similarities found in their works provide scope for comparison. Both possessed genius of the highest order. Nature has an important role in their plays. Kālidāsa depicts the tender aspects of nature whereas Bhavabhūti the awful side. Kālidāsa is unrivalled in the delineation of the sentiment of love. Bhavabhūti is unparallelled in the depiction of pathos. Unlike Bhavabhūti’s characters, Kālidāsa’s characters seldom make the readers weep. Prof. Wilson remarks that Kālidāsa has more fancy. He is a greater artist than Bhavabhūti. The former suggests or indicates, what the latter expresses in forcible language, the characters of the latter overcome by force of passion, often weep bitterly, while those of former simply shed a few tears, if at all they do so.

Bhavabhūti adopts certain devices successfully used by Kālidāsa. In order to depict Dusyanta as a noble king Kālidāsa introduced the incident of the curse of Durvāsa. Otherwise the hero would have been a rake and wicked. Likewise, in order to
exonerate Rāma from the cruel act of abandoning Sītā, Bhavabhūti has stated that the king should give prime importance to the welfare of his subjects. He should be ready to leave anything for the sake of it.

If Kālidāsa has more fancy and imagination, Bhavabhūti is more sentimental and passionate. The former is modest, the latter is proud and sensitive.

Kālidāsa writes the sweet simple and natural vaidarbhī style: Bhavabhūti the high flown, complicated gauḍī style. Elphinstone observes:

The best dramatic authors are Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti; the first excels in tenderness and delicacy and is full of highly practical descriptions. The other great dramatist possesses all the same qualities in an equal degree, accompanied with a sublimity of description, a manly tone and a high and even marital spirit, that is without example in any other Hindu poet that I have heard of. The success of both these poets lies in choosing simple things and elevating them to sublime level.
The popularity of the plays of Bhavabhūti in Kerala

Bhavabhūti’s plays are popular in Kerala. Many commentaries written on the Uttararāmacarita and Mālatīmādhava reveal that Keralites enjoyed his plays very much. The commentaries on the Uttararāmacarita by Nārāyaṇa, and Abhirāma and the ones on Mālatīmādhava by Pūrṇasarasvatī and Abhirāma are rated literary works of high standard.

The Rasamañjarī commentary on Mālatīmādhava of Pūrṇasarvasvatī is an voluminous one and possesses the quality of an independent work. A detailed analysis is given in the 7th chapter. His Rjulaghvi is a poem in 266 verses epitomising the story of Mālatīmādhava. He has also written a ṭīka on the Uttararāmacarita.

Literary Estimate of the plays of Bhavabhūti

Literally, the plays of Bhavabhūti have considerable merits. They are veritable sources from where students can learn the idioms of Sanskrit language. To lexicographers, they are fruitful source to know the history and uses of that most important class of words - the verbs or rather roots - for which they will vainly seek in the
old popular vocabularies. The readers get familiarised with various sastras, since reference on the same occurs every now and then. Bhavabhūti calls himself a master of speech. His command over Sanskrit and style and expressions attest his estimate about himself.

In a literary work importance is given to beauty. A work will be remembered by all if it can impress the readers by its aesthetic expressions and Bhavabhūti has achieved notable success in this regard.

Bhavabhūti’s name will always be remembered owing to his literary and poetic merits.
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(तबसर मात्रथनिर्मात्रमस्यकरणे जनः)

Mahāvīrācarita, Act I, P. 2

(सबसे व्यक्तित्व तुली तत्वचन्दना)
(चर रॉनिया तथा वास्तो शाश्वते) दुर्में जनः


Chapter VI - Page 185.