CHAPTER II
CIRCUMSTANCES, CHARACTERISTICS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE AGE

In order to make a proper appreciation of the characteristics and achievements of Sanskrit prose kavya, it is imperative to understand fully the circumstances under which it originated and the environments in which it developed. Sanskrit kavya, along with its other forms, has been, from the very beginning, closely associated with royal courts, and the contact, which remained intact throughout the long history of its development, has exercised a deep impact on its content, form and spirit. The royal patronage bestowed on the poets, apart from wealth and fame, the requisite leisure and spirit essential for serious composition. One of the results of this affiliation is the aristocratic character of Sanskrit kavya which faithfully mirrors the graces as well as the artificialities of courtly life. It was the courtly atmosphere which inspired the richness of fancy and luxuriance of style and inclination towards what attracts the eye in preference to what touches the heart, in Sanskrit poets.

The establishment of the Gupta empire, which is unanimously styled as the golden epoch of Indian history, and the brâhmanical renaissance accompanying it provided a congenial atmosphere for, and also gave an impetus to, the growth of art and literature and the tremendous momentum of this great inspiration lasted for centuries and is clearly observed in the literary life of 7th century A.D. The re-establishment of

brāhmanical ideal of life replacing the pessimistic attitude of Buddhism restored the wealth and pleasure to their legitimate position equal to that of duty and final emancipation (mokṣa), as objects of life, and the new attitude is amply reflected in contemporary art and literature which attached due importance to the delineation of love and pleasure. In fact, the tradition goes back to very early times. As early as Patañjali, love is established as one of the dominant themes of poetry. The great human emotion is deified as the flower-arrowed god with charming personality which receives the fullest possible development in Sanskrit kāvyā. The revival of the old healthy view of life put forth a general demand for beauty, love and refinement, and it was duly met by the celebration of various festivities with pomp and show and by the public entertainments in the form of dance, music and play. And as was natural, the kāvyā of this period reproduced the optimistic ideal of brāhma-
nical life. The dominant theme of love made its appearance in Sanskrit kāvyā in the accompaniment of the social environment which consisted of nāgaraka or the typical man-about-town and his lady companion, the accomplished courtesan. The culture, hobbies and habits of a nāgaraka had a great bearing on the character of Sanskrit kāvyā which also exhibits a deep impact of his lady companion who occupied a well-recognised position in society by virtue of her beauty, wealth and artistic accomplishments. The science of Erotics also exercised a profound

impact on Sanskrit kāvyā. The treatment of erotic passion occupied the minds of love theorists as well as of rhetoricians and poets. In order to appreciate the love poetry of Sanskrit, it is essential to study both the fundamentals of the science of Erotics and the literary traditions recorded in the rhetorical writings which present a subtle and elaborate analysis of the emotion of love. Without the background of some knowledge of these manuals, one is likely to misunderstand the aspect of love poetry which freely indulges in the minute description of feminine beauty and sexual pleasure. We do not mean that there is nothing objectionable in Sanskrit love poetry, for, we do observe, here and there, nude and vulgar sensuality in the pictures of love sports and we must concise it.

The Sanskrit kāvyā was further influenced by the standard set by saharādaya, the man of taste with cultivated mind, whose critical judgement finally shaped the form of poetry. Although pratibhā or poetic imagination, which may be aided by culture, the knowledge of technique of poetry, and practice which makes a man perfect, was generally considered to be the essential condition for an aspiring poet, yet some theorists including Dandāṇin stressed the value of culture and practice even at the cost of pratibhā and consequently the unhealthy idea of 'educating' and thereby 'manufacturing' a poet came into being.


5. We have a long list of arts and sciences which are to be studied by a man aspiring for poetry in rhetorical writings, esp. cp. Bhāmāha I. 9; Rudrata I. 18; Vāmana I. 3. 20-1. Later, books were written for the practical guidance of
The unwholesome attitude made poetry a learned pursuit. In such an atmosphere which prevailed in the sphere of belles-lettres almost from the beginning, spontaneity of poetry naturally gave way to elaboration and artificiality. Learned ingenuity replaced true poetic genius and extravagance of fancy and erudition usurped the place of real feeling and perspicuity. No doubt, there were gifted poets who aspired for real poetry, but the general tendency inclined towards a blind adherence to rules and regulations. The slavish tendency of the poets resulted into the development of a set paraphernalia of traditional story-telling and a number of poetic conventions. The conventionality of themes and descriptions discouraged originality and suppressed poetic individuality to a considerable extent and thereby hindered a free movement of Sanskrit kāvya.

Again, the peculiar conception of kāvya which was regarded, more or less, as a piece of literary composition, romantic in matter and sentimental in character and above all strictly perfect in form and diction, affected its nature and scope as also its growth. The fact that the term kāvya commanded a wide scope comprehending any literary piece of imagination whether it is in prose or verse results into the insalubrious tendency of developing similar art and style for the metrical and prose forms of literary composition. And as was natural, the

in the art of poetry; op. De: HSP. II, pp. 357 ff; also op. Keith: SL, pp. 335 ff.

6. For kavisamayás or poetic conventions, op. Kāśīm. XIV; SD. VII. 23 ff.
art and style of metrical kāvya invaded the sphere of prose with the result that the prose form was unduly marked with poetic stamp. In theory it may have been a wise step to discard the metre, an external factor, as a line of demarcation of poetry, but in practice it seriously hampered a natural development of prose as prose. Prose and poetry may be essentially one in spirit, but they are entirely different in rhythm, diction and technique and hence can never reconcile with each other. Judged from modern measure-stick of literary criticism, Sanskrit prose kāvya, wherein the elements of poetry and prose have been interwoven together in an unnatural way, the former overpowering the latter, presents a strange type of literary form. The prose which may be regarded as such from modern standard — the simple, fluent and forceful prose,—could never develop in Sanskrit under the circumstances described above.

Certain outstanding characteristics and achievements.

Although Sanskrit kāvya suffers from certain serious defects, yet it must be admitted that it possesses some outstanding merits which can be appreciated only when it is viewed in right perspective of its limitations and the circumstances conditioning its origin and development. Sanskrit poetry, it must be confessed, is not the spontaneous outcome of powerful emotions, but the fact remains that it very often succeeds in creating an impression of spontaneity with freshness of poetic art and style.

Sanskrit kāvya delights in the beauty of words. It possesses a rare gift of melodic sound-effects which the poets
skilfully produce by a matching combination of soft vocables. The unique susceptibility of the poets to fine variations of sound 'to which literatures of other countries afford few parallels' was duly recognised by the theorists who classified diction on the basis of the pleasing effect of sounds and dealt in detail with verbal figures like anuprāsa and yamaka.

The peculiar quality of flexibility of Sanskrit language which afforded a free and frequent occurrence of musical assonances, also encouraged the subtle employment of double entendre as a fine artistic device, and the theory gave its full support to the practice by glorifying the device as an element which adds to the charm of poetic expression. No doubt that it involves the straining of language and stands in the way of free enjoyment of aesthetic pleasure, but if used with a due sense of proportion, its subversive aspect disappears and it helps the realisation of poetic delight.

Again, the peculiar genius of the language permitted a free use of long strings of compounds in kāvyā and especially in prose compositions and the theorists accorded their willing recommendation to the tendency by exalting the profusion of compounds as the very essence of prose. The unique device, if employed judiciously, enhances the charm of diction and picturesqueness of descriptions. It is a forceful means of

8. KA. II. 363; also op. above, chap. I, fns. 28-9.
9. KA. I. 80; also op. De: HSL. p. 34.
synthetic expression with a singular power of compression. It brings about compactness both in matter and diction and produces a group picture of a series of allied objects.

Another outstanding feature of Sanskrit kāvya is its peerless quality of metaphorical expression which theorists commended as the quintessence of poetic diction. It lends force and beauty to a kāvya if there is freshness of originality and brilliance of imagination accompanying it. If, however, it is used deliberately for scholastic effects, it loses its charm and becomes tiresome. Sanskrit poetry is also rich in figurative expression. A judicious employment of figures like simile and metaphor enriches poetical fancy and embellishes word-pictures, in the sphere of which also Sanskrit kāvya excels. For the sake of effecting beautiful and graphic word-paintings, it even overlooks the theme or narrative which fact forms one of its serious defects.

The general complaint that Sanskrit poetry is indifferent to the problems of human life, and consequently it does not possess any great tragedy or light comedy is no doubt genuine, but as a matter of fact Sanskrit kāvya reflects in this respect the peculiar trend of Indian mind which faced neither physical strifes nor mental conflicts. The complacent attitude towards life and destiny prevented it from yielding to a sense of suffering or discontent. The serene and satisfied mood was the result of a profound faith in God and His justice which made the people
idealistic in outlook, and created a congenial atmosphere for
the idealised creation of art and literature in which there
are not cavities or angularities of vicissitudes of life. The
theorists also contributed to the healthy attitude of poets by
drawing a line of distinction between the real world of hard
facts and the imaginary sphere of art and poetry wherein the
problems of life yield place to pleasures of romantic realm.
Even the sorrows and sufferings depicted in poetry do not dis-
turb the even temper of mind and instead impart supreme poetic
pleasure, appearing as they do in impersonalised form of pure
aesthetic character. The peculiar condition of mind realis-
ing the aesthetic delight is technically called rasa which has
been recognised as the soul of poetic art. The idea of
suggestion also, which existed in spirit in quite an early
age, encouraged the idealistic outlook on art and poetry by
opposing the direct and express portrayal of life and its
problems in poetry. But it is unjust to say that Sanskrit
kavya is devoid of any interest in problems of human life,
for it does depict life and its eternal problems in the form
of human emotions of love and disgust, humour and pathos,
heroism and fear and terror and wonder which it ably delineates
in their multifarious forms and aspects.

One of the remarkable achievements of Sanskrit poetry is
its unique power of delineating nature in its multiformity of

12. Cp. the rasaś; see above, sect. II, chap. VIII.
phenomena with matching colours. Of course, there is much which is \textit{mx} conventional and stale, but freshness of observation is not altogether wanting. Natural phenomena often accompany corresponding emotional aspects of human life and they make the colour and impressional of each other faster and deeper. The various objects of nature also supply a poet with requisite material for their similes and metaphors and other allied figures. Nature serves in this respect as a befitting background of human emotions and especially of the predominant emotion of love which gets perhaps the most out of the natural phenomena including the six seasons which have been elegantly portrayed in Sanskrit \textit{k\=avya} with special reference to various moods of lovers and their beloved in different seasons. \footnote{13. Cf. for detail, De: HSL. pp. 18-42; Keith: HSL. pp. 338-51. 14. Cf. Kuma. I. 3.}