

The Place Of The Sekasubhodaya In Sanskrit Literature And The Style Of Story Telling

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A literature is considered to be a mirror of the Society. Be it in Verse or in mixed it is remarkable seen that a social order or formation encompasses historical, political, religious elements and by proper analysis or dissection some conclusion can be made. That is why the Scholars take the literature one of the fact finders.

This book proves its gravity as it touches the materials of early Bengal literary and culture with firm belief and undoubtedly preserves some old tradition and gossip about the Pala and Sena ruling in Bengal before the coming of the Turks. A container of miscellaneous stories that were current in the country reminds us some of the stories of "Vetalapancavimsati" and a few stories of some historical importance 'sekasubhodaya' celebrating the auspicious coming of a Muslim saint in a country which did not know Islam, is a first literary record in Bengal that purports to honour a Pir. The overall view of the book extends the essence of historicity enshrouded by a few pseudo historical verses, some anecdotes, historical persons such as Laksmanasena, Umapatidhara, Govardhana Acharya, Halayudha Misra, Vijaysena, Ramapala.

Its contents are affluent by the adventures of these and other people and miscellaneous stories that were current in the country together with a number of moral hemistichs attributed to Chanakya. Sanskrit tags and pro verses, Several Sanskrit verses all more or less are corrupted. In this topic we tried to analyse the text, basically to know the purpose of the book.

Sekasubhodaya, celebrating the auspicious coming of a Muslim saint in a country which did not know Islam, is a first literary record in Bengal that purports to honour a Pir. The overall structure of the book extends the essence of historicity enshrouded by a few pseudo historical verses, some anecdotes, historical persons such as Laksmanasena, Umapatidhara, Govardhana Acharya, Halayudha Misra, Vijaysena, Ramapala, Dhoyi, Jayadeva etc. This book proves its gravity as it touches the materials of early Bengal history and culture with firm belief and undoubtedly preserves some old tradition and gossip about the- Hindu Kings - Pala and Sena ruling in Bengal before the coming of the Turks.

A container of miscellaneous stories that were current in the country reminds us some of the stories of Vetalapancavimsati and a few stories of some historical importance. The story of the mother losing her head on hearing good music goes back to the ninth century. The scene of a mother mistaking her child for the pitcher and dropping him in well is depicted in a panel of the ruined temple excavated at Paharpur in North Bengal, not far off from a historical site connected with the Sena kings.

Having not been puffed up with much material for the text book variety of history, some incidents and references articulated breathe the spirit of genuine history. For instance

Laksmasena antagonism to Muslims and his clash with the old minister Umapatidhara, though not mentioned in any records of Laksmasena and his sons was a fact. There is little doubt that Laksmasena had several armed conflicts and fights with the Muslim power which came into light by the eulogies of the two court poets of the king.¹

Laksmasena's hostile attitude to the Turks was detected from the present book where the seikh was told by the Great Person to go to the eastern country where the king was Laksmasena who killed the Muslim that ventured there.²

Antagonism between king Laksmasena and Umapatidhara, between the Queen Vallabha and the minister is the main note in many of the stories and anecdotes in Sekasubhodaya. The king was jealous of the minister as the latter had a skilled attendant like Madana. He was also ungracious to the minister on account of the latter's dislike for Vallabha. A story in Prabandhacintamani of Merutuhga relating to the antagonism between Laksmasena and his senior minister who did not approve of the king's partiality for a low-caste concubine.

Besides the author Halayudha Misra and Umapatidhara, a few other persons belonged to the court of Laksmasena such as GovardhanaAcarya, Dhoyi, Jayadeva etc. GovardhanaAcarya who is called Jagadguru, appears as an upright, pious Brahman of somewhat irritable temper, while Dhoyi, an illiterate man coming to possess divine gift of high poetry obviously follows the tradition of stories concerning Valmiki and Kalidasa. The story of Jayadeva and his wife contesting VudhanaMisra is obviously apocryphal as Kapilendra of Orissa belonged to the 15th Century. This does not stand far from truth. It indicates that Jayadeva did not originally belong to the court of Laksmasena and that he had first come there as an outsider. This had been supported by a verse by Jayadeva quoted in Sadukti-karnamrta.

Apart from such historical persons another figure Garigo, the play actor deserves mention, but sincerely there was a historical person named Garigoka, a play-actor and also a poet of some sort and two of his verses are quoted in Sadukti-karnamrta.³ This chapter in Sekasubhodaya with his son Jaya, also a play actor Jayanta and the latter's wife Vidutprabha are probably baseless pleasantries.

The author Halayudha Misra appears as a friend of the seikh in the opening chapter and reappears sporadically in the later chapters as a good and impartial man liked by the seikh enjoying the full confidence of the king and respected by the people.

The hero of the "Sekasubhodaya" the seikh is not a historical person. The miracles of the saint, his adventures and his journeys are narrated in a style which recalls the mediaeval Mohammedan Person and Arab romance, as in the tales of HatimTayi and the of Four Dervishes. The contents are undoubtedly inspired by the rich arabesques of Mohammedan romance and hagiology, But the style of narration is based on that of India and from that aspect the book is a direct descendant of the Vetalapancavimsati, the Dvatisatputtalika the Sukasaptati and other similar medieval works. In fact, in it we find wedded the spirit of Hindu story-telling with Mohammedan romance.) As a collection of legends narrating the advent of Bengal of a miracle working Mohammedan preacher to whose memory an important mosque and shrine still stands, the work affords us a curious side light into the spread of Islam in Bengal, with hints as to its having penetrated inside the province even before the Turk had brought it as the faith of an iron-handed ruling class. The glimpses into

Bengalee Hindu society, such as perhaps it was in the decadent days of inefficient rule immediately preceding the Turki raids and final conquest, are valuable indeed, as a document of Bengali sociology it is very important. This book also was regarded as an incontrovertible proof of the right of the mosque and shrine) and of its attendant priests to the rich lands it had been enjoying. It bears other value also as it used to be read out on solemn occasions to the pious pilgrims who were mostly the Mohammedan peasantry of the neighbourhood of Maldah and these people were Hindus in all, but name, among whom the traditions of the spacious days of the Hindu kings - The Great Palas and the Senas would linger and from whom in spite of their nominal adherence to Islam the Sanskrit learning and Sanskrit culture of the days of their ancestors still claimed homage.) And for the delectation of such an audience the work was composed by one, may be by one of them, whose knowledge of the Sanskrit language in which it was his ambition to compose was not of the best. He had a tolerably good Sanskrit vocabulary and even now in Bengal villages the tradition is to make the boys in the village school (both Hindus and Mohammedans) get the Amarakosa by heart after some elementary knowledge of Bengali, together with a number of moral hemistichs attributed to Canakya.

Style of story-telling

The text ending in twenty five chapters out of twenty seven chapters (Colophon saptavimsatihparicchedahsamaptah) goes to celebrate the auspicious coming of a Muslim saint in a country which did not know Islam and purports to honour a Pir. In its narration the essence of historicity through a few pseudo historical verses, some anecdotes, historical persons such as Laksmanasena, Umapati Dhara, Govardhana Acarya, Halayudha Misra, Vijaya Sena, Rama Paia, Dhoyi, Jaya- deva etc. enlightens the materials of early Bengal history and culture preserving some old traditions and gossip about the Hindu kings - Paia and Sena - ruling in Bengal before the coming of the Turks. Its contents are affluent by the adventures of the seikh and other people and miscellaneous stories that were current in the country together with a number of moral hemistichs attributed to Canakya. Sanskrit tags and proverbs, several Sanskrit verses all more or less are corrupted.

Before taking any analysis of the text it appears to us that it is manifestly a forgery and partly a pious forgery to boot. The purpose is to establish a high antiquity for the shrine of a Mohammedan saint of the 15th century and incidentally to establish the rights of the shrine to some connected landed property. In order to fulfil such pious fraud the unknown concoctor threw chronology and history to the winds and took the hero of this romance-cum-collection of folk tales three centuries earlier, to the reign of the last Hindu King of Bengal, who is said to have been convinced of the religious merits of the saint and to have endowed his mosque with valuable lands. The authorship has been ascribed to Halayudha Misra who is well-known as a courtier of Laksmana Sena, and author of the Brahmana-sarvasva, a popular smṛiti work, so that its authenticity might not be questioned. Chapter XVIII is the most important one from the point of view of the purpose in writing this book, as it contains the names of villages alleged to have been offered by King Laksmana Sena as grants to the seikh.⁴

While narrating the adventures of a Mohammedan saint, Jalaluddin Tabrizi by name and establishing his reputation, the author extended his effort to speak about the life pattern and supernatural behaviour of the said saint to the king who ultimately granted him some villages to build a mosque and these villages were apparently in possession of the mosque when the work was written. Incidentally there are stories of the Vetala pancavimsati-type with

a certain elements obtained from mediaeval Persian romance (which forms the distinctive Mohammedan contribution in the formation of the work Ch - I) .

Apart from style and manner the text bears some testimonies from the Mahabharata, Vetalpanca-vims²ati, Pane a-tantra, Perso-Arbic, Persian Middle Bengali etc. that provide additional importance to it.

A set of examples will justify its stand.

Ch. I.

3.25 Durvesa: Persian Darves= Bengali Darvesa. The form Durvesa is a folk-etymological form as the dervish or faqir is generally dressed in black.

6.11 asalaguda : Bengali 'aisasota', from Perso-Arabic 'Asa'.

6.18 srnginivisam - arsenic; Bengali . Senko visa' is from Portuguese arsenico.

6.25 Namaja : Persian namaz.

6.28 Daranl 'flood' cf . Maithili dadala 'flood'.

Chapter II.

10.17 jahaj : Persian jahaz.

Chapter VI

27.4 Kafur : Perso-Arabic 'qafur'.

27.8 Ramjan : Perso-Arabic 'Ramzan'.

27.23 ayasa Perso-Arabic 'Ayesah'; also ayasi.

Chapter VIII

40.22 - 23

vubhuksitahkirnnakaroti papain ksina Jana niskarunabhavanti /
akhyahibhadrepriyadarsanasyana gahgadattah punareti kupam.//

This verse occurs in the Pancatantra.

43.22 Raji siraja s Perse-Arabic Qazi Shiraj.

Chapter X

53.20 The story of the Kapalika and the King Vikrama has been taken from the Vetalapancavimsatika where, however, the Kapalika is named Santasila and not Ksantisila.

54.5 The story of the short-footed and long footed sisters has been taken from the 'Vetalapancavimsatika'. (Story no. XXIV. in Uhle's edition.)

Chapter XII

60.13-14 Srimallaksmanasena mahavir / Karnarandhre bheje tir //

-This verse is in Middle Bengali.

61.21-22 Ram raja varte indra varse jal /

ye vrksa roye se avasya dhare phal //

- This verse is in Middle Bengali.

Chapter XV

77.27 dhalayamasa 'poured out' Bengalicism.

77.28 Tolayamasa 'gathered'. 'Bengalicism'.

Chapter XVII

89.1 masida : this is an old form in the New Indo-Aryan languages which comes from Perso Arabic masjid. It occurs in dialectal Hindi and in Bihari also as masit, masid.

89.10 Vatavatena ; "In course of gossip", Vata (SKT.varta) is now lost in Modern Bengali.

90.16 madhye ache pirermokam /
tasyoparividvatepradhanpurusersthan /
tiyamjalitahar name dan //...etc.

These These verses are in Middle Bengali.

92, 10-12.

vanersakkhaysekvanergona /
jhikarir potali vandhina dey sek
hate vikaile hay sona //

These verses are in Bengali.

Chapter XXI

108.2 Barakat : Perso-Arabic 'barakat'(All the numbers have been given here referring to the page and line)

Faith in meaning and not in words is the spirit of the text. We find that such belief and attitude and contempt of grammar in sentences were dominant in the Buddhists. No compromise by them with the maintenance of accuracy in placing words in a sentence after Sanskrit grammar is met with and the following comment is expressed - asmakanamsangatanamarthattatparyamsabdani Kos cinta ? (BenermeyerHaraprasadSastri, P.222) To ascertain the spirit stated above we are to look back to the history of the then society.

As a collection of legends narrating the advent in Bengal of a miracle-working Mohammedan preacher to whose memory an important mosque and shrine still stands, the work affords us curious sidelight into the spread of Islam in Bengal, with hints as to its having penetrated inside the province even before the Turk had brought it as the faith of an iron-handed ruling class. The glimpses into Bengalee Hindu society, such as perhaps it was in the decadent days of inefficient rule immediately preceding the Turkey raids and final conquest are valuable indeed. It can easily be apprehended that the appeal of the book to the people was its essence. In one hand the book was regarded as an incontrovertible proof of the right of the mosque and the shrine to the rich lands it had been enjoying, on the other hand it used to be read on solemn occasions to the pious pilgrims who were mostly the Mohammedan peasantry of the neighbourhood of Maldah and these people were Hindus in all but name, among whom the tradition of the specious days of the Hindu Kings - the great Palas and the Senas «. would still linger and from whom in spite of their nominal adherence to Islam (brought about by circumstances other than that of peaceful persuasion only) the Sanskrit learning and Sanskrit culture of the days of their anecdotes still claimed homage. And for the delectation of such an audience the work was composed by one, may be by one of them whose knowledge of the Sanskrit language in which it was his ambition to compose was not of the best. He had a tolerably good Sanskrit vocabulary and even now in Bengal villages the tradition is to make the boys in the village school (both Hindus and Mohammedans) get the Amarakosa by heart after some elementary knowledge of Bengali, together with a number of moral hemistichs attributed to Canakya even when we do not have the remotest idea of taking up them seriously. Sanskrit tags and proverbs and several Sanskrit verses, all more or less corrupted are common coin in the exchange of every day speech in Bengal even to the present day, and it was certainly more so in early times. Our author

knew some Sanskrit and he had undoubtedly some old materials to go by and he had the stories. All these he combined into a book of 27 chapters, of which two are lost and he invented a language of his own which would be intelligible to the more learned among his village audience, although the renowned scholars might laugh at it to scorn. His language should be called 'dog Sanskrit'; 'corrupt Sanskrit' would be too flattering a term for it. The author thinks in Bengali and he makes his Sanskrit follow the Bengali.. All grammatical forms of the stately classical speech of India which would seem superfluous from the point of view of Bengali he casts aside with a bold hand and he creates turns of expression and inflexional forms utterly foreign to Sanskrit, whenever he feels that his knowledge of the language of the Gods is not equal to rendering his Bengali sentences. The author was not unique in his boldness with regard to Sanskrit grammar. Orthodox Pandits, Brahman scholars who had their strong foundation over grammar would not bear slipshod grammar. But the Buddhists did not do so. The literary traditions are connected with the cultivation of vernaculars and when they later took up the Brahman's language, they sought to bring it down to the level of the Prakrts. If the Brahmans laughed at them for their atrocious solecisms, they would retort that unlike the Brahmans, they were not believers in fine words - they had faith in meaning and not in words as indicated by writer. Such spirit finds heartiest support from every page nay every sentence of the Sekasubhodaya. The language may be described as Buddhist Sanskrit run mad and in fact, it would be pertinent to think that the Sekasubhodaya follows Post-Mohammedan form of the Buddhist tradition of writing Sanskrit which exhibited corrupt display.

However, the present text which was in its earlier form wholly or for the most portion written in verse as presumed by the scholars, furnished the prose portions strewn with broken verse feet, often not properly adjusted in the sentence. The verses, verse-lines and imbedded verse feet other than quotations are usually written in very good Sanskrit. The prose too sometimes shows good Sanskrit words, phrases and idioms. Not a few stories carry an atmosphere of pre-Muslim days. One such story not found anywhere else is depicted in a panel of Paharpur temple. A few of the stories belong to the class of Vetala-pañcavimsati. The historical stories and anecdotes are narrated in it to make a popular and fruitful writing. A few examples may be tendered here to reveal the style of story-telling of the author Halayudha Misra.

Number refer to the line of page.

Page 1

2-3 : jjisnurlekhaghatitamahim.....

darsayan jahnavi ca /

ayatah pascimantaddiso disi

dadpsesasayan pujoyamanam.

- The second line is corrupt and the reading
of the third line is uncertain

8. sirovestanat&tparah: Originally tatpara might have
been toppara (cap, headdress).

11. bhase should be read bhaseh

12. sakrodhaysa should be read sakrodhasca.

Page 2

20 :asmakamlokairvigiyate raja :

it is a translation from Bengali amakelokegayaraja.

21 : tvamapi= tvayapi

22 : Yanapimriyate = Bengali Yahakei mare.

25 : maya = Bengali mai, mui (I)

Page 3

24 : janatah may be read janata (imperative plural).

Page 4

2 : Gango the dancer (Nata Gahgoka) has been mentioned as the author of a verse in Saduktikarnamrta (10.5) written in Sardulavikridita metre.

20 : Durveso'pi. There is a pun here : durve/a ill-clad and darvesa (dervish).

21 : bhavitri =bhavati (lady).

Page 5

22 : pakavestam= Bengali paka it.

Page 7

5. Karpuradibhirjutta should be read Karpuradibhiryukta.

19. patitaste = Bengali pariache.

Page 9

11. dutenamantrinamjnapitasca = Bengali dutadiyamantrikejanaila.

13. dvau vyagrabhyam = Bengali dui baghe.

Page 15

1. procchayamasa may be read protsahayamasa.

Page 17

9. Khanitram= Bengali khanta (an iron rod which was carried by some classes of sadhus).

Page 19

2 : nakciyari : Bengali word (not identified)

Page 22

4 : galayoh= locative dual of gala (Bengali word, meaning cheek, treated as Sanskrit).

Page 37

17 s acch ad an am may be read ucchadanam (utsadana)

Page 41

23 : Kakuvadam= Bengali kakuti.

Page 42

8 : Khatake'ham = Bengali khatakami.

17 : Karta vyatiriktatkapinajanami- Bengali kartach ad a kahakeo janina.

Page 45

10 : mama haste ekavarammistaniaambhoktavyam =Bengali amar hate ekbarmistanna avasya khaibe.

Page 46

4-5 : vastutritayamraksabhavati « Bengali vastutintiraksa hay.

Page 48

18-19 : haindavi katha = Indian lore (or talking an Indian language)

24-25 : karavalam = Bengali karoya.

Page 51

10 : yatramkrtva = Bengali yatrakariya (having made a formal departure) .

Page 54

a) ff : This is a concluding story from new version of Vetalapancavimsati.

Page 56

24 : ahamdatrakhandambandhakamdattvasmi = Bengali Ami dakhanabadhadiyachi.

Page 57

5 : purusaih should be read-varsaih

Page 65

20 : The story is apparently old and it is not told anywhere else. But it illustrated in a panel recovered from the temple of Mahasthan.

Page 70

27 : The queen Vallabha probably did not belong to as high a caste as the minister of the king. She might have been a concubine. The reputation of LaksmanaSena keeping a number of concubines spread widely and it is echoed in story books. Thus : babhuvagaudadesLaksmanaSenanama raja. Tasyaratnaprabhanamnimahisi, taditarascabhoginyahkaticidbabhuvuh (There was King LaksmanaSena in the country of Gauda. His queen was Ratnaprabha by name. Besides there were other concubines) Purusapariksa by Vidyapati, ed.by R. Jha, p.136.

Page 75

10 : ekadivasopari = Bengali ek divas pare.

Page 77

6 : Chittvaste = Bengali chediyache.

25 : Khadayitva = Kh ad ay it urn.

26.27 : dhalayamasa, tolayamasa = Bengali dhalila, tulila.

Page 81

21 : paridhapasi should be read paridhapayasi.

25 : sardhamkrtva = Bengali ardhekkariya.

Page 83

4 : vadasi na - Bengali balls na.

Page 121

2 : danavapaterastram..... for vastram.

This book is full of grammatical mistage. Some of them may be mentioned.

Sandhi

All final anusvaras have been rendered by m in the printed text, but they have been retained in other places. The following wrong euphonic combinations occur in the work :

srnuraham = srnu + aham.

Tatopravisya = tatah + pravisya

bhavatornama = bhavatah + nama

avayortrptim = avoyoh + trptim

Noun

The grammatical gender in the work often varies from the standard usage. Thus for example, we find svabhava, prana, dhvani, gandha and grama as neuter, dhana, ajirna and sasti as masculine and dara as feminine.

The language shows much peculiarity in declension. Correct Sanskrit forms of course are found, but there are wrong forms and solecisms. Some of the typical anomalous forms are given below :-

vyaghrabhyam = vyaghrau
padau = padayoh
atithaya=atithaye
bhartaram= bhartuh

Pronouns

Pronouns have been used as nominative for the instrumental and vice versa. Such as,
maya = aham
avavyam = avam
sa = taya etc.

In the latest phase of Sanskrit the passive construction becomes usual for,, the 'past. tense of the verb, and this might have been responsible for the confusion between the nominative and the instrumental.

Verb

The causative verbs have been very frequently and often exclusively used for the simple verb. The simple verb, on the other hand, has not infrequently been used for the causative.

The passive stem has been very often used for the active; e.g. kriyate, ucyante etc. The reverse phenomenon is to be found in tyajati= tyajyate.

The use of the tense bears the peculiar mentality of the author. The perfect has been used for the present as well as for the future. Thus :-

a) Nandi nama ksetrapalah pratyaham manusyam dhrtva khada- yamasa - A
ksetrapala, named Nandi, seizes men every day and eats them up. SSD. Ch.XVIII
Lines 11-12 P.97 pp. 97

b) aturah b rah man ah sarve tatha ca mama kimkarah /
etan yah palayamasa sa raja jayatacciram //
- All that are afflicted, the Brahmins, and my attendants may that king be victorious, who shall support these people. SSD. Ch.XI, Lines 10-11, p.57.

The future for the present (a) atah karanSt ratrau bhramisyami - hence I wonder at night. SSD. Ch.XV, lines 15, P. 74.

The future for the simple past.

(a) vakam hanisyasi katham - why did you assault the heron SSD. ch.vi, line 19, p. 31.

The past has often been used for the future. The past-participle (ending in-ta) of all verbs without any restriction has been used in the active voice as the substitute of the finite verb. In the passive construction the object is very often retained in the accusative. Thus :

tato mayoktam tam napitabadhum Then I said to the barbar's wife. SSD . Ch. III, line 17, p.14.

The concord between the subject and the finite verb in respect of person and gender is more often broken than observed. The subject in the second person often takes a verb in the third person and vice versa. This confusion is probably due to the difference of construction between yusmad and bhavad, the former being construed in the second person, and the latter in the third.

Even a careless perusal of the Sekasubhodaya will show that the work belongs to the same class as the Mahavastu, the gatha portions of the Lalitavistara and. other Buddhist Sanskrit works. The only point of difference is this that in the former naturally enough the

vernacular (New Indo-Aryan) is the basis of this dog Sanskrit, while in the latter it is Prakrt (Middle Indo-Aryan). The way in which in these two forms of corrupt Sanskrit Middle Indo-Aryan and New Indo-Aryan vernacular forms and idioms have been sanskritised is notable.

Footnote

1. Saduktikarnamrita III. 15.4; V.18.3.
2. "yatrayoyavanoyatitam ghatayati"
SSD. Ch. IX. Line, 18, P. 48.
3. Saduktikarnamrita – I. 10,5; IV.40.4 .
4. Prathamadevatalonitaln .
Yatodevatalam nandanvetitatah Paramasamanamhattamcottaresu Satsaha
syasyagramavailahucariVahavarajadingramamnitammahatmanaPuriRama
vatiyatrabhuvirVikhyatanama ca.
PurvahattamuttarahattammadaihattamtatahParam.
SSD. Ch. XVIII Lines 24-28,P.98.