

A NEW RELEVANT DRAMA ---- AWAY FROM THE TRODDEN PATH

“Tritiya purusharthasya paaramyam”

Dr.Mrs.Sundari Siddhartha

A new Sanskrit drama for the intelligentsia of the free world of 2020 AD, is available in the grantha script. Titled ‘**Prahasana Natakam**’ it was published in South India in 1889, by Purasai Yezhumalai Pillai at the printing and publishing house named Vivekadipikaa. The cover page says that the author is a famous and revered poet named Kaalidaasa. The Script has been edited and corrected and proof-read by a scholar, Shri.K.Subrahmanya Shastri of the Kaushika gotra (family).

I have got the ‘grantha script’ transliterated into the Devanaagari script. The critical study of the unique theme, character and poetic tenor of the play reveals a definite milestone in the evolution of the Sanskrit drama in the last part of the 19th century.

The **structure** of the drama does not show any change or striking novelty. It begins with two Nandi verses. This is followed by the usual Prologue ---the dialogue between the Stage- manager and his companion. The main part of the drama has just one long act, with a number of scenes. The play ends with the Bharatavaakya and a prayer to Lord Siva and his Consort.

The main **sentiment** running through the play is a modified version of Sambhoga Sringara, freely transgressing the limitations of the relationship between husband and wife. The Science of Poetics of the middle ages, or for that matter the Victorian-age-puritans would definitely have branded it as having the dosha (fault) of anauchitya (Inpropriety). The actions, thoughts and reactions of the characters would have been termed as sub-human or primitive, uncouth, projecting the animal in man.

Not only in Poetics but also in the Society and literature of those times, these were taboo, as they deal with physical intimacies whose description went against the grain of the Victorian prudishness. So what has the dramatist done to get around these obstacles? He has given the characters names of animals and birds and superimposed the sexual urges and reactions of humans on them. Consequently, humour and laughter are generated, instead of disgust and protest, because of the escapism of the author by suggesting that they are more animal than human.

Inspite of all these camouflage, the drama brings up forcefully, the fact that these are realities of life which have to be faced and accepted as such. They cannot be wished away or brushed under the carpet. Human nature cannot be regulated by rules of Poetics and Aesthetics.

Right from the Vedic times the four aims of life---dharma, artha, kama, moksha--- have had equal importance. Hymns in the tenth mandala of the Rig Veda discuss sex freely with due emphasis on the dharma aspect of it. The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana is the magnum opus on the subject of erotics written nearly two thousand years ago. Ananga Ranga, another treatise on the art of love, is said to have been composed in the sixteenth century. The English translations of Kama Sutra and Ananga Ranga (published in 1883 and 1885 respectively) have most probably influenced and encouraged the penning of this play in 1889.

It is hence inferred that this play is an attempt of a dramatist to rise above the puritan society of his time and present a real, clean picture of this overlooked aspect of man and woman. Even then, fearing the audience-reaction, he dressed it up as a **Prahasana** (joke, humorous, generating laughter). A writer is powerful. He can describe what was, what is, and what will be, as per his vision. And for all we know, the future might be just what he has presented.

Dr.Mrs.Sundari Siddhartha
c/o Theosophical Society
Adyar,Chennai-600 020,
India.
Email: mahagouri@yahoo.com