

“Paraśurāma and Bhavabhūti’s Anguish”

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Bhavabhūti was born in a very orthodox family of traditional Brahmins. He was also deeply steeped in śāstric learning. He is rightly described as a padavākyapramāṇja (adept in Vyākaraṇa, Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā) in all the three prologues of his plays. Born at Padmapuram in Vidarbha, he migrated towards north and reached Padmāvati (most probably modern Pavāyā near Gwalior Dist. in Madhya Pradesh) where his plays were performed during the Yātrā of Kālapriyanātha. He had very good relations with the repertoire which presented his plays on stage. And yet in his second play Bhavabhūti expresses his anguish for being disregarded. G.K.Bhat opines that the reason being this so-called disregard lies in Bhavabhūti’s neglect of his family traditions, and his indulgence in theatre. This does not sufficiently explain the outburst by Bhavabhūti. It is true that in the tradition of highly orthodox and scholarly family to which Bhavabhūti belonged, writing of poetry or play was supposed to be an inferior task of derogatory nature. However, Bhavabhūti would not expect appreciation from his family members whom he has left to seek his career as a dramatist. It is clear that he is unhappy because his first play - *Mahāvīracaritam* has not been properly received. Bhavabhūti has recast the whole story of Rāmāyaṇa offering new interpretations to many of its characters and episodes. This redesigning of the whole story must have been some what startling for his audience. This in itself cannot become a reason for the disregard of which Bhavabhūti is talking in his verse- *Ye nāma kecidih nah* etc. It is Bhavabhūti’s portrayal of the character of Paraśurāma that must have caused a furor amongst a section of the society, to the extent that there was a movement to seize the copies of the text of Mahāvīracaritan and destroy them by putting them to fire.

In Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki Paraśurāma is viewed with awe and terror and he is dreaded. But his act of sacrilege as well as his barbarous killings of human beings including women and children have nowhere been decried. It is Bhavabhūti who questions these acts of Paraśurāma. Unlike their counterparts in Rāmāyaṇa, Daśaratha, Janaka and Śatānanda in his play are not at all terrified by the onslaught of Paraśurāma; they challenge him and go to the extent of vehemently condemning his murderous acts.

The section of society that upheld Paraśurāma as one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu, obviously could not tolerate this contempt for Paraśurāma. These votaries of Paraśurāma might have led a tirade against Bhavabhūti, thus causing him the anguish