

MAHĀŚVETĀ. A VISIONARY PICTURE OF MYSTICAL LIGHT?

AN ABSTRACT

The Mahāśvetā portrait is a *nakhaśikhavarṇana* of perfect aesthetical artistry, describing, with ethereal imagery, the light-flooded appearance of the Śiva-devoted and *vinā*-playing ascetic Mahāśvetā, one of the heroines of Bāṇa's prose novel Kādambarī, its conspicuous feature being the depiction of a radiating candescence of the type of the inner light of a shaman or mystic or holy person, comparable to mystical visions of the beyond, whatever their settings.

There are many direct and indirect descriptions as well as philosophical and theological discussions of this phenomenon in practically all religious cultures of the world, so also in India (before and after Bāṇa). It is shamanic in origin and widely spread in mystical traditions throughout history all over the globe.

The primary purpose of the paper is to determine what the lucency aspect of the Mahāśvetā portrait is basically modelled upon: a traditional whiteness-*utprekṣā* typology; conventional and personal fancies of mystical aura depiction; iconographic theophany symbols and pictures; a personal ken of mystical visionary scenes.

Although the first-mentioned elements have been largely at work to form the traditional frame and insides of the portrayal, the primary (incentive) source of inspiration (lending his account an air of authenticity) must have been the latter, so the argument.

The main reason for this assumption is the overwhelming life-like intensity of the candent aura depiction exceeding all other whiteness-imagery pictures, cherished by the poet, both in sublimity, purity, density, depth and redundance, and surpassing traditional aura portrayals, thus being comparable only to personal visionary light descriptions of a shamanic, mystical, near-death-, post-mortem-, or other light-experience nature. Reference is made to archaic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian descriptions as well as modern scientific reports.

Considering Gwendolyn Layne's analysis of the deeper import of the story (based on its structure and symbolism) as "a master-work of illusion and of transformations", the author tries to situate the portrait's role between poetical finality and noetical contingency, interpreting his concept of *māyā* as a poetical device inculturated from outside, but intrinsic to poetical vision alone.