

Aśvaghōṣa's world of simile as reflected in Saundarananda and Buddhacarita

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Known to us as one of the most eminent poets of Sanskrit literature, as the masterly model of Kālidāsa and as the author of epic, dramatic and lyrical poems, Aśvaghōṣa (about 100 AD) was the great exponent of the Buddhism. Historically recorded as a legend and light of guidance by the two great Chinese Buddhist pilgrims o(5th and 7th centuries respectively), his literary skill of creating a mass impact through the numerous examples of similes is marvelous.

While discussing the seriousness of the Buddhist philosophy, his narration is made lively by this poetic device. The concept of morality and the advice for support and charity for a larger socio-religious cause (such as the erection of a monastery) through the Words of the Great Master, Tathāgata(Buddhacarita) are well expounded by the world of similes. The description of daily life scenes such as the womenfolk peeping out of the windows to see the incoming Kumāra, and the inability of one girl to run due to her voluptuous body (Saundarananda)-- all become lively through his pen. No wonder, Buddhaghōṣa's composition was found being narrated and understood by a large number of listeners in front of Buddhist shrines as reported by I-tsing. The present paper makes an attempt to evaluate the artistic arrangement of material through the similes in his two compositions, viz., Saundarananda and Buddhacarita.