

Philosophical thoughts in invocatory verses of Bhasa

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Abstract/Introduction

Bhasa is a highly acclaimed dramatist of Samskrit literature, whose hereto discovered works are 13 in number, though a 14th play (Yajnaphalam) is still debated of his authorship. Bhasa follows the tradition of Samskrit writers, who have most traditionally incorporated a benedictory or invocatory verse at the beginning of their works. It was even seriously debated in Nyaya and other schools of Indian philosophy that the Mangala (Styled Nandi in Dramas) is efficient in bringing about the completion of the work without hindrances. Whatever may be the credence and arguments of Mangalavada, it does throw light on the philosophical attitude a author has. It also shows the stage of philosophical development in the period of the poet or author. It is with this perspective that the present paper takes up the invocatory verses from the 13 plays of Bhasa for study from philosophical perspective. It shall be functional in understanding the philosophical stance taken by our poet Bhasa. It shall also be constructive to make an estimation of the philosophical development of the Pre-Christ era in India (In the southern part as well, as most feel the region of Bhasa to be the South, as also as definitely Pre-Christ by several centuries). The paper shall examine the invocatory verses in the background of Vedic and Puranic literature which Bhasa richly inherits. It is beneficial as a reminder of philosophical

tradition in India after the Puranas, but just about the beginning of era of classical Samskrit literature.

Keywords: Bhasa, Philosophy, Invocatory Verses, Mangala, Nandi, Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Vaishnavism, Krishna, Realism, Dualism

Paper

Bhasa, the renowned Samskrit dramatist, richly inherits the legacy of early classical Samskrit literature. His adherence to convention is in the backdrop of traditional Samskrit works, with invocatory verse at the beginning of his plays.¹ The philosophical tendency of any writer is epitomized in the invocatory verse, and hence is worth examining. Bhasa's philosophical outlook is well reflected in his Nandi (Mangalapadyas).

In the invocatory verse of pratignayaugandharayana, differently from other plays, Bhasa praises Skanda as the commander of the forces of Devas. He is eulogized as the mighty warrior, a young warrior who led the forces of Indra to victory.

**Paatuvaasavadattaayo mahasenotiviryavaan
Vatsaraajastu naamnaa sashakti yaugandharayanah
(Invocatory verse of Pratignaa yaugandharayana)**

This is in keeping with the puranic literature, and is not in contradiction with Bhasa's general style of praising Vishnu. Bhasa seems to belong to a Vaishnava tradition which recognizes all other deities in the pantheon of Vishnu deities.² If not, Bhasa would have considered the Shaiva

¹ Carudatta play, however, due to its prototype, is an exception.

² Skanda as one of the god of vaishnava pantheon is testified even in the saying of Skanda Upanishad by Skanda himself: तद्विष्णोः परमं पदं सदा पश्यन्ति सूरयः । दिवीव चक्षुराततम् ॥ चक्षुराततम् १४ ॥ तद्विप्रासो विपन्यवो जागृवांसः समिन्धते । विष्णोर्यत्परमं पदम् । पदम् इत्येतन्निर्वाणानुशासनमिति वेदानुशासनमिति वेदानुशासनमित्युपनिषत् ॥ वेदानुशासनमित्युपनिषत् १५ ॥

background more prevalent in the south, and may not have opted for a benediction. Bhasa's tolerant behavior needs to be appreciated, which makes him promoted to be a more enveloping poet of Indian theological tendencies, and not static to any particular deity singularly.³

In the invocatory verse of Svapnavasavadatta, the mighty arms of Balarama is praised. His arms are compared to rising moon in lusture, which is an unusual simile:

Udayanavendusavarnaavaasavadattaa balau balasya tvaam

Padmaavateernapurnau vasantakamrau bhujau paataam

(Invocatory verse of svapnavasavadatta)

However, the adherence to Mudralankara by Bhasa may force him to chose the theme. A different conventional simile was also a possibility. He is praised as resplendent and more white in complexion, and "lovely as spring". It should be noted here that Bhasa notes at the personality of Balarama (where his arms are symbolic) as an "incarnation", but doesn't very clearly identify him Vishnu himself, as some sects of Vaishnavas have it⁴. Hence, it may be remarked that in South and in post-puranic era, it was perceived that Balarama was an incarnation of Shesha, and not Vishnu. The liking to wine allusion, and moon-like description to complexion, make him different from Krishna, and even other forms of Vishnu who has no allusion of tendency to wine.

Also note the saying of a latter poet, Sri Vadiraja Tirtha: "... Srikrishnapajalajabringa..." and others. Skanda is recognized as Kama incarnate and intermediate Abhimanidevata of Vishnu Chakra.

³ It may be observed that Kalidasa adheres to Shiva in his invocatory verses, even in Raghuvamsha, where he does not take up Rama in Invocation.

⁴ Vedanta Deshika of Srivaishnava tradition recognizes Balarama as one of the Avataras of Vishnu in his Dashavatara Stotra: SLOKAM 9:

Pakkath Kowrava paTTaNa prabruthaya: praastha pralambaadaya:
Thaalaankasya tathaa vidhaa vihruthayas thanvanthu bhadraaNi na: /
Ksheeram Sarkara yEva yaabhir apruthak boothaa: prabhoothair guNai:
Aa-kowmaarakam aswadhantha jagathE krishNasya thaa: kELaya: //
Caitanya tradition too identifies Balarama as one of the forms of Vishnu

In the Pancharatra, an interesting invocatory verse, Bhasa praises Krishna as a great god who is brilliant and of great valour. Krishna's form is identified with Vishnu, who is seated on the lord of birds, Garuda:

Dronah pruthivyarjunabheemadhuto
Yah karnadharah shakuneshvarasya
Dhuryodhano bheemayudhishtirah sah
Paayaat viraduttaragobhimanyuh
(invocatory verse of pancharatram)

The last line is philosophically more intriguing. Vishnu is recognized as Virat. Bhasa seems to belong to very authentic vedic tradition which recognizes Vishnu as Virat noted in Purusha Sukta and others⁵. He is also praised as leading aspirants "Upward" to Summom Bonum, even when practicing karma with the fervor of adoration to Vishnu⁶.

The Madhyamavyayoga's invocatory verse runs as follows:

Paayaatsavosuravadhoohrudayaavasaadah
Paado hareh kuvalayaamalakhanganeela
Yah pradyotastribhuvanakramena raraaja
Vaiduryasakrama ivaambarasaagarasya

⁵ TATO VIRAAAJAAYATA VIRAAJO -ADHI PUURUSHAH/ SAJAATO -ATYARICHYATA PASHCAADBHUUMI MATHO PURAH// - Purusha Sukta 7. The identification of Virat with Vishnu is rampant in earlier literature. See Bhagavatha Purana, III Skanda, Adhyaya 3. The verse of the Bhagavad Gita: Tvamasya vishvashyaparam nidhanam Vettasi vedyam ca param ca dhama Tvaya tatam vishwamanantarupam, Bh. Gi. 11.38. The following nomers of Vishnu indicating Virat Rupa may be seen in Vishnu Sahasranama: Vishvabahu, Vishvabhuk, Vishvadakshina, Vishvadhruk, Vishvakarma, Vishvaksena, Vishvam, Vishvamoorthy, Vishvareta, Vishvatma, Vishvayoni, Vishvayoni, Vistara.

⁶ "tasmad asaktah satatam karyam karma samacara asakto hy acaran karma param apnoti purushah" – Bh. Gi. 3.19

(invocatory verse of madhyamavyayoga)

It is most beautiful a description of Vishnu in the form of Trivikrama. Here, the glory of Vishnu's feet is praised. This is in keeping with puranic style of submission to Vishnu's feet.⁷ It is also spoken of by Bhasa as a terror to Demons, symbolized to their damsels. The radiant blue-glamour adds poetic beauty, as well as picturised puranic allusion of the form of Vishnu.⁸ The simile of radiant blade too is very apt and captivating. Trivikrama form has the entire universe covered with his feet, during the sacrifice of Bali.⁹ Bhasa describes this form, and also hints at the all-pervasive feature of Vishnu.¹⁰ The Imagery of his feet as a bridge of beryl in the sea of ether is a testimony for Bhasa's poetic genius in forming imagery and also his devotion to Vishnu.

In the invocatory verse of Pratimanataka, the benediction is more cryptic, partly due to the challenge posed by Mudralankara style of Bhasa.

Seetabhavapaatu sumantratushtah

Sugreevaraamasalakshmanashca.

Yoraavanaaryapratimamca devyaa

Vibhishanaatmaa bharatonusargam.

(invocatory verse of pratimanatakam)

By the expression of "wealth of seta" and also as the foe of Ravana, he hints at Rama, and offer salutations in gleaming terms. Although directly not identified with Vishnu by Bhasa, it is hinted

⁷ Padastutis and Padasevana concepts are found in Bhagavatha Purana and Vishnu Purana.

⁸ Well-known Stotra: Shantakaram Bhujagashayanam Padmanabham Suresham, Vishwadharam Gaganasadrusham meghavarnam Shubhangam. Lakshmikantam Kamalanayanam Yogihridhyanagamyam Vande Vishnum Bhavabhayaharam Sarvalokaikanatham, notes "Meghavarna" for Vishnu, noting his dark radiant complexion akin to 'Indranilamani' styled in Bengal Vaishnavism.

⁹ Bhagavatha Purana, 8th Skanda, Adhyayas 15-23

¹⁰ "viṣṇur viṣvater vā vyaśnoter vā", "atha yad viṣito bhavati tad viṣnurbhavati". – Yaska. Medhatithi takes the root Vis to pervade.

in the backdrop of naming characters of Ramayana, pleading Rama to save us in *all* births, thus making him one with the universal being, Vishnu. Bhasa, if were to refer to Rama in mortal terms, would have forgone pleading to “save in all births”, “pleased by chants”, “with all auspicious marks”, and as the “greatest awe soul”. The general outlook of Bhasa to identify Krishna with Vishnu, also may be taken as ground for inferring suggestion of indentifying Rama with Vishnu here. He praises Rama as endowed with appealing neck and with all auspicious marks. This may be a reference to the 32 lakshanas which dwell in entirety in Vishnu alone.¹¹

The benediction of Dutavakya runs as follows:

Padah paayaadupendrasya sarvalokotsavah sa vah

Vyaaviddho namuchiryena tanutamranakhena khe

(invocatory verse of dhutavakyam)

In this verse, the Upendra form of Vishnu is eulogized. This is slightly different in description from the verse on Trivikrama noted earlier. Although Vishnu is named here as “Upendra” or the brother of Indra¹², Vamana identified with Trivikrama, the exact glory of measuring the three worlds is not a subject-matter in this verse. Instead, Upendra’s foot is praised as sending the demon Namuchi in reels to death¹³. As usual, Bhasa is picturizing the reeling, and praising the beauty of Vishnu’s feet and the bliss it brings to devotees.¹⁴

¹¹ Sri Madhvacharya details on 32 Lakshanas in full measure in Vishnu alone, vide Tantrasarasamgraha, Bhagavathatarparya and others.

¹² Bhagavatha Purana, 8th Skanda, Adhyayas 15-16

¹³ Although killing of Namuchi is connected with Indra (Rigveda, shatapatha brahmana and Mahabharata), Bhasa is quite correct to point out that it was the Shakti of Vishnu which killed Namuchi through Indra as only an instrument by using foam with Vishnu’s powers. (Mahabharata, shalyaparvan, 43). In Vedic lore, Vishnu hence is called as the “friend” of Indra. Bhasa, hence, seems to belong to an authentic Vaishnava tradition in recognizing the role of Vishnu in killing Namucchi. Shatapatha brahmana V 5.5.1, <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=T09JAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA95&lpg=PA95&dq=namuchi+vishnu&source=bl&ots=L Y8mSgJ1u&sig=Y5DFgslgMFFLCBozJLtky2QLt6Y&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjA96SXjvbSAhWnjFQKHQU4CZQQ6AEIRzAJ#v=onepage&q=namuchi%20vishnu&f=false> (courtesy)

¹⁴ Suvariti Pratishte Dve Pratishte Dve Ete Akshare is said in the Upanishad lore about the feet of Vishnu

Three important aspects related to Bhasa's favorite diety, Vishnu, is noted in the following verse of Dhutaghatotkacham:

Naaraayanastribhuvanaikaparaayano vah

Paayaadupaayashatayuktikarah suraanaam

Lokatrayaaviratanatakavastutantra

Prastavanapratisamapanasutradharah

(invocatory verse of dhutaghatotkacha)

It is noted that lord Narayana is main and sole refuge all the three worlds. It is also noted that it is lord Narayana alone who solves the troubles of other Devas whenever in calamity. This concept is well in keeping with Vedas and other texts where Narayana is spoken of as the highest lord.¹⁵ By this verse, it can be seen that although Bhasa praises and offers his salutations to other gods like Skanda and Balarama elsewhere, it is lord Narayana alone who is held in highest esteem by him. The last two lines are clever and worth noting. Bhasa remarks that Narayana is indeed the sutradhara (Stage-Director) of the Drama of life. Such an allusion is not unfamiliar in the older Samskrit texts.¹⁶ It should be noted that even though Bhasa had quite a situation and context here to just remark that the lord is the Director of the World-Drama "which is illusory".¹⁷ However,

¹⁵ Narayana param brahma Tattvam Narayanah Parah... and others.

¹⁶ Adhiyajñoham evātra (Gita 8.4)

¹⁷ Bhasa is more reasonable and logical in temper here than Ranganatha Sharma, a writer of 20th Century, who remarks in his invocatory verse of Ekachakra Drama: "...Shabalitagunayogat Kalpite Vishwarange...Pranamata Vibhumadyam Sutradharam Mahantam". There is no need to deem the drama of life as illusory in the allusion to God as the Director or sutradhara. Infact, it is more justified by deeming the 'Drama of life' as real and yet controlled by God, rather than making it imaginary, which makes even the Directorhood or sutradharatva of God as imaginary. Bhasa is more logical here than the latter. The latter's terming of world as illusory is clearly an influence of Advaita which does not suit the logic or even the aesthetic flow and Auchitya (tenability and coherence) here.

Bhasa, very notably makes no such remarks, and thus it becomes convenient for researchers to place him among Realists and among Vaishnava's in theistic front.

The Karnabharam begins with a praise of Lord Narasimha:

Naramrugapatibarpmaalokanabrantanari

Naradanujasuparvavratapaatalalokah

Karajakulishapalibhinnadaityendravakshaa

Suraripubalahantaa shreedharostu shriyo vah

(invocatory verse of karnabharam)

His form is praised as most auspicious. Together, it is a fearful form to all, which brought the death of Demon Hiranyakashipu by the sword-like nails. However, it is fearful only to the demons who are hostile to the gods. The praise of Lord Narasimha and his nails is especially a Vaishnava form of eulogizing lord Narasimha.¹⁸ Narasimha form of lord is especially adored by the followers of Vishnu. Thus, it may be inferred quite unambiguously that Bhasa belonged to Vaishnava doctrine.

The Urubhanga aptly to the plot of the Play opens with a metaphorical verse which compares Lord Krishna form of Vishnu as the one who drifts a soul across the world of sorrow like a sea, just as he had saved Arjuna in a similar-like instance:

Bhismadronatataam jayadrathajalaam gaandhaararajahrudaam

¹⁸ ...srematkantheravaasyapratatasunakharaa..” – Nakhastuti of Sri Madhvacharya, and also “...Sadaa Naraharim Shreye Nakharanavyavajrankuram...” of Sri Vadiraja Tirtha in his Tirtha Prabandha may be seen in this context.

Karnadraunikruporminakramakaraam duryodhanasrotasam

Teernah shatrunadeem sharaasisikataam yena plavenaarjunah

Shakrunaam taraneshu vah sa bhagavaanastu plavah keshavah

(Invocatory verse of Urubhanga Play)

Every great warrior on the side of Duryodhana is compared to the calamities one comes across when crossing a dangerous river. This is a very rich metaphorical verse rich in philosophy. Surprisingly, it may be seen that a similar verse can be seen in the prelude of Madhusudhana Saraswathi on the Bhagavad Gita. Such a striking similarity in theme and construction goes without saying that the latter may be influenced by the former's verse in some way, although not credit is paid.

In the Avimaraka Play, the following verse is found where four forms of lord Vishnu is eulogized simultaneously:

Utkshiptaam saanukampam salilanidhijalaadekadamshtagraaroodhaa

Maakraantaamaajimadhye nihataaditisutaamekapadaavadhootaam.

Sambhuktaam preetipurvam svabhujavashagataamekachakraabhiguptaam

Shreemaan naaraayanaste pradishatu vasudhaamuchritaikaatapatram.

(invocatory verse of avimarakam)

Bhasa wishes that by the grace of lord Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana and Rama, may the world be under a single umbrella, symbolically under a single rule of Dharma and natural justice. It may be noted that Bhasa is Dharmic and not imperial in this verse. This is brought out by his praise and plead to lord. This unique verse combines four forms unlike other benedictory verses. To link the plead for the welfare of the earth, Bhasa relates how the earth in the past was sanctified

and protected by Lord Vishnu. Vishnu in Varaha form brought the earth out of water on his tusk, as per the puranas. Vishnu made the earth to sustain from the fear of Demons, by his Narasimha form. By the Vamana form, he scaled the earth, and by Rama form, brought joy to the earth. Symbolically, he embraced earth, and thereby Bhasa wishes that such a joyful earth as the reign of Rama may be recreated.

In the following verse of Balacharita Play, the form of Lord Narayana, and is praised for his four forms in keeping with the four Yugas:

Shakshaksheeravapuh puraa krutayuge naamnaa tu naaraayanah

Tretaayaam tripadaarpitatribhuvanah vishnuh suvarnaprabhah

Durvaashyaamanibhah sa ravanavadhe ramo yuge dvapare

Nityam yoanjanasannibhah kulayuge vah paatu daamodarah

(invocatory verse of balacharita)

The first Yuga, i.e, Kruta recognizes the Lord as Narayana, who is brilliantly white in complexion.¹⁹ The form of Narayana as the primeval form is closely connected to Pancharatra and other hoary Vaishnava texts.²⁰ Thus, it may be clearly inferred that Bhasa belonged to the doctrine connected with Pancharatra. In the Treta Yuga, lord is of the form of Vishnu, who scaled all the three worlds in the form of Vamana. It may be seen that Bhasa names the lord as

¹⁹ Shuklambaradharam vishnum Shashivarna Chaturbhujam Prasannavadanam Dhyayet Sarvavighnopashantaye” is a well-known verse appearing in the Puranas on Vishnu. Bhasa clear allusion to white-bright complexion of Vishnu here answers some the questions raised in some quarters on this verse quoted as that of Ganesha. Vishnu form with white-bright complexion is noted in the puranas, as also here by an ancient poet like Bhasa. Moreover, the verse will be bereft of subject-word if the clear term “Vishnu” is made as an adjective to Ganesha. It is unreasonable to make a clear noun “Vishnu” as an adjective.

²⁰ Narayana is the mula rupa for latter Vyuha Rupas like Vasudeva, sankarshana, Pradhyumna and Aniruddha. Vide Bhagavatha and others.

Vishnu but suggests the feat of Vamana-Trivikrama. There seems to be hint that the namer of Vishnu stands for the omnipresence of the lord, which made him to scale the universe.²¹ Rama of Dwapara (?) is praised as dark²² as durva who slew Ravana. The reference to Dwapara Yuga for Rama is rather unconventional. Maybe Bhasa refers to the Sandhi time of the Treta-Dwapara, which again is admittedly questionable. The comparison to Durva is to show the sanctity of the lords form.²³The form of Krishna in Kali Yuga, which refers to Sandhi of Dwapara-Kali, is praised as dark as collyrium, and is named Damodara. The verse, in short, refers to eternity of Narayana and his incarnations, and also to omnipresence.

The last verse for examination in this paper is that of Abhishekanataka which runs as follows:

Yo gadhiputramakhavighnakaraabhihantaa
Yudhdhe viraadhakharadhooshanaveeryahantaa
Darpodyatolbanakabandhakapeendrahantaa
Paayaat sa vo nishicarendrakulabhihantaa
(invocatory verse of abhishekanatakam)

In this verse, Rama form of Vishnu is praised in keeping with the plot of the Drama based on Ramayana. Rama is hailed as the protector of sacrifice of Vishwamitra and destroyer of demons Viradha, Khara and Dushana, who brought obstacles to it. This may be seen as a very evident sign that Bhasa was a writer of Vedic heritage who recognized Yajnas as Dharma indeed. This apart, he also killed others who though very pious inwardly were arrogant and were of

²¹ idam vishNur vicakrame tredhA nidadhe padam.- Rig Veda (1.22.17)

²² dundubhi svana nirghoShaH snigdha varNaH prataapavaan | samaH sama vibhakta ango varNam shyaamam samaashritaH | | - Valmiki Ramayana 5-35-16 and also "Shyamam smitasyam pruthudeergha hastam ..." (Narayana Pandita on Rama)

²³ Durva's sanctity is noted in Rigveda X.16.13, 134,5, 142,8, Taittiriya Samhita, Vajasaneyi Samhita, aitareya Brahmana and Shatapatha brahmana also refer to Durva. (Vedic Index of Names and subjects, volume 1; volume 5, Page 372)

misconduct outwardly. The examples cited are Kabanda and Vali. Kabandha was a Gandharva cursed, who regained his form by Rama. Vali was Indra-Incarnate who was a Deva within.²⁴ The grouping of Viradha with Khara and Dushana is slightly an error, since Viradha was not an obstacle to sacrifice, but only Tumburu cursed to be of demonic form, who was released of curse by Rama.²⁵ Ravana and his horde is grouped separately, as they are neither obstacles to sacrifice, nor inwardly pious yet arrogant, but are unethical and demoniacs. The grouping is in keeping with a deep understanding of Ramayana.

Conclusion

Based on the appraisal of Bhasa's invocatory verses noted in this paper, it may be inferred without doubt that Bhasa indeed belonged to Vaishnava doctrine, which dates back to pre-christ era. Such a Vaishnava tradition mirrored in the verses of Bhasa is necessarily a post-puranic continuation of Vedic tradition. This clearly shows that right from the Vedas to the classical Samskrit period, Vaishnava doctrines continued unabated, and Bhasa is a witness to it. Such a Vaishnava doctrine is not a fanaticism but is a inclusive one of other deities as well in the pantheon of Vishnu devotees, as it is seen in one verse of Bhasa eulogizing Skanda. Bhasa's adherence to Vaishnava philosophy is very well in keeping with vedic tradition, puranic lore and the rich legacy prevalent in India in those days, which he inherits. The credit for soul-stirring plots of Bhasa goes to Vyasa, Valmiki, Shuka and even to Bhasa's own genius. Bhasa, thus, has rendered his poetic service to the philosophy of the Vaishnava through his works and beautiful verses, not to mention the position he occupies as one of the greatest dramatist and poet of Samskrit literature of all times.

²⁴ Valmiki Ramayana, Uttara Kanda, and also Brahmanda Purana. "Babhuva Vaali Svata eva Vasavah" – Mahabharata Tatparya Nirnaya, 3.65.

²⁵ Ramayana, Aranyakanda, Sarga 3 and 4. अभि शापाद् अहम् घोरम् प्रविष्टो राक्षसीम् तनुम् | तुंबुरुः नाम गन्धर्वः शप्तो वैश्रवणेन हि || Valmiki Ramayana ४-३-१६

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