

Who is Rājasimha in the “Bhāsa” Plays?

Katsuhiko Kamimura

It is well known that a king “Rājasimha” is mentioned in the final verses of the plays ascribed to Bhāsa¹. Although Ganapati Sastri thinks that “Rājasimha” does not refer to any particular king, even A. D. Pusalker, who believes Bhāsa’s authorship of these plays with Sastri, is inclined to take these Bharata vākyas to refer to historical facts².

L. D. Barnett directed his attention to *Mattavilāsa* by Mahendra-Vikramavarman (7th century), which “shows exactly the same features of technique as the plays attributed to Bhāsa”, and concluded that the king Rājasimha mentioned in the final verses of the plays of ‘Bhāsa’ was the Pāṇḍya Tēr-Māran Rājasimha I (c. A. D. 675)³. But regrettably Barnett’s grounds for the identification are not so convincing⁴. Then who is Rājasimha after all?

Now we shall turn our attention to the “Bhāsa” plays themselves. The only work which title was referred to by the later writers is the *Svapnavāsavadatta* (or *-vāsavadattā*). Although a subhāṣita attributed to Rājasekhara (9th century) which states that the *Svapnavāsavadatta* of Bhāsa survived a fire-ordeal is very famous⁵, it is merely a later quotation by Jalhana (13th century), the historical value of which is very doubtful as in the case of other quotations in the anthology.

The first writer known so far who referred to a *Svapnavāsavadattā* and quoted from it was Abhinavagupta (10–11th century). He refers to a *Svapna* three times in his works. While commenting on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, he refers to it as follows:

kvacit kṛtā yathā Svapnavāsavadattāyām⁶.

He quotes a verse from a nāṭaka called *Svapna* in his *Locana* commentary on the *Dhvanyāloka*:

drśyante ceti. yathā Svapnavāsavadattākhye nāṭake—

svañcitapakṣmakapāṭaṃ nayanadvāraṃ svarūpatāḍena /
udghāṭya sā praviṣṭā hṛdayagrhaṃ me nṛpatanuḥ // iti⁷⁾.

It is noticeable that Abhinava quotes this verse as an instance of an inferior type of poetry where the poet is so absorbed in the use of alaṃkāra that he neglects rasa⁸⁾. So it seems that Abhinava himself does not appreciate this verse in a nāṭaka called *Svapna* so much. Since this verse is not found in the present text of the *Svapna*, we cannot but think that Abhinava referred to a different *Svapna*⁹⁾. It is noticeable too that Abhinava does not affirm that the author of the *Svapna* is Bhāsa in this context.

The third reference to *Svapna* by Abhinava occurs in a passage of his commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* which contains a lot of obscure readings, where he simply mentions its name along with the nāṭaka of Kālidāsa.

tata eva Vikramorvaśīya-Svapnavāsavadattā (tte) nāṭakam iti kavayo vyavaharanti¹⁰⁾.

From the testimony of Abhinavagupta we can at least understand that a nāṭaka called (*ākhyā*) *Svapnavāsavadattā* was known in the end of the tenth century or the beginning of the eleventh century. But he does not assure us that the author of the nāṭaka is the legendary Bhāsa who is mentioned by Kālidāsa along with Saumilla and Kaviputra in the beginning of his *Mālavikāgnimitra*. Abhinava quotes a verse of *mahākavi* Bhāsa in his *Abhinavabhāratī* :

mahākavinā Bhāsenāpi svaprabandha uktaḥ —
tretāyugaṃ tad dhi na maithilī sā
rāmasya rāgapadaviḥ mṛdu cāsyā cetah /
labdhā janas tu yadi rāvaṇam asya kāyaṃ
protkṛtya tan na tilaśo na vitṛptigāmī // iti¹¹⁾.

But in this case the source of this verse of Bhāsa is not given. We can only know from this that Abhinava thought Bhāsa as a *mahākavi* who had written some *prabandha* whose plot had been taken from Rāma story.

Bhojadeva (c. 1005-1054 A. D.)¹²⁾ quotes from the *Svapnavāsavadatta* in his *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* :

[Svapna] vāsavadatte padmāvatīm avasthāṃ drṣṭvā (draṣṭum) rājā samudragrha-

kam gataḥ. padmāvatīrahitaṃ ca tad avalokya tasyā eva śayaniye suṣvāpa. svapnāyamānaś ca vāsavadattā ababhaṣe. svapnaśabdena ccha svāpo vā svapnadarśanam vā svapnāyitaṃ vā vivakṣitaṃ¹³⁾.

These incidents, as Pusalker says, resemble the events in the fifth act of the Trivandrum play¹⁴⁾, but unfortunately Bhoja is silent about its author.

Śāradātanaya (1175-1250 A. D.) in his *Bhāvaprakāśana* discusses the entire plot of the *Svapnavāsavadatta*. A thing worthy of notice is that one of the verses quoted by him is actually found in the Trivandrum play (VI. 3).

cirprasuptaḥ kāmo me vīṇayā pratibodhitaḥ /
tāṃ tu devīm na paśyāmi yasyā ghoṣavatī priyā // ¹⁵⁾

Although there are several problems, we can conclude that Śāradātanaya had almost the same text as the Trivandrum play in front of him¹⁶⁾. But here again he does not mention the author of the play.

The first writers to assure Bhāsa's authorship of the *Svapnavāsavadatta* are Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra (12th century):

yathā Bhāsaḥ Svapnavāsavadatte śephalikāmaṇḍapaśilātālān avalokya vatsarājaḥ—

“padākrāntāni puṣpāṇi, soṣma cedam śilātalam /
nūnam kācid ihāsīnā, māṃ dṛṣṭvā sahasā gatā // ”¹⁷⁾

Since this verse is not found in the Trivandrum play, many scholars argued over the problem¹⁸⁾. Nevertheless, from this testimony it is certain that in the twelfth century there was an opinion that a *Svapnavāsavadatta* had been written by Bhāsa himself.

It is certain that before the eleventh century a nāṭaka called *Svapnavāsavadattā* became popular and was considered to be a fine work which was worth consideration, although its author was not known. Bhoja seems to refer the text which is very similar to the Trivandrum play and it is certain that Śāradātanaya had almost the same text as the present *Svapnavāsavadatta* in front of him.

Why did the writers prior to the tenth century not mention the *Svapnavāsavadatta*? The answer to this question seems to be very easy. It is because there was no work called *Svapnavāsavadatta* until then. It is

said that Vāmana (c. 800 A. D.) quotes a verse from the *Svapnavāsavadatta* (IV. 7) in his *Kāvya-lamkārasūtra-vṛtti* (Vṛtti under Sūtra IV. 25) with slight variations. But it is possible to imagine that Vāmana quoted from a floating subhāṣita, and it is equally possible that the author of the Trivandrum play borrowed it from Vāmana. In any case, the available evidence indicates that a nāṭaka called *Svapnavāsavadatta* was not known until the end of the tenth century. It is not so unreasonable to conjecture that a nāṭaka called *Svapnavāsavadattā* which was known by Abhinavagupta was written in the tenth century, perhaps in North India. It is supposed that the present *Svapnavāsavadatta*, together with other Trivandrum plays, was composed a little later than that period, in some district of South India, presumably in Kerala, because close relationship between the present "Bhāsa" plays and Kerala pointed out by several scholars is undeniable¹⁹. The author (or a group of authors) of the plays might have been a court poet of a king called Rājasimha²⁰.

In the twelfth century, a legend which attributed the *Svapnavāsavadatta* to Bhāsa became widely known. It is needless to say that the name of a great poet Bhāsa was known by Kālidāsa and that some of the peculiarities of his works handed down by literary tradition was respectfully pointed out by Bāṇa and Daṇḍin²¹. However it appears that no one had actually seen his works. If the works of Bhāsa had been widely known at that time, Bāṇa and Daṇḍin would not have felt the necessity of explaining his peculiarities. Literary men who were eager to look for Bhāsa's work finally found out the *Svapnavāsavadatta*, the characteristics of which seemed to agree with the Bhāsa tradition, and in the twelfth century, the *Svapnavāsavadatta* and several other plays which had similar characteristics came to be considered as the works of Bhāsa. They called those works "Bhāsa-nāṭaka-cakra". (See Note 5.) It seems that there was a "Bhāsa problem" at that time as in the twentieth century, and that the "Bhāsa" plays became the object of the highly animated controversy among the writers. That is the reason why the advocates of "Bhāsa" play should have emphasized the genuineness of at least *Svapnavāsavadatta*. The subhāṣita ascribed to Rā-

jaśekhara was composed in this period, and in the thirteenth century it was known by writers such as Jalhaṇa.

As stated above, from the available evidence, the present writer submits the possibility that the Trivandrum plays (at least six of them) were composed a little later than the end of the tenth century by a court poet (or poets) of king Rājasimha, presumably in Kerala. Then who was the king called Rājasimha in the beginning of the eleventh century? It is not unreasonable to think that the king is none other than the Chera king, Rājasimha (1028-43)²². According to the Mannārkoil inscription, this Rājasimha acknowledged the supremacy of Cholas, so he could be assumed to be militarily weak. We of course must admit that there is a poetic exaggeration in the expression “himavadvindhyakuṇḍalāṃ mahīm praśāstu”²³ in the “Bhāsa” plays, but it is also possible to say that a patriotic sentiment of the poet is implied in it.

NOTES

1) *Svapna*, VI. 19 :

imām sāgaraparyantām himavadvindhyakuṇḍalām /
mahīm ekātapatrāṅkāṃ rājasimhaḥ praśāstu naḥ //

Pratijñā, IV. 25; *Avimāraka*, VI. 22; *Abhiṣeka*, VI. 35; *Pañcarātra*, III. 26;
Dātavākya, I. 56 : imām api mahīm kṛtsnām rājasimhaḥ praśāstu naḥ //

Cf. *Pratimā*, VII. 15 : rājā praśāstu naḥ.

2) A. D. Pusalker, *Bhāsa—A Study*, 2nd ed., Delhi 1968, p. 101.

3) L. D. Barnett, *BSOS*, Vol. I, Pt 3, 1920, p. 38. Cf. also *JRAS*, 1919, pp. 233-4.

4) On different views on the identification of Rājasimha, see Pusalker, pp. 101-3.

5) *Sūktimuktāvalī* (GOS 82), p. 43 :

bhāsanāṭakacakre 'pi cchedakaiḥ kṣipte parīkṣitum /
svapnavāsavadattasya dāhako 'bhūn na pāvakaḥ //

6) *Abhinavabhārati*, Vol. I, Baroda 1956 (GOS 36), p. 39. Note that the title in this case is “Svapnavāsavadattā”. Cf. A.K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 289-90.

7) *Locana*, III (KSS 135), p. 344.

8) His commentary is on the *Dhvanyāloka* (KSS), p. 342 : dṛśyante ca kavayo 'laṃkāranibandhanaikarasā anapekṣitarasāḥ prabandheṣu.

9) Cf. N. P. Unni, *New Problems in the Bhāsa Plays*, Trivandrum 1978, pp. 191-2.

- 10) *Abhinavabhārati*, p. 85. Dr. Unni's quotation (p. 191) is not exact and there is a misprint in his footnote : "GOS, XXXV, p. 17."
 - 11) *Ibid.*, p. 319.
 - 12) Cf. P.V. Kane, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, Delhi 1961, p. 428.
 - 13) Ed. : G. R. Josyer, Mysore 1963, Vol. II, p. 402. Words in the brackets are added by the present writer.
 - 14) Pusalker, p. 28.
 - 15) Ed. : in GOS 45, 2nd ed., 1968, p. 239.
 - 16) Cf. Pusalker, pp. 28-30; Unni, pp. 186-90. But see C. R. Devadhar, *Plays Ascribed to Bhāsa*, p. 58!
 - 17) *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* (GOS 48), 2nd ed., 1956, p. 74.
 - 18) See Pusalker, pp. 31-3; Unni, pp. 195-7.
 - 19) Note that Kulaśekhara (c. 900 A. D. according to K. K. Raja) does not enumerate Bhāsa among mahākavis in his *Tapatisaṃvaraṇa*, p. 4 (chāyā) : śūdrakakālidāsaharṣadaṇḍīpramukhāṇaṃ mahākavinām.
 - 20) It is admitted that *Svapna* and *Pratijñā* are sequels, and that these two are composed by the same author. It is said that Bhāmaha (7th century?) criticized the wooden elephant trick in the *Pratijñā* in his *Kāvyaḷaṃkāra* (IV. 45). If it is true, the date of *Pratijñā* will be earlier than Bhāmaha. But see K. K. Raja's Intro. to Unni, p. 14 : "But in the play special effort has been made to make it natural for the king to mistake the wooden elephant for a real one; the author seems to answer Bhāmaha's criticism." Cf. S. Kuppaswami Sastri, Intro. to the *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* (Madras, 1926), pp. 21-22. By the way according to Dr. Raja, Bhāmaha's date is between Diṇnāga and Dharmakīrti, in the fifth century A. D.
 - 21) *Harṣacarita*, I, verse 15 (Ed. Kane, 2nd ed., p. 2) :
 sūtradhāraḥkṛtārambhair nāṭakair bahubhūmikaiḥ /
 sapatākair yaśo lebhe bhāso devakulair iva //
Avantisundarikatha (Ed. M. R. Kavi, p. 2) :
 suvibhaktamukhādyaṅgair vyaktalakṣaṇavṛttibhiḥ /
 pareto 'pi sthito bhāsaḥ śārīrair iva nāṭakaiḥ //
 - 22) Cf. E. P. N. Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam 1970, p. 243; A. S. Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 4th ed., Kottayam 1980, pp. 128-9; R. Tirumalai, *Rajendra Vinnagar, Institute of Epigraphy*, 1980, p. 17, and Appendix II.
 - 23) See note 1.
- <Key Words> Bhāsa, Rājasimha

(Assoc. Prof. of the University of Tokyo.)