



Face of Violence in Sanskrit Drama with Special Reference to Veṅīsaṃhāra and Nāgānanda

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Abstract

Violence, as a harsh reality of nature and natural being is well reflected in literature of different languages in its different forms. Sanskrit dramas equally depict violence as it is found in many dramas written by dramatists. How Sanskrit drama have depicted this violence is the basic query of this paper. It emphasizes mainly on two major dramas Veṅīsaṃhāra and Nāgānanda along with few of other Sanskrit dramas.

Keywords: Violence, sanskrit drama, Veṅīsaṃhāra, Nāgānanda.

Introduction

Violence which is a harsh reality of the world, occupies a vital position in the field of literature. Many books have been written throughout the era, in different languages, where this aspect has been depicted very aptly. The presentation of violence in those works may not be shown in the same manner, but the underlying fact is everywhere equal.

Before beginning a discussion on violence in Sanskrit literature, a conceptual clearance of violence is very much necessary to point out the depiction in various dramas. The word 'violence' according to dictionary meaning is vehemence, force, oppression, attack or injury. Thus, loosely it can be said that violence is the behavior or action of a particular individual or a group of people in doing harm, injury or damage to another individual or to the society. Violence can be basically categorized into direct and indirect violence. Direct violence shows any use of physical or verbal force that harms one individual directly where as the indirect violence can be said as that violence which does not show any use of force apparently, but the violence is manifested in various ways indirectly. Again violence can be conceptualized in five ways as discussed by Ashes Gupta¹. These are: i. Direct violence, ii. Cultural violence, iii. Self-inflicted violence, iv. Structural violence, v. Symbolic violence.

If the history of human civilization is analyzed, the reality regarding violence is witnessed again and again. In the early age of human civilization, people were nomadic and used to travel from one place to another in search of their livelihood. In that period hunting was their main occupation which is a direct violence against the animals. This behavior of killing of animals has been underlying in their sub-conscious mind since that time which raises its head, time to time when it is struck with an opposite state of action. This instinct is suppressed by the rationality of human character but sometimes over-bursts in a

certain condition. This violence is historically proved and sometimes encouraged also.

The thrust area of this paper is related mainly to direct violence, hence it is required to discuss on that type. The family violence or domestic violence, racial violence, terrorism and war come under the domain of direct violence. The present paper will give emphasis on the portrayal of direct violence found in dramas of Sanskrit literature. All the varieties may not be discussed here but which are very common in Sanskrit dramas, would be taken in consideration. Self-inflicted violence is very often found in those dramas which are based on romantic love stories. This would also be discussed in this paper when its context would come.

Expertise in Portrayal of Violence by the Authors in Sanskrit Literature

It is a common fact that the authors of literature select a particular story for making the plot of their works and a good number of works have been found in which violence occupies a very significant place. It is necessary to know, how far the author or dramatist shows his skill in depicting this harsh element in their works, what actually they think to highlight through their works and what the motive behind the insertion of that cruel aspect is. In the history of Sanskrit literature, two great epics- the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* reveal this element though both of these are valuable assets of Indian literature. War, which is known as a case of direct violence gets much space in these works. A series of incidents have been observed in those works which gives birth to violence. It is also found that many Sanskrit dramas have been composed to illustrate the evil effects of violent activities. The dramatists while composing the dramas tried to follow the dictation imposed by dramaturgy but there are some cases where the traditional customs also have been violated. The prescribed rule of dramaturgy is that, war etc. cannot be presented on the stage

in Sanskrit drama², especially in *nāṭaka*, but this can be managed through *Viṣkambhaka* and *Praveśaka* by a dramatist but some cases are found where this prescription has not been followed, for example *Urubhaṅga* of the great poet Bhāsa, which is a popular tragic drama in Sanskrit literature.

Depiction of Violence in Sanskrit Drama

The most popular dramas containing the occurrence of violence are *Veṅṣaṃhāra* of the great poet Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa and *Urubhaṅga* of Bhāsa. The two dramas are based on the great epic, the *Mahābhārata* which is famous for the rivalry of Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas.

Urubhaṅga is a drama starts with the scene which bears the brunt of violence. The drama is based on *Mahābhārata* which particularly centred on the insult made on Draupadī, the wife of pāṇḍavas which is found in Sabhāparva, Draupadī was insulted in front of all the court members where a dice-play was arranged by the kauravas with an intention to defeat the pāṇḍavas so that they can take advantage of their victory. As it happened so, the kauravas insulted all the pāṇḍavas and gradually they started insulting Draupadī. In the process Dūryodhana, the eldest kaurava, told Draupadī to sit on his thigh. As a result Bhīma the second pāṇḍava, could not tolerate the insult made on Draupadī and to the pāṇḍavas. Out of rage he promised to smash the thigh of Dūryodhana.

The main plot is based on the incidence of smashing of thigh of Dūryodhana by Bhīma. It shows the tricks played by Krishna to defeat Dūryodhana as he was well trained for mace fight. The drama shows violence of its extreme nature where a description of battle field is given. The whole battle ground was full of corpses and of jackals and vultures gathered to eat the flesh from the dead bodies. The mace -fight between Dūryodhana and Bhīma is shown in the drama which includes use of physical forces by both the fighters. At the end Dūryodhana's thigh was smashed by Bhīma. The scene depicts barbarism of extreme nature. Besides physical violence, the drama also indicates the violence of norms of mace-fight. According to the rule one should not hit on the lower portion of the body. But Bhīma was instructed by Kṛṣṇa to hit on the lower part which can only make Bhīma victorious.

Besides, some other dramas can also be mentioned where violence occupies a major role. In this connection the drama *Nāgānanda* is noteworthy in which an equal stress is given on both violence and non-violence. Though in Kālidāsa's dramas violence is not revealed directly yet mention can be done of his drama *Mālavikāgnimitra*.

Veṅṣaṃhara

Veṅṣaṃhāra is a drama consists of six acts where the heroic sentiment dominates from the very beginning. This drama is a creation, the background of which is violence both physical and

mental. An incident related to the Sabhāparva of the *Mahābhārata*, supplies the inspiration to the dramatist in composing the drama. Draupadī and pañca- pāṇḍavas have been staked and lost by Yudhiṣṭhira in gambling. In the presence of Bhīṣma, Droṇācārya, Kṛpācārya and many other members in the assembly Draupadī was physically assaulted and dragged by the hair by Duḥśāsana at Dūryodhana's bidding. For such a cruel deed, being insulted, Bhīma vowed that he would drink the blood from the bosom of Duḥśāsana and wetting his hands with his blood, would tie up Draupadī's hair, which she led open. The drama *Veṅṣaṃhāra*, hence deals with the description of the battle happened between Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas. It is a drama which depicts violence in its different scenes. These can be written as follows:

The drama opens with a heroic utterance of Bhīma where he announced that the *dhārtarāṣṭras* could not be able to rest in peace, who had attempted to strike both at their (pāṇḍavas) lives and property by using a lac-house-fire, poisoned food and gambling tryst and also pulled the hair of the wife of Pāṇḍavas³. Such type of utterance of Bhīmasena clearly indicates the violent attitude of the same towards kauravas. He was against the proposal of peace for which lord kṛṣṇa went to Dūryodhana. It is often observed that the denial of peace is to follow the path of violence. Anyone who expresses his denial against peace indicates that he is not satisfied with certain aspects and goes to break off the peace. Ashes Gupta while writing on 'the violent pattern' mentioned that peace is the absence of violence and the absence of peace suggests the presence of violence. Here also, in the drama, through the activities of Bhīma this truth is reflected in the eyes of the reader. In fact, the cruel activities of Dūryodhana promote violence in the mind of Bhīma, which ultimately destroys the whole kaurava dynasty.

An important aspect of violence is observed in the case of '*Abhimanyu vadha*'. Here the law of war has been violated by the so-called great warriors, for which Arjuna, the father of Abhimanyu being frenzied with the pain of the death of his son, has vowed the death of Jayadratha, who was one of the warriors against Abhimanyu.

The third act of the drama begins with the conversation of a Rākṣasī and a Rākṣasa, Vasāgandhā and Rudhirpriya. 'Rudhirapriya' means 'who is fond of Rudhira or blood'. Though he is a Rākṣasa, but the very word Rudhira indicates how furious would be the picture of the battle. In the drama it is shown that both the Rākṣasa and the Rākṣasī were engaged in collecting flesh and fats of men, slain in the battle field. From the speech of Vasāgandhā it is known that she had filled thousand jars with flesh and fat which clears the picture of the battlefield. That the effect of violence would be how much dangerous, is found from the portrayal of the battlefield, reflected through her speech.

Mention may be done of Yudhiṣṭhira, who is recognized as Dharmarāja, is presented in such a way that he did not raise

voice or take any necessary steps against the kauravas while Duḥśāsana and Dūryodhana teased Draupadī and dragged her by the hair, but follows the path of Violence while announcing 'aśvatthāmā hata iti gajāḥ'.

As it has been mentioned earlier that the drama is based on the incident which let the famous 'Kuruṣetra war' hence all the events centred with the revenge took by pāṇḍavas towards kauravas. Here, one incident gave birth to another incident, the basis of which is violence. In this drama all the kauravas along with their followers were killed one by one and at last, Bhīma could keep his word that is given by him to Draupadī.

Nāgānanda

It is a five-act drama deals with the story of self-sacrifice of Jīmūtavāhana, composed by Harṣa. This drama gives a beautiful portrayal of violence. The drama starts with the love affair of king Jīmūtavāhana, a vidyādhara prince and a siddha princess Malayavatī. But this love affair becomes sub-ordinate to the attitude of the self sacrifice of the hero Jīmūtavāhana. The drama can be considered as the unique of itself as it brings together both reality of human nature i.e. violence and non-violence.

Once, Jīmūtavāhana was roaming in the sea-shore, just after his marriage ceremony is over. Suddenly he heard the lamentation of an old woman. Arriving there he could discover that it was the mother of Śamkhacūḍa, a serpent, who had been selected as the prey of Garuḍa, the king of bird, for that very day. Garuḍa used to arrive on the sea-shore and devoured the serpents according to his will regularly. Vāsukī, the king of serpents, being frightened for the endanger of the species of serpents, made an agreement with Garuḍa that he would be sent one serpent each and every day, which will serve the purpose of both. In this way one day the turn of Śamkhacūḍa came. This is the turning point of the drama which made the love affair sub-ordinate to concern for the life of Śamkhacūḍa and there by the serpent species.

The drama depicts direct violence in its true sense which is observed through the character of Garuḍa and its cruel action. On the other hand, Jīmūtavāhana is against this violence, who sacrifices his own life to save Śamkhacūḍa from the hand of Garuḍa. Though, self-sacrifice may be interpreted by some as the path of non-violence but if an analysis of the pattern of violence is made, then self-sacrifice can also be treated as an act of violence.

Nāgānanda is very often shown as a drama where impact of non-violence as a principle of Buddhism is interpreted. The

violence in the action of Garuḍa in killing of serpents one after another, shows the power of Garuḍa and the helplessness of the serpents, who were saved by Jīmūtavāhana fighting against violence through the act of non-violence in its general sense. Though, the drama has a latent intuition of depicting non-violence as a weapon which is equally strong enough to win a battle, yet can be said to inculcate violence if the dissection of the concept of violence is made.

A case of attempting suicide is also noticed in the second act of the drama Nāgānanda, where princess Malayavatī tries to hang herself placing a noose around her neck⁵. Such type of incident falls under the category of self-inflicted violence. Thus it is noticed that the drama Nāgānanda depicts violence in its many-fold patterns.

Conclusion

Violence as an important element in most of the literary works equally shows its presence in Sanskrit dramas too. This has been observed through a dissection of various popular Sanskrit dramas especially *Veṅṣaṃhāra* and *Nāgānanda*. These two dramas are taken for analysis as these not only show the violence of extreme nature but also give maximum presentation of violence in terms of the frequency of portrayal of violence. Though the source of *Veṅṣaṃhāra* is the great epic *Mahābhārata* which is popular for portrayal of violence to Indological studies, the theme is selected purposefully by the author, which shows how violence is one of the important themes in making of dramas. The drama *Nāgānanda* gives a different reading. Here violence is abandoned and non-violence is taken as a weapon of victory. In both cases one thing can be noticed, i.e., though violence is depicted and described pronouncedly in both the dramas, the main motive of the dramatists is to convey a message to society to focus on the darker side of the effect of use of violence as violence is in no way welcomed in many doctrine or philosophy and it should be condemned.

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