

## **Bhasan in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Appraisal Introductions by T. Ganapathi Sastri**

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### ***Abstract***

*Bhasa is one of the earliest and most celebrated Indian playwrighter in Sanskrit. He stands outstanding among the Sanskrit playwrighters with the greatness of his prolific writing style. His words are well known all over the world. The credit of this prestigious position of Bhasa goes mainly to the great Sanskrit scholar T.Ganapathysastri.*

*T.GanapathiSastri rediscovered, translated and interpreted the works of Bhasa. Here an attempt is made to introduce T. GanapathiSastri and also the Bhasa plays he discovered and published in 1912.*

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## **Introduction**

Bhasa is one of the earliest and most celebrated Indian playwrighter in Sanskrit. He stands outstanding among the Sanskrit playwrighters with the greatness of his prolific writing style. His words are well known all over the world. The credit of this prestigious position of Bhasa goes mainly to the great Sanskrit scholar T.Ganapathysastri.

T.GanapathiSastri rediscovered, translated and interpreted the works of Bhasa. Here an attempt is made to introduce T. GanapathiSastri and also the Bhasa plays he discovered and published in 1912.

T.GanapathiSastri was born in 1860 in the village of Tiruvai in Tirunelveli District in Tamilnadu, as the son of Ramasubhalyer and Seethambal. He is a renowned scholar who holds innumeroustitles such as a grammarian, at curator, researcher critic, poet, interpreter, publisher, etc. He had learnt Sanskrit language from the great scholar NeelakandaSastri. He was also the disciple of the great grammarian SubhaDeekshitar and acquired scholastic knowledge in grammar and rhetoric.

In 1879 he was appointed in the post of clerk in Travancore Highcourt. Later he was appointed as a Sanskrit teacher at Govt.SanskritCollege, Trivandrum in 1889, the year in which the college was founded. Later on he was promoted as Headmaster and in 1899 he rose to the position of principal of the college keeping with him the charge of the *Granthappura*. While he was rendering service there, he had been bellowed with the work of publishing Sanskrit books. In 1908, he was appointed as the president of the publishing committee. In the subsequent year, Sastri got placed as the Curator of the Institution, and continued in the position for 18 years.

Sastri visited many places and collected numerous manuscripts written on palm leaves. He published 87 books in Sanskrit. These books cover varied areas like, Veda, Sastra, Kavya, Alankara, Vyakarana, Music, Architecture, Buddhism, Jainism, and so on through his publications and he himself wrote prefaces to these books. Sastri produced phenomenal interpretations for KoudilyasArthasastra. He was greatly interested in prose than poems. He discovered 13 Bhasas plays from Manalikara madam in Padmanabhapuram. It was the revival of the Bhasa plays which were presumed to be lost; and the plays were compiled in the book *BhasanadakaChakra* which was published in 1912. This great publication gained him world-wide applause.

Sastri adorned to court of Kerala Varma Valiya Koi Tampuran and was greatly admired by the great Sanskrit scholars of that time. Honouring his scholarliness Sri. Visakhambhadracharya presented him a precious Ring. In 1924, the Tubingen University

honoured him with a Doctorate Degree. Sastri was also elected as Honorary Member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. During the visit of the Prince of Wales, Sastri was presented a Gold medal for literary eminence in Sanskrit. For all these achievements and more he was given the title of Mahamahopadhyaya by the Emperor. Sastri was instrumental in the progress and growth of research in Sanskrit literature. Hence he is known as the exponent of research in Sanskrit literature.

Bhasa was the earliest known Sanskrit dramatist and the pioneer of the Sanskrit classical drama. He wrote plays delineating from the entire style of *Natyasastra* written by Bharathamuni. Scholars have different opinion about the period in which Bhasa lived. The great playwrighters like Kalidasa and Banabhatta had immense admiration for Bhasa's 13 plays which have been later discovered which are presumed to be written by him.

Ganapathy Sastri, the versatile scholar cum poet discovered the palm leaves of 13 plays of Bhasa namely – *Abhisòëkanātaka*, *Pratimānātaka*, *Madhyamavyāyoga*, *Pañçarātra*, *Dūtavākya*, *Dūtaghatōtkaça*, *Karòṇòabhāra*, *Ūrubhanga*, *Bālaçarita*, *Pratijñayaugandharāyanòa*, *Svapnavāsavadatta*, *Avimāraka* and *Ćārudatta* and were published in a book *Bhasanataka chakra* in 1912. This became a milestone in the history of Sanskrit researches and gave a new path to the advanced studies in this field

Bhasa's writings were based on the popular stories from 'Rāmāyana', 'Mahābhārata', 'BhrughathKadha' etc. *Abhisòëkanātaka*, *Pratimānātaka* are based on episode from the Ramayan whereas *Balacharita* is based on Harivamsa. *Madhyamavyāyoga*, *Pañçarātra*, *Dūtavākya*, *Dūtaghatōtkaça*, *Karòṇòabhāra*, *Ūrubhanga* are based on episodes from the *Mahabharatha*. The remaining four plays are said to be based on 'BhrughathKadha'.

### **1. *Pratimānātaka***

The plot of *Pratimānātaka* is adapted from the great epic Ramayana. The play covers the crucial periods in Rama's life; from the time of announcement of Rama's coronation till the end of Rama's life in exile in the forest for 14 years. Bhasa has deviated to performance act from the original story of Ramayana in order to give a unique status as well as authentically craftsmanship and skill made the audience enjoy and appreciate the play with a new perspective.

### **2. *Abhisòëkanātaka*,**

*Abhisòëkanātaka* is also written based on Ramayana. It portrays the stories based on the different episodes of the epic like Kishkindhakanda, sundarakanda and

yudhakanda. Aggrieved by the losses of the land and Sita Rama with the help of Sugreeva , liberates sita and coronate the throne of Ayodhya.

### 3. *Madhyamavyāyoga*

In the *Mahabharata*, there is an account of the Bheema killing Hidimba and marrying his sister Hidumbi. In this play Bheema and Hidimbi's only son Ghatotkaha is the villain and Bheema is the hero. The plot is construed as one of the ingenious imaginative sublimely of Bhasa. Bheema rescuing a Brahmin family from the atrocities of his son Ghatotkaha forms the plot of the play.

### 4. *Pañcarātra*

The plot is adopted from the virataparva of the Mahabharata. Having vanquished in the dice game, the Pandavas spent 12 long years in exile in the forest. After this they had been living incognito in the palace of the king of Virata. During this time ,the Kaurava prince Duryodhana conducted a great Yaga; the consequences of this event are depicted in the play.

### 5. *Dūtavākya*

The advice given by Lord Krishna depicted in the Udyogaparva of the Mahabharata is the theme of this play. Conforming to the conditions of the dice game, the Pandavas had completed 12 years in exile and additional one year incognito. When the Pandavas came back to claim their kingdom the Kauravas completely refused their rightful demand and this led to the great war of Kurukshetra. Both sides took great preparation for the war. At last, foreseeing the unparalleled devastation that the war will cause, Pandavas send Lord Krishna to Kauravas as the mediator in order to end the war. This is the theme of the play.

### 6. *Dūtaghatōtkāca*

The play takes its plot from a scene in Yudhishthira's parva in Mahabharata. After the assassination of Abhimanyu Ghatotkaha (son of Bheema) approaches the Kauravas as a messenger of the Pandavas.

### 7. *Karṇabhāra*

This is written as a one act play in Sanskrit. The story of generous Karna giving up his celestial earrings and divine breast plate armour, portrayed in the Adiparva and vanaparva forms the plot of the play.

### 8. *Ūrubhanga*

The plot of the play is adopted from the sahyaparva of the Mahabharata . It focuses on the story of the character Duryodhana during and after his fight with Bheema. Bheema crushed his thighs from false play and violation of the rules of the

war and finally he passes away in front of his parents, wife and son. Bhasa's altering of certain aspects reflects n a different presentation of the story.

#### 9. *Bālaćarita*

The plot of the play is delivered from the puranas like srimatBhagavatGeeta and Harivamsa. Portrays the young Srikrishna being a mischievous child who enjoys playing pranks and having fun.

#### 10. *Pratijñayaugandharāyanòa*

The play focouses on the Udayanakadha depicted in GunadhyasBrihatkatha and kathasaritsagara written by somadeva . The play narrates the deep love of Vasavadatta and Udayana. Udayana captivation for getting him in to a wedding with Vasavadatta, and vow of the chief minister of UdayanasYaugandharayanòa to release him from captivation.

#### 11. *Svapnavāsavadatta*

This play is a sequel to*Pratijñayaugandharāyanòa* . After the marriage of Udayana and Vasavadatta, they began to enjoy life and neglected his state affairs which enabled his enemies to march against him. One Aruni had invaded the kingdom of Kausamb. To retrieve the kingdom from Aruni the ever watchful minister Yaugandharayanòa with the help of vasavadatta and vasanthaka makes a plan; this forms the basics of the play.

#### 12. *Avimāraka*

The play depicts to time of a traditional folklore. The play gets ime Chandalas for one year. Remounting to kingdom and the crown for one year , they reached the land of kuntibhoja and decided to spend one year there incognito. Once Kurangi, daughter of the king kuntibhoja was attacked by a mad elephant and the Avimaraka rescues her from the elephant . The sequel to this incident leads the play.

#### 13. *Ćārudatta*

*Ćārudatta* is a lovely play which celibrates the glory of true love of Vasanhasena, a rich and cultured courtesan , and charudatta, a noble but poor Brahmin

#### **Conclusion**

The mahakaviBhasan'sworks are the greatest rare gems of Indian literature. Each and every play of Bhasa is a crafty painting of mental conflicts. They are more dramatic than poetic Psychoanalytic approach ,rhetorical qualities , creativity, psychoanalytic cognition , simplicity of the dialogues etc. are the general characteristics of Bhasasplays.His plays are valuable part of Sanskrit drama and the Malayalam literature. Even today , when hisplays are translated,the uniqueness

and speciality of Bhasas play makes it stand out from other literatures .It has been one hundred and sixty years since Ganapathy Sastri has discovered and published Bhasas plays. It was 300 years old when publishers published 106 years ago. It was 300 years old when his play was published in 1912. These plays which has been celebrated in the heart for many generations is an exquisite piece of art. Bhasas play has opened new windows in the field of play literature. Even now when these plays are being studied and discussed, Bhasa and Ganapati Sastri who introduced us to Bhasas plays still live in the minds of all. There is no doubt that these plays would be enjoyed by audience for centuries .Bhasa and Ganapati Sastri are honoured in the twenty first century also .

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