

The Rustic Love-expressions of Maharashtra

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Every Sanskritist and particularly Prakritist in the world, knows the uniqueness of the anthology 'Gaathaa-sapta-shatee'. At the very outset one may think about it as a religious work but it is not so. In this article, an attempt has been made to highlight the soul of Gaathaa-sapta-shatee, in which the poetic love-expressions of contemporary Maharashtra are documented. This collection of 700 verses (*gaathaas*) belongs to 1st century A.D.

'Haala Satavaahana', the 17th ruler of the Saatavaahana dynasty, is the compiler of this work. It is noted down in the third verse of this text that, ""Out of ten millions of verses adorned with ornaments (or rhetorical figures of speech), seven hundred only have been collected (or compiled) by Kavivastala (lit. compassionate toward the poets) Haala".

Many mythological accounts of the king Haala, Saalaahana or Saatavaahana are found in the legendary-history-books written in Sanskrit. Modern historians have written a lot about the history of Saatavaahana dynasty. Ancient Pratishthaana (Paithana) was the capital of Saatavaahanas. Haala, the present compiler was a great lover of Prakrit, particularly Mahaaraashtree Prakrit. He appealed and encouraged his subjects to write their poetries in their colloquial language. The appeal of the king was extremely welcomed and literary hundreds of poets and poetesses showered king Haala with their *muktakas* (*gaathaas*, two-liners) in torrents. Per poetry, he offered one golden coin.

After going through the whole collection carefully, he selected 700 best verses and divided them into 7 parts - each called '*shataka*'. Thus Gaathaa-sapta-shatee manifests the poetic competence and intellectual abilities of the common people of Maharashtra. The expanse of Saatavaahana kingdom was a large one. So this unique anthology acquired tremendous popularity. It is a grand package of poetry and wisdom, a rich-socio-cultural data and the aspirations of common people, mainly belonging to rural areas. No wonder that this anthology is enumerated among the world-classics. In true sense, it is the Gangotri of the vast and rich Lokasaahitya in Marathi.

This anthology was first translated into German by Weber. It is available in English and French. Up till date, it is translated into all chief modern Indian languages. We find many imitations of this unique treatise in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramsha. Bihari Lal's Sata-sai in Vraja-bhaasha attained great popularity.

When a Prakritist cast a glance to the subject referred to in this anthology, a wide range of subjects is seen. There are the good sayings (*subhaashitas*), quotable quotes, the descriptions of good and bad persons (verses dedicated to *sajjana* and *durjana*), the ethical teachings, universal value judgments, the role of Destiny and Death in the worldly activities, the serene beauty of nature, the outlook of commoners towards the ways of life and so on. But it is observed that the spontaneous, natural and un-restricted outburst of erotic sentiment (*singaara-rasa*) is the soul of this anthology. Most of the verses are full of erotic ideas which are exhibited with unique imagery.

Studies from the view of rhetoricians, this anthology is full of poetic excellences but "*dhvani*" or suggestiveness is the salient feature of almost every verse. Several renowned commentators have exerted a lot to explain the hidden meaning (popularly known as "double meaning"). It may be believed that the *vibhaava* (ensuant feeling), *anubhaava* (manifestation of feeling), *vyabhichaari-bhaava* (accessory feeling), love in association or union, love in separation, even illicit and unbridled kind of love - all these agitate, everywhere and always, the human mind, in the same manner.

Men of taste can enjoy a good deal of delight from the suggestive words and expressions of various kinds of erotic ideas inlaid in them. It has been said in the last verse of the fourth century (viz. *shataka* i.e. chapter) that if read by men of sentiments, a "*gaathaa*" in this treatise may seem to him as sweeter than ambrosia.

Some beautiful examples exhibiting all possible shades of "love" will help the reader to know the essence of this anthology -

The initial benediction is dedicated to the intense love of god Shiva and Gauree. The verse runs like this -

pasuvaino rosaaruna-padimaa-samkanta-gori-muhaandam &
gahiaggha - pankaam via samjhaa - salilanjalim namaha &&

Which means, ""Salute the twilight offering of handful of water by Shiva, on which remains reflected the moon-like face of Gauree (Paarvatee), red in anger, and which therefore looks as if it bears the red lotus of adoration. " (1.1)

At the very outset, a *rasika* gets thrilled with the beauty of imagery used by the compiler (i.e. Haala) as an apt benedictory expression for this anthology!

The fourth verse of the first chapter is oftenly quoted in the books of poetics by the Indian rhetoricians. The purport of the verse can be summarized like this -

""Look here ! , the female crane appears splendid while sitting steady and motionless on the lotus-leaf, just like a conch-shell placed on a spotless vessel made of emerald." (1.4)

Actually, it is a beautiful description of nature but the commentators say that, here, a "*meelanotsuka naayikaa*" is suggesting to the hero that, "this place is safe and suitable for our secret meeting.'

In another verse (1.19), the romance of a newly-wed couple is described. The husband is wondering when he observes the two different moods of his newly-wed wife - the most romantic mood at night and the most obedient daughter-in-law among the elderly family-members at day-time. He exclaims -

""The beloved lady, who with her cheeks blooming with joy, gave in that way hundreds of directions to me at the time of dalliance during the previous night, could not be believed by me the next morning to be the self-same lady with her down-cast face." (1.19)

The relation between the young lady and her husband's younger brother (*devara*) is one of the favorite subjects in this anthology. The flirting of the *devara* is oftenly mentioned. The different reactions of three different young ladies are quite amusing. One lady encourages him, another lady bears him with great distaste and the third one instructs him properly by showing the pictures of Lakshmana, so devoted to Raama, recorded in the paintings on the walls of their house. (1.20)

The sentiment of love is so subtle that in different situations, it appears before us in altogether new manner and mode. A young lady who beloved is going on the long journey next day, expresses her feelings - ""It is reported that my tough-hearted beloved husband will go abroad tomorrow. O Lady Night, I request you to so lengthen yourself that 'the tomorrow' does not at all come into actuality." (1.46)

Some of the couples live together with certain adjustment and patch-work. One of the poets of this anthology aptly says -

pemmassa virohia-samdhiassa paccakkha-dittha-viliassa &
uaassa va taavia-seealassa viraso raso hoi &&

""The feeling of that love, which is first estranged and then composed, and in which the fault (of either of the pair) is directly visible, become flavorless - like water (first) heated and then made cold." (1.53)

One of the poets describes the pseudo-anger in love-sport of a young couple. The meaning can be paraphrased likewise -

""Look here! the feeling of displeasure towards her lover adopted by the lady, fretted by jealous anger, slips away quickly like a handful of very fine sand." (1.74)

The onomatopoeic word "*surasuranto*", which is the adjective of the "fine sand", is quite noteworthy.

Actually, in this anthology, the power of words consists in the usage of proper *deshi* words, having the flavor of the rustic ideas of the village-dwellers. Half of the credit of the success goes to the apt use of proper *deshi* words - which have nothing to do with refined Sanskrit words. A very small list given bellow will illuminate the rustic nature of this poetry - *adaanaa, attamatta, undura, ulla, ojhara, olugga, kakkara, khudda, khutta, golaa, gose, ghola, chiradi, chulachulanta, chojja, chippa, dhakka, tambaa, tuppa, paosa, pakkala, pattala, phaggu, bhandana, mankusa, maami, runda, lukka, vallara, vellahala, baaula, saalee, hallaphalla, hutta* and so on.

Again, going back to the main theme of love, one poet of this anthology thinks that when one loses one's love, the person starts thinking of various alternatives. These options are enumerated in a very simple manner and simple words. We feel the attitude of philosophizing the emotion of love in the verse 1.76

At another place the jealousy of co-wives (*sautana*) is captured and stated by using unique poetic imagination, which is really rare. The verse means - ""The red color of her lips, which was wiped off by the kiss of her lover on the previous night, is seen reflected next morning in the eyes of her co-wives." (2.6)

A typical filmy love-triangle is also not new when we read -

saa tujjha vallahaa, tam si majjha veso si, teea tujjha alam &
baalaa phudam bhanaamo pemmam kira bahu-viaaram tti &&

""She is your beloved, but you are mine. You are an object of hatred to her, and I am hated by you. O boy, I plainly state this - love is said to have many transformations." (2.26)

The extreme condition of love-lorn youngsters is described in Gaathaa-sapta-shatee 2.41. The psychology of a widow or widower is expressed thus -

""The couple had shared many moments of joy and misery throughout their life. Their love was matured. In this case, when (he or she) dies, the dead-one remains immortal in the memory of the other. But the alive person feels that as if he is dead." (2.42)

The attitude of a flirt youth is described in a unique way which creates a smile on the reader's face -

""O fortunate one! having had no place (for herself) in your heart, full of other thousand women, she is making her thin body thinner, in order to get place in your heart." (2.82)

Unsatisfied sex-instinct of a middle-aged woman is expressed without any constraint in the concerned verse, likewise -

""The village is full of young men; the month belongs to the spring season; she possesses youth; her husband is old; the matured liquor is handy. Under these circumstances, will she die? How can it be that she is not unchaste?" (2.97)

Unfulfilled one-sided love of a younger girl is described with her psychological thought-modes in these words -

""Perhaps my merits are trivial, or he is not an appreciator of merits, or I am, myself devoid of merits or his favorite girl possesses many merit." (3.3)

The countdown of a fiancée starts right from the departure of her fiancé and see what happens -

In the first half of the day of his departure, the fiancée painted the whole wall with the marks, saying, "he left home today", "he left home today", "he left home today". (3.8)

At another place, a friend of the heroine says very smartly and intelligently -

""There is no wonder that one can give to others the best of his wealth which one possesses; but you have given to your co-wives 'ill-luck', which does not exist in you." (3.12)

A true friendship is defined at three-four places in this anthology with the help of using off-beat and non-traditional images viz. a doll painted on the wall, or a rough woolen blanket.

References of the river Godavari are ample and scattered through all the chapters. Godavari is often presented as a witness in love matters. One young girl exclaims -

""The flood water of Godaa and the midnights of the rainy season - both are aware of his attractive youth and of the daring feat of mine which is not woman-like." (3.31)

The sense of exaggeration is seen while describing the beauty of a damsel-like girl -

""The gaze of a person, who falls first on a particular limb of hers, gets stuck thereto. So all her limbs could not be seen by any one person." (3.34)

At one place, there is an interesting reference of a love-letter written by a lover to his beloved. He says -

""O dear friend! What shall I write in my love-letter? I can't complete even the initial '*swasti*', as my pen slipped out of my hand because of sweating and trembling of fingers." (3.44)

The sweet nostalgic memories of aged persons are noted down likewise -

""Alas! the villagers narrate our unique love-stories to each other and we simply hear them like distant observers !" (6.17)

Totally shameless behavior of a wanton woman is presented in one verse very artistically. The poet says -

""The wanton woman has so tamed the dog with food and drink that the dog welcomes her paramour but barks at the owner of the house (i.e. her husband) when he comes in." (7.62)

Several references of harlots, courtesans and unchaste women are found in this anthology along with the *kula-vadhus* and *kula-baalikas*.

If we compare the present anthology Gaathaa-sapta-shatee to a decorated hall, then the *subhaashitas*, descriptions of nature, ethical teachings and philosophical reflections etc. are the peripheral decorations while the glittering chandelier of '*singaara-rasa*' hanging in the middle of the ceiling, is the crest-jewel of all decorations.

These rustic love-expressions of Maharashtra, start with the divine love of Lord Shiva and Gauree and the last auspicious salute at the end of the 7th chapter is also dedicated to the same celebrated pair - the spring well of all the patterns of acting, music and dance.

Indeed the Gaathaa-sapta-shatee stands as incomparable in Indian Literature.
