

THE TEXT OF THE MAHĀVĪRACARITA OF BHAVABHŪTI

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The manuscripts of the *Mahāvīracarita* (MVC) do not present the text in a uniform manner; hence there is a difference of opinion regarding the extent and authenticity of the text.

The first scholar to pay attention to this problem was Hertel who held the last two acts, namely VI & VII of the MVC, as spurious¹. Next to Hertel, Todarmall was advantageously placed for examining the problem in depth since he had collated 18 manuscripts to edit the text of the MVC. The critical edition indeed is a lasting monument to his scholarship and critical acumen. All manuscripts collated by Todarmall, all printed editions (of Trithen, Borooah Shridhar, Jivanand, Taranath, Jyotishi and Laxmanasuri) and some manuscripts procured by De uniformly agree up to the act V-46. Thereafter there is a wide divergence and, according to Todarmall, three different recensions emerge from them.

1. Eight northern MSS. from the act V 46 to the end of the play present recension A which is the Vulgate Text of Hertel. Ratnam Aiyar calls this as the *Sarvataḥ pracalitaḥ pāṭhaḥ*, which he tags as an appendix to his edition of the MVC.
2. Todarmall's MS. MR. as well as the printed edition of Ratnam Aiyar gives different text subsequent to V 46 up to the end of the play. This is recension C and this much portion has been attributed to some Subrahmanya as stated in the MS. MR. at the end *Asmin nāṭake vāliprakaraṇe "daurātmyadaribhiḥ" iti ślokaparyantena granthasandarbhena Bhavabhūtinā tribhāgaparimitā kathā viracitā, tataḥ "avaśyam ca śreyasvinā mayā bhavitavyam" iti vālivākyādārabhya bhāratavākyaparyantena granthasandarbhena Subrahmanyakavinā kṛtsnopi kathāśeṣaḥ pūritaḥ*.
3. The MSS. K and B give a different text from the act V 46 to the end of the Act V. This is recension B. The acts VI and VII of these MSS. agree with the recension A. MS. K. reads *etāvad Bhavabhūteḥ agre kavīnāyaka-Vināyaka bhāṭṭairapūri*. Todarmall, after having examined the MSS., came to the conclusion that Bhavabhūti wrote the MVC up to the end of the act V and did not complete the drama. He held the last VI and VII acts not authentic².

De, going further (or backward ?) than Todarmall, considers the genuine text of the MVC extending up to V 46 only. He offers an ingenious interpretation of the word *agre* in recension B as indicating not only the completion of act V, but the subsequent VI and VII acts as well³. According to De, recension A is from V 46 to the end of the act, and borrows the VI and VII acts from recension B. It is highly probable, according to De, that originally there existed a longer text of Vināyaka in Recension B but, subsequently a shorter anonymous text came into existence, receiving the

universal acceptance and even superseding the original text of Vināyaka. This thesis of De presents some difficulties as pertinently pointed out by C. R. Deodhar. How the shorter version for the portion from V 46 to the end of the act V is preserved in recension A and how it came to receive the universal approval, throwing into oblivion the longer text of Vināyaka ? These questions remain unanswered in the thesis of De. That Vināyaka cannot be the author of the VI and VII acts, moreover, is ably demonstrated by C. R. Deodhar. First, there is a world of difference in point of style. Many of the verses in recension B are extremely uncouth and obscure, some stanzas also happen to be metrically glaringly defective, and the author, moreover, is guilty of committing a grammatical error of employing *dhanu* in the neuter gender. Second, the characterization of Vāli is substantially different from that of the acts VI and VII, where some angularities in his character have been softened off. And third, there is a discrepancy. In the act VII, there is for instance, a mention of the Tāla trees which are not alluded to in the act V by Vināyaka. "From all these considerations one feels that Vināyaka is not the author of VI and VII acts."⁴ Of course, Deodhar's argument regarding the repetition of two phrases *kilakilakolāhala* and *kāpicakramakrama* is not a convincing one. He writes "He (Vināyaka) was so fascinated by the two phrases that he repeated them in the Vth and VIth acts. This is rather unusual."⁵ This is rather a feeble argument, as Bhavabhūti also seems to take a fancy for some phrases as is evidenced by his repetitions in all of his plays. Todarmall has also pointed out some other grounds on which the portion from the act V 46 to the end of the act in recension A appears genuine. That the tradition regarded this portion from the pen of Bhavabhūti is borne out by the quotations from this portion in the rhetorical works. There is a repetition of some passages from this portion in other two plays by the author. The oldest known MS. I-1 (1609 A. D.) runs without a break beyond V 46 and does not mention that the subsequent portion of V 46 is from a different author. This should leave no doubt regarding the genuineness of the portion beyond V 46.

Now, the authenticity of the last two acts remains to be examined. Todarmall (along with Hertel, De, Mirashi, and Kane⁶) considers the last two acts not from the pen of Bhavabhūti on the following suppositions :

1. He accounts for the incompleteness of the play by supposing that Bhavabhūti got his MS. circulated among the connoisseurs of the day and received an unfavourable opinion. Dampened by the hostile reaction, he abandoned the writing of the play, and left it up to V 46. "Some time later on he revised this portion and brought the act to a close."⁷
2. In the Vth act, Rāma is shown to have cast aside the heap of bones of the demon Dundubhi. But in the act VII, Lakṣmaṇa is said to have thrown aside it. This is clearly a contradiction of which Bhavabhūti, had he been the author of the last two acts, could not be held guilty.

3. The use of Prākṛta forms in the VI and VII acts varies from that of the first five acts.
4. There is a metrical irregularity in the word *vidrāvita* in VI 27 d, the like of which is not committed in the previous act.
5. Rhetorical works do not cite a single passage from the VI and VII acts.
6. No repetition of any phrases from the last two acts has been found in the other two plays of Bhavabhūti excepting the two non-descript phrases, namely *kilakilakolāhala* and *cakramakrama*.

Let us examine the arguments :

1. Todarmall's hypothesis of abandoning the play before completing it is quite interesting but given to much fancying. First of all, it is difficult to understand why, Bhavabhūti got his incomplete MS. circulated among the literary circles of the day. This is rather a modern practice in vogue among the literary circles. Second, what judgement can one form of an incomplete work and what can an author be expected to benefit from such practice. Moreover, the prologue indicates that the play was presented on the occasion of a festival⁸. So, the presentation presupposes the complete drama. Of course, we do not get a hint or a detail as to how a play was actually written. But it can be surmised that at first the main play was got completed and afterwards a prologue suggesting the import of the work was added, predictably sometime before its staging. The word in the prologue *hata-pāpmane* suggests the slaying of the demon Rāvaṇa which has been the subject of VI and VII acts. If we assume that, in the chronological order the MVC is the first, only then we can explain the author's indignation and lashing out at his contemporary's apathy in the *Mālatīmādhava*(MM). If the completed drama MVC was presented, then the only criticism would be *forth coming* and then the only Bhavabhūti's cry for a kindred soul in the MM would appear to be consistent in view of the contemporary apathy with reference to the complete MVC.
2. This is further corroborated by two MSS. C. R. Deodhar has noted a remark *samāptamidam nāṭakam Mahāvīracaritam nāma Rājasekharadagdhaśeṣam*, in the colophons of the MS. No. 4434 from the Saraswati Mahal Library, Tanjore, Catalogue Vol. VIII. Again, the same remark, now more explicit in the colophon of the MS. No. 4435 from the same collection, thus runs : *Iti śrivaśyavācā Bhavabhūtimahākavinā viracaritam nāma nāṭakametāvadevasmindeśe drśyate śeṣam Rājasekhareṇa dagdhamiti prasiddhiḥ*.

Apart from lending any credence to this statement in its entirety, the remarks unwittingly, but unmistakably, point out to the fact that Bhavabhūti himself had written the entire play but, in course of time, some portion of it came to be lost either due to natural or by human agency.

3. It is also significant that all the southern MSS. present the text of the *MVC* in diversified forms. C. R. Deodhar offers a plausible explanation for this phenomenon : "The fact that the Southern MSS. preserve the text only up to V. 46 while the Northern MSS. give the text to the end of act VII clearly supports the widely accepted tradition that the poet must have migrated from his native Vidarbha to the North before he had completed his *MVC*."⁹ So, the unfinished work which he completed in the North, gained currency in the South.
4. According to Todarmall, the oldest MS. I1 continues beyond V 46 without any break and does not make any reference that the portion beyond V 46 up to the close of the act V is from a different author. Hence the authentic text extends up to the end of the Vth act. Now, the other MSS. in the Northern group also continue without any break beyond V 46 up to the end of the play. Out of these MSS., the MS. I2, though dated A. D. 1801; "Copied from originals belonging to the 17th century"¹⁰ seems to be equally old. This MS. also does not break in the middle nor does it make any mention of an author different from Bhavabhūti and continues up to the end of the play. So, this MS. is entitled to some weightage in respect of the authenticity of the text. Uninterrupted continuity beyond V 46 is the characteristic of all the manuscripts in the Northern group.
5. Much stress need not be lent to the argument of contradiction by Todarmall. Lakṣmaṇa is depicted to be casting aside the heap of bones of the demon Dundubhi in one MS. E of Todarmall. One more MS. No. 471 of the B.O. R.I. also, similarly attributes the act to Lakṣmaṇa. Bhavabhūti, then must not be held guilty on this count and deprived of the authorship of the last two acts of *MVC* as the tradition of the MSS, is not unanimous. As Deodhar points out, Murāri closely following Bhavabhūti, also attributes this act to Lakṣmaṇa¹¹.
6. The difference in the use of Prākṛta forms is also an argument not having "much probative value."¹² Deodhar has very cogently refuted this argument on the following grounds :
 - (i) The Prākṛtas are generally neglected in the MSS.
 - (ii) The use of forms depends upon the age and provenance of the MSS.
 - (iii) The variance noticed by Todarmall in the employment of the Prākṛita forms is in fact not to be met with uniformly.
 - (iv) The same peculiarities in the VI and the VII acts, persist in the *MM* and *URC* also. So, this cannot be made the ground to dispossess Bhavabhūti of his authorship of the last acts of the *MVC*.
7. Similarly, the metrical irregularity noticed by Todarmall is too minor to lead to any definite conclusion.
8. Also, nothing much can be made of the absence of references to VI and VII acts of the *MVC* in the rhetorical works.

9. Todarmall points out that the non-repetition of any phrases from the last two acts has been found in Bhavabhūti's other two plays. This argument has been proven fragile in view of the profusion of repetitions painstakingly collected and pointed out by R. G. Harshe in his work, *The Observations on the Life and Works of Bhavabhūti*¹³. So this proves that Bhavabhūti does repeat himself from the VI and VII acts of the MVC in his other plays.

Now, this brings us to another important consideration of the affinity of style perceptible between the first five acts and the last two acts of the MVC and some other peculiarities of Bhavabhūti. Scholars do not seem to have paid due attention to this aspect of the problem which it deserves.

- (i) We know that Bhavabhūti was fairly sensitive to the contemporary appreciation and quite irked by the lack of it. So, he was yearning for recognition from his contemporaries and this is discernible even in his final benedictory stanza. The last line of the last stanza of the VIIth act of the MVC brings out this urge of Bhavabhūti, *Samkhyāvantopi bhūmnā parakṛtiṣu mudam sampradhārya prayāntu*. This was a cordial invitation to his contemporary cognoscenti who insensitively did not grasp it. This line can definitely be seen as a precursor of the indignation and are expressed in the celebrated verse *ye nāma kēcidiha* in the MM. Poetasters or plagiarists are not known to be possessed of such favour and spirit.
- (ii) In the first act before the verse 40, a Rākṣasa saw the incredible things happening before his eyes. He saw that a formidable demoness was being slain by a tender-aged prince and exclaimed *ambūni majjantyālabūni grāvāṇaḥ plavante*. This is a sort of pithy saying signifying the most unbelievable episodes. The later part of the sentence is repeated by the character of Rāvaṇa in the VI act in its literal sense when he comes to know of a bridge of stones built across the ocean by Rāma *grāvāṇopi plavanta iti*. The context would indicate that the saying has been employed ironically in its literal sense. The author certainly is straining at a stylistic effect. Now, this kind of elasticity of the language raised to a very subtle level is possible only when both the portions under consideration are from an identical pen. Imitators are incapable of attaining such dizzy heights.
- (iii) Bhavabhūti's tendency to personify the non-sentient objects and present them as characters is a peculiar feature of his style. In the MVC, in the last act the two cities Alakā and Laṅkā have been personified and presented as characters, reminiscent of a similar personification of the rivers Sarayū, Tamasā, Godāvarī, and Gaṅgā in the URC.

It is almost a literary axiom that, some words, a turn of expression, a peculiar way of phrasing, bear the stamp of the author which is rather inimitable. As W. H. Hudson puts it, "the choice of the words, the turn of the phrases, the structure of the sentences, their peculiar rhythm and cadence—these are all curiously instinct with the individuality of the writer...."¹⁴

This is enough to show that style is fundamentally a personal quality. This is truer of Bhavabhūti who reaches out at the core of the being and with disturbing intensity seeks to give an expression to his creative urge. This would simply be beyond the pale of any imposter who would be incapable of instilling his writing with what Hudson calls "sincerity the foundation principle of all true style."¹⁵ This individual style in the acts VI & VII is quite in consonance with the first five acts of the MVC. Of course, it should be candidly confessed that we are now treading on a rather slippery ground which is liable to be trodden in a highly subjective fashion according to one's own inclinations and predilections. As Rene Wellek so analytically avers : "In many other cases, however, it will be far more difficult to isolate and define the stylistic characteristics of an author. A delicate ear and subtle observation are needed to discern a recurrent trait."¹⁶ Here is an attempt to discern recurrent traits permeating both the portions of the MVC.

It is true that the mere use of words and verbs cannot lead one to any definite conclusion but, what is here sought to be pointed out, is its peculiar usage and a given turn which can be peculiar to Bhavabhūti alone.

The denominative from *durmana* and other derivatives are recurrently employed by Bhavabhūti. First, Paraśurāma says in the act II, verse 10, *jāmadagnyaśca vo mitramanyathā durmanāyate*. There, in the sixth act, the Lankā city has been set afire by Hanumān and so a character Trijaṭa reports, *etannagaravṛttāntamanubhūya kimapi durmanāyamāna svāminī prabodhayitum tatraiva prasthiteti*. Again in the VIIth act, after verse 8, the verb is used with the same *Samprati tu droṇādrim pratyāharato hanumataḥ saviśesagr̥hita-pravṛttidurmanāyate kila kumāra Bharataḥ*. Similarly, in the VIIth act, Arundhati, after the verse 33, *vatse Kaikeyi kimevamatidurmanāyase*. One is also reminded of the similar use in the 1st act of the URC, just before the verse 13, *Jānāsi vatsa durmanāyamānām devir vinodayitum*.

Likewise Viśvāmitra of the MVC in the 1st act, verse 13, speaks *atha khalu vyagrāḥ pramodāmahe*. In the similar context, the same character Viśvāmitra speaks in the verse 38 of the VIIth act *nirvṛtānām falamiti muhuḥ sampramodāmahe naḥ*. Further, before the verse 41, Viśvāmitra : *viśṛjyetāmetāvanubh utotsavapramodān Sugrīva-Vibhiṣaṇau*. Vaśiṣṭha also, in the verse 33 in the act VII : *pramodādvai tasyapyupari parivartāmaha ime*.

Similarity is the case of the context and usage of these instances which make the imitation of them highly improbable. It would not be amiss here to point out that Toderhall himself has pointed out in all 41 words which have been repeated in both these portions¹⁷. Mere repetition of a word is not indicative of any peculiar style. So, all the repeated words do not, and cannot, have any bearing upon the style or have any significance to enable us to fix the authorship from the style point of view. Words like *vidhi*, *khandaparaśu*, *ṭankāra*, *dhamani*, *prakṛti*, *prauḍha*, *vivarta*, etc. cannot have any stylistic significance as they are contextually non-descript. Words like *sfur* and

sfurja and its derivatives, *prāgbhāra*, *parisara*, *ādhmāta*, *udarka*, *sarvātīśaya* and *sarvamkaṣa*, *kulatantu*, *ulbaṇa*, *kimapi* etc. may offer us some clues regarding the style. An analysis of the usage of the word *kulatantu* may be illustrative. Mālyavān, an astute politician, explaining his political strategy to Sūrpaṇakhā says in the IVth act that in the all pervading annihilation at least Vibhiṣaṇa, a *kulatantu* may live to perpetuate the race *ekaḥ sa jivyātkulatantuḥ*. Now, in the similar context, the same character Mālyavān employs the word *kulapratisthātantum* in the act VI. Now, this repetition of the word *kulatantu* cannot be dismissed just on the ground that the writer of the latter portion has cleverly imitated Bhavabhūti. Moreover, this is further strengthened by the use of the same word in the *Anargharāghava* in the same context as pointed out by Deodhar¹⁸ *ārye yatsatyam śaṅke Vibhiṣaṇa eva yadyasmākaṁ kulatanturavaśīyeta*.

It is Bhavabhūti's wont to describe the profundity of feeling simply by terming it as *kimapi* indescribable or beyond the words. This has been resorted to in the VIth and VIIth acts as often as three times, namely, *kimapi gahaṇo vastumahimā* (VI 52 d), *Kopi acintyānubhavaḥ* (VI 53d) and *Kopi acintyaprabhāvo* (VI 61 c).

In this way such an analysis and scrutiny of words and their usages can go a long way in enabling us to understand the peculiar style of an author. However, sadly enough, this aspect of the problem has not been examined and used in its fulness by the scholars.

This aspect, in point of fact, has received scant attention from the scholars. A sort of willy-nilly attitude seems to be pervading the discussion by Todermall. Todermall, having established the last two acts of the *MVC* not authentic, proceeds to discuss the style of Bhavabhūti and on many points, he gives illustrations from the portion that is a suspect in his eyes. While discussing a trait in the style of Bhavabhūti of giving a peculiar turn to the verses, according as a new idea strikes the mind of the speaker or a new circumstance happens, out of the four illustrations three are from the portion of dubious authenticity¹⁹. Throughout this discussion, perplexing attitude is adopted by Todermall which, if it is to be explained, stems either from his ambivalence in respect of the authenticity of the portion under discussion or not attaching much importance to the style factor either way. Harshe, in his French work now translated into English, *Observations on the Life and Works of Bhavabhūti*, also did not touch the stylistic aspect of this problem though he did prepare an impressive list of words and ideas from VI and VII acts repeated in Bhavabhūti's other works. Deodhar, who very ably argued in favour of the last two acts being genuine, also did not deliberate over this problem.

It is a universally agreed proposition that Bhavabhūti is considerably influenced by Kālidāsa. In the acts VI and VII of the *MVC* also, this influence can be traced. Description of the journey by the aerial car *puṣpaka* seems an emulation of the similar description in the XIII canto of the *Raghuvamśa*. Of course, here one may

always argue that the *Rāmāyaṇa* story being the common source of both the works, the similarity is inevitable. Toderhall, under the heading “Bhavabhūti and Kālidāsa” (again an anomaly ?) points out the expressions *gauriguroḥ pāvanāḥ* (VII 27), *iṣṭairyujyethām* (VII-35), and *jaṁ amhe cintemo taṁ tahmanam̐ hodu*, after the verse 35 in the VIIth act, are *akin to those in the Śākuntalam̐* VI 17b, 2 13/14 and IV19/20 respectively²⁰. R. D. Karmarkar, while discussing the sources of the *MVC*, regards Bhavabhūti’s acquaintance with Kālidāsa’s *Raghuvamśa* as one of the facts²¹. Bhavabhūti was, in fact, impelled by the desire to compete with Kālidāsa. This is done very subtly. Kālidāsa is believed to have displayed his scientific knowledge in the verse 40 of the canto XIVth of the *Raghuvamśa*²². The similar display has been resorted to in the VIIth act before the verse 22 where Sītā wonders at the sight of what looks like the cluster of stars, Rāma, correcting, states that it is indeed the cluster of stars and then presents the scientific fact that during the day, on account of a great distance, the eyes, dazzled by the sun rays, are not able to see it. *ativiprakarṣadravik-iraṇapratihatacakṣubhirna dṛṣyate kila divase*. Here Bhavabhūti is indulging in one-upmanship with reference to Kālidāsa.

Bhavabhūti excels in the description of the sublime. The flight of imagination in the VI 51 b where Hanumān is said to have scattered away the cluster of stars in the sky with his tail is delightful. A poetic verse VII. 12, portraying a quaint phase of nature is also quite consonant with the tradition of Bhavabhūti describing the unusual aspects of nature. In the VI 60, the statement that the haughty demons — who could not accommodate themselves even in the three worlds while living — now lay dead on the ground, is profoundly simple yet charming. All this is characteristically Bhavabhūtian.

All these considerations should restore the authorship of the VI and VII acts of the *MVC* to Bhavabhūti who is often, on insufficient grounds, made to part with it. The VI and VII acts indeed are as much authentic as the first five acts. This must, then, clinch the issue.

Annotations :

1. George Hertel, “A Note on Bhavabhūti and Vākpatirāja,” *Asia Minor*, Vol. I, 1-9.
2. *MVC*, 28 Introduction, p. XVIII.
3. *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. 59, pp. 13-18.
4. C. R. Deodhar, “The textual problem of the *MVC*,” *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Vol. IX, p. 252.
5. *Ibid*.
6. As he does not cite the repetitions of Bhavabhūti from the *MVC* beyond the act V in his edition, the *Uttararāmacaritam* (URC)⁷¹, p. 33.
7. *MVC*, “Introduction”, p. XVIII.
8. *ādyā khalu bhagavataḥ kālapriyanāthasya yatrāyāmāryamiṣrāḥ samādiśanti*.

9. Deodhar, "The Textual.," *JOI*, X, p. 247.
 10. Todarmall in *MVC*, "Intro.," p. XV.
 11. *JOI*, Vol. IX p. 248.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
 13. R. G. Harshe, *Observations on the Life and Works of Bhavabhūti*, Meharchand Lachhmandas, Delhi 1974, P. 18 and 19 and note No.1.
 14. W. H. Hudson, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*; Sec. Ed. George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd. London 1965, p. 27.
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, London 1955 (reprint), p. 181.
 17. *MVC*. "Intro.," p. XXXIV.
 18. *JOI*, Vol. IX. p. 254, the third instance.
 19. *MVC*. "Intro.," p. XXXIV
 20. *Ibid.*, p. XI.
 21. *Bhavabhūti*, p. 14.
 22. *Chāyā hi bhumeḥ śāsino malatvenāropitā śuddhimataḥ prajābhiḥ.*
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