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 Bhāsa. 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 facts.

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). But regrettably Barnett’s grounds for the identification are not so convincing. 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 -vasavadattā). Although a subhāṣita attributed to Rājaśekhara (9th century) which states that the Svapnavāsavadatta of Bhāsa survived a fire-ordeal is very famous, it is merely a later quotation by Jalhaṇa (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 Nātyaśāstra, he refers to it as follows:

kvacit kṛṣṭa yathā Svapnavāsavadattāyām.

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

dṛṣṭyante ceti. yathā Svapnavāsavadattākhye nāṭake——

—512—
(2) Who is Rājasimha in the "Bhāsa" Plays?

svaṁcitapākṣmakapāṭāṃ nayanadvāram svarūpataḍena/
udghātya sā praviṣṭā ṛdayagrhaṃ me nṛpatanujā // 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 alamkāra 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 Svapna9). 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 Nātyaśāstra 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 vyavaharantāti10).

From the testimony of Abhinavagupta we can at least understand that a nāṭaka called (akhya) 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 Abhinavabhārati:

mahākavinā Bhāsenāpi svaprabandha uktah ——
tretāyugaṃ tad dhi na maithilī sā
rāmasya rāgapadavi mṛdu cāsyā cetaḥ /
labdhā janas tu yadi rāvaṇam asya kāyaṃ
protkṛtya tan na tilaśo na vṛtrptigāmi // 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 Śrīngāraprakāśa:

[Svapna] vāsavadattē padmāvatīm avasthāṃ drṣṭvā (draṣṭum) rājā samudragrha-
Who is Rājasimha in the “Bhāsa” Plays?

kam gataḥ. padmāvatīrahitaṃ ca tad avalokya tasyā eva śāyanīye suśvāpa. svapnāyamānas ca vāsavadattām ababhāse. svapnaśabdāna ceha svāpo vā svapnadarśanaṃ vā svapnāyitaṃ vā vivakṣitam.

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

ciraprasuptah kāmo me viṇayā pratibodhitaḥ /
tāṃ tu devīm na paśyāmi yasyā ghośavatī priyā //

Although there are several problems, we can conclude that Śāradātana had almost the same text as the Trivandrum play in front of him. 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 Bhāsakṛte Svapnavāsavadatā śepālikāmaṇḍapāsītalān avalokya vatsarājaḥ—

“padākrāntāni puṇḍarī, soṣma cēdaṃ śīlātalaṃ /
nūnāṃ kācid ihāśīnā, māṁ drṣṭvā sahasā gataḥ //”

Since this verse is not found in the Trivandrum play, many scholars argued over the problem. 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 Svapnavāsavadatā 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 Śāradātana 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

—510—
Who is Rājāsimha in the “Bhāsa” Plays?

said that Vāmana (c. 800 A. D.) quotes a verse from the Svapnavāsavadatta (IV. 7) in his Kāvyālaṃkārasūtra-vṛtti (Vṛtti under Sūtra IV. 25) with slight variations. But it is possible to imagine that Vāmana quoted from a floating subhāṣīta, 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 Rājāsimha20).

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 subhāṣīta ascribed to Rā-
Who is Rājasiṃha in the “Bhāsa” Plays?

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 Rājasiṃha, presumably in Kerala. Then who was the king called Rājasiṃha in the beginning of the eleventh century? It is not unreasonable to think that the king is none other than the Chera king, Rājasiṃha (1028-43)\(^2\). According to the Mannārkoil inscription, this Rājasiṃha 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 “himavadvindhyakundalāṃ mahaṃ praśāstu”\(^3\) 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:
   imāṁ sāgaraparyantāṁ himavadvindhyakundalāṁ/
   mahaṁ ekātpatrāṅkāṁ rājasiṃhāḥ praśāstu naḥ//
   Pratijñā, IV. 25; Avimāraka, VI. 22; Abhiṣeka, VI. 35; Pañcarātra, III. 26;
   Dātavakya, I. 56: imāṁ api mahaṁ krtsnāṁ rājasiṃhāḥ praśāstu naḥ//
   Cf. Pratima, VII. 15: rājā praśāstu naḥ.


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

5) Sūktimuktāvalī (GOS 82), p. 43:
   bhāsanāṭakacakre 'pi cchedakaiḥ kṣipte paṅkṣitum/
   svapnavāsavavadattasya dāhako 'bhūn na pāvakaḥ//


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

8) His commentary is on the Dhvanyaloka (KSS), p. 342: dṛṣyante ca kavyo 'lāmkāranibhandhanaikarasā anapekṣitārasāḥ prabandheṣu.


— 508 —
Who is Rajasimha in the "Bhāsa" Plays?

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.


14) Pusalker, p. 28.


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 *Tapatisāṇṇvarana*, p. 4 (chāyā): śūdrakakālidāsaharṣadaṇḍipramukhāṇām mahākāvinām.

20) It is admitted that *Śvapna* 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 *Kavyalaṃkāra* (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. Kuppuswami Sastri, Intro. to the Āścaryacudāmani (Madras, 1926), pp. 21-22. By the way according to Dr. Raja, Bhāmaha’s date is between Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti, in the fifth century A.D.


sūtradhārakṛtārambhār nāṭakā rā bhābhūmikāiḥ/
sapatākār yaśo lebhē bhāsō devakulār iva //

Avantisundarikatha (Ed. M.R. Kavi, p. 2):

suvi bhaktamukhādyaṅgair vyak talakṣaṇavṛttibhiḥ /
pareto ’pi sthito bhāśaḥ śartrair iva nāṭakaiḥ //


23) See note 1.

(Key Words) Bhāsa, Rajasimha

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