The Poetical Construction of the Saundarananda

Hideo Kimura

The Poetical construction of the Saundarananda, one of the early Mahākāvyā epics of the great Buddhist poet Aśvaghoṣa (c. 50–150 A. D.), has three aspects; the metrical construction, the syntactic construction, and the poetical arrangements of the materials in its contents. Since it is impossible to pursue satisfactorily all these subjects in detail, I shall pick up some of them in brief.

On the metrical construction of the Saundarananda, as E. H. Johnston says, Aśvaghoṣa is skillfully accurate in his handling of the Sanskrit metre. The Anuṣṭubh metre is mostly used by the poet in the Saundarananda because in the course of the history of the development of the Sanskrit poetry, the Kāvyā literature took over the metre style of the two great epics, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. Besides the Anuṣṭubh metre, Aśvaghoṣa employs the Upasthitapracupita, the Udgata, the Čarabhā metres, etc. in this Kāvyā poetry consisting eighteen chapters and 1043 poems. The fact that Kālidāsa, who is generally referred to the c. 4th cen. A. D. (although some Indian scholars maintain his date as the c. 1st or 3rd cen. B. C.), besides using fairly many Anuṣṭubh in the Kāvyā epic Raghuvṛtiṇa and moreover employing the Tristubh, Jaṅgati Atijagati, Čakvari, Atičakvarī Atyaṣṭi, Dhṛiti metres, etc., seen from the standpoint of the development of the Sanskrit poetry can be said that it manifests the pattern of the Kāvyā artistically developed more than that of the Saundarananda. From this point, the Kāvyā poetry of Aśvaghoṣa showing somewhat simplicity in its metrical construction, may be recognized as one belonging to the earlier Kāvyā period.

In a word, the syntactic construction of this Kāvyā poetry can also be said to be simple. Such skillful techniques as that of long compounds consisting many words found in the later Kāvyā literature has not yet been developed in this

---


(2) D. S. Triveda: Indian Chronology (Bombay, 1959), p. 95, Kālidāsa is referred to 232 B. C.; K. S. Ramaswami Sastri: Kalidasa Vol. I (Srirangam, 1933), p. 63, Banerji points out: “Kalidasa flourished under Vikramaditya, the king of Ujjain, not long after 2nd century B. C.”

— 752 —
As compared with Kālidāsa’s works, the vocabulary employed in the Sāundarānanda is less. Popular words are mostly used in this Kāvya poetry. Therefore, the style of the sentences constructed with such vocabulary is clear, easy to comprehend, and familiar with the readers. Although the vocabulary in it, however, is not large, Aśvaghōṣa employing skillfully and in variety the many meanings of the words according to the position of the words in the sentences as well as the paronomasia expressions, afford a vivid and a splendid prismatic colours in the meanings manifested by the words in the sentences of the poetry. This is one of his literary characteristics as a great poet and distinguishes him from other poets.

For example, the 35th cloka of the 2nd chapter runs:

acrāntaḥ samaye yajvā yajñabhūmim amīmapat I
pālanāc ca dvijān brahma nirudvignān amīmapat II
‘He who performed sacrifices without weariness, caused
(the Brahmans) to prepare the sacrificial ground in due time,
And he made the Brahmans pray on Brahman without anxiousness
according to his protection.’

Amīmapat employed twice, which is the causative aorist, 3rd person, singular, Parasmāipada of auctū means in the 2nd stanza ‘he caused (the Brahmans) to measure and prepare’ the sacrificial ground. In the 4th stanza it means ‘he made (the Brahmans) pray on’ Brahman devotedly without anxiousness. His use of the variety of a word’s meanings and paronomasia expressions in the 3rd cloka of the 1st chapter is artistically skillful. The cloka runs:

haviḥṣu yaṣ ca svātmārthaṁ gām adhukṣad vasiṣṭhavat I
tapahcistesu ca čiṣyeṣu gām adhukṣad vasiṣṭhavat II
‘He milked a cow for the oblation of burnt offering for the sake of his own benefit like the richest one who milks the earth for his own benefit,
And he milked speech for the disciples trained in asceticism as Vasiṣṭha milked a cow.’

In this cloka the variety of gām’s, adhukṣat’s and vasiṣṭhavat’s meanings are employed by the poet. Here ‘gām’ has three significances: the earth, cow, and speech. ‘Adhukṣat’ has also three significances: harvested (from the earth), uttered (speech), and milked (a cow). ‘Vasiṣṭhavat’ is used for two meanings: like the richest person and like the sage Vasiṣṭha. Among those three words, gām and adhukṣat construct the two paronomasia expressions in this cloka. Although this cloka is constructed with popular words with which we are familiar, the significance manifested by it has more width and brilliance according to the poet’s skillful use.
The Poetical Construction of the Sāundarananda (H. Kimura)

of such variety of meanings and paronomasia expressions of words.

On the poetical arrangement of the materials in the contents, I shall pick up a subject regarding the historical materials. In his description of the Buddha's family lineage in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd chapters of this Kāvya poetry, the poetic sentiment, Vīra, or 'excellence of a man' which is one of the fundamental elements of poetic sentiment constructing a Kāvya poetry, is accentuated by Açvaghoṣa. Following after this description accentuated with Vīra, the poetic sentiment, Çṛiuṅgāra or 'love', is accentuated by him in the 4th, 6th, and 7th chapters. Both accentuations in these chapters make a brilliant contrast.

The poetic sentiment, Vīra, is generally translated as 'heroism,' but in the works belonging to the early period of the Kāvya literature it manifests the meaning, 'excellence of a man.' The poetic sentiment, Vīra, found in the description of the sage Gāutama Kapila as the ancestor of the Buddha's Dharma lineage in the 1st to the 17th çlokas of the 1st chapter manifests the latter, because in these çlokas Gāutama's religious eminent nature is depicted splendidly with description of his ascetic life. In the 18th to the 62nd çlokas of the same chapter, excellence of the natural talent as a Kṣatriya of Ikṣvāku princes who were the ancestors of the Buddha's lineage is depicted with their brave behaviour. Here is found the poetic sentiment, Vīra, manifesting Kṣatriya's heroism. The glory of the Buddha's father Čuddhodana's heroism and good government as the lord of a country is depicted in the 1st to the 45th çlokas of the 2nd chapter, therefore in this case the poetic sentiment, Vīra, manifests heroism. In the 46th to the final çlokas of the same chapter, the excellence of the Buddha's birth is depicted in the traditional way like that of the Jātaka stories. Further in the 3rd chapter the Buddha's religious excellence in guidance of people as the spiritual teacher of the world is depicted by skillful arrangement of Nikāya tradition. Here also the sentiment, Vīra, manifests religious excellence of the Buddha. As mentioned above, the accentuation of the sentiment, Vīra, in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd chapters emits the noble fragrancy of Buddhist literature.

In the description of the Buddha's family lineage, the etymological origin of His clan name Çākya is depicted, Açvaghoṣa's creative poetic idea manifests its distinction in his poetical arrangement of the historical materials regarding the ances-

(3) See "On the Homophonous Expression found in the Sāundarananda" by Hideo Kimura, The Ryukokudaigakuronshu, No. 360, June, 1959.

(4) The Rasas or 'sentiments,' are 8 or 9 mentioned in the Kāvyaprakāṣa 1, 4. They are çṛiuṅgāra, Hasya, Karuṇa, Rāudra, Vīra, Bhayānaka, Bibhatsa, Abhuta (the 9th is Çānta).
tor of the Buddha’s lineage. According to the Aṃbaṭṭhasutta in the Dīghanikāya (III, 1. 16) and the Mahāvastu (I, pp. 348-352), the etymological origin of the Buddha’s clan name Čākya is described as follows: At the occasion when the younger queen’s son was acceded to the throne of the crown prince by his father, the king, due to his blind love for her, Okkāka or Ikṣvāka’s princes, the elder queen’s sons were exiled from their country by the king. Then having gone to the sage Kapila Gāutama’s hermitage at the foot of Himālaya and having settled themselves in the forest of it, they married their sisters for the sake of preserving the purity of their blood. The Aṃbaṭṭhasutta says that such a marriage between brothers and sisters for the preservation of the purity of the blood is ‘proper’ and therefore, the princes’ conduct is ‘most proper.’ The Mahāvastu says that such a marriage is not sinful from standpoint of the laws of Brahmanism and it is ‘possible to do.’ The etymological origin of the Buddha’s clan name Čākya is traced to mean ‘proper’ and ‘possible to do’ in the tradition before Aṃvaghoṣa. Aṃvaghoṣa, however, traces it to the fact imagined by him that the princes dwelled in the forest of the sage Gāutama’s hermitage. The 24th cloka of the 1st chapter runs:

\[
\text{cākāvṛṣaṃpraticchannāṁ vāsaṁ yasmāc ca cakre} \\
tasmād ikṣvākumṛtyāṁ te bhuvī čākyā iti smṛtāḥ}
\]

‘And as they made a dwelling covered over by Čāka trees, They, scions of Ikṣvāku’s clan were mentioned as Čākyas on the earth.’

In this cloka Aṃvaghoṣa’s description of the etymological origin of the Buddha’s clan name Čākya is entirely different from the traditional one, as mentioned above and his new creative poetic idea on it is recognized. From the standpoint of the history of the development of culture at the time of Aṃvaghoṣa, his description that the etymological origin of the clan name Čākya is traced to the natural scenery of Čāka trees in the hermitage forest, is acceptable and proper than the traditional opinion, the marriage between the princes and their sisters, and also it might have been willingly accepted as the popular sentiment at his time. Even today we appreciate with profound sentiment filled with religious loftiness and purity to imagine the scene of the temporary residence of the Ikṣvāku princes in the forest of huge Čāka (Tectona grandis, Linn., Verbenaceae) trees spreading large leaves and having cymes of tiny white flowers peeking above the green leaves waving in the breeze. (5) This description makes us recognize Aṃvaghoṣa’s talent as a great and excellent poet.