

## The Element of Humour in Bhāsa

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Bhāsa is a prolific playwright to whom thirteen plays are ascribed. These thirteen plays were discovered as late as 1912 in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, by T.Ganapati Sāstri. These plays which appear to have been specially adapted from the Bhāsan originals for the Kerala stage by the traditional actors known as *cākkyars*, are as follows:

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|----------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Madhyamavyāyoga         | } | based on the Mahābhārata                               |
| 2. Dūtavākya               |   |  |
| 3. Dūtaghaṭotkaca          |   |  |
| 4. Karṇabhāra              |   |  |
| 5. Ūrubhaṅga               |   |  |
| 6. Pañcarātra              |   |  |
| 7. Pratimānāṭaka           | } | based on the Rāmāyaṇa                                  |
| 8. Abhiṣekanāṭaka          |   |  |
| 9. Bālaçarita              |   | based on a Kṛṣṇa legend                                |
| 10. Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇa | } | based on the Bṛhatkathā                                |
| 11. Svapnavāsavadatta      |   |  |
| 12. Avimāraka              |   |  |
| 13. Daridrācārudatta       |   | believed to have been developed from Indian folk tale. |

All these plays are not of the same type. Each of them bears special characteristic features with regard to dramatic presentation.

As regards Sanskrit drama, the earliest available Sanskrit treatise on dramaturgy, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata enumerates eight *rasas* (sentiments) associated with the

theatre. They are *śṅgāra* (erotic), *hāsya* (humour), *karuṇa* (pathetic), *raudra* (furious), *vīra* (heroic), *bhayānaka* (terrible), *bībhatsa* (odious), and *adbhuta* (marvelous).<sup>1</sup> Among them three sentiments i.e. *śṅgāra*, *hāsya* and *karuṇa* generally predominate in the Sanskrit dramas. Naturally the sentiment of love takes the pride of place. Bharata mentions humour next to erotic. In point of importance this order of gradation may be observed apt.

Bhāsa too must have realized the advantage of depicting humour in addition to the other sentiments in his dramas. He supplies a variety of interests in his plays. Probably his purpose was to remove the monotony and dullness of the usually serious dramas. In the interlude to Act. II of the *Avimāraka*, the playwright expresses his view in regard to humour through one of his characters: “*bhavatu etena saha muhūrtakam nirvedam vinodayisyāmi*” (Good, I will liven up dullness for a while by joking with him) which indicates that joke livens up dullness.

Humour is a sentiment which has a universal appeal. Almost all branches of Sanskrit literature embody humour in them. Not only Sanskrit literature but the literatures in other languages too abound in humour. Even in both the Epics, the *Mahābhārata*<sup>2</sup> and the *Rāmāyaṇa*<sup>3</sup> too, there are remarkable patches rich in humour. From this it is understood that humour is old as literature itself.

Humour finds an important place in Sanskrit drama. Hence, Bharata in his *Nāṭyaśāstra* discusses at length, the sentiment of humour along with other sentiments. There he says that every sentiment is evoked from a permanent mood called *sthāyibhāva*<sup>4</sup>. The permanent mood of the sentiment of humour is laughter (*hāsa*) which he classifies into six kinds. They are *smīta* (slight smile), *hasita* (smile), *vīhasita* (gentle laughter), *upahasita* (laughter of ridicule), *apahasita* (vulgar laughter) and *atīhasita* (excessive laughter)<sup>5</sup>. He further analyses the causes of laughter too.

As far as the dramas in Sanskrit are concerned, they yield much material towards the sentiment of humour. If we consider the provision that Bharata has made for the presentation of the *hāsya* on the stage, one of the ten types of drama described by him<sup>6</sup>, the *prahasana* has *hāsya* as its dominant sentiment<sup>7</sup>. In the development of the Sanskrit dramatic tradition, the farcical comedy seems to be the earliest feature. In the penultimate chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharata narrates the story of the evolution

and development of the dramatic tradition. There he says that the actors who were proud of their art, indulged in ridiculing Brahmins and sages who were offended and condemned them to a degraded status<sup>8</sup>. This shows that the comedy is one of the earliest forms of Sanskrit drama. Although in the other types of drama the *nāṭaka* and the *prakaraṇa* for instance, the element of humour is present, the *prahasana* the farcical and satirical type had the capability to survive as an independent variety<sup>9</sup>. The *prahasana* was of very early origin which is proved by Bharata's statement '*sarvalokaprahasanaih badhyante hāsyasamśrayaih*'<sup>10</sup>.

The *vīthī* which is said to be another type of Sanskrit drama, constitutes a series of witticisms. From Bharata's description, it is clearly seen, that the *vīthī* is to be a form of comic monologue or dialogue which is rich in humour.<sup>11</sup> But no old specimens of the *vīthī* are preserved. Bharata indicates in many places the disappearance of the *vīthī* into the body of the *prahasana* through its mixed (*miśra*) variety, where *vīthī* is introduced completely<sup>12</sup>. He then enumerates thirteen elements (*aṅgas*) which constitute a *vīthī*<sup>13</sup>. These *vīthyaṅgas* feature themselves in the perfected types of drama, the *nāṭaka* and the *prakaraṇa* and help to evoke the tendency of humour. V. Raghavan remarks in this regard that the old native and small imperfect types of dramatic situation like *vīthī* grew into the *prahasana* and perfected it later into the *prakaraṇa*<sup>14</sup>.

Besides, the *vīthī* and the *prahasana*, one more variety in which some amount of comic is found, is the erotic monologue called '*bhāṇa*'. In fact the *bhāṇa*, like the *vīthī* is one of the predecessors of the *prahasana*<sup>15</sup>. In the *bhāṇa* the device of imaginary dialogue called '*ākāśabhāṣita*' is used, which is mostly speech. Though it is narrated by one actor who usually plays the role of *viṭa*, who by employing the technique of the said *ākāśabhāṣita*, stands for all the other characters figuring in the play<sup>16</sup>.

These features of humour embody themselves in the Sanskrit plays through the characters like the *Vidūṣaka*, the *Viṭa*, the *Ceta* and the like. Of them the *Vidūṣaka*, the jester, is considered the most important as far as the major types of Sanskrit plays are concerned. He plays the key role of comic figure in most of the Sanskrit plays which employ humour besides other sentiments. The presentation of a comic figure

was mainly aimed at introducing the comic relief and titillating the audiences' interest in the performance. According to dramatic theory, the *Vidūṣaka* should be a Brahmin of ugly and uncouth appearance, dwarfish in stature, with teeth projecting, lame, bald-headed and sometimes with red fiery eyes<sup>17</sup>. Though in the majority of plays the *Vidūṣaka* is a stupid simpleton who talks nonsense and behaves in the most ridiculous way; in a few plays at least he is featured as a resourceful, prudent and confidant of the hero<sup>18</sup>. At the same time he is shown as the wit of the court who is also a popular figure in the royal harem. He is represented as indulging in incoherent and ludicrous expressions abounding in humour. At times he could be vulgar and unwise. Though he is a Brahmin, he speaks a form of Prākṛt, called '*prācya*'<sup>19</sup> a dialect which was prevalent in the Eastern part of India, and exposes his lack of learning and finesse and due to this nature he does not find a place even in the middling category in the classification of character types which are three in number, viz: the higher, the middling and the lower<sup>20</sup>.

He occasionally is referred to as a gourmand, most of whose similes and metaphors are drawn from the kitchen. With all these mannerisms and stupid talks that are supposed to pass as jokes, and his comic behaviour is expected to provide comic relief to the otherwise serious drama.

The *Viṭa* or parasite is another assistant to the hero in his love affairs. He is featured as a cultured, shrewd but a depraved man proficient in the ways of courtesans. Also he is a man with a wide experience of human nature. He is an expert in polite and quick-witted conversation and flattery. He plays the main role in the monologue plays or *bhāna*. But in other forms of play his place is insignificant. The *Cārudatta*, the *Mṛcchakaṭika* and the *Nāgānanda* give him his due place. As he is featured as a cultured person, he speaks Sanskrit. However Bharata classifies him in the category of inferior characters<sup>21</sup>, may be due to his poor social standing<sup>22</sup>.

The *Śakāra* who features as a villain in a few Sanskrit dramas evokes laughter through his action and speech. He is represented as ignorant, foolhardy, lacking proper education, swashbuckling, boastful and ridiculous<sup>23</sup>. In the *Daridrācārudatta* and the *Mṛcchakaṭika*, the character *Śakāra* has been used to produce a rare kind of humour not usually found in other types of play.

With this brief introduction to the sentiment of humour in Sanskrit drama, we can now go to the plays of Bhāsa and examine how far he has been successful humourist. According to some critics, humour has been Bhāsa's forte as stated in the following hemistich:

*'bhāso hāsah kavikulaguruh kālīdāso vilāsaḥ* <sup>24</sup>.

Though there are thirteen plays to Bhāsa's credit, not all of them are rich in humour. As mentioned above, they all do not belong to the same type. In regard to their forms and themes, some have no room for the depiction of humour. Hence, in our examination of humour in Bhāsa, it is proper to pick out only those plays which lend themselves to the depiction of humour.

The first five plays of the list given above (para 1) are one-act plays with serious themes, for they contain supernatural scenes, depict violent fightings, battles, cutting, piercing and the like which go to give rise to exciting sentiments like fury and terror<sup>25</sup>. Hence, the *ārabhaṭī vṛtti* energetic style prevails in them. Inasmuch the *ārabhaṭī* is the *vṛtti* (style) of violence and given scope for full display of physical movement, mainly forceful action, it is called as *kāyavṛui*<sup>26</sup>. Thus the characteristic of these plays undoubtedly reveals that they have no scope for humour which on the other hand is very characteristic of the *kaiśikī vṛtti* (graceful style)<sup>27</sup>.

The *Pañcarātra*, next in the list, appears to belong to the *Samavakāra* type by virtue of its being a three-act piece. This too is a serious type of play. The dialogues have a political overtone, which along with descriptions of furious fights and battle field scenes go to give rise to the furious sentiment<sup>28</sup>. In the *Pañcarātra* too humour finds no room due to the reason that fury and terror are its prevailing sentiments. Nevertheless, in one and only instance Bhāsa finds an opportunity to provoke laughter in the audience by depicting a dance by an old cowherd<sup>29</sup>.

The plays that remain could be designated as either *nāṭakas* or *prakaraṇas*. There is adequate provision for comic relief in both *nāṭaka* and *prakaraṇa* which belong to the graceful category<sup>30</sup> and in which heroic and social themes respectively, attain their fullest and perfect dramatic development. Most of the *nāṭakas* have love as their main theme in which humour has intimate relation to the main sentiment of the play. The *Vidūṣaka* is the character who evokes laughter in these pieces. However,

as per convention, the *nāṭakas* those deal with gods or their incarnations appear to banish *Vidūṣaka*. Aśvagoṣa is an exception. He employs the *Vidūṣaka* in his *Sāriputraprakarana*. Probably he must have thought that he should stick to the traditional dictum laid down as to the employment of *Vidūṣaka* in the *nāṭakas* or the *prakarana* type, although the hero of the play, Sārīputra, has no need of the company of a buffoon like the *Vidūṣaka*.

From most of the Sanskrit plays that deal with the life of Rāma who is considered an *avatāra* (incarnation) of Viṣṇu, the *Vidūṣaka* is driven out. Employment of the *Vidūṣaka* therefore seems to have been banned in the Rāma dramas. Bhāsa too must have been bound by this convention, for, despite the *Pratimānāṭaka* and the *Abhisekanāṭaka* being of the *nāṭaka* type, the character *Vidūṣaka* is missing from them.

The *Bālacarita* too represents the life of Kṛṣṇa. Thus, in keeping with the convention, Bhāsa refrains himself from the employment of *Vidūṣaka* in this play too.

Thereupon, Bhāsa had the opportunity to bring out his ability of employing humour in the dramatic production only through four of his dramas: viz. *Svapnavāsavadatta*, *Avimāraka*, *Pratijñāyaugandharāyana* and *Daridrācarudatta*. First two of them are of *nāṭaka* type and have love as their theme with which humour is intimately connected.

In these two plays, Bhāsa employs the *Vidūṣaka* to evoke humour. The *Svapnavāsavadatta* has the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) as its dominant sentiment. The *vipralambha śṛṅgāra* (love in separation)<sup>31</sup> is one of the two varieties of *śṛṅgāra* that prevails in the *Svapnavāsavadatta*. The love in separation leads to give rise to the *karuṇa* (pathos) sentiment. The *śṛṅgāra*, the *karuṇa* and the *hāsya* are appropriate to the *kaisikī vr̥tti*<sup>32</sup>. The *Avimāraka* has the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) remarkably the *sambhoga śṛṅgāra*, means love in union, as its dominant sentiment. Thus, these two *nāṭakas* allow humour in them. The *Pratijñāyaugandharāyana* is termed a *prakaraṇa* in its prologue itself. Of course it could be considered a *prakaraṇa* as it has a minister as the hero, as Bharata specifies for *prakarana*<sup>33</sup>. On the other hand, it has the semblance of a *nāṭaka* by virtue of its being a four-act piece<sup>34</sup>. The *Daridrācarudatta* could be

described as an incomplete *prakaraṇa*. But these two works seem to deviate from the normal trend of social drama, for, they both deal with political intrigue. Anyhow, there is adequate provision in them for comic relief. The necessity to have humour in the *nāṭaka* and *prakaraṇa* is to supply a variety of interest in them.

Though both the *nāṭaka* and the *prakaraṇa* have provision for depicting humour, the *Vidūṣaka* who plays the key role of comic figure serves the purpose of evoking humour. But in the *prakaraṇas* in addition to the *Vidūṣaka*, other persons from different social ranks too serve to enrich humour. As such, the *prakaraṇa* could offer the best and richest humour. The performance of this type would have attracted crowds which expected to indulge themselves in delight by its comic and humourous nature.

Illustrations from these plays may be given here to highlight Bhāsa's ability in handling characters and making use of the opportunities to depict humour in his plays. In the first instance, we shall see how he evokes humour through the *Vidūṣaka*.

From the *Svapnavāsavadatta*, which has six acts, it could be inferred that Bhāsa seems to be thoughtful of effective admixture of a light comedy into a play at proper time and space which would produce a pleasing after-effect, reducing the weight of nervous tension and monotony of pathos. In this play, the *Vidūṣaka* answers to the description of the hungry and frightened jester and amalgam of folly and resourcefulness. The *Vidūṣaka* appears in Act. IV for the first time and brings in laughter with his ridiculous speech; refers repeatedly to food and specifically to delicious dishes of sweet-meat as usual. He also mentions here of his lack of digestibility of food and he is represented as experiencing discomfort due to the same and struggling for his sleep though he lies on the downy couch.<sup>35</sup> When the maid inquires of prince's bath as she has to bring garland and oinment to be taken to the prince, *Vidūṣaka* replies "you may bring everything except food." The maid was probably surprised to hear this and asks "why do you bar food?" Then, he complains that his stomach is like that of rolling eyes of a cuckoo<sup>36</sup>. Though in nature he is greedy, now he bars food due to his excessive discomfort and may be due to over-eating. His physical movements and the speeches here would elicit laughter.

In the *Avimārika* the *Vidūṣaka* admires the city at sun-set<sup>37</sup>. Even there he betrays his greediness by means of the similes that he uses in his description of the sun-set.

“On the promenades and the upper terraces of the market, as white as lumps of curd, the sunlight seems like a layer of treacle spread over them.” From this similie, the *Vidūṣaka*’s familiarity with sweet food and his thoughts about some tasty food are made known and understood.

In the *sthāpanā* to the *Cārudatta*, we find another humourous situation, where the *Vidūṣaka* speaks of his hunger and shows his greed for food. The typical dialogue is given in the foot note : <sup>38</sup>.

Again, at the outset of Act. I of the same play, there is another reference that could be shown to prove the *Vidūṣaka*’s greediness where he refuses an invitation for an ample meal and *dakṣiṇā* (fee) of gold coins, and boasts of the variety of food that he enjoyed earlier at *Cārudatta*’s house : “I used to pass my days in *Cārudatta*’s house chewing the cud of savoury sweet meats, like a bull at the cross-ways stuffed up to the gullet. I was like a painter who is surrounded by his numerous dishes of paint various kinds of food seasoned with special spices, ready night and day and in between there were fragrant drinks produced at the lift of an eyebrow” Following this he discloses his own plight pathetically and at the same time humourously. “There is another wonderful thing. My belly understands the changes in affairs and becomes satisfied with a quite a little but if it is offered, takes a good weight of rice, it does not expect or demand if it is not offered with food”.

The *Vidūṣaka* brings in laughter through his levity, ignorance and carefree attitude. From his speech and action he seems to be a person lacking seriousness. In the *Svapnavāsavadatta*, *Udayaṇa* goes to the *Pramadavana* (garden) with the *Vidūṣaka* to see princess *Padmāvati*. As she was not there, *Udayana* tells that he is sleepy and to keep himself awake he wants the *Vidūṣaka* to tell a story. The latter starts to tell the story, may be purposely he confuses King’s name with Kingdom<sup>39</sup>. *Kāmpilya* is the name of a town. The king of that place is *Brahmadatta*. But the *Vidūṣaka* starts the story as “There is a town called *Brahmadatta*, where there was a king named *Kāmpilya*”. Even after *Udayaṇa* pointed the error out, he repeats what he told earlier. Then *Udayaṇa* corrects it and the *Vidūṣaka* represents memorizing the corrected portion by uttering it repeatedly. By the time he starts the story again, *Udayaṇa* is fast asleep. This type of carefree behavior of the *Vidūṣaka* gives rise to the humourous sentiment.



Another instance in the Cārudatta too answers well to his characteristic carelessness, timidity and ignorance. In Act III the *Vidūṣaka* reluctantly takes charge of Vasantasenā's jewellery on Cārudatta's order with the words :No way out of it. Bring it here. I will take it. It is sure to be stolen by thieves"<sup>40</sup>. He seems to be frightful to keep it with him, for he prattles that he has to roll on the ground like a pack donkey. Meanwhile, Cārudatta feels sleepy and asks the *Vidūṣaka* not to make noise. Then both sleep. But the *Vidūṣaka* could not sleep peacefully, for he says that he prefers to be poor by caste"<sup>41</sup>. In the meantime a burgler makes a hole in the wall of their house and enters inside. The *Vidūṣaka* says, that he believes he can see a thief cutting hole in the wall. But he does not get up and also nobody takes his words into account. Again, he insists Cārudatta to take that golden casket over, and this is heard by burgler. He makes the lamp extinguished, the *Vidūṣaka* is greatly frightened and shouts at Cārudatta for taking the jewellery over, also says that if failing to do so he will curse with Brahman's curse. Here, the burgler takes this opportunity and easily seizes the jewellery. But the *Vidūṣaka* is unaware that it is taken by the burgler and in turn he thinks that it has gone to Cārudatta's custody. This momentary transfer of the jewellery from the *Vidūṣaka* to the hands of burgler due to the *Vidūṣaka*'s stupidity may evoke humour in the audience. Furthermore, in the following morning the maid informs the *Vidūṣaka* of the burgler's entry through the hole that was made by himself on the wall. On seeing the same *Vidūṣaka* confirms that he has a pleasant news to him. As they converse of burgler's entry, the *Vidūṣaka* discloses "Ah, my friend, you are always saying Maitreya is a fool, Maitreya is blockhead, but I did well to entrust that golden casket to your hands". Bhāsa enriches the scene with this type of *Vidūṣaka*'s witty talks.

Besides, the *Vidūṣaka* sometimes through his puzzled or inappropriate speeches and also inappropriate usage of similies exhibits his illiteracy or ignorance. In fact in certain instances, he himself lets him down or we may say that he accepts his unletteredness. In the *Avimāraka*, the *Vidūṣaka* accompanies Avimāraka on his approach to the palace of Kuraṅgī. On the way, they converse about Kuraṅgī's charm and the like. In the midst of that talk certain statements made by the *Vidūṣaka* confirm his own illiteracy. For example, 'Ah, as you are used to me, you mock me. But the people who have not seen me before and know nothing of my intelligence, praise me highly. I know that well, so that I will not chum up with any body"<sup>42</sup>.

Another illustration from the *Avimāraka* too proves the *Vidūṣaka*'s illiteracy. the prelude to act II, he boasts of himself as if he is learned. He also says that it is hard to find a Brahmana who can read and understand the meaning of it. So the maid shows him a signet ring and asks him to read that word for her. He is unable to read it and thinks deeply as what to tell, after a while he finds a way to escape and states "This is not in my book , lady."

Furthermore, through his ignorance the *Vidūṣaka* commits amusing blunders like confusing the well-known epic *Rāmāyaṇa* with the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the treatise on dramaturgy<sup>44</sup>. This is taken as an important evidence to place the date of Bhāsa after Bharata.

An illustration from the *Cārudatta* too verifies *Vidūṣaka*'s nature of puzzled talks. Just after the burgler seizing the jewellery and left the place, the maid puts the *Vidūṣaka* awake and breaks the news of the entry of a thief into the house, he gets up in a hurry astounds and enquires puzzlingly "Ah, a hole cut the thief and entered in?"

It is Bhāsa's expertise that to feature the *Vidūṣaka* with two different natures in the very same play itself. In the *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa* the *Vidūṣaka* is featured as a jester and on contrary, an intelligent person as well. When the *Vidūṣaka* partici-pates in a *trigata* (three - men talk) in his disguise as a beggar, he is represented as a stupid simpleton who talks nonsense and who behaves in the most ridiculous way<sup>46</sup>. Yet, when the three assemble in the fire shrine to discuss about their plans (plot), the *Vidūṣaka* is represented as a confidential companion of the hero and also an in intelligent and resourceful character who is full of activity, skillful in carrying out plans and devising plans for escape from the most difficult of situation, with a strong mind able to keep secrets and supplying an effective motive power for the plot to develop like any other chief character.

As far as the humour is concerned, Bhāsa supplies the best and richest comic fare where the *Vidūṣaka* is featured as a beggar in the *trigata*. As usual, here too, the *Vidūṣaka* fondly speaks of sweet-meat and over this sweet-meat he quarrels with the mad-man who also is a participant in the *trigata*. Totally the *trigata* brings in a ridiculous atmosphere. At the same time this particular conversation among the three ministers disguised as a mad-man, a jester and a monk carry double meaning. The

expressed meaning is full of humour and apparently innocent. But the kidden meaning understood by the characters reveal their secret plans to rescue the king. This conversation is in Prākṛt and they resume the usual dialogue after their entry to the fire sanctuary.

Furthermore, the *Vidūṣaka's* incoherent language and behaviour too kindle laughter in the audience. He very frequently uses the word *dāsyah putra* (lit, son of whore) which is not a refined usage. In the *Cārudatta*, he refers to the thief as "*avihā dāsyah putrena kukkurena praveśah kṛtah*"<sup>47</sup> means "Damn it all, the rascally dog got into the house". Elsewhere in the same play, in the *Svapnavasavādatta* and in the *Avimāraka*, the *Vidūṣaka* very often uses these words. Also his indecent behaviour too in certain instances evokes laughter. In the *Avimāraka*, the *Vidūṣaka* accompanies *Avimāraka* on his way to the palace of *Kuraṅgī*, *Avimāraka* makes both of them invisible by the magic power. The *Vidūṣaka* is excited over this and intends to spit just for fun and does so with the sound "*thu, thu*"<sup>48</sup>.

In the same play, when the *Avimāraka* and *Kuraṅgī* at their first meeting converse excitingly, the *Vidūṣaka* with his doubt asks whether they are beginning to cry? The context of his comment at this instance is very ridiculous; "Don't you worry too much or I shall cry too. No, not a single precious tear comes out of my eye. When my father died I made mighty effort to cry. But not a tear. So, how can on somebody else's trouble?"<sup>49</sup>.

Bhāsa could be distinguished from other playwrights from his employment of special devices for the development of humorous atmosphere. It is remarkable that in addition to the set type of *Vidūṣaka*, Bhāsa employs certain other characters to enhance the audience's interest. Among them, *Sakara* becomes the most enjoyable figure, Bhāsa employs the *Sakara* as an abominable yet amusing character in his *Cārudatta*. It is notable that in any of the extant plays except the *Mṛcchakatika* the character *Śakāra* is not found.

In the *Cārudatta* the *Śakāra* is figured as an atrocious at the same time extremely amusing character. Through his foolhardiness, pomposity, foibles, lack of proper education, boastfulness, bravado, and malapropisms render him more amusing than atrocious.

It may be explained with certain illustrations. His malapropisms of puranic lore, he messes up names and episodes of mythology. In the first act which depicts the long chase of the courtesan Vasantasenā, the Śākāra's malapropisms and his behaviour are extremely amusing. There he tells Vasantasenā. "Like Viṣṇu am I, the lord of corpse bazaar, Janameyaya, Kunti's son. I shall catch you with my hands in your hair and carry you off as Duhśāsana did to sītā<sup>50</sup>."

The Śākāra speaks boldly when he sends Mārīca to take a message of Vasantasenā's release, to Cārudatta, failing to do so he says that he will crack Mārīca's skull-cup like a garlic root in the beak of a turtle-dove; otherwise will chew up his head like a woodapple caught between two doors<sup>51</sup>. On seeing the Vidūṣaka bringing the lamp and hearing his words of threatening the Śākāra slowly scoots.

The repetition of the same idea in more than one word is another species of a verbal comic. In the *Cārudatta*, when Vasantasenā runs in flurry persued by the *Viṇa* and the Śākāra, the latter asks "why you are going away, running away, racing away as you stumble?"<sup>52</sup> Elsewhere, he lets himself down by saying "closely chased by us two lads like a jackel by a couple of dogs" Here, the similie he uses goes to mean himself as one of the two dogs<sup>53</sup>.

His confusion of speech for smelling with the ear and viewing with the nose brings in extreme laughter<sup>54</sup>.

There is also a wit worked by punning through two linguistic media, Sanskrit and Prakṛt. When Vasantasenā "*śāntam śāntam apehi*" meaning "Please go away" the Śākāra imagines that she is referring to him endearingly as being '*śrānta*' means tired and welcoming him, mistaking '*apehi*' as '*ehi*'<sup>55</sup>.

Another instance may also be cited as to how Śākāra's behaviour provides amusement. After Vāsantasenā had made her escape under the cover of darkness, the Śākāra with his poor visibility due to darkness is seen hopelessly trying to locate Vasantasenā. In this hilarious scene, the Śākāra fumbling about in the dark, gets hold of Cārudatta's maid mistaking her for Vasantasenā<sup>56</sup>.

Besides the *Vidūṣaka* and the Śākāra, Bhāsa proves his ability to use other characters too for evoking humour. The minor characters sometimes play remarkable role in provoking laughter.

In the *Cārudatta*, *Sajjalaka* the Brahmin who comes to burgle Cārudatta's place, affords us plenty of amusement when he displays his knowledge of text books on the art of stealing and deeply thinks of designs as to the shape of the hole in the wall, whether the shape of lion-stride or full moon, jaws of a pike or semi-circular, or tiger's face or triangular or a chair or elephant's mouth which could amaze the votaries of this art.<sup>57</sup> To start the job firstly he looks for something to measure the hole, and finds that his sacred thread could be used for this purpose. His words at this instance are enjoyable: "sacred thread by day and measuring line by night."<sup>58</sup> Further, he wishes that on the next day the neighbours would foregather with long and gloomy faces to discuss the errors and the skill of his work.

In the *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa*, Bhāsa handles admirably well the characters like the mad-man, the drunkard and the page-boy for bringing about comic relief. In Act III the Udayaṇa's chief minister comes as a mad-man in disguise. His speeches sometimes are monologue which suits his character. As he pretends to be a mad person, he speaks utter nonsense. Here is a portion of his meaningless and amusing talk: "Hī Hī the Rāghu is swallowing the moon. Let go, let go the moon. If you do not I will smack at your mouth and make you let go. Look, here is a mad horse running loose. Now he is at the cross roads. I shall mount him and eat my alms ....."<sup>59</sup>.

Barring these situations, Bhāsa masterfully effects another humourous situation, in the *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa*, by including a scene where a soldier and a page-boy participate who later on poses as drunkard, which gives rise to the sentiment of humour<sup>60</sup>. We may say that the playwright invents a situation like this with the intention of depicting humour in this piece.

The page-boy is represented as fully drunken. The soldier's words describe the appearance of the page-boy. As he enters the scene, he asks "who is this calling me as Gātrasevaka on the highways now". Afterwards he utters a song with the eulogy of drink (liquor) in Prakṛt, which means "Blessed those that are drunken with liquor, blessed those that are anointed in liquor, blessed those that are have bathed in liquor, blessed those that are scuppered in liquor"<sup>60</sup>. A.B. Keith holds an opinion that this song is a fragment of the drinking songs which must have existed in ancient India.<sup>61</sup> In this scene the page-boy's conversation with the soldier becomes very interesting.

When the soldier asks him to bring Bhadrāvati, the royal mount for Vasantasenā to go for bathing, the page-boy comes out with the message that he had pawned firstly her goad, secondly her half-moon necklet then her bell and whip one after the other and at last he says that he had pawned even Bhadrāvati for his liquor<sup>62</sup>.

In the course of time, the page-boy discloses that he is a spy deployed by Yaugandharāyana in his attempt to rescue Udayana. In fact he is not a drunkard but has pretended as a drunkard<sup>63</sup>. This shows that how adroitly Bhasa arranges the scene as to find room for the depiction of humour with the running of the story.

In this respect, Bhāsa sets a model for his successors. He not sticking to the tradition of employing only the *Vidūṣaka* for the depiction of humour in the Sanskrit plays, employs other characters like *Śakāra* too for the same purpose and much advantage. He purposely inserts scenes where he could give rise to the sentiment of humour. He displays his expertise by painting scenes suitably in the *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa* for instance, which he cleverly utilizes for the development of the comic element. We may therefore safely conclude that Bhāsa was the greatest humourist among the Sanskrit playwrights and rightly deserves to be described as “*bhāso hāsah kavikulaguruh*”.

### Foot Notes

1. Nāṭyaśāstra (N. Ś) of Bharatamuni with the Commentary Abinabhārati, Vol. I Gaekwad's Oriental Series. (XXXVI) Baroda, 1956, VI. 15.
2. Mahābhārata Sabhā parva, 2.5. 107 Bhandarkar Oriental Reserch Institute, Poona.
3. Rāmāyana Gita Press, Gorakhpur (1966) 2.91, 44.47.
4. N. Ś op. cit. VI. 17.
5. Ibid op cit. VI. 52.
6. Ibid Vol. II – IV (Chapters 8-36), Parimal Publication, Delhi, XVIII. 2 cf. Dr. I. 11.
7. Ibid XVIII. 103.
8. Ibid XXXVI. 31 ff.
9. Ghosh, Manomohan English translation of the Nāṭyaśāstra Vol. I (Chapters 1 – XXVII) Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta (1950) p. 372.
10. N. Ś XXXVI. 32 ff.
11. Ibid XVIII. 112.
12. Ibid XVIII. 107.

13. Ibid XVIII. 112-126.
  14. Rāghavan. V Sankrit Drama, Its Aesthetics and Production, Madras, (1993) p. 149.
  15. Ibid op. cit. p. 159.
  16. N. Ś. XVIII. 108 ff, Abhinavabhāratī Vol. III parimal Publications, Delhi. p. 332.
  17. Bhāvaprakāśana of Śāradādanya, GOS, Baroda (1930) p. 289, 5-7.
  18. Mālavikāgnimitra  
Pratijñāyugandharāyana  
Svapnavasāvadatta  
Cārudatta  
Mrccakatika
  19. N. Ś. XVII. 51.
  20. Ibid XXIV. 1.
  21. Ibid XXIV. 14.
  22. Marsasinghe. E. W The Sanskrit Theatre and stagecraft, Delhi (1989) p. 219.
  23. Bhavaprakasana pp. 242, 243.
  24. Prasannarāghava of Jayadeva, Nirnayasagar press, Bombay, (1922) Prologue.
  25. N. Ś. XX.65, A.Bh. Vol.III Parimal Publication, Delhi p. 103.
  26. Abhinavabhāratī (A. Bh.) Nāṭyaśāstra, Vol. I, G O S. p. 20.
  27. Ibid Vol. I. p. 20 f.
  28. N. Ś. XVIII.63, A.Bh. Vol.II. Parimal Publiation, Delhi p. 322.
  29. Pañcarātra of Bhāsa Bhāsanāṭakacakram, Plays ascribed to Bhāsa, Devadhar. C. R., Delhi. (1987) II interlude, p. 391.
  30. N. Ś. XIII. 63, A. Bh. Vol. II, Parimal Publication, Delhi p. 161.
  31. Ibid XX. 55.
  32. Ibid XX.55, A.Bh. Vol. II Parimal Publication, Delhi p. 334.
  33. Ibid XVIII. 49 ff.
  34. Ibid XVIII 60 ff.
  35. Svapnavāsavadatta of Bhāsa Bhāsanāṭakacakram, Plays ascribed to Bhāsa, Devadhar. C.R. Delhi (1987) IV. p. 20 f.
  36. Ibid IV. p. 21.
  37. Avimāraka of Bhāsa Bhāsanāṭakacakram, Plays ascribed to Bhāsa, Devadhar. C. R. Delhi (1987) II. 8/9.
  38. Cārudatta of Bhāsa Bhasanāṭakacakram, Plays ascribed to Bhāsa, Devadhar. C. R. Delhi (1987)I. 1 / 2.
- Sūtradhāra : I left my house so early in the morning that my eyes are rolling with hunger like water drops on a lotus leaf (Turning round ) I will just go home and see whether there is any meal or not. (Enters and looks around) the ground has been blackened by

turning round iron pots. There is a smell of savoury, and as a good omen the attendants are running to and fro. Is there then meal ready? Or does hunger make me think the whole world is made of rice? Well, I will call my wife. Madam will you come here a moment?

Actress : Here I am Sir, It is a good thing that you have come.

Sūtradhāra : Madam, Is there any breakfast in the house?

Actress : There is,

Sūtradhāra : Long life to you, and may you ever be the giver of food.

Actress : Why, Sir, I have been waiting for you.

Sūtradhāra : Ah, madam, is there what I want?

Actress : There is.

Sūtradhāra : So the Gods bless you, what is there?

Actress : There is ghee, sugar, curd and rice.

Sūtradhāra : All these in our house?

Actress : No, no in the shop.

Sūtradhāra : (Angrily) Oh, you wicked woman, so may your own hopes cut off, and you shall come naught.

I am like a wisp of grass tossed up by strong wind so high from the hill top and then let fall again.

39. Svapnavāsavadatta op. cit. V. 6/7.
40. Cārudatta op. cit. III. 4/5.
41. Ibid III. 9/10.
42. Ibid III. 14/15.
43. Avimāraka op. cit. V. 1 / 2.
44. Ibid II. Interlude (praveṣaka).
45. Cārudatta op. cit. III. 14/15.
46. Pratijñāyugandharājana of Bhāsa, Bhāsanātakacakram, Plays ascribed to Bhāsa, Devadhar. C. R. III.
47. Carudatta III. 14/15.
48. Avimāraka op. cit. II. 21/22.
49. Ibid V. 4/5.
50. Cārudatta I. 12.
51. Ibid. I. 16/17.
52. Ibid. I. 8.
53. Ibid. I. 10.
54. Ibid. I. 21/22.



55. Ibid. I.15/16.
56. Ibid. I. 23/24.
57. Ibid. III. 9.
58. Ibid. III. 9/10.
59. Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇa III. after Sloka, 9.
60. Ibid. IV. 1.
61. Keith. A. B. The Sanskrit Drama, (reprinted) Oxford University Press, (1954) p. 108.
62. Pratijñāyugandharājana IV. 1 / 2.
63. Ibid. IV. 2/3.