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Satire in Bhallaṭaśataka of Bhallaṭa

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Abstract:

The poet Bhallaṭa is a Sanskrit poet from Kashmir who lived in the latter half of the 9th and the first half of the 10th century AD. He is known as the author of Bhallaṭaśataka. The work contains 100 verses. It is the earliest known compilation of detached poems (*muktakakāvya*) focused entirely on allegorical satire. Satire is one of the most powerful styles of writing that targets the fraudsters and the hypocrites in the literature of every age. The work contains satire, but it is not purely satirical. Bhallaṭa has used allegorical satire to express the deeper truths of human life through flowers, animals, trees, etc. He is remembered as the poet who employed the genre of *anyokti*. In the poem, the poet's deep emotional pain is expressed. In the work, the poet satirizes the upper-class people of his time for their incompetence. The poet also ridicules the shortcomings of the patrons of his time.

Keywords: Satire, allegory, Bhallaṭa, Bhallaṭaśataka.

Introduction:

Satire is a commonly used literary form in almost all literature. It is used to mock things like people's behaviour or social issues to highlight their foolishness or flaws. Samuel Johnson, the great English Lexicographer, defined satire as 'a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured'.¹ Satire is used in literature, theatre, and other art forms. In literature, satire

is used as a powerful tool by the author to expose all kinds of flaws in society across all eras. It employs humour, irony, exaggeration, or mockery to criticise or lampoon individuals, organisations, society, or human behaviour. Although satire exposes frailties, its main aim is to eliminate them from society. A satirist always seeks to reform society by exposing its vices and follies.

In Sanskrit literature, pure satirical writing is not much available. Satire as a literary genre is not common in Sanskrit literature. But satirical elements are observed in most of the works.

Bhallāṣaṭaka of Bhallaṣa is a collection of a hundred allegories. Bhallaṣaṭaka is the earliest known compilation of detached poems (*muktakakāvya*) focused entirely on allegorical satire. Bhallaṣa was a court poet of King Avanti Varman of Kashmir. He belonged to the latter half of the 9th and the first half of the 10th century. AD. Avanti Varman's leadership was a model of good governance. The king was a renowned supporter of distinguished poets. Many well-known scholars were patronised by him. But, during the reign of King Śaṅkaravarman (AD883-902), the successor of King Avanti Varman, the scenario changed. He came to be known as tyrant ruler. In the *Rājatarāṅgini*, Kalhana mentions that Śaṅkaravarman withdrew royal patronage of Bhallaṣa and his fellow poets, which leads to the meanest existence.² A porter named Lavata rose to the position of king's treasurer and drew the salary of two thousand *dīnāras*, while poets like Bhallaṣa had to live without any means of livelihood.³ Bhallaṣa experienced a degrading decline from his prestigious position as a court poet. In the poem, the poet's deep emotional pain is expressed. In the work, the poet satirizes the upper-class people of his time for their incompetence. The poet also ridicules the shortcomings of the patrons. He criticizes the king who treats the learned and the foolish as the same. Though the work is not fully satiric but satirical element is observed here.

The term 'allegory' comes from the Greek word '*allēgoria*', meaning 'speaking otherwise'. An allegory is a narrative in verse or prose with a double meaning, a primary or surface meaning, and a secondary or under-the-surface meaning.⁴ An allegorical poem uses symbols to convey a deeper meaning, often imparting a moral or lesson. The poet often uses allegory to criticise political systems, societal norms, and other aspects of human behaviour.

Objective:

To examine how allegorical satire is used in the Bhallaṭaśataka of Bhallata.

Methodology:

Both Descriptive and Analytical methods have been used for this study.

Satirical Elements in Bhallaṭaśataka:

In the poem, satirical element is observed in the criticism of the upper-class people of Bhallata's time for their incompetence. In the work, the poet satirizes unfit persons of the high class by using '*anyokti*'. The poet expresses his bitterness against contemporary society. The poet deeply touches both the heart and the mind by expressing the profound truth of human life through the medium of the sun, flowers, and other such elements.

The poem reflects that during the reign of King Ananta, the poet enjoyed all the privileges. During King Sankaravarman's reign, the poet noted that scholars were disregarded and the common people were subjected to exploitation. Poets like Bhallata were deprived of all facilities. The afflicted poet expressed himself through the imagery of the sun and darkness, thus-

pātaḥ pūṣṇo habati mahate nopatāpāya yasmāt/

kāle prāpte ka iha na yayuryānti yāsyanti cānye//⁵

According to the poet, though the sun sets in the west everyday it is not a matter of grief, because if the time comes, everyone has to leave this world. All are going from this world and others will also go. But, for him, the saddest thing is that as soon as the sun departs from this world, darkness covers the whole sky. Here, in this verse, the poet satirizes the ruler Shankaravarman by comparing him to darkness. Like darkness, Sankaravarman also covered all the goodness of the previous patron king, Ananta, with his evil deeds. Sankaravarman was a greedy and ignorant person. King Ananta is compared with the sun as his time was a shining period for all the people living in his kingdom. But it is painful for the poet as some adulators of his time were still praising the king Shankaravarman. For him, when the sun sets, the pain that arises in all three worlds can only be soothed by the moon- there is nothing more

inappropriate than this statement.⁶ For the poet, Sankaravarman is just like the moon. He cannot take the place of the sun, i.e., his father king Ananta.

Bhallāṭa expresses his bitterness by saying that even the goddess of wealth goes to wicked people instead of good people. Now she does not like the sayings as well as the sound of jewellery of learned persons.⁷ This verse exposes that the patron of his time gave importance to incompetent people instead of learned ones. Learned people like the poet Bhallāṭa had to sacrifice everything for the sake of knowledge. According to the poet, stars never shine like the moon in the presence of the sun during the day. It shines at night only in the sunlight. Similarly, the presence of a foolish scholar does not affect the upper-class scholars but the foolish scholars become arrogant when they receive honour with the upper-class scholars.⁸

In the next verse, the poet addresses the lotus- O lotus! Why are you hiding your long thread? O there is a reason! Yes, yes, if the goddess of wealth sees your long thread, then she will be scared.⁹ Here, the poet, through the *anyokti* on the lotus, exposes the frailties of his time. Like the lotus, the learned people have to conceal their qualities during the time of King Sankaravarman. The king exploited wise people instead of incompetent people. During the time of Bhallāṭa, learned people always remained calm; they never showed their scholarly expertise. If the king comes to know about it then they shall have to lose all their facilities of a royal court poet.

In the poem, the poet addresses the goldsmith thus- O goldsmith! You are in many hard tests, putting on the balance gold jewelry along with the stones.¹⁰ Here in the verse, the poet criticizes the king who treats the learned and the foolish as the same. According to the poet, not all people can be jewels; a few are like stones. Therefore, the poet raises the question- who is that fool creator who gave the equal title of jewel upon both Ciṇṭāmaṇi and Tṛṇamaṇi?¹¹ For him, stone-like people (Tṛṇamaṇi) always collect from others, while jewel-like people (Ciṇṭāmaṇi) never get tired of presenting objects to the needy one. Here, the poet presents a scenario of his time. According to the poet, the king has no respect for learned persons. He cannot recognize a person of high birth. Therefore, there is no hope of getting anything from him.

In another verse, through the *anyokti* on the bhramara and elephant, the poet raises the question of why people are still serving a master who speaks absurd things, believes in gossip heard from others, and, due to pride, cannot distinguish between his own and others.¹² The

poet ridicules those people of his society who remained calm and silently tolerated the injustice of the king. The poet also ridicules those people who served their kingdom despite their king's negligence.

In another verse, the poet, through the *anyokti* on the camel, says that- oh camel! You want to shriek with full force. How ear-rending will it be? My only resort is your long zigzag neck. Your speech, tired due to coming through the opening of your long neck, will take a long time, and by that time, who knows what may happen to whom and in which way? ¹³The verse expresses the mental state of an innocent person deceived by a cruel ruler. The poet exposes that the ruler punished even the innocent. As the ruler and all the officials were corrupt, the guilt was also spared from punishment. In the verse, the poet satirizes the governance and judicial system of that time.

The poet, through the *anyokti* on the lotus, says that this lotus-stalk has so many holes inside and so many thorns out, how would its threads not be momentary?¹⁴ In this verse, the poet is criticising the ruler whose cabinet had differences of opinion, and the enemy was looking for an opportunity to attack. For him, such a ruler also loses his own qualities.

The poet is concerned about the future of the kingdom. Through the *anyokti* on the hunter, the poet expresses his concern. The poet remarks that the jungle will be emptied of animals because of the hunter. The poet hints at the king. The cruel king deceived the people. The poet raises the question of how the king will be able to remove the stain of disgrace from the body. ¹⁵The poet ridicules the king by saying that Brahmā has made a small heart for the king.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it is observed that in the kingdom of that king who distanced himself from the wise, the poet like Bhallaṭa has to live a miserable life. The author laughs not so much at the folly of the people of his time, though he was affected by their mistakes. The poet uses allegorical satire to expose all the loopholes. The poem is not fully satiric, but satiric elements are observed. In the poem, the poet is not mocking directly; he uses symbols like flowers, trees, animals, etc. to expose the frailties. In this regard, the poet Bhallaṭa is the first author. However, a satirist is always a reformist. He always tries to expose the absurdities of society so that he can reform it. The poem is full of suggestion. The

poet appeals to everyone not to insult jewel-like people and to always give to others instead of taking from them. Bhallaṭaśataka is relevant even today.

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Conflicts of interest:

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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2. Rajatarāṅginī. 5
3. Bhallaṭaśatakam, p.28
4. Cuddon, J.A, History of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, p. 780
5. Bhallaṭaśatakam ,11
6. gate tasmin bhānau tribhuvanasamunmeṣairaha/
vyaśām candro neṣyatyanucitamato nātyasadṛśm/
cetastāpaṁ janayatitaśamatra yadamī
pradīpāḥ saṁjātāstimirahatibadhoaddhuraśikhāḥ// ibid.13
7. śrīrviśṛṅkhalābhisārikā
vartmabhirdhanatamomalīmasaiḥ/
śabdamātrmapi sodhumakṣamā
bhūṣṇasya guṇinaḥ samutthitaṁ// ibid.7
8. paṅktau viśantu gaṇitāḥ pratolobhavṛtṭyā
pūrve bhavyuriyatāpyathavā traparen/
santopyasanta iva cet pratibhrānti bhāno
rbhāsā'vṛtte nabhasi śītamayūkhamukhyāḥ// ibid.12
9. kim dīrghadīrghreṣu guṇeṣu padma siteṣvavacshādanakāraṇaṁ te/
tryasteva, tānpaśyati cedanāryā trasteva lakṣmīrna padaṁ bidhatte// ibid. 25
10. hemakāra sudhiye namo'stu te
dustareṣu bahuśaḥ parīkṣitum/

kāñcanābharaṇamaśmanā samam

yattvayaivamadhiropyate tulām// ibid.67

11. cintāmaṇeṣṭṛṇamaṇeśca kṛtaṁ vidhātrā

kenobhayorapi maṇitvamadaḥ samānam/

naiko'rthitāni dadannarthijanāya khinno

grhṇañjaratṛṇalavaṁ tu na lajjate'nyaḥ// ibid.51

12. so'pūrvo rasanāvīparyayavidhistatkarṇayoścāpalam

dr̥ṣṭiḥ sā madavismṛtasvaparakim bhūyasoktena vā/

pūrvam niścītavānāsi bhramara he yad vāraṇo'dyāpyasā-

vantaḥ śunyaḥ karō niṣevyata iti bhrātāḥ ka eṣa grahaḥ// ibid. 19

13. karabha rabhasāt kroṣṭumvāñcati aho śarvañajvaraḥ

śaraṇamathavāñjvī dūrghā tavaiva środharā/

pr̥thugalavilāvṛttikṣāntocariṣyati vāk cirā

diyati samaye ko jānīte bhaviṣyati kasya kim? Ibid.23

14. antaścīdrāṇi bhūyāsi kaṇṭakā bahavo bahiḥ/

katham kamalanālasya mā bhūvan bhaṅgurā guṇāḥ// ibid.24

15. mṛtyorāsyamivātataṁ dhanuridaṁ cāśīviśābhāḥ śarāḥ

śikṣā sāpi jītārjunaprabhṛtikā sarvāṅgalaṅganā gatiḥ/

antaḥkrauraymho śathasya madhuraṁ hā hāri geyaṁ mukhe

vyādhasyāsyā yathā bhaviṣyati tathā manye vanaṁ nirmṛgaṁ// ibid. 94

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