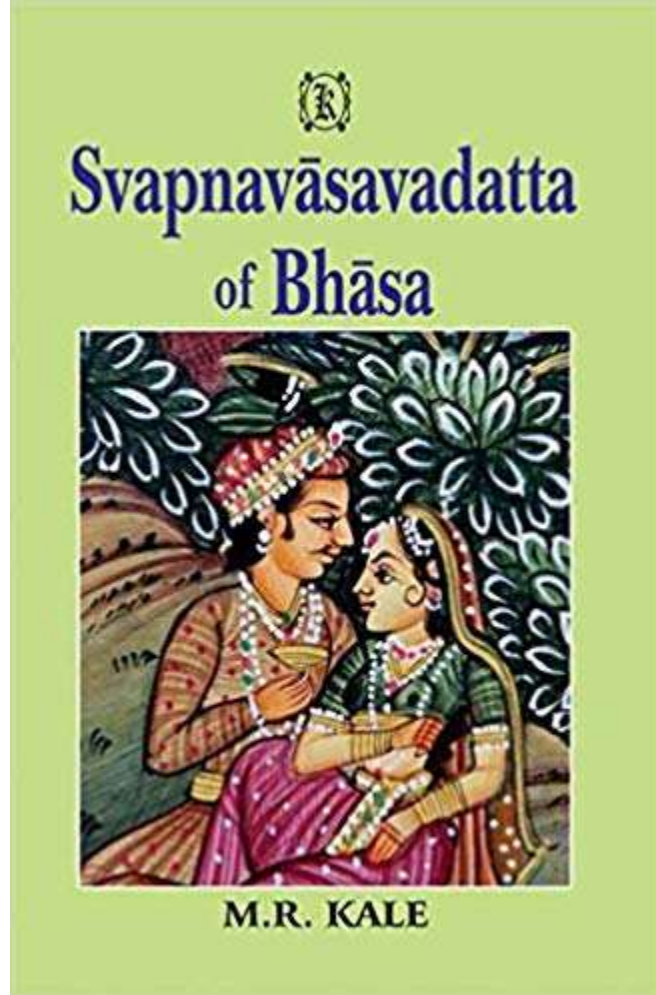


**Bhasa's *Svapnavasavadattam* (The Vision of Vasavadatta):
A Thematic Study**

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Abstract

Bhasa is one of the earliest known great dramatists of ancient India. He is one of the greatest pioneers of classical Sanskrit drama. He lived around 3rd Century A.D. An Indian scholar, Mahamahopadhyaya Ganapati Sastrigal, rediscovered thirteen of his plays in the year

1912. *Svapnavasavadattam* (The dream of Vasavadatta) is one of them. It is probably the best known of Bhasa's works. The complete text of the *Svapnavasavadattam* was long lost until it was discovered in the state Kerala in 1912. A tradition is recorded that when the critics subjected the plays of Bhasa to a severe test by throwing them into fire, only *Svapnavasavadattam* rose out unaffected, while other plays were all consummated by the flames.

The play is divided into six acts. It is reported that the play faithfully follows the text and the principles of the *Natyashastra*. In keeping with the metaphysical nature of Sanskrit drama, here too we are confronted by notions of time, memory, reality, and illusion. Bhasa used verse as the medium for dramatic expression. He gave Indian drama passion and poetry.

The plot of the drama is drawn from the romantic narrative about the Vatsa king Udayana and Vasavadatta, the daughter of Pradyota, the ruler of Avanti, which were current in the poet's time and which seem to have captivated popular imagination. The main theme of the drama is the sorrow of Udayana for his queen Vasavadatta, believed by him to have perished in a fire, which was actually a rumour spread by Yaugandharayana, a minister of Udayana to compel his king to marry Padmavati, the daughter of the king of Magadha. This marriage brings a disaster in the life of king Udayana. He began to neglect the affairs of his state, always remembering the memory of his first wife, Vasavadatta. The thematic study of the play shows the professional skill of Bhasa. The play is a great example of contemporary innovative trend in ancient classical drama.

Keywords: Bhasa, *Svapnavasavadattam*, Vasavadatta, classical Sanskrit drama, romantic narratives, imagination, rumour, disaster.

Research Methodology

This work is mainly based on secondary source of information, such as published documents, books, literary reviews, autobiography, journals, critiques etc. I have collected some selected documents and records as the major sources of data collection for the study. I have involved myself in intensive and critical reading of *Svapnavasavadattam* written by Bhasa. The study has enabled me to collect information about the heartrending story of the protagonist, king Udayana and his beloved wife Vasavadatta.

The play centres round love, separation and union and various facts and points relevant to the study. Lie, Rumour and treachery play very significant role in the play. All these cause a temporary crisis in the life of king Udayana. The study has used critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a research tool for the thematic study of the play *Svapnavasavadattam* (The dream of Vasavadatta).

Introduction

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Svapnavasavadattam (The dream of Vasavadatta) is perhaps the most noted play in Sanskrit literature. It is a Sanskrit play in six acts written by the ancient Indian poet Bhasa. The story revolves around King Udayana who is pressurized by his state minister to marry Padmavati, the daughter of a very powerful ruler of Magadha in order to gain power to protect his kingdom from foreign invasions. The king is not too keen on this proposal as he loves his wife Vasavadatta too much to consider taking such a step. But the wife becomes ready to sacrifice her life for the kingdom and stages a fake death. She secretly returns back to the king to be with him and awaits the new wife. The play is so well written that it won the hearts of general readers and the critics as well. The play is the story of restoration, reconciliation, moral resurrection and regeneration. There are tears and sighs before reunion of husband and wife taking place. The course of happy conjugal life never runs smooth and trouble-free. The path is beset with misfortune and difficulties. So, king Udayana and Vasavadatta have to face hostilities of fate. All the misfortunes and difficulties are unexpectedly removed by the benign power of destiny.

Vatsa, kingdom of King Udayana, is invaded by foreign invasions at a time when the military power of the state is weak and inefficient. And only an alliance with Magadha state can save Vatsa. In this situation the ministers of Vatsa think of alliance with the powerful state of Magadha. Yaugandharayana, the wily Chief Minister of Udayana, suggests king Udayana to marry Padmavati, the princess of Magadha. At first it was utterly impossible for king Udayana to marry Padmavati, because he loves his wife Vasavadatta. But Vasavadatta becomes ready to sacrifice her life for sake of the kingdom. Yaugandharayana comes forward to remove this obstacle. He makes a plan with the co-operation of queen Vasavadatta. One day, while the king is away on a hunting expedition, the royal pavilion in a frontier village, Lavanaka, is burnt down. A rumour is spread that Vasavadatta and Yaugandharayana have both perished in the fire; where as they have really slipped away to Magadha distinguished as pilgrims. In the way they stay a night in a hermitage where they meet the retinue of the Magadha princess, Padmavati.

This gives an opportunity to Yaugandharayana to put Vasavadatta into the security of the Magadhan court. He pretends that she is his sister and requests the princess to take care her as a ward. “Yaugandharayana: This is my sister. Her husband has gone abroad. My wish is that Her Highness would take my sister under her protection for some time. For, No need have I of wealth, or of worldly joys, or of fine raiment, nor have I donned the orange robe to gain a livelihood. The royal mind is wise and knoweth well the path of duty. She can well protect the virtue of my sister.” (Bhasa,9) The princess grants his request and allows Vasavadatta with her. “Padmavati: Yes, come higher. Now you belong to me.”(Bhasa,10) Since then Vasavadatta is with the princess, Padmavati. This background of the play gives greater insight later. Yaugandharayana says to himself “Those who first predicted our troubles, foretold that Padmavati was destined to become the consort of my king. On that prophecy I have relied in acting as I did, for fate does not transgress the words of well-ried

oracles.” He feels relief as he has party success in his plan: “Ah! Half my task is ended.” (Bhasa,11)

Having the news of Vasavadatta’s perished in the fire, king Udayana’s heart becomes heavy. He never ceases to mourn for Vasavadatta as he is perpetually haunted by her memory. Yaugandharayana has arranged that Udayana will remarry with Padmavati, sister to the King of Magadha, to cement the alliance. Then a nurse enters and announces that Padmavati is betrothed to Udayana and that the wedding must take place that very day. A deeply-rooted passion is hard to abandon when Vasavadatta comes to know that news. “Vasavadatta: She wants my noble lord as her husband.”(Bhasa,16) Though she remains the vision of her master, Udayana most of the time, she scarifies her own happiness for the sake of her lord’s dignity. “Vasavadatta: The more they hasten, the deeper the gloom in my heart.”(Bhasa,17) The unhappy Vasavadatta secretly attains the marriage ceremony and watches that her husband has drawn into a marriage with Padmavati. She consoles herself thinking only that Udayana is unable to forget her even in the midst of a new marriage. “Vasavadatta: she is gone. Alas! All is over. My noble lord is now another’s. Heaven help me! I’ll to bed; it may soothe my pain. If I can sleep.” (Bhasa,19)

The new queen, Padmavati wanders in the garden with her train, including Vasavadatta. King Udayana and his Jester come into the same garden. The ladies bide in a bower for Vasavadatta’s sake. The gentlemen sit down at the entrance and the ladies cannot avoid over-hearing their conversation. The king admits his heart is still bound to Vasavadatta, and bursts into tears. Padmavati goes to comfort him, and he leaves to attend a court reception. King Udayana mourns his lost love. It was chiefly out of political motives that Udayana married Padmavati. But the tension is soon relaxed. Padmavati notices the resemblance of Vasavadatta’s picture to the “Lady of Avanti” entrusted to her care. So, Padmavati says to King Udayana “Now. Sir, resume your charge of this lady.” All embracing tolerance has come to an end. The principal dramatic incident that gives its name to the play is the momentary vision of Vasavadatta when king Udayana wakes from a dream of her. For Vasavadatta, it is the test of time. The play ends not with the celebration of new marriage, but a reunion of husband and wife who love truly each other.

Bhasa moulds characters and forms a vigorous conception of the parts they have to play. This play contains some of Bhasa's greatest characters-Udayana, Vasavadatta, Padmavati, Avantika, Yaugandharayana. He introduces funny character like Vasantaka, the gesture of king Udayana. All the characters are well developed. They are types and not individuals.

Bhasa has always been considered as the most influential playwrights of his time by Ideologists, Indian commentators, scholars and anthologists. His style of writing was quite different from the other contemporary playwrights of his time. He did not use too flashy and superfluous Sanskrit in his plays. He did not use any open benediction in his plays, rather opened

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his plays directly with the stage directions. He maintained the classical unities of drama. His stories have unconventional twists and turns to it. In fact, he broke a very important convention by killing the hero of his story in the end of one of his plays, which was a very big thing in those times as people were only used to the happy endings. This play is called *Urubhangam*. Most of Bhasa's plays were lost over the years. He did not really used to follow the rules led by *Natya shastra*. He used to use physical violence in his plays, on the drama stage. This was very badly taken up by the authorities of *Natyashastra*. The *Unbhangam* is considered as one of the two most tragic plays of the Sanskrit language. In *Unbhangam*, Duryodhana is considered to be an actual hero instead of been considered as a villain according to the great epic of *Mahabharata*. He is shown repenting in the play for all the treachery and lies that he had applied here.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to a thematic study of Bhasa's great play *Svapnavasavadattam* (The Vision of Vasavadatta). The play is divided into six acts. It is reported that the play faithfully follows the text and the principles of the *Natyashastra*. In keeping with the metaphysical nature of Sanskrit drama, here too we are confronted by notions of time, memory, reality, and illusion. Vasavadatta made a great sacrifice for the sake of her husband, king Udayana's restoration of his kingdom to him. Vasavadatta is the selfless, devoted wife who undergoes a bitter emotional trial. We are awestruck by "the complete self-abnegation of the noble queen, who suffers martyrdom for the sake of her lord with cheerful resignation, as also her self-sacrifice, self-restraint, serenity and dignity. Her only consolation is that Udayana is unable to forget her even in the midst of a new marriage. A feeling of awe pervades the play. We feel pity for Vasavadatta. She knows no wavering and her dignity never forsakes her. The play has an ethical significance. The heartbreaking realities distinguish this play. The play has a universal appeal.

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