



## The character of Bhaskaravarma, the Mighty King of Assam : as projected in the Sanskrit novel *Avinasi*.

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Bhaskaravarma was one of the mighty kings of medieval Assam. The reign of this powerful emperor of Varman dynasty is a unique period in the history of ancient Assam. All indialogists have negatively accepted the date of Bhaskaravarma in 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>1</sup> The glorious historical events of Bhaskaravarma have been recorded from the days of yore through some written forms. So, we have some inscriptions, literary works etc. regarding life events of Bhaskara. Among the literary works there is a Sanskrit novel known as *Avinasi*, composed by Biswanarayan Shastri, a pioneer scholar of Assam; which is based on a story formed in the backdrop of the history of Assam during the 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., when the state was known as Pragjyotichapur and Kamarup and that of northern India. The story of the novel mainly deals with the political ups and downs of the kingdom laid down by Bhaskaravarma, who is the hero of the novel. The main story of the work rolls around the love story between Bhaskaravarma, the hero and Madhavi, the heroin of the plot. The novelist has projected the character of Bhaskara from every aspect i.e., as a king, brother, son, lover as well as a human being.

In Sanskrit literature the detailed study of hero is taken up in the rhetoric works i.e., *Alamkarashastra*. But the rhetoric works have not prescribed any instruction for Sanskrit novels. If we consult the norms of Nathakas then Bhaskaravarma comes under the characteristic features of *dhirodatta* type of hero.<sup>2</sup> This type of hero means the one with self-control. The *dhirodatta* type of hero is also noble in bearing and esteemed one. Consequently, Bhaskaravarma possesses all these characteristic features. Moreover, Sanskrit literature always aims at illustrating the ideal sides of life. Therefore, in Sanskrit works heroes have

usually been projected as a symbol of nobility possessing the attributes of self-control of *Ramayanam*, Dushyanta of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* etc. The author of novel *Avinasi* has maintained this tradition of Sanskrit literature regarding the qualities of hero. In the novel Bhaskaravarma is represented as possessed all the qualities of ideal hero. If we analyse the character of Bhaskaravarma it seems that the main aim of the author is to establish Bhaskara as an ideal king throughout the whole novel. Bhaskara has projected as a dedicated king through his all actions. We get from the very beginning of the plot that Sasanka, the king of Gauda plans to attack Pragjyotishpur with advanced and powerful armies. Susthiravarma, the father of Bhaskara, at this dejected time wants to ally with the king of Maukhari but due to the shortage of time he has to send his two sons Supratisthavarma and Bhaskaravarma with all the power that he has. Unfortunately, both the princes are captured in the hands of perennial rival Gauda. Afterwards, it is delineated that the kingdom of Pragjyotishpur turns into a new track when Bhaskara becomes the king. Ideologist P.C. Choudhury states that with the accession of Bhaskaravarma, Kamarup entered into a new chapter of her history.<sup>3</sup> Bhaskara, who is fervently waiting for the salvation of the lost portion of his kingdom, knows all the strategies of governing system. Eventually, Bhaskara comes to know about Harsha, the emperor of North. As said in *Kavyamimamsa aniyatakalah pravrittayo*<sup>4</sup> which means actions not done at the appropriate time do not yield the desired result, Bhaskara allies with Harsha, the king of Sthanesvara, and invades Gauda. With this glorious event of mutual friendship with Harsha which is compared with ever famous friendship of Lord Siva

and Kuvera, the god of wealth; Indra, the king of gods and Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya;<sup>5</sup> Bhaskaravarma has made history as a king. Bhaskaravarma is literally as like as his name indicates i.e. *Bhaskara* or sun cf. *esha khalu pragjyotishakumaro bhaskaradyutih bhaskaro nama*.<sup>6</sup> As the sun lights the whole world Bhaskaravarma also used to gratify his general through the schemes and policies that he has taken during his governance. After regaining the Gauda, Bhaskaravarma has also ascended his kingdom by conquering Karnasuvarna which once conquered by Bhutivarma, the fifth predecessor of Bhaskara and then recaptured by Sasanka during the reign of Susthiravarma. Bhaskaravarma to celebrate his victory issues grand land inscriptions donating land in Candrapura area in Paundravardhana region of Karnasuvarna to the Brahmins at their request which once granted to them by Bhutivarma.<sup>7</sup> Bhaskaravarma is a king of common man. As said by Kalidasa *raja prakriti ranjanat*<sup>8</sup> means king is the one who pleases his subject, Bhaskara is also seen to please his general during his one year stay in Karnasuvarna. In *Avinasi* it is stated that Bhaskara used to pay attention all sort of requests of his general. The king used to offer food and clothes to poor, encourage the general in farming and business and used to egg on the poets and scholars.<sup>9</sup> Bhaskara becomes popular as charitable king- *raja dateti prathitam yaso bhumandale*<sup>10</sup>. Here, we may quote the verse of *The Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarma* regarding the Bhaskar's introduction- *ekopi hi yah pumsam hridayesvabhilakshita svabhavena/suddheshu darpanesviva bahushupamam sammukhinesu//*<sup>11</sup>

It means though Bhaskara was single as a person, he manifested himself in diverse images in the hearts of the people as one well reflected in a similar way before a cluster of a clean mirrors. Bhaskara's success as king lies in the speech of Suracita, an inhabitant of Pragjyotishapur, when he replies to Dharmatra, a teacher of Nalandamahavihara, regarding his place that the region of Bhaskaravarma is now safe. In his territory women can fearlessly roam at night, on streets, wearing expensive jewellery without having company of man.<sup>12</sup>

Bhaskara has strong willpower and determination which can be assumed from the situation when he becomes guardian less after the death of his father Susthitavarma and brother Suratisthitavarma. He takes resolve that he has to regain their lost kingdom even by sacrificing his life and has to uphold the tradition of victory of his dynasty, led by Naraka,

cf. *pitripaitramaham rajyam pranairapi palaniyam.../ prakatite kale asmin vipatkale anarthah nunam vahulibhavisyanti/narakanvayasya mahadayasasyam bhavisyati yadi rajyamidam paribhrastam bhavet/*<sup>13</sup>

Another striking feature of Bhaskara's character is *dhira*, i.e. quality of self-control. In the *Kumarasambhavam*, one of the five epic poems of Sanskrit literature, it is that only that one can be considered as a *dhira* whose mind is not disturbed or overcome by emotions even in the presence of objects of temptation.<sup>14</sup> In the novel *Avinasi* Bhaskara is seen to focus on his administrative affairs rather than his personal matters. Bhaskaravarma loves Madhavi whom he has taken from the temple of Mahakala and generally, he wants to spend quality times with her but he never overcomes his love in the path of performing his duty. As for example, we can take the scene where after the death of Supratisthavarma, Bhaskaravarma is seen in dilemma whether he should first meet Madhavi who is enthusiastically waiting for him in the royal harem since her arriving in his kingdom or finish the funeral ceremony of his elder brother. And after the conflict of his inner mind he first chooses his duty towards his brother and kingdom and overlooks his feelings towards Madhavi by saying as that the primary duty of a king is to protect his nation and there is no way for existence of emotions of heart cf. *rajnya prathamam rajyam rakshaniyam/ natra hridayavrtteh prakasavasarah*<sup>15</sup> Here, also reflects King's dedication towards his duty.

Next, Bhaskara is a true lover. His love towards Madhavi is unconditional and real. According to ethics, kings are not allowed to marry devadasis. As Madhavi is a *devadasi* Bhaskara doesn't marry her and lives a bachelor life to make his subject happy. We can compare his character with Rama, the king of Ayodhya and the hero of *Ramayanam*, who has discarded his wife Sita to please his general. Moreover, as polygamy is sanctioned to kings, Bhaskara could have married other woman but he remains single for lifetime. Rather the epithet *Kumara* i.e. bachelor, has always been affixed before him name and he is known as *Kumara Raja*.<sup>16</sup> Although there are some contradictions among the indologists regarding the epithet of Bhaskara but the novelist has clarified through the character of Malati, a female royal spy and lover of Bhaskara, who says at a place that Bhaskara, the soul mate of Madhavi, must not want to accept other woman as his better half except Madhavi and therefore, he remains unmarried and known as

*Kumara* .<sup>17</sup> Even Bhaskara considers himself as a lifeless body without his beloved Madhavi ,cf. *madhavivihinam kumaram savam janihi/* <sup>18</sup> The relation of Bhaskara and Madhavi has to face lots of difficulties. Madhavi has to leave Bhaskara for two times but Bhaskara is seen to search her with all power and accepts her in all conditions. Although, they are not tied in any relation but Madhavi joins Bhaskara's funeral pyre as like wife and their love remain immortal. Here, we may cite the evergreen saying of Khalil Gibran, the great Persian poet- Love one another but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your soul.<sup>19</sup>

Another feature that makes Bhaskara unique is his perception towards woman. Bhaskara belongs to 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. when women were not allowed to work like man. Generally, they were only busy with their household things. But in the novel *Avinasi* we come across a female character i.e. Malati, who is a spy of the kingdom of Bhaskara. The clever Malati performs as a fake lover of Madhava who is a spy of rival empire of Sasanka and even after losing her chastity in the hand of Madhava, Malati collects some information regarding the power and political backdrops of his country. Undoubtedly, it would not have been so easy for Bhaskara to conquer Gauda without the information imparted by Malati. So, we can assume from this character of Malati that in Bhaskara's consideration both man and woman are same as he has appointed her in such a prestigious and important job. Next, Bhaskara's loves for a *devadasi* also implies

his incredulity about such superstition of prevailing society regarding women.

Bhaskaravarma seems to be interested in education throughout the novel. Suracita, a student of Pragiyotishapur, goes to Nalandamahavihar to learn Buddhist philosophy which itself indicates the awareness of education among inhabitants of Pragiyotishapur in the kingdom of Bhaskara. Bhaskara's enthusiasm to meet the Chinese pilgrim reveals his studious mind. The king has sent messengers for two times to invite the Chinese monk. And finally the Chinese pilgrim has visited Pragiyotishapur on the invitation from Bhaskara. Historians have also remarked that because of Bhaskar's patronage, Pragiyotisapura became a noted centre of learning, attracting students from outside and learning was attracted by his liberal gifts.<sup>20</sup>

So, in conclusion we may say that Bhaskara by his kingly qualities, devotion to duties, and love of his general, contributes to the proper organisation of his territory and the enhancement of his kingdom, both by peaceful means and wars, is revealed from the novel *Avinasi*. Bhaskara has projected as typical sovereign of his people and the various traits of his character are shown in bold relief by the novelist. Although we all familiar with this mighty king of Assam but the character becomes more interesting and appealing in the expert hands of the novelist. *Avinasi's* Bhaskara has not suffered in the least at the hands of our novelist; he is the same idealized type of individual and kingly virtues.

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