**Bhāsa**



Bhāsa is one of the earliest and most celebrated Indian playwrights in Sanskrit. However, very little is known about him.

Kālidāsa in the introduction to his first play Malavikagnimitram writes, “Shall we neglect the works of such illustrious authors as Bhāsa, Saumilla, and Kaviputra? Can the audience feel any respect for the work of a modern poet, a Kālidāsa?”

**Early Life :**

Bhāsa is dated between the 2nd century BCE and 2nd century CE. Based on the language used, his date is also supposed to be around 5th century BC. However, we can consider him to remain around 450 B.C.1 Another important contribution that India made to the global society, is the 'emergence of dramas' which further developed as the modern age film industry. Mahakavi Bhasa is considered to be the first dramatist of the era. The plays of Bhāsa had been lost for centuries. He was known only from mention in other works like the famous text on poetics Kavyamimamsa written during 880-920 AD by Rajashekhara a famous poet, dramatist and critic. In the Kavyamimamsa, he attributes the play Svapnavasavadatta to Bhāsa .

**Works :**

Mahakavi Bhasha wrote the following dramas

1. **PRATIGYA YOUGANDHA RAYANAM** -This is a four act play describing how a minister swears to rescue his king from the imprisonment of enemy and he makes it with his clever brain. The drama has a beautiful love story of Prince Udayan and Princess Vasavdatta, too.

2. **SWAPNA VASAVDATTAM** -This is a six act dramatic rommance. The story revolves around the love borne marriage between Prince Udayan and Queen Padmawati. This can be said to be a later part of ‘Pratijnayaugandharayana’.

3. **URUBHANGAM** -This one act play is plotted upon the story of Mahabharata in which Prince Bhima breaks the thighs of Duryodhana in the battle field to take avenge of his wife Draupadi's insult.

4. **DOOT VAKYAM** -This one act play describes how Lord Krishna goes to Duryodhana with the message of peace on behalf of Pandavas to prevent war but in vain as Kauravas reject his proposal of treaty.

5. **PANCHRATRAM** -This three act play portrays how Duryodhana, on request of Drona, promises to share half of the empire with the Pandvas, provided the hidden Pandvas appear within five nights.

6. **BALCHARITAM** - This one act play describes the interesting childhood events of Lord Krishna. It illustrates how He ended up the devilish empire of Kansa. This is a collection of many stories related to Lord Krishna’s childhood days.

7. **DOOT GHATOTKACHAM** -This one act play describes how Lord Krishna managed to send Ghatotkacha to Dhritrashtra to give message of Arjuna's oath after the death of Abhimanyu.

8. **KARNA BHARAM** - This one act play describes the story of Karna giving his divine gifted armour to Indra disguised in a brahmin.

9. **MADHYAM VYAYOGA** -This one act play narrates how Bhima saves a brahmin's son from Ghatotkach. In due course, Bhima becomes happy to see his son Ghatotkacha and his second wife Hidimba again. This is a story of reconciliation.

10. **PRATIMA NATKAM** -This seven act play describes the whole story of The Holy Ramayana in brief.

11. **ABHISHEK NATKAM** - This six act play also revolves around the story of Ramayana from the crownship of Lord Rama to the war against evil.

12. **AVIMARKAM** -This six act play is based upon a folk tale of love and romance between Prince Avimarak and a common girl Kurangi.

13. **CHARUDATTAM -**This four act play is the climax of dramatic excellence where the love story of a poor man Charudatta and a prostitute Vasantsena has been nicely woven.

The impact of Valmiki upon Bhasha makes him an easy, interesting, intelligible, natural, fluent and qualitative writer. Bhāsa does not follow all the dictates of the Natya Shastra. This has been taken as a proof of their antiquity; no post-Kālidāsa play has been found to break the rules of the Natya Shastra's. Bhāsa allows scenes that contain signs of physical violence to be shown on stage in plays like Urubhanga.This is strictly frowned upon by Natya Shastra.

The Uru-Bhanga and Karna-bhara are the only known tragic Sanskrit plays in ancient India. Though branded the villain of the Mahabharata, Duryodhana is the actual hero in Uru-Bhanga shown repenting his past as he lies with his thighs crushed awaiting death. His relations with his family are shown with great pathos. The epic contains no reference to such repentance. The Karnabhara ends with the premonitions of the sad end of Karna, another epic character from Mahabharata. Early plays in India, inspired by Natya Shastra, strictly considered sad endings inappropriate.

The plays are generally short compared to later playwrights and most of them draw the theme from the Indian epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana. Though he is firmly on the side of the heroes of the epic, Bhāsa treats their opponents with great sympathy. He takes a lot of liberties with the story to achieve this. In the Pratima-nataka, Kaikeyi who is responsible for the tragic events in the Ramayana is shown as enduring the calumny of all so that a far noble end is achieved. His most famous plays Pratijna-Yaugandharayana (the vow of Yaugandharayana) and Swapna-vasavadatta (Swapnavāsavadatta) (Vasavadatta in the dream) are based on the legends that had grown around the legendary King Udayana, probably a contemporary of the Buddha.

The first play tells the story of how the king Udayana married the princess Vasavadatta (his first wife).The second play tells the story of how the king Udayana, with the help of his loyal minister Yaugandharayana, later married the princess Padmavati, a daughter of the king of Magadha, and thus made this king his ally rather than enemy. Though his plays were discovered only in the 20th century, two of them UruBhanga and Karna-bhara, have become popular due to their appeal to modern tastes and performed in translation and Sanskrit. Bhasa has been a constant source of inspiration to all later dramatists for a very long period till his dramas went out of public currency.

Sudraka planned his whole work on the ‘Caar’, bodily taking not only the plot, characters and incidents but the wording as well, making improvements and removing the crudities wherever necessary, and adding something to the original work for the purpose of making a popular appeal. In saying that Kalidasa has taken ideas from Bhasa, we do not intend to detract from the merits of the Prince among Sanskrit dramatists. Kalidasa seems to be such a close students of Bhasa that knowingly or unknowingly, there appear in his plays many ideas and conceptions from Bhasa. The influence of Bhasa on the Kerala dramatists is immense. Not only have they imitated his structural peculiarities but also they have taken down his antique Prakrit.

Mahendravikramaverman and Saktibhadra, the pioneer dramatists of the South, are specially indebted to the Abh and Pratijna of Bhasa for their Matavilasa and Ascharya respectively. Bhasa’s Udayana plays are responsible for the creation of the Vinayvasavdatta, Unmadvcasavdatta, Tapasvatsraja, Vatsrajcharita, etc. The plays of Kulshekharaverman, the Kalyansaugandhika, Damaka, Chaturbhani, Traivikrama, Bhagvadajjukiya and many other plays from the South have imitated the technique and ideas of Bhasa.