**MAGHA**

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Among many of our ancient noted Sanskrit poets the name of Magha also stands out prominently. He was a seventh century poet and hailed from Gujarat. He was born in then Shrimala Nagar, present Bhinmal of Rajasthan. It seems he became the honoured Sanskrit poet at the court of King Varmalata at Shrimala which was then the capital of Gujarat.

**Early Life**

Magha belonged to a Shrimali Brahmin family known to be quite rich. His father was Dattaka  Sarvacharya and he was the grandson of Suprabhadika. Magha rose to fame as a poet chiefly for his Epic poem (Mahakavya) ‘Shishupal Vadh’. This Epic poem it seems was written in 20 ‘sargas’ i.e. Cantos and the content was taken from an episode of Mahabharata. The content of the Epic was ‘Shishupala Vadh’ regarding the killing of Shishupal by Lord Krishna with His Chakra (disc).

Magha’s concluding five verses of his work are known as Prasasti  in which it seems he has mentioned all about his parents, his birth place and being in the court of the King. Therefore these verses are called the Nija-Vamsa-Varnana or Kavi-Vamsa-Varnana by commentators.It is said, he was inspired by poet Bharavi and often compared to him.

We learn that Magha was highly popular with Sanskrit critics who did not spare any chance to quote him intensely. As already mentioned, his Shishupala Vadha seems to have been inspired by the Kiratarjuniya of Bharavi, and Magha even tried to emulate it and surpass him. Scholars commend that “Like Bharavi, he displays rhetorical and metrical skill more than the growth of the plot, and is noted for his intricate wordplay, texture complexity and verbal ingenuity.”  Scholars also opine that Magha has used a rich vocabulary, so much so that the claim has been made that Magha’s work contains almost every word in the Sanskrit language.

**Works**

Whilst comparing Magha’s works with Bharavi’s works, scholars find that Magha glorifies Lord Krishna whereas Bharavi glorifies Shiva.  Moreover,while Bharavi uses 19 metres Magha uses 23; like Bharavi’s 15th canto full of contrived verses, Magha introduces even more complicated verses in his 19th canto. A popular Sanskrit verse about Magha says (after translation):-

“The similies of Kalidasa, Bharavi’s depth of meaning, Dandini’s wordplay—in Magha, all three qualities are found.” Another Sanskrit saying tells (after translation) “the lustre of the sun lasts until the advent of Magha (coldest month),  but the lustre of Bharavi lasts until the advent of Magha.” Consequently, Magha is seemed to be more admired as a poet than his work as a whole and it is considered “even if the sections of the work that may be considered digressions from the story, have the nature of an anthology and are more popular.”

Magha has chosen his poem ‘Shishupala Vadh’ from an episode of the epic Mahabharata. To give the gist of the story, to Shishupal Krishna was not only a cousin but a foe because Krishna had carried off Rukmini his intended wife. Furthermore, it was foretold that Shishupala’s death was at the hands of Krishna. However, Krishna had given his vow to Shishupal’s mother (his aunt) that He would forgive Shishupala till he committed hundred wrongs but will kill him when he exceeded the limit. During the Rajasuya Yagnya held by Yudhishtira, Shishupala insults Lord Krishna calling Him a cowherd and not fit to be honoured as a king at the Sacrifice (Yagnya). Shishupala throws many more abuses at Krishna exceeding his limit with the result Krishna is compelled to behead Shishupala with His Chakra (disc).  Shishupala’s death is the main subject of Magha’s famous Sanskrit epic poem of Shishupala Vadh.

We are told the story taken from the episode of the epic Mahabharata begins with a description of a brilliant light descending from the clouds and all the people marvelling at it. The town people are amazed at this unique kind of brilliance which they presume to be of the Sun or the Fire. Actually the light was of the great sage Narada descending from heaven to warn Krishna about Shishupala! So skillfully has Magha presented the appearance of sage Narada.

In the words of Scholars “Shishupala Vadh, an epic poem in Sanskrit, is undoubtedly one of the most complex and beautiful poetic works ever created. The masterpiece of poetry follows the story of Krishna as he marches to Indraprastha on his way to attend the great Sacrifice held by his friend Yudhishtira.” It seems Magha has too beautifully described in detail the chaotic march of Krishna to the Yagnya with His army and also the supernatural beauty of the holy mountain Ralvataka and  the surroundings where His army had  camped

According to one Sanskrit scholar, Paul M.M. Cooper “ However, it is not the beauty of the poetry or the skill of the story teller that has impressed scholars throughout the ages, but the metrical skill in volume in its creation. Magha was a manipulator of the Sanskrit language who knew no equal.” Magha claims “The great height and beauty of the mountain need none of the false exaggerated embellishment of a poet” before extolling and describing its beauty and height in his main verses.  He describes:-

The mountain sprouted trees, in whose branches magnificent peacocks lounged, around the trunks of which large snakes were twined, and from which the tips of many vines swung like pendulums.”

Magha being a manipulator of the Sanskrit language is proved by some verse in the 19th Canto of his poem. To quote from Encyclopedia Britanica “ Shishupal Vadh comprising of 20 cantos has a rich vocubalary that allegedly includes every known word in the Sanskrit language. The 19th Canto which is noted for its complexity, contains a stanza that is identical to the previous stanza if read backward.”

The Sanskrit scholar Paul M.M. Cooper writes that today, the Shishupala Vadha is still unobtainable in English. It seems there is fantastic version in German by Eujen Hultzsch and another in French by Hippolytic F.  He deplores “Unfortunately, until some Sanskrit scholar of greater knowledge and patience than I comes along to translate it, the secrets and wonders of one of the world’s greatest poetic works will forever be obscure to us.”