



CULTURE OF SATIRE: A STUDY OF SANSKRIT LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to deal with the question as to what is 'satire' and can we talk in terms of a culture of satire in our sources. The paper also seeks to critique the dominant historiographical position that satire as a genre is absent from Sanskrit literature. We have tried to show that Sanskrit literatures were deeply conscious of the political, social and religious inequities that were prevalent in their world and on these injustices, they used the whiplash of their satire sometimes blatantly but more frequently subtly to draw attention to and censure them. We also argue that sometimes a satirical gaze of an outsider is able to illuminate those cultural realities or peculiarities which are lost on the native populace.

Keywords: *Caste iniquities, Class divisions, Misogyny, Political Authority, Religious hypocrisy, Satire*

I

In this paper we shall seek to analyse what is satire, and equally importantly can we talk in terms of a culture of satire in our textual sources. In order to answer above questions, we need to first define satire. In Sanskrit satire has been variously termed as *ākṣepa* (allegation), *tīkṣṇavācāna* (sneer at), *vyangyokti* (taunt), *aruntudabhāṣaṇam* (hurtful words that lunge at the core), *upahāsa* (ridicule/mock) and *vidrūpa* (vitriol). In Sanskrit poetics there was a rhetorical device of *vyājastuti* (false praise) which was an artful flattery of ruler that was actually intended to convey his criticism (Ingalls 1965:297) Thus, satire has always functioned to unpack sometimes forthrightly but more often in a veiled manner injustice, power struggle and fraudulent behaviour in any given society. In our sources, satirical verses and prose passages have offered criticism of social, political and moral values. As a strategy satirists employ both wit and ridicule to draw attention to the unresponsive edifice of authority. Furthermore, while satire may be practiced in all epochs and different cultures, we can appreciate it essentially in its particular historical and cultural context. For example, in the *Śatapatha* and *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* a Vedic king Vishvakarman Bhuvana (Macdonell & Keith 2007:309) is rebuked by earth for having gifted her in *dakṣiṇā* (reward). This admonishing can only be registered in the historical context of a tribal society where clans enjoyed merely usufructuary rights over the land and had no right to individual ownership. Furthermore, in many Brahmin authored texts of early medieval period we find invective directed against Kāyasthas as a caste group. R.S Sharma (2001:195-96) explains this ire against them, due to two main reasons. As a literati class,



Kāyasthas had become challengers to brahmanas in filling administrative posts. Secondly, and this was perhaps more important, the Kāyastha scribes were the writers and record keepers of the land grants of this period whose primary beneficiary were brahmanas. The Kāyastha scribes could and perhaps did cause constant trouble to them. This is obvious from both Ksemendra (*Kalāvīlāsa*: 5.7.11) and Kalhana's (*Rājataranṅinī*: 5.180-84 & 7.1227) diatribe against Kāyasthas.

Satire, as scholars have pointed out, is not an omnibus category. In order to appreciate it one needs to be aware of the variation in the type and function of satire. Gilbert Highet (1962:26) draws an important distinction between lampooning and satire in the context of their purpose. While lampooning merely wishes to wound the ego of an individual or a group, satire is a more powerful tool which employs mockery to benefit the entire society. Highet concludes picturesquely that while lampoon functions as a poisoner or gunmen, satire can be perceived as physician or policemen. In the context of our sources this distinction can be illustrated as follows: in the *R̥gveda* (Macdonell & Keith 2007:357) chieftain Shauradeva is lampooned for his niggardliness in gifting a single calf to three poets. In the *Mahābhārata* (5.38.29 & 5.34.21) king who is incapable of extending patronage is taunted as a 'śaṅḍha' (impotent) whom no one wants for a spouse. Ksemendra (*Narmamālā*: 1.62-70) caricatures a Kāyastha provincial governor as a demon who is a scourge of temples and villages murdering and pillaging at will. Such sarcastic exaggeration can be seen, says Dustin Griffin (1994:181) as repressed hostility, a form of sadism. He cites Freud who had once observed that by sneering at our adversary and presenting him as inferior we achieve in a roundabout way satisfaction of vanquishing him (Griffin 1994:183). Banabhatta through his compelling *Śukanāsopadeśa* in *Kādambarī* (1928:167-180) succeeded in presenting a potent satire on the nature of insensitive political authority within a society.

Another very significant issue which needs to be examined is the function of satire. While satire may generate *hāsya* (mirth) it equally produces *krodha/ākroṣa* (wrath) particularly among those who are at the receiving end of invectives. While mockery can be no more than abusive gibing which stands out for its astringent tone and bitter caricature; the real purpose of satire is to explicate on deeply experienced truth on ethical and social issues. Whether this satire is brought home jokingly or as a derisive rebuke the important thing is that it illuminates some universal truths. It is only then that satire achieves a subversive quality and acquires an 'Orwellian' longevity that transcends even the historical context in which it had first emerged.



II

Although the purpose of this paper is to characterize the culture of satire in Sanskrit literature, the predominant historiographical position is that one cannot talk in terms of the presence of satire as a genre in this literature. S.K De both in his *History of Sanskrit Literature* (1947:36,197) and his subsequent essay 'Wit, Humour and Satire in Ancient Indian Literature' (1955:162) was of the view that Sanskrit literary output was one of "super-individual artistic emotion" and as such ruled out any direct mirroring of life. Since Sanskrit poetry was very often nothing more than a "delicate blossom of fancy fostered in a world of tranquil calm", the tendency of this literature was towards "ornate and harmonious rather than jagged angularity". In De's understanding Invective, lampoon, parody, pasquinade-all that the word 'satire' connoted were beyond the sphere of "smooth tenor and serenity of Sanskrit artistic composition". He therefore came to the conclusion that in this "distinct cleavage between life and literature, between art and experience there could be no possibility of a real satire".

D.D Kosambi in his introduction to an edited volume on Vidyakara's *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* says about Sanskrit poets that they were conscious of the fact that they were not addressing themselves to the entire society but only to a minority at its apex. Embedded as they were in this class society these poets were ill-disposed to bite the hand that extended them the patronage for survival. The dilemma for these litterateurs then was how to fashion words of censure against their elite patrons. Kosambi (1957:1x) notes " If the Sanskrit poet had been conscious of his failings, which were those of his society ,there would at least have been powerful satire, of which no example is to be seen except perhaps ridiculous exaggeration".

Devraj Chanana in his essay on 'The Sanskritists and Indian Society'(1965:49-67) applied Marxist class analysis to these literary outputs from medieval to the early modern period. Chanana was even more direct and disparaging in critiquing Sanskritic literary tradition which only sang paeans to those in authority while turning a deaf ear to the woes of common people.

We can conclude this historiographical position as follows. While De argued that *Kāvyaśāstra* (texts on Poetics) and its theory of '*rasaniṣpatti*'(genesis of emotions)in '*rasika/sahṛdaya*'(connoisseur) precluded any affinity towards reality; the poet being content with merely symbols of reality rather than strive for reality itself. On the other hand, Kosambi and Chanana laid the blame on the elitist/feudal class roots of Sanskrit literature which was responsible for the absence of satire in this literary tradition. While we do not propose to outright dismiss the perceptive



comments of these scholars, nonetheless we seek to argue as Griffin (1994:14) does that satire is not a specific literary genre but more a mode or a procedure and therefore it can appear anywhere. Furthermore, Satire need not be seen as an attack from outside the system by an outsider, rather it is a subversion that operates stealthily, both by unsettling convictions and shattering illusions (Griffin1994:178). This being the case we need to analyse our Sanskrit sources for what has been satirized there and how has it been achieved.

III

The most visible sarcasm is quite expectedly directed against structures of authority; the ruler himself and also his entourage which oppresses and defrauds people. In the burlesque like *bhāṇa* and *prahasana*, base people are frequent characters and vulgar and crude sentiments abound. Yet the pungent wit of these farces, represent a very successful instance of social and political satire. In some of these burlesque like *Kautukasarvasvam* and *Hāsyārṇava*(De1947:498-99) the characters are named very adroitly which sums up their character, and in the process, illumine the socio-political reality which they represent. The kings for instance are given pithy abusive epithets like *anyāyasindhu* (ocean of injustice), *kalivatsala* (lover of strife), *duritārṇava* (sea of misconduct). The domains they rule over are equally sarcastically named as *dharmanāśa*(where righteousness is destroyed) and *pun्यavarjitā* (where merit is prohibited). King's chaplain/preceptor are given epithets like *viśvabhāṇḍa* (universal hypocrite), *anṛtasarvasva* (essence of falsehood) and *ajitendriya* (lacking self-control). Astrologer who advises the king is sarcastically named *aśubhacintaka*(who wishes evil). The self -serving and venal counsellors of the kings fare no better, they are given epithets like *kumatipuñja*(source of bad advice),*kukarmapañcānana*(five-headed one of bad deeds).Kings police chiefs earn the contemptuous epithets like *śiṣṭāntaka*(terror of decent folks) and *sādhuhimsaka*(killer of good men).

In *Mṛcchakaṭikam*(Act 9.14) there is an equally relentless and unvarnished focus on the corridors of power. The court of justice(*adhikaraṇamaṇḍapasya*) is compared to a sea infested with sharks and crocodiles in form of spies and with snakes in form of court clerks. Poets (*Mahābhārata*:5.34.12) rebuke kings who are so smug in their power that they behave like bullies. Sanskritists are also severe in pouring scorn over rulers who are 'pramādi' (debauched). Kalidasa in *Raghuvamśa*(19.4-7) etched a mocking figure of one such king Agnivarna who instead of engaging with his duties remained cloistered in his harem and when his ministers came for audience, he merely dangled his foot from a window.



But if being a bully and dissolute made the ruler an object of reprimand the litterateurs were even more contemptuous of those who lacked sagacity. In *Mṛcchakaṭikam*(Act 9.40) king Palaka is derided as ‘*avimarśyakārī*’ (one incapable of deliberating) Bilhana in *Vikramānkadevacarita*(6.29) lampoons an ill-intentioned ruler(*avataratimatih*) because of which sovereignty is destroyed like a boat that capsizes when hit by rocks on the shore. Litterateurs also sneer at weak willed rulers. In *Mudrārākṣasa*(Act3.23) Vishakhadatta notes with subtle sarcasm “ A lord does not become a ‘*prabhu*’(lord) by wearing ornaments. He alone is said to be a ‘*prabhu*’ who’s command is not slighted by others”.

Sanskritists understood quite well the tight rope which a ruler had to walk between ensuring that his command was not infringed upon and simultaneously safeguard the legitimacy of that power. The *śukanāsopadeśa* in *Kādambarī* (1928:174) intensely scrutinizes the axiom that while power corrupts absolute power corrupts absolutely. Banabhatta uses the royal coronation ceremony as a metaphor for ruler’s delusion regarding his greatness which is corrosive of his virtues. At his censorious best he states “King’s ‘*dākṣiṇyam*’ (courtesy) is washed away by water of ‘*abhiṣeka*’ (consecration) and his heart is darkened by the smoke of sacred fire. His forgiveness is swept away as if with a broom of *kuśa* grass; while the sight of the next world is obscured by the royal ‘*chatra*’ (parasol)unfurled on his head. His truthfulness is blown away by the breezes of chowries waved around while ‘*sādhuvādāḥ*’ (good advice) is drowned in the din of ‘*jayaśabda kalakalairiva*’ (victory cheers) of his subjects.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that Sanskritists have devoted much of their energy and talent in unleashing their whip of satire on the functioning of authority. The poets savage mockery lays bare the inaccessibility of the corridors of power. Thus a poet says about the royal patron, “he does not care if you are stopped at the door; takes no notice when you manage to meet him; blinks like an elephant at your presentation; pretends to agree and after you leave runs you down.”(*Subhāṣitāvali*: verse3238). Sometimes the satire is less brutal and more subtle as when a poet says, “your majesty’s ears I filled with words devoid of meaning; you too did the same with me, words even more inane. Thus, we both have passed time deceiving one another” (*Subhāṣitāvali*: verse3234).

The poets understood quite well that remoteness of authority was due to the wall of opaqueness which state functionaries created around the center of power for selfish reasons. In *Kādambarī* (1928:177-78). Bana draws an evocative picture of the royal court where counsellors are



compared to vultures, intent on securing their own ends(*svārthanīṣpādāna*). They make it their business to represent vices as virtues. Thus, to abandon one's wife is represented as absence of desire (*svadārā parityāgaḥ avyasanitēti*); arbitrariness as assertion of authority (*svacchandatā prabhutvamiti*); listening unmoved about acts of atrocities is presented as nobility of mind (*mahāparādhānākaraṇam mahānubhāvatēti*). The accolades of sycophants, is presented as true fame (*vandijanakhyāti yaśa iti*), and indecisiveness as sign of impartiality (*aviśeṣajñatā apakṣapātītvamiti*). Bana therefore concludes contemptuously that surrounded by such cheats(*dhūrte*) who are adroit in paying homage(*stutibhiḥ*) the ruler in spite of being mortal thinks of himself as having a divine quotient(*divyānśa*) and acting accordingly(*divyocittaceṣṭān*) he becomes a laughing stock (*sarvajanasypahāsyatāmupayanti*).

Apart from the unapproachability of the authority what the litterateurs also satirize is the inscrutability of the powerful. Bhartrhari etches a picture of a bewildering Kafkaesque world where:

“when silent, courtier is branded dumb,

When eloquent, pretentious or a prating fool,

When distant, diffident,

When patient, pusillanimous,

When impetuous, ill-bread.

The rules of service are thus a mystery incomprehensible even to the wise (*paramgahano yogīnām api agamyah*).

IV

In pre-modern age Religion was firmly in public sphere. Quite pronounced in our sources is the satirical gaze that is focused not only on the pretensions of religious preachers of all sectarian affiliations but the hypocrisy practiced in the guise of religion itself. Furthermore, it will not be an overstatement if we argue that religious satire is profound and perhaps the most dynamic feature of Sanskrit literary discourse.



Kshemendra is razor sharp in his mockery of religious hypocrisy(*dambha*)¹. He does not mince any word in laying bare the nature and rationale behind it, centuries before Marx became notorious for stating that religion is the opium of the masses. In *Kalāvīlāsa*(1.45) he states unambiguously that, “*dambha* is the mockery of human intellect; the underpinning of deception; the cause of world’s ruin ,misperception and the cornerstone of fraudulent enterprise”. Author of *Pañcatantra*(2.50) attesting to the validity of above belief states sarcastically, “ If your mind is set on going to hell, then just serve a year as ‘*purohita*’ (priest); if time is short spend just three days overseeing a ‘*maṭha*’ (monastery). Kshemendra warns that only when it is understood that religious hypocrisy is omnipresent and rapacious, can it be rendered ineffective and then the ploys of dishonest, will be in vain (*Kalāvīlāsa*: 1.95). If Kshemendra theorizes about religious hypocrisy Dandin’s tale of Mantragupta in *Daśakumāracarita*(2005:470-73) is a parody of how an ordinary man transforms himself into a sham ‘*sanyāsī*’(mendicant) and goes about fooling people around him. Further if charlatans succeed in fooling innocent people Kshemendra is quite clear in indicating the reason for it. He contemptuously lampoons in *Deśopadeśa*(8.26) a ‘*buddhivihīna śiṣya*’ (mindless disciple) who is ‘*kevalabhakta*’ (just a devotee). Lacking independent judgement, he simply follows the trodden path like a dumb beast.

Krishnamishra’s allegorical play *Prabodhacandrodaya* is a powerful satire on a variety of religious practitioners in the setting of the city of Varanasi. The author berates those who are no more than man beast(*nṛpaśubhiḥ*)and lack discernment;² they are blasphemers of Veda, attached solely to repeating their rote lesson (*adhyayana mātra niratā*)(2009:48-51). He further chides them for their mendicant vows (*grhīta yativratā*) which is meant solely to get alms(*bhikṣāmātram*). Krishnamishra dismisses as hypocrite cheats(*dāmbhikāḥ*) those who were busy counting beads of their chaplets just to pick pockets of those with wherewithal (*haranti dhaninām*)³. The author further sneers at the ascetic paraphernalia for its sheer worthlessness. He notes, “fire oblation, triple Veda, trident staff, smearing the body with ash (*bhasma guṇṭhanam*) these are trades(*jīvik*) for those lacking brains and

¹ *Dambha* in the sense of religious hypocrisy is mentioned by Apte(1966 : 449)

² In fact the character of Cāravāka in *Prabodhacandrodaya*(2009:68) refers to 3 Vedas as crook’s patter (*dhūrta pralāpa*).

³ A 17th century satire *Kali-Viḍambanm*(verses86-87) shows that character of religious hypocrisy had not changed in the many centuries that separated this text from *Prabodhacandrodaya*.



effort (*buddhi pauruṣa hīnānām*)” (2009:74-75). Through the character of Cāravāka Krishnamishra in *Prabodhacandrodaya* (2009:70-71) voices his mockery of many empty religious practices which were prevalent in the society. Thus, about Vedic cult of sacrifice he states, “If sacrificer holds that heaven is attained by the beast that is sacrificed, then why does not the sacrificer slaughter his own father as well.” He further notes, “If funeral rites brought contentment even to creatures quite dead; the oil might well sustain the flame of the lamp once its quenched”. Krishnamishra derisively disdains alms, fasting, rites of contrition (*bhikṣopavāsa niyam*) as no more than fool’s restrictions (*dhūrta praṇīt*) and therefore dismisses them as games played on feeble minded (*durbuddhi vilasitam*) (2009:70-72).

However, the profundity of satire on religious hypocrisy is reduced to being a farcical one in those texts where author in a spirit of Brahmanical triumphalism viciously draws a caricature of votaries of heterodox sects. A 12th century farce titled *Laṭakamelkam* or a gathering of rascals satirizes Jaina and Buddhist monks and nuns. The lampooning is evident in the nomenclature of these personages. For instance, a *Digambara* Jaina monk with bald pate is sarcastically named *Jatāsura* (demon with matted locks). A *Kāpālika* is named ‘*ajñānśrī*’ (epitome of illiteracy) even as another is called ‘*mithyāśukla*’ (moon of falsehood). A Buddhist monk is ridiculed as ‘*vyasanakara*’ (ocean of vices). Since only Jains and Buddhists had order of nuns, the promiscuous nuns became a common trope in Sanskrit literature. In *Laṭakamelkam* (1962:24) one such ‘*tapasvinī*’ (female mendicant) is said to be suffering from ‘*prasava vedanā*’ (labour pains). In a farce *Ubhayābhisārikā* (2009:180) a Buddhist ‘*parivrājikā*’ (nun) is sneered at as ‘*vilāsakuṇḍinī*’ (coil of pleasure). In Dandin *Daśakumāracarita* (2005:443) nuns are frequently depicted as ‘*dūtī*’ (messengers) between lovers as in the tale of Mitragupta.

Mattavilāsa prahasana was authored by 7th century Pallava King Mahendravarman. This farce pokes fun at *Kāpālikas* and Buddhists. The text can be appreciated only in the historical setting of early medieval Tamilnadu where heterodox sects were on wane and Brahmanism under Pallava patronage had come to flourish.

V

Besides religion, ancient Indian society had *varṇa/jāti* identity and hierarchy to contend with. Do our sources show awareness of this very crucial reality and engage with it? Both caste and class consciousness, is reflected in Sanskrit texts. Historically the earliest censorious observation on the



notion of what constitutes ‘Brahminhood’ comes from the Buddhist texts. Thus, Asvaghosa in his *Vajrasūcī*(1960:16) remonstrates that birth is not the real determinant of ‘brahminhood’ instead “truth is brahminhood, austerity is brahminhood, control over senses is brahminhood, compassion towards all sentient beings is brahminhood”. Since these are the characteristics of brahminhood, *Vajrasūcī* (1960:17) opines, that “even if a *Cāṇḍāla* possesses them he is recognized as brāhmaṇa by the Gods.”

What *Vajrasūcī* critiques philosophically the secular Sanskrit texts openly ridicule. In *bhāṇa Padmaprābhṛtak* (2009:246-47) a Brahmin by birth is mockingly named ‘*Pavitraka*’ (pure one). Nonetheless, in the farce he is lampooned for his act of shrinking from the defiling touch of common people in the street although, he is hypocritical enough to visit the prostitute quarter for sexual liaison. His interlocutor therefore taunts him sneeringly, “you say that you are avoiding the touch of strangers (*avijñāta jana saṁsparśo*) but is the ‘*jaghana*’ (lower part) of the prostitute pure as a ‘*jāhanvī tīrtham*’ (Ganges pilgrim center).” In fact, Sanskrit litterateurs deeply conscious of the class and birth divide in the society were quick to admonish those who discriminated on that basis. *Pañcatantra* (4.3) states that hospitality must be extended to all- “ask not the lineage or profession, learning or country of origin of the guest at your doorstep at mealtime”. It is crucial to remember that traditionally in maintaining birth status commensality restrictions had played a significant role.

It is a truism that authority is premised on hierarchy which also entails domination of the lower order. Sanskritists are scathingly scornful in underlining this reality. As one poet puts it pithily “It is a dog’s life, whoever says this idly prates without knowing; for a dog roams at will, a servant by the order of his master” (*Pañcatantra*:1.262). The despair of the exploited is highlighted in another verse where poet candidly states “The rich generally do not perceive other’s discomfort; Vishnu sleeps comfortably on Shesa who is already wearied by the burden of the earth.”(*Subhāṣitaratnabhaṇḍāgāram*, verse2, column2:64). This pervasive miserable reality of those at the bottom of the society is put across by the poet subtly yet quite devastatingly when he overturns the meaning of the word omniscient. He states, “Hail O poverty! By your grace I have attained super natural powers; I see the whole world but no one sees me.” (*Subhāṣitaratnabhaṇḍāgāram*, verse2, column2:65)

In fact, this disturbing veracity of loss of power effacing all merit is a constant rhetoric in Sanskrit literature. *Pañcatantra*(5.3) notes mockingly that self-esteem, judgement, learning, social grace and understanding all seem to vanish precipitately when man loses power and authority.



Conversely all virtues are seen to be embodied in rich (*Pañcatantra* 2.68) In fact Bhartrhari scoffs “A man of wealth is held to be high born, wise, scholarly, discerning, eloquent and even handsome” (*Śatakatrāyam* verse 51) On the other hand a poor person could be easily made a scapegoat for other’s faults (*daridrḥ khalu saḥ tasya sarvam sambhāvyaṭe*) as Shudraka notes pointedly in *Mṛcchakaṭikam*(Act9:453-54).

A late satirical text on the parody of life in dark ages titled *Kali-Viḍambanam* makes a powerful exposition of how people with little or no merit manage to achieve success in society. Author Nilakanta Dikshitar points out derisively that since acquisition of knowledge is time consuming, an aspiring scholar in a hurry should give up all sense of shame, loudly proclaim and exhibit his limited knowledge on any given subject (2018: Verse 5). The author further opines in a similar mocking tone that some other ways of ramming your way through success is to insult your competitors, praise the judges or accuse them of partiality. He then concludes sarcastically that uttering lies, speaking in an enticing manner are ways of becoming rich while being honest and cultivating profound scholarship is the surest passport to poverty (2018: verse 2-3).

VI

In all patriarchal cultures and India is no exception we find a lot of misogynistic satire. Male authors were quick to censure women for “falsehood, wile and reckless daring; greed and envy overbearing; no merits much impurity are faults innate in femininity”(Hitopadeśa:1.196). *Pañcatantra*(4.48) is equally derisive in castigating women-“ What’s within them appears not on the tongue; what’s on the tongue finds no expression; what’s expressed is not acted upon; how strange are the ways of women.” Perhaps this male vitriol resulted from the sheer unpalatability of domestic reality; the tensions of the sexual relations as they unfolded within households. As a poet (*Subhāṣitaratnabhaṇḍāgāram*, verse 3, column2:89) puts it trenchantly “wailing kids, a damp seat, a dusty courtyard, a bed infested with bugs, stale food, a home filled with smoke, a sharp- tongued wife (*bhāryā niṣṭhurbhāṣiṇī*), an enraged husband (*prabhurapi krodhena*) and always a chilled water bath, damn forever the householder’s life (*dhigdīga ḡrasthāśramam*)”. Since within patriarchal households, wife’s access to resources and exercise of any power was not so much by right as by cajolery, this wheedling on their part provided men rationale for mouthing invectives against them. In *Rājataranḡiṇī* (5.317-19) Kālhaṇa contemptuously refers to wives as night tutors instructing their husbands in the privacy of bedroom. However, where wives were unsuccessful in coaxing husbands they could resort to plain quarrelling. In the farce *Laṭakamelkam* (1962:12) a wife is mockingly



named ‘*Kalahapriyā*’ (who loves discord). The author of the farce then mocks at the husband who was comprehensively worsted in this battle and was shown the exit by his combative wife.

If at one level domestic familiarity bred contempt for women another reason for men venting their misogynistic spleen was due to the inversion of man chasing woman equation of the phenomenological world. On the spiritual path men perceived women as temptresses who led men astray. *Prabodhacandrodaya*(2009:34-36) states that when man embraces illusion (*māyā saṅgāt pumān*) his mind befuddled by women (*strībhiḥ pratārīta mānasah*) he loses his inner composure(*dhairyam*).

Nonetheless we also get a counter satire where a man is honest enough to admit that “A deceiver of himself and his peers is the pompous *paṇḍita* who reviles young women. The fruit of his austerity is heaven and even heaven is full of nymphs” (*Śatakatrayam* verse 120).

We also need to ask if women were only the object of men’s satire or whether they assume a subject position occasionally to mock at men. In *Matsyapurāṇa* (157.9-27) Parvati berates Shiva for finding faults with others as he had done with her, deriding her for being crooked and cold hearted. She sarcastically tells Shiva that it is he who is full of defects on account of bad company he keeps. She taunts him for his devious nature surrounded as he is by serpents. His detached dry temperament comes from the ashes he is smeared with and his dull intellect is derived from the bull he rides. She also scoffs at him for being shameless since he walks virtually naked.

However, it is rare to find woman indulging in open mockery of the kind Parvati does in the *Matsyapurāṇa*. What is more common for women is to resort to subtle sarcasm to draw attention to the realities of their lot in the patriarchal societies. This strategy perhaps also protected them from male violence which would not have taken too kindly to direct contemptuous taunts from women. For instance, a wife reproaches her promiscuous partner by stating “I feel very light in my body, as you have helped to remove heaviness off my drooping spirit, my sense of self- worth (*mama gaurava*) is lost and I am made to look small” (*Amaruśatakam* verse 30). The macho phallic culture has always been quick to dismiss women as too old for sexual pleasure. Thus, in *Laṭakamelkam* (1962:12) a husband openly proclaims his aversion for his ‘*vrddhā*’ (old) wife whose sagged breasts he was afraid to touch(*patitakucasparśabhītaḥ*). Although, men continued to exercise the right to sexual gratification without any age bar, women were denied right to their sensual pleasures. Against this duplicitous sexual double standard, a woman’s voice rises strongly. Remonstrating she states, “How



unjustifiable and improper is the decree of fate, which makes men succumb to desire even when they are too old for them; especially when we see that the life of women is not limited to the contraction and fall of their heaving breasts”(Chaudhuri 1941: Verse 83).

VII

As we have argued in this paper, satire is a function of a particular cultural milieu. A wry gaze of an insider who has the ability to put finger on the raw nerve. However sometimes the satire is most revealing when an outsider fixes his gaze on a completely different society and makes penetrating observations on those cultural proclivities which would be lost on the native populace. Thus, Chinese traveler Hsuan Tsang (*Sī-Yu-Kī* 2003:73 &77) says about 7th century India that people are very particular about personal hygiene but finds their public thoroughfares filthy.

Al Beruni who came to India in the wake of Mahmud of Ghazni in 11th century made some very astute observations. He tried to understand India in an intellectually insightful way but was often stonewalled by his elite interlocutors. He caustically reproves, “their fanaticism is directed against those who do not belong to them...they call them *mlecchas* and forbid any connection with them because they will be polluted”(Sachau2002:3) In sheer exasperation against this opaqueness Al Beruni commented sarcastically “ They think there is no country but theirs ,no king like theirs ,no religion like theirs, no science like theirs...they are niggardly in communicating that which they know; take greatest possible care to withhold it from men of another caste still much more from any foreigner”(Sachau2002:6).

Zahiruddin Babur who came to a hotter country India from his cooler homeland Farghana via Kabul caricatured India as a land lacking in pleasures. It had no delicious fruits⁴ like grapes and melons, ice and cold water, no public baths and tasty food for sale in the market place. He sneered at Indians for lacking desirable appearance and ridiculed them for wearing just a loin cloth(*langoṭī*)” (*Baburnāmā* 1991:369-70).

⁴ Interestingly, the Indianization of his Mughal descendants was so complete that emperor Jahangir notes in his memoirs *Tūzuk-i-Jāhangīrī* (2006 :5 &116) how much he liked mangoes; so much so that he thought that with regards to fruits from Kabul none of them could compare favourably with the flavour of mango.



In conclusion one might say that since life itself is a satire we only need to document and highlight it; as Sanskrit litterateurs have managed to do. There is therefore, no need to be sidetracked by the traditional scholarly opinion that Sanskrit literature has lacked the genre of satire.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Dambha in the sense of religious hypocrisy is mentioned by Apte(1966 : 449)
- 2 In fact the character of Cāravāka in *Prabodhacandrodaya*(2009:68) refers to 3 Vedas as crook's patter (*dhūrta pralāpa*).
- 3 A 17 th century satire *Kali-Viḍambanm*(verses86-87) shows that character of religious hypocrisy had not changed in the many centuries that separated this text from *Prabodhacandrodaya*.
- 4 Interestingly, the Indianization of his Mughal descendants was so complete that emperor Jahangir notes in his memoirs *Tūzuk-i-Jāhangīrī* (2006 :5 & 116) how much he liked mangoes; so much so that he thought that with regards to fruits from Kabul none of them could compare favourably with the flavour of mango.