

**Women characters in the text *Sekaśubhodayā*: A Cosmopolitan voice of Moral and Ethical Values**

Bhattacharya, Partha Sarathi

Assistant Professor in Sanskrit, Baghajatin, Sammilani Mahavidyalaya

**Abstract**

“Social organization cannot be really understood except as a part of culture; and all special lines of enquiring referring to human activities, human groupings and human ideas and beliefs can meet and become cross fertilized in the comparative study of cultures”<sup>1</sup> Values, Morality and Ethics – this try polar system i.e. (the sense of righteous) are the epitome of Human existence. Although it is differ from man to man. In the present century search for a theory of values has become a separate branch and has been called *axiology*. According to our opinion the main approach to value system comprises two parts i.e. theistic and humanistic. Theistic approach opines that absolute values are related to absolute reality where the supreme power is the upholder of all values. Whereas, humanistic holds that the values are as a distinct component of the total human personality, which guide or affect attitude and behaviour of the individual and social groups. The text we are dealing here is entitled with *Sekaśubhodayā*; is a hagiological literature which attributed to *Halāyudha Mīśra*. The blending of Sanskrit and Bengali makes the text unique. Political discrepancy, social and moral degeneration, adultery and mutual rivalry projected boldly without much pretention. Although the text is a pen picture of decadent Medieval Bengal, still a handful of Women excels in their own merit and retains the morality that is equally relevant even in 21<sup>st</sup> century. The position of women in Medieval Bengal, especially of the house-wives of well-to-do families, as reflected in this story is somewhat unparalleled in Sanskrit literature. This text predicts as a unique collection in the genre of Sanskrit literature because of its sharp representation of women characters. Characters like Madhavī, Vidhutprabhā taught us a lesson that the concept of *Satyam*, *Śivam* and *Sundaram* is the beauty of human nature if we violate one another one

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* (vol. IV), New York: 1959: p 621.

automatically disturbed. Our endeavor is to reevaluate this value system in our life which is still relevant.

*Keywords:* *Sekaśubhodayā*, Madhavī, Vidhyutprabhā, concept of ethical and moral values.

## I

If we consider literature is a mirror of the society then our text also an integral part of it. It is not only a unique collection of medieval liturgical work but also is an ample example of several fragment short-stories, folk-tales, folk-songs and also miscellaneous stories with of rich human interest of everyday life which leads us to glimpse about the socio-historical and cultural atmosphere of medieval Bengal. Civilization, Society and culture always related to each other's periphery but the innermost differ between civilization and culture is that civilization is a part of a culture. So, for understanding the socio-historical aspects of the text *Sekaśubhodayā*; at first, we have to look out the contemporary situation of medieval Bengal which is very often reflected in our text although it is a forgery and its time not later than 16<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The text is to a large extending of Mohammedan inspiration in its contents. The appeal of the book to the people of whom it was originally intended which makes "an incontrovertible proof of

the right of the mosque and shrine to the rich lands it had been enjoying." (*Seka*, 1943, p viii). The language of this text is so called 'Dog Sanskrit' or Sanskrit written in colloquial style. The author thinks in Bengali and he make his Sanskrit following the style of Bengali 'he creates turns of expression and in flexional forms utterly foreign to Sanskrit whenever he feels that his knowledge of the language of the Gods is not equal to rendering his Bengali.' (Ibid).

## II

The position of women in Medieval Bengal, especially of the house-wives of well-to-do families, as reflected in this story is somewhat unparalleled in Sanskrit literature. We find many adulterous women in different places of Sanskrit literature, but the character like Vidyutprabhā is rarer. Vidyutprabhā was a play-actress and the daughter in law of the play-actor (naṭa) Gaṅga, but even being a house wife, she gives erotic pleasure among her customers. The great saint Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi was a misogynist who accosted her sheerly for being a woman. The

man was rigidly of the opinion that Male is created by the almighty with all merit; naturally all evils belong to women. Hearing such gender bigotry Vidyutprabhā replied in a verse which has enough aesthetic value. *siṃhāt siṃhaḥ samājāto mṛgān mṛgasamudbhavaḥ/pāpāt pāpam samājātam [kasya putro] bhavāniti//* (Sen,1963,5) means A lion is born of a lion and a deer originates from a deer, evil comes out from evil. So, from what you have been born? Her answer strongly argues for equality beyond gender discriminations. She assaulted king's minister at the front of the court not for the reason that he enjoyed her but he gave less money as she expected. When the minister wants her to come with suitable witness, the lady retorts with same smartness. 'Who indulges adultery with eyewitness?'-was her answer. Defeated the minister decided to die throwing himself into water. At such crisis, the bold lady changes her composure. *mayā yathocitam prāpya* (Sen,1963,86) the man is duly paid, the truth has come out. She wants nothing more. Another stirring remarks she makes is that dissatisfied Brahmans are lost as the satisfied rulers are; a bashful harlot is lost, and so is a shameless housewife- *asantuṣṭā dvijā naṣṭāḥ santuṣṭā hi*

*parthivaḥ/salajjā gaṇikā naṣṭā nirllajjāśca kulastriyaḥ//*(Sen,1963,86). which strikes that she was aware about righteousness. But she had the quality of forgiveness which is the greatest value among other values. Even the misogynist Sheikh could not but praise her *dhanyeyam narttakī* (Sen, 1963,87).

### III

The house wife like Mādhavi is also rarely found in Sanskrit literature. The brother-in-law of the king Lakṣmaṇasena, named Kumāradatta, molested her and she complained fearlessly in the court *rājaśyalako 'yaṃ Kumāradatto mama gṛhaṃ balāt praviśya vastraṃ vidṛtya stanamardanaṃ kṛtam* (Sen,1963,16) which means that very brother-in-law of the king, Kumāradatta, entered into my house forcibly and catching me by the clothes squeezed my breasts. She had a strong belief on right justice about law and piety which has been permanent. No one could exert undue force *asmin rāṣṭre sāsvaro dharmo āsīt. okapi valāvalam kartum na śaknoti* (Sen,1963,16). Most fascinating fact is that when the king was tried to kill Kumāradatta, Mādhavi quickly bowed down to the king and made him desist. Because according to Mādhavi, this molest neither claimed her life, nor

corrupted her caste. *rājan asya karāvalamvanena mama prāṇā na gatāḥ, nāpi jātiḥ* (Sen, 1963, 17). It shows that forgiveness is the best virtue that can change a beast into a man reborn. It is the resonance of our ancient ethic *kṣamā hi paramo dharmah*. Apart from this, in this text other women characters are shown with falsity. We often see them plotting for relationship to gain money. Sometimes they are held as liars, cheat and pervert. Likely so a Muslim lady named Āyāsi was blackmailing Sheikh and the false lady went to t Kāzi but ultimately the truth comes out. These kinds of facts show that in the stage of social and moral decadence women exercised their capability for proper justice. Apparently so called greedy and selfish women gentry boldly assert their individuality, worth and sometimes moral education. *yathā śiśur mātur anke candram jighāmsate sadā| na tasmai śapate candro nāpi kruddhaḥ kadācana||* 1.17 i.e. Just as a child in his mother's arms often utters threats to the moon, but the moon curses him not, nor is ever displeased. Translation by Sukumar Sen, 1963) which shows that might be they had no textual or traditional education but they were aware of self-respect and if necessary, they

were not ready to stay behind while seeking proper justice. It re estimates and re assesses that even in social and moral decadences somehow our own values glimpse independently. Because to estimate the truth there is no need to help others since Truth itself is a power (*satyameve jayate*).

#### IV

If we try to sum up above discussion, we arrive at the heart of some important points. First of all, the Medieval Bengal usually considered as a period of decay and oppression failed suppressing women voice thoroughly. Women, despite having low concern were aware of self-respect and often they contain ready wit. Secondly, their intelligence is carried convincingly in their discourse. Thirdly, women are not to blame solely for degeneration because male are also equally proactive as we see even today in cases of women molestations, sexual abuses and so on. Education fits hypocrite class like disguise but ugly reality of medieval Bengal is often seen unmasked day in and day out. The newspapers bear the disgrace of educated society. So, the text obliquely involves a pretentious modern society thick with hypocrites. A harlot like Vidyutprabhā stresses on forgiveness. She teaches us to

hate the sin not the sinner. Apparently, she was fallen but what she embodies is the crux of universal humanism. Therefore, in exterior, it is the disgrace of society but the inherent message voices sustainable development and spirited womanhood. To conclude, it can be summed up that the text is a trustworthy treatment of society and having its feet planted on Medieval Bengal but its eyes are looking afar at the depth of newer Bengal. The morality and sustainable development demand a relevance that is universal, timeless and true in every spell of humanity.

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