

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE PROSE DICTION OF THE SANSKRIT DRAMA

S. Weeratunge

The Sanskrit drama, unlike its counterpart in most other literatures as, for instance, the Greek tragedy, came under the growing influence of Kāvya from its early beginnings. Most of the dramatists laid more emphasis on the poetic aspect than on the all-important dramatic element. In fact as Shekhar says, "the dramatist had to be a poet first and the play, though intended to be enacted on the stage, provided more attraction for mere reading".¹ "Since, in drama, as Lévi says, sentiment is the essential element, as also in other literary works (*—l'élément essentiel dans le drama, comme dans les autres ouvrages littéraires, est le ruse*),² it was never considered as a separate literary genre and was often classified as a subdivision of Kāvya. It was another type of Kāvya—the *Dṛśya*, that which could be enacted and, therefore, seen (cf. Dhanañjaya's explanation—*rūpaṃ dṛśyatayocyate*)³ as distinguished from the *Śrava* which could only be read and heard. Later theorists like Abhinavagupta did not hesitate to identify poetry with drama—*cf Kāvyaṃ tāvat mukhyato daśantipātātmakāmeva.....kāvyaṃ ca nātyameva*.⁴ A study of the extant dramatic works clearly reveals the tendency of most dramatists to adorn their works with the poetic embellishments of the Kāvya, thereby sacrificing the dramatic effect to the extravagance of description. Very few dramatists have been able to extricate themselves from this tendency and lend their works some individuality. It is a strange feature that some of the dramatists of great repute like Kālidāsa and Śūdraka were, at times, apt to lay more stress on the poetic aspect, heaping their works with a 'heavy load of poetic fancies' and a 'multiplicity of verses' (vide Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśīya* IV and the incessant string of verses in *Mṛcchakatika* V).

The prose of most of the extant Sanskrit dramas represents a developed stage in the evolution of the prose style. The later dramas, especially, influenced undoubtedly by the developments of the prose Kāvya, show distinct tendencies towards ornamentation. This influence of the prose Kāvya has introduced into the prose of the drama certain features which are detrimental from the dramatic point of view. However, with the verses contri-

1. Shekhar, I, *Sanskrit Drama—Its origin and decline*, Leiden, 1960, p. 63.

2. Lévi, S. *Le Theatre Indien, Deuxieme Tirage*, Paris, 1963, p. 257.

3. *Dasarupa* of Dhanañjaya (DR), Ed. by G. C. O. Haas, New York, 1965, I. 8, p. 3.

4. *Abhinavabhāratī* (GOS, Vol. I) p. 92.