

## Mahābhārata Testimonia in the Bṛhatkathā-Ślokaśaṅgraha

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0.1 Testimonia provide, as S.M. Katre observes in his classic *Introduction to Indian Textual Criticism*, "direct evidence of the condition of a text in the ages before the existing manuscript tradition begins." Therefore, testimonia are of some importance in textual criticism. Katre classifies testimonia into the following categories: anthologies, translations, direct quotations, imitations or parodies, epitomes or adaptations, ancient commentaries, parallel versions and the like.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the *Mahābhārata*, such testimonia include, besides the adaptations in Javanese (ca. AD 1000) and Telugu (ca. AD 1025), direct quotations occurring in several Sanskrit texts.<sup>2</sup>

0.2 Budhasvāmin's *Bṛhatkathā-ślokaśaṅgraha* (=BKSS)<sup>3</sup> is one of the early texts to contain quotations from the *Mahābhārata* (=MBh), in particular from the chapters that constitute the *Bhagavadgīta* (= BhG). The BKSS, as is well known, is the earliest Sanskrit version of the lost Pāisācī *Bṛhatkathā* of Guṇāḍhya. Budhasvāmin playfully incorporates MBh verses into his narrative, sometimes with direct attribution to the source and sometimes without. Unfortunately neither Budhasvāmin's

delightful technique of narration<sup>4</sup> nor the date of his composition<sup>5</sup> has received adequate critical attention.

0.3 The quotations in the BKSS, though not many in number, are some of the earliest evidences we have for the text of the MBh. Therefore, they deserve a close examination. In the following pages, I shall first briefly explain the context in which the quotations occur in the BKSS and then compare their readings with those in the Critical Edition (= Crit. Ed.) of the MBh.<sup>6</sup>

1.1 BKSS 15.81 = MBh 6.30.6 (BhG 8.6). The first two passages occur in the story of Vegavatī, a Vidyādhārī whom the protagonist Naravāhanadatta wins as his wife. One night, Vegavatī quarrels with him over a petty matter and goes to sleep on a separate bed. Naravāhanadatta therefore has a disturbed sleep. Suddenly he sees himself being carried away in the sky by Vegavatī's brother, the wicked Mānasavega. Naravāhanadatta tries to engage the latter in a trial of strength but Mānasavega brushes aside his attacks and asks him to choose the manner in which he would wish to die. Convinced that there was no other alternative but death at the hands of the powerful adversary, Naravāhanadatta decides to die while thinking of his beloved Vegavatī, so that he may attain her at least in the next life:

yaṁ yaṁ eva smaran bhāvaṁ tyajaty ante kalevaram /  
taṁ taṁ eva kilāpnoti tadā tadbhāvabhāvitaḥ //

BKSS 15.81

This verse is taken from the BhG where the Lord declares that whosoever dies taking His name would definitely reach Him:

*yaṁ yaṁ vāpi smaran bhāvaṁ tyajaty ante kalevaran /  
taṁ tarṇ evaiti kaunteya sadā tadbhāvabhāvitaḥ //*

MBh 6.30.6 = BhG 8.6.

(The Crit. Ed. offers the following variae lectionis: for *vāpi*: *cāpi*, *cānte*; for *ante*: *etat*; for *tarṇ evaiti*: *tarṇ eveti*; and for *tadbhāva*: *mad°*, *sad°*).

Here the reading of the BKSS is without doubt superior. *eva* is better than *va+api*; the former is integral to the text; *vāpi* is a line filler without any contextual meaning. MBh *kaunteya* is again a line filler, but *eti* (“attains”) has greater significance in the Lord’s mouth. BKSS *kila* refers to the hoary tradition. BKSS *āpnoti* (“obtains”) implies that Naravāhanadatta will obtain Vegavatī. Is it a change deliberately introduced in the BKSS?<sup>7</sup>

1.2 BKSS 15.105 = MBh 9.24.50. However, before Naravāhanadatta is forced to choose one of the two ways of dying, Vegavatī rescues him from Mānasavega’s clutches. Through her magical power, she lets Naravāhanadatta fall to the ground gently like a leaf, before she takes on the mighty Mānasavega. But, as ill-luck would have it, Naravāhanadatta falls on the dry bed of a deep well—out of the frying-pan into the fire, as it were. This mishap reminds him of a similar situation encountered by Sañjaya in the MBh. Though literally in deep distress, Naravāhanadatta is nevertheless amused to recall (*vihasya smṛtavān*) Sañjaya’s parallel situation:

*tatastivraṁviṣādo’pi vihasya smṛtavān idan /  
sañjauyasya vacaḥ kaṣṭe vartamānasya śakyate // 15.104//  
dhṛṣṭadyumnād ahaṁ muktaḥ kathañcit krāntavāhanaḥ /  
pātitaḥ sātyakānīke duṣkṛtī narake yathā // 15.105//*

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The original of the second verse occurs in the Śalyaparvan of the MBh.

*dhṛṣṭadyumnād ahaṁ muktaḥ kathañcicchrāntavāhanaḥ /  
pātito madhavānīke duṣkṛtī narake yathā // 9.24.50//*

Sañjaya was narrating to Dhṛtarāṣṭra the day’s events on the battle field. Having been first attacked by Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Sañjaya freed himself with great difficulty. A moment later, he was pounced upon by Sātyaki with his army of four hundred chariots. Therefore the BKSS correctly reads *sātyakānīke pātitaḥ*, instead of *mādhavānīke pātitaḥ* of the MBh. Lacote states that Budhasvāmin changed the text from *mādhavānīka* to *sātyakānīka* for greater clarity.<sup>8</sup> But when one reads the context in the MBh, it becomes obvious that the army, or more correctly the battalion (*ānīka*), belonged to Sātyaki and not to Mādhava-Kṛṣṇa. Sātyaki is indeed mentioned in the verses preceding (No. 49) and following (No. 51) the quoted verse (No. 50):

*jitas tena [dhṛṣṭadyumna] vayaṁ sarve vyāpayāma raṇāt tataḥ /  
athapaśyaṁ sātyakiṁ tarṇ upāyāntarṇ mahārathin /  
rathāiṣṭatuḥṣatair viro maṁ cābhyadravad āhave //49//  
dhṛṣṭadyumnād ahaṁ muktaḥ kathañcic chrāntavāhanaḥ /  
pātito mādhavānīke duṣkṛtī narake yathā /  
tatra yuddharṇ abhūt ghoran muhūrtaṁ atidārunaṁ //50//  
sātyakis tu mahābāhur mama hatvā paricchadaṁ /  
jīvagrāharṇ agrhnan māṁ mūrchitaṁ patitaṁ bhūvi // 51//*

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It may also be recalled that Mādhava-Kṛṣṇa participated in the Great Battle in his personal capacity as Arjuna’s charioteer, and was not accompanied by any army

of his own. Therefore, the original reading in the MBh also must have been *sātyakānika*, which got corrupted to *mādhavānaka* in course of time.<sup>9</sup> Thus the testimonium in the BKSS offers a positive evidence to a stage when the text of the MBh was logical and free from the subsequent corruption. However, this logical reading *sātyakānika* is not supported by existing manuscript tradition. Therefore, the Crit. Ed. retains the reading *mādhavānika*.

In the Vulgate Edition of the MBh, the verse in question reads thus:

*dhṛṣṭadyumnād ahaṁ muktaḥ kathañcic chrāntavāhanāt /  
pātito mādhavanikaṁ duṣkṛti narakaṁ yathā //*

making the root *pat* govern the object in accusative. It is worth noting that in this respect the Crit. Ed. chooses a reading akin to that in the BKSS.

Finally, for the adjective at the end of the second *pada*, there are three readings: Vulgate *śrāntavāhanāt*; Crit. Ed. *śrāntavāhanaḥ*; BKSS *krāntavāhanaḥ*. Here too the Crit. Ed. and the BKSS agree in as much as they treat the expression as an attribute of *ahaṁ* (i.e. Sañjaya, in the nominative) and not of Dhṛṣṭadyumna (in the ablative). But then it is difficult to decide between the readings of the Crit. Ed. and the BKSS. In the former case, it would mean that Sañjaya whose chariot horses were tired (*śrānta*), became free from Dhṛṣṭadyumna with great difficulty; and in the latter case: Sañjaya became free from Dhṛṣṭadyumna, after having passed through (*krānta*) the arrayed chariots of Dhṛṣṭadyumna with great difficulty.

1.3 BKSS 18.21 = MBh 12.138.36. The next four quotations occur in the emboxed story of the Merchant Sānudāsa. Sānudāsa was born to his parents after a long period of waiting. Throughout his childhood, he was kept busy with his studies. Deprived of fun and games, he grew up into a sombre youth who was shy even towards his own wife. His friend Dhruvaka attempts to remedy the situation and advises him to follow the gay life of the Nāgarika. In the course of his peroration, Dhruvaka quotes the following words of "wisdom" allegedly from the mouth of Bhīmasena.

*na cāpi svārthasiddhyarthaṁ mayā tvaṁ vipralabhyase /  
tathā hi bhimasenasya vākyaṁ ākarṇyatāṁ yathā //18.20//  
pratyupasthitakālasya sukhasya parivarjanaṁ /  
anāgatasukhāśā ca naiśā buddhimatāṁ nayaḥ // 18.21//*

The second verse is a quotation from the Śāntiparvan of the MBh (12.138.36). But in the MBh these words are uttered by Bhīṣma and not by Bhīmasena. Lacote opines that our poet confuses between Bhīmasena and Bhīṣma.<sup>10</sup> Though both these names carry the same literal meaning, Budhasvāmin could not have mistaken one for the other.<sup>11</sup> What is more likely is that Budhasvāmin deliberately altered the name to show Dhruvaka's superficial scholarship: Dhruvaka, the gay youth, was merely trying to sound profound but was not particular about the correct attribution of the quotation. Indeed Sanudasa remarks that Dhruvaka is using profound sentences for trivial purposes.<sup>12</sup>

1.4 BKSS 18.104 = MBh 6.40.48 (BhG 18.48). Finally, by means of drugged wine and through the charms of the courtesan Gaḡadattā, Dhruvaka succeeds in converting the staid Sānudāsa to the Nāgarika way of life. While

Sānudāsa is squandering away the family fortune in the company of Gaḡadattā, his father passes away, creditors appropriate the family mansion and his mother and wife are forced to live in a miserable hovel in the poor-men's quarters. The king appoints Sānudāsa to the hereditary office of the Chief of the Merchants' Guild (*Sreṣṭhin*) and exhorts him to lead a steadfast life. Sānudāsa, ever ready to listen to others' advice, follows the king's command literally and severs all connections to Gaḡadattā. When this lady sends him a message that she is pining for him, Sānudāsa sends a stern reply: a courtesan should not have permanent attachment to any man, she should scrupulously follow the calling of her profession. Let her honour Viṣṇu's (Kṛṣṇa's) words that one should not give up one's profession howsoever debased it may be:

*sadoṣarṇapi na tyājyaṁ sahaṛaṁ karma bandhubhiḥ /  
itīdaṁ vacanaṁ viṣṇoḥ sāpi sambhāvayatv iti // 18.104//*

This is not a direct quotation but an adaptation of the following verse from the BhG:

*sahaṛaṁ karma kaunteya sadoṣarṇapi na tyajet /  
sarvāraṁbhā hi doṣeṇa dhūmenāgnirīvāvṛtaḥ //*

MBh 6.40.48 = BhG 18.48:

1.5 BKSS 18.479-480 = MBh 12.136.175. Sānudāsa, however, does not continue his steadfast life for long and gets into several adventures. Once, while he is proceeding on a narrow mountain path as a member of a caravan, the caravan is attacked by a band of robbers. There ensues a fierce fight between the members of the caravan and the robbers on the precarious mountain path. Finally when

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only one of the attackers was left, Acera, the leader of the caravan orders the reluctant Sānudāsa to kill this last robber. It is either the life of a single enemy or the lives of his entire caravan members. So saying, the caravan leader makes Sānudāsa perform the heartless task of felling the lone enemy, just as Viṣṇu made Arjuna perform the merciless task of fighting against his own kinsmen:

*na cāpi rakṣitum kṣudraṁ ātmānaṁ dustyajam tyajet /  
ātmā tu satataṁ rakṣyo dārairāpi dhanairāpi // 18.479. = # #  
ityādi bhagavadgītāmātraṁ daṇḍakam īrayan /  
sa pārtham iva māṁ viṣṇuḥ karma krūraṁ akārayat // 18.480//*

Verse 479 cd is an adaptation of MBh 12.136.175 cd:

*naṭvātmanaḥ sampradānaṁ dhanaratnavad iṣyate /  
ātmā tu sarvato rakṣyo dārairāpi dhanairāpi //*

12.136.175:

What does Budhasvāmin mean by *ity ādi bhagavadgītāmātraṁ daṇḍakaṁ īrayan*? He is certainly not attributing the verse from the Śāntiparvan to the BhG. *Daṇḍaka* is the name of a long metre, but used here metaphorically in the sense of sanctimonious discourse, and this discourse is lengthy like the *Bhagavadgītā*. It is the use of such refreshing irony which distinguishes the BKSS from the other versions of the *Bṛhatkathā*.<sup>13</sup>

1.6 BKSS 18.255 = MBh 12.47.41. In a further adventure, Sānudāsa was caught in a ship-wreck. While reciting the prayer to Kṛṣṇa in the form of the Eternal Waters (*toyātmā*), he finds a wooden plank with the support of which he safely reaches the shore of the ocean:

*yasya keśeṣu jīmūta iti gītān anusmaran /  
daivāt phalakamālāmbhya prāpaṁ toyanidhestatām //* # #  
18.255.

The reference here is to Bhīṣma's prayer on the arrow-bed at MBh 12.47.41:

*yasya keśeṣu jīmūtā nadyaḥ sarvaśaṅghīṣu /  
kukṣau samudrās catvāras tasmai toyātmane namaḥ //*<sup>14</sup>

1.7 BKSS 20.373.cd = MBh 1.107.32.cd. Our final testimonium occurs in another emboxed story, that of the city-mouse and forest-mouse. While the former was visiting the latter in the deep jungle, a fire breaks out. Instead of rescuing the wife and the new-born children of his friend, the city-mouse takes to his heels, uttering the dictum

*ātmārthe sakalān jahyāt paṇḍitāḥ pṛthivīm iti //*  
20.373cd//.

This line occurs at MBh 1.107.32.cd and is repeated at several other places in the epic.<sup>15</sup>

2.0 As some of the earliest extant quotations or adaptations of the MBh text, the passages discussed above are not without interest. However, it must be borne in mind that these testimonia, like rain drops in the ocean, do not substantially change the reading of the text of the critical edition of the MBh. The great editor V.S. Sukthankar himself cautioned against undue reliance on testimonia in the following words:

It is perhaps well to add in this place that a certain amount of caution is necessary in making any critical

use of citations of stray *Mahābhārata* stanzas we meet with again in other works. We must, in the first place, bear in mind that most of the other works have yet to be properly edited. Even in critically edited texts we must take into account the various readings of the passage in question in the manuscripts collated. Then in the citations we must allow for failures of memory; since in ancient times the stanzas were almost invariably quoted from memory, and the quotation was never compared with the original. Moreover, we must never forget that probably from time immemorial there have existed local versions of the *Mahābhārata*. The citations made even by very old writers were from these local versions. A citation by a writer of the eighth century or even sixth century proves nothing for the *Ur-Mahābhārata*, that ideal but impossible desideratum; though the citation is far older than our manuscripts, it is evidence only for the text of the local *Mahābhārata* in the eighth, respectively of the sixth century, notwithstanding that the differences between the various recensions and versions of the *Mahābhārata* must diminish as we go back further and further.<sup>16</sup>

### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> S.M. Katre, *Introduction to Indian Textual Criticism*, with Appendix II by P.K. Gode, second edition, Poona 1954, pp. 33-34.

<sup>2</sup> On the quotations from the Adiparvan, see V.S. Sukthankar, "Prolegomina" [to the Critical Edition of the Adiparvan of the *Mahābhārata*], reprinted in: P.K. Gode (ed), *Sukthankar Memorial Edition*, Vol. I: Critical Studies

in the Mahabharata, Bombay 1944, pp. 10-140, esp. 36-41. On those from the Araṇyaparvan, see idem, "Introduction" [to the Critical Edition of the Araṇyaparvan], reprinted in *Sukthankar Memorial Edition*, Vol. I, pp. 141-186, esp. 151-152.

<sup>3</sup> Budhasvāmin, *Bṛhatkathā-ślokaśaṅgraha*, edited with notes by Félix Lacôte and translated into French by Félix Lacôte and Louis Renou, Paris 1908-29. Two other editions are published in India. (i) *Bṛhatkathāślokaśaṅgraha: a Study*, Varanasi 1974, which contains Lacôte's text without the critical apparatus, and notes by V.S. Agrawala. (ii) *Budhasvāmin's Bṛhatkathāślokaśaṅgraha* with English translation by Ram Prakash Poddar and Neelima Sinha, Varanasi 1986.

<sup>4</sup> The only scholars who paid some attention to this aspect are J.A.B. Van Buitenen, who translated some stories from the BKSS in his *Tales from Ancient India*, New York 1971, and A.K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. II, Delhi 1974, pp. 129-138.

<sup>5</sup> Félix Lacôte, *Essai sur Guṇādhyā et la Bṛhatkathā*, Paris 1908, assigns the BKSS to the eighth or ninth century AD, which according to M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der Indischen Litteratur*, Volume 3, Leipzig 1920, p. 316, n. 1, is a mere conjecture. V.S. Agrawala, op. cit., p. 299, on the other hand, thinks that the BKSS was "written sometime in the Gupta period."

<sup>6</sup> V.S. Sukthankar et al (ed), *Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata*, Vols. 1-19, Poona, 1927-66.

<sup>7</sup> Lacôte does not comment on this parallel.

<sup>8</sup> Lacôte, Text, p. 185, note on verse XV.106.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, the grammatical construction of *sātyakāṅṅika* is rather problematic.

<sup>10</sup> Lacote, Text, p. 220, note on verse XVI.21.

<sup>11</sup> Nor would any other person, considering the wide disparity between these two personages.

<sup>12</sup> BKSS 18.22: ... *tuccha eva prayojane / idam samrambhagāmbhīryam?* [vacaḥ].

<sup>13</sup> This irony is well reflected in the translations by Lacôte ("Des formules de ce genre, il m'en récita un chapelet long comme la Bhagavad-gīta," Translation, p. 164 ) and Warder ("And so on, he poured out a song as long as the *Bhagavadgītā*," op. cit., p. 138). Poddar and Sinha, however, miss the real purport of *Daṇḍaka* and render the line thus: "In this way, showing the stick of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, ..." (op. cit., p. 359).

<sup>14</sup> See Lacôte, text, pp. 242-243, note on XVIII.255.

<sup>15</sup> Besides these direct quotations or adaptations of the lines of the MBh, there are also several allusions to the theme and characters of the Great Epic in the BKSS. For example, in one emboxed story, the merchant Buddhavarman's wife advises him to utter a small falsehood for a larger good, and cites the example of the Pāṇḍava prince Yudhiṣṭhira:

*kārye guruṇi prāpte mithyā satyam apīṣyate /  
aśvatthāmā hato drauṇirityūce kim na pāṇḍavaḥ //*

BKSS 22.39.

Like Dhruvaka earlier, the merchant's wife is alluding to the Epic for rhetorical purposes and is thereby simplifying the issue. What Yudhiṣṭhira actually said was not quite *aśvatthāmā hato drauṇiḥ*. Aloud he says *Aśvatthāmā hataḥ* and adds in an undertone *hataḥ kuṅjaraḥ*, hoping thus to escape the sin of uttering falsehood.

<sup>16</sup> Sukthankar, "Prolegomina," op. cit., p. 41.

*The practice of equitable justice together with truthfulness in thought, word and deed in one word: that which is in conformity with the Vedas, that alone is Dharma or righteousness.*

— Dayanand Saraswati

*Soft speech is the severest austerity. Humility is one quality liked by the Lord.*

— Basaveswara

*Rid thy mind of lust, wrath, covetousness, obstinacy and attachment. Thou shalt then be qualified to behold the Supreme Essence in this world itself and meet Him.*

— Guru Gobind Singh