

PART - III

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

CHAPTER - IINTRODUCTORYGeographical Data- Difficulties in Discussion :

The most important contribution of the prose kāvyas of the period to the history of ancient India is the geographical information which they afford us. True to the dictum that literature reflects the life in general and the contemporary culture in particular, the prose-kāvya of the period under study mirror the country in which they were written. They afford us a glimpse of the geographical extent and natural & territorial divisions of the country, its mountains and oceans forests and rivers. It is here that prose-writers can be credited with having geographical data in a very real sense by undertaken^{ing} of the original survey of the place-names in vast-area of the country. The reason for such richness of geographical data in the works, is due to the fact that place names form an integral part of the description which is the object of every writer of prose-kāvya. An analytical approach to the place names and various horizons reveals to us many a forgotten chapter of history and settlement on land. As such the contributions which prose writers make in this respect through their poetic expositions possess abiding historical value.

Such being the case, a study of the geographical data, in prose-kāvya on the other hand, is beset with many difficulties. First of these, is the uncertain and conventional

character of the prose writer's geography. The early geography of India shares much of obscurity of the early history. Thus, Geographical uncertainty has lead to the historical uncertainty. The employment for modern names by a kind of literary licence for which it is difficult to find an appropriate name called conventional has made the problem very complicated. When for instance Bāna in the *Harṣacarita* calls Bhāskarvarman¹, ruler of Prāgjyotiṣa, there can be little about that he was expressing himself in a way perfectly intelligible to his contemporaries, but he could hardly have adopted the then accepted designation of the country which is now called Assam, for that was known as Kāmrupa² to Bāna's contemporary Hiun Tṣang, The Chinese traveller in the seventh century and is mentioned under that name in an inscription of the 4th century A.D.³

The use of the name Videha in the *Daśakumāracarita* is probably quite similar, if Dandin wrote his work in the 8th century A.D. as its style shows.

The frequent occurrence of the same name in respect of places, mountains and the like in the various parts of the country, is also the cause of obscurity and difficulty. The difficulty is still the more owing to the uncertainty of date. The context sometimes decides Kōśala in the Buddhistic Suttas, in the northern country in the *Daśakumāracarita*, it is the Southern.⁴

The love of synonyms of the prose-writers has made the discussion of geographical data some what difficult.

1. HC. Ch IV E-VI

2. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World* (BRWW) Boston, 1885, Volume II, p. 195.

3. Sunda Gupta. CII; III-No. 1, l. 22.

4. Weber Ind. Stre I. p. 312; Pischel-Srngarakilka. Kiel. 1886. Introd. p. 13. Quoted by M. Collins in GDAD 3

Due to this practice, we not only find the same name in different places unintelligible through confusing phenomenon, but different names are used frequently for the same place, tribe or natural feature. Thus for instance we meet with Kusumpura by the side of Pushaptra, Sakranrasta⁵ by the side of Inderprasta.

The traditional element in Geogranhy preponderating in the writers of the prose kavyas of the period is a further disturbing element. Names appear to be handed down from author to author and used without any regard to the existence of the places and peoples concerned and the geographical fancies of the early age are similarly propagated from generation to generation and sometimes find their way centuries⁶ later into the sober pages of technical literature. For instance the nine fold division of Bhārtavarsa, given in the third book of Vishnu Purāna, is repeated to the later as the 15th century by the Astronomer Bhāskarācārya in his Siddhānt⁷siromani and the Geographical section of Vardhamihira's Brhatsamhitā book XIV. The writer of the prose kavyas follows the tradition in right spirit. This has made the problem⁸ much difficult.

No regards has been shown by the prose-writers of the period to the distinction between real and mythological or fabulous geography. Some time a broad line of demarcation between the two is wholly disregarded. For instance when Darvasāra in Daakumaracarita is said to retire to the

5. M. Collins GDRD; p. 8

6. Ibid.

7. Tr. L. Wilkinson. Bib. Ind. Calcutta 1861 p. 120.

8. Dr. Fleet. Ind. Art, XXVII.

mountain of Kubera i.e. Kailasa, to practice austerities. No doubt the Himalayas are meant the mountains but the name is nevertheless purely mythical. In this particular case we find ourselves once again in peculiar position due to the traditional bias of Hindu mind.⁹ Similarly peculiar and fabulous notions have been embodied in phrases like Siddhas,¹⁰ Yakṣa and Kinnars etc.

A comparative and historical study of the geography of classical prose-writers of the period reveals a close agreement. Among the various writers under our study with regard to the conception of different geographical units and divisions of the ancient Bharata. The broad similarity of geographical units and divisions in the descriptions of the prose kavyas points to the fact that geographical names were seldom disturbed in those days, even though changes took place quite frequently in the political field. A good number of old geographical names are still current either in identical form or in slightly changed form, in modern names, facilitating us to identify the ancient places.

But in spite of the above mentioned difficulties, we hope to form a general outline of the topography of the land by asserting out the data at hand and corroborating it with other evidences, as and when available.

9. GDRD.

10. Op. cit.