

GUDRUN BÜHNEMANN: *Budha-Kauśika's*

*Rāmarakṣāstotra: a contribution to the Study of Sanskrit devotional poetry.*

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It is not difficult to see why little attention has so far been paid by scholars to the popular genre known as *stotra* (= *stuti* = *stava*), lit. 'hymn of praise'. As S. K. De put it:

'From the point of view of those who believe in an infinitely merciful god, it is absurd to suppose that the god would wait until mankind had reached particular metaphysical evolution and learned to clothe its praise and prayer in a grammatically and philosophically correct form before he would respond to his fervent appeal for help and guidance' (*Aspects of Sanskrit literature*, Calcutta, 1959, 110).

This observation accounts for the vastness in quantity of Hindu devotional *stotras* (in print, MSS, or merely orally transmitted) since the rise of medieval sects and cults, the variety in their form, and the unevenness in their literary merit. It, however, also accounts for their significance as a repository of the creed and credulity of the people.

Recently the genre in question has been investigated by no less an authority than J.

Gonda, with his usual thoroughness (in his *Medieval religious literature in Sanskrit*, Wiesbaden, 1977, ch. xiv: 'Stotra literature', pp. 232-270). Gudrun Bühnemann's present undertaking admirably dovetails with Gonda's overall treatment. It serves as a supplementary illustrative study in depth of a single popular sample—the *Rāmarakṣāstotra*. The latter has been studied by the author not only textually but also contextually, i.e. *in situ*. In Part 1 she has painstakingly assembled and critically studied different versions of the *stotra*, including a Balinese one. In Part 2 she deals with interpretations from Sanskrit and Marāṭhī sources. In Part 3 she looks at the complex ritual application of the *stotra* and the musical aspects of its recitation. Of special interest is the author's analysis of the structure of the *stotra*, although generalizing from it to stereotyped characteristics is bound to be hampered by the open-ended variety of this genre.

On p. 9, n. 1 we read: 'The terms "stotra, stuti, stava" are generally translated as "hymns of praise". The contents of many compositions named "stotra" show that this translation is often misleading'. This attitude is scarcely consistent with another statement, on p. 103, n. 87, where, referring to the *Śaiva Upaniṣads* the author says: 'I treat these later Upaniṣads as stotras which eulogize a personal deity and agree only in their outer form with the old texts of this name but not in their content'. In other words, the author herself concedes that the content consisting of *eulogium* is the defining characteristic of the *stotra* genre.

In the last chapter ('Conclusions') the author reflects on factors accounting for the popularity of the particular *stotra* singled out by her for study. An obvious factor passed over here is the double promise extended by the *stotra* to its faithful reciters of both *bhukti* and *mukti*, namely mundane enjoyment and transcendence—the best of both worlds—an offer which it must have been felt difficult to refuse.

The following minor criticisms are to be made. (1) Sanskrit philosophical terminology clearly distinguishes between (i) a sense-faculty (*jñānendriya*) and (ii) a sense-organ (*goḷaka*) which is its visible physical location (*āyatana*, *adhiṣṭhāna*) or duct (*pranālikā*). Hence the expression 'five organs of knowledge' (p. 79, n. 64) where (i) and not (ii) is intended is a misnomer.

(2) In verse 24 (p. 32) the term *śraddhā* (in *mad-bhaktah śraddhayānvitah*) would be better served by an expression such as 'faith, trust, reliance' than by 'devotion' (which may be reserved for *bhakti*, as is apparently intended in the title of the book under review). For, as shown by Minoru Hara and others, the terms *śraddhā* and *bhakti* are not synonyms.

(3) The epithet *puruṣah pūrṇah* in verse 22 is rendered as 'the Supreme Being', whereas 'the Person Perfect' appears to be intended. (Cf. the epithet *puruṣah purāṇah* [sic!] 'the Person Pre-eternal' for Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavadgītā* 11.38, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 8.12.44. A substitution in the *stotra* of *purāṇah* by *pūrṇam* for prosodic reasons cannot be ruled out.)

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(4) In verse 23 *vedānta-vedyo yajñeśaḥ* is rendered as 'the one whom the Upaniṣads know, the lord of sacrifice'. Another possibility might have been noted: 'the lord of sacrifice, known from the Upaniṣads' (and intended creative ambivalence here cannot be ruled out). Cf. *Bhavavadgītā* 15.15c: *vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo . . .* 'That which is to be known through all the Vedas (i.e. their subject-matter) am I'.

(5) An oversight may account for a mistranslation on p. 28 (verse 24) of *aśvamedhādhikam puṇyam samprāpnoti* as 'acquires more merit than (one who performs) sacrifices like [sic] the Aśvamedha' (p. 32). Instead it should run: '. . . than (one who performs) the Aśvamedha'.

TUVIA GELBLUM

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