# *THE HERMIT & THE LOVE-THIEF*

*Sanskrit Poems*
*of Bhartrihari and Bilhaṇa*

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# INTRODUCTION

IN INDIA, where the historical reality of ancient poets and even kings is elusive, poetry in the classical genre of the fragmentary lyric (*khaṇḍakāvya*) has usually been preserved anonymously. Despite this, several collections of miniature poems are attributed to known authors by the rich legendary traditions surrounding their names. Bhartrihari and Bilhaṇa are prominent in Indian literature for the quality of their poetry and the power of their legends.[1]

Bhartrihari was a philosopher of the fifth century A.D. He is the legendary author of the *Śatakatraya,* a three-part collection of Sanskrit poems about political wisdom, erotic passion, and renunciation. Popular stories portray Bhartrihari as a world-weary king who renounced society in bitter reaction to the infidelity of lovers. One version says that a brahman priest who had obtained a fruit of immortality decided to give it to his king, Bhartrihari. But the king gave it to his beloved queen, who gave it to her paramour, who in turn gave it to one of his mistresses, and she presented it again to the king. After reflecting for a time on this chain of events, the king cursed love and retired to the forest:[2]

> She who is the constant object of my thought
> is indifferent to me,
> is desirous of another man,
> who in his turn adores some other woman,
> but this woman takes delight in me.
> Damn her, damn him, the god of love,
> the other woman, and myself!

In an early written version of the Bhartrihari legend recorded by the Chinese pilgrim I-ching, who visited India in the seventh century, Bhartrihari is a Buddhist grammarian renowned for his continuing vacillation between the secluded life of a monk and the world of pleasure. In his epigrammatic poems of discontent Bhartrihari decries his own failure, fate, and the greedy inhabitants of his courtly world. The poet can-

not choose between asceticism and worldly indulgence because he finds them equally attractive, and equally deficient. He dreams of finding salvation as a hermit meditating on Lord Shiva in a mountain cave washed by sprays of the sacred river Ganges, or lying embraced by Nature:

> Earth his soft couch,
> arms of creepers his pillow,
> the sky his canopy,
> tender winds his fan,
> the moon his brilliant lamp,
> indifference his mistress,
> detachment his joy—
> tranquil, the ash-smeared hermit
> sleeps in ease like a king.

The content of the verses, however, suggests that Bhartrihari was not a king but a courtier-poet in the service of a king. He makes frequent references to the degradation of a courtier's life and to the strained relationship between king and counselor. Bhartrihari is acutely sensitive to the lack of esteem for a poor poet in a materialistic society.

Bhartrihari's thoughts are those of a restless, frustrated man. He meanders, lingers nostalgically over trivial scenes, laments his wasted vigor and the tragedy of old age. He describes youthful women with the self-conscious lust of a lover who cannot trust that the attraction is mutual. He tells himself consolingly that his poetic art and wisdom are immortal, but he cannot escape the feeling that he has spent his youth vainly and that his life has been reduced to an overpowering greed. Compelled by a strong sense of personal irony, Bhartrihari sees man's position as paradoxical in a transient, seductive world.

Bilhaṇa, the legendary author of the *Caurapañcāśikā* ("Fantasies of a Love-Thief") is known from his other writings as a poet who lived in the eleventh century A.D. and traveled throughout India to serve at various courts. According to

legend, Bilhaṇa became involved in a secret affair with the king's young daughter whom he was supposed to be instructing in the subtleties of literature. When they were discovered, her father condemned him to death. In the moment before his execution he evoked the princess in fifty lyric verses whose beauty was so powerful that the goddess Kālī interceded with the king to effect his pardon. Each verse is a remembered moment of love voiced in the first person by a separated lover who uses memory to evoke his mistress's presence. Elegantly simple metaphors and sensuous compound adjectives describe her physical qualities and gestures of emotion:

> Even now,
> I remember her eyes
> trembling, closed after love,
> her slender body limp,
> fine clothes and heavy hair loose—
> a wild goose
> in a thicket of lotuses of passion.
> I'll remember her in my next life
> and even at the end of time!

Scattered references to "the princess" in these verses may only be figures of speech, like other extravagant epithets Bilhaṇa uses to characterize his mistress; the "I" of the verses may only be a rhetorical device to intensify their emotional atmosphere. Nevertheless, it is impossible to separate the legend from the content of the verses. The legend is a parable of the pain and violence of frustrated love, which is paradoxically aroused and overcome by remembering the joyous moments of fulfillment. The formulaic *Caurapañcāśikā* verses sustain the interplay between the antithetical moods of fulfilled and frustrated love that Sanskrit critics considered the height of aesthetic joy. The collection achieves its tone through the threatening presence of death that plays over the cumulative eroticism of the word-pictures.

Writers on Sanskrit poetry tend to stress its impersonality. The British scholar A. B. Keith, for example, could detect no revelation of personal character in the poems. When he compared the Sanskrit poets to Sappho, Lucretius, and Catullus, he found them wanting in vividness:

> They live moreover in a world of tranquil calm, not in the sense that sorrow and suffering are unknown, but in the sense that there prevails a rational order in the world which is the outcome not of blind chance but of the actions of man in previous births. Discontent with the constitution of the universe, rebellion against its decrees, are incompatible with the serenity engendered by this recognition by all the Brahmanical poets of the rationality of the world order. Hence we can trace no echo of social discontent; the poets were courtiers who saw nothing whatever unsatisfactory in the life around them. . . .[3]

Bhartrihari and Bilhaṇa both defy the stereotype, each in a different way.

In both cases, the legends surrounding the verses are mythical contexts for the poetry. The drama of its author's legend makes the poetic personality of each collection more vivid. The legends serve as parables indicating the dominant poetic structures of the collections, in much the same way that the prologue of a Sanskrit drama announces its dramatic structures. They explain the poetry by means that are different from academic analyses of Sanskrit poetics, which characteristically focus attention on the formal elements of individual stanzas. The legends illuminate the human emotional basis of the poetry, which the preoccupation with form obscures.

The mythic structure of each legend complements the content and language of the collected poems of Bhartrihari and Bilhaṇa so well that it is possible to imagine that the legends were self-consciously elaborated by the poets themselves. Textual evidence is against this in both cases. Once the verses and the legends were associated, however, the legends clearly influ-

enced the literary history of the collections by making them distinct from eclectic anthologies. Verses in the anthologies were collected by critics and connoisseurs, just as miniature paintings are put in albums according to the taste of the collectors. They were culled mainly from older collections or from the Sanskrit dramas, and usually arranged to illustrate various poetic figures or themes.[4] In contrast, the collected poems attributed to Bhartrihari and Bilhaṇa are unified by their legends as well as by characteristic subject matter and formal devices.

The courts of ancient and medieval India delighted in eloquent speech. Words of counsel, as well as erotic and philosophical musings, were recited before the king in witty and elegant language. The poetic grace of the erotic verses of Bhartrihari and Bilhaṇa is obvious even in translation, but the sententious, reflective epigrams of Bhartrihari are not folksy bits of wisdom in verse form. They are also dominated by strict aesthetic technique and a self-conscious idea of art. When Bhartrihari regrets decline in the world he says:

> Wise men are consumed by envy,
> kings are defiled by haughty ways,
> the people suffer from ignorance.
> Eloquence is withered on my tongue.

The eloquence (*subhāṣita*) to which he refers is his own ability to compose the polished epigrams that characterize Sanskrit poetry.

"Sanskrit" means "refined" or "perfected." Applied to language, it implies a contrast with the Prākrits, the "unrefined" and more popular dialects that developed independently of the strict rules applied by the grammarian Pāṇini to the learned language of North India in about the fourth century B.C. Sanskrit was the hieratic language of the brahman priests, and by the time it entered court circles in the early centuries A.D. it was regularized and somewhat artificial—still highly inflected and abounding in complex constructions. Increasingly divorced

from the processes to which a natural language is subject, it was learned through a specialized training process and was employed mainly for official and literary purposes. It was a mark of distinction to have learned Sanskrit well, and the poets were masters of its intricacies.

The genre of Sanskrit lyric poetry within which Bhartrihari and Bilhaṇa composed evolved from an ancient poetic tradition of hymn and epic. It is significant that both poets address their poems to particular divinities, from whom they seek favor. Bhartrihari directly invokes Shiva, the potent divine ascetic.[5] Bilhaṇa ambiguously invokes Kālī when he remembers the princess. The epithets he uses could equally apply to the goddess or to his earthly mistress, making both of them the object of his prayer and the subject of his poems. Erotic poems thus become religiously powerful.[6] The exaggerated dramatic gestures of the poet's mistress suit her implied religious role as the incarnation of his muse and tutelary deity, who effects his salvation in response to the beauty of his poetry.

Invocations of the divine are characteristic of Indian poetry. The earliest preserved literature in India, the *Rig Veda*, expresses the notion that poetry is a means of establishing relations between the world of men and the world of the gods. In Vedic hymns, which were composed as invocations to accompany offerings poured on the sacrificial fire, speech is personified as a goddess (*Vāc*) who gives inspired priests the power to communicate with the world of the gods. By gaining insight into hidden correspondences between the human and divine realms, the seer-poet (*kavi*) attained the special power to give his visions concrete expression in poetry (*kāvya*). Fascination with expressing hidden correspondences between experience and imagination lies at the base of the metaphorical language that is exploited throughout the history of Indian poetry.

Because of the status of the *Rig Veda* as sacred revelation, classical Sanskrit poets and critics seem to have consciously avoided claiming it as the source of their poetic art. Instead

they traced their craft to the post-Vedic epic *Rāmāyaṇa,* and named its traditional author, Vālmīki, the "first poet" (*ādikavi*).[7] A widespread popular legend tells that Vālmīki was a thief who became a sage by meditating on the word "death" (*māra*) until it became the name of the god Rāma (MA-RA MA-RA MA-RA-MA RA-MA RA-MA). By that time the sage was covered by an anthill (*valmīka*), from which he emerged as Vālmīki.

The text of the epic itself begins with a mythic dialogue between Vālmīki and the divine sage Nārada, who travels among men as a messenger of the gods. In answer to Vālmīki's inquiry about who in the world was the perfect man, Nārada outlined the story of Rāma, whose wife was abducted by a demon king. Obsessed by the story, Vālmīki went for a walk along the bank of the Tamasā river (which Rāma and his wife and brother crossed when they went into exile) and he saw a pair of cranes:

Nearby he saw a pair of birds innocently wandering—
The sonorous sound of mating cranes filled the forest.

But an evil-minded tribal hunter, hiding in a blind,
Shot the male of the pair while Vālmīki watched.

When his mate saw his bloody body writhing on the ground
Where it was struck, she cried a compassionate lament.

When the seer steeped in sacred law saw the bird
Shot by the hunter, compassion welled up in him.

Intense with compassion, he felt like the bird and saw,
"This act mocks sacred law." Hearing the crane's crying mate,
he said:

"Hunter, year after endless year you will not find a place to rest,
For when these cranes mated you murdered the love-distracted male."

While he was speaking anxiety entered his heart.
"What is this I said—in such anguish for that bird?"
With great insight he continued to ponder.

Mindful, he made a design. Then the great sage said to his pupil:

"Divided into quarters of equal syllables measured to the lute's tempo,
Lyric verse came out of my anguish. Let verse so formed endure!"

This episode of the generation of lyric poetry from anguish is compressed in the Sanskrit into a half-pun on anguish (*śoka*) and lyric verse (*śloka*). The episode is not only the frame setting for the *Rāmāyaṇa,* but is at once a parable of poetic inspiration and a sample of the epic's pervading mood of compassion. As he walked on the riverbank, the whole anguish of the Rāma story was fresh in his mind. It was revived by the sound of the bird's cry at the death of her mate. The articulated anguish of the female crane inspired Vālmīki to give expression to the anguish of the Rāma story in lyric verse. The Indian tradition that framed its poetry in the mythical lives of legendary poets was continuous from the time of the *Rāmāyaṇa.*

Vālmīki's epic composition was the basis for both codified genres of classical Sanskrit poetry, the narrative lyric (*mahākāvya*) and the fragmentary lyric (*khaṇḍakāvya*). The *Rāmāyaṇa* remains throughout essentially an epic of oral literature, characterized by redundancy of words and formulas and a pace carefully measured to the listening audience, in which stanzas flow into the narrative rhythm. Classical poetry, in contrast, is characterized by brilliant condensation of independent stanzas, metrical complexity, long compounds, and intricate figures of speech.

Of the two genres, the narrative lyric is formally descended from the ancient epic. Its conventions demand that it be based on mythological or historical themes and that it contain descriptions of mountains, moonrise, weddings, births, and battles. Despite the rules that the syntax and imagery of indi-

vidual stanzas must be complete, verses were obviously conceived in groups meant to create the rich mood that is the aesthetic purpose of this poetry.[8] A vivid example of this genre is the opening of Kālidāsa's *Birth of the Prince,* which celebrates the love of the god Shiva for Pārvatī, the daughter of the Himālayas. Kālidāsa sets the scene by evoking the potent, sensuous divinity of the mountains:

Far in the north divinity animates the majestic mountain range
called Himālaya—a place of perpetual snow
that sinks deep into the seas on its eastern and western wings
and stands over the earth like a towering barrier.

Himālayan mountain high peaks hold a wealth of minerals
whose red glow diffuses through a cleft in the clouds
to produce an aura of untimely twilight,
making nymphs rush into evening ornaments.

Filling the hollow spaces of bamboo reeds
with winds rising from the mouths of caves,
Himālaya strives to sustain the droning tonic note
that celestial musicians need for their singing.

Himālayan herbs shine at night
deep inside cave shelters
where wild forest men lie with their rustic women—
herbs like lamps burning without oil to excite sensual love.

Bearing sprays from Ganges River waterfalls,
making cedar trees quake,
parting the peacocks' plume feathers,
Himālayan wind is worshipped by tribal hunters stalking deer.

Fragmentary lyric, the genre to which both Bhartrihari's and Bilhaṇa's collections belong, is defined in contrast to narrative lyric by its more restricted subject matter and by the independent quality of each stanza. Verses are neither bound together by narrative nor arranged into logical sequences. Each verse is grammatically complete and contains distinct images

and a dominant rhetorical device. The theoretical ideal is that an isolated verse should be appreciated on its own, without any larger context.

The verses are very short, most commonly quatrains in which the lines are structured into uniform, quantitative metrical patterns. The meters generally have fixed sequences of long and short syllables repeated in each quarter of the verse. As in Latin and Greek prosody, rhythm depends on the amount of time required to pronounce a syllable, not on stress.[9] The Bhartrihari collection contains twenty-one different meters, the most frequent of which have repeating sequences of syllables in the following patterns: *śārdūlavikrīḍitā* (19 syllables, - - - u u - u - u u u u - / - - u - - u - ); *śikhariṇī* (17 syllables, u - - - - - / u u u u u - - u u u - ); *vasantatilakā* (14 syllables, - - u - u u u - u u - u - - ). Bilhaṇa uses the meter *vasantatilakā* exclusively in his *Caurapañcāśikā*. The opening line of the poem scans according to its pattern:

*adyāpi tāṁ kanakacampakadāmagaurīm*
- - u - u u u - u u - u - -

Brevity is not poverty; abundant detail and great complexity of thought can be compressed into a simple metrical pattern. The miniature context is enriched by rhetorical ornamentation (*alaṁkāra*). The figures of speech commonly employed include many subtle varieties of metaphor, simile, allegory, synecdoche, antithesis, hyperbole, irony, and sarcasm. Consonant with the mocking opposition of worldliness to asceticism in the Bhartrihari legend, a tone of irony is present in many verses. This is effected by the frequent use of contrastive figures of speech, such as contradiction, objection, and rhetorical question.[10] Punning is a favorite technique of Sanskrit poetry. Though neither Bhartrihari nor Bilhaṇa uses it extensively, Bhartrihari's use of it (in verse 139) to strengthen the antithesis between passion and religious peace is a good example.[11] The sonorous qualities of chanted Sanskrit add to the verbal density

of each verse. Rhyme is rare, but alliteration, assonance, and consonance are used freely. The miniature mold of each verse is expanded by poetic exploitation of the suggestive overtones (*dhvani*) of words and images. When words and images rich with connotations are used, they create multiple layers of meaning and thus intensify the aesthetic mood, *rasa,* of the poem.

The notion of *rasa* is at the heart of Sanskrit lyric poetry. The word is generally translated as "mood" or "sentiment," but it means more literally the taste or flavor of something—the *rasa* of a verse or a dramatic scene is the essential pervading flavor of a given emotional situation. Human emotion (*bhāva*), the basic material of *rasa,* is divided by the theorists into nine categories each of which has its corresponding *rasa* (the nine *rasas* are the erotic, the comic, the compassionate, the wrathful, the heroic, the terrifying, the loathsome, the marvelous, and the peaceful). The poet distills essential qualities from spontaneous emotion and structures them in order to awaken an aesthetic response in his audience of connoisseurs. In classical India new ideas, imagery, and techniques were less important than the skillful manipulation of conventional language. Literary conventions whose repetition may seem dull to us made their appeal to highly educated men of discriminating taste (*rasikas*) who were familiar with the techniques of the art and could attune themselves to the linguistic and expressive subtleties of Sanskrit. In a culture where the initiated audience relished poetry as much for its precious qualities as for the content of thought, conventional words and images were an important way of expanding meaning.

## *BHARTRIHARI'S POEMS*

In India the life of a man is circumscribed by four traditional pursuits: *dharma* (righteousness, learning, and religious life), *artha* (material gain and political power), *kāma* (erotic love

and artistic pleasure), and *mokṣa* (the rejection of these three in order to concentrate on escaping from worldly bondage). In his poems Bhartrihari considers the relative merits of these pursuits. All are commended, but all are found deficient. Women and wealth breed anxiety; virtue and wisdom are rare and of little avail either in this world or in the forest; even the state of tranquillity, so arduously won, is threatened by sensuous beauty. Bhartrihari does not simply vacillate between wordly indulgence and asceticism; his confusion is more profound. He concurrently experiences delight in the fullness of the world, anxiety over its cruel transience, and the feeling that this tension is inescapable. His ironic sense that none of life's possibilities are what they seem gives pattern to his irreconcilable attractions and unifies the three parts of his collected poems.

Each section of the *Śatakatraya* concentrates on a different aspect of the poet's life: the *Nītiśataka* (here "Among Fools and Kings") expresses his worldly concerns and ideals; the *Śṛṅgāraśataka* ("Passionate Encounters") evokes his erotic moods and analyzes the nature of passionate love; the *Vairāgyaśataka* ("Refuge in the Forest") explores his disillusionment with the world and his thoughts on renunciation.

The *Nītiśataka,* like the popular Indian works of "good counsel," comments on man's obsession with acquiring wordly advantage and the obstacles he encounters. Yet its tone sets it apart from the didactic fables and aphorisms of works like the *Pañcatantra.* Many verses reveal a lurking attachment to the world as well as a revulsion against its sordidness. There is an undercurrent of turmoil and disenchantment to Bhartrihari's concern with worldly dominion and social action. He refers repeatedly to the intoxicating power of wealth, to insatiable greed, to unruly fate, to the haughtiness of kings, to the humiliation of servitude, to the supremacy of evil men in a society where virtue is judged only in terms of its proximity to gold. All this is very painful to a man who finds frank attraction in worldly pursuits and in life at court. He would prefer to grace

the summit of the world rather than to wither in the isolation of a forest retreat, but the world discourages him.

Concern with the power which greed and desire exert over man is a recurrent theme in Indian literature—Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain. Generally it is believed that desire, which is ultimately based on ignorance and delusion about the nature of things, is the source of every action—action which binds man to the suffering of continued existence in birth after birth. When Bhartrihari reflects on his own painful, perplexing position in the world of sense experience, he speaks of delusion, ignorance, desire, and bondage. The abstract terms have concrete and insidious meaning for him in the context of man's greed for material possessions and his passion for women.

If we see that Bhartrihari's erotic poetry expresses his subjugation to the power of desire, we shall find the verses of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka* less frivolous than they might otherwise seem. These stanzas possess depth and intensity precisely because the poet considers the confusion, longing, pain, and ephemeral pleasure of love to be at the center of human existence, implicit in any account of man's condition. Even in the verses about erotic love, Bhartrihari is more often intent on teaching life's absurd transience than on sustaining the classical mood of passion:

> Bearing the luster of a full moon
> at its loftiest phase,
> the lotus-face of a slender girl
> locks honey in her lips.
> What is tart now like unripe fruit
> on vines of gourd,
> when time has run its course
> will be an acrid poison.

Woman, his passion's object, is an enigma that defies Bhartrihari's solution. She seems to him an invitation to some kind of supraterrestrial paradise, but she is at the same time life's

device for enticing men into inescapable bondage. The delights of passionate encounter are at once beautiful and ominous; the vehemence of Bhartrihari's denunciation of woman is only a measure of the terrible fascination which she holds for him. The seductress who causes Bhartrihari's unrest is neither his wife nor a particular mistress, nor is she some idealized Beatrice; she is every woman who is young, affectionate, artful, charming, and voluptuous. His adoration of her is neither a worshipful nor a ritual love; it is concrete passion which delights in the physical subtleties of amorous play and in the seasons which set love's moods.

Emotion is not an isolated human phenomenon. The natural world of birds, flowers, and forests in their seasonal transformations expresses the emotions of man. The sensuous nuances of the changing natural world are evoked in Indian poetry to convey human dispositions. Bhartrihari expresses emotion amidst a multiplicity of sensuous qualities (colors, scents, sounds), and especially in his love poetry he tends to luxuriate in the richness which nature provides. This is not sparse poetry; the poet does not crystallize or unravel emotion. He rather tries to compress the profusion of its qualities into a flavor, into a thick, emotion-laden atmosphere so highly controlled that the audience shares in his experience.

Erotic emotion is magical, and magic is in the cycles of the seasons as well as in women's eyes. If Kāma, the god of love, has in woman a great weapon for subjugating man, in nature he has a powerful ally. The fragrances of freshly blooming flowers, breezes laden with sandalwood and rain, the sound of peacocks and cuckoos, the rays of the moon at its various phases all stimulate passion in a man. By their magic woman is transformed from a creature of flesh and bones into a siren who destroys man's reason.

Bhartrihari curses her not because she has become repugnant to him but because her beauty continues to lure him. He feels the need to tear himself away from the fetters of passion

before old age overtakes him and his sensuality becomes a lecherous mockery of itself. But he is weak; he does not have the strength to renounce his erotic attachments in a world in which every movement serves to evoke both memory of some past pleasure and new longing.

Bhartrihari's bondage is complicated by his sense of the inevitability with which time ravages a man's life as the days and seasons revolve. Life and its pleasures are poisoned by the presence of time; and as he loses his capacity for pleasure, bondage in worldly existence becomes insufferable.

It is accepted in Indian belief that one's position in present life is rigidly determined by the net balance of good and bad actions in previous lives. If he accepts this doctrine of *karma* (action), Bhartrihari should be reassured. It seems to explain life's misfortunes as just results of past misdeeds, and seems to make man master of his future destiny. But one's *karma* is stored infinitely; it binds one, even if to better lives, to endless cycles of death and rebirth (*saṁsāra*). And the workings of *karma* are remote and abstract. Popular tradition pays lip-service to the doctrine of *karma* but turns to a notion of fate to provide a more ready explanation for the apparent absurdity with which *karma* expresses itself in the world. The concept of fate as it appears scattered through Bhartrihari's poems does not impair the validity of *karma* but operates on a different level: fate does not have the cosmic significance that *karma* does. Fate is invoked to explain the irrational confusion of events in the life of a man in society, frustrated by the pursuit of gain and concerned only with immediate results. He need not blame his own actions for his present state; his destiny is written on his forehead, having been traced there at the time of birth by a creator-god who acts by mere caprice.

Escape from the workings of fate and *karma* is theoretically possible through renunciation of the world, and this is the central subject of the *Vairāgyaśataka*. Bhartrihari longs for the dispassionate tranquillity of the forest, where he hopes to dwell as

an ascetic on the bank of a mountain river and pass his days in spiritual meditation. As in the erotic poetry, the emotions of man are associated with the natural world; here the calm mood of the forest reflects ascetic peace. In fact, Bhartrihari effects a strange transposition of the elements of an amorous scene into a convincing description of the tranquillity of a hermit in the forest. The hermit lies calm and happy in the embrace of nature almost as a lover lies weary after love-making in the arms of his mistress.

But though the quiet beauty of nature provides an environment conducive to meditation, it cannot assure the ascetic's release from the worldly bonds. In aesthetic consciousness the elements of sensuous experience are always present, no matter how transfigured. And their presence is potentially dangerous; the concentration of ascetics is threatened by woman's beauty. Even the great hermit-sages of legend (Viśvamitra and Riśyaśṛṅga in the *Mahābhārata,* Marīci in the *Daśakumāracarita,* divine Shiva) were enslaved by glances from a woman's eyes.

Release is possible only by overcoming time and the other worldly categories; only when his mind is absorbed in the equanimity of ultimate reality (*brahman*) can man cross beyond the ocean of *saṁsāra*. The practice of *yoga* and the pursuit of knowledge, which is discrimination, are means of escape. In all this Bhartrihari is expressing a concern with salvation which is the motivating force behind Indian philosophy; there is little thought here that is not expressed earlier in the Upanishads and *Bhagavad Gītā*. But there is uniqueness in the unorthodox juxtaposition of ideas to reinforce both the poet's own sense of suffering and his desire to escape it.

When he dwells in ignorance and is deluded by Love's magic, man sees the world filled with the glances of women, but when he achieves the state of dispassionate calm, his senses are disengaged and he rests in the pure vision of absolute reality—so the scriptures say. But this state is remote and the fortune of a very few men who possess extraordinary resolution. For the

poet, indifference to women's eyes and falling blossoms seems impossible. The futility of the attempt is such that he cannot suppress the occasional feeling that the ascetic is a ludicrous figure. He is humanly skeptical about the possibility for salvation which tradition offers.

In terms of Bhartrihari's collected verses, man's life is an intricate web of conflicting moments and attractions. It is beautiful and pleasurable, but the beauty becomes bitter when he feels the weight of time and the caprice of fate upon him. His anxiety casts a gray shadow over pleasure and makes the world a prison house from which he sees no escape. Drunk with the wine of a little wealth or some passing enjoyment, a man is deluded by the world; though he experiences the transience of life, he cannot understand the real meaning of time or his own absurd position in it. Bhartrihari shows a keen awareness of the paradox involved in enjoining a deluded man to abandon the world of his delusion. Nevertheless, the life of a hermit remains for him the only way to step outside time and sever the bonds of worldly existence.

## *BILHAṆA'S POEMS*

To anyone familiar with the conventions of Sanskrit poetry, there is nothing remarkable in Bilhaṇa's elegant catalog of remembered moments of love. But what is true of the individual verses does not hold for the *Caurapañcāśikā* collection. As one continues to read or hear the verses, the formulaic style and uniform meter serve to carry resonances from one verse to another. Images, descriptions, and dramatic scenes accumulate to produce a pervading and dominant mood of passionate love (*śṛṅgārarasa*). The particular mood of love expressed in the *Caura* is a blending of the ordinarily antithetical moods of love-in-separation (*vipralambha*) and love-in-enjoyment (*saṁbhoga*). By use of the formula "Even now" (*adyāpi*) and verbs meaning "I remember," "I see," "I meditate," the lover recreates their

love at the same time that he regrets their separation. The blending is not unique to the *Caura;* individual verses of this type are known from the anthologies.[12] What is unique is the repetition of "Even now" at the beginning of each verse, followed by a reference to the mistress, either by a pronoun or by synecdoche (e.g., *tad . . . vadanam,* that . . . face), followed in turn by some verb of remembering, often as the final element of the verse. The position of the verb does vary, and the act of remembering is also conveyed by indirect expressions which may appear anywhere in the verse. *Adyāpi* acts as a refrain, reminding the lover and the poet's audience that the details so vividly etched in his mind now belong to him only in his imagination. The intensive particle *api* (best translated as "even") emphasizes the present intensity of his passion and his wonder.

Between "Even now" and the word or phrase of remembering is the substance of the *Caura* verses, the lover's descriptions and characterizations of his mistress. Compound words, which are an important feature of the Sanskrit language, are exploited here to create the dense atmosphere. The majority of descriptive phrases in the verses are compounds of the type known as *bahuvrīhi.* Most of them can be read as string of adjectives and adjective phrases in English, with the final member serving as the base for the modifiers preceding it. Each compound taken as a whole functions as an epithet to delineate some characteristic of its subject. Although the poet's mistress is sometimes praised in abstractions, she more often emerges from a series of images that appeal directly to the senses. The sensuousness of the imagery is enriched by free use of alliterative sound patterns. A long compound, one of three in the fifth verse, illustrates the force of compound words and their sound symbolism. The half-verse reads:

*adyāpi tāṁ surata-jāgara-ghūrṇamāna-*
*tiryag-valat-tarala-tāraka-dīrgha-netrām*

The lines mean approximately: "even now her love-wakefulness-rolling-oblique-moving-glittering-pupils-long-eyes." Not only is this unsatisfactory in English, it is also less than the Sanskrit original conveys to its audience. Relationships of words in a compound are not explicitly indicated in Sanskrit, but the reader or listener is expected to be skilled enough to supply them. Usually the relationships are clear, but ambiguities are frequent, and these are used to expand the meaning of certain verses. A minor ambiguity exists in relating "rolling-oblique-moving-glittering-pupils" and "love-wakefulness"; are her pupils so agitated during love or because of it? The audience's interpretations will color this verse only slightly, but some cases are more extreme. A translation must retain the compression and sonority of the original:

> Even now,
> [I remember] her:
> deep eyes' glittering pupils
> dancing wildly in love's vigil.

These formal aspects of the *Caura* verses are all necessary to the production of the erotic mood, whose presence is greatly dependent on the poet's ability to construct an environment in which it can flourish. Seasonal changes of nature and descriptions of natural phenomena are commonly used to create an erotic flavor, as we saw in the poems of Bhartrihari. But these elements are notably absent in the *Caura.* Although the mistress is compared with birds, flowers, or the moon, there is no descriptive evocation of these. It is above all her manifestations of emotion, her movements, and her physical beauty that cause the excitement as they emerge in a web of sensuously descriptive, sonorous words.

The lover recaptures his mistress through her responses to love. Emotional reactions are shown by their external manifestations (*anubhāva*) in her eyes, face, limbs, and gait. For ex-

ample, shame can be inferred from the fact that she cowers to cover her body or lowers her face. Such emotional responses are classed by the Sanskrit critics as transitory states of emotion (*vyabhicāribhāva*), which function in cooperation with the pervading emotional state (*sthāyibhāva*)—as it were, emerging from it and being submerged in it, like waves in the ocean. The transitory states not only change, they rarely occur simply and are usually combinations of the psychological states of anxiety, fear, shame, modesty, anger (real or feigned), affected indifference, sorrow, and fatigue.

The physical responses to love are largely involuntary manifestations of emotion (*sattvabhāva*). Indian aesthetic theory considers them highly significant because they arise from inner feeling and cannot be simulated. In the love situation such signs as sweating and bristling of the hairs on the skin show the body's natural excitement and longing, no matter what one may do to pretend otherwise. Also taken as involuntary signs are paralysis, trembling, weeping, change of color, breaking of the voice, and fainting. Physical beauty is thought to be enhanced by the signs, and few descriptions of beauty ignore them. Concrete images of sounds, odors, tastes, and textures supplement the visual imagery and heighten the sensuous appeal of the poetry.

Bilhaṇa's poems, unlike the epigrammatic verses of Bhartrihari, lend themselves well to visual interpretation. A series of miniature paintings was done in the sixteenth century to illustrate Bilhaṇa's work.[13] Formal and symbolic means are exploited in the paintings to concentrate the viewer's attention on the relationship between the central female figure, which appears in every painting, and the male figure of Bilhaṇa. The elaborately painted figures, like the princess and her lover in the poems, are drawn in stylized movements, presented to stimulate the response of a cultivated audience.

# NOTES

1. Scholarly research in Indian textual criticism has made it increasingly reasonable to identify Bhartrihari, the traditional author of the *Śatakatraya* poems, with the fifth-century philosopher-grammarian who wrote the treatise entitled *Vākyapadīya* and to identify the author of the *Caurapañcāśikā* poems with the eleventh-century poet who wrote the literary epic entitled *Vikramāṅkadevacarita*. In both cases the identifications are made on the basis of known legendary material and subject matter common to the lyric verses and the other works.

D. D. Kosambi, in the introduction to his critical edition of *The Epigrams Attributed to Bhartrihari* (*Bhartṛhari-viracitaḥ Śatakatrayādi-subhāṣitasaṁgrahaḥ*, Bombay, 1948), notes the impossibility of reconstructing a definitive text on the basis of the extensive manuscript material he examined, but he did find it remarkable that in spite of the extraordinary variation from version to version, the total impression produced by any of them is about the same. He concludes, "A certain type of stanza came to be attracted to the collection . . . the seeds must necessarily have been present in the original collection to permit such growth." The group of 200 stanzas which Kosambi determined to be most authentic by the criteria of textual criticism, and which constitute the text for my translation, do echo a tone of irony, skepticism, and discontent which is unique in Sanskrit literature. The poetry of Bhartrihari shares with the grammatical philosophy of Bhartrihari, as expounded in the *Vākyapadīya*, ideas and terminology drawn from traditional systems of Vedānta and Saṅkhya metaphysics, as well as from classical Yoga psychology. Also common to the poetry and the philosophy is a critical interest in the nature of time. In Bhartrihari's philosophy, time is a creative power that is responsible for the birth, continuity, and destruction of everything in the universe. Much of the poetry shows a pessimistic preoccupation with the beginning and end of things. The inevitability with which time is said to ravage the life of man may conceivably represent the poetic expression of the futility and dejection attendant upon a philosopher profoundly impressed by the power of time. Good arguments are put forth to date Bhartrihari the philosopher to the fifth century A.D. The core of the collected poems attributed to Bhartrihari also probably dates to this period. Although the oldest preserved version of the *Śatakatraya* text took form in the eleventh or twelfth century, there is good evidence that the collection existed in some form long before this.

The Chinese pilgrim I-ching, in his *Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago: A.D. 671–695* (trans. J. Takakusu, Oxford, 1896), wrote that a grammarian named Bhartrihari, author of the *Vākyapadīya* and another work which "treats of the principles of human life as well as of grammatical science," died in A.D. 650. Although I-ching's dating is inaccurate, his account of Bhartrihari's vacillation between the Buddhist monkhood and the life of sexual indulgence, about which Bhartrihari is said to have composed stanzas, suggests that at the time I-ching traveled in India, Bhartrihari was already a legendary figure. For details of the scholarly arguments see Ko-