

A LEXICAL NOTE ON BAMBHADATTA'S STORY :

obheḍio and sarisari/saribhari

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Jacobi's *Ausgewahlte Erzählungen in Mähārāshṭri* (Leipzig, 1886), which contains extracts from the *Uttarādhyayana Ṭikā* of Devendra Gaṇi, is probably still the most popular Prakrit reader in Europe, and many students have been initiated into Prakrit literature by reading its first story, that of Bambhadatta. Most of them presumably used the excellent (if oddly named) translation by J. J. Meyer, *Hindu Tales* (London, 1909). I wonder how many of them have noticed that at least one episode has been misunderstood by both Jacobi and Meyer. Much of the misunderstanding survives in the translation by N. V. Vaidya (*The Story of Bambhadatta*, Poona, 1956). What I feel sure is the correct interpretation of this passage occurred to me while I was discussing it with my Prakrit teacher, Mr. K. R. Norman, and I wish to record here my gratitude for his help.

In their wanderings Bambhadatta and Varadhaṇu come upon a cock-fight between two young men, Sāgaradatta and Buddhila, both sons of financiers. Sāgaradatta loses his stake of a hundred thousand because after the very first encounter his cock refuses to fight. Varadhaṇu is suspicious and inspects Buddhila's cock; he finds it has iron needles attached to its feet. Buddhila offers him half his winnings to keep quiet, so he says aloud that he has found nothing, but manages to convey the truth to Sāgaradatta by surreptitious signs.

At this point the text reads: *teṇā 'vi' kaḍḍhiṇā 'lakkhaṃ piva sū-obheḍio niya-kukkuḍo. teṇa ya parājio biya-kukkuḍo tti hāriyaṃ Buddhileṇa vi lakkhaṃ. tao jāyā doṇha vi sarisari.*² (Jacobi, p. 10, lines 27-9)

Thereupon Sāgaradatta, highly delighted, invites Varadhaṇu to his home.

The passage quoted in Prakrit is translated by Meyer (pp. 35-6):

“And Sāgaradatta freed his own cock from the needles by taking them off [the feet of Buddhila's cock] all unnoticed. And thus the second cock was defeated. So Buddhila lost the lakh. Thereupon the two were astonished.”

He seems to have misinterpreted *obheḍio* and *sarisari*. In both cases he is following Jacobi.

1 *teṇa* refers back to *Sāgaradatto*, the last word of the previous sentence.

2 Variant reading : *saribhari*,

(1) *obhedio*. Jacobi in his vocabulary gives the meaning 'befreien' and refers to Hemacandra³ 4.91: *avaheḍai=muñcati*. Sheth in his *Pāia-saddamahāṇavo* gives the Sanskrit equivalent of *obhedīya* as *avamukta*, gives corresponding Hindi meanings, and cites this passage, which suggests that he is just following Jacobi. The awkwardness of this meaning in our context arouses suspicion.

In his appendix (p. 295) Meyer suggests dividing the words *sūio bhedio*. This he glosses: "taking away the needles, he freed etc.; *bhedīya* may be Sanskrit *bhedita* 'separated'." The form *sūio* would of course be accusative plural, and Meyer is taking it as the object of *kaḍḍhiūṇā* (only). Vaidya too divides *sūio bhedio*. In a note he says: "*bhedīa* —*deśī*. (1) Freed, released (2) rushed against, cf. Mar. *bhidvinem*."

Turner (*CDIAL* § 9490, s.v. **bhiṭ-*) gives Pkt. *bhīḍai* meaning 'meets, fights'. The same information occurs in Sheth. We seem to have here the causative past participle of this root, with prefix *o* < *ava*. This yields the interpretation 'caused to fight'; Sāgaradatta's own cock was caused to fight with needles, i.e. was armed with needles. The story has more point if Sāgaradatta not only took the false spurs off his opponent's bird but also transferred them to his own, thus ensuring his victory and giving tit for tat. In this interpretation we keep Jacobi's word division.

There is another possible meaning of *obhedio* which would give the sentence the same purport. Turner (*loc. cit.*) gives cognates of **bhiṭ-* in modern languages with meanings 'put on, gird on', and 'tie together'. So either *sūio-obhedio* or, perhaps better, *sūio bhedio*, might mean 'caused to put on the needles'. But it seems more satisfactory to stick to a meaning of the root already attested in Pkt.

Meyer's translation makes *alakkham piva* go only with *kaḍḍhiūṇa*, but it must go with what follows as well, as its position suggests.

(2) *sarisari/saribhari*. Meyer has the following note to his translation: "For *sarisari* Jacobi conjectures the meaning 'astonishment'. Unfortunately we do not know who is intended by *doṇha*. Only Bambhadatta and Buddhila can have been surprised at the issue. *Sari* is found in the sense of *sadrś* (see [Pischel's *Grammar*] §245). So *sarisari* could perhaps denote 'friendship' (lit. 'a like-and-like')... The translation then would run: 'A friendship between the two (Sāgaradatta and Varadhaṇu) sprang up'. The context favours such an interpretation. (Possibly noise, hubbub, Skt. *sarasara*?)"

Turner is not helpful; but Sheth seems in this case to have the answer, and he has been followed by Vaidya. Under *sarisari* Sheth refers the reader to *saribhari*, which he lists as a *deśī* word. Again, it is this passage that he cites. He gives as Hindi meanings *samānatā*, *sarikhāi* ('equality, similarity'), and

3 *Siddhahemacandram, adhyāya VIII*.

refers to the Gujarati word *sarabhara*. The best Gujarati dictionary at my disposal⁴ gives *sarabhara* the meanings 'equal; equal in value; at par', and adds '*sarabhara khātum*—an account in which the credit and the debit sides are equal.' This last usage is so exactly right for our context that I feel sure that Sheth's reference is apposite. Sāgaradatta and Buddhila each won one bet of one lakh. (Meyer may have missed the point through omitting the *vi* after *Buddhileṇa*.) They are of course the two (*doṇha*) referred to, and their equality is described by a term from accountancy, as befits the financial transactions of financiers' sons.

While I feel sure of the meaning, the etymology of *saribhari* remains in doubt, and so therefore does the reading. Sheth's listing it as *deśī* is presumably no more than an admission of ignorance. The Gujarati dictionary just quoted derives *sarabhara* from Guj. *sara* 'head.' I have no competence in Gujarati, but cannot think that this is correct. *Sara* derives from Skt. *śiras*, the Pkt. derivatives of which keep the *i*. Thus if Pkt. *saribhari* is attested, and is not a back-formation from Gujarati (which would be chronologically fantastic), derivatives from *śiras* can have nothing to do with it.

As Meyer says (citing Pischel), *sari* is a Pkt. derivative of Skt. *sadrś* 'like'. Since my interpretation requires that the word mean something like 'equality', this is a highly probable explanation of the first half of the word. The rest is speculation. May be *bhari* derives from 'bhara' 'weight, load'; thus the whole would mean 'equal weightage', and hence come to refer more generally to numerical (and other?) equality.

Another possibility is that *saribhari* is an echo word derived from *sari*, similar in both formation and meaning to English 'tit for tat'. But if we follow this line of reasoning the original reading might as plausibly be *sarisari* and the form a reduplication; then Meyer's 'like-and-like', though he glossed it wrongly, would not be wide off the mark. Although I can find neither *sarisari* nor *saribhari* attested elsewhere, among the many Dravidian loans of *sari* (which demonstrate its wide currency) is Tulu *sarāsari* 'equally, alike, right, proper, on average'.⁵ Of course if *sarisari* is the correct reading the question whether *saribhari* is a Pkt. or a Gujarati coinage remains open.

On both the points discussed, therefore, my interpretation of the passage can stand even if my preferred explanation is rejected. I conclude with my translation of the passage:

"And Sāgaradatta, also unobserved, removed the needles and had his own cock fight with them on. He beat the second cock, so Buddhila too lost a lakh. Then they were both quits."

4 Mehta, B. N. and Mehta, B. B., *The Modern Gujarati-English Dictionary*, Baroda 1925.

5 Emeneau, M. B. and T. Burrow, *Dravidian Borrowings from Indo-Aryan*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962, p. 31, § 147. I am grateful to Professor Burrow for bringing this to my attention. Vaidya refers to Marathi *sarāsari*.