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to

THE ŚATAKAS OF BHARTRIHARI.

Who was Bhartṛihari? what was his date? where did he live? did he, in fact, ever really exist at all? These are questions to which no satisfactory answer has as yet been given. It has been alleged that he was of regal descent, and the brother of Vikramāditya; that not only did he belong to a reigning family, but that he was next in succession to the crown, and that, disgusted with the world, he resigned in favour of his brother Vikrama.

He is the reputed author of three Śatakas or centuries of couplets:—

1. Śṛṅgāra Śataka, a purely amatory poem;
2. Nīti Śataka, on polity and ethics;
3. Vairāgya Śataka, on religious austerity.

Besides these, tradition assigns to him a grammar called Vākyapadiya, and a poem called Bhaṭṭikavya.

But beyond tradition there is no evidence whatever as to the authorship of these Śatakas. The theory already referred to, that Bhartṛihari was a prince who quitted the world in disgust, is founded upon the somewhat vague allusions in the second Śloka of the Nīti Śataka. This has been supposed to refer to the discovery of a domestic intrigue in his own household, which so shook Bhartṛihari’s faith in worldly matters, that he decided to abdicate his royal position, and to retire into the forest as an ascetic.
These conclusions seem, however, too much to deduce from a remark in itself somewhat obscure. But whoever the author may have been, there seems a continuity and a uniformity in each of these separate Śatakas, as well as a similarity in character between them, which forbid us to accept the theory that they are merely a compilation of well-known sayings. The unbroken tradition, moreover, that they are the authorship of one man (whatever his name may be) should not go for nothing.

The question of date is almost as difficult to decide as that of authorship, and this can only be arrived at approximately on internal evidence. The doctrines enunciated in the Vairāgya Śataka are relied on as supplying us with some of the proofs that are required. Many of the Ślokas in this Śataka speak in the language of the Vedantic philosophy. The rooting out of Karma or action, absorption into the Supreme Spirit, the driving out of Moha or illusion by Jnāna, or the true knowledge—these ideas occurring very frequently in the Vairāgya Śataka, all point to Vedantic influence. The eighth or ninth century A.D. has, on these grounds, been assigned as the date of these Śatakas. Not that this date can be held as conclusive; for though Sankarācharya, the great exponent and formulator of the Vedantic philosophy flourished and taught at that date, it is not, therefore, proved that the Vedantic doctrines did not exist before his time; and it necessarily follows, therefore, that neither similarity of idea nor of phraseology can warrant us in making Bhartṛihari's Śatakas cotemporary with Sankarācharya.

The argument as to their date from the mention of the Purâṇas in the Vairāgya Śataka seems to be equally unconvincing. Some of the Purâṇas may be even comparatively modern productions, as late as the fourteenth or fifteenth century; but some are much earlier, dating back to the fifth or sixth century A.D. Further, the contents of these Purâṇas may be carried back to an even
earlier date, and are spoken of under the title of Purânas by Amara Sinha in the first century B.C. Therefore, to derive any satisfactory conclusion as to dates from the mention of the Purânas in the Vairâgya Śataka, we should require to know what Purânas are referred to in the particular passages—whether the works known to us as Purânas or those known under that name to Amara Sinha.¹

Telang, in the preface to his editions of the Niti and Vairâgya Śatakas, is in favour of assigning the close of the first or beginning of the second century to the author of these philosophical poems, in opposition to some authorities, who would place his date at 56 A.D. He grounds his view on the following considerations. Tradition informs us that the author of the Śatakas was Bhartrihari, the brother of King Vikramāditya, and that he also composed a grammatical work called the Vâkyapadiya. This work shows us that its author lived at least one generation after Patanjali’s commentary on Panini’s Grammar, called Mahâbhâshya, had come into general use. The date of Patanjali varies according to different authorities from 200 B.C. to 25 A.D. Bhartrihari, in the Vâkyapadiya, notices the fact that the Mahâbhâshya had gone through changes and rearrangements of text; possibly interpolations and additions. The period between 144 B.C. (which Telang considers the probable date of Patanjali) and 56 B.C. would have been hardly long enough to account for alterations and interpolations in the text of the Mahâbhâshya, and therefore 56 B.C., as the date of Bhartrihari, must be abandoned. We have, however, seen that Vikramâditya was said to be the brother of Bhartrihari. Now there appears to be a general consensus of opinion that this Vikramâditya was the founder of the Śaka era, and that he lived about 78 A.D.

This date allows an interval of more than two centuries between Patanjali and Bhartrihari, a period of sufficient

¹ Some, however, have placed Amara Sinha in the middle of the third century A.D., or even later.
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length to account for the alterations and interpolations which existed in the text of the Mâhabhâshya referred to in the Vâkyapâdiya. On these grounds, then, such as they are, the authorship of these Śatakas has been assigned to the end of the first or to the beginning of the second century A.D.

Some attempt has been made to fix Bhartṛihari's date by comparison with that of Kalidâsa. But the date of Kalidâsa himself is not sufficiently well ascertained to arrive at any certain conclusion by that method.

Much, therefore, as to the date and authorship of these poems must be left to probability and conjecture.

Note.—The text from which the following translation has been made is that edited by Kâshinâth Trimbak-Telang, Bombay, 1874.