The *Sandesarāsaka* of Abdur Rahman and the *Pāsaṇāhacariu* of Śrīdhara

The ***Sandesarasaka*** is an anomaly in the library of literary works in Apabhraṃśa: the only known Apabhraṃśa work composed by a Muslim, one Abdur Rahman, probably in the 13th century CE, and probably somewhere near Multan. It is a "message poem" in the tradition of the *Meghadūta* and formally a *rāsa(ka)* in the tradition of the *rāsa* as deployed in the *rāsalīlā* text of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. I have provided two examples of bodily descriptions, from the *Sandesarāsaka* of Abdur Rahman: the first is a classic *sarāpa*, the second is an example of "non-linear" description of the female body by a 'traveler' narrator, in this case prostitutes who live in the city, Sāmora, to which the 'traveler' (the city is not identifiable) belongs. Both examples involve the female body. But, as we will see, "gazing" don't necessarily focus exclusively on the female body. Another point: the formality of the *sarāpa* or *nakh-śikh* doesn't provide the entire picture, so to speak. My examples in both cases, of the *Sandesarāsaka* and the *Pāsaṇāhacariu*, involve descriptions of female bodies that progress as randomly constructed descriptions of bodily attributes of females, without regard to linear description, i.e., beginning with the head or the foot. This raises the question if we are unnecessarily "obsessing" on the category of *sarāpa* or *nakh-śikh*, at the risk of missing the point. Minimally, there appear to be various styles of bodily description, involving notions of gender and physical beauty, as well as voyeurism. Linearity with respect to anatomical description generates a kind of reaction, one of captivation, engagement, even rapture, but was it meant to be the only, superior and exclusive form of bodily description? Other descriptions of the body suggest that the *sarāpa* or *nakh-śikh* mode is but one of a number of "visions." Three of the four examples from the *Pāsaṇāhacariu* are not *nakh-śikh* descriptions. I imagine that Abdur Rahman was an adept linguist and translator, learned the intricacies of Apabhraṃśa grammar and lexicography and decided, for whatever reason, to demonstrate his skill. A specific patron is not mentioned. As far as I am aware, the *S.* is a unique text, in that it is authored by a Muslim.

The *Pāsaṇāhacariu* of Śridhara, is a traditional hagiographical "account" of one (the 23_{rd}) of the "saints" or *tīrthankaras* of Jainism. The *Pāsaṇāhacariu* is datable to 1132 CE and was produced in Delhi (Ḍhilli) for a known patron who undoubtedly lived within the enclosed city/fort of the reigning Tomara ruler of the time, the fort now referred to by historians as "Lal Kot" or "Rai Pithora" after the Chauhan ruler, Prithviraj, who had defeated the Tomara ruler, before he himself was defeated by the army of Muhammad Ghuri in 1192 CE.

For the purposes of the workshop it is interesting to note that the *Sandesarāsaka* uses the *sarāpa* approach, perhaps inspired/borrowed from Persian literature by way of its Muslim author, while the *Pāsaṇāhacariu* uses the *nakh-śikh* formula so well attested in Sanskrit literature.

Selections from the *Pāsaṇāhacariu*:
1.2.7. - 1.2.13. : The Yamuna River as a courtesan.
1.13.1. – 1.14.1. : A *nakh – śikh* description of Queen Vammadevī, the mother of the 23rd *tīrthankara*, Pārśvanāth.

1.14.12 – 1.15.10 : A description of the city of Varanasi where Queen Vammadevī and King Hayasena live as a courtesan.
1.15.11. – 1.16.8. : A description of the *apsaras* who arrive at the home of Vammadevī to attend upon her.

Selections from the *Sandesarāsaka*:
Verses 32 – 39, a description of the lonely woman by the traveler.
Verses 46 – 54, a description of the prostitute's 'court' (mehfil) in the traveler's home city, Sāmora.

Text Sources:

Colin Mayrhofer, *The Sandesarāsaka of Abdul Rahman*, *with text and translation*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998.

Richard J. Cohen, *The Pāsaṇāhacariu of Srīdhara: The First Four Sandhis of the Apabhraṃśa Text*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1979.