



## Comparative Study of Bṛhatsaṃhitā and Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā

Mr. Nikhil Dnyaneshwar Jagtap<sup>1</sup> & Dr. Aniruddha A. Mandlik<sup>2</sup>

Department of Sanskrit and Research Center,

S. N. Arts, D. J. M Commerce & B. N. S Science College (Autonomous) Sangamner, Ahmednagar.

Department of Sanskrit and Research Center, S. N. Arts, D. J. M Commerce & B. N. S Science College  
(Autonomous) Sangamner, Ahmednagar.

Corresponding Author – Mr. Nikhil Dnyaneshwar Jagtap

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### Abstract:

The National Education Policy 2020 encourages the study of Sanskrit language, aiming the revival of ancient Indian scientific and philosophical wisdom. This research paper an attempt to realise the above-mentioned aim. It consists of a comparative overview of two monumental works in astronomy and environmental science: the Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā (BS) by Jain scholar Ācārya Bhadrabāhu and the Bṛhatsaṃhitā or Vārāhīsaṃhitā (VS) by the renowned astronomer Varāhamihira.

The study examines basic and thematic deviations between these texts. Varāhamihira's 6th-century CE work is known for its orderly, concise organization of the content. In contrast, the Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā is in-depth and expansive arrangement of the oral traditions and observational data regarding nimittas (omens). The BS often provides four times the details found in the VS across areas such as meteorology, cloud incubation and planetary movements.

Analysis reveals that while both texts align on certain scientific observations – such as the 195-day gestation period for clouds but they frequently differ in astrological predictions. These contradictions suggest that ancient Indian astral sciences were not monolithic but contained diverse schools of thought influenced by different philosophical traditions. Finally, the paper comes to the conclusion that while the Bṛhatsaṃhitā offers a refined, logical reference guide, the Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā serves as a vital resource of environmental and astronomical knowledge which reflects a deep-rooted enlightening commitment to understanding the relationship between the universe and earthly life.

**Keywords:** Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā, Bhadrabāhu, Vārāhīsaṃhitā, Varāhamihira.

### Introduction:

Sanskrit is given immense importance in National Education Policy 2020 (National Education Policy 2020, Government of India, Pg. 55, 22.15). Sanskrit is not just the language of poetry or drama. It is also the language of knowledge and wisdom. As we all know that many great poets Vālmīki, Kālidāsa and authors like Vyāsa, Bāṇabhatta have enriched Sanskrit language with their unforgettable and time-tested compositions. Yet, there is another aspect of this language. That aspect is its philosophical and

scientific approaches. There are many treatises in Sanskrit which deal with the nature of knowledge as well as the nature of the universe. These treatises are known as Darśanaśāstrāṇi. They mainly deal with the evolution of the universe and the role of man in context with it. The other approach namely scientific approach deals with the various factors of nature and its impact on the life on the earth.

Environment plays a significant role in the development of life on the earth. Though our earth is the only planet known so far to have life

on it, is significantly impacted by the movements of other planets in the solar system, which our earth is the part of. Ancient scholars in India have studied these movements patiently and recorded their impact on the earth thoroughly. While studying the ancient scientific literature in Sanskrit, two prominent scholars of those times namely Jain Ācārya Bhadrabāhu and Varāhamihira and their contribution to the field of astronomy cannot be overlooked. These two scholars have observed and studied the galactical objects very meticulously and recorded their impact on the life on earth in very great detail in their respective eras. The present research paper is an attempt to overview the two treatises of these authors and compare their work.

### **Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā – An Overview:**

Bhadrabāhu is a scholar belonging to Jain tradition. His era is considered to be from 367 BCE to 298 BCE. He was born in Puṇḍravardhana of Northern West Bengal. He is also said to be a spiritual teacher of Candragupta. The book is named after himself. Yet, some scholars opine that Bhadrabāhu, the author of the above-mentioned treatise was related to Varāhamihira and was also contemporary to the latter. But, this opinion does not seem to be accepted by the scholarly community. There are 27 chapters in the book. They mainly deal with meteorites, circles around the sun and the moon, tithis and nakṣatras, lightening, clouds, winds, pregnancy of clouds, movements of different planets, astrology, omens etc. and the impacts of all of these on human beings, especially on kings.

In the beginning of the treatise, it is said that king Prasenajita ruled the Magadha. He lived in the city named Rājagṛha. The king met Ācārya Bhadrabāhu at the foothills of the Pāṇḍugiri mountain. The Ācārya was seated along with his disciples. The king approached him very politely,

saluted him and asked the Ācārya the knowledge of environment.

पार्थिवानां हितार्थाय भिक्षूणां हितकाम्यया।  
श्रावकाणां हितार्थाय दिव्यं ज्ञानं ब्रवीहि नः॥  
सुखग्राह्यं लघुग्रन्थं स्पष्टं शिष्यहितावहम्।  
सर्वज्ञभाषितं तथ्यं निमित्तं तु ब्रवीहि नः॥

(BS – Intro.)

Moreover, according to Pt. Jugalkishor Mukhtar, the treatise is divided in 5 parts .and 12,000 verses. They are as follows: Vyavahāra, Jyotiṣa, Nimitta, Śarīra and Svāra.

प्रथमो व्यवहाराख्यो ज्योतिरोख्यो द्वितीयकः।

तृतीयोऽपि निमित्ताख्यश्चतुर्थोऽपि शरीरजः॥१॥

पञ्चमोऽपि स्वराख्यश्च पञ्चखण्डैरियं मता।

द्वादशसहस्रं प्रमिता संहितेयं जिनोदिता॥२॥

(BS – Intro.)

Interestingly, despite the treatise being divided in 5 parts, the second part is known Madhyama Khaṇḍa and the third part is called Uttara Khaṇḍa. Another significant aspect of the treatise is that it also deals with aṣṭāṅganimittas. The word ‘nimitta’ means ‘a sign’ A sign which helps one predict the past or future incidents that took place in a person’s life. They are of two types – 1. Kāraka (Causal) and 2. Sūcaka (Indicative). The former is the one which causes the creation of something. For example, a potter creates a pot. The latter is the one which indicates a prospective word or creation. For example, dark clouds suggest rain. Saṃhitā texts mainly deal with these two aspects of astrology. They believe that changes are bound to take place before any phenomenon. Studying nimittas will help one understand the nature better.

For this research paper, the treatise is just overviewed in the context of the comparison between the above-mentioned two texts. Hence, the detailed description of all chapters is not given here for the sake of conciseness.

**Bṛhatsaṃhitā – An Overview:**

Varāhamihira, also known as Varāha or Mihira, was one of the most renowned Indian astronomers, mathematicians and astrologers of the classical period. He lived during the 6th century CE and was a prominent figure in the Gupta Empire. Varāhamihira's contributions to astronomy, astrology and various branches of science had a profound impact on traditional Indian science.

Varāhamihira was born in Ujjain, a major centre of learning and culture during the Gupta period. His father, Ādityadāsa, was a learned scholar who inspired Varāhamihira's interest in astronomy and astrology. Ujjain was a hub for astral studies, providing Varāhamihira with access to various scholarly resources and

intelligent discussions with other great scholars of the time.

The Bṛhatsaṃhitā is an encyclopaedic work covering a wide range of subjects, including astrology, astronomy, meteorology, geography, architecture, agriculture and many more. It is often considered a monumental text in Indian literature due to its breadth and depth. Some notable sections of the Bṛhatsaṃhitā include astrology, meteorology, geography, architecture, agriculture etc. In the second verse of the first chapter of his treatise, 'Upanayanādhyāyah', Varāhamihira states the nature of his book saying that the book is neither too copious nor too brief.

प्रथममुनिकथिमवितथमवलोक्य ग्रन्थविस्तरस्यार्थम्।

नातिलघुविपुलरचनाभिरुद्यतः स्पष्टमभिधातुम्॥२॥

(VS – Ch. 1, Verse 2)

This table will give us a general idea about the nature of both the treatises

Aspects	Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā (BS)	Vārāhisāṃhitā (VS)
Author	Acārya Bhadrabāhu	Varāhamihir
Time Period	c. 367–298 BCE (Debated)	5th Century CE (Gupta Era)
Main Focus	Scientific aspects of daily life, including rain	Scientific aspects of daily life, including rain
Chapters	27	107

**Comparative Study of Bṛhatsaṃhitā and Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā:**

As we have seen both treatises deal with similar topics, there are some interesting similarities found in both of them. They can be seen with the help of a table:

Feature	Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā (BS)	Vārāhisāṃhitā (VS)
General Framework	Extensive detail on omens/portents	Concise and systematic
Meteors and Halos	Predicts results based on 4-5 colours	Predicts results based on many varied colours
Cloud Pregnancy	Predicts rain on 196 <sup>th</sup> day	Predicts rain on 195 <sup>th</sup> day
Portents and Omens	182 verses describing types	66 verses describing types
Planetary Movements	Identifies 7 types of motion	Identifies 7 types but uses different names
Rahu, Ketu, Sun and Moon	Focuses on shapes and colours as omens	Focuses on astronomical calculations and omens

**General Comparative Framework:**

Many chapters of the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā match the Bṛhatsaṃhitā in terms of

subject matter. Specifically, the second and third chapters of the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā align with the 33rd chapter of the Bṛhatsaṃhitā. The second

chapter describes the nature of meteors, while the third chapter describes their effects.

भौतिकानां शरीराणां स्वर्गात् प्रच्यवतामिह  
सम्भवश्चान्तरिक्षे तु तज्जैरुल्केति सञ्ज्ञिता॥  
तत्र चारा तथा धिष्ण्यं विद्युच्चाशनिभिः सहा  
उल्काविकारा बोद्धव्या ते पतन्ति निमित्ततः॥

(BS – Ch. 2, Verses 5 & 6)

दिवि भुक्तशुभफलानां पततां रूपाणि यानि तान्युल्काः।

धिष्ण्योल्काशनिविद्युत् इति पञ्चधा भिन्नाः॥

(VS – Ch. 1, Verse 33)

There is a striking similarity between the two works in terms of sentiment. However, while the Varāhīsaṃhitā is concise, the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā is expansive, attempting to explain every subject in detail. In some instances, the predictions in the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā differ from or are even diametrically opposite to those in the Varāhīsaṃhitā.

#### **Meteors and Halos (Chapters 4 & 34):**

The description of halos (Pariveṣa) is found in Chapter 4 of the Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā and Chapter 34 of the Varāhīsaṃhitā. In the Jaina text, broken halos are considered inauspicious, while those coloured like silver or oil are seen as signs of prosperity. While both texts share similar views on the effects of these halos, the Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā lacks the detailed results regarding the specific lunar dates and constellations associated with them, which are more systematically organized in the Varāhīsaṃhitā. Additionally, the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā contains frequent repetitions in this section.

#### **Cloud Gestation (Chapter 12):**

Chapter 12 of the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā deals with the signs of "cloud gestation" (Garbha). It states that the "pregnancy" of the

clouds matures in 7 months and 7 days. While this seems different from Varāhamihira's 195-day calculation, they are actually identical. The Bhadrabāhusaṃhitā uses the sidereal month (Nakṣatra Māsa) of 27 days, which totals 196 days. Varāhamihira counts 195 completed days, making the 196th day the time of result. BS stands out here by describing this gestation according to specific months, a detail absent in the Varāhīsaṃhitā.

#### **Portents and Omens (Chapters 14 & 46):**

Both texts cover the topic of portents (Utpāta). The Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā divides them into three categories: Celestial, Atmospheric, and Terrestrial, though it describes them without a strict order. In contrast, the Varāhīsaṃhitā is much more organized, classifying omens into categories like fire, trees, crops, water, birth, and animals. Even though Varāhamihira is more systematic, the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā is far more exhaustive, containing 182 verses on the subject compared to Varāhamihira's 46. Both define a portent as a "deviation from nature."

#### **Planetary Movements (Venus, Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury):**

BS is significantly more detailed here, with 231 verses compared to Varāhī's 45. It includes new information on the paths (Vīthīs) and movements of Venus.

#### **Saturn:**

Varāhamihira's description is more academic and detailed regarding the transit through each constellation. However, BS includes a unique section on the conjunction of the Moon and Saturn that is not found in Varāhī.

#### **Mercury:**

BS lists seven types of motion for Mercury. While the results are similar to Varāhī, the names of the motions differ (e.g., "Durgā" in BS is "Yoganta" in Varāhī). BS is more detailed regarding the retrograde and stationary phases of Mercury.

### Rahu, Ketu, Sun, and Moon:

For Rahu, the Varāhī Saṃhitā is more extensive, but BS is considered more "useful" for its focus on the physical omens of eclipses. Regarding Ketu (comets), Varāhī provides a systematic classification by three types, while BS focuses on the results of Ketu appearing in specific directions or constellations. For the Sun and Moon, both texts are very similar, equating a clear, lustrous appearance with prosperity and a dark or rough appearance with fear and war.

### Analysis and Conclusion:

Based on the detailed comparison provided in the text, several layers of analysis emerge regarding the relationship, stylistic differences, and philosophical underpinnings of the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā and the Bṛhat Saṃhitā.

#### 1. Structural Divergence:

The most immediate contrast lies in the literary "temperament" of the two authors. Varāhamihira's Bṛhat Saṃhitā is characterized by its systematic, concise, and highly organized structure. It serves almost as an academic encyclopedia of ancient Indian science, where brevity is valued. In contrast, the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā is expansive and exhaustive. It prioritizes completeness over conciseness, often providing detailed explanations for phenomena that Varāhamihira mentions only in passing. However, this expansiveness comes at a cost; the text admits that the Jaina work suffers from frequent repetitions (punarukti), grammatical laxity, and

occasional breaks in poetic meter, suggesting a focus on preserving oral tradition rather than polished literary perfection.

#### 2. Depth vs. Breadth in Portents:

The two works offer a fascinating trade-off between depth and breadth regarding Utpāta (portents or omens). Varāhamihira offers a more sophisticated and logically categorized system of classification (fire, water, animal behavior, etc.), which makes it easier to navigate as a reference guide. However, the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā contains nearly four times the volume of information on this subject (182 verses vs. 46). This suggests that the Jaina tradition, perhaps due to its deep philosophical interest in the law of cause and effect and "Nimitta" (signs), preserved a much larger corpus of folklore and observational data regarding natural omens than the more streamlined Bṛhatsaṃhitā.

#### 3. Contradictory Predictions (Phalādeśa):

One of the most intriguing points of analysis is the existence of "opposite results" for the same celestial phenomenon. The text notes that in certain instances, a meteor or planetary position that Varāhamihira deems auspicious is interpreted as inauspicious in the Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā. This highlights that "astrological science" in ancient India was not a monolith. Different schools of thought had distinct interpretive lenses, likely influenced by local traditions, varying historical experiences with natural disasters, and different philosophical interpretations of celestial "intent."