

The portrayal of nature and language in kalidasa's *meghaduta*

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Abstract

Kalidasa's single lyric *Meghaduta* is adequate to judge him a national poet of India. Kalidasa has transformed the state of his experience in its gorgeous forms and made it alive in his creativity. Kalidasa has shown the graphical descriptions of nature along with topographical details of ancient India in *Meghaduta*. *Meghaduta* depicts the deep insight of human life yet the central issue remains the natural helplessness of a passionate lover. He has described the oceans and the rivers, the mountains and the forests, the trees and flowers, the beasts and birds as much conscious of a personal life as man. Kalidasa's deep insight into the heart of Nature is merged wonderfully with his profound knowledge of the human heart. The poet envisages the objects of Nature in association with human being and introduces the various facets of human heart in an appropriate style.

Keywords: lyric, Nature, beauty, human heart, artistic brilliance, language, style

Introduction

Umashankar Joshi, the stalwart of Gujarati literature, considers Kalidasa 'the national poet and a poet of Indian Culture'. Even his single lyric *Meghaduta* is adequate to judge him a national poet of India. India is an agriculture-centred nation and the base of its odorous culture is fully dependent upon rain (cloud) (Pandya 1). Kalidasa has transformed the state of his experience in its gorgeous forms and made it alive in his creativity. Dr. Radhakrishnan in his *Living with a Purpose* appreciates his art in the following words:

Kalidasa's works preserve for us moments of beauty, incidents of courage, acts of sacrifice and fleeting moods of the human heart. His works will continue to be read for that indefinable illumination about the human predicament which is the work of a great poet. Many of his lines have become almost like proverbs in Sanskrit (13-14).

The perception of a poem according to Sanskrit critics is a very extensive form. Acharya Vishvanath defines poem as "*Vakyam Rasatmakam Kavyam*" i.e. the sentence full of Rasa (sentiment). The poem *Meghaduta* is centered entirely on personal sentiments, hence, is considered a lyric poem: According to S. K. De: "It should be noted that the ardent feeling in this poem is not isolated but is blended picturesquely with a great deal of descriptive matter, which stands in the way of regarding the composition as a pure lyric" (Introduction *Meghaduta* 30)

Though, the poem *Meghaduta* has also been considered an elegy, though it lacks the intense feelings of compassion and pains manifest in an elegy usually. Kalidasa has shown the graphical descriptions of nature along with topographical details of ancient India in *Meghaduta*. *Meghaduta* – cloud messenger, is essentially a lyric verse composed in *Mandakranta* meter in two parts *Purvamegha* (previous cloud) and *Uttaramegha* (consequent cloud). *Mandakranta* verse form consists of four repeating lines of seventeen syllables arranged in affixed pattern. This lyric poetry describes Yaksha, who has been exiled from Alaka, suffering the pain of

separation from his wife, takes the help of a cloud (*the Megha*) to convey love message to his beloved. *Meghaduta* depicts the deep insight of human life yet the central issue remains the natural helplessness of a passionate lover. It has also been clarified that the idea of conveying message of Yaksha through cloud is not merely a poet's fancy, and Kalidasa himself has justified it in the poem when he says: '*Kamarta Hi Prakrutikrupanachhetanachetaneshu*': Where the cloud, a compound of vapour, heat, water and wind, [and] where the messages that have to be carried by living creatures possessed of sound organs of sense? [that is, there is a great incongruity between the two objects]- Not taking this into consideration, through eagerness, the Gujyaka [Yaksa] implored him; for those [that are] oppressed by love [are] by nature incompetent as regards [that is, to distinguish between] animate and inanimate objects (Karmarkar 5). Yaksha seems unhappy in a phase of separation but has enough faith to spend the four months of monsoon anyhow. He seems to concern the delicate heart of his beloved that how could she resist the separation, hence, he conveys the message that she should not be anxious too much hoping their reunion soon.

Kalidasa has achieved a unique place in the literature of the world. His excellent creativity, sense of imagination and wonderful poetic fluency etc. have established him in a front-row of the great poets of all ages. Kalidasa has been acclaimed by Sir Monier-Williams as the "Shakespeare of India" (Ram Gopal viii). Though, while surveying era and time, we come to know Kalidasa lived circa 1100 years before Shakespeare. Hence, some scholars are of the view that Shakespeare is the 'Kalidas of England'. The works of Kalidasa were discovered in a later phase than those of Shakespeare by the British. Hence, Kalidasa's greatness was verified afterward. Looking to the theme of his works, Hindu culture is fully evident in his poetic expression. He has described the oceans and the rivers, the mountains and the forests, the trees and flowers, the beasts and birds as much conscious of a personal life as man. Kalidasa's deep insight into the heart of Nature is merged brilliantly with his profound knowledge of the human heart. Hence, it is impossible to see in his poetry where the poet of

nature ceases and the poet of human emotion begin. Ram Gopal in *Kalidasa His Art and Culture* notes that “It is no exaggeration to say that the excellent and elevating description of Nature is the very soul of Kalidasa’s poetry. The description of Nature is inseparable from his poetry, just as the moonlight is inseparable from the moon” (119).

Meghaduta, is a lyrical poetry, consisting of about 120 stanzas divided into two parts. The first part introduces the path of the cloud from Ramgiri to Alaka. Here, Kalidasa represents the glowing description of the beauties of Nature woven together with human feeling whereas the second part reveals the picture of the human heart placed in the frame of natural beauty. The poet very lively demonstrates the various forms of a beautiful nature. The poet seems very conscious while describing a variety of facets of Nature. In the description of the route to be followed by the cloud along with nature, the poet very skillfully incorporates the changing emotions of human heart. Kalidasa introduces the distinctive peculiarities of the various towns/states, rivers and mountains sited on the route to be followed by the clouds: Amarkuta, Himalaya-Kailasa (*Mountains*); Narmada, Vetravati, Sindhu, Gambhira, Ganges (*Rivers*); Dasarna, Avanty (*States/Country*) and Vidisa, Ujjayani, Alaka (*cities*). Kalidasa has offered an eternal form to various places and its landscape in his works.

In the very second stanza, Kalidasa’s describes the condition of the Yaksha and the beauty of the cloud. The translation by D. R. Karmarkar reads:

“Having passed some months on that mountain, that uxorious one, separated from [his helpless] wife, with[his] fore-arm bare on account of the sleeping of the golden bracelet [owing to extreme emaciation], saw on the first day of [the month of] Asadha, a cloud resting on a peak,[and] and as charming to look at as an elephant in position for giving a side-blow by his tusks, in the sport of battering against a rampart” (2).

The holy river Reva (Narmada) is described as:

“you would see the Narmada shattered [into streamlets] at the root of the Vindhya [mountain] rugged with stones [and appearing] like the coloured decoration on the body of an elephant, formed in variously painted streaks”(13).

After that the poet introduces the charming scene of nature intermingled with musical quality at the advent of the cloud in the Dasarna country which, the Yaksha describes:

“would have the garden-fences possessed of a whitish luster on account of the Ketaka flowers spilt up at the ends, big village trees noisy with the preparations for [building their] nests by the crows and others... the regions of the Jambu thickets dark with ripe fruits, and the swans staying [there] for few days” (Stanza 23).

Soon after this, there comes the capital of that country named Vidisa where “the sweet water of the Vetravati with the waves surging up, in a charming manner owing to the thundering near the banks, as if it were the face [associated] with the knitting of the eye-brows” (Stanza 24).

Kalidasa offers a gorgeous portrayal of Ujjayini of his time:

“on seeing in which [Ujjayani] crores of bright necklaces with big precious stones as the central gem, conches, shells, emerald gems dark-green like grass, with rays shooting upwards, [and] pieces of corals, stocked in the shops, the oceans are noticed as having only water remaining [in them]”(Stanza 33).

Kalidasa’s unique sense of imagination can be observed in his wonderful sketch of Kailasa Mountain. The Yaksha tells the cloud to be the guest of the Kaliasa-[mountain] with [its] peak-joints pulled up by the arms of Ravana [the ten-mouthed one], the looking glass for the heavenly damsels, which has stood over-spreading the sky with [its] lofty peaks white like lotuses, as though the loud laughter of the three-eyed God [Siva] gathered into a heap day by day!” (Stanza 60)

While portraying Alaka which is located at the top of Kailasa, Kalidasa shows the stature of his artistic brilliance: The translation reads:

“Alaka with [its silken] garments, the Ganges, slipped off, on its slope, as on a lover’s lap...with her lofty seven storied mansions, bear in your[proper] season a mass of clouds pouring forth water, like a noble woman free from pride [her] curly hair wreathed with strings of pearls” (Stanza 65)

Both the facets of environment: the living and non-living things have been woven together in Kalidasa’s works through which he has acknowledged the inseparable relationship of Nature and human being. It has also been studied that Kalidasa’s appreciation of nature can also serve as the basis of environmental ethics in the present day world. The issues of global warming has threatened the entire world, hence to resist it, the awareness to save environment should be generated. The majority of works by Kalidasa remain a source of inspiration to human being to answer the environmental plight. His works are appreciated as a treasure house of ethical values.

Regarding his style of writing, it has been viewed that Kalidasa wrote essentially for an aristocratic audience. T. G. Mainkar opines it as a form of “aristocratic romanticism,” adding: “Images, events, persons, expression—all these are in [Kalidasa’s] eyes subordinate to artistic considerations.” (Critical essays enotes.com). His works represent the best specimen of *Vaidarbha* style of composition which is highly praised by Dandin and the later writers on Sanskrit poetics (Ram Gopal 104). Along with similes Kalidasa has employed figures of speech like metaphor (*rupaka*), hyperbole (*atisayokti*) and fancy (*utpreksha*). The poet has vividly defined the emotion which is *Vipralambha Srinara* or love in separation. The poem *Meghaduta* is also considered a *Duta Kavya* in Sanskrit literature.

Kale (1974) very appropriately points out on Kalidas’s style:

“He set forth as a necessary corollary that man attains his true dignity only in releasing that is not independent of and above the world that is not not human.: that the ocean and the rivers, the mountains and the forests, the trees and the flowers, the birds and the beasts, are as much

conscious of a personal life as man and therefore claim from him a recognition of their dignity and worth (Baindur Meera 158).

Kalidasa is famous for use of simile (Upama): *Upama Kalidasasya*: For example: the waves in the Vetravati river are compared to the river knitting her eye-brows at the noisy cloud thundering on her banks (Stanza 24 *Purvamegha*) and the eyes of sorrowing wife are half open and half closed like a lotus bud on a cloudy day, neither closed, nor open fully (Stanza 30 *Uttarmegha*). He has employed Mandakranta metre in a wonderful style in shloka 32 as:

Hang by lattice windows, large and sweet
with incense out of women's new-washed hair,
watch the filial peacocks dance affection,
and in the flower-scented palace air
see dancers moving on their red-lac feet

(Holcombe 8)

Hence, the portrayal of Yaksha's abode and his longing for beloved represented with unique sense of creativity by Kalidasa, seems to motivate the emotions and generates sympathy among the readers consequently. The multicolored sketch of Alaka, of Ujjayini, of Himalaya and of Kaliasa etc. proves the magnificence of Kalidasa's artistic talent. His ecological acquaintance is vividly manifested through his wonderful descriptions of mountains, rivers, countries, villages, cities, etc. The poet envisages the objects of Nature in association with human being and introduces the various facets of human heart in an appropriate style. The poem concludes with blessing to the cloud: *Atakrutva Priyannuchitam Prarthanadatmano Me.....Ma Bhudevam Kshannampi Sakhe Vidhuta Viprayog*, i.e. 'May you not be separated from your wife even from a moment' (Stanza 117).

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