

KEY-NOTE ADDRESS TO KĀLIDĀSA-PARVA ON MEGHADŪTA

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Introducing Kālidāsa is, in fact, recalling to memory the height of emotional excellence reached in ancient India. In the ultimate analysis, it can safely be held that the poet's function is to transport the temporal to the eternal by infusing emotional content in it. Through this process, facts related to particular time and place are transformed to truths of all times, which, demanding and arousing widest possible human sympathy, lead one to the ineffable joy of Rasa-realisation. Universality of the poet's mission depends on this widening of the human sympathy beyond time and space. That is why the poetry of the great poets are considered immortal. Whether Rāma of the solar race or the sons of Kuru or Pāṇḍu, the scions of the lunar race—all have been obliterated by Time but their feelings and emotions are still going on inspiring and reverberating in the human hearts even today, solely due to the poet's art. Scholars have underlined this unique aspect of the poetic art in such observations as: 'See for yourself: the reflections of the glory of the primeval kings in the literary mirror (poet's words), do not fade away even in their absence.' (Daṇḍin, Kāvyaadarśa 1.4).

Kālidāsa is the foremost of all such Sanskrit poets as have easily assigned immortality to time-bound individual human life by the alchemy of universalisation of the feelings. His singular skill, not in the narration of facts but in the suggestion of emotions, proves his greatness as a poet. Ānandavardhana rightly observes: 'That is why in this world, comprising innumerable types of poets, only two and three or four and five, such as Kālidāsa etc. are counted as great poets.' (Dhvanyāloka I)

Assigning the dustbin to such adverse comments of the criticasters as 'Is Raghu a poem, readable too!', the poetry of Kālidāsa today reigns supreme all over the world. There is no dispute over this. For Kālidāsa, known all the world over for his poetic excellence, details of personal history also do not carry any weight. We all know and accept--'Fame is exemplified by Kālidāsa'. The fame of Kālidāsa, it should be noted, is not due to his parentage, nor to his native place but is due only to his poetry. Considering all this, poetic fancy takes its flight:

Which was the country, O poet that became hallowed
By your birth?
From which teacher did you acquire your
wonderful knowledge?
Who was the King, desirous of honouring the gifted,
Honoured thee, and attained immortality
Along with the honoured?

Such baffling questions, wise men ask incessantly
To ascertain thy identity till this day --
Futile is the effort, a poet's identity shines in his rhymes.
The rising Sun requires nothing else than
his own resplendant rays for his identity.

The object of these lines is not belittling or denigration of sincere research in any way. The stress is on: 'A poet's identity is to be sought in his poetry'. The poet like the Sun is resplendant in his own glorious poems and a proper appreciation of the same should be the befitting gift to the great poet.

The simile of the Sun is also pertinent. The poet has offered seven works of art just as the seven rays of the Sun. These are: **Ṛtusamhāra**, **Mālavikāgnimitra**, **Vikramorvaśīya**, **Meghadūta**, **Kumārasambhava**, **Raghuvamśa** and **Abhijñānaśākuntala**.

This order of the works of the poet appears sound from the viewpoint of the gradual maturity of the poet's vision and art. If **Ṛtusamhāra** shows the flourish of the poetic skill, **Raghuvamśa** in poetry and **Abhijñānaśākuntala** in drama show up the fullest maturity of Kālidāsa's poetic genius. These works present the poet's manner of looking at the world (weltan-schawung) and in them the individual and social aspirations--hopes and despairs, pleasure and pain, richness and poverty--have been reflected on the emotional plane, which deeply move and overwhelm us even today.

In spite of the bold pronouncement: "Antiquity only does not make everything good", Kālidāsa cherishes high respect for the old tradition but nevertheless is a lover of the new. Among all the Sanskrit poets, Kālidāsa is the first to use both the forms of poetry--the poetic and the dramatic. In the field of drama, he refers to the earlier dramatists--Bhāsa, Saumilla, Kaviputra etc. and in the field of poetry he pays homage to Vālmiki, the precursor. Kālidāsa is unique for his simultaneous mastery of both the forms.

Along with this versatility of talent, Kālidāsa is also the first poet to devise a new genre of poetry, which has been defined as lyric. Characteristic feature of this form of poetry is the exposition of the poet's own feelings without any narrative linking. **Meghadūta** is the first work in the Sanskrit literature, where a poet's personal feelings have found free expression. The technique of the Mahākāvya is leisurely. In it the poet remains bound, to a great extent, by the subject-matter. Similarly, in the drama too the freedom of the poet is circumscribed. But Kālidāsa started uttering his own voice right from his first **Ṛtusamhāra** which reached the climax in the **Meghadūta**.

The foremost feature of the **Meghadūta** is that it does not have a narrative. More than a hundred verses are composed in the sober Mandākrāntā metre (17

syllables with pauses on 4th, 6th and 7th) in which the *yakṣa* is just a symbol. Here charm of the narrative, variety of metres, pleasing uses of the figures of speech are not objects of attraction. Verses move on like the sound of the dark clouds of the rainy season and after touching a few halts, draw to a close in the message for the beloved. The division of the poem into two parts--Pūrva and Uttara--thought of by Kālidāsa, has become the future model for this variety. This contribution of the poet in the field of poetic technique also deserves respectful recognition.

The **Meghadūta** is a poem of a journey and reaching the destination. The theme is well-known. A certain *yakṣa*, due to negligence in duty, is banished and decides to send a message to his separated beloved through the cloud, which can move to any direction freely. Assuming approval of the cloud, he first describes the path to follow and later conveys the message to be delivered to his beloved.

It has been observed that in the main the **Meghadūta** is an expression of the poet's own feelings. It is not the love pangs of any particular person. Referring to the *yakṣa* as '*kaścit*' (a certain), the poet has universalised his feelings. If *yakṣa* is replaced by '*martyaḥ*' (man), it would technically be faulty as the destination of a man cannot reasonably be the city of Kubera (Alakā) but the idea of universal human feeling would be apparent. Kālidāsa being the greatest of the suggesting poets, rightly uses *yakṣa* to play up the universality of the pang of separation.

The motif of the **Meghadūta** is the agony of world-wide sense of isolation/separation. Separation is a painful but unavoidable fact of human life. The **Meghadūta** is the outcome of the desire to overcome it. When the Western poet laments the mortal existence saying "Here where men sit and hear each other groan", he actually echoes the introduction of Kālidāsa's message:

Separated though, still holding on, your lover
Enquires your welfare, O lady
That is what one should ask in the beginning
As human life abounds in dangers.

Human life is subject to many hazards and so the bonds of affection and love are the more valuable in it.

Yakṣa is a lover and Kālidāsa, upholding the moral limits of love, makes him send his message to his beloved wife. Though Kālidāsa calls him a lustful lover (*kāmin*), his sincere love and concern for his beloved wife prove him to be an ideal lover.

However, much love-lorn people may not distinguish between the sensible and the insensible (*kāmārtā hi prakṛti-kṛpaṇā cetanācetanēṣu*), the *yakṣa* has been very careful in propitiating the cloud. In the very beginning he refers to the aristocratic,

official and authoritative supremacy of the cloud: 'I know that you are the scion of Puṣkara and Āvartaka clouds known all over the world, chief officer of Indra and capable of assuming any form at will.'

*jātaṁ vaṁśe bhuvanavidite puṣkarāvartakānām /
jānāmi tvāṁ prakṛtipuruṣaṁ kāmarūpaṁ maghonaḥ*// (I.6)

With this introduction, the *yakṣa* presents a detailed account of the path to be followed to reach the city of Alakā from Rāmagiri, which has endowed all those places of Bhāratavarṣa with perpetual beauty and splendour.

Leaving a verse by verse appreciation of the poem, I would like to quote the observation of Rabindranath, the poet of a different age: 'How sweet are the very names of the rivers, mountains and cities of that ancient Bharata country: Avanti-Vidiśā, Ujjayainī, Vindhya-Kailāśa-Devagiri, Revā-Siprā-Vetravatī. There is a beauty, a charm and a purity in these names. Time appears to have gradually lost its purity. A general degeneration has set in in the language, conduct and mental disposition. So while the cloud of the *yakṣa* overflies the hills, rivers and the cities, a deep sigh of separation wells out of the reader and follows it.' (**Meghadūta**, 1891, Translation mine).

The cloud of the poet Kālidāsa revives that feeling of pang lying dormant in every heart for attaining what is far away, most beloved and the original abode whence we have drifted away. The cloud arouses in man an awareness of that absolute fullness that lies beyond the pale of fragmentary fulfilment and can alone make human life fruitful. We are standing aloof from and ignorant of the emotional Unity of Man due to the inanity of our selfish individuality. The poet's cloud draws our attention to the realisation of the same.

(2)

Culture is not the primary commitment of the poet. Worldly life is his aim and his main function is to portray the ups and downs, pleasure and pain, efforts and failure and attainment and discomfiture of that life in a supernormal manner. The poet's depiction of the world is not supernatural but supernormal. In this depiction, culture naturally is reflected since it is a part and parcel of life. We may say that worldly life is 'a fact' and being reflected in literature, this fact changes to truth.

Another truth has to be accepted. Every poet is an escapist in the true sense [Latin Ex-(out)+cappa (cloak) - hence to throw off restraint]. He seeks and advocates freedom from restraints. To be a missionary is also not the object of the poet. He, of course, gets disturbed with the anomalies of human life, the social injustice and brutal selfishness but does not turn a crusader to fight these ills physically. He just attempts to represent the terrible repercussions of these on the emotional level. As a result,

his poetry, though based on a particular individual, ceases to remain related with him alone but brings home the inner anomalies of all those who symbolise these emotions. If the reader is *sahṛdaya* i.e. capable of identifying themselves with the poet's world, he derives himself the message of the poet, viz. 'One should follow the ideal of Rāma and not that of Rāvaṇa'. In this context, one should not forget that there is a still higher purpose of poetry which is to provide ineffable joy instantly (*sadyaḥ paranirvṛtiḥ*). As a path-finder of realising the individual feelings in the mirror of universal emotion, the poet proves to be the supreme teacher of the world. Sympathising with the sympathies of others may be held to be the supreme mission of poetry. This obliteration of the self and unification with all--has been extolled in the *Gītā* as the greatest achievement of man: "By means of Yoga one sees his own self in all the beings as well as all the beings in his own self and becomes unbiased (*samadarśana*)."

Even though the poet is thus the supreme guide, his method is different from that of a philosopher. According to our standpoint the poet must necessarily be a passionate admirer of life. He who has no loving concern for life cannot be a poet. Ānandavardhana holds:

If the poet is a lover of life (*śṛṅgārin*), the world in his poem becomes replete with charm (*rasa*). Conversely if he is hateful everything becomes disgusting. (*Dhvanyāloka*)

Without a total sympathetic disposition, it is not possible to find out the elements of hidden richness of the human life.

The heart of Kālidāsa is so wide and 'full of the milk of human kindness' that he can easily sympathise with the feelings of the living and non-living world. His poems and plays are the outcome of this very world-wide sympathy. We can easily see this sympathy in all his works. The all-pervading sympathy of the poet is going on widening the limits of man's sympathetic horizon through the ages. The poet teaches us to love life and its natural environment. Kālidāsa has seen the world and human life with his two mortal eyes and has not tried to acquire a third eye by closing them. The worldly life, though encumbered with many ups and downs has drawn the emotional attention of the poet and he has successfully endowed the mortal life with eternal values. Splendor of life surpasses its mortality. The poet visualises it and shows it up.

(3)

The test of the poet lies in the tasting of his poetry--that has been my premise. So entreating the learned participants to a sincere discussion of the poetic art of Kālidāsa, I conclude. I however would like to humbly indicate that it is necessary to evaluate the poet's approach to life in his creations. Human life happens to be the

base standing on which the super-structure of literature becomes worthwhile. Artistic finesse is just a form, the grandeur of life, though mortal, is the ultimate value.

In the very first verse of it Kālidāsa records his indebtedness to the father-figure of poetry, Vālmīki. Then he starts delineating the love-lorn condition of an individual soul and transforming the same into the universal feeling of estrangement ends with the exhortation: "Let no such separation befall thee even for a moment with your beloved" (*mā bhūd evaṃ kṣaṇamapi ca te vidyutā viprayogaḥ*). Such a grand universalisation of individual feeling is really unique.

It would not be improper to conclude with a sonnet in Sanskrit in honour of the poet:

भारतीवरपुत्रस्त्वं त्वां नमामो महाकवे ।
ज्योतिस्तेऽद्यापि विमलं चित्तं पुलकयत्यलम् ।
न जानीमः कदा कुत्र गृहीत्वा जनिमात्मिकाम्
अद्राक्षीर्धरणीमेनां दुःखविच्छेदविह्वलाम्
सा दृष्टिस्ते निरुपमा परमप्रेमपूरिता
भासयामास मधुरं कृत्स्नं मानवजीवनम् ।

कुत्र का कन्यका श्लाघ्यं पतिमाप्नुं तपस्यति,
गान्धर्वविधिनोढ का पत्या रूढं विसर्जिता
राजानः के सहृदयाः शौर्यवीर्यसमुज्ज्वलाः
मातृभूमिं समुद्धृत्य शीर्षस्थाने व्यतिष्ठियन्,
कश्च यक्षः पराधीनः प्रियाविरहकातरः
विलपन् याचते मेघं गिरा मर्मस्पृशा पुनः ।

एवं ते भारती सास्मानानन्दहृतवेदनान्
धन्यीकरोति नित्यं भोस्तेन तुभ्यं नमो नमः ।

