

CONTRIBUTION OF KALIDAS FOR SANSKRIT LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

In sum, it gives us great aesthetic pleasure to read Kalidas's works. His descriptions enthrall us. With him we are in the company-cultured a highly civilized, cultured personality. It is like a flower which, in bloom, spreads its fragrance all around. And a man's mature, ripened mind and intellect brings pleasure to those around him. In Kalidas's creations, we enter the world of people pure in mind and body and who are graceful. We learn here the manner in which man's nature can reach high, moral levels. It pleases us deeply to come into contact with characters like Parvati, Dileepa, Raghu, Aja, Shakuntala, Dushyanta and Kanva. It is for this wonderful experience that we as well as people in other countries read Kalidas. KALIDASA, India's greatest Sanskrit poet and dramatist. In spite of the celebrity of his name, the time when he flourished always has been an unsettled question, although most scholars nowadays favor the middle of the 4th and early 5th centuries A.D., during the reigns of Chandragupta II Vikramaditya and his successor Kumara Gupta. Undetermined also is the place of Kalidasa's principal literary activity, as the frequent and minute geographic allusions in his works suggest that he traveled extensively. Numerous works have been attributed to his authorship. Most of them, however, are either by lesser poets bearing the same name or by others of some intrinsic worth, whose works simply chanced to be associated with Kalidasa's name their own names having long before ceased to be remembered.

Key words: Alakanagari, hermitage, Mount Kailasa

Who was Kalidas? When did he live and where in India was he residing? Much discussion has taken place for a long time now about his life and times. Not many queries on this score have elicited definite answers. Several legends have sprouted around him.

According to one such popular legend, Kalidas wasn't always so wise and learned. In fact, there was a time he was considered to be one of the stupidest people in the kingdom!

One sunny day, Kalidas was sitting on a branch of a tree, trying to saw it off. But the dimwitted man was sitting on the wrong end of the branch, so when he finally sawed through the branch, down he tumbled! This

act of sheer stupidity was observed by some shrewd pundits minister passing by.

Now these pundits wanted to play a trick on the arrogant princess, to teach her a lesson. She was determined to marry someone who would defeat her in a debate about the scriptures. The princess had heaped considerable abuse on them over a period of time, and they were determined to extract their revenge. So, when they chanced upon Kalidas, they decided to present him to the queen as a suitable match for her.

In order to conceal his stupidity, the pundits asked Kalidas to pretend that he was a great sage, who was observing a vow of silence. Kalidas readily agreed, and they presented him to the queen, saying that Kalidas would only communicate by way of

gestures. When the queen asked Kalidas a few questions to test his intelligence, Kalidas gesticulated wildly and the astute pundits 'interpreted' these gestures as extremely witty answers and retorts. The princess was suitably impressed, and the couple was married without much delay.

Kalidas's stupidity could be concealed for only so long, and the night of the wedding Kalidas blurted out something inane. The princess realized that she had married a prize fool. Furious, she threw him out of her palace, and her life.

The dejected Kalidas wandered around, till he came to the bank of the river. He contemplated taking his life when he suddenly saw some women washing clothes on the edge of the river bank. He observed that the stones which the women were pounding with clothes, were smooth and rounded, while the other stones were rough and ragged. This observation hit him like a thunderbolt, and it dawned upon him that if stones could be worn through and change their shape by being pounded upon by clothes, then why couldn't his thick brains change, by being pounded upon by knowledge!

Kalidas thus grew determined to become the wisest and most learned man in the country, and to achieve this end he started indulging in intellectual pastimes, reading, meditating and praying to his goddess Kali to grant him divine knowledge. His wish was fulfilled.

This is one of the most popular legends about Kalidas. There are several other stories but they lack authenticity.

It appears Kalidas was at the court of emperor Vikramaditya. The place and time of this king are also not definite. But it can

be said with some certainty that Kalidas lived before the 6th century A.D., i.e., about 1400 years ago. But when exactly he lived before the 6th century is not firmly established. Though a deep affection for the city of Ujjain is discernible in his works, it cannot be said with certainty that he lived there. But we can assume that, wherever he may have been born, he had lived at Ujjain.

Kalidas, however, had good knowledge of the whole of Bharat. In his poem 'Meghaduta', his descriptions of mountains and rivers and cities and villages stretching from Ramagiri in Central India up to Alakanagari in the Himalayas are very beautiful. In another epic poem 'Raghuvamsha', Kalidas, while portraying the conquests of emperor Raghu, describes the places and peoples, their modes of living, food-habits and trades and professions, rivers and mountains in almost the whole country — Assam, Bengal and Utkal in the East; Pandya and Kerala in the South and Sind, Gandhara and other places in the North-west.

Reading these pen-pictures, one cannot help but conclude that the poet must have had a personal knowledge of these areas. In short, he must have traveled widely across the length and breadth of the land, seen those places, talked to the people and studied their modes of living.

Kalidas possessed that distinct intellect which makes one a great poet. He was a scholar and his works display his poetic genius as well as scholarship. Also they are marked by a belief of what is good in life and people's noble goals of life. He could describe the rich and wealthy life of a royal palace and the serene, simple and peaceful life at a hermitage with equal understanding. He could, likewise, describe



the joys of the marital life of a man and his spouse as well as their pangs of separation.

He creates scenes of a serious and thoughtful nature as also hilarious scenes of light comedy. In his works is found an excellent combination of art-consciousness, unmatched wordpower and an unparalleled capacity for vivid portrayals.

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Numerous works have been attributed to his authorship. Most of them, however, are either by lesser poets bearing the same name or by others of some intrinsic worth, whose works simply chanced to be associated with Kalidasa's name their own names having long before ceased to be remembered. Only seven are generally considered genuine Plays. There are three plays, the earliest of which is probably the MalavikAgnimitra (Malavika and Agnimitra), a work concerned with palace intrigue . It is of special interest because the hero is a historical figure, King Agnimitra, whose father, PuShpamitra, wrested the kingship of northern India from the Mauryan king Brihadratha about 185 B.C. and established the Sunga dynasty, which held power for more than a century. The Vikramorvashlya (Urvashi Won Through Valor) is based on the old legend of

the love of the mortal Pururavas for the heavenly damsel Urvashi.

The legend occurs in embryonic form in a hymn of the Rig Veda and in a much amplified version in the Shatpathabrahmana. The third play, Abhijñānaśakuntalā (Shakuntala Recognized by the Token Ring), is the work by which Kalidasa is best known not only in India but throughout the world. It was the first work of Kalidasa to be translated into English from which was made a German translation in 1791 that evoked the often quoted admiration by Goethe. The raw material for this play, which usually is called in English simply Shakuntala after the name of the heroine, is contained in the Mahabharata and in similar form also in the Padmapurna, but these versions seem crude and primitive when compared with Kalidasa's polished and refined treatment of the story.

In bare outline the story of the play is as follows: King Dushyanta, while on a hunting expedition, meets the hermit-girl Shakuntala, whom he marries in the hermitage by a ceremony of mutual consent. Obligated by affairs of state to return to his palace, he gives Shakuntala his signet ring, promising to send for her later. But when Shakuntala comes to the court for their reunion, pregnant with his child, Dushyanta fails to acknowledge her as his wife because of a curse. The spell is subsequently broken by the discovery of the ring, which Shakuntala had lost on her way to the court. The couple are later reunited, and all ends happily.

The influence of the Abhijñānaśakuntalā outside India is evident not only in the abundance of translations in many languages, but also in its adaptation to the operatic stage by Paderewski, Weingartner, and Alfano. Poems.

In addition to these three plays Kalidasa wrote two long epic poems, the KumArasambhava (Birth of KumAra) and the Raghuvamsha (Dynasty of Raghu). The former is concerned with the events that lead to the marriage of the god Shiva and ParvatI, daughter of the HimAlaya. This union was desired by the gods for the production of a son, KumAra, god of war, who would help them defeat the demon Taraka.

The gods induce Kama, god of love, to discharge an amatory arrow at Siva who is engrossed in meditation. Angered by this interruption of his austerities, he burns Kama to ashes with a glance of his third eye. But love for ParvatI has been aroused, and it culminates in their marriage.

The Raghuvamsha treats of the family to which the great hero Rama belonged, commencing with its earliest antecedents and encapsulating the principal events told in the Ramayana of Valmiki. But like the KumArasambhava, the last nine cantos of which are clearly the addition of another poet, the Raghuvamsha ends rather abruptly, suggesting either that it was left unfinished by the poet or that its final portion was lost early. Finally there are two lyric poems, the MeghadUta (Cloud Messenger) and the Ritusamhara (Description of the Seasons). The latter, if at all a genuine work of Kalidasa, must surely be regarded as a youthful composition, as it is distinguished by rather exaggerated and overly exuberant depictions of nature, such as are not elsewhere typical of the poet.

It is of tangential interest, however, that the Ritusamhara, published in Bengal in 1792,

was the first book to be printed in Sanskrit. On the other hand, the Meghaduta, until the 1960's hardly known outside India, is in many ways the finest and most perfect of all Kalidasa's works and certainly one of the masterpiece of world literature. A short poem of 111 stanzas, it is founded at once upon the barest and yet most original of plots. For some unexplained dereliction of duty, a Yaksha, or attendant of Kubera, god of wealth, has been sent by his lord into yearlong exile in the mountains of central India, far away from his beloved wife on Mount Kailasa in the Himalaya.

At the opening of the poem, particularly distraught and hapless at the onset of the rains when the sky is dark and gloomy with clouds, the yaksha opens his heart to a cloud hugging close the mountain top. He requests it mere aggregation of smoke, lightning, water, and wind that it is, to convey a message of consolation to his beloved while on its northward course. The YakSha then describes the many captivating sights that are in store for the cloud on its way to the fabulous city of Alaka, where his wife languishes amid her memories of him.

Throughout the MeghadUta, as perhaps nowhere else so plentifully in Kalidasa's works, are an unvarying freshness of inspiration and charm, delight imagery and fancy, profound insight into the emotions, and a oneness with the phenomena of nature. Moreover, the fluidity and beauty of the language are probably unmatched in Sanskrit literature, a feature all the more remarkable for its inevitable loss in translation.



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