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From the Bhavan's President
Kalidasa Sahitya

R. Venkataraman



*Kumarasambhava, Raghuvamsa, Ritusamhara, Meghaduta,
Malavikagnimitram, Vikramorvasiyam and Abhijnana
Shakuntalam* have seeped into our national consciousness and
have become a part of our collective heritage. In their impact,
they rank next only to the all-time great epics, the *Ramayana*
and the *Mahabharata*.

Kalidasa is a true representative of India's spirit, grace and genius. He absorbed India's cultural heritage, enriched it and gave it universal scope and significance. Like the dialogues of the Buddha or of Plato, the dramas of Sophocles and the plays of Shakespeare, Kalidasa's *kavya* is both national and universal; national because of its setting and universal because of

the echo of similar human emotions and experiences in other climes and ages. We find in his works, simple dignity of language, precision of phrase, classical taste, cultivated judgement, intense poetic sensibility and a fusion of thought and feeling.

In his dramas one finds pathos, power, beauty and skilful construction of plot and delineation of character. His

characters range from kings to clowns, courtesans to common folks while the scenes spread from Himalayas to Sri Lanka, princes and palaces to hermit homes. His enchanting descriptions of flora and fauna and his similies and analogies of delicate charm have no parallel:

*Eko hi dosho guna sannipate
Nimajjatindoh kiraneshu
vivankah*

'Even as a single stain of the moon is not noticed by anyone who gazes at the beams that flow endlessly, even so no one dares to blame a shade of weakness in a hero's fame'.

These qualities have made Kalidasa's works belong to the literature of the world. And yet the great poet's humility is astounding. He opens his *Raghuvamsa* thus:

*Kva surya-prabhavo
vamsaha
Kva cha alpa vishaya mathi
Titirshur dustaram
Mohat udupensami sagaram.*

'Where is the race originating from the Sun (*Surya vamsa*) and where is my talent limited in

scope? Through infatuation, I am desirous of crossing with a raft, the ocean that is difficult to cross'.

Western and other historians and students of Sanskrit literature, have gone into the question of the date of Kalidasa. While some place him 800 years before Christ, others assign him to the Gupta period. Some hold the view that the reference to the commencement of the rainy season in *Meghaduta* of the first day of *Asadha*, places Kalidasa in the third century A.D.

But all these speculations, interesting as they are to chronology, seem strangely to be beside the central point. And the central point about Kalidasa is that he is a poet who is ageless and timeless.

More than perhaps any other, the Indian mind goes beyond the immediate to the timeless, beyond the physical to the spiritual, beyond meaning to metaphor. This is ascribable to the fact that there is perhaps no other literary

tradition in the world with the antiquity of India's tradition.

Its beginnings can be traced not to one or even a group of writers but to the timeless collective consciousness of the people as a whole. All our epics and all our mythology existed for centuries as oral traditions and as popular belief systems among the inhabitants of our country. Classical scholars distilled their literary works out of this pre-existing reservoir. *Sthalapuranas*, ballads and folklore, flourished in every nook and corner of India and came to be transmitted from generation to generation. In fact each family was a faculty and each cradle, a classroom.

Kalidasa kept alive the great Indian tradition of *sruti* and *smriti* which together add up to *Sanskriti*.

In Kalidasa's *sahitya*, our *Sanskriti* reached its literary pinnacle. His seven major compositions, *Kumarasambhava*, *Raghuvamsa*, *Ritusamhara*, *Meghaduta*,

Malavikagnimitram, *Vikramorvasiyam* and *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, have seeped into our national consciousness and have become a part of our collective heritage. In their impact, they rank next only to the all-time great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

Kalidasa's knowledge of history and geography is amazing. His description of the Himalayas, the several rivers of India and parts of Southern India suggests that he had travelled widely. For instance in *Raghuvamsa*, there are intimate descriptions of the entire route from Lanka to Ayodhya. He devotes 20 slokas to describe the ocean, the marine fauna, the arecanut and palmyra trees fringing the seashore, the pearls, shells and conches of Tamil Nadu. Then he refers to the river Godavari and the Chitrakuta hill. No person could have described these areas so minutely without seeing things personally.

But Kalidasa offers a great deal besides descriptions of life

in nature. He provides a timeless guidance for man's spiritual progress.

Raghuvamsa recommends the path of righteous conduct; the *Malavikagnimitram* speaks of *sanmarg* and the *Vikramorvasiyam* refers to the attainments of devotion: *Bhakti Yoga Sulabah*. Kalidasa has conveyed in his immortal words the unity of all life, animate and inanimate, and the possibility of spiritual self-refinement which man possesses.

The *Meghaduta* which contains about 120 stanzas is perhaps the best-known and most widely-read works of Kalidasa. It is a remarkable example of Kalidasa's power of description coupled with imagination.

The journey of the Cloud Messenger is so realistically portrayed that it can even to this day be plotted on a map of India. In fact the former director of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute at Pune, Shri R. D. Karmarkar, has drawn such a route map commencing from Ramtek and proceeding along the

Narmada and Ganga. After visiting the Himalayas and Kailash, it terminates in the city of Alakapuri.

The descriptions of the different places en route are remarkably accurate. Not only are the flora and fauna described but the people and cities are portrayed as well. Sri Aurobindo himself has described this work as follows:

"The *Meghadutam* of Kalidasa is the most marvelously perfect descriptive and elegiac poem in the world's literature. Every possible beauty of phrase, every possible beauty of sound, every grade of literary association, every source of imaginative and sensuous beauty has been woven together into a harmony which is without rival and without fault; for amidst all its wealth of colour, delicacy and sweetness, there is not a word too much or too little, no false note, no excessive or defective touch."

No work, howsoever successful as a literary

masterpiece, can survive the test of time if it does not also possess a spiritual margin.

The *Meghadutam* carries a powerful spiritual power in it. Dealing as it does with the anguish of separation between a man and his wife, the work speaks, essentially, of man's quest for harmony and fulfillment as a human being. Human nature is fulfilled in companionship, companionship in marriage, marriage in parenthood and parenthood in the knowledge that one has carried the principle of life forward. A disruption of this continuity and fulfillments, whether by separation or by strife, goes against nature. A separation, therefore, between man and the finer elements of human nature which a woman

personifies, namely, compassion, charity and grace, robs human nature.

What is true of individuals is also true of society. *Yaksha* can be seen as society which cannot but suffer and pine if the finer values of life are divorced from it. The Cloud messenger carries this message across the length and breadth of India.

The Cloud Messenger, at a higher level of meaning, carries for us, a message that we need both individually and collectively. Society cannot afford to live without the finer aspects of the human soul, without culture, without *Sanskriti*, without *dharma*. Anything that separates, divides or vitiates harmony, damages our essential beings. This is the message that we need today.

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