

kAlidAsa life and works -info

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காலிதா³ஸ ஸங்க்ஷிப்த சரித்ர

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Document Information



Text title : kAlidAsa sa.nkShipta charitra

File name : kalidas.itx

Category : kAlidAsa, major_works

Location : doc_z_misc_major_works

Transliterated by : NA

Latest update : February 15, 1996, October 21, 2019

Send corrections to : sanskrit at cheerful dot c om


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March 24, 2024

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காலிதா³ஸ ஸங்கதிப்த சரித்ர

A collection from various sources.

Kalidas : Encyclopedia Americana

Written by: Walter Harding Maurer

University of Hawai at Manoe

KALIDASA, (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 KumAragupta . 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 . 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 dvnasty, which held power for more than a century . The VikramorvashIya (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 ShatapathabrAhmaNa.

The third play, Abhij nAnashAkuntala (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 PadmapurANa, 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 Abhij nAnashAkuntala 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 Alakha, 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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Kalidas : The Student's English Dictionary

V . S . Apte

Word: navan நவந்

நவரத்நம் The nine gems or poets at the court of king VikramAditya.

த⁴ந்வந்தரிக்ஷபணகாமரஸிம்ஹஸங்கு

வேதாலப⁴ட்டக⁴டகர்பரகாலிதா³ஸா: |

க²யாதோ வராஹமிஹிரோ ந்ரு³பதே: ஸபா⁴யாம்

ரத்நாநி வை வரருசிர்நவ விக்ரமஸ்ய ||

The navarathnas are:

த⁴ந்வந்தரி (dhanva.ntari)

க்ஷபணக (kShapaNaka)

அமரஸிம்ஹ (amarasi.nha) of the author amarakosha , the most popular Sanskrit Lexicon . He was a Jaina.

ஸங்கு (sha.nku)

வேதாலப⁴ட்ட (vetAlabhaTTa)

க⁴டகர்பர (ghaTakarpara)

காலிதா³ஸ (kAlidAsa)

வராஹமிஹிர (varAhamihira)

வரருசி vararuchi, Poet and grammarian,

identified by some with kAtyAyana, the celebrated author of the

vArtikas on Panini's sUtrAs.

Kalidas : The Discovery of India

by: Jawaharlal Nehru

Europe first learned of the old Indian drama from Sir William Jones's translation of Kalidasa's Shakuntala published in 1789- Something in the nature of a commotion was created among European intellectuals by this discovery, and several editions of the book followed . Translations also appeared (made from Sir William Jones's translation) in German, French, Danish, and Italian . Goethe was powerfully impressed, and he paid a

magnificent tribute to Shakuntala . The idea of giving a prologue to Faust is said to have originated from Kalidasa's prologue, which was in accordance with the usual tradition of the Sanskrit drama.

Kalidasa wrote other plays also and some long poems. His date is uncertain, but very probably he lived toward the end of the fourth century A.D . at Ujjayini during the reign of Chandragupta II, Vikramaditya of the Gupta dynasty . Tradition says that he was one of the nine gems of his court, and there is no doubt that his genius was appreciated and he met with full recognition during his life. He was among the fortunate whom life treated as a cherished son and who experienced its beauty and tenderness more than its harsh and rough edges . His writings betray this love of life and a passion for nature's beauty.

One of Kalidasa's long poems is the Meghaduta, the Cloud Messenger . A lover, made captive and separated from his beloved, asks a cloud, during the rainy season, to carry his message of desperate longing to her . To this poem and to Kalidasa, the American scholar Ryder has paid a splendid tribute . He refers to the two parts of the poem and says: "The former half is a description of external nature, yet interwoven with human feeling; the latter half is a picture of a human heart, yet the picture is framed in natural beauty . So exquisitely is the thing done that none can say which half is superior . Of those who read this perfect poem in the original text, some are moved by the one, some by the other . Kalidasa understood in the fifth century what Europe did not learn until the nineteenth, and even now comprehends only imperfectly, that the world was not made for man, that man reaches his full stature only as he realizes the dignity and worth of life that is not human. That Kalidasa seized this truth is a magnificent tribute to his intellectual power, a quality quite as necessary to great poetry as perfection of form . Poetical fluency is not rare; intellectual grasp is not very uncommon; but the combination has not been found perhaps more than a dozen times since the world began . Because he possessed this harmonious combination, Kalidasa ranks not with Anacreon and Horace and Shelley but with Sophocles, Virgil, Milton . "

Kalidas : A Portable India

Editors: Jug Suraiya and Anurag Mathur

Written by: Harish Trivedi

In secular Sanskrit literature, the biggest name is that of Kalidasa (5th century AD). Of his two epics, the longer Raghuvamsha describes the dynasty of Rama, and the shorter Kumarasambhava celebrates the wedding of Shiva and Parvati and their union in their lofty picturesque abode, “the divine souled Himalayas.” His masterpiece is the play Shakuntala, a romantic tragicomedy involving a tenderhearted forest maiden and a king who then goes away and under a curse forgets her. But perhaps the most original and popular work of Kalidasa is the Meghaduta (The Cloud Messenger), in which a banished newly-wed lover sights a likely cloud on the exhilarating first day of the monsoon and begs it to carry a message to his beloved wife pining in their fabled city of Alakapuri in the Himalayas . The first half of the poem gives an enchanting cloud’s eye-view of the changing landscapes of central and north India, and the second half describes in sensuous and glittering detail the pining lady, still ravishing in her attenuation . Though he mainly wrote epics and plays, Kalidasa’s genius was essentially lyrical . He delights constantly with his apt similes and he is the master of sweet elaboration of the softly unfolding sentiment . Many readers including Western orientalisists have regarded him as the greatest Indian poet ever, and the one who expresses best the characteristic Indian sensibility . In colonial times, in proud patriotic counter-assertion, he was often claimed by Indian scholars to be the Shakespeare of India. Rabindranath Tagore wrote a marvellous humorous poem on Kalidasa. Can anyone find it and add it here? If it is in Bengali, please send it as you would pronounce it.

ஸீதம் ப³ஹு பா³த⁴தி ।

The cold hurts very much

by: Kedar Naphade, ksn2 at lehigh.edu

ஸர்வே ஜாநந்தி யத் போ⁴ஜராஜ்ஞ: த³ரபா³ரே அவித்³யத கவி: காலீதா³ஸ: । கதா³சித்
ஏக: பரதே³ஸீய: பண்டி³த: போ⁴ஜராஜ்ஞை ஸந்தே³ஸம் ப்ரக்ஷிப்தவாந் ।

ஸந்தே³ஸே விகி²தம்,

ஆக³மிஷ்யாமி அமுகதி³வஸே ப⁴வத: த³ரபா³ரஸ்ய பண்டி³தை: ஸஹ சர்சாம்
விவாத³ம் ச கர்தும் இதி । ததா² போ⁴ஜராஜா த³ரபா³ரே அகத²யத் ஏஷ:

பண்டி³த: ஆக³மிஷ்யதி இதி ।

Everybody knows that poet kaIIdAsa was in King Bhoj’s court . Once a foreign scholar sent a message to King Bhoj . It said, “I shall come on such and such date to debate and

discuss with the scholars in your court ”. King Bhoj then mentioned in his court that this scholar was going to come.

யஸ்மிந் தி³வஸே பண்டி³த: ஆக³ச்ச²தி, தஸ்மிந் காலீதா³ஸ: பாலகீ²தா⁴ரகஸ்ய
 ரூபம் பரித³தா⁴ந: தஸ்ய ஸ்வாக³தாய உபஸ்தி²த: ப⁴வதி | ந க²லு ஜாநாதி
 பண்டி³த: யத் காலீதா³ஸ: ஏவ ஸ: | பாலகீ²ம் ஸ்கந்த³யோ: : வஹந் நிர்க³த:
 காலீதா³ஸ: பண்டி³தேந ஸஹ | தஸ்மிந் காலே ஸிஸிர: ப⁴வதி ரு³து: சீத:
 ச பவந: தே³ஹம் தாட³யதி இவ | வத³தி பண்டி³த:, சீதம் ப³ஹு பா³த⁴தி
 இதி | சதுர: காலீதா³ஸ: த்வரயா ஏவ புந்³வத³தி
 “ந ததா² பா³த⁴தே சீதம் யதா² பா³த⁴தி பா³த⁴தே ”

On the day the scholar arrived, kAlIdAsa disguised himself as a palanquin carrier and went to receive him . The scholar did not know that he was indeed kAlIdAsa . Carrying the pAlakhI on his shoulders, kAlIdAsa set off with the scholar . It was winter that time and the cold wind was hitting the body . The scholar said, “The cold hurts very much, ” Clever kAlIdAs immediately retorted, “Cold does not hurt as much as ‘badhati’ ”

ஆத்மநேபதீ³ க²லு பா³த⁴ த⁴து: இதி ந விஜ்ஞாதம் பண்டி³தேந | மந்யதே ஸ:,
 யதி³ ஏதஸ்மிந் ராஜ்யே பாலகீ²தா⁴ரகா: அபி ஏதாவத் ஜாநந்தி ஸம்ஸக்ரு³தம்
 பண்டி³தை: ஸஹ மேல: மம பராப⁴வாய ஏவ | ததா² காலீதா³ஸம் ஆஜ்ஞாபயதி ந
 க²லு இச்சா²மி ஏதஸ்மிந் ராஜ்யே க³ந்தும் | க்³ரு³வே க³மிஷ்யாமி | இதி |

The scholar did not know that the verb “badh ” was ‘Atmanepadi’ (and hence had used the wrong form bAdhati instead of the correct form bAdhate’) He thought, if even the palakhicarriers in this kingdom know the language so well, then meeting with the scholars shall certainly lead to my defeat . then he ordered kAlIdAsa, “i really do not want to go to t his extremely cold place . we should go back home . ”

சதுரஸ்ய காலீதா³ஸஸ்ய |

Of the clever kAlIdAsa

by: Kedar Naphade, ksn2 at lehigh.edu

கோ⁴ஷிதம் கதா³சித் போ⁴ஜராஜ்ஞா, யதி³ கோ⁵பி கவி: மம த³ரபா³ரே நூதநம்
 காவ்யம் பட²தி தர்ஹி த³தா³மி தஸ்மை லக்ஷருப்யகாணி இதி | ஸ்ருத்வா ஏதத்³,
 ப³ஹவ: க²லு ஆக³தா: கவய: த³ரபா³ரே ஸ்வகாவ்யபட²நம் கர்தும் |

(King Bhoj once proclaimed, “If any poet reads a new poem in my court , I shall give him One Lakh Rupees ”. Having heard this indeed many poets thronged the palace in order to read their poetry.)

பரந்து த³ரபா³ரே அவித³யந்த கேசந வித³வாநா: யே கம் அபி காவ்யம்
ப்ரத²ம்ஸ்ருத்யநந்தரம் ஏவ ஸம்பூர்ணதயா புநரோக்தும் ஸக்தா: | இதரே ச
த³வீதீயபட²நாநந்தரம் புநருக்தவந்தா: | அந்யே த்ரு³தீயபட²நாத்
புநருக்தவந்தா: |

(However, in the court there were several scholars who could re-recite a poem completely just after having listened to it once . Then there were others who could re-recite it after they had heard it twice, and yet others who could do it after the third reading.)

அத: யதா³ கோ³பி கவி: ஆக³தவாந், ஸ்வஸ்ய நவகாவ்யம் ச படி²தவாந், கே³பி
வித³வாநா: அகத²யந் ந க²லு நூதநம் ஏதத்³ | பஸ்ய, வயமபி ஏநம்
ஜாநீமஹே | தத: புநரவத³ந் தத்³ காவ்யம் | தத³நந்தரம் யே த³விபாடி²ந:
அப⁴வந் தே³பி ததே³வ அகத²யந் அவத³ந் ச காவ்யம் | தத³நந்தரம்
த்ரிபாடி²ந: ததை²வ அசூர்வந் | அத: ந கோ³பி கவி: ப்ராப்நோதும் அஸக்த்நோத்
லக்ஷருப்யகாணி |

(So whenever any poet came and read his new poem, some scholars said, this is not really new . see, we also know it . Then they recited the whole poem. then those who could remember things after they had heard it twice said the same thing and recited the poem . Then those who remembered things after they had heard them thrice did the same thing . Hence no poet was able to claim the lakh rupees.)

காலீதா³ஸாய ந க²லு அருச்யத ஏதத்³ | கஞ்சித் நவகவிம் ஸ: ஸ்வகக்ஷே
ஆநீதவாந் தம் ஏதத்³ ஸுபா⁴ஷிதம் ச த³த்தவாந் -

(kAlIdAsa didnt really like this . He took one poet to his room, and gave him the following subhAShita -)

ஸ்வஸ்தி ஸ்ரீ போ⁴ஜராஜந் த்வமகி²லபு⁴வநே தா⁴ர்மிக: ஸத்யவக்தா
பித்ரா தே ஸங்க்³ரு³ஹீதா நவநவதிமிதா ரதநகோட்யோ மதீ³ய: |
தாம்ஸ்த்வம் தே³ஹீதி ராஜந் ஸகலபு³த⁴ஜனைர்ஜ்ஞாயதே ஸத்யம் ஏதத்³
நோ வா ஜாநந்தி யத்தந்மமக்ரு³திமபி நோ தே³ஹி லக்ஷம் ததோ மே ||

(O King Bhoj, let there be good ! You are the (greatest) just and true-speaker in the whole world . 99 Crores of precious stones belonging to me were taken by your father . Give them back to me, O king .. all the scholars in your court know that this is true . If they do not, then they do not know my poem either . Then give me the lakh !)

த³ரபா³ரே கவி: தத் காவ்யம் அபட²த் | ந க²லு வக்தும் அஸக்ருவந்
கே⁵பி வித்³வாநா: யத் ஜாநந்தி தத் காவ்யம் இதி | அத: அப்ராப்நோத் கவி:
லக்ஷருப்யகாணி | சதுர: க²லு காலீதா³ஸ: |

(The poet read this poem in the court . None of the scholars were able to say that they knew this poetry . So the poet got one lakh rupees . kAlidAsa was indeed clever !)

A story on KAlidAsa's name

Written by: Vidhyanath K . Rao

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The following (far-fetched) story is told about the name of KAlidAsa. There was a learned and intelligent princess who said she will marry only the man who is able to defeat her in debate . Many tried and failed . In revenge, some of them got hold of a dim-wit and brought him to debate the princess . But they said that this man was currently observing a vow of silence and will debate in sign language . The princess interpreted the signs the dim-wit made in her own way and thought herself defeated . But the truth came out on the wedding day. The princess was angry and turned out her husband . In dejection he went to the KAlid temple to sacrifice himself . But KAlid stopped him and gave him the gift of 'vAc'. When he returned home, the princess asked him "asti kAchid vAg?", to be interpreted as "what do you have to say?" (see note below). The man then replied, reciting the MeghadUta starting with "kashchid", RaghuvaMsa starting with "vAgarthau" and KumArasambhava starting "asti". Because he became a poet by the grace of KAlid, he became known as KAlidAsa. Note: the princess's question is the weak link in this story. "asti kashchid vAk?" is grammatically wrong (the genders don't agree).

Kalidasa : The Hindu World Part I

Written by: Benjamin Walker, 1968

Kalidasa (AD ?350-600?) the greatest of the Sanskrit dramatists, and the first great name in Sanskrit literature after Ashvaghoshā . In the intervening three centuries between Asvaghoshā (who had a profound influence on the poet) and Kalidasa there was some literary effort, but nothing that could compare with the maturity and excellence of Kalidasa's poetry . Virtually no facts are known about his life, although colourful legends abound . Physically handsome, he was supposed to have been a very dull child, and grew up quite uneducated . Through the match-making efforts of a scheming minister he was married to a princess who was ashamed of his ignorance and coarseness. Kalidasa (Kali's slave), an ardent worshiper of Kali, called upon his goddess to help him, and was rewarded with sudden gifts of wit and sense . He became the most brilliant of the 'nine gems' at the court of Vikramaditya of Ujjain.

There is strong reason to believe that Kalidasa was of foreign origin . His name is unusual, and even the legend suggests that it was adopted . The stigma attaching to the suffix 'dasa' (slave) was very strong, and orthodox Hindus avoided its use . His devotion to the brahminical creed of his time may betray the zeal of a convert . Remarkably enough, Indian tradition has no reliable data concerning one of its greatest poets, whereas there is a fund of information both historical and traditional about hundreds of lesser literary luminaries . Kalidasa was well acquainted with contemporary sciences and arts, including politics and astronomy . His knowledge of scientific astronomy was manifestly gleaned from Greek sources, and altogether he appears to have been a product of the great synthesis of Indian and barbarian peoples and cultures that was taking place in north-western India in his day . Dr S . Radhakrishnan says, 'Whichever date we adopt for him we are in the realm of reasonable conjecture and nothing more . Kalidasa speaks very little of himself, and we cannot therefore be sure of his authorship of many works attributed to him . We do not know any details of his life. Numerous legends have gathered round his name, which have no historical value' (II, p . I). The apocryphal story that he ended his days in Ceylon, and died at the hands of a courtesan, and that the king of Ceylon in grief burned himself to death, is not accepted by his biographers . Listed below are the chief works attributed to Kalidasa.

ShAkuntal, with a theme borrowed from the Mahabharata, is a drama in seven acts, rich in creative fancy . It is a masterpiece of dramatic skill and poetic diction, expressing tender and

passionate sentiments with gentleness and moderation, so lacking in most Indian literary works . It received enthusiastic praise from Goethe.

MalavikAgnimitra (Malavika and Agnimitra) tells the story of the love of Agnimitra of Vidisha, king of the Shungas, for the beautiful handmaiden of his chief queen . In the end she is discovered to be of royal birth and is accepted as one of his queens . The play contains an account of the rAjasUya sacrifice performed by Pushyamitra, and a rather tiresome exposition of a theory on music and acting . It is not a play of the first order.

Vikramorvashi (Urvashi won by Valour), a drama of the troTaka class relating how king Pururavas rescues the nymph Urvashi from the demons . Summoned by Indra he is obliged to part from her . The fourth act on the madness of Pururavas is unique . Apart from the extraordinary soliloquy of the demented lover in search of his beloved, it contains several verses in Prakrit . After many trials the lovers are reunited in a happy ending.

MeghadUta (Cloud Messenger): the theme of this long lyrical poem is a message sent by an exiled yakSha in Central India to his wife in the Himalayas, his envoy being a megha or cloud . Its beautiful descriptions of nature and the delicate expressions of love in which passion is purified and desire ennobled, likewise won the admiration of Goethe.

Raghuvamsha (Raghu's genealogy), a mahAkavya, regarded by Indian critics as Kalidasa's best work, treats of the life of Rama, together with a record of his ancestors and descendants . There are many long descriptions, large parts of which are contrived and artificial . Only one king in this pious dynasty fails to come up to the ideal standard, namely, Agnivarna.

RitU-saMhAra, (Seasonal Cycle), a poem describing the six seasons of the year in all their changing aspects.

KumAra-sambhava (KumAra's Occasioning), usually translated 'The Birth of the War-god', a mahAkavya relating how Parvati won the love of Siva in order to bring into the world Kumara (i.e . Karttikeya) the god of war to destroy the demon Taraka . The last few cantos are usually omitted from printed versions, being of an excessively erotic nature . This is especially true of Canto VIII where the embraces of the newly-wedded divine couple are dwelt upon in vivid detail.

Great as Kalidasa was, it has been observed that he had his literary weaknesses . He showed no interest in the social problems of his day; his plays do not reflect the tumultuous times in

which he lived; he felt no sympathy for the lot of the common man; his work is overburdened with description, and is sentimental, wordy and at times coarse . Within his range he was unsurpassed by any of the dramatists who wrote in the Sanskrit language, but this does not amount to much, for the general standard of Sanskrit drama is not on a par with the best elsewhere . Comparing his works with those of the Persians, Arabs, Greeks and Europeans, and by the same strict standards of criticism, Max Muller declares, ‘Kalidasa’s plays are not superior to many plays that have been allowed to rest in dust and peace on the shelves of our libraries’.

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Kalidasa: Sanskrit dramatist and poet (4th century A.D.). Little is known of Kalidasa’s life, but there is sufficient evidence to surmise that he lived at the court of Chandragupta II, a great patron of the arts . Kalidasa may not quite deserve the title of the Indian Shakespeare, given to him by his first English translator, Sir William Jones, nor the unqualified praise bestowed upon him and his ShAkuntal by Goethe . Nevertheless, he is India’s foremost classical dramatist, who wrote at least three important dramas and showed great ability as an epic and lyric poet . Raghuvamsha is long poem in honor of the house of Raghu, is probably his best-known epic work . Here, as in his purely lyrical poems, Kalidasa proves himself master of the language . In his plays, too, the grace and beauty of poetic speech are most striking, especially in the descriptive and lyrical passages . These are the qualities that distinguish Vikramorvashi, the story of the love, separation, and final union of the king Pururavas and the nymph-Urvashi; Malavikagnimitra, a story of court love and intrigue

ending in the marriage of King Agnimitra and the princess Malavika; and ShAkuntal, Kalidasa's best-known and most remarkable work.

ShAkuntal is a seven-act drama based on the legend of the king Dushyanta, who, during a hunting party, comes to Kanwa's hermitage and falls in love with his foster daughter ShakuntalA, the child of the holy Viswamitra and the nymph Menaka . After a secret and simple wedding, the king has to return to the capital and leaves his ring with ShakuntalA, who is to follow him later . When ShakuntalA, filled with longing for her absent husband, neglects to pay due respect to the divine sage Kashyapa- comparatively small matter to touch off the fateful events of the following acts- —he pronounces a curse to the effect that she will be forgotten by her beloved unless some token reminds him of her . When ShakuntalA goes to the court, the king does not recognize her, and the ring, which might have aided her, is lost . In her plight, she is assisted by Menaka and taken to heaven, where she gives birth to a son. In the meantime a fisherman finds the ring in the stomach of a fish, and the king regains his memory and begins the search for ShakuntalA . While visiting Kashyapa, Dushyanta watches a boy wrestling with a lion's cub and learns that it is his son . He is reunited with ShakuntalA (in one of the most tender scenes of the play), and Kashyapa frees him of his feeling of guilt by telling him the story of the curse.

The play consists of a series of lyrical outbursts rather than of scenes marking the progression of the action . For instance, when the king searches for his wife, we are, in the main, shown various aspects of his state of inner unrest . Kalidasa's characters are not too well drawn; most of them are stylized puppets . Because the miracles of the gods determine the outcome of man's fate, there is little need to lay bare the workings of the human mind . The men are idealized; only the women seem to be somewhat closer to reality.

ShAkuntal is meant for the stage, as the prologue, with its dialogue between stage manager and actress, clearly indicates . Some humor relieves the solemn and fantastic scenes, and the two stables speaking in their own peculiar language provide elements of farce . Yet the quick changes in location, the utter disregard for the element of time, the various scenes in motion- on the hunt, in the car of indra in the airstrike- anybody brought up with the traditions of Western drama as unusual.

Kalidasa : by Shashikant Joshi

Kalidas!!!!

Wow! What do I say about him . He is my idol!! Here are some extracts from the 'prastAvana' (preface) of Kumarasambhavam, translated by Pt . Praduman Pandey . I am leaving aside technical details. My main aim was to give the story of Kalidasa's gaining wisdom, but I find some other stuff to be of general interest . See how historians/literature-researchers tackle such simple questions as when was Kalidasa born, where did he live. There is lot of discrepancy about his life time, place of birth and even some of his works!!

Kalidasa's Life Time

There are eight hypothesis about his lifetime . The main logics, evidences are as follows:

1- 6th century AD, Yashodharman defeated Mihirkul of Hoon clan . Dr. Harnely says this Yashodharman is kalidas's VikramAditya.

Flaw: Y . never took the title of VikramAditya

2- Fargusen says that 6th century AD, there was a king VikramAditya in Ujjayini (present day Ujjain). he defeated Shakas, started 'Vikram-samvat' calendar, starting it 600 years back 57BC . Prof . Max Muller basing on this said that Kalidasa was in the court of this Vikram.

Flaw: There was no king by name VikramAditya in 600 AD in India. 'Vikram-samvat' calendar was in vogue since 1st century BC as 'mAlav-samvat'. This is clear from 'mandasor' 'shilAlekhA' (stone writings) of VatsabhaTTi.

3- Kalidasa was familiar with Greek astronomy, using words like 'jAmitra'. Greek astronomy/geometry was popularized by AryabhaTTa who was in 5th century AD . SO, Kalidasa was in 6th AD onward . Dr McDonald refutes this saying 'Romaka-siddhAnta' was prevalent before AryabhaTTa, so he didn't popularize Greek astronomy.

4- MallinAth (the most famous commentator on Kalidasa) gives two meanings to Meghadoot's 14th verse . He says that 'dinnAga' and 'nichula' words refer to Buddhist philosophers 'dinnAga'. Based on this some scholars put kalidasa in 6th century AD because kalidasa's contemporary 'dinnAga' was disciple of Vasubandhu who was in 6th century AD.

Flaw: Vasubandhu was apparently in 400 AD 'coz his books were translated in Chinese around 475-525 AD.

5, 6, 7: some more complex conjectures :-))

Finally this is what can be said about his lifetime:

Kalidasa in his drama 'MalvikA-agni-mitra' makes Agni-mitra his hero, who was the son of Pushamitra Shunga who was in 2nd century BC . This is his upper bound. VAN.bhaTTa in the preface of his kAdambaree mentions Kalidasa. VAN.bhaTTa was in early 7th century AD . This is Kalidasa's lower bound.

Kalidasa's Life

Many tell tales are there for his life . Some call him native of Kashmir, some of Vidarbh, some of Bengal and others of Ujjain. It is said that he was a dumb fool to start with . The king's daughter was a very learned lady (equality of women ! :-)) and said that she will marry him who will defeat her in 'shAstrArtha' (debate on the scriptures). Anyone who gets defeated will be black faced, head shaven and kicked out of country on a donkey . (The punishment part might be later additions!) SO, the pundits took Kalidasa (whom they apparently saw cutting the tree branch on which he was sitting) for debate . They said that he (Kalidasa) only does mute debates . The princess showed him one finger saying 'shakti is one'. He thought she will poke his one eye, so he showed her two fingers . She accepted it as valid answer, since 'shakti' is manifest in duality (shiv-shakti, nar-nAree etc etc). She showed her the palm with fingers extended like in a slap . He showed her the fist . She accepted it as answer to her question . She said 'five elements' and he said 'make the body' (earth, water, fire, air, and void). [The debate explanations are also apparently later additions] So they get married and she finds he is a dumbo . So she kicks him out of the house . He straightaway went to Kali's temple and cut his tongue at her feet . Kali was appeased with him and granted him profound wisdom . When he returned to his house, his wife (the learned) asked, "asti kashchit vAg-visheshH" (asti = is; kashchit = when, as in questioning; vAg = speech, visheshH = expert; i.e . "are you now an expert in speaking"). And the great Kalidasa wrote three books starting with the 3 words: with asti = asti-uttarasyAm dishi = Kumara-sambhavam (epic) with kashchit = kashchit-kAntA = Meghdoot (poetry) with vAg = vAgarhAviva = Raghuvansha (epic) Another story says that he was the friend of Kumardas of Ceylon . He was killed by a courtesan once when he visited his friend in Ceylon.

Kalidasa's work

Mainly his epics - Raghuvansha and KumAr-sambhavam; 'khaNDakAvyA' - Meghadoot; and dramas - abhigyAn-shAkuntalam, Vikrama-uravasheeya, and Malavika-agnimitra are considered his works for sure. Apart from that 'Ritu-sanhAr and Shruta-bodh are considered his works as well.

Characteristics of Kalidasa's works

Kalidasa is considered as the greatest poet of 'shringAr' (or romance, beauty) His works is brimming with shringAra-rasa . Sometimes he has used 'hAsya' (comedy) and 'karuN.' (pathos). There are two aspects of 'shringAr' - 'sambhoga' (sam = together, bhoga = to enjoy, consume as in consumer; so sambhoga = the being together, the romance of being together, the happy love poems etc) 'vipralambha' - that of separation Kalidasa was expert at both . Meghadoot is immersed in the 'vipralambha-shringAr'. Kumara-sambhavam's 8th chapter is epitome of 'sambhoga-shringAr'. 4th chapter of KumarS (Rati-vilApa) and 8th chapter of Raghu-vansha (aja-vilApa) are superb examples of 'karuN.-rasa' (pathos).

Kalidasa's comedy is of the highest order . (Bharata in his NaTYa-shAstra mentions 8 types of comedy from the crudest of physical comedy resulting in guffawing loud laughter to the most subtle where the heart smiles). Kalidasa's comedy brings a gentle smile, not a loud guffaw. AlankarA (figure of speech) is of two types -

'shabda-alankArA' = beauty of sound

'artha-alankAr' = beauty of meaning

Kalidasa uses artha-alankAr more than the former . He is famous for his 'upamA' (metaphor?). Indian pundits say, "upamA kAlidAsasya" (upamA like Kalidasa's). His upamA are clear, complete and beautiful. His observation is sharp and subtle . He knows the nature and human nature in and out . He has a sound knowledge of the scriptures . His 'utprekShA' (simile) and 'artha-antaranyAs' (transfer of meaning) are also very beautiful . He has used some 'shabda-alankAr's as well. 'anuprAsa' (alliteration), 'yamaka' (same word repeated with different meaning), and 'shlesha' (pun; one word two meanings). Kalidasa loves the softer side of nature . He mentions serene and beautiful ashramas, river banks, gardens, palaces, bumblebee, deer, cuckoo etc. He loves Himalayas more than the VindhyAchal (both mountain chains). Kalidasa knew the human psychology deeply . What humans think in what situation . He also knew woman's psychology very well . He is a master of expressing emotions through actions . This brings extra dimension to his work

(Remember the shlok about Parvati counting the lotus leaves when her marriage proposal was being discussed?). In continuation to the shlok (about The great rishi asking parvati's hand from Himalaya for Shiva), Kalidasa says, "and then Himalaya glanced at Mena" It is understood that he was seeking Mena's approval "as every good householder should include his wife's opinion in every decision". (So, women's oppression is a pretty later development)

Kalidasa expresses inner world and the external world equally well . Among the objects of metaphors, he knows exactly how much importance to give to which one . He only describes the major attribute of the thing being compared . He also maintains the chronological order of events (else you get what is called kAla-dosha = time discrepancy). e.g . here is a shlok about Parvati meditating hard to win Shiva:

stithAH xa.Nam paxmasu tADita-adharAH payodhara-utsedhanipAta-chur.NitA
valeeshu tasyAH skhalitAH prapedire chire.N nAbhim prathama-oda-bindavaH
prose:

prathama-oda-bindavaH tasyAH paxmasu xa.Nam stithAH tADita-adharAH
payodhara-utsedhanipAta-chur.NitA valeeshu skhalitAH chire.N nAbhim
prapedire

prathama-oda-bindavaH = first water drop

tasyAH = her

paxmasu = on eyelids

xa.Nam = momentarily

stithAH = stayed

tADita-adharAH = fell on the lips

payodhara-utsedhanipAta-chur.NitA = shattered on hard breasts

valeeshu = in the tri-vali (triple fold on the belly, a mark of beauty)

skhalitAH = slid

chire.N = in a long time

nAbhim = in the navel

prapedire = disappeared

i.e.

The first drop of rain stayed momentarily on her eyelids, dropped on her lips, shattered on her hard breasts and trickled down her triple

fold and after a long time disappeared in her navel.

Notice the time order of events!

Sanskrit pundits have accepted three style of writing -

gauDee = big huge samAsa (word conjugations)

pAnchAlee = small samAsa

vaidarbhee = no samAsa

kAvya (loosely poetry) has three features:

oja = harsh words and long samAsa

mAdhurya = sweet words with small samAsa

prasAda = scarce samAsa and easy to understand

Kalidasa is of the vaidarbhee style . Easy to understand (yet the trickery of hinting the cause through mention of effect and vice versa is very common). He has COMPLETE control over language . His language is very chaste as per the grammar . His words are very select . He doesn't use words like 'hi, cha, vA' (also, and) for completing the meter . When he uses them, he has a purpose!

Kalidasa's verse knowledge is immensely deep . He has used most of the known meters (Chanda) in Sanskrit . In one chapter he uses only one meter. The next chapter is in a new meter . The whole of 'Meghadoota' is in 'mandA-krantA' meter (2-2-2, 2-1-1, 1-1-1, 2-2-1, 2-2-1, 2-2). Kalidasa was follower of the Vedic Sanatana dharma . He believed in the 'var.Na-AshrAm' social order (four "castes" loosely explained in modern terminology and four 'AshrAma' (stages of social life)) He believed in dharma, artha, kAma, moxa . Moxa was his eternal goal. Then dharma . Then comes kAm . He advocates 'tyAga' (opp . of indulgence) and 'tapasyA'(austerity). He prefers 'tapovana' (forest Ashramas) instead of palaces . he is a Shiva devout and remembers Shiva in all his openings of works (mangala-Achara.N). He puts society above the individual . He prays here and there for world peace . he is optimistic . Even though he considers death as natural and life as a deviation from that, he considers this small life as a great gain.

– ShashiKant Joshi

PS: anyone is free to use this translation as long you give the credit

for translation and typing and extra comments :-)))

ஸமஸ்யாபூர்தீ 1 samasyApUrtI 1

டா²ட²ம் ட²ட²ம் ட²ம்

by Sameer Mahajan (sameer at cc.gatech.edu)

ராமாபி⁴ஷேகே ஜலமாஹரந்த்யா:

ஹஸ்தாச்ச்யுதோ ஹேமக⁴டோ யுவத்யா: |

ஸோபாந மார்கே³ண கரோதி ஸப்³த³ம்

டா²ட²ம் ட²ட²ம் ட²ம் ட²ட²ட²ம் ட² ட²ம் டா:² ||

Once King Bhoj lying on his bed saw a young beautiful girl on her way to fetch water . But as she reached the stairway she stumbled and dropped the vessel . The King listened to the noise made by the vessel and it gave him an idea . The next day he called his courtiers and gave the puzzle to solve “ThAThaM ThaThaM ThaM ThaThaThaM Tha ThaM Tha ” None was able to solve it . Kalidas, when asked, demanded two days of time or the solution . He observed Bhoj’s daily schedule minutely for those two days . The observation provided him the insight into the solution and he gave the above mentioned answer . The meaning is quite straightforward.

ஸமஸ்யாபூர்தீ 2 samasyApUrtI 2

கா த்வம் பா³லே?

by Deepa Ganesan (deepa at tiac.net)

Once King Bhojha asked KAlidAsa to write a piece containing the alphabets “ka, kha,ga, gha.” KAlidAsa came out with this beautiful verse which kids can easily learn by heart and recite often:

கா த்வம் பா³லே காந்சநமாலா

கஸ்யா: புத்ரீ கநகலதாயா: |

ஹஸ்தே கிம் தே தாலீபத்ரம்

காவா ரேகா² க க² க³ க⁴ ||

Meanings: kA tvam bAlē: who are you,little girl(Question);

kAnchanamAlA :(my name is) KAnchanamAlA(Answer);

kasyAH putrI: whose daughter are you (Q);

kanakalatayAH :(I am the daughter of) kanakalatA (A);

haste kiM te :what is it in your hand (Q);

tAlIpatraM: the palm-leaf (used as a slate or writing pad)(A);

ka vA rekhA: what is the outline (written there)(Q);

ka kha ga gha:the alphabets, ka kha ga gha (A).

The End

Your contribution will be added, to this file, with credits.

It may be useful to add following items:

- 1) A humorous poem by Ravindranath Tagore on Kalidasa will be interesting.
- 2) Stories of Kalidasa and Vikramaditya or Bhojaraja mostly in samasyApurtI style.
- 3) Collect references on his work.
- 4) Anything else you can think of?
- 5) What is the complete story about the samasyApUrtI line gaurImukhaM chuMbatI vAsudevaH

Encoded NA

kAlidAsa life and works -info

pdf was typeset on March 24, 2024

Please send corrections to sanskrit@cheerful.com

