Kalidasa: life and works

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kaalidaasa[1]

From: Encyclopedia Americana
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KALIDASA, kä-lē-dä'sa (kaalidaasa), 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 Vikramaaditya and his successor Kumaaragupta. Undetermined also is the place of Kaalidaasa'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 Kaalidaasa'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 Malavikaagnimitra (*Malavikaa and Agnimitra*), a work concerned with palace intrigue. It is of special interest because the hero is a historical figure, King Agnimitra, whose father, Pushhpamitra, 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 Vikramorvashiiya (*Urvashii Won Through Valor*) is based on the old legend of the love of the mortal Pururavaas for the heavenly damsel Urvashii. The legend occurs in embryonic form in a hymn of the Rig Veda and in a much amplified version in the ShatapathabraahmaNa.

The third play, AbhiGYaanashaakuntala (*Shakuntalaa Recognized* by the Token Ring), is the work by which Kaalidaasa is best known not only in India but throughout the world. It was the first work of Kaalidaasa 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 Shaakuntala after the name of the heroine, is contained in the Mahaabhaarata and in similar form also in the PadmapuraaNa, but these versions seem crude and primitive when compared with Kaalidaasa's polished and refined treatment of the story. In bare outline the story of the play is as follows: King Dushhyanta, while on a hunting expedition, meets the hermit-girl Shakuntalaa, whom he marries in the hermitage by a ceremony of mutual consent. Obliged by affairs of state to return to his palace, he gives Shakuntalaa his signet ring, promising to send for her later. But when Shakuntalaa comes to the court for their reunion, pregnant with his child, Dushhyanta fails to acknowledge her as his wife because of a curse. The spell is subsequently broken by the discovery of the ring, which Shakuntalaa had lost on her way to the court. The couple are later reunited, and all ends happily.

The infiuence of the AbhiGYaanashaakuntala 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 Kaalidaasa wrote two long epic poems, the Kumaarasambhava (*Birth of Kumaara*) and the Raghuvamsha (*Dynasty of Raghu*). The former is concerned with the events that lead to the marriage of the god Shiva and Paarvatii, daughter of the Himaalaya. This union was desired by the gods for the production of a son, Kumaara, god of war, who would help them defeat the demon Taaraka. The gods induce Kaama, god of love, to discharge an amatory arrow at Siva who is engrossed in meditation. Angered by this interruption of his austerities, he burns Kaama to ashes with a glance of his third eye. But love for Paarvatii has been

[1] Some of the Sanskrit words are modified for pronunciation, at times with first letter in upper case.

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 RaamaayaNa of Vaalmikii. But like the Kumaarasambhava, 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 Meghaduuta (*Cloud Messenger*) and the Ritusamhaara (*Description of the Seasons*). The latter, if at all a genuine work of Kaalidaasa, 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 Ritusamhaara, published in Bengal in 1792, was the first book to be printed in Sanskrit.

On the other hand, the Meghaduuta, until the 1960's hardly known outside India, is in many ways the finest and most perfect of all Kaalidaasa'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 Himaalaya. 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 yaksa 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 Alakaa, where his wife languishes amid her memories of him. Throughout the Meghaduuta, as perhaps nowhere else So plentifully in Kaalidaasa's works, are an unvarying freshness of inspiration and charm, delight imagerry 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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From: The Student's English Dictionary
V. S. Apte
Word: navan.h नवन्

नवरत्नं **The nine gems or poets at the court of king Vikramaaditya.**

धन्वंतरिक्षपणकामरसिंहशंकु
वेतालभट्टघटकर्परकालिदासाः ।
ख्यातो वराहमिहिरो नृपतेः सभायां
रत्नानि वै वररुचिर्नव विक्रमस्य ॥

The navarathnas are:

धन्वंतरि **(dhanva.ntari)**

क्षपणक **(kshapaNaka)**

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

शंकु **(sha.nku)**

वेतालभट्ट **(vetaalabhaTTa)**

घटकर्पर **(ghaTakarpara)**

कालिदास **(kaalidaasa)**

वराहमिहिर **(varaahamihira)**

वररुचि **vararuchi, Poet and grammarian, identified by some with kaatyaayana, the**

celebrated author of the vaartikas on Panini's suutraas.

From: THE DISCOVERY OF INDIA
by: Jawaharlal Nehru

Europe first learned of the old Indian drama from Sir William Jones's translation of Kalidasa's Shakuntula 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."

From: 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 orientalists 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.

शीतं बहु बाधति ।

The cold hurts very much

by: Kedar Naphade, ksn2@lehigh.edu

सर्वे जानन्ति यत् भोजराज्ञः दरबारे अविद्यत कविः कालीदासः ।कदाचित् एकः परदेशीयः पण्डितः भोजराज्ञै सन्देशं प्रक्षिप्तवान् ।सन्देशे लिखितं, आगमिष्यामि अमुकदिवसे भवतः दरबारस्य पण्डितैः सह चर्चां विवादं च कर्तुं इति ।तथा भोजराजा दरबारे अकथयत् एषः पण्डितः आगमिष्यति इति ।

Everybody knows that poet kAlIdAsa was in King Bhoj's court. Once a foreign scholar sent a message to King Bhoj. It said, "I shall come on such and s uch date to debate and discuss with the scholars in your court". King Bhoj th en mentioned in his court that this scholar was going to come.

यस्मिन् दिवसे पण्डितः आगच्छति, तस्मिन् कालीदासः पालखीधारकस्य रूपं परिदधानः तस्य स्वागताय उपस्थितः भवति ।न खलु जानाति पण्डितः यत् कालीदासः एव सः ।पालखीं स्कन्दयोः : वहन् निर्गतः कालीदासः पण्डितेन सह ।तस्मिन् काले शिशिरः भवति ऋतुः शीतः च पवनः देहं ताडयति इव ।वदति पण्डितः, शीतं बहु बाधति इति ।चतुरः कालीदासः त्वरया एव पुन्र्वदति

"न तथा बाधते शीतं यथा बाधति बाधते "

On the day the scholar arrived, kAlIdAsa disguised himself as a palanquin carrier and went to recieve 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' "

आत्मनेपदी खलु बाध् धतुः इति न विज्ञातं पण्डितेन ।मन्यते सः, यदि एतस्मिन् राज्ये पालखीधारकाः अपि एतावत् जानन्ति संस्कृतं पण्डितैः सह मेलः मम पराभवाय एव।तथा कालीदासं आज्ञापयति न खलु इच्छामि एतस्मिन् राज्ये गन्तुं ।गृहे गमिष्यामि।इति।

The scholar did not know that the verb "badh" was 'Atmanep adi' (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."

चतुरस्य कालीदासस्य ।

Of the clever kAlIdAsa

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घोषितं कदाचित् भोजराज्ञा, यदि कोऽपि कविः मम दरबारे नूतनं काव्यं पठति तर्हि ददामि तस्मै लक्षरुप्यकाणि इति ।श्रुत्वा एतद्, बहवः खलु आगताः कवयः दरबारे स्वकाव्यपठनं कर्तुं ।

(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.)

परन्तु दरबारे अविद्यन्त केचन विद्वानाः ये कं अपि काव्यं प्रथमश्रुत्यनन्तरं एव सम्पूर्णतया पुनरोक्तुं शक्ताः ।इतरे च द्वीतीयपठनानन्तरं पुनरुक्तवन्ताः । अन्ये तृतीयपठनात् पुनरुक्तवन्ताः ।

(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.)

अतः यदा कोऽपि कविः आगतवान्, स्वस्य नवकाव्यं च पठितवान्, केऽ पि विद्वानाः अकथयन् न खलु नूतनं एतद् । पश्य, वयमपि एनं जानीमहे । ततः पुनरवदन् तद काव्यं । तदनन्तरं ये द्विपाठिनः अभवन् तेऽपि तदेव अकथयन् अवदन् च काव्यं । तदनन्तरं त्रिपाठिनः तथैव अकुर्वन् । अतः न कोऽपि कविः प्राप्नोतुं अशक्नोत् लक्षरुप्यकाणि ।

(So whenever any poet came and read his new poem, some scholars sad, 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 thinf 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.)

कालीदासाय न खलु अरुच्यत एतद् । कंचित् नवकविं सः स्वकक्षे आनीतवान् तं एतद् सुभाषितं च दत्तवान् स्

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

स्वस्ति श्री भोजराजन् त्वमखिलभुवने धार्मिकः सत्यवक्ता // पित्रा ते संगृहीता नवनवतिमिता रत्नकोट्यो मदीयः । // तांस्त्वं देहीति राजन् सकलबुधजनैर्ज्ञायते सत्यं एतद् // नो वा जानन्ति यत्तन्ममकृतिमपि नो देहि लक्षं ततो मे ॥ //

(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 t 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 !)

दरबारे कविः तत् काव्यं अपठत् । न खलु वक्तुं अशक्नुवन् केऽपि विद्वानाः यत् जानन्ति तत् काव्यं इति । अतः अप्राप्नोत् कविः लक्षरुप्यकाणि । चतुरः खलु कालीदासः ।

(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 Kaalidaasa's name

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The following (far-fetched) story is told about the name of Kaalidaasa.

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 Kaali temple to sacrifice himself. But Kaali stopped him and gave him the gift of 'Vaac'. When he returned home, the princess asked him "asti kaachid.h vaag.h?", to be intrpreted as "what do you have to say?" (see note below). The man then replied, reciting the Meghaduuta starting with "kashchid", RaghuvaMsa starting with "vaagarthau" and Kumaarasambhava starting "asti". Because he became a poet by the grace of Kaali, he became known as Kaalidaasa.

Note: the princess's question is the weak link in this story. "asti kashchid.h vaak.h?" is grammatically wrong (the genders dont agree).

Kalidasa

From: 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 Ashvaghoshha. In the intervening three centuries between Asvaghosha (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 (Kall's slave), an ardent worshipper 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. ii). 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.

Shaakuntal, 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.

Malavikaagnimitra (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 raajasuuya 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 (Urvashii won by Valour), a drama of the troTaka class relating how king Pururavas rescues the nymph Urvashii 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.

Meghaduuta (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 mahaakavya, 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.

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

Kumaara-sambhava (Kumaara's Occasioning), usually translated 'The Birth of the War-god', a mahaakavya 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 dwelled 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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Kalidas

From: The Reader's Companion to World Literature
Eds: Hornstein, Percy, Brown, 1956

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 Shaakuntal 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 Shaakuntal, Kalidasa's best-known and most remarkable work.

Shaakuntal 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 Shakuntalaa, 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 Shakuntalaa, who is to follow him later. When Shakuntalaa, 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 Shakuntalaa 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 Shakuntalaa. While visiting Kashyapa, Dushyanta watches a boy wrestling with a lion's cub and learns that it is his son. He is reunited with Shakuntalaa (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.

Shaakuntal 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 'prastaavanaa' (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 descrepancy about his life time, place of birth and even some of his works!!

<u>Kalidasa's Life Time</u>

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

1. 6th century AD, Yashodharman defeated Mihirkul of HooN clan. Dr. Harnely says this Yashodharman is kalidas's Vikramaaditya. Flaw: Y. never tok the title of Vikramaaditya

2. Fargusen says that 6th century AD, there was a king Vikramaaditya 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 VIkramaaditya in 600 AD in India. 'Vikram-samvat' calendar was in vogue since 1st century BC as 'maalav-samvat'. This is clear from 'mandasor' 'shilaalekha' (stone writings) of VatsabhaTTi.

3. Kalidasa was familiar with Greek astronomy, using words like 'jaamitra'. Greek astronomy/geometry was popularised by AryabhaTTa who was in 5th century AD. SO, Kalidasa was in 6th AD onwards. Dr McDonald refutes this saying 'Romaka-siddhaanta' was prevalant before AryabhaTTa, so he didn't popularise Greek astronomy.

4. Mallinaath (the most famous commentrator on Kalidasa) gives two meanings to Meghadoot's 14th verse. He says that 'dinnaaga' and 'nichula' words refer to Buddhist philosophers 'dinnaaga'. Based on this some scholars put kalidasa in 6th century AD 'coz kalidasa's contemporary 'dinnaaga' 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 conjuctures :-))

Finally this is what can be said about his lifetime:

Kalidasa in his drama 'Malvikaa-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.

VaaN.bhaTTa in the preface of his kaadambaree mentions Kalidasa. VaaN.bhaTTa was in early 7th century AD. This is Kalidasa's lower bound.

<u>Kalidasa's Life</u>

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 'shaastraartha' (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 aditions!) 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 thot 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-naaree 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 vaag-visheshaH" (asti = is; kashchit = when, as in questioning; vaag = speech, visheshaH = 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-uttarasyaam dishi = Kumara-sambhavam (epic)

with kashchit = kashchit-kaantaa = Meghdoot (poetry)

with vaag = vaagarthaaviva = 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.

<u>Kalidasa's work</u>

mainly his epics - Raghuvansha and Kumaar-sambhavam; 'khanDakaavyaa' - Meghadoot; and dramas - abhigyaan-shaakuntalam, Vikrama-uravasheeya, and Malavikaa-agnimitra are considered his works for sure. Apart from that 'Ritu-sanhaar and Shruta-bodh are considered his works as well.

<u>Characteristics of Kalidasa's works</u>

Kalidasa is considered as the greatest poet of 'shringaar' (or romance, beauty) His works is brimming with shringaara-rasa. Sometimes he has used 'haasya' (comedy) and 'karuN.' (pathos). There are two aspects of 'shringaar' -

'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-shringaar'. Kumara-sambhavam's 8th chapter is epitome of 'sambhoga-shringaar'. 4th chapter of KumarS (Rati-vilaapa) and 8th chapter of Raghu-vansha (aja-vilaapa) are superb examples of 'karuN.-rasa' (pathos). Kalidasa's comedy is of the highest order. (Bharata in his NaTya-shaastra 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 comdey brings a gentle smile, not a loud guffaw.

Alankaraa (figure of speech) is of two types -

'shabda-alankaara' = beauty of sound

'artha-alankaar' = beauty of meaning

Kalidasa uses artha-alankaar more than the former. He is famous for his 'upamaa' (metaphor?). Indian pundits say, "upamaa kaalidaasasya" (upamaa like Kalidasa's). His upamaa 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 'utprekshaa' (simile) and 'artha-antaranyaas' (transfer of meaning) are also very beautiful. He has used some 'shabda-alankaar's as well. 'anupraasa' (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 Vindhyaachal (both mountain chains).

Kalidasa knew the human psychology deeply. What humans think in what situation. He also knew women'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 uderstood 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 kaala-dosha = time decrepancy). e.g. here is a shlok about Parvati meditating hard to win Shiva:

stithaaH xa.Nam paxmasu taaDita-adharaaH payodhara-utsedhanipaata-chur.Nitaa valeeshu tasyaaH skhalitaaH prapedire chire.N naabhim prathama-oda-bindavaH

prose:

prathama-oda-bindavaH tasyaaH paxmasu xa.Nam stithaaH taaDita-adharaaH payodhara-utsedhanipaata-chur.Nitaa valeeshu skhalitaaH chire.N naabhim prapedire

prathama-oda-bindavaH = first water drop

tasyaaH = her

paxmasu = on eyelids

xa.Nam = momentarily

stithaaH = stayed

taaDita-adharaaH = fell on the lips

payodhara-utsedhanipaata-chur.Nitaa = shattered on hard breasts

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

skhalitaaH = slid

chire.N = in a long time

naabhim = 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 disapperaed in her navel.

Notice the time order of events!

Sanskrit pundits have accepted three style of writing -

gauDee = big huge samaasa (word conjugations)

paanchaalee = small samaasa

vaidarbhee = no samaasa

kaavya (loosely poetry) has three features:

oja = harsh words and long samaasa

maadhurya = sweet words with small samaasa

prasaada = scarce samaasa 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, vaa' (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 (chhanda) in Sanskrit. In one chapter he uses only one meter. The next chapter is in a new meter. The whole of 'Meghadoota' is in 'mandaa-krantaa' 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-aashraam' social order (four "castes" ¡loosely explained in modern terminology¿ and four 'aashraama' (stages of social life)) He believed in dharma, artha, kaama, moxa. Moxa was his eternal goal. Then dharma. Then comes kaam. He advocates 'tyaaga' (opp. of indulgence) and 'tapasyaa'(austerity). He prefers 'tapovana' (forest aashramas) instead of palaces. he is a Shiva devout and remembers Shiva in all his openings of works (mangala-aachara.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 :-)))

समस्यापूर्ती samasyaapuurtii

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

रामाभिषेके जलमाहरन्त्याः
हस्ताच्च्युतो हेमघटो युवत्याः ।
सोपान मार्गेण करोति शब्दं
ठाठं ठठं ठं ठठठं ठ ठं ठाः ॥

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 "ThaaThaM ThaThaM ThaM ThaThaThaM Tha ThaM Thaa.h"

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.

The End

Notes to contributors

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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 samasyaapurtii style.

3) Collect references on his work.

4) Anything else you can think of?

5) What is the complete story about the samasyaapuurtii line

gauriimukhaM chuMbatii vaasudevaH
