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Scientific geographical aspects in kavikalidas as kavya meghdutam

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Introduction

Mahakavi Kalidasa is a unique poet in the literature of the world, The most popular poet in Sanskrit literature as his highly creative powers, his massive intellect, his immense imagination, his marvellous poetical fluency, and his supreme culture, place him in the very front rank among the great poets of all ages^[1]. He is the great representative of India's spirit, grace and genius. The Indian national consciousness is the base from which his works grow. The great qualities make his works belong to the literature of the world.

It seems that Kalidasa possessed considerable knowledge of the contemporary topography of India, as his works bear a lot of evidence to his accurate and detailed geographical knowledge of our country He knows the climatic conditions, physical features, and natural products of most parts of India, the names and exact location of rivers, mountains, lakes, forests and cities situated therein. The *Meghaduta*, especially Purvamegha which describes step by step the cloud messenger's northward course from Ramagiri to Alaka will no doubt the truth of our assertion. Generally, during June-July the direction of monsoon wind is from east to west and finally towards north direction, i.e., to the Himalayas, as the route of clouds depicted in the *Meghadutam*. This also indicates the meteorological knowledge of Kalidasa.

The Yaksa who sends the cloud with the message to his wife was according to Kalidasa at Ramagiri^[2] which is identified by H.H.

Wilson with Ramatek or Ramatekadi, which in Marathi language means the same import Ramagiri, 'Rama's hill'. Both Vallabhadeva^[3] and Mallinatha^[4] say that it is Citrakuta, a mountain in Bundelkhanda. M. M. Haraprasada Shastri identifies Ramagiri with Mount Ramagarh of the former Sirguja state in Madhya Pradesh. But there is a traditional belief still prevalent there that Rama, Sita and Lakmaina in their southward course during exile had bathed there. Foot-prints are still discernible on the rocky surface of this mount, somewhere in the middle, which the residents of this place in devotional fervour point out to the visitors as Rama's. Mount Ramagiri is spoken in the Meghaduta as bearing such sacred prints. In the words of Kalidasa

आपृच्छस्व प्रियसखममुं तुग्मालिग्य शैलं
वन्द्यैः पुंसां रघुपतिपदैरटितं मेखलासु ॥^[5]

While explaining amum Sailam of the above verse G. R. Nandargikar says "this mountain must be Ramagiri that stands a short distance (around 28 miles) north of Nagpur, and not Citrakuta given by Mallinatha in his commentary."^[6] Besides these, Prof. V. V. Mirashi is of the opinion that we are inclined to take Ramagiri to be the same as Ramatek. He adds: "two copper-plate grants of the Vakataka Queen Prabhavatigupta, one discovered in distant Poona and the other at Riddhapur in Berar, lend support to our view that Ramagiri is Ramatek today. Both the grants were made by the Dowager queen near the feet of the Bhagavat (i.e., Rama) at the time of Pcrana after observing a fast on Karttika Sukla ekadasi (cf. शापान्तो में भुजगशयनादुत्थिते शार्ङ्गपाणौ. Uttaramegha, 50). The Riddhapur plates actually describe the god Ramachandra as 'the lord of Ramagiri'^[7]. He further adds, "the Riddhapur plates show that Prabhavatigupta, mother of Pravarasena II and daughter of Chandragupta II Vikramditya,

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often visited Ramagiri, which was close to her capital Nandivardhana, in order to worship the sacred shrine of Sri Rama situated on the top of it”^[8] So, considering the matter from all points of view, it is no clear that Ramagiri is modern Ramatek.

In the verse “मार्गं तावच्छृणु कथयतस्त्वत्प्रयाणानुरुपम्”^[9] Kalidasa begins to instruct the cloud about the route to be followed by him. While commenting on this verse H. H. Wilson writes “we will now begin the geographical part of the poem: which, as far as it can be made out through the difference of ancient and modern appellations, seems to be very accurately conceived. The two extreme points of the cloud’s progress are the vicinity of Nagpur and the mountain Kailasa or rather, the Himalaya range. During this course, the poet notices some of the most celebrated places with the greater number of which we are still acquainted. In the first instance, we have here his direction due north from the mountain of Ramagiri and we shall notice the other points as they occur,”^[10] Then the cloud is to start towards north and he is first of all to get up Malaksetra^[11] the high plateau containing the black cotton soil Millinatha^[12] takes mala to be the name of an elevated hilly spot. But other commentators^[13] interpret it as malakhyam desam, the district of that name Mallinatha’s sense is better, as the cloud would like to ascend an elevated spot rather than a district. H. H. Wilson, however, takes mala to be the name of a town called Malda, a little to the north of Ratanpur, the chief town of the northern province of Chhattisgarh.

Next the poet takes the cloud to the hill of Amrakuta^[14] This must be the mountain now known as Amarakantaka^[15] from which the river Narmada and other rivers spring and which form the eastern part of the Vindhya mountain. Kalidasa describes the Narmada or Reva, a thin stream flowing by the foot of the Vindhya, after it comes down from the top of Amarakantaka^[16]. Then the cloud is to pass from hill to hill and then to reach the country of the Dasarnas, which is dark with the ripe berries of the Jambu and which is frequented by the Swans only for a few days. The word Dasarna means ‘the country of ten citadels’. It is the name of a country laying south-east of Madhyadea^[17].

Dasarna is the name of a river rising in the Vindhya mountain, the ancient Dasarene. This country is the eastern part of Malva. According to Prof. H. H. Wilson, Dasarna may be identified with modern Chhattisgarh. It is watered by many rivers, Vetravati being the foremost of them. The modern name of Vetravati is Betava. It rises on the north side of the Vindhya chain and pursuing a north-easterly course of 340 miles, traverses the province of Malva and the south west corner of Allahabad and falls into the Yamuna. The early part of its course, it passes through Bhilsa or Vidisa Vidisa is known as the capital of Dasarna and situated on the bank of river Betava in the province of Malva. The Puranas associate the people of Dasarna country with the Malavas, Karusas, Mekalas, Utkalas and Naisadhas. In the Ramayana¹⁸ their country is connected with those of the Mekalas and Utkals, where Sugriva sent his monkey-army in the quest of Sita. But Prof. B.C. Law says “it should be noted that the Dasarna country of the *Ramayana* and *Puranas* seems to be different from the Dasarna country of *Meghaduta*.”^[19]

After visiting the capital Vidisa^[20] and after tasting the rippling water of Vetravati, the cloud should rest on the ‘Nicaih,^[21] a hillock of little importance ‘most likely the Sanci of modern maps’.

There are so many Buddhist monuments remains even now round this place Then the poet leads the cloud by the gardens on the banks of the *Vananadi* The commentator Mallinatha

explains this in the sense of ‘forest rivers’ According to H. H. Wilson^[22] it may have been the name of a small river west of the Betva named Parvati, which rising in the Vindhya chain runs north-west, till it joins another called the Sipra; and the two together fall into the Chambal.

Now the poet Kalidasa makes the Yaksha apologize to the cloud and request hint to turn a little from his straight path towards the west, to make a detour so as to include the famous city of Ujjayini, which must have been very dear to the heart of the poet. In the words of Kalidasa

वक्रः पन्था यदपि भवतः प्रस्थितस्योत्तराशां
सौधोत्सगप्रणयविमुखो मा स्म भूरुज्जयिन्याः ।।^[23]

Ujjayini situated on the bank of Sipra river, was the capital of the country called Avanti. It has many other names, viz. Visala. Avanti, Avantika, Puspakarandini^[24] it has been the place of great importance from the earliest period of Hindu tradition down to the present day. The famous Mahakala temple of Siva is also situated in this city. So, it is one of the seven sacred cities in India^[25]. The most important thing is to be noted here that the Hindu geographers calculate their longitude from this city, taking it as their meridian.

The modern Ujjayini or Ujjain is about a mile south of the ancient city. Hiuen Tsang describes the capital of U-she-yenna, or Ujjayini as 80 li, or 5 miles, in circuit, which is only a little less than its size at present day. The kingdom was 16000 li or 1000 miles in circuit^[26]. Between Vidisa and Ujjayini, i.e., between the Vetravati and the Sipra Kalidasa mentions two other streams. There are many water courses in the regions and the Nirvindhya and the Siudhu belong to them. These two have been identified with Parvati and the Kali Sindh respectively. Reaching Ujjayini the poet speaks of the Sipra^[27] upon which stands the temple of Chandessvara and the river Gandhavati and famous Mahakala temple of Siva. The river Gandhavati which was fine stream at the time of Kalidasa, has now shrunk to a mere drain, as M. M. Haraprasada Shastri, who has carefully gone over these parts of the country with the express object of identifying the geographical names given by Kalidasa observes^[28]. He says about Gandhavati that river does not exist at the present time. In Kalidasa’s time it formed the boundary of the temple gardens of Mahakala^[29]. The cloud is asked to wait at the temple till sunset to witness the evening worship of Siva there and then to resume its journey after sunrise on the following day.

Leaving Ujjayini, thereafter, the cloud is asked to cross the Gambhira, a small river in Malva province along the side of river Gambhira the poet would lead the cloud to a certain distance and then take him to Devagiri hill on which Lord Karttikeya dwells. H. H. Willson has identified it with Devagada, situated south of the Chambal, in the centre of the province of Malva, and precisely in the line of the cloud’s progress^[30]. Then the poet makes the cloud cross the Carmanvati river (modern Chambal) and again makes him deviate from the direct route in order to reach Dasapura or Mandasora. This river known as the Carmanvati, because it was formed of the blood of many cows slaughtered by Rantideva, when he performed cow-sacrifices in ancient times^[31]. According to the plan of the journey the cloud uses the rivers as his watering stations. The long stream of the river with its sparkling water would look like a pearl-necklace with the cloud hung in the middle as a pendant of sapphire.

Dasapura is identified with the modern Mandasor in Western Malva division of central India. The ancient Dasapura stood on the north or left bank of Siwana river. From Dasapura the

cloud is asked to go straight towards the north and stops at the Kurukshetra in old Brahmavarta land. The modern Kurukshetra, one of the sacred places of the Hindus, lies a little to the south-cast of Thaneshvara. It is mentioned by the sage Manu as situated between the divine rivers Sarasvati and Drasvati^[32]. The modern city Thaneshvara is a correct form of Sthanvisvara or God of Siva.

The saraswati, one of the holy rivers of (ancient) India, falls from the southern portion of the Himalyas & runs into the great desert where it is lost in the sands. Kalidasa has some definite knowledge about this holy river as well as the city of Sthanvisvara. So he makes the cloud to drink the water of Sarasvati^[33]. From the Sarasvati, ignoring the Yamuna, which, however is mentioned by name in verse 1. 54 (as स्यादस्थानोपगतयमुनासंगमेवाभिरामा)] the cloud is to go to Kanakhala, which is a holy place near Haridwara, where the Ganges descends into the low ground of Hindustan. in the words of Kalidasa:

तस्माद्गच्छेरनुकनखलं शैलराजावतीर्णा
जोः कन्यां सगरतनयस्वर्गसोपानपङ्क्तिम् ।^[34]

Here, Kalidasa mentions the place Kanakhala, but omits Haridwara another sacred spot of the Hindus. H. H. Wilson observes, "it is rather extraordinary that Kalidasa should have omitted the name of Haridwara and preferred Kanakhala^[35] especially as the former occurs in the Puranas^[36]. Besides, Kanakhala may be more famous place than Haridwara in the time of Kalidasa. The poet also mentions a word cararanyasa in verse I. 58.

The spot here alluded may have some connection with a neighbouring hill at Haridwara called Harka payari (paudi), the foot of Hara (Siva). it is called Sricarananyasa in the Sambhurahasya^[37].

So, Sricarananyasa is a sacred spot on the Himalayas, where there is supposed to be a foot-print of Siva, a sight of which was supposed to qualify the pilgrim for rebirth, a sight of which was supposed to qualify the pilgrim for rebirth as gana of Siva.

After Kanakhala the cloud is asked to go to Himlaya mountain; Arriving at the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas, the cloud is invited to rest on some breezy height. Viewing the several wonders of this great mountain, the cloud should pass to the north through Krauricarandhra^[38] and come upon mount Kailasa, at the foot of which lies limpid lake Manasarovara^[39] abounding in golden lotuses. The Manasa lake is situated on Mount Kailasa, now in China. Really the lake lies between the Himalaya and the mountain Kailasa, which runs parallel with it on the north of that chain.

It is the favourite haunt of flamingoes which migrate to it at the commencement of the rainy season. Kailasa is the name of a mountain in the Himalayas, north of the Manasa Lake. It is the abode of Lord Siva and also of god Kubera's. H.H. Wilson observes, "Kailasa, as it here appears, a part of the Himalaya range is in fable, a mountain of costly gems or of crystal, the site of Kubera's capital, and the favourite haunt of Siva^[40]. On the top of this mountain stands the city of Alaka, the city of perfect glory and bliss. It is the capital of Kubera, the god of wealth and the regent of the north so called because of its grandeur. This is the destination of the cloud as said by Kalidasa in the following verse:

गन्तव्या ते वसतिरलका नाम यक्षेश्वराणां,
बौद्यानस्थितहरशिरश्चन्द्रिकाधौतहर्म्या ।^[41]

So, Alaka, the mythical abode of Kubera, supposed to be situated on the Himalayas.

Conclusion

From the above description of cloud route, we can surmise a physical map of ancient India, especially northern part which is almost the same as we find in the modern geography, only with some changes in the names of places (cities, etc.), hills and rivers. These types of changes are quite natural even today (e. g., from Madras to Chennai). No doubt, Kalidasa has some sharp witted knowledge on geography of India, on the basis of which he has accurately sketched the exact position of the towns, rivers, hills and lakes of ancient northern India. Hence, Meghaduta may be treated as a geographical kavya of Kalidasa.

However, from this study some questions may arise in the minds of modern researchers/thinkers firstly, why Kalidasa, being a devotee of Lord Siva has not shown the shortest cloud route through Varanasi (Kasi), place of Lord Visvanatha? Secondly, was there any physical map of ancient India before Kalidasa?

References

1. Meghaduta (tr. into English) by M. R. Kile Introduction, P, XV
2. कश्चित्कान्ता विरहगुरुणा स्वाधिकारात्प्रमत्तः रामगिर्याश्रमेषु ।
3. रामगिर्याश्रमेषु चित्रकूटाचलतपोवनेषु वसतिं चक्रे ।
Vallabhudeva's Comm. On Meghaduta, I,1
4. रामगिरेश्चित्रकूटस्याश्रमेषु वसतिम् । Mallinatha's comm. On Meghaduta I.1
5. Ibid., I. 12
6. Note on Verse I, II of Meghaduta, P. 17 (1998 Ed) cf Meghaduta by M. R. Kale, notes on Verse I. 12
7. Kalidasa by V.V. Mirashi & N.R. Navlekar, p. 153 (1969 Ed.)
8. Ibid., of. Prof. V.V. Mirashi's Studies in Indology, Vol. I (Second ed. 1968). P. 12f.)
9. Mdghaduta I. 13
10. Note on verse I. 13 of Meghaduta by H.H. Wilson.
11. सद्यः सीरोत्कषणसुरभि क्षेत्रमारुह्य मालम्... । Meghaduta, I. 16
12. मालं मालाख्यं क्षेत्रं शैलप्रायमुन्नतस्थलम् । मालमुन्नतभूतलम् इत्युत्पलमालायाम् । I. 16 of Meghaduta,
13. मालं मालाख्यं देशम् । मालं देशे वनेऽप्युक्तं मालं ग्रामान्तराटवी । मालं मालवदेशे च वसतेर्भूमिरुर्ध्वका इति सुमतिविजय भाष्य । मालं क्षेत्रसमूहम् । मालाख्यं देशं वा । वनभूमिं वा इति सारोद्धारिणी भाष्य । मालं—मालमुददार क्षेत्रं इति वल्लभाचार्य भाष्य । मालं—ग्रामान्तराटवी । मालभिधानं देशमारुह्य इति मेघलता भाष्य । मालं—मालवदेशमारुह्य इति अवचूरि भाष्य ।
14. मानुमानाप्रकूटः Meghaduta I. 17
15. H.H. Wilson rightly identifies Amrakuta with mountain Amarakantaka.
16. रेवां द्रक्यस्युपलविषमं विन्ध्यपादे विशीर्णाम्... । Meghaduta I. 19
17. In Manusmṛti (II. 21) the position of Madhyadesa is described as – हिमवद्विन्ध्ययोर्मध्यं यत्राग्निशनादपि । प्रत्यगेव प्रयागाच्च मध्यप्रदेशः प्रकीर्तितः ।।
18. Kiskindhakanda, 4, 8 – 10 (Gita Press Edition).
19. Law, B.C.; Geographical Aspects of Kalidasa's works, P. 27 (Calcutta 1954 Ed).
20. The ancient city of Vidisa identified with Bhilsa in the Gwalior state was situated at a distance of 26 miles north-east of Bhopal. In the neighbours of Avanti. Since the time of Asoka it became an important centre of Buddhism and later on of Vispavism. Its importance was due to its

- central position on the lines of communication between the sea-ports of the western coast and Pataliputra and between Pratisthan and Sravasti
21. Nicaia is a small bill near Vidisa town; Vide, Meghaduta: Ek purani Kahani by Acharya Hazari Prasad Dvivedi, PP. 42 – 43
 22. Commentary on Meghaduta verse I, 27
 23. Meghaduta, 1. 28.
 24. उज्जयिनी स्याद्विशालावन्ती पुष्पकरण्डिनी। Haima Kosa, IV. 42
 25. अयोध्या मथुरा माया काशी कांची अवन्तिका। पुरी द्वारावती चैव सप्तैता मोक्षदायिकाः।।
 26. Law, B.C.; Geographical Aspects of Kalidasa's works, p. 26
 27. Vallabha says “स्त्रिप्रारख्योज्जयिन्यां नदी। Meghaduta, I. 32; Cf. सिप्रातरङ्गानिलकम्पितासु विहर्तुमुद्यानपरम्परासु। Raghuvathsa, VI. 35
 28. JBORS, Vol. I. Part 2 p, 202.
 29. It is one of the twelve Jyotilingas, viz. सौराष्ट्रे सोमनाथं च श्रीशैले मल्लिकार्जुनम्। उज्जयिन्यां महाकालमोकारपरमेश्वरम्।। केदारं हिमवत्पृष्ठे डाकिन्यां भीमशङ्करम्। वाराणस्यां च विश्वेशं त्र्यम्बकं गौतमीतटे।। वैद्यनाथं चिताभूमौ नागेशं दारुकावने। सेतुबन्धे च रामेशं घुश्मेशं च शिवालये।। (एतेषां दर्शनादेव पातकं नैव तिष्ठति)।। Sivapurana Kotirudrasainhita (4), I 21-23
 30. Meghaduta tr. into English by H.H. Wilson, I. 45.
 31. Meghaduta, i. 48 Cf. “यतोहि रन्तिदेवेन राज्ञा गोमेधयज्ञेषु शतशो धेनव आहूतास्तद्रक्तनदीप्रवाहेण चर्मण्वती नदी जायेति प्रसिद्धः।”
 32. कुरुक्षेत्रं च मत्स्याश्च पञ्जालाः शूरसेनकाः। एष ब्रह्मर्षिदेशो वै ब्रह्मावर्तान्तः।। Manusamrti, II. 193 of. II. 21-23
 33. Meghaduta, I. 5-52
 34. Ibid., I.53
 35. तीर्थं कनखलं नाम गङ्गाद्वारेऽस्ति पावनम्। यत्र कांचनपातेन जाह्नवी देवदन्तिना। Kathasaritsagara, III.4 Cf. गङ्गा कनखले पुण्या कुरुक्षेत्रे सरस्वती। ग्रामे वा यदि वारण्ये पुण्या सर्वत्र नर्मदा।। Cf. गङ्गाद्वारं कनखलं सोमो वै तत्र संस्थितः। and स्नात्वा कनखले तीर्थे पुनर्जन्म न विद्यते।। Harivarhsa Quoted in G.R. Nandargikar's edition of Meghaduta, I.54
 36. Meghaduta edited by H.H. Wilson, 3rd edition, London 1843, p.50.
 37. Mallinatha's comm. on Meghaduta, I. 58.
 38. The Krauricarandhra was apparently a part of the mountain. This 'pass' is situated somewhere in the Himalayas, and is said to have been opened by Parasurama with his arrows to make a passage from Kailssa to the southwards. The vayu Purana attributed the splitting of the mountain to Karttikeya.
 39. The Manass lake is called Brahman sark (Raghuvamsa, XIII, 60) having been created by Brahman from his mind. According to Ramayana the river Sarayu issues from it कैलासपर्वते राम मनसा निर्मितं परम्। ब्रह्मणा नरशार्दूल तेनेदं मानसं सरः। तस्मात्सुस्त्राव सरसः साऽयोध्यामुपगूहते। सरः प्रवृत्ता सरयूः पुण्या ब्रह्मसरश्रुता।। Ramayana, Balkauda, XXIV, 8-10
 40. Vide notes on he Meghduta edited by H.H. Wilson 3rd Ed. London, 1843
 41. Meghaduta, I. 7.