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Sanskrit Kavyas: As a base of Indian culture a review

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Introduction

Culture has a very vast connotation. It deals with the concrete material world as well as the abstract inner world. Thus it is mainly two-fold-elemental and spiritual. For a common man culture means good taste, refined manners, norms of life, etc. it is closely related to the concept of ultimate values. Many times there arises confusion regarding the meanings of culture and civilization, and these words are sometimes used for one another; but civilization is not always an ally, but sometimes an enemy of culture^[1].

Literature is one of the sources to know the culture of a particular country during a particular period. Sanskrit Kavya-s, including the panch mahakavya-s, the Khanda-kavya-s, the historical poems as well as the prose romances and subhasita-s, form a major portion of literary activity roughly during 4th century AD to 12th century AD Indian culture as seen and reflected in this vast literature is presented in this paper under four different heads.

1. Soda-Political

It is very difficult to name the texture of social culture of India. It can be called a mosaic of racial, linguistic, and political groups or motley of diverse values of varied people.

Basic unit of society was the family, which was governed by the patriarchal system. Though all the four stages of human life are reflected in the then literature, it is the householder's ideal life which is focused the most. Menu also says, "As all the rivers and streams ultimately reach the ocean, in the same way, all asramas have their footing in grhasthasrama^[2]. Woman was the most important factor in the family. The Sanskrit kavyas speak of women in high terms. The period of this literature was the golden age of India; and the poets like Kalidisa, Dandin, Bharavi, Bana. Bhartrhari were court poets; as such a very healthy, civilized highly cultured and affluent picture of women is seen reflected in their works.

Generally women wore silk clothes, garlands round their breasts, wreaths in their hair, wore pearl ornaments, applied sandal paste to their bodies and rendered hair fragrant with cosmetics^[3]. On special occasions like marriage, white aloe (sukla aguru) was applied to the body and ornamental painting were drawn with yellow pigment ('gorocana). Talcum powder (patavasa) made from lodhracurna was used, collyrium for the eyes, red dye (laksaraga), for the feet and a thin layer of wax, a sort of lipstick, for the lips are mentioned for bride Parvati. Bana^[4] mentions six types of clothes, like netra, badara, dukala, kauseya, ksauma and ansuka; and four types of printing methods^[5]. Printing clothes with the help of moulds was rupa, with wavy and curved lines was kutilakrama, that involving leaves and flowers, i.e., nature drawing was pallava and contrast colour print was parabhaga The progress made by India in textile manufacturing and printing in the 7th century was really very remarkable General ornaments were bracelets, anklets, necklaces, girdles, earning, ring, diadems and crowns etc That was made from gold, precious stones like ruby, sapphire, emerald, corals and mainly pearls as large as amalaka (See trans).

The general social status of women in kavya literature seems to be enviable, In the R. V. woman was supposed to be the queen of the house^[6], during the Smrti period she was expected to be always in the service of her husband, treating him as god^[7]. In the kavya, however, she symbolizes the conjugal happiness; a combination of the views of Sruti and Smrti. She has freedom to speak what she feels. Bharavi's Draupadi not only expresses her opinion as regards administration and warfare; but also doesn't even hesitate to criticise her husband Yudhisthira^[9].

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Bhimasena praises her for her fiery speech. Harsa's sister, Rajyasri was sitting next to him in the court when the Chinese traveller came to see him. Choosing the bridegroom was in vogue in royal families. Freedom on such levels and equality might have been the result of education and training. Women were not only skilled in fine arts like singing, painting, playing on musical instruments, etc. but also conversant with the science of polity and other lores that made them earn their livelihood when required. Vatsyayana has provision for such earning for the widows and those whose husbands are staying abroad^[10].

To trace the political culture, one has to turn to digvijaya, which was one of the mediums to establish foreign policies. The conquests of Raghu or Candrapida, public relations of king Dilip or Rama and charitable activities undertaken for the welfare of the subjects by the rulers like Duryodhana. Harsa or Avantivarman of Kashmir, the details described in the *kavya-s* tally with the historical accounts of the conquest of Chandragupta the 2nd, and his impartiality, clemency and efficiency in the administration. Fa-hien, the Chinese pilgrim who visited India at this time, has left an impression of prosperous and contented people^[11].

Though almost all the heroes of Raghuvamsha are just, learned, noble and balanced administrators^[12]. Dilipa was like a father to his subjects^[13]. Raghu was a good disciplinarian, neither too harsh nor too lenient in punishments^[14]. Aja, as a mirror reflection, not different from his father^[15] and Rama, the ideal king in all respects. In this list of good rulers, even Duryodhana of Bharavi can be listed. He did not depend upon rains only, but had irrigation schemes and canals dug to provide water to the fields^[16]. King Lalitaditya of Kashmir also brought lands under irrigation and multiplied his food resources^[17].

Appointments of messengers, ambassadors and spies and obtaining latest news from them was the main political function of the kings, which is reflected in the *kavya-s* very often. Bharavi and Magha, in fact, compete with each other in revealing their knowledge as regards the science of polity

2. Religio-Philosophical

Sanskrit *Kavyas*-do not reflect narrow-minded approach towards any religious faith. Different faiths and cults flourished during this period; yet people lived in harmony. Hindu way of life being very assimilative, the differences seemed to merge and as stated earlier, a colourful, diversified mosaic of religio-philosophical thought emerged. Kalidasa, Bana and Bharavi seem to be Siva worshippers, while Magha is a Visnu devotee. Siva and Shakti was considered to be the primeval couple. Kumara Kartikeya and river Ganga also attained importance. Meghaduta full of such respectful references to Himalaya, Siva, Parvati, Kumara and Ganga^[18]. Kalhana says that king Jayapida used to drink Ganga water, specially brought for him from Prayaga. He had donated 100,000 horses to Brahmins to have this facility and luxury^[19].

People, in general, were god-fearing. They abided by the rules and regulations prescribed by the *Sruti* and *Smṛti* Power of incarnations, both benign and malign, was known to the people. Srithasa mentions that king Bhimaka's priest drove away and protected the city from Nairta, the demonic god of south-west direction by reciting the *mantra-s*^[20].

Along with the Vedic, the tantric means of worship were also in vogue. Bana refers to sakta Pauspata cult in detail in both *Kadambari* and *Harsacarita*. Sinister practices like pleasing *Vetala* with burning *guggula* in the mouth of a dead person on

the 14th flight of dark fortnight, entering into a deep dark pit called *asuravivara*, selling of human flesh (*mahamamsavikraya*), are peculiar to the *Kapalika's* who called themselves *mahavraties*^[21]. *Bhavabhuti* also mentioned this^[22].

Besides this, worship of mother goddesses, reference to *mahamandala*, offering of blood, etc, are found in *Harsacarita*. *Sakti* of the *tantra*, is *Tara* of the *Bauddhas* and *Cakresvari* of the *Jainas*^[23]. *Jatamatrdevata*, surrounded by many children, established in the birth-chamber of *Harsavardhana*, called *Carcika*, is similar to *Jivantika* or *Jivti* or *jivdani* in *Marathi*. *Sakti*, being a mother goddess, fertility is her characteristic and procreation her function. Blood, therefore, becomes a special sacrifice to her, symbolizing the menstrual fluid^[24]. *Bana's* reference to, the sale of human flesh by the feudatory kings of *Prabhakaravardhana*, during his illness, could be called a reminiscent of human sacrifice. *Kathasaritsagara* also gives instances of human sacrifices in honour of *Camunda* or *Candika*^[25].

In Indian way of life religion can never be separated from philosophy. Theory of *Karman* is a solution to many Indian problems. Discarded by *Rama*, *Sita*, first gets enraged and wants to condemn him, but ultimately concludes that this bolt from the blue was an effect of her own past deeds; and further prays that she should have him alone as her husband in births to come^[26]. Belief in rebirth is as outcome of the doctrine of *karman*. Continuity of life even after death is unique to Indian philosophy and is artistically dealt with by *Bans* in *Kadambari*.

Purusartha-s or goals of human life is yet another concept which gets exemplified in the lives of the heroes of *Raghuvamsha*^[27]. *Dilipa* illustrates *dharma* (duty) in the sense of contributing to the progress and well being of the individual and society. *Raghu* symbolizes *artha*; He is a conqueror; but knows that the purpose of material gain in fulfilled only when it is given away to the deserving. *Aja* stands for *Kama*, which is nature's pre-eminent phenomenon, providing the foundation of family and social life. *Kama* - instinct conditions human nature and culture; and not only *Kalidasa*, but all the *Sanskrit* writers given optimum importance to happy and successful married life *Rama* indicates the highest goal *moksha* i.e., spiritual salvation. According to some, even *Naisadhiyacaritam* is not to be studied only from poetic value; but as a mystic composition^[28]. Here *nisadha* means body (*nisidanti sura atreti*) and *naisadha* means owner of the body, i.e. soul. (*nalyate badhyate iti nalah*) *Damayanti* is *Mahatripurasundari*. And the love depicts a spiritual longing. *Sriharsa*, the author of *Khandanakhandakhadya*, a highly philosophical text, could not have written an ordinary love story. From gross to subtle, from general to particular and from mundane to transcendental is the journey of all thinkers. Even *Madana*, the love god is introduced by *Kalidasa* as a character, then his gross nature is burnt and he is resurrected to a sublime form of bodiless state. Spirituality and mysticism coming in an allegorical manner is not new to Indian literature.

Various philosophical thinkers studying in the hermitage of *Divakaramitra*, are mentioned by *Bana*^[29]. They are: *Arhats* *Maskarin*, the disciple of *Bhairavacarya* (see trans), *Svetapata* (*Sveti ambara Jaina*), *Bhagavata*, *Varnin* (Referred to by *Bharavi*), *Kapila*, *Kesaluncana*, *Lokayatika*, *Kanada*, *Aupanisada* (*Vedantin*), *Pauranika*, *Shabda* (*Grammarians*) *Panchratra* (*Vaisnava*) etc *Divakaramitra* himself was a *Brahmin* of *Maitrayani Sakha*, who later turned to be a *Bauddha*. During 7th century, *Bauddhas* had greatly

influenced the Vedntins and both had many things to share. Gaudapada shows high regard for some of the principles of Buddhism^[30]. Synthesizing attempt of Gaudapada and later by Sankara might have brought contempt to them, but at the same time, it throws light on the amalgamation of Indian culture. Bharavi's observation that sensual pleasures are as fickle and temporary as dreams^[31] is a reflection of Gaudapada's Vaithya-Prakarana.

3. Ethico- Mythological

Vedic and Puranic mythology is in the veins of kavya-writers. Various myths and mythical notions are seen through the description of the characters and nature. Poetic use of the sleep of Visnu, the lyrical form given to the Krisna myths, the hunter wrestling with Arjun, churning of the milky ocean, the mythical accounts of the scientific phenomenon of solar and lunar eclipses, the doctrine of incarnations, beast heads of deities, the incestuous behaviour of the creator, etc. Mythological accounts are referred to by the poets every now and then. Most interesting is the concept of trinity and an attempt to seek unity in it. Kalidasa in Kumarasambhavam VII. 44 mentions one form dividing itself in three ways and their seniority or otherwise, being mutually interchangeable. Harihara, combined in one mentioned by Bana^[33] is important from the architectural point of view and such a figure is to be found first during Gupta period.

Ethics is the foundation stone of human culture. No society can thrive without high moral standards and ideals. Sanskrit Kavya-s, specially the anthologies and the floating mass of stray verses, cater to these needs of the society. The highly spirited man does not swerve from his righteous, duty-bound path, whatever may come his way; sets an example of 'work is worship' for a commoner^[33]. The definition of a true friend given by Bhartrihari^[34] and an anonymous poet reflect the intimacy in this relation. Such a healthy friendship can be seen even in opposite sexes. Chandrapida and Patralekha is the best example of such friendship^[35].

Such relation is rarely found even in today's liberal atmosphere of women's liberation, Intensity and depth of conjugal love; be it the separation of Yaksha, or the consummation of Nala, Aja and Siva, becomes palpable through sensuous description of physical forms and seasonal changes. Not only human beings, but birds and beasts too, are made to share such subtle, safe, gentle and genuine love by Kalidasa. Jayadeva, on the other hand, inter- weaves levels of physical and metaphysical associations through. Imagery, tone colour and rhythm. This erotic mysticism inspired the Vaishnava saint Chaitanya to interpret it allegorically in terms of the Sahajiyi doctrine of devotional aesthetics^[37].

Contentment and satisfaction, peace and tranquility and nobility are some other standards of morality that have been emphasized by the anonymous poets^[38]. The innate wisdom of the human mind shines in the brevity and pointed expression of the subhasita.

4. Eco-geographical

All the Sanskrit Kavyas give photographic details of nature descriptions. Regard for natural surroundings, concern for insects birds and beasts, association of nature and the living world are commonly and consistently reflected by all the poets. In Kalidasa's poetry, nature vibrates and pulsates with passion; it is personified and portrayed as a living character. Originally geographical accounts were closely linked with cosmogony and pilgrimage. The earliest form is seen in the treatment of bhuvanakosa, tirthas and ksetras in the epics and

legends. In classical kavya literature, the duta-kavyas involve such description. Meghaduta while giving the itinerary of the cloud, presents many geographical details, which can be traced to the modern areas and rivers.

Kalidasa and Bana mention 18 dvipas, which seem to be the division of earth known from the Gupta period. Some dvi-pas with their modern names are Simhaladvipa, i.e., Sri Lanka. Indradyumna, i.e., Andaman, Narikela or Nagna, i.e. Nicobar, Varuna, i.e., Borneo, etc.^[39]. Bana refers to the earth wearing astamangalakamala of 18 dvipas^[40]. Traditionally this is a collection of 8 lucky things like mirror, fan, lamp, bull, garland, etc. Mala as seen carved at Sanchi and Mathura however, reflect 11 and 13 symbols including ankusa, mina mithuma, srivatsa, parasu, darpana, kamala, cakra, etc. This may mean bracelet also as Sankara, the commentator of Harsacharitam, remarks (see trans)^[41]. Kalidasa also mentions that Kartavirya of Mahisrati erected sacrificial poles in 18 dvipas^[42]. Kalhata gives the history and the geography of Kashmir, right from the days of Mahiabharata till 12th century AD and proudly declares that his motherland is the best in the entire world^[43].

Ecology is the study of plants, animals, their environments, inter-relations, interdependencies, etc. Vedic Indian respected nature and deified her various aspects like Agni, Parjanya, Usas, Surya, etc. This respect turned into intimate relationship, which is seen in the kavyas. The grateful village damsels gazing at the cloud, the benefactor with admiration presents a perfect picture of harmony between man and nature^[44]. The Devadru tree depicted as a son of Siva, Rama treating river Sarayu as is mother, trees in the hermitage of Varatantu nourished by constructing water basins and grown like sons, prince Aja spared the life of an elephant marching towards him because it was a wild animal^[45] reference to feeding the horses with salt early in the morning for their good health^[46] the longings (dohada) of the trees taken into consideration, these and many more references are conducive to the fact that Sanskrit poets have an insight into environmental awareness and ecological balance. Sri Hara gives a fine detail that a pomegranate tree is fumigated so that the seeds become ripe and red^[47]. Minister Suyya of king Lalitaditya of Kashmir, in view of floods. of Vitasta, created slopes, got the rocks in the stream removed, divided the river in many streams, dug canals, brought land under cultivation, habituated many cities and thus brought about the development of his land^[48]. King Avantivarman issued a proclamation that no fish or bird is killed near the artificially built ponds^[49].

Anthologies and stray verses express relation of man and nature more vividly. A verse says, instead of having many wayward and capricious sons, it is better to plant a tree on a public road^[50]. A tree is equal to 10 sons^[51]. For conservation of forest one should save tigers and for saving tigers one should maintain forest this vanavyaghanyaya^[52] clearly reveal the importance of eco-system felt by the Sanskrit writers. Gardens were specially built, and made beautiful by artificial ponds, fountains, pleasure mounds, etc. These provided recreation to fatigued

kings. Nala saw the golden goose near the pond, wandering in such pleasure-garden, where many trees like Campaka, Asoka, Patala, Rasala, Dadima, Ketaki, Maluraphala (bilva), Agastya, etc. were planted^[54].

If man shows concern for nature, she too responds favourably, a perfect balance is sought and the country flourishes. Durga Bhagwat remarks that eco friendly literature always ends with a happy note. Culture struggling with ecology ends up

tragically. In Indian literature, nature is the soul, the focus and that is why, we do not have tragedies^[53].

Conclusion

Forefathers give cultural heritage to the coming generation, but no culture is static and stagnant. Stone Age man to the robot is a remarkably long journey. The bed of Indian culture has remained the same, but its stream has become fuller and richer. Things that have contributed to this enrichment, are various diversities, geographical, political, ethnographical, linguistic, religious outbursts, as well as the foreign invasions. Assimilation and integration of these different factors have helped the acculturation and that too, through as strong a medium as Sanskrit.

Really, “vina sarhskrtam naiva sarhskritih.”

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