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Himalaya: Descriptions of two great poets

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In its classical form, a Mahakavya must, contain descriptions of great cities, oceans, mountains, seasons, the rise of the sun and moon, sporting with ladies in gardens and water, Madhupana, separations and unions of lovers. The style should be highly sentimental and embellished with figures of speech.

Great poets like Kalidasa, had used such descriptions with due respect and Aucitya. His Kumarasambhava has all the requirements of a Mahakavya and is classed as such by scholars. The poet begins the Kavya with a description of the Himalaya Mountain respecting him as the king of all mountain-ranges [Nagadhiraja]. Bharavi in his work Kiratarjuniya in an occasion pictures the great mountain Himalaya. Arjuna in his journey for penance sees the greatness of this mountain. These two Mahakavyas Kumarasambhava (1st) of Kalidasa and Kiratarjuniya (Vth) of Bharavi contain the elaborate description of Himalaya Mountain. This paper tries to study and collate these different illustrations of Himalaya Mountain in Mahakavyas.

Kalidasa in his Kumarasambhava starts with description of the Himalayas as the Devatatma in North. Himalaya is the source of exquisite materials, such as the glossy gems and the best herbs. Snow could not be a destroyer of beauty in the case of him who is the source of countless jewels; for one blemish is lost in a host of virtues, like the spot on the moon in her rays. Glaciers with various mineral shadows are beautifully described by poet. Himalaya bears on his peaks, a richness of metals, appearing like an untimely twilight, which, with its colours reflected into the pieces of clouds, leads to the amorous decking of the Apsarases (heavenly nymphs). The snow is high above the cloud. To whose sunny peaks the Siddhas retire (for comfort) when troubled by showers, after having enjoyed the shadow fallen on the peaks below the clouds floating round the mountain's zone. The poet says that, the barks of the birch trees, having characters written on them with mineral fluid, and so resembling the red spots on (the bodies of full grown) elephants, become useful to the Vidyadhara damsels for amatory correspondence.

In Himalaya, as if wishes to play an accompaniment to (swell the music of) the Kinnaras, singing in a high pitch, by filling the holes of the bamboos with the wind breathed from the mouths of the caves. The Kiratas (mountaineers) track the spoor of the lions that have killed elephants by the pearls drooping from the cavities of their claws, though they do not see their foot marks, the blood stains being washed away by the stream lets of melted snow. There is a belief that the best karindran, jeemutam, varaham, shankham, malsyam and ahi contain pearls. The phosphorescent herbs with their luster shed into the interior of the caves, serve, at night, as lights requiring no feeding of oil, at the time of the amorous sports of the forest dwellers accompanied by fair females seen in Himavan. The yaks prove his title, the "Lord of the mountains," to be significant by (waving over him) the chauries (in the shape of their tails) as white as the rays of the moon, and having their beauty extended all round by the movements of the tails.

By describing the poet in the Himalayas, the wind warms the vapors of the Ganges, and frequently the goddess of the goddess, indicating the warmth, dizziness and aroma of the wind. The poet depicts a lot of animals in the upper strata of the Himalayas. In Himavan, the lotuses, growing in the lakes on the highest summits and left after being collected by the bands of the seven sages, the sun, moving on a lower level, blossoms by rays shooting upwards. The position of the Saptarshi's is above the sun. So the poet suggests that the Himalaya rises up to the place of the Saptarshi.

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The poet says that Lord Brahma granted the kingdom of Himavan. On observing him as the source of sacrificial requisites, and his strength as capable of holding up the earth, the Lord of creation himself conferred on him the sovereignty of the mountains with a share in the sacrificial offerings attached to it.

स मानसीं मेरुसखः पितृणां
कन्यां कुलस्य स्थितये स्थितिज्ञः।
मेनां मुनीनामपि माननीया-
मात्मानुरूपं विधिनोपयेमे ॥^[1]

To maintain the continuity of his line, he, a kinsman of Meru, knowing rectitude, married, according to (proper) rites, Mena, the mind-born daughter of the Pithris, equal to himself and respected of the sages. The education (Veda etc.) of Himalaya (Sthitanja) is described by the poet in this Sloka.

Then the poet describes the function of the father of Parvati's (Himalaya).

In Bharavi's Kiratarjuniya, Arjuna looks at the Himalayas in the form of Indra Nilaparvatam, which is very bright, this described in the fifth Sarga.

While the Himalaya is very high, one side is reflected in the sunlight and the next is darkness. The God dwells at the top of the Himalayas, Antarikshavasi dwells in the middle and the inhabitants of the world dwell underneath. In this sloka the expansiveness of Himalaya is illustrated by the poet. The rambling of the devangana's in the forest of Himalayas make the place flower garden. Himalaya is birth many valuable gems and rivers. Water in the river is very pure and holy and is used for many sacred purposes. Great medicinal plants which are luminous in night there are present. These types of herbs are appearing enormously. Sight of Himalaya gets rid of the sins. If the Sages penance in Himalaya they are attained the divine knowledge Brahma.

इह दुरधिगमैः किञ्चिदेवागमैः सततमसुतरं वर्णयन्त्यन्तरम्।
अमुमतिविपिनं वेद दिग्बयापिनं पुरुषमिव परं पद्मयोनिः परम् ॥^[2]

Amrith dwells in the Himalayas, which is submerged in the world and pleasing to the serpents. Home of the lights coming from the herbs, the bed of sandal shoot wind blows calmly and with fragrance. So the desire for returning to heaven is lost by the Devanganas.

The contacts of sunsets in the snow cover Himalayas shine as similar to the moonlight. There are many slokas mentioning the glacial of the Himalayas, penance of Indra and the extent of the Himalayas.

Imaging Himalaya, "Kalidasa starts his Kumarasambhava by personifying Himavan as a king and god in mountain form (devatatman). Though stationary, he has to discharge godly functions of distribute godly favours. It might look impossible for us, but not to Kalidasa. That he was the calf used in milking all gems and precious herbs from the earth as mother cow is an image drawn from myths. He causes twilling anytime he likes by his mineral resources and helps in the make –up of nymphs (1.4). He helps the singing of Kinnaras by making his bamboos serve as so many flutes (1.8). His iridescent herbs serve as night lamps to mating celestial couples (1.10). He protects darkness from the fear of sunlight by sheltering it in his caves (1.12). The yaks turn their tails to

wave him with chowries as it were the wind provided by him will relieve the fatigue of hunters (1.15). He was crowned by the Creator as king of Mountains in view of his services to religious sacrifices (1.17)^[3]

The Concrete and the Myth: Himalaya

The very first verse of Kumarasambhava reveals the blend of reality ('In the North, is the king of mountains, Himalaya'), imagination ('spanning the east and west seas'), poetry ('lying as though a measuring rod of the earth'), and myth ('with deities within himself'). The next verse contains a mythical image that could arise only in a pastoral society ('He was posited as the calf for milking Meru of lustrous jewels and healing herbs and plants'). While society gave matter-offact importance to snow in naming the mountain, the poet grudges it like the blot on the moon, in contrast to the source of infinite jewels that the mountain is imagined to be as a result of the milking operation. Yet in all this, the mountainness of the Himalaya is accepted as such.

The next fourteen verses also give a poetic description of the mountain and its residents. In the eighteenth verse however Himalaya as a mythical person suddenly enters the scene, wedding Mena, born of the manes' mind. Apart from the nuptial rites, human mores do not find mention here. But the progeny is mixed: the first, a male, is a *mount* true to the myth of Indra having to 'cut off his wings' *in future!* The second is a female, a goddess fashioned after the humans – in her previous birth incensed at the insult hurled by the father, she had forsaken her body by yogic means and now *approached Mena for rebirth*. She was named Parvati signifying her as offspring of the mountain father but the poet's description of her physical beauty and feminine charms corresponds totally to that of a human being, not necessarily a goddess. Himalaya as her father is bound by the customary norm of elite Indian society that the daughter would be given to a non proposer^[4].

Yet the human 'shape' in which Himalaya is made to play the role, is made to possess the qualities of the mountain 'form' on which it is built. After Shiva had turned away from her, 'the mountain (*adrih*) took the pitiable daughter with both arms'^[5]. When the seven sages came to him as negotiators, 'From some distance, bringing the offerings, the mountain (*giri*) approached them, pressing the earth with his weighty footsteps'^[6]. Not content with calling him *giri*, even if walking like a living being, the poet is more explicit in the next verse: For, he was the Himalaya, coppery-lipped with precious metals, long-armed with the Deodar trees, rocky-chested in physique and snowy- looking in appearance'^[7]. The reader acquiesces in this sudden shift from the mythical to the physical phenomenon, unknowingly.

The mythically created person not only walks but also talks and profoundly as described in the following verses. In one of them the cave-mouth metaphor is meant to tell that 'through the echo from the cave-mouths, Himalaya as if conveyed the same meaning twice.' While the intertwining of the mythical and phenomenal characters is easily discerned, it is more worthwhile to observe that the cave-mouth metaphor is reversible. This means that the attributes and functions of the cave in the phenomenal mountain could have been ascribed to

³ Kalidasa A Fresh

⁴ Kumarasambhavam, 1.22

⁵ Kumarasambhavam, 3.76

⁶ Kumarasambhavam, 6.5

⁷ Kumarasambhavam, 6.51

¹ Kumarasambhavam, 1.18.

² Kiratarjuniyam; 5.18.

the mythical Himalaya's mouth - which may not have taxed the readers' credulity very much.

This applies to other obvious as well as concealed metaphors occurring above and also elsewhere. In fact such reversible metaphors enable us to fathom the phenomena at the bottom of the mythical story and the myth, even when they are not so obviously brought together as in the case of Himalaya. Thus, the mention of 'weighty footsteps, coppery-lips, rocky chest, cave mouth' and not least the name 'parvathi' of the comely daughter would enable us to guess at a mountain being the subject of 'strange but not true' events in the story.

Conclusion

Although there are different forms of writing, there are a described things are in common. The natural wealth, height, and extent of the Himalayas, etc. are described by these two poets. Apart from expensive jewellery, night shadows are also mentioned in the number of slokas. It is also claimed that the wealth in Himalayas are not attainable for humans. Snow is also said to be a beautiful sight of the Himalaya.

The poet Kalidasa speaks about Himalaya as the father of Parvathi the heroine but the poet Bharavi speaks of the Himalayas as a place with its peculiar. If Kalidasa is depicted as Parvathy's father Himalaya, but Bharavi describes Himalaya as the residence of the Shiva and Parvathi. Furthermore, if Kalidasa speaks about Himalaya's knowledge, but Bharavi says that even the sages who do penance in the Himalayas attain the divine knowledge Brahma.

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