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Poetic conventions in *Meghadūta*: An environmental analysis

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Introduction

Sanskrit is foremost among world literatures which have produced poets who attained immortality through their poetical works. Kālidāsa is one of the bright stars shining with great lustre in the galaxy of eminent poets. Kālidāsa's great scholarship, his deep knowledge, and the luxurious style of life which he must have reflect throughout the poem. This work reveals his profound knowledge of the various subjects, animals, birds and nature etc. He is keen observer of the behaviour of not only men but other subjects also.

Poetry is an excellent medium for narrating a story or event. One of the significant feature of poetry is its fine imagery, the word pictures, it presents. In the opinion of the ancient writers of stylistics or *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, the world of the poet and the descriptions about it are far nobler and more exquisite than all the other physical realities and material creations. The often unscientific and non-worldly concepts and descriptions are what is meant by the term 'Kavisamaya' or 'Kavisaketa'. The ultimate objective of poetry is the joy or pleasure that gives to the readers or listeners. For that the poet uses different figures of speech, like Simile, Metaphor, and *Gūṇas*. They also make use of various stylistic devices related to lexicon and syntax, including *Foregrounding* which is *Deviation* from the norm. All these constitute what is collectively known as 'Kavisamaya'.

It was Rājāśekhara, who was a poet and a rhetorician, who studied extensively and intensively about 'Kavisamaya'. Rājāśekhara lived in the 10th century. Although various forms of 'Kavisamaya' were in use before him, no proper study was made about them. Through his '*Kāvyaśāstra*', Rājāśekhara codified all the various forms of 'Kavisamaya'. In the early chapters of '*Kāvyaśāstra*', Rājāśekhara has discussed 'Kavisamaya' quite elaborately and with examples. After Rājāśekhara, many other rhetoricians made elaborate studies on this subject. Hemacandra's '*Kāvyaśāstra*', Ajitśena's '*Alaṅkāraśāstra*', Devaśvara's '*Kavikalpalathā*', Arisimha and Aricandra's '*Kāvyaśāstra*', Visvānātha's '*Śhītyadarpaṇa*' etc. are the most prominent works of such studies. The 'Kavisampradaya' explained in the later books is more or less similar to the term 'Kavisamaya' as expounded by Rājāśekhara. To make its literary work popular and enjoyable, a poet, making use of his genius or *pratibhā* and experience creates a world of his own. In this world the poet reigns as the supreme authority. It is this principle that Ānandavardhana spoke about in his '*Dhvanyāloka*':

“अपारे काव्यसंसारे कविरकः प्रजापतिः

यथास्मै रोचते विश्वं तथेदं परिवर्तते ॥”^[1]

Some of the descriptions in poems are so complicated that they are beyond the imagination of ordinary people. But these exist on the basis of some unwritten agreement and understanding between the poet and the readers.

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¹ *Dhvanyāloka*, Ānandavardhana, Chowkhamba Vidhyabhavan, 1976, p. 530

Definition of Kavisamaya in *Kjvyamçm;msa*

In *Kjvyamçm;msa*, Rjjaçekhara describes the relations between these 'Kavisa'ketas' and their relevant to other poetical theories and the circumstances that led him to formulate these principles.

Some rhetoricians before him considered such descriptions as 'DoÅas' or blemishes of the poets. Bh;maha in his *Kjvyjla k;ra* says:

“देशकालकथालोकन्यागमविरोधी च
प्रतिज्ञाहेतुदृष्टान्तहीनां दुष्टं च नेष्यते ॥” [2]

Kavisa'ketas and Myths

If Kavisa'ketas are to be compared to any modern poetical theory, it will be with myths. A Myth is something that we can never explain historically and often they have supernatural elements in them. They are often woven round legends and folklores. In the same way Kavisa'keta are also traditional and cannot be explained scientifically and logically.

Division of Kavisa'ketas

In the 14th Chapter of his work, Rjjaçekhara elaborately describes Kavisamaya or Kavisa'keta. Kavisa'keta are basically divided into three. They are Bhauma-Divya-P;tiçya. Of these the 'Bhauma' is the most important.

It is again subdivided into three: AAñanibandhana, áatama,ibandhana, Niyamenanibandhana. In the first category we have the journey of the swans to M;nasasarass, the sorrow of departure of the ruddy geese, the whiteness of fame, laughter etc. In the second class we find indescribable fruits of trees like sandalwood and the Açoka. The third class of things are based on the rules and traditions made by the poets themselves.

All the Sanskrit poets make use of all these different kinds of Kavisa'ketas. The first place among such poets goes to K;lidi;sa himself. The sa'ketas he has used in his poems indicate how meticulously and elaborately he had observed nature, the various natural phenomena and also the flora and fauna of the earth and the entire universe itself. We can see all of these Kavisa'ketas scattered here and there in all his works. In his "*MeghadËta*" he has used them quite lavishly.

In the poetry of K;lidi;sa, nature is an active presence. In his *MeghadËta*, there are many descriptions of nature. We see the mountains, forests, lakes etc. in their abundance. Although these things are described in the poems of other poets also, in the poetry of K;lidi;sa they occupy a very special niche. In his poems we see how the inanimate objects are personified giving factors of nature all the human qualities and emotions and reactions. K;lidi;sa is superb in the use of the figure of speech of personification. In his poems rivers, trees, mountains, birds and animals speak and behave like human beings.

Describing Rivers

In *MeghadËta*, there are many descriptions showing how rivers behave in various contexts. There are the moods of anger, the smiles of joy, the brisk movement of pleasure, the slow motion of indolence in these images of the river which is personified like a beautiful woman capable of thrilling one's heart.

“वीचिक्षोभस्तनितविहगश्रेणिकाञ्चीगुणायाः
संसर्पन्त्याः स्खलितसुभगं दर्शितावर्तनाभेः ।
निविन्ध्यायाः पथि भवरसाभ्यन्तरः सन्निपत्य
स्त्रीणामाद्यं प्रणयवचनं विभ्रमो हि प्रियेषु ॥” [3]

Here the river Nirvindhya is described as a beautiful woman. She is wearing a waistband made of water-birds chirping noisily as they are moved by the waves of the river. She is moving forward with a smiling face displaying her navel, the whirl and chasm of the river. Come close to the river and enjoy her shy looks. When meeting their lovers first words women say are their physical movements and expressions. YakÅa is a lover who had to go away from his darling very quickly. But the departure is not something very old; it is recent. Therefore it is natural that on his lips still there are smiles of amorous encounters with his sweetheart. The beauty of the sexual encounters with rivers in the route of the Cloud is exceptional and captivating.

“तेषां दिक्षु प्रथितविदिशालक्षणां राजधानीं
गत्वा सद्यः फलमविकलं कामुकत्वस्य लब्धा ।
तीरोपान्तस्तनितसुभगं पास्यसि स्वादु यस्मात्
सभ्रुभङ्गं मुखमिव पयो वेत्रवत्याश्चलोर्मि ॥” [4]

J;l;ibha, as soon as you reach the capital of Vidi;a, the ideal country, you will be able to enjoy the full fruits of love. There you can enjoy the lips of your lover, like the banks of the River enjoy the water of Vetravatç which is sweet and swinging in waves, making pleasant noises like the murmuring thunder.

In *MeghadËta* there are many such examples. The images of the River as drawn by K;lidi;sa amply depict the differing conditions of human life. He has made such exquisite pictures using dozens of Rivers like the Indus, Ganges, Yamunç, Sarasvati, K;lindç, Nirvidhya, Vetr;vatç, Rekhi, Gambhçrç, Muracç, Sipi, Narmadi, God;varç, Pamb; and Sarayç.

Description of Trees

The descriptions of Trees are abundant in the poetical compositions of K;lidi;sa.

“नीपं दृष्ट्वा हरितकपिशं केसरेरर्धरूढै-
राविर्भूतप्रथममुकुलाः कन्दलीशचानुकच्छम् ।
जग्ध्वाऽरण्येष्वधिकसुरभिं गन्धमाप्रायचोर्व्याः
सारङ्गास्ते जललवमुचः सूचयिष्यन्ति मार्गम् ॥” [5]

Multicoloured birds pass along your path where you made showers of rain looking at the blooming Kadamba buds, watching the bubble like mushrooms popping in the marshes, and savouring the fresh aroma emanating from the earth because of the nourishing fresh rains.

Again we find the fine Kavisa'keta, in which the Kadamba trees are said to get excited by looking at the Cloud.

“नीचैराख्यं गिरिमधिवसेस्तत्र विश्रामहेतो-
स्त्वत्संपर्कात् पुलकितमिव प्रौढपुष्पैः कदम्बैः ।
यः पण्यस्त्री रतिपरिमलोद्गारिभिर्नागराणा-
मुद्दामानि प्रथयति शिलावेशमभियौवनानि ॥” [6]

³ *Meghasandea*, Dr.Vijayakumar, Samskrti Publications, Kalady, 2010, p.71

⁴ Ibid.p.61

⁵ Ibid.p.53

⁶ Ibid.Pp.63-64

Kavisa'keta like these are abundant in *MeghadĒta*.

Description of Birds

We find that birds like swans, hornbills, pied cuckoos, cranes and partridges with all their special features and characteristics are elaborately described in the poem.

“अम्भोबिन्दुग्रहणचतुरांशचातकान् वीक्षमाणाः
श्रेणीभूताः परिगणनया निर्दिशन्तो बलाकाः ।
त्वामासाद्य स्तनितसमये मानयिष्यन्ति सिद्धाः
सोत्कम्पानि प्रियसहचरीसम्भ्रमालिङ्गितानि ॥” [7]

The hornbills drink the raindrops before they fall on earth. We can see the cranes or storks which are keenly observing the hornbills drinking raindrops. Here is another one:

“मन्दं मन्दं नुदति पवनश्चानुकूलो यथा त्वां
वामश्चायं नदति मधुरं चातकस्ते सगन्धः ।
गर्भाधानक्षणपरिचयान्नूनामाबद्धमालाः
सेविष्यन्ते नयनसुभगं खे भवन्तं बलाकाः ॥” [8]

Oh Cloud, the slow breeze is making you move very slowly the way you like. The hornbills are singing sweetly as they are pleased to see you. The silver winged geese travel with you like adorning garlands. It is usual for poets to describe the dance of the peacocks with the sighting of clouds.

“ज्योतिर्लेखावलयि गलितं यस्य बहू भवानी
पुत्रप्रेम्णा कुवलयदलप्रापि कर्णे करोति ।
धौलापाङ्गं हरशशिरुचा पावकेस्तं मयूरं
पश्चादद्रिग्रहणगुरुभिर्गजितेर्नर्तयेथाः ॥” [9]

Here the fine peacock feathers are described. The Cloud is asked to make the thunder loud enough for the peacock, the vehicle of Subramāṇya, to perform its dance. There are also many Kavisa'keta about swans in the poem.

“कर्तुं यच्च प्रभवति महीमुञ्जिलीश्रामवन्ध्यां
तच्छ त्वा ते श्रवणसुभगं गर्जितं मानसोत्काः ।
आकैलासाद्विसकिसलयच्छेदपाथेयवन्तः
सम्पत्स्यन्ते नभसि भवतो राजहंसाः सहायाः ॥” [10]

Here the description is about the flocks of royal peacocks that welcome the Cloud as it is travelling to Aljga. In *MeghadĒta* we also come across different Kavisa'keta relying on various colours. It is a traditionally accepted norm to assign white colour to those things that do not have any specific colour. Examples can be seen in the white hue assigned to moonlight and smiles.

“सन्तप्तानां त्वमसि शरणं तत्पयोद ! प्रियायाः
सन्देशं मे हर धनपतिक्रोधविश्लेषितस्य ।
गन्तव्या ते वसतिरलका नाम यक्षेश्वराणाम्
बाह्योद्यानस्थितहरशिरश्चन्द्रिकाधौतहर्म्या ॥” [11]

Here is the description is about the white crescent on the head of Parameṣvara and the journey of the Cloud to Aljga which has the tower shining because of the light from the white crescent. Here is another one:

“गत्वा चोर्ध्वं दशमुखभुजोच्छ्वासितप्रस्थसन्धेः
कैलासस्य त्रिदशवनितादर्पणस्यातिथिः स्याः ।
शृङ्गोच्छायैः कुमुदविशदयैर्वी वितत्य स्थितः खं
राशीभूतः प्रतिदिनमिव त्र्यम्बकस्याट्टहासः ॥”¹²

Here the white splendour is attributed to the lotus flowers and to the laughter of Lord āiva. This indicates the white colour of laughter and smile. These are not facts or realities but merely Kavisa'keta used by the poet. Piercing darkness with a needle is a popular Kavisa'keta. This Kavisa'keta is used by poets to show the intensity of darkness.

“गच्छन्तीनां रमणवसतिं योषितां तत्र नक्तं
रुद्रालोके नरपतिपथे सूचिभेद्यैस्तमोभिः ।
सौदामन्या कनकनिकषस्निग्धया दर्शयोर्वी
तोयोत्सर्गस्तनितमुखरो माम्भूर्बिक्लवास्ताः ॥”¹³

Here the abstract darkness is described as if it could be pierced by a needle. By doing that darkness which is abstract is made concrete. In other words the abstract darkness is concretised or solidified.

Many of the kavisa'keta, Kṛlidṛsa used in *MeghadĒta* come under the category known as 'Añjanibandhana'. The genius of the poet to present even highly improbable supernatural descriptions to make the hearts and minds of the readers happy is exemplary. Kavisa'keta play a major role in making the works of Kṛlidṛsa highly popular and interesting. It should be noted that Kavisa'keta or Kavisamaya are usages contrary to accepted norms and principles. This can be easily translated as 'Foregrounding' in English. Foregrounding is 'De-automatisation' or 'Deviation from the Norm'. Foregrounding is an essential ingredient of poetry as there can't be any poetry without this kind of 'Vakrokti'.

Conclusion

We can see that in *MeghadĒta*, Kṛlidṛsa has made extensive use of Kavisa'keta. The descriptions of Kṛlidṛsa beautifully portray the ups and downs of human life. He also portrays nature in an effective way. Natural phenomena are closely related to human life and man's existence on the earth. When we love and nurture nature, she returns our love and care in abundant measure. But today man is exploiting nature in so many ways. We destroy rivers and forests. We cut down trees mindlessly. We use a lot of artificial fertilizers and insecticides ruining the soil. All these things are harming the earth and the environment. We should do something to protect and preserve our nature.

By giving inanimate things life and human qualities, the poet is doing an excellent job in driving home the principle of the sanctity of nature. Killing nature is killing mankind. Works such as *MeghadĒta* have historical and geographical significance. The Cloud which is an amorous lover and the elephants caressing the trees are symbols. There is a desire and an exhortation asking the people to go back to the idyllic nature from the hustle and bustle of the polluted, dusty cities. These books are read and discussed even today because of

⁷ Ibid.p.55

⁸ Ibid.p.27

⁹ Ibid.p.112

¹⁰ Ibid.p.31

¹¹ Ibid.Pp.21-22

¹² Ibid.p.145

¹³ Ibid.p.97

their magnificent descriptions of nature and human conditions. The insights the poet had centuries ago must still be relevant to the present generation and it is hoped that the modern people will imbibe the positive things that can be garnered from the great gooks like *MeghadĒta*. If we are to survive, we should pay heed to the exhortations of Kĳlidĳsa to whom nature is not something inanimate but a persona with a body, mind and even soul.

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