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Environmental awareness in Kālidāsa's lyric poems

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Abstract:

Existence of human being depends upon into environment. Environment includes air, water, land, animals, birds, insects, trees, flowers, fruits and human being etc. during the growth and destruction of human beings, we not only come into contact with these environmental elements but also, we have to go through the influences and impact created by these environmental substances in our way of life. In my article, concentrating on particular portion of Sanskrit Literature, that is the literature of the famous poet Kālidāsa. His awareness for environment is revealed in his treatment of nature in his Lyrical Works like 'Meghadūtam' and 'Ṛtusamhāram'. In 'Ṛtusamhāram', the relationship between environment of different seasons and human life has been suggested and through this attempt Kālidāsa's thought and consciousness in respect of environment have taken shape. In the 'Meghadūtam', nature plays very significant role, the poet with his attempt to associate nature with living beings, has drawn the picture of the cloud as if to be fit for carrying Yaksha's message.

Keyword: Environment, awareness, kālidāsa, ṛtusamhāram, summer, winter, autumn, spring, hemanta, rainy, meghadūtam, alakā, rāmgiri, pūrva megha

Introduction

Environmental awareness in the ṛtusamhāram

In the influence of the circle of seasons on the animals' world. In the word 'Ṛtusamhāra', 'samhāra' means 'description'. Six seasons in the nature world are described this lyrical work. The arrival of the seasons mainly summer, monsoon, autumn etc is delineated here with a true poetic mind and the beautiful picture of the feelings of human being, specially of lovers due to environmental influence is drawn here. The relation between environment of different seasons and human-life has been suggested and through this attempt Kālidāsa's thought and consciousness in respect of environment have taken shape.

'Ṛtusamhāra' starts with description of 'Summer'. In this season the scorching heat of the sun is felt. Naturally people are eager for the soothing rays of the moon. Due to extreme heat of the forest-fire in this season, crops get burnt. The dry leaves of trees are scattered everywhere by air, ponds, rivers etc are dried up. The poet describes beautifully the influence of the summer on animals such as deer, lions, elephants, monkeys etc.

The dearest 'Rainy' season of lovers comes in a straight manner –

‘समागतो राजवदुधतद्युतिर्धनागमः कामिजनप्रियः प्रिये’¹ (Rtu. 2/1)

At this season rain of arrows seen to fall on the lovers staying abroad, the lovers who are pained due to distance from their beloveds. Cloud in this season grow like this sounds of drums in the battle, lighting seems to be the shooting of arrows from bows. Rivers, Mountains are painted beautifully. The poet describes the beauty of charming, maidens decorated with flowers like Bakula, Kadamba etc. This rainy season is like the life spout of animals, it fulfils everyone's demand. So, the poet prays –

‘जलदसमय एष प्राणिनां प्राणभूतो दिशतु तव हितानि प्रायशो वाञ्छितानि’² (Rtu. 22/28)

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¹ Rtu. 2/1

² Rtu. 22/28

‘जलदसमय एष प्राणिनां प्राणभूतो दिशतु तव हितानि प्रायशो वाञ्छितानि’³
(Rtu. 22/28)

Kāśh flowers, blooming lotus, the voice of swans (Kalahamsas) announces the advent of the season of ‘Autumn’. It reassembles to be a new bride –

‘काशांशुका विकचपद्मनोज्ञवक्त्रा सोन्मादहंसरवनूपरनादरम्या।
आपक्कशालिरुचिरा तनुगात्रयष्टिःप्राप्ता शरन्नववधुरिव रूपम्या ॥’⁴ (Rtu. 3/1)

The atmospheric surrounding in autumn with different kinds of birds such as peacocks, cranes, swans etc vividly described by the poet.

The season ‘Hemanta’ appears with Śāli rice, flower named Lodhrā, coldness etc.

‘नवप्रवालोद्गमशस्यरम्यः प्रफुल्ललोध्रः परिपक्कशालिः ।
विलीनपद्मः प्रपतत्तुषारो हेमन्तकालः समुपागतोऽयम् ॥’⁵ (Rtu. 4/1)

The season the attractive die to fully ripen crops, due to moving gait dear and the voice of Kraunca. Ornamented with the garland made by cranes let the season Hemanta, give all pleasures this is the prayer of the poet

‘सततमतिमनोज्ञः क्रौञ्चमालापरीतः प्रादिशतु हिमयुक्तः काल एषः सुखं वः
।’⁶ (Rtu. 3/18)

The crop Śāli becomes ripen in ‘Winter’ –

‘प्ररुढशालांशुचथैर्मनोहरं क्वचित् स्थितक्रौञ्चनिनादराजितम्’⁷ (Rtu. 5/1)

People at this time love to stay inside, prefer fire and rays of the sun –

‘निरुद्धवातायनमन्दिरोदरं हुताशनो भानुमतो गभस्तयः’⁸ (Rtu. 5/2)

This season is unbearable to men who are not with their beloved ones –

‘प्रियजनरहितानां चित्तसन्तापहेतुः’⁹ (Rtu. 5/16)

‘Spring’ does not stay behind, it comes with the spout of mangoes, humming bees, fragrance of lotus. At this time both day time and evening are enchanting

‘द्रुमाः सपुष्पाः सलिलं सपद्मं स्त्रियः सकामाः पवनः सुगन्धिः ।
सुखाः प्रदोषा दिवसाश्च रम्याः सर्व्वं प्रिये । चारुतरं वसन्ते ॥’¹⁰ (Rtu. 6/2)

Through the picturesque description of all six seasons, the great poet not only has drawn, the picture of the moon, the sun, cloud, lighting, raining etc but has also given impression of the influence of these seasons on human-beings, trees, birds etc. From the vivid description of the seasons come to know about the poet’s awareness of the environmental

situations. He has not mention however in kind of pollution in environment. Season used to appear then one after another in a proper line and the environment was in cope with the existing season. No exceptional hindrance was felt then. Destruction of forest, pollution created in the environment etc which spoil the balance in the atmosphere where no existent then. As such the poet did not feel any urge to comment on the topic of protecting environment from pollution in his works. Infect the varied charm of different seasons which is beautifully described in Kālidāsa’s work is not felt now a days due to pollution created by over population, destructed of forest the leftover things of factories.

Environmental awareness in the meghdūtam

Kālidāsa’s awareness for environment is revealed in his treatment of nature in his works particularly in the ‘Meghdūtam’ and ‘Rtusamhāram’. Man cannot live ignoring environment around him. As such the idea of retreat into nature, a mountain-top or a forest or rivers in search of the revelation of the split of the universe has been with us from early times. Kālidāsa was aware of this.

In the Meghdūtam, the wonderful poem, unsurpassed as a masterpiece of its kind, i.e. lyrical compositions, nature plays very significant role. It should be noted that the ardent feeling in this poem is not isolated but is mingled with the great deal of descriptive matter. The poem begins with the banished lover Yaksha requesting a cloud to accept the mission of a messenger. The poet with his attempt to associate nature with living beings, has drawn the picture of the cloud as if to be fit for carrying Yaksha’s message. At the approach of the rainy season Yaksha banished at the Mountain Rāmagiri sees a cloud changing to the hill –

‘धूमज्योतिः सलिलमरुतां सन्निपातः क्व मेघः
सन्देशार्थाः क्व पदुकरणैः प्राणिभिः प्रापणीयाः ।
इत्यौत्सुक्यादपरिगणयन् गुह्यकस्तं ययाचे
कामार्ता हि प्रकृतिकृपणाश्चेतनेषु ॥’¹¹ (Pū. Meg. 5)

In nature we see clouds moving from one place to another in the sky. So, the selection of the cloud as messenger by Yaksha is not against the fact in the environment. Water coming in contact with sun’s rays becomes vapour and that mingled with smog when comes in contact with the air in the sky transforms into cloud. The poet was aware of this factual truth of atmosphere. So, he has mentioned that cloud is formed of the mixture of smog, rays, water and air.

From Rāmagiri, the cloud as messenger will have to go in the company of swans and cranes to the lake Mānasa, to the mount Kālidāsa, where the divine city of Alakā, the residence of Yaksha’s beloved is situated. In this context we have the vivid description of various types of plants, animals, mountains, hills, rivers, lakes, flowers as well as some living and non-living elements of nature which not only charm the poetic creation of the great poet, but also reflect the heartiest love or consciousness of Kālidāsa towards nature or natural environment surrounded by him. The poet has placed the natural elements and human beings in the same platform. Yaksha on his way to Alakā reaches the mountain Āmrakūt and after raining there and meeting the river Revā, it is to seek the Daśārṇa country, with its city Bidiśā. Then it must drink the water of the river Betravatī, before proceeding to visit Ujjayinī, after crossing the rivers the Nirvindhya and Sindhu.

³ Rtu. 22/28

⁴ Rtu. 3/1

⁵ Rtu. 4/1

⁶ Rtu. 3/18

⁷ Rtu. 5/1

⁸ Rtu. 5/2

⁹ Rtu. 5/16

¹⁰ Rtu. 6/2

¹¹ Pū. Meg. 5

The description of those rivers are beautiful pictures of nature—

‘स्थित्वा तस्मिन् वनचरवधूभक्तकुञ्जे मुहूर्तं
तोयोत्सर्गद्रुततगतस्तत्परं वर्त्म तीर्णः ।
रेवां द्रक्ष्यस्युपलविषमे विन्धपादे विशीर्णा
भक्तिच्छेदैरिव विरचितां भूमिमङ्गे गजस्य ॥¹² (Pū. Meg. 19)

After visiting the shrines of Mahākāla, it will cross the rivers Gambhirā, Carmanvatī and reach the mountain Himālayas via the holy Bramhāvarta drinking the water of the Sarasvatī there in. then the floating cloud will reach the lake Mānasa and the Kālidāsa Mountain on the top of which is situated Alakā. The beautiful pictures of nature are also available in the descriptions of the mount Kālidāsa and the Mānasa Lake. In the second part of the lyric Kālidāsa describes the city Alakā which is the destination of the cloud Yaksha. Here also Kālidāsa describes the beauty of this city with its pleasant sights of nature.

Thus, in the whole of the lyrical composition nature and environment are replete with each other. Atmospheric consciousness is totally reflected here. Some facts about clouds are found to be present here. When the forest is going to be destructed due to natural fire then raining shower from the cloud only can engulf that fire and forest is also reached.

‘त्वय्यायत्तं कृषिफलमिति भ्रूविलासानभिज्ञैः
प्रीतिस्निग्धैर्जनपदवधूलोचनैः पीयमानः ।
सद्यःसीरोत्कषणसुरभि क्षेत्रमारुह्य मालं
किञ्चित्पश्चाद् ब्रज लघुगतिभूय एवोत्तरेण ॥¹³ (Pū. Meg. 16)

Cloud heavy with water cannot be flown by air anywhere. Due to first shower certain type of sweet scent comes out of the soil. It is mentioned in the sloka –

‘नीपं दृष्ट्वा हरितकपिशं केशरैरर्धरुढै -
राविर्भूतप्रथममुकुलाः कन्दलीश्चानुकच्छम् ।
जग्धवारण्येष्वधिकसुरभिं गन्धमाघ्राय चोर्व्याः
सारङ्गास्ते जललवमुचः सुचयिष्यन्ति मार्गम् ॥¹⁴ (Pū. Meg. 21)

Peacocks get delighted to see the cloud full of water in the rainy season –

‘उत्पश्यामि द्रुतमपि सखे मत्प्रियार्थं यियासोः
कालक्षेपं ककुभसुरभौ पर्वते पर्वते ते ।
शुक्लापाङ्गैः सजलनयनैः स्वागतीकृत्य केकाः
प्रत्युद्यतः कथमपि भवान् गन्तुमाशु व्यवस्येत् ॥¹⁵ (Pū. Meg. 23)

With the flash of lightning cloud sometimes shows path –

‘गच्छन्तीनां रमणवसतिं योषितां तत्र नक्तं
रुद्रालोके नरपतिपथे सूचिभेद्यैस्तमोभिः ।
सौदामन्या कनकनिकषस्निग्धया दर्शयोर्वी
तोयोत्सर्गस्तनितमुखरो मास्म भूर्विक्लवास्ताः ॥¹⁶ (Pū. Meg. 38)

Thus, we see that Kālidāsa in his work of ‘Meghdūtam’ while describing that cloud has mentioned so many factual truths of the cloud.

Abbreviation

Rtu. Rtusamhāram
Pū. Meg. Pūrva Megha

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¹² Pū. Meg. 19

¹³ Pū. Meg. 16

¹⁴ Pū. Meg. 21

¹⁵ Pū. Meg. 23

¹⁶ Pū. Meg. 38