

VALUE-ORIENTED EDUCATION SERIES

Selected Episodes from
RAGHUVAMŚAM
of
KĀLIDĀSA



GENERAL EDITOR
KIREET JOSHI

Selected Episodes
from *Raghuvamśam*
of
Kālidāsa

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Contents

Preface	10
Introduction	13
Selected episodes from Raghuvamsam	
1. On Raghu's line	37
2. Dilipa	39
3. Raghu	48
4. Aja	58
5. Rama	68
Appendices	
Passages from the writings of Sri Aurobindo on Kalidasa	92
References	101

ON KALIDASA

[KALIDASA] is a true son of his age in his dwelling on the artistic, hedonistic, sensuous sides of experience and pre-eminently a poet of love and beauty and the joy of life. He represents it also in his intellectual passion for higher things, his intense appreciation of knowledge, culture, the religious idea, the ethical ideal, the greatness of ascetic self-mastery, and these too he makes a part of the beauty and interest of life and sees as admirable elements of its complete and splendid picture. All his work is of this tissue. His great literary epic, the "House of Raghu", treats the story of a line of ancient kings as representative of the highest religious and ethical culture and ideals of the race and brings out its significances environed with a splendid decoration of almost pictorially depicted sentiment and action, noble or beautiful thought and speech and vivid incident and scene and surrounding. Another unfinished epic, a great fragment but by the virtue of his method of work complete in itself so far as the tale proceeds, is in subject a legend of the gods, the ancient subject of a strife of Gods and Titans, the solution prepared here by a union of the supreme God and the Goddess, but in treatment it is a description of Nature and the human life of India raised to a divine magnitude on the sacred mountain and in the homes of the high deities.

— Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*,
SABCL, Volume 14, pp. 300-1

Illumination, Heroism and Harmony

Preface

The task of preparing teaching-learning material for value-oriented education is enormous.

There is, first, the idea that value-oriented education should be exploratory rather than prescriptive, and that the teaching-learning material should provide to the learners a growing experience of exploration.

Secondly, it is rightly contended that the proper inspiration to turn to value-orientation is provided by biographies, autobiographical accounts, personal anecdotes, epistles, short poems, stories of humour, stories of human interest, brief passages filled with pregnant meanings, reflective short essays written in well-chiselled language, plays, powerful accounts of historical events, statements of personal experiences of values in actual situations of life, and similar other statements of scientific, philosophical, artistic and literary expression.

Thirdly, we may take into account the contemporary fact that the entire world is moving rapidly towards the synthesis of the East and the West, and in that context, it seems obvious that our teaching-learning material should foster the gradual familiarisation of students with global themes of universal significance as also those that underline the importance of diversity in unity. This implies that the material should bring the students nearer to their cultural heritage, but also to the highest that is available in the cultural experiences of the world at large.

Fourthly, an attempt should be made to select from Indian and world history such examples that could illustrate the theme

of the upward progress of humankind. The selected research material could be multi-sided, and it should be presented in such a way that teachers can make use of it in the manner and in the context that they need in specific situations that might obtain or that can be created in respect of the students.

The research team at the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) has attempted the creation of the relevant teaching-learning material, and they have decided to present the same in the form of monographs. The total number of these monographs will be around eighty.

It appears that there are three major powers that uplift life to higher and higher normative levels, and the value of these powers, if well illustrated, could be effectively conveyed to the learners for their upliftment. These powers are those of illumination, heroism and harmony.

It may be useful to explore the meanings of these terms illumination, heroism and harmony – since the aim of these monographs is to provide material for a study of what is sought to be conveyed through these three terms. We offer here exploratory statements in regard to these three terms.

Illumination is that ignition of inner light in which meaning and value of substance and life-movement are seized, understood, comprehended, held, and possessed, stimulating and inspiring guided action and application and creativity culminating in joy, delight, even ecstasy. The width, depth and height of the light and vision determine the degrees of illumination, and when they reach the splendour and glory of synthesis and harmony, illumination ripens into wisdom. Wisdom, too, has varying degrees that can uncover powers of knowledge and action, which reveal unsuspected secrets and unimagined skills of art and craft of creativity and effectiveness.

Heroism is, essentially, inspired force and self-giving and sacrifice in the operations of will that is applied to the quest, realisation and triumph of meaning and value against the resistance of limitations and obstacles by means of courage, battle and adventure. There are degrees and heights of heroism determined

by the intensity, persistence and vastness of sacrifice. Heroism attains the highest states of greatness and refinement when it is guided by the highest wisdom and inspired by the sense of service to the ends of justice and harmony, as well as when tasks are executed with consummate skill.

Harmony is a progressive state and action of synthesis and equilibrium generated by the creative force of joy and beauty and delight that combines and unites knowledge and peace and stability with will and action and growth and development. Without harmony, there is no perfection, even though there could be maximisation of one or more elements of our nature. When illumination and heroism join and engender relations of mutuality and unity, each is perfected by the other and creativity is endless.

Valmiki, Vyasa, and Kalidasa are the three greatest poets of India, and one cannot have a living experience of Indian culture without some direct experience of the works of these three great poets. Kalidasa is the reputed author of *Ritusamhara*, *Meghadutam*, *Raghuvamsham*, and *Kumarasambhavam*. Apart from these four poetical works, three dramatic works have been universally attributed to Kalidasa, viz., *Malavikagnimitram*, *Vikramorvashiyam*, *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*.

In *Raghuvamsham*, the poet describes a number of kings that belong to the House of Raghu, — from Dilipa to Agnivarna. Only a few episodes have been selected for this compilation, — just enough to introduce to the reader a few glimpses of the idealism of the heroic qualities of kings like Dilipa, Aja, and Sri Rama. The victory of Raghu, the lamentation of Aja, the hunting expedition of Dashratha and four chapters devoted to Sri Rama may be regarded as perhaps the best portions of *Raghuvamsham*.

In all the works of Kalidasa we find a majestic style, charming suggestion, apt similes, beautiful ornamentation and colourful descriptions of nature as also the description of human happiness and suffering. It has been said that Poetry unveiled herself in all her beauty in the presence of Kalidasa. "Vaidarbhi kavita svayam vritavati Shri Kalidasam varam."

Introduction

I

Kālidāsa: his life, time, works and genius

It has been rightly pointed out by C. R. Devadhar that, "Kālidāsa is both famous and unknown".¹ Nothing definite can be said about Kālidāsa's life, place of birth, and the time to which he belonged, for Kālidāsa himself, like many other great Indian authors, did not give any hint about himself. He was much more interested in highlighting and elaborating upon the themes chosen by him for his work, rather than speaking anything about himself. That is why his life-history as it comes down to us through different traditional sources, is usually full of popular anecdotes and interesting stories about him. One of the most popular anecdotes about him is that he, in his early days, was an illiterate fool who subsequently became learned by sheer grace of the Goddess of learning, Saraswatī, after being insulted and thrown out of his home by his learned wife. This particular anecdote is associated with still more interesting stories of how his learned wife, who was a princess puffed up with her learning, was cheated by scholars who were positively angry with her insolence and who somehow befooled her by introducing Kālidāsa, an illiterate fool, as the best scholar-suitor for her. This story of an illiterate fool changing overnight to one of the greatest poets of India, the story has caught hold of popular imagination, like the story of

Cinderella, an ordinary girl in rags, who changed into a beautiful princess overnight through magic. But at the same time, there is naturally very little evidence available to us in favour of such anecdotes about Kālidāsa. On the other hand, we have nothing more reliable to go by either; it means that, unfortunately, we know almost next to nothing about Kālidāsa's life-history.

One thing, however, is certain, and it is that he had a soft corner in his heart for Ujjaini, as is evident from his insistence displayed in so many words of the *Yakṣa* in his *Meghadūtam* that the cloud-messenger, must visit Ujjaini, even if it would mean a diversion from the route from Rāmgiri to Alkā in the Himalayas, where *Yakṣa*'s beloved wife resides. The reasons specified by the *Yakṣa* are of course quite a few, but one of the main reasons is that Ujjaini, to put it in a nutshell, is most beautiful and attractive in so many ways. From this it can very well be inferred that the poet was born and brought up in Ujjaini, at least during his early days, because of which he had a specific attachment towards this city, or perhaps he had spent quite a good deal of his most valuable and pleasant time there and carried sweet memories of Ujjaini in the innermost recesses of his heart which he was eager to share with his readers. It is obvious that his love for Ujjaini was not ordinary; it was extraordinary, like that of a lover for his beloved. And yet, we cannot be sure that Ujjaini was his birth place, even if it was a place with which he had fallen in love no doubt. There are also other possible claimants from different parts of this country for being the birth place of Kālidāsa, which need our due consideration.

Is it possible that he was somehow connected with Ramgiri hills near Koraput of Orissa, because of which he has mentioned it prominently as the place of exile for the *Yakṣa* in his *Meghadūtam*? May be, but it does not justify that he belonged to Orissa on this count. Some regard him as belonging to Bengal, as his name was Kālidāsa, the servant of Goddess Kālī, the famous Deity of Bengal. But this does not imply that he was born in Bengal. Some others take him to be a poet of Kashmir, where many great poets of India have been born. He is the only poet

who describes a living saffron-flower, the plant which actually grows only in Kashmir. But all this does not justify the claim of his being a Kashmiri either, because Kālidāsa, being a great traveller, knew the details of India's geography, and was also a very keen observer of Nature. In the *Raghuvamśam*, while describing the expedition of Raghu in all directions, he has given a number of accurate descriptions of different parts of India and their specific characteristics, wherever necessary. All this makes him really a National Poet *par excellence*, of course, but no particular region of India can doubtlessly claim to be the birth place of this great poet simply on the ground that he has described a particular region in some detail. On the other hand, those who would identify Rāmgiri with Rāmték, near Nagpur, cannot be said to be entirely pointless; the river Reva, i.e., Narmada is towards the north of Rāmték and the cloud messenger has been asked to go in the northerly direction (*udānimukhaḥ*) of Rāmgiri. But whatever may be the case, in view of Kālidāsa's deep acquaintance with and a sympathetic appreciation of the whole of India, even now it has been difficult to identify any particular region as the birth place of this great poet, although, once again it may be reiterated, Ujjaini was his most favourite city where perhaps he might have spent most of his fruitful years.

The Date of Kālidāsa

Here again, regarding the date of Kālidāsa, there has been more of controversy than of unanimity. According to the traditional view, Kālidāsa was the contemporary of King Vikramāditya, the founder of Vikrama-era in 57 BC. Kālidāsa, as a matter of fact, seems to covertly adore King Vikramāditya, when he points out in his *Vikramorvaśīyam*, "Anutsekaḥ khalu Vikramālaṅkarāḥ" or "Diṣṭyā Mahendropakāraparyāptena Vikramamahimnā vardhate bhavān".

This is taken as positive evidence in support of assigning this great poet to the 1st century BC. Sir William Jones, Dr. Peterson,

Mr. S. P. Pandit, Mr. M.R. Kale and others support this theory. According to Dr Keith, Kālidāsa flourished in the 5th century AD during the rule of Chandragupta-II of Ujjain, who ruled up to about AD 413, and might have been referred to with the title of Vikramāditya in *Vikramorvaśīyam*. *Kumāra Sambhavam*, the other epical treatise written by Kālidāsa, may be regarded as referring to the birth of Kumāragupta who was the son and successor of Chandragupta II. As a matter of fact, the title of Vikramāditya was assumed by Chandragupta after defeating the Śakas in AD 395. Both the above mentioned theories, viz., the Gupta theory and the traditional theory, may be regarded as probable, for there is a definite reference made by the poet to the King Vikramāditya in his drama *Vikramorvaśīyam*. The controversy regarding the identity of this King Vikramāditya, it must be admitted, has not yet been resolved. However, it may be said that the probability is a little tilted in favour of the traditional theory. In any case, it must be admitted that Kālidāsa certainly flourished before AD 610, for Bāṇabhaṭṭa who belonged to AD 610 speaks very highly of Kālidāsa's writings, and on the other hand, the earliest limit of the date of Kālidāsa can be fixed around 1st century BC, the date of the great King Vikramāditya, the founder of the Vikramasamvat (57 BC) whose contemporary he might have been, for his reference to Vikramāditya in his drama *Vikramorvaśīyam* is unmistakable.²

Kālidāsa's Works

Kālidāsa is undoubtedly the author of this immortal epic, *Raghuvamśam*. Besides *Raghuvamśam*, Kālidāsa is also the author of another epic, *Kumārasambhavam*, and two lyric poems, *Meghadūtam* and *Ṛtusaṃhāram*. *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Vikramorvaśīyam*, and *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam*, — these three dramatic pieces are also attributed to Kālidāsa. As Kālidāsa was famous both during and even after his life-time, many other works were also attributed to Kālidāsa subsequently but they

were actually the works of poets of inferior talent who wanted their works to be famous by being attributed to Kālidāsa. This explains the undue proliferation of the works of Kālidāsa; as a matter of fact, only the seven works mentioned above undoubtedly belong to Kalidasa, the great. Rājaśekhara, it needs to be noted, speaks of three different poets who were known to him as bearing the name of Kālidāsa (*Kālidāsa trayī kimu*), and it is therefore probable that those of inferior talent bearing the name of Kālidāsa might have written pieces other than the seven mentioned above.³ Doubt expressed in certain quarters regarding Kālidāsa's authorship of *Rtusamhāram*, on account of an apparent lack of a mature touch here, seems to be baseless after all; it is possible that *Rtusamhāram* was one of his earlier works.

Importance of Kālidāsa as a Poet

Kālidāsa, is a world-poet of all times, not to be confined to any particular region, country, race or narrow religious creed, for we find reference to all sorts of noble ideas and ideologies in his writings. He can be regarded as a truly universal poet. He discovered the permanent, the immortal, and eternity in beauty, truth and goodness, amidst change, the mortal and the evanescent things of the world and sang the Universal in and through the particulars while not being negligent of the particulars themselves. Along with Vyāsa and Vālmīki, Kālidāsa adorns that pedestal of excellence which can hardly be reached by any other poet, for there is something superbly beautiful about his poetry that makes it unique for all times. I am reminded in this context of what Matthew Arnold had to say about Shakespeare, and I think, this would, *mutatis-mutandis*, apply to the writings of Kālidāsa too.

Others abide our question — Thou art free!
We ask and ask— thou smilest and art still
Out-topping knowledge!

It is no wonder that Sir William Jones has referred to him as "the Shakespeare of India". Sri Aurobindo, the greatest Indian yogin-philosopher, and poet, has the following words to say about Kālidāsa:

Kālidāsa is the great, the supreme poet of the senses, of aesthetic beauty of sensuous emotion... In continuous gift of seizing an object and creating it to the eye he has no rival in literature.... He is besides a consummate artist, profound in conception and suave in execution, a master of sound and language who has moulded for himself out of the infinite possibilities of the Sanskrit tongue a verse and diction which are absolutely the grandest, most puissant and most full voiced of any human speech, a language of the Gods.⁴

M. R. Kale has this to say about Kālidāsa's poetry:

His genius has been recognized in India from very early times. He has been and will ever be enshrined in the hearts of his countrymen as the Prince of Indian poets. Most Indian successors of Kālidāsa have expressed in suitable words their admiration of the poet who stood far ahead of them in the perfection of his art.⁵

Eulogies of Kālidāsa and his poetry highlighting his greatness abound in plenty not only in our tradition but also in countries outside India, coming as they do from scholars and writers of eminence belonging to different countries at different times. I give a few examples here, in order to highlight some of the aspects of his undisputed glory. Professor Lassen, for example, rightly calls him "the brightest star in the firmament of Indian poetry". According to Humbolt, "Tenderness in the expression of feelings and richness of creative fancy have assigned to him a lofty place among the poets of all nations".⁶ Goethe's apprecia-

tion of Kālidāsa's Śakuntala is well-known. Goethe says:

Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms and the fruits of
its decline,
And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted,
fed?
Wouldst thou the heaven and earth in one sole name
combine,
I name thee O Śakuntala, and all at once is said.

When we remember that Goethe himself was the greatest poet of Germany and one of the greatest of the world, we realize the importance of his estimate of Kālidāsa.

The American scholar, Ryder, has paid a glowing tribute to Kālidāsa and his lyric poem *Meghadūtam* as follows:

Kālidāsa understood in the fifth century what Europe did not learn until the nineteenth, and even now comprehends only imperfectly, that the world was not made for man, that man reaches his full stature only as he realizes the dignity and worth of life that is not human. That Kālidāsa seized this truth is a magnificent tribute to his intellectual power, a quality quite as necessary to great poetry as perfection of form. Poetical fluency is not rare; intellectual grasp is not very uncommon; but the combination of the two has not been found perhaps more than a dozen times since the world began. Because he possessed this harmonious combination, Kālidāsa ranks not with Anacreon and Horace and Shelley, but with Sophocles, Virgil and Milton.⁷

There are references to Kālidāsa's greatness as a poet at different times, in our own country from scholars and poets of eminence, even of the stature of Bāṇabhaṭṭa, the famous author of *Kādambarī*, about whom it is said that his scholarship was all-pervasive and nothing under the sun remained untouched by him. The great Bāṇabhaṭṭa has commented thus:

निर्गतासु न वा कस्य कालिदासस्य सूक्तिषु ।
प्रीतिर्मधुरसार्द्रासु मञ्जरीष्विव जायते ॥

Nirgatāsu na vā kasya Kālidāsasya sūktiṣu
Pritirmadhurasārdrāsu mañjarīṣviva jāyate

When Kālidāsa's sweet sayings, charming as they are with sweet sentiments, went forth, who did not feel delight in them as in honey-laden flowers?

There is a 'subhāṣita', a beautiful saying, regarding Kālidāsa remaining unsurpassed throughout since the time when the counting of the names of eminent poets started, which runs as follows:

पुरा कवीनां गणनाप्रसङ्गे कनिष्ठिकाऽधिष्ठितकालिदासा ।
अद्यापि तत्तुल्यकवेरभावादनामिका साऽर्थवती बभूव ॥

Purā kavīnām gaṇanāprasāṅge kaniṣṭhikādhīṣṭhita Kālidāsā
Adyāpi tattulya kaverabhāvādanāmika sārthavatī babhūva

While once the poets were being counted, Kālidāsa's name came first, and occupied the last finger. The next finger, the ring-finger continued to remain true to its name (*anāmika* i.e. nameless), as there was no second poet available to take the place after Kālidāsa.

A somewhat exaggerated poetic description perhaps, yet not entirely pointless either.

Some unique features of Kālidāsa's poetic genius

Kālidāsa was unique in many respects, and in the words of M. R. Kale:

His poetic genius has brought Sanskrit poetry to the highest elegance and refinement. His style is peculiarly pure and chaste... An unaffected simplicity of expression and an easy-flowing language mark his writings which are embellished with similes unparalleled for their beauty and appropriateness and with pithy general sayings... Kālidāsa excels other poets in his description of the sublime and the beautiful...⁸

The highest place is assigned to Kālidāsa among poets for the construction of happy similes, when it is said:

उपमा कालिदासस्य भारवेरर्थगौरवम्
दण्डिनः पदलालित्यं माघे सन्ति त्रयो गुणाः । ।

Upamā Kālidāsasya Bhāraverartha gauravam
Daṇḍinaḥ padalālityam māghe santi trayo guṇāḥ

Simile is, indeed, the (distinguishing mark) of Kālidāsa; meaningfulness of Bhāravi; charm of word of Daṇḍin; all the three (distinguish) Maghā.

The excellence of the similes or *upama* in Kālidāsa's writing is really unsurpassable and that it is a special forte of Kālidāsa's works is beyond any doubt. Let us take another well known verse from the tradition, again. Kālidāsa, it is pointed out, exceeds in the Vaidarbhī style which is supposed to be the best in traditional Sanskrit literature. That is why, it is said, in the following beautiful verse (subhāṣita), that:

Vālmīkerajani prakāśasitaḡuṇā Vyāsenā līlāvatī, Vaidharbhī kavitā
svayam vṛitavatī Śrī Kālidāsaṃ varam

Vaidharbhī style of poetry, which had its origin from Vālmīki, and was nurtured and educated by Vyāsa, chose Kālidāsa as her bridegroom, out of her own accord.

His style is suggestive, suggesting much more than what it expresses; it is devoid of artificiality, laxity and of extravagant descriptions found in later writings. Brevity and perspicuity simultaneously adorn his works; easy-flowing language, simplicity of expression with profundity of inner significance in his writings make him attain a unique status of elegance and refinement that has remained unsurpassed so far amongst poets.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Mallinātha, the great commentator, who himself was highly learned in the Śāstras, should be vociferous in his praise of Kālidāsa with the following words:

Kālidāsa girāṃ sāram Kālidāsaḥ Saraswatī, Caturmukhothavā
vidyāt vidurnānye tu mādrśāḥ.

Mallinātha says:

The greatness of Kālidāsa's poetry can be genuinely appreciated only by three persons in this world, first of all, Kālidāsa himself, the second one is Goddess Saraswatī (from whom Kālidāsa had derived his poetic powers) and then, Brahmā, the creator of Kālidāsa himself. People like me cannot, by any chance, comprehend the real significance of Kālidāsa's poetic genius.

This particular verse composed in honour of Kālidāsa coming as it does from the great scholar-commentator, Mallinātha, speaks volumes about the richly suggestive style of Kālidāsa, which makes it difficult for ordinary readers to fathom the impli-

cation of his writings in all their subtle nuances, although they, being apparently lucid and perspicuous to all outward purposes, touch the heart directly. Numerous examples can be cited in favour of this highly suggestive character of Kālidāsa's poetry from his epics, lyrics, and dramas, for they all abound in this quality unlike the writings of any other poet. In the words of Shelley, addressed as they were to a skylark in another context, one may perhaps significantly address this poet, of unparalleled brilliance as follows:

What thou art
We know not; what is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see.
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

I am not sure if Kālidāsa, as has been pointed out by H.K. Satapathy,⁹ has indirectly hinted at the infinitude of his own poetic genius through the passage in his *Raghuvamśam* Canto XIII, where Lord Rāmā is comparing the all-pervasive nature of Ocean with that of Lord Viṣṇu, but I am sure that this passage can be regarded as a fitting description of his unfathomable poetic excellence that engages our mind with universal significance.

Kālidāsa's Philosophic Genius

Another important feature of the poetic genius of Kālidāsa lies in the fact that he was not merely an Indian poet of eminence but, intrinsically, he was also an Indian philosopher *par excellence*. In India, a poet and a philosopher are not so sharply divided from each other, for the Sanskrit word *Kavi*, which stands for a poet is, as a matter of fact, supposed to be a *ṛṣi*, and *ṛṣi* stands for one who is a seer (mantra draṣṭā) of truth. Even if it is not so in case of ordinary poets or philosophers, we must admit that at least in the case of some of our most eminent thinkers and

spiritual masters like Ācārya Śaṅkara, they are found to be simultaneously both philosophers of eminence and also poets in their own right. *Saundarya Laharī*, *Ānanda Laharī*, etc., authored by Ācārya Śaṅkara, for example, are as much poetical, as they are philosophical. It is also *mutatis mutandis* true of great poets throughout the world and more so in case of great Indian poets like Kālidāsa. It is worth mentioning here that according to Coleridge, one cannot be a great poet without being a great philosopher. "No man," says Coleridge, "was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher".¹⁰ Kālidāsa, in my humble opinion, was a great poet whose philosophical genius has been overshadowed because of his poetic excellence. Therefore, the philosophy of Kālidāsa should be worked out in some detail alongside his poetic excellence. I can only give some hints here about a certain prominent philosophical attitude of this great poet which is found to be pervading all his works in different degrees and in different ways. The most prominent idea that pervades the works of Kālidāsa, to my mind, centres round the Upanisadic philosophy of Vedānta which goes far beyond any fanatic clinging to one ideology or the other, based on the conception of a particular deity as the ultimate, while at the same time doing adequate justice to various devotional aptitudes and inclinations in different contexts.

It is true that Kālidāsa was an ardent devotee of Lord Śiva, as is evident from the opening stanzas of *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Vikramorvaśīyam* and *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam*, but was no less respectful towards Goddess Pārvatī, along with Lord Śiva, as is evident in the opening lines of *Raghuvamśam*. He was equally respectful towards Lord Viṣṇu, as is evident in Canto X of *Raghuvamśam* and towards the creator Brahmā too, as is evident in *Kumārasambhavam*, Canto II. As a matter of fact, he did not admit of any ultimate difference in the Trinity. In *Kumārasambhavam*,¹¹ the idea that is propagated by Kālidāsa reminds us of the Rig Vedic lines, "Ekaṁ sad viprā bahudhā vadanti" i.e., "the same reality is spoken of differently by different sages". Ātman, one without a second, has assumed the form

of Trinity and has appeared in different forms as the creator Brahmā, sustainer Viṣṇu and destroyer Śiva, — this idea of the poet is more or less Vedāntic in character. The term “Ātman” used by the poet here is significant, for the *Ātma tattva* (the concept of Atman) is specifically Vedāntic in its purport. The same term “Ātman” is used also in *Raghuvamśam*, while gods pray to Lord Viṣṇu (Canto X. 16). Similarly, in *Raghuvamśam* Kālidāsa is found to be subscribing to the theory that the Paramātmā is ungraspable and unfathomable by the human mind (Canto X. 28.); even *anumāna* (inference) and the Vedic authority cannot make us fathom or measure the infinitude of the Lord (the term used by the poet here is “aparichhedyā”, a very appropriate term indeed). When the gods are praying to Lord Viṣṇu, in *Raghuvamśam*, they point out that various means adopted by us, shown to be diverse by various systems of thought, lead to the Lord Himself, just as all the streams of the river Ganges meet in the ocean (X. 26.). This reminds us, naturally, of the “Tattu samanvayāt” (1.1.4) sūtra of the *Brahma sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa; this is the fundamental philosophical attitude of the Indian philosopher in maintaining that all the differences in our ways of thinking, ways of worship, etc., are merely outward manifestations, while actually all forms of worship, all forms of thinking find their culmination in the ultimate reality, i.e., Brahman. *Bhagavadgītā* is particularly emphatic in this regard, when it points out that all forms of worship ultimately find their culmination in the worship of the same Lord (mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ Pārtha sarvaśaḥ). The idea is that all roads lead to the ultimate goal, the *Summum Bonum*. Ryder has rightly said that, “Kālidāsa moved among the jarring sects with sympathy for all, fanaticism for none”.¹² And this is possible only on the part of a true Vedāntin. It has been pointed out by Ācārya Śaṅkara,¹³ a true Vedāntin does not have any quarrel with the dualists, who sees non-difference (abheda) everywhere. Kālidāsa was well-versed not only in Vedānta but also in Sāṃkhya dualism, Yoga philosophy and its practices, rather in almost all the systems of Indian thought, but his fundamental attitude towards all schools of thought, rather towards everything,

was that of a true Vedāntin.

His universal vision as well as sympathy extending far beyond the narrow geographical territory becomes evident in his writings, in different ways and with different nuances, especially where a typical philosophy of detachment is promoted by this great poet-philosopher as the foundation of our Indian culture centering on an over-all Vedāntic perspective. Lord Śiva is thus extolled, adored and worshipped as the model in his writings because of His spirit of detachment amidst plenty; this is note-worthy.¹⁴

II

Importance of the Raghuvamśam

Raghuvamśam (the House of Raghu) is a *Mahākāvya* with epical dimension. The *mahākāvya* (or Great Poem) is one of two most popular forms of literary composition, and have attracted the best geniuses to try their hand at them. M.R. Kale says the following:

For in dignity of style, depth of thought, and majesty of movement, the *Mahākāvya* is far and away the best expression which the Sanskrit literary artist has found for his genius.¹⁵

The characteristics enumerated by Daṇḍin (a rhetorician circa 6th century AD) for a work to be identified as a *mahākāvya* are quite applicable in the case under consideration. Says Daṇḍin:

A “*mahākāvya*” is a composition in cantos, and it is thus defined; it should begin with a benediction or salutation or a reference to the subject-matter; its subject should be

one taken from history or otherwise real; the attainment of one of the ends of human existence should be its aim; the hero able and noble; as embellishments it should contain the garden or water, drinking scenes, love-delights, separation or wedding of lovers, the birth of a son, a council, an embassy, a march or a battle or a victory of the hero; it should not be concise, and should be full of sentiments and feelings. Its cantos should not be too long, its metres sonorous, its transitions (from one canto to another) well-arranged, and with a change of metres at the close. Such a poem, suitably ornamented with figures, and a source of delight to the people, will last for ages.¹⁶

That this particular work of Kālidāsa is a source of delight to the people, and has already displayed its capacity for lasting through ages, there cannot be any second opinion in this regard; besides, it fulfills all the other conditions specified by Daṇḍin in a general manner, even though it needs to be noted that Kālidāsa was a master of self-restraint in style and was never a stickler for the specific details and artificiality in rules meant for technical perfection.

The Raghuvamśa sings of the great solar race of Ikśvāku in which Viṣṇu was pleased to become incarnate as Rāmā, that he may destroy the demon Rāvaṇa and free the gods and men from his tyranny.¹⁷

It is worth noting in this connection that "the list of kings given by Kālidāsa is in general agreement with the one found in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, and more or less so with those preserved in other purāṇas".¹⁸

It is obvious that Kālidāsa has more or less followed in the footsteps of descriptions of a city, the sea, mountain, the seasons, sunrise, moonrise, sports in Vālmīki, the Ādikavi, and his Rāmāyaṇa for his description of the life of Rāmā. Although in certain respects and at certain places, he has surpassed the poetic

excellence of the great Vālmīki even, in respect of the other kings mentioned in the *Raghuvaṁśam*, it seems that he has mostly taken the help of *Harivaṁśa purāṇa*, where we come across a long list of the kings of the Solar race. But it needs to be highlighted that the originality in the poetic talent of Kālidāsa has been evident almost everywhere, irrespective of his following in the footsteps of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* or *Harivaṁśa*, as the case may be. Although Lord Rāmā was the incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu who was born in the solar race in order to liberate the gods from the torture inflicted on them by Rāvaṇa and the story of Rāmāyaṇa was thus supposed to be the central theme of *Raghuvaṁśam*, even then Raghu was so very prominent as a king of the solar race that the entire dynasty was named after him, as *Raghuvaṁśam*. But why so one may wonder? And the poet himself has given a hint in this regard. Dilīpa is described by Kālidāsa as asking for a boon from Nandini (Vasiṣṭha's cow) to have a son in the womb of his wife, Sudakṣiṇā, who would perpetuate his line and would also earn eternal fame for himself. (Canto II. 64.) This implies that the progeny of Dilīpa, i.e. Raghu, as a matter of fact, perpetuated the solar race and earned eternal fame for himself. It is thus no wonder that the entire mahākāvya of Kālidāsa should be named after such a king viz., Raghu, who was "vaṁśasya kartā" (perpetuator of the race) and "anantakīrti" (a king of eternal fame).

It is unfortunate that the last king named in *Raghuvaṁśam* was Agnivarṇa, who was a libertine whose excesses hastened his death, and this great epic abruptly ends with a note that the widowed queen who was pregnant at the time ascended the throne as the Regent on behalf of her unborn son. Such an abrupt end naturally makes one suspect that the epic has been left incomplete for reasons unknown. It is noteworthy that there is no epilogue to the poem, no benediction which is usually found at the end of all Sanskrit works, and also In all the other works of Kālidāsa. Traditionally, as a matter of fact, it is pointed out that there were originally twenty-five cantos in *Raghuvaṁśam*. But if this is so, where have the other cantos gone? Again, is this par-

ticular tradition an authentic one? One may wonder.

It needs to be noted that Mallinātha, the famous commentator of Kālidāsa, has written commentaries only on nineteen cantos of *Raghuvamśam*. On the other hand, critics like Hillebrandt have pointed out that, "the last two cantos of the Raghu are spurious".¹⁹ Doubts in this regard are natural because of the lack of the typical poetic skill and self-restraint of Kālidāsa, the last canto being devoted to the love-making of a king who was exclusively engaged in debauchery, thus reducing the work to more of an erotic than a heroic poem. It needs to be noted that, "opinion in India has throughout favoured these cantos as Kālidāsa's works; hence it is that we find quotations from these cantos in works that belong to the 11th century, and commentators of note such as Mallinātha have thought it fit to comment on them."²⁰ However, even if we accept the last canto, i.e. Canto XIX, to be authentic, the end is an abrupt one, for it ends with the description of a widow occupying the throne of the illustrious race of the Raghus, bearing the progeny of the deceased king in her womb. Even though the future appears uncertain, one may say that it ends with a happy note, to the effect "that the chief queen of Agnivarṇa had conceived and that the line of Ikṣvāku dynasty would not cease but continue further".²¹ Even then we have to admit that the great epic, with this abrupt end, remains somewhat incomplete as one feels there remains a hidden want, as it were, waiting for a further magical touch from the poetic genius of a Kālidāsa. Hence, one has to concede most unwillingly perhaps, that in this respect, it remains an incomplete work.

Regarding the kings mentioned in this great work, only a few like Dilīpa, Raghu, Aja, Daśaratha and Rāmā were most conspicuous. The kings coming afterwards were not so important, after all; the last one mentioned in Canto XIX was not only insignificant, he was inglorious too, as a matter of fact bringing disgrace to the great descendants of Raghu. Ryder's remarks are indeed appropriate when he says that:

We must regard it (i.e. *Raghuvamśa*) as a poem in which

single episodes take a stronger hold upon the reader than does the unfolding of an ingenious plot.²²

Looking to the poem itself, we find that the first three cantos deal with Dilīpa; cantos three to eight are on Raghu and cantos five to eight speak of Aja.... Cantos nine to fifteen are similarly dominated by Rāma though canto nine describes Daśaratha "but there too, the end clearly shows that it is Rāma that the poet had in mind."²³

The episode of Dilīpa and the lion, the description of Raghu's encounter with Indra, and an account of his *digvijaya* (heroic victory pervading all directions), Aja's marriage with Indumatī and the pathetic bereavement on account of the accidental demise of his most beautiful and talented wife in the prime of her youth, all these are indeed most conspicuous and appealing, and Kālidāsa's immortal pen has made each one of these episodes come alive to us with a rare and unforgettable beauty which leave us, as it were, enchanted. But so also are the beautiful romantic love-episodes of Rāmā and Sītā along with their typically pathetic scenes of forced separation, bereavement, banishment and the tragic end too. It is undoubtedly true that the Ādikavi Vālmīki in his Rāmāyaṇa has excelled at many places in describing certain episodes of Rāmā and Sītā in detail and at those places, naturally, Kālidāsa has simply touched upon those episodes. But it would be wrong to observe as Devadhar has done that, "as a poet he was irresistibly drawn to sing of the most popular hero of India, and limps after 'the first poet' without a thought of challenging the great epic directly".²⁴ This is somewhat unfair to Kālidāsa, in my humble opinion, for how can one even dream of Kālidāsa possibly challenging the "first poet" (Ādikavi), when in his opening verses of *Raghuvamśam* he has openly acknowledged his indebtedness to and his following in the footsteps of earlier eminent poets in this regard:

अथवा कृतवाङ्मारे वंशेऽस्मिन्पूर्वसूरिभिः ।

मणौ वज्रसमुत्कीर्णे सूत्रस्येवास्ति मे गतिः । ।

Athavā kritavāgdvāre vaṁśe asminpūrvasūribhiḥ
Maṇau vajrasamutkīrṇe sūtrasyevāsti me gatiḥ

Or to this race to which ancient bards have opened the
doorway of Speech, I may get access even as a thread may
pierce a diamond perforated gem.

— Canto I.4.

There is therefore, no question of the great poet Kālidāsa
"limping after" the other great poet, viz., Vālmīki. I would rather
regard this remark to be an unfair one by the critic.

The poetic excellence of Kālidāsa has come out in its full force
in certain episodes, for example, when Rāma is returning from
Laṅka in the Puṣpak along with his wife Sītā, in Canto XIII; here
there is obviously no question of coming to a clash with the po-
etic excellence of Vālmīki, who has not highlighted this particular
episode in his great epic, Rāmāyaṇa. This, once again, speaks of
Kālidāsa's great sense of propriety (*aucitya*), self-restraint, and a
depth of understanding and appreciation of the situation, rather
than any "limping" on his part after the genius of Vālmīki.

The poet's "descriptive powers are great, and some of the
scenes in the *Śākuntalam*, the *Meghadūtam* and the *Raghuvaṁśam*
are so enchanting as to hold his readers spellbound. And as re-
gards *dhvanikāvya*, the kind of poetry which suggests more than
what it expresses, he is master of acknowledged skill."²⁵

This great work of Kālidāsa, it needs to be noted, is full of
those very qualities of the poet which are to be found in his other
writings, — the lucidity and spontaneity of expression, sugges-
tiveness in style, lack of artificiality, novelty of thought, construc-
tion of happy similes (*upamā*) and deep insight into both the
internal nature of man and external nature, all these features are
no less prominent in the *Raghuvaṁśam*, including the Sītā-Rāma
episodes beautifully described by the great poet, than in his oth-
er works. We give below a few passages from the *Raghuvaṁśam*
that illustrate these qualities:

त्वया पुरस्तादुपयाचितो यः सोऽयं वटः श्याम इति प्रतीतः ।
 राशिर्मणीनामिव गाण्डानां सपदमरागः फलितो विभाति । ।
 क्वचित्प्रभलपिभिरिद्रवात्मुक्तामया यष्टिरिवानुविद्धा ।
 अन्यत्र माला सितपङ्कजानामिन्दीवरैरुत्खचितान्तरेव । ।
 क्वचित्खगानां प्रियमानसानां कादम्बसंसर्गवतीव पङ्क्तिः ।
 अन्यत्र कालागुरुदत्तपत्रा भक्तिर्भुवश्चन्दनकल्पितेव । ।
 क्वचित्प्रभा चान्द्रमसी तमोभिश्छायाविलीनैः शवलीकृतेव ।
 अन्यत्र शुभ्रा शरदभलेखा रन्ध्रेष्विवालक्ष्यनभःप्रदेशा । ।
 क्वचित्च कृष्णोरगभूषणेव भस्माङ्गरागा तनुरीश्वरस्य ।
 पश्यानवद्याङ्गि विभाति गङ्गा भिन्नप्रवाहा यमुनातरङ्गैः । ।

Here is the banyan tree, known as Śyāma, formerly be-sought by thee, which, laden with fruit, glows like an emerald-heap, interspersed with rubies.

Behold, O fair one of flawless limbs, how the Ganges with its stream cleft by the Yamunā gleams here like a necklet of pearls interwoven with sapphires that cover it with their splendour, there like a garland of white lilies, set in the intervals with blue lotuses; here like a row of birds that love the Mānasa lake interspersed with dark-winged swans; now like sandal-paintings on the earth with ornamental leaves in dark aloes; now like moonlight chequered with darkness underneath the shades; now like a patch of white autumn clouds, where through the interstices the (blue of the) sky peeps out and in places like Śiva's body smeared with the unguent of ashes, and girt with black-snakes for ornaments.

— Canto XIII. 53-57

धारास्वनोदगारिदरीमुखोऽसौ शृङ्गाग्रलग्नान्मुदवप्रपङ्कः ।
 वध्नाति मे वन्धुरगात्रि चक्षुर्दृप्तः ककुदमानिव चित्रकूटः । ।
 एषा प्रसन्नस्तिमितप्रवाहा सरिद्विदूरान्तरावतन्वी ।
 मन्दाकिनी भाति नगोपकण्ठे मुक्तावली कण्ठगतेव भूमेः । ।

Yon Citrakūṭa, O one of proportionate limbs, like a stately bull, loud-bellowing without break from its mouth-like cave, and with dark-clouds clinging to its peaks like mud to the bulls-horns in its playful butting, now enchants my eye. Here at the base of the mountain shines the river Mandākinī, with its pellucid, steady stream, made slender by distance, and hence looking like a pearly band on the neck of the Earth."

— Canto XIII. 47-48

Regarding suggestiveness in style, two examples are given here. Take the case of the great Hanumān crossing the ocean, for which our poet gives the following description:

मारुतिः सागरं तीर्णः संसारमिव निर्ममः । ।

Mārutiḥ sāgaraṁ tīrṇaḥ saṁsāramiva nirmamaḥ

"Māruti crossed the ocean, as a detached person would cross this saṁsāra"

— Canto XII. 60

Here the implications are profound, indeed, for it has an implicit reference to the background of our whole Indian culture that culminates in tyāga (detachment and self-sacrifice) at the end. Similarly, when Rāma, along with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa enter

into the Daṇḍaka forest, the poet says:

स सीतालक्ष्मणसखः सत्याद्गुरुमलोपयन् ।

विवेश दण्डकारण्यं प्रत्येकं च सतां मनः । ।

Sa Sītā Lakṣmaṇa sakhaḥ satyādgurumalopayan
Vivesha daṇḍkāraṇyaṁ pratyekaṁ cha satām manaḥ

Helping his father not to deviate from truth, Rāma along with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa entered into the Daṇḍaka forest, and the heart of every good man.

— Canto XII. 9.

This verse points to our commitment to ethics being at the apex of our entire value system. This also implies how dear to the innermost core of our heart and of everybody for that matter, Rāmā is or should be, provided we are whole heartedly devoted to the good. Through a pithy expression, a very important suggestion is made here by the poet of the universal acceptability of Rāma's conduct, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, time, or country, only on the basis of high sense of morals.²⁶ Here is only an example, but this is not all. The legend of Sītā-Rāma, as it is developed in *Raghuvamśam*, is not lacking in the magical touch of Kālidāsa's poetic talent, even if one has to admit that the original Rāmāyaṇa was also full of episodes that were described most beautifully by the Ādikavi. Kālidāsa has excelled at places where Vālmiki has left certain things unsaid, while Kālidāsa has only touched upon those themes where he has felt that Vālmiki has excelled.

The geographical range of knowledge that Kālidāsa displays in this great epic is simply astounding. Some of it is visible in his beautiful description in the thirteenth canto (where Rāma is shown to be returning to Ayodhyā along with his wife in the Puṣpak, the aerial car) of the dark shore-line, dark with rows of Tamāla and palm-forests, as also in the description of the

confluence of Gangā and Yamunā at Allahabad, and in the episode of Indumatī svayaṁvara (the description where Indumatī selects Aja amidst the prospective candidates coming for marriage from all over India) too, but much more so in the episode of 'Raghudigvijaya', the description of Raghu conquering the whole of India in all directions.

And in our own work here that follows, the aspects of heroism, harmony and illumination, as they are manifested in the *Raghuvaṁśam*, are highlighted as also the specific style and excellence of Kālidāsa's writings beginning from the episode of Dilīpa and Sudakṣiṇa and ending with the episode of Rāma and Sītā.

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* * *

Selected Episodes from Raghuvamśam

ON RAGHU'S LINE

सो

ऽहमाजन्मशुद्धानामाफलोदयकर्मणाम् ।
आसमुद्रक्षितीशानामानाकरथवर्त्मनाम् । ।
यथाविधिहुताग्नीना यथाकामार्चितार्थिनाम् ।

यथापराधदण्डानां यथाकालप्रवीधिनाम् ।
त्यागाय संभृतार्थानां सत्याय मितभाषिणाम् ।
यशसे विजिगीषूणां प्रजायै गृहमेधिनाम् । ।
शैशवेऽभ्यस्तविद्यानां यौवने विषयैषिणाम् ।
वार्धके मुनिवृत्तीनां योगेनान्ते तनुत्यजाम् । ।
रघूणामन्वयं वक्ष्ये तनुवाग्विभवोऽपि सन् ।
तद्गुणैः कर्णमागत्य चापलाय प्रचोदितः । ।

Of kings who were untainted from their birth,
Who toiled until there was success, who ruled the earth to
the sea,
Whose car-track reached to heaven;
Who duly worshipped the sacred fire, who gave to every
guest according to his wish, whose punishments were in
proportion to the crimes, who were watchful at the proper
time;
Who sought wealth that they might give it away, whose
words were measured for the sake of truth, who sought
victory for glory's sake, and for offspring took unto them

their wives;

Who, in childhood, studied all good arts, and next in youth
sought worldly joy, who, in age, lived hermit's lives, and
cast away their bodies through meditation at last;

Such was Raghu's line, and such my theme, though meagre
be my wealth of speech; their virtues, having reached my
ear, impel me to this fond attempt.

— Canto I. 5-9

This description, given by the poet in detail about the entire line of Raghu, is indeed significant, simply because it highlights the best qualities of the kings belonging to this line in general. All the kings belonging to the line of Raghu represent illumination, heroism and harmony in their respective ways. It is true that the last king of this race, Agnivarṇa, was not up to the mark, but this may be regarded as an exception whose description comes only in the 19th canto which is the last canto. Evidently, Agnivarṇa is not taken into consideration by the poet, when he counts the greatness of the kings belonging to this illustrious race.

* * *

DILĪPA

वैवस्वतो मनुर्नाम माननीयो मनीषिणाम् ।
आसीन्महीक्षितामाद्यः प्रणवश्छन्दसामिव । ।
तदन्वये शुद्धिमति प्रसूतः शुद्धिमत्तरः ।
दिलीप इति राजेन्दुरिन्दुः क्षीरनिधाविव । ।
व्यूढोरस्को वृषस्कन्धः शालप्रांशुर्महाभुजः ।
आत्मकर्मक्षमं देहं क्षात्रो धर्म इवाश्रितः । ।
सर्वातिरिक्तसारेण सर्वतेजोभिभाविना ।
स्थितः सर्वोन्नतेनोर्वी क्रान्त्वा मेरुरिवात्मना । ।
आकारसदृशप्रज्ञः प्रज्ञया सदृशागमः ।
आगमैः सदृशारम्भ आरम्भसदृसोदयः । ।

There once lived Manu, the son of Vivasvat, highly honoured by the wise, who was first among earthly kings like 'Om' among the sacred triad.

In his pure line was born Dilīpa who was purer still, shining among kings like the Moon in the milky sea.

Broad-chested, with shoulders like a bull's, with long arms like Śāla boughs, he was as it were the very essence of the Kṣātrīyas residing in a body capable of doing its proper duties.

Endowed with all-surpassing strength, graced with a splendour that overpowered all others, towering over all on earth, he strode like Meru with its lofty form.

Like his form was his intellect, like his intellect was his

learning; his efforts were worthy of his learning and like his efforts was his success.

— Canto I. 11-15

Dilīpa is the illustrious father of an illustrious son, viz., Raghu, the pre-eminent king of this race. Dilīpa too, embodied all the virtues of the line, though it is heroism that is the most conspicuous in him, while it has to be admitted that heroism reaches the climax in Raghu himself, as is evident from his 'digvijaya' (conquest in all directions) described by the poet in Canto IV.

The poet in his inimitable style points out how king Dilīpa was harmony personified, as it were, in respect of his form, intellect, learning, efforts and success thereof. The poet further points out:

ज्ञाने मौनं क्षमा शक्तौ त्यागे श्लाघाविपर्ययः ।

गुणा गुणानुबन्धित्वात्तस्य सप्रसवा इव । ।

अनाकृष्टस्य विषयैर्विद्यानां पारदृश्वनः ।

तस्य धर्मरतेरामोदवृद्धत्वं जरसा विना । ।

With knowledge he combined restraint of speech, with might forgiveness, with generosity absence of vaingloriousness, his virtues thus associated with other virtues, seemed as if they were twin-born.

Unshackled by worldly joys, thoroughly versed in all useful arts, he, who loved virtue, was without aging old.

— Canto I. 22-23

This is indeed nothing but a beautiful description of the rare harmony of virtues existing together, in the words of the poet himself: "twin-born".

The three goals of life, dharma, artha and kāma (Trivarga, as they are called) were also meticulously followed by Dilīpa in

a harmonious manner, where artha and kāma found their fulfillment in dharma, as it should be, in the case of an extraordinary personality like that of Dilīpa (Canto I. 25), who was the model of men in his conduct. In spite of the fact that Dilīpa was, as it were, harmony personified both in his bearing and conduct, he was very much aware of a great discord in his life on account of his being deprived of an appropriate progeny who could continue to carry on his line after him. That is why, he decided along with his queen, Sudakṣiṇā, to go to the hermitage of Vasiṣṭha, his mentor, place his grievances before his Guru and get this defect rectified once for all through Guru's advice. Dilīpa was greatly affected in his inner being and felt acutely this particular short-coming, that for him all other achievements without a suitable progeny appeared to be meaningless. R. D. Karmarkar says:

Dilīpa's address to Vasiṣṭha is couched in very elegant language and the thoughts of the son-less monarch, about the agony caused to the Pitrs on account of his being without a son, are full of pathos and make a powerful appeal to the reader.²⁷

I give below a few stanzas as illustration:

उपपन्नं ननु शिवं सप्तस्वङ्गेषु यस्य मे ।
दैवीनां मानुषीणां च प्रतिहर्ता त्वमापदाम् । ।
पुरुषायुषजीविन्यो निरातङ्का निरीतयः ।
यन्मदीयाः प्रजास्तस्य हेतुस्त्वदब्रह्मवर्चसम् । ।
त्वयैवं चिन्त्यमानस्य गुरुणा ब्रह्मयोनिना ।
सानुवन्थाः कथं न स्युः संपदो मे निरापदः । ।
किंतु वध्वां त्वैतस्यामदृष्टसदृशप्रजम् ।
न मामवति सद्योपा रत्नसूरपि मेदिनी । ।

It is but natural that it fares well with all the seven constituents of my state, since you are there to avert divine and human harm alike. ...

That safe and unharmed by calamities my people live the utmost term of human life is surely due to your spiritual might.

With you, my preceptor born of the creator, guarding me who am free from vice, how will fortune not bless me continually?

Yet what is Earth to me with all its isles and precious gems, when never from your daughter has sprung a child worthy of me?"

— Canto I. 60, 63-65.

And then we come to the episode of both Dilīpa and Sudakṣiṇā devoting themselves whole heartedly to the service of Nandini, the cow in Vasiṣṭha's hermitage, in order to over-come the impact of the curse already incurred by him, unawares, because of deviation in his conduct of showing appropriate respect towards the mother of Nandini, Surabhi, during one of his trips to heaven. "Good fortune" says the poet, "is hindered if honour is not rendered where it is due". (Canto I. 79). Dilīpa and Sudakṣiṇā are asked to devote themselves to the services of Nandini, taking Nandini to be the representative of Surabhi, her mother. Here certain discord, disruption, in fortune is shown to be accruing to oneself on account of some lapse in one's action in the past. This is in accordance with the doctrine of Karma that pervades our whole life, according to Indian thought. This doctrine of Karma has its origin in the doctrine of Rta in the Vedas. Rta stands for certain harmony that governs the functioning of the entire universe. This harmony has been highlighted through the episode of Surabhi in the context of Dilīpa's over-all conduct. No one, it is said, can violate the principle of Karma; on any account, for one has to reap the fruits of Karma even after a lapse of time.

In Dilīpa's entire life and conduct, there is a specific emphasis given on the aspect of harmony in this manner. This particular

aspect has been highlighted duly in the couple's services meticulously rendered to Nandini, Vasiṣṭha's cow in his hermitage, for bringing about the requisite balance in their life.

The kindly monarch, shining in his glory... protected the cow born of Surabhi, as if she were earth embodied, with the four oceans for her udders.

Following the cow in his vow of service he prohibited even the remainder of his attendants (to follow him); nor was there any other means of self-protection; for Manu's race their own valour defends.

— Canto II. 3-4.

Now we come to the occasion when a lion suddenly attacks Nandini, the cow of Vasiṣṭha's hermitage, while he was engaged whole-heartedly in his services to her near a cave of the Himalayas. His valour was evident when we find him making efforts forthwith to strike the lion with his arrow. He, however, could do nothing when he found his right arm was restrained by some spell, as it were. The entire scene, as a matter of fact, was contrived by Nandini herself to test the sincerity of devotion in the king towards her. Ultimately, the king expressed his willingness to sacrifice his life in place of Nandini, when the lion, who was talking to him in human voice, insisted on killing the holy cow of Vasiṣṭha for satisfying its hunger. When the king offered his own body as food for the hungry lion, and was expecting a fierce attack from the lion on his body, the situation changed, and he found to his astonishment that there was simply no lion on the scene. Nandini, the holy cow herself, stood there in front of the king and said that the whole scene was contrived by her just to test his sincerity. She expressed her satisfaction finally with the services of the king.

Dilīpa says to the lion when the cow Nandini has been seized by him:

स त्वं मदीयेन शरीरवृत्तिं देहेन निर्वर्तयितुं प्रसीद ।
दिनावसानोत्सुकवालवत्सा विसृज्यतां धेनुरियं महर्षेः । ।

क्षतात्किल त्रायत इत्युदग्रः क्षत्रस्य शब्दो भुवनेषु रूढः ।
राज्येन किं तद्विपरीतवृत्तेः प्राणैरुपक्रोशमलीमसैर्वा । ।

Do you therefore, favour me by satisfying your hunger with my body; release this cow of the great sage, whose young calf is yearning for her at the end of the day.

The high sounding word meaning a Kṣatra (Kṣattriya) is well known in the world by its derivation: 'one who protects from danger', of what use is a kingdom to him who acts in a reverse way and of what use is his life to him which bears the stain of ignominy?

— Canto II. 45, 53

[And then King Dilīpa] "...cast himself a prey before the lion as he would a ball of flesh." II.59

It is significant here to note the heroism of king Dilīpa, who was prepared to sacrifice his own life for the sake of the holy cow for whose protection and services he had offered himself voluntarily. More than his physical body, Dilīpa was more concerned to protect his "body of fame", for he speaks out his mind to the lion as follows: -

किमप्यहिंस्यस्तव चेन्मतोऽहं यशःशरीरे भव मे दयालुः ।
एकान्तविध्यंसिषु मद्विधानां पिण्डेष्वनास्था खलु भौतिकेषु । ।

If you think of sparing me, be kind to spare the body of my fame, for people like me put little value on their physical bodies that are made up of gross elements and are, there-

fore, bound to perish.

— Canto II. 57

This is expressive of Dilīpa's high sense of value, speaking volumes of his developed mind that exudes illumination of a high order, while valour and heroism remain as the basis throughout. In Dilīpa, we find a blend of various virtues displayed on different occasions such as heroism, illumination, and harmony, while heroism remains conspicuous in him. A harmonious integration of his character and conduct with those of his ideal wife, queen Sudakṣiṇā, who helped her husband in ways more than one, in all his domestic and family-duties, became conspicuous both in the hermitage of their Guru, the great Vasiṣṭha, while serving the cow Nandini to the best of their capacity and also later, when the queen, after return from the hermitage, became pregnant. The poet in his inimitable style writes:

निधानगर्भमिव सागराम्बरां शमीमिवाभ्यन्तरलीनपावकाम् ।
नदीमिवान्तःसलिलां सरस्वतीं नृपः ससत्त्वां महिषीममन्यत । ।

"The king regarded his pregnant queen as the sea-clad earth with her buried treasures, or the Śami tree with fire concealed within it, or the river Saraswatī with her waters hidden below her bed".

— Canto III. 9

This typical harmony in conjugal life envisaged by the great poet here is simply unparalleled and unique in itself, although it is true that Kālidāsa is adept at such descriptions of an ideal couple in other contexts too, in *Raghuvamśam* itself, for example, in case of Aja-Indumatī, Rāma-Sītā and the like.

Kālidāsa's description of Dilīpa as a king is quite charming and the following description of Dilīpa's journey to Vasiṣṭha's hermitage is exquisite:

स्निग्धगम्भीरनिर्घोषमेकं स्यन्दनपास्थितौ ।
प्रावृषेण्यं पयोवाहं विद्युदैरावताविव । ।
मा भूदाश्रमपीडेति परिमेयपुरःसरौ ।
अनुभावविशेषात्तु सेनापरिवृताविव । ।
सेव्यमानौ सुखस्पर्शैः शालनिर्यासगन्धिभिः ।
पुष्परेणू त्किरैवतिराधृतवनराजिभिः । ।
मनोभिरामाः शृण्वन्तौ रथनेमिस्वनोन्मुखैः ।
षड्जसंवादिनीः केका द्विधा भिन्नाः शिखण्डिभिः । ।
परस्पराक्षिसादृश्यमदूरोज्झितवर्त्मसु ।
मृगद्वन्द्वेषु पश्यन्तौ स्यन्दनावद्धदृष्टिषु । ।
श्रेणीवन्धाद्वितचदिभरस्तम्भां तोरणस्त्रजम् ।
सारसैः कलनिर्हादैः क्वचिदुन्नमिताननौ । ।

Seated in one chariot that rumbled on with a deep and pleasant sound, like the Airāvāt and lightning occupying a cloud in the season of rains.

But scanty retinue was theirs, lest they disturb the hermitage; and yet such their peculiar splendour, an army seemed to surround them.

Breezes that were gratifying in their touch played over them, fragrant with the exudations of the Śāla tree, scattering flower-dust and gently shaking the groves of trees. Listening to the cries of peacocks that lifted up their heads at the sound of the chariot-wheel, the cries that charmed the mind, that answered to the Śaḍja note and were broken twice in utterance.

Seeing the likeness of each other's eyes in the pairs of deers, that had withdrawn not far from the way and had fixed their gaze on the chariot.

At times raising up their faces at the Sārasa birds, who sweetly warbled, and by flying together in a line seemed to form a garland at the archway without supporting pillars.

— Canto I. 36-41

And again:

सरसीष्वरविन्दानां वीचिविक्षोभशीतलम् ।
आमोदमुपजिघ्रन्तौ स्वनिःश्वासानुकारिणम् ॥
हैयंगवीनमादाय घोषवृद्धानुपस्थितान् ।
नामधेयानि पृच्छन्तौ वन्यानां मार्गशाखिनाम् ॥
काप्यभिख्या तयोरासीद्व्रजतोः शुद्धवेषयोः ।
हिमनिर्मुक्तयोर्योगे चित्राचन्द्रमसोरिव ॥

Smelling the fragrance of lotuses in the ponds — a fragrance that was sweet as their own breath, and was cooled by the ruffling wavelets.

Questioning the old herdsmen, who came with presents of fresh butter, of the names of forest trees on the way.

And a nameless grace was theirs as onwards they moved, clad in bright raiment, like the moon with Chitrā beaming, when the mists have rolled away.

— Canto I. 43, 45-46

* * *

RAGHU

ग्रहेस्ततः पञ्चभिर्दुच्चसंश्रयैरसूर्यगैः सूचितभाग्यसंपदम् ।
असूत पुत्रं समये शचीसमा त्रिसाधना शक्तिरिवार्थमक्षयम् । ।
दिशः प्रसेदुर्मरुतो ववुः सुखाः प्रदक्षिणार्चिर्हविरानिराददे ।
वभूव सर्वं शुभशंसि तत्क्षणं भवो हि लोकाभ्युदयाय तादृशाम् । ।

At the right moment, she who was comparable to Śaci (Indra's wife), gave birth to a son whose glorious fortune was indicated by five planets occupying high places, and far removed from the Sun, as regal power gives birth to inexhaustible treasures through its triple means. And at that moment, the quarters brightened up, and the winds blew gently, while the fire with the flames curling towards the south accepted oblations; all augured happiness: the birth of such as these brings good to all mankind.

— Canto III.13-14

When we come to assess the importance of Raghu, to whom the name *Raghuvarṁśam* owes its origin, we find that in the poet's estimate, Raghu, long before being crowned as a king, had attained prominence because of his unique personality and prowess, even during the life-time of Dilīpa himself, when he was conferred the title of Yuvarāja (the crown prince) by the king himself. Dilīpa, it is specifically stated by the poet, became more irresistible than ever because of Raghu's prowess who happened to be his great asset:

विभावसुः सारथिनेव वायुना घनव्यपायेन गभस्तिमानिव ।
वभूव तेनातितरां सुदुःसहः कटप्रभेदेन करीव पार्थिवः । ।

Vibhāvasuḥ sārathineva vāyunā ghanavyapāyena gabhastimāniva
Babhūva tenātitarām suduḥsahaḥ kaṭaprabhedena karīva
pārthivaḥ

As fire because of its helpmate the wind, or the sun by the dispersion of clouds, or an elephant by the opening of its temple, so by him the king became more irresistible than ever.

— Canto III. 37

What is more significant is that he was appointed by his illustrious father to protect the sacrificial horse meant for completion of one hundred sacrifices comparable to Indra known as Śatakratu (one who has completed one hundred sacrifices). Dilīpa completed ninety-nine sacrifices with the help of Raghu and his comrade-princes. The last sacrifice, however, could not be completed unhindered, simply because the sacrificial horse was carried away by Indra in disguise who was afraid of being superseded by Dilīpa. And then a fierce fight ensued between Indra and Raghu, as expected, for Indra was adamant in his decision to obstruct the last sacrifice in order to protect his title 'Śatakratu' meant to be applied uniquely to Indra and Indra alone. The poet, while describing the fight between Raghu and Indra, has highlighted the valour of Raghu by depicting him as "Kumāra vikramaḥ" i.e., one who is as brave as Kumāra or Kārtikeya, who himself is an exemplar of heroism:

तयोपुपान्तस्थितसिद्धसैनिकं गुरुमदाशीविषभीमदशनैः ।

वभूव युद्धं तुमुलं जयेषिणोरधोमुखैरूर्ध्वमुखैश्च पत्निभिः ॥

अतिप्रवधप्रहितास्त्रवृष्टिभिस्तपाश्रयं दुष्प्रसहस्य तेजसः ।

शशाक निर्वापयितुं न वासवः स्वतश्च्युतं वस्त्रिमिवादभिरम्बुदः ॥

And now ensued a fierce fight between them who strove for the mastery, their arrows hurtling upwards and downwards, like so many fierce-looking winged serpents, while the siddhas and the soldiers stood by. Nor could Indra, even with a ceaseless shower of missiles, repress him who possessed such irresistible fire, just as a cloud is unable to extinguish the lightning-fire released from itself."

— Canto III. 57-58

In the end, Indra was pleased with the heroism of Raghu:

तथापि शस्त्रव्यवहारनिष्ठुरे विपक्षभावे चिरमस्य तस्थुषः ।
तुतोष वीर्यातिशयेन वृत्रहा पदं हि सर्वत्र गुणैर्निधीयते । ।

However, Indra was pleased with his great heroism, who for long stood in a state of hostility, a state made terrible by the use of weapons: for indeed virtues find access everywhere [even in the mind of an enemy].

— Canto III. 62

And then, in the words of the poet, when Raghu was asked by Indra to speak out what was in his mind:

Then putting back the arrow which was not wholly drawn out of the quiver, and which by its golden feathers made his fingers radiant, the sweet-voiced prince made answer to the king of the gods.

O Lord, if you think that the horse cannot be restored, then let my father, who is hallowed by constant vows, be blessed with the entire fruit of the sacrifice, as if the rite were concluded in the proper manner.

— Canto III. 64-65

Indra granted this boon to Raghu, and because of Raghu, as a matter of fact, the entire fruit of the sacrifice accrued to Dilīpa as a boon although the last one was practically interrupted by Indra himself. Raghu knew fully well that it was not a full-fledged victory on his part, and yet he was to be satisfied on the practical level because circumstance demanded it. The point to be noted here is Raghu's heroism itself, irrespective of the outcome of the fight in the end; it was nevertheless Raghu's victory, for Indra had to acknowledge Raghu's valour and grant him the boon which virtually was a fulfillment of the wish of Dilīpa through Raghu's unique heroism.

Raghu's ascension to the throne after Dilīpa is described thus:

स राज्यं गुरुणा दत्तं प्रतिपद्याधिकं वभौ ।
दिनान्ते निहितं तेजः सवित्रेव हुताशनः । ।

Succeeding to the kingdom made over to him by his father, he shone more brilliantly like fire which at the end of the day received lustre imparted to it by the sun.

Again,:

मनुप्रभृतिभिर्मन्यैर्भुक्ता यद्यपि राजभिः ।
तथाप्यनन्यपूर्वेव तस्मिन्नासीद्वसुंधरा । ।

And the earth, whom although worthy kings from Manu onwards had enjoyed, yet wooed him as though she never had loved before.

मन्दोत्कण्ठाः कृतास्तेन गुणाधिकतया गुरौ ।
फलेन सहकारस्य पुष्पोद्गम इव प्रजाः । ।

And by his virtues exceeding those of his father, he made his subjects feel less keenly (the retirement of) his father, as when the fruit appears the mango's blossom is scarce remembered."

हंसश्रेणीषु तारासु कुमुद्वत्सु च वारिषु ।
विभूतयस्तदीयानां पर्यस्ता यशसामिव । ।
इक्षुच्छायनिषादिन्यस्तस्य गोप्तुर्गुणोदयम् ।
आकुमारकथोद्धातं शालिगोप्यो जगुर्यशः । ।

And the wealth of his fame seemed dispersed in rows of swans, in clusters of stars and in lakes with lotuses. The female keepers of the rice-fields sitting in the thick shade of sugar canes sang his fame which was due to his virtues beginning from the story of his life as a child.

— Canto IV. 1, 7, 9, 19-20

This shows the unique greatness of Raghu as a king, surpassing both the past ones and the contemporaries available during his time; it is therefore no wonder that the entire treatise is named after him as *Raghuvamśam*.

In this context, the poet has also pointed to Raghu's illumination in so far as he is described as invariably choosing the path of fairness instead of the unfair ones:

नयविदभिर्नवे राज्ञि सदसच्चोपदर्शितम् ।
पूर्वं एवाभवत्पक्षस्तस्मिन्नावदुत्तरः । ।

nayavidbhirnave rājñi sadasaccopaḍarśitam
pūrva evābhavatpākṣastasminnābhavaduttarah

Men learned in state politics taught him both fair and unfair

ways (of strategy); but he always chose the former and never the latter alternative.

— Canto IV. 10

About such genuine heroes, the Gita says, they are really *sthitadhī* or *sthitaprajña* i.e., whose mind is well balanced while others that are puffed up by their achievement are really *ahamkāra vimūdhātmā* or are bewildered by their egoistic vanity.

Regarding Raghu's *digvijaya* (conquest of all four quarters), it would be sufficient to point out that he came out victorious wherever he went in different directions, East, West, North and South. We find beautiful and elaborate descriptions from the poet depicting Raghu's most memorable conquests all over India; Canto IV of *Raghuvamśam* is full of these beautiful descriptions of the conquest by Raghu, most of them richly suggestive and highly imaginative, the actual content of which is meant to highlight the heroism of Raghu and his army. Some examples are given below:

रजोभिः स्यन्दनोद्धूतैर्गजैश्च घनसंनिभैः ।

भुवस्तलमिव व्योम कुर्वन्व्योमेव भूतलम् । ।

rajobhiḥ syāndanodhdūtairgajaiścha ghanasañnibhaiḥ
bhuvastalam iva vyoma kurvan vyoma iva bhūtalam

...With the dust raised by the chariots and with elephants looking like clouds, he seemed to make the sky look like the earth, and the earth look like the sky.

— Canto IV. 29

स सेनां महतीं कर्षन्पूर्वसागरगामिनीम् ।

वभौ हरजटाभ्रष्टां गङ्गामिव भगीरथः । ।

sa senām mahatīm karṣanpūrvasāgaragāminīm

babhau harjaṭābhraṣṭām gaṅgāmiva bhagīrathah

Leading his large army to the Eastern Ocean, he appeared like Bhagīratha leading the Ganges that had slipped from the matted lock (of Śiva).

— Canto IV. 32

आपादपदमप्रणताः कलमा इव ते रघुम् ।
फलैः संवर्धयासासुरुत्खातप्रतिरोपिताः । ।

Those who bowed down before his lotus-feet and who were (on that account) reinstated after having been first ejected, honoured Raghu by presenting him with their wealth, like paddy-plants which yield their fruit when they are transplanted after having been first uprooted.

— Canto IV. 37

दिशि मन्दायते तेजो दक्षिणस्यां रवेरपि ।
तस्यामेव रघोः पाण्डयाः प्रतापं न विषेहिरे । ।

The Sun himself glows dim in the south, but even there the Paṇḍyā princes could not resist Raghu's might.

— Canto IV.49

Again, take the following description:

भयोत्सृष्टविभूषाणां तेन केरलयोषिताम् ।
अलकेषु चमूरेणुश्चूर्णप्रतिनिधोक्तः । ।

The dust raised by his army replaced the saffron powder in

the hair of the Kerala ladies who in their fear had put aside their ornaments.

— Canto IV. 54

यवनीमुखपद्मानां सेहे मधुमदं न सः ।

वालातपमिवाब्जानामकालजलदोदयः । ।

He could not bear the flush of wine upon the lotus-faces of the Yavana ladies, just as the gathering of untimely clouds the tender light of the morning sun upon the lotuses.

— Canto IV. 61

It is noteworthy, even amidst such highly imaginative descriptions of the poet, that Raghu is shown to be a king having a balanced attitude with illumination and a sense of harmony pervading his entire invasion; though an unconquerable hero, he was bereft of pride or greed for others' territory. The poet is quite suggestive in this regard, when he points out that:

गृहीतप्रतिमुक्तस्य स धर्मविजयी नृपः ।

श्रियं महेन्द्रनाथस्य जहार न तु मेदिनीम् । ।

grhītapratimuktasya sa dharmavijayī nrpaḥ
śriyaṁ mahendranāthasya jahāra na tu medinīm

Conquering in the cause of righteousness, Raghu took away the royal prowess but not the domains of the Lord of Mahendra who was first captured and later on released.

— Canto IV. 43

It is to be noted further that on returning from his conquests, Raghu performs the Viśvajit sacrifice in which everything one possesses is given away.

स विश्वजितमाजहे यज्ञं सर्वस्वदक्षिणम् ।
आदानं हि विसर्गाय सतां वारिमुचामिव ॥

sa viśvajitamājahe yajñam sarvasvadakṣiṇam
ādānam hi visargāya satām vārimucāmiva

He (after his conquest was over) performed the Viśvajit sacrifice in which everything one possesses is gifted away. The good, like clouds, draw up (wealth, water) only that they might give away.

— Canto IV. 86

What is still more astonishing about Raghu is that even after virtually becoming a pauper on account of the Viśvajit sacrifice, where one is required to give all one's wealth away as dakṣiṇā (gift), he took every care not to disappoint Kautsa, who had come to him for financial help in order to pay the fee required by his preceptor, Varatantu. Raghu, being reduced to pauperhood through the Viśvajit sacrifice, was of course under no obligation whatsoever to fulfil the wishes of Kautsa but the king's personal honour being at stake, he got the wealth from Kubera, the lord of Kailāsa, and offered the same to Kautsa. As a matter of fact, it was offered to him by Kubera himself, whom he desired to conquer by force:

... Raghu, on his part, seeing that the wealth of the earth had all been drained, now desired to wrest it from Kubera.

At dawn, when he was making ready to set forth, his treasure-keepers wonderingly told him how from the sky a show-

er of gold fell into the very inside of the treasure-house.

— Canto V. 26, 29

Kautsa's blessings bestowed Raghu with a son, who was named Aja. As the son was born in the early morning hours, known as Brahma's hour, he was named Aja (unborn, existing from all eternity), after Brahman himself (Canto V. 36). What is most significant however about the great hero, viz., Raghu, is that he had not only conquered all his opponents during his youth and established his kingdom without any rival, he also took to sannyāsa in the last stage of his life and conquered the triple constituents of matter (guṇatraya) for attaining balance and ultimately attained the *summum bonum* (highest good) through yogic practices (VIII.21)

* * *

AJA

When we come to a description of Aja, in the *Raghuvaṃśa*, we find that he is regarded as a replica of Raghu, in almost all respects.

रूपं तदोजसि तदेव वीर्यं तदेव नैसर्गिकमुन्नतत्वम् ।
न कारणात्स्वादविभिदे कुमारः प्रवर्तितो दीप इव प्रदीपात् । ।

He had the same powerful figure, the same valour, and the same inborn loftiness; the son, did not differ from his father, as a lamp does not differ from the lamp from which it is kindled.

— Canto V. 37

This is quite significant, because it shows that Aja was a worthy descendant of Raghu.

Then we find an elaborate and beautiful description of *Indumatī swayamvara* (the marriage ceremony of the princess Indumatī where she was supposed to select her husband) in the sixth canto, where we find Indumatī, the most beautiful daughter of the King of Vidarbha, making her choice of Aja as the lord of her love and life amidst the most eligible suitors. Aja was so handsome and attractive that in the lofty hall, where Indumatī was to make her choice, other suitors immediately lost hope about their own success in winning over Indumatī, when "they saw Aja who seemed the God of Love, restored to his original form by Śiva, who had yielded to Rati's prayers." (VI.2)

The poet's description of Aja at the *swayamvara*:

वैदर्भनिर्दिष्टमसौ कुमारः क्लृप्तेन सोपानपथेन मञ्चम् ।
शिलाविभङ्गैर्मृगराजशावस्तुङ्गं नगोत्सङ्गमिवारुरोह । ।

परार्ध्यवर्णास्तरणोपपन्नमासेदिवान् रत्नवदासनं सः ।

भूयिष्ठमासीदुपमेयकान्तिर्मयूरपृष्ठाश्रयिणा गुहेन । ।

By a well-arranged stairway he mounted to the dais that the King of Vidarbha assigned to him, as ascends a lion's cub over rocky ledges to gain a mighty mountain-summit. Then as he sat down on a jewelled throne spread with rich-hued tapestry, he very much resembled Kārttikeya in his splendour, when the latter mounts his peacock."

— Canto VI. 3-4

तेषां महार्हासनसंस्थितानामुदारनेपथ्यभृतां स मध्ये ।

रराज धाम्ना रघुसूनुरेव कल्पद्रुमाणामिव पारिजातः

Raghu's son alone shone by his lustre amid those kings who were seated on gorgeous thrones, and were attired in splendid robes, as shines the Pārijāta amongst Heaven's trees.

— Canto VI. 6

This undoubtedly speaks of the most beautiful and harmonious physical features of Aja. This typical harmony of features in Aja becomes conspicuous when the poet points out that after coming near Raghu's son, i.e., Aja, Indumatī stopped from going any further, for Aja was flawless in all his limbs *sarvāvayavānavadya* (VI.69). And then we see what Sunanda, the lady escort of Indumatī, has to say in praise of their anticipated union — the union of Aja with Indumatī which is supposed to be an ideal one:

कुलेन कान्त्या वयसा नवेन गुणैश्च तैस्तैर्विनयप्रधानैः ।

त्वमात्मनस्तुल्यममुं वृणीष्व रत्नं समागच्छतु काञ्चनेन । ।

Choose him, thy peer in lineage, beauty, youth and in all virtues of which modesty is the chief; let the gem be set in gold.

— Canto VI. 79

Here again, there is a definite indication of an anticipated union in case of Aja and Indumatī which is likely to be the most befitting and harmonious in all respects. My point here is that the entire episode of the union of Aja-Indumatī, lays specific emphasis on harmony and beauty that lasted throughout their conjugal life, which unfortunately was cut short by an accidental death of Indumatī in her prime of youth after the birth of Daśaratha.

There is also an elaborate description of heroic exploits of Aja displayed during his return journey along with Indumatī after marriage, when he was obstructed on his way by the kings who were angry, because of being deprived of Indumatī. A fierce battle ensues between them; Aja strewed the battle-field with his enemies' heads severed from their neck by his *bhalla* (a kind of arrow). At the end, the prince struck, with his sleep-inducing missile, the entire army of his foes, thus compelling them to go to sleep.

सशोणितैस्तेन शिलीमुखाग्रैर्निक्षेपिताः केतुषु पार्थिवानाम् ।

यशो हतं संप्रति राघवेण न जीवितं वः कृपयेति वर्णाः । ।

Then, with the blood-stained points of his darts he wrote letters on their banners: 'Raghu's son now has taken from you your glory, but has spared your lives out of mercy.'

— Canto VII. 65

As if this was not enough of humiliation for his enemies, he also drew the attention of his newly wed bride, Indumatī, to his own valour with avid interest in the following words:

इतः परानर्भकहार्यशस्त्रान्वैदर्भि पश्यानुमता मयासि ।
एवंविधेनाहव्येष्टितेन त्वं प्रार्थ्यसे हस्तगता ममैभिः । ।

Look, Vaidarbhi (O daughter of the king of Vidarbha), — I give you leave — look at these our foes; even infant hands may seize their weapons, it is with such feats of war that they seek to win thee from my hands!

— Canto VII. 67

This speaks also of a sense of humour in Aja as well as his desire to show his heroism to his newly wedded wife, Indumatī, who in turn appreciated the valour of her newly wedded husband, not directly, but through the lips of her maids, as she was herself overpowered with bashfulness. (VII. 69) The harmonious blending of heroism of the bridegroom with the charming response by the bride created a beautiful scenario with the background of the sleeping army of the foes. Then he set his left foot upon the heads of the enemy kings and carried away his flawless bride, Indumatī. The utter humiliation of his foes at his hands shows the natural valour of Aja who was compared to a lion's cub. He, however, spared the lives of those kings who in a humiliated condition were overwhelmed by sleep induced by his missile; this speaks of his compassionate nature too.

Immediately on his return, his coronation as the king follows with the approval of his father, Raghu. Here, again, the poet refers to the ideal character of Aja, when the kingdom comes to him unsought, for what sons of other kings seek to make their own even by unfair means, Aja accepted that kingdom only as a gift from his father, Raghu, without any lust for enjoyment:

दुरितैरपि कर्तुमात्ससात्प्रयतन्ते नृपसूनवो हि यत् ।
तदुपस्थितमग्नीदजः पितुराज्ञेति न भोगतृष्णया । ।

What sons of Kings seek to make their own by wrong, Aja took when come to him unsought, at the behest of his father, and not because he lusted after enjoyment.

— Canto VIII. 2.

Once again his greatness as a hero, even after the acquisition of the kingdom from his father, becomes evident when the poet describes his invincibility as a king:

स वभूव दुरासदः परैर्गुणार्थविदा कृतक्रियः ।
पवनाग्निसमागमो ह्ययं सहितं ब्रह्म यदस्त्रतेजसा । ।

"Thus when his preceptor, who was deep-learned in Atharva texts, had performed the rites for his installation, he became irresistible to his foes: as the union of Wind and Fire are sacred lore to the glory of weapons."

— Canto VIII. 4

However, what is significant about Aja is that there was a harmonious blending of power with a high sense of practical commonsense displayed by him when he adopted the middle course in subjugating other kings:

न खरो न च भूयसा मृदुः पवमानः पृथिवीरुहानिव ।
स पुरस्कृतमध्यमक्रमो नमयामास नृपाननुद्धरन् । ।

Not over-harsh, nor yet too lenient, he followed the middle course, and humbled the kings without uprooting them like the wind the trees.

— Canto VIII.9

There was a great benevolence as it were in Aja's governance

as a king, for in the words of the poet:

अधिकं शुशुभे शुभंयुना द्वितयेन द्वयमेव सङ्गतम् ।
पदमृद्धमजेन पैतृकं विनयेनास्य नवं च यौवनम् । ।
सदयं बुभुजे महाभुजः सहस्रोद्वेगमियं व्रजेदिति ।
अचिरोपनतां स मेदिनीं नवपाणिग्रहणां वधूमिव । ।
अहमेव मतो महीपतेरिति सर्वः प्रकृतिष्वचिन्तयत् ।
उदधेरिव निम्नगाशतेष्वभवन्नास्य विमानना क्वचित् । ।

"Two things alone shone more bright when joined with the auspicious two: His father's prosperous state with Aja and Aja's fresh youth with his modesty. The long-armed [prince] enjoyed the newly-wedded Earth with tender love, like a newly married bride, lest she should be dismayed. Everyone of his subjects thought 'It is me the King loves best', for he scorned none amongst them, like the Ocean none scorning amongst his hundred streams.

— Canto VIII. 6-8.

This is indeed a rare virtue in Aja which is highlighted here by the poet. Again:

वलमार्तभयोपशान्तये विदुषां सत्कृतये बहुश्रुतम् ।
वसु तस्य विभोर्न केवलं गुणवत्तापि परप्रयोजना । ।

He used his power to free the oppressed from fear, and his vast learning to honour the learned: thus not merely his wealth but his virtues alike this monarch used for other's good.

— Canto VIII. 31

This speaks highly of Aja as a king endowed with rare virtues not only of the great, but also of the good men. Kālidāsa, in his *Meghadūtam*, also points out, "the belongings of good men are meant to alleviate the sufferings of the oppressed, who need their protection".²⁸ Here was a great hero who was intrinsically a good man too, with a happy and a fruitful conjugal life, for Indumatī gave birth to a heroic son, Daśaratha, who was to attain glory later as the father of Śrī Rāma. This happy conjugal life of Aja and Indumatī, however, came to a sudden and unexpected end during the prime of their youth, when a wreath of heavenly flowers hung at the top of the lute of Nārada, passing through the sky, fell accidentally on Indumatī's breast while she was with her Lord, Aja, enjoying together in a city-park. This was most unfortunate indeed, but what is more significant is that it was a final turning point in Aja's otherwise glorious and happy life. Aja ceased to be himself since that most unfortunate incident and there was a thorough and final disruption in his life-style from that moment — how great was Aja's loss in Indumatī's sudden demise! It was an ideally harmonious conjugal life the couple had before this sad and unexpected separation of one from the other through death. This harmony was so subtle, so refined, and on a higher plane that, once disturbed could not be restored again. In Aja's lamentation, immediately after the sad demise of his beloved queen, Indumatī, as described by the poet with exquisite poetic skill, becomes quite evident to the readers:

Even his inborn firmness broke and in tear-choked words he (deeply) mourned (her): when even iron melts with intense heat, how much more must human beings? (VIII.43)

कुसुमान्यपि गात्रसंगमात्प्रभवन्त्यायुरपोहितुं यदि ।

न भविष्यति हन्त साधनं किमिवान्यत्प्रहरिष्यतो विधेः । ।

अथवा मृदु वस्तु हिंसितुं मृदुनैवारभते प्रजान्तकः ।

हिमसेकविपत्तिरत्र मे नलिनी पूर्वनिदर्शनं मता । ।

स्रगियं यदि जीवितापहा हृदये किं निहिता न हन्ति माम् ।
विषमप्यमृतं क्वचिदभवेदमृतं वा विषमीश्वरेच्छया । ।

If even flowers suffice to cut short life by contact with the limbs, then what else may not serve as instrument for Fate when He seeks to slay?

Or by tender means alone does Death destroy a tender life; the lotus plant destroyed by the shower of frost strikes me as the first illustration of this.

If this wreath can destroy life, how does it, even when placed upon my heart, not kill me? Ah! Even poison turns into nectar, or nectar into poison through the will of God.

— Canto VIII. 44-46

Aja wails in grief and expresses his utter helplessness at the sad and untimely demise of his beloved queen, for in losing her, he has lost everything and in tear-choked words that expressed his utter despair, thus:

धृतिरस्तमिता रतिश्च्युता विरतं गेयमृतुर्निर्गुत्सवः ।
गतसाभरणप्रयोजनं परिशून्यं शयनीयमद्य मे । ।
गृहिणी सचिवः सखी मिथः प्रियशिष्या ललिते कलाविधौ ।
करुणाविमुखेन मृत्युना हरता त्वां वद किं न मे हृतम् । ।

My firmness is broken, my joy sped, music is stilled (for me), the season has lost its charm, ornaments are now vain and my couch henceforth lies desolate.

The mistress of my home, counsellor, the friend of my intimate moments, a loved pupil in all the fine arts: tell me what relentless Death has not taken away from me, in bereaving me of thee?

— Canto VIII. 66-67

Now nothing is left for Aja to be consoled with; life has become a void for him in the absence of Indumatī.

Aja's expressions of wailing are so pathetic that they can be compared, if at all, with the wailings of Rati in *Kumārasambhavam*, Canto IV, when she was also unexpectedly deprived of her Love-Lord, Madana (Cupid), as he was reduced to ashes by fire originating from the third eye of Lord Śiva on account of His wrath at being disturbed during penance.

There was an end to Aja's enjoyment once for all, for Indumatī was really the centre of all enjoyments for Aja who was never allured by any other source (VIII. 69). As a matter of fact, Aja's death was expedited by this sad and untimely demise of his beloved queen, for the message of wisdom coming from his preceptor to console him in different ways on this occasion could not find a footing in Aja's grief-stricken heart. The poet writes:

तस्य प्रसह्य हृदयं किल शोकशङ्कुः
प्लक्षप्ररोह इव सौधतलं विभेद ।
प्राणान्तहेतुमपि तं भिषजामसाध्यं
लाभं प्रियानुगमने त्वरया स मेने । ।

Sorrow's dart, they say, forcibly broke his heart, as a shoot of the fig-tree does the palace top; and in his eagerness to join his beloved, he considered even that cause of the end of his life, which physicians could not cure, as a gain.

— Canto VIII. 93

It is difficult to imagine a better picture of conjugal love and harmony than that of Aja and his beloved queen, Indumatī.

Regarding this canto a commentator has the following to say:

This Canto is probably the best and the most widely read of all the cantos in Raghuvamśa... The lamentation of Aja stands unrivalled in the simplicity of language and depth of pathos...There is almost an absence of any studied effort on the part of the poet to produce any word effect, and the flow of language is unimpeded and natural. Altogether this canto clearly reveals Kālidāsa at his best.²⁹

* * *

RĀMA

In *Raghuvamśam*, Rāmā stands before us as a colossal figure, in whom the lofty qualities of the descendants of the solar race have reached their culmination. He is the epitome of dharma, it is rightly said, a model for others to follow, in whom heroism, harmony, and illumination, all these virtues, find their best manifestation.

In the *Raghuvamśam*, Canto X, in the very beginning, the poet mentions how Lord Viṣṇu, whom the gods, tortured by the tyranny of Rāvaṇa, approached for a respite, promised to them that he would take birth as Daśaratha's son, specifically for this purpose, and would destroy Rāvaṇa. By the time when *Raghuvamśa* was composed, it must have been a confirmed belief, that Rāma was an avatāra or incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, although it is also a fact that the human qualities and virtues of Rāma were never lost sight of. In the original Rāmāyaṇa, composed by the Ādikavi Vālmīki, although there are some references to Rāma being Viṣṇu's incarnation, the emphasis from the very beginning is on Rāma as the best of all human beings. Vālmīki asks Nārada if there is any one in the contemporary world who is endowed with the best of human virtues enumerated one by one by Vālmīki himself, and the reply comes forthwith from Nārada that certainly there is one such model of a man, Rāma by name, born to the Ikṣvāku dynasty, who fulfils the criteria specified by the poet, and possesses all those virtues that are indeed very rare.³⁰

Now coming to *Raghuvamśam*, we find that the virtue of equanimity has been highlighted in Rāma by the poet, which speaks highly of his illumined mind. Regarding Rāma's exploits and valour there cannot be any second opinion, of course, as is evident from his slaying of Tāṭakā at an early age under the guidance of the sage Viśwāmitra and his heroic exploits with Śiva's bow in Mithila where he won in marriage, Janakanandini,

the daughter of the illustrious king, Janaka, through his prowess. Kālidāsa has very aptly drawn our attention to this fact:

कौशिकेन स किल क्षितीश्वरो राममध्वरविघाततशान्तये ।
काकपक्षधरमेत्य याचितस्तेजसां हि न वयः समीक्ष्यते । ।

While Rāma was (still) wearing a boy's dark curls, there came Kauśika to beg him from the King to quell disturbance in his sacrifice. For in the high-spirited (heroes) age is not regarded.

— Canto XI. 1

This is sufficient to indicate the valour of Rāma manifested even in his early age. But his illumined spirit was no less manifest in his youth when his coronation ceremony was first announced and subsequently cancelled. He had to forsake the kingdom out of respect for the earlier vow of his revered father to grant two boons to Kaikeyī, the mother of Bharata. It was Kaikeyī who asked for the banishment of Rāma to the forest for fourteen years and the kingdom for Bharata instead. Kālidāsa points out that the people of Ayodhya amazingly noted a rare equanimity on Rāma's face when first he wore the auspicious silken robes for coronation and then later put on the bark garments for going to the forest in order to fulfill the vow made by his revered father, Daśaratha:

दधतो मङ्गलक्षौमे वसानस्य च वल्कले ।
ददृशुर्विस्मितास्तस्य मुखरागं समं जनाः । ।

"Amazed, the people remarked his unchanging aspect, both when he wore the holy silken robes and when the bark dress."

— Canto XII. 8

An unparalleled and unique illumination maintaining a rare balance at the advent of prosperity followed by dire adversity — naturally remind us of the characteristics of a *sthitaprajña* (one whose intellect is unruffled amidst changes) in our hoary tradition, as is envisaged in the Bhagavadgita.³¹ No wonder that such an ideal personality should find a firm footing in the heart of every good man. This is what is suggested by the poet in the next stanza, where Kālidāsa points out that:

स सीतालक्ष्मणसखः सत्याद्गुरुमतोपयन् ।
विवेश दण्डकारण्यं प्रत्येकं च सतां मनः । ।

sa Sītā Lakṣmaṇasakhah satyādgurumalopayan
viveśa daṇḍkāraṇyaṁ pratyekaṁ ca satām manah

With Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā for companions, helping his revered father not to deviate from truth, [Rāma] he entered the Daṇḍaka forest, and the heart of every good man.

— Canto XII. 9

Coming to the heroic exploits of Rāma at Daṇḍaka forest, when he was attacked by Khara and other demons, after the insult extended to Sūrpaṇakhā, Rāvaṇa's sister, on account of her becoming furious at being rejected by both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in her lustful advances, we find the description of the poet in this regard as:

एको दाशरथिः कामं यातुधानाः सहस्रशः ।
ते तु यावन्त एवाजौ तावांश्च ददृशे स तैः । ।

True, Rāma was alone while the demons numbered thousands; yet in the fight they saw him equal to their own

number.

— Canto XII. 45

This implies that Rāma was so swift in his movements that he seemed to be opposite every one of them or he appeared to them as having assumed so many varieties of forms. Such was Rāma's prowess in the battle field, which reached its climax in his direct fight with Rāvaṇa, the great king of Lankā. The foe in this case was not an ordinary warrior; he had conquered the world's guardians, had worshipped Lord Śiva by making an offering of his heads, and had also poised aloft the Kailāsa mountain. It is therefore appropriate that Rāma should highly esteem his foe because of his extraordinary status. The poet describes:

That fight between Rāma and Rāvaṇa, in which after a long time their valour found scope for their mutual encounter, seemed not in vain.

— Canto XII. 87

Rāmā's Love for Sītā and for Nature,

Sītā was a woman of rare beauty and character, and without a reference to her the Rāmāyaṇa cannot even be conceived of.

As is evident from the poet's description in Canto XIII, Rāma's romanticism is manifested after the battle with his great foe, Rāvaṇa, is over, and he is on his way back to Ayodhyā in Puṣpaka (the aerial car) along with Sītā. We find, in Kālidāsa's description, Rāma, as being endowed with an aesthetic and poetic appreciation of harmony and beauty, both external and internal. Rāma's entire life-time is, of course, well-known for his emphasis on harmonious living governed by the idea of dharma which gave him the impetus to forsake with equanimity the kingdom even on the eve of his coronation as King of Ayodhyā, but it is also noteworthy that Rāmā's emphasis on harmony is no less visible in his appreciation of the beauty of Nature as well as the beauty of his

wife, Sītā, an epitome of the best womanly virtues.

Kālidāsa describes in the following stanza from *Raghuvamśam*, XIII.15., where Rāma points out to Sītā, who is seated with him in the Puṣpaka, the rare beauty of the sea-shore abounding in the dark Tamāla and palm trees. The ocean looks from afar like an iron wheel, and the dark shore-line as a streak of rust gathered along with the edge of that wheel. Very beautiful imagery, indeed, which shows the rare beauty of the slender shore-line, blue-hued because of Tamāla and Palm-forests. In the next verse (XIII.16), Rāma was flying over a region full of Ketaka plants in blossom and the pollen of the flowers had been wafted by the breeze onto Sītā's face. Rāma gallantly remarks:

वेलानिलः केतकरेणुभिस्ते संभावयत्याननमायतक्षि ।

ममक्षमं षण्डनकातहनेर्वेतोव विम्वाधरवद्धृष्टाम् । ।

O long-eyed One, the breeze from the shore beautifies thy face with the dust of the Ketaka, as if it knows how I, in my longing to taste thy bimba like lips, am impatient of the loss of time that decoration may take.

— Canto XIII. 16

Let us cite here some other beautiful descriptions of this ideal couple, given by the great poet, which are contrary to the modern impression in some quarters that Rāma was perhaps not an ideal husband and the image of Sītā represented as a mere weakling weeping under the Aśoka tree in Laṅkā. Take the verse 20 in Canto XIII, where Rāma displays how sensitive he is about the mid-day sun afflicting his beloved whose beautiful face is perspiring under the scorching heat.

असौ सहेन्दुद्विपदारगन्धिस्रिषार्णगादीचिविषर्दशीतः ।

आकाशवायुर्दिनयौवनोत्थानाचामति स्वेदलवान्मुखे ते । ।

This breeze from heaven, scented with the ichor of great Indra's elephant, and cooled by contact with the waves of the triple-streamed Ganges, wipes from thy brows those drops that mid-day heat has raised.

What a beautiful scene between an ideal lover and his beloved, Rāma and Sītā! Again take the description of Rāmā recalling before Sītā, their stay in Pancavaṭī:

एषा त्वया पेशलमध्ययापि घटाम्बुसंवर्धितवातचूता ।
आनन्दयत्युन्मुखकृष्णसारा दृष्टा चिरात्पञ्चवटी मनो मे । ।
अत्रानुगोदं मृगयानिवृत्तस्तरंगवातेन विनीतखेदः ।
रहस्त्वदुत्सङ्गनिषण्णपूर्या स्मरामि वानीरगृहेषु सुप्तः । ।

This Pancavaṭī, where thou, though slender-waisted, didst rear the young mango with water poured from a jar, and where the black antelopes have raised their heads, gives delight to my mind as I see it after a long time. I recall how, returning from chase by Godāvari's stream, I rested my head in thy lap and slept in the privacy of the bower of reeds, while the breezes from the waves removed my fatigue."

— Canto XIII.34-35

Rāma enjoying a sound sleep in Pancavaṭī after completing his chase in the lap of Sītā in privacy and speaking about the same in retrospect, on their way back to Ayodhyā in the Puṣpaka (the aerial car) is a very beautiful episode. It speaks of an uninterrupted mutual love for each other expressive of perfect harmony in an otherwise disturbed conjugal life of Rāma and Sītā both on account of sudden banishment from Ayodhyā to the forest and also because of abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa.

The same perfect rapport between each other becomes evident when Rāma is narrating to Sītā, on his return journey, about

his deeply felt misery near the Mālyavān mountain range when he was rendered bereft of her company, on her abduction by Rāvaṇa. Rāma points out from the aerial car the sky-kissing peak of Mālyavanta hills, and tells Sitā about his pathetic condition in her absence as follows:

सैषा स्थली यत्र विचिन्वता त्वां भ्रष्टं मया नूपुरमेकमुर्व्याम् ।
 अदृश्यत त्वच्चरणारविन्दविश्लेषदुःखादिव वद्धमौनम् । ।
 त्वं रक्षसा भीरु यतोऽपनीता तं मार्गमिताः कृपया लता मे ।
 अदर्शयन्वक्तुमशक्नुवत्यः शाखाभिरावर्जितपल्लवाभिः । ।
 मृग्यश्च दभाङ्कुरनिर्व्यपेक्षास्तवागतिज्ञं समवोधयन्माम् ।
 व्यापारयन्त्यो दिशि दक्षिणस्यामुत्पक्षमरजीनि विलोचनानि । ।
 एतदगिरेर्माल्यवतः पुरस्तादाविर्भवत्यम्बरतेष्वि शृङ्गम् ।
 नवं पयो यत्र घनैर्मया च त्वद्विप्रयोगाश्रु समं विसृष्टम् । ।
 गन्धश्च धाराहतपल्लवानां कादम्बमर्धोदगतकेसरं च ।
 स्निग्धाश्च केकाः शिखिनां बभूवुर्यस्मिन्नसह्यानि विना त्वया मे । ।
 पूर्वानुभूतं स्मरता च यत्र कम्पोत्तरं भीरु तवोपगूढम् ।
 गुहाविसारीण्यतिवाहितानि मया कथंचिदघनगर्जितानि । ।
 आसारसिक्तक्षितिवाष्पयोगान्मामक्षिणोद्यत्र विभिन्नकोशैः ।
 विडम्ब्यमाना नवकन्दलैस्ते विवाहधूमाणुलोचनश्रीः । ।

अत्रावियुक्तानि रथाङ्गनाम्नामन्योन्यदत्तोत्पलकेसराणि ।
 द्वन्द्वानि दूरान्तरवर्तिना ते मया प्रिये सस्पृहमीक्षितानि । ।

This is that glade, where in my search of thee, I found an anklet dropped, which seemed to be struck dumb with sorrow at separation from thy lotus-foot.

Ah, timid one! These creepers unable to speak, yet pitying, showed me the path, by which the Rakshasa had borne thee, with their branches the leaves of which were bent. The deer too, neglecting the sprouts of *Darbha* grass, taught me, who knew not the way thou hadst gone, by directing their eyes, with their upturned lashes, in the southern direction.

Here before us appears the sky-kissing peak of Mālyavat, whereon the clouds dropped fresh rain and I tears, for loss of thee, at the same time.

There, reft of thee, the scent of puddles struck by rain-showers, the Kadamba flowers with filaments half-opened and the melodious tones of the peacock became unbearable to me.

O timid one (*bhīru*), remembering thy embrace, accompanied by tremor, erstwhile enjoyed by me, I could scarce endure the rumble of clouds here resounding from its caves. Where the beauty of thy eyes, that were red by the smoke from the marriage-fire, as imitated by the fresh Kandali flowers whose buds were fully opened by contact with the vapours exhaled by the shower-drenched earth, afflicted me.

Here, my love, I fondly gazed on pairs of unseparated Cakravāka birds that gave to each other the filaments of lotus, while I stood so far removed from thee.

— Canto XIII. 23-29,31

Here Kālidāsa has described vividly the pathos of the separation of Rāma from Sītā and paints a picture of the happy and the ideally harmonious conjugal love of Rāma and Sītā in spite of their untimely separation from each other.

Was Sītā really “timid” after all, as the epithet “*bhīru*” indicates in the above stanza, or is it simply a term of endearment used by Rāma? It is my humble submission that the latter is the

truth in the present case, not the former; it is rather the deep love and protective instinct of Rāma that caused his beloved wife to behave timidly before him (and even when she was away from him) in order to elicit more of the intense love from her consort, whom she had followed to the forest out of sheer love, not out of compulsion.

The above interpretation seems to stand to reason when we find Rāma using the term "*caṇḍī*" (the fierce one) also with the same fervour and sincerity in case of Sītā, when he finds:

करेण वातायनलम्बितेन स्पृष्टस्त्वया चण्डि कुतूहलिन्या ।
आमुज्यतीवाभरणं द्वितीयमुदिभन्नविद्युद्गतयो घनस्ते ॥

The cloud, touched by thy hand, stretched through the lattice in curiosity, O fierce one, seems to offer thee a second bracelet of the ring of lightning manifested from it.

— Canto XIII. 21

Here also the term "*Caṇḍī*" is a term of endearment; although it indicates here the dignity of Sītā to whom it is addressed. The entire episode here also speaks of Rāma's deeply caring attitude towards Sītā and also of Rāma's high degree of sensitivity to her exceptional beauty which is enhanced by her hand coming into contact with the cloud and lightning.

What is the most significant point, however, to note regarding Sītā in her relationship to her most loving and caring consort is that she was not only physically attractive and the most befitting partner in her various love-plays with Rāma, she was also not a weakling or timid. She was really an ideal woman of strong character who rejected outright the unlawful and unethical advances of Rāvaṇa, the undisputed hero of Laṅkā, for carnal pleasures with her. This theme was highlighted by the Ādikavi Vālmīki himself in his Rāmāyaṇa, particularly in the Sundarakāṇḍa, and Kālidāsa in his highly suggestive style has referred to this theme also very

clearly in half a stanza when Bharata meets and bows at the holy feet of Sītā, at the end of Canto XIII of *Raghuvamśam*.

My point is that she was not at all timid (*bhīru*) in any ordinary sense, not even when she is seen clinging to Rāma's lap at the threatening from Sūrpaṇakhā in *Raghuvamśam* XII.38, which only speaks of her unique personality in completely surrendering to the will of her Lord out of sheer love for him; even an expression of fear on the part of such a loving one can elicit the loveliest form of expression from her doting husband in extending his requisite loving protection. A significant description is given to us about Sītā, when the poet suggestively points out how Māruti i.e., Hanumān first saw her:

दृष्ट्वा विचिन्वता तेन लङ्कायां राक्षसीवृता ।
जानकी विषवल्लीभिः परीतेव महौषधिः । ।

Searching through Laṅkā, he found Sītā encircled by the demonesses, like the life-giving plant (*mahaauṣadhi*) being clasped on all sides by poisonous creepers.

— Canto XII. 61

Here the implication is that Sītā was not at all affected by or afraid of the demonesses in any way. As a matter of fact, the simile of *mahaauṣadhi* or the life giving plant in Sītā's context reminds us of Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Sundarakāṇḍa, where Rāvaṇa is admonished by her, without any fear whatsoever in her mind, to follow the principles of *sādhudharma* (the principles of conduct which are followed by good men), vis à vis, *Rākṣasadharmā* (principles of the demons that take into account only their own typical self-interest at the cost of all others). Comparison of Sītā with a life-giving plant amidst poisonous creepers in the form of demonesses by Kālidāsa naturally calls to the mind of the reader her astonishingly exemplary conduct, bereft of any fear whatso-

ever, in front of Rāvaṇa in the Aśoka grove, as depicted in Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa.

Here it might be of interest to make a little excursion into the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, for an elaborate description of Sītā's spiritual strength before which Rāvaṇa must have been flabbergasted in his encounter with her, which Kālidāsa has referred to in *Raghuvamśam* XIII.78, with great dexterity only in half a stanza in his inimitable style. Rāvaṇa tries to exert pressure on her in different ways. He even goes to the extent of speaking about *svadharma* (the principle of the Rākṣasas) in justification of his most heinous crime of abduction as follows:

Svadharmo Rākṣasam bhīru sarvadaiva na saṁśayaḥ,
Gamanam vā parastriṇām haraṇam saṁpramathya vā.³²

What has Sītā got to say to such a shameless justification advanced with an apparent scholarly dignity by Rāvaṇa in favour of his heinous conduct, which amounts to something like the Devil quoting the scriptures? She rejects Rāvaṇa's justification outright, of course, but not by a mere fiat, but by sound reasoning. Sītā points out that *svadharma*, as envisaged by Rāvaṇa, is not a *sādhudharma* (good conduct) and is therefore not worthy of being practised. Mark her words:

Sādhu dharmamavekṣasva sādhu sādhuvrataṁ cara,
Yathā tava tathānyeṣāṁ rakṣya dāra niśācara.³³

You, O Ravana, should follow the principles of good conduct, by protecting women of other races too as much as you are protective of women of your race.

What is most important for Sītā is dharma that respects the dignity of others as much as it respects one's own (Yathā tava tathānyeṣāṁ,— these words are highly suggestive). Justice can be ensured only if an equal treatment is meted out to people according to their deserts, irrespective of the situation of belong-

ing to one's own clan or to others, which is irrespective of caste, creed, or birth in a particular race, etc. The concept of fairness, as Rawls³⁴ has pointed out, is fundamental to justice. And this idea of fairness is inherent in the notion of *sādhudharma*, as envisaged by Sītā while advising Rāvaṇa in the most uncongenial circumstance. Sītā's point was that women of an alien race also ought to be protected by Rāvaṇa, the king of kings, no less than his own women. The implication of this is important and far-reaching. Even in those days, Sītā was single handedly fighting both rationally and ethically and was pleading for women's rights, irrespective of their caste, creed or race before Rāvaṇa, the most powerful king of the time, on the grounds of a general principle of conduct which she designated as *sādhudharma*. This is how Sītā with an astounding sensibility for high moral principles met Rāvaṇa's argument in support of *svadharma*, which was really an argument in favour of *adharma*, in the Aśoka grove where she was imprisoned by him. It is still more astounding how she conducts herself in the presence of the great abductor, Rāvaṇa. I will draw the attention of the serious students of Rāmāyaṇa only to two different lines in the same context:

Trṇamantarataḥ kṛtvā pratyuvāca śucismitā

Rāvaṇam prṣṭhataḥ kṛtvā bhūyo vacanamabravīt."
(Sundarakāṇḍa, XXI.)

A small blade of grass made to serve as a screen at times, and at other times talking with Rāvaṇa with her back towards him, these were the strategies adopted by her to avoid Rāvaṇa the great, who was so very despicable from her point of view. This speaks of the unusual dignity of Sītā in face of adversity. Her aversion and indifference for the abductor in spite of all his prosperity, wealth and power are evident from the above lines. She was no doubt distressed because of her separation from Rāma and yet she was mentally perfectly alert. Spiritual strength of an unusual variety and depth should tell on, rather shatter,

the nerves of anyone who has deviated from the righteous path, and this is what really happened to the great Rāvaṇa who had degraded himself to the lowliest level by abducting the wife of another person during his absence.

Sītā's unusual strength of character and her absolute faith in herself were manifest also at the time when she was asked by Rāma to prove her chastity through the fire-ordeal in Laṅkā in front of all present including Hanumān.

Sītā did not accept her fate and even the orders of Rāmā lying down with a supine submissiveness, as is most unfortunately supposed by many. The highest dharma for her, however, it should be noted, consisted in thinking good of and doing good to her husband who was her all in all and was himself an incarnation of dharma.

Kālidāsa gives expression to the same idea of the spiritual strength of character in Sītā in his typically suggestive style as follows:

लङ्केश्वरप्रणतिभङ्गादृढव्रतं त -

द्वन्द्वं युगं चरणयोजनकात्पजायाः ।

ज्येष्ठानुवृत्तिजटिलं च शिरोऽस्य साधो -

रन्योन्यपावनमभूदुभयं समेत्य ।।

That adorable pair of Sītā's feet, that had kept the rigid vow of repudiating the supplications of Laṅkā's Lord, and the head of this noble (brother) whose locks were matted together from his adopting the way of life embraced by his elder brother, then coming together, sanctified each by the other.

— Canto XIII. 78

The adorable pair of Sītā's feet, it is noteworthy, had repudiated the supplications of Laṅkā's Lord, Rāvaṇa, such was the nature of her firmness in continuing with an unbreakable vow.

On the other hand, noble Bharata's vow was also no less great, for his locks were matted together because of his adoption of the way of life of his illustrious elder brother. So the poet surmises that when one came in contact with the other (i.e., when noble Bharata's head bowed at the holy feet of Sītā on her return from Laṅkā), they mutually sanctified each other. What a great revelation indeed, a revelation made available to the readers only because of the unusual intuitive talent of Kālidāsa which could give a photographic impression, as it were, of this unique event.

When we come to Canto XIV, we find Rāma's sterling character glowing in dazzling light, as it were, when he meets mother Kaikeyī after his return to Ayodhyā (a unique meeting, surely):

कृताञ्जलिस्तत्र यदम्ब सत्यान्नाभ्रश्यत स्वर्गफलाद्गुरुः ।

तच्चिन्त्यमानं सुकृतं तवेति जहार लज्जां भरतस्य मातुः । ।

Then with hands clasped together, he soothed Kaikeyī's shame saying, 'Mother, it is due to thy merit, that our father did not swerve from truth, that leads to heaven, if only one thinks (rightly) about it.

— Canto XIV. 16

What a high compliment paid to Kaikeyī, anticipating her embarrassment on meeting Rāma after his return! This is certainly the sign of a perfect hero that Rāma was, and a genuine effort on his part not to put even his enemy in an embarrassing situation. Here it may also be regarded as a conscious effort on the part of Rāmā to bring about harmony in the life and thoughts of mother Kaikeyī and through her to bring about concord in the entire household too. Sītā, almost simultaneously, begs apology to her two widowed mothers-in-law; by announcing her name, she bows down to them and says:

Here I am, Sītā, destitute of all auspiciousness, a source of trouble to my husband.

Immediately by this she wins the hearts of her mothers-in-law who acknowledge her merit on the other hand by pointing out that her spotless conduct and life alone had brought her Lord and his younger brother safely back through great ordeals in the forest. Here again, there is a restoration of peace and concord in the household both on account of Sītā's spotless character and also because of her genuine modesty expressed in front of her mothers-in-law after her return. With their spotless conduct and exemplary character, Rāma and Sītā were a unique couple indeed!

Regarding Rāma's ideal type of dealing with all his widowed mothers, the poet has this to say: On account of his intrinsically loving disposition, Rāma paid equal regard to all his mothers, as the leader of the heavenly army i.e., Kārtikeya had paid equal regard to all his six mothers (*Kṛttikas*).

Regarding his administration as an ideal monarch, its flawlessness was evident from the following:

तेनार्थवोल्लोभपराङ्मुखेन तेन घृता विघ्नभयं क्रियावान् ।

तेनास लोकः पितृमान्त्रिनेत्रा तेनैव शोकापनुदेन पुत्री । ।

As he was free from avarice, his subjects became prosperous; as he dispelled their fear of obstacles, they performed their religious rites, as he corrected them, they had in him a father; and as he smoothed away their grief, they had in him a son as well.

— Canto XIV. 23

Now, the prosperity of Ayodhyā on all sides described by the poet during Rāmā Rājya i.e. Rāma's rule needs to be noted too. Says the poet:

तस्यै प्रतिश्रुत्य रघुप्रवीरस्तदीप्सितं पार्श्वचरानुयातः ।

आलोकयिष्यन्मुदितामयोध्यां प्रासादमभ्रंलिहमारुरोह । ।
ऋद्धापणराजपथं स पश्यन्निगाह्यमनां सरयूं च नौभिः ।
विलासिभिश्चाध्युपितानि पौरैः पुरोपकण्ठोपवनानि रेमे । ।

Followed by his attendants, the mighty warrior of Raghu's race went to the top of his sky-soaring palace in order to have a look at the delighted Ayodhyā. He was delighted to see Ayodhyā highway lined with rich shops, the Sarayu ploughed by boats and the parks at the skirts of the town thronged with happy citizens of both the sexes.

— Canto XIV. 30

Sītā's banishment by Rāmā

The most pathetic and unfortunate episode in the *Raghuvaṃśam* occurs where there is a description of Rāmā hearing with great concern that the people of Ayodhyā were all praise for him except for the fact that he had accepted the Queen Sītā, although she had lived in the palace of the Rākṣasa Rāvaṇa for sometime. For the people of Ayodhyā, this was an unpardonable sin on the part of Rāmā. Naturally, on hearing this slanderous report, —

कलत्रनिन्दागुरुणा किलैवमभ्याहतं कीर्तिविपर्ययेण ।
अयोधनेनाय इवाभितप्तं वैदेहिवन्धोर्हृदयं विदद्रे । ।

The heart of Vaidehi's consort (Rāmā), was as if smitten by that slanderous report, imputing foul disgrace to his wife and therefore unbearable, and broke down like heated iron when beaten with a sledge-hammer.

— Canto XIV. 33

Although initially Rāma had to face a dilemma, unable to decide what to do, finally he resolved to banish Sītā, though he was sure of his wife's innocence, as he was convinced that the slander could not be wiped off by any other means, and the glory of the solar race had to be valued more than one's own body and object of sense. It was Lakṣmaṇa who obediently carried out Rāma's orders, and started on his mission to leave Sītā near Vālmīki's hermitage.

One thing that seems to many quite inexplicable, however, is as to why this final decision of Rāma was kept hidden from his faithful and beloved wife, Sītā, and why Lakṣmaṇa was asked to leave his respected sister-in-law near Vālmīki's hermitage under the pretext of an excursion to see the penance-groves for which Sītā had expressed her longing before her husband. Was it necessary to adopt a course of camouflage in case of a faithful wife like Sītā? But, then why was this course adopted by Rāma, the ideal husband and also an ideal king? On the other hand, does it not manifest extreme restraint on the part of Rāma? Does it not indicate the exemplary modesty of the husband in restraining himself from communicating to his beloved wife, since it was bound to be unbearable to speak something that was bitterest in his entire life? This can perhaps best be understood by one who has loved most deeply and yet required to do in regard to the object of love something most regrettable but unavoidable on account of the demands of public responsibility that one is required to discharge.

Rāma certainly wanted to prove himself before his subjects to be an ideal king who was not insensitive to calumny; perhaps, he wanted to set a typical model for all his subjects to follow, who would no longer dare to ignore the ideal conduct meant for them in their daily life too. When Lakṣmaṇa informed him about the successful execution of the duty assigned to him for banishing Sītā in the forest, the poet writes about the natural reaction of Rāma to this most unbearable news for him as follows:

वभूव रामः सहसा सवाष्पस्तुषारवर्षीव सहस्यचन्द्रः ।

कौलीनभीतेन गृहान्निरस्ता न तेन वैदेहसुता मनस्तः । ।

Suddenly Rāma shed profuse tears, as the moon in Pauṣa (winter season) showers down dew; for on account of the scandal he had cast his beloved Sītā from his home, but not from his mind.

— Canto XIV. 84

This speaks greatly of Rāma's deep feelings of tenderness towards his beloved wife and of the profusion of tears that he shed and also of the fact that Sītā was still so very dear to his heart, although cast away from home on account of the scandal in her name. Sītā was in dire distress after the news of her banishment was suddenly communicated to her in the forest by Lakṣmaṇa himself; let us see what she says to Lakṣmaṇa at that point:

श्वश्रूजनं सर्वमनुक्रमेण विज्ञापय प्रापितमत्प्रणामः
प्रजानिषेकं मयि वर्तमानं सूनोरनुध्यायत चेतसेति । ।
वाच्यस्त्वया मद्वचनात्स राजा वह्नौ विशुद्धामपि यत्समक्षम् ।
मां लोकवादश्रवणादहासीः श्रुतस्य किं तत्सदृशं कुलस्य । ।

Request the mothers-in-law, greeting them from me in due order: — 'Pray in your hearts for your son's progeny that I bear in my womb.' Next, to the King convey this message from me: does it beseem thy noble race, that thou forsakest me now, at breath of scandal, although my purity was proved in fire in thy very presence?

— Canto XIV. 60-61

I don't think that there could be an adequately satisfactory reply to this question raised by Sītā expressed in her dire distress. Finally, of course, she was reconciled to her fate, not because she was a weakling, but again because of her deep love for Rāma, for

she said in the next moment:

कल्याणबुद्धेरथवा तवायं न कामचारो मयि शङ्कनीयः ।

...

Or rather it was no willing act of thine, towards me, since thou art so benevolent in thy disposition...

— Canto XIV. 62

This speaks of her illumined mind in the face of adversity. And then —

किं वा तवात्यन्तवियोगमोघे कुर्यामुपेक्षां हतजीवितेऽस्मिन् ।
स्याद्रक्षणीयं यदि मे न तेजस्त्वदीयमन्तर्गतमन्तरायः । ।

I would have no longer borne this accursed life, all profitless to me through endless separation from thee, had not thy seed, that I bear in my womb, and that must be preserved, proved an obstacle.

— Canto XIV. 65

She decides then and there to take recourse to penance (tapas) after giving birth to the progeny of Rāma, so that in the next life, she may have Rāma again for her husband but will never be separated from him. What depth of love indeed!

Now let us see what Sage Vālmīki has to say about Sītā's banishment by Rāma in *Raghuvamśam*, after his meeting with Sītā near his hermitage. Kālidāsa as a matter of fact displays his own deep feelings in this regard, it seems, through Vālmīki who is made to express the following:

By holy intuition I know that thou art abandoned by thy husband who was agitated by a false scandal: grieve not then, O Princess of Videha; thou hast come to thy father's

home in a different country. I acknowledge Rāmā's greatness in view of the fact that he has uprooted Rāvaṇa who was a thorn to the three worlds, he has also been always true to his vow, and his character is free from any blemish and yet I am sorrowful for his cruel dealings with you without any reason whatsoever.

— Canto XIV. 72-73

Sītā rather comes out with greater glory in this second ordeal of her banishment much more than when she went through her first fire-ordeal in the presence of Rāma in Laṅkā. Rāma's nobility and greatness in remaining faithful to his beloved wife till the end in spite of all this cannot be undermined or under-estimated in any way, for he never accepted another woman as his bride in the absence of Sītā and kept an effigy of Sītā on his side for fulfilling the requirements of sacrificial performances. (XIV.87). Rāma was certainly a great king and a faithful husband, too, but in my opinion, the balance would be slightly tilted in favour of Sītā who is glorious like no one else in the *Raghuvamśam*.

But at the same time Rāma was both an ideal king and also a loving husband. It is true that he was a loving and protective husband for his wife, Sītā, but unfortunately he had to face a dilemma when he heard of the scandalous report about his faithful wife, and did not know what to do. Finally, he decided in favour of banishing his pregnant and faithful wife to the forest. Calumny was the only ground of Sītā's banishment.

राजर्षिवंशस्य रविप्रसूतेरुपस्थितः पश्यत कीदृशोऽयम् ।
मत्तः सदाचारशुचेः कलङ्कः पयोदवातादिव दर्पणस्य ॥
पौरैषु सोऽहं बहुलीभवन्तमपां तरङ्गेष्विव तैलविन्दुम् ।
सोढुं न तत्पूर्वमवर्णमीशे आलानिकं स्थानणुमिव द्विपेन्द्रः ॥

...

अवैमि चैनामनघेति किंतु लोकापवादो वलवान्मतो मे ।

छाया हि भूमेः शशिनो मलत्वेनारोपिता शुद्धिमतः प्रजाभिः । ।

Behold, how dark a blot my act has brought on all the Sun-descended race, so flawless in its virtue — stock of saintly Kings — as a cloud-bearing breeze stains a mirror.

I cannot bear this slander, the first of its kind, spreading wide among my folk, like a drop of oil on waves of water, even as a mighty elephant hates the post to which he is tied."

...

I know that she is innocent, and yet public opinion, I hold, prevails: Earth's shadow cast across the spotless Moon is held by vulgar minds to be a stain on her.

— Canto XIV. 37-38, 40

Rāma went through a really difficult ordeal in this case, and his greatness both as a faithful husband and as an ideal king remained intact in so far as he decided not to take another woman as his spouse in place of Sītā and also kept an effigy of Sītā by his side, as already referred to, while performing sacrifice, thus displaying his unflinching devotion to his wife of spotless character. Sītā, it is to be noted, took it as a matter of great consolation for herself and somehow bore the grief of unbearable separation from her beloved husband, on learning about this from different sources at the hermitage of Vālmiki (Canto XIV. 87). However, all the same, the entire episode shows Rāma as king and as husband torn between two most difficult alternatives. And this existential problem for Rāma, was indeed a hard knot to cut.

After Sītā gave birth to her two sons in the hermitage, Kuśa and Lava by name, her sons got adequate training in the hermitage under the guidance of the sage Vālmiki himself, and became well-versed and well-trained in singing the Rāmāyaṇa composed by Vālmiki himself. They are also said to have given their performance before Lord Rāma and his brothers. Then Rāmā, be-

ing very much impressed by their singing and on learning about Vālmīki being both the composer of Rāmāyaṇa and the music teacher of Kuśa and Lava both, went to the sage Vālmīki along with his brothers. Here Rāma was asked by Vālmīki himself to accept Sītā, after introducing his sons to him. But Rāma had the following to say in reply, and this is most unfortunate, for again, here, the public opinion holds sway in his mind. Rāma says:

तात शुद्धा समक्षं नः सुषा ते जातवेदसि ।
दौरात्म्याद्रक्षसस्तां तु नात्रत्याः श्रद्धुः प्रजाः । ।

Sire, this your daughter (Sītā) has been purified in fire in our very presence, but because of the wickedness of the Rāksasa, the subjects here, did not put their faith in it.

— Canto XV. 72

Again, the demand was made on Sītā by Rāma himself on behalf of the subjects as follows:-

Let her convince them of her chastity, then I will accept her along with her sons, by your command.

— Canto XV. 73

This was indeed too much of a demand for Sītā. However, when the next day, Rāma arranged a meeting of his subjects and called Vālmīki to be present there, the sage ordered Sītā as follows:

Dear child, let the doubt be removed from the mind of the people, concerning your conduct, in the presence of your husband.

— Canto XV.79

And here was the climax reached by Sītā in her life already

replete with ordeal after ordeal. Sītā had no other alternative now but to give up her life voluntarily after giving her last minute declaration as follows:

वाङ्मनःकर्मभिः पत्यौ व्यभिचारो यथा न मे ।

तथा विश्वंभरे देवि मामन्तर्धातुमर्हसि । ।

If there is no violation of duty from my side towards my husband whether in speech, thought or action, O divine Earth, the supporter of the universe, please conceal me in your bosom.

— Canto XV. 81

Sītā, to my mind, represents the ultimate victory of a woman of rare honour and dignity. She was well aware of the depth of Rāma's love for her, and it was really a strong protest of a highly dignified woman.

It is precisely because Sītā was "pure and chaste" beyond an iota of doubt and also because at the same time she was not a weakling or docile as she is made out to be in certain uninformed quarters, she invited her end in this way, without speaking a word to anyone, not even to her beloved Rāma, so that the world at large may perchance learn a fitting lesson from this regarding the excesses done to her by the willful public which had been so very unjust towards her. So, in my humble opinion, there was nothing strange, nothing unclear, about her final response, when she was not left with any other alternative. Devadhar has rightly pointed out in this context that "Kālidāsa's account of Sītā's disappearance tallies with that of Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa, Uttarakāṇḍa".³⁶ If Rāma was so very disturbed about his and the solar dynasty's honour being at stake, because of the scandalous reports from the public, it is no wonder that for an honourable lady of the stature of Sītā, it should be intolerable to undergo humiliating situation one after the other, finally ending with a public demand for a second fire-ordeal in front of the denizens of Ayodhyā before her

readmission into the royal household along with her children.

What an irony of fate, indeed, that the people felt ashamed at her departure, though they were the cause of her ordeal.

जनास्तदालोकपथात्प्रतिसंहतचक्षुषः ।

तस्थुस्तेऽवाङ् मुख्याः सर्वे फलिता इव शालयः । ।

The people, with-drawing their gaze from the path of her sight, stood with their face downwards, inclined like rice plants with the burden of fruits.

— Canto XV. 78

Neither Sītā nor Rāma should have tolerated such vagaries of the public mind which was already inclined to blame Sītā in spite of her obviously spotless character. Nothing less than a second fire-ordeal could have satisfied the public that was perhaps curious to see the earlier ordeal to be enacted once again before them. I am reminded here of the following observations of a famous existentialist thinker expressed in another context which seem to be somewhat relevant here in the context of the citizenry of Ayodhya vis-à-vis the great Sītā and Rāma towards whom it was so very intolerant beyond any reasonable explanation. "It is a fundamental truth of human nature", says Kierkegaard, "that man is incapable of remaining permanently on the heights, of continuing to admire anything. Human nature needs variety. Even in the most enthusiastic ages people have always liked to joke enviously about their superiors. That is perfectly in order and is entirely justifiable so long as after having laughed at the great they can once more look upon them with admiration; otherwise the game is not worth the candle".³⁷ So strange, and yet so true!

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Appendices

Passages from the writings of Sri Aurobindo on Kalidasa

"Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa are the essence of the history of ancient India; if all else were lost, they would still be its sole and sufficient cultural history. Their poems are types and exponents of three periods in the development of the human soul, types and exponents also of the three great powers which dispute and clash in the imperfect and half-formed temperament and harmonise in the formed and perfect. At the same time their works are pictures at once minute and grandiose of three moods of our Aryan civilisation, of which the first was predominately moral, the second predominately intellectual, the third predominately material. The fourth power of the soul, the spiritual, which can alone govern and harmonise the others by fusion with them, had not, though it pervaded and powerfully influenced each successive development, any separate age of predominance, did not like the others possess the whole race with a dominating obsession. It is because, conjoining in themselves the highest and most varied poetical gifts, they at the same time represent and

mirror their age and humanity by their interpretative largeness and power that our three chief poets hold their supreme place and bear comparison with the greatest world-names, Homer, Shakespeare and Dante..."

* * *

"Many centuries after these poets [Valmiki and Vyasa], perhaps a thousand years or even more, came the third great embodiment of the national consciousness, Kalidasa. There is a far greater difference between the civilisation he mirrors than between Vyasa's and Valmiki's. He came when the daemonic orgy of character and intellect had worked itself out and ended in producing at once its culmination and reaction in Buddhism. There was everywhere noticeable a petrifying of the national temperament, visible to us in the tendency to codification; philosophy was being codified, morals were being codified, knowledge of any and every sort was being codified; it was on one side of its nature an age of scholars, legislators, dialecticians, philosophical formalisers. On the other side, the creative and aesthetic enthusiasm of the nation was pouring itself into things material, into the life of the senses, into the pride of life and beauty. The arts of painting, architecture, song, dance, drama, gardening, jewellery, all that can administer to the wants of great and luxurious capitals, received a grand impetus which brought them to their highest technical perfection. That this impetus came from Greek sources or from the Buddhists seems hardly borne out: the latter may rather have shared in the general tendencies of the time than originated them, and the Greek theory gives us a maximum of conclusions with a minimum of facts. I do not think, indeed, it can be maintained that this period, call it classical or material or what one will, was marked off from its predecessor by any clear division: such a partition would be contrary to the law of human development. Almost all the concrete features of the age may be found

as separate facts in ancient India: codes existed from old time; art and drama were of fairly ancient origin, to whatever date we may assign their development; physical Yoga processes existed almost from the first, and the material development portrayed in the Ramayana and Mahabharata is hardly less splendid than that of which the Raghuvamsha is so brilliant a picture. But whereas, before, these were subordinated to more lofty ideals, now they prevailed and became supreme, occupying the best energies of the race and stamping themselves on its life and consciousness. In obedience to this impulse the centuries between the rise of Buddhism and the advent of Shankaracharya became — though not agnostic and skeptical, for they rejected violently the doctrines of Charvak — yet profoundly scientific and outward-going even in their spiritualism. It was therefore the great age of formalised metaphysics, science, law, art and the sensuous luxury which accompanies the arts."

— Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library
(SABCL), Vol. 3, pp. 217, 221-2.

"The classical age of the ancient literature, the best known and appraised of all, covers a period of some ten centuries and possibly more, and it is marked off from the earlier writings by a considerable difference, not so much in substance, as in the moulding and the colour of its thought, temperament and language. The divine childhood, the heroic youth, the bright and strong early manhood of the people and its culture are over and there is instead a long and opulent maturity and as its sequence an equally opulent and richly coloured decline...."

"The great representative poet of this age is Kalidasa. He establishes a type which was preparing before and endured after him with more or less of additional decoration, but substantially unchanged through the centuries. His poems are the perfect and harmoniously designed model of a kind and substance that others cast always into similar forms but with a genius inferior in

power or less rhythmically balanced, faultless and whole. The art of poetic speech in Kalidasa's period reaches an extraordinary perfection. Poetry itself had become a high craft, conscious of its means, meticulously conscientious in the use of its instruments, as alert and exact in its technique as architecture, painting and sculpture, vigilant to equate beauty and power of the form with nobility and richness of the conception, aim and spirit and the scrupulous completeness of its execution with fullness of aesthetic vision or of the emotional or sensuous appeal. There was established here as in the other arts and indeed during all this era in all human activities a Shastra, a well recognised and carefully practised science and art of poetics, critical and formulative of all that makes perfection of method and prescriptive of things to be avoided, curious of essentials and possibilities but under a regime of standards and limits conceived with the aim of excluding all fault of excess or of defect and therefore in practice as unfavourable to any creative lawlessness, even though the poet's native right of fantasy and freedom is theoretically admitted, as to any least tendency towards bad or careless, hasty or irregular workmanship. The poet is expected to be thoroughly conscious of his art, as minutely acquainted with its conditions and is fixed and certain standard and method as the painter and sculptor and to govern by his critical sense and knowledge the flight of his genius. This careful art of poetry became in the end too much of a rigid tradition, too appreciative of rhetorical device and artifice and even permitted and admired the most extraordinary contortions of the learned intelligence, as in the Alexandrian decline of Greek poetry, but the earlier work is usually free from these shortcomings or they are only occasional and rare.

"The classical Sanskrit is perhaps the most remarkably finished and capable instrument of thought yet fashioned, at any rate by either the Aryan or the Semitic mind, lucid with the utmost possible clarity, precise to the farthest limit of precision, always

compact and at its best sparing in its formation of phrase, but yet with all this never poor or bare: there is no sacrifice of depth to lucidity, but rather a pregnant opulence of meaning, a capacity of high richness and beauty, a natural grandeur of sound and diction inherited from the ancient days. The abuse of the faculty of compound structure proved fatal later on to the prose, but in the earlier prose and poetry where it is limited, there is an air of continent abundance strengthened by restraint and all the more capable of making the most of its resources. The great and subtle and musical rhythms of the classical poetry with their imaginative, attractive and beautiful names, manifold in capacity, careful in structure, are of themselves a mould that insists on perfection and hardly admits the possibility of a mean or slovenly workmanship or a defective movement. The unit of this poetical art is the *Sloka*, the sufficient verse of four quarters or *pāda*, and each *Sloka* is expected to be a work of perfect art in itself, a harmonious, vivid and convincing expression of an object, scene, detail, thought, sentiment, state of mind or emotion that can stand by itself as an independent figure; the succession of *Slokas* must be a constant development by addition of completeness to completeness and the whole poem or canto of a long poem an artistic and satisfying structure in this manner, the succession of cantos a progression of definite movements building a total harmony. It is this carefully artistic and highly cultured type of poetic creation that reached its acme of perfection in the poetry of Kalidasa.

This pre-eminence proceeds from two qualities possessed in a degree only to be paralleled in the work of the greatest world-poets and not always combined in them in so equable a harmony and with so adequate a combination of execution and substance. Kalidasa ranks among the supreme poetic artists with Milton and Virgil and he has a more subtle and delicate spirit and touch in his art than the English, a greater breath of native power informing and vivifying his execution than the Latin poet. There is no more perfect and harmonious style in literature, no more inspired and careful master of the absolutely harmonious and sufficient phrase combining the minimum of word expenditure with the

fullest sense of an accomplished ease and a divine elegance and not excluding a fine excess that is not excessive, an utmost possible refined opulence of aesthetic value. More perfectly than any other he realizes the artistic combination of a harmonious economy of expression, not a word, syllable, sound in superfluity, and a total sense of wise and lavish opulence that was the aim of the earlier classical poets. None so divinely skilful as he is imparting without any overdoing the richest colour, charm, appeal and value, greatness or nobility or power or suavity and always some kind and the right kind and the fullest degree of beauty to each line and each phrase. The felicity of selection is equaled by the felicity of combination. One of the most splendidly sensuous of poets in the higher sense of that epithet because he has a vivid vision and feeling of his object, his sensuousness is neither lax nor overpowering, but always satisfying and just, because it is united with a plenary force of the intelligence, a gravity and strength sometimes apparent, sometimes disguised in beauty but appreciable within the brodered and coloured robe, a royal restraint in the heart of the regal indulgence. And Kalidasa's sovereign mastery of rhythm is as great as his sovereign mastery of phrase. Here we meet in each metrical kind with the most perfect discoveries of verbal harmony in the Sanskrit language (pure lyrical melody comes only afterwards at the end in one or two poets like Jayadeva), harmonies founded on a constant subtle complexity of the fine assonances of sound and an unobtrusive use of significant cadence that never breaks the fluent unity of tone of the music. And the other quality of Kalidasa's poetry is the unfailing adequacy of the substance. Careful always to get the full aesthetic value of the word and sound clothing his thought and substance, he is equally careful that the thought and the substance itself should be of a high, strong or rich intellectual, descriptive or emotional value. His conception is large in its view though it has not the cosmic breadth of the earlier poets and it is sustained at every step in its execution. The hand of the artist never fails in the management of its material, — exception being made of a fault of composition marring one, the least consider-

able of his works, — and his imagination is always as equal to its task as his touch is great and subtle.

The work to which these supreme poetic qualities were brought was very much the same at bottom, though differing in its form and method, as that achieved by the earlier epics; it was to interpret in poetic speech and represent in significant images and figures the mind, the life, the culture of India in his age. Kalidasa's seven extant poems, each in its own way and within its limits and on its level a masterpiece, are a brilliant and delicately ornate roll of pictures and inscriptions with that as their single real subject. His was a richly stored mind, the mind at once of a scholar and observer possessed of all the learning of his time, versed in the politics, law, social idea, system and detail, religion, mythology, philosophy, art of his time, intimate with the life of courts and familiar with the life of the people, widely and very minutely observant of the life of Nature, of bird and beast, season and tree and flower, all the lore of the mind and all the lore of the eye; and this mind was at the same time always that of a great poet and artist. There is not in his work the touch of pedantry or excessive learning that mars the art of some other Sanskrit poets, he knows how to subdue all his matter to the spirit of his art and to make the scholar and observer no more than a gatherer of materials for the poet, but the richness of documentation is there ready and available and constantly brought in as a part of incident and description and surrounding idea and forms or intervenes in the brilliant series of images that pass before us in the long succession of magnificent couplets and stanzas. India, her great mountains and forests and plains and their peoples, her men and women and the circumstances of their life, her animals, her cities and villages, her hermitages, rivers, gardens and tilled lands are the background of narrative and drama and love poem. He has seen it all and filled his mind with it and never fails to bring it before us vivid with all the wealth of description of which he is capable. Her ethical and domestic ideals, the life of the ascetic in the forest or engaged in meditation and austerity upon the mountains and the life of the householder, her familiar customs

and social standards and observances, her religious notions, cult, symbols give the rest of the surroundings and the atmosphere. The high actions of gods and kings, the nobler or the more delicate human sentiments, the charm and beauty of women, the sensuous passion of lovers, the procession of the seasons and the scenes of Nature, these are his favourite subjects.

He is a true son of his age in his dwelling on the artistic, hedonistic, sensuous sides of experience and pre-eminently a poet of love and beauty and the joy of life. He represents it also in his intellectual passion for higher things, his intense appreciation of knowledge, culture, the religious idea, the ethical ideal, the greatness of ascetic self-mastery, and these too he makes a part of the beauty and interest of life and sees as admirable elements of its complete and splendid picture. All his work is of this tissue. His great literary epic, the "House of Raghu", treats the story of a line of ancient kings as representative of the highest religious and ethical culture and ideals of the race and brings out its significances environed with a splendid decoration of almost pictorially depicted sentiment and action, noble or beautiful thought and speech and vivid incident and scene and surrounding. Another unfinished epic, a great fragment but by the virtue of his method of work complete in itself so far as the tale proceeds, is in subject a legend of the gods, the ancient subject of a strife of Gods and Titans, the solution prepared here by a union of the supreme God and the Goddess, but in treatment it is a description of Nature and the human life of India raised to a divine magnitude on the sacred mountain and in the homes of the high deities. His three dramas move around the passion of love, but with the same insistence on the detail and picture of life. One poem unrolls the hued series of the seasons of the Indian year. Another leads the messenger cloud across northern India viewing as it passes the panorama of her scenes and closes on a vivid and delicately sensuous and emotional portrayal of the passion of love. In these varied settings we get a singularly complete impression of the mind, the tradition, the sentiment, the rich, beautiful and ordered life of the India of the times, not

in its very deepest things, for these have to be sought elsewhere, but in what was for the time most characteristic, the intellectual, vital and artistic turn of that period of her culture."

— Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*,
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3. Cf. M.R. Kale (ed), *Abhijñānaśākuntalam of Kālidāsa*, MLBD, Delhi, 1969, p.11.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Harmony of Virtue*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL) Vol. 3, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972, pp. 223-4.
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8. M.R. Kale, *The Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa*, MLBD, Delhi, p. x.
9. Cf. H.K. Satapathy, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (in Oriya), Kitab Mahal, Cuttack, 1988, p. 273.
10. As quoted in J.B. Patnaik, *Sanskṛta Vāṅgmaya Vaibhavam* R.S.V.P.,Tirupati, 2007, p. 88.
11. Cf. II.4, *Kumara Sambhavam*, "Namastrimūrtaye tubhyam prākṣrṣṭeh kevalatmane, Guṇatryavibhāgāya paścādbhedamupeyuse". Also cf. *Ibid.*, 7.44, "Ekaika mūrtirvibhide, tridhā sā sāmānyameṣām prathamāvatāratvam, Viṣṇorharastasya Hariḥ kadācit Vedhā stayostavepi dhātu rāsyau."
12. As quoted in C.R. Devadhar (ed); *Op.cit.* Introduction, P-v.
13. Cf. Ācārya Saṅkara's commentary on Gauḍapāda's *Māṇḍūkya*

Kārikā, Advaita Prakaraṇa, 17, "Svasiddhāntavyavasthāsu dvaitino niścītā dṛḍham, parasparam virudhyante tairayam na virudhyate".

14. Cf. *Mālavikāgnimitra*, the opening verse, and also *Kumara Sambhavam*, V.

15. M.R. Kale, *The Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa*, MLBD, Delhi, p. ii.

16. As quoted in C.R. Devadhar (ed.), *Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa*, MLBD, Delhi, 2005, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

17. Ibid., p. viii

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. x.

20. Ibid., p. xi.

21. Ibid., p. xxiii.

22. As quoted in Ibid. pp. xi-xii.

23. R.D. Karmarkar, *Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa* (Cantos I-V) Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, Delhi, 2003, pp. ix-xx.

24. Cf. C.R. Devadhar (ed.) *Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa*, MLBD, Delhi, 2005, p. xi.

25. M.R. Kale, *The Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa*, MLBD, Delhi, p. x.

26. It may be of interest to mention here how eminent Rāmāyaṇa scholars of foreign origin like Brockington of Edinburgh University have laid a special emphasis on the pre-eminently ethical aspect of Rāma's conduct. Cf. Prof. J.L. Brockington's *The Relevance of the Ramayana*, 3rd Surendra Lal Kundu-Sarojini Kundu Memorial lecture, delivered at Calcutta on 18th December 1993. "Rama's moral grandeur", says Brockington, "comes from his willing submission to the apparently arbitrary requirement of his exile which leads him ultimately to his greatest deed, the killing of Ravana". Also, "Thus, the reason for the story's (Rāmāyaṇa's) continuing popularity is above all the ethical emphasis on the figure of righteous Rama."

27. R.D. Karmarkar, *op. cit.*, Cantos I-V, pp. xxi.

28. Cf. *Meghadutam*, 53, "Āpannārttiprasāmanaphalā saṃpado hyuttamānām".

29. R.D. Karmarkar, *op. cit.*, Cantos VI-X, p. 105.
30. Cf. *Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa*, Bālakāṇḍa, 1.
31. Cf. *Bhagavadgīta*, II.55-61.
32. Cf. *Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa*, Sundarakāṇḍa, 20.5.
33. *Ibid.*, 21.7.
34. Cf. John Rawls: "Justice as Fairness", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXVII, April, 1958.
35. Cf. also Bhavabhūti's *Uttara Rāma Caritam*, 6.30, where Kuśa, on Lava's query, points out, "What grief has not the Lord of the Raghus suffered in separation from the queen Sītā!" etc.
36. Cf. C.R. Devadhar (ed.), *Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa*, MLBD, Delhi, 2005, XV, Note 81, p.688.
37. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, translated by Alexander Dru and Walter Lowrie, Oxford University Press, 1962.

For the English translation, I have profusely taken the help of C.R. Devadhar (ed.), *Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa*, MLBD, 2005.

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Valmiki, Vyasa, and Kalidasa are the three greatest poets of India, and one cannot have a living experience of Indian culture without some direct experience of the works of these three great poets. Kalidasa is the reputed author of Raghuvamsham, Ritusamhara, Meghadutam and Kumarasambhavam. Apart from these four poetical works, three dramatic works have been universally attributed to Kalidasa, viz., Malavikagnimitram, Vikramorvashiyam, Abhijnanashakuntalam.

In Raghuvamsham, the poet describes a number of kings that belong to the House of Raghu, from Dilipa to Agnivarna. Only a few episodes have been selected for this compilation, just enough to introduce to the reader a few glimpses of the idealism of the heroic qualities of kings like Dilipa, Aja, and Sri Rama. The victory of Raghu, the lamentation of Aja, the hunting expedition of Dashratha and four chapters devoted to Sri Rama may be regarded as perhaps the best portions of Raghuvamsham.

In all the works of Kalidasa we find a majestic style, charming suggestion, apt similes, beautiful ornamentation and colourful descriptions of nature as also the description of human happiness and suffering. It has been said that Poetry unveiled herself in all her beauty in the presence of Kalidasa.

