

The Biochemistry of Love, Vegetation, and Eroticism: An Analytical Study of Kālidāsa's Meghadūta

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Abstract:

Love in human body – be it man or woman-is a mysterious chemistry. The body creates the urge for union between the sexes. Exactly the same phenomenon happens among the nature's organisms. But it is tremendously interesting to know when this happens between the lifeless mute objects like Cloud and the Earth to engender Nature's vegetations. Kālidāsa, the greatest playwright in Indian classical literature in 1st century BC among the 'nine gems' in the court of King Vikramāditya of Ujjaini, has envisioned in his artistic finesse *Meghadūttam* the coital act between the cloud and the rivers on Earth along with the mountains, a leviathan masculine body reposed upon the giant feminine body, depicting a rich diversity of eroticism. In this context, the paper has reprojected the mythic legend of conjugal love and separation between *Yakṣa* (Hemamāli) and *Yakṣiṇī* (Viśālākṣī) of *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, by magically focussing the cloud as the catalyst of begetting amorous advances of love, sex and rejuvenation. It confirms with the logic of Vegetation ritual and the *Sāṃkhya philosophy* (that) cloud or rain is permeated with the spirit of life, rejuvenation and *Śṛṅgāra* (erotic desire) that sustains mankind by a close organic relationship.

As the original story retells disobedient to Lord Kubera of *Alakāpurī* of Kailāsa *Parvata*, *Yakṣa* has been cursed to stay in separation from his newly wedded wife *Yakṣiṇī* for a period of one year as abstinence on the *Rāmagiri* mountain of Earth. With the cognition of cloud as '*Prakṛti-puruṣa*' and a symbol of masculine virility, *Yakṣa* has prayed it to be the messenger of his love-tidings from his bereaved heart to his remorseful wife at *Alakā*. The cloud's route as suggested by *Yakṣa* from Southern India to Northern Himalayan region covering the long winding tracts of mountains and rivers is a miraculous chemistry of love and sex, aligned with Nature's permanent geography. Thus it heals up and sustains, as it generates erotic desire with an artistic finish.

Keywords: *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, *Sāṃkhya philosophy*, Vegetation ritual, Eroticism *Prakṛti-puruṣa*.

Introduction

True identity of Kālidāsa is yet obscure. However, sustained research about his biography reveals that in the Pre-Christian era of 1st century B.C, he was the court poet of king *Vikramāditya* of *Ujjayini* and one of the 'nine gems'. In the version of Prof. Lassen, 'he was the brightest star in the firmament of Indian Poetry'. Considering his poetic genius, he is ranked as one of the great classics of the world. He is recognized the world all over for being the sheer composer of the play *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (the mythic

episode between Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta). Critics say had he composed this single play throughout his life, he could have yet remained famous for the expression of an artistic talent of rare kind. He was at par with the European classics like Homer, Virgil, Dante, Goethe and Shakespeare. Love and 'Rasa' are the main feature of his writing. To project this, the essential background is Nature -Mountains, rivers, streams, clouds, sky, earth, plants, animals, moon, stars etc. a vivid panorama of external nature. He so convincingly personifies rivers, mountains, and clouds, trees that those are supposed to be having a conscious individuality as truly and certainly as animals, or men or gods. Eco-critics arguably state that Kālidāsa had abundant knowledge in ecology, with a healthy sense of environmental ethics that spur the recent environmental scientists to dig his entire work for knowledge of sustainable development. It is delightful to imagine that his works scientifically reduce to be a confluence between Kālidāsa and Darwin. The nucleus of his writing is Indian Myth, Legend, *Purāṇas*, *Vedas*, *Upaniṣad* and *Saṁhitā* -the entire Indian knowledge System (IKS). The same stories have been re-projected on a grand human scale. His immortal works chiefly rest upon seven varieties- three dramas, two epics, one elegiac poem, and descriptive poem. They are *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Vikramorvaśīyam*, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, *Kumārsambhavam*, *Raghuvamśam*, *Meghadūttam*, and *Ṛtusamhāram*. His plays are the basic theories to oriental drama which supplement to the making of Modern European Drama. So far as the style of the text is concerned, *Meghadūttam* is composed in *Mandākrāntā* meter (slow-stepper prosodic meter) due to elegiac tone, metaphoric, witty imagery, having liquid movement with grace and hypnotic melody.

Background Source to the Text- The *Meghadūttam* (The Cloud- Messenger)

The background to the text is *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* of Indian Mythology. There is an episode called *Āṣādhakṛṣṇa Yoginī Ekādaśī* (*Āṣāḍha* month's dark fortnight i.e., 11th day of *Yoginī*) where Lord Krishna is narrating the significance of this day to Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest brother of five *Pāṇḍavas*. To cleanse the scholar's doubt, it can be said that *Yoginī* in Indian Mythology is a demi-goddess. As the story goes, *Kubera*, a God of wealth was a Devotee of *Lord Shiva*. Everyday his attendant *Yakṣa*, plucking lotus flower from *Mānasa sarovara* of *Himālaya* offered it to *Kubera* for the worshipping of *Lord Shiva*. The newly married *Yakṣa*, being passionately attached to his wife, other gave the same lotus to his wife *Yakṣiṇī* for which he couldn't offer the lotus flower to his deity, Lordship. So the enraged *Kubera* cursed him to be the victim of leprosy and stay detached from his wife for a period of one year. He was too cursed to spend this period of separation on Earth's *Rāmagiri* Mountain of southern India. Consequently, he got exonerated from this curse by the strict observance of *Āṣādhakṛṣṇa Yoginī Ekādaśī*.

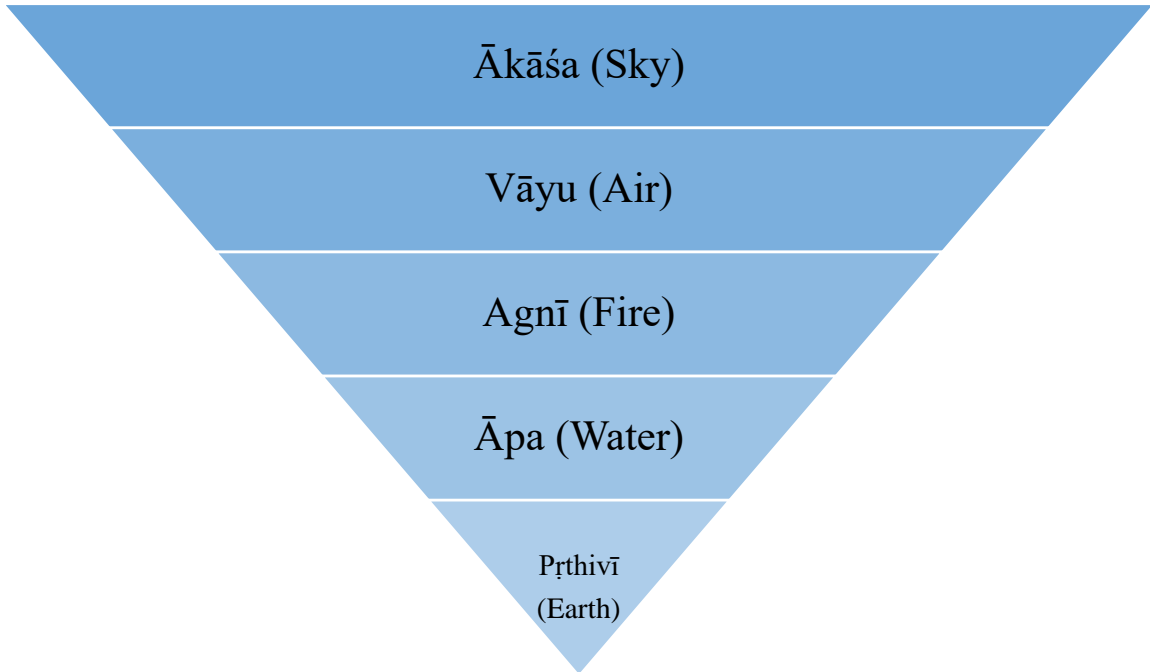
Love and Vegetation

Chemistry of love is the basic theme of the major works of Kālidāsa, such as *Meghadūttam*, *Raghuvamśam*, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* be it lyric, epic or play. Sublimation of love comes either through union or separation. As different elements either in solid, liquid or gaseous stage combine to produce a new element with complete different characteristics by the process of chemical reaction, intensified by the catalyst non-affected by the reaction, here the love between *Yakṣa* and his wife in separation has been accentuated through the catalyst *Megha* or Cloud, an inert body producing an erotic desire or *Śṛṅgāra Rasa* as messenger of love-tiding from the heart of *Yakṣa* on *Rāmagiri* at Southern of India to *Yakṣiṇī* at *Alakā* of *Himālaya* on Northern Region.

However, the actual Chemistry of Kālidāsa meant that cloud or *Megha's* body was composed of 'dhūmajyoti salila marutām' (smoke, fire, water and air) as stated in Śloka-5 of *Meghadūtam*. Thus, lifeless *Megha* or cloud is scientifically inert to reciprocate feelings. But Kālidāsa has gone beyond this scientific limitation. His superb artistic vision endowed with Indian *Sāṃkhya* Philosophy, infuses life to this inert body 'Megha' or cloud and proves it to be the legitimate father of creation. That 'Megha' or cloud is quite capable to infuse life into the whole Earth with complete vegetation as the sheer proof of cloud's role as sustenance of mankind as far as the fertility ritual myth of Indian culture is concerned.

Thus, cloud palpably seeming as inert has a tremendous role in this mysterious universe, what *Taittirīyopaniṣad* speaks –*tasmādvā etasmādātmana ākāśaḥ sambhūtaḥ | ākāśadvāyuh | vāyoragniḥ | agnerāpaḥ | adbhyaḥ pṛthivī pṛthivyā ośadhayaḥ | ośadhībhyo'nnam | annātpuruṣaḥ | sa vā eṣa puruṣo'nnarasamayaḥ |* (*Taittirīyopaniṣad, Brahmānandavallī, Prathamo'nuvāka, Verse 1*)

As per Upaniṣadic sense, *Ākāśa* or Sky and all pervasive empty blueness originates from the soul of Brahma; from *Ākāśa* or sky comes *Vāyu* or air; from Air originates Agni, from *Agnī* comes water, and finally from water comes this Earth or *Pṛthivī* which is as scientific as Big-Bang/steady-state theory of creation of this universe. This five elemental forces known as *Pañcabhūta*, is cyclic in structure. Thus, logically this order reverts to sky the original source where it originated. Water or 'Āpaḥ' that births the Earth, also dissolve the same Earth. As it has importance in creation, so also it plays a crucial role at the time of destruction. It vegetates the entire earth with an infusion of vegetation in all. The structure is as follows



Its fall on the earth like God's germination engenders, fills in, and makes the flora and fauna pregnant with Kernel. In parallel with this *Sāṃkhya* vision, regarding rain or cloud, *Lord Krishna* in *Karmayoga* (Śloka-14) of *Bhagavadgītā* speaks about the creative vigor of rain or cloud that comes through vegetation of Earth to Man.

*annādbhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḍannasambhavaḥ |
yajñādbhavati parjanyo yajñaḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ ||
(Bhagavadgītā Śloka no. 3.14)*

Translated as:

From food come forth beings; from rain food is produced; from sacrifice arises rain and sacrifice is born of action. (English Translation by Swami Sivananda)

All men are born from the rice, which comes through also rain; from corn, life energy also comes to man. Rain is to produce from the fire or *Yajña*. Thus, life energy again returns to the original source at the time of death, where man gets dissolved in '*Pañcabhūta*' this is scientific too. Likewise, *Manusmṛti* admits '*Āpah*' or water birthes this Earth which carries in its stroke of fertility.

Cloud's Genealogy in Indian Myth and Astrology

Kālidāsa in *Meghadūttam* has rightly chosen cloud to be messenger; profoundly imbued with both Vedic and scientific sense what actually the text-language confesses. In *śloka*-6 of *Meghadūttam*, *Yakṣa* is awfully addressing the *Puṣkara*-cloud, being hailed from a dignified family as origin:

*jātaṃ vaṃṣe bhuvanavidite puṣkarāvartakānām
jānāmi tvāṃ prakṛtipuruṣaṃ kāmarūpaṃ maghonaḥ ।*

(*Pūrva Megha, śloka, 6*)

Translated as:

[I know, thy far-famed princely line,
Thy state, in heaven's imperial council chief,
Thy changing forms...]

Arthur William Ryder (P. 196)

Recognizing the early cloud name as *Puṣkarāvartakanām* and important executioner body of *Indra*, as *Puṣkara-Āvarttaka Yakṣa* thinks it not be an act of misdemeanors for praying him with the oblation of wild tulips and choosing him to be the befitting messenger of love for a long distance, from *Rāmagiri* of south to *Alakāpurī* of North. Clouds according to *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* are divided into three categories as to their origin from fire – the breath of Brahman or the wings of mountain. *Lord Indra*, according to Vedic conception is the god of firmament, the lord of atmosphere and dispenser of rain, wherein the clouds may be spoken of as his chief agents or officers (P. 16). So they are described as *Puṣkaāvrttaka*. However, Indian Astrology classifies cloud-family as four different categories – '*Āvartta*', '*Sambartta*', '*Puṣkara*' and '*Droṇa*'. '*Āvartta*' is without rain, but helps in churning the cloud in atmosphere. Secondly '*Sambartta*' is full of water, which outpours the rainwater. Thirdly, '*Puṣkara*' is the best variety, light-winged to fly and float and can rain rarely as it desire. According to Indian Astrology, it is supposed to be the hero among all the clouds. Finally '*Droṇa*' is the best of all to vegetate, fill the seed and fruits with kernel and suitably rain for mankind's sustenance. Of this four varieties, Kālidāsa has deliberately used '*Puṣkarāvarttaka*' as the befitting cloud-messenger to help *Yakṣa* at the depressing stage as a lover pining for his newly married wife. The light winged '*Puṣkara*' can fly and float freely, rain as it desires and drink too as feel thirsty, carrying *Yakṣa*'s message from Southern region to Northern region. Most important *puṣkara*, like a superhuman, can take different shapes such as Mountain, boar, buffalo, elephant, tiger, etc. For lord *Indra* this '*Puṣkara*' is supposed to perform all miraculous activities, being '*Kāmarūpī*' (desiring to adopt various shapes) and '*Prakṛti Puruṣa*'

Cloud Begetting Love & Erotic Desire

The status of the same cloud in Indian context is varying- father or originator of this Earth, an important agent of Lord *Indra* as saviour of Earth in the proportionate distributor of rain, *Indra*'s important

‘*Puruṣa*’ as mythic dimension, multiple shaping agent as ‘*Kāmarūpī*’, a role-model in Earth’s vegetation and finally love and sex-inducing agent.

Cursed *Yakṣa*, painfully overcoming eight months’ stay on *Rāmagiri* Mountain as a physical separation from his newly married wife *Viśālākṣī*, sees the new cloud in early *Āṣāḍha*. Suddenly he becomes love-sick and has been restless to be sexually united with his beloved wife. The cloud appears to be a mad elephant in rage tearing off the soil from the mountain peak with his tusk:

āṣāḍhasya prathamadivase meghamāśliṣṭasānuṃ /
vaprakrīḍāparīṇatagajaprekṣaṇīyaṃ dadarśa // (Pūrva Megha, śloka,2)

Translated as:

[.....]

Ere he beheld the harbinger of rain

A cloud that charged the peak in mimic fray,

As an elephant attacks a bank of earth in play.]

A. W. Ryder (P. 195)

Reminding Kālidāsa’ *Rtusamhāram*, rain starts from the very early day of *Āṣāḍha* which is too conducive to erotic longing. Thus, cloud in the form of raining over the earth induces erotic desire in men and women as the potent force of sexual lust. Kālidāsa’s plural sense of language is understood when he says cloud as ‘*prakṛti – puruṣam*’, ‘*kāmarūpam*’ (śloka, 6 P.15) and ‘*santaptānām śaraṇam*’ (śloka, 7 p.17). In one sense, it is Lord Indra’s potential male-agent to perform his lots of works, but on the other hand, it is both ‘*prakṛti*’ and ‘*puruṣa*’, combining an androgenic experience of male and female sometime. Its fall or strike upon the inert ‘*prakṛti*’ as feminine is to erotically sensitize with the male-force to make it pregnant with vegetation. While coming to ‘*kāmarūpam*’, it is too ambivalent- in one sense desiring to change form as it wishes and, in another sense, it is an emblem of *kāma* (sex) – desire. In the context of *Yakṣa*’s version, *santaptānām* is an ablution for the sexually starved people by invitation to sex and equally gratifying to those love-lorn lovers in their union- ‘*santaptānām śaraṇam*’ is commonly understood to be the protector of extremely sun-lit affected persons, tress, animals and other living organism. *Yakṣa*, with a humble prayer to dignified *Puṣkara* cloud, requests to send his message to his wife at *Alkāpurī* who is too equally victimised by Lord Kubera’s curse. Rain intensifies *Yakṣa*’s desire of meeting his wife. He thinks at least the message will be more satisfying than the true physical reunion which will at least become a spur for further survival in anticipating their union in future after the curse being over. It is reasonable to admit *Meghadūttam* is an erotic suffused (*Śṛṅgāra rasātmaka*) poem, love in separation (*Vipralambha Śṛṅgāra*) is more intense than love in fusion (*Sambhoga Śṛṅgāra*).

So far as Indian geography is concerned ‘*Āmrakūṭa*’ known as ‘*Amarkaṇṭaka*’ from where on the mango trees are found on top, river *Narmadā* emerges there from. Here cloud after raining on summer – drenched *Āmrakūṭa* moves towards *Vindhya* Mountains. Kālidāsa using *Puṣkara* cloud as the highest genealogy of *megha*, an important masculine body for the service of *Yakṣa*, has turned him as hermaphrodite, having male and female experience in one body. In one instance, cloud is having non-attached vicarious pleasure of sex and in another instance, cloud is involved in lustful affair being a feminine body. Kālidāsa describes from the bottom of *Vindhya* Mountain River *Revā* or *Narmadā* flows. Strange as it might seem the leviathan mountain body of *Vindhya* seems to be a great elephant like lascivious man. Whereas river *Narmadā* flowing at the bottom seems to be a pretty silent sex-gratified woman on ground by the sex-craving mountain man *Vindhya*. She helplessly tries to escape out of the

clutches of mountain *Vindhya* and runs endlessly towards the sea. Here cloud gets a vicarious pleasure of the sex. However, in another instance Kālidāsa says black cloud resting on *Vindhya* Mountain top seems to be the breast nipple of white blossom, wherein the celestial spirits might be amorously attracted to fall upon its beauty. This is not pornographic but artistically the masculinity of the cloud is changed to femininity. This is hermaphrodite. The same cloud is having the male- female experience in different incidents. Thus, the version comes like this.

channopāntaḥ pariṇataphaladyotibhiḥ kānanāmraisa-
tvayyārūḍhe śikharamacalaḥ snigdhaveṇīsavarṇe /
nūnaṃ yāsyatyamaramithunaprekṣaṅtīyāmavasthām
madhye śyāmaḥ stana iva bhuvah śeṣavistārapāṇḍuḥ //
(*Pūrva Megha, śloka, 18*)

Translated as:

[With ripened mango fruits his margins teem;
And thou, like wetted braids, art blackness quite;
When resting on the mountain thou wilt seem
Like the dark nipple on earth's blossom white
For mating gods and goddesses a thrilling sight.]

Arthur William Ryder, P. 199

Further, cloud on his way to Ujjain encounters river *Nirvindhyā* which has her emergence from *Vindhya* Mountain. Kālidāsa compares *Nirvindhyā* river with lewd woman who tries here to attract the *Puṣkara* cloud exposing her naval during the whirlpool of water and so many titillating attitude like loosening sarees from hip or lusty look of the eyes. This way a man is tempted to enjoy the women. Exactly the cloud blind with *Nirvindhyā's* irresistible desire for fornication is opiated to drink water from her body to quench the burning sensation of erotic desire. Thus, *Yakṣa* says :

vīcikṣobhastanitavihagaśreṇikāñcīgunāyāḥ
samsarpantyāḥ skhalitasubhagaṃ darśitāvartanābheḥ /
nirvindhyāyāḥ pathi bhava rasābhyantaraḥ saṃnipatya
strīṇāmādyam praṇayavacanam vibhramo hi priyeṣu //
(*Pūrva Megha, śloka, 29*)

Translated as:

A glimpse of charms in whirling eddies pursed,
While noisy swans accompany her dance
Like a tinkling zone, will slake thy loving thirst-
A woman always tells her love in gestures first.

Arthur William Ryder, P. 202

T. S. Eliot's recent concept of 'objective co-relative' in the context of *Hamlet and Other Essays*, published in 1932 by Faber and Faber is an outer let-out of emotion. Cursed *Yakṣa* separated from his newly wedded wife, who has become emaciated with depression sends the love – tiding through *Puṣkara* cloud of early *Āṣāḍha* for begetting the renewal of love to overcome the depression of separation. This situation alternately co-relates when cloud reaching the river *Nirvindhyā* is a masculine potency finds *Nirvindhyā* to be a woman, dedicated to her husband, having a single braid with lean body resulting out of continuous pining for the separation, flowing steadily, looks haggard and destitute of all glamour like winter's yellow leaves. Here cloud will be fortunate to rain sufficiently to enliven the shrunken river,

like a lady under prolonged starvation of sex will be thankful to the man being gratified of the desires. Whatever *Yakṣa* and *Yakṣiṇī* feels intensely in separation from each other as acute depression, so also *Nirvindhya* feeling the same and being a one-line flow of water like a woman's elongated single braid, is perversely united with the cloud's rain - stroke. Cloud and *Nirvindhya* are the reflex of *Yakṣa* and *Yakṣiṇī*. In modern critical terms this concept can be artistically termed as *defamiliarization* in the context of Russian Formalism as postulated by Roman Jakobson. Kālidāsa made it extremely superb with a proof of his exceptional artistic talent in the making of rare comparisons – conceited and far-fetched. Thus, Kālidāsa speaks in *śloka* no. 30 of *Meghaduttam*, turning cloud as the lover and river *Nirvindhya* as sexually – starved woman where cloud with a heavy downpour of water will quench the sexual thirst of dried river. This way the river will be pregnant with water, forsaking its emaciated body.

*veṇībhūtapratanusalilā tāmatītasya sindhuḥ
pāṇḍucchāyātataruhatarubhramśibhirjṛṇaparṇaiḥ |
saubhāgyam te subhaga virahāvasthayā vyañjayantī
kārśyam yena tyajati vidhinā sa tvayaivopapādyah||
(Pūrva Megha, śloka,30)*

Translated as:

[Thou only, happy lover! Canst repair
The desolation that thine absence made:
Her shrinking current seems the careless hair
The braids deserted wear in single braid,
And dead leaves falling give her face a paler shade.]
~ A. W. Ryder (P. 202)

Conclusion

As to the clarifications of classical research on the angels of the purpose of *Kāvya* as stated in *Sāhitya Darpaṇa*, 'Dharma', 'Artha', 'Kāma', 'Mokṣa' (religion, finance, desire, salvation) are the four gifted fruits of *Kāvya*. Kālidāsa thus, in the remythologisation of Śakuntalā-Duṣyanta episode has done a unilateral focus upon 'Kāma,' (desire or lust) on *Meghadūtta*, making it tremendously erotic suffused long narrative love lyric, where cloud or *megha*, a floating inert body in sky has been metamorphosed to be having all kinds of masculine potency of a man capable to enjoy, beget and vegetate with mysterious chemistry of love, sex and eroticism though it is asexual. Kālidāsa through this research paper opens the further scope of *Kāmasūtra* or Indian sex- a step to higher rebirth, not to be consumed in the fire of sex.

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