

# KĀLIDĀSA'S VISION OF DIVINE SPLENDOUR ON EARTH AND *MEGHADŪTA*

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One of the chief characteristics of the works of the great poet Kālidāsa appears to be the descent of divinity on earth. In other words, it is a constant endeavour to transform the mundane into super-mundane. He does not attach much importance to the gods living in heaven, sky or outerspace but attracts them to remain constantly associated with world or make their abodes on earth.

The opening verse of the **Kumārasambhava** states that the Himālaya is the embodiment of divinity—

अस्त्युत्तरस्यां दिशि देवतात्मा हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः ।

Ku 1.1

This has been corroborated by the affirmance that all the desired deities dwell in the Himālaya—

मनीपिताः सन्ति गृहेषु देवताः ...

Ku 5.4

and another declaration that it is futile to undergo penance for heaven as the entire mountain is the abode of gods:

दिवं यदि प्रार्थयसे वृथा श्रमः पितुः प्रदेशास्तव देवभूमयः ।

Ku 5.45

The same spirit has been maintained in the **Raghuvamśa** where a well administered and prosperous state has been compared with heaven:

महीतलस्पर्शनमात्रभिन्नमृच्छं हि राज्यं पदमैन्द्रमाहुः ।

Raghu 2.50

It was, therefore, quite befitting that on the auspicious occasion of the birth of Raghu not only the courtesans in the royal palace but the gods also rejoiced the event by singing and dancing in the sky—

सुखश्रवा मंगलतूर्यनिस्वनाः प्रमोदनृत्यैः सह वारयोपिताम् ।  
न केवलम् सद्मनि मागधीपतेः पथि व्यजृम्भन्त दिवौकसामपि । ।

Raghu 3.20

Even at a tender age he had the guts to challenge the supremacy of Indra by taking charge of the protection of the horse of the hundredth Aśvamedha—

नियुज्य तं होमतुरंगरक्षणे धनुर्धरं राजसुतैरनुदुतम् ।

Raghu 3.38

When the sacrificial horse was stolen by Indra, Raghu asked him to take up the arm and fight—

गृहाण शस्त्रं यदि सर्ग एष तेन खल्वनिर्जित्य रघुं कृती भवान् ।

Raghu 3.51

Hearing the determination of Raghu for a dual Kubera causes the rain of gold coins in his treasury—

प्रातः प्रयाणाभिमुखाय तस्मै सविस्मयाः कोशगृहे नियुक्ताः ।  
हिरण्मयीं कोशगृहस्य मध्ये वृष्टिं शशंसुः पतितां नभस्तः । ।

Raghu 5.29

The **Abhijñāna Śākuntala** speaks in the same voice or goes a step forward when the gods being unable to conquer demons of Kālanemi dynasty invite Duṣyanta to serve the purpose—

सख्युस्ते स किल शतक्रतोरजय्यस्तस्य त्वं रणशिरसि स्मृतो निहन्ता ।  
उच्छेत्तुं प्रभवति यन्न सप्तसप्तिस्तनैशं तिमिरमपाकरोति चन्द्रः । ।

Abhi 6.30

The reason of this inability of gods is their constant indulgence in pleasure seeking and Indra has to depend on others for his own defence—

सुखपरस्य हरे रुभयैः कृतं त्रिदिवमुद्धृत दानव कण्टकम् ।  
तव शरैरधुना नतपर्वभिः पुरुष केसरिणश्च पुरा नखैः । ।

Abhi 7.3

Naturally, such a victory deserves to be celebrated with writing and singing by deities in heaven—

विच्छित्तिशेषैः सुरसुन्दरीणां वर्णैरमी कल्पलतांशुकेषु ।  
विचिन्त्य गीतक्षममर्थजातं दिवोकसस्त्वच्चरितं लिखन्ति । ।

Abhi 7.5

The other important work **Vikramorvaśīya** begins with the cry of divine nymphs for protection from demons who have kidnapped Urvaśī and Citralekhā while returning from the house of Kubera—

वन्दीकृता विबुधशत्रुभिरर्धमार्गे क्रन्दत्यतः शरणमप्सरसां गणोऽयम् ।

Vikram 1.3

The helplessness of gods to defend themselves has been pointed out by Menakā that whenever critical moments come in battle with demons, a king from earth is invited with great honour and declared as commander of the divine army—

'उपस्थितसंपरायो महेन्द्रोऽपि मध्यम लोकात्सबहुमानमानाय्य तमेव विबुध विजानाय सेना मुखे नियुंक्ते'  
Vikrama.I after verse 4

This reflects the weak and cowardice nature of gods that they are not in a position to ensure safety even for their own womanfolk. On the other hand, the rulers on earth had perfect grip over administration and everybody felt safe in the reign of Dilīpa and Raghu--

यस्मिन्महीं शासति वाणिनीनां निद्रां विहारार्धपथे गतानाम् ।  
वातोऽपि नासंसयदंशुकानि को लम्बयेदाहरणाय हस्तम् । ।

Raghu 6.75

Such was the efficient control of Dilīpa.

Raghu's excellent administration results in ensuring safety, peace and prosperity everywhere. This finds praise of Kautsa—

सर्वत्र नो वार्तमवेहि राजन्नाथे कुतरस्त्वय्यशुभं प्रजानाम् ।  
सूर्ये तपत्यावरणाय दृष्टेः कल्पेत लोकस्य कथं तमिस्रा । ।

Raghu 5.13

Here the light of Sun denotes transparency, removal of all ignorance and slackness which sometimes percolate in the bureaucracy. This has been conveyed by the term स्फुरत्प्रभामण्डल which is the peculiar feature of Gupta period halo in the sculptural rendering.

In such a blissful environment gold has to flow from each direction and including from the heaven, as already pointed out. Whether the poet is to be fixed in the fifth century A.D. or earlier, is not the subject of debate at present but we do find a glimpse of the divinity descending on the earth in the historic Gupta period. Probably, the largest number of gold coins available now belong to the Gupta rulers. The Brāhmī legend stamped on this artistic gold currency sometimes informs that the king with his noble deeds conquers heaven as the earth was already under his full control.

गामवजित्य सुचरितैर्दिवं जयति ।

The remarkable fact which is supported by the numismatic evidence is that he does not long for heaven but conquers it.

The theory of *avatāra* i.e. descent of divinity on earth also gains momentum now and is evidenced by literature and fully strengthened by sculptural finds. The two epics and the Purāṇas find it a favourite subject and the icons start displaying this aspect. Almost all natural deities from sky or heaven came down on earth to be worshipped first in form of symbols and later in anthropomorphic shape. This reveals *avatarāṇa* (descent) of supernatural power and earth was naturally sanctified or glorified as the **Bhāgavata** recites:

अहो अलं श्लाघ्यतमं यदोः कुलं अहो अलं पुण्यतमं मधोर्वनम् ।  
यदेष पुंसामृषभः श्रियः पतिः स्वजन्मना चक्रमणेन चाञ्चति । ।

Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa 1.10.26

The worship of Rāma and particularly that of Kṛṣṇa excelled other heavenly deities. Śiva was assigned a permanent abode of Kailāśa. Even Jainism and Buddhism disregarded or downgraded the gods and the Jainas and the Buddha or Bodhisattvas emerged much more important and powerful. This entire spectacle was a procedure of bringing down the splendour of heavenly divinity on earth.

The perusal of the **Meghadūta** leads us in the same direction.

The Rāmagiri where the cursed *yakṣa* spends his time in exile is venerable because it was sanctified by the holy feet of Rāma—

वंदैः पुंसां रघुपति पदैरंकितं मेखलासु Megha I.12

In the **Raghuvamśa** Rāma has been remembered as Hari—

रत्नाकरं वीक्ष्य मिथः स जायां रामाभिधानो हरिरित्युवाच Raghu 13.1

The opening verse of **Meghadūta** reminds that the water of the spring of Mountain (Rāmagiri) had become purified by the holy bath of Sītā—

'यक्षश्चक्रे जनकतनयास्नानपुण्योदकेषु Megha I.1

The purity of conduct of Sītā remains an unshakable faith of the poet at several places in the **Raghuvamśa** (cf. 13.78, 14.14, 14.72-74, 14.84 and 86).

The destination of cloud is Alakā and also of the *yakṣa* and if we read the description of the town it becomes the destination of all. It is possessed with unlimited pleasures and delight which are available in heaven, yet it is not a separate satellite but remains in the world situated at Kailāśa, a part of the Himālayas. By describing Alakā, the poet seems to create heaven on earth. It is, therefore, sought for by every body—

'गन्तव्या ते वसतिरलका नाम यक्षेश्वराणाम्'

Megha I.7

The word *gantavyā* has a special significance and it bears the stamp of human aspiration. There you see the tears of joy only, no sorrow and suffering except the feeling of meeting with dear ones there is no fever except the one caused by cupid and there is no age except the youth. Who would not like to dwell in a place like this? The women are charming, the tall sky-scraping buildings are excellent, their exterior and interior decoration is marvellous, these are beautifully carved and painted and look like the multi-colour rainbow of Indra, these are studded with precious and semi-precious stones and always resound with the sound of musical instruments—

विद्युत्वन्तं ललितवनिताः सेन्द्रचापं सचित्राः

संगीताय प्रहत मुरजाः स्निग्ध गम्भीर घोषम् ।

अन्तस्तोयं मणिमयभुवस्तुंगमभ्रंलिहाग्राः

प्रासादास्त्वां तुलयितुमलं यत्र तैस्तैर्विशेषैः । ।

Megha II.1

There, one finds the wish-fulfilling trees i.e. *kalpavr̥kṣa*, the best drinks and even gods long to live in the company of damsels of Alakā (II.5-6) 'अमर प्रार्थिता यत्र कन्याः'. The heaven is generally typified for satisfying the two cravings of man i.e. the wealth and lovely women and in Alakā these are available inexhaustibly in the outer pleasure garden known as Vaibhrāja—

अक्षय्यान्तर्भवन निधयः प्रत्यहं रक्त कण्ठै

रुद्गायद्भिर्धनपति यशः किन्नरैर्यत्र सार्धम् ।

वैभ्राजाख्यं विबुधवनितावारमुख्यासहाया

बद्धालापा बहिरुपवनं कामिनो निर्विशन्ति । ।

Megha II.10

The term *kalpavr̥kṣa* occurs several times and it may be presumed that every house in Alakā was gifted with this divine tree which produced each and every thing when desired.

The narration is quite elaborate and at places excels heaven. The grace, grandeur and lasting prosperity of Alakā is justified as it is the seat of two important gods i.e. Śiva and Kubera who live there with their attendants (*gaṇas*) with perfect harmony.

This should, however, be pointed out that this new heaven of Kālidāsa is free from shortcomings with which the heaven suffers. While the heaven is vulnerable to attacks, the city of Alakā is well protected, the gods are weak and coward and unable to defend themselves, the soldiers of Alakā are great warriors and consider their wounds in war with Rāvaṇa as real ornaments—

योधाग्रण्यः प्रतिदशमुखं संयुगे तस्थिवांस—

प्रत्यादिष्टाभरणरुचयश्चन्द्रहासव्रणांकैः । ।

Megha II.13

The gods in heaven often remain indulged in seeking pleasure and forget their basic duties but in Alakā the things are different. The pleasures are in plentitude and also inexhaustible but do not overdominate. The damsels do project their charm through inviting gestures but the cupid or sex remains restrained for the fear of Śiva who physically resides there—

मत्वा देवं धनपतिं सख्यत्र साक्षाद्सन्तं

प्रायश्चापं न वहति भयान्मन्मथ षट्पदज्यम् ।

सभूभंगप्रहितनयनैः कामिलक्ष्येष्वमोधै

स्तस्यारम्भश्चतुरवनिता विभ्रमैरेव सिद्धः । ।

Megha II.14

By using the word *prāyaḥ* i.e. often, the poet seems to be inclined to allow some margin for pitfalls in exceptional cases. After all to err is human and who knows our poor *yakṣa* become prey to some of the weaknesses of the conduct, hence fell from grace.

The divine splendour of Alakā is guarded and maintained well through constant vigilance and surveillance and if found necessary the punishment is awarded for indiscipline, discourtesy and misconduct. The hero of **Meghadūta** himself was a victim of the perfect and awakened management and suffered for one year. He was either found neglectful of his duties or misused his power 'स्वाधिकारात्प्रमत्तः' ।

From certain texts we gather that the message sent by *yakṣa* to his wife through cloud was also heard by his master (Kubera) who took it as a mercy appeal and exonerating him from charges re-instated on his original post with dignity.

श्रुत्वा वार्ता जलद कथितां तां धनेशोऽपि सद्यः

शापस्यान्तं सदय हृदयः संविधायास्तकोपः ।

Megha II.62

Supervision, control, punishment, appreciation and kindness all are the parts of administration and in Alakā these are effectively initiated as the occasion demands. The conditions can well be compared with those as prevailing in the **Raghuvamśa**:-

यथापराधदण्डानां यथाकालप्रबोधिनाम् I.6

It was with these measures that the abundance of prosperity and pleasures remained secured unlike heaven.

The splendour of divinity is not confined to the Kailāśa or Alakā, there are some other places where this spectacle of heaven is witnessed on earth. The foremost is Ujjayinī or Avantī which is blessed by the Lord. This must be viewed and appreciated even if a circuitous path is followed. Although the narration is not so elaborate as compared with Alakā, yet a good glimpse is imparted:

वक्रः पन्था यदपि भवतः प्रस्थितस्योत्तराशां  
सौधोत्संग प्रणयविमुखो माम् भूरुज्जयिन्याः।

Megha I.28

The opulence, affluence, enjoyments and amusements of the place give an impression that it is a radiant part of heaven brought down on earth by those whose balance of merits remained unused:

स्वल्पीभूते सुचरिते कुले स्वर्गिणां गां गतानां  
शेषैः पुण्यैर्हृतमिव दिवः कान्ति मत्खण्डमेकम्।

Megha I.31

If the other verse is not declared as spurious, one finds the accumulation of the wealth of entire world, even from the oceans of Ujjayinī :-

दृष्ट्वा यस्यां विपणि रचितान्विदुमाणां च भंगान्  
संलक्ष्यन्ते सलिलनिधयस्तोयमात्रावशेषाः।

Megha I.33

There are references in which the divinity descend on the mortal plane although the fulfilment of desires is either missing or expressed shortly. The cloud is advised to anoint Kārttikeya who lives permanently on the Devagiri hill (probably Devagarh in Lalitpur District in U.P.). He being an embodiment of energy and brightness was appointed as the chief of the armies of Indra.

तत्र स्कन्दं नियतवसतिं पुष्पमेघीकृतात्मा  
पुष्पासारैः स्नपयतु भवान्योमगङ्गाजलाद्रिः।

Megha I.46

The word *niyatavasati* is of vital importance. Since Kumāra Skanda has made the place as his permanent residence, it is futile to trace him in the heaven. The expression finds similarity with Śiva on Kailāśa where the Lord stays in physical form '*sākṣādvasantam*'. Viṣṇu came down in different forms (*avatāras*) and the **Meghadūta** particularly recollects Kṛṣṇa—

बर्हेणेव स्फुरित रुचिना गोपवेषस्य विष्णोः.

Megha I.15

This probably suggests that Śivaloka, Kuberaloka, Skandaloka, Viṣṇuloka etc. are very much on the earth or these have descended from heaven.

The water of Sarasvatī is possessed of such merits which remove all internal and external impurities and even Balarāma gave up his wine drinking habit in favour of this water. This indicates the process of transformation towards spiritual awakening—

हित्वा हालामभिमतरसां रेवती लोचनांकां

बन्धु प्रीत्या समरविमुखो लांगली याः सिषेवे ।

Megha I.52

In short, the poet in his works seems engrossed in shaping new and more beautiful world where sorrows and sufferings have no place. This was the creation of heaven on the earth, a divine splendour to be seen and experienced while living on the mundane plane. The **Meghadūta** like other works, spells out this vision quite explicitly. This should be possible through constant noble effort (*sucarita*), penance (*tapa*) and an unshakable confidence. The exile of *yakṣa* for one year from Alakā and particularly the separation from his beloved is no doubt a punishment or curse (*śāpa*) but it actually culminates into *tapa* as he again becomes entitled to regain his lost glory after undergoing this banishment. Thus the heaven is assured through *tapasyā* on the earth itself and this is the 'summum bonum' of **Meghadūta** as also revealed in other works of Kālidāsa.

