



Great works of Kalidasa – epic poet & playwright

Sanskrit Literature, full of richness and content has witnessed a new form of literature with the different themes of Kalidasa who has produced masterpieces during his lifetime. He is believed to have lived around the first millennium and seven of his works are extant. It is unfortunate that over the period of time his works underwent recensions yet the beauty of the works provide divine fragrance that has not lost even with those alterations. World literature has learnt so much from the writings of Kalidasa and it would be our duty to remember his works.

Malvikagnimitram

Malvikagnimitram is the first play written by Kalidasa. The play centres on the love adventures of Emperor Agnimitra and a servant Malavika. Agnimitra sees a painting of Malavika done by chief queen Dharini. A Brahmin advisor by the name Gautama helps Agnimitra to find his love through various arrangements. Dharini dislikes the idea of the emperor showing interest towards a servant girl; therefore, she orders Malavika to be imprisoned. After a series of events, it is found that Malavika is a girl with royal blood and everyone is happy with the result. Agnimitra find his love Malavika and she becomes a queen of the Shunga dynasty.

Vikramorvasiyam

It is a tradition in ancient Sanskrit Literature to adopt a story from the famous texts and religious texts. The five act play has taken sources from Rig-Veda, Puranas and other prominent texts so that the audience can familiarize with the play immediately and the entertainment is brought out by dialogues, mishaps and tensions created within.

The plot is about a celestial being Urvashi who gets abducted by a demon. She is rescued by a King who hears the cries of Urvashi. King Pururava falls in love immediately with Urvashi and the nymph develops the same feeling. She goes to Heaven after summoning and the king returns to his court. However, both are unable to concentrate on their duties. Urvashi observes the behaviour of Pururava and expresses her love by writing a message on a birch leaf, which unfortunately reaches the queen Aushinari. Meanwhile, Urvashi gets banished from Heaven for not performing her duties properly and as a consolation her banishment is limited only to a time when Puruvura is able to see the child laboured by Urvashi. Their problems eventually turn out as favours as they unite and Urvashi is allowed to live with Puruvara till his death.



Abhijnanasakuntalam

Sakuntala, daughter of the great sage Viswamitra and Menaka grows under the protection of another sage Kanva. King Dushyanta visits the hermitage during a hunt and sees the beauty Sakuntala. They fall in love and Dushyanta gives a ring as a token of his love. Eventually, they get married and Dushyanta leaves to his kingdom. She keeps thinking of the king and does not receive a sage named Durvasa who is known for his anger. He curses that the person who she is thinking will forget about him and the only consolation is the ring through which Dushyanta shall identify Sakuntala.

Sakuntala along with others go to the kingdom of Dushyanta only to find the ring is missing and she calls upon the earth to take her resulting in her disappearance in front of everyone. The signet is found in the stomach of a fish and the fisherman caught by the police makes it possible for the ring to return to Dushyanta. He remembers everything after witnessing the ring and feels terrible for the loss of Sakuntala. After some time, Dushyanta is invited to join the forces of Heaven to kill a demon. On his return, he visits the hermitage of Maricha and finds a young boy wrestling a lion cub. Due to a charmed armllet Dushyanta realizes that the child is his son and Sakuntala is in the hermitage. Their reunion is blissful and everyone in the hermitage is happy for them.

Raghuvamsa

One of the greatest Sanskrit epics that deals with the famous people of the Raghu Dynasty; the epic poem consists of nineteen cantos [sargas] and is considered one of the longest poems with 1570 verses. Raghuvamsa by Kalidasa beautifully portrays the change of fortunes, run of fate and different characters of the Solar Dynasty beginning with the Emperor Dilipa. The epic can be exemplified as a neat interpretation of the Raghu Dynasty and it's rulers including Dashaartha and the famous story of Rama.

Kumarasambhava

The epic is a detailed description [wonderfully at that] of the courtship of God Siva and Goddess Parvati. Kumarasambhava by Kalidasa is written in seventeen chapters and most of them detail the love between the God and Goddess. Siva exiles everything physical and resorts to meditation; Tarakasura, a demon understanding the situation takes a severe penance and gets a boon. The boon is to die only in the hands of the one born to God Siva. As Siva is under meditation, Tarakasura feels invincible and creates chaos in the world. Unable to bear his atrocities, many gods along with Goddess Parvati make efforts to make Siva help the world. Siva and Parvati unite to begot a son Karthikeya who kills Tarakasura and restores peace in all worlds. Lord Indra is given his throne back and everyone hails Siva, Parvati and Karthikeya.



Ritusamhara

Ritu means season(s) and samhara means compilation in Sanskrit; meaning compilation of seasons – unfortunately, many misinterpret the word samhara as destruction which is not the intention of Kalidasa and the poem. Ritusamhara by Kalidasa depicts six season summer, monsoon, autumn, season of cold climate, winter and spring. Lovers reactions to changing seasons are depicted by Kalidasa in this minor poem.

Meghaduta

Meghaduta by Kalidasa is a masterpiece using a very innovative subject to depict the separation of a husband from wife. The poem consists of one hundred and eleven stanzas divided into two parts. Yaksha, who is a subject of Kubera neglects the duties given to him and becomes exiled. While in Central India [his place of exile] he asks a cloud to send message to his wife living near the Himalayas. Yaksha describes the wonderful sceneries that the cloud might encounter during the journey and gives out the lover's message in a beautiful manner. The cloud ultimately reaches Alaka city where the wife of Yaksha is living.

It is believed that there are other great works of Kalidasa that were lost in time. However, these seven remain as the great white pearls of Sanskrit literature and are translated into numerous languages. Any avid reader of literature should go through the works of Kalidasa only to lose themselves in the mesmerizing word plays of Kalidasa.