

Human Beings' Affinity with Nature in *Meghadutam*

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Abstract

Kalidasa's *Meghadutam* evokes a strong correspondence between nature and human beings. The poem was composed at a time when there was no any polluted environmental problem created by the inventions of science and technology. It was a time when people passionately lived with nature and worshiped it bringing different images of divinity. Nature was a source of inspiration and people had unshakable trust in it. When human beings were deceived and mistreated or they were in trouble because of their own activities or some other outside problematic agencies, they naturally tried to seek shelter to be with nature.

Key Words: Affinity, ancient, modern, virtue, dignity.

Meghadutam by Kalidasa deals with Yaksa's request to cloud to carry out his message to his wife who was far away from him when he was cursed by his master Kubera due to his negligence in performing the duties. Yaksa was, consequently, bound to spend one year being away from his wife and family members. Therefore, he was completely disappointed and leading his life of banishment in miserable condition. He had spent about eight months on Ramgiri Mountain without being in touch with any human beings. When he had still four months to go with his banishment, Yaksa saw a rainy cloud covering the mountain emotionally. This article attempts to explore how Kalidasa establishes close relationship between natural and human worlds by creating or visualizing such magnificent scenes over there and it also discusses poetic art of Kalidasa while dealing with nature, human beings and poetic imagination.

Meghadutam begins with Yaksa's pitiable condition when he was spending his time on Ramgiri mountain. He had spent his lonely days of eight

months without being in touch with any human beings. He was only with nature and there were strong desires and feelings with him to be with his wife as soon as possible. Kalidasa writes:

A certain Yaksa unmindful of his appointed duties
and cursed by his lord to endure
a year's grievous separation from his beloved
dwelt exiled, his luster dimmed, on Rama's hill
in hermitages thick with shade –trees and water
hallowed by the touch of Janaka's daughter. (*Meghadutam* 1)

The poet simultaneously displays the condition of nature and Yaksa. Because of being separated from his beloved wife, Yaksa was in desperate mood. He was accompanied only by nature and natural activities. He suffers “a year's grievous separation” to fulfill the curse as a punishment given to him by his master Kubera, for not fulfilling his duties properly. Although he was in sad mood, there were lively natural scenes around him and he could enjoy them without any predicaments. The mountain had become a holy place since the visit of king Janaka's daughter, Sita. Her holy bath on the shower of the springs on Ramgiri mountain has made the place sacred ever since. Therefore, the place is culturally protected and it has become naturally rich strengthening and promoting “the relationships between human and natural worlds” (Rajan 55).

Kalidas's poetic significance lies on his capacity to describe the activities of human beings and nature side by side. Furthermore, he establishes lively communication between them and enriches their relationship beautifully acknowledging each other's significance to move ahead in this universe. Human beings' relationship with nature is so strongly attached that they emotionally begin to communicate with their surroundings whenever they feel disappointment or happiness in the course of their life. Kalidasa says:

The impassioned lover having passed some months
on that hill, parted from her unsupported
the golden armlet slipping down

to lay bare his wasted fore-arm -
 saw on Asadha's most auspicious day
 a cloud embracing the crest of the hill,
 strikingly - shaped like a sportive elephant
 bent down to butt a river bank. (*Meghadutam* 2)

The poet describes Yaksa's miserable condition addressing him as "impassioned lover" who had spent his painful days on the hill. His miseries were visible through his lean and thin physical appearance because his "golden armlet" was "slipping down." In spite of his weak strength and sadness, Yaksa gets exalted to catch the sight of "a cloud embracing the crest of the hill" in front of him. His attempt to establish relationship between nature and Yaksa's feeling is "extraordinarily lively" (Pandeya 6). Kadidasa describes the scenes bringing the images of "a supportive elephant" and "a river bank." The images of cloud, elephant, river and Yaksa's intense feelings are all brought together with the poet's poetic art of figurative language.

To see the approach of the cloud and gathering the multiple images of natural elements and activities, Yaksa undergoes both painful and happy experiences. He also remembers his bygone days with his beloved wife and suffers from his intense desire to be with her in vain. The poet portrays:

Gazing on that which stirs the ketaka to bloom
 the vassal lord of the King of Kings
 brooded long,
 with effort restraining his tears.
 The sight of rain clouds makes even happy hearts
 stir with restlessness;
 what then of one far from her who longs
 to hold him his close embrace. (*Meghadutam* 3)

When Yaksa still had to undergo his miserable days of four months, he happened to see the cloud covering the mountain in front of him and he could not control himself. Yaksa, then, began to remember and visualize his days with his wife. He came to the conclusion that the only medium to contact his

wife was the cloud which could carry his message faster than anybody else. Kalidasa speaks about the power of nature to stimulate human beings and bring them into action to move forward even in desperate situation. The scenes of rain clouds begin to stir the heart and mind of Yaksha. It is a poetic art to demonstrate “poignant lyric expression of [the] misery” (Corcoran 120). There is immense capacity of nature to arouse the feelings of sadness and happiness in the mind of human beings establishing close affinity between them.

Although Yaksha was in desperate mood for being away from his wife, he was perfectly able to recollect his bygone days and was trying to console himself finding a way out to be in touch with her. His sadness starts to dwindle when he sees the arrival of cloud in front of him. Yaksha could not think anything except the idea of sending his messages to his wife as far as possible. He was not able to distinguish between living and nonliving things and begins to communicate with nature thinking that it was an agent that could carry his message to his wife sooner than others. Kalidasa writes:

Blended of mists and light, winds and water
can a mere cloud bear messages
that only the living with keen senses
and intelligence can convey ?
Unmindful of this the Yaksa entreated it
overwhelmed by unreasoning eagerness;
indeed, the love-sick, their minds clouded,
confuse the sentient with the insentient. (*Meghadutam* 5)

The poet thinks that it was the task of the living agents who are intelligent enough carry and convey the messages from one person to another. Since the cloud is not a living thing to perform such work, it is the condition of Yaksha that made him do such request to nonliving thing to get his desire fulfilled. It is only the mixture of “mists, winds and water” and to carry any information is quite impossible for it. But in his excitement, Yakshahas lost his senses because he is in “grievous tension” (Deane 70) for being away from his wife and begins to beg the cloud to get help from it. The speaker, here, tries to establish a sense of belonging to nature through his metaphorical

language. Kalidasa is “credited with a power to open unexpected and unedited communications between our nature and the nature of the reality we inhabit” (Heaney 131). Therefore, the poem is “filled with voices, questions, answers [and] guesses” (Deane 72).

Yaksha, then, begins to praise the cloud that it belongs to a high class family and it always carries out the duties asked by Indra to perform at different intervals of time. He is very hopeful that his work will be done by such great friend. Yaksha praises:

Born in the lofty lineage of swirling diluvial clouds,

I Know you are the god of thunder's minister
assuming what shape you will; so banished
from wife and kinsmen by diving decree, I entreat you;
for it is nobler to address barren pleas
to the virtuous than fruitful to the vile. (*Meghadutam* 6)

Yaksha, in spite of his confused state of mind due to being separated from his wife and kinsmen, controls himself and communicates with nature. For him the rainy cloud is source of hope and inspiration. He beautifully talks about the “the lofty lineage” of the cloud and becomes confirmed that his request will not go in vain. Kalidasa, in this stanza, inserts a great and philosophical idea that we must not hesitate to make an earnest request to a nobler one because it does not make any difference even if our pleas are not fulfilled by such great person. There must be some logical causes for not bringing our requests to completion. Such virtuous people’s blessings are always upon us. But on the other hand, a vile person’s fulfillment of our desire is worthless because such person always has vested interest while communicating and working with us. Yaksha’s trust in nature is very strong in this stanza, for he associates it with nobler and virtuous people who always guided by moral works. It is an “extraordinary characterization” (Pandeya 5) performed by Kalidasa in his poetry.

Kalidasa's poetry expresses the "representations of the relationship between human and non human nature" (Branch 282). Yaksha talks with cloud as if it is a human and their conversation is quite lively and meaningful. Such personification of natural element is the poetic art of Kalidasa. Because of the poet's figurative language, his poetry is significantly enriched it touches the heart and mind of the readers. He uses nature as a vehicle to express his powerful feelings and such use of nature and natural elements in his poetry strengthens the relationship between human beings and nature. Associating cloud to the lineage of high rank reveals its ancestors' existence and values in history. It is a kind of paying sincere homage to the worth of nature in dealing with human existence. It is like creating "the grounds upon which the communities – the human, the natural – can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere" (Rueckert 107).

Kalidasa's *Meghadutam* sets the opinion regarding how human beings should treat nature to live a dignified life in spite of predicaments in their life. Yaksha warmly welcomes cloud loaded with heavy rain and begins to communicate and share his miseries with it. Such communication and sharing can take place only with our closest and nearest people. Thus, this incident with cloud and Yaksha reveals close and actual affinity with human beings and nature. It can be interpreted as Kalidasa's concept of "dignity of living" with nature "without bias or motive" (Dillard 7). He does not show any anger and ferocity against the rain despite the fact that he was in trouble and disturbed mood. Yaksha rather attempts to receive cloud whole heartedly and starts to celebrate its approach enthusiastically. Yakshastates:

You are the refuge, O Rain-Giver
for all who burn with anguish; so bear
a message from me parted from my love
by the wrath of the lord of Treasures;
go then to Alaka. abode of the Yaksa Lord,
her palaces washed by moonlight
streaming from Siva's brow
where He is seated in her outer groves. (*Meghadutam* 7)

Yaksha associates cloud with agent of care giver and thinks that it protects others who are “burn with anguish” Since Yaksha himself was in trouble due to being departed from his wife, he earnestly pleads nature to pass his message to her to Alka, dwelling place of the Lord Shiva. Metaphorically speaking, nature is “hope of restoration” (Rajan 66) of peace and solace. Therefore, for Kalidasa, nature is not only a place for shelter and a source of hope, but also a messenger for transporting important messages from one place to another as quickly as possible. Such personification of nature is the poet’s significant use of figurative language to enrich his poetry.

Kalidasatakes nature as a sight of wonder for human beings and describes how people spend their time wondering at mysterious scenes of nature in the universe. The wonderful sights of nature closely engage people and they become close to nature and natural elements. In spite of human beings’ wonderful discoveries, nature’s surprising incidents are far more attractive than ours. Kalidasa illustrates:

While simple Siddha maidens with upturned faces,
 watching your impetuous power tremble in alarm
 and cry; ‘Is the wind carrying off the mountain's peak?’
 soar high up into the sky facing north,
 far above this thicket of sap-filled nicula,
 shunning on your path the proud sweep of the heavy trunks
 of the elephants that guard the sky's quarters. (*Meghadutam*
 14)

Movements of the cloud in the sky become a wonderful sight for the “simple Siddha maidens” who look upward to watch nature’s activities. It seems as if the wind is carrying the peak of the mountain. At the same time, the elephants begin to sweep their trunks to stop the cloud. Here, Kalidasa portrays a majestic scene of nature which attracts the people on earth. They enjoy the creation of the cloud with hope and dignity. And such description of nature and women signify the underlying relationship between them. It is a

kind of acknowledgement about the “awareness of [the] membership in the natural community” (Branch 288).

Although the movements of the cloud and the presence and activities of the big elephants are horrible, there is no fear because after all they have adopted themselves to live and enjoy their life with nature. Similar ideas are expressed by John Muir, who desires to walk along with nature and natural activities no matter how horrible the situation is. In his famous article, “A Wind-Storm in the Forests,” Muir explains:

Excepting only the shadows there was nothing somber in all the wild sea of pines. On the contrary, notwithstanding this was the winter season, the colors were remarkably beautiful. The shafts of the pine and libocedrus were brown and purple, and most of the foliage was well tinged with yellow; the laurel groves, with the pale undersides of their leaves turned upward, made masses of grey; and then there was many a dash of chocolate color from clumps of Manzanita, and jet of vivid crimson from the bark of madronos, while the ground on the hillsides, appearing here and there through openings between the groves, displayed masses of pale purple and brown. (182)

Muir accepts everything as the sights of beauty in spite of winter season that troubles people with cold and its bad effects on daily life. The speaker visualizes “all the wild sea of pines.” He greatly appreciates “the foliage” which “was well tinged with yellow” image. He even begins to enjoy and praises the beauty “of pale purple and brown” landscapes of the hillsides. Such description and appreciation of winter’s effect on environment depicts Muir’s “exuberant love of wild nature” (Anderson, Slovic and O’Grandy 179). Therefore, nature’s beauty and its affinity are equally treated both in Eastern and Western society by the artists, poets and writers.

Kalidasa’s *Meghaduta* minutely observes the relationship between human beings and nature. While dealing with human conditions, the poet describes the multiple scenes of nature and its surroundings along with their identity

and effects upon each other's life. Nature's benign and beautiful impressions are closely dealt with human conditions and their works. The poet begins *Uttar Megha*, the second part of *Meghadutam* with equal status of nature and human beings. Yaksha speaks:

Where palaces with their cloud-kissing tops
equal you in loftiness,
and their gem-paved floors rival the glitter
of your glistening rain drops;
where paintings on the walls vie
with your rainbow hues;
and graceful movements of lovely women
rival the lightning's play;
where drums beaten to the sound of music
resemble your thunder, mellow, deep-throated:
And in each particular more than compare with you.
(*Meghadutam* 66)

Equal recognition between nature and human beings is maintained in these lines. As the cloud is moving higher and higher, so are the men-made palaces and their equal heights are beautifully and convincingly portrayed. At the same time the cloud's lightening is compared with the ornaments of the women, gems on the floors and paintings on the walls. The sound of the cloud's thunder is equivalent to the sound of musical instruments played by the people. Kalidasa is successful to give "equal dignity to both individual [nature and human being]" (Pandeya 6) to enhance their affinity.

In conclusion, Kalidasa's attempts to portray the relationship between nature and human beings are seen on several grounds. Sometime, nature is taken as a shelter when human beings are in trouble. In *Meghadutam*, Yaksha spends his miserable days of his separation from his wife on Ramgiri. He was under the bushy trees which could protect him from sun lights, rains and other calamities. The poet takes nature as a carrier of the message sent by Yaksha to his wife residing far away from her husband due to the curse given by Kubera for not performing his task seriously. Furthermore, Kalidasa

establishes a lively communication between nature and Yakshato strengthen their affinity in human civilization. Yaksha acknowledges the cloud as a decedent from high lineage and it would surely carry his message. He further states that even though he did not fulfill his task, Yaksha's trust in cloud would remain forever. There is lively personification of the cloud to identify and recognize the affinity between nature and people living in this world.

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