

Ideals and Status of Women in Kālidāsa

1. Dr. Subhasree Dash

Assistant Professor in Sanskrit
Ravenshaw University, Cuttack.
Email- subhasreedash1@gmail.com

2. Dr. Bibhudatta Dash

Assistant Professor in English
Dept. of Humanities & Social Sciences
Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology, Nagpur.
Email- dr.bibhudattadash@gmail.com

Abstract

The civilization records the hall-marks of women contribution at all the ages. Kālidāsa as a great poet of humanity, has created female characters in his poems and plays, who are very famous for their individual status and social ideals. Their attitude and fortitude, aptitude and ideals, service and sacrifice, speak a lot about the ancient Indian society during the period of the poet (c.400 AD). The Vedic vision of the seers and the epic ideals of the sages of the land modulated the female characters of Kālidāsa. The characters like Pārvatī, Śakuntalā, Sītā etc. are painted with distinguished individual traits which contribute significantly to the ideals of universal woman hood. This article presents the growth, ideal and status of Kālidāsan women at different stages of girlhood and womanhood with a critical and analytical vision to their contributions to the social life at large.

Key Words: Kālidāsa, *caturvarga*, *Śakuntalā*, *Kumārasāmbhava*, *Raghuvamśa*, *Meghadūta*

Introduction:

The female characters of Kālidāsa's works contribute significantly to the graces and ideals of Indian social life. They correspond to the vision of the Vedic seers and the ideals of the epic poets of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. The heroines like Pārvatī, Sītā, Śakuntalā, Yakṣa-patnī etc. are either divine or semi-divine beings like their hero-counter parts and they more powerful than the characters of flesh and blood we encounter in our day to day life. They represent our social ideals of service, sacrifice, truth, character and purity and at the same time reconcile to the claims of the *caturvarga* system of social order or four ends of human life like *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*.

With all their righteousness qualities (*dharma*) they fight the odds of life with the trials and tribulations. They accept challenges for material prosperity (*artha*) and for the fulfilment of their worldly desires (*kāma*) with an eye to liberation (*mokṣa*). They believe both in earth and heaven, grace of gods and goddesses, blessings of elders and preceptors, curse and blessing of the sages and ultimately the victory of the good over the evil. Higher ideals lead them to the noble sphere of human activities and raise their status to the position of the celebrities. Besides, the poet portrays the realistic feature of some common categories of women, found both in cities and villages. The picture of different stages of women like girl-hood, youth and old age show that Kālidāsa visualised the finikin details of the growth of women and presented their accomplished role that corresponded to their social needs.

This paper attempts to present how Kālidāsa's women contributed to the growth and prosperity of the society and how their ideals accomplished the common social goals. Besides, this attempts to focus whether the characters of his epic, lyric and plays could prove themselves successful in addressing the grievances of Indian women and could voice the same to the outside world with a universal note? The objective of our research is to answer

such queries through textual analysis and interpretation by the application of various cultural and linguistic norms.

Ideals of Girlhood:

Excellent idealization of girlhood is noted in the description of the birth of Umā. It is said that by the birth of Umā, the father Himālaya was sanctified and beautified:

prabhāmahatyā śikhayeva dīpaḥ trimārgayeva tridivasya mārgaḥ I

saṃskāravatyeva girā maṅṅī tayā sa pūtaśca vibhūṣitaśca II (Kumārasambhava 'KS', 1.28)

As the lamp (*dīpa*) by very brilliant flame (*mahatī prabhā*), as the path (*mārgaḥ*) of heaven by the three coursed-Ganges (*trimārgā*), as a man of wisdom (*maṅṅī*) by refined speech (*saṃskāravatī gīḥ*), so he, (Himālaya) by her (birth), was both purified and beautified. Here three sets of images for both the daughter and the father successively speak repeatedly that the father was first purified and then beautified by the birth of Umā. In Sanskrit all three words presenting Himālaya, the father, like *dīpa*, *mārga* and *maṅṅī* are in masculine and other three sets of words presenting the daughter like *prabhā*, *trimārgā* and *gīḥ* are in feminine which present the elevated relation of father and daughter successfully. All the images standing for both the characters have Puranic purity and decorative elegance. This makes clear than Hindus loved the birth of both male and female issues, and the girls received special attention. It is said that the eyes of the mountain-king (Himālaya), though having a son (*Maināka*), did not get satiety and started casting his lovely eyes toward the female child Umā again and again (*KS, 1.27*). with glowing grace and loveliness Umā, accompanied by her maids, played with the altars of the sand of *Mandākini* (the river Ganges), with balls and artificial persons (dolls) which gradually enhanced her aptitude for both sports and games. (*KS, 1.29*). Due attention was given also to the education of the girl child. Then the Indians believed that education brings elevation and furthers purification to the soul of a person at the time of instruction. The poet notes that as the rows of swans come to the Ganges in the autumn, as the lustre comes to the medicinal herbs at night, the educational impressions of Pārvaṭī (of the previous life) came to her mind automatically at time of her educational instruction. Girls were instructed to worship deities (*KS, 5.4*), and to water the saplings (*KS, 5.14*). Śakuntalā and her friends like Anasūyā and Priyambadā were trained to rear up plants and domesticated animals of the hermitage (*Abhijñāna śakuntalam 'AS', Act-I & IV*).

They were literate enough to show courtesy to the guests and to discharge house-hold duties. *Yakṣapatnī* is presented with the graces of mind and the body. She expertised in fine arts, painting, poetry and music and also spent time with the fondly pet parrots. Malavikā in the play *Mālavikāgnimitra (MA)* is presented as an expert in songs, dance and music that her teachers were very proud of her. King Agnimitra comments that the creator after uniting the knowledge of fine arts *lalita vijñāna* with her guileless charm has devised a new shaft of love smeared with poison (*MA, 2.13*). Thus the education prepared the girls to face the challenges of the distinguished position of a house-hold lady (*gr̥hinī*) in future.

Ideals of Womenhood-I:

Out of numerous female characters of Kālidāsa, thirteen stand out prominently and leave indelible imprint in the hearts of the connoisseurs of literary art. Such characters of his poems and plays are Dhārīnī, Auśinarī, Pārvaṭī, Urvaśī, Indumatī, Irāvātī, Mālavikā, Yakṣapatnī, Śakuntalā, Priyamvadā, Anasūyā, Sudakṣiṇā, and Sitā. Their lovely graces of the young age together with the morals and maturity of seniority prove that the poet was the master of womenheart. He understood their different shades of emotions at different stages of life.

Distinguished scholars like Professor Mirashi and Professor Navalekar observe the different traits of their characters as follows: “Thus Auśinārī is broad minded and sober, Irāvātī is hot headed and jealous, Dhāriṇī is vigilant and patient, Anasūyā is thoughtful and practical, Priyamvadā is lively and humorous, Śakuntalā is pensive and proud, Sitā is spirited and resigned, Mālavikā is demur and coquettish, Urvaśī is amorous and petulant, the Yaśapatnī is sentimental and languishing, Sudakṣiṇā is serene in mind and unfailing in duty, Indumatī is keen in observation and quick in judgement, and Pārvatī is lofty in aspiration and firm in determination” (Mirashi 359). In spite of all this they had their common points of resemblance as all of them were very loving by nature with positive approaches to a successful life.

The poet sings that the role of a woman in the position of wife is certainly the fundamental cause of all righteous actions (*dharma*) - *Kriyāṇām khalu dharmyāṇām satpatnyo mūlakāraṇam* (KS.6.13). It is for the successful achievement of the four ends of life (*dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa*) that the righteous actions can only lead one to material prosperity (*artha*) and through which one may create scope for the fulfilment of earthly desires (for offsprings, power, position etc.) with an eye to *mokṣa*, which is said to be the release from the earthly bondages for the realisation of the Absolute, the summum bonum of life. So for the realisation of these ends, the role of wife is at the root that leads one to the practice of righteous actions (*dharma*). Therefore after death the wife Indumati, Aja bewails piteously as follows:

gṛhiṇī saciva sakhī mithaḥ priyaśiṣyā lalite kalāvidhau I

karuṇā-vimukhena mṛtyunā haratā tvām vada kim na me hṛtam II (Raghuvamśa, 8.67)

The mistress of my home, my counsellor, my intimate friend and my loved pupil in fine arts (i.e. literature, music, dance, drama, painting etc.): tell me, what merciless Death has not snatched away from me !

Prof. G.K. Brahma notes that Aja has lost all hopes of attaining perfection in any one of the four objectives (ends) of human life. In the absence of the wife he can not perform *dharmakriyā* or righteous action; since she was *saciva* (counsellor) he has lost her advice with regard to property (*artha*) of a person, family and state at large; by the loss of a *sakhī* (intimate friend) he has lost the enjoyment of the intimate passionate moments and worldly charms; by the loss of a *priyaśiṣyā* (loved pupil) his doors to the *lalitakalā* (fine arts) that leads one to *mokṣa* (salvation) is permanently closed as it is admitted by the scriptures like the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, *Bharatanāṭya-śāstra*, *yājñavalkyasmṛti* etc that *kalā* is the reliable means for the attainment of salvation (*Brahmā*, 19-23).

Perhaps for the above reasons that Kālidāsa has conceived Śiva, the lord of the Universe as *Ardhanārī śvara* or equal embodiment of both man and women as follows:

vāgarthāviva sampṛktau vāgartha-pratipattaye I

jagataḥ pitarau vande pārvatī-parameśvarau II (Raghuvamśa, 1.1)

Here the poet bows down to Pārvatī and Parameśvara (Supreme Lord), the parents of the universe, who are unified like word and the meaning so that he may attain right knowledge of the sound (word) and the sense (meaning)

Ideals of Womanhood-II :

The above concept awards dignified position to women in the life of the men and the society. Family of a house-hold is a mini-unit of the state administration. A happy family can only contribute to the cause of peace and prosperity of the nation. Therefore the sage Kaṇva, at the time of Śakuntalā's departure to her husband's house, gives her instructions which earn the note of a universal appeal as follows:

Having reached your husband's house from here you should serve your superiors and act the part of a dear friend un to your fellow bride. Even when insulted you should not out of

anger, show a refractory spirit against your husband. You should remain kind and courteous towards your attendants and should bear no pride in the objects of enjoyment. The young women adopting this way attain the position of house-wives (*gr̥hinī*). The women opposed to the above spirit are inimical to the growth of the race (*AS, 4.18*).

Besides, marriage and mother-hood bestow grace and purity on the life of a woman. She, the light of one race (*prabhā mahatī*) becomes the light of another. The mutual exchange of reverence and affection by daughter-in-law and mother-in-law brings peace and joy to the family (*Raghuvaṁśa, 14.5-6*). Mutual love respect of both father and the mother towards each other is also shown in the matters of the sage Aṅgīrasa's matrimonial proposal for the marriage of Śiva with Pārvatī. Even though Himālaya was fully satisfied with the proposal he looked up to the face of Menā (his wife) for approval as in the matters relating to the daughters, house-holders were expected to be guided by their wives - *prāyeṇa gr̥hinī-netrā kanyārtheṣu kuṭumbinaḥ* (*KS,6.86*). Menā also approved the proposal immediately as devoted wives never disagree with their lords with regard to their desired objects- *bhavantya'vyabhicāriṇyo bharturīṣṭe pativrataḥ* (*KS,6.87*). The poet says that the women received reverence for their attainment of superiority in penance irrespective of their age. Young or old, the great sages visited to pay regards to Pārvatī for her superior penance through austerity measures as maturity in wisdom and righteousness stood superior to the youthful age- *na dharmavṛddheṣu vayah samīkṣate* (*KS,5.16*). In the same way Menā, even before her marriage with Himālaya, was respected by the sages for her piousness, purity, and penance. The poet notes that Himālaya, to maintain the continuing of his line-age married Mena, who was equal to himself and was respected even by the sages: *menām munīnāmapi mānanīyāmātmānurūpām vidhinopajeme* (*KS, 1.18*).

Therefore K.S. Ramaswami Sastri remarks on the women of Kālidāsa as follows: "None of the poets of India excluding of course Vālmīki in his portraiture of Sitā- has excelled Kālidāsa in the presentation of true and real and yet idealised pictures of the highest aspects and graces of Indian woman-hood" (*Kālidāsa, vol.II.214*).

Thus women were not considered subservient to their husbands and they commanded respect for their unique personality. They also admonished and advised their husbands at the time of need. The dialogue of Parivrājikā addressed to the queen Dhārīni notes that the house-wives, even though found dominant in house hold affairs of the husband get annoyed for appropriate reasons- *prabhavantiyapi bhartṛṣu kāraṇakopāḥ kuṭumbinyah* (*Malavikāgnimitra,1.18*). The mothers of the heroes and the wives of the heroes were considered noble and very much respected. Here Parivrājikā's noted remarks on queen Dharitri may be read as follows:

Bhartāsi vīrapatnīnām ślāgyāyām sthāpitā dhuri I
Vīrasūriti śabdo 'yam tanayātvāmupasthitaḥ II (*MA,5.16*)

You have been placed in the respectable position of the fore most of the wives of the heros. However, the title "mother of the heros" comes from your son. Keeping above noble aspect of life in view the respected seniors usually blessed girls as follows: *vaste vīraprasavinī bhava* (oh my child ! may you give birth to a hero); *vaste bhartuḥ bahumatā bhava* (oh my child ! may you be your husband's most adorable one) (*AS, 4.4 ff*)
In this way the highest ideals of womanhood was achieved by piousness, purity, adorable marital life and successful mother-hood.

The remarks of K. Krishnamoorty in this regard may be seen as follows: "It thus stands out clearly that Kalidasa's major heroines are all paragons of moral perfection and mothers of matchless heroes, honouring tradition of the family (*kula-dharma*) in such earnest that they would willingly brave any sacrifice in moments of crisis as illustrated in the careers

of Sitā and Śakuntalā. There is the streak of spirituality which almost divinises these heroines on earth, while in the case Pārvatī, it is entirely divine". Thus the women of higher social life contributed to the dignified social order with a universal appeal.

Portrayal of the Common Women:

In addition to the great heroines of epic glory Kālidāsa presents common woman life of both villages and cities. The innocent country-women are ignorant of the sportive movements of their eyes and look at cloud with cheers and joy (*Meghadutam-‘MD’, 1.16*). At the advent of rain some with faces covered by the marks of the drops of perspirations pluck jasmine flowers in the gardens grown at the banks of *Vananadī (MD,1.27)*; some others with their tresses raised up look at the cloud with the hope of the arrival of their husbands, who travelled abroad (*MD,1.8*). It is also noted that innocent female keepers of the rice-field sitting in the thickets of the sugar canes sang the songs for Raghu (*Raghuvamśa, 4.20*). On the other hand in the sophisticated city life of Vidisa and Ujjain some well trained talented courtesans are seen with divine service of dance and music in the temples. Sophisticated ladies used shower baths (*yantradhārāgrha, MD,1.64*) and incensive smokes (*Keśasaṃskāra dhūpa, MD,1.35*) for decorating their tresses. *Yakṣapatnī* composed poetry with the name of her husband, played the lute in her lap and also conversed with her pet parrot (*sārikā*) to while away the toe time of separation (*MD,2.25-26*).

The other category of women character in Kalidāsa were the handmaids and help-mates. Anasūyā and Priyamvadā were the help-mates of Śakuntalā. In Kalidasian sketches all the queens and royal ladies were having their own hand-maids. The reader meets *Bakulavālikā* and *Nipuṇikā* in the play the *Mālavikāgnimitra* where *Mālavikā* herself also played the role of a hand-maid Pārvatī in the *Kumārasambhava* is seen with her handmaid *Vijayā*. In the words of K.Krishnamoorty: "These handmaids are all experts in several artistic accomplishments, and they served the heroines as their mouth pieces. Though enlisted for doing odd jobs, non of them show any meanness or discontent or vile nature, which shows how Kālidāsa had almost shut his eyes to ground reality or the seamy side of life" (*Kalidasa,118-119*).

The *Kumārasambhava* bears reference to the practice of Satī during the period. After the death of Madana, the widow Rati moved to the funeral pyre of her own accord (*KS,4.33-36*) who was prevented by the words of consolation and blessings from the heaven (*KS,4.44*). The goddess Satī, the daughter of Dakṣa driven by the insult offered by her father to her husband (Lord Śiva) abandoned her body through yogic practices (*KS,1.21*). It shows that women sacrificed their lives for the sake of their devoted love for their husbands.

The inheritance of property by woman is understood from the Dhanamitra episode in the 6th act of the *Abhijnānaśākuntalam*. Dhanamitra was a sea-faring foreman of a merchant-guild, who died in a ship-wreck. With many wives he was childless and so as per the then law of inheritance his property was expected to be confiscated to the royal treasury. Therefore though enquiry it was found that one of his wives belonging to Saketa was pregnant and the king directed inheritance in favour of the foetus in the womb (*AS,6.26 ff.*). In the same way when the king of Raghu's race Agnivarṇa died issueless the ministers consecrated the pregnant queen on behalf of the child in the womb (*Raghuvamśa,19.55-56*). Thus Kālidāsa's pen picture of women was within the frame work of the cultural and literary traditions of the land. During the period the women of high pedigree were very much respected. There was scope for rising from the lower to the higher position of the society. A forelorn hermit girl Śakuntalā could rise to the height of the position of the queen. It is seen that Gautamī, Śakuntalā's matron and Parivrājikā, a learned and reputed personality in the *Malavikāgnimitra* could become the role-model of respect in the society. Women enjoyed

adorable and dignified position and were given option for marriage by self choice (*svayamvara*). They were the embodiments of service and sacrifice. The anecdotes like *Putrapīṇḍa pālanavrata* by the mother-queen for Duṣyanta, the *Patiprasādana-vrata* (propitiating the husband) by the queen Auśīnārī in the *Vikramorvaśīya* and Aśokadohana in the *Mālavikāgnimitra* show that women as mothers, wives and daughters sacrifice their lives for the cause of the family and welfare of the state.

Kālidāsa's woman-life like that of the life of man corresponded to the social order of *caturāśramas* (four stages of life) and *caturvarga* (four ends of life like- *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*). This is understood from the advice of Kāśyapa to Śakuntalā at the time of her departure to her husband's abode.

Clasping the father Śakuntalā sobs aloud and asks how can she support her life in a foreign soil like a sandle-plant uprooted from the Malaya-mountain? Here the father consoles the child with few mellifluous lines that suggest her duties for the four ends of life as follows: Placed in the respected position of the house-wife of a high-pedigreed husband (suggesting *dharma*-righteous act) and at every moment distracted very much by the affairs of excessive wealth (suggesting *artha*-material prosperity) very soon having given birth to a hallowed son like *Prācī* (the east) to *Arka* (the sun) (suggesting fulfilment of *Kāma* – worldly desires), oh my child ! You shall never take account of the pangs of separation from me (suggesting *mokṣa*-release from worldly bondages). (AS,4.19).

Thereafter being asked by the weeping Śakuntalā about the time of her next visit to the hermitage the sage suggests her to cross four *āśramas* of life as follows: After crossing the stage of *brahmacaryāśrama* in Kāśyapa's hermitage Śakuntalā is advised to continue as the fellow bride of the earth (the queen of Duṣyanta as the kings were considered the lord of the earth) and to settle her only son, in the throne without a rival (suggesting the completion of the work of a household *grhasthāśrama*). Then having transferred the burden of the kindred to her son, settled in marriage (suggest) the duties before *vānaprasthāśrama* that precedes *yativrata* or *sannyāsāśrama*), she along with her husband shall come back to this hermitage (AS,4.20).

All above points proves the duties, position and status of women in ancient India during the period of Kālidāsa.

Conclusion:

The above study reveals that Kālidāsa modelled the women characters that conformed to the rules of the dramaturgy and the social sciences of the day. The social philosophy of *caturvarṇa* (four caste order), *caturāśrama* (four stages of life) and *caturvarga* (four ends of human life) had enduring effect in modulating the characters. All the categories at different stages of woman-hood like baby-girls, girls, young women and old women etc. are seen in the literary art of the poet. However, the reader seldom encounters with very old women characters like Dākṣāyani, the wife of the sage Marīci (*Śakuntalā, Act-VII*) and mother of Duṣyanta (*ibid, Act-II*). Though most of the women characters fall into the accepted categories of the Sanskrit Poetics like *svā*, *anyā*, *sādhāraṇī*, *mugdā*, *madhyā*, *pragalvā* etc. (cf. *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.56-80) still the poet has painted some gifted heroines of distinguished personal traits, unusual divine qualities and adorable universal appeal. Sitā, Śakuntalā, Pārvatī, Indumatī and Yakṣapatnī are very coy and delicate and at the same time dignified and courageous to accept the challenges of life at the teeth of odds and adversaries. Śakuntalā after being repudiated by her husband Duṣyanta tried her best to vindicate her secret marriage in the court of law. Sitā, after being exiled by Śrīrāma blamed only her misfortune and promised to practice penance so that she will have no separation in the next life (*Raghuvamśa*, 14.66). Therefore the study reveals that the heroines were more tolerant than

revolutionary, but they had their sway at all the walks of life and stood for the cause of the universal social good.

Works Cited

1. *Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam* of Kālidasa.ed. R.M Bose, Calcutta: Modern Book Agency pvt.ltd.,1976.
2. Brahma, G.K. *Fresh Light on some slokas of Kalidasa*, Bhubaneswar: Brahma Publications,1988.
3. Mirashi, V.V. and N.R. Navalekar. *Kālidāsa*, Bombay : Popular Prakashan, 1969.
4. *Sāhityadarpaṇa* of Visvanatha Kaviraja.ed. Saligrama Sastri, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 2014 Reprint.
5. Sastri, K.S. Ramaswami. *Kalidasa: His Genius Ideals and Influence*, Vol. I & II, Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1933.
6. *Mālavikāgnimitram* of Kalidasa. Ed. C.R. Devdhan, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1977 Reprint.
7. *Meghadūta* of Kālidāsa.ed. M.R.Kale, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, 2011Reprint.
8. *Ritusamhāra* of Kalidasa.ed. M.R. Kale, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1967.
9. Krishnamoorthy, K. *Kālidāsa*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi,1994.
10. *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidasa.ed. M.R. Kale, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, Pvt. Ltd.2011 Print.