

Kalidasa and his Times

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INTRODUCTION

In coming to the date of Kalidasa, we approach an extremely vexed point of Sanskrit antiquarian scholarship. In spite of years of patient research and close criticism, the point has not yet been finally settled. But the balance of the views put forward seems to point to the 6th century as the probable date of India's greatest poet. Before summarizing the arguments which led us to this conclusion, let us take a rapid glance at the other theories, at any rate, at the more important of them.

1 M. Hippolyte Fanche makes Kalidasa a contemporary of the Raghus, described in the *Raghuvamsa* as a posthumous child. The arguments leveled against this theory by *Mr. S. P. Pandit* are —

- (I) that Kalidasa does not describe the career of this supposed contemporary of his as he does the careers of his predecessors and ancestors,
- (II) that it is a serious question whether the 19 Cantos that are extant exhaust the poem,
- (III) that it would not be correct to suppose that there were no more princes of the line of the Raghus, because Kalidasa does not describe more.

2 There is an of-quoted memorial verse occurring in a work of the 13th Century, which associates Kalidasa along-with eight other alumni with the court of *Vikramaditya*. The verse runs as follows —

धन्वन्तरिः क्षपणकोडमरसिंहं शंकु
वेतालभट्ट घटकर्पर कालिदासाः।
ख्यातो वराहमिहिरो नृपते सभायाम्
रत्नानि वै वररुचिर्नव विक्रमस्य॥

—*Jyotirvidabharana*

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Kalidasa and his Times

On the strength of this authority *Sir William Jones* places Kalidasa in the 1st century before Christ, holding this King Vikrama to be same as the supposed founder of the Vikrama era (B. C. 57). This theory obviously involves three suppositions:

- The verse cited above is a genuine verse,
- The Vikrama mentioned therein was the king known to tradition as the founder of the Samvat era, and
- The Kalidasa of the verse was the renowned author of the *Shankuntala* etc. Now (a) there is nothing to show the genuineness of the verse. Again (b) the *Rajataranjan* describes no less than three different Vikramas, which renders it difficult to decide which of the three presided at the court graced by the nine gems. The only work which associates Kalidasa with the epoch-maker, Vikrama is a Jaina text entitled *Jyotirvidabharana*. The book has been fathered upon Kalidasa, but scholars of the critical acumen of Dr. *Bhau Daji* and *Mr. S. P. Pandit*, *Dr. Hall* and *Dr. Kern* have pronounced it to be spurious. Much capital is sought to be made for the purpose of this theory of an inscription found at *Bodda Gaya* which makes mention of a Vikrama, but to which Vikrama is meant is still a question. Beside, the genuineness of this inscription is seriously doubted and its translation considered unauthoritative, In fact, many renowned investigators and critics doubt the real personality of the king whom tradition credits with having founded the Vikrama era. *Mr. Fergusson* is responsible for a theory known as the Korur theory, according to which, the famous battle of Korur having been fought and won by Vikramaditya in the year 544 A. D., an era was established to commemorate the victory, and to give this new era an appearance of antiquity, it was thrown back 600 years. This calculation, of course, yields the date of 56 B. C., but why exactly 600 years and why not more or less remains a serious question. Such as it *Mr. Fergusson* would suppose the era to begin for recording purpose in 544 A. D. But discovery since made of the Mandsour Inscription delivers an effective prick at *Mr. Fergusson's* ingenious bubble, because it bears date in the year 494 of Vikrama era, The fact is that modern opinion looks upon the personality of the founder of the Vikrama era as a myth, As for (c) there is no date to establish independently of our verse that the Kalidasa mentioned therein is our poet.

3 Taking his stand upon *Bhojaprabandha*, *Mr. Bentley* pronounces that the Vikrama of nine gems tradition was the successor of Bhoja in the 11th century A. D. We have *Col. Todd's* authority for saying that there were three Bhoja's whose date this historian of Rajasthan gives as 555 A. D., 665 A. D. and 144 A. D. respectively. In which of these there was in the contemplation of the Bhojaprabandha, it is difficult to say. In fact, *Mr. S.P. Pandit* dismisses this book with the remark that it is silly medley of Absurdana Chronisms.

4 *Prof. Lasson* utilizes the numismatic and epigraphic title of the friend of the Poet affixed to the name of Samudragupta for his theory that Kalidasa lived in the latter half of the Second century A. D. The line of reasoning adopted by the learned professors is that Samudragupta must

Kalidasa and his Times

have been a friend and contemporary of Kalidasa. This reasoning is on the face of it anything but sound, and hence it is not necessary to pause over it.

5 A Jaina work entitled *Shatrunjaya Mahatma* affords data to *Col. Wilford* to enunciate his theory that Kalidasa lived in the 5th century A.D. But reputed critics doubt the authority of the Jaina work, which in fact detracts a good deal from the soundness of *Col. Wilford's* theory.

Now we come to the theory of the 6th century. It was propounded by *Dr. Bhau Daji* and has been independently acquiesced in since by *Prof. Max Mutter, Dr. Kern, Dr. Bhandarkar* and *Mr. M.B. Pathak*. Before summarizing the argument that is to support this theory, let us look about us for any data for fixing at least the downward limit of our Poet's date. *Prof. Weber* says that the dramas of Kalidasa directly furnish none. Still, *Prof. Weber* goes on "*the mention of the Greekfemale slaves in attendance upon the king points at least to a time not especially early : While the form in which the popular dialects appear, and which, as compared with that of the inscription of Piyadasi, is extraordinarily degraded, not infrequently coinciding with the present form of these Vernaculars, brings us down to a period at any rate several centuries after Christ.*"

The vagueness of this conclusion is removed by such facts as the following. The Aihole Inscription of the Saka year 556, i.e. 634 A. D. makes a reference to Kalidasa, Bana's (beginning of the 7th century A. D.) eulogies of Kalidasa in his *Harsha Charita* are too well-known to need mention and Goudavaho of the 8th Century refers to the author of *Raghuvamsha*. The lexicographer *Kshiraswami*

quotes from *Raghuvamsha, Vikramorvashiyam.....and Meghadiita*.

These allusions blow up the theory of Kalidasa's contemporaneity with Bhoja of Dhar (A. D. 993). Let us now turn to the argument variously adduced in support of the theory that Kalidasa belonged to the first part of the 6th century A. D.

A) The nine gems tradition helps this theory only so far as it goes. Because if the three suppositions, mentioned in Para.2 above are proved or granted, the inclusion of Varahamihira, the astronomer furnishes an unmistakable index to the date of Kalidasa, as there is good authority for saying that Varahamihira died in 587 A. D.

B) The Story occurs in the *Rajatarangini* that Hiranya, the ruler of Kashmir having died without an issue, Harsha, Vikramaditya of Ujjain, gave the throne of Kashmir to a poet named Matrgupta Who had come to his court to seek patronage. *Dr. Bhau Daji* expresses the opinion that Matrgupta was none else but poet Kalidasa, but he feels some hesitation at the fact that Kalhana, the author of the *Rajatarangini*, fails to bring out an identity between the two.

Mr. Nandargikar canvasses the point fully and comes to the conclusion that Matrgupta and Kalidasa were two different poets altogether.

Kalidasa and his Times

C) The 14th stanza of the *Meghadūta* is made the basis of a theory on the authority of Mallinatha alone who seen in it a punning allusion to an enemy of the poet. This interpretation is not supported by Hemadri, another noted commentator of Kalidasa. Mallinatha is silent as to whether he had in his mind the Buddhist teacher *Dinnaga*. Again the Buddhist teacher is not referred to in any document earlier than the 16th century as a pupil of Vasubandhu. Lastly, Vasubandhu's date is itself disputed. Hence, a great caution is required in placing much reliability on the *Dinnaga* theory.

D) In the 4th canto of the *Raghuvamsha*, while describing the campaigns of Raghu, the poet refers to the Northern country where saffron is grown. This territory is evidently Kashmir, Raghu is mythical hero of ideal bravery, and in the poet's imagination his bravery reaches its highest point when he conquers the Hunas. This trend of description obviously implies that the power of the Hunas was at its Zenith at the time of or immediately before the composition of the poem. Now history tells us that the period when the empire of the Hunas in the valley of the Indus was the most powerful was the time of Toramana and Mihirakula; the latter is described in the *Rajatarangini*. The Chinese traveller *Hiuen Tsiang* has also given an account of the reign of the Huna chieftain, Mihirakula, Mihirakula began to reign in 515 A. D. Kalidasa, therefore, must belong to the first half of the 6th century.

E) The word *Jamitra* occurs in *Kumarasambhava* (VIII). Kalidasa also alludes to the theory of the lunar eclipses of which the Greeks are supposed to be the first exponents. There are many other passages where Kalidasa evinces a minute acquaintance with the sciences of astronomy and astrology. Now Aryabhata (born 476 A. D.) is credited with being the first Indian astronomer who studies the Greek astronomy. It may be noted in this connection that Varahamihira, with whom the traditional verse cited in II above, associates our poet was a well known astronomer of the 6th century. The astronomical and astrological allusion in Kalidasa, therefore, may be said to suggest a conclusion that he belonged to the 6th century.

F) There is a Sinhalese tradition according to which Kalidasa must be a contemporary of Kumaradasa, king of Ceylon. Kumaradasa began his reign in 515 A. D.

G) Prof. Cowell propounds the theory that for many of the verses in the *Raghavamsha* and *Kumarasambhava*, Kalidasa is indebted to Ashvaghosha's *Buddha Charita*. The *Buddha Charita* was translated into Chinese in the beginning of the 5th century; it, therefore, must have been composed at least a century or two earlier. If Kalidasa drew upon this work, he must have come considerably later; otherwise the exploitation of a contemporary work would not be compatible with his high position as a leading poet and with the high esteem and love with which he must have been regarded even by his contemporaries.

Kalidasa and his Times

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