



History or Myth? With Reference To The Biography Of Kalidasa And Shakespeare:A Comparative Aspect

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ABSTRACT:

“Shakespeare is the Kalidasa of England and Kalidasa is the Shakespeare of India,” is a well-known and popular dictum. Just as Shakespeare holds a unique place in English Literature as a dramatist, similarly Kalidasa has its own distinctive place as a poet and dramatist in the field of Sanskrit Literature. Englishmen regard Shakespeare as the greatest poet and dramatist, the world has ever produced; similarly Indians pay the same tribute to Kalidasa. Mahakavi Kalidasa, “Servant of Kali” was a renowned Classical Sanskrit poet and dramatist; just as Shakespeare in English Literature is the author of Comedies, Tragedies, Histories and Tragicomedies. Their names have become a household word with the students of both English and Sanskrit Literature and lovers of Drama, the world over. Yet we do not possess any documented information about them, their lives and the time, in which the life of the two great dramatists, unfolded. All we are left with, are legends, which have been woven around their personalities. Both of them have a veil of ambiguity round themselves so complete that even their real name is not known to posterity.

Keyword: The life of each of the two great dramatists is shrouded in mystery, and so their biography is based on internal and external evidences.

COMPARATIVE ASPECT OF BIOGRAPHY:

Shakespeare is the greatest literary figure in English Literature. He was the greatest dramatist of England. Despite Shakespeare’s greatness and worldwide fame, our knowledge of his life is rather meagre. This is, however, not very surprising. The reason is that in the sixteenth century, there were no newspaper or periodicals to record the principal events in the lives of great men. Like many great names of yore, the unknown life-story of the dramatist has been a thing of untold speculation and conjecture. Due to lack of enough material, there are schools who put a very big question mark even on the name of Shakespeare but it is futile to pay much heed towards these propositions, as many have cropped up but have been refuted side by side.

Similarly, there are three main reasons, why there are diverse tales about Kalidasa. In the first place, as already mentioned, he has not said anything about himself in his works. Secondly, there are number of works attributed to him, all of which could not have come from the pen of the same poet. Thirdly, when a person attains great fame, as for instance, Vikramaditya, there is a tendency for others to adopt his name, resulting in confusion about the real identity. Poet Rajashekhara has said that, “There might be not one but three Kalidasa.” (Winternitz 45)

Little is known about Kalidasa’s life. According to legend, he was known for his beauty, which brought him to the attention of Princess Vidyottama and she married him. However, as legend has it, Kalidasa had grown up without much education, and the princess was ashamed of his ignorance and coarseness. A devoted worshipper of Kali, Kalidasa is said to have called upon his goddess for help when he was going to commit suicide in a well, after he

was humiliated by his wife, and was rewarded with a sudden and extraordinary gift of wit. The goddess relented, and inscribed some letters on his tongue. He then became a great poet- scholar. Since goddess Kali blessed him, he assumed the name of 'Kalidasa' (devotee of Kali). This is one of the most popular legends about Kalidasa. There are several other stories but they lack authenticity.

Likewise, despite great labour that has gone into discovering the complete life-history of Shakespeare, the material we have got is still as insufficient, as it is uncertain. People, therefore, have to move in the world of conjecture. Whatever knowledge we have about him, is derived from four sources: entries in the Parish register of Stratford-on-Avon, legal translations such as purchase of property, or law suits, in which Shakespeare was involved and his will, the original document of which is extant; second, references in the writings of other Elizabethan men of letters to Shakespeare's plays, characters or incidents of life; third his own plays; and lastly tradition or legends or stories, associated with him. Of these, the first two sources are most reliable and fruitful. The third, viz his plays, throws little light except in a general way, on his life, while the last source, tradition, is very unreliable and has been increasingly discredited.

William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and baptised there on 26 April 1564. His actual date of birth remains unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April. The common practice in those days was to present the newly born for baptism between the third and sixth day after his birth. Hence Shakespeare's birthday is taken to be April 22 or 23, 1564, at Stratford-on-Avon, in Warwickshire of England, deduced from his baptism date. Since Shakespeare died on 23 April, his birth date also is generally taken to be 23 of April, as it makes for poetic perfection.

Similarly, Kalidasa's period cannot be dated with precision. His name is discussed not only in India but also in many countries of the world. 'Kalidasa Jayanti' is celebrated not only in India but also in Europe. Many Indians and Western critics have written much about Kalidasa. His works have been studied for a long time on account of philosophic, cultural, social, moral and psychologic point of view, and, according to their own interest, every critic discover something about him. Kalidasa has not written something about himself, so it is very difficult to decide his age and life sketch. Nothing is known with certainty about the life of Kalidasa. Clearly later than the great Buddhist poet, Asvaghosha (1st century), Kalidasa was celebrated as a major literary figure in the first half of the 7th century (the Aihole inscription, 634). The scholarly consensus outside India is, that Kalidasa flourished in the time of Chandragupta II (reigned 380-413). A traditional Indian view would have it that he adorned Vikramaditya's court in the 1st century B.C.

Kalidasa's birthplace is also not certain. Various regions in the country have laid claim to the honour of being the poet's place of birth. It is clear from reading his works, that the greater part of his life must have been spent in Malwa (ancient Avanti); and that in the deepest sense, Ujjayini, of which city he writes with such affection and pride, was the poet's own city. His poems contain detailed descriptions of the city of Ujjayini and its majestic buildings. Learned commentators have expressed different views, thereon. There is no dispute that whatever was his actual birth place, he had travelled widely in Northern India; his description of places, rivers, mountains etc. clearly echo his personal experiences. Because of his vivid descriptions of the Himalayas and Kesara flowers found mostly in Kashmir, some claim that Kalidasa belonged to Kashmir. Many have tried to establish in turns, that Kalidasa's birth place was Vidarbha, Malwa and Simhala. But there is little to support these views. Mirashi has refuted all these opinions and gave evidence that Kalidasa spent his childhood in Ujjayini.

On the other hand, it is said about Shakespeare that he was, indeed, a country boy endowed with remarkable sensitivity. It is more correct and proper to say that Shakespeare could not have been Shakespeare without having been brought up at Stratford. The vast and rich asset of natural grandeur enriched the vast store of beauty at Shakespeare's command. His early life was the chief spring of his creative art. It was the fountain of light and delight of his poetic vision and it made him intensely poetic. His varied experiences also gave him a first-hand knowledge of fun and pleasure.

There are a number of works attributed to Kalidasa but all of those could not have been written by the same writer. The works attributed to Kalidasa are- 'Nalodya', 'Rakshaskavya', 'Sringaratilak', 'Shrutbodh', 'Jyotirvidabharan', and 'Setubandh', Kuntleshwardotya. But Garolla

said that the discovery of the scholars have proved that Nalodya 'Rakshaskavya', 'Sringaratilak', 'Shrutbodh', 'Jyotirvidabharan', and 'Setubandh' are not written by Kalidasa but they are written by the writers, assuming the name of Kalidasa (Garolla 846). According to Baldev Upadhyay, 'Shrutbodh', 'Nalodya' etc. granths are considered to be written by Kalidasa but they neither contain that type of poems, that are written by Kalidasa nor there is any historical fact, that they are the works of Kalidasa. After the great Kalidasa, many have adopted the name of Kalidasa. This may be the work of any of them." (Upadhyay 75). According to Winternitz, Let there be any number of Kalidasas; we are concerned with, and our eternal gratitude is due only to the Kalidasa who produced Raghuvamsham, Abhijnanasakuntalam and other monumental works, universally accepted as his. Winternitz suggests, "Indisputably belonging to the poet are the epics Kumarasambhavam and Raghuvamsham, the Dramas Abhijnanasakuntalam and Vikramorvashiya and the lyric Meghadutam and most probably also the Drama Malavikagnimitra and perhaps the garland of songs Ritusamharam too." (Winternitz 49)

Just as it is impossible to write Kalidasa's biography, it is impossible to establish the order in which his works were composed or to show development, therein. The poet has left us seven works; two long lyrical poems, three plays and two epics. Their chronology is uncertain. Many other works, including even an astronomical treatise, have been attributed to him. In their chronological order, his works stand as under:- Ritusamharam ("The gathering of the Seasons"), Malavikagnimitra ("Malavika and Agnimitra"), Kumarsambhavam ("Birth of the War God"), Vikramorvashiya ("Urvashi Won by Valour"), Meghadutam ("Cloud Messenger"), Raghuvamsham ("Dynasty of Raghu"), Abhijnanasakuntalam ("The Recognition of Shakuntala")

Shakespeare's works, include 36 plays printed in the First Folio of 1623, listed according to their folio classification as Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. Two plays not included in the First Folio, The Two Noble Kinsmen and Pericles, Prince of Tyre, are now accepted as part of the canon, with scholars agreed that Shakespeare made a major contribution to their composition. No Shakespearean poems were included in the First Folio. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets (written in the 1590's but published in 1609). Besides giving a new form to sonnet writing, we find an infinite variety and lyrical flow in these sonnets. They also contain references – mostly, sad ones – to his private life. The identity of 'The Dark Lady' and the 'Fair Youth' of the sonnets, yet remain a mystery. These sonnets of Shakespeare can be divided in two segments – the longer and the shorter. In addition to these sonnets, there are six sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music.

William Shakespeare's dramatic career extends over a period of nearly twenty years, from 1590 to 1613. During this period, the dramatist worked producing, on an average, about two plays a year. Some of his plays had appeared in one or more separate editions, known as the Quartos. The complete set of thirty-seven plays first appeared in the First Folio Edition of 1623, seven years after the death of Shakespeare. It was published by his friends, Heminge and Condell, and he classed them as Tragedies, Comedies and Histories. This edition does not contain Pericles. The original copy of the First Folio (1623), available at the National Museum, Delhi contains 36 plays. Further Folio editions of these plays appeared in 1632, 1663, 1664 and 1685.

It was only in 1709, 100 years after the death of Shakespeare, that the first critical edition of his plays appeared. This was the work of Rowe, who provided lists of dramatist's personal and a clear division into acts and scenes. Though many more editions were published, But Peter Alexander's volume of complete works (1951), is the most modern, authentic and widely read edition. It consists of 37 plays including, Pericles, Prince of Tyre, whereas Encyclopedia Britannica mentions a list of 38 plays further including The Two Noble Kinsmen, (a play considered to be of collaborated authorship of William Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher.) The 37 plays are classified as (fourteen) Comedies, (eleven) Historical Plays, (eight) Tragedies and (four) Romances.

Thus, the life of Kalidasa, as well as of Shakespeare, remains almost a blank and their very name, a subject of contention. About their private lives, absolutely, no information, that is trustworthy, is available. The life-history of

Kalidasa, as well as of Shakespeare, is absolutely fascinating and interesting. Little authentic facts are known about their lives. Some great writers have not cared to give much information about themselves, in their works, But they are left to be judged by their intrinsic merit, without the personality of the author influencing the readers. They do not seem to have subscribed to the theory that knowledge about the author, would help readers to appreciate their works better and it applies to both the two great legends, Kalidasa and Shakespeare.

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