# Art & Iconographic features in Kalidasa Works

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The approach of Kalidasa has not yet been fully developed although the art evidence in his works is quite considerable. Kalidasa refers to particular forms of Hindu gods and goddesses for example, to Kartikeya riding on the back of a peacock and holding a spear (mayura- prishtasrayina Guhena). This feature of Kartikeya images did not exist in the Kushana period, but was distinctly found in the Gupta period. He also refers to the images of two river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna in human form and attending in the worship of deities (Kumar VII 42). It is an undisputed fact with regard to the Indian temple architecture that this feature was found for the first time in the Gupta period. Not any writing in Kushana or earlier periods could have thought of images of Ganga and Yamuna attending on the deity. It was only during the Gupta period that this became an accepted motive of art, literature and iconography. Kalidasa also mentions the seven mothers and especially Kali decorated with a kapala ornament (Kali Kapalabharana, kumar, VII 30). This again is an iconographic feature inconceivable before the Gupta period. The reference in the Raghuvamsa(X. 60) to the Ayudha purushas of Vishnu in human form is also a feature which holds good in the Gupta period. Thus it can undoubtedly be said that the evidences of art as found in the works of Kalidasa represent the Golden Age of the Guptas.

In the present paper attention is drawn to a few instances present in the works of Kalidasa, which are found in the Buddhist Sanskrit literature also. The first instance,found in the II canto of Raghuvamsa viz. King Dilipa offering his body to a hungry lion to save the life of a cow. As the poet says 'the king offered his body to the lion like a lump of flesh' ( Haraye svadeham upanayat pindamivamishasya, II.59). The story has been most graphically related with consummate skill and perfect literary art. Indeed, it has not only immortalized Dilipa as an ideal king but has caught the imagination of millions of readers as a very sublimating force. This incident does not occur in any of the puranas, but is the product of Kalidasa's own mind. We find in it an attempt to create a parallel to the VyaghriJataka which symolised the perfection of compassion (karunyaparamita ) of the great Buddha. Because of the overflowing mercy of his heart, the Enlightened one had sacrificed his life in one of his previous births to save the life of a hungry lioness and her cubs. This is no doubt a very moving story possessing an intensely human appeal and touching the sympathetic chord of human heart. When properly related by accomplished story-tellers, it must have been simply irresistible. The great Bodhisattva in the Vyaghri Jataka typifies the eternal ideal of self- sacrifice for the sake of all living beings, than which nothing is greater. The inscriptions in the Kushana and Gupta periods speak of this ideal permeating the atmosphere in that age: sarva- sattvanam hitaya-sukhaya, for happiness and welfare of all living beings. This ideal of universal good was the dynamic force underlying the mighty civilization built up by the teachers and philosophers of Mahayana Buddhism. Their ideal of Bodhisattavahood revolves round this central theme.

The story of the VyaghariJataka seems to have been at one time extremely popular. Not only do we find it represented on railing pillars in the art of Mathura, but the poet Aryasura, who possibly is the contemporary of Kalidasa gives the place of honour to this Jataka in his collection of thirty two Jataka tales known as the Jatakamala. The incident in the life of Dilipa of feeding the hungry lion with his own body is Kalidasa's response discriminated as selected from the armoury of Hindu puranic myths and legends which were especially multiplied with many new versions during the Gupta period as the influential part of the prevalent literary style of the age.

Another important instance is that of the ' Rain of Gold' (Suvarna-vristi). This is also rooted in the facts of India' s economic history during the Gupta period as reflected in Gupta coins. We know that the period of the Guptas was literally a' Golden Age' . Through her international commerce, India had earned vast amount of gold and jewels. It is as if the country was inundated with an overflow of gold from all sides. The imperial Guptas hardly minted in copper. There are no silver coins of Samudragupta and Chandragupta except for a comparatively few specimens of the letters minted specially for circulation in western India after that region was wrested from Saka supremacy. The gold coins of Samudragupta, Chandragupta Vikramaditya and his son Kumaragupta are however abundant and present a veritable feast to the eye for the artistic beauty in their different types and varieties. In a great measure they represent the aesthetic culture of the Golden Age of Indian art. The Gupta coins have never been surpassed in the history of Indian numismatics for their artistic quality and variety. The emperors took a personal interest in their coinage, which served as the medium of illustrating their cultural life and religious specifications. In the great cities and

the countryside, in the palaces of the rich and in the homes of the poor the Gupta gold coins shed their sparkling luster and beauty. It seemed as if they were the foot-prints of the Goddess of Prosperity and plentiness, Lakshmi, who was the presiding deity of that period and the family goddess of the Gupta Emperors. This phenomenon of the abundance of minted gold on all sides set people thinking as to what was the source of this plentiness unseen and unheard of ever before. Mother earth would not have been credited with bearing the enormous wealth in her coffers. The idea naturally appealed to them was that this profusion was due to a rain of gold from heaven. In the fifth ($5^{th}$) canto of the Raghuvamsa, Kalidasa deals in his own inimitable manner and perfect poetic excellence with this suvarna-vrishti. 'When the Kings are pious, the earth fulfils the wishes of the people; this is natural and should cause no surprise. But miraculous is the glory of the new king who through his wisdom tapped even the heavens for golden showers' (RaghuvamsaV. 33). This literary instance belongs not exclusively to Kalidasa, but to that age. We find it also in the Divyavadana in the story of the great king Mandhata who says that in his palace there had fallen a rain of gold for seven days. (vrishtam me saptaham antahpure hiranyaVarsham, Divyavadana, XVII. P. 216) This instance was distinctive of the period which appears both in Buddhist Sanskrit literature and Kalidasa.

The Raghuvamsha and other works of the poet can be regarded as written against the background of thought in the particular cultural epoch of the Gupta period. The same ideas, imagery, expressions literary motifs and references appertaining to the art are only natural.