



VEDĀNTIC CONCEPTION OF SUPREME BEING IN KĀLIDĀSA

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Kālidāsa is not only sovereign among poets but also a philosopher and an advocate of dharma of the highest order. His kāvyas are a source of aesthetic pleasure; and also of *śivetarakṣati* which is considered to be one of the aims of poetical work.¹ Kālidāsa indicates in Meghasandeha that one's existence in this world is justified only when one takes refuge in God². Kālidāsa's work reveals not only his mastery over the darśana, kalpa-sūtra, dharma-śāstra, artha-śāstra, jyotiṣa and other branches of knowledge, but also his deep understanding of the Vedāntic lore.

Vedānta as the philosophy of life here and hereafter was well portrayed in the works of Kālidāsa. Kālidāsa as a poet ranks next to Vyāsa and Vālmiki who are accepted as ṛṣis-the seers of beyond, krānta-darśins. He brought into being an integral conception of Hindu Culture enriched by purāṇas.

The Upaniṣads, Brahma-sūtra and Bhagavadgītā are the tripartite basis for Vedāntic Philosophy. The Upaniṣads are known as Śruti-prasthāna, the Brahma-sūtras as Nyāya-prasthāna and the Bhagavadgītā as Smṛti-prasthāna. The Great Ācāryas like Śāṅkarācārya, Nimbārkācārya, Vallabhācārya, Rāmānujācārya and Sri Kṛṣṇa Caitanya have tried to propound their philosophies as contents of Upaniṣads, Brahma-sūtra and Bhagavadgītā and arrive at the central teaching of the latter by way of synthesis. Kālidāsa, long before these Ācāryas flourished, is found to have affected the same thing. He appears to take the role of a Mīmāṃsaka in reconciling the apparently conflicting passages in the Upaniṣads.

¹ काव्यं वल्लसेर्षकृते व्यवहारविदे शिवैतस्मिन्नेव—Kāvya-prakāśa 1.2

² In the verse हित्वा तस्मिन् (Megha, 1-60), the cloud is requested to form himself into steps for facilitating Pārvaī climbing the sports-hill.

1. THE CONCEPT OF SUPREME BEING

1.1. Image of Viṣṇu as Supreme Being –Kālidāsa has referred to innumerable images of gods through which they were worshiped. He has given several names and epithets to Viṣṇu, who is the object of worship and devotion in Vaiṣṇavism. Besides Viṣṇu, the poet has referred to a number of gods such as Nārāyaṇa, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Mahāvarāha etc. All these gods are the different manifestations of Viṣṇu. The poet has spoken of Nārāyaṇa as being the father of Urvaṣī³. Again the aerial region is described as the middle pace of her father⁴. This clearly identifies Nārāyaṇa with Viṣṇu, whose middle region, as represented through the second stride of Vāmana, is the sky. The dwarf incarnation of Viṣṇu is again identified with Rāmachandra⁵ establishing complete identity of the latter with the former. Mahāvarāha is said to have lifted up the earth from the billowing waves of the ocean at the time of dissolution⁶. This Mahāvarāha is identified with the Primeval Being Viṣṇu.⁷ Again Kṛṣṇa is but a manifestation of Viṣṇu.⁸ Viṣṇu has been described reclining on the couch formed by the thousand hooded Serpent.⁹ Viṣṇu has his feet resting on the lap of Lakṣmī sitting on a lotus.¹⁰ He wears on his chest the gem named Kaustabha.¹¹ Viṣṇu is further described as waited upon by Lakṣmī standing on lotus with a fan in her hand. He has four hands.¹² Identification of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa can be inferred from Mālavikāgnimitram, verse-2 also. Kālidāsa has given a great prominence to Viṣṇu. Not only this, by making Nārāyaṇa etc. only different incarnations of Viṣṇu, he has described Him as the highest being. The poet has praised Him in terms of the Highest in Raghuvamśam. Therefore in Kālidāsa, we can safely say, Viṣṇu has assured a great importance and He has become the Supreme.

³ ऊरुदत्ता नसाख्यस्य मुनेः सुरस्त्री...Vikram, L4

⁴ Vikram, L19

⁵ कामनाश्रमपदं ततः परं पावनं.....बभूव राघवः ॥ Raghū XI.22

⁶ निवारयामास महावसाहः कल्पक्षयोदृतमिवार्णवाम्भः । Raghū, VII.56

⁷ रसातलादिभवेन पुंसा भुवः प्रयुक्तोऽह्नक्रियायाः । अस्याच्छमम्भः प्रलयप्रवृत्तं मुहूर्तवक्राभरणं बभूव ॥ Raghū, XIII.8

⁸ येन श्यामं वपुरतिसं कान्तिमापस्वते ते , बहैषेव स्फुरितरुचिना गोपवेषस्य विष्णोः ॥ Megha, L15

⁹ शोषिभोगासीनासीनं ददुशुस्तं दिवोकसः । तत्कषामण्डलोदर्विमण्डितविग्रहम् ॥ Raghū, X.7

¹⁰ शिवः पद्मनिष्णयायाः क्षौमान्तरितमेखले । अङ्गे निक्षिप्तचरणमास्तीर्षकसपल्लवे ॥ Raghū, X.8

¹¹ प्रभानुलिप्तश्रीवत्सं लक्ष्मीविभ्रमदर्पणम् । कौस्तुभाख्यमयां सारं विभ्रानं बृहतोरसा ॥ Raghū, X.10

¹² हरिरिव युगदीर्घदोर्भिरसैस्तदीवैः , पतिरवनिपतीनां तैश्चकाशे चतुर्भिः ॥ Raghū, X.86



2. NATURE OF SUPREME BEING

2.1. Supreme Being is all pervasive - The Benedictory verses of the three dramas of Kālidāsa embody One of the principal tenets of teaching of Vedānta. Third Quarter of Nāndi in Mālavikāgnimitram states that Śīva is totally free from Self-conceit though he is the Sustainer of the entire Universe with his eight bodies- अष्टाभिर्यस्य कृत्स्नं जगदपि तनुभिर्विभ्रतो नाभिमानः . In the Nāndi of Abhijñānaśākuntalam, Śīva is described as having eight visible bodies (प्रत्यक्षाभिस्तनुभिः) i.e. the five gross elements, the sacrificer, the sun and the moon. The benedictory verse of Vikramorvaśīyam states that the Vedāntas declare Śīva as the only Supreme Being pervading the whole Universe. Whether Kālidāsa means Śīva, or Viṣṇu, or Brahman (the Creator) as the Supreme Being, is immaterial for the present paper.

एकैव मूर्तिर्विभिदे त्रिधा सामान्यमेषां प्रथमावसत्वम् ।

विष्णोर्हरस्तस्य हरिः कदाचिद्देहास्तयोस्तावपि धातुगच्छौ ॥ (Ku. VII.44)

What is important here is that the Supreme Being is manifested in the visible bodies of the five gross elements, etc. This shows that the poet considers the universe constituted by the sentient and non-sentient (चैतनाचैतन-प्रपञ्च) as the body of the Supreme. The word *Tanu* in the benedictory verse means something that includes the cosmic body of the Supreme as well.¹³ The inseparability of the Universe from the Supreme is pointed out in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad where water, fire, firmament, moon, speech, eyes, ears, etc., are referred to as constituting the body of Brahman.¹⁴

2.2. Supreme Being is the controller of the universe - The concept of body-soul relationship between the Supreme and the Universe signifies the relation as one being the Controller and the other being the Controlled. This is again indicated by the poet in the statement made in the course of his description of the simultaneous setting of the moon and the rising of the sun 'लोको नियम्यत इवात्मदशान्तरेषु' (Śāku, IV.2). Here, the sun and the moon, which are the body of the Supreme, are spoken of being controlled, as the universe (लोक) includes them also. These natural forces, like sun and moon, are controlled by the

¹³ यस्य चेतनस्य यदुद्रव्यं स्वार्थे धारयितुं नियन्तुं च कृत्स्नं तच्छेषतै कस्वस्य च ततस्य शरीरम् । Śrībhāṣya

¹⁴ Bṛ.Up.III.vii.3 to 22.



Brahman is an idea found in the Upaniṣads also.¹⁵ Supreme Being is identified with the Father of Fathers, God of the Gods with One beyond that which is beyond all and with the creator of the creators.¹⁶ Likewise, He has been called both the offering and the offerer, eatable and the eater, knowledge and the knower and the meditator and the object of meditation.¹⁷ He is supposed to dwell in the heart and still away to be free from desires yet as an ascetic, compassionate yet unaffected by grief, old yet not subject to decay.¹⁸ This idea is similar to that contained in the Īśāvāsyopaniṣad, 4-5. Though Omniscient; He is Himself unknown; though the source of all; He is Self-Existent; though the Lord of all, He is himself without a Superior, He is One yet, He assumes all forms.¹⁹ As an act of favour to the people, He condescends to take birth and act like human being.²⁰ This idea is similar to that contained in Bhagavadgītā where the view of incarnation and acting like human beings is expressed.

न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।
नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥ (III.22)

He is able to protect the people but still remains indifferent.²¹

2.3. Supreme Being is the mighty knower - As the Lord has no other cause of himself and is thus self-caused, so he has no other knower of Himself. He produces his objects from out of himself, and, therefore, his object, the world is not something other than himself; it is but only himself, and therefore he can bring about total absorption of himself by himself. Therefore the poet says -“Thou knowest thyself in thyself, thou createst thyself by thyself and art absorbed in thyself by thy own mighty self”.²²

2.4. Supreme Being is self-conscious - As He is the knower of all, His knowability is not dependent on anything else. He knows himself. He is thus the Absolute knower, and is not known by anybody.²³ If he be an object of a conscious subject of anything other than

¹⁵ भीष्मास्माकतः एवते । भीषोदेति सूर्यः ।...Tait. Up.VII.2

¹⁶ त्वं पितृणामपि पिता देवानामपि देवता । परतोऽपि पराशसि विधाता वेधसामपि ॥ Ku-II.14

¹⁷ त्वमेव हव्यं होता च भोज्यं भोक्ता च ज्ञाश्नतः । वेद्यं च वेदिता चासि ध्याता ध्येयं च वत्परम् ॥ Ku-II.15.

¹⁸ हृदयस्थमनासन्नमकारं त्वां तपस्विनम् । दयालुमनषस्मृष्टं पुरुणमजरं विदुः ॥ Raghu-X.19

¹⁹ सर्वज्ञस्त्वमविज्ञातः सर्ववोनिस्त्वमान्भूः । सर्वप्रभुरनीशस्त्वमेकस्त्वं सर्वरूपभाक् ॥ Raghu-X.20

²⁰ अनवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं न ते किञ्चन विद्यते । लोकानुग्रह एवैको हेतुस्ते जन्मकर्मणोः ॥ Raghu-X.31

²¹ शब्दादीन्विषयान्भोक्तुं चरितुं दुःखरं तपः । पर्याप्तोऽसि प्रजाः पातुमौदासीन्येन वर्तितुम् ॥ Raghu-X.25.

²² Kumārasambhavam trans. by Kale II.10

²³ Raghu-X.20



himself, he would be dependent upon that. Therefore, the Lord is self conscious subject - the first knower - self-consciousness.

2.5. Supreme Being is positive in nature and existent before creation - He is not void and is the ground of all reality; for the poet acknowledges him as the one soul before creation (*श्राक्सृष्टेः केवलात्मने*, Ku.II.4) The whole world of created beings is permeated through by the same eternal spirit and is grounded on oneness of its cause. cf. "Just as water from the sky which is originally of one (uniform) taste gains a diversity of flavours in different regions, so Thou being Immutable, assumest (different) conditions in (as identified with) different qualities."²⁴

2.6. Supreme Being is one - the threefold division is but three attributes - Though a three-fold division of the same Supreme Power with the predominance of the respective qualities of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* in the fields of creation, protection and the retraction is acknowledged, the same Supreme Being is described as the sole cause of them all. Elsewhere the poet says "that was one form which divided itself in three ways. Their seniority or juniority is common (interchangeable); sometimes Śiva is prior to Viṣṇu or Viṣṇu to Śiva; sometimes Brahmā to them both and sometimes the two to Brahmā."²⁵ Whatever be the name whether it is Śiva, Rudra, Brahmā or Viṣṇu, it is after all the Supreme Spirit that has transcended all multiplicity of the world.

2.7. Supreme Being is desireless in nature - Though in a corporeal frame with His manifestation of eight forms, He has no pride in it. cf. *अष्टभिर्वस्य कृत्स्नं जगदपि तनुभिर्विभ्रतौ नाभिमानः* (*Māla*, 11). Though He grants many desires, He is noted for his renunciation.

2.8. Supreme Being is self-luminous in character - Kālidāsa has laid sufficient emphasis upon self-luminous character of the Absolute in his writings. cf. "With their minds restrained by constant practice, ascetics seek Thee, whose form consists of light and who abidest in their hearts, for absolution."²⁶ He is conceived to be Prakāśa (self-luminous) dispelling darkness cf. *स हि देवः परंज्योतिस्तमः पारे व्यवस्थितम्* (*Ku* II.58).

2.9. Supreme Being is transcendental - Kālidāsa has shown a conspicuous tendency to portray God in its transcendental aspect more as a reality than as an abstract principal.

²⁴ रसान्तराण्यैकरसं यथा दिव्यं पवोऽरुनुते । देहे देशे गुणैश्वैवमवस्थास्त्वमविक्रियः ॥ *Raghu*, X.17

²⁵ *Kumārasambhavam* trans. By Kale VII.44

²⁶ अभ्यासविगृहीतेन मनसा हृदयाश्रयम् । ज्योतिर्मयं विचिन्वन्ति योगिनस्त्वा विमुक्तये ॥ *Raghu*, X.23

Therefore we see that Paramātmā or the Brahman of the Upaniśads has assumed the incarnation of the Highest Deity who is the Īśvara or Over-lord of the universe - an idea prominent in the epics and the Gītā and the earlier purāṇas. Such an idea of Īśvara as non-distinct from the Abstract Brahman of the Vedānta is also clearly visible in the Pātañjala Yoga where Īśvara is described as a *puruṣaviśeṣa* not touched by ignorance, activities, their fruits and impressions of the fruits of actions.²⁷

2.10. Supreme Being is immutable in consciousness - Supreme Being is Immutable in its real nature, because He is not the object but subject of activity and this subject is unchanged all throughout. This changeless character of the Absolute is denoted by the verse *जगद्धोनिरयोनिस्त्वं जगदन्तो निरन्तकः । जगदादिरनादिस्त्वं जगदीशो निरीश्वरः ॥(Ku II.9)*

2.11. Supreme Being's saḡuṇa character - Kālidāsa in the same verse described the Absolute as the source, the end, the beginning and the ruler of the Universe. This is his *saḡuṇa* aspect.²⁸

2.12. Supreme Being's nirḡuṇa character - At the same time He is above all these attributes (*प्राक्सृष्टेः केवलात्मने, Ku.II.4*). He is without a cause, without any end or beginning or a lord of Himself. This is his Nirḡuṇa aspect.

3. SUPREME BEING IS BOTH MATERIAL AND EFFICIENT CAUSE OF THE WORLD –

Just as the potter and his ideas of a pot cannot be separated, so also the efficient and the material cause of the world, the Absolute, cannot be conceived of in different identities. He is absolutely one though underlying the multiplicity difference, – “Thou alone art the cause of the creation, the protection and the retraction (of the universe).”²⁹ The difference is not apparent but it is implicit with the strong will for creation. “Male and female are the separate manifestations of thy own self (thus) split up through the desire of creating.”³⁰ The spirit may be contemplated as the male portion and the power aspect as the female, which has in its partial manifestation assumed the form of

²⁷ क्लेशकर्मविपाकाशयैर्यमृष्टः पुरुषविशेष ईश्वरः । Yoga-sūtra I.24

²⁸ Ku II.9

²⁹ तिसृभिस्त्वमवस्थाभिर्महिमानमुदीरयन् । प्रलयस्थितिसर्गाणामेकः कारणतां गतः ॥ Ku. trans. by Kāle II.6

³⁰ स्त्रीपुंसात्मात्मभागौ ते भिन्नमूर्तेः सिस्सृक्षया । प्रसूतिभाजः सर्गस्य तावेव पितरौ स्मृतौ ॥ Ku. trans. by Kāle II.7



Śakti a feminine entity. This Śakti has been variously described as *Prakṛti*, *Mātā*, *Māyā* etc.

Passages³¹ concerning the origin of the Universe from *Īśvara* and all things going back to him in *pralaya* are reminiscent of the Upaniṣadic conception of Brahma as the cause of Universe (*यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते...*, *Taitt.Upa.III.1*).

4. ATTAINMENT OF THE SUPREME BEING - Kālidāsa accepts the *karmyoga* of *Gītā*. The way to attain ultimate goal (*Supreme Being*) is explained in *Raghuvamśam*

त्वय्यावेशितचित्तानां त्वत्समर्पित-कर्माणां ।

गतिस्त्वं वीतरागणामभूयः-संनिवृत्तये ॥ (X.27)

This verse of *Raghuvamśa* could be meant as *chatuḥ-sūtrī* of *Brahma-Sūtra*.

4.1. Means of attainment of Supreme Being:-

(1)Meditate on the Lord

(2)Surrender all the Karmans to the Lord

(3)Detachment from all the objects of the Material World

Kālidāsa is also in the favour of meditation through Yoga, because through Yoga One can concentrate on Lord. In *Kumārasambhava* Kālidāsa has written—

योगिनो यं विचिन्वन्ति क्षेत्राभ्यन्तरवर्तिनम् ।

अनावृत्ति-भयं यस्य पदमाहुर्मनीषिणः ॥ (Ku.VI.77)

The only easy path leading to liberation is the firm and steady devotion to the Lord. Kālidāsa in the fourth quarter of *Nāndī* in *Vikramorvaṣīya* has written -

स स्थाणुः स्थिरभक्ति योगसुलभो निःश्रेयसावास्तु वः ।

This echoes a passage in the *Gītā* where Kṛṣṇa says that he is attainable only through unflinching devotion.³² In the Last stanza of the *Śākuntalam* Kālidāsa indicates that final liberation is *apunarāvṛtti*, not returning to the mundane world. *ममापि च क्षपयतु नीललोहितः*

पुनर्भवम् । Śāku.VII.35. The last stanza of the *Brahma-sūtra* states the same- *अनावृत्तिः*

शब्दात्- B.S. IV.IV.22

³¹ *Raghu X.16, X.18, X.20; Ku II.5-10*

³² *भवत्या त्वनन्यथा शक्य अहमेवविधौऽर्जुन । Bhagavadgītā XI.54*



Therefore, the attributes, nature, powers and so on, ascribed to Supreme Being, in the Vedāntic context, is well-reflected in the works of Kālidāsa. Through his synthetic vision and interpretative skill to harmonize the apparently conflicting passages of the Upaniṣads, we can consider him as Realistic Vedāntin.

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