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## The fifth canto of *Kumarasambhava*: A critical appreciation

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### Abstract

*Kumarasambhava* included in the Panchamahakavyas is one of the best works of the 'Kavikula guru' Kalidasa. This work is composed in eight Sargas. The main theme of this is the love of Śiva and Pārvati. The event behind the name *Kumarasambhava* is the birth of Kumara or Muruga (Skanda). But there are some who consider this an incomplete work as it does not mention Skanda's birth anywhere. The poet has tried to beautifully describe the greatness of married life. According to scholars, the story was completed due to the circumstances of Skanda's birth. Parvati's penance is often depicted as rigorous, involving physical and mental discipline. It highlights her determination and devotion. This act of tapas is believed to have pleased Lord Śiva who eventually accepts her as his consort. At the beginning of the fifth sarga, readers can see Parvati preparing to achieve what beauty cannot (to please Lord Śiva) with tapas. The fifth sarga is crucial as it marks the union of two powerful divine entities and sets the stage for the birth of their son, Kartikeya, who plays a significant role in Hindu mythology. Additionally, the fifth sarga showcases Kalidasa's poetic prowess through vivid descriptions of the lyrical beauty, intricate descriptions, devotion, cosmic forces, wedding rituals, celestial celebrations and the divine beauty of Shiva and Parvati. My paper also tries to discuss the uniqueness of Parvati's penance, concept of divine love, Alankaraprayoga, Nature illustration etc.

**Keyword:** Penance, wedding rituals, poetic beauty, divine love

### Introduction

After Valmiki and Vyasa, it can be said without a doubt that the great poet Kalidasa is the name that always remains in the minds of everyone. Poetry is also reflected in the works of Kalidasa. Unique beauty, beautiful expression of heart touching moments of life, philosophy, use of simple phrases, poetic imagery, rural setting, decorative applications and beautiful nature depiction are the hallmarks of Kalidasa's works. With the translation of his works in Malayalam, common people could also enjoy the sweetness of his works. Among his works, *Abhinjanashakuntala* has had more Malayalam translations. All the other works also had excellent translation in Malayalam.

Kalidasa's two epic poems are *Kumarasambhava* and *Raghuvamsha*. *Kumarasambhava*, which has seventeen sagas, contains the story of Parvatiparameshvaras.

Parvati was born as the daughter of Himavan and Mena in the first sarga and learned from sage Nārada that Śiva would be her husband in the future and Parvati fell in love with Siva. The story revolves around Parvati going to the Himalayas with the permission of her mother Mena. At the behest of the gods, Kamadeva and Vasanta together reach the Himalayas to perform the penance of Lord Siva to perform the penance of Lord Siva to kill Tarakasura and Kamadeva succeeds temporarily against the backdrop of the artificially created Vasanta Ritu, but ultimately fails. Kamadeva is consumed by the fire of Siva's anger. This is the plot of both second and third sargas. Fourth sarga is the lamentation of Rathidevi, the wife of Kamadeva. Realizing that no one in the world is as beautiful as her, Parvati realizes that she cannot win the mind of Lord Shiva with her physical beauty, and with a firm resolve to win Lord Shiva through her spiritual beauty, Parvati performs severe penance. In order to complete that penance, Lord Shiva comes to Tapovana in the form of a Brahmachari. Śiva in the form of Brahmachāri who mocked Śiva could not sway Parvati from her decision, and the theme of 5<sup>th</sup> Sarga is that Shiva finally appears before Parvati. The plot of the 6<sup>th</sup> sarga is that the Saptarṣis approach Himavan with proposal of marriage between Shiva and Parvati. Parvati and Shiva's marriage and their vilasakelis are represented in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Sargas.

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### The concept of love

Through *Kumarasambhava*, Kalidasa was able to bring Sahrdaya to the height of Sringara Rasa. The notion persists even today that if a woman has reached the limits of beauty prescribed by society at any given time, she can generally keep anyone on their feet with her beauty. We can see many people around us who have achieved things that could not be achieved through academic excellence, through beauty. This is what the poet says about his heroine Parvati in *Kumarasambhava*, Parvati is cursing her beauty for Shiva not falling in love with her, despite her beauty enough to bring the whole world under her feet. Nowadays, we see news all around us where the boy or girl who rejected their love is thrown acid on their face or killed. But in the story of *Kumarasambhava* written centuries ago, Kalidasa reveals that love rejected by the hero was won by severe penance<sup>[1]</sup>.

Realizing that severe penance is better than any other way to get a noble love and a world class husband that no other woman can get, Parvati goes to the Himalayas to do penance with the permission of her father Himavan and mother Mena. Mena tries to dissuade Parvati from going to the Himalayas to do penance for the realization of her love. Despite Mena's advice, her daughter Parvati could not be deterred from penance. Through *Kumarasambhava*, Kalidasa instill in the mind of Sahrdaya that inner beauty is more important than external beauty.

इति ध्रुवेच्छामनुशासती सतां  
शशाक मेना न नियन्तुमुद्यमात्  
क ईप्सितार्थस्थिरनिश्चयं मनः  
पयश्च निम्नाभिमुखं प्रतीपयेत् //<sup>[2]</sup>

### Application of alankara

Kalidasa in his work also presents warm feelings in a very simple and touching way. Therefore, the readers of Kalidasa's work can enjoy the meaning of the things intended by the poet without the help of someone else<sup>[3]</sup>.

It can be seen that the Dr̥sh̥tanta Alankara, as it is said that the Girisha Flower which can support the feet of a beetle cannot support the feet of a heavy bird. Here also Viṣamalankaram, as it describes two unrelated things: Parvati with a soft body performs austerities that should be performed by those who are strong in body. Alankaram Arthantharanyasam as the epithet that despite this advice, the mother Mene could not dissuade Parvati from her firm resolve to perform penance, is described in the general sense of who can hold back a flowing river<sup>[4]</sup>. Alankaram Utpreksha as it is described that Parvati gave up her vilasacheṣṭa and Chanchala notam after deciding to do penance and offered the vilasacheṣṭa in ilamvallis and the Chanchala notam as a deposit in deer pens<sup>[5]</sup>.

Parvati is not staying at home but is sleeping on the rock with constant wind and rain. Alankaram Utprekṣa as the lightning that occurs between the continuous winds and rain is described as the winks of the night witnessing the great penance of Parvati. Alankaram Uthpreksha as Parvati's face visible on the surface of the water, during the part of her penance, as she stands neck-deep in the water, attributed to the presence of the lotus flower in the body of water that has perished<sup>[6]</sup>.

In the conversation between Brahmachari and Parvati, it is said that due to the abandonment of Chempanj Charu, Parvati's pale red lips were able to match the shoots of the plants that Parvati grew. Here alankaram Prathipam as the shoot which is Upamanam is described as Upameyam<sup>[7]</sup>. Alankaram Utpreksha as Brahmachari likens the moving eyes of deer to the eyes of Pārvati<sup>[8]</sup>. Alankaram Drishtantam as

the two Prakrutha Prakrutha verses are rendered as bimba Prathibimbam, when the Brahmachari inquires as to the reason for penance, Parvati will not be attacked by anyone, and no one will reach out for the gems on the serpents head<sup>[9]</sup>. Alankaram Apresthutha Prasamsa, by describing that gem does not seek anyone, it is sought by others, Parvati, the gem of woman does not need to perform penance to get a groom, because it means that grooms need to perform the penance to get Parvati, the beauty of the three worlds, as a wife<sup>[10]</sup>. Alankaram Upama because Parvati, emaciated by severe fasts and withered by the heat of the sun, is likened to the crescent moon seen during the day<sup>[11]</sup>.

Alankaram Vishamam, where Brahmachari sneers at the bride tying the threads of the groom's cloths together at the time of marriage, describes a silk garment with a Kalahamsa image and an elephant skin dripping with blood as two unrelated objects<sup>[12]</sup>. Alankaram Apresthutha Prasamsa, the rituals which are given to the rope of sacrificial cow is not given to Smashna Shoola, means that Parvati's superior penance is not for the sake of Shiva, who is interested in doing amangalam. Vishama Alankaram also will come because two unrelated things are mentioned here like where is Shiva, the person who lokes to do amangala things and the Parvati, who is Samastha Punya Swarupa. Alankaram Upama because Parvati's condition, knowing that Shiva, whom she worships, has come as Brahmachari, is likened to that of a river that cannot flow due to obstruction<sup>[13]</sup>.

### Nature Concept

Kalidasa's works shows that he was a nature lover and nature observer. Beautiful nature description and seasonal changes in nature are his favorite subjects. The great poet Kalidasa's method was not to ignore the nature and give importance only to the subject. Therefore, Kalidasa's natural observation curiosity has influenced all the famous poets who came after him. Usually, we all see the beetle coming to the flower, drinking honey and flying away. But Mena telling her daughter Parvati about the rigors of penance by mentioning that a bird cannot sit on a withered flower is a good example of Kalidasa's observation of nature.

मनीषिताः सन्ति गृहेषु देवता –  
स्तपः क्व वत्से क्व च तावकं वपुः  
पदं सहेत भ्रमरस्य पेलवं  
शिरीषपुष्पं न पुनः पतत्रिणः // <sup>[14]</sup>

When Parvati is said to have spread forest grains like Chama to the deer with her own hands, it can be understood that the deer had the belief that Parvati would not harm them. The following is the story of the change in the forest after the practice of penance. Animals that were born enemies like cows and tigers have given up their primordial enmity. The trees were worshipped by giving auspicious fruits to the guests.

विरोधिसत्वोज्झितपूर्वमत्सरं  
द्रुमैरभिष्टप्रसवार्चितातिथि  
नावोटजाभ्यन्तरसंभृतानलं  
तपोवनं तच्च बभूव पावनं // <sup>[15]</sup>

By saying all this, the poet pictures the beautiful land of Tapovana in the mind of the Sahrudaya. Parvati's face, exhausted by penance is linked to a lotus flower facing the sun. A lotus that faces the sun will not wilt, but when exposed to excessive heat, the edges of its petals may turn black. If one

wants to understand the phenomena taking place in nature, only one who observe nature closely can do so. Kalidasa's closeness with nature is evident from his works. It is a part where the poet talks about the harsh story of summer heat.

तथातिसं सवितुर्गभस्तिभि-  
 मुखं तदीयं कमलश्रियं दधौ ।  
 अपाङ्गयोः केवलमस्य दीर्घयोः  
 शनैः शनैः श्यामिकया कृतं पदं ॥ [16]

During the Panchagni Penance, Parvati, whose body was overheated, was showered upward along with the wet earth by the first rains at the end of summer. The poet presents the most beautiful thing in his poetry that we can see when we look at nature.

द्रुमेषु सख्या कृतजन्मसु स्वयं  
 फलं तपः साक्षिषु दृष्टमेष्वपि  
 न च प्ररोहाभिमुखो अपि दृश्यते  
 मनोरथो अस्याः राशिमौलिसंश्रयः ॥ [17]

Parvati's Sakhy instead of saying to the Brahmachari that it has been a long time since Parvati started penance, even the trees that their friend Parvati planted with her own hands bore fruit and stood as a witness to the penance, but her passion for Chandrashekarana shows no signs of budding. One of the beautiful sloka from 5<sup>th</sup> sarga of *Kumarasambhava* which describes the state of Parvati when Lord Shiva in his Brahmachari form appeared before her in his own form. A comparison has been made with the situation of a river blocked by a mountain.

The fifth sarga (Canto) of *Kumarasambhava* an epic poem by the ancient Indian poet Kalidasa, holds significant importance both within the narrative and in the context of Sanskrit literature. Here are some key points highlighting its importance: 1. Development of Parvatis Character- This canto focuses on Parvatis intense penance to win the love of Lord Shiva. It showcases her determination, devotion and transformation from a princess into a powerful ascetic, emphasizing the theme of perseverance and the power of devotion. 2. Role in the Epics Plot- Parvatis penance is a crucial turning point in the story, as it sets the stage for the eventual union of Shiva and Parvathi. This union is essential for the birth of their son, Kartikeya (Kumara), who is destined to defeat the demon Tarakasura, thus fulfilling the prophecy that drives the narrative. 3. Spiritual and Philosophical Themes: The sarga delves into themes of asceticism, self-discipline, and spiritual striving. Parvati's penance symbolizes the soul's journey toward union with the divine, making it a significant section for understanding the deeper spiritual message of the epic. 4. Literary Excellence: Kalidasa's poetic prowess shines in this canto. His vivid descriptions of Parvati's austerities, the natural surroundings, and the reactions of the gods and sages are exemplary of classical Sanskrit poetry. The beauty of the language and the use of literary devices contribute to the sarga's enduring appeal. 5. Cultural and Religious Impact- The portrayal of Parvati's penance has influenced Hindu worship and iconography. The narrative underscores the virtues of patience, devotion and purity, which are celebrated in various cultural and religious contexts within Hindu tradition.

In Summary, the fifth sarga of *Kumarasambhava* is essential for its character development, plot progression, spiritual and philosophical depth, literary beauty, and cultural significance. It can be said that the great poet Kalidasa has been able to

reach the highest level of enjoyment without disappointing the friends who read *Kumarasambhava* 5<sup>th</sup> sarga. All the characters and poetic contexts of Kalidasa will remain forever in the minds of those who read poetry.

### End Notes

1. *Kumarasambhava.*, 5.2.
2. *ibid.*, 5.5
3. *ibid.*, 5.4
4. *ibid.*, 5.5
5. *ibid.*, 5.13
6. *ibid.*, 5.27
7. *ibid.*, 5.34
8. *ibid.*, 5.35
9. *ibid.*, 5.43
10. *ibid.*, 5.45
11. *ibid.*, 5.48
12. *ibid.*, 5.67
13. *ibid.*, 5.85
14. *ibid.*, 5. 4
15. *ibid.*, 5.17
16. *ibid.*, 5.21
17. *ibid.*, 5.60

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