MAJOR FEMALE CHARACTERS OF KALIDASA

CHAPTER IV

MAJOR FEMALE CHARACTERS OF KĀLIDĀSA

Works of Kālidāsa

Widely regarded as the greatest writer of all time, Kālidāsa occupies a position unique in world literature. His works, written centuries ago, are even today performed and read more often and even in more countries than before. The stories of his works are fascinating to all, generations after generations. They have been translated into almost all languages of the world. A self-effacing writer, like other Indian poets, has revealed little of himself in his works.

Nothing is known, or certain, about the life and time of the great Kālidāsa. Various anecdotes are though popular, truth of which cannot yet be determined. This is a topic for discussion for years and theories assigning him from first century B.C. to eleventh century A.D. are propounded by scholars, but not came to a conclusion. As it is beyond the scope of topic, it is not discussed here.

Kālidāsa stands unquestioned in classical literature, occupying the first finger while counting the poets. He is a multi sided genius, who excels not only in individual works, but also in his whole achievement. Bhāsa is famous as a dramatist, later Bāṇa as a writer of prose romance, but Kālidāsa remained unparalleled at the head of all Sanskrit poets, unsurpassed by those who preceded and followed him. He is a
dramatist, creator of a literary genre, the lyric, as well as an epic poet
drawing attention to exquisite craftsmanship of his works widely
commented upon, appreciated and lavishly praised\(^1\).

A large number of works, reckoned either as outstanding or
otherwise have been attributed to Kālidāsa. But only two epics, three
dramas, and two lyric poems are assigned to him by tradition. The two
long epics written by him are the RV and the KS. The lyrical poems are
the MD and the RS. The MAL, the VIK and the SK are the three dramas,
mentioned as the works of Kālidāsa in the dramas itself. Literary critics
also approved them as written by Kālidāsa.

*The Raghuvamsa*

As the name indicates, this epic poem in nineteen cantos, gives an
account of the history of twenty nine kings of solar dynasty, from Dilīpa
to Agnivarna, which was accounted in the RM. Dilīpa, Raghu, and Aja
are dealt with in the first eight cantos. Aja’s son Daśaratha, father of
Rāma and the death of Aja’s wife Indumati come in eighth canto. The
story of Rāma, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, from birth to the disappearance
of rejected Sītā under the bowels of earth, is described in cantos ten to
fifteen, in resemblance with the RM of Vālmīki. The next two cantos
cover the story of Kuśa’s return to Ayodhyā and coronation of his son
Aditi. The eighteenth canto contains a rapid account of twenty one

\(^1\) Harsacarita I
kings of the Raghu dynasty from Niṣadha, son of Aditi to Sudarśana, father of Agnivarna giving a short picture of each in two or three verses. With the nineteenth canto, which deals with the Agnivarna’s voluptuous life and his end caused by it and crowning of a queen, who was expecting a child and ruled the kingdom with efficiency and justice, ends the poem.

The Kumārasambhava

The other epic poem KS narrates the story of the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī, the daughter of Mount Himavān, in twenty nine cantos. The first canto contains, the birth and childhood of Pārvatī and penance of Śiva in the Mountain Himavān after the death of his consort Satī. Gods terrorised and oppressed by the demon Tāraka, seeking Brahma their protection and Brahma’s reply thereto are described in canto two. The third canto deals with Indra’s request to Kāmadeva to allure the heart of Śiva towards Pārvatī and the burning of Kāmadeva. The fourth canto is the description of the lamentation of Rati on the death of Kāma. Fifth canto gives a description of the austere penance of Pārvatī and appearance and promise of Śiva, pleased with the deep and sincere devotion of Pārvatī. In canto six the message of Śiva seeking the consent of her father, through seven sages is detailed. Canto seven is devoted to the elaborated description of the marriage ceremony and the eighth to their happy wedded life. The poem written by Kālidāsa, as believed by some scholars, ends here and the last ten cantos, which are not at par
with the earlier part and are not found in some old manuscripts, are believed to be written by a later poet. In the ninth canto, which comes under the second part, Agni reminds Śiva about the purpose of their marriage. Canto ten describes the birth of Kumāra through Agni. In the next, the nourishment of Kumāra by the Kṛttikās and ultimately his adoption by Pārvatī is given. The twelfth canto deals with the preparation of Kumāra for war and Śiva’s wishes for success. Cantos thirteen to seventeen describe Amarāvatī, war between gods and the demon and the death of Tāraka. It can be seen that the addition of cantos are intending to picture Pārvatī as incapable of giving birth to the child of Śiva and thus to degrade her. Kālidāsa himself has stated that their union was intended only for the birth of a son, which was implied by their union in the earlier part.

_The Meghadūta_

_MD_, introduced by Kālidāsa as a lyric or a romantic poem is a short poem (_khaṇḍakāvyā_), in which there is a melodious description of the longing of a Yakṣa in his separation from his beloved and more than that a glowing description of nature. Emotion dominates in the work. It is divided into two parts. The first part describes the root from Rāmagiri to Alakā and the second part to the residence of Yakṣa, who sees everything and his short but lifesaving message to his beloved through cloud, the sustainers of nature.
The Ṛtusamhāra

It is a short poem in six chapters in the form of a conversation, describing the six seasons and their effect on nature and human beings. It is presented through the words of a passionate lover and so erotic in character. Though the description of nature is a common character in Sanskrit works, RS, which is exclusively devoted to the description of six seasons, is the first of this type.

The Abhijñānaśākuntala

SK, a fine play in seven acts is the most famous among the works of Kālidāsa and the best among the poetic works. This is based on the love story of king Duśyanta and Śakuntalā, parents of Bharata, the famous and founder father of Bharata dynasty. The first meeting of the king with Śakuntalā in the hermitage of Kaṇva, who was on a pilgrimage to avoid the misfortune in the life of Śakuntalā, is dealt with in the first act. In the second act the king pretending to protect the hermitage, though demanded by his mother, and sends vidūṣaka to the capital. In the third, Śakuntalā conveys her love through a letter and got married under gāndharva system. Duśyanta returned to the capital promising to take her within three days. Durvāsa cursed Śakuntalā for not receiving him, as she immersed in the thought of Duśyanta. Her female maids managed the situation and secured concession. Act IV describes the departure of Śakuntalā to capital accompanied by ascetics.
and loss of token ring. Act V details Duśyanta’s refusal, her rescue by mother Menakā etc. Act VI is the story of childless fisherman, who brought the ring by which Duśyanta could remember Śakuntalā and got regretted. In act VII, Duśyanta accompanied Mātali to fight against a demon on Indra’s demand. Visit of Duśyanta to the hermitage of sage Mārīca, on his return journey is detailed in the last chapter. There he meets his son Sarvadamana and Śakuntalā and got united with the blessing of Mārīca and Aditi.

*The Vikramorvaśīya*

*VIK* is a play in five acts based on the first love story of India, between Urvaśī and Purūravas of lunar dynasty. This is the description of the meeting, marriage, separation, reunion and final separation after the birth of a son, and the pangs of separation. It begins with the kidnapping of Urvaśī by the demon Keśī in his aerial region. Purūravas, who was passing that way, rescued her and they fell in love. In the second act, the king pacifies the raged queen and she allowed their union through *priyānuprasādanavrata*. In the third act, utterance of the love sick Urvaśī as ‘Purūravas’ for ‘Prūṣottama’ by mistake in the rehearsal of a drama and as a consequence, the curse to become a human being, Urvaśī’s return to earth as the wife of Purūravas are included. Act four, contains the story of Urvaśī remaining concealed due to misunderstanding and her transformation into a creeper, the pangs of Purūravas on her separation, and regaining her human form
on touching the jewel. In the fifth, the story of the killing of vulture and meeting with Āyus, which caused his separation from Urvaśī and their final union with the consent of Indra were described. Thus it has a happy ending.

The Mālavikāgnimitra

MAL, a play in five acts based on the love story of Agnimitra and Mālavikā, existed in the Brhatkathā of Guṇāḍhyā made fascinating with his imagination. This was described as an attempt to perform a new play to be presented on the occasion of a spring festival. Agnimitra, son of Puṣyamitra of second century B.C. is a historical character. In Vidiśā, where Agnimitra was camping, there was a dispute between two cousins. Agnimitra promised to help Mādhavasena, one of them, with whose sister Mālavikā, the marriage of Agnimitra was arranged. Mādhavasena with Mālavikā, on their visit to Agnimitra was taken to prison by the rival. When Mālavikā escaped and reached the boarder, guarded by Dhārini’s brother, she was sent to Dhārini. Sumati’s sister who joined the order of Buddhist nuns accompanied and stayed there as a learned lady advising the king and keeping with the company of the queen. They lived there without revealing her identity with their plan to join with the king. Based on this political story, Kālidāsa wrote the play with kāmaśṛṅgāra as the main sentiment.

Agnimitra received a letter from the king of Vidarbha that he would release imprisoned Mādhavasena with his wife only if Agnimitra
released his brother-in-law, the Maurya minister. Dhārini guarded Mālavikā from the sight of the king, but the king fell in love on the sight of her portrait. Gautama devised a plan for the meeting of Mālavikā and the king in the guise of a dance programme. The king, queen and parivṛṣṭikā witnessed the dance performance of Mālavikā, where she expressed her passion for the king through a song. Then Dhārini commissioned Mālavikā for performing dohada, since she was unable as fallen from the swing. While preparing for dohada, Īrāvatī and her maid Nipuṇikā happened to listen the conversation between Mālavikā and Bakulāvalikā. Īrāvatī dismissed the girl and speaks rudely to the king, vidūṣaka, obtained the signet ring, which was required for magical curing of the pretended snakebite and released Mālavikā. Subsequently, the king and Mālavikā managed to meet. Later a messenger from Vidiṣā who arrived there announcing the disappearance of Mālavikā identified her. By this time the queen herself decided to permit their marriage, pleased by the victory of her son over Yavanas. Agnimitra condemned the action of Mādhavasena’s rival and decided to divide the vidarbha country and give to Mādhavasena and his cousin to rule. Agnimitra with the concurrence of Īrāvatī, though somewhat ungraciously, married Mālavikā. Thus it has a happy end.

Major female characters

Based on certain similarities, the characters are divided into groups such as heroines or beloveds, queens, princess, maids, working class or labourers, goddesses, semi divine and personified characters.
This is done based on textual evidences. Only human characters or characters presented in human form are included here. In this section, a sketch of the major female characters of Kālidāsa is given.

Heroines (or Beloveds)

Pārvatī

Pārvatī is the heroin in KS. She is the only female character seen pervaded from the very beginning to the end of the text. In the works of Kālidāsa, no female character other than Pārvatī catches so much attention. In KS, she is presented as a divine incarnation of Sati, the former wife of Śiva. Three stages in the life of a woman, according to the tradition, are her life as a daughter, as a wife, and as a mother. In KS, Kālidāsa depicts Pārvatī as a lucky character in these three roles. She was born as the daughter of Mount Himalaya, the sovereign of mountains. Her birth is considered as auspicious. She purified her family. Her parents had a special concern towards her than her elder brother. She lived happily in her home. Kālidāsa describes Pārvatī's happy childhood in three verses. She became favourite to all by her pleasant behaviour. Gradually she attained her youth. She is described

---

1 KS I. 21
2 KS I. 1, KS. I. 21, KS I. 22
3 KS I. 23
4 KS I. 28
5 KS I. 27
6 KS I. 29-31
7 KS V11. 5
as the most beautiful in the world.\textsuperscript{1} Sage Nārada\textsuperscript{2} and Arundhati\textsuperscript{3} blessed her to become the only wife of Śiva. She engaged in the service of Śiva who was doing penance, with the permission of her father.\textsuperscript{4} Loosing proud of her beauty\textsuperscript{5} as she could not win the mind of Śiva by it, she decided to achieve the purpose of her beauty through penance with the permission of her parents.\textsuperscript{6} Kālidāsa justifies her desire, which was praised in the Vedas\textsuperscript{7} Śiva was also performing penance up to their marriage\textsuperscript{8} ‘...kenāpi kāmena tapascakāra’. Thus they were pictured as equals. She is the only suitable to Śiva and it will be futile if they were not joined together.\textsuperscript{9} Kālidāsa did not recognise Gaṅgā as the wife of Śiva but only as a river.\textsuperscript{10} Śiva is pictured as a strict monogamist. Pārvatī is the only person, who can give birth to a son from Śiva and rescue gods from the attack of Tārakāsura.\textsuperscript{11} She occupied the highest rank among the chaste women and enjoyed a happy conjugal life. She is the inherent creative power of Śiva according to tradition.\textsuperscript{12} She is a divine and affectionate mother endowed with all qualities of a mother. She was affectionate even towards trees, birds and animals.\textsuperscript{13} She is eulogised as a vīramātā, mother of the hero, being the mother of

\textsuperscript{1} KS I.49
\textsuperscript{2} KS I.50
\textsuperscript{3} KS VI. 92
\textsuperscript{4} KS I. 59
\textsuperscript{5} KS V. 1
\textsuperscript{6} KS V. 3-6
\textsuperscript{7} KS. V. 51-62
\textsuperscript{8} KS I. 57
\textsuperscript{9} KS VII. 66
\textsuperscript{10} KS VII.42
\textsuperscript{11} KS III. 16
\textsuperscript{12} Soudaryalahari. I.1
\textsuperscript{13} RV II. 36
Kumāra, the rescuer of gods and virtues. Kālidāsa pictured them in an ideal human way with harmony in wedded life supplementing and complementing to each other.

Sakuntalā.

Sakuntalā, the heroine of Kālidāsa's famous play SK is a character driven by fate, in contrast to Pārvatī. Her life is a failure from the very birth. She could not enjoy the eligible privileges in her life. She was born as the daughter of the celestial nymph Menakā and resplendent sage Viśvāmitra a warrior turned sage. This birth is a combination of spiritual and celestial powers and provides intellectual, social, financial facilities and high reputation. But unfortunately, abandoned by parents she was protected by birds, then rescued and brought up by Sage Kaṇva. Though she was brought up in a house of ascetics, she obtained the affection of a mother from Gautami and of brothers and sisters from the inhabitants of the hermitage of Kaṇva. She lost all celestial glory and enjoyment, which she might have had, if she lived with her parents.

Then in youth, she got married and deceived by the Paurava king Duṣyanta. The king, who reached the forest on the way for hunting happened to visit the hermitage. He met sakuntalā there and fell in love with her. Defeated by infatuated love, he married her under gandharva form of marriage, convincing her that it was not against the rule,

1 SK I. 22. 58
2 SK I. 25. 3
without even waiting for the return of sage Kaṇva, who was away for performing remedies for the misfortunes in the marriage life of Śakuntalā. Then he returned to the palace promising to take her within three days. When he reached home, he forgot this in the midst of delights enjoyed in the palace life. Śakuntalā, who forgot herself in the thought of the king, did not notice the presence of furious sage Durvāsa in the hermitage, who cursed her for not receiving him properly that the beloved could not remember her. This carelessness and hurriedness is explained as a negation of dharma. So Kaṇva sent her to King’s court. The King could not identify her. He rejected the arguments of the disciples of Kaṇva as well as Śakuntalā. Motherly Gautamī accuses both Śakuntalā and Dusyanta for getting married without the consent of elders. Śāṅgarava explained the reason for taking her to the palace. She, even though chaste, if lives with her kinsmen when husband is alive, people would suspect her. But the king as well as ascetics abandoned her cruelly. The priest suggested the king that he would keep her in his residence. If she delivers a son the king can take him as his successor and admit her in his harem with felicitations, otherwise send her back to her father. Śakuntalā, who was thus deceived and neglected, resorted to death as the only remedy. Then her mother Menakā appeared in the form of lightening and took her to the

---

1 SK I. 16, 24, 44; III. 20.2; III. 21-22
2 SK V. 16
3 SK V. 16
4 SK V. 26-27
5 SK V. 22
6 SK V. 29.3
maricāśrama for protection. Thus, the second and most celebrated stage of wifehood became not only a failure but also a dreadful one. The suggestion of priest proves that Śakuntalā can either be accepted or rejected according to the need of the man, which indicates that the concept of chastity is relative and is a creation of masculine mind.

In the third stage of motherhood also she could not lead a peaceful life. Due to her misfortune, her son Sarvadamana also lost his glorious childhood life of palace. At last on the recovery of token-ring he remembered her and repented on his fault of lapse in dharma. He also had to pay much for this. He thought that the affliction caused by him to Śakuntalā by deceiving her was the cause of his sorrow. Finally, Śakuntalā could meet her husband, who was changed for want of progeny to continue his lineage; otherwise the kingdom would become heirless. However the poet made the play having a happy ending after all the sufferings. She lost all the traditional protection.\(^1\) She was a child without parents, a queen without guards and a wife without husband. But it is significant to note that she possessed the virtues of a traditional wife not cursing or even accusing her insulted husband, but cursed herself repenting on the doings in previous birth.

Mālavikā

Mālavikā, in MAL, is the daughter of Vidarbha king and sister of Mādhavasena. She is the beloved heroine of the play and pervaded

\(^{1}\) MS. IX. 3
through out the text. Though she was a daughter of a king, she had to
live as a maid of Dhārīṇī in Agnimitra’s court. She was described
almost as a child. She did not try to conceal her feelings of love towards
Agnimitra before her friends. Parivrājikā, who accompanied her to the
court, functioned as an intermediary. Dhārīṇī, understanding her talent
in dance, appointed a dance master for specialisation. The queen
aware of the fickleness of her husband tried to hide her from his sight.
But, Agnimitra who saw her picture incidentally, fell in love and tried
to gain her with the help of clever vidāśaka. In the pretext of testing the
efficiency of the dance masters, he arranged a dance performance of
Mālavikā, though protested by the queen, in which she expressed her
love towards the king through a song cleverly. Overcoming many
obstacles he succeeded in his venture. Like Agnimitra, she also became
passionate and anxious to gain her lover. She lives a life of a brave lover
and tries to meet the king on her accord. She was cautious of the arrival
of Īrāvatī, the younger and once beloved wife of Agnimitra. As a result
of their effort she won him as a present by queen Dhārīṇī, overjoyed by
the victory of her son Vasumitra and also with ungracious concurrence
of Īrāvatī. In this work, Mālavikā is not pictured as a wife who leads a
life of sufferings and silence. But he depicted the heroine as a
submissive character of Indian tradition. He did this, based on
traditional values but with progressive and positive outlook as well and
with the vision of society in which he lived or flourished. This work
contains a value oriented programming of social consciousness pointing
to female oppression. Though the drama was intended for
enlightenment (*kṛdāṇīyaka*) he employed quality and discrimination in depicting his characters. Mālavikā acted according to the rules in *KaS.*¹ She being the youngest one secretly served the king well, and received special honour from him. Kālidāsa adopted the policy that heroes should join or encourage co-wives to act jointly and not to encourage them to quarrel or create enmity.

Urvaśī

Urvaśī, a heavenly *apsaras* and the beloved of king Purūravas, is the heroine in the play *VIK*, who appears from the beginning to the end of the text. She is a woman of ardent love. She is an *apsaras*, sprung from the thigh of the sage Nārāyaṇa as a youthful maiden.² So there is no relevance of her childhood. Being an *apsaras* she enjoyed more freedom to move in society and possessed some super human powers like *thiraskarini*, than the terrestrial woman. She could also move through air. She, with no match in beauty, was described as an ornament of ornaments, a peculiar decoration of decorations and a standard of comparison to accepted standards.³ The play begins with the story of capturing Urvaśī by demon Keśi and her rescue by Purūravas. They fell in love with each other. She is a good actress of heaven and belonged to a race of actors. She uttered the word ‘Purūravas’ wrongly instead of ‘Puruṣotthama’ in a drama directed by Sage Bharatha, who cursed her to

¹ *KaS.* IV. 2. 22; IV. 24
² *VIK* I. 3
³ *VIK* I. 3. 19; II. 3
become a human being. By this curse, which was a boon to her, she could remain as the wife of Purūravas. She felt more freedom on earth than the forced servant-ship of Indra. So she wanted to remain on earth. She was the personification of love. According to Indian tradition the conjugal life would be fruitful only on begetting a child especially a son. Urvaśī wanted to live in company with Purūravas at any cost, so she hid her son from the sight of Purūravas for fear of separation. She was pictured as self-radiant and more assertive not controlling all kinds of deviant behaviour like jealousy and with complete failure of femininity. She was jealous towards Auśinarī and departs disappointed due to her all consuming passion. Unlike other heroines in Sanskrit plays, she had the freedom to depart from the company of Purūravas, if she liked. She agreed to marry Purūravas only if certain conditions were satisfied. When there is any breach of contract, she could desert her husband-lover. This character is an example for participation of Indian girls acting and dancing in theatre as professionals. Generally the role of a heroine ends with the birth of a son. Urvaśī put her son hidden and on his sight she lost her happiness because there ends the story. But Kālidāsa extended their relation by a special order from great ruler Indra through sage Nārada aiming at further helps from the valorous king.

Yakṣapatnī

Yakṣapatnī, the heroine of MD, is a beautiful young girl recently wedded and having no experience. She is the wife of Yakṣa, who is in
exile for one year on account of a curse of his master. So to them every movement and everything is embraced with love, which caused the feelings and emotion during separation unbearable. The poem itself is an exploitation of emotions of Yakṣa on the sight of the cloud, which is articulated through his own words. The heroine Yakṣapatnī was not presented in the poem in person, but remains all pervasive. Kālidāsa has drawn a full sketch of Yakṣapatnī through a word picture in a touching manner. She is the symbol of love. Yakṣapatnī belonged to the group of Yakṣa, a semi divine being. (vidyādharo/psaro yakṣah rakṣogandharvakinnarāḥ/ piśāco guhyakah śiddho bhūtemī devayonayah.) MB mentions in Sabhāparva of millions of Yakṣa engaged in the service of Kubera.¹ Yakṣinīs are depicted as goddesses, worshiping whom one releases from the sin of brahmahatya. In SP-rudrasamhitā, yakṣēśvāra is said as an incarnation of Śiva to subdue the pride of gods on acquiring of ambrosia. According to popular tradition, yakṣī or yakṣinī is the romantic spirit dwelling on trees in forests and having uncommon beauty and seductive in character. The Yakṣapatnī in MD is also described as made up by a combination of the best available things in the world and having no comparison. As a virahinī, she is depicted as in a state of undergoing vrata, avoiding entertainments and personal and familial decoration and thinking and praying for the welfare of her husband. She was engaged in counting the days remaining of separation putting flowers on the dehali. She was pictured as not living

¹ MB. sabhāparva. ch.10. sl.18
but only existing or sustaining. The Yakṣa, on separation from his lover could find enjoyment in all the things in nature like rivers. In all these, he tried to describe the physical form of the beautiful maid, seeing different aspects of beauty arousing kāma according to Kāmaśāstra, which describes the ways for arousing erotism. But Yakṣapatnī had to remain sorrowfully avoiding all decorations and enjoyment in her house.

Sītā

Sītā in India is the epitome of ideal wife and is considered as the model and all Indian women are advised to be like her. Though she is not the beloved wife of Rāma, it seems that she is the most respected and beloved character to Kālidāsa. This reverence, he had, can be seen in the expression 'janakatanyāsnānapuṇyodakesu' in the description of Rāmagiri in MD. It seems that Kālidāsa is more satisfied with the use of words Jānakī, Janakaputri etc. and not Rāmapatnī or Rāmajāyā for Sītā. He even used 'Jānakijānī' for Rāma.

Like all other women characters, no mention was made of Sītā’s childhood. She appears in the poem only at the time of marriage with Rāma. She is described as ayonijā, the wife of the leader of Raghu dynasty and the symbol of wifehood. Her marriage with Rāma is the beginning of her sufferings. Paraśurāma attacked them on their journey

---

1 MD II. 9
2 MD I. 1
3 RV XI. 47-48
4 RV XI. 54
to Ayodhya.\(^1\) Then, when Kaikeyī interfered and obstructed the placing of royal fortune upon Rāma and forced exile, she had to abandon her queen-ship and even her home for the sake of her father in law. She had to lead her life in forest in the prime youth as an ascetic without any hesitation. There the princes had to undergo many sufferings. In the RM she reminds Rāma of her future, leaving her alone with rival king. In RV, Kālidāsa states that Kaikeyī persuaded her not to accompany Rāma.\(^2\) In doing so her intention might be to leave cute Sītā alone in the palace under Bharatha. Rāvana’s sister Ṣūrpaṇakhā\(^3\) approached Rāma, seeking love while he was sitting with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa at pañcavaṭi. He rejected her, telling that he was married. His comment, with contempt of woman folk as a whole reveals his character.\(^4\) On the untimely approach of Ṣūrpaṇakhā to a person in company with his wife seeking love, he directed her to approach Lakṣmaṇa not having wife with him. This indicates his sense of morality. As a typical wife, Sītā with deep single-minded love followed him silently in his misfortunes avoiding her worldly desires. When they ridiculed Ṣūrpaṇakhā, child like Sītā laughed at her.\(^5\) On this, enraged Ṣūrpaṇakhā warned her of its consequences in future. Then Lakṣmaṇa caused deformity to her limbs with his sword. Though, she was ridiculed by them Sītā was made the victim of their action. The laughter of Sītā was a fault attributed to her. Apart from this, the fault imposed upon her is that she persuaded Rāma

---

\(^1\) RV XI. 58, XI. 61  
\(^2\) RV XII. 26  
\(^3\) RV XII. 32  
\(^4\) RV XII. 33  
\(^5\) RV XII. 36-38
and Lakṣmaṇa to catch the golden deer, which attracted her.1 Here also, if Rāma could know that the deer was an illusionary one, it was better to retreat or turned back her from her wrong desire as a good husband. After killing Rāvaṇa, Rāma retained Sītā and accepted her on purifying by fire.2 The killing of Rāvaṇa was justified by Rāma as to avenge the wrong deeds of Rāvaṇa and not to rescue her.3 The innocent Sītā was denounced, not for her sins or faults but for the fame of Rāma.4 That is why he solemnly decided and disclosed it before his brothers and threatened to die if they oppose5 though he knew that the birth of a child is very near.6 Kālidāsa also added that none of his brothers dared to speak or even respond to the cruel and stern decision.7

After her return from the forest, when Sītā bowed her mothers-in-law, apologising for the miseries caused to her husband,8 they greeted her using untrue words of consolation to please her. It is also stated that though she did not deserve it, they did so because she needed kind treatment at that time.9 With eternal ornaments and cosmetics given by Anasūyā she appeared before the people as if she was standing in the fire shown by her husband to prove her purity before his people10, which indicated a further fire ordeal at the instance of those people.

1 RV XII. 53
2 RV XII. 104
3 RV XIV. 41
4 RV XIV. 34, 40
5 RV XIV. 35, 37
6 RV XIV. 39
7 RV XIV. 43
8 RV XIV. 5
9 RV. XIV. 6
10 RV. XIV. 14
Rāma appointed his obedient brother Lakṣmana to implement his order in guise of satisfying her desire during pregnancy.¹ Lakṣmana obeyed the unquestionable order like Paraśurāma² and left her near the hermitage of Vālmiki.³ When Lakṣmana conveyed the order of exile by the king, Sītā fell unconscious on her mother’s (earth) lap.⁴ Kālidāsa ridiculed Rāma’s vanity through the reaction of mother earth, who did not accept her as she could not believe that the lord of Sītā, a descendent of Ikṣvāku race and of noble conduct could abandon her. She thought that unconscious state is better and is compared to a lioness when she regained consciousness.

The noble Sītā, as other traditional woman, also did not utter any word blaming her discarded husband but blamed herself and her wrong actions.⁵ She compared Rāma to Indra, the notorious wanton king of gods and Lakṣmana, the helpless younger brother obedient to the eldest one in a joined family, to Viṣnu a dependent on Indra. She also wanted him to convey her hesitation and aversion towards the timid king Rāma.⁶ She reminded her mothers in law through Lakṣmana of the existence of a child of Rāma growing in her womb and to pray for the welfare of the child.⁷ She censured herself, on becoming a refugee, who in her exile days herself had given refuge to many female ascetics.⁸

¹RV. XIV. 44-45
²RV. XIV. 46
³RV. XIV. 58
⁴RV. XIV. 55-56
⁵RV. XIV. 47
⁶RV. XIV. 61
⁷RV. XIV. 60
⁸RV. XIV. 64
She sustained her life on behalf of the child of Rāma, the king who acted against the varṇāśramadharma\(^1\) violating MS and she decided to join asceticism after the birth of the child so as to get common protection as other ascetics were getting.\(^2\) She addressed Lakṣmaṇa, as a child -vatsa-, a dependent baby, or a slave of Rāma.\(^3\) Sage Vatmiki, abusing\(^4\) Rāma and praising Sītā received her with great affection, advised the ways to dispel sins and acquire mental peace, assured full protection for herself and her child, and entrusted her to female ascetics.

Afraid of slander, Rāma did not remarry.\(^5\) Sītā remained in the hermitage praying for the welfare of her husband, who did not even inquire about her or his progeny. When he ordered for a second fire ordeal\(^6\) to prove her chastity before his people as she returned with her sons\(^7\) to Ayodhyā, she reacted vigorously, abandoning her life and making husband and his country prosperous. Thus, Sītā is the bold heroin of Kālidāsa and bold wife of timid Rāma.

Indumatī

The episode of Indumatī and Aja in RV is important in this study, as it is the only story of a widower. Indumatī was the princess of Vidarbha, which is also known as Bhoja and Kr̥thakaiśika.\(^8\) Indumatī

---

\(^1\) RV. XIV. 67  
\(^2\) RV. XIV. 65  
\(^3\) RV. XIV. 59  
\(^4\) RV. XIV. 73,74  
\(^5\) RV. XIV. 86  
\(^6\) RV. XV. 74,81  
\(^7\) RV. XV. 63  
\(^8\) RV. V. 39, VII. 2
was an *apsaras* reborn due to a curse of sage Trñäbindu, who was practicing severe penance. Afraid of this, Indra sent Härini, an *apsaras*, to withdraw the sage. She engaged in lovely sports and disturbed penance. Then, he cursed her to be born as a female in earth. She requested to forgive her fault, as she, only a dependant on Indra, was acting on his command. The sage felt pity on her and stated that the curse would end on the touch of the celestial flower. Thus, she was born as the princess of Bhoja country.

Her story begins with the sending of a messenger by her brother to Raghu on her getting youth, to invite Aja for her *svayamvara*.\(^1\) Indumati chose Aja, whom Sunandä introduced as the suitable and equal to her with regard to family, beauty, age and compared their union to a jewel melted with gold and also to Rati and Käma. Indumati was qualified as ‘*patimvara*’ ie who chose her husband herself.\(^2\) On the way to capital of Aja, after marriage desperate rival kings attacked them. He conquered them after a long and severe attack, by *sammohanästra*. The couples begot a son Daśaratha, father of Räma and they could release from the four debts.\(^3\)

Generally, the description of conjugal life ends with the birth of a son. But in this it is not so. After releasing from all *rnas* they went to the garden and engaged in sports. There a garland from the viña of Närada fell on Indumati. All on a sudden she fell down dead. Seeing this, he fell

---

\(^1\) *RV. V. 40\(^2\) *RV. VI. 10\(^3\) *RV. VIII. 30
unconscious.\textsuperscript{1} He regained consciousness by the nursing of attendants. Aja lamented putting her on his lap, which is contrary to that of Rāma. He cursed himself and the wrong deeds like Sītā or any female character.\textsuperscript{2} Kālidāsa pictured Aja as a sincere husband. All others except Aja are interested in the physical beauty of consort bhāryā or patni.\textsuperscript{3} He hopes for her survival\textsuperscript{4}. The words used by him such as ‘aham ekarasah abhinnaragah' and ‘samadukkhah sakhtjanah'\textsuperscript{5} reveal his attitude towards her. Aja performed her funeral rites as advised by the family priest, who consoled him\textsuperscript{6} describing this as an inevitable separation\textsuperscript{7} and advised not to repent on it. ‘He did not consign his body to flames with queen not because he cared for his life but because he apprehended the scandal that the king, knowing as he was died after his queen from grief'.\textsuperscript{8} But the repentant king ruled the country till his son got matured. After that he led a life of a widower thinking of Indumati herself abandoning all pleasures and died due to some contagious diseases.\textsuperscript{9} This episode pictured a widower, corresponding to the widow in alamkāraśāstra, avoiding decoration and all pleasures thinking of the consort. Thus, Indumati is the beloved of Aja and Kālidāsa loved this episode. Critics having vested interest neglected this and ridiculed Aja. Though an apsaras, it is seen that she was not free from the flatters

\textsuperscript{1}RV. VIII. 38 \\
\textsuperscript{2}RV. VIII. 50 \\
\textsuperscript{3}RV. VII. 47, 48 \\
\textsuperscript{4}RV. VIII. 54 \\
\textsuperscript{5}RV. VIII. 65 \\
\textsuperscript{6}RV. VII. 72 \\
\textsuperscript{7}RV. VIII. 75 \\
\textsuperscript{8}RV.VIII. 72 \\
\textsuperscript{9}RV. VIII. 94, 95
bounded by the social rules. She herself could not congratulate Aja on his victory over the rival kings, on their journey to capital; instead, she fulfilled that desire through her personal friends.

Queens

In Sanskrit plays, generally, king is the hero. He is expected to be a perfect personality. His primary duty is to protect the earth and make progeny as his successor. So he marries a maiden as the queen with the intention to have progeny. In such marriage, all the good qualities of a maiden were taken into consideration so as to have good children. She was respected as the mother of the prince and not as the queen. If these queens do not possess a son they would be marginalized. Remarriages were generally done as to satisfy his sensual pleasures. In the works of Kālidāsa also these types of queens are seen. Among his works Dhārini, Sudakṣiṇā and Kumudvatī fall in this group. Auśinari and Vasumati being childless are neglected. Īrāvati, the childless second wife though beautiful was also neglected. Sītā and Śakuntalā became acceptable later, as they were mothers of sons. Mālavikā is the beloved beautiful wife in the play.

Dhārini

Dhārini is the daughter of King of Kāsi and the eldest wife of Agnimitra. According to one legend, Dhārini is the daughter of Pitṛs in

1 RV. VII. 69
2 RV. II. 75, RV. III. 13, MAL. v.16 , V. 9. 7
Svadhā and sister of Menā. She was a brahmavādinī and a scholar in philosophical and theosophical doctrines. She was depicted as a dutiful wife and amicable in character. In the play she is presented on the scene from the beginning to the end. She is depicted as having all the expected qualities of a housewife. The blessings of Parivrājīkā on the king as to be the lord of Dhārīṇī and of the earth, whose progeny is the great and whose forbearance is worthy. She inquires to her dance master about the performance of Mālavikā in dancing. She tried to protect young Mālavikā from the sight of the sensuous king Agnimitra, who fell in love with her on seeing her portrait. Dhārīṇī also witnessed with Parivrājīkā the dance performance. She entrusted Mālavikā to fulfil the dohada for the unblossomed asoka as she was made unable to fulfil it. She put Mālavikā in the cellar and sealed. But vidūṣaka seized the signet ring acting as bitten by snake, for the magical cure of the poison by the court physician and Mālavikā was released. Then she invited the king to enjoy the beauty of blossomed asoka in his company. In this disguise she gave Mālavikā to the king as promised earlier, on the victory of her son, informing Īrāvatī also.

Though a ‘good’ wife, she was jealous towards Īrāvatī, who became her co-wife and beloved of Agnimitra and so avoided Īrāvatī.

---

1 VP. I. 10
2 MAL. I. 15
3 MAL. I. 4. 3-6
4 MAL. I. 3. 58
5 MAL. I. 12
6 MAL. IV. 1. 15
7 MAL. IV. 4. 32-36
8 MAL. III. 5 –17
9 MAL. V. 17-24
from the Dohada and introduced cunningly Mālavikā to suppress Īrāvatī, based on the principle of KaS ‘yām tu nāyako/dhikām cikṣṛṣṭāṁ bhūtāpaṁvāsubhāgayā prosāhyā kalahayet / tatasca anukampeta’.\(^1\) All, especially the king, who could not avoid his dignity in her presence even in love long condition, respected her. She courageously expresses her opinion even to the king. She was a viramātā.\(^2\) However she succumbed to the love of the king towards Mālavikā and gained the doubled respect in the society. Though she tried to weal the king or helped to win his mind, in the time of approved polygamy, it became impossible but she had to remain as a life long companion in dharma.\(^3\)

Īrāvatī

Īrāvatī is the second wife of king Agnimitra. She was presented on the scene in third act, though mentioned in the viśkambhaka in the first act as a good dancer.\(^4\) She entered the garden with her maid Nipuṇiṅkā\(^5\) to enjoy a ride in the garden in company of the king as promised earlier. Agnimitra felt it impossible as his mind is devoted to Mālavikā but he knew that Īrāvatī would notice it.\(^6\) When Īrāvatī entered, Mālavikā and Bakulāvalikā were present there to fulfil dohada.\(^7\) Agnimitra who was already there, expressed his love towards Mālavikā. Īrāvatī who could know the king’s love towards Mālavikā,

---

1 KaS. IV. 2. 9-14
2 MAL. V. 16
3 MAL. III. 1. 9
4 MAL. I. 5. 3
5 MAL. III. 2. 12
6 MAL. III. 2. 18
7 MAL. III. 14. 13
hiding herself with her maid and shocked by this news of passion rushed forward\(^1\) with uncontrollable emotion of love. She ridiculed \textit{vidūṣaka} and congratulated the maid Bakulāvalikā.\(^2\) Though the king tried to console her by excuses on the advice of \textit{vidūṣaka}, it was not acceptable to her and left him scolding.\(^3\) Yet the king blamed Īrāvatī as guilty. She approached Dhāriṇī to get Mālavikā imprisoned to cause her to retreat from the alliance. Īrāvatī appeared interrupting the love scene and greeted the king joking\(^4\) and congratulated Bakulāvalikā for the fulfilment of her efforts successfully. The king states that her anger is not proper.\(^5\) The king could escape on the news of attack by an ape on princess Vasulaksī.\(^6\)

Īrāvatī is not a character acceptable to tradition as she, who could conquer the heart of king by her charm could not survive \textit{sapatnīmatsara} (quarrel between co-wives). She is not a \textit{bhāryā}, though she was an object of charm. The king was once, more affectionate towards Īrāvatī - \textit{vallabha} the beloved of the king and she was full of love for him. But when he met the younger charm Mālavikā he began to treat Īrāvatī with indifference. He could not see anything worth in her to compel him to attend Īrāvatī; that is why he considered her rejection as a boon or service to him\(^7\). As soon as she knew that she lost supremacy over the

\(^{1}\text{MAL. III. 18. 3}\)
\(^{2}\text{MAL. III. 19. 3}\)
\(^{3}\text{MAL. III. 19. 7-39, III. 20. 0}\)
\(^{4}\text{MAL. III. 15. 82, IV. 15. 86}\)
\(^{5}\text{MAL. IV. 15. 97}\)
\(^{6}\text{MAL. IV. 17. 24}\)
\(^{7}\text{MAL. III. 90. 0}\)
king’s heart, she responded in a bitter manner.¹ She was a princess by birth, a beautiful wife of a king, but *vidūṣaka* indicates that she does not belong to a noble lineage.² Her jealous reaction at the meeting with her rivals and unwilling and ungracious acceptance of inevitable respective solutions made this childless *Īrāvati* a *naughty wife*. According to *KaS* she failed to win Agnimitra due to her anger.³

Auśinari

Auśinari, the daughter of the king of Kāsi was equal to Saci in beauty⁴ and was the lawfully wedded queen of valorous king Purūravas.⁵ She appeared with Nipuṇikā standing concealed and listening to the conversation between the king and *vidūṣaka* where they got a love letter from Urvaśī⁶, which the king was searching for. When the queen approached with the letter, the king perplexed, and tried to escape falling at her feet consoling and begging pardon, but she left with anger.⁷ When she knew the king’s love towards Urvaśī she protested; but she had to retreat, by the vow of *priyānuprasādana*, which was intended to the happiness of husband sacrificing herself. The king though happy, accepted the worship humbly pretending to be unhappy and Urvaśi’s friend Citralekhā understood his false courteousness. She

---

¹ *MAL*. V. 2  
² *MAL*. III. 221  
³ *KaS*. IV. 2. 72  
⁴ *VIK*. II. 12. 6-7, III. 12. 20. 88  
⁵ *VIK*. II. 19. 12  
⁶ *VIK*. II. 19. 24  
⁷ *VIK*. II. 21. 3. 31, 28
departed leaving the king freely.¹ By this suffering and tolerance of her husband’s love with other woman, she became acceptable to the society as a respected and obedient wife. After this, she was referred to individually, where issueless king took a bath at the confluence of Gaṅgā and Yamunā. Thus Auśinarī became a member of antahpurā. She could not command the respect of king, as she had no children. If she had a son she could have regain her lost glory and the lost power over the king as the mother of his son.

Vasumātī

Vasumātī, who remained behind the curtain and was known from the reference made by others is the lawfully wedded queen of the king Duśyanta and had to confine to harem as a member. Vasumātī was mentioned by Duśyanta ² as the object of jealousy of Hamsapadikā on account of king’s love towards her. While her upper garment caught up on by the branch of a tree as she was entering with the painting brush and delayed, vidūṣaka kept off the picture, when pratidhārī (the door-keeper) informed her arrival. Duśyanta’s comment as jealous (bahumānagarvitā), indicates his attitude towards her. Like all dakṣina nāyakas, Duśyanta showed respect towards his first wife, though his love was transformed to another.³ Duśyanta, unlike Agnimitra, did not insult directly this childless queen. Kālidāsa avoided her on the scene as

¹ VIK II. 12. 13. 17, III. 13. 36. 88, 13. 48
² SK. V. 1. 4
³ SK. VI.22. 21
she did not deserve respect as *viramātā* or *priyatama* (beloved) but depicted as an example of neglected wife.

**Sudakṣinā**

Sudakṣinā, the daughter of the Magadha king,¹ was named so considering her *dākṣīṇya*. Her marriage with the king Dilipa intending issues made her the dharmapatnī of Dilipa who in turn became a husband and they were qualified as *dampati*.² She was also called *bhāryā* because of the sufferings caused to her. She accompanied Dilipa, like *smṛti* following *śruti*, to serve Nandinī, daughter of Kāmadhenu in forest to get release from the curse of Kāmadhenu. After getting a son as a boon from the cow, to propitiate his dynasty and endless fame, she goes to oblivion.³

**Kumudvatī**

Kumudvatī is the younger sister of prince Kumuda of Nāga country and wife of Kuśa.⁴ She was given in marriage to extend the kingdom by which the county was also freed from ancestral sins by servicing Kuśa, son of Viṣṇu. She got a son, who possessed all the qualities of paternal and maternal lineage⁵ and purified the families and

---

¹*RV. I. 37*
²*RV. I. 32, 31, I. 54. I 35*
³*RV. III. 13*
⁴*RV. XVI. 85*
⁵*RV. XVII. 1, 2*
became the great ruler. Kumudvatī followed Kuśa to assist Indra in the battle with the demon Durjaya and were friends of Saci and Indra.¹ Thus they were given more or less the same status and respected each other.

Menā

In ancient literature two Menās² are mentioned. One is the daughter of Mahāmeru. She had two daughters; Gaṅgā and Umā and they became the wives of Śiva. Another Menā daughter of Pītra is mentioned in VP. Pītras were categorised into two groups agniśvātta or sāgna and bahiśvattas or anagniś. They had a common wife Svadhā who had two daughters, Menā and Dhārinī. They were yoginīs and well versed in all branches of knowledge like theosophical doctrines, meditation. This Menā, daughter of Pītra, is the queen of Himālaya, the king of mountains in the personified form.³ She had a son named Maināka⁴ and a daughter named Umā, wife of Śiva in former birth. Menā is the only character, who was respected as the mother of a daughter, not of a son. She and Himālaya were partial to their daughter.⁵ She appears as a mother anxious about the daughter and tried to dissuade from the penance though not against it.⁶ Menā and

¹ RV. XVI.5
² RM. I. 35 and VP. part one chapter 10.29
³ KS. I. 1, 18
⁴ KS. I. 20
⁵ KS. I. 27
⁶ KS. V. 3
Himavān had mutual respect and kept good relation. They received Saptarṣis together along with the daughter, a system not common in ancient India. The masculine and plural words ‘āmī dārah’\(^1\) used to denote her indicate his respect towards her. Before taking a decision, Himavān sought her opinion, which was agreeable to her also.\(^2\) Though worried on the separation from her daughter, she herself put the vivāhatilaka on the forehead of Pārvatī and the kautukasūtra with the help of dhātri\(^3\) and got her bowed before the family deities. she was satisfied as her daughter was loved by husband.

It can be seen that Indian wives fall into two groups, the lawfully wedded wives and beloveds. The former is depicted as vamśasthāpakas or sahadharmacārīṇīs. If they had no children they were thrown away to oblivion; otherwise respected as a mother of heroes or viramātā, whose story ends with the birth of a son; others were married for the enjoyment of heroes. Their story ends with the union with the hero or his union with another one and becomes a member of harem.

Wives of Daśaratha

Kālidāsa gives the attitude towards wives in polygamy through the three wives of Daśaratha: ‘arcita tasya Kausalyā priyā kekayatmajā/ athah sambhāvitā tābhyaṁ sumitrāmaicchod īśvarah’ Kausalyā was the

\(^{1}\) KS. VI. 63
\(^{2}\) KS. VI. 84-85
\(^{3}\) KS. VII. 24, VII. 17, VIII. 12
Kausalyā was the honoured wife, Kaikeyī the beloved and Sumitrā for service. The relationship of princesses of Kosala, Kekaya and Magadha with Daśaratha was as natural as the rivers joining the ocean and they were lucky by this marriage and he lived happily. Kausalyā was respected as she was wedded with the aim of begetting a son endowed with all qualities and got Viṣṇu as son, as the light of dynasty by denying and accepting the kingship and showing equal respect towards mothers. They became mothers on the sight of the scars on the body of Rāma and Lakṣmana who wished not to become the mother of heroes, but of sons and mother-in-law while raising Sītā who bowed, acting as if her action was favourable to them.

Kaikeyī the beloved wife, adorned by her son with good qualities wished naturally to coronate him as promised previously on her marriage. When she felt deceived by the king, she prevented Sītā from accompanying Rāma. As a mother, she wanted all this for the benefit of Bharata, who not only rejected it but also turned his face from her. During exile, Rāma expressed his hatred towards her. Thus, her life was a failure thereafter. This character is introduced to instruct that the duty of beautiful queen, being an object of enjoyment, is to entertain

---

1 RV. IX. 22, X. 66, IX-23  
2 RV. X. 69, XIV. 1-23, XIV. 4, XIV. 6 and XIV. 13  
3 RV. X. 67  
4 RV. XII. 26  
5 RV. XII. 23  
6 RV. XIII. 59
the king and had no access to power. The king insulted her by the
timely and cunning trick by Kausalyā.¹

Sumitrā the last in all grades, not respected or beloved, is a
representative of the neglected, serving the family with her child. Due
to the enmity between Kausalyā and Kaikeyī she became acceptable to
them both and that is why co-wives shared the sacrificial food with her.
She respected them according to the rule ‘kaniśṭhā tu mātrota sapatnim
pasyet’² She should consider elder co-wives equal to mother and love
their children to win her husband. She assisted Kausalyā in greeting the
couples and preparing Sītā for coronation.³ She having no existence of
her own, never felt proud of her son, the king maker who did not get
recognition.⁴

Wives of Ayodhyā

The three characters left unnoticed are the wives of Laksmana,
Bharata and Śatrughna. Kālidāsa devoted only one sloka to describe
their marriage.⁵ Rāma married the daughter of earth, Laksmana her
younger sister Úrmilā and the other two younger brothers, married two
maids with beautiful waist, the daughters of Kuśadhvaja younger
brother of Janaka. Kālidāsa did not mention even their names. Their
union is compared to prakṛti and pratyaya, base and termination or

¹ KaŚ. IV. 2. 12
² KaŚ. IV. 2. 16
³ RV. XII. 13
⁴ RV. XIV. 9
⁵RV. IX.54
affixes. Kālidāsa describes that they attained their end in life by this marriage. By this he hints that there was nothing more to attain in their life or in other words the marriage caused the end of their pleasures. Probably that might be the reason for avoiding these characters.