Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Feminism is one of the most popular social movements, seeking equality for woman with man in all spheres of life and the impact of this movement is seen in literary works as well. As literature, one of the most powerful media for communication, has been traditionally perpetuating male dominance, feminists focussed their attention on literature. This gave rise to the formulation of feminism as a literary discipline with three stages or waves in its development. In the first and second waves, belonging to the period prior to 1970s they were concerned with the politics of woman authorship and representation of woman in literature. In the third wave of feminist criticism a variety of topics such as body, sex, sexuality etc. were also taken into consideration. Feminist criticism was influenced by gender theories of Freud and Lacanian theory of psychoanalysis as part of deconstruction of existing relationship of power. The analysis and evaluation of literary works from female perspective is one of the main concerns of feminist criticism today.

Kālidāsa, the greatest poet ever India has seen, and his contribution to almost all branches of Sanskrit literature is well known. His works include two mahākāvyas, Raghuvamśam (RV), and Kumārasambhavam (KS), two khaṇḍakāvyas, Meghadūtām (MD) and Rtusamhāram (RS) and three plays, Abhijñānaśākuntalam (SK),
Vikramorvaśiṇyam (VIK) and Mālavikāgnimitram (MAL). He wrote his plays based on the love stories of the kings and in khaṇḍakāvyas also the main sentiment is love. He wrote his works in the context of the Vedic culture and kingly rule. Evidently, his works envisage the impact of the social and cultural scenario of his time and the design and characterisation through out his works seem to be largely based on these facts.

Studies and criticisms of Kālidāsa’s works are innumerable and are written from different angles or perspectives. Ancient Sanskrit critics mostly concentrated their attention on the literary merit and purpose of poetry for evaluation and not on the historical or personal information about the author. No serious study of literary works was made so far applying modern literary theories like feminism. The present thesis is an attempt to read the works of Kalidasa by applying feminist theories, which is now hotly debated in literary criticism. As such, this study may be a pioneer work and is deviated from conventional methodology in the study of the works of Kālidāsa.

In the definition of aims of poetry in Kāvyaprakāśa, Kālidāsa is quoted as the example for the acquisition of fame. – Kālidāsādināmiva yaśaḥ. But when analysed from the poet’s angle, it will be clear that the intention of the poet in writing was to give advice through sweet words- kāntāsammitatayā upadesāyujey and to establish the principles of puruṣārtha through this. His genius as a poet made his works attractive through smooth and elegant narration. In his RV he tried to picture the ruler as an ideal king, a man, a husband, a father and a son. Thus, it
seem that he is a poet, with commitment to the society, in which he lived. Therefore, he pictured the ideal society and cherished values of his time in his works as the highest ideals of Indian culture.

Sanskrit literary criticism is mainly based on some fundamental principles of literary criticism like alaṅkāra, guṇa, rasa, dhvani etc. and their place in the work, but without considering the author's view point and the related matters. According to the Indian critical tradition people of different ages, countries and culture will appreciate good art by sādhāraṇīkaraṇa. Traditionally, the merit of work was evaluated by critics based on the criteria: how far it could give joy to the discerning critics or readers. In contemporary criticism, the approach has totally changed; the change in criteria of evaluation is being due to the growth of altogether new literary disciplines. The personal history of the poet like place of birth, education, life and his relationship with the society, his philosophy of life etc. were not considered relevant by old Sanskrit critics. This thesis is a humble attempt to read Kālidāsa's works against the background of modern principles of feminist literary criticism, relevant and globally debated in contemporary literary circles, thus enriching studies on Kālidāsa's works.

The works of Kālidāsa are universally appreciated for its beauty and imagination and other literary embellishments. But they can also be evaluated on the basis of his philosophy or vision of life and accordingly all the situations and literary categories can stand interaction. For example feminist critics rejected the so called universalisation, because they argue that 'this promoted Eurocentric
and Phallocentric norms and practices created by man, elevating man and relegating women to a subsidiary marginalized status. During the first step, concentration of feminism was on reclaiming of one’s past while in the second to eroding on the masculine ideology that caused devaluation to the past.

Application of a modern literary theory to an old work is not an easy task because the author lived centuries ago where the principles, laws and customs, manners, economy, politics and culture were different from that of the modern. India has a tradition of liberal interpretation of literary works based on different views; sometimes even contradictory and sometimes complementary. While interpreting so, they establish their doctrines, only after logically refuting the opponent’s arguments. Vyāsa himself approves this when he says:

\[\text{Tarko'prati̇sh̄taḥ śrutayo vibhinn̄aḥ}\
\text{Naiko muniryasya vacaḥ pramāṇam,}\]

This shows the adaptability of changes in the Indian tradition. Thus, the famous rasasūtra in the Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata was interpreted in different ways by different critics like, Bhaṭṭatauta, Bhaṭṭalollaṭa, Rudraṭa, Bhaṭṭanāyaka, and Abhinavagupta, which gave rise to different schools. They gave their own way of interpretation to the same sūtra. Not only Indian poetics, but the different schools of Indian philosophy also bear testimony to this. It may be noted that the interpretation of Brahmasūtra resulted in the emergence of entirely different or opposite schools in Indian philosophy. They are famous as
Advaita, Dvaita, Viśiṣṭadvaita and the like. Kālidāsa acknowledged this tradition in his MAL. In short Indian tradition recognised the plurality of interpretation or readings as inherent in the text itself, and did not prevent critical appreciation and free play of literary discourse. The common elements provide only a framework for different modes of perception. Kālidāsa also agrees with this:

![Image](MAL.I.2)

In his opinion, wise men analyse everything by his own mind and not fank other’s judgement, like stupid people. Kālidāsa himself defines wise men as ‘santah sadasyaktihetavah’: wise men are those, who are capable of discriminating good and bad not believing blindly. Garuḍapurāṇa (GP) endorsing this says:

![Image](MAL.I.2)

Even a cursory reading of the works of Kālidāsa with a feminist perspective reveals how he depicts the image of woman in his works. While analysing his works, which is based on the traditional ideological system, it can be seen that they cleverly emphasize and effectively communicate such ideologies to the reader. So while reading the text aiming to subvert the dominant ideology in a feminist perspective, strategies must be found with in the realm of discourse, that
deconstruct the ideology, and appreciate the text by reading in a different way.

The importance attached to the erotic sentiment in Sanskrit literature demanded introduction of women characters in these works. Like all other countries in the world, India has its own peculiarities in tradition, history and heritage and woman like all other people is moulded to suit that system. Apart from these, Indian woman is a product of the hierarchies of caste, and other social conditions. However, the universal aspect of womanhood is common irrespective of region, race, language etc. This common cord of womanhood connects all women. This enhances the scope of further reading of Kālidāsa’s works by applying a feminist approach. Sanskrit dramaturgy also had made a framework for women characters as the source of enjoyment. They are appreciated on the basis of the degree of enjoyment they provide to the male characters.

Even in modern Indian criticism, literature viewed from the women’s point view is conspicuous by its absence. No study is made applying feminist approach. Women were viewed as object of pleasure in most of the works. Motherhood was viewed as respectable in India as begetters of heir sons to the king heroes. But in that role also psychology of a mother is not a concern in literature.

Before Kālidāsa’s works are taken up for detailed study an overview of feminism and feminist literary criticism are given here. Granting that the author might have been influenced by the socio economic conditions prevailed in his time and the literature already
existed, a study of such conditions and literature are also essential for
the reading of his works. Thus to have an overall idea of the same as
reflected in the literature, a brief study of Indian concept of woman in
Sanskrit literature is also attempted covering different periods from
vedic literature to that of Kālidāsa.

The method adopted in this thesis is to study the text and
conventional understanding of it and analyse it from the point of view
of feminist criticism to see how women were thought of and depicted
by Kālidāsa in his works. The authority that support for such depiction
is also to be examined. Kalidasa’s picture of women does not differ
much from that of the present day. How women became convinced of
patriarchal ideologies as if they are natural is also to be examined. With
this aim, an analysis of women characters appearing in his works and
the role they play are considered. Kālidāsa had adopted the plot of his
works from texts like MB. However, he transformed it by introducing
necessary changes to suit to his ideologies. These thematic deviations
made by him, is also included in the study. Feminist theorists now
have identified the role of gender and power as the determining factors
in the unequal treatment of woman. How these gender and power
factors determined the destiny of woman characters is another concern
in addition to other topics like sex, sexuality, class, race and so on.

Feminist criticism has adopted some notions from history, race,
culture etc in literary criticism. Political power is also associated always
with male. Accordingly, men handled all well-paid and well-placed
positions associated with positions like priesthood, ministry and
military, and the kingship. This eventually resulted in framing certain values, ethics, philosophy, art and culture that are suited to this male centred system. This male centred power structure naturally culminated in different types of supremacy, which in turn oppressed women as a class. Instances of such female subordination and oppression are not rare in the works of Kālidāsa.

Kālidāsa's works are taken up in the following chapters for a detailed study from the point of view of feminist criticism. His attitude or the attitude of the society in which he lived had exerted tremendous influence on all literary categories employed by Kālidāsa. The selection of the plot, characterisation, dialogues, descriptions and even figures of speech betray how this great Sanskrit poet has handled women characters in his works.