ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN KALIDASA’S WORKS:
A CRITICAL STUDY

ABSTRACT

Submitted by- Ranjan Borthakur

Chapter-I

INTRODUCTION

Human being and Environment are closely interrelated and interdependent as the two sides of the same coin. The human being flourish in its lap and at the end take eternal rest therein. In the vast field of Sanskrit literature, beginning from the Vedic up to Classical, nature as well as environment plays a significant role towards human civilization.

Kalidasa, the great poet-dramatist occupies a dominant place in the field of Sanskrit literature. The description of nature in Kalidasa’s works is unique, majestic and significant one through which he earns the world-wide recognition as ‘the Poet of Nature’. Hence, the present research work is a humble attempt to examine the different aspects of environmental awareness as reflected in the famous works of Kālidāsa and its relevance in the present challenging crisis.

A) The Meaning of Environmental Awareness:

In common sense parlance, environment means the surroundings, i.e. the surroundings where we, the human being live. In Sanskrit, the equivalent
word for environment is *Paryavarana*. This word is constitutes as- *pari* + *a* + *vr-anat* in which the earlier prefix means ‘fully’, the second means ‘completely’ and the root have the sense of ‘covering’. Thus, it refers to the environment which entirely surrounds the living creatures, especially the human being, whose existence depends upon it.

Similarly, different dictionaries put the meaning of the term ‘environment’ in their own languages from where it is reveals that Environmental Awareness means in general, awareness about one’s surroundings i.e. air, water, plants etc. and some ethical commitment towards its general health.

*(B) Environmental Awareness as Revealed in Ancient Indian Scriptures:*

Although the concept of Environmental Awareness has become a very serious issue and a matter of great discussion in the contemporary age, it did arrest the attention of the ancient Indians since the early stage of civilization. Our ancient Indian thinkers and sociological scientists heartily realized the importance of natural objects on human life. Hence, they worshiped the natural objects as deity to protect and maintain a healthy environment.

In the *Rgveda* along, we have several *suktas* where *Rishi* propitiates the natural elements as deities showing the significance of these objects in human life or in all living being. As for instance, in the *Vayu-sukta* of the *Rgveda* states that *Vayu* or the air is the essence of all living being. Science is also regards pure air (*vayu*) is a boon to good health and happiness. The sages felt *vayu* as the store-house of ambrosial for him, it has medicinal qualities.
The *Isopanisada* states that the God is present in each and every part of this creation ‘*isa vasyamidam sarvam yatkinca jagatyam jagat*’ (*Iso*.1) Thus, it indicates that one should not dare to disturb the environment which is nothing but a manifestation of God. Following the *Upanisadic* maxims like- ‘*sarvam khalu idam brahma*’, ‘*ayamatma brahmasmi*’, ‘*yat pinde tat brahmande*’ etc also bear the same moral obligation to all.

The *Athavaveda* says that ‘the earth is our mother and we are her child’–‘*mata bhumi putroh’am prthivyah*’(*AV*.12.1.12). Similarly, the *Visnupurana* also praises the earth as our mother as she nurse the receptacle and nourished of all existing things ‘*saisa dhatri vidhatri ca dharini prasani tatha*’ / (*VP*.1.32.92).

Likewise, the animals are also a major part of our environment. Some animals like cow, horse etc. have been described in the Vedas emphatically c.f. *annam hi gauh //rastram va aswamedha..* etc. bears the testimony regarding this aspect. Therefore, the *Atharvaveda* suggest punishment to those who becomes threaten to such type of animals for their existence.

In this way, a lot of instances are available in different ancient Indian scriptures, which provide evidence of the ancient Indian thinkers concern regarding environmental awareness.

(C) Kalidasa and His Works:

Kalidasa, the prince in Sanskrit literature, occupies an unique place in the history of the world literature both as an immortal poet and dramatist. In spite of the great celebrity of his name, it must be admitted that
absolutely there are no trustworthy information regarding the personal history of this great genius. Although a large number of works are attributed as Kalidasa’s authorship but, on the basis of the grounds of common ideas, expressions and style most of modern scholars come to a view that only two epics (Mahakavyas) namely, The Raghuvamsa and the Kumarasambhava; two lyrics (Khandakavyas) named the Rtusamhara and the Meghaduta; and three plays viz. the Malivikagnimitram, the Vikramorvasiyam and the Abhijnanasakuntalam can be ascribed to his unique creations.

(D) Objectives and Scope of the Study:

Environment plays a key role in human civilization. In order to obtain sustainable development of human life, favorable environment is essential. In the twenty first century, the era of science of technology, human civilization has achieved tremendous progress in different fields of the society. On the other hand, due to process of industrialization and technological advancement has created innumerable environmental problems like-the air pollution, ozone depletion, noise pollution, wild-life protection, water pollution, land degradation etc. which hazards the human-being to exist in this planet. At the same time, it is probably an undeniable fact that human being has failed to provide required attention towards Mother Nature. As a result, various types of environmental laws like the Forest Act, 1927; Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980; Wild-life Protection Act; 1970; Water (Protection and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981; Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986 have emerged out. Different Govt. and Non-Govt. organizations have been undertaken various significant programmed and research to create environmental awareness among the people.
Kalidasa, the prince in Sanskrit Literature, portrays in a most appreciating manner the universal relationship between Nature and Human being. The works of Kalidasa, the poet of nature, is, in fact, a treasure house of moral lessons which can work as the basis for develop new environmental ethics in the world which has much relevance in the present era. Therefore, it is probably the need of hour to examine the concepts of Environmental Awareness in the works of Kalidasa, the poet dramatist. The present work is a humble attempt to search and find out the way, if any, which help us in solving environmental problem which has appeared before the world as one of the most remarkable challenges.

Chapter – II

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE LYRICAL WORKS.

Environmental Awareness in the Rtusamhara:

In the Rtusamhara, the poet of nature Kalidasa portrays six Indian seasons in a most fascinating way. It is the first literary product of the young poet, whose eye misses no loveliness in nature where Kalidasa establishes an equal harmony between man and nature. Here, the poet shows the impact of various seasons upon the flora and fauna. In the Rtusamhara, Kalidasa shows that nature itself has its own beauty. Each and every season can glad the earth with their own virtue. Again, each and every season offers abundant items towards mankind which has been highlighted by the poet time and again in this lyric. For example, during the summer season, the women ally heat by using sandal paste and some other cosmetics used in
their bath which are produced by some trees. All these reveal Kalidasa’s affectionate love towards his natural environment.

**Environmental Awareness in the Meghaduta.**

In the *Meghaduta* also nature plays a very significant role. Here, we have the vivid description of various types of plants, animals, mountains, hills, rivers, lakes, flowers as well as some living and non-living elements of nature which not only charms the poetic creation of the great poet, also reflect the heartiest love or consciousness of Kalidasa towards nature or the natural environment surrounded by him. As for instance, in the *Meghaduta*, Kalidasa presents the piece of clouds through which Yaska wish to send his well being message to his beloved as an animate object. Thus, he placed the natural elements and human beings in the same platform. The poet while processed to describe the route of the cloud in its march from Ramagiri to Alaka has not forgotten to mention such hills and rivers like Amrakuta, Vindhya, Narmada, Vetravati, Gandhavari, Gambhira etc.

Similarly, in the second part of this lyric, Kalidasa describes the city Alaka which is the destination of the cloud by the exiled Yaska. Here also Kalidasa describes the beauty of this city with its pleasant sides of nature. All these stand nothing but as the loveliness, high gratitude as well as his concern towards nature.

Thus, these two lyrics set up on the lap of nature where Kalidasa establishes the natural objects in human forms and he makes an emotional relationship between man and environment. Through his two lyrics, Kalidasa depicts in a touching manner, the natural objects in human form. For example, in the *Meghaduta*, many rivers catch our attention as heroines, they
captive the heart of the cloud. The river Vetravati flows with trembling waves like a beautiful heroine. The cloud is kissing the passionate lady. These all bear as Kalidasa’s attractive and aware mind towards his surroundings.

Chapter – III

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE COURT EPICS.

Environmental Awareness in the Kumarasambhava.

In the epic Kumarasambhava, Kalidasa portrays a very pleasing and exciting picture of environment. In the Himalaya Mountain, everybody becomes very excited and delighted by the presence of nature. The description of spring season as found in the third canto is very unique and noticeable where Kalidasa presents all the living and non-living objects of nature in the same platform. By presenting the natural objects in different important character of this epic the poet establishes an equal harmony between man and nature. The live picture of the natural environment as found in the third canto may be mentioned here as a clear instance. Moreover, he shows that nature has its own feelings and emotions. These are nothing but Kalidasa’s aware-mind towards nature or natural environment.

Environmental Awareness in the Raghuvamsa

The attractive mind of Kalidasa towards nature is reveals from the beginning of the epic Raghuvamsa. In the second verse of the first canto,
Kalidasa compares the description to the solar dynasty to the vast ocean and his poetical genius to a small boat. Similarly, in the thirty verse of this canto the poet calls the ocean as the rampart of the earth. The earth is a heroine. The ocean serves as her girdle and bracelet. These all shows Kalidasa’s affectionate love towards nature or environment. Moreover, in the *Raghuvamsa*, we have the description of the divine cow Nandini, by the advice of Vasistha, Dilipa follows the cow Nandini as her shadow in the Himalayas. Through the episode of the cow Nandini, Kalidasa seems to suggest that the cow is valuable asset that needs to be preserved and protected at all cost. Again in this epic, Kalidasa shows the utility of wind. The wind like a faithful attendant serves his master with great earnestness and devotion. It also carries within its wake fragrance of flowers. Thus, we have a lot of examples are here and there in the whole epic *Raghuvamsa* which reflects Kalidasa’s affectionate mind towards nature or natural environment. He minutely observes nature and establishes it that how man is completely dependent on nature. Similarly, he shows how the natural objects like air (wind), water, ocean etc. serves all living-being and other utilities of these natural elements in human life in a very attractive poetical manner.

*Chapter – IV*

**ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE PLAYS.**

Environmental Awareness in the *Malavikagnimitram*:

The *Malavikagnimitram* is known as the first attempt of dramatic creation of Kalidasa containing the love-story between the king Agnimitra and Malavika as its central theme. From the beginning to the end, in delineation of the main theme, the poet associates various types of pictures
of different seasons, and natural objects like the Sun, Moon, clouds, sky etc. are the inanimate objects apart from flora and fauna in a very fantastic, artificial and exciting manner which ultimately reflects the aware or attractive mind of Kalidasa towards his surroundings. In the *Mālavikāgnimitram*, Kālidāsa Portrays a very delightful and exciting picture of environment. The heroine of the play Mālavikā, the Paribrājikā, the king Agnimitra, the Vidūṣaka etc. who became delighted by such types of environment. Kālidāsa makes an interrelationship between man and nature. As for instance, in the third act of the *Mālavikāgnimitram*, Mālavikā goes to the Aśoka-garden to strike the Aśoka-tree which is eagerly waiting for the kick of a fair lady to blossom fully. To make an intimate relationship between man and nature Kālidāsa establishes this concept that the natural objects have also the capacity to share with human feelings. For example, in the third act the intoxicated cuckoos with pleasant notes asked the king that if the love–torture is bearable. Again, this play reflects Kālidāsa’s emphasastic mind to protect the plant kingdom. By comparing the natural elements to the hero and the heroine of the play, the poet establishes an equal harmony between man and nature where the natural objects are stands in the human form. Sometimes, Kālidāsa places the animals in higher position than man. In the third act, Mālavikā is compared to the hidden treasure jealously guarded by the serpents, suggesting that Mālavikā was under the strictest watch of the queen Dharini which suggests man’s dependence on even the poisonous snake for guarding his wealth. All these reveal Kālidāsa’s awareness and great concern towards environment.
Environmental Awareness in the Vikramorvasiyam:

In the Vikramorvasiyam the poet of nature, Kālidāsa endows poetic grandeur in the delineation of nature. In this description of nature the dramatist includes the inanimate objects apart from the flora and fauna. He deals with all these from a subjective point of view. King Purūrava, the hero of the play becomes almost mad in grief due to separation from his beloved. So, is in search of his beloved in the forest and expresses his mournful emotions to each and every object of the forest that he sees before him. Kālidāsa makes the hero of the play to perceive an image of the heroine in the various objects of nature. So, Purūrava finds immense similarities of his beloved in many of these objects and suspects them as the disguised form of Urvaśī and finally rescued his beloved in the form of a creeper. Thus, in this play nature plays a dominant place. These ultimately ponder Kālidāsa’s knowledge and affiliation towards natural environment.

Environmental Awareness in the Abhijnanasakuntalam:

Kālidāsa’s magnum opus Abhijñānasakuntalam is a concrete example of the co-existence of nature and man. The whole play is set in the lap of nature through which the great playwright spreads the importance of nature or environment in human life. Except the fifth act of the play almost all the acts have their settings admits nature where we find a perfect harmony between man and nature in a most appreciating and unique manner. In his description, Kālidāsa shows how the plants and animals can share their feelings and emotions with human beings at the time of their joy and sorrow. The mournful picture of the penance-grove at the time of
Sakuntala’s departure may be cited here as an example. Thus, the whole play stands as an unique citation of Kalidasa’s love, sympathy, high gratitude as well as great concern towards nature or environment.

Chapter – V

THE RELEVANCE OF KALIDASA’S CONCEPTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE PRESENT CHALLENGING CRISIS:

From the above discussions, it seems that Kalidasa, in his all works portrays nature or natural environment in a most appreciating manner, the universal relationship between Nature and Human being, where human-being is nothing but an element of virtue nature which is much relevant in the present century.

Kalidasa always laid emphasis regarding the character formation towards once natural environment. For example, in the Abhijnanasakuntalam we observed Sakuntala as a good volunteer of nature. In the first act of this play, Anasuya, Priyamvada and Sakuntala were watering in the garden of Kanva. They always took utmost care to their plants. Sakuntala, even never took a single droop of water without watering the plants of the hermitage. Similarly, in the Kumarasambhava, Parvati have been depicted as a good servant of the hermitage of Siva. In the Raghuvamsa, he presents Dilipa is a well follower of the divine cow Nandini. Thus, through his poetic manner, Kalidasa conveys a message to all that how man should accustomed with nature, is a great teaching towards mankind at the present environmental situation.
Kalidasa always emphasizes on a pure mind for a conducive environment which has relevant in the present psycho-ecological scenario of the global era.

It is fact that maximum environmental hazards that has faced by modern society occurs due to human activity. Various types of pollutions like air, water, soil defilement etc. exhausted the modern civilized society to live in this planet. But in Kalidasa, we have adequate morals to reduce these problems.

The concept of yajna has been depicted by Kalidasa in his all works. Modern scientists have also find out the utilities of such yajnas. In different places, different types of experiments have been going on about the influence of yajnas towards environment. Scientists prove that yajnas can save the ozone layer from its depletion.

Regarding the protection of wild-life’s, which draws serious attention among the environmentalists of the present era. In this case, the works of Kalidasa, we have innumerable moral lessons relevance of which may play as a nodal approach in solving this problem. According to Kalidasa, man should avoid violence. He should get rid of the negative feelings such as anger, malice, desire, attachment etc. One should understand his duty properly towards these wild creatures.

Some other concepts, found in Kalidasa’s works, may lead the modern scientists to new way of investigation. For example, in his all works, Kalidasa mentions about many auspicious plants with their medicinal value. Among his all works, in the Kumarasambhava only, there are references to more than 50 plants and trees with innumerable utilities. Data as found in
Kalidasa’s works, it may be said that these texts, regarding the plant ecology, contain rich treasures of botanical information. Analysis of these data may bring to fore usefulness of some plants hitherto unknown or less known.

Thus, it can be said that the works of Kalidasa had the grass root level information along with its practical utilization for eco-friendly life support system. Kalidasa’s works is full of techniques, methods, principle and philosophy of saving human beings from the horrible impact of environmental pollution.

Chapter – VI

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS:

In Sanskrit literature, Nature as well as environment occupies a dominant place. Kālidāsa is a poet of classical Sanskrit literature, maintains the tradition regarding environment. In his all works Kālidāsa establishes himself as a devotee of nature. The description of nature is unique in Kālidāsa’s poetry bringing out the natural beauty and serenity of the mountains, forests, hermitages, lakes, oceans, rivers and natural activities of the animals and birds. In his whole literary works, Kālidāsa, the poet of nature, portrays skillfully the intimate relationship between man and environment.

Kālidāsa perfectly realized this fact that for a fair environment both the animate and inanimate things should have equal importance. Therefore, he depicts various seasons cool breeze, rivers etc through his own poetic
manner and side by side shows its influence in human life or the living world. Kālidāsa depicts the glamour of seasons and their reactions on man and other living beings. All these reflect Kālidāsa’s great sense of respect towards nature.

Kālidāsa presents nature possessing sharp human feelings. The description of nature as observed in the fourth act of the Abhijñānasakuntalam and the presentation of the spring season as found in the third canto of the Kumarasambhava may mention here specially.

The characters in Kālidāsa’s plays have been depicted as dedicating themselves as workers of nature. With their normal duties they maintain their oblation to the Sun, Moon, or to the other natural objects. In this context, the characters like the goddess Parvati, sage Marica, Kanva, the king Dusyanta, Agnimitra, Purūrava, Šakuntalā, Anasuyā, Priyamvadā, etc. may mention here especially.

Kālidāsa, the great poet was well aware of the fact that trees and plants are the major components of the environment, play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance. Therefore, the poet-dramatist gives much emphasis regarding the protection and care of them, which have been well revealed in his works, especially in the fourth act of the drama Abhijñānasakuntalam. He is so strict in protection of the plant kingdom that in the Kumarasambhava, Kalidasa states that even a poisonous tree should not cut be down growing after it once own hand.

In his all works, Kālidāsa shows the utility of plants for human benefit. In the Abhijñānasakuntalam, Kālidāsa mentions the Iṅgudi nuts, the Darva grass etc. as medicinal plants through which he shows how man’s
health depends upon the plants. Similarly, in his all works, Kālidāsa depicts in a touching manner, the inter-dependence between man and animals.

Through his all works, Kālidāsa imposed restrictions on killing animals. Therefore, the king Dusyanta was cautioned not to misuse his valuable arrow by applying the same on an innocent animal. He alerts the king Dusyanta not to kill the hermitage deer. Kālidāsa establishes well the fact that in a peaceful environment even the fierce animals forget their violent nature if the human being may maintain an eco-friendly, fellow-felling behavior with the other.

Kālidāsa is always in favour of hermitage which is a place of peace, purity and tranquility and where there is no space for violence. According to Kalidasa, it is the best place for health, education and so on, besides the religious activities by the asetics.

Kālidāsa portrays the Yajñas as purifiers of environment. It can purify the whole environment including human beings and human minds. So, on the eve of Śakuntalā’s departure to her husband’s house, Kaṇva advised her to go round the sacrificial fire for purifying her mind desiring a well future.

It is an undeniable fact that, in the present century human being has enjoys maximum comfort in daily life, through the advancement of science and technology. On the other hand, the degradation of nature and environment is also alarming. Kālidāsa, the great poet dramatist, in his all works, skillfully portrays an intimate and cordial relationship between man and nature and here lies the uniqueness of Kālidāsa which is very much relevant today. Thus, the depiction of nature, his views and thoughts definitely establish Kalidas not only as a great poet of nature but as an
environmentalist too. And if the present so called developed human civilization may follow the great morals regarding man-nature relationship as maintained by the great poet Kalidasa may surely help to overcome the threats of environment and may lead the human being to live in a conducive, eco-friendly, pollution free world.