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***Meghdutam* and Nature: A Comparative Study on Nature, Ecocriticism and Transcendentalism between Kalidasa and Ralph Waldo Emerson**

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Abstract

Kalidasa is known as the most powerful nature poet of Sanskrit. His depth of knowledge about nature and his true love for it make him one of the best Indian poets. By describing different seasons, natural elements like trees and plants, animals and birds, clouds, mountains, fountains and many things, Kalidasa helps the readers to realize the beauty of nature. On the other hand, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great philosopher and poet of eighteenth century has some philosophical ideals where nature is not simply a backdrop but an essential element of human consciousness and love. *Meghdutam* is such kind of a love poem by Kalidasa where he uses the beauty and importance of nature, and a beautiful connection between man and nature. Emerson's philosophy on nature is found in the lines of Kalidasa. In brief, Emerson has many philosophical concepts about nature of his own which can be applied in *Meghdutam*. This article explores how the incessant environmental beauty of *Meghdutam* brings a beautiful realization about the importance of nature in human life in the light of Emerson's philosophical concepts of nature. A deep connection between nature and human experience in Kalidasa's *Meghdutam* is explored examining its resonance with Emerson's philosophy of Nature. Through this article, my intention is to confirm that both Kalidasa and Emerson highlight the transformational influence of nature, advocating for a profound ecological and spiritual bond between people and the environment.

Keywords: nature, ecocriticism, Kalidasa, *Meghdutam*, philosophy, love, spirit.

Introduction

There is very close relationship between nature and human being at various levels since

the Paleolithic age. Early human race started their lives living in the lap of nature. Because of the development of age, at present human being create their own society, but still, they cannot imagine living their life without nature. Nature becomes part and parcel of human race, and thus, they fully depend on nature for all kinds of supports which they need the most. In short, it can be said that the learnings of human beings start from nature and thus they are indebted to nature in so many ways. Great Indian poet Kalidasa makes his place not only in Sanskrit literature but also in the world literature. In his writing, a beautiful blend between nature and human life is found which makes him very different than other poets of his time. His lyrical pattern, poetic style, language, selection of natural objects like cloud, trees, mountains, fountains, a close relation between husband and wife, separation between two lovers and eagerness to meet with one another, and many more topics help him to reach at the highest pick of literature. On the other hand, 81 Ralph Waldo Emerson, the renowned poet as well as a philosopher wrote several essays, prose and composed beautiful poems of nature. In his writing, he explains nature in many ways, especially through some philosophies. As a philosopher, Emerson explores himself in the midst of nature where there is presence of peace and happiness instead of hazards and tension of life. According to him, people in the past always maintained an intimate and immediate relationship with God and nature as life was simple without any complexity like the present days. People motivated themselves by their faith on God. Emerson believes that, each moment provides an opportunity to learn from nature and to approach an understanding of universal order through it. This paper analyzes the poetic and ceaseless natural beauty of Kalidasa's love poem *Meghdutam* through Emerson's lens of different philosophies of nature. It also focuses on the importance of ecocriticism which becomes a very important topic now a days.

We know that literature keeps a very integral role to connect with nature, which is called ecocriticism. In other words, it can be said that ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and environment. Thus, an ecological study deals with green landscapes, trees and plants, animals and birds and other natural resources. It also focuses on contemporary environmental issues by dealing with human and non-human life. The first definition on ecocriticism in the introduction of the book *Ecocriticism Reader* is:

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production

and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (Garrard 03)

Cheryll Glotfelty comments about the theory of ecocriticism in this way:

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know that there was an earth at all. (Glotfelty and Fromm p. xvi)

However, ecocriticism expands its importance and critical approaches by describing the social hazards and awareness using the theories which differ from other literary theories. Some particular human beings consider themselves superiors than all other living things. Thus, they become self-centered and exploit natural and environmental things intentionally for their own desires without caring about others. In this regard, a close study of Emerson's discussion on the philosophy of nature as well as Kalidasa's love for nature make the reader a satisfactory realization about the importance of nature in the life of man. At the same time, how to make nature green, pollution free and safe place for living, also come out in their writings. To make the article fruitful, there are some research questions which help to identify the gap in existing literature that this paper aims to fill. In which way both Kalidasa and Emerson bring the comparison through some facts, by answering these research questions, it will become clear. The key research questions guiding this study are given as follows:

- a. How Kalidasa and Emerson bring a very close connection between man and nature through their writings?
- b. How does eco-criticism in Kalidasa and Emerson's works address environmental and human issues?
- c. How can we make a comparative study between Kalidasa's *Meghdutam* and Emerson's essay regarding human-nature connections?
- d. Explain the roles of conscious human beings in order keep themselves very close to their nature.

Methods and Materials

The methodology that is applied in this article is Qualitative Research Methodology. The aim of this method is to discover the underlying motives of human behavior. It also refers to the

understanding of people's regular dialogues, attitudes, beliefs and experiences. In this regard, the living place of human being is also very important. Through literary analysis and thematic exploration, the methodology is applied in this paper. The primary tool that is used here is a close study of the poem, some philosophies on nature and the essay with a detailed exploration of the themes and issues connected with the characters and a good understanding of the viewpoints of both the poets. Some critical books, topic related documents, library sources and online references are used in this article for analyzing purpose.

Results and Discussion

Kalidasa was not only a poet, but also a traveller. He travelled widely in India and spent a long time in the city of Ujjain which he had referred many times in his poems. As a pilgrim, he went to Southern India and became a lover of nature as the side was full of mountains and different types of wild flowers. To him, more than the sea, the ocean was beautiful and terrible barrier. As a poet and a man of nature, Kalidasa observed both nature and human being very closely and later he wrote about all these points in his epic poem *Meghdutam*. *Meghdutam* is a lyrical and melancholic love poem composed by Kalidasa having two parts: Purvamegh (previous cloud) and Uttarmegha (consequent cloud). Both parts consist 115 stanzas compiling six to eight lines in each stanza. The title *Meghdutam* reflects the theme of the poem. Megh means Cloud and Dutam means Messenger. So *Meghdutam* means the Cloud Messenger. Each stanza of this poem explores some themes; such as ecological topic, a passionate relationship between a husband and wife and various agents of natural objects through which the couple want to unite after their separation. Emerson, the renowned poet as well as a philosopher wrote several essays, prose and composed beautiful poems of nature. In his writing, he explains nature in many ways, especially through some philosophies. As a philosopher, Emerson explores himself in the midst of nature where there is presence of peace and happiness instead of hazards and tension of life. According to him, people in the past always maintained an intimate and immediate relationship with God and nature. Life was simple without any complexity like the present days. People motivated themselves by their faith on God. Emerson feels the presence of God in every object of nature like the romantic poet and Pantheist William Wordsworth. To Emerson, each moment provides an opportunity to learn from nature and to approach an understanding of universal order through it. Thus, Kalidasa and Emerson have applied the same sentiment about nature in this regard.

The lyrical poetry *Meghdutam* shows how Yaksha, the banned king feels for his wife Alaka

even after his exile. Yaksha is asked to uphold the responsibility to safeguard the lotus garden assigned to his care. Because of neglecting this regular duty intentionally, Yaksha gets the punishment by Kubera, the King of Yakshas or natural spirits and the God of wealth. Yaksha becomes completely alone and detached from others, especially from his beloved wife Alaka for one year. He wants to become invisible and visit to Alaka whom he has to leave behind for a long time. But he fails to do it as he lost all his supernatural powers cursed by Kubera. He starts missing her so much and becomes crazy to get her whereabouts anyhow. He is in such kind of situation that he fails to trust any human being who can help him in this regard. Suffering the agony of separation, at last Yaksha becomes completely love ridden and takes the help of a cloud named Megha so that it can carry the message from Yaksha to Alaka. The living place of his wife Alaka is on mount Kailasa in the Himalaya mountains, far from the place where Yaksha is exiled. At the time of describing his mental agony through Yaksha, graphical descriptions of nature with topographical detail of ancient India have been wonderfully described through the lyrical stanzas of *Meghdutam* by Kalidasa. *Meghdutam* deals with the environmental theme from the very beginning to the end of the poem. Among all the poems of Kalidasa, *Meghdutam* is the one where a complete and beautiful nature and its different objects come out by describing some seasons with their beauty. That means, seasonal beauty of nature plays a very important role in this poem. Kalidasa describes different seasons and their changes in his poems. Reading his study on seasons, it reflects his good observation on seasons and their impacts on nature. For example, in his poem *Rtusamharam* (The Gathering of the Seasons), which completes in six cantos, Kalidasa describes summer, rain, autumn, the season of frosts, winter and spring very beautifully. In *Meghdutam*, he describes monsoon. Rainy season or monsoon offers freshness and profound affection between lovers. Kalidasa describes the direction through which the cloud is a traveler, not with the dullness of prosaic detail, but with that true poetic pencil which, by a few happy touches, brings the subject of the description vividly before the mind's eye. Every verse displays the essence of the charm that in itself is beautiful. The descriptions of all these sights rise to their own heights of loveliness as the Yaksha describes his beloved city Alaka:

And, hearing your thunder-a sound sweet to their ears-
That can make Earth unfurl her mushroom parasols,
Regal swans longing for Manasa-lake,
Gathering tender lotus-shoots for the way

Will be your companions in the sky

Even up to Mount Kailasa's peak. (Kalidasa, stanza 11)

Ecocriticism:

To make the human beings conscious about the objects of nature, ecocriticism expands its focus from nature writing to environmental commitment, study of the society and culture of people. In the words of Glotfelty and Fromm, "Ecocriticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire eco sphere." (Glotfelty and Fromm xix) Three major American authors named Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau become familiar and renowned as their works are related to nature, its life force, a good connection between man and nature and the wilderness of nature. The term Ecocriticism was first used by William Howe Rueckert in his essay named *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. In this essay, Rueckert mainly focuses on the application of ecology and its concepts to the study of literature. According to him:

The first Law of Ecology-that everything is connected to everything else-applies to poems as well as to nature. The concept of the interactive field was operative in nature, ecology, and poetry long before it ever appeared in criticism. (Rueckert 04)

To Rueckert, in the stanzas of the natural and ecological poems there is a living presence of the environment and nature which are very much connected with each other. A poet is an ecologist as he cannot avoid nature while he composes poems. Thus, he says in the essay:

Poems are green plants among us; if poets are suns, then poems are green plants among us for they clearly arrest energy on its Path to entropy and in so doing, not only raise matter from lower to higher order, but help to create a self-perpetuating and evolving system. That is, they help to create creativity and community, and when their energy is released and flows out into others, to again raise matter from lower to higher order (to use one of the most common descriptions of what culture is). (Rueckert 05)

It is to be noted that though the poem *Meghdutam* by Kalidasa was composed before Rueckert's work on ecocriticism, a very good analysis on ecocriticism is brought in this poem by the poet. In the following lines of *Meghdutam*, a serene beauty of nature comes out by the poet:

If you aim to drink her clear crystal waters slantwise,
Hanging down by your hind-quarters in the sky
Like some elephant out of paradise,
As your shadow glides along her stream

She would appear beautiful at once as though

She and Yamuna flowed together at that spot. (Kalidasa, stanza 53)

In these lines, Kalidasa describes the journey of the Cloud whose intention is to meet the river Yamuna and drink the clear crystal-like water of that flowing river. The shape of the cloud is like elephant, a gigantic animal of Paradise plays with the currents of that river. Kalidasa introduces the monsoon cloud which Yaksha finds while he feels completely alone:

Saw on Asadha's most auspicious day

A cloud embracing the crest of the hill,

Strikingly-shaped like a sportive elephant

Bent down to butt a river bank. (Kalidasa, stanza 02)

These beginning lines of the poem describe a connection between nature (cloud) and animal (elephant). Symbolically though, the poet brings the monsoon cloud with the shape of an elephant. Yaksha thinks for a while and requests the cloud to take a farewell from other clouds so that it can start its journey as early as possible. This journey of the cloud is from the place Ramgiri Mountain in Central India to Alaka city instructed by Yaksha. During the journey, many natural elements like rivers, forests, moon, sun, animals, birds, cloud, etc. are described by Kalidasa. All these natural objects are the representatives of the beautiful nature. For example, in Alaka city, the young pretty women are compared to sweet scented flowers. The different parts of their attractive bodies represent the flowery decoration of the nature, blooming plants, humming insects like birds and bees, and lakes full of lotus flowers.

In order to enrich the environmental crisis, the role of literature is very important. A message lies in this regard. According to this message, as a human being, living with nature and removing limited resources is the only source to live in peace and harmony. To Kalidasa and other ancient writers, nature is one of the central themes in their earlier writings. Later, a serious concern of ecology is found after the ancient age. The study of the poem *Meghdutam* has defined the path of cloud according to Yaksha's instruction. He further uses his own experience related to his birth place Ujjayani, the capital of Avanti nation in order to relate the geographical ideal segment. The descriptions of cloud's journey, monsoon, various rivers like Reva and Vetrav, seasonal flow of the rivers, etc. represent the strong bonding between human being and nature.

In the poetic lines of Kalidasa and the theories of Emerson, the philosophical comments of Rueckert about nature are found very clearly. Kalidasa uses not only the names of some famous

rivers, mountains and animals, at the same time he uses some sweet-scented flowers of nature without whom nature remains incomplete:

Seeing the green-gold Nipa flowers
With their stamens half-emerging
And the Kandal is showing their early buds
Along the edge of every pool,
Savouring the rich fragrance of the earth
In the forests burnt by fire,
Antelopes will chart your path as you pass
Shedding fresh rain drops. (Kalidasa, stanza 22)

On the other hand, in his poems and essays, Emerson applies several philosophies related to nature. He further uses analogy and imagery to advance the concept of universal unity, that is a close relation between man and nature. For example, by the image of a circle, Emerson conveys a message: encompassing, perfect self-containment of the universe. To him, reason and understanding are closely connected to get attachment with nature. Later, this attachment helps the human being to find spirit or God in nature where he is living, and among the natural objects, animals and birds. Thus, nature is a fundamental statement of Emerson's own philosophy.

Meghdutam starts with a request to the Cloud by Yaksha about a journey with a beautiful description of the landscape. The Cloud starts its journey from Himalaya Mountain and travels from south to north toward Alaka Mountain in order to represent Yaksha's exile-related emotions and circumstances. His wife understands the feelings of her husband though they are far from each other. Both of them keep a hope that very soon they will be reunited and again start loving to each other. Through their hope and true love for each other, the message of the poem come into focus. In the very beginning stanzas, Kalidasa describes Yaksha's emotional breakdown using the following lines:

A certain Yaksha unmindful of he appointed duties
And cursed by his lord to endure
A year's grievous separation from his beloved
Dwelt exiled, his lustre dimmed, on Rama's hill
In Hermitages thick with shade-trees and waters
Hallowed by the touch of Janaka's daughter. (Kalidasa, stanza 01)

Yaksha starts spending his time restlessly. He remembers the sweet memories of his past where he has passed a very romantic and relaxed life with his beloved wife. This remembrance of his past is like a healing balm to him during his crucial time in exile. He keeps his strong faith that his wife never forgets him and she always waits for his return. In this situation, Yaksha prays to Megha (the Cloud) to work like a messenger. Kalidasa describes the faith of Yaksha on the Megha or Cloud about delivering his message to his wife by the following lines:

Go then to Alaka, abode of the Yaksa Lord,
 Her palaces washed by moonlight
 Streaming from Siva's brow
 Where He is seated in her outer groves. (Kalidasa, stanza 07)

The nature used by Kalidasa in *Meghdutam* keeps a connection with the themes of Emerson. To Emerson, each individual must develop a personal understanding of the universe. Human being continues their living with the help of their wisdom, knowledge and love for nature and natural elements. He further comments that, people in the past had a very intimate and immediate relationship with God and nature by arriving at their own understanding of the whole universe. He comments that all the natural elements get new lives with a new day. Emerson further joins the lines by saying that each moment of human being provides a good opportunity to learn the basic things from nature, and to approach an understanding of universal order through it. In this regard, Emerson's philosophy resembles William Wordsworth, the romantic poet and pantheist who believes God's presence both in nature and human life, especially during childhood time. In his poem "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", God's presence is declared through the following lines:

And all the earth is gay;
 Land and sea
 Give themselves up to jollity,
 And with the heart of May
 Doth every Beast keep holiday
 Thou child of Joy

Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy Shepherd-boy! (Wordsworth, line 29-35). Another famous poem "Tintern Abbey" by him is also a good example in this regard. Wordsworth's love for nature, God and childhood are combinedly present in the lines of both

poems where he expresses a happy and tense free life with the presence of God, a similar feeling like Emerson.

Transcendentalism:

In the book-length essay *Nature*, Emerson puts forth the foundation of transcendentalism, a movement of 19th century writers and philosophers in New England. Webster dictionary defines it in this way: It emphasizes a priori conditions of knowledge and experience, or the unknowable character of ultimate reality or that emphasizes the superior as the fundamental reality. Transcendentalism promotes a non-traditional appreciation of nature by suggesting that the divine, or God, suffuses nature, and it can be understood only by studying nature very deeply. He explains in this essay that ancient people always maintained a direct connection with God and nature to expand their knowledge as well as finding the answers of some questions related to their lives in the world. The transcendentalists are different and self-governing individuals who accept some basic premises about man's place in the world. Above all, they believe in the importance of a direct relationship with God and nature. In his essay *Nature*, the beginning lines of Emerson defines the truth in following ways: "The foregoing generations beheld God and Nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?" (Emerson 05). After few lines, in the same paragraph, Emerson further comments:

The sun shines today also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship. (Emerson 05)

Through these introductory lines, he emphasizes the parallel positions of men and nature as manifestations of the universal order, and consequently as means of understanding that order. To him, the divine is accessible as God can communicate directly to man and thus man can grant the unlimited possibility of higher development individually. To remain receptive to this process, according to Emerson, a man must trust in himself which he explains in details. This development permits intuition, which allows the individual to realize the divinity that unfolds the human and natural realms. In the essay *Nature*, Emerson divides nature into four usages: Commodity, Beauty, Language, and Discipline. These distinctions define the ways by which people use nature for their basic needs, their desire for delight, their communication with one another, and their understanding of the world. Emerson develops the idea of each particle of nature as a microcosm reflecting the whole, and as such a point of access to the universal. In his essay *Discipline*, he writes about the

unity of Nature and the unity of variety, and then gives a conclusion stating that every single part of nature combinedly brings the perfection of the whole. The way Emerson describes nature by applying the idea of microcosm, is very similar to the nature described by Thoreau. To him, by using or looking at only one part of nature, it becomes very easy to get a complete idea about that part. Emerson explains another term named Reason as a means of universal truth. His description of Reason is very much similar to Thoreau's awareness of knowledge.

If we compare the writings between Kalidasa and Emerson, we find that both of them are not interested to take any kind of help from human beings. Kalidasa writes about the mental suffering of Yaksha who get his punishment from the King Kubera. That time he feels that nature is his true friend. And that is why he takes help from the cloud, river, mountain and other elements of nature, and always expands its helping hand in many ways. He believes that other people may refuse to help him and give him punishment for his crime, but not the natural objects. The descriptions of natural objects, season and animals in the poem *Meghdutam* by Kalidasa reflect his close study of all these things which are very much connected with Transcendentalism. On the other hand, Emerson finds a great relief when he is in the lap of nature. To him, nature is a true friend from whom he can take help, he can get a relief from mental suffering and he can share his joy and sorrow without hesitation. In his essay *Nature*, Emerson expresses his satisfaction about the presence of God in his surrounding atmosphere. He feels that man may betray him, may forget him and refuse to give any kind of support at the time of his need. But God always keeps His place in the mind of man and nature always serves him like a true friend. In the same essay *Nature*, Emerson describes the first part as natural Beauty. There he explains that natural beauty depends upon whether or not it is perceived as beautiful, and the mind fails to identify beauty in nature unless it is brought to its perception a mental agony called beauty. However, Kalidasa describes natural beauty in his poem *Meghdutam* which brings peace in the mind of its hero, Yaksha. At the same time, awareness of the necessity of the forests for the development of the human society in terms of the social, historical, economic and cultural aspects is found in Kalidasa's writing.

New Knowledge/Thesis:

On the basis of ecological theory, *Meghdutam* represents the relationship between man and nature which is defined as interdependent. This interdependent quality is present in Emerson's essay *Nature*. The difference is that Kalidasa uses nature as a friend who can help the human being to give a mental relief as well as a messenger. On the other hand, Emerson applies the bondage

between man and nature where he can get peace and satisfaction and becomes tense free. Both Kalidasa and Emerson are very conscious about ecocriticism or Green Studies. In both of their writings, the consciousness about ecocriticism come out with several examples. As both of the poets keep a strong faith on their own religion, using transcendentalism, both Kalidasa and Emerson make it confirm that in nature, God is always present who is the most reliable than any living creation of the world.

Conclusion

The language of Kalidasa provides an opportunity to learn more about the sentiment of true lover and a very clear description of nature. Through his characters from his poem *Meghdutam*, he wonderfully describes importance of nature, transcendentalism, and above all, a close bondage between man and his nature with natural elements. On the other hand, Emerson brings the same concept about nature, ecocriticism and transcendentalism in his philosophies where human being is the main element of nature. Applying the philosophies related to nature in his essay *Nature*, Emerson proves that man can be able to transcend his current focus on isolated parts and gain insight into the whole by analyzing nature properly. The learnings of human beings start from nature and thus they are indebted to nature in so many ways. Kalidasa and Emerson are both men of nature and their love and thinking on nature, ecocriticism and transcendentalism intersect each other explicitly by revealing the relationship between man and nature. Both of their views are same, where Kalidasa uses poetic lines, and Emerson uses his concrete philosophies. Reading and analyzing both Kalidasa and Emerson, it can be easily said that from ancient to eighteenth till the present age, role of nature in the life of man in so many ways is permanently chained.

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