

Metaphorical Structures in the Similes of Kālidāsa

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The Sanskrit Poeticians define poetry as figurative speech (*kāvyaṃ alanīkārāḥ*). The tropes or semantic figures contribute the cellular structure of the body of poetry (*kāvya śarīra*). By using tropes (*arthālanīkāras*), poets not only expand the spectrum of mental images but also verbalize such reflections transformed into words of figurative language. Here, language works as an organic entity where matter and manner, thought and expression are indissolubly unified. Language functions on the twin axis of selection and combination in accordance with paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships for constructing the verbal code. Therefore poetry can only be understood by a minute study of the language in which it is realized.

Since poetic language is “the language at full stretch” (Nowotny, 123), words play an important role in this creative scheme¹. Bhāmaha opines that *kāvya* formation is like stringing of a garland. As flowers with different fragrances, various forms, kinds and colours are available to a garland maker, words of different sounds, meanings, forms, types and associations are similarly available to the poet. As fragrance is the most prominent quality of the flowers, so also meaning is the soul of the word. It is on the element of meaning (*arthatattva*) that the whole importance of a word rests.

Vāmana, who introduced “*śabdapāka*” in his *Kāvyaalanīkārasūtra*, signifies it with special reference to “*vaidharbhī*” style defining that the delightful effect of the maturity of words (*śabdapāka*) results from what he considers to be the best mode of diction (*vaidharbhī rīti*). He describes that in it the excellence of a word quickens and the unreal appears as real. He explains that the “*śabdapāka*” occurs when the words are chosen in such a way that they cannot bear exchange of synonyms². Ivor Richards also seems to agree with Vāmana when he perceives that in the hands of a creative writer language acquires a life and identity of its own (1936: 131). Language, therefore, becomes—both code and message—a system of systems of signs, a sign being an intrinsic and indissoluble combination of perceptible *signans* and an interpretable

signatum. Nevertheless, it has to be kept in mind that some linguistic signs occur both in the code and in the message; others occur only in the messages.

It is interesting that both the Indian and Western Poeticians recognize figurative language as a code which is opaque and indirect. Bhāmaha speaks that deviant expression is the natural language of poetry. Descriptions such as “The sun has gone down”, “The moon is shining”, “The birds are returning to their nests”, are, in the opinion of some theorists, pieces of good poetry. Bhāmaha, however, thinks otherwise. He poses a question: “What kind of poetry is this?”³ In his view such descriptions are only pieces of information sentences (*vārta*) bereft of poetic beauty. Others such as Ruyyaka, Kṣemendra, Kuntaka, Mammaṭa and Viśwanātha, building on these ideas also feel that the unexpressed goes to embellish the expressed, which shines in its undimmed splendour and consequently captivates the minds of the connoisseurs.

Therefore, an expression is understood as figurative, both in the Oriental and Occidental views, when its literal meaning is unacceptable because it contradicts our knowledge of the world. From the semiotic point of view, to use Saussurean terms, we observe that in a tropological sign the usual *signifier-signified* relationship is disrupted. “The oscillation between several semantic planes, typical of the poetic context, loosens up the bond between sign and the object. The denotative precision arrived by ‘practical language’ gives way to connotative density and wealth of associations” (Erllich, 185). Therefore, the potentiality of various figurative transfers leads to the ‘levels of meaning’ inherent in the text. Nevertheless, the multifunctionality of the text may lead to a variety of different interpretations depending on the hierarchization of various functions.

The question—“what makes a Mahākavi?”—gets answered when a poet is conscious of all those factors mentioned above. The key lies in the art of employment of limited medium of language having unlimited possibilities. It is the skill of expressing the deepest meaning in the fewest words which is considered the sign of a great writer. Knowing the language inside out along with the quality of being a genius certainly helps a creative writer achieve excellence.

A poet like Kālidāsa exploits more consistently the full potential of language. After Vālmiki, only Kālidāsa is such a poet who could excel in writing in metaphorical language with such maturity. We find all elements of best poetry such as: *guṇa*, *rīti*, *alaiṅkāra*, *rasa*, *dhvani* etc. in his poetry. He had nothing before him to look up as

precedence of style except the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. Nevertheless, through poetry, he changed a mere skeleton in a beautiful figure by investing it with a fresh poetic embellishment or has turned ore into gold by superfine, concealing ugliness by splendour and brilliance. He, therefore, stands supreme in the whole range of Sanskrit literature and has earned the richest deserving tributes and eulogies in glorious terms for his literary flourishes from the Eastern and the Western critics and scholars. “Kālidāsa is certainly a poet’s poet” (Balakrishnan 3). Jayadeva in his *Gītagovinda* has called him *Kavikula-guru* (qtd. in Balakrishnan 6).

To build the metaphoric paradigm working in poetic language and to substantiate the hypothesis developed above, I’ll make an attempt to analyze a simile culled from *Meghadūtam*. The simile will be analyzed in three strata. The first layer will unfold the grammatical structure of the unit under analysis and will present the range of lexemes in the vocabulary i.e. lexicon of the given language. The second layer would construct the underlying proposition and the conceptual structure. And finally, the third layer will unfold the pragmatic value of the lexemes and the utterance; then unroll the suggestion constructing its emotive value.

Meghadūtam:

Pādānindoranṛitasirasirāñjalamārgapraaviṣṭam

Pūrvaprītyā gatamabhīmukham sannivṛttam tatheva/

Caṅṣuḥ khedātsalilla-gurūbhiḥ pakṣmabhiḥ cchādayantīm

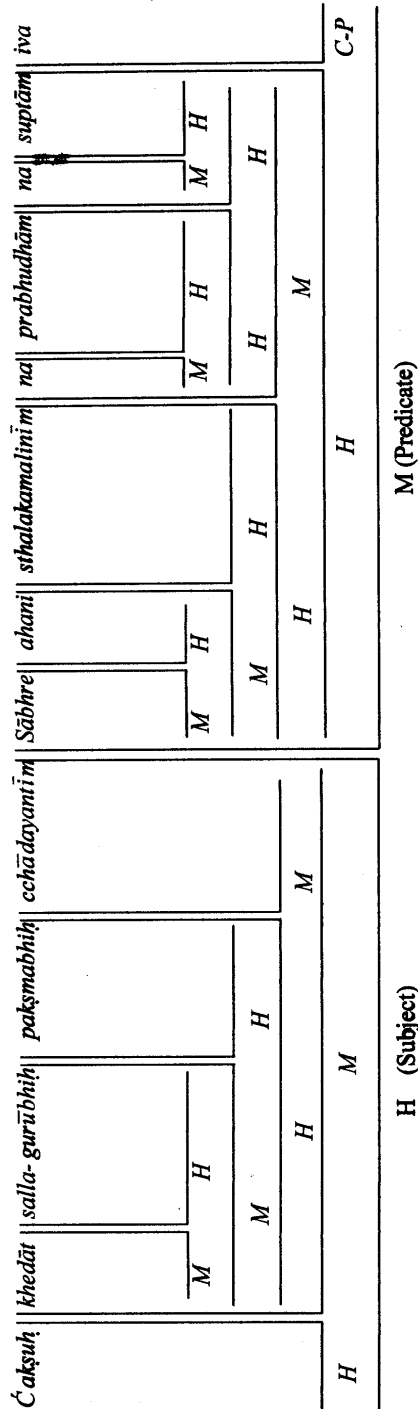
sthalakamalinīm na prabhuḍhām na suptām ||

Uttara Megha, Sl.-30)

[(Her) covering with her eyelashes, heavy with tears caused by sorrow, the eye turned, owing to delight previously felt towards the rays of the moon cool with nectar, entering through the lattice-holes, but fallen back as quickly; and (thereby) resembling a land-lotus plant, on a cloudy day, (with its lotus) neither opened nor closed up.]

Level₁: The Linguistic structure:

The first two feet of this verse stand as a pre-modifier for ‘*Caṅṣuḥ*’ (the eye) of the *Yakṣiṇi*. Therefore, I shall not give a detailed IC for this clause and would attend to the main clause furnishing the simile.



Āakṣuḥ – Neutar Singular Noun, *Khedāt* – Fifth Inflectional Singular Noun, *Salila-gurūbhiḥ* – *Salilen gurūṇi salilgurūṇi īḥ* i.e. Third Determinative Compound Noun, *Pakṣmabhiḥ* – Third Inflectional Plural Noun, *Cchādayantiṁ* – √ *chad* (root) + *śr* (Present Continuous Tense Affix) + *ī* (Feminine Suffix) = Second Inflectional Singular Noun, *Sābhre* – *abhren seha vartate sābhrm tasmin* i.e. Attributive Compound Noun in Seventh Singular Inflection, *Ahani* – Singular Noun in Seventh Inflection, *Sthalakamaliniṁ* – Singular Noun in Second Inflection, *Naprabudhām* – *pra* (prefix) + √ *budh* (root) + *ta* (*ka* – Past Passive Participle) + *ā* (Feminine Suffix) = *prabudh* + second Singular Inflection = *prabudhām* + *na* (negative prefix) = Negative, Neutar, Singular Determinate Second Inflectional Abstract Noun, *Nasuptām* – √ *swap* + *ta* (Past Passive Participle) + *ā* (Feminine Suffix) = *suptām* + *na* (negative prefix) = Negative, Neutar, Singular Determinate Second Inflectional Abstract Noun.

The phrase “*naprabudhām nasuptām*” applies both to the synecdochic Tenor “*Āakṣuḥ*” which stands as a part for the whole i.e. *Yaḥṣiṇi* and the vehicle “*Sthalakamaliniṁ*” thereby presenting the common ground for comparison. I call the Tenor synecdochic because “*Āakṣuḥ*” is neuter gender whereas “*Sthalakamaliniṁ*” is feminine gender and the common ground is also made feminine by adding the feminine suffix ‘*ā*’ to the past passive participial root form as discussed above. *Kālidāsa*, as a poet, is skilled and dext so much so that he maintains an equation regarding the number, gender and person of the objects of description. Since eyes by themselves can neither sleep nor awake voluntarily, the actual comparison is constructed between the *Yaḥṣiṇi* and the land-lotus plant. This will further be clarified in Level₂. Hence:

Tenor : *Yaḥṣinayā Āakṣuḥ*

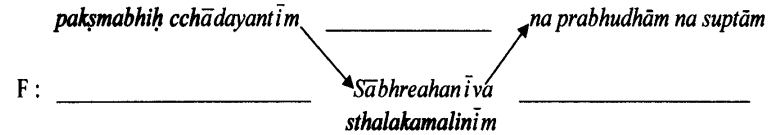
Vehicle : *Sthalakamaliniṁ*

Common ground : *na prabhudhām na suptām*

Connector : *iva*

To understand the simile more clearly, the literal and the figurative elements are separated:

L : *Āakṣuḥ khedātsalila - gurūbhiḥ*



These text-gaps can possibly be filled literally as:

Ten : *Āakṣuḥ khedātsalila - gurūbhiḥ*

pakṣmabhiḥ cchādayantiṁ [*duhsahatvāt*] *na prabhudhām na suptām*

Veh : [*Suryaprabhām vinā*] *Sābhreahanīva sthalakamaliniṁ* [*nā praphullitā*]

Lexical Choice:

The vehicle ‘land-lotus’ has been chosen from a range of lexical sets present in the lexicon. The word ‘land-lotus’ falls under the lexical category of Nouns. The table below presents the possible lexical sets:

Lexical category (N)	Lexical sets
(sthala) Kamaliniṁ	Set ₁ Yūthikā, Ketakī, Kukubhī, Kandalī, Kesara, Navajapā, Kurabakī, Śirīṣā, Kundakṣepā, Kadambinī, Kumudini, Mālatī, Lodhrā, Maṁjarī, Mandārpūṣpa, Kutujakusuma
	Set ₂ Nīlakamalini, Swarnakamalini, Madhvīlatā

This brings us now to the level of proposition and conceptual structure.

Level₁:

The Propositional Structure:

I shall again remind here that the literal unit is labeled as: 'REF_L' kept under the linguistic 'Frame' and the non-literal unit is labeled as: 'Pred.' kept under the linguistic 'Focus'. Any non-literal concept being built in the 'linguistic frame' is termed as: 'REF_r' and the implicit literal referent constructed from the co-text or the context is kept in inverted commas (" "). Any modifier is labeled as: 'MOD'.

Tenor :

		Pred.		REF _L
P1	(pakṣmabhiḥ cchādayantim)	Ākṣuḥ
		Focus		Frame
P2	(REF _r Ākṣuḥ)	"Sādhvī "
		Focus		Frame
P3	(MOD Sādhvī)	"Yakṣiṇi "

Vehicle:

		REF _L	
P1	(MOD Sthala)
			Kamalini

The proposition indicates that it is the Yakṣiṇi which is compared with the land-lotus plant. Therefore, conceptually the Yakṣiṇi is mapped from the source domain to the target domain on the basis of comparison.

These domains can be determined by using semantic markers:

Yakṣiṇi (Ākṣuḥ)	Kamalini
[+ animate]	[- animate]
[+ human]	[- human]
[+ specific]	[- specific]
[+ generic]	[+ generic]
[- having stalk]	[+ having stalk]
[- hydrophyte]	[+ hydrophyte]
[- floral]	[+ floral]

The 'Kamalini' is also associated with the concepts like: being beautiful, lustrous, long, sleek, with a halo and affected by sun and water. Besides, if the water level rises, it rises with it but if the level recedes, it does not leave its station.

Level₂:

Message:

To speak in terms of English, the common ground is functioning as an adjective, which applies both to the synecdochic Tenor and the Vehicle equally as:

(Yakṣiṇiyā) Ākṣuḥ → na prabudām na suptām → sthalakamalini

In this phrase, the verb root 'budh' has been prefixed by the prefix 'pra' [pra + 'budh = prabudh] which presents an interesting study.

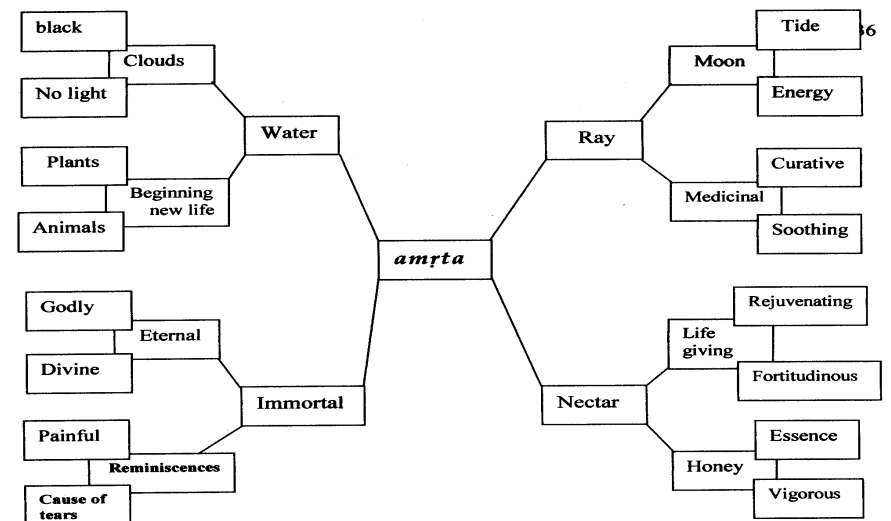
The word 'Prabudh' has the following meanings:

- wake or be awakened
- expand, open (flower)
- recognize
- developed, manifested; begun to take effect (spell)
- clear-sighted, wise
- recognized, enlightened (mind)
- inform ; teach, instruct; admonish
- awake, blown (flower)
- waken, rouse; cause to expand or open

And 'suptam' means – feign sleep.

Since both these words are attached with negatives 'na', their meanings turn into negatives too i.e. the reverse of what is presented above. Therefore, at the locutionary level the utterance is—'neither awake nor asleep' but the illocution is a state of hanging in-between smiles and tears, delight and grief, recognition and dejection, enlightenment and obscurity, appreciation and admonishment. These words splendidly state their illocutionary value by describing the predicament of the Yakṣa's beloved wife. They reflect her state marvelously and spectacularly.

Besides, another word 'amṛta' also resonates. Though each word has its resonance and suggestion which is the hallmark of Kalidāsa's poetry yet this word works like a magnet to gather many thoughts and reflections providing us a chance to have an insight into the poet's vision:



Firstly, the black clouds hold water-vapours. They shower it in the form of rain which works like *amṛta* (nectar) for the flora and fauna. Everything in Nature regenerates refreshes and is invigorated. Therefore, such clouds bring cheerfulness and joy in the rainy season as well as fertilization and growth. They are the messengers of Romance too. Not only humans but animals also are filled with passion and admixed emotions. This is what happens with Yakṣa too. He is separated from his dear wife. He is facing the pangs of ‘*viyoga*’ (separation). This separation has filled him with intense emotions and these emotions have become so powerful that he forgets the difference between the animate and the inanimate. He becomes one with Nature and calls the cloud his brother. The Śloka-5 of *Pūrvamegha* speaks of this state as: “*kāmārtā hi prakṛtikṛāpanaśetanācetanāneṣu*”. The Yakṣa also upholds the cloud as being of divine origin.

Secondly, the sky is overcast with this kind of black clouds. Had these clouds been white, i.e., without water-vapours (*Salila*), the sunlight would have reached the earth but because they are black clouds filled with water, the sunlight cannot reach the earth. This affects the land-lotus plant because to blossom and be blown, it requires sunlight which is absent since the black clouds have shrouded the sky; likewise it cannot close itself because it is day-time.

Thirdly, just as there is the alternate rise and fall of the surface of oceans, seas, rivers etc. caused by of the moon and sun, similar is the feelings within the heart of the Yakṣiṇī since her eye anxiously goes towards the moon-rays owing to previous delight but returns back as quickly because now they are the cause of her agony. Besides, the eye-lashes of the Yakṣiṇī are heavy with ‘*Salila*’ i.e. tears. These tears do not let her eyes close and she cannot open them completely lest they may fall; equally the moon-beams would hurt the eyes since she is in the state of separation too.

The suggestion is that water and the sun are a life-source. Now the land-lotus is an aquatic plant which requires water as well as the sunlight as its life source. Kālidāsa has used the word ‘*sthala*’ with lotus which suggests that this life source is missing or to be more precise, it is at least not in an adequate amount. Now, this specific land-lotus plant is given comparison with Yakṣiṇī thereby suggesting that she is away from her husband—the Yakṣa and this has brought catastrophic results. Since her dear husband is virtually not present, she has to feed herself on his memories and these memories are just adequate to keep her alive.

Further, the land-lotus plant is deprived of the sun-rays which again is a life source. As a result, the lotus cannot fully blossom. Similarly, the presence and the love of Yakṣa is like the sunlight which is required by the Yakṣiṇī to regain her state, youth and beauty. The essence of her life—her husband—is missing. This again has made her survival very difficult and causing her affliction.

Both these points are again suggestive of the sixth stage out of the total ten stages of ‘*Kāma*’ (sensuality) whereby nothing interests the subject whether it is good food, entertainment or even self-grooming etc. In this stage everything seems insipid and waste.

Conclusion

Kālidāsa has presented a very apt simile. The first two foots describe ‘*prabuddha*’ (awakened) state of the Yakṣiṇī and the next two foots describe the ‘*supt*’ (asleep) state. Though ‘*na prabuddhām na suptām*’ is a contrastive (*virodhātma*) statement yet both the words are complementary to each other; in other words, being inconsistently consistent and interrelated. This speaks of and illustrates Yakṣiṇī’s predicament.

The dexterity, insight and genius of Kālidāsa is also manifested in his choice of words for he was cognizant of the suggestive, emotive and cognitive power of words especially in the citation of the word ‘*kamalinī*’ for introducing the comparison of Yakṣiṇī. The Yakṣiṇī is a *Padminī Strī* and no other flower could describe her as *Padminī* than the lotus (*kamalinī*). His grammatical skill is visible in his use of the qualifier ‘*sthala*’ making the word—‘*sthala kamalinī*’ because he wanted to make the comparison look alike as the Yakṣiṇī was lying on the floor. The *kamalinī* is virtually away from water and sunlight just as the Yakṣiṇī is away from her husband – the Yakṣa, and his love.

Hence, decoding the metaphoric structure of this simile not only brings to light Kālidāsa’s pictorial quality, creative gift and vision but also illustrates how the metaphoric structures unfold themselves step by step. How words used accrue the picturesque and become semantically loaded. The skill to tap the right word and dexterity to naturally weave metaphoricity into the matrix of the text is what makes Kālidāsa a great poet (*Mahākavi*).

Notes and References

¹ Echoes of the same idea in at a more deeper and kaleidoscopic level can also be noticed in Patañjali’s:

ābdabrāhmaṇi nisnataḥ parabrahmādhigacchati —*Mahā-Bhāṣya*, Ūnti Parva.

² *Adhanoddharane tāvad yāvād dolayate manaḥ/*

padasya sthāpīte sthairyē hant siddha sarasvatī /

yat padāni jyājanīyeva pariṛttisahīṣṇatam /

tām ābdānyāsanisnataḥ ābdapākam pracakṣate / —*Kāvyālaṅkārasutrarṛtti* 1.3.15 Comm.

³ *Gato’stamarko bhatinduryanti vasaya pakṣīnak /*

Itīyevamadi kim kāvyam vartamenam pracakṣate / //

—*Kāvyālaṅkāra* II/92.

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