



Kumarasambhava of Kalidasa

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The Kumarasambhava of Kalidasa varies from the loveliness of spring and the delights of married love to the utter desolation induced by the death of beloved. The subject is unquestionably a daring one: the events which bring about the marriage of Lord Siva to Uma and the birth of Skanda. The prose order of each sloka has been given in the commentary by using bold type, the words not actually repeated by Mallinatha being enclosed within rectangular brackets. The notes explain allusions, grammatical peculiarities not noticed by Mallinatha, copious extracts from other commentaries being given for this purpose. The book includes text, the commentary of Mallinatha, a literal English translation, notes and introduction.

Kumarasambhava of Kalidasa Details

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From Reader Review Kumarasambhava of Kalidasa for online ebook

Amogha says

Kumarasambhavam is a notoriously sexy book, so much so that many versions of it simply omit the eighth sarga. Needless to say, the romance, the drunken smiling kisses, the shy glances left me giggling and hiding my giggles.

Kalidasa is a poet like no other. His comparisons distil the beauty of nature and even in translating, his poetry drips from the tongue like honey. The closing lines just blew my mind away.

I think my fundamental issue with this book is how Hank Heifetz translates epithets. 'The Lady Who Gave Up Leaves' all capitalised is not nearly as effective as 'Aparna, she who gave up leaves also.' Given that Sanskrit is a language of epithets, it skips the fundamental tone of wonder that Sanskrit has. It's like a piece without any of its cultural heritage. ~~I think it's time white people stopped translating Indian works.~~ Props to this book because it gave me a burning desire to learn Sanskrit properly and translate it myself.

Akash Gupta says

An amazing book by Kalidas. The shringar and saundarya written by kalidas can't be written by anyone so beautifully, he truly is a mahakavi. Surely read this hindi classic.

John Redmon says

Nice to get a taste of ancient Hindu poetry and culture. However, personally I have a lot of classic poetry under my belt and reading translated poetry is never fully satisfying.

Sookie says

3.5 stars

Kumarasambhavam is arguably Kalidasa's finest works to survive. The mahakavya narrates the origins of Kumara/Subramanya/Murugan starting with birth of Uma/Parvati, his mother and Uma's courtship with Shiva, his father, that leads to their nuptials. As is the tradition in Indian mythology, there is no great event without a divine hand progressing the fate.

The Backstory:

Taraka, an asura (a malevolent being), has defeated demi Gods because of a boon granted to him - he could be only defeated by son of Shiva (who is doing *tapas*), and also has to be a yogi. Some texts also say that the son should be exactly seven days old. Shiva has lost his consort, Sati, who immolates herself in the holy pyre

after she had her husband are insulted by her father, Daksha.

The story:

Uma/Parvati is incarnation of Sati born to Himavan (or Parvata, thus deriving her name Parvati), who is personification of the Himalayas. This epic poem consists of eight cantos starting from birth of Uma and ending with Uma spending her days happily with Lord Shiva as his consort.

In the first cantos, Lord of the mountain is blessed with a daughter. She is named Parvati and is also called Uma. She is loved by her family and is adored by everyone else. In Kailasa, Shiva meditates.

In second cantos, Lord Shiva visits the mountains where Uma offers prayers and respects to the God.

Kamadeva, the Lord of Love, awaits to shoot Shiva with a flower arrow so potent that it would disturb the ascetic state of mind of the Lord Shiva himself.

In third cantos Kamadeva is successful with his mark. Lord Shiva notices the shift in his mind as he watches Uma perform her duties and experiences intense attraction towards her. Being the Lord Supreme, he sees Kamadeva hiding behind a boulder and directs his third eye at him. Kamadeva is burnt on the spot.

The Fourth Cantos is dedicated to Rati, Kamadeva's consort and Goddess of sexual delight. She is lost with out her husband and bemoans the position she is in.

In Fifth Cantos, Uma dedicates her time selflessly helping Shiva perform his daily duties. She finds herself cornered after Kamadeva's death and performs her actions with all the affection she could muster to a God who is relentless in his tapas. Uma wins him over in the end with her relentless faith.

Uma is married to Shiva in sixth and seventh cantos. In the final eighth cantos, Kalidasa describes their married life.

Technical aspects of the poem:

Sanskrit poems boasts of technical excellence. With metres playing as a clue to the emotion of the sarga (cantos) or using euphemisms to trip the listener or using a stanza simply as a homage to the geography. Having studied first half of this poem in school, importance was given to Kalidasa's excellent technical ability to hold the fort with perfect words. When it comes to Uma, he uses words that when recited are soft, nasal and gentle while with Shiva (in the beginning), the words sound harsher, throaty and are clipped. As these poems were recited in those days, Kalidasa gave special consideration to the tone of the poem. Emotional moments had words that evoked sympathy or anger; be it a husky drag or a high pitched nasal sound.

The translator Hank Heifetz notes the change in metre in the ending stanzas. Traditionally the number of lines in the final stanza of a cantos had more (sometimes even lesser) sentences. But Kalidasa had a signature style of changing the metre that marked as both ending of the cantos and its tone served as a premonition to the upcoming story.

There are works dedicated to his style, techniques, word usage, the exaggerated metaphors and his innovative way of mixing metres in his poetry.

About the translation:

There is a note to 6:3 that says "There is a beautiful echo (and pun) here which I cannot reproduce in English." This is unfortunately true not for just this stanza but several others. Sanskrit is a layered language where words change their meaning with context and some words exists for specific contexts only. While there are words that describe body parts sensually, in English they sound vulgar or obscene or technical. Since Kalidasa spends an half of a cantos explaining Uma's physical attributes, Heifetz struggles to retain Kalidasa's beauty. It isn't the short coming of the translator but the language itself.

Heifetz refers to commentaries made by Sanskrit scholars which is definitely an added bonus. Since this is a

poem deep rooted in mythological tales, he gives as many references as possible to some of the outstanding words that seem out of place but are present just to make an impact or emphasize an event. And as far as translation goes, this is pretty good.

I must confess. There are handful of stanzas that are quite flat. To Heifetz's credit, the misses are few and far between, and whenever something goes amiss, Heifetz confesses in notes.

Interestingly, the eighth cantos was cut off from our school books because it had references to sex and smut. Since sex wouldn't be discovered by us fourteen year olds till the age of 18 or whatever, school boards provided summaries only for the first seven cantos even though the spoiler is there right in the title: Kumarasambhavam - birth/origin of the young God. Right.

In conclusion, Kumarasambhavam is a must read to anyone who is interested in reading Sanskrit classics with its innovative and creative ways of expression and humanizing Gods for a little period of time.

Maxin James says

Kumarasambhavam (the origin of the Young God) is perhaps the greatest long poem in classical Sanskrit by greatest poet of the language, Kalidasa. His sanskrit is most refined Sanskrit and expressed one of most beautiful usages and descriptions of Indian Myths and literature. The beautiful poetical translation by Hank Heifetz is simply awesome and is able to bring out the beauty of original verses.

The long poem begins with description of birth of Parvathi, the poem then proceeds in perfect sensuous detail through her love making with Shiva until the night after their wedding. This poem is tale of union of Parvathi and Shiva wherein Gods are viewed both as lovers as well as Cosmic Principles.

The poem enlightens us on our love with beloved from its mundane human form to holy communion with ultimate Principle. If we read deeply, the book is about Tapas of soul to reach her beloved. The beauty is both in Tapas of Paravthi and also in its completion in holy communion with Supreme Principal in form of Shiva.

Kalidasa, was greatest Sankrit poet and lived during Gupta Dynasty, the Golden Period of India. Kalidasa was pinnacle of Golden Age in Sanskrit literature, where dramas are in fact long poems.

Barnaby Thieme says

Kalidasa was a poet of the golden age of Sanskrit verse who deserves comparison with Homer and Shakespeare. His vibrant and expressive gifts are of the first rank, as is his understanding of human psychology and divine mystery.

In this elegant translation of the first eight cantos of his Kumarasambhava, Heifetz has given the modern reader of English an excellent account of Kalidasa's magnificent long poem treating the love between Shiva and Paravati. Of the great goddess, he sings:

Like a painting unfolding under the brush
or a lotus spreading open at the sun's touch,

every part of her body had its
perfect symmetry in the fresh fullness of her youth. (1:32)

Shiva is the yogi's yogi, and he would rather remain in ascetic withdrawal and contemplation than come to the aid of his fellow gods. Paravati, daughter of the great Himalayas, is a goddess of supreme beauty and charm, and to her falls the task of drawing him forth from seclusion.

And Uma [Paravati] approached the entrance to the grove of Shiva,
who would be her husband, just as he who had seen
within himself the highest light in the trance
called The Highest Self broke off his meditation. (3:58)

When Shiva first beholds this vision, Kama, the god of love, assails the great god with a bow of mango blossoms. He struggles between the outward fire of love and the inner fire of austerity, and the problem of the poem is finding a bridge to unite these two energies.

And indeed, the psychological problem that the poem addresses, written as it is in the mid-first millennium CE, is the tension between the call of the renunciate way of life of the contemplative and the life of the householder.

This is a magnificent poem, a projection onto a grand stage of a perennial human situation, exemplifying the case of a distracted human being who is civilized and coaxed out of self-absorption by the powers of a beautiful and loving companion.

Kalidasa is just the poet to tell this story. As with his great play "The Recognition of Shakuntala," he shows himself to possess a great and sensitive gift for potent imagery, and a great insight into the mysteries of beauty and love.

Richard Abbott says

I was recommended Kumarasambhavam, "The Origin of the Young God", by Kalidasa, by a friend who had noticed the reprint of the English translation by Hank Heifetz and alerted me to it. I have read a certain amount of modern Indian literature (in translation) so here was a chance to absorb a Sanskrit epic classic. Kalidasa is thought to have lived around 500AD, but most details of his life have long gone. His work, however, has proved to be enduring, and this is an exceptionally great poem which became part of the standard against which other works might be judged.

The theme of the work is the courtship of Shiva and Parvati, as imagined through their personal interactions, the participation of other individuals, and the rich echoes of their emerging love in the natural world. The 8th section celebrates their sexual union after their wedding. In due course this will lead to the birth of the Young God of the title, who will liberate parts of the natural and divine world from oppression. Over the years, this final section has been sometimes regarded as an improper subject for poetry, and has often been omitted from published versions. To me this immediately brought to mind the Song of Songs in the Hebrew Bible, which has from time to time only gained acceptance by being read as allegory rather than literal delight.

For the curious, Heifetz explains the different kinds of metrical pattern used by Kalidasa, as well as

highlighting other devices used, such as alliteration. He also speaks a little about his own choices in translation – when to be literal, when to add an explanatory phrase, when to try to imitate a pattern of sound. Sanskrit poetry was based on several patterns of long and short syllables, like classical Greek and Latin metres but unlike ancient near eastern or more recent European ones. This means that direct imitation of the variety of metrical forms, and their specific associations, is not possible in English, and Heifetz explores other ways of representing the differences.

But the poem itself can be read and enjoyed without troubling with any of this, so that the reader can immerse him or herself in Parvati's determined efforts to win Shiva over, followed by Shiva's gentle and sensitive arousal of Parvati's desire. One of the outstanding features of the work is the extended use of imagery from the natural world – flowers, birds, animals, mountains, and the cycle of the seasons are all invoked and drawn up into the relationships of the divine couple.

At the end of the book I found myself filled with a great regret that the ancient Egyptians never had the opportunity to interact and cross-fertilise with ancient India. The ways in which both human and natural worlds participate seamlessly and shamelessly with the universe of gods became alien to Europe, but would have found a resonance in Pharaonic Egypt. Conversely, there is a haunting sense in some Egyptian literature that Egypt never really found another deep culture to relate to. I feel that there was a loneliness there that longed for, but never fulfilled, the possibility of being united with another. Perhaps Shiva and Parvati succeeded in marriage, where Egypt and India failed even to meet. But you have to wonder what kind of young god would have been the fruit of their union.

I have to give a star rating to post this review on some sites, even though that feels bizarre for an acknowledged literary pinnacle of its culture. Five stars, of course. The book will not appeal to everybody, but deserves to be better known and more widely read by those many people who cannot do so in Sanskrit.

Frank Ashe says

Why did I leave this on my to-read shelf for so long?

From one of the greats of Sanskrit literature, and brilliantly translated to English poetry.

Rupinder Sayal says

It is IMHO unfair to review this classic, so I will just comment on the translation, which was a bit mechanical and laconic. The translator could have elaborated on the context of various important passages. Anyhow, an important epic by Kalidasa, and another classic checked off my too-long TBR list of Sanskrit texts :)
