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10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

107

Similes in *Meghduta* **The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language**

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

***Meghduta* and the Study of Similes**

For more than fifteen centuries, Kalidasa has been unanimously acclaimed as the greatest Sanskrit poet. Banerji says, “No study of the cultural material, contained in the works of a writer, can be complete without an *index verborum* to his works” (Kālidāsa-Kośa, ix).

Kalidasa is certainly also known to be the master in creating nonpareil similes. Linguistic investigations into similes not only yield exciting results but also broaden one’s understanding in decoding metaphoric structures.

One of the most celebrated works of Kalidasa is *Meghduta*. It has inspired many great commentators, scholars and critics, poetry-lovers to appreciate the genius of the poet, his poetry and style.

To substantiate this claim, I have culled a simile from the text for linguistic analysis.

What is a Simile?

Before I take this discussion further, an overview of what a simile is — seems obligatory.

Simile, a trope, is a figure of speech which involves comparison between two unlike entities. A simile unlike the metaphor compares two things through the use of words such as ‘like’, ‘as’, ‘as though’ to draw attention to similarities about things that are seemingly dissimilar. At times, similes may have about the same effect as a metaphor but similes often focus on a single characteristic of comparison, while metaphors imply a broader scope of equation between the two objects being compared. A simile in literature may be specific and direct or more lengthy and complex.

An Important Aspect of Sanskrit Poetry

In Sanskrit poetry, for the production of any imagery, there must be *Bimba Pratibimba bhāva* or also called *Bimbānubimbabhāva* i.e. the relation of the reflected (*bimba*) and the reflecting element (*pratabimba*) between the thing compared and the standard of comparison. In the thing

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

108

compared (*upameya*) the standard of similitude (*upamāna*) is mirrored or focused and an image is produced. In technical language, this might be called tingeing (*rañjana*) of the former by the latter.

The Purpose of a Simile

The purpose of a simile in the broader sense, according to Indian *Alamkārasāstra*, is to make abstract ideas picturesque by relating them to parallel concrete instances from the physical world. Besides richness of their poetic contents, the technical perfection of their form is also superb. The science of rhetoric insists that in a simile the word indicative of the standard of comparison must be of the same gender and number as the word denoting the object in hand, so that the adjective expressive of common quality or the verb expressive of common action may be connected with both without any hitch and the intended similarity be comprehended at once.

The Style of Kalidasa

Kalidasa, certainly seems to be well-versed with the science of rhetoric and linguistic craftsmanship. The style of Kālidāsa is “fully conversant with the grammar” (Yadav, 157) and is, therefore, suggestive. How does he achieve this? To delve into his poetic vision and stylistic acumen, even one example is enough to provide results comprehensively. The example I have picked depicts the state of the *nayika* (heroine of the epic Meghadūta) who is in sorrow because she is separated from her love, her husband.

The Analysis

The scheme of analysis has three strata to achieve total cognizance. Each level is construed with two steps.

1. The first layer unfolds the grammatical structure of the unit under analysis and presents the range of lexemes in the vocabulary i.e. lexicon of the given language.
2. The second layer constructs proposition and the conceptual structure.
3. And finally, the third layer unfolds the pragmatic value of the lexemes as well as the utterance and then unrolls the suggestion and then also attempts to construct its emotive value.

Pādānindoramṛitāsīsirāñjalamārgapraṅgavistān

Pūrvapṛītyā gatamabhimukham sannivṛttam tathēva!

Ākṣuḥ khedātsalil- gurūbhiḥ pakṣmabhiḥ cchādayantīm

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in Meghaduta: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

109

Sābhreahanīva sthalakamalinī̄m na prabhudhām na suptām ||

(Uttar 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.]

Level 1: Linguistic Structure

Kalidasa uses a nominal style. How this nominalization springs at the lexico-grammatical level is an interesting study. Here, at the onset, I feel the need to draw attention to the fact that Sanskrit is an inflexional language and is unlike English in terms of order, governance and concord. For grammatical analysis, I have taken recourse to immediate constituent analysis using labels — Head (H) and Modifier (M).

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

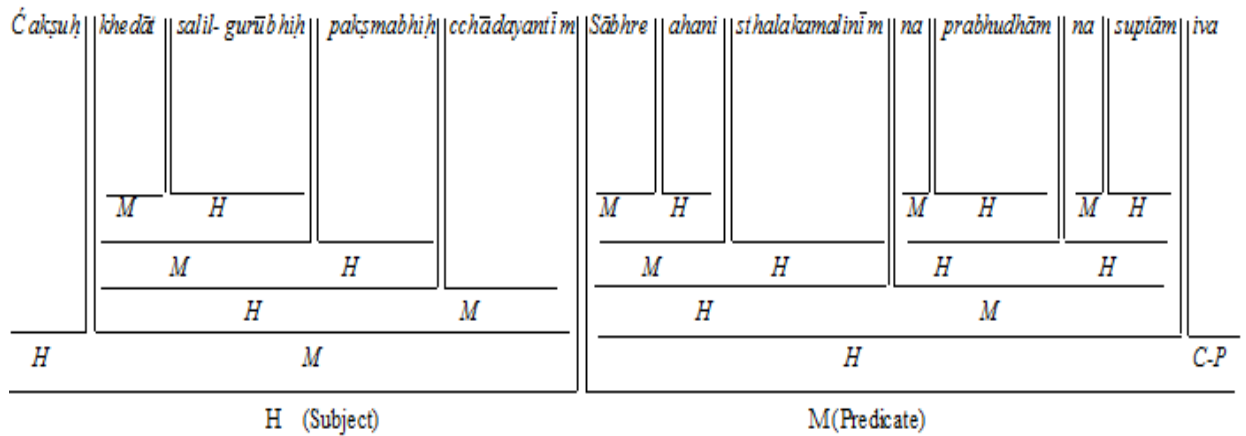


Fig.1

Ākṣuḥ – Neutar Singular Noun, *Khedāt* – Fifth Inflexional Singular Noun, *Salil-gurūbhiḥ* – *Salilen gurūṇi salilgurūṇi tēh* i.e. Third Determinative Compound Noun, *Pakṣmabhiḥ* – Third Inflexional Plural Noun, *Cchādayantīm* -- √*chad* (root) + *śtr* (Present Continuous Tense Affix) + *ī* (Feminine Suffix) = Second Inflexional Singular Noun, *Sābhre* – *abhren seha*

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghaduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

110

varate s̄bhr̄m tasmin i.e. Attributive Compound Noun in Seventh Singular Inflexion , *Ahani* – Singular Noun in Seventh Inflexion , *Sthalakamalinīm*– Singular Noun in Second Inflexion , *Naprabudhām* – *pra* (prefix) + √ *budh* (root) + *ta* (*ka* – Past Passive Participle) + *ā* (Feminine Suffix) = *prabudh* + second Singular Inflexion = *prabudhām* + *na* (negative prefix) = Negative, Neutar, Singular Determinate Second Inflexional Abstract Noun , *Nasuptām* -- √ *swap* + *ta* (Past Passive Participle) + *ā* (Feminine Suffix) = *suptām* + *na* (negative prefix) = Negative, Neutar, Singular Determinate Second Inflexional Abstract Noun.

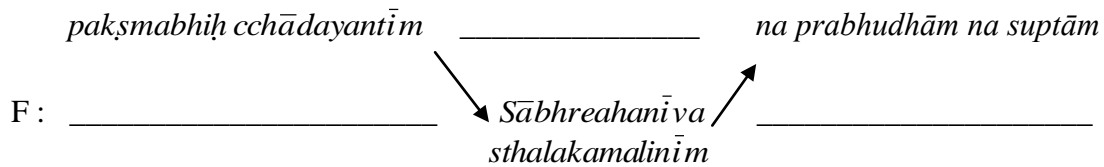
The phrase “*naprabudhām nasuptām*” (neither opened nor closed) applies both to the synecdochic Tenor “*Ākṣuḥ*” which stands as a part for the whole i.e. the demi-goddess and the vehicle “*Sthalakamalinīm*” (a land-lotus) thereby presenting the common ground for comparison. I call the Tenor synecdochic because “*Ākṣuḥ*” is neuter gender whereas “*Sthalakamalinīm*” 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 *Yakṣiṇi* and a land-lotus plant. This will further be clarified in Level₂. Hence:

Tenor :	Yakṣiṇayā Ākṣuḥ	(the eyes of the demi-goddess)
Vehicle :	Sthalakamalinīm	(a land-lotus plant)
Common ground :	na prabudhām na suptām	(neither opened nor closed)
Connector :	iva	(like)

Separation of the Literal and Figurative Elements

To understand the simile more clearly, and taking cue from Leech, the literal and the figurative elements are separated:

L : *Ākṣuḥ khedātsalil - gurūbhiḥ*



These text-gaps can possibly be filled literally as:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

Ten : *Ćakṣuḥ khedātsalil - gurūbhiḥ*

paḥsmabhiḥ cchādayantiṁ [*duhsahatvāt*] *na prabudhām na suptām*

Veh : [*Suryaprabhām vina*] *Sābhreahaniṁ va sthalakamalinīṁ* [*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 (Fig.2) below presents the possible lexical sets:

Lexical category (N)	Lexical sets
(sthala) Kamalinīṁ	Set ₁ Yūthikā, Ketakī, Kukubhī, Kandali, Kesara, Navajapā, Kurabakī, Śirīṣā, Kundaḥsepā, Kadambinī, Kumudinī, Mālatī, Lodhrā, Maṅjarī, Mandārpūṣpa, Kutujakusuma
	Set ₂ Nīlakamalinī, Swarnakamalinī, Madhvīlatā

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

Level 2: Propositional Structure

I have labeled the literal unit 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_P’ 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

P1	(Pred.		REF _L)
			<i>paḥsmabhiḥ cchādayantiṁ</i>	<i>Ćakṣuḥ</i>	
		Focus		Frame	
P2	(REF _P	<i>Ćakṣuḥ</i>	“Sādhvī”)
		Focus		Frame	
P3	(MOD	<i>Sādhvī</i>	“Yakṣiṇi”)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

112

Vehicle

P1 (MOD Sthala REF_L
Kamalinī)

The proposition indicates that it is *Yakṣiṇi* which is compared with a land-lotus plant. Therefore, conceptually *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 (Ćakṣuh.)	Kamalinī
[+ animate]	[- animate]
[+ human]	[- human]
[+ specific]	[+ specific]
[+ generic]	[+ generic]
[- having stalk]	[+ having stalk]
[- hydrophyte]	[+ hydrophyte]
[- floral]	[+ floral]

The ‘*Kamalinī*’ 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.

Level 3 : 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) Ćakṣuh → na prabudām na suptām → sthalakamalinī

In this phrase, the verb root $\sqrt{\text{budh}}$ has been prefixed by the prefix ‘*pra*’ [*pra* + $\sqrt{\text{budh}}$ = *prabudh.*] which presents an interesting study. *Prabudh* means awake or be awakened; expand, open (flower); recognize; developed, manifested; begun to take effect (spell); clear-sighted, wise; recognized, enlightened (mind); inform, teach, instruct, admonish; waken, rouse whereas *suptam* means – feign sleep.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

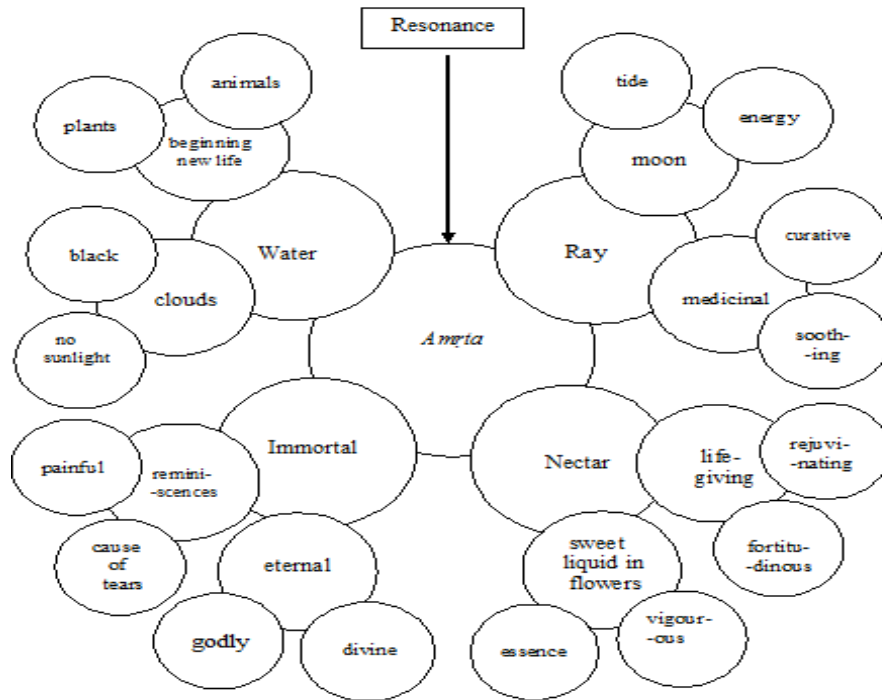
Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

113

Since both these words are attached with negatives ‘na’, their meanings turn into negatives too i.e. the reverse of what is listed above. Therefore, at the locutionary level the utterance is – ‘neither awake nor asleep’ but the illocution is a state of hanging 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 Yakṣa’s beloved wife. They reflect her state marvelously and spectacularly.

Besides, another word ‘*amṛta*’ (nectar) also resonates. Though each word has its resonance and suggestion which is the hallmark of Kalidasa’s poetry yet this word works as a cognitive magnet and provides us a chance to have an insight into the poet’s vision (Fig.3):



Implications

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

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

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: “*kāmartā hi prakṛtikṛpāṇaś’cetanā’cetanāṇesu*”. The *Yakṣa* also upholds the cloud of 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 (*Salil*), 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 *Yakṣiṇi* 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 *Yakṣiṇi* are heavy with ‘*Salil*’ 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. Kalidasa has used the word ‘*sthala*’ with lotus which suggests that this life source is missing or to be more precise, it is atleast not in an adequate amount. Now, this specific land-lotus plant is given comparison with *Yakṣiṇi* thereby suggesting that she is away from her husband – *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 *Yakṣiṇi* 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.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

115

Appreciation

Kalidasa has presented a very apt simile. According to Sanskrit Grammarians, words are divided into four categories, i.e. *jāti*, *guṇa*, *kriyā* and *dravya*. This division of words is elaborated in *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali. Kālidāsa seems to recognize this theory of words. He selects his words keeping in view the required suggestion. This makes his style replete with an exquisite way of perfection of form and high intellectual power, an emotional intensity and radiant imagination, and with a fine and pervasive spiritual quality.

The first two foots describe ‘*prabudh*’ (awakened) state of Yaḡṣiṇi and the next two foots describe the ‘*supt*’ (asleep) state. Though ‘*na prabudhām na suptām*’ is a contrastive (*virodhātmaka*) statement yet both the words are complementary to each other; in other words, being inconsistently consistent and interrelated. This speaks of and illustrates Yaḡṣiṇi’s predicament. Besides, the poet’s skill is again exemplary especially in selecting the word ‘*kamalinī*’ for introducing the comparison of Yaḡṣiṇi. Yaḡṣiṇi is a *Padmini Strī* and no other flower could describe her as *Padmini* than the lotus (*kamalinī*). His grammatical skill is visible in his use of the qualifier ‘*sthala*’ making the word – ‘*sthalakamalinī*’ because he wanted to make the comparison look alike since the pretext states that Yaḡṣiṇi was lying on the floor. The *kamalinī* is virtually away from water and sunlight just as Yaḡṣiṇi is away from her husband – Yaḡsa, and his love.

To Conclude

To conclude, it can be said that this simile illustrates not only Kālidāsa’s pictorial quality, but also of linguistic adroitness and vision. The words are meticulously selected and they are like molecular balls semantically loaded, revolving in a magnetic field of aesthetic energy. Each word creates a semantic-pragmatic tension leading to stylistic fusion and fission. All these qualities speak aloud of Kalidasa’s absolute craftsmanship in language making his poetry suggestive and the poet – a mastermind and genius.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

116

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghaduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

117

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 1 January 2010

Amrita Sharma, Ph.D.

Similes in *Meghduta*: The Absolute Craftsmanship in Language

118