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**Contrasting Narratives: Exploring Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhavam*
and Jayshekharsuri's *Jain Kumarasambhav Mahakavya* through
Comparative Study**

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Jain Kumārasaṃbhava is an epic (Mahākāvya) by Jain Kavi Jayshekharsuri inspired from Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhavam*. Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhavam*, as the title suggests intends to describe the birth of Kumar, Kārttikeya, son of Lord Śiva and goddess Pārvatī. Similarly, *Jain Kumārasaṃbhava* is about the birth of Bharat, son of Jain tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabhadeva and Sumangala. Both the poems, though believed to deal with the birth of Kumara, do not actually cover the birth of Kumara. Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhavam*, is divided into 17 *Sargas* (cantos), though it is believed that Kālidāsa wrote only the first eight cantos and the remaining cantos were interpolations.

Jain Kumārasaṃbhava is believed to have been written between C.E. 1405-1425. Jain poet Shri Jayshekharsuri is Ācārya in Jain Śvetāmbara paramparā (School) and he was a disciple of Jain ācārya Mahendraprabhusuri. Before writing *Jain Kumārasaṃbhava*, Jayshekharsuri wrote *Cintāmaṇi*, *Prabodha Cintāmaṇi* and *Dhammil Carita*. He was a renowned Sanskrit scholar and was respected equally among Jain and non-Jain Scholars. Hence, he intended to write a poem which appeals to both Jains and non-Jains.

It is divided into 11 cantos. *Jain Kumārasaṃbhava* is undoubtedly inspired by Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhavam* and draws heavily from its source of inspiration in terms of poetic design, plot construction, description of people, places and nature, narration of incidents and poetic conventions.

Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhavam* ends with the consummation of Śiva and Pārvatī's marriage and *Jain Kumārasaṃbhava* ends with reference to Sumangala's pregnancy. Both the poems begin with description of places. Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhavam* begins with the description of Himalaya, on the other hand *Jain Kumārasaṃbhava* begins with description of Ayodhya.

The first cantos of both the poems deal with the birth childhood and attainment of youth of Pārvatī and Ṛṣabhadeva respectively.

Second canto of *Kumārasaṃbhavam* narrates the story of Īndra and other gods pleading Brahma to rescue them from the terror of Tārakāsura. On the other hand, in *Jain Kumārasaṃbhava*, Īndra himself on his own comes to Ṛṣabhadeva to encourage him to marry. Thus, here both the poets give background of circumstances which leads to the birth of kumar. Kālidāsa's depiction of the gods' pleading before Brahma is steeped in philosophy, in *Jain Kumārasaṃbhava*, there is nearly recounting of earlier incarnations of Ṛṣabhadeva and his noble deeds in earlier incarnations.



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The third canto of *Kumārasaṃbhava* is about dialogue between Īndra and Vasant (the season of Spring); in *Jain Kumārasaṃbhava*, we have a dialogue between Īndra and Ṛṣabhadeva which, though not as sublime as its counterpart in *Kumārasaṃbhava* is interesting none the less. In this canto, Jayshekarsuri gives a description of Sumangala and Sunanda, sisters of Ṛṣabhadeva whom he marries, and preparation for marriage. A similar description of Śiva and Pārvaṭī is found in the seventh canto of *Kumārasaṃbhava*. Both the poets describe the ornaments, clothes and use of cosmetics for the central characters before marriage. In *Kumārasaṃbhava*, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Surya etc., come in the service of Śiva to deck up the bridegroom; in *Jain Kumārasaṃbhava*, goddess lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Mandākinī and other deities present ornaments and other cosmetics to the brides- Sumangala and Sunanda.

The description of the maiden young girls of the town eager to see the brides and the bridegroom and their gestures, emotions and conversations seem to be inspired from *Kumārasaṃbhava* where in the seventh canto there a description of eagerness of women is to watch Śiva. This is a poetic convention of Sanskrit Mahakavya where the poets depict the excitement and intoxication of maids and women at seeing the hero and Jain poets have appropriated this poetic convention.

In both the poems we find the description of natural phenomena such as night, rising of the moon, various seasons etc. Kālidāsa is undoubtedly a better poet of the two when it comes to describing nature in its vividness and beauty. In both the poems, the deities and the hero, who is a supreme god, have been depicted as human beings though the Jain poet seems to be more impressed with the mythology of Ṛṣabhadeva.

Kālidāsa has given an unfettered and frank description of sexual intercourse of Śiva and Pārvaṭī in the eighth canto of *Kumārasaṃbhava*. Jayshekarsuri was a Jain Monk and has been constricted by his sense of piousness and decorum. Therefore, Jayshekarsuri has only shown the bride and the bridegroom entering the nuptial bedroom and indicates the consummation of their marriage by a reference to Sumangala's pregnancy. However, both the poems fall short of their titles because neither includes the birth of kumara which their titles suggest.

In both the poems the poets have devised a dialogue of the hero and the heroine. The dialogue of Śiva and Pārvaṭī is an instance of the best poetry because of its dramatic quality, liveliness and poetic excellence whereas the dialogue between Sumangala and Ṛṣabha does not rise above the level of ordinary.



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In both the poems there is an instance of advising the newly wedded couples about domestic duties of married people. In *Kumārasambhava*, it is limited to just one shloka in which the priest presiding over the marriage ceremony advises Pārvatī about her duty in the righteous wedded life. Interestingly enough, *Jain Kumārasambhava* is more detailed and emphasizes the duties of both- the husband and wife. In *Jain Kumārasambhava*, Indra and his wife Śacī respectively give detailed lessons to the bridegroom and bride about each partner's duty and about mutual relationship. Both the poems also depict the various rituals and ceremonies associated with marriage.

The two poets deal with births of two different Kumaras. The poets come from different philosophical traditions and represent different ethos in their poems. Kālidāsa was primarily a poet and one of the best that India had produced so far. Jain monk Jayshekharsuri is a Jain monk first and poet after. His preoccupations and concerns are different from those of Kālidāsa's. If Kālidāsa is a poet with an aesthetic sense of beauty in his creation which has a world view and may carry certain philosophical truths, Jayshekharsuri is a monk with ascetic leanings and hence, the poem has undeniable signs of his preoccupations and concerns as a Jain Monk. So Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* is basically a creation of the poet's aesthetic sense, Jayshekharsuri's *Jain Kumarasambhava* has a definite ethical and philosophical undertone in addition to the aesthetic beauty. For instance, Kālidāsa gives free and vivid description of the romance of Lord Śiva and Pārvatī, Jayshekharsuri is restrained and uses indirect suggestions and allusions to the consummation of marriage of Ṛṣabhadeva and Sumangala. So the Jain poet actually made a significant contribution by adding ascetic philosophy to a sensuous poem of Kālidāsa. This fusion of ascetic and aesthetic was a remarkable achievement of Jayshekharsuri.

One important factor that we have to keep in mind when interpreting a literary epic of Jain literature is that while most Jain writers and poets appropriated the classical literary traditions and conventions, they also wanted to show a remarkable departure from the classical Sanskrit literature. Jayshekharsuri was a scholar of Sanskrit, Prakrit and Gujarati and shows his erudition in his style and language. But the desire to create and follow distinct Jain tradition in literature is unmistakably there. So by naming his poem *Jain Kumarasambhava*, Jayshekharsuri tries to appropriate Sanskrit literature but by deviating in choice of central characters and treatment of the central theme he creates a separate literary mythos to deal with the ethos of Jain life and philosophy.



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Sanskrit literature is rich in Mahakavya (epic) – a form of poetry which is grandest of all forms. A fifteenth century scholar, Viśvanātha, has given a lucid definition and description of the form of epic or Mahakavya in his treatise *Sāhityadarpaṇa*. According to him, a Mahakavya is a poem in cantos. It is the story of one hero who is usually a godly figure or a king of noble dynasty. He is noble in deed. Some Mahakavyas depict more than one noble kings of single dynasty. It is a story of valour and love aiming at Shringar, Vira and Shanta rasa. However, one of these rasa is predominant. All the devises used in a drama are considered essential in a Mahakavya. It is usually about some historic or mythological story. Mahakavya deals with all the four puruṣārthas considered central to Indian philosophy and world view namely Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. It has noble intention. Some Mahakavyas also depict the praise of the brave and noble and criticism of the depraved. It consists of more than eight cantos which are not too short and not too long. Every canto has one metrical form each. But the end of every canto has a different metrical form. Every canto ends with a suggestion of the next canto. Every Mahakavya has adequate description of natural phenomena, rituals, towns and cities, journey, meeting and separation of lovers, rishis and heaven etc. The title of a Mahakavya usually derives from the name of the poet or the name of the central character or the central incident of the poem. Each canto has a name usually derived from the thread of story in that canto.

Jain Kumarasambhava consists of more or less of all the constituent elements of a mahakavya. It is divided into cantos and has an invocation which states the subject of the poem with a prayer to the deity. The poem is about Ṛṣabhadeva and hence has an auspicious tone and is like a pilgrimage because of the divine status of Ṛṣabhadeva. The predominant rasa is Shanta here but it also has Shringar rasa as per the need of the occasion. All the four Purusharthas are realised in the story of this mahakavya. Since Ṛṣabhadeva is a reverent deity of Jainism, the aim of the poem is Moksha. The hero is the first *īrthāṅkara* of Jain religion, Shri Ṛṣabhadeva Swami. He has all the qualities of an ideal hero and his story is popular and well known. This mahakavya has 11 cantos and the length of the cantos range from 68 to 85 verses (Shlokas) and each canto is written in one metrical form having different metrical form at the end of the canto. Jayshekarsuri has effortlessly employed both Śabdālaṅkāra and Arthālaṅkāra in the poem.

The text yields interesting reading in juxtaposition to Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* and how similar subjects can be treated differently by poets from different background and philosophical school. In a sense this is an alternative reading of Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* with different characters and back ground.



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