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## MYTH, MYSTERY AND METAPHOR: AN ALLEGORICAL ANATOMISATION OF JAISHANKAR PRASAD'S *KAMAYANI*

Dr. Ashish Kumar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Lucknow Christian Degree College, Lucknow, India

**Abstract-** *Literary allegory is deeply rooted in the understanding and interpretation of classical myths and texts. Jaishankar Prasad's Kamayani is considered as one of the best epics only after Ramcharitmanas by Tulsidas. Kamayani is a phenomenal modern epic based on the story of how Manu, the first man, procreated mankind after the great Deluge had subsided. It is not only a literary composition but also a confluence of science, philosophy and mythology that makes an exemplary use of mythological metaphors and allegory to reflect on the conflict of human psyche. This paper is not merely a rendering of the poem; it is a study of the use of allegory in the narrative poem. An understanding of the use of symbols and metaphors would help the reader understand the onward shift of the human self from material passions to the height of sublimation.*

**Keywords-** *Allegory, Epic, Human psyche, Indian ethos, Metaphor*

*Mahakavya* or court epics, also called *sargabandha* is considered the most prestigious literary art in Sanskrit literary tradition characterized by ornate and elaborate descriptions of an event as in Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Ved Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. Jaishankar Prasad's *Kamayani* (1936) is reckoned as the best epic positioned only after Tulsidas's *Ram-Charita-Manas* and ranks among the top classics of the world. The entire world of Hindi literature was taken by surprise by its publication, for nothing like it had appeared in Hindi poetry for centuries. It is unique in many aspects and stands apart in its pre-eminence from all other works of its kind. It is the most musical and lyrical text, perhaps the only psychological epic of mankind, in all literature that made Jaishankar Prasad already win the coveted distinction of composing an immortal work of great importance, creative skill and poetic excellence.

Jaishankar Prasad is a prominent figure of *Chhayavad* – a literary trend in Hindi literature that fused romanticism with spiritualism. His passion for knowledge kept him ignited even after facing many hardships since childhood. His deep philosophical knowledge of the Vedas transcreated as his brilliant writings. He was born in the year 1889 in the family of Sunghani Sahu. His father Babu Devki Prasad was a prominent tobacco businessman in the area of Kashi, present-day Varanasi. Prasad started his literary career by writing poetry with the pen name 'Kaladhar'. *Chitradhar* (1918), his first collection of poems, was written in the Braj dialect of Hindi but he shifted to Khadi Boli for his later works. He propagated the *Chhayavad* literary tradition in Hindi literature along with the distinguished figures like Mahadevi Varma, Sumitranandan Pant and Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' – popularly known as the four pillars of *Chhayavad*.

His first story "Gram" was published in the literary magazine *Indu* in 1912 and his first creation in the *Chhayavad* tradition, "Kholo Dwar" was also published in the same magazine in 1914. He has written around seventy-two stories, anthologized in his different collections titled *Chhaya* (1912), *Pratidwani* (1926), *Akashdeep* (1929), *Aandhi* (1931), *Puruskara*, *Gunda*, *Saalvati*, *Chhota Jadugar* et cetera. He has three novels to his credit – *Kankal* (*The Skeleton*), *Titli* (*The Butterfly*) and *Iravati*, which remained incomplete. Prasad is also known for his inclination toward Indian theatre and he has immensely contributed with his historical plays like *Skandgupta*, *Chandragupta* and *Dhruvaswamini*. *EkGhoont* (*ASip*), *Rajyashri* and *Janmejaya Ka Naag Yajna* are among his other excellent dramatic compositions. Universally known as an extraordinary poet, Prasad has a vast number of poems to his credit in enormous collections like *Jharna*, *Aansu*, *Lahar*, *PremPathik*, *Aatmkathya*, *Urvashi* and *Kamayani*. He was highly influenced by Sanskrit and other languages that originated from Sanskrit when he was at the apex of his literary career. It is also reported that he also sought inspiration from Bengali and Persian works for his intellect. However, the discussion of Jaishankar Prasad's literary career is incomplete without a special reference to *Kamayani* which remains, by far, his most important work.

The function of myth is to help human beings cope with the inexorability of reality and the course of events a need that is not outmoded by scientific advances and rationality, that myths evolve according to a "Darwinism of words," in which those forms and variations survive that cope most effectively with the changing social environment; and that myth is best conceived not as a collection of fixed and final stories, but as "a work"-an ongoing and ever-changing process that is

expressed in oral and written narratives and involves the diverse ways in which these narratives are received and appropriated. (qtd. in Abrams 230)

*Kamayani* is a modern epic that reflects on the conflicts of human emotion in the form of mythological metaphors. The vast purview of the epic begins with the scene of deluge and the despair of the world of the immortals. It takes the readers to the theme of the evolution of consciousness. It talks about the clash of individual consciousness with another consciousness and the resulting evolution of cosmic consciousness that makes humankind see the universal oneness of the whole mankind. Jaishankar Prasad expresses the objective of his poetry in Canto 11, Verse 35-37:

Human form itself is an evolution of consciousness,  
It has a world created within its fold of layers  
The conflict is in the centres of human consciousness,  
It always shrouds the mind with a feeling of duality.  
Though unmindful they are familiar with one another,  
Coming closer constantly, they unite many together. (Prasad 122)

Allegory has been defined in *A Handbook to Literature* as,

A form of extended METAPHOR in which objects, persons, and actions in a NARRATIVE are equated with meanings that lies outside the NARRATIVE itself. Thus, it represents one thing in the guise of another—an abstraction in that of a concrete IMAGE. By a process of double signification, the order of words represents actions and characters, and they, in turn, represent ideas. Allegory often clarifies this process by giving patently meaningful names to persons and places. The characters are usually PERSONIFICATIONS of abstract qualities, the action and the setting representative of the relationships among these abstractions. Allegory attempts to evoke a dual interest, one in the events, characters, and setting presented, and the other in the ideas they are intended to convey or the significance they bear. The characters, events, and setting may be historical, fictitious, or fabulous; the test is that these materials be so employed that they represent meanings independent of the action in the surface story.  
(Harmon and Holman 12)

The major characters of this allegory are representative of sentiments of musing mind (Manu), abiding faith (Shraddha) and intellect (Ida). The two conflicting aspects in the mind of Manu, that is, of his heart and head, have been represented by Shraddha and Ida respectively. These characters create their hypothetical sorrow and fall apart causing a huge pain to them. Their sufferings and actions go parallel with the natural occurrences. It is only when Manu achieves the ultimate peace in the vicinity of Mount Kailash that the conflict is resolved and they start living in harmony.

*Kamayani* opens with the occurrence and end of the Flood of Doom which Manu, also called the Vaivasvata Manu or the sun-born, survived in a boat after a hard and long struggle. Prasad beautifully opens as,

*Himgiri ke uttung shikhar par,  
baithshila ki sheetal chhanh  
Ek purush, bheege nayanon se,  
Dekh raha tha parlay pravaah.*

Translated as,

Sitting atop a high peak  
Under the shade of rocks,  
A man with tear-filled eyes  
Surveyed the swirling deluge.  
(Prasad 1)

It is the first great event in the ancient history of India, rather than the whole world, which provided Manu with an occasion for establishing a new human civilization, different from the pre-diluvian civilization of his so-called immortal race of deities. According to the poet Prasad, the flood of doom came about due to the deities' extreme lust and love of luxury, inordinate pride and self-worship, and their brutality to the innocent animals slain in their *Pashu-yagyas* (animal sacrifices). The Deluge submerged the whole Earth and destroyed the Deity race.

The event of the Deluge is described in different Indian scriptures viz. *Rigveda*, *Shatapatha Braahmana*, *Mahabharata*, *Shrimad Bhagavata*, *Matsya Purana*, *Markandya Purana*, *Padama Purana*, *Aganeya Purana*, *Vaayu Purana*, *Kalika Purana*, *Bhavishya Purana* and *Bhagvati Sutras* in Jain scriptures. However, the event has been narrated with slight variations in the literature of other countries like Greece, Sumer, Palestine, Babylonia, Burma, China, Australia etc. A similar story has been narrated in the *Bible*- it tells that the whole of mankind had been overtaken by corruption and evil deeds. They had lost their moral character as a result of which the Earth was drowned by the Deluge and Hazarat Noah survived it along with his family and some other creatures, by mounting his Ark. The Ark sailed on and ultimately stranded on mountain Aravat (Bible Genesis 8:4). The flood had subsided, Noah dismounted the Ark and the further narration goes thus: "And Noah builded an alter unto the lord; and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the alters." (Bible Genesis 8:20). An almost similar story of Noah's survival is described in the *Quran Sharif*. But sources of *Kamayani*'s story are Indian scriptures, mainly *Rigveda* and *Puranas*. However, Prasad has also drawn upon other legends to impart a logical sequence to different links of the story.

After surviving the havoc wrought by the 'flood of doom' Manu is shown sitting with tearful eyes on the Himalayan peak, lamenting over the destruction of his Deity race. He reflects on the glorious past and gloomy present which makes him much anguished and perturbed. Desperate and desolate, he loses the urge to live and becomes a nihilist, denying all reality except that of death. Slowly, however, the night of horrors is over and a radiant morning dawns on the horizon. Nature puts on her myriad-coloured veil of beauty again and awakens the light of hope in the heart of Manu. So, he settles himself in a Himalayan cave and takes on the life of meditation and ritual sacrifices. But soon he grows sick of his lowliness and pines for the companionship of a life partner. At this stage, Shraddha, the heroine of the epic, appears in the scene. She is the very embodiment of beauty in all respects. After a mutual introduction, she exhorts Manu from his plight of depression and inertia to a life of action. She offers her services to him as a life partner and awakens in him a new sense of responsibility towards the regeneration of a new human race.

Jaishankar Prasad says in his Preface to *Kamayani*:

It is probable that in ancient times the evolution of mankind through the joint life and effort of Manu and Shraddha may have been accepted as an allegory just as most of the Vedic histories were allegorised. Even if it be taken as an allegory, it is rational, thoughtful and praiseworthy. It can succeed in becoming the psychological history of mankind.

No matter how the legend of Manu and Shraddha was perceived in the ancient times, *Kamayani* has by now been accepted, as prophesied by scholars of the age as an allegory, besides it being a narrative epic and the psychological history of mankind. Apart from being the story of Manu and Shraddha as physical entities, it is also the story of the 'mind' and 'heart' in their combined development towards the ultimate objective of bliss. The outstanding merit of *Kamayani* is that its surface story with all physical characters runs parallel to the suggestive story with its symbolical characters representing the human instincts and impulses so that the reader never finds himself in the arid land of philosophical contemplations or intellectual exercises, nor is he chained with the surface story. Using the legendary sources, Prasad has endeavoured to humanise and rationalise the story of *Kamayani* as the mythic allegory dissolves beneath the moral and historical allegories. Prasad draws a symbolic value of myth from different episodes. Just as the Gods, or say the Deities, are symbolic of the sense that risk fall in their blind gratification. At the climax of their voluptuous civilization, they were drowned in their sexual extremes as depicted in Canto-I, Stanza 33:

How a stream of lustful pleasures  
was flowing in an endless chain,  
Whose merger in dooming Deluge  
made the heart to cry with pain!

(Prasad 6)

That the Deities were destroyed by the flood of passions is further testified in Canto-IV, Stanza 38 by Kaama, the God of Love saying:

Thirsty I am still, not content  
Even on enjoying, flood of passions;  
Sureit came but passed away then,  
Was not quenched the thirst of passions.

(Prasad40)

Conspicuously, the flood is symbolic of the Deities' endless exuberance of sex. Manu's deep anxiety in the first canto is the psychic state born out of that limitless sexual perversity of his Deity race. The water is symbolic of Maya (illusion) which surrounds the consciousness or mind. The mind (Manu) discovers hope only when Maya, that is the flood water, recedes as is evident in the second canto. This psychological allegory not only gives a moral warning to 'man' of the repercussions of sexual extremes but also foreshadows the disastrous consequences of such laxities as are telescoped in the epic.

*Kamayani's* allegory manipulates the characters of the epic most impressively. Manu is symbolic of the human mind or says the means of meditation. Shraddha is symbolic of the heart and devotion and Manu has been described as lord (or husband) of Shraddha, which concords with the psychological explanation that the mind is the ruling impulse of the heart. Moral journey of the mind (Manu) over anxiety, hope, devotion, love-passion, lustful desire, ritual action, jealousy, intellect and conflict, remorse and renunciation, the vision of Shiva, the mystery of life, makes it perfect and enables it to achieve the supernal Bliss. An abrupt replacement of one set of values by another implicates disasters as is evidenced in Manu's fall. In the creed of Prasad, the unification of desire, knowledge and action and man's happiness lies in the blend of the two impulses, emotion and intellect, and not in their remaining distanced from each other.

Prasad has characterised Shraddha as a symbol of heart and devotion as also a historical figure on the physical plane. By devotion, he does not mean blind or imprudent faith but a positive force. That is why Shraddha, though depicted as a symbol of devotion to her husband Manu, retains her independent identity as seen in the last canto "Bliss Supernal". They now appreciate each other better and, in that consciousness, melt all their differences. Manu's life shows that the mind suspended in obeying the urges of all senses, distanced from the conscious soul, will not enjoy lasting peace and bliss. The mind sublimates itself through devotion which assists its purgation.

Ida has been characterised as the Queen of Saaraswat on the physical plane of the story. However, she has been described in *Rigveda* as the guide of Manu and the ruler of mankind, the intellect or the power of judgement and bestower of consciousness to mankind. Her intellectualism helps in creating a partition wall between Manu (mind) and Shraddha (devotion). Then it is natural that pain and misery will befall in the wake of developing intellectualism too much, in the quest for more comforts and pleasures, as is evidenced in cantos tenth to twelfth. Ida is an allegorical personification of the intellect of man as the creator of rights, discrimination, class division and struggle. She is the rational spirit behind science and industry, devoid of emotion which brings mankind closer to each other.

Kaama and Modesty are two supernatural characters; one is a symbol of a man's love for women and sexual desire while the other is the symbol of shyness in women. They represent two human instincts and moral forces. Their effect on human conduct is natural and, inevitable yet they are governed by the power of the mind.

Kumar or Maanav is the symbol of modern man and his generations. He has been symbolised as the harmonious blend of devotion and intellect, the temperamental elements inherited by him for Shraddha and Ida, for in their synthesis laid the perfection of man.

Kilaata and Aakuli, the two demons, are the symbol of vices which tempt men to violence, prejudice and suspicion. Representatives of the lower world, conspire with the rebels against their one-time master, showing how the lower impulses meet against the mind in their characteristic actions.

While the pet animals of Shraddha are the symbols of innocence and freedom, the bull of Ida alludes to religion (Dharma) marching through the righteous course leading to absolute bliss. The Maansarover Lake with its mountainous surroundings and greenery bears allusion to blissful harmony.

*Kamayani* depicts on a Vedic canvas- the story of Manu, Shraddha and Ida; the growth of post-diluvian civilization and its success in industry and science; its fall and poignant finale as to how mankind's salvation lies in the harmony of knowledge, desire and action. It presents a psychological interpretation of human history- neither racial nor material, but the basic conflict of

man, his littleness and limitations, follies and faults of his life and the continuous struggle he is involved in. This epic not only represents the modern age but also relates at length to the existing class conflicts, spiritual decimation, utter helplessness and self-agony, while dramatizing the inevitable process of life and death, and an ultimate goal which dissolves all mundane desires into spiritual bliss and harmony.

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