Chapter – V : Nature and Beyond

The formula that all great minds think alike holds true in case of Keats and Kalidasa. The universality of artistic vision which, of course, presupposes a philosophy for its substratum, cuts across the barriers of race, nation and age and so on and holds a mirror to the unity of human understanding as of human life. It may look really strange that Keats and Kalidasa who had never heard of each other and were so completely apart, could arrive at a common picture of life in their artistic and philosophical achievements.

No critic of Keats with any knowledge of Sanskrit Poetics could have failed to notice a great similarity between Keats’s and Kalidasa’s romanticism in their poetry. The poems of both represent a height of artistic vision independently achieved by the two writers belonging to two different cultures: Occidental and Oriental. The similarity in their presentation of Nature, their concept of Beauty, and Style show the universality of vision and unity of human experience in spite of cultural, racial, national, temperamental and exigential differences between the two masters.

It is quite interesting to note that these two great poets viewed Nature as the divine manifestation of God. Both had the firm conviction that God Manifests Himself in all forms of nature and universe. Both believed that Nature is God’s temple, and the universe – felt and known, alive and sentient – is the face of god.

And both of them were able to enter into the varied life of the earth, which is a characteristic of the infinite lifespan of God.
Both Keats and Kalidasa have exhibited a wonderful sensitiveness in the treatment of nature. All their sense organs, such as eyes, ears, nose and touch were always alive to carry the impressions to their minds and through it to the soul. They felt a feeling of joy in their sensitivity to nature. They both identified the highest works of art with nature and to them art and nature gave the same joy. Beauty of art for them was nothing else than the beauty of nature which had passed through the brain of the artists.

Keats’s Treatment of Nature

The revival of Romanticism in the beginning of the Nineteenth Century was largely a renaissance of the poetry of Nature. Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats – all were nature poets, though each is distinct from the other by virtue of his individual approach to the world of flora and fauna, of hills and rivers, and of empty spaces and the stars and the moon.

It should always be clearly understood that when we talk of nature in the poetry of the Romantic revival of the Nineteenth Century, we mean wild, uncultivated, untamed and in its own natural state. Secondly, to each of the Romantic poets, nature constitutes a philosophy of life, an ideal state of being for man to be aspired after, but in each case in different sense. And, finally, their theory of Imagination is blended with their attitude to Nature. It is through Imagination that Wordsworth discovers soul in an inanimate nature; Shelley, a message of complete liberty and progression to Utopia in Nature; and Keats the pleasures of sensation in Nature.

The distinction between Keats on the one hand and Wordsworth and Shelley on the other can be pushed further still. Wordsworth philosophies his attitude to nature, while Shelley’s approach is intellectual and humanitarian in
a larger sense of the word. C.M. Bowra has pointed out that ‘with Wordsworth is almost a substitute for God, and the basis of his new metaphysics cooked up from Plato and Rousseau. Shelley is primarily concerned with man, his capacity for intellectual progression and creation of a utopian society devoid of any moral restrictions whatsoever. In Shelley, nature is treated largely as a symbol, even as an allegory on man’s immense powers waiting to be released from the bondage of conventions and social restrictions’.¹

By comparison, Keats had no philosophy of Nature. Nor did he look upon Nature as a symbol or an allegory. He did not have ready made intellectual system to control his attitude to Nature. It would be perhaps nearer the truth to say that he had no “attitude” to Nature.

Nature certainly was a constant source of joy to Keats in a world of despair, frustration and pain. It was full of sensation for him. Thus, Keats, as a typically Romantic poet, shares with Wordsworth and Shelley, the idea of opposition, almost unresolvable opposition between the civilized industrial society and the life in close contact with nature.

Nevertheless, his distinction lies in his fully responsive concretely responsive, approach to nature. He responds vividly and passionately to the pleasures that Nature with its endless variety of beautiful objects melodic sounds, gives to him. These are the pleasures of senses: eye, ear, skin, tongue, lips, and nostrils. Completely unlike what we find in Wordsworth and Shelley, these pleasures in Keats are their own end: they are supremely valuable in the state of pure sensations. Keats fully submits himself fully to the pleasures of these sensations which are therefore infinitely more valuable than thoughts of philosophical arguments.
This is, then, what is meant by the frequently used term: Keats’s sensuousness. He keeps his senses keenly alert and active to the endless pleasures that perennial nature offers and finds them the highest and the greatest pleasures life can afford. No system of philosophy, however, logically constituted, no code of moral conduct, however liberally devised, no other purpose or goal or ambition, nor any amount of worldly success could afford the joy which the sensation of beauty from looking at flowers or listening to the song of Nightingale can afford.

“Keats”, says Compton Rickett, “had no religion save the religion of beauty; no God save Pan, the earth was his great consoler, and so passionately did he love her, with a love far more concrete and personal than that of Wordsworth or even Shelley that no other consideration impinges upon his work. Keats’s sympathy with nature was not of the reflective and ethical order, drawing food for moral inspiration and spiritual edification. He did not philosophies upon the phenomena around him. With an intense and passionate simplicity, holding as it were, his breath with wonder and delight, he sees to know Nature perfectly and to enjoy her fully with no ulterior end or other thought than to give her complete expression. He loves her purely for her own sake and paints her not with the reason but with imagination. Whereas Wordsworth spiritualises and Shelley intellectualizes Nature, Keats is content to express her through the senses. The colour, the sound, the touch, the pulsating music – these are the things that stir him to his depths. There is not a mood of earth he does not love, not a season that will not cheer and inspire him”.\(^2\) Keats love for Nature was purely sensuous and he loved the beautiful sights and scenes of Nature for their own sake and ‘less for the sake of sympathy which the human mind can read into her with its own working
His love of Nature had not a tinge of mysticism about it. Nature bore no spiritual message for him, as it did for Wordsworth and Kalidasa, nor did he seek any moral inspiration from the beauties of Nature. He was tremulous with delight at the feast of Nature and its music delighted his ears. He viewed Nature like an objective observer and painted its beauties in a picturesque and pictorial manner. He cared only for ‘the beauty of earth that was never dead. Rightly, therefore, Haydon pointed out, “He was in his glory in the fields. The humming of the bee, the sight of the flower, the glitter of the sun seemed to make his nature tremble.”

The poet himself wrote to his friend Charles Brown in his letter, “Nothing startles me beyond the moment. The setting will always set me to right, or if a sparrow were before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel.” He was wholly in the place and in the time, and with the things of which he wrote, not confused by the thought of how the trees would look in winter if he saw them in spring and how the clouds in the sky might be arranged tomorrow; still less confused by any imputation of his own feelings to nature. He always appreciated Nature in her present state without brooding sorrowfully over the past glories not anticipating the joys of Nature in the future. “Where are the songs of spring? He fancied that his friend Haydon asked, “And where are they?” Keats, the lover of the moment in Nature, answered, “Think not of them, thou hast the music too.”

In the early poems of Keats we come across fine descriptions and charming pictures of nature. In ‘Sleep and Poetry’ and ‘Endymion’ the poet paints nature with the skill of a consummate artist. His first poem ‘I Stood tiptoe upon a little hill’ opens with a beautiful and lovely description of an early summer’s day:
“I stood tip-toe upon a little hill,
The air was cooling, and so very still,
That the sweet buds which with a modest pride
Pull droopingly, in slanting curve aside,
Their scantly leaved, and finely tapering stems,
Had not yet lost those starry diadems
Caught from the early sobbing of the morn.
The clouds were pure and white as flocks new shorn,
And fresh from the clear brook; sweetly they slept
On the blue fields of heaven, and then there crept
A little noiseless noise among the leaves,
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves:”

- I Stood tip – toe, Lines 1 – 12.

The poet finds in Nature the perennial source of poetry. In ‘Sleep and Poetry’, the thought is further developed and here Keats felt that poetry was natural song of rejoicing that sprang from the heart in response to Nature:

No one who once the glorious sun has seen,
And all the clouds, and felt his bosom clean
For his great Maker’s presence, but must know
What ’tis I mean, and feel his being glow:
Therefore no insult will I give his spirit
By telling what he sees from native merit.

- Sleep and Poetry, Lines 41 – 44.

Keats feels sensuous pleasures in the beauties of Nature. Stopford Brooke says, “In these early poems, it was a temper in Keats of unruffled
pleasure, a sensitive girl like sensuous pleasure in beauty, and in the
consolation of beauty to the soul; a pleasure which loved also to have the body
comfortable while the soul enjoyed, so that all things might be in harmony. It
was also a temper in which freed from the religious and philosophical troubles,
men could play with Nature. He had a way of fluttering in a butterfly fashion
from one object to another, and touch for the moment the momentary charm
of each thing”. The mood of rapture in the presence of the beauties of Nature
is reflected in several descriptions and is best seen in the ‘Ode to Autumn’
where a complete picture of the autumn season is presented with a minuteness
of detail that does credit to the poet’s imagination and vivid observation of
Nature. He showed with the Greeks the instinct for personifying the power of
Nature in this ode and the picture of the season is presented through a series
of vivid personifications such as:

“Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;”

- Ode to Autumn, Lines, 12 – 15.

The Ode to Autumn is Keats’s last of the odes. It requires little
commentary. The poet’s own account gives a beautiful description of the
theme-

“How beautiful the season is now ! How fine the air ! A temperate
sharpness about it. Really without joking, chaste Dian Skies – I never liked
stubble weather – fields so much as now – Aye better than the chilly green of
the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm – this struck me so much in my Sunday’s walk that I composed upon it.”

What he wrote that Sunday afternoon was his most perfect and as Aileen Ward says “most untroubled” poem.

The poem expresses the essence of the season but it draws no lessons, no overt comparison with human life as we see in Kalidasa. Keats was being neither allegorical nor Wordsworthian. Goethe once said –

“For most men, the vision of pure phenomena is not enough. They insist on going further like children who peep in a mirror, then turn it round to see what it is on the other side.” But there is no looking on the other side in Keats’s poem. It is only the pure phenomenon which is the object and the object is described, as it is - We do not come across the poet’s ‘I’ anywhere in the poem. He is giving an impersonal description of the season. It is lyrical not in the sense of being autobiographical but being the song of Nature.

Keats exhibited a wonderful sensitiveness in the treatment of nature. All his sense organs, such as eyes ears, nose and touch were always alive to carry the impressions to his mind and through it to the soul. He felt a feeling of joy in his sensitivity to Nature. He identified the highest works of Art with Nature and to him art and Nature gave the same joy. Beauty of art for him was nothing else than the beauty of Nature which had passed through the brain of the artist.

Keats like Wordsworth had no place for ‘meddling intellect’ in the appreciation and understanding of Nature. Analysis of the objects of Nature could give no joy to both of the poets. Keats complained in Lamia that analysis spoilt the beauty and charm of Nature:
“There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture: she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.”

- Lamia, Lines 231 – 233.

Keats believed in coming to Nature with a ‘heart that watches and receives’. The bird’s song can be appreciated only if one listens to it without a feeling for knowledge or scientific analysis:

“Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft times hath
Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.”

- Ode to Nightingale, Lines 61- 70.

Keats conceived that the relation of humanity and Nature was one of sympathy and intimate relationship. It was the realization of the close bond of relationship between Nature and man which enable him to endow the figures of the reaper, the gleaner and the maiden at the cider press with the whole spirit of Autumn:

“Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap’d furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

- Ode to Autumn, Lines, 11 – 23.

Sometimes Keats’s note of happiness towards Nature was coloured by sorrow and despair. When he had finished Endymion, when the troubles of the world had come upon him, when he had seen his brother die, and felt himself that life was ill – made for him, his note towards Nature changed. It was mixed with sorrow, but it was sorrow which was impassioned to lose itself in joy which remembered the time of self – forgetfulness and urged him to escape. ‘Leave me behind’ cries sorrow, ‘escape from your life into joy.’ And Keats obeys; flies to Nature and her loveliness and for a time succeeds in forgetting; then the note of pain falls again, and again he forgets it, and again remembers, and again forgets; till the alternating passion is worn out and all the mixed music dies.”

“My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,
That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.”

- **Ode to Nightingale, Lines 1 – 10.**

Keats wished to die into Nature – to ‘cease upon the midnight with no pains’, but this was not his ordinary mood. It was rather the characteristic mood of Shelley. Keats sought, in spite of such moments of pain, to live in Nature and to be incorporated with one beautiful thing after another. He had a way of fluttering, butterfly – fashion from one object to another, touching for the moment the charm of each thing – the work of fancy ‘who is never at home’. For Keats Nature remained a perennial source of poetry and joy:

“For what had made the sage or poet, write
But this fair paradise of Nature’s light?”

- **I Stood Tiptoe, Lines, 125 – 126.**

**Most Sensuous Romantic Poet**

Keats’s poetry was not in the chill grip of politics or propaganda, and he never allowed political considerations to make inroads into sacred realm of poetry. He fled from the work – a – day world into an enchanted realm of beauty, loveliness and sensuousness and jealousy closed the gates of poetry against the intrusions of ordinary human affairs. Shelley’s revolutionary idealism colours all his works; Keats idealism reflects nothing of the life of his
day. He took from Medievalism material for fashioning his sequestered land of beauty, but what he found here, he used for ‘sensuous delight’, and not ethical inspiration.

It was Keats’s poetic creed that poetry should make an appeal to the sense, and art should create beauty, loveliness and charm, to feed the senses of storm – tossed man wearied out by the fever and fret of the world. Keats believed that poetry need not be allied with philosophic or political thought, but it should certainly minister to the senses, gratifying the feeling for touch, taste, colour, and smell. The poet should present beautiful and colourful word – pictures appealing to the five senses. “Sensation to him was all – important, because only through sensation could he come into communion with the principle of beauty. Therefore he welcomed every lovely sensation and revelled in it to the full whenever the opportunity occurred. It was only when he found that the sensations of love for Fanny Brawne were more than his nerves could stand, especially as this love was thwarted that he realized that a life of sensation is, in certain circumstances, disastrous. We may deplore the fact that he did not discover this sooner but Keats would not have been Keats if he had.”

Keats was true to his poetic creed, and his poetry is, in fact, the most sensuous and sense appealing than the poetry of any of his contemporaries. Keats was a sensuous poet in the best sense of the term. Sensuousness is a paramount bias of Keats’s genius. His poetry has scarcely been equaled in description of the beauties perceptible to the sense such as, form, colour, perfume, music. It was his mission to interpret not the highest spiritual life, but the highest type of ‘sensuous beauty’. Cazamian says, “His art is full of passion. It is above all aspiration and desire; and the object of this desire is not
the intellectual beauty of Shelley, but that which reveals itself to the enchantment of the senses.”

Poetry, according to Milton, should be ‘simple, sensuous, passionate’. Matthew Arnold says, “No one, can question the eminency in Keats’s poetry of the quality of sensuousness. Keats as a poet is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous; the question with some people will be whether he is anything else? Many things may be brought forward which seem to show as under the fascination and sole domination of sense, and desiring nothing better.”

“Poetry as it came to Keats was not a spiritual vision as with Wordsworth, not an emancipating vision, as with Shelley, but a joy wrought out of sensation as exquisite as Coleridge’s by an imagination not weird and mystic like his, but plastic and pictorial.’ There is thus an unanimity of opinion that Keats is nothing if not throughout sensuous and impassioned, and his effectiveness lies in the exercise of five senses. As a matter of fact sensuousness operates everywhere across his poetry. In the early part of his career his fancy was always dwelling on outward feminine form:

“Light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted hair;
Soft dimpled hands, white neck, and creamy breast,
Are things on which the dazzled senses rest
Till the fond, fixed eyes, forget they stare.”

- *Imitation of Spenser, Lines 15 – 18.*

The following lines from the sonnet which he wrote in the last year of his life are a fine illustration of his sensuousness:
Pillowed upon my fair love’s ripening breast,
To feel forever its soft fall and swell,
Awake forever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever - or else swoon to death.


Keats’s sensuousness is not limited to mere representation of physical passion, nor it is of a light and sportive nature. Some of his poems are expressions of the sensuous embodiments of the feelings of ennui, fatigue and physical languor. In the Ode to a Nightingale the poet expresses the sensation of languid and aching heart:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:

- Ode to a Nightingale, Lines, 1 – 4.

The disembodies sense of ‘taste’ is well represented in the following lines:

“__________ Here is wine,
Alive with sparkles—never, I aver,
Since Ariadne was a vintager,
So cool a purple: taste these juicy pears,
Sent me by sad Vertumnus, when his fears
Were high about Pomona: here is cream,
Deepening to richness from a snowy gleam;
Sweeter than that nurse Amalthea skimm’d
For the boy Jupiter: and here, undimm’d
By any touch, a bunch of blooming plums
Ready to melt between an infant’s gums:


The richness and delicacy of ‘sound’ and ‘sight’ can best be represented from the Eve of St.Agnes:

That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft;
And so it chanc’d, for many a door was wide,
From hurry to and fro. Soon, up aloft,
The silver, snarling trumpets ’gan to chide:
The level chambers, ready with their pride,
Were glowing to receive a thousand guests:
The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,
Star’d, where upon their heads the cornice rests,
With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise on their breasts.

- The Eve of St. Agnes, Lines 28 – 36.

OR

The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,
Flutter’d in the besieging wind’s uproar;
And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

- The Eve of St. Agnes, Lines, 360 – 368
Delicacy and richness in sensation of ‘touch’ and ‘sound’ are found throughout when is an ante – chamber every guest:

“Had felt the cold full sponge to pleasure pressed,
By ministering slaves, upon his hands and feet.


The following lines from Lamia make an appeal to sight and sense of colour:

“She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr’d;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
Dissolv’d, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries–


In the following lines from the Eve of St. Agnes the appeal is to the eye, to the sense of touch, to the sense of smell and to the ear:

“Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:”

- The Eve of St. Agnes, Lines 218 – 221.
Keats portrays technicolour pictures. The multi-coloured wine and flowers are painted gorgeously:

“Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim
And purple-stained mouth.

- Ode to a Nightingale, Line 16 – 19.

The sense of sound:

“Soft went the music the soft air along,
While fluent Greek a voweled undersong
Kept up among the guests,”


The sense of smell:

“Then in a silken scarf, - sweet with dews
Of precious flowers plucked in Araby,
And divine liquids come with odorous ooze
Through the cold serpent – pipe refreshfully, -
She wrapped it up.”

- Isabella, LII, Lines 1 – 5.

The sense of ‘touch’ is again well-represented in the Eve of St. Agnes:

Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp’d trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman’s fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seem’d taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin’s picture, while his prayer he saith.

- *The Eve of St. Agnes, I, Lines 1 - 9.*

And

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex’d she lay,
Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppress’d
Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away;
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;
Blissfully haven’d both from joy and pain;
Clasp’d like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.

- *The Eve of St. Agnes, XXVII, Lines 1 - 9.*

If you want to enjoy the sensations of four out of five senses, then turn to these lines from the Ode to a Nightingale:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

- **Ode to a Nightingale, V, Lines 41 – 50.**


In the presentation of the beauties of Nature, Keats is mainly interested in the presentation of sensuous pictures. Compton – Rickett say, “Where as Wordsworth spiritualises, and Shelley intellectualizes Nature, Keats is content to express her through the senses. The colour, the scent, the touch, the pulsating music – these are the things that stir him to his depths. There is not a mood of earth he does not love, not a season that will not cheer and inspire him. The setting sun will always set one to rights, or if a sparrow comes before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel” 12

Stopford Brooke rightly emphasizes Keats’s sensuous love for Nature when he says, “It was a temper in Keats of unmuffled pleasure, a sensitive girl like sensuous pleasure in beauty, and in the consolation of beauty of the soul.
He flies from one beautiful object of Nature to another in a butterfly fashion, tasting and sipping honey and little caring to settle upon any one. He is thus completely and frankly sensuous in his attitude towards Nature.”

Part of the poet’s sensuousness lies in the great ‘pictorial’ quality of his poetic art in which he equals the excellence of Spenser. “It is impossible for Keats,” says Brandes, “to name any conception or any thought without at once proceeding to represent it in a corporeal, plastic form. His numerous allegories have the same life and fire as if they were executed in by some of the best Italian artists of the 16th century. Upon this background of sensitiveness of the sensuous pictures rise, distinct and round, like the reliefs on a shield. The word ‘welded’ comes voluntarily to one’s lips when one thinks of Keats’s pictures.”

Compare the figure of Autumn:

“And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep

    Steady thy laden head across a brook;

    Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,

    Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

    - Ode to Autumn, Lines 19 – 22.

    Or that of cupid and Psyche with :

    Their arms embracèd, and their pinions too;

    Their lips touch’d not, but had not bade adieu,

    As if disjoinèd by soft-handed slumber,

    And ready still past kisses to outnumber
At tender eye-dawn of auroean love:

- **Ode to Psyche, Lines 16 – 20.**

Or that of Saturn in ‘Hyperion’;

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_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ Upon the sodden ground

His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead

Unsceptred ; and his realmless eyes were closed
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- **Hyperion, Book I, Lines 17 – 19.**

Keats’s later poetry is not much sensuous. Undoubtedly, Keats is sensuous through and through, but his sympathies broadened as his mind matured. In his maturer poems, there is an awakening intellect and a spiritual passion. But it was not the mere worship of simple sensations that characterized his attitude to the external world. His senses were transfigured by imagination and their acuteness becomes so creative as to ‘make the loveliness of the real world still lovelier.’ Fausset remarks: “Keats’s mind is mainly sensuous by direct action, but it also works by reflex action, from sensuousness into sentiment. Certainly, some of his work is merely extremely sensuous; but this is a work in which the poet was trying his materials and his powers, and rising towards mastery of his real faculty and final function. In his maturer performances in the Odes, for example, and in Hyperion sensuousness is penetrated by sentiment, voluptuousness is permeated by vitality, and aestheticism is tempered by intellectualism. In Keats’s palace of poetry, the nucleus is sensuousness, but the superstructure has chambers of more abiding thing and more permanent colours.” 

15
There was a tendency in Keats’s later poetry to be free from the hold of sensations. He was not satisfied with the life of sensations but sought to grapple with sorrows and sufferings of the world. The spirit of humanitarianism that touched Shelley also came to have its influence on Keats. He started to cherish the vision of glorifying human life, and the grim truth began to have its way with the poet that higher scales of life could not be attained by any one except those:

“To whom the miseries of the world
Are misery and will not let them rest.”

The poet sought to give up the early ideal of sensuous poetry when he had once written:

“And they shall be counted poet kings
Who simply tell the most heart-easing things.
O may these joys be ripe before I die”


All the later stage of his life, he realized that he could attain immortality better by moving to higher task merely reveling in sensuous joy as he says:

“Yes, I must pass for a nobler life
Where I may find the agonies”


Keats, indeed, has much similarity with Kalidasa. It lies in the fact that, like Kalidasa, Keats perceived a mystery beneath the visible objects of Nature,
though this sense of mystery is not definable and definite. Keats let himself be drunk so deep in the pleasures of sensations of all kinds – visual, auditory, and tactual – that his own sensations appeared to him a thing of mystery and wonder. In Kalidasa, the sense of mystery beneath the visible world of Nature always led him to the consciousness of philosophical or religious mystery. In Keats, the mystery is the mystery of sensations, which, aided by, or blended with imagination, remains the constant source of joy.

When Keats says, “The poetry of earth is never dead “ – the line with which his first youthful ambitious Endymion opens – his meaning is plain. Nature always has infinite number of objects, sights and sounds to excite the sense of man and gives him pleasure, only if he keeps the senses open and alive and has not dulled them or blunted them by subduing them to a system of thought or morality. Whatever the season, whatever the time, Nature has its own storehouse of beautiful things, a constant source of joy to our senses. Each season brings its own joys. Even, winter, which is the most tortuous death – like season, can afford joy, if one lets one’s imagination, stirred by the warmth of the fireside, roam about and capture the glories of summer. Nature is everfresh, for its objects – flowers, fruits, birds – are ever charming from season to season. One season passes, but it is not dead and gone forever. It will come again. Nature is never dead; it is always alive. One season passes into other. Things of beauty vary from season to season, but they are always there for the man of alert senses and sharp imaginative power to be constantly enjoyed. It is in this sense that “The poetry of earth is never dead”

This response to nature determines Keats’s treatment of Nature in his poetry. Because he delights in sensation caused by variegated beauties of Nature, he easily captures the minute details of size, shape, form, colour,
fragrance, taste and so on of the objects of nature. Each detail makes an immediate stirring in the senses of the reader. Keats’s capacity for observation is matched well by his enormous capacity for vividly presenting the sensations in words. Very often, he would give a picture of riot of colours, cluster of flowers and fruits with all the vivid details about their lusciousness, colour, fragrance, and taste. Keats does not contemplate on the objects of Nature: he presents them as they naturally are: stimulus to our sense organs.

These characteristics of his treatment of Nature are to be found even in his earlier pieces, though Keats learned quickly to blend them with the themes in his later poetry. Notice the details of nature description with its richly sensuous appeal in the following lines from one of early pieces, ‘I stood Tip–toe:

“A bush of May flowers with the bees about them;
Ah, sure no tasteful nook would be without them;
And let a lush laburnum oversweep them,
And let long grass grow round the roots to keep them
Moist, cool and green; and shade the violets,
That they may bind the moss in leafy nets.


Mark the sensuous appeal of “flowers with the bees about them,” “hush laburnum”, “long grass” (growing) round the roots (of May flowers) to keep them “Moist, cool and green”, and ‘leafy nets.’ Already even in this early piece,
Keats shows his dramatic sense in Nature description, as, for example, in the following:

“Where swarms of minnows show their little heads,

Staying their wavy bodies ’gainst the streams,

To taste the luxury of sunny beams

Temper’d with coolness. How they ever wrestle

With their own sweet delight, and ever nestle

Their silver bellies on the pebbly sand.

If you but scantily hold out the hand,

That very instant not one will remain;

But turn your eye, and they are there again.


He declares his passionate devotion to Nature’s richness and beauty in the following lines of sensuous appeal:

“_ _ _ _ _ _ First the realm I’ll pass

Of Flora, and old Pan: sleep in the grass,

Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,

And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;

Catch the white-handed nymphs in shady places,

To woo sweet kisses from averted faces,”
Play with their fingers, touch their shoulders white

Into a pretty shrinking with a bite

As hard as lips can make it: till agreed,

A lovely tale of human life we’ll read.”

- Sleep and Poetry, Lines 102 – 110.

The description of the love-game with the nymphs borders on adolescent sensuality, but since a nymph is an imagined Nature Creature, it is still to be regarded as sensuous.

Endymion is a Nature poem from his early period, and the poem is a string of sensuous pictures of Nature’s endless beauty. The myth, on which the poem is based, has a good deal of scope for narrative elements but the poet’s fascination for Nature’s beauty frequently holds up the narration. Any occasion in the poem is a good enough excuse to tarry and describe Nature’s plentiful charm. Take these lines, for example, from Endymion’s address to “Great Pan”:

“O thou, for whose soul-soothing quiet, turtles
Passion their voices cooingly ’mong myrtles,
What time thou wanderest at eventide
Through sunny meadows, that outskirt the side
Of thine enmossed realms: O thou, to whom
Broad leaved fig trees even now foredoom
Their ripen’d fruitage; yellow girted bees
Their golden honeycombs; our village leas
Their fairest-blossom’d beans and poppied corn;
The chuckling linnet its five young unborn,
To sing for thee; low creeping strawberries
Their summer coolness; pent up butterflies
Their freckled wings; “


What is the important is not that the lines constitute details of actual observation, but how fondly Keats’s imagination dwells upon the sensuous details of nature. Through his imagination the poet vividly feels the sensations described in the lines and, then, captures them in words. In this accuracy and adequacy of reproducing the sensations in words lies the essence of Keats’s craftsmanship.

But in his early poems as well as Endymion, description of nature stands only for its own sake. The passage with descriptions of nature can easily be isolated for sheer pleasure. Richly sensuous and cloying as they are, they do not yet constitute an integral element of the theme, subject matter and, frame work of the poems concerned. In Endymion, passage of nature description can be taken out without in any way adversely affecting the main narrative action.

The poem in which the descriptive and the narrative come to a sort of blend is Lamia. In ‘The Eve of St. Agnes, Keats’s narrative power had been more at work than descriptive, the opposite of what happened in Endymion.
In Lamia, written a year before his death, nature description tends to be more intimately related to the action of the poem. The famous passage describing Lamia in the state of snake can be cited for illustration. It is a description in vividly colourful, sensuously evoked details:

“She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,

Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;

Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,

Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr’d;

And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,

Dissolv’d, or brighter shone, or interwreathed

Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—

So rainbow-sided, touch’d with miseries,

She seem’d, at once, some penanced lady elf,

Some demon’s mistress, or the demon’s self.

Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire

Sprinkled with stars_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _‰


Here the excessive sensuous details serve a purpose: the purpose is to suggest this illusory, self-blinding significance of the snake-girl. The details through the excesses serve to give the description a semblance of magic enchantment. More typical is the description of the “banquet-room” towards
the end of the poem. Although, the description is that of a room with decorations, dining table etc., it involves Keats’s eye for the gorgeous details in nature and is a typical example of Keats’s sensuousness:

“Of wealthy luster was the banquet-room, 
Fill’d with pervading brilliance and perfume:
Before each lucid pannel fuming stood
A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,
Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,
Whose slender feet wide-swerv’d upon the soft
Wool-woofed carpets: fifty wreaths of smoke
From fifty censers their light voyage took
To the high roof, still mimick’d as they rose
Along the mirror’d walls by twin-clouds odorous.
Twelve sphered tables, by silk seats insphered,
High as the level of a man’s breast rear’d
On libbard’s paws, upheld the heavy gold
Of cups and goblets, and the store thrice told
Of Ceres’ horn, and, in huge vessels, wine
Come from the gloomy tun with merry shine.”

Such passages as quoted above tend to stand out even in Lamia as purple patches of poetry of sensuous description; but they are only few in number, and even this have more functional value here than in Endymion.

It is, however, in Hyperion, particularly the second version of the poem, and in the Odes that Keats’s Nature – description is inseparably blended with themes and structures. Hyperion, Keats’s most ambitious poem, has the design of an epic. He makes an attempt to fill it with action befitting an epic, and he succeeds considerably when he is not writing unconsciously in the Miltonic mode. In this poem, therefore, Keats could not afford to tarry long on describing scenes and sights in detail as he could do in Endymion. In Hyperion, his sensuousness serves to strengthen the thematic suggestiveness of the description, and create an appropriate mood and atmosphere. Take for example, the opening lines which present Saturn brooding sadly over his defeat:

“Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve’s one star,
Sat gray-hair’d Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair;
Forest on forest hung about his head
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer’s day
Robs not one light seed from the feather’d grass,
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.

A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more

By reason of his fallen divinity


Every detail of the sense stresses the theme of Saturn’s defeat and his gloomy, brooding, spirit, and at the same time suggests the might of fallen God.

The Odes are, however, the best examples in Keats’s work, of the blend of sensuous Nature description and the given poetic theme and atmosphere. In Ode to Psyche, the details of Nature description are inseparable from the dreamy atmosphere of the poem. Take these lines, for example:

“Mid hush’d, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,

Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian

They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;

Their arms embraced

- Ode to Psyche, Lines 13–16.

In the Ode on Melancholy, we have a beautiful picture of rain falling from a cloud above on the drooping flowers below:

“But when the melancholy fit shall fall

Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,

That fosters the droop – headed flowers all,
And hides the green hill in an April shroud.”

- **Ode On Melancholy, Lines, 11 – 14.**

The scheme of Ode to a Nightingale is based upon a contrast between the eternal glories of Nature and the painful realities of life: the two themes comment critically upon each other with the poet as the victim of the conflict. Notice how in the following lines, the sensuous description of Nature intensifies further the poet’s own swooning agony:

“I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,

Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,

But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet

Wherewith the seasonable month endows

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;

White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;

Fast-fading violets cover’d up in leaves;

And mid-May’s eldest child,

The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,

The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

- **Ode to a Nightingale, Lines 41 – 50.**

Finally, it is in Ode to Autumn that Keats’s sensuousness is at its richest and finest delineation. It is not limited to two or three lines or even a stanza: the poem is a storehouse of sensuous description. The whole atmosphere
and mood of the season are caught with vivid details of flowers, fruits, harvested corns being thrashed, singing birds and so on, which virtually cloy the senses of the reader.

Keats’s Nature poetry is the poetry of exact knowledge. To Kalidasa Nature is a living thing with power to influence man for good or ill. Keats neither gives a moral life to Nature, as Kalidasa did, nor attempts to pass beyond her familiar manifestations. But in Keats’s Nature poetry, realism or the quest for pure truth informs every detail. He is the predecessor of the Tennysonian school because all his Nature poetry is based on exact knowledge, and the knowledge of a man deliberately observing and storing up the minutest details of what he sees.

Sidney Colvin observes\textsuperscript{16} : Keats’s character as a poet of Nature begins distinctly to declare itself in his first volume, ‘the Poems of 1817. He differs by it alike from Wordsworth and Shelley. The instinct of Wordsworth was to interpret all the operations of Nature by those of his own strenuous soul. For Shelley, natural beauty was symbolical in a two-fold sense. In the visible glories of the world, his philosophy saw the evil of the unseen; and all the imagery of Nature’s more remote phenomena was inseparable in his soul from the vision of a radiant future. In Keats the sentiment of Nature was simpler than in either of these two men; more direct, and more disinterested. It was his instinct to love and interpret Nature more for her own sake, and less for the sake of sympathy which the human mind can read into her with its own workings and aspirations. He was gifted with a delighted insight into all the beauties of the woods and fields. Evidences of this gift appear in the longer poems of his first volume, with their lingering trains of peaceful summer imagery, and loving inventories of “Nature’s gentle doings”. And pleasant
touches of the same kind are scattered also among the sonnets as in To Charles Wells:

“As late I rambled in the happy fields,
What time the skylark shakes the tremulous dew
From his lush clover covert,”

- **To Charles Wells, Lines, 1 – 3.**

Or again in the one To Solitude:

“ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ let me vigils keep
Mongst boughs pavillioned, where the deer’s swift leap
Startles the wild bee from the fox – glove bell.”

- **To Solitude, Lines, 6 – 8.**

**Kalidasa’s Treatment of Nature**

Coming to Kalidasa we may find that his presentation of Nature too possesses all the characteristics shown above, as revealed in Keats’s works. “The Indian lives in intimate and close contact with primeval Nature even today. Naturally Nature has been nearer to the average Hindu than she could ever be to the average Westerner. Nature also has never been so pruned, tailored or ordered in India as she has been in the West; even the cultivated fields in India, stretching for miles on to distant horizons, present to the Indian mind their majesty and immensity. And when we know that man in India has been living in close proximity to vast primeval forests, mighty rivers and stupendous mountain ranges, we can easily realize how the Indian, in stead of feeling himself the master of Nature, conceives himself only as a part of it, linking his own plane of existence to those of minerals, vegetables and
animals. And the pantheistic Indian conception of the universe that — सर्व खलु इदम् ब्रह्म "All is form of God", has not a little influenced the Hindu attitude towards the created world. Such a concept naturally brings Nature and Man into intimate and inalienable Kinship. In the works of Kalidasa, the supreme product of Hindu culture, this pantheistic concept has found the finest aesthetic expression, culminating perhaps in the play of Sakuntala in which Nature’s kinship to and companionship with human existence has been so naively portrayed as not to be found anywhere else in world – literature”¹⁷

Kalidasa whose poetic genius is inspired by Nature excels in the description of natural scenery in its beautiful, charming and sympathetic aspects. It is no exaggeration to say that the excellent and elevating description of Nature is the very soul of Kalidasa’s poetry. The Ritusamhara, which is regarded as his youthful production, is solely devoted to the description of Nature in different seasons as viewed by a lover. His other lyric poem, Meghaduta, presents a more mature description of Nature from the view point of a separated lover. The epic poem Kumarasambhavam hinges on the description of the mountain Himalaya. The plot of his masterpiece, Abhijnana Shakuntalam, is mainly set in the natural surroundings of the hermitages of the sages Kanva and Maricha. Kalidasa’s other three works, viz., the Raghuvamsham, the Vikramorvashiyam and the Malavikagnimitram, are also characterized by the description of Nature in varying degrees.

Prof.G.C.Jhala has rightly said, “The description of Nature is inseparable from Kalidasa’s poetry, just as the moonlight is inseparable from the moon. He displays not only his great power of imagination and keen observation but also the refinement of his aesthetic taste and his concept of
beauty in the description of Nature. For instance, the poet through his extraordinary power of imagination presents in the Raghu vamsham, an imaginative description of the natural scenery of India as viewed by Rama and his companions in the course of their journey from Lanka to Ayodhya in the aerial car called Pushpaka. “The poet imagines that the ocean, as seen from the aerial car, resembles an iron wheel; and that the beach appearing blue with the rows of Tamala and Tali (a kind of palm tree) trees looks from afar like a thin streak of rusty spots on the edge of the iron wheel”.

\[\text{}\]

- *Raghuvamsham XIII, 15.*

The calm and clear current of a river named Mandakini in the vicinity of Mount Chitrakuta appears thin from the sky like a necklace of pearls around the neck of the earth:

\[\text{}\]

Presenting an aerial view of the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, Kalidasa imagines that the former mingled in its flow with the waves of the latter looks at one place like a necklace of pearls inlaid with sapphires emitting luster, at another place like a garland of white louts flowers interwoven with blue lotuses, and somewhere else like a flock of white swans
intermingled with geese called Kadamba having dark-grey wings: (Mallinath explains Kadamba as Nilahamsa “a blue goose”)

- **Raghuvamsham, XIII, 54 – 55.**

Similarly an imaginary description of the landscape, as surveyed from the sky, is contained in Act VII of the play Abhijnana Shankuntalam. When king Dushyanta is descending from the heaven to the earth in the celestial aerial car driven by Matali, the scene below is described by the former to the latter as follows: “The earth appears to descend from the peaks of emerging mountains; with the emergence of their trunks the trees seems to withdraw from hiding under their own foliage; and the rivers, which previously appeared to be waterless due to their indistinctness from high altitude, present themselves now in full view with their expanse. See the wonder: it looks as if the earth is being brought near me by someone who is throwing it up”:

- **Abhijnana Shakuntalam VII, 8.**
Kalidasa’s keen observation of Nature is revealed in his description of seasons, mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, trees, plants, creepers, flowers, animals, birds and insects. In the Ritusamharam the poet describes the plight of thirsty deer in Summer as follows: “The mouths of the deer parched by the fierce heat of sun have become dry due to intense thirst, and they run about in the forest, mistaking the illusory collyriumlike sky for water.”

मृगा: प्रचण्डातपतापिता भृश्चे
तृषा महत्या परिशुष्कतातृः।
वनान्तरे तोयमिति प्रथाविता
निरिक्ष्य भिक्ष्रोजनसंनिम्नं नभं: II
- Ritusamharam I, 11.

Another verse of the Ritusamharam contains an equally vivid description of birds and animals afflicted with excessive heat in Summer: “Birds perched on leafless trees are panting; fatigued monkeys resort to a mountain bower; Gayals roam about in search of water; and Sarabhas lift up water from a well to drink”

श्मसिति विहरवर्गः शीर्षपर्ण्डुर्मस्थः
कपिकुलमुपयाति क्षणमद्वानिनिकुंजम्।
भ्रमति गवयूथः सर्वत्सतोयमिच्चन्
छरभकुलमजिहम प्रोध्यरत्यम्बु कूपात् II
- Ritusamharam I, 23.
In the Abhijnana Shakuntalam there is a picturesque description of the
deer who, being pursued by king Dushyanta, runs for his life: “Bending his
neck gracefully, the deer glances time and again at the chasing chariot; fearing
the fall of an arrow, he closely draws the hinder part of his body into the front
part; his path is strewn with half-chewed blades of Darbha grass dropped
from his mouth opened in fatigue; due to his high leaps he runs more in the
air than on the ground.”:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{श्रीवाम्भज्ञभिरम् मुहुर्तपत्ति स्वन्दने दृष्टदृष्टिः} \\
\text{पद्धार्धेन प्रविष्टः: शरपतनभयाद्वृयसा पृत्तकायम्।} \\
\text{दृष्टेन्द्रगर्भावलंडः: श्रमविवृत्तमुखच्छासिभि: कौणिवर्त्त्मा} \\
\text{पश्योदयंध्रुत्वास्थित्यति बहुतरं स्तोकमुक्र्याम् प्रयति।।}
\end{align*}\]

- Abhijnana Shakuntalam, I, 7.

The description of natural scenery belonging to the whole country
displays Kalidasa’s broad vision, national outlook and minute observation. For
instance, in Canto IV of the Raghuvamsham, he describes the vineries of
Persia; the walnut trees of the Kamboja country; the saffron plant growing on
the banks of the river Indus; the sandal forests infested with snakes on the
southern mountains Malaya and Dardura; the groves pepper plants in the
valleys of the mount Malaya; the pearl – fishery in the Bay of Bengal adjacent
to the mouth of the river Tamraparni; the cardamom plant and the trees
named Ketaka, Pummaga (Nagakesar) and Rajatali growing in the South; the
forest of palmtrees on the eastern coast; a variety of rice known as Kalama
cultivated in the eastern part of India; the betel – plant growing in Orissa; the
rows of fruit – laden betel – nut trees on the eastern coast; the herbs, musk –

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deer, minerals, bamboos, birch - trees, Sarala trees, and deodar trees of the Himalayas; and the black aloe trees of Pragjyotish.

Kalidasa and Mountains

Kalidasa, who seems to be very fond of mountains, misses no opportunity to describe them. A very beautiful and charming description of the Himalayas is contained in the Kumarasambhavam: “There is, in the northern direction, the supreme Lord of mountains, possessed of a divine nature by name Himalaya, who having plunged into the eastern and the other (that is Western) ocean, stands as if the measuring - rod of the earth:

अर्थि उत्तरस्य दिशि देवतात्मा हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः।
पुर्वापरो तोयनिधि वगङ्गः स्थितः पृथिविया इव मानदण्डः॥

- Kumarasambhavam, I, I.

Describing the Himalaya Kalidasa says that the snow - clad mountain range as the treasure - house of innumerable precious stones, minerals, important herbs, trees, plants and creepers with delightful flowers make the mountain unique. The Himalaya is the abode of the Siddhas, Ascetics, Yakshas, Kinnaras, Kiratas and various types of animals and birds. This mountain is the source of the Ganga and several other rivers; and as possessed of lofty peaks and dark caves.

Kalidasa’s lyrical poem Meghaduta portrays a very fascinating picture of the Himalayas where the exiled Yaksha’s native city Alaka governed by God Kubera, is situated. Mapping the path of the cloud - messenger to Alaka, the Yaksha describes the Himalayan scenery right from Kanakhala, where the river Ganga enters the plains, up to Alaka: the crystal clear waters of the river
Ganga, sowy peaks of the mountain scented with the smell of musk deer, forests teeming with various animals such as the Yak and the Sharabha, resounding bamboo – trees, echoing caves, the white peaks of the Kailasa serving as the mirror of the God wives, the lake Manasa abounding in golden lotuses, and the enchanting scenic beauty of Alaka. The poet attempts in his epic poem Raghuvamsham (IV, 71 – 84) a very brief description of the Himalayas from Kashmir to Kamarupa, mentioning the lofty peaks, minerals, caves, several trees such as the birch, the bamboo, the Nameru, the Sarula, the deodar and the black Aloe, several animals such as the lion, the elephant and the musk deer, the rivers Ganga Lauhitya (Brahmaputra), the Kinnaras, the Kiratas and other hill tribes. The forest of Gandhamadana mountain on the Himalayas is described in Act IV of the Vikramorvashiyam. King Pururavas, who madly roams about in the forest in search of his beloved Urvashi, addresses the mountain peaks, clouds, streams, trees, creepers, animals, birds, and insects. A very beautiful description of Nature is contained in the stanzas uttered by Pururavas. A very fascinating description of the Gandhamadana forest is contained in the Kumarasambhavam. In the last Act of the Abhijnana Shankuntalam Kalidasa describes the natural scenery of the mountain Hemakuta of the Kimpurusa country where the hermitage of the sage Maricha is situated.:

मातालिः — आयुष्मन्ते, एष खलु हेमकुटो नाम किंपुरुषपर्वतस्तपः
संसिद्धिख्येच्छम् पद्य

वाल्मीकार्यं निम्नतमुदिवरसा ख्वद्रृसपत्तचा
कणः जिङ्गलतैप्रतात्तनवल्येपनात्यथंसंपीडितः ।
“Matali – O long – lived King, this is the mountain of Kimpurushas (a class of demi – gods) called ‘The Goldenpeaked,’ the place for attainment of perfection in penance.

See –

Where, immovable like the trunk of a tree, stands the yonder sage, facing the sun’s orb, with his body half buried in an ant – hill, with his breast closely covered over with sloughs of serpents, hard – pressed at the throat by a ring of withered tendrils of creepers, and wearing a circular mass of matted hair over – spreading his shoulders and closely filled with birds’ nests.”

- Abhijnana Shakuntalam, VII, 11.

In the first half of the Meghaduta, Kalidasa describes the natural scenery of the Vindhya mountain, its rivers and number of hills in the rainy season. The Vindhyas are depicted as abounding in numerous ornamental trees, plants, and creepers such as the yellowish – brown Kadamba, the Kutaja, the Ketaka, the kadali ( a plant with white flowers) and the Yuthika ( a kind of jasmine), which all blossom in the rainy season, the Jambu tree which is laden with black fruits at this time and the Udumbara (a kind of fig – tree) which bears fruits in this season. From among the animals, birds and insects of the Vindhya region the elephant, the spotted deer (Saranga), the peacock, the crane (Sarasa), the Chataka, and the bee are particularly chosen for description by the poet in the Meghaduta.
In Ritusamharam Kalidasa describes the natural scenery of the Vindhyas in the rainy season. The poet imagines that the clouds, bent down with water contained in them, seem to gladden with showers the Vindhya mountain scorched by the excessive heat of summer, deeming it to be their lofty resort:

जलधरविनतानामाश्रयोः अरसानुपूर्वे स्थायिति जलसेवकस्तोयदास्तोयनन्द्राः।
अतिशायपरुषाभर्गीष्मवहे दिखावं हस्पुजनिततायं हाद्यन्तीविच्छिन्न्यम्॥

- Ritusamharam II, 27.

Describing the sylvan beauty of the mountain in the rainy season, the poet says that the Vindhya forests, looking attractive due to the sprouting trees and tender shoots of green grass mauled by deer, delight our mind:

तृणोद्मृद्विश्रकोमलस्वरुपं धितानि नीलक्रंधरिप्रीणिमुख्वशते।
वनानि सम्पाणिवेद्विभानि हरंति मानसं विभृंधितान्यद्वपेद्वर्धणः॥

- Ritusamharam II, 8.

In the Malavikagnimitram, king Agnimitra likens himself to the Vindhya mountain and his angry and weeping Queen Iravati, who is about to strike him with her golden girdle, to a row of raining clouds, which strikes the mountain with lightening:

वाष्पसारः हेमकांचीरुणेः प्रोणीवीमादभूण्येश्वराच्छुते।
चण्डी चण्डे हन्तुभंग्युष्टमा विध्वत्र आभ्रा मेघराजीविच्छिन्न्यम्॥

- Malavikagnimitram, III, 21.
In the Raghuvamsham, Rama, who did not violate the rules of righteous conduct during his stay at Panchavati, is compared by the poet to the Vindhya mountain which is believed to stay in its original form without growing in height:

पंचवट्ट्यां ततो राम: शासनात् कुम्भजनन: ।
अनपोदस्थितिस्तथो विन्ध्यादिः प्रकृताविव ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XII, 31.

Moreover, Rama, who is sprinkled with waters collected from various seas, rivers and lakes for his royal consecration, is compared by Kalidasa to the Vindhya mountain being showered with rain waters:

सरितमुद्रान् सरसिश्र गत्वा रक्ष: कर्पीन्द्रुरुपपादितानि ।
तस्यापतत् मुख्यो जलानि जिष्णोविन्द्यस्य मेघप्रभवा इवाप: ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XIV, 8.

The mount Chitrakuta, resounding the sound of water – falls and having clouds on its peaks, is likened to a bellowing wind bull whose horns are covered with mud in sportive butting:

धारास्यनोदरामारीमुखो असो श्रुंगायलमाम्बुद्वप्रपंकः ।
चक्षुर्वर्णि मेव बन्धुरगात्रि ! चक्षुर्वर्ण: ककुदमानिव चित्रकूटः ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XIII 47.
Describing the natural scenery of the mountains in the rainy season, the poet says that the mountains, being kissed by lotus-like white clouds, and a bounding in water falls and dancing peacocks, delight our hearts:

नीलोत्पलाभम्बुदृ चुम्बितोपलाः
समाचिताः प्रस्वरणः सममतः ।
प्रवृत्तनृत्यः शिलिभि: समाकुलः
समुत्सुकश्च जनयत्ति भुधरः ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XIII, 10.

The Raghuvamsham contains a vivid description of the Indian Ocean and its beach. Whales, which swallow in their wide-open mouths aquatic creatures with water at the mouth of rivers, discharge jets of water from their perforative heads by closing their jaws:

ससत्वमादाय नदीमुखाभ्य संयोल्लयतो विख्यानवननवातः ।
अभी शिरोभिसितिमयः सरनध्रुवं वितन्त्वलनि जलः प्रवाहान् ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XIII, 10.

When the sea foams, which are ripped into two by sudden emergence of elephant-like crocodiles, reach their cheeks, they (the sea—foams) look for a moment like their ear chowries:

मात्रागकै सहसोत्पत्तदृ भिजनित्वाथा पश्य समुद्रफलनान् ।
कपोल सर्पित्याः य एषां व्रजस्य कर्णेश्वर चामरत्वम् ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XIII, 11.
The sea-snakes, which emerge from water to breathe in fresh air at the
beach and which are hardly distinguishable from the rolling waves can be
spotted by means of the shining gems of their hoods in the sunlight:

वेत्रानिलाय प्रसूता भुजंगा महोर्मि विसुंजंगुर्णिनिविशेषाः ।
सूर्यायुसंपर्कसमृंधारागृह्यज्यन्त पते मणिभं फणस्थे: ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XIII, 12.

A cluster of conch-shells suddenly thrown up by strong waves on coral
reefs drift away somehow with great difficulty, as their apertures are entangled
in the erect shoots of the coral reefs:

तवाधरस्तधिषु विद्रुमेषु पर्यस्तमेलत सहसोमिवेगात् ।
ऊध्याकुरप्रोतमुखं कथंचित्त केशादपकामति शंखयुथम् ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XIII, 13.

The poet imagines that the ocean with a cloud revolving over it due to a
whirlpool appears as if it (the ocean) is again being churned by means of a
mountain:

प्रवृत्तमात्रेन पत्यांसि पादुमार्ववेगाध्रस्मता धनेन ।
आभाति भूविद्रमयं समुद्रः प्रमध्यमानो गिरिणेव भूयः ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XIII, 14.

The sands of the sea-coast are strewn with a mass of pearls issued
from open oyster shells thrown ashore by waves, and there are rows of betel-
nut trees laden with fruits along the sea-coast:
Kalidasa metaphorically describes the earth as a cow and the ocean as her udder:

तदानं मृत्सुरभि क्षितीश्वरो रहस्युपाध्राय न तृषिमायोः
करीव सिकं पृष्टे: पयोमुच्छं शुचिव्यपाये वनराजिपत्तल्लम्.

- Raghuvamsham, II, 3.

**Kalidasa and Rivers**

Several rivers of the North and the South are described in the works of Kalidasa. In the Ritusamharam there is a general description of rivers in various seasons. Washing away trees grown on their banks with their strong currents of muddy water, the rivers in the rainy season flow fast to the ocean in a flurry like corrupt women:

निपातयन्त्य: परितस्तट्ट्रामानः
प्रवृद्धवेगः सलिलंरनिर्मिते: ।
खियः नयत्स्वरितं पयोनिधिम्

- Ritusamharam, II, 7.
In the autumn the rivers flow slowly like young, beautiful and intoxicated ladies, having golden girdles in the form of moving glittering fish and pearl – necklaces in the form of rows of white birds perched on their banks:

चंचनमनोज्जशएषफरीसनाकतपाः
पर्यन्तसंश्चितसिताण्डजपक्षिभाराः ।
नयो विशालपुत्रिनान्तनितम्बमिख्या
मन्दः प्रयाणिः समदा: प्रमदा इवाद ॥

- Ritusamharam, III, 3.

The river Ganga is described by Kalidasa in various contexts. In Kumarasambhavam Uma’s quick attainment of learning, already acquired by her in her previous birth, is compared to the arrival of flamingoes on the banks of the Ganga in Autumn:

तां हंससमालः शरदीव गंगा महौषधिः नक्तमिवात्मभाः ।
स्थिरोपदेशामुपदेशाकाः प्रपेदिरे प्राक्कनजन्मविचा ॥

- Kumarasambhavam, I, 30.

Shiva’s favourite Himalayan peak full of deodar trees watered by the streams of the Ganga is spoken of in another verse of the same epic:

स कृत्विवासस्तपसे यतात्मा गंगाप्रपातोक्षितदेवदारू ।
प्रस्थं हिमाद्रेमूर्गानाभिगन्धि किचिदं कवण्तिकिंकरमध्युवास ॥

- Kumarasambhavam, I, 54.
Oshadhiprastha, the capital of Uma’s father Himalaya, is described in the Kumarasambhavam as surrounded by the waters of the river Ganga like a moat. In the Meghadutam the poet first describes the Ganga near Kanakhala where it descends from the Himalayas and enters the plains:

तस्माद् गच्छेरतुकनखरं शैलराजावतीणां
जहहि: कन्यां सगरतनवस्वर्गसीपानपद्वम।
गौरीवक्रस्थुकुटिरुच्छन्या या विहस्येव फेरेन:।
श्रोभो: केशग्रहणमकररोदिन्दुलघोरिमहस्तता॥

- Meghadutam, Purvamegh, 53.

Kalidasa imagines that, if the cloud messenger bends down obliquely to drink the crystal clear water of the Ganga, the shadow of the dark cloud falling on the stream would create there a delightful artificial spectacle of the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna:

तस्या: पार्तुं सुरगज्जइं व्योऽभि पूर्वीत्तम्भि
तवं चेदन्त्यस्तस्तिकविश्वद्र तत्स्येदित्यगम्भी।।
संसर्पन्त्या सपदि भवत: स्तोतरसि छाण्यासौ।
स्वादस्थानोपगतयमुनासझिमेववाभिरामा॥

- Meghadutam, Purvamegh, 54.

As already pointed out above, the Ganga flowing by Alaka on Mount Kailasa is likened by the poet to a white silken garment. In another verse of this lyric poem the poet imaginatively describes the heavenly maidens, wooed by the gods, as playing with gems to be searched after concealment in the
golden sands on the banks of the river Mandakini (Ganga), in its cool breeze under the shade of coral trees:

मन्दाकिन्या: सत्तिशिविरेष: सेव्यमाना मरुद्रिः
मन्दाराणामनुतिरही छायया चारितोणाः।
अन्त्वेषयः कनकसिकसमुष्ठिनिश्चेपूः
संकीड़न्ते मणिभिरमप्रार्थिता यत्र कन्या॥

- Meghadutam, Uttarmegh, 6.

In the Raghuvamsham Kalidasa describes the Ganga in various similes, besides giving its aerial description. Raghu, leading his great army to the eastern ocean in course of his Digvijaya, is compared to Bhagiratha taking the river Ganga, fallen from Shiva’s matted hair, to the eastern ocean:

स सेनां महतीं कर्षन्पूर्वसागरगामिनीम्।
भमो हर्जटाठृष्टं गंगामिव भगीरथ:॥

- Raghuvamsham, IV, 32.

The poet likens the various philosophical systems for attaining final emancipation to the divergent branches of the Ganga near its mouth:

वहुधा ज्यागमेमित्रा: पन्थान: सिद्धिहेतवः।
त्वायं एव निपतत्त्योधा जाहुवीया इवार्थेऽ॥

- Raghuvamsham, X, 26.
Slender – waisted Kausalya, sleeping by the side of infant Rama, looked graceful like the thin stream of the Ganga with the offering of lotuses on its sands in Autumn:

शाय्या गतेन रामेण माता शालोदरी बभोः ।
सैकताम्भोजविठिना जाहवीव शरत्कृपशा ॥

- Raghuvamsham, X, 69.

The river Sarayu, on the banks of which the ancient city of Ayodhya was situated, is vividly described in the Raghuvamsham, and the confluence of the Ganga and the Sarayu is regarded as sacred as that of the Ganga and the Yamuna. On his return journey from Lanka to Ayodhya in the aerial car called Pushpaka, Rama tells Sita that the sages declare the lake Manasa, abounding in golden lotuses enjoyed by heavenly maidens, to be the source of the river Sarayu whose waters, sanctified by the final bath of the Ikshavakus at the performance of their Ashwamedha sacrifices, flow to the capital city of Ayodhya; which (Sarayu) is esteemed by him as the common foster – mother of the Uttara – Kosalas for rearing them in her lap in the form of the sands of her banks, with her abundant milk in the form of her waters; and which (Sarayu), separated like Rama’s mother from his revered father (King Dasharatha), embraces Rama on his return from exile with her arms in the form of her waves accompanied by the cool breeze:

पर्योऽधरे: पुण्यजनांगनानां निर्विक्षेपमाम्युजरेणु वर्षः ।
ब्राह्म सर: कारणमातवायः गुर्जेरिवाव्यत्तमुदाहरन्ति ॥
जलानि या तीरंखात्यूपाव वहत्त्योध्यामनु राज्यानिमः ॥
King Kusha’s water – sport with the ladies of his harem in the river Sarayu is graphically described by the poet in the Raghuvamsham (XVI, 54 – 71). The river Sipra, on the bank of which the city of Ujjayini is situated, is fondly described by the poet. In the Raghuvamsham Kalidasa mentions the pleasure – gardens refreshed by the cool breeze passing through the waves of the river Sipra (VI, 35). It is said in the Meghadutam that the Sipra’s pleasant morning breeze, which is fragrant with the perfume of blooming lotuses and which prolongs the eloquent, low and sweet cooing of cranes, relieves the amorous languor of ladies like a lover adept in wooing:

- **Raghuvamsham, XIII,60 - 63.**

- **Meghadutam, Purvamegha, 32.**
The river Narmada (alias Reva), flowing in several streams at the foot of the Vindhya mountain through its rugged rocks, looks like a decorative painting in divergent lines of colour on the body of an elephant:

सिथत्वा तरिमञ् वनचरवधूभुतकुञ्जे मुहृत्त
तोपोत्सर्गदुर्गटरगतिस्तयरं वर्त्म मीरणः ॥
रेवां द्रक्ष्यस्यपत्रविषमेविन्ययापदे विशेरणां
भक्तिभादेश्रिव विश्रवितां भूतिमझे गजस्य ॥

- Meghadutam, Purvamegha, 19.

There is a very beautiful and imaginative description of the river Charmanvati (modern Chambal) in the Meghadutam. The Yaksha tells the Cloud Messenger that when the cloud, which appears dark by stealing the complexion of Lord Krishna, bends down to drink water from the river’s broad stream looking thin from a distance, the celestial beings will witness this spectacular sight: as if it (the river) is a necklace of a single string of pears, studded with a large sapphire in the centre, around the neck of the earth:

त्वम्यादातु जलमवनते शाक्षिणो वर्णचौरे
तत्रा: सिन्धो: पृथुमपि तनु दूरभावत प्रवाहम् ॥
प्रेक्ष्यन्ते गगनगतयो नृतमावज्य दृष्टि:
एकं मुक्तागुणमिव भुव: स्थूलामचण्डनीलम् ॥

- Meghadutam, Purvamegha, 49.
Kalidasa and Birds

Kalidasa often describes in his works the natural scenery of lakes adorned with trees, creepers, flowers, fish, and birds. In Autumn the lakes, which are adorned with the pairs of merry flamingoes and blooming white and blue lotuses, and in which rows of waves are stirred by the mind morning breeze delight our hearts. In Winter also the lakes, having clear and cold water, and adorned with blue lotuses and gay geese, fascinate the minds of people:

प्रफूल्लनीलोपत्तशोभितानि
सोन्मादकादम्बविभूषितानि।
प्रसन्नतोपानि सर्दैवलालनिमुशीत्तलानि
सरौङ्सि चेतासि हरिर्नि पुंसाम्॥

- Ritusamhar, IV, 9.

The lake Manasa (alias Manasarovara, Brahmasaras) is often described by the poet as full of golden lotuses, inhabited by flamingoes, and possessed of crystal clear water in Meghadutam (Purvamegha 62, Uttaramegha, 13), in Kumarasambhavam (VIII, 64) and in Raghuvamsham (VI, 26).

Kalidasa briefly refers to the natural beauty of the lake Pampa vividly described in the Ramayana:

उपान्तवानीरवोपपुद्रान्यालक्ष्यपारिशुचारसानि।
दुरावतीर्ण भिक्षतिवेदादमुनि पम्पासलिलानि द्रष्टिः॥
The description of the effect of hot summer on birds is seen in Malavikagnimitram:

पत्रच्छायासु हंसा मुकुटिर्नवना दीर्घिकापद्रिमिनीनां
सौधान्यत्थापातु वद्धभिपरिवर्धेषिपारवतानि ।
बिन्दूक्षोपान् पिपासुः परिपतति शिखि भ्रान्तिमतत् वारियंत्रम्
सर्वैःस्तः समग्रस्तवभिव नृपगुणेदिद्यते सतसतिः ॥

- Malavikagnimitram, II, 12.

“In the long, lotus pool, wild geese laze, each one in the shadow of a lotus leaf, their eyes resembling shut buds; pigeons shun the sloping roofs of palaces and mansions sparkling — white that shimmer in the intense noonday heat; peacocks, dazed, fly round whirling fountains eager to drink the droplets of water scattering; the sun who drives seven steeds shoots all his rays straight down with their full power, blazing, even as you, O King, blaze with kingly virtues.”

“Kalidasa was a close observer of Nature calm and placid, which is a feast to the eye and which can contemplate with repose. Whatever was pretty and attractive in Nature, cultivated and uncultivated, appealed to him, mountains, hills, rivers, brooks, trees, creepers, flowers, gardens, breeze, snow, dew, birds and beasts profusely enrich his poems and dramas. No other poet has been able to approach him in description of spring. It is Nature in its milder and more lovable aspect that Kalidasa shows a partiality for, leaving the grander and the stern aspect for Bhavabhuti to dwell on. One secret of the charm of his poetry lies in his capacity for describing natural phenomena and for drawing similes from natural objects.
Nature to him is an amiable being whom he loves and wants us to love too. Nature is, according to him no stranger to us part and parcel of the universal consciousness of which we are ourselves also a portion. Unfortunately, we do not understand Nature’s language, he seems to do. This communion with Nature enraptures to him and a part of the thrill of indescribable joy he feels he attempts to transmit to us.”

It is beyond the scope of the present work to attempt a detailed account of trees, plants, creepers, flowers, birds and animals variously described in Kalidasa’s works. However, a few important points in this connection are noted here. We have already mentioned above briefly some trees, plants, flowers, birds and animals of different regions of India described in Kalidasa’s works. Moreover, the foregoing description of the seasons, mountains, rivers and lakes gives us an idea of some trees, flowers, birds and animals included therein. In a single verse of the Meghadutam Kalidasa describes the ornamental beauty of half a dozen flowers worn by the youthful ladies of Alaka on their person:

हस्ते लीलाकमलमलके बालकुन्दामुनिविन्
नीता लोध्रप्रसवरजसा पाण्डुतामानने श्रीः ।
चूडापान्ते नवकुरकर्कृ चारु कर्ण शिरीषं
सीमन्ते च तसुपलमञ्ज यत्र नीपं वचूनाम् ॥

-Meghadutam, Uttarmegha, 2.

“The young women of Alaka hold in their hands a lotus for sport. Their curly locks of hair are interwoven with budding jasmine flowers. Their faces look beautifully white with the pollen of Lodhra flowers. The knot of hair on
their heads is adorned with fresh and lovely Kurabaka flowers, their ears with Shirisa flowers, and the parting – line on hair on their heads with Kadamba flowers”. In pursuance of the poetical convention that an Ashoka tree blossoms only when it is struck by a beautiful maiden with her foot, Kalidasa fondly describes the Ashoka tree with reference to beautiful maidens. (Kumarsambhavam III, 26; Malavikagnimitram III, 12, 17; Raghuvamsham VIII, 62 ; Ritudamharam, VI 16) the elephant is described by Kalidasa in various contexts as well as numerous similes as a standard of comparison: for instance, a cloud is compared to an elephant:

सशीकराम्बोधरमतकुज्जरः
तदिद्धिताको अश्वानिशद्यबद्दर्डः ।
समागतो राजवदुद्धत चुँति:
घनागमः कामिजन्मियः प्रिये ॥

- Ritusamhara, II, 1.

“With streaming clouds trumpeting like haughty tuskers, with lightning – banners and drum beats of thunder claps, in towering majesty, the season of rains welcome to lovers, now comes like a king, my love.”

आषाढ़स्य प्रथमदिवसे मेघमाशीष्ट सानुः
वप्रकीडापरिणातस्मज्ञेष्कणियं ददर्श ॥

- Mehadutam, Pruvamegha, 2.
“Yaksha beheld, on the first day of Ashadha, a cloud, resting on (Lit. clinging to) the peak of the mountain, and looking as attractive as an elephant stooping down in his butting sport against a bank.”

- Meghadutam, Pruvamegha, 2.

Moreover, King Dilipa and his queen Sudakshina are compared to a pair of celestial elephant called Airavata, and Young Raghu to a baby elephant. (Raghuvaṃsham I, II, 36, 32). Similarly the cow, the bull and the deer also figure in some similes of Kalidasa. The peacock, the flamingo, the chakravaka, the chataka, the cuckoo, the chakora, the crane and the Kurari (the female osprey) are some of the important birds which are poetically described in Kalidasa’s works. According to the poetic convention, the Chataka is believed to drink only raindrops from a cloud and no other water; the chakora is fabled to subsist on rays of the moon; and a pair of the Chakravakas, supposed to be separated at night, is regarded as a symbol of conjugal fidelity.

The beauty of Kalidasa’s poetry is appreciably enhanced by the charming descriptions of clouds, the moon and the moonlit night in various ways. His lyric poem, the Meghadutam is devoted entirely to the fascinating description of a cloud journeying over various regions of India. The second Canto of the Ritusamharam describes the natural scenery of the rainy season. The moon is a very popular standard of comparison which forms the basis of a large number of similes employed by the poet. Similarly the beauty of the star – lit night adorned with the rising moon is also described by Kalidasa in his similes.
In short Kalidasa whose poetic genius is inspired by Nature describes the various aspects of Indian scenery in his inimitable, original and charming style.

It is a characteristic feature of Kalidasa’s description of Nature that he describes only the beautiful, charming and agreeable aspects of Nature and overlooks its sublime, somber and dreadful aspects. Another noteworthy feature of Kalidasa’s treatment of Nature is that he invests it with human feelings. For instance, he imagines that like human beings Nature is also filled with amorous feelings in Spring. Therefore, on the advent of spring with Cupid in the Himalayan forest of Shiva’s hermitage the trees embraced, with their arms in the form of their stooping branches, their wives, creepers, which had breasts in the form of abundant bunches of flowers and charming lips in the form of quivering leaves. It is said by the poet in the Raghuvamsham that when Sita, who was abandoned by Lakshmana in the forest near Valmiki’s hermitage, cried piteously, the entire Nature was grieved in sympathy with her. So the peacocks stopped their dance, the trees shed flowers, and the doe dropped the morsels of Darbha grass from their mouths:

नृत्यं मयूरा: कुसुमानि वृक्षा दर्भानुपातान् विजहुहेहरिण्यः ॥

तस्या: प्रफळे समतुः स्वभावमत्यन्तमासीद्रुदितं वनेअपि ॥

- Raghuvamsham, XIV, 69.

In the above verse we see the unity between animate and inanimate. It is no wonder in Indian culture because “from early Vedic literature the unity of all life, animate and inanimate, is indicated and many of the Vedic deities are personifications of striking aspects of Nature. The idea of retreat into Nature, a
mountain top or a forest hermitage, in search of the revelation of the spirit of the universe has been with us from early times. As human beings we have our roots in nature and participate in its life in many ways. The rhythm of night and day, changes of seasons suggest man’s changing mood, variety and capriciousness. Nature had not become mechanical and impersonal for Kalidasa. It had still its enchantment. His characters have a sensitive appreciation of plants and trees, of hills and rivers and a feeling of brotherhood for animals. We see in his writings flowers which bloom, birds which soar and animals which spring. We find a striking description of the love of the cow in Raghuvamsham (Canto II). The Ritusamharam gives a moving account of the six seasons. It reveals not only Kalidasa’s vision of Nature’s beauty but also an understanding of human moods and desires.

In the Abhijnana Shankuntalam, when the curtain rises, Shakuntala and her two friends are seen watering the plants, creepers and trees of Kanva’s hermitage where the stars and colours in the sky, the pretty flowers and the lively animals are vital parts of human experience. Shakuntala does not look upon nurturing the plants as a drudgery but finds joy in it:


“_________ not merely because my father has ordered it, I also have fraternal affection for them.”

Each act of the Abhijnana Shankuntalam, except the fifth act, has its setting amidst Nature. In the precincts of the hermitage, we find wild rice fallen under the trees that abound in the nests of birds, deer moving fearlessly and the tender sprouts with a changed colour owing to the smoke arising from
sacrificial fires. The ground is made clear of the sharp blades of Darbha grass, and we have, in the hermitage, creepers like Navamalika, etc. trees like Kesara etc., and the hovering Bhramara (hornet) near the Saptaparna trees.

For Kalidasa rivers, mountains, forests, trees possess a conscious individuality as animals, men and gods.

Shakuntala is a daughter of Nature. Nature is her mother. When she was an infant, she was abandoned by her celestial mother Menaka, the birds of the sky pick her up and rear her until the sage Kanva takes her under his fostering care. Thus, she has been brought up in Nature and so she has affection for every tree, for every creeper and for every sprout. She will not drink water without herself watering the trees. She can forget herself but not the Navamalika creeper. She will not pluck even a tender sprout in spite of her fondness for ornaments. The flowering season of Nature is a great festival for her. To her, deer are her own children, She will apply Ingudi-oil to the mouth of a young deer, which is wounded slightly in course of eating the Darbha grass. She, in her own hands, will hold out the wild rice for the deer to eat. Before leaving the hermitage, she embraces the Vanajyotasna creeper and leaves it under the care of her friends. She is anxious about the pregnant deer. She writes a love letter on a lotus leaf. She covers her breasts with the lotus – leaves, sleeps on bed of flowers and wear a bracelet of lotus – stalk.

Even Nature has the same deep affection for Shakuntala. The foliage of Kesara invites Shakuntala. The young deer will not allow Shakuntala to leave the hermitage and therefore, pulls her garment. On the occasion of Shakuntala’s wedding, trees sent their gifts, forest deities showered their blessings and cuckoos cooed aloud.
The whole hermitage was filled with grief at the prospect of Shakuntala’s departure. The deer drop their mouthfuls, the peacocks stop their dancing and the creepers shed their leafy tears:

उद्दितदर्मकवल्लु मृगा: परित्यक्तनर्तना मयूरा:।
अपभृतपाण्डुपत्त्रा मुच्छन्त्यश्रृणीव लठ्ठा:॥

- *Abhijnana Shakuntalam, IV, 12.*

Kanva says of her: “O the trees of forest, my daughter Shakuntala never tries to drink water first when you have not drunk, who, though fond of decoration, does not out of affection for you pluck a blossom, whose great joy is at the period of the first appearance of blossom, even that Shakuntala now departs to the house of her husband, let her be permitted by you all”:

पातुं न प्रथमं व्यवस्थितं जलं युष्मास्वपीतेषु या
नादत्तं प्रियमण्डनापि भवतं स्त्रेष्नं या पठ्ठवम्।
आद्ये वं कुसुमप्रसूतिसमयं यस्या भवत्युत्सवः
सेवं याति शाकुंतला पतिगुहं सर्वेननुझायताम्॥

- *Abhijnana Shakuntalam IV, 9.*

Kalidasa takes up an object and creates it to the eye. He had a strong visualizing power. His knowledge of nature was not only accurate but sympathetic. His observation was wedded to imagination. His descriptions of the snows of the Himalayas, of the music of the mighty current of the river Ganga, of the different animals illustrate his human heart and appreciation of natural beauty”. 19 It is a characteristic feature of Kalidasa’s description of
Nature that he describes only the beautiful, charming and agreeable aspects of Nature and overlooks its sublime, somber and dreadful aspects. In delineating the sympathetic aspect of Nature Kalidasa might have been inspired by the first classical poet (Adi – Kavi) Valmiki because such sympathetic descriptions are found in the Ramayana.

**How Keats and Kalidasa Differ**

It will be no wonder to discover that in this field of Nature Keats and Kalidasa differ a great deal in spite of many remarkable similarities. As we go on from Man to Nature and then to super – nature, we do perceive Kalidasa looming larger and larger than Keats. These are territories which perhaps did not interest Keats much, and Kalidasa, with the spiritual culture of his race innate in him, was more at home in these fields than in the details of man’s mundane existence in which Keats appears to have been the natural master. Kalidasa seems to have loved this beautiful earth of ours as few poets have, and he may be said to have long anticipated the eighteenth century romantic revival in the West by his intimate relationship with and his deep love for Nature. His love of Nature is surprisingly as spiritual in quality and as aesthetically sensitive, as could be found in the poetry of the finest of the romantics. Kalidasa might have very justly described his personal passion for Nature as Keats did nearly sixteen centuries later:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

- *Endymion, Book I, Lines 1-5.*

रम्याणि वीक्ष्य मधुरांश्च निशाम्य शब्दाः

न्यायृत्वुको भवति यत्सुखितोऽपि जन्तुः।

तच्चतसा स्मरति नूतमबोधपूर्वः

भावस्थिराणिजननान्तरसौहदानी॥

- *Abhijnana Shakuntalam V, 2.*

“When a being, although in enjoyment or happiness, becomes perturbed on seeing charming objects or hearing agreeable sounds then, indeed, he mentally remembers, without being conscious of the fact, the association (lit. Friendships) of past lives remaining permanently impressed on the mind.”

- *Abhijnana Shakuntalam V, 2.*

Having pondered over the two expressions, it becomes obvious how spiritual Kalidasa is.

Kalidasa loved beauty for its own sake. He tries to impart beauty a spiritual form:

The clown tries to persuade the king that Shakuntala, being a hermit girl, he (the king) had not chance of marrying her, and it was useless, therefore, to pine away in order to see her again and again. But the king replies;
King : Fool,

And is it selfish longing then

That draws our souls on high

Through eyes that have forgot to wink

As the new moon climbs the sky?

“Kalidasa loved nature like an artist would love a beautiful woman, with all the windows of the senses wide open to receive in all her subtle charms. And rightly enough he has tried to enjoy Lady Nature in as many of her moods as possible, exactly as young lovers would desire to watch each other.”20

Although Nature in Keats’s works is but a subsidiary factor, she is not only not a thing apart from the human activities but is closely linked with, and enriches and adds further glamour and meaning to them. In fact Keats so skilfully elaborates the theme of his poetry that man and his background become almost homogeneous. His characters live with, as well as in, Nature.

**The supernatural**

Both in Keats and Kalidasa Nature merges into Super Nature. The invisible and inexplicable usually and as a matter of course, do come up in the writings of all great master of literature in and through the visible and explicit. Goethe, born in a scientific age, himself, and deeply conversant with the sciences, has been found delighting in the intermingling of Nature with the Supernatural. “In English Literature” W.J.Long writes, “Supernaturalism is one of the outstanding qualities of romantic poetry. A sense of wonder and mystery was imparted to poetry by romantic poets. It was this Supernatural
note that gave to romantic poetry its atmosphere of wonder and mystery, uncanniness and eerie feeling and justify the title ‘The Renaissance of wonder’ given to this poetic age by critic of repute.”

No wonder then, if both Keats and Kalidasa also occasionally did take recourse to this device for facilitating their creative process at critical points. Thus we find in Keats myths and legends of gods and men moving and acting together. The Medieval English myths and legends offered Keats almost the same world: the world of supernaturalism, of men and women in close association with the supernatural beings.

It is important to note that Keats is not fascinated by the unquestioned supremacy of Christianity during the Medieval age in England. He is not interested in the religion. But he fondly dwells upon the medieval supernatural and superstitious myths which suggest to him the pervading mystery beneath the appearance of visible reality.

The beautiful sites and scenes of Nature which both Keats and Kalidasa have presented in a colourful language are always coloured with a sense of mystery and touch of the supernatural. Both have superb power to create the proper atmosphere for supernatural happenings. Both move to old age. Both believe that the living present world has no wonder or mystery.

In Keats’s works, we see a flight to the medieval world. Keats aroused the sense of supernatural mystery by taking the imagination to far off distant lands and unknown places in his poetry. In his poetry we are transferred to the old medieval days and it is easy for the poet to create association of magic and superstition in this remote period of human history. Almost all poems of Keats possess medieval and supernatural elements. Lamia, Keats’s finest
achievement in narrative poetry, is based upon a Greek myth, but on occasions, the description tends to create medieval atmosphere.

Keats’s heroine Lamia is a serpent woman, one of mythical goddesses, and therefore immortal. But she desires the love of the mortal.

The same thing is found in Kalidasa’s Vikramorvashiyam. The heroine Urvashi is a celestial damsel and is therefore immortal but she falls in love with the mortal king Pururavas.

Lamia is a serpent woman and a mythical goddess. She is:

“Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barred.”


“Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter sweet!
She had a woman’s mouth with all its pearls complete.”


When Lamia’s original identity was exposed, she assumed her serpent form and disappeared:

“A Serpent! “echoed he; no sooner said,
Than with a frightful scream she vanished.”


In ‘Isabella’, a long narrative poem, the poet has interwoven the supernatural element of the ‘Phantom Love.’ The poem deals with the murder
of a lady’s love by her two wicked brothers. The two brothers of Isabella, a Florentine lady, decay Lorenzo, the lover of Isabella and murder him. They bury his body in a forest. Isabella gets information of this heinous crime in a dream by her Phantom Lover. Such a thing produces an atmosphere of foreboding and suspense.

Endymion was a youth renowned for his beauty and his perpetual sleep. As he slept on Mt.Latmus in Caria, his beauty warned the cold hearts of Seleue (Moon Goddess) who came down to him, kissed him and lay by his side. His eternal sleep on Mt.Latmas is assigned to different causes but it is generally believed that Seleue had sent him to sleep that she might be able to kiss him. Keats has certainly made a use of the supernatural myth of Encymion to explore his own way to realize the truth that is beauty.

‘The Eve of St. Agnes’ is a legendary story told in lyrical form. According to a legend which forms the basis of the story, a virgin, by performing certain rituals and fulfilling certain conditions on the Eve of St.Agnes, could see in dreams her lover and would be husband. Everything in the poem contributes to the perpetual tension between natural and supernatural, youth and age, life and death, warmth and cold which makes up the musical harmony in the poem.

‘Hyperion’ deals with the theme of the war between the Titans or the earlier generation of gods, and the later Olympians who overthrew them. Such a theme often occurs in Greek literature which Keats fond of reading. The specific theme, the dethronement of Hyperion, the old sun – god, by Apollo the new, is Keats’s own. Apollo is also the god of poetry, and as Endymion had symbolized the fate of the lover of beauty in the world, so the story of
Apollo and Hyperion was perhaps going to symbolize the fate of the poet as creator.

‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ is a masterpiece of horror stricken reticence and magical suggestion. It is the consummation of Keats’s medieval inspiration. With a depth and intensity of passion that Keats has shown in no other poem, this agonized story of an impossible love combines the magic of medievalism under the restraints and modulations of the highest art. Here Keats treats the world of magic with the detail of realism.

Keats personifies and humanizes nature in the Greek manner. The objects of nature acquire pulsating life, sharing in the moods and passions of human beings. While any number of illustrations could be found in the narrative poems, the most typical are the Odes. In Ode to a Nightingale, the bird is described in the opening stanza as “light – winged Dryad of the trees’, singing ‘of summer in full – throated ease”. Often, in this Ode the world of Nature blends with the world of the Greek myth and both worlds separately as well as together are related to the Poet’s personal life.

The Ode To Autumn is wholly suffused with Greek spirit. The season has been personified in a series of charming human poses and moods. The season, Autumn, becomes in the poem, very similar to the almost sensual Greek pagan gods like Hermes, Zeus and Apollo. These gods loved to live in the midst of plentiful Nature and share in the human affairs:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap’d furrow sound asleep,
Drows’d with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

- Ode To Autumn, II, Lines 12 – 22.

Like the ancient mythical world of the Greek, Keats’s poetry is teeming with nature, gods and goddesses with whom Keats seems to take delight in communicating. In one of his epistolary poems, Keats says:

I shall again see Phoebus in the morning:
Or flushed Aurora in the roseate dawning!
Or a white Naiad in a rippling stream;

- (Epistle) To George Felton Mathew, Lines 21 – 23.

Aurora in Greek mythology is the goddess of dawn; Phoebus is the god of sun and Naiad is a water – spirit. In other words, Keats possessed a myth making faculty in regard to Nature.
The realistic and the fantastic, the natural and the supernatural, the possible and the impossible have been so skilfully and artistically blended in the poems of Keats that the whole strikes us as quite convincing and credible.

Coming to Kalidasa we find that Kalidasa has made the use of the supernatural agency in almost every work. In his works men and gods get so mixed up as to make it difficult to draw the line of demarcation between their two planes.

Keats and Kalidasa both the poets got the supernatural lore as racial legacies. They were born to it, and as everybody in their ages believed in them, they took them for granted. “In India such beliefs are deep – rooted in the national consciousness. A people who have been believing for ages that even the so – called dead matter is sentient and that our souls survive death, must not discover any strangeness in finding the visible merge into the invisible. The same pantheistic philosophy of life that brings the Hindu into close spiritual relationship with Nature, brings him into communion with the supernatural also. To the Hindu, human life is not an isolated factor in creation. It is, to him, related backward to the minerals and forward to the universal spirit. He lives in a cosmic family in which atoms demand kinship with the stars, the trees and plants become relations of human beings and men and gods rub shoulders with and live for one another”.

It was an easy matter for Hindu poet Kalidasa, on the other hand, to bring the supreme spirit into relation with human life in all his works, as he never lived in an isolated mundane world as did Keats. The devout Hindu even of today lives in Cosmos and in Eternity which brings his own little existence into perpetual contact with the Immanent and Transcendental force in
Creation which is the Hindu’s God. Kalidasa felt God more in Nature perhaps than in Man, God being never very far or apart from him in his concept. It is this pantheistic view of life and this consciousness of the pervasive, eternal presence of the Divine Spirit in all that was going on in the world, which may explain the sublimity of Kalidasa’s hymn to God quoted below. That there is no greater supernatural than God and that there can not be anything more sublime and inspiring also than this Song of Praise to Him as found in the tenth canto of the Raghuvamsham (Dynasty of Raghu). Only a few stanzas are reproduced here:

तस्मानः अवसरे देवा: पौरलस्त्य उपस्थुता हरिम्।
अभिजगु मुनिन्दापर्ता इष्टाया वृक्षमिवा ध्वगः॥

“At the same time, the gods harassed by Paulastya (Ravana) went up to Hari, like travellers oppressed by heat to a shady tree.”

- Raghuvamsham X, 5.

Then the gods began to pray to Him who is beyond conception and expression [अथैनं तुष्टः स्वत्त्वमवाभ मनस्गोचरम्]

नमो विश्वसृजे पूर्व स्वर्यं तदनु विन्धने ॥
अथ विश्वस्य संह्रेत्रे तुम्यं त्रेघारंश्चतातमने ॥

“We bow to You remaining in a three - fold form, - the creator of the universe in the beginning, thereafter the supporter of the universe, and then the destroyer of the universe.”

- Ibid X, 16.
“As water from heaven which has one taste, acquires other tastes in different countries, so you who are immutable, assume different states in connection with different qualities.”

- Ibid X, 17.

"You who are immeasurable, have measured out the worlds; You, who have no desires, fulfil all desires; You, who are unconquered, are the conqueror of all; You, Who are quite unmanifest, are the cause of the manifest”

- Ibid X, 18.

"You reside in every heart, yet ever are You far away; You have no desires, yet You are lost in sacrifices; You are ancient, but not old, that is how the wise ones describe You.

- Ibid X, 19.
“You are omniscient and incomprehensible; You are the source of all and born of Yourself; You are the lord of all, and without any one to rule over you; You are one and you assume all forms.”


Lines of great poetry such as these bring us face to face with the Infinite and thrill our little existence, linking it to the vaster existence of the super – spirit.

If we bear in mind the difference of character in the origins of the supernatural in both nations, it will be easy for us to understand the way it functions in the works of the two poets. In Kalidasa, there is absolutely no distinction between the visible and the invisible, or the natural and the supernatural. The one is complacently put in the place of the other. The supernatural elements in Kalidasa come in familiar day – to day characters and perform acts that could have been done by humans as well. They do not carry any more significant responsibilities than those given to men and women in Kalidasa’s works. Thus when Shakuntala is rejected by her husband and is led away by the kind – hearted Prime Minister to his home, she is reported to be spirited away by some invisible creatures on the way. In the fourth act of the Abhijnana Shakuntalam we see gift of ornaments by the trees. In Meghaduatam, Vikramorvashiyam and in Abhijnana Shakuntalam, the element of curse plays a dominant part. As these little incidents clearly show, the supernatural elements, in Kalidasa, do not carry any special psychological significance either, they do not influence the destinies of the characters at all; while the supernatural in Keats, however, is not so simple or casual as that.
In the Hindu view of life, however, such a belief is absolutely unwarranted. The inexplicable parts of human life are explained by the law of Karma, with reference to our own actions in the past, while in Keats, these parts appear independent supernatural entities.

We do miss this vital aspect of all great poetry in the amazing multitude that romantic minded Keats has left behind. Poems of Kalidasa, India’s great national poet, throb however, with both humanity as well as Divinity in harmonious proportions, true to the essentially spiritual and psychic culture of his great and ancient land and people.

इति शिवम्
The materials of this chapter have been gathered from the following sources:

Texts

- Acharya Narayana Rama, Meghadutam with Mallinatha’s Commentary, Nirnaya Sagar Press, Bombay, 16th edition 1953.