

*na ratnam anvīsyati mṛgyate hi tat*

On the Gems embedded in Kālidāsa's Poetry

(abstract)

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Sanskrit 'ratna' and English 'gem' have a binary connotation, meaning precious stone as well as the foremost member of a group or class (*jātau jātau yad utkr̥ṣtam*). In his poetry Kālidāsa makes skilful use of this double meaning as is evident in the famous line that forms the title of this paper. Like the colours and scents of various kinds of flowers, the colour and lustre of different gems appeal greatly to Kālidāsa and he employs these motifs in diverse figures of speech. The pearl, in particular, occupies a prominent place among all the gems, for no description of feminine beauty is complete without a mention of the pearl necklace that adorns the lady's bosom. The pearl necklace interspersed with blue sapphires gives rise to several charming tropes in Kālidāsa's poems. Regarding the diamond, we learn that it was used for boring holes in other gemstones (*Raghu* 1.4), a fact valuable for the history of technology.

Besides the colours and qualities of gems, Kālidāsa gives poetic currency to certain popular beliefs regarding gems. Thus *Sūryakānta*, the 'gem dear to the sun', is said to emit fire when touched by the rays of the sun, while its counterpart *Candrakānta*, the 'gem dear to the moon', displays its agreeable nature by oozing cool soothing liquid at the touch of the moon's rays. Or, at the first sound of thunder, slender columns of beryl (*vaidūrya*) sprout from the earth. Poets who came after Kālidāsa imitated these tropes of Kālidāsa so avidly that these became established as standard poetic conceits (*kavi-samaya*) in Sanskrit poetic practice.

The present paper seeks to investigate the nomenclature, scientific notions, myths and popular beliefs concerning gems which are to be found in Kālidāsa's writings. This data will be compared with Buddhahatṭa's *Ratnaparīkṣā*, the earliest extant Sanskrit work on gemmology. It will be shown that Kālidāsa's writings reflect a stage of gemmology which was gradually evolving at the time of Kālidāsa and which would soon develop into *Ratnaparīkṣā*.

However, the main thrust of the paper will be on the poetic use of the gem motifs in Kālidāsa's poetry and to show how this use established certain patterns that were emulated by many later poets.