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## Economic Life in Kālidāsa's Laghutrayī: A Socio-Cultural Study

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### Abstract

This article studies the economic life reflected in Kālidāsa's Laghutrayī, namely Raghuvamśa, Kumārasambhava, and Meghadūta. The study explains the material world shown in these works in simple English. Kālidāsa is not only a poet of beauty, love, and nature. He also gives small but clear pictures of work, wealth, land, cattle, roads, trade, coins, royal revenue, and gifts. These details help us understand the social life behind the poetry.

The article begins with the idea of artha, or wealth, as an important aim of life. In Indian thought, artha supports dharma and kāma, so it is not treated as something impure or negative. It becomes wrong only when it is collected through greed or used without responsibility. Kālidāsa presents this balanced view through royal conduct, agriculture, animal wealth, transport, and charity.

The farmer, trader, traveller, king, donor, and receiver all appear within this economic picture. Agriculture is shown through crops such as yava, śāli, nīvāra, kalama, and śyāmāka. Animal wealth appears through cows, horses, and elephants. Roads, chariots, rivers, and trade routes suggest movement and exchange. Mudrā, niška, suvarṇa, ornaments, and jewels point to developed ideas of value and stored wealth.

Above all, Kālidāsa gives an ethical view of wealth. Kings collect bali for the welfare of people, and noble persons gather wealth for tyāga and dāna. Thus, the Laghutrayī shows economy as a part of culture, duty, and social care.

### Keywords

Kālidāsa, Laghutrayī, Raghuvamśa, Kumārasambhava, Meghadūta, artha, dharma, kāma, kṛṣi, paśupālana, vāṇijya, mudrā, dāna, śāli, socio-cultural life.

### Introduction

Kālidāsa holds a very high place in Sanskrit literature. He is often regarded as one of the brightest figures in the history of Sanskrit poetry. His writings are not limited to imagination, beauty, love, and nature. They also reflect the social and cultural life of ancient India. This is the main reason for studying his poetry not only as literature, but also as a source for understanding society.

The Laghutrayī is a well-known group of three works: Raghuvamśa, Kumārasambhava, and Meghadūta. These three works have a special place in Sanskrit literature. They contain social, political, economic, administrative, and religious elements. The present article focuses only on the economic element.

Economic life means the way people earn, keep, move, use, and share wealth. In a simple sense, it includes land, crops, cattle, trade, roads, coins, taxes, gifts, and royal duties. Kālidāsa does not write an economics textbook. He is a poet. Yet poetry often shows life more naturally than a dry rule book. When he describes a city, a forest, a king, a farmer, a journey, or a gift, he also gives hints about the economy of his imagined world.

The language of this article is kept simple and clear. The aim is not to make the subject heavy. The aim is to show how Kālidāsa's Laghutrayī gives an image of a society where wealth is needed, but wealth must be guided by moral duty.

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### 1. Artha as a Necessary Part of Life

The economic life shown in Kālidāsa's *Laghutrayī* should first be understood through the Indian idea of artha. Artha means wealth, material support, means of living, and practical prosperity. In Indian thought, wealth is not rejected. It is accepted as one of the important aims of human life. A person needs food, shelter, safety, learning, ritual support, travel, and social honour. All these need some form of artha.<sup>1</sup>

This does not mean that money is the highest value. It means that wealth gives support to life when it is used properly. The same idea is found in the famous statement of Kauṭilya: arthamūlau dharmakāmau, meaning that dharma and kāma have artha as their base.<sup>2</sup> In simple words, a hungry and helpless person finds it difficult to perform duty, study, give charity, or enjoy peaceful life. Therefore, artha becomes a practical support of culture.

The Indian tradition also speaks of three human desires known as eṣaṇā: putraīṣaṇā, vittaiṣaṇā, and lokaiṣaṇā. These mean desire for children, desire for wealth, and desire for the world or higher state.<sup>3</sup> The presence of vittaiṣaṇā shows that the desire for wealth was recognized as a natural part of human life. But this desire was expected to remain under the control of dharma.

Thus, the economic vision of Kālidāsa should not be understood as greed for wealth. It is a cultural vision. Wealth is necessary because it supports life. But wealth becomes meaningful only when it is connected with responsibility, duty, charity, and social welfare.

### 2. Kālidāsa's Ethical View of Wealth

Kālidāsa does not praise greed. He praises the responsible use of wealth. In *Raghuvamśa*, the kings of the Raghu line are not shown as selfish collectors of money. They collect wealth, but they do so for duty, sacrifice, charity, and public welfare. The expression tyāgāya sambhṛtārthānām shows this noble idea very clearly.<sup>4</sup> It means that wealth is gathered for giving, not merely for personal enjoyment.

This is a powerful moral statement. It shows that in Kālidāsa's view, the true greatness of a ruler or noble person lies not in hoarding wealth, but in using wealth for higher purposes. A person may earn wealth, but the wealth should finally return to society through dāna, yajña, protection, and welfare.

Another important idea is connected with King Dilīpa. Kālidāsa says that the king collected bali from the people for their welfare. The king is compared to the sun. The sun takes water from the earth and gives it back many times as rain. In the same way, a good king takes revenue from the people and returns it as protection, order, and prosperity.<sup>5</sup>

This idea is very important from the economic point of view. It says that tax is not meant only for royal luxury. It is meant for public good. A ruler has no moral right to collect wealth from people if he does not protect them and support

their welfare. In this way, Kālidāsa connects economy with rājadharmā.

The ethical limit of wealth is also clear. Wealth should not be taken by hurting others. It may be earned through work, land, cattle, trade, gifts, and royal service. But wealth gained by greed, force, or injustice breaks the order of dharma. Therefore, Kālidāsa's economic thought is not blind materialism. It is a moral economy.

### 3. Agriculture as the Base of Prosperity

Agriculture, or kṛṣi, is one of the main signs of economic life in the *Laghutrayī*. Ancient life depended greatly on land, rain, seasons, and crops. A good harvest meant food, trade, tax, gifts, and social stability. Therefore, agriculture was the foundation of prosperity.<sup>6</sup>

Kālidāsa's poetry is full of seasons. Fields do not appear in his works like dry information. They appear with smell, colour, wind, rain, flowers, and human feeling. Crops are connected with festivals, beauty, and daily food. The names of grains such as yava, śāli, nīvāra, kalama, and śyāmāka show that agriculture was diverse.<sup>7</sup> Different lands and different seasons produced different grains.

Yava, or barley, appears in auspicious contexts. It was used in maṅgala acts such as royal consecration and marriage rituals. This shows that grain was not only food. It was also a symbol of growth, fertility, and good fortune.<sup>8</sup>

Śāli, a type of rice, gives a clear picture of settled agriculture. Rice cultivation shows a stable agricultural society. Different kinds of rice were known, and this means that people understood crops according to season, quality, and use. Nīvāra was linked with forest and āśrama life, while kalama and śyāmāka also show crop variety.<sup>9</sup>

From these details, it becomes clear that Kālidāsa gives an economy rooted in the earth. Land is not only a poetic background. It feeds society. It gives beauty to poetry and strength to the state. The farmer may not always stand at the centre of the story, but the fields behind the story are always important.

### 4. Animal Wealth and Rural Economy

Animal wealth was another major part of economic life. Cattle, horses, elephants, and other animals were not only objects of beauty. They were also valuable economic resources. Cows gave milk, curd, ghee, and support to ritual life. Bulls helped in farming. Horses were important for travel, war, royal power, and fast movement. Elephants were signs of strength and royal dignity.<sup>10</sup>

In Kālidāsa's works, these animals are often described poetically, but behind the poetry there is an economic meaning. Animals are movable wealth. A society rich in cattle, horses, and elephants is also rich in food, transport, military strength, and prestige.

Raghuvamśa gives many pictures of royal movement with horses, elephants, and chariots. Such descriptions are not merely decorative. They show the cost and power of the

state. A king who has elephants, horses, and chariots also needs resources, trainers, roads, fodder, soldiers, and organized administration.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, animal wealth forms an important part of the rural and royal economy. It connects agriculture, transport, warfare, ritual, and social status. Through these descriptions, Kālidāsa shows that the economy of ancient society was not based on land alone. It was also supported by animals and their many uses.

### 5. Roads, Movement, and Trade

No economy can grow without movement. People must move crops, animals, goods, letters, gifts, armies, and travellers. Therefore, roads, rivers, chariots, horses, and trade routes are important signs of economic life. Kālidāsa's works show a world that is not closed. It is connected by journeys, routes, rivers, forests, mountains, and cities.<sup>12</sup>

Chariots and horses show land transport. Rivers and crossings show water routes. Merchants and travellers suggest exchange between different places. Trade routes were necessary because goods produced in one area had to reach other areas. Crops, ornaments, animals, ritual materials, and luxury goods all needed movement.

Meghadūta is especially useful for understanding geographical movement. The cloud travels from the south toward the north. On its path, Kālidāsa describes mountains, rivers, cities, fields, and settlements. Although the poem is mainly

about love and separation, it also shows how different places were imagined as connected spaces.<sup>13</sup> A connected land is also an economic land.

In simple words, the Laghutrayī shows that prosperity needs movement. Crops must reach markets. Gifts must reach priests, guests, and dependents. Kings must move to protect borders. Messengers must carry news. Trade routes are therefore silent helpers of culture and economy.

### 6. Mudrā, Niṣka, Suvarṇa, and Stored Value

The use of terms such as mudrā, niṣka, and suvarṇa points to developed ideas of value. Mudrā may mean coin, seal, or sign of authority according to context. In economic discussion, it points to organized value and recognized exchange.<sup>14</sup>

Niṣka and suvarṇa suggest the use of gold value. Gold, silver ornaments, jewels, and precious objects also worked as stored wealth. In such a society, wealth could be worn, gifted, saved, exchanged, or offered in ritual. This is different from modern banking, but the basic idea is similar: people needed reliable forms of value.<sup>15</sup>

The reference to niṣka, śata, and suvarṇa in connection with dakṣiṇā shows that religious and social acts could involve measured wealth. Dakṣiṇā was not simply a gift. It was part of a sacred exchange between giver, priest, ritual, and society.<sup>16</sup>

This kind of detail is important because it shows a developed culture of value. Wealth was not only grain or cattle. It could also be counted, measured, stored, and transferred. Therefore, the economy included both rural wealth and metallic wealth.

### 7. Dāna, Tyāga, and the Social Use of Wealth

The final moral point in Kālidāsa's economic vision is dāna, or giving. A society may be rich, but if wealth never returns to society, it creates hardness and inequality. Kālidāsa praises rulers and noble persons who give. Wealth should not stop in one hand. It should move toward need, ritual, learning, worship, and public welfare.<sup>17</sup>

Raghuvamśa gives the best example of this ideal. The Raghu kings collect wealth, but they are famous for giving. Their greatness lies not only in conquest or power. It lies in self-control and generosity. They do not hold wealth with greed. This is why the idea of tyāga is so important.<sup>18</sup>

Tyāga means giving up, but in this context it also means the wise release of wealth for a higher purpose. Wealth becomes pure when it is used for others. It becomes noble when it protects people, supports learning, helps ritual life, and maintains social balance.

This view can teach modern readers also. Wealth is useful, but wealth must carry responsibility. A person may earn through skill and effort. A king may collect tax. A society may produce grain and goods. But the highest use of wealth is not display. It is service.

### 8. Economic Life as a Part of Culture

The economy in Kālidāsa is never separate from culture. Agriculture is linked with ṛtu, beauty, and maṅgala. Animal wealth is linked with royal duty. Roads are linked with journeys and messages. Mudrā is linked with authority and value. Dāna is linked with dharma. This makes Kālidāsa's economic picture soft, human, and meaningful.

Kālidāsa's poetry is not merely poetry of imagination. It is also a reflection of social life. The Laghutrayī allows us to see how poetry can preserve economic memory without becoming a manual of economics.<sup>19</sup>

If we read only the beauty of Kālidāsa, we miss one part of his greatness. If we read only economic facts, we miss the poetry. The right reading joins both. The field, crop, road, coin, tax, and gift are all placed inside a larger moral world. This is why his poetry remains useful for socio-cultural study.

### Conclusion

This article has studied the economic life reflected in Kālidāsa's Laghutrayī in simple language. The main point is clear: Kālidāsa gives a balanced idea of wealth. Artha is necessary, but it must be guided by dharma. Wealth supports family, ritual, travel, state, learning, and social honour. But wealth becomes noble only when it is earned without greed and used for public good.

The Laghutrayī shows many parts of economic life. Agriculture appears through crops such as yava, śāli, nīvāra, kalama, and śyāmāka. Animal wealth appears through cows, horses, and elephants. Movement and trade appear through roads, chariots, rivers, and journeys. Mudrā, niṣka, suvarṇa, ornaments, and jewels show the idea of stored and measured value. Dāna and tyāga show the moral use of wealth.

The image of the ideal king is especially important. The king takes bali from the people for their welfare, just as the sun takes water and returns it as rain. This is one of the finest economic ideas in Kālidāsa. It says that power and revenue must serve society.

Thus, Kālidāsa's economic vision is neither dry nor greedy. It is cultural, ethical, and human. It teaches that prosperity is good when it feeds life, protects people, supports duty, and flows back to society. This is the lasting value of studying economic life in the Laghutrayī.

### Footnotes

1. Vācaspatyam Kośa, s.v. "Artha"; Śabdakalpadruma, s.v. "Artha."
2. Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 1.7.
3. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.5.1.
4. Raghuvamśa 1.7.
5. Raghuvamśa 1.18.
6. Kālidāsa, Raghuvamśa; Kālidāsa, Kumārasambhava.
7. Kālidāsa, Raghuvamśa; Kālidāsa, Kumārasambhava; Vācaspatyam Kośa, s.v. "Yava," "Śāli," "Nīvāra."
8. Vācaspatyam Kośa, s.v. "Yava."
9. Vācaspatyam Kośa, s.v. "Śāli," "Nīvāra," "Śyāmāka."
10. Kālidāsa, Raghuvamśa; Vācaspatyam Kośa, s.v. "Go," "Aśva," "Gaja."
11. Kālidāsa, Raghuvamśa.
12. Kālidāsa, Meghadūta; Kālidāsa, Raghuvamśa.
13. Kālidāsa, Meghadūta.
14. Vācaspatyam Kośa, s.v. "Mudrā"; Śabdakalpadruma, s.v. "Mudrā."
15. Vācaspatyam Kośa, s.v. "Niṣka," "Suvarṇa."
16. Kālidāsa, Raghuvamśa; Vācaspatyam Kośa, s.v. "Dakṣiṇā."
17. Raghuvamśa 1.7.
18. Raghuvamśa 1.7.
19. Kālidāsa, Raghuvamśa; Kālidāsa, Kumārasambhava; Kālidāsa, Meghadūta.

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