

## BOOK REVIEW

**Prashant Kaushik and Purshotam Kaushik. 2024. Ecological and Societal Diversity in the Epic Padmaavat. Today and Tomorrow's Printers and Publishers, New Delhi, India. Pp. 348. Coloured Plates 43 (202 photographs), ISBN 978-819-795-168-8.**

**Prashant Kaushik** is a Gold Medallist in English Literature from Gurukul Kangri University and is currently pursuing PhD in English Literature from the same institution. He serves as an Assistant Professor of English, where he shares his passion for literature and communication skills with his students. Before entering academia, Prashant earned a degree in Computer Engineering from GB Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar and worked as a Software Engineer in a multinational corporation for around five years. **Dr. Purshotam Kaushik** is the former Professor and Head, Department of Botany and Microbiology, and Dean, Faculty of Life Science, Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India. He has published over 118 research papers, 7 original research monographs, many chapters in edited books, 3 text books and 2 editions of edited book *Indigenous Medicinal Plants including Microbes and Fungi*. He has been an elected Syndic of Gurukul Kangri University and a member of Board of Management and Academic Council.

The book *Ecological and Societal Diversity in the Epic Padmaavat* reviews the status of the sections of the society and both animal and plant diversity, ecological niche, ecosystems and ecological disasters. It provides the useful information on Vedic Microbiology, limitations of the poet regarding Phytodiversity, Vedic Plants, Pharmaceutical Formulation and Folklore Medicine and Animal Diversity.

The Padmaavat is an Avadhee epic composed by Malik Muhammad Jaayasi between 1527 to 1540 A.D. on Singhalese Island princess and daughter of King Ghandharv Sen who later became Queen of Chittor after marrying Raajpoot King Ratn Sen, and became popular among the masses as Rani Padmavati. The poem tells the legendary story of her extraordinary beauty, and the siege of her kingdom by the Sultan of Delhi, Alauddin Khilji, who was obsessed with capturing her. Garh of Chittaur remained surrounded for eight years according to the poet Jaayasi but for six months and seven days according to English version of Akbarnaama. Under passage 43/532, the Herat in the west of Hindu Kush attacked having looked eye to eye. Khiljee was called back to Delhi. Hence, the war ended. But Allauddin Khiljee played treachery and extended the hand of friendship through Sarja, his trustworthy messenger to

go to the King Ratn Sen and speak *Now I will not take the Queen Padmini from him*. Sarja applied the policy of *Saam Daam Dand Bhed* by any or all means. King Ratn Sen agreed to host the dinner. Having read and identified the intentions of Alauddin Khiljee, Gora and Baadal, the Chieftains of the King proposed in the ear of King Ratn Sen, *Today the wicked fellow is in our hands. Let us destroy the root, the leaves will wither away and the devil's ecosystem will vanish itself* to which advice the King Ratn Sen turned down calling it against the ethics of friendship. When the King Ratn Sen accompanied Alauddin Khiljee for his safe transportation to Delhi, he was deceitfully imprisoned by Alauddin Khiljee, and was highly tortured. Gora and Baadal using tit for tat technique got the King Ratn Sen freed. Alauddin Khiljee attacked again. Gora ordered his son Baalak (Lad on the adolescent boy) Baadal to take King Ratn Sen, safe, to Chittaur, which Baadal did well. Very next day, the King Ratn Sen had to go for a war with other neighbour enemy Devpaal of Kumbhalmer, who challenged King Ratn Sen for *One on one battle* and threw a poisoned small spear which hit the King Ratn Sen beneath the navel and went out to the back. The King Ratn Sen having separated the head of Devpaal from his torso, tied to his feet and set for Chittaur and died mid-way, on way to home. Both of the Queens Naagmati and Padmaavati became Sati on the pyre of the King Ratn Sen. Gora alone fought bravely. Sarja hit Gora with a spear and withdrew that forcefully and his intestine fell on land, to which he put on his shoulder, attacked Sarja on his neck and killed him. The poet compares Gora with Bholu Bheem, a brave warrior of the history also known as Bheem Dev of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chalukya dynasty. Brave Baalak Baadal laid down his life fighting at the main gate of the fort. Women performed Jauhar. Allauddin Khiljee entered the Garh. He picked a handful of ashes and flew that in the air.

The book conveyed the societal diversity and biodiversity at the time of Padmaavat. The book has given the description of the Epic in 58 Khand or parts which are further grouped into 653 groups, of 9 verses each. The book provides the information about the Vedic microbiology and mentions the Vedas at several places in the epic. The authors discussed the four Vedas (Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharveda) and microbiological tenets as Adhyaya/Khand and Mantras represented in these Vedas. The book explained the limitations of the poet Jaayasi regarding phytodiversity; the poet makes mention of wells, Baawaries, fresh water bodies *etc.* but he has not cited blue green algae or algae but he did mention this as *Kaai* under some passages. A large number of plants including trees,

shrubs, herbs, vines, xerophytes, hydrophytes; animals: marine invertebrates, corals, arthropods, arachnids (= Veer Bahootiyan = red velvet mites), scorpions, insects, amphibians, aquatic vertebrates, lizards, and other animals and fungi are mentioned in the epic *Padmaavat*. There is also a mention of specific groups of plants like orchids as *Sanjeevani* (Sam + Jeewani) which restores full life. The synonyms of this word in Sanskrit stand for some orchids have been given in the epic many times, these synonyms are : as *Swarnjeevanti* and *Jeewanti*. First mentioned in Khand 11 (Prem Khand Chapter on the Love) on page 35 of the Research monograph / book, when the King Ratan Sen becomes unconscious on listening about the beauty of the Princess Padmavati from the parrot Heeraman.

The Sanskrit names of some orchids as *Swaranjeevanti* (*Flickingenia macrae*) and *Jeewanti* (*Pholidota articulata* and *P. imbricata*) which are known to restore life are popular in the Ayurveda. It is also mentioned in the epic *Padmaavat* that these orchids were growing at Mandap, the gold coated temple of Lord Shiva on the mountain. The orchids also find mention at some other places in the epic *Padmaavat*. He made no specific example of eukaryotic fresh water or marine algae. The

book discusses the algae, fungi, lichens, gymnosperms and angiosperms, the poet Jaayasi might have come across their mention in the Vedas. The book presents information on the Vedic plants referenced by the poet, without using their Vedic names, as well as the Vedic plants that were omitted by the poet in his epic *Padmaavat*, all compiled into one chapter. The book summarised the pharmaceutical formulations (*Dashmoola*) and cosmetic formulations (*Chatursam*) mentioned in the epic and the drugs used in these formulations. In the last chapter of the book, information on animal diversity mentioned in the epic is provided. The book also provide the photographs of the important plants and animals.

This excellent book is the rare blend of both Art and Science providing detailed information about our medieval history along with plant and animal diversity. This will be highly useful not only for the researchers and students of different disciplines but also for society, in general.

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