

An Ecocritical Perspective in Kalidasa's Abhijnanshakuntlam

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Abstract-

The finest author of the Gupta era was Kalidasa, who was dubbed the "Shakespeare of India" with justification. Nature has always served as a source of inspiration for writers, who have attempted to capture it in their works. The portrayal of nature in Kalidasa's Abhijnana Shakuntalam contributes significantly to the work's beauty, and the poem can be interpreted as reflecting nature as a whole. The modern environmental critics and proponents of sustainable development continue to discuss and argue about this work. This ancient literature teaches us to love and respect nature while also illustrating its beauty.

Key Words: Nature, forest, eco criticism

Shakuntala's original Mahabharata tale is transformed into a rainbow-hued tale of love, betrayal, and reconciliation as Kalidasa sees it through the prism of nature. At every point in the play, nature gets involved in the lives of the people, bringing about love, separation, and reconciliation. The purpose of this paper is to examine how Kalidasa's writings can serve as a model for world literature as it transitions from a human-centered to a nature-centered paradigm. It also explores how Kalidasa can be seen as a romantic poet with romantic ideas about nature and its stunning, biologically diverse natural landscape. The poem brings nature to life, allowing the reader and viewer to experience the breathtaking splendour of the deep forest with its wild deer, mango trees, jasmine flowers, birds, and brooks. The play extensively references the several seasons. Summer is praised as the season of love in the prologue. The drama is set between summer and spring. With precise detail, Kalidasa transports the audience right into the enthralling splendour of the wilderness while describing the sensuous beauty of the forest and the changing seasons.

Through the picturesque description of an antelope with its "haunches folded into his chest" and the "open mouth dropping half chewed grass" on the path, Kalidasa subtly depicts the encroachment of culture into nature. This not only creates a mental image of the swiftly running, terrified animal but also provides knowledge about the encroachment of king Dushyantha into the forest. The antelope merely stops by Shakuntala's side to seek Dushyantha's protection. Despite the fact that Dushyantha enters the forest as an outsider, he cannot be separated from the narrative because it is he who defends the sacred grove from the demons' attack.

The deer's need for lush vegetation to survive paints an image of the dense forest for us. The splendour and uniqueness of nature are revealed by visiting the ashram of the sage Kanva. According to Kalidasa, the path through the forest leading to the ashram is covered in "wild grain under the trees," and "parrots nest in hollow trunks." The deer that trust human speech "do not break their gait" despite the path's stones being "stained by the dark oil of crushed Inguri nuts". The deer only flees for its life in the sight of Dushyanta, a complete outsider to the area. "Water from wet bark cloth" is "streaked by water on the paths from ponds." The deer does not halt in the middle of its travel due to the presence of humans nearby because the nature is unaltered, and the dropped grains and nuts under the plants and trees are unaffected by humans. The play's clean environment is something to behold for the reader. Shakuntala is frequently seen in the forest ministering to the animals and flora, like a delicate jasmine blossom dispersing its scent. The summer and spring months are the optimum for

jasmine plant growth. These flowers are used in sacrifices and to embellish deity statues with garlands. Here, it is impossible to ignore the connection between Shakuntala and the forest deity. Shakuntala is given the responsibility of running Kanwa's ashram while he is away. Shakuntala thus transforms into a divinity who can be worshipped in the sacred Kanwa grove as a result of her ongoing connection to nature and the grove. Her closeness to nature enhances her ethereal attractiveness. Her bark outfit and natural accessories like flowers and leaves enhance her beauty. She is able to notice and react to even the smallest changes in nature, blending in flawlessly with it. She is drawn to the trees and plants by the way their branches sway. Shakuntala is described by Kalidasa as a young lady with "lips as fresh as buds." Shakuntala's youthfulness and full beauty are compared to lovely flowers and flora. Her limbs are blossoming with youth, and her arms resemble tendrils. The Gandharva vivaha that will take place between Shakuntala and Dushyanta is predicted by the union of the jasmine creeper and the mango tree. The laws of the forest are observed by both man and nature. There are both supernatural and natural safeguards in place to stop anything from upsetting nature's delicate balance. Only when man coexists peacefully with nature does life become happy. In order to maintain this equilibrium, boundaries between heaven and earth, nature and culture are muddled in the play.

The gods became envious of Viswamitra's dreadful penance on the banks of the river Gautami and the heavenly powers he attained as a result, and they quickly despatched the nymph Menaka to break the penance. The seduction took place during spring's most seductively stunning season. This couple gave birth to Shakuntala. The infant girl was being cared for by the shakunta birds when sage Kanwa came across her. Shakuntala was thus born in the midst of nature, and Kanwa, her foster father, gave her a name that symbolised her upbringing. Shakuntala receives Dushyanta by a swarming bee. Wild elephants charging into the hermitage are the image and representation of the hero and heroine's untamed passion. The untamed elephant that rushes into the monastery, its feet entangled in vines and its tusks adorned with tree branches, personifies human impulses. The imagery of a bee drinking nectar from a "fragile virgin blossom" is a great way to depict how Dushyanta and Shakuntala made love to one another. It is appropriate to believe that Shakuntala and Dushyanta's union is a sacred deed that will give rise to a ruler-child. The hermits had already given Dushyanta their blessing for him to have a son who would rule his realm. This prophecy is realised when Dushyanta weds Shakuntala.

The lotus flower conceals the love note that Shakuntala wrote with her nail on the lotus leaf, calling it "delicate as a parrot's breast." Nature contains the cure for Shakuntala's love affliction. She receives care using the leaves and fibres of the lotus plant, and she spends the majority of her time in the "bower of vines on the Malini river bank." Her old maid bathes her with water and 'kusa' grass. The 'kusa' grass is typically utilised in religious rituals and sacrifices. Perhaps Kalidasa is using the fundamental principles of Ayurveda, which emphasises the interdependence of nature and people. The white silk fabric is made by trees, while another tree makes the resinous lac that would redden her feet and the tree nymphs make the jewellery for her. Shakuntala is advised by Kanwa to say goodbye to every plant and tree in the forest. Kanwa's remarks describe Shakuntala's sensitive care for the plants, her refusal to drink even a sip of water before watering the plants, her excitement at the sight of budding blossoms, and how she was a part of nature in the past. Shakuntala is blessed by the sylvan gods, and cuckoos sing her goodbye melodies. Shakuntala elicits a response from each component of nature. She is the sister of the jasmine plant that Shakuntala dubbed "The light of the forest." When she leaves this sacred grove, she feels "orphaned" since she asked her sister, the jasmine plant, to convert her tendril arms into an embrace before she left to Dushyanta's palace.

The buck, Shakuntala's adoptive son, had his mouth cut by a blade of Kusa grass. Shakuntala used oil to treat the wound. Women and nature often have a close relationship in literature. This relationship has only been highlighted by Kalidasa in the play. The sustenance of life depends on water. It is necessary for making compromises. A messenger from the grove named Sarangarava cites the scriptures as saying that the loved ones should only be taken up to the water's edge. The piece heavily emphasises the importance of water. Shakuntala misplaces the signet ring that King Dushyanta had given her in the sacred river.

In the play, nature is virtually always seen to empathise with humans. Shakuntala, who will soon be abandoned by Dushyanta, is symbolised by the picture of the wild goose that sobs in agony when her mate is concealed by the lotus leaves.

Thus the play is an evocation of the richness, variety, and abundance of nature in literature. From the play's commencement to its conclusion, we observe the author using images drawn from nature. In comparison to natural items, human emotions are objectified. The drama makes several references to various woodland creatures, including the buck, wild elephants, chakravaka birds, cuckoos, bees, kusa grass, dharba grass, jasmine creeper, mimosa

plants, mango trees, and ashoka trees. The writer makes a connection between these elements of the wilderness and people because he recognised the natural affinity between nature and people.

The play's journey through the forest is experienced by the reader, who is left feeling rejuvenated after passing through Kanwa's sacred grove and taking in the sounds of the woodland's animals, birds, and streams. Thus, Kanwa's ashram continues to be a biodiverse area or ecological hub where we can discover a wealth of life and a cure for anything. Our forebears didn't attempt to tame nature because they understood its inherent invincibility. They were able to preserve the priceless bounty of the forests and wildlife because to this understanding. In works of literature that praised nature, women played a significant role. Women and environment were valued in real life and in literature, therefore there were no worries about them.

The personification of the pristine beauty of the forest, Shakuntala, was consistently exalted in the writing. Just as Dushyanta seeks to contain the bee in a lotus bud, Kalidasa captures the beast and beauty of nature in his magnificent literary masterpiece. The reader will fall in love with Kalidasa's forest as a result of the aranyaka's breathtaking beauty and the numerous colours, scents, and noises it contains. Colour and sweetness are added to Kalidasa's artwork by the expression of many emotions through descriptions of nature, the lyrical beauty of the songs, the lovely aroma of the flowers and pollen, and the magical environment with trickling brooks.

The great poet Goethe of Germany said of Shakuntalam, "bloom of youth and fruit of later years" and "the heaven and earth" in this work of Kalidasa. According to Banabhatta, Kalidasa's lines are delicious like "clusters of buds" in the Harshacharita, which pays respect to him. The viewpoints of these two authors, who come from different eras and nations, demonstrate how the description of nature in literature enables any reader to fully appreciate the play's various rasas. There is never a time in the narrative when nature is not present, and there is never a time when the characters are separated from the forest's plants and animals. The text continues to be a true representation of nature in art, and the aranyaka culture has been kept in all of its purity. The disruption of the connections with environment is mostly the result of cultural interference. The environmental problem is a result of nature's destruction. The return to nature is the only other solution to this catastrophe. If left to themselves, nature has all the tools necessary to make things right. Since Kalidasa recognised the inherent worth of

nature, his text does not raise any objections to environmental concerns. No species is in danger of becoming extinct, and there is an abundance of forest richness. The text makes no mention of trying to maintain the forest or the sacred grove. When Kalidasa observes his work through the kaleidoscope of nature, it obtains a peculiar beauty. Kalidasa's dedication to nature reached the heights of spiritual awe and worship. Recent ecofeminist, ecocritical, and ecospiritual concerns are not addressed in the text. The fundamental ecological principle—that everything in nature is interconnected—remains a truth in the text, and Kalidasa's play continues to stand out among other works of contemporary literature.

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