

# English Literature Depicting Harmony with Environment: A Case Study of Kalidasa's Abhijnanasakuntalam

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**Abstract**—In Sanskrit, the word environment means 'paryavarna' referring to the surroundings of all living beings which is a matter of great importance in the present. Since the early age of civilization our ancient Indian thinkers realized its importance. Knowledge of nature is instrumental in various literary works. Ancient Indian texts like Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata reflected that human beings and environment are closely interdependent. Trees, plants, rivers, mountains, birds have been the main source of creativity. Present paper deals with one of the greatest Indian poet of nature Kalidasa's play Abhijnanasakuntalam. It is based on the story of Shakuntala as described in Mahabharata. Kalidasa with his unique style further modified it by depicting nature at its best. The heroine of the play Shakuntala's character has been presented as a nature's child. Mother nature has been incredibly illustrated in this play. Almost all the acts describe nature except V and VI. The first four acts occur in Kanvas forest hermitage, act V and VI in king's palace, act VII on a heavenly mountain. Abhijnanasakuntalam is in every respect rich in culture and literature depicting harmony with nature. Kalidasa is a masterly describer of Shakuntala's relation with plants, peacocks and deer. This play is a great blend of nature and human nature. Be it Shakuntala's relation with king Dushyanta, hermits pleading with Dushyanta over deer or Shakuntala's leaving the hermitage to join her husband - all incidents are sublime and so much part of nature. The need of the hour is that considerable measures should be adopted by us to make the people aware of our dependence on nature. Kalidasa in Abhijnanasakuntalam has tried to bring out the interdependence of two elements-nature and human emotions which has been discussed in this paper.

**Keywords:** Ancient India texts, Nature, Harmony, Human nature, God's gift.

In Sanskrit, the word environment means 'paryavarna' referring to the surroundings of all living beings which is a matter of great importance in the present.

The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 defines the environment as follows:

'Environment includes water, air and land and the inter-relationship which exists among and between water, air, land

and human beings, other living creatures, plants, microorganisms and property.'

Since time immemorial nature has been instrumental in various literary works. Trees, plants, rivers, mountains, birds have been the main source of inspiration for creativity.

The ancient Vedas were very much concerned about environment. It is through Veda we comprehend whether living creatures and non-living creatures have life. Plants were given prime importance. 'As per one of the verses of Rigveda where deity of forest is praised for her gifts to the mankind and also for her charm.'

Ancient Indian texts like Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata reflected that human beings and environment are closely interdependent. Present paper deals with one of the greatest Indian poet of nature Kalidasa's play Abhijnanasakuntalam.

Kalidasa was undoubtedly a poet of nature. He has written two epic poems - Raghuvansham, Kumarasambhava, two lyric poems - Meghduta, Ritusamhara, three plays - Malavikagnimitram, Vikramorvashiyam and Abhijnanasakuntalam.

The play was first translated by Sir William Jones. German poet Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe after reading the translated version said,

'Wouldst thou the young year's blossom and the fruit of its decline, and all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed? Wouldst thou the heaven and earth itself in one should name combine I name thee Shakuntala and all at once in said.'

Abhijnanasakuntalam is based on the story of Shakuntala as described in Mahabharata. Kalidasa with his unique style further modified it by depicting nature at its best. Shakuntala's character has been presented as a nature's child. Kalidasa in Abhijnanasakuntalam has tried to bring in interdependence of two elements nature and human emotions.

Abhijnanasakuntalam is a play in seven acts. The first four acts take place in Kanvas forest hermitage, act V and VI occur in king's palace and the act seven occur on a heavenly mountain. Kalidasa has illustrated incredibly mother nature in his this work. Shakuntala's innocence, purity is as natural as nature's beauty. She uses flowers as jewellery and is always surrounded by deers and birds.

This play is a great blend of nature and human nature. Be it Shakuntala's relation with king Dushyanta, hermits pleading with Dushyanta over deer or Shakuntala's leaving the hermitage to join her husband - all incidents are sublime and so much part of nature.

The focus of my paper is to show that mother nature and literature are inseparable. The environment has the power to influence the characters. Abhijnanasakuntalam is in every respect rich in culture and literature depicting harmony with nature.

The very beginning of the play leads us to conclude that Kalidasa believed that human nature is interdependent with Prakriti. He talks about Lord Shiva and Nature and is concerned about the moral duty of human's to protect this environment.

'Eight forms has Shiva, lord of all and king: And these are water, first created thing; And fire, which speeds the sacrifice begun; The priest; and time's dividers, moon and sun; The all embracing ether, path of sound; The earth, wherein all seeds of life are found; And air, the breath of life: may he draw near, Revealed in these, and bless those gathered here'. [4]

Shakuntala is so much part of nature that Dushyanta describes his beloved, 'This blooming body of hers, by the dark dress fastened delicately with knots upon her shoulders and covering the orbs of her two breasts, does not exhibit of her charms like a flower enveloped by a calyx of pale leaves.' and another, 'truly her lip has the colour of a young bud her two arms resemble the flexible stalks, attractive youth, like the blossoms pervades her limbs.' [5]

Kalidasa with his this art of writing is truly inspiring. Shakuntala is a child of nature, later when she leaves the hermitage, for her husband's palace, her departure has an impact on nature.

'Trees of the hermit's grove, you have within you

The very spirits of the forest gods.

She would not drink herself before she sprinkled

Your venerable roots with kindly showers.

Though food of ornaments, she herself would not

Denude your branches laden with sweet flowers.

Her festival occurred when spring had first

Showered its blooms, casting their magic spell.

Now that she travels to her husband's house

Time has come for us to say farewell.' [6]

These lines show the Shakuntala is responsive to nature and a great vacuum is created at the time of farewell.

Human's have no right to interfere in natural world. This thought is creatively explained in Abhijnanasakuntalam through various incidents when king Dushyanta is hunting near the hermitage.

The king is made to realize his duty of protection and not exploitation. Hermits plead with the king to save the deer: 'O king, this deer belongs to the hermitage. 'Why should his tender form expire, as blossoms perish in the fire? How could that gentle life endure the deadly arrow, sharp and sure? Restore your arrow to the quiver; to you were weapons lent. The broken-hearted to deliver, Not strike the innocent.' [4]

Hermits are shown raising voice to protect the sanctity of hermitage. In the later part, when hermits visit king's palace to unite Shakuntala with king. King is concerned about the danger of some species becoming extinct as a consequence of unknown sins committed by him.

'Do leagued powers of sin conspire to balk religion's pure desire? Has wrong been done to beasts that roam contented round the hermits' home? Do plants no longer bud and flower, to warn me of abuse of power? These doubts and more assail my mind, but leave me puzzled, last, and blind.' [4]

Shakuntala is happy after king agrees not to harm deer and it is his integrity that draws in her and she experiences passionate feelings. She says: 'Ever since I saw the good king who protects the pious grove... I love him, and it makes me feel like this. Oh, girls, that mango-tree is trying to tell me something with his branches that move in the wind like fingers as if gesturing me to come. I must go and see him.'

Ansuya: 'Oh, Shakuntala! Here is the jasmine-vine that you named Light of the Grove. She has chosen the mango-tree as her husband.'

Shakuntala: 'What a pretty pair they make. The jasmine shows her youth in her fresh flowers, and the mango tree shows his strength in his ripening fruit.' Shakuntala- 'It is out of season, but the spring creeper is covered with buds down to the very root.'

Priyamvada: 'I'm not teasing. I really heard Father Kanva say that this flowering vine was to be a symbol of your coming happiness.' [4] Thus indicating her relationship with King Dushyanta.

Towards the end when the prince Bharata is playing with lions cub and insists upon counting the teeth of the cub. The dangers of interfering the natural world are so well explained by attendants and hermit women that any lover of nature would be impressed.

'The lioness will chase you' [7]'The lioness will spring at you if you don't let her baby go.'[4] Interestingly nowhere its mentioned lioness will kill little Bharat. An important point that is raised here is that human interference towards environment was checked to some extent.

Nature and man are inseparable this sentiment is reflected when her friend Priyamvadaspeaks :'Shakuntala, we have watered the trees that blossom in the summer time. Now let's sprinkle those whose flowering time is past. That will be a better deed, because we shall not be working for a reward.'Shakuntala: 'What a pretty idea!'[4]

Kanva : 'My daughter, walk from left to right about the fires in which the offering has just been thrown. (All walk about). The holy fires around the altar kindle, And at their margins sacred grass is piled'. 'Beneath their sacrificial odours dwindle Misfortunes. May the fires protect you, child!' [4]

In the above shloka importance to Agni (fire) has been raised which will energize her during her journey. Even in Rigveda Agni has been considered as one of the important elements.

One of the non-human image - image of chariot also gains importance here. With this image Kalidasa tries to emphasize upon beauty of nature as well as Kings union with Shakuntala's innocence.

'King (joyfully). See! The horses are gaining on the deer.

As onward and onward the chariot files, The small flashes large to my dizzy eyes. What is cleft in twain, seems to blur and mate; What is crooked in nature, seems to be straight. Things at my side in an instant appear Distant, and things in the distance, near.'[4]

These are the few examples from the text which highlight harmony with nature. The whole play represents this harmony. Thus creating an everlasting impact over readers of all age groups. Shakuntala speaks to nature like tenderness, love for her father Kanva and love for other living creatures in the ashram and her husband further reflects undying adoration towards Nature.

Value for nature and connection with nature are the two thoughts which provide the background for the entire play. Towards the end of play we are introduced to transformed Shakuntala, king Dushyanta and their son Bharata. Shakuntala offspring of nature is a mother subsequent to bearing hardships, unites with king Dushyanta who also has gone through incredible sacrifice - the impact of curse. We see the development of all characters. Thus a converging of human instinct and nature.

Kalidas is undoubtedly the greatest poet, his works have created awareness amongst people regarding environment. After reading Abhijnanasakuntalam we are exposed to the world where earth is considered as sacred space. We come to know that since vedic times, nature was worshipped. People raised their voice for environment

protection. Today rapid industrialization has affected earth, and resulted in degradation of environment. Trees have been cut and ecological balance has been affected. The prime concern today is to protect the environment, make it pollution free. Earlier, ancient scriptures in Hindi or English or even Sanskrit contributed for environment awareness amongst readers. Today the entire world is working hard to put a check over manmade pollution. If the ancient writers could create awareness via literature, the times have come that we should via short stories, texts, fictions try to create awareness in the society.

The need of the hour is considerable measures should be adopted by us to make the people aware of dependency of ours on nature. With the increase in population man started interfering with nature, rather destroying the environment e.g. destruction of trees which is considered as great sin. This has resulted in extinction of various species of plants and animals. Man for becoming civilized, polluted the environment. Environment is indeed a God's gift to us that needs to be protected.

In words of Dr. Abdul Kalam, 'Ancient India was a knowledge society that contributed a great deal to civilization. We need to recover the status and become a knowledge power. Spirituality must be integrated with education. We should ignite our dormant inner energy and let it guide our lives. The Radiance of such minds embarked on constructive endeavour will bring peace, prosperity and bliss to the nation.'[8]

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