

Ecological Concerns Reflected in Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*



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Ecological Concerns Reflected in Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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Abstract

The research attempts to reflect on the ecological awareness that Kalidasa has portrayed through his play *Abhijnana Sakuntalam (Sakuntala)*. The purpose is to correlate the play with the present-day socio-ecological crisis. With the ideas of modern Eco criticism, Vandana Shiva's take on ecofeminism the research shall closely analyze the dichotomies between nature/city and man/woman. As per the methodology, the research shall be conducted through the qualitative method. Lastly, the research elucidates to various aspect of Sanskrit literature.

Ecological Concerns Reflected in Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*

Chapter- 1

Introduction

“A classic does not simply belong to its own time. The very definition of a classic implies the recognition that it speaks to all age, despite the complex ways in which it relates to and reflects the specific circumstances of the world in which it originated. A classic work must carry within itself the potentialities for relevance to the future generations of researchers in different cultural contexts”.

The Loom of Time

Backstory:

In Sanskrit literature, poets usually go through self-revelation from the divine in the form of boons or prophecies. Similarly, Kalidasa receives his boon by accident. As the name suggests he was a servant of Goddess Kali who is an avatar of Goddess Parvati. Usually, the temples for Goddess Kali are built in the forest, and Kalidasa, being the true Bhakt, seeks refuge in one of the temples. On praying for saving himself from his wife's insults, Goddess Kali decides to help him. Being a common man with childish attributes, he sticks his tongue out and mocks Kali for not responding to him in his previous prayers. Kali being in her most furious state strikes a wound on her servant's tongue and the wound made Kalidasa for what we know him for (Story Of Kalidasa: Who Still Is Greater Than Shakespeare).

Kalidasa's poems and plays are widely read in both parts of the world. The wound made him recite poems spontaneously. Historians argue that Kalidasa lived during the reign of Gupta dynasty in the fourth and early fifth century. During that time Ujjain was known to be the

vibrant metropolis of ancient India. His plays and poems allude to the characters of Hindu mythology and the places he resided. His Nataka, *Abhijnana Shakuntalam (Shakuntala)* is about the marriage of Shakuntala and king Dushyanta. Shakuntala was raised in the hermitage of Kanva Rishi which is near the banks of the river Malini and Dushyanta, the king of Hastinapura, fell in love with Shakuntala and got married. Their secret marriage came with punishment that made the king realize his mistake.

Kalidasa adapted the play from a short episode of The *Mahabharata*. In the episode, Vyasa portrayed Dushyanta as insensitive towards nature. Kalidasa's Dushyanta is “ecologically sensitive and compassionate” (Kandel 35). His adapted version opened doors for interpretations. Through the seven acts, he not only portrays the relationship of the couple but also showcases the dichotomy between the urban and forest spheres. Although the medium is drama in which miming and showing expression are vitally important. Kalidasa, being a poet, wrote the drama in such a way that it emphasized more on the dialogues than the expressions. The important scenes such as the marriage, the curse, and the loss of the ring, take place backstage and through the enactment of the minor characters, the backstage scenes are delivered to the audience.

What is Eco criticism?

Cheryll Glotfelty defines Eco criticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Garrard 03). The essence of nature is found in Kalidasa’s works. However, in today’s world nature is seen as inferior to humankind. The rapid chopping of trees and forests is now resulting in extreme temperatures. Through literature, ecocritics are spreading their awareness of saving the environment.

Alongside nature, women also face the waves of male domination. Women are the preserver of nature (Shiva). Just like Shakuntala, most women around the world nurture the beings of nature as their kin. Eco critics, for example, Karla Armbruster argues that the categorization of nature/female and culture/male is the construct of patriarchy (Diamond 14). She suggests that only if the male can understand and acknowledge the feminine in them and vice versa the duality will be subdued and harmony will bring peace to the world (Diamond 14). To overcome the present environmental issues, Westerners are now referring to ancient Indian texts. From the Vedas to Kautilya's *Arthashastra* the importance of nature and its fundamental elements seems to be present.

Research objective:

The objective of the research is to analyze the text through an Eco critical lens, especially in light of ecofeminism. The research will shed light on the natural elements that Kalidasa has written in the play. The research attempts to show the ecological awareness that has been portrayed through this ancient play. The purpose is to correlate the play/text with the present-day socio-ecological crisis. The research shall closely analyze the diverse dynamics of the Nataka with the help of Vandana Shiva's take on ecofeminism, and other secondary sources. Following are the research questions that shall be answered in chapters three and four.

Research Questions:

1. How Kalidasa has represented nature in his text and how does it connect with the present ecological crisis?

2. What makes *Sakuntala* a tragedy? And in what ways does society challenge the eponymous character?

Methodology:

The research shall be conducted using the qualitative method. I shall deconstruct the play with the help of the theoretical frame of Eco criticism and ecofeminism. The research would consist of five chapters. The first chapter shall be the introduction followed by the literature review. The third chapter and fourth chapter shall answer the research questions. Lastly, the final chapter shall conclude the research.

Chapter- 2

Literature Review

The world is filled with binaries that are opposing one another, for example, forest/city, man/woman, and foresters/city dwellers. The purpose of these binaries is to bring order but the cycle of order and disorder is an ongoing process that will end with the end of mankind. The play *Abhijnana-sakuntalam (Shakuntala)* written by the 4th-century poet and playwright Kalidasa incorporates these binaries which are studied to this day. His poetic genius is widely known among Sanskrit enthusiasts. Similar to this chapter (literature review), Kalidasa also did not write his plays and poems out of the blue. His characters were taken and adapted from the Hindu mythic characters and epics which give a fresher and more contemporary look.

The play is divided into seven acts and each actor plays a distinctive role to develop its characters by putting them through different settings and crises. The primary theme of this play is the restoration of dharma. The chapter will discuss the existing secondary sources that are related to the text and my attempt in this paper is to analyze the text from an Eco critical viewpoint. The purpose of the paper is to reflect on the connection between humans and nature and the hierarchy between man and woman.

To begin with, Chettiarthodi Rajendran in his essay “The City man in the Forest and the Forester in the City” talks about the dichotomy between foresters and city dwellers. He shows how their surroundings developed their character to be social beings and the challenges they have to face when they are in unfamiliar spaces. He did put forward about the protagonists and their behavior when they first arrived at different places. Moreover, the author analyzes the role of Madhavya and the ascetics who pay a visit to the city with Shakuntala. The analysis of

these minor characters would help me answer my research questions as the differences and similarities are extensively discussed by the author.

Another article by Chettiarthodi Rajendran, “Kalidasa- An Eco-aesthetic approach” briefly talks about the works of Kalidasa. In which he mentions the eco-aesthetic aspects of *Abhijnanashuntalam*. He showed traces of how “rural innocence” wins over “urban sophistication” (Rajendran 5). Although the author has analyzed other works of Kalidasa in which he draws various connections with one another. These connections prove the fact that Kalidasa always prefers nature over urbanization. The section where he talked about the play would be useful for my research as the author brings forth the relationship between Shakuntala and Dushyanta based on their native environment.

To look into more eco-aesthetic elements, Suprabha C.T in her PhD thesis, *Eco-aesthetic Approach to Kalidasa's Poetry* (237) discusses in the introduction about the ecological and eco-aesthetic aspects between nature and humans. The author addresses various types of pollution and the interdisciplinary fields of ecology. In the introduction, the author mentions Vandana Shiva's ideologies and Arnae Naess' philosophy on deep ecology. Later in chapter four, the author discusses the Nataka (*Shakuntala*) and provides ecological remarks.

Furthermore, Vandana Shiva's book *Staying Alive* mentions that nature is an integral part of humankind and women are the preservers of nature. By protecting nature women become a part of Shakti - “the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos” (Shiva 37). To add to her statement, Suprabha C.T states that the heroines, for example, Shakuntala, of Kalidasa's works represent “the energy of nature” therefore they are “the ‘Shakti’ with whom Shiva unites” (249).

This thesis and the book would be immensely helpful for my research as it connects to most of the relevant details that will be talked about in the analysis.

Moving on, Laxmi Prasad Kandel's master's thesis, *Adherence to Dharma for Environmental Harmony in Kalidasa's Abhijanasakuntalam*, depicts the restoration of dharma through harmonizing the environment. The author compared Kalidasa's play with the episode of the Mahabharata. The author also states that one of the acts of dharma is protecting the ecosystem (Kandel 33). While comparing the stories it is shown that Kalidasa brought changes to Dushyanta's personality. For example, he made Dushyanta "ecologically sensitive " so that he could win Shakuntala's heart and through this, he can attain dharma (Kandel 42). Moreover, Kandel draws connections between Shakuntala's visit to the city and her lifestyle in the woods, which shows that she is comfortable in a forest environment. Shakuntala's farewell brought together her extended family which included humans, flora, and fauna. Through this paper, I will be able to show the interconnectedness between nature and humans. I will also show that women are the preservers of nature and that women are the mediator between nature and dharma.

The article "Environmental Awareness at the Time of Vedas" by Nimisha Sarma reflects on the Environmental crisis that is happening due to industrialization. The author argues that through the teachings of the Vedas humans can control pollution of all kinds. She discussed several branches of the Vedas that connect with natural elements and their positive use in society. The essay is partially related to my research as I may use it to show the importance of nature in the Vedas.

To add to ecofeminism, Catherine Diamond in her article "Four Women in the Woods" analyzes four female characters from different plays including the protagonist, Shakuntala. The

author argues on the role reversal of Dushyanta after losing her. Diamond mentions that even after being in love and getting married to Dushyanta, Shakuntala is not able to let go emotions that she feels towards her foster “forest family” (26). For it is the mind occupied with the thoughts of Dushyanta. However, the curse reveals the inner intention of the king which makes no choice for Shakuntala but to return to nature. The author claims that through Shakuntala the king learns the depth of Dharma. This article would allow me to explain the personality development of Shakuntala and Dushyanta and form a connection to my research as the focus is to show the hierarchy between men and women.

Another essay “The Breaking of Shakuntala: How a Bare Life is Transformed into a Social Subject” by Ankur Betageri argues that Kalidasa’s *Abhijnanashakuntalam* is not a romantic play but a tragedy. According to him, the tragedy occurred the very moment Shakuntala was born. The author argues that Shakuntala was not born for the city; instead, she is a part of the forest. However, all Dushyanta wished for was to tame her through an alliance like Ghardarva marriage and make her in the patriarchal sphere. The author argues that Shakuntala’s identity was never recognized all she played was a forest girl who married the king. Betageri’s following statement shows that Shakuntala gets her recognition only when she was about to be or when she became king Dushyanta’s wife.

“Shakuntala is recognized as Shakuntala only when she becomes what patriarchy and caste-coded society want her to become. For Shakuntala is not recognized when the mould grasps her uniqueness, she is recognized only when she herself has become the mould” (181).

Since the article disagrees with the general narrative of the union and reunion of the couple this paper would help me establish strong grounds for the research questions. Through this paper, I would be able to show the discrimination Shakuntala faced in the name of love.

Lastly, the reviewed articles and the book show how nature and humans are interdependent. The secondary sources would also show the hierarchy between men and women when they are put in different settings.

Chapter- 3

Nature is Family

यह मेरा है, वह पराया है, ऐसे छोटें विचार के व्यक्ति करते हैं।

उच्च चरित्र वाले लोग समस्त संसार को ही परिवार मानते हैं॥

Transliteration:

ayaṃ nijāḥ paro veti gaṇanā laghucetasām ।

udāracaritānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam ॥

English translation:

This is mine, that is his, say the small minded,

The wise believe that the entire world is a family.

(Maha Upanishad 6.71–75)

The above verse from Maha Upanishad speaks directly to mankind to be generous and welcoming to everyone and everything. Although it is a Vasnavite verse, the representation of the verse is reflected in Kalidasa's play *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. His adapted version of *Shakuntala* shows various connections between nature and humans. Through his poetic genius, Kalidasa showcases the togetherness of humans, non-humans, and nature as a whole.

This chapter attempts to show the socio-ecological awareness Kalidasa has raised through his play. In recent years, development is all about forests being defrosted, the era of industrialization has polluted almost half of the world, and humans consciously or unconsciously harm other beings. Forests are now turning into wastelands and fields for monoculture vegetation. Through perception, penance, and protection Kalidasa describes nature and human beings to be part of the bigger whole.

Varied Perceptions:

Forest regions can make an individual humble. It is a region from which most divine energy is generated. However, perception varies from person to person. In the play, characters such as the protagonists, the ascetics, and the king's men show various opinions regarding forest culture.

Kalidasa begins his play with an invocation that is addressed to Lord Shiva and his avatars. In the invocation, he associates nature as the “source of all seeds” (Thapar 86). The seeds are the natural elements that are used by humans and nonhumans for sustenance. Moreover, Kandel states in his thesis mention that the purpose of god and his incarnated avatars is to protect the universe against Adharmic forces. The universe is protected when “all life-forces of nature are protected” (32).

The story of Dushyanta and Shakuntala begins during the summer season. It is the time of the year when everything is at its most active and productive state. To connect with the season the play opens with an action scene of king Dushyanta chasing behind the “black buck” (Thapar 87). Through the black buck, Kalidasa not only starts the play but also alludes to the mythic story of Shiva. This forms a connection or a resemblance between the action of Shiva and Dushyanta.

Through the minute details such as the deer's "glances", "open mouth" and "half-chewed grass" Kalidasa is showing the fear that he is experiencing (Thapar 87). Romila Thapar addresses the antelope as 'he' because the antelope is a part of the hermitage. Since Dushyanta is a city man his perception of a deer is understood as an 'other' which is meant for hunting.

On the contrary, asceticism does not differentiate between humans and non-human beings. Ascetics believe in restoring harmony in nature. Whereas the King temporarily forgets the laws of harmony and is about to do an Adharmic act by hunting the deer.

To change Dushyanta's perception the Monk requests him to "withdraw" his weapons and use them to "rescue victims" and "not destroy the innocent" (Thapar 89). The advice makes Dushyanta realize that he was about to make a grave mistake that would label as a king with no mercy. The ascetic (Monk) woke Dushyanta ecologically and in return, he received the blessing of having an heir, whom he was pining for a long time. Since he is now on the premise of the hermitage he removes his jewelry and bow. It is to show respect towards the ascetics and the hermitage.

Kalidasa, with the help of Dushyanta, has specified the difference between sacred forest and the city. Rajendran mentions in his article that Dushyanta notices the presence of the "wild uncultivated rice" and the "crushed ingudi nuts" which reflects the fact that in the wilderness, germination takes place without the intervention of human beings (Rajendran 03, Thapar 89). On the contrary, in recent years genetically modified grains are widely consumed which gave rise to monoculture. In Vandana Shiva's words monoculture is one of the recipes "for desertification" (133). Mixing of crops or crop rotation in the plantain fields gives better results than monocultures (Shiva 103). The sacred grove in the play shows that the intermingling

of plants and beings, such as birds and bees helps in pollination, and the nutrient value of the grains increases as they are exposed to other plantains. Kalidasa is in favor of putting the beings of the earth under one sphere.

Penance of an Urban Man:

The king respects the hermitage. The moment Dushyanta was aware of the premise he de-armored himself and walked in barefoot. This makes Dushyanta an ecologically conscious king.

On the other hand, Dushyanta's city friend, Madhavaya, portrays the king's alter ego. With his sarcastic tone, he expresses the difficulties he faces in the sacred forest. His soliloquy, at the beginning of act two, reflects the distress and discomfort he feels towards the lifestyle of the grove. Like every other city person, Madhavaya is accustomed to the "urban space of pleasure" (Rajendran 05). The heat of the summer and not being able to drink the unfiltered water from the river Malini makes Madhavaya a city man who will never be able to live or have any will to adapt to the forest region.

In contrast to Madhavaya, the ascetics, Sharngarava and Saradvata perceive the royal palace as a "house in flames" (Thapar 132). Since they are accustomed to living in nature, the city's air seems to be impure and has a hypnotic element that makes a person's mind filled with fog from seeing reality and being a slave of materialistic possessions. The ascetics and Madhavaya play an important role in distinguishing forest and city in their perception. The rigidness of these minor characters helps in understanding the personalities of the time frame Kalidasa. Interestingly, these personalities are still found among us. The play is ancient but the diverse personalities of the characters are relatable.

Both the forest and the city create heat. The deep meditation performed by the ascetics and the sages generates divine heat which in Sanskrit is known as *Tapasya*. Whereas, the heat or fire Sharngarava mentions is the heat of sophistication and greed. The growth of civilization makes human beings drawn toward unrealistic possessions. As a result, attaining dharma becomes challenging. In today's context, rapid urbanization and industrialization have taken over the forest regions. The wave of extreme temperatures is nothing but the result of human greed. The element of heat symbolizes Agni/Fire, one of the elements of the earth. In the city sphere, the fire or the fumes is destructive and in the forest sphere, the heat produced from penance spreads positive energy and restores Dharma.

Protecting the Nature:

The microcosm of environmental degradation is seen through the discovery of the signet ring. A fisherman finds the ring from a fish that belongs to the king. The swallowing of the ring is a man-made product that caused harm to the river. On a large scale, this is the current condition of aquatic bodies around the world. In the past and present years due to rapid industrialization, waste materials are discarded the nearby water bodies by the factory. Toxins such as chemicals and minute metals come in contact with the water and alter the pH of the water. To develop the plot, Kalidasa made the ring lose but it also violates the water and the aquatic beings.

Through these minor events, one can relate to the fact that humans nowadays are neglecting the riches that mother earth has gifted us. Rivers and other large water bodies are filled with debris that is lethal to the fishes and other aquatic beings. Vedic seers considered water as sacred and ancient Indians used the resource by maintaining its purity (Sarma). Nimisha Sarma mentions that Vedic society believed that the earth itself is living and she is carrying all

the living and non-living beings. For instance, in the fifth act, when Shakuntala lost hope and expectations from everyone. She then pledged mother earth to take her away from the royal court. Sita had to experience a similar accusation and the earth rescued her.

Moreover, Vedic society did not discriminate between human and non-human beings and protected the environment (Sarma 221). In the play, Kalidasa showed the harmony between flowering plants, non-human beings (deer), and humans. At the beginning of the play, Shakuntala was found to be watering the plants that were in season and out of season with the same sisterly affection. It reflects on the teaching that humans should care for that environment even if it is not benefiting us at the moment. Withered leaves are nothing but a sign of death and sorrow but water helps to retain its youth. Since the world is one and we are part of an enormous family we need to be compassionate to one another.

The Aerial view of the Nature

Nature is showcased at its best when Dushyanta was returning from the war. While he was descending from the heavens he was glorifying the elements of nature. Dushyanta was observing the aerial view of the mountains, water bodies, and trees. Through Matali, Kalidasa is alluding to the myth of Vishnu and his strides which “bears the Ganga’s three celestial streams” (Thapar 158). To balance the play and restore its Dharma, Kalidasa brings the three spheres together; the natural sphere, the urban sphere, and the divine sphere. He reflected on the idea that without the knowledge of the three spheres one is unable to break the cycle of rebirths.

King: “ Mountain peaks emerge as the earth descends,

branches spread up from a sea of leaves,

fine lines become great rivers to behold-

the world seems to hurtle towards me.”

(Thapar 158)

(Line 8; Act 7)

The above lines depict the beauty and the emergence of the natural elements as the king descends from heaven. This reflects the idea of deep ecology developed by Arne Naess. According to Suprabha C.T, Naess does not define deep ecology rather he leaves us with a concept where every being is seen on a horizontal scale without discriminating (29). Therefore, the merging of the elements in the last act reflects the unity of living and non-living beings. Deep ecologists believe that “all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom” and wish to see the world return to its natural conditions (T 28). However, the mechanized world never stops interfering with the flow of nature. In the above dialogue, Dusyanta addresses the rivers as the fine lines that spread to the sea. Humans, non-human beings, and plants are dependent on rivers but constructing dams across a river only favors the human population.

Suprabha C.T argues that non-human beings and plants are deprived of accessing river water which is why several plants and animals are on the verge of extinction. Since the lives of these beings are negatively affected it also increases the risk of climate deterioration. Disruption is caused in the ecosystem and its consequences are faced by humans and the rest of the beings. Lastly, the aerial view from the play is a reminder to humankind that the ecosystem works when everything and every being lives and breathes in harmony. Exercising materialistic power over natural resources will bring destruction and discomfort.

Chapter 4

The Semi-Divine Tamarind among Sweets

King: “Her lower lip has the rich sheen of young shoots,
her arms the very grace of tender twining stems;
her limbs enchanting as a lovely flower
glow with the radiance of magical youth.”

Rajan 271

(Act one; line 20)

The above dialogue shows that it is Shakuntala’s physical appearance that made the middle-aged king fix his eyes upon her, like an eagle at its prey. He discovered her amid the forest grove where she was giggling and enjoying the company of her *Sakhi*/ friends. Unaware of her tragedy, Shakuntala solemnly committed herself to the service of her lord, the king. Her journey made her realize her real identity.

Abandoned by her biological parents, Shakuntala was found protected by non-human beings (birds). Although being a celibate Kanva Rishi showered his fatherly affection on her. Being raised in a forest grove and marrying the King made her face unexpected challenges. Her portrayal anticipates various ideas of ecofeminist critique which makes her one of the most influential female characters of all time. This chapter aims to answer Shakuntala’s grief and her recognition through settings, Dushyanta, and symbols.

Nature Nurturing Shakuntala:

Shakuntala’s first appearance in the play begins with watering the plants. She is showering her sisterly care to the plants that are blooming in season and are yet to bloom in the upcoming season. Shakuntala does not discriminate between humans, non-humans, and nature. The forest is

her home since she spent her childhood amid intense greenery (Kandel 31). However, her marriage had an impact and made her come out of her comfort zone which made her realize her true self.

Shakuntala was found surrounded by Shakunta birds from where she received her name. Nature protected her from harm and nature was with her from the beginning till the end of the play. In return, Shakuntala showered all her affection by devoting herself to taking care of the beings of Prakriti. For her, the beings of nature are one big family. This made her farewell one of the melancholic parts of the play. In the following dialogue act four when she was leaving for the city her adopted son kept clinging to her skirt.

Kanva: “The buck whose mouth you healed with oil
when it was pierced by a blade of kusa grass
and whom you fed with grains of rice-
your adopted son will not leave the path.”

(Thapar 124)

(Act four; line 14)

The Buck resembles Shakuntala's childhood. When she was abandoned, nature protected her through birds. Despite being a celibate, Kanva raised her like his own. He was there for her when she was an infant. When the buck was hurt by kusa grass, she took care of the buck and fed him rice. She is aware of the feeling of being abandoned, which is why she does not want her child (deer) to feel neglected and hands the responsibility of her son to Sage Kanva.

Vandana Shiva claims in her book *Staying Alive* that women are the preservers of nature. Women and nature represent Shakti which is the feminine and creative principle of the universe (37). Shakuntala is already a mother. Her empathy and humbleness are what has been tested

when she arrives at the royal court. Kanva, being the quintessential father and a celibate, advises Shakuntala to be patient and obedient but instead she was accused of being cunning and immoral.

Dushyanta and Shakuntala

The entire story revolves around the king and Shakuntala. In the first half of the play, Dushyanta kept secretly admiring Shakuntala. His competitor the bee was ahead of him in achieving close distance with Shakuntala. His jealousy of a simple bee shows his high level of physical infatuation for her.

The union of Dushyanta and Shakuntala came with penance. Since they got married in the presence of no mortal beings but gods, they had to live a certain period away from each other. After the marriage, Dushyanta left Shakuntala's mind entrapped in his thoughts. They were miles apart yet Shakuntala's mind remained captive in his thoughts. The curse may have erased Shakuntala from Dushyanta's conscious mind. However, his repressed subconscious memory made him remain anxious. It seems like Dushyanta had “no desire” for a “rustic girl” (Thapar 107)

In the second act, Dushyanta expresses his infatuation with his jester friend. Dushyanta doubts the fact that Madhavya might spill his secret love interest to the court women. To end the discussion, Dushyanta to stop him from gossiping says that his and Shakuntala's worlds are different and they are not a proper match. It foreshadows the later parts of the play. What Dushyanta shared with Madhavya shaped into a prophecy.

The Ring and the Poem:

The ring surely symbolizes the ‘love’ Dushyanta feels for Shakuntala. Both of them exchanged love tokens, but only the ring could make it through to the end of the play. What happened to the poem Shakuntala wrote to him?

The traces of gender did not leave when tokens were exchanged. Shakuntala, being the hermit girl, shaped her “tortures” of “love” in a form of a poem (Thapar 113). Limited with the writing resources, Shakuntala managed to “engrave” her thoughts onto a lotus leaf (Thapar 112). The leaf is more environmentally friendly than a metal ring. The ring from the king is made out of intense heat, far away from the realm of nature. The ring embodies the essence of kingship and power as it is not at all environmentally friendly. A ring is a man-made object that is used to place a stamp on the As the play proceeds the lotus poem withers and Kalidasa does not mention it in any other acts. However, the ring becomes the most significant ‘(re) cognition object’ that without it Shakuntala is no one to Dushyanta.

When Dusyanta and Shakuntala were left alone, the mighty king lost to hold onto his temptations and tried to seize “her by her garment” which in every context is inappropriate (Rajan 320). He then justifies his actions by convincing her to marry him through the “Gandharva rite” (Rajan 320). The king thinks he has rights over her and does not care about her consent. This proves that Dushyanta is in love with her physical appearance and does not respect her emotions.

United through Gandharva marriage the king’s ultimate purpose was to find a suitable body to plant the *bija*/seed (his heir). Dushyanta took advantage of Shakuntala’s naivety and chained her with his patriarchal values. The signet ring which he gave as a token symbolizes the

power that he possesses upon Shakuntala. However, Shakuntala's innocence transformed the meaning of the ring and its return of it made the king realize his mistake.

Shakuntala's transformation:

Shakuntala's voice and her presence fail to revive the memory of the king about their union. Moreover, the ascetics she came along with (re) abandon her. This left her with no other choice but to call upon nature to take her away similar to what Sita did in the *Ramayana*. This is the moment when the third world or the world of divinity intervenes. It made the king realize that Shakuntala belongs to the world of celestials. Right after, Mishrakeshi (Meneka's friend) rescues Shakuntala and ascends to heaven, Dushyanta at that very moment experiences unusual longing for Shakuntala, even though he is consciously absent from their marriage. Ecofeminists argue the slight hint of melancholy which he feels might be because celestials are by her side. Ankur Betageri claims that the reason behind Shakuntala's grief is her "extraordinary hybrid-otherness" which also makes her character much more superior to Dushyanta (5).

Furthermore, Betageri argues that Shakuntala was rescued by Mishrakeshi (Meneka's friend) to the world of immortals. In the process she dies. It is because Shakuntala, being a mortal, is not allowed to enter the world of divinity. This reflects on the death of Shakuntala's naivety and her rebirth "as a dutiful caste-conscious wife" (Betageri 181).

Through the discovery of the ring, Dushyanta regains his memories of Shakuntala. Out of remorse and guilt, Dushyanta cancels the spring festival. A battle between Dushyanta and Kalanemi brings the play back to where it began but this time in the back of his mind he is grieving for Shakuntala. In Marica's hermitage both of them reunited, but this time Dushyanta describes Shakuntala by her virtue and not by her appearance:

King: "Wearing dusty gray garments,
 her face gaunt from penances,
 her bare braid hanging down-
 she bears with perfect virtue
 the trail of long separation
 my cruelty forced on her."

(Thapar 164)

(Act seven; line 21)

In the earlier parts of the play, the king was glorifying her appearance by comparing her lips to "young shoots" and her "limbs" to "lovely flower" (Rajan 217). The rhetoric has changed and now her virtues are "perfect" and her face has shed some of its vibrance and turned into "pale-red flowers" (Thapar 164-165). However, Shakuntala could not recognize Dushyanta or maybe she does not want to after all he humiliated her and questioned her morals. She was hesitant to acknowledge Dushyanta as her husband. He released his mistake and his "carnal love" for her has transformed into "mature and spiritual love" (Betageri 6).

Lastly, the (re) cognition by Shakuntala puts an end to the play. Dushyanta makes an offering, similar to the innovation Kalidasa offers at the beginning of the play, giving the play a cyclical form. Through Dushyanta, Kalidasa seems to end it from his side and hands it over to the generations for interpretation. By balancing both the sentiments of the protagonists, Kalidasa not only restored Shakuntala's misery but also restored dharma. Attaining Dharma is one of the fundamental principles toward Moksha (eternal liberation). At a superficial level play does reflect on comic and romantic elements making it seem a romantic comedy. However, as we inspect between lines the play reveals its patriarchal side turning it into a tragedy.

Chapter- 5

Conclusion

Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* reminds us that we are part of nature not the other. The objective of the research was to portray the natural imagery, metaphors, and symbols Kalidasa has used to show the distinction between city and forest living. The magic about a classic is that it is relevant to all timelines. Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* helps to raise awareness regarding the present environmental crisis. The text is analyzed from a modern eco-centric lens. It is observed that Kalidasa kept a balance between the protagonist and nature. He did not discriminate against nature; rather he presented the beauty of nature by adding poetic touch to the dialogues of his characters. Eco-feminist Vandana Shiva argues that the feminine principle is called Shakti and the literal meaning of Shakti means feminine energy.

Since the play is adapted from Vyasa's epic, the characters Kalidasa designed are still found among us. The most relatable character is Madhavaya, who is desperate to leave the forest. However, the English translation did spread its essence but the analysis would have been more fragrant if I would have directly read the Sanskrit text. This brings to the limitation of the research. To conclude, the earth is our only home and together we are all family.

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