

Role of Nature in Abhigyan Shakuntalam by Kalidasa=

Kalidasa is a poet in Sanskrit literature who has infused the romantic spirit in it. In his verse and plays, Nature provides a setting for the main action. His poetic play Abhigyan Shakuntalam presents the main characters enacting the drama of emotions in Nature's sylvan surroundings. The opening pages of the play introduce Shakuntala as a child of Nature and she is often compared with flowers like Jasmine. On the other hand, her lover king Dushyant belongs to other world which is alien to Nature. Abhigyan Shakuntalam is a play of love, anxiety, separation and reunion. The story of the play is originally found in the book of beginning (Adi Parva) of the Mahabharata where king Dushyanta and Shakuntala enact the drama of passions and love. Shakuntala is the daughter of a celestial nymph Menaka who united with sage Vishwamitra. Shakuntala's mother belongs to heaven and her father lives on the earth.

After her birth, Menaka leaves her in a forest which is near to sage Kanva's hermitage. As an abandoned child, Shakuntala is saved by Shakunta birds (peacocks in the forest. So she is called Shakuntala. Sage Kanva takes this child to his hermitage where she grows up in the lap of Nature. Birds, animals and hermits are her companions. She also symbolises the world of innocence and Nature itself. She grows up as an embodiment of perennial beauty. In a modern epic Savitri by Sri Aurobindo, one finds the vivid description of the beauty of Savitri in exquisite words.

In Act I, King Dushyanta happens to be in the hermitage while chasing a deer. He is surprised to see the heavenly beauty of Shakuntala. It is his love at first sight and they enact the "Gandharva" kind of marriage in the forest. The king returns to his capital Hastinapur promising to send his men to take her with honour. One day, Shakuntala stands on the door of the hermitage, she loses awareness about her immediate surroundings. She is so much engrossed in her thoughts that the presence of sage Durvasa remains unknown to her. Sage Durvasa is known for his wrath and he curses Shakuntala. The king at once forgets everything about her under the spell of the curse. Later, on her way to her husband's house, she loses the signet ring and the king fails to recollect about her. In the Repudiation scene, Shakuntala stands in the court and her mother Menaka takes her away. Shakuntala gives birth to a child on Hemkoot mountain, the abode of sage Maricha. This place represents the ideal natural surroundings where everything exists in perfection. The poet gives a vivid description of the caves, mountains, forests, waterfalls, flora and fauna.

When king Dushyanta is summoned by gods in heaven to fight the demons, he returns victorious. On his way back, he stops on Hemkoot mountain. He remains wonder-struck to see this abode of adepts and realized souls. Earlier in the opening Act, Shakuntala appears as a perfect embodiment of ideal womanhood. The only comparisons for her beauty are to be found only in Nature. Shakuntala and Nature represent each other in their attributes. Her individuality consists in her harmony with Nature. Other heroines of Kalidasa such as Urvashi and Malvika enjoy a life of luxury but Shakuntala is a child of Nature. She has been brought up by Nature itself. Nature plays an important role in her psycho-sexual growth. Whenever Shakuntala appears in the play, she is accompanied by Nature in her different forms. She represents Nature in her beauty and feminine grace. Her permanent companions are birds, animals and plants in the forest. She has established human relationship with them and she calls them as her real kins. She has even given names to her pets.

She has established a kinship with Nature. She calls the Jasmine bush in the hermitage as 'Vanjyotsana' and a fawn as 'Deerghpanga.' Daily she waters the plants and feeds her pets. Then she takes food. No one can pluck flowers from trees. When flowers bloom in the garden, it is an occasion of celebration for her. Even the flora and fauna become co-sharers of Shakuntala in her joys. According to M.R. Kale, Kalidasa has always expressed himself against the background of Nature. Each of his works-Rtusamhara and Meghaduta, breathes of Nature and she is related to every tree, creeper, and every sprout. In the play, Nature is not acting against the human life, but as working in perfect harmony with it. This blending of Nature and human feelings is complete and it is impossible to think of one without the other.

When Kalidasa describes the beauty of Shakuntala, he draws images from Nature. Often she is compared with a flower or a delicate plant. She even marries her creeper sister Vanjyotsana to a mango tree. The little fawn follows her all the time. He does not drink water from the hands of Dushyanta. When Shakuntala bids farewell to the hermitage, and its inhabitants after her marriage, the whole nature sheds tears. Animals and plants express their grief over the departure of their companion. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi observes that Nature itself becomes a living character in the play. Nature has been a witness to all the major developments in the play.

Romila Thapar finds the play and its theme "a veritable treasure hunt with pointers" which has taken her far from the epic. Thapar observes, "In Shakuntalam we are in the realm of delicacy and romance, of anguish and imminent tragedy, of pathos and of happiness. The emotional range is infinite and in the intermeshing of emotions and the images of Shakuntala under goes a transformation." In Nature, one finds another face of Shakuntala. Kalidasa does not over-romanticize situation and characters. Even love may appear to be erotic, finally it leads to order and serenity of conjugal love. In the play, there is a search for harmonious conjugal love.