

Symbols and Motifs in Abhigyan Shakuntalam by Kalidasa=

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Kalidasa has made an extensive use of symbols and motifs in the play, Abhigyan Shakuntalam. The narrative of Shakuntalam opens in the forest where Shakuntala dwells in the hermitage of sage Kanva. King Dushyanta arrives in the forest while on a hunting trip. He is greatly impressed with the natural environment and peaceful ambience of the hermitage. The description of the hermitage, its dwellers, the flora and the fauna is elaborated in detail by the poet. These descriptions are rich in sensuous images, metaphors and symbols that heighten the poetic and emotional impact of the story.

The poet describes the power of the ascetics and this theme has been a recurring theme and a motif in Hindu mythology. Kalidasa has made use of motifs like the, 'curse motif' and 'the signet ring motif', along with the use of 'memory and recollection,' in the play.

The curse motif is an important recurrent motif in Indian mythology, where the curse by an ascetic determines the fate of the individual. It also affects the course of action in the Shakuntalam. The two motifs- the curse motif and the signet ring motif guide the course of the narrative in the Shakuntalam. After her Gandharva form of marriage with king Dushyanta, Shakuntala is totally lost in her dreams of love and companionship. When Dushyanta leaves for Hastinapur, he assures Shakuntala about her place in his household. He promises to send his men to take her to her real home with dignity. Meanwhile Shakuntala waits for the messengers.

Shakuntala waits and waits but no messenger appears at her door. She is pregnant and this worries her. One day, she stands on her threshold, lost in the sweet memories of her lover Dushyanta, sage Durvasa happens to pass by that route. He asks for alms but his words do not disturb her reverie. On seeing the indifference of Shakuntala towards an ascetic, the sage Durvasa is enraged and hurls a curse upon her that her lover would forget her. Shakuntala is so much engrossed in her thoughts that she does not know about this incident.

Her companions Priyamvada and Anusuya are a witness to all this. They request the angry sage to make some amendment in the curse. The sage makes a provision that on seeing some ornament of Shakuntala, her husband will be able to recognize her. Here Kalidasa makes use of 'the device of memory and recollection' to bring about the desired poetic effect and 'Rasotpatti' (experience of the artistic delight). Shakuntala remains ignorant about these developments.

The second important motif in the play is that of the signet ring (nam-mudra) which is given by Dushyanta to Shakuntala. A long time has passed yet no messenger comes from the royal court. Due to the effect of the curse, Dushyanta has forgotten everything about Shakuntala. Realizing that Shakuntala is pregnant, her foster father sage Kanva decides to send her to her husband's house. He sends some of his disciples and ascetics as escorts

with her to Hastinapur. When they reach the court in Hastinapur, Dushyanta is surprised to see a woman claiming to be his wife.

Dushyanta refuses to recognize Shakuntala because of the effect of the curse. Her companions Priyamvada and Anusuya ask Shakuntala to produce the signet ring given to her by the king himself. But the ring is missing and this complicates the matter. Her companions and ascetics leave her in the court and return to the hermitage. Shakuntala stands alone in the court with her head bowed down with humiliation. Kalidasa has presented this Repudiation Scene with unmatched artistic skill.

Shakuntala's real mother Menaka, a celestial nymph (an Apsara) is agonized to see all this. She descends from heaven and takes Shakuntala with her. Every one is amazed to see this incident. Dushyanta is amazed as well as shocked but couldn't recall anything. One day, his soldiers bring a fisherman with the king's 'nam mudra' in his hand. According to him, he had found this ring in the belly of a fish. Now on seeing his signet-ring, Dushyanta at once remembers Shakuntala and the effect of the curse is over. Dushyanta is filled with a sense of remorse and guilt for the ill-treatment with Shakuntala.

Now the reader or spectator learns that this ring had slipped off from her finger while washing her hands in the river. Again, chance plays its role in the play. The curse provides a turning point in the play and later the recovery of the lost ring leads to recognition. So these two motifs have been employed by the writer to bring about the desired poetic effect in the play. These motifs are also an integral part of the structure of the play.