

Environmental Consciousness in Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and Shakespeare's *As You like It*

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Abstract:

Ecocriticism deals with study of relationship between literature and environment. In the milieu of literature, Ecocriticism has its impetus on contemporary environmental issues and deals with human and non-human social life. Ecocriticism, fast emerging over the past few years, has offered a new area for the scholars, academicians and critics to pursue research and study in this direction. Kalidasa's Abhijnanasakuntalam brings forth before its readers ecological concepts like as relationship between man, nature and its prevailing culture. On the other hands, Shakespeare's As you Like It is regarded as "both a celebration and a critique of the pastoral". Both these great playwrighters are popularly known as the Poets of Nature. At this backdrop, the present paper makes an attempt to discuss Ecocriticism in Kalidasa's Abhijnanasakuntalam and Shakespeare's As You like It.

Key words: Ecocriticism, Ecology, Nature, Beauty, Character, Forest.

INTRODUCTION

Ecology being integral part of the world focuses on relationship with to man and nature. Ecocriticism is also reckoned through different names viz Green study, Environmental Literary

Criticism, Literary Ecology but on the top of all, the core objective behind all such writings is to understand and study the relationship between literature and physical environment. Ecocriticism covers ecosphere which includes all human and non-human worlds. In *As You Like It*, the forest environment affects the actions of the characters. Through relations with the nature, man becomes more in contact with a life which is fully of pleasures and contentment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Egan (2006) remarked that Ecocriticism has made its way into Shakespeare scholarship, investigating how characters throughout the drama of Shakespeare "speak of the world around them as though it is alive" relate themselves to nature, or see in nature the reflection of their fears, struggles, and desires. Brown (2010) examined that through the character of Jaques, Shakespeare "challenges readers to re-examine their relationship with nature and also with each other and urges them to make adjustments to their lives accordingly"

Dash (2015) found that even Kalidasa, in his play *Abhigyanam Shakuntalam*, accepted water as the evolutionary source of life viz. "ya srishti srishtiradya..." ('Water is the primary creation of the Creator,' 1.1)". Yashpal (2015) viewed that the writing of Kalidasa expressed the basic idea of human culture which is interconnected to physical world. The natural world is affecting to both human and non-human and also affected by both of these.

Agag (2016) found that an ecocritical reading of *As You Like It* as an example of how Ecocriticism may highlight aspects of the literary text that would help us see our contemporary world from a more ecologically aware perspective. Kumaresan, R. and S. Boopathi (2016) stated that in *As You Like It*, Jaques' character introduces an ecocentric twist in the play through his "compassion to the wounded deer.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE

This paper is based upon review of literature and secondary data collected from various websites, journals, news papers and reference books. Literature review has shown prior research work done in this area. Informal discussions/ deliberations with educationists have also been conducted and their views have been also incorporated. This paper discusses Ecocriticism in Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and Shakespeare's *As You like It*.

ECOCRITICISM IN KALIDASA'S ABHIJNANASAKUNTALAM

Except the fifth act of the drama almost all the acts have their settings admits nature where one can find a perfect harmony between man and nature. Nature plays a very prominent role in the advancement of the story. Kālidāsa was conscious of the fact that trees and plants are the key elements of the environment, play an imperative role in striking an ecological balance. The play opens with a benedictory verse, Nandi, where Kalidasa invokes lord Siva in his eight Forms as to protect the world. (i.e. the air, water, fire, earth and ether, the Sun and the Moon as well as the self).

या सृष्टिः स्रष्टुराद्या वहति विधिहृतं या हविर्या च होत्री
ये दवे कालं विधत्तः श्रुतिविषयगुणा या स्थिता व्याप्य विश्वम्
यामाहुः सर्वभूतप्रकृतिरिति यया प्रणिनः प्राणवन्तः
प्रत्यक्षाभिः प्रपन्नस्तनुभिरवतु वस्ताभिरष्टाभिरीशः
[*Abhijnanasakuntalam* Act I 1]

King Dusyanta enters the hermitage following a deer to hunt. He was restrained by from killing the hermitage deer. “राजन्नाश्रममृगोऽयं न हन्तव्यो न हन्तव्यः” After this, he withdrew his bow and bestowed blessing from the sage.

The king Dushyant is also captivated by the natural beauty of the forest so he wanted to purify himself with a sight of the holy

hermitage. “पुण्याश्रमदर्शनेन तावदात्मानं पुनीमहे”। Due the serene impact of hermitage, in the second act, king orders his troupe not to disturb the quiet atmosphere of the hermitage. i.e.

गाहन्तां महिषा निपानसलिलं शृङ्गैर्मुहुस्ताडितम्
छायाबद्धकदम्बकं मृगकुलं रोमन्थं अभ्यस्यतु
विश्रब्धं क्रियतां वहारततिभिर्मुस्ताक्षतिः पल्वले
विश्रामं लभतां इदं च शिथितलज्याबन्धं अस्मद्धनुः

Thus, it is seen that Kalidasa regards that hermitage located in the lap of the Nature as the best place for health, education and so on, besides the religious activities by the ascetics. In *Abhijnānaśakuntalam*, Kalidasa describes the Índudi nuts, the Darva grass etc. as medicinal plants through which he shows how a man can be benefitted by rich natural wealth of forest as even good health depends upon the plants. It also exhibits Kalidasa's awareness towards protection of treasure of forest. Kalidasa compares Sakuntala to many objects of nature. In the tenth verse of this play, the king says that she is like a flower as:

अनाघातं पुष्पं किसलयं अलूनं कररुहैरनाविद्धं
रत्नं मधु नवं अनास्वादितरसं
अखण्डं पुण्यानां फलं इव च तद्रूपं अनघं
न जाने भोक्तारं कं इह समुपस्थास्यति विधिः
[Abhijnanasakuntalam Act II 10]

Kalidasa describes that nature can share feelings and emotions like human-beings. King Dusyanta feels immense pleasure by the breeze and utters:

शक्यं अरविन्दसुरभिः कणवाही मालिनीतरङ्गाणां
अङ्गैरनङ्गतप्तैरविरलं आलिङ्गितुं पवनः
[*Abhijnanasakuntalam* Act III 5]

Similarly, in the fourth act of the drama, Kalidasa portrays nature endowed with sharp human feelings and emotions. Sakuntala has to go to her husband's house and her friends, Anusuya and Priyamvada are busy to collect the gifts from the hermitage for her decoration. She does not put on gold or diamond jewels rather her earrings, bangles and necklaces are made out of various kinds of colourful flowers and creepers.

तेन ह्येतस्मिंश्चूतशाखावलम्बिते नालिकेरसमुद्गक एतन्निमित्तं एव कालान्तरक्षमा निक्षिप्ता मया
केसरमालिका। तदिमां हस्तसंनिहितां कुरु । यावदहं अपि तस्यै मृगरोचनां तीर्थमृतिकां
दुर्वाकिसलयानीति मङ्गलसमालम्भनानि विरचयामि। [*Abhijnanasakuntalam* Act IV]

This mood is extended further in the Act IV, and is clearly reflected when Sakuntala departed from Hermitage and whole grove became very sad and appeared to be deserted. Kalidasa portrayed Sakuntala as a daughter of Mother Nature. She is as innocent, as pure, and as natural as the other inhabitants of the forest. Shakuntala is grown amidst flora and fauna and Mother Nature has imbibed all the good qualities of head and heart in her. She too has a sisterly affection towards trees and creepers of the hermitage. She never drinks water at first without watering the trees; and despite her weakness, she never plucks even a leaf for ornaments.

पातुं न प्रथमं व्यवस्यति जलं युष्मास्वपीतेषु या
नादते प्रियमण्डना अपि भवतां स्नेहेन या पल्लवं
आद्ये वः कुसुमप्रसूतिसमये यस्या भवत्युत्सवः
सेयं याति शकुन्तला पतिगृहं सर्वैरनुजायतां
[*Abhijnanasakuntalam* Act IV, 9]

In the departing scene of Act IV of the play, we come to know that whole forest has turned out to be pathetic as the female deer had dropped their halfly-chewed of darva-grass, the peacocks have given up their dancing, and the creepers shed tears in the form of falling off their yellow leaves.

उद्गलितदर्भकवला मृग्यः परित्यक्तनर्तना मयूराः

अपसृतपाण्डुपत्रा मुञ्चन्त्यश्रूणीव लताः

[*Abhijnanasakuntalam* Act IV, 12]

Moreover, she seeks permission from all the living and non-living elements of the hermitage before leaving for her husband's house. On Kanva's request they grant her permission on a very sad note and in gloomy mood. On this, the penance-forest also permitted her by the sweet note of a cuckoo employed by them to reply:

अनुमतगमना शकुन्तला तरुभिरयं वनवासबन्धुभिः

परिभृतविरुतं कलं यथा प्रतिवचनीकृतं एभिरीदृशं

[*Abhijnanasakuntalam* Act IV, 10]

Kalidasa presents king Dusyanta as the protector of environment. The fifth act clearly reflects the protective mind of Dusyanta. According to Kalidasa due to the impact of tranquil ambience of Nautre, the fierce animals forget their violent nature. Dusyanta becomes shocked to see that a little child, (Sarvadamana) for the purpose of playing, forcibly drags away a lion from its mother and counts its teeth.

अर्धपीतस्तनं मातुरामर्दक्लिष्टकेसरं ।

प्रक्रीडितुं सिंहशिशुं बलात्कारेण कर्षति

[*Abhijnanasakuntalam* Act VII, 14]

Ecocriticism in *As You Like It*

Shakespeare views that nature possesses unending joy and happiness. It has been shown with enduring, graceful and decorated beauty. Through his play, Shakespeare adds the holy,

transparent, elegant and glorious beauty of nature. In *As You Like It*, nature is not depicted as an inanimate object rather it is shown as a family member, a brother, a sister, or a friend. It has own feelings and emotion like human beings and can share with man at the time of joy and sorrow.

The description of nature in *As You Like It* associates with the Pastoral tradition. The beauty, serenity, and purity of the environment in the forest enables the play to provide a proper setting for development of themes such as of love, one prominent theme in the play. The majority of characters wander in the forest, comparing themselves to animals and birds.

In *As You Like It* images of animals, birds, and plants are used to refer to human beings and music and singing permeate the atmosphere of the play. Duke Senior refers to Jaques as being "transform'd into a beast" (II, vii, 1), Orlando describes himself as being like "a doe" going to find his "fawn" to give him food (II, vii, 28), and Celia speaks of her relationship with Rosalind as "Juno's swans" (I, iii, 72). The Forest of Arden is depicted as the real hero of the play. Forest of Arden presents before us a transformed Orlando and change of Oliver and Duke Frederick too are very significant and clear. Being a victim of the socio-political structure of the court, the feelings of kinship and other virtues were subdued in them but when they entered Arden, those qualities within them starting to emerge.

The forest in *As You Like It*, despite of Jaques' melancholy, the rough winter weather (II, ii, 26 and 7) and the existence of dangerous animals, is described as the most happening and happy place, with all the positive elements eliminating negative ones. Duke Senior's words describing his life in the forest proved this point:

"And this our life exempt from public haunt, 'Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything" (II, i, 15-17).

In *As You Like It*, the forest represents as an abode place for those who have problems in the courtly life and are in search of peace and tranquility. The forest offers them a great solace in form of a safe haven where regeneration and self-regulation are possible. The forest also portrayed as a place where people become better as Oliver admits:

“Twas I; but „tis not I. I do not shame
To tell you what I was, since my conversion
So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am”. (IV, iii, 135-7)

The forest of Arden is also described as a strong medium to bring a great change in the personalities of people who come in contact with it as Duke Frederick, who comes to the forest with the intention of killing Duke Senior, meets with a religious man and:

“After some question with him, was converted both from his enterprise and from the world; His crown bequeathing to his banished brother, And all their lands restored to them again That were with him exiled”. (V, IV, 157-161)

The play is quite successful in highlighting this fact that human beings become simpler and nobler when they come close to forest and Man is the master of his destiny in the forest. In the play, Jaques introduces an eco-centric point of view. He is an ardent lover of nature in its original essence. It is clearly reflected as towards the end of the play, he appears to be the only one who refuses to leave the forest. The forest environment has a vast impact upon the major and minor characters alike and offers them an opportunity of self-cleansing process.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The *Abhijnanasakuntalam* emerges before its readers as a wonderful citation of Kalidasa's love, sympathy, high gratitude as well as great consciousness towards environment. The natural beauty of the forest in *As You Like It* and its spiritual

and healing power is the main source of change in people and in social and political levels. Love and justice emerge victorious towards the end of the play. In these plays, both the dramatists portray almost each and every scene through the background of nature. They personified Nature and bring out the distinctive harmony between human beings and nature.

Thus, the literary works of Kalidasa and Shakespeare, the greatest dramatists are based on natural beauty and full of natural landscapes. Both the great poets of Nature portray adeptly the cherished relationship between man and environment. They never portrayed Nature as isolated from the human world. Both the great writers find immense joy in the leap of Nature as they consider Man and Nature are part of the organic whole living together in supreme harmony. They were concerned about this fact that for a fair environment both the animate and inanimate things should have equal and great significance. They appeared to put stress on environmental justice to a large extent. They present nature vividly relating with the human feelings and emotions.

Both the plays unfold unique human sentiment and value of nature which please to one and all. The beautiful and live description of nature, their views and thoughts definitely establish both theses scholars not only as great poets of nature but also as environmentalists too. By following their eternal lessons, compassion and morals, we can be overcome from the threats of environment and can lead a life in eco-friendly world.

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