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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO CLASSICAL SANSKRIT DRAMAS
'ABHIJNANASAKUNTALAM' AND 'MALAVIKAGNIMITRA'

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ABSTRACT

Abhijnanasakuntalam and *Malavikagnimitram* were legendary creation of Mahakavi Kalidasa. In the drama Kalidasa has laid out several worlds. First the world of Shakuntala, it is the green world of nature. Shakuntala is portrayed as the "lady of Nature". She is the child of nature. Right from her birth she was abandoned by Menaka. She was growing in the care of the birds. There is also a bird called "Sakunta". So the girl in the lap of the birds was named "Shakuntala". Unlike the other plays *Malavikagnimitra* depicts the court life of the Sunga emperor Agnimitra. This play is also written in five acts. The hero, Agnimitra is a real historical figure. He falls in love with one of his queen's attendants, who is finally revealed as Malavika, the princess of Vidarbha. Two of his queens oppose his love with the attendant. The eldest queen, Dharini reacts to the king's relationship with an attendant, as it is not the dignity of the king to marry an attendant. On the contrary Iravati, the youngest is jealous. Kalidasa does not show the heroic details in the play. The intrigue is restricted to the court. It is an intrigue at court, very different from other Sanskrit dramas. Kalidasa's works are remarkable for their poetic excellence. But *Malavikagnimitra* is more prosaic.

Keywords: Light and Dark, lady of Nature, separation and reunion, poetic imagination, etc.

Introduction

There are seven known works of Kalidasa: the plays *Malavikagnimitram* ("Malavika and Agnimitra"), *Vikramorvasiyam* ("Urvashi won by Valour"), and *Abhijnanasakuntalam* ("the recognition of Sakuntala"); the Mahakavyas ("epic poems") *Kumarasambhava* ("the birth of kumara") and *Raghuvamsam* ("the lineage of Raghu"); the poem *Meghaduta* ("the cloud messenger") and the poem *Rtusamharam* ("the gathering of the seasons"). The Encyclopedia Britannica has divided the works of Mahakavi Kalidasa into three groups. These are the dramas, the epics, and the poems. *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, *Vikramorvasiya* and *Malavikagnimitram* are the dramas. The epics include *Raghuvamsam* and *Kumarasambhavam*. *Meghadutam* and *Ritusamharam* are his poems. Every section of his creation has its own beauty and greatness.

Amal Dhari Singh gives his views on the idea of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* where Kalidasa has represented the old theme according to the high ideals of Hindu Religion. He has modified the story with his poetic imagination. His *Abhijnanasakuntalam* occupies the supreme rank in the presentation of ideal love in the whole range of Sanskrit Dramatic literature.

The most legendary dramas of Kalidas were *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and *Malavikagnimitram*. In *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, this is acknowledged as one of the world's masterpieces in drama Kalidas deals with the romance between Dushyanta and Sakuntala, their secret marriage, their separation, and their final reunion. In the second one, he deals with the theme of love between prince Agnimitra and the princess Malavika.

In the Study of Ghosh and others (2014) in relation to the comparative study of dramatic purpose of supernatural intervention of Shakespeare and Kalidasa, they found that Thus Kalidasa and Shakespeare unanimously believe in the theory of happy endings of their plays and the happy endings are made possible by the supernatural overriding the ordinary laws of nature. Thus both the dramatists use the supernatural to achieve the dramatic purpose. The danger is averted only through the intervention of divine elements in the end. Thus the supernatural occurrences serve to accomplish all significant turns in their plays. The supernatural events transform the tragic course of life into an instrument of good and their by suggesting the idea of providence or destiny which shapes human life.

While studying the representation of harmony between nature and human nature in the *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and the *Tempest*, Verma and others (2015) identified that the highest human values and spiritual significance win over all inhumanness and wickedness. Shakespeare has put most of his experience into the *Tempest* as Kalidasa has done into *Shakuntala*. Destruction and regeneration take place in both the plays. In the last Act of *Shakuntala* we see *Shakuntala*, the mother of *Bharatha* and the incarnation of goodness and *Dushyanta* is re-born through suffering. He is no longer the pleasure-seeking, romantic *Dushyanta* of the earlier acts. He too has passed through the ordeal of fire; he has gone through a long and austere *tapasya*. Suffering and penance makes him worthy of *Shakuntala*, the foster child of *Kanva*. A wicked and corrupt old world is destroyed and world as created in *The Tempest*, it is the "brave new world. The play breathes the very spirit of the Renaissance, the spirit of discovery and exploration. The Godlike reach of the human mind is in evidence everywhere in the play.

Dwived and *Chandra* (2017) studied on the portrayal of consistency between nature and human nature in the *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and the *Tempest*. They concluded that both Kalidasa and Shakespeare, as perfect literary artists, have greatly influenced the world of thought and action through their dramas. They were not of an age but are of all ages. They were dramas show an unrivalled elegance, felicity of expression, a mastery of rhythm and melody. There is much scope for the upcoming research scholar to make a comparative study of Kalidasa and Shakespeare analyzing their universality of theme and poetic genius. In the words of *William Wordsworth* (about a poet) it can be said that Kalidasa and Shakespeare are-"Endued with more lively sensibility, more Enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater Knowledge of human nature, and a more Comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be Common among mankind..." Both the plays celebrate goodness, human values, and reject the bolder and wicked confrontation of evil. Both plays are done in natural background, love.

It is said that when *Sir William Jones* translated 'Sakuntala' of Kalidas into English and published it in 1789, it created a sensation among the Europeans that such a brilliant play could have been written in ancient times, describing human emotion and feeling in such a wonderful way. The work was then translated to German, French, Danish, Italian and other languages. The celebrated German poet *Goethe* was so powerfully impressed by this magnificent work that he regarded it as the greatest drama ever written in any literature.

Discussion on *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

The drama *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is the most legendary and is usually adjudicated the best Indian literary effort of all the time. Taken from an epic legend, the effort tells of the seduction of the nymph *Shakuntala* by King *Dushyanta*, his denial of the girl and his child, and their subsequent get-together in heaven. The epic myth is important because of the child, for he is *Bharata*, eponymous ancestor of the Indian nation.

As destiny would have it, Sage *Kanva* happened to pass by that forest where he covered the newborn child, encircled by *Shakunta* birds. Taken by kindness, he makes a decision to take the child home and names her 'Sakuntala', which means one fed by *Shakunta* birds. *Sakuntala* nurtures up to be a beautiful young lady just similar to her mother *Menaka*. One day, King *Dushyant*, while returning from a deer hunt, happens to stop by the hermit's cottage. There he sees *Sakuntala* engaged in a friendly banter with her friends and immediately falls for her. In the absence of the sage, they secretly marry in the ceremony of "*Gandharva*

Vivaha" with Mother Nature as the witness. After some days, the King gets news of unrest in his city and is summoned to return. He leaves half-heartedly, but promises to return soon and take his beloved with him. As a token of love, he gives her a signet ring and promises to send an envoy to escort her to the palace. One day, sage Durvasa, infamous for his mercurial anger, stops by the hut for hospitality. Lost in her love thoughts, Sakuntala fails to acknowledge his presence. This infuriates the temperamental sage and he censures Sakuntala, cursing that the one whom she is thinking about will forget her. Sakuntala begs for mercy and explains her situation. On the plea of Sakuntala and her friends, the sage relents and says that if the king sees any significant souvenir that he gave her, he will remember everything. After months of waiting, when she fails to hear anything from the king, Sage Kanava arranges for the visit of Sakuntala to the royal court of King Dushyant. On her way, she stops by a lake to drink water and unfortunately the ring slips out of her finger and a fish swallows it. She reaches the royal palace, but Dushyant fails to recognize her because of the curse. She then remembers the ring but realizes that she has lost it somewhere. Dejected, she returns back to the forest. After sometime, an angler finds the ring in the stomach of a fish. He immediately takes it to the king, who on seeing the ring recalls everything and rushes to the hermitage to meet Sakuntala. There they reunite and later Sakuntala gives birth to a son, Bharath, after whom India begets her name.

Kalidasa rethinks the story into a love idyll whose characters represent a pristine aristocratic ideal: the girl, sentimental, selfless, alive to little but the delicacies of nature, and the king, first servant of the dharma (religious and social law and duties), protector of the social order, resolute hero, yet tender and suffering agonies over his lost love. The plot and characters are made believable by a change Kalidasa has wrought in the story: Dushyanta is not responsible for the lovers' separation; he acts only under a delusion caused by a sage's curse. As in all of Kalidasa's works, the beauty of nature is depicted with a precise elegance of metaphor that would be difficult to match in any of the world's literatures.

In Shakuntala, the play new characters were introduced to satisfy the needs of drama. Kalidasa created, Priyamvada and Anasuya, as the companions of Shakuntala. These characters were introduced not just to tease and play with Shakuntala. It is they who saw and understood the growing love of Shakuntala for Dushyanta. Their teasing and flattering provoked innocent Shakuntala to express her love in words. Each incident in Shakuntala's life was known to them – her love, marriage and even the curse that fell upon her.

There are lot of connotations between Kalidasa's Shakuntala and the episodes of Shakuntala in the Mahabharata. The variations in the first to fifth acts can more truly be said as the reshuffling of the episodes of Shakuntala in the Mahabharata. But the sixth and seventh acts are creations of Kalidasa's genius. These acts show clearly the strong support of Kalidasa for the ideals of Hindu religion. Birth of Bharata and the reunion of the separated hearts show that "beneficence achieves complete fruition" (Krishnamachariar).

The theme of the drama is based on the Indian philosophy that true love is immortal. Rabindranath Tagore has explained this theme of love in Kalidasa's Shakuntala: Kalidasa has shown that while infatuation leads to failure beneficence achieves complete fruition, that beauty is constant only when upheld by virtue, that the highest form of love is the tranquil, controlled and beneficent form, that in regulation lies the true charm and lawless excess, the speedy corruption of beauty. He refuses to acknowledge passion as the supreme glory of love; he proclaims goodness as the final goal of love. (Krishnamachariar)

Discussion on Malavikagnimitra

The third of Kalidasa's dramas, Malavikagnimitra, is of a different stamp—a harem intrigue, comical and playful, but not less accomplished for lacking any high purpose. The play (unique in this respect) contains datable references, the historicity of which has been much discussed.

The plot is a comedy that involves romantic relationships between a King and a humble maid. It is the tale of King Agnimitra's love for Malavika, who is an unheard of maid in the royal palace. It is said that this lady was proficient in dance and music. The way situations crop up between them and the way they handle it amidst confusion and jealousy is applaudable. There are many scenes of light hearted comedy, confusion and confrontation that make Malavikagnimitram one of the finest works of Kalidasa.

Thoroughly enjoyable, this play is the first work of Kalidasa. The skill with which he employs comedy, confusion and romance in a potpourri of romantic drama is truly the work of a genius. The smooth flow of the events adds to the continuity of the play. Though the play lapses in some aspect, yet on the whole, it bears the

trademark of the workmanship of Kalidasa. Agnimitra, though passionate is a bit passive and uses the help of his minister to help him win over Malavika and make her his queen. This play is a must read if you want to enjoy the purity of literature. The play is basically divided into 5 main acts.

Act I: In the first act two scholars, Ganadas and Hardatt, from the kingdom are shown fighting amongst each other to settle the question of who is more knowledgeable in the field of dance and drama. To solve this conflict King Agnimitra summons the chambermaid Malavika. It is made obvious that the king has some desires for her but he did not want to make them public as yet as he is already married to Queen Dharini. Malavika was a student of Guru Ganadas, one of the best if you will. He thought of using her in case of any competition. This little secret was known to Agnimitra's childhood friend and the court entertainer Gautam. Gautam also knew about king's little love crush on Malavika. It was in fact Gautam who sets up a competition between the two gurus so that he gets to see the much talked about Malavika finally. Side by side, a battle is planned against the King of Vidarbha. King's soldiers had captured his cousin Madhavsena by the. Madhavsena's sister escaped the capture. Kanchuki takes care of the preparations of the dance competition while Minister Amatya Vahtak prepares for the military attack. The king insists that Madhavsena's sister, Parivrajika Kaushiki, should be present during the dance competition and her decision will be the final decision.

Act II: Gautam's plan turns out to be successful and Guru Ganadas chooses Malavika to represent him in the dance competition. She performs a graceful and charming Chhalik playact on a quartet written by Sharmishtha. She looks so beautiful while dancing that the king cannot take his eyes off her. Even her voice enamors him. She sings about a beloved craving for her over. The king starts feeling like she is calling out to him and he loses himself into her song and dance. When she finishes, Gautam sees on king's face that he was dying to see Malavika smiling. Gautam makes a joke in the court and everyone starts to laugh and Malavika also smiles a little before leaving. This makes the king very happy. He loses all interest in the competition now. He does not really want to see the other dancers. Just when the king thought that he could not take any of this dance competition and cannot bear to see anyone else sing or dance, Vaitalik arrives. He announces the commencement of the lunch.

Act III: Queen Kaushiki's maid Samahitika and Madhukarika discusses the dance performance of Malavika and comes to a mutual consensus that she is going to win the competition hands down. They are also aware of king's feelings for her, so is everyone else in the kingdom. Now Malavika and Bakulavalika is sent to stand underneath the Asjka tree by the chief queen Dharini to perform dohada. Dohada was a ceremony of dancing which has the capacity of making the buds flower soon. The queen does not take part in the ceremony herself as her feet were hurting after a fall from the swing but she promises Malavika that if the tree blossoms then she will grant Malavika a wish of hers. At this time queen Iravati invites the king to come into the pleasure garden and spend some time with her. But the king was worried that he might not be able to be himself in front of his queens now that he had this burning desire for Malavika. But Gautam suggested him to not leave the side of his queens and continue being the same with them. There comes a point where the king, Gautam, Iravati, Bakulavalika and Malavika all come face to face in the pleasure garden.

Act IV: Queen Dharini gets know about the king's feeling for Malavika. She sends guards to capture Malavika and Bakulavalika and imprison them in the dungeons. It was ordered to not set them free unless someone produces the seal of her ring Nagmudrika, which would mean that it's an order by her. It was queen Iravati and her maid Nipinika who informs the chief queen about the feelings of the king for Malavika. The king decides to meet the queen in her chambers where she was getting her feet nursed and burning with anger. Gautam also assures the king that he will think of a clever idea and help in getting Malavika out of the prison. He fakes a snake bite and goes to the royal physician. There is chaos and disorder everywhere in the palace and it is spread out that the physician is asking for a talisman with an image of the snake on it to perform a medicinal ritual on Gautam to take the poison out of his body and save his life. In the disarray, Dharini gives away her ring without making sure where it is going and then the ring is shown to the keepers of the dungeons. Malavika is released.

Act V: The Ashoka tree is in full bloom after five days and the chief queen is now obliged to fulfill one wish of Malavika. In the mean while, the king of Vidarbha had been defeated and Madhavsena is set free. He comes back to the kingdom and reveals that Malavika is his sister who has been in hiding all this while. This makes the

chief queen very happy and knowing that her husband has fallen in love, she makes Malavika as one of his queens. Nobody has a problem with it now as everyone knows that she is of royal blood.

Conclusion

Abhijnanasakuntalam is a beautiful tale of love and romance, the name literally meaning 'Of Sakuntala who is recognized by a token'. Written by one of the greatest poets of India, Sakuntalam is synonymous with its author, Kalidasa. *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is the first Indian play ever to be translated into western languages. It is for the very first time translated in English language by Sir William Jones in the year 1789. Later to this, there were at least 46 translations of this play by Kalidasa in 12 different European languages. To know more about this beautiful play called *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, continue to read this insightful article on it.

The other play composed by the great poet Kalidasa is *Malavikagnimitram*. This beautiful play of intrigue grips its readers and keeps them glued till the very end. The plot of the play is cleverly constructed and it revolves around the King's love interest who is a maid in the royal palace. The construction of love plots and many incidents that make the story move further are commendable and are beautifully described, without deviating from the central theme.

Sanskrit drama like in *Abhijnanasakuntalam* ignores the unities of place and time. As against the Athenian stage, in Sanskrit drama, it is seen as the blending of tragic and comic. As opposed to Classical, the Sanskrit drama is essentially romantic in nature. It is also true that all these sources must have made important contributions to its growth and development. Sanskrit drama is a product of Indian mind that has a kaleidoscopic view of life. It has expanded itself under the influence of various factors – religious and secular, foreign and national, yet maintaining its own essence.

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