

## Depiction of Aashram in Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam*

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### **Abstract:**

*Aashram was a place where hermits lived in seclusion from the rest of the world for religious purposes. Originally hermitages were natural caves, a hut in the forest or temple ruins. Generally, these are situated in beautiful natural spots with many flora and fauna. Hermitage in ancient India is supposed to be a utopia. Kalidasa is considered one of India's greatest writers, dramatists and poets. Abhijnanashakuntalam is one of his finest creations, where he has presented a very lively description of Kanv Aashram. He has given a detailed description of the surroundings of Kanv Aashram in the drama. It is apparent that he was familiar with the location of Kanv Aashram, which is situated in Uttarakhand. The present paper explores how Kalidas has portrayed the ashram in Abhijnanshakuntalam.*

**Keywords:** Drama, plot, story, ashram, love, marriage, nature, forest

### **Introduction**

Kalidasa was a Classical Sanskrit writer. He is one of the greatest dramatists and playwrights of the nation. He is also known as Indian Shakespeare, who has penned his acclaimed work in Sanskrit. Kalidasa's works are mainly based on *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and Vedas. His surviving works consist of three plays *Malavikagnimitram*, *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, two epic poems, *Raghuvamsa* and *Kumarsambhava* and two shorter poems *Ritusambhara* and *meghduta*

In the words of Hazlitt, 'he was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be'.

His poetical production is the immortal monument of his surpassing poetic excellence. We must satisfy ourselves with little information we have about him. Kalidasa was supposedly born in Ujjayini. He was brahmin and devotee of shiva. His graphic description of the Himalayan scenes looks very much like that of one who was an eyewitness. His works bear further testimony to his considerable acquaintance with the Vedas, the philosophy taught by the Upanishads, The *Bhagavadgita*, The Puranas and Vedanta as propounded by Badarayna, Medicine and the rudiments of Astronomy. Except for these facts, nothing is known about the poet at present. The most convenient and reliable method of studying the development of the poet's mind and its relation to his productions would be to read his works in chronological order. But we have no external evidence whatsoever to ascertain the chronology of Kalidasa's work. It must therefore be based wholly on internal evidence.

Kalidasa is indisputably the greatest mastermind in Sanskrit poetry. His genius has been recognised in India from very early times. His fellow citizens have cherished him as the prince

of Indian poets. Goethe has voluntarily bestowed his praise on him. He was stuck with his poetic genius. This is what he says about the Shakuntala.

“Wouldst thou the young year’s blossoms and the fruits of its decline,  
And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted fed?  
Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one sole name combine?  
I name thee, O Sakuntala! and all at once is said”

Kalidasa’s merits as a poet cannot be said to be determined. His poetic genius has brought Sanskrit poetry to the highest elegance and refinement. His style is peculiarly pure and chaste. It has ‘neither the laxity of the Puranas nor the extravagant colouring of later poems’ An unaffected simplicity of expression and an easy flowing language mark his writings, which are embellished with similes unparalleled for their beauty and appropriateness. It is a principle recognised by all the modern critics that ‘Nature must be the life and essence of poetry’, and in respect of this, Kalidasa may be said to be essentially a poet of nature. He is a master of the acknowledged skill.

### Review of Literature

M.R. Kale says The *abhijnanashakuntalam* is an exceptional work of the great poet and playwright Kalidasa, the brightest star in the firmament of Indian poetry. No other composition of this poet displays more the richness of poetical genius, the warmth and play of fancy, the profound knowledge of human heart than this masterly production.

Ashok Kaushik states that Kalidasa’s position in the Sanskrit literature is unequalled. Kalidas was one among the *navratnas* (nine jewels) of emperor Vikramaditya. During olden times, the cabinet of ministers of the emperors used to be called *ratnamandal* (galaxy of jewels). Ministers were akin to jewels in those times. It is difficult to say who was more bright, brilliant and influential than who among the *navratnas* of Vikramaditya. As Kalidas holds a unique position in Sanskrit Literature, his work was also unique. Ministerial cabinet of Vikramaditya. A lot has been said about the narrative compositions of Kalida in Sanskrit literature. We consider it necessary to bring them up to get acquainted with Kalidasa’s composition.

The story has been described in the form of play. The dialogues are full of romances, thrill and zest for life. Two young persons, Dushyant and Shakuntala, fall in love with each other in the lap of nature. Then comes separation. Finally, they reunite, thanks to the ring found by a fisherman under the weirdest circumstances. This ring was given by Dushyanta to Shakuntala and lost by the latter. A love tale has never been so finely described by any other Sanskrit scholar. Kalidas used good Sanskrit verses to push the story ahead at a fast pace. Dialogues are terse, in context with the story and heart-piercing, especially the romantic ones between Shakuntala and Dushyanta. This classical play has been staged in various parts of the world. It has also been translated into many global languages. Centuries after it was created, it still remains an enthralling piece of literary perfection.

Dr. Nisha Francis (2017) states that A look into sage Kanva's ashram reveals the beauty and uniqueness of nature. Kalidasa describes the forest path to the ashram as a path strewn with "wild grain under the trees" where the "parrots nest in hollow trunks". The stones on the path are "stained by the dark oil of crushed ingudi nuts", and the deer that trust the human voices "do not break their gait". Nature is undisturbed, and the fallen grains and nuts lie under the plants and trees untouched by humans, and the deer do not stop amid its movement in the presence of humans around it. The reader can only marvel at the unpolluted environment of 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 happiness. The emotional range is infinite, and in the intermeshing of emotions and the images of Shakuntala undergoes a transformation." In Nature, one finds another face of Shakuntala. Kalidasa does not over-romanticize situations 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.

Dr. Nalini Gandhi Kapoor explains. This play is a great blend of nature and human nature. Be it Shakuntala's relation with king Dushyanta, hermits pleading with Dushyanta over deer or Shakuntala's leaving the hermitage to join her husband. All incidents are sublime and so much part of nature. Value for nature and connection with nature are the two thoughts that provide the background for the entire play. Towards the end of play, we are introduced to transformed Shakuntala, king Dushyanta and their son Bharata. Shakuntala offspring of nature is a mother subsequent to bearing hardships, unites with king Dushyanta, who also has gone through incredible sacrifice - the impact of the curse. We see the development of all characters. Thus a converging of human instinct and nature.

Kalidas is undoubtedly the greatest poet; his works have created awareness amongst people regarding the environment. After reading *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, we are exposed to the world where the earth is considered a sacred space. We come to know that since Vedic times, nature was worshipped.

Rooble Verma (2015) found. In drama, *Abhijnanshakuntala* is the most famous and is usually judged as the best Indian literary effort of any period. Taken from an epic legend, the work tells of the seduction of the nymph Shakuntala by King Dushyanta, his rejection of the girl and his child, and their subsequent reunion in heaven. The epic myth is essential because of the child, for he is Bharati, the eponymous ancestor of the Indian nation (Bharatavarsha, "Subcontinent of Bharata"). Kalidasa remakes 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 literature.

### Research methodology of the study

This is qualitative research that aims at critical textual study based on a primary and secondary source. This paper is primarily based on literature review and data collection from different sources like newspapers, journals, different websites etc. This paper discusses the depiction of Ashram in Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam*.

### Concept of Ashram in Abhjnanshakuntalam

Hermitages in ancient India were situated in a beautiful forest with a lot of greenery and natural scenery. The atmosphere of those places was tranquil and peaceful, where many animals and birds took refuge. Hermitage is a place in which all the ascetics are pretty content. Nature provides a background of the play. Hermits' daily routine was to meditate, gather firewood for fire sacrifice and take care of wild animals. Kalidas has described such hermitages in his play *Abhijnanshakuntalam*. Kanv Rishi had so much love for the plants and animals that he cared for them like his own children. Holy trees, birds and animals surrounded his Ashram.

In the first act, we can see that king didn't even enter the ashram with his royal dress. He removes all his jewels and arms before entering the Ashram. Hermitages were known for hospitality. Anyone who goes there could have food and shelter. Ashram has played a vital role in *Abhijnanshakuntalam*. All the significant incidents took place in the ashram only like the Arrival of king Dushyant, the curse of Durvasa Rishi, the departure of Shakuntala from Ashram, the birth of Bharata. Kalidasa has always expressed himself against the background of nature. Each of his works, particularly *Ritusambhara*, *Meghduta* and *Abhijnanshakuntalam*, breathes of nature, and it appears that nature has entered into his bones, as it were.

In *Abhijnanshakuntalam*, Ansooya says to Shakuntala that father Kanv loves the trees of the ashram more than you; otherwise, why should he assign the task of filling the watering can to someone like you who is delicate as the bud of jasmine? And Shakuntala replies I do not irrigate these trees just because father has assigned this task to me she further says I love them like my kin; therefore I do all these. Shakuntala talks to trees of the ashram as if they were her sisters and same with deers and birds of the forest. She even gives the name 'Van Jyotsana' to the creeper. Hermits had a very contented life. They ate fruits and vegetables from the trees and led a simple life with minimum needs. They fetch flowers and leaves from the vines and trees for the ornamentation of Shakuntala. Some trees offered auspicious clothes; some offered mahaavar (red colour used by ladies to beautify their feet), competing with the buds, giving away many ornaments.

Every act of the play, except the fifth act, has its setting amidst nature. In the first act, we find a black-spotted deer, with its neck turned and hindered part of the body contracted, galloping

fast for fear of the arrow of the persuing king. In the precincts of the hermitage, we find wild rice fallen under the trees that abound in the nests of birds, deers moving fearlessly, and the tender sprouts with a changed colour owing to the smoke arising from sacrificial fires. In hermitage, there are creepers like Navamalika, trees like Kesara and the hovering Bhramara. Near the hermitage, there is a seat covered with the dense shade of the Sataparna trees. A thickly inter-woven creeper bower, in the forest and outside the camp of Dushyanta forms the background of the second act, Shakuntala is to be found on the bank of river Malini, in a creeper- bower enclosed by canes, and where the cool breezes blow, with the fragrance of lotuses and cool particles of the river the fourth act, in brief, reveals the world of nature.

After getting married to King Dushyant, Shakuntala was daydreaming about her new husband. One day a powerful rishi came to the ashram but lost in her thoughts, she failed to welcome Rishi Durvasa. Angry Rishi cursed her, saying that the person she was dreaming about would forget her altogether. But one of her friends explained everything to Durvasa, so he modified his curse and told the person who had forgotten her would remember everything if she showed him some personal token given by him. Time passed, but Dushyant didn't return for Shakuntala, so she finally decided to go to the capital to meet her love.

As the time of her departure is coming near, the sacred grove also appears to be sad. The deer are regurgitating the chewed morsels of the grass. Peacocks have stopped dancing, and trees shed tears in the form of leaves. She never used to drink water without watering the trees of tapovan; she never touched their delicate leaves, despite the fact she loves ornament. Shakuntala is the daughter of nature. Nature is her mother, and so she has affection for every tree, for every creeper and every sprout. She can forget herself but not Navamalika creeper. The flowering season of nature is a great festival for her. She was always delighted to see new buds of flowers. The same Shakuntala is going home, and the plants of the ashram are sad. The trees, which were Shakuntala's companions of the ashram and other birds who have the cuckoo's voice, are wishing her good fortune and a bright future ahead of her. Shankutala says to van jyotsana. Despite being clung to the mango tree, do embrace me in the arm of your branches. I am going far away from you. Before leaving the hermitage, she embraces the Vanjyotsana creeper and leaves it under the care of her friends. She used to apply Higota oil to the mouth of young deer, which is wounded slightly while eating the Darbha grass. She used to feed him a fistful of millet grains every day. She is anxious about the pregnant deer. She writes a love letter on a lotus leaf, sleeps on a flower bed, and wears a lotus stalk bracelet. The same affectionate deer stops her from leaving the ashram and pulls her garment. Even nature has a deep affection for Shakuntala, The foliage of the Kesara tree invites her. Indeed, mother nature has to decorate her daughter. The affection between Nature and Shakuntala is so deep that Kanv rishi first requests nature to allow Shakuntala to go to her husband's place.

The scene of the fifth act is the royal palace of Dushyanta at Hastinapur. We are not in hermitage, yet we are not entirely away from nature. The sixth act begins with a scene in Pramadavana, blooming with spring. The king and Vidushaka talk in the bower of Madhavi

creepers. In the seventh act, we have king Dushyanta coming down from Heaven to the Earth through the region of Pravaha Vayu and the region of clouds. Later on, we have the hermitage of sage Marica, which abounds with trees like Mandara, Kalapavriksha and Ashoka and a lake with golden lotuses.

When the king returns to the hermitage, he comes across a very courageous child. Two female hermits were coming behind him. That boy pulls the cubs apart and forces them to play with him. In this tussle, his locks have been dishevelled. He says, o lion! Open your mouth; I will count your teeth. The female hermit tries to stop his pranks. Looking at the child's hand king says The sign of sovereign king can be seen on his hand. Spread for a toy; this palm seems like the lone lotus that shines with the readiness of daybreak and has not yet bloomed. Female hermit takes the name of Shakuntala. The child is so attached to his mother that he is baffled by merely listening to the sound of his mother's name. Dushyant thinks why this naughty child seems so dear to him. Finally, the king realises that he is the child's father, and the reunion of Shakuntala and Dushyant takes place. Nature comes alive in the play. Every season plays an essential role in *Abhijnanashakuntalam* play starts in the month of summer and ends in spring. Kalidasa describes the beauty of forest and hermitage in a way that makes us astonished.

### Conclusion

We find nature not as working against human life but as working in perfect harmony with it. This blending of nature and human feeling is complete, and it is impossible to think of one without the other. Ashram has so much love and affection for Shakuntala that that separation from her is excruciating for it. In the play, the ashram is perceived as having emotion like a human, and one need to handle it with care and affection.

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