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REPRESENTATION OF HARMONIOUS RELATION BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE IN THE  
*ABHIGYANANASHAKUNTALAM*

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ABSTRACT

Great writers of the world have never depicted Nature as separate from the human world, for them Man and Nature are part of the organic whole, living together in harmony. India has the heritage of treating nature as God, and an entire chapter has dedicated to the forest, in the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. In ancient Sanskrit literature, nature has always revered as something sacred, and the great Sanskrit writers spurn the exploitation of nature and have motivated its preservation with love and affection. Kalidasa, one of the shining stars in the firmament of Indian poetry, whose works presents a perfect fusion of natural beauty and human emotions. In Kalidasa's most acclaimed work *Abhigyanasakuntalam*, humans and nature share an ardent relationship which makes separation of one poignant to another. The heroine, Shakuntala, being nurtured by nature is the embodiment of benignity. Nature provides the background for play, and even it is equal to a character. The play lays emphasis on the preservation of nature. Kalidasa paints a story using nature, and he depicts how love occurs in nature, and how man and nature love each other. The present paper deals with the representation of the relationship between man and nature, in the play.

Key words: harmony, human nature, nature, benignity, harmony, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is profoundly rooted in nature. The pristine nature serves as an important source of inspiration for writers, and all great writers of the world have written about the majestic nature. In fact, great writers have never depicted Nature as separate from the human world, for them Man and Nature are part of the organic whole, living together in harmony. India has the heritage of treating nature as God, and an entire chapter has dedicated to the forest, in the Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In the ancient Sanskrit literature, nature has always revered as something sacred, and the great Sanskrit writers spurn the exploitation of nature and have motivated its preservation with love and affection. Kalidasa the greatest Sanskrit poet and dramatist based his works on *Puranas*, and his most acclaimed work *Abhigyanasakuntalam* has an iconic status in Indian literature as well as world literature. Kalidasa, one of the shining stars in the firmament of Indian poetry, whose works presents a perfect fusion of natural beauty and human emotions.

The story of the play has taken from Adi Parva of *Mahabharata*. The play portrays a vibrant and colourful romantic story of, with slight variation from the original story. The story is about the love between Shakuntala and king Dhushyanta, his rejection of her and their later reunion in heaven. Nature provides background for the play and even considered equal to the character. Nature is not presented as a hostile element in the play, but as a companion that needs preservation, with love and affection. Shakuntala, the heroine, being nurtured by nature, becomes an integral part of it. In the play, humans and nature share an ardent relationship which makes separation of one poignant to another.

The play opens in an idyllic hermitage of sage Kanva, where life flourishes in the perfect harmony of nature and human life. When Dushyanata reaches the precinct of the hermitage the protective nature of the hermits comes to light as they save, a deer from King Dushyanta's arrow, during his hunting expedition, and they forbid Dushyanta from exploiting nature. He also sees Shakuntala and her maidens watering plants and delighted in their budding. These incidents show man's care and love for nature and a good illustration of preservation of nature. In the introductory scene of Shakuntala and her maidens, Anasuya and Priyamvata, King Dushyanta calls them as "Flower-children of the wood" which shows that they are very much part of nature itself. Shakuntala, the heroine who grows up in the lap of Mother Nature, has an innate attachment to nature. For Sakuntala, trees are her sisters, and she finds delight in their service. In the play, we could see Shakuntala's intuition that, the mango tree is trying to tell her something which shows her ability to perceive the emotions of nature. As Priyamvata tells that the budding of spring-creeper indicates Shakuntala's imminent marriage, for Father Kanva tells it is a symbol of her happiness, it becomes clear that nature is so integral to their life that they associate changes in nature with changes in their life. Here, the presence of humans adds to the landscape but never overpowers or controls it.

In Farewell act, while asking nature to bid farewell to Shakuntala Sage Kanva talks about her love for nature:

O trees of pious grove, in which fairies dwell  
She would not drink till she had wet  
Your roots, a sister's duty,  
Nor pluck your flowers; she loves you yet  
Far more than selfish beauty.  
'Twas festival in her pure life  
When budding blossoms showed; (*The Abhigyanshakuntalam* , IV)

From this speech, we can infer Shakuntala's selfless love and care for nature. She has more concern for their comforts than hers. When Shakuntala departs, Anasuya and Priyamvata cries out: "Holy father, the grove will be a perfect vacuity without Sakuntala"; being soul mates Shakuntala's departure creates a gap in nature. Works like *The Tempest* and *Riders to the Sea* presents man's control over nature, and man's conflict with nature, respectively. But this play has accentuated the harmony with nature; here nature is not presented as something to be conquered but to be preserved.

Sri Lankan, J. Tilakasiri has written an article, *Kalidasa's Poetic Art and Erotic Traits*, in which he tells that Kalidasa links womanly beauty with natural beauty not simply in an idealistic fashion, but realistically as well (Tilakasiri 368). Further, he adds, Kalidasa is successful in instituting complete identification between nature and womanhood, and in so doing conveying a more mature character to the nature images ( Tilakasiri 367). Kalidasa uses nature to describe the beauty of Shakuntala, in the play. Shakuntala is endowed with both nature's beauty and purity. Dushyanata has enticed by the beauty of both nature and Shakuntala. Dhushyanta has not fallen in love with pretty Shakuntala, alone; actually, he is enticed by the whole idea of a benign natural beauty, in the forest.

Life of Shakuntala being so much merged with nature, it can't bear her separation. They grieve along with hermits:

The grass drops from the feeding doe;  
The peahen stops her dance;  
Pale, trembling leaves are falling slow,

The tears of clinging plants. ( *The Abhigyanshakuntalam*, IV)

In the play, Shakuntala adopts and showers motherly on the fawn, which was orphaned soon after its birth; and she requests, her foster- father to take care of the spring-creeper, she loved as her sister. She also asks him to send her the good news of the happy delivery of the pregnant doe. These incidents indicate her love and care for nature. She loves nature immensely that she makes no distinction between man and nature. In turn, nature also loves her so much that it showers its benevolence in the form of clothes and Jewels, during her departure. Kalidasa considers nature to be more than a collection of trees, plants, hills, etc. to him nature has personality, almost similar to man. Here, the strong emotional bond between man and nature becomes apparent. As repudiated by her husband, Shakuntala shows the courage to face it, without losing self- respect and after that, she leads the life of an ascetic and forgives her husband. She acquires qualities like patience, courage, self- respect, purity, etc. from her foster mother, nature, which becomes her possessions in her life journey. We can infer that close attachment to nature, teach us to handle life more precisely.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Nature is instrumental in the story. Man and nature live with amity, in the serene atmosphere of the hermitage. As they have an abiding faith in each other, their life becomes peaceful and buoyant. This play celebrates the beauty and divinity of nature. The heroine, Shakuntala, becomes nature's companion, and her association with nature being so cordial that, she finds happiness in serving nature. Shakuntala, who grows up in the lap of Mother Nature, can be seen as the embodiment of benignity who is innocent of ethical dilemmas. We can say that Shakuntala is the quintessence of living things because in them we recognize the warmth and tolerance by which life flourishes, and the Kindliness of her heart surpasses the pathos of her fate. Shakuntala shows selfless love to all creatures ranging from shrubs, trees, flowers, birds and beasts to her friends, hermits and most to her husband. In turn, nature has so much fondness for Shakuntala that separation from her is excruciating for it. In the play, nature is perceived, as having emotions like humans and it stresses the need to handle it with care and affection. The play lays emphasis on the preservation of nature. Kalidasa paints a story using nature, and he depicts how love occurs in nature, and how man and nature love each other.

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