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ABHIJNANSHAKUNTALAM: A STUDY IN ECO-CRITICISM

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ABSTRACT

Writers like William Wordsworth and Thomas Hardy inspired Cheryll Glotfelty to postulate her theory of eco-criticism. Like Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native*, Kalidasa's Shakuntala in *Abhijnanshakuntlam* is the true child friend and lover of nature. Her attachment and deep association with nature elements calls for a eco-critical study of the work. Kalidasa shows a great relation between man and nature in this play. Not only Shakuntala, even king Dushyanta is very close to nature. The paper demonstrates that there is ample scope for a full length study of the play with eco-critical perspective.

Key Words: Blossom, ecology, environment, flowers, groves, nature, Rishi, sanctuary.

Writers like William Wordsworth and Thomas Hardy inspired Cheryll Glotfelty to postulate her theory of eco-criticism. Glotfelty is considered as the mother of eco-criticism in the USA. Peter Berry quoting Cheryll Glotfelty's definition of eco-criticism writes, "Simply defined, eco-criticism is the study of relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Peter Berry: 239). Just to prove the theory with example one can quote the famous novel *The Return of the Native* by Thomas Hardy. The Protagonist of the novel Clym Yeobright is the product of nature and he merges his identity with nature:

If anyone knew the heath well, it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substances and with its odours. He might be said to be its product... Take all the varying hates felt by Eustecia towards the heath and translate them in loves, and you have the heart of Clym. (*The Return of the Native* 205)

In Sanskrit literature, Shakuntala the heroine of Kalidasa's play *Abhijnanshakuntlam* is the product of nature Like Clym Yeobright of *Return of the Native*. Shakuntala was the daughter of Menka, the divine dancer and Vishvamitra. Her mother departed to heaven leaving the infant upon the earth and the young babe was protected by Shakun birds hence she was named Shakuntala. Not only this, Kalidasa shows a great relation between man and nature in this play. The school of the great teacher Kanva is in forest area and within the boundary of the school the hunting of the wild animals is prohibited. In the first act of the play the king Dushyanta chases the deer who is running fast and he targets his arrow at the deer. Just then the disciples of Rishi Kanva request the king not to kill the deer as it lives in the Ashram. It is to be noticed that the king at once

asks his charioteer to stop the horses. The student says, "Quickly withdraw your well-armed arrow bound/ to protect the distressed, not strike the poor." (Kalidasa: *The Loom of Time* 113)

Kalidasa with his sharp observing faculty uses nature images to predict the future events. Ansuya informs Shakuntala about the marriage of Jasmine who has chosen the mango tree as her bridegroom. Shakuntala loves the Madhvi bush as her sister.

In the second act of the play when the captain of the Royal army comes to the king and tries to motivate him for hunting, the king says that he should take rest as this is the sanctuary area and they should not kill the wild animals there. He asks his army captain to allow all animals to enjoy their activities:

Let bisons plunge into forest pools and revel splashing,
Striking the water repeatedly with their mighty horns
Let the herds of antelopes clustering in groups in the shade
Chew the cud undisturbed. (KTLT191)

It is the Fourth Act of the play that presents the deep relation between humanity and nature. They go hand in hand in this drama of Kalidasa. The disciple of Sage Kanva comes out of the hut in the early morning to know the time. He beautifully describes the morning time as the union of joy and sorrow, loss and profit and rise and fall of human life. In his description of the moon's departure he also predicts about the departure of the king. At the same time sun is arising in the sky from the east that symbolizes new hopes. When the moon sets in the morning, the flowers of moon lotus (female) have withered. These lines suggest the pain of Shakuntala after the king's departure:

Now that the Moon has set, the pool of moon lotuses
Delights not my eye - her beauty is but a memory.
The grief of women left alone when loved once
Travel far beyond, measure hard to bear. (KTLT217)

Priyamvada, the friend of Shakuntala, informs Ansuya that sage Kanva has received the information by aerial voice that Shakuntala is married to Dushyanta and is pregnant by him. Sage Kanva grants his relationship and orders the friends of Shakuntala to make the preparation of her departure. They come to Shakuntala who after having bath, sits surrounded by the wives of the sages. They bless her simultaneously to be respected by husband and get a great son then the ladies depart from there. The two friends decorate Shakuntala not with golden ornament but the ornaments of flowers gifted by trees and creepers. Kalidasa shows the nature of Shakuntala and her relation with nature. When Sage Kanva, in the beginning of the play had gone out for pilgrimage, he had handed over the care of plants and trees to Shakuntala. She too, like a mother is fond of all trees, plants and animals of the sanctuary. It becomes a pastoral play in the sense that is told by the disciples of the sage. They inform the surprised Gautami, the wife of Kanva, that the sage had ordered them to bring adornment for Shakuntala from the garden where one tree offered the pale bright ornament of the silk. Another tree gave red rose juice to decorate her feet and one invisible tree fairy gifted soft and beautiful and rich jewels for her decoration-

A certain tree produced as if by magic
Garment of silk pale bright as moonbeams
Fitting for this most auspicious occasion.
Another noble tree poured out rich rose red juice.
To tint beautifully her tender feet. (KTLT221)

Shakuntala is in complete tune with nature. She never drank water before watering the plants. She loves flowers but she never plucks them. She celebrates the season of blossom as festival. Kanva a wise sage begs

permission to the trees for her safe departure. In Britain, the theory of eco-criticism is commonly known as Green Studies. As in America the eco-criticism had roots in the works of Emerson, Thoreau and Margaret Fuller, so in England the Romantic Movement paves the way for green studies. No doubt Wordsworth stands at the top who says that nature never betrays a man who loves her; surely like pantheistic Indians he felt divine presence of God in every aspect of nature. Accurate in Wordsworthian diction Indians are pagans, the worshipper of nature. One can see Indians, worshipping the tree, plants, water, sun, moon and animals like cow, elephant and monkeys etc. Emerson, for instance comes in the line of Wordsworth when he loves Rhodora, the wild rose, saying that Rhodora is the symbol of divine presence in desert and it fulfils the divine duty of spreading its fragrance there. In the same way Kanva begs the trees:

Hear O hear, all you noble trees of the
Holy grove with indwelling divinities.
She who never had a drink of water
Before you had all drunk your fill
She who never plucked your tender buds
For love of you....
She to whom it was a joyous festival
When you burst in the bloom: She
Leaves us today.....
All grant her leave to go. (KTLT223)

Shakuntala is unable to step forward due to grief of parting. This grief is also visible in different objects of nature. The trees are shedding their pale leaves like tears. The Peacocks have stopped dancing and the deer are not happy to chew their food. When she moves ahead towards the gate of the sanctuary, she feels that somebody is holding her back by catching her clothes. Her father Lord Kanva tells her that the young fawn that was like an adopted son of Shakuntala, is tugging the hem of her garment. Infact the mother dear had died leaving the young fawn to the care of Shakuntala and she reared the fawn like a mother. That fawn was stopping the way of Shakuntala. Later she comes to the Madhvi creeper and hugs it like her sister in fact addressing it as his "woodland sister"(KTLT224) the scene envisages a beautiful relationship between nature and man.

In India in the present history of environment movement the famous man Sunderlal Bahuguna started a movement famous as *Chipko Andolan* in Uttarakhand to save tree and ecology, and he was successful to a great extent. In western countries sometimes the critics call it "Tree Hugging"(PB242). These movements must be taken in positively as we observe the rise in Earth's temperature due to deforestation. Humanity can be saved only if we can save our natural habitat. One can go to the last scene of reunion of the King Dushyanta and Shakuntala in the play. The king stands under the "Ashoka" tree with her and their child 'Bharat' plays with the cub of the lioness who is looking peacefully towards the cub in the hands of the child Bharat. Ashoka tree is regarded as the symbol of happiness in Indian culture. Thus we can clearly state that *Abhijnanshakuntlam* can be further studied from the point of view of eco-criticism.

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