



ELEMENTS OF BHARATAMUNI'S NATYASHASTRA IN KALIDASA'S ABHIJNASAKUNTALAM

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ABSTRACT

Abhijnasakuntalam (Recognition of Sakuntala) written by Kalidasa has been adapted from the original epic(itihasa) which appears in the Adiparva section of *Mahabharata*. It is one of Kalidasa's most successful works and has been translated by numerous writers. Sakuntala, has been resurrected to a new life in this play. The use of brilliant narrative and adherence to theatrical elements of *Natyashastra* reveals a 'Shakuntala', who has individuality , who seeks an identity and one who evolves as a character with love for nature.

Kalidasa implemented the elements of Bharata's *Natyashastra* and used four distinctive elements under Nataka of "Rasas" and "Bhavs" which are defined in the *Natyashastra* i.e. Heroic (Vera Rasa with Utsaha Bhav) , Romantic love/erotic (Srngara rasa with Rati Bhav) , the Furious(Raudra Rasa with Krodha Bhav) and the Pathetic or compassionate(Karuna rasa with Shoka Bhav). This paper focusses on the elements of mythical narrative ,*Mahabharata* and how the epic has been transformed into a play. The text studied here is "*Kalidasa Shakuntala*" which has been translated by Arthur W. Ryder in 1912 who was a professor of Sanskrit at University of California, Berkeley.

KEYWORDS: Mythical Narrative, Ancient India, theatre, History of Rasa and Bhava, Arthur W Ryder, feminism, Mahabharata, Kalidasa, Bharata, Shakuntala, Indian literature

INTRODUCTION

The Origin of Natyashastra (Rasas and Bhavas)

Bharata Muni's Natyashastra is considered to be one of the oldest treatise of performing arts in the world, which is more than two thousand years old (around 2nd century BCE-2nd century CE). It comprises 36 chapters and more than 6000 verses. The title Natyashastra can be defined as Manual of Dramatics and theatre in which Natya means dramatic form and Shastra means manual or treatise. It defines aspects of theatre like movement, emotions, makeup, costumes, stage, music, expressions, plot, meter, rasas, bhavas, etc.

Although there is no conclusive evidence to prove if it was widely used by the Sanskrit dramatists in the ancient times, interpretations of some of the earlier plays lead us to believe that it might have been extensively referred to. Playwrights like, Aśvaghōṣa(80-150CE), Bhāsa(4th century CE) and most importantly Kalidasa(before 600CE followed the norms and rules of Natyashastra in some or the other way. Few examples would be of Bhāsa's *Urubhangam* which is a type of Anka play, Shudraka's *Mrcchakatika* which is best known for its theme of Prakarana, and Kalidasa's famous plays *Vikramōrvaśīyam*, *Mālavikāgnimitram* and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. The roots of evidence can be seen in *Natasutras*, which are mentioned in the works of Panini (6th-4century BCE), who is famous for his treatise on Sanskrit grammar (*Ashtadhyayi*) and also in the 10th century philosopher Abhinavagupta, who is famous for his long and complicated commentary on Natyashastra in his work *Abhinavabharati*, his most important contribution being the theory of rasa. Variant art forms like Kudiyaattam, Krishnaattam, Ramanattam, and Kathakali, also find their origin in *Natyashastra*.

Natyashastra mentions ten types of plays in which Nataka (heroic) and Prakarna(social) are the most important. The list goes as follows

1. Nataka
2. Prakarana
3. Bhana

4. Samavakara
5. Ihamrga
6. Vyayoga
7. Vithi
8. Anka
9. Dima
10. Prahasana

Chapter VI and VII of Natyashastra describe about the theory of Rasa and bhavas. Abhinavagupta in his commentary in *Abhinavabharati* states how Sage Bharata defines Rasa as something which can be savored like the taste of food. “Rasyate anena iti rasaha (asvadayatva)”. Dhananjaya who wrote a treatise *Dasrupaka* writes “Anything be it beautiful or ugly, dignified or despicable, dreadful or of a pleasing appearance, deep or deformed, object or non-object, whatever it be, could be transformed in to *rasa* by poets’ imagination “There is sometimes a contradiction between what *rasa* is and what *bhava* is. Without Rasas, bhavas carry no meaning. *Bhava* is defined as a certain emotion, feeling, psychological state which is expressed through music, words, actions and gestures. Van Buitenen tells us that these emotions are “love, energy, disgust, fury, merriment, wonderment, fear, and grief.”The Rasas and bhavas are further divided into 8 subtypes. The category mentioned below aligns Rasas and bhavas, according to their types and emotions.

Rasas	Bhavas
Stringara (erotic)	Rati
Hasya (comic)	Hasa
Karuna (Compassionate)	Shoka
Roudra (furious)	Krodha
Veera (heroic)	Utsaha
Bhayanaka (terrible)	Bhaya
Bibhasa (odious)	Jugupsa
Adbhuta (marvelous)	Vismaya

Kalidasa's life and history

Kalidasa is regarded as one of the greatest poets of Sanskrit Literature who enjoyed huge popularity during his lifetime. He wrote 3 plays *Mālavikāgnimitram* (Malavikaa and Agnimitra), *Vikramorvasiya* (Urvashi won by Valour) and *Abhijñānaśakuntalā* in which *Abhijñānaśakuntalā* (Recognition of Sakuntala) is his most famous play. He also wrote two epic poems *Kumarasambhavam* (Birth of Kumaara) and *Raghuvamśa* (Dynasty of Raghu) and minor poems, such as, *Meghadūta* (Cloud Messenger) and *Ṛtusamhāra* (Description of the Seasons).

There is a lot of debate that in which century Kalidasa was born. No certain information exists about Kalidasa's life but we know for sure that he belonged to the period of Gupta Empire. One of his plays *Vikramorvasiya* is in fact believed to be dedicated to his king Vikramaditya, also referred to as Chandragupta II (318-415 CE) during whose rule he was honored as a court poet. He is believed to have lived in the city of Ujjain because of the frequent descriptions of the place. Ingalls puts him between 390-470 CE. There is in fact a Sanskrit inscription dated 473 CE found at Mandsaur's Sun temple. The Aihole inscription dated 634 CE and Banabhatta (7th century poet) also lauds Kalidasa for his tremendous work which only leads us to believe that the lower limit might be around the mid-2nd century and upper limit being 634 CE.

Kalidasa derived narratives hugely from folk tales or the epics, which were a part of oral traditions, like Mahabharata. He is considered to be a poet of nature and he structured his work upon Dharma, Veda Philosophy and Astrology. He was very knowledgeable and would have definitely studied the great scriptures, such as, Mahabharata and Ramayana as there are several accounts of these epics in his work. He is sometimes considered the Shakespeare of India. Humboldt appreciates the qualities of Kalidasa: "Tenderness in the expression of feelings and richness of creative fancy have assigned to him his lofty place among the poets of all nations". Kalidasa uses a variety of styles in his work, such as, Riti, different types of rasa and bhav, scientific language, Alankara, etc. Acharya Dandin was of opinion that *Vaidribhi* was a style established by Kalidasa. His use of Shringara-rasa is evident in almost all his works. Kalidasa's language is very simple and he excels in usage of simile, metaphor (upamaa), imagery and meter.

She will come into your view absorbed/ in the day's
rites of worship or drawing my likeness/ imagined wasted by
separation/ Or, asking the melodious songster in the cage/

‘Sweet one, do you remember our lord? / You were a favorite
with him .

KALIDASA’S ABHIJÑĀNAŚAKUNTALĀ - MYTHICAL NARRATIVE AND ADAPTATION

Kalidasa’s *Abhijñānaśakuntalā* is a play considered a masterpiece in Sanskrit literature and otherwise in the world literature. It has been translated into different languages is still read worldwide after so many generations because of its impact and how it has adjusted to the reality and feminist perspective of our times.

Adapted from the myth mentioned in Adiparva section of the epic Mahabharata about the story of King Dushyanta and Sakuntala and how they fell madly in love with each other and how King Dushyanta learns about dharma through this journey. Kalidasa took inspiration from a simple story and added elements of Natyashastra in the epic to provide a different angle to the epic.

The play is divided into seven acts each one having a title of its own except the seventh one for example, Hunt (Act 1), Secret (Act 2), Love making (act 3) and so on. The title of each act describes the gist of what it contains.

It is possible that Sanskrit, was spoken only by the nobility (aristocracy, princely and Brahminic classes) and the common people used Prakrit. In Sakuntala too, Sanskrit is spoken by the King, higher officials, male aesthetic and the Brahmins. Females and lower cast men speak a different kind of Prakrit.

The play is filled with poetic lines from start till the end of the play. Although King Dushyanta is given the most number of poetic lines, there are numerous characters who narrate or converse in poetic format. The lines do have a rhythm but no format as such. Few characters which are important and who speak in poetic format are, Sakuntala, Dushyanta, Charoiteer, Court poets, Director, Gautami(Sakuntala’s mother), Matali, Sharadvata and Sharngarava.

One more point which is to be highlighted is that Kalidasa did not follow the format of introducing the characters in the middle of the Act, only in the starting characters are given the

preference of entry and then it is assumed that people will understand by the tone of the play, when a character will enter.

Abhijñānaśakuntalā deals with the story of two lovers who go through a difficult journey to find love. Kalidasa divided the play into seven acts dealing with a pattern of encounter, separation and reunion. This pattern can also be seen in Bhasa's *Vision of Vasavadatta*. I disagree with Sir Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof who in his paper says that "Kalidasa wishes us to know that there is a higher reality at work, that the meeting, separation and reunion has been planned and executed by the gods. The separation is in fact a necessity, and there is a particular reason for it. It is required to give rise to maturity of religious faith."

This doesn't seem likely from the pattern that Kalidasa portrays in the play. He intends to shift the play to heaven to put the audience in awe and in order to give more emphasis on the godly structures and their powers. The reunion could have taken place on earth in normal world because Shakuntala's characteristic is more in love for nature and earth but Kalidasa decided to shift the play to heaven like place which is a perfect place for any human to dream of and can only be attained by spiritual belief and rigid discipline "a world of austere beauty, luminous with the light of the spirit; it is not a world of nature, spontaneous, informed by instinct, but of Nature perfected by restraint and discipline". This is done to create a persona of magical powers that is present with godly figures and also the power that Dushyanta holds to travel to such a place. This is similar to Virgil's portrayal of Aeneas in *Aeneid* to cement the legacy of King Augustus in the Roman empire

From Act I to Act III we see how Dushyanta while hunting in a forest comes across Sage Kanva's hermitage. While visiting the hermitage he sees Shakuntala and is infatuated by her beauty and instantly falls in love but is confused at her being a hermit's daughter. "King (to himself): And this is Kanva's daughter, Shakuntala. (In surprise.) The good Father does wrong to make her wear the hermit's dress of bark." Shakuntala feels a sudden attraction towards the King at their first meeting. King cannot forget her after leaving the hermitage and contemplates if he is in love with Shakuntala. "King (He takes the clown by the hand. Aloud.) Friend Madhavya, my reverence for the hermits draws me to the hermitage. Do not think that I am really in love with the hermit-girl". King then decides to visit the hermitage and to see if Shakuntala also feels the same way about him. "Shakuntala: Ever since I saw the good king who protects the pious grove— (She stops and fidgets.). Shakuntala: I love him, and it makes me feel like

this. Subsequently they marry each other through a socially acceptable Gandharva tradition and before leaving, the King gives Shakuntala a ring as a token of love. It acts as a bond for bringing them back together in further scenes.

Act IV starts with a curse which sage Durvasas gives to Sakuntala for the despised treatment that he receives at the Hermitage as a guest. He gives her a curse that:

Your lover shall forget you though reminded, Or think of you as of a story told". After hearing the pain that Sakuntala is going through and the apology by Priyamvada and Anusuya, he gives them another option that the curse can be lifted if "her lover sees a gem which he has given her for a token". Act IV also marks the departure of Shakuntala from her hermitage to find her love and acceptance in Hastinapur where her husband King Dushyanta lives. She gets father Kanva's blessings for the departure and he blesses her with a prediction "And may you bear a kingly son, Like Puru, who shall rule the earth", which is the description of their son Bharata. This Act puts its focus on the concept of Adieu (Vidai) of a woman who married the king in secret and now she has to find a place in her husband's home. We see a lot of emotional moments with mother Gautami, sisters Anusuya and Priyamvada expressing sadness at this departure. The play which is filled with elements of nature is also personified and brought to life with the departure of Shakuntala.

Act V is very crucial for both the protagonists of the play, as it features their inner characteristics as it sets up the separation between them. Shakuntala while travelling from the hermitage to King's palace loses the token of love: the ring which King gave her. When she and her family reach the palace Shakuntala gets very sad and angry when Dushyanta does not recognize her. She is humiliated in the court by the King who actually has forgotten her due to the curse of Sage Durvasas and to protect his dignity acts with harsh words for Shakuntala.

King. It is just such women, selfish, sweet, false, that entice fools.

King. I ask you which is the heavier sin:

Not knowing whether I be mad

Or falsehood be in her

Shall I desert a faithful wife

Or turn adulterer?

At the end of this act Shakuntala vanishes with the "heavenly light in women's form, but shining bright." Act VI begins with the realization of the love that King had for Shakuntala as the

fisherman who found the ring tries to sell it and is caught and the moment the King sees the ring, the curse is lifted and remembers how much he loved her. First time in this play we see a scene, which is setup in the palace and Mishrakeshi (a heavenly nymph) observes in hiding, the situation of the palace. We see a sad king who has lost all hope in matters of life and is engrossed in thought of Shakuntala. He does not even attend the matters related to the throne. “Chamberlain: He hates the thing he loved: he intermits the daily audience, nor in judgement sits; spends sleepless nights in tossing on his bed”.

He forbids the Spring festival because how important nature was to Shakuntala. We see the remorse and guilt that King feels for treating Shakuntala as a character of disgrace and unholy women. His clown (Madhavya) who has been his companion from the start of the play is very important in this act as Matali (Charioteer of heaven’s king) grabs him by the throat to awaken a King as he is needed in the heaven for heaven is attacked by demons and they need King’s help in the matter. Clown always had acted as mouthpiece to audience’s views and he is very vocal about each situation that King faces and is not afraid of him.

The last act, Act VII marks as a union after the separation of both the characters. In this act we see “a world of spiritual beauty”. There is a huge difference between the worlds of Act I and Act VII, “the green world and the golden world”. This place is beyond the normal human beings and is “a mountain of fairy centaurs”. This Act takes place hermitage of Sage Kashyapa. King expresses the desire to be blessed by the holy sages who reside at this mountain. On the way he meets a boy and is impressed by his skills and bravery while playing with a cub. He feels a kind of attraction towards the kid and feels as if it is his own son. On inquiring with the hermit women, he gets to know that the boy belongs to the family of Puru family and is in fact his own son Shakuntala is his mother. As they meet and King apologizes by falling at her feet for treating her the way he did and disgracing her and the kind and humble nature of Shakuntala forgives him and they take blessings of Sage Kashyapa and mother Aditi and Kashyapa declares “As Bharata he shall be known”, and the play ends on a happy note.

Mythical narrative and its adaptation by Kalidasa

The play which has been adapted by Kalidasa from the Indian epic *Mahabharata* by Vyasa has “transformed the somewhat undistinguished original into something complex and rich in dramatic possibilities, as Shakespeare was repeatedly to do later in his own plays.” I totally

agree with R. K. Gupta on his views that Kalidasa did indeed have an immense knowledge so that he could use elements of Natyashastra to make *Abhijñānaśakuntalā* not just a complex play but a play with ability to woo the audiences. His narrative to keep the protagonist Dushyanta as very good character who is cursed by sage Duravsas is not the story as depicted in Mahabharata. He is a character with a flaw in the epic and when Shakuntala approaches the King who had so passionately loved her, to accept her and his son, he completely disdains them and even calls Shakuntala a liar and an immoral woman. We see King bound by Dharma and does not accept her without divine intervention, because of the possibility of suspicion about the marriage and the child in the society. He is so adamant in his singular view that he does not think twice for a person he loves so much that treat her disgrace and dishonesty in front of the society. Hence if there would have been no intervention from the heaven, he would have never accepted Shakuntala. We see something close to this in Ramayana when Sita has to go through the test of fire to prove her chastity and even then, the society questions Rama. In turn Rama who loved her so much had to abandon her because of the Dharma of being Kshatriya.

Kalidasa adds certain characters to the play like her two sisters Anusuya and Priyamvada, the Clown and other intricate details which a play should have to add more sensibility complexity and difference to the play from the original epic. Since audience knew about the characters and the mythical narrative, it was easy for his to focus on the main protagonists and specially the character of Shakuntala. The feminist perspective is common in both the narratives and Shakuntala maintains her character in both the stories. Only King Dushyanta shifts his role and becomes a King who is not at mistake but his mistake is governed by supernatural elements.

Elements of Natyashastra - Rasas and Bhava present in *Abhijñānaśakuntalā*

Abhijñānaśakuntalām is a type of play called Nataka-high drama, mentioned in Natyashastra. The characters in the Nataka are divine elements-deities and demons(rakshash). The stories in Nataka are not created but taken or adapted from the epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. These plays do not end badly and the hero always wins in the end and is the model of virtue. Nataka has often been compared to Aristotle's concept of tragedy but Kalidasa's plays do not fully support tragedy. They do have elements where we see the flaws in the hero but the play always ends on a happy tone. Stoler Miller has cited possible examples of Nataka to Western drama and even compares *Abhijñānaśakuntalā* to Shakespeare's *Tempest* and Euripides

Alcestis. The play is often referred to as a mixture of Vera Rasa and Sringara Rasa and titled as “Heroic Romance” In detail the elements of Nataka i.e. Rasa’s and Bhavas which are used by Kalidasa in this play are basically four which are elaborated with examples from the play below.

1. Heroic (Vera Rasa with Utsaha Bhava)

The heroic or the Veer Rasa is an element of Natyashastra which deals with heroic deeds, courage, diplomacy, charity, etc. The heroic character is often played by the protagonist and in this play, it is Dushyanta. According to Manu women should not have independence of action under any circumstances. They cannot be allowed to peruse any action on their free will. The Utsaha Bhava portrays the expression of the feeling of courage and boldness. We see heroic deeds of Dushyanta mostly in Act 1 and Act 2 of the play. When King is seen for the first time on stage he is portrayed as heroic and noble. His charioteer even compares him to lord Shiva. He is also referred as devaraja, an earthly symbol of the gods.

Charioteer: I see you hunt the spotted deer
With shafts to end his race,
As though God Shiva should appear
In his immoral chase

Clown: “There’s a deer!” he shouts, “There’s a bore!” And off he chases on a summer noon through woods where shade is few and far between

First poet: The world you daily guard and bless,
Not heeding pain or weariness;
Thus is your nature made.

Second poet: You are our strong defender.
Friends come to all whose wealth is sure,
But you, alike to rich and poor,
Are friend both strong and tender.

The Veer Rasa and Utsaha Bhava are clearly visible in these lines from the play. The depiction of these lines by the stage actors had to portray the emotions of bravery and excitement so that the audience could relate to the mighty power of the King.

2. Romantic love/erotic (Sringara rasa with Rati Bhava)

This is the most important element of the play and most of the critics even focus on Shakuntala being a romantic play. Bharata divided Sringara Rasa into two categories, Samyoga

which describes the union, the flourished seasons like spring, intimacy, etc. and Vipralamba which deals with separation, jealousy, anxiety, desire, contemplation, etc. Most of the descriptions of love and erotic sentiments is provided through the mouthpiece of Dushyanta in poetic form, and Shakuntala is given very reserved words to speak and she is portrayed as a shy character in the starting. It very well speaks of the feministic attitude and how the women in Kalidasa's time were not allowed to speak with erotic elements. The union and the separation play a very important role in this play. This union happens twice in the play, first in the Act III (Love making) and then again in the Act VII when they meet again after the separation. Separation actually takes place in the Act V (Shakuntala's Rejection) and Act VI (Separation from Shakuntala). Act I is filled with elements of Sringara Rasa and how they falling love with each other just by looking. It is definitely an infatuation which is present in this Act.

King: Her arms are tender shoots; her lips
Are blossoms red and warm;
Bewitching youth begins to flower
In beauty on her form.

“Shakuntala: Oh, why do I have such feelings when I see this man? They seem wrong in a hermitage”.

“Shakuntala: I would never leave him if I could help myself”

Act III which is itself titled “Love Making” is about the acceptance that they have fallen in love with each other. Shakuntala's and Dushyanta's love most certainly are arguable because Shakuntala being a daughter of a deity Menka and living a life of a hermit girl has never met a man such as Dushyanta who doesn't introduce himself as a king but of a royal family, and Dushyanta coming from royal land, enters an environment of nature which represents true beauty and falls in love with a beautiful girl even though he is married.

3. The furious (Raudra Rasa with Krodha Bhava)

The main element of this rasa is anger. This felling is the result of action that has been aroused or has occurred before. Actions can be jealousy, false accusation . This Rasa and Bhava can be seen in the Act V of the play which is titled “Shakuntala's Rejection”. Shakuntala is shaken at the thought that her husband does not recognize her. She is filled with rage at the insult

made by Dushyanta for their marriage and it seems as if the child she carries is illegitimate. She does not want to remind him of this love but she keeps her own character clean.

“Shakuntala: He loved me so. He is so changed. Why remind him? Ah, but I must clear my own character.”

“Shakuntala (angrily). Wretch! You judge all this by your own false heart. Would any other man do what you have done? To hide behind virtue, like yawning well covered over with grass!” .

“Shakuntala: Well, well. I had my way. I trusted a king, and put myself in his hands. He had a honey face and a heart of stone.”

4. The Pathetic or compassionate (Karuna rasa with Shoka Bhava)

This rasa and bhava play a difficult tangent in portraying the role of tragedy and grief in the play and emotions of sadness and sorrow that may surround it. It happens either after the loss of someone very dear, misfortunes Shoka Bhava is expressed with emotions of crying, mournful state, depression, fainting, etc. and gives an appearance of dullness on the face of the character. The whole of Act VI deals with Karuna Rasa and Shoka Bhava. After seeing the ring, the king gets his memory back and plunges into extreme sadness and grief at what he had done to the women he loved so much. It is more of an inner turmoil that king goes through and cannot do anything about his mistake.

“King: No sooner did the ring recall my banished maiden dear, No sooner do I vainly weep For her, than spring is here”

“A deed worthy of you, scion of Puru’s race, and shining example of kings. May you be get a son to rule earth and heaven.”

King: My friend, how can I endure a grief that has no respite?

I cannot sleep at night

And meet her dreaming; I cannot see the sketch

While tears are streaming.

King: After all, what does it matter whether he have issue or not?

Let King Dushyanta be proclaimed To every sad soul kin

That mourns a kinsman loved and lost,

Yet did not plunge in sin.

These poetic lines portray the grief and sadness that Dushyanta feels for insulting the women he loved so much. He does not even attend the matters of his court as he cannot think

anything else except his mistake. He is filled with remorse and guilt and the stage portrays the same emotion and people feel the tragedy behind the character and his regret.

CONCLUSION

The play *Abhijanasakuntalam* has been so beautifully structured by Kalidasa with the elements of *Natyashastra* that it is difficult to elaborate all the intricate emotions that he tried to portray but while going through each act we experience all the properties that he so deftly used for the performance. There have been numerous translations of the play but no records of the performance of the play in his time exist. There have been different interpretations but all agree with the emotions of Dramaturgy and poetic style occupied by Kalidasa, which puts him in the league of the famous playwrights in the world. This paper sought to focus on the basic premise of Kalidasa's use of mythical narratives and elements of *Natyashastra* in *Shakuntala*. It establishes how mystical narrative has been borrowed from an episode in the *Mahabharata*, and how using the dictates of *Natyashastra*, the story is woven into a play that has captivated the imagination of mankind for centuries.

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