



The Symbolic Landscape: A Study of Kalidasa's *Abhijnānaśākuntalam* through the Lens of Ecocriticism

Dr. Archana Gupta

Assistant Professor of Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Lucknow

Abstract:

The concept of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam' means one Earth: one Globe and one Family. Today, the problems of climate change, Global warming, and species extinction have caused havoc to the entire ecosystem. Contextualizing the same idea, this paper questions the human tendency to exploit the ecosystem and explores the vivid portrayal of nature in Kalidasa's play *Abhijnānaśākuntalam*. The ecocritical study of Kalidasa's play aims to rekindle readers' interest in ecology and to look for its roots in Indian culture. Through the story of Dushanta and Shakuntala, the paper intends to re-establish the importance of the ever-present masculine (Purush) and feminine principle (Prakriti) in the cosmos. This paper interprets the ecological themes in the play and substantiates how the contemporary environmental crisis is informed via the ancient text. It also lays emphasis on the fact that any kind of disruption in the harmony of the ecosystem may create an ecological imbalance. Thus, the objective of this paper is to emphasize the importance of preserving nature to maintain ecological balance, as well as its restoration, for the survival of human beings in the future.

Keywords: Past and present, Timeless Humanities, Boethius, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Path through Life, Relevance of Literature, Philosophy.

Introduction

Climate change and global warming are the biggest threats to humankind today. The rapid change in the Earth's environment and the emission of greenhouse gases have far-reaching consequences on the current generation. It is affecting the entire ecosystem, which in turn

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causes ill effects on human civilization. Its consequences can be seen all over the world in the form of water crisis, extreme changes in weather conditions, disruption of agricultural systems, frequent occurrence of floods, droughts, hurricanes, and the rise of several diseases among human beings. However, the ever-formulated viewpoint that human beings are masters of the universe, and every other object is merely there to serve the whims and fancies of human beings, is misleading. Human beings are an integral part of the natural order of the world and each species on this earth is like a member of this family cum ecosystem. To establish the value of human-nature relationships and spread awareness amongst people, it is important to know the intricate relationship that exists between the two. With this perspective, this paper studies the vivid portrayal of the human-nature bond in Kalidasa's *Abhijnānaśākuntalam* and explores the enigmatic relationship of both for the preservation and proliferation of the ecosystem as well as the human species. It tries to answer some of the puzzling questions related to the rituals and beliefs of Indian people, such as worshipping nature as a deity and looking at mountains, rivers, and trees with great reverence. For this, the Indian Vedic philosophy has been taken into consideration to apply the ever-present "feminine" and "masculine" principles in the cosmos to the ecological backdrop of the play *Abhijnānaśākuntalam*.

In India, the relationship between humans and the ecology is not something new, but it is age-old. Harold Coward (2003) reviews this relationship in his article and mentions that for the Hindu, this universe is God's body, of which humans, along with everything else in nature, are but a part. The essence of earth, air, water, the tree, the cow, and every individual being is the same divine spirit manifested in different forms. Therefore, according to him, it is natural that the ethic of radical non-violence (ahimsa) to all forms of human, animal, and plant life should have originated in India. For Coward, "to harm another (person, animal, or plant) is to harm God's cosmic body of which one is a part" (Coward, 2003, p. 411). Hindu Eco theology has much in common with different plans made to combat the global environmental crisis. Coward contextualizes this point by reviving the ancient Hindu myth, which is based on "what we would now call a profoundly ecological vision". In his essay, Coward says that the relationship between "the human/nature" was "at the core of that vision and permeated the biological, physical, and spiritual dimensions of life.". To substantiate his point, he quotes Kapila Vatsyayan's words:

Man's life depends upon and is conditioned by all that surrounds him and sustains him, namely, inanimate, mineral and animate, aquatic, vegetative, animal and gaseous life. It is, therefore, Man's duty to constantly remind himself- in individual and collective life – of the environment and ecology. (Coward, 2003, p. 411)

Vatsyayan's words summarize the crux of Vedic philosophy and ancient wisdom that manifested in different forms through religion. Lord Krishna, in the ancient religious scripture Bhagwad Gita, speaks to Arjuna through his cosmic form and establishes the fact that everything in this universe between the Earth and the Sky originated from Him and ultimately will be assimilated in Him (Fosse, 2007, p. 104). Lord Krishna's dialogue with Arjuna reiterates the fact that everything is a part of the Divine Soul and will be assimilated within Him at the end, and thereby dismantles the human being's dominance over other living organisms of the Earth.

An eminent critic, Rana Singh (1992) throws light on the Vedic concept that male and female energies are working mutually in the cosmos, and every element in the universe is the combination of these two energies. According to him:

The origin and unity of organic life in Nature are conceived as the product of Purusa (male energy) and Prakriti (female energy), each represented by a triangle (trikona), one with its apex at the top and the other with apex at the bottom. Together these two

triangles make a hexagon, which symbolizes the continuity of creation and existence. The two forms of triangles also symbolize phallus (Linga) and vulva (Yoni), thus interaction of the two results in creation. (Singh, p. 141)

Thus, Rana Singh in his article symbolizes the male (apex at the top) and female (apex at the bottom) energies through the triangles, along with the intersecting triangles symbolizing creation and existence. The continuity in the Universe is thus maintained through the male and female energies balancing and supporting each other with their creative and productive principles. In recent times, contemporary theories like ecocriticism have also paved the way for studying literary texts from an ecocritical perspective. Ecocriticism emerged as a major discipline in the late 1980s and early 1990s. To define ecocriticism in the words of Cheryll Glotfelty, “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xviii). *The Ecocriticism Reader*, the book edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, is a collection of thought-provoking writings in the field of literary ecology. In this, Glotfelty has emphasized the close bond that is shared between Literature and the environment. The term ecocriticism was first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”. Rueckert defined the term ecocriticism as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature”. Glotfelty has used several other terms in the same context, such as “ecopoetics”, “environmental literary criticism,” and “green cultural studies” for environmental studies and the study of ecology (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xx). There was also a long trail of questions pertaining to whether it should be called “ecocriticism” or “green studies,” as mentioned by Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory* (Barry, 2022, p. 239). The term “ecocriticism” was first used in the USA, while the term “Green Studies” in the UK. The term became popular with the efforts of the founding fathers of Transcendentalism, namely Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, and others. Emerson’s 1836 essay laid the foundation for the cause of Transcendentalism. Thoreau’s work, *Walden*, which came out in 1845, propounded the view that by living near nature, man can attain harmony and peace.

The contemporary theorist and ecofeminist Vandana Shiva (1993) revived the concept of oneness between humans and nature. In her book *Staying Alive*, she extensively discusses the “primordial energy”, which, according to her, “is the substance of everything”. In her words, “the manifestation of this power, this energy, is called nature (Prakriti).” Taking in consideration the foundational beliefs of Hindu theology in Shiva and Shakti as important elements in nature, Vandana Shiva says, “Nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos; in conjunction with the masculine principle (Purusha), Prakriti creates the world”. If any attempt is made to separate these two the result is destructive as she writes, “Without Shakti, Shiva, the symbol for the force of creation and destruction, is as powerless as a corpse” (Shiva, 1993, p. 37). According to Vandana Shiva the embodiment and manifestation of the “feminine principle” is characterized by “creativity, activity/productivity” whereas the Cartesian concept in which “nature is seen as inert and passive; uniform and mechanistic; separable and fragmented within itself; separate from man; and inferior, to be dominated by man” (Shiva, 1993, p. 37). This ontological dichotomy justifies domination of man over woman and nature. Vandana Shiva goes back to the roots and traces the tradition in ancient India when the “Terra mater symbolized the Earth in the form of the Great Mother- creative and productive” while in the current times, “the shift from Prakriti to ‘natural resources’ and from Mater to ‘matter’ is considered a significant shift from superstition to rationality. (Shiva, 1993, p. 40) In terms of Vandana Shiva, this shift has made the current generation more callous towards the other living organisms of the Earth and thus led to the destruction of the ecosystem.

Apart from Vandana Shiva, the other ecocritical theorists like Ramchandra Guha and Nirmal Selvamony have also made a remarkable contribution in this direction. Ramchandra Guha's *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (1989) significantly focuses on the environmental history of the Himalayan region, particularly in the Kumaon and Garhwal regions, environmental changes that have taken place in these areas, and social resistance. This book lays bare the complexities of environmental degradation and grassroots movements that have developed in this region. His book also emphasizes how marginalized communities counterattack ecological exploitation and struggle to conserve their natural heritage. Nirmal Selvamony's *Essays in Criticism* (2007) is a collection of essays that integrate ecological knowledge, cultural perspectives, and literary traditions into global ecological discourse. Different essays in this collection provide critical insight into various literary texts and thus set a landmark in the history of ecocriticism. Selvamony's examination of Indian rivers, holy groves, and landscape reiterates the idea of environmental conservation and its preservation for future generations.

With this Indian philosophical perspective and ecocritical angle of human/nature relationship propounded in the Indian Knowledge System, this paper evaluates the symbolic landscape of Kalidasa's *Abhijnānaśākuntalam*. Picked from the Adi Parva- Book I of The Mahabharata, Kalidasa's book beautifully captures the story of Dushanta and Shakuntala. Alongside, it also establishes the importance of nature in the lives of human beings by unfolding the miraculous incidents happening in and out of Rishi Kanva's hermitage and in the later part, sage Marica and his consort Aditi's hermitage. The story begins with King Dushanta's arrival in the hermitage of Rishi Kanva, chasing a blackbuck. Coming from the jeweled palace, Dushanta symbolizes the 'modern man' who brings the influence of the Industrial society with him to the sacred groves of the hermitage. The high-built castles of King Dushanta stand in contrast to the sanctity of the ashram. His meeting with Shakuntla and his attraction for her at the very first instance materialize into their Gandharv marriage, which is witnessed by the flora and fauna there. As defined by Chandra Rajan (1989), Shakuntala herself is the "Lady of Nature" born from the union of sage Vishwamitra and Celestial nymph Menaka (Rajan 45). Abandoned by both parents, Shakuntala was first taken care of by "shakunta" birds and later found by Rishi Kanva in the lap of the forest. Shakuntala's upbringing in the sacred surroundings of the hermitage and at the hands of the father figure, sage Kanva, makes her one with nature. She remains completely untouched by the corrupting influence of the outside world, which is materialistic and full of physical pleasures, till Dushanta encroaches on the holy grounds of the hermitage. Therefore, the instant attraction of King Dushanta towards Shakuntala vis-à-vis the hermitage represents modern man's inherent love for exploration and eagerness to unravel the intricacies of nature by meddling with its mysterious affairs.

The setting of the first act is the "forests in the foothills of the Himalayas" and later the hermitage of sage Kanva, by the river "Malini". This "green world" is pious and serene, while the "king with his charioteer" and "bow and arrow" in his hand is in pursuit of a deer as represented in the opening scene of the play. Dushanta here symbolizes 'Everyman' hunting down the natural world (represented by the deer) and thus causing the extinction of wild species. Stopped by the ascetic of Kanva's hermitage, the king is awakened to his senses. Till the time he is trapped in the illusion of this sensual world, he remains an intruder and thus encroaches on the hermitage. Later, he becomes the protector of the hermitage and its species when ascetics awaken him to his senses by informing him about the sanctity of that place. The ascetic reminds him by saying:

How fragile the life of this deer!

How cruel your sharp-pointed arrows, swift-winged!

Never should they fall on his tender frame

Like tongues of flame on a heap of flowers. (Kalidas, 1989, p. 173)

Here, the “fragile life of the deer” indicates that man’s dominance over the speechless and helpless animals has been practiced for ages, sometimes for fun and sometimes for materialistic advancement. Dushanta’s fate is decided by the surroundings he chooses to live in. Fate brings him close to nature and to divinity, but till the time he is surrounded by flora and fauna, his understanding of the environment and its precious treasures continues and in fact flourishes. The moment he steps out of this territory, he is disillusioned and is bound to lose his sanity. This hermitage represents the agrarian world, while Dushanta’s palace represents the industrial world and the world of illusion. This mirage disillusions him due to which he forgets Shakuntala. Restoration of the natural order of the world and his reunion with Shakuntala take place in the final act of the play. Dushanta is also seen as the “Purush” or masculine principle in nature showcasing male prowess, physical strength by entering with arrow and bow in his hand in the first scene while Shakuntala is represented as “Prakriti” or feminine principle of nature that is creative, reproductive, caregiver, meek, humble and docile. Chandra Rajan also considers Shakuntala as an essential part of this “green world” because she is the embodiment of Shakti. According to her, without Shakuntala, the green world vanishes and has no existence. Similarly, her existence is also possible only in the lap of nature, which is her ‘green world’.

The farewell of Shakuntala from the hermitage situated her away from the natural world. Uprooting her from her “green world” and locating in a foreign land of Dushanta’s palace is often seen as destroying the natural order of the world. This universe is not a single man’s entity. It can accommodate all those who are going to repay the gifts of nature, like Shakuntala does, by keeping the species of nature alive. As soon as she encounters Dushanta (the modern-degenerated man), she starts getting trapped in this world of Maya and becomes more distanced from the “green world” she belongs to. Instead of maintaining the sanctity of her love and waiting for it to be approved by the elders, she moves close to sensuality by experiencing the pangs of love, which is more an emotion of this mortal world. By yielding to the advances of this mortal man, she tastes the mortal fruit and is bound to pay its price and thus incur Durvasa’s wrath. The curse of Durvasa is nothing but a curse to her for losing her sacredness by offering herself to the wishes of the common man (Dushanta) of this material world called Maya (illusion). By being the “feminine” part of nature, she must bear the fruit of her recklessness for losing her chastity and honour at the hands of the man who came to exploit her resources and went back into his own world, leaving her to suffer from misery and loneliness. Being “Prakriti” herself, she is symbolic of “Mother Earth,” who is a mother of not only the child she carries in her womb but also each species raised by her. She has been in the service of all the species of this hermitage and has taken care of them since her childhood. She laps the young doe and treats it with motherly affection in the absence of its mother. In the farewell scene, all parts of the hermitage seem to be crying about being deserted by her. Thus, she must pay the price for betraying her infants by being forgotten by her own lover, King Dushanta himself who deserts her when she is sent to his palace and refuses to identify her.

The climax of the play raises very subtle questions about the motive of Shakuntala to move out of the periphery of the hermitage, which is her original and actual abode. By abandoning it, she could never be at peace. According to Chandra Rajan (1989) in the Introduction to *The Loom of Time*, “When Shakuntala leaves the hermitage and the green world vanishes, what remains is ‘an empty desert’, for she is the lady of Nature” (Rajan, 1989, p. 45). Rajan says that there is a representation of the “magical world with all its details, the blossoming trees and vines, ‘the full flowing river, the mating deer and pairs of geese on the riverbank, rendered with dead accuracy by the amateur painter’ and extracting the “feminine energy” of this landscape makes it motionless and unproductive. In Indian mythology, nature

is the manifestation of the Supreme power. In his Prologue, Kalidasa even mentioned that the Supreme lord of the universe is visible to human beings through the eight forms of Water, Fire, the Priest, the Sun, the Moon, Space, Earth, and Air. The description of the summer season and the impact of cool breeze on the Indian audience is also very explicitly stated in the Prologue. There is a clear indication of “quiet beauty” and “calm” pleasure that Indian people used to have earlier at the end of the day. Drawing water from wells, taking a dip in ponds when a cool breeze “having consorted with Patali flowers” spreads its fragrance, all such things have now become obsolete. Such aesthetic beauty and serenity of nature described by Kalidas is a clear indication of people’s connection with nature at that time. Kalidas has a keen eye for the appreciation of natural beauty as he writes, “bees kiss sirisa blossoms” and lovely women in their youth, “place the blossoms/ tenderly/ as ornaments over their ears” (Kalidas, 1989, p. 170). Kalidas has not depicted the summer season in the play as humid and hot as it is today. The poet does justice to the description of the hermitage and lays emphasis on the importance of shady trees, flowing rivers, and the protected environment in the lap of nature.

Moreover, as soon as the play progresses, and the king enters sage Kanva’s ashram, on his way, he notices grains of rice scattered under the trees because the parrots have been nesting there in the tree. Similarly, there were stones lying scattered under the trees because the parrots have been nesting there on the tree. Similarly, the stones lying scattered near the tree were moist and glistening with the ingudi oil as the nuts fallen on the stones split and the oil spread around them. It is clearly indicated that the medicinal properties of such plants were known to the people, and they could make use of them. However, the modern generation is away from such knowledge. Recent trends have shown that current research is being done to restore India’s past and its glory. Sanjeev Kumar, in his article “Medicinal Importance of Ingudi” researched the numerous uses of ingudi and its benefits in the times to come. He mentions that the ancients used ingudi oil to treat several diseases. Kumar writes that “that almost all parts of Ingudi have immense medicinal potential; either the seed or seed oil form an essential constituent of many Ayurvedic preparations” (Kumar et al, 2014, p. 1). In his paper, he also describes that Ingudi oil is helpful in treating several types of diseases such as Kustha, Svitra (Skin disorder), Krimi (Germicidal), etc.

In contrast to the times today, the play throws light on the use of bark garments by people because they were hung on trees to be dried in the sun. Bark is generally used for garments, canoes, painting, and map-making. The readers of the play witness in the initial pages of the play the smoke drifting up from oblations to the sacred fire, which manifests the idea of yajnya/havan, etc, done in the hermitage in which woods of a variety of medicinal plants were used. Burning such wood helped in cleansing the air and kept the environment worth living. Kalidasa’s love for nature becomes more evident when he hints at the idea that even the wild animals like “fawns” lived and roamed freely without fear in meadows. In the play, there is a constant reference to “durbha” grass shoots, which are considered sacred even today in different rituals. The Times of India reports, “Durva is a sacred grass. . . . Derived from Duhu means “faraway” and “avam” means “that brings closer”. So, when Ganesha loves Durva, it means that when devotees offer it to him it brings the Ganesha devotees closer to him”. Earlier, people lived close to nature, so they were well versed with the uses of “durbha” and other varieties of grasses and plants that grow in Indian geographical settings. However, now-a-days people live in apartments which keep them at arm’s length from nature. There may be greenery around them, but it is used more for showcasing the grandeur and enhancing the architectural beauty of the apartments rather than making it useful for people and maintaining the environment. Today, people may grow more indoor plants, like cacti, aloe vera, money plants, peace lily, snake plant, instead of growing Basil Plant, Neem tree, banyan tree, Peepal Tree, etc.

As mentioned earlier, Vandana Shiva (1989) considers the whole Earth a family, and each species of this family is a family member. It is the duty of each member to ensure the safety and well-being of other members of the family. This harmony will be brought only when we strengthen the bond between humans and the Earth. Kalidas minutely observes the Jasmine and Mango trees and their budding youth. Here, Jasmine is compared to a young maiden, and the Mango tree is compared to its male counterpart, which is laden with “young fruit, indicating he is ready for enjoyment” and denotes bodily changes in adolescents when they reach puberty. Similarly, these changes in the natural phenomenon indicate the upcoming Gandharva vivah, which further takes place between Dushanta and Shakuntala. Kalidasa, beautifully, blends the beauty of the budding Jasmine vine and the young Shakuntala. The hormonal changes within a woman’s body, attraction for the opposite sex, and pangs of love at the arrival of youth lead Shakuntala to imagine herself as one with the Jasmine vine. Alongside Priyamvada, the friend of Shakuntala, also informs that Madhavi Lata was planted and nurtured by Rishi Kanva (suggesting his nurturing of Shakuntala), which has also bloomed and is now covered with buds, indicating Shakuntala’s ripe age for marriage. Nature and humans become one in the imagination of Kalidasa.

Kalidasa’s love for nature and its healing power has given him an eye to visualize beauty in and around the environment. Therefore, he writes, “breeze that wafts the fragrance of lotuses with the cool spray of malini’s rippling stream” is “able to soothe love fevered limbs/enfolding them in a close embrace” (Kalidas, 1989, p. 201). King’s thoughts are pensive, and he feels the touch of the breeze on his limbs, which reminds him of his beloved (Shakuntala), whose touch is mingled with the breeze and has made it more fragrant. As Shakuntala has been compared with a Jasmine flower, Rishi Kanva’s anger towards her is like “sprinkling tender Jasmine with boiling water” (Kalidas, 1989, p. 216). Kalidasa sees nature’s nursing care, its beauty, and soothing effect on the human mind and soul. Later, the play delves deeply into the description of Shakuntala and her adornment being done by her friends for sending her to her husband’s house. Preparations have begun, and Kalidas’s nuanced artistic skills are seen in being so observant that he does not spare even the minutest bliss that nature can provide for human beings. The irony of the situation is that these things have been replaced with more artificial and temporary articles used by ladies these days, which have led to many other problems pertaining to it. Act IV of the play is replete with images of what nature gives us in abundance, and along with that, it also lays stress on how human beings’ identification with the ecosystem is possible.

Shakuntala is brought up amidst the flora and fauna of the hermitage, and similarly, her departure towards her husband’s house is celebrated as a girl’s family bids farewell to her after the wedding rituals are completed. Each tree contributes to adorning her to give her mortal bliss once she gets ready to go to Dushanta’s palace. Kalidasa describes it like this:

A certain tree produced as if by magic

A 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. (Kalidas, 1989, p. 221)

The trees offer silk garments (silk garments are prepared by silkworms), precious jewels to adorn her (elephant tusk is used for making jewellery), and pour out rich rose-red juice to tint her tender feet (the red colour of rose petals or beetroot juice image). The sage Kanva also

reflects here on the close-knit relationship between the natural landscape of the hermitage and Shakuntala. He addresses the woods thus:

She who never had a drink of water

Before you had al drunk your fill,

She who never plucked your tender buds

For love of you, though fond of adorning herself

She to whom it was a joyous festival

When you first burst into bloom. (Kalidas, 1989, p. 223)

He asks her loved ones to permit her to depart for her husband's house. Like her parents, nature must grant permission for her marriage and must bear the pain of their separation from Shakuntala at the time of marriage. Though nature itself has been a witness to her Gandharva marriage and her consummation but the formal approval by the same parentage must be sought. At Kanva's request, in fact, a Koel sings, which is like a farewell song to complete the wedding ritual. Kalidasa uses pathos to heighten the effect of the pain borne not only by Shakuntala but also by her playmates. Here again, it is reiterated that flora and fauna are not some outside non-living objects but are full of emotions, enduring the same pain as human beings experience. In fact, Priyamvada reminds everyone that this grief and agony are felt not only by Shakuntala but also by the Holy Grove. Priyamvada says,

The doe tosses out mouthfuls of grass,

The peacocks dance no more:

Pale leaves flutter down

As if the vines are shedding their limbs. (Kalidas, 1989, p. 224)

Trees shedding tears seem to be crying at Shakuntala's departure. Shakuntala herself wishes to meet Madhavi Lata, whom she considers her "woodland sister". Shakuntala embraces her affectionately and says, "O, Madhavi, beloved sister, twine your branching arms round me..." and in fact she entrusts the responsibility of this plant to her father (Kanva) and requests him to take care of it as if it was Shakuntala herself (Kalidas, 1989, p. 224).

Shakuntala's identification with the young doe is a kind of parent-child relationship, and she took care of her similarly till she was in the hermitage. However, moving away from her family, she ensures that when the young doe delivers her baby, she must be taken care of well. She also picked up the little fawn in her arms, whom she treated like her son. She fed him with millets, and whenever he fell sick or got wounded by the sharp blades of Kusa grass, she applied Ingudi oil on it. The same fawn stops her path and does not let her go. The young fawn's mother died at an early age, and Shakuntala raised him like her own child. The animals do understand the love and affection showered on them and reciprocate the same with humans. That's why the little fawn "tugs again and again at the hem of her garment" (Kalidas, 1989, p. 225). At this juncture, Shakuntala considers herself very hard-hearted as she abandons her kith and kin, including the habitat of the hermitage, which is her family.

According to the eco feminist, Vandana Shiva (1989), women and nature have been exploited in similar ways. In the play, Shakuntala and the Land have been physically exploited

and their honor is robbed by Dushanta by entering their territory and later deserting their bodies completely mutilated and assaulted. They are left to manage themselves on their own. Dushanta's masculinization of the Earth/Shakuntala is complete when he makes her pregnant with his child for his pleasure. However, his rejection comes to Shakuntala like wildfire, spreading around her to test her patience and endurance. She stands all shaken to accept his betrayal when Dushanta accuses her of ruining her family's honour in this manner:

Why are you out to sully your family's honour,

And to make me fall; you are like a river

That crumbles its banks to muddy its crystal stream,

And uproots the tree growing by its edge. (Kalidas, 1989, p. 238)

Here, Shakuntla is personified as a holy river that gives soothing comfort to whoever approaches her (as Dushanta does) and demands protection in return. However, she is used to her exhaustion, abandonment, and thus suffers humiliation like Shakuntala does at the hands of Dushanta himself. Once forgotten by her lover, Shakuntala tries to reawaken his memory when she says the little fawn "would not come near, because you were a stranger to him. When I took the cup from you and held it in my hand, he was happy to drink. And you laughed, saying 'One trusts one's own kind, you are both creatures of the woods'" (Kalidas, 1989, p. 239). Thus, once surrounded by woods and its soothing balm, Dushanta can identify the unique bond between Shakuntala and her habitat but as soon as he is away from it, he does not hesitate in hurting his own wife by saying that "By such honeyed words are pleasure-loving men lured by young women out to gain their own ends" (Kalidas, 1989, p. 239). Such words are like shooting arrows at Shakuntala. However, she is the personification of Mother Earth. Her anger and fury return in abundance, and she retaliates, "Very well; so be it; putting my trust in the fame of Puru's lineage, I have fallen into the clutches of a man whose mouth is honey, but whose heart is stone. . . and now, I am made out to be a self-willed woman" (Kalidas, 1989, p. 240).

Forsaken by this masculine world, she seeks shelter in the lap of Mother Earth, who can only offer her solace, "O gracious Goddess, Mother Earth, open wide and take me in" (Kalidas, 1989, p. 242). At this stage, nature itself intervenes to lap the child it has borne and then "A flash of light in a woman's shape/ From Apsara Pool, snatched her up and vanished straightaway" (Kalidas, 1989, p. 242). When the "Green Lady" of the "Green world" curses the masculine world, Dushanta turns averse to all that is precious to him in this mundane world. His loss of interest in worldly affairs, his kingdom, and other activities of his household significantly indicate the curse of Prakriti's exploitation, desertion, degradation, and degeneration. In the absence of Prakriti/ Shakti, the king loses his ability to work, and he resigns from all other duties.

The fish becomes the harbinger of fortune for Dushanta, and the fisherman the mediator of that fortune when he finds the signet ring in the belly of a fish. The innocent creature must sacrifice its life yet again to make the union of male and female elements in nature a success. The pleasure Garden in Act VI reestablishes the celebration of the Spring Festival and the blooming of flowers and nature's bounty. Vasant Ritu in the Indian context itself is a month symbolic of the blossoming of love, which is closely connected with the celebration of nature in its bloom. Nature itself intervenes to make the union of Purush and Prakriti possible. The king's remorse is evident in his words for forsaking his better half, his Shakti, when his memory is restored.

Dushanta, in the final act of the play, is taken to the hermitage of sage Marica and his consort Aditi, who tends to the young Mandara trees herself there. Here, he immerses himself completely in nature's ecstasy and finds it more blissful than even Paradise. His senses get awakened to Prakriti's magnitude around him, and he feels grateful for being a part of such a world. Dushanta says, "I feel as if I am immersed in the Pool of Nectar" (Kalidas, 1989, p. 269). Here, Dushanta feels a sense of responsibility toward the ecological system, and he can appreciate the rhythm and harmony that a man can have with nature. At this stage, he is no longer a hunter showcasing his hunting ability and making the species of nature his prey, but he is a saviour, protector, and a parent who is entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding each species of one big family, 'Earth'. The final act reiterates another point that human beings can live with other species of the universe in peace and harmony, provided they establish a loving bond with the other species instead of hurting, abusing, or destroying them. If it happens, even a lion can be domesticated as represented by the fearlessness and bravery of Bharat, who captures a lion's cub to count its teeth. Unaware of Bharat's identity, Dushanta is shocked to see his courage in this scene, and he utters:

To amuse himself in play, he pulls

Roughly from its mother's half-sucked teat,

A lion's cub; tousling its soft mane

He drags it along by sheer force. (Kalidas, 1989, p. 270)

In addition to Dushanta's amazement at Bharat's playfulness with the lion's cub, Bharat also displays a close affinity with that small creature when he says, "Come little lion, come, open wide your jaws; I wish to count your teeth" (Kalidas, 1989, p. 270). Dushanta is compelled to admire the boy as he is his son (though unknown), and also for the fact that he symbolizes the primal spirits of nature. He is the child of the "Green World," born from the lady of the "Green World." In the absence of Dushanta, the Purusha, Shakuntala, the Prakriti lost her charm and glory. It is the reunion of Purusha and Prakriti that Kalidas has been able to establish in the final act of the play. The final act, rightfully titled 'Shakuntala's Prosperity', is nothing but the prosperity of Mother Earth and the Prakriti herself, who blossoms only with tenderness and affection of the Purusha. Anyone opposed to nature and trying to exploit its resources cannot proliferate in a true sense.

Conclusion

Thus, in Kalidas's play, nature becomes an embodiment of love, harmony, kindness, brotherhood, and peace. Mother Nature is seen as the harbinger of happiness for the one who takes care of her and maintains the 'Give and Take' relationship with her. The symbolic representation of Purusha and Prakriti through the characters of Dushanta and Shakuntala establishes the importance of male and female energy working together in harmony in the cosmos. Kalidasa's Prakriti is not lifeless but has all feminine attributes, and the Purusha is to nurture and care for the Prakriti so that it is preserved for the future. The writer restores peace and harmony not only in the life of Dushanta and Shakuntala but also in the whole universe by reinstating ecology in order. The ecocritical study of Kalidas's *Abhijnānaśākuntalam* reawakens the readers to look for their roots in Indian culture. By studying this magnum opus work, the research paper brings out the need for the preservation of Mother Nature as well as its restoration in ensuring the survival of human beings in the times to come.

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Bio-Note

Dr. Archana Gupta is an Assistant Professor at Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Lucknow. She completed an MPhil in English and cleared the National Eligibility Test. As she was a Junior Research Fellow, she was awarded a scholarship by the UGC for doing her research. In December 2017, she was awarded her doctorate degree on the topic *The Rhetoric of Selfhood: A Study of Select South -Asian Women Writers' Autobiographies*. Dr Archana Gupta has also presented research papers at various national and International

Conferences, and her research papers have appeared in reputed journals. The quality of her research reflects her academic mind and a caliber for good research. She is also a Silver and Gold Medalist in several NPTEL Courses offered by SWAYAM. She is a poet at heart and loves to write poems. She has recently edited a book titled *Natyakala: Theory, Performance and Practice* as a part of the Conference Proceedings. As a Soft Skills Trainer and Educator, she has helped students in personality development and confidence building in her training programs. Her research areas include Literature in Translation, Gender Studies, Literary Criticism and Literary Theory, Autobiographical Literature and Criticism.

