



KALIDASA'S SHAKUNTALA AND SHAKESPEARE'S MIRANDA: STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY

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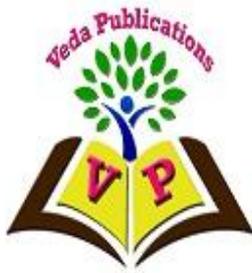
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ABSTRACT



The *Abhijnanashakuntalam* and *The Tempest* is a unique formulation of the exceptionally good dramatist Kalidasa and Shakespeare and also considered as the best Indian literary effort of any period. *Abhijnanashakuntalam* is taken from an epic legend *Mahabharata* whereas *The Tempest* is based on Italian tale. They both shared many things in common. The paper will give a short overview of how Miranda and Shakuntala struggle for identity and evaluate how they react on various social problems. They make us conscious of the original identity of which is reconquered after the great scramble and hurdle generated by the society.

Keywords: Kalidasa, Shakespeare, Identity formation, Women struggle.



The young orphan Brahmin boy by the grace of goddess Kali became known to the world as Kalidasa or the devotee of the goddess Kali. And with each of his work his popularity increased so much when he published his greatest masterpiece *Shakuntala* it became quite evident that the public would find pleasure in watching only the plays of Kalidasa. The drama *Shakuntala* stands alone and unrivalled in all literature because it depicts how restraint can be harmonized with freedom.

Whereas the plays of The Bard of Avon William Shakespeare were grouped into four categories: tragedies, histories, comedies, and romances. His plays translated into every major living language, and performed more often than those of any other playwright. Among his later works the fantastical romance *The Tempest* is one of his finest, and the last play. He only received high accolades due to this half magical and half real play during the centuries following his death in 1616.

Woman seems to be a sacred name for both the dramatists, Kalidasa and Shakespeare and both of them have a great reverence for the women. There is portrayal of multiple relationships in their works. Women in all stages and conditions are depicted in their dramas: lovelorn woman, the happy wife and the discontented beloved, the daughter, wife, and mother, the widow, the deserted woman, and who has renounced the world. Women are always on the front in their works and the males are insignificant. Everywhere the father and the daughter, wife and husband and mother and son relationships are depicted in their writings. They believed and convinced the audience that man and woman are never complete without each other. They considered women as the power incarnate of men, the strength that makes man act in the right way. Hence, women are considered by them as the pillars of society, and that there can be no safety for anyone or anything if they are ill treated or neglected by men. Both Kalidasa and Shakespeare depicted conditions of women in their times.

Shakuntala indeed is one of the most beautiful creations of Kalidasa. The plot of *Abhijnanashakuntalam* revolves around charmingly beautiful *Shakuntala* the daughter of the great saint Vishvamitra and heavenly damsel Menka. She was

brought up in the sanctified atmosphere of high ascetic discipline. She is a child of nature, quite innocent and perfectly chaste. Her simplicity and truthfulness is truly remarkable, which for a moment caused her fall, but it also redeemed her forever. She is the combination of the ethereal with the earthy, and the sensuous with the celestia. Her affection towards trees and plants of hermitage was nothing less than fraternal. She is naturally very beautiful. Even her simple rustic garments add grace to her beauty. Her beauty is of an order entirely different from that of the ordinary creation. Goethe the greatest poet of Europe said:

“Wouldst thou the young year’s
blossoms and the fruits of its decline,
And all by which the soul is charmed,
entraptured, feasted, fed?
Wouldst thou the earth and heaven
in one sole name combine?
I name thee, O Sakuntala, and all at
once is said.” (Kalidasa 1)

Her youth is sweet and lovely as flower. She follows the unsuspecting path of nature. Kalidasa has developed her into the model of a devoted wife her reserve endurance of sorrow and life of rigid spiritual discipline. *Shakuntala*, full of compassion and undiminishing love so she does not want to see her gallant husband falling at her feet. She says-

SAKUNTALA. O my lord, rise. It must
be that I had to reap the
Consequence of some wrong-doing
on, my part in a
Former birth: otherwise how could
my lord, so
Compassionate by nature, have acted
in such an
Unfeeling manner towards me. (VII.1
89)

After abandoned by her parents discovered and raised by sage Kanva amid the beautiful natural surroundings and ascetic hermits. She was brought up under the protection of rishi Kanva and obtained the affection of mother from Gautmi and of brothers and sisters from the inhabitants of the hermitage. They will take care of her as their own daughter. She is the combination of love, courage, self-respect and ready to pardon the errors in others that endears her



so much to the readers or audience. She has been seen as darling of all from her companions and Kanva, Gautami to Maricha, Sanumati and even the trees and fawns. She is a precious and delicate thing and loved by all.

In the absence of rishi Kanva Shakuntala falls in love with king Dushyanta and their mutual attraction eventually blossoms into a romance, and they secretly married and got enceinte. Dushyanta's beautify her with the words:

DUSHYANTA. She seems a flower
whose fragrance none has tasted,
A gem uncut by workman's tool,
A branch no desecrating hands have
wasted,
Fresh honey, beautifully cool.
No man on earth deserves to taste
her beauty,
Her blameless loveliness, and worth,
Unless he has fulfilled man's perfect
duty-

And is there such a one on earth? (II.I
21)

Then he leaves her in serene hermitage and gives a ring to Shakuntala as a token of love. As responsible and loving father rishi Kanva accepts her daughter's choice and sends her to her husband's place. The deep affection comes to the surface in strong colours when Shakuntala is ready to leave for the King's palace and tearfully bids farewell to her dear friends as well as to the trees and animals. There is to be seen a complete harmony between her and the surroundings. She has, therefore, affection for every tree, for every creeper and for every sprout. Where she is rejected by King Dushyanta due to rishi Durvasa's curse lost her token of love a royal signet ring. Now, her beauteous dream of hermitage is about to be broken. At some point she is rejected by both sides that situation is extremely pathetic. She also loses her connection with the loving friends, the birds, beasts, and plants and the beauty, peace and purity of the former life. She now stands alone shelterless and loneliness surrounded her. Further she is in unfamiliar hermitage of Maricha all is still and silent to us. She is in a dusty robe, face pale with austerities doing the penance of a lorn wife, pure souled.

SAKUNTALA. The pale, worn face, the
careless dress,
The single braid,
Show her still true, me pitiless,
The long vow paid (VII.I 88)

There is no hermit girls water the trees, nor feed the young fawn with handful of paddy. Her long penance purged her of the evil of her first union with Dushyanta. She is now inserted with the dignity of a matron, she is the image of motherhood, tender and good. After long penance in the Hermitage of Maricha the reunion of lovers possible by delinquency accepted by king and falls in Shakuntala's feet and says:

KING. Dear, graceful wife forget;
Let the sin vanish,
Strangely did madness strive
Reason to banish,
Thus blindness works in men,
Love's joy to shake;
Spurning a garland, lest
It proves a snake. (VII.I 89)

At the beginning of the play she is self-forgetful and obedient to nature's impulses like the plants and flowers at the end she is developed as deeper feminine soul, sober patient under trials, intent on austerities, strictly regulated by the sacred laws of piety.

Arthur Ryder the lover of Kalidasa, said of Shakuntala: "Though lovely women walk the world to-day By tens of thousands, there is none so fair in all that exhibition and display with her most perfect beauty to compare." (Ryder 2)

Miranda is indeed one of the most wonderful creations of Shakespeare. The plot of the *Tempest* revolves around Prospero whereas Miranda is here to share her father's misfortunes. She came to an inhabitant island so young at the age of three with Prospero in an old boat full of holes and with no sails and spend thirteen years of her life on deserted island. This island set in a lonely sea and the only dwelling is a cell weather fended by trees, the food is the simplest that nature yields. The atmosphere is of a subtle, tender, and delicate temperance and full of mystic melodies.

CALIBAN. Be not afeard; the isle is full
of noises,



Sounds and sweet airs, that give
delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling
instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and
sometime voices
That, if I then had waked after long
sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then,
in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open
and show riches
Ready to drop upon me that, when I
waked,
I cried to dream again. (III.I 48)

She is created of every creature's best and the wonder child of the Miranda. Miranda grew up motherless under the fostering care of her father on deserted island with the company of her father Prospero and the deformed slave Caliban and she hasn't seen another female other than herself on enchanted island. Her first words on seeing the shipwrecked nobles were:

MIRANDA. O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there
here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave
new world, That has such people in't
(V.I 69)

Prospero educated her in the lap of nature all the essential needs of life, speech, dress, gentleness, obedience, and modesty. This makes her seem very ignorant of the world by having very little experience with people and of anything outside the island. Her environment is either created by the benevolence of nature or the studious presence of her father. She must have learnt a lesson from her acquaintance with Caliban, who had tried to rape her after she was kind to him. She would learn not to trust people so easily because not everyone is as nice as she is. She is selfless and caring, she suffers by seeing others suffer, not even knowing who they are. Miranda appears to be a compassionate and gentle, but also quite passive heroine. In her very first lines in the play she has just seen the shipwreck and shows an honest and emotional nature and utters:

MIRANDA. O, I have suffered

With those that I saw suffer – a brave vessel
(Who had no doubt some noble creature in her)
Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart. (I.I 7)

She has a sweet union of womanly dignity and childlike simplicity in her character. Her education did not counteract her naturalness and simplicity. She is truly the child of nature. Prospero is proud of her excellent qualities and merits, and this is how he appreciate her daughter Miranda.

PROSPERO. O Ferdinand,
Do not smile at me that I boast her
off,
For thou shalt find she will outstrip all
praise

And make it halt behind her. (IV.I 54)
Even the beast-like creatures, Caliban
describes Miranda's beauty in
eloquent terms.

CALIBAN. He says to Stephano-
"I never saw a woman,
But only Sycrox my dam and she
But she as far surpasseth Sycrox
As greatest does least. (III.I 47)

Despite of the lack of contact with people Miranda is able to marry and to mature into a respectable woman. In *The Tempest* Miranda never remember about their past and when Prospero recalled her she is very curiously hear about their past and ask her father about their past. Prospero reveal the mystery of her past in front of Miranda that Prospero was a Duke of Milan and she was a princess and only heir of Milan. His usurping brother Antonio deceitfully exiled Prospero and his daughter after they lived on an inhabitant Island. After hearing about their past she feels pity for father's troubled because of her. But really she is strength of her father. Prospero arranged a magical shipwreck to fulfil his plan and take revenge to their past enemies and give righteous place to her daughter. Prospero hopes she and Ferdinand will be attracted to each other and they immediately fall in love, he pretends to be angry and makes Ferdinand a slave to test him. Once Ferdinand has proved he deserves Miranda. Prospero aroused magical love between Ferdinand and Miranda and bless their engagement that provides a symbolic ground for reconciliation and also gives Miranda



recognizance as a queen of Naples and completed his revenge with his brother Antonio and Alonso, king of Naples. Then Prospero and Miranda revisit their native land, to take possession of his dukedom and to witness the happy nuptials of his daughter Miranda and Prince Ferdinand. Ferdinand was the first heavenly male figure she saw, when she first sets eyes upon Ferdinand, she is amazed, and exclaims:

What is it? A spirit?

Lord, how it looks about!

It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit. (I.II 21)

Further she immediately fall in love with him. Ferdinand is also fascinated by Miranda and express his love as shown in the following lines:

FERDINAND. Admired Miranda!

Indeed the top of admiration! worth

What's dearest to the world! Full

many a lady

I have eyed with best regard, and

many a time

The harmony of their tongues hath

into bondage

Brought my too diligent ear: for

several virtues

Have I liked several women; never

any

With so full soul, but some defect in

her

Did quarrel with the noblest grace

she owed,

And put it to the foil: but you, O you,

So perfect and so peerless, are

created

Of every creature's best! (III.I 44-45)

Miranda is the only female character in the cast of 'The Tempest' and she is the heroine. She is a highly intelligent woman, gentle, sympathetic, and inquisitive. There is intensity of Miranda's love for Ferdinand when she finds him piling logs of woods under Prospero's orders. She offers to share his labours but of course he would listen to no such thing. She then asks him to sit down and rest because her father is busy reading his books and would remain away from this place at three hours. But Ferdinand replies that he must complete his task in time, and that he cannot therefore think of sitting

down to rest. Then she surrenders herself to the man with whom she has fallen in love at first sight and utters:

MIRANDA. I am your wife if you will
marry me,

If not, I'll die your maid, to be your
fellow

You may deny me, but I'll be your
servant

Whether you will or not. (III.I 44)

Here have an evidence of the fact that Miranda is an utterly inexperienced woman. Her simplicity of nature, her total inexperience of life, her complete innocence and her passionate nature are fully revealed to us here. It is interesting to note that Miranda does not necessarily know what a handsome male looks like since she has never seen a male, besides the people mentioned above, before. At one point, her father even says that Ferdinand is ugly for a man, but she says she does not care for she is humble and would not want a more handsome man. Miranda's physical beauty is a reflection of her inner merit. It is quite natural imagine her nymph like beauty from the effect she produces on her beholders. The beauty of nature and the music of the place had passed into her body and countenance and made her exquisitely lovely. She impresses her beholders as if she was the goddess of the island and no creature of flesh and blood. When Ferdinand first sees her he exclaims:

FERDINAND. Most sure, the goddess

On whom these airs attend!

Vouchsafe my prayer

May know if you remain upon this
island;

And that you will some good
instruction give

How I may bear me here: my prime
request,

Which I do last pronounce, is, O you
wonder!

If you be maid or no? (I.II 21)

Ferdinand finds her perfect and peerless. Thus Miranda the mere child of nature, is struck with wonder at her own new emotions. She is unaware of her beauty because she does not know what feminine beauty is suppose to look like. Her



tenderness is also evident when she begs her father not to use magic to control Ferdinand, whom she loves. Miranda is an obedient daughter, as proved by her dismay when she forgets herself and reveals her name to Ferdinand, but she is also a young woman in love, and when her father is occupied, she immediately looks to release Ferdinand from his labors. Miranda has no experience with people, and she has no experience with men, other than her father and Caliban. Because of her isolation, she has developed no artful skills at flirting, and when Ferdinand tells her that he loves her, Miranda weeps. In all that she does, Miranda is sweet and pure, honest and loving. So Prospero's magic gives identity to her daughter and make their exile worthy. In reality Miranda is a Princess but she lived as a maiden and struggles with life. Thus Miranda struggle starts on island and ends on the island with the identity of Princess of Milan and queen of Napel's. She has grown up in complete ignorance of life and the world. Living all her life on an inhabitant island and away from all human society and social intercourse, her knowledge and experience are inconceivably limited. She brought up in solitude, but she has not grown selfish, but has developed the social instinct and the fellow feeling. At the beginning Miranda is obedient daughter of her father and in the end she is devoted beloved of Ferdinand.

The admirable summing up of the character of Miranda is done by Mrs. Jameson: "The character of Miranda revolves itself into the very elements of womanhood. She is beautiful, modest, tender.....She is so perfectly unsophisticated, so delicately refined, that she is all but ethereal. Let us imagine any other woman placed beside Miranda – even one of Shakespeare's own loveliest and sweetest creations – there is not one that would not appear somewhat coarse or artificial when brought into immediate contact with this pure child of nature, this Eve of an Enchanted Paradise."(Jameson 154)

Through the reading of both the marvelous writings of Kalidasa and Shakespeare observed that both the heroines are high-born but both are scrambled in a lap of nature because of their parent's carelessness and lived a normal life instead of luxurious life. But Miranda seems not to be associated with nature as far as trees, creeps, flowers and birds are concerned

whereas Shakuntala is very much associated with all the natural surroundings in which she has been born and brought up. She finds the kinship with nature. Both Miranda and Shakuntala not prepared for the sudden unfair changes in their lives and different circumstances under which the two were bought up and struggled. Shakuntala's simplicity is natural that of Miranda is unnatural. Shakuntala's simplicity caused her fall, it also redeemed her forever. Miranda's simplicity was subjected to such a fiery ordeal. Shakuntala's simplicity was not girt round with ignorance, as was the case with Miranda. We see Shakuntala has two companions but Miranda is alone. Both the heroines have no experience of outside world because brought up in the lap of nature. Shakuntala brought up under religious atmosphere and natural atmosphere whereas Miranda brought up in artificial surrounding under the limitations of magical world created by her father. Both the heroines struggled from their childhood. Shakuntala was a child without parents, a queen without guards, and a wife without husband whereas Miranda is motherless and her father Prospero used her for his own personal ends and controlled her life through magic. Both the heroine's life in forest as a one long dark night and dawn came in the form of getting right position after great struggle. Shakespeare's heroine Miranda is a princess whereas Kalidasa's heroine Shakuntala is celestial born but their destiny against their and compelled them to retreat in forest instead of luxury life of palaces. Both Miranda and Shakuntala falls in love with first sight. As Miranda sees Ferdinand she regards him as a brave spirit and falls in love with him. Similarly, Dushyanta firstly reveals himself before Shakuntala as a brave spirit. At the very first sight of Dushyanta she feels an emotion scarce consistent with a grove devoted to piety and falls in love with him. But as far as the course of the path of the love is concerned it seems not to be so hard for Miranda. Prospero just tries to put hurdles on the path of Miranda and Ferdinand to prove their fidelity in love for each other. On the other hand the path of the love for Shakuntala proves to be very hard because destiny intervenes in the form of the curse of the sage Durvasa and thereby both the lovers are purified after passing through the fire of separation



for seven years. In the end of the play Miranda discovered love and new life in Milan and Naples and Shakuntala also got her lost love and become a Queen of Hastinapur. They both scrambled in nature to regain their lost identities. In the end of the plays they both win over destinies and get their proper positions and find their true identities also with the help of their parents because of them they lived unexpected lives. Shakuntala the dignified mother get her rightful place besides her son's father king Dushyant and Miranda the loving daughter of Prospero get her rightful place besides King Ferdinand. Their lost identities plays important role in plot construction and makes the play more interesting to readers. Both dramas teach us that identity is our most valuable possession and it must be protected. Thus there is no great love ever came without great struggle. In the writings of Kalidasa and Shakespeare women are considered as the pillars of society, and also that there can be ill treated or neglected by men. Both the heroines grown up under limitations of society they are independent on others but their strong will power motivates them and they obtain their lost identities after great struggle. Therefore women have constantly been struggling to gain equal rights and true identities everywhere in ancient times and as well as in modern world.

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