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Literary Projection of Nature and Environment in Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam: Reflection of Faith-Based Care for the Environment

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Abstract

Abhijñāna Śākuntalam, as Sanskrit play by the renowned poet Kālidāsa offers the utmost importance to nature and the environment. It is the responsibility of all and everyone, irrespective of their social strata; king, sages, their sons and daughter and their disciples' given equal responsibility and accountability to care for the environment. The king is advised not to kill the animals roaming inside a guarded territory of the Āśrama (cottage) of the sages. Śākuntalā was advised by her father Kaṇva to look after the plants and animals. The reciprocal nature of mutual dependence between Human and Environment vividly delved in *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam*. The King's major responsibility includes preserving environment, one such example; the text eludes King Duṣyanta, taming a mad elephant, destroying the plants, while the king introduces himself to the Śākuntalā the very first time, another example is, the opening statement in *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam* reflects the concern of environment protection, the very importance of the people who care and nurture environment and have describes as: *Yāsṛṣṭihsraṣṭurādya vahatividhihutam yāhviryā ca hotrī, Ye Dvekālam vidhattaḥ śrūtiṣaya gunā yā sthitā vyāpyaviśvam, Yām āhuḥ sarvabīja-prakṛtiriti yayā prāñinaḥ prāñavantaḥ, Pratyakṣābhīḥ prapannastanubhiravatuvastābhiraṣṭābhīrīśaḥ [A.S 1.1]*. Eight forms has Shiva, Lord of all and king: And these are water, first created thing; And fire, which speeds the sacrifice begun; those who care for nature; and time's dividers, moon and sun; The all-embracing ether, path of sound; The earth, wherein all seeds of life are found; And air, the breath of life: may he draws near, Revealed in these, and bless those gathered here (Ryder;1999). The eight elements described in *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam* viz; the five gross elements along with time and space, and the people in general who care for nature are considered to be the constituents of god or Shiva. The environment and nature treated here as one entity represented here as, Lord Shiva, one of the trinities of Hindu god, shows the reflection of faith in relation to the care for the environment.

Keywords: religion, Sanskrit text, environment, faith.

I. Introduction

The World is invariably filled with three types of sufferings (*Duḥkha*), *Adhibhautik*, *Adhidaivik*, and *Adhyatmika*; which are concerned with Nature, God and Body subsequently. Deliverance from these three types of *Duḥkha* is the goal of all beings. Our *Ācārya* sages have shown the path for liberation from all such sufferings. The Indian wisdom and intellectual tradition value a holistic understanding of knowledge. Knowledge where all disciplines are in unison. It is important to note that this knowledge and is mentioned in the upaniṣad as *Avidyā VidyāVidyā* or *Parā-Aparā Vidyā*. *Śākuntalam* imbibes the Vedic Philosophy and *Aupaniṣadic* values and ethos to describe the environment in a poetic expression in the form of a Sanskrit drama.

There is a total of seven *aṃka* (chapters) in the play. Throughout the text in those seven *aṃka*, *Kālidāsa* has brought the environment and conservation of nature as one of the major themes of the text.

II. Environment and Its Depiction in *Śākuntalam*

A. The beginning

In the very beginning of the text it says:

*Grīṣmasamayamadhikṛtya gīyatām
saṃprati hi-*

*Subhāgasalilāvagāhāḥ
pāṭalasamṣargasurabhivānavātāḥ*

*Pracchāyasaḥprabhānidrā divasāḥ
pariṇāmaramaṇīyāḥ*

*Īśadīṣa ccumbitāni bhramaraiḥ
sukumāra kesarāsikhāni*

*Avatamsayanti dayamānāḥ
pramadāḥ śirīṣakusumāni.*

[A.S 1.3-4]

Poetic expression presented in the first *aṃka* of the play, the song depicts the value of perfection in nature. The beauty of summer inside the *Āśrama* and the flowers nature has offered to it. A panoramic description of how all of them reside in *Āśrama* in harmony given special attention to biodiversity through such verses.

*Vaikhānasaḥ – (hastamudyamya)
Rājan- āśramamṛgoyaṃ na hantavyo
na hantavyaḥ*

*Na khalu na khalu bāṇaḥ
sannipātyoyamasmin*

*Mṛduni mṛgaśarīre
puṣparāśāvivāgniḥ. Kva bata
harīnakānāṃ jīvitam cāti lolam.
Kva ca nīṣitanipātā vajrasārāḥ
śarāste. Tatsādḥukṛtasandhānam
pratisamḥarasāyakaṃ*

*Ārtatrāṇāya vaḥ śāstraṃ na
prahartumanāgasi.*

[A.S 1.10-11]

King Duṣyanta, the protagonist of the play, goes hunting in the *Āśrama*, King advised not to kill innocent creatures as it is the duty of the king to protect the nation by preservation and conservation of the environment. It shows here that nation, it is not just the protection of material wealth,

conservation of the natural assets and environment is also a *Dharma*, towards the nation. Natural diversity is very critical for a nation and hence for King Duśyanta, It is forbidden to kill this deer, it is also a creature and very much part of the natural diversity of the *Āśrama*.

B. Female protagonist and environment

Anasūyā – halā śakuntale, tvattopi tatakāśyapasy āśram-avṛkṣakāḥ priyatarāḥ iti tarkayāmi

Yena navamālikā kusumapelavāpi tvameteṣāmālavālapūraṇe niyuktā

Śakuntalā – na kevalam tātaniyoga ev asti me sodasnehopyeteṣu (iti vṛkṣasecanam nirupayati)

Rājā -katham iyaṃ sā kaṇvaduhitā asādḥudarśī khalu tatra bhavan kāśy apoyaimāmāśramadharmeniyuṅkte

Idam kilāvyājamanoharamvapus

Tapahkṣamaṃ sādhayitum ya icchati

Dhrumaṃ sa nīlotpalapatradhārayā

Śamīlatāṃ cchettumṛṣi vyavasyat.

[A.S 1.17]

In the first *aṃka* of this play, the father of Śakuntalā i.e. Ṛṣi Kaṇva, offers his daughter very fatherly advice, to water the trees of the *Āśrama* and look after the animal in the *Āśrama* as must do, daily routine. He shows utmost affection and care for trees and animals and treat them as his own children. Śakuntalā's testimony makes it clear that the environment treated here as a

family. This reflects the importance of the environment on equal footings as children.

Śakuntalā, the female protagonist in the play, her attires and perfection of beauty is immersed in nature. All her embellishments are from nature itself, and even nature covers her body and she is a reflection of owing nature on herself.

C. Abhijñāna Śākuntalam and society

This text talks not only about human beings but also animals. The King gives orders to his followers not to disturb animals.

Gāhantāmmahiṣānīpānasalilamaśrṛṇ gairmuhustāḍitam

Chāyābadhdakadambakaṃmṛgakula mṛomanthamabhyasyatu

Viśrabdhakriyatāmvarāhatatibhirmu stākṣatīhpalvale

Viśrāmamlabhatāmidamcaśithilajyā bandhamasmadhdanuḥ

[A.S 2.6]

The environment depicted here as the way of life, an integral part of the daily life in Śākuntalam. It described as extremely critical for society. There is a mutual relationship between the human and the non-human. If we do not conserve the environment, our existence is endangered. In the second *aṃka* of the play, that essential relationship between nature and society. It indicates the reciprocal relationships society and environment complement each other.

D. *Nature and its Boundaries.*

The King Duṣyanta promises to Anusūyā and Priyamvadā, the friends of Śakuntalā-

Parigrahabahutvepi dve pratiṣṭhe kulasya me

Samudrarasanā corvīm sakhī ca yuvayoriam.

[A.S 3.18]

Not only in terms of the environment. The tree plant but the beach is included. Protecting the sea in the third issue. It is clearly stated that the king has the ultimate duty.

E. *Environmental diversity-symbolism*

If we care environment it cares for us, hence we must care it-

Pātum na prathamam vyavasyati jalam yuṣmāsvapītesu yā

Nādatte priyamaṇḍanāpi bhavatām snehena yā pallavam

Adye vaḥ kusumaprasūtisamaye yasyā bhavatyutsavaḥ

Seyam yāti śakuntalā patigṛham sarvairanujñāyatām

[A.S 4.9]

Kṣaumaṃ kenacidindu pādutaruṇā māṅgalyamāviṣkṛtam

Niṣṭhyūtaścaraṇopabhogasulabho lākṣārasaḥ kenacit

Anyebhyo vanadevatā karatale rāparvabhāgotthitai

Rdattānyābharaṇāni tatkisalayodbhe dapratidvandibhiḥ

[A.S 4.5]

Then the fourth *aṃka*, for the environment and society, which we can consider trees and plants as a symbol of biodiversity. There has been talk of conversation with nature and its constituents with humans. At the time of Śakuntalā's brides' farewell, flora and fauna and animals look like their relatives, trees and plants are bringing adornment to them. It is important to note that these are the times when nature was protected, that is, when we preserved our nature as our day to day responsibility, only then nature reciprocate and protect and enrich our quality of life. The preservation and conservation of nature are done by one generation, look after by one, benefits to later generations, the water offered to plant eventually is for everyone, and the plants planted and nurtured much before of, they reap fruits or other benefits to us.

F. *Nature and Social arrangements*

Śakuntalā asks his father when she would revisit his native home? His father gives a very significant answer.

Bhūtvācirāya caturanta mahīsapatnī

Dauṣyantimapratiratham tanayamniveśya

Bhartātadarpitakuṭumbabharenaśā rdham

Śāntekariṣyasipadamṇarāśrame' smin

[A.S 4.20]

In the fourth *aṃka*, the key to social system sustainability is

discussed. Environment protection, social protection, family responsibility, protection of the nation. All of this is especially seen here following ethical rules. Duty of child towards father, duty of father towards child, duty towards citizens, and duty of environment towards citizens are all widely discussed.

G. *King, kingdom and water conservation*

*Bhavanti namrāstaravaḥ
phalāgamaiḥ*

Navāmbubhirdūravilambinoghanāḥ

*Anudhdatāḥ satpuruṣāḥ
samṛdhidibhiḥ*

Svabhāvaevaiṣa paropakāriṇām

[A.S 5.12]

The fifth *aṃka* widely deals with morality. This verse of the play narrates to be humble and polite even you are in prosper situation. We may learn how to be polite from nature. Trees bow down when fruits come; the cloud bows down when it is prosperous with water. Like this, if you are a good-mannered human you must be polite. The disciples of sage also talk about the water reservoir. Nowadays we protect water pond because we need it but those students say to save water because it is also part of nature. It also needs the coexistence.

H. *Water bodies, diversity and cyclical interdependence*

*Puruṣaḥ-ahaṃ jāloṅgālādibhir
matsyabandhanop*

Āyaiḥ kuṭumbabharaṇaṃkaromi.

*Śyālah- (vihasya)
viśudhdaidānīmājīvaḥ*

Puruṣaḥ-bhartah, māevambhaṇa

*Sahajaṃ kila yad vininditaṃ na
khalu tatkarma vivarjanīyam*

*Paśumāraṇa karmadāruṇonukampā
mṛdureva śrotriyaḥ.*

*Śyālah-tatastataḥ puruṣaḥ-
kasmin divasekhaṇḍaśo
rohitamatsyomayākalpitaḥ...*

[A.S 6.1]

The sixth *aṃka* narrates about the diversity of water bodies. The pond is dedicated to nature.

I. *Harmony and Nature*

*Mākhalu cāpalaṃkuru kathaṃgata
evātmanaḥprakṛtim ? Rājā-
(karṇaṃdatvā)abhūmiriyama
vinayasyako nu khalveṣaṇiśidhyate?
(śabdānusāreṇāvalokya,
savismayam) aye ko nu khalvayam
anubadhyamānastapasvinībhyā
mabālasattvobālah ? ardhapīta
stanam māturamardakliṣṭakesaram
prakīdituṃ simhaśiṣuṃ
balātkāreṇakarṣati*

[A.S 7.14]

Finally, in the seventh *aṃka*, there has been talk of mutual harmony between these two animals and social animals. A boy Bharata. Description Is playing with What else could be a better example than this? Maharishi The description of the Āśrama of Mārici is very well known. In this way, we can say.

III. Conclusion

The care for the environment considered religious dharma, those persons who inclined towards taking responsibility and accountability of nurturing the environment, considers a godly figure. The reciprocal sum game between nature and humans for environment conservation based on long term commitments and planning, like Naturopathy medicines are normally consumed to remain fit and healthy, not when one has fallen sick, they are designed as a preventive measure for the continuation of a healthy life. In the play, rituals like brides farewell not completed until Śākuntalā visited the pond in the Āśrama before finally left with Duṣyanta to his Kingdom. Nature treated as auspicious, just before a married couple begins their married life.

In this way, we can say that Śākuntalam delves into the diversity of nature, deliberates upon various dimensions in the context of environmental protection and care. Forest protection, flora and fauna conservation, reservoir conservation, water conservation. The sense of

harmony amongst human and wild animals, especially the reciprocal relationship between the king and the citizens including animals, plants, trees under his kingdom, presents a narrative and Philosophical conjecture that even those who conserve nature are treated no less than constituents of God. Śākuntalam offers a natural and mutual harmony amongst human and non-human alike. It motivates us towards the conservation and protection of nature. Modern age problems, flood or drought and recent bush fire in Australia, due to our negligence and breaking of the harmony between nature and humans. Polluted air leads us to health issues, mainly among children, and is alarming and turning into a global emergency. Humans and the environment lived together in unison since human evolution took place in Africa and spread to another part of the world, diversity and environmental harmony are the answer to our environmental concerns. Abhijñāna Śākuntalam attributes to the people of that time, and the social system and governance of that period.[]

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