



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

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ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2020; 6(2): 293-295

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www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 18-01-2020

Accepted: 20-02-2020

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Human values in the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* of kālidāsa: a study

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Abstract

Values are the basis of human being. As human being man should have to maintain peace, tolerance, respect, equality, selflessness, sincerity, ethical actions etc. which makes the human being different from other animals. Kalidasa, the prince in Sanskrit literature, occupies a unique position both as a great poet and dramatist. Among his seven well-known creations, the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* is regarded as an unique creation by the poet and playwright. It has been observed that the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* of Kālidāsa is based on equality, morality, intolerance and so on. Hence, it may be an interesting topic to examine the different aspects of human values as revealed in the world famous play by Kalidasa and find out these relevance, if any, for maintain an ethical world in the present era.

Keywords: Human values-kālidāsa- *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* - relevance-present era.

Introduction

Values and human being are to be considered as the two sides of the same coin. The word 'Value' comes from the Latin word 'Velere' which means 'to be worth'. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the term 'Value' as the 'worth, desirability or utility of a thing'. Different eminent scholars and dictionaries gives the meaning of the word 'Value' in their own perceptions and as well as in their own languages. Thus, it may be said that value is that which renders anything useful, worthy or estimable.

Kālidāsa, the prince in Sanskrit literature, occupies an unique place not only in Sanskrit literature but also in the world literature too. The matchless qualities of his works have been lavishly praised both by ancient Indian critics and modern scholars. Kālidāsa has been designated as the *Kavikulaguru* i.e. 'the mentor of the poets'. Although a large number of works are attributed as Kālidāsa's authorship; but on the basis of the grounds of common ideas, expressions and style most of the scholars come to a view that only two epics (*Mahākāvya*s) namely, the *Raghuvamśa* and the *Kumārasambhava*, two lyrics (*Khandakāvya*s) named the *Ṛtusamhāra* and the *Meghaduta* and three plays viz. the *Mālavikāgnimitram*, the *Vikramorvaśiyam* and the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* can be ascribed to his unique creations. Among these all, the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* is regarded as the best which has a world-wide recognition. The verse by unknown critics proves---

*kāvyēṣu nātakaṁ ramyaṁ tatra ramyaṁ śakuntalā /
tatrāpi ca caturtha' nkaḥ yatra yāti śakuntalā //*

Along with his all works, the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* is based on equality, morality, intolerance, co-existence of man and nature, characters with all humanities and so on. The present century, the century of science and technology; where the human civilization has achieves tremendous progress and reaches at top of civilization, at the same time, but it has been observed that in each and every day, many inhumanly activities is also going on in our surroundings. Hence, it may be an interesting topic to find out the different aspects of human values as reveals in the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* and find out their relevance, if any, for maintain an ethical world in the present era.

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Major discussions

The *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* is a play in seven acts where the playwright portrays the passionate love between the king Dusyanta and Sakuntala, the daughter of a celestial nymph, Menaka and sage Viswamitra. So, it represents a bond between earthly and heavenly elements. So, among his seven well-known creations, the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* is highly praised as his best paragon. In this dramatic creation, from the beginning to the end, we have here and there various types of moral lessons; such as once tolerance kindheartedness, co-existence between nature and man, respect towards our traditions, beliefs, customs etc. through which the great playwright spreads the importance of such values in human being for ever.

The hero of the play, i.e. the king Dusyanta is a descendant of the great *Puru* dynasty. Instead of a very powerful king, in the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam*; from the very beginning of this play, he has been observed as a very obedient person. In the first act of this play, sage Vaikhanasa restrained him from killing the hermitage deer. Yet, he never argued with him. Rather, like an obedient student, the king withdraws his bow and accepted the invitation of vaikhanaśa went to visit the holy hermitage with a very simple dress ^[1].

‘Consider every good object as a gift of the God’. No one should feel proud for their credit. At his first site of the beautiful girl at the hermitage of Kanva, Dusyanta reckoned her as the first creation of the God. “*sriṣṭirādyeva dhātuh*”. Dusyanta was dissolved in the love of Sakuntala, at that time; he was invited by her mother. His mind become like a ‘*Trisanku*’. So, being an obedient son, he makes all arrangement to Vidusaka to present in his mother’s ceremony. In the whole play *Abhijñanaśakuntalam*, Kalidasa portrays the co-relation between nature and human being which is very remarkable one. Almost all the characters of this play have been depicted as a co-existent and undistinguished member of nature. Sakuntala has a sisterly affection towards trees and creepers of the hermitage. Therefore, she never attempts to drink water at first without watering the trees; and despite her weakness, she never plucks even a leaf for her ornaments. c.f.

*pātum na prathamam vyavasyati jalam yuṣmāsvapīteṣu yā
nādatte priyamandanāpi bhavataṁ snehena yā pallvam /
ādye vaḥ kusumaprasutisamaye yasyā bhavatyusavaḥ
seyam yāti Śakuntalā pratigrihaṁ saivairanujñāyatām // 2*

Similarly, mother-nature also offers all ornaments to Sakuntala at her auspicious occasion. i.e.

*kṣaumaṁ kenacidindupāṇdu taruṇā māṅgallyamāviṣkṛtaṁ
niṣṭhyūtacaranopabhogasulabho lākṣārasaḥ kenacit /
annyebhyo vanadevatākaratalairāparvabhāgotthitair-
-dattānyābharanāni takisalayodbhedapratidvandyabhiḥ // [3]*

Such type of relationship is probably rare in any literature through which Kalidasa treated nature with love, affection and once utmost care.

In the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam*, Kanva has been observed as an ideal father of Sakuntala. As a father, he performs all the rituals towards his daughter for her well-future. c.f.

*ami vedim puritah vlrptadhisnyah
samidhantaḥ prāntasamstīrnadarbhāḥ /
apadhanto duritam havagandhoi
vaitanastvam vahunayah pāvayantu // [4]*

Again, in the fourth act Kanva says that the *Navamallikā* has resorted to the mango tree and Sakuntala has been weeded with a worthy husband. So, now he feels free from all worries and anxieties regarding both of his daughters ^[5].

In the fourth act Sakuntala has been forwarded by the hermitage to her husband’s house. She will have to take the charge as the wife of Dusyanta. Here, Kanva’s advices to Sakuntala, may be a very significant, noticeable and undoubtedly an universal lesson for every bride and most worth full for all times. c.f.

*śuśrusva gurunkuru priyasakhībrtīm sapatnījane
bhaṭṭrtrivipraktāpi roṣanatayā mā sma pratipaṁ gamah /
bhuyiṣṭhaṁ bhava dakṣiṇā parijane bhāgyeṣvanutsekini
yāntevaṁ grhinipadaṁ yuvatayo vāmāḥ kulasyādhyayaḥ // [6]*

Again,

*abhijanavato bhartuh slādhye sthitā grhinipade
vibhavadguribhiḥ kṛtyaistasya pratikṣaṇamakulā /
tanayamcirātprācivāka prasuya ca pāvanam
mama virahajām na tvam vatse śucam gaṇayīṣyasi // [7]*

‘One should always be respected by his duty, not by his designation’. Kalidasa always loudly praises the honesty in profession. In the sixth act, Kalidasa appreciates the honesty of a fisherman. According to Kalidasa- ‘A man’s character should never be judged by his trade, howsoever in famous, to which he is born. A learned Brahmana may appear inhuman in performing a religious act of animal sacrifice. Yet his heart may none the less be always overflowing with the milk of human kindness’ ^[8] Similarly, Kalidasa never compromised with the negligence of anyone’s duty. He is very strict in one’s righteous conduct. In the first act, Vaikhanasa reminds the king Dusyanta that his weapon is for the protection of the distressed and not for striking at the innocent ^[9]. By the curse of Durvasa Kalidasa punishes both the king Dusyanta and Sakuntala due to their prohibited activities in the holy hermitage. Both of them were united in the holy hermitage, dissolving in love; Sakuntala even forgot her assigned duty i.e. hospitality towards the guests ¹⁰. The curse of Durvasa stands up as one’s self-realization, achievement of perfection and so on.

In the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam*, it has been observed that Kalidasa always in favor of penance groves, which contains peace, purity, tranquility and so on. In the first and in the seventh act of this play, we have a very long description of the peaceful hermitage of Kanva and Marica respectively. In the eyes of Kalidasa, in some cases; the hermitages are far better than the heaven---*svargādadhikatarām nibṛtisthānam amṛtahṛdamivāvagāro’smi* ¹¹. According to Kalidasa such holy hermitages only can built a human mind of harmonious environment, positive ideas, welfare to all, balance in plants and animals and balance in the cosmos. It is true that a pure tranquil environment can only provide a pure human mind. Mind is most powerful organ of human being. A pure mind may have a pure consciousness, purity in thought, deed and action, a spiritual life style, selfless, no greed or lust, truth and honesty. On the other hand a polluted mind provide a materialistic, greedy, lustful, exploitation of natural resources for own benefits, untruthful and selfish. So, in the fifth act Kalidasa condemns the crowded capital of the kingdom of Dusyanta. i.e.

abhyakamiva snātaḥ śuciraśucimiva prabuddha iva suptam /

baddhamiva svaragatirjanamiha sukhasanginamavaimi //^[12]

Similarly, in the seventh act of the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam*, Kalidasa clearly states that ‘an image takes no effect on the surface of a mirror having its transparency obscured by dust, but finds an easy access (has a clear reflection) when it is clean’^[13].

The characters of this play such as sage Kanva, the king Dusyanta, Sakuntala, Priyambada, Anasuya etc. all are portrayed by Kalidasa stands as an ideal character of mankind. As for instance, Kalidasa demonstrates the hero as an ideal king. All the qualities of a king that have been proclaimed by ancient Indian ancestors are found in Dusyanta. i.e. ‘*jitendriyo hi śaknoti vaśesthāpayitum prajāḥ*’^[14]; ‘*rājā vai saguṇo yeśām kuśalam teṣu sarvaśaḥ*’^[15] Being a king, Dusyanta bears all these qualities. In the begging of the third act the pupils addresses the mighty prowess—‘*aho mahānubhāvaḥ pāṛthivo duśyantaḥ*’^[16]. In the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam*, king Dusyanta has been observed as a social, spiritual, mental, physical conscious person. These are nothing but stand as human values as portrayed by Kalidasa.

Conclusion

Human being cannot imagine without its humanity or values. All kinds of happiness, peace, wrathful society or individual is possible through only humanly behaviors or activities. From the above discussions, it has been observed that through his play *Abhijñanaśakuntalam*, Kalidasa portrays all the values of our life that should be maintain by all. In purview of Kalidasa, the values are ‘Truth, Auspicious and Beauty’; ‘Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram’. In the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam*, Kalidasa portrays various types of Indian customs, rituals with a great respect which are core values that need to be practiced. Moreover, various types of values like once own duty, love and attraction towards the innocent and dumps, the concept of non-violence, sympathy towards all, fello-feelings towards natural objects, the spiritual life-style that should be maintain by everyone, the professional ethics, honesty in profession etc. are highly reflected in the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* which are gradually becomes disappear day after day in today’s society.

So finally, it may be concluded that indisputably the *Abhijñanaśakuntalam* occupies a unique position in the field of literature. This play is abundant with innumerable moral and values, may execute as nodal approach for solving various inhuman activities and problems, which the society in facing today.

Notes & References

1. *vinitaveṣeṇa praveṣṭavyāni tapovanāni nāma---*
Abhijñanaśakuntalam p-22
2. Ibid, IV.9
3. Ibid, IV.5
4. Ibid, IV.8
5. Ibid, IV.13
6. Ibid, IV.18
7. Ibid, IV.19
8. Ibid, VI.1
9. Ibid, I.11
10. Ibid, IV.1
11. Ibid, p-262
12. Ibid, V.12
13. Ibid, VII. 32
14. *Manusmṛiti*, VII.44
15. *Mahābhārata*, Sāntiparva 91.32

16. *Abhijñanaśakuntalam*, p-86

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