
Artistic Influence of the Classics: Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Sakuntalam*

Dr.Kshamata Chaudhary

HoD,Dept. of English

Vardhman Mahaveer Open University,Kota(Raj.)

Aesthetics or the philosophy of art in India has been studied not with reference to music or pictorial representation but mainly through the field of the dramatic representation. Music and pictorial representation have been treated as subsidiaries of the dramatic art. This is probably due to the fact that the situations of human life are best represented through the dramatic art appealing to the eye, and the ear giving in the process an aesthetic pleasure to the spectator. The purpose of my paper is to trace the elements that go into the depiction of aesthetic principles that are involved in such writings.

The inquiry into the nature of drama involves the origin, theory and technique of drama with all its accompaniments of speech, dress, gesture and decor. *Natya* is referred to as the fifth *Veda*, revealed by Prajapati to Bharata. *Natyaveda*, the fifth *Veda* was created to instruct people in the pursuit of the well-recognized goals of human life: *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, *Moksha* and to divert the mind from the painful. The Gods therefore wished to instruct humanity in a way that would delight them. And they felt this could be done through the dramatic art. The result was that a wide variety of dramatic forms came into existence. *Vastu*, *Neta* and *Rasa* were regarded as the main elements of drama. The *nataka* was recognized as one of the tenth form of Sanskrit drama and as a full-fledged creation of dramatic art. The chief constituents of *nataka* were:

1. The *Vastu* or the subject matter which had to be *Prakhyata* or well known.
2. The *Nayaka* or the central character who was required to be the *Dheeroddhata* and *Udhata* meaning exalted, endowed with the virtues of tremendous energy and enjoying rulership of the world.
3. The *Nataka* dealt with a variety of sentiments, a string of achievements and involved the elements of wealth, splendour and love.
4. The *Adbuddha* or marvelous had an important place in the scheme of drama and the *Nataka* was generally divided into many acts which constituted the progress of the story and unity till the last.

The drama provides both pleasure and education and has the potential of uniting diverse elements of life into a meaningful whole. Drama has been linked in 'Yajna' and has a moral and ethical purpose.

Abhijnana Sakuntalam of Kalidasa is one of the most celebrated works of the ancient Indian drama. A marvelous use of innovation is seen here in the way Kalidasa

reconstructs the story of Dushyanta and Shakuntala as told in the *Mahabharata* to include in it various *rasas* such as the *shringara*, the *veera*, the *karuna* and the *veebhatsa*. While the story of Shakuntala in the epic version is stiff and clinical, Kalidasa's version of the story has an undeniably delicate charm in the way he weaves passion, anger, pity and fear into the texture of the play. The *gandharva vivaha* of Dushyanata and Shakuntala in Kalidasa's story is more romantic and fanciful as compared to the business deal that it appears to be in the epic version. One has to accept that in the process of weaving passion and pathos into his poetry, Kalidasa has compromised rather heavily on the portrayal of Shakuntala's character, which almost appears as a caricature of the original character of Shakuntala in the epic version. Kalidasa depicts her as a perfect *nayika*, a *kulastri*. She is a *dheera* meaning self-controlled, *lalita* meaning elegant, *udatta* meaning exalted and *nibbrata* meaning quiet. She is also *virahotkanthita* meaning unhappy in separation from her loved one. Kalidasa introduces elements of the *vipralabdha nayika* and the *abhisarika* too into her personality in the way she appears to have been deceived by her love and the way she proceeds to meet her lover. The *shringara rasa* evoked depicts both the aspects of love – the *sambhoga* meaning union and the *vipralambha* meaning separation.

Ancient Indian drama recognized five *avasthas* or stages in the action of the play. The *beeja* or the seed of the story was introduced constituting the beginning or *prarambha* of the play. The *beeja* excited the curiosity of the reader or spectator. The second stage was that of *prayatna* when the hero made suitable efforts to achieve his purpose. What was important about this stage was the fact that the object of the hero was still vague. The third stage was that of *praptisambhava* when there appeared a slight hope of the achievement of the object desired. This stage later progressed to the stage of *niyataphalaprapiti* when there was almost a certainty that the desired object would be achieved. Each stage carried the story a step further and culminated finally in the *phalayoga* wherein there was a full and final achievement of the desired object. The hero or the *nayaka* in his efforts to gain *phala* becomes the *phalarthi*.

Illustrating the five stages from Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* it can be said that Dushyanta's statement "Well, her I will see; She, indeed," (AS 4) and Shakuntala's shy musing "How is it, indeed, that on seeing this person I have become susceptible of an emotion which is inconsistent with a penance-grove?" (AS 9) constitute the *prarambha* of the play. *Prayatna*, which constitutes the second stage, begins with Dushyanata's urgent words to Vidusaka, "Friend, some of the sages have recognized me; think therefore, under what pretext I may again visit the hermitage" (AS 19). The fourth and the fifth acts make up the third stage of *praptisambhava* when obstacles present themselves. The obstacle in *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* is caused by *anarsa* or anger of sage Durvasa who with his quick outbursts of temper and his lethal curses becomes the cause of the obstacle in the play. King Dushyant forgot his beloved and the marriage, which was solemnized at the ashram. This stage was the poet's dramatic imagination who removed the king's capacity or responsibility for dealing with the situation. At this stage the achievement of the *phala* seems a remote possibility. The fourth stage of *niyataphalaprapiti* arises when the so-called obstacles are satisfactorily removed and the union of the lovers can very well be expected. The sixth act of *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* makes up this stage when the ring is brought to the

court of Dushyanta by the fisherman. The final stage or *phalayoga* is the achievement of the desired object, takes place in the seventh act of the play wherein the reader or spectator witnesses the ecstatic union of Shakuntala and Dushyanta after a long period of suffering and remorse.

Rasa in Indian poetry is its very soul. It is the relish, the savour and taste of poetry. Various *rasas* are evoked in the play that give perfect aesthetic satisfaction to the spectator. While the main *rasa* evoked in *Abhijnan Shakuntalam* is *sringara*, other *rasas* too like *raudra*, *karuna*, *vira*, *adbhuta*, *utsaha* etc., find their proper place in the text. The *vibhava* or emotions too always have an objective reference. It requires an external stimulus. *Vibhava* refers to that stimulus and can be of two types: (a) *alambana*, the object which primarily arouses the emotion and, (b) *uddipana*, the environment which enhances the emotion. Dushyanta is the *alambana vibhava* for Shakuntala's love and Shakuntala is the *alambana vibhava* for Dushyanta's love. The beautiful hermitage that is set in the midst of the deep forest on the banks of the river Malini is the *uddipana vibhava*. Even in the fourth act the scene of leave taking of Shakuntala from Kanva's hermitage evokes the *karuna rasa*. The trees, the plants, the deer and the peacock of the Vanajyotsna, and even the doe that is slow by the weight of her young, of the fawn, Shakuntala's foster-child try to prevent her going by catching the end of the garment. Kasyapa says to Shakuntala:

“My child, this fawn here, regarded by you as your son, whom you affectionately reared with handful of rice, and to whose mouth, when wounded with the sharp points of the *kusa* grass, you applied the healing oil of the *ingudi*, does not leave your path”(AS 39).

Here nature not only echoes the feelings of the persons and even the progress of their thoughts — but actively partakes of man's joys and sorrows and gives a foreboding of the approaching catastrophe.

Shakuntala at the outset of *Abhigyanashakuntalam* is the picture of maidenly virtue, hesitating to even speak to the king directly. She, infact addresses him through her friends but there can be little doubt that several dormant emotions in her have been stirred to the extent that after a modicum of maidenly hesitation she readily consents to the *gandharva vivaha* proposed by the king. The *shringara rasa* is evoked in the scene of a bee hovering around Shakuntala's face, filling the king with envy. The erotic mood is heightened by Shakuntala's request to her friend to loosen the garment. The story of their love develops in a beautiful grove in the forest. The various flowers and birds provide the stimuli for the love between them. Nature is not something external but a background for reflecting human emotion. This is felicitously described as “atmospheric subjectivity” and is one of the feature of Kalidas' nature poetry.

The *karuna rasa* is fully evoked in this aspect of separation of love. It is a dictum of Sanskrit critics that there is no charm in love unless it is sweetened by separation. *Sambhoga* and *vipralambha* are both essential features of love in the drama. The leave taking scene of King Dushyanta introduces *karunarasa* into the play. The King says,

“My desire to return to the capital has slackened. So I’ll join my followers and encamp them at no great distance from the penance-grove. I can’t turn myself away from the occupation about Shakuntala”(AS 14).

Even the *rudhra vibhava* of Shakuntala is worth noticing when Dushyanta refuses to recognize her and even accept her identity in his life in past, she “O Wicked one! You judge after the manner of your own heart! Who else will act as you, putting on a garb of virtue and resembling a well covered over with grass?” (AS 50). A deep note of pathos later enters the story in the way Shakuntala suffers pangs of agony after being separated from her royal lover. This brings in the other aspect of love that is, separation in love.

Thus, poetic drama is the most beautiful and effective way of saying things. The human mind is capable of various aesthetic experiences. The poet with his inner vision is the creator of a new world other than the one created by Brahma. The poet has the rare gift of transforming this gross world into a world of celestial bliss. Sublimated joy is the aim of poetic drama and this bliss is purely aesthetic. Kalidas beautifully and minutely utilized the epical story of *Abhigyanam Shakuntalam* with great skill and delicacy. No poet had a richer and fuller sense of sensuous loveliness or a more masterly command of the resources of suggestive incidents, imagery and pictorial phrasing such as would reveal that loveliness in words. As Tagore has remarked about the poet that he “has fully painted all the blandishments, the playfulness and fluttering of the intoxicating sense of youth, the struggle between deep bashfulness and strong self-expression”.

Works Cited

- Pandey, K.C. *Comparative Aesthetics: Indian Aesthetics*. Vol. 1. Banaras: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1950.
- Gupta, Abhinava. *An Historical and Philosophical Study*. Banaras: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1935.
- Choudhari, Narendra Nath. *Philosophy of Poetry*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1959.
- Kale, M.R., ed. *Abhigyanam sakuntalam of Kalidasa*. Bombay: Gopal Narayan & Co., 1934.
- Jain, Nemichandra. *Indian Theatre*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1992.
-