
**Title: Women in *The Tempest* and
Abhignansakuntalam: A Comparative Study**

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Abstract

William Shakespeare belongs to 16th century and the first quarter of 17th century, England whereas Kalidas belongs to 4th century BC India. The language of Shakespeare's literary corpus is English whereas Kalidas has written in Sanskrit. Shakespeare has contributed to the world literature nearly 37 plays in addition to his sonnets and other poems. To Kalidas' credit, there are only three known plays i.e. *Abhignansakuntalam*, *Malvikagnimitram*, and *Vikramorvasiyam* in addition to his epics and short poems. Despite the fact that both of them belong to different culture and language, time and space, the researchers find a striking similarity in the treatment of themes like love, nature, and portrayal of men and women. *The Tempest*, which is supposed to be the last play by Shakespeare, shows a striking similarity with Kalidas' *Abhignansakuntalam* particularly in terms of portrayal of the women. Both of the writers have shown their heroines as pure children of nature. So it would be very interesting to see the portrayals in comparative mode.

Keywords: Nature, Nurture, beauty, Sensitive, Pure, Similarity

Introduction

In *The Tempest*, Miranda is often referred to as a pure child of nature by critics. Anna Brownell Jameson writes on Miranda "Our impression of her nymph-like beauty, her peerless grace and purity of soul, has a distinct and individual character" (Bloom, 2010, p. 91). Jameson talks of Miranda's nymph-like beauty. This nymph-like beauty of Miranda has a

striking semblance with the grace and charm of Sakuntala who is the daughter of a nymph, Maneka. Jameson writes:

She has never beheld one of her own sex;...her companion have been the rocks and woods, the many shaped, many-tinted clouds, and the silent stars; her playmates the ocean billows, that stooped their foamy crests and ran rippling to her feet. (Bloom, 2010, p. 91).

Jameson points out that Miranda does not show any social artificiality as there was no social company to her. Her companions were rather rocks, woods, many shaped clouds and the silent stars.

Sakuntala, in *Abhignansakuntalam*, according to myth, was discarded by her mother, Maneka, a nymph, who had come to pervert Vishwamitra from his penance. Maneka was successful in her task but for this she had to marry Vishwamitra. They got a daughter, Sakuntala, but Maneka left Vishwamitra as her purpose was served. Before leaving, Maneka put the baby, Sakuntala, at the ground and covered her with leaves. According to the myth, Sakuntala was initially brought up by the birds (her name, Sakuntala, in Sanskrit, means someone who has been brought up by the birds) before she was found by a sage, Kanva. Kanva's hermitage was there in a forest and therefore Shakuntala too had the company of nature like Miranda had. The trees, vines, and the flowers were the companions of Sakuntala. Both of these heroines are motherless and are brought up by single parents.

Portrayal of Miranda in *The Tempest*

Having been betrayed by his younger brother, Prospero, Miranda's father, lands at an uninhabited island. As Miranda was only three years old and motherless, Prospero's responsibilities were very challenging. At this island, Prospero neither had social support nor power, he had only time in his hands which he utilizes in upbringing his daughter. Miranda is motherless but Prospero does not let her miss her mother through his sensitive caring and supervision. Jameson writes:

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She is 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 loveliest and sweetest creations—there is not one of them that could be compared for a moment; not one that would not appear coarse or artificial when brought into immediate contact with this pure child of nature (Bloom, 2010, p. 92).

Jameson finds Miranda perfectly unsophisticated and the sweetest creation of Shakespeare. She calls her the ‘the pure child of nature’ and finds her matchless among other Shakespeare’s women. When she comes to know that her father has caused storm and hence sufferings to the people on the ship. She responds:

O !I have suffered

With those that I saw suffer : a brave vessel,
Who had, no doubt, some noble creatures in
her,

Dashed all to pieces.

(1.2, 2-8) (Vaughan, 2011, p. 33)

Miranda is so kind-hearted that she is very sad to see other in troubles. Her reaction on hearing that many people have been caught in storm represents her emotional and sentimental growth.

Portrayal of Shakuntala in *Abhignansakuntalam*

As discussed above, Sakuntala was discarded by her nymph mother, Maneka. She was brought up by a sage, Kanva. Like Miranda, she also passed her childhood and early youth in the lap of nature. Kanva performed the role of a father and a mother to her as Prospero did for Miranda. Like Miranda, Sakuntala has also been referred to as the pure child of nature. Lalwani points out “Kalidas has thus pictured Sakuntala as a fine flower of nature, a nymph’s daughter, brought by a sage; so combining in herself romantic beauty and ascetic simplicity, artless charm and conquering passion... (Lalwani, 1998, p. 588)”. Kalidas has described that she used

to drink water only after watering the plants. The following lines are remarkable in terms of Sakuntala's beauty and innocence:

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.
(Lalwani, 1998, p. 587)

Kalidas describes her as flower which is still untouched, and a gem which has not been cut by the tool of any craftsman. The playwright finds none, on this earth, who deserves to enjoy her beauty. Kalidas describes her unearthly beauty as "How else among mortal women could there be the birth of such beauty? The flash with quivering light arises not from the surface of the earth (Lalwani, 1998, p.590)". M. Mansinha writes about Sakuntala:

Sakuntala is the very picture of girlish innocence. She is one of those trees and creepers she was asked to tend by her sage father, knowing no more sorrow in life as yet than the death of a pet deer. Then comes the young and the handsome king from the city, and when Sakuntala meets him face to face she is shaken for the first time in her short life with those psychological disturbances that love creates in adolescent hearts. In innocence she cries out "Oh, why do I have such feelings when I see this man. They seem wrong in a hermitage (Mansinha, 1969, p.82).

Mansinha finds Sakuntala a blend of beauty, grace and innocence. He refers to Sakuntala's reaction on seeing king, Dushyanta. Sakuntala could naturally feel the emotions of love which are often seen in an adolescent but it is remarkable that she shows her consciousness also that such feelings are wrong

in a hermitage. Lalwani observes that “Sakuntala is a combination of beauty and vivacity, simplicity and sincerity...(Lalwani, 1998, p.600)”.

Miranda and Sakuntala: A Comparison

As discussed above, Miranda and Sakuntala have been called pure children of nature by different critics. Anna Jameson calls Miranda ‘a pure child of nature’ whereas Saroj Lalwani refers Sakuntala as ‘a flower of nature’. Lalwani has compared these two heroines “She (Sakuntala) is like Perdita and Miranda, nature’s child....Her intimacy with nature is evident when she bids farewell to the creepers with such poignancy.....(Lalwani, 1998, p.598)”. M.R. Kale describes Sakuntala’s farewell to the creepers with great poignancy “O Vanjyotsana, although you were united with mango tree, do you embrace me, in return, with your arm like twigs that point in this direction. From today, I part (Kale, 1983, p.143)”.

One more point which brings these two heroines on the same ground is: both of them are motherless. Miranda probably lost her mother when she was only an infant as her father brought her to the island when she was only three years of age. On the other hand, Sakuntala is said to have been discarded by her mother, Maneka, a nymph, when she too was an infant. It is also noteworthy that both Miranda and Sakuntala were brought up by single parents.

The arrival of lover also, in both plays, seems to be a point which brings both works close to each other. In *The Tempest*, Ferdinand arrives at the uninhabited island and falls in love with Miranda as soon as he sees her. He is completely enamoured of Miranda’s beauty. He takes her as ‘goddess’ when he first sees her ‘Most sure the goddess (Vaughan, 2011, p.422)’. In *Abhignansakuntalam*, Dushyanta arrives at the hermitage of Kanva and falls in love with Sakuntala as soon as he sees her. Like Ferdinand, he too is enamoured of her beauty. Dushyant express “How else among mortal women could there be the birth of such? The flash with quivering

light arises not from the surface of the earth (Lalwani, 1998, p. 590).

Conclusion

In the comparative study of the plays, *The Tempest* and *Abhignansakuntalam*, we have found that both Shakespeare and Kalidas have portrayed their women in similar style. The heroines of both playwrights are pure children of nature. The nature has nurtured them into sweet women. These two plays have certain aspects in common but this paper has only dealt with the portrayal of women. In the comparative study of Shakespeare and Kalidas, this paper also tried to explore the grounds on which these two writers of different time, country and culture are often compared with each other. The portrayal of women in these two plays may obviously be one of those grounds which brings both of them together. In the discussion of the plays, we have found that both of them have portrayed motherless daughters who pass from childhood to adulthood in the sensitive supervision of their single parents. Further we have found that the heroines of both writers turn out to have similar nature, behaviour and modesty. The introduction of a romantic lover too marks a striking similarity. As Kalidas belongs to 4th century BC India and Shakespeare 16th century England, one cannot find a direct chronicle link between these two writers but the characterization and particularly the portrayal of the heroines in the selected plays bring Shakespeare and Kalidas very close to each other. This paper does not try to justify that Kalidas is Shakespeare of India or Shakespeare is Kalidas of England but it does highlight the similarities in the portrayal of the women in the selected plays.

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