

---

# UNIT 4 *ABHIJNANA SHAKUNTALAM*: CHARACTER ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

---

## Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Character Analysis
  - 4.2.1 *Sutradhar*
  - 4.2.2 *Shakuntala*
  - 4.2.3 *Duhsanta*
  - 4.2.4 *Madhavya*
- 4.3 Critical Perspectives
  - 4.3.1 Gender
  - 4.3.2 Caste
  - 4.3.3 Kingship
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Questions
- 4.6 Suggested Readings and References

---

## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

---

This Unit is aimed at giving a deeper understanding of the play by analysing the characters and providing critical perspectives on the play. The first section examines important characters and their function in the play. The second section provides key criticisms on the play that include and are not limited to gender, caste, and kingship. Finally we will end with a few questions, which will help us to encapsulate what we have studied so far.

---

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

---

In this unit we'll look at what *Sanskrit* drama denotes and how characters have certain functions and roles to play. *Sanskrit* drama delineates the characters and their roles in combination with the use of various *rasas*. Let's take a deeper look at character analysis in the sections that follow.

---

## 4.2 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

---

*Sanskrit* drama has many stock characters and the audience who were familiar with its structure could easily figure out the function of these characters. *Abhijnana Shakuntala* contains the staples of *Sanskritic* drama with the *nayanka*/hero and his entourage, *nayaki*/heroine and her companions, *Vidusaka* (jester) and court officials etc. The play is a beautiful mixture of the *rasa* of love (*srngara*) and heroism (*vira*) and we can see how they play out in the actions and dialogues of the characters.

### 4.2.1 *Sutradhar*

As the name suggests, the *Sutradhar* is someone who holds the thread of the story. He is the one who introduces the play to the audience and in essence can be considered the narrator or if we stretch the analogy a bit even the director

of the play and **Chandra Rajan** has translated the *Sutradhar* as Director. His role is usually restricted to introductions- of characters and acts. He guides the audience towards the proper enjoyment of the play as well as guides the play to its proper and logical ending. His role begins as soon as the Benediction ends.

*Director: Lady! If the preparations in the dressing room are completed, would you be pleased to attend us?...*

*Director: Lady, we have here before us, an august audience that is highly educated and most discerning. This evening we wait upon it with a new play composed by Kalidasa, entitled The Recognition of Sakuntala. Will you see to it that all the actors do their very best?* (p. 169)

At one point the *Sutradhar*/ Narrator/ Director is so carried away by the actress's song that he forgets what they had intended to do as stated above:

*Director: Beautifully sung, dear lady; aha – just look around you; the audience is still, as if drawn in a picture – spellbound, caught in the web of beauty woven by your singing. Now then, what play shall we put on to honour and entertain them further?*

*Actress: Why, Sir, what you mentioned right at the beginning – the new play entitled The Recognition of Āakuntalā.*

*Director: You do well to remind me, dear lady. Indeed, my memory failed me for an instant; because,*

*I was carried far, far away, lured  
By your impassioned song, compelling,  
(looks towards the wings)  
even as the King, Duhsanta here,  
was, by the fleet fleeing antelope.* (pp. 170-71)

#### 4.2.2 *Shakuntala*

*Shakuntala*, the heroine or *nayaki* of the play, was born of the *apsara* Menaka and the sage *Visvamitra* and abandoned at birth. *Kanva* finds her in the forest, protected by birds and adopts her as his daughter. Being part human and part *apsara*, she inherits her mother's otherworldly beauty and grace, which is what, attracts *Duhsanta* in the first place. *Shakuntala* is portrayed as an exceptionally beautiful young woman who is loved by everyone in the hermitage, including the animals, trees, and plant life.

*Dear Anasuya, it is not merely a matter of Father's injunction; I love them like a sister.* (p. 176)

She is first shown to us watering the plants and treating them like her kin. Similarly, when she leaves the hermitage, the animals and trees show their sorrow as well.

*Anasuya: Shakuntala dearest, have you noticed that there is not one sentient being in the Hermitage that is not sorrowful now at the thought of losing you. See:*

*The cakravaka answers not the call of his love  
hidden behind lotus - leaves:  
with lotus – fibre dangling from his beak,  
he gazes only at you.* (p. 225-26)

**Kalidasa** describes *Shakuntala* in traditional feminine terms of beauty as being slender waisted, smooth skin, dark hair etc. but he adds erotic terms too to her description through images drawn from the natural world.

*Duhsanta: ...With rounded breasts concealed by cloth of bark  
fastened at the shoulder in a fine knot,  
her youthful form enfolded like a flower  
in its pale leafy sheath unfolds not its glory. (p. 177)*

Especially through *Duhsanta*'s words we are given a sensual physical picture of the heroine. She is equated to lovely flowers, blooming with magical youth, with doe like eyes that radiate beauty, with sensuous lips, rounded breasts etc.

*Though inlaid in duck weed the lotus glows;  
a dusky spot enhances the moon's radiance;  
this lissome girl is lovelier far dressed in bark!  
... Her lower lip has the rich sheen of young shoots,  
her arms the very grace of tender twinning stems;  
her limbs enchanting as a lovely flower  
glow with the radiance of magical youth. (p. 177)*

In **Kalidasa**'s play, *Shakuntala* is therefore a young girl, yet to experience the vicissitudes of the worldly world.

The *Shakuntala* of the epic is slightly different from the one in the play. In the epic, *Shakuntala* arrives with her son at the court. When rejected, she fights for herself and her son, quoting the Law to counter *Duhsanta*'s lies and insults. She argues her case in front of *Duhsanta* and prepares to leave after asserting that her son will reign sovereign. However, a heavenly voice affirms *Shakuntala*'s words and the King accepts her. The play therefore departs firstly in showing *Shakuntala* as arriving before the birth of the son. At the face of *Duhsanta*'s insults, *Shakuntala* does indeed, like her epic counterpart, assert her truthfulness but there is no heavenly voice to validate her words and both *Duhsanta* and her ascetic companions reject her. The rejection is crucial in elevating *Shakuntala*'s status as a pious woman because even after being humiliated in front of everyone, she remains faithful to her husband and suffers with quite dignity rather than fighting further for her rights.

*Shakuntala*, in accordance to the character of *nayaki*, is therefore steadfast in her love for *Duhsanta*. Her loyalty to her husband is what ennobles *Shakuntala* as an exemplary woman, the ideal *pativrata stri*. Thus the play offers us a *Shakuntala* who will be celebrated as a virtuous woman, being both a good wife and mother.

### 4.2.3 *Duhsanta*

The *Nayank* or the Hero is the main protagonist of the play. Heroes in *Sanskrit* drama belonged to the upper castes such as *Brahmins* or *Kshatriyas*. Since these figures embodied the *vira rasa*, they had to be handsome without any disfigurements, be intelligent, daring, and filled with courage and fortitude, making such men worthy of the heroic mantle. *Duhsanta*, the King of the *Puru* clan in the city of *Hastinapur*, is an ideal hero, loved and venerated by everyone in the kingdom, even by the ascetics in the secluded Hermitage. As a king, *Duhsanta* is the upholder of Law, and it is his sacred duty to maintain order in his kingdom and protect his subjects. The hermits who come to request *Duhsanta* to protect the ritual in Act II compare him to a Royal Sage, who has the qualities of a king as well as a holy sage.

*How admirable! His person radiates such majesty; yet one feels at ease. But that is not surprising in a king who is almost a sage.*  
(p. 194)

*What wonder then that this heroic King  
with arms strong as massive iron beams  
that bar the city's great gates should hold  
single sway over the all supporting Earth  
bounded by the dark – blue oceans?*  
(p. 195)

Thus, *Duhsanta* is presented to us as an extremely likeable character that can do no wrong. Therefore, we are not surprised when *Shakuntala* begins to have feeling for the disguised king after their very first meeting. However, when we further analyse his actions we realise that he is a product of a patriarchal Brahminical order and follows the rules prescribed therein at the cost of hurting others such as the animals he hunts or his other wives whom he ignores.

The play opens with the King chasing a beautiful blackbuck, wreaking havoc in the scared forest so much so that a scared elephant runs amok in the forest causing more destruction. *Duhsanta* only stops when the ascetics request him to. In the pursuit of the deer, *Duhsanta* forgets his duty to protect the weak and creates fear instead. The metaphor of the hunt can be applied to his pursuit of *Shakuntala* as well when he hides behind a tree to observe her much like how a hunter would observe its prey. His initial appreciation of *Shakuntala* is purely physical. He is enchanted by her beauty and demure mannerisms, which are so different from the women in the court. Even *Madhavya* comments and ridicules *Duhsanta*'s sudden desire for the "taste of the sour tamarind" in contrast to the sweet delicacies available at the court. Nonetheless, *Duhsanta* first confirms *Shakuntala*'s caste before beginning wooing her. As such we can see how the king is acutely aware of caste positions and doesn't dare to upset them even when it comes to love.

*Duhsanta*'s *Gandharva* marriage is another example of the king neglecting his duty and forgetting his heroic conduct.

*Duhsanta: Many are the daughters of sages,  
married by the Gandharva rite, we hear;  
and once married, felicitated  
with joyful acceptance by their fathers.*  
(p. 209)

Even though this type of marriage is allowed it is nevertheless a marriage whose legitimacy can be challenged and it is later on in the play. Furthermore, *Duhsanta* is in such a hurry to marry and consummate the marriage with *Shakuntala* that he does not wait for *Kanva* to return and also neglects to inform *Kanva* or even *Gautami* about it. This as we see is crucial in leaving *Shakuntala* without any material witnesses to prove her marriage to him.

*Duhsanta: Are you saying that this lady is already married to me?  
... O, hermits, rich in holiness, try as I might, I cannot recall to my  
mind accepting the hand of this lady in marriage at any time. Seeing  
that she is plainly pregnant, how can I receive her when I have doubts  
about being the husband?*  
(p. 237)

*Duhsanta*'s repudiation of *Shakuntala* provides us with yet another glimpse into the man. Since the curse has made him forget *Shakuntala*, he refuses to

acknowledge her and the unborn child, calling her a cuckoo for trying to pass of another man's child as his. He further insults her by insinuating that all women are sly and cunning.

*Ascetic matron, listen:  
intuitive cunning is seen even in females  
of lower creatures: what then of those  
endowed with reason and understanding:  
the cuckoo, as we know, has her young reared  
by other birds before they take to the air.* (p. 239)

We can excuse *Duhsanta's* memory loss but we cannot excuse his harsh and sexist rejection.

*Perish the sinful thought,  
Why are you out to sully your family's honour,  
and to make me fall; you are like a river  
that crumbles its banks to muddy its crystal stream,  
and uproots the tree growing by its edge.* (p.238)

Even as *Duhsanta* regrets his actions later when his memory is restored, such remorse seems lacking in sincerity if this is how *Duhsanta* behaves with women in general. **Kalisada** has portrayed a king whose actions is not above criticisms and thus provides us with a nuanced depiction of a hero that allows for a reconsideration of the hero figure.

#### 4.2.4 *Madhavya*

The jester is a stock figure in *Sanskrit* drama and is portrayed here by *Madhavya*. He is *Duhsanta's* constant companion and friend and is the only other character from the world of *Hastinapur* who knows about *Shakuntala*. *Madhavya* is depicted as a frail, hunchback with a staff, weak because of the physical strains of following the king in his hunts. He is thus a perfect foil to the handsome king. *Madhavya's* role as the jester is not limited to providing witty humour that highlights the flaws of the people around him. He is also *Duhsanta's* friend and confidant. He provides a helpful ear to the king, who unburdens himself on *Madhavya*, giving advice as well as providing solutions. Their friendship is so close that *Duhsanta* sends *Madhavya* in his stead for the completion of his mother's ritual. It is to *Madhavya* that *Duhsanta* reveals his true self and feelings.

*O, this cruel play of Fate: I am reduced to a state of such misery;  
and why – because I am the friend and constant companion of the  
King – he is obsessed with the chase.*

*... Then, what happened – as my ill - luck would have it, he chanced  
upon a beautiful hermit-girl – Shakuntala is the name. From that  
moment, Sirs, the very idea of returning to the Capital finds no place  
in his thoughts.* (p. 187)

Despite being the King's friend, *Madhavya* does not shy away from poking fun at the lovesick king, even interrogating *Duhsanta's* desire for *Shakuntala* or satirically reminding him of his duties. Thus, *Madhavya* provides comic relief in the play that would otherwise become too serious. His words show his witty humour, which does not disparage anyone. Perhaps this is why *Duhsanta*, despite being the king, is indulgent of his friend and does not mind *Madhavya's* humorous barbs, at himself or others.

---

## 4.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

---

The next section will deal with the critical analysis of the play from the point of view of gender, caste and the notion of kingship.

### 4.3.1 Gender

The play has been scrutinised under various critical lenses, one of them being gender. The play provides a very fertile space to examine the concept of gender in the *Vedic* society and what it means today, in our contemporary world, to read such works. We will look at the role of gender as well as study its implications on the actions undertaken by the characters in the play.

Let us begin with the titular character, *Shakuntala*. *Shakuntala*, as we discussed earlier, is of semi-divine parentage as her mother is an *apsara*/ celestial being. Her ethereal and enchanting beauty is a testament to her *apsara* heritage. *Apsaras* are known for their beauty but are also known for their disorderly femininity, in the sense that these women are not controlled by the strictures of the patriarchal mortal world. They are, mostly, free to act on their own accord and are seen as more sexually free than mortal women. These celestial beings were adept at music and dance and the gods used them to disrupt the meditations of powerful ascetics, which was the case with the *apsara Menaka* who is *Shakuntala*'s mother as she was sent by the God *Indra* to distract the sage *Viswamitra* from his penance. It is not surprising that the *apsara*' image is that of uncontrolled women, who abandon their children, and take on multiple lovers etc.

*Shakuntala*'s *apsara* legacy is something that the audience would be acutely aware of and **Kalidasa** uses their dangerous femininity to show *Shakuntala* as a *pativrata* woman unlike her mother. It creates a neat contrast between women who disrupt society (*apsaras*) and women who uphold the mores of society (*Shakuntala*). In the play, when *Shakuntala* goes to *Duhsanta*'s court, he accuses her of trying to pass off another man's child as his when she tells him of her pregnancy. This statement is in line with the actions expected out of *apsaras*, who do not behave responsibly towards children born from their encounters with men. Looking at *Shakuntala*'s own history at being abandoned at birth and her *apsara* lineage, *Duhsanta*'s accusation, though not acceptable or warranted, cannot be seen as completely ungrounded.

However, **Kalidasa** does offer a redemptive understanding of *apsaras* right after *Duhsanta* rejects *Shakuntala*. Abandoned by everyone, a distraught *Shakuntala* asks the earth to swallow her, which is reminiscent of *Sita*'s request in the *Ramayana* when her chastity is questioned, and as she leaves the court her mother transports her to her heavenly hermitage.

*High Priest: No sooner had Kanva's disciples left on their journey  
back than:*

*The young girl cursing her stars,  
Wept aloud, flinging her hands up.*

*King: And then?*

*High Priest: A flash of light in a woman's shape  
From Apsara Pool, snatched her up*

*And vanished straightaway.*

(p.242)

This event shows us the protective and caring side of *Menaka*, who though an *Apsara* feels a sense of responsibility for her daughter *Shakuntala*'s plight.

Her mother even instructs her friend, *Misrakesi*, to keep an eye on *Shakuntala* as well as on the events unfolding in the mortal realm with *Duhsanta*. These actions are a departure from the general understanding of these supernatural women and show a much more agreeable angle to them.

However, this is not enough to overturn the stigma of promiscuity and assertive individuality associated with *apsaras* and so **Kalidasa** recreates *Shakuntala* in the play as an obedient, virtuous woman who is steadfast in her love (unlike *apsaras*) even after being abandoned. Thus, **Kalidasa** creates an image of the dutiful wife, who even in the face of injustice does not abandon her responsibilities.

Through *Shakuntala* we see **Kalidasa**'s attempt at rewriting *apsara* femininity in creating a compliant, dutiful, *pativrata* wife who would serve as an exemplary of ideal womanhood. *Shakuntala* is purged of her deviant femininity and can therefore be celebrated in the play as the heroine.

The play also offers us a look into the expected female behaviour in the *Vedic* period through the repeated instructions on how to be an ideal wife which we see in *Kanva*'s advice in Act IV.

*Kanva: My beloved child:  
Be held in high esteem by your lord  
as Sarmistha was by Yayati;  
as she bore Puru, may you too bear  
a son to whom the whole world will bow  
.... My child, you are now leaving for your husband's home; when  
you enter it:  
Serve your elders with diligence; be a friend to your co-wives;  
even if wronged by your husband do not cross him through anger;  
... thus do girls attain the status of mistress of the home;  
those who act contrary are the bane of their families.  
What does our Gautami think of this?*

The matron Gautami too confirms the point of view of Kanva implying that that was how young girls were trained to behave in their marital homes.

*Gautami: The best advice for a young bride. (to Shakuntala) Dear  
daughter, keep these precepts always in mine. (p. 227)*

*Gautami* and the other female ascetics reiterate this advice as well. Even as her hermit companions abandon *Shakuntala*, these ascetics do so by telling her to do her duty as a wife and stay with the husband, even though it is clearly visible that the husband does not want her.

*Sarngarava: If you are what the King says you are,  
what will your father have to do with you –  
a stain on his family? But, as you know  
your own conduct to be pure, even servitude  
in your husband's house will be welcome to you.  
Stay here; we are leaving. (p. 241)*

These wifely duties are referenced to in the final act where *Marica* is said to be busy preaching to *Aditi* and the wives of other sages on the conduct of a virtuous wife. So we can see a running preoccupation with women's behaviour and how to create ideal women in the play. These dictates essentially tell women

to obey their husbands and to bear them sons to carry forward the lineage, outlining their duties as mothers and wives. Nowhere do these dictates incorporate women's feelings or their personal desires. In fact, *Kanva* in Act IV considers women as other's wealth, to be taken care of till they are given away and is relieved that he has finally given *Shakuntala* away to *Duhsanta*. The blatant objectification of women and their secondary position is visible here. This helps us to understand the position that women occupied and the powers that, at least upper caste women, were allowed to exercise.

Compared to the disorderly femininity of the *apsara* is the patriarchal sanctioned femininity embodied in the figure of *Aditi*, *Marica's* wife and *Indra's* mother. It is important to note that it is in the ordered patriarchal world of the sacred Hermitage that *Shakuntala* regains her marital happiness. Unlike the epic where a celestial voice asserts *Shakuntala's* claims and helps her to reclaim her rightful place as *Duhsanta's* wife, in the play their union occurs after a break of six years. This union is sanctified in the sacred Hermitage as compared to the *Gandharva* marriage, which was rejected.

The heavenly couple, *Marica* and *Aditi*, serve as a model for *Duhsanta* and *Shakuntala* and it is apt that their familial union occurs here. We must not forget that it is not simply the union of two lovers but of a family, which includes their son, *Bharata*. Thus, the play's end undercuts the romantic aspirations of the text and takes its conclusion in the fulfillment of family life by reasserting upper caste feminine ideal. *Shakuntala* has thereby fulfilled her duty as a wife and mother by providing a son to continue the *Puru* line, which was a deep concern for the childless *Duhsanta*.

In this analysis we have seen how the play takes from its surrounding and influences it as well. The play's remodeling of *Shakuntala* as the ideal wife is a good example of how 'proper' feminine behavior is articulated and propagated.

### 4.3.2 Caste

Caste played a huge role in the *Vedic* Hindu society and it still does in today's Indian society. The four-fold structure of caste regulates everything from marriage, occupation, education, food, and religious rituals etc. In the play, right from Act I, we see how caste determines the actions of the characters. Before *Duhsanta* begins to actively pursue *Shakuntala*, he wants to ascertain her caste/*varna*. A *Kshatriya* king cannot marry a woman of unknown caste and as stated in the *Manusmriti*, a man can marry a woman who is of the same caste or one caste lower, known as *anuloma*. Once *Shakuntala's* friends confirm her *Kshatriya* caste, *Duhsanta* is relieved and proceeds to woo her. *Duhsanta's* love for *Shakuntala*, whether genuine or a passing whim, cannot fall outside of the *varna* order and hence knowing where she stands in the *varna* system is important for him. This preoccupation with caste shows its central place in the society and more so for the king as the continuation of his lineage depends on the birth of sons who will carry on the father's caste.

In accordance to the caste system, sons are important as they ensure the continuation of the family's name/caste line. As such, another preoccupation in the play is the birth of a son to continue the *Puru* line. *Duhsanta's* mother is shown as keeping a fast to ensure the succession of her family and in the episode regarding the distribution of a recently deceased merchant's wealth in Act VI, *Duhsanta* faints at the realisation that unlike the merchant, he might

not beget a son to ensure the continuation of the *Puru* clan. The blessings given by *Kanva* and *Gautami* to *Shakuntala* also pertain to giving birth to sons for the same purpose.

Another incident that shows caste prejudice is the fisherman episode where he is treated with disdain and called a thief for having found the cursed ring. The guards abuse and beat him and threaten to hang him without any proof because of their own caste superiority over the fisherman's. They assume that he must have stolen the ring because of his lower caste position. Even after *Duhsanta* rewards the fisherman for having found the ring, the guards do not apologise for their cruel behaviour but are instead irritated at the reward being given to him. It is only when the fisherman offers to share the reward by buying alcohol for them that, they become friendly. This incident displays the hypocrisy of the caste system where differences can easily be surpassed when it comes to money. Greed seems to know no caste.

As we have seen till now, caste is not overtly noticeable in the play but if we peel back the layers and examine the text, we find caste assumptions and prejudices that underlie the actions of the characters.

### 4.3.3 Kingship

The play is not just a romance between a man and a woman but of a king and a semi-divine woman. *Duhsanta* is also described as the sage king, having the virtue, wisdom as well as the power to rule over his kingdom. Therefore, it is *Duhsanta's* duty to protect those in need, which is what gives him the opportunity to woo *Shakuntala* in the Hermitage. He is also responsible for maintaining order in his kingdom and *Indra* even calls upon him to help them defeat the demons/*asuras* and help restore cosmic order. His confirmation of *Shakuntala's* caste, as discussed above is also in keeping with his duty to maintain the social order.

When he departs the forest, he gives *Shakuntala* his signet ring with his name on it. The ring is a symbol of his kingship and a surety of his promise to send for her and make her his queen. The loss of the ring combined with the curse puts into doubt the veracity of *Shakuntala's* claims and thus *Shakuntala's* rejection is seen as justified by the people in the court. In the epic, *Duhsanta* rejects both *Shakuntala* and his son, but here it is a lonely *Shakuntala* with her unborn son. However, it is *Duhsanta's* duty to also provide an heir to continue the *Puru* line.

The King's desire for a son is of paramount importance for the benefit of the kingdom as well. Thus, when he rejects *Shakuntala* and the unborn son, he is doing so not just as a man but also as a king. Being the king, he cannot accept any child as his without confirming the parentage. Nonetheless, we see how desperate *Duhsanta* is for a son when he agrees to the High Priest's idea that if the child bears the auspicious marks prophesised for his son, he will accept both *Shakuntala* and the child as his. Thus, the need for a son to bequeath the kingdom to and insure its safety and prosperity far outweigh the truth of *Shakuntala's* claims and the justice denied to her.

As a king, there are times when *Duhsanta* forgets his duty, specifically before the consummation of his desire for *Shakuntala* and after the revelation of the curse. In both these instances, he languishes firstly, in his unfulfilled desire and later in his remorse for treating *Shakuntala* so cruelly. He becomes dejected and has to be roused from this lethargy as such prolonged neglect of his duty

is not only bad for the kingdom but also can incite criticism and rebellion. The resolution in the play is therefore not just for *Duhsanta*, *Shakuntala*, and *Bharata* to achieve the required happy familial union but also for the smooth functioning of the kingdom and for its secure future.

---

#### 4.4 LET US SUM UP

---

By this time we have finished reading the text *The Loom of Time*, we have gone through each unit and are now in a position to see how **Kalidasa** has used his characters to narrate the story of *Shakuntala* and how he deviates from the *Sanskritic* norms as well as the epic by playing with the audiences expectations of the characters. The critical analysis will equip us to understand the various lenses through which the play can be read and will help us expand our understanding of the play. However, we should keep in mind the fact that though we as 21<sup>st</sup> Century readers analyse the play from our point in time and our location, and through various 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century critical tools, what we see as blatant disregard for a woman's honour and dignity was the norm and even today in many parts of the country it still is how women are regarded. For instance, we may recall hearing women in our own families or women who work for us say things like a daughter cannot stay forever in her parental home or that a daughter's *Dholi* (wedding entourage) leaves her parental home and her *arthi* (Funeral procession) will leave from her marital home. Or even that their burdens will become lighter once the daughter(s) are married off. Then again, we keep reading about honour killings and of deaths related to inter caste marriages so the question really is have we really moved away from the time of *Shakuntala* and **Kalidasa**? Just leaving you with food for thought!

---

#### 4.5 QUESTIONS

---

1. Discuss the points of contrast between the two *Shakuntala* episodes in the *Mahabharata* and the *Loom of Time/ Abhijnana Shakuntala*.
2. Discuss the evocation of the *vira* (heroism) and the *srngara* (love) *rasa* in the play.
3. *Abhijana Shakuntalam* is a dramatisation of the conflicts of the private and the public and of desire and duty. Discuss.
4. Discuss the rejection and recognition scene in the play.
5. What is the relevance of the curse and the ring in the play?
6. *Duhsanta* leaves his kingly authority behind when he enters the Hermitage. Do you agree?
7. Comment on the treatment of women in play with reference to any three female characters.
8. Write a note on the role of *Madhavya* as *Vidusaka*.

---

#### 4.6 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

Chandra, Rajan, translator. *Kalidasa. The Loom Of Time*. New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 1989.

Kalidasa, *The Recognition of Shakuntala*. Edited and translated by Somadeva Vasudeva, New York University Press, 2006.

- Keith, Arthur Berriedale. *The Sanskrit Drama in Its Origin, Development, Theory and Practice*. London: Oxford University Press, 1924.
- Raghavan, V. “Sanskrit Drama: Theory and Performance.” *Comparative Drama*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1967, pp. 36–48.
- Shekhar, Indu. *Sanskrit Drama: Its Origin and Decline and Decline*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960.
- Varma, K. M. “The Basis of Indian Classical Drama.” *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 110 (n.F. 35), no. 2, 1960, pp. 317–329.
- E M Forster, “Nine Gems of Ujjain”, *Abinger Harvest*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, pp. 324-7.
- P S Sane, G H Godbole and H.S Ursekar, eds., *Malvikagnimitra of Kalidasa*, Bombay, 1950.
- A N D Haksar, Introduction, *Bhasa: The Shattered Thigh and other Plays*, Gurgaon: Penguin, 1993.
- Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.
- J A B Buitenen, trans. and ed., “The Book of the Beginning—Book 1”, *The Mahabharata*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1973.
- Payal Nagpal and Anand Prakash, *Text and Performance: A Theoretical View*, Chennai: Macmillan, 2017.
- Pollock Sheldon, trans. and ed., *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*, New York: UP of Columbia, 2016.

ignou  
THE PEOPLE'S  
UNIVERSITY