
UNIT 3 ABHIJNANA SHAKUNTALA: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will be analysing the text / play *Abhijnana Shakuntala* critically. We will begin with a brief explanation on how to read the play. This will help us to understand the play and enjoy its full aesthetic appeal. This will be followed by a detailed summary of the seven Acts. In addition to this, we will also discuss the major themes and characters in the play.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Abhijnana Shakuntala is one of the most well-known plays by **Kalidasa**. As most of the *Sanskrit* dramas of his time, **Kalidasa** wrote in a mixture of both classical *Sanskrit* - spoken by the royals, courtly figures, upper caste figures and *Prakrit*, consisting of different types of vernaculars - spoken by the common people including women and children. What does this sentence say about the times? Does it strike you to find women and children clubbed together? Hold that thought.

The title of the play *Abhijnana Shakuntala* can be translated as *The Recognition of Shakuntala*. The play, as stated in the earlier unit, is an extension of an episode from the *Mahabharata*. **Kalidasa's** prowess as an exemplary dramatist can be seen in way he has lent complexity to the characters - to *Shakuntala* and *Duhsanta*, adding innovative elements such as the curse and the ring to enhance the *rasa* of *kama* /love as well as, making *Duhsanta's* character more appealing to the audience. Furthermore, the ultimate union of the hero and the heroine does not occur in the royal Palace of the King but in the heavenly hermitage of *Marica* and *Aditi*, years after the birth of their son. Thus, his retelling of *Shakuntala* is significantly different from its original source.

Kalidasa creates a heroic drama of a romantic nature, endearing it to the audience of his day and now readers beyond his time and place. The longing and aches of first love; the trials of love thwarted; the happiness at being reunited; are emotions and feelings that everyone can identify with. However, one cannot deny how the drama is a reflection of particular socio-political and cultural ethos of his time. The very rejection of *Shakuntala* because of the loss of the token makes us question the position of women in his time (notwithstanding the loss of memory). As *Misrakesi* asks “does a love such as this really need a token of recognition? How can that be?” (254). *Duhsanta*’s unhappiness at his inability to have a son is a telling portrayal of the importance of sons in carrying the name of the family forward. Even in the depiction of the fisherman who finds the lost ring, **Kalidasa** shows the corrupt and brutal nature of the guards/ soldiers/ law enforcers who treat him unfairly and assume his guilt without any proof. Such details help us to imagine the world of *Shakuntala* and *Duhsanta* with a clarity and nuance not available in the epic.

The play is available to us in translation, which naturally begs the question of how well can the translated text embody the *rasa*/essence of the drama? The translation that we are using is the Penguin Classics series titled **Kalidasa - The Loom of Time** by **Chandra Rajan**, published in 1989. The text is a beautiful rendering of the original drama, keeping in mind its literary and aesthetic quality. When we read the play, we are able to imagine the cool wooded groove where *Duhsanta* first meets *Shakuntala*,

*Rippling beneath a passing breeze, waters flow
in deep channels to lave the roots of trees;
smoke drifts up from oblations to the Sacred Fire
to dim the soft sheen of tender leafbuds;
free from fearm fawns browse lazily in meadows
beyond, where darbha-shoots are closely cropped.* (p.175)

- feel *Shakuntala*’s crushing agony when she leaves the Hermitage for the royal palace,

*Rent from my dear father’s lap like a sapling of the sandlewood tree
uprooted from the side of the Malaya mountain, how can I survive
in an alien soil?* (p. 227)

and visualise the splendor of *Indra*’s chariot as it travels in the sky. To enjoy the play, we must imagine as we read and keep in mind the fact that *Sanskrit* drama does not just include dialogues but also includes subtle gestures and postures, singing, dancing, and miming to bring about a holistic performance and enjoyment of the narrative. For the sake of consistency, all spellings, references, and page numbers referred to follow the said edition.

Check Your Progress 1

1. What is the difference between the *Shakuntala* episode in the *Mahabharata* and in *Kalidasa*’s play?

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3.2 SUMMARY & ANALYSIS ACTS I-IV

In this section we shall try and summarise the play, for convenience sake we have split the play into two segments – Acts I – IV and Acts V – VII. Let us begin with the Prologue and summarise each act as we go along. Needless to say we hope everyone has read the play by now.

3.2.1 Prologue

The play opens with a benediction or a prayer to Lord *Shiva*.

*That first creator of the Creator
That Bearer of oblations offered with Holy Rites:
That one who utters the Holy Chants:
Those two that order Time:
That which extends, World – Pervading,
In which sound flows impinging on the ear:
That which is proclaimed the Universal Womb of Seeds:
That which fills all forms that breathe
with the Breath of Life.
May the supreme Lord of the Universe
who stands revealed in these eights Forms*
perceptible preserve you.*

*The eight forms are in order: Water, Fire, The Priest, Sun and Moon, Space, Earth, Air (p. 169)

This invocation follows the Epic tradition and seeks blessing and inspiration from the divine, thereby sanctifying the play. The *Sutradhar*/Narrator/ Director, then, addresses the Actress/wife, introducing in the progress of the dialogue the play being performed for the audience. The Narrator/ Director deftly moves to presenting the Hero/*Nayank* of the play- King *Duhsanta*- as the latter arrives on stage in full hunting regalia chasing a fleet of antelope.

3.2.2 Act I: The Chase

Act 1 takes place in the forest on the foothills of the Himalayas and moves to the hermitage of the great sage *Kanva*, by the river *Malini*. The King *Duhsanta* appears, followed by his Charioteer, in hot pursuit of a deer, specifically a Blackbuck, which is a sacred animal. *Duhsanta* is stopped in his hunt by an ascetic who reminds him of his duty

*This deer is of the Hermitage, O King! He should not be
killed...no...no...do not strike him down.
How fragile the life of this deer!
How cruel your sharp- pointed arrows, swift-winged!
Never should they fall on his tender frame
like tongues of flame on a heap of flowers.
Quickly withdraw your well-aimed arrow, bound
to protect the distressed, not strike the pure.* (p. 173)

Furthermore, *Duhsanta* has entered the sacred Hermitage, where such slaughter is sacrilegious. At the ascetics urging, *Duhsanta* decides to go to the Hermitage of *Kanva*, to pay his respect as well enjoy the hospitality offered there. As they near the Hermitage, *Duhsanta* takes of his royal ornaments and weapons,

as it seems unfit for such a spiritual space. On entering he sees three women watering plants and one of them is *Shakuntala* whose extraordinary beauty immediately captivates *Duhsanta*. He hides behind some trees to further observe the trio and finally reveals himself to them. The women welcome a disguised *Duhsanta* into their midst, where he learns that *Shakuntala* is the adopted daughter of the sage *Kanva*. She is in fact the daughter of the *Apsara*/celestial nymph, *Menaka* and the seer *Visvamisra*. *Duhsanta*'s questions lead him to figuring out her *Kshatriya* origin, which makes *Shakuntala* a suitable bride for him. Before *Duhsanta* can learn of *Shakuntala*'s feelings for him, they hear the news of how the arrival of *Duhsanta*'s hunting party has frightened an elephant and that the elephant is now wreaking havoc in the forest. As the party splits, *Shakuntala* realises that she has fallen in love with *Duhsanta*, and the two depart with longing for the other in their hearts.

3.2.3 Act II: Concealment of the Telling

Act II takes place in the forest and introduces *Madhavya*, the Court Jester, and a close friend of *Duhsanta*, who complains about the physical pains he is undergoing because of following *Duhsanta* on his hunting expeditions. *Duhsanta* is presented as suffering from lovesickness, and describes *Shakuntala* to *Madhavya* in sensual terms. He then asks *Madhavya* to help him gain entry into the hermitage on some pretext or the other. Characteristic of a jester, *Madhavya* is quick to respond in a witty manner and tells *Duhsanta* that as the King, he can rightfully enter the hermitage to demand the royal tax owed to him by the ascetics. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of two ascetics who request *Duhsanta* to protect their sacred rites from demons bent on disturbing them. *Duhsanta* readily agrees as it complements his desire to visit the Hermitage without arousing any suspicion. However, his joy is cut short by the arrival of *Karabhaka* with a message from the Queen Mother asking for his immediate return to *Hastinapur*. Torn between his duty towards the ascetics and his mother, *Duhsanta* finally decides to go to the hermitage and sends *Madhavya* in his stead to *Hastinapur*. *Duhsanta*, however, is careful to mask his interest in *Shakuntala* and tells *Madhavya* that his interest in her was a just "a whim" (197).

3.2.4 Act III: Love's Fruition

This Act continues in the forest and opens with a Prelude which functions to inform the audience of events that have occurred off stage. Here the audience is told of *Duhsanta*'s success at thwarting the demons and how *Shakuntala* is suffering from a 'heat stroke' making her feel hot and feverish. *Shakuntala* is actually shown to be suffering from lovesickness, unable to keep *Duhsanta* out of her thoughts, she longs for his company. Her two companions, *Priyamvada* and *Anasuya* try to soothe her. *Duhsanta* presently arrives at the bower where the three women are resting and on hearing *Shakuntala* confess her love for him, reveals himself to them. *Shakuntala*'s companions leave the two lovers alone and in the process *Duhsanta* tries to woo *Shakuntala*. However, their love play is interrupted by the arrival of *Gautami*, the Matron of the Hermitage, and the lovers separate. A despondent *Duhsanta* is called to fight the demons tormenting the ascetics.

3.2.5 Act IV: *Shakuntala*'s Departure

The scene is still the forest and much has happened in the meantime. The Prelude in this Act reveals that *Shakuntala* and *Duhsanta* have married according to the *Gandharva* rites. *Duhsanta* has since then left for *Hastinapur*. While

Shakuntala's companions discuss *Duhsanta's* dedication to her, the great sage *Durvasa Rishi* arrives at the Hermitage. *Shakuntala*, distracted by the thoughts of *Duhsanta*, does not attend to the great sage.

Durvasa Rishi, known for his temper, immediately curses her saying:
... you shall be lost in his thoughts:
though you goad his memory hard
he shall fail to remember you, (215)

As *Durvasa Rishi* storms off, *Anasuya* attempts to plead with the sage and manages to extract a reprieve wherein, at the presentation of a token of recognition, the curse will be lifted. The companions are reassured at this because *Duhsanta* had given a ring to *Shakuntala* as a token of his love and so believe that the curse will be broken without much harm. The Prelude ends with both the companions deciding to spare *Shakuntala* from the knowledge of the curse.

Worried for *Shakuntala*, *Anasuya* begins to question *Duhsanta's* actions and wonders how to inform *Kanva* of his daughter's marriage and pregnancy. The resolution arrives in the form of a spiritual voice that announces the union of *Shakuntala* and *Duhsanta* to the great sage. *Kanva* is overjoyed at this and decides to send *Shakuntala* to *Duhsanta's* court with a few ascetic escorts. *Shakuntala's* departure from the Hermitage is poignantly described. Everyone is filled with sorrow seeing her leave even the plants and animals forsake their natural routines and grieve her absence from the holy Grove. As *Shakuntala* bids farewell to her home and embraces her family and friends for the last time, *Kanva* instructs her on her duty to the King and other's at the palace. The finality of *Shakuntala's* separation from the world of the Hermitage is established through *Kanva's* words where he says that she can only return after fulfilling her duties as wife and mother, in the final years of her of her life with her husband.

Check Your Progress 2

1. What is the function of the Prologue at the beginning of the play?

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3.3 SUMMARY & ANALYSIS OF ACTS V–VII

The next few sections will deal with the remaining portions of the *Sanskrit* drama *Abhijnana Shakuntala* by **Kalidasa**. As mentioned earlier, for convenience sake we have divided the play into two segments – Acts I to IV and Acts V – VII. Let's move on with our summary and analysis without wasting time.

3.3.1 Act V: The Repudiation of *Shakuntala*

The Prelude takes place in *Duhsanta's* Royal Palace and begins with the Chamberlain praising the King's hard work in maintaining peace and prosperity in the kingdom and his exemplary behavior in all things concerned with the welfare of the state and his subjects. *Shakuntala* and her entourage appear at the Royal Palace and wait for an audience with *Duhsanta*. One of the ascetics, *Sarngarava*, relays *Kanva's* message and asks him to accept *Shakuntala* as his wife. *Duhsanta*, under the influence of the curse does not remember *Shakuntala* and refuses to acknowledge her as his wife. *Shakuntala* tries to prove her claim by presenting the token of recognition but realises instead that

she has lost it. *Duhsanta* casts doubts on *Shakuntala*'s virtuosity and honesty and tells the accompanying ascetics to take her back with them. The ascetics, however, refuse to take her back, saying that if she is lying then she will be a stain on *Kanva*'s honour and therefore, cannot be allowed to go back and, if she is indeed speaking the truth then she must be with her husband, even if it means living in servitude to him. *Shakuntala* is thus, left stranded and alone with no one by her side and she cries for Mother Earth/ *Dharti Mata* to open up and swallow her whole. Note, three important issues here: a) women's position in society; b) the notion of honour; c) the similarity between this particular episode and a similar scene from another famous epic. Women were positioned in the safe keeping of their father or the husband as it is clear from the various references in the text. Secondly, if a woman were not married conventionally as is the case with *Shakuntala* and the husband refused to acknowledge her then she would be a stain on the honour of the father. Thirdly, *Sita* in the *Ramayana* is faced with a similar situation when a washer man/ *dhobi* casts aspersions on her chastity on her return from *Lanka*.

Finally the King's High Priest comes up with a solution to let her remain in the King's palace till she gives birth and should the child she bear be the son prophesised (King *Bharata*) to *Duhsanta*, then *Shakuntala* may be accepted as his lawful wife and take her rightful place by his side. No sooner do the ascetics, High Priest, and *Shakuntala* leave that the High Priest rushes back to *Duhsanta* and tells him how as *Shakuntala* wept, a bright light in the form of a woman from the *Apsara Pool* came and took *Shakuntala* with her. *Duhsanta* dismisses the whole affair and yet he feels a strange sensation of missing something and a "poignant ache" (243) in his heart that seems to validate *Shakuntala*'s claim.

3.3.2 Act VI: Separation from *Shakuntala*

The Prelude informs us about a fisherman who has been found with the lost royal ring (originally given to *Shakuntala*). The guards/ soldiers/ law enforcers accuse him of stealing the ring, but he claims to have found it in the stomach of a fish he caught. The fisherman's innocence is proven once *Duhsanta* sees the ring, and rewards the man for finding it. *Duhsanta* then remembers *Shakuntala*, their marriage, and his promise to bring her to his palace. He is ashamed of his behavior and cannot figure out why his memory lapsed at that particular moment. He is distraught about how he repudiated *Shakuntala* and the cruel ways in which he doubted her. His sorrow at having lost his beloved is so severe that he orders the cancellation of the celebration of the Spring Festival. *Duhsanta* tries to recreate his first encounter with *Shakuntala* by painting it and conversing with the painting. *Madhavya* laments how the king has become so despondent that he has lost all vitality. Meanwhile, *Misrakesi*, a friend of *Shakuntala*'s mother *Menaka*, quietly observes *Duhsanta*'s behavior. Finding his remorse genuine, she goes back to the *Apsara Pool* to report her findings to *Shakuntala*. Even as *Duhsanta* is wracked with remorse, he deals with matters of the state and is approached with the problem of solving the inheritance rights of a rich merchant who dies without a legal heir. The merchant's wealth is set to be appropriated by the royal treasury but *Duhsanta* asks for the wealth to be given to one of the merchant's pregnant wife, thereby ensuring that the child to be born is not left penniless.

Duhsanta feels bad for his ancestors as he himself is without any issue, which will leave them without anyone to perform sacred rites and rituals. This adds to his misery and he faints. On waking *Duhsanta* learns that some invisible entity is threatening *Madhavya*. As he rushes to save his friend, it is revealed that the entity is *Matali*, Lord *Indra*'s charioteer, who on seeing a dejected *Duhsanta*, devises this plan to rouse him into action. *Matali* requests *Duhsanta* to fight on the behalf of the gods against demons bent on destroying them. *Duhsanta* readily agrees and they leave on *Indra*'s chariot.

3.3.3 Act VII - *Shakuntala*'s Prosperity

This Act occurs in the realm of the celestial beings and then moves to the Hermitage of *Marica/Prajapati* and *Aditi* (*Indra*'s father and mother). After defeating the demons, *Duhsanta* and *Matali* are on their way back to earth when *Duhsanta* sees the holy Hermitage of sage *Marica* and expresses his desire to seek his blessings. At the Hermitage, *Matali* requests an audience with *Marica* and in the ensuing wait *Duhsanta* comes across a young boy playing with a lion's cub and playfully tormenting his caretakers. He notices the mark prophesised that was meant to be on his son, on the young boy and begins to yearn for a child. In the course of the conversation with the caretakers, *Duhsanta* realises that the boy might indeed be his son and after picking up the boy's magical amulet that only his parents or *Marica* could touch, it cements *Duhsanta*'s belief of being the father. *Shakuntala* appears at the news of a stranger's arrival and at first is unable to recognise *Duhsanta*. In a touch of irony, it is *Duhsanta* now who asks to be recognised as the boy's father. *Duhsanta* explains his loss of memory and how he regained it at the sight of the ring and a happy *Shakuntala* accepts his explanation. The reunited family goes to *Marica* to seek his blessings where *Marica* reveals the truth about *Durvasa Rishi*'s curse. *Duhsanta* is relieved at this revelation and is absolved of his cruel behavior. *Kanva* is also informed of the events and the family leaves for earth from the celestial realm. The play ends here. In the next sections we will take a look at the critical themes that the play deals with.

3.4 THEMES

A theme is the central topic of a text. However, since no work of literature can concentrate on just one theme without referencing others, a text will usually have more than one, with some being more essential for the text than others. *Abhijnana Shakuntala* deals with many themes, such as love, memory, concealment, duty *Vs* desire, courtly world *Vs* the hermitage etc. Let us begin with the theme of Love.

3.4.1 The Theme of Love

Abhijnana Shakuntala as stated in the introduction is a heroic drama of a romantic nature. The *rasa* invoked here is *srngara* or love and according to the *Sanskritic* dramatic order, love poetry consists of *sambhoga*, love in union and *vipralambha*, love in separation. In the play, **Kalidasa** first creates a temporary union of the protagonists, King *Duhsanta*, the hero or *nayaka* and *Shakuntala*, the heroine or *nayaki*, as the play narrativises the burgeoning and consummation of their love (ACT I, II, III). It is then followed by separation caused by the loss of memory and the token ring due to the curse (ACT IV,

V, & VI). The play ends with the re-union of not only *Shakuntala* and *Duhsanta* but also of their son *Bharata* (ACT VI).

We notice how these different stages of love occur in different places in the play. The initial courting and marriage takes place in the forest of the Hermitage, where the King had come to hunt. It's a world that is an intrinsic part of *Shakuntala's* character; even the plants and animals are her kin. *Duhsanta* has thus entered her world. The interruption of this love happens when *Duhsanta* leave this world to go back to the Royal Palace, where his duties as a king await. When *Shakuntala* goes to claim her right to be by his side at his Court, the device of the curse delays that union and both the ascetic companions and *Duhsanta* desert her. Their final union happens around six years later in the celestial realm on a heavenly mountain in the Hermitage of *Marica* and *Aditi*. In portraying the development of their love in such a way **Kalidasa** highlights the differences between the world of the Hermitage and the world of the Royal Court. Paradoxically, it is in the world of the Hermitage, a place for austerities and meditation that *Shakuntala* and *Duhsanta* find love and it is the Royal Court, a place ideal for the intrigues of love that their separation occurs.

Shakuntala born and bred in the innocent and pure world of nature puts her faith in words rather than objects thus, consenting to a *Gandharva* marriage. This form of marriage does not require the consent of the parents/elders and is primarily foregrounded on the desires of the lovers. However, this love cannot disrupt the established caste hierarchy and therefore, we see how *Duhsanta* pursues *Shakuntala* once he ascertains her *Kshatriya varna*. *Duhsanta* represents the world outside the secluded and protected Hermitage, which is filled with deceit and cunning. In this world, *Shakuntala's* word is not sufficient but needs tangible proof to be validated, in the form of the ring, in front of everyone in the Royal Court. The contrasting nature of their worlds necessitates that their union occurs in a different world altogether, moreover specifically after *Duhsanta* becomes a more considerate and compassionate man.

Kalidasa seems to bring in an element of sadness in the prologue and some might even say unnecessary delaying of their union. **Kalidasa** shows us the intoxicating nature of passion and love and how it might lead to a neglect of one's duty/*dharm*a. For *Shakuntala* that results in the curse which leads to her repudiation. This curse can only be broken on the presentation of a token of recognition, which is the royal signet ring.

Though the curse complicates our understanding of love, we nonetheless see how *Shakuntala* is unwavering in her love for *Duhsanta*, which ascribes her as the ideal heroine. The ring too complicates our understanding of love by making us question the veracity of love itself, if such love needs inanimate objects to validate it.

Kalidasa's depiction of love is thus nuanced and complicated and does not shy away from making his audience ask uncomfortable questions regarding it.

3.4.2 The Theme of Concealment

The theme of concealment becomes evident in Act 1 itself when *Duhsanta* takes off his royal garments and weapons on entering the Hermitage of *Kanva*. Even though he undertakes this action as a sign of respect for the sacred space, it allows him to take off the mask of a king and conceal his real identity. He introduces himself to *Shakuntala* as a court official out inspecting the penance grooves. This deception makes space for a much more relaxed interaction

between *Duhsanta* and *Shakuntala* and her companions, without the strict rules of engagement mandated for royals. Literally throwing off the mantle of his kingship, *Duhsanta* presents himself as a man first and *Shakuntala* is attracted to this noble court official at first. When *Duhsanta* comes again to woo her, he can no longer hide his true identity as he is performing his kingly duty of protecting the Hermitage from demons.

The second act of concealment occurs in Act II when *Duhsanta* is urgently called by his mother to the Royal Palace. He is torn between his duty towards his mother and his kingdom, and his desire to see *Shakuntala* again. The dilemma is solved when the ascetics' request his help. As he sends *Madhavya* in his stead to the capital city, he tells *Madhavya* that he is staying back to do his duty towards these ascetics and not out of his desire for *Shakuntala*. He further tells his friend to consider all he said about *Shakuntala* as a joke. *Duhsanta* therefore, conceals his true feelings for *Shakuntala* as well as his reason for staying back at the Hermitage. This concealment creates a sense of foreboding in the play as it allows their marriage to be a secret from everyone outside the Hermitage and therefore, there are no witnesses who can support *Shakuntala* when she comes to the Royal Court.

The next concealment takes place in Act III when a lovesick *Shakuntala* writes a love letter to *Duhsanta*. The problem, however, is its delivery since *Duhsanta* is busy protecting the ascetics in their ritual. It is *Priyamvada* who devises a plan to disguise the letter with other offerings for the ritual, thus allowing her to give it to *Duhsanta*. *Duhsanta*'s timely appearance saves them from actualising the plan. This event again points to the incongruity of love's actualisation in the hermitage, where such actions don't sit well with a holy space established on abstinence and austerity.

In the same act we see one of the most important scenes of concealment. *Shakuntala* is so disheartened and distracted by the thoughts of *Duhsanta* that she unknowingly angers the sage *Durvasa Rishi*, who then curses her. She also fails to register the curse and is oblivious of it. It is her companions who hear the curse and on receiving the reprieve from the sage decide not to inform *Shakuntala* about the curse. Thus, it is their concealment of the truth of the curse that leads her to arrive at *Duhsanta*'s court unaware of the reason why he no longer remembers her. Had she been warned, perhaps *Kanva* would have gone with his daughter to the court to help her or *Shakuntala* herself would have been more careful with the ring and not lost it in the river. With the ring as a token that would break the curse, *Duhsanta* and *Shakuntala*'s union would have occurred much earlier and without so much pain on both sides.

The final concealment occurs in Act VI, where *Misrakesi* hides herself to observe the repenting king. She observes how deeply *Duhsanta* regrets not just his rejection of *Shakuntala* but also the loss of the son who could have continued the *Puru* clan. Even as *Misrakesi* feels sad for both the suffering lovers, she does not intervene because the gods have a plan for *Duhsanta* and have devised their reunion in accordance to *Indra*'s wishes. Here we see how the events of the story are not completely in the hands of the two protagonists. The reunion only occurs according to the plans of the gods. Even the curse and the subsequent loss of memory cannot be controlled by either of the two, as both are unaware of it. This makes the audience aware of the ambiguous and complex nature of Fate.

3.4.3 The Hermitage and the Court

The Hermitage and the Court are two diametrically opposed spaces in the play. The Hermitage is a secluded space devoted to sacred pursuits by the ascetics. They choose to live away from society and its problems. The people there live a simple life and are closer to their natural surroundings, living in harmony with nature as they are dependent on it for their survival. Furthermore, they are under the protection of the king and call upon him for assistance during their rituals. The sacred grooves of the Hermitage are safe spaces, where even the king must not hunt animals. *Shakuntala, Priyamvada, Anasuya, Kanva, Gautami* etc all belong to this world.

The Court is the worldly world, a society with strict rules and regulations, functioning under social codes that dictate the code of court etiquette to people. Corruption and abuse of power is a part of this world as seen in the fisherman episode. The Palace itself is filled with intrigues and suspicions among *Duhsanta's* wives. *Duhsanta* himself is beset with kingly duties. *Duhsanta, Madhavya, Vasumati, Hamsavati*, and the High Priest belong to this world.

The king falls in love at the Hermitage and he not only extends his stay there but also neglects his duty. The *Gandharva* marriage between *Shakuntala* and *Duhsanta*, a marriage contracted on word alone with no witnesses or material proof can be sustained in the hermitage because it's a world that exists outside of the strict moral codes of society. Taken out of this context, such marriages are suspect and we see that in the epic where *Duhsanta* refuses to acknowledge *Shakuntala* out of fear of what his subjects might think of him. In the play the loss of memory dilutes the effect of the rejection but *Duhsanta* does demand proof of their marriage and the paternity of the child in accordance to the codes of the courtly world.

Wealth is another factor that marks the difference between the two worlds. The women in the hermitage wear clothes made of bark and adorn themselves with flowers but when *Shakuntala* leaves for the Court, *Kanva* procures precious jewels from the trees to beautify his daughter in accordance with the outside world.

Throughout the play, we see how the King is forced to choose between the two worlds and must sacrifice or neglect one for the other. Similarly *Shakuntala* too must sever her contact with the hermitage if she is to be accepted into the courtly world. Her return can only be realised once she reaches the third stage of her life, i.e, *vanaprastha*, where both she and the king will give up and retire from the worldly world. Therefore, we see how characters in the play cannot inhabit both the world simultaneously and how one must carefully navigate the two worlds because they function on different principles and in different levels.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Discuss the theme of love and marriage.

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have focused on the text and introduced the play within the context of *Sanskrit* drama. This has been followed by a detailed and comprehensive summary and examination of all the seven acts. The next section gives us a critical understanding of the major themes, which will allow us to understand the play and the purpose to which **Kalidasa** has used them. The Unit has attempted to give a concise and succinct understanding of the play to help us grapple with *Sanskrit* drama in translation for the first time.

3.6 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

Read Section 3.1

Check Your Progress 2

Read Section 3.2.1

Check Your Progress 3

Read Section 3.4.1

