

Love, Desire And Ecstasy In Kalidasa's Play *Malvikagnimitram*

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Abstract: A classical Indian language Sanskrit is said to be originated from Indus Valley presently forming part of north-western India and Pakistan, and has been grouped with the Indo-European languages. Sanskrit was mostly used for religious discourses and is no longer popular in this modern world. Despite being an ancient language, it conveyed a lot about the modern world many years ago, and this knowledge is relevant even today. Kalidasa, one of the greatest literary dramatists, has infused the piousness of this language into his works. He is unrivalled to exhibit his conformity to nature's law and state that only divine intervention can mould the fate of characters. Theme of love, jealousy, friendship, desire, etc has been already explored by Kalidasa in his play that guides to the modern time in this language itself. The present paper explores the tendency of desires in Dharini, Iravati and Malavika by Kalidasa in the light of *Malvikagnimitram* and how petals of love unfold bringing ecstasy in the life of Malavika.

Introduction

The classical language of India, Sanskrit, is regarded as one of the oldest languages and mother of several other modern languages in India. Its usage is widely recorded in religious literature, mostly in Hinduism. All the other languages spoken presently are said to be directly derived from or strongly influenced by Sanskrit. As an early member of the Indo-European family, Sanskrit is closely related to Greek and Latin and most deviously to English, including other modern languages. Therefore, it becomes obvious for scholars to state that the position of Sanskrit in Indian culture is similar to that of Latin in European culture. Sanskrit represents a continuous cultural tradition from the time of the Vedas in the second millennium BCE until the present. It was a spoken language even before Vedas were written down and has an extremely rich and complex structure infused with heavy vocabulary.

The chronology of Sanskrit literature begins from the Vedic period (2000 BC to 500 BC) and follows up till the era of Classical Poetry that falls between 3rd century AD and 7th century AD approximately and the later period of Sanskrit literature (11th century AD and beyond). It is observed that after 11th century, the usage of Sanskrit as a general language declined mostly because of the rise in other secondary languages. This period noticed the emergence

of literature in vernacular Indian languages viz. Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, and Kannada. Sanskrit continued as the language for religious discourses and other philosophical texts.

The Vedic period experienced creation and compilation of four Vedas that mostly talks about the historical and cultural development observed during this period. Sanskrit used during Vedic period is highly archaic and aphoristic, and is referred to as “Vedic Sanskrit.” The kind of language and vocabulary used during this period makes almost impossible for the reader to understand without the aid of commentaries. On the other hand, Sanskrit of Classical poetry phase is simple yet beautiful. The most conspicuous feature of this period is the use of word games, such as stanzas that read the same backwards and forwards, words that can be fractioned in distinctive ways to form new and different meanings, sophisticated metaphors, and so on. Kalidasa is considered as the prime example for this period who mostly wrote plays and poetry.

The Sanskrit dramas cover a wide range of subjects and types of plays. They include full-length poetic love stories, political plays and palace intrigues, as well as shorter farces and one-act love monologues. The foremost drama genre centred on the character of a noble hero. These “heroic dramas,” often with plots derived from tradition, are called *natakas*. In literatures, the writers have conspicuously taken up the issues and problems of women focusing on delineation from different perspectives and points of view. Their creative sensibility has always been responsive to the problems of women and her position in society and culture. Our society, organized on the basis of *chatur varna* and patriarchal system, needs to be explicated in order to mark the position of women in the Indian social system. (Mishra, 2014)

India's most noteworthy Sanskrit poet and dramatist Kalidasa is collectively acknowledged as the greatest artist of Sanskrit language and appreciates a similar spot in Indian drama by focussing on the Indian social system and patriarchy. He with his imaginative, poetic and artistic language and knowledge about profound sanctity of cultural heritage of his times creates word-play in poetic verse with the help of mythological reference. His dramas and poetry are renowned and are classics in world literature that is attached deeply to the heart of the audience.

There are several rules or characteristics that are unique to Sanskrit drama and dramatists have used them in their works. These include the following:

- Play always begins with a prologue and regularly opens with a benediction.
- Sanskrit plays are full of lyrical passages.
- Plot of the play is mostly borrowed from history, epic or legend.
- Love is the main theme of any Sanskrit work.
- Grief and sadness in the play keep audience glued and then the play drastically ends on a happy note.
- Hero is usually a king who will already be husband to more than one wife.

The most striking feature of Sanskrit drama that has also been observed in Kalidasa's work is the evocation of *rasa* or sentiment that creates the necessary emotional mood for readers and audience is the quintessence of any Sanskrit play. The Sanskrit literature is extremely vast not only encompassing the Vedas, Upanishads, epics, drama and poetry but also criticism; the most extensive treatise on dramaturgy being the *Natya Shastra* by Bharata, who is greatly known for his theories on *Rasa* and *Bhava* in drama bearing some resemblance with Aristotle's *Poetics* in its theory of imitation and catharsis. (D' Rozario, 2019).

Kalidasa, the renowned Sanskrit poet, left nothing much regarding his personal life for historians to decipher. Talking about his life and his literary journey that approximately dates back from the First century BC to the Fifth century AD. From his works, scholars have deduced that he must have lived near Himalayas and Ujjain. This hypothesis is formulated based on the detailed description of Himalayas in his *Kumarsambhava* and his heart pouring love for Ujjain in *Meghaduta*.

However, most critics and scholars these days argue Kalidasa to have been lived between the middle of the Fourth century and early Fifth century AD during the reigns of the great Emperor Chandragupta II who was also known as Vikramaditya and his successor Kumargupta. But some scholars, including M. Srinivasachariar and T. S. Narayana Sastri, counter attack this idea claiming that all the works that has been attributed to 'Kalidasa' is not by one person rather other literary figures who share the same name. At the same time, it is said that many of the literary sources like the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* were canonized during his reign and cultural development of ancient India reached its climax. This viewpoint is supported by scholars as plays and poetry of Kalidasa have plots similar to that observed in texts like the *Vedas*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. During the ancient periods the *Rig Veda* mentions "women were fully the equal of men as regards access to and capacity for the highest knowledge, even the knowledge of the Absolute or Brahma." (Mookerji, 1957)

There are many works credited under the name of Kalidasa that focus mainly on female characters, the obligations they face due to patriarchy and their resentment of the Indian social system. His few illustrious works include *Malvikagnimitram*, *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, *Vikramorvasiyam*, and *Meghaduta*. This paper will focus primarily on *Malvikagnimitram* and will shed some light on *Abhijnanashakuntalam*. *Malvikagnimitram*, which is his first and finest work, is based on some events of the reign of Pushyamitra Sunga, founder of the Sunga dynasty. The skill with which he employs comedy, confusion and romance in a potpourri of a romantic drama is truly the work of a genius. On the other hand, *Abhijnanashakuntalam* dramatizes the story of Shakuntala told in the ancient epic *Mahabharata*. The plot of the play seems to appear as a precursor in the creation of the lineage of Kauravas and Pandavas. The adopted daughter of sage Kanva meets King Dushyanta on a hunting trip. He immediately falls in love with her and later gets married but misfortune befalls them and they get estranged, ultimately getting reunited. Later, their son Bharata marked the foundation of the dynasty which was eventually take over by the Kauravas and Pandavas. This play received

many recognitions from the West and was the first play to be translated in many other different languages for easy access.

The origin of the play *Malvikagnimitram* traces back to the time of Sunga dynasty (185 BCE-149 BCE) under the reign of Pushymitra Sunga. Agnimitra (149 BCE-141 BCE), was the second king of the Sunga Empire. According to Kalidasa's plot of *Malvikagnimitram*, he belonged to the Baimbika family while the *Vayu Purana* and the *Brahmanda Purana* suggest his reign to last for eight years as a successor of his father Pushyamitra Sunga. This hypothesis is formulated based on the plot of the play. A war broke out between the Sungas and the neighbouring kingdom of Vidharbha under the reign of king Agnimitra. The play also contains an account of the Rajasuya sacrifice performed by Pushyamitra Sunga and an elaborate exposition of a theory on music and acting. Three main female characters of the play Dharini (mother of the fourth Sunga King, Vasumitra), Iravati and Malavika (a princess of Vidarbha and also a maid to Dharini) are seen expressing varied emotions they felt while interacting with different characters.

For instance, the moment Malvika was granted permission from Dharini for being able to express her love towards the king, they both could not resist their inner joy and were relieved to see their desires being fulfilled. Now we look forward to explore how these emotions are elementally relatable in the play Kalidasa's *Malvikagnimitram*.

Research Gap

Many scholars and critics in their research have mostly talked about the female characters from Kalidasa's plays and how they have been portrayed. However, not much attention has been given to how feelings or emotions or situations have been imposed on characters thereby forcing them to behave in a certain manner.

Research Objectives

- To study the intensity of emotions as a driving force for the characters.
- To provide a deep meaning to the reader about the occurred themes in the play.

Methodology

Present research caters descriptive style of writing and focuses on quantitative work rather than qualitative work which mostly includes data and sampling of any survey conducted to write a research paper. To address the research objectives, this paper uses both primary and secondary sources. Translated version of text *Malvikagnimitram* by Srinivas Reddy originally written by Kalidasa in Sanskrit has been used as a primary source for this paper whereas different journals, articles and research paper related to this text and other Kalidasa's text is working as a secondary source. Other than this, few references from library like critical commentaries on Kalidasa and his work helped greatly with the research.

Literature Review

Bhairvi Dixit asserts that "Portrayal of Dharini as a perfect package of power, possession, punishment and politeness in the light of Kalidasa's play the *Malvikagnimitram*." She

explains that Kalidasa has his own way of portraying female characters in his plays and poetry, making scholars to centre their research around them. Though scholars have not talked much about Kalidasa's play, *Malvikagnimitram* but the main aim of this paper is also to focus on the portrayal of women. Dr Dixit brings only Dharini's character sketch into the spotlight from different perspectives. Dharini being called powerful comes from her name itself that means earth. She has the ability to encompass everything inside her and rule them accordingly. As Dixit mentions, "woman in India is considered as symbol of power, meaning *Shakti*." Dharini is blessed to be a mother of heroic son Vasumitra and also blessed with abundant showers of crops. She is depicted as both, a woman and an elderly queen of king Agnimitra. She is possess the character of a typical Aryan woman who is able to get all the comforts. According to Dixit, her love towards the king is never ending and she also highlights that true emotions of Dharini always superseded the enviousness inside her.

In the play, as Dharini notices the king's attraction towards Malvika, maid to chief queen Dharini, she addresses to imprison Malvika. Though from the story it is obvious that Malvika is not to be blamed completely. Her act, according to Dixit, is justified as she mentioned whatever step Dharini took against Malvika was mainly because to respect Malvika's feeling. This entire situation encapsulates Dixit's point of power, possession, and punishment. Dharini can be seen exercising her power whenever needed and king Agnimitra not questioning her even once but we see him taking help from Vidushak Gautam (minister) in order to release Malvika from prison. The last variable portrayed in the paper is the tendency of politeness exhibited by Queen Dharini when she fulfils her promise of granting a wish to Malvika if the ceremony of *dohada* becomes a success. Another instance observed by Dixit is when Dharini takes consent from the second Queen Iravati before presenting Malvika to the king in Act V of the play. Her act is considered one of generosity, kindness and politeness. In his concluding remarks, Dixit mentions Dharini to be a perfect queen who manages and handles her royal household wisely and quite efficiently. She is also a lover and promoter of art and is respected by his king Agnimitra.

Devaki E. has adopted a distinctive approach towards Kalidasa's female characters. Devaky has grouped major female characters based on certain similarities they possessed. (Devaky, 2006) She has divided characters in groups such as queens, princess, beloveds, maids, working class, goddesses, semi-divine, and personified characters.

Parvati from Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava* has been grouped as a beloved, goddess and a divine being. This character gained so much attraction because she was presented as a divine incarnation of Sati, former wife of Lord Shiva. Devaky considered her as lucky character who was born from Himalayas and became sovereign to the mountains. Parvati was considered as the only suitable person for Shiva who can help rescue gods from Taraksura and can give birth to a son from Shiva.

Shakuntala, the heroine of Kalidasa's play, is said to be driven only by fate. Devaky defines her character facing failures since birth unlike Parvati who had a happy childhood. Her birth is defined as a combination of celestial and spiritual powers, abandoned after birth she was

rescued by father Kanva. Devaky defines her life as a misery because King Dushyanata after marrying left her in the hermitage and forgot about her in the midst of delights in the palace. Shakuntala attained happiness only in the end when she was again reunited with her husband along with her son Bharata.

Malvika is a character from the first play of Kalidasa's *Malvikagnimitram*. She is the daughter of Vidarbha king and a sister to Madhavsena. Until the text reaches the final act, Malvika had to live as a maid of Dharini in Agnimitra's court even though she was a noble by birth. Therefore, Devaky has grouped her character as a maid. Despite living as a maid, she never hesitated to express her love towards him on her accord. According to Devaky, Kalidasa has depicted Malavika as a submissive character of Indian tradition. She proves her statement by mentioning that he did this with the vision of society he lived in then and flourished. She believes that he is consciously trying to portray the oppression of females in the society. Devaky pointed out the striking features of king Agnimitra and explained that he wanted his co-wives to act jointly and not quarrel or get jealous with each other.

Maithilee Sagara in "A study on the Kalidas's plays: highlighting portrayals of desire" explores the vivid desires of major characters of Kalidasa's play. (Sagara, 2017) Maithilee Sagara begins with describing the greatness of poet and dramatist, Kalidasa. She goes on to talk about his life. The interesting fact stated by Sagara is that, once long time ago Kalidasa was a fool and he was married to a knowledgeable woman Vasanti by her rival for his insult but according to other legends a queen inspired to him learn. Since then, he started visiting goddess Kali's temple and wrote text in her presence who granted him the boon to become an intellectual being. She has divided the paper into three sections. The first section deals with *Abhijnanashakuntala* (The Recognition of Shakuntala), the second with *Vikramorvashi* (Urvashi won by valour), and the third section is on *Malavikagnimitra* (Malavika and Agnimitra). Then she has analyzed each text critically.

Sagara further states that Shakuntala has been portrayed as an object of desire. The objectification of Shakuntala by the king in front of his jester, emphasizes the king as a subject and Shakuntala as an object of desire. On the other hand, there is no description by Shakuntala about the king. This clearly showcases the difference between the subject and object, for instance, Shakuntala does not hold right to gaze unlike the king.

In the second play, *Vikramorvashi*, she talks about the title that places Urvashi as the grammatical object, and Pururavas as the subject that won her with his display of valour. Urvashi is one of the most famous seductresses in Hindu mythology. She was created by Sage Narayana, from his thigh. The irony is that an ascetic created the most erotic object of desire out of himself.

In *Malvikagnimitram*, the moment the king fell in love with the dancer Malvika, he had all the intentions of having. Here the object of gaze is Malavika and the subject is king Agnimitra. According to Sagara, the political structure places Malvika lower in order, first of all, because she is a woman and secondly, she is just a maid in front of their eyes even though she belonged to a royal family.

Findings

After a profound study in 'female sexuality' and 'femininity,' Freud comes to the conclusion that "female sexuality has an archaic and inscrutable quality, rendering it only partly accessible two coherent analysis" (Bristow, 2007). The treatment meted out either to Iravati or Dharini or Malvika, it throws light on the mindset of the patriarchal society which has not changed suggestively even in the contemporary times. A man is permitted to keep as many wives or mistresses as he wishes, but women are forbidden to such a privilege in the contemporary society. The terms 'pativrita,' 'loyalty' and 'chastity' are the terms restricted exclusively to women in India to pin them down under male domination.

Bhairvi Dixit, who discards the idea of Dharini being jealous of the dancer Malvika, says that "Her love for the king is deep-rooted and her age does not allow her to be greatly ruffled by jealousy or envy." After closely analyzing Dharini's character, it is observed that she is getting jealous and fuels of desires are gushing inside her veins to completely have the king for herself. As she is aware of the fickle-minded nature of the king, she tries to hide Malvika from his sight. It should be noted that before the King saw Malavika, Dharini was not that insecure. The moment the King saw Malvika's portrait and her dance performance, he was simply smitten by her beauty and could not resist falling in love with her. The King is constantly conscious of his desire, and controls his expressions in order to hide his lust for Malavika from his other queens.

After her dance the King speaks:

More lovely than her dance this stance erects and motionless- left arm akimbo, bracelets silent on her wrist, the other arm languid like a fruit dark branch, eyes fixed on flowers that lie crushed at her feet. (Unni, 2013)

This made Dharini to pump up with rage and jealousy and insecurities of losing him. Malavika's meeting with the king brought her misery. Queen Iravati and her maid Nipunika informed Dharini about the secret meeting held between the king Agnimitra and dancer Malavika. After learning about the information, she immediately ordered imprisonment in the underground dungeons to Malavika and the maid Bakulavalika who helped to set that meeting. She did not bother to verify the facts even once. She was biased towards the King, one because she loved him and secondly, because she was jealous of Malavika who was only her maid.

Other than this, Dixit majorly points out the humble and polite attitude of Dharini, and says that "she fails not to take the consent of Iravati by requesting her that-

you should not cause me to deviate from truth promise. (Unni, 2013)

Her innate dignity and generosity of her heart makes her give a promise of Ichchapurti to Malavika and later to keep it up at the cost of her happiness."

Though Dharini was portrayed in a negative light initially but her generous nature is seen only when she realized Malavika belonged to the royal family and was a daughter of Vidharbha and a sister to Madhavsena. Another factor was her promise to Malavika that she would fulfil one of her wishes, if she completed the ceremony of *dohada* (she wanted trees to flower within five days of the ritual) She took a prophecy of living a life of a maid for a year to find the right man for herself. After hearing to this, Dharini consented upon to get Malavika married to king Agnimitra. On observing her actions, it is observed that the reason behind that approval might be because Malavika is said to come from the royal and superior family background. Therefore, it can be concluded in a way that she was not generous because she wanted to rather situations and circumstances forced her to behave the way she did in Act V of *Malvikagnimitram*.

The character of Queen Iravati has been portrayed as that of a shrewd lady. After witnessing the meeting of two forbidden lovers (King Agnimitra and Malavika), she and her maid Nipunika informed Queen Dharini because she wanted to maintain her image in front of the king and did not want to be labelled as a quarrelsome lady because the King never appreciated such behaviour.

All the three characters are struggling for the love of king Agnimitra. In the end, Malavika was lucky enough to win him over despite all the hurdles put by Dharini. New and budding romance between the King and the dancer greatly explored the theme of love, and jealousy shown by two other wives is a circuitous way of showing love.

Conclusion

Throughout time and history there have always been conflicts between good and bad, right and wrong, love and war, individuality and religion. Classical Indian literature is a medium through which one is offered a sneak peek into the ancient times. Kalidasa's characters are not just characters playing their part. They are the perfect representation of the inner self, feelings, emotions that are relevant in today's time. It is perhaps an inevitable consequence of Kalidasa's subject that his women appeal more strongly to a modern reader than his men. No poet or dramatist except Shakespeare, who has given the world a group of heroines/female characters, so individual yet so universal. In all the plays, the kings are smitten by the beauties at the very first sight of them. It is not a coincidence that the kings are able to appreciate the beauty of the heroines at the first glimpse of them, this is a conscious attempt that denotes the king as a connoisseur of natural beauty.

The research papers, journals, articles mostly talk about how Kalidasa has infused the beauty of language in his works and expressed through lyrical ballads. For instance, though he has portrayed Shakuntala as a character driven by fate, his descriptive verses about her beauty makes the text extra ordinary. And in the play *Malvikagnimitram*, it is observed that both the queens, Dharini and Iravati are aware about the King's fickle-minded nature and the presence of beautiful dancer hurls up the desire of love and jealousy amongst them. The surreal moment of ecstasy was felt once the King and dancer get united. Most of the critics and scholars largely talk about Dharini being generous and polite. Keeping in mind, the research

objectives and findings, the outcome here turns out to concentrate on how the behaviour of Dharini was a consequential performance and exhibits the traits of love, desire and jealousy. On the contrary, Malavika fell prey to king Agnimitra's love and relished the moment of utter joy upon uniting with him.

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