

# Treatment of Women in Kalidasa's Dramas

## Abstract

Kalidasa was a Classical Sanskrit writer, widely regarded as the greatest poet and dramatist in the Sanskrit language of India. There are three dramas ascribed to Kalidasa --- Mālavikāgnimitram, Vikramōrvaśīyam and Abhijñānaśākuntalam. This paper will discuss on the treatment of women as reflected in the three dramas of Kalidasa.

**Keywords:** Kalidasa, Mālavikāgnimitram, Vikramōrvaśīyam, Abhijñānaśākuntalam, Shakuntala/Sakuntala, Dushyanta, Rishi Kanva, Menaka, Dialogues, Malavika, Urvashi, Agnimitra, Pururavas, drama, poet, dramatist, society, equality, women, gender, power, independence.

## Introduction

Kalidasa, one of the greatest Indian writers of Any epoch, authored three dramas - Mālavikāgnimitram, Vikramōrvaśīyam, Abhijñānaśākuntalam. His plays are primarily based on the Vedas, the Mahabharata and the Puranas. He wrote real dramas with excellent dialogues. His plays impress us by their admirable combination of dramatic and poetic qualities. He wrote his dramas in prose with a generous mingling of verses and descriptive stanzas. The drama Mālavikāgnimitram has a conventional plot. The Abhijñānaśākuntalam is transfigured by the character of the heroine. The Urvashi, in spite of beauty, points out a distinct decline.

## Objective of Study

During the Vedic period women occupied an honorable position in the society. But gradually with the passage of time they started losing their admirable and glorious position in the society. Though men and women are equal in the eyes of dharma, women were being started to be used as commodity and a child producing machine. They were expected to serve the purpose of men. Women were always needed to be protected by her father/ husband / lover or son. Women became puppets in the hands of men. The status of women was also miserable during Kalidasa's period.

The most popular theory says that Kalidasa was present during the reign of Chandragupta II. It helps us to assume the date of kalidasa being 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Objective of this paper is to present the position of women during that period through the treatment of women characters by Kalidasa in his dramas.

## Review of Literature

Author has studied a lot of literature like Jones, William's *Sacotalá or The Fatal Ring: An Indian Drama by Cālidās, Translated From the Original Sanskrit (1)*, Monier-Williams, Monier work on *Śakuntalā, or: Śakuntalā (2)*, Pitambar Panda's *Kālidāsa in his own work (3)*, .Patel, G. worker on the *Vikramorvashiyamnu Mool (4)*, Pandya, S. M. & Shah's work on *Mahakavikalidasavirachitam Vikramorvashiyam (5)* C. R. Devadhar's *Works of Kālidāsa. (6)* M. Srinivasachariar's work on *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature (7)*, M. Dent & sons Limited's *Kalidasa's Translations of Shakuntala, and Other Works (8)*"About Kalidasa". *Kalidasa Academi. Worked on Archived from the original (9)*also works of *Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi and Narayan Raghunath Navlekar Kālidāsa: Date, Life, and Works. Popular Prakashan. (10)*.

But in this field of research no work has been done yet, so I have selected this work for my study.

## Concepts and Hypothesis

Kalidasa's achievement in the drama is no less striking. Three dramas are ascribed to his name - Mālavikāgnimitram, Vikramōrvaśīyam, Abhijñānaśākuntalam.

Abhijñānaśākuntalam remains his greatest work. The old legend of Śākuntalā is the plot of this drama. Though the picture of Śākuntalā, as



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delineated by Kalidasa, is one of his masterpieces but she received immense humiliation from the King himself. In Kanva's hermitage, she received father's affection from the sage, mother's love from Gautami, sisterly affection and friendship from her two friends. She also received love and respect from the other male members of the hermitage. But starting from the love affair with the King Dushyanta to the Gandharva marriage with him was a series of mistakes committed by both of them. In the fifth act the king refused to accept Shakuntala as his wife in front of all the members of the Royal Court, though Dushyanta was in dilemma whether Shakuntala was speaking the truth or not. Gautami though rebuked the King in strong words but she left Shakuntala lamenting in most pitiable condition. Sarangarava has also no sympathy for Shakuntala. He firmly told her that for her, even slavery at her husband's place is better. But Shakuntala does not lose her courage at the King's repudiation. Controlling her feelings Shakuntala politely and patiently tried her best to make Dushyanta remind the earlier incidents. She failed. No one was there to stay beside her - neither from her paternal side nor from the King's side. Shakuntala lost all her traditional protection. She was a girl child without parents, a queen without protections and a lonely wife without husband. Lastly, in the hermitage of Maricha, Shakuntala met Dushyanta and forgave the King for all his wrongs. Reunion was achieved at the cost of Shakuntala's silent suffering and humiliation. Hamsapadika, being the wife of Dushyanta was extremely neglected. After marriage she and the king Dushyanta were intimate for only once. Basumati, being the chief queen of Dushyanta was also unable to draw the king's attention.

However the poet made the play having a happy ending after all the sufferings.

The *Mālavikāgnimitram* is one of Kalidasa's youthful production perhaps his first dramatic work. In its five acts the love affair of Malavika with Agnimitra was depicted. The interest of the plot is enhanced by the complications of the passionate impetuosity and jealousy of the young discarded queen Iravati, which is finely shown off against the pathetic dignity and magnanimity of the elderly chief queen Dharini. Malavika being the daughter of a king, had to live as a maid of Dharini in Agnimitra's Royal Court. Queen Dharini being aware of the fickleness of the king tried to hide Malavika from his sight. But she could not. Agnimitra and Malavika fell in love. Though Iravati was once beloved wife of Agnimitra. Malavika was not depicted as a wife who lives a life of sufferings and silence. She is a representative of submissive Indian traditional women having traditional values.

Malavika, in *MAL*, is the daughter of Vidarbha king and sister of Madhavasena. She is the beloved heroine of the play and pervaded through out the text. She was described almost as a child. She did not try to conceal her feelings of love towards Agnimitra before her friends. Parivrajika, who accompanied her to the court, functioned as an intermediary. Dharini, understanding her talent in dance, appointed a dance master for specialisation. The. But, Agnimitra who saw her picture incidentally,

fell in love and tried to gain her with the help of clever vidii-aka. In the pretext of testing the efficiency of the dance masters, he arranged a dance performance of Malavika, though protested by the queen, in which she expressed her love towards the king through a song cleverly. Overcoming many obstacles he succeeded in his venture. Like Agnimitra, she also became passionate and anxious to gain her lover. She lives a life of a brave lover and tries to meet the king on her accord. She was cautious of the arrival of Iravati, the younger and once beloved wife of Agnimitra. As a result of their effort she won him as a present by queen Dharini, overjoyed by the victory of her son Vasumitra and also with ungracious concurrence of Travati. In this work, This work contains a value oriented programming of social consciousness pointing to female oppression. Though the drama was intended for enlightenment (kridaniyaka) he employed quality and discrimination in depicting his characters. Malavika acted according to the rules in Kas.' She being the youngest one secretly served the king well, and received special honour from him. Kalidas adopted the policy that heroes should join or encourage co-wives to act jointly and not to encourage them to quarrel or create enmity.

The *Vikramōrvaśīyam* based on a mythological love story of Pururavas and Urvasi, is the second dramatic creation of Kalidasa. Urvasi being a paragon of beauty was depicted as a normal wife. Kalidasa didn't feel any necessity to make her character as noble and feminine as that of Shakuntala. Her jealousy due to a minor cause makes no favourable impression on us. Urvasi is modest to a certain extent but that cannot be compared to that of Shakuntala. Her sense of honour was not very great in the visits she pays to the King before they were wedded. The character of the queen in this drama presents the picture of an unhappy wife who is painfully made aware of the fact that her husband's heart is estranged from her whose any consolation, therefore, is virtuous resignation in her fate. Seeing the King interested in another marriage notwithstanding her indirect protests, she gives at last her consent to the match though not without evident signs of anguish and displeasure. Urvasi is a woman of passionate love. She is an apsaras possessing some super human powers than the earthly woman. The play starts with the story of capturing Urvasi by demon Kesi and the Puraravas salvaged her. They fell in love with each other.

#### **Research Design**

This work has done mostly on the basis of analysing the principal women characters in Kalidasa's three dramas -- *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Vikramōrvaśīyam* and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*.

#### **Finding**

From the above analysis we come to know about the position of women in the society during Kalidasa's period.

#### **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, we observe that polygamy for men was allowed and it was an accepted custom. A man was allowed to marry a

number of women. Women could not have independence of action under any of the circumstances. They are not independent at all at their parental house or in laws' place. There are certain social, religious taboos which operated as social sanctions. To abide entirely by the interests and wishes of her parents before marriage and of husband after marriage and to be devoted completely to husband's well being, were considered to be the sacred duties of a Hindu women. There is an abiding faith in the institution of marriage as not just a private affair but as a sacrament, a mystic unifying force that builds the society. Restrictions for the women to stay in their inner apartments are also found. A widow could not inherit her husband's property during those days. She was only entitled to take care of it. It shows that there was no special importance or significant honour for women at the time of Kalidasa. Women were not allowed to breathe an independent life. They were the puppets in the hands of male dominating society. The *Mālavikāgnimitram* contains a value orientation of social consciousness indicating to female oppression. Kalidasa made his heroes encourage co-wives to act jointly and not to encourage them to quarrel or create enmity. It proves that polygamy was so deep-rooted in men and the position of women was not so glorious during his period that he could not afford to avoid it in any of his three dramas.

The conjugal life would be rewarding only on begetting a child especially a son according to Indian tradition. Urvasi passionately wanted to live with Puraravas at any cost. To fulfil her desire, being afraid of separation, she hid her son from the sight of Puraravas. She could not control all kinds of aberrant behaviour like jealousy. Urvasi was jealous towards Ausinari and departed being disheartened due to her intensified passion. The heroine of the *Vikramōrvaśīyam* had agreed to marry the king only if certain demands were satisfied. When any breach of contract takes place, she could give up her husband lover. Urvasi is an excellent example for participation of Indian women acting and dancing in theatre as professionals.

#### **Suggestions**

Women and men are the two main pillars of the society and family. Therefore, it is important to bring equality for both of them in the society. It can only be possible if both the sexes are able to have equal opportunities in the distribution of power, influence and financial independence. To construct

peaceful societies it is essential to achieve full equality of rights and opportunities between men and women. It is rightly said that women empowerment is absolutely necessary to make the future bright for the family, society and country when they represent half of the world's population. It should be our oath that men and women should not be discriminated against on the basis of their gender.

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