

The virtue of unstinting patience: A comparative analysis the female protagonists in Kalidasa's Sakunthalam and Ramayana

Dr. MK Sheeba

Contract Teacher in English, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Deemed University, Guruvayoor Campus,
Puranattukara, Thrissur, Kerala, India

Abstract

Shakuntalam and the Ramayana the two works seem to be similar in extent that they have focused on the role of a woman in the ancient society. The real comparison begins after the banishment of Sita and the public disowning of shakuntala. The pang of love which the hero of both the plays feels at the separation of their respective queen is a matter common to two plays. The present paper will try to shed some light on the various social values i.e., emotions, behaviour, attitude, feelings and experiences, mental states, the degree of patience, the quality of forgiveness, reaction to social situations, modesty and decency etc. of Women in Shakuntalam and the Ramayana.

Keywords: Shakuntalam, Ramayana, emotions, behaviour, attitude, feelings

Introduction

Literature is the most important art filled by the mythic content. Myth thus provides the main outlines and the circumference of a verbal universe which is later occupied by literature as well. Literature is more flexible than myth, and fills up the universe more completely: in all cultures mythology merges insensibly into and with literature. Both the Shakuntalam and the Ramayana are more similar stories because they both share the story type about the slandered bride that is seen in the folktales. The two narrative stories have critically addressed the issues of love and duty, nature, loyalty and the nature of families in the ancient Indian society in the ancient Indian society from a similar perspective; hence, the two narratives seem to be similar. The two works seem to be similar in extent that they have focused on the role of a woman in the ancient society ancient.

The trials and tribulations of the story of Ramayana as in Shakuntala suffering has been displayed for the sake of relishing one's state of suffering through undergoing difficult moments. The real comparison begins after the banishment of Sita and the public disowning of shakuntala. The pang of love which the hero of both the plays feels at the separation of their respective queen is a matter common to two plays.

In the Ramayana, a recurrent theme is one of maintenance of honor and virtue. This is amply evident through the lives of Ram, Lakshman, Sita, Hanuman, etc. All these characters go to great lengths in keeping their promises and upholding their loyalties. Ram, for example, stands firm in his commitment to Sita, even when he is tempted by attractive women like Surpanak after Sita's abduction by Ravan. Sita, likewise is a model of restraint and fidelity, as she spurns Ravana's repeated attempts to seduce her. Hanuman's whole life is devoted to the service of his master and lord Ram. His loyalty exceeds even that of Ram's younger brothers. Hence, the various characters in this great epic show how they overcome challenges in maintaining their

honor and loyalty. In Shakuntala, in contrast, this showcase of virtue is not so pronounced, except tenuously. For example, one could see parallels between Shakuntala's years of lament and longing for Dushyanta as similar to that experienced by Sita. But Shakuntala's virtue and fidelity were not as severely tested as that confronted by Sita. After Ram defeats Ravan and Sita rejoins with her beloved, as a proof of her chastity, she even steps into fire as part of a symbolic cleansing ritual.

In terms of their scale and grandeur too there are differences between the two works. Shakuntala is a shorter narrative when compared to the lengthier and broad-scoped epic that is the Ramayana. The latter, believed to be written by Sage Valmiki, is a genuine epic, comparable to the Odyssey, Iliad or Beowulf of the Western literary canon. Moreover, Ramayana is a more complete story compared to Shakuntala. Indeed, every common human crisis can be found at some stage in its narrative. The thoughts, actions and decisions of characters at various such moments of crisis serve as guidance and moral lesson to the reader of the text. In this way, the Ramayana is comparable to sacred texts of other major religions, in terms of the breadth of its scope and the profundity of wisdom contained within. In this regard the Shakuntala is quite limited. Written in the form of a play, its primary purpose is entertainment, although it contains some elements of didacticism (related to Hindu Dharma). Both are exemplary wives but Sita's devotion to her husband is of a transcendental nature, her forgiveness verges on improbability. Shakuntala is a maiden bordering womanhood. Her capacity for love is unbounded. She can forget herself; forget the world and everything when she is absorbed in thoughts of love. She is gentle and meek yet she can undauntedly give vent to her moral indignation against the ruler of the earth. But she is not vindictive. She has that benign graciousness that forgiveness and that kindly nature the presence of which in a woman makes a goddess of her and a heaven of home.

As per mythology, Shakuntala was born to celestial nymph,

Menaka and sage Vishwamitra and was abandoned by her parents right after she was born she grows up to be a striking beauty and in a chance encounter she meets King Dushyantra, with whom she eventually falls in love. When he proposes marriage by mutual consent (a form of marriage that did not require religious rites) she audaciously asks that her son be the heir to his throne. After their marriage, the husband returns to his princely occupation and forgets his promise. Several years later Shakuntala boldly travels to the prince's kingdom and demands that he should consider their son as his heir. In his highly acclaimed play entitled "Shakuntala and the ring of remembrance" Kalidasa, the great Sanskrit dramatist of the Gupta period, transformed shakuntala into a shy, submissive girl who becomes a symbol of love in separation. After reaching his kingdom, he delves into oblivion. Unlike Rama, he does not abandon her of his own will – is a result of Durvasa's curse. Durvasa curses her for her neglect of duties towards him. Thus the tragic flaw in the heroin proves her preoccupation with love. When she loses her signet proves to be major short-coming. Nevertheless fate does not allow her to suffer endlessly. Shakuntala is immortal to Indian literature, she remains throughout all doubts and second thoughts, portrays a world of righteousness where truth ultimately triumphs over the unattainable.

In the Ramayana, Valmiki, perhaps with a feminist heart, chiseled Sita's character as a harmonious embodiment of beauty, tenderness of heart, abundance of compassion, fidelity, wisdom of the truest type, courage of heart, and endurance, that served her well in constantly asserting herself for her rights-rights as defined by her value-system. Sita is extolled for her chastity, obedience, loyalty and faithfulness to her husband despite a remarkable series of trial, including unjust accusation of infidelity by her husband's subjects. Following her husband from a royal palace into difficult forest exile, she remains faithful despite temptation by an evil king agrees to an ordeal by fire, at her husband's request to prove her chastity. Even after emerging unscathed from the flames Sita is forced into forest exile, this time with her sons. She eventually secures recognition of her sons as the legitimate heirs of Rama, and then returns to mother earth.

Sita is portrayed as angry willful, and so powerful that the fire of her chastity burns up Agni, the vedic fire God, during her fire ordeal. Shakuntala is the embodiment of female virtue whose main feature is endurance as it was in Kalidasa. Endurance, however, is further enhanced and takes an even stronger form what is forgiveness. Women are the embodiment of forgiveness in the end, she will forgive.

Conclusion

There is a charming myth associated with the creation of woman by the supreme creator, "Bramha". Bramha first created man and in his generosity, wished to give man a companion. But by then he had exhausted all the material in the creation of man and hence he borrowed several components from the beautiful creation of nature and made woman out of them. Hence the reference of woman is as prakriti. Bramha presented women to his earlier creation man saying that she will serve him lifelong and if he cannot live with her, neither can he live without her. The primordial myth carries an unmistakable implication of woman's image in life and literature for centuries. Woman is created for man as compensation for his innate loneliness. Indian woman is a

metaphor for purity, chastity of the ancient spirit of India. Her identity is defined within the parameters of her social relationship to man. Her identity is constituted in different contexts, settings and situations such as her relation to man, family, Community, organization and society in her everyday life however woman who occupies outside the heterosexual, patriarchal family is in a space unrecognized by the nation.

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