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## ABHIJNANASHAKUNTA

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This expression is often used for the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa- 'Kalidasaasya Sarvasamabhijnanashakuntalam' and 'Kavyeshu Natakam Ramyam Tatra Ramya Shakuntala'. Sanskrit scholars have accepted the works of Kalidasaa as the best work not only of Sanskrit literature but also of world literature. This is a play in which Kalidasa has used all the essences in a very beautiful manner. In this play, Kalidasa tells the story of love, separation and reunion of Chandravanshi king Dushyanta and Maharishi Kanva's foster daughter Shakuntala, which he expresses with different dramatic twists. This is the only composition which has been translated and performed the most on theatre. Abhijnanshakuntalam is a great play in the tradition of Natyashastra. Examples of Kalidasaa's works are often given to explain the topics described in Natyashastra.

Abhijn?jakuntalam is the only work which has been translated in India as well as in other languages of the world. In this lesson, we will try to know about this great creation of Kalidasaa, Abhijnanashakuntalam.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After studying this lesson,you-

- know about great poet Kalidasa;
- know about the works of Kalidasa;
- know about the story of Abhijananashaakuntala;
- know about the characters of Abhijananashaakuntala; and

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- know about theatrical style of Abhijananashaakuntala.

**10.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF KALIDASAA**

There is difference of opinion among scholars regarding the life and introduction of the great poet Kalidasa. Many scholars agree that Kalidasa is one of the Navratnas of King Vikramaditya of Ujjayani and his time period is the first century BC. The time when Kalidasa wrote his works was the time of decline of Buddhism and revival of Vedic religion. The royal power of the Maurya dynasty had passed into the hands of the Brahmins of the Sunga dynasty and the Vedic religion had received state support. Yajna rituals and the recitation of Veda mantras again started becoming popular in the society. To understand the works of Kalidasa, it is very important to understand the social and cultural structure of that period.

The great poet Kalidasa has composed only three epics and three rupakas, but due to his writing talent, he is counted among the great creators of the world. The three epics written by him are - (1) Meghdootam, (2) Raghuvansham and (3) Kumarasambhavam. Also, there are three rupakas written by him - (1) Malavikagnimitram, (2) Vikramorvashiyam and (3) Abhijananashakuntalam.

The first play written by Kalidasa is 'Malvikaagnimitram' which is the love story of the Shungavanshi king Agnimitra and a princess named Malavika. His second play - 'Vikramorvashiyam' tells the story of the mutual love between the nymph Urvaji and King Pururava. He has adopted the basic form of this story from Vedic narratives. In this sequence, his third play is 'Abhijananashakuntalam' which is the love story of King Dushyant and Shakuntala. From the composition point of view, it has been written in the completely mature style of Kalidasa.

**10.2 Introduction to Abhijnanashakuntala**

Kalidasa has adopted the story of Abhijananashakuntala from 'Shakuntalopakhyan' of Mahabharata. In the play Abhijananashakuntala, Kalidasa tries to make the play more interesting by making some changes in the original story with his imagination. He portrays the character of the hero and heroine very beautifully. Through his imagination, he has made some changes in the original story and has also maintained the public decorum. Like Mahabharata, the story of Shakuntala is also found in Padmapuran. The story found in Padmapurana has some similarities with the story of Abhijananashakuntala. That is why some critics believe that Kalidasa has selected the plot for his play from Padmapuran. Abhijnanashakuntalam is an entertaining and simple composition. It is clear that Kalidasa makes some changes from his imagination like the scene of Bhanvara,

cursing of Durvasa, the incident of fisherman and the fourth act. We must understand this fact along with the plot of the drama, only then we will be able to know in its entirety about the story described in each ending.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 10.1

1. What is the time period of Kalidasa?
2. Which is considered to be the best play of Kalidasa?
3. What are the sources of the plot of Abhijananashakuntala?
4. What is the basic story of Abhijnanashakuntalam?
5. What are the poetic compositions of Kalidasa?

### 10.3 STORY PLOT OF ABHIJANANASHAKUNTALA

Kalidasa has divided the main plot in his play 'Abhijananashakuntala' into seven acts. The story described in each issue is as follows-

#### Act-1

At the beginning of the first act, Kalidasa performs the process of invocation and praises Lord Shiva. After that the Sutradhar and Nati enter the stage. Sutradhar calls Nati and says if she is wearing the jewelry, then come here. The narrator addresses the audience in his dialogue and requests Nati to present the play before them. Dushyant enters the stage with the incident of Sutradhar and Nati. King Dushyant reaches Kanva's Tapovan while hunting. They come to know that Kanva has gone from Tapovan to some other place for some work. Then Dushyant's eyes fall on Shakuntala watering the trees with her friends. Seeing the beauty of Shakuntala, Dushyant gets attracted towards her and becomes fascinated by her. Love for Shakuntala blossoms in his heart. Shakuntala is introduced to the king that she is the daughter of Menaka and Vishwamitra and has been brought up by sage Kanva. At the end of the act, love for each other begins in the hearts of Dushyant and Shakuntala.

#### Act-2

In this act, the king talks to his friend Vidushaka about the beauty and love of Shakuntala.



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**Act-3**

At the beginning of the third act, we learn that Shakuntala is unwell and at the insistence of her friends she writes a love letter to the king. Coincidentally, at that very moment King Dushyant arrives and knowing about Shakuntala's love for her, expresses his desire to marry her. Without informing their teachers, both completed the Gandharvas marriage.

**Act-4**

In the fourth act, due to some reasons, King Dushyant has to return to Hastinapur. He makes Shakuntala wear his named ring and assures her to call him soon. Shakuntala, saddened by her husband's departure, does not pay attention to sage Durvasa who had come to Tapovan. Angered by this, Durvasa curses Rishi Shakuntala that when the time comes, the person in whose memory you are lost will not recognize you. Due to being lost, Shakuntala herself is unable to hear the curse but coincidentally her friends hear this curse. When the friends pray to sage Durvasa, then Durvasa only assures that the effect of the curse will end by showing the object of Abhijnana identification. Returning from the pilgrimage, Maharishi Kanva comes to know through Akashvani that Shakuntala and Dushyant have settled in the matrimony and Shakuntala is pregnant. They arrange to send pregnant Shakuntala to her husband. At the end of the episode, the scene of Shakuntala being sent from Tapovan is shown to be very poignant.

**Act-5**

In the fifth act, Shakuntala reaches Hastinapur along with the sages and Gautami and goes before King Dushyant and requests him. But due to the curse of sage Durvasa, the king refuses to recognize Shakuntala. Shakuntala is not able to present the proof that I am the same person with whom you had Gandharva marriage and this child in my womb is yours because the ring given by Dushyant fell in the water. She remembers the curse of sage Durvasa but due to lack of any knowledge, she is unable to prove her point. Feeling insulted, a crying Shakuntala turns away from the king and then a divine light, (Menaka), takes her away.

**Act-6**

In the sixth act, Dushyant comes to know Shakuntala. Shakuntala's fallen ring is found by a fisherman in the stomach of a fish. When he goes to sell the ring in the market, the soldiers catch him after seeing the ring bearing the king's name. The city guards hear the story of finding this ring from the fisherman and take the ring to the king. Seeing the

ring in front of him, King Dushyant remembers the forgotten incident. He remembers all the things about his love and marriage with Shakuntala. The king becomes sad and gets lost in the memories of Shakuntala. Then Indra's charioteer Matali from heaven goes to King Dushyant with a chariot and asks him to kill the demons on Indra's orders. The king immediately leaves for heaven.

### Act-7

In the seventh act, while King Dushyant is returning from heaven after killing the demons, Marich stays at Aditi's ashram. Coincidentally, Dushyant meets his son Bharat and Shakuntala there. The king apologizes to Shakuntala for his crime and Marichrishi blesses both of them. King Dushyant returns to Hastinapura with his wife and his son and with this the play ends.

In Natyashastra, three categories of plot have been described - famous, utpadya and mixed. The story material used by Kalidasa for Abhijnanashakuntalam is of renowned quality. Kalidasa adopted this story from Shakuntalopakhyaana of Mahabharata which is described in the eighth chapter of Adi Parva. But it is also extremely important that there are many significant changes in the story of Mahabharata and the story described in Kalidasaa's Abhijnanashakuntalam. This story is found in a very short form in the Mahabharata and Kalidasa has converted this plot into a drama with his imagination and skill. In which he gives a poignant description of the feelings of the human heart. With his imagination he gives dynamism to the plot and portrays the character in a befitting manner. The scene of the bumblebee, the event of the ring falling and being received is captivating in itself. In the Mahabharata, King Dushyant is portrayed as a lustful and promiscuous man who, in fear of society, refuses to recognize his wife and son. He tells lies despite knowing everything. But Kalidasa's Dushyant is completely different from Mahabharata's Dushyant.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 10.2

1. How many points are there in Abhijnanashakuntalam?
2. Who is the hero of Abhigyanshakuntal?
3. Whose love story is there in Abhigyanshakuntal?
4. In which act is the curse given by Durvasa mentioned?
5. According to Natyashastra, what category is the story of Abhijnana Shakuntal?,
6. In which act is the incident about the fisherman?



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**Notes****10.4 CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY ABHIJNANASHAKUNTALA**

The main objective of Abhijnanashakuntalam is to mature the Rasa. The audience can be entertained only by the performance of Rasa and the audience is entertained only when the characters of the play and their characters are attractive. The main difference between a play's success and its failure is the plot, its characters and the characterization of the characters. Even though Kalidasa has included changes in the plot of the play Abhijnanashakuntalam with his imagination, at the same time he has also depicted the character of the characters in an interesting way with his imagination. The number of characters in Abhijnanashakuntalam are relatively high but the main characters of the play are - Dushyanta, Shakuntala, Anusuya, Priyamvada, Gautami, Kanva, Durvasa, Maricha, Sharanarva, Sharadvata and Vidushaka.

**Dushyanta**

Dushyanta is the hero of Abhijnanashakuntalam. From the point of view of drama, he is Dhairodatta hero in nature. While discussing the hero Dhairodatta in Dasharupaka, Dhananjay has mentioned his qualities - great strength, very serious, stable mind, egoless and determined. He has also told that this character should be a god or a mythological or historical character and should be a person born in a high clan. Dushyanta, the hero of Abhijnanashakuntalam, is the best among all these categories. In this play, Dushyanta has been portrayed as a handsome and strong young man. Dushyant is very serious by nature and is a mighty ruler. In Abhijnanashakuntalam, Dushyant has been described as a friend of Devraj Indra. If there is enmity with someone or a situation of war arises, then in such a situation the goddesses expect their protection only from Dushyant and Indra. At the end of the sixth act, Dushyant himself goes towards Indraloka to fight with the demons on the orders of Indra. What I mean to say is that Dushyant himself is a brave, serious, patient and majestic character.

**Shakuntala**

Shakuntala is the heroine of Abhijnanashakuntalam. She is the daughter of Vishwamitra and Apsara Menaka. His parents had abandoned him since birth. In such a situation, Shakuntala was brought up by Kanwarishi. Shakuntala is of unique beauty. In the first act itself, when Shakuntala is watering the trees, Kalidasa has depicted her beauty and youth through Dushyanta. She herself is the daughter of an Apsara, hence her beauty is attractive. Dushyanta, enchanted by her beauty and virginity, becomes sad at their separation. If we look at Shakuntala's character in the context of the entire play, then some important qualities are visible in her character like - shyness, being the daughter of Tapovan, there is simplicity, purity and innocence in her nature. She is a devoted

girlfriend to her hero. The day she sees Dushyanta, she falls in love with him, contrary to the nature of the ashram. In case of separation, she suffers from fever. Shakuntala herself is adept in knowledge and arts. He is completely proficient in animal husbandry, gardening and hospitality.

### Down

Clown is an important character in Sanskrit theater style. He does not have any specific role in the main plot but still this character helps the hero in love. He also entertains the audience through his speech and action, that is why it is considered very important to have a clown in the play. He entertains the hero by nature and is his trusted friend. He creates humor through his comical costumes, awkward dialogue style and figure. Despite being Brahmins, these characters appear illiterate and foolish. They are greedy and cowardly by nature, but if we look deeply, they are capable of raising questions to the hero. While praising the hero, they also criticize his actions. The clown character in Shakuntala has been shown to be very simple and dim-witted.

### Anusuya and Priyamvada

In the first 4 acts, there is mention of two of Shakuntala's friends- Anusuya and Priyamvada. Both of these play an important role in making the plot dynamic. Both of them always think about Shakuntala's welfare and they are also like Shakuntala in beauty. Both of them are of the same age as Shakuntala and are practical, well-mannered, polite and soft-spoken. Both of them support Shakuntala in every work. Anusuya is patient and practical, that is why Priyamvada gets scared after hearing the curse of Durvasa, but Anusuya remains patient and asks Durvasa for a solution to get rid of the curse. Unlike Anusuya, Priyamvada is soft-spoken, joking and curious. Like Anusuya, Priyamvada is not of a suspicious nature. Anusuya supports Shakuntala in her crisis and Priyamvada in her love affair. One of them is better, reflective and serious, while the other is humorous and eloquent.

### Kanva

Kanva is an important character of Abhijnanashakuntalam. Kanva's arrival occurs only in a few numbers in the entire story. Kanva is the patriarch of the ashram and Shakuntala is his adopted daughter. He has affection for her in his heart and for her peace he had gone on pilgrimage. Study of Abhijnanashakuntalam reveals some important characteristic features of sage Kanva. Like he is an ascetic celibate, intuitive and very influential. With his spiritual power, he can know everything about past, future and present, that is why he had already sensed the disaster coming on Shakuntala and had gone to Som Tirtha for her planetary peace. Even after returning to the ashram,



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he came to know about the Gandharva marriage of Shakuntala and Dushyant through his penance.

### Sharandarva and Shardvata

Both Sharandarva and Shardvata are disciples of Kanva. They have immense devotion and reverence towards the Guru. In the absence of the Guru, he takes care of the arrangements of the Ashram. Sharandarva is older than Shardvata in age. He is more tactful than Shardvata. Whereas Shardvata has disinterest in public life. He sees Raj Prasad engulfed in flames. He is a person of polite and calm nature.

### Durvasarishi

Durvasa Rishi is an ascetic and appears to be harsh, arrogant, angry and cruel by nature. In Abhijanashakuntalam, when Shakuntala remains lost in the memory of Dushyant, then with his divine vision he realizes that Shakuntala has become void of feelings due to separation from her husband, but still, considering it as his disrespect, he curses Shakuntala for separation from her husband. Priyamvada finds it unfair to give such a big curse for a small mistake. This incident proves the angry and violent nature of sage Durvasa.

### Maharishi Marich

Maharishi Marich is a resident of divine world. Despite having heavenly resources in that world, the sages stay away from them and remain engrossed in penance. Despite having Kalpavriksha, Rishi Marich lives a life of restraint in the company of Apsaras. They are extremely patient, ascetic, patient and have stable minded qualities. When Dushyant reaches his ashram, Maharishi Marich is in samadhi. Dushyant worships him for his rigorous penance. Here it is revealed that Marich is the father of Indra and other gods. Lord Vishnu also takes birth from him in Vaman incarnation. He is detached from work and is engaged in penance for the welfare of the people. Shakuntala finds peace after reaching this ashram. Maharishi Marich had performed all the rites of Shakuntala's son. Kalidasa has very skillfully ended the play with the blessings of Maharishi Marich.

### Gautami

Gautami is an ascetic who loves Shakuntala like her own daughter. In the first episode, when Priyamvada jokes with Shakuntala, Shakuntala tells Anasuya that she will complain about it to Arya Gautami. Similarly, in the third act also it is revealed that Shakuntala is ill and then Gautami approaches her and asks about her. Seeing Gautami coming, Dushyant moves away, this is because Dushyant had respect for the elderly. In the



fourth issue, Maharishi Karan had sent Gautami along with Shakuntala as her protector. When Dushyant does not recognize Shakuntala, Gautami explains it to him and orders Shakuntala to speak openly. In this way, Kalidasa has portrayed her as a loving mother.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 10.3

1. DushyantA is the hero of which trend?
2. Tell us about Shakuntala?
3. Who are Anusuya and Priyamvada?,
4. Who is Kanva?
5. What is the nature of sage Durvasa?
6. Where does Dushyanta and Shakuntala meet in the end?

### 10.5 DRAMATIC STYLE OF ABHIJNANASHAKUNTALA

Kalidasa is the best creator among Sanskrit playwrights. Abhijnanashakuntalam is his third and last composition. Before this, he had composed Malavikagnimitram and Vikramavasiyam. Compared to other plays, Kalidasa's language and style in Abhijnanashakuntalam is refined. He also uses short, simple and interesting style for dialogues. Abhijnanashakuntalam has been called the best among Sanskrit plays because the ultimate development of Kalidasa's dramatic art as per the rules of Natyashastra is visible in this play. Kalidasa composes plays keeping Shringara Rasa at the center. Kalidasa has woven the scenes of both coincidence and separation from his imagination. The main rasa of an rupaka drama should be sringara and all other rasas should be secondary. Following this tradition, Kalidasa also uses other rasas in a secondary form. Like in the fourth act he uses Vatsalya Vipralambha. When Shakuntala is going towards her husband's residence, the way he describes animals, birds, creepers and Kanva becomes a unique and touching scene in itself.

Another important feature of the plays of the great poet Kalidasa is the depiction of nature. Kalidasa describes nature in the play by connecting it with very lively and human emotions. The deep relationship between nature and man is visible in his dramatic works. Kalidasa takes the help of nature in his drama to express human emotions, their intensity and the reality of feelings. By connecting the emotions that are rising in the mind of the character with the events happening in nature, they make the audience's



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heart emotional. In Abhijnanashakuntalam, Dushyanta is distraught with separation from Shakuntala and is repenting for his actions. Similarly, with the arrival of spring, there is no atmosphere of joy and happiness in nature. Mangoes are not blooming, the cuckoo's voice has stopped. Kalidasa is also known for his beautiful illustrations and for this he uses his unusual talent. A wonderful and erudite description of beauty is visible in all three of his plays. Like in Abhijnanashakuntalam, Kalidasa is unable to separate himself from the description of Shakuntala's form. He repeatedly describes Shakuntala's beauty from Dushyant's point of view.

**WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT**

- Kalidasa is counted among the great poets of Sanskrit.
- The period of creation of Kalidasa is first century BC. He was one of the Navratnas of Vikramaditya.
- The great poet Kalidasa has composed three epics and only three rupakas.
- There are three plays written by Kalidasa- Malavikagnimitra, Vikramorvajyam and Abhijnanashakuntal.
- Abhijnanashakuntalam is the best play in the tradition of Natyashastra.
- To explain the topics described in Natyashastra, examples of Kalidasaa's works are often given.
- Abhijnanashakuntalam is the only work which has been translated in India as well as in other languages of the world.
- Malavikagnimitram which is the love story of Shunga dynasty king Agnimitra and a princess named Malavika.
- His second play - 'Vikramorvasiyam' tells the story of the mutual love between the nymph Urvashi and King Pururava. He has adopted the basic form of this story from Vedic narratives.
- Kalidasa has adopted the story of Abhijnanashakuntalam from Shakuntalopakhyan of Mahabharata. In the play Abhigyan Shakuntalam, Kalidasa tries to make the play more interesting by making some changes in the original story with his imagination.

- Kalidasa makes some changes from his imagination like the scene of Bhanvera, cursing of Durvasa, the incident of fisherman.
- There are seven points in Abhijnanashakuntalam.
- The main characters of Abhijanajakuntalam are - Dushyant, Shakuntala, Anusuya, Priyamvada, Vidushak, Kanva, Durvasa, Sharnarva, Sharadvat, Gautami, Marich, etc.
- In this play, Kalidasa has also made some character changes in the original story as per his imagination.



### TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. What is the difference between the main story of Abhijnanashakuntal and Shakuntalopakhyana?
2. What do you know about Kalidasa?
3. Tell us about the hero of Abhigyan Shakuntalam?
4. Throw light on the dramatic style of Abhigyan Shatalam.



### ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

#### 10.1

1. First century BC
2. Abhijnanashakuntalam
3. Shakuntalopakhyana and Padmapuran of Mahabharata
4. Love story of King Dushyant and Shakuntala
5. Meghdootam, Raghuvansham and Kumarasambhavam.

#### 10.2

1. Seven acts
2. Dushyanta
3. Dushyanta and Shakuntala



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4. Fourth act
5. Famous
6. Sixth act

**10.3**

1. Dhairodatta
2. Unique beauty, modesty, modesty and practicality
3. Shakuntala's friends
4. Kanva is the patriarch of the ashram and Shakuntala is his adopted daughter.
5. Angry and furious nature
6. In the ashram of Maharishi Marich