

Ecofeministic Approach of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night and Kalidasa's Abhijnana Shakuntalam

Piyali Gope

Research Scholar, Amity Institute of English Studies & Research (AIESR), Amity University, Noida,
Uttar Pradesh, India
piyali.gope@ymail.com

Deepali Sharma

Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of English Studies & Research (AIESR), Amity University, Noida,
Uttar Pradesh, India
dsharma6@amity.edu

ABSTRACT

The undertaken work has been taken with an aim to estimate the position of women in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (1600) with a western background and Kalidasa's Abhijnana Shakuntalam (composed in the span of 3rd to 4th century AD) mirroring an ancient monarchical Indian social context along with an ecofeminist approach. The study of both masterpieces has given emphasis to the temperament, characteristics, duties and role of nature and woman and also shows how they both phenomenally and philosophically resemble each other.

Keywords: ecofeminism, nature, women, ecology, environment

Culturally the tradition of both the east and the west are vividly different from each other but the elementary attitude remains the same towards the eco-antagonistic notion that the main reason behind the women's subordination and her sphere of activity is rooted in their reproductive functions, their biological tendency and in a small and delicate body. Man began defending and suggesting theories about the inferiority of women by saying that they are both physically and mentally always inferior. According to Aristotle women are less courageous, less complete, emotional and weak creatures. According to him women should be honoured when she obeys her master/man. Male-texts have eco-uncongenially discouraged woman as they have the qualities of being enterprising, bold and assertive, as all these qualities have been reduced as demonic blemishes, which distort and distract the male-defined solemn female image. "The patriarchal contrivances allege that the conventional images of the enchanting mythological female characters like Sphinx, Medusa, Circe, Kali, Delilah and Salome are deceitful captivators who artfully reduce and steal male creative energy." (Gilbert & Gubar, p. 12) Women have always been assaulted, criticized, victimized and humiliated in different situations within the society directed either by their unpredictable consciousness or through the ecologically aggressive patriarchs.

Both occidental and oriental societies recognize women as others property. The quiet suffering, the loyal self-sacrifice for the good and happiness of the others, and the continued compassion towards the family were all the qualifications of women working under the banner like wifehood, motherhood, sisterhood and daughterhood. The highly idolize women follows self-abnegating discipline who should liberally and respectfully let her contribution to get cover and marginalized by the soaring sublimity of philosophy and fabled hierarchy which has to be inherited from the paternal heritage. Every segment of her expectations unavoidably is encountered with patriarchal desires and definition of womanhood. Her feeling of subversion and her disobedient attitude against the patriarchal monopoly consequences into a collision which gives her vast distress and moreover places her with other insane, noxious and abnormal entities. Ecofeminism has arisen because of arising of new consciousness of redefining the intertwined role and status of both nature and woman, an exceptional discovery of human. Ecofeminism relates philosophies and movements which connects feminism with ecology. This term is said to be first coined in the French book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* by Françoise d'Eaubonne. Vandana Shiva argues by saying that that woman has a special connection to the environment through their daily interactions which is being ignored. Ecofeminism is not just a way of analyzing woman and nature together in literature but it extends creative thinking of human in the worldwide community and recommends simultaneously for cultural transcendence by examining the limitations of cultural suppositions about women and Nature/ nonhuman entities. Karen Warren further emphasizes by saying that

one should understand the domination of both nature and women and also the remarkable connection between women and the non-human natural world.

Shakespeare under the impact of progressive Elizabethan society has endeavored sincerely to invest his female characters with intelligence, elegance and beauty. Kalidasa, the great Indian poet has portrayed a society as well as an age when both polygamy as well as monarchy were prevalent practices. He has beautifully portrayed the maidens as different but unique, but the initial inadequacy and qualities he has described converges frequently with the Shakespeare's female images. Persisting impact of stereotype ecoheinous notions about women is vivid in Kalidasa's masterpieces like *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, and *Kumar Sambhavam*. He puts an attention towards the glory of the Indian women as ancient race is vividly reflected. Also as a responsive creator, he predicts the decaying and unforgivable difficulties of Indian women. In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* Viola stays back in Illyria irrespective of multiple inconveniences in accomplishing her mission of searching her brother Sebastian, accidentally isolated from her in a shipwreck. During this period, Viola presents herself as a eunuch (Orsino's page boy named Cesario) in order to veil her feminine identity intentionally for protecting herself from the dread of humiliation and dilapidation in the hands of hypocritical civilization. Nature's liberal school has taught her this technique of hiding in order to protect herself from their enemies. "O!...not be delivered ... estate is." (1.2.40-44) (*William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*) "Conceal me ... disguise ... I'll serve this duke.... Thou ... present me as a eunuch to him." (1.2.53-56). During her service as a Duke and a love messenger of Orsino to Olivia, Viola falls in love with Orsino. Although she liked and strongly love Orsino but she stops herself and her emotions from interfering from her duties. Extracts from her conversation with the Duke, "My father ... daughter" (2.4. 106) "She never told her love, / ... She pin'd... / ...with...melancholy...like Patience... / Smiling at grief...Was not this love...." (2.4.109-114) "I'll do my best / To woo your lady – [Aside] Yet, a barful strife" (1.4.39-40) ecocritically attest her successful struggle against being possessed by envy, which in its utmost becomes ecologically catastrophic. Rather she agree to submit herself and surrender her identity with utmost responsibility, devotion, docility, sincerity and tactfulness as a duty of a messenger carrying proposals and tokens of love from Orsino to Olivia. She silently understands everything under the anthropocentric responsibilities, but on the other hand she has also been seen as strangulating her instincts and natural feelings against nature's principle. Viola's sense of responsibility and dutifulness illustrates her cognizance of her dependence upon the environment and indebtedness towards her environment. Moreover, Viola's beauty is emblematically associated with Nature's by the Duke in his depiction of her beauty: "...thou...Diana's lip/Is ...rubious...thy small pipe/ is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound, / And all is simulative a woman's part." (1.4.30-33) Viola's demeanour conforms to eco-amicable ideologies for an eco-friendly existence on a terrain, Viola possesses profound compassion and wisdom with which, and she tries to resolve the complex problems of that specific environment in which she stays. Her energy, activities and all rounder talent marvelously shows her eco-centric standard. Viola, who is manifestation respectability, is basically parallel to nature with all its resources. Yet all her duties constantly cannot be acknowledged, for example, commonly she is subjected series of problems, disgrace, and complications but still she ignored it. Her helplessness surrounding allegiance to her task cumulated with her overall goodness has been ravaged. Her right to freedom remains unheard, her feelings remain ignored, therefore she is unsubstantial. Instead she has become a mechanical messenger. Thus, her status as a maintenance worker remains intertwined with Nature's, and, whatever satisfies needs or ensures sustenance is usurped and devalued in general anthropocentrically. Ecocritically, Viola's ascending poverty and suffering is not only because of lack of involvement in developmental complication but due to gender prejudices and society which dominates and victimizes her state of desiccated entities. The whole arrangement of the story has been braided with false techniques so as to show that the trauma of Viola has been fixed substantially and generously. But materialistically, this exhibition of remunerating and securing woman and nature is a weakening trait of men to hide their authoritative, mobilizing and offensive attitude towards them. Ecocritically, Viola is a victim of that society in which no one is concerned about the law and order but instead they try to justify/ form their power and indispensability by overruling the Nature's ecological reality through strength/ power or women's competence alike. Viola's union with the Duke and reconciliation with her brother has made possible under strong forces of conservation of Nature. She is remunerated and all her desires have been fulfilled by nature in the form of destiny. Olivia's radiance can be equated with the splendour of Nature. Orsino by implementing the name of marriage determined to possess and colonize Olivia. The following excerpts testify the preceding statement: "Tis beauty... truly blent, whose red and white/ Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on" (1.5.223-225); "Why so O, when mine eyes did see Olive first. Me ... purged ... pestilence. That instant ... hart ... my desires ... pursue me."(1.1.18-23). Duke's passion for Olivia's beauty, at his first glimpse, besides his impatience to marry her depicts

the intertwined relationship of nature and Olivia as both are the victims of patriarchal capitalistic consumerism. Therefore all the ways have been embraced for justifying and promoting colonization as an unavoidable policy in the name of preservation and security. Olivia's unusual declaration that she will remain veiled like a nun and grieve for seven long years in order to isolate herself from the substantial-world because of her father's and brother's death. But it is soon witnessed that as soon as a handsome young man Viola/Cesario appears before her, she instantly falls in love with him and tries to persuade him to enter into matrimonial bonds, casting aside her mourning. These two successive events indicate that primarily, Olivia is already enduring a situation gestated with insecurity due to the fulminant loss of her father and brother in a terrain haunted with hardships, injustice and constraints against women, and secondarily, due to her intense disinclination towards Duke Orsino's amative advances. Her salience of selecting partner independently substantiates the ecological process of pairing through natural selection, thus overthrowing the anthropocentric code of selection. But, when Olivia encounters the reality of mistaken identity, she withdraws and simultaneously consents to marry Sebastian, Viola's twin brother. Helpless Olivia adopts certain non-conventional methods for self-conservation, and consequently she has been misconstrued as a discrepant entity by the anthropocentric society, which derogates Nature's inexplicable ways alike. Besides, Olivia's sophisticated, gentle, lyrical and skilled management of household ecologically idealizes her. Behind the disguise of his feigned concern for Olivia, Sir Toby possessing a feudal attitude seeks a suitor to her in unsuitable Sir Andrew Aguecheek, with an intention of substantiating his selfish aspirations. Malvolio's motif of bogging Olivia into a nuptial bond to elevate his social status behind the mask of his servitude and adoration towards her defines Olivia as a resource in the hands of Malvolio in the same way as the organic world gets reduced to commercial objects in the hands of progressive civilization. Squandering of Olivia's ideas and believes shows that how man unnecessary weakening the domain of nature without any sympathy. Amidst all these adversities Olivia's candid confession of her love for Cesario, "By maidenhood ... I love thee ... is better." (3.1.147-153) and her non-conformation to Duke's proposal, "Your lord does know my mind; I cannot love him/ / He... answer long ago." (1.5.241-247) reflect her path-breaking enterprise to assert her identity and independence.

Maria's dynamism emblematically identifies her with vibrant and glorious facet of Nature. Her contribution to protect Olivia from all odds imprints her as a protector in this process, although her dissimilarity and adjustability also have been demonstrated several times. Some of her aspirations have been accepted by the eco-centric ethics regarding the responsibilities and functions of nature and women. Her stand for the inferiority behavior towards Olivia assumes proceeding of women towards not only the deconstruction of unnecessary assault, partial commodization and insensitive colonization of women but also the substitution of hierarchical subjugation of women by both enabling and emancipating equally. Maria's vigilance gets evinced in her correct judgment of the characters around her, for instance, Malvolio as an opportunist and pseudo-Puritan and Andrew Augecheek as a discrepant and improper match for Olivia. Her movements and outlook tells about her honesty and heroism. Thus she is an activist-prototype rebutting and dismantling the ignominiously biased perceptions about women as dumb appendages. Her interpretations are very much secure to convince people. She attempts to destroy steady attitude of Malvolio towards others by confronting his tendency of monopolizing and manipulating things around. She is very well familiar with her rights, her environment, her skills and her responsibilities. This self-awareness makes her ecologically noncompliant, confident, careful and independent. She holds herself from being consumed by the most abominable handicaps, which hinder her way to enfranchisement.

We now move to the legendary character of Kalidasa's Shakuntala of *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, "the loveliest of poetic creations." She is the biological daughter of the celestial court dancer Menka and Sage Vishwamitra. She has been nurtured and reared by Gautami and Sage Kanva in their hermitage. Kalidasa has depicted her natural virgin beauty in spiritual form and also has been contrasted with courtly and artificial beauty. Apart from this she also possess 'kanti' (charm), 'shobha' (beauty), 'dipti' (radiance), 'madhurya' (delicacy), 'audarya' (dignity) and 'dhairya' (patience), the qualities of conventional Indian womanhood. Her beauty and morality can be equated with resourcefulness of Nature. Sage Kanva, Shakuntala's foster father says that ritually after the creepers and plants of the hermitage are watered then only she would feed herself. Although she was fond of flower decorations, but because of the warm concern of the flowers she would not pluck any of them and she would celebrate their first efflorescence as a festival. Shakuntala is a symbolic representative of the entire scenario. Dushyanta portrayed her flawless beauty as a delicate shoot not yet torn with nails, a flower not yet smelt, fresh honey whose sweetness is yet to be tasted, or an unpolished diamond, connects her with nature enchanting spirituality and freshness, which, whenever, have seen by the materialistic section of the society, unquestionably becomes a prey to brutal consumption. Dushyanta's such description of Shakuntala's beauty shows within his materialistic desire of consuming and colonizing the same. Dushyanta employs his weapons of impressive personality and wistful gaze as

baits to arrest Shakuntala. In a similar manner a hunter entraps innocent animals and birds. Dushyanta's secret union with her by the rites of Gandharva's marriage, not favored by society, is a male-created contractual policy to maneuver woman as his private property. Here, her destiny resembles a segment of the earth fenced and controlled by man. The signet ring which was adorned with the words 'Abhijnana Shakuntalam' which was given to her by the king represents a stamp for recognizing the property. Same as like a nature her status has also been minimized into an object. Sexual intercourse of Dushyanta and Shakuntala not only symbolize his total domination and colonization over her but also it as a process in which the former ploughs the latter in order to harvest fruits but in the form of sexual pleasure and descendents as functionaries for the anarchical bureaucracy and to rule the territory.

A gradual change in her body due to her pregnancy becomes visible: "her face has its cheeks excessively emaciated, her bosom has lost the firmness of her breasts; her waist is more slender; her shoulders are very much drooping; her complexion is wan." (Tewari, p. 238) She conceals in her bosom strangulating personal worries and turmoil mixed with dreams of future prospect just like the earth hides in its core the mines of treasure and volcanic lava together. The only error committed by her unmindfully under the ascending pressure of such crucial circumstances is not conforming to her duty of hospitality and reverence towards her guest Maharshi Durvasa who in turn misconceives the situation and irrationally hurls curses upon her. His curse symbolizes a weapon that destroys the life of Shakuntala by deactivating the memory of the king about her. She becomes a prey to Dushyanta's irresponsibility, suspicion and indifference. Once again, she has become like a piece of land which is knowingly dumped by commercially inclined men after reducing it to the extent of bareness and then identifying it as a useless alien to their declared area. The embarrassment which has been created by such misbehavior of the king overlooks her unborn child along with her. Shakuntala's womb is the environment for her infant Sarvadamana (Bharat) who turns out to be brave and radiant. The fact that mother's health and psyche cardinally affect the infant's well being cannot be denied. Sanctified seclusion of Sage Maricha's hermitage where she finds shelter during her ripe periods of pregnancy also plays an important role in protecting her womb from being inflicted by any more tortures and injuries. It initiates the ecofeminist ideologies as it shows the relation of nature with its fellow beings. Her acceptance and fearlessness of all injustice against her as a misfortune without any protest against her husband King Dushyanta, returns her to the traditional characteristics of womanhood, which is sacrifice and self eradication to the male-built whirlpool of ideology and tradition. Therefore motherhood proclaims as a condition of woman who demonstrates the intertwined humbleness of woman who supports and produce worker in herself. What is praised is actually a barrier for their emancipation. Dushyanta's recollection of all the past events surrounding Shakuntala at the sight of the lost ring has been justified as an effect of curse, yet the possibility of viewing a lifeless object (ring) as a reliable and valuable signifier to nullify the authentic version of woman (Shakuntala) candidly reveals the status of woman in the patriarchal regime. The act of humbly pleading of Gautama in front of Dushyanta to accept Shakuntala as her wife revolve around the fact that she was trying to dissolve and endure the conflicts in order to preserve the identity of Shakuntala. Even Priyamvada and Anusuya also begged forgiveness from Durvasa from Shakuntala because of the same outlook of her existence. Both of them extremely request him to take back his curse because they want to save her from any kind of sorrow which would distress Shakuntala's whole life and which would be displeasing and unbearable happening for them too. Shakuntala received advice from Sage Kashyap at the time of her departure after being reunited with Dushyanta, visibly shows the ideology of ideal 'Grihini' (wifehood). Kalidasa has simply highlighted the painstaking sacrifices and remarkable contributions of Shakuntala whose struggle and involvement in general are deprived of recognition and remuneration like that of Nature. He has intensely focused upon her mental power and strength which allows her to face all the miseries but on the other hand he has neglected an important feature related to the reawakening of her consciousness. Nature too undergoes similar crises. Therefore at all stages eco-domain and Shakuntala are associated whether it is materially or symbolically.

Therefore our reading both Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* gives us an experience that irrespective of their widely dissimilar socio-historical background, but they also have common attention towards the set of responsibilities and duties, mannerisms that a woman must fulfill, but also how their destiny, role, identity and status are connected with nature in various aspects. Both Olivia and Viola from the Elizabethan (Western) Society and Shakuntala belonging to ancient monarchical Indian civilization are connected with each other on the basis of victimization of the self-centered practices of the patriarchal capitalism. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* portray Viola, Olivia and Shakuntala respectively as a bundle of conventional feminine virtues and emotions that have been equated with Nature's assets to be undermined and gleaned mindlessly. Lawless gender-biased bureaucracy and hierarchy in their work to indicate power has broken-down these women from eco-antipathetically to mere commodities from living entities worth consumption and conquest. They have been treated with excessive obstruction; therefore their morality has

been reduced as their constrictions and limitations on their way to liberalization. The concerned masterpieces are also familiar with how the positions of women are correspondent to that of nature primarily as maintenance workers. Since their work is parallel to nature's regular process so their contribution has also been viewed with indifference and inevitably taken for granted. Therefore, exceptionally Viola's and Shakuntala's difficulties symbolically correspond to ruined ecological terrain. For example, their analysis, Olivia's betrothal to Sebastian, Viola's development towards her brother Sebastian and Duke Orsino and Shakuntala's reconciliation with Dushyanta hides man's harmful urge and his selfish interests of reducing them to simple objects which needs to be rescued/delivered and steered by men. Their indigence and distress is not due to their insufficient involvement in the process of development but due to biased discrimination practiced against them where they have endured all the pain but have been denied the recognition and pleasance. Shakuntala has amenities and assistance; as an asset from nature where she had grown up, and which would be enough for her survival; Olivia and Viola are materialistically independent beings within the Illyria's popular world; but Shakuntala's experience of degradation of her own image is same as simple non-human entities in Dushyanta's hands and on the other hand Viola's way of tackling exploitation as an employee and Olivia's ownership of huge capitalistic wealth through natural inheritance has become the main reason for her commoditization. Therefore only self-adequacy is not sufficient for the liberation of nature or women. Women in Shakespeare's novels have been provided with traditional formal education and on the other hand Shakuntala has been tutored by nature. But both type of education were not successful to provide them their freedom. Although works of Shakespeare have been generally regulated by usual eco-averse patriarchal whimsies about women, but we still come across his endorsing principles of ecofeminism which wants female to be in power precisely through the character of Maria. Olivia, Viola and Shakuntala fail to have this realization which is mandatory for the emancipation of women. Man's control over nature also brings together his subordination over women. A reciprocal, reintegration non-exploitative communication with women should be created without changing their relationship with nature. It promotes a plan to work for their welfare, twin upliftment and conservation as an alternative to break them just for the cause of self-centered profit.

In both the plays amplitude and vigour of nature have been periodically referred to represent feminine beauty. The resulting link of beauty and youth of woman has been pinning like a rose blossom under the conclusion of time and nature's law and according to which everything mortal has to die and wither in due course to maintain balance in the ecosystem; garments of woman has been addressed as 'weeds of women'. Moreover, various traits of birds and animals have been anthropocentrically resemble with weakness and dissimilarities of woman, for instance, arrogance and self-love are related with the roles and biological characteristics of naïve non-human creatures: "woodcock near the gin" (2.5.77), "turkey-cock" with "advanc'd plumes", "ass", "dog". Ecocritically, mere restlessness of losing male chauvinism and unstable power exhibits to absolute mind which is more forbidding, hence entombing and eliminating the spiritual and organic wisdom of nature and women alike under the ruble of somatic philosophy.

Eco-critically, nature disapproves and focuses against basic and unkind colonization against woman. Nature's and woman's intertwined position as working and productive machines both fundamentally and solely have been shown here. The ecofeminist study of the undertaken plays has illustrated as how fertility, congenital munificence and regenerative capacity turn out to be the most merciless blockage to the way to the emancipation of woman. Flexibility and adaptability both are the inherent parts of the female personality, have been underestimated as their excuses and shortcomings by hiding their helplessness. This analysis of ecocentricity also unfolds as how harsh the unyielding/ rebellious look of woman and unkind eco/biosphere are tried to sterilize and yoked many a time according to the benefit of opportunistic human civilization. Both the plays ecologically objects and manifests strongly the following anthropocentric practices: marginalization, totalitarian exploitation, oppression and derogation of woman; unfeeling towards degradation of Nature/Earth and woman from the living entities of their natural status so that of commercial goods to be consumed and possessed in spite of their sacred generous and significance service towards the society; hypocrisy, ascending manipulations and injustice practiced against them without any fellow-felling for their conservation or replenishment. Therefore both the plays eco-critically express their voice for eliminating such inequality against woman and anthropocentric tyrannous acts and also propose eco-rational assessment for their attempt towards conservative endeavors, which are as of same importance as of men, and at the same time endure against the nullification of this fact.

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